



## From the President

JEFFREY WRIGHT

I AM A great fan of our Chamber newsletter, the *Byline*. It is aesthetically pleasing and has good content. John Stashik, who serves as the *Byline* editor, deserves the lion's share of the credit for the quality of the publication. Even the layout and design are the result of his handiwork.

Like most editors, he sets deadlines for those of us contributing content. The usual submission deadline is the 25th day of each month, with the reminder of "don't wait until to the last minute." In my role as Chamber president, I write a monthly column, and I will make the open confession that I usually fail to heed John's "don't wait until to the last minute" request. For me, my column is like preparing a special dish and I need time to let things "marinate" so that all the flavors can come together. Everything is homemade from scratch; nothing is frozen or comes out of a can. Right now, today, May 25th, I am "in the kitchen" cooking my column, but rest assured it will be ready by the noon deadline!

June is an eventful month inasmuch as the official state re-opening is scheduled for June 15th and everyone is eager to get back to business as usual. June 20th is also the first day of summer, Father's Day and my wife Tyra's birthday. In terms of putting a column together, a lot of things were swirling around in my head and I had to decide which direction I wanted to go.

■ See *From the President*, page 7



Chris Treadway

## Rialto Cinemas Cerrito Reopens

BY CHRIS TREADWAY

IF YOU MISSED the week of classic movies that marked the long-awaited reopening of the Rialto Cinemas Cerrito, there are some changes you may notice when you first go to the two-screen cinema.

Ky Boyd, president of Sebastopol-based Rialto Cinemas, took the Chamber on a walk-through as finishing touches were being done before the Cerrito hosted a week of "Classic Big Screen Experiences" from May 21 to 27 to welcome back movie lovers.

"We've been closed since March 17th, but we've been busy," Boyd said, showing off the theater's newly installed carpet and anti-skid flooring around the snack bar.

Under normal circumstances "We would have had to work around the movie schedule, so it's sort of a silver lining to have the opportunity to get the work done without disrupting operations," Boyd said.

While government relief funds were helpful for a limited time, community support made the difference in allowing the cinema to weather the pandemic and finally reopen after more than a year. A combined GoFundMe campaign for the Cerrito and Elmwood theaters has raised more than \$123,000 of its \$125,000 goal, allowing the operations to stay solvent and meet pressing obligations.

■ See *Rialto Cinemas Cerrito*, page 4



John C. Stashik

### CHAMBER MIXER

Pre-Pandemic Style  
(that means live and in person)

Tuesday, June 29th · 5pm

### El Mono Fresh Peruvian

11720 San Pablo Ave. (at Knott) · El Cerrito  
Info@elcerritochamber.org



## Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

**HOW SWEET IT IS!** 2021 marks the 100th year of See's Candies, made right here in the Bay Area. Did you know the El Cerrito store is one of the original tenants at El Cerrito Plaza?

□

**Rolling on.** The new, larger location for Quad Republic Skate Company will be at 10036 San Pablo Avenue. This is the former vacuum cleaner store next to Noodles Fresh and remodeling is underway now to accommodate the popular full service roller skate shop.

□

**Norge Cleaners and Alterations** has found a new home in El Cerrito at 10344 San Pablo Avenue, opposite Down Home Music Co. The firm was located in Albany for many years before owners David and Myoung Yi made a decision to move across the county line. Open Monday through Saturday, 8-5.

I heard that Mayor Paul Fadelli stopped in to welcome the new business to our town. A nice gesture, and that's also good for El Cerrito.

□

**New homes.** Townhomes in the first two buildings comprising Village 29 on El Dorado Street have all been sold. A third building is under construction. The 29-unit development is next to Central Park.

□

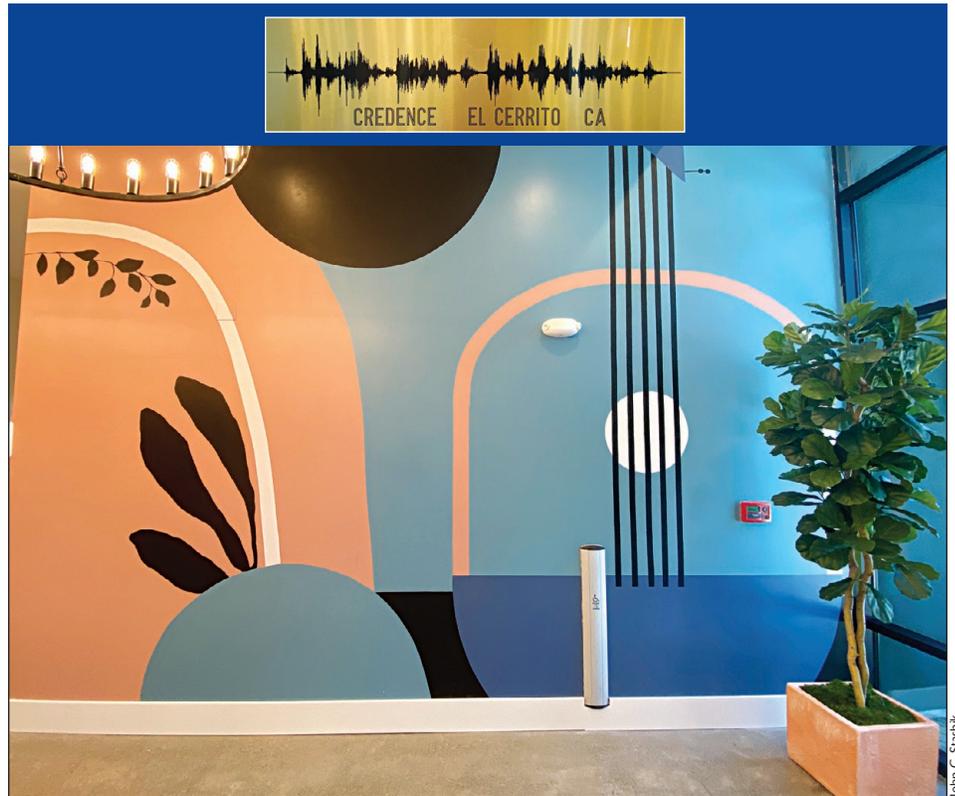
**EBT.** Several customers at the Farmers Market at El Cerrito Plaza recently inquired about Electronic Benefits Transfer (formerly food stamps). The market manager will be looking into the details of the program to see if it would be beneficial to both customers and farmers.

□

**Tessa talks.** Spend an hour with Council member Tessa Rudnick on Monday, June 14th by Zoom, 7 p.m. Lots of Q&A. RSVP: tessaforelcerrito@gmail.com.

□

**Acquisition.** VSP Ventures has acquired El Cerrito Optometry located in El Cerrito Plaza. Owners of the office, Dr. Mia L. Miller and Dr. Margaret



John C. Stashik

This art by Fernanda Martinez greets you in the Credence lobby at Eureka and San Pablo. Martinez is a Mexican artist based in Oakland. (Instagram: @tinta\_art.) Credence is the new condominium development by Branagh with 32 homes, two of which are designated as live-work. At press time, nine units already had buyers. A full Credence story will appear in the July *Byline*. More photos on the next page.

Stolarczuk, purchased their practice together in 1990. See [vspventures.com](http://vspventures.com).

□

**Gone.** What likely is the oldest continuous operating business in El Cerrito, Connors Overhead Door Co., has left the premises. 10931 San Pablo Ave., across from our main fire station, will become the site of a new apartment complex. Customers can reach Mike Connors at 510-719-8976 for garage doors and service.

□



**10919 SPA.** When the Connors building is demolished, the above rendering shows what will replace it. Developer Kevin Wang will build 90 residential units in five stories on the 23,000 sq. ft. lot with some commercial space. Wang is the same person who built Cerrito Vista, one block to the north, in record time.

□

**EC budget.** For those interested in the nitty gritty of municipal finance, the City Council will take up the 2021-22 budget at their June 1st meeting. With so much to discuss, the meeting has an early start: 5 p.m. (by Zoom). Obtain login info at [el-cerrito.org](http://el-cerrito.org).

Thank God for Zoom as those City Hall chairs would get very hard late into the evening as the meeting and public comments run on. A leaner budget is the goal for the City in order to rebuild general fund reserves.

On June 15th, the Council dives into the budget again (with the possibility of additional public meetings) to approve El Cerrito's budget by June 30th. All this information is on the City website.

□

**Finale.** Batteries+Bulbs must vacate their store at Schmidt Lane and San Pablo Avenue by mid-July. The building owner is now Authentic El Cerrito. Options are being explored to find a new location in or near El Cerrito. At this point the store will definitely close in early July. Finding a new site, Batteries+Bulbs could open again.

# A Big Thank You to Our eGift Card Sponsors

OUR CHAMBER has been connecting with local shops and businesses as we launch our “We LOVE El Cerrito” program to encourage neighbors to help El Cerrito thrive by shopping locally. A special thank you goes to our program sponsors for helping with the costs of promotional banners, premiums and other elements.

Those sponsors are: East Bay Sanitary Co., Inc., El Cerrito Royale, Mechanics Bank, and Sunset View Cemetery Association.

Because eGift cards are good at all participating businesses,

we encourage all businesses to participate so shoppers have lots of ways to buy and spend locally. Contact us to join! Reach out: [manager@elcerritochamber.org](mailto:manager@elcerritochamber.org) or 510-730-0160.

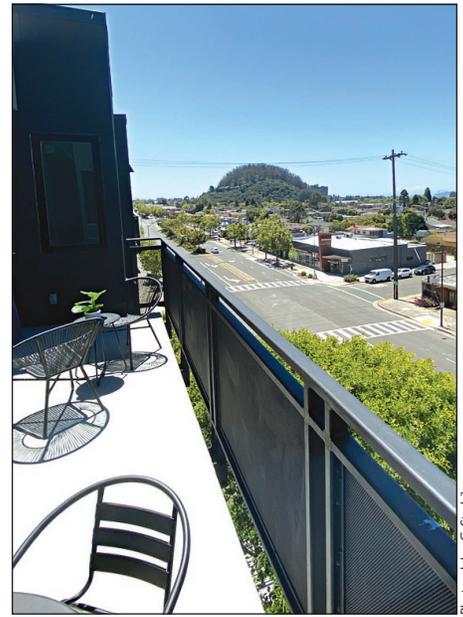
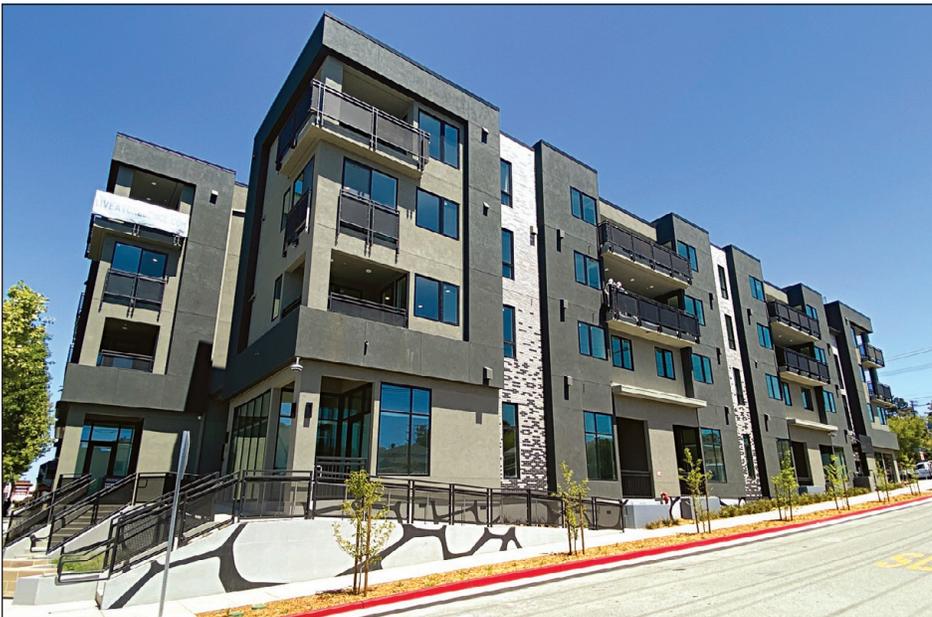
Participating Businesses at this time are: Abbey Pet Hospital, Center for Better Hearing, Copy Central, Great American Dry Cleaners, Rockin’ Robbie’s Music Works, The Junket, Twin

Trees Coffee, and Vasco Career College.

Stay updated on participating business and get more information: [elcerritochamber.org/shop-local](http://elcerritochamber.org/shop-local).



## Credence: El Cerrito Transformed



Photos: John C. Slashnik



Credence incorporates Branagh Development’s urban development philosophy: infill housing near city centers creating thoughtful, inviting homes. Amenities: secure parking, interior bike storage, central elevator, AC and heater units in every room, washer and dryer hookups in each home, pre-wired high speed Internet service.

The El Cerrito building is at Eureka and San Pablo, former site of Guitar Center. Information available at: [www.liveatcredence.com](http://www.liveatcredence.com)

Email: [sales@branagh.com](mailto:sales@branagh.com)

## RIALTO CINEMAS CERRITO

■ Continued from page 1

gations without its customary source of income.

“Without the GoFundMe we would not have survived,” Boyd said. “We’ve been hanging on by a thread.” Promotions during the shutdown included weekly curbside popcorn pickups, a movie poster sale and virtual events, which kept the theater in the public eye but did nothing to ease the financial pressure.

“We’re grateful to the people who supported the popcorn pickup, but we know at the same time it is not the experience they wanted,” Boyd said, adding that the idea of offering other menu items during the shutdown was rejected because “There are so many struggling restaurants, why would we want to be competition for them?”

Now the theater is eager to literally brush the dust off and pick up where it left off.

“When you’ve been closed for a year everything just collects dust, so we’ve been cleaning like crazy,” Boyd said.

The sprucing up goes much further. The downstairs and upstairs theaters each have new seating and a new configuration that increases overall capacity — once COVID-19 restrictions are fully lifted.

The sofas in the front rows are gone and high-back seats with cup holders have been installed, along with access aisles to improve circulation downstairs, and a server aisle upstairs.

Capacity downstairs will increase from 130 to 147 seats, while upstairs goes from 120 to 137. For a few weeks, at least, the theaters will have a socially distanced capacity of 60 downstairs and 67 upstairs.

But perhaps the most significant change with the seating is how it will be used. No longer will it involve entering either auditorium and finding some likely seats.

“We’re going to an all-reserved seating model starting with the Classics week,” Boyd said.

The reserved seats in particular will eliminate problems during the time capacity falls under pandemic restrictions. Under state regulations, “capacity is supposed to be 50 percent, but when



John C. Stashik

you measure six feet, it comes out more like 30 percent,” Boyd said.

That means seating for 60 patrons downstairs and 67 upstairs.

Masks will also be required until at least mid-June under state and county regulations, which are more cautious than federal guidelines.

“It would be so much easier if they were all on the same page,” Boyd said. “We’ve just been rolling with the punches through all of this.”

Opening with restrictions, while not ideal, is still opening, which is far better than more than a year of uncertainty created by the pandemic.

The Cerrito is the third of Rialto’s movie houses to reopen, following the Sebastopol location on April 30 and the Elmwood in Berkeley on May 7.

“We’re getting a few people each day, not as many as we need,” Boyd said of the earlier reopenings. “It’s a process, having people getting comfortable with going to the movies again.”

First-run film programs are set to resume May 28 with “Cruella” and “A Quiet Place, Part II.”

“The pandemic affected all filmed entertainment,” Boyd said. “There has been a slow down in the production of new movies.”

But he noted that Hollywood has banked some features and is gradually cranking up production of new films.

After being limited to making popcorn for so many months, the Cerrito’s kitchen is reopening with an updated menu and a change in the ordering process.

Customers will state their theater and seat number when ordering to simplify things and allow the server to find you easily in the dark.

Items from the menu of Scene, the cinema’s streetside wine bar, will be added to the regular theater menu, along with some of the wine selections.

“Scene will not reopen immediately,” Boyd said. “It’s such a small space, we don’t see how to make it work with social distancing. We now have an integrated menu. It applies to wine, as well.”

The food itself is a part of the attraction. “At a lot of theaters, food is unwrapped and reheated,” Boyd said. “We take as much pride in our food as in our presentation.”

“Everything we make here is made-to-order,” he said. “We try to do things that are easy to eat in the dark, so it veers toward pub food — pizza, sandwiches, salads.”

A little less than half of the theater’s 16 to 20 employees work in the kitchen. “They put out a lot of food from a very small area,” Boyd said.

Rialto has run the El Cerrito location since 2009 and purchased the property

■ Continued on following page

from the city in 2018, agreeing to key restrictions intended to protect and preserve the historic property.

Restrictions include maintaining the theater as “a public venue offering feature-length motion pictures, or programs, live performance and a restaurant” for a 99-year term; providing at least 12 “community use days” annually; and protection of historic elements.

The community use days have included the Cerrito Classics series sponsored by community group Friends of the Cerrito Theater.

“If it weren’t for the Friends of the Cerrito Theatre, this place wouldn’t have been saved,” Boyd said. “We’re very fortunate in El Cerrito to have a community that loves its theater and loves what we do.”



John C. Stashnik

One of the popular offerings Rialto has been noted for is the National Theatre Live series of productions by the Royal National Theatre in London that is beamed by satellite to cinemas and other venues around the world.

“As soon as National Theatre Live restarts and they are putting stuff up on the satellite, we will have those,” Boyd said, adding that in the meantime, “We may have encore presentations.”

As far as new Hollywood productions, “What happens with the release schedule depends on what happens with audiences coming back,” according to Boyd.

“At the end of the day, we human beings are social creatures who crave social interaction,” he said. “I don’t care how big your television is, you can’t

duplicate the experience” of being in a theater with a big screen and sharing the experience with others. “Directors make movies envisioning they will be shown in theaters,” Boyd noted.

While there is pent-up demand to get out and back

to activities such as movie-going, “The hard part is changing attitudes,” Boyd said. “People feel safe when everybody



John C. Stashnik

is vaccinated. I don’t understand people who don’t want to be vaccinated. More people getting vaccinated is better for all of us,” he said. “It’s

been a challenging, challenging time for everybody.”

As the owner of the premier attraction in what is known as the city’s “theater block,” Rialto is invested beyond simply running a movie house.

The Cerrito’s presence has spurred businesses, particularly restaurants, to open nearby. Like the theater, those businesses are beginning the return to normal operation.

“I love this block. I feel like we’re the heart of downtown El Cerrito,” Boyd said. “And we’re no longer an island. We used to be open alone.”

Proposed residential projects in the area would add to the activity.

“A mid-block crosswalk would help improve things for pedestrians,” Boyd said. “It’s a long block and it could benefit from a mid-block crosswalk.”

## Cerrito Friends Keep an Eye on the Theater

**S**HORTLY after the Cerrito re-opened as a cinema after being shuttered for about 40 years, leaders of Friends of the Cerrito Theater began referring to the group in the past tense.

We had done our job, after all.

The group, which started in mid-2001 as a single individual raising the cry — the former Art Deco theater is about to be gutted — morphed in 2002 into a well oiled machine that convinced the City Council to buy the building and turn it into a theater again.

Time to close up shop, right? But what if the new theater operator, who was leasing the theater from the city, fails? What if the city decides to sell the theater? What if a future owner decides to change its use or rip out the mural and art glass?

Shouldn’t someone stay around to watch over this community treasure? And spur some community spirit?

But before answering, let’s return to the theater’s rebirth.

Lori Dair and Pam Challinor, who formed Friends with me, brought the skills and energy needed to forge a powerful organization. Lori led the group during these challenging years.

Dozens, sometimes hundreds of people attended public meetings, and the city bought the theater, seeing it as a focal point for economic revival of the “theater block” and nearby.

Good thing Friends continued. The first operator did fold, and we were around to show continued community support for the theater as Rialto took over. The city did sell the theater (to Rialto), and we were there to ensure an agreement that will keep it as theater far into the future, and ensure preservation of its historic elements.

Friends continues to promote the theater as a community amenity, with Classic film showings and periodic celebrations. Our group turns 20 next year.

— Dave Weinstein, Chairman,  
Friends of the Cerrito Theater

# Home Sweet Home As We Age

BY GEORGINA EDWARDS

SENIOR HELPERS of the East Bay has been serving our community since 2008, with administrative offices at El Cerrito Plaza, with Maria Lum leading the team of friendly and helpful staff ready to help with the needs of caring for elder family members.

Home care has become a successful solution to fill the gaps crated by traditional care models, including hospitals, nursing homes, and home health services, which are spread too thin to meet the demands of the aging population. Senior Helpers of the East Bay helps clients at their homes from Vallejo, to El Cerrito and Oakland, continue their independence by assisting them to maintain an active life-style for as long as possible in the comfort of their homes. Along with assistance with daily needs, caregivers provide companionship and mental stimulation by engaging their clients in conversation and other activities.

Caregivers can act as an extra set of eyes and ears for families who cannot be with their loved one all the time and help ensure safety provide information to help address needs as they change. Often times, both younger and older members of a family find themselves unprepared for this chapter of live and Senior Helpers can provide support in assessing and determining solutions that best fit each circumstance. In El Cerrito, many clients manage living in their own homes, even 85 years old and on, with some hours of reliable support each day.



Care and comfort at a moment's notice.

(510) 327-5104 • [www.seniorhelpers.com](http://www.seniorhelpers.com)

## From Peru to El Cerrito in One Delicious Bite!

WITH SUMMER around the corner, lots of us are looking forward to reconnecting with friends and sharing time with family. How about “visiting” another country for a meal? El Cerrito’s restaurants provide many opportunities for culinary travel.

Feeling those South American vibes? How about spending some time at one of



El Cerrito’s long standing establishments, El Mono Peruvian restaurant ([elmonofresh.com](http://elmonofresh.com)), to enjoy authentic plates

and atmosphere? With a menu featuring traditional savory dishes like Lomo Saltado, Ceviche and delightful desserts like Lucuma Ice cream, all you have to do is “blink” and imagine yourself in Lima, Cusco, or Arequipa.

A family owned and operated restaurant, El Mono has withstood the test of time and always goes the extra mile to bring the healthiest ingredients coupled with a memorable experience. Starting out as a simple café in 2012, the owners have deep roots in El Cerrito, evolving and growing each year, moving



Pedro Rosales and Rosa Los Santos perform Saturdays, 6-9 p.m.

into its current location during 2020 while managing to remain open during the pandemic, serving our community, embracing delivery services and finally re-opening for in person dining.

One of the most popular times at El Mono are Saturday evenings 6-9 p.m. when you can experience live Latin music with musicians playing rhythms and genres like Salsa, Bachata and Peruvian music. Adding to the festive

vibe is a full bar and specialty drinks, including Peru’s national drink, the Pisco Sour. You can also complement your meal with special non-alcoholic options such as Chicha (made from Purple Corn) and Maracuya (made from Passion Fruit).

Celebrate the return to normality with El Cerrito’s very own El Mono restaurant! Location: Del Norte Place, 11720 San Pablo Ave. opposite Honda.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

With Father's Day fast approaching, being a father was tugging at me in the context of having the good fortune to raise my children in the El Cerrito community, and realizing how all the elements of a community can work together to bring forth positive outcomes. This I can honestly say, my wife Tyra and I are pleased with the results thus far.

El Cerrito Cub Scout Pack 104, Boy Scout Troop 104, El Cerrito Youth Baseball League, El Cerrito High School, Katie's Dance Studio, Big 5 Sporting Goods in El Cerrito, and our great neighbors all played a role in the positive development of our children. It was not just one singular part of the community but the greater community that contributed to their growth.

Scouting and baseball were a tremendous benefit for my son Jeffrey David Wright. He learned a lot as a team member about working with others towards a common goal. He also learned how to work with a wide range of personalities. Our daughter Gina Raquel Wright also learned a lot about teamwork as part of the dance troupe of Katie's Dance Studio and later as part of the dance group at El Cerrito High School. Jeffrey and Gina also were members of the exceptional media and tech futures programs at El Cerrito High School. They both became skilled enough that they were hired through the school district as part-time theatre technical assistants, while still in high school. These are skills that they leveraged into other areas of their lives. Also, while still in high school our son landed a job at the local Big 5 Sporting Goods store and he worked at that store for five years!

As far as our neighbors are concerned, they have been great! A big shout out to

my former neighbor Marian Blechman who gave my son Jeffrey his first "official job" which was watering her yard. I had her house listed for sale and she was no longer occupying it. She hired my son, who was about nine years old at the time, to keep the yard watered. He took the job seriously. I was impressed with the log sheet that he created to track the date and time that he performed his duties.

Our daughter Gina became an "in demand" neighborhood babysitter and frequently was called into service by the Burnham and Davis families, so I thank them as well. Today, I am pleased to report that both of our children are doing well. Jeffrey David left for Bangkok, Thailand in April, where he

will be attending Le Cordon Bleu Dusit and pursuing other business opportunities. Gina Raquel just completed her four-year program at Cal and graduated with a degree in Geography on May 15th.

The takeaway for me is that the Wright children had the opportunity to grow up in a community that they felt safe in and one that afforded them opportunities on multiple fronts. Even amid challenges and on the heels of the pandemic, it is essential that we keep the "fabric of our community" intact so that every aspect and element of our community can thrive and be part of the threads that make up the tapestry of the great city of El Cerrito.

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## Farmers Market

AT EL CERRITO PLAZA

Open Tuesday & Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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Linking Business and Community Since 1936



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# El Cerrito

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## Byline Online

[elcerritochamber.org/byline](http://elcerritochamber.org/byline)

### APARTMENTS

#### TRD AUG 1 1961 Firm to Enter \$2.5 Million Building Plea

EL CERRITO, Aug. 1—The Planning Commission will be asked tomorrow night to grant a use permit for construction of a \$2.5 million, nine-story apartment and recreation center adjacent to the El Cerrito Shopping Plaza.

The center, to be known as El Cerrito Towers, is planned by Apato Inc. of Berkeley on the south side of Fairmount Ave., 200 feet east of San Pablo Ave.

Paul Markling and Associates of South San Francisco, the architects, said plans call for a 60-unit apartment tower with penthouse, an athletic center with Olympic pool and other recreational facilities, a restaurant and meeting hall seating 400.

The apartment structure will be set up on columns on the east end of a three-story structure which will extend west over a total of some 45,000 square feet.

One item the commission will consider will be whether to allow a structure in excess of 50 feet in height, a limitation set down in a city ordinance.

## BART PLAZA PLAN IS SO YESTERDAY

A hot topic on the south end of the city is the BART proposal to develop the El Cerrito Plaza station. It is part of the railroad's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plan to replace most parking areas with apartment housing. New construction would include commercial space and, if financing can be worked out, a city library. [See *Byline*, March 2021.]

The newspaper story at the left is from 60 years ago. Apparently, the idea of housing towers is nothing new. But I doubt BART wants nine-story buildings.

Thanks to Chris Treadway for finding this old news clip.

— John C. Stashik

## Help Wanted

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

HOSPITALITY is hurting. Our members operating bars and restaurants, and even retail businesses, report they cannot hire sufficient help. A quick glance at the Bay Area unemployment statistics show the rate at about six percent.

What is going on? Some attribute the lack of job applicants to generous pandemic unemployment benefits. Maybe. The fact is, I hear the same concern from many businesses. In fact, one business owner told me if they cannot find help, restaurant hours will need to be reduced.

Elevation 66 Brewing Company, for example, needs workers immediately. Advertising isn't getting results. After well over a year either closed or operating with reduced hours due to pandemic regulations, business is finally increasing. Customers are now flocking to the pub eager to enjoy to what was normal before March 2020. But there are few people willing to pour beer or prepare the food.

What is your experience? Where are all the workers?

## Byline

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