We are well underway with the new year, and I find myself in a reflective mood. I am both grateful for the opportunity to experience another year and optimistic about all the promise that it holds. However, I am reflecting upon the recent passing of Jerrick Bernstine, the 26-year-old El Cerrito police officer who lost his life in a car accident on January 9, 2022. All the earthly promise that this young officer had, has been cut short. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and colleagues at the El Cerrito Police Department.

On January 18, 2022, I was among family and other mourners at Sunset View Cemetery standing at the gravesite of my nephew’s niece by marriage, De’Jah Robinson. She was a very bright 22-year-old woman who had a sudden and unexpected health situation that claimed her life within hours. Again, so much promise left unfulfilled.

For each of us, life holds much promise. The key is to find ways to embrace it daily. The leadership at the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce wants to continue to support our community and its members.

New Members

The Joint, Chiropractic
11450 San Pablo Ave., #400
El Cerrito 94530
510-288-5046
Opening Soon

Contra Costa College
2600 Mission Bell Drive
San Pablo 94806
contracosta.edu

Declan Wyrick
Associate Member

El Cerrito Recognizes The Natural Grocery

On December 10, 2021, The Natural Grocery Company celebrated its 40th birthday with an evening of live music, food, drinks, cheers and laughter. A video presentation showed black and white images of young Bob Gerner, the founder of the Company, when he was just starting out on his journey to make natural foods accessible to everyone. I had the honor to meet Bob Gerner after the festivity on a sunny Sunday morning inside of the beautiful Annex Café to listen to how he started the business more than 40 years ago.

Gerner grew up in Richmond Annex not far from where the El Cerrito Natural Grocery is. While he was attending UC Davis, he got a job on campus. In late 1969, he worked as the manager of The Coffee House, which was a failing business ran by the students at the time. While making purchases for The Coffee House, he visited the natural food market for the first time. He was inspired and motivated to cook everything from scratch using natural, unprocessed ingredients. Looking back, he realized how his father

See The Natural Grocery Company, page 6
MEET PAUL. Between 9 and 11 on the first Thursday morning of every month, Paul Fadelli stakes out a table at the Natural Grocery Annex. If there is anything you’d like to chat with an El Cerrito city council member about, stop by and talk.

Paul is the only council member who holds such a meet and greet session. The other four council members were asked if they have similar outreach; all declined to reply to an email message. Score one for Paul; he reads his mail.

Flame broiled. Early last month I sent a note to City Hall regarding the embarrassing abandoned Taco Bell at the north city limits. Essentially, I said it ought to be gone. A day later, it was on fire. I’d love to credit someone at the City for the deed, but we know they don’t commit arson. Still, the blaze was a lovely sight on the cold morning of January 4th.

Torching old buildings is not without precedent. (Think the Castro adobe that gave way to El Cerrito Plaza in the late 1950s.) But this burned out Taco Blight is still standing as this is written, albeit barely. The owners owe El Cerrito an apology for allowing this eyesore to trash up our town. Now finish the job; a vacant lot is a huge improvement.

IRS. Standard mileage rate for 2022 is 58.5¢ per mile driven for business use of your vehicle.

COVID-19. This thing hasn’t gone away yet. So get your free at-home test kits by visiting covidtests.gov.

El Cerrito City information can be found at el-cerrito.org/covid19. Hit the contact link to find a table on how to access the services you need from City personnel. It’s business as usual at City Hall, however, the building was closed to the public much of January and could well be closed this month too. Online, email, postal mail, are all options to use. Email and website links work best. Please be patient.


Watch for it. Around the second week of this month every house in El Cerrito (plus the Heights and some Annex) will receive an El Cerrito Marketing Program card. Advertising by local businesses and several offer discounts on products and services.

Crime. The guy pictured on page 8 caused some serious damage to local businesses on January 22nd. Repairs are costly. Maybe he’ll be arrested and given a ticket (California style). [Hal]

Music. The voice of Ronnie Spector and the Ronettes lives forever. RIP.
From Aissia Ashoori
El Cerrito Community Development Dept.

On January 26, 2022, California Strategic Growth Council Affordable Housing Sustainable Communities (AHSC) Program awarded $808 million in cap-and-trade revenue funds to 37 projects across the state. Mayfair Affordable, 69-affordable units located at 11690 San Pablo Avenue (corner of Knott), was awarded $27 million in funding under the transit-oriented development category.

These funds will support BRIDGE Housing and the El Cerrito community in many ways by advancing much needed housing affordability and further improving resident access to integrated public transit, walking and biking while reducing green house gases.

Here is a snapshot of how the funding will be distributed:

- $17.2 million – affordable housing
  This goes to BRIDGE to use for affordable housing ranging from extremely low to very low incomes.
- $3 million – sustainable transportation infrastructure
  To the City of El Cerrito to support the Complete Streets improvements in the City’s capital improvement program.
- $5 million – BART infrastructure
  Money to purchase a new fleet of BART rail cars.
- $1.3 million – transit-related amenities
  Assist with new fare gates at BART’s Del Norte station.
- $403 thousand – other programs
  Transit passes for project residents.

AHSC provides the project with its largest financing source and BRIDGE has a pending application submission under review by Contra Costa County (expected to be released this spring). Based on the current project schedule, BRIDGE is slated to apply for building permits between Winter 2022 and Spring 2023. Construction could begin Fall-Winter 2023 with project completion in Winter 2024 or Spring 2025.

To receive project updates, please subscribe to the Community Development eNews: el-cerrito.org/CommDev or visit el-cerrito.org/majorprojects on the City website.
Who knew that Bruno and Cindy’s Labor of Love, and Fountain of Youth, The Junket Delicatessen & Café established in 1979 in El Cerrito would have such a 42 year deli-cious run. If those Deli slicers could talk! Countless stories of love, mystery, Clotted Cream, Bündnerfleisch, Spotted Dick, Köstritzer and… Headcheese. “Tales from the Deli” is sure to be a bestseller.

The Junket was truly a one-of-a-kind place. It’s not often that you find a family-run business these days. Bruno and Cindy opened the The Junket in 1979 at the El Cerrito Plaza. (I do remember talk of an Earthworm Farm or Almond Ranch?). They quit their corporate jobs at age 50, because they wanted to work for themselves. They ventured into “unknown territory” with no restaurant experience. They were, however, familiar with “unknown territory.”

They got engaged the night they met, despite the fact they did not speak the same language. “I’m from Jamaica” said Cindy. “I’m from a Shoemaker” heard Bruno. Bruno asked Cindy to marry him and put a piece of wire on her finger, and off they went to find the Land of Plenty.

Cindy had left her large family in Jamaica to study nursing in England after WW2. She grew up in Galina, near Ian Flemings (James Bond) Goldeneye estate. Her mother Gwendolyn Cleopatra ran a straw hat shop and also worked for Noël Coward (the playwright), who lived nearby at Firefly, in pirate Henry Morgan’s former home. (Okay, enough name dropping).

Bruno grew up in Southern Germany, Schwabenland. He was a young teen during WW2 and witness to many atrocities. They fell in love at a dance party in Germany and yearned to flee depressed Europe and start life elsewhere. A “Golden” bridge in San Francisco? The Land of Opportunity? The young lovers headed west. They emigrated first to the icy land of Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, with practically nothing and knowing no one. They lived in an attic. 6’5” Bruno (a Sean Connery dopplegänger) could only stand up in the center. They were married “below the alter” in a church because Cindy was not Catholic, and that preacher also told them their marriage would “never work.” Their generous Canadian landlords threw them a wedding reception. They did not know any of the guests, but there was a money tree!

“San Francisco, open your Golden Gate, you’ll let nobody wait outside your door” — Those song lyrics eventually rang true for them. They arrived in Berkeley in the sixties. Lived in El Cerrito for a couple years and then moved to the Shire of Kensington, where they remain today.

Bruno and Cindy are now in their nineties. They have been happily married for 65 years. They absolutely loved their so called “work” at their beloved Junket and had been “working” together just about everyday for the past 40 years, until the pandemic forced them to “shelter at home.” The Junket was their “Fountain of Youth.” You’ll not find two
more vibrant 88/89 year-olds doing what they did. They even worked on their days off. Cindy handled the business end of The Junket, and was also the social butterfly, flitting around her place, chatting with customers, handing out treats, donating to causes, and multi-tasking like nobody’s Headcheese… And Bruno handled customer-to-go transactions at his cash register with the utmost care, “NO… you MUST take a napkin!” He also vacuumed/swept the entire place, lifting up all the wooden chairs to the tops of the tables (next to his own hand-hewn napkin holders)... every single night. Ask him if he needs help? No, you don’t. He also doled out little “chewing candies” to kids and meat scraps to dogs. He traversed the Bay Area speeding around in his giant truck picking up fresh produce and other supplies from the same vendors he has dealt with for 40 years. He built the giant wine wall with my brother Gary, among other things.

Many a spectacular employee (Junketeers they are called) filtered through the deli. A heartfelt thanks to all of them. Heather did an incredible job, especially at the end. We salute all the past employees; Dave, Eloise, Maria, Tanya, Rachel, Brandon, Garrett… the list goes on.

And yes it wasn’t always a piece of cake working for Bruno. It was Bruno’s way or the highway. New employees had to learn the proper way to use a “broom.” But I’ve heard former employees are still thankful for the things they learned from him… and think of Bruno whenever they sweep. Cindy on the other hand gave many employees second or third or nine chances… She hired a homeless fellow to bus tables. Hired an almost blind man (that was rough) and I remember her telling one employee “No guns at The Junket!” He had concealed weapons under that apron of his. Wish I had set up that Deli-cam to catch all the excitement at their place. Would have made for quite a sitcom as well.

Bruno and Cindy helped, and befriended thousands of customers. So many stories to share. There was Karl “Mr. Underberg,” an older German gentleman. He was a regular at The Junket. He came in everyday to smoke his cigar and have a stein of beer at The Stammtisch. One day Karl did not come in. Bruno and Cindy were concerned, so Bruno went to Karl’s house nearby, climbed the back fence and peeked in the bedroom window. Karl was on the floor and had passed away from a heart attack. Oh and the time an American fighter pilot came to The Junket and realized he had bombed Bruno’s hometown of Heilbronn in Germany during WW2. Bruno and him shook hands… just two of many stories.

I write this on my behalf of my parents. It’s their daughter, Schatzie, the Renegade Deli Heiress. Her website: SchatzieFrisch.com.

Thanks for the outpouring of Junket love. I sat with them recently and we read the lovely cards the community sent. I have only the utmost respect for my mom and dad and The Junket. I am truly sorry to see the doors shuttered, but we must celebrate 42 years, and I think laughter is still the best medicine…

Bruno and Cindy will miss everyone.

Auf Weidersehen and Cheerio!

Cindy and Bruno Frisch at their deli.

Bruno and Cindy on the beach in Jamaica 1958 and in Kensington, CA 2020. (Germans like wearing socks with sandals.)
always cooked everything from scratch and so did his grandparents.

In March 1970, Gerner left The Coffee House and opened Natural Food Works in Davis with 10 partners. In 1971, Gerner founded Westbrae Natural Foods in Berkeley. During the early years of running a natural food business, Gerner made granola, nut butter and jams, roasted nuts, dried tons of pears, pressed juices, and even worked as a cherry farmer. He went through a great deal of trial and error while running the stores. His mission was to introduce natural food to the larger community, not just to the “hippies.” He knew he had to make some changes.

In early 1974, Gerner took a one-month trip to Japan, where he was introduced to tofu and learned how to make it the traditional way. After returning home, he taught tofu cooking classes and introduced tofu burgers at his new shop, Gilman Street Gourmet Natural Foods & Delicatessen, in 1976. In addition to tofu burgers, the Deli had 50 different ready to eat food items everyday. Once people tasted the food, the clientele expanded, and the business model gradually started to take shape.

In 1981, Gerner closed Gilman Street Gourmet Natural Foods & Delicatessen and opened Berkeley Natural Grocery Company at the same location. As the business took off, El Cerrito Natural Grocery opened on December 10, 1988. The Grocery stores provide the community with locally sourced fresh organic non-GMO products. In early 2014, the Prepared Food Annex opened for business next to the El Cerrito Natural Grocery, where community members can sit and enjoy healthy, delicious food prepared with the natural ingredients from the Grocery store.

As I listened to the history of the Natural Grocery Company in awe, I was even more touched as Gerner explained why he sold the company to its employees at the end of 2002. Even though he started the business, he believes its success came from the hard work and dedication of all the employees. He decided the best way to show his appreciation to his staff was to share the company with them. By doing so, he could also make sure the business and its mission will continue after he is gone.

Jennifer Sandkhuler, who often works seven days a week, has been with the Grocery Company for 29 years and is now the General Manager and President. Even though Gerner has retired, he serves as the Chair of Board of Directors and stops by the Grocery Company almost everyday. He is still in charge of the impressive chocolate collection because it is his hobby, as he proudly stated. If you love chocolate, be sure to stop by the two-tier chocolate table in the Prepared Food Annex to check out the award winning collection from Peru, Hawaii, Lithuania, Ecuador, and California.
to see each of our members as well as the community at large prosper. We want our members to experience economic prosperity, but we also want them to experience prosperity that extends beyond that measurement. I like the definition “embarking on a journey towards completeness and wholeness.” That definition should encompass “smelling the roses” along the way.

Let us not allow ourselves to get swept up and overwhelmed in the cares and affairs of business and commerce to the extent that we neglect to take time to “smell the roses.” I can state most assuredly, whatever material possessions that we acquire, and level of financial success that we achieve, when we “leave this place” someone else will be enjoying it. The wise words of Kay Lyons Stockham resonate with me: “Yesterday is a cancelled check; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is the only cash you have — so spend it wisely.”

In closing, I want to recognize two people that I have personally observed and who grasp that manner of living quite well. John Stashik, the Chamber Treasurer and editor of this publication loves to sail and travel. If he takes a notion to go sailing, he will put a crew together and go sailing. If there is a destination that piques his interest he will go, be that by plane, train, automobile or boat. He has restaurants that he enjoys locally as well as in San Francisco and he frequents them without hesitation.

My friend and colleague in the real estate business, Victoria Curtis, also makes time to live a very rich, full and adventurous life of travel, dining, concerts, movies, shows and quality time with her family and network of friends. Sometimes for Victoria, it is just quiet time in her hot tub. John and Victoria live their lives this way. It is part of their normal routine. The real estate business is a highly competitive, hands-on business. Victoria takes care of her clients, and still manages to live a full and prosperous life.

We should all take pause and make every effort to “prosper” every day and fully enjoy the journey.
On January 22, 2022, in between approx. 0530 and 0700 a.m., the depicted subject smashed numerous windows and damaged vehicles in the business community along the San Pablo Avenue corridor, the EC Plaza, and Fairmount Avenue. At the time of the incident, he was armed with a hammer. He also had a black duffle bag with him. The suspect caused thousands of dollars of damage to our community.

If you see this subject, please notify the El Cerrito Police Department Dispatch Center immediately at (510) 233-1214, or in case of emergency, dial 911. If you know the identity of this subject, please contact:

Acting Detective Sergeant Whitney
(510) 215-4420
jwhitney@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us

Detective Hashimoto
(510) 640-5214
khashimoto@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us

LIVE & IN-PERSON MIXER
[THE REAL DEAL]

Wednesday, February 16
5:30 p.m.

174 El Cerrito Plaza

We ♥ El Cerrito
#ElCerritoProud