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A chilly day at the Orinda Farmers' Market in front of the Orinda Community Park in Orinda Village.

Photo Jeff Heyman

# Local farmers' markets offer food and fun, rain or shine

By Jeff Heyman

Recent blustery weather didn't deter eager shoppers of all ages from indulging their culinary curiosity to peruse the bountiful fresh and often organic goods on offer at both the Orinda and Moraga farmers' markets. A weekend morning tradition for not only Lamorindans, but for folks from far and wide, the Moraga Farmers' Market features over 40 farmers and vendors on Sundays in Moraga from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Moraga Shopping Center at Moraga Road and Moraga Way. The Orinda Farmers' Market is open every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. -- rain or shine -- set in the historic heart of Orinda Village.

With more than 15 vendors, and live music to boot, the range of products is impressive. From seasonal produce and fresh meats, seafood, and cheese, to local

honey, olive oil, vinegar and homemade jam, and, of course, baked goods, there is really something for everyone at the Orinda Farmers' Market. And if all those gastronomic goodies make you hungry, you can choose some munchies, or a full lunch, from one of the vendors or food trucks on site. Tamales, crepes, dumplings and much more are all made fresh on the spot to quell that yearning for a tasty treat.

A visit to the Orinda Farmers' Market is a perfect family outing. The information booth often provides fun activities for kids, not to mention a wealth of information on the farmers at the market and the locally-sourced produce on hand each week.

Find out more about the Orinda Farmers' Market at <http://www.cccfm.org/> and Moraga Farmers' Market at [www.cafarmersmkt.com/moraga-farmers-market](http://www.cafarmersmkt.com/moraga-farmers-market).

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# Contra Costa County only system in Bay Area with no libraries open on Sundays

By Sora O'Doherty



The Orinda Library

Photo Sora O'Doherty

Contra Costa is the only county of the nine Bay Area counties whose libraries are closed on Sundays. Long time library supporter Carol W. Brown says that Orinda has enough funding to have the Orinda library

open every Sunday afternoon, but the county won't allow the library to open because they think that it is inequitable to allow cities that can afford to pay to have their libraries open when others cannot.

Historically, nine Contra Costa County libraries, including Orinda and Lafayette, had Sunday opening hours before the pandemic. At that time, Orinda used funds from Measure L, a library bond passed in 2000, to supplement the county-provided hours to assure that Orinda Library would be open 60 hours per week, including Sundays. Orinda voters also passed Measure J in 2018, an extension of the parcel tax passed in 2008, with the promise of maintaining library hours and services.

During lockdown, all the libraries were closed for in-person use, then reopened gradually, starting with grab-and-go services, and then reopening fully, except for Sundays. It should be noted that the nine libraries are not open the same days or number of hours per week, but none are currently open on Sundays.

According to Brooke Converse, Public Information Officer of the Contra Costa Library system, there are a number of factors that prevent Contra Costa County from offering Sunday hours. Chief among them is the union contract with library staff that prevents them from being required to work on Sundays. And, although there are staff members who would be willing

to work Sundays, Converse says that it was an administrative problem trying to fill Sunday hours with library staff, both in terms of administrative time and stress.

Converse provided some numbers in support of her contention. At one time, she said, there were 30 permanent intermittent staff (PIs) who could be required to work on 11 Sundays per year. However, there were 1,728 Sunday shifts, with some holidays included. 330 shifts were required to be filled by PIs, and the rest were filled by staff who volunteered to work Sundays.

The biggest hurdle to more library opening time is funding, and Converse points out that the Contra Costa County Library is funded at a significantly lower level than any of the other eight Bay Area counties. Contra Costa County libraries are funded solely from property tax, of which they receive 1.5%. The library does not receive any general fund monies from the County. The Library's budget for FY23-24 is \$41.3 million, which is less than 1% of the County's entire budget.

A survey of the other eight counties in the Bay Area revealed that they all have libraries that are open on Sundays, some for half days, some for even longer hours. Most county library systems receive funds in addition to property tax allocations.

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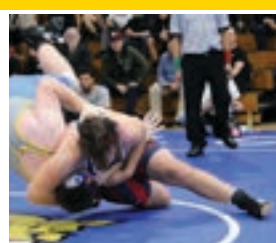
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**Chamber of Commerce:**  
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**Lafayette Public Meetings  
 City Council**

Regular Meeting: Monday, Jan. 22, 7 p.m.  
 Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall

**Planning Commission Meeting**

Tuesday, Feb 5, 7 p.m.  
 Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall

**Design Review**

Monday, Jan. 22, 7 p.m.  
 Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Arts & Science Discovery Room

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COMPASS

**Replacement process begins for Council Member Teresa Gerringer**

By Lou Fancher

Lafayette City Council Member Teresa Gerringer, who has served the residents of Lafayette for nearly 23 years – having been for more than a decade an elected member of the Lafayette School District Governing Board and for the last five years, a member of the Lafayette City Council – recently announced her resignation from her position effective Jan. 23.

In her Dec. 15 resignation letter, Gerringer thanked the residents of Lafayette “for allowing me to represent and work with them, my colleagues on the Council, the excellent Lafayette City staff, the business community, the schools, students, parents, and teachers, and the many committed

volunteers and community organizations, all who work together to protect and enhance the quality of life in Lafayette.”

Gerringer joined the council in 2018 and her term is not scheduled to expire until December of 2026. State law designates that the council must fill the seat within 60 days of her official resignation. The individual appointed by the council to replace Gerringer will serve only until the next municipal election is held. That election occurs in November of the current year.

City attorney Mala Subramanian at the Jan. 8 council meeting said the November election would therefore include three open positions with four-

year terms and one seat that will consist of the remaining two years of Gerringer’s term.

In 2019, the council adopted detailed policies for filling vacancies that provides for the announcement of an open position, direction to the city clerk to advertise the position for a period of no more than two weeks, and interviews scheduled upon acceptance of applications that begin with the mayor and vice mayor meeting in advance to prepare draft questions, which would be considered by the entire council at the public meeting on Jan. 26.

Council Member Susan Candell asked about the process used in the past to address filling po-

sitions between elections and recalled having advance questions submitted by all members of the council, not just the mayor and vice mayor. Subramanian said that to avoid a violation of the Brown Act – the California law passed in 1953 that guarantees the public’s right to attend and participate in meetings of local legislative bodies, such as the city council – an ad hoc “committee” of two council members would provide the full council a drafted list of questions for consideration. The council would discuss and modify the list at a meeting open to the public.

Council Member Carl Anduri verified whether or not the process

adopted in 2019 meant the advertising had to be available for two weeks, or simply any number of days set by council up to two weeks. Having confirmation from the city clerk the advertising could begin as early as the next day, Jan. 9, Anduri suggested an expedited schedule that had the candidate application window closing at 8 a.m. on Jan. 25. The interviews would be scheduled for Jan. 29 and if second interviews are necessary, on Jan. 31.

Mayor Gina Dawson, receiving no in-person or online public comments requests, returned the discussion to the council for final consideration and a vote.

Council Member We-

Tai Kwok agreed that the buffer period provided by Gerringer’s announcement in December had received wide coverage in the press and on social media. The public, Kwok said, was well aware of her pending departure and a month’s “head start” on the official replacement process was sufficient.

With no further discussion, the council reiterated the schedule as proposed by Anduri and approved the process used in the past, with the full council considering the list of questions one hour prior to the first interview on Jan. 29. The calendar and process received unanimous approval from council members.

**Lafayette Chamber names Hollie Lucas-Alcalay Business Person of the Year**

By Sharon K. Sobotta

On a rainy, cold Saturday morning in downtown Lafayette, Hollie Lucas-Alcalay’s shop –Hollie’s Homegrown – is warm and cozy as a handful of new customers trickle in and check out the wine and cheese sampling menus and the freshly made products throughout the store and return customers replenish their seasoning salt supply. In

the background, Lucas-Alcalay and her colleague are making rose geranium based essential oils, herb infused honey and flavored sugar.

“I have a small herb farm in Moraga and I grow a lot of culinary and medicinal herbs and body products. Almost every day we’re making. In addition to my things, we have over 30 local ar-

tisans here with candles, jewelry, textiles, books and a rotation of featured wall artists,” Lucas-Alcalay explains while giving an overview of what her store has to offer. “You can also have tea here or come in on Friday, Saturday or Sunday for fresh focaccia bread made by an Italian Moraga family and do an olive oil or honey tasting.

We offer local chocolates, cookies and other goodies on dessert platters and cheese tastings.”

It’s perhaps her heartfelt personal backstory, paired with creativity, a desire to create special, memorable experiences for customers and a product line that meets customer needs that earned Hollie Lucas-Alcalay the title of Lafayette Business Person of the Year.

Lucas-Alcalay helped her dad, a longtime grape grower, open two tasting rooms 25 years ago and says that’s how she modeled her store, with the



Hollie Lucas-Alcalay in her store Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

idea of supporting local agriculture. She says her little corner shop offers people a little reprieve or mini-outing for those who simply don’t want to

go to Napa. Those looking to indulge in some self-care can try out Lucas-Alcalay’s handcrafted herb infused skin care products or care for sore muscles, a skin rash or even irritated skin of a pet.

“The common thread of all of this is my wholehearted belief that it’s really important that we support a local, creative economy. Without having a platform for makers and growers and crafters or a place to sell all of this, we lose it,” Lucas-Alcalay says. “I remember noticing the abundance of things being imported from non-local or intercontinental sources. The environmentalist in me couldn’t help thinking about the carbon footprint. I’m not naive to think that we’re taking over Amazon. All I’m asking is maybe every 10th purchase people consider making a purchase with us and their money can go back to the community.”

Before starting her own business in the center of downtown Lafayette, Lucas-Alcalay had a multipage resume which included working in politics on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., doing environmental, health-care advocacy and conservation work, serving as the director of communications for an environmental agency and working in her family’s wine business.

... continued on Page 3

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**Lafayette City Council Seeks Applicants for Vacancy on the City Council**

The Lafayette City Council seeks qualified applicants to fill Councilmember Teresa Gerringer’s seat. The temporary appointment will commence immediately and end November 2024. For application and additional information visit the city’s website:

[www.lovelafayette.org/councilvacancy](http://www.lovelafayette.org/councilvacancy)

Applicants must be a resident of the City of Lafayette and registered to vote. Applicants will be interviewed on Monday, January 29th and Wednesday January 31st (if necessary).

The application form is available on the City’s website at [www.lovelafayette.org/councilvacancy](http://www.lovelafayette.org/councilvacancy).

Applications must be received by 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, January 25, 2024. Applicants may submit their application via e-mail at [jrobbins@lovelafayette.org](mailto:jrobbins@lovelafayette.org), mail or in-person at 3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd., #210, Lafayette, CA 94549.

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# Libraries hope therapy dogs can help reading take root in young readers

By David Scholz



Photo David Scholz

**Luca Akjeje, 9, reads as he pets Breeja, a labrador with the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, as part of the Lafayette Library's Read to a Dog program.**

Luca Akjeje settled in next to Breeja. After collecting a graphic novel from nearby offerings, Luca commenced reading, laying a hand on the labrador's soft, white coat.

The experience for the 9-year-old youth in a back nook of the Lafayette Library children's area epitomized the goal of the "Read to a Dog" program. "It's about capturing young readers and enriching young minds," said Library manager Rob Tygett.

With handler Carey Carpenter of Lafayette sitting nearby, Breeja, also 9 years old, laid down her head and found eternal bliss in the moment as well. Carpenter brings in two therapy dogs known for their calm demeanor, on behalf of the Alliance of Therapy Dogs.

As Luca became more engrossed in his selection, Breeja came less the center of the encounter. Luca's grandmother, Susan Sisco, who brought Luca over the hill from Martinez, was thoroughly enjoying the comfort of the dog's presence too. "The dog is nonjudgmental and not telling (anyone) what to do," said Sisco. "It's a chance to relax, be a kid and read a book with a dog."

Sitting nearby, Sawyer Griggs, 8, of Lafayette, reacted as only a kid would. "I think it's pretty cool," she said.

Her caregiver, Kirsten Scheepers, called it "a great idea" for the "soothing and peaceful" experience it creates for youngsters as they enjoy reading a book.

Reading for some youngsters is as easy as rolling out of bed in the

how it was happening in Pleasanton and made the trek down I-680 to check out how it worked. Sixteen years later, she hasn't looked back and continues to make dogs a regular presence, much to the joy of young and old patrons alike.

For some who are reluctant, reading to the dog breaks the ice. And for the more competent readers, they just like hanging out with the dogs.

Learning to read is a lot about practice, and Look noted that depending on what one is reading and the reason why they are reading something can make it a task that is not fun. "And reading to a dog is a little more fun," she said. "(It's) a little out of the ordinary and it becomes a little more interesting."

Alle Porter, the children's librarian at Lafayette since December 2019, inherited the program and has kept it going, even during the pandemic when she recalled a youngster regularly read to a dog via Zoom.

Very relieved to have the in-person experience back, she echoed the values and virtues of the program expressed by her Orinda colleague.

"The dogs are non-judgmental," said Porter. "If a child skips a word, no worry, they are happy to be there."

"The dogs bring a calmness to the environment," she continued.

In turn, for the children, the experience of reading and greater proficiency with skill "builds their confidence; You see the results carrying over to school," Porter added.

Looking ahead, Porter anticipates scheduling dogs at the branch during the summer break to bridge the gap and curb the summer slide parents dread. "Reading to a dog is a good break," said Look, who observed how area youngsters are under a lot of pressure to achieve and succeed. "If you don't have to perform, you can just enjoy reading the book or the dog, and that is the best of both worlds."

For more information about the reading with dogs activities, and to register online, visit local branch calendars at [www.ccclib.org](http://www.ccclib.org).

morning; it's a skill that comes naturally. For others, though, it is a frustrating grind, full of starts, stops, and misfires. The greater one is engaged in the reading process, the more opportunities can be for this important life skill to take root. To that point, libraries around Contra Costa County are increasingly tapping into the calming presence of therapy dogs to help bridge that literacy gap.

Area branches, including the one in neighboring Orinda, which also brings in the therapy dogs, have long seized on the power of the pooch in creating a welcoming environment for readers of all skill levels to find reading a fun, relaxing and rewarding pastime.

Lafayette's Read to a Dog program offers 15-minute sessions on Jan. 23 and 30, from 3 to 4 p.m., and 15-minute sessions from 2 to 3 p.m. on the Jan. 24 and 31. Times can be booked online. With no-shows a possibility, there might be times available for families who decide to drop into the branches to check out the program.

Orinda's Paws to Read, offering 15-minute reading sessions from 4 to 5 p.m. on Thursdays, Jan. 18 and 25, and Feb. 1 and 8, is coinciding with the current county-wide Community Reads for Kids activities related to the book, "Dogtown," by Katherine Applegate and Gennifer Choldenko.

Starting in 2006, Orinda was the first library in the county to introduce the activity. Lin Look, the branch's children's librarian since 2000 and dog lover herself, was intrigued by the concept after hearing

## Business Person of the Year

... continued from Page 2

Ultimately, it was her desire to do work that allowed her to be with her kids and turn her passion into a sustainable business that drove her.

"I absolutely love doing this work, but the goal was always to make money comparable to what I made. It wasn't optional. I had two kids and there wasn't an alternative," Lucas-Alcalay says. "It was hard to be 42 and have people pat me on the head and say this was cute (when it was my career)."

Even though Lucas-Alcalay's business is doing well as a local fixture now, she endured some growing pains and learned some important lessons along the way. Her first year in business, she recalls selling or trying to sell 11 varieties of basil. "It was my dream garden, but people didn't know how to do anything with it and they didn't buy it," Lucas-Alcalay recalls. Feeling somewhat defeated, she talked with

a marketing manager who suggested she bring out her dehydrated herbs and put them in a mason jar with a bow on top for the holiday season. "I sold out in two weeks. That's how I found the 'business' in my business."

Lucas-Alcalay took it one step further to develop one of her most popular products. "I realized people wanted shortcuts. I started experimenting with the herbs from my garden and combining them with locally sourced salt to create seasoning salt to figure out how to make them taste good. People love that."

Lucas-Alcalay expressed gratitude for the Lafayette Chamber's recognition of her as the Business Person of the Year, and hopes that this will inspire community members to consider shopping locally.

Ben Canady is a repeat seasoning salt customer who stopped in the store to replenish his supply of rancho Moraga,

flakey sea salt and lemon basil seasoning salts. "I love this," Canady says. "I think there should be more places like this."

Siv Ricketts has worked at Hollie's Homegrown since August 2022. "I love that Hollie's has local, organic, sustainable and mostly consumable products. The things that aren't consumable are beautiful. I love working here and interfacing with the community," Ricketts says. "It's so well deserved that Hollie is the Business Person of the Year, but she's doing good for the community. I tell people that what you buy here is supporting local people, but it's a gift you can feel good about because someone's creativity has gone into that product."

Hollie Lucas-Alcalay will be honored at a special dinner Feb. 1 at the Lafayette Park Hotel. The evening will include a State of the City address by incoming Lafayette Mayor Gina Dawson. For tickets or more information, visit [lafayettechamber.org](http://lafayettechamber.org).

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Phone: (925) 888-7022  
**Chamber of Commerce:**  
www.moragachamber.org  
**Moraga Citizens' Network:**  
www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

### Town Council

Wed., Jan. 24, 6:30 p.m.  
Wed., Feb. 14, 6:30 p.m.  
**Planning Commission:**  
Tuesday, Feb. 6, 6:30 p.m.  
**Park and Recreation Commission:**  
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# Local businesses continue to struggle post-pandemic

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

**Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe closed on Dec. 31 after over 30 years in business.**

Many local businesses began to experience a decline in foot traffic when the pandemic first struck the U.S. in 2020, which is understandable and obvious. However, much of the shopping public has gotten used to making purchases online, causing a stagnation in recovery for local retail.

Case in point, Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe, a staple in town for over 30 years, closed its doors for good on Dec. 31. According to Moraga Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Katie Bidstrup, "We're all busy in our lives, but shopping local is important. The Cham-

ber is trying to remind residents how important it is. The convenience of having things delivered to your door is wonderful, but it's not helping locals."

Bidstrup spoke with several of Moraga's business owners asking them what they'd like residents to know about their post-COVID comeback and the struggles they still face. Moraga Cleaners Owner/Operator Debra Le said that up to 60% of her business has returned from COVID. People are going back to work, but they are dressing more casually which often doesn't require dry

cleaning. There was an uptick in business during the holidays, because more people were willing to go to parties that required "dressing up." Le wants people to think about using Moraga Cleaners for their household needs such as sleeping bags, bedding or curtains. She has no idea what the next 2 to 5 years will bring, but regrettably she will have to raise her prices to make up for the loss in patronage.

Not having any pre-COVID experience in town, the owner of Jang Acupuncture, Andrea Jang, took a daring leap of faith in 2020 by opening her Moraga business in the middle of the pandemic. Once she was able to safely treat her clientele, "people thanked me for being here locally. Acupuncture has never been better in Moraga. People seem so grateful to have wellness service in town, because they used to commute [to] other locations." In fact, her personal success story has encouraged Jang to open Higher Ground Wellness Center with a scheduled grand opening on Jan. 18

in Moraga.

The owner of an auto repair shop in town told Bidstrup that "revenues are about the same, but the net is not. There's only so much you can pass on to the consumers when your stock's prices have risen, and in order to retain your staff you have to deal with payroll increases." He mentioned knowing that several businesses have had to shorten their hours, because they are short-staffed.

According to Bidstrup, many of the town's restaurants continue to struggle, and anyone who does the family grocery shopping will attest that food prices have skyrocketed to unreasonable heights. Restaurants are loathe to raise their prices, but find themselves in a Catch-22 situation.

One business owner in Moraga expressed how difficult it is to hire and keep workers. Potential employees come to town in the middle of the day for an interview and assume that traffic is basically non-existent. These workers typically come from outside the town

limits and are shocked when they are stuck in rush hour congestion trying to get to the freeway. Even though they love the town, the length of time spent in traffic, especially the Moraga through Lafayette corridor, is a game-changer.

Some retailers have difficulty keeping employees aged 18 and older, so in order to stay in business have begun hiring 16-year-olds (which is legal, depending on the task). "There are always new laws that consumers never hear about, but affect how a business operates in the form of expenses," stated Bidstrup. She cited the new Paid Sick Leave law which, as of Jan. 1, requires that employers must generally provide 5 days or 40 hours of sick leave per year to their employees in California.

Bidstrup wants to remind shoppers to think outside the box "if you want something done by one of our businesses that's out of the norm; just ask them. You'd be surprised at what additional services they can offer that you're not aware of."

# Authentic Mexican taqueria comes to Rheem

By Vera Kochan

The new La Chamba Taqueria, located at 484 Center Street in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center of Moraga, doesn't just bill itself as "authentic Mexican cuisine" without backing up the claim. All of the recipes were handed down to owner Ben Rojas from his Mexican-born mom.

Rojas, his wife Kelly and kids Sam (11) and Lily (9), moved to Moraga in 2018 from San Francisco. He had a dream of opening "a no fuss place for people to get a good meal." And, recalling the laid-back taquerias in Mexico, "I wanted to

bring this type of food to Moraga using authentic recipes that came from my family. I'm big on food and wine, and I wanted to try something that would connect me to my culture."

As a young woman, Rojas' mother had every intention of becoming a nun in the Catholic church. The order she belonged to expected their novices to develop a skill that would be useful within their convent. She was put through a culinary program just before she was to take her vows, and while on a contemplative break, decided to leave the order and get married. Sadly, both of Rojas' parents died in their 30s, but her creative recipes are lovingly kept by his brother in a large folder.

Rojas, in real estate by trade, admits to being a good cook, but leaves those duties to his restaurant staff. His son wants to work at La Chamba as soon as he's legally allowed. "You

should never work in the restaurant business unless you want to provide something special for the community," he stated. "And it's important for the community to support local business."

The restaurant's name, "La Chamba," is slang for "the job" or "work," but Rojas explained that when you find a job and the experience becomes good, it becomes your passion. "It's your gig. It's what you do. That's your jam."

Their website states: "We want our customers to feel like they are part of our family when they dine with us. That's why we've created a warm and inviting atmosphere that is perfect for family dinners, date nights and everything in between."

La Chamba's décor includes bright white and soft blue walls, chrome countertops, and red chairs that complement the 1930/40s-era antique taqueria tables from Mexico. Customers



La Chamba Taqueria's cheerful interior Photo Vera Kochan

can watch the finishing touches being applied to their orders through the glass preparation counter. "It's kind of like dinner theatre," joked Rojas, before proudly stating, "Everything [the salsas, guacamole, handmade tortillas, etc.] is made fresh in the morning."

The eatery's No. 1 seller is the carne asada, with Baja fish and pollo asado coming in second and third respectively. Also on the menu are tacos, burritos, nachos, flautas, ensaladas, quesadillas and birria Jalisco-style (a meat

stew). They've already had positive feedback that their food tastes like authentic taqueria fare. Mexican sodas, draft beer, and wine by the glass are also available. Shrimp has recently been added to the menu, and there are vegetarian options with no added animal fats.

La Chamba Taqueria is open Monday through Saturday from noon to 8 p.m. Closed on Sundays. They also cater. For more information visit their website: LaChambaTaqueria.com or call (925) 592-0964.

## Public Safety

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Police Dispatch: 24 Hours  
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Nixle: Text your zip code to 888777 or www.nixle.com  
**Lafayette Police Department:**  
3471 Mt. Diablo Blvd.  
925-283-3680  
Chief of Police, Ben Alldritt  
925-299-3221  
Police Department Tip Line  
94549Tip@gmail.com  
Police Department Traffic Issues  
94549Traffic@gmail.com  
**Moraga Police Department:**  
329 Rheem Blvd., 925-888-7055  
Chief of Police, Jon King ext. 7049  
**Orinda Police Department:**  
22 Orinda Way 925-254-6820  
Chief of Police, Ryan Sullivan  
925-254-6820  
Orindatip@cityoforinda.org

**Lafayette Police Department Incident Summary Report Dec. 24 - Jan. 6**



Alarms	47
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	18
Traffic	69
Suspicious Circumstances	8
Suspicious Subject	11
Suspicious Vehicle	8
Service to Citizen	14
Patrol Req./Security Check	4
Public/School Assembly Check	0
Supplemental Report	9
Vacation House Check	55
Welfare Check	8
Ordinance Violation	1
<b>Vehicle violations</b>	
Auto Burglary	
1100 Block Loveland Dr.	
Hit And Run Misdemeanor	
3300 Block Springhill Rd.	
Reckless Driving	
Glenside Dr./St Marys Rd.	
Reliez Station Rd./Richelle Ct.	
Moraga Rd./Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
Tc - Property Damage	
Reliez Station Rd./Glenside Dr.	
Mt. Diablo Blvd./Golden Gate Way	
Pleasant Hill Rd./Acalanes Ave.	
Moraga Rd./School St.	
Vehicle Theft	
200 Block Lafayette Cir.	
<b>Other criminal activity</b>	
Fraud False Pretenses	
1100 Block Estates Dr. (2)	
Identity Theft	
Police Department	
900 Block Acalanes Rd.	
Panhandling	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Bl A	

Petty Theft	
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
700 Block Old Jonas Hill Rd.	
1800 Block Reliez Valley Rd.	
Shoplift	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd. (5)	
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
<b>Nuisance to the Community</b>	
Disturbing The Peace	
El Curtola Blvd./Camino Diablo	
Loud Noise	
1800 Block Reliez Valley Rd.	
3300 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
Loud Party	
3300 Block Sweet Dr.	
Public Nuisance	
El Curtola Blvd./Eb Sr 24 (2)	
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd. (2)	
3700 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
50 Block Lafayette Cir.	
Vandalism	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
10 Block Hidden Valley Rd.	
<b>Other</b>	
Checks Non Suff Funds	
3500 Block School St.	
Trespass	
3100 Block Cordova Way	
Unwanted Guest	
Pleasant Hill Rd./Stanley Blvd.	
3600 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	
3500 Block Mt. Diablo Blvd.	

## Moraga Police Department Incident Summary Report Dec. 26 - Jan. 1



Alarms	6
911 Calls (includes hang-ups)	3
Traffic	43
Suspicious Circumstances	1
Suspicious Subject	2
Suspicious Vehicle	1
Service to Citizen	24
Patrol Req./Security Check	28
Public/School Assembly Check	8
Supplemental Report	13
Vacation House Check	0
Welfare Check	1
Ordinance Violation	0
<b>Vehicle violations</b>	
Excessive Speed	
Moraga Way/Ivy Dr. (2)	
Tc - Minor Injuries	
Moraga Rd./Rheem Blvd.	
400 Block Moraga Rd.	
<b>Other criminal activity</b>	
Embezzlement	Homegoods
Grand Theft	Safeway
<b>Nuisance to the Community</b>	
Disturbance-domestic	
700 Block Augusta Dr.	
Disturbing The Peace	
Not Available	
<b>Other</b>	
Failure To Obey	Safeway

## New Wildfire Mitigation Requirements in effect Jan. 1

Residents with juniper or bamboo on their property might soon find a door hanger from a Moraga-Orinda Fire District's Wildfire Mitigation Specialist noting that they are not in compliance with Ordinance 20-01, which MOFD's board of directors approved on July 15, 2020. The ordinance included a requirement that all juniper (genus juniperus) and bamboo (genus bambusa) within 10 feet of the paved edge of all public and private roads be removed by Dec. 31, 2023. If your property has juniper or bamboo that must be removed, the Fire District has several programs that may be of assistance:

**Fuels Mitigation and Fire Prevention Programs** (including home hardening grants) - www.mofd.org/Fire-Prevention  
**Request a no-cost home assessment** - www.mofd.org/FAC-A  
**Chip and haul cut vegetation** through the MOFD Wood Chipper Program - www.mofd.org/chipper-program  
**City of Orinda's Free wood chipping program** https://reserve.chipperday.com/Orinda and the Measure R Fire  
**Fuels Reduction Incentive Program** (may be available to Orinda residents) at: www.cognitofirms.com/CityOfOrinda/1-MeasureRFireFuelsReductionIncentivePilotProgramApplication

If you have questions about the new requirements, email info@mofd.org or contact MOFD fire prevention staff at (925) 258-4599. - J. Wake



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# The Moraga Barn – over 100 years of history in one building

By Vera Kochan



Photo courtesy Moraga Historical Society

## Sacramento Northern freight train arrives in front of Moraga "Bar" in the 1950s

There's a question mark when it comes to The Moraga Barn. When was it built? The Moraga Historical Society has documentation that alludes to 1911, but several other sources claim the building was constructed in 1914. The MHS archives contain a Moraga Sun newspaper article from the 1990s, with a photo showing Helen Sanders pouring drinks at the bar with a sign behind her that reads: "Est. 1911, Moraga Barn, Prop. T. Sanders." There's no explanation as to why so many accounts tout 1914 as the date that Robert Noble Burgess, a partner in the Moraga Land and Water Company, first built a structure that was initially named Moraga Hotel.

The hotel had five bedrooms on the top floor, and each came with a washstand and shower. The main floor, the lobby, was two stories high and the hotel was intended to serve passengers and personnel who came through town on the Oakland, Antioch & Eastern Railway and stopped at the train station across the street. In later years the upper floor was converted to an apartment and a middle floor was added.

In 1915-1916, John Fleuti bought the building and turned it into a general store. Six years later, Fleuti's daughter, Helen Hetfield, before she married John Smart, moved into town to manage the store that became Moraga Mercantile. Besides groceries that included meat and dry goods, hardware and drugs were also stocked. Customers were mostly grain, hay, and dairy ranchers from the Moraga Valley. Eventually the

store would also become a voter registration office, post office, telephone exchange and soda fountain.

The Moraga Barn was not immune to the law during Prohibition. A December 1927, Contra Costa Gazette headline almost screamed the following news: "BOOZE FOUND IN MORAGA P.O." According to the article, the location "was raided last night by the prohibition squad, and a quantity of wine and whiskey confiscated including a case or more of whiskey said to be of pre-war distillation." Fleuti was taken into custody "where he pleaded guilty and paid a fine of \$500 for possession of liquor and an additional \$100 for operating a slot machine."

The article continues, "Fleuti's son-in-law, the late John Smart, was formerly connected with the federal prohibition enforcement office until he retired to engage in business in Moraga with his father-in-law. Several years ago a moonshine still, said by the Contra Costa authorities to have been the property of Fleuti, was confiscated in the Moraga hills, but there was no further prosecution."

During the raid, prohibition officers, who had their eyes on Moraga Mercantile for several months, claimed to have found 300 gallons of wine in the basement of the store/post office/telephone exchange building along with 100 gallons of "jackass whiskey."

When prohibition ended in 1933, Hetfield/Smart stated in a 1966 Moraga Sun interview, "We served beer at first, and gradually the beverage department

grew." The grocery and drug counters were moved to one side until the demand for them stopped completely. For over 20 years after, the building was known as Moraga Bar. When a new state law prohibited the use of the word "bar" on the outside of structures, "we simply went out and added "N," explained Hetfield/Smart. That's how a building that never was a barn got its name.

The Moraga Barn's original street address was 1002 Viader Dr., which was intended to be located on Moraga's "main street." During a blink-and-you-miss-it moment, the building went by the name of Moraga Inn according to a 1957 advertisement that boasted "an assortment of beverages" and was located in the "center of a metropolis opposite the railroad depot."

From the 1970s through the 1990s, The Moraga Barn had seen its share of visits from the Moraga Police Department, called to break up bar fights or investigate reports of serving liquor to minors. In an October 1990 article titled, "Minor 'Barn Storming' Attracts MPD," then proprietor Todd Sanders said, referring to his Saint Mary's College clientele, "We love the student crowd, but we are being watched very closely by the Moraga police this year. They have the power to make things difficult for us ... and the students. They have been in already and said they will crack down on us this year."

In the early 1990s, The Moraga Barn offered half price lunches or dinners thanks to coupons residents received in the mail. These coupons stated: "Temporarily... no

one under 21 allowed in." Items such as barbecue pork ribs, prime rib or "armadillo chicken" were on the menu, along with umbrella drinks and fine wine. They were open every day, catered events, and offered take-out. Sadly, this extra effort to get customers in the door was not working, and Sanders would eventually face financial troubles resulting in its 1995 closure.

Not even the Moraga Historical Society's effort to turn The Moraga Barn into a historical landmark on July 4, 1994 with a dedication ceremony, could keep the property solvent, and in 1997, with no one interested in purchasing the building, the bank lowered the asking price from \$225,000 to \$199,000. It was eventu-

ally purchased with the hopes of turning The Moraga Barn into a bar and grill, but cost estimates for renovations came to \$750,000 and parking restrictions weren't conducive to the new owner's plans.

By 2006, The Moraga Barn went through complete renovations and an address change to 925 Country Club Dr., when Canyon Construction Company bought the property for office use, and in order to comply with property line codes had to move the building approximately five feet.

The Moraga Barn continues its new incarnation as a building that houses offices with current owner Greg Gaskin, of Gaskin Wealth Management, who's been there since 2016. The

designation as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certified structure, made so by the previous owners, has brought the building up to "green" standards, and according to the company's Michelle Marcucci, they have been approached by a winery asking to bottle their grapes which grow on the premises. Between the grapes and the fact that Gaskin has also rented out the grounds as a private event venue, one might say that The Moraga Barn has made a gentle full circle to the good old days.

*Special thanks to Moraga Historical Society's president Susan Sperry, archivist Bonnie Krames and member Sam Sperry.*

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**The Orinda Association:**  
[www.orindaassociation.org](http://www.orindaassociation.org)

### Orinda Public Meetings

#### City Council Regular Meeting:

Tuesday, Jan. 23, 7 p.m.

Orinda Library Auditorium, 26 Orinda Way

#### Planning Commission

Tuesday, Jan. 16, 7 p.m.

Orinda Library Auditorium, 26 Orinda Way

#### Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission

Wednesday, Jan. 30, 7:00 p.m.

Sarge Littlehale Community Room, 22 Orinda Way

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 DRE 00943989

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[chrisswim.com](http://chrisswim.com)



# After 30 years, Wilder developer is finished, hiking trail staging area eliminated

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

The most contentious aspect of the ninth amendment to the Wilder Development Agreement (DA) addressed at the Orinda City Council meeting on Jan. 9 was the assignment of responsibility for a BART shuttle to the Wilder Owners Association (WOA). The developer, OGLLC, had declared in July, 2022, that they had run out of funds to complete the development. City staff have been working with the developer since then and a number of the remaining tasks were completed.

With the ninth amendment to the DA,

the council agrees to end the developer OGLLC's obligations to complete the planned Red Hawk staging area for access to trails at the southern end of the valley and to leave the completion of sidewalks to the few homes, yet to be completed, that will need sidewalks on their property. There was no public objection to the changes, with the exception of the BART shuttle changes. The required ordinances will be finalized at the next council meeting on Jan. 23.

Things have changed a lot since the first DA was adopted in 1994. At that time, it was thought

that a bus shuttle to the Orinda BART Station would be an amenity, and perhaps an environmental advantage. However, since the development of non-polluting electric vehicles and the change in working habits brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been no demand for such a service. (Wilder students are served by the Lamorinda School Bus Program that transports students to Wagner Ranch Elementary School and Orinda Middle School on school days.)

The requirement to provide a shuttle had previously been delegated from the developer to the Wilder Owners Association (WOA), and public commenters objected to the removal of the obligation from the developer without also removing the obligation from the WOA. Bob Finch, vice-president of the WOA, in public comments, told the council that 94% of Wilder residents have no interest in using a shuttle. Maintaining the requirement for the WOA, even if the

city manager says that the city is not asking that a shuttle be established, imposes an "unnecessary, undesirable, and financially untenable" burden on Wilder residents, he said.

Cathy Finch pointed to the many extra requirements that apply to Wilder residents, who pay over \$9,000 in assessment fees. She suggested the possibility that a shuttle would be used to access the Wilder playing fields, for which the city charges user fees. David Doupe, who also submitted written comments, added that half of Wilder residents own electric or hybrid vehicles and 85% have rooftop solar. Commenters requested that any reference to the shuttle be removed from the Wilder CC&Rs.

Tracey Borst and Robert Menicucci wrote to the council "in opposition to the amendment agreement that the HOA [sic] operate and maintain, at our expense, a shuttle service." They argued that it would be a real financial burden on homeowners, and mentioned that a poll of

Wilder residents showed that the shuttle would not be used. David Doupe, Mark Ashby, John Steward and Cindy Grant also submitted written comments against the shuttle.

During council discussion, council members and Orinda city attorney Osa Wolff, struggled to come up with language to release the developer from the shuttle requirement, and agreed upon the following language: "As acknowledged in the 9th Amendment to this Agreement approved in 2024, Orinda Gateway, LLC is no longer responsible for implementing a BART/Downtown Shuttle Service between the Wilder Project and downtown Orinda, including the BART station. The parties acknowledge responsibility for the BART/Downtown Shuttle Service is limited to the Wilder Homeowners Association as described in Section 7.11 of the Declaration of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions of Wilder."

Although the change does not remove the requirement of providing a

shuttle from the WOA, council members did not suggest that there would be any immediate demand for a shuttle, but sought to provide for the possibility in the future.

The East Bay Regional Parks District indicated to the city that they did not oppose the elimination of the Red Tail Hawk Staging Area, but expressed interest in ensuring access to Wilder via the existing approved trail system to Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve. According to the staff report, that would be accomplished by designating approximately 10 parking spaces in the Wilder Sports Complex lot for trail parking, with appropriate signage. The Parks District is also exploring the possibility of assigning an existing deposit for a modular restroom structure to the nearby Old Tunnel Staging Area. Wilder resident David Korpi submitted written comments in favor of removing the Red Tail Hawk Staging Area, but expressing concern over how the area will be secured in the future.

## Another stellar audit for Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda has once again received a clean opinion on its annual audit. The City Council on Jan. 9 received the annual comprehensive financial report (ACFR) containing the auditor's opinion and audited financial statements for fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. An unmodified opinion is the highest level assurance that a certified public accountant firm can give to an entity. City staff will submit the ACFR for the Government Finance Officers

Association certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting award program. Orinda has received the award for the past nine consecutive years.

The audit was prepared by Maze & Associates, who have performed the audit for nine years, and presented to the council by David Alvey. Next year the city will chose a different auditor, to comply with the California Government Code requirement that auditors be

changed periodically.

In addition, Maze & Associates also did a Transportation Development Act audit, and presented an unmodified opinion.

Orinda's total assets increased by \$3.6 million. The increase was largely owing to the advent of Measure R, a one-half cent sales tax increase passed by the voters in 2020 and capital asset improvements. Total expenses also increased by \$1.8 million, much of which was

caused by increased demand on parks and recreation facilities and the library, as well as an increase in staffing as two vacant positions were filled.

The audit concluded that Orinda could survive for 11 months on the fund balance in the general fund and for five months on emergency reserves of \$7.9 million. The text of the audit report is contained in the full agenda packet for Jan. 9, found on the city's website.

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# Gardennest brings floral beauty to Country Club Plaza

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

**Gardennest breathes life into Orinda Village with fresh plants and accessories.**

Assistant Planner Darin Hughes introduced the Orinda City Council on Dec. 5 to a number of new businesses recently opened in the city. Among those new businesses was Gardennest, a garden design firm that decided to open a retail shop. Owner Jean-

nie Fitch and Kelli Schley appeared at the meeting and, although they said they were both a little shy, spoke about their endeavor.

Introducing them, Hughes noted that the retail location had its grand opening on Oct. 7. Located at 105 Orinda

Way, Hughes praised the shop for how much effort they've been putting into that space. "The shop itself is beautiful," he said. "The street out front is beautiful." In addition, he said, "they've been working with their neighbors, in order to sync up hours, so that everybody's open at the same time and kind of seems like they've got the really cool community ecosystem going on."

The shop has a small patio in back, and has been holding events there. They also participated in the Orinda Village holiday market. Hughes welcomed them as really excellent partners with everyone that's down at that end of town.

Fitch said that she has lived in Orinda for close to 30 years and raised her daughter and

built her business in Orinda. She is a landscape contractor as well as running the shop. She said that it has been a longtime dream of hers to have her own flower shop. "And it's kind of, you know, morphed into something bigger and more fun. My daughter Reagan is one of the buyers along with Kelli."

Fitch said that the space is much bigger than she ever imagined. "You know, it's kind of turned into a whole other animal, on its own." A lot of creative energy has gone into putting the shop together. "It's a really old building. I don't know if you know that it's the old Penny Lane hair salon. So it actually had two different entrances. When we took over the salon, we then opened the wall that kind of divided the two spaces."

Fitch praised Kelli as a plant guru: "She's really great and she's my plant buyer and her background is horticulture and she's worked at several big nurseries." She also had kind words for the shop's neighboring stores, Maureen at Rechic, Susan Leech who owns the little antique shop, and Gepetto's Cafe, saying, "They are really adorable and super supportive of us."

Fitch welcomed everyone to come and make new friends down on that side of the town. "The buildings are really charming; I mean, they're old history," she said. "I don't know if you guys know that that building was built in the 1940s and it used to be a residence." One of the things that was uncovered during the renovation was an upstairs fireplace. "It's gorgeous,"

Fitch enthused, "and we uncovered built-in bookshelves on either side that had been covered with drywall." All of this has now been opened up and it's like our showroom.

Mayor Inga Miller agreed: "It's really beautiful, it's really incredible. It's something that you expect to see maybe on Fourth Street in Berkeley or somewhere in San Francisco or Santa Barbara. It's really something just eye-opening that I really haven't seen on this side of the tunnel or elsewhere in this region."

Miller compared Gardennest to another new business in Orinda, Fish Barn. She credited both business with drawing people in to Orinda and showing that what Orinda has to offer is really important.

# No libraries open on Sundays

... continued from Page 1

Solano County, for example, has had a 1/8 cent sales tax dedicated to the library for almost 30 years. In November 2022, San Francisco voters approved renewal of their Library Preservation Fund (LPF) for the next 25 years. The LPF is SFPL's largest budget source, measuring 99% percent of its FY23 budget of \$185.7 million, and making the San Francisco Library one of the

best funded in the country. Santa Clara voters also endorsed special funding for their libraries in 1994, 2005 and 2013.

Converse agreed with Brown's suggestion that the county was basing their refusal to allow Orinda Library to open on Sundays on an equity issue. Although Brown points out that the Orinda Library is open to everyone, Converse stated that not all of the libraries have outside

funding that allows for additional opening hours. Additionally, although there might be staff willing to volunteer at the Orinda Library, they might not be willing to volunteer at the other branches, including more distant ones such as Pittsburg, Antioch, or Oakley. Brown notes that the Orinda Library is close to the Orinda BART station, at only 0.6 miles away.

President of the Friends of Orinda Li-

brary, Nancy Ross-Madnick, commenting on Sunday library opening, said, "While it is a laudable goal, complete equity is difficult to achieve. By opening up some branches on Sundays, the libraries would be available to everyone in the county. Under the current plan, none of the 26 branches have Sunday hours. Isn't it better for the community to have some access to library services rather than none?" She added, "Ideally, the county should make fully-funding all Contra Costa County libraries a high priority. But if the county chooses not to,

then let the cities that want to fund Sunday hours have their branches open to serve the greater community."

Converse said that while the cities in which the libraries are located are required to provide for the maintenance of the buildings and some technical services, the county pays for the operational costs, including staffing, books, etc. There are also five libraries that are in unincorporated county areas. There has not been a library bond, as such bonds are very difficult to pass, Converse said, requiring a two-thirds majority vote, and many

other county departments would also love to receive bond funding.

However, according to Converse, there is a plan for a pilot program for Sunday library opening, starting with the Concord library, sometime in 2024. Under that plan, the Concord library, which is 0.8 miles from the Concord BART station, will be open on Sundays with no library staff present, except for one security guard. Library patrons will be required to get approval in advance for Sunday library use, and the details of how this will work have not yet been finalized.

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 Mondays 9:30 am Centering Prayer in the Chapel  
 Wednesday 10 am Contemplative Worship in the Chapel

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 All are welcome  
 www.christianscienceorinda.org

We invite you to join us at

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## Not to be missed

### Art

Two dozen member and guest artists in Moraga's iconic gallery invite art fans of all ages to a free reception on Jan. 27 from 3 to 5 p.m. (note the new hours), to the new exhibit, Stories on Canvas, which consists of hundreds of artworks in numerous genres including ceramicists, photographers, painters in many genres, jewelry makers, woodworkers, and more. Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. until March 17, at 432 Center Street in the Rheem Shopping Center. (925) 376-5407 or visit www.MoragaArtGallery.com.

Orinda Books art show in January features Barbara Breashears as the Artist of the Month. After working as a graphic designer for 22 years, Barbara has enjoyed teaching various art disciplines over the past 11 years. Her exhibition displays robust owl portraits in a variety of media. For a preview, visit www.orindabooks.com.

### Music

Multi-platinum selling singer/songwriter, Tony nominee and jazz legend Ann Hampton Callaway returns to the Orinda Theatre for the Bay Area debut of her brand new show and to celebrate the release of her new album, Finding Beauty. Sunday, Jan. 21 at 5 p.m. at Orinda Theatre Square.

Berkeley Chamber Performances presents Black Oak Ensemble on Saturday, Jan. 27, from 7:30 to 10 p.m., at the Lafayette Library, 3491 Mt Diablo Blvd, Lafayette. Cost: \$22.50 - \$45. For more info see www.tickettailor.com/events/berkeley-chamberperformances/992925 or call (510) 525-5211 or email info@bcp1.org.

Young People's Symphony Orchestra, which is the oldest youth orchestra in California, will be having its Winter Concert on Jan. 27 at 7:30 p.m. at the Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church. Tickets and info at www.ypsomusic.org/

Do you love to sing? Come join the Diablo Women's Chorale. Their Spring 2024 season begins on Monday, Jan. 22 with rehearsals every Monday from 7 to 9 p.m. at St. Mark's Lutheran

Church in Pleasant Hill, CA. For audition information contact their Member Chair, Nancy Hickman (925) 899-5050 (hickmandg@gmail.com), and visit their website at www.diablowomen.schorale.org/join-us.

The Sunday Paper at the Town Hall Theatre. The Sunday Paper is known for their crisp, tight sound with former and current members of Tower Of Power, Cold Blood, Sly & The Family Stone, Santana. Sunday, March 10, 2 to 6 p.m. \$45 Early Bird Special until Feb. 1, \$55 after Feb. 1. Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School Street, Lafayette. For tickets go to https://SundayPaperMarch10.eventbrite.com.

### Theatre

Diablo Ballet presents Sleeping Beauty's Wedding Feb. 9 and 10 at the Leshner Center for the Arts, located at 1601 Civic Drive in Walnut Creek. Performances are: Friday, Feb. 9 at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, Feb. 10 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 pm. Single tickets are on sale now (\$28 - \$57) with senior and youth pricing available. For tickets, call (925) 943-7469 or visit www.lesherarts-center.org or www.diabloballet.org.

Adventure Cabaret on Tuesday, Jan. 30, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., at Freight & Salvage, 2020 Addison St., Berkeley. Adventure Cabaret is a unique, unprecedented live theater experience that includes massive use of multimedia to bring you into the Empire of Ideas. Cost: \$35. For more info see https://adventurecabaret.com or call (415) 579-2586 or email contact@adventurecabaret.com.

### Literature

Join the Sweet Thursday Author Series on Thursday, Jan. 18 at 7 p.m. in the Don Tatzin CH at the Lafayette Library to hear author and former Lafayette City Manager Steven Falk discuss his book, California Story. This is a free event, but registration is required at www.tinyurl.com/sweet-Jan2024. The doors will be open at 6:30 p.m. for coffee and treats. This program is sponsored by the Friends of the Lafayette Library.

Adam Plantinga will introduce and discuss his de-

## Not to be missed

but novel, "The Ascent," on Saturday, Jan. 20 at 5 p.m. at Orinda Books. A thriller in which a down-on-his-luck cop and the governor's daughter team up to solve a high security prison failure. Plantinga began his career in law enforcement in 2001 as a Milwaukee police officer. To Register: go to www.eventbrite.com/e/adam-plantinga-author-of-the-ascent-tickets-773869764297?aff=oddtcreator

The Cozy Mystery Club will discuss Murder on a Girls' Night Out by Anne George Thursday, Jan. 25 at 10:30 a.m. Cozy Mystery Club meets at Orinda Books on the 4th Thursday of the month at 10:30 a.m. and welcomes new members. Phone the store at (925) 254-7606 for more information. 276 Village Square. Orinda, www.orinda-books.com, (925) 254-7606

### Other

On Jan. 27, from 10 a.m. to noon some of Bay Area's top dermatologists and skincare leaders, including Dr. Tomi Lee Wall, Rebecca Walker, Dr. Jerome Potozkin and Dr. Paige Radell will discuss what really works, from Botox, Kybella, Microneedling, Cryofacials, Lasers to Retinoids and everything in between. Additionally, Cindy Deily, VP of Sephora Skincare will give her tips of favorite anti-aging products. Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School Street, Lafayette.

Mocktails & Cocktails Returns Sunday Jan. 28 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the remodeled The Hideout Kitchen & Café at 32 Lafayette Circle. Art lovers from the Lamorinda Arts Council are looking forward to hearing about your creative life. Questions? Email info@lamorindaarts.org or call (925) 359-9940.

Free income tax preparation for the 2023 tax season will again be offered by the AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Program, providing IRS certified tax counselors for local Contra Costa County residents. Service is offered to people of all ages with limited to moderate income with special attention given to those age 50 and older. Beginning in early January, call one of the site-specific appointment phone numbers listed below to make

an appointment, or call (925) 726-3199 for general information about the Tax-Aide program. The tax preparation service locations: Concord Library (925) 471-5686; Concord Senior Center (925) 671-3320; Danville Veterans Memorial Bldg. of SRV (925) 272-0902; Martinez Senior Center (925) 370-8770; Pacheco Community Center (925) 709-4525; Pleasant Hill Hillcrest Congregational Church (925) 289-9790; San Ramon Senior Center (925) 973-3250; Walnut Creek - Rossmoor, Hillside Clubhouse, Vista Room Appointments made on-site.

Xenophon Therapeutic Riding Center 4th Annual Drive-Thru Crab Feed. Order online by Sunday, Feb. 4. www.xenophontrc.org

Wine and Tapas Speaker Series host a conversation on the power of pilgrimage as a method to enrich life's journey. Often a tool used by religious pilgrims to the world over, this model can reframe our local journeys to add in intentionality and depth. Michael Drell of the Graduate Theological Union, not only brings years of international experience to the conversation, but has applied the wisdom of this practice to journeys to the Mission District, local arts and culture. Sunday, Feb. 4, 4:30 - 6 p.m. Creekside Commons 1035 Carol Lane. Donations welcome at the door, bring a drink or small plate to share.

### Garden

The Montelindo Garden Club presents Glenn Phillips, Executive Director of the Golden Gate Bird Alliance, on Friday, Jan. 19, where he will share his bird expertise at their January meeting, on "Saving Birds, House by House." What can we do to ensure that these visitors stay safe and healthy while enjoying the many pleasures that our gardens offer? Discover simple ways to treat windows to prevent deadly crashes, how to manage bird baths and feeders to prevent spreading disease, and other uncomplicated ways to be a good host for our feathered guests. See www.montelindogarden.com/2024-meetings.html for schedule and directions to the Lafayette Library Community Hall. Free.

Please submit events to: calendar@lamorindaweekly.com

## Lamorinda Weekly

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# Cinnamon Roll Knots a fun, culinary creation

By Susie Iventosch



Cinnamon Roll Knots

Photos Susie Iventosch

If you've never made cinnamon rolls, it's a fun project and super satisfying. These cinnamon knots, filled with plenty of brown sugar-cinnamon butter are not only ridiculously tasty but also beautiful and really, really fun to make. If you know how to braid, you can make these rolls. Goopy on the inside with

crispy strips of dough on the outside, they are the perfect pastry.

I use the basic roll dough from the 1976 version of Better Homes & Gardens New Cookbook, which really isn't very new at all as it turns out, but it's still just as good as it has always been. The only thing I changed was using butter in place of

shortening. We just never cook with shortening in our house, loving the taste of butter so much more.

Yeast doughs can be a little scary at first if you haven't made them, but if you follow the directions, you will be able to make this in a snap. I suggest picking up a candy thermometer, so you know the temperature of the milk when you add it to the yeast and flour. If it's not quite hot enough, it may not activate the yeast, but if it's too hot, it can kill the yeast too. You

want the milk to be in the 110-120 range, no cooler and no warmer. Aim for 115 F and you'll be in great shape!

Then it's just a matter of rolling out the dough into a large rectangle, spreading the brown sugar-cinnamon butter filling over the entire thing, folding the dough into thirds, cutting it, and braiding it. Oh, and you do need to exercise a little patience by allowing the dough to rise before creating your cinnamon knot masterpiece!



Susie can be reached at [suziventosch@gmail.com](mailto:suziventosch@gmail.com). This recipe can be found on our website: [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com) If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>

Prep Time: 30-40 Minutes | Rising Time: | 2 hours in total | Makes 8 Rolls

## Basic Roll Dough (based on the recipe from Better Homes & Gardens 1976 Edition)

- Dough Ingredients**
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
  - 1 package active dry yeast (or 2 1/4 teaspoons)
  - 1 1/4 cups milk
  - 1/4 cup granulated sugar
  - 1/4 cup butter
  - 1 teaspoon salt
  - 1 large egg
  - 1 egg white for brushing on knots before baking them.

### DIRECTIONS - Dough

Mix 1 1/2 cups flour and yeast in a large mixing bowl. Set aside. In a saucepan, heat milk, butter, sugar and salt until warm (110 to 120 F) and butter is melted, stirring constantly. Add milk mixture to dries along with the egg. Beat all at low speed for 30 seconds or so to moisten all dries. Then beat for 3 minutes at high speed. Stir the remaining flour into the dough by hand to form a soft dough. Dust your hands with a little flour and shape the dough into a ball. Place dough ball in a lightly greased or sprayed large bowl, turn dough once to grease the entire ball and then cover with a damp cloth or plastic wrap and leave in a warm spot in the kitchen (not in the oven) to rise until doubled in size. This will take about 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Once the dough is doubled in size, punch down the dough to deflate slightly and let rest for 10 minutes.

**Brown Sugar-Cinnamon Butter Filling** (If you really love the filling, then make 1.5 times the recipe for extra cinnamon-goopy knots!)

- 4 oz. butter (equals 1/2 cup or 1 stick) at room temperature
- 1 cup light brown sugar, packed
- 2 tablespoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon cardamom (optional, but we love this spice!)

Mix all together well to incorporate butter, sugar and spices.

### DIRECTIONS - Making the Cinnamon Knots

Line a baking sheet with 1-inch sides with parchment paper. (You want a tray with sides, so that the brown sugar-cinnamon butter does not spill over into your oven!) Sprinkle a cutting board or pastry cloth with flour. Roll the dough out into a large 14 x 18-inch rectangle on a floured cutting board or pastry cloth.

Spread cinnamon and brown sugar butter evenly over the entire rectangle. (See photo.)

Starting at the longer end, fold the dough into thirds, lapping one third over the center third and the last third over that to make a three-layer dough.

Cutting across the narrow side of the folded dough, cut the dough into 8 strips, roughly 2-inches wide per strip.

Starting at the end with the open fold, cut each dough strip into three strips, but DON'T cut through the top end of the dough. Leave about 3/4 to 1-inch whole at the top. (See photo.)

Now, starting at the solid end, begin braiding the dough strips all the way to the bottom.

Roll the dough up towards you and then keep rolling to the top of the braid to form a cinnamon knot.

Place each knot on the prepared baking sheet and let rise for about 30 minutes to poof up a little bit more.

Preheat oven to 325 F. Lightly brush the tops of the knots with the beaten egg white. Sprinkle the tops of the knots with pearl sugar, raw sugar, or cinnamon sugar.

Bake for 20-25 minutes or until rolls are just beginning to brown on top and the filling is beginning to bubble at the edges. Remove from oven and cool slightly before diving in! They are delicious warm or at room temperature. You can also freeze these rolls and reheat them at a later date.

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## Letters to the editor

### Brace for it, Lafayette

Lafayette will be subject to 'Builder's Remedy' projects starting Feb. 1, 2024, which means that developers can submit housing projects literally of any size, anywhere in our city. Prior approved projects can also be revised (think The Terraces, Lafayette Lane, Madison Park, ...), ignoring our general plan and zoning. We have already heard from developers, and proposals are being readied now. We could get 20-story projects in the middle of single family neighborhoods, for example, like other cities across the state have experienced.

How did we get here? Lafayette is joining cities across the state who won't have a 'Certified Housing Element' by the Jan. 31, 2024, deadline. Despite working on our Housing

Element for 3 years, when Council was presented with the latest revision in October, we were already too late to avoid the Builder's Remedy penalty. Our housing consultant took 6 months to bring this revision, knowing that we would fail to meet the deadline. None of her other 3 cities (Danville, Belmont, and San Mateo) have certified housing elements. We also found out that our 'methodology' is NOT the same as Orinda's or Walnut Creek's, and both have certified housing elements. If Lafayette changed our methodology to be more standard, there would be

no 'upzoning' necessary in our downtown at all. And if we include the open space at DeSilva, HCD would not do a detailed review, increasing our chances of getting a 'Certified Housing Element'.

But the only solution to stop penalties like the Builder's Remedy is to support the Our Neighborhood Voices Initiative, a statewide constitutional amendment that will bring back local democracy to our cities, fighting the state's preemption of our local land use and zoning laws. With the 100+ laws passed, there is no way to 'un-do' all of them any-

more. Go to <https://ourneighborhood-voices.com/> and join our movement to restore local democracy so that both you and your City Council will have a say with what happens in our city and in your neighborhoods, like intended in our state's constitution.

Susan Candell  
Lafayette City Council Member and Former Mayor  
Proponent, Our Neighborhood Voices Initiative

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence — we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters must be factually accurate. Lamorinda Weekly reserves the right to refuse publishing a letter submission. Visit [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com) for submission guidelines. Email: [letters@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:letters@lamorindaweekly.com); Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, 1480 Moraga Road STE C #202, Moraga, CA 94556



# LAMORINDA SPORTS

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## Wrestling's continued growth in Lamorinda

By Jon Kingdon



Miramonte's Brody Suba

Photo provided



Claire Casado, Miramonte

Photo provided



Campo's Luke Hansen takes down his opponent.

Photo Eric Lowe

In this post-pandemic period, the number of wrestlers has increased exponentially. "Early in the season, we hosted the novice tournament at Campolindo, and it went really well," head coach Phil Freeman said. "There were a total of 230 novice wrestlers, about 55 of them being girls, which showed the strong growth of wrestling for the boys and girls in our area."

### Campolindo

After finishing in third place last year at the NCS tournament, Freeman remains optimistic and has kept his eyes on the prize. "I still think we're the top team and we're going to be tough to beat though we may have some forfeits in the lower weight classes," Freeman said.

With three wrestlers coming over from the football team, seniors Gavin Juni (177-190), Shane Harris (215) and sophomore Luke Hansen (250), the team is well set at the higher weights. "We've continued to make inroads with football and we're getting some pretty athletic kids to come out for the team," Freeman said. "Gavin is the leader on the team and someone I'm hoping to see medal. Shane is lean and mean and Luke is doing very well. Garrett Joyce (145), a freshman, has shown good toughness and has competed against varsity wrestlers, and I expect him to turn out well." There are a number of wrestlers that Freeman will be able to call upon: seniors Daniel Thaler and Emilio Penate, juniors Emory Hsiao and Adam Barash and sophomores Soushians Bahramifar and Jack Simmons.

"The middle of the lineup at the 140's has a

bit of a log jam and is going to be contingent on who is healthy," Freeman said. "It's time to get everyone's weight set and that's going to be key for us. If we can shift our wrestlers around, we should be able to cover our weights."

It's a solid core of girls returning to the team. "Senior Piper Lalli just finished sixth at the Napa Valley tournament with five wins, and has really stepped up and should make the state meet," Freeman said. "Juniors Cami Baxter placed second last year and we're looking for her to go to state and K.T. Thompson, who lost in the blood round last year, is someone that could finish in the top four and go to state as well."

Isabel Zabronsky, who went to the state tournament as a sophomore, suffered a season ending knee injury. "Isabel will be back next year, and I fully anticipate her doing better than ever," Freeman said. "At this point, she's helping in different capacities and working out in ways that she can."

Freshman Maya Shu (110) and senior Nataliz Kalas (112) are also anticipated to do well in the upcoming dual matches and may be used to fill in to pick up some forfeit points when an opponent does not have a wrestler at a lower weight. "The girls have all improved in technique and physique, adding muscle and looking like wrestlers," Freeman said. "The mental aspect with a lot of stress they put on themselves adds another element. They want to win, and they do add some pressure on themselves."

### Miramonte

Now in his third

year as the Miramonte head coach, Louis Suba has seen his roster grow each year from nine to 20 to this year's team, which numbers in the 40s. "A lot of our growth had to do with Hannah Rapp (2022-2023) due to her success the last couple of years, building a social media presence and a buzz around the school," Suba said. "I've gotten great support from the administration and the PE demonstrations I've done have also helped."

Right now, the team is comprised of 35 boys and 10 girls. "We're getting a lot of first-year freshmen, sophomores and juniors," Suba said. "I let the kids, and their parents decide whether they will wrestle at a particular tournament."

Zach Fineman (175-190) is captain and is the only fourth-year senior on the roster and that included two abbreviated seasons due to the pandemic and has been a key leader on the team. There has been a lot of individual success so far for the Matadors, led by Brody Suba, Owen Biedelman, Julio Villanueva, Owen Turtle and freshmen Finn Hura and Jaxon Ziehn.

Suba (132) came in first at the Pittsburg Tournament. Beidelman (165), a sophomore at the Colt Classic Tournament had four pins in 7:21 and scored the most team points with 30 and finished in third place. Suba and Ziehn both took first place at the Pittsburg Wrestling Tournament. Hura, who has a jujitsu background, currently has a 13-5 record and finished in second at the Colt Classic. Ziehn (120) finished in first at the Pittsburg Tournament and has a current record of 14-3.

Villanueva (126) with a strong off season has shown a lot of promise finishing third at the James Logan tournament. Turtle, a first-year junior already has six wins this season.

There is a core of first-year wrestlers that Suba is counting on in the future: freshmen Nolan Wagner, Geoff White, Rhys Williams, and sophomore Joe Young.

The girl's team is led by senior Izarra Ballesteros, sophomore Claire Casado, junior MaryAlice Cropsey, and freshman Cayleigh Farrar.

Ballesteros (135-140) has a 10-1 record and took first place at the Roger Briones and Dennis Solis Tournaments with three pins in 5:02. Casado (110), winless last season, has a current record of 10-7. Cropsey has been injured but has taken on the role of a leader, helping out in practice with the girls and the boys. Farrar came in first at the Gael Showdown and Dublin Tournament and currently has a 14-6 record. Olivia Park, a first-year sophomore has also shown a lot of potential. "With more experience, Claire has developed much better technique," Suba said. "Running cross-county has really helped with her conditioning."

This young team has grown a lot heading into the dual meet season. "Our improvement has been great because it's such a new sport for the majority of our kids," Suba said. "The amount of learning that is present during the season is the steepest learning curve imaginable. This is a sport that most of these kids have never even seen before, and they're thrown into the fire from

day one. It's like learning a new language almost four months later, the transformation is amazing."

### Acalanes

It's been a homecoming for Acalanes head coach Steve Nelson, a former Don himself. Nelson was the head wrestling coach at San Lorenzo High School and it's a welcome change for him on a couple of levels. "There were times when I had to be something of a father figure for some of the wrestlers at San Lorenzo, but now I'm working strictly as a coach and don't have to worry about every aspect of my wrestlers' lives," Nelson said. "It's also cut down my commute each week by over 11 hours."

Nelson harkens back to his days as a wrestler for his coaching style.

"Growing up, I was coached with old school beliefs, and I still believe that works nowadays," Nelson said. "It's holding kids accountable, and I believe competition is the way to get the best out of my athletes, so we compete a lot. It's been a little bit of an adjustment for the team since they weren't necessarily used to somebody like me."

While some were unable to adjust, the Dons have 19 wrestlers on the roster, seven juniors and seniors and 12 freshmen and sophomores. There are three girls on the roster, though two are currently injured.

The boys are led by senior co-captain Dylan Potter (190), juniors co-captain Sam Whipple (215) and Ian Sanftner (175), and sophomores Kirian Gracie and Marley Oh. "Dylan has stepped up big this year

and I've been impressed with his leadership in helping his teammates to understand what we're doing in practice," Nelson said. "Sam has also taken it upon himself to become a leader and it's been thoroughly impressive to watch him. Kirian (120) was an NCF qualifier last year who may also wrestle at 115 and Marley has been a bright spot, becoming one of our better wrestlers being able to hear what I am telling to do in his matches, and it has led to some pins. Ian is extremely strong, and I have high expectations for him."

Senior Dakota Goyert (100) was close to medaling last season at the NCS and comes from a wrestling family with her dad serving as one of the team's assistant coaches. "Dakota has a good skill set and basic reference," Nelson said. "I'm working on expanding some of her moves and hope she can qualify for state, which I have done with two NCS champions at San Lorenzo, so I know what we need to do to get ready for it."

Senior LiLou Picard is out with a broken foot and junior Anya HaasHollenbeck has been ruled out for the rest of the season due to a concussion.

Nelson's ultimate goal is simple: "If I can get more kids returning next season than quitting, I will consider this a successful season. I was basically starting from scratch, and I was told that I might only have six or seven kids so for me to have 19 in the room, I'd say it's a pretty successful start to rebuilding the program."

## Saint Mary's Basketball – a tale of two seasons

By Jon Kingdon

When the preseason prognosticators in the press declared that Saint Mary's was the favorite to win the WCC, it was something that head coach Randy Bennett did not trumpet himself.

After starting the season with a 4-5 record, Saint Mary's has won 10 of their last 11 games, opening up league play with four straight wins over San Diego (81-70), Loyola Marymount (68-64), Portland (95-52) and Santa Clara (73-49), who had defeated nationally ranked Gonzaga two days earlier, making the press look more prescient. "We had a lot of growth that needed to happen and there were some expectations on us that we just weren't ready for as a team yet," Bennett said.

Though there are a number of experienced players that returned this season, four of the five starters had hurdles they

had to overcome, which was not perceptible to the general public. The starting five of center James Saxen, forwards of Alex Ducas and Joshua Jefferson and guards Augustas Marciulionis and Aidan Mahaney all had adjustments to make from the start of the season.

"We had a lot of growth that needed to happen. Joshua and Augustus have come to grow into their roles as starters," Bennett said. "Alex spent the entire off-season trying to get healthy. He was out for four months, and it has taken him four months to get back and he's close to 100% now. Aidan's role this year is different with the graduation of Logan Johnson who shouldered a lot of the load for him, and he is now going against the best perimeter defender every night and we've asked Saxen to increase his scoring and

rebounding and he's been trying to do that. It's not a completed process at this point."

As the season was developing, the offense was not what Bennett had been anticipating: "That's what surprised me a little bit in that I thought we would have been further along offensively but we haven't put it all together yet. We turned the ball over way too much, but our field goal percentage numbers have gotten better (48.7) in nine of our last 10 games. As Ducas, Marciulionis and Jefferson have gotten better, we've gotten better offensively. I was careful not to get down on them because we've been playing tough games against high ranked teams. Aidan had a bad shooting streak early in the season, but he has been coming out of it and shooting better. Confidence can be a

fickle thing even for the best of them and he's fighting through it and he's going to be all right."

Starting league play, Bennett understood what the team needed to do to be successful. "We could not lose our identity of being a really good defensive and rebounding team and that's what we are right now. We had to be a better offensive team and the number one thing was taking care of the ball. That's why we've been good the last two years. We needed to keep getting better offensively without losing the other two factors."

After the slow start, the team's performance has made a big turnaround with everything coming together in the win over Portland last Thursday, with as balanced a performance as a team could have, both offensively and defensively. The Saint Mary's guards

scored 39 points, the forwards 40 points and the centers 16 points led by Mahaney with 25 points, Ducas with 17 and Saxen with 8. With only five turnovers, 25 assists, 40 rebounds and 10 steals, Bennett appreciated those numbers. "We played really unselfishly and defended well," Bennett said. "We try and hit those numbers and I was pleased with how our guys kept playing unselfishly."

Mahaney, who had been going through an uncharacteristic shooting slump, has come out of it with a vengeance in the last four games, connecting on 28 of 53 shots, averaging 18 points in those games.

Historically, the strength of a Randy Bennett team has been in areas other than offense as is the case this season. "We're really a good defensive and rebounding



Photo Tod Fierner

### Head Coach Randy Bennett

team. (Saint Mary's is fourth in the nation – 59.1 ppg and 24th in the nation – 41.1 rebounds per game)," Bennett said. "We're 12-0 when we hold teams to 40% shooting or less. We're 1 and 6 when we don't. That's who we are. ... We're still gritty, not pretty."



# Lamorinda Girls Soccer Teams State Cup Showdown

Submitted by Jennifer LaForce

This fall, 238 girls' soccer teams across the state spent most weekends waking early to compete against each other at soccer fields throughout northern California. The ultimate prize, winning the NorCal State Cup, was top of mind. On Dec. 10, in the 2012 Girls Bronze Division, this event culminated in the ultimate championship showdown between two cross-town Lamorinda club teams: Cal Magic and Eclipse.

The Lamorinda teams, comprised primarily of sixth-grade girls

from Stanley, Joaquin Moraga, Orinda Intermediate, and Seven Hills, put on their gear and put down their phones to compete against friends and classmates in a fierce soccer face-off. Both teams remained undefeated in state cup play, and both advanced to the finals dramatically with narrow overtime PK shootout wins - Magic in the quarters and Eclipse in the semis.

As the 27 Lamorinda girls lined up for the national anthem, their faces showed determination on

both sides. Eclipse scored first and early, but it was ultimately Magic's day to shine with two goals in the second half and a 2-1 State Cup victory. There were cheers and tears, but ultimately, the girls hugged and supported each other across teams, even gathering for a post-medal picture, exemplifying friendly competition and team spirit. With the Cal Magic 2012 goal team also advancing to the finals, Lamorinda High School classes of 2030 will surely be teams to watch.



Photo provided

# JM Jaguars sixth grade girls basketball rolls to EBMS Championship

Submitted by Marino Salvi

The Joaquin Moraga Intermediate (JM) sixth grade girls basketball team won the East Bay Middle School Championship over Martin Luther King Middle School on Dec. 21. Overall the JM Lady Jaguars compiled a record of 10-2 during the eight-week winter season with only two losses to combined sixth/seventh grade teams.

Photo provided



Front row, from left: Aria Salvi, Sydney Osteen; back row: coach Eric Moon, Avery Zwakman, Abigail Moon, Olivia Escobar, Sierra Romagnolo, Lizzy Gilbert, coach Jerry Gilbert. Not pictured: Vivian Welch and Ava Ricksen.

# Orinda Intermediate girl's J.V. basketball team makes seventh grade varsity tournament finals

Submitted by William Real



Photo Liz Daoust

Back row, from left: coach William Real, Meeya Vareerak, Annie Daoust, Jaya Patel, Elise Guymon, coach Jack Fouts; front row: Emma Logan, Aimee Fagundes, India Cohen

The OIS Junior Varsity Girl's season started with four simple desired outcomes that the team agreed upon. They

wanted connection, friendship, to have fun, and to get better at basketball.

Together, they ac-

complished all of those things and more. The team was comprised of four sixth-graders and three seventh-graders. They played in the always strong East Bay Middle School League Seventh Grade Varsity Division and were able to qualify for the postseason championship tournament at Willard Middle School in Berkeley. The girls played two tough teams, Walnut Creek Intermediate School and Willard Middle School, in order to qualify for the championship game. On Dec. 23 the team fell short against Benicia, in a game that had several momentum shifts.

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# Local author writes about his disability, many accomplishments

By Diane Claytor

Sitting in a coffee shop talking with Jonathan Winchell about his life and his recently published book, it's easy to forget that he's not like most other older Lamorinda residents. Winchell says some of his facial features and physical characteristics are evidence but those are not immediately apparent. Then he pulls out his book, "Being Different Than My Family, Living with Mosaic Down Syndrome Chromosome #21."

Mosaic Down syndrome (MDS) is a rare form of Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that results in an extra copy of chromosome 21; people with MDS have a mixture of cells and often have fewer symptoms because some of their cells are normal. In fact, according to healthline.com, people with Mosaic Down syndrome typically have a higher IQ than those with other forms of

Down syndrome. Winchell's father told him many years ago that he "could be a good writer" if he was ever interested in pursuing it. Once he was no longer working full time, Winchell decided that he did, indeed, want to write a book about his experiences living with MDS.

The oldest of four children and a lifelong resident of Lafayette, Winchell was born with MDS. His parents were told not to have many expectations of their special needs baby; medical professionals advised that he likely would be unable to lead a normal, productive life. The prediction was wrong.

Married with two adult sons, the high-functioning Winchell worked in the family real estate business and has been an active supporter of and volunteer in numerous civic organizations.

His many accomplishments didn't come easily. Winchell always felt he was "different from the other kids at school and was definitely treated differently at home," he remembers, but his differences were never actually verbally identified. It wasn't until he was in middle school that his parents told him he was born with MDS.

The Winchell family, like most families, was, and still is filled with contrasts. There is love, support and loyalty as well as family gatherings. Growing up, Winchell recalls, there were family vacations and fun times playing

with his siblings. He hiked, played tennis and enjoyed watching sports.

But it was also hard. As Winchell explains, his parents were extremely overprotective and "very controlling." He wasn't allowed to participate in outside activities, didn't have friends and found school to be quite difficult. "I didn't feel accepted or appreciated," Winchell writes. "I was never happy as a teenager ... and felt my parents held me back, micromanaging my life and believing I couldn't do things on my own." He also believes that his difficulties were never understood nor embraced.

As he began writing his book and reflecting on his life and experiences, Winchell became more understanding of his parents. "Looking back," he writes, "I understand that my parents and siblings only saw my disability, which caused them to overprotect me and not recognize my strengths."

Winchell has been, and continues to be, an active volunteer in local organizations. It began with his involvement with the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation (LASF, now LPIE) when his oldest son was in school. "I wanted to get involved in my kids' lives," Winchell says, "but knew I was unable to help in many ways because of my disability. I told my son that while I can't help with your education, I can help in other ways." He underwrote the LASF catalog and volunteered in their office. "It was great get-

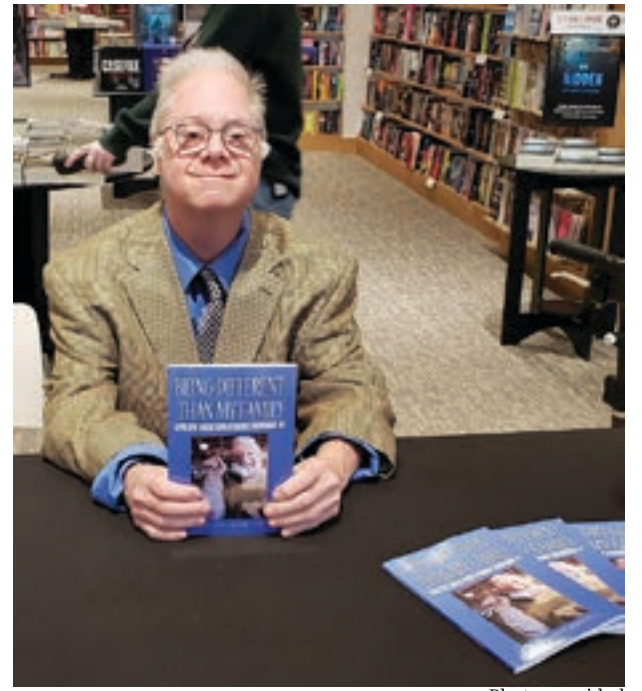


Photo provided

Local author, Jonathan Winchell, at a Barnes and Noble book signing.

ting exposure behind the scenes and seeing where I could make a difference in my sons' education."

He continued his volunteer work with both the Lafayette and Pleasant Hill Chambers of Commerce, the East Bay International Jewish Film Festival, the Lamorinda Film Entertainment Foundation, the California Independent Film Festival Association, and the Community Emergency Response Team.

Winchell is an active member of the California Historical Radio Society and serves as the staff photographer for the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame; he received their Legend of the Year award in 2019. Last year, he received the Volunteer of the Year award from the California Independent Film Festival

Association. "I never expected the best in myself when I was younger," Winchell proclaims. "Being born with Mosaic Down syndrome is not who I am, it's what I have. ... But I overcame so much and am very proud of my accomplishments."

A review on amazon.com says Winchell's book "takes you on a life journey of his obstacles and struggles in everyday life that so many take for granted" and kirkusreviews.com writes that "this memoir ... is a candid life story sure to teach and inspire others affected by disability ... it will undoubtedly resonate with readers."

"Being Different Than My Family" is available on Amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and other online booksellers.

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<p><b>JANE &amp; DAVE SMITH</b></p> <p>925.998.1914 DRE# 01476506/02105225</p>	<p><b>SOLD</b></p> <p><b>3351 BETTY LANE, LAFAYETTE</b> SOLD FOR \$1,300,000 SMITH HOMES TEAM   925.998.1914</p>	<p><b>SOLD</b></p> <p><b>3341 N. LUCILLE LANE, LAFAYETTE</b> SOLD FOR \$1,101,000 L. LEGLER &amp; C. HATA   925.286.1244</p>	<p><b>SOLD • REPRESENTED BUYER</b></p> <p><b>117 WOOTTEN DRIVE, WALNUT CREEK</b> SOLD FOR \$1,700,000 COLOMBANA GROUP   925.878.8047</p>	<p><b>JILL BALAZS</b></p> <p>925.804.0200 DRE# 02038791</p>
<p><b>JOY WIEHN</b></p> <p>415.377.1884 DRE# 02047712</p>	<p><b>SOLD • REPRESENTED BUYER</b></p> <p><b>3351 BETTY LANE, LAFAYETTE</b> SOLD FOR \$1,300,000 KAAREN BRICKMAN   925.351.5049</p>	<p><b>SOLD • REPRESENTED BUYER</b></p> <p><b>8 BUCKINGHAM DRIVE, MORAGA</b> SOLD FOR \$1,200,000 MATT MCLEOD   925.465.6500</p>	<p><b>SOLD • REPRESENTED BUYER</b></p> <p><b>105 MARVIN DRIVE, PLEASANT HILL</b> SOLD FOR \$1,005,000 COLOMBANA GROUP   925.878.8047</p>	<p><b>JULIE DEL SANTO</b> BROKER/OWNER</p> <p>925.818.5500 DRE# 01290985</p>
<p><b>KAAREN BRICKMAN</b></p> <p>925.351.5049 DRE# 01932119</p>	<p><b>LORI LEGLER</b></p> <p>925.286.1244 DRE# 00805732</p>	<p><b>MATT MCLEOD</b></p> <p>925.464.6500 DRE# 01310057</p>	<p><b>RACHEL DREYER</b></p> <p>415.990.1672 DRE# 01994561</p>	<p><b>COLOMBANA GROUP</b></p> <p>925.878.8047 DRE# 01979180</p>
<p><b>RUTH EDDY</b></p> <p>925.788.5449 DRE# 01313819</p>	<p><b>SHELLEY RUHMAN</b></p> <p>510.506.1351 DRE# 01180260</p>	<p><b>SHERRY HUTCHENS</b></p> <p>925.212.7617 DRE# 01320608</p>	<p><b>TINA FRECHMAN</b></p> <p>925.915.0851 DRE# 01970768</p>	



# Lamorinda

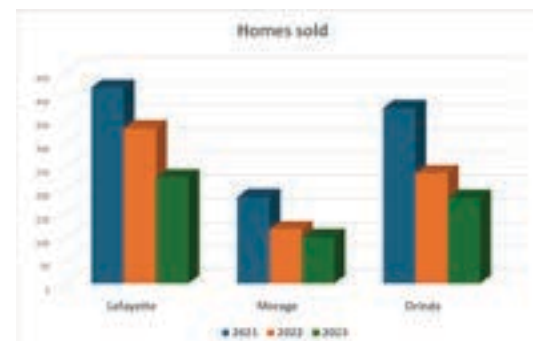
# OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly

Volume 17

Issue 24

Wednesday, January 17, 2024



The Real Estate Quarter in Review

... read on Page OH5

*Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian*

## 2024 Garden Trends Part 2

By Cynthia Brian



Photos Cynthia Brian

January jonquils perfume the garden with their sweet scent.

*"Sometimes in the winds of change, we find our true direction." ~ Source Unknown*

Thus far, January has indeed been a windy month. Optimism is my true direction.

The vernal equinox is still two months away, yet my jonquils are already perfuming my landscape. Daffodils are a symbol of rebirth and usually begin to bloom in March. All jonquils are daffodils (*Narcissus jonquilla*), yet not all daffodils are jonquils. Since winter is my least favorite season, my optimism soars as I stroll through my garden witnessing these adaptable narcissi stretching their yellow and cream petals to the sky whilst most of my garden sleeps.

My bright pink *Bergenia* with large, glossy leaves that resemble elephant ears has been blooming for over a month, lining the edges of beds in front of the privets and along the lawn. I count on *Bergenia* to brighten the garden throughout the drabness of winter. *Bergenia* is easy to propagate by dividing the roots. *Bergenia*'s unflattering name is "pig squeak" because of the sound the leaves make when rubbed together.

The 2024 Garden Media Garden Trends Report shares information to enhance garden customer experiences and shape winning new products. The theme for 2024 is Eco-Optimism. The growing awareness of our global climate's volatility has increased the number of people planting for pollinators. Without birds, butterflies, bats, bees, and other pollinators, we wouldn't have the foods, medicines, beverages, or spices that we need for healthy living. Since pollinator populations have been declining, we must plant to improve their habitat, refrain from using pesticides, and explore methods to be organic. Since 2019, the number of people purchasing native plants has doubled. Native plants are specimens that are region-specific, and adaptable to the soil and climate where they naturally grow.

... continued on Page OH10



Pink *Bergenia* brightens the bottom of the privet bed.



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## Lamorinda home sales recorded

City	Last reported	Lowest amount	Highest amount
LAFAYETTE	13	\$1,174,000	\$4,581,000
MORAGA	6	\$490,000	\$2,020,000
ORINDA	11	\$700,000	\$2,975,000

Home sales are compiled by Cal REsource, an Oakland real estate information company. Sale prices are computed from the county transfer tax information shown on the deeds that record at close of escrow and are published five to eight weeks after such recording. This information is obtained from public county records and is provided to us by California REsource. Neither Cal REsource nor this publication are liable for errors or omissions.

**LAFAYETTE**

- 3351 Betty Lane, \$1,300,000, 3 Bdrms, 1633 SqFt, 1954 YrBlt, 12-15-23
- 916 Brown Avenue, \$1,174,000, 2 Bdrms, 1343 SqFt, 2022 YrBlt, 11-30-23
- 933 Diablo Drive, \$1,200,000, 3 Bdrms, 1619 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 12-05-23,  
Previous Sale: \$890,000, 02-17-15
- 3523 Eagle Point Road, \$1,700,000, 4 Bdrms, 2399 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 11-20-23
- 26 Hidden Valley Road, \$2,060,000, 3 Bdrms, 2180 SqFt, 1952 YrBlt, 12-01-23
- 3368 Las Huertas Road, \$3,650,000, 4 Bdrms, 3537 SqFt,  
1964 YrBlt, 11-20-23, Previous Sale: \$4,825,000, 02-18-22
- 3963 Los Arabis Drive, \$4,581,000, 3 Bdrms, 2185 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt,  
12-08-23, Previous Sale: \$2,155,000, 12-24-20
- 1141 North Thompson Road, \$1,485,000, 2 Bdrms, 1276 SqFt,  
1971 YrBlt, 11-22-23, Previous Sale: \$1,007,000, 01-27-23
- 3445 Shangri La Road, \$1,650,000, 4 Bdrms, 3596 SqFt, 1972 YrBlt, 12-12-23
- 1025 Silverhill Drive, \$2,584,000, 4 Bdrms, 4196 SqFt, 1990 YrBlt, 12-05-23,  
Previous Sale: \$1,950,000, 03-24-23
- 88 Silverwood Drive, \$2,000,000, 3 Bdrms, 2998 SqFt, 1962 YrBlt, 12-01-23
- 1098 North Thompson Road, \$1,396,000, 5 Bdrms, 2504 SqFt,  
1965 YrBlt, 12-11-23, Previous Sale: \$110,000, 06-01-78
- 95 Woodbury Highlands Court #23, \$1,604,000, 3 Bdrms, 1904 SqFt,  
2022 YrBlt, 12-15-23

... continued on Page OH8

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## 5 questions to consider about where to live in retirement

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson



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Where to live in retirement? That is either a challenging question or one that has not been contemplated fully. I hear from many people of all ages that they are concerned about this aspect of their own aging or that of a parent. The good news is there are now many more options for where to live in retirement; the downside is this array of choices can actually cause some of us to procrastinate in thinking the question out realistically.

What does one do to be prepared for the long lives we all hope to have? I have 5 questions along with options for you to ponder as you look at the New Year!

**1) What do you or your family member value? What gives your life meaning?** The answer to this question is going to help you make a decision about where to live in retirement. Your desires, wishes, and/or needs should lead you. You want to keep some elements of your answer to this question in the decision. For example, even if you can no longer sail, can you get to a marina and watch the activities?

**2) What are your health needs or that of your family member?** Do you have any progressive issues you need to prepare for? For exam-

ple, do you have arthritis or any mobility challenges? Do you or your family member have any issues with memory? If not, are you continuing a healthy lifestyle—maintaining a heart healthy diet, exercise, social engagement, good sleep, and a positive attitude? You will also need to look at options for the possible “what ifs.”

**3) Does your or your parent's existing living environment address all those suggestions for healthy aging in question two?** Is the environment conducive for progressive issues, and can you continue with your socialization if you cannot drive? Are you able to afford and find help should you need it to age in place? A consultation with an Aging Life Care Expert could help you with the answers to this question.

**4) What about your or your family member's finances?** This is a very important question to answer in order to help you decide the type of retirement living that will best meet your needs. Your answer might include more than one option. For example, you might decide to stay in your own home until X or Y happens.

... continued on Page OH9



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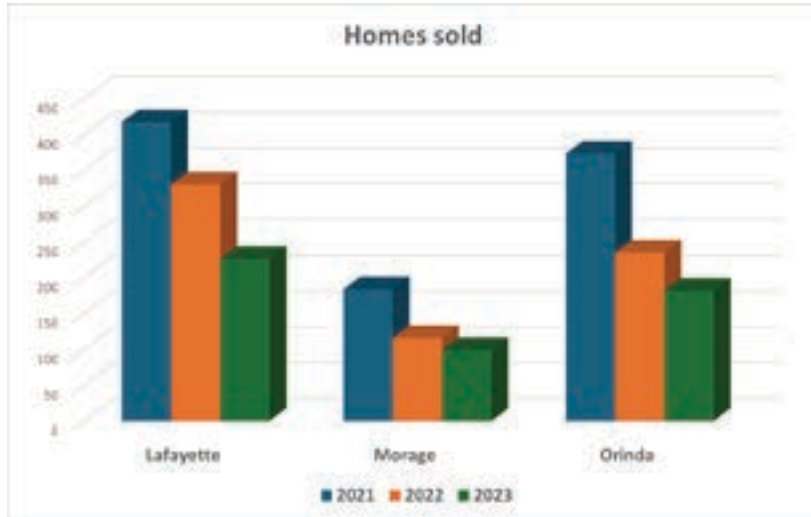
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# The Real Estate Year in Review

By Conrad Bassett, Licensed Real Estate Broker and CRP, GMS-T



It was an interesting year for buyers and sellers of residential real estate during 2023 in Lamorinda. The higher interest rates as well as a lack of supply kept the number of transactions down for the year. Sales volume was much lower in each community and the average sales price in each community moderated somewhat.

Homes stayed on the market for a similar limited time like in 2022 and 2023 and the majority of homes still sold near or above their final asking price.

Per Contra Costa Association of Realtors statistics reported for closings Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2023, 226 single family homes closed in Lafayette versus 330 in 2022 and 417 in 2021. For the 226 reported closings, sales prices ranged from \$750,000 to \$13.69 million and the average time on market was 24 days, up from the 17 days in 2022.

The average Lafayette sales price was \$2,230,387. This was a large decrease from the \$2,456,834 in 2022. It was \$2,124,266 in 2021. (It was \$1,248,532 in 2013.)

The average sales price was just over 100% of the final list

price which in 2023 was \$2,218,569. This comes from a combination of properties being listed at or near actual values rather than in the past years where many were listed well below value in order to hopefully promote a "bidding war." There were no REO or short sales in Lafayette sold on the MLS.

Only four homes closed below \$1 million ... there were seven in 2022.

In Moraga there were 99 single family closings in 2023. There were 116 in 2022 and 184 single family closings in 2021. Prices ranged from \$1.3 million to \$4 million. The average sales price was \$2,029,624, down from \$2,214,037 in 2022. In 2021 it was \$1,926,353. The 2013 average was \$1,147,207.

The average number of days on market in 2023 was 18. In 2022 it was 12. The average home sold for 103% of its asking price. The average list price was \$1,968,099. There were no REO properties that closed on the MLS and no short sales.

... continued on Page OH8

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# The Real Estate Year in Review

... continued from Page OH5

In Orinda the number of single-family closings was 182. A year ago it was 235. In 2021 there were 373 closings. The reported sales ranged in price from \$700,000 to \$4.295 million with an average price of \$2,091,048. In 2022 it was \$2,291,847 and in 2021 it was \$2,187,385. In 2013 it was \$1,240,158.

The average market time was 23 days – about the same as the 22 days a year ago.

The average sales price was an average of 102% of the final list price. A year ago, it was 106.4% of the final list price for the reported sales. There was one REO (bank owned) sale in Orinda in 2023 and one short sale in the MLS.

There were no reported sales in Canyon in the MLS in 2023.

On an average price per square foot basis for reported sales in 2023, Lafayette homes sold for \$832.06, well below the \$945.10 in 2022.

In 2023, Moraga homes sold for \$842.26 per square foot. In 2022 it was \$872.73 and in 2021 it was \$775.04 per square foot.

In Orinda last year it was \$807.87. In 2022 it was \$862.26. In 2021 it was \$797.26.

In the condominium/town home category, Lafayette had 30 closings – down from 34 closings in 2022. Sales prices ranged in 2023 from \$581,784 to \$2.675 million. Moraga had 54 closed non-single-family closings in 2023. In 2022 there were 81 closed units – down from the 118 in 2021. Sales ranged from \$410,000 to \$1.8 million. This includes “attached” homes in Moraga Country Club. Orinda had eight closings, down from 16 in 2022. Three of these were in the complexes on Brookwood Road and the others in Orindawoods. They sold from \$515,000 to \$2.275 million.

It should be noted that there are always a few direct sales that do not go through the MLS and they are not reported here. These are usually sales between private individuals.

As of Jan. 8, there were only 27 dwellings under contract per the MLS in the three communities combined, with asking prices of \$609,000 to \$4 million. It should be pointed out that there are no pending REOs or short sales. Prices have continued to rise over the last few years and more owners now have equity in their homes and have not had to go the short-sale process or face foreclosure.

A comparison of year-end inventory in the three communities combined shows 28 homes on the market. Last January there were 38 homes on the market. Seasonally the biggest inventory is in the spring and early summer. The current asking prices range from \$470,000 to nearly \$5.9 million in the three communities combined.

In Lamorinda in 2022, 118 homes sold for over \$3 million. This number dropped to 66 in 2023! In Lafayette alone, 63 sold for \$3 million or more in 2022; it fell to 38 last year.

Mortgage rates have moderated somewhat in the last month or so but are still above historic lows. Corporate relocations have increased as many companies want their staff to be in their destination offices rather than working remotely from their departure locations. We have not seen many outbound relocations for people working for companies who have announced that their corporate headquarters will be moving out of the state.

One other factor that will continue to affect the markets will be the reluctance of those who financed or refinanced at a rate below 3% to want to make discretionary moves and pay rates of twice as much as they have today. This will limit supply.

The East Bay communities like Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda as well as Piedmont and several neighborhoods in Oakland and Berkeley continue to benefit from their proximity to San Francisco where prices remain very high but have also started to moderate.

Comparably speaking, the East Bay is still relatively more affordable and many of the buyers in the East Bay have come from the Peninsula and Silicon Valley and San Francisco.

## Lamorinda home sales recorded

... continued from Page OH2

### MORAGA

1967 Ascot Drive #A, \$490,000, 2 Bdrms, 964 SqFt, 1971 YrBlt, 12-06-23,

Previous Sale: \$310,000, 10-28-14

81 Ashbrook Place, \$1,935,000, 3 Bdrms, 3055 SqFt, 1967 YrBlt, 12-15-23

1026 Larch Avenue, \$2,020,000, 5 Bdrms, 2711 SqFt, 1995 YrBlt, 11-21-23

1290 Larch Avenue, \$1,875,000, 3 Bdrms, 2169 SqFt, 1966 YrBlt, 12-04-23,

Previous Sale: \$1,500,000, 07-12-23

1874 School Street, \$1,900,000, 5 Bdrms, 2638 SqFt, 1969 YrBlt, 12-12-23

820 Villa Lane #4, \$525,000, 2 Bdrms, 882 SqFt, 1968 YrBlt, 12-13-23,

Previous Sale: \$96,000, 11-01-85

### ORINDA

70 Citron Knolls, \$1,740,000, 5 Bdrms, 2666 SqFt, 2013 YrBlt, 12-07-23

228 El Toyonal, \$1,121,500, 3 Bdrms, 1445 SqFt, 1959 YrBlt, 11-30-23

34 La Campana Road, \$1,010,000, 3 Bdrms, 1476 SqFt, 1946 YrBlt, 12-12-23

51 Las Palomas, \$1,375,000, 4 Bdrms, 2124 SqFt, 1958 YrBlt, 12-11-23

7 Los Amigos, \$700,000, 2 Bdrms, 1591 SqFt, 1951 YrBlt, 12-04-23

7 Oak Flat Road, \$2,975,000, 4 Bdrms, 3891 SqFt, 2020 YrBlt, 12-08-23,

Previous Sale: \$217,000, 07-01-89

58 Orchard Road, \$2,011,000, 4 Bdrms, 3950 SqFt, 1950 YrBlt, 11-28-23

1 Poco Paseo, \$1,400,000, 3 Bdrms, 1554 SqFt, 1957 YrBlt, 11-22-23,

Previous Sale: \$1,165,100, 06-21-18

44 Rheem Boulevard, \$1,250,000, 3 Bdrms, 1404 SqFt, 1965 YrBlt, 12-08-23

48 Singingwood Lane, \$2,700,000, 4 Bdrms, 2854 SqFt, 1972 YrBlt, 11-28-23,

Previous Sale: \$2,005,000, 06-01-15

324 Tappan Terrace, \$1,960,000, 3 Bdrms, 3592 SqFt, 1982 YrBlt, 12-08-23,

Previous Sale: \$1,878,000, 07-10-19



# 5 questions to consider about where to live in retirement

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson

... continued from Page OH4

But that “X” could change – we do not have a crystal ball. So, consult with your financial planner or estate attorney and talk about this sensitive but important issue. Assisted living is averaging around \$6,000+ monthly without any additional services. Home care averages around \$40 per hour. The New York Times did a recent series on the cost of care called Dying Broke; this is a revelation for us all.

## 5) Have you looked at the current options available?

Many communities have senior housing that provides rental units for those over 55 years of age; these usually don’t offer any support systems except for socialization. Then there are senior communities like Rossmoor in Walnut Creek that have lots of activities and security; however, you purchase them like a home and still have a monthly expense to the community.

Assisted Living Communities can accommodate independent seniors, as well as those that might need some level of assistance, including “memory care.” This option can often be good for couples that have different needs but want to stay close to their partners. You must ask good questions about all the different levels of care. It’s a good idea to tour at least three and choose one you like, even if you plan to stay in your home – because life happens, and it is good to have an idea of places you like if you cannot stay in your home for any reason.

Continuing Care Retirement Communities are appealing to healthy seniors without family and couples who no longer want to maintain a home and garden. You pay a very large purchase price for your unit, plus a monthly fee that covers meals, cleaning, and the amenities of a large community. Many offer you all levels of care including skilled nursing and some only to the level of “memory care”. For solo seniors, this is often a good choice if you have the financial means because you have secured for yourself a place to age with support systems that often prevent moves.

Staying in your own home with maybe just some community support systems may be an option when choosing where to live in retirement. Perhaps your area has a local senior center. Maybe there is a nearby “village” you can join; these are organizations that for a low membership fee provide free volunteer services, socialization and educational opportunities, and much more (for instance Lamorinda Village).

Small residential homes for six persons are an option for very frail seniors, and most individuals have lived in other levels of care before this is their best choice. The setting is very homey and comfortable, but there is a lack of the programming and social stimulation provided by larger Assisted Living Communities.

There are other choices in senior housing, like “co-housing”. This option is a purchased small home/condo with a common community room and individuals provide some support and common meals for one another.

There are low-income senior housing apartments that are a good option for low- and middle-income seniors. The wait list is typically quite long, but if this is something you or a family member would like, get on the lists sooner rather than later. You can call senior information in California at 1-800-510-2020 and ask for a list of these facilities in your area.

As you can see from these five questions above, a lot goes into choosing the right environment for each individual or couple. Your choice should be made with eyes wide open to the realities of what can be provided, the cost, and how they match your values and wishes for aging well.

My book, “The Empowered Caregiver: Practical Advice and Emotional Support for Adult Children of Older Adults,” is still a resource I encourage

you all to have as a reference for the many challenges faced by those living a long life. Older adults tell me they buy it and underline what is important to them and then give to their children!

My next free Zoom class will be at 11 a.m. Feb. 9. It is called “What is Dementia?” Just send me an email to attend this free class – LindaFJ620@outlook.com

Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She has been practicing professional care management since 1984. Linda founded Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company in 1989. Eldercare Services is now a division of Home Care Assistance and continues to provide Bay Area families with care management, advocacy, counseling, support groups and education.





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## *Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian*

### 2024 Garden Trends Part 2

Photos Cynthia Brian



**Noxious weed and invasive Euphorbia, leafy spurge, killed native plants.**

... continued from Page OH1

We must also garden for wildlife to ensure the viability of our landscapes. One of my apple trees supplies late-harvest tasty treats not only for my family and friends, but also for the birds, bees, squirrels, raccoons, foxes, rabbits, and other creatures that frequent the orchard.

The United Nations projects that by the year 2050, 89% of people will be living in urban areas. Container gardening increased by 200% in 2022 and as people move to smaller spaces, demand for container gardening will continue. Bring a pot of amaryllis into the house and watch the blooms unfold. Hanging gardens will be a trend for 2024 while edible gardens are all the rage. In addition to herbs and vegetables, I am cultivating mustard greens which are harvested young to be added to salads or steamed as a vegetable.

Trees of the future is a theme as we save our vital canopies. As people learn more about the benefits of trees, they will want to plant specimens that will enhance their spaces while also providing shade for humans and a habitat for wildlife. Trees will be up-lit to add drama to the night garden. In the past few months, I have reinstated landscape lighting to showcase the architecture of my trees. A favorite tree for our environment is the crape myrtle. Crape myrtles offer four seasons of splendor, including breathtaking bark in

winter. Birds and hummingbirds flock to my trees.

By reusing and repurposing many home products, we will neutralize our carbon footprints. The vivid, wild, and powerful color of the year is called cyber lime. This is a hyper-bright green that signifies the connection between nature and technology. I see it in the new leaves on my sage plants, and naturally on my lemon and lime trees. According to the Garden Trends Report, cyber lime is gender-inclusive, fashionable, and complements most colors. It looks terrific in combination with purple, pink, orange, yellow, white, and other neon. The color “green” echoes nature and will continue to work in harmony with interior décor, stimulating and energizing our body, mind, and spirit. You’ll find this bold lime hue in many indoor and outdoor plants including hellebores, heuchera, spirea, echinacea, hydrangea, zinnia, pothos, philodendron, lemongrass, mint, coleus, potato vine, and many more.

Though its bracts are a gorgeous lime green, one plant that I don’t recommend because it is terribly invasive is euphorbia, also called leafy spurge. Its root system spreads rapidly and produces a chemical that stops other plants from growing. The leaf’s milky juice irritates the skin. Leafy spurge was introduced from Europe as a garden plant, but it has now escaped into hills, fields, roadsides, and my orchard. What began with a single specimen in my landscape exploded to cover a hillside and kill the growing natives. I have been working to eradicate it from my land for at least two decades. It is a noxious weed to be avoided.

Let’s be eco-optimists in 2024 and assist the winds of change to help us find our true direction.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



**The citron lemon reflects the cyber lime color of the year.**



**Plant sage for its color, flowers, and flavor.**



**Clip baby mustard leaves to add a peppery flavor to food.**



Photo Cynthia Brian



Crape myrtle bark is artfully captivating in winter.



White amaryllis blooms indoors in a container.



Cynthia Brian

For more gardening advice for all seasons, check out Growing with the Goddess Gardener at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/books>. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia Brian is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!® 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyle® Radio Broadcast at [www.StarStyleRadio.com](http://www.StarStyleRadio.com). Her newest children's picture book, Family Forever, from the series, Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures is available now at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com) <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com>

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