



## From the President

KEVIN O'NEAL

VALENTINE'S DAY 2001 was the day I met my wife, Jen. On Valentine's Day, 2004 we opened Jenny K. Gifts in El Cerrito, then in September we married! Every year since then, we've celebrated Jenny K.'s anniversary with a Valentine making party. That's right, 20 years! So please come, we invite everyone to join us at 2 p.m. on February 10th to make some Valentines and share in the lovefest!

Valentine's Day has a special place in my heart as you might guess. It's a time when smitten children shyly hand a Valentine card to their crush at school. When young lovers plan a romantic evening. When friends let each other know just how much they mean to each other. When couples reminisce about their courtship. Lucky parents might even get a Valentine from their

■ See From the President, page 7

### RIBBON CUTTINGS

**Saturday, February 3rd  
10 a.m.**

**NitPixies**

**Organic Lice Removal**

11362 San Pablo Ave. • El Cerrito  
nitpixies.com



**Wednesday, February 28th  
10:30 a.m.**

**Yve's Dominican Salon**

10024 San Pablo Ave. • El Cerrito  
yvedomhairdesign@gmail.com

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## Introducing This Year's El Cerrito Mayor

BY ROBERT ROGERS

ADORING HER striking talents and leadership resumé, Tessa Rudnick's grandfather gleamed with pride—and ambition.

"We talked on the phone multiple times per week, and he would always start with the same question," Rudnick said, eyes flashing at the memory.

She took a breath and girded herself. She lowered her voice, inflected her pitch, and slowed her speech.

She channeled her grandpa's Czech accent. "When will you be Mayor?"



John C. Saahik

Rudnick would gently respond about the nuances of city government. But grandpa, a Holocaust survivor and lover of this country and its institutions, would not be placated.

His beloved Tessa *must* be Mayor. Not if, but when.

Jean Greenstein passed in 2018 at age 93, but he was with his granddaughter Tessa in spirit when she was sworn in as El Cerrito's Mayor.

The date was December 19, 2023.

"I only wish I could go back and tell him that date, the date I will be Mayor," she said.

During a brisk, wide-ranging discussion at the new, elegant Dolly's Tavern at 10172 San Pablo Ave., El Cer-

rity's newly-minted Mayor shared ambitions for her city, her career in government as both an elected official and administrator, and the personal history that drives her commitment to public service.

And she shared a morsel about her family's newest addition—an 8-pound rescue rabbit named Willow or "Big Willy." The husky bunny fits right in with her family, and the coterie of avuncular uncles and other characters adorning her family tree.

"I have a very eclectic family," she said with an impish grin.

Eclectic fits right in with El Cerrito, a diverse, vibrant city that Rudnick describes as a "culturally unique place that attracts a diversity of thought and perspective and care about community."

"So it's a small town but it's in the big, wider Bay Area," Rudnick said. "It feels really special to be part of what's going on here."

Rudnick was elected to the El Cerrito City Council in 2020, in the throes of the pandemic and a mounting fiscal crisis. She brought with her not only public administration expertise, but a key perspective—that of a mother with a young child who utilizes the city's public services.

She promptly got to work. She joined another freshly elected council member, Lisa Motoyama, to spearhead a budget subcommittee and dive into the thorny work of stabilizing the City budget.

Cuts had to be made. Nothing was sacred. The pain would be shared.

"We made a lot of hard decisions," Rudnick said. "And we are in a much healthier fiscal situation now."

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, whose west county district includes El Cerrito, praised Rudnick's compassion and competence.

"I've enjoyed working with Tessa on west county issues and know that she will be a great Mayor for El Cerrito," Gioia said. "She's smart, thoughtful, well-prepared

■ See Mayor Tessa Rudnick, page 4



## Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

**F**LOWERS, NOT FLOUR. That's the current exhibit at Elevation 66, the original, one and only brew pub in El Cerrito. Local artist Michelle B. Fillingim displays photographic prints of flowers printed on transparencies and attached to re-purposed wooden cutting boards. On the theater block near Rialto Cinemas Cerrito, the exhibit runs until March 30th.

□



**New!** After a total remodel, Tub Town is open at Conlon and San Pablo Ave., near the Red Onion. It's a state-of-the-art laundromat with all new equipment.

□

**Update.** A month ago it was mentioned that Sushi Matsu would do a brief closure in January to remodel the popular restaurant. That didn't happen yet. Owner Angie Yang says she is "still planning" and you know construction can be a slow process.

□

**Beware.** Chamber dues bills recently sent by email have a link to click for credit card payment. However, carefully read the instructions, as your credit card will apparently stay on file for automatic billing until your card expires. I received several calls about this from members. You can *always* pay by check.

□

**Common sense in Berkeley?** (Mooo.) A report from KTVU news last month reads, in part, as follows.

*The city of Berkeley lost its latest legal battle to enforce a ban on natural gas pipes in new construction.*

*...The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit denied Berkeley's petition for the court to re-hear the case after the*

## Location, Location, Location



In an extremely wise move, the El Cerrito City Council adopted a resolution authorizing the city manager to execute all required documents and agreements for the City to purchase the above church at 10936 San Pablo Avenue. This property occupies a parcel of land between the main fire station and the parking area where Kensington leases former Midtown Activity Center trailers. The appropriation is for \$1,604,631 from the general fund reserve balance. Suffice to say, this strategic purchase would never have been possible without the Herculean efforts of the city manager to rebuild a general fund running on fumes four years ago and the engagement of an enlightened city council. It's good to have money in the bank.

*ban was ruled illegal last year.*

*There was a sense of relief at La Marcha, a restaurant in Berkeley, as the staff cooks Spanish cuisine on all natural gas appliances after a federal appeals court refused to allow the city to enforce its first in the nation ban on installing natural gas appliances in new buildings.*

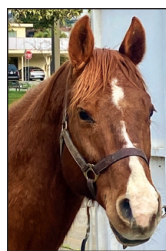
*"Surprised but really relieved," the restaurant's co-owner Emily Sarlatte.*

*She added she's concerned such a ban would eventually lead to prohibiting restaurants from cooking with natural gas appliances.*

*"Cook times would be a lot longer," Sarlatte said.*

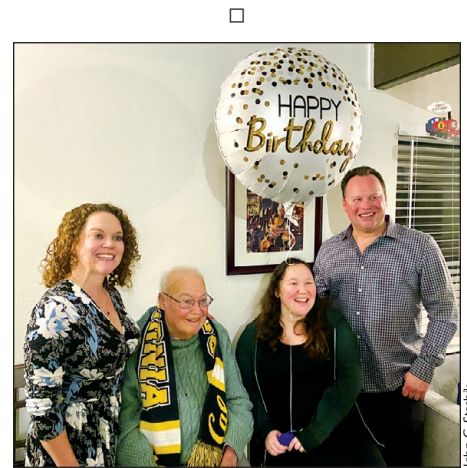
For what it's worth, I've not met one restaurant business owner in El Cerrito that thinks a ban on cooking with gas is a good idea.

□



John C. Stashik

**One of many** marchers in the 35th annual MLK day parade in El Cerrito on January 15th. It was so good to be walking the route again, on foot or hooves. 35 years is a major accomplishment.



**80 years.** That's the birthday milestone marked by Howard Abelson last month. Attorney, former El Cerrito mayor and council member, BART director, railfan, not to mention husband of dear departed longest serving El Cerrito council member, Janet. Shown above with proud daughters Ruthie and Sarah and son Joel.

□

**More about Ruthie.** The January 25, 2024, issue of *The Richmond Standard* has a story by Mike Kinney about Ruthie Abelson-Olivas. Headlined

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3



## PAST PREZ PALAVER

■ Continued from page 2

“Local Realtor’s success tied to legacy of public service” the story’s pull quote from Ruthie reads: “Sitting on the sidelines is not in my DNA.” So true! Find the article at [richmondstandard.com](http://richmondstandard.com).

□

“**Luck be a lady...**” The El Cerrito chapter of Soroptimist International will hold their Monte Carlo night on Saturday, March 16th, 7 to 10 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Church at 1 Lawson Road in Kensington. A \$75 ticket includes chips, a glass of wine or beer, and hors d’oeuvres. Blackjack, roulette, craps, poker, and a money wheel, with live music, magic, tarot card

readings and a silent auction. Hopefully, the musicians play “Viva Las Vegas.”

Proceeds from the event fund the local scholarships and service projects of the club. Buy tickets at this link: [auctria.events/SoroptimistMonteCarlo](http://auctria.events/SoroptimistMonteCarlo)

□

**Appreciation.** Soliciting gifts for the City of El Cerrito employees appreciation event held January 26th, for those *essential* folks that keep this town running, East Bay Sanitary Co., Inc., and Pastime Ace Hardware came through (as always) with great gifts. My own business, Premier Graphics, contributed to the cause too. We ♥ our City workers.

□

**Cops.** Recent news reports have mentioned the difficulty cities have in hiring police officers. Not enough people want to take the abuse dished out when working in that field. The city of Alameda is apparently offering a \$75,000 hiring bonus. Here in El Cerrito, we have close to full staff at ECPD without having the money for big bucks bonuses. Maybe there is something to be said for a city council that prioritizes public safety. Just a thought.

□

**See the note** on the back page from the Chamber president regarding your future *Byline* issues.

## Dolly's to Premiere El Cerrito's First Cheese Wheel Pasta

BY “DOLLY” BATATHOTA

I’VE ALWAYS been passionate about authentic Italian cuisine, my cousins are half Italian and I grew up with them eating pasta made from scratch by my aunty Elizabetha, and I wanted to introduce something unique to the community. Cheese wheel pasta, or “cacio e pepe,” is a classic Roman dish, and I thought El Cerritans would love the experience of watching their pasta tossed in a giant wheel of Parmesano Reggiano.



It’s an interactive and visually stunning experience that we believe will resonate with our patrons. Our pasta is made using traditional techniques, and the star of the show is the Parmesano Reggiano cheese. We import it directly from Italy to ensure the authentic flavor and texture.

The combination of quality ingredients and the theatrical presentation creates a dining experience like no other. Authenticity of the importing specific ingredients and maintaining consistency have been challenges, but I believe it’s crucial to stay true to the traditional recipe. It took time to find reliable suppliers, but the effort has been well worth it for the positive feedback we’ve received. A little taste of Roman culture right here in El Cerrito.

The cheese wheel pasta experience is not just a meal; it’s a celebration of food, community, and the joy of discovering something extraordinary in your own backyard.

I look forward to welcoming more people to Dolly’s for an authentic Italian culinary experience. *Buon appetito!*



Spaghetti Meat Balls  
Crab and Shrimp Ravioli  
Fettuccine with Smoked Salmon

# Dolly's

*Fine Wines & Italian Bites*

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Open every day 11:30 until 9  
[dollystavern.com](http://dollystavern.com)

## MAYOR TESSA RUDNICK

■ Continued from page 1

and works to build coalitions to solve the challenging issues we face.”

Rudnick describes herself as a “Bay-coastal native,” having grown up in Berkeley and San Francisco. She holds a master’s degree in public administration and works for a city in Marin County.

Rudnick jauntily chirped her goals for her mayoral term while sipping a cup of water at Dolly’s, the natural light beaming across a marble countertop.

Energized by a morning workout at Plank+Power, a local Pilates studio, Rudnick noted her four highest priorities:

- Execute the City’s strategic plan in continuity with Motoyama, her Mayoral predecessor.
- Advance the biannual budget process.
- Update the City’s Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.
- Enhance city safety, particularly with respect to crime, fire, and large-scale disaster readiness.

While those headline the priority list, Rudnick noted other key areas where she hopes to help the City improve during her term.

She’s passionate about library services, calling librarians “the first responders of information” in the 21st century and pledging to find resources to support a new local facility. Fiscal responsibility, a budget cushion, and ongoing budget sustainability are vital. She is also intent on reducing crime



Big Willy

and supporting a police department of which she is proud.

“The culture among our peace officers is excellent,” she said.

Continuing El Cerrito’s impressive run of developing mixed-income housing is also a priority, as is supporting the City’s dynamic business community.



The Mayor and her colleagues participated in the 35th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. parade in El Cerrito on January 15th. From left, council member Lisa Motoyama, Mayor Rudnick, council member Gabe Quinto, Mayor Pro-Tem Carolyn Wysinger, and council member Paul Fadelli.

“For us in El Cerrito, affordable housing is not a dirty word,” she said. “We need to continue to welcome more housing and more residents to support more business, and we need to work to foster a ‘shop local’ culture that keeps more of our dollars in our City.”

Rudnick credits the late Janet Abelson as one of her political mentors. She said Abelson was one of the City’s most influential leaders of the last 25 years and “shaped our city’s policies around housing, transit, accessibility, and inclusion.”

Rudnick brings additional gravitas to the Mayoral seat by virtue of her participation on a number of local, state, and regional entities.

Rudnick also serves as Vice Chair the Public Safety Policy Committee for the League of California Cities, is Chair for RecycleMore, and is East Bay Chair of the Bay Area Network of Jewish Elected Officials (BANJO).

In 2019, Rudnick participated in a year-long cohort in the Government Alliance on Race and Equality (GARE) program, where she worked to develop policies and practices around equity and inclusivity in local government.

Asked about her toughest moment in public service, Rudnick drew a deep breath and turned pensive. Her silver necklaces—one a Tree of Life and the

other a Hamsa pendant representing protection—dangled gently against her black and white shirt.

“It was the death of Jerrick Bernstein,” she said, referring to the young El Cerrito police officer killed in an off-duty traffic accident in 2022.

“A few months before (his death), during his badge pinning ceremony, I walked out at the same time as his parents and his dad jokingly said to me ‘keep my son safe.’”

Rudnick paused, then continued:

“A few months later, watching Police Chief Paul Keith giving the badge back to Jerrick’s father (after his death)...it was a profound, life-changing moment for me. Being there for his family...”

Her voice trailed off. Then she snapped back.

“He was an outstanding officer.”

Both personally and professionally, Rudnick balances being mindful of the past and focused on the future.

She’s versed in El Cerrito history, thanks in part to her work with the late, great Janet Abelson, and clear-eyed about what lays ahead.

“Our City—and that includes everyone, businesses, schools, the public sector, all of us—has a bright future,” Rudnick said. “And I am excited to be a part of it.”



# Chicken and Waffle: One of Many Fatapple's Classics

BY ANDREW MELENDEZ

EL CERRITO'S official gathering place has long been on Upper Fairmount Avenue at Fatapple's Restaurant & Bakery. Mornings are always a special time at Fatapple's.

From the moment doors open at 6:30 a.m., visitors are welcomed to a cozy and inviting atmosphere that represents the best of El Cerrito. Whether it's the sincere friendliness of the staff, the tantalizing selection of bakery goods and meals, or the joyous chatter of local residents, there is a unique charm to Fatapple's.

Today's review, the Chicken and Waffle meal, consisted of four warm slices of their famous buttermilk waffle and thick chicken tender slices, paired with 100% pure maple syrup and tangy buffalo sauce. Each of these ingredients came together in a perfect blend of sweet and savory flavors, with each bite introducing a new combination of tastes that were both exciting and satisfying.

What distinguished Fatapple's from similar meals, however, was the superb quality of their buttermilk waffles, which boasted a soft texture that melted right into my mouth.

Fatapple's is not just a restaurant; it's a haven where culinary artistry meets community spirit. Breakfast, lunch, or dinner, Fatapple's is the go-to spot for great food and the warm ambiance of El Cerrito pride.



Fatapple's Chicken and Waffle



7525 Fairmount Ave., El Cerrito  
Open Daily 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
510-528-3433  
[fatapplesrestaurant.com](http://fatapplesrestaurant.com)



Clockwise from far left: Fieldwork Beer on tap, delicious pizzas, Sunday morning music, and classic cheeseburgers (in Paradise). Plus big screen sports and always the Bob Ross channel!







A builder and businessman, Elmer Freethy was also a member of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Posse.

## New School Open



The new building is opposite Fairmont School

**L**ITTLE LAMB Bilingual Pre-school offers a Mandarin Chinese-immersion program focused on play-based learning in our new campus at 729 Kearney Street in El Cerrito.

## A Conversation with Jack Freethy

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

**T**HE ANNUAL meeting of the El Cerrito Historical Society will be highlighted by a conversation with Jack Freethy. The event will occur on Thursday, February 8th, at 7 p.m. in the Hana Gardens community room next to El Cerrito City Hall. There is no charge and is open to all.

Well known throughout the city, Jack Freethy is a contractor, businessman, Rotarian, and author of a memoir. His father, Elmer Freethy, was one

of El Cerrito's great builders in the mid- and late 20th century. Elmer constructed such structures as the old high school, police station, and many fine homes, while owning El Cerrito Mill & Lumber.

The Historical Society is seeking new members who have an interest in local history. Dues are a modest \$30 per year. For more information contact David Weinstein: [davidsweinstein@yahoo.com](mailto:davidsweinstein@yahoo.com).



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*Jenny K.*

EVENT No. 2

### Happy Galentine's Day

Celebrate your gal's with our Super Bowl Party  
Sunday, February 11th • 2-5 p.m.

Fairy Hair Appointments with the Very-Fairy Manda, plus special discounts, spin our prize wheel, fun *super* party foods, swag bags!  
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*Jenny K.*

EVENT No. 1

**20th Anniversary Celebration**  
Saturday, February 10th • 2-4 p.m.

Join the Celebration with our Annual Valentine Making Party. Door prizes, treats, and fun!

6921 Stockton Ave., El Cerrito

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

kids! This year I encourage everyone to embrace the spirit of this holiday and let the people in your life know that you love them.

February is also Black History Month and we are blessed to live in a region rich in Black History. This past October I was honored to attend a luncheon held by our local NAACP Branch entitled "Freedom: The Struggle Continues." It was incredibly moving to hear stories told by a number of the speakers, which vividly described a time when they were young and their parents moved to this area to set down their roots.

Education was repeatedly mentioned as a motivation of their parents to move here, and it was stunning to hear one woman tell how she, at age five, desegregated Madera Elementary School! It's testament to the determination of past generations that such a concept of segregation seems utterly alien today. But it was real, and despite notable success stories shared on that stage, the struggle does continue!

What can we do today to carry the torch? We do whatever is in our power to do, in our hiring practices, in our vendor relationships and in our interactions with our customers. Because we are all in this together.

To honor the Black-owned and Black-led businesses we are fortunate to have here in El Cerrito, a Chamber created a directory page on our website: [elcerritochamber.org/black-owned-business](http://elcerritochamber.org/black-owned-business)

Each one has a story, and each has contributed to the richness of our community. I hope we can eventually do a profile on everyone, but this is a start. We want it to grow, so please take a look and use the link on the page to suggest more that we should add. Be sure to also show some love by visiting these businesses!

# Farmers Market

AT EL CERRITO PLAZA

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

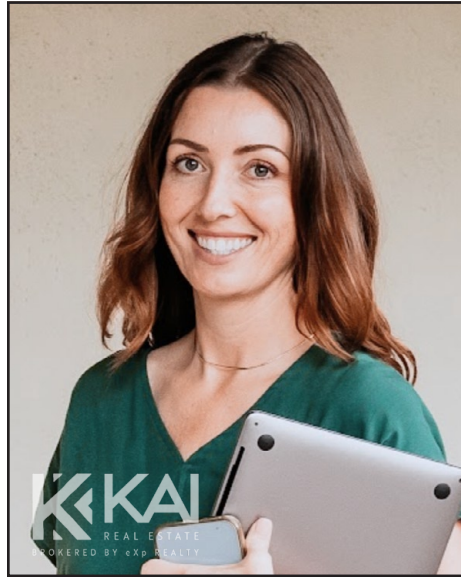
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Tickets & Info: [el-cerrito.org/crabfeed](http://el-cerrito.org/crabfeed)



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- [there is one vacant director seat]
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- Robert Rogers

**To Our Readers**

Posted as submitted and instructed by Chamber President Kevin O’Neal

***Byline* Print Newsletter Home (or Office) Delivery Confirm by March 15, 2024**

DO YOU ENJOY the convenience and ease of reading our high quality print *Byline*? All Chamber members (associate and regular) receive the full color, high quality print *Byline* delivered to their mailbox on the first of every month.

Our digital *Byline* is always available on our website in .pdf format, in case you’d like to revisit favorite articles or share it with others. Go to [elcerritochamber.org/byline](http://elcerritochamber.org/byline).

If you’re a community member or yet-to-become Chamber member organization, ensure you subscribe to the *Byline* by March 15, 2024, to continue receiving the print *Byline* at your home (or office) for the April 2024 issue. Questions? Contact: [info@elcerritochamber.org](mailto:info@elcerritochamber.org).

Your subscription (or Chamber membership) helps ensure our Chamber thrives to serve our wonderful El Cerrito community. To subscribe: [elcerritochamber.org/byline](http://elcerritochamber.org/byline).



**Some Local Places to Watch the Game**  
Sunday, Feb. 11th from Las Vegas, 3:30 p.m.

- 514 Lounge 11236 San Pablo Ave., EC
- Dolly’s 10172 San Pablo Ave., EC
- Elevation 66 Brewing Co. 10082 San Pablo Ave., EC
- Fatapple’s Restaurant & Bakery 7525 Fairmount Ave., EC
- Los Moles Beer Garden 6120 Potrero Ave., EC
- McBears Social Club 10458 San Pablo Ave., EC
- Super Slice Pizza 10180 San Pablo Ave., EC

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