We'll, I did it. As you'll recall, I mentioned in my two previous columns that I was planning to join my son and his Boy Scout troop on their annual 50-mile backpack trip. This is a required trip for all members of his troop. As such, this year marked his fifth trip. For the past five years I assisted with the food logistics but was too afraid to go myself due to some back related issues. But as a fifth year scout, this was my son’s year to organize and lead his trek. When he asked me to join him I decided I couldn’t refuse.

This trip is quite a logistical effort. In order to minimize environmental impacts, the Forest Service will not issue wilderness permits for groups larger than 15 people. Including dads, my son’s troop sends about 90 people on this trip each year. That means seven different treks had to be created and seven different routes had to be selected in the same general vicinity. Each of those treks had to apply for a wilderness permit. Wilderness permits become available at 12:01 a.m. on February 1st. So back on February 1st at 12:01 a.m., seven parents made an online dash to submit permit requests. Believe it or not, it’s quite competitive. Fortunately, they were all successful.

Business people, city leaders and other VIPs attended the August 16th sneak preview of the new 24 Hour Fitness Super Sport gym at the Moeser Lane shopping center and there was no shortage accolades for the new facility.

“It’s beautiful,” City Manager Scott Hanin said while touring the spotless building brimming with all new exercise equipment, rooms for classes, and an indoor swimming pool and spa. “I’m a Pizza Roma fan. I can come work out and go eat pizza.”

Mayor Gabe Quinto said he is “excited that they made the decision to open in El Cerrito, and we’ve never had a gym here. We’re going to get a lot of business from having the gym and that will just trickle over.”

As its name implies, the 35,000-square-foot gym will be open 24 hours a day, bringing new life to a former supermarket that relocated seven years ago. It will also help in reviving the shopping center at San Pablo Avenue and Moeser Lane.

“It’s so wonderful the space is finally activated again. It’s a great amenity to have in the city and it’s conveniently located,” Assistant City Manager Karen Pinkos said. “It’s really great to see the center active again.”

Joe Beckles, manager of the newest member of the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce
**More on Nibs.** Construction is underway at Orchard and San Pablo in the former Nibs building which will become another Inn Kensington. I spoke with Hung Tran who confirmed his Kensington restaurant will have a second location initially serving breakfast and lunch. Tran hopes to open in two or three months. The original Inn Kensington is on Arlington at Amherst and has been a popular neighborhood restaurant since 1981. In fact, I’ve been a customer there for over 30 years. The food is good, prices reasonable, and a similar menu is to be available at the new location. Restaurants are notoriously slow to get approvals from government agencies but one can hope this moves on a fast track. This Inn Kensington on the west side of San Pablo Avenue has an El Cerrito mailing address but is actually in Richmond. That could be a big plus. Read on.

**Cigar Box Kitchen.** Opened July 27th and closed August 26th. A short life for a great concept on our “theater block.” What went wrong? Basically, owner Steve Zwetsch, was losing a bundle of money on the place after dealing with delay after delay from inefficient inspections by either city or county government. (We’ll try to learn whether it was the city or county causing the problem.) Needless to say, rent, payroll, and other overhead had to be paid yet the business couldn’t operate while inspectors nick-picked one thing or another, sometimes changing their minds. Zwetsch mentioned a requirement to hire a mechanical engineer to satisfy some inspector was the last straw.

My take: the public deserves safe and clean places to eat. Building and health department inspections are totally necessary. But lengthy delays in dealing with government bureaucracy can bankrupt a business owner.

The issues may have importance, they just must be presented to owners all at the same time and not piece-meal. CBK lost a boatload of money trying to open. Was this an El Cerrito building inspection issue? I don’t know. But it’ll be interesting to see how quickly Inn Kensington opens. Score one for the bureaucracy; the public is the loser. Common sense is often not part the process. Anyone want to buy a restaurant? Or will CBK rise again?

**Economic development?** The above matter ought to be on the radar of our Economic Development Committee. We have two Chamber members on that body. What’s happening? If somebody desires to open a business in El Cerrito they should be told the facts: how much it will cost and how long the bureaucratic process will take. Straight talk. If one needs a million dollars plus five years to start a local business, so be it. Tell the applicant up front (using a worst case scenario).

We need a business friendly city and that should be the focus of the EDC. More business enterprises help everyone. Think jobs; taxes. The perception out there is that we are not always business friendly. Change that.

**Farmers Market.** Rainbow Orchards has been a vendor at the market for over 20 years selling apples and berries from the Camino (El Dorado county) area. The firm was recently honored as Small Business of the Year by Assemblyman Frank Bigelow. Emily Hall is the person staffing the table at our market. Congratulations!

**24 Hour Fitness.** It was a fantastic ribbon cutting and it’s great to see the fitness center up and running. I noted, during the opening speeches, that the Chamber was mentioned a few dozen times. Yes, we’re here to help all business, large and small. Thank you for the acknowledgment.

**New bistro.** Opened August 27th, Azn Star Bistro offers Chinese cuisine at 10558 San Pablo (at Moeser). They replace the recently closed Atcha Thai Bistro.

**Happy anniversary to Los Moles Beer Garden which opened one year ago.** A real asset to the community.

**Prop. 10.** Our Board of Directors approved a motion opposing the repeal of the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act which will appear on the November ballot. The Chamber seldom takes sides on political matters, but the repeal is not in the best interest of members doing business in real estate, property.

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**Comments?**
Contact the Byline
byline@elcerritochamber.org

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**Past Prez Palaver**

**John C. Stashik**

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Moer Shopping Center, 1986

A look back at the location where the new 24 Hour Fitness Super Sport is now located. Safeway’s parking lot is full and the store was open 24 hours. Payless had a super drug store. Out of view is Citicorp Savings, where New MD & Urgent Care is now located. Who recalls blue grass music at Pizza Roma?
24 Hour Fitness? It’s Here! How About 24 Hour Fairness?

The last few months construction crews have been busy at the corner of Moeser Lane and San Pablo Ave. They are now done and the wait is finally over! I am speaking about the opening of the long-awaited 24 Hour Fitness center that excitingly took over the space that Safeway, and/or the property owner left vacant for seven years. Why did it take so long? How can it be legitimate for a business or property owner to maintain such a stranglehold on property for so many years? Will we ever know the whole story? During the years of negotiations or litigation that must have occurred, I don’t recall reading any public disclosure to El Cerrito residents what or if city leadership was doing anything to help alleviate the problem.

I had the impression the vacant and forlorn parking lot was a concrete symbol of the helplessness city residents were feeling as the years passed. There’s something frustratingly wrong with our system when the local citizens have no recourse in private property situations like these, while owners and corporations are allowed to do what they want, when they want, regardless of the negative impact on the city’s image and morale.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

In addition to the Forest Service requirements, Boy Scouts of America has its own requirements. Doctor endorsed medical forms have to be filled out for each participant, special first aid and wilderness survival certification has to be gotten by at least two adults on every trek and BSA requires that every parent has to receive “child protection” training. All these forms and certifications must be submitted in triplicate and then broken down and issued to the adult leader of each trek.

Next comes meal planning. A subcommittee, working from a master list purchases all of the food. The food gets distributed to each trek leader who then breaks half of it down to three meals per day, each packed into a bear proof can to be carried by one of the trekkers. The other half then gets packed into boxes and ice chests. This half gets delivered to nearby outfitters who subsequently load it on to mules and deliver the resupply to an agreed upon location on day four of the trip.

Another big piece is organizing the gear. The troop owns and issues tents, stoves, water filters, cooking pots, and utensils. This gets distributed to each trek leader who then issues it to his trekkers. All of the other personal gear belongs to each participant. The troop has a very good packing list that must be adhered to. There is a pack impound established several days before departure where each backpack is delivered and inspected by the trek leaders to make sure no extraneous gear or food has been included.

The rest is up to the trek leaders. They must follow the general route but are free to add or subtract daily mileage based on how everyone is doing and how suitable each approximate camp site turns out to be. I must say, my son and his co-leader nailed it. It was a great source of pride to see that his mother and I did at least a few things right in raising him. We had a fantastic time. But for all the smoke from the Ferguson fire to the north of us, we enjoyed spectacular scenery. Perhaps best of all for me, we caught fish which we used to supplement our freeze-dried sustenance. When I’m finished here I have to write a letter of complaint to the company that made the freeze-dried Pad Thai. What the hell were they thinking?

Yeah, I got some pretty good blisters. And sleeping on a two-inch thick air mattress every night was a minimum of 10 times worse than I thought it would be. Despite all of that, I’ve already decided to go again next year. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. But next year I’m bringing the ultra-light cot. Live and learn.

PAST PREZ PAVALER

Management, or simply owning rental property. There is a shortage of housing in the Bay Area, but repealing Costa-Hawkins will not build a single property. In fact, repeal could reduce investment in rental housing. The solution to the housing shortage is more construction. More supply reduces prices too. Hence, the Chamber’s public position against.

La Estrella is back. The food truck at McBears Social Club has returned. Actually, it’s a new rig as the old one was t-boned by a car on the avenue.

Charter city? I was asked about this. The Chamber has not, and likely will not, take any position as it’s not really a business concern. Personally, not a big deal at all.

The views expressed here are mine and do not necessarily represent those of the Chamber Board. Email: l.martinengo@elcerritochamber.org; cell: (510) 778-5883.
Have you ever walked or driven by a beauty salon and seen the word threading, and wondered what the word meant in that context? I sure did, and now can report it doesn’t involve a ritual being tied up in string! In fact, threading refers to a very traditional Nepalese method of facial hair reduction, using precise placement of threads to isolate and remove unwanted hairs.

At El Cerrito Plaza, in Sola Salon, you’ll find this new Chamber member and excellent practitioners of this ancient yet accurate process: Elegance Brows & Lashes. The business is co-owned by two married couples, originally from Nepal, but who met and became business partners after relocating to the United States. Sushma Poudel and Archana Nepal are the experienced aestheticians and their husbands contribute to the business success behind the scenes with marketing, etc.

In Sushma’s previous professional life, she was a middle school teacher in Katmandu for 15 years, while practicing threading in salons part time. In 2011, she won the immigration visa lottery and brought her family to the East Bay, where her sister was already living. In contrast, Archana made it her profession right away, based on her passion and skills. Starting at age 18 she worked on friends and family until referrals grew enough to form a business. Coincidentally, Archana, also won the visa lottery and she and family came here in 2012.

Once they settled down in the area, the two women realized how much time and money was being spent on beauty, image and wellness and decided they could make a viable business together. Along with threading, they wanted to offer other services, so they became fully certified aestheticians, licensed to do facials, waxing, henna design and other body treatments. Sushma and Archana are eager to help everyone look and feel their best.

The hair removal process by threading is completely natural, there are no chemicals or compounds used and the results last a lot longer than waxing. Another service offered by the duo is eyelash extension. Customers have a choice of mink hair or silk for creating thick lush eyelashes that will stay attached for 4-6 weeks. Henna tattooing also has cultural importance in Nepal, but here has become another lovely and temporary way for people to indulge in decorating their bodies.

If you or anyone you know is interested in updating their image, or would like to have a relaxing facial treatment, please call Elegance Brows & Lashes at (510) 502-2965 or (408) 830-6541 and check out their Facebook page: Elegance Eye Brows Threading & Lashes. Create some elegance for yourself now!
The City of El Cerrito invites you to discuss parking patterns, design access and mobility improvements on San Pablo Avenue, that will increase safety, accessibility and connectivity among pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles and transit that supporter all users.

The San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, adopted in 2014, laid the groundwork for development and increased economic activity along the San Pablo Avenue corridor. The City is currently working to move forward many of the parking and transportation components of the Plan through the San Pablo On-Street Parking Study and Complete Streets Project.

The goal of these projects is to create a more vibrant and connected community to maintain and increase access to commercial districts, local businesses, transit and neighborhoods.

Your participation is important as we work together to improve San Pablo Avenue. See meeting dates on front of post card or online at www.elcerritochamber.org

For more information, please contact Aissia Ashoori, Community Development Analyst, at 510.215.4361.
Continued from page 1
Commerce, said the months of work needed to convert the former Safeway went smoothly and on schedule. “Not at all, not one piece,” he said when asked about any setbacks. “The grand opening is right on time.”

If there was any lament, it was that the building had been vacant so long. “It took years to get to the point of building it,” Hanin said.

Beckles was presented with a Chamber membership plaque during the ribbon cutting. He said the location would have 80 to 100 employees.

“We look forward to changing your lives through fitness, one member at a time,” he told the VIPs.

“You’re part of our community and we look forward to celebrating your 25-year anniversary of being in El Cerrito,” Chamber vice president Bill Kuhlman said.

Photos on this page were taken at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

JOIN THE CLUB — Special Rates
All Club Super Sport, month to month, 1 year commitment $43.99 — No initiation fee
All Club Super Sport, month to month, no commitment $44.99 — $29.99 initiation fee
Contact the Chamber of Commerce office for details
Time to Dine Out

By Bill Kuhlman

El Cerrito Restaurant Week is October 11 to 17. Plan on dining out by gathering up your friends, employees, and family, and show your support for your local business owners.

Also, there is still time for restaurant operators to join the program. Contact Lisa Martinengo at the Chamber office for information and assistance.

To see a list of participating restaurants and special deals visit www.el-cerrito.org/RestaurantWeek. We stand together, making El Cerrito a better place to work and live. Sometimes life is best lived one bite at a time. Stay hungry!
Meet City Manager
Scott Hanin
at the September
Chamber Luncheon

Tuesday, September 18th at Noon
Berkeley Country Club
7901 Cutting Blvd., El Cerrito

RSVP: info@elcerritochamber.org or (510) 705-1202
$20 includes lunch ($22 credit or PayPal)

The Calendar

Sept.
5 Chamber Board meets, 9 a.m. Location TBD.
8 El Cerrito Royale’s annual Grandparents Day Carnival.
   11 a.m.-3 p.m. See page 4.
13 Cerrito Classics: “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” 7 p.m.
   Rialto Cinemas Cerrito
15 Auction at Playland-Not-at-the-Beach, 10 a.m.
17 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
18 Chamber luncheons resume. Special guest:
   Scott Hanin. See above.
21 “Allegiance” premieres, 8 p.m. Contra Costa Civic
   Theatre. cct.org

Oct.
4 Mixer at Mountain Mike’s Pizza. 5:30 p.m.
5-7 Annual ECAA Art Show; Community Center.
7 Sip & Savor at the Berkeley Country Club. 2:30 p.m.
11-17 El Cerrito Restaurant Week.

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

Chamber Officers & Staff
President
Mark Figone, East Bay Sanitary Co., Inc.
Vice President
Bill Kuhlman, CW3 Bio, LLC
Secretary
Melanie Mintz, City of El Cerrito
Treasurer, Byline Editor
John C. Stashik, Premier Graphics
Manager
Lisa Martinengo
Byline Correspondent
Chris Treadway