



From the President

JEFFREY WRIGHT

THERE ARE a lot of good things going on in El Cerrito. Let me start by personally thanking former mayor and current city council member Paul Fadelli for spearheading and aggressively working towards bringing back the wonderful El Cerrito Fourth of July event. COVID-19 and budgetary constraints put it on hold; however, Paul had a vision to bring it back, and by all measures it is coming to fruition.

As you look around the city there are various commercial ventures as well as housing related projects opening soon. Harbor Freight just opened, and the Mayfair apartment complex at Cutting and San Pablo will do so soon. We are doing a good job here in El Cerrito; however, lately stories about housing and homelessness on a regional level have been in the local news on an almost daily basis.

As a veteran real estate professional with 43 years of licensed experience under my belt, I have seen and personally been involved in a wide variety of real estate transactions for clients as well as for myself, including decades of

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New Members



11450 San Pablo Ave. (inside Safeway)
El Cerrito 94530
usbank.com



7019 Stockton Ave., El Cerrito 94530
thisisjuku.com

Charis Advisory Group

Kimberly White

info@charisadvisors.com
charisadvisors.com

Announcing: 'Best of El Cerrito' Awards

BY ROBERT ROGERS

EXCEPTIONAL BUSINESSES serving the City of El Cerrito will be celebrated with a powerful "Best of El Cerrito" campaign launched by the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce board of directors, on the suggestion of board member Scott Harris, has initiated the campaign and will soon begin the work of collecting survey data, outlining categories, building web pages, advertising, linking with sponsors, and embarking on a promotions drive.

"This will help consumers navigate the diverse services we have here in El Cerrito while raising the profile of our great businesses," Harris said. "We as a Chamber take pride in supporting local businesses, empowering consumers, and bolstering our local tax base."

According to City licensing data, El Cerrito brims with more than 700 businesses, an impressive number in a town that's relatively small in both population and square mileage.

The board is considering more than 50 "Best of" categories to best highlight our large and eclectic business community. Categories will range from standards like best restaurants in each of a range of culinary classifications and professionals providing various services, to more modern categories like "best cannabis dispensary" and "best website designer."

Local businesses have faced daunting challenges during the pandemic. To survive, resilient owners, managers and staff have innovated and adapted, and they deserve Chamber and civic recognition.

"Best of" contests have long been a key driver of excellence in services and products, as well as revenues, as new customers flock to award-winning busi-

■ See Best of El Cerrito, page 6



Now Open in El Cerrito

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

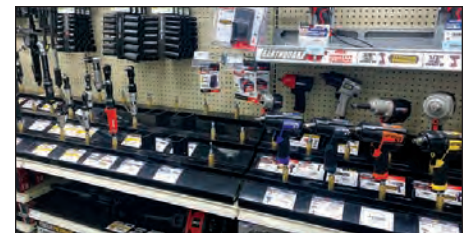
EL CERRITO is the newest location of Harbor Freight which opened on April 26th. The nationwide firm,

headquartered in Calabasas, California, operates over 1200 stores employing in



excess of 20,000 people. The official grand opening for the new store will be at 8 a.m., Saturday, May 14th, at 11048 San Pablo Ave.

Manager Michael Jules stated the company is opening new locations at a very aggressive pace. He's delighted to be working in El Cerrito.



Photos: John C. Stashik



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

THREE CHEERS for council member Paul Fadelli. He took the challenge, decided it was time for El Cerrito to have a party on July 4th, and set out to raise \$50,000 from sponsors and private donors. A daunting task, he (with some colleagues) reached and exceeded the goal. So plan on Independence Day at Cerrito Vista Park this year. More details to come from El Cerrito Recreation.

Paul will be at the Prepared Food Annex, as usual, on Thursday, May 5th, 9-11 a.m. That'll be Cinco de Mayo so enjoy a cerveza while you chat him up.

□

JUKU got a mention here when it first opened at 7019 Stockton Ave., opposite 7-Eleven. Now this co-work/study/event space is a Chamber member; welcome! Fast Wi-Fi, big screen TV, lots of seating in a roomy space, and a variety of baked goods, coffee and tea. Stop by and say hello to Jordan or visit thisisjuku.com.

□



John C. Stashik

The splash of color on Fairmount near Fatapple's is courtesy of Ana Sanchez, owner of the new Golden Poppy 2 florist. (GP #1 is in Albany.) Open Monday-Saturday at 7509 Fairmount. Mother's Day is May 8th.

□

Citibank moves into new quarters on Fairmount Ave. at El Cerrito Plaza effective May 11th.

□

More pie. While celebrating their 70th year, Nation's is expanding the bakery behind corporate headquarters at Madison and Kearney.

□

Thank You Rialto Cinemas Cerrito



John C. Stashik

"Anything Goes" was absolutely delightful and it was wonderful to have live—albeit on screen—musical theater here in El Cerrito for two days last month. More please!

Rialto Cinemas now has a *movie lover* card. Ask for one at the Cerrito and earn points for movie admissions, popcorn, pizza, beer, candy; you name it.

More on crime. Last month District Attorney candidate Mary Knox stated the following in her story on *How do we rise from the ashes of Proposition 47*.

A misdemeanor theft offense carries the potential punishment of a year in custody in the County Jail (six months with "good conduct" credits which are automatically awarded to prisoners irrespective of whether they were of "good conduct" in custody). While six months may not be an effective long-term deterrent for some career criminals, *it is an effective crime prevention tool for the six months that the offender is in custody*.

That's worth emphasizing as the current policy of no jail time is costing businesses and consumers a fortune with criminals free to steal up to \$950 without any penalty. Even six months behind bars for a crime would give our business owners a much needed break as so many of the perps are "frequent flyers" doing their crimes on a daily or hourly schedule.

To be informed I reviewed the City Council presentation of October 5, 2021, where current District Attorney Diana Becton spoke of all the accomplishments of her office. Not one word about the continual crimes at local businesses and the huge cost borne by owners and consumers. Maybe they don't count.

□

Super Slice update. Like everyone else, Omar Esmatyar has been dealing with "supply chain" issues. His desire is to open on May 1st. However, the new Super Slice Pizza at 10180 San Pablo Ave. could be delayed a bit.

□

Banter Wine Bar. Current plan is to be open in the summer. At our last conversation the wait was on for various permits to buildout the Stockton and San Pablo location.

□



John C. Stashik

Restaurant for rent. The business known as Sasa Kitchen at 10350 San Pablo Ave. has been closed for months. Recently the lot was fenced to keep vagrants off the property. The building is available; call broker Yvonne Lee for leasing details at 415-225-9686.

□

In-person again. El Cerrito's City Council meetings will return to City Hall on June 7th, barring any late breaking COVID-19 issues. Bonus: these will be hybrid sessions with the option to attend in-person or by Zoom. Trust me, City staff will work very hard to ensure this will run smoothly.

This Chamber is planning on a return to live, in-person lunch sessions, starting in June. Details will be announced next month in the *Byline*.

□

American Graffiti, May 19th, 7 p.m. at Rialto Cinemas Cerrito. Another Cerrito Classic.



Thank You to All Sponsors

of the City of El Cerrito/worldOne July 4th Festival

"It's great that we've reached our fundraising goal for the July 4th Festival. Thanks to our generous local sponsors and donors, El Cerrito can hopefully celebrate again this year. Good news too, in this frugal time for our city, is that we will be saving more than \$55,000 from our General Fund." — Councilmember Paul Fadelli

Public Art Fund Grant \$20,000



Additional Contributions

The generosity of local residents and businesses allows this July 4th festival to happen. Even though the financial goal was exceeded, contributions are still accepted with any such money used only for a July 4th festival. See: el-cerrito.org/july4donations

Stars & Stripes Level \$2,500



Assisted Living With Heart & Soul

El Cerrito Royale



Premier Graphics

www.4premiergraphics.com



Blue Level \$1,000



OLIVERO PLUMBING



NUG

Red Level \$500



Former Mayors Jane & Rich Bartke

White Level \$300

Plaza Auto Service

El Cerrito Art Association

Dave Weinstein & Mary Barkey

Alan Miller

Gary & Jean Pokorny

20 Years of Assisted Living With Heart and Soul

BY CATALINA HU

EL CERRITO ROYALE celebrated its 20th anniversary last month since becoming a Berg Assisted Living Community. It was a joyful occasion for its staff and residents as the community is gradually feeling more relaxed and much more confident with the COVID-19 protocols and procedures. The hard work and sacrifices of the staff has kept the residents safe during the past two years.

Before I could enter the Royale to meet with Sonja Givens-Thomas, Vice President and Executive Director of El Cerrito Royale, I sanitized my hands, signed a waiver form, provided proof of vaccination, got my temperature taken, took 20 minutes to complete an antigen rapid COVID-19 test, and received an N95 mask to wear during my visit. I was impressed by how diligently the staff carried out the entrance procedures for all visitors.

Sonja recalled vividly how everything changed in March 2020. She had been following the news on COVID-19 outbreaks in senior care facilities across the country. When Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency and issued the statewide shelter in place order in California, she took immediate action to close El Cerrito Royale to all visitors. Following the lock down were months of sleepless nights as she tried to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) for the residents and staff.

When Sonja described how she pleaded with a business acquaintance to sell her a box of latex gloves, she couldn't help the tears from filling up her eyes. As she wiped the tears away, she told me how desperate and scared she was for her staff and all the residents. As the director, she felt it was her responsibility to keep them safe but every vendor was out of PPE supplies. After the initial months of shortage on masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer, help finally arrived.

People from the community started calling to offer help and donated much-needed items. She was grateful to all the volunteers who helped making masks and hand sanitizers. She praised El Cerrito Fire and Police Departments for delivering donated items and always ready to help.

Sonja proudly introduced me to many of the team members as she gave me a tour of the three-story facility. The dedicated employees come from all over the world and each has passed background check, is certified in First Aid and CPR, and fully vaccinated. 25% of staff members receive Covid test every week to ensure everyone gets tested at least once a month. Every staff person is required to put their mobile phone away in the locker room before they start their shift! With three rotating shifts, the residents are always being well cared for.

Each floor has a different theme, and all the suites are decorated in matching theme. The first floor is art and cinema, the second floor is U.S. regional locations, and the third floor is world cultures. The hallways are lovingly decorated with colorful artifacts, memorabilia, murals, framed photographs, and famous painting replicas.

El Cerrito Royale is 90% occupied with 98 residents at an average age of 90. During the first several months of shelter in place, the large dining room and the common areas of each floor were closed off. Meals were delivered to each room. "Mobile Happy Hour" was created to deliver upbeat music and drinks. With all the regular field trips and group activities suspended, the activity staff had to modify all daily activities to keep the residents engaged and socially active while distanced from each other. The creative and talented team members dressed up in costumes, sang, danced, and played musical instruments to entertain and



All photos: El Cerrito Royale



uplift the residents' spirits. Accompanied by Sassy, the Royale's emotional support dog, "Activity a la carte" stopped at each resident's suite with music, games, and reading materials. Videos and photographs were shared on the Royale's Facebook page for the residents' families and friends and also to document the unprecedented time of their lives.

When the vaccines became available, a mobile vaccine clinic was onsite to provide vaccinations to all the residents.



The dinning room had reopened; however, the residents still had to take turns to dine in the dinning room with clear dividers placed between everyone. 98.5% of all residents are fully vaccinated and boosted. Two quar-

antine rooms were created but fortunately they were never used. The Royale was able to accept new residents during the past two years by using Zoom to provide virtual tours and conduct assessments.

El Cerrito Royale's assisted living rates include three delicious meals and snacks daily, housekeeping and laundry



available at different levels and rates to meet each resident's individual needs.

During my two-hour visit with Sonja at the Royale, I had the good fortune to meet one of the centenarians and many cheerful residents and staff members. The dinner was being served, and it smelled great! The staff delivering meals to the suites were singing and greeting each resident with heartfelt smiles.

I have new-found respect and deep gratitude for all the team members at the Royale for their professionalism, compassion, patience, and affection they have provided to our community's elders and kept them safe and healthy during the pandemic.

They were the unsung heroes who have served as the frontline workers during one of the toughest times in our recent history. Thank you, Team El Cerrito Royale, for all you do!



services weekly, wellness and social programs, community entertainment, supervised transportation to medical appointments and planned outings, plus 24-hour professional staff. Additional services such as medication management, personal care, and memory care are

Assisted Living With Heart & Soul

El Cerrito Royale

6510 Gladys Avenue • El Cerrito 94530
510-234-5200

elcerritoroyale.com



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Re-Grand Opening RIBBON CUTTING

Wednesday, May 25th, at 10:30 a.m.



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Seafood Is Back!



John C. Stashik

ANNA SVEDISE is the new seafood vendor at the Farmers Market at El Cerrito Plaza on Saturdays from 9 until 1. Anna's business is based in Petaluma which unloads and processes fish from 36 different boats; local, sustainable, and fresh.

Visit Anna at the market and give her a big El Cerrito welcome; then mention that you read about her business in the *Byline*. Online orders can be placed on the website: shopannasseafood.com. But it's always more fun to visit the market and shop in person.

Farmers Market

AT EL CERRITO PLAZA

Open Tuesday & Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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BART Plaza Plans

WHEN HOUSING is built around the El Cerrito Plaza station, the parking lots will go away. Therefore, BART is holding a second open house (online only) to discuss their Corridor Access Plan. General discussion of access strategies will take place on May 4th and 5th. To participate or learn more, go to bart.gov/beccap on the Web.

El Cerrito Budget

IT'S THAT TIME again and a new City budget must be prepared and adopted by July 1st. The Financial Advisory Board and City Council will hold a joint meeting on May 24th at 6 p.m. by Zoom. The best information and login instructions can be found at el-cerrito.org.

Hillside Fest 2022

Sat. & Sun., May 14-15
For info: ectrailltrekkers.org

BEST OF EL CERRITO

■ Continued from page 1

nesses they learn of via online promotions, word of mouth, and physical awards hanging in storefronts. As the region emerges from the grips of the pandemic, which siphoned spending from Main Streets here and across the country to multinational corporations like Amazon, supporting local businesses has never been more important. The Bay Area is a world-class consumer environment, and the Chamber wants to help El Cerrito businesses not only recapture local spending, but draw dollars

from throughout the region and beyond.

The Chamber of Commerce hopes to open the nomination phase in June after extensive website and social media outreach, as well as physical banners in the City's vibrant commercial corridors. An award ceremony is slated for August, after weeks of open voting.

Winning businesses will enjoy extensive Chamber benefits including both physical and digital logos, certificates, marketing packages, municipal recognition, privileges at a banquet award ceremony, features in the *Byline*, and more!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

experience dealing with landlord/tenant relationships.

In my humble opinion, many of our legislative bodies at both the state and local level have exacerbated the housing shortage problem through what they deemed to be “good policy.”

I recently closed the sale of a rental property for a long-time client who is thoroughly frustrated with being a landlord in the current over-regulated environment. He is 80 years old and often tells me that in his day “your word was your bond, and a handshake sealed the deal.” He feels as though some of his tenants are manipulating him and exploiting the extra protections afforded by the pandemic and have been willfully not making any effort to pay him. As soon as the subject property, a single-family residence, was vacated he enlisted my services to get it sold. An owner occupant now owns it. One less rental property in the marketplace. He has other rental properties that he will also be selling. His properties are in Richmond, and he finds the rent control ordinance “draconian and unfair.”

My cousin, who owns a duplex and a house in Berkeley, both of which were passed down to him by his late parents many years ago, has also been facing difficulties because of having to deal with the bureaucracy of the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board. He was assigned to a job in South Africa decades ago and has lived there since that time. He is now ready to take occupancy in one of his Berkeley units and he is required to buy the tenant out. Even though he made a very generous five figure offer to the tenant, it was refused followed by the tenant backing out of participating in a mediation session. He cannot take any further action until after August 1, 2022. I looked at the package from the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board and from my perspective, the requirements are mind boggling.

The Tenant Buyout Agreement Data sheet as of December 13, 2021, was an eye-popper. It lists the buyout amounts that Berkeley property owners have had to pay tenants to regain possession of *their own property!* 263 entries covering twenty-five pages listed by street

name, dollar amount paid, date paid, length of tenancy and bedroom count. There were several entries with payouts exceeding \$50,000 and a few whoopers such as entry 98 on Le Conte with a buyout payment of \$127,000 on July 2, 2018; entry 123 on Piedmont Avenue with a buyout payment of \$226,000 for a three-bedroom house where the tenant resided for eight years; entry 260 on 66th Street #C with a buyout payment of \$185,000 where the tenant resided for 42 years.

Let us continue to stay on the right track in El Cerrito and avoid creating these types of circumstances and focus on sound “nuts and bolts” municipal government operations. Now that’s good business!



Sylvia Mori
of the
El Cerrito
Art Association

May 9th at 9 p.m.

Our program features a demonstration and talk by Sylvia Mori on her mosaics at the El Cerrito Community Center. Free and open to the public.

elcerritoart.org

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Community Development e-Newsletter
el-cerrito.org/CommDev

El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce

Invites you to a

Spring Celebration and Mixer

Thursday, May 19th • 5:30–7:30 p.m.

Berkeley Country Club

7901 Cutting Blvd. • El Cerrito

Admission \$40

Enjoy a gorgeous setting and appetizers. No host bar.

Join us in recognition of all who contribute to strengthening our business community, Chamber members, supporters, volunteers. We'll come together to rejoice and share together and to honor long time contributors, and celebrate Sil Addiego who served 40 years as a member of the Board of Directors.

RSVP: info@elcerritochamber.org

The Cast of CROWNS



Brittany Nicole Sims as Wanda, Chris Poston as the Preacher, Juanita Harris as Mother Shaw, Pam Drummer-Williams as Mabel, Alana Wagner as Jeanette, and Leslie Ivy as Velma.

The musical gospel CROWNS runs through May 15th at the Contra Costa Civic Theatre. Tickets: ccct.org

Byline

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