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Ruby Gill M.D.

## Dr. Ruby Gill

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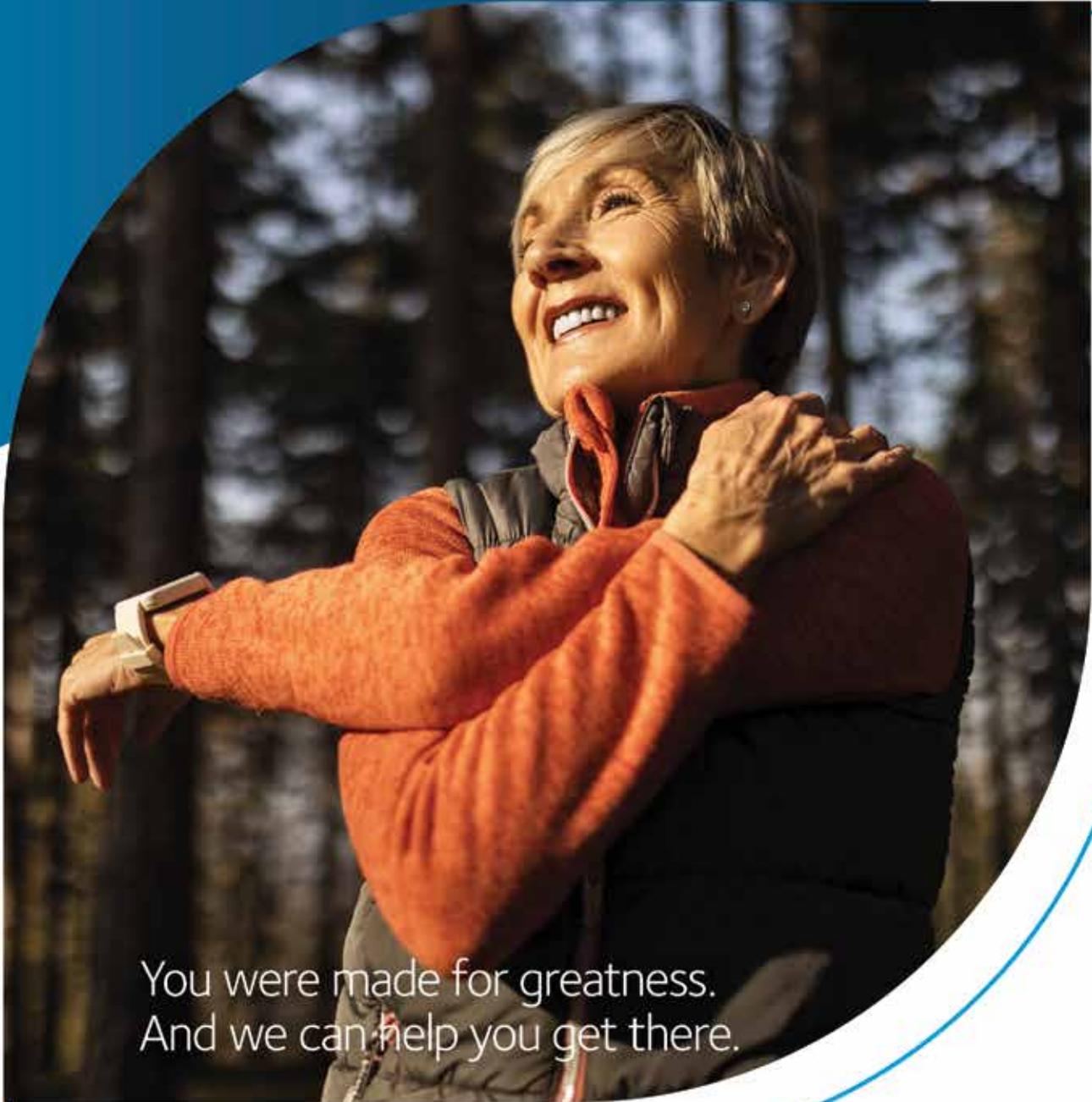


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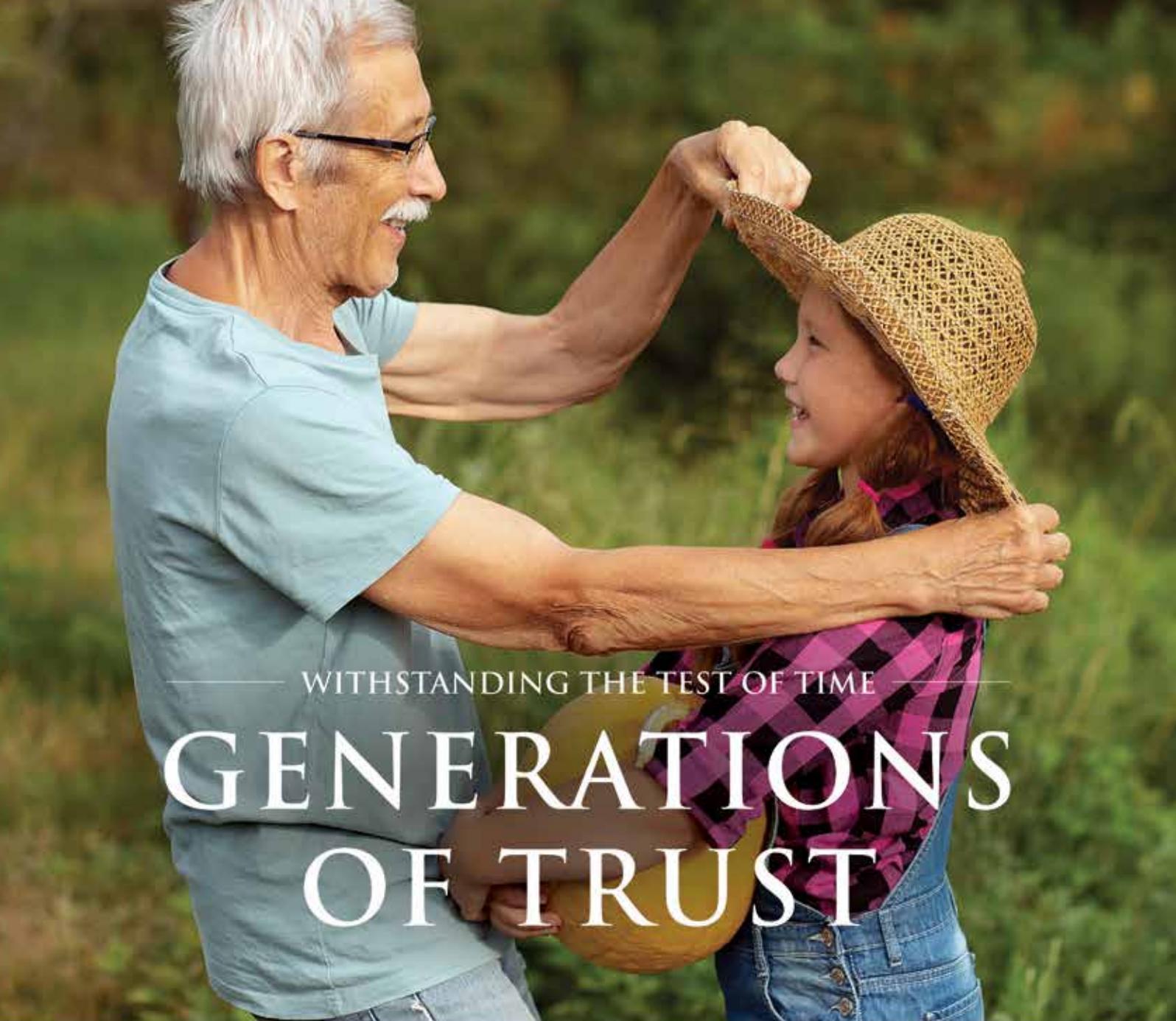
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**15**  
**INSPIRATIONS**

**Dr. Ruby Gill: “I write lifestyle prescriptions!”**

Dr. Ruby Gill’s resume speaks for itself: a double major, medical school, residency and several fellowships to satisfy her joy of learning. When she founded Gill Aesthetic Institute, she was able to blend primary care medicine, industry-leading non-surgical, aesthetic medicine procedures and listening skills to develop treatment plans and diagnoses for women and men.



**22**  
**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**



**35**  
**DESIGN TRENDS**



**54**  
**WAG TALES**



**30**  
**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**

**10**  
**WELCOME**  
*Sunset Park Grandmas: Our Generational Investment*

**15**  
**INSPIRATIONS**  
*Dr. Ruby Gill: “I write lifestyle prescriptions!”*

**20**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**  
*Athena Awards Luncheon*

**22**  
**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**  
*Mary and Malcolm Berean: Partners in Love, Partners in Business*

**24**  
**SILVER LININGS**  
*Staying Strong*

**28**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**  
*Century Business Dinner*

**30**  
**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**  
*Crosscourt Community: The Grupe Park Pickleball Players of Stockton*

**32**  
**I LOVE MY COMMUNITY**  
*Vena Ford*

**35**  
**DESIGN TRENDS**  
*Beyond the Gray: Adding Color & Character to Neutral Spaces*

**40**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**  
*Because Kids Awards*

**42**  
**SPARK JOY**  
*Robert T. McGee Student Art Exhibition: Celebrating Art in Education*

**44**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**  
*Gospel Center Rescue Mission Gala*

**45**  
**ENTERTAINMENT**  
*Stay Tune: An Eploration of the Local Music Scene*

**46**  
**CULINARY**  
*Heart-Healthy Suggestions for Foodies*

**49**  
**RECIPE**  
*Cranberry Hand Pies*

**50**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**  
*Dueling Pianos*

**52**  
**COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**  
*O’Connor Woods: A Community of Care—For Seniors and for Cats*

**54**  
**WAG TALES**  
*Tiger Lily the Sassy Siamese*

**58**  
**CALENDAR**  
*Celebrate Community Events*

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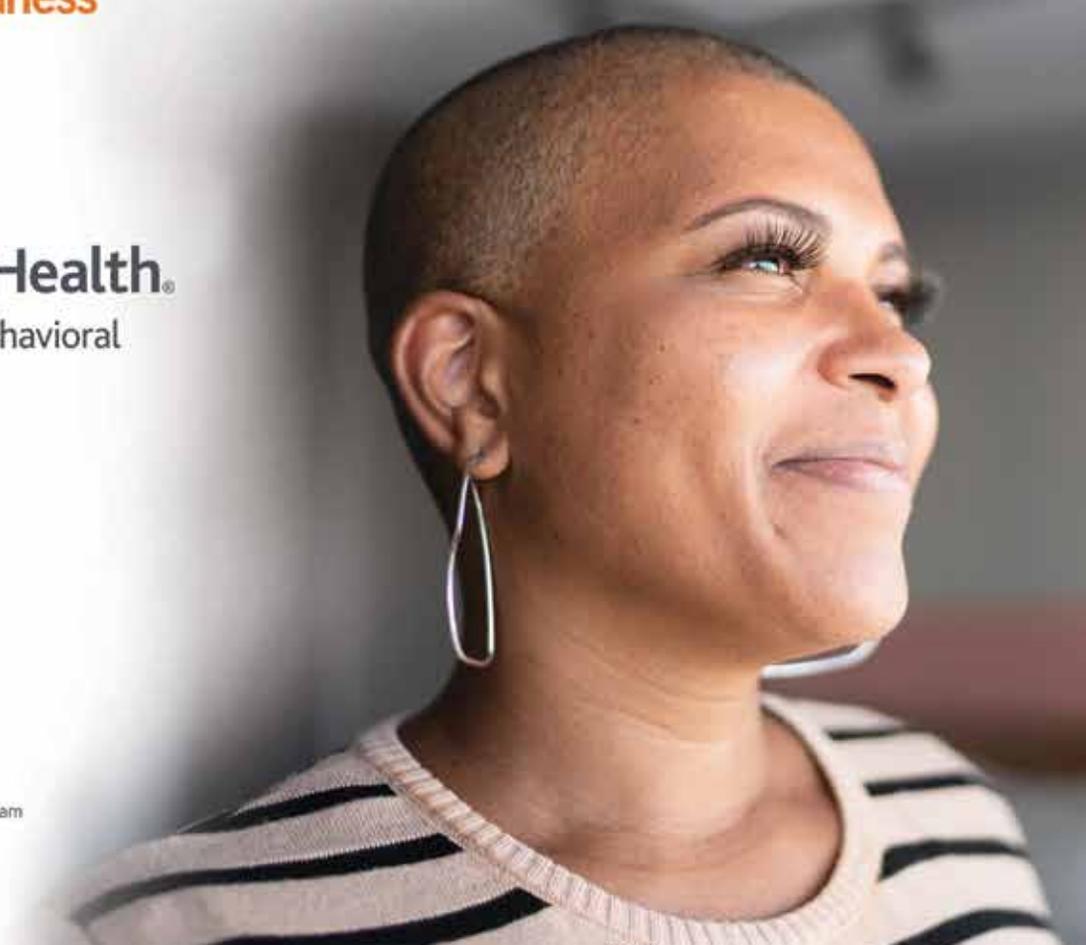
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# Sunset Park Grandmas:

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**W**hen my husband, Aaron, and I were looking to purchase our first home, we had things that we were looking for. Our home would need to be close to our kids' school, a backyard big enough to play catch, and neighborhood kiddos for our two children to play with, just to name a few. But once we got into the house, we quickly realized that there was something very special about our Hutchins Sunset Park neighborhood. We noticed there were grandmas and grandpas who lived up and down the street! As we got to know them, we were amazed by how they generously invested their time, wisdom and affection into our family. And it wasn't just our lives they invested in, but the lives of the other neighborhood families as well. These wonderful seniors embody a tradition of community caregiving that extends beyond biological family ties. They offer guidance through storytelling, provide practical lessons in everyday skills, and serve as steady sources of emotional support.

This intergenerational community has brought more joy to our



lives than we could have ever imagined. Our neighborhood is a family who participates in regular life together. My kids have benefited from the engaged and compassionate grandmothers and grandfathers in so many ways. These bonus grandparents check in on how sports activities are going, offer to help with school projects, bake a variety of banana nut breads and pies, share fruit from trees, and, of course, supply advent calendars in December. The kids can even enjoy "dinosaur rock," displaying an ever-changing variety of plastic dinosaurs for kids to stop and play with

while out for a walk! Additionally, they just know how to simply ask a question and listen.

Now, I'm not one to make New Year's resolutions, but if I were to do so, for me, it would be centered around being more like the grandmothers of our neighborhood. Their genuine involvement in our lives is an example that I wish to emulate in my own life. They have encouraged me to preserve this legacy and to practice qualities of grace and compassion for generations to come. I will forever be grateful to these grandmas and grandpas!

*Enjoy every moment,*

*Anna*



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# Dr. Ruby Gill

*"I write lifestyle prescriptions!"*

BY RACHEL FENTON | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Medicine is a science, healing is an art, and both are needed to treat the whole human person. With every science, one must approach it with curiosity and humility. As with every art, one must come from a place of joy and empathy. Dr. Ruby Gill delights in both the art and the science of her vocation as a physician.

To her, the true practice of medicine is a marriage of the two, a focus on the internal and external to bring about restoration of the body and the soul. "That's the joy of medicine, seeing the healing," Dr. Gill said. Everything she does is driven by this curiosity and joy, from her many years of education and fellowships to opening her own

practice, the Gill Aesthetic Institute and Gill Medical Group.

## Seeking Knowledge Early

Since she was a little girl, Dr. Gill knew that she wanted to help people. She often found herself flipping through her mother's nursing textbooks when she was very young, fascinated by what she read. "I always knew I wanted to be a doctor," she said. "I wanted to know more. I was curious!" She credits her mother, a now-retired registered nurse, for inspiring her journey toward medicine. "My mom has always been my role model," Dr. Gill said. "She was the perfect nurse, comforting, with a great bedside manner." She vividly remem-



bers being inspired by her mother's tireless work throughout their childhood, finishing her night shifts while studying for licensing exams, and bringing home thank-you notes and cards written by her patients. "She would get so many cards from patients," Dr. Gill said with a smile. "It made me really see the compassionate side to it all." That example of tireless work and compassionate care "created a discipline in me," Dr. Gill said, a discipline that drove her to become the first physician in her immediate family.

As she grew up, Dr. Gill had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. She competed in the United States Academic Decathlon and graduated high school a year early. She would spend her free time volunteering in hospitals, observing and assisting wherever she could in the NICU and ER. Her family lived in New York City for the first part of her childhood before they moved to the Bay Area, but she prefers to call herself a "nomad" over claiming either the East or West Coast as her home. After getting a scholarship to California State University East Bay, then known as Cal State Hayward, she double majored in biology

and physiology and minored in psychology, then attended Ross University School of Medicine. She split her different rotations between New York and California, visiting multiple parts of the states in order to experience hospital settings in urban and rural locations.

### Watch and Listen

Dr. Gill completed her residency at a UC Irvine affiliate hospital, describing it as a "great learning experience," and she still cherishes the wisdom she received from many of her attending physicians. Certain sayings in particular stuck with her as she went on to forge her own career in medicine. The first was a doctor who emphasized the importance of listening, saying, "Eighty percent of the diagnosis is in the history; you need to sit and listen to them, and the clues will come to you." As she worked with patients, Dr. Gill found herself relying more and more on the skills she gained studying psychology, both in the way it helped her arrive at a diagnosis and the healing impact of a listening ear on her patients. "I love psychology and mental health,



*"There's nothing wrong with wanting to take care of yourself, physically, emotionally, externally, internally...Don't dismiss yourself...You deserve attention and care."*

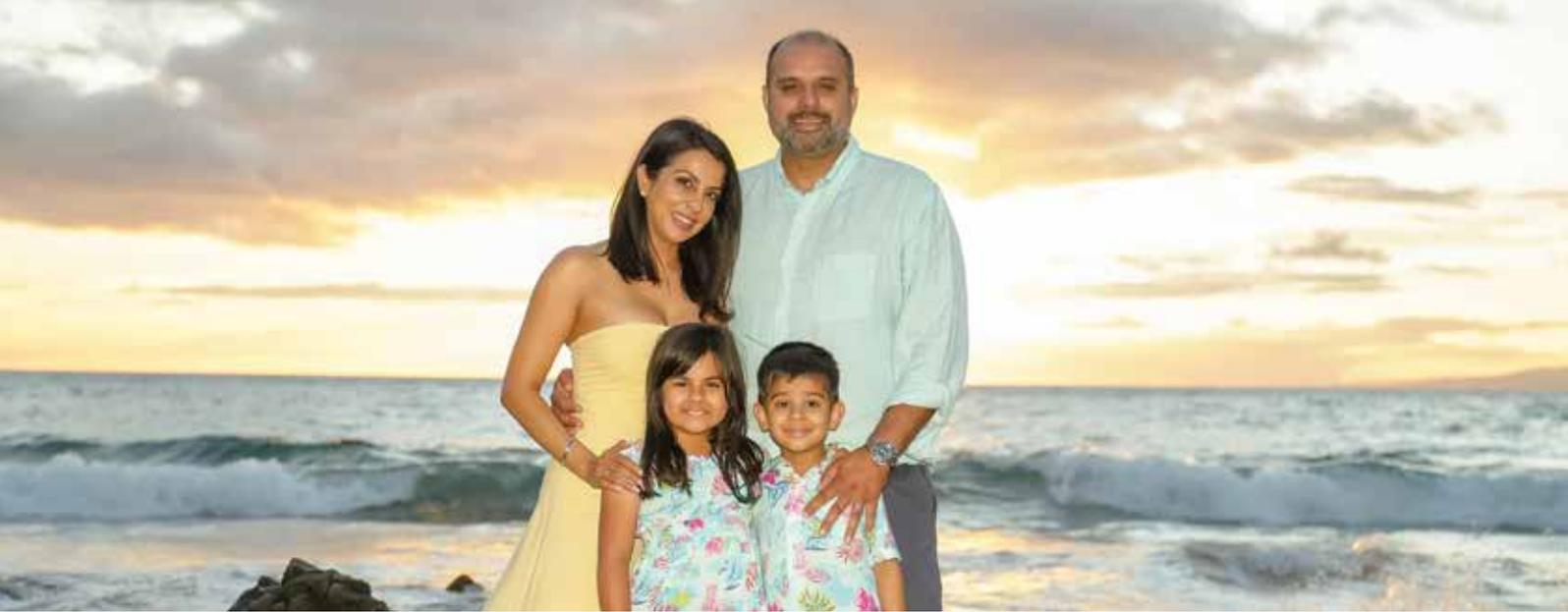
and I love the way it connects to physical health as well," she said. But the second quote in particular shaped her entire approach to the practice of medicine. Dr. Gill said, "One of my attending physicians in residency always said, 'The eyes do not see what the mind does not know.' It inspired me to forever be a student and forever learn, forever be intellectually humble and be willing to do what you can." This mindset has followed her throughout her career, hand in hand with the inspiration of her mother's hard work and compassion.

After gaining her board certification in family medicine and meeting her husband, she moved to the San Joaquin County area, calling the move an "unexpected turn in life" but not an unwelcome one. Her husband became one of her greatest supporters and biggest cheerleaders, encouraging her to follow her curiosity wherever it led even if it wasn't strictly conventional. "Without him, my trajectory would not have been the same," she said. As she continued to work in medicine, focusing on family medicine and primary care, she felt something was missing. She wanted to bring the standard of care

she'd experienced in cutting-edge hospitals to the Central Valley, and she knew she would have fewer limitations if she branched out from corporate medicine. With her husband's support, she transitioned from outpatient service to opening her own practice, even seeing patients when she was five weeks postpartum.

### **Connecting Aesthetics and Healing**

In the meantime, Dr. Gill had also completed an aesthetics fellowship, inspired by the connection she saw between aesthetics, mental health and healing the whole person. "I don't see aesthetics as vanity," Dr. Gill said. "I see it as self-esteem." As a teen, she struggled with acne and went through the basic regimens of antibiotics and medications, but she still dealt with scarring and was told that her skin color gave her limited treatment options. That answer didn't sit right with her. "This can't be it, there has to be more," she said. Dr. Gill also wanted to make premium resources available in San Joaquin County itself, limiting the need for patients to commute to Sacra-



*“From the integrative health perspective, I have so many tools in my toolbox now to never leave a woman without an answer. Imagine what would happen if women’s issues were addressed instead of dismissed.”*

mento or the Bay Area. She became the first local physician to offer Sciton® laser therapy, the industry’s gold standard, and remains the only physician in the county with the full complex laser platform.

Despite her busyness as a doctor, business owner, wife and mother of two, Dr. Gill continued to look for ways to grow and learn. Often when she was treating patients, she found herself organically integrating her wide variety of experience when developing treatment plans or a diagnosis. It felt counterintuitive to isolate symptoms when treating them; from mental health to skin issues to hormonal imbalances, all were often interconnected at some deep level. It seemed like the natural next step was to pursue a fellowship in integrative medicine. Especially over the past few years, integrative medicine has started to gain recognition for its holistic approach to healing, and once again her husband strongly supported her, even attending conferences with her. She earned another board certification, making her a double-board-certified physician in family medicine and integrative medicine.

Combining integrative medicine with aesthetics gave Dr. Gill a unique niche. Her practice began to focus on integrative aesthetics, with a forte toward women’s health, hormone health and metabolic health. She is known for applying her experience both as a physician and as a patient herself; her difficult experiences with pregnancy and hormone depletion give her an empathetic view into her patients’ struggles. “From the integrative health perspective, I have so many tools in my toolbox now to never leave a woman without an answer,” she said. “Imagine what would happen if women’s issues were addressed instead of dismissed.” Her intake questionnaire is notoriously extensive, but so are her results. “Sometimes I treat with traditional prescriptions, and sometimes with supplements and diet changes and specific recommendations,” Dr. Gill said. “I see phenomenal differences. It’s a bit of a different approach. I write lifestyle prescriptions!” Her passion for finding answers and helping people become the best versions of themselves, supplemented by her integrative approach of-

ten brings her clients the healing they have sought for years.

## **Help is Here**

While her specialty is women’s health, including being a certified Menopause Society practitioner, Dr. Gill also often sees men for a variety of reasons. “I love it when people come in as couples, supporting each other and raising awareness,” she said. She also hopes her practice will continue to empower everyone, both men and women, and help them learn to prioritize self-care and living a healthy, integrated life. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to take care of yourself, physically, emotionally, externally, internally,” she said. She fights vehemently against the idea that there is a particular marker of suffering to reach before a patient can ask for help: “Don’t dismiss yourself,” she said. “You deserve attention and care.” Having practiced nearly ten years of integrative hormonal management and aesthetics, she also looks forward to expanding the integrative part of her practice in the future, hoping to reach more people and help them find healing from the inside out.

Dr. Gill is no stranger to forging a new path; from being a first-generation immigrant and the first physician in her family to pioneer state-of-the-art technology in her local community, she embraces being a trailblazer. Her thirst for knowledge constantly drives her to become a better scientist, asking questions and making hypotheses as she searches for truth and answers for her patients. Her empathy, joy and curiosity help her cultivate a welcoming and healing environment, reminding her why she loves her job. “It fills my cup and brings me joy to have those healing encounters,” she said. No matter who you are, no matter what you might be struggling with on your journey toward healing, whether you’re searching for an answer to chronic inflammation or hormonal imbalances, or simply looking for a way to boost your self-esteem through fading old scars or enhancing your natural beauty, Dr. Gill is ready to walk with you every step of the way. ♦

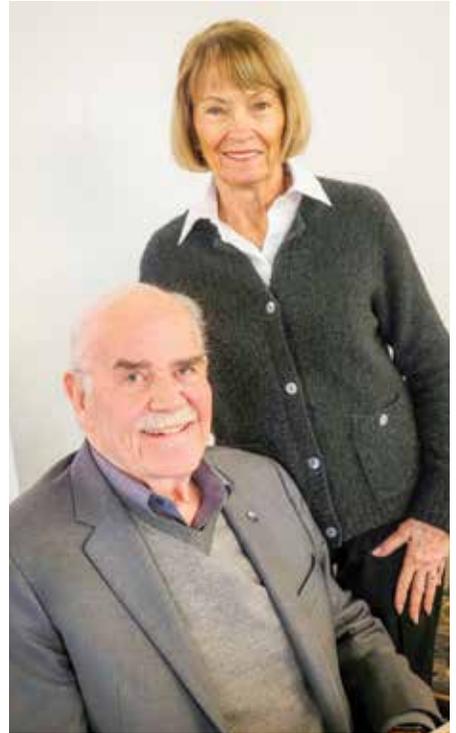


Rishy Gill, M.D.

# ATHENA AWARDS LUNCHEON

Kay Ruhstaller, CEO of the Family Resource Center, was awarded the 2025 ATHENA Leadership Award at the 38th annual ATHENA Awards Luncheon, which was hosted by the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce at Stockton Golf & Country Club on November 20, 2025. The 2025 ATHENA Young Professional Award was given to Stephanie Braithwaite of Lily Pad Living/Lotus Recovery Services, and the 2025 ATHENA Youth Leadership Award was presented to Linden High School senior Abigail Coussons. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





# CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

## LET'S CHECK UP ON... WHEN MIDLIFE ARRIVES

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

For many women, midlife arrives quietly—but the changes do not. Sleep becomes lighter. Weight shifts despite unchanged habits. Anxiety appears without warning. Energy dips. Focus blurs. Libido fades. And too often, women are told the same thing: This is normal. Welcome to aging.

But what if we've been getting midlife completely wrong?

Midlife is not a failure of the body. It is a physiological turning point—one that deserves attention, education, and proactive care rather than dismissal.

### The Missing Conversation

Perimenopause and menopause affect every woman, yet most are unprepared for how deeply these transitions can influence daily life. Hormonal fluctuations begin years before periods stop, impacting the brain, metabolism, muscles, mood, and cardiovascular system. These changes are not subtle—and they are not “just stress.”

Yet many women spend years cycling through appointments, addressing symptoms in isolation: sleep aids for insomnia, antidepressants for anxiety, diet plans for weight gain. Rarely is the bigger picture discussed. Rarely is the question asked: What is my body actually going through right now?

### Why Symptoms Feel So Disruptive

Hormones are not just reproductive messengers; they are master regulators. Estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone influence insulin sensitivity, inflammation, muscle preservation, bone density, and neurotransmitters that govern mood and cognition.

As these hormones fluctuate in midlife, the body's systems must recalibrate. When support is lacking, women feel it everywhere—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

This is why midlife symptoms often feel overwhelming. They are not isolated issues. They are interconnected signals.

### Weight Gain Is Not a Willpower Problem

One of the most distressing changes women report in midlife is weight gain—particularly around the abdomen. This shift is often framed as a failure of discipline, but that narrative is not only inaccurate, it is harmful.

Hormonal changes reduce insulin sensitivity, alter fat distribution, and accelerate muscle loss. Without muscle, metabolism slows. Without proper guidance, women are often advised to eat less and exercise more—strategies that can backfire, increasing stress hormones and worsening fatigue.

Midlife weight changes require a different approach: one that prioritizes muscle preservation, adequate protein, metabolic health, and recovery—not punishment.

### The Role of Metabolic Health

Midlife is a critical window for metabolic health. How women navigate this transition influences their risk of diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and cognitive decline later in life.

New therapies, including GLP-1 medications, have brought attention to metabolic health—but they are not magic solutions. When used without proper nutrition, strength training, and medical oversight, they can compromise muscle mass and long-term vitality.

The goal should never be smaller bodies at the expense of stronger ones. The goal is resilience—physical, metabolic, and mental.

### Why Women Feel Dismissed

Many women hesitate to speak up because they've been conditioned to believe their concerns are inconvenient or expected. But dismissal is not benign. When women internalize the message that suffering is normal, they delay care—and the consequences compound over time.

Education changes that trajectory. When women understand what is happening in their bodies, they can advocate for care that aligns with their biology rather than fighting against it.

### A New Framework for Midlife Health

Healthy midlife care is not about chasing youth. It's about preserving function, confidence, and quality of life. That means:

- Addressing hormonal transitions early
- Supporting metabolism and muscle, not just weight
- Recognizing the connection between sleep, mood, and inflammation
- Treating women as partners in their care, not passive recipients
- Midlife can be a time of clarity, strength, and renewal—but only if we stop treating it as an afterthought.

### The Takeaway

If there is one message women deserve to hear, it is this: your symptoms are not imaginary, and they are not a personal failure. They are data. They are your body asking for support during a profound transition.

Midlife is not the beginning of decline. With the right care, it can be the beginning of a more informed, empowered chapter—one where women finally feel seen, heard, and supported in their health. •

*Schedule your integrative medicine consultation with Dr. Ruby Gill today! Take the first step toward thriving again with personalized, evidence-based care tailored to your unique needs. Let Dr. Gill help you reclaim your health, confidence, and joy!*



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# Mary & Malcolm Berean

## PARTNERS IN LOVE, PARTNERS IN BUSINESS

BY JO ANN KIRBY

Mary and Malcolm Berean have found success and achieved work-life balance while raising their four children, establishing careers in social work and operating their private therapy practice. They follow the advice that they give their own clients. “Happy and fulfilling marriages are all about an emotional connection, teamwork, healthy communication, mutual respect, trust and shared values,” Mary said.

The Lodi couple met when they were students at Long Beach State University, where each earned a bachelor of arts degree in

psychology. They married at Cathedral of the Annunciation in Stockton, Mary’s hometown, in 1995 before attending graduate school at Chapman University, where both graduated with a master of arts degree in counseling. In 2001, the Bereans received licenses in marriage and family therapy and started a small private practice, M&M Family Counseling, Inc.

In 1994, Mary and Malcolm received job offers from Share Homes, Inc., to serve as social workers for the social services nonprofit. The organization meets the needs of today’s children by helping match potential adoptive parents for children who

need permanent homes, providing foster care, offering counseling services to children, couples and families, and providing supervised visits to those in the family court system. "We enjoy working together," Mary said. "We have different responsibilities in the agency that allow us to have both independence and collaboration in the same social service setting."

Mary and Malcolm thrived at Share Homes and in 2014 were named co-executive directors. Now with more than 30 years of experience, they continue the important work of serving foster children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect and helping find temporary homes or adoptive parents for at-risk children.

There is a great need for foster and adoptive parents in San Joaquin County. According to the Child Abuse Prevention Council, more than 1,500 children live in foster care countywide. Foster children can face enormous obstacles and the Bereans' work is vital. "The most challenging aspect is finding qualified foster and adoptive parents," Malcolm said. "When we screen foster parents and adoptive parents, we look for many positive qualities. We look for emotional stability, commitment to the child's best interests, understanding of trauma, whether they have a good support system, their respect for birth family, developmentally appropriate parenting and if they are able to uphold the rights of the foster children."

Mary and Malcolm say the most rewarding part of working with Share Homes is when past foster children or adoptive children return to the agency and thank the staff for serving them when they were most at risk. Foster parents who work with Share Homes said they appreciate the small agency because everyone knows each other and it's a family-like environment. Malcolm said, "The need for foster and adoptive families is great. We receive intakes for numerous foster children daily." Some of these children are housed at the local shelters until an appropriate match is found. The largest need is for foster or adoptive parents for large sibling sets and older stable teens. There is also a huge need for specialized parents who are trained to deal with children who may have ADHD, oppositional behaviors and developmental disabilities.

"Sometimes serving as a foster or adoptive parent has its trials, yet it can be deeply meaningful and rewarding in so many ways. And, most importantly, it can make a long-lasting impact on a child's life by providing safety, stability and care to a child who is going through a deeply traumatic time. It is rewarding to teach children life skills and coping mechanisms that they can use throughout their life," the couple emphasized. The ultimate success is when an adoptive child is placed with a forever family who can make a long-term contribution to a child's life when no other suitable parent or relative can provide care. Share Homes will hold orientations at their Lodi office February. 11, 15 and 25 for prospective foster and adoptive parents.

The Bereans know firsthand how important it is for all children to have a stable, supportive and caring family. Their work in social services coupled with their therapy practice has given them a strong foundation to help children through difficult times and to learn coping strategies that will serve them throughout their lives.

Their work has also given the Bereans the time and flexibility

to raise four beautiful children of their own and achieve that elusive work-life balance. Today, their oldest Isabella is 27 and uses her bachelor of science degree in finance in her career with Matthews Commercial Real Estate. Dante, 22, is also studying finance at Delta College. He hopes to transfer to University of the Pacific; he has worked at Pietro's in Lodi for the past four years. Demetri, 20, is taking pre-business classes and pursuing a finance degree at the University of Arizona. And their youngest, 17-year-old Delano, is a senior at Lodi High. He works at Round Table in Lodi and plans to attend college in Arizona to study accounting.

Raising hard-working and responsible children while juggling careers is always a balancing act, but the Bereans counted on help from Mary's mother, whom they affectionately call Nonni. "My mother was very instrumental and supportive in helping out with our children and making it possible for us to juggle all of our responsibilities," Mary said. That close bond with Nonni continues today.

With their youngest graduating from high school this year, the Bereans will soon find themselves entering a new stage of life as empty nesters. They will continue a close relationship with all their children, planning family vacations, holidays and get-togethers or visiting them wherever they may have landed. They also enjoy traveling, boating, concerts, cooking and hanging out with good friends. Most importantly, they will continue to invest in their own relationship as true partners; one pursuit they have started together is yoga. They truly enjoy each other's company whether it's work or play! ♦



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# STAYING STRONG!

BY ANN E. BUTENAS

*Are you aware that your peak muscle mass typically occurs, on average, when you are in your early 40s? From that point, muscle mass begins to decline; that loss will eventually lead to changes in your strength, mobility and ability to live independently.*



In addition, loss of muscles mass can also lead to a decline in your metabolic function. Therefore, it is highly critical to maintain your muscle mass for the sake of your overall health, as it plays an integral role in metabolic and hormonal function. When maintaining muscle mass is neglected, it can increase your risk of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. By ignoring age-related muscles loss, you can spiral into numerous health challenges in terms of reduced strength and ac-

celerated aging, along with an increased risk of chronic diseases.

Surprisingly, you can lose on average about seven pounds of muscle per decade.

Some research has also revealed that after the age of 50, up to 5 percent of strength loss can also occur. However, you can intervene and address muscle loss, and the best way to do that is through regular exercise.

It's no secret that aging takes a toll on our bodies. It goes all the way to the cellular level; the damage incurred by cells in older muscles

can be quite severe, as they are not able to regenerate as easily as they once could and soon become weaker as the mitochondria, which are responsible for creating energy for muscle cells, diminish in vigor and number. That's where exercise comes into play, as it can mitigate some of the effects of aging by improving the cellular health of your muscles. This in turn slows the loss of muscle mass while simultaneously improving bone density.

One type of exercise that's beneficial is interval exercise. Researchers at the Mayo Clinic found study participants above the age of 64 realized notable benefits from high-intensity interval training, or HIIT. The participants saw better increases in healthy mitochondria than in those participants who worked out with weights alone.

HIIT exercise involves alternating periods of high-intensity exercise with periods of rest or low-intensity exercise. As an example, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the greatest effort you apply, you would run at a level 8 for 2 minutes and then at a level 1 or 2 for 30 seconds, repeating this for a number of cycles. You can then adjust the length of those periods of intensity and rest depending on how fit you are and how much time you have to devote to exercise. It's also advisable to incorporate weight training into your fitness routine; this is what builds muscle mass, which keeps your metabolism in check and also helps you burn more calories while you are at rest.

You may also want to consider some body weight exercises, which don't require any special equipment and still allow you to improve bone density. The key is to find something you love to do and keep at it. There are numerous body weight exercises that might be appealing to you, including squats, planks, walking, hiking, tai chi, yoga, climbing stairs, lunges, push-ups and even dancing. Further, if you're not interested in using dumbbells as a form of weight resistance training, consider the power of stretchy resistance bands to add strength to your muscles. These are made of latex or rubber and will build strength as you perform specific exercises targeting certain muscles groups. They can even be used while sitting.

In addition to exercising, it's important to properly fuel your body through the consumption of protein, complex carbohydrates and fiber. Keeping hydrated is a highly important part of building muscle mass, as it allows your body to absorb and metabolize the nutrients you are consuming from your diet.

As with any new exercise program, it is important to consult with your doctor first. Don't attempt to do too much too soon, or you might risk injury. Be sure to start with lighter weights first and then work up to heavier weights. Be sure to learn proper form and pacing before transitioning to the heavier weights.

It can be tough to face the realities of aging, and individuals in the afternoon of life need to approach nearly everything differently than they did when they were younger. Building muscle is no different. Whether your training regimen includes strength training or resistance training or a combination of both, it is possible for you to increase muscle mass when you take exercise and nutrition seriously. Remember to start slowly and take the time to do these exercises realistically and safely. After all, you can't participate in your new exercise program if you are sidelined with an injury! ♦

**SOURCES:** *fitness.mercola.com, fitness19.com, businessinsider.com and seniors.lovetoknow.com.*



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# WALKING FORWARD

## Care, Connection & Peace of Mind *in the Face of Parkinson's*



In 2021, during a chapter of recovery and rehabilitation, Tim Hachman began taking daily walks through his neighborhood. With his caregiver close behind and a wheelchair nearby for support, the walks became part of a carefully built routine – one focused on strength, confidence, and connection.

Those walks no longer define Tim's everyday life. Parkinson's is progressive, and over time his mobility has become far more limited. But for Tim and his wife, Judi, that season remains meaningful. It represents what was possible with the right care, the right support, and a shared commitment to preserving dignity and independence for as long as possible.

The journey to this point was neither quick nor simple. Like many families, the Hachmans did not begin their story anticipating home care. Instead, they arrived there gradually – through years of adapting, advocating and learning what it truly means to accept help. For the Hachmans, that support ultimately came through Pacific Homecare Services, a local home care agency that partners with families navigating aging, illness, and the transition to care at home.

**“You can't be here this much and not have a relationship.”**

— Judi Hachman

### When Independence Begins to Shift

Tim has lived in Stockton his entire life. Judi moved there in 1965, the year they were married. Together, they built a life rooted in long friendships, family traditions and a close-knit community. Before Parkinson's reshaped their routines, Tim remained active and independent – qualities he valued deeply.

That independence became harder to maintain following a medical crisis that led to hospitalization and rehabilitation. Judi found herself providing increasingly physical care – work that became unsafe to manage alone.

“I don't like to be babied,” Judi said. “But I certainly do appreciate the help.”

Recognizing her limits was not easy. Asking for help required letting go of long-held roles and expectations, but it also marked a

turning point.

“I called and said, ‘I don't know what to say about this, but I need more help than I can provide,’” Judi recalled.

### The Decision to Seek Home Care

Inviting outside help into the home came with hesitation. Judi had spent years managing care on her own, and relinquishing that control took time. But as Tim's needs evolved, the need for partnership became clear.

Through Pacific Homecare Services, the focus was not simply on filling hours of care, but on finding the right caregiver match. Compatibility, experience, and communication were prioritized – an approach that allowed trust to build gradually and organically.

That partnership took shape when Judy Willey, Tim's caregiver, entered their lives.

### More Than a Caregiver

From the beginning, the connection between Tim, Judi and Judy was evident. During the interview, the ease among them was unmistakable – shared humor, mutual respect and the comfort that comes only with time and trust. Judi moved through the home with confidence and familiarity, seamlessly supporting both Tim and Judi in ways that felt intuitive rather than rehearsed.

Over time, that closeness became second nature. In fact, among Tim's healthcare professionals and care team, the two women are often affectionately referred to as “Judi 1” and “Judy 2” – a lighthearted distinction that reflects just how seamlessly Judi has been woven into the fabric of the family.

“After this long, I love them,” Judi said. “How can you not love them?”

Judi echoed that sentiment, noting how naturally Judi became part of their world.

“It didn't take long for our children to bring her into the family,” she said. “You can't be here this much and not have a relationship.”

For Judi, caregiving has always been personal. Having cared for members of her own family before becoming a professional caregiver, she brought that same approach into the Hachmans' home.

“I just came into it hands-on, treating them like a family member,” Judi said.

### One Step at a Time

During that period of recovery, walking

# TOGETHER...

became an important part of Tim's routine. What began as cautious steps following rehabilitation slowly evolved into something more ambitious.

"We walked for an hour a day – over a mile – and I'd walk right behind him with a wheelchair," Judi said.

Those walks became about more than mobility. They were moments of connection.

"That was a good time," she added. "We talked about everything."

For Tim, the walks represented progress and confidence. For Judi, they brought reassurance. Knowing someone who truly understood Tim's needs was beside him allowed her to step out of constant vigilance and return to being his wife.

**"That was a good time. We talked about everything."**

— Judi, Care Provider at Pacific Home Care

## Setbacks and Adaptation

Progress was not linear. Tim experienced setbacks, including COVID and pneumonia, which affected both his strength and confidence. Recovery required patience and adjustment – not only to physical routines, but to how care was delivered.

Rather than pushing forward unsafely, Judi adapted.

"Let's work on your upper body strength and your leg strength," she told him, prioritizing safety and independence.

Clear communication and consistency – hallmarks of the care approach at Pacific Homecare Services – helped ensure that adjustments were made thoughtfully and collaboratively. Judi maintained detailed communication logs and coordinated closely with the rest of the care team, providing continuity and reassurance.

"It takes a big weight off of Judi," Judi said.

## Advocacy and Peace of Mind

Throughout the journey, Judi remained a strong advocate for Tim – coordinating care, communicating with providers and ensuring concerns were addressed.

"Taking care of me is important," Judi said.

With support in place, care became a shared responsibility rather than a solitary burden. The result was not just improved safety but renewed peace of mind.

## The Power of Community

Outside the home, the Hachmans found support through the Lodi Parkinson Support Group, a local organization that provides education, connection and encouragement for individuals living with Parkinson's and Parkinsonism, as well as their caregivers and spouses.

"There's a support group that meets the first Monday of the month," Judi explained.

The group offers meetings for individuals living with Parkinson's and Parkinsonism, along with separate sessions for caregivers and spouses.

"They don't just have meetings for patients – they have meetings separately for caregivers and spouses," she said.

For Judi and Tim, the group provides perspective and connection.

"We didn't know any of the people in this group," Judi said, "but we're very glad that we do now."

"There was a great exchange of ideas," she added.

## Advice for Families Considering Home Care

Reflecting on their experience, both Judi and Judi emphasize the importance of not waiting until exhaustion sets in.

"If you're thinking about it, you don't realize how quickly you get weighed down," Judi said.

She acknowledges that finding the right caregiver can take time.

"Sometimes it takes a couple tries before you find your fit," she said. "But your fit will be there."

For Judi, the journey has reinforced the importance of teamwork.

"It's taken us three and a half years to get where we are," she said. "Everybody's got a role on the team."

For families navigating Parkinson's or other complex health journeys, the Hachmans' experience reflects what is possible with the right support system. Through Pacific Homecare Services, care became not just assistance, but partnership – one that helped preserve dignity, routine, and peace of mind at home. ✕



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## CENTURY BUSINESS DINNER

The San Joaquin County Historical Museum held its annual Century Business Dinner on November 21, 2025, at the F.E.S.M. Portuguese Hall of Manteca. The 2025 honorees that have been in business for at least 100 years included Builder's Exchange of San Joaquin, the Conti Ranch, Con J. Franke Electric, Genova Bakery, the Golden Rose Barbershop Co., Grand Theater for the Arts, Perry & Sons as well as Van Groningen & Sons. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



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# CROSSCOURT COMMUNITY

## THE GRUPE PARK PICKLEBALL PLAYERS OF STOCKTON

BY RACHEL FENTON



Pickleball is the nation's fastest-growing sport for a reason! For teenagers to octogenarians, it's a fantastic way to both stay active and get involved with local community. The sport has seen an average growth of 311 percent over the past three years, with no indication of slowing down any time soon. The Grupe Park Pickleball players have been championing the pickleball craze for the city of Stockton; even in the midst of the winter chill, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday the courts are full of the sounds of breathless laughter and encouraging shouts.

The group had humble beginnings in 2020. A small group of retirees had been gathering at their local gym to play pickleball, but when the world shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they soon found themselves without a facility. Pickleball was a perfect sport for social distancing with its wide outdoor courts, so the friends pivoted and instead met in the parking lot at Grupe Park. They measured out the pickleball courts with a tape measure and duct tape on the asphalt. "It gave us purpose and exercise!" said Gil Parker, who often joined during the early parking lot days, when people brought their own equipment and christened their most frequent spectator, a friendly duck, as their official mascot.

As more people began looking for safe ways to play sports and participate in communal events, the group began to grow. "We had about 12 to 15 people who rotated in and out; now we're over 100 in our group, and 45 to 50 players regularly show up on the weekends," said Jack Steigerwald, one of the founding members and oldest players. Carmen Wong stands as their oldest reigning veteran and recently celebrated her 84th birthday; she's often described as "the first one here and the last one to leave." Sporting bejeweled pickleball earrings and a pickleball license plate cover, she has no plans to retire from her beloved sport any time soon.

The Grupe Park Pickleball players are more than a mere sports team; they will be the first to tell you that they're a family. "The thing we are most proud of is our belief in one another, our community. We have a good representation of the dynamics of Stockton right here. We've got all races represented, we're accepting of everyone," said Gil. "All ages, all nationalities," added Brenda, another devoted member. "We're not just pickleball players, we're family!" Steve Wong, another of the original founding members, encourages players of all levels to come join them. "If you've never played before, we'll teach you. We're all levels!" The Grupe Park Pickleball Players also host a Dink n' Dine on the first Saturday of every month, during

which people bring a medley of food and drink ranging from sandwiches and fruit to lumpia and pancit. Often the courts are full, with a line of people waiting outside the fences for their turn at a game.

With the exponential growth of the group since their humble beginnings, many of the members began to look into ways to acquire better pickleball facilities. They had moved into the tennis courts and made makeshift courts between the existing ones, but they were fast outgrowing them. "We had only three courts to start," Gil said. "When we began our pilgrimage to city council, we had seven courts and realized we needed still needed more." In 2024, the Grupe Park Pickleball players formed a committee and approached the Stockton City Council and Parks and Recreation, presenting a request to get official pickleball courts installed in the park.

"They're a wonderful community," said Michael Blower, Stockton's District 3 City Council member. "Linda reached out to me and told me about the group, so I stopped by on a Saturday," he said. "And next thing I know there are 60 people and I'm giving an impromptu speech and being taught how to play!" Councilman Blower helped champion their plan for funding to renovate the Grupe Park tennis courts into the city's first official pickleball court. Their request was recently granted, and construction of ten pickleball courts with a communal center aisle and increased seating is slated to begin in spring 2026.

The group is thrilled at the official recognition of their sport from the city and they hope it will help their membership grow even more. "One of the unique things about this group is that we don't charge; there are no fees. We don't require money to join," Jack said. Don't let their casual atmosphere and friendly attitudes fool you; they take their sport very seriously. Many of the members are talented athletes. Linda Christopherson competed in the USA Pickleball National Championships in Mesa, Arizona, and Marlene Hodges played in the National Deaf Pickleball Tournament in Pikesville, Maryland. But at the end of the day, their focus is not competitive; it's communal. "We're so proud of the community we've built. It's a family," said Gil, and several bystanders enthusiastically voiced their agreement.

What began as a small group striving for connection within the constraints of the pandemic has blossomed into a multi-generational family that lifts each other up and encourages each other to be the best they can be. Whether you're 9 or 99, regularly hit aces or don't know the difference between a dink and a drive shot, there's a place for you among the Grupe Park Pickleball Players. ♦





# Vena Ford

BY HERLIFE STAFF

*Vena Ford makes her home in Lathrop, California, and serves as the director of community, marketplace and member engagement for Health Plan of San Joaquin. We asked her ten questions about her role in making our community a healthier place to live!*

**Q: Tell us about your role at Health Plan of San Joaquin.**

**A:** My role is to be an “oracle” between Health Plan of San Joaquin and our member engagement and communication strategy. My responsibility covers membership monitoring, renewal and forecasting, community relations and member engagement, benefit administration, marketing and communications, grants and sponsorships, and sales. My most amazing team interacts with the community directly, from supporting benefit interpretation to communicating the best of the Health Plan of San Joaquin to those who are our members and those who may need us at community events. I spend a lot of time in the community sharing information and receiving information to share internally. From community events, dinners, walks and runs, engaging in the community health needs assessments, and collaboration with people and organizations who serve our communities, I find myself listening, deciphering and developing plans and actions, when necessary, all to achieve a healthy community.

**Q: What do you love about your career?**

**A:** I love that everyone at HPSJ has a deep passion for the people we serve. Working in an administrative capacity on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our community is not easy. There are many rules, regulations, policies, limitations and expectations because our funding comes from the state of California. However, working with our network of providers, county and city partners and community-based organizations helps us develop innovative ways to address challenges and achieve success in our community for all people of San Joaquin County. We often remind each other that these are our families, neighbors and friends we serve.

**Q: What got you into this field?**

**A:** I wanted to be a cardiologist. However, I discovered in college that I didn’t want to always be on the treatment end of the challenges we have in our communities, such as housing, food access, poor air quality, transportation issues, health care access, pay and other needs, so in the middle of my studies, after consulting with an amazing counselor, I changed course to become an advocate, an educator and a policy influencer. I changed not because this was easier but because I didn’t want to see another member of my family pass away from health issues that could have been addressed early at the onset or prevented altogether.

**Q: What do you love most about San Joaquin County?**

**A:** I love the natural landscapes here. The waterways, agricultural and the very diverse community such as the people, culture, history, entertainment and food, have encouraged me to tell my

friends in the Bay to come on out and explore!

**Q: What brings you joy?**

**A:** I love to travel. I love going to new places and learning their history, visiting both natural and built sites, smelling different air and engaging in different cultures with their music, food, fashion, language and beliefs. After living and traveling all over the U.S., my travels focus on at least one international trip a year to encourage me to think differently and learn from those different than me.

**Q: What do you do in your free time?**

**A:** I work out with a fitness group three or four times a week, but I absolutely love teaching community vinyasa and yin yoga classes three times a week. It brings me joy, gets me moving more and gives me an opportunity to stretch outside the gym, to some amazing R&B, soul, jazz, pop and hip-hop. Yes, I curate the playlists. I also love listening to and playing music. I take piano lessons once a week and am excited to pick up a trombone to start playing again and working with my niece.

**Q: What’s on your bucket list?**

**A:** Go visit one of my favorite people in this world in Australia before he turns 61; take a trip to Crater Lake; figure out how to not have allergies so I can get a dog.

**Q: What’s something cool you’ve accomplished?**

**A:** Making it to 50, healthy! No, really, that is a huge accomplishment considering my health ups and downs. Finishing the Nike Women’s Half Marathon in October 2009 in San Francisco. I was so excited, I got lost and did a 14.2-mile event versus a 13.1-mile event. At work, my most recent accomplishment that we all achieved was launching a Medicare Dual Special Needs product (D-SNP). At HPSJ, we can now serve people who qualify for both Medicare and Medi-Cal. It is such an amazing opportunity to support our members in care continuity. I was tasked with launching a sales team! They are absolutely amazing, both in sales and as people.

**Q: My favorite quote?**

**A:** “Nothing is impossible, the word itself says ‘I’m Possible!’”  
~Audrey Hepburn

**Q: What’s your favorite dessert?**

**A:** A butter pound cake, no glaze. Or a lemon Nothing Bundt Cake, very light frosting. I am not complicated at all. ♦



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*Beyond the Gray.*  
**ADDING COLOR  
& CHARACTER  
TO NEUTRAL SPACES**

BY KATHLEEN JENNISON | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY



### START SMALL WITH COLOR

If the idea of painting your entire living room in bold teal makes you break into a sweat, relax. Color does not have to mean commitment. Start with smaller accents that are easy to swap out.

Pillows and throws are the easiest way to add a seasonal pop. Jewel tones for fall, soft pastels in spring and everything in between.

Think artwork. A large piece with vibrant hues instantly becomes the focal point.

Accessories such as lamps, vases and books in colorful finishes bring in energy without overwhelming the room. Think of it like lipstick. A pop of color can completely transform your look without changing your entire outfit.

### SAY YES TO WALLPAPER

Wallpaper has made a serious comeback, and for good reason. A single accent wall can change the entire feeling of a room. Whether it is a subtle grass cloth for texture or a bold floral in a powder room, wallpaper adds depth that paint simply cannot.

One of my clients moved into a home in which every room was painted the same shade of gray. We installed a moody patterned wallpaper behind the bed in the primary bedroom, and suddenly the space felt like a boutique hotel. All it took was one wall to create drama and personality.

### LAYER TEXTURES, NOT JUST COLORS

Character is not only about color; it is also about texture. Imagine a sofa upholstered in soft linen, paired with a leather armchair, a woven rug and a brass side table. Even if everything stayed in neutral tones, the mix of textures creates richness.

If your space feels flat, add materials that contrast each other. Smooth with rough. Matte with glossy. Soft with hard. The more variety, the more interest.

### LET LIGHTING DO THE WORK

Lighting is another way to break up the monotony of a gray-

**T**here is nothing wrong with gray walls. In fact, gray can be chic, calming and a perfect backdrop. The problem comes when an entire house is dipped in gray from top to bottom. Floors, walls, cabinets, countertops, all in the same shade of blah. Suddenly, what should feel sophisticated ends up feeling lifeless.

That is the reality of many newly built homes. They are functional, but they lack soul. The good news is that you do not have to repaint every wall or start from scratch to bring character into a neutral space. With the right touches, you can create warmth, personality and depth while still keeping that elegant, clean look you love.

on-gray room. Swap out builder-basic fixtures for ones with personality. A statement chandelier in the dining room, a pair of sculptural lamps in the living room or warm sconces in the hallway will shift the mood instantly.

**Pro tip:** choose warm light bulbs instead of cool white. A golden glow makes a space feel cozy and inviting instead of sterile.

## USE NATURE AS A PALETTE

If you are nervous about picking colors, take cues from the outdoors. Think of autumn leaves for inspiration, such as deep reds, earthy oranges, muted golds. Or look at the ocean, with soft blues, sandy tans and crisp whites. Nature has already done the work of combining colors that make sense together.

Bringing in plants is another easy win. A fiddle-leaf fig or a cluster of succulents adds life to a room instantly. Green is the most natural color to balance all that gray.

## CASE STUDY: FROM BUILDER BLAND TO COLLECTED COLOR

One of my recent projects involved a couple who had just moved into a brand-new home in a 55+ community. Every single room was painted in the same neutral gray. The house felt flat and cold, even though it was technically finished.

We brought it to life by layering in wallpaper, custom drapery, colorful rugs and new light fixtures. We also integrated the clients' existing artwork from their travels. The result was a home that reflected them, not the builder's paint catalog.

## QUICK WAYS TO GET STARTED

Add a bold piece of art above the sofa. Use a colorful area rug to anchor your seating area. Introduce wallpaper in a powder room or behind your headboard. Mix in metallics such as brass, bronze or chrome. Bring in greenery for instant warmth.

## THE TAKEAWAY

A neutral base is not a bad thing. It is actually a gift. Think of it as a blank canvas waiting for your brushstrokes. By layering in color, texture, lighting and personality, you can turn a cookie-cutter house into a home that feels collected and alive.

Your home should never feel like it belongs to the builder. It should feel like it belongs to you..♦



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.

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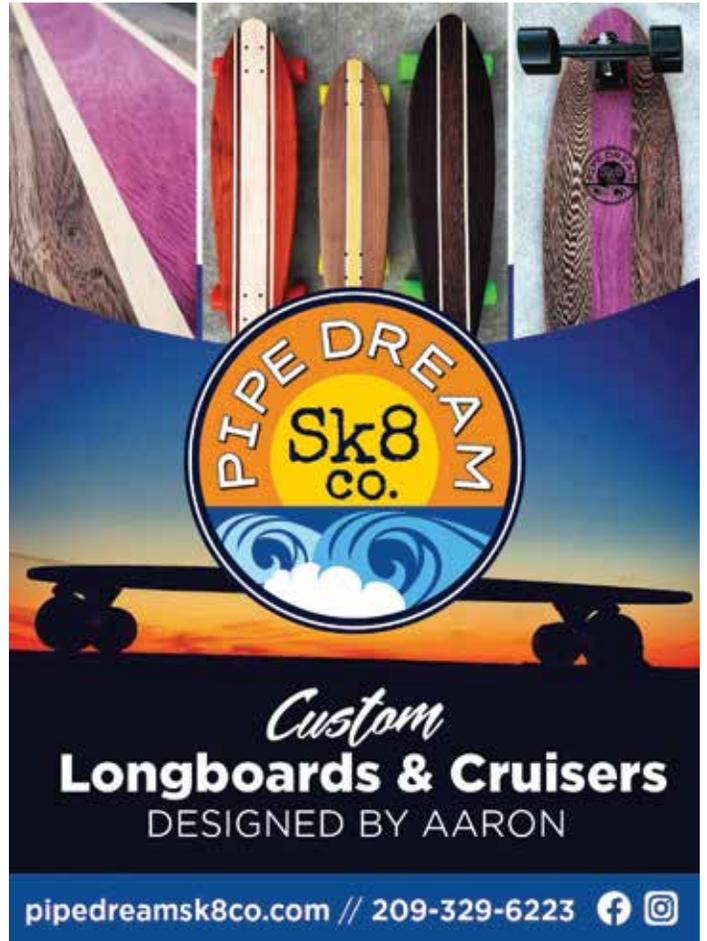
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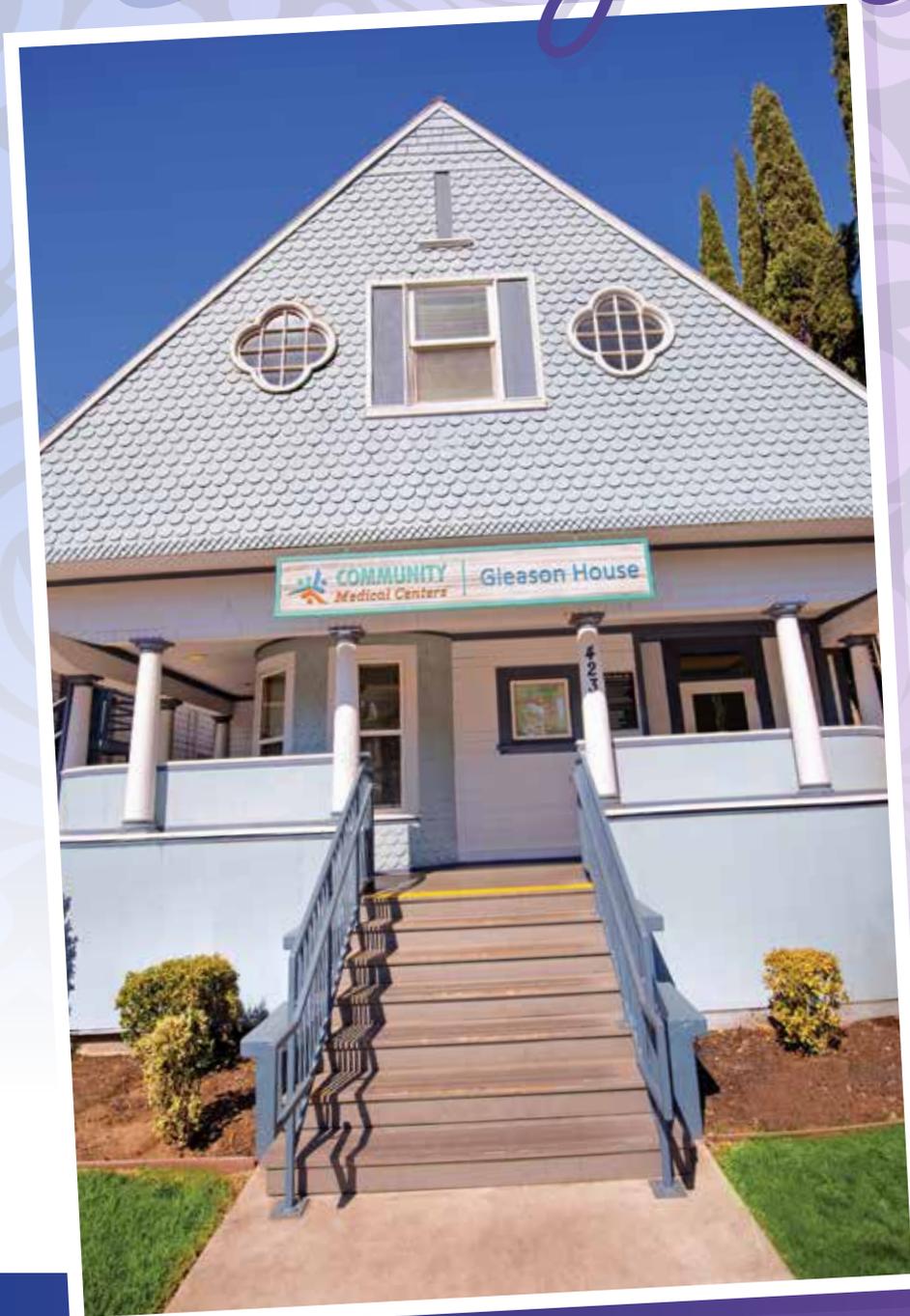
## BECAUSE KIDS AWARDS

On Thursday, November 6, 2025, the annual Because Kids Awards were held at the University Plaza Hotel in Stockton. It was a night to remember, with San Joaquin County residents being honored in categories from businesses to individual advocacy on behalf of children. Lester Patrick received the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award. Other recipients included Jakesha Hillman, Heather Freligh, April Farage, Dr. Amy Scriven, the Stockton Kings, John McCandless STEM Charter School and Manteca Moms Supporting Kids with ASP Inc. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



# Beauty of Stockton



## “Stairs to Perseverance”

The Gleason House on South San Joaquin Street is a wonderful blend of Folk Victorian and early 20th-century American residential architecture (highlighted by the charming fish-scale shingles). It exemplifies the architecture of many homes in Stockton’s southern area. It stands as a powerful testament to resilience, much like its original owner, pioneering pharmacist Edna Gleason, whose story is one of remarkable perseverance. Soon after she passed the state pharmacy board exam in 1922, her husband tragically passed away. Edna went on to open multiple pharmacies and become the first woman to serve on the California State Board of Pharmacy. Her legacy of service and community leadership lasted until her death in 1963.

In 2002, her former home faced demolition. Community Medical Centers stepped in to lovingly restore the home and turn it into a vital community medical clinic, which continues a legacy of care by serving Stockton’s most underserved residents, including the students at Gospel Center Rescue Mission.

Like Edna, the home endured hardship and found new purpose. It’s a profound symbol of perseverance, care, and the enduring spirit of Stockton.



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](http://www.facebook.com/kevin.richtik) or [www.instagram.com/carolinephotography209](http://www.instagram.com/carolinephotography209)



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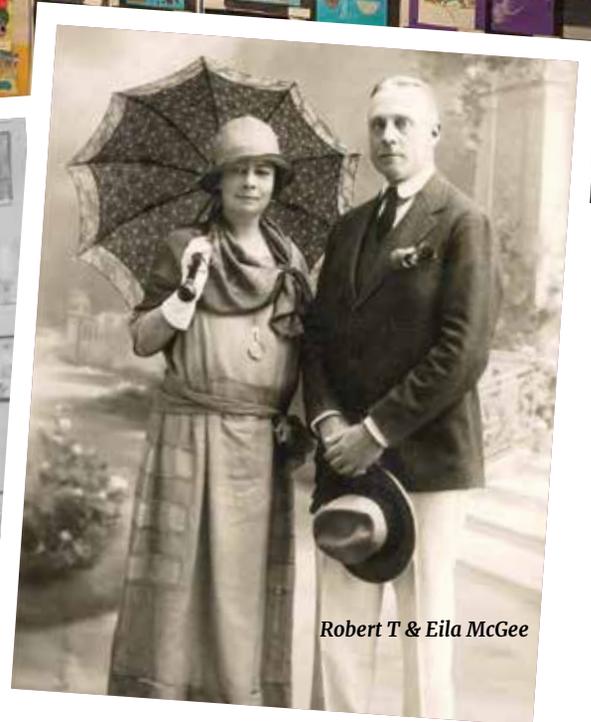
Stockton

# ROBERT T. MCKEE STUDENT ART EXHIBITION: *Celebrating Art in Education*

BY JO ANN KIRBY



KIDS SHINING BRIGHTLY



Robert T & Eila McGee

If the 95th Robert T. McKee Student Art Exhibition is anything like past shows, more than 1,000 stunning pieces of artwork produced by area artists in kindergarten through 12th grade will be on display at the Haggin Museum in Stockton. The longest-running museum-sponsored student art exhibition in the country celebrates arts in education. The submitted art is hand-selected by teachers as the best from their classes. The exhibit gives students the chance to have their artwork displayed for the general public to enjoy. It also features a special reception that students, their families and teachers are invited to attend.

Teachers and students say participating in the exhibit is so rewarding. "Students are motivated to share their hard work with others beyond school because they are proud of their creative talents," said Jean Aguilar, who teaches a variety of art classes at Saint Mary's High School in Stockton. "Exhibiting their artwork publicly is very empowering. It inspires students to keep learning, experimenting and expanding their creativity."

Jean said the exhibit is important because it gives students a real-world experience that is a boost for their self-esteem. "They are sharing a very personal part of themselves through their artwork," she said. Twenty students from Saint Mary's have entered their artwork in the exhibition including a variety of drawings, paintings and mixed-media pieces.

Malelany Phillips, a junior at Saint Mary's, has submitted a symmetrical design created with markers in various shades of pink and other colors. Her project took about two weeks to create. "My design was inspired by the scrollwork in ancient Greek and Roman architecture," she said.

The show will be on display at the Haggin Museum from January 29 through March 15, 2026. All schools in San Joaquin County—public, private, charter, parochial and home-schools—received invitations to submit their work. The McKee Student Art Exhibition is a snapshot of arts education in our area and underscores the importance of creative activity in the classroom. Once a teacher encourages their students to enter the exhibit, it often becomes something they look forward to doing again and again!

"For 95 years, the Robert T. McKee Student Art Exhibition has reflected the strength and diversity of arts education in San Joaquin County," said Susan Obert, the Haggin Museum's chief executive officer. "By bringing together student work from classrooms across the region, the exhibition celebrates the essential role creativity plays in learning and community life."

Bear Creek High School art teacher Shan Swoverland said his students have been participating for over 25 years. "I encourage my students to strive to show their voice in their work, while creating pieces of fine art. They always have a sense of pride when I recommend them to enter. Even the students who don't enter, I give them extra credit to go view the show," he said. "The McKee exhibition holds a special place for me. I remember some of my work was entered a few times as

a child and teenager. Now it's my pleasure to carry on that tradition as an art educator. I remind my students that the McKee show isn't about winning. It's all about coming together and celebrating art in our community.

The exhibition was first envisioned by the Haggin's founding patron, Robert T. McKee, whose goal was to encourage students by providing a public venue for their artwork. Since the first show in 1931, the Haggin has been honored to collaborate with the schools of San Joaquin County, resulting in 95 years of celebrating the efforts of its teachers and expression of its young artists.

"This exhibition embodies our commitment to supporting young artists by giving them a public space to share their ideas and perspectives," said Nicole D. George, who serves as the Haggin's director of education. "It reinforces the museum's mission to spark curiosity and inspire lifelong engagement with the arts and regional history."

The Museum will hold an artists' reception for students, their families and teachers on Saturday, February 7, from 1:00 to 3:30 pm. This event is free to the public and sponsored by the Junior Women's Group of the Haggin Museum, who will provide punch and cookies to the guests. The reception is a fun time for students to spy their artwork on the wall and pose for a photo opportunity holding colorful arrow-shaped signs that declare "My ART is at the Haggin."

This year's student art show judge is MJ Lazarski, a plein air painter. "To experience the beauty and joy of our existence here on earth is the path to achieving great happiness. My intention as an artist is to share some of this beauty from my perspective," MJ said.

Jean, who teaches Art 1-2, Art 3-4, Design and Exploration, as well as AP Art & Design, said many of her former students have won awards for their artwork over the past 29 years she has taught at St. Mary's. "The pride and excitement they feel is unmatched. I often hear them say how surprised they are that people they don't even know appreciate and admire their work," she said. "It's one thing for their teacher and family members to acknowledge their talents, but to receive positive feedback from complete strangers is probably the most empowering feeling." ♦



Malelany Phillips, artist

The Haggin Museum is a nonprofit art and history museum accredited by the American Alliance of Museums located at 1201 N. Pershing Ave., Stockton, CA. and open to the public Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Wednesdays and Fridays from 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and 1st and 3rd Thursdays from 1:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$7 for seniors 65 and older, \$5 for students and youth 10-17, and free for children under 10, museum members and on the first Saturday of each month. For more information call 209-940-6300 or visit [hagginmuseum.org](http://hagginmuseum.org).

# GOSPEL CENTER RESCUE MISSION GALA

Friends and supporters of the Gospel Rescue Center Mission celebrated the nonprofit's 85th anniversary at a gala November 14, 2025, at the Stockton Golf and Country Club. The festive celebration was attended by 200 guests who watched a poignant video on the center's mission. They were also able to see the milestones the mission has reached in a walk-through-history exhibit and hear from keynote speaker Lindsey Pierzina, who serves as the Men's New Life Program Director. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



# LET THE MUSIC MOVE YOU

## *Stay Tuned: An Exploration of the Local Music Scene*

BY TIM DALY

**A**t the end of 2024, with retirement approaching, I wasn't necessarily looking forward to full-on relaxation. I'd fully intended to stay busy with activities and projects I had put off as a younger guy.

One activity I wanted to resurrect was playing the trumpet. I'd played from fifth grade through my second year of college, where I also played trumpet and keyboard in a relatively decent band.

So, one of the first things I did last January was find my 45-year-old trumpet and start playing again. Where was it? The garage? Under a bed? One of my kid's closets?

Two things happened when I reintroduced myself to the trumpet. I remembered how hard it is to learn and master a musical instrument. I also gained a huge appreciation and respect for all the people in the Stockton area who are still playing their instruments, whether in concert bands, wineries or restaurants. After much brushing up, I joined the Stockton Concert Band, where I have met many accomplished musicians. Our next performance is March 3, 2026, at Delta College and it's free! I hope you'll come out and enjoy some fine music.

Back to the part about staying busy. I've signed on with *HER-LIFE* Magazine to write stories about the local music scene. This article is the first, which is about me, my interest and my intentions. I'll introduce you to people and places in San Joaquin County that illustrate what a great time it is for people to play, as well as venues to listen to music.

You might remember me from my days at News10. I reported on this region for 25 years and it was always a treat to depart from reporting on daily events and issues to tell feature stories, especially music stories.

From the beginning of my career, I've reported on musicians across all genres. In El Paso, Texas, I profiled Huey Lewis and his band just as their wildly successful career was taking off. Moving on to Tucson, Arizona, I was in awe as I interviewed jazz legends Pat Metheny and Dizzy Gillespie. During these early years, I also learned the importance of doing my homework when a prickly John Fogerty made it clear he wasn't impressed with my questions about his legal issues.

I covered rappers RUN DMC and the Beastie Boys, plus local band Quarterflash ("Harden My Heart"), who allowed us to videotape them recording what they hoped would be a comeback album. Unfortunately, it wasn't. And Donny Osmond would have



*During the college years*

preferred I used some word other than comeback when describing his late '80s return to the charts.

One memorable story involved Smashmouth keyboardist and then-Stockton resident Michael Klooster, who welcomed us into his home studio as he produced tunes for a small local band. Other memories include Chicago trumpet player Lee Loughnane, who stopped in for an interview. That became a news feature about Chicago and Earth, Wind and Fire using the Stockton Arena to rehearse for an upcoming tour. We had two legendary bands here, practicing and playing for a week—and no one got to hear any of it.

When Tower of Power retiree Mic Gillette returned to a Lodi recording studio for a solo album, he patiently put up with my dozens of questions as to why he left the tightest and funkier (sorry, a bit biased) soul band ever. He just wanted to be home for his young daughter instead of going out on tour again.

It's probably clear by now that I get jazzed from this stuff. That's why I intend to write about how local music is made and where it's being performed. I'm anxious to introduce readers to the fabulous and dedicated musicians who live and work all around us and entertain every chance they get. ♦



*I am always looking for new and exciting gigs to showcase musicians in our community who deserve recognition. Stay tuned!*

*Feel free to reach out: [tim@dalyvideoservices.com](mailto:tim@dalyvideoservices.com).*

# HEART-HEALTHY SUGGESTIONS FOR FOODIES

BY JOELLE MALINOWSKI, RD, CDE, CDN

*The American Heart Association's heart disease and stroke statistics of 2025 report that one of two deaths in the United States was stroke or heart disease related. That's a staggering statistic. A healthy lifestyle is your best weapon in the fight against heart disease and stroke. Nevertheless, heart-healthy changes do not have to take the fun out of being a foodie; they can only enhance it!*

**A**s a rule, a heart-healthy diet should focus on whole grains, healthy fats, lean sources of protein, and a rainbow of fruits and vegetables while minimizing refined carbohydrates, sugar and saturated fats. However, certain foods are particularly heart smart because they have links to healthier arteries, lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure and reduced inflammation.



## HEART SMART DIET

Of the many diets designed for optimal heart health, one of the most popular is the Mediterranean diet, which consists of the traditional cuisine of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Its main components include daily consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and healthy fats; weekly intake of fish, poultry, beans and eggs; low to moderate portions of dairy products; limited intake of red meat and spices. Other important elements of the Mediterranean diet are dining with family and friends, enjoying a glass of red wine and being physically active.

The plant-based trend also promotes the heart-healthy way of life as more people choose to move away from beef, pork, poultry and dairy and make a conscious decision to eat more plant-based foods. The change in focus means you're eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, plant-based oils, nuts and legumes, enhancing your diet as well as your heart!

## WHAT ABOUT FATS?

In the past, all dietary fats got a bad rap. A nutritious eating plan does not mean cutting out all fat, just focusing on the healthier varieties. A good start is to swap foods higher in saturated fat for foods higher in unsaturated fat. Saturated fat comes from animal sources such as meats, poultry, fish and dairy as well as coconut oil. However, some sources of saturated fat such as fish contain Omega3 fats and offer many health benefits, such as promoting normal functions of the brain and nervous system; lowering cholesterol levels and supporting heart health; protecting against dry eye disease; and reducing inflammation in the body. Food sources of Omega3 fats include salmon, herring, sardines, walnuts, flaxseeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds and

fortified eggs.

The two main unsaturated fat sources, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, help to increase HDL levels, the "good" cholesterol in the body. Start by adding more plant-based fats such as nuts or nut butters, seeds, oils and avocados to your diet to boost that good cholesterol. Avocados not only contain monounsaturated fat, but are packed with dietary fiber, potassium and vitamins. Add them to salad, pizza, soup,

salsa, eggs and sandwiches. Enjoy avocado spread on toast for breakfast! Plus, as a cheese replacer, avocados provide the yummy creaminess of cheese minus the saturated fat.

## USE SPICE, NOT SALT

Eating too much sodium can increase risk of high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. When you're cooking, season with lemon or lime juice, fresh herbs or salt-free herb blends and vinegar to boost flavor. Surprisingly, the salt we add during cooking and at the table accounts for only a small percentage of our daily sodium. The main delinquents are packaged and processed foods. Choosing more fresh or frozen options is the heart-smart way.

## OUT ON THE TOWN

When dining out, it's important to understand the information on the menu to ensure that the meals you eat away from home are part of a healthy diet and still delicious! Look for steamed, broiled, baked, grilled, poached or roasted foods. Choose entrees that feature seafood, chicken or lean meat and avoid fatty meats.

Ask for condiments to be served on the side. Control your portions. If there are small plate options, opt for those over a plate that may tempt you to overeat. Ask your server how particular foods are prepared or what ingredients they contain.

For more heart-healthy information on reducing your risk for heart disease, consult a registered dietitian nutritionist in your area. ♦

**SOURCES:** [eatright.org](http://eatright.org), [heart.org](http://heart.org), [consumerreports.org](http://consumerreports.org), [newjersey.heart.org](http://newjersey.heart.org) and [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

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# CRANBERRY HAND PIES

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## INGREDIENTS

### FILLING

3 ounces fresh or frozen cranberries  
 ¼ cup pomegranate juice  
 2 tablespoons orange juice  
 ¼ cup brown sugar  
 ½ teaspoon cinnamon  
 Pinch of salt

### CRUST

1 large egg  
 Splash of milk  
 14-ounce box refrigerated pie crusts

### GLAZE

½ cup powdered sugar  
 1 tablespoon orange juice  
 ¼ teaspoon orange zest

## DIRECTIONS

In a small saucepan, mix together filling ingredients and bring to a boil; reduce heat to a gentle simmer and cook about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. In a small bowl, beat together the egg and milk. Carefully unroll the pie crusts. Using a 4-inch cookie cutter, cut dough into 8 circles. Combine scraps, roll out and cut 4 more circles. Divide the cranberry filling among 6 of the dough rounds; brush with egg wash. Place the remaining rounds on top of the fruit; press the edges to seal. Transfer pies to parchment paper-lined baking sheets; brush tops with the egg wash and slice two vents in the tops. Bake 25-30 minutes until golden brown. For glaze, combine ingredients. When the pies have cooled, brush glaze on top. Allow to cool completely. ♦



## TIPS

**1:** Substitute other seasonal fruit or fruit preserves to change it up.

**2:** Keep your ingredients cold! Use ice-cold water and butter.

**3:** Sprinkle with sanding sugar right after baking.

# DUELING PIANOS

The Animal Protection League partnered with St. Mary's Community Services to host Dueling Pianos and Bingo on November 20, 2025, at the Stockton Ballroom. Guests enjoyed an exciting evening of music, games and fun that raised vital funds to help build an emergency and temporary housing facility at the St. Mary's Community Services center. The facility will help provide safe, loving care for dogs and cats while their owners are recovering from hardship. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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# O'Connor Woods

## *A Community of Care—For Seniors & for Cats*

BY MARY ANN CHAPMAN



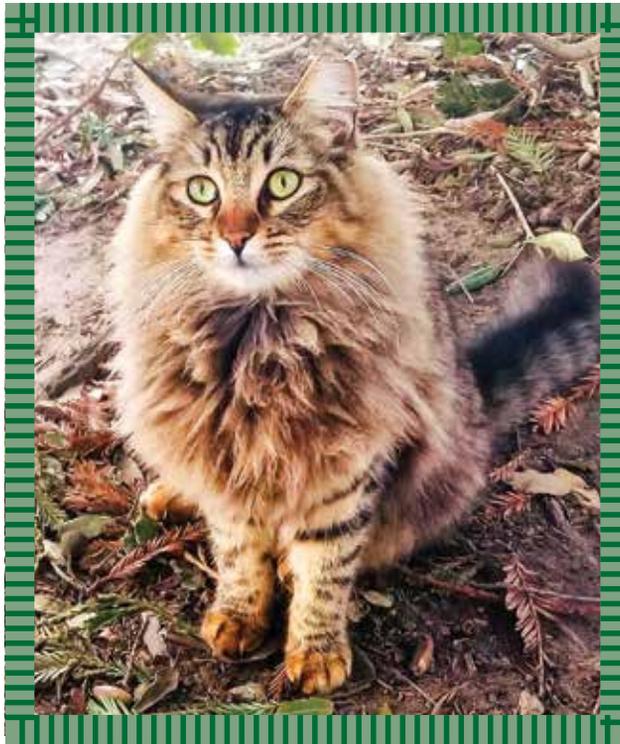
**OREO**

O'Connor Woods is a nonprofit Life Plan Community that has proudly served adults aged 62 and older for more than 35 years. Nestled on a picturesque 34-acre campus shaded by old-growth oaks, it has long welcomed animal companions and, over time, has become a safe haven for cats abandoned or left behind in the surrounding area. These feline residents have been embraced as part of the commu-

nity, reflecting O'Connor Woods' deep commitment to compassionate, animal-friendly living.

For years, a handful of dedicated staff members took it upon themselves to care for the campus cat population. But when those volunteers retired and the pandemic made veterinary access nearly impossible, the cats' needs grew urgent. The question became "Who will step in now?"

There was one cat who started it all. In July 2020, Patty, a nearby resident, walked past the O'Connor Woods fence as she often did. One day, a striking older black-and-white cat with emerald-green eyes caught her attention. The next day, he appeared again, this time accompanied by three tiny black kittens. Something about him felt purposeful, almost as if he were asking for help. Patty named him Oreo. What began as sliding bowls of food through a fence quickly grew into a daily commitment. Within months, Patty was feeding more than 30 cats at her own expense. She returned day after day not only because they were hungry, but because Oreo had captured her heart. Without knowing it, he became the catalyst for everything that followed.



O'Connor Woods stepped up! Recognizing Patty's dedication, O'Connor Woods invited her onto the campus to help more directly. She immediately saw the growing need and stepped into action, organizing volunteers among staff and residents, coordinating donations and partnering with local animal welfare organizations. With her leadership, O'Connor Woods was able to restart its spay-and-neuter program, ensuring responsible and humane population management. Over the next two years, every cat on campus, including all kittens born during that time, was spayed or neutered. In total, 75 cats were altered, ending the cycle of overpopulation once and for all.

Tragically, Oreo's life was cut short but his legacy would remain. According to the veterinarian, he had been poisoned. The loss of Oreo devastated everyone who knew him. But it also came

with a promise: Oreo would be remembered not for how his life ended, but for the countless lives his story would save.

In his honor, Oreo's Haven was founded, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing food, shelter and medical care for stray and feral cats in the community. O'Connor Woods resident Pat Frederick played a key role in bringing Oreo's Haven to life, sharing Patty's story and helping raise \$6,000 from fellow residents and staff to launch the rescue. Patty soon became a familiar, comforting presence among the cats, organizing donation drives and working with veterinarians to continue the spay and neuter efforts.

Today, O'Connor Woods residents foster and adopt many of these cats, and Oreo's Haven runs a thriving adoption program, host-

ing weekly events at the Lodi PetSmart. This past year alone, the rescue celebrated 100 adoptions and hopes to double that number in 2026.

It is a mission rooted in love. At its heart, Oreo's Haven believes that every cat deserves a home, and that love and respect are never optional. Patty never imagined that feeding a single cat through a fence would lead to a full rescue organization. Yet today, she stands on the same grounds, watching once-forgotten cats warm, safe and cared for and it's all because of one cat. ♦

*To support or donate to Oreo's Haven, visit [oreoshaven.com](http://oreoshaven.com) and connect with Patty Galaz. To learn about living at O'Connor Woods, an animal-friendly community, contact Mary Ann Chapman at 209-662-4669.*

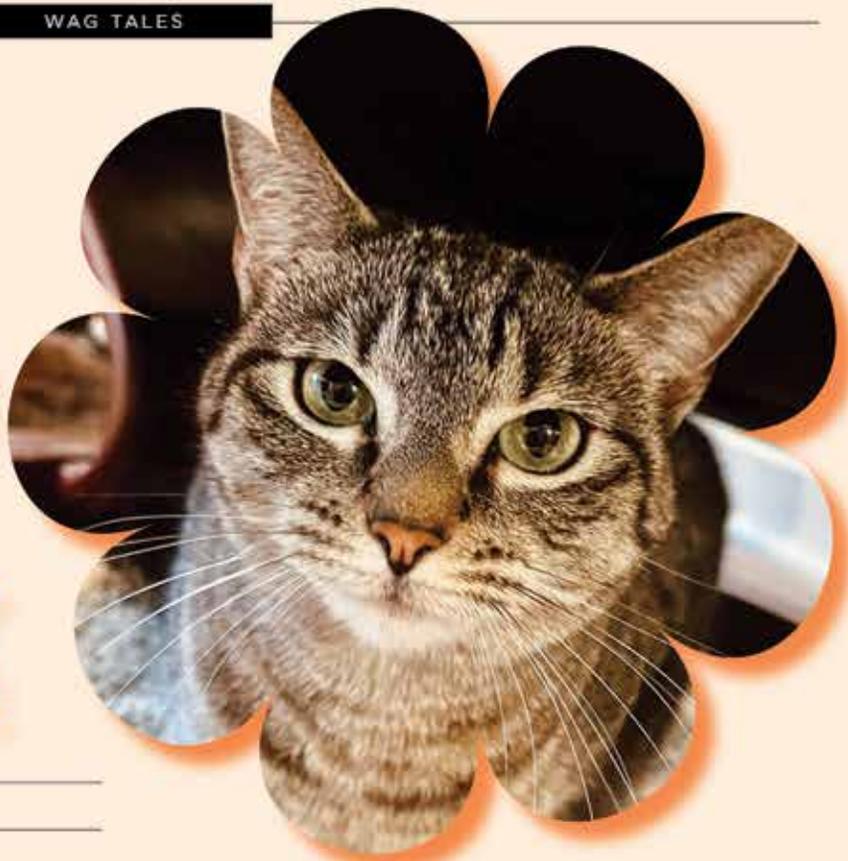


# Tiger Lily

THE

## SASSY SIAMESE

BY SHARON BONNEY



**M**y name is Tiger Lily and I live in O'Connor Woods with my people, Mom and Daddy. I am not your run-of-the-mill house cat. I am Siamese; no wonder I am so beautiful. Those dogs who live here and prance around on their walks have nothing on me. I am the best!

My birth mother was dropped at O'Connor Woods late one evening. She didn't know where she was or where to go, so she wandered around and finally found the security gate, where a guard helped her. She was very sick and very pregnant. Patty from Oreo Haven, an animal rescue program, took my mother home for the night. In the morning, I woke up with my six siblings who were born during the night. They didn't move or eat or play with me, and soon Patty took them away. I was sad.

After a few weeks, Patty took me to the Woods to meet my future mom and daddy. I liked them and hoped they liked me. Patty took me to their home often and they played with me. Finally, Mom and Daddy said they had adopted me and as soon as I weighed three pounds I would live with them. I had a hard time eating enough to gain weight. I needed to weigh three pounds to get my first shots so I could move to the Woods with Mom and Daddy. Finally, four months later, Patty moved me to the Woods. WOW! I was so happy to have a family.

My new home is wonderful. I have two patios on the second-floor porch. I sit on the patio and watch the people and dogs on leashes go by. I hide inside the house when the garbage trucks come by. So noisy. I don't like it when the rain blows on the patio. Even if I sit under the potted plants, I get wet. I usually go inside on rainy days and Mom plays with me. I puff up my ridge back and my tail and hide. When Mom comes by, I jump out at her, chase her around and run under the bed or behind Daddy's chair. I grab Daddy around his elbows and bite him. He yells at me and I

let go, but he is still mad at me.

Sometimes Mom or Daddy tells me to get off the kitchen counter or the refrigerator or the couch. Sometimes I get back at Daddy after they go to bed. I love to unroll the toilet paper, especially if it is a new roll. I get tired of unraveling it after a while. Then I rip it up, chew it and spit it out on the floor. I also love plastic bottle caps that I also throw around and hide all over the house for future use.

Sometimes I get on top of the bed in the middle of the night. I stretch my hind legs and then hop on Mom, grab her legs in my paws and kick her in the stomach. She yells at me because she doesn't understand that I am playing. Mom yells at Daddy to get me out of the bedroom! I don't like being banned from the bedroom, but it sure is fun to kick Mom in the stomach! It is worth being banned because I can cry outside the door and keep her awake.

I describe myself as loving when people visit. My next-door neighbor says I am sweet and soft. I greet them, wait for a head pet or an ear rub. I am inquisitive. I love sitting on Daddy's office chair, spinning it around while I lay on my back and dangle my legs over the side. I also enjoy ripping up the papers on Daddy's desk and throwing them on the floor. Neighbors have tried feeding me wet cat food, but I hate it. Dry and crunchy is the best. I do love treats when I find them hidden somewhere. Mom says she loves me. I know she does because she kisses me when I let her do it.

There is always something to watch off the patio. Birds to chase off the porch and new things to eat. Best of all is the tall dresser in the bedroom. It is wonderful for napping all afternoon, yawn, while Mom and Daddy play Mexican Train. Oh yawn...Did I say...nap? ♦



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# CELEBRATE COMMUNITY EVENTS

**FEBRUARY 7**  
*Inspired Voices Concert*

Atherton Auditorium  
Info: [stocktonsymphony.org](http://stocktonsymphony.org)

**FEBRUARY 7**  
*Winter Bird Festival*

Various locations around Galt  
Info: [visitlodi.com](http://visitlodi.com)

**FEBRUARY 7**  
*Community Medical Center's  
Black & White Masquerade*

Stockton Golf & Country Club  
Info: [jrmoore@cmcenters.org](mailto:jrmoore@cmcenters.org)

**FEBRUARY 14-15**  
*Lodi's Wine & Chocolate Weekend*

Various Lodi wineries  
Info: [lodiwineandchocolate.com](http://lodiwineandchocolate.com)

**FEBRUARY 15**  
*Classical Meets Pop*

Hutchins Street Square  
Info: [visitlodi.org](http://visitlodi.org)

**FEBRUARY 15**  
*Trio 180 Chamber Music Concert*

Faye Spanos Music Hall  
Info: [pacific.edu](http://pacific.edu)

**FEBRUARY 19-22**  
*Ripon Almond Blossom Festival*

Mistlin Sports Park  
Info: [visitstockton.org](http://visitstockton.org)

**FEBRUARY 21**  
*Stockton Chorale Cabaret  
& Karaoke Fundraiser*

Hutchins Street Square  
Info: [stocktonchorale.org](http://stocktonchorale.org)

**FEBRUARY 22**  
*Galentine's Brunch*

Brookside Country Club  
Info: (209) 479-8619

**FEBRUARY 26**  
*Rotary Read-In*

Various schools  
Info: [stocktonrotaryreadin.org](http://stocktonrotaryreadin.org)

**FEBRUARY 27**  
*Marriage of Two Cities film*

Haggin Museum  
Info: [stocktonsisitercities.org](http://stocktonsisitercities.org)

**FEBRUARY 28**  
*Dancing for the Dogs & Cats*

Stockton Golf & Country Club  
Info: [apl209.org](http://apl209.org)

**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

**MARCH 1**  
*World of Wonders  
17th Birthday Party*

WOW Museum, Lodi  
Info: [visitstockton.org](http://visitstockton.org)

**MARCH 14**  
*Lodi Animal Services  
Crab Feed*

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds  
Info: [thelasf.org](http://thelasf.org)

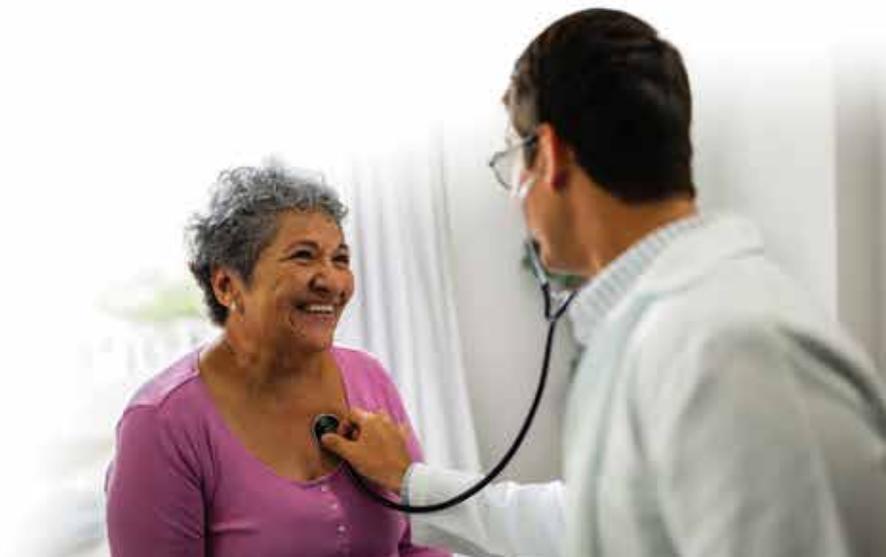
**MARCH 14**  
*Chinese New Year  
Celebration*

First Baptist Church, Stockton  
Info: [visitstockton.org](http://visitstockton.org)

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**Hello humankindness<sup>®</sup>**



# A Little Help at Tax Time

## Can Make a Big Difference

Health Plan of San Joaquin is returning for a second year to offer Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)—a trusted, IRS-certified program providing free, in-person tax preparation for eligible community members.

VITA supports working families, seniors, students, and individuals earning \$70,000 or less by helping them file their taxes and claim valuable tax credits—putting more money back into their pockets for essentials like housing, childcare, and food.

If you know someone who could benefit from VITA, let them know about the program. This is a simple way to make a meaningful difference.

*\*All program volunteers are IRS-certified.*



▲ **Maira Chavez**  
Volunteer Tax Preparer assists community resident with tax filing.

“We helped a family from Peru file their taxes for the very first time. They told us we didn’t just help with their taxes- we gave them confidence.”

### **VITA** VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Find VITA locations and helpful tax preparation checklists at  
[www.hpsj.com/taxhelp](http://www.hpsj.com/taxhelp)

Health Plan   
of San Joaquin

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**2-1-1**