I’ve just finished a very interesting book the gist of which I’d like to share with you this month. The title of the book is “A Generation of Sociopaths: How the baby Boomers Betrayed America.” The writer, Bruce Gibney, is a venture capitalist turned author.

For reference, Merriam-Webster defines the word sociopath as someone who behaves in a dangerous or violent way towards other people and does not feel guilty about such behavior. Gibney’s premise that the notion of the baby boomer generation (people born between 1940 and 1965) as a progressive generation is contrary to the reality that they are actually a generation devoted to their own enrichment at the cost of their country and children.

He does not imply that this is a purposeful coordinated effort. Rather, he suggests that the nature and time of their upbringing, a time without wars or depressions or any such crisis comparable to what previous generations had endured—as well as it being a time of incredible technological innovation that made everyday living much simpler—has somehow resulted in a generation that is very self-focused and generally disinclined to consider future generations in their actions.

He points to several examples of the consequences of their legacy such as our broken health care system, the looming Social Security crisis and the unsustainable and still rising national debt.

See From the President, page 7

Restaurant Operators: Sign Up Now

By Bill Kuhlman

Volunteers will be fanning out across El Cerrito in the next few weeks to recruit participants for El Cerrito Restaurant Week, October 11-17, 2018. Now in its fourth year, Restaurant Week is co-sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the City of El Cerrito. The event highlights the quality and diversity of local restaurants for residents and visitors alike.

No fees are imposed on restaurants to participate, although every business is encouraged to offer a special menu or other incentive to boost customer turnout. We know, because residents consistently remind us, that local businesses, especially restaurants, help define the character of our city.

If you operate a restaurant, please sign up when our volunteers visit. For more information, please see the website at: www.el-cerrito.org/939/Restaurant-Week.

Contact Jennifer Peat at the city’s Community Development Department, (510) 215-4362, for assistance. Email: jpeat@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.
Who remembers Nibs? (Alright, put your hands down.) When a fire shut down the popular San Pablo Avenue eatery in March 2013 the owners said they’d be back in business in a month. It didn’t work out that way. But I’m here to report that over five years later a new restaurant is under construction in the same building. The plans show nine tables instead of the long counters of the old Nibs. I’ve no idea of the type of cuisine. Also, I will not guess on any opening date; construction is in progress now.

Name a chair. Al Miller, citizen extraordinaire, is looking for donors to pay for new upholstery on the library’s chairs. For a mere $250 a plaque can be placed on a chair honoring somebody, even yourself, while funding chair renewal. Contact the El Cerrito Library Foundation at: info@eclibraryfoundation.org.

La Estrella. The food truck that parked at McBears Social Club was damaged several months ago in a collision at Columbia and San Pablo. A sign at McBears explains why the popular truck is missing. Does anybody have an update on repair? Let me know.

Happy anniversary to Martino and his team at La Strada Italian Cuisine in San Pablo celebrating 22 years in business. They cater Chamber lunches periodically.

Po Po U. A new eight week session of the Community Police Academy will begin on September 19th. This sounds like an excellent way to learn more about the El Cerrito Police Dept. Slots in the course are very limited; early application is a must. Contact Officer Perez at (510) 215-4400 if interested.
Recently I returned from vacation that included visits to Seattle and a few wonderful places in western Canada. It was truly hard to return to the overcrowded and smoggy Bay Area. Yes, I’m aware that vacation experiences are very different than the quotidian life. However, Canada seems to be better off in certain areas (health care, for one), while the U.S. is struggling in too many to mention now. Indeed, I thought changing to a single-payer health care system would be one of the hot debatable topics as we approach the November elections, but it seems too big or too controversial for our state leaders to deal with now.

I wish I had visited, while in Seattle, the futuristic Amazon Spheres; a giant four story glass atrium space that serves as both workspace and hangout lounge for Amazon employees. Evidently, inside, the temperature is always a perfect 72 degrees with 60 percent humidity, creating a haven for over 40,000 tropical exotic plants sourced from around the world. The huge edifice also includes waterfalls, winding walkways, and fish from the actual Amazon River. By connecting the space to a nearby data center with piping, excess machine energy is turned into heating, keeping the interior well protected from the harsh winter months of the northwest.

In stark contrast, living outside the Spheres is a brutal reality for many of Seattle’s homeless population. That city, like San Francisco, is dealing with a ever increasing divide between the haves and the have-nots. From an article by Victor Luckerson, on the site, The Ringer: “the haves can be ID’d from afar by the blue lanyards hanging from their necks as they swarm fast-casual restaurants at lunch hour. Amazon is Seattle’s largest employer, its greatest occupier of office space, its most prized economic engine. It’s also one of reasons the city has endured skyrocketing housing prices, ever-expanding waves of gentrification, and a huge spike in homelessness over the past several years.”

In a few years, Amazon has become so successful, its rapid growth having huge impact in the city, that some critics say it was like being hit with a “prosperity bomb.” However, there are huge numbers of people left behind in the wealth explosion aftermath. In case you have not followed the news there are huge numbers of people left behind in the wealth explosion aftermath. In case you have not followed the news from the northwest, I’ll summarize it here because I think we, as a society and as a local community, can learn a lot from what happened and will continue to happen, unless those in big corporate echelons adopt views and practices that go toward helping solve income inequality problems.

Following her 2014 success in getting a minimum wage ordinance instituted in Seattle, city council member Kshama Sawant, stridently called for Amazon and other wealthy businesses to give a lot more back to the city, to help pay for programs for homelessness and other social services, in the form of a per employee or head tax.

This past May, after a heated campaign of months that included frequent raucous street protests, contentious council meetings, and a gong rung over 6,000 times to represent the number of homeless people within the city, the city council passed the head tax, compromising on $250 per employee for companies making $20 million or more annually. The next day, reps from Goliath itself, came into one council-member’s office, waving a press release stating they would halt construction on a new tower, putting the fate of 7,000 jobs in question. That aggressive action and other initiatives by numerous business leaders, led to a massive mobilization of volunteers and money, to put the issue on the November ballot with the hopes of decimating the ordinance. Even with a threshold of $20 million, some low margin businesses such as restaurants and food stores, would have been affected. This did not sit well with many progressives and soon the anti-tax side had amassed $450,000. Naturally, Amazon donated some pocket change ($25,000) to help them. It looked like a long summer battle would be coming, but it never got that far.

On June 12th, just four weeks after the head tax was signed into law, the city council voted 7-2, to repeal, stunning everyone on both sides. The tax-supporting side accused the council of meekly capitulating to the pressure from the big businesses. “Council Caves In to Amazon” read the headlines.

The world’s wealthiest man beyond anyone’s dreams, Jeff Bezos, is about to decide on the location of yet another gigantic base of operations, called HQ2. The last few months have seen several cities bend over backwards to entice him to choose their package. How many of them are willing to give up taxing the behemoth reasonably, to help solve local issues that don’t get enough funding via other means? I read with glee, that at least one city leader in Austin, Texas, has publicly stated that he does not think it’s in the city’s best interest to woo Bezos.

For El Cerrito, the related issues have to do with the current wave of developers that want to create all sorts of housing projects, both market rate and so-called affordable, along San Pablo Avenue. One can see quite a large number of building plans on the city’s website in various stages of the development pipeline. Last month, the council passed an ordinance that allows these developers to pay a one-time fee instead of actually creating some affordable housing. These funds are supposed to go to a city account especially for affordable housing, so why not keep the requirement for the developer in place?

In closing, I just would like all El Cerritans to be vigilant, show up at meetings, and be sure to demand total clarity and transparency from the council and staff on what goes on with that fund. I don’t want to read next year in the Business Times about a fat cat developer from out of town or out of state, making huge profits from a building in El Cerrito that we get very little actual, practical benefit from.

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.

Contact the Byline
byline@elcerritochamber.org
Making Your Financial Life Simpler!

By Lisa Martinengo

One of the most frequent suggestions my late mother (and also millions of other parents) made was that I take my finances more seriously and plan well for my future. While it always sounded like good advice at the time, the future always seemed very far away and it was all too easy to postpone those chores.

Now, as time flies by, the future doesn’t seem so far away anymore and I find myself wishing I had established better financial habits earlier. I also think maybe I should have consulted someone to help guide me down the proper path, someone like financial planner, Mark Sifling, and his business Simple Life Financial.

Mark has the experience and skills to make it easy for clients to build wealth for the future, without feeling like they have to sacrifice all the good things in life today. He’s got several tiers of service geared toward people of various ages and stages of life. And financial planning isn’t just about retirement and “old age.” While a comfortable retirement is an important objective for everyone, there are numerous other goals Mark’s clients are also planning for, such as returning to college, buying a house, or starting a business. Mark’s background and experience helps him understand, design, and execute plans to achieve each client’s individual goals.

Mark was raised in the Rochester, New York area, and graduated from Cornell University with a degree in physics and minor in International Relations. To help create structure in his life and develop valuable management skills at the same time, Mark applied for and received a full scholarship to Cornell through the U.S. Navy Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). After college, he joined the Navy as an officer. For a 20-something young man to be suddenly moving to Honolulu, and given a huge responsibility in his duties, was an awesome experience. Mark spent five years with the Navy, in Hawaii and Japan, gaining invaluable life skills such as leadership and new perspectives, that continue to serve him well today.

Post Navy, Mark decided to return to graduate school and applied to U.C. Berkeley’s MBA program to begin his training in finance. In the early 1990s, Mark and his partner moved to Berkeley and he received his MBA from Cal in 1994 after two intensive years of study.

After graduating from Cal, Mark went to work for a small but well-connected boutique management consulting firm in San Francisco. It was through this experience that he built his significant background in financial services, especially banking. One large project Mark coordinated, was the merger of Wells Fargo and First Interstate banks.

He then moved to Charles Schwab for several years, becoming vice president of retail product management. At Schwab, he earned several certifications, including Series 7 and 24 licenses, which are required to provide investment advice to individual clients. Around 2003, Mark decided to leave Schwab and go into business for himself.

He started Simple Life Financial to assist people who are dedicated to accumulating assets. Rather than joining another brokerage firm to simply sell products to people, Mark organized his new firm as a registered investment advisor, with a fiduciary responsibility to his clients. Being a fiduciary means always putting his client’s needs first, a model Mark feels is the best match for a financial planner.

In addition to investment advising, he also offers cash flow management and can provide referrals to trusted partners in other critical areas, such as estate planning and tax preparation. A complimentary consultation is the first step to discuss financial needs and goals as well as ensure there are similar values and philosophies. Maybe it’s not too late for me or you? Please get in contact with Mark and make your financial life more simple!

Simple Life Financial
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Playland-Not-at-the-Beach is still serving up entertainment and celebrating the amusements of a bygone era, but the staff at the popular attraction know the writing is on the wall and the mood behind the scenes at the “Museum of Fun” is rather gloomy right now.

The El Cerrito Playland, which opened in May 2008, is named in tribute to the beloved San Francisco amusement park Playland at the Beach and there are parallels related to its closing.

“We are open through Labor Day, which is a bit of irony. The original Playland closed on Labor Day in 1972,” said Frank Biafore, who carries the title of “Master of Fabulous Fun” at the El Cerrito attraction. “(The original) Playland was torn down to build condos. This will be torn down to build apartments.”

Banners now outside the building at 10979 San Pablo Ave. at Jefferson Avenue are now advertising a September 15th auction of the unique El Cerrito Playland collection amassed by founder Richard Tuck, which encompasses far more than a typical pinball arcade.

“We definitely want people to get here and enjoy it before it’s gone, versus coming during the last day or two,” Biafore said. Along with individual visitors, Playland regularly hosts groups for birthday parties, fundraising events and the like.

“We’ve been looking for the better part of a year (for a suitable place to relocate) and it’s two bridges away or five times what we are able to pay.” In the meantime, he said, “The landlord has been very generous about giving us a break on our rent.”

Along with classic pinball machines, there are vintage boardwalk arcade games and memorabilia, early video arcade games and displays of miniature replicas of circuses and carnivals.

"It is better to have had Playland and lost it, than never to have had the attraction at all.”

“Part of the challenge has been in finding people interested in it. It’s such an eclectic collection,” Biafore said. “We’re hoping parts of it stay together, like the miniature circus. We had someone working to sell the miniature circus for about a year.”

Still, he said, it is better to have had Playland and lost it, than never to have had the attraction at all.

“We’ve gone through the seven stages of grieving. Tim (Sauer) and I and others on the board have had time to deal with it. It’s hard for some people, but there’s a sense of closure and knowing that everything is going somewhere. We’re down to the wire and it’s either do an auction or let it go to the landfill or a yard sale.”

Biafore became the public face of Playland after Tuck’s death of colon cancer in 2011, giving magic shows there and staffing the Playland booth at community events.

As a tribute to Tuck, Playland has also taken a lead role in sponsoring and planning the annual Relay for Life of the East Shore (relayforlife.org/east-shoreca), a benefit for the American Cancer Society. This year’s relay is set for August 11-12 at Cerrito Vista Park.

“We don’t know what to expect once the auction is over,” Biafore said. “We have to work on getting everything out of the building. I don’t know how it’s going to feel seeing everything gone. But I’m very grateful for what it’s brought me and what it taught me.”

Biafore will still be around after Playland closes. “I’m hoping to continue to bring magic to the community, literally and figuratively,” he said, noting that he will be available for hire as a magician (frank@playland-not-at-the-beach.org).
El Cerrito City Manager Announces Retirement

BY CHRIS TREADWAY

Scott Hanin, who has served as El Cerrito’s city manager since March of 2001, will retire at the end of the year, it was announced July 18th. He will be succeeded by Assistant City Manager Karen Pinkos.

Hanin’s 17 years is the longest as the city’s top administrator since El Cerrito’s adoption of the city manager form of government in 1949 as part of a series of reforms enacted after World War II.

During his time at the helm, El Cerrito undertook such major projects as modernizing the acclaimed recycling center, building a new city administration building, and renovating the historic Cerrito Theater as a catalyst for economic development, major streetscape additions on San Pablo Avenue, and new directional signage around town.

The city also became adept at landing funding from state programs for amenities such as “rain gardens” on San Pablo Avenue and the Ohlone Greenway that filter and cleanse storm runoff before it enters the bay.

Voters backed civic improvements by approving two sales tax measures. The first, Measure H, is dedicated to road repair and street improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists. The half-cent tax increase was approved in 2008.

A second half-cent tax, Measure R, was approved in 2010 at a time when the city was facing a budget shortfall. That measure was increased to one-cent and extended for 12 years by voters in 2014.

“It has been a great run here in El Cerrito and just seemed like the right time to step down and take a break to spend more time with my family,” said Hanin. “I have been lucky to have such dedicated city councils to work with and an amazing city staff that continually raises the bar for public service.”

Hanin’s career includes more than 30 years in local government and consulting to public agencies. Before taking the El Cerrito post he was executive director of the West Contra Costa Integrated Waste Management Authority.

He has a master’s degree in public administration from New York University, a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Delaware, and completed the U.C. Berkeley Executive Seminar program.

Pinkos, who has more than 20 years of local government management experience, was hired by El Cerrito in September 2001. She is the incoming President of the International City/County Management Association.

Charter City Measure on November Ballot

BY CHRIS TREADWAY

Voters in November will decide the fate of a ballot measure that would make El Cerrito a charter city. The change, in the planning since early 2017, would allow El Cerrito to enact a real property transfer tax “to maintain and/or increase the current level of services and facilities provided by the City,” according to the staff report.

The City Council on July 17th unanimously approved placing the measure on the ballot, saying the revenue would allow El Cerrito to meet the service and infrastructure needs of a full-service city. In their discussion, some members of the council likened the tax to “an entry fee” on those who want to own property here.

El Cerrito previously had a RPTT that was repealed in 2003 due to changes in law. Revenue from the tax that fiscal year was $1.2 million and it was estimated that a tax at the same rate would have realized about $1.7 million in fiscal 2016.

No rate has been set for the possible new tax, but a rate similar to that in Richmond, $12 per $1,000 of sale price, would have generated about $2.7 million.

“A general law city has the authority to act locally but its acts must be consistent with the California Constitution, state statutes and state administrative regulations. A charter city has the additional authority to adopt laws regarding ‘municipal affairs’ that are inconsistent with state statutes, but the charter must still be consistent with U.S. and California Constitutions,” according to the staff report.

Those speaking in support of the measure noted that many older city facilities suffer from deferred maintenance and that the city has no funds set aside in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency. Critics said the RPTT would be a burden on older homeowners dependent on their home as a retirement nest egg.

Jack Weir of the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association called the charter city change a ploy to enact “a terrible tax” needed to meet the city’s unfunded pension liability. He further called it an attack on tax limits set by state Proposition 13 and said his organization would campaign against it, as it has in other cities in the county.

Former Mayor Rich Bartke did not speak about the tax, but cautioned against rushing to switch to El Cerrito’s status, saying that all California cities that have filed for bankruptcy or accepted state bailouts are charter cities.

A survey by a contracted consultant concluded there is sufficient support needed for the measure to get the simple majority needed to pass.

Charter cities in the area include Albany, Emeryville, Berkeley, Richmond, Oakland, Alamed, Piedmont, San Francisco, San Leandro, and San Rafael.

Deadline: August 15

El Cerrito Marketing Program

Target 14,000 addresses in El Cerrito and Richmond
ads@elcerritochamber.org
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

I’d like to point out the Gibney is not characterizing every individual boomer as being a sociopath. Certainly, as individuals, boomers are every bit as intelligent and compassionate as any other generation. But somehow, collectively these traits get lost.

Gibney begins by describing how the boomers inherited an economic system the likes of which has never been seen in human history. But over the next several decades through their own short-sighted self-interest have succeeded in enriching themselves and leaving future generations to suffer the consequences of what I fear will be a severe economic collapse.

As the largest voting bloc for decades, the boomers accomplished this by, among other things, failed regulatory actions during the 1980s and 1990s and a whole host of improvident tax policy changes all of which benefitted themselves, but which have led to crushing debt for our children, grandchildren, and beyond.

What I found most interesting is that according to Gibney, the boomers’ actions are neither Democrat nor Republican, but rather generational. In other words, there are no clean hands. I can’t say that I agreed with every assertion he makes. But for the most part he makes a strong case backing it up with well researched data and by demonstrating powerful correlations between the timing of our economic slide and when the boomers began to take control.

It was at times a rather dry book to read but it is a book I highly recommend. I think that the information it presents could go a long way in toning down the acrimony in today’s political discourse.

Now for the fun stuff. Since writing in my June column about my upcoming backpack trip, I have logged approximately 80 miles worth of practice hikes with a 40 lb. pack on my back and I’ve purchased far too much money’s worth of all the latest gear. We leave in three days and I think I’m ready.

Hopefully, next month I will have a few good stories to share rather than a bill for a rescue helicopter ride. Devil’s Postpile, here I come!

Wine, tacos, and tequila were featured at this July 26th super mixer hosted by Bankston Immigration. Turnout was huge; tacos were excellent; and the wine and tequila strictly top shelf. Watch for the next mixer in a future Byline.

John C. Stashik
The Calendar

Aug.  8 Chamber Board meets; 9 a.m.; 1432 Kearney St.
   16 Ribbon cutting ceremony at 24 Hour Fitness (page 1).
   21 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
   28 Small Business Tax Seminar, 8:30-11 a.m.
   Elihu Harris Bldg., 1515 Clay St., Oakland. Free.
Sept.  8 El Cerrito Royale's annual Grandparents Day Carnival.
   11 a.m.-3 p.m.
   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. (page 5).
   17 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
   18 Chamber luncheons resume. Special guest:
Oct.  7 Sip & Savor at the Berkeley Country Club, 2:30 p.m.

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

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