THE Rockridge News
www.rockridge.org
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Sponsored by the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) • 4900 Shattuck Ave., PO Box 22504, Oakland, 94609

Milestones & New Beginnings on College Ave.

by Anna L. Marks



It's a family affair — Viva, Aza, Merci, Gerardo and Leslie all chip in at their new shop at 5239 College Avenue.

As we bring in 2025, this issue of the *Rockridge News* honors and celebrates the many local entrepreneurs who grace our community with a mosaic of inspired goods and services and treat us to an array of delectable cuisines. There are more than 100 dedicated hardworking, business owners who continue to make Rockridge a vibrant community and contribute greatly to its economic vitality and overall well-being. They provide career opportunities, foster creativity, and help to build a sense of connectedness. It would be impossible to mention all of them in this issue, and therefore we have focused on a few that are new to town or celebrate big anniversaries and continue to do what they love despite the challenges. Look for more of these highlights in upcoming newsletters.

Right Way Shoe Repair / 5239 College

Soon after the pandemic hit, Right Way Shoe Repair left Rockridge to regroup. When the perfect spot recently became available on College Avenue they jumped at it. Their new shop opened on November 1.

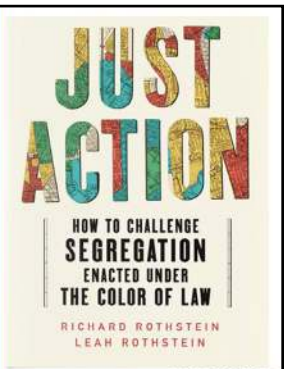
"I saw the sign up for rent on the building by the laundromat at the top of College Avenue and thought to myself, 'Wow, wouldn't it be awesome to come back.' The size and price are perfect — laundromat next door, a barbershop two doors down, parking right up front and a bus stop less than 20 feet away," says **Leslie Casteñeda**, daughter of owner **Gerardo**.

This multigenerational business understands how to provide quality service with an eye for detail. It offers a rare, old-school repair shop that

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RCPC is launching the Rockridge Community Vision Plan!
The process will include several opportunities to weigh in on priorities for our neighborhood within multiple working groups, as well as online. On February 10, we will host a Town Hall to share more about the upcoming process where we hope many will participate (see page 6).

Want to participate in the Community Vision Plan?
Sign up here!

RCPC Community Event
Rockridge
Discussion with Oakland Author Leah Rothstein
Save The Date
January 16 @ 7pm
@ College Avenue Presbyterian Church
Snacks and warm beverages provided
Register at Rockridge.org or scan here


This book is available at Pegasus Bookstore (on College Ave) & Marcus Books (Black owned bookstore at 3900 MLK Way)

Anniversaries, from front page

fixes, cleans, and restores shoes, sneakers, and assorted wardrobe accessories that need a second chance. The business also plans to provide temporary job opportunities for high school students to "keep the youth busy."

"My father's father was a cobbler in Mexico City. My father was a professional boxer before he got into shoe repair. He taught my brother Samuel how to do it and I'm next. Looks like mending is in our blood."

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Sadly, Samuel, at age 34, passed away in his sleep this past October. "I want to remind anyone who is reading this to please reach out to your loved ones, especially the ones you haven't talked to in a long time and put your pride aside and tell them you still care about them."

Chocolate Dragon Café / 5427 College



Photo by Anna L. Marks

In 2015, owner **Lise Dale** fell in love with the Bittersweet Café while working for the owner, and took it over when they wanted to move on — relaunching it as the Chocolate Dragon Café. She has held fast to the shop's original vision and now celebrates ten years in business.

The shop offers an unusual spin on some typical café offerings, including a decadent classic hot chocolate with a blend of milk and dark chocolate, and an expansive display of specialty-crafted chocolate bars — making it a standout among a host of other coffee shops on the avenue.

Dale learned to bake at the University of New Mexico and brought the skills with her. She sees small brick-and-mortar shops as an endangered species requiring a delicate balancing act to keep staff and visitors happy.

"There may be rocky times when we have to close early or give the staff a day off, or we run out of your favorite cake, or people have been working a long shift with no break and look glassy eyed. Your patience with all these things is always appreciated."

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The RockridgeNews

The Rockridge News was founded in March 1986 by **Don Kinkead** and is published monthly (except August). It's sponsored by the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC), a nonprofit public benefit organization founded to: preserve and enhance the unique character of the Rockridge neighborhood; promote the health, safety and quality of life of its residents; furnish a forum for community involvement; and provide leadership and representation of neighborhood interests.

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Anna L. Marks ..... Editor & Layout Artist
Jo Ellis..... Assistant Editor & Ad Manager
Susan Montauk .....Business & Distribution Manager
Judith Doner Berne ..... Senior Contributing Writer

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Want to write a Letter to the Editor? Letters are limited to 450 words and are published at the editor's discretion in the order received. Send letters to: editor@rockridge.org. Please include your name, email, and street of residence. **Deadline is the 11th of each month for the upcoming newsletter.**

All submissions accepted for publication are subject to editing for clarity and brevity. *The Rockridge News* reserves the right to refuse any articles, letters, or advertisements.

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Views expressed in published articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Rockridge News, *its editor, or the board of directors of the Rockridge Community Planning Council.*

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LOOP Hair Design / 5257 College


Photo by Anna L. Marks

When **Stacy Hambly** decided to retire after 30 years as owner of Right Angle Hair Salon, the shop was purchased by her longtime friend and fellow stylist, **Leslie Orvik** (see photo above). After Covid, a core group of stylists moved to the new location now called LOOP, which refers to the cyclical design methodology of observing, then reflecting, and then creating — which they use to shape the best look every time.

All of the shop's stylists have worked together for many years, making for a fun and relaxed environment. Orvik appreciates how the move has allowed the group to stay together, and equally important, how it has allowed her to utilize her extensive background in design. She has since redesigned the outdoor garden where clients can hang out, as well as the interior "blank canvas" that has taken on a new modern look.

Tootsies Rockridge/Crush on College
5523 & 5525 College Avenue


Photo by Anna L. Marks

After a less-than-fulfilling stint as a buyer in Corporate America's fashion industry, **Liz Taylor** (see photo above) wanted to go out on her own. Many of her friends had opened stores that offered shoes along with manicures and pedicures — and that's how it all started. Tooties offers women's shoes, and Crush curates contemporary women's clothing. They eventually opened the wall to expand their eclectic selection with side-by-side storefronts for ease of shopping.

"I love being here. It's my community. I've been here for so long that I know many people and their kids when they were babies. Then they come work for me, and then they go to college, then their kids come back. Now they're grown up and have kids of their own."

Taylor appreciates the emphasis on independent businesses along College Avenue and feels that Rockridge "gets it" when it comes to providing local support. She curates her selections to individual tastes. "We do affordable and adorable, cute, comfortable shoes and we cater to what people are looking for. I'm always looking for new brands, depending on the times and what people want. We do a lot more sneakers than we ever did."

She is concerned about how online shopping has taken a bite out of her business and encourages the community to continue supporting local proprietors — and wants us all to remember to "keep shopping small and local."

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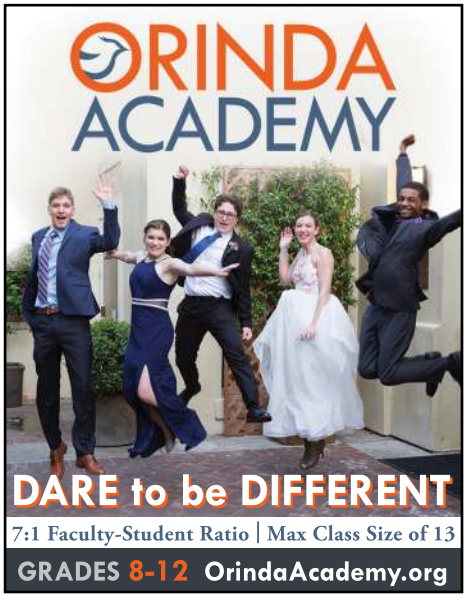
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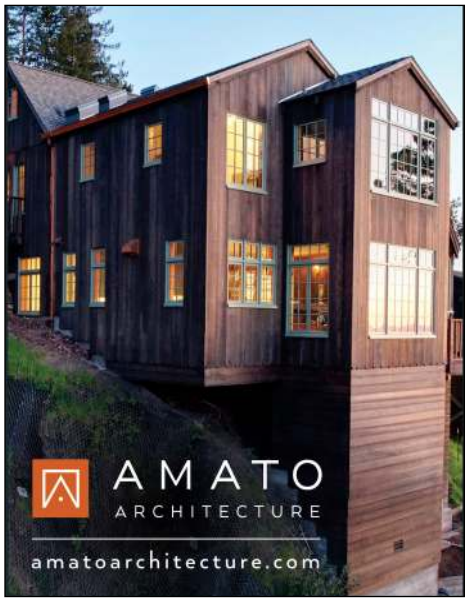




Anne D. Brandon
Realtor
510.682.6644 | 510.339.9290
Anne.Brandon@corcoranicon.com
AnneDBrandon.com
Lic# 01877719

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Bella Vita / 5511 College


Photo by Anna L. Marks

Jennifer Viale (photo above) opened Bella Vita in August of 1999 after working as Senior Director of Women's Visual Merchandising at The Gap for 17 years. She celebrated her 25th anniversary this past year. Her shop offers an eclectic mix of vintage finds and a selection of kid fashions from local and independent designers. In addition to women's clothing and accessories, and baby and children's merchandise, the shop offers a great toy selection.

"I try to stay true to what Bella Vita stands for — a thoughtful selection of merchandise with a sense of whimsy. I also adore my customers. They have been with me since the beginning. I love the neighborhood and the vibe. I also love that there are no big box stores. Rockridge LOVES their small businesses and supports them one hundred percent.

"I have a passion for customer service and visual merchandising, and love what I do. I've been in three locations on College Avenue. Each one has been a learning experience and I can confidently say that I love my current location. I look forward to more years in Rockridge. Shop Small."

Marica / 5301 College


Photo by Anna L. Marks

Berkeley High graduate **Christopher Cheung** began cooking at the young age of 23. His love of food became a passion after eating at Fourth Street Bar and Grill, noting, "Wow, this is really, really good." He went to work for famed chef Mark Miller (an Alice Waters alum) during the burgeoning Bay Area's food movement — embracing farm-fresh cuisine. A few years later, in 1984, he opened Christopher's Café on Solano Avenue, which thrived until 1999 when he and his wife, **Nedda** (they've been married for 47 years) decided to move to College Avenue, and, in 2000, opened Marica. The food is based on high-quality meats and fish with a California Cuisine twist.

"This is a great neighborhood. It used to be quiet up on this end of the street until maybe about 15 years ago. Since then, many shops have opened at this end." The two have seen many restaurants come and go, and remember them fondly… Garibaldi's, Grasshopper, Crème de la Crème, Marzano's, and Filippo's (whose owners come often to eat).

Cheung recalls a time when Ver Brugge's had a restaurant across from the Claremont Hotel (now Rick and Ann's) where he did a brief stint as head chef. Now, he looks forward to retiring soon and enjoying his wife's home cooking.

Talisman Antiques / 6007 College


Photo by Anna L. Marks

Thirty-plus years ago, a few years after the earthquake of 1989 and the passing of his father, **Kingsley Moore** (see photo above) closed his shop on Church Street in San Francisco's Cole Valley neighborhood and moved it to Rockridge. He and one of his partners at the time, Bill Parkinson, found two small shops available on either side of Barney's Gourmet Hamburgers, but were inconvenienced due to the

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lack of bathroom facilities. When presented with the opportunity to move to the current location several years later, they jumped at it. Being the more personable of the two, Kingsley eventually went solo and hasn't looked back. He is proud to be part of the local community and appreciates its diversity and positivity.

"I shop at flea markets, auctions, and the odd estate sale. I like handmade things. I'm kind of a textile junkie. If you look around here, you see many hand-woven pieces. I love them, they're beautiful. I tell people, this is the land of actual stuff. People made almost everything in this room. Our coverlets were all made before the Civil War."

Kingsley also does restoration and has friends who help out with that as well. Reflecting on his longevity in the business, he notes that "All we've got is each other, and today, and I'm just glad to be part of this. It's been a really good ride — I'm glad to still be in the game."

Jarvis Architects / 5278 College



Glen William Jarvis established his architectural business in 1970 and for the first decade ran it out of the back room in his Rockridge home where he built local projects during the day and designed projects in the evening. Seven years in, George Lucas hired Glen for extensive remodeling of his home in San Anselmo and later at his facilities at Skywalker Ranch.

Jarvis Architects is a community-based firm of six architects — three men and three women — who have worked together continuously, some for more than 40 years. They have many diverse talents to augment their architectural skills, including landscape and interior design.

Glen's first employee, **Robin Pennell**, was hired in 1978 to help with the Lucas home. Eventually, Robin joined Glen as a partner, and the firm became Jarvis Architects. Needing more space for the growing business, they moved to College in 1999, and, of course, remodeled the building.

After the community was impacted by the '89 earthquake and '91 Oakland Hills Firestorm, the firm was able to help rebuild many of the neighborhood homes they had become so familiar with. The company designed more than 75 new houses and continued work on remodeling homes, commercial spaces, and restaurants.

Glen spent seven years on the Oakland Planning Commission and was chair when Jerry Brown became Mayor. A long-time Rockridge resident, Glen moved here in 1971. He participated in the 1974 rezoning of College Avenue to the current "Neighborhood Commercial Zone." He also served on the RCPC board for many years, and as chair of the Land Use Committee.

It should be noted that Glen has delivered the *Rockridge News* on his block for decades; and Robin serves on the Board of the Rockridge District Association, the business and merchant's association for College Avenue. They have truly enjoyed being a part of Rockridge. ■



BART Improves Lighting at the Rockridge Station

A big boost for safety and the overall rider experience at Rockridge BART Station is on the way thanks to the transit agency's lighting improvement project.

BART crews are replacing outdated lights in the Rockridge Station plaza now, and work on upgrading platform lighting is expected to happen this month. BART will replace all 40 pole lights on the platform and over 60 fixtures in the parking lots with LED fixtures. The new energy-efficient lights will provide a dramatic upgrade in the visibility and brightness of Rockridge Station.

The work happening at Rockridge is part of an overall program to upgrade lighting at stations across the BART system, including modernizing the lighting at eight stations across the system in 2025. ■





RCPC TOWN HALL MEETING

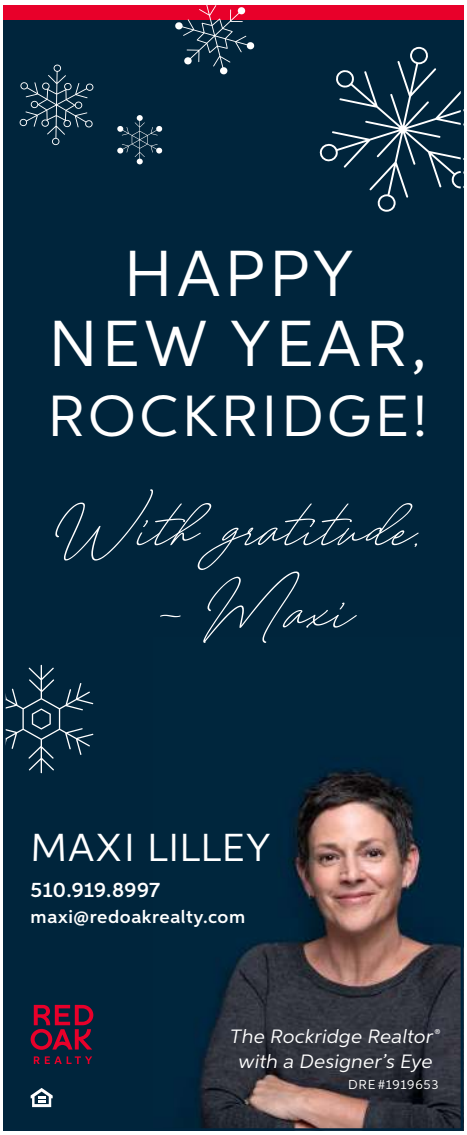
Launching the Rockridge Community Vision Plan

Monday, February 10, 2025, 7pm

The Rockridge Community Planning Council will hold a **Town Hall on February 10 at the Rockridge Library**. Learn about our process to create a vision for our neighborhood's growth, open space, transportation, and more — and how you can participate.

At the meeting, residents will be invited to vote on a proposed amendment to Sec. 7.6 of the RCPC Bylaws regarding our election process. This amendment would require that in the case of an election tie, the winner be determined through a coin toss or drawing of lots, instead of a runoff election.

Voters must be at least 18 years of age and must present documentation (e.g., CA driver license) showing primary residence within RCPC boundaries. Learn more at www.rockridge.org.



Market Hall's Epic Cheese Fest and Truffle Fest

Back by popular demand, the second annual **Epic Cheese Fest** returns to Rockridge Market Hall on **Saturday, January 25, from noon to 3pm**. The event features free tastings and demonstrations with some of Market Hall's favorite artisan cheesemakers from the Alps and beyond. Meet the makers, importers, and industry icons while sampling renowned cheeses such as Alp Blossom, Gruyère 1655, and the famous Comte AOP Symphonie Fort Saint-Antoine 16/24.

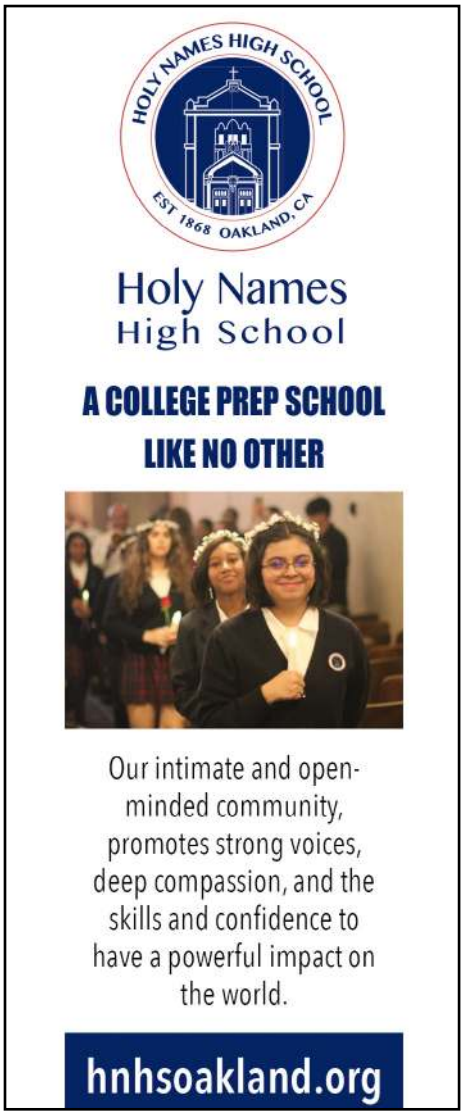
Berkeley's Squabisch Pretzels will be on hand with an exclusive cheese-filled pretzel made just for this event, and Oakland's LINE 51 Brewing Company will provide samples of lager for those 21 and older.

The inaugural Market Hall Foods **Truffle Fest** takes place **Saturday, February 8, from noon to 3pm**, with freshly foraged truffles from France and Italy. This free event celebrates these fragrant earthy gems and their unparalleled flavor.

Taking place throughout Rockridge Market Hall, this will be a chance to taste trufflely goods and house-made treats, chat with purveyors, and win prizes. Highlights include the Truffle Raffle — win a truffle, gift basket, and chocolate truffles. Samples of truffled charcuterie, and truffle dishes from the kitchen and bakery will be on hand.

Taste truffled cheeses and enjoy hot, melty truffled raclette at the Cheese Counter; sample wines that pair well with truffles at Paul Marcus Wines; and find cuts of meat ready to truffle at home at Marin Sun Farm.

Sign up for the Market Hall Truffle Club to learn about the different truffles carefully sourced each year, and be the first to learn when these treasures next become available. For information and updates visit https://rockridgemarkethall.com/events. ■



Piedmont Play School: Open House

All are welcome to visit the play school located within Piedmont's beautiful Hampton Park on **Saturday, January 11, from 10am to 12pm** for its annual Open House. Meet the teachers, including Director **Michelle Richie**, hear from current parents, and learn about this play-based cooperative preschool for children ages 2 1/2 to 4 years. Kids welcome; visit https://piedmontplayschool.org/. ■

RCPC Land Use Committee Meeting

January's meeting has been canceled. Email landuse@rockridge.org for information regarding February's meeting.

East Bay Booksellers Relocates to New Home



Rockridge artist **Rachel Perls** (pictured with **Brad Johnson**) created a beautiful mural of vibrant blossoms to bring some color to the fire-burned and boarded-up storefront and help brighten the neighborhood.

After a 3-alarm fire destroyed East Bay Booksellers, owner **Brad Johnson** was down, but not out. The community rallied with a fundraising campaign and continued to support the bookstore by shopping on their website and assisting with the relocation to 6022 College Avenue (formerly occupied by Berkeley Kids Room). Despite the greatly reduced inventory, November's reopening festivities helped bring in much-needed sales before the end of the holiday season.

Johnson is unsure how long it will take to rebuild the prior storefront. "Our intention is to return to our old location at some point, but we're looking at a matter of years versus months, so many things related to such a return are outside of our control. We're focusing our energies purely on where we need to be now. It's a nice spot. Smaller, but we're settling into it."

As the crew works to get books into the store, they are eager for neighbors to browse the new space, which is open 7 days a week from 11am to 7pm; closing at 6pm on Sundays. ■

Dogs (and sometimes cats) of Rockridge

Hawkeye is a charismatic male tabby whose striped coat reflects his vibrant and playful spirit. He adores his humans and finds joy in their company, yet he's also the master of the side-eye, playfully casting judgmental glances. When it's time to unwind, you'll find him basking in the sunlight on his cozy window perch, observing the bustling activities along College Avenue with a serene and contented demeanor.





Finn, short for Huckleberry Finn, is a 10-year-old cattle dog / Corgi mix rescued from Texas. He has a passion for fashion and for taking naps. He's mischievous, but even more so if you have pizza. He loves a warm patch of sun and always claims the coziest blankets and pillows in the house. If you spot him around the neighborhood, be sure to say hello! He loves making friends.

Does your furry friend live in Rockridge? If so, send a photo of your four-legged companion with a short commentary to: editor@rockridge.org.







eyes on Rockridge

Finding Strength And Healing through Music and Art

by Judith Doner Berne



Amikaeyla Gaston's "Tunnel of Love" embodies her role in the neighborhood, and the world. *Photo by Judy Berne*

It's so appropriate that when you walk by **Amikaeyla** ("Call me Ami") **Gaston's** Rockridge house you go through her "Tunnel of Love."

The overhanging almost 30-foot-long and sidewalk-wide arch, a regimented tangle of bougainvillea leaves and blossoms, truly reflects her talent, ingenuity, generosity, beauty… and yes, love.

"Ami is all about giving the world love," said **Jenny Ray**, her next-door neighbor for nearly 15 years. "She is down to earth, Mother Earth, and you just have to hear her laugh," Ray said, as well as sing, compose, and play her own orchestra of instruments.

Starting at age 4, she studied classical piano, then went on to viola, western and Indian flute, dulcimer, and harp. Somewhat later, she took on percussion instruments from around the world such as djembe, bata, conga, tabla, taiko, and timbale. "My whole family is very musical. My father was a percussionist for Miles Davis.

"My strongest love is singing," Amikaeyla said, and she does it in six languages. "I became obsessed with sacred songs." She has been the lead singer on 16 albums (four of them solo) and performed live with such household names as Pete Seeger and Bobby McFerrin in front of the Dalai Lama, and is often a draw at SF Jazz, Freight and Salvage, and Yoshi's. Song permeated her 2014 Ted Talk, "Dare to be Dauntless" (see it on YouTube), as she describes a near-death experience at the age of 22 that led to her becoming a healer and activist.

It was 1992, and she was attending the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in Hart, Michigan. Attracted to a nearby field of flowers, she decided to lie down among them. "Five white boys driving by in a white truck" targeted her, dragging her 86 feet as she was lodged between a tire and the exhaust pipe. "I was thinking my mother will kill me if I die out here. I was trying to sing. Three teeny, tiny women (from the festival) lifted the truck off me with the boys still in it. Another ran five miles to phone an ambulance. They were superheroes."

She spent a year and a half in and out of hospitals with third-degree burns covering 70 percent of her body.

Eyes on Rockridge, see next page

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Eyes on Rockridge, from previous page

"I was able to rise above the pain. Music was what saved me. I vowed one day I would travel the world."

And travel the world she has, most often as a cultural arts ambassador for the U.S. State Department. "My specialty is refugee kids," most recently in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, using music to help them calm down. She has also brought both spiritual songs as well as Broadway show tunes to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, and before the current conflict, to Palestine, Israel, and Lebanon. She most recently was in Qatar, narrating a live presentation of "The Pearl Divers Daughter," which she describes as "a huge (U.S. State Department) production all about love."

Amikaeyla is founder and executive director of the nonprofit International Cultural Arts and Healing Sciences Institute (ICAHSI), which brings together artists and healers to promote wellness through the arts. And wait, there's more… She is also co-executive director of World Trust, a nonprofit started in 1998 that works to provide dignity and respect for all people regardless of race, gender, or class.

"My life's work," Amikaeyla said, "is dedicated to guiding and empowering people to heal themselves and discover their authentic voice. Then, step boldly into accessing it consistently, irrespective of their background, financial situation, skin tone, or position within their community, village, or society as a whole.

"I grew up in a scientific household" in the Washington D.C area, aspiring to be a doctor like her parents. Her mom, **Dr. Marilyn Hughes Gaston**, was an assistant surgeon general in the U.S. Public Health Service and the first African American woman to direct a public health service bureau, following her breakthrough work in Sickle Cell Disease. Her dad, Dr. **Alonzo Gaston**, was a professor of life sciences at Howard University.

But after earning her undergraduate degree in neuroscience at Wesleyan College, her own medical experience, and two years at Howard Medical School, "I realized this was not where I would do the best healing," Amikaeyla said. That was when she opted for music as the mode of medicine she wanted to practice. Her ICAHSI organization was a sponsor of, and was a performer in, the three-day 2024 Music as Medicine Festival held last May in Oakland to honor local musicians, which is planned for this spring as well.

Her activism is also a result of the fact that "I grew up marching." Both parents were active in the Civil Rights Movement, Her dad was a member of the Black Panthers, and luminaries such as Miles Davis, Cecily Tyson, and Nina Simone would come over to the house. A large oil painting of Simone dominates her living room thanks to **Monica Smith**, co-owner of Open Mind Music at 5521 College Avenue.

Amikaeyla saw the painting hanging on the vintage record shop's wall. "She very much gravitated to it," Smith said. After working with local artist **Mike Welch** to settle on a price, Smith combed Scrap, a San Francisco creative re-use arts education nonprofit, for a frame that would fit. "It was a long shot that worked. So, I bought it (the frame), I framed it, and I dropped it off."

That generosity fits into the big picture of why Amikaeyla loves Rockridge where she has lived with her wife, attorney **Susan Callender**, since 2006, raising chickens alongside their "cheeky" dog Kaya, amidst 14 fruit trees. "We try to grow all our own vegetables and live off the land as much as possible." That's helped by the Temescal Creek that runs under their property, so they never have to water.

"This is a sweet, darling neighborhood," she said. "Everyone is so friendly. It is so thrilling to me to have this sense of community. They built Frog Park, then they clean up Frog Park each year. Where people have that level of consciousness is where I want to be."

If you know of a neighborhood story waiting to be told, contact judyberne@att.net. ■





Hillegass and Colby Traffic Calming Update: Community Input and Next Steps

by Muhammad Alameldin, — RCPC Transportation Chair

Over the past several months, concerns about increasing cut-through traffic and proposed solutions such as traffic diverters, have sparked strong reactions, particularly in the area east of Telegraph, west of College, and between Alcatraz and Claremont. The Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) remains neutral on the specific issue of diverters but has been working to ensure that all voices in the community are heard and that decisions about our streets are made transparently.

RCPC heard the significant concerns of neighbors when Oakland's Department of Transportation (OakDOT) Director **Josh Rowan** proposed at a quickly assembled community meeting a pilot project for diverters on Hillegass Avenue and Colby Streets to minimize cut-through traffic between Alcatraz and Claremont. In response, RCPC and interested neighbors pushed for another community meeting to provide a space for broader discussion. On December 4th, over 200 neighbors packed the pews of the College Avenue United Presbyterian Church for a community meeting hosted by Director Josh Rowan. The turnout was a clear sign that traffic safety and neighborhood impacts remain a high priority for the whole neighborhood.



Hundreds of Rockridge residents packed the meeting at the College Avenue Presbyterian Church.

At the meeting, a path forward was agreed upon: Director Rowan agreed to pause the project and to work with a community task force to evaluate the challenges of traffic safety and develop solutions that reflect community needs. RCPC has recommended that the group be comprised of neighbors and two RCPC representatives, working closely with Director Rowan and newly-elected District 1 Councilmember **Zac Unger**. Over the first three months of 2025, the group will integrate ongoing community feedback and proven traffic-calming principles to shape a pilot program for improving safety across the area.

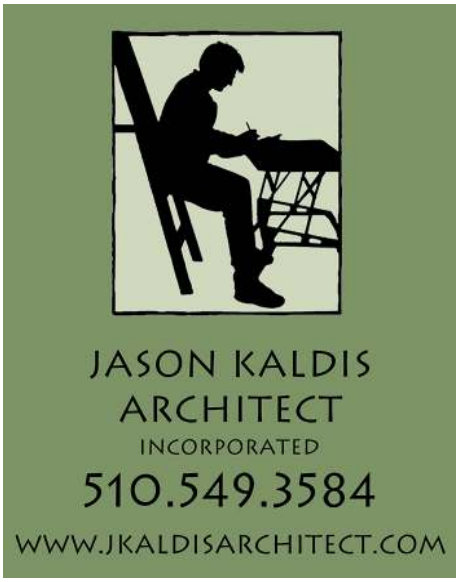
Director Rowan will establish the members of this working group. RCPC will remain actively engaged to ensure that the process remains transparent, inclusive, and iterative. Community meetings will be scheduled during this period to gather input, share progress, and refine proposals based on what the working group develops. It is important to note that OakDOT retains final authority over the pilot project — which may or may not include diverters. Any selected pilot project, whether the original proposal from OakDOT or a new proposal from the working group will last for approximately six months, and its effectiveness will be evaluated after that.

The discussion about traffic calming in Rockridge is not new. For the past decade, cut-through traffic on Hillegass Avenue has increased since the expansion of the Safeway on College Avenue. A settlement agreement set aside funds to mitigate these types of impacts, but Safeway refused to fund certain proposed measures and the city decided not to intervene despite its ability to do so. OakDOT's proposal to implement a pilot project represents an opportunity to address the long-standing unaddressed challenges on Hillegass, Colby, and the surrounding numbered streets.

RCPC supports evaluating and implementing appropriate traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps, bulb-outs, mini-traffic circles, and truck restrictions. We believe measures such as traffic diversions or outright closures warrant neighborhood-wide input because they could cause unintended consequences or disproportionately impact on other streets. No single block should bear the burden or reap the benefits of measures to mitigate traffic.

Thank you all who have engaged in this process so far. Your input remains critical as we work together to make our neighborhood safer for everyone. And here's some great news — the recent discussions have inspired RCPC to kick off our Community Vision planning in 2025. This initiative aims to bring neighbors together to shape a shared vision for Rockridge that focuses on housing, transportation, and safety. By fostering collaboration and consensus from the get-go we hope to build a stronger, more connected community that reflects the needs and priorities of all residents.

Sign up at Rockridge.org for updates on the working group's progress and for upcoming opportunities to share your thoughts on how to improve the Rockridge community. ■



Upper Telegraph Avenue Completes Plan for Street Improvement Project

by Muhammad Alameldin, RCPC Transportation Chair

The City of Oakland's Department of Transportation (OakDOT) is moving forward with the Upper Telegraph Avenue Complete Streets Project — a major improvement for the corridor between 52nd Street and Woolsey Street.

After months of community engagement, including surveys with over 1,100 responses, outreach to more than 60 businesses, and discussions with transit riders, OakDOT has chosen to implement a 4-to-3 Lane Road Diet. This design will enhance safety, accessibility, and mobility for all users of Telegraph Avenue.



The project will bring safer streets with a calmer roadway, pedestrian safety islands, and upgraded crosswalks. Cyclists will benefit from fully separated bike lanes designed for comfort and safety, while transit riders will see improvements with ten new bus boarding islands featuring shelters and seating. Businesses and deliveries will be supported by floating parking on both sides of the street, ensuring better parking and loading access.

The 4-to-3 Lane Road Diet allows for significant safety upgrades while minimizing impacts on traffic and transit operations. Travel times for AC Transit's Line 6 will remain largely unchanged, with pending delays of just 3 seconds southbound and 9 seconds faster northbound.

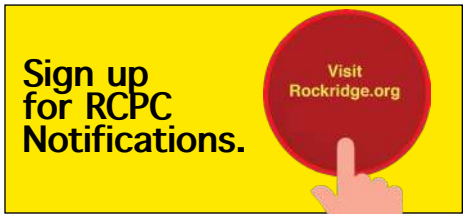
Construction, which will align with Oakland's Measure U-funded Paving Plan, is part of a citywide effort to prioritize safety improvements on high-injury streets. This project closes the final gap on Telegraph Avenue, creating a consistent design from downtown Oakland to the Berkeley border.

While construction will bring temporary disruptions, the result will be a safer, more accessible, and user-friendly corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers. RCPC will keep residents updated as we learn more about the construction schedule and impacts. Thank you for your patience and support as we transform Upper Telegraph Avenue into a safer, vibrant corridor for everyone. For questions or updates, stay connected at Rockridge.org. ■

The Greater Rockridge NCPC meets on the 2nd Thursday of even numbered months.

The next meeting will be held on:
February 13, at 7pm,
Rockridge Library Conference Room, and on Zoom, with special guest **Zac Unger**, the new District 1 City Councilmember.

For details and Zoom link, visit
www.rockridgencpc.com





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Letters to the Editor

Action Now for Safer Streets

Dear Editor: On December 4, I attended the meeting at Presbyterian Church on College Ave (5951 College Ave) to show my support for a Slow Neighborhood Pilot Program in the area bounded by Claremont, College, Alcatraz, and Telegraph. I was gratified by Oakland DOT Director Josh Rowan's commitment to Rockridge, his patience with a passionate crowd, and his stated bias toward action and experimentation. These qualities are sorely needed in our neighborhood because intervention is needed to ensure pedestrian safety and health are prioritized in Rockridge.

Traffic volume and speed need to be reduced significantly in our neighborhood. There have been deaths, accidents, and destroyed property as well as intensive air quality issues when cars idle for blocks during prime commuting times.

Rockridge is full of children and families — and the many schools, parks, daycares, and bike commuters are a wonderful part of our community. I welcomed my first child, Mateo, in early November, and I am so grateful to live here and watch him grow up here. But cut-through traffic from commuters, industrial trucks, construction vehicles, and app drivers is endangering our children, threatening bikers, choking our streets, and compromising our air quality.

We must ask ourselves: What are Rockridge's streets and sidewalks for? I believe we need to prioritize local residents at the expense of those who use our neighborhood simply as a place to recklessly speed through on the way to somewhere else.

The prevailing sentiment at the December meeting was that something must be done to change this status quo. Armed with OakDOT's engagement and commitment to action, we have an opportunity to work together over the next two months to agree upon tangible solutions for our neighborhood. I am optimistic about the forming of a task force and want to express my gratitude for Councilmember **Zac Unger** to his commitment to this process and for his interest in seeing progress made. This has been a 20-year effort for many residents. The time is now to pilot solutions that address the reduction of traffic volume and speed.

Ben Friedman
Colby Street ■

Traffic Diversion Surprises

Dear Editor: Everyone buying a house should expect surprises. This one was a doozy. While my wife and I were still unpacking at our new home on 62nd Street, we, and over 150 neighbors, belatedly learned that neighbors on Colby and Hillegass had been working for months on an unannounced, zero-sum traffic-diversion plan — silently backed by the Oakland Department of Transportation — to dump traffic from their streets onto ours. During an acrimonious town hall on December 4, that plan was suspended. In its place, OakDOT Director Josh Rowan charged an as-yet-unformed committee to present a community-backed alternative plan by early spring.

Another surprise: The brouhaha over the traffic-diversion plan became a great way for my wife and me to meet neighbors. Regardless of which side of the conflict they take, the people we've met are good. We hope

Letters, see next page

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Letters, cont'd

many will become friends.

The surprises keep coming: The neighborhood bounded by College, Alcatraz, Telegraph, and Claremont is remarkably disorganized. Several sub-communities, some as small as one block, are tightly organized, with email lists and in-person meetings. But these fragmented groups don't connect with each other. Our capability for *collective* identity, communication, and action is still at the starting line — thus, the avoidable unpleasantness at the Town Hall. We need to get our act together.

How? We need one effective organization dedicated to the best interests of the entire community. Invite everyone to join with the invitation and a clear mission statement reliably delivered to every residence. Use one comprehensive database of residents to solicit input on issues and keep people informed. Take responsibility for surfacing and resolving conflicting interests at the start of any change effort.

After the divisive Town Hall meeting, many hope the new traffic committee will be a forum including representatives from micro-neighborhoods, emphasizing conflict between hyper-local interests. That might deepen our fragmentation. Worse, it risks ending in a deadlock that frees OakDOT to steamroll us all.

One suggestion is to populate the committee with representatives committed to collaborating for the common good. And let's remember that our traffic issues are trivial compared to the challenges facing the City of Oakland.

Looking back, the root cause of the traffic-diversion conflict may not have been malign intent but failure to communicate. Good people focused on legitimate issues lost sight of the responsibilities we all share as part of this delightful community.

Now's the time to forgive, forget — and organize.

Strat Sherman
62nd Street ■

of Rockridge



Photo by Saeid Kian

Hudson Bay Café: Breakfast Burrito

5401 College Avenue

This year, Hudson Bay Café is celebrating its 40th anniversary, and I can't sing its praises enough. I have to admit I have a soft spot for owner **Sadri Madjlessi**, who shares my Persian heritage. His warmth reminds me of my family, and his dedication to creating a welcoming space is evident in every corner of this neighborhood institution.

What truly sets Hudson Bay Café apart is its incredible food — something you might not expect from a spot that could easily focus on coffee first and food second. But here, the menu shines just as brightly as the espresso machine. Case in point: their breakfast burrito. A perfectly warm, slightly charred tortilla wraps around a perfect combo of flavors — freshly scrambled eggs, crispy yet billowy potatoes, and juicy sausage. And the bacon? It's the star — thick with a crispy edge that adds a wonderful crunch.

Another standout aspect of Hudson Bay is its exceptional prices. In a time when dining out often feels like a splurge, this cafe keeps costs reasonable without sacrificing quality. But perhaps what makes Hudson Bay Cafe most special is its atmosphere. It's more than a cafe — it's a community hub. The space hums with friendly chatter, the baristas greet regulars by name, and you can feel the sense of connection that only comes from being a true neighborhood gem.

If you're in Rockridge, or even if you're not, Hudson Bay Café is worth a visit. Grab a coffee, savor that breakfast burrito, and soak in the welcoming vibes of a place that's been doing it right for four decades. ■

— by Saeid Kian

Send your favorite bite (or beverage) in Rockridge to: editor@rockridge.org



Letters, cont'd

Say Yes, to Affordable Housing

Dear Editor: I am writing in response to the letter concerning the proposed development at 5295 College Ave. It's disheartening to see yet another case of NIMBYism dressed up as "preserving neighborhood character." California is in the middle of a housing crisis and resisting new developments like this actively harms people by driving up costs, displacing residents, and stifling economic opportunity. The reality is, we urgently need more housing — here in Rockridge and across the state.

Let's be honest about what phrases like "visual and environmental impact" or "terrifyingly large structure" truly mean. The fear is not about environmental impact, it's about protecting property values and preserving privilege. This notion of "quality of life" prioritizes the comfort of a few over the basic needs of many. Housing scarcity isn't accidental, it's been engineered through decisions like these, and it's way past time to reject this exclusionary mindset.

California's housing shortage isn't just a policy failure, it's a moral one. Housing scarcity has been built, one blocked development at a time, and we have a responsibility to stop reinforcing this privilege.

I urge the RCPC to stand up for inclusivity, not exclusion, and support the future of all Californians, not just a select few.

Christopher Kaplan
Forest Street ■

More Housing is a Good Idea

Dear Editor: It has been interesting to see all the letters sent in about the proposed 5295 College Avenue project. In particular, it has been heartening to see that some locals support the project.

To remind readers of the context of this project, the SF Bay Area is in a housing crisis. For many years, this area has not created enough new housing, due to zoning and other restrictions making housing development difficult and costly, if not impossible.

We have recently started to see some laws at the state level trying to override oppressive local laws and development processes. The 5295 College Avenue project is aggressively trying to use these laws, like SB 330 and SB 423, to build something that would never have been approved previously.

I live very close to the proposed site and am very strongly in favor of this project. The only way out of the housing crisis is to build much, much more housing. And not just "affordable" housing, but housing of every type.

But my opinion should be irrelevant. I do not think developers should have to take into account the "character" of the neighborhood, or even the opinions of the people in that neighborhood. If you own a property, you should be able to build on it to your wishes, not the wishes of your neighbors. If we can change our mindset to absorb that idea then we might have a shot at building a neighborhood where people can afford to live, which will build a better and more prosperous community.

Ian Gilmore
Manila Ave ■









Rockridge Library JANUARY 2025

For Children

Storytime Thursdays and Saturdays; 10:30am. (No storytime on 1/2/25.)

Chess Club: Wednesdays at 4pm. All ages and skill-levels welcome.

Read to a Dog: Thursdays at 4pm every week.

Tinker Tuesdays: Join us for various crafts for children every Tuesday at 4pm. All ages welcome, children under 8 must bring a grown-up.

Origami for All: Every third Tuesday at 4pm; 1/21. All ages welcome.

Winter Bingo: Complete 5 activities in a row on your bingo card to win a free book! Ages up to 13. Stop by anytime! Program ends 1/21/2025.

East Bay Naturalists: Learn about & meet animals found in your parks and neighborhood. Ages 5-12. Saturday, 1/25 11am.

For Teens, ages 12 – 18

Teen Advisory Board: Second Wednesdays, 1/8; 4pm-5pm. Join the Rockridge Branch Library Teen Advisory Board and take an active role in creating, planning, and implementing programs and services you want to see at your library.

Uno Tournament for Teens: Wednesday, 1/8; 2:30-4:30pm. Bring your card skills to be the Rockridge Teen Uno Tournament! Snacks provided by Friends of the Rockridge Library.

For Adults

Shibori Snowflake Garlands: Jan. 15, 6-7:30pm. Create a magical winter garland with Shibori snowflakes. A sample is currently hanging in the adult side of the library if you want to see a sample. Wintery drinks provided.

Ask Your Area Home Experts: Every 2nd Friday, noon-2pm. Get answers, tips, and connections from a Senior Loan Advisor and a Realtor, both Rockridge locals. Have questions answered about home ownership, maintenance, finance, investing, ADUs, downsizing, moving, and more.

Rockridge Book Club: every 2nd Saturday, 3:30pm-4:30pm. Please call 510-597-5017 for more info and to get a copy of the book. January's book is *The Art Thief: A True Story of Love* by Michael Finkel.

Needlework Circle: every Thursday, 2pm-4pm. Bring your yarn and fiber arts projects to Rockridge Library. Build community, share your passion, learn, have fun!

1-on-1 Computer Help: every Saturday from 10am-12pm. Do you need help with a password or your Email or your phone? Come with your devices and technology questions and our volunteer tech guru will help you get sorted. First come first served. ■

Holiday Closures:
New Year's Day – January 1
Martin Luther King Jr. Day – January 20

Library Hours:
Mon, Thurs, Sat 10am to 5:30pm
Tuesday and Wednesday from 10am to 8pm
Friday, noon to 5:30pm.

Please see the online calendar at www.oaklandlibrary.org/events for events throughout the city.

5366 College Avenue at Manila
510-597-5017

RN Classifieds

List your 36-word message here for only $22 (phone number counts as one word). Make check payable to RCPC, and write "Rockridge News Classifieds" in the memo line. Mail to: RCPC, 4900 Shattuck Ave., P.O. Box 22504, Oakland, 94609-20131.

For more information, email Susan at smontauk@gmail.com.

Deadline for February's issue is: January 23, 2025 (available Feb 8).

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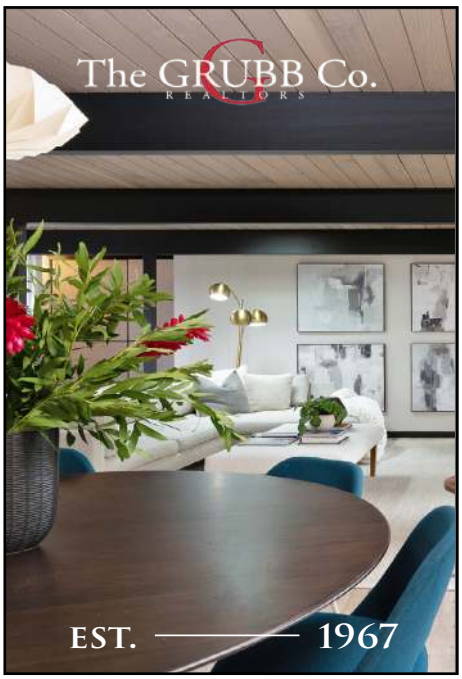
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