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Photographer Golnaz Shahmirzadi took portraits of people at the Norouz Persian New Year Festival on Sunday, Mar. 10. The whimsical portraits featured the various symbols that are commonly used as part of the Norouz Table in celebration of spring.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

Persian festival brings overflow crowds to Wilder Art & Garden Center

By Sora O'Doherty

In the words of organizer Farigol Bineshpour, "When mothers get together, magic happens." Three generations of her family joined Minoo Akbarian and other organizers of the first annual Norouz Bazaar and Spring Equinox celebration at the Art & Garden Center at Wilder on Sunday, March 10.

The event drew people of Persian ancestry, including those born in Iran, from all over the Bay Area and beyond. Visitors came from as far away as Sacramento, San Francisco, Oakland, and Pleasanton, as well as many other places.

Norouz (Nowruz) is a celebration of the new year, and on the Persian calendar the new year is 1403. Next to the stage, large numbers indicating the year were flanked by flowers, as visitors took the opportunity to have their photographs taken. Inside, a professional photographer took portraits with symbols of Norouz and Spring.

The parking lot was filled to capacity, and more, as some 1500 people at-

tended the free event. Nevertheless, the crowd was good natured, waiting patiently in line for barbecue or ice cream, and browsing the many booths of artisan offerings. Traffic control screened cars, and prevented festival-goers from venturing up Wilder Road into the Wilder development. Many vehicles were parked in places inside the parking lot but not designated for parking.

Bineshpour said that she didn't think that the turnout would be so large, but she was delighted by the success of the event, which was one year in the planning. She hopes the event will be at Wilder again next year, although she recognized that a larger venue might be required.

From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. festival goers were able to enjoy Persian food and sweets and live music on a mild spring afternoon. There were crafts for the children, and inside the building numerous stalls offered apparel, jewelry and accessories, pottery, handbags and shoes, among other things for sale.

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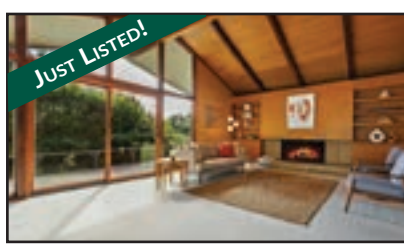


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Is BART safe?

Lafayette residents react to BART's bystander intervention program

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Lafayette BART Station and the path that connects it to Town Center Apartments, downtown shops, restaurants, and Walgreens is a place that is frequented by commuters on their way to and from work, those on a night out in another part of the Bay, and unhoused people. Spend a little time in the area, and you're bound to see police patrolling, stopping, questioning, and occasionally chasing someone.

Five years ago, 18-year old Nia Wilson and her sisters got on the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) three stops down from Lafayette at the Concord Station for what would be her last time. John Lee Cowell, who was 29 at the time and three months out of treatment at a mental health facility, boarded the same train and stabbed and killed Wilson and injured her sister during a transfer stop at MacArthur Station. Shortly after, the beginnings of the pandemic kicked in, forcing many to pivot to remote work. Now, BART's ridership is at 43 percent of its pre-pandemic numbers and many are citing safety concerns as a deterrent.

In 2021, after hearing from youth who had experienced, witnessed, or feared gender-based violence while riding public transportation, BART partnered with the Girls Alliance and Unity Council to roll out a bystander intervention initiative called 'Not One More Girl.'

Alicia Trost, Chief Communications Officer for BART, says, 'Not One More Girl' has the capacity to benefit everyone – not just girls.

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Election results: Moraga passes school bond, incumbents win their races

By Sora O'Doherty

Moraga citizens voted in large numbers for a new school bond in the Statewide election held March 5. The bond, intended to address Moraga's aging school facilities, will raise approximately \$3 million annually and will cost homeowners around \$28 to \$30 per \$100,000 of assessed values. The bond authorizes the Moraga School District to sell \$52 million in bonds, with both the principal and interest on the bonds to be repaid from the ad valorem tax on property. The measure, which required a 55% majority to pass, seems to have achieved a greater than 66% majority, according to preliminary results of the election released by Contra Costa County Elections, with 100% of precincts reporting.

Moraga Superintendent of Schools Julie Parks said, "We are so grateful for the Moraga community and the ongoing commitment to our schools. We look forward to putting this investment to good use to improve facilities for Moraga students now and in the future."

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