



From the President

JEFFREY WRIGHT

NOT SO LONG ago I found myself longing for the “good old days.” I understand that the phrase means different things to different people, but I was sure longing for my version of it. Chamber member Larry Seidell, the former owner of Seidell Chevron Service, who also had a AAA service contract for many years, was occupying some space in my head while I was on my mental “good old days” journey.

If you are a frequent reader of this column, you should know by now when a story is getting ready to start. Among the many hats that I wear, one of them is that of a board member for the Richmond Museum Association. The single largest artifact that the museum owns is the *Red Oak Victory* ship, a World War II cargo and munitions carrier docked in Yard 3 at the very end of Canal Blvd., in Richmond.

A few board members and ship personnel recently hosted a delegation from South Korea aboard the ship. After the ship tour we were scheduled to tour the museum at 400 Nevin Avenue.

I was driving solo in the caravan headed to the museum and just as I passed the old shipyard cafeteria building at 1301 Canal Blvd., my car sputtered with enough authority that I knew that it was going to quit on me. I immediately sought refuge from Canal Blvd. and ended up in front of a rail crossing that is the “entryway” to some

■ See From the President, page 7

Mandatory Recycling & Composting Laws

THE CITY OF EL CERRITO is currently conducting outreach on new Mandatory Recycling and Composting Laws. As of January 1, 2022, all businesses and residents must be enrolled in organic waste or “green waste” collection services, under California Senate Bill (SB) 1383 and as required under the El Cerrito Municipal Code. All generators of waste (businesses, public entities, and single/multifamily residents) must properly sort their waste, which includes placing organics (food scraps, food/beverage soiled paper products, and yard trimmings) in the green waste/food scraps container and placing recyclables in the recycling container. Arranging for organics service with East Bay Sanitary is the easiest and most often cost-effective way to comply with the law.



In partnership with East Bay Sanitary, a 64-gallon green waste cart will be delivered to all accounts that have not yet subscribed to organics services directly. The green waste container will be serviced once a week at no additional cost to customers. If your business requires multiple pick-up days and/or multiple containers, additional charges will apply. Please contact East Bay Sanitary directly for questions regarding green waste services and any necessary adjustments. East Bay Sanitary can be reached at 510-237-4321 or at info@ebsan.com.

The City is also able to provide free labels, training, indoor containers, and technical assistance. For more information on these resources, please contact City staff at 510-559-7686 or at lbrazil@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Exemptions for businesses: If you operate a business, you are required to subscribe to organics recycling unless you can demonstrate that you dispose of less than 20 gallons of organics each week; or 10 gallons per week for a smaller business. Multifamily properties are not eligible for such waivers, due to the volume of tenant food waste. To apply for a waiver, submit an online application at recyclemore.com/waiver. Once your application is received, staff from the West Contra Costa Integrated Waste Management Authority (RecycleMore) will be in touch to award the waiver or determine next steps.

For additional information, please visit el-cerrito.org/MandatoryOrganicsRecycling or call or email City staff at 510-559-7686 or lbrazil@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

15% DELIVERY FEE CAP NOW EXPIRED

On February 2, 2021, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance, supported by the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce, limiting delivery fees charged by third party providers to all restaurants in the county at 15 percent. That ordinance has now expired as public health orders that limited inside dining at restaurants have been repealed.



**VOTE
NOW**



elcerritchamber.org/best-of-ec

Voting ends September 15th at 6 p.m.

Welcome New Members

Bay Area Girls Club
260 Broadway
Richmond, CA 94804
bagirlsclub.org

Scott Poland, CFP®
Wells Fargo Advisors
9800 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito, CA 94530
scott.l.poland@wellsfargo.com

TO JOIN THE CHAMBER, email: info@elcerritchamber.org



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

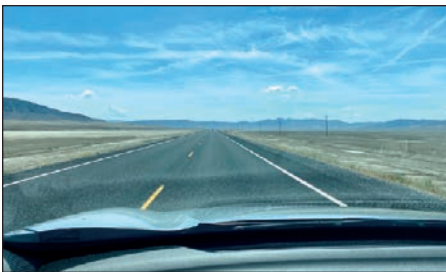
Wow. This tidbit is from an agenda item for El Cerrito's city council meeting last month. "*Preliminary estimates indicate that due to the overwhelming success of the fundraising for and attendance at the July 4th/worldOne Festival, the event was able to cover its costs without impact to the General Fund (and may have achieved a small net revenue surplus).*" Thank you, sponsors!

□

One stop shopping. That would be our own Elevation 66 Brewing Co. on the theater block of San Pablo Ave. Great brews, sandwiches, desserts, even the art decorating the walls. Plus it's a pick up bar, for the *Byline*, that is.

□

The open road. Every now and then it's refreshing to get out of town. A recent drive to Ely, Nevada, along Hwy. 50, "The Loneliest Road," was a treat.



You can set your cruise control high on Highway 50. Austin, Nevada, one of a few small towns. The White Pine CofC in Ely received a *Byline*.

□

Introducing...



John C. Stashik

Fire Chief Eric Saylor began working for the City of El Cerrito on August 8th. From Sacramento, it is likely Saylor will appreciate El Cerrito's comfortable climate over that of the river city. Welcome aboard, Eric.

Lullaby of Broadway. Our fabulous Rialto Cinemas Cerrito does it again as the classic musical *42nd Street* shows on Tuesday, September 6th, right here in El Cerrito (*not* in Allentown!). Filmed live in London. Join me at this show: rialtocinemas.com.

Grease with Xanadu. Celebrate Olivia Newton-John with this double feature, September 2-8.

□

Live theatre. The premiere of Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot* is Friday, September 9th, 7:30 p.m., at Contra Costa Civic Theatre. This is the first show of the 2022-23 season and *Camelot* plays through October 9th. Tickets: ccct.org.

□

Plus art! The annual El Cerrito Art Association show and sale begins with an artists' reception (open to all) on Friday, September 30th, from 7-9 p.m. at the Community Center. That's followed by two more days of the show on October 1st and 2nd with doors opening at 11 a.m. Meet local artists. More information: elcerritoart.org/artshow.

□

Lito Saldaña, owner of Los Moles Beer Garden, has been recognized by *Marquis Who's Who Top Business Owners* for his achievements and leadership in the restaurant industry. Since opening in September 2017, Los Moles has become a favorite of El Cerritans.

Congratulations. Never idle, Lito is opening a new 5 Tacos and Beers in Berkeley's Elmwood district.

□

Tacos? That's what will be sold at the former Jack in the Box across the street from the Natural Grocery Prepared Food Annex. Drive-thru and take out. Hopefully, some outside tables too. Construction is underway now.

□



Georgina Edwards

NUG@1. These delectables were provided by Premier Graphics on August 12th to celebrate the one year anniversary of NUG, El Cerrito's first cannabis retailer and Chamber member. Keeping it local, PennDel's Bakehouse created the logo-topped cupcakes which were distributed to employees. Manager Nic Pickard said business has been good.

□

Politics. Skip this part if you don't like my views. However, "my page" is news and opinion. In November El Cerrito voters will decide who will fill two city council seats. I endorse Gabe Quinto for one of those. Gabe and I will not agree on everything but he seems more business focused than the other candidates. Pragmatic too. More important to me is the fact that he works well with the City Manager, and as I've stated before, Karen Pinkos is the key person who worked extremely hard to get El Cerrito out of the financial morass the City was in two years ago. Gabe supports public safety, important to both businesses and residents alike. He and colleagues have learned the hard way to be careful with the checkbook too.

□

CARE Court. Our members voice concern to me frequently about homeless people camping at their businesses, bothering customers, leaving trash, and starting fires. Our City Public Works team does the best they can clearing

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3

PAST PREZ PALAVER

■ Continued from page 2

public right of ways. The county has a CORE group that deals with homeless. A lot of money is spent on the problem and nobody sees any improvement. Governor Newsom is proposing CARE Court funded by the state. I'm not going into detail or taking sides here; my point is merely to call it to the attention of our membership. If interested, search for CARE Court at gov.ca.gov, read up on it, and have conversations with your state elected reps as well.

□



John C. Stashik

Banter Wine Bar progress. Digging, re-plumbing, and then more building. Much more to do but the vision is taking shape on what will be a very popular El Cerrito business some day. Stay tuned.

□



John C. Stashik

That's action. No sooner did I mention the ugly, abandoned building at Eureka and San Pablo, then it got demolished. The avenue is better now and will be even *mo' betta* when new residences are eventually constructed.

□



Thank you for 21 years of service to the City, Karen Pinkos. Your contributions and hard work have made a difference.

Caveat: there's always more to do!



2022 Annual Art Show & Sale
September 30 - October 2

Reception
September 30, 7-9 pm

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Amazing Janet Abelson to Retire from

BY ROBERT ROGERS

NESTLED IN a sofa in her El Cerrito home — walls adorned with photos of smiling family and surfaces stacked with documents — El Cerrito City Councilmember Janet Abelson's mind races back in time.

It's 1964. A time of tumult. Youth are rising. Paradigms are shifting. Abelson is in the center of this moment, at UC Berkeley by way of Phoenix, Arizona. Now she's getting an education that will last a lifetime.

The Free Speech Movement is in full, chaotic bloom, and the wispy then-18-year-old Abelson is staffing a table on Bancroft Way.

The authorities come for her.

"The word that comes to mind is offensive, it was offensive," Abelson says. "I remember being on Bancroft and they told us we had to get off ... it didn't seem fair."

The umbrage she felt would last a lifetime.

"That experience has been a big part of my life and career," Abelson says, her usual smile straightening. "I have always believed that people have a right to speak, because I didn't have one" that day in Berkeley.

Nearly 60 years later, Abelson has had one of the most successful and long-lasting political careers in the Bay Area. She served as El Cerrito Mayor for a record five terms, and when she officially retires in December, she'll complete



her sixth term on the El Cerrito City Council. During her more than 20 years as an elected official and member of innumerable public commissions, Abelson has fought for all residents, especially the voiceless and disadvantaged. Her work has enhanced accessibility of public accommodations, improved transit, fostered development, promoted transparency and inclusivity in government, and protected the rights of free speech and open exchange of ideas.

Abelson, who has used a wheelchair since suffering severe injuries in a 1984 auto accident, is proud of her record and at peace with transitioning into the next stage

of her life. She said she'll prioritize time with her children and grandchildren, but also continue to serve on a few citizen commissions.

"I think it's time," the 76-year-old Abelson said with a knowing nod and smile when asked why she won't run for re-election.

Abelson's career in public service hasn't all been accolades and warm receptions. Known for a keen, inquisitive mind and a tenacity that belies her slight stature, it's Abelson's willingness to fight for her convictions and buck conventions that may be responsible for her greatest political successes.

A Few Words from Janet's Colleagues



Melanie Mintz
Community Development Director

"Janet has been such a consistent champion for transforming San Pablo Avenue into a more livable, walkable, strollable, rideable, sustainable, resilient and vibrant corridor. She has held the vision and consistently supported local and regional policy making and choices to keep the City on course. Her tenacity, relationship building, and work at all levels of government have helped the City chart the way towards achieving the vision which is now well underway."



Paul Fadelli
Councilmember

"As much as the Cerrito theater, the recycling center, our July 4th celebration and Nation's Giant Hamburgers, Janet Abelson is an institution in El Cerrito. She has remained popular for decades because of all that she's done. I will especially miss her because she was the first to suggest I run for City Council. We should all be grateful for her service."



Karen Pinkos
City Manager

"Janet Abelson is, simply, an El Cerrito icon. She has been a true leader on the City Council, especially in her advocacy for the disabled and in making El Cerrito a place that is inclusive and welcoming for everyone. She always has the best interests of the City at heart, because she cares so much about the people who live and work here. I have learned so much from Janet. I will miss her presence, her determination, and her thoughtfulness. El Cerrito is a better place because of Janet."

City Council After a Record Setting Run

You don't set a record for stints as Mayor without upending a status quo. She said she continued to run for the City's top post because she felt it was necessary to see through the agenda she was elected to advance. Prior to her, no one had ever served more than two terms as Mayor.

"I was told that there was a gentleman's agreement that no one would run for more than two terms (as Mayor)," she said. "I said, well, I'm not a gentleman."

It was that courage and confidence that allowed her to cut through the groupthink that often infests organizations, leading intelligent leaders to go along with flawed policies, their judgment clouded by consensus.

When asked what she regards as her greatest accomplishment in government, Abelson responded without hesitation.

"The Specific Plan," she said.

In Abelson's recounting, the 2014 San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan was years in the making, with countless hours of hard work and hammering out differences among elected officials, departments, contracted consultants, and community stakeholders. While she is careful to point out that many cooks deserve credit for the final meal, she does note that early drafts needed significant work. She said she fought for major changes and pressed consultants to work beyond their initial contract to ensure the public got a quality product.

While the final document isn't perfect — no policy is — Abelson is proud of what was accomplished. Specifically, Abelson notes the plan has helped increase population and density in El Cerrito with a number of key provisions.

Among them:

- Streamlining Environmental Impact Review processes to enable development.
- Coupling the Design Review Board with the Planning Commission to reduce redundancy.
- Reduced parking requirements.
- Expanding maximum height limitations.

The result has been a City where dense, tall, and walkable development has occurred at a faster pace than

in many other cities in the region, especially around its two BART transit hubs.

"Don't you think we made some significant changes?" Abelson asked.

Other elected leaders have also taken notice of Abelson's long, successful career. One of those elected leaders is Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, one of California's leading champions for sustainable development, clean air, and transit equity.

"Over the last 24 years, I've had the honor of working with Janet to make West County a healthier and stronger community," Gioia said. "She will be remembered for her passion to make transit accessible for all and to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in El Cerrito."

While Abelson is retiring from her elected seat, she doesn't plan to stop working for a better future in El Cerrito and the region. So much work remains for a new generation of elected officials. Her beloved City still needs a new public safety building, a library, and expanded recreational and senior services, she said.

But Abelson is content with the work she's done and the template she has helped forge for the future.

Asked if she has any regrets, she pauses a long time. Maybe regret isn't the right word. Mistake doesn't quite fit either. What Abelson wants is better. Better for all. Better, especially, for the mobility-challenged.

Abelson passionately believes people should be able to fully participate in their communities and live complete lives regardless of their health or bodily abilities, and infrastructure is key to realizing that lofty vision.

Abelson invested a life and career toward that end. The progress is real, but work remains.

"Our City is still not as accessible for all as I would like it to be," Abelson said.

□

New council members are sworn into office after election results are certified. While it is yet to be officially scheduled, Janet Abelson's final City Council meeting will likely be on December 20, 2022.



Tessa Rudnick
Councilmember

"Janet is one of the most enduring figures in El Cerrito for a reason, because her pursuit of making things happen is legendary. In the two years I've served with Janet, she's demonstrated to me why she's survived in this space for such an impressively long time. She knows parliamentary rules like the back of her hand; she loves this community; but above all, she is brave. Janet is never afraid to speak her mind."



A Doer, Not a Dreamer

- Chair, West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee
- Chair, Contra Costa Transportation Authority
- Chair, Transportation Authority when the fourth bore was added to the Caldecott Tunnel
- Fact: drove her wheelchair through the brand new fourth bore in November 2013
- Chair, East Bay Division, League of California Cities
- Award from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission for disabled advocacy
- Long time member of the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce

Long Term Employee: One Great Job Lasts for 46 Years

BY CATALINA HU

BILL HALLIGAN knows every single street in El Cerrito. For nearly 46 years, he has worked for Olivero Plumbing Co., Inc. Bill enjoys waving at his friends from his truck as he drives around town helping people with their plumbing issues.

On October 18, 1976, when he was a 13-year old student at St. John the Baptist School, he started washing Olivero's work trucks as his after school part-time job. After graduating from Salesian High School in 1980, John A. Olivero, founder of the plumbing company, hired him to work full time and trained him in every aspect of the trade.

Bill grew up in El Cerrito and lived on Potrero Avenue. In 1981, he moved to Concord and has lived there ever since. He continued to work at Olivero Plumbing at the exact same location over the last four decades.

With a big smile, Bill told me, "This is the only job I ever had and it's been great! It just sort of happened to me, and I wouldn't change a thing!" He has raised a family and was proud to pay for his children's college tuition. He and his wife enjoy traveling, and they just visited Ireland and Scotland in May. Bill also enjoys woodworking and gardening.

Bill is retiring on December 31st this year. He is a little sad, and it's going to take some time for him to adjust to retirement life. Julie Olivero Blakeman,



the office manager, shouted from behind the counter, "We will be very sad when he retires! You know, we all went to school at St. John's together!"

El Cerritans, especially the old timers who have depended on Bill's help over the years, will also miss his familiar face around town.

Congratulations, Bill, on your upcoming retirement after many years of a job well done! Wishing you the best of health, happiness and success on your new journey in life.

Above: A newspaper clipping shows Bill Halligan in 1984. Left: Bill today.

Best of El Cerrito—Votes Skyrocketing

BY GEORGINA EDWARDS

WITH MORE than 700 businesses nominated for the "Best of El Cerrito" contest, voting for the favorites in each of the categories is in full swing.

We are delighted that our neighbors and businesses are enthusiastically embracing this program, with merchants and professional services encouraging their customers to participate by voting, spreading the word on social media, and even putting up posters at dining booths and store front windows.



As of the third week of August, nearly 1500 people have cast their choices, representing about 13,000 votes spread across various categories. Voting ends September 15th at 6 p.m., with winners announced later in this month.

Businesses wanting to share about how the program is going, or needing some support with the program, please contact info@elcerritochamber.org or 510-705-1202.

Vote: elcerritochamber.org/best-of-ec.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

petroleum related businesses that have tanker trucks coming in and out regularly. Not an ideal location, however, it was the only spot that I could get to that was out of the main flow of traffic. The tanker trucks still had ingress and egress with very little impediment on my end. It quickly became evident that my car was not going to start. It was *DEAD!*

A few motorists passed by looking at me strangely, obviously wondering “why is he parked there?” I whipped out the old AAA card and punched in the roadside service assistance number. In the “good old days” a human-being would answer the call and take care of me. These days, an automated AAA voice quickly switches the caller to a phone-based app requiring the distressed motorist to input the details regarding the service request.

After awhile I began standing outside of the car, leaning against it with my arms folded. Soon, a white pickup truck with two gentlemen in it, associated in one way or another with the business enterprises on the other side of the rail crossing, were checking me out. I felt like the Mission Impossible music should have been playing. Their eyebrows were raised, and they approached me with measured caution. I received the “this guy might be a terrorist vibe.” I was wearing business attire and the car was clean. Nothing about me was suspect in the stereotypical terrorist mode.

I explained the situation and they offered to push me to a safer location. The tone was almost “hmmm, so you say you’re parked in front of this rail crossing because your car won’t start, eh?” My attitude was let’s do it, commence with the pushing! These guys were young and in good shape, the car had so much momentum going when they pushed me into the old cafeteria building parking lot, I almost did a figure eight! I thanked them and suggested that they had enough stamina to push me to El Cerrito. They chuckled and departed.

I received a AAA update that indicated that the tow driver would arrive at 6:57 p.m. or the equivalent of a total three-hour wait time. I called an independent

tow service and paid them for the tow. They arrived within 30 minutes.

Now in the “good old days” when AAA was contracting with Larry Seidell and other longtime local operators, service was much timelier and more responsive. An actual person would take the call at AAA and the caller really felt like they were receiving service. Larry and the other local AAA contractors knew what they were doing. They had enough trucks and manpower to get the job handled in a reasonable length of time.

As time passes, some will look back and refer to 2022 as “the good old days.” Things happen, cars break down, and people do, too. Enjoy every day. Life is what you make it!

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MIXER

Thursday, September 22
5:30-7:30 p.m.

Meal Discount for Participants



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Byline Pick Up Locations

This newsletter is mailed monthly to Chamber of Commerce members and others. A PDF edition is posted and available on the Chamber website: elcerritochamber.org/byline.

Other distribution points are: El Cerrito City Hall, The Glenn Custom Framing, Mr. Pickle's Sandwich Shop, Doherty's Truck Rental, El Cerrito Public Library, El Cerrito Community Center, The Farmers Market at El Cerrito Plaza, and Elevation 66.

CERRITO CLASSICS—Sept. 9-15

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