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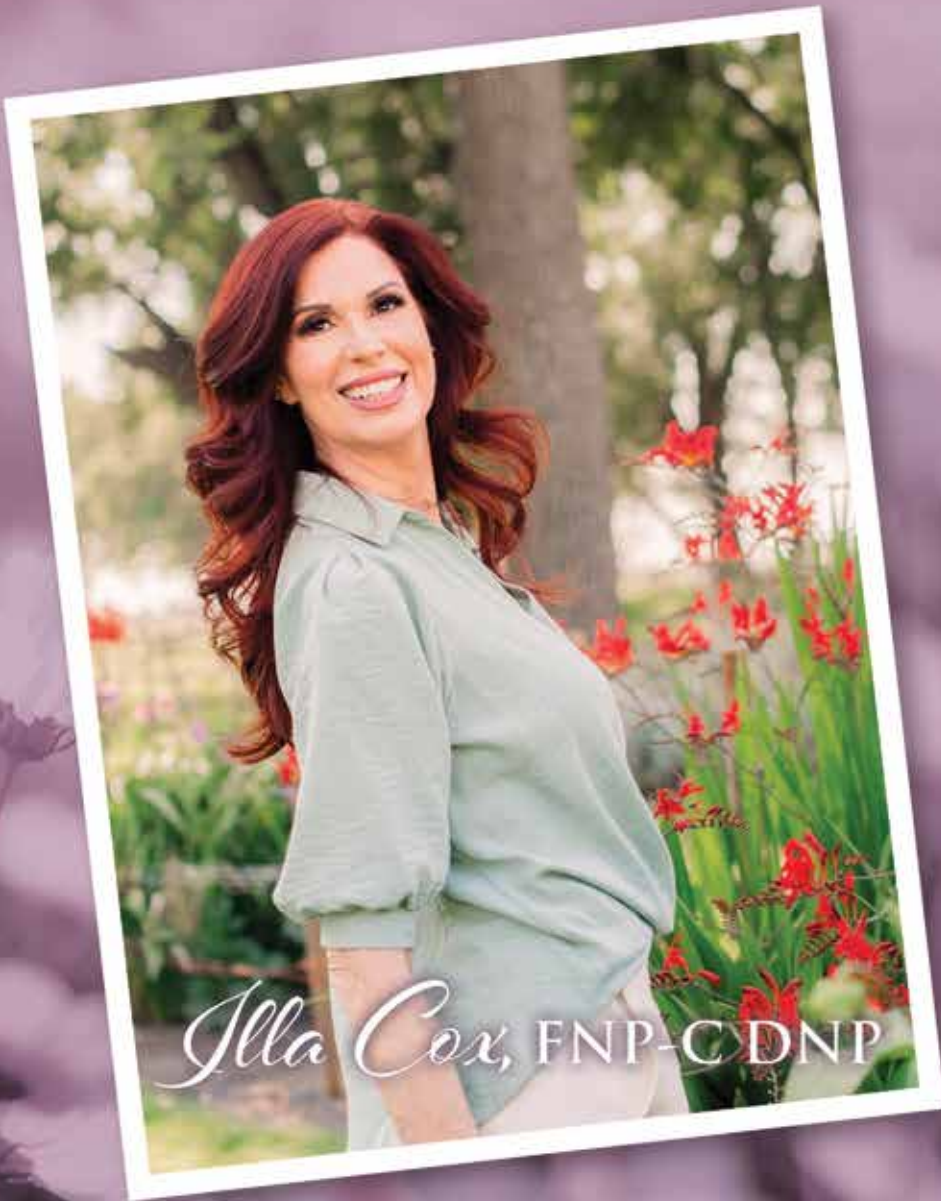
A smiling man and woman standing in a field of white-blossomed trees. The man is wearing a light blue and white plaid shirt and blue jeans. The woman is wearing a blue sleeveless top and large hoop earrings.

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The Machado Family: Healthier Soil = Healthier Trees = Healthier Food

Farming is faith, family, resilience and respect for nature's timing. That's the philosophy that drives Melissa Machado Cheney, her husband, Drew, and Melissa's parents, Michael and Diana Machado. Drew and Melissa brought the principles of regenerative farming when they stepped in to become the fourth generation of stewards of the land.



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Linden

The French Bee Nursery at 3730 Duncan Rd. Thurs – Sun.

For further information contact: SASS! Public Relations - 209-957-7277

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Feeding America

THE AG ISSUE

Is there anything better to eat than fresh fruits and vegetables straight from our valley farms? I certainly don't think so. As I write this, the cherry trees are in full bloom. While my allergies don't enjoy this time of year, I manage to push through because of the produce that we have available in our area! Our local fruit stands are about to open and I can't wait to grab baskets of fresh cherries, strawberries, eggs, honey, tomatoes and zucchini on my way home from work. Here in the San Joaquin Valley, we are incredibly fortunate to have the freshest food in the world right in our backyard.

I grew up in Sacramento and we always had access to farm-to-fork options. Farmers markets and local markets were common. But when I moved to Lodi in 2006, my eyes were opened to an entirely new level of good food. Perhaps I'm just more aware of the importance of healthy, locally grown food, but it is so ingrained into our community that it has become part of what makes this area so great! For this reason, I have truly fallen in love with everything about our Ag community.

In this issue, you will meet some of the local farmers who work tirelessly to feed America. We visit with the Machado family in Linden, the absolute sweetest family who have been farming for generations.



Not only can you buy their fresh produce, but you can also visit the farm for special U-pick cherry days! And while you're there, check out the baby lambs and their mamas who are part of their regenerative farming efforts. We also highlight Lodi Blooms and their incredible honey. I had no idea how complex honey could be, not just in taste, but in how beneficial it is for our bodies.

At the beginning of the year, my husband and I decided to tackle a challenge: 52 new recipes for the year! Some have been major wins, while others... Well, let's just say they weren't our favorites. Now, we get to lean into recipes featuring fresh, seasonal ingredients, which is always a win. We have a unique privilege here; we get to cook with

produce picked at the peak of ripeness.

Speaking of new recipes, be sure to check out The Dinner Party Experience featured in this issue. Talia and Heather host dinner parties centered around fresh foods that you get to cook, eat and enjoy together. How fun is that?

So, the next time you're planning a meal or prepping snacks for the week, look to our local farmers first. Plan a visit to a farm, stop by a roadside stand, or pop into one of our many farmers' markets. Your taste buds will thank you!

Enjoy every moment,



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**BEST SALES
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Beauty of the Valley



Photo taken on location at Machado Family Farms

Each year from late February through early March, countless almond orchards transform the Valley into a breathtaking display of blossoms. The trees erupt in soft shades of white and pink, drawing honey bees and admirers alike with their promise of spring. As petals drift to the ground, they create a delicate carpet that resembles freshly fallen snow, a gentle farewell to winter. For a few fleeting weeks, the blossoms give the Valley a dreamlike quality, as though nature has staged its own masterpiece.



Kevin Richtik is a Brooks Institute of Photography graduate and the owner of Stockton-based Caroline Photography, a studio deeply rooted in the community.

He has photographed thousands of local families and worked with a wide range of regional and national companies with his photography appearing in numerous publications. Kodak has featured his work in worldwide advertising to showcase its products.

In addition, Kevin creates a wide range of fine art images, from sweeping landscapes of the San Joaquin Valley and is creator of the ongoing Beauty of Stockton photo project, a weekly series that highlights the city's unique and often overlooked strengths, showcasing Stockton's vibrant, positive spirit. The project has expanded to include the Beauty of the Valley.



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



THE MACHADO FAMILY

Healthier Soil = Healthier Trees = Healthier Food

BY JO ANN KIRBY | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

There are signs of spring on the farm in Linden; vibrant blooms are blossoming in the orchards. Three generations of Machado Family Farms are taking time for a photo that will go on the company's new website, where they will share their story and honor their history.

It's a full circle moment.

Melissa Machado Cheney and her husband, Drew Cheney, were new parents juggling careers when they faced a choice 12 years ago. Did they want to change direction and return to their agricultural roots by joining Machado Family Farms in Linden? If not, Melissa's parents, Michael and Diana Machado, would have to consider leasing some or all of the land that generations of the family had worked since 1906 without more helping hands on deck.

After careful deliberation Melissa and Drew decided; yes, they would be the fourth generation to come on board.

LIVING ROOTS

It's an assurance that the legacy of the farm will continue, Diana and Michael said. "It brings a lot of pride," Michael said of having his daughter and son-in-law step up. "It's also a new adventure for me as they embark on looking at farming in a different way than what we've done for the past 40 years."

Drew and Melissa envisioned a way to contribute something meaningful to Machado Family Farms while respecting its long legacy. Plus, it would be a great place to raise kids. "There were a lot of positives growing up on the farm," Melissa said of the family's Linden land, where they grow walnuts, cherries, almonds and olives. "I wanted to raise our kids in the country and have them be involved in 4-H and FFA."

It would be an adjustment, but it wasn't an unfamiliar one, since Melissa's own parents had navigated a similar path years ago. "Every generation wants to do it differently and should," Michael said. "The whole environment of agriculture is changing and changing faster. New people with new ideas help adopt to the change."

Today, more than ever, it's clear Melissa and Drew's decision has been impactful for the family, the farm and its future. "Our roles are transitioning as my parents are taking on less responsibility," Melissa said. "We are being mentored by my parents."

Returning to their roots is a focused mission to continue the family's heritage. Melissa and Drew are building a resilient agricultural business that has them acting as true stewards of the land with regenerative practices that are healthier and more sustainable.

DIVERSIFICATION

When they came on board, they took time to learn the ropes. "You can't just come in and take it to the next level without learning about the past. You need to see what brought us this far," said Drew, whose own father was in the rice industry. "We had to look at ways to operate and diversify without abandoning the core."

The couple have built their own home on the farm, where their kids can be close to their grandparents and raise their own animals. They've also built a gym where Melissa operates One Body Whole Health. It's a boutique health and fitness center nestled among the farm's orchards and offers CrossFit, FIT Yoga, Pilates, AquaFIT and tumbling classes as well as personal training, nutrition coaching and more.



As operations manager, Drew noted that regenerative farming makes both economic and environmental sense. It also reflects principles that farmers, including the Machado family's ancestors, used for generations before pesticides became the norm. Regenerative farming means using cover crops in the orchard to prevent erosion and retain water while boosting soil health and employing sheep to graze and fertilize the ground. In other words, healthier soil = healthier plants = equals healthier food.

REGENERATIVE FARMING

"True regenerative farming is more cost effective," Drew said, citing just as one example that allowing sheep to graze the orchards reduces the need to buy diesel gas for mowing. "People are more concerned than ever with what's in their food and how it's grown," he

said, referring to a need for fewer chemicals and pesticides. "If I'm not comfortable feeding something to my kids, I'm sure not going to ship it off for someone else to feed their kids."

Cover crops and grazing sheep in their orchards is just the beginning as they look to create a healthier, balanced ecosystem that continues the legacy of growing crops not only for their children, but for future generations. But why keep it to themselves? They've been educating the public about their best practices and opening up for events that let people get face time with farm life.

NEW IDEAS

Melissa has been instrumental in pushing for a rebrand of the logo and the farm's website. A visionary strategic planner, she likes to take their goals and break them down into action plans. Melissa han-



MELISSA:

“This is the third year for our U-pick cherries, which are grown pesticide free. We are the first U-pick cherry farm in Linden and this year we are really excited because we timed it with the sheep that will be grazing nearby with all of their baby lambs.”

DREW:

“You can’t just come in and take it to the next level without learning about the past. You need to see what brought us this far. We had to look at ways to operate and diversify without abandoning the core.”

dles marketing, social media and employee benefits. “She’s a really good strategist and I’m a hardcore tactician, so that’s how we work so well together,” Drew said.

They have introduced agritourism to the farm, engaging their children to help with U-pick cherry events from mid-May to mid-June, inviting the community to book photography blossom sessions and hosting harvest tours on the farm.

“This is the third year for our U-pick cherries, which are grown pesticide free. We are the first U-pick cherry farm in Linden and this year we are really excited because we timed it with the sheep that will be grazing nearby with all of their baby lambs,” Melissa said.

As Drew and Melissa have learned how they fit in, they are mindful of their children’s future. “I feel like having the space to raise animals, to care for an animal and see the whole life cycle has been something they really enjoy. I love that they can ride their bikes to see their grandparents,” Melissa said. “Our daughter learned to drive a tractor last year.”

Having Melissa, Drew and two of their grandchildren living next door has been special for Michael and Diana. “I’ve been privileged to help homeschool them and it’s been a special treasure to be part of that experience,” Diana said.

Drew said they’ve been talking to their children about what they can bring back to the farm to diversify. “You don’t have to do what we are doing,” he said. “Ask yourself, ‘what would you want to do to be part of the business?’”

For now, they are helping their teen and tween feel connected to Machado Family Farms as the fifth generation to grow up on the land. And by the smiles on their faces in their new family photo, the future is bright. ♦



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CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

LET'S CHECK UP ON... SEED OILS, OLIVE OIL AND THE OMEGA BALANCE: WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOUR HEALTH

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

When patients come into my clinic for metabolic, hormone or integrative medicine consultations, one laboratory pattern I see repeatedly is low omega-3 levels. Many people are surprised by this finding because they believe they are eating "healthy fats." Yet one of the most overlooked drivers of inflammation in the modern diet is the imbalance between omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

This imbalance is not simply a nutrition issue. It is also an agricultural story. Over the past several decades, modern industrial agriculture has dramatically increased the production of oilseed crops such as soybeans, corn, sunflower and canola. These crops are heavily processed into what are called seed oils, and they now dominate the modern food supply. These oils are inexpensive, shelf-stable, widely used in packaged foods and restaurant cooking. However, they are very high in omega-6 fatty acids, which in excess can promote inflammatory pathways in the body. Many people don't realize that the type of fat we eat matters just as much as the amount of fat.

UNDERSTANDING THE OMEGA BALANCE

Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids are both essential fats, meaning our bodies cannot produce them and must obtain them through diet. However, they perform different roles in the body. Omega-3 fatty acids generally support anti-inflammatory processes. Omega-6 fatty acids, necessary in small amounts, can promote inflammatory signaling when consumed in excess.

Historically, humans consumed these fats in a relatively balanced ratio, often estimated between 1:1 and 4:1 (omega-6 to omega-3). Today, the typical Western diet has shifted dramatically toward 15:1 or even 20:1 due to the widespread use of industrial seed oils.

This imbalance can influence biological systems including cardiovascular health, metabolic regulation, skin health, mood and brain function. In my clinical practice, I frequently see patients with low omega-3 levels, which can contribute to inflammatory patterns that affect multiple aspects of health.

WHY OLIVE OIL STANDS APART

An advantage we have in Northern California is access to high-quality extra virgin olive oil, including olive farms in the Lodi region. Olive oil, a cornerstone of the Mediterranean dietary pattern, is one of the most extensively studied approaches to nutrition associated with longevity and reduced chronic disease.

Extra virgin olive oil differs significantly from many industrial seed oils. It is rich in monounsaturated fats, which support cardiovascular health. It contains polyphenols, antioxidant compounds that help reduce oxidative stress and inflammation. It is minimally processed, typically produced through mechanical pressing, not chemical extraction.

High-quality olive oil tends to retain natural plant compounds that support vascular health and metabolic function. Locally produced olive oils emphasize freshness, quality and traditional production methods, which further preserve these beneficial properties.

OMEGA-3 SOURCES BEYOND FISH

While fatty fish such as salmon and sardines are well-known sources of omega-3 fats, not everyone consumes seafood regularly. For many of my hormone and integrative medicine patients, I often recommend plant-based omega-3 sources as well.

Two of the most practical options are chia seeds and flax seeds, which provide alpha-

linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid. However, preparation matters. For better absorption, flax seeds should be freshly ground, since whole seeds often pass through the digestive system intact. Chia seeds benefit from soaking or hydration to allow their beneficial fatty acids and fiber to become more bioavailable. Incorporating these foods alongside extra virgin olive oil can help support a healthier overall fatty acid balance.

HIDDEN SOURCES OF OMEGA-6

Another issue many people are unaware of is how pervasive omega-6-rich seed oils have become in the modern food supply.

These oils commonly appear in packaged snack foods; salad dressings; restaurant cooking oils; fried foods; processed sauces and spreads. Because they are inexpensive and shelf-stable, they have become the default fat source across much of the food industry. As a result, many individuals unknowingly consume far more omega-6 fats than their bodies were designed to handle.

When omega-6 intake becomes excessive, especially when omega-3 intake remains low, it can push the body toward a pro-inflammatory state.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD QUALITY, AND THE FUTURE

The conversation around fats and inflammation is increasingly connected to a broader discussion about how our food is produced. Many nutrition and agricultural experts are now exploring regenerative agriculture, a farming approach focused on improving soil health, biodiversity and nutrient quality in food. Regenerative farming practices emphasize restoring the health of the soil and ecosystems that produce our food. As this movement grows, it may play an important role in shaping the future of a more nutrient-dense and sustainable food system.

A SIMPLE SHIFT WITH MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Improving omega balance does not necessarily require drastic dietary changes. Often, the most impactful step is simply replacing certain fats with better ones. Practical changes may include cooking with extra virgin olive oil instead of refined seed oils; adding ground flax or hydrated chia seeds to meals; increasing intake of whole, minimally processed foods; and becoming more aware of hidden oils in packaged products. These small shifts can gradually support healthier fatty acid balance and reduce inflammatory burden over time.

THE TAKEAWAY

A common surprise for patients is learning that not all fats function the same way in the body. The balance between omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids plays an important role in inflammation, cardiovascular health, brain function, skin health and mood.

Access to locally produced olive oil, nutrient-dense whole foods and growing interest in regenerative farming provide an opportunity to reconnect food, agriculture and human health in a meaningful way. Sometimes, improving health begins with something as simple as choosing a different oil in the kitchen. •

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SWEET CHERRIES

Gotelli Farms ... We Specialize In Cherries



GO TELLI FARMS

It's Cherry Season!

BY RACHEL FENTON

Sometimes the smallest moments end up changing the trajectory of our lives. A smile, a conversation, a last-minute decision all can take us places we never thought we would go.

Missy Gotelli knows the power of the small moments. Her whole life has been shaped by them, from meeting her husband on a brief visit to her parents to an off-hand comment at a bunco night that changed her entire career. Missy never planned to forge a path as a woman in agriculture or create a successful business selling cherries at farmers markets all over Northern California.

But, supplemented with grit and determination, Missy took the opportunities those small moments gave her and created a legacy that will not be easily forgotten.

Born and raised in Stockton, Missy originally pursued a career in education, attending UC Santa Barbara and receiving her teaching credential from the University of the Pacific. She absolutely loved teaching her third graders. But once she became a mother, she realized her rigorous teaching schedule wasn't compatible with her aims for motherhood. She retired from teaching to focus on parenting. One night, chatting over a bunco game

with friends, someone asked her if she'd ever thought of selling cherries at farmers markets since her husband and his family were in the cherry business. Her interest was piqued, and soon she found herself at her first market with nothing more than a card table and flats of cherries. As people stopped to chat and sample, walking away with their hands full of gleaming bright fruit, Missy realized she was hooked. "It's so fun," she said. "You love the energy of it!" And so, 34 years ago, Gotelli Farms was born.

With a laugh like an angel and grit like sandpaper, Missy was undaunted by being a woman in a male-dominated industry. "It was tough when I first started," she said. "I had to be really strong. But it was worth it!" Cherry season spans from May through June; ensuring everything goes smoothly takes a monumental amount of labor and planning, but Missy is no stranger to hard work. She'll be the first to tell you about the challenges of the industry and the many things we take for granted about our food and agriculture, but she'll also be the first to tell you how rewarding it is. "You're refined through fire," Missy said. "I'm grateful and it's been a very great learning experience, not only for myself but for my family. It's the foundation of who we are and our family value system."

The joy of interacting with her customers kept her going even through the most difficult parts of the business. She remembered one who had a particular impact on her, calling every year to ensure Gotelli Farms would be at her market that season. The customer's attitude spread cheer to everyone around her, despite her chronic illness that required wheelchair use. "It inspired me," Missy said. "She would show up and spread love and joy and positivity, and it had a huge impact on me." She also spoke of customers who remembered her working while pregnant with her son during cherry season; they now get to see her playing with her grandchildren when they visit the markets. That joyful, life-long connection with the community is the heart of Gotelli Farms.

Whether she's educating her employees or customers on the nuances of the agriculture industry or passing out samples at markets with her grandchildren, Missy loves every aspect of her business. "It brings me so much joy," she said. To her, it's more than just a job; it's a way to touch the lives of people around her. "My mantra is 'Be a blessing to others,'" she said. "This is a platform where you can reach out and make a difference in people's lives." She values and mentors her employees, specifically the young women who hope to follow in her footsteps. She remembers her customers by name. And while she's proud of the business she's built, she sees the people first and foremost, not the numbers. As she emphatically says whenever she's asked about her success, "It's just a tool for blessing people's lives." ♦



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The Lodi Tokay Rotary Foundation hosted Fire & Ice: A Gatsby Gala on March 7, 2026, in Kirst Hall at Hutchins Street Square in Lodi. Lisa Craig-Hensley and Katie Garner co-chaired the event while Carol Meehleis and Chris Meehleis are foundation co-chairs. The event raised money for the Lodi Fire Foundation to support local firefighters' needs for equipment, training and supplies. ♦

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TINY BUT MIGHTY...

The female Workforce Turning Spring Blossoms Into Cherries

BY JAMES CHINCHIOLLO

Every spring in the San Joaquin Valley, there is a small window of time that determines whether or not a fruit crop will be successful. For cherry farmers like me, that window is bloom.

When our cherry trees open their blossoms, every flower represents the potential for a cherry. However, that potential only becomes fruit if pollen is moved from one blossom to another. That job belongs to bees.

Most people see bees as part of nature. Farmers see them as

essential partners in food production.

Not all cherry varieties pollinate the same way. Our Cor-al Champagne cherries depend on pollen from other varieties such as Brooks, Tulare and Bing, while our Lapins cherries are self-fertile and grow in their own section of the orchard. In both cases, it is the female worker bees that move pollen from blossom to blossom. That simple movement is what allows fertilization to happen and cherries to begin forming.

Without bees doing that work during bloom, a cherry orchard

would produce little to no crop.

At our Lodi Blooms cherry orchard in San Joaquin County, the sound of bloom is the hum of bees moving through the trees. Each hive contains tens of thousands of bees, and during peak bloom they work the orchard from morning until evening. A strong bee flight during bloom is one of the best signs a farmer can see.

At the center of every hive there is a single queen bee. She does not leave the hive to work the blossoms. Her role is to lay eggs and keep the colony strong and growing. The bees flying through the orchard are her daughters, the female worker bees that do the pollination work from sunrise

to sunset. Male bees, called drones, play a different role inside the hive and do not take part in pollinating the orchard. A healthy queen means a strong hive, and strong hives mean more worker bees moving pollen through the orchard during bloom.

While cherries are a good example, this relationship between bees and agriculture extends across the entire San Joaquin Valley. Many of the crops grown here depend on pollination. Almonds, cherries, plums, apples, blueberries and numerous seed crops all rely heavily on honeybees to produce a harvest. Even crops that are not directly dependent on bees benefit from the broader ecosystem that healthy pollinator populations support.

In practical terms, bees are a critical piece of California agriculture's production system, just like irrigation water, soil fertility and sunshine. That is why farmers and beekeepers work closely together.

At Lodi Blooms, we partner with Becker Bees, a fourth-generation beekeeping family here in the San Joaquin Valley. Our family has farmed in this region for four generations as well, and the relationship between growers and beekeepers is built on trust and experience that develops over many seasons.

The bees arrive just ahead of bloom and are placed carefully throughout the orchard. From that point forward, orchard management has to consider the health and activity of the bees. Spray timing, product selection and orchard practices all have to respect the pollinators that are helping produce the crop.

When the bees are healthy and active, pollination is strong and fruit set improves. In many ways, the beekeeper and the farmer are working toward the same goal during bloom.

That partnership continues beyond pollination. Becker Bees also produces the honey that we bottle as Blooms Gourmet Honey. The nectar collected by their bees across the valley becomes honey that reflects the agricultural landscape those



bees work in each spring.

For our family farm, bloom is the starting point of the entire cherry season. What happens during those few weeks determines what will be hanging on the trees when early summer arrives.

Then, suddenly, it happens. By early to mid-May into early June, those blossoms the bees worked so hard become the deep red cherries our customers wait all year for. That is when Lodi Blooms opens for cherry picking, and families can walk the same rows where the bees were buzzing weeks earlier and pick cherries straight from the trees, enjoying the sweet results of the pollination that started the whole season. It is an experience that connects our customers directly to the process of growing food.

For farmers, the lesson is simple. Healthy pollinators mean healthy orchards. The work bees do during bloom may last only a few weeks each spring, but the results of that work carry through the entire season.

Every cherry begins with a blossom, and every blossom depends on the quiet work of bees. ♦



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Connection Over Perfection

THE DINNER PARTY EXPERIENCE

BY RACHEL FENTON

Life's greatest memories and deepest conversations often happen around a dinner table. When done intentionally and joyfully, cooking and consuming even the simplest meals can be an intimate and transformative experience. That's what The Dinner Party Experience is all about, bringing together strangers and making them friends, connecting local businesses with the communities they serve, and reminding all of us of the

power of a good meal in good company.

Talia Sanguinetti and Heather Crooker grew to be friends at the Ripon Farmers Market, which Heather manages and where Talia had a booth selling their LADS Home Ranch organic farm boxes. The pair connected instantly over their shared interests, specifically, making farm-fresh local food accessible to their communities.



“I love to cook, and Heather is so passionate about community and connecting people,” Talia said. When a mutual friend of theirs suggested hosting a community dinner using local resources, they both fell in love with the idea. “It wasn’t something we planned or sought out to do, but once it got going, it made sense!” said Heather. They decided to host four seasonal dinners for 2025. “The idea was to highlight local vendors and teach people how to eat seasonally,” Heather explained. Tickets sold out within hours of launching, and from those events, The Dinner Party Experience was born.

The Dinner Party Experience events are centered around making beautiful, farm-fresh food accessible to every person. Eating seasonally can seem daunting, but under Talia’s tutelage and Heather’s encouragement, attendees learn how simple the process can actually be. As Talia walks people through the different steps of preparation, Heather explains where each ingredient comes from. From the meal’s fresh produce and animal products to the cut flowers for tables’ flower arrangements, everything is sourced from farms around Central Valley. Once the preparation and cooking are complete, the camaraderie continues and the

feasting begins, often lasting for hours. “The time around a table sharing a meal is the most precious and intimate time you could have with someone,” Talia said. They have lost track of how many friendships have come together as a result of these events. As Heather said, “So many cool connections happen at our dinners.”

Their seasonal menus are works of art. Talia’s favorite meal came from one of their autumnal gatherings; it featured roasted acorn squash stuffed with a mushroom medley, paired with a pomegranate persimmon kale salad. Heather’s favorite was a pan-seared pork loin drizzled with a spicy fig jam and paired with an arugula apple salad. While some might initially feel intimidated by cooking, Talia and Heather encourage everyone to come and try it. “This is not a class about perfection, it’s a class about connecting! You’re going to make it with love, and you’re going to deliver it with love,” Talia said. “There’s no rules, no pressure. It’s going to taste great either way. It doesn’t have to be perfect,” Heather added.

The Dinner Party Experience is the culmination of Talia and Heather’s love for the local community: They see all the different aspects of their jobs as extensions of what they do at these events,



from Talia's LADS Home Ranch farm boxes, which help deliver seasonal local produce around the Central Valley, to Heather's job managing the Ripon Farmers Market. "It's about trying to make fresh local food accessible in any way we can," said Talia. The farmers market is also a fundraiser for Garden Joy, a nonprofit community garden that donates all of its produce to schools and food pantries and works to educate youth on gardening and accessible seasonal eating. Even their podcast, *The Afterparty with Talia and Heather*, both recaps their events and menus and interviews local farms, giving them a platform to tell their stories and connect with the local community.

Talia and Heather know first-hand how transformative seasonal eating and local connections can be, and nothing brings them more joy than sharing it with others. For those who want to get more communally involved, make friends or just learn how to cook a good meal in good company, look no further than The Dinner Party Experience. ♦

For information about future events and tickets, visit thedinnerpartyexperience.com.

PROTECTING WHAT FEEDS OUR COMMUNITY

A Blue Diamond poster in the Himalayas reminded me what we grow here reaches the world. Here's how to protect it.

On day four of a 12-day trek to Everest Base Camp in Nepal, I was surprised to see a poster for Blue Diamond Almonds in the backcountry of the Himalayas. Not even a road, just a reminder that what we grow and ship in California can end up almost anywhere.



That moment raised a question I still think about. If our food can travel that far, what keeps it secure from field to dock to store here at home when the lights are off, the gates are closed and the crew has gone home? Most problems start with one small gap, not a big failure. The answers aren't complicated but are often missed.

In 2024, California farms and ranches received \$61.2 billion in cash receipts and agricultural exports totaled \$23.8 billion. Nearly half of the country's vegetables and more than three quarters of its fruits and nuts are grown right here. That success depends on more than the field. It depends on steady processing, storage, distribution, and shipping.

When theft, vandalism, or sabotage happen, it often targets simple points of failure. A dock or gate left unsecured. A trailer lock broken. A hole in the fence. The loss is not only what was taken. It is downtime for your crew, missed orders, and the stress that follows.

At Delta Protective Services, I work alongside Kimberley Borgens, our CEO. We help agriculture operations protect their people, property, and peace of mind. The good news is that most agriculture businesses can lower their risk with a few consistent habits that do

not slow the work.

Each month we'll share another practical safety topic for our community. For now, here are five things to watch for that we see show up again and again across farming, processing, storage and shipping:

1. START WITH THE PERIMETER

Walk the fence line, confirm all gates latch and lock. Repair fences before a long weekend or seasonal shutdown.

2. LIGHT THE VULNERABLE AREAS

Add lighting at entrances, doors, fuel and storage areas, and employee parking. Light removes hiding places and supports better camera footage.

3. KEEP CONTROL OF KEYS AND CODES

Track who has keys and access codes, and change them when staff changes, contractors rotate, or something goes missing.

4. USE A DOWNTIME CHECKLIST

Before a long weekend, shutdown or end of a season, lock doors, docks and



By Lawrence Borgens, President

trailers, confirm seals, secure high value materials, and confirm alarms and cameras are working. the street and neighboring properties.

5. TIGHTEN HANDOFFS IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

Cargo theft has estimated annual losses of up to \$35 billion, and food and beverage are frequent targets. Verify pickups, confirm driver identity, and set clear after hours rules for deliveries and paperwork.

These steps are not about fear. They are about protecting what you value most, your people, your product, and your reputation. When security is planned, your team can work with more confidence and less distraction.

Start with a quick walk of your property this week. If you find risks and gaps in security you're not willing to tolerate, then bring in support. Delta Protective Services provides uniformed officers, marked vehicle patrol, alarm response, and video monitoring so you have a clear plan and peace of mind. What is one weak spot you can strengthen before the next long weekend?

If you want a second set of eyes on your operation, you can request a security assessment at deltaprotectiveservices.com. ▲



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Helping Hands, Essential Work

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EQUIPMENT COMPANY

BY RACHEL FENTON

Community is an essential part of what it means to be human. None of us can thrive by ourselves; we need each other's helping hands to stand strong throughout the storms of life. This mindset of strength through connection is what transforms communities from merely existing to flourishing and businesses from being simply good to being something great.

Watts Equipment Company is one such great business. The forklift dealer and service company has been operating since 1967, a family-owned, woman-owned, local gem. Guided by the loyal leadership and hard work of their CEO, Shirley Perreira, the roots of Watts Equipment Company have sunk deeply into the Central Valley, creating a beautiful legacy for a company that puts employees, customers and community above all else.

When Shirley first began working at Watts Equipment Company, she was stepping in to cover shifts for a college friend, planning to return to school once the semester began. But the owner, Brock Watts, asked her to stay, promising to teach her everything she'd need to know to be successful in the business. She agreed to take a semester off from her business classes to gain some hands-on experience. Now, 39 years later, she proudly holds the title of CEO. "If he hadn't believed in me and seen something in me," Shirley affirmed, "I wouldn't be where I am today."

Shirley quickly learned how important their work was at Watts Equipment Company. Transportation is the lifeblood of commerce. As she said, "If equipment isn't running, nothing gets moved." Without the essential work of companies like Watts Equipment, the world would grind to a halt. She learned each and every aspect of the trade. From being parts runner to parts technician, then developing the customer service department, then becoming GM and president before her current title as CEO, she noted, "I basically came up doing every job at the place." "It's fun, and it's never boring!" When she started working at Watts Equipment, there were 10 to 12 employees. Now there are 90. "It isn't a job, it's a career," Shirley said. "I'm surrounded by great employees who I lean on every day."

The job was not easy, especially as a woman in a field almost entirely dominated by men. Shirley described meetings at

which she was the only woman at the table, or customers who would try to trick her to test her knowledge. She dealt with both with grace and poise. "I know what I'm doing," she'd say calmly. "I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't." Shirley also spoke of the wonderful support of other colleagues and older men in the field who taught her everything they knew, never belittling her or making her feel unwelcome. The Watts family continued to support and empower her, giving her every opportunity she needed to learn and grow. "It allowed me to have my own confidence, put the work in and get myself to the level where I needed to be," she said.

Shirley turns away from the spotlight, instead shining it on those who helped her get where she is today. She credits her parents for her indomitable work ethic and her passion for helping others, and the Watts family for giving her the opportunity to prove herself. She always looks for the chance to share with others; she knows how it can change a person's life. "You never know what they're going through; that smile or helping hand could change their life," she said. Whether through their commitment to Second Harvest Food Bank, where they host a 12-day giveaway of pallet jacks to local nonprofits, or their independent partnerships with local causes, Watts Equipment Company works hard to give back to those who need it most. "We have to do our part to help the community," she asserted.

Above all, Shirley brings the focus back to the importance of community. "Watts Equipment is a business, but it's run by people," Shirley said. "It thrives because we keep that same mentality of taking care of customers and employees and community. Your employees aren't numbers; your customers aren't numbers. They're people. Treat everyone with respect." It is this mindset that has helped the company flourish for nearly 60 years, mentor employees from their first day to their retirement, and build a customer base that is as loyal as it is varied.

Shirley has dedicated her entire life to Watts Equipment Company's work and values and would do it again in a heartbeat. "I can honestly say I love going to work every day," she smiled. "I've been so blessed with this job. I can't imagine doing anything else." ♦

A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS



ALLIE MALONE

TUNDE BAKER

Photo by 39Pixels

A simple handwritten letter from a homeowner, "Sitting on my back deck of the home you built fifty years ago on Lake Lincoln, I wanted you to know how much it meant to our lives." For more than six decades, The Grupe Company has played a defining role in shaping the region – developing award-winning communities and guiding generations of families home. As he nears 90 founder Greenlaw "Fritz" Grupe, Jr reflects, "Real estate development and sales is so rewarding because what you do helps someone change their life, and I've been fortunate to be a part of that for over 100,000 people."

Grupe Real Estate came about because of "Trust". In 1973, a young agent approached Grupe, saying he thought Fritz should start his own Real Estate firm because people trusted him. 53 years later, Grupe has consistently ranked one of the top Agencies in Stockton. "Not only have we sold three generations of families their homes, but we also have three generations of agents working for us", says Jerry Abbott, Principal Broker, who joined forces with Fritz in 1994. With a shake of his head, Fritz, "Trusted for generations, wow, how many people can say that?"

Now one of the central valley's oldest firms, Grupe Real Estate, is

embracing and thriving under a new generation of leaders. With offices in Stockton, Lodi and Rio Vista, Grupe's agent count is nearing 100, speak a combined seven languages, and remains the region's strongest independent agency. Chief Operating Officer Allie Malone attributes Grupe's longevity to its independency, "We can offer Agents more, without having to go up a chain, we have the autonomy to make decisions."

Chapter 13 of his book *Enjoy the Ride: Timeless Principles for Building a Successful Business and Family*, Grupe titled *Embracing Change*, stating "Change is inevitable and necessary." Looking to the future of the family of businesses he built, Grupe replies "it's very important to me to have someone capable to carry on." Allie Malone and Tunde Baker have been quietly working behind the scenes for 20 years at the brokerage, it's no accident they've been growing into trusted leadership positions. Their strongest cheerleaders? Jerry and Fritz. "They have responded to every challenge, asking what else can I do, and have done a really great job. You couldn't find anyone more qualified", commented Jerry.

Allie and Tunde's partnership represents the future of the industry, one where women's presence at the top is beginning to match

their dominance in the field. While their backgrounds couldn't be more different, they now complete each other as the perfect match to each side of a coin.

Born and raised in north Stockton and attending Lodi Unified schools, Allie is the ninth of twelve children, and as she is quick to point out, no twins and all born on odd days. In 2004, Allie started as a receptionist for Jerry Abbott. She quickly moved into administrative duties. To move up, Allie got her Real Estate license and progressed into the role of transaction coordinator. Seeing room to grow, Allie pursued her Brokers License and advanced to Office Manager and for the past 10 years has served as Chief Operating Officer. Allie brings the strong belief that good leaders provide open doors to problem solve.

Hungarian born and raised, Tunde found herself immigrating to the USA at age 21. "It was quite the culture shock; English is not my first language." Tunde began her career as an Agent in 2001 at a local nationally affiliated firm. Encouraged by the coaching and small group training offered at Grupe, in 2006 she made the move to Grupe Real Estate. "I still remember thinking, oh my, Grupe is the place to work at, am I good enough to be here?" The answer there was a resounding YES. She describes the next twenty years as an incredible journey. In new agent training and agent support, Tunde found her passion. For fifteen years she has been the woman behind the scenes training and supporting each agent to come through Grupe. Tunde's guiding principal is "Are you providing excellence?" Agents describe her as a quiet force of professionalism who leaves them feeling empowered, supported, and confident.

The final piece to the new executive leadership team, Shane Hart Jr. Shane brings a passion for tools, technology and measurable outcomes. Talking with Shane, the next 50 years is about equipping agents with the tools, technology, and marketing platform to compete at the highest level while still operating as a locally owned, relationship driven brokerage. If his passion and convictions sound familiar, it's legacy at work. Shane is Fritz's grandson. His grandfather taught him to take the time to understand what makes each person exceptional and that leadership is about helping people see their strengths clearly, equipping them with the right tools, and creating accountability, "When people feel both supported and accountable, that's when real growth happens."

In his book *The Art and Science of Leadership and Management*, Grupe is clear on his position on management teamwork by quoting the saying "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far go together." Working under the same industry icons, Allie and Tunde share a commonality of life lessons in real estate and express the belief that history is knowledge. Their leadership style is calm and respectful. "When you work with someone who gives their best every day, it naturally brings out your

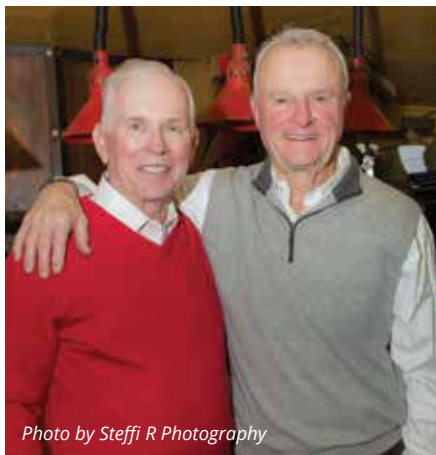


Photo by Steffi R Photography

JERRY ABBOTT & FRITZ GRUPE

best," commented Allie. Tunde expanded, "together with Shane we represent generations of excellence, combined with the best of today's technology." Fritz concludes "through 60 years, I have learned that the biggest challenge is management replacement. They are proven leaders, providing a balanced team of Agent, Office and Innovation."

Speaking with the agents, being a Grupe agent carries a sense of pride—an identity rooted in a company culture where agents feel seen, supported, and genuinely valued. It's a place that "feels like family," where recognition is part of the culture, and where every agent is supported with the tools and leadership that wants you to succeed. "Agents are our number one priority", all three will tell you. How do they do that? There are multiple brokers in the

office to assist and an after-hours hotline, no other brokerage does that. They provide the latest tools and support. Then there is the ongoing training, "many of our Rookies go on to be top producers, that's due to Tunde's training program. I haven't seen that anywhere else", remarked Jerry. Shane's goal, "I'm excited to be building on a brand that feels modern, confident, and distinctly Grupe, one that attracts top agents and creates opportunities for the next generation."

When asked what do you think people think when they see a Grupe Real Estate sign, or one of your agents out? "It's joked that you can't go around town without running into a Grupe agent, that's part of what makes Grupe so special," says Allie, Tunde continues, "our ties to the community, engagement in fundraisers, schools, knowing where to shop and eat." Shane, "You hear people talking, and it's consistently positive, professional, respected and stable. That's something I take seriously because reputation is built slowly and protected deliberately."

As the next chapter of Grupe Real Estate is written, the story feels less like a handoff and more like a continuation. Allie, Tunde, and Shane step forward not to replace what came before, but to carry it forward. Their leadership reflects the values Fritz has championed his entire life: clarity, humility, teamwork, and the belief that real estate is about people and the lives shaped by every home.

"I have witnessed many doors opening, but I have learned they open only if I knock." As he looks toward the future, Fritz shares his poem from *Enjoy the Ride*—a reflection shaped by a lifetime of building, leading and learning what truly matters. "Life on earth is a finite gift from God! How will I spend my days? Will I separate the urgent from the important and focus on the latter? Do I accept the premise of happiness is a choice? Will I let today bring joy to my life?"

And so the legacy continues—rooted in the communities they have always served, strengthened by the next generation, and trusted for generations. Grupe Real Estate: you know us, and we know real estate. •



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The dramatic custom dining table commands the room, with a graphic mural and antique brass lighting overhead.

Mix, Mingle & Martini

A Formal Home Gets a Glamorous Second Act

BY KATHLEEN JENNISON | PHOTOS TODD PETERSON



A former dining room transformed into a moody, engaging lounge where every finish invites guests to stay a while.

There's something slightly tragic about a formal dining room that's only used twice a year.

You know the one. Perfectly styled. Perfectly untouched. Waiting for a holiday that never quite justifies its square footage.

This project began with a bold question: What if the most beautiful rooms in the house were also the most lived in?

The homeowners love to entertain. We're not talking about a quiet dinner for four. Think cocktail parties that spill into every corner. Think Christmas with 50 guests. Think laughter, cigar smoke curling into the evening air and someone inevitably asking for "just one more splash."

The existing layout didn't match that energy. The formal dining room felt stiff. The living room was rarely used. The spaces were elegant, yes, but they weren't serving the life being lived inside them.

So, we flipped the script, since the best design doesn't preserve a room. It liberates it.

The Lounge: Moody, Masculine and Martini-Ready

The former dining room became something far more intriguing. It became a sophisticated bar and lounge designed for lingering. This wasn't about adding a bar cart in the corner. This was about creating an experience.

We converted an entire wall into a walk-up wet bar, fully equipped for serious hosting. Twin wine chillers stand ready for a collection that ranges from everyday pours to celebratory vintages. An undercounter freezer keeps ice at the ready. Open shelving displays spirits like curated artwork. Everything has intention. Everything has a presence.

The cabinetry, painted in a deep olive tone, anchors the room with

warmth and depth. Walnut finishes and porcelain surfaces elevate the function into something undeniably luxe. And above it all, a custom three-tiered gold shelving installation floats from the ceiling, illuminated glass shelves casting a subtle glow across crystal and cut glass.

It's glamorous without trying too hard.

The palette leans into rich greens, blacks, burnished golds, and deep woods. Moody wallpaper adds graphic interest. Four custom lounge chairs upholstered in a soft plaid flannel invite conversation. A leather ottoman with a sliding walnut surface adapts effortlessly from footrest to cocktail perch. And then there's the chandelier. Eighteen candelabra lamps. Gold and black. Dramatic in all the right ways.

This room doesn't whisper. It smolders. Yet despite its drama, it remains intimate. Seating is arranged to encourage conversation. Lighting layers create warmth rather than glare. It feels like a private club, except it's home, designed for cigars, storytelling and second rounds.

The Dining Room: Grandeur with a Modern Edge

With the lounge established, the former living room stepped into its new role as dining hall. And not just any dining hall.

The homeowners needed a table that could comfortably seat 20 for dinner and expand for gatherings that stretch to 50. That kind of scale demands more than good taste. It demands engineering.

The solution: a custom 214-inch walnut dining table with three generous leaves and a polished brass extension bar running down the center. It's sculptural. It's unapologetic. And it anchors the entire room. Twelve custom dining chairs, upholstered in a warm butterscotch fabric with brass details, soften the formality while maintaining elegance. The overall mood feels layered and collected rather than showroom perfect.



A concealed TV keeps the dining room elegant until it's time to watch the game or stream a series.

On the north wall, a mural introduces texture and quiet drama. It serves as the backdrop for candlelit dinners, holiday toasts and conversations that stretch long after dessert. Two antique brass and acrylic chandeliers hover above the table, offering sparkle without heaviness. A stone and gold abstract rug grounds the space, adding movement beneath the linear table.

And then there's the detail that makes guests do a double take. A framed mirror hangs on the wall. Classic. Refined. Until the screen flickers to life. The television disappears when not in use, preserving the integrity of the room. When the game is on or a movie is queued, it emerges seamlessly. No black rectangle interrupting the design. No compromise. Grand enough for 50. Intimate enough for two.

Balancing Scale and Soul

One of the greatest challenges in a project like this isn't simply fitting more people into a room. It's maintaining intimacy at every scale. When a dining table stretches nearly 18 feet, the risk is that it becomes cavernous. When a lounge is designed for entertaining, it can easily tip into hotel territory.

The success here lies in proportion and layering. Rich paint colors envelop rather than overwhelm. Upholstery choices bring softness. Metals add light reflection without glare. Custom millwork feels architectur-

al instead of decorative.

Every detail works together to create rooms that feel both expansive and personal. Because, at its core, this project wasn't about square footage. It was about experience. It was about honoring how these homeowners actually live. They host. They gather. They celebrate loudly and often. Their home now rises to meet that energy.

Out with the Old, In with the Extraordinary

There's a tendency to treat formal rooms as sacred spaces, untouched, pristine, almost museum-like. This transformation challenges that idea entirely.

What if the most dramatic room in the house was also the most used? What if elegance didn't mean restriction? What if entertaining at scale felt effortless?

By reimagining two traditional spaces with bold intention, the home gained not just function, but personality. The lounge invites late-night conversation. The dining room commands attention. Together, they tell a story of hospitality, confidence and a willingness to rethink convention.

Perhaps that's the most compelling detail of all. These rooms no longer wait for special occasions. They create them, because when design reflects how you truly live, every night feels like an event. ♦



Kathleen Jennison leads KTJ Design Co., blending thoughtful strategy with creative edge to craft interiors that reflect real life. Her approach balances function and richness of style, helping clients create spaces that feel beautiful and effortlessly livable. Kathleen's work turns everyday moments into memorable experiences.

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

THE MARRIAGE OF TWO CITIES

Stockton Sister Cities Association hosted a screening of *The Marriage of Two Cities*, a film exploring a World War II Italian POW camp in Stockton. The short film explores the surprise that occurs when love bridges oceans and destiny unites more than hearts. The sold-out screening took place February 27 at the Haggin Museum and featured appetizers and wine. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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ROAST BEEF STYLE REUBEN SANDWICH

RECIPE & PHOTO PROVIDED BY BELLYFULL.NET



INGREDIENTS

2 slices dill rye bread
 ¼ cup Thousand Island dressing, divided
 2 slices Swiss cheese
 ½ cup shredded cabbage
 6 thin slices deli roast beef
 5 (or more) round slices of dill pickles

DIRECTIONS

Place bread slices in a toaster oven, with Swiss cheese on one of the slices, facing up. Toast for about 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate; slather Thousand Island dressing evenly between the two slices of bread. On the slice with the cheese, pile high with the cabbage, roast beef and pickles. Top with the other slice of bread. Serve with chips and extra dill pickles on the side and enjoy! ♦

TIPS

1: Substitute Russian dressing for the Thousand Island.

2: Try using Bavarian sauerkraut for a more traditional Reuben.

3: Experiment with spicy mustard and mixing sour cream into the sauerkraut.



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CHILDREN'S MUSEUM RIBBON CUTTING

The Children's Museum of Stockton held a ribbon cutting on February 24, 2027, to celebrate the unveiling of five new exhibits including new playground equipment. Dr. Troy Brown, San Joaquin County Superintendent of Schools, was one of the speakers at the event and discussed the importance of play. The museum is located at 402 Weber Street in downtown Stockton. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



Linden Ag Boosters

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IS PAYING OFF!

BY JO ANN KIRBY



KIDS SHINING BRIGHTLY



To support Linden High School's flourishing Future Farmers of American program, the Linden Ag Boosters is hosting its fourth annual Farm to Fork Dinner Dance fundraiser Friday, April 17, 2026. The event showcases the FFA students' talents and puts them to work! It's an event that gives Linden's FFA students the chance to show the community how their contributions have helped them learn, grow and succeed.

"The support of our Ag Boosters has been a game changer for our program. We are able to offer more opportunities for our students," said Jana Colombini, a Linden High agriculture teacher and FFA advisor. "Last year our Ag Boosters purchased a new Chevy truck for us to use for transporting students, hauling animals and everything in between."

Funds from Ag Boosters events have helped sponsor students to attend conferences, finish a barn, boost student's livestock projects at San Joaquin Ag Fest, and provide scholarships to Linden High seniors, she said. Event organizers say that the sold-out event has raised between \$40,000 to \$60,000 a year. "They truly fill a gap in the funding sources of our program and help us ag teachers do our jobs. They support us and believe in advancing agricultural education here in Linden," Jana said.

As hard as the parents work to put on this showstopping event, the students are pitching in as well. The Farm to Fork event shows off the students' efforts and accomplishments. Students build projects to be auctioned off. They make wreaths and propagate succulents to sell in a student market that night. The Linden High floral department even makes all the centerpieces for the tables. Students etch souvenir wine and beer glasses for the event, help set up, take down and serve in many other roles throughout the evening.

"They showcase their agricultural projects, welcome and serve guests, and present on the past year's success of our FFA program," Jana said. "This allows our guests to really see where their support is going and how it changes the lives of our students. We have something to be proud of here at Linden FFA and it's always good to let our community see that firsthand."

A display area is proof that ag education is paying off. "When we decided to put on this event, we wanted to make it about them and their successes and have them be present," Dena Daluz, president of the Linden Ag Boosters, said. Guests can check out a display that

has detailed information on each ag student's Supervised Agricultural Experience, or SAE, a project that can be anything from organic egg marketing to heirloom seed sales.

"Those projects are part of their grade. That SAE project might not be an animal, it might be raising a flock of chickens and selling their eggs, one student made wine, some weld a tractor trailer," Dina said. "There are so many that the community doesn't know about so we created that area so the members of our community could see and realize, wow, look at all the things these kids are doing."

Linden High School's FFA program has seen some astounding successes. This past fall, their Ag Sales Team of Ava Avansino, Leah Guido and Abbie Samuel won the state title as a team and Abigail Coussons won the individual. They advanced to the National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis where the team placed third.

Funds that the Ag Boosters raise helped defray some of the travel costs involved in competing. "We also are able to raise money for scholarships," Gina Billigmeier, chair of the Ag Boosters scholarship committee, said. "We've given out \$23,000 in scholarships to deserving seniors."

Gina's daughter Sydney, a Linden High School senior who is active in FFA, said the students greatly appreciate the support. "The dinner is so beneficial to our program," Sydney affirmed. "In FFA, we are always doing so many activities and they are a big help." She has helped at the dinner/dance since its inception. "I've been a greeter, I've helped sell raffle tickets," she said. "I've served and cleared plates."

Sara Cowan, Ag Boosters fundraising chair, said the group has other fundraisers throughout the year, including a Turkey Bingo in November for which the prizes are turkeys the students raised. "It's become an annual event that people really look forward to attending," Sara said. "The first year, we started out with 250 attendees and last year we sold out at 400."

"We are very grateful for the support of one big booster. The Sambado Family and Prima Frutta donate the venue and all the tables and chair because we piggyback off their cherry grower dinner," she said. "We are so thankful to them." ♦

Tickets are \$100 per person and can be purchased by calling Sara at (209) 603-4694. Follow the Linden FFA on Instagram @linden_ffa46.



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LET THE MUSIC MOVE YOU

Joni Morris: Paying Tribute to a Legend

BY TIM DALY

Thirty-nine years of age is when most of us are settled into a career. But that's not how it went for Joni Morris. That's the age at which she seriously pursued her love of music – and for nearly 40 years, the Stockton resident has entertained thousands around the US with her tribute to country legend Patsy Cline.

Why Patsy? “Her voice was like velvet to me,” said Joni. “She suffered a lot of personal injury in her marriages and could really make the song believable with a cry in her voice. Just amazing quality, so enjoyable to hear someone sing so convincingly, the story was real.”

If music fans aren't completely familiar with the music of Patsy Cline, it's likely because she died at the age of just 30 in a plane crash. She was in the process of becoming a country superstar, with huge hits like “Crazy,” “Walkin' After Midnight,” “I Fall to Pieces” and “Sweet Dreams.” “We just didn't get enough of her music,” said Joni. “If she had lived longer, she'd be another Willie Nelson.”

Joni Morris was born in Modesto, raised in Stockton and grew up in a household where it was common to hear country stars such as Hank Williams Sr., Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette. Many years later while her daughter was taking a piano lesson at a Stockton music school, Joni took a vocal lesson just to pass the time and was complimented by the instructor for her voice.

“Mom would ask us to sing in front of the family for gatherings, but I'd go hide and make myself unavailable,” said Joni about her childhood. Years later she had three children to raise and loved being a mom but really didn't have a hobby just for her. The light bulb went on, and she thought she'd like to sing with a women's vocal group. Though she insists she was shy as a child, Joni was ready for the spotlight in her late 30s. She would sing at retirement homes and veterans' hospitals; seeing the reaction, she realized making people happy was so rewarding.

Joni jokes that performing the music of Aretha Franklin would have been her first choice, but the country tunes of Patsy Cline were a better match for her voice. And it was the right decision. Her first professional gig was portraying Cline in a play produced by the Columbia Actors Repertory, Columbia, located in Tuolumne County. That led to developing a tribute act and performing hundreds of times at Garbeau's dinner theatre in Rancho Cordova. Soon after she took the stage and delighted music fans at the Alcazar Theatre in San Francisco. Those wonderful songs and her talent would soon be



SAVE THE DATE

Upcoming Joni Morris Performances

April 18, Black Oak Casino, Tuolumne, California
 April 26, Nashville Social Club, Carson City, Nevada
 June 5, Harrah's Northern CA Casino, Ione, California
 July 11, Music at the Ranch, Jackson, California

on display around the country.

Every step of that musical journey, Joni was, and still is, joined by her husband, Matt Cardinalli, who was a dentist by day but at night took on the role of equipment roadie, sound engineer and lighting technician for the tribute show.

Joni and Matt realized after staging the Cline tribute for so many years that it would be wise to expand the repertoire, so the act has grown to include music by a dozen country artists. The “Legendary Ladies of Country Music” offers songs made famous by Kitty Wells, the Carter Family, Dolly Parton, the Judds, Crystal Gayle, Alison Krauss and others. Joni is very capably accompanied by local piano player Jack Jones, who adds backup vocals as well.

At the height of their success, they performed 250 times a year. Slowing down a bit means singing country classics about 40 times per year. But slowing down doesn't mean she and Matt are about to stop. There are too many people who still enjoy that trip down country-memory lane.

“It's something I can give to others. I feel it's a God-given gift and it would be a shame to waste it,” said Joni. “If He's going to give me the ability to do this, I should. Thankfully, I'm still able to get out there and sing.” ♦



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Julia MC

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BY HERLIFE STAFF



Q. What's your full name?

A. My name is Julia MC, and I am a Dutch Warmblood dressage horse.

Q. How would you describe your personality?

A. Sometimes I hear the humans calling me "that snooty mare," but I don't exactly know what that means. I would describe myself as beautiful, fancy, talented and special.

Q. What's your favorite vacation spot?

A. My mom takes me to Rancho Murieta Equestrian Center a lot. When we go there, I have to work a little bit, but then I get to eat grass and visit with my friends.

Q. What's your favorite park or place to play or roam?

A. My favorite place to go is anywhere with grass to eat.

Q. Do you have a guilty pleasure?

A. I don't feel guilty about pleasure.

Q. What's your naughtiest deed?

A. Well, I do feel a bit sorry for this one. My mom took me to a horse show and in the middle of my test I decided to rear up and dump her and then gallop around the show grounds. But in the end, I did let her catch me and finish the test, so maybe it wasn't so bad?

Q. Do you have an equine obsession?

A. Myself. I wish they would put a mirror in my stall so I could

admire my pretty face.

Q. What's your favorite, most wonderful treat?

A. I love, love, love apples, carrots, cookies, bananas, gooey German muffins and peppermints. One thing I do is pin my ears back and look fierce when the humans walk by. That way they give me treats so I'll put my ears back up. Works like a charm.

Q. Where do you go to get pampered, your favorite treatment, and why do you love it so?

A. Cara is my masseuse and she gives me full body massages. She doesn't give me treats, though, which she really should.

Q. What would you like everyone to know about you?

A. So, I do this thing where I pick up my legs very high and kind of prance around. It makes

the humans clap and say, "Wow! Nice piaffe!" whatever that is. Anyway, I like doing it, since it makes them very happy. I can do lots of other fancy things.

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born in California and my mom found me at DG Bar Ranch when I was three. My horsie mother is a Grand Prix horse named Graceful Times and my daddy, Idocus, competed in the Olympics.

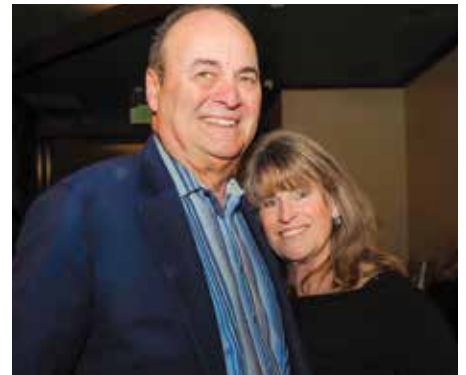
Q. Who is your human parent?

A. My human mom is "Mom," but I've heard other humans call her Mahala. ♦

LOCAL STARS DANCE FOR DOGS!

Members of the community paired up with professional dancers from Arthur Murray Dance Studio for an exciting competition to raise money for the Animal Protection League. Local Stars Dancing for the Dogs and Cats was held February 28, 2026, at the Stockton Golf & Country Club. First, second and third place prizes were awarded as well as People's Choice. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



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CALENDAR

CELEBRATE COMMUNITY EVENTS

APRIL 3-4

Easter Bunny Visits

Lincoln Center
Info: lincolncentershops.com

APRIL 9-11

AKC Dog Show

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds
Info: visitlodi.com

APRIL 9

A Toast to Time

Haggin Museum
Info: events@stocktonchamber.org

APRIL 11

USS Lucid Open House

3100 Monte Diablo Ave.
Info: smmspring2026.eventbrite.com

APRIL 16

Stocktonian of the Year

Stockton Golf & Country Club
Info: stocktonian2025.eventbrite.com

APRIL 17

Linden FFA Farm to Fork Dinner

Prima Frutta
Info: (209) 603-4694

APRIL 18

Earth Day Hike

Durham Ferry Outdoor Education Center
Info: sjcoe.org

APRIL 18

Champagne & English Tea

Church of the Presentation
Info: hospicesj.org

APRIL 18

Barnyard Biofest

World of Wonders Museum
Info: wovsciencemuseum.org

APRIL 19

Stockton Earth Day Festival

Victory Park
Info: earthdaystockton.com

APRIL 24-26

San Joaquin Asparagus Festival

San Joaquin County Fairgrounds
Info: sanjoaquinasparagusfestival.net

APRIL 25

*Lodi Beer Fest & State BBQ
Championship*

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds
Info: grapefestival.com

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MAY 2

Kentucky Derby West

Oak Farm Vineyards
Info: hospicesj.org

MAY 2

Chanticleer:

An Orchestra of Voice

Hutchins Street Square
Info: (209) 327-1875

MAY 3

Lodi Street Fair

Downtown Lodi
Info: visitlodi.com

MAY 16

Linden Cherry Festival

18100 E. Front Street
Info: visitstockton.org

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