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INSPIRATIONS

Denise Ost: “Goodwill is so much more than a thrift store!”

From job training to recycling, Goodwill’s positive effects on the community branch out farther than you’d think, and CEO Denise Ost knows that better than most. As we shift into the season of gratitude, it’s time to consider places that are going above and beyond to help the Central Valley.



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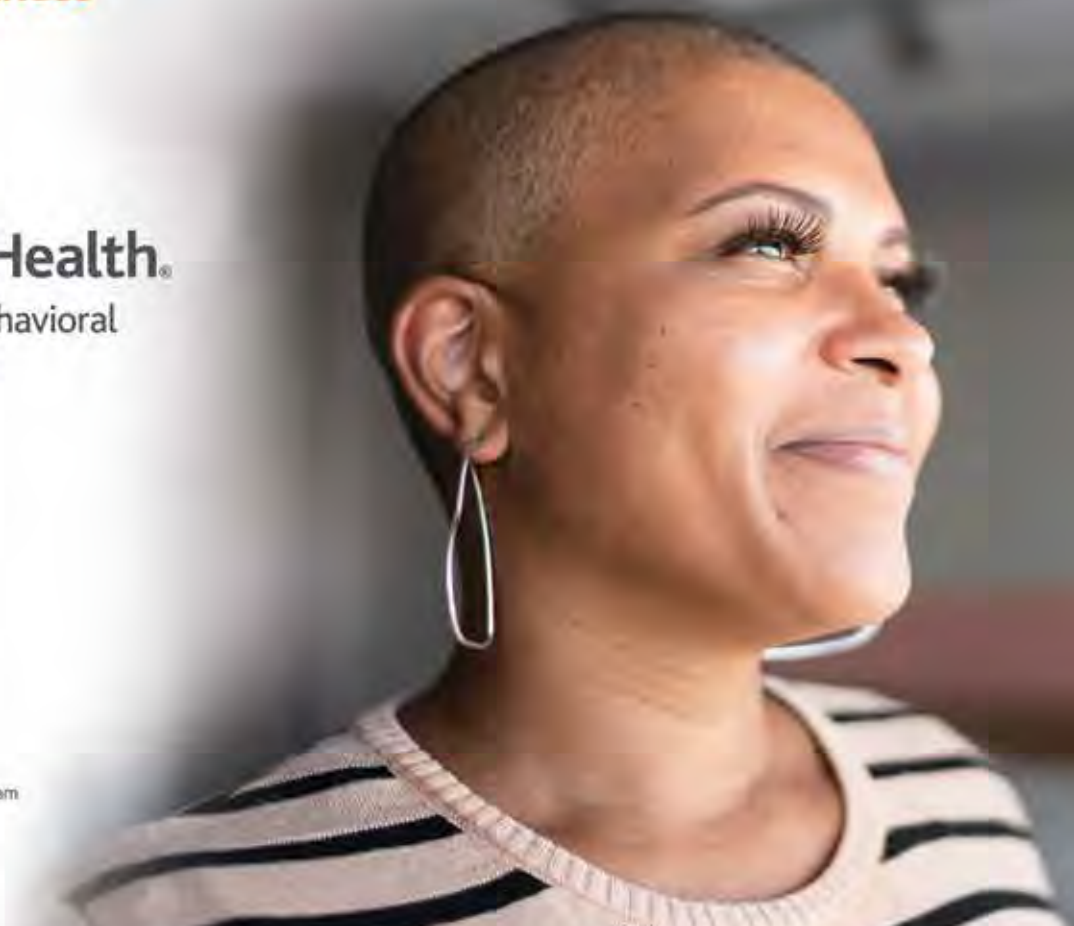
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GIVE THANKS WITH A GRATEFUL HEART

If there was ever a single year to feel grateful, for me it would be 2022. This year has had its challenges, to say the least, but through it all, I am reminded that life is precious, the strength of faith, family and friendship is to be cherished, and appreciation and gratitude for each and every day needs to be expressed. I've had plenty of time to enjoy quiet time each morning, journaling my thoughts and intentional statements of gratitude and grace. My heart has been filled beyond measure, and I am truly grateful for all of life's circumstances.

As Anna and I put together this Gratitude issue during this beautiful season, we are reminded of the hard work that the people of our nonprofit organizations perform. From creating jobs for people with disabilities, to preserving and showcasing our local history, to protecting our children, to being present at the end of life, the leaders of these organizations are tirelessly working. We are grateful for their selfless service, focused daily to support those in need. Throughout this issue we highlight just a few of the many leaders (there are many, many more) who have graciously shared their stories and statements of gratitude. Even in the midst of dealing with



many issues that may never be fully erased, they continue giving of themselves. I believe you will be inspired by their sharing.

This month we are excited to introduce our newest writer, Rachel Telander Fenton. She is a young, gifted writer who is inspired by her homestead life, and we look forward to the many stories she will be sharing. We are also thrilled to showcase the new release of *Grieving Daughters Club*, the first book authored by Andrea Bear, *HERLIFE* Magazine feature writer and St. Mary's graduate. Our writers are of all ages and have a variety of interests, yet they all capture the true essence of the spirit

of our community and the lives of the people who live here.

During this season of Thanksgiving, Anna and I are so grateful. Grateful for our faithful advertisers for believing in us and supporting us! Thank you for taking a chance on us during this first year! And our readers; we hope you enjoy each and every article! Please share *HERLIFE* with your friends and follow us on social media! Our motto is: "Be the Positive!" You will not find negative news in *HERLIFE*. Ever.

Blessings to you and your family!


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DENISE OST

“GOODWILL IS SO MUCH MORE THAN A THRIFT STORE!”



BY CAITLIN HAMER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN ISHII

How often do we consider the second lives of the items we donate? For many of us, they leave our minds once we drop them off at our local Goodwill. But everything that's donated to Goodwill gets a chance to extend its usefulness. The old coat your daughter outgrew can keep a child warm this winter. The serving platter you just don't like can find a new place in someone's first home. The blazer you don't wear anymore can be worn to someone's job interview.

But these donated items also have a significant impact on the many people who work at Goodwill. Just like we may forget to consider what happens to our donated goods, many may not think about the hard work that goes into every aspect of the day-to-day business at Goodwill, a carefully connected web of people who process donations, put items on the floor, ring up your purchases, haul merchandise, or take care of the things that don't sell. For some of these employees, it's

“I’ve done pretty much every job at the agency besides driving a Class A truck,” she said, reflecting on her history with Goodwill. “I feel like I’m a living example of Goodwill’s mission of the power of work to change lives.”





simply a job; for others, it's so much more. Someone who knows this better than anyone is Denise Ost.

CAREER PATH

What began as a human resources job at Goodwill right out of college in August 1984 eventually turned into something much bigger for Denise. It's safe to say that the Lodi native never imagined that she'd work her way up and that in 2022, she'd not only be leading Goodwill Industries of San Joaquin Valley Inc. as president and CEO, but she'd also be overseeing the biggest move in their 80-year history. "I've done pretty much every job at the agency besides driving a Class A truck," she said, reflecting on her history with Goodwill. "I feel like I'm a living example of Goodwill's mission of the power of work to change lives."

Goodwill has been practicing what they preach for quite some time. It was founded in 1902 by the Rev. Edgar J. Helms, who collected used clothes and household goods and then hired and trained people to mend and repair the goods before reselling them. Today, Goodwill's business model is a little different, but the general philosophy remains the same: strengthening the community by reusing goods and creating jobs. While many people are most familiar with Goodwill as the popular chain of thrift stores where you can donate and find preloved and gently used items, there's more here than meets the eye.

Everything you see at a Goodwill store started as a donation, but the steps that are taken to get the items from intake to the sales floor require processing and preparation, and behind those steps are numerous people keeping things running behind the scenes. "When you give to Goodwill, you're creating a job," said Denise. "And that job is changing someone's life."

DEPTH OF OPPORTUNITY

Whether a job at Goodwill is a stepping stone on someone's journey or it becomes a career as in Denise's case, it's clear that they're dedicated to investing in their employees. Goodwill offers classes and job training services for their employees, meaning prospective applicants can get hired with practically no skills and learn as they go while earning a paycheck. Some people have even started as donation attendants and ended up being Class A truck drivers. And many of the skills employees can learn at Goodwill, such as computer and digital skills, can be applied to jobs at other companies if they decide to move on. "The best part about working at Goodwill is the opportunity to constantly learn and grow, and that's been the case from the day I started until today," shared Denise.

Even Goodwill's website offers job and career advice for the general public, always circling back to their mission of helping individuals and families reach their full

potential through employment. Goodwill also prides themselves on employing people with disabilities and disadvantaged conditions, and for being a place where people can get their first start or a second chance. And they teach more than just job skills; Goodwill employees can take classes on subjects such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving, budgeting and more. "We can connect staff with legal counsel, with healthy eating programs, with personal counseling for themselves and family members," added Denise. "It takes a lot of support around an individual, including in their household, for people to be able to show up to work effectively."

FOR THE FUTURE

Over the course of her career at Goodwill, Denise has loved witnessing success stories unfold in real time. And now she gets to see another big event, one that will go on to affect numerous lives for decades into the future. Denise is currently preparing their organization for a move from their downtown Stockton location on Grant Street to a 90,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility on Arch Road. They'll be opening their first 10,000 square foot outlet store, which will create new jobs for the community, allow for more customers and generate millions more for Goodwill's mission services.

Their new facility will also expand logistics to include 16 dock bays, an



improvement over the four dock bays they've previously been working with. This monumental move, which started in 2019 but is finally nearing completion, will expand job training services, double the number of jobs for the community, support twice the number of retail thrift stores and allow for the recycling of more pounds of product every year. With 15 store locations and 17 donation sites in the San Joaquin Valley, it's easy to imagine how much gets donated each year. And

Goodwill's little-known recycling program is another reason they're a popular pillar of sustainability.

REPURPOSE AND REUSE

"We're the original recyclers, long before recycling was chic," quipped Denise. "At Goodwill we give people and things a second chance." Recycling at Goodwill is a fairly large undertaking, but it's a very worthwhile one. In addition to being a state-certified collector of electronic waste, Goodwill recycles plastics, bags, glass, shoes and clothes. When something doesn't sell, it's brought back to the distribution center for another chance to be sold by the pound through the outlet store. If it doesn't sell there, it's bundled up, and they sell as much of the byproduct as they can to other recyclers. All these items must be sorted and then stored until shipping time, and that requires space; when they sell to recyclers, these items must go out in large containers rather than small batches. But at their new facility, the larger square footage and extra dock bays mean more space to sort plastics out from glass to fill entire trailers that will be sold to secondary markets. "We work really hard to keep as much of the items that are donated to us out of the community landfill," explained Denise. She estimates that every year they keep roughly nine million pounds of merchandise out of the landfill, but that will double at their new facility.

PLEASE FOLLOW PROCEDURES!

At the start of the pandemic, the extra time spent at home inspired many people to do some deep cleaning of their closets and cupboards, and the result of that was a significant uptick in donations. While the donations keep people working, Denise stresses that they must be done properly. One of the many misconceptions that people have about Goodwill is that they can simply drop off their items even if there's no one there to receive them, but that's not true; in fact, it disrupts the efficient processes that are constantly in motion and have kept Goodwill running for so long. Donations cannot be left by the closed doors; they must be left with an attendant or not left at all.

Another common misconception is that people sometimes think that just because Goodwill receives donations, these items should be free to whoever wants them. But Goodwill is a not-for-profit agency, and the money generated through those retail purchases pays salaries, keeps the lights on at the stores, fills the gas tanks of the Goodwill trucks and goes toward all the other things it takes to operate a business. "Governmental reporting, payroll taxes, insurance, utilities, rent and all those things," added Denise. "And, there is the cost to providing our mission services of job coaching, job training, life skills training, and all the ways we're supporting people to get into or back into the workforce."

YES, DONATING IS WORTH IT!

For anyone who wonders if they should make the effort to go to a Goodwill location to donate their items rather than just toss them in the trash, the answers are obvious. It's better for the environment to not let things rot in a landfill; and if your items are still in good condition, they can continue to be useful for many more years with someone else. Thrifting may be wildly popular among young folks looking for unique styles these days, but there are also people who shop at Goodwill because they're seeking reasonably priced items for their important and everyday moments. It would be an understatement to say that lives are being affected by Goodwill in countless ways, all year round. This mecca for secondhand shoppers cares about fulfilling your thrifting needs, but they also care about helping people attain and maintain self-sufficiency through the power of a good job. "I've had a lot of difficulties in my own life," shared Denise. "The one constant for me has been Goodwill. I'm really proud to say I work for Goodwill and that I get to lead Goodwill is truly a gift."

Goodwill's enduring popularity is often credited to many things: for their sustainable retail model of reselling and recycling; for being an invaluable institution for people who need to shop for certain items on a budget; and of course, for those who love getting lost among the aisles and the clothing racks, finding hidden gems they didn't know they needed. But it's important to remember that the employees are an essential aspect of Goodwill, and for many of them, this job could be making the biggest difference in their lives; just like some of the items you part ways with, they may do the same for someone else.

"Goodwill is important because we see potential in all people and all things," said Denise. "Everyone and everything have value." ♦

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MADISON MACDONALD

RAISING AWARENESS FOR TEEN MOMS

BY HERLIFE STAFF

As a senior at Tracy High School, Madison MacDonald was interested in holding a fundraiser to support pregnant teens. Growing up, Madison remembers stories of her grandma's struggles as a teen mother, and although it was generations later, she wanted to help bring awareness to the commonly overlooked challenges teenage mothers face. After much research she decided that the Women's Center Youth & Family Services Safe House was the right fit. It's a place for runaway and homeless youth ages 12 to 17 to receive wraparound services such as support groups, life skills training, parenting classes and shelter. When choosing an organization to support, it was important to Madison that the funds collected went to resources for pregnant teens.



A teenage pregnancy can feel incredibly scary and overwhelming, especially if you are going through it alone. Expecting

teenagers are at a higher risk for school dropout, unemployment and mental health issues. With the funds donated to Madison's project, she hopes that teens will have the resources they need to feel supported and encouraged during this challenging time.

She began helping Safe House by attending community events, offering information and talking about resources available. She gave handmade bracelets to anyone who donated to help support Safe

House. To date, she has raised more than \$1,500. Although she is graduating this coming year, she has decided to continue her efforts to raise awareness and support

pregnant teens. Madison plans to attend college and will continue to help others, especially her Tracy community.

When asked what she enjoyed about this project, Madison responded, "Since there are limited resources, I enjoy shedding light on what is available for pregnant teens! I am glad that I am able to help teens connect with the resources that are available for them in our community." ♦



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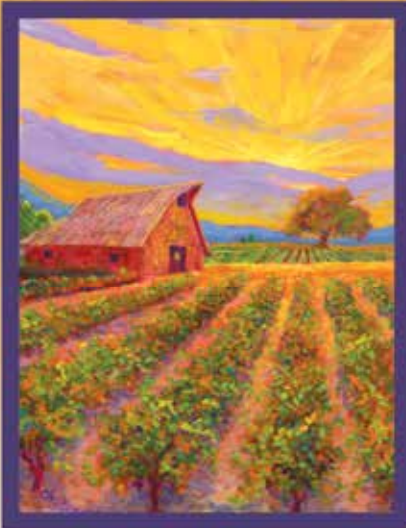
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BY HERLIFE STAFF

Kay Ruhstaller, nonprofit leader and CEO of the Family Resource & Referral Center, sat down with HERLIFE Magazine recently to share her dedication to family and community.

HLM: *How long have you lived here? What do you love most?*

KR: I'm from Omaha, Nebraska, and I have lived in Stockton for 33 years. The part I love the most about Stockton and San Joaquin County is the diversity of cultures and hard-scrabble people that continue fighting to make this place we love better. I also adore the sunsets over the Delta accompanied by the delta breeze.

HLM: *How is your heart inspired to serve the community?*

KR: The greater part of my career has been in service to children and youth and their families. My heart is here. The Family Resource & Referral Center team goes above and beyond to create bright futures for children and youth. We have diversified our services beyond child care to include employment services, home visitation services, and many other family strengthening services such as the Help Me Grow program, which provides assessments of children's development milestones so children can be properly screened for vision, hearing, speech and developmental delays. We've operated a pre-school named after the founder of our organization, Joan Richards Learning Village, since 2015. We also became the designated 211 service provider for San Joaquin County. 211 is a dedicated phone line for the sole purpose of improving access to health, human and disaster recovery services. For a decade, we operated the Teen Impact Center for the city of Stockton as the city emerged from bankruptcy, affording youth a safe haven in downtown Stockton.

HLM: *What sparks joy for you?*

KR: Kids absolutely still spark joy in my life. Kids and puppies; dancing; spending time with lifelong friends.

HLM: *What's your free time passion?*

KR: When not working, I can be found walking with my husband, our dog Lincoln, and his sidekick Stevie, my grand dog. I'm fairly religious about shopping at the farmer's market on Sunday morning where you can really soak in the bounty that is San Joaquin County.

HLM: *Top three bucket list goals?*

KR: The top long-term goal on my bucket list is to create a dedicated children's local fund along with the army of the persistent that is the San Joaquin Children's Alliance. When we invest in children, everyone wins. Second is to live abroad and travel extensively while there. Short-term bucket list is to see the Giants at spring training; next year will be better for them.

HLM: *What accomplishment are you most proud of?*

KR: Choosing a great partner of 31 years, Donald, and raising two kind, smart and spirited daughters, Kathleen and Rebecca, together while having a rewarding career is what I had always dreamed of doing. I'm most proud of our family and the love and strength we share in good and in challenging times. Becoming the 13th female president of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce in the 121-year history of the organization is an accomplishment. I'm very honored to serve with a board committed to making businesses and Stockton thrive. When business is good, families and children thrive.

HLM: *Can you describe a key event that had an impact on your life?*

KR: My mom's mother passed away when she was 11 years old. Her family was dirt poor, as they say in Texas. Her older brothers went into the military after high school and she and her younger brother went to an orphanage because her father didn't feel they would learn and grow as needed while he tried to earn a living during the Depression. My mother profoundly shaped all of her children by her silent strength and resourceful resilience. She did not complain about anything. This remarkable example she set fueled almost all of my professional work to connect people to the resources they need when they need them, child care and other. I've often wondered if I might have known my grandmother if they'd had the resources for healthcare.

HLM: *Do you have a favorite quote?*

KR: For this time of year: "Gratitude is the memory of the heart," an old French proverb by Jean-Baptiste Massieu.

HLM: *What are you currently reading?*

KR: Reading for about the tenth time, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. I'm always reading more than one book at a time.

HLM: *Favorite food or dessert?*

KR: Soft-serve vanilla ice cream, preferably in a small town in Texas with family, simply the best. ♦



GRUPE COUNTRY FAIR

It was a beautiful evening on the grounds of Shady Oak, and the home of Fritz and Phyllis Grupe was the perfect setting for the Grupe Country Fair on September 10. Hosted and underwritten by The Grupe Company, Grupe Huber and Greenlaw Partners, the event raised \$1.3 million for Gospel Center Rescue Mission, Community Partnership for Families and other organizations that provide programs to help the homeless learn life skills and career training. More than 850 guests enjoyed strolling through classic automobiles while enjoying cuisine from local restaurants. Following dinner under the beautiful oak trees, guests enjoyed a concert by country star Sara Evans and danced 'til midnight! ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN,
STEFFI R. PHOTOGRAPHY AND TIM ULMER





OPPORTUNITY HOUSE

Second Chances



Opportunity House Staff

BY ANDREA BEAR | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN ISHII

A second chance for someone can be the difference between new beginnings or setbacks, especially for the residents of San Joaquin County's Women's Center-Youth & Family Services or WCYFS, Opportunity House, a transitional living program that serves male and female youth from ages eighteen to twenty-two, and provides emergency shelter for youth ages 18 to 25. Elizabeth Sanchez, community engagement and education manager, recognizes this as she encounters some of the most vulnerable youth of the Stockton community. "We are the county's primary provider for support to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, along with youth at risk or experiencing any form of homelessness or housing instability," said Sanchez. Her job supports those trying to overcome difficult challenges in their lives, but what she didn't expect was that on a cold February morning those difficult challenges would emerge from the housing where these youth reside.

On February 27, 2021, a mysterious fire began in the south corner of Opportunity House. Residents in the home detected the back of the house filling up with smoke. Fortunately, everyone had escaped safely,

but the damage that was done created a sense of hopelessness. "We were devastated," said Krista Fiser, CEO for the WCYFS. "We were already in the middle of finishing a remodel in the kitchen." This would mean the residents would have to be uprooted and this was equally personal for her as she had experienced homelessness herself at an early age and could relate to having to relocate.

Fortunately, WCYFS' community was able to temporarily move the residents to hotels and eventually to another temporary housing while the fire damage was assessed and repaired. But this would take time and extend over a year and seven months. Krista was assured that while the residents were rehoused, they would continue to receive support during the remodel. "Fortunately, temporary housing was very close to our main office so residents wouldn't have to travel far," she said. Services such as case management, mental and physical wellbeing, education and employment were all amenities that many of the residents would continue to receive.

While Krista and Elizabeth were taking care of the emotional and physical wellbeing of the residents, Haggerty Construction was hired to assess the damage and rebuild. Jeff



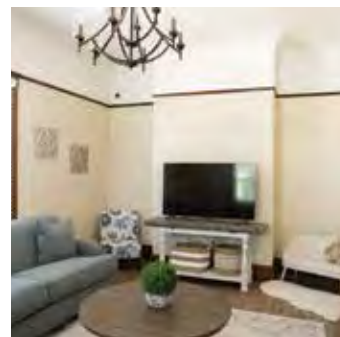
Booksher, manager for Restore for Haggerty Construction, shared that the goal of the restoration was to keep the integrity of the design to the age of the home and to restore the personal features. But in order to do that they needed to address the severity of the damage. "The biggest challenge to the project was securing the foundation," he said. "The house had a crawl space and caught fire, which created quite a bit of damage. We had to have a company come and bring tractors to remove the entire foundation." This would create a challenge as the entire home would have to be lifted; this would delay the remodel

by adding an additional three months to the restoration. Fortunately, it was a challenge Haggerty Construction could manage. "Everything else was relatively seamless," Jeff affirmed.

While the fire created a setback for the residents, Krista acknowledges it created a second chance to open up more space, and beds, in the house for future residents. Both Haggerty Construction and Krista agreed that the rebuild should match the age of the home. "We wanted to keep the same wood look and aesthetics of the home itself," recalled Jeff, who oversaw the remodel along with the help, in its final months, from assistant superintendent Edgar Vasquez. While they kept to the integrity of the 1905 design, they also included some upgraded features such as new wood flooring, paint and a whole brand-new kitchen, mixing the Victorian features with a contemporary style.

On September 7, the Opportunity House held a ribbon cutting ceremony and invited community members to visit the newly remodeled home. Krista Fiser was thrilled how it came together. "It took a lot of work, prayer and having faith that it would work out the way it was supposed to." In addition, Elizabeth Sanchez loved the response from the residents. She recalls overhearing a conversation from some of the younger residents about which room would be theirs while she was giving a tour. "They felt like this was their house, and it was beautiful," she said. "For some, they have never had a house nor a person to care for them. To see that they have that sense of belonging to something, that makes everything worth it."

Now Opportunity House, just like its residents, has had its



All hope seemed lost for Women's Center-Youth & Family Service's Opportunity House after a fire compromised the foundation on February 2021. But with a new remodel and support from the community, hope was restored as residents celebrated its return.

second chance and continues to be that haven for other youth. In the last year, over 35 residents have made a stay in the facility and called it home.

If you would like to learn more about Opportunity House or how you can help make an impact in the lives of transitional youth, you can reach out at womenscenterYFS.org or visit their office on 620 N. San Joaquin Street in Stockton. ♦

To learn more about Opportunity House or how you can help make an impact in the lives of transitional youth, reach out at womenscenteryfs.org or visit their office on 620 N. San Joaquin St., Stockton.

- MEDICARE INFORMATIONAL MEETING -

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NOVEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3



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ALESHA B. PICHLER

BY HERLIFE STAFF

Alesha B. Pichler, Emergency Food Bank's community relations manager, talked with HERLIFE Magazine recently to share her dedication to family and community.

HLM: How long have you lived here? What do you love most?

AP: I was born in San Francisco and have lived in Stockton for over 40 years. Stockton and the Central Valley are just that, central, three

hours to the beach, three hours to the mountains and even less time to enjoy any of the area waterways! Festival and community events are plentiful in the county. And with the exception of a couple of triple-digit temperatures, the weather cannot be beat.

HLM: How is your heart inspired to serve the community?

AP: When I worked at *The Record* newspaper, I became involved with the United Way and realized that there were so many organizations that do just that, help. No judgment, just a helping hand. That is what drove me to my current position at the Emergency Food Bank. Food is essential to the well-being of all and at this moment in time, with so many families struggling to purchase healthy food, I am proud to be part of the Emergency Food Bank team that assists hard-working families during difficult times. The pure act of serving those who find themselves in an emergency situation inspires me on a daily basis.

HLM: What sparks joy for you?

AP: My family. My friends. My job.

HLM: What's your free time passion?

AP: Teaching children how to play the piano. Spending time with my only daughter, who will soon leave to serve a church mission, helping my husband around the yard and teaching Jazzercise!

HLM: Top three bucket list goals?

AP: Take my family on a trip to Central America so they can see where I lived during my childhood years. Play Greig's Piano Concerto in A Minor. Visit the Disneyland parks all around the world with my family.

HLM: What accomplishment are you most proud of?

AP: Raising two amazing humans. One has graduated university, married and just purchased his first home; and the other graduated high school under trying (COVID) circumstances and on her own decided to defer college for a year and a half while she serves a church mission.

HLM: Can you describe a key event that had an impact on your life?

AP: Having my parents move in with me and my family. Being able to care for my parents has been a humbling experience. It is interesting that even as I have become an adult, I can still continue to learn from them.

HLM: Do you have a favorite quote?

AP: "In all of living, have much fun and laughter. Life is to be enjoyed, not just endured." ~Gordon B. Hinkley.

HLM: What are you currently reading?

AP: My daughter just gave me a quick read.... "Way to Be! 9 Ways to be Happy and Make Something of Your Life" by Gordon B. Hinkley.

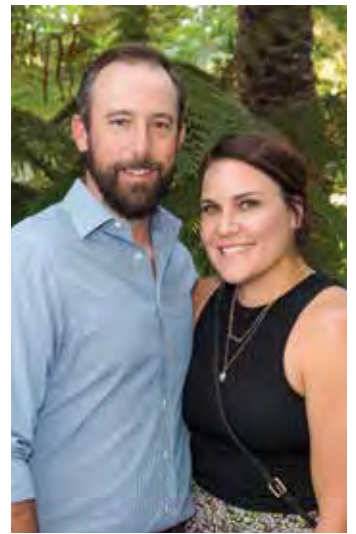
HLM: Favorite food or dessert?

AP: I am always on the hunt for good crème brûlée. ♦

ROSE GARDEN GALA

“To plant a seed is to believe in tomorrow.” Celebrating their 20th year of sowing and growing in Lodi and beyond, the 180 Teen Center held the Rose Garden Gala at Wine and Roses on September 9. It was an incredible evening, filled with live music, dinner and the chance to connect with other amazing supporters while hearing about the center’s advancements. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



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gratitude



"I am grateful for my professional life at the Haggin Museum that allows me to grow as a person and enriches my personal life. From our work with local teachers and the schools to hosting temporary exhibitions, being involved in education and quality of life in our community is very rewarding. Our volunteers' tireless dedication is a tremendous asset to the Haggin and our entire community. I am honored to work with these dedicated volunteers, humbled by their generosity and thrilled to call so many of them my friends. I know that many of our visitors and local students are grateful for our docents sharing their knowledge and time with them throughout the years. There is no doubt that the museum has a fabulous collection as its foundation, but it has always been the museum's volunteers, members and our community that have been its strength. I would be remiss if I did not say that I am also grateful for the museum's beautiful setting within Victory Park that leaves me no excuse not to get my exercise walking around the one-mile perimeter."

SUSAN OBERT, CEO
THE HAGGIN MUSEUM



"I am grateful for grace. Grace given and grace received.
And chocolate."

LINDY TURNER, PRESIDENT CEO
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION COUNCIL

"The practice of gratitude is near and dear to me. Stockton invested in me at a young age and in return I am grateful to serve our students, community and organizations to provide direct impact. Reinvent Stockton Foundation has given me the opportunity to be a part of the journey with programs such as Stockton Service Corps and Stockton Scholars that provide services directly to our students and community. In fact, we just celebrated the beginning of a new service year for our corps members who will support Stockton's students, teachers and community organizations. The kickoff was held at the Emergency Food Bank, where our Reinvent Stockton Foundation and Stockton Service Corps team came together with our corps members to provide a day of service to the Emergency Food Bank. We put together food distribution items and helped them with a few facilities projects as a thank you for the important work they do for Stocktonians. I believe gratitude makes us appreciate the value of something, and when we appreciate the value of something, we're less likely to take it for granted. Gratitude allows us to participate more fully in life. I am deeply grateful for the investment my family and friends have made in me through their love and endless support that keeps me motivated to serve my community."

**CLAUDIA HARO, DIRECTOR
OF OPERATIONS**
REINVENT STOCKTON



gratitude



"On a daily basis I see an overwhelming number of needs at the Lodi House. While this can feel discouraging, I've learned that it provides the best environment to cultivate gratefulness. I get to witness generosity and genuine human kindness in our community. I delight in watching our supporters get involved to help us. I experience the joy of seeing people donate treasured items to the Lodi House Thrift Boutique that bring hope to mothers as they furnish their first apartments. I am grateful to all for the extensive work from so many who are willing to help at a moment's notice. Together they provide everything we need to keep Lodi House operational! We have an ambitious and at times daunting mission to see lives transformed as women and children who were burdened by homelessness achieve long-term stability. However, these impossible moments have given me countless opportunities to develop my personal relationship with Jesus and experience incredible comfort, strength and hope. What I have come to understand is the more difficult the trials and obstacles in front of us, the more grateful I have grown in seeing women and children's lives healed and restored. The grace, perseverance, love and hope that I receive through Jesus keep me from giving up. For this I am eternally grateful."

SHELBY YOUNG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LODI HOUSE



"I'm most thankful for my mom and dad. From my earliest childhood memories, they, Jovita and Paul Gomez, showed me the importance of love and kindness. I am who I am because of my parents! They've given me the greatest gift of acceptance and love. They taught me to make life count and not to take anything for granted and to be kind to people. I love

living in Stockton, where community means something. I'm grateful that I get to work every day with passion and purpose at Children's Home of Stockton and honored to work alongside inspiring and compassionate people who share the same vision of improving young lives. My daughters, Isabelle and Alyce, are my greatest gift in this life. I am in awe of the both of them as they fulfill their own dreams, finding their destiny. Their gumption, compassion and fearlessness take my breath away. I'm grateful and so proud to be their mom. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude to have such a special love in my life. Edward Figueroa is my best friend, my role model, confidant and love of my life. I'm grateful he chose me to share this life with. He has taught me to make my actions, not just my words, true. I have learned to live in the moment and savor the blessings in life. Finally, I am grateful to be in a world where hope makes anything possible, and the future is full of promise."

JOELLE GOMEZ, CEO
CHILDREN'S HOME OF STOCKTON

"Each night we sit around the family dinner table and share a moment we were grateful for. Each night my husband, Brett, says, 'I am thankful for this moment right now.' Each night his words serve as the foundation for our dinner conversation, grounding us in the simplicity of gratitude. I have so many things to be grateful for it is truly challenging to narrow it down to 250 words. So, I want to focus on the present. I want to focus on being grateful for

right now. I want to reflect on the moment I am in. Right now, I am grateful for my baby's laughter. Right now, I am grateful for the lesson our girls learned about time management this morning. I am grateful for the hard moments, frustrating situations, my mistakes and my triumphs. By choosing to actively live "positively present," I must give grace to myself and others. It is hard to find clarity in the present if we worry only about the past or future. I must trust God when I don't know the answer. In Luke 12:25, Christ asks this question: "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" So today and every day I choose to be grateful and live positively present. I choose to be grateful for the lessons I learn, relationships I build and the opportunities I have to serve. I know my God has conquered death and it is this knowledge that gives me the confidence to be grateful for every single moment of life."

MEREDITH BAKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FOR FAMILIES
OF SAN JOAQUIN



gratitude

"Gratitude is feeling good about life even when the thunder clouds threaten. In every situation there is good and bad, yin and yang. Growth doesn't happen without struggle. If these sound like empty platitudes, think again. The ability to see the good while devastation strikes allows my mind, body and spirit to muscle through. No one's life is free from challenges. I've faced many. I'm grateful for my husband of 30 years, Fred Sheil, my loving and supportive and strong family, and a community that has allowed and encouraged me to be me, to forge ahead. I'm proud to be part of Stockton's artistic tribe, the players, performers, makers and mad folks who dance in the rain. I'm grateful that Stockton supports Tuleburg Press and our book arts center, The Write Place. They are my thank you, my legacy, to my home town. Books are the bastion against ignorance. Everything about books—the reading, writing, and making of them—fascinates me. I hope I can always read more, write more, and be more."

**PAULA SHEIL, FOUNDER TULEBURG PRESS
VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR, THE WRITE PLACE**



"Where is gratitude in my life? Everywhere! Expressing gratitude hasn't always been easy for me. Earlier in my years, I tried gratitude journaling, writing daily on things that brought me gratitude, which didn't last long. Then I thought, I will try something simpler, so every morning I think of five things I'm grateful for. I believe age helps with the understanding of gratitude. All too often we hear, 'You don't realize what you have until you don't have it anymore.' I have had my share of life's up and downs just like everyone else, lost loved ones, life's many disappointments. Looking back at those sad and disappointing times, I am grateful for all those learning opportunities. Life lessons just seem to get clearer as age. Every day, as I walk my dog, JoJo, it gives me time to reflect, really take a breath to look around and count my many blessings. I make sure that I wake up feeling calm, joyful and blessed, adopting an attitude for gratitude, which forces me to get outside of my problems and look at the bigger picture. In turn, I am able to bounce forward when challenges occur in life. Expressing gratitude may be the true key to happiness. It's working for me."

**MARJORY SCHRENK,
PRESIDENT/CEO
LOEL FOUNDATION**



"Losing a loved one at any age is a difficult experience. But when you are young, it can be absolutely devastating. I am very grateful that Hospice of San Joaquin can provide grief services to children in our area through our Camp Caterpillar program. Due to the growing need for bereavement services in San Joaquin County, we have added a second Camp Caterpillar in Lodi. Camp Caterpillar helps children kindergarten through eighth grade cope with their grief in a safe environment. Grief-related activities are planned and led by trained volunteers and staff. Activities include art, music, storytelling, creative writing and recreation. Campers learn to express their feelings, improve communication, and learn coping skills to deal with current and future losses. Children learn that grief is not a process of forgetting but remembering with less pain. Camp Caterpillar is one of many programs that Hospice of San Joaquin provides to all members of our communities. There are grief programs designed for teens and adults. I am grateful to be part of the team that facilitates these programs. I am grateful that Hospice of San Joaquin has been in San Joaquin County for over 42 years and is the only hospice with a Hospice House. Our programs are provided at no charge."

**SANDY STODDARD, MARKETING DIRECTOR
HOSPICE OF SAN JOAQUIN**



"There's so much to be grateful for! I am grateful for my new career at the Gospel Center Rescue Mission, helping restore the lives of the homeless and addicted in San Joaquin County. I am so thankful for those that I have met along the way thus far in my role here, including our students and staff. I am also so thankful for all of our donors. Without their generosity, none of what we do to serve the homeless in our community would be possible. There are so many amazing things happening here at the mission, and many more exciting things to come. None of these things would be possible without the help and support of our donors. We are truly blessed beyond measure. Lastly, thank you to HERLIFE Magazine for giving not only myself, but all women of the Central Valley, an opportunity to be seen and heard."

**KENDRA KAISERMAN, MARKETING DIRECTOR
GOSPEL CENTER RESCUE MISSION**

gratitude



"I recently changed my morning routine to try to include personal reflection, something I have struggled to make time for since having my second child a few months ago. As a working mama, it's hard to not want to sleep in and hit the snooze button when the rest of the house is asleep. But I have found that when I make the time for this, my outlook on the day is transformed. Why? Because we gravitate in the direction of our dominant thoughts. In this season of Thanksgiving, I have found myself extra thankful for Oasis City Center. I'm truly thankful

to be a part of an organization that ignites hope for thousands of families living in our community, on a weekly basis. I'm grateful to work alongside a passionate group of individuals who create moments of opportunity for our volunteers. And I'm fortunate enough to have my family alongside me through all of this. I was recently thinking about how quick the holidays are approaching and I can't help but think about all the work and resources that will go into providing moments of hope and opportunity for our community, from the family grocery boxes that will be packed, dollars that will be donated, and time that will be volunteered. I am truly grateful to be a member of such an amazing community."

HEATHER GREEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OASIS CITY CENTER

"There are many things I am grateful for: healthy food, a nice house, a fulfilling job, amazing children and a supportive community of friends. My gratitude for these blessings is unmatched by the person I am most grateful for: my husband, Eric, and his matching passion for volunteering in our community. From being my right hand person during the early years of Festa Italiana to helping Girl Scouts earn money so they can have experiences they might never be able to afford on their own, he's always there to do what's necessary and make a success out of everything he touches. When I started working Election Day as a poll worker, he soon joined me and now we work together in locations as far away as Clements. When the Northern California Pinball Association needed a new volunteer, Eric dove in and championed the effort to bring the Golden State Pinball Festival to Lodi providing a significant revenue stream to charities that benefit local kids. He manages all of this while working a demanding job as a software engineer. He's a dad who loves his girls and even teaches them how to drive. Eric is the glue that holds our family together. He understands exactly the difference a few people can make when they come together to volunteer. He's the creative force behind so many of my wild ideas and for that I am grateful."

ANDREA SONGEY-NEFF

"I have so many things to be grateful for! First of all, I am grateful for the outstanding, brilliant man that I am married to (he really is irreplaceable). Additionally, I had the honor of raising two awe-inspiring children who gave me three flawless grandchildren. How can I not be thankful? Stir into the mix the fact that I get to live in beautiful California where there are redwoods, the Pacific Ocean and museums. Ahh, museums, a perfect segue to another thing I am grateful for, my new job! I am thankful for the opportunity to work for San Joaquin County Historical Museum. Not very many people get to drive past beautiful farmlands and vineyards on their way to work. Moreover, I get to work in the Erickson Building beside the first people's gallery, the Miwok and Yokuts, and the Helen Weber Kennedy Gallery. Together, with the expertise of knowledgeable docents, my job allows me to work with students across the San Joaquin County. When I blend my work environment with the incredible staff of the museum, it's a dream job! Finally, I am grateful for living in this very moment and for the God who gives me breath."

CAROLE PINNELL, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM



PLEASE PASS THE PLATTER AND THE TRADITION

BY CINDY MCDERMOTT

For many, holidays would not be complete without a traditional family gathering with a multitude of foods in dishes spread across a mishmash of tables at Grandma's house. It's time to dig in.



However, last year's traditional dinner did not go smoothly. The potatoes were lumpy, the pumpkin pie served more like soup and the burnt turkey set off the smoke detector. It's apparent the job has become too cumbersome for your elderly loved ones. Your holiday celebration may need a change but it could be easier said than done. The institution of creating and consuming that turkey and trimmings is deeply embedded in your happiness.

"Traditions are a way of keeping consistency. As the world continues to change, we have these things that we can come back to, these things that are familiar, touchstones, that reflect to us that everything is okay," noted Gregory Nawalanic, PsyD, clinical director of psychology and behavioral sciences, The University of Kansas

Health System. "It's a nice communication of the importance and value of family, especially in the wake of the pandemic. It's about familiarity, comfort and connections. These are the things that keep us centered."

PROOF IN THE PUDDING

Yes, it's very clear to the "next generation" that something needs to happen for the traditional holiday dinner to

continue. But it's pea soup to your stubborn matriarch or patriarch. Dr. Nawalanic points to an appropriate way to open the discussion.

"When we get trapped in traditions, it happens because no one wants to initiate conversation. It doesn't have to start with a statement but with a question. 'Mom, it seems like this is a lot of work for you to do every year. Maybe we can try something else? Let's share the

load,” stated Dr. Nawalanic. “Maybe you initiate another tradition, which can be hard to evolve, but it’s important to recognize the evolution of tradition by saying that you need to try something different. ‘Mom, how about you make the turkey, and everyone brings a side?’ Remember, it’s not about the food; it’s about the people, the family and the love. ‘Mom, it’s our way to share the love in the same way you shared the love with us through all those years.’”

EVEN THE PROS LEARN

Another key to success could be asking for Grandma to become your teacher and begin a new tradition. Not only does it involve the matriarch, who may be a bit reluctant to give up her part, but the results are valuable kitchen learnings to pass on to another generation.

HERLIFE Magazine Culinarian Lauren Lane knows the importance of this role. Unfortunately, her mother and mother-in-law passed away before the “technology transfer” occurred and the traditional holiday dinner landed on Lauren’s plate.

“It would’ve been nice had there been a transition and a coaching phase. My first Thanksgiving on my own was a disaster. My turkey was still raw, my corn casserole was still frozen and my pie was burnt. It’s still the running joke,” she mused. “It took a long time to get to where I am today.”

OTHER RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

Another suggestion to ease the move to a new tradition is creating a family cookbook, and everyone is welcome to contribute. Now, it’s not just Grandma’s dishes, but members can participate with a

favorite food.

“It’s creating a special connective document for the family, and it becomes a new investment for them,” Dr. Nawalanic shared. “Traditions are a way to still enjoy Grandma’s sweet potato casserole that she shared with us even though she has passed on. When we make that dish, we remember her and maintain that connection viscerally. You can almost convince yourself she’s still there.”

Perhaps Grandma isn’t quite ready to give up her role. Then consider asking every attendee to bring a dish to enjoy, including the turkey, which could be purchased at the local grocery and delivered or baked at another home. You may need the room that Grandma’s house offers for your large family, but this relieves her of the burden of completing the entire meal. And everyone cleans up!

Be creative with traditions. Perhaps your holiday meal changes to a picnic in the park. Maybe it becomes snacks and desserts or a buffet of soups and breads. Or you decide to volunteer at a community kitchen or visit relatives in assisted living facilities. Although years ago it might have been shunned, if you plan far enough in advance, you can go out to eat, which relieves everyone of the cooking burden. Or you can purchase the entire meal from a restaurant or grocery for delivery.

“Try extending your traditions to something different,” commented Dr. Nawalanic. “Truly, it’s about coming back to the connection, that love and the real meaning of the holidays, which is taking stock of your family, connecting and being grateful for what you have.” ♦



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RIMA BARKETT

STOCKTON COMMUNITY KITCHEN
AND INTERNATIONAL FOOD HUB

Cooking Up Success for Women

BY MARY RAFFETTO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SYDNEY SPURGEON



Something wonderful is cooking over at Rima Barkett's Bella Vista Restaurant and Rooftop Events venue, and it's more than fabulous food. It's the sweet smell of opportunity for talented cooks who want to learn how to open their own food businesses. The Stockton Community Kitchen and International Food Hub trains these participants in the entrepreneurial skills needed to succeed.

Monday through Friday, select cooks produce their unique lunch cuisine, selling it to a hungry public from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. via Door Dash and/or pickup. Original ethnic foods are showcased and often featured in the International Food Hub's social media posts to keep customers updated and inspired.

KITCHEN INCUBATOR

Rima, who hails from the Tuscany region of Italy, described her attraction to the restaurant business. "It gave me the opportunity to share my love, because I love to feed people, to make people happy with my food." She had plenty of experience running a restaurant and had already operated a nonprofit for over ten years, so it was a natural fit when Stockton leaders approached her with the idea to build a more diverse food industry by establishing a "kitchen incubator," a project modeled after one in San Francisco that nurtures hardworking cooks into fledgling restaurant owners.

"I loved the concept," Rima said, speaking from the heart. "To elevate a society, you need to give the opportunity of a hand up to women. If women are doing well, they can be better mothers, raise peaceful and confident children, and that's what improves our society." After a cook submits her application to the Stockton Community Kitchen, there is a selection process. "We choose very outstanding cooks first and foremost. They provide food samples, tastings, and if we find that they have 'that something special' and we think they will succeed, then we select them for three to six months of training here before they move on. A lot of people are surprised to discover that this training is free to the cooks." To her protégées, Rima preaches a work ethic mirroring her own. "I tell them 'commitment, commitment, commitment' is the secret to success! You show up, and work, work, work. Come back the next day and do it again." Even with her years of experience, Rima added, "I'm still learning every day!"

THE CHEFS

Antoinette Miller, owner of Chef Net Soul Food, currently dishes up her popular specialties, which change regularly but include fried fish, green beans, creamy mac 'n' cheese and cornbread, just to name a few, all made from scratch, all exceptionally delicious. Alongside her, Krista "Tita" Lucero, owner of Koquito, serves her scrumptious vegan/plant-based versions of her Puerto Rican family recipes, such as irresistible empanadas with citrus sauce, flavorful rice with pink beans and delectable gourmet green salads. Also vegan is the homestyle cuisine of Comida de Jen, with its tempting array of authentic Mexican comfort foods including tamales, birria tacos and homemade salsas. With beaming smiles, their joy and enthusiasm are palpable as these ladies share their gift of food with others.

Rima looks forward to seeing her students succeed as others have already done. "Seeing these women open their businesses and succeed is what I want most. We find a way to help with whatever they need." There's plenty of work to be done as they enter fall, their busiest season. When one group of cooks graduates, another is already on its way in, thanks to Rima's generous spirit and actions to help these entrepreneurs soar. While the foods and the entrepreneur-cooks are many and may change from week to week, there is one person Rima credits as the grounding force for the whole program, Leonel Castillo. "He is my right hand at the foundation and he is a big part of its success." Leonel started the Stockton Community Kitchen with Rima and she feels strongly about giving him the recognition due. "He was there from the beginning and deserves the credit."



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MORE OPPORTUNITIES

The commercial kitchen is so big and has so many independent production areas, that it also accommodates the preparation of thousands of Meals on Wheels and Food Care meals without overlapping or interfering with Rima's students' operation up front. In fact, most people don't realize this, but the commercial kitchen is also available for rent to professional caterers in hourly and daily increments for special projects and the cost is very reasonable.

"One of the Stockton jewels is our view from the Bella Vista rooftop." Apropos of its name, "beautiful view" in Italian, the venue boasts what is indeed likely the best and most beautiful view of the waterways. "From up there you can easily imagine yourself to be at a resort, somewhere very special," she observed, and her guests agree; the location is truly a hidden gem. Describing some of the options for special events, Rima says Bella Vista proudly offers an array of superb Italian and Mexican foods. "Bartenders, full bar, it's all available if you want," she added, "Chairs, tables, servers, all included!" The rooftop is open until 10:00 p.m. and downstairs until midnight. "Weddings, office meetings, reunions, quinceaneras, celebrations of any kind, we do a beautiful job!" ♦

Bella Vista is located at 110 N. El Dorado Street, Stockton, (209) 608-5455 or (209) 949-2104; visit internationalfoodhub.menu to order foods online; stocktoncommunitykitchen.org to learn more about the foundation; and bellavistastockton.com.

BEST CROSS BODY BAGS FOR FALL

BY LINDA R. PRICE

For fall, the crossbody bags are in. They're so practical! Women are out and about again, so they are looking for bags that will free their hands for grabbing the run-away toddler or a couple of dresses to try on.



Whether you're searching for the latest bag from top designers or searching on Amazon for an economical travel bag, crossbody is king. Many of the bags are designed with straps that can be detached or tucked into the bag, allowing you to carry the bag as a clutch. You can shorten the straps to carry the bag on your arm or over the shoulder. Chains are especially practical. They're easy to stow in the bag, and they can't be slashed by purse-snatchers!

Crossbody bags come in all sizes: mini to large totes. Looks can be so deceptive when shopping online. When in doubt, take out your

tape measure and carefully measure an old bag and compare it with the one being offered online. Mid-sized bags are large enough to carry daily essentials such as phone, lip gloss, hand sanitizer, tissues and wallet without scrunching everything in. Many have additional pockets on the back or the ends of the purse.

Stella McCartney led the catwalk with tiny crossbody bags. She is also known for her vegan bags. The Stella Logo Collection is an example of these bags. The bag is made of grey felt with a wide strap featuring Stella McCartney in large block letters. Other styles are available in sierra, military green, cheetah print and camel. McCartney's

bags frequently sport heavy chain detailing.

Large totes are essential to carry your computer and dress shoes for the office while accommodating a little shopping along the way. For the devotees of the large tote crossbody, it's hard to beat the Vera Bradley large tote bag. The bag is made of recycled materials, has three interior slip pockets and one zip pocket to keep everything organized and your chocolate away from the laptop.

The Tory Burch crossbody bucket bag in brown suede with spaghetti straps shown in the spring collection has been updated for fall. The bag now adds downward zippers that can be pulled to reveal contrasting gussets.

Kurt Geiger's London striped leather chain wallet stole the show for drama. Its bold stripes of pebbled metallic leather with a snap closure and chain strap is a true statement piece, unusual and gorgeous.

LOVEVOOK has designed a series of PU purses in a variety of styles including a crossbody. The purse has an almost grey geometric design in dim light, but when struck by bright light, it becomes luminous with different jewel-colored refractions.

THE CLASSICS

The Toy Loulou matelassé leather crossbody bag is a timeless classic. It's on the small size at 7½" x 5½" x 3"; for those who prefer a larger bag, the Loulou comes in a medium version, 12" x 4½" x 8½". The bag is styled in several neutral colors with a quilted chevron pattern and the YSL classic monogram clasp.

Another stylish crossbody bag from YSL is the Sunset medium chain bag. It has two central compartments with a slot pouch inside

the suede leather interior. There are a couple of exterior pockets, too. The Sunset comes in neutral colors, smooth leather finish and the iconic YSL monogram clasp. This is a very practical bag that can easily become your go-to bag for the office and lunch with the girls.

The Gucci Bamboo 1947 top handle bag has been reissued in many different versions since it was first introduced after WWII. The AW22 version is black with two interchangeable straps and the classic bamboo trim. A more daring version is in brown leather with a bold jockey-like print and natural bamboo handles.

Giorgio Armani's Palmellato leather La Prima handbag can be worn over the shoulder or as a crossbody bag. It comes with a leather strap that adjusts to three different lengths. The bag has rounded lines with soft, pleated edges and is available in over a dozen colors.

In discussing designer bags, we are talking investment. The bags will last for decades if properly cared for, and they hold their resale value. If the price tag is beyond your current budget, you might consider a gently used bag. ReBag, FASHIONPHILE and The RealReal are among the better-known resellers.

There was a full range of crossbody bags on the catwalks for spring/summer and fall 2022. The most intriguing bags continue to be the cute minis and micro-minis. Minis are great for dates but often don't hold more than a lip gloss, cab fare and phone if you are lucky. For the more practical fashionista, the medium-sized bag is still your best bet. Regardless of price, there are hundreds of bags to love. ♦

SOURCES: usmagazine.com, wwd.com, glamourmagazine.co.uk, byrdie.com and harpersbazaar.com.



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STORY AND PHOTOS BY RACHEL FENTON

If you're anything like me, gift-giving can be a bit of a stressful endeavor. Sometimes it's a last-minute affair, remembering a gift the day before it's needed because your busy schedule drove it from your mind. And on top of that, there's a pressure to find a "perfect gift" that shows how much you care for the person.

This year, I decided to combat my gifting stress by making most of my gifts by hand. I love handicrafts and baking and wanted to share them with my loved ones while removing as much of the stress around gifting as possible. But making things by hand takes time! I had to intentionally plan out what I was going to make and follow through sometimes months in advance. I had to find pockets of time in my busy day to add a few knitted rows to a project or plan out my next gift.

For my son's first Christmas, I knit him a Hobbit Vest, a pattern designed by Lisa Chemery. I worked on it while he napped and delighted in its details, the heathered green yarn with hints of gold and blue and the little acorn buttons I sewed onto the lopsided button

THE GIFT OF *Present*



Instead of stressing over the perfect gift, I've embraced the imperfections that inevitably come with my creations. I am not perfect, but through this gift I'm giving a piece of myself, flaws and all.

band. There are a few odd stitches and the pocket linings are uneven, but I love it and I hope he will, too.

For other loved ones in my life, I've created a medley of small items, such as homemade vanilla extract, hand-knit potholders or dishcloths, embroidered napkins and baked good mixes in Mason jars. These things might seem small and mundane but they're transformed into something intimate and precious when they're made with our hands. I felt as though I was giving them a small piece of myself: my time and energy and presence, wrapped with an imperfect bow.

What we make is often flawed; hand-made and imperfect could be synonyms. A machine can knit stitches and sew

seams much more neatly than we ever could. But I learned that is part of the handmade present; we're giving something that reflects ourselves. Instead of stressing over the perfect gift, I've embraced the imperfections that inevitably come with my creations. I am not perfect, but through this gift I'm giving a piece of myself, flaws and all.

As these pockets of time added up, I realized I was not only making gifts for others. I was being blessed by making these gifts. The process grounded me and gave me a sense of presence and peace in my daily life I hadn't expected. I spent less time on my phone and more time talking with my family, hands busy as we laughed together. I chatted with strangers about knitting as I worked on a pair of socks in a dentist's waiting room. And above all, I found myself thinking of the gift's recipient and how grateful I was for their influence in my life. I held them in my heart as I worked, each stitch and second of my time a chance to reminisce on the gift that person was to me. And just as I thought of them whenever I worked on their presents, I hope they'll think of me every time they use what I've given them.

When I made the resolution to focus on gifting handmade items, I was surprised by how much it gave back to me. Next time you have a loved one's birthday or anniversary, consider taking a little extra time and making them something with your hands. You might be surprised at how much it gives back to you. ♦



Rachel Fenton is a writer and mother who homesteads on the family property with her parents and grandparents. When she's not running after her baby, you can usually find her knitting, reading, writing or gardening. Follow their homesteading journey at fiveacresfourgenerations.wordpress.com.



MAXIMIZING YOUR PHILANTHROPY

BY VIRGINIA MARTIN

With the holidays in full swing, our thoughts turn to gifts, champagne toasts and ways to help those less fortunate than ourselves.



Charities rely on that urge to give back in the season of giving; many raise the majority of their annual budgets during the last three months of the year. It's easy to drop a few bills into contribution jars or donate to holiday fund drives. Those causes are certainly worthy of support. But with thought and preparation, you can stretch your donation dollars to accomplish something more personal and perhaps more lasting.

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

What cause moves you most? What need do you want to fulfill? If someone close to you has had breast cancer, you may target your

giving to cancer research or to helping caregivers in your community. If education is your passion, perhaps you want to support literacy efforts or programs run by your local library. Where do you feel you can make a difference?

Several services evaluate charities so people can determine whether they are giving their money in a way that will accomplish their goals. Start

by researching on myphilanthropedia.org, charitynavigator.org and guidestar.org, which have financial information on individual charities, including how much of the budget is spent on administrative costs versus program costs. Or make your contributions through a donation management service such as Bright Funds, which allows you to donate money to any of six areas: water, poverty, education, human

rights, health and environment. Your money is pooled with donations from others, and the service selects a package of nonprofits working in each field.

If you want to give closer to home, doubtless you'll find many worthy nonprofits at work and know many of them already. If not, find them through news reports, searching the web for your city and your favorite cause or looking at local listings. Sites such as giving-compass.org allow individuals united by a community or a cause to create their own groups to raise money.

If you see a need in your community that no one else is tackling, consider taking it on yourself. You don't need to fund the entire project yourself or even do all the work. Connect with your own networks to find people who will chip in money or time needed to get the job done. Turn first to church groups, office colleagues, PTAs, book clubs or other groups with which you are affiliated. Post your project on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social media sites. Ask your friends to share your posts, and you might be surprised at how many people you are connected to. Consider crowdfunding through sites such as gofundme.com. You can set up a fund drive for virtually any cause, and people can contribute through the website, which takes a portion of the donations as payments. Projects funded through such sites run the gamut. Often there are drives to raise money for medical and funeral expenses and to help families displaced by house fires.

MAKE MONEY WORK

Make the maximum impact with your donation by deducting your contributions on your federal tax return. Most citizens can deduct donations up to half of their adjusted gross income on their federal tax forms. The charity must have tax-exempt status and you must have proof of your contribution.

Consider giving stocks; if you've held the stock for a year or more and the value has increased, you can write off the contribution and avoid paying capital gains. While you're planning future donations, consider making a bequest in your will or purchase a life insurance policy with the charity as beneficiary.

Ask representatives from your charity what else it needs. You might have property that can be used by the charity or sold to raise money. This could be a donation of land or simply everyday items. If you're buying a new car, consider whether you can donate your old one to a good cause rather than using it as a trade-in. Go through your house; some charities need items such as clothes, kitchenware and appliances. Anything you donate is something they don't have to buy. The items should be in good condition or better; you can deduct the value from your taxes and it will be of use. Donation is not an alternative to loading things up and taking them to the landfill.

Improving your community and helping your neighbors isn't always an issue of money. Consider donating your time to your favorite charity. Do you have a skill that might be useful? They might need accountants, drivers, writers or people to staff fundraising events. Ask what you can do to help. In the end it might not be your money that your community needs most—it might be you. ♦

SOURCES: guidestar.org, irs.gov, forbes.com, nccs.urban.org, bankrate.com, gofundme.com and mint.com.

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OLGA RODRIGUEZ

BY HERLIFE STAFF

Olga Rodriguez, executive director of Haven of Peace, sat down with HERLIFE Magazine recently to share her dedication to family and community.

HLM: *How long have you lived here? What do you love most?*

OR: I was born and raised in the Republic of Panama and I have lived in Stockton, California, for the past 46 years. Working at Haven of Peace, has allowed me to see the great heart and generosity of our community members, donors, businesses and organizations who have supported and embraced the women and children by responding to their needs and when crisis arises. What a blessing it is to have a community that goes beyond their line of duty!

HLM: *How is your heart inspired to serve the community?*

OR: My heart is inspired to serve the women and children at Haven of Peace because they are broken and have a feeling of hopelessness when they arrive to Haven of Peace. But it is an amazing feeling for me to see their growth, after providing them with the support, love, encouragement, resources and life skill classes they needed to become self-sufficient.

HLM: *What sparks joy for you?*

OR: One is to see the Lord's hand in the life of the women and children of Haven of Peace when they achieve their goals. Working with homeless families and helping them succeed also sparks joy in my life.

HLM: *What's your free time passion?*

OR: Outside of work, my time is best spent sharing the word of God with others, encouraging those that have lost hope and praying with them. I also enjoy traveling with my family.

HLM: *Top three bucket list goals?*

OR: Visit Jerusalem; visit Australia; learn to swim.

HLM: *What accomplishment are you most proud of?*

OR: It's the Haven of Peace Mission: We are committed to providing our residents with tools that help each of them become self-sufficient. Our aim is to show the women and children of our shelter the forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ, which we believe fosters good decision-making and healthy living. Therefore, the accomplishment I am most proud of is following Haven of Peace's mission, which is to share the word of God with the women and children hoping that many more women and children would accept the Lord in their life.

HLM: *Can you describe a key event that had an impact on your life?*

OR: One of the women at Haven of Peace was challenged getting her five children back from CPS, finding a house, obtaining transportation and a job. What seemed impossible for her to achieve was all possible because of the support, guidance, love, encouragement, resources provided, life skills classes she received and prayers. This mother has completed all of her goals and currently has all of her children with her. Nothing is impossible with Christ at our side!

HLM: *Do you have a favorite quote?*

OR: Philippians 4:13: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

HLM: *What are you currently reading?*

OR: I am studying and reading about the Holy Spirit. The book that I am reading is *Jesus in Me: Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a Constant Companion* by Anne Graham Lotz.

HLM: *Favorite food or dessert?*

OR: Chinese food is my favorite food and my favorite dessert is ice cream. ♦

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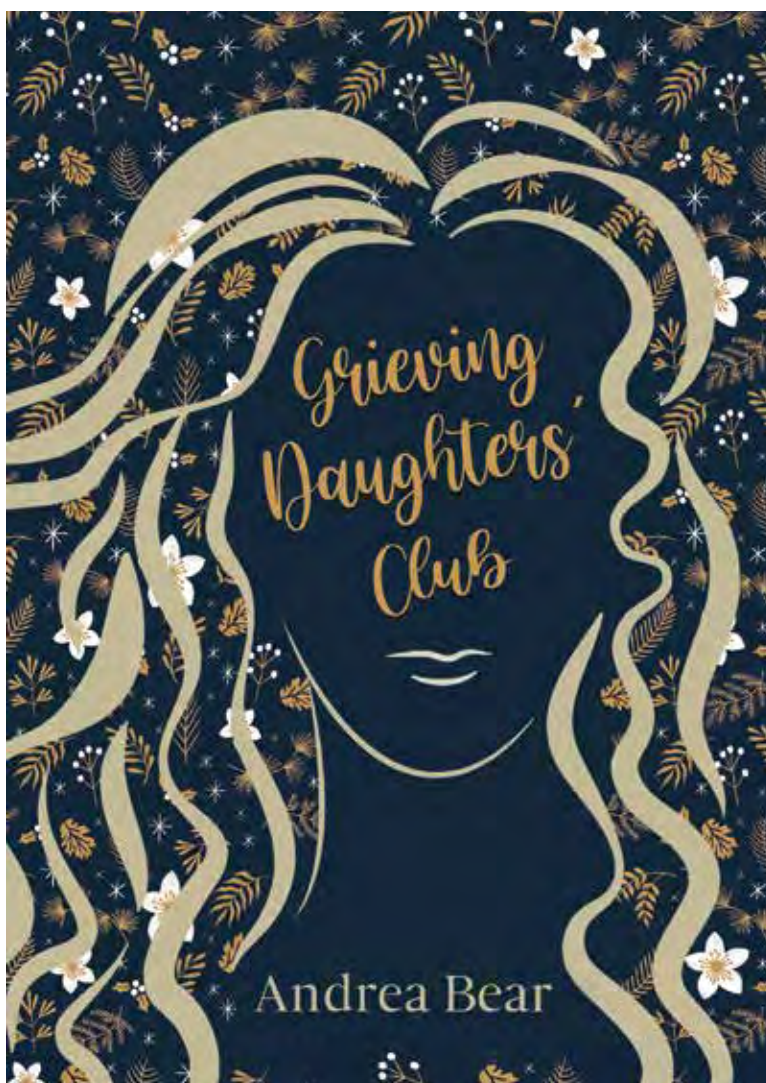
WRITING MY STORY

BY ANDREA BEAR

HERLIFE Magazine Central Valley cover story writer Andrea Bear loves reporting on the unique accounts of women in the Central Valley, and that also includes her story. In 2018, after losing her mother to brain cancer, she found that writing became a form of healing as she learned to navigate her grief. Now, in 2022, publishing her debut fiction novel Grieving Daughters' Club, she finds that the stories she shares in her book are common to the lives she reports in this magazine. ~Carrie Sass, Publisher and Editor-In-Chief

If you had asked me ten years ago (even five) if I'd envisioned myself as a writer, I would have thought you were crazy. Writing wasn't something I planned (commas and I have a love-hate relationship), but life has a funny way of steering one down a path, and in my case, my faith and personal hardship became my navigators. When my mother, Debbie Kapina, passed away in 2018 from a glioblastoma brain cancer, I was never prepared for the grief that would follow. My nature is to do and to serve, and grief is a reminder that no matter how one tries to escape, one can only run so far until it catches up. Grief can be crippling and I found myself trying to find purpose.

The first few months after my mom passed, I tried to return to



normal and quickly discovered that my idea of “normal” was gone because she no longer was in that world. As a high school teacher and a mother, I had to figure out what my “new normal” would look like. I had been journaling my grief, concerned I would bother others with my sorrow. But that summer I promised I would try to find some kind of purpose. As fate would have it, I attended a Christian women's conference and in doing so saw an old friend, Courtney Vallejo, who was a speaker and writer for Christian blogs. Something came over me and I believe it was the Holy Spirit. I felt a call

to inquire into her world of writing.

Courtney gave me some leads and it took me six months to muster up the courage to write a few sample pieces before I could

submit anything. But almost instantaneously after my first article was published on an online site, I got a call from a local Christian radio station who wanted to interview me on my article. It was confirmation that I was on the right path. I then joined a writer's guild and started writing more articles. Writing gave me a new purpose that allowed me to connect with others I had never met, yet share similar scenarios of life experiences.

As I continued to write articles, I wanted to do bigger projects but I didn't feel qualified to write self-help books or write a memoir and share overly personal experiences; I was still deeply mourning the loss of my mom. Around this same time, I belonged to a Bible study group. They were an eclectic bunch who drank wine and read the Bible on Friday nights. As I sat there with these women, they offered comfort and support, especially my friend, Sonny, who had lost her mother only a year prior to mine, and I realized her grief and mine were different yet equally difficult. The other women in the group also shared stories of loss and hardship, but possessed a deep joy that provided support. It was in this group my big project came to light, and I realized this was the story God wanted me to write. I had no idea what I was doing but I just wrote.

After the first few chapters, I realized this was my healing, and

I realized these women's journeys were equally important to tell. I finally opened up to my group about what I was doing and they were overjoyed and supportive. This past September, I was fortunate to have Elk Lake Publishing, Inc. publish *Grieving Daughter's Club*, a fictional account loosely based on the lives of women in my group. Since its publication, many women and men have shared how they can relate to the characters in my book. I don't proclaim that these characters show all types of grief, but I do believe it's meant to help someone.

Yet writing my story and that of the women in my group hasn't been the end, only the beginning. This past spring another prompting came over me and I felt called to write beyond my own narrative. This is when I began writing for *HERLIFE Magazine* Central Valley. Similarly, I found that the women and men I've interviewed all have beautiful stories of inspiration, struggle and hope, parallel even to characters in my book. In a way, you could say I've been writing "her life" before I even realized it. Making this connection has led me to see that we all have a story to tell to help someone along the way. We don't all have to write a book or blog online, but sharing our human experiences with each other can be a support for those who often feel like they're alone. ♦



Andrea Bear believes that learning life lessons is easier to digest when presented in the form of a story. Feeling the call to write about her grief journey after losing her mother to brain cancer in 2018, she created the Grieving Daughters' Club to share the experiences some face after loss, tucking a little bit of herself and her lessons into each character. She is already working on the second book of a three-part series. In addition, she is a journalist for HERLIFE Magazine and contributes articles to online sites such as catholicmom.com. She is also a high school history teacher in Stockton, California. When she's not writing or teaching, she is shuffling one of her three daughters to volleyball practice or relaxing at a local Lodi vineyard with her husband. To read more about her work, visit andreabearauthor.com.

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CELEBRATING 140 YEARS OF IMPACTING LIVES

The Children's Home of Stockton celebrated their 140th Anniversary at the Haggin Museum on September 22. Guests experienced a walk-through history as it was displayed in photographs and exhibits and enjoyed a program highlighting the countless lives that have been impacted through the Children's Home. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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GIDGET

BY HERLIFE STAFF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SYDNEY SPURGEON



Q: Tell us about yourself.

A: I am the leader of our pack (besides Dad) and I am usually in charge. My sister, Pumpkin, is a bit of a nervous Nelly. She's a talker for sure, but she also piddles when she's nervous. Our brother, Batman, is the baby of the family and he takes full advantage of it! He loves to cuddle and we are pretty sure he thinks he's a human.

Q: What's your favorite vacation spot?

A: We love going to Oregon to visit our grandparents and our cousin, Miko, the 150-pound Akita. She loves to play with us even if we bark at her and she taught us how to eat Frosty Paws! Grandma gets us all kinds of cute outfits and even Batman likes to dress up. We also love going to Yosemite and staying at the cabin with our friends, Roscoe and Mellie. Mom even brings our stroller so we don't burn our paws on the granite when we hike!

Q: And when you get to go along?

A: Batman always sits in the driver's seat and likes to have his paws on the wheel. Pumpkin and I usually fight over the back seat; she can be so moody! We love to go for walks but our parents had to buy us all inescapable harnesses because we all learned how to break free and run like the wind!

Q: Your best play spot?

A: We love to play in the backyard because there are so many squirrels to chase! When we're not doing that we are fighting through the fence with our neighbor's Chihuahuas (he has three too), or occasionally we get lucky and get to chase a duck out of our pool. Our backyard is a great place to take a sunny nap or eat some grass or worms. We love to root through the yard for worms.

Q: Are you ever a naughty pup?

A: My mom would say it's definitely when we go wee wee on her carpet or shred her important papers, but it's just because we miss her and want to be with her ALL THE TIME. Batman is an instigator who likes to bark at dogs three times his size and sometimes at nothing at all, just to get us riled up so that everyone gets in trouble!

Q: What's your canine obsession?

A: I love to squeak my dead squirrel toy (yes, that's a real thing), especially when I'm waiting for Dad to give me my dinner! My sister Pumpkin is obsessed with flies! If she sees one in the house, she will track it until she catches it in mid-air. Batman seems to be obsessed with sleeping; the kid will sleep for nearly 18 hours a day!

Q: What's your favorite treat?

A: We especially love salami, prosciutto and chicken. If we don't get a little with our dinner then we will stand in protest.

Q: Where do you go for pampering?

A: My sister and I love to go to Charlene's Grooming because they are so nice to us there and don't even mind that Pumpkin is so talkative. Mom washes Batman in the sink at home but he hollers like he's dying when he comes into Charlene's to get his nail clipped. They are so nice they give him a bandanna anyway!

Q: What else should we know about you?

A: My Mom isn't very good at teaching us to sit, stay or to use those little talking buttons to tell her what we want, but she has taught us all how to sneeze for treats. So, if Dad is taking too long to feed us, we just jump up on his lap and sneeze in his face. It seems to do the trick!

Q: Where were you born?

A: My sister Pumpkin and I were adopted by our parents at the Cool Cats & Barking Dogs event when we were just puppies. We were fostered before that by the kind humans at Animal Protection League. Today, we are happy, healthy, high-energy (neurotic) Chihuahuas that crave ALL the attention! Our little brother from another mother, Batman, was also adopted at CCBP a year after we were. He lived on the streets before Mom and Dad got him and now, he's quick to remind us that he's their favorite! He's a spoiled baby that gets away with everything!

Q: Who are your human parents?

A: Mom: Brenna Butler Garcia, Dad: Bob Gutierrez, brothers: Luciano and Giovanni ♦

DEFINE AND REFINE

Having owned both retail and service-based businesses, I wish I had been aware of these five tips for new business owners.

If you can't see yourself doing it in five years, don't start. Launching a new business takes not only financial investment but a great expenditure of time and energy. Make sure this is a product or service that has longevity.

Identify goals and business/content pillars of your niche before you start. Think of these

pillars as a table of contents. Defining them will solidify a foundation for your business to build upon and strategically keep your efforts on track.

Identify influential mentors early on. Observe their successful habits and recognize those worth emulating. Use your mentors for their expertise and immediately implement advice as it pertains to your specific niche. Consistently refine what's working for you.

Acknowledge value and avoid a pattern of discounting. Your product, service and your time offer benefits. Discounts

can ultimately devalue your offering and train customers to drop shop, buying only when prices are dropped beyond positive profitability. Stay patient.

In the beginning, motivation is easy to come by. Once the initial excitement wears off, discipline must endure. Schedule time for activities that maintain your commitment. Knowledge is literally at our fingertips through the internet, books, podcasts. And don't forget to schedule time for yourself. Accomplishments are worth celebrating and so are you. ♦



Tracci Dare, social media creator, influencer and coach, authors *The "Social" Scene* for HERLIFE Magazine, sharing strategies for your social media growth. Follow her on Instagram @daringdarlingbold where she shares lifestyle, fashion, home and wine. Need social media help or want to know more? Email her at tddconcepts@gmail.com.

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GET OUT AND ENJOY COMMUNITY EVENTS

NOVEMBER 4 - 6 *Sandhill Crane Festival*

Info: info@cranefestival.com

NOVEMBER 5 *Veteran's Fundraiser*

Village Barber Shop
Lincoln Center, Stockton

Info: villagebarbershopstockton.com

NOVEMBER 5 *Lodi Heroes*

Jesse's Grove Winery & Vineyard

Free family fun!

Info: lodiheroes.org

NOVEMBER 11 *Movie Night - Aladdin (1992)*

Hutchins Street Square

Info: hss@lodi.gov

NOVEMBER 18 - 19 *27th Annual Fine Arts Festival 2022*

St. Basil's Greek Church, Stockton

Info: sjpg.org

NOVEMBER 24 *Run & Walk Against Hunger*

Downtown Stockton

Info: runagainsthunger.org

DECEMBER 1 *Lodi Parade of Lights*

Downtown Lodi

Info: visitlodi.com

DECEMBER 3 *Annual Lighted Boat Parade*

Downtown Stockton

Info: visitstockton.org

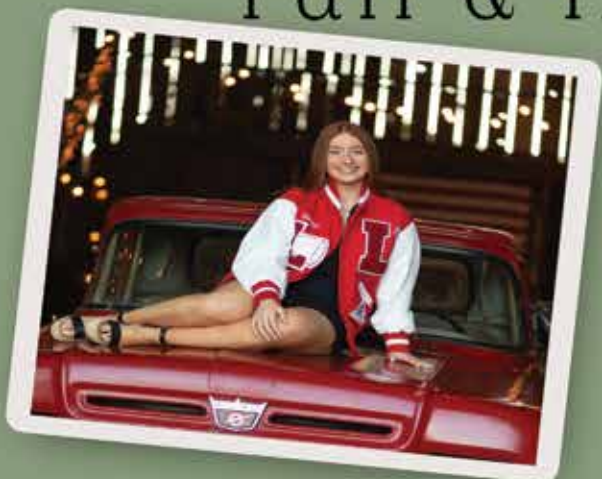
DECEMBER 3 *Annual Holiday at the Point Tree Lighting Ceremony*

Downtown Stockton

Info: stocktonca.gov/specialevents ♦



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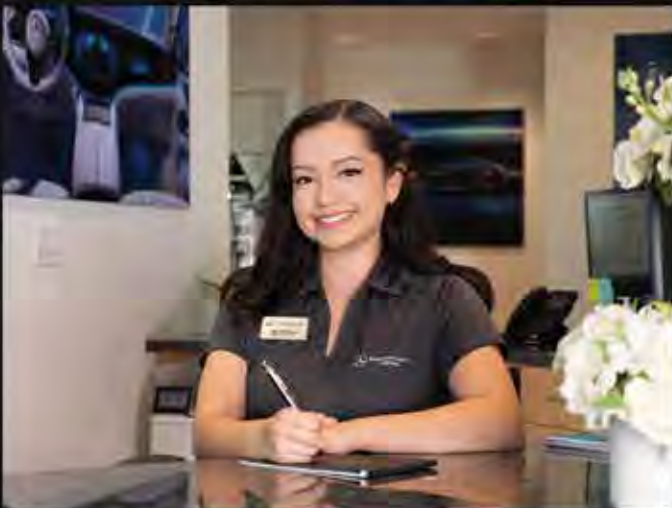
St. Joseph’s Cancer Institute





Mia Zamora

Service Consultant



Mercedes-Benz of Stockton is proud to feature Mia Zamora

"Born and raised in Stockton, I started working at Mercedes-Benz of Stockton in 2017 at nineteen years old as a lot porter. Since then, I have served in several positions including Cashier, Customer Care Manager and Inventory Manager. Now at twenty-four years old, I enjoy my work as Service Consultant where each day is filled with new tasks and learning experiences. Working with coworkers, who I consider friends, makes my day all that much more enjoyable. I am grateful for each opportunity this dealership has given me; each has helped to shape me into the woman I am today. I am also the proud mother of a two-year-old daughter, Ivy, who brings joy and purpose to my life."



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