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CIRCULATION: 5,800 RESIDENCES; 200 BUSINESSES
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More Than 200 Rockridge Residents Cast Ballots Over Two Days of Voting

Four Incumbents Return to RCPC Board; Two New Members Elected

by Stuart Flashman, RCPC 2022 Election Officer

Rockridge residents cast their ballots last month in the Rockridge Community Planning Council's Annual Election for positions on its Board of Directors. Candidate statements appeared in *The Rockridge News* and on rockridge.org. The candidates presented their views to the community in the moderated Candidates' Forum Zoom Webinar on April 18, which was also streamed and posted to RCPC's YouTube channel.

Voters turned out to cast their ballots on April 21 outside of and in the outer lobby of the Rockridge Branch Library (with doors wide open) and continued on April 23 in the Rockridge Library parking lot. The open-air outdoor sites were chosen to ensure a safe voting experience.

Six candidates, four of them incumbents, were elected to fill two-year board terms. In all, 214 ballots were cast for nine candidates in this contested election.

Incumbents (with vote counts): **Robin McDonnell** (176), **Casey Farmer** (146), **Annette Floystrup** (128), and **Kirk Peterson** (124) retained their seats. Two new members joined the board: **Ben Friedman** (123), and **Alysoun Bonde** (118).

The vote tallies for the rest of the 2022 candidates were as follows: **Diana Mitchell-Chavez** (114), **Brett Moyer** (103), **Eric Neville** (72) votes.



RCPC board member Ronnie Spitzer assists neighbors with the voting process.

Congratulations to the new and returning board members, and thank you to all the candidates in the 2022 RCPC Board election.

The Board would also like to thank the board members who volunteered to help run the election: Elections officer **Stuart Flashman**, board members **Ronnie Spitzer**, **Ken Rich**, **Andrew Charman** and **Zach Unger**, retiring board chair **Leonora Sea**, and legal advisor **John Gussman**. ■

LAST CALL FOR KITCHENS

by Robin McDonnell, RCPC Kitchen Tour Co-Chair

The 2022 Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) Kitchen Tour is coming this fall, currently scheduled for **Sunday, October 2**. If you've modernized your kitchen in the last few years and are willing to share a peek at it with your neighbors, we'd love to include you on the tour. We're looking for kitchens of all sizes and styles.

"You have a wonderful kitchen that you love to show off. You spent hours agonizing over the selection of each piece of hardware, tile, and appliance. It's the kitchen of your dreams. Here's an opportunity for your Rockridge neighbors to admire your creation and gather some ideas for their own homes," commented **Myrna Walton**, who participated in the last kitchen tour and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Walton continued: "In 2019, I volunteered my newly built home, a tiny additional dwelling unit, to be included on the tour. While I was not required to be present, it was great fun to be there in person. Visitors asked lots of questions about how I made my choices, the problems I encountered, and the suppliers and craftspeople I recommended. And of course, I loved the compliments.

"I did have some qualms about

Kitchen Tour, see page 2

Rockridge Wants to Know: What's the Plan for the JCC East Bay?

by Anna L. Marks

The recent announcement regarding the Jewish Community Center's (JCC) expansion into the Dreyer's campus on College Avenue has been met with absolute excitement here in Rockridge. It has also raised many questions about how it will impact the surrounding neighborhood. This is a large-scale project that will require lots of input from local residents, as well as permits from the

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JCC East Bay, from front page

City, before a final design is complete.

In the meantime, the JCC is actively seeking community feedback. They intend to have a series of community meetings over the summer where they will relay their vision, and where residents can express specific desires and concerns.

While some activities will be starting up soon on a small scale, the community center won't be fully active until Dreyer's, the current tenant, has completely moved out (their lease has been extended to December 2024). Until then, *The Rockridge News* spoke with **Melissa Chapman,** Chief Executive Officer of the JCC East Bay, to answer some questions about their potential plans.

RRNews: How long will the project take? When will the JCC Move In?

JCC: We're looking at many years for this project to come together — what's there and what's being built will be dependent on zoning with the understanding that in two years certain things could also change.

We have a small footprint right now, we're occupying about 4,000 square feet. There will be another organization moving in next to Moishe House this summer, a nonprofit residence, as an extension of Moishe House (subsidized housing for post-college youth serving the local community).

Who else will be occupying the campus and the existing office building?

The primary use for the existing building is office space. The JCC will maintain the most significant footprint of the Jewish and other nonprofits on the campus. We will likely have 20-plus organizations occupying the main building, which may include a service-based social service organization, and serve as offices for organizations headquartered in San Francisco — a full-service campus.

And, it's a Jewish community campus. We first reached out to local Jewish community organizations, and then, after we understand the areas of interest, and depending on available space, we would then reach out to other values-based nonprofits because

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Kitchen Tour, from front page

letting strangers walk through my home, but RCPC meticulously organized the visit to prevent any mishaps. They assigned volunteer docents who accompanied visitors and enforced the 'no smoking, eating, or drinking' rules. They provided plastic booties to protect the floors (high heels, pets, and strollers are not permitted). They limited the number of visitors at any one time.

I felt quite safe, and the visitors were respectful and interested. We all had a good time."

The tour isn't only about kitchens, it's also the primary fundraiser for the RCPC. Funds raised have gone to support a variety of projects including a community grants program.

Take the leap and volunteer your home for the next tour: Contact kitchentour@rockridge.org. You'll have a wonderful experience and so will your neighbors. ■

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Are there community issues you'd like to see covered in *The Rockridge News*? Have questions about newsletter distribution? Want to volunteer to be a *Rockridge News* block captain? Want to write a letter to the Editor? We'd love to hear from you.

All letters must be limited to 350 words and are published at the discretion of the Editor. Send them to: editor@rockridge.org. Please be sure to include your name, email address, and city and street of residence. **All submissions accepted for publication are subject to editing for clarity and brevity.**

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To subscribe to *The Rockridge News*, send your check for $20, payable to *RCPC* with "Rockridge News" noted on the memo line.

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Display Advertising Deadline for JUNE: May 19, 2022

Advertising rates are $28/column inch. Six-month pre-pay rate available. For display ads, call Jo Ellis at 510-653-3210 (**after noon**), or email joellis1@hotmail.com. Email Susan Montauk at smontauk@gmail.com for information regarding classified ads.

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JCC East Bay, from previous page

being integrated and partnering with the broader community is a core principle of a lot of the work that we do.

How will you include the Rockridge neighborhood in the design process?

We want to have an active dialog about what's being planned and make sure we're sharing the process. If folks have concerns about what we're planning, we want to be there to listen and respond in the best way possible, including town hall meetings.

Will the plans be environmentally friendly?

That is certainly our intention. Creating additional green spaces, adding solar, making sure that there's great access for bikes and pedestrians — the idea is to condense and streamline the current parking footprint into one that's partially underground, has a soccer field on top, and also has enough parking so residential streets don't become burdened.

Will you be removing any rental housing from the property?

We may reconfigure some of the existing buildings on the campus. There are four residential units, three of which haven't been used as residences in over 20 years. We're looking for other places that we can add housing too. At 6050 Claremont, where the JCC administrative offices are right now, we're looking at turning that back into a residential building. We know that housing in the Bay Area is a significant issue, so that is something we're being very sensitive about in all of our considerations.

Editor's note: Libitzky Property Company purchased the campus in 2019 with the intention of transforming it into a Jewish community campus. They recently sought to buy a private home on Chabot Road. "We could use just a little more space to make the plans work," said President Moses Libitzky, who clarified that no other houses were being considered for purchase.

Will you make any changes to the main building fronting College Avenue?

There's a grand staircase when you enter the lobby and the only significant construction would be putting that on the main floor to make it more accessible and welcoming.



This artistic rendering depicts a conceptual use of the outdoor area as a large, shared open space that can be enjoyed by the whole community.

What sort of community spaces do you expect to have?

Most of the community spaces are going to be outdoor, and any type of new structure that would be built. The soccer field will be available for any community event — middle school leagues, preschool, afterschool programming, summer camp, classes in yoga, meditation, dance, and wonderful cultural opportunities… music, theater, and art.

What about a commercial demonstration kitchen?

You've got to have some sort of commercial kitchen capabilities. We think that that's something the community would want both from a learning opportunity and knowing that we're going to host events.

What other sorts of rental spaces can people look forward to?

Flexible spaces. It will have a gymnasium floor, probably with retractable bleachers, which can also turn into a magnificent celebration center for weddings, bar mitzvahs — any sort of celebratory event or community gathering. The general public is welcomed and encouraged to use any of these beautiful rental spaces as well as any of our services.

More information can be found on their recently re-designed website at https://jcceastbay.org/. ■

Red Cross Remodel: Update

Work has resumed at 5450 College Ave. (formerly The Levant Rug) to serve as the East Bay Red Cross blood donor center. Although the City gave approval well over a year ago, the work had been stalled since last year.

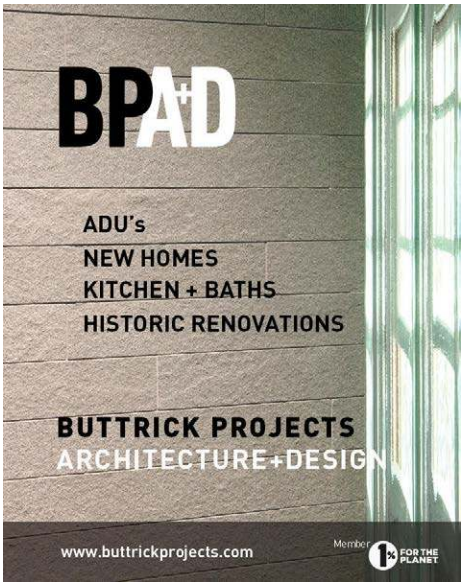
A workman at the site said he expected the center to open late summer.

LAND USE COMMITTEE Meeting Notice

The next meeting of the RCPC Land Use Committee will be held on Wednesday, May 25, 2022, at 7:30pm, via Zoom.

Email landuse@rockridge.org, or call (510) 652-5373 to attend.

The meeting is open to the public. Check Rockridge.org for details.



Letters to The News

Rockridge Community Planning Council Reacts to Home Depot Application

When the Rockridge community first learned about Home Depot's application to open a store on the empty lot at Broadway and 51st (see *East Bay Times*, April 6, 2022), many residents were not pleased.

The widespread view is that the store is too big for the district and simply not needed. The Emeryville Home Depot is less than a 10-minute drive away, and there are two hardware stores and a lumber store nearby.

In response, the RCPC Board sent a letter on April 13, 2022 (see below) to the developers, Terramar Retail Centers, stressing the importance of working with the community when considering potential tenants. *— Anna L. Marks, editor*

Dear Mr. Palafox:

We are writing to follow up with you on our previous communications regarding the Shops at the Ridge site. As you are aware, this site is of extreme importance not only to our community but also, due to its size and prominent location, to the City as a whole.

Several months ago, we shared with you the results of a survey that RCPC sent out to all readers of our monthly newsletter, *The Rockridge News*. The survey makes clear that housing, along with other complementary uses, is the strong, primary desire of our community for this site.

We have indicated in the past that we want to work with you and the City to see how to move toward this goal and that we understand that for a number of reasons it will not be a quick or easy path for us to take. Certainly, we'd like to see the site developed as soon as possible, but we would prefer to wait longer to arrive at the best long-term use for the site rather than lock in something less desirable just because it can be implemented more quickly. We want to emphasize that we believe TRC has similar views about the site, and we want to work with you as a partner to arrive at this vision.

Recent newspapers articles announced that Home Depot had submitted a preliminary application to the City to build a "big box" store on the site. We have found the pre-application listed as "Accepted" on the Oakland Planning website, with the applicant listed as a Daniel Zoldak, of the firm Lars Andersen, based in Fresno. We would appreciate knowing whether TRC has any involvement in this application and would also appreciate your willingness to discuss TRC's attitude towards this application.

As you know from the aforementioned survey results, placing "big box" retail on the site met with strong disapproval from the community. We believe that it is also not compliant with the site's current CC-2 zoning, which prohibits building materials sales. Thus the project would require a zoning code amendment and perhaps a General Plan amendment. Perhaps needless to say, it would also require a full environmental impact report.

We hope that TRC will continue to maintain the site and improve its appearance. In particular, we'd like to see TRC put up more permanent and code-compliant fencing around the site if it is going to remain unused so it is less likely to collect debris. We'd also like to see some effort at landscaping so that the site does not appear blighted, resulting in a "broken window" effect on the surrounding area.

Very truly yours,
Leonora Sea, RCPC Board Chair

Stuart Flashman, RCPC Board Member & Land Use Committee Chair ■

A Disturbing Trend — Disappearing Rentals

About me: When I was born at Alta Bates, my parents were living in Temescal. My whole family was involved with the Oakland Recreational Department, namely Studio One. We used to eat at the Pancake Queen on Telegraph as a Sunday treat.

I have lived on and off in Rockridge over the years. At first, during the 1970s, I rented next to the College Bowling Alley (now East Bay Booksellers). My sister has had a home here in Rockridge since before BART was operational. I have occupied my current apartment for the past 32 years. I have just turned 70 years old. Needless to say, Rockridge has been my home for the vast majority of my life.

It is now certain that I will need to leave this beautiful area for good. I am in shock. I have been evicted as have all the tenants of this seven-unit building, all because of a speculator. And yes, it is capitalism at its best until it happens to you.

By way of hearsay, I learned that it has already occurred in at least two other locations nearby. How many other older apartment complexes might be targeted? Why? Because of how amazing this Rockridge area is to live, play and work. But no longer to grow old! Without naming names for fear of retribution, it is known these speculators originate from the Napa Valley area with a $1 billion bankroll behind them.

Are we protected by Oakland's Housing Authority Rental Ordinances? Well, I thought so, and when I spoke to the Housing Authority they reassured me that due to my advanced age and health issues I was protected from eviction. What I was not told was that all that changes when the Ellis Act is invoked. This State law circumvents Oakland's Ordinances — the implementation of which, I am sure, is profitable for speculators.

Kit Baxter, Claremont Avenue ■

Letters cont'd

School Closures Accelerate Gentrification

I've been following the crisis around school closures in Oakland and can see how several points are obscured in the article (see April 2022 *Rockridge News*) about District 1 board member Sam Davis. Mr. Davis notes that no schools in our District are closing and that schools in other areas are under-enrolled due to gentrification and the pandemic.

The school closures are themselves a further gentrifying move. Black and brown people are being priced out of Oakland. Closing these schools will accelerate the "whitening" of Oakland as more will leave. This reality cannot escape the awareness of Board members and explains the huge protest against the board's move.

There is a long history In Oakland and other cities of under-resourcing black and brown communities. Just as the State is moving toward the possibility of reparations for some of these harms, the city is moving toward continuing them.

The underlying racial realities of school closures are glossed over by many on the Board, including Mr. Davis. When families leave the school district, the Board should be concerned with why they left rather than moving to close their schools. Otherwise, the Board is complicit in the sharply changing demographics of Oakland.

I wish *The Rockridge News* would look deeper into housing and the school issues it reports on.

Beverly Burch, Ayala Avenue ■

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Rock-N-Stroll Outdoor Live Music Event Returns to College Avenue

by Jody Colley, Rockridge District Association Marketing Manager

The retailers, restaurants, and service providers that make up the Rockridge District welcome you to stroll, sip, sample, and save at Rock-N-Stroll **every second Saturday of the month** with art shows, merchant and spa specials, fine dining, savory sweets, and delicious drinks.

Beginning on **Saturday, May 14**, Rockridge will host over a dozen performers along with DJs and house music on College Avenue between Broadway and Alcatraz Avenue. Merchants will offer trunk shows, sidewalk sales, and in-store specials while hosting local popup vendors selling locally made goods.

Restaurants featuring unique menus, including **Cactus Taqueria's** (5642 College Avenue) delicious street tacos, will be available right out of their window to enjoy while strolling the event. **Rockridge Market Hall** (5655 College Avenue) will offer American-made cheese tastings. Craft brews will be hosted at venues like **Ben 'N Nick's** (5612 College Avenue) with **Line 51 Brewing** spirits available to sample and buy.

Oakland Art Gallery (5291 College Avenue) will host live music and a rotating art show. **First Federal Savings** (6058 College Avenue) and **College Avenue Presbyterian Church** (5951 College Avenue) will have crafts available for the kids. Children's stores **Goldenbug Shoes** (5509 College Avenue) and **Bella Vita** (5511 College Avenue) will host kid-oriented popup vendors.


Photo: Anna L. Marks

Milo Nuevo perfomed in the alley outside Oakland Art Gallery (5291 College) at last year's event.

Rock-N-Stroll reunites neighbors recently isolated by the pandemic by showcasing independent businesses, local bands, artists, and makers in a leisurely and spacious daytime event for all ages. For more information, visit RockridgeDistrict.com/rocknstroll. ■



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Meet the Man Behind the Wheel of That Familiar Brown Truck

by Skip Fogarty

The first time I met our favorite UPS delivery driver was a dozen years ago, or maybe more. Alerted by a robust knock, I opened the front door and immediately recognized the familiar brown uniform. I didn't recognize the well-tanned, grinning fellow, bearing the weighty parcel.

"Hey, what are all of these heavy packages you keep receiving? I'm curious," he asked. I told him, "It's an old typewriter. I know it's an odd hobby, but I collect them.

"Whoa, that's cool," he said. "You won't believe my hobby, but check it out." He wrote his name and website right on my package.

This is how I met **Marlo DiPietro**. He's been a familiar face in the Rockridge neighborhood for a long time. He has many great stories, warm memories and longtime friends from his days driving his route. We've learned he's also an amazing artist, outdoorsman, and even a hero. Now, after 34 years with UPS, DiPietro is retiring.

A native of Livermore, he lives on the same street where he grew up. "I keep an eye on my 92-year-old mom, who is still in our family home," he reports. Asked why he didn't seek a UPS assignment closer to home, DiPietro says: "I don't like the summer heat. Simple as that."


Photo: Skip Fogarty

Known for giving toy UPS trucks to kids, and always stopping to pick up dangerous screws and nails in the street, Marlo DiPietro is retiring after 34 years.

Besides the cool breezes of the Oakland Hills, DiPietro says he will miss the neighborhood "vibe" and the many interesting people he's gotten to know. Funny thing is, he often refers to folks by their house number, rather than their name.

Marlo, see next page

Rockridge Café Hosts New Show by Five Bay Area Photographers

Rockridge photographer **Don Rhett** will showcase his work alongside four other local photographers; **Marsha Kirschbaum** (Oakland), **Bill Johnston** (Richmond), **Don Melandry**, and **Steve Napoli** (both from Berkeley).

The exhibit, titled "Five Photographers, Five Visions," will **open on June 23rd** and remain on display until August 3rd. The Rockridge Café is located at 5492 College Avenue near the corner of Lawton. ■



Marlo, from previous page

"Once, at 5416 Broadway, I was flagged down by a young woman. When I pulled over, I saw she was pregnant and barefoot." She explained she'd accidentally locked herself out of her new apartment. DiPietro went to the rescue. He pulled his truck into the driveway, snug to the building, climbed on top, and scaled a balcony railing to help her get back in.

At 5776 Broadway, DiPietro befriended a series of business owners over the years. He knew the principals of an acoustic engineering firm called Wilson & Ihrig, now in Emeryville. DiPietro even did some fly fishing together with them. Subsequently, he came to know the operators of the Musically Minded Academy, and more recently he's connected with the preschool staff at "5776." He also liked hanging out with the "record store guys" who used to be on Claremont.

Visiting his website, www.marlodipietro.com, you'll discover an incredible portal into DiPietro's artistic life. Mainly, he designs and fabricates fly-tying vises. They are beautiful, otherworldly tools of sculptural beauty — part steampunk, part baroque.

"The vises are inspired by my father, who was an accomplished machinist, and especially by my passion for fly fishing," DiPietro explains. He's designed over 50 vises to date, each as unique as it is functional. Crafted of marble, steel, and brass, they suggest a slightly insect-like form — in keeping with the fly itself. He also dabbles in watercolor painting, garden sculpture, fountains, and a kinetic line of wind-powered artworks.

Ask about his retirement bucket list and you realize that DiPietro isn't planning on slowing down. "My partner Ellen and I hope to travel a lot." He lists Scotland, Luxembourg, and Italy on their itinerary. Of course, lots of fishing is ahead too. He cites the McCloud River and Hat Creek in Shasta County and Yellow Creek near Lake Almanor among his favorite destinations.

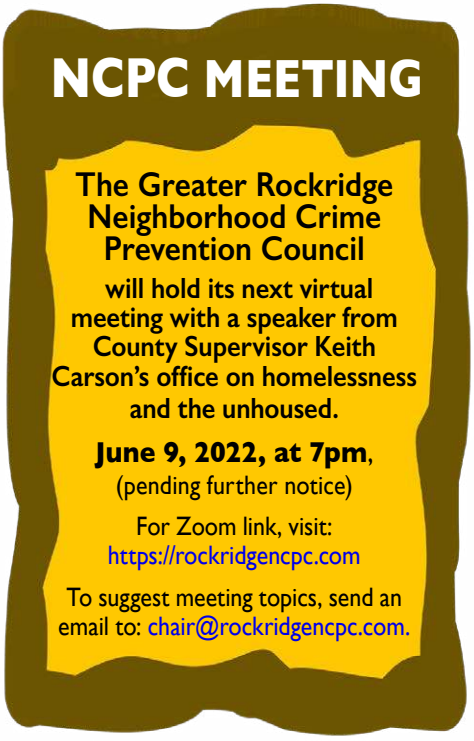
Here's another story that sticks with you about DiPietro. Returning from a hunting trip near Sonora some years back, he saved a motorist's life. "It was on Highway 108 north of Yosemite," he recalls. "We came upon an ugly, head-on accident that had just happened." It was around 100 degrees and the crashed cars were sitting on dry grass on the roadside. He saw two individuals in a car that seemed to be leaking gas. Both were strapped into their seats, trapped. Then a small fire started. In his flip-flops and shorts, he knew he had to act quickly.

He was able to reach in and pull out one of the men, badly lacerating his own arm at the elbow. Fire quickly engulfed the car and the second occupant, unfortunately, perished at the scene. It took nine months of surgeries and physical therapy for DiPietro to get back to work, but he couldn't wait to return to his familiar route.

"Driving a delivery truck can be long and hard at times. But the stories and personal relationships make my days worthwhile," DiPietro says. "I've seen young couples move into Rockridge, have children, then watched those kids grow up. It's a measure of time going by for me."

DiPietro is negotiating his pension details and expects to work a few more months. If you see him, give him a friendly wave or a shout-out. He's earned it. ■







Rockridge Food Star Earns His Chops at *Bon Appetit*

by Judith Doner Berne

As youngsters, **Elazar Sontag** and his older brother Sam sat in the back seat of their parents' car, drawing floor plans of the restaurant they hoped one day to own, and composing the menus they would serve.

"Sam probably had the biggest impact on my love for food," said Sontag, who at age 24 is the new restaurant editor for *Bon Appetit Magazine*. His Manhattan office, "part of the biggest offices (Conde Nast) I've ever been in," is sky-high in One World Trade Center.

Sontag, whose family moved from Berkeley to Rockridge when he was 14, spoke to me by phone early on an April morning from his San Francisco hotel room, on his first official trip to check out restaurants beyond New York City. "It's been three and a half days of four to five meals a day between San Francisco and Oakland — breakfast, lunch, dinner, dinner (yes, two dinners), drinks," he said. "If there's one thing I can do, it's eat."

"I was supposed to rent a car and take little driving trips on my own," he continued, but his dad, Jerry Sontag, a retired publisher and body movement teacher, insisted on driving him. "For me, it's a work trip; for him, it's a father and son road trip. We've gone everywhere together."

Sontag doesn't call what he does "reviewing," because it's not awarding stars for a restaurant's particular fare, quality of service, or price. "I want to give people a picture of a restaurant. What did someone (the chef and/or owner) have to do to get to this point? It's always a food story, but it's always more than that. It's so great to come home and feel so much pride in what people are doing here. It's an immense privilege to tell their stories."

I first interviewed Sontag in 2016 when, as a Rockridge teenager, he and his photographer friend **Anya Ku**, an Oakland Tech, and now Cal Berkeley and Cal Berkeley law school graduate, self-published their cookbook, *Flavors of Oakland*.

eyes on Rockridge

As I wrote then: Over a six-month period, they showed up at the doors of home cooks in 20 Oakland neighborhoods — notebook, camera, and bags of groceries in hand — often traveling by bus. As they watched each prepare that night's meal, Sontag wrote down their recipes and stories as Ku documented the cooking process and took their portraits. Then they joined the family around the dinner table.

But in a recent backyard interview with his mom, **Lorelei Sontag**, she said his interest in writing about food might have originated with a farm-to-table photo essay for an eighth-grade project. The Local Butcher Shop in Berkeley was his starting point; he journeyed to Magruder Ranch in Mendocino County, one of the shop's suppliers; and ate at Gather Restaurant, serving Magruder meat that night.

All this, even though his parents are vegetarians. "I'm so lucky to have grown up in a household where we always had a home-cooked meal on the table," Sontag told me. "And the fact that my parents were vegetarian meant that if I wanted to eat meat, I had to cook it myself." His brother, now in law school at Columbia University, is the better cook, he said. Living near one another in Brooklyn, "We still cook together all the time."

"And the fact that my parents were vegetarian meant that if I wanted to eat meat, I had to cook it myself."

As a teenager, he worked after school in Oakland's Pizzaiolo and Duende kitchens — thanks in part to Samantha "Sam" Smith, who co-directed the Emeryville food camp "Cook!" that he started attending at age 11. "He was more engaged both intellectually and creatively than many of the campers," she told me. "What also separated him was that he wanted the immersive experience."

In those days, Sontag thought he would be a chef. That was before he came out as gay, and though grateful for those early kitchen experiences, "I felt a little bit isolated." A queer history class at Bard College inspired him to leave school to discover and

Elazar, see next page

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Elazar, from previous page

write about queer kitchen culture, first as a freelancer and more recently on staff at the national offices of the food website, Eater. "It was an 'aha moment.' I wanted to be a part of it."

At *Bon Appetit*, in addition to writing, he supervises food writers — including freelancers. "I try to work with them, the way *Washington Post* food editor Joe Yonan worked with me" on Sontag's breakthrough 2018 *WAPO* story. It profiled Oakland resident and Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garcia and how she feeds her activism through cooking. "Joe gave me my first big break. My first draft wasn't perfect, but he worked with me. It's really hard to get your foot in the door."

"I've been a big fan of Elazar's since he first wrote a piece for me a few years ago, and have been watching his career closely," commented Yonan. "It was definitely one of those 'this kid is going places' moments. He's so smart, so committed, such a hard worker, and he displays such wonderful sensitivity in his work, from his choice of stories to the way he clearly gets his subjects to trust him and open up. I'm not surprised in the least to see him rise in food media at this pace. He deserves every accolade that comes his way — he's a star!"

"I always called Elazar my shining star," his mom, a retired psychologist and expert witness on the death penalty, told me. "The world of food made way for this odd-ball kid to become who he can be. He's such a people person. I think he's perfect for journalism. He's always had a voice."



Photo: Judy Berne

"My experience with Elazar is I'm always running to catch up," said Lorelei Sontag (pictured above with her son).

Will he ever have that restaurant he once dreamed of? "I never want to say never," said Sontag. "Food journalism energizes me and gives me life. I will always be in the kitchen. Nothing brings me more happiness than doing the cooking myself."

To comment on this column or to suggest topics for Eyes on Rockridge, please email judyberne@att.net. ■

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One Block Captain Route Left to Claim

by Susan Montauk, Rockridge News Distribution Manager

We had two openings last month for Block Captains. One was filled by **Carmelle McCune**, who took on a second route delivering to Ivanhoe, but **Zach Larson** still needs someone to take his Hillegass route as his work schedule has changed. Please let us know if you want this route:

• Route 24B: Woolsey, South side, from Benvenue to Hillegass, both sides of 6400 Hillegass, up North side of Alcatraz to Benvenue.

Block Captains deliver newsletters door-to-door. Bundles are delivered to their front porches the first weekend of each month (except August). Call (510) 547-3855 or email Susan at smontauk@gmail.com to volunteer. ■

Scenic Streets Needs Your Help

by Robert Firehock

The pandemic didn't spare Scenic Streets, your local nonprofit that aims to keep the Highway 24 Claremont on-ramp at Hudson, the De Vita street trees, and the Claremont off-ramp as attractive as circumstances permit.

After a months-long shutdown, the nature of our outdoor, socially distanced undertaking allowed Caltrans to let us get back to work. We hope you have appreciated the trash clearing and landscaping that helps make our community just a little bit brighter through these dark times.

While Wednesday morning volunteers are always welcome, we now need some specific help. We would love to consult with an arborist who is willing to give us a couple of hours to see what we might be able to do to resuscitate that Redwood tree. And we need someone with website design experience to help us return our moribund site to good working order.



Lee whacks weeds near a struggling Redwood.

If you are a willing volunteer with the relevant skills but Wednesday trash picking isn't your thing, we'd love to chat about the tree and the website. If you have some time to contribute to your community, please get in touch with Lee at lee.scenicstreetsoakland@gmail.com. And, trash pickers are always welcome. ■

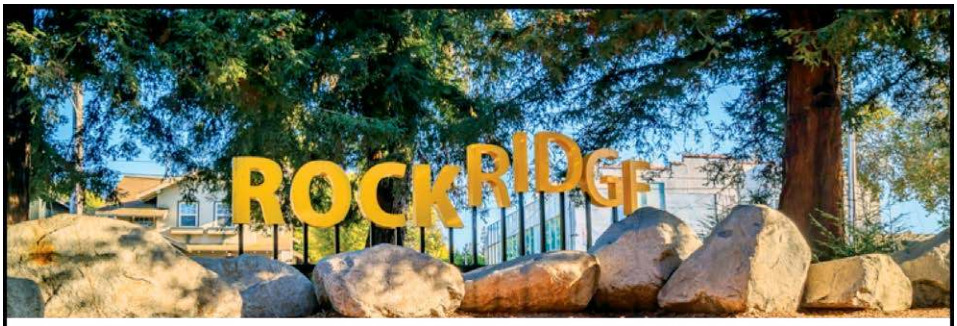
Storytime and More At Rockridge Library

Oakland Public Library is happy to announce that storytimes have resumed at all locations in Oakland. **Rockridge Library offers an all-ages Family Storytime on Thursday mornings at 10:30am**, outdoors in the back parking lot. In case of rain, we will meet upstairs inside, where masks are still required.

Rockridge Library is accepting Junior Volunteers to help with the **Summer Reading Program and Drop-In Crafts**. Please send an email to Erica at esiskind@oaklandlibrary.org, or stop by the library to sign up. Volunteers must commit to 5 (or more) shifts of 2.5 hours per shift, over June and July — sign-up for specific dates will occur in mid-May.

Also: bring your bike for BikeMobile Fix-It Clinic on Tuesday, July 12, 10am-1pm, in the back parking lot. All ages welcome, tools provided. ■

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Achieving True Strength, Forever

by Carol Kasparek



Photo: Anna L. Marks

Liam Bauer and Jesse Schmidt of TNT Strength continue the shop's historical body-building legacy on College Avenue.

You can continue to build strength forever. Got your attention? **Liam Bauer** and **Jesse Schmidt** want this message to be heard. They opened TNT Strength on the Avenue to help people "maximize their strength as safely and efficiently as possible." Bauer's experience led him to the motto "Truth not Trends," and hence, TNT.

"I really want people to get that concept, know what they can expect from us", he said. Their methods are based on the latest science on high-intensity training. Brief resistance exercises (measured in minutes) twice per week are the key. The goal is a body "functional and strong for a high-quality of life" according to Schmidt.

TNT's location has been part of a long history of weight lifting and body building in Oakland. Mr. America 1956, Jack Delinger, purchased the studio in the 1950s (Delinger had been a student at Oakland Tech and a member of its gymnastics team), and the space has been continually used as a fitness center for over 60 years. Since Delinger's departure, the facility has housed Pilates and yoga classes, a gym, and a supplements store.

Mr. America 1956 would not recognize the current format at TNT. The space is sleek with advanced equipment to comfortably target specific parts of the body. Only one person works out a time...yes, one person at a time. Clients range in age from teens to folks in their 80s. Each person's progress is precisely tracked on TNT's personalized cloud software. Importantly, you get to choose your own music for your session (a Beatles play list accompanied my experience).

The owners bring traditional experience and innovative approaches to their business. Bauer has coached the three-times Women's World Boxing Champion, trained and consulted with national level martial arts athletes, and state and local speed skaters. For 24 years, he taught self-defense to young people through Kid Power.

Schmidt has worked in Bay Area gyms for five years, after playing on a club baseball team at UCLA. Both are certified nutritionists. **Taylor Jones** has recently joined their team, also with a background in baseball and high-intensity training.

TNT offers several pieces of equipment unique to the Bay Area. One piece is the 4-Way Neck Machine, which allows a focus on neck strength. Neck strength is critical to optimal posture. Optimal posture is important for athletes, office workers, and older people. A strong neck means more resilience to concussions, less pain in sitting, and lowered risk of tripping and falling. "You cannot replicate this workout with other traditional pieces of equipment," Bauer emphasized.

After one year, TNT is already very involved in the community. TNT helps Oakland Tech athletes improve performance and prevent injury. For four years, Bauer and Schmidt have hosted a podcast featuring leading researchers and medical experts in the Bay Area and throughout the world. The coaches have found the neighborhood welcoming and are grateful for a supportive landlord.

People can subscribe for one month at a time, for one or two sessions per week. Sessions are available from 5am to 8pm. Enjoy the facility to yourself, with your music — my posture is better already.

TNT Strength is located at 5256 College Avenue. For more information, check out their website, TnTstrength.com, scan the QR code on the door, or give them a call at (510) 768-5421. ■



"Flex Streets" To Continue As Is Into 2023

The Oakland City Council recently passed a series of ordinances to make the Flex Streets Initiative a permanent option for businesses to use outdoor public rights-of-way.

Since launching in June 2020, the streamlined Flex Streets permit processes have helped Oakland businesses weather the pandemic by expanding their operations outdoors through 140 sidewalk cafes and parklets, 14 permitted private spaces, and more than 60 mobile food truck permits.

"Two years ago, we launched Flex Streets to address the urgent need of Oakland businesses to adapt at time when health orders severely restricted or eliminated the ability to operate indoors. Because of Flex Streets, many businesses were able to stay open and keep their workers employed," said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf.

She continued, "As we emerge from the pandemic, continuing the Flex Streets program gives our business community additional time to recover from the pandemic while their patrons enjoy our beautiful climate."

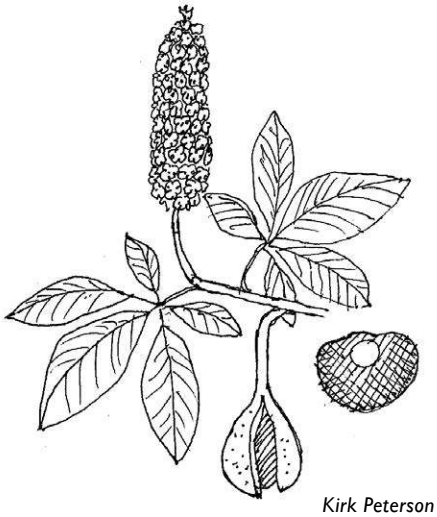
The existing permit programs will remain mostly unchanged and free through July 2023. Businesses interested in expanding their operations outdoors should apply at www.oaklandca.gov/flexstreets. ■

LOOK AROUND: *Aesculus californica*

by Kirk Peterson

The California Buckeye *(Aesculus californica)* lives in the coastal ranges and foothills around the Central Valley, among its friends, the live oaks and bays. It grows in lush canyons, woodlands, and also hot open hillsides. *Aesculus californica*, also called California Horse Chestnut, is multi-trunked with a broad round shape up to 30 feet high.

Buckeyes drop their leaves in the summer, earlier in the hot interior, and later near the coast. They leaf out early in the spring and their spires of fragrant white flowers follow in later spring.



Kirk Peterson

In the fall, the pendulous fig-shaped seed pods open to reveal shiny brown "buckeyes" the size of eggs, or bigger; the largest seeds north of the tropics. They resemble deer eyes; they could as well be called doe eyes.

The California buckeye has cousins; one makes Ohio "The Buckeye State," and "Horse Chestnuts" are common street trees in European cities.

The large round seed, bark, stems, and leaves all contain toxin. Native peoples used tannin from buckeyes in making leather, ate the buckeyes after leaching out the toxin (when acorns were not available), and put crushed roots into slow-moving water to stun fish, making them easier to catch. ■

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Flavors From Home

by Carol Kasparek and Gary Fine



Tej Rai, Kailash Thapa, and Sim Poudyal serve home-inspired Nepalese-North Indian cuisine at Namastey Patio, 5500 College Avenue.

Rockridge residents took in a surprising sight last spring. In the middle of the pandemic, a new restaurant opened at the corner of College and Lawton. While other businesses were limiting their offerings and hours, even shutting down, the owners of **Namastey Patio** instead believed the time was right for them to open their Nepalese-North Indian restaurant. The past year has proven them correct.

Smriti (known as Sim) **Poudyal**, **Kailash Thapa**, and **Tej Rai** drew on their various food backgrounds and the support of their Nepalese community in the Bay Area for their restaurant, Namastey Patio. Poudyal has created and distributed food at farmers' markets, and Thapa and Rai helped run family restaurants. All three have been active in organizations serving their community. The chefs too, are from their close-knit group.

"Rockridge is a small, lovely town, a good neighborhood for families," said Poudyal. "We wanted to bring our authentic taste from home." Home meant cooking with what was available — no processed ingredients. "We never heard about organic because everything we used was organic," she laughed.

They love the location's expansive patio for outdoor seating. Health concerns, then and now, make the fresh air option a draw for the community. Connection to the customers and avenue businesses has been critical to their success during a difficult time. "We know them, they know us — we wouldn't have survived without their support."

Another draw was the menu. Warm, full flavors are part of every carefully chosen offering. All sauces and condiments are made from scratch with whole spices in the restaurant kitchen. Indian and Nepalese dishes share some ingredients, yet differ in their cooking styles.

"Our version of familiar dishes may be different than what you expect," notes Kailash. Nepalese dishes have little to no dairy and less oil than most Indian dishes. "You will feel better when you get home," predicts Tej Rai.

Traditional Nepalese Goat *(Khashi)* is one of Namastey's most popular offerings. Momos are a distinctive version of steamed and fried dumplings made with homemade spices. With an array of chutneys coming with each momo order, guests can explore a variety of flavors with a single dish. Also new to some diners are the *Dahi puri chaat*, a very popular appetizer. The owners always point customers to the desserts, light yet flavorful concoctions that include Milk Cake *(Ras Malai)* with milky cream sauce and nuts.

Your server could very likely be one of the owners. They are present at every shift, doing whatever needs to be done, even cooking. Every server will ask and answer questions to make certain the diners get what they want — choosing from mild to moderate to spicy and very spicy for their orders. Vegan options are available throughout the menu.

The partners are looking to hold more special events. A wine tasting dinner for Cline Winery last October was "a huge success." Namastey's takeout business is increasing; plans may develop for additional locations. "Once you are in the business, you can't get out of it," remarked **Poudyal**. ■

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How, When and Where to Report Crime

by Karen Ivy, Secretary, Greater Rockridge NCPC

What do you do if you have evidence of a crime? What about online reporting? Whether you are a witness or a victim, this is an attempt to clarify all that.

Emergency Calls

If you see a crime being committed, you should call 911. But, if you're calling on a cell phone, call OPD's direct emergency number, (510) 777-3211. Put this number in your cell phone so you can call it easily. Some cell towers still route 911 to the California Highway Patrol dispatch center in Martinez, which then reroutes the call to Oakland. Try to stay clear of whatever's going on while you do!

Non-Emergency Calls

If you find out that a crime has been committed but the criminals have left the scene (your car was broken into), in some cases you can report it online. Once the criminals have left, the crime is no longer considered an emergency, so you should call the non-emergency number at (510) 777-3333 to make a report. You may have to wait, and you may have to call more than once. The dispatcher should give you a temporary report number — write it down and refer to it in case you have to call back.

The police department's website has fairly clear instructions on what you can report online at https://www.oaklandca.gov/resources/can-the-crime-be-reported-online. Basically, you must be over 18 with a working email address, and the crime had to happen inside Oakland city limits and not on a freeway.

The first page of the online reporting site has a list of the types of crime you can report — you'll see it when you click the Report Online link on this page: https://www.oaklandca.gov/services/report-a-crime-online.

There is also a list of situations where the crime must be reported by phone:

1. You know who committed the crime

2. You have evidence related to the crime (photographs and/or video)

3. The damage or value is over $5,000

4. The lost or stolen property includes the loss of a firearm; or

5. The lost or stolen property includes the loss of a vehicle license plate.

6. The lost or stolen property is a motorized vehicle.

Most importantly, if you have evidence (photos, videos) hold them until after you file a report by phone. Dispatch will assign a temporary report number and refer the case to OPD for review. **Our Community Resource Officers confirm that they can't accept evidence unless it's associated with an open case number.**

After review, the report is assigned a case number and they email you a PDF of the report. At that point you should know the officer assigned to the case and can send your evidence to the officer, with the case number. You can't just attach your photo to the online report form that the filed online because the report doesn't have a temporary report number yet, much less an official case number.

Remember, when you report a crime you may have to go to court in person to testify if the police arrest a suspect and the District Attorney chooses to press charges.

To get regular notices of NCPC meetings and crime statistics, sign up at RockridgeNCPC.com. ■





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The deadline for the June 2022 issue (available June 4) **is May 17, 2022.**

For more details, email Susan Montauk at smontauk@gmail.com.

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Competition Drives Price in April

Closing date	BR	BA	Address	Original price	List price	DOM	Selling price
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4/6/2022	2	2	5405 Carlton St	$679,000	$679,000	2	$800,000
4/13/2022	2	1	5340 Broadway Terrace	$699,000	$853,000	6	$853,000
4/14/2022	3	2.5	5739 Presley Way	$1,695,000	$1,695,000	12	$2,470,000

Homes sold in April closed 32% over the asking price on average.

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