LET ME BEGIN by thanking everyone who attended our highly successful installation luncheon. Special thanks to El Cerrito City Manager Karen Pinkos who served as the installing officer and as our keynote speaker. Many thanks to our Chamber manager, Lisa Martinengo, for organizing such a fine event. I am totally cognizant of the fact that we are well underway with the new year, my mind is churning, thinking, processing, and forming thoughts as to how I can best serve the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce and the community at large throughout 2019. Being visible as well as being a source of good, relevant information is high on my priority list.

In the course of a year a lot of decisions are made by our local businesses, the city council and our respective households. Each of the aforementioned groups make decisions based on their perceived as well as actual circumstances, driven in large part by their short- and long-term goals. Having access to good information that is properly interpreted is critically important. Our local businesses, the city council, and our community at large are all interrelated. As a chamber of commerce president, of course I want our businesses to have a banner year but along with that I want effective and efficient city government and happy and healthy households throughout El Cerrito.

El Cerrito is a pleasant community with good services and amenities. The community has been very generous in their acceptance of additional costs associated with providing services. I think it’s fair to say that we all want a good quality of life in our city and I also think that is incumbent upon all of us, city leaders included, to accomplish that objective in the most thoughtful and competitive manner possible.

Competitive? Yes, I used word the word competitive. In business we...
On January 9th, H&J’s Restaurant opened for business at Orchard and San Pablo in the completely renovated former Nibs building. From that soft opening the hours and menu have been expanded to now include both breakfast and lunch. This place is an offshoot of my long time favorite, Inn Kensington, on the Arlington. Business has been good too. Open seven days a week. www.hjsrestaurant.com. Try it.

Burgerim was up and running on January 11th at El Cerrito Plaza adding to the dining options around the city. Located between Miller & Stolarczuk Optometrist and Dentists of El Cerrito Plaza.

Crab feed. The El Cerrito Police Employees Association will have their K-9 fundraiser Friday, March 1st, at the Community Center. Generous portions of crab plus lots of raffle prizes, 6-10 p.m. This year tickets are for sale online. www.eventbrite.com.

Ken Berndt. Kenneth Berndt passed away on January 19th at the age of 90. A long time resident of El Cerrito, Ken was an active member of the community and involved with many organizations. He worked as manager at Central Bank which was eventually absorbed into Bank of the West. A member of the Chamber of Commerce, Ken served as president in 1970. He also was elected to the city council and served as mayor 1973-74. After the city council, he was a regular attendee and speaker at council meetings. His wife, Patsy, was employed by the Chamber as an office secretary until early 2009; she passed away in 2013. The duo was one of the city’s power couples who knew almost everyone in town.

A celebration of life will be held Tuesday, February 5th at 11 a.m., at Sunset View Cemetery.

15 years! That uniquely El Cerrito gift shop, Jenny K., will hold an anniversary celebration on Saturday, February 9th, 10-2 p.m., to mark 15 years of doing business on Stockton Avenue. Everyone is welcome. Events will include Valentine making, food and wine tastings, a Very-Fairy Manda, and more. Stop by 6921 Stockton to join the festivities.

City personnel changes. El Cerrito got a new fire chief on December 31st. Michael Pigoni was promoted to that position following the retirement of Lance Maples. Pigoni is no stranger; he’s been with the ECFD since 1995.

Attending our recent meeting was Holly M. Charléty, El Cerrito’s new city clerk. Date of hire: January 14th, I believe.

One more new face at city hall is Alexandra Orologas, the new assistant city manager, who assumed her duties on January 22nd. HR has been busy.
A False Carrot-and-Stick Solution on Housing

By Joel Fox
Editor and Co-Publisher of Fox & Hounds Daily.

Lack of housing in California is a big problem. But, so is Gov. Gavin Newsom’s solution of withholding transportation money from local governments that do not hit housing goals.

Newsom noted that cities and counties are required to plan enough housing to meet population increases. However, most local governments don’t meet the requirement. The carrot-and-stick solution the new governor put forth is to stop sending transportation money to local governments if they fall short of their housing goals.

Incentives can work and using a stick is fine, but the carrot in this formula is not one that could be considered earned by appropriate behavior. Transportation funds, especially through the recent gas tax increase, have already been earned by the local governments because taxpayers in local communities are paying transportation taxes with the express understanding that are to be used to repair the roads.

Newsom originally stated that the withheld gas tax money would be the revenue generated by SB 1, the gas tax increase signed by Gov. Jerry Brown in April 2017. Those revenues were subject to a failed repeal attempt with Proposition 6 last November. Later, he backed off specifically targeting SB 1 funds in deciding which transportation dollars could be put on hold.

The problem is the political establishment worked hard to defeat Proposition 6 by promising that road repairs would be made with the new tax dollars. Those promises of road fixes go beyond the dollars raised specifically by SB 1.

Taxpayers would be rightfully indignant if they learn transportation revenue is withheld because of a squabble over housing, especially considering the heavily advertised campaign to promote transportation fixes we so recently went through.

Many Californians would see just another broken promise from government officials if all the rhetoric over the Proposition 6 campaign dedicated to promoting road repairs and transportation improvements would be wiped away by gubernatorial fiat.

There might even be grounds for a legal challenge. All taxpayers, no matter which community they reside, are paying into transportation funds and expect to see some return on their investments.

Newsom is focused on the housing crisis in California as he should be. He has other proposals in his budget to incentivize home building. But pulling gas tax and transportation funds from fixing another serious problem in California should not be included as a solution. Promises to voters and taxpayers must be kept.

The views expressed here are the author’s and do not necessarily represent those of the Chamber Board. Email: lmartinengo@elcerritochamber.org; cell: 510-778-5853.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

must compete and operating a city is a business! I was reviewing a few hard facts and data relating to some of the costs associated with doing business in El Cerrito. Of course, the costs must weigh against the benefits.

Did you know that the sales tax in El Cerrito is 9.75% the highest sales tax in Contra Costa county and among the highest in the state of California?

In November of 2018 the voters in El Cerrito passed measure V which allowed El Cerrito to become a charter city and impose real estate property transfer taxes at the rate of $12.00 per thousand of property value. Richmond is the only other city in Contra Costa county that imposes a real estate property transfer tax with a base rate of $7.00 per thousand and a tiered rate for more expensive property transactions. An $800,000 real estate transaction in El Cerrito will generate $9,600 for the city’s general fund coming directly from the property seller’s equity. A common negotiating tactic is to have the buyer pay half of the cost, but even on a split it’s still a lot of money! Are you aware of the fact that on January 1, 2019 the minimum wage in El Cerrito increased to $15.00 per hour? That too, is among the highest in the state.

I am very much for El Cerrito but along with being a supporter and booster for El Cerrito it is important for all of us to be mindful as to where we currently stand and what decisions our city leaders might be considering and the resulting impacts. Currently there is a lot of discussion among the city council and various groups about renter displacement and the potential for loss of diversity in the community. Presently the city council has no hard facts, statistics or “measurable data” to assess any loss in diversity or renter displacements that would constitute a crisis level situation. Even in the absence of critical information some council members are inclined to move forward with policies and ordinances which will potentially cost certain classes of property owners thousands of dollars in additional expense and create more bureaucratic processes at city hall.

I started this article off by referring to good, relevant information. As we wind our way through 2019 let us all make a concerted effort to make decisions based on good, relevant information that is properly interpreted. Specifically, to our city leaders, please do not make any decisions pertaining to ordinances and policies without having substantial, quantifiable data along with a thorough understanding of the financial implications for all parties involved. To the business community and citizens, contact the city council members and share your thoughts on issues of importance. Attend city council meetings and let your voices be heard. Remember, the business community, city government and the community at large are all interrelated. Let’s make solid fact-based decisions that keep our city competitive, thriving and moving forward.
By Lisa Martinengo

For millions of people, the act of bringing a baby into this world is absolutely the most monumental event of their lives, and naturally they intend to document it in countless photos and videos. Probably, since the dawn of photography, giddy parents have captured every movement the child makes, and treasured the pictures forever in boxes and books.

Now, in the digital photo age, there’s a new business in El Cerrito that provides expectant mothers (and partners) with some amazing 3-D images and 4-D realtime videos even before the baby is born! At First Glance uses high definition ultrasound technology to capture images that can show the baby’s growth and progress while in the womb. Depending on the chosen package, the expectant mother will return home with a compact disc of photos, videos, and keepsake treasures to share with family and friends.

At First Glance provides both services and products that feature the baby’s face and heartbeat. From framed photos and videos, to the pregnancy confirmation or early gender package, your baby is highlighted in a way that makes it easy for you to share and enjoy the big occasion in fun ways. There are heartbeat animals where the baby’s heartbeat is placed inside a cuddly stuffed animal, and heartbeat jewelry which displays the individual tracing recorded from the ultrasound. These keepsakes are to be treasured forever.

In 2016, Abayomi Jones, or “Yomi” as she prefers to be called, noticed there was no nearby business providing 3-D or 4-D imaging to pregnant moms, which she knew people desired. She realized there was an unmet business niche that she could fill, providing a new personalized service to expecting parents in the East Bay. This is a positive side of health related service and she was also motivated by being able to interact with people at a time in their lives when they are most joyful. After much research, acquiring the special equipment, hiring certified technicians, and finding the right location, the two room office suite opened for business in February of last year.

After leaving her hometown of East Palo Alto to pursue a B.S. in Biology at Spelman College, she eventually landed in Washington, D.C., for graduate school. Starting a career working in clinics and hospitals, she transitioned back to the Bay Area when her husband’s job required them to relocate. Soon after, they began a family and she was pregnant with her second child during the opening of At First Glance!

Yomi suggests that pregnancy confirmation be done at 8+ weeks, gender confirmation at 14 weeks, and the best time to see the baby’s face is sometime between 28 and 34 weeks. Soon, At First Glance will be offering a blood test for gender confirmation, which can be done at nine weeks. A typical session goes from 15 to 30 minutes according to what services are requested. There is a comfortable bed in a spacious room to accommodate family and friends if desired.

The office is conveniently close to the El Cerrito Plaza BART station and Interstates 80 and 580. Prices for the various services and packages are found on the website: www.atfirstglanceultrasound.com.

Advance appointments are needed. Please contact At First Glance to book for yourself or to arrange a gift certificate for a friend or family member who is planning a pregnancy. The studio is located at 6328 Fairmount Ave., Suite 203, El Cerrito, and the phone number is 510-898-1340.
The city is on the verge of major positive changes and the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce has an important role in the process, new City Manager Karen Pinkos told members at the installation luncheon on January 15th.

“We’re absolutely on the precipice of what is going to happen. The avenue is going to be transformed. Public buildings — I’m going to build a library before I die if it kills me,” she said to applause.

“We’ve got a lot of needs, we’ve got a lot of desires, but we are right there,” Pinkos said. “And we’re closer than we ever have been. All of us in this room, especially the Chamber, especially the business community, you have the bigger role than we do in trying to coordinate the sizzle, we’re trying make sure that developers think of El Cerrito first and not last.”

Pinkos is a Michigan native and remains an avid fan of Detroit sports teams, but “I’ve lived here since 2001, so I can say I love the Giants, and I love the As. I know that would be fighting words in some families,” she said.

“We’ll do our part, but I’m counting on all of you to help us do that to. We are the cheerleaders for El Cerrito. I always want to accentuate the positive. I’m always trying to see what we can be and how we can get there.”

Pinkos is a familiar face to Chamber members, who now have a better idea of her background and outlook as she assumes her new duties from Scott Hanin, who stepped down after 17 years.

“I’ve been here since 2001, so I’m not new to El Cerrito, of course, I’m new to this role,” she said.

Pinkos grew up and was educated in the Detroit area, graduated with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in public administration from Oakland University. She was completing her graduate studies and was working as assistant to the city manager in Oak Park, Michigan, when she made her first to California in 2001 to visit her grandmother and aunt living in San Mateo.

She quickly fell in love with the Bay Area.

“It’s so hard to describe I just felt so at home,” Pinkos said. “There’s a reason I moved to California, there’s a reason I moved to El Cerrito.”

It was during that visit that she applied to be an assistant to Hanin, newly appointed as El Cerrito’s city manager and met him at Bette’s Ocean View Diner in Berkeley. Hanin wore blue jeans, she recounted.

“I have a very different style than Scott. He’s definitely the introvert to my extrovert,” Pinkos said, adding, that they “made a fabulous team.”

She was offered the job and “In a six- to eight-week span I finished my thesis, packed up my life” and drove to California.

“I started work on September 10, 2001. That was an interesting week,” she said, describing going from a “dream come true to thinking the world is going to end” after the terrorist attacks. “I’ll never forget my anniversary date.”

Pinkos advanced to assistant city manager and joined the 12,000-member International City/County Managers Association, serving as its vice president and currently as its president.

“I wanted to be a city manager, but not just anywhere. I wanted to be city manager in El Cerrito.”

“I have to give Scott credit. He absolutely allowed all of us to explore different avenues of our professions so we could become the experts,” she said. We can learn from other people, but other people can learn from us.”

Pinkos said she has been recruited “a lot” to be an administrator elsewhere.

“There’s a reason I stayed here, there’s a reason I moved here. This place is my home. I wanted to be a city manager, but not just anywhere. I wanted to be city manager in El Cerrito.”

She said that “In the local government world, El Cerrito, little tiny El Cerrito in the middle of the Bay Area, California, we have a reputation of being visionaries. We’re not on the leading edge, but we’re on the cutting edge.”
The small building that housed the Chamber offices for many years plays a large role in the theme of a residential project that has opened on the former Tradeway property next to City Hall.

A restored building, an outdoor public plaza and Japanese heritage garden with interpretive signs, and sidewalk markers are central features of Hana Gardens, a mixed-use project with 63 units of affordable apartments for seniors.

According to the project fact sheet, “Hana is often translated from Japanese into English as flower.”

The interpretive signs describe the establishment of flower nurseries by Japanese-American families in the area, the first dating back to 1902; their survival despite subsequent exclusion laws targeting Asian land ownership; the removal of families to prison camps during World War II; and what the families faced when they returned to rebuild their lives and businesses.

The 40,000-square foot site at 10860 San Pablo Ave. includes a renovated 900-square-foot structure that once housed the Contra Costa Florist shop, a longtime business that was part of the Japanese-American flower growing industry that thrived for decades in El Cerrito and Richmond.

The building was originally a sales office in 1920s for the Valley of the Moon Quarry near Glen Ellen in Sonoma, according to the El Cerrito Historical Society, and since the mid-1930s was used as a flower shop was operated by the Mabuchi family, who lived in an attached home in the rear.

Along with other Japanese on the West Coast, the Mabuchis “were interned during World War II but their property was preserved for them by the owner of an adjacent store, Fred Conwill,” notes a description in a historical society walking tour brochure, which calls it one of the last architectural remnants of the local nursery trade.

The Tradeway property was purchased by the city Redevelopment Agency in 2009 and designated for senior housing. After resolving funding issues and other delays, construction began at the end of January, 2017.

An initial historic resources evaluation conducted for nonprofit developer Eden Housing Inc. of Oakland concluded there were no structures of significance on the site. But a second study, done after significant lobbying by the El Cerrito Historical Society, found merit in the florist building, which has been renovated and will be used as a community center for the project.

The building is now listed as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

See Hana Gardens, page 7
This offering of our Best Selling Marketing Products at Exceptional Prices addresses the key pieces in marketing your business. As your Marketing Partner we can expand well beyond this core offering to help you create a marketing plan that exceeds your goals.
Review New Business Laws in Effect this Year

Jean Shrem
CHAMBER LUNCHEON
Tuesday, February 19
Noon to 1:30 p.m.
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 prepared by Sasa Kitchen of El Cerrito

The Calendar
Feb. 5 City Council meets, City Hall, 7 p.m.
6 Chamber Board meets, 9 a.m., Location TBA.
14 Cerrito Classics: “Pretty in Pink” at Rialto Cerrito
Cinemas. 7 p.m.
15 “Humble Boy” premieres at 8 p.m., Contra Costa Civic
19 Chamber luncheon; see box above.
19 City Council meets, City Hall, 7 p.m.
Mar. 1 Crab feed for the PEA. See page 2.
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.

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

El Cerrito Royale
Proudly Presents:
In Recognition of Black History Month
All-You-Can-Eat Soul Food Buffet
& “Free” Concert
Featuring:
“Consonance” A Gospel Quartet
& Solos, Paul Foster Jr.
Sunday, February 17th
11am. - 3pm.
Theme: "Black Migrations" which follows the continuous movement of blacks from the American South to the industrialized North and beyond. Beginning in the 20th century south, African American migration included relocation from farms to cities, and from the South to the Northeast and Midwest.
RSVP By February 10th
510-234-5200

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