I really enjoy living in El Cerrito and being a part of a community that participates and is involved in so many civic endeavors. A few events that come immediately to mind are the great Fourth of July “party” that takes place annually at Cerrito Vista Park. The annual Martin Luther King, Jr., rally, march and program at El Cerrito High School is also another highlight and this year was the thirtieth anniversary of the event taking place in El Cerrito. In 2017 we had great participation as we celebrated the centennial year of El Cerrito that featured a series of interesting events throughout the year capped off with a parade and a gala dinner dance.

Civic engagement is a strong indicator as to the vibrancy and strength of a community and our city has demonstrated that we are engaged and vibrant. On Tuesday, February 19th, I participated in two distinct and engaging events in our city. The first event was our Chamber of Commerce monthly luncheon. We had an excellent turnout and a great presentation by local attorney Jean Shrem who updated us on some of the many laws that have come into effect for 2019. Believe me when I say the presentation was quite an eye opener. Among other things, she shared with us some of the fines associated with traffic violations and they are in the stratosphere! Whatever you do, please do not park in a bus stop zone, not even for a minute, lest you find yourself paying a fine in excess of $900.

The other event that I attended was the city council meeting where the hot topic was a presentation and discussion on tenant protection options. I arrived shortly after the 7 p.m. start time and the council chambers were overflowing with people spilling all the way into the overflow area.

Celebrating 15 Years on Stockton Ave.

I celebrate 15 years on Stockton Avenue, the Jenny K. Gifts shop is also bucking a national trend by going from online startup to mom-and-pop, brick-and-mortar business. Their secret?

“She has the most friendly business in town,” said a woman bringing her father to the Jenny K. gift shop (www.jennyk.com) on a cold but sunny Friday in February.

Married entrepreneurs Jen Komaromi and Kevin O’Neal specialize in friendly and neighborly at their storefronts on Stockton Avenue, which include the gift shop, Well Grounded Tea & Coffee Bar (www.well-grounded.com), and their latest venture, a co-working space.

The gift shop opened on Valentine’s Day in 2004 and just celebrated its 15th anniversary. The coffee shop began in January 2005. All three are in the same building, with other storefronts sandwiched in between.

“I can’t believe it,” Komaromi said looking back 15 years. “I don’t know if I ever thought about it. We never thought of failure as an option. It just evolved. Time goes by very fast.”

So fast that the couple’s two children grew up in the coffee shop starting as babies. Jack, now 12, and Evie, almost 9, now know the routine.

“I can’t believe it,” Komaromi said looking back 15 years. “I don’t know if I ever thought about it. We never thought of failure as an option. It just evolved. Time goes by very fast.”

By Chris Treadway

 Supervisor John Gioia congratulates Jenny K. along with Kevin O’Neal and Al Miller at a February 9th anniversary party marking 15 years doing business on El Cerrito’s Stockton Avenue.

See From the President, page 7

See 15 Years on Stockton, page 5
Final call! The El Cerrito Police Employees Association K9 Fund crab feed is on March 1st. When this Byline enters your mailbox, you have mere hours to get a ticket if you’re lucky. At press time there were still a few available at eventbrite.com.

No more Lime. A year ago LimeBike entered El Cerrito with their dockless bike share business. (The firm is now called Lime.) They are discontinuing the bike share service in El Cerrito and elsewhere to focus on electric scooter rentals. In fact, looking at Seattle, one of their biggest markets, virtually all the bikes have been replaced by electric scooters plus a few cars. I was puzzled how the company could make a buck on low cost bike rentals anyway. What this means for the future in El Cerrito is unknown except that the bikes are gone for now. As for e-scooters, they have not been without controversy.

Closed. Curves, located next to our main post office on San Pablo Avenue, has ceased operation. Looking for fitness training? Visit The Perfect Workout (El Cerrito Plaza) or 24 Hour Fitness (at Moeser and San Pablo).

Open. Jenny’s, at 6331 Fairmount Avenue, is now open for business offering haircuts and beauty services. First mentioned in this newsletter in May 2017, it has been a long time making the move to EC. Welcome!

Status quo. The 514 Lounge at 11236 San Pablo (near Potrero) remains in the “coming soon” category. The search was on for a top notch bartender when I last checked. I’d love to see this business open and succeed. We don’t need another CBK which was sad. 514 has been in the works since 2017.

Hana Gardens. Word from the city is that the official grand opening will take place on Monday, May 13th. Stay tuned for details.

Happy anniversary. The Rotary Club of El Cerrito was chartered on May 2, 1949. Therefore, this will be the 70th year of “The Friendly Club.” Later this year, on October 13th, the Rotary’s annual Sip & Savor event will be held at the Berkeley Country Club. Put it on the calendar now. This will be the 10th S&S.

One more anniversary. Albany Bowl will be 70 years old on August 5th. The best known business in Albany is a proud member of this Chamber. More to come in a future Byline.

And another. El Cerrito Royale and the Berg Communities celebrate their 17th anniversary on March 1st. It seems like yesterday when they opened. The Chamber is grateful to El Cerrito Royale for providing us meeting space every month.

Luck be a lady… Casino Night at the Berkeley Country Club will be Saturday, March 9th. Poker, roulette, blackjack, a raffle, plus a light dinner. $37 per person. Call 510-233-7550 for reservations.
As 2019 steamrolls along and some new buildings are starting to change the look and feel of El Cerrito’s main artery, I find it reassuring that a few places and institutions are likely to stay the same—at least in my lifetime!

For example, the block from Central to Fairmount on San Pablo Avenue, has an interesting mix of unique old and new buildings housing locally owned businesses that keep the small-town character of El Cerrito intact.

Walking from Nông Thôn to Pic-n-Pac, is like being in a time machine, visiting many different decades in five minutes. I imagine there are those who’d like to see the real dated buildings come down and instead, they’d be fine with a few big glass and steel boxes with the obligatory mega-chain coffee shop on the corner. Obviously, I’m not in that group.

Do people really want El Cerrito to look like a cookie-cutter copy of thousands of other towns? A better question: is it possible to respect the longevity and character of a place while creating fresh new opportunities for living, working, or opening a business? I’d like to believe our city staff sincerely and thoroughly deals with that question as they forge policies in the name of civic progress, though at this time, it’s not clear they are.

It’s certainly not an easy task to balance and obviously, big box developments are coming soon to other parts of the Avenue, so I suggest we look around and appreciate the unique vintage parts of our city while we still can. If you’re really intrigued, check out the El Cerrito Historical Society website (www.elcerritohistoricalsociety.org) for their schedule of guided walks and avail yourself of the wonderful resource and knowledgeable team.

Another local group that is an example of and appreciates longevity, is the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce, founded 83 years ago. The Chamber is going strong with over 100 members and shows no signs of fading into obsolescence.

Some of the members have been continuously in business close to 80 years, too. The Junket, Connors Overhead Door Co., Pastime Ace Hardware, East Bay Sanitary, Olivero Plumbing; these are some masters of successful longevity in El Cerrito. In August, Albany Bowl will reach 70! (Keep reading the Byline for future news on a big party there.)

Other than long term stability, another common feature of these businesses is—surprise—they’ve all been steadfast members of the Chamber of Commerce. Now, of course, the Chamber can’t take all the credit for that longevity, but it certainly played a hand.

As any marketing pro will say, it takes message repetition, consistency, and making relationships to help a business grow and thrive. The aforementioned businesses realized those areas of business support are exactly what the Chamber can and does provide year after year.

However, it’s important to say that the business owner or principal needs to participate actively and prepare to do so over time, otherwise, the Chamber isn’t in a position to guarantee successful growth results.

So, if success and longevity are what your business needs, we encourage our current, new, and future business members to reach out to us, come to the events, write an article for the Byline, call us up, send your special offers to publicize, come to board meetings, share what challenges you are facing and how we can assist. After all, the Chamber’s mission is to create, foster and support a successful business community that links and serves businesses and residents, but we can’t do it alone. We need you!

The views expressed here are the author’s and do not necessarily represent those of the Chamber Board. Email: l.martinengo@elcerritochamber.org; cell: 1-510-778-5883.

Higher ROI Comes With Sustained Chamber Involvement

**March Mixer**

**Hosted by:** Chop Salon & Spa 6493 Portola Drive, El Cerrito

**Wednesday, March 13** 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Networking ★ Raffle Prizes ★ Refreshments ★ Fun
By Lisa Martinengo

The founder and owner of Gate View Painting, Jim Spain, is as local as it gets. He was born and raised in Berkeley and attended Albany High School. Taking care of buildings one way or another has been in Jim's blood since childhood. As a young boy, he helped his grandfather, who owned vacation rental cabins at Lake Tahoe. Every summer they would repair, paint, do carpentry and more to maintain the cabins in top shape. Jim learned many practical skills during these fondly remembered years.

In 1971, as a young adult, he joined the El Cerrito Police Department and stayed for five years, until he received a great offer from Wisconsin Diesel Engines. He moved up the ranks there to become purchasing manager for the entire west coast.

In the early 1980s, the call of entrepreneurship was strong, and Jim decided to strike out on his own, using the painting skills he learned growing up. As a one-man show, he got up early to put promo fliers on neighborhood doors, made job proposals on a old typewriter, procured the supplies and, of course, did all the painting work alone. Many of the first jobs were houses in the hills, and since the landmark Golden Gate Bridge was so often in view Jim named his new business after it: Gate View Painting!

For the first three years, Jim focused on interior painting only and his reputation for doing excellent work grew until it was necessary to bring on his first employee. Gradually, the business has grown to sustain between 5 and 11 employees, whom Jim says are like an extended family.

Gate View Painting takes on all types of projects: residential, commercial, and industrial scale. They can also handle installation of interior crown molding and offer exterior sealing services for decks, etc. They use only the safest high quality paints and products.

University of California at Berkeley is one of Gate View's largest accounts, and Cal keeps the crew busy, as does the accompanying paperwork for environmental impact reports and insurance requirements. Jim and his staff meet every two weeks to keep up to date with new products and current safety regulations.

Due to Jim's dedication to excellent customer service and workmanship, Gate View Painting is the local business to turn to for any of your home or business painting and maintenance needs. Contact Jim Spain at 510-620-0164 or email: jimgvpinc@aol.com.
register, clean dishes. They’re my sales assistants.

“We feel really blessed to create a life for ourselves that enables us to spend time with our kids, instead of having to commute and send them to daycare and stuff.”

The family feel also extends to the customers. “At the coffee shop we have what we refer to as ‘coffee babies,’” Komaromi said, referring to dads who would bring their tots with them on weekends. “They’re all freshmen in high school now.”

The success of the enterprises might seem unlikely in an age when online commerce is supposed to be eroding so-called “brick-and-mortar” businesses. Even more so because the gift shop originated as an online enterprise that was crowding the couple’s home.

Komaromi put an ad on Craigslist seeking office space or a storefront and the owner of the Stockton Avenue building responded letting her know he had a vacancy.

The couple took the plunge and opened Jenny K., a small gift shop in the space at 6927 Stockton. When a computer repair shop vacated the space next door, the couple thought a coffee shop would be a complementary business and unsuccessfully tried to find people interested in opening one before jumping into another new venture themselves.

Longtime resident and Stege Sanitary District board member Al Miller was the first customer in the door that day and he recalled that “Everyone was scurrying around. So I asked if there was anything I could do to help.”

Miller said he was dispatched to Semifreddi’s to pick up pastry that hadn’t been delivered yet.

“It was really crazy. We had a nightmare opening,” Komaromi said.

The gift and coffee shops weren’t quite overnight successes. “We made sacrifices. We were at the poverty level the first five years,” Komaromi said. And even though their perseverance paid off, there are still challenges, including the new $15 an hour minimum wage that took effect in El Cerrito in January.

“Our payroll went up a ton,” Komaromi said, explaining that the shops closed early during the week of Presidents Day, when school is closed and patronage declines. “We can’t afford to have the store open when it’s slow. We’ve definitely been impacted. At the same time, it feels good to provide a living wage.”

The couple have been steady promoters of their businesses through direct mailings, sponsorship and support of local events, and community involvement, including volunteering at Fairmont Elementary, where their children have attended.

“We like to say we’re a community-based business,” Komaromi said. “Because we’re in the community and in the neighborhood, we need to be involved. It’s a way to learn more about the community and what the community wanted.”

“We travel all over training. The key is you do have to constantly educate yourself and always have to watch the bottom line.”

Elkayam Center for Acupuncture Adds Two Practitioners to Staff

BY LISA MARTINENGO

TWO PEOPLE have recently joined the staff of El Cerrito’s full service health and wellness improvement center. The Elkayam Center for Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine at 731 El Cerrito Plaza (upstairs) is truly becoming a premier center for the healing arts.

Michael Fitzgerald has practiced Chinese medicine since 2002 when he graduated from the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. He speaks fluent Mandarin Chinese and spent eight years in living in Taiwan and China. Applying the ancient wisdom he learned in China to treat modern illnesses, his focus is on preventative and compassionate care.

Dr. Jorge Intal is a specialist in the practice of acupuncture and integrative medicine. He possesses over 15 years of clinical experience and training and holds a clinical doctorate in acupuncture and Asian medicine and a master’s in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Contact the Elkayam Center for Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine at 510-528-1836.
Be Aware or Beware! New Laws Effective This Year

BY CHRISS TREADWAY

What you don’t know about laws taking effect this year in California could cost you. El Cerrito attorney Jean Shrem covered a variety of new laws as the guest speaker at the Chamber’s monthly luncheon February 19th, with an eye to “interesting, unusual, applicable, or fun” entries.

Business law is part of Shrem’s legal practice and much of the fast-moving talk covered changes involving employers and workers. They include:

• The hourly minimum wage increases statewide this year to $11 for companies with up to 25 employees, and $13 with 26 or more workers. El Cerrito has enacted a $15-an-hour minimum as of January 1st.

• California-based public corporations must have at least one woman on their board of directors by the end of 2019 and at least two by 2021, with a requirement of three women by then if a firm has six or more directors.

• One of the most far-reaching changes involves a court decision that reinterprets existing state law governing employees and independent contractors. The 2018 ruling, which upheld a claim by truck drivers that their work constitutes employment, has ramifications for anyone in the state who has been using independent contractors, Shrem said. “If you are an employer or an independent contractor, you should talk to an attorney,” she said. “That case is a big deal.”

• Sexual harassment training is now required to be given by 2020 by California firms with at least five employees.

• Cities and counties cannot ban street food vendors, but are allowed to regulate them with a licensing system.

• Restaurants may only give customers a plastic straw by request, but fast-food outlets are exempted.

• Restaurants that offer child meals must have a healthy beverage — milk, water, sparkling or flavored water — as the default, with no artificial or natural sweeteners allowed.

Another food-related law requires that vegetarian meal options be offered by hospitals, health care facilities and prisons.

Natural disasters, particularly the wildfires that have devastated large areas of the state in recent years are the focus of a package of laws meant to combat gouging of victims. Laws prohibit “significant” increases (more than 10 percent) in charges for rent, hotels, food and other basic commodities, and extend to locales outside the immediate disaster area that might supply victims. “If you’re going to increase your rate more than 10 percent, you might want to think about it,” Shrem advised.

Another set of laws seeks to put restrictions on insurers after a disaster.

Many new laws increase fines for vehicle violations. Talking on or simply holding a cellphone while driving is a $76 fine for the first offense, $190 for the second. Not wearing a seatbelt will cost you $160, while a driver caught wearing headphones will be fined $178. A child not wearing a seatbelt or in a child seat costs $436.

Speed violations of 1 to 15 miles over the limit now carry a fine of $224, which jumps to $338 for going 16 to 25 miles over the limit. Driving with high beams on is $282, crossing a double yellow line is $425, not making a full halt at a stop sign or violating a “No U-turn” sign is $284, stopping at a bus stop is $976.

An uninsured driver in an accident will be fined $796 and have a driver’s license revoked for four years.

Other changes:

Pet shops in California are now prohibited from selling cats, dogs or rabbits that haven’t come from animal shelters or nonprofit rescue groups.

Vote-by-mail ballots will include a postage-paid return envelope.

The state primary election in 2020 will be held on the first Tuesday in March to give California more influence in the presidential primaries.

Almost all single-family homes built in California after January 1, 2020, will be required to include solar panels, part of the state’s effort to achieve 50 percent renewable energy by 2026 and 100 percent by 2045. Multi-unit residential buildings up to three stories would also fall under the requirement. It is uncertain whether it would apply to accessory dwelling units.

Shrem is a licensed real estate broker and attorney with a legal practice in El Cerrito (www.shremlaw.com) specializing in real estate and business law, estate planning, and intellectual property.

To contact Jean Shrem, phone 510-882-9992 or email jeann@shremlaw.com. The Shrem law office is located at 11720 San Pablo Avenue, Suite C, El Cerrito 94530.

15,000 Addresses: Next Deadline April 23rd
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

the main lobby of city hall where additional chairs were subsequently placed to accommodate the mass of people. The fire marshal made a few sweeps through the council chambers and redirected people who were standing in other areas in order to comply with safety regulations.

As for the topic itself, staff member Aissia Ashoori provided a thorough and comprehensive PowerPoint presentation regarding the various types of tenant protection options that are available for consideration along with other relevant and important information. Prior to the presentation, Karen Pinkos, our highly skilled and extremely competent city manager, let it be known that our city needs to be data driven, hence decisions made based on facts.

The council chambers and overflow areas were filled with concerned property owners, many of whom were emblazoned with brightly colored neon labels stating, “Responsible Housing Provider.” Without a doubt, those in opposition to the various options presented outnumbered those in favor of the options by a huge margin.

When logic is applied to the situation, I can certainly understand why that was the case. What property owner wants to incur additional costs and bureaucracy when no data driven, fact-based case has been made for implementing such measures as they pertain specifically to El Cerrito?

I can certainly sympathize with the position that the city council is in from a first-hand experience perspective. For the past five years I have served on the planning commission for Contra Costa County. In that capacity I have had to make several decisions about various proposals throughout the county. It is difficult to keep everyone happy, but decisions must be made on the basis of facts and what serves the greater good of the community as a whole.

It takes courage to vote against proposals or actions that individuals and/or groups may favor especially if the group has direct and/or indirect influence. However, if the facts don’t bear out or support the position you tell them no and move on to other important business. Again, that takes courage.

I started off my column by stating how much I enjoy living in El Cerrito and being a part of a community that is so civically engaged. Just as our citizens have demonstrated that they will pack out Cerrito Vista Park for a great day of celebrating the Fourth of July, they will also pack out city hall when issues that resonate with them are before the city council. This diversity of engagement adds to the vibrancy and strength of our community.

Let us continue to be a vibrant and strong community engaged on all levels.

Like the Chamber on Facebook

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Mark Sifling

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The Calendar

Mar. 1 Crab feed for the PEA K9 fundraiser, 6 p.m., Community Center.
5 City Council meets, 5:30 p.m., City Hall. (Early start.)
6 Chamber Board of Directors meets, 9 a.m., location TBA.
9 Mardi Gras celebration at El Cerrito Royale. 5-7 p.m.
   “West Coast Blues Society Caravan of All Stars”. Sample the best of Cajun cuisine. RSVP by March 1.
   510-234-5200.
10 “Humble Boy” closes at Contra Costa Civic Theatre.
   Tickets and complete schedule at ccct.org
13 Chamber Mixer at Chop Salon; see page 3.
14 Cerrito Classics: “Office Space” at the Rialto Cinemas Cerrito, 7 p.m.
19 Chamber luncheon; see box above.
19 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.

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

Chamber Officers & Staff
President  Jeffrey Wright, Wright Realtors
Vice President Nic Tang, Marvin Gardens Real Estate
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Treasurer, Byline Editor John C. Stashik, Premier Graphics
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Mardi Gras Celebration Saturday, March 9th
5 pm - 7 pm
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