



From the President

MATT KHADIVIAN

MY DEAR READERS, it appears as though gas prices are starting to climb back up again. But what does this mean for the average business owner?

Rising gas prices can have significant implications for small business owners. Firstly, increased fuel costs directly impact their operational expenses, making it more expensive to transport goods and provide services. This can lead to reduced profit margins or the need to pass these higher costs onto customers, potentially affecting competitiveness.

Secondly, small businesses often have limited resources, making them vulnerable to economic fluctuations. As gas prices rise, their budget for marketing, hiring, and growth initiatives may shrink, hindering their ability to expand and thrive in a competitive market.

Moreover, higher fuel costs can also affect consumer behavior. When gas prices surge, consumers may cut back on spending, which can impact small businesses' sales and revenue. This can be particularly challenging for businesses in sectors closely tied to discretionary spending, such as hospitality or retail.

In conclusion, rising gas prices can squeeze the finances of small business

■ See From the President, page 7

Winners To Be Honored October 26th

BY ROBERT ROGERS

EL CERRITO'S "Best of..." campaign sparked a sensation, as more than 20,000 votes poured in for businesses in categories as diverse and exciting as "Best Hair Salon" to "Best Real Estate" and "Best Donut Shop."

Now it's time to celebrate the winners with El Cerrito's premier business recognition event, "The Best of El Cerrito" award ceremony. Mark your calendar for Thursday, October 26th at 5:30 p.m. The party will be hosted in the elegant showroom of El Cerrito Honda at 11755 San Pablo Ave.

You do not want to miss out on this! This is an invitation only event. Go to elcerritochamber.org to get your invitation.

Local elected leaders and other dignitaries will be on hand to meet and honor you, our business superstars!

When you support local business, you are voting with your dollar. You are investing in every facet of your community and its public resources and amenities.

Join our growing El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce family today!

Thanks to our great sponsors who care deeply for our El Cerrito community: El Cerrito Honda, Prospect Sierra, Negar Souza & Feri Niroomand/Red Oak Realty, AC Transit, Little Hill Real Estate, Shrem Law, Off the Block S.T.E.M.

El Cerrito Says: "Hello Dolly!"

BY ROBERT ROGERS

DULANTHI "DOLLY" Batathota came to El Cerrito from Sri Lanka in 2009, and she brought a dream: To one day become a business owner in this great community. Through hard work, resilience, and the support of mentors and loved ones, her dream has come true.

"Sometimes I have to step back and remind myself that this is really happening," Dolly said, dabbing at misty eyes. The aptly named Dolly's Restaurant is set to open in early October at 10172 San Pablo Avenue at Peppermint Tree Plaza.

Chamber Election

TERMS FOR four of the nine directors will end in January, 2024. They are Matt Khadivian, Kevin O'Neal, Robert Rogers, and Jeffrey Wright. Directors serve two years.

The president will appoint a nominating committee at the board meeting on October 4th. The report from that body will be announced at a membership meeting in November. Ballots are then mailed to all regular members in good standing if there are multiple people running.

Participation is encouraged. Any member interested in serving on the board of directors should contact President Matt Khadivian: m.elcerritochamber@gmail.com.



John C. Stashak

It will feature a diverse selection of beer and wine, along with exquisite Italian appetizers.

The ambiance is a cozy, vintage vibe with modern touches, including sharp lines and a gleaming marble bar. Steel tear-drop shaped lights hang overhead.

■ See Dolly's Restaurant, page 6

★ NEW MEMBERS ★

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Point Richmond, CA 94801
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feagleyrealtors.com



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El Cerrito, CA 94530
510-710-2564
leahmarieinteriors.com



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

HIJACKING a public meeting is never acceptable. The anti Semitic, racist comments by anonymous losers (neonazis) directed at our City Council on September 19th and heard by all in attendance make me sad and very, very angry. I direct your attention to the statement by our City Manager on the next page. If *Byline* readers desire an El Cerrito Stands United Against Hate poster, email byline@elcerritochamber.org and I will promptly deliver to your door.

□



John C. Stashik

DHC opened on September 21st and business is off the hook. Located where Rubio's was in the Plaza, Dave's is open late too. **Kendall**, above, was one of the super friendly staff on duty the first day.

□



Ike has arrived! The new El Cerrito Plaza Ike's Love & Sandwiches store is now open and in the business of making you those delicious sandwiches. Location: near Joann Fabrics. **More on page 7.**

□

Mayfair Station. Those Cutting & San Pablo apartments are now 83% occupied.



John C. Stashik

□

Marshalls construction is well underway at El Cerrito Plaza where they will be located after leaving the present Portola Drive & San Pablo Avenue location. Holi-daze are coming.

Don't ask what will replace Marshalls on Portola Drive. That's up to the property owner and they are typically tight lipped. Across the street is a now closed CVS store. Again, wait and see. If you want a pickleball court, sign a lease. Simple.

□

Tires + food. A capital idea is the new trailer at TiresDirect called Don Taco. It seems a perfect fit as you can grab a bite while your vehicle is serviced.

By the way, TiresDirect is seeking service techs. Stop by if job hunting.

□



Here to stay. Anime Island, the unique collectables store near the Mel-o-Dee cocktail bar at El Cerrito Plaza opened last April. Owners **Kalen** and **Amy Yamashiro** will be moving the shop across the Plaza to the Fairmount Avenue side sometime late in November.

Comcast/Xfinity will then lease the space where Anime Island currently is. That's the Plaza Shuffle!

□

Elevation 66, El Cerrito's one and only brewpub, offers gourmet dinners paired with their craft beers. The previous one was in May. Watch for a Fall event, date to be determined, which will be announced in the next issue.

□



John C. Stashik

Meet Jun Simundo. He is seen above performing at the El Cerrito Royale Grandparents Carnival held last month. That's one of the regular gigs for Jun and his band. His day job is with the U.S. Postal Service. I guess you can call him "a singing mailman." He appreciates both his postal customers and audiences. In fact, he said that if you experience any problems with your mail service, please call him; and he announced his number: "1-800-HANDSOME." (That's a quote.) Okay, if you'd like to hire this talent, get his number from El Cerrito Royale.

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3

PAST PREZ PALAVER

Continued from page 2



John C. Stashik

EC everywhere. A recent lunch stop at Harris Ranch revealed this wall art by El Cerrito artist Mark Canepa.

□
Moving up. El Cerrito city council member Gabe Quinto is now Second Vice President of the League of California Cities. Congratulations!

□
Point Isabel. It's the best dog park on the planet. But there is history, too. Mary Barnsdale will lead a free history walk on Saturday, October 21st, starting at 11 a.m. from the Sit and Stay Cafe. This is presented by the El Cerrito Historical Society.

□
Old photos. Speaking of the Historical Society, they're having a photo contest. If you have El Cerrito photos from before 1973, share them. Visit their website at elcerritohistoricalsociety.org for more information. Watch for a postcard, too.

□
Taylor Swift is coming to town. Her Eras Tour is on film (as we used to say) and it begins on Friday, October 13th, at Rialto Cinemas Cerrito for a four week run. rialtocinemas.com gets you info on this and also Cerrito Classics.

□
Pinball and wine. That's the way you roll at the quirky Banter Wine Bar.

This San Pablo Avenue establishment has been a hit since their opening day. There are a good selection of craft beers too. Maybe they need a retro cigarette machine. (Nah, don't go there.) 10368 San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito. Open 4-9, Wednesday through Saturday.

□
RIP Jimmy Buffett. September 1st was a sad day for Parrotheads; our leader passed away at 76 from cancer. *The New York Times* called him the "roguish bard of island escapism." His music will play forever. *Mother, mother ocean, I have heard you call; wanted to sail upon your waters since I was three feet tall; you've seen it all, you've seen it all.* Fins up!

A Message from City Manager Karen Pinkos

I want to address some disturbing things that happened at the City Council meeting on September 19th. During both the special meeting for City Council to interview candidates for advisory bodies and the regular Council meeting that was broadcast, there were members of the public who called into the Zoom meeting and made anti Semitic, racist, and vulgar comments.

The comments were being made by people using fake, racist names on the Zoom call participant list and continued during the public comment period during every item of the Council meeting. While several audience members and staff, including myself, wanted to kick them off the call or shut down the comments, we did not do so upon advice from our City Attorney. As disgusting as the comments were, they are protected under the First Amendment, and even offensive comments must be allowed to be made at public meetings.

During the comments, the City Council held up our "El Cerrito Stands United Against Hate" signs and stood silently. This was difficult to do, but the mindset was that if we are forced to listen to these terrible comments, the Council and staff tried to show grace and not provide a reaction that these people were looking for. Unfortunately, this seems to be a coordinated effort because several other public meetings nearby and across the state were attacked in the same way in recent weeks, and we believe that none of these people were connected with El Cerrito in any way.

I want to acknowledge how disgusting and repugnant the

comments were, and that they impacted everyone attending or watching the meeting. The City Council, the City Attorney, and I are going to discuss options for future meetings. But the main issue isn't what happened at the meeting, it's the fact that there are people out there—who have always been out there and are now more empowered—who are hateful and horrible and actively seek to spread their hate and alienate others. I'm appalled and I never want this to be normal.

This, sadly, is not the first time El Cerrito has encountered hate. But when it has happened, we have been able to come together and be strong for each other and for the communities that have been targeted. We know how hurtful and impactful this type of behavior is, and we will do whatever we legally can to protect our community from this behavior.

We have to move forward as best we can by staying true to our values even in the face of hate. If you don't already have one, you can pick up an "El Cerrito Stands United Against Hate" sign at City Hall. I encourage everyone to post these signs in their homes or businesses. We will continue to stand together, we will speak out against hate, and we will be united with every member of every part of our community.

Let us remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: *"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

Let us all be the light and love for each other, for our families and friends, and for our entire community.

EL CERRITO
STANDS
UNITED
AGAINST
HATE

Local School with Global Impact

BY ROBERT ROGERS AND OSCAR SORIANO

WHEN PEOPLE refer to the diverse, world-class educational opportunities open to Bay Area children, El Cerrito's Prospect Sierra often serves as a shining example.

Founded via merger in 1997, this acclaimed school has established a sterling reputation for combining impactful academics with social-emotional learning and community service partnerships. Prospect Sierra is one of only seven schools in the nation recognized by the National Association of Independent Schools as a model for 21st Century Education.

The result is a school that continues to draw exceptional teachers and a diverse student body from throughout the broader community.

Prospect Sierra also boasts a growing alumni network of engaged, successful professionals.

"There are a lot of choices in the Bay Area, there are a lot of great public schools and really great reasons to send kids there," said Mary DeNardo, Prospect Sierra's Director of Communications. "What sets us apart, for me not only as staff but as a parent, is the way that social-emotional learning and equity and justice are woven into the curriculum. Emotions matter and identity matters, and we believe and the research shows that students are more successful in their learning when they sit at a table with people who are different than them."

DeNardo described the educational philosophy of Prospect Sierra as bolstered by three pillars:

1. *Deep intellectual engagement in fields of study, as opposed to rushing to touch broadly on a wider range of academic fields.*
2. *Self-knowledge and healthy emotional self-regulation.*
3. *Care for others, empathy, and healthy relationships.*

"We pride ourselves on our reputation for a focus on social-emotional learning," DeNardo said. "Emotions matter. When we know our emotions, when we have that self-awareness, our learning is at its best."

Prospect Sierra's supportive alumni network attests to the enduring value it provides students and families.

In a recently published video testimonial, lead third grade teacher Annie Fujimoto shared her experience as a student more than 20 years ago.

"When I was a kid I was very shy, and very afraid to talk in front of other people," Fujimoto said. "And yet when I look back on everything I did here, I was in plays, and I remember these amazing cooperative learning projects,



and I had voice recordings of myself on cassette tapes, and I kind of thought, was I a shy person? And I actually think that's the beauty of Prospect Sierra is I felt as a student very safe and very supported and that my teachers were very aware of my strengths and challenges."

Prospect Sierra's curriculum emphasizes tactile experiences, critical thinking, and creative, inclusive collaboration.

The project-based curriculum combines academics and arts with social-emotional learning, service, and innovative technology—all with an emphasis on equity and inclusion.

As an independent TK-8 school of 470 students with shuttle services to Berkeley and Oakland, Prospect Sierra also works hard to ensure opportunities exist for students regardless of their economic background.

As an independent school, Prospect Sierra must pay enough to attract exceptional teaching professionals, which is why tuition ranges from \$26,000 to \$36,000 annually.

However, about one in three students pay less than the full amount, thanks to fundraising and other resource supports that enable the school to offer needs-based scholarships.

"We work very hard to ensure that we can offer flexible tuition options to families who can't afford full tuition," DeNardo said.

Prospect Sierra's gorgeous, leafy main campus continues to draw diverse families in part because its faculty and staff embody the core values of the education they provide children: love, justice, innovation, and impact.

The school goes above and beyond as a member of the community, including providing space for community camps and meetings, supporting the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce, and incorporating community service projects into its students' curriculum.

"We are proud of our partnerships with the City of El Cerrito and community," DeNardo said.



PROSPECT SIERRA
www.prospectsierra.org



An Exquisite Journey Into Thai Cuisine Without Leaving El Cerrito

STORY AND PHOTO BY ANDREW MELENDEZ

TODAY'S CULINARY adventure found me inside Banana Leaf, the newest Thai sensation located in El Cerrito's Bishop Center.

Stepping into Banana Leaf feels like entering a realm where contemporary aesthetics and Thai cuisine blend seamlessly. The polished marble tables and sleek modern lighting evoke a clean, modern sensation, while the dark oak walls and bright green houseplants create a vibrant and homey contrast.

Their \$20 lunch special surprised me with its variety of appetizers, entrées,

and drinks that were both diverse in taste yet economical in cost.

Meal selection was a challenge, thanks to the slew of delectable options. I decided upon a starter of chicken Gyoza complemented by a main course of pad Thai.

My first bite of chicken Gyoza, with its firm texture and juicy core, had my taste buds in ecstasy. The two hearty pieces I received were encased in crisp shells that made each bite a crunchy and flavorful delight.

Following this delicious introduction came the main entrée: A mouth watering pad Thai that emerged as a masterpiece of culinary balance.

From the chewy texture of the rice noodles to the crunchy sensations of the crushed dry roasted peanuts, this meal showcased a piquant combination of ingredients and flavors. One

standout was the tofu, which was fried into a golden hue that boasted delicate crispness outside, and tender consistency inside. The generous portions of thinly-sliced carrots and fresh bean sprouts packed a visceral crunch that melded into a truly appetizing meal.

Banana Leaf's fusion of authentic flavors left an indelible mark on my palate and my senses. For just \$20, I couldn't have asked for a better culinary experience.



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2023 Art Show & Sale

Sue Otten, "Spring Hill Ranch"

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October 6-8

El Cerrito Art Association
elcerritoart.org

Opening Reception:
Friday, October 6th, 7-9 pm

A Realtor with a Passion for People

BY ROBERT ROGERS AND SKYLER DIAS

FOR NEGAR SOUZA, being one of the region's most prolific and acclaimed Realtors is just the beginning.

Her passion is helping people. That's part of why so many of her clients become and stay friends long after the ink has dried on their real estate transactions.

"I've helped my clients get jobs, helped them find the right schools for their children, been there for weddings, birthdays, travel plans, deaths in the family," Souza said. "When past clients reach out I am there for them, because it's about people first for me."

And Souza has a great deal to offer. A lifelong East Bay native and a resident of El Cerrito for more than two decades, the vivacious Souza combines deep professional knowledge with a vast network of high-profile allies and a sure grasp of the diverse assets and amenities in El Cerrito.

She's a key member of acclaimed real estate firm Red Oak Realty, a local and woman-owned company known for mastery of the complex local market and a personal, caring touch with every transaction.

"I know the city, the staff, the permitting processes, regulations, everything you need to know," Souza said. "And with my background volunteering in local schools and nonprofit organizations, I help people navigate our community."

Souza, a married mother of three, was born in Berkeley and raised mostly in Albany. Her mother and father came to the United States from Iran in 1970. Both had ambitions to study at UC Berkeley. They each achieved their world class educations.

Souza, who credits her parents for her work ethic and love for community, earned her degree in Interior

Architecture design from San Francisco State University.

"My Interior Architecture background helps me see the big picture for my clients when they look at a property," Souza said. "I help them see into the future, into what can be done in a given space."

That's just one of the skills that helps Souza stand apart as a Realtor in a competitive market brimming with beautiful, eclectic properties.

She also boasts a deep historical perspective, personal authenticity, integrity, local roots, technical savvy, and a warm heart for service. The proof is in the data: Souza and her team of five—which includes her mom—generated more than \$45 million in sales last year, putting her in the top 1.5 percent of agents nationwide, according to RealTrends, and her team was the top producer company-wide in 2022.

Her region extends far beyond her beloved El Cerrito. Souza can help you find your dream home anywhere between Crockett and San Leandro, and east to the Lamorinda area.

Souza loves everything about her work—the architecture, the properties, the negotiations—and overcoming challenges. Most of all, she loves helping people achieve their dreams.

"I live and breathe this," Souza said. "It's much more than a career. What drives me is the fulfillment I get, the passion I have for seeing someone else succeed. I'm the type of person who loves giving gifts better than receiving them."

Contact Negar Souza at negar@redoakrealty.com or 510-543-7016. You can also find her on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and [redoakrealty.com](https://www.redoakrealty.com).



DOLLY'S RESTAURANT

■ Continued from page 1

The opening of Dolly's has been a decade in gestation. Recent months have been hard, grinding work to refurbish the space, formerly occupied by Nana Desserts.

Long before taking the plunge to open her own business, Dolly worked

her way up at the famous Milano's Restaurant in Tiburon. She worked under the tutelage of the late Roger Milano. Like Dolly, Milano immigrated to the U.S. as a young person with no money but driving ambition. He founded what would become an acclaimed chain of seven restaurants.

Roger saw something in Dolly, whom he promoted to manager. "He pushed me so hard," Dolly said. "When Roger passed in 2020, I realized how much he gave me...I know he is proud of me, and I want to create a happy family environment in my restaurant like he did in his."

Dolly spotted the vacant space that

would become her restaurant when she and her husband took a stroll to dine at the adjacent Vietnamese restaurant. She fell in love. She seized the opportunity and secured a lease.

Dolly eschews any suggestion that she deserves credit, instead thanking others. She specifically thanked her husband Shenal Dias, her circle of friends, her uncle Anton Edippuli, the head chef at Milano's who passed in 2020, Aissia Ashoori of the City of El Cerrito, the Mayor and council members, and of course Roger Milano.

"I am so excited to create something like Roger did, but here in El Cerrito," she said.

**Effective
January 1, 2024
the El Cerrito
Minimum Wage
will be
\$17.92 per hour**

FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

owners, leading to increased operational costs, reduced growth opportunities, and potential declines in consumer demand. Adaptation and efficient resource management become crucial for their sustainability during periods of escalating fuel prices.

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

Welcome to El Cerrito



Ike's Love & Sandwiches

Official Opening Schedule
at El Cerrito Plaza

Thursday, Sept. 21
Open for Business

Tuesday, Oct. 10
Friends & Family Event

Wednesday, Oct. 11
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October 2023



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I am very thankful to have acquired wonderful clients who are not only loyal, but my best advertisers.

They are creative bringing in challenging items and ideas, giving me the opportunity to often create magical one of a kind jobs.

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I'm lucky to have found a job that I love, in a town full of interesting thinkers.

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ANOTHER TWO-FER IN OCTOBER

Jenny K.
A Little Bit of Everything!

**Set your alarm clocks for an
8 a.m. Chamber Mixer.**

Wednesday, October 18th

Enjoy complimentary breakfast beverages from our café, along with freshly baked pastries, as you immerse yourself in the enchanting world of Jenny K. Gift Shop.

Mingle, and celebrate with fellow local business owners in a lively party atmosphere.

6921 Stockton Ave., El Cerrito

PLANK + POWER Grand Opening



Megan welcomes you to the newest high intensity low impact Pilates studio in El Cerrito.

Ribbon cutting at 10 a.m. on Saturday, October 21st.

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plankandpower.com

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