The Rockridge News

rockridge.org

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

"RO" illustration by Laura Serra

SAVE THE DATES | RCPC Board Election, voting at The Rockridge Library: Thurs. April 23, Sat. April 25. More info at rockridge.org

Rockridge HICAP Volunteers Help Neighbors with Medicare

by Paul McDonnell, RCPC Board Member



HICAP volunteers in training.

Shortly after Don Smullin, 79, was diagnosed with a rare liver disease in November, he discovered—on his own, without warning—that his insurance carrier would no longer cover care from UCSF. He had been under UCSF's care for 15 years. He's a former State Department engineer, who has navigated many tricky situations—including communications in Eastern European countries amidst the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet he needed extensive assistance to interpret information from Medicare.

Smullin was eventually referred to a substitute medical group in Pleasanton, but they would not pick up dozens of his calls. Frustrated with dead ends, he drove out to their address to see if he could manage things in person—only to find a completely empty office. He's not alone; these runarounds are an irritatingly common trend with Medicare-affiliated insurers.

As of early 2026, roughly 11,000 Americans are aging into Medicare eligibility every single day, joining a population of over 61.2 million senior beneficiaries who must navigate an increasingly complex web of private and public coverage. Most seniors are fortunate enough to have coverage via Medicare, but negotiating the maze of options and securing necessary care can be extremely challenging. Medicare has multiple options, but none of the plans are universally accepted by medical groups.

However, Oakland has assistance in the form of Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP), a publicly funded organization aided by several Rockridge volunteers who help their neighbors navigate the complexities of the health care industry. In the last year, they served 2,322 people in Alameda County, 1.5% of which reside in Rockridge—with a volunteer force that's 10% composed of Rockridgians.

HICAP, continued page 7

A Tribute to You on The Rockridge News' 40th Anniversary

The Rockridge News is far from a singular effort. The term "neighborhood newspaper" (or "newsletter," if you're feeling cheeky) falls short. It's better defined as the "neighborhood's newspaper." In the possessive.

It belongs to Rockridge—it is made for you. It is made by you. It is lovingly delivered straight to you, by you.

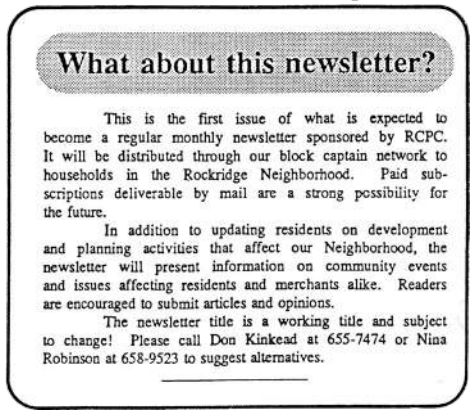
The sheer number of distribution volunteers is staggering: 172 people currently. It took all of page 8 to fit the names of each, adding in writers, artists and more—from the last year alone.

At The Rockridge News' workshop in February, 34 people of all ages, identities and creeds showed up to contribute to the paper. Dozens of volunteer writers pour their love for this place onto the page each month.

We could wax poetic on the significance of this small but mighty publication's persistence across a decade shy of a half century—and the changes the world and the neighborhood have seen along the way. But we thought it'd be best put by you. We've compiled reflections on what the paper has meant to people over the years.

All we're left to say is: Thank you.

40th Birthday, continued page 8 & 9



What about this newsletter?

This is the first issue of what is expected to become a regular monthly newsletter sponsored by RCPC. It will be distributed through our block captain network to households in the Rockridge Neighborhood. Paid subscriptions deliverable by mail are a strong possibility for the future.

In addition to updating residents on development and planning activities that affect our Neighborhood, the newsletter will present information on community events and issues affecting residents and merchants alike. Readers are encouraged to submit articles and opinions.

The newsletter title is a working title and subject to change! Please call Don Kinkead at 655-7474 or Nina Robinson at 658-9523 to suggest alternatives.

Published March 1986, the first articles from The Rockridge News were about (Dreyer's) plans for the corner of College and Claremont avenues, local political activism and an RCPC meeting with developers about an apartment building proposal. Forty years later and those topics sound all too familiar to what's in the very same publication today.

INSIDE: • UPDATE: 6230 Claremont Senior Housing, page 4 • Xocolate Closing, page 6 • Pucquio, page 10

Bike Ride for a Reason: Support Oakland & Alameda Public Schools, April 25



Join the 18th Annual Ride for a Reason! This community-focused bike ride/school fundraiser has raised over $2 million for East Bay public schools since 2009, including several in Rockridge. Funds support library books, sports, science equipment, after-school programs and critical staff such as counselors, librarians and reading specialists.

Choose a fully supported 45-, 68- or 110-mile ride to Sacramento (shorter rides begin with a bus/train from Oakland Tech). Enjoy a post-ride meal and a powerful day of community impact.

And you don't have to ride to support the event! During March artists at the Grand Gallery in Oakland (560 2nd Street) will be donating a portion of their sales to R4R! Originals, prints and note cards will be available. Come to a reception at the Gallery on Mar. 22 from 2 to 4 p.m. and save 20% off the regular registration fee for the ride. ●

Learn more, register or volunteer at r4rschools.org
Questions? Contact Nora Vargas-Dye at R4RSchools1@gmail.com

New Speed Camera on Claremont Ave.

by Robbie Tasker, RCPC Board Member

As a part of the City of Oakland's ongoing work to reduce the speed of traffic and collisions, 18 new speed safety cameras have been installed all around town, one of which is in Rockridge. Covering the street segment along Claremont Avenue from Hillegass to College avenues—deemed a part of Oakland's "high injury network"—the cameras have already been issuing warnings since Jan. 14, but will start handing out tickets in mid-March.

Officials said the cameras only snap photos and don't use any facial recognition software. If you drive at least 11 mph over the posted limit of 30 mph on Claremont, you might incur a fine.

"Fines will start at $50 and increase to a maximum of $500 for those traveling more than 100 mph," the City stated on its website. "There is an income-driven payment scale for people with low income. Citations will include details regarding eligibility and how to apply."

As for the other cameras around the city, drivers might want to keep in mind that these cameras are often placed around high volume areas, like the on/off ramps to freeways. So you will also find them in places like Fruitvale Avenue, and Broadway. They help ensure that traffic coming off freeway ramps properly adjusts to the speed of local traffic. A full list of the new cameras is available online:

tinyurl.com/3y89h58b. ●



The Rockridge News

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For information: **info@rockridge.org**

Contacting The Rockidge News
Are there topics you'd like to see covered in the Rockridge News? Have questions about newsletter distribution? Want to volunteer to be a Rockridge News distributor? We'd love to hear from you.

Letters to the Editor
Letters are limited to **200 words** & 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.

smontauk@gmail.com

Views expressed in published articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Rockridge News, its editor or the board of directors of RCPC. ●

Veranda, a Spot for Home Decor and Community Connection

by Michele Himmelberg



Matthew Giles and Anthony Mack | self portrait

Matthew Giles and Anthony Mack didn't just open a shop on College Avenue last March—they joined the neighborhood. Now, they're celebrating the one-year anniversary of Veranda with dreams of building their cozy oasis into a community hub for connection.

Their storefront evolved out of a 2024 Rockridge pop-up, where they listened to what locals said they were craving. That guided their current customer approach: Come in, explore and discover something new to love for your home, garden, self-care or for a unique gift. And while you're here, come in for conversations, interactions and the experience.

The Veranda environment is soothing, with scented candles, symmetry and jazzy instrumental music. It's also delightful, with surprising items like "Raymond the Rabbit," a whimsical bronze wall-mount sculpture sure to grab attention in your home. Customers can pop in for pillows and artisan serving boards, or they can become members, signing up for classes and playlists curated by Giles, who's also a DJ and trained classical pianist.

In February, shoppers picked up Valentine boxes featuring locally made chocolates, an example of Veranda's limited-time, curated gift boxes. Customers also found seven tips for having a successful soiree, listed in Veranda's monthly newsletter. And they had their gifts wrapped in Veranda's signature forest-green paper with bronze ribbon (offered year-round).

"We specialize in the 'finishing touch,'" Mack said. "People come to us when they have the furniture but they need the soul—the textures, the conversation starters and the perfect gift that says 'I really know you.'"

Giles added: "We don't just sell objects. We sell tools for social connection, whether that's a beautiful platter for entertaining or a candle that signals it's time to decompress."

They said they chose College Avenue for their storefront because Rockridge is a neighborhood that values local craftsmanship and themes aligned with their vision of comfort and connection.

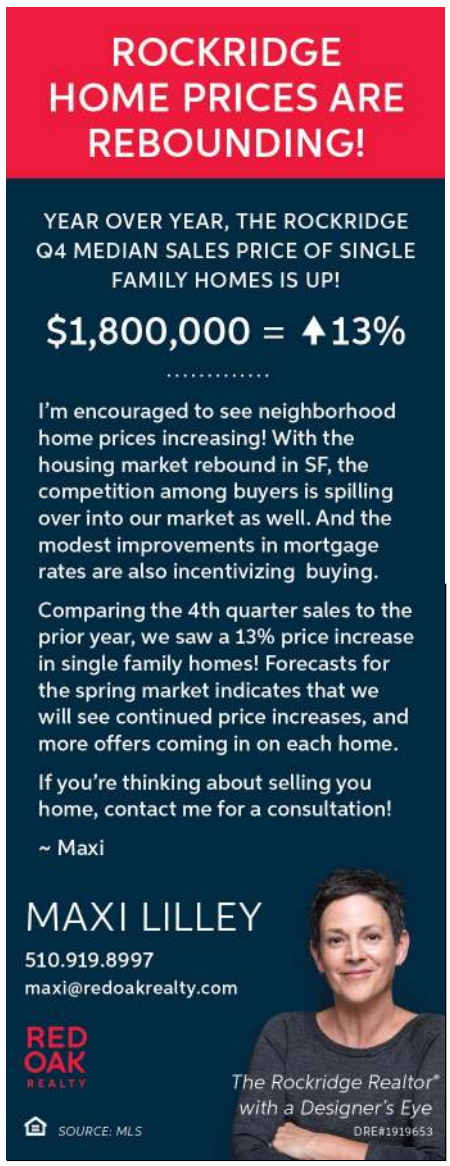
Their goal is to make Veranda a brand that's instantly recognizable. Ideally, they'll be in a home one day and overhear a comment about the vibe of an item: "Oh, is that Veranda?"

Married partners, Giles and Mack also work as school psychologists, navigating high-stress environments that call for a creative outlet. Tapping into their training, they wanted to create a physical space for customers that felt like a pleasant "deep breath" at the end of the day.

"Psychology is about the internal home, cultivating peace, resilience and safety within oneself," Mack said. "Veranda is about the external home. The two are deeply linked; your environment profoundly impacts your nervous system."

Mack and Giles keep things running with five part-time staff. One is Kathleen Schumer, a retiree who was looking for an outlet and extra income. She said: "I wish everyone who wanted a part-time job could find one as wonderful as mine. Anthony and Matt make me feel valued, and I love talking to our customers." ●





6230 Claremont Senior Housing Update: Height, Footprint, More

by Mark Aaronson, RCPC Board Member



Rendering provided by Jones Architecture

On Jan. 21, seven Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) designees met with three representatives from Ellis Partners and Spirit Living Group, the developers of a proposed Residential Care Facility for the Elderly (RCFE) at 6230 Claremont Ave. Issues raised included the height and bulk of the building; vehicle access on Claremont Ave. for all purposes; the method used to calculate residential density bonuses under recently enacted State law; and open-space proposals.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND APPROVAL PROCESS OVERVIEW

The proposed RCFE is a 203-unit, life-care, market-rate rental facility for seniors. Monthly charges are projected to be similar to those at Merrill Gardens.

The approval process will be the normal Oakland Planning Department's Regular Discretionary Design Review. There will be public hearings before the Oakland Planning Commission makes final environmental impact and land use decisions regarding the proposed project, which may be as soon as this summer.

The design now under review describes the building height as a little under 85 feet with a rooftop terrace and protruding sections for utility equipment and an elevator shaft. It also indicates setbacks from the front and rear property boundary lines ranging from 5 to 10 feet. A circular porte-cochere drop-off,-main entry way and separate access to an underground 90-car garage are on Claremont Avenue. The ground floor ceiling height is 21½ feet and includes space for a partial mezzanine floor. Above that, there are six mainly residential floors.

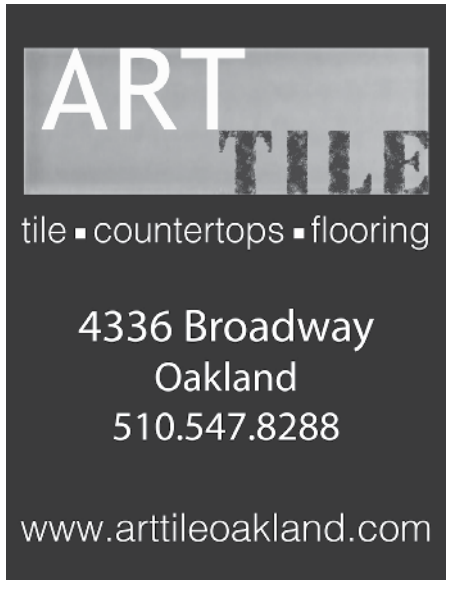
The apartment mix consists of 24 Memory Care (MC) units, 20 Assisted Living (AL) units, and 159 Independent Living (IL) units including studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom configurations. While the IL and AL units have full kitchen areas, facility-prepared meals will be available for residents in separate IL, AL and MC dining rooms.

The number of units and other land use factors, such as height and bulk, will be reviewed in accordance with State law density bonus provisions, which allow for buildings that exceed normal local zoning standards. RCFEs without any requirement for affordable housing qualify for such review.

SPECIFICALLY APPLICABLE OAKLAND AND STATE LAW

The project site is within Oakland's CN-1 Neighborhood Commercial Zone. Permitted uses include multi-family housing. The combination of IL and AL as regular dwelling units with kitchens and MC as rooming units qualifies for consideration as a mixed-use building consistent with CN-1 zoning. The maximum building height for structures in a CN-1 zone is 55 feet, but that is subject to overriding State law. Determining when and how State law preempts Oakland land use law is a three-step process.





First, it involves calculating the base maximum allowable residential unit density of a proposed site under Oakland law and then the number of additional units authorized under State law as a 20% bonus. The base residential density cap for the 1.06-acre proposed RCFE site is 195 units, which—on an apportioned basis considering the two different types of residential units covered—includes 172 regular dwelling (IL and AL combined) units and 23 rooming (MC) units. The 20% bonus under State law yields a maximum allowable project site density of 232 residential units, which could include up to 205 regular dwelling units and 27 rooming units. The developers' proposal of 159 IL units, 20 AL units, and 24 MC units falls within these limits.

Second, if the project design is within the maximum residential units permitted after the State bonus, it is up to the developer to request bonus density waivers for structural and design features not in compliance with local requirements. In this case, the main waivers requested by the developers involve the following Oakland zoning requirements: the 55-foot building height limit; 30-degree sloping step-backs when residential properties abut; a consistent 10-foot rear setback from Florio St.; and positioning driveways, garage doors, and other vehicle access from a secondary frontage rather than a primary street like Claremont Ave. Initially, the developers requested a waiver from on-site open space requirements but have now determined that private balcony space can be included in square-footage calculations negating the need to request a waiver.

Lastly, the Planning Commission decides whether to grant waivers with important limitations on its discretion. In most cases, for a waiver to be denied, it has to "have a specific, adverse impact … upon health or safety, and for which there is no feasible method to satisfactorily mitigate or avoid the specific, adverse impact." Cal. Government Code sec. 65915(e)(1). Furthermore, "a 'specific, adverse impact' means a significant, quantifiable, direct, and unavoidable impact, based on objective, identified written public health or safety standards, policies, or conditions...." Cal. Government Code sec. 65589.5(d)(2). Inconsistencies with local zoning ordinance or general plan land use designations are explicitly excluded as grounds for finding a specific, adverse impact.

NEIGHBORHOOD RESPONSES

Neighborhood views regarding the proposed project vary considerably. Some support the project because it adds housing. Several express specific interest as elderly individuals in selling their nearby houses and moving into the facility as a safe and supportive way to continue to reside in Rockridge.

The main opposition to the proposed project has come from Rockridge Neighbors for Sensible Housing (RNSH), which is largely composed of residents who reside on Auburn Ave. and Florio St. and who are most directly impacted by the RCFE's height, bulk and traffic circulation. RNSH's first response was to suggest alternative development for affordable housing. It now supports senior housing on the site but seeks improvements that refine building height and design to ensure maximum light, enhance health and safety, and promote livability, privacy and a comfortable streetscape.

The RCPC board has not yet taken a position on the project. Instead, it appointed a seven-member Consultation Committee, which includes four RNSH participants, to meet with the developers to obtain information and discuss changes in project design and impact.

At the Jan. 21 meeting, Committee members proposed lowering the ground floor height to 15 feet, building out the mezzanine as a full floor, and reducing the remainder of the building by one floor. Other issues addressed involved incorporating more significant step-backs, reducing the number of units by decreasing the likely hard-to-market IL studios, providing support for all-purpose vehicular access on Claremont Ave, and contributing as a community benefit to furthering public open space in Rockridge. ●

Please send questions and comments about the proposed project to landuse@rockridge.org





Xocolate & Confections' Semi-Sweet Goodbye to Rockridge

by Shea Zerbino

On Valentine's Day, Xocolate & Confections on College Avenue buzzed with energy as it bid farewell on its closing day. The storefront window—splashed with timely reds, pinks and hearts—showcased general manager Frances "Frankie" Fernandez's final, creative display. It invited the community to bid farewell and write love letters to the staff.

Inside, artisanal chocolates and shiny foil-wrapped sweets lined the walls while customers—old friends and new—snatched up last-minute gifts and personal treats. Amid the bustle, Fernandez called out prices for vintage candy holders that the store would no longer need, sending shoppers home with sweet deals and thrifty finds.

Founded 17 years ago by Malena Lopez-Maggi at a location on Solano Avenue in Berkeley, The Xocolate Bar is a Latina-owned chocolate shop known for its beautiful, handcrafted goods and its commitment to global artistry and community.

In 2023, College Avenue became a second home for the store under the name Xocolate & Confections, born from Lopez-Maggi's hope and vision to support the growing business by selling, storing and shipping chocolate from there—and sharing something sweet with a new neighborhood. She set out with her team to create not just a chocolate shop, but a warm and imaginative space that embraced culture and sustainability.

Unfortunately, this vision proved more challenging than gnawing on a jawbreaker. Upon securing the space, she worked with the health department for guidance and obtained approval to move in. Shortly after, Lopez-Maggi was told she had been misinformed and needed to make serious changes to the store to meet health and safety requirements, so she did. This scenario played out not once, but multiple times, causing her great financial strain.

While regulatory challenges plagued the store, Lopez-Maggi was also managing caregiving for her mother and facing a cocoa crisis caused by climate change and tariffs.

"The Aztecs valued cocoa beans like gold," Lopez-Maggi said. "And with climate change as it is, it looks like we're headed there again."

Lopez-Maggi was forced to lay off staff and make other changes to stay afloat. And after months of exhausting effort and honest reflection, she decided to close the Rockridge shop.

"I had to finally throw in the towel and accept that the Rockridge store never went according to plan," Lopez-Maggi said. "Despite the heartbreak, it was a relief to set an end date for this project, especially as my mom hovered between life and death. It was one thing I could control in this time of utter limbo."

During the final moments on closing day, Lopez-Maggi and Fernandez were approached by a man who said, "What is meant for you will not miss you," bringing further peace on the difficult decision to close the store.

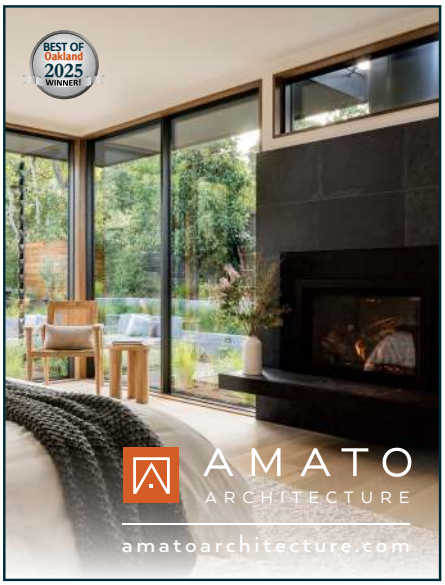
"It felt less like a closure and more like a celebration of something meaningful that had existed against all odds," Lopez-Maggi said. "At the end of the night, [Fernandez] and I had a good laugh-, cry- and hug-fest."



photo by Shea Zerbino

Xocolate & Confections' final window display

While the Rockridge chapter has ended, The Xocolate Bar's story is far from over. The original store at 1709 Solano Ave. remains open and continues to craft the same delicious chocolate. Community members can support the business by shopping there, especially during the quieter months between Mother's Day and Halloween, purchasing from their move out sale (of furniture and other nonperishable goods from the store, check IG: @xocolatebar) from the College Avenue location, joining the mailing list at thexocolatebar.com or even by providing video services or event spaces for some fun projects Lopez-Maggi has cooking up. So let us continue to support our former Rockridge neighbor, as they journey through the box of chocolate that is life—because you never know what you are going to get. ●





HICAP, continued from cover

"I think it's very unsettling to transition from private care to Medicare," said Caitlin Chan, the executive director of Legal Assistance for Seniors (LAS), the parent organization for HICAP. LAS is an Oakland-based non-profit that operates partially off of public funding and partially off of private foundation and individual donations. LAS offers a variety of programs to help seniors beyond health care.

"Most people receive their health care from their employer and if they have an issue, they can walk down the hall," Chan said. "But under Medicare, it's often unclear where to turn when trying to find the right provider—and it can be a literal life-or-death situation."

Fortunately for Smullin, one of his daughters is a medical professional, who helped him connect with HICAP, a free resource for education, counseling and advocacy for Medicare beneficiaries. HICAP helped Don keep his care with UCSF, which took "persistence and insistence," according to Don. The new arrangement also cut his monthly costs by over $100 a month.

Rockridge resident Diane Heinze—one of over 30 Alameda County HICAP volunteers—was on the team that helped Don get back into UCSF's care. Heinze and other volunteers help beneficiaries who are 65 years old and up to make informed decisions and offer advocacy when their health care benefits or rights are threatened or denied.

Most of Heinze's fellow volunteers are seniors, and all of them have received significant training to keep current with the ongoing changes to Medicare and its related coverages, such as Senior Advantage plans. Many are also certified by Medicare, which allows them to represent and support clients. Volunteers' average tenure with HICAP is eight years and they annually serve over 2,000 clients, logging 20 hours of service per month. The most common type of assistance provided is with the initial enrollment, followed by annual open enrollment decisions.

HICAP's primary means of outreach is through the 23 senior centers located throughout Alameda County. Fourteen centers offer in-person service while the rest offer telephone appointments. The closest senior center to Rockridge is the North Oakland Senior Center (5714 Martin Luther King Way) and it does offer in person counseling. Both Berkeley and Emeryville have Senior Centers nearby.

"HICAP Volunteers are the heart of the program," said Jacob Systma, the HICAP Program Manager who coordinates the activities of the volunteers. "They are knowledgeable and dedicated to helping their fellow seniors. Those both give confidence and comfort to our clients."

Other services provided by LAS include legal services in the following areas: Elder Abuse, Guardianship of Minor Children, Public Benefits, Health Law, Legal Services for Immigrants, Conservatorships and Housing.

Alison Hightower is another Rockridge resident who volunteers with HICAP, now in her fourth year with them.

"Our goal is to help them make an informed decision," Hightower said. "Medicare is complicated enough that many people do not understand the risks or rewards of the decisions they make without impartial guidance."

The most challenging situations Hightower sees are those where coverage has been denied.

"Recently we were able to secure reimbursement of over $10,000 in nursing home bills to a family for their 90-year-old mother," Hightower said. "That was only possible because of our knowledge of the appeals process."

One client Hightower assisted was her neighbor Kerry Gough. After two senior plans covering him successively withdrew from Alameda County, he was searching for a new plan. Hightower was able to guide him to a combination of plans including Medicare, use of his veteran's benefits and a supplemental prescription plan that gave him the coverage he needed—while at the same time reducing his monthly costs.

"She listened, asked the right questions and laid out the alternatives," Gough said. "I totally relied on her advice and have no doubt I made the right choice." ●

More information about LAS can be found at lashicap.org. Its offices are located at 333 Hegenberger Rd., Suite 850, Oakland. The telephone number is 510-832-3040

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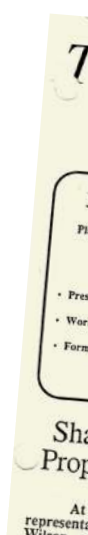
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ONE YEAR. FOUR DECADES IN THE MAKING.

Shown here are some of the hundreds of volunteers who distributed The Rockridge News, wrote articles or contributed art —from this year alone. Now imagine that spirit amplified across 40 years. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Bruce Paton Margaret Pinter Andra Pligavko Susie Poncelet Dare Porter Lorraine Price Courtenay Redis Brenda Reeves
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Devan Reiff Morgan Cecil Laura Burnett Leslie G. Moldow Malena Lopez-Maggi
Will Sheldon Roberta Klugman Katie, Vince & Declan Blair

The first issue of The Rockridge News, edited by Don Kinkaid, was a single sheet, front and back.



CHEERS TO 40 YEARS

I've delivered The Rockridge News on and off for over 10 years to many different routes. Currently I have three. Rockridge friends and neighbors say I know everyone here in Rockridge. If that is true, I credit The News for it. As I'm delivering copies people stop me and want to chat. Each one says, "Thanks for delivering The Rockidge News. We all appreciate it a lot." **Candy Vernetti**

Having just turned 40, I feel a unique kinship with the paper this year. When I moved to the neighborhood in 2020 I happely "inherited" my subscription from the previous homeowners, a great welcome gift to quickly learn about the neighborhood and different perspectives on its future. In the few years I've lived here, the paper is a fun way to get the inside scoop on local development, community events and most importantly, read Galen's food recommendations and others. Thank you for four decades of local reporting, and here's to forty more to keep our community connected." **Dane Johnson**

I'm embarrassed to admit that I don't know how often The Rockridge News is published. Is it monthly? Quarterly? Whenever the editor darn well feels like it? I should be able to figure it out because I'm a) a former RCPC board member, b) a dad who helped his kids deliver the RRN, and c) a fully functioning adult human being. I think it's because the paper isn't a periodical; it's a constant, omnipresent on my kitchen counter for as long as I've been sentient. That combo of boosterism, well-reasoned takes on controversial topics and hard-hitting profiles of notable neighborhood dogs is a spot-on encapsulation of our neighborhood vibe. I'll always read it back to front whenever the hell it arrives." **Zac Unger**

For the past three decades of living in Rockridge, the Rockridge News has always been a constant in the neighborhood, a truly great local paper that reflects the spirit of this community. There's something deeply comforting about having a neighborhood news outlet that's been around for so long, sharing the stories, people and moments that make Rockridge special. Its focus on positive stories and the everyday happenings that bring neighbors together has helped strengthen the sense of connection here over the years. Congratulations on 40 years, and here's hoping The Rockridge News continues to thrive and tell our community's stories long into the future. **Scott Ayers**

We've been delivering The Rockridge News since shortly after we moved to the neighborhood in 2011—starting out solely with James Ave. and taking on more routes as our son Declan, who was 1 when we began, got old enough to deliver on his own. It's been especially fun to cover College Ave. and get to know all of our local proprietors. Highlights we'd like to point out include the advent of colored pages, and our dog Kona appearing in Dogs of Rockridge last year!" **Katie, Vince & Declan Bair**

I love that the Rockridge News distribution system relies on volunteer distributors for every street in Rockridge, some of whom have been doing this for more than 20 years. The RCPC bylaws even define the geographic boundaries of Rockridge specifically as the streets where residents are willing to distribute the Rockridge News. We are so lucky to have this hyper-local, community-owned, high-quality means of sharing neighborhood-level information, and equally lucky to have a web of dedicated neighbor-volunteers to have been putting it directly in the hands of every Rockridge resident for the last 40 years, for free. Thanks to this village! **Zabrae Valentine**


The Rockridge News
March 13, 1986 Vol. 1 No. 1
WHEN IS THE NEXT MEETING?
Dreyer's Plans Final!
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after Avenue Housing
posed by Wilson Bros.

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Layout by Stephen Coles





Pucquio: A Taste of Peruvian Heaven

by Franchesca Garagorri

I left my native country of Peru 40 years ago and one of the things I truly miss is the food. The wonderful flavors—different types of peppers, yellow potatoes, gigantic corn kernels, cumin, paprika, turmeric, ginger, soy and oyster sauces—just burst in your mouth. Peruvian food is totally unlike anything I've found elsewhere. Whenever I feel like stepping into a time capsule and eating back at home, my husband and I stroll down College Avenue and pop into Pucquio.

"Pucquio" is Quechua for "well-spring" and its talented chef and owner Carlos Moreira welcomes us to explore the abundance of fresh, complex and absolutely delicious flavors of Peru.

Our first favorite is their tiradito, a ceviche-adjacent dish made with white fish—typically the catch of the day. It's delicately cut and served crudo in a velvety "aji amarillo" (yellow chili) emulsion that just melts in your mouth. (Fun fact: Peru has around 300 types of peppers that flavor most of our dishes—we call our peppers ajies or rocoto, which vary in spiciness and heat.)

You might want to try their other types of ceviches as well. The best fish ceviche is from Peru. This isn't up for debate; it's a non-negotiable fact of the universe, trust me on this one. Pucquio has a sumptuous selection of fresh fish, marinated in Peru's signature mix of lime, ginger, celery, garlic, fish sauce and Peruvian pepper, known as "leche de tigre." It's also served with onions and sweet potato, accompanied by the biggest corn kernels you've ever seen. Pucquio's ceviche truly captivates all of your senses.

Our second favorite dish is lomo saltado, which Moreira makes with incredibly well balanced Asian flavors. Tender beef is stir-fried with onions and tomatoes in a silky soy sauce, plus some of Moreira's secret ingredients—you might have to bribe him for the recipe! It comes with a stack of fries the size of small bricks and garlic rice so flavorful, you'll question any other grain you've ever eaten. Top it with a fried egg, "a lo pobre" style, and you won't regret it.

Following that on our favorites list is ají de gallina. It just feels like the kind you'd get in Peru—a lovely pulled chicken porridge, in Peru's famous yellow pepper sauce, with olives and walnuts, served with white garlic rice and a hard-boiled egg, a taste unlike any other.

The Pucquio sours were excellent. Peru's most famous cocktail is the Pisco Sour, made with our pisco brandy—a controversial spirit, the cause of our mini 'war' with Chile regarding its country of origin. For curious readers, Pisco is a city in Peru's Ica region, meaning Peru definitely won this quarrel. Since Pucquio doesn't have a hard liquor license, Moreira's version of the sour is a creative twist, made with a lower-ABV grape spirit instead of traditional pisco. They also have a nice list of wines that complement the Peruvian flavors and match individual palates.

To top it all off, for dessert, if you're lucky enough to be offered the seasonal (between September and March) lucuma ice cream go for it! It's a very unusual and delightful fruit from the Andean region of Peru. Lucuma has a unique taste—like a mix of caramel, maple and sweet potato, with subtle nutty notes and a rich yet delicate, smooth, custard-like sweetness. Moreira gets them imported. Any of the other desserts will be satisfying, but the bombitas de carretilla are special: who can say no to sweet potato, dulce de leche and pisco crème anglaise?

I hope you find Peruvian food to be a fantastic multicultural experience. Each bite contains not just one culture, but native Peruvian, Spanish and Asian flavors, blended in harmony. Buen provecho! ●



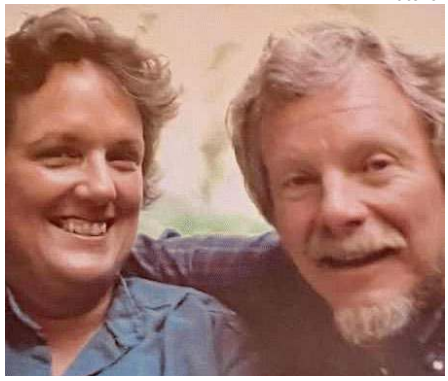
The author's favorite dish at Pucquio: their tiradito—a ceviche-adjacent serving of delicately cut fish, served in a yellow chili emulsion | photo by Bex Wyant





Remembering William R. Dutcher

by Kieren Dutcher



Nancy and Bill Dutcher

William "Bill" R. Dutcher, noted architect and longtime resident of Ivanhoe Road, passed away on January 17, 2026. He went to Piedmont Avenue Elementary School, Westlake Jr High and Oakland Tech, where he met the love of his life, Nancy Palmer, at the "Hello Day Dance." He and Nancy married two weeks after graduating from UC Berkeley. They had great luck at being given a gorgeous 1908 brown shingle craftsman house in Rockridge they could find a lot nearby and move it off the property. This became their lifelong project, working on this house, which was the heart of their family.

Over the course of his career, Bill designed many local buildings: a Christian Science reading room, St. Joseph of Arimathea chapel in Berkeley, Curds & Whey Cheese Shop and Yasai Market. He also worked on CPS High School and many home remodels as well as several entire houses after the Oakland Hills fire. He was given many architectural awards for his work, and became a Fellow of the AIA in 1992.

Bill is survived by his beloved wife Nancy Dutcher, daughters Kieren Dutcher (son-in-law Gregory Sage), and Greta Dutcher (son-in-law Pete Rypins), grandchildren Sophie Worm and William Worm, and former son-in-law Daniel Worm.

If you really want to celebrate Bill, take your favorite people out to a (preferably Italian) restaurant and drink a toast to his grand, long life! Cin cin! ●

For a full version of Kieren's remembrance of her father, visit: rockridge.org

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Next NCPC Meeting: Thurs. April 9, | 7 p.m.

We hope to have brief presentations by local OPD officers and a discussion of local crime and safety issues.

Rockridge Library upstairs conference room and on Zoom: rockridgencpc.com

Become a Rockridge News Distributor!

Miles Avenue Long-Time Block Captain Resigns:

Barbara Loomis has been providing her neighbors monthly with The Rockridge News for more years than we have recorded. We appreciate her dedication and will miss her when she steps down from her job as Block Captain for her block of Miles Avenue. We'd hate to see distribution paused for her route so please let us know if you can pick up her mantle.

AVAILABLE ROUTES

Routes 16B:

Both sides of 5100 Miles from Cavour to 51st Street.

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5400 to 5700 Golden Gate, from Acacia down to Eustice, until it turns to Buena Vista.

To volunteer:

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WALK-INS WELCOME!

RNews CORRECTIONS

● **"Dogs of Rockridge" (Feb. '26)** The editor regrets including a Godfather reference, as it evokes an inappropriate stereotype about Italian culture that reflects neither the views of the owners nor their very adorable and innocent Italian dogs. ●

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Lawton Avenue Cabin from 1904 Says Goodbye

by Chris Ayan



The foundation-less structure was ultimately determined to be unsafe.

The small cabin at 5339 Lawton Ave. sat through two world wars, heavy flooding and multiple earthquakes, including the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the 1989 Loma Prieta quake.

Built in 1904, it dates back to when Rockridge was still on the edge of town, before the street grid settled in, before most of the surrounding homes were built and even before its current address existed. Lacking a concrete foundation, the house originally served as the caretaker's cottage for the large Victorian house at Shafter and Hudson that has undergone its own retrofitting over the last five years.

At the time, Oakland was scattered with small cabins and cottages. Some were weekend places. Others were full-time homes for people who wanted a little space and air away from the noise and chaos of Oakland proper or San Francisco. They were not meant to impress anyone. They were built to be lived in, using what was available, and to quietly do their work.

Standing in the yard, the cabin felt small in a way that has nothing to do with neglect or the larger Craftsman-era homes and newer multi-story rebuilds that surround it. Built from coastal redwood, the workhorse material of early Bay Area houses, it was made for a different moment and never asked to be more than that.

Over the years, Oakland grew up around it. Roads were paved. The hills filled in. What had once been open and scattered slowly became a neighborhood. Through all of it, the cabin stayed mostly the same, small and a bit out of time with what came later.

While much around it was rebuilt, reinforced, or replaced, the small structure remained with minimal upgrading. It absorbed the shocks and carried on as a remnant of a time past.

The structure has been demolished and will be replaced with a new single-family home. Its removal reflects a familiar reality in Oakland, where older, smaller buildings are often cleared as the city continues to change. ●



Dogs (& Cats) of Rockridge

illustration by Laura Serra





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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March is awareness month for Red Cross, Women's History, Athletic Training, Gender Equality, Parental Mental Health, Noodles, Nutrition



Happy Spring!

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COMPASS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RCPC,

While I very much support new and much needed housing (particularly affordable housing) in Rockridge, I also expect that codes and zoning requirements that protect all residents be respected. Our City codes and zoning laws have been developed and implemented with an overall vision of what we want our communities to achieve, and any developer requested variances and waivers should be subject to the full review and scrutiny afforded by Federal, State and Local laws in order to protect the health and well-being of all Oaklanders.

As a Rockridge resident, I have serious concerns regarding the proposed building project at 6230 Claremont Ave, which includes a structure planned to reach 93 feet in height and an entrance on Florio Street – which is already constrained by its partially one-way configuration. Florio is a narrow residential street with many children living there and is not designed to accommodate repeated large-vehicle activity.

Under the current proposal, this entrance is expected to serve as the access point for multiple high-impact uses, including: Garbage and recycling collection turning the Florio sidewalk as a staging area for dumpsters; Delivery of commercial laundry and food services; Residential move-ins and move-outs.

Each of these functions requires the use of large trucks. Concentrating this kind of activity on a street with limited maneuverability poses a significant safety risk to pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. It is difficult to imagine how oversized service vehicles will enter, exit, turn, and wait for unloading without obstructing traffic or creating bottlenecks. I and my neighbors living on Florio and surrounding blocks already face tight parking, high foot traffic, and limited through-flow, and the addition of regular industrial-scale vehicle access would only intensify those challenges.

I urge RCPC to closely evaluate whether Florio is an appropriate and safe location for this entrance. Consideration should be given to alternative access points or mitigation measures that protect the quality of life for Rockridge residents, ensure safe traffic circulation, and prevent long-term congestion issues.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Our neighborhood depends on thoughtful planning that prioritizes safety, livability, and responsible development.

– Ann Del Simone, Florio Street

Dear Editor,

I am dismayed to read that RCPC would consider "continual communication and interaction" with the folks opposing much-needed senior housing on Claremont Avenue. As a former state official charged with housing and transportation policy oversight, I remind you that California's ongoing disastrous housing crisis is a direct result of nickel-and-diming housing projects, like this one, to death with "concerns" and demands for "process." It is why Rockridge, in particular, has seen housing prices and rents sky-rocket—ironically, significantly impairing the ability of seniors to live here.

The data are entirely clear. If one wants housing to be affordable, the appropriate response is not to demand individual developments bey 100% below-market—which is a project-killer—but to up-zone entire districts, lowering process costs, and driving public and private funds into construction. The right answer with regard to this specific housing project is, simply, to do nothing—it's welcome and in no need of suggestions from local busybodies. RCPC would do well to instead loudly advocate for more like this, including in the years-old abandoned wedge down the street on College, and for development generally. It should also have nothing to do with people who, in year two of the Trump administration, have such misplaced priorities as to call an 8-story building an "obscenity." Plenty in the world is obscene these days; housing projects are not.

Rockridge is rich with useful advocacy opportunities—including, as the latest Rockridge News notes, finally dealing with dangerous intersections like that at College & Claremont, clearing away remaining barriers to affordability generally, and getting building going on its many blank spots. Rather than commencing the same tired dance of "concerns" on individual buildings that has frozen the neighborhood in expensive amber, why not pay attention to decades of disappointing results from that failed approach, and instead do something useful? Many of the neighbors you represent would appreciate that sensible approach.

– Craig Segall, Alcatraz Ave.

Dear Editor,

I think Thomas Lollini's article in January 2026 about solving the College & Claremont intersection was very illuminating and... right on!

Years ago we had the "pleasure" of experiencing Tokoyo's Shibuya Crossing, by chance. Initially we were quite intimidated. But when we realized we could go diagonally across rather than making 3 crossings our map said (yeah, no Google then!), what a relief.

I rarely walk there now but drive through and occasionally take Florio. I'm always leery of pedestrians there and more than once had to slow in mid-intersection as someone just crossed without looking. However, we could do without the neon lights!

– Tom Noyes ●



Rockridge Library

For Children (Red = March-only events)

Women's History Month Treasure Hunt: Mar. 9-23 Ask at the Children's Desk to test your knowledge (or your library skills) of Women's History, and a chance to win a lollipop.

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

Chess Club: Wednesdays; 4 p.m. All ages & 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, Mar. 19, 3:30 p.m. Monthly art workshops for children & families led by teachers from the Museum of Children's Art. For ages 5 to15 & caregivers. Build creativity, social-emotional & academic skills through art.

Making Stories Club: Thursday, Mar. 5; 3:30 p.m. Monthly workshop to write, illustrate & tell stories. Make books, zines, stories, comics, kamishibai or plays! Join youth writers & illustrators. For ages 8 to 12

For Teens, ages 12 – 18

Spring Crafts: Wednesday, Mar. 11; 2-3 p.m. All supplies provided. For teens only! Presented by the Teen Advisory Board, with support by the Friends of the Rockridge Library.

Teen Advisory Board: Second Wednesdays, Mar. 11; 4-5 p.m. Join the Rockridge Branch Library Teen Advisory Board (TAB) and take an active role in creating, planning and implementing programs and services you want to see at your local library.

For Adults

AI Safety Awareness: Tuesday, Mar. 24, 6-7:30 p.m. Where is AI in 2026 and where is it going?

Adult Crafting Series: Tuesday, Mar. 10, 6-7:30pm. Botanical Collage. Draw with scissors like Henri Matisse! Drop ins welcome.

Meet the Author—Dr. Shelley Sella: Wednesday, Mar. 18, 6:30-7:45 p.m. Dr. Shelley Sella will discuss her book, "Beyond Limits: Stories of Third-Trimester Abortion Care." Dr. Sella is a board-certified OB-GYN and the first woman to openly practice third-trimester abortion care in the U.S.

Ask Your Area Home Experts: Every 2nd Friday, 12:00 a.m. - 2 p.m. 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. March's book is "Crying in H Mart," by Michelle Zauner.

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

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

Chair Yoga: Monday, Mar. 2 and 16, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Learn from certified instructor Bett Bollhoefer, drop ins welcome.●

Rockridge Library Hours:

Holiday Closure: Cesar Chavez Day—Tues., Mar. 31

Mon., Thurs., & Sat.: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Tues. & Weds.: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Fri.: 12 noon to 5:30 p.m.

See calendar for events: oaklandlibrary.org/events

5366 College Ave., at Manila; 510-597-5017

RN CLASSIFIEDS

List your 36-word message here for only $24 (phone #'s count as one word). Make check payable to RCPC, and write "Rockridge News Classifieds" in the memo line. Mail to:

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Deadline for APRIL News: Mar. 19, 2026 (available Apr. 7)

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