They say timing is everything. Well, in our case truer words were never spoken. Our Chamber lease was scheduled to time-out on February 28th. Despite nearly a year of searching and many inquiries, the Chamber was on the verge of being without a brick and mortar location to conduct our affairs. But on February 8th I received an email indicating that a deal had been reached for new office space at 10895 San Pablo Avenue, a second floor office above Doherty’s Truck and Auto Rental. I’m happy to announce that effective immediately, we have some new digs. Come by and have a look, but check with Lisa first to make sure she is in the office. I want to thank Suzanne, CJ, and Peter Doherty for the opportunity and I look forward our shared time together. And thanks to Sil Addiego and all of the other members of the board who helped to find our new home.

See From the President, page 3

Partner with City to Remove Graffiti

No one likes graffiti. It is unpleasant to see as you visit local businesses. It can make patrons feel unsafe and is expensive to remove. And, if it is allowed to remain for any length of time, it seems to grow and spread. The term graffiti includes any inscription, word, figure, mark, or design that is written, marked or painted on any real or personal property without the property owner’s written permission.

El Cerrito’s code enforcement officer has been working with property owners to remove graffiti, and some have said that it would be helpful if the city could offer services to assist with graffiti removal. In response, the Community Development Department drafted amendments to the language of the existing graffiti ordinance in order to create a pilot program to assist property owners with graffiti abatement. The City Council adopted the new ordinance at its January 16th meeting and encouraged staff to continue to team with the business community on this issue.

The new program allows the Community Development Department to retain deposit accounts, for property owners who are interested, and to create a stable of prequalified graffiti abatement contractors. An interested property owner can opt into the program at any time. Then, when their property is tagged, the code enforcement officer can work with the property owner, alert them to the issue and dispatch one of the pre-approved contractors to remove it.

For property owners who are not interested in participating in this program, the city will also add the list of qualified graffiti abatement contractors on the city’s website, to assist property owners to locate a graffiti abatement contractor even if they don’t want to opt into the city’s program. The goal of the program is to reduce the incidence of graffiti. Whether or not a property owner opts into the city program, or
Hallelujah! We found a new office location just in the nick of time (see address on page 1). Thank you Suzanne, CJ, and Peter Doherty for offering the space. More thanks go to Nick Arzio and JunkCat.com for donating some heavy lifting and hauling. Kudos to our manager, Lisa Martinengo, for her cheerful handling of the extra workload that moving entails. By the time you read this we will be doing business from new quarters. Onward.

RIP. Paul Grunland died on February 2nd at the age of 93. Paul was a Berkeley resident, an avid outdoorsman and historian. He was also manager of El Cerrito’s long gone, but fondly recalled, Capwell’s department store, the one time anchor of El Cerrito Plaza. As part of the city’s centennial celebration last year our Chamber put together a Movers & Shakers evening where Paul was on the panel that talked about the good old days of doing business in El Cerrito. He was a Fatapple’s regular too.

New business. Treatland is moving to El Cerrito after renovation of the former El Cerrito Steel building is complete. Presently in San Francisco, Treatland is a moped parts superstore. The old steel company building at 1424 Kearney Street (behind the Nation’s building) is a real a landmark dating from the city’s industrial days.

More apartments. A proposal to replace Big 5 Sporting Goods with two new apartment buildings has been publicized. 170 residential units mean more housing but yet another nail in the coffin of El Cerrito retail. Buy your stuff at Amazon.

The latest proposal is for an 887-unit apartment project in two buildings. They may need their own ZIP code! Chevy would have provided good jobs but the big money is in rental housing.

CBK. Work on the new Cigar Box Kitchen (next to the Cerrito theater) continues. The restaurant and music venue has no firm opening date, but think April at the earliest. Here’s a preview of the Wendell Edwards mural inside CBK courtesy of owner Steve Zwetsch.

Construction of the new fitness center at the old Moeser Lane Safeway building is now in full swing. That’ll be a bright spot on the avenue. I’m sure that nobody will be happier to see the fitness center open than neighbors Papi’s Pizza Roma and the New MD & Urgent Care clinic.

The BART path is finally getting trash cans. Fancy ones at that. Plus lots of signs and benches. More improvements to come. Hopefully, path users will actually use the new trash containers. A big improvement.

Street people. Have you noticed the increase in ne’er-do-wells at and near Fairmount and San Pablo? This is something that cannot be good for businesses in the area. Starbucks shut down one entrance to their store due to thefts from patrons and tip jars. Pastime Ace Hardware is closing at 6 o’clock every day now as customer traffic is light after that hour and people don’t really like panhandlers bothering them. The regulars sit on those granite blocks while smoking in our “smoke free” city or drink illegally while causing costly problems for merchants like shoplifting. The situation doesn’t seem conducive to bringing people and business to the city’s theater block area.
Employee Ownership? It Helps Workers; Provides an Exit Strategy!

As frequent readers of this column may notice, the various challenges facing local employers is a familiar topic. After minimum wage laws, the second most vexing problem faced by our businesses, particularly in food service, is the notoriously high turnover rate of employees. Some of our local shops and eateries struggle to find and retain loyal and reliable employees.

What if there were a way to compensate workers better than average, while providing incentives for them to remain loyal and care about the success of the business? There could be a way that’s right for you. It goes by several names and models, but the gist of it is transitioning to a shared ownership of the business with the employees. It could be a worker-owned cooperative model, such as the Berkeley Cheesecake Factory and Arizmendi, or it could be utilizing an employee stock ownership plan, such as El Cerrito Natural Grocery and Zachary Pasta.

At the time of this writing, I was not able to speak to Bob Gerner of ECNG about his reasons for going this route or how he would describe the pros and cons of this strategy.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

On February 20th we held our monthly lunch again at El Cerrito Royal. Thanks Sonja and staff. Another great pasta lunch along with Italian sausage and salad was catered once again by our valued member, La Strada. We were joined by our newest member, a founding partner of LimeBike, Rodney Ruiz. LimeBike, in case you haven’t noticed the bright green bikes all over town, is a new company that provides bicycles to be shared by anyone with a transportation need in and around El Cerrito. It’s a very interesting business model to say the least. Users can download an app that they then use to unlock any of over 100 bicycles that have been placed all around the commercial areas of El Cerrito. Use of the bikes costs $1 per hour, but your first ride is free. Rodney answered quite a few questions about the new service including safety and helmet use, potential vandalism, and LimeBike’s response process for dealing with appropriated and damaged bikes.

The story behind LimeBike in El Cerrito was covered in last month’s Byline. For more information or to download the app, go to https://www.limebike.com/. Thanks, Rodney.

Our featured speaker was our new Mayor, Gabe Quinto. The mayor spoke to us about his very positive vision for El Cerrito, gave an update on all of the new development coming to El Cerrito, and spoke about the new charter city proposal that will be going before the voters in the next election. Following his talk, there was a rousing question and answer session. Thank you, Mayor Quinto, for your time.

I’ll close with a few announcements from Chris Jones, El Cerrito’s Recreation director. Dates for the final public meetings for the El Cerrito Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan have been set for Thursday, March 29th at 6:30 p.m. and Wednesday, May 23rd at 6:30 p.m. Both meetings will be held in the council chamber at City Hall. The meetings will cover maintenance and enhancement costs and help develop priorities for implementation. Updates will be posted online at www.el-cerrito.org/ParksMP.

In case you have or know of any children who might be interested, El Cerrito’s Egg Hunt is happening again this year at the Arlington Park on Saturday, March 31st. Kids should bring baskets and be ready by 10 a.m. sharp to take part in this annual tradition.

Finally, summer camp registration is underway. Visit www.el-cerrito.org/summercamps or stop by the El Cerrito Community Center, 7007 Moeser Lane, to check out all the over 60 offerings for children in grades K-12.

GRAFFITI REMOVAL

Continued from page 1

selects their own contractor, they will be required to have graffiti removed within 10-days or may face citations.

For more information, please contact Jay Marlette, the El Cerrito’s code enforcement officer at (510) 215-4363 or jmarlette@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

LimeBike

Dockless bike sharing company LimeBike is now operating in El Cerrito for a six-month pilot program. LimeBike is providing more than 100 bicycles for public use, offering El Cerrito residents, businesses, and visitors with an affordable, reliable, and sustainable option for traveling throughout the area.

LimeBike estimates that 25% of urban users use LimeBike to access shopping and entertainment districts, which equates to more time being spent in the community and more money being spent at local businesses.

See http://el-cerrito.org/limebike for more information or visit limebike.com to download the app and get started.
You can count on one hand, the number of existing businesses in El Cerrito over 65 years old. Olivero Plumbing Co., Inc. is one of them and I’m glad to report, they are thriving better than ever. In a recent conversation with John and Jerry Olivero, I learned about the past, present, and future of this well respected local business that has literally helped build El Cerrito. Rose Park and Wildwood are some of the housing developments that were completely plumbed by the Olivero and sons business.

John A. Olivero, John and Jerry's father, founded the company in 1951, after buying out Soldavini Hardware. He ran a one-man shop while El Cerrito was still a sleepy suburban town. As El Cerrito grew throughout the 1950s, so did the plumbing business. John A. hired a young kid named Bill Halligan, fresh out of Salesian High School, whom he trained in every aspect of the field and yes, Bill is still with the company today! In 1965, John A. was able to buy his own real estate right on San Pablo Avenue and constructed his offices and workrooms that are still in use.

As with many family owned businesses, John A.’s two sons took different routes before coming back to the fold. Jerry, the youngest, didn’t stray too far. He received training at Laney and apprenticeships through the union, and joined his father in business right away. John, the elder, went to Cal and graduated with a journalism major. His first job was at the San Mateo Times, and eventually he landed a dream job in the sports department. Soon after, unfortunately, the draft nabbed him for service. After a military stint that took him to France, John came back to the U.S. where his brother and father persuaded him to join the business which had continued to grow. They were obviously doing something right as the Olivero’s reputation for high quality service, fair prices, wonderful selection of fixtures helped them become the go-to plumber for El Cerrito and nearby towns.

Flash forward a decade or two, and now John and Jerry’s children and grandchildren have joined in, making it a four generation family business: John’s son, David and grandson, Vincent, along with Jerry’s son, Jerry, daughter Julie Olivero Blakeman (office manager) and grandson, Anthony, all work full time to keep Olivero Plumbing Co., Inc. humming along smoothly.

Along with full service installation, repairs and remodels for residents, Olivero Plumbing also works with independent local contractors for mid-size commercial projects. Backwater valve testing and repair is another service offered by the knowledgeable Olivero technicians. With over 65 years of longevity, experience and knowledge to build on, (plus over a half century as a member of the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce), local family owned business Olivero Plumbing should be your number one choice for any plumbing needs.

Olivero Plumbing: Since 1951, Four Generations Helping to Plumb El Cerrito!

BYLINE MEMBER PROFILE

Call the Professionals!

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Another positive comment from an El Cerrito Marketing Program advertiser

“We’ve been pleased with the results of both drops we participated in [during] 2017 and would like to include the Chamber mailers in our 2018 advertising.”
On November 7, 2011, the El Cerrito City Council voted to begin an involved public evaluation process to study the issue of El Cerrito becoming a charter city. The process will include the appointment of a resident Charter Committee that will conduct public input sessions, study and analyze the pros and cons of the issue and report to the City Council with a possible recommendation on whether to put the issue on the November 2014 ballot for voter consideration. El Cerrito residents can become a charter city with a majority vote of approval.

So, what is a charter city and what are the advantages to the residents and the business community?

El Cerrito is now a general law city, as defined by the state constitution and legislative law, and bound by the state's general city laws, as established by the state Legislature with respect to “municipal affairs.”

The state constitution allows charter cities to govern their own municipal affairs under the constitution's “home rule” provision and is based on the principle that a city and its residents are in the best position to know what they need and how to manage and deliver those needs. Home rule allows charter cities to establish their own unique document, a city charter (effectively a city’s constitution). To the extent the state constitution allows, the residents of El Cerrito, not the state Legislature, will determine its laws and procedures. Charter city status for El Cerrito would provide the flexibility of home rule to guide the city's future.

Charter cities may decide such basic functions as the form of government, election procedures, and the criteria and qualifications required for City Council members. In addition, such complex and involved issues such as taxation, land use powers and public contracts can fall under the purview of charter cities. However, state laws may put limits on provisions and control of these and other issues. For example, a vote of the people is required to approve property and other taxes in all California cities.

The business community may benefit from a charter city form of government in several direct and indirect ways. Flexibility in the formation and approval of rules, regulations, local codes and zoning requirements and issues can be specifically developed according to the desires and needs of the residents and local businesses in El Cerrito. This can provide an atmosphere of cooperation and streamlining of procedures that will expedite the development process and aid businesses owners.

Charter cities have the power by ordinance to create their own business improvement districts to fund activities and improvements that provide direct benefit to local businesses. For example, these districts can fund improvement programs such as façade renovation, seismic construction, expanded security and other business related projects. However, assessments for such programs must be implemented in accordance to state propositions 218 and 26.

In my view, El Cerrito has had a long history of dedicated residents serve on the City Council and the various commissions, boards and committees that make up our governance and business systems. El Cerrito residents have shown that we are fully capable of governing the city with integrity and commitment in an honest and forthright manner. We should be able to operate our city to the fullest extent allowed by state law to the benefit of our residents and businesses. Being a charter city will allow the type of flexibility necessary to continue to go forward in a manner determined by and for the community and businesses of El Cerrito.
Business Bike Racks

To encourage bike use, businesses can take advantage of a grant to install bike racks and lockers. Businesses that are interested can get more information by contacting Coire Reilly, at creilly@wcctac.org or by visiting the 511 Contra Costa employer Web page at 511contracosta.org/employers.

El Cerrito Royale

Thank You for generously providing our meeting space every month

Crime-Safety Forum

The El Cerrito Police Department will be hosting a Crime and Public Safety Forum where attendees will be able to discuss traffic issues, police policies and philosophies with ECPD’s Chief Paul Keith, Special Operations Sergeant Lauren Caputo, and Detective Sergeant Ian Wong.

This forum is free, open to the public, and will be held on Saturday, March 3rd, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Castro Park and Clubhouse, located at 1420 Norvell Street, El Cerrito. Seating is limited so please arrive early.

El Cerrito Pet Hospital Joins Chamber

Lisa Martinengo presents a membership plaque to Dr. Syed Naqvi, Tax in Naqvi.

Lisa Martinengo presents a membership plaque to Dr. Syed Naqvi, Tax in Naqvi.
Use bookkeeping to run your business instead of it running you!

Meet Tracy Giles
of B&T Bookkeeping, Inc.
Former Chamber President
Former Rotary President

CHAMBER LUNCHEON
Tuesday, March 20 • Noon-1:30
El Cerrito Royale
3rd Floor meeting room
6510 Gladys Ave., El Cerrito

RSVP to info@elcerritochamber.org • $20 (22 credit cards or PayPal)
Online reservation: www.elcerritochamber.org

Lunch by
PAPI'S PIZZA ROMA

Calendar of Events

7 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
7 Chamber Board of Directors meets, 9 a.m., City Hall.
10 Charter Committee meeting, 9 a.m., City Hall.
20 Chamber luncheon meeting, see box above.
20 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
22 Charter Committee meeting, 7 p.m., City Hall.
23 El Cerrito Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce mixer at Berkeley Country Club. 5:30 p.m. The BCC is sponsoring the hors d’oeuvres and it is a no-host bar.

Farmers Market
AT EL CERRITO PLAZA
Open Tuesday & Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
SPONSORED BY

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

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