



From the President

MATT KHADIVIAN

I HOPE THAT you had a successful month of February and a fantastic Valentine's Day. The Chamber board has great speakers lined up for our upcoming events as well as luncheons and mixers. I hope you will find the time to join us. Also, if you know of any other business owners who may benefit from joining the Chamber, please let us know so we can assist them.

As discussed in last month's column, we will briefly touch on Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies here. Before I begin this topic, let me just remind you that I am not a financial advisor and this is not financial advice. You are responsible for matters related to your own personal and business finances. Please take my opinions with a grain of salt and always do your own research. I personally like to spend at least a minimum of three hours researching new topics before expressing any opinions to others; I hope you do too.

■ See From the President, page 7

New Board Member



RACHEL MELBY has been appointed to the board of directors filling the vacant seat effective March 1st.

A local Realtor and community builder who is best known for sharing *what's good in El Cerrito* via the popular @thelittlehill Instagram account, Rachel brings her local expertise and passion for small business along with her 12+ years in tech marketing to the Chamber.

TiresDirect Makes Big Investment Here



Rohan Shahid and George Hanna at their new El Cerrito store

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ROBERT ROGERS

GEORGE HANNA is an expert at knowing when and where to invest in a new store, and he sees his new location in El Cerrito as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"I just had to buy when this location came available in El Cerrito," Hanna said, standing in his bay of state-of-the-art automotive repair equipment. "To have this location in this community is special."

Hanna, the owner of 11 TiresDirect locations throughout the state, believes so strongly in El Cerrito that he bought the 12,000 square foot facility at 11820 San Pablo Ave. rather than leasing it. "We are excited to be a part of this community long-term."

Hanna's new TiresDirect in El Cerrito will absorb a smaller store he has in Richmond, quickly growing from six to 12 employees. The sprawling, fully-equipped facility provides any and all automotive services a customer needs. Hanna is also

making major investments in upgrading the aesthetics, waiting rooms, and other facilities.

The employees at TiresDirect El Cerrito combine expertise and superb customer services skills, under the direction of manager Rohan Shahid.

"Without my core group of employees we couldn't be successful," Hanna said. "We are family-owned, community-minded, totally honest and able to provide all services. Also, we can do better than the big-box corporations on prices for our customers."

Hanna and Shahid spoke with big smiles at the granite-top front desk of their new location, which opened

■ See TiresDirect comes to El Cerrito, page 4

NEW MEMBERS

Ruth Stroup Insurance Agency

Farmers Insurance
CA Insurance License #0F00956
Ruth@Stroupins.com
3560 Grand Ave., Oakland 94610
510-874-5700

Guaranteed Rate Inc.

Evelyn Freitas

Residential Mortgages
evelyn.freitas@rate.com
1900 Mountain Blvd., Oakland 94611
510-501-8473

CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon

Julie Persons

Hair, Skin, & Nail Care for Everyone
capequeencosmeticsandsalon@gmail.com
460 El Cerrito Plaza #38, El Cerrito 94530
707-243-4300 See story inside



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

MARTY KALISKI closed his automotive repair shop in December 2018. Marty's Motors had a loyal customer base, kept several technicians employed full time, and contributed to El Cerrito's tax revenue.

Next door, in the same building at Alameda and San Pablo avenues, was **Connors Overhead Door Co.**, possibly then the oldest business in the city. Eventually, Connors was forced to move, albeit with some help from the CoCo County Sheriff. The building was demolished in June 2021.

The grand plan for 10919 San Pablo Avenue by developer Wang Brothers is to build a five story, 90 unit, apartment building one block south of their other apartment building called Cerrito Vista. The City website lists the project as "under construction." Not quite.

Nearly two years since the Marty's/Connors building was razed, and after 100,000 (give or take) trips along San Pablo Avenue, all I see is a vacant lot. Marty got a forced retirement out of the deal, his employees got the axe, customers scrambled to find another repair shop, while the City's tax take ceased.

Nothing new here. For example, in 2009 this Chamber was evicted by the City, at considerable cost to us, from the small historic flower store office that became part of **Hana Gardens**. There was about a ten year lag between our eviction and the actual construction of Hana. Hindsight shows we could've stayed put until the developer was seriously ready to move dirt; likewise for Marty.

Sadly, that is the system. Developers, planners, financiers, and others do their thing on their schedule and our City as a whole suffers as everyone waits for stuff to happen. Patience is a necessity.

Hopefully, actual building can begin soon on the 54-unit residential project at Eureka and San Pablo (**The Civic**). Am I dreaming? Don't even mention the "McNevin lot" next to Burger King. Stay optimistic! You absolutely must.

□

Roadside Rotisserie Comes to El Cerrito Plaza



John C. Stashik

Hella good hot chicken, ribs, port loin, potatoes, sprouts, wraps, salads, and more, are now available at the Farmers Market at El Cerrito Plaza every Tuesday and Saturday from 9 until 1. Edwin Quiroz is the man to see and he offers customers a Loyalty Card: buy 13 and get #14 free.

Taqueria demora. Frustrating as it is, El Cerrito's new tamale place, Masa at Panama and San Pablo, didn't open yet. "Waiting for signatures" is the reason given at press time as they deal with Richmond city bureaucracy. Again, let's say *soon*.

□

CFG. Moving along in high gear with their store build out is the **California Fish Grill** at El Cerrito Plaza.

□

Sweet date. On March 27th PennDel's Bakehouse will celebrate their second anniversary.

□

Mayfair Market will occupy one of the four street level commercial spaces on San Pablo Avenue at Cutting. That clever name is pure nostalgia, as old timers in El Cerrito recall. Don't expect 24-hour operation however.

□

Bricks for sale. The El Cerrito Tennis Club hopes to fund a Tennis Center at Arlington Park. Get a personalized engraved brick for a tax deductible contribution and your brick will become part of a viewing area adjacent to the courts. Email ectenniscub@gmail.com for more information.

□

Wings. New at **Fatapple's** with buffalo sauce and dressing. Every day.

□

Academy Awards. Join a viewing party at the **Rialto Cinemas Cerrito** on Sunday, March 12th. Red carpet at 4 p.m.; show begins 5 p.m. This is a benefit for the **Contra Costa Civic Theatre**. Tickets at \$50 include appetizers, beverages, costume contest, games, trivia, and Oscar. Don't miss this! rialtocinemas.com.

□



Acrobat. Owner Claire Sullivan works on a wall during construction of her soon to open **Banter Wine Bar**.

□

Janet. The **Celebration of Life** held last month for Janet Abelson was beautiful. Thank you to the family and all involved in setting it up.

□

Be a Joiner. Scan this code to become a Chamber member.



The El Cerrito Fire Department could not have thought of a nicer, or more appropriate tribute to Janet Abelson than this giant flag which hung from Truck 71 over Moeser Lane during her Celebration of Life held on February 25th at the Community Center.



TIRESDIRECT COMES TO EL CERRITO

■ Continued from page 1

in mid-January. Construction workers hummed with activity in adjacent rooms as Hanna and Shahid happily showed

The location was Steve's Auto Care for many years before Hanna bought it from Steve Kahn, who is set to enjoy retirement. Hanna pledged that all cus-

services for all EVs will also be provided in the coming months.

Hanna has come a long way. His career started as a young technician working in a Stockton wheel shop in the early 2000s. He fell in love with the industry, worked hard, saved, and finally was able to open his first store in Vallejo in 2012. Since then, he's been consistently successful enough to open roughly one new shop per year.

"We're really happy to be in El Cerrito," Hanna said, standing in front of massive new promotional banners he has installed on the back of the building, visible to passing BART trains. "I believe in being a helpful part of the community."

Auto service, alignments, tune ups, brakes, shocks, struts, lube, tires, wheels along with custom lowering and lifting are all available at the new El Cerrito store. Open from 9 to 5; closed Sunday.

Visit TiresDirect at 11820 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito. Call 510-235-2200. On the web: tiresdirect510.com.

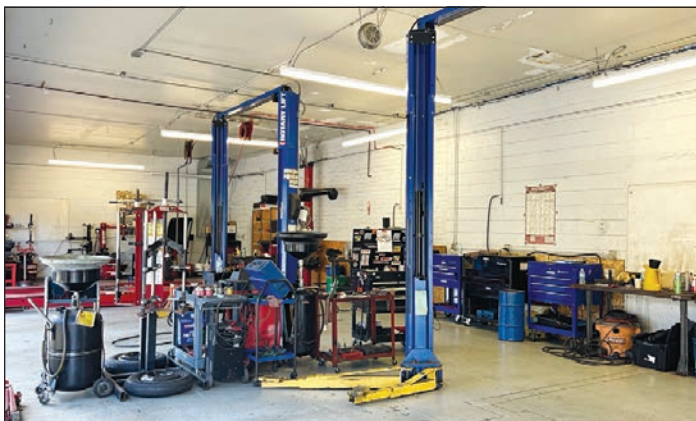
TiresDirect also has Facebook and Instagram pages.



Very community-minded, owner George Hanna and El Cerrito store manager Rohan Shahid joined the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce immediately upon opening for business. TiresDirect is here for the long haul and their goal is excellence in customer service.

off the various projects that will add to the comfort and quality of the customer experience.

tomers, new and existing, will be satisfied if they give him and his team a chance to service their vehicles. Full



CHAMBER MIXER
Wed., March 29th

El Cerrito Natural Grocery
Prepared Food Annex
10367 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito

5:30-7:30 p.m.

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New Economic
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The Taste and Beauty of Antojitos Guatemaltecos

BY ANDREW MELENDEZ



Robert Rogers



ANTOJITOS GUATEMALTECOS offers an authentic culinary experience that takes you on a journey into Guatemalan culture. As I walked inside, I was met with the blissful aroma of sizzling meats and the pleasant sight of Guatemalan imagery that made me feel right at home. The ambiance of the restaurant felt casual and inviting, with traditional Guatemalan artwork adorning its bright orange and yellow walls.

I had the pleasure of trying what I can confidently say was the best chicken burrito I've ever tasted. From the first bite to the last, the entire meal was a flavor explosion that left me wanting more.

My \$10 burrito was generously filled with juicy, tender, and perfectly marinated pieces of grilled chicken, mixed with brown rice, pinto beans, and a variety of sauces and vegetables wrapped in a soft and warm tortilla.

The flavors were nicely balanced, with a subtle mix of sweetness and tanginess from the chicken and pico de gallo, making for a dense and pleasing texture in every bite. Chips come complimentary with your order, and they are expertly fried and strong enough for a hefty scoop of salsa.

Overall, this burrito was a true work of art, and it was evident that the people working here put immense care into not only the dish itself but also the atmosphere. The décor is authentic and lovingly crafted, with wry phrases in Guatemalan Spanish dialect, spotless glass throughout, and intimately arranged dining sets both inside and out on the sidewalk frontage.

The lunch crowd was robust and diverse. The din of conversations in the dining room was a medley of English and various Spanish dialects.

If you are in the El Cerrito area, Antojitos Guatemaltecos is sure to blow your mind. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 to 9.

It's located at 11252 San Pablo Ave. (near Potrero) and you can find them on Facebook (Antojitos Guatemaltecos) and Instagram (@antojitosguatemaltecos). Call 510-224-8018.

Que Chilero Ser Chapin!



John C. Stashik

Azriel, Yury, Carlos, and Josue.



All photos: John C. Stashlik

Surrounded by family and friends, including the Mayor and two colleagues, the ceremonial ribbon was snipped in front of Sola Salon at El Cerrito Plaza to officially launch CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon.

CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon's Official Grand Opening

BY ROBERT ROGERS

WHEN JULIE PERSONS' moment arrived, she was ready. With her daughter dancing and skipping around her at waist-level and an adoring crowd surrounding her, Persons held nothing back.

"This is a truly a dream come true!" she said, hands extending outward and ear to ear smile beaming.

The El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce and top city leaders joined Persons and her throng of family, friends and customers at El Cerrito Plaza on February 11th for the grand opening of CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon. The crowd listened rapt as Persons shared her journey and the philosophy of her business. Moments later, the coalition officially cut the ribbon on the location and toured the spa itself.



Glamour girls: Mayor Lisa Motoyama, Julie Persons (owner of CapeQueen), Mayor Pro Tem Tessa Rudnick, and Council Member Carolyn Wysinger.

Supporters on hand included El Cerrito Mayor Lisa Motoyama, Mayor Pro Tem Tessa Rudnick, and Council Member Carolyn Wysinger.

The weather was cool and gray, but CapeQueen's future, like that of El Cerrito, is bright.

Located inside Sola Salon (at 460 El Cerrito Plaza #38), CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon is billed as a tranquil oasis where beauty and wellness intersect. The salon uses all natural products and focuses on three key areas: protective hairstyling, skin nourishment and rejuvenation, and mental wellness.

Persons, who is a licensed cosmetologist, community advocate, and medical professional, said the name CapeQueen is inspired by the challenges we all face in life, especially moms.

"To embrace the many capes we wear, and to feel good about it, and so the salon symbolizes self-care, it symbolizes feeling good, feeling good about who you are, embrace it," Persons said. "Me being a mom and a wife and a community advocate, a friend and a family member ... I feel like I am the queen of many capes."

To schedule an appointment, please call 707-243-3400 or visit capequeencosmeticsandsalon.com. Find them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter too.



Julie seems excited

FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Let us start with what cryptocurrencies are. Cryptos, for short, are designed to be different forms of digital currency that typically run on secure computer networks without a central authority, such as government agencies or banks. They tend to implement the practice of cryptography, which uses complex computer programming that serves to secure the transmission of messages from the senders to the intended recipients.

Bitcoin is the very first cryptocurrency, and arguably the most popular and widely known of them all. There are literally thousands of cryptocurrencies that now exist and can be purchased from different exchanges. However, in my opinion, about 99% of them belong to your spam or trash folder, and have no realistic use cases. In the words of Michael Saylor, the executive chairman and a co-founder of MicroStrategy, "Bitcoin is a bank in cyberspace, run by incorruptible software, offering a global, affordable, simple, and secure savings account to billions of people that don't have the option or desire to run their own hedge fund." I tend to agree with him as he has a deep knowledge of Bitcoin and cryptocurrencies, as well as large investments in Bitcoin on behalf of himself as well as his company.

Bitcoin in essence is a very secure computer protocol that communicates information among people and computers. It is permissionless, incorruptible, and decentralized, which means no bank, government, or affiliate agencies, or even the Federal Reserve can control it or dismantle it. Money launderers cannot move it or escape it. Counterfeiters cannot create it, print it, or duplicate it. It runs on a secure and complex network powered by Blockchain technology, which is basically a digital ledger of transactions that are copied and distributed across all the

computers operating on the network. Blockchains record information using computer programming methods that make it nearly impossible to defraud.

Pretty interesting concept wouldn't you say? I think so. But it gets even better. Bitcoin is inherently deflationary. Bitcoins are obtained via a process called "mining," conceptually similar to the work you would have to put into mining for gold or silver. But instead of digging up dirt, computers on the Bitcoin network "mine" for coins by solving complex mathematical equations and the first computer that solves the equation being worked on at the moment, "wins" the respective Bitcoin. The work that goes into solving these mathematical problems involves quite a bit of electricity as well as wear and damage on

the computers. Here is where one of the best parts of Bitcoin shines for me. There can only exist a total maximum of 21 million bitcoins. After the last coin has been "mined" there will be no more. The network has been designed to stop at 21 million coins and this cannot be changed. This means that as we get closer to the 21 million mark, bitcoins will become more scarce, and their perceived value will continue to rise. As of the date of this writing, there have been 18.9 million bitcoins that have already been mined, with each coin being worth approximately \$24,000.

Please do your own research if this topic interests you.

Opinions expressed here are the author's and do not represent those of the Chamber of Commerce.



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Q&A El Cerrito Public Safety and Code Enforcement



Paul Keith
Chief of Police



Steven Mello
Code Enforcement

Monday, March 20th
Noon until 1 o'clock
A Zoom Meeting

Get Zoom link here:
info@elcerritochamber.org



★ A FUN FUNDRAISER ★

PASTA FEED

Saturday, March 25
5:30 p.m. • \$25, kids \$15

El Cerrito Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane

Performance by the
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Proceeds go to the Rotary Scholarship Fund and
El Cerrito Recreation's David Hunter Memorial Scholarship

Get tickets at: elcerritorotary.org

Or email: ElCerritoRotaryFundraiser@gmail.com

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