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Students gather outside Miramonte High School as part of a joint protest on Feb. 4, organized by Acalanes High School students. Photo Jeff Heyman

Lamorinda high school students take to streets to protest ICE actions

By Sharon K. Sobotta

Many older community members have been at the forefront of periodic "No Kings" protests in downtown Lafayette, as well as in Concord and Walnut Creek and elsewhere since President Donald Trump began serving his second term in January 2025, but seeing younger folks at these types of events was reportedly rare. That changed on Feb. 4 when hundreds of high school students from Acalanes, Cam-

polindo, Miramonte, Los Lomas, and Carondelet as well as students from Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School and others walked out of class a half-hour before the end of school to protest Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) actions in Minnesota and honor the lives of Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Evelyn Hollenberg, 16, who was one of the student organizers of the high school protest, says she's

grateful to the older community members for protesting even when youth are sometimes preoccupied with school and extracurricular activities. Hollenberg says she is counting down the days until she can vote, but until then, she feels an obligation to do what she can do and join in the protests.

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New Mayor demands improvements to Moraga Shopping Center

By Vera Kochan

For several years, Moraga residents have complained about the dilapidated condition of the Moraga Shopping Center calling it a dump, a blight, tacky, unwelcoming, and an embarrassment to a community that considers itself affluent. While past town councils have felt that their hands were tied, because the property owners chose to operate in a status quo manner, new Moraga Mayor Kerry Hillis is demanding significant changes and improvements.

During the Town Council's Jan. 14 meeting, a staff report was presented by Planning Director Sonia Urzua outlining a proposed Professional Services Agreement with Kosmont Companies for on-call real estate and economic development advisory services. The initial payment is a not-to-exceed amount of \$60,000. There is enough funding in the General Fund Budget Fiscal Year 2025-2026 to cover the cost of a one-year agreement.

According to Urzua's staff report, "On February 26, 2025, the Town Council approved a top priority to develop and implement a plan to encourage com-

mercial landowners and business owners to develop their underutilized properties. Kosmont would begin with an in-person kickoff meeting with Town staff and a review of background materials (including prior studies and available market data), and coordinate with Town staff to engage private property owners and better understand near-term and long-term objectives and development constraints, including challenges associated with underutilized properties."

Kosmont has been a real estate advisory firm for 39 years "working with cities and public agencies on over 1,000 economic development strategies, real estate market analyses, and public and private projects."

Both Vice Mayor Brian Dolan and Town Manager Scott Mitnick have worked with Kosmont during their tenures at other cities and highly recommend their services for the Town's purposes. All council members agreed that something must be done with the Moraga Shopping Center.



Mayor focuses ire on state of Moraga Shopping Center, flanked by multi-million dollar homes..

Photo J. Wake

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www.lovelafayette.org
Phone: (925) 284-1968
Chamber of Commerce:
www.lafayettechamber.org

Lafayette Public Meetings
City Council: Regular Meeting: Monday, Jan. 23, 7 p.m.
Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall
Planning Commission: Tuesday, Jan. 17, 7 p.m.
Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall
Design Review: Monday, Jan. 23, 7 p.m.
Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Arts & Science Discovery Room

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Residents embrace gas leaf blower ban

By David Scholz



Lafayette resident Dorothy Walker tries out a hand-held electric leaf blower.
Photo David Scholz

Just one citation has been issued in response to the City of Lafayette's ban on gas powered leaf blowers since it went into effect July 1, 2024 – a sign that voluntary compliance is taking hold.

And, such is the trend that Gerardo Jiminez, the city's lone Code Enforcement Officer tasked with following up on complaints made by residents in response to scofflaws, hopes will persist in the year ahead.

Jiminez noted an uptick in complaints from 2024 to 2025 made to his office as calls rose from 487 to 571.

Issuing a citation is the last thing Jiminez says he wishes to do, with educating the ap-

parent violators the preferred course of action.

"Regardless of who they hire, it is the responsibility of the homeowner to provide the (landscape crews) with the resources and requirements, at the very least, to stay in compliance," he said.

To that end, he emphasized that "a very friendly letter" informing a resident that they are in violation is the first step in the process after a complaint has been logged, to which Jiminez hopes the individual self-polices their behavior and no further complaints result.

But, if it comes to it, a notice of violation could follow. The ulti-

mate hope is that violators comply, and after 30 days, the matter is closed. But a report about the specific residence will remain on file just in case a new complaint is made.

The hardest part of Jiminez's job is getting complaining residents to sign a Disclosure Form. Doing so means complainants may have to testify against the offending party if the matter goes to court.

Jiminez encourages photos of the alleged violation be taken when residents make a complaint. Otherwise, he noted, it takes a lot more time for him investigate and see firsthand when a violation is taking place.

"It is lengthy process, but I try to give the residents a chance to comply," he said. "My goal is not to write citations; the goal is always voluntary compliance."

A common situation Jiminez finds is that the violations at times involve a property where its owner doesn't reside there, and there is either a lack of awareness about the gas-powered ban or they have taken it on good faith that the landscaping crew who was hired had been following the law.

Just as before the gas-powered leaf blower ban took effect in mid-2024, the City of Lafayette is continuing to offer its free loaner program for residents to borrow either a commercial backpack electric leaf blower or a smaller hand-held model. The leaf blowers are available for homeowners to try out the equipment and understand how much of a charge batteries carry for the equipment before making a financial investment for their residence.

For details about the loaner program, visit: <https://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/commissions-committees/environmental-task-force/electric-leaf-blower-lending-program>

High school students protest ICE



Acalanes High School students protest along the sidewalks surrounding the school parking lot on Feb. 4.
Photo Margaux Stone

..continued from Page A1

"One thing that I was thinking about recently was Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, when Lincoln says that 'government by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth,'" Hollenberg said. To Hollenberg, it feels like the government is working against its people and those who came to America in hopes of making a better life for themselves while contributing to America, regardless of their status.

Ary Deepak, another student organizer, wants to upend the narrative that teenagers are


indifferent.

"People tend to have a perception that teenagers just don't really care about what's happening in their society, in their world, and are kind of just disconnected trying to get by," Deepak said. "But we do care. The things that are happening now are what we're going to grow up into and going to live in. We need to show that we do care and stand in solidarity."

For those who feel a little too disheartened or overwhelmed by the current state of politics in the country, Deepak urges them to push through and stand up for

others. "If it's not you or your group that's being targeted, it'll be some other marginalized person or group that they will try and deport from this country, and then it'll be people who even just disagree with them, where people have different ideas and it'll just keep going; it's a very slippery slope. We can't just allow this to happen. We have to show up."

Participating high school students walked out of class precisely at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 4 and then took to the peripheries of their respective schools.



Get Involved
Lafayette City Council
Seeks Citizen Volunteers

Crime Prevention Commission: studies safety issues in the City and works to educate the public. Some activities of the Commission include coordinating the neighborhood watch and business alter programs, providing crime prevention tips to the local newspapers, supporting Community Events, and organizing a community safety day with the Emergency Preparedness Commission.
Meetings: 4th Tuesday of each month.

Environmental Task Force (ETF): develops and implements policies and programs that will enable the City and its residents to meet their needs present needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
Meetings: 2nd Thursday of each month.

Planning Commission: charged with the preparation and implementation of the General Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and the review of development projects in the city.
Meetings: 1st and 3rd Monday of each month.

Lafayette citizens interested in these volunteer opportunities and application go to: LoveLafayette.org/VolunteerApp or e-mail cityhall@lovelafayette.org

POSITIONS OPEN UNTIL FILLED

Lafayette council discusses new objective design standards

By Gwyneth Lee



Flat roofs like this one at 210 Lafayette Circle were a point of contention for the Lafayette City Council during its Jan. 12 meeting.

Photo J. Wake

Lafayette Senior Planner Alry Cassidy introduced Objective Design Standards (ODS) to the City Council during its Jan. 12 meeting, before turning the presentation over to Monica Szydluk, Senior Associate for Lisa Wise Consulting. Design standards regulate the design, architecture, and layout of a site and building. Recent state law now requires that certain development applications be reviewed using only objective standards.

Lafayette’s ODS Phase 1, adopted in 2019, created priority standards to address the building height, scale, and design, pedestrian access, and outdoor space, among other priorities, and was implemented through the ODS form. In December 2024, Lafayette’s 6th Cycle Housing Element was adopted, and in January 2025, the city adopted Ordinance 696. Ordinance 696 approved a Zoning Text Amendment and a Zoning Map Amendment to rezone certain areas, though this did not include modifications to the ODS form, focusing on objective development standards, rather than design.

The purpose of Cassidy’s presentation was to present the new draft of ODS Phase 2 for the City Council to review and offer their feedback. ODS Phase 2 plans to create detailed, predictable design standards, which will apply to multi-family, commercial, and mixed-use residential development.

“After the council and public make feedback to staff, staff will make updates as directed and return to council with an adoptable draft,” Cassidy said in the meeting. “No action is required to adopt this ODS draft, as it is an implementation step of the

housing element, which has already been fully analyzed by CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act).”

The council and several members of the public provided feedback about ODS Phase 2, with a significant portion of the discussion focusing on the roof forms and height. The council pushed for stronger requirements mandating pitched roofs on buildings over two stories, which could include a mansard-style roof that mimics a pitched roof at the building’s edges, but hides the flat roof behind it where equipment can be placed.

The council also had concerns that the draft standards would allow for too much low-quality material usage. They objected to the standard allowing up to 70 percent of a façade to be stucco and concrete, and requested the standards be capped at the combined total of stucco, concrete, and concrete block at a lower percentage.

There were also some concerns about the building massing and articulation, which is the three-dimensional, detailed design of a building’s exterior surface. Council Member Susan Candell argued that the articulation options need to be “substantial,” as it allowed for elements that were temporary or lacked architectural heft. Candell also requested that one item previously removed from the Planning Commission draft be added back to avoid boxy, massive, and flat homogenous structures.

The council requested that staff emphasize the city’s mission statement and purpose, and asked staff to include a topic sentence that mirrored the mission statement, to underscore what they are looking for. They also requested that staff de-

velop a booklet or web page containing visual examples of design standards for developers to view.

Many of the public comments were critical of the draft ODS, largely stemming from fears that the new standards would destroy Lafayette’s character. A majority of the feedback focused on preserving the city’s semi-rural character, with residents worrying that the draft standards failed to uphold the city’s mission statement to make Lafayette a “small-town community with a semi-rural ambiance.” Specifically, many addressed a desire to not look like Walnut Creek.

One resident, Eliot Hudson, submitted a video presentation, which several other residents supported, with a detailed revision of the draft standards. The video included specific technical demands, including banning flat roofs, arguing against the allowance of 60% glass coverage, and the use of 70% stucco or concrete materials.

While a large majority of the public pushed for stricter aesthetic standards, Chair of the Design Review Commission Glenn Cass spoke as a resident to offer a counter-perspective. Cass warned that for six-story buildings, there was no “semi-rural” style, and that completely restricting flat roofs would lead to developers requesting waivers, and noted that the strict mandates would increase costs, considering the affordability aspect of the mandates.

Staff will proceed with revising the draft standards based on the council and public’s feedback, before returning to the Planning Commission and then the council for a final review.

LARIG participates in Winter Radio Field Day



The Lamorinda Area Radio Interest Group participated in Winter Field Day on Jan. 24. Al Archangel and Jeff Peacock set up on the ridge overlooking the ball fields in the Lafayette Community Park. As transmission was less than optimal at that site, they moved to the Lafayette Reservoir. – S. O’Doherty



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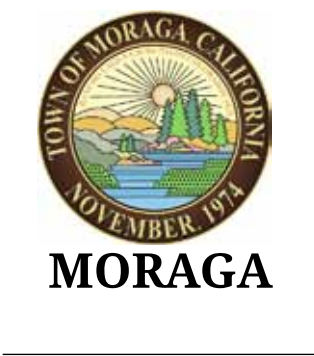
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www.moragachamber.org

Moraga Citizens' Network:
www.moragacitizensnetwork.org

Town Council Meeting ,
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Council Chamber

Planning Commission ,
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EBMUD undertakes Carter and Arroyo Reservoir Improvement Project

By Vera Kochan

East Bay Municipal Utility District has begun the Carter and Arroyo Reservoir Improvement Project with the intention of enhancing water quality, renewing aging infrastructure, and improving operational flexibility and resiliency for the Carter Pressure Zone located at the end of Alta Mesa Drive in Moraga. The project also includes replacing the Town's existing Arroyo Reservoir with two new tanks located at the end of Shannon Court.

EBMUD held a community Zoom meeting on Jan. 29 to discuss their plans and answer any questions from the public. The utility's representatives included:

EBMUD Board Director Marguerite Young, Community Affairs Representative Joe Voelker, Associate Civil Engineer Construction Division Michael Reid, Manager of Water Distribution Planning Dave Rehnstrom, Manager of Construction Division Michael Hartlaub, Director of Operations and Maintenance Dave Briggs, and Senior Civil Engineer Ben Townley.

Besides the aforementioned objectives, additional goals include maintaining fire flow capacity for emergency response readiness and improving site safety by incorporating the latest safety standards at Carter Reservoir.

Until recently, Arroyo Reservoir was the only facility in service. It holds 1 million gallons of water. The Carter Reservoir had been out of service since 2011 and was not contributing to the system. Both pumping plants worked together to move water to its destinations with a total pumping capacity of 1.1 million gallons per day. With that combined capacity, only Arroyo Reservoir has been the sole operational storage facility for the past 14 years. Even though Carter Reservoir had been out of service for over a decade, its water



Old Arroyo Reservoir tank to be replaced by two new smaller tanks.

Photo courtesy EBMUD

distribution system was still operational to maintain existing fire flow requirements to protect the Town.

Phase 1 of the Project took place between April and December 2025 with the rehabilitation of Carter Reservoir and its return to service with a new protective coating and roof replacement to ensure long-term reliability. During this time Arroyo Reservoir remained functional.

January 2026 to December 2027 will see the replacement of Arroyo Reservoir which will entail substituting it with two smaller tanks, each with a 0.29-million-gallon capacity, for a total

of 0.58 million gallons. The replacement will serve to modernize the water distribution system and improve flexibility during seasonal demands.

The entire project is expected to be completed by December 2027 with a total water storage capacity of 0.83 million gallons that will balance supply and demand. The pumping capacity will remain at 1.1 million gallons, thereby ensuring continued water reliability and fire protection for Moraga.

EBMUD wants to reassure residents that no "hot work" will be done during Red Flag Warning days. This means that no electrical work will

be performed that might cause sparking to dry grasses. There will be a dedicated fire watch during all hot work, and any areas around hot work will be wetted before and during construction.

Additionally, water service will continue throughout the construction process with reliable pressure during the Project. EBMUD addressed Moraga-Orinda Fire District concerns by adding an on-site generator.

Sign up for alerts at: ebmud.com/alerts. For any questions send emails to: construction-east@ebmud.com.

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Moraga Shopping Center improvements



RVs parked off of School Street behind Safeway.

Photo J. Wake

..continued from Page A1

Prior to Hillis giving his comments on the matter, he warned his fellow council members that his thoughts would not be brief, calling what he had to say as "tough love," and describing Moraga as "a scenic and uniquely isolated cul de sac community with eye-popping property values and fantastic schools, yet with no downtown, few recreational amenities other than largely unimproved open spaces and decaying relics of another age's idea for commercial districts.

"Through it all we have largely ignored one asset that Moraga has, that no one else in our county can claim, the only traditional 4-year university in all of Contra Costa County – Saint Mary's College – a small school with one of the

best college sports programs in the United States," Hillis went on to say.

Circling back to the shopping center, Hillis stated, "Due to a point of the combination of the above factors coupled with landowners who seem to lack a profit motive entirely in an area we've always talked about – having a downtown at the Moraga Center – it's completely covered in blight and decaying buildings, including a myriad of abandoned banks, rusting and broken signage, illegally constructed facilities, rotting farm equipment, an illegal RV encampment where multiple people live and multiple people have died, gas stations with wrecking yards of vehicles surrounding them along our scenic corridor, mostly vacant storefronts that aren't even

available to rent as the landowner is using them to store decades worth of accumulated who-knows-what, and acres and acres of land that has never been developed in human history – and I'm not over-stating that."

Hillis reminded everyone that for approximately the past three years, since Mitnick was hired as town manager, a major focus of his energies was directed toward building a rapport with the Moraga Shopping Center property owners. The town has even upzoned the area, virtually increasing the value by "tens of millions of dollars. Potentially hundreds of millions of dollars" to no avail.

"We are all tired of beating our heads against the wall," Hillis continued, "and begging the owners to participate in capitalism and making multiple future generations of their family extravagantly wealthy. That is not our job."

Hillis pointed out that Rheem Valley Shopping Center's property owners are more than happy to work with the Town. A case in point, the recent upgrade to CVS's exterior and the incoming Grocery Outlet. He also noted other ways that Rheem has out-shined Moraga's

downtown with the only post office, the Town Offices and Chambers and two gyms located on that side of the Town.

"We need to make the entirety of Moraga, not just the part by the country club, look like a place that merits our \$2 million property values," said Hillis, "and to that, we must double-down on vigorous code enforcement to compel errant landowners and business owners to not treat our scenic corridors as their private junk heaps, or a place to illegally store an RV encampment, which as I've already pointed out, is a public health threat. What was allowed in the past will not be tolerated anymore – period. End of story!"

Hillis proposed the idea of a vacant storefront tax as incentive to bring businesses into downtown. He also stressed that Moraga needs to aid SMC with whatever progress they require in building new college facilities. And, by improving the shopping center, the Town will help to increase student enrollment.

Before a unanimous council vote to retain Kosmont's services, Hillis concluded, "With the aid of Kosmont we will finally have the safe, beautiful, and engaging community we all want."

Moraga and Orinda awarded \$508K grant for Moraga Way Safety Study

By Vera Kochan



Moraga Way heading toward Orinda (in front of MOFD Station 41, near School Street)

Photo Vera Kochan

The Town of Moraga and the City of Orinda are joining forces for the Moraga Way Safety and Connectivity Planning Study. To that end, both municipalities are sharing a \$508,000 federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Planning and Development grant.

The study is meant to evaluate the 4.7-mile Moraga Way corridor that stretches from Moraga Road to the Orinda BART Station to develop a community-informed corridor concept meant to improve safety and connectivity for walking, cycling, driving and transit. It is a planning study only. It does not include final design or construction.

The architect of this plan, retired Moraga Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp, intended this shared-use path to also function as an emergency access lane during disasters, allowing emergency responders to reach affected areas when regular roadways are congested.

“I was very happy to receive the news that the joint Town of Moraga

and City of Orinda had been awarded the SS4A planning grant for analyzing feasibility to construct multi-use regional trails along Moraga Way,” stated Knapp. “In times of emergency, the regional trails could be used for emergency vehicle access (EVA). An example of EVA in Moraga is that portion of the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail between the Canyon Road Bridge and Westchester Street in the Moraga Country Club (MCC). It was designed as an EVA because of the MCC singular public access along St. Andrews Drive.”

Knapp first began developing the concept in 2018, after completing the Moraga Way Improvement Project which provided a myriad of safety improvements including new street pavement, bike lanes and sidewalk/pathways within the project’s budget limits. However, he felt that “more Moraga Way safety improvements were greatly needed in consideration of wildfire and other emergency evacuations, transit, localized conges-

tion, safety for school children using the roadway to get to and from schools, alternative methods for commuting, and viable and safe trails for general recreation for families. To get there, I had envisioned interconnecting the existing Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail with the construction of additional trails to criss-cross Moraga. The Moraga Way Regional Trail project would be the starting point with Camino Pablo and Moraga Road as possible next candidates for trails.”

“Resident safety is our top priority,” said Moraga Mayor Kerry Hillis, “and this funding is a critical first step toward a safer Moraga Way for everyone, whether you walk, bike, drive, or take transit. This study will help us evaluate a protected shared-use path and other practical safety improvements along a key connection to BART, while also exploring how the corridor can better support emergency response and evacuation when it matters most. Just as important, this work reflects the strong partnership between Moraga and Orinda, as meaningful progress on Moraga Way depends on planning together across city boundaries.”

Orinda Mayor Brandyn Iverson stated, “This project reflects a forward-thinking approach to how Orinda and Moraga plan for the future. It addresses congestion and safety on a road that cannot be widened, by giving residents more ways to move within their com-

munity that are safe and easy to use. Moraga and Orinda are closely linked by our shared dependence on this corridor, and meaningful progress means reimagining it as a place that works better for everyone, supporting everyday mobility, strengthening resilience, and enhancing quality of life.”

Iverson added, “Both congestion on Moraga Way (and its safety issues for people walking or biking) and evacuation concerns are two of the biggest challenges we face. Getting a grant that is meaningful enough to do a feasibility

study means we can get started right away on what is going to be a long process, but one that could make a real difference to our residents.”

“The success of obtaining the Moraga Way SS4A Study Grant was based on the extensive partnership and collaboration of the Lamorinda City and Town agencies, as well as the great technical support from Contra Costa Transportation Authority,” explained Knapp. “Additionally, a number of agencies wrote supporting letters for the project including

Moraga-Orinda Fire District, District 2 Supervisor Candace Andersen, United States Congressman Mark DeSaulnier, and State Assemblyperson Rebecca Bauer-Kahan.”

Added Knapp, “I have completed so many different projects in Moraga during my engineering career. I look back proudly and feel that I have made a difference. Now, if the Moraga Way Regional Trail project is one day constructed, it would be my pinnacle of conceived safety projects for the community.”

Academy Cadet awarded post-graduate Marshall Scholarship

Submitted by Jeffrey Troth, U.S. Air Force Academy

U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet 1st Class Mark Tang, Class of 2026, has been awarded the highly competitive Marshall Scholarship. Upon his graduation this May, Tang will commission into the U.S. Space Force, making him the Academy’s first Space Force Marshall Scholar.

A political science and management major, Tang has conducted research on nuclear non-proliferation with the Institute for National Security Studies in the Republic of Korea and Japan. Tang also interned at the Joint Staff Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Planning Division at the Pentagon and the Nevada Test Site. He was a member of the Academy’s Men’s Colle-

giate Lacrosse Association team and has served in many leadership positions where he oversaw policy reform and implementation for the 4,000-person cadet wing.

“Being named a Marshall Scholar is an incredible honor and opportunity to represent the Air Force Academy and the U.S. Space Force internationally. It is an incredible honor to be the Academy’s first Space Force officer-candidate to be named a Marshall Scholar,” said Tang, a native of Moraga and graduate of Miramonte High School. “The Air Force Academy prepared me for this scholarship and beyond by combining academic rigor with real military leadership experience



Mark Tang

Photo provided

and athletic training. The demands of balancing academics, research, military training and service forced me to develop discipline and resilience.”



86 years ago, LAFAYETTE’S ICONIC PARK THEATER brought arts, culture, entertainment — and community — to downtown Lafayette. Now, it’s COMMUNITY, working together to bring this historic cinema back to life.

The building permit has been received! The renovation has begun! The Park WILL REOPEN in 2027! It is with deep gratitude that the Board of Directors of the all-volunteer Park Theater Trust acknowledges the following businesses and civic partners for their **generous contributions in 2025** to The Park Theater Renovation Capital Campaign.

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Visit **parktheatertrust.org** to learn how you can contribute to this exciting region-wide effort. Donations are cumulative toward exciting perks and final on-site recognition once The Park reopens.

Our **2025 Honor Roll** of Park Theater Supporters is now posted on-site at the cinema.

With sincere thanks,

The Park Theater Trust Board of Directors — Peter Berkowitz, Kathy Bowles, Jana Corey Tracey Karsten Farrell, Angie Ferrif, John McCormick

The Park Theater Trust (TPTT) successfully purchased the Park Theater cinema for the community in 2021. TPTT’s mission is to restore and operate Lafayette’s iconic Park Theater building and revitalize it into an accessible and inclusive, community-centered cinema, arts, and culture hub with programming that includes Hollywood new releases and classics, critically acclaimed independent and foreign films, live music, and engaging non-film events. The anticipated reopening date for The Park Theater is first quarter 2027.

The Park Theater Trust is a proud member of The League of Historic American Theaters, Arthouse Convergence, and the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.





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Phone (925) 253-4200
Chamber of Commerce:
www.orindachamber.org
The Orinda Association:
www.orindaassociation.org

City Council Reg. Meeting:
Tuesday, Feb. 17, 7 p.m.
Orinda Library Auditorium
Planning Commission:
Tuesday, Feb. 24, 7 p.m.
Orinda Library Auditorium
Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission
Wednesday, Feb. 11, 6:30 p.m.
Sarge Littlehale Community Room



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COMPASS

Orinda moves to approve multifamily housing on Altarinda Road

By Sora O'Doherty

Despite objections, the Orinda City Council on Feb. 3 voted unanimously to move forward with approval of a project that could eventually lead to the existing medical office building located at 23 Altarinda Road being replaced with a multifamily housing development. Objections to the plan were voiced by Michele Jacobson on behalf of Orindans for Safe Emergency Evacuation (OSEE) and retired attorney Nick Waranoff.

The council received a presentation by Orinda Principal Planner Christine Thompson. The applicant, Brian Griggs, asked the council to take two actions: 1) to amend Orinda's General Plan land use designation from "Business and Professional Offices" to "Downtown – General" and 2) a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district from "DO (Downtown Office)" to "DG (Downtown General)".

If adopted, the new general plan land use designation and new zoning designation would continue to allow office uses but would expand the allowed land uses of 23 Altarinda Road to include multifamily residential uses at a minimum density of 20 units per acre and a maximum density of 25 units per acre. No project is proposed at the current time.

The 0.6-acre parcel is located on the north side of Altarinda Road, beside the campus of the Orinda Academy and close to the housing developments Orindawoods and Orinda Grove. It is currently occupied by an underutilized two-story medical office building.

OSEE had previously sued the city, maintaining that the addition of housing in downtown Orinda under the city's Plan Orinda would hamper emergency evacuation and endanger Orinda residents in the event of a wildfire. They succeeded partially, with the court issuing a writ requiring the city to rescind its certification of the original Plan Orinda final environmental impact report, revise the EIR in part, certify the revised EIR, and adopt revised Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in support of its 2023 approval of the Housing Element and Safety Element update components

23 Altarinda Road, Orinda

Photo Sora O'Doherty

of Plan Orinda. All of these actions have been taken by the city.

In written comments, Jacobson opined that the proposed rezoning of 23 Altarinda Road would increase the allowed density of downtown beyond what is already allowed by the final Housing Element, which she claimed would directly contradict the court's orders. "To avoid defying the court, the council could balance the rezoning of Altarinda Road with a simultaneous and equivalent reduction of density on another parcel(s) in the existing Plan Orinda Housing Element. Otherwise, the city would be exposing itself to the exact same legal challenge that they have already lost," she concluded.

In defense of his application, Griggs said that he respected the opinions of Waranoff and Jacobson and takes wildfire safety very seriously. However, he said, "wildfire concerns should not create a moratorium on sites which are appropriate for redevelopment into housing." Griggs, a longtime Lafayette resident, added that he and his partners have "balanced the need for housing with respect for the communities we live in." Griggs also said that there is no guarantee that they will be applying for a new project on the site.

In his public comments, Waranoff noted that, since the fire in Pacific Palisades a little over a year ago, Orinda is now the community in California most at risk of wildfire. He suggested that the city should not approve development at the risk of a loss of life, and suggested that the staff report confirmed

that if a housing project were built at Altarinda Road it would add as much as 24 to 33 minutes to evacuation time.

Staff relied on data from the Ladriss application, which the city was required to subscribe to as part of the decision in the OSEE case. Based on that data, it was the opinion of staff that evacuation times would not be substantially increased by the presence of a multi-family housing unit at 23 Altarinda Road, if one were ever built. In fact, it was suggested by a council member that the amount of traffic and cars could even be less than at a medical office building.

In the staff report, it was explained that "the city is committed to added evacuation measures to improve safety despite the unavoidable impacts which are deemed acceptable under CEQA guidelines. The city is using evacuation modeling software from Ladriss AI and has made a public portal available for use by the public. The evacuation modeling tool is housed on the city's new OrindaReady.com website and is pre-populated with more than 100 evacuation scenarios, including large scale evacuation efforts for North and South Orinda with new housing development for housing element sites and current baseline amounts."

After public comments, the applicant spoke in rebuttal. He reiterated that Mr. Waranoff's concerns are valid, but added, "I don't think at the end of the day the project we're proposing at 23 Altarinda Road is going to break the bank either way." He further suggested that many of

the sites already adopted in the housing element will not be developed. "I think 23 Altarinda Road is a perfect site for housing in the city. I think it'll give us momentum," he concluded, noting that he believes that any impact from the development would be minimal.

Council Member Latika Malkani said this project sounds like it will be in a location where there are other homes, so it won't change the look and feel of Orinda in a material way. Council member Janet Riley agreed, saying, "I think this is a good opportunity to rezone this one property," citing its small size and locations near other residential developments.

Mayor Bandon Iversen brought the discussion to a close, telling the council, "I think you all articulated a really good rationale. I would just remind ourselves and the public that this is everything that the state laws have been aiming at. It's within a half mile of BART. One of the comments in the initial review was that this site should have been zoned to 75 units an acre. and they were disappointed that it wasn't more dense. It's walkable. It's an infill project. We should do this. And so, I really agree with what sounds like a consensus."

There will be training sessions for the public on the use of Ladriss. Training webinars will take place on Feb. 18, at 2 p.m. and on Feb. 24, at 6 p.m. via Zoom. For more information, go to the Orinda Ready website, www.orindaready.com

Please submit community stories/ pictures to:
submit.lamorindaweekly@gmail.com

Give your Valentine the gift of crispy, buttery cookie goodness

By Susie Iventosch

Valentine Cookies

INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup unsalted butter (at room temperature)
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup light brown sugar
1 large egg
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
Icing and Decorating Ingredients
4 cups powdered sugar (sifted)
2 +/- tbsp. milk
1 tsp. vanilla powder (can use vanilla extract, but it will change the color of the icing.)
food coloring gels for decorating (Red and Pink)
sprinkles (to match the occasion)



Photo Susie Iventosch

DIRECTIONS

Sift flour, baking powder, and salt into a medium sized bowl.
Cream together butter and both sugars until light and fluffy, scraping down the bowl with a rubber spatula as needed. Add egg and beat well. Stir in vanilla.
Add flour mixture and beat into butter mixture on low speed. Gather the dough into two balls.
Prepare two pieces of parchment paper with a dusting of flour and roll out half of the dough onto each parchment. Place the parchment paper with the dough on a baking sheet and completely cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or overnight.
When ready to cut the cookie shapes and bake them, preheat the oven to 350 F. Remove one sheet of the rolled-out dough on the parchment paper from the baking sheet and place it on the counter or a cutting board. Place a new piece of parchment paper on the baking sheet.
Cut out the cookie shapes and place them onto the prepared pan. Gather up any extra dough and re-roll to continue to cut as many cookies as possible. With the last bit of dough, I usually just make a flat round cookie.
Bake the for about 10-12 minutes, or until golden brown and dough is set. (While the first batch is baking, you can start to cut out the second batch of dough.) Remove the cookies from the oven and cool for about 10 minutes before placing them on a rack for decorating. Repeat the process with the second batch of dough. Be sure cookies are completely cool before decorating.
Whisk together powdered sugar and vanilla powder. Slowly add milk until you get to a good icing consistency. You can always add more powdered sugar or more milk to get to a good consistency – not too runny, but not too thick. Add whatever food coloring you have selected. I used plain white and pink. I put the pink icing in a pastry bag fitted with small a plain round pastry tip.
Frost the cookies with your base color, (in my case the white) and allow to sit for few minutes. Then, using the second color in the pastry bag, pipe designs onto the frosted cookie. Using a toothpick, swirl the pink icing to make fun designs. Decorate with the sprinkles at once, before the icing gets hard. Allow decorated cookies to sit for about an hour before packing them into storage containers or bags.
These cookies store well in an airtight container in the refrigerator for about a week, and in the freezer for up to a month.

Valentine’s Day is a free pass to go all out on sweets, especially cookies covered in icing and sprinkles! These brown sugar Valentine’s cookies fully embrace the moment. Crispy and buttery, with a hint of caramel flavor, they’re the kind of cookies that disappear quickly from the counter (usually “just one more” at a time).
There’s something extra special about baking for Valentine’s Day — maybe it’s the heart-shaped cutters, or the simple joy of making something sweet for the people you love. I love baking with light brown sugar and these brown sugar Valentine’s Day sugar cookies are delicious with just the right texture. Once you try them, I’m pretty sure you’ll fall in love with them.

Brown sugar gives them a richness while keeping them tender enough to melt in your mouth. The dough rolls out beautifully, bakes evenly, and holds its

shape, making it ideal for cutting into hearts, scallops, or any festive Valentine shape you can dream up.
Once the cookies are cool, the real fun begins. A smooth layer of white icing turns each cookie into a tiny canvas, and pink icing adds flair while the sprinkles add sparkle. Mini hearts, colorful sugars, and cheerful pops of color make every cookie feel like a mini celebration. There’s no wrong way to decorate them — messy, playful designs are half the fun.
I used an offset spatula to spread the white icing on the cookies first. Then, I made the pink designs from pink icing I had put into a pastry bag

fitted with a small-ish plain tip. The pink icing was fun for creating designs over the white. A toothpick helped to create swirls and patterns from the pink icing. Then, I topped everything off with my favorite Valentine’s sprinkles and sugars.
These cookies are perfect for baking with kids, sharing with friends and neighbors, or tucking into little bags for teachers and classmates. They’re sweet and festive without trying too hard and guaranteed to bring smiles wherever they go.
Grab your rolling pin and clear some counter space ... the loves of your life will be glad you did!



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: 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>

Letter from the Publisher

Dear Lamorinda readers,

As we enter our 20th year of publishing Lamorinda Weekly, I thought a note to all of you would be helpful.
Many of you are aware that 15 months ago our publisher, Andy Scheck, had an accident. He fell through our second-story window while replacing it and was medevac’d to a trauma hospital, where he received excellent care and recovered remarkably well. However, he has not been able to return to work at the paper and has now retired.
After the accident, our daughter Jaya added production layout to her editing duties, I took on many other details, and we scaled back to just 13 issues in 2025. We received heartfelt notes, emails, and calls from many readers and friends that truly kept us going—thank you all.

Our reporters, columnists, printer, and carrier continued to write, print, and deliver the paper to your driveways, despite the many emotional and technical challenges we encountered.
Our advertisers were supportive of our need to pivot to a new production schedule, and their marketing dollars have kept this paper publishing.
Jaya and I were completely exhausted under the workload, but our long-time editor, Jennifer Wake, came out of retirement in September 2025 to return as our editor and saved our sanity.
During all this time, we were unable to upload issues to our website, and our website and email were often not working at all. Andy had written

all the code for our site and managed every part of that process before his accident.
I am happy to report that this problem has now been solved! Our website was rescued and rebuilt by Orinda resident Jeremy Conescu, who reached out to help and redesigned the site
Our two most recent issues are now online; we will be uploading missing issues and updating the archive in the months to come.
Please check out the new website (lamorindaweekly.com) and look for your printed paper on the second Wednesday of each month.
Lastly, we could use your help to help keep the paper printing, delivering, and archiving. Please consider becoming a supporter by mailing a check to:
Lamorinda Weekly
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Moraga, CA 94556
or by scanning the QR code.

Thank you for your continued support!
Wendy Scheck, Publisher and Ad Sales

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New laws and new concerns about e-bike safety for kids

By Sara O'Donerty — January 14, 2026 — Page 1 — View as PDF

Although California has new laws that come into effect on Jan. 1 designed to improve electric bicycle (e-bike) safety, there is growing concern among the law enforcement and medical communities about what is seen as a rapidly growing incidence of severe...

Inside this Issue (January 14, 2026)

LAMORINDA

LOCAL NEWS

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New laws and new concerns about e-bike safety for kids

Local restaurant owners look for answers amid food truck competition

Senior Services Commission updates council on Lafayette's Age Friendly Action Plan

Lafayette receives Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for 12th consecutive year

Midcoast owners, Erin and Ford Andrews, named Lafayette Business Persons of the Year

Lamorinda wins growers 'Take a glass' to new-tasting venue — Local Vines

Moraga receives yet another GPCA Award

A look back at Rhein Valley Shopping Center 60 years ago

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Lafayette Seeks Citizen Representatives On Regional Boards

Central Contra Costa Transit Authority Advisory Committee (CCCTA):

There is one representative for each city or town in the County Connection service area. Advisory Committee members review, analyze, and advise the County Connection Board of Directors on issues and policies relating to fixed-route and paratransit service. Meetings: 1st Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m., in Concord

Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) Citizens Advisory Committee:

The focus of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) is to provide the Contra Costa County citizen perspective, participation and involvement in Authority policy development and implementation. Meetings: 4th Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m., in Walnut Creek

Lafayette citizens interested in these volunteer opportunities and application go to: LoveLafayette.org/VolunteerApp or e-mail cityhall@lovelafayette.org

POSITIONS OPEN UNTIL FILLED

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

‘Mary Me’ - a twist on V-Day

By Sharon K. Sobotta



From left: April Garro (Blue), Peter Dunn (Matteo) and Gaby Rose (playwright). Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Valentine’s Day is not a rosy time of the year for everyone. For those who are on a quest to find love but have so far fallen short, for those who’ve recently experienced break-ups, it can be particularly hard. A survey in Better Help suggests that some 15 million young American adults say the day negatively impacts their mental health for some of those exact reasons. Debut Playwright Gaby Rose believes that

love should be for everyone and that it could be found anywhere – even in a psychiatric center during a 72-hour involuntary hold. Rose’s play, “Mary Me,” will be on stage Feb. 13 and 14 at the Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette with a cast full of local artists and actors. “The play centers around several patients and the connections they make inside and outside the psychiatric center in a short period of time,” Rose said. “It explores the way that people can connect with each other in sad and unfortunate circumstances, as well as the ways that people choose to work on themselves – or choose not to.” Rose says she can see pieces of her own life and her own struggles reflected back at her with many of the characters. Her mother has a

schizophrenia diagnosis. “I hope this play helps people see the humanity in each other.” April Garro, who is also a teaching artist at Town Hall Theatre plays the part of Blue. “Blue is a trans woman who’s gone through a lot of struggles and has been kind of ostracized by society, by her family, and is struggling with dark impulses and self-harm,” Garro said. “She has lots of anger, but underneath that anger is like a soft, squishy core.” It’s not a stretch for Garro, who also identifies as a trans woman, to relate to the character she’s playing on stage. “I feel really connected to Blue, because sometimes we have these defense mechanisms that are up that kind of push people away, because we’re not able to really recognize what our actual needs

are,” Garro said. “That means we sometimes push people away, when what we actually really want is connection.” If play attendees leave remembering that everyone is struggling with something, Garro says she’ll feel satisfied. Peter Dunn plays the part of Matteo, who has a schizophrenia diagnosis. Dunn says even if Matteo is quirky and talks about non-existent people, he still is worthy of love. “If the audience takes away something, it would be that people, no matter (what diagnosis they have), still might have a heart of gold and might even be trying to get better.” To get tickets for the forthcoming show, visit townhalltheatre.com. There are always ‘pay what you can’ options available to ensure that the play is accessible to everyone.

A gem from Morocco: ‘Calle Malaga’ at Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini

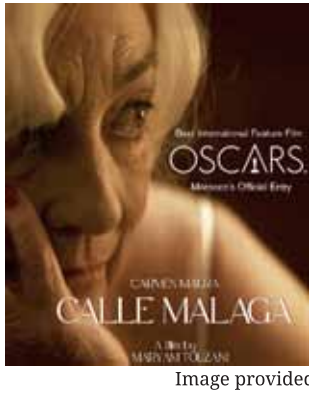


Image provided

You may have known that the city of Tangier, at the northern tip of Morocco, was a place of escape in the 1930s for Spaniards fleeing Franco’s brutal dictatorship. Over the years, and even after democracy was restored in Spain, some stayed and had children who were raised in Tangier in a mixed Spanish/Moroc-

can culture. This is the backdrop of the delightful Moroccan movie, “Calle Malaga,” brought to Orinda this month by the local nonprofit The International Film Showcase. It centers on Maria Angeles, a woman in her late 70s, and her fight to maintain her dignity. This beautiful film, at times funny, at times tragic, is a lesson in resilience. It changes the way we look at aging. The film is set in the present time. Maria Angeles lives on Calle Malaga, a street in a neighborhood of Tangier with a strong Spanish influence. That language is spoken everywhere; the food bears a mix of Moroccan and Spanish influences. Maria was born in this town. Her apartment, bought by

her late husband, is full of prized objects and antiques. Among them a phonograph where she plays her favorite record, “Toda Una Vida” by Maria Dolores Pradera, a romantic ballad that reminds her of her late husband and their love. Everyone in the neighborhood, young and old, knows and loves her. One day her daughter, Clara – a mother herself and in the middle of a harsh divorce compounded by financial issues – comes for a short visit and announces to her mother that she is going to sell the Tangier apartment because she needs the money to establish herself and her children in Madrid. It appears that the deceased father had put

the apartment in the daughter’s name. Clara gives her mother a choice: come back with her to Madrid or go to a local retirement home. She quickly sells all her mother’s prized antiques to a dealer, appoints a real estate broker, drops her mother in a local old folks’ home, and goes back to Madrid. From desperation to resurrection, the vanquished Maria Angeles is going to make a comeback. Grit, astuteness, community, and a passionate desire to live will bring her back to her feet. The film, directed by Maryam Touzani, is competing in the Oscar International Film category for Morocco. This acclaimed movie is a tour de force by Spanish

actress Carmen Maura. Those of you who appreciate Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar and loved “Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown” will remember the beautiful Maura in her prime – her power, her expressiveness. Now at 80 years old, looking her age with grace and pride, she radiates

strength and passion. She is at times full of humor and provocation, daring and determined; she also has moments of doubt and sadness. She is a force to be reckoned with. This wonderful movie will be presented at the Orinda Theatre for at least one week, starting on Feb. 20. Tickets at Orindamovies.com

Miramonte student helps transform regional public policy for the Bay Area

Submitted by Rick Vierra

For the first time ever, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission approved a \$22 million funding policy under MTC’s CARE Program in November 2025 with additional funding in January 2026 to include and benefit youth that advances the expansion of housing choices and affordability, and reduce car dependency. According to the MTC, the \$22 million program is funded by a mix of local, state and federal sources to support a mix of community-based transportation initiatives that have been identified as a high priority by local communities and through community power-building and engagement efforts. Freida Vierra, a Miramonte High School sophomore and change agent motivated by ensuring all youth have the supports needed to reach their full potential, presented her policy proposal during MTC’s competitive high school summer program. Her interest areas include regional transportation, environment, and housing policy solutions. What started as a cu-

riosity around youth well-being grew to an examination of built-environment, infrastructure barriers young people can face to become healthy, productive young adults who contribute to their communities. “(This) matters deeply to me and young people because many of us rely on public transit every single day,” stated Vierra, who rides public transit five days a week. “Whether we are traveling to school, jobs, internships, sports, or after-school activities, reliable and accessible transportation directly affects our opportunities. When transit works well, it helps us stay connected, involved, and safe. When it doesn’t, it limits where we can go and what we are able to do. That is why including youth voices in this process is so important – we understand these challenges from daily, lived experience.” MTC’s Community Action Resource and Empowerment (CARE) Program was co-created by the Community Advisory Working Group and community representatives. The Program funds



Freida Vierra Photo provided

three categories: Community Power-building and Engagement (Pb+E) Grant and Learning Action Lab, Project Development Technical Assistance for Community-Based Transportation Projects, and Participatory Budgeting Process and Project Implementation. MTC provided grants to 16 community-based organization applicants totaling \$1.5 million for Pb+E in November 2025. MTC received 143 grant applications totaling \$18.9 million in requests. The program anticipates funding an additional \$1 million in January 2026 for Pb+E to accommodate more communities. Total Pb+E grants awarded will be up to \$2.5 million.

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Dr. Matthew Tamplen, who grew up in Lafayette and is a nationally recognized Double Board-Certified Facial Plastic surgeon, opened a private practice in Downtown Orinda to better serve Lamorinda patients. Specializing entirely in the face, Dr. Tamplen’s expertise is nationally recognized for providing patients with beautiful, elegant, and natural results.

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‘The coolest times of your life’ – Lamorinda college students reflect on traveling abroad

By Emma Wong

Ordering food in a foreign language. Navigating unfamiliar streets. Living thousands of miles from home. For three Lamorinda high school graduates, studying abroad transformed these initial uncertainties into some of the most meaningful experiences of their year—and even their lives.

Three recent alumnae of Miramonte High School embarked on immersive academic and cultural experiences abroad, spending anywhere from a quarter to an entire school year in other countries. Leila Maboudian (graduated 2024) spent five weeks in Cholula, a city in Mexico’s Puebla county. Annabelle Ryan (graduated 2025) spent her fall semester in Paris, France. Selma Ahmed (graduated 2024) studied in Rabat, Morocco, for eight months. Each student returned with strengthened language skills, a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, and memories that will remain long after their time overseas.

For many students, the opportunity to travel abroad arises through a university’s study abroad program. Maboudian, now a sophomore at the University of California, Berkeley, discovered her cultural immersion program at a club fair. “I’ve been thinking about studying abroad for a while, and this offered a lot I was excited about,” Maboudian said. Others, like Ryan, chose to travel abroad during their very first semester of college. A freshman at the University of Southern California, Ryan saw the opportunity to go to France when she opened her acceptance letter. “I learned that I could spend my first semester either at a community college or one of USC’s partner schools abroad,” Ryan said. “I’d never considered studying abroad as a freshman, but I decided to take a leap of faith.”

Ahmed took a gap year to participate in the National Security Language Initiative for

Youth (NSLI-Y), a U.S. government program that provides students with full-year cultural immersion experiences. Following her time in Morocco, Ahmed is now attending Stanford University.

Leaving home came with challenges. For any college student, departing from friends and family sparks nervousness – a feeling that is amplified when traveling abroad. Still, every student retained their optimism and curiosity. “I didn’t want to let fear be my driving feeling going into study abroad,” Ryan said.

Once abroad, each student faced unique challenges. In Paris, communication became tough at busy train stations, where few people spoke English. “I’d ask for directions and realize that security guards, and even police, aren’t typically English speakers,” Ryan said. “I saw this early, and I ended up using Google Translate to talk to a lot of people.”

In Morocco, Ahmed lived with a host family, which required navigating both cultural differences and language barriers. Although Ahmed spoke modern standard Arabic, her host mother spoke Darija – a different Arabic dialect – and was illiterate, motivating Ahmed to adapt her communication style. “It was tough in the beginning, but we figured it out. I’d practice Darija with her every day, and instead of texting, I’d send her voice messages,” Ahmed said.

Language learning became a crucial part of each student’s experience, offering deeper insight into local culture. In Mexico, Maboudian lived in a community where many residents spoke Nahuatl, an indigenous language, alongside Spanish. “I started hearing these off-the-cuff phrases at marketplaces and little shops. They became a part of my Mexico-specific vocabulary, which really helped me hold a conversation,” Maboudian said.

For Ahmed, Arabic was the primary focus of her program. Each day included a four-hour Arabic class, taught entirely without English. The coursework aligned closely with the interests she’d pursue at Stanford. “I’m really interested in the literary and artistic history of Arab regions, and this class resonated with that; we’d read complex poetry and political documents that are hard to articulate even in English,” Ahmed said.

Beyond the classroom, students experienced history and art woven into daily life. “I took Introduction to the History of Art, and we studied art during the French Renaissance,” Ryan said. “Paris is one of the few places where you can learn about a famous artwork and walk to a museum to see it.”

As the students settled into daily life abroad, they fully immersed themselves in their cities. “I’d walk around Paris for hours,” Ryan said. “I would find myself wandering into the most beautiful churches, or somehow ending up at the Seine and having a view of the Eiffel Tower.”

“Cholula has this incredible, massive artisan market, and it runs all week,” Maboudian said. “We’d go together and get gifts for our families, and we’d learn how to bargain. It was magical.” Another defining element of studying abroad was the community built among fellow students. “My classmates in Mexico came from different parts of the world. We had different life experiences, academic interests, and ethnic backgrounds,” Maboudian said. “Hearing about their experiences was eye-opening, and they’re some of my close friends now.”

Whenever homesickness resurfaced, the students relied on their newfound friendships for support. “When it got hard to stay motivated, reaching out to my cohort helped a lot; we leaned on each other,”



During her months spent abroad, Selma Ahmed (far right) often spent weekends on trips to scenic places around Morocco.

Photo provided

Ahmed said. “By springtime, my spirits were a lot higher. I even felt like I wasn’t ready to leave.”

As their programs came to an end, the students reflected on the lasting impact of their experiences. “I call Morocco my second home,” Ahmed said. “I love the culture and the food, and I want to keep practicing the local dialect. I’m sure I’ll come back.” Beyond language acquisition, traveling abroad offered valuable life lessons shaped by local perspectives. “A lot of the Moroccans I’d meet were well-versed in

global politics and cultures because they spoke so many languages,” Ahmed said. “I’ve learned not to keep myself in a bubble – to learn about new countries and learn new dialects.”

“By meeting so many different people in Mexico, I began thinking about the layers we have to our identity,” Maboudian said. “In a politically fraught time like today, we have to realize how these backgrounds are incredibly sacred.”

Ultimately, each student encourages peers to

consider studying abroad. “There’s incredible value in spending time in another country,” Ahmed said. “Don’t be afraid to go abroad. You learn the most about yourself when you’re away from home.”

“I will never forget the months I spent in France. It was such an incredible, unique way to begin my college experience,” Ryan said. “If you’re considering study abroad, do it – you’re going to look back on it and see some of the coolest times of your life.”

Two local Library events on Valentine’s Day



This year’s Lunar New Year performance will feature a martial arts demonstration and lion dance by Tomizaki’s Champions Kung Fu Institute to welcome in the Year of the Horse from 2 to 2:45 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 14 at the Orinda Library. Seating will be limited, and tickets will be given out 20 minutes before the performance. Generously sponsored by the Eng family. For special accommodations,

please contact the library at least 72 hours before the event.

Also on Feb. 14, the Moraga Library will host a free Chalk a Haiku for Moraga and Poetry Reading event from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sponsored by the Moraga Art in Public Spaces Committee, participants can create haikus, drawings, or chalk messages about their love for Moraga on the veranda in front of the library. Free chalk

will be provided, and no experience is needed. Inside the library, there will be a live poetry reading by Saint Mary’s College poets, and community members can share their own poetry as well. This event offers a creative space for all ages to connect and celebrate Moraga. For special accommodations, please contact the library with 72 hours notice. – S. O’Doherty

Campo student writes children’s book to benefit Jelly’s Place Animal Rescue

Submitted by Eloise Gafni

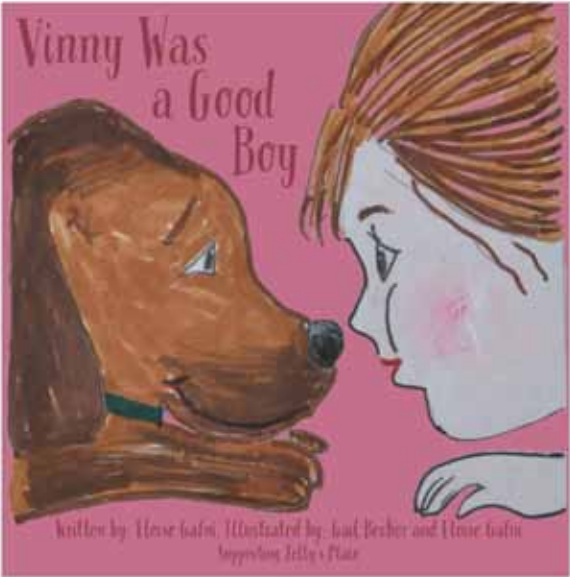
For her Girl Scout Gold Award, Campolindo junior Eloise Gafni wrote and published a children’s book supporting Jelly’s Place Animal Rescue. Her book, “Vinny Was a Good Boy,” is about a dog named Vinny who spent his life at the shelter, and Delilah, a little girl who looked for a family to call her own.

“When they met, they realized their home was each other – together,” Gafni said. “Proceeds from my book will go to Jelly’s Place. I’ve been volunteering at Jelly’s Place and have also done some fundraising for them by making T-shirts for my project (“Paws for Rescue”), and a calendar highlighting the available dogs at Jelly’s.” Gafni has also raised enough funds to replace the old play yard couch with a new one suitable for outdoors. Gafni’s book is available on Amazon.com.



Eloise Gafni

Photos provided



Kendall (“Kenny”) Tuckerman

1971 – 2026

In Memory

Kendall (“Kenny”) Tuckerman passed peacefully on Jan. 15, 2026, at EvergreenHealth Hospice in Kirkland, Washington, at age 55, following a battle with metastatic melanoma.

Kenny is survived by his husband, David; their adult children Lowell, Whitney Trexel (Eric), Carter, and Jacob; and grandchildren Emma and Max Trexel. He was predeceased by his parents, Wallace (“Ken”) and Barbara Woolley of Opelika, Alabama.

Before moving to Lake Stevens, Washington, in 2021, Kenny and David were longtime residents of Lamorinda, first in Orinda and later in Lafayette. Kenny was an active volunteer in the Lafayette School District and had an interest in supporting and advocating for students with special needs, including serving on the Board of the SEED Foundation. He subsequently served for more than two years as a member of the Lafayette School District Governing Board. He was a dedicated volunteer with Canine Companions, having helped and raised five litters of puppies for service dog training.

A memorial service is planned for spring 2026, with the location TBD. To receive notification of the event, please contact Jean Follmer at jeanfollmer@yahoo.com.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a charitable donation in Kenny’s memory to the Melanoma Research Alliance.



Adjustments on and off the mat for Lamorinda wrestling

By Jon Kingdon

MIRAMONTE AND CAMPOLINDO

With the departure of Campolindo’s wrestling coach, Athletic Director Ray Meadows was unable to find a suitable replacement so he called upon Louis Suba, Miramonte’s head wrestling coach and a former wrestling coach at Campolindo to see if he would be willing to coach both the Miramonte and Campolindo wrestling teams.

Suba saw the positives to coaching both teams: “It’s nice to have the extra practice partners in the room. Even though we’re big rivals, our wrestlers were positive about it as were the Campolindo wrestlers. Our wrestling community is unified in wanting to grow the sport so it’s more inclusive with a nurturing attitude in getting more kids interested in wrestling.”

The arrangement still took some adjusting for Suba and the assistant coaches: “During tournaments and other matches, we compete as two separate teams so it can be a little awkward when it’s Campolindo against Miramonte on the mat.”

There have been zero pushbacks from the wrestlers and a lot of positive comments about the improved communication with the Campolindo parents and the administration about what is going on with the team.

MIRAMONTE

The Miramonte program came into the season with a roster of 50

wrestlers. “Our program has been getting more popular and I’m really proud of it,” Suba said. “When I first started at Miramonte five years ago, I only had nine wrestlers on the team. There has been great word of mouth by the wrestlers that helped to grow our program.”

The leading wrestlers for Miramonte are seniors Elliot Orr (175/165) and Brody Suba (151/144). “Elliot was our only wrestler that placed at NCS last year and has gotten stronger and faster,” Suba said. “He is very tough and absolutely loves wrestling. Brody also got bigger, stronger, and faster in the offseason.”

Two juniors, Finn Hura (144) and Jaxon Ziehn (138/132) are both top wrestlers, though Hura is currently out with an injury. “Finn took third in a very tough tournament, going against the Nevada State champion and Fargo All-American,” Suba said. “He worked very hard in the off season. Jaxon looks very strong and recently took first place at a tournament at Vintage High School. Cael Suba is one of our lightweights at 120/115 and Oskar Orr are both showing great potential.”

Miramonte does not have any wrestlers to compete at 215 or 285 but are able to compete in 11 weight classes. Their two heaviest wrestlers are Owen Beidelman (180), who was an NCS qualifier last year, and Geoff White (190).

The girls team for Miramonte is limited in numbers, Suba said. “Senior Claire Casado has been looking very good along with junior Cayleigh Farrar. Freshman Ashley Silverman, a product of Chris Herrick’s Lamorinda wrestling program, has been great, having taken first place in two novice JV tournaments.”

CAMPOLINDO

With a roster size of 22, Campolindo is led by senior heavyweight Luke Hansen. “Luke came in a little late from football but he has been a standout and has been looking very strong in his tournaments,” Suba said. “Luke is a great athlete and we’ve been teaching him to use his athleticism to his advantage.”

There are two other wrestlers that have come over from the football team but both are currently on the sidelines with ankle injuries – Soushians Bahramifar and Demitri Drury. Demitri wrestled at Vintage High School and after winning his first two matches, he was injured and has been out since and is looking to return toward the end of January.

There are a group of freshmen that have been coming to practices consistently, competing in tournaments, and showing a lot of promise – Jacob Wah, Colton Kao, Andy Ostling, and Henry Hansen.

The leading wrestler on the girls team has been Maya Shu. “Maya has come to practice every day and has been

looking very good,” Suba said. “Charlie Somi is another young woman who has shown a lot of potential.”

It’s been a season of adjustments for Campolindo. The team has had to organize carpools to head over to Miramonte every day for practice. Every coach has their favorite moves and special way of teaching things and running drills so the more exposure to different ways to wrestle the better, since everyone does not learn the same way and the coaches can adapt to the different ways that people wrestle. “The Campolindo wrestlers have had to adapt to a different coaching style as well as different ways of doing things and so far, things have gone very smoothly,” Suba said. “The future looks bright for Campolindo wrestling.”

ACALANES

Coming into his third year at Acalanes, head coach Steve Nelson once again has a really young team with only three seniors. “A number of our wrestlers opted to go with the rugby team which limited our numbers along with the tragic loss of Amin Noroozi who would have been my top wrestler,” Nelson said.

Nelson is essentially starting from scratch: “I have a lot of new, young, first year wrestlers that have never been in a varsity match and have to get started quickly before they get thrown into a match when we start



Brody Suba locks up a pin against Granada.

Photo Mark Bell

the dual season, but we should be able to fill 13 of the weight classes.”

Leading the boys team are Marley Oh (134) and Kirian Gracie (128). “They are my two best wrestlers,” Nelson said. “They both have the potential to have good seasons depending on how much time and effort they want to put into it. Kirian can be an absolutely phenomenal wrestler but just needs to show more commitment so we’ll see how he does. Marley is also a top wrestler but is in a tough weight class, going against very strong wrestlers. Junior Ryan Crane (159) is coming off a broken collarbone suffered last year. Ryan went two and two at NCS last year so we’ve got some pretty high expectations for him this year.”

Gabriel Van Houten (167), Jake Hammons (140), and Nova Hedlund

(152) have shown potential but just need more experience and mat time.

The girls team has doubled their numbers from last year to six, which is a step in the right direction. The girls are led by sophomore Lilah Kring (127), Gwyneth Lee (105), and Jill Pierce (140).

“Lilah is going to become one of my best wrestlers,” Nelson said. “She has had a lot of success in the tournaments at Albany, Castro Valley, and San Leandro. She and Gwyneth put the time and effort in the camps and off-season wrestling so I’m excited to see where both of them end up this season and Jill can be a helluva wrestler for the first timer. We also have three other first-year wrestlers on the team, including Marley Oh’s sister, Isabel (102).”

McConnell, Rahon and Sheets named to Silver Waves Media 100 Most Impactful Mid-Major Assistant Coaches

By Jon Kingdon



Dan Sheets, Joe Rahon and Mickey McConnell

Photo Tod Fierner

Since 2020, Silver Waves Media has in their words “helped shine a light on the coaches, at all levels, across the country.” They just released their top 100 Most Impactful Mid-Major Assistant Coaches list.

On that list are three Saint Mary’s assistant coaches and former players, associate head coach Mickey McConnell in his 17th season, associate head coach Joe Rahon in his fifth season and Dan Sheets in his third season as an assistant coach after two seasons as the Director of Basketball Operations.

“We have 10 people on the committee that are familiar with the coaches throughout college basketball and we are listing people that have good chances down the road to become head coaches,” said Ryan Silver, the founder of Silver Waves Media. “(Head Coach) Randy Bennett has a coaching tree that is in the top three nationally.”

Bennett has always

placed great stock in his assistant coaches. “You hire a good staff and they’ll take good players and make them better. They have to have great attitudes for us to do it the way we’re doing it and that’s why they’re good.”

Also on the staff are former player E.J. Rowland in his second year as an assistant coach after a 20-year career having played on four different continents. Though Trey Touchet did not play for Saint Mary’s, prior to being named an assistant coach, he spent two years at Saint Mary’s as a recruiting coordinator and two years as a graduate assistant for Bennett.

“The big advantage that most of our assistants have had coming into this program is that they have played in it. Those that have not played for me, it takes them a year or two to know how we do things. It’s a matter of figuring out how you are able to recruit a player that fits

here and once they get here, how you mold them into a player and leader in this program.”

These guys who have played for me are really good guys and it’s just a matter of giving them reps. After that, it’s a matter of giving them responsibility and letting them get it. They coach a lot and Mickey, Joe and Dan have been on very successful teams and that’s what coaching is – being able to find a way to help your team win and they get that and none of it is about them.”

Most recently, former Gael Todd Golden won the National Championship at the University of Florida. “I’ve never even thought about that (his coaching tree) and I don’t know how they stat it but we’ve had some great assistant coaches that have gone on to become great head coaches and I’ve been very fortunate,” Bennett concluded.

Acalanes flag footballers Ines Coyne and Isabelle Agnost named to the S.F. Chronicle All-Metro team

By Jon Kingdon

With the exponential growth of girls football, there has also been a greater interest in the high school teams, highlighted by San Francisco choosing its first all-Metro flag football team. With 22 players chosen from areas as far south as San Jose and as far north as Santa Rosa, Acalanes had two players, Ines Coyne and Isabelle Agnost, both in their second seasons, with a team that finished the season with a 17-3 record and played in the NCS championship game.

Coyne, a junior, played quarterback, completing 155 passes for 1,544 yards and 23 touchdowns. She also ran for 1,016 yards and scored 13 touchdowns. She also played linebacker and was second on the team with 76 tackles, with two sacks and five interceptions.

Coyne, who is also an equestrian, did not play football as a freshman and was strictly a defensive player as a sophomore and in an unexpected way became the Acalanes quarterback. “We had a scrimmage on a Saturday and none of our quarterbacks could be there so we put Ines in and she played great and ended up taking most of the snaps the rest of the year,” co-head coach Mike Ivankovich said. “What made her productivity all the more impressive what that I barely got to coach her as a quarterback on her mechanics, footwork and



Acalanes’ Isabelle Agnost (30) and Ines Coyne (48)

Photo Jim Clark

reads over the summer as she was playing wide receiver and outside linebacker. What Ines had was a will to win and a desire to dominate and more than once would put the team on her back and just willed our way to victory. Besides her natural ability, Ines is super smart, clever, tricky, and so competitive on the field.”

Agnost, a sophomore in her second year of flag football played running back and cornerback, finishing the season rushing for 1,468 yards, caught 25 passes, scored 19 touchdowns, threw two touchdown passes, returned a punt for a touchdown, and had 15 tackles and was chosen first team all-league as well.

“Isabelle is just a great kid who is fun to coach,” Ivankovich said. “It’s rare to have a player that has all the physical attributes, mental toughness, and high-level competitiveness and yet with all of these attributes, she

is so unselfish. There has not been one time when she went high maintenance, selfish or pouted if she wasn’t getting the ball. She just goes out and plays hard and loves her teammates. By the end of the year Isabelle was also starting as a cornerback and she did a great job there as well. Isabelle works just as hard as a sprinter on the track team and she set a freshman record in the 100 meters.”

Ivankovich is already looking forward to next season: “We’re just really grateful that Ines and Isabelle are returning next season but all together, we are returning 22 of the 27 players that were on our team last season.”

The skinny on getting ‘skinny’

By Steve Mitchell, Certified Personal Trainer / Fitness Nutrition Specialist



Avoiding processed snacks is a key element to curbing an appetite.

Photo J. Wake

If losing weight were simply about eating less, most people wouldn’t be stuck losing the same pounds over and over again. They wouldn’t feel like their body is working against them. And as usual blaming themselves when the weight comes back.

First off, you don’t want to be “skinny” – you want to be lean. They are very different species. So let’s talk about doing it right this year, so you can come up with a different New

Year’s resolution in 2027.

The truth is, modern food and modern dieting have stacked the deck, and not in your favor.

Highly processed foods are designed to make you hungry. They digest quickly, spike blood sugar, and barely activate the hormones that tell your brain you’re full. You can eat plenty of calories and still not feel satisfied – not because you lack discipline, but because your body didn’t get what it actually needed.

This is why two people can eat the same number of calories and have completely different experiences. One may feel energized and satisfied (the whole foods eater) while the other is rummaging through the pantry an hour later.

Metabolism plays a major role here – specifically your basal metabolic rate. That’s the energy your body uses just to keep you alive: breathing, thinking, repairing tissue. A large driver of that number is how much lean muscle you carry.

Here’s the deal: Muscle is metabolically active tissue. Fat is not.

When we diet (we’ll call it reducing calories) we’ll all lose weight, but (and this is the big “but” here, pun intended), somewhere around 40-50% of that weight will be muscle. When muscle diminishes, metabolism quietly slows down. Fat loss becomes harder. Maintenance becomes exhausting.

Losing muscle is like downsizing your engine to make your car lighter – it works briefly, then makes everything harder.

To be successful here the real goal shouldn’t be just weight loss; it’s losing fat while building and preserving muscle.

This is where hypertrophic (muscle-

building) training changes the game – not to turn you into a body-builder or Olympic weightlifter, but to build healthy, functional lean muscle – the kind that supports joints, improves movement, and raises your metabolic floor. More muscle means more mitochondria, and more mitochondria means a body that’s better at using energy.

Think not of dieting your way to a faster metabolism but building your way there.

Protein is the cornerstone of that process. To support muscle while training, most people need approximately 0.8 to 1 gram of protein per pound of target body weight. This helps preserve lean tissue during fat loss, supports muscle growth, keeps you fuller longer, and even increases calorie burn during digestion compared to carbs or fat.

No extremes. Just intention and consistency.

GLP-1 medications have changed the weight-loss landscape by reducing appetite and improving blood sugar control. For many people, they finally quiet the constant food noise that made fat loss feel impossible. But appetite reduction alone doesn’t protect muscle. Without strength training and adequate protein, weight

loss – on or off GLP-1s – can still come at the expense of metabolism.

The most successful, sustainable results pair these tools with resistance training and protein so the weight coming off is primarily fat, not muscle.

And here’s the part people rarely talk about: how this feels.

When fat loss is paired with muscle gain, you don’t just look different—you move better. Your joints feel supported. Energy is more stable. Sleep improves. Food feels less obsessive. Your body starts working with you instead of against you.

You may feel smaller. But more importantly you feel capable, a well-tuned, lean machine.

The Solution

1. Do some type of resistance exercise 2-3 times per week (don’t be afraid, I’m talking about 20-30 minutes only to begin, make it something you love). Perhaps join a gym that feels good to you, research exercises, or hire a trainer to get you on the right path.

2. Walk, smell the flowers. “10,000 steps” is

a nice goal but if you are just getting started, just get out there and enjoy. You can count later.

3. When you eat, think protein first (it’s more satiating) – target 1 gram of protein per target final body weight, complete your plate with veggies and healthy carbs.

4. Avoid processed foods as much as possible.

5. Important note: removing bad carbs (over-processed foods), will cause the cravings to go away in 5-10 days. I promise. Get over that hump and you’ll be on your way.

Please submit community stories/ pictures to:
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