



From the President

MATT KHADIVIAN

MY DEAR readers, in this edition, let's examine how small businesses can fight inflation in 2023.

Inflation can be a challenging obstacle for small businesses to overcome, especially in 2023, where many economies are experiencing higher inflation rates than usual. However, there are several strategies that small businesses can implement to fight inflation and stay afloat.

Firstly, small businesses should focus on managing their costs. They can start by reviewing their expenses to identify areas where they can cut back without compromising on the quality of their products or services. For example, they can negotiate with their suppliers for better prices, switch to energy-efficient equipment to reduce utility bills, or reduce their marketing expenses by focusing on social media marketing instead of expensive advertising campaigns.

■ See From the President, page 7



Etch Your Catalytic Converter

THE EL CERRITO Police Department offers CATETCH as a method for marking catalytic converters to deter theft. These self-install kits are available to El Cerrito residents. Limit: one kit per vehicle; four vehicle kits per household.

Each kit is to be registered online with CATETCH so that if your catalytic converter is stolen and recovered, it can be returned to you.

Visit the police station at Manila and San Pablo Avenues Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., to pick up a free kit.

Contact the ECPD at 510-215-4400 for additional information.



Robert Rogers

El Cerrito's Mayor Focused on Fiscal Strength

BY ROBERT ROGERS

LISA MOTOYAMA has had business sense since she was a little girl in a sleepy Los Angeles County beach town. When she wasn't playing in the Hermosa Beach sands with her grandmother, Motoyama was often hard at work in her parents' corner store.

Parts of each summer were for sweeping the sidewalks, jangling the cash register, rotating the stock, and watching the razor thin margins.

"I spent a summer inside the cooler wearing my dad's old Army coat stocking cases of beer," Motoyama said, laughing at the memory. "I viscerally understand how hard small business owners work."

Soon, the precocious child was giving her mom basic tax advice. A first-rate education at UCLA and UC Berkeley would follow soon after.

Today, El Cerrito Mayor Lisa Motoyama wrestles with bigger numbers, but the acumen, attention to detail, and fiscal discipline are sharp as ever.

"I am committed to making it easier to successfully run a small business in El Cerrito," Motoyama said.

Motoyama, the City's first Japanese American mayor, is determined to leave the city stronger than she found it, and she's confident she has the fortitude and outlook to make it happen. She

■ See Mayor Lisa Motoyama, page 4

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See story inside



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

ONLY ONE YEAR ago, Mi Casa Grill opened for business serving great Mexican cuisine at Macdonald and San Pablo (in Richmond) next to the “GrocOut” store. Then last February, I mentioned that owners Blanca and Juvenil Magaña had signed a lease for two of four commercial spaces at the Mayfair Station apartments at Cutting and San Pablo here in El Cerrito. Their Mayfair location will serve upstairs apartment dwellers and BART riders. That build out could be a year or more.

The really big news is Mi Casa will open Biancoverde inside the Hotel Mac in Point Richmond in the latter half of May. Cuisine at the “Mac” location will be Italian, with a full bar, lounge, and entertainment. Pasta will be freshly made on site.

Hotel Mac’s restaurant and bar has been closed since COVID-19 hit so this is welcome news for the Point. Biancoverde is now doing a complete remodel of the premises. Next month this column may have an opening date.

□



California Fish Grill at El Cerrito Plaza opens Wednesday, April 5th, at 11 o’clock. Seafood here in El Cerrito! Join me for lunch. **Bonus? A Chamber ribbon cutting** has been requested by the restaurant for this opening.

□

On a recent trip to southern California I passed by several Dave’s Hot Chicken stores. People seem to love the food there and later this year a Dave’s outlet will occupy the former Rubio’s space at El Cerrito Plaza.

□

Celebrity chef Lito Saldaña, who built Los Moles Beer Garden at Potrero and San Pablo in El Cerrito, also operates the popular 5 Tacos & Beers on Solano Avenue in Albany. A brand new 5 Tacos... just opened on College



KALEN AND AMY YAMASHIRO will open **Anime Island** at El Cerrito Plaza on or about April 9th. The store is at the long vacant site of The Junket delicatessen. In case you don’t know, *anime* is hand-drawn and computer-generated animation originating from Japan. Anime Island will stock stickers and other collectibles. Contact: 510-365-0257; Web: animeislandca.com.



John C. Stashik

Avenue in Berkeley’s Elmwood district with another planned for downtown Walnut Creek. Lito is an El Cerrito resident and local success story.

□

Sushi Matsu is a favorite stop of mine which I highly recommend. At 10561 San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito, the restaurant is open seven days a week for lunch and dinner; dine in or take out. Owner **Angie Yang** tells me she’s opening a second restaurant to be known as **Daruma Sushi** at 2215 San Pablo Avenue in Berkeley. The new place (with parking) still needs some construction so a grand opening is not immediate.

□

Where’s Masa? The short answer is in the permit black hole at Richmond

City Hall. Management tells me they could have opened months ago, but they await paperwork and signatures. Eventually, the one time Jack in the Box will be a convenient taqueria next to the **Natural Grocery Prepared Food Annex** at Panama and San Pablo. So be patient folks.

□

Well Grounded Tea & Coffee Bar at 6925 Stockton Avenue finally opened a table for *inside dining* last month.

□

Earth Day is on April 15th. From now on, let’s dedicate it to the late **Janet Abelson**. She’d put me to work at the **Bruce King Memorial Dog Park** every year.

□

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3

Building a New El Cerrito Preschool



Presently, it’s just a steel frame. But opening later this year on Kearney Street, opposite Fairmont School, will be **Little Lamb Bilingual Preschool**. With a location in Albany, this will be a new El Cerrito campus. Call 510-778-4560 for enrollment information; or see littl lambpreschool.com.

PAST PREZ PALAVER

■ Continued from page 2

Chargers. Construction underway in the parking area of Del Norte Plaza at Potrero and San Pablo is for electric vehicle charging stations. The new revenue stream for parking lots.

□

Gone. The former RC Imports auto repair building at Lexington and Fairmount Avenues has been demolished. Its replacement will be The Lexington, a six story structure with 45 condominium units and ground floor commercial space. Initially, the city will get another vacant lot. But as always, the goal is to begin construction quickly. Here's a rendering.



□

License plate readers. The El Cerrito City Council approved a request by the Police Department last month for 40 cameras to be strategically placed around the city. These readers will be installed early next fiscal year.

Chief Paul Keith stated "I want El Cerrito to have a vibrant business community," and added "El Cerrito has the highest property crime rate in the county." Business people here know this all too well with robbery and larceny at local stores a daily, and very costly, occurrence. Catalytic converter theft is off the charts too.

These cameras will be a valuable tool for our cops to capture criminals. When the word spreads, as thieves get together in their dens to chat, El Cerrito will become known as a *bad* place to do crime.

□

City budget. A town hall meeting to discuss the 2023-24 El Cerrito budget will be held on Saturday, April 22nd, at City Hall. The time will be announced and this will be a hybrid (in-person or Zoom) event.

'The Friendly Club' Throws a Party



John C. Sushnik

A capacity crowd filled the Community Center on April 25th for an El Cerrito Rotary Club fun fundraiser spaghetti feed. Proceeds from the food, wine, beer, and raffle ticket sales, went to the Rotary Scholarship Fund and also El Cerrito Recreation's David Hunter Memorial Scholarship. Entertainment was provided by the El Cerrito High School Jazz Combo. El Cerrito Rotary is a valued member of this Chamber and the club always knows how to have a good time. Join! elcerritorotary.org

The previous such in-person meeting was held on February 1, 2020. That was a raucous gathering, putting it mildly. Then, a month and a half later, everything, everywhere, shut down for COVID-19. Quite a memorable year.

The City of El Cerrito has a much improved financial position now. I maintain that credit for the turnaround goes to our city manager, consultants she hired at Management Partners, and a city council that began to seriously

look at financial reports. Continued improvement should be expected.

□

City Hall news. The Assistant to the City Manager position has finally been filled after being vacant since Maya Williams left City employment in December 2020. The new go-to guy is none other than Will Provost, a name familiar to many. To contact: 510-215-4318 or wprovost@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 7

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Ask us about festival naming rights.

Questions? Email recreation@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us

Thank you for your consideration!

MAYOR LISA MOTOYAMA

■ Continued from page 1

said her political aspirations are limited to present challenges, which empowers her to make tough decisions for the good of the City.

Seated in her spartan, plain-walled office on the ground floor of City Hall, Motoyama cheerfully articulated her public service goals between telling charming anecdotes about her past.

A city and regional planner by trade, Motoyama still holds her high-powered day job. She works as a senior affordable housing finance consultant at Community Economics Inc., an Oakland-based nonprofit dedicated to helping build affordable housing (she's cut back to four days per week, a tiny concession to her tireless work as mayor).

Wide-eyed through her trademark purple-rimmed glasses, purple sweater and black vest, Motoyama rattled off her top priorities as mayor.

1. Establish a sustainable budget and frugal fiscal practices.
2. Build more housing, and affordable housing.
3. Enable more transit-oriented development around the City's two BART stations, including a City library.

Motoyama said she is confident these goals can be achieved, especially with the tremendous talent at City Hall led by City Manager Karen Pinkos and the City Council.

Never short of ideas or energy, Motoyama brims with aspirations beyond the top three priorities.

"Public safety is the number one issue for most El Cerrito residents," Motoyama said. "One thing I really want to accomplish is to bring back police bike patrols on the Greenway. Our police chief said we need to be fully

staffed, and that's something I hope we can do."

A married mom of two teens, Motoyama evinces a well-earned humility and willingness to consider alternate perspectives. When asked

and I look forward to partnering with Lisa on city-county issues to improve our community."

Like the City she leads, Motoyama has come a long way in a short time. She and her family moved to El Cerrito in 2005, and have fallen in love with the small town feel and sense of community that El Cerrito boasts.

Motoyama first engaged with City politics as a concerned mom advocating for traffic safety measures to protect children. She was so effective, she soon found herself on the Planning Commission, on which she served two terms until 2018. The nudges grew stronger and more specific over the years. Many people urged Motoyama to run for City Council. Maybe the biggest name who prodded her was the late Janet Abelson, one of the most effective legislators in El Cerrito's history.

"When Janet said 'you should run for Council,' that meant something," Motoyama said.

Fast-forward to 2023, and Motoyama is comfortable and confident as El Cerrito's Mayor.

There's much beyond her control, but she is committed to giving her City all she can.

"Call or email me anytime," Motoyama. "I will be a Mayor who shows up."



Mayor Lisa Motoyama after taking her oath of office on December 20, 2022

what her weaknesses may be, her eyes flash with brio at the opportunity to improve.

"I need to get better at running the Council meetings, procedurally, and at telling people about El Cerrito and all the great things going on here," she said. "And I will keep getting better."

Motoyama's rise in recent years has caught the attention and admiration of other East Bay leaders.

"Lisa's historic appointment as El Cerrito's first Japanese-American Mayor reflects the growing diversity of the city," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. "She brings a thoughtful, collaborative working style



Contact the Mayor at:
lmotoyama@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us



KATANA-YA RAMEN

Elite Taste on a Bargain Budget

BY ANDREW MELENDEZ

EL CERRITO is home to some of the best restaurants in the Bay Area, and Katana-Ya Ramen on San Pablo Avenue fits right in to this tasty tradition.

I knew I was in for a wonderful experience the moment I stepped inside. The modern dark-oak floor of



the Japanese restaurant complements the traditional decor of bright paper lanterns and ornate cherry blossoms,

providing vibrant warmth and a sense of authenticity.

The menu was extensive, offering a variety of ramen and sushi, each with its own unique ingredients and flavors.

The option most exciting to me was their beloved “special dumpling ramen,” which includes a handful of steamed pork dumplings over a ramen blend of fresh noodles, hearty spinach, and savory green onions.

The expertly-steamed pork dumplings were an immediate stand-out, as the tender meat paired perfectly with the mild flavor of the white wheat noodles. Every bite melted in my mouth, and the sea salt broth mixed with a generous portion of vegetables only heightened my experience by adding an extra layer of flavor. The ramen noodle was perfectly cooked and had a satisfying salty taste, while the flat-leaved spinach added an earthy texture.

The \$13 dumpling ramen meal provided me with a delicious lunch and a well-rounded dining experience. I hope that anybody who is seeking a high-quality and affordable meal will look to Katana-Ya Ramen as their next culinary destination.



Photo: Robert Rogers



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Yammy Sushi: A Passion Project of Excellent Cuisine

BY ROBERT ROGERS

FOR LINDSEY KANG, sushi is more than delicious food and a beloved business.

It's personal, in the deepest sense of the word.

"Sushi has been part of me since I was in the womb," Kang said, smiling ear-to-ear. "It's my first love."

Many years later, that love is now embodied in the form of one of El Cerrito's world-class restaurants, where a diverse clientele dines in or orders online for some of California's best Japanese cuisine.

And the El Cerrito community showed it shares Kang's passion.

The grand re-opening of Yammy Sushi, at 195 El Cerrito Plaza, on March 25th drew dozens of friends, family, diners, and more, along with the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce's top officers and El Cerrito Mayor Lisa Motoyama. Those in attendance saw the energetic support the Chamber provides its members, along with Yammy Sushi's charming and authentic décor and the Chamber's classic six-foot gold scissors cutting the ribbon — to signify a new beginning.

After days of rains, the weather cooperated with a brilliant, crystal clear blue sky with sunbeams that danced through the sweeping windows along Yammy's dining room. Flower petals of pink, white, and purple added to the buoyant mood. Kang is focused on lending her energy and smarts to lifting Yammy Sushi to the next level.

"It makes this corner so vibrant to have you here!" Mayor Motoyama said to



El Cerrito Mayor Lisa Motoyama wields the classic Big Scissors with Yammy Sushi owners Lindsey and Tiffany Kang, cutting the ceremonial ribbon, while Chamber president Matt Khadivian looks on.

Kang, as the crowd smiled and nodded. "So thanks so much for being here and El Cerrito is happy to support you."



Owners Tiffany and Lindsey Kang

Yammy Sushi has been a family business for 30 years, and the latest iteration features Kang and her mother, Tiffany, taking over operations late last year. Yammy Sushi is well-known and loved for superb Japanese cuisine and unlimited sushi rolls and appetizers.

"We are doing our best to revamp and rebrand our business, because after all these years we wanted something fresh and new," Kang said. "Just to be a positive part of this community is one of my biggest missions."

Yammy Sushi is here for dine in, takeout, catering and more. Enjoy a meal in the restaurant, or visit their website at yammysushi4u.com. Phone to order at 510-525-9570.



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Dinner 4:30-8:30 p.m.
Friday-Saturday: 11:30 a.m.-9:00 p.m.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

Secondly, small businesses should consider increasing their prices. While this may seem counterintuitive, raising prices can help offset the impact of inflation and maintain profit margins. However, small businesses need to be strategic in their pricing strategy, as customers may be more price-sensitive in an inflationary environment. They can consider offering discounts for bulk purchases or loyalty programs to incentivize customers to continue doing business with them.

Thirdly, small businesses can explore alternative sources of financing to overcome cash flow challenges. They can consider applying for government grants, seeking alternative financing options such as crowdfunding, or partnering with other businesses to share resources and costs.

Finally, small businesses should invest in their employees by providing them with training and development opportunities. This can help improve productivity and efficiency, leading to cost savings and increased revenue. Moreover, employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to remain loyal to the business, reducing turnover and recruitment costs.

In conclusion, fighting inflation in 2023 requires small businesses to be proactive, flexible, and strategic. By managing costs, raising prices, exploring alternative financing options, and investing in their employees, small businesses can overcome the challenges posed by inflation and thrive in a challenging economic environment.

As always, thank you for giving me your most valuable commodity, your time.



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PAST PREZ PALAVAR

■ Continued from page 3

Wine. The city's new Banter Wine Bar is advertising for help and that means the owners are optimistic about an opening this month as construction continues. If you're good at pulling corks, contact them for a job: banterwine.com. The address is 10368 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito.

Hillside Fest 2023. The ninth annual edition of this popular free event presented by El Cerrito Trail Trekkers and the City's Environmental Quality Committee will be held the May 6-7 weekend. Maps are available all over town. Or see ectrailtrekkers.org.

Homeroom restaurant. Memo to the Economic Development Committee:



El Cerrito Plaza Barnes & Noble display

let's get one in El Cerrito. (There's a location in Berkeley.) Mac and cheese all ways. Comfort food made easy.



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