I’m writing this month’s column on the first day of Spring 2018. And I have to say this year seems to have gotten off to a very good start. My various annual audits have been completed, my tax returns are nearing completion, the El Cerrito Chamber has completed its move to our new office space and business prospects for El Cerrito and the Chamber appear very good for the coming year.

Our March luncheon was held once again at the El Cerrito Royale. Thank you Sonja for hosting. Lunch was provided by Papi’s Pizza Roma with dessert from Fatapple’s; thanks to both. There were several new members in attendance and our guest speaker was Tracy Giles of B&T Bookkeeping, Inc. Tracy presented some great ideas about running a business in general and concluded with a brief discussion about the new tax law. It was a great presentation.

Tracy also touched on something I have tried to convey over the years, and I really appreciated her message. She talked about the value of face to face connections with people from other businesses. Think about it from a personal perspective. If you need a carpet cleaner or someone to fix a crashed computer, how do you find the right person or business? Sure, you can thumb through the yellow pages or do a Google search. But how much more likely are you to make your first call to someone you have actually met and have had an opportunity to form a personal opinion about? I know for myself, I would surely first reach out to someone I have had some direct experience with.

This is perhaps the single greatest value of your active participation in Chamber events. Digital marketing is one thing, but it will never beat the opportunities provided by personal contact.

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By Al Miller
President of the El Cerrito Library Foundation

For the first time since Proposition 13 passed in 1978 the El Cerrito Public Library will be open seven days each week starting April 2nd. This restoration of seven-day-per-week library service for residents of El Cerrito is happening because the El Cerrito City Council unanimously included funding in the city’s budget to allow this improvement in service.

Their reasoning is that the vital services the library provides are important to all area residents and that the old, more limited, schedule made it difficult for patrons to gain access to services that are important to them and their families.

While the schedule still varies from day to day, the library will always be open between the hours of one o’clock and five o’clock every day. This means that folks who want to use the library will not have to keep a complex schedule of open and closed days in their mind when planning their errands. The new schedule also means that the staffing at the library will be more stable and that more children’s and teen programs will be available.

To celebrate the start of the new library schedule, the El Cerrito Library Foundation, Friends, and the El Cerrito Library, with the support of Chamber of Commerce members East Bay Sanitary Company, Inc. and Fatapple’s Restaurant & Bakery, are having a party on the first Wednesday of seven-day service on April 4th, from 4 to 6 p.m. Come and celebrate with us on 4/4 at 4 p.m! More information about the first Wednesday celebration is on the insert included in this Byline.

Let’s all attend and give thanks to the El Cerrito City Council for their support of lifelong learning in our community.

The El Cerrito Library Foundation is an associate member of the Chamber of Commerce.
El Cerrito got some heavy ink in the Sunday papers on March 25th. Both the San Francisco Chronicle and East Bay Times reported on the fact that Playland-Not-at-the-Beach (PNATB) could be forced to close when museum’s building is demolished for new apartments or condos. Frank Biafore is the Fabulous Fun Facilitator of PNATB. Columnist Carl Nolte quoted Biafore in the Chronicle: “It’s funny, Playland-Not-at-the-Beach may suffer the fate of the original Playland at the Beach in San Francisco. Torn down for condos.” That’s our new San Pablo Avenue; apartments and condominiums.

PNATB held its grand opening in El Cerrito on May 31, 2008. I was there along with the city’s mayor, Bill Jones. The Big Scissors of the Chamber snipped the ribbon and the place has welcomed visitors, hosted parties, and even Chamber mixers ever since.

Playland was the dream of Richard Tuck, a local businessman, who was fascinated by amusement parks, magic, sideshows, carnivals, and circuses. He located the “museum of fun” next to his business, Lander International, at the corner of San Pablo and Jefferson Avenues. Tuck died in 2011 and Biafore along with Tim Sauer continued running the museum.

Among the staff at PNATB are a few people who actually worked at Playland at the Beach, San Francisco’s amusement park that shut down in 1972. I recall visits to Playland back then. Memorabilia from the old Playland is at El Cerrito’s PNATB.

Our Playland will be kicked out of their present building and a new location is needed soon. Ideally, in El Cerrito, as it would be a shame to lose this unique attraction. The reality is PNATB will have a tough time finding a new spot in El Cerrito not to mention paying market rent. Other businesses are to shut down as buildings are razed for new housing. There is always good news and bad news when it comes to development.

But there is always hope. Maybe somebody reading this can throw a life ring to our Playland-Not-at-the-Beach.

New biz. Mr. Pickle’s Sandwich Shop at 10810 San Pablo (just north of Schmidt Lane) will open April 15th according to the owner. Just pencil it in for now as we know how restaurant openings go. Still, remodeling is near completion. Mr. Pickle’s has many locations in the Bay Area and El Cerrito is next.

HK Home Kitchen opened on March 24th in the old Violet’s building at 10140 San Pablo Avenue, just north of Central. A very lengthy Chinese food menu. Open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

At the Plaza. Sola Salon Studios, a national firm supporting beauty professionals, will occupy the former DB Shoes space near the flagpole in the middle of El Cerrito Plaza. Construction is underway now. Leasing of salon studio space with early move-in specials is offered. 40 custom built studios will be built. More information call (415) 629-9991.

Moeser center. Construction at the former Safeway building near Moeser and San Pablo is really in high gear. 24-Hour Fitness will occupy the structure when the dust settles. A big plus for El Cerrito.

No golf. The annual Dynamo Golf Scramble, a fundraiser scheduled for April 20th, has been canceled. According to a Rec-Park contact, not enough participants signed up. It was to be held at Hiddenbrooke Golf Club in Vallejo this year. Maybe people don’t really want to travel that far.
The ‘Gig Economy’ Helps Some and Destroys Others

Recently, I came across a tragic story that escaped my radar when it first happened. In early February, Douglas Schifter, a man in his sixties, who, for more than 30 years, drove taxis and limousines professionally, made his last trip. He parked in front of City Hall in New York City, took out a gun and killed himself.

A few hours earlier, he had written a lengthy Facebook post lamenting the economic ruination of his life after car-on-demand services, like Lyft and Uber, flooded the streets, destroying his capacity to maintain a basic income. He despaired of the app-based business models that produced millions for the investment bankers, lawyers and white collar classes, but said “they count their money, and we are driven down into the streets we drive, becoming homeless and hungry.” He also blamed New York City and state politicians for caving in to Uber and its ilk, by allowing the influx of thousands of unregulated drivers that have decimated the traditional taxi systems.

Mr. Schifter did not drive part-time to make extra money for his yoga class or double lattes, it was his livelihood and he was working up to 100 hours a week, just to keep up, and it became an unbearable condition. An isolated case? Perhaps, but still pointing to a huge dilemma; when a regulated industry (such as taxi service) is invaded to the point of devastation by an unregulated and rampant newcomer.

Then get this counterpoint to the story. Marco Zappacosta, CEO of San Francisco-based Thumbtack, an app that connects seekers and providers of short term tasks and gig jobs, mentioned how those on his platform are happily earning about $75 an hour. I bet that is a rarity, but in any case, the gig worker has to shell out for all the legal, insurance and health related requirements what a traditional employer would. The gig worker has to shell out for all the legal, insurance and health related requirements once considered good perks from an employer. So, realizations about making tons of money just don’t materialize, once all costs are figured in.

Indeed. According to Jay Youngdahl, former owner of the East Bay Express, there is analysis showing profits for app-based gig companies, come from not paying for employee health care, pension, paid leave, as well as foregoing any outlay for governmental safety net benefits, such as social security, workers compensation and unemployment insurance.

Is this the workplace reality progressives really want to see flourishing?

What happened to standing up for worker rights and protections? There are some former Clinton and Obama strategists who now conduct marketing campaigns to shape public opinion, promising “freedom” and “flexibility” and some vague future benefits. But incredibly, these highly paid consultants are opposing traditional unionization and unwilling to face what life is like today for these “independent” workers.

Yet, I understand this type of app-based gig system can clearly be a great solution for creating jobs in certain fields of work. Dog walking, programming, office tasks, writing, handymen, food deliveries, are a few examples of short-term gig jobs that don’t disrupt an entire industry in order to create “flexibility and freedom.”

But when drivers for Uber and Lyft, as in our own city, are allowed to multiply like mushrooms without any regulation or regard for the existing taxi drivers who pay taxes and license fees, this crosses a line that I find unfair and disturbing. I’d like to know if our city leaders will be addressing this issue this year. Obviously, the whole topic of “independent” workers and the disruption of traditional economic models is a huge one, more than I can address in the scope of our newsletter. I welcome any responses from Byline readers.

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.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

connections. So once again I’d like to encourage you to come to our meetings and mixers and take advantage of all we have to offer.

I’ll conclude with one other reminder. The City of El Cerrito’s annual Earth Day celebration will be held on Saturday, April 21st, with the theme of reduce, reuse, recycle, re-imagine, re-design. Individuals and groups can volunteer at various work party locations around the city between 9 a.m. and noon, then gather at the Community Center for the volunteer appreciation lunch from noon until about 1:30 p.m. where they can learn more about how to improve local environmental quality. This lunch is funded by donations from residents and local businesses. For more information on how to volunteer or donate, send an email to greenassistant@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us or call (510) 215-4350.

I look forward to seeing you all at our next event.

Correction

The Byline photo caption in March for El Cerrito Pet Hospital, a new Chamber member, was incorrect. The photo caption should have read: Dr. Syed Naqvi and Rizam Naqvi. We apologize for the error.

Manager’s Musings

LISA MARTINENGO

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April 2018

BYLINE
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Strong coffee and good food! That’s the slogan of CafeN!ne, a Chamber member since last October. Co-owner Gannon Abbey says the name came about because “when you squint your eyes, the words cafe nine sort of look like caffeine!”

Luckily, squinting is not needed to enjoy the great coffee that is the hallmark of the newest cafe and sandwich shop in El Cerrito. Along with wonderful brews and espresso preparation, a substantial sandwich selection, salads and breakfast pastries, there is often a delicious house-made soup on the menu. Everything is so tasty there, it was no surprise to learn that Gannon grew up learning how to cook at an early age.

His parents lived in the East Bay, but had an opportunity to start a new life in eastern British Columbia, where Gannon was born. Perhaps his first exposure to the world of food and fine cooking was partially due to catering work his mother did for the nearby film industry. During teen years, they were back in the East Bay and Gannon attended an alternative school in Orinda. Soon after that he was drawn to the creative world of music, film, theater production. He established a small recording studio in Oakland, which provided lots of valuable learning opportunities with the nuts and bolts of running a small business.

The lure of food service business was strong and Gannon realized how friendly interaction with clients and customers was an important element to him. He decided to join the Semifreddi’s team at the Kensington location. He helped managed that and the Claremont store for over a year but moved on after a year or so. For a while, Gannon handled some real estate transactions for a family member which proved very important by giving him the essential project management skills that set the stage for future endeavors.

There was another period in BC, and Gannon became locally famous for his guacamole, which was something exotic for his Canadian friends. He returned to Oakland once again, this time to focus on two relationships; one business, one romantic. He and his business partner were determined to get into business together and the search to buy out an existing coffee shop took just two months. That was just over five years ago and the business is called Earthly Coffee, located in Oakland near Children’s Hospital.

Last year, to help strengthen their business stability, Gannon and his partner decided the time was right to expand and luckily for us in El Cerrito, they found and met the Francos who were selling their Franco’s Mini Deli cafe business in the Bank of the West Plaza. Some of the factors that helped sway the decision, were the proximity to the Ohlone Greenway, freeway access, parking, and good terms from the sellers.

It’s obvious Gannon and his sweetie, Kita, who helps out part-time, really enjoy greeting customers as they enter. In a few short months, they already know the favorite coffee drinks of the regulars. They pour a real Italian style espresso, which means it’s strong yet mellow, never bitter. If you haven’t done so, I suggest you stop in CafeN!ne very soon to meet Gannon and Kita, try a hot drink and hot or cold sandwich or the soup. There are chips and other goodies if you’re real hungry, but I’ve often found one of Gannon’s hearty sandwiches can become two meals.

For me, CafeN!ne definitely scores a ten!
What the Advertisers Say

“...It has been by far the most successful campaign I’ve seen done by the Chamber. The return on investment on it is phenomenal... I, for one, will be signing up each time as the impact that it has had on [my business] has been nothing short of a complete success.”

El Cerrito Marketing Program

Ads@ElCerritoChamber.org
Calendar of Events

April
3  City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
4  Chamber Board of Directors meets, 9 a.m., City Hall.
12  Cerrito Classics: “Thelma & Louise,” 7 p.m., at Rialto Cinemas Cerrito.
13  Premiere: “Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike” at 8 p.m., Contra Costa Civic Theatre. Through May 6. ccct.org
14  Friends of the El Cerrito Library spring book sale. 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. 6510 Stockton Avenue.
17  Chamber luncheon meeting. See box above.
17  City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.

May
2  Mixer at Everything Under the Rainbow, 6491 Portola Ave. 5:30-7:30 p.m.