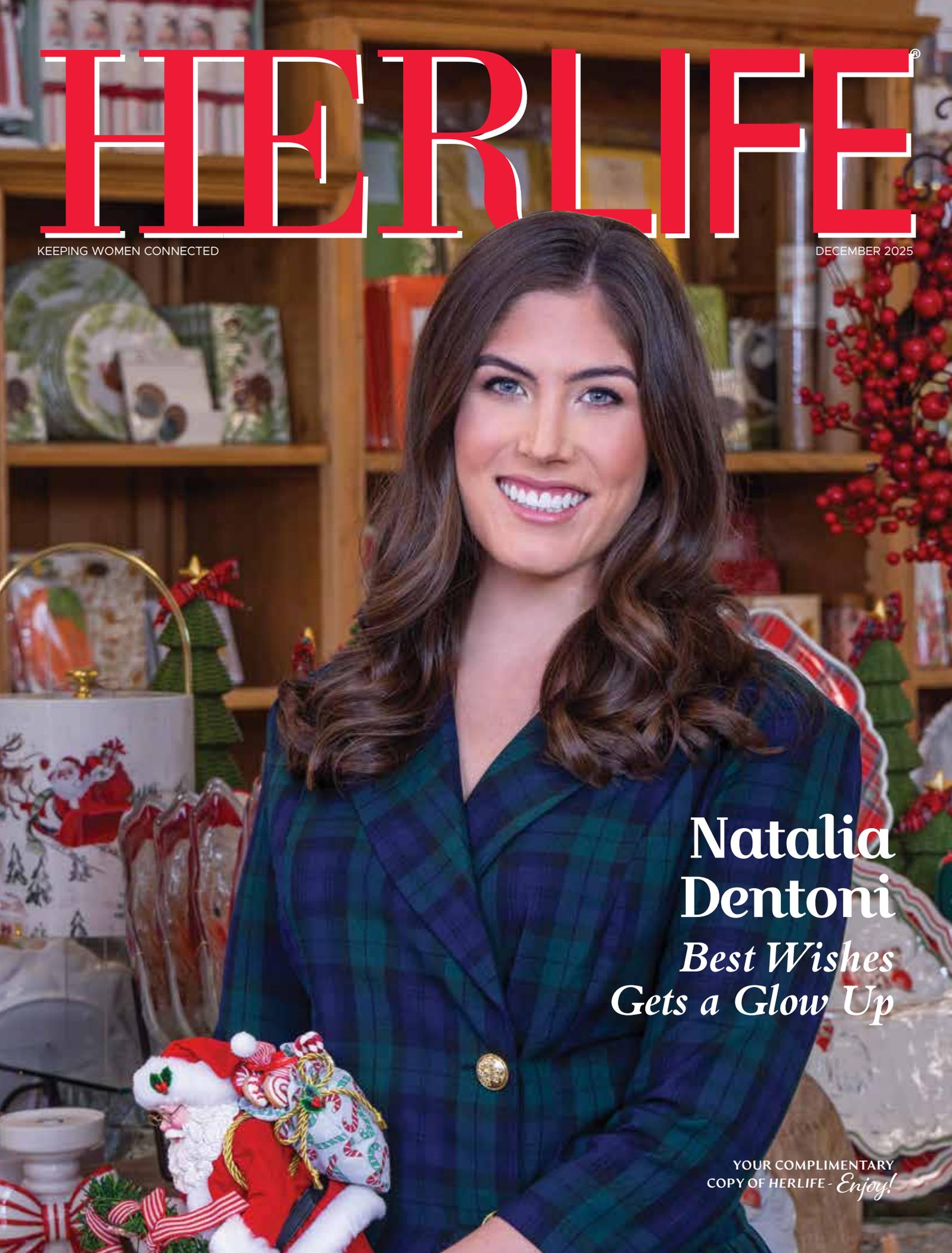


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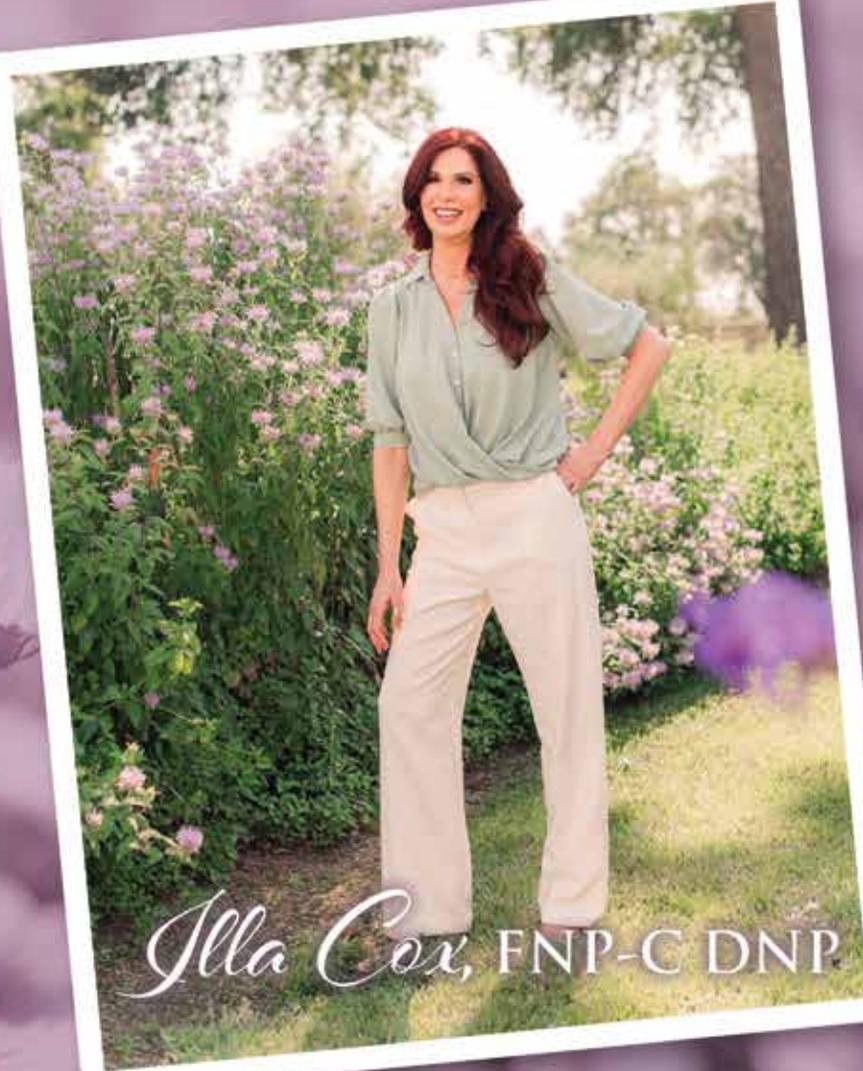
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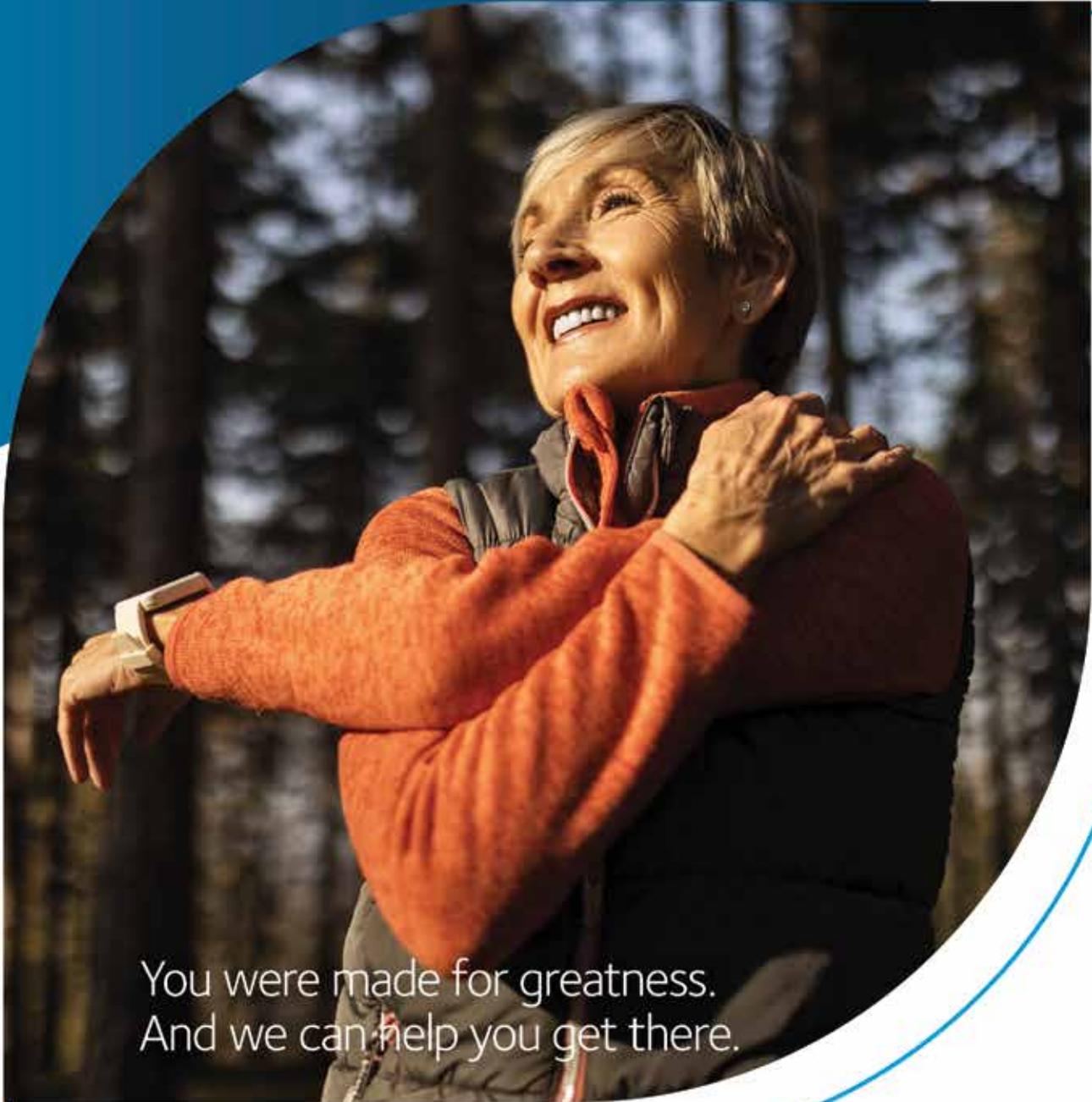
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Giving Back

As the holiday season approaches, our calendars fill with shopping lists, family gatherings and holiday parties. The rush of preparation makes it easy to forget the true meaning of this time of year — connection, generosity and gratitude. The holiday season offers us the joy of celebration as well as an opportunity to give back to our community.

Giving back doesn't always require grand gestures or financial donations. Sometimes, it's the smallest acts of kindness that leave the biggest impact. An afternoon spent volunteering at a local shelter, donating gently used coats and toys or a warm meal delivered to a neighbor can make the season much brighter for someone in need. These simple acts remind us that compassion creates a thriving community.

As we think of providing meals, we recently lost an amazing man, a celebrated chef and business owner, who cared deeply for his community. Don King, owner of Fat City Brew & BBQ, passed away last month from a tough battle with cancer. Please consider supporting his family by dining at Fat City Brew & BBQ or enjoy a take-out order at home. Fat City Brew & BBQ is located on the Miracle Mile. We know his



wife, Nadia, and his children would appreciate the support! Don had a wonderful, thriving business. He will certainly be missed.

This holiday season, let's ask ourselves a simple question: "How can I make someone else's holiday brighter?" Whether it's contributing to a local food drive, shopping local or simply checking in on someone who may be spending the holidays alone, every act of compassion and generosity will leave a lasting impression.

The holidays remind us that giving is not just a seasonal gesture; it's a way of living. When we lift others up, our communities become stronger, more compassionate and

full of hope. So, this year, as you wrap your gifts and gather around your table, remember that the greatest gift you can give might just be your time, your kindness or your open heart.

We are so thankful for the opportunity to produce *HERLIFE* Magazine and could not do it without all our wonderful advertisers, faithful readers and all the amazing people we've featured. Remember, we do not have a January issue, so please keep your eyes peeled for our February issue! In the meantime, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays AND Happy New Year!

Enjoy every moment,

Anna



A Snowy Mascot at the Firehouse-circa 1930

Hunter Street station firemen added whimsy to their firehouse in this photo which appeared in the January 13, 1920 edition of the Stockton Daily Record chronicling the unusual snowfall that had happened overnight. Their cold guest was built from the 3-inches that covered most of Central California—the first snow in the area in 13 years—making the Valley into a winter wonderland. Bank of Stockton was 63 years old at the time of this photo.

Warm holiday wishes

Through the years, we've had the privilege of serving our community and being part of its growth and success. It's an honor to support the people and businesses who make this region such a special place to call home. From our Bank of Stockton family to yours, we wish you a holiday season filled with health and happiness, and a bright start to the new year ahead.

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As the new owner of Best Wishes in Lincoln Center, Natalia Dentoni said the store always had a special place in her heart. Now, with her entrepreneurial mindset and an experienced, creative staff, gifting for the holidays—all holidays—and more days is convenient and transformational.



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CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

LET'S CHECK UP ON... THE MIND-SKIN CONNECTION: HOW DECEMBER STRESS SHOWS UP ON YOUR FACE

By Dr. Ruby Gill, MD, ABOIM, ABFM
Double Board-Certified in Family & Integrative Medicine
Menopause Society Certified | Fellowship-Trained in Aesthetics

Every December, we see an influx of laser cases in the clinic. I call these patients my “winter laser birds.” They understand how important it is to revitalize their skin at least once a year and address the sun damage that inevitably builds up over the summer. But the seasonal patterns I see are always interesting—and they can help you better manage your skin health as the temperature drops.

Let's start with the most common winter flare-ups: rosacea, eczema, and acne. An integrative dermatological approach is always my favorite, because time and time again I see the best results when we combine lasers, nutrition, movement, meditation, targeted supplements, and carefully chosen topicals. True skin healing often comes from the inside out.

What do all these flare-ups have in common? Inflammation. Winter stress increases inflammatory pathways in subtle but significant ways. It usually begins with changes in sleep patterns, holiday eating, alcohol, and end-of-year deadlines—all of which place extra pressure on the body. Stress isn't just emotional; it's very much physical. And while solstice season traditionally signals a time to slow down, most of us end up doing the opposite.

Women in perimenopause or menopause who haven't gained control of their hot flashes often start showing signs of rosacea this time of year. Teens and adults may notice acne flaring again. And eczema loves to make its grand re-appearance as the air becomes cold and dry. Assessing a patient's skin means also assessing their internal inflammatory system—that's the key to long-lasting prevention. Many of my most complex cases finally start improving only after we address the deeper inflammatory triggers that topical medications and antibiotics alone cannot resolve.

Your gut microbiome plays a major role in immunity and skin health. We also talk about something called the gut-brain axis, which explains why someone might say they feel “sick to their stomach” as an emotional response. That communication system is real, and it's deeply connected to inflammatory skin conditions. Once we get the gut and nervous system back into balance, the skin often follows.

With the right nutrients, strict dietary guidance, and a smart

combination of traditional prescription topicals, I rarely need to rely on long-term antibiotics. Conversations around stress reduction are just as important—lowering stress lowers inflammation, which results in clearer, calmer skin. As I often tell my patients: the happiest people are the prettiest people.

And now, let's talk about collagen and hydration. Lack of moisture and barrier damage can make the skin look dull, lax, and inflamed. Collagen can be helpful for both skin and joint health, and a simple home remedy I love is bone broth. Increasing medically monitored vitamin D, omega-3 intake, and fermented foods can support gut and skin health as well. One of my top winter tips: apply an oil-based moisturizer within three minutes of stepping out of the shower. And for my eczema-prone patients—please skip the olive oil topically. It disrupts the skin barrier and can make things worse.

There are three highly preventable behaviors that accelerate skin damage more than anything else: smoking, UV exposure (wear sunscreen daily and stay far away from tanning beds), and chronic dehydration or sleep deficiency.

If you stay ahead of winter weather and rising end-of-year demands by sleeping at least seven hours, hydrating well, keeping a low-glycemic diet rich in probiotics, and moisturizing consistently to prevent TEWL (transepidermal water loss), you can avoid most flare-ups entirely.

Many people have heard of IPL for rosacea, but my preferred technology is the BBL photofacial, a robust Stanford-developed, clinically proven form of photobiomodulation that helps repair and treat the skin more effectively than traditional IPL. When we combine excellent skin health habits with the most advanced laser systems, we create our signature “winter laser birds”—patients who understand that stressed skin is a reflection of a stressed body, and that healing one means healing both. •

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Natalia Dentoni & Best Wishes

Creating A Beautiful Pocket of Peace & Light

BY RACHEL FENTON | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

The holiday season is full of its own unique magic, woven by familiar songs and children's laughter, ornamented with twinkling lights and tinsel, and wound throughout it all is the simple joy of gift-giving. From finding that perfect gift to wrapping it in paper and ribbons and watching your loved one open it, each step of the giving process has its own thrill and is an instrumental part of what makes this season so beloved. How-

ever, finding that perfect gift can be quite a challenge in a world stuffed with big box stores. Among shelves of mass-produced and cookie-cutter clutter, it can be nearly impossible to find a gift that is beautiful, local and intentional. But those familiar with Stockton know exactly where to go.

Best Wishes in Lincoln Center has long stood as a local gem, its vibrant and cheerful sign beckoning you to wander through its



cozy interior. Even though it boasts impressive square footage, it maintains the intimacy and warmth of a boutique. It is advertised as merely a home décor and gifts store, but that description seems to fall short of what the store has become to the community. “People come here because it’s a Stockton store...it’s a feel-good store!” said Natalia Dentoni, a life-long Stocktonian and the new owner of Best Wishes.

A New Direction

An alumna of University of San Diego with a degree in marketing, Natalia described herself as “always having an entrepreneurial mindset.” She traveled with her sorority, Kappa Delta, for a year after graduation doing consulting work and spoke of how wonderful the experience was for her. “It was so confidence building. I had to get up in front of 400 girls and give a presentation and win them over; the fact that I could captivate an audience was such an empowering moment.” Natalia went on to earn her master’s degree in business administration from the University of the Pacific, and while she entered the traditional workforce, she still stoked the flame of entrepreneurship. In 2020, she launched a home bakery business as an anchor through the turmoil of the pandemic, baking and packaging cookies, bars and cake pops. While she had always loved baking, the home bakery business



specifically opened her eyes to how much she loved how the work combined her marketing and branding skills with her love of content design and customer interaction.

Natalia grew up frequenting Best Wishes as a youth and it has always had a special place in her heart. “Best Wishes has always been my ‘happy store,’” she said with a laugh. “I’ve been shopping here since I was in high school!” Natalia also had close family ties to the former owner of Best Wishes, Julie Van Noate, who

owned the store for 36 years. Natalia knew how important the store was to Julie, and so, in 2024, her interest was sparked when her dad mentioned that Julie was looking to sell.

A Good Fit

At first it seemed too “out of the blue,” but when her mother encouraged her as well, she began to look more seriously into the possibility of taking over the store. After several conversations with her husband and with Julie, and several more discussions over paperwork, the dream became a reality in the beginning months of 2025. “Julie was excited; I was excited,” Natalia said. Although managing the store is a bit different from her previous job experiences, she sees it as the perfect fit for her skillsets and her passions. “I love seeing the visions come to life and interacting



with the customers. I'm definitely a people person; I love to socialize." But it isn't just Natalia's love of people that makes her good at running a home décor and gift shop, "Of the five love languages, mine is definitely gift-giving," Natalia said. "I love to give to others; it's how I express love and friendship."

Best Wishes has dusted itself off after an in-depth remodel and reorganization, and the interior shines with a fresh coat of paint and a new point-of-sales station that was carefully designed by Natalia to provide the elevated shopping experience she desires for every one of their customers. "It's a centerpiece!" Natalia said proudly as she described how it's one of her favorite parts of the remodel. The gleaming marble countertop softly reflects the light from the chandelier, and rolls of ribbons and tissue paper sparkle behind the cash registers, waiting to swathe gifts in their bright colors. She has loved interacting with all the vendors and attending the gift show in Las Vegas, curating their wares to fit the community's needs and create a beautiful ambiance for those who browse among her store's tables and shelves. Among the familiar brands and products there are some exciting new additions, including MacKenzie-Childs' breathtaking hand-painted ceramics, a personal favorite of Natalia's and available only in select locations.

“

“I want it to be a feel-good store for everyone,” she said emphatically. “I want to create a store that is multigenerational... young adults through grandparents. I want them to be able to come here and find what they need.”

”

Legacy and Expertise

While Natalia is enthusiastic about all the new opportunities the future holds, she is still staunchly dedicated to preserving the legacy Best Wishes has built throughout the years. She intentionally retained the store's longest-working employees, Janene Harrington, who has been employed at Best Wishes for 20 years, and Erika Hendrickson, who has worked at the store for a decade. "They've been super instrumental," Natalia said. "They know the customers really well." She cred-

its Janene and Erika for the ease with which she slipped into Julie's shoes, depending on their expertise to help things run smoothly as she got her bearings, meeting with all their vendors and representatives and figuring out which directions she wanted to go.

One of the things that Best Wishes is known for is its themed displays, gorgeously curated wares organized on tables by themes. "Some of our tables are exclusively one brand, but most of the other tables are mixed," Natalia said. "We pick a theme; it gives customers some direction. I'm really into the aesthetics." The themes cover a wide variety of products that shift slightly with the seasons, including bridal and bachelorette gifts, lounge apparel, kitchenware, jewelry, baby clothes and toys, bath and body products, garden decorations and more.

The crew at Best Wishes has worked especially hard to put to-



gether a winter wonderland for their customers to peruse this holiday season, each table dancing around a specific theme. “Erika works her magic,” Natalia said as she explained the process of designing each of their signature themed tables for the holiday season. Whether you prefer the look of a rustic holiday with warm plaid and frosted gingerbread men, or the nostalgic glow of a traditional Christmas tree adorned with tinsel and angelic carolers, or perhaps the fun, neon vibe of classic Christmas shows, there’s a place in Best Wishes expertly curated and waiting for you.

Find Your Style

“I prefer traditional to trendy,” Natalia said, discussing the different holiday décor styles and her preferences, but admits she indulged in some of this year’s fashions. “Red bows are in, and I love red bows and they’re very on brand for me, too!” she said. For those who aren’t quite sure what to choose or who get overwhelmed by all the options, Best Wishes also offers beautiful, themed baskets according to occasion and season. Their gift to the community is a luxurious and stress-free gifting experience, whether you love to browse for the perfect item or prefer to defer to the expert selections of their staff.

While Natalia has already whole-heartedly embraced Best Wishes and added her personal touches to the store, she is far from finished; in fact, she’s just getting started. The employees joke that her tagline is “So I’ve been thinking...,” an innocent phrase that foreshadows a new idea brewing and perhaps a few sleepless nights in their futures. When asked about her plans for the store’s future, Natalia’s face brightened and her eyes lit up: “Bringing community events in,” she answered. “Something that allows people to get out and connect.”

She shared her ideas to cultivate monthly events for the community, partnering with other local businesses to offer workshops and experiences that cover every age range and interest, from potential flower-arranging and cookie-decorating classes to painting or wine-tasting nights. Her excitement was contagious and so was her vision. “I want it to be a feel-good store for everyone,” she said emphatically. “I want to create a store that is multigenerational... young adults through grandparents. I want them to be able to come here and find what they need.”

Shop Local

The world might be dark and cold this winter, but even if storms shake the windows, in our community there are still beautiful pockets of peace and light. When we turn our focus and energy toward our local businesses, going to them for something as simple as a birthday card or as involved as a gift basket, we keep those lights burning. “Supporting local is huge,” Natalia said. “It means a lot.”

There is something beautiful and transformative about giving—or being given—a gift, whether large or small, holding in your hands a sign of someone’s intentional thought, time, energy and love. Gift-giving is at the heart of the holiday season, and at the heart of gift-giving is the simple yet powerful joy of human connection. The aim of Best Wishes is to foster that connection, helping to knit together the community throughout life’s events and seasons with beautiful gifts. Under Natalia’s tasteful eye and creative direction, she hopes it will continue to do so for decades to come. “Julie owned the store for 36 years, and I want to own it for 36 years,” she said. “I’m not just here for today. I’m here for the journey” ♦



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The Pacific Athletic Foundation's Orange and Black Ball was held October 11 at the Janssen-Lagorio Gymnasium. Held during University of the Pacific's Homecoming & Family Weekend, the fundraiser is a way to support and celebrate student athletes. The evening featured wine and beer tasting, silent and live auctions, dinner and dancing. The 26th annual event is Pacific Athletics' biggest fundraiser. ♦

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BY JO ANN KIRBY

When Dr. Krystle Balduzzi, her husband and their two daughters returned home from a Thanksgiving trip last fall, they walked into a magical winter wonderland. “It truly felt like stepping into a dream,” she said.

Their house had been extensively remodeled and needed a holiday glowup to match, so Krystle tasked Holiday Helpers with the job. They created a dazzling seasonal showcase that included creating a look for specific rooms, including a special tree for the playroom. Holiday Helpers even sourced all the décor and, best of all, completed the installation. Lois Billigmeier, her daughter-in-law Gina Billigmeier and their friend Sara Cowan have a sleigh full of tricks for transforming a ho-hum holiday into oohs and aahs and have a jolly time doing it.

“It was a total surprise for my entire family, including my hus-

band,” Krystle said. “On the day we drove back, they came over ahead of time to turn on all the lights and candles so everything would be glowing when we arrived. The house was absolutely magical.” The family went from room to room, taking it all in with delight.

Krystle said the Linden trio is easy to work with, so much so that she’s hired them to decorate her home for other seasons. “I didn’t have a strict vision, but they came over to see my home and get a feel for my style,” she said. “Together we decided on the overall direction, gold or silver, red and green, that sort of thing.” Being from Montana, she always has loved a forest or woodland theme, so they incorporated that into the overall design.

The Holiday Helpers say the Balduzzi job was so enjoyable because it was top secret until the big reveal. Krystle went with the decorators and her youngest daughter to a Christmas Open House at C.R. Porter, which has since been renamed Bungalow, to





pick out some bigger pieces. “She was happily pointing out things she liked without realizing that Lois, Gina and Sara were quietly taking notes,” Krystle said of her youngest daughter’s choices. “It made for such a sweet surprise later when those very items appeared in our home.”

Some customers have their own collections of decorations that they’ve had fun curating over the years but just need a little help pulling it all together. “They use my decorations and purchase additional items that will work,” Leanne Scannavino of Linden said, adding Holiday Helpers will also direct her to a certain store to check out something they’ve spotted and think she can’t live without. “As a result, we are able to create an entirely new look each season,” Sara said.

Leanne, who has relied on these Christmas “elves” season after season, has a cherished collection of Santas that they stage in her home plus decorate her two nine-foot trees, a seven-and-a-half-foot tree, two mantels and four garlands over credenzas. Leanne helps on decorating days. “I assist at my home because I have several vintage ornaments that I always like to put on my tree,” she said. “I couldn’t imagine doing it without their help. They are definitely Santa’s hardest working elves.”

The trio’s business has grown mostly by word of mouth. Angela Karp, owner of Sassy Pants in Stockton’s Lincoln Center, said the their magical touch at her mom Leanne’s house inspired her to have Holiday Helpers give her own home a Christmas transformation. They also decorate the family’s trucking business, Cherokee Freight Lines, much to the staff’s delight. For business jobs, they incorporate company colors and logos into the overall design. “They put up a formal flocked tree in the lobby, an eight-foot tree in the lunchroom and a nine-foot tree in the accounting department, along with a couple of garlands,” Leanne said of the magic Holiday Helpers create at Cherokee.

Over the years, the creative trio has continually raised the bar and impressed their clients. “I have given up on the Hallmark

Christmas movies because I have yet to see decorations in the movies that match my own,” Leanne said.

These three holiday helpers truly weave magic and love to see their clients’ reactions when the big reveal takes place! “The most rewarding reaction we have found is from the residents of O’Connor Woods,” Gina said of the senior living community in Stockton. “They are always so happy to see us bring the holiday cheer, which warms our hearts.”

Lois said the dream team got their start when she was working in a gift shop and a customer asked if she could recreate one of the shop’s decorated trees in her home. “When I recognized my daughter-in-law’s creative talent, we became a team,” Lois said. “After several years, we found the need to bring on another person. Gina’s friend, Sara Cowan, loved holiday decorating as much as we did, so she became part of the team.”

To pull the magic together, they find unique and trendsetting décor at local businesses such as Regalo Bello, Fiori Floral, With Garden Flair, Voila and Bungalow. Each woman has her specialty when it comes to setting the scene. “To create a beautiful tree, each ornament, each spray and the ribbon need to be strategically placed,” Gina said. Lois installs the sprays, Sara does the ribbon work and Gina finds the perfect placement for the ornaments. “We bring all the necessary tools for the job, including ladders, tools, drop cloths, brooms and other tools to leave the house neat,” Lois said. At the end of the season, they are available to take down the decorations and carefully pack everything away for next year.

Gina, Lois and Sara agree that the most fun part of the job is the camaraderie they share, bouncing ideas off each other, learning from each other and laughing through it all. ♦







Have Yourself a
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and a
FanSASStic New Year!

Carrie *Anna*


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Beauty of Stockton



Have a Playful Day At The Children's Museum of Stockton

The Children's Museum of Stockton is a space dedicated to fun and play from the moment young visitors step through the doors. The museum features hands-on interactive exhibits meant to inspire young minds to explore their imaginations and creativity. The newest AIRWAYS exhibit is truly mind-blowing! Littles can experience the amazing power of pneumatics as they watch balls and scarves zipping through the maze of twists and turns and try to catch them as they are released and fall back to earth.

The Children's Museum of Stockton is available for birthday parties and field trips and hosts special events throughout the year. Follow them on Facebook or Instagram @Childrensmuseumstockton for the latest updates.

Visit the Children's Museum of Stockton, where every day is child's play!

Content courtesy of The Children's Museum of Stockton: 402 W. Weber Ave. Stockton, CA 95203, 209.465.4392.



As a professional photographer, I've seen countless wonderful things about the city, and I finally decided to use my art to highlight them. Artists call it a "personal project," and with social media, it's easy to share images with many people. I named my project The Beauty of Stockton and committed to posting a stunning photo of one beautiful aspect of the city every Monday for at least a year. That's at least 52 unique, artistically created images highlighting something beautiful about Stockton—a year of doing exactly what cities like Santa Barbara do: emphasizing the good.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. The best comment I've received so far came from a friend who described scrolling through social media, seeing posts about crime, car accidents, and city politics, and then seeing one of my beautiful images pop up, which brought a smile to his face.

That's my goal: helping to change the impression of Stockton, one smile at a time.

You can view and share each week's Beauty of Stockton post at: www.facebook.com/kevin.richtik or www.instagram.com/carolinephotography209



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Stockton

PACIFIC ITALIAN ALLIANCE SCREENS DOCUMENTARY FILM

The Pacific Italian Alliance hosted an exclusive screening on October 19 of *A Little Fellow*, a documentary film celebrating the life of first-generation Italian American trailblazer A.P. Giannini, founder of the Bank of Italy, which later became Bank of America. Giannini played a pivotal role in rebuilding San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. A forgotten titan, Giannini's vision empowered working-class Americans and fueled economic recovery. The film was directed by Davide Fiore. After the screening, attendees were able to engage with the director and producers in a Q & A and enjoy a reception. For more information on the film, visit alittlefellowmovie.com. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



Holiday-Ready Homes



CREATING WARMTH
& WOW WITHOUT THE
TINSEL OVERLOAD

BY KATHLEEN JENNISON | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY



Let's get one thing straight; you will not find me advocating for inflatable snowmen in the front yard or stockings that look like they were bedazzled at summer camp. Holiday décor can so easily tip into “tacky overload,” and once that line is crossed, it is hard to come back. The good news is that a holiday-ready home does not require themed tchotchkes or bins of plastic décor. In fact, the most inviting homes for the season often use very little “holiday” décor at all.

Being holiday-ready is not about gimmicks. It is about the atmosphere. It's about creating a space where guests feel welcomed, conversations linger and every corner glows with warmth. Here is how to get there without a single candy cane in sight.

SET THE STAGE WITH LIGHTING

If you take one step this season, make it lighting. Warm light makes people relax, stay longer, and actually look good in photos. Swap out cool white bulbs for warm white. Add candles, real or battery-operated, to mantels, tables and sideboards. Use dimmers to adjust the mood as the evening unfolds.

Think of lighting as ambiance control. Bright enough for a lively cocktail hour. Softer for intimate dinners. Low and golden for late-

night conversations over dessert. No reindeer-shaped lamps required.

TEXTURES DO THE HEAVY LIFTING

Forget novelty holiday throw pillows. Instead, layer in cozy, tactile materials that automatically make a space feel festive. Velvet cushions, chunky knit throws, faux fur accents and wool rugs create instant comfort.

The magic of texture is that it feels seasonal without screaming it. Your living room looks and feels inviting, and you can leave those pieces out long after the holidays.

THE ART OF THE TABLE

Most gatherings revolve around food, which means the dining table deserves attention. But again, no glitter-covered centerpieces, please. Instead:

Layered linens: A runner over a tablecloth adds dimension.

Natural elements: Branches of greenery, bowls of pomegranates or even artful pears scattered down the center.

Candle clusters: Mix pillar candles of varying heights for glow and drama.

The effect is elegant, seasonal and sophisticated. Guests will feel like they have stepped into a lifestyle magazine, not a dollar store.

FLEXIBLE SEATING FOR REAL LIFE

Nothing kills holiday hosting faster than not having enough places to sit. Invest in ottomans, benches or a chic set of nesting stools. They double as décor most of the year but become lifesavers when you need to seat the cousin who always shows up unannounced.

SCENT IS PART OF DESIGN

Yes, design has a smell. Nothing says holiday-ready like a subtle, inviting scent. Think simmer pots with cinnamon sticks and orange peel, or candles with woody, spicy notes. Skip anything labeled Christmas Cookie. The goal is warmth, not sugar headache.

HOLIDAY WITHOUT THE THEME PARK

If you absolutely must bring in some overtly seasonal touches, keep them understated. A simple evergreen wreath on the door. A bowl of ornaments in one color palette on the coffee table. One garland draped along a banister. That is enough nod to the season without competing with your existing décor.

DESIGNER PRO TIPS

Edit ruthlessly. Too many little things make a space feel cluttered. Choose a few bigger gestures instead.

Stick to a palette. Choose two or three colors that complement your home's existing décor and carry them through.

Think longevity. Opt for décor that transitions seamlessly from Thanksgiving through New Year's without requiring a full reset.

THE TAKEAWAY

A holiday-ready home is not about seasonal overload. It is about curating an atmosphere that feels warm, thoughtful and memorable. The glow of candles. The softness of velvet. The sparkle of glassware on a well-set table.

Your home should feel elevated, not overwhelmed. The holidays will always bring enough chaos on their own. Your décor should be the calm, stylish backdrop that makes the season feel magical without ever making you cringe. ♦



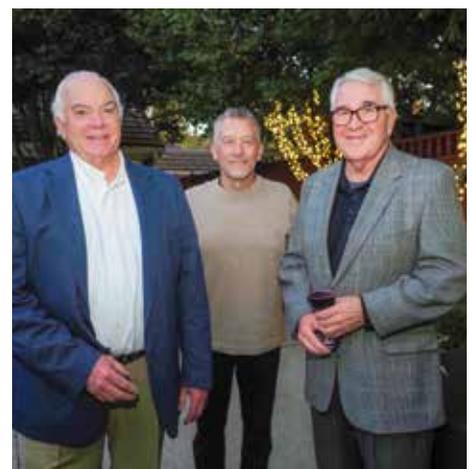
Before becoming an interior designer, Kathleen Jennison worked as certified public accountant for a national firm. A near-fatal car accident changed her career path and life forever. She suffered serious brain injuries, and her doctors suggested she take art classes to help with her rehabilitation. With her newfound love for design, she studied at the Art Institute in Sacramento, obtaining her bachelor's degree in interior design. She is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers and has served as the director of marketing for the National Association of Remodelers for the Greater Sacramento area. In 2009, she started KTJ Design Company.

404 N. HARRISON | STOCKTON, CA 95203 | 209.915.0442 | KATHLEEN@KATHLEENJENNISON.COM

TREBLE & BASS

Stockton Beautiful's Treble & Bass was an evening during which music met beautification. Hosted by University of the Pacific's First Lady Jean Callahan on October 23 at the president's university residence, the evening featured music, appetizers and wine and an opportunity to support Stockton Beautiful's beautification efforts. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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FAMILY PROMISE GALA

The Family Promise of San Joaquin County held its first fundraising gala at Capecchio Ovest, thanks to presenting sponsor Cortopassi Family Foundation. Proceeds from the sell-out Family Promise Gala on October 18 will help the nonprofit in its life-changing mission to end child and family homelessness. The event featured drinks, dinner, entertainment and information on the organization's accomplishments to helping children and adults. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



THE JEWISH FESTIVAL OF HANUKKAH

*Explained
by Stockton
Rabbi*

BY RACHEL FENTON

In the midwinter darkness, a candle burns. Joined by another, then another, the flames of the menorah dance across continents and oceans, each light a symbol that unites a people through their shared faith. The Jewish festival of Hanukkah, also spelled Chanukah to reflect the Hebrew pronunciation, commemorates the rededication of the Temple in the second century BCE during the Maccabean Revolt. For the Jewish people, the Maccabean Revolt is a very significant event: “It’s often regarded as one of the first battles fought in the name of religious freedom,” said Rabbi Jason Gwasdoff, who serves as the rabbi of Temple Israel in Stockton, one of the oldest Jewish congregations in the state of California.

The historical context of the festival of Hanukkah begins when Antiochus IV, Greek king of the Seleucid Empire, outlawed the practice of Judaism. “The daily practice of Jewish life—the study of Torah, observing Shabbat, circumcision—those things became officially outlawed,” Rabbi Gwasdoff explained. “That’s what stirred the traditional masses to stage this revolt.” Led by the priest Mattathias along with his five sons, the Jewish people fought back against Antiochus IV and his draconian restrictions. Despite the strength of the Seleucid Empire and being greatly outnumbered, they managed to drive out Antiochus’s forces and reclaim the Temple. “The victory alone was a miracle, that the Maccabees could win this battle against an army far superior in numbers and strength,” said Rabbi Gwasdoff as he recounted the story, his tone gentled by repetition and reverence.

Though the Jewish people had successfully reclaimed the Temple, it needed to be cleansed. Antiochus IV and his forces had set up their own idols and slaughtered pigs upon the altar to intentionally defile it. They cleansed the Temple and held a celebration for eight days to rededicate it: and thus, the festival of Hanukkah (hanukkah means “rededication”) became an established part of Jewish faith and life. There are a few different explanations as to why the festival spans eight days, but as Rabbi Gwasdoff said, “One interpretation we get from the Talmud, a

very important book of Jewish law and lore, is the story of the Miracle of the Light.” When the people went to relight the lights of the Temple, there was only enough oil prepared for one day, but miraculously, the cruse of oil lasted eight nights, the exact amount of time it took to prepare new oil. From this story comes the tradition of lighting the eight candles of the Hanukkah menorah, adding one candle each day of Hanukkah (from one to eight), in remembrance of the Miracle of the Light. This is also why foods fried in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts) are traditional Hanukkah fare; they too are a remembrance of this miracle.

In 2025, Hanukkah spans from December 14 to 22, and Temple Israel will be hosting their celebration on the first night, Sunday, December 14. This year, festivals at Temple Israel have been especially exciting as the temple celebrates its 175th anniversary, and Hanukkah is no exception. “All our choirs will be singing, and our dance group will be dancing, and we will touch upon that theme of the longevity of our congregation here in Stockton,” said Rabbi Gwasdoff. “It’s really quite a wonderful thing to celebrate.” And, as in all holidays and festivals, “A component of the celebration is tzedakah, which means ‘righteous giving;’ by giving to others, we are increasing the joy of the holiday and giving it its meaning,” he said, touching on how the Hanukkah celebration affects not just his congregation, but the local community as a whole.

Every person, regardless of ethnicity or religion, can look to the celebration of Hanukkah as an example of joyous resilience and hope. It can be easy to forget what a privilege religious freedom is, but festivals such as Hanukkah, rooted in deep faith and cultural traditions, are a poignant reminder of those who have sacrificed much and fought hard for those privileges. The festival of Hanukkah is, as Rabbi Gwasdoff said, a story of “not just passive hope, but an active hope.”

As the candles burn, as food is shared, as the children sing and dance, may we all be reminded of the beauty of resilience and the power of hope. ♦



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ABIGAIL COUSSONS 2025 ATHENA YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

BY JO ANN KIRBY



KIDS SHINING BRIGHTLY

Abigail Coussons, a senior at Linden High School, has been honored with the 2025 ATHENA Youth Leadership Award, which includes a \$2,500 scholarship.

“I was initially shocked to be chosen for such an incredible honor, but that feeling quickly turned into gratitude to those who recognized my hard work and commitment to making Linden and our community a better place,” Abigail said.

Abigail is the daughter of Brad and Lisa Coussons; she has two brothers and one sister. The family also has two dogs, one of which Abigail rescued from the side of the road. “When I learned Abigail had won the ATHENA award, I was so proud and excited that she was being rewarded for all of her accomplishments,” said Lisa Coussons, adding that she thinks her daughter is just an amazing human being. “She works tirelessly to maintain her grades, help others and contribute to foster positive relationships throughout the community in any way she can.”

Lisa said Abigail has always been a leader, and much of that is due to the teachers, administrators and staff who have influenced her during her years attending Linden Unified School District. “Waverly Elementary staff pushed her to become the best version of herself and that was brought to even higher levels as a student at Linden High School, especially with the support, encouragement and mentorship she has received from teachers like Ms. Jana Colombini and Ms. Morgan Parker,” Lisa said.

Abigail has a 4.1 GPA and a class ranking in the top ten. To say that Abigail is involved in her school community is an understatement. She’s in her fourth term as class president, she is also spirit commissioner and is a student athlete who has been named captain of her high

school girls’ golf team. Her nomination biography noted that she is a four-year member and officer of FFA, serving as vice president, treasurer and reporter. She earned first place in both team and individual divisions at the 2025 FFA State Ag Sales Competition, advancing to represent California at the national level, where the team placed third in the United States. After graduating from high school in May 2026, Abigail plans to attend a four-year university to study animal science in hopes of becoming a veterinarian.

Through the California Scholarship Federation, she contributes to community projects that benefit residents of all ages. “I am motivated to give back to my community because I am grateful for the support and opportunities it has given me,” she said. “Helping others allows me to create positive change and strengthen the sense of connection that makes our community thrive.”

As a Linden Cherry Queen Princess, she proudly represents her community, bridging generations and celebrating the heritage of her hometown. In addition, she is serving her second term as a Linden Unified School District’s Student Trustee.

“Abigail represents the very best of young leadership — authentic, courageous and committed to others,” said Scott McGregor, superintendent of Linden Unified School District. “She doesn’t just talk about leadership; she lives it, every single day.”

The ATHENA Youth Leadership Award is given to a girl under age 18 who embodies ATHENA’S Eight Principles of Enlightened Leadership™, which are to live authentically, learn constantly, build relationships, foster collaboration, act courageously, advocate fiercely, give back and celebrate. The Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce began presenting the ATHENA Youth Leadership Award in 2024. ♦



Kay G. Ruhstaller



Stephanie Braithwaite

ATHENA *Awards*

**Recognize Community
Changemakers**

The Stockton chapter of ATHENA International honored three influential women at the ATHENA Awards Luncheon, which took place November 20 at the Stockton Golf & Country Club. Kay G. Ruhstaller of Family Resource Center is the 2025 ATHENA Leadership Award recipient; Stephanie Braithwaite of Lily Pad Living/Lotus Rising Recovery Services received the 2025 ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award; and Abigail Coussons, a senior at Linden High School, accepted the 2025 ATHENA Youth Leadership Award.

“I am so excited to honor three amazing women at this year’s ATHENA Awards luncheon,” said Timm Quinn, CEO of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, said prior to the event. “This is one of the longest-running ATHENA Awards communities, and I am amazed each year by all the recipients and nominees. We are so blessed as a community to have such wonderful leaders and role models for everyone to aspire to and learn from.”

ATHENA International partners with hundreds of chambers of commerce, colleges and universities, corporations, women’s organizations and affiliate communities in 48 states and 11 countries. Over 8,000 leaders have been recognized with the ATHENA Leadership award in more than 500 regions worldwide. Stockton has one of the longest-running ATHENA programs in the nation, with the first Stockton ATHENA Award having been presented in 1986. The ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award was introduced locally in November 2010. The ATHENA Youth Leadership Award, for young women under the age of 18, was introduced nationally and locally in 2024 with the Stockton chamber giving out the first ATHENA Youth Award in the United States.

Kay G. Ruhstaller

The ATHENA Leadership Award recognizes accomplished individuals who actively support women in attaining professional excellence and leadership skills. This award highlights what recipients have accomplished in addition to ways they have paved the path for other women to have future successes. Throughout her time as CEO of the Family Resource Center, Kay G. Ruhstaller’s work has helped thousands of families find affordable, quality childcare. Family Resource Center is San Joaquin County’s largest nonprofit organization, now operating with an annual budget exceeding \$100 million and impacting over 8,000 children annually. Christina Gilbert, a mentee and colleague, described Kay as “the most influential mentor in my career, combining strategic insight, compassion and remarkable generosity.”

Kay co-founded the San Joaquin Children’s Alliance, uniting nonprofit and civic leaders to align child-focused investments and secure more than \$5 million in mental health funding for families after the pandemic. She played a key role in developing 211 San Joaquin, a helpline that provides residents with referrals to housing, food, mental health and emergency services. In 2024, she led the integration of a Community Resource Navigator into the Family Justice Center,

strengthening trauma-informed services for survivors of violence and deepening partnerships across county lines. As a registered dietitian, she has overseen the delivery of more than 4 million healthy meals to children and over \$6 million in reimbursements to childcare providers annually. She also guided Family Resource Center’s Joan Richards Learning Village to a Tier 5 quality rating, the highest standard in California for early childhood education. She has served on the First 5 San Joaquin Commission for more than a decade and is a gubernatorial appointee to the California Early Childhood Policy Council. Kay was the 13th female president of the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce in 2023. “Kay is a leader of leaders. Her strength, planning and calm presence have guided our organization through difficult times and lasting transformation,” Gillian Murphy, president of Family Resource Center’s board of directors, said in a Chamber press release.

Stephanie Braithwaite

The ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award celebrates emerging leaders. This award honors those under 40 who have taken significant steps in their career journey and served as a role model for women and girls. Stephanie Braithwaite’s nomination for the Young Professional Leadership Award cited many achievements that show she is a powerful advocate and visionary leader with a servant heart. She is the founder and program director of a multi-site recovery residence network, Lily Pad Living/Lotus Rising Recovery Services, known for its intensive outpatient and integrated services programs that support individuals and families facing substance use, human trafficking, domestic violence, housing insecurity, poverty and child welfare involvement.

Stephanie leads outreach and education efforts throughout the community, focusing on youth impacted by the justice system, neglect, violence and housing instability. She works tirelessly to spread awareness about the dangers of fentanyl and substance use while guiding those in need toward hope and recovery. Stephanie teaches weekly Bible study and volunteers at His Way Community Church. She also facilitates a weekly trauma-informed recovery group and leads Keys to Freedom, a program supporting survivors of violence and abuse. In 2023, she organized San Joaquin County’s Recovery Happens event, part of a national initiative celebrating the power of recovery. She serves on the San Joaquin County Public Health Healthy Communities Committee and the Community Advisory Committee and has presented at numerous events for the San Joaquin County Opiate Coalition. She also founded and coaches two Stockton softball teams as part of a sober living wellness initiative. Stephanie mentors the next generation of female leaders through Vision 209. She does all this while also raising her sons!

Abigail Coussons

Learn more about Abigail Coussons, the recipient of the 2025 ATHENA Youth Leadership Award, in the Spark Joy feature on page 39. ♦

Annie's story...from fear to healing shows the power of compassion.

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Judy Kozina

Author of Just-Published Children's Books for the Holidays

BY HERLIFE STAFF



A Lodi mom and teacher is a newly published author of two holiday books, *All the Cool Snowmen* and *The Reindeer Rundown with Donner and Blitzen*, that are just the thing for youngsters on your Christmas list.

"Being surrounded by students' humor and curiosity for over 25 years has created a vast mental library of book ideas. This year, I finally decided it was time to put pen to paper and bring those ideas to life," Judy Kozina said. "When I earned the amazing title of Mom I became inspired to write children's books of my own."

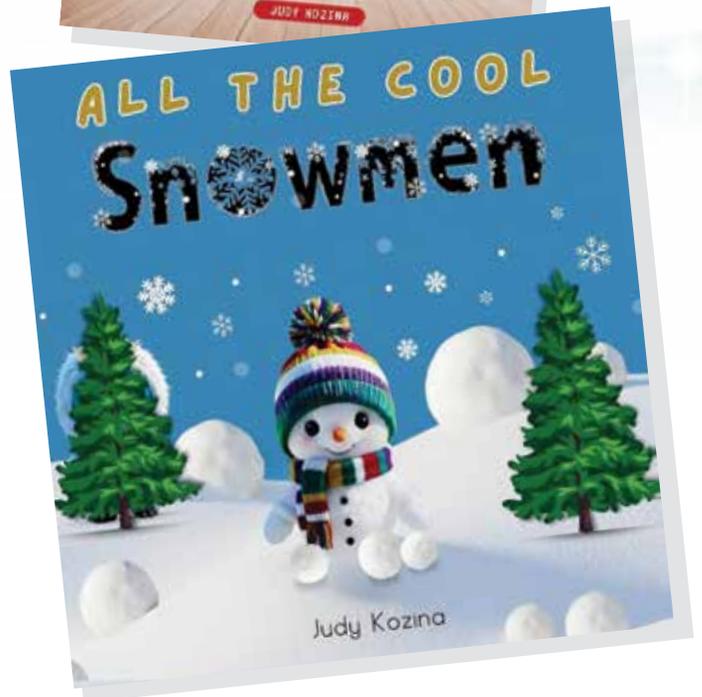
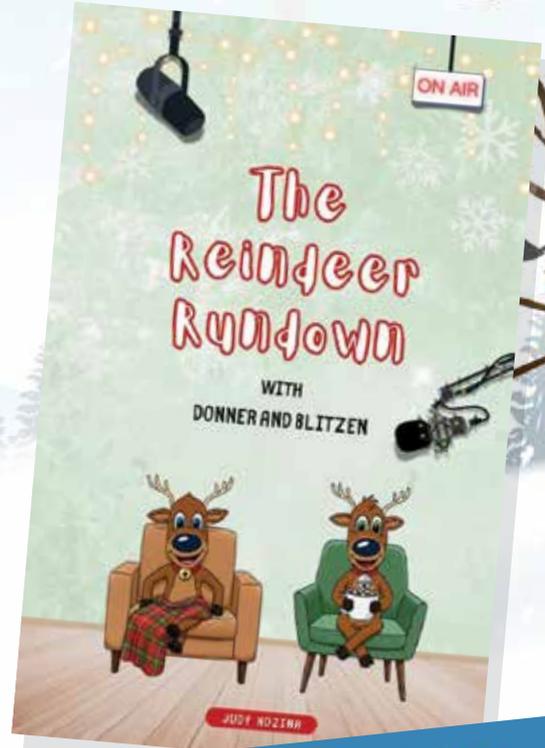
Judy and her husband have one daughter; she said her daughter's love of graphic novels and rhyming stories, combined with her own love for the holidays and charming characters, sparked the creation of these two books. "By night, I'm an aspiring author-illustrator living in Lodi with my husband, Matt, and our daughter, Maryn. They have been wonderfully supportive and very tolerant of our dining table full of reindeer doodles. They are the first to hear my new story ideas and have been my editors, free of charge," she said. "My daughter loves to read, and through her and my students I have seen the lasting impact a good book or series can have on a child."

The author said her stories celebrate friendships, promote positivity and bring out the magic of being a kid. "I want to be a part of creating those meaningful stories that leave a lasting impression, and to also show my daughter that ideas and dreams can become a reality."

All the Cool Snowmen is a hardcover picture book with catchy rhyming verses best suited for preschoolers. It tells the story of how friendship means that no one gets left out in the cold, no matter how big and furry they might appear.

The Reindeer Rundown is suitable for anyone who believes in Santa, Judy said of the paperback book. In the story, Donner and Blitzen host a hilarious holiday tell-all podcast in which they spill secrets about the jolly old man in his signature red suit with his iconic "Ho, Ho, Ho." The reindeer siblings unwrap the history of Santa and offer plenty of laughs, mischief and holiday chaos.

Judy's books can be purchased on her Bookshop website at bookshop.org/shop/judykozina or online at Walmart, Amazon or Barnes & Noble. *All the Cool Snowmen* is \$15.99 and *The Reindeer Rundown with Donner and Blitzen* is \$14.99. ♦



GOODWILL HELPING HANDS AWARD 2025

A gala dinner was held in honor of Kevin and Sandy Huber at the Stockton Golf & Country Club October 16, at which the Hubers received the 2025 Goodwill Helping Hands Award for their many contributions to the community. Their philanthropic work includes the Huber Endowed Scholarship and support for Health Careers Academy. Kevin, president and CEO of the Grupe Huber Company, has served in leadership roles across regional and national organizations. The Hubers led the development of University Park, a healthcare and education campus in midtown Stockton where Sandy created the University Park World Peace Garden. Their family brand, Good Citizen, reflects their commitment to sustainability and purpose. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



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The Medication Assisted Treatment Program described is supported by Grant Number H79TI084141 from SAMHSA.



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Family Dinners to Go

Save the Day!

BY JO ANN KIRBY

Gathering with friends and family around the holidays can mean that someone is always meal prepping.

The holidays are a great time to give the cook in your house a break for once. Many of us have our go-to deli that we call for a tray of raviolis or a neighborhood taqueria where we order our Christmas tamales. And who turns down pizza or Chinese food from their favorite spot?

But some restaurants have family takeout meals that fit the bill. “We actually started doing the family dinners to go during the pandemic,” Jennifer Pappas, of Papapavlo’s said. “It just became really popular, so we kept it.” At Octavio’s Restaurant, owner Octavio Cruces says his customers have been loving the Sunday Hot and Ready Enchilada package! “Folks appreciate the portions and love the convenience of ordering online,” he said. When the college kids come back home and the relatives stay over, take a break and take advantage of some tasty family meal packages to go by some of our favorite locally owned restaurants. You can travel around the world with our roundup or check the options at your go-to eatery.

Papapavlo’s

The 6 for \$75 Family Meal at Papapavlo’s in Stockton includes a choice of one or mix and match (beef is limited to



three) chicken brochettes, beef brochettes, vegetable brochettes and gyros strips. This dinner includes a family-size Greek or Caesar salad or a 32-ounce container of soup or a pan of rice pilaf. It also comes with tzatziki and pita bread. Their \$65 Pasta Family Meal includes a family-size Greek or Caesar salad or a 32-ounce container of soup, a box of pita bread and one pan of pasta that serves five to eight people. The pasta choices include Mediterranean Chicken Pasta,

Papapavlo’s Pasta with Chicken, Chicken Pomodoro Pasta, Grilled Vegetable Pasta and Seafood Pasta. The Seafood Pasta option rings up to \$95. And you can even go big and go home with the special 30 for \$370 package when you have a lot of mouths to feed. Papapavlo’s has locations in Lodi at 223 N. School Street and in Stockton’s Lincoln Center. For more information, visit papapavlos.com and check out the takeout menu.

Pietro’s Trattoria

At Pietro’s in Lodi, the three-course Family Pack to go serves four at \$95 and serves 10 at \$195. For an insalata, choose between a Pietro’s salad, Caesar salad or garden salad; for primi, pick a penne pasta with marinara or meat sauce, gnocchi with cream or pesto sauce, ravioli with Bolognese sauce or lasagna. For the sec-

ondi, the choices are chicken parmigiana, eggplant parmigiana, chicken piccata or, for an extra \$30, choose the New York Steak. They also have family style trays of menu items such as lasagna, chicken piccata, bread and so much more that serve 10 to 12 guests. Another option is their bulk portions menu! Pietro's has moved to a larger location after 40 years on Kettleman Lane. They are now located at 282 Rocky Lane in Lodi. For more information, visit pietrosloidi.com/catering/#family-pack.

Octavio's

Check out the Sunday Special at Octavio's in Stockton. The Hot and Ready Family Enchilada package is just \$59 and features ten enchiladas; choose between cheese, chicken, beef or pork, with red or green sauce, refried beans, Spanish rice and their chips and salsa. Got a crowd to feed? Just order two or more! The Sunday Special is available only through the restaurant's direct online ordering link on Sundays at octaviosrestaurant.com. Octavio's is located in Stockton's Marina Center at 3201 W Benjamin Holt Dr., Suite 155.

Komachi Sushi

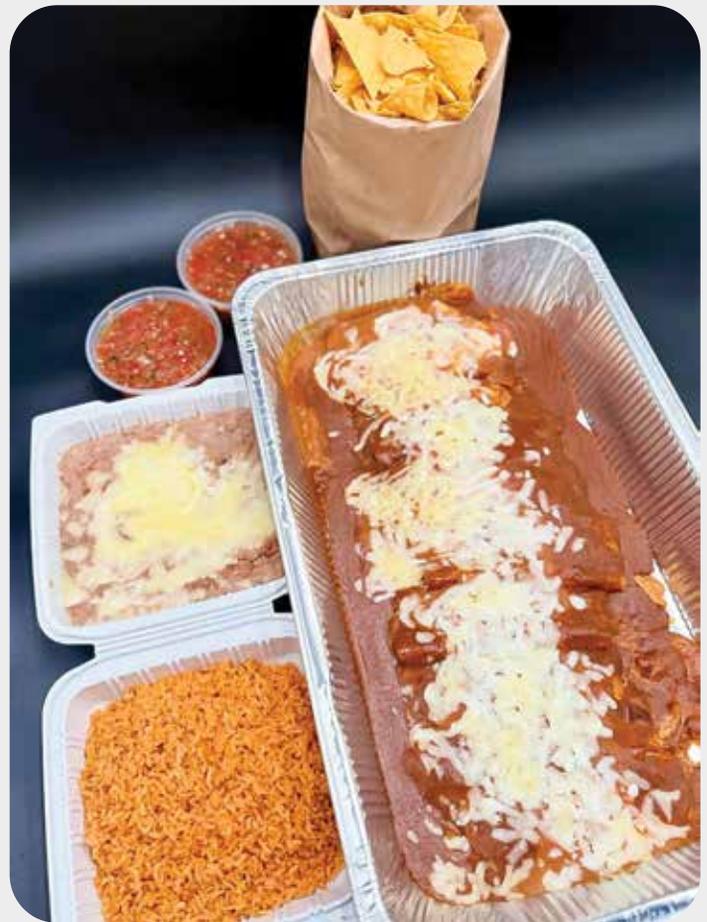
Mix up your mealtime by ordering a Sushi Bar platter to go. Komachi has three Sushi Bar platters to go, each priced at \$115. They feed four to five as a meal or 15 to 20 as an appetizer. Each sushi bar platter features a variety of rolls such as Spicy Tuna, Golden Shrimp, California and more. They also serve up a Nigiri Platter featuring tuna, salmon, albacore and white fish for \$115 and a Kitchen Platter that includes rice, edamame, fried Gyoza, chicken teriyaki, sesame chicken and mixed panko vegetables. Komachi Sushi is located at 307 S. Lower Sacramento Rd. Suite D in Lodi. Check out their menu at sushikomachi.com.

Bud's Seafood Grille

December is a great month for soup and Bud's has a family to-go special on their clam chowder. On Mondays, the Monday Night Special is \$41 and includes 2 quarts of New England clam chowder, a family-size salad with dressing and a half loaf of sourdough bread to feed a family of four. Order multiples to feed your guests. On Tuesdays through Sunday, the order is dubbed the Chowder Special for \$43. Thursdays and Fridays, you can switch things up and order their red Manhattan chowder. On Tuesdays, Bud's has a Fish & Chips to go special that feeds four. The Pacific cod is accompanied by French fries, cole slaw, lemon wedges, tartar sauce and sourdough for \$48. Bud's Seafood is located in Stockton's Lincoln Center. For more information, visit budsseafood.com.

House of Shaw Café & Bakery

What about brunch? For stayover guests, House of Shaw wants to help with the holidays. With 48 hours' notice, they have a large quiche that serves six to seven people at \$35 each. They also create charcuterie boards that serve 10 to 15 people starting at \$200 and a delicious carrot cake that serves 8 to 10. Add some mimosas and coffee, and you're set! Check them out on Instagram @hofshaw or call 209-948-4300. House of Shaw is located on the Miracle Mile in Stockton at 227 Dorris Place. ♦



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STRESS LESS FOR PETS

BY REBECCA FLANSBURG

*'Twas that long-anticipated holiday time and all through the house, not a creature was stirring...
except Fido the dog and Fluffy the cat, who were freaking out!*

The holidays are filled with hustle and bustle, and that fast-paced dynamic can leave many of us reeling from exhaustion and forgetting the meaning of the season. Planning a stress-free holiday is a bit of a unicorn everyone wants, but very few seem to know how to successfully achieve it. There's a fine line between topsy-turvy and holiday bliss when it comes to the most joyous time of year.

Many people don't realize that this heightened time of stress and anxiety also affects our pets. Parties, shopping, excitement, expected and unexpected company and more activity than usual disrupt household schedules. As humans we can read a calendar and know that these hectic times are coming, but imagine this unexpected shift in atmosphere and schedule from your pet's perspective. They are unaware of the looming festivities and only know that their pet parents are snappy, frazzled and there's suddenly a herd of strange humans in their house. Soon our beloved fur children are just as anxious and stressed as we are. Only Fred, the turtle, seems unaffected by the frenetic activity because...well...he's a turtle.

But there are ways to buffer the effects of this busy time of year when it comes to our pets. For many of us, our pets are like members of our family and going the extra mile for their safety, sanity and comfort isn't an inconvenience; it's an act of love. Here are some ideas for ways to reduce our own holiday chaos, which in turn will positively affect our four-legged family members.

PLANNING IS EVERYTHING

The first step in planning for a stress-free holiday is prioritizing your time. Whenever possible, figure out what activities are upcoming and which ones need your attention and time. Use that pre-planning to take into account your pet's schedule and endeavor to work around it if possible. If Fido is used to taking a walk after work or getting a potty break at noon, work out alternative options or shift your activities away from those times.

Consider your pet's domain. Your home is their kingdom, so to keep stress at a minimum, make sure your dogs or cats have an escape plan when the Rowdy family stops by for their holiday visit. Unless they are very sociable critters, make your pets comfortable in a safe, warm and quiet area until your visitors leave. Felines are particular-



ly sensitive when it comes to stress and are less likely to want to hang out with your company than a canine.

Keeping mealtimes and scheduled walks the same will go a long way in smoothing the bumps in your pet's life during the holidays. Humans thrive on routine and set schedules just as pets do, so this step is a sanity saver for everyone in your household.

ATTENTION DIS-ORDER

Another source of stress for pets during the holiday season is attention, either too much or too little. Too much attention, particularly from little visitors, can make sensitive pets grumpier and excitable pets that much more excited. Be aware of your pet's temperament and limits and plan accordingly. This also applies to our feathered friends, since birds are not exempt from holiday upset. Little fingers poking through the cage can be worrisome and stressful to feathered pets, so it may be best to retire your bird to a quieter area for some temporary peace and tranquility until guests leave.

Don't be afraid to set ground rules for handling your pets, especially for visiting children. Use the opportunity to educate youngsters on the proper way to handle and respect animals. Overzealous little humans sometimes forget that Fido is not a wrestling buddy or Fluffy isn't fond of having her tail repeatedly pulled. This education and rule-setting can help avoid issues with pets who have had enough and start to lash out in self-defense. If your visitors bring their pet over, let the animals meet and greet each other on their own terms; don't force the friendship.

THE GIFT OF TIME

Above all, make time for your pets. Spending time with our fur babies is beneficial to humans and animals alike; studies have shown that the simple act of petting a dog or cat can lower the blood pressure of their owner. Pets have a calming effect on humans, but they can feel our emotions as well. When life at home is hectic and we find ourselves stressed and frazzled, that anxiety is easily transferred to our pets. By slowing down, relaxing and taking the time to nurture the health and well-being of our pets we are in effect nurturing ourselves. Enjoy your holiday season! ♦

SOURCES: care2.com and vetstreet.com.

Snowballs Bentley...

A Mellow Velcro Pup

BY HERLIFE STAFF



Q: What is your full name?

A: Snowballs Bentley.

Q: What breed are you?

A: I'm a Shih Tzu.

Q: Describe your personality!

A: I am mild and mellow, only yappy when someone comes to the door. I'm very alert when someone comes to the doors. I'm a perfect watch dog.

Q: Where do you most like to vacation?

A: I don't have a favorite vacation place but I love to go on walks. I really enjoy visits with Frankie at House of Coffee and I also like to then go off to Starbucks to see the fellas, my mom's friends!

Q: Do you have a guilty pleasure?

A: My guilty pleasure is a pup patty from In and Out without extra seasoning. When Mom goes I get a patty.

Q: What is the naughtiest thing you've done?

A: I'm my most naughty when I choose not to listen to my mother. I

got left at home once because I refused to come when my mom called me to put on my harness. I've never made that mistake again!

Q: What is your current obsession?

A: I'm obsessed with toys and I don't like to share. My mom says we're working on it, but I don't know how that's going.

Q: Where do you get pampered?

A: I like going to the groomer. I go to Beauty of the Beast on Pine Street in Lodi. They greet me and I love hanging out with them.

Q: Is there anything else special that you want to tell us?

A: I love sitting on my mom's lap in the wintertime, but I have to have my blanket. I have to know where my mom is at all times. I cannot do anything without her, even going to the bathroom. She has to come outside with me!

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Oregon.

Q: Who is your human?

A: Paulette Parker of Lodi. ♦



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& Happy 2026!



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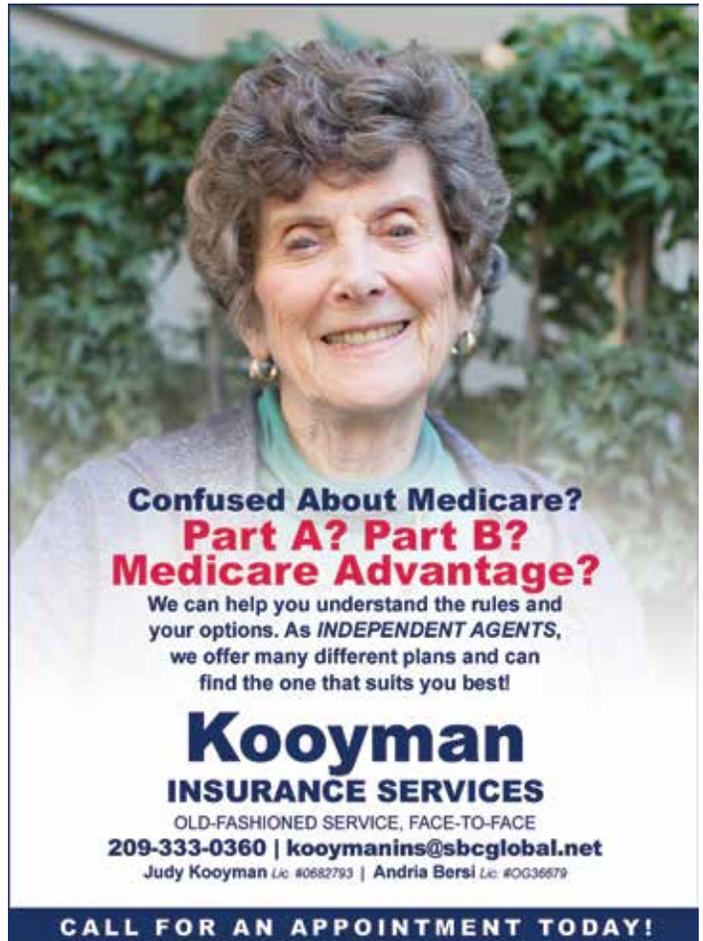
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The El Concilio California Gala was held October 24 at Hutchins Street Square in Lodi. John Vera was honored as Amigo of the Year; Rosie D'Arcy was bestowed the honor of Amiga of the Year. Armando Villapudua was recognized as Unsung Hero. Roxana Calderon was given the La Raza Award and Rich Ibarra was presented with the Legacy Award. The annual gala provides an opportunity to join business, civic and community leaders together to honor individuals who share in El Concilio's commitment to educate, uplift and advocate for California's diverse vulnerable communities. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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Lodi Parade of Lights
 Downtown Lodi
 Info: kiwanislodi.org

DECEMBER 7
Winter Wonderland Holiday Boutique
 Hutchins Street Square
 Info: (209) 333-6891

JANUARY 17
Crack Crab Feast
 Lodi Boys & Girls Club
 Info: 209-334-3697 ext. 4

DECEMBER 6-7
Festival of Trees
 San Joaquin Historical Museum
 Micke Grove Park
 Info: sanjoaquinhistory.org

DECEMBER 7
Stockton Symphony Holiday Pops
 Atherton Auditorium
 Info: stocktonsymphony.org

JANUARY 30
Vineyard Christian Crab Feed
 Discovery Church in Lodi
 Info: vcmslodiacrabfeed@gmail.com

DECEMBER 6
Holiday at the Point
 Weber Point Events Center
 Info: stocktonca.gov

DECEMBER 11-13
Journey to the Manger
 11451 N. West Lane, Lodi
 Info: (209) 339-7333

JANUARY 31
Fun Run/Walk for Wellness
 University Park Campus
 Info: unite.chiphilanthropy.org/stjoesfunrun2026

DECEMBER 6
Wild Winter Wonderland
 The Haggin Museum
 Info: hagginmuseum.org

DECEMBER 13
Holiday Sip & Shop
 Miracle Mile
 Info: stocktonmiraclemile.com

JANUARY 31
Animal Shelter Surf 'n' Turf
 Stockton Elks Lodge
 Info: (916) 345-4838

DECEMBER 6
Lighted Boat Parade
 Weber Point Events Center
 Info: (916) 847-8959

DECEMBER 18
Opus Handbells
 The Haggin Museum
 Info: hagginmuseum.org



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