ONE OF the simple pleasures of being the Chamber president is presiding over our monthly luncheon meetings. We have a period set aside for introductions and will often have a specially designated spotlight business which provides an opportunity for the business owner or representative to give more details about their business.

At our June meeting we allocated some extra time to one of our local businesses. They were not the featured or designated spotlight business, however, the circumstances warranted giving that business some “extra love.”

This courtesy was extended to Ron Codron, the owner of Abbey Carpet & Floor in El Cerrito for 45 years and a member of this Chamber. He made us all aware of the fact that he sold the business on June 1st. His announcement was both heartfelt and uplifting. It was great to hear that a local businessman and resident had operated successfully in our community so many years and was retiring by choice. Ron went on to say that his primary concern in making the decision to retire was his loyal team of employees with the rookie team member having been with the company for 20 years! He was committed to making sure that his employees fared well with the transition.

After Ron finished his remarks, he introduced the new owners of Abbey, Kevin and Patricia Bohm. Kevin’s background, extensive business experience, and high ethical standards made the perfect fit for Ron to confidently “pass the baton.”

We ended the introductions portion with our spotlight business, Move With Studio, a new business focused on the Pilates method of exercise. Owner Kelsey Weidenhoefer was very informative as to the services offered and the tremendous benefits gained utilizing

THE FARMERS MARKET CELEBRATES A QUARTER CENTURY AT THE PLAZA

By Chris Treadway

A FARMERS MARKET established 25 years ago as a last-ditch effort to bring badly needed foot traffic to a dying shopping center is today a thriving part of the revamped El Cerrito Plaza, attracting produce buyers from a wide area each Tuesday and Saturday.

Over its first quarter century, the market has changed very little, said manager Jean Thompson, and that familiarity is part of the attraction. “That’s the beauty of it,” she said. “We have five members who have been there since opening day and another four or five that have been there at least 20 years. Basically, the majority have been there 20 to 25 years. And we have many customers who have been there 20 to 25 years.” Customers know what to expect, and who to expect, and the place has a family feel.

“The farmers have children who grow up working with their parents, then go on to manage the parents’ booth,” said Thompson, who will mark 20 years as manager in July. “A lot of customers are on a first-name basis with (the sellers). They take a real interest, it’s a real one-on-one. You don’t have that at grocery stores.”

Sellers come from as far away as Fresno, Winters and Watsonville, as well as a bakery that brings goods from Santa Cruz.

“The farmers are really hard-working people,” Thompson said. “They take a lot of pride with what they put out to sell. You can find things out there you won’t find in a store.”

The market got its start on July 25, 1994.

NEW MEMBERS
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San Francisco 94111
415-743-9886
mark.a.porter@ampf.com

See From the President, page 7
See The Farmers Market at 25, page 5
The June Byline had just been put to bed when a new tapas bar opened for business on Memorial Day. The 514 Lounge is the creation of Mary Dugbartey and is located at 11236 San Pablo Avenue near Potrero. Open seven nights a week; www.514lounge.com.

New vet. Dr. Manprit Buttar is to open his new office in El Cerrito mid-month. El Cerrito Veterinary Care will be at 10324 San Pablo Avenue, once the location of an animal eye care specialist. elcerritoveterinarian.com.

Workout. New at 10330 San Pablo Avenue is Team Tufunga Training. Between Eureka and Stockton.

Flat fee. A different concept in financial planning charges. Simple Life Financial is offering flat rate pricing. Call Mark Sifling for information: 510-526-4407. See their ad on page 7.

Valjean returns! Live, on stage, “Les Misérables” will run at the El Cerrito High Performing Arts Theater (540 Ashbury Ave.) from July 19-28. This is a production of the Youth Musical Theater Company (YMTC). Tickets are a steal at $32; seniors $25 and youth $16. YMTC provides training to young theater artists. Tickets: ymtcbayarea.org.

That time again. The annual El Cerrito business license fee is due by July 31st. Don’t overlook it; the late pay penalty is costly. Bills have gone out but if your business didn’t receive one, visit our City Hall.

Dave Terry is a musician and song writer who attended our June luncheon. He wrote the “El Cerrito Song” which he previewed at our meeting and sold a few copies on the spot. (It could be played to break up those long city council meetings.) It’s on his “It’s About Time” album. Those that heard it liked it. Get a disc for $20, or download for $15 at davetmusic.com.

Where in the World is Karen?

Answer: representing the City of El Cerrito in China! In her capacity as current president of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) our city manager recently visited Qingdao and Beijing. Along the way she got a close-up view of the Great Wall of China.

There Is No Place Like Down Home

John McCord accepts a plaque from manager Lisa Martinengo. El Cerrito’s legendary Down Home Music Store recently became a member of the Chamber.
Wrangling Over Rent Regulations

It seems to me that since 2013 and the days of emotion-packed hearings at city council deliberations to mandate wage hikes, there has been no other issue causing such heated controversy, as that of the recent passage of several ordinances under the umbrella of “tenant protections.” Justifiably so, as rent control and related rules are extremely thorny issues. Several council meetings were chock full of speakers from both sides of the court, sharing their stories, model tenants and model landlords appealing the council.

The fact that two council members voted against these ordinances indicates how divisive the topic is. Even our Chamber president may have polarized someone because of his eloquently stated position at meetings and in earlier editions of this newsletter.

From DeutscheWelle.com

The city of Berlin called on Tuesday for a five-year freeze on rents in the German capital beginning in 2020. Housing costs in the city have doubled over the past decade.

The city’s proposed freeze would “protect against rent increases for 1.5 million apartments,” according to city officials. The move was announced after a city council meeting held Tuesday. Urban Development and Housing Senator Katrin Lompischer from the Left Party said, “The Senate [Berlin’s executive body] has decided that there are legal grounds for capping rents.” Lompischer will now have until October 15 to present a bill to be voted upon by the Senate. Key points include:

- Rents across Berlin cannot be raised for the next five years; non-price-controlled apartments and welfare housing are exempted from the rule.
- Maximum rent levels will be fixed citywide and renters will have legal recourse if their rent exceeds that cap.
- Rent caps are to be implemented on January 1, 2020 and will apply retroactively from June 18 onward.
- The rent cap does not apply to new construction.
- Although there are exceptions in the case of renovations, landlords will be required to seek city approval for larger improvements.
- Property owners who ignore rules regarding renovation could face fines of up to €500,000 ($560,000).

Haus und Grund, Germany’s largest property owners’ association, wasted no time in calling on its members to pre-emptively raise rents on Monday before the new bill was publicly announced.

A surge in prices has led some residents to call for property to be seized from landlords possessing 3,000 apartments or more. Those behind the initiative have already gathered more than 77,000 signatures in hopes of getting a referendum on the issue.

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.

Wells Fargo Bank Comes On Board

A new member of the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce, Wells Fargo branch staff posed for a photo proudly displaying their membership plaque.

Left to right: Ramiz Janjua, Tassadit Aiboud, Lydia Kam, Scott Poland, Hassan Ali (senior branch manager), Roberto Corona, and Jay Singh.

The El Cerrito branch is at 9800 San Pablo Ave.
By Lisa Martinengo

Have you thought about remodeling or updating your home to increase its size or value? Would you like to add an Accessory Dwelling Unit to your property for guests or supplemental rental income? Does your home, store, or office need some upgrades to comply with code? These are just a few of the projects that Coast Architecture and Design handles with ease.

Based in Richmond Annex, Tony Valadez, owner and principal architect, is our neighborhood licensed architect who would like to assist you with these sorts of goals. Please read on to learn more about this new Chamber member.

Tony Valadez was born and raised in Austin, Texas. He was always a kid who loved to tinker, to take things apart and rebuild so it wasn’t surprising when he decided to attend University of Texas at Austin, and enter the well-regarded five year program for architecture and design. Tony described those years as challenging but a thorough preview and preparation for the world of architecture as a profession.

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 2000 and soon after, moved to New York City, finding work easily. The two years spent there included two momentous events, meeting his future wife and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Tony went back to Texas to get his Master of Architecture from Rice University and then in 2006, he and his life partner, Lauren, decided to come out west to the Golden State which they had visited in the past, Oakland, specifically.

Tony’s career continued at Lowney Architecture, a cutting edge Oakland firm, which he credits with imparting a full range of opportunities and learning, increasing skills, meeting contractors, customers, making contacts, etc. At that time, the firm was still small, and Tony was able to work on many aspects of a given project, sometimes he had to oversee as many as a dozen projects!

After many years, and Lowney successfully grew into a bigger firm, Tony decided he was ready to start his own practice. He still contracts with Lowney, but in March of this year, he founded Coast Architecture and Design, his own full service business. It’s a home based company, which allows Tony to be close to family which includes a six year old daughter, going to Fairmont Elementary.

The process starts typically with a free hour-long consultation to discuss and assess the client’s needs, budget, schedule. If all tasks and terms are agreed upon, Coast will prepare and provide all design drawings, all construction documents, negotiate with contractors and handle all required permits. Tony is well versed in using sustainable building methods as well as repurposing materials whenever possible or appropriate.

Please look at the Coast website for photos of many previous jobs: www.coastarchitecture.com.

I highly recommend getting in touch with Tony, if you have any building or remodel project in mind.
"The reason it started was because all those businesses closed," Thompson said. "The manager of the center and the merchants association started the Tuesday farmers market."

The Saturday market was added about a year later and is now the more popular of the two days.

"Saturday is much busier," Thompson said. "We have a bakery that comes from Santa Cruz. We have a lady fisherman who goes out on her boat and sells fresh fish. Another sells homemade tamales and enchiladas."

Thompson came aboard when the managers of the two days had a dispute with each other and simultaneously walked out.

"I put my name in for the job when there was a dispute between the two managers," said Thompson, who had done accounting jobs, managed an office building, and operated a store space where artists could sell their wares. "They both quit the same day. I was out there the next Saturday.

"I try to keep them all happy. They’re like my kids. I’ve seen them once or twice a week for 20 years. They’re important to me," she said.

The market, which requires a sponsor due to its non profit status, was originally hosted by the Plaza merchants group, but that organization eventually folded when the center was rebuilt and took chain stores as tenants. The El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce stepped in as the market’s sponsor in 2012.

The market is certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which can conduct surprise inspections at any time.

"The purpose is for farmers to have a place to sell fruits and vegetables and get a fair price, and the consumer has a chance to buy straight from the grower. No middle men, just farmer to consumer," Thompson said.

Just as important is the atmosphere that remains after 25 years. "It’s like a community. People can step in there and forget what’s in the paper or on the news, they can really enjoy themselves and just take a break," Thompson said. "When they come out there people are smiling. It’s a happy place, a feel-good place — except when it’s raining."

**WIN A GIFT BASKET**

To celebrate the market’s 25 years, 25 gift baskets will be awarded to lucky ticket holders on Saturday, July 20th. The drawing will be held at 12 noon sharp at El Cerrito Plaza.
Change is inevitable and Ron Codron has seen a lot of it during the 45 years he has owned the Abbey Carpet & Floor location at 10351 San Pablo Avenue.

Neighboring stores have changed hands or identities. The economy has had its ups and downs (Codron said he has weathered at least seven recessions), and tastes in flooring and floor coverings have changed.

Now the Abbey Carpet store is changing as Codron steps down and a new owner, Kevin Bohm, takes over.

The location is one of the oldest in the Naples, Florida-based chain of almost 900 stores. But it’s not immune to change itself.

Bohm is a contractor who has done business with Abbey for some 20 years and sees a nice fit.

“It’s a significant presence in flooring.” Bohm said.

Codron said he had many options when he made the decision to sell the business, including finding someone to continue what he started, or even liquidating the stock and selling the building.

Liquidation likely offered the biggest return, while one potential buyer was already in the floor covering business and brought experience.

“But when Kevin came in late it was an obvious choice because he wanted to synergize the business and could take it to the next level,” Codron said. “Now it can offer service floor-to-ceiling. He had more desire and focus. It was an easy decision.”

Another consideration in selling was that some of the employees have been at the store for 20 years or more.

“It’s people that made the business stand the trials of time,” Bohm said, noting that he likewise has workers with long tenures.

Bohm acknowledged that venturing into retail is different than contracting. “But at the end of the day all businesses succeed by the way they run and manage customers. If you listen to the customer and provide service, I don’t think it matters whether you’re in retail or construction. Following through and providing service are what it’s all about.”

The store itself is undergoing changes too. “This place right now is a work in progress. It’s being changed around,” Codron said, explaining that the large rolls of carpet that take up a major amount of floor space are being removed. In their place will be samples of not only carpet, but ceramic and luxury vinyl tile, allowing many customers to see and evaluate many more styles than they could before.

“We’re doing more hard surface because that’s where everything is going,” Codron said. “Soft surface (carpet) is losing its share of the market.”

Luxury vinyl tile, flooring brands such as Marmoleum, and sustainable materials such as cork flooring are gaining popularity for being environmentally friendly.

Instead of large rolls of carpet, a single table can hold 200 to 300 samples, freeing space for a greater variety of materials, including ceramic tile, which the store will offer for the first time.

“Right now we’re cleaning things up, we’ll be putting new paint on the walls, adding new ways to display,” Bohm said, adding “Carpet is not going away, it’s just going to be utilized differently.”

Codron isn’t going away completely either from the business he has guided for so long. “Kevin says I can work as much or as little as I want,” he said. “I’ll probably be in on appointment or randomly.”
the various techniques. I thought that it was a great transition going from a well-established business to our spotlight business. I told Kelsey that perhaps in 45 years she’d be introducing us—well I guess not all of us—to the new owners of Move With Studio.

The business is conveniently located in Bank of the West Plaza directly across the street from the main post office on San Pablo Avenue. You can get details about the business at their website movewithstudio.com or by calling 510-232-4885.

In other business matters I’ve been asked what’s going on with the new ordinances pertaining to rental properties that the city council passed. Two ordinances passed, one being a Rent Registry, which requires that owners provide the city with specific information pertaining to the operation of their rental properties such as the rental amount, etc. The requirements will apply to all rental properties in El Cerrito including single family residences and Accessory Dwelling Units. The registration fee is $44 per unit.

This fee is separate and apart from the annual business license fee. The intent is to collect statistical data to assess the true state of the rental property market in El Cerrito. For complete details about the Rent Registry visit the city website: www.el-cerrito.org.

The other ordinance that the city council passed was a Just Cause eviction ordinance which basically created a tenancy in perpetuity unless the tenant was found to be in breach of specific terms and conditions. A one year or even a five-year lease would essentially become meaningless for certain classes of property owners in terms of the owner regaining possession without the owner incurring additional payouts.

An effort was immediately made to repeal this ordinance. 1,631 signatures were needed to qualify the referendum. Nearly 2,200 signatures were submitted to the City Clerk and they were turned over to the County Registrar of Voters which subsequently validated the signatures.

At this point the city council will now have to choose one of three options:

1. Repeal the ordinance.
2. Order a special election at least 88 days in the future.
3. Order the item to go before the voters at the next regularly scheduled municipal election which will be in November of 2020.

Inasmuch as this ordinance was passed by a council majority on a 3-2 vote with no real compelling or substantial hard data to support the action, my expectation is for the council to take the intelligent option and repeal the ordinance. With the Rental Registry in place there is now a means to gather data which will allow for fact-based decisions instead of decisions based on emotions, hyperbole and politics.

We have a great business community in El Cerrito as Ron Codron, the former owner-operator of Abbey Carpet, for 45 years so aptly demonstrated. We also have many rental property owners who have operated their properties for decades with a high level of professionalism and ethics.

Let’s support our business community by letting them do what they do best which is to run their businesses and provide goods and services without unnecessary outside interference.

Unfortunately, there are a few cities that are totally out of step and off key because their focus is misplaced. We have a great city; let’s stay focused and in step while marching to the beat of our own drum.
Burgerim Gets Snipped

Up and running since January it was time for an official ribbon cutting at the new El Cerrito Plaza restaurant. Chamber president Jeff Wright, owner Peter Nguyen, mayor Rochelle Pardue-Okimoto, Ashley Nguyen, and council member Paul Fadelli do the honors on June 27th.

The Calendar

July
4  The annual City of El Cerrito/worldOne Fourth of July festival.
10  Chamber Board meets, 9 a.m., City Hall.
11  El Cerrito Rotary Club dedicates a memorial bench at Cerrito Vista Park, 11 a.m.
16  City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
16  Deadline for next campaign of the El Cerrito Marketing Program. Contact ads@elcerritochamber.org
20  Farmers Market 25th anniversary celebration, noon, El Cerrito Plaza
21  “Once On This Island” closes at Contra Costa Civic Theatre; cct.org

No Chamber lunch meetings in July & August. We’ll see you in September.

Welcome Aboard Mark

Mark Porter, private wealth advisor at Porter, Ritchie and Associates, receives a membership plaque from manager Lisa Martinengo.

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

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