

JANUARY 2025

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 Blue Eyed Grass p9**

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Top row from L-R: Rich Silveira, Ted Clement, and John Gallagher. Bottom row L-R: Dave Schneider and Bob Loomis. Photo by Tena Gallagher.

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# Adverse Weather Hinders Annual Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Count

By Jill Hedgecock | Photos by Jerry Britten

The Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA; formerly the Mount Diablo Audubon Society) held its 69th Central Contra Costa County (CCCC) Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 14, 2024. The count for the National Audubon Society began on Christmas Day 1900 and is the world's longest-running citizen-driven wildlife census. This year about 65 MDBA volunteers documented the type and numbers of every bird seen that day, either on established routes led by a trip leader or in their backyards.

This year, local CBC volunteers persevered in particularly brutal driving rain with winds up to 40 miles per hour. The CCCC count circle is centered approximately halfway between Pleasant Hill and Clayton and is divided into 24 sections.

I joined Claudia Hein and Steve Buffi on the lower Mitchell Canyon section of the count circle. One of our target birds was the Bell's sparrow (formerly sagebrush sparrow). Typically, it stays low and hidden in dense chaparral and sagebrush unless perched on top of the bushes singing. It is not surprising that we missed seeing the bird, given the high winds and rain. The weather also prevented us from surveying the full area due to a downed tree and hazardous conditions on a steep, muddy section of the trail.

Despite the uncomfortable conditions, there were highlights to the day, including seeing quite a few spotted towhees, California thrasher, California quail, and a

wren. Documenting wren is relatively easy due to their distinctive "bouncing ball" song and are very vocal. However, they are often secretive and difficult to get a visual on. But not that day. One bird popped out of the shrubs and lingered long enough for all three of us to see it.

Still, it was a tough day. Hein, who has surveyed this area for the CBC for over thirty years, lamented that her team usually counts up to thirty species. By day's end, we had only found twenty. It was so quiet that at one point, Hein listed all the bird species we should be seeing.

I asked Hein about her favorite CBC sighting during her tenure of leading the lower Mitchell Canyon CBC. "It wasn't a bird at all," she said. "I found an Alameda whip snake, which was really crazy."

I understood her enthusiasm because it is one of the rarest snakes in the East Bay region.

One person surveying Mallard Reservoir, which holds thousands of waterfowl species, recounted how several blue-winged teal were having a challenging time landing in the water, which gave the team time to distinguish the species from the green-winged teal.

Another exciting find was a northern saw-whet owl which is only the second sighting in the last 25 years.

The tally of species observed in 2024 from all Central CCC segments was officially reported as 148 species. This is one less than last year, and below the

all-time high of 161 species in 2020. One more species had been observed, a Swimhoe's white eye, but it doesn't count as a wild bird. This introduced species from Southeast Asia has established a permanent population in southern California and sightings of it are included in the CBC for the southern end of the state, but its wild population status in northern California has not been confirmed.

It is remarkable that the volunteers essentially found the 25-year average of 149 species in such adverse weather. Bird enthusiasts or anyone wishing to learn more about the MDBA's activities are invited to learn more about MDBA's programs ([www.mtdiablobirds.org](http://www.mtdiablobirds.org)).



California Quail photo by Jerry Britten



Spotted towhee Photo by Jerry Britten



Northern Rough Wing Swallow. Photo credit - Alan Krakauer Photography



Northern Saw Whet Owl - Photo credit Julie Woodruff

*Jill Hedgecock has a master's degree in Environmental Management and a bachelor's degree in Biology. Her love of nature inspired her to write the award-winning novel, "Rhino in the Room" and the sequel, "Queen of the Rhino."*

*Concord Chamber*  
**CRAB FEED**



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**Carlyn Obringer**  
Concord Mayor  
cityofconcord.org

# Concord Showing Pride with Adopt-A-Program

## A-Program

Happy New Year!

Nearly a month has passed since I was sworn in for my third term on the Concord City Council and was honored to accept the gavel and the title of “Mayor of the City of Concord” on December 10th.



As promised during my acceptance speech, I will continue to strive each day to serve the people of Concord to the best of my ability and help people find government solutions to their city-related challenges whenever possible.

As Mayor, I look forward to continuing to focus on building a sense of community. I want residents to feel pride in being a Concordian: living, working, operating a business, shopping, and celebrating milestones here.

Participating in our Adopt-A-Street and Adopt-A-Spot programs are two excellent ways to build positive relationships with other community members and a sense of place. In both cases, Concord residents come together to focus on a common issue impacting their neighborhood and take action to improve the situation.

What is Concord’s Adopt-A-Street Program? It is a program to enable concerned citizens and businesses to actively participate in enhancing our city’s appearance and cleanliness. Interested groups, such as Boy and Girl Scout troops, churches, service clubs, private businesses, or neighborhood associations can adopt a minimum half-mile section of one of Concord’s key thoroughfares.

Volunteers make a commitment to remove trash along their designated sections of city streets a minimum of four times per year for a two-year period and are encouraged to monitor conditions on their section of the street and report problems to city staff.

In return for conducting scheduled clean-ups of their adopted stretch of street four times a year, participating organizations are recognized with signage that includes the Adopt-A-Street Program logo, the City of Concord logo, and the volunteer group’s name.

The signage is installed at the beginning and end of the volunteer group’s designated street sections. Signs are installed after the group’s fourth clean-up event has been held and will remain in place for the designated adoption period of two years. More information, including a map of street locations targeted for cleanup, is available here: <https://www.cityofconcord.org/357/Adopt-A-Street>

What is Concord’s Adopt-A-Spot Program? This program enables community groups and individuals to “adopt” part of a city park and take an active role in beautifying and keeping it clean. Volunteers make a commitment to helping with litter pick-up, spreading mulch, planting trees, weeding, leaf clean-up, trail improvements, graffiti removal, etc. a minimum of four times per year over a two-year period, and are encouraged to monitor conditions in their adopted park site and report issues to city staff. More information, including a list of adoptable park sites is available here: <https://www.cityofconcord.org/1243/Adopt-A-Spot>

If you decide to Adopt-A-Street or Adopt-A-Spot, please invite me to your event. I am always happy to roll up my sleeves and pick up trash or plant a tree if I am available.

## New California Laws in Effect for 2025

From cannabis cafes to tenant protections, here are eight of the most noteworthy 2025 laws that went into effect on Jan. 1.

Alcohol and Cannabis Sales May Expand in “Entertainment Zones.”

Local governments can designate “entertainment zones,” where bars and restaurants can sell alcoholic beverages for people to drink on public streets and sidewalks. In addition, AB 1775 legalizes Amsterdam-style cannabis cafes, allowing lounges to also sell food and drinks that are not pre-packaged.

California state’s minimum wage will increase to \$16.50 per hour for all employers, regardless of employee headcount. This also means that as of Jan. 1, 2025, exempt employees in California must be paid a minimum annual salary of \$68,640.

Jaywalking is no longer illegal in California as long as it is done safely and with no oncoming traffic. Pedestrians must stay out of bike lanes when a walking path is available. Vision-impaired pedestrians with a cane or

a guide dog have right-of-way at all intersections.

California employers cannot require workers to attend any meetings related to their political or religious views — or how their bosses feel about unions.

Employers can no longer force employees to use as much as two weeks of vacation time before taking paid family leave. And workers can use sick time to perform jury duty.

Renters facing eviction have more time to respond after receiving an eviction notice, from five business days to ten.

Banks cannot fine you if your ATM withdrawal is declined instantaneously due to insufficient funds. The law calls penalties for insufficient funds “junk fees.”

Health providers and debt collectors may not report medical debt information to credit agencies. That means unpaid medical bills should no longer show up on people’s credit reports.



**Kim Trupiano**  
Mayor, Clayton  
kimT@claytonca.gov

# State of the City

Congratulations to all of the newly elected and re-elected Clayton City Councilmembers: Jim Diaz, Richard Enea and Holly Tillman. I look forward to working with each of them to achieve our goals this year.

My focus this coming year will be addressing the most pressing needs of the city including:

- Long-deferred infrastructure improvements
- Additional staffing needs
- Continued strong public safety
- Bringing the community together

Naturally, we will have other issues to address throughout the year including our mid-year budget review, continued review of our investment policy, hiring a permanent police chief and ensuring that our City Manager has the additional staffing needed to accomplish the City’s goals.

We are also planning on finalizing our infrastructure work with our partners at Climatec this year and that includes adding solar array panels, an EV charging station at the library and continued improved HVAC and irrigation equipment.

We are also embarking on

a library refresh project in conjunction with the library’s 30th Anniversary and I will be updating the community more on that special project in the future.

I am looking forward to working together with my fellow councilmembers, our city staff and the members of our community to achieve these goals and I am hopeful that our effort will be respectable and collaborative in manner. We need to do this for the good of the community, for our city staff and for the people who elected us.

We are so fortunate to live in a city with a safe environment, natural beauty, great schools, a robust financial reserve and a strong community spirit, evidenced by the number of outstanding events that take place in our city throughout the year.

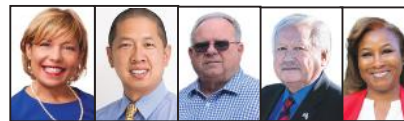
We have a busy year ahead of us and I look forward to achieving these goals and helping bring the community together because I truly believe that we are Stronger Together.

Here’s to a great 2025 and please feel free to contact me at kimt@claytonca.gov or 925.673.7324.

## Area Councils Reorganize for 2025

Here is a look at area city council’s current membership and their reorganized leadership.

### Clayton City Council



(L-R:) Mayor Kim Trupiano, Vice Mayor Jeff Wan, Councilmembers Richard Enea, Jim Diaz, Holly Tillman

### Concord City Council



(L-R:) Councilmember Dominic Aliano, Vice Mayor Laura Nakamura, Mayor Carlyn Obringer, Councilmember Laura Hoffmeister, Councilmember Pablo Benavente

### Pleasant Hill City Council



(L-R:) Dist 5 Councilmember Amanda Szakats, Vice Mayor Zac Shess, Mayor Sue Noack, Dist 2 Councilmember Andrei Obolenskiy, Dist 1 Councilmember Belle La

### Walnut Creek City Council



(L-R:) Mayor Cindy Darling, Mayor Pro Tem Kevin Wilk, Matt Francois, Cindy Silva, and Craig DeVinney

### Martinez City Council



(L-R) Councilmember Jay Howard, Councilmember Craig Young, Mayor Brianna Zorn, Councilmember Attendor Molly, Vice Mayor Debbie McKillop

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# CRAB FEED



## FEBRUARY 22, 2025

**Pleasant Hill Community Center**  
320 Civic Drive • Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

**5:00 PM • Doors Open**

**6:00 PM • All You Can Eat Dinner**  
(Salad, Garlic Bread, Pasta, Marinated Crab & Dessert)

**8:00 PM • Live Band & Dance**

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# calendar of events

## CRAB FEEDS



**January 25, Pleasant Hill Lions Club Annual Crab Feed, 6 PM -11 PM** at the Pleasant Hill Senior Center. Tickets are \$70, send an email to [lisacosso25@gmail.com](mailto:lisacosso25@gmail.com) or find our event on Eventbrite.

**February 1, College Park High School Crab Feed 5-9PM**, Pleasant Hill Community Center. <https://www.collegeparkathletics.com/page/show/4697229-2025-crab-feed>

**February 15, Bay Area Crisis Nursery's 25th Annual Crab Feed.** 1506 Mendocino Dr, Concord. [crabfeed.cbo.io](http://crabfeed.cbo.io)

**February 21, Concord Chamber's 2025 Crab Feed Dinner and Auction, 5:30 PM - 10:00 PM** Centre Concord 5298 Clayton Road, Concord. [concordchamber.com](http://concordchamber.com)

**February 22, 2025, Blue Devils Crab Feed, 5 PM.** Funds raised benefit the community arts programs of the Blue Devils. [bluedevils.org](http://bluedevils.org)

**February 22, Carondelet High School Crab Feed, 6-9PM.** [carondeleths.org](http://carondeleths.org)

**February 28, Northgate Athletics Crab And Pasta Feed, 6-9PM.** Centre Concord. 5298 Clayton Rd, Concord. [northgatebroncos.org](http://northgatebroncos.org)

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## Clayton

**January 11, Brad Edelman Trio, 9:00 PM - 11:55 PM**  
Covers of your favorite songs spanning bands and decades from Bad Company, Bruce Springsteen, The Rolling Stones, ZZ Top, The Black Crowes and much more! Brad Edelman-Guitar & Vocals, Dakota White-On Bass, and Travis White-On Drums! Show starts at 9:00 pm and ends at 1:00 am.

<https://www.claytonclubsaloon.com/events>

**January 11, Club Shoot** (open to the public), 8:00 am - 12:00 pm. Club shoots are for all members and guests! You don't need to be a pro to participate. For a qualifying score you will shoot 2 rounds, one Field and one Hunter (4 arrows at each target). Fees Member - \$8 Guest - \$10 Diablo Bowmen, Oak Hill Lane, Clayton <https://diablo-bowmen.org>

**January 22, Modern Calligraphy for Beginners** at Roadside22 Beer & Wine Bar, 6:00 pm-7:30 pm. Join Sip & Script for Modern Calligraphy Fun! Whether you're a stationery nerd, DIY Bride-to-be, or just a crafty individual, you'll be introduced to modern calligraphy with a pointed dip pen and ink. Tickets \$75.00. 5439 Clayton Road, Clayton

## Concord

**Thru Feb 14, ICE AT THE VERANDA**, 2001-2003 Diamond Blvd. Concord

**Bambino's Free Live Music** - Every Saturday 6:00 - 9:00 PM 1895 Farm Bureau Rd. Concord

**January 16, Learn to Square Dance for Fun, Socializing, and Exercise-FREE** Open house. 7:30PM. Square dancing is just what you're looking for! Our class will start with a free Open House on Thursday, January 16, 2025. Following that, the class will run every Thursday evening for 9 more weeks through March 20. Classes are from 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm, at the Willow Pass Community Center, 2748 East Olivera Road, Concord. The first night is free. CONCORD LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION Admission: Free Location: Concord Library 2900 Salvio St Concord, CA 94519 Time: 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM Phone: (925) 646-5455 2025 27

**January 27, Lunar New Year Celebration with Tomizaki's Champions Kung Fu Institute.** 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM. Join the CVCHS Chinese Cultural Club for crafts and enjoy lion dancing with Tomizaki's Champions Kung Fu Institute dancers. Children will receive a 'Lai See,' a red envelope containing a 'sweet' surprise. All ages are welcome.

**January 29, Fun Airgun Only Shooting Session, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm.** Open to public, airguns .30 cal and below. Benches available, targets and stands, 200 yard range. Good group of people. All types of airguns-springers, PCP's, Pistols. Eye protection required, ear protection optional. USI Multi Purpose Range 4700 Evora Road, Concord. <https://diablorodandgun.com>

**February 6, 40th Annual Mayor's State of the City Luncheon, 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM.** Mayor Carlyn Obringer will reflect on our city's accomplishments and

unveil the vision for our city's future. Hilton, 1970 Diamond Blvd, Concord. Tickets [concordchamber.com](http://concordchamber.com)

## Pleasant Hill

**January 16, Carlton 40th Anniversary Celebration, 10:30 AM**, with Martinez Mayor, Ribbon Cutting. 2770 Pleasant Hill Rd., Pleasant Hill. [carltonseniorliving.com](http://carltonseniorliving.com)

**February 1, Whiskey Tasting and a Taste of Pleasant Hill, 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM** Rec & Park Teen Center, 147 Gregory Lane, Pleasant Hill. Tickets [pleasanthillchamber.com](http://pleasanthillchamber.com)

**February 8, Film in a Day! Actors, Writers & Directors Challenge** 9am - 7pm. Given to Fully Registered Participants ONLY. Film MADE ON THIS EVENT WILL BE Screened at a local Theater BASH Film Festival. And Voted on! It may also be part of a bigger feature film and distributed and streamed. Everyone attending this event will receive IMDB credits after it Screens in Festival. <https://www.eventbrite.com>

## Martinez

**January 25, Manifest Your Magic-Vibe Dance Studio.** 6pm - 8.30pm. Unlock the power within you at our 8th annual "Manifest Your Magic" event! Join a transformative evening of yoga, and self-discovery. Flow through rejuvenating Vinyasa poses and sink into easeful restorative practice. Cost \$55. Bring a journal and a pen and come with a willing spirit and an open heart. Tickets, [andrewmnorris@gmail.com](mailto:andrewmnorris@gmail.com). 6635 Alhambra Avenue Suite 210 Martinez

**February 15, I ♥ Downtown Martinez Wine & Chocolate Stroll, 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.** Enjoy a fun afternoon strolling from business to business sampling 25+ wines and chocolate treats! Downtown Martinez

## Walnut Creek

**Merry Mixers Events, 7:30-10 PM** **January 17, February 7 & 21, March 7,** 1475 Creekside Dr., Walnut Creek. [www.merrymixers.life](http://www.merrymixers.life)

**AT THE LESHER CENTER** **January 16-26. Improvised Law and Order**, a spontaneous mockery of justice.

**January 18, The ABBA Concert Experience, 7:30 PM - 9:30 PM**

**February 1-2, Mozart Serenity,** A world-famous Spanish guitar concerto and Mozart's genius.

**February 4, Take It To The Limit - A Tribute to the Eagles 7:30-**

9:30 PM.

**February 7-8, Diablo Ballet's Cinderella's Wedding**, Based on the second act full-length fairytale ballet

Leshner Center for the Arts 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, <https://www.lesherartscenter.org> Tickets: (925)943-7469 Wed-Sun Noon to 6:00 p.m.

## Lafayette

**February 7, February Coffee Talk 9AM - 10:30 AM.** Think your child needs more support? Come share ideas, coffee and a few bites with other parents and caregivers of students receiving special education services. Lafayette Public House, 50 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette

## Clubs

### Clayton Clubs

**Concord NorCal Helping Hands Lion's Club.** <https://www.lionsclubs.org>

**Rotary Club of Concord.** [www.concordcarotary.org](http://www.concordcarotary.org)

**Cars 2nd Chance, vehicle / car donation programs** turns donations into cash for charities Clayton Valley Concord Sunrise Rotary Charitable Fund. <https://www.cars2ndchance.org/>

**Clayton Valley Concord Sunrise Rotary** meets weekly at 7am at the Clayton Valley Charter School Administration Building, 1300 Alberta Way, Concord [www.claytonvalleyrotary.org/CVCSRotary](http://www.claytonvalleyrotary.org/CVCSRotary)

### Concord Clubs

**Concord NorCal Helping Hands Lion's Club.** [lionsclub.org](http://lionsclub.org)

**Rotary Club of Concord.** [www.concordcarotary.org](http://www.concordcarotary.org)

### Martinez Clubs

**Martinez Rotary Club** meets weekly, 5-6 PM on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. Campbell Theatre, 636 Ward Street., Martinez [www.martinezrotary.org](http://www.martinezrotary.org)

### Walnut Creek Clubs

**Rotary Club of Walnut Creek** meets weekly 12:15 to 1:30 on Tuesdays at Assistance League Diablo Valley, 2711 Buena Vista Ave, Walnut Creek. <https://rotarywc.org> Need help with eBooks, emailing, printing, or basic web searching?

### Pleasant Hill Clubs

**Diablo Women's Chorale** is holding audition for all female voice parts for its Spring 2025 season. 6-9:00 PM, by appointment. For more information contact Nancy Hickman. 925-899-5050 or [hickmandg@gmail.com](mailto:hickmandg@gmail.com). [diablowomenschorale.org](http://diablowomenschorale.org)

**SUBMIT YOUR CALENDAR ENTRIES** by the 20th of the month before Issue month. [diablogazette@gmail.com](mailto:diablogazette@gmail.com)



## Home-Selling Mistakes to Avoid for a Faster Sale

The difference between a quick sale at a great price and a long, drawn-out process often boils down to preparation and strategy. Here's a guide to the most frequent home-selling mistakes and how you can sidestep them for a faster, smoother sale.

**Overpricing** — Savvy buyers will compare your home to similar properties on the market. Overpricing can lead to your property languishing on the market and to price reductions that make buyers wary. Work with a real estate agent to set a competitive price based on recent sales in your area.

**Skipping Repairs and Cosmetic Updates** — Small flaws and repairs can stand out to prospective buyers. Whether it's a leaky faucet, scuffed paint, or outdated fixtures, minor repairs and cosmetic upgrades can make a big difference.

**Ignoring Curb Appeal** — First impressions are everything, and the exterior of your home is the first thing potential buyers see. Neglecting landscaping, having overgrown plants, or a dirty driveway can set a negative tone from the start. Keep your lawn trimmed, remove any clutter from the yard, and consider power washing your home and driveway.

**Not Staging the Home** — Help buyers visualize their life in your home. Staging involves arranging furniture and décor to highlight the home's best features and create a warm, welcoming atmosphere. If staging is not in your budget, at least declutter and remove personal items to create a more neutral setting.

**Using Poor Quality Photos** — Most buyers start their home search online, so high-quality photos are

essential. Consider hiring a professional photographer.

**Being Too Involved in Showings** — It is usually best to leave during a showing. Potential buyers need the space and time to explore your home without feeling like they are intruding. Letting your agent handle the showings can lead to more honest feedback and a better experience for buyers.

**Failing to Market the Property Properly** — Simply listing your home may not be enough to attract buyers. Work with your agent to market your home across multiple channels including social media, email blasts, open houses, print, mailers and online listings.

**Not Being Flexible with Showings** — The more flexible you can be with showing times, the more likely you are to attract serious interest which can lead to a faster sale.

**Ignoring Feedback from Potential Buyers** — Buyers' feedback can be incredibly valuable, especially if it points out a consistent issue that is turning people away. Use their feedback to make necessary adjustments.

**Skipping the Pre-Listing Inspection** — Surprises during the buyer's inspection can delay or derail a sale. By getting a pre-listing inspection, you can identify any major repairs upfront and decide whether to fix them or adjust the asking price accordingly.

By avoiding these common home-selling mistakes, you can increase your chances of attracting serious buyers, speeding up the sale. Remember, the little details can make a big difference.

Compliments of VirtualResults.net



## Going Underground for Veggies

Over a billion tons of root and tuber food is produced worldwide each year that is grown below the Earth's surface. Tuber foods are headlined by potatoes, however beets, carrots, onions, garlic, sweet potatoes (yams), radishes, and turnips are also popular underground foods.



Hilling Up Potatoes improves yield and quality-Courtesy Dreamstime

Americans consume 135 pounds of potatoes per person each year. They are easy to grow in your own backyard garden, or in planter pots on your deck. Potatoes and other tubers love cool weather and are generally ready to harvest

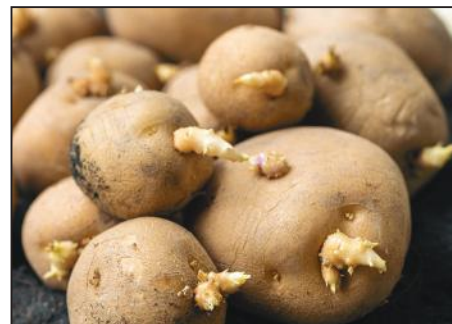
in 60-90 days. Let's focus on how to grow great tasting white potatoes, understanding that the other mentioned underground veggies have similar cultivation needs.

White potatoes originated in Central America. The two main types of white potatoes are round and long, both having off-white or brownish thin skins and white, starchy nutritious meat.

One medium-sized white potato has about 110 calories, 26 grams of carbohydrate, 3 grams of both fiber and 3 grams of protein, and is also free of fat and cholesterol. As for vitamins and minerals, white potatoes are stuffed with vitamins C, B6, niacin, folate, potassium, manganese, magnesium and phosphorus

In Central Contra Costa's mild winter climate, white potatoes can be planted from January through March since they tolerate light frosts. Do not cut up store-bought potatoes as they sometimes harbor disease. Garden Centers provide "certified seed potatoes" that grow well. When you divide up whole potatoes, make sure to have two or three grow-eyes in each planting chunk, then allow them to dry for a day. Potatoes prefer sandy, loose, and well-drained soil with plenty of organic material and regular but light waterings. A raised bed or pot is much better than trying to grow them in our native hardpack clay. The location should have at least six hours of direct sunshine. Plant the cutting chunks so each has about 15" by 24" of space to grow, about 4" deep with eyes pointing up.

Potatoes like rich soil, so add home-grown compost every couple of weeks, or a light amount of balanced organic fertilizer (10-10-10). When potato sprouts are several inches tall, start to "hill up" straw mulch or organic



Seed Potatoes



Root and Tuber Veggies are Easy to Grow in Backyard Gardens - Courtesy Shutterstock

compost around their bases, and continue this until harvest.

It is okay to cover lower leaf junctions. This practice forces plants to produce more and larger tubers and protects them from drying out. Some say it improves their flavor also.

When the plants begin to yellow and lose their lower leaves, cut back watering so the young potatoes don't get too wet and rot. Wait a couple of weeks and the plants will be nearly dead. This is the time to carefully dig up your mature potatoes. Spread out your harvest for drying and do not clean them. Store your new potatoes in a cool, dark, dry place for up to three weeks before washing and throwing them in the Irish stew pot.

Potatoes and other tubers are essential foods for the modern family. Make them an essential addition to your all-natural garden.

Seasonal notes: January is a great month for trimming roses.

Pick a dry day so your pruning cuts heal properly. Choose stems that are at least the diameter of your little finger to prune and cut away all other smaller stems that produce weak, lanky growth. Leave at least two leaf junction buds on each pruned stem to produce new strong shoots in spring. Cut about 1/4 inch above the primary leaf junction and at an angle sloped toward the ground so rainwater drains properly off the cut.

Email your comments and questions to: NakedGardener@diablogazette.com. In some cases, these may appear in future columns.

# Happy NEW YEAR!

**5425 Concord Blvd. #C1, Concord**

**Delightful First Floor Kirkwood Unit** offering a spacious living area perfect for relaxing and entertaining. 1 bedroom, 1 bath, approx. 762sf with assigned carport. Great location tucked back in complex close to swimming pool.

**1119 Oakwood Cir, Clayton**

**Amazing/Rare opportunity to own a Custom Built Architectural Home** nestled in Clayton's secluded Oakwood Estates. 4 bedrooms, 3 baths plus bonus room, approx. 3155sf on an approx. .46 acre lot with an attached 3-car garage. Great yard with seasonal creek. Must see!

**3 Xavier Pl, Clayton**

**Charming & Updated Single Story Rancher** tucked away on a large corner lot nestled in a serene neighborhood offering timeless style with modern comforts. 4 bedrooms, 2 baths, approx. 2060sf on an approx. .24 acre lot with an attached 2-car garage.

**56 La Honda Ct, Clayton**

**Fantastic & Updated Two Story in Regency Meadows** at the end of a court situated on a generous approx. .28 acre lot featuring refreshing freeform in-ground pool and spa. 4 bedrooms, 2.5 baths, approx. 2390sf with an attached 3-car garage.

**Clayton Market Update**

Address	Sales Price	SF	Bed/Bath	Sales Date
3090 Windmill Canyon Dr	\$1,169,000	2680	4/2.5	11/6/2024
333 Saclan Ter	\$880,000	1904	3/2.5	11/15/2024
56 La Honda Ct	\$1,325,000	2390	4/2.5	11/25/2024
3 Xavier Pl	\$1,020,000	2060	4/2	11/26/2024
222 Mt Wilson Pl	\$1,040,000	2692	5/2.5	12/2/2024
10 Mt Eden Pl	\$1,265,000	2442	4/3	12/4/2024
1236 Easley Dr	\$1,074,900	2188	4/2.5	12/9/2024

**Concord Market Update**

Address	Sales Price	SF	Bed/Bath	Sales Date
3503 Halfmoon Ln	\$965,000	1852	4/2	11/25/2024
5430 Roundtree Ct #B	\$384,000	973	2/1.5	12/4/2024
1788 Landana Dr	\$730,000	1216	3/1.5	12/4/2024
3712 Oakpark Ct	\$885,000	1610	3/2	12/6/2024
3993 Wilson Ln	\$973,000	1867	4/2	12/10/2024
5131 Laurel Dr	\$1,195,000	2126	4/2	12/11/2024
5582 Merritt Ct	\$1,369,000	2961	5/3.5	12/11/2024

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Based on information from CCRAR/Paragon MLS® as of 12/20/24. All data, including all measurements and calculations of area, is obtained from various sources and has not been, and will not be, verified by broker or MLS. All information should be independently reviewed and verified for accuracy. Properties may or may not be listed by the office/agent presenting the information.

Based on information from CCRAR/Paragon MLS® as of 12/20/24. All data, including all measurements and calculations of area, is obtained from various sources and has not been, and will not be, verified by broker or MLS. All information should be independently reviewed and verified for accuracy. Properties may or may not be listed by the office/agent presenting the information.

# The Arts Page

## Three Events fill January's Slate at aRt Cottage

For the month of January, aRt Cottage will be hosting three special events.

Dori Sanchez will show us how to make beautiful all occasions and other specialty cards in a special card-making workshop on Thursday, January 16, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Dori has taught card-making classes on cruise ships and is quite the entertainer. For more information or to register, call (925) 956-3343.



Card making workshop #30226

On Saturday, January 18, at 6:00 p.m., author Bobby Knudsen will have a book signing and reading for his new children's book "Bobby Otter and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch."



Bobbie Otter

This is a special book because one of our regular showing artists, watercolorist Samantha McNally, was the illustrator for it. She will also be there at this event.



The Great Ocean Garbage Patch

"Did you know that the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is twice the size of Texas and Ocean Voyages Institute travels out into the ocean garbage patch every summer and removes several tons of plastic debris for recycling and repurposing?" asks Knudsen. Knudsen states that he is "thankful for the opportunity to share the story, the beautiful artwork by Samantha and the great cause they are supporting in Ocean Voyages Institute." Bring the kids.

Also come tour our current exhibit "All Creatures Great and Small." The animals will be represented by professional artists, novices and our aRt Cottage students. The "All Creatures Great and Small" exhibit will continue through February.

aRt Cottage is located at 2238 Mt. Diablo St. Concord. arcottage.info.

## Main Street Arts Starts 2025 with "Carquinez Color" Show

Main Street Arts welcomes Nancy Roberts as our guest artist. Nancy's show, "Carquinez Color", is a collection of acrylic landscapes that celebrate the beauty of the Carquinez Strait region from Crockett and Martinez to Benicia and Vallejo. Created in her signature bold and colorful style, her compositions focus on natural shoreline environments, bridges, piers, serene water views, and vintage townscapes.



January Free Drawing by Bonnie Fry -Sleeping



Martinez Shoreline by Nancy Roberts



Bridge Vista by Nancy Roberts



Martinez Shoreline by Nancy Roberts

"Carquinez Color" opens January 3 and runs through February 28. The gallery will host a reception on Saturday, January 4, from 12:00-2:00pm.

Main Street Arts members have worked diligently to generate unique and inspiring work to cover our walls for our

latest show. Take a look at our webpage to get a peak at our new art pieces.

This month's "art giveaway" will a painting by Bonnie Fry called "Sleeping". Be sure to sign up for the drawing when you visit the gallery. www.mainstreetarts.net Happy New Year!

Open Wednesday-Saturday 11:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m., Sundays 10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m., and First Fridays 6:00 - 0:00 p.m. Main Street Arts, 613 Main Street in Martinez.

## Blackhawk Gallery Presents Winter Beauty

Don't miss this inspiring celebration of artistry, nature, and the beauty of winter.

Blackhawk Gallery, 3416 Blackhawk Plaza Circle, Danville. Opens Friday, January 24, 2025, 11:00 AM. Reception: Saturday, January 25, 2025, 4:00 - 6:00 PM. This event is free and open to public. www.adas4art.org



Joan Pinto's organic ceramic work is deeply inspired by the natural world, drawing from her fascination with seed pods, desert formations, and the delicate illumination of porcelain. Her unique artistry adds a sophisticated and tactile dimension to the exhibit, offering visitors a sensory experience not to be missed.




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## Final month for "Winter's Embrace" Exhibit at Jor Gallery

This is the final month for JOR Fine Art Gallery's exhibit "Winter's Embrace." Here you will find exquisite works from 34 different artists and two guest artists, Dee Tivenan, and Dave Matthews.

Matthews is primarily a self-taught assemblage, mixed media, and abstract artist. His work often includes found or secondhand materials, such as fabric, dolls, hair, glass, jewelry, acrylic, photographs and mirrors.



"New Hope" Mix Media on Yupo



Dave Matthews and his sculptures

"Local dumps, roadsides, flea markets, thrift stores and lumber yards provide the raw materials for my assemblage, mixed media, and abstract sculptures. Seeing and handling discarded objects triggers memories from my childhood as well as adult life experiences. I try to capture these thoughts and emotions in my work," he states.

Guest artist Dee Tivenan grew up in Chicago and was exposed to art at an early age by frequent field trips to the Chicago Art Institute with her artistic mother. "My process is an expressive art of being in the moment and connecting to it. I frequently paint with nature references and little homes. Trees and flowers

are calming. Rocks remind me that life can be rough, smooth and awkward. The ocean, in particular, fuels my perspective. It's beautiful, expansive and meditative," Tivenan says.

Enjoy serene landscapes to abstract interpretations of winter's charm and mystery.

Show ends February 2, 2025. Located at 1026 Oak St. in Clayton. Open Wednesday through Sunday: 12:00 to 5:00 p.m.

jorfineartgallery.com



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# Save Mount Diablo's All-Volunteer Band, Blue-Eyed Grass Releases Album

by David King

Save Mount Diablo's all-volunteer band, Blue-Eyed Grass, has just released their new album containing mostly original songs about nature and conservation.

Of the 11 songs on the album, which is entitled "Blue-Eyed Grass" after the band's name, nine are original and two are cover songs the Grateful Dead played, one of which has an environmental message.

There are five members in the Blue-Eyed Grass band: Ted Clement, Save Mount Diablo's Executive Director, on guitar and vocals; John Gallagher, who serves on Save Mount Diablo's Board of Directors, on dobro and vocals; Bob Loomis on ukulele, harmonica, flute, and vocals; Dave Schneider on bass and vocals; and Rich Silveira on drums (made out of a recycled suitcase!) and vocals. All are supporters and volunteers of Save Mount Diablo.

"I'm really grateful to be able to play with John, Dave, Bob and Rich," Clement says. "They're really talented musicians. Bob, John and Rich have been in the music scene for years. Dave played in a band that opened up for Creedence Clearwater Revival. Dave's band was really big in Concord back in the day."

"We got to do that when I was a kid," Schneider elaborates. "We won the California Amateur Battle of the Bands, and the reward was for the winners of those battles to open up for Creedence Clearwater. They had just come out with a new song called 'Susie Q.' For me as a kid, that was the highlight. It got me hooked on music so bad that I haven't been able to shake it in 70 years."

Blue-Eyed Grass's original songs on the new album cover various topics: loving Mount Diablo, protecting land, appreciating native flora and fauna like the Mount Diablo globe lily, honoring the Mount Diablo Beacon, hiking in the Diablo area, dealing with the climate crisis, addressing invasive species, and being a kid in nature.

The band threw an album release party at Luigi's Deli downtown Martinez on December 21 and played to a full house. Those who made a donation of any size to Save Mount Diablo received a free CD.

"We thought it would be a nice holiday gift for nature lovers, and music lovers," Clement said. They sold a lot of CDs that day. Clement says if demand requires it, they will order more CDs.

However, who buys CDs anymore? Everybody is streaming through Pandora, Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music and others. Fortunately, even by listening on streaming services, Save Mount Diablo will receive royalties for each time a track is played. To listen to the new album, visit any of the major online music platforms. You can start listening now by scanning the QR code, then listen and like each song.



Blue Eye Grass performs at album release party at Luigi's Deli in Martinez. (L-R) Ted Clement, Bob Loomis, John Gallagher, Rich Silveira, and Dave Schneider.



The band's new album cover art by Edward Sortwell Clement, III

The band will be grateful if you enter your likes for all their new songs you enjoy, thus spreading love for Mount Diablo and its Diablo Range, our incredible natural world and for the band and its music that is delivering a positive message about nature and conservation.

"By liking and subscribing, the streaming services will keep track each time a song is selected, and royalties will enter into an account that will go directly to save Mount Diablo," Schneider explains.

The band worked with recording engineer Bob Byers, of Clayton, on recording the album. Music and events artist, Edward Sortwell Clement, III, Ted's son, created the art for the band's new album cover.

"Our music is a mix of blues, folk, country, rock, bluegrass. It's real classic Americana music, and we're real proud of it," Clement says.



Scan to listen to the album

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## Selling, Buying, Age in Place or Renting in Retirement: Which is Right for You?

In retirement, only you know when it is time to give up a high maintenance or two-story home for something more manageable. Planning ahead is key to your peace of mind, sometimes looking 10 years into the future. Eventually decisions about Aging in place; renting or buying depends on what best supports your lifestyle and budget. Many seniors and their family members wonder which is the right way to go. Here are some options.

**Buying offers stability**  
Monthly payments remain predictable, which is especially valuable on a fixed income. You will build equity and have control over your space. However, owning does come with maintenance responsibilities and upfront costs. See the Aging in Place graph which gives things to consider now and later should you choose to stay at home. When the upkeep and/or size of your home becomes too much to take care of, you might think about other living situations.

**Purchase or build an ADU**  
If you have the space, purchase or build an ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) at your own property or with a family member. Most cities have approved building plans of all sizes to make it easier and faster. Then you have your own space but with family nearby to be the ones cleaning gutters and taking out the trash. Having an ADU or apartment gives you options for additional income until you eventually need the space for a caretaker or yourself. If that interests you, take a tour of one or two.

**Consider Among Several OVER 55 Options**  
There are Over 55 purchasing options that range from homes,

condominiums, to mobile homes. Or, places to rent for independent living with or without meal options (Ohhh, to have someone else cook might be a good thing) and assisted living for those that need additional help with medication, showering, appointments, or more. Another idea, we have a dear friend that shares her huge home with another adult.

**Renting provides flexibility and freedom from repairs**  
While rents can rise with little notice, so can HOA dues. Weighing your options and budget is important as you look forward. Visiting places ahead of decision making helps to evaluate things when you are not under pressure to do so. If you know folks in different living situations, visit and/or ask them the pros and cons of where they live. Would they choose that again if they had to decide today whether to move or not?

Most places allow people to visit for lunch, and a no obligation tour. Often, people choose a place where a friend or family member resides because they want to know someone in the new place. Keeping your community, place of worship, doctors, and personal services nearby and familiar can be a huge help in making one feel more comfortable in a new place.

A Seniors Real Estate Specialist (SRES®), has experience and specialized training to help older adults make housing decisions that fit their unique needs. They understand the challenges and priorities involved, and can help you navigate every aspect, from weighing financial considerations to evaluating the benefits of each option. The goal is to help you find a home that supports your lifestyle and provides peace of mind in your retirement.



## Recipes: For A Warm Argentinian Menu

### Grilled Provolone Cheese on Toasted Bread

#### INGREDIENTS

- (4) 3/4-inch-thick slices of provolone cheese
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 8 thick slices of bread



#### DIRECTIONS

Place the cheese slices in a shallow dish and drizzle with olive oil. Turn the slices so that each side is coated with oil. Sprinkle the cheese with the salt and the oregano (and red pepper flakes if desired). Place the cheese in the freezer while you prepare the grill.

Brush the grill with a generous amount of olive oil to help prevent sticking.

When the grill is ready, place the cheese slices directly on the grill, and cook for about 2 minutes on each side, or until cheese is hot, slightly browned, but still holding its shape.

Remove cheese to a plate. Brush bread slices with any remaining olive oil left in the dish that had the cheese. Grill bread slices until slightly toasted. (If your grill is large enough you can grill the cheese and bread simultaneously). Serve cheese on bread to eat.

### Chimichurri Sauce

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup (packed) fresh Italian parsley
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup (packed) fresh cilantro
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 3/4 teaspoon dried crushed red pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon salt



#### DIRECTIONS

Puree all ingredients in processor. Transfer to bowl. (Can be made 2 hours ahead. Cover and let stand at room temperature.) Yield: 1 cup

### Pasta Frola de Dulce de Membrillo - Quince Tart

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 stick butter, chilled
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 cup dulce de membrillo (quince paste), homemade or store-bought
- 1/4 cup pineapple preserves (optional)
- 1/4 cup seedless raspberry jam (optional)



#### DIRECTIONS

Mix the dry ingredients (flour, salt, baking powder, and sugar) together in a medium bowl. Cut the butter into pieces and mix butter into dry ingredients using a pastry cutter or 2 knives, until well blended.

Stir egg, egg yolk and milk together and add to flour mixture, blending gently with a fork until dough comes together. Knead a couple of times to just barely mix the dough, which should not be too crumbly nor too wet. If needed, add an extra tablespoon or so of flour or milk. Wrap dough in plastic wrap and chill for at least 30 minutes.

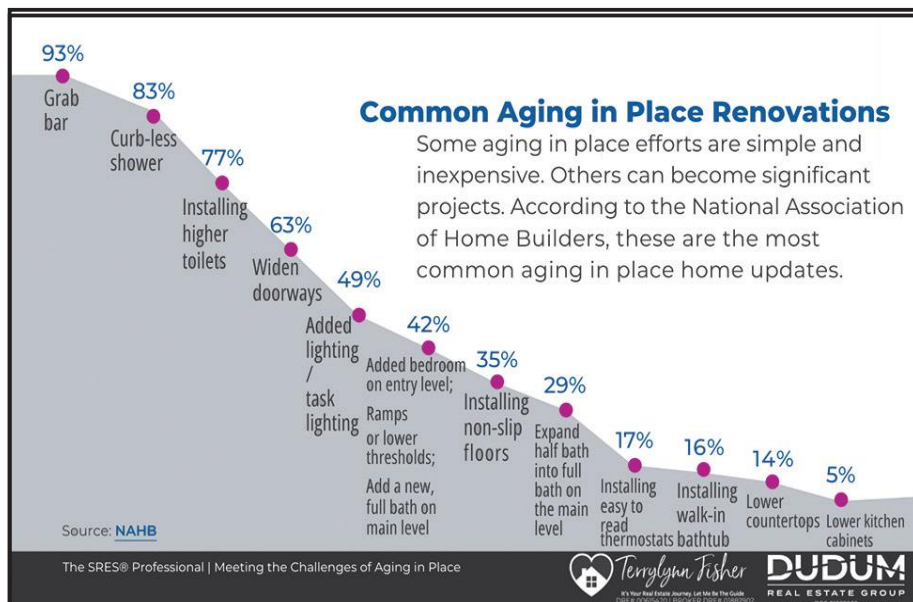
Add dulce de membrillo (and pineapple preserves and raspberry jam, if using) to a small pot, with 1-2 tablespoons of water. Heat over low heat, stirring frequently, until mixture has melted enough to be smooth and have a spreadable consistency. (Add a little more water if necessary.) Remove from heat and let cool slightly.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9" tart pan with a removable bottom. Roll out about 3/4 of the dough on a floured surface in a circle large enough to line the bottom and sides of the tart pan. Place the dough in the pan. Spread the filling evenly over the dough.

Roll the remaining dough into a circle, and cut thin strips of dough, using them to make a lattice pattern over the top of the tart. Brush the tart lightly with an egg wash (1 egg thinned with 1 tablespoon water) and bake until golden brown (about 30 minutes). Sprinkle with powdered sugar. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**Yield: 6 servings**

*Pair Up with wine and beer on page 15*

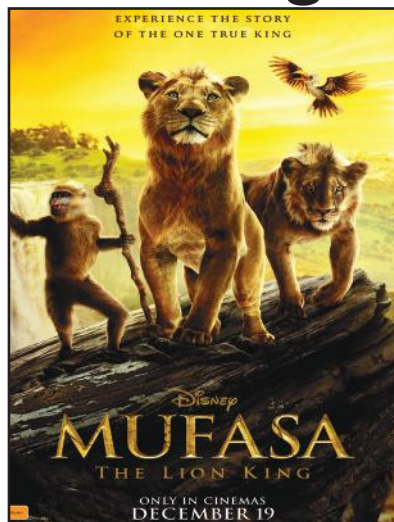


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## Mufasa: The Lion King



For some time now, Disney has been remaking their classic films as live action or CGI generated worlds that appear to be real. While certain adaptations are better than others, some of these films are direct retellings of the original stories and many of them dive deeper into well-known characters, letting the audience learn their origin story. This is the case with “Mufasa,” which tells the tale of Simba’s father.

There is already a CGI version of “The Lion King” and many of the characters are back for this origin story. The movie opens with Simba the lion (Donald Glover) and Nala (Beyoncé) embarking on a journey during a storm. They leave their young cub Kiara (Blue Ivy Carter) in the care of Rafiki the mandrill (John Kani), Timon the meerkat (Billy Eichner) and Pumbaa the warthog (Seth Rogan).

Kiara is frightened by the storm, and Timon and Pumbaa try to distract her with their silly antics. Rafiki decides it is a good opportunity to tell her the story of her grandfather Mufasa (Aaron Pierre) and how he became a great king.

Mufasa is separated from his parents during a flood and rescued by Taka (Kelvin Harrison Jr.), who brings him home to the pride. Taka’s father Kiros (Mads Mikkelsen) is the king of the pride and he does not want an outsider infiltrating the group. With Taka and his mother’s pleading, Kiros agrees to let Mufasa stay as long as he lives with the females.

Focusing on the influence of the female lions provides an interesting angle reflecting how Mufasa grows up to be such a great leader. We see his bravery and strong sense of honor. These are traits that Taka struggles with, even though he has a royal bloodline. As the cubs grow older, these traits, or lack thereof, play an

important part in their destinies.

Younger viewers may have a difficult time following the storyline. The story jumps from past to present and although the animators did a wonderful job in making each lion look unique, it can still be confusing when only one lion is shown and you cannot compare and contrast.

It appears the message is that some are destined for greatness no matter what. We see, however, that greatness takes putting yourself front and center, and caring for others above your own personal safety or reputation.

Fans of “The Lion King” know where the storyline is going but learning more about Mufasa’s beginning and the early stories of some of the other characters will definitely hold your interest. You will also learn the origin of the amazing rock formation from the opening scene of “The Lion King”!

Rated PG, In Theaters



## Into the Jungle, by Erica Ferencik

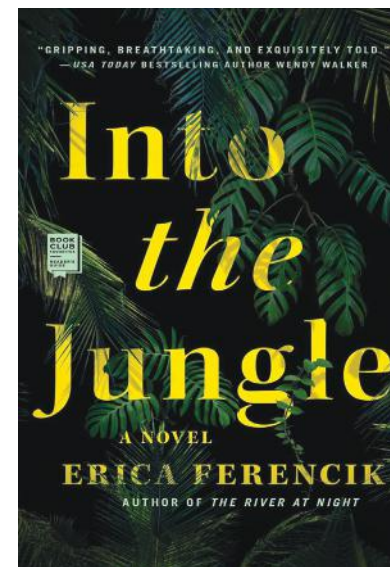
“Into the Jungle” (Gallery/Scout Press, 2019, paperback, 352 pages, \$10.06) by Erica Ferencik is a literary thriller that will keep readers turning the pages.

Nineteen-year-old Lily Bushwold is a survivor. She fled her latest foster home to take a job in Bolivia. When her teaching post falls through, Lily remains adrift in Cochabamba, living on stolen bananas until she meets handsome Omar. Omar is a hunter from an indigenous tribe who wants to learn English so he can become a jungle guide in the tourist industry. When Lily agrees to teach him, the two become lovers. But when Omar’s nephew is killed by a jaguar, his family asks him to return to his remote home deep in the jungle.

Omar thinks Lily will not adapt to the rigors of living in the rainforest. But spunky Lily, who has lived as a wild child most of her life, believes she has what it takes to assimilate into an undeveloped jungle community. She shrugs off that there is no electricity, no running water, and no roads. Lily insists on taking the perilous flight into the remote village and Omar acquiesces.

Lily gets her first wake-up call when, upon arrival, she discovers tarantulas have invaded her hut. To make matters worse, the inhabitants of Omar’s tribal village of Ayachero are less than welcoming. Even after a few of the residents warm to her, Lily soon discovers how hard and dangerous daily life in the rainforest can be. The novel does not back away from difficult topics, such as the vulnerability of indigenous women when the men are off hunting, or the problems caused by greedy Westerners intent on extracting natural resources that are critical for the continued existence of the indigenous residents.

Lily and Omar are both complex characters, but For God’s Sake, a Tatinga



tribesman, and the poachers, Carlos and Dutchie, are memorable additions to the story. For God’s Sake is torn between loyalty to his native tribe despite that they have shunned him, and the Ayachero people who employ him as a river driver. For God’s Sake’s adorable habit of concluding his statements with “over” is sure to endear readers to him. Carlos and Dutchie represent all that is wrong with people who lack a conscience and who view money as more important than morality.

“Into the Jungle” is more than a coming-of-age thriller set in an exotic world. The novel takes a hard look at the impact of colonialism on native tribes.

Erica Ferencik is the award-winning author of two other thrillers, “The River at Night” and “Girl in Ice” which “The New York Times Book Review” declared hauntingly beautiful. Her work has appeared in “Salon” and “The Boston Globe”, as well as on National Public Radio.

## Clayton’s MK-ULTRA Victim’s Revealing New Novel

Project MK-ULTRA was the code name for a covert CIA mind-control and chemical interrogation research program, run by the Office of Scientific Intelligence. This official U.S. government program began in the early 1950s and continued at least through the late 1960s.

Published evidence indicates that Project MK-ULTRA involved the surreptitious use of many types of drugs and other methods to manipulate individual mental states and to alter brain function.

The Deputy Director of the CIA revealed that over thirty universities and institutions were involved, including Stanford.

CIA Director Richard Helms ordered all MK-ULTRA files to be destroyed in 1973. Investigative efforts from the Presidential commission, known as the Rockefeller Commission, relied on the sworn testimony of direct participants and on the relatively small number of documents that survived Helms’ destruction order.

Clayton resident, Bill Yarborough, gave his testimony as one of the MK-ULTRA child victims to Diablo Gazette. He revealed in the September, October and November 2019 issues the horrific details of his time spent as a child, age 4, in what he concluded was the CIA’s notorious MK-ULTRA program; an experience he endured with his younger brother, age 2 and older sister, 8.

MK-ULTRA’s goal was to reprogram them by putting the mind in a state of shock by using electroshock, drugs, isolation, psychological assault and other traumas.



novel, “**Memories of MK-ULTRA: A Journey of Discovery From Darkness to Deliverance**”.

The novel contains two interwoven storylines. One follows Dr. Rudolf Holtzmann, a Nazi-trained MK-ULTRA psychiatrist charged with engineering super soldiers and spies at the Gateway School. Dr. Rudolph Holtzmann harbors a secret agenda to turn Tommy into a future world leader, but Holtzmann’s work is compromised by dangerous forces surrounding him and by one of his experimental subjects, a Mexican boy with shamanic gifts.

The other tracks the quirky developments of Tommy, Beth, and Curtis as they grow up leading to the mystery of having identical repressed memories.

Tommy, Beth, and Curtis Matthews are children placed in the MK-ULTRA program and forced to take part in life-altering experiments. The experience dramatically impacts their lives, but they don’t

It took 30 years before Bill and his brother and sister would awaken to their repressed childhood memories.

“I’m often asked how my childhood experiences in MK-ULTRA impacted me. They did in substantial ways,” Yarborough says. Those experiences inspired him to tell his story in his

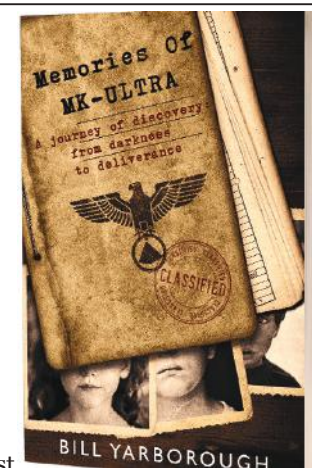
remember any of it—at least not right away.

The siblings left the program deeply damaged without access to the memories that can free them. It takes Curtis’s psychotic breakdown and Beth’s startling vision to open up the pathways to their buried past. These developments lead to the detective work of Lynn Snyder, a diligent therapist to unravel the hidden tapestry of deception?

One Amazon reviewer states, “This is one of those ‘wow’ stories that will have you researching more about MK-ULTRA, and asking how our government ever got involved.”

The book launched with considerable early success reaching as high as #9 on the Best Seller, Political Fiction and #11 Best Seller, Biographical Fiction on Kindle. Among nearly 1,000 MK-ULTRA titles on Amazon and Kindle, it reached #1 for MK-ULTRA paperbacks and eBooks.

The book is available on most online bookstores including Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Learn more at [billyarborough.com](http://billyarborough.com).



# Around Martinez



by Brianne Zorn, Mayor, City of Martinez

## Unlocking the Gates at Alhambra Hills

After years of unsuccessful negotiations with the property owner, the Martinez City Council agreed to put to the voters a 30-year parcel tax ballot measure that would fund the purchase of the 297.5-acre Alhambra Hills property for permanent public parkland and wildlife habitat. The Alhambra Hills is the tallest ridgeline in Martinez and includes parcels owned by John Muir. The Save Alhambra Hills Open Space community group (led by community member Jamie Fox) advocated for Measure F and after a successful campaign, Martinez voters approved Measure F on June 7, 2022, with a 68.8 percent approval.



Docent-led hikes in May 2024. photo by (Brianne Zorn)

The City completed the sale and purchase of the Property in November 2022 and secured assistance from the John Muir Land Trust in March 2023 to conduct an initial assessment to help the City evaluate and prioritize next steps in the process of opening and managing this Property for public use which was presented to City Council in December 2023.

At the December 2023 meeting, the Council directed staff to prioritize opening the Alhambra Hills Open Space to the public. To help expedite the opening of Alhambra Hills to the public, the Council formed the Alhambra Hills Open Space Ad Hoc Subcommittee (comprised of me, Mayor Brianne Zorn, Councilmember Jay Howard, City management analyst Steve Devine, and other integral City staff).

The opening of Alhambra Hills has not been as simple as many assumed. It took years of community partnerships, both before and after Measure F passed in 2022.

A wonderful example of community coordination is the Parking Lot Use Agreement executed with Bethany Baptist Church in 2023. The Church has allowed the City to permanently use the parking lot on non-Sundays. As part of the improvements to the open space entrance, the City will also be repaving the parking lot to benefit both visitors to Alhambra Hills open space and the Church congregation.

The members of the Save Alhambra Hills Open Space also partnered with the City in 2023 and 2024 to lead 11 docent-led hikes. The hikes were coordinated via an RSVP process managed by the City, and led by community docents. Every docent-led hike

was enjoyable, as we were able to share the amazing views and the inspirational history of the property with over 300 visitors.

The Subcommittee coordinated with Contra Costa Fire to identify best practices for wildfire safety and mitigation. The Subcommittee also met with Walnut Creek Parks Department to visit Sugarloaf Open Space to get insight into how another city manages their open space, including their process for closing the open space in times of emergency such as during high fire warning.

The final step was negotiating, finalizing and adopting a Grazing License Agreement for cattle grazing on the Property. Cattle grazing is an important component of wildfire mitigation. The grazer is also responsible for discing the property and installing fire breaks every spring. It is an indispensable partnership for the operation of this open space.

City staff and the subcommittee have been working diligently the past few months to cross the final T's and dot the final I's: Identifying appropriate access points for installation of pedestrian-friendly gates; mapping the existing hiking/riding trails on the Property and installing trail markers; determining the rules for use of the property for the safety of visitors including bikes and dogs on leash; and designing and installing kiosks and trailheads with informational signage.

The gate and entry kiosks will be installed in January 2025. Join us for the ribbon cutting on February 1. Once these gates are unlocked, the Alhambra Hills Open Space will be for you, the Martinez community, to enjoy and protect for years to come.



by Craig Lazeretti, MartinezNewsandViews.substack.com

### ConFire seeks applicants for reserve firefighter position

The Contra Costa Fire Protection District will accept applications for the reserve firefighter position from Jan. 6 to Jan. 19. To get an inside look at what it means to be a reserve firefighter, ConFire will host an open house Saturday, Jan. 11, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Station 19, 1019 Garcia Ranch Road, Briones. For more information, email lbrun@cccfd.org

### School district seeks candidates for board vacancy

The Martinez Unified School District is accepting applications to fill its Area 3 vacancy on the Board of Trustees for the final two years of the term. The seat became vacant when incumbent Yazmin Llamas was elected to the Contra Costa County Board of Education in November. Applicants must reside in Area 3. The deadline for applicants to apply is 4:00 p.m. on Jan. 17.

Qualified applicants will be interviewed with the school board during an open meeting on Jan. 27. The seat will be up for election in 2026.

### Curbside pickup of Christmas trees will be held week of Jan. 13

Residents can leave their unflocked Christmas trees at the curb for pickup during their regular garbage collection day the week of Jan. 13 to 17. Residents should remove the tree stand and decorations and place the tree beside their curbside containers. For flocked trees, contact Republic Services at 1-925-685-4711 to schedule a pickup for \$40 per tree (or, residents can use one of their two free "bulky item" pickups). Alternatively, residents can cut up their flocked tree and place it in their landfill receptacle.

### Volunteers sought for Point-in-Time survey of unhoused

Contra Costa County is seeking residents to take part in the Point-in-Time count of the unsheltered on Thursday, Jan. 30, from 5:30 to 9 a.m. Volunteers will be required to attend a two-hour training session the week of Jan. 13. For more information and to register:

<https://contra-costa-point-in-time-count-cocogis.hub.arcgis.com/>

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### January at a Glance

<b>WEEK OF 13-17</b> W/ YOUR REGULAR TRASH PICKUP Christmas Tree Curbside Pickup	<b>SAT 25</b> 9AM - 1PM Styrofoam/Cardboard Drop Off Event	<b>EVERY SUNDAY</b> 9AM - 1PM Farmers Market in Downtown
--	--	--

- Jan 9 - 6PM** Cemetery Commission
- Jan 15 - 7PM** City Council Regular Session
- Jan 20** Martin Luther King Jr. Day  
City Hall Closed in Observance
- Jan 21 - 7PM** Park, Recreation, Marina & Cultural Commission
- Jan 28 - 6PM** City Council & Planning Commission Special Joint Session
- Jan 30 - 6PM** Measure D Street Selection Workshop
- February 1** Save the Date!  
Alhambra Hills Open Space Ribbon Cutting

Follow Us on Social Media for more! For full details of events, visit [www.cityofmartinez.org/events](http://www.cityofmartinez.org/events) or our social channels.

# Martinez Unified Budget Woes Continue as More Painful Cuts Loom in 2025

by Craig Lazeretti, Martinez News and Views

The Martinez Unified School District Board of Trustees closed out 2024 largely where it started in terms of the district's budget and overall financial picture.

Chief Business Official Andy Cannon had to play the role of budget grinch. In a nutshell, district expenditures continue to outpace revenues, forcing MUSD to eat through its reserves at a rapid rate and necessitating more painful cuts in 2025.

"We have to get on top of our deficit somehow and make some reductions," Cannon told the board during his first interim budget update for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

MUSD, which is already anticipating having to make \$1.92 million in budget cuts for the 2025-26 fiscal year, is dealing with a perfect storm of harsh budget realities that have made climbing out of its budget hole increasingly difficult.

Significant staff pay increases (totaling 25% over three years) to address hiring challenges amid inflation and the area's high cost of living have boosted district spending, along with a sharp rise in contracted services needed to provide special education services to the district's disabled student population. But district enrollment, though finally stabilizing this year, fell precipitously during and following the pandemic, eating into attendance-based revenues from the state's school funding formula (which trustees Courtney Masella-O'Brien and Anne Horack Martin decried as fundamentally unfair and punitive.)

Although the district saw its enrollment increase by 16 students this school year to a total of 3,800 (the first enrollment gain since 2019-2020), Cannon said MUSD is anticipating an overall decline of 60 students over the next three years.

Revenue from the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) that comprises a lion's share of the district's budget has fallen by over \$1.2 million (or 2.7%) this year, coming in at \$44.28 million. The district's LCFF revenue is not expected to reach 2023-24 levels

again until the 2026-27 school year, according to district budget projections.

The district's deficit spending is expected to continue over the next few years, though at a lower level as MUSD makes additional operating reductions. MUSD anticipates spending \$5.1 million more than it takes in this fiscal year, followed by deficits of \$2.9 million in 2025-26 and nearly \$2 million in 2026-27. MUSD will continue to need to tap reserves to make up the shortfalls, and on its current trajectory, the district's general fund reserve amount will exceed the 3% minimum requirement by only \$16,000 in 2026-27.

Although tax receipts at the state level have improved recently, Cannon said there is no way to know how much, if any, of that money will trickle down to districts. Another uncertainty is that the district has resumed collective bargaining negotiations this year with its teachers and classified unions, though given the extent of the budget deficits and dwindling reserves, it's clear that the hefty raises handed out in recent years are a thing of the past for the time being.

Superintendent Helen Rossi said the district is planning to test pilot a new "Saturday School" program in the spring that will give students a chance make up for days missed to absences. If successful, the program could help boost the district's ADA numbers, and therefore its revenues. The program would be voluntary and focused on academics.

Board members also debated the degree to which the district should encourage families to boost attendance by getting their students to school more often, balancing the need to avoid preventable absences such as family trips without creating a culture that promotes going to school when sick.

The district's next budget update will come in March.

*[Truncated, you can read the full article on MartinezNewsandViews.substack.com/]*

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**JANUARY SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

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January 10: Comedy Night  
January 24: Comedy Night  
January 26: Wine and Craft with Janet

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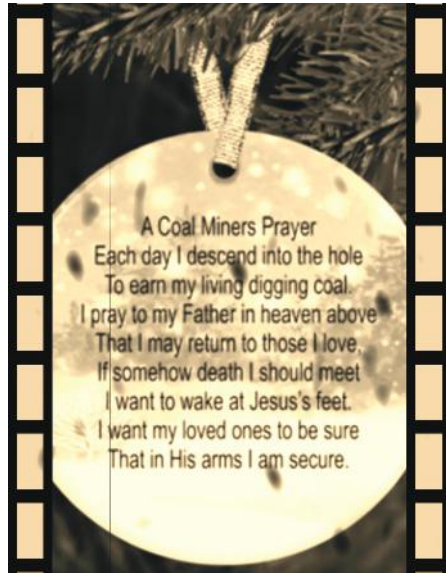
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# A Simple Christmas - 164 years ago

A newspaper clipping from the Contra Costa Gazette, 164 years ago, glimpse a Christmas gathering among the citizens.

“There was no public observance of this holiday here, yet many pleasant reunions took place where Christmas cheer was dispensed with old-fashioned liberality. In the evening, a large party was entertained beneath the hospitable roof of one of our prominent citizens, where music, dancing and an excellent Christmas supper caused the fleeting hours to glide rapidly away. The raging storm without was unheard amid the mirth and sociability which reigned within. It was at late hour that the guests reluctantly departed and from the recollection of this happy gathering, they will reap a harvest of pleasant memories.” - Contra Costa Gazette, December 29, 1860



**CHRISTMAS** —There was no public observance of this holiday here, yet many pleasant reunions took place, where Christmas cheer was dispensed with old-fashioned liberality. In the evening a large party were entertained beneath the hospitable roof of one of our prominent citizens, where music, dancing, and an excellent Christmas supper, caused the fleeting hours to glide rapidly away. The raging storm without was unheard amid the mirth and sociability which reigned within. It was at a late hour that the guests reluctantly departed and from the recollection of this happy gathering they will reap a harvest of pleasant memories.

Contra Costa Gazette, December 29, 1860



# In Case You Missed It...

Local News Items from Claycord.com and Other Sources

## “Ladies Night” Promotion Lawsuit Forces Lima Restaurant to Close

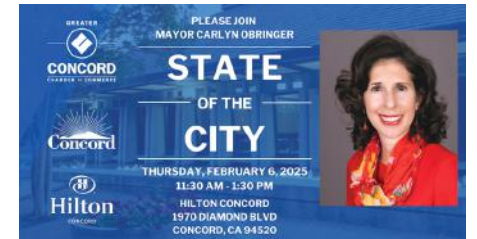


Lima Restaurant one of Concord’s popular eateries located at Concord’s Todos Santos Plaza has closed as of December 31 due to legal fees fighting a discrimination lawsuit over their years long “Ladies Night” promotion offering ladies half-priced drinks for women for three hours every week.

Chef/owner John Marquez said his family believes they were targeted by people who are not local and are taking advantage of California’s laws meant to promote equity.

a little more money withheld from their paychecks starting in January 2025 because of a small tax increase quietly approved by state officials to provide more money to the state’s disability insurance program, according to KCRA3.

## Mayor Obringer to Deliver Annual State of the City Address Feb. 6



Concord Mayor Carlyn Obringer will deliver the annual State of the City address at the 40th Annual Mayor’s luncheon on Thursday, February 6 from 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at the Hilton Concord.

Tickets are now on sale for the event, which is hosted by the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce.

Participants will have the opportunity to network with business and civic leaders and learn about the City’s priorities for the year ahead. For ticket information go to concordchamber.com.

## East Bay Regional Parks Launches Trails Challenge For 2025

East Bay Regional Parks has launched its 2025 Trails Challenge, an annual program that invites the public to explore trails handpicked by Park District staff to show off the region’s stunning natural beauty.

Individuals interested in the 2025 Trails Challenge can pick up a free guidebook and T-shirt at any East Bay Regional Parks visitor center. The guidebook can also be downloaded at www.ebparks.org/trailchallenge.

The 2025 Trails Challenge includes 20 trails of varying difficulty levels located throughout East Bay including those suitable for people with mobility limitations. Walking, biking, and horseback riding are all ways visitors can participate in and have until December 31, 2025, to complete a total of 26.2 miles to finish the challenge.

## Toll Now \$8 To Cross Bay Area Bridges

If you cross the bridges in the Bay Area, the toll just went up to \$8 on Jan.1 on all bridges except the Golden Gate, which is currently \$9.25.

## Snowpack Near Average for California



On Jan 2, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) conducted the first snow survey of the season at Phillips Station. The manual survey recorded 24 inches of snow depth and a snow water equivalent of 9 inches, which is 91 percent of average for this location.

The snow water equivalent measures the amount of water contained in the snowpack and is a key component of DWR’s water supply forecast. Statewide, with readings from 130 stations throughout the Sierra Nevada, the snowpack is 108 percent of average for this date compared to 28 percent on this date last year.

## King Tides Flood Martinez Marina



On December 14, King tides were responsible for flooding at the Martinez Marina causing temporary street closures at North Court Street and Tarantino Drive. Photo credit Shane Lopez.

## California Workers Have More Money Taken Out Of Their Paychecks

All California workers now have

## For the Love of Pets by Jill Hedgecock, Jilhedgecock.com

# Reading Aloud to Pets Can Improve Child Reading Skills

Reading to your pet can have a calming effect on your pet. Dogs and cats love it when you pay attention to them and respond positively to the sound of your voice when you are relaxed.

If you have children, the benefits are even greater. According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, if a child is struggling with their reading skills at the end of first grade, there is a 90 percent chance that without additional help, they will remain a poor reader through at least the fourth grade. Because dogs and cats do not judge their skills, reading to pets can help children improve their reading ability even more than when a human is helping them learn. This according to an article in Psychology Today post, November 3, 2022.

So, what should you read with your pet? Here are a few ideas:

“Three Stories You Can Read to Your



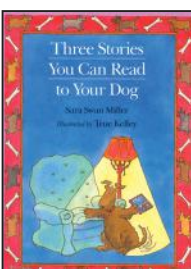
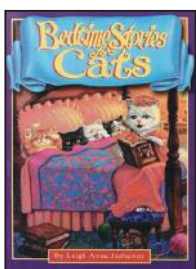
“Dog” by Sara Swan Miller is a wonderful option. It includes three stories: “The Burglar,” “The Bone,” and “Squirrel Chasing.” These entertaining tales will provide tail wagging fun for humans and canines alike.

“Bedtime Stories for Cats” by Leigh Anne Jasheway and Leigh Anne

Jasheway-Bryant reworks some classics including Rumpel Katzkin,” “Kitty and the Beast,” “Puss and the Missing Boots,” “The Three Alley Cats Gruff”, and “Catpuzel.”

“Goodnight Dog” by Katie Button is technically a children’s book, but it works just as well as a read-to-your-dog book. In this delightful tale, a dog wants to say goodnight to all his farm animal friends before he goes to bed.

If your dog initially seems uninterested or will not hold still long enough to get through a story., Start by reading a page or two then gradually increase the time. Also, consider laying out a special blanket that is used for reading.



## Diablo Vista Middle School Student to Compete on Food Network’s Kids Baking Championship

Sixth-grade Diablo Vista Middle School student, Aria Karayil, will compete on season 13 of Food Network’s popular show, Kids Baking Championship.

Aria’s love for baking began during the COVID-19 pandemic when she was inspired by her mother who baked to raise money for World Central Kitchen. Motivated by this example, Aria discovered her own passion for creating delicious treats to support causes close to her heart, including the San Francisco AIDS Lifecycle, the Contra Costa Food Bank, and the Paw Works Animal Rescue. Now, much more than a hobby, baking has become Aria’s way to spread joy and give back to the community.

Aria applied to be on the Kids Baking Championship not only to showcase her talents but also to learn from expert judges like celebrity chefs Duff Goldman and Dardea Brown, who have inspired her baking journey. “She is constantly looking for new challenges in baking and continues to support her charities,” shared Aria’s mom, Neethi. “We are also grateful that she had this opportunity to showcase her skills on such a large platform.”

SRVUSD Superintendent CJ Cammack expressed his enthusiasm for Aria’s achievements, “We are incredibly proud of Aria’s accomplishments and excited to see her showcase her talent on national television. We will be rooting for Aria every step of the way.”



The first episode of Kids Baking Championship will air on January 6th on the Food Network channel.

We will be cheering for Aria as she competes.

*Truncated submission by Ilana Israel Samuels, Director of Communications, San Ramon Valley School District.*

## Area Students Win Gold at World Tap Dance Championships in Prague

by Ilana Israel Samuels, SRVUSD

Two local students, Braelyn Schaffer (Monte Vista) and Presley Nava (San Ramon Valley High), won gold medals representing the United States at the prestigious World Tap Dance Championships in Prague, Czech Republic, in October, 2024.

Often referred to as the “Olympics of tap dance,” the World Tap Dance Championships brought together over 1,700 dancers from 40+ countries. Through a highly competitive selection process led by the United States Dance & Sports Federation and approved by the International Dance Organization, Schaffer and Nava were two of only three dancers chosen from Northern California.

The pair competed on a team of six dancers who made it to the finals performing in the Junior small group division for ages 13-16.

Their routine, set to the hip-hop song “Ratata,” showcased a fusion of hip-hop energy and traditional tap artistry. Their costumes featured graffiti-inspired designs with their names, and the routine’s dynamic choreography included complex turns and acrobatic moves, which are incredibly difficult to execute in tap shoes.

It was a special experience for Nava and Schaffer who danced together back when they were six years old. “Winning the gold at Worlds was a dream come true,” said Schaffer. “Standing on the podium together as the National Anthem played, representing the USA in the Parade of Nations - it was a fairy tale moment.”

San Ramon Valley School Unified District’s Superintendent, CJ Cammack, commended on their achievement, “Their



Presley Nava and Braelyn Schaffer.

success on the world stage is a testament to their talent and hard work, and our community is incredibly proud to have them represent SRVUSD and the United States with such excellence.”

In addition to their gold-medal win, the girls also competed in the large group formation category, which placed sixth with a performance to “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.” Nava also tapped in the duo category and placed fourth.

The opportunity to compete at the international level required immense commitment with weekly practices and balancing academics alongside an extremely rigorous training schedule. You can scan the QR code to watch their winning performance.



Scan to view Tap dancing winning performance



## Are Your Resolutions January 15th Proof?

If you are feeling overwhelmed, you are not alone. The world feels like a lot right now. Yes, it’s the most wonderful time of the year, but the holidays can be overwhelming, overstimulating, and overindulging.

Prioritizing self-care is essential right now — good sleep, clean food, and adequate movement are key. But sometimes, even getting those basics in can feel overwhelming.

In a world that capitalizes on our stress, I suggest walking through the world with your head held high, as an “act of defiance,” literally, against gravity, but also against the chronic drains on our energy that life continually deals us.

Finding your way back to center is hero’s work, in no small part, because it takes work.

Self-care requires action. That is the awkward catch-22 here. How do I add in one more thing when I’m already overwhelmed?

Thankfully, as a Neuro Performance Coach, I have a plethora of simple tools to help make standing upright against the winds of life easier and more sustainable.



Here are five simple things you can try to pull yourself from feeling overwhelmed.

1. Stare at something far away. Looking at the bigger picture can literally help calm the brain down.
2. Stand in the sunshine. If you need help finding the light within, start with the big light in the sky.
3. Tap into your physical strength. Remind yourself how strong and capable you are. This can be as simple as doing some wall push-ups or getting up and down off of your couch a few times.
4. Change something up. Take a different way home, brush your teeth with the other hand, or perhaps walk backward. Firing up new neural pathways can help open up our thinking to new solutions.
5. Challenge your balance. This will literally help you find your center.

Try sprinkling these suggestions into your daily life and say goodbye to holiday overwhelm.



## Winter Grilling: Savor a Warm Argentinian Menu

Here is a meal that warms you up on a cold, Northern hemisphere, winter night. If you can find a dry place to do some grilling (if not, the broiler will work), explore this Argentinian menu pairing grilled foods with smoky beverages.

Start off with Grilled Provolone Cheese paired with a dry stout beer. Dry stout is dark black with a roasted coffee-like taste. Most dry stouts are brewed in Ireland and not necessarily high in alcohol content. One of the most well-known brands of stout beer is Guinness Stout. Other popular brands are Murphy’s Irish Stout and Beamish. Beer is a great beverage to drink while tending the grill and it will complement the tangy provolone cheese that has picked up the smoke from the grill.

Argentina is known for its top-quality beef. Choose your favorite cut and make it Argentinian by topping it with Chimichurri Sauce. Chimichurri is bright green and super garlicky.

Add roasted potatoes and Brussels sprouts and you have a complete plate. Toss Brussel sprouts with cumin and chili powder before roasting to give them a smoky flavor like the grilled meat.

You will need a bold red wine to stand up to the strong flavors of this meal. Argentinian Malbec is perfect. The high-altitude vineyards of the Andes Mountains allow the grapes to ripen fully while maintaining a fine quality to the tannins. These wines can be inexpensive and offer great value.

If you want to really finish off the meal with a true Argentinian dessert, Pasta Frola (full recipe at [www.LaSommellerie.com](http://www.LaSommellerie.com)) is a wonderful dessert made with a cookie-like shortbread crust and dulce de membrillo (quince paste) filling.

For a beverage pairing, look for a coffee with bright, fruity notes to echo the fruit filling. Kenyan coffees are known for their fruity, red wine character.

So, go on. Pair Up!

*Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in Northern California. [LaSommellerie@gmail.com](mailto:LaSommellerie@gmail.com)*





# Proud Accomplishments of 2024

As the new year starts, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of my second year as County Supervisor. The County had many critical projects and initiatives come to fruition. For me, 2024 was about making Contra Costa a more welcoming community, improving access to essential services, and developing a sustainable future.

## Making Contra Costa a Welcoming Community

Throughout my public service career, I've focused on making our community welcoming to all. I authored the Inclusive City Resolution in Pleasant Hill to champion human rights, social justice, and equality. I continue to bring my commitment to ensuring every resident feels supported as I represent District IV as County Supervisor.

A particularly meaningful moment was the Naturalization Ceremony I hosted on March 18, 2024, at the County Administration Building in Martinez. The first of its kind in a County facility, the ceremony celebrated the citizenship journey of 31 individuals from 17 countries—all residents of Contra Costa. In partnership with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services



(USCIS), I had a front-row seat to this momentous occasion. Meanwhile, our County Elections Office was on hand for our newly minted citizens to register them to vote and empower them to engage fully in our democracy.

## Expanding Access to Essential Services

As the County continues to build a welcoming community, it is equally important to expand access to services. In 2024, the Board of Supervisors took steps to ensure our most vulnerable residents get the support they need. I was proud to include the undocumented population to our Basic Health Care program, providing affordable healthcare access for

uninsured county residents who do not qualify for Medi-Cal or Covered CA for primary care, medications, and more.

In addition to improving healthcare access, the Board allocated Measure X funds for youth centers in Districts 3, 4, and 5. District 5 was the first District to utilize our \$5 million capital investment to support the Community Youth Center (CYC) in Concord. The CYC currently serves over 2,000 youth through sports, gymnastics, cheerleading, dance, tutoring, and counseling. To optimize my allocation, it was important to collaborate with an existing youth center. These funds will help expand the CYC into a 75,000-square-foot facility, increasing its capacity to serve more youth. The

new facility is expected to open in September 2025.

## Planning for a Sustainable Future

Alongside expanding services, the Board of Supervisors is planning a sustainable future. In 2024, the Board of Supervisors adopted the 2045 General Plan and the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP), which will guide the county's development for years to come. The General Plan, last updated in 1991, addresses growth, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability. The CAAP focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change. The adoption culminates five years of public outreach and over 170 community meetings and ensures Contra Costa remains a place of balanced growth and environmental stewardship.

As 2025 begins, our County will continue protecting the vulnerable, improving access to services, and fostering a welcoming community.

Thank you to the constituents of District 4 for the honor of serving you. I look forward to continuing our work together to build a thriving, sustainable Contra Costa for generations to come.



## Touch

"Touch" is a quiet film that takes patience to reach the payoff. Kristofer (Egill Olafsson) is an elderly man, recently widowed, living in Iceland. Struggling with his memory, he begins each morning reciting his bank account number and a Haiku from his youth. Kristofer's doctor informs him this is a time people decide to tie up loose ends. The sad reality is this needs to be done before memories fade.

Fifty years earlier, Kristofer (the younger character played by Pálmi Kormákur Baltasarsson) lives in London where he meets a girl and falls in love. Bored with his university studies, he sees a beautiful young girl at a Japanese restaurant and decides to get a job there as a dishwasher. He becomes close to the restaurant owner, Takahashi-san (Masahiro Motoki), and is eventually taken under his wing to learn the ways of Japanese cooking.

Takahashi-san is the father of Kristofer's crush, Miko (Koki), and as he gets to know her, he feels a deep tension between Miko and her father.

As events unfold that separate the young lovers, Kristofer goes on to have a life without Miko, but she never leaves his thoughts. He decides he must find her, or at least some answers before it is too late. His timing could not be worse, though, as the pandemic begins to hit globally and the whole world starts to shut down. In the midst of the chaos, he travels to London and Japan as his



worried daughter calls his cell phone repeatedly, begging him to come home.

During Kristofer's journey, he reflects on his time in London as the story slowly unfolds. All the sequences have a dream-like quality and most scenes feel quiet and contemplative. The backdrop of the pandemic lends an immediacy to the plot, but it somehow does not feel rushed.

Viewers will get a satisfying conclusion and a lens into a horrific time in history. If you are looking for a movie that offers an alternative to the usual fare, this one is worth your time.

Rated R  
Currently streaming on Peacock

## Concord Rotary to Host Central Asia Delegates Looking to Combat Their Domestic and Gender-based Violence Issues

By Michael Barrington

For the past ten years, the Rotary Club of Concord has hosted a group of young professionals from Central Asian countries for one week through a Federal Open World Program.

They expose these delegates to the best professional practices in the East Bay and especially what our local communities have to offer.

This March 26 through April 5, Rotary will host a mixed group of professional women focusing on combatting gender-based violence issues. One delegate from the following countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, plus a facilitator and a translator will arrive.

Several countries have recently passed domestic violence laws. This group will visit specialized police departments that respond to cases, attend court hearings, visit courts and prosecution offices, visit helpline services, visit shelters and crisis centers, meet directly with prosecutors and judges and with several victim service providers including:

**A Domestic Violence Unit** in Contra Costa County comprises a team of experienced attorneys and investigators who take a multidisciplinary approach to cases involving a pattern of coercive behavior. Domestic violence does not discriminate.

**The District Attorney's Office** works primarily with law enforcement partners to prosecute criminal domestic violence. Criminal domestic violence includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, and stalking between people who are in an intimate partner relationship.

**STAND! For Families Free of Violence** is a nonprofit organization committed to promoting safe and strong families. In addition to providing

a complete spectrum of prevention, intervention, and treatment programs, they also enlist the efforts of local residents, partners, and institutions, all of whom are striving to stop domestic violence and child abuse.

STAND! is a founding member of the Alliance to End Abuse initiative, a cross-sector organization working to help solve domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.

**Contra Costa Family Justice Center** has sought to create a community to support the healing process for those who are affected by any form of family violence and human trafficking.

**BRAVE BAY AREA** is a nonprofit that offers free services, peer counseling and advocacy around the clock. BRAVE offers three Sexual Assault Counselor trainings per year and uses a strong team of trained volunteers as the backbone of their services.

Gender-based violence is a threat to women and girls globally. According to the UN data, 1 in 3 women/girls in Central Asia have experienced violence at some point in their lives.

The Alliance's ultimate goal is zero tolerance for gender-based violence, benefiting an estimated 35 million women and girls in the five Central Asian countries.

The Central Asian Alliance to End Gender-Based Violence was officially launched on June 27, 2024, as part of the United Nations Spotlight Initiative Regional Program for Central Asia and Afghanistan, supported by the European Union.

While these delegates will learn about best practices, their visit will also help to highlight for California, what is being achieved in Contra Costa.



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