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Rockridge News "O" illustration by Laura Serra

Danspace: Rockridge's 50-year Legacy of Dance Inclusivity

by Madeleine Turner, senior at Oakland Tech



Photo provided by Danspace

Beth Hoge, owner and founder of Danspace, recently found an old notebook where she wrote down her goals for her dream ballet school, which she had yet to start.

"I wanted it to be a space where people could experience themselves dancing—where they could learn the basics without judgement; only guidance and support," Hoge said. "I wanted there to be no particular body image or expectations."

Hoge is a Juilliard alumni and following her 10-year professional career in New York City, she began to feel a calling towards teaching, looking to popularize a newer, kinder style of ballet training.

"Less forcing, straining… more positive feedback and encouragement," Hoge said. "It might take a while to catch on, but I felt the need was there. So I began."

Founded in 1976—and, in 1985, relocated a stone's throw from Frog Park on Hudson Street—Danspace created a legacy in Rockridge through its inclusivity and authenticity. I should know; I've been here at Danspace as both a student and a teacher-in-training. I have seen students come in upset over the struggles of childhood, and leave with the biggest smile on their faces. Danspace is able to intertwine the joys of movement, music and creativity with classical ballet training.

I'm 17 years old now, but began my ballet training at age nine. I went through two studios over the course

Danspace contintued next page

Meet the Firehouse 19 A-Squad Protecting You This Holiday Season

by Liam Pierce

From Left-to-Right: Nicholas Ramirez, Ceciley Johnson, Michael Worthington and Brian Petrie | Photo by Liam Pierce



Captain Michael Worthington wears his grandfather's firefighter belt buckle every day he's at Rockridge's Firehouse 19. It reminds him of his visits to his grandfather's station as a kid in Cleveland.

"We spend so much time away from our families that they come to the firehouse instead," Worthington said of his own family, noting that it's particularly true during the holidays. "Sometimes we do Secret Santa or a white elephant—you've got games for the kids. You make it a memorable thing."

Firehouse continued page 4

Danspace, from front page

of five years, and have certainly seen (and experienced) all sides of the ballet world. I can recall my elementary years spent in front of a mirror, waiting for an angry woman to list my shortcomings. I never thought ballet would be a comfortable experience for me, a sentiment that many dancers share.

Ballet is a notoriously toxic activity. We often hear tales of disordered eating, racism and an emphasis on perfection. However, perfection isn't always feasible, creating more issues surrounding mental health and self-esteem.

There's a euphoric feeling coming from a mere compliment from your teacher that makes all the panic attacks and self-hatred go quiet. But after one bad class, it all comes flooding back. The culture of ballet, traditionally, encourages all the girls to be the same. The same height, weight, look, behavior—everything is uniform. However that all changed my freshman year, when I began taking ballet at Danspace.

Katie Taylor, the operations manager at Danspace describes the studio's history as authentically inclusive.

"Ballet training is very rigorous and demanding, but it wasn't meant to be this exclusive experience," Katie Taylor, operations manager at Danspace, said. "It was meant to be: if you're showing up here and you want to dance, then we're dancing."

And dancing they did.



Before the little green building on the corner of Hudson became Danspace, it was a meat market, a dry cleaners and a mailroom. Hoge's husband, David, transformed the building into the Danspace we know and love today. Following her time at Juilliard, Hoge befriended Andra and Ernesta Corvino. After falling in love with their musicality and strength, Danspace is now the only school in the Bay Area following the Corvino approach. In 1980, four years after its inception, Hoge introduced the children's division at Danspace.

The first thing that struck me when I joined the children's program at Danspace was the fact that they have a mini fridge. It's small, tucked away in a closet, but it was chock-full of yogurt, granola, cheese sticks, applesauce—all the hits. They also have cups for juice or water, in case you forget your water bottle. It was apparent that this was an environment where health took precedent over how far you can stretch your splits.

In fact, gentle repetition became the signature of Danspace. The stress isn't on the final product, but how we got there, and if we got there in a ballet-approved manner.

"Like a math teacher who just gives you the answer, but doesn't say how they got there," Dancespace director KT Mower said. "You have to describe what you're feeling, what you're doing and how you should get there."

For 40 years, Danspace has resided in Rockridge, instilling a love for dance into everyone that comes through the door.

Today, I help run the front desk and assist in a class once a week for one of our younger levels. Seeing the behind-the-scenes has helped me understand all that goes into creating an environment where everyone is happy to be there. And believe me: it's not easy.

Building inclusivity is equal amounts hard work and love, coming together to ensure everyone feels happy, comfortable and respected. With classes for all ages, Danspace cultivates an environment in which anyone with the slightest inclination to dance, will be dancing. ■

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Letters are limited to 350 words and published at the editor's discretion in the order received. Send letters to: editor@rockridge.org. Please include 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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Marcia Alpert's Quilt Exhibit at the Rockridge Library Verges on Dreams

by Laura E. Miller



Marcia Alpert's quilt "Virus Monster Over Town" (right) started out as a pencil drawing | photos by the artist

Artists gather at the Rockridge Library every Thursday to create unique items with yarn, thread and fabric. Fellow artists, ages 25 to 85, share artistic methods and swap life stories, open up about heartfelt quandaries and cheer each other on.

One of these artists is Marcia Alpert, whose brilliant quilts and watercolors will be exhibited in her solo show, "The Illustrated Journey," upstairs in the library from Friday, Dec. 12– Jan. 29. A collection of the drawings that inspired her quilts will also be on view there at the artist's reception on January 3.

After a traumatic fall in 2023, Alpert began doing small, nightly ink and colored pencil drawings to aid her spiritual recovery. She dubbed them "healing shapes" and they eventually morphed into images of people and animals. These compositions eventually evolved into pictorial wall quilts.

Her quiltwork came to the attention of the adult services librarian Anita Bowen, who urged Alpert to exhibit them there. That commitment energized Alpert and moved her to create six new quilts.

Her latest piece—a quilt inspired by her own drawing—is called "Virus Monster Over the Town" and shows a deceptively friendly looking creature floating over three buildings and observed by a person and a dog.

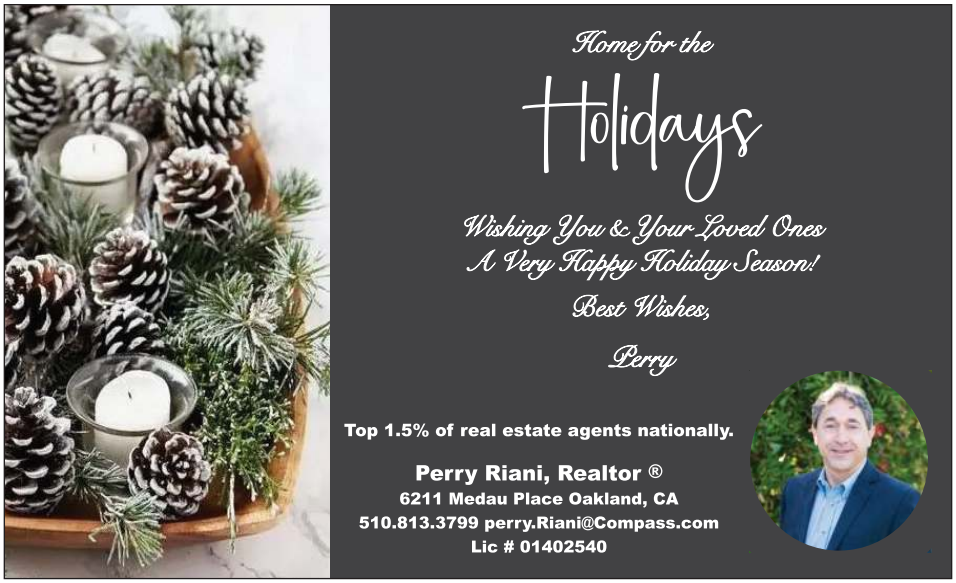
"Marcia's work makes me stand still and be happy," a fellow artist said. "It really sparks my imagination; her energetic output is inspiring."

Alpert's works are colorful, fantastical creatures who are impish or cherubic, spritely or thunderous. The pieces conjure up a story in a viewer's mind. Witnesses to Alpert's work have been reminded of the dreamlike symbols in the paintings of Marc Chagall or the fantastical Golden Compass stories of Phillip Pullman.

She writes that her figures have "eyes to see" and "fingers and toes to take action," each element a vignette of a spiritual and symbolic journey anchored in physical reality.

Alpert exhibited watercolor paintings throughout the 1990s and 2000s locally and at art fairs in the western states. Fabric work and quilting paralleled her painting along the way. In addition, much of her own wardrobe is hand- and machine-sewn.

Since retiring from her day job in materials prep at the Berkeley Public Library in 2008, she is enjoying quilting with the East Bay Heritage Quilters and is especially fulfilled by participating in charitable endeavors there. She intends to continue her engagement with the library needlework circle and to evolve with her art, building new exhibits as she is inspired. ■





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Firehouse, from front page

Worthington is one of 12 firefighters who reside in Firehouse 19—with three separate crews of four firefighters rotating in 48-hour A, B and C shifts, followed by 96 hours off. The station is tucked away on the north side of Highway 24, just east of College Avenue, at 5776 Miles Ave.

During the holidays, when neighbors settle in and the nights stretch long and cold, the station becomes an anchor—for firefighters and for the community. Their daily work moves with the pace of Rockridge, with the neighborhood and its firefighters quietly shaping each other.

UNIQUELY FIREHOUSE 19

Worthington—49, with 28 years experience and only three months on with Firehouse 19's A shift—acknowledges that, in one way, they might be Rockridge's most fortunate residents.

"We're lucky; we get compensated to live here," Worthington said. "There are tradeoffs—the sleep deprivation, the stress—but Rockridge is residential, so we get more downtime than other stations, which is not by-and-large the Oakland fire experience."

According to the Oakland Fire Department (OFD)'s most recent data, Firehouse 19 ranked No. 18 out of 25 stations in terms of call responses. The top five categories of their 1,069 911 responses in a year were EMS Code 3 (life-threatening emergencies) at 65.4% of total calls, structure fires at 7.8%, engine utility (support vehicles sent) at 7.4%, communication alarms (basically: alarms) at 4.9% and investigations at 3.2%.

Captain Nicholas Salgado (54, with 27 years experience), works at Firehouse 17, but was at Firehouse 19 for a year before Worthington took over.

"It's not an excessively busy firehouse in terms of run call volume and it may seem normal to the untrained eye," Salgado said. "But that couldn't be further from the truth; the types of incidents you're called to involve a much higher level of skills training."

Both Salgado and Worthington pointed to the challenges of Firehouse 19, which is first due company to incidents along Highway 24 and the Caldecott Tunnel, often coordinating with Berkeley, Orinda and Moraga fire departments. Additionally, Firehouse 19 handles a whole host of incidents at Rockridge BART station, where Salgado said they were called to "nearly daily." Salgado and Worthington also mentioned that Firehouse 19 is positioned to handle brush fires in the hills and stranded or injured hikers along trails.

It turns out it's pretty tricky to build the technical knowledge, haul equipment and stay safe when it comes to tunnels, BART, highways and hiking trails, according to Salgado.

However, when it comes to the types of calls for businesses along College Avenue and the residential



COOL TIPS FOR A FIRE-SAFE HOLIDAY

You're fire-smart, right? You know the basics: don't play with matches, don't let circus fire swallowers perform inside, etc. Well, here are some tips/facts you might not know:

In the U.S.

- ~1/2 of Dec. decoration🔥's are 🕯️'s
- Christmas Day = peak 🕯️🔥's
- 2/5ths of Dec. decoration🔥's = too close to heat source
- 1/3rd of 🎄🔥's = electrical problems
- 2023: 1,446 home cooking 🔥's on:

No. 1 cooking-🔥 day: 🦃-day

- No. 2: 🎅 & No. 3: 🎅-Eve

"During the holidays, you have a lot of inattentive, inexperienced cooks. And no one's going to repel from your ceiling and say, 'Ah, ah, ah—that's not a safe way to do that...'"
– Captain Worthington



Cooking

-Keep snugly fit lids to 🍲's nearby because...

- Grease 🔥's; *don't* use 🚰 on them

Instead: smother 🍕 with lid, turn heat off

- Oven 🔥's: turn off the heat, keep oven closed

Christmas 🎄's:

- Cut 2" off the base of your 🎄, because it' the most dry part
- Water the 🎄 daily
- Get rid of 🎄 when dry
- Oakland pickup = compost day

Decorations

- Consider using ⚡🕯️'s
- Check string 💡's for broken 🔌's
- Use clips, not nails for 💡's

3 feet = magic 🪄 number

- Keep decorations (including a 🎄)
  - 3 feet from heat sources: 🕎's, radiators, 🔥-places, space heaters, 🕯️'s or vents
- For 🕯️'s, distance from heat is 12"
- Cooks need 3-foot radius of space

Information provided by OFD and NFPA

neighborhood, Salgado said that, proportionally, Firehouse 19 is not that dissimilar to the rest of OFD.

A PERSONNEL TOUCH

But there are several other things that make Rockridge's Firehouse 19 unique. First, the architecture. It makes for a striking facade, a single-story structure with baby blue steel beams propping up a brick-red roof at about a 30° angle that almost makes its way to the ground—with two giant garage doors for the station's engine and truck. There are benefits to a single-story design: they allow for speedier response time.



"That old sort of dramatic going down the fire pole," Worthington said. "It's not the most efficient."

Then there's the way that Rockridge maintains itself. Worthington said that the neighborhood's proximity to the Oakland Hills Fire of 1991 made residents particularly fire-conscious. And the Firehouse 19 crew all agreed that the way neighbors attend to trash and leaves very effectively reduces fire danger.

"People really care here," said Nicholas Ramirez, Firehouse 19's paramedic firefighter (with nine years experience), who grew up in Oakland and visited Rockridge often as a kid. "There are a whole lot of people who sweep the front porch, who pick up trash who want to see Oakland beautiful."

But perhaps the foremost factor that makes Firehouse 19 unique is the firefighters themselves. Rockridge News sat down with one-third of the Firehouse 19 crew: the A shift. Every single-engine shift contains the same combination of an officer (usually a captain), an engineer, a firefighter-paramedic and a firefighter. Together, the 12 firefighters have an average of roughly 16.5 years experience.

Ceciley Johnson, a probationary (training) firefighter, grew up four blocks away from the Berkeley fire station where her dad worked and lived. She and her brothers would climb on the engines, run around the station and press various buttons just to see what they would do.

"I felt like my dad was a real life superhero," Johnson said, her admiration glowing. "I remember him bringing his uniform home and it actually looked like it had a cape."

Brian Petrie, a skateboarder in his youth, has 19 years experience as an engineer: the person who operates the fire engine, manages water pressure, pumps and equipment to support the crew.

"He's one of the most important pieces of the puzzle," Worthington said. "Especially within the first 10 minutes on the scene."

HOLIDAY HEROICS

The crew didn't recall many harrowing stories about holiday-induced fires—nothing about menorahs torching living rooms or Kwanzaa candles incinerating a whole house.

Petrie mentioned a fried turkey incident he heard about on High Street ("take that turkey out early and let it fully thaw," he advised). And that he'd had a few calls—to other parts of Oakland—where people set fire to dried-out Christmas trees left on the curb.

"It goes up so fast that by the time we get there, we're looking for it because it's already burned itself out," Petrie said. "Hopefully it hasn't burned anything else."

Worthington gave a general warning about kitchen safety—the biggest cause of holiday fires—especially about croweded kitchens and leaving pot handles facing outward: a real hazard.

But when it came to Rockridge-specific, holiday-related stories, not a fire was stirring; not even a house.

Though the crew is called to various chaotic scenes all throughout Oakland, there was a shared gratitude for the relative calm of their immediate district of Rockridge.

"When other firefighters come to Rockridge, they go 'this is still Oakland?'—the sun is shinier over here, the people wave," Ramirez said. "There's a shared experience here; best district in OFD." ■

Beautifying a Utility Box on Chabot Road

by Aanika L. Newman, age 9



From Left-to-Right: Andre, Jasmine, Raphael, Aanika, Shayne and Iyla | Photo by Marissa Toffoli

Squeak, squeak. That's the sound of our gloves scrubbing off years and years of caked dirt from green metal.

A group of us neighborhood kids were cleaning utility boxes on Chabot Road at College Avenue on a sunny Saturday afternoon, with the goal of painting two boxes and two poles a shade of baby blue. For the paint to stick, we needed to remove the dirt off first. That took a lot of time, energy and cleaning spray.

We were painting these boxes for a few reasons: One, we wanted to make the community more beautiful. We noticed that the utility boxes were sometimes tagged or people put their old boba tea cups on top of them, and we knew that wasn't good. We wanted to make the boxes look nicer so that people would appreciate it as art.

Second, we wanted to help our fellow muralist, Rachel Perls. She was going to paint flowers on the utility boxes and poles on top of the baby blue coat that we painted.

The third reason was because we wanted to build our community (not destroy it). We wanted to spend time with each other, to hang out and to work together to make something better. That's how I think a sense of community is built.

Our team of kids encourages other small groups to come together to make Rockridge more beautiful.

Thank you to Rachel Perls for donating her talents to residents all over Oakland and RCPC for sponsoring our activity. ■

Become a Rockridge News Marshal!

by Susan Montauk

Thank you, Cristin Williams!
Cristin Williams has just informed us that she is going back to school full-time and sadly has to pass the torch as Marshal of the Alcatraz Avenue area of distribution. Williams has been a very dedicated marshal for several years now and the block captains in her area from Alcatraz Avenue to the Berkeley border could always rely on her to get their bundles on time. She's a hard act to follow, but we would love for someone in her area or nearby to accept the challenge.

Thank you, Judy Berne!
For her service as Block Captain of Coronado Avenue and for her many wonderful stories and interviews that appeared in The Rockridge News' column "Eyes on Rockridge" over the years. Berne, a career reporter, was a highly valued staff member and will be sorely missed. Coronado Avenue now needs a new volunteer to deliver the newsletter to 14C/D. — See below:

What a Marshal does:

Pick up a box of 11 bundles of newsletters for this route from the nearby bundling house the first Friday or Saturday of the month.

To volunteer:
Call or email Susan at 510-547-3855 or smontauk@gmail.com
Let us know if you are interested and/or, perhaps, might need more information. ■

CLAUDIA MILLS
REAL ESTATE TEAM
5737 Country Club Dr
BAY AREA PORTFOLIO

Rockridge's Transitional Shelter Needs Your Help: Donate to their Financial Literacy Course

by Liam Pierce



Photo provided by EOCP

Family Matters is the name of the homeless rehousing program that lives in the first and second floors of the former CCA dorms at 5276 Broadway Ave. And "family matters" may as well be the program's mantra.

"When you take families suffering from homelessness and you put them in nicer areas, it makes them want to do better," said Ieisha Watson, director of Family Matters at the East Oakland Community Project (EOCP).

"To walk out into Rockridge: it's a lot of friendly people: everyone's walking; everyone's happy; it's a clean neighborhood. Sometimes the community is part of your healing."

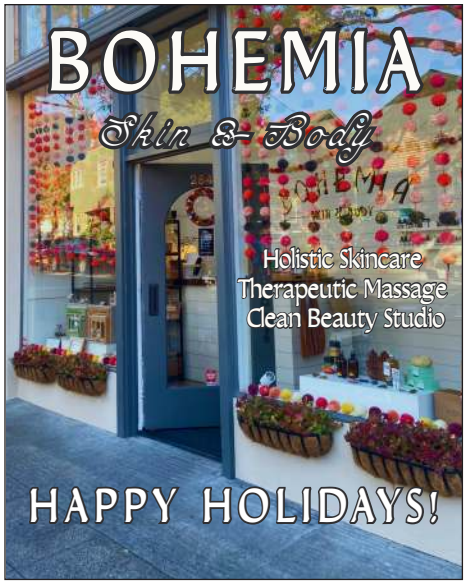
Watson is currently leading a fundraiser to help the 20 families—who go through the program on six month cycles—get access to financial literacy classes. One family that Watson was working with had a particularly difficult time finding housing at first.

But after taking Family Matters' financial literacy class—led by Veronica Dangerfield of Patelco Credit Union—the family were not only able to build up their savings over two months but secured housing and still had money set aside. Watson said these lessons often help families throughout a lifetime.

Family Matters' real mission is "no child left on the street," according to Watson. And their work goes beyond that. They want to make sure families feel comfortable and welcome—and Rockridge residents have helped with that. Some families have brought cookies; one little girl sewed pillows for the children; others come in to read books out loud. One of Watson's passion projects is to decorate the residences for the seasons.k

"When families are coming out of their rooms and coming down to the lobby, I want them to feel like it's their living room: you see a Christmas tree, and it makes them feel like they're not missing anything," Watson said. "Even the kids who have been through a lot of trauma—their eyes light up."

Consider contributing this holiday season to help your neighbors at Family Matters and other EOCP programs via eocp.net. Or, to contribute directly to Family Matters, send a check to EOCP, 7515 International Blvd., Oakland, CA 94621), write "for FM" on the memo line. ■







ROCKRIDGE HOLIDAY GIFT

Golden Bambino Thrift Shop Bella Vita Blick Art Materials Bosko's Picture Framing Chic Boutique Claremont Rug Cole Hardware Crossroad Trading Furniture Hazara Rug Gallery Imaginarium Marin Rug Market Mercy Home Museum Fine Futon Shop Nail Salon Co. Op Refill Shop Skin Savvy Studio Full Service Tea Room The Collective The Hamburger Hall The Chocolate Dragon Bittersweet CRE Kitchen and Bar Antique Mall Ice Cream Records Tool Rental Bed Bar & Grill Boba Guys Billingsgate Seafood The Burrito Shop Cactus Taqueria The Cheese Shop at Market Hall

Rockridge's warm, village-like atmosphere and eclectic mix of locally owned stores make for a festive place to dive into holiday shopping. The tree-lined sidewalks, enchanting storefronts and welcoming shopkeepers create a sense of community that big malls just can't match.

Rockridge's small businesses rely on local support to thrive and sustain jobs. These businesses also invest back in the community through events and donations to local causes. By shopping local, you help preserve the vibrant, walkable charm that makes Rockridge such a special place to live, visit and enjoy.

The neighborhood's cozy cafes, independent bookstores and delicious eateries add an extra layer of joy to the season. Make a day out of your holiday outing! You can sip locally roasted coffee while browsing handcrafted goods, pick up gourmet treats for a holiday party and finish off with a warm meal at one of the area's beloved restaurants.

The Rockridge District Association's website is a fantastic holiday resource, featuring everything from gift ideas and seasonal events to catering options, venue rentals, health resources, fundraisers and local food drives.

Its Holiday Hub highlights unique gifts for all ages and interests, making it easy to find something special for everyone on your list.

For more gift ideas & other holiday resources, visit: rockridgedistrict.com

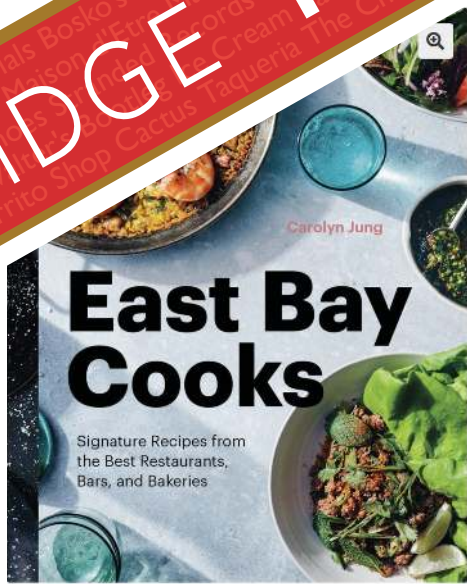
by Jody Colley, Rockridge District Association

Photos provided by respective businesses



These might be the prettiest little solar hand-crank radios you ever did see. They come in two sizes, in designs and colors so pleasing you might not want to stash them away in your disaster kit. Use them year-round, knowing they're also ready to be your info source in an emergency. A practical, beautiful gift.

Local Economy (6028 College Ave.)



"East Bay Cooks" is an impressive collection of eighty signature dishes from 40 of the city's leading restaurants. It's a region that's got you covered, no matter what the craving. An uncomplicated taco with the power to stir the soul? A nourishing bowl of authentic Singaporean laksa? Shrimp and grits with layers of flavors never imagined? It's all here, and designed with home cooks in mind, so that re-creating signature dishes from the area's favorite chefs has never been easier. Its beautiful photography serves as a culinary tribute to the East Bay and its unique ethnic food variety.

Nathan & Co (5636 College Ave.)



Give the gift of a quiet mind, reduced tension and mental reset. When suspended in a skin-temperature solution of Epsom salt and water, your loved one will lose track of where their body ends and the water begins. They'll experience a euphoric afterglow that can last for days.

Cocoon Day Spa (5377 College Ave.)



Xocolate & Confections is known for beautiful and delicious bonbons and truffles made with organic, fair-trade chocolate and natural ingredients. Each is handmade in small batches in Berkeley. Each box includes a variety of textures and flavors sure to please any chocolate lover.

Xocolate & Confections (5854 College Ave.)

GUIDE



Finch + Fennel's Strawberry Fig Preserves are carefully crafted to balance and enhance the flavors of your favorite soft cheeses. This jam is specially formulated to pair with goat cheese, cream cheese, blue cheese or Brie. Add it to your next holiday charcuterie board.

Veranda (5931 College Ave.)



This reversible cashmere buckle shawl is so versatile, beautiful and cozy. The shawl is 30 inches long, providing the perfect amount of cover and comfort.

In Full Swing (5937 College Ave.)



These traditional Japanese watercolors for artists and crafters are recognized by their vivid color and quick dissolution. They offer a wide range of colors without mixing and create whimsical, dreamy effects.

Blick Art Materials (5301 Broadway Ave.)



The annual wine boxes from Vino are made up of their seasonal favorites that best pair with your holiday spread. You can customize your box by wine types. They also offer free local delivery.

Vino! (6319 College Ave.)



Friends and Neighbors is a game that focuses on emotions. Can players help a girl who's sad because she's standing out in the rain or a boy who's afraid of the dark? Parents help their children recognize characters' feelings and needs; considering others is the first step to building empathy.

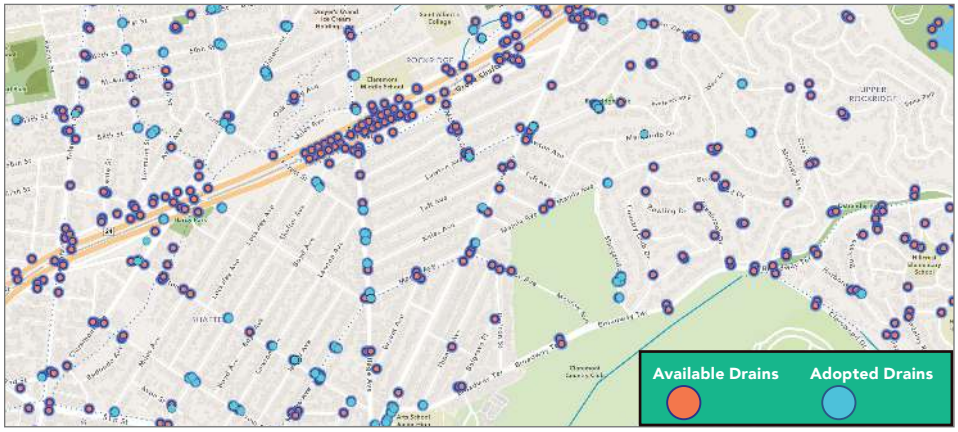
Bella Vita (5511 College Ave.) ■

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Help Oakland Out: Adopt a Storm Drain

by Liam Pierce



Adopt-A-Drain map

Heidi Giancola, an environmental analyst with the Oakland Public Works Department, has adopted a few drains of her own via Oakland's Adopt-A-Drain program. She has caringly tended to some in downtown Oakland, making sure they're not clogged in case of rain.

"Mine are more trash guzzlers than leaf guzzlers," Giancola said.

Oakland has 13,000 storm drains, but only 1,600 have been adopted. Even if Rockridge residents are particularly conscientious about raking leaves and clearing drains, Giancola encourages residents to officially claim their drain parenthood to help the city with tracking. There are even prizes for hitting certain marks with your drain reporting: notebooks, mugs and (appropriately) water bottles.

Rockridge resident Brooke Levin was assistant director of Oakland Public Works in 2012, when she helped oversee the launch of Adopt-A-Drain. She said the program was started after a particularly heavy bout of rain.

"It makes a big difference when you rake and dispose of leaves, pick up litter and report larger items to 311," Levin said.

Rockridge has a unique history with street clearing that predates the Adopt-A-Drain program.

When Oakland launched its official street-sweeping program in 1986—the one that requires people to move their cars on certain days—Rockridge residents pushed back. They petitioned for an exemption, and the City agreed, on the condition that neighbors would keep their sidewalks, curbs and gutters clean themselves.

"That was a long time ago," Levin said. "New residents may not be aware they're responsible for clearing leaves."

Through Adopt-A-Drain, Oakland provides tools to help with drain clearing, such as trash grabbers, rakes, trash bags; they also send people over to pick up any green waste spillover. There will also be a city-wide Adopt-A-Drain event on January 19 for MLK Day of Service.

With rainy season here and leaves continuing to fall, it's more important than ever to keep your drains debris-free. Visit tinyurl.com/2znnk4er for more information. ■

RNews CORRECTIONS

■







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BEST BITES

Belotti: Fantastico Insalata di Lattuga Burro Vivae

by Jeff Sykes

Almost 10 years ago, my wife and I walked by a new restaurant on College Avenue. As we stopped to look at the menu in the window, someone got up from their meal and stepped outside to tell us how great the food was. When was the last time this happened to you?

The same thing happened to us again—two more times—before we first dined at Belotti Ristorante. We have since become regulars. This is our favorite restaurant. We consider the food to be some of the best we have eaten anywhere in the world.

Michele Belotti was born in Bergamo, Italy and was classically trained as a chef. His wife Joyce was born in Taiwan and handles daily tasks. Several of the servers were born and raised in Italy. Their small restaurant is a friendly neighborhood place with indoor and outdoor seating.

Davide, one of the servers from Venice, always warmly greets my wife and our dog as we walk by. While our dog is normally favored with a handful of veal placed on the sidewalk, Davide is quick to joke that I, however, am not allowed and need to go home. We're just that close. When my wife and daughter were recently in Venice, they spent three evenings with Davide and his family being shown the town and best places to eat.



photo by the author

Everything at Belotti Ristorante is fantastic. Particularly the salad of living butter lettuce, toasted pine nuts, lemon dressing and Grana Padano cheese. Harvested from its root ball immediately before it is plated, this is unlike any other lettuce. It is mild, tender and sweet. No salad is fresher or tastes more like summer.

Some reviews boast that Belotti Ristorante has the best pasta in the East Bay. It is all freshly made with 100% Italian flour, extra virgin olive oil and some with 15–20 egg yolks per pound. The pasta dishes are made with grass-fed beef and veal shank, pork loin, sausage prosciutto, pork shoulder, smoked pancetta, duck sugo, rabbit sugo, wild boar sugo, braised osso buco and a variety of cheeses and other ingredients. This time of year, black and white truffles are found throughout the menu.

Belotti also has an extensive and reasonably priced wine list.

In addition to Belotti Ristorante, their other establishment Belotti Bottega—part shop, part restaurant—is on Piedmont Avenue, where all of their pasta and sauces are made. You can watch the chefs at work and buy their pasta, fresh truffles, olive oils, wines and cheeses and enjoy them all at home.

Belotti Ristorante is being talked about far and wide. When my wife and I were attending a cooking class in Japan, we asked a Bay Area couple what their favorite restaurant was. They said Belotti Ristorante.

In my opinion, Belotti Ristorante deserves a Michelin star and will have one. Buon appetito. ■

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor:

I was very distressed to learn that both editors of the Rockridge News were fired. Worse yet, is that their terminations were without explanation. And adding insult to injury, it's quite disturbing that the interim editor does not live in the Rockridge.

I have always enjoyed getting my copy of the Rockridge News and in particular, loved to hear about my neighborhood and neighbors.

I've had a number of interactions with Anna Marks and found her to be very helpful and generous.

I have no doubt that my feelings here are not unique. Please consider resigning your unjust decision. If that isn't possible, please explain why this decision was made and how, in your eyes, it benefits the Rockridge Community.

-Marsha Balian, Kales Ave.

Dear Editor,

As a 13-year resident of Rockridge and a regular reader of the News, I want to welcome you to your post and congratulate you on a stellar first issue. As I often do on Sunday mornings, I read the main articles aloud to my wife at the breakfast table. Only this time I had tears in my eyes. The story about Coyo Tena was powerful. Thank you for centering indigenous people (including Linda Yamane!), and reminding us in your intro letter about what truly matters.

I look forward to this next phase of the News. We are lucky to have a professional journalist leading our little neighborhood newsletter, and your experience already shows. (I say "little," but I'm sure I don't need to tell you how local publications like this one have an outsized influence in our climate of fading media.)

Keep doing what you're doing!

-Stephen Coles w/ Laura Serra ■

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BART SweaterFest Merriment in Rockridge Plaza

by Henry Symons, BART Community Affairs Director

BART's popular SweaterFest returns to the Rockridge BART Station plaza on Saturday, Dec. 13 from 1-3 p.m. The free event will feature live music, crafts and rides through the parking lot on the BARTmobile, decorated for the holidays. A pop-up BART merch store will be selling transit themed gifts, including the coveted 2025 BART holiday sweater. BART holiday sweater owners are encouraged to wear theirs for a large group photo at the event. ■





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Dogs (& Cats) of Rockridge



If their cuddle puddles were measured in volume, **Chico (14)**—a senior dog—and **Stasha (16 months)**, a mischievous tabby/Maine Coon mix, would rival Lake Baikal. When not cuddling, Stasha (aka Cleocatra) is pouncing on Chico (aka Cheeky-week) to keep him spry. Chico's Rockridge hobbies include reading his 'pee-mail' on the streets, while Stasha catches up on BirdTV™ through the window.

Dogs of Rockridge illustration by Laura Serra

Let's cut to the chase: **Ollie (3)**—aka Oliver Horatio von Loewenfeldt—is a dastardly table thief of ill repute. His family has put up more gates than a medieval castle to abate his kitchen table tyranny. When he's not rasacking his family-of-five's vittles, he's the cuddliest good boy imaginable. In case you need to shake him down for food that mysteriously disappeared, you can find him loitering in Bushrod Park. ■



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

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RCPC to Launch New Website in January

by Gary Barg, RCPC Board Member



In January 2026, RCPC will launch a new website. Same URL: (rockridge.org), but with loads of new content and features.

You'll see familiar oldies like: archived Rockridge News issues, upcoming events and information about Rockridge boundaries and RCPC. But on top of that, there will be new features like blogs, a completely new, easier-to-navigate layout and a decked-out newsreader for the Rockridge News. Planned for later: a dedicated Events page listing events like book clubs, art classes and other group activities the community is involved with.

We look forward to hearing your feedback as we roll out this new community resource! ■

Rockridge Food Drive Update!

by Star Lightner, RCPC Vice Chair

By the time you read this, the Rockridge food drive will be wrapping up, BUT there is still time to donate food or money to help us reach our goal. The folks at the Food Bank have expressed their deep appreciation to the residents of Rockridge for your generosity—let's keep going and make it to our goal! Please make a food donation by Dec. 8 and a financial donation by Dec. 15.

Support Families Who Were Denied SNAP

RCPC

donate.accfb.org/vfd/RockridgeGives

At the time of this writing, the Food Bank had picked up from Market Hall and Claremont Middle School three times already, and twice at the Rockridge Library. That translates to Rockridge residents having donated more than 1,000 pounds of food in barrels in just over two weeks! Final barrel pickup is the week of Dec. 8.

Our virtual food drive is also doing fantastic—we have a total of $8,000 in matching funds, and have raised just over $5,000 so far! If we can raise $3,000 more, the Food Bank will receive $16,000!!

Please contribute any way you can. While the government shutdown is finally over, there will likely be delays and possibly only partial SNAP benefits in the near-term. Thank you for your generosity! ■

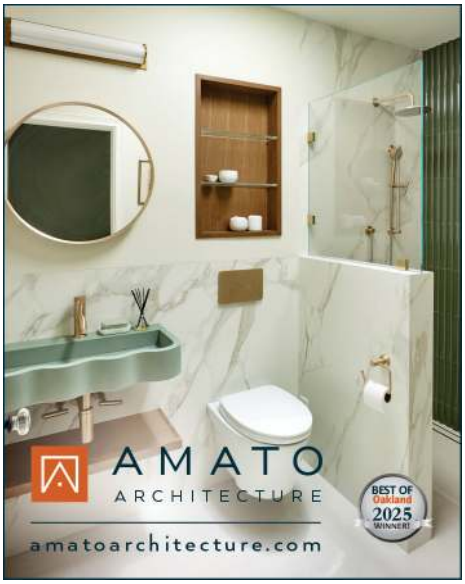
RCPC Board Update on Community Vision Plan

The Draft will be available for public input in January

Thanks to the hundreds of residents who engaged in this process! We've been carefully reviewing your feedback & conducting analysis on how to implement the ideas shared.

More details in the next Rockridge News or join our email list @ Rockridge.org

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

Deadline for JANUARY News is: Dec. 18, 2025 (available Jan. 9.)

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Rockridge Library DECEMBER 2025

For All Ages (Red = Dec.-only events)

Winter Kamishibai Stories and Snowflakes: Mondays, 12/22 & 12/29 at 3:30 p.m. All ages, please join us for paper theater stories followed by paper snowflake making! Children; bring your whole extended family!

For Children

Special Saturday Mornings instead of Storytime:
12/6; East Bay Parks Program; all ages welcome.

12/13; Kids Go Mandarin; storytime and songs to learn Mandarin, for the whole family.

Storytime: Thursdays and Saturdays; 10:30 a.m.

Chess Club: Wednesdays; 4 p.m. All ages and skill-levels welcome.

Read to a Dog: Thursdays; 4 p.m. Practice reading aloud with Gladys the dog.

Craft Programs: MoChA at the Library! Thursday, 11/20, 3:30 p.m. Monthly art workshops for children & families led by teachers from the Museum of Children's Art. For ages 5-15 and caregivers.

Making Stories Club: Thursday, 12/4; 3:30 p.m. (No meeting 1/1.) Monthly workshop to write, illustrate and tell stories. Make books, zines, stories, comics, kamishibai or plays! Join youth writers and illustrators. For ages 8 to 12.

For Teens ages 12 – 18

Holiday Party Wednesday 12/10 2–4 p.m. Come make snowglobes, snowflakes & decorate cookies!

For Adults

Making Sense of Medicare presented by Denise Lombard: Friday Dec. 5th, 1-3pm. Drop ins welcome. Learn about the ins and outs of the 2026 changes coming to Medicare and how to make the best coverage decisions.

Meet the Author: Wednesday, Dec. 3rd, 6:30-7:45pm. Ilana DeBare, author of "Shaken Loose," will be in conversation w/ journalist and author Sue Fishkoff about her newest novel, "Shaken Free."

Ask Your Area Home Experts: Every 2nd Friday, 12:00-2:00. 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, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Please call 510-597-5017 for more info and to get a copy of the book. November's book is "The Sentence," by Louise Erdrich.

Needlework Circle: every Thursday, 1-3 p.m. Bring your yarn and fiber arts projects to Rockridge Library. Build community, share your passion, learn and have fun!

Artist's Open Studio: every 3rd Tuesday, 2-4:30 p.m.

1-on-1 Technology Help: every Saturday, 10am-12pm and 1-3 p.m., Tuesdays 5:30-7:30 p.m. and Wednesdays 5:30-7:30 p.m. Come with your devices and technology questions and our volunteer tech guru will help you get sorted. Signup recommended.

Adult Crafting Series: Tuesday Dec. 2nd, 6-7:30 p.m. Draw a bird with lellobird. Come learn how to recognize and break down bird's unique features into simple shapes to draw realistic or stylized birds. Makes a great holiday card or gifts.

This is for You: Gift-Giving as a Way of Life. Books will be sold onsite by A Great Good Place for Books. This program is sponsored by the Friends of the Rockridge Library.

Rockridge Gardening Series: on hiatus until 2026.

Chair Yoga: Monday Dec. 1st and Dec. 15th, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Learn from certified instructor Bett Bollhoefer, drop ins welcome. ■

Rockridge Library Hours:

Mon., Thurs., & Sat.: 10am – 5:30pm
Tues. & Weds.: 10am – 8pm
Fri.: 12 noon – 5:30 pm

Holiday Closures:
Christmas Eve: Weds., Dec. 24 – Close at 5:30pm
Christmas Day: Thurs., Dec. 25
New Year's Eve: Wed., Dec. 31
New Year's Day: Thurs., Jan. 1

Please also check our calendar: oaklandlibrary.org/events for events in the city.

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