



From the President

KEVIN O'NEAL

WELCOME to 2024. I'd like to share with you all a practice of mine that I like to do every January: *visioning*.

Creating a vision of greatness for your year is useful for setting clear intentions for yourself and your business. What I like most about visioning is the perspective. We place ourselves in the future, reflecting on all that we've accomplished in a period of time. As a business planning tool, this is incredibly powerful, like a compass that points the way. While I'd love to take credit for the method I'm about to share, I learned it from author Ari Weinzwieg, founder of Zingerman's, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Recipe for a Vision of Greatness.

Step 1. Pick your topic: Our Successful Chamber.

Step 2. Pick your time frame: December 5, 2024 (1 year).

Step 3. Put together a list of "Prouds" (from past successes): BofEC, programs, membership, marketing.

Step 4. Write the first draft of the vision:

■ See *From the President*, page 6

Dues Increase

EFFECTIVE January 1, 2024 the annual dues rates are as follows.

ASSOC	\$136
Associate Members	
MEM-1.....	\$223
1 to 5 Employees	
MEM-2.....	\$301
6 to 10 Employees	
MEM-3.....	\$380
11 to 15 Employees	
MEM-4.....	\$459
16 to 25 Employees	
MEM-5.....	\$517
26 to 50 Employees	
MEM-6.....	\$576
51 to 100 Employees	
MEM-7.....	\$636
Over 100 Employees	

El Cerrito's Best Kept Secret Treasure



Sabreen and Vito at Granter's

BY ROBERT ROGERS

EVEN AN untrained eye knows immediately that Granter's Showroom is bristling with treasures. Once you swing through the iron gate entrance, your eyes dart among the innumerable valuables. There's a trove of exotic guitars, violins, and other instruments behind the display case, flanking the heavy-duty stitched Major League Baseball jersey. Designer handbags with ornate patterns gleam in the overhead light.

The glass cubes glimmer with jewels ranging from gold necklaces to a hand-crafted Gazelles sparkling with precious crystals. A Native American wood sculpture watches over all.

"We're no flash in the pan," says Vito, the general manager, an amiable, one-named raconteur. "We're proud of El Cerrito and to be in business continuously for 80 years in this city."

Granter's Showroom is a paradox. It's both a legendary El Cerrito institution and one of the city's best kept secrets, a fact owed to its history as a pawn shop and the security and stigma that may entail.

But times are changing. Granter's has dropped the "pawn shop" label and focuses instead on the more alluring components of its business: The unique inventory, the ability to help consumers and traders from all walks of life, the expert staff and consultation, and the inherent environmental friendliness of its enterprise.

"We are leading in the original green industry," Vito says of pawnbrokering.

■ See *Granter's Showroom*, page 4

★ NEW MEMBERS ★



Granter's Showroom
10056 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito
510-525-9144
granterpawn.com

◆
Yve's Dominican Salon
10024 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito
510-761-2718
yvedomhairdesign@gmail.com



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

IT'S OVER. After eight years as your treasurer I finally have a replacement: **Mark Figone**. Hallelujah! Fact is, I hated the job. But I'm not a quitter and every single penny of Chamber money has been accurately accounted for during my tenure. So finally, our "nominating committee" decided to find a new guy. Have a blast, Mark.

Since joining this organization on July 25, 2000, I've done it all. My term as a director continues and the two tasks I actually enjoy are (a) daily contact with local business people and (b) publishing this *Byline* for loyal readers who really appreciate it. Now I can focus on the fun stuff and ignore the ridiculous bureaucracy inherent in groups such as ours.

□

Raully Butler. It was nice to meet this long time, now retired, Mechanics Bank officer recently at a local event. His new gig is that of executive director for the Council of Business & Industries.

□

Movin' up. Jeffrey Wright, leaving this Chamber's board of directors on January 10th, is the new chairman of the board at the Bay Area Rescue Mission. I continually hear from *Byline* readers who miss Jeff's monthly column. Perhaps we should bring him back.

□

Nation's Giant Hamburgers is now awarding limited franchises to qualified applicants in northern California. Check out nationsrestaurantsfranchise.com.

□

Plaza news. With Anime Island now relocated to the Fairmount Avenue side of the shopping center, Xfinity will move into Anime's old space next to the city's famous Mel-O-Dee lounge.

□

BOLO. The great Sushi Matsu at 10561 San Pablo Ave., near Moeser, plans a remodeling this month both inside the restaurant and to the menu. The exact timeline is unclear so be on the lookout for a "closed" sign and know that the owner, ever energetic **Angie Yang**, says any interruption will be very brief.

Good Mechanics



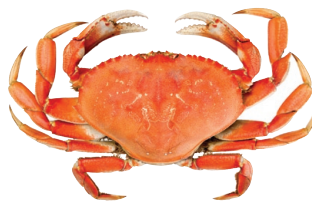
Mechanics Bank sponsored a superb holiday mixer on December 6th at the El Cerrito branch. Meet the staff: Rudyard Ryan Ratcliffe, Ashika Kumari, Veronica Escobedo, Jury Zamora (manager), Mayor Lisa Motoyama, and Francie Esparza.

John C. Stashik

□

Spin cycle. The laundromat at Conlon and San Pablo is undergoing a total rebuild. This is next to that mysterious Quonset hut at the north end of town.

□



Crab feeds. It's back! EC Rec (aka the Dept. of Fun) is hosting a crab feed on Saturday, March 9th, at the Community Center at 6 p.m. The meal also includes salad, pasta, garlic bread, dessert. Plus cool raffle prizes. Tickets now on sale. el-cerrito.org/crabfeed. One of the best City events of the year!

If you really can't wait for "Rec's" feed, our friends at the Bay Front Chamber of Commerce will be crabbing it on Saturday, January 20th, 6 p.m., at the Hercules Community Center. \$75 tickets at eventbrite.com or at Rodeo Hardware, 670 Parker Ave., Rodeo.

Now we eagerly await word from the El Cerrito Police Employees Association on their crustacean plans. That event benefits our K-9 cops.

□

Mayfair commercial. At Cutting and San Pablo, all four new commercial spaces, totaling 8,894 square feet, have been leased to three new businesses. The operators of Mi Casa Grill will occupy two spaces. Their new concept includes Mexican, Peruvian, and Pasta food stations along with coffee and juice bars.

Mayfair Market [absolutely the perfect name], will be a convenience store, and expects to start construction soon following permit review. "Get more for your money at Mayfair Market!"

SaWadDee Thai Restaurant, formerly in Richmond, intends to apply for a building permit shortly.

Mayfair fulfills many of the City's goals by creating new mixed-income housing adjacent to transit while supporting economic development along the San Pablo Avenue corridor. On the web: mayfairstation.com.

□



Post holiday cleanup.

This is El Cerrito's very own junk hauler. Recommended by this Chamber, too. Licensed, insured, and legitimate.

□

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3

PAST PREZ PALAVER

■ Continued from page 2

Mayfair affordable. Community Development reports the Mayfair mixed-use project at Knott and San Pablo continues to take shape. BRIDGE Housing received their final funding award from the California Debit Limit Allocation Committee on December 6th. With this source, 69 affordable units are slated to break ground in Spring 2024. More at: el-cerrito.org/mayfairaffordable.

□

Number 88. The annual installation of officers and directors has been a tradition since this Chamber opened for business in 1936. I'm talking about a lunch, with drinks, and appropriate ceremony. Last year was by Zoom. (Wow.) This year, no *real* installation, so plan on another Zoom event.

So if you're into staring at a little screen, Installation No. 88 will occur at the board of directors meeting on Wednesday, January 10th, at 9 a.m. Two new faces will make their appearance. No need to dress up, or dress at all for that matter; it's Zoom.

However, there is a lunch meeting this month, plus mixer. Those on page 8.

□

Tessa Rudnick is the new El Cerrito Mayor. I've been a TR fan since the day we first met in my driveway four years ago. Her daughter, Shira, loves the front window antics of our cockatoo, *Peeps*. It'll be another very productive year for this city with Tessa at the helm, backed by an engaged city council, and supported by superb city staff.

□

For lease. This 4850 sq. ft. building, at 10351 San Pablo Avenue (with a parking lot), will become available mid-year. It's on a prime midtown block in El Cerrito near the Natural Grocery Co. Contact Rod Codron at ronec@comcast.net.



John C. Stashik

Introducing El Cerrito's 2024 Leaders



Photos: John C. Stashik

Mayor Tessa Rudnick and Mayor Pro Tempore Carolyn Wysinger



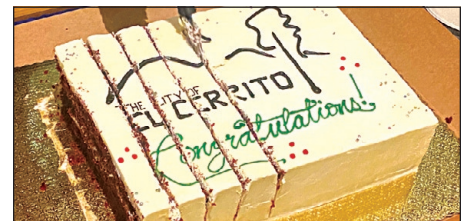
New Mayor Tessa Rudnick with Former Mayor Lisa Motoyama.



A special greeting to Mayor Tessa Rudnick from Jonathan Mintzer of JCRC Bay Area.

PennDel's
BAKEHOUSE

The annual transition meeting of the City Council is known as the "cake meeting." El Cerrito's renowned PennDel's Bakehouse did the honors providing this huge cake.



GRANTERS SHOWROOM

■ Continued from page 1

“Rather than manufacture and ship new products and waste old ones, we rebuy, refurbish, repurpose, and resell.”

Granters Showroom is one of the oldest businesses in El Cerrito, founded in 1943 by Bob Granter as Granters Jewelry and Loan. Granter was a Canadian who settled in El Cerrito when he met his future wife here while on a sightseeing vacation.



Uncle Ray

Vito's dad, a former El Cerrito police officer affectionately known as “Uncle Ralph,” bought the business in 1993. Vito moved the shop a few doors south on San Pablo Avenue to its current location in 2000.

Granters has a diverse mix of offerings that yields not only sustainable profits, but a passionate following and an eclectic inventory.

The inventory comes through one of several channels: some customers simply sell their possessions to Vito, who is a ready and discerning cash buyer. Estate sales, liquidations, and full estate purchases are also a favorite method

of garnering new merchandise. Vito also buys, often in bulk, from department store retailers who are closing. He also buys and trades with a vast network of other stores in his industry.

In economics, pain in one sector often equals profit elsewhere. So it goes today, as the contraction in malls, retailers, jewelers, and other traditional brick and mortar commercial enterprises means a bonanza for entrepreneurs like Vito.

But Vito likes to focus on what he does for customers in need. “What we can do for people is allow them to access equity in their possessions if they need it, no strings attached,” he said.

If, for instance, a customer comes in with an expensive watch, he or she can give it to Vito in exchange for an agreed upon amount of money and then leave, knowing the watch is safe. The item can be picked up anytime within the next four months and 10 days, per state law, with a relatively small interest payment and the principal. It's a collateralized loan.

“The equity is the value, and we help people access it when they need it,” Vito said. “I would estimate that only about five percent of my customers leave their item in the shop and don't come back for it.”

Collectors and value hunters aren't the only people entranced by Granters Showroom. Over the years, local legends John Fogerty and Green Day have been known to hang here and check out the instruments.

Even a young, thirsty gaggle of heavy metal musicians who called themselves Metallica used to stop by on their way to the liquor store to gawk at the guitars or even negotiate a buy or trade.

The inside of the shop may be crammed with value, but it's no ramshackle yard sale or back-alley assortment. The vestibule is well-lit and



Granters has one of the most distinctive façades on the “theater block.”

meticulously organized, with balanced spacing and smart placement of the merchandise. There's a framed White House published copy of John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural address, flanked by a massive brass eagle sculpture. Precious jewelry flashes light upward while wood and iron collectibles loom overhead. High-quality electronic equipment, clocks, watches, and more fill their niches.

Limited edition luxury handbags are hot right now, Vito says. He recently found a buyer for a rare Dior handbag from Japan when the customer spotted it on Instagram and loved it so much she called to secure it while on her vacation.

You never know what you may find here, making this a top destination for holiday shoppers looking to make a splash with their loved ones.

Vito, himself an avid collector since childhood, is proud of his store and his town.

“It's amazing that after all these years and all this success in this great city, there are still so many people out there who haven't yet been here and seen what we have to offer,” Vito says. “I want to reach more people.”



San Francisco Chronicle reporter Carolyn Said wrote this piece on August 8, 2011. So fascinated with the store, she spent an entire day there.

John C. Staehik

Granters

Granters Showroom

Authentic, Affordable Luxury
Granters sells most of its fine jewelry
for half the JAGi appraised value

10056 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito
510-525-9144 granterspawn.com

Authentic Indian, Nepalese Cuisine at Little Kathmandu

STORY, PHOTOS BY CATALINA HU

IN THE MIDDLE of Cerrito Galleria is Little Kathmandu with the golden yellow sign. The small restaurant with seven tables features authentic Indian and Nepalese cuisine. During the pandemic, I ordered dinner to go from Little Kathmandu. I have been looking forward to going back and dine inside for a full experience.



On a sunny Friday after the peak lunch hour, I arrived at Little Kathmandu and ordered the vegetarian thali, medium spicy. I was asked how spicy I liked my food, which is always a plus in my book since I love spicy food but often forget to ask. Thali means “tray” or “plate.” It is a round platter used to serve food in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. A Thali served in a restaurant is made up of a selection of various dishes. It is one of my favorite items to order because it is like a sampler. I get to try a variety of dishes in single servings on a platter!

While I waited for my thali, I looked around the cozy restaurant. In addition to the framed photographs of the Dalai



The Papadam

Lama and Potala Palace, there are food safety certificates hanging on the wall. I could hear other patrons having a great time praising and enjoying their food.

It was love at first sight with my thali! There’s the spicy pickled radish, Aloo Gobi (cauliflower, potatoes, green beans with spices), Saag Paneer (creamy spinach curry), mustard greens, dal soup, a cone shaped papadam (crunchy lentil wafer), a piece of cucumber and carrot, and rice pudding all placed neatly in small bowls surrounding a mound of steamy basmati rice on a round tray.

The cucumber and carrot slices were there in case I found the food



too spicy; however, every dish was seasoned perfectly spicy to my liking. The cone shaped papadam was so adorable. I couldn’t resist not scooping some rice and spinach curry into it and eating it like a mini ice cream cone. The rice pudding was just a tad sweet and very refreshing after having a spicy meal.

Little Kathmandu serves a wide variety of vegetarian and meat dishes including different kinds of momo (Tibetan dumplings), tandoori, fried rice, and curry. If you are looking for something different or spicy, Little Kathmandu is a *must try!* Don’t be shy to ask the friendly staff questions or recommendations.

10396 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito
510-559-8083 ilkathmandu.com
Closed Sunday

Outside School Offers Something Different and Extraordinary

SPECIAL TO THE BYLINE

TRADITIONAL classrooms aren’t for everyone, including Outside School’s Heather Taylor.

In 2007 she became a garden teacher at the preschool she had been teaching at for the previous five years. She never looked back. Nestled in our urban environment, outdoor spaces of light, colors, sounds, and other sensations offer the richest learning milieu possible.

Through outdoor education, Taylor realized children learned in a more natural way. Why color or paste leaves on a worksheet when children can experience the colors, shapes, longevity, sounds, and movements of them while learning under a tree canopy?

At Outside School, children are always out in nature. Learning takes place organically. A parent recently described it as, “They follow their noses.”



Outside School’s schedule is refreshing and restful. At three days per week, six hours per day (Tuesday

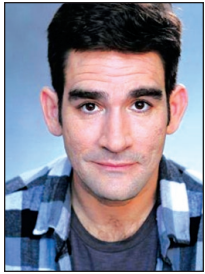
through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.), there’s plentiful time for everyone to

■ See Outside School, page 7

New Artistic, Managing Director at CCCT

CONTRA COSTA Civic Theatre (CCCT), wrapping up its 64th year of operation, is delighted to announce Joel Roster as its new Executive Artistic and Managing Director. Roster succeeds Marilyn Langbehn who is leaving CCCT after 10 years.

Joel's impressive background in directing, alongside his extensive leadership experience in non-profit arts administration, positions him as an ideal fit for this pivotal role.



Joel's directorial resume showcases his versatility and excellence in the theatre arts. Notably, his work with Town Hall Theatre Company in Lafayette includes directing critically acclaimed productions like "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches," "Angels in America: Perestroika," and "The Farnsworth Invention," all of which garnered East Bay Shellie Awards for Best Play. His direction of both parts of "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches" also earned him Shellie Awards for Outstanding Direction of a Play.

His history with CCCT dates to 2011 as an actor in the production "Big River," and subsequently appearing in "Barefoot in the Park." He then directed two productions for the venue: "Bleacher Bums" and "Steel Magnolias," which were both critically and financially successful.

Joel's work extends beyond adult

theatre into youth theatre, where he has spent over 20 years as an arts educator. He has helped create educational programs and restructured existing programs to be more inclusive and expansive. This experience underlines his commitment to nurturing the next generation of theatre artists.

His previous leadership roles, including his successful tenure as Executive Director of El Campanil Theatre in Antioch, as well as running his own successful theatre company, have prepared him well for his new position at CCCT. Joel's strategic vision and inclusive approach promise to bring fresh, dynamic energy to the theatre's programming, with a focus on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ representation in all levels of the organization.

Joel holds a Certificate in Grant Writing from San Diego State University and studied Theatre Arts at Diablo Valley College, where he honed his skills in various aspects of theatre production and direction. He is also a member of Actors Equity Association.

CCCT is excited to embark on this new journey under Joel Roster's guidance. "We anticipate a bright future filled with innovative, inclusive, and captivating theatrical experiences under his leadership," said Kathleen Perka, president of the board at CCCT.

"The community of El Cerrito is incredibly fortunate to have such a gem of a theatre in its backyard," said Roster, "but not half as fortunate as I am to be entrusted to CCCT's future."

FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

Go for greatness.

Write from the heart.

Get in the future.

Go quickly.

Use the "Hot Pen" technique: Keep the pen on paper; doodle gibberish if you have to, but keep writing.

Get personal.

Step 5. Re-view and re-draft

Step 6. More re-drafts

Step 7. Input from Advisory Content Experts (ACE).

Step 8. Let's go! Start sharing the vision.

So far, I've gotten only to my first draft of my vision for the Chamber in 2024. But, I'll share it with you here and invite your feedback as my ACEs to help me flesh it out. Here it goes:

□

It's December 5th, 2024, and we are all gathered at Mechanics Bank to celebrate the holiday season. Bringing back an old tradition like this one has brought our El Cerrito business community closer together. Earlier this October, we celebrated the Best of El Cerrito winners at Honda. New traditions like that have been really energizing for our members and the broader business community.

Looking back, I couldn't be more pleased with our success. The Chamber is on the map! Businesses are clamoring to join. We are recognized for being a positive force in the community. Our educational programs are resonating with local businesses. Mixers are providing a camaraderie among members. Our marketing program is providing so much value that we've got full inserts in our *Byline* each month and social media is buzzing with what's going on in El Cerrito.

I'm marveling at the membership. We have fresh faced new entrepreneurs just starting out, and we have established institutions rejoining to be a part of the movement. A whole new generation is getting poised to make cool stuff happen in El Cerrito, and I couldn't be happier. It's great to be a part of the Chamber right now.

□

That's it! So easy and yet so powerful. I encourage you all to give it a try. Here's to a happy and prosperous 2024!

- ★ Buyers
- ★ Sellers
- ★ Probate
- ★ FSBO
- ★ Divorce
- ★ Expired



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www.exprealty.com

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REALTY

CalRe #02136640

Call Billy Ray today!

Poets: Read This

*The deadline date has been extended;
However, it is not open ended.
The City needs a new Poet Laureate today,
So send your app to the ACC without delay.*

INTERESTED candidates seeking to be the City's next Poet Laureate have until January 8th at 4 p.m. to submit an application. More info at: el-cerrito.org/poets.



OUTSIDE SCHOOL

■ Continued from page 5

work on social relationships. Children come to know and love the environment where they're spending time, exploring and discovering. They even spend about an hour a week volunteering by working to support the health of our Wildcat Creek watershed.

Some families whose children come to Outside School are part of their school district's independent studies programs, where they either attend classes in person (or virtually) on Mondays and Fridays, or complete their studies remotely. Other families choose to fill out a private school affidavit with the State of California, and pursue academics as they please. Either way, parents consistently report that their children are happier and healthier than they were in full-time traditional classrooms.

Heather Taylor even provides an email synopsis of each day's activities that includes photos. She also provides a private Google folder with all the photos she and the children take each day.

For more information, please visit outside.school.

Market Closed January 2nd
Reopens on January 6th

Farmers Market

AT EL CERRITO PLAZA

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

SPONSORED BY



El Cerrito
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Linking Business and Community Since 1936

El Cerrito Recreation Crab Feed
Saturday, March 9th, 6 p.m., at the Community Center
Tickets & Info: el-cerrito.org/crabfeed

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www.littlehillrealestate.com
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Contact the *Byline* at byline@elcerritochamber.org



New Officers, Directors, Staff as of Jan. 10th

President	Kevin O'Neal, Well Grounded Tea & Coffee Bar
Vice President	Robert Rogers, Supvr. John Gioia's office
Secretary	Aissia Ashoori, City of El Cerrito
Treasurer	Mark Figone, East Bay Sanitary Co., Inc
Directors	Evelyn Freitas, Guaranteed Rate Scott Harris, ClientClicks Internet Marketing Negar Souza, Red Oak Realty
Director, <i>Byline</i> Editor	John C. Stashik [there is one vacant director seat]
Manager	Georgina Edwards
<i>Byline</i> Correspondents	Catalina Hu Robert Rogers

**NEW YEAR
MEGA MIXER**
Monday, January 22
5:30-7:30 p.m.
La Strada Restaurant
2215 Church Lane (at San Pablo Ave.)
San Pablo
Appetizers • No-host Bar
FREE to Chamber members
RSVP: eventbrite.com
Info: admin@bayfrontchamber.com

LET'S DO LUNCH
Wednesday, January 24 • 11:30 a.m.



[Pairs well with a Margarita]

Los Moles Beer Garden
6120 Potrero Ave., El Cerrito
\$25 members, \$27 non members • Tickets: eventbrite.com

88th Annual Chamber Installation
This will occur at the Board of Directors meeting
by Zoom on January 10th starting at 9 a.m.
Get Zoom link from a.ashoori@elcerritochamber.org

Byline

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