Usually when I sit down to compose my column I have a specific thought or topic in mind. As I am working on this column my mind is swirling with a multitude of thoughts ranging from getting older, new technology, and our system of values. Recognizing that the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce is an organization that promotes and advocates for businesses this column will be a potpourri, a mixture of thoughts with some nexus that relates to business, hopefully, in a fragrant way.

“Just keep waking up everyday” is a refrain that I heard more than once from my grandparents as they were expressing to me why they were moving a little slower or did not have an interest in doing certain things. Well, now I have had the benefit of waking up enough mornings to understand what they were talking about. Things that I used to do without even thinking about I now give considerable thought to. The days of climbing on my roof to string Christmas lights or clean out the gutters requires thought often followed by hesitation on my part. The Christmas lights at the roof line are out of the picture. Attending evening events also requires thought. Depending on how far I’ll have to travel by car at night weighs in my decision making process. I consider myself to be vibrant, energetic and in good health but I find it increasingly difficult to drive at night, in great part because of the technology associated with the blinding headlights on newer cars. Modern headlights

—See From the President, page 7

There Is No Place Like El Cerrito’s Down Home

By Chris Treadway

The music world and market for recorded music has changed dramatically since Down Home Music opened in 1976 and the store has weathered it all.

Even when record stores could be found everywhere, Down Home was unique in its specialty of roots music from around the world. And it perseveres in an age when albums can be downloaded and stored on your phone or other digital device.

“We still provide an experience you can’t get through your phone. We strive to do that,” said J.C. Garrett, co-manager with John McCord of the store at 10341 San Pablo Ave. “It’s had its ups and downs. Technology comes into play.”

In fact, the store has lasted long enough to see LPs regain popularity after falling out of favor to CDs, which in turn fell out of favor to online streaming and services such as iTunes and Amazon.

“As I understand it, LPs are now outselling CDs, but it’s mostly due to a decrease in CD sales,” Garrett said.

“We are selling a lot more vinyl, though.”

That includes new and vintage LPs, which have their own large room, 45 RPM records and even 78 RPM platters.

The store’s selection of smaller labels and less mainstream genres and artists has long made it a destination for enthusiasts and musicians.

“Musicians buy as much, if not more,” Garrett said. “Other than the fact they’re all broke, they’re our best customers.” Celebrity shoppers at the store over the years have included Santana, B.B. King, Ry Cooder, Maria Muldaur, Elvin Bishop, Taj

—See El Cerrito’s Down Home Music Store, page 6

New Member
Coachland Education Center
11858 San Pablo Ave.
El Cerrito
510-680-5218
www.coachland.com

—See From the President, page 7

El Cerrito
Chamber of Commerce
Linking business and community since 1936
10895 San Pablo Ave. • El Cerrito, CA 94530 • 1-510-705-1202
ElCerritoChamber.org

From the President
JEFFREY WRIGHT

February 2020

From the President
Get well. Sincere wishes for a full and complete recovery to El Cerrito city council person (and Chamber member) Janet Abelson.

A favorite. That would be the annual crab feed and raffle put on by EC Recreation last month. A well run event that is just a joy to attend. This was the 4th Annual since EC Recreation replaced the old Exchange Club feeds. (Remember that wheelbarrow of booze?) The hall looked sold out to me and proceeds benefit the David Hunter Youth Memorial Scholarship. Well done, “Rec folks!” If you missed it, too bad. But wait, here’s another.

This month is the EC Police Employees Association crab feed at the Community Center on Friday, February 21st. Benefit: our canine cops. More information on page 3. This sells out so move quickly. El Cerrito = fun!

R.O.Y. The Contra Costa Association of Realtors recognized our Chamber president, Jeffrey Wright, as Realtor of the Year for 2019. Congratulations!

Moving soon. March 1st is the target date for El Mono Fresh Flavors of Peru to open at the former Strings location at Knott & San Pablo. Work is underway as you read this. Hopefully, the project stays on schedule; but some time in March is almost a guarantee. We’ll keep you posted. Use your El Cerrito Marketing Program coupon for a generous discount too.

Trek the town. A sharp looking map has been published by the El Cerrito Trail Trekkers with a comprehensive showing of public paths, trails, and stairways in the city. Pick up a copy at an ECTT event. www.ectrailtrekkers.org.

EC Art Association exhibit. “The Bay, Boats, and Bridges” is the title of a photography display by Kevin Berndt at the Community Center through February 19th. Kevin operates a local landscaping business and if his last name is familiar, his mother was long time Chamber office employee Patty.

Town hall meeting. Learn about the budget and El Cerrito’s financial position at this gathering. Ask city staff and council members questions. February 1st, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., at City Hall.

Reality check. Everyone’s favorite Internet site, Nextdoor, has been loaded with discussion lately on El Cerrito’s financial challenges and with plenty of ideas on how to fix them. The State Auditor calls the city “high risk” due to a deficit, pension obligations, low reserves, among other reasons.

I have not lost any sleep over the matter even though I am invested in this city. While serious, it will be resolved as quickly as possible. That is just my opinion. It’s now on the city radar. We have a good city council. I trust them. Criticism of the mayor and former mayor for the city landing on the Auditor’s naughty list is a bit over the top. They’re citizen politicians, most with day jobs, who don’t necessarily have advanced accounting degrees. However, barbs from the public are part of getting into politics. Our financial ship will be righted. In the meantime, chill out and enjoy the Super Bowl.

Marching for 31 Years

There are not many parades in El Cerrito. So here are two scenes from the 31st annual parade and rally held on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 20th. Even the Richmond High School Oilers came for a march.

EC Art Association exhibit. “The Bay, Boats, and Bridges” is the title of a photography display by Kevin Berndt at the Community Center through February 19th. Kevin operates a local landscaping business and if his last name is familiar, his mother was long time Chamber office employee Patty.

New look. If you noticed something different at Colusa & Fairmount, it would be the new signage for Sunset View Cemetery Association. I think the old sign stood there for about 60 years. Change can be good.

Recent survey: List three of El Cerrito’s greatest attributes. My answers: (a) Pastime Ace Hardware; (b) Down Home Music Store; (c) Fatapple’s Restaurant & Bakery. Do you agree?
California has overreached in its effort to address the challenges in today’s tech platform gig-work economy. The live music sector, the progenitor of the term “gig” work, is being swept up by this law. The irony would be comical if it were not such a serious problem.

There are some worthy arguments to be made for Assembly Bill 5 by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, San Diego Democrat. It could improve the lot of workers trying to piece together a living in this expensive state. It should help capture unemployment taxes from unscrupulous employers misclassifying workers as independent contractors.

However, the law has created a tangle of red-tape and administrative expense for large portions of California’s cultural sector. To illustrate: In 2019, San Jose Jazz presented more than 1,000 musicians across 326 different performances. The vast majority were independent musicians and singers from California, the nation, and around the world.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics defines musicians under code, 27-2042 Musicians and Singers. This is distinct from the category for Fine Artists, 27-1013 Fine Artists Including Painters, Sculptors, and Illustrators. For some big name acts, we contract with their corporate agent and pay the agency for the band’s performance. However, for most musicians, we work directly with the band leader to agree on a price and terms, providing them payment as independent contractors. They, in turn, pay their band members in accordance with IRS Schedule C filing rules.

Under AB 5, we will be required to inform all U.S.-based musicians that they must now become employees of San Jose Jazz, or incorporate themselves before they will be allowed to perform for us. If band leaders choose to pursue incorporation, they will then need to take on the responsibility of payroll and HR administration for the rest of their band. In many performing arts disciplines, such as jazz, musicians are constantly reconfiguring line ups, performing as sidemen in various bands, and as one-time special guests for specific performances. We will now be obliged to devote tremendous time and resources to constantly hiring, managing and tracking of musicians through this cumbersome process.

AB 5 unnecessarily complicates other work arrangements found in community cultural programming such as small festivals, neighborhood street fairs, parades and summer music series in our local parks. San Jose Jazz is best known for producing our large Summer Fest which brings tens of thousands of visitors and requires hundreds of temporary roles to execute. The vast majority of previously contract work roles will now be required to be employees. For instance, we are required by the City of San Jose to hire off-duty police officers through their Secondary Employment Unit program to insure a safe and well-run festival. Under AB 5 we will be required to classify these moonlighting officers as San Jose Jazz employees with the attendant oversight and administrative requirements.

Typical of such legislation, AB 5 comes with a hefty list of exempted categories that are a Who’s Who of the politically connected and well-funded: lawyers, doctors, accountants, brokers, builders, and others. Actors, choreographers, dancers, directors, producers, and musicians are among numerous roles in the performing arts that exhibit a multitude of contract work arrangements. None of these are exempt from AB 5’s rules. The cultural sector is full of various work arrangements, some as employee others as contractor, that have evolved over decades to accommodate artist’s unique crafts and artistic products and services.

AB 5 runs roughshod over all of these arrangements. Beyond the financial, legal, and administrative mess created by AB 5, communities face even more profound threats from the new law. Segments of our cultural and civic life are at risk of going out of existence. Non-equity theaters, music venues and jazz clubs, dance companies, small cultural festivals of all types face very real threats to how they organize their work arrangements.

The cavalier approach by which Sacramento adopted this legislation opened a Pandora’s box that will chip away at California’s cultural life. Perhaps our legislators will begin realizing the implications of AB 5 when they start organizing and staffing their next campaign or political rally, and find that they, too, must deal with the mess they created.

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.

Cops ‘n Crab: Friday, Feb. 21st

The annual El Cerrito Police Employees Association crab feed will be held at 6 p.m. on Friday, February 21st, at the Community Center. Funds raised benefit the police K9 program. Oven roasted and marinated crab highlights the menu along with pasta, garlic bread, salad, and dessert. Tickets sold only at Eventbrite.com.

Enter to win awesome raffle prizes for all ages plus the ever-popular gun raffle. A bar will offer beer, wine, soda, and water. Don’t miss out!
I would like to introduce one of the Chamber’s newest members: Jason Russell, an Edward Jones Investments specialist, establishing a practice based in El Cerrito. Jason has lived overseas and traveled the wide world for many years, but has rich historical ties to this area. His grandfather was Irving (Ernie) Minster who went from salesman to eventual owner of the landmark House of Harris (Call me Joe) store in downtown Berkeley. In 1948, Ernie decided that the gentle hillside of El Cerrito on Brewster Drive was a good place to build a family home and Jason has many childhood memories connected with it. In a grand circuitous way, he has recently returned to live in this home after being away for ages.

In Jason’s years at University of Southern California, he majored in theater and minored in psychology. During junior year in England, he met his future wife, an Italian woman also studying abroad. As one thing led to another, they ended up in Prague in the early 1990s and settled there, staying seven years. Jason’s entrepreneurial spirit led him to launch and operate various businesses, a café-bookstore, a nightclub, a fine dining restaurant, along with English as a Second Language teaching. With all this, he also found time to publish a literary magazine (The Prague Revue) and become a father, too!

When his wife was expecting their second child, the couple decided to return to her native town of Modena, Italy. Jason adapted quickly and honed his skills in the areas of international business development, exporting and sales. From Italy, he made exhausting round the world business trips until 2014, when personal life factors convinced him a change was due. Jason moved to Florida and got into the real estate business for a while, but the lure of his west coast roots was strong. Last year he came back to El Cerrito, excited to begin a new professional chapter as a financial advisor with Edward Jones Investments.

The variety of Jason’s business background and experiences brings a valuable perspective to clients, particularly those small business owners with potentially irregular revenue streams. Having worked in the international business arena, he has thorough understanding that will be very beneficial to anyone open to considering investments with international ties. Jason’s primary desire is to provide peace of mind for his clients with regard to their business and/or personal financial goals.

The Edward Jones company provides a very solid foundation with constant knowledge-sharing between representatives. If you’re searching for someone to advise or guide you through the maze of options and decisions about your finances, try reaching out to Jason Russell. I think you’ll be glad you did. Jason will be launching an office space soon and in the meantime, he can be reached by phone at 510-480-7793 or email: Jason.Russell@edwardjones.com.
By David Weinstein

It is one of the most distinctive buildings on San Pablo Avenue, if one of the smallest. It is also a “storybook” building in two senses of the term. Architecturally, with its four steep gables that suggest a house from a fairytale, and historically—telling a true tale both of betrayal and friendship.

The former Contra Costa Florist Building, 10848 San Pablo Ave., next to City Hall and now part of the Hana Gardens senior housing complex, was the flower shop of the Mabuchi family from 1935.

It had been built in the 1920s to serve as the shop of the Valley of the Moon Quarry, from Sonoma. The building also served as the Chamber of Commerce office for about 17 years until February 2009 when the city purchased the property.

The Mabuchi family was part of a community of Japanese Americans in El Cerrito and Richmond, who made the area one of the most important cut flower growing regions around. The entire community was rounded up and locked in internment camps during World War II, a betrayal by their very own government.

The Mabuchis’ friend and neighbor, Fred Conwill, owner of the Tradeway furniture store, preserved the property for the family while they were interned, allowing them to reclaim it after the war.

Tom Panas, a longtime member of the El Cerrito Historical Society who has been studying the local Japanese-American community and befriending its members since 2002, led efforts to preserve this building and its important story when the city planned to demolish it to make way for senior housing.

The Japanese American Citizens League and other members of the community played an important role in this successful effort, which was recognized by the State of California on January 22nd with a plaque, during a ceremony at the Stanley Mosk Library in Sacramento.

The restoration of the Contra Costa Florist Shop and the historical signage that has been installed as part of Hana Gardens was one of five winners of the 2019 Governor’s Historic Preservation Awards.

Attending the ceremony were several members of the Historical Society, including Tom, and Dianne Brenner who prepared the nomination for the award. Mayor Pro Tem Paul Fadelli and city council member Rochelle Pardue-Okimoto also attended, as did several members of the local Japanese-American community, including Flora Ninomiya, of a flower growing family. Flora was interned during the war as a young girl.

The certificate will likely be displayed in the former flower shop, which we believe is to be used as an activity and events space.

If you have not visited the site recently it is well worth it. Tom Panas worked with members of the Japanese-American Citizens League to write many of the historical panels. Both the text—which delves into the entire Japanese-American experience in this region, as well as flower growing and the internment years and beyond—and the way it is displayed, leading viewers from a public plaza to the old shop itself, is not only informative but deeply moving.
EL CERRITO’S DOWN HOME MUSIC STORE

Continued from page 1

Mahal, Charlie Musselwhite and Linda Ronstadt.

“Whenever Elvin was making a recording he’d bring the whole band here and buy them CDs” to provide musical inspiration,” Garrett said.

Now they are being joined by a new generation of customers discovering the pleasures of shopping, browsing, discovering and talking music. Garrett, who has worked at the store for 17 years and was a customer before that, attributes much of that to people moving here as new housing is built along San Pablo Avenue.

“The neighborhood has picked up, which means business has picked up,” he said. “We’ve seen in the past two years a precipitous increase in the number of people and changes in the demographic.

Adults come in with kids and want to show them what vinyl records are.”

Some concessions to the online world, offering music for sale on its website (www.downhomemusic.com), and an eBay store, as well as reaching customers via its Facebook and Instagram accounts have been made. But that can’t compare to paying a visit.

“Regular customers who live very close by come in almost daily. We see more and more cases of dads coming in, pushing a stroller. There’s more women, too. It’s still kind of a boys club, but it’s definitely changing.”

It’s an experience that isn’t available online.

“They are two very different worlds,” Garrett said. “I think there’s been a backlash to the digital world by people who want to have something tangible, something they can hold in their hand and read the notes. It’s not a huge thing — it’s still a niche, but it’s a thing.”

There is also a social aspect, he said.

“It’s kind of the musical equivalent of a barbershop,” Garrett said. “People hang out and express their opinions. Sometimes you see 10 or 20 people in the vinyl room arguing or comparing thoughts.”

Down Home, one of a few brick-and-mortar record stores left in the East Bay, has an advantage because store founder and owner Chris Strachwitz owns the building, which also houses the Arhoolie Foundation and Les Blank Films.

Artifacts from a 2019 exhibit at San Francisco International Airport on “Down Home Music: The Story of Arhoolie Records,” chronicling the career and subjects documented by Strachwitz during a long and celebrated career as a music archivist, are going up on the interior walls of the store and the store is planning to hold a celebratory event once everything is in place.

The store also regularly hosts in-store musical performances and other events, as well as parking lot events such as a monthly swap meet for collectors of 78 RPM records, and meets with vendors selling stereo equipment, records and related items.

The memorabilia on display at the store is part of the overall attraction. “It’s as much a museum as a store,” Garrett said. “Sometimes I refer to myself as a docent.”
and roads dominated by trucks and SUV’s that sit high with their intense headlights beaming a glaring stream of far reaching light does not bode well for me. That’s just one example of a circumstance that causes me to be much more cognizant and mindful of factors that influence the decision making process of people as they reach different stages in the “life process.” I’ve forgone many events that were scheduled during rush hour traffic, at a time when the roads are dark and when the event is situated at a location with difficult and/or insufficient parking. In business we need to be in tune with all of the factors that impact the actions that our customers and clients take. What the customer deems as a convenient and pleasant experience means a lot and will have considerable impact as to how successful we are. It’s critical for us to know what works best for our existing as well as our potential customers.

As my late father would say “six one way, half a dozen another way,” so goes technology. On the one hand the blinding headlights frustrate me to no end. On the other hand, the degree of illumination and ability to see farther down the road is considered a great improvement in terms of safety. Some people enjoy having the ability to go to self-checkout at stores whereby others enjoy having human contact and seeing actual people gainfully employed and working.

As a real estate broker, I started in the business 40 years ago when business was conducted on a face-to-face basis. In the present environment most of the transactional aspects of the business are conducted electronically often times resulting in never seeing some of the key parties to the transaction. Times have certainly changed and we have to use and embrace the tools of modern business if we intend to be competitive, but as I’ve said in the past, we must also maintain the old school values of integrity, professionalism and personal service.

Core principles and values should be consistent, and carryover from generation to generation, at least that what I thought. I find that in this “modern era” that is no longer the case. Certain seg-
MONTHLY LUNCHEON
Tuesday, Feb. 18th at noon

Guest Speaker:
Sabina Pan, CPA
El Cerrito Royale
6510 Gladys Ave., El Cerrito

$20 includes lunch ($22 credit or PayPal)
RSVP: info@elcerritochamber.org

Sandwiches from Mr. Pickle’s

The Calendar

Feb. 1 Special town hall meeting in the council chambers at City Hall, 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. Learn about the city budget, current financial position, and ask questions of staff.
4 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
8 Broadway Inside Out. 8 p.m. Celebrate 60 years of Contra Costa Civic Theatre. One night only. Tickets at: ccct.org
12 Community Strategic Plan Open House, 6-8 p.m., City Hall.
18 Chamber of Commerce lunch meeting. See above.
18 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
20 History Room open 4:30-6 p.m. at City Hall.
21 PEA crab feed; see page 3.
18 Chamber of Commerce lunch meeting.

SUPER BOWL LIV
Sunday, February 2
Not going to Miami? Then stay close to home and watch the 49ers vs. the Chiefs on the big screens at these local sports bars.

514 Lounge — opens at 2 p.m.
11236 San Pablo Ave. at Potrero, EC

Los Moles Beer Garden
6120 Potrero Ave., EC

McBears Social Club
10458 San Pablo Ave., EC

Chamber Officers & Staff
President
Jeffrey Wright, Wright Realtors
Vice President
Russell Doi, Retirement Funding Solutions
Secretary
Aissia Ashoori, City of El Cerrito
Treasurer, Byline Editor
John C. Stashik, Premier Graphics
Manager
Lisa Martinengo
Byline Correspondent
Chris Treadway

Editorial, Typography & Layout by Premier Graphics
Printed by Minuteman Press
1-510-540-7113
1-510-235-2195
Proud members of the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce
February 2020