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Tiffany Phovixay: “I’m passionate because of lived experience.”

For San Joaquin County residents, 211 isn’t just a number; it’s a helpline and a lifeline for vulnerable populations. The work of Tiffany Phovixay and the staff of the Family Resource Center make this possible through their tireless dedication. For Tiffany, it’s part of her family legacy and her understanding of what her parents provided to make her contributions possible.



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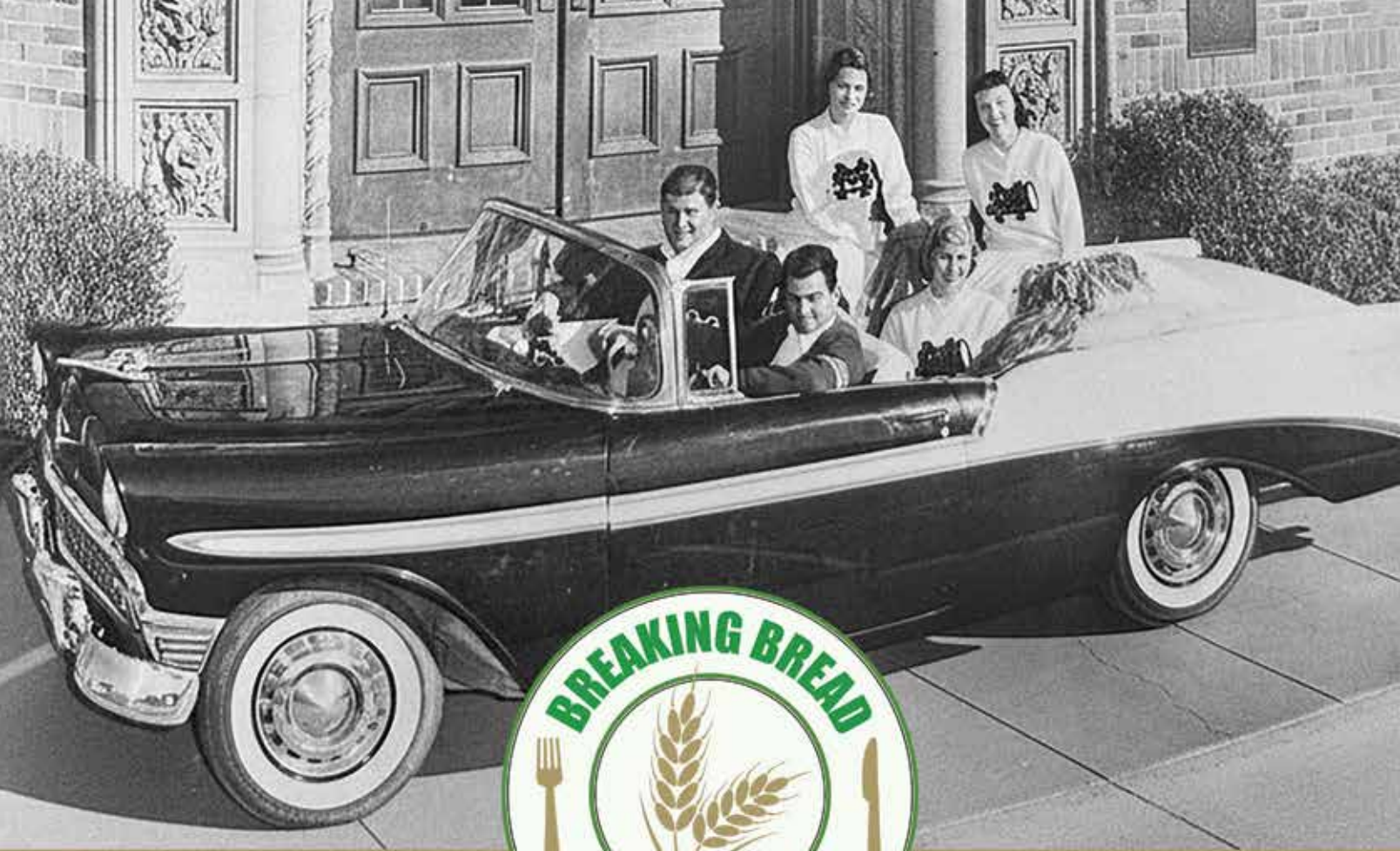
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Celebrating MOMS & COMMUNITY

I always look forward to our May edition of *HERLIFE* Magazine. With Mother's Day on the horizon, we are pleased to be featuring moms who are career jugglers, volunteer warriors, pet moms, mentors and village builders. In this world of ours, there are really good moms, and many that fall short. Fortunately for me, I was raised by a mom who put my growth ahead of her own and was always very nurturing and caring.

My ideal definition of a mom is the one who listens not just to your words, but to the silence between them. She is the one who wakes up early to make sure lunches are made. She is the one who crosses t's and dots i's without anyone even knowing that they needed to be crossed and dotted. For those of us lucky enough to have a mom who defines the words caring, nurturing and loving, we know that her warmth is the glue that keeps it all together. She doesn't just raise children; she nurtures souls.

I am a parent to teenagers right now and am often conflicted



as to whether I am being led to be nurturing and loving or be firm and to the point. Or maybe both. As I navigate this ever-changing, hormonal and unsteady time, I do know that I want to parent with grace and be a steady place for my son and daughter as they navigate the pressures of growing up and finding their footing in the world.

As you read through these stories, I hope you will be inspired. I encourage you to reach out to your mom, the mom of your grandchildren or the surrogate mom who

filled in when needed. Pick up the phone on May 10 and give them a call, send flowers or stop by for a visit and give them a hug. It will mean the world to them.

Fifteen years before Carrie and I bought *HERLIFE*, we started SASS! Public Relations! It's hard to believe that I joined my mother-in-law in this business 20 years ago. This milestone definitely calls for a celebration. Please join us on May 14 as we honor all of you in this community—the people, the events and the festivities—that have sustained us for two decades. We are humbled and grateful.

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Beauty of the Valley



A Trip Through A Land of Wonder

For this month's image, I wanted to highlight just one small part of the magic Pixie Woods brings to local children. How many cities can say they have a place where kids can ride a real train past a lush lagoon surrounded by towering palms, all just minutes from home? Our very own Pixie Woods offers dozens of enchanting corners to explore and countless ways to spark a child's imagination. It's more than just a park—it's a cherished community treasure that continues to delight children year after year. A hometown adventure, capped off with the cheery whistle of the train engine as it heads out on its next journey of creating big smiles and magical memories along the way!



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



Tiffany Phovixay

“I’m passionate because of lived experience.”

BY RACHEL FENTON | PHOTOS BY KEVIN RICHTIK, CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY



Motherhood is a conundrum. It's equal parts exhilarating and exhausting, fulfilling and frustrating. It can often feel thankless, an endless cycle of sacrifice and trivial tasks caring for tiny humans. But motherhood itself is anything but trivial; it is the source of life and basis of connection. From our maternal figures, all of us learn how to take care of ourselves and our families, and, by extension, our communities. A living being itself, our community thrives when it is nurtured.

And just as essential as mothers, there are those who step up to the task, tirelessly working to ensure the most vulnerable populations have the resources they need to thrive. The Family Resource Center is one such source of nurturing care. Its chief operating officer, Tiffany Phovixay, is a figurehead of resilience and strength, with a gentleness untarnished by the hardships she has witnessed and endured.

The Family Resource Center & 211 San Joaquin

"All I do is my job," Tiffany said with a laugh that belies the resounding impact her job has had on her local community and beyond. Tiffany worked in the nonprofit sector her entire professional career. For more than two decades, her tireless work at the Family Resource Center has been an agent of change throughout the county. "Stockton has been my home since I was nine years old," Tiffany said. "My roots are here." Even though she moved to attend the University of San Francisco and lived and worked in the Bay Area for a while, she found herself moving back to Stockton to be closer to family when her two eldest children were little. "Life gives you different paths and you take them," she said. Soon, the Family Resource Center reached out to her. She had been named as a reference for another employee, and they wanted her to come in for an interview. She began working with them and never looked back.

The Family Resource Center, a nonprofit in operation since 1980, has as its mission "to provide resources to parents and childcare providers to encourage healthy growth for the children in their care," and they offer a wealth of information and resources to families and communities throughout San Joaquin County. Their offerings have only continued to expand under Tiffany's work. "We have brought in, with my team, so many different programs serving families and parents and children and childcare providers," Tiffany said. "I love what I do here." She is especially proud of Help Me Grow, which offers developmental screenings for children under five at a crucial time in their development, and their oral health program, which directs families to dentists and dental health resources.

One of the center's most essential community programs, 211 San Joaquin, is a confidential call center dedicated to connecting people with whatever service they need, from mental health services and healthcare to low-income housing and food banks. 211 San Joaquin works with over 4,600 different programs across the county, and they are

Tiffany:

"That's what I teach my children. Make something of yourself. Seize what opportunities are given to you and see every challenge as a win. Find a win in every challenge. At the end of the day there is always a win."



constantly auditing and adding to their list. All a person has to do is dial 211 and they are connected with trained specialists who perform assessments to give the best referrals for a person's needs. The nonprofit is multifaceted; they work with PG&E to ensure community members are safe and have access to resources in the event of a planned power outage, and they direct emergency and disaster preparedness. Family Resource Center was also a crucial component of keeping the community safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, working on the front line and helping schedule and coordinate everything from personal protective equipment to vaccines.

Recently, the Family Resource Center opened a new exhibit with the Children's Museum of Stockton centered around 211 San Joaquin. It features an interactive floor display that guides children through different scenarios and puzzles, each designed to educate children and caregivers alike on the resources the 211 has to offer. They worked with the Canada-based company LumoPlay, which specializes in children's programs and games, and multiple child psychologists to design the interactive exhibit. In it, children follow a pair of sibling kittens around the game board as they walk through their local community and help their neighbors call 211 to solve problems and meet different needs before those situations turn into crises. "It's been quite an adventure," said Tiffany. The exhibit is aimed at the Children's Museum's target audience of three to ten years old, but QR codes around the space are available for caregivers, offering more information about 211 San Joaquin and directing them to their app and website.

From Hardship to Open Hearts

When she was very young, Tiffany learned first-hand the power of sacrifice and hard work in the name of love. Her father was a medic in the Vietnam War who lost his leg and part of his hand to a land mine. He risked everything to escape with his wife and children by

hiding them in his fishing boat and crossing the ocean to Hong Kong. Her youngest brother was only a few months old at the time, and Tiffany's mother had to press him to her breast to keep him silent so they wouldn't be discovered. Tiffany herself was only three years old at the time, but she grew up hearing stories of her father's selfless bravery as their family traveled from Hong Kong to the Philippines, where they were sponsored by Catholic Charities and able to immigrate to the United States, landing in Monterey and eventually moving inland to Stockton.

Her parents and older siblings worked in the fields to support their family while Tiffany took care of her younger siblings and acted as interpreter for her parents, navigating the nuances of the Human Services Agency at nine years old. "I didn't know anything," Tiffany said, describing the phone calls and conversations she would have as her parents' interpreter, even missing school to go to appointments. "That's why I'm so passionate about the work we do here at the Family Resource Center and 211. I have the lived experience." She worked incredibly hard, graduating high school and working multiple jobs, putting herself through both college and law school before she pivoted her career to social services.

She credits her parents' teachings for her love of her local community; their teachings and sacrifices opened her eyes to the immense need for basic care in the most vulnerable populations. "We didn't understand when we were younger, but now that we're adults and parents, we understand what they did for us and the sacrifices that my parents made," she said. Despite every obstacle that stood in their way, she and all of her siblings have their degrees; their parents worked hard to ensure they would have the chance for a better life. Though some might have become jaded and cynical, the hardships Tiffany and her family endured have only widened her embrace. "My heart has always been in nonprofit and giving back," she said. Her



Tiffany:

“That’s why I’m so passionate about the work we do here at the Family Resource Center and 211. I have the lived experience.”

family came to the United States to have the dreams and freedom that Vietnam could not offer them, and though the hardships were many and the price costly, their focus was always on gratitude. “My dad’s legacy has always been, “Take what has been given to you and make something out of it, you need to give back to the community that gave so much to you,” she said.

The Legacy Continues

Tiffany’s passion for giving back is something she and her husband have both passed down to their three children, all of whom decided to go into healthcare-related fields. Her eldest works in optometry at California Eye Surgeons. Her middle child is graduating this year with her audiology and pathology degree to become a speech pathologist, and her youngest just began studying pharmaceutical chemistry with intention of becoming a medical researcher. “They want to give back, and I’m extremely proud,” Tiffany said. She encourages them to continue being a living legacy, taking whatever obstacles life hands them and turning them into stepping stones for success. “That’s what I teach my children. Make something of yourself. Seize what opportunities are given to you and see every challenge as a win. Find a win in every challenge. At the end of the day there is always a win.”

This mindset informs everything Tiffany does, both at home and

at the Family Resource Center. She advocates constantly for those who have no advocate, helping them overcome obstacles while increasing the reach of the programs she loves. Currently, they are working with Assemblymember Rhodesia Ransom for the 211 San Joaquin to receive state budget support with Bill AB1832, hoping to expand the impact that the program has on the local community.

But there is always work to be done. She encourages people to seek out opportunities with the Family Resource Center, helping children and their caregivers access the resources they need to thrive and finding ways to give back to their neighbors in any way they can.

Tiffany has taken the gifts her parents gave her, their sacrifices, their love and their legacy, and shared their blessings with everyone around her. “The legacy is from my dad. I want to make him proud; look what he did to get us here. That story does not end; his legacy does not end with him,” Tiffany said. Not only has she dedicated her life to giving back and nurturing her community, but she has raised her own beautiful family to share this legacy through their own careers. “It shaped me to be who I am today, and I hope it shapes my children to be who they are in the future,” she said. Her life’s work, both at the Family Resource Center and as a mother within the walls of her own home, continues to spread like a ripple in a pond, a beautiful reminder that even the smallest act of love can transform the world around us. ♦



CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

LET'S CHECK UP ON... MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH: UNDERSTANDING MOOD CHANGES IN PERIMENOPAUSE

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

Mental health awareness conversations often center on depression and anxiety as primary conditions. Yet in clinical practice, particularly among women in their late 30s to early 50s, a more nuanced pattern frequently emerges, one that is often overlooked during the perimenopausal transition.

A common statement I hear from patients is "I just don't feel like myself." This phrase, reflected in observational data presented at recent meetings of the Menopause Society, captures a subtle but important shift. Notably, these changes can appear before classic symptoms such as hot flashes. Mood variability, irritability and changes in sleep may be among the earliest signals of this transition.

Perimenopause can begin as early as age 35 and is under way for most women by their early 40s. During this time, hormonal patterns, particularly estradiol and progesterone, become increasingly erratic. These fluctuations are not just reproductive; they have direct effects on the brain.

Estradiol plays a key role in regulating serotonin, which influences mood, emotional stability and irritability. Progesterone and its metabolites interact with calming pathways in the brain, supporting stress resilience and sleep. Testosterone, though often under-discussed in women, contributes to motivation, energy and overall sense of well-being. When these hormones fluctuate, it is not uncommon to experience parallel shifts in mood and cognition.

For many women, these changes are not severe, but they are disruptive enough to affect quality of life, impacting work performance, relationships and overall sense of self. This life stage often coincides with peak career demands and significant personal transitions, adding another layer of complexity. These overlapping pressures are not coincidental; they amplify an already sensitive physiological period.

Another important and often underrecognized contributor to cyclical mood changes is that PMDD exists on a spectrum and is characterized by mood symptoms that intensify during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. In perimenopause, irregular cycles can make this pattern more difficult to identify, requiring a more individualized and attentive approach to care.

It is important to emphasize that not every woman will experience significant mood disruption during this transition. However, for those who do notice new or worsening symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, disrupted

sleep or emotional sensitivity, it is reasonable to pause and consider whether hormonal shifts may be contributing.

Treatment does not have to be one-dimensional. In some cases, pharmacologic therapy is appropriate and beneficial. In others, a broader, integrative approach may help address underlying contributors. Often, the most effective strategy is a thoughtful combination tailored to the individual.

From an integrative standpoint, several evidence-based interventions may support mood and physiologic resilience during this time:

- **Calcium citrate (600 mg twice daily during the luteal phase):** Research has demonstrated that calcium supplementation can reduce premenstrual symptoms, including mood-related changes.
- **Magnesium (400 mg daily, citrate or glycinate):** Magnesium supports neurotransmitter synthesis, including serotonin and melatonin, and can improve sleep quality and nervous system regulation.
- **Vitamin B6 (30-60 mg daily):** Pyridoxine plays a role in serotonin and GABA production, with studies suggesting benefit in reducing premenstrual mood symptoms.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids and phytoestrogens:** Nutrients found in flaxseed and organic soy may support anti-inflammatory pathways and provide mild estrogenic effects that can be beneficial during hormonal transitions.

Finally, it is worth recognizing that many women report improved stability once they reach postmenopause, particularly when supported appropriately. The unpredictability of perimenopause often gives way to a steadier physiologic state.

This phase of life is both complex and deeply individual. It requires a balanced perspective, one that acknowledges biology, lifestyle and personal context.

If you find yourself in your 40s experiencing a shift in how you feel, physically, mentally or emotionally, it is appropriate to explore this further. You do not need to dismiss these changes, nor do you need to assume there is only one path forward. Seeking care from a clinician experienced in menopause medicine can provide clarity, options and a more personalized approach to wellbeing. •

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!

Disclaimer: This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Always consult with your physician or qualified healthcare professional before starting any new treatment, including supplements, to ensure it is appropriate for your individual health needs.



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NEW EXHIBITS ENRICH EXPERIENCE



BY JO ANN KIRBY

For more than three decades, the Children's Museum of Stockton on Weber Street in downtown Stockton has been an enchanting place for kids to explore. Now, it has some new exhibits and outdoor play equipment to entice young visitors. A special celebration was held in late February to show off the new upgrades and to thank the museum's community sponsors as well as their generous donors.

"These new exhibits will enhance visitor experience," Edward Figueroa, executive director of the museum, said. "While many of our exhibits are staples at the museum, we believe creating new exhibits or updating others helps keep the exhibits socially relevant and invigorates the creativity and imagination."

The Family Resource Center is sponsoring a brand-new 211 exhibit, an interactive space designed to teach families about local community resources. Launched in February 2026 in partnership with the Family Resource Center, the exhibit aims to make calling 211 as familiar to children as calling 911. "The museum's vibrant hands-on environment makes it the perfect place to unveil 211," Kay Ruhstaller, CEO of Family Resource Center, said at the celebration. "Children do learn through play."

The 211 exhibit features a fast-paced interactive game in which children help "critters" in need by identifying the right resources. Kids also can use a touch screen to practice dialing 211 and connecting characters to services such as food, housing and healthcare. The exhibit is designed to show that help and support are just a call away, helping families navigate essential services in San Joaquin County.

The Health Lab Exhibit, sponsored by Kaiser Permanente, has three features. There's a Pedal Powered Blood Flow Race where children race on stationary bikes. As they pedal, children face a display of the basic outline of

a person and the movement of their pedaling tracks on the outline shows how the blood is pumped from the heart to the extremities and back to the heart. There are two bikes and two body displays so that children can race each other to see who can get the blood flowing the fastest. The second feature is a Heartbeat Box. This display tracks the child's heartbeat. It is displayed as heart symbol on a monitor as well as having an auditory pumping noise so that a child can both see and hear their heartbeat. And there is a Light Bar, with a hand crank that a child may use. The faster they can rotate the crank, the higher the lights rise on the light bar.

"We are investing in our future workforce, our future leaders, future politicians, future changemakers," Dr. Anitra Williams of Kaiser Permanente said of Kaiser's sponsorship of the exhibit at the celebration. "Play builds power."

Also new at the museum are two outdoor playground structures that are sponsored by the Mildred Luck Lewis Foundation. The new playground offers two outdoor structures designed for play for ages 2 through 5 and 6 through 12. They are a great place to climb, jump and slide! In addition, there are outdoor musical instruments sponsored by Sponsors of Musical Enrichment Foundation. Designed in the shape of a



tree, a mushroom and flowers, they're designed to not only be beautiful but fun too! Children can use percussion mallets to hit just the right note.

The San Joaquin County Office of Education is sponsoring a new Amazing Airways exhibit to encourage STEM education. "Children can experience the amazing power of pneumatics as they watch balls and scarves zipping through the maze of twists and turns and try to catch them as they are released and fall back to

the earth," said Edward. "This exhibit is truly mind-blowing!"

For moms, there is a Mamava Lactation Pod sponsored by the Rosi Cerri Foundation. While not technically an exhibit, the Mamava Lactation pod is a new and exciting addition to the museum. While nursing mothers are free to nurse in all areas of the museum, the museum also recognizes that some may want a bit more privacy. The Mamava Lactation Pod is designed with their needs in mind and offers a seating area, USB plug ins and is ADA compliant.

In all, the museum has 31 interactive, hands-on exhibits and experiences for children to enjoy. "The reaction from visitors has been overwhelming and extremely positive. Many have shared how bright and updated the museum is looking. They appreciate the changes and we are excited for more updates to come," Edward said. ♦



mental health **MAY AWARENESS**

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ILLA COX

MOTHER, MENTOR, MEDICAL PROVIDER

BY RACHEL FENTON | PHOTOS BY KELLY MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY

No one achieves greatness by themselves. Without the gentle guidance of mentors for the upcoming generations, our communities would fall apart, toppling like rootless trees. We all depend on those people who selflessly help others to become the best versions of themselves. Illa Cox has dedicated her life to being a mentor who lifts people up, both metaphorically as a teacher, business owner and a nurse practitioner, and also literally, as a life-long dancer and cheerleading coach.

During her childhood in Texas, Illa threw herself complete-

ly into the art of dance; from jazz to drill team, she found it a beautiful outlet for expression and connection. “I was a dancer my whole life,” Illa said. She was accepted into the elite Statue of Liberty Drill Team, getting to spend two weeks in New York City and perform for the president of the United States, and she also received a full ride college scholarship. “Jazz was my favorite; you get to express yourself with the music,” Illa said, describing how she loved attention to detail, accenting the little parts of the songs that were most often overlooked. “Through dance, I learned that I could do things by putting a lot of hard work into

them,” she said. That hard work laid the foundation for the grit and tenacity she has relied on throughout her life, from mothering four children to opening her own business.

After Illa met her husband and they moved to California, she decided to pursue her nursing degree. “It crosses over. I just loved helping people,” Illa said. “I loved being around people; I loved to listen to their stories.” Her husband was her greatest supporter, encouraging her along the way. She found her experience with dance translated very well to her work as a nurse practitioner; her years of cultivating a comfortable and organic stage presence helped her put patients at ease as she worked in emergency departments. She fell in love with her job in healthcare in the same way she fell in love with dance as a girl. “I love it because I never feel like I’m working,” she said. Her favorite part was educating patients, explaining to them the “why” behind what she was doing. “Knowledge is power,” Illa said. “If I educate you, you have the power to educate somebody else.” She went on to pursue her doctorate of nursing practice, which empowered her to teach at the university level and also open her own independent practice, Cox Medical Aesthetics in Lodi. The aesthetics medical spa is set to open its new location in summer 2026, where Illa will also be teaching aesthetics to certified nurses in addition to her full-time teaching at Stanislaus State University. “I love what I do,” Illa said. “I love seeing the lightbulbs go off.”

While many would consider working shifts at multiple emergency departments, teaching full time and running a medical spa a tightly packed schedule, Illa still prioritizes making time to give back to the community and nourish her love of dancing through coaching cheerleading at Jim Elliot Christian School. “Coaching cheerleading keeps me balanced,” she said. “I coach cheerleading because I love helping.” She organizes all the choreography and often does the stunting along with her students, working alongside them to show them how it’s done. “I show them by example,” she said. “If I can achieve it, so can you, and I’ll help you achieve it.” She emphasizes cheerfulness over complaint, helping her girls learn the leadership skills and hard work that helped Illa herself get so far in life. “My favorite part is being a mentor and a leader and showing them that working hard helps you be successful,” she affirmed.

Despite her impressive accomplishments, Illa approaches those around her with the kindness of a mentor and the humility of a life-long learner. “I’m only one chapter ahead of you,” she tells her students, helping put them at ease when they enter her capstone seminar class. They walk in her door as students, and at the end of the year, they exit her classroom as medical providers. She approaches her patients with the same humility, whether in the emergency room or in her aesthetics office. Illa calls it “approaching a person from the inside out,” saying, “I listen first. I want to enrich their lives as much as they enrich mine.” Illa does indeed enrich the life of her community, whether it’s by mentoring high school girls and teaching them the value of hard work and leadership or educating the next generation of nurse practitioners. “I wanted to be a person who made a change in the world,” Illa said, speaking of the different choices that led her to where she is today. And if you ask her family, her students or her patients, they’ll be the first to tell you: she has definitely succeeded. ♦



Deana Brooks

has been named Chief Executive Officer of Hospice of San Joaquin, bringing more than 25 years of healthcare operations experience and a deep commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care.



Brooks previously served as Chief Administrative Officer at Hospice of San Joaquin for the past three years, where she played a key role in strengthening organizational operations, supporting clinical teams, and advancing the organization's mission of providing high-quality end-of-life care to patients and families throughout San Joaquin County.

Prior to joining Hospice of San Joaquin, Brooks spent 25 years with Fresenius Medical Care, where she held multiple leadership roles in operations and developed extensive expertise in healthcare delivery, team leadership, and organizational growth.

Brooks holds a Master of Social Work (MSW), which grounds her leadership approach in empathy, advocacy, and a holistic understanding of the needs of patients and their caregivers.

As the longest-standing nonprofit hospice in San Joaquin County, Hospice of San Joaquin has built a strong reputation for compassionate care and deep community trust thanks to the dedication of its staff and volunteers.

"I'm honored to serve as CEO and continue the work we do every day for patients and families in our community. Our mission is to honor life by keeping patients and their caregivers at the center of everything we do. I look forward to building on that commitment, supporting our incredible staff, and strengthening our connections to ensure every patient and family receives care with dignity, compassion, and respect."



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KAMNI DEL BARBA

BY JO ANN KIRBY

Kamni Del Barba of Stockton, California, is a wife, mother of two and retired Army combat veteran who works for Stockton Unified. Kamni, a native of India who has lived in Stockton since 1980, is passionate about supporting amputee children and their families after her son, Dez Del Barba, contracted streptococcus A during Army basic training. She spoke to us about what it means to be a mother, her son's experience and her passion for helping others.



Q. Describe your career.

A. I served over 20 years in the U.S. military, holding a wide range of positions that spanned logistics, training, recruiting, military intelligence and readiness. I managed operations, ensured mission readiness and led personnel development. I coordinated training programs, supported critical missions under high-pressure conditions, and implemented policies to improve efficiency and effectiveness. My focus was always on preparing individuals to perform at their best and achieve objectives safely and successfully. Today, I work for Stockton Unified School District with their human resources department. I have been with them since my retirement from the military.

Q. Tell us a little about your family.

A. My supportive husband and I have been together for 30 years. We have one son and one daughter.

Q. What does it mean to you to be a mother?

A. It means loving more deeply than I ever imagined. It's guiding, protecting and supporting while learning from them in return. I celebrate their joys, carry their fears and give a piece of my heart that lasts forever. It's the most extraordinary love I will ever know.

Q. How was Operation Dez Strong started?

A. Operation Dez Strong was launched after five-year-old Jonathin Perez, hospitalized for necrotizing fasciitis, was inspired by Dez Del Barba's story. Jonathin drew a picture of himself and Dez holding hands, sparking a connection between their families. From that act of encouragement, the nonprofit was created to provide financial and emotional support to amputee children and their families, helping them adapt, recover and thrive.

Q. How is Operation Dez Strong changing lives?

A. Operation Dez Strong changes lives by providing essential support to amputee children and their families when they need it most. The organization eases financial burdens by helping cover costs related to prosthetics, medical equipment and rehabilitation

that aren't fully covered by insurance. It connects families with others who understand the challenges of amputation, fostering hope, resilience and belonging, and provides practical resources, including education on recovery, adaptive tools and access to care, so children can pursue activity, independence and confidence.

Q. How is Dez doing today?

A. Dez has turned his journey into purpose and hope. He stays active with wheelchair tennis and quietly supports others through Operation Dez Strong, using his experience to help other amputees' children and wounded service members.

Q. What do you love most about your community?

A. My community is wonderfully diverse, and we all genuinely look out for one another.

Q. What brings you the most joy?

A. I love seeing others overcome challenges and thrive. Moments of resilience, kindness, and connection remind me why giving back matters. And a good cup of homemade Chai brings me simple, everyday joy.

Q. If you have free time, how do you most like to spend it?

A. With a cup of homemade chai; watching a good Bollywood movie helps me recharge.

Q. What accomplishment are you most proud of?

A. Holding the United States Army and the Department of Defense accountable and make serious changes for what they did to my son. You can read more at operationdezstrong.org. We are continuing our advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill with our lawmakers.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy?

A. Yoga at True You Yoga Studio on the Miracle Mile.

Q. Is there anything else you want to share?

A. Please take the time to educate yourselves on the severity of streptococcus A, also known as strep throat. What may seem minor can escalate quickly and have life-altering consequences. Strep A isn't just a sore throat. Strep A can cause serious and sometimes life-threatening complications; it can quickly turn deadly, causing necrotizing fasciitis, toxic shock, kidney failure, heart inflammation, sepsis and permanent tissue loss. A \$2 penicillin shot can prevent severe damage. Quick recognition and treatment can save lives, so don't ignore the warning signs. ♦

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SUPERHEROES IN HEELS PODCAST

What does it really look like when a woman stops waiting, stops apologizing and starts leading?

BY KIMBERLEY BORGENS
CEO, PODCAST HOST, SPEAKER, COACH, AUTHOR

That's the question and the unapologetic mission behind Superheroes in Heels, the bold, no-nonsense podcast hosted by Kimberley Borgens. The podcast was designed for women navigating life, business, leadership and male-dominated industries. The show isn't about surface-level motivation, it's about transformation with a little sass and a whole lot of truth.

At its core, the podcast is a rallying cry for women ready to step into their full power. It is not an "I am woman hear me roar" kind of show. It is more of a "been knocked down, have the scars to prove it but won't let that get in the way of being successful" kind of podcast. Each episode blends real-life experience, raw storytelling and practical strategy, creating a space where resilience meets execution. The message is clear: you don't need permission to lead; you need to decide.

What makes this podcast stand out in a crowded space is its refusal to sugarcoat the journey. From navigating shifting relationships as success grows to tackling financial confidence and breaking the "nice girl" habits that cost women money, Superheroes in Heels dives into the conversations many avoid but every ambitious woman needs. It's not just inspiration. It's a blueprint.

The Power Behind the Mic

Ever share something with someone that seemed ordinary to you, but others thought it was powerful?

After sharing many times some ordinary fundamental keys in business and in life, Kimberley was urged to create a podcast because she was willing to share the things other women didn't want to talk about, show how to do or give awareness too. This is why Superheroes in Heels was created.

From tough beginnings, married at 18, parent at 19 and divorced at 20, single mom on welfare, to building business, raising four kids and becoming the CEO of business, there are real life lessons to share with moms, sisters, friends and women leaders navigating in the world today.

Borgens brings over three decades of experience in business, including leading in male-dominated environments that has given her insights that go far beyond theory. Her voice is equal parts mentor, challenger and cheerleader.

Listeners don't just hear ideas; they hear lived experiences with truth intertwined in them.

One episode pulls back the curtain on how success can reshape marriages and friendships, revealing the emotional cost of growth. Another dismantles the myth of "getting ready," exposing it as a disguised form of procrastination that keeps women playing small. The result? A podcast that doesn't just make you think, it makes you move.

Here Are Five Business Power Moves from Superheroes in Heels

If you're looking for actionable takeaways, here are five standout lessons pulled straight from the show.

1. STOP WAITING TO BE READY (EP. 43)

Perfection is a delay tactic. The podcast emphasizes that confidence doesn't come before action, it comes from it. Women often over-prepare, while success favors those willing to move before they feel "ready."

2. OWN YOUR FINANCIAL VOICE

Money isn't taboo, it's a tool. From negotiating salaries to pricing services, the show challenges women to speak boldly about finances and step into financial leadership without hesitation.

3. PLAYING SMALL IS COSTING YOU MORE THAN YOU THINK

Every time you dim your light, you lose opportunities, income and influence. The podcast pushes women to show up fully, even when it feels uncomfortable, because visibility creates momentum.

4. REDEFINE RELATIONSHIPS AS YOU RISE (EP. 44)

Growth changes dynamics at home, in friendships and in business. Instead of shrinking to maintain comfort, the podcast encourages open communication and creating new "rules" for evolving relationships.

5. STEP INTO THE CEO IDENTITY - NOW

You don't earn the CEO title after success; you claim it on the way there. Thinking, acting and decision-making like a leader is what creates results, not the other way around.

More Than a Podcast—A Movement

What Superheroes in Heels ultimately delivers is more than business advice. It's a mindset shift.

It's about helping women see themselves differently; stronger, bolder, and more capable than they've been conditioned to believe. It's about replacing hesitation with action, silence with confidence and doubt with direction.

And perhaps most importantly, it reminds listeners that they're not alone on the journey.

Because when women hear real stories of resilience, courage, and leadership, something powerful happens; they begin to believe they can do it too.

So, whether you're building a business, stepping into leadership, or simply tired of playing small, this podcast offers an invitation:

Put on the heels, own the room and step into the role you were always meant to lead. •

Listen to Superheroes In Heels with Kimberley Borgens in your favorite podcast app or visit KimberleyBorgens.com for podcasts and transcriptions.



Sandra Merriweather

The Quiet Strength Behind the Spotlight

BY JO ANN KIRBY

The third time Sandra Merriweather of Stockton gave birth, she witnessed firsthand how quickly circumstances in childbirth can dangerously shift and how critical attentive care and careful assessment are in protecting both mother and baby. The experience left a lasting impression that prompted the doctoral-level medical scholar to advocate for maternal and infant health to reduce mortality rates.

As perinatal service coordinator for San Joaquin County Pub-

lic Health Services, in collaboration with health plans and medical providers, Sandra provides education about prenatal and postpartum women on health matters that affect them and their babies. "My goal is to improve maternal and infant health outcomes, specifically by reducing low-birthweight babies and providing comprehensive care coordination, psychosocial and health assessments in maternal health in coordination with physicians and medical staff as well as supportive public health staff through

quarterly educational trainings,” she said.

Sandra's work is especially important in San Joaquin County, which has the highest infant mortality rate in the state for black babies at 12.4 deaths per live 1,000 births, according to California Department of Public Health report released in 2023. And national Centers for Disease Control data show maternal mortality rates for black women at 44.8 deaths per 100,000 live births — more than three times higher than white women. “She has a huge influence in work on immunizations, prenatal care and post-partum mental health,” Vena Ford, director of Community, Marketplace and Member Engagement for Health Plan of San Joaquin, said of Sandra's work.

Her mission to create a healthier community is just one of many hats this wife, mother and grandmother wears. Sandra is a doctoral-level medical scholar and a licensed advanced practiced health care professional who already holds a masters in nursing and a bachelor of science in nursing. She is also a missionary for her church as well as an author and poet. But there is one additional role that has taken her to the brightest stadium lights in the country!

As the wife of NFL legend Michael Merriweather, she has played a supporting role. The linebacker played at University of the Pacific. He was a third-round draft pick in 1982. The “sack man,” a three-time Pro Bowler, would go on to play for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Minnesota Vikings, New York Jets and the Green Bay Packers before retiring after the 1993 season. “Football may have been his profession but being his partner has been my privilege. Behind his challenges, to this day, I believe in him, and that belief has been the most beautiful part of it all,” Sandra affirmed.

The glamour is still there but for the 2026 Super Bowl, it was her turn to shine. Sandra was asked to take part in the 25th annual Off the Field NFL Players' Wives Association Charity Fashion Show in San Francisco, California, where she once lived, attended college and received her first job as a registered nurse working in the neurological care units. The event, featuring hall of famers, current and legendary NFL players' wives, took place February 6, 2026, during Super Bowl LX Week in San Francisco. “It still makes me emotional just to think about what an honor it was to unite with my NFL sisters and have them bring the fashion show to my area,” she said before tears started to trickle down her face. The experience was as dazzling as one would expect, complete with a glam team, designer wardrobe, pink carpet, top tier swag and, something she will never forget, a performance by Ashanti! “Best of all, it raised money for the Boys and Girls Clubs of San Francisco and Oakland, California,” Sandra beamed.

It was a well-deserved break for the woman who never takes a break!

Sandra learned her work ethic from her parents. “I had 43 foster siblings over the years,” the Vallejo native said. Her parents, in addition to taking in children in need, ran a residential care facility, pastored at a local church, ran a pre-

school and owned multiple properties, all while holding down other jobs. She grew up in Vallejo and earned her first degree at Dominican University. “I used to watch Mike play baseball when I was just 12 years old, and I observed his high school football skills. My sister even married his brother, but I never would have thought we would have gotten together in a million years,” she said. Michael and Sandra would make their home in Stockton, where Michael graduated and played at University of the Pacific.

As she pursued her own career as a rapid care nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital, including as a district school nurse for Galt and school nurse for Lodi Unified School District, she became acutely aware of how children's concussions were treated differently than adults. “I had this situation where two children collided and the hospital didn't have a concussion protocol for youth at that time,” she said. “But I just knew they had suffered a concussion, which should be treated differently and with extreme caution.” She began to study the work of concussion expert Dr. Bennet Omalu, who was San Joaquin coroner at the time and a pioneer in CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy. She contacted Dr. Omalu for advice crying, not realizing he was on the set helping prepare for the movie *Concussion*, his part played by actor Will Smith. “Dr. Bennet Omalu was so nice and understood my compassion to help children,” Sandra noted. She would go on to write a book published in 2013. *A Football Wife's Research Study for the Love of the Games* detailed the signs and symptoms of concussive head injuries and how school nurses and coaches can better treat them.

Today, Sandra is still trying to make the world a better place. She continues to juggle her career, study after work for her continuing education, reach out to others in her ministry, judge beauty pageants and enjoy the flashes of glamour that come with post-NFL life, whether it's that unforgettable fashion show, a celebrity golf charity tournament or one of the many other philanthropic endeavors that make up post-NFL life.

This Mother's Day, Sandra is even more mindful of her goal. “Every mother deserves to feel safe. Every baby deserves a healthy beginning and every life deserves someone willing to care deeply enough to make a difference,” she asserted. As her friend and peer Lou Ella V. Taylor, PhD, CNS, RN, said, “Driven by an unwavering dedication to improving the health of others, Sandra is a trusted advocate who combines technical brilliance with deep compassion to make a lasting, tangible difference in the lives of her patients, community and the health of society as a whole.”

What began as a conversation about the life of an NFL wife ultimately revealed something much deeper. A story about purpose, compassion and service, a life lived between the worlds of medicine and professional sports, united by a simple commitment to care for others. Sandra further stated, “It is about service, advocacy, commitment, resilience, partnerships, unity and purpose born from experience.” ♦



NATIONAL STROKE AWARENESS MONTH: THE F.A.S.T. WAY TO RECOGNIZE A STROKE

BY LISA BUTLER

Every year approximately 800,000 people in the U.S. experience a stroke; that's about one stroke every 40 seconds. It is the fifth most common cause of death and a leading cause of disability in the country. For every person who dies from stroke, five people who experience one will survive. If you know the warning signs of a stroke and are able to react quickly, you can help your family member or you survive a stroke and lead a healthy, normal life.

A stroke occurs if the flow of oxygen-rich blood to a portion of the brain is blocked. Without oxygen, brain cells start to die after a few minutes. Sudden bleeding in the brain also can cause a stroke if it damages brain cells.

Almost three-fourths of all strokes occur in people 65 years of age or older. However, a person of any age, even a child, can have a stroke. The two main types of stroke are ischemic and hemorrhagic. About 87 percent of all strokes are ischemic strokes, which are caused by reduced blood flow to the brain when blood vessels are blocked by a clot or become too narrow for blood to flow through. Brain cells in the area die from lack of oxygen. In hemorrhagic strokes, the weakened blood vessel ruptures



and bleeds into the surrounding tissues, compressing them and causing damage.

Knowing the signs and symptoms of a stroke is the first step to making sure medical help is received immediately. In each minute a stroke goes untreated and blood flow to the brain is blocked, a person loses about 1.9 million neurons. This could mean that their speech, movement, memory, behavior and more can be affected.

ACT F.A.S.T!

FAST is an acronym for an easy way to remember and identify the most common symptoms of a stroke. Recognition of stroke and calling 911 will determine how quickly someone will receive help and treatment. The faster you get a stroke victim to the hospital, the more likely their recovery

will be more successful. Check out FAST for signs of a stroke.

F: Face – Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

A: Arms – Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

S: Speech – Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?

T: Time – If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Other symptoms of stroke include numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, trouble understanding others and problems seeing with one or both eyes. If someone is having difficulty walking or staying balanced, or if they appear dizzy and confused, they may be experiencing a stroke. The first priority is to call for help but make a note of the time of the first symptom, as this important information can affect treatment decisions as well as recovery afterward.

PREVENTION

Although some risks are hereditary, everyone can reduce their stroke chances through simple lifestyle changes, many of which are the same strategies that are advised to prevent heart disease. Monitoring and controlling blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes can decrease the risk of stroke. In addition, maintaining a healthy weight, eating a nutritious diet and exercising regularly all combine for a reduced risk of stroke.

Smoking almost doubles the risk of stroke in smokers compared to nonsmokers, since it thickens blood and builds plaque in the arteries. Drinking too much alcohol can also increase blood pressure and

the risk of stroke. By modifying behaviors, knowing hereditary risks and being aware of warning signs, a person can dramatically decrease their chances of experiencing a stroke.

AFTER A STROKE

Stroke affects everyone differently, but most survivors improve over a period of time, which may be months or years. Recovery from stroke involves making changes in the physical, social and emotional aspects of life. Survivors may experience a grieving process similar to those who have experienced death or divorce.

The success of stroke recovery varies depending on a number of factors, including how much damage the stroke caused, how soon recovery is started and how high the motivation is to work toward recovery. Patients and families should be proactive in seeking guidance from their doctor or nurse about prevention and rehabilitation. Excellent advice and publications can also be obtained from the national stroke education associations.

While it is normal to feel sad, angry or anxious after a stroke, some people will also worry about work, money, relationships and more. By going through a strategic rehabilitation and taking a more active approach to quality of life, patients can get back to normalcy and live as independently as possible. ♦

SOURCES: strokeassociation.org, nhlbi.nih.gov and stroke.org.

Note: strokeassociation.org and stroke.org are different stroke education associations.



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When you recognize the signs of a stroke, you need to head to the ER right away—because the faster someone gets help for a stroke, the stronger they recover. So, if you ever see or experience symptoms such as facial drooping, slurred speech, numbness or weakness in the arms and legs, confusion, trouble seeing, severe headache (with no explanation), dizziness, or problems walking—don't take a chance.

St. Joseph's Medical Center is a certified Primary Stroke Center, giving you access to advanced, life-saving care right in the place you call home. Learn all the ways stroke symptoms can manifest at dignityhealth.org/stockton/stroke.

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LODI ADOPT-A-CHILD

A HAND UP, NOT JUST A HANDOUT



This is the mission of Lodi Adopt-A-Child for disadvantaged children in the Lodi community. The idea for the foundation began nearly 40 years ago when Lodi police officer Dennis Lewis got his coworkers and friends together to collect donations that would be used to purchase Christmas gifts for children in need who he and other officers encountered in their work.

Some 37 years later, Lodi Adopt-A-Child still operates its annual Christmas Wish Program, along with three other programs including Activity Scholarships, Hope Outfitters and the Claude Brown Memorial Scholarship.

"While people know about Lodi Adopt-A-Child, they know us mostly for our Christmas Wish Program and perhaps not much about the other ways we help children," Rick Freedman, president of Lodi Adopt-A-Child, said of the program that gives children in need a chance to fill out a Christmas wish list. Good Samaritans in the community are then invited to pick up an Angel Card that has the wishes listed so they can donate specific items for the kids.

Activity Scholarships are a way that the organization helps children throughout the year. "Our Activity Scholarships help children who want to play sports, take music classes or drama classes. We have children who need an instrument rental, for example," Rick said.

The Activity Scholarships help children with after-school, weekend and summer extracurricular sports, drama classes, music lessons and other activities. The organization partners with Lodi Parks and Recreation Department, the Boosters of Boys and Girls Sports, Changing Faces Theatre Company, Sayla Music Academy and the Community Partnership for Families of San Joaquin. The scholarships may involve purchasing cleats and practice gear for a child wanting to play soccer or paying the soccer signup fee.

"Another program that is very important is our Hope Outfitters," Rick said. "Teachers and school liaisons will contact us when they encounter a student who doesn't have warm clothes or they have holes in their shoes." Lodi Adopt-A-Child will shop for the appropriate clothes and shoes to help take care of the child in need.

A fourth effort to help children succeed is the Claude Brown Memorial Scholarship in honor of Lodi Adopt-A-Child's third

president. The organization offers two \$1,000 scholarships to graduating seniors at Lodi high schools who are pursuing a degree in agriculture or engineering.

Rick said they could do more, but the nonprofit counts on the generosity of donations to make a difference. They also count on a bevy of volunteers, especially during the Christmas Wish Program season. "We provided Christmas gifts for children from 400-plus families last year," he said. "All those gifts need to be wrapped and boxed up. That's where our volunteers come in."

Rexie LeStrange is one such volunteer. She said the nonprofit's work is really making a difference in the Lodi community. "My son got me into it. He's a Lodi police officer and Lodi Police have always been involved in Lodi Adopt-A-Child. I was retired and my son said I should help out," she said. "So, I picked up a couple of Angel cards and bought gifts. I thought, wow, this is cool." Next, she became a full-fledged volunteer, working at the front desk, doing data entry to keep the wish lists organized, working fundraisers. "It always makes you feel good when you are helping out someone else. It's great," she affirmed. "I think it's a very good organization. I believe they are helping so many children. To see the children and all their happy faces makes it all worth the while."

Lodi Adopt-A-Child needs help from the community in three key ways, Rich suggested. First, he invites the public to go online to lodiadoptachild.org and click on Make a Donation, which allows donors to make a one-time donation or to give monthly and annually. Those donations help fund the foundation's programming. Second, he encourages community members to take an Angel Card in November and purchase gifts for the Christmas Wish Program. Finally, "We could always use more volunteers, especially at Christmas, when helping hands are needed to wrap gifts," he noted.

"We've been talking about other things we might do," he said. "But that takes funding." The community's generosity is most appreciated, whether it's a monetary donation, gifts for the wish lists or helping hands!

To contact Lodi Adopt-A-Child, visit lodiadoptachild.org or call (209) 333-1056. •

This feature was made possible through nonprofit capacity-building support from the Lodi Community Foundation. Are you interested in leaving a legacy or maximizing your charitable goals? Let's talk...

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MOTHERHOOD HAS MANY FACES

BY MARILYN ISAMINGER

Becoming a mom may take us by surprise. Or it may have been a long-planned and hoped-for dream. It can leave us breathless with its new joy and wonder as those we mother grow and change every day. We become mothers through nature, nurture, choice and most assuredly through love. And we know that the depth and poignancy of this mother love never ends



The spectrum of motherhood is as diverse as the many women who are called by the various “Mom” names. This month we pay tribute to the affection that is shared through these myriad relationships.

The act of bringing a new life into the world is accompanied by a multitude of feelings—joy, gratitude, hope for the future, wonder, perhaps a touch of uncertainty that one isn’t up to the task. Jessica Lange puts it simply: “The natural state of motherhood is unselfishness.

When you become a mother, you are no longer the center of your own universe. You relinquish that position to your children.”

A mother of a child who is adopted will quickly clarify that there’s no diminishment

of love because they don’t share genes. For her, motherhood transcends biology, and it’s been said that creating family is not about blood; it’s about who is willing to hold your hand when you need it most. “Adoption has the dimension of connection—not only to your own tribe, but beyond, widening the scope of what constitutes love,

ties and family,” said Isabella Rossellini. “It is a larger embrace. By adopting, we stretch past our immediate circles and, by reaching out, find an unexpected sense of belonging with others.”

Emily Perl Kinglsey, describing the experience of being a mother to a child with a disability, likens it to planning a fabulous trip to Italy but landing in Holland. “So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people that you would never have met. It’s just a different place...But after you’ve been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around...and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills...and Holland has tulips.” Terri Mauro, author of *50 Ways to Support Your Child’s Special Education*, says, “Having a child with special needs brings with it abundant opportunities for grace. It slows you down and allows you to enjoy the little things—a calm quiet day, a hard-won skill, a spontaneous hug, a pleasant conversation...Miracles happen every day, if you only know where to look for them.”

Many women who are blessed by marrying a man with children, young or adult, wish the word “step” could be stricken from the English language. Yes, there are challenges with blending two families, but frequently the rewards far outweigh the difficulties. I fall on both sides of the fence; I have a wonderful mom who came into our family when I was 18, and I became a bonus mom myself years later. Mutual respect, love, forgiveness and friendship establish bonds within a blended family that may be as strong as biological ties.

Author Hope Edelman, at the age of 29, published *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss*, an exhaustively researched work that ex-

plores the myriad, lifelong issues facing women who have lost their mothers. She says, “There is an emptiness inside of me—a void that will never be filled. No one in your life will ever love you as your mother does. There is no love as pure, unconditional and strong as a mother’s love. And I will never be loved that way again.” If you are one of these women, Edelman understands that Mother’s Day may be a double-edged sword, celebrating the mother who gave life and yet still feeling longing and grief. She suggests making your mother part of the day—cooking one of her recipes, talking about her, telling her stories, recognizing her and celebrating her life.

Mothers who have lost a child, at any age, from any cause, have experienced life-altering change accompanied by a roller coaster of emotions. The “closure” that is a part of the grieving process is elusive or non-existent; these moms are never the same person they were before, but nevertheless they will always be a mother to the child who was lost.

Mothers who are raising their grandchildren, moms of choice—aunts, sisters, your friend’s mother who treats you as her own—are all part of the many faces of a mother’s love. Recognizing these women is part of our celebration as well.

Ironically, Anna Jarvis, who lobbied Woodrow Wilson to name a national Mother’s Day 117 years ago, remained unmarried and childless her whole life. Let’s remember her efforts—call your mom, whatever her name is and wherever she may be! ♦

SOURCES: adoptionmamablog.com, brainyquotes.com, cnn.com, compassionatefriends.org, history.com and specialchildren.about.com.



She says “hold hands, Nana,” and my heart melts...

I snap a photo and notice the contrast between our hands. Hers are soft and silky, while mine are rugged from life’s journey. Initially, I’m tempted to hide the picture, unfamiliar of the worn hands that stare back at me. But then I’m struck by the realization that these hands of mine have accumulated stories, wisdom, and love over the years. They’ve been faithful companions, serving me with dedication and devotion. I choose to celebrate their strength and every line that tells a tale – a tale of love, hard work and resilience.

– Nana Vicky

TAKE FLIGHT!

The Mary Graham Scholarship Foundation hosted Take Flight! to honor Dianne and Gene Gini, owners of 102-year-old Collins Electrical Co., and raised much-needed scholarship funds. The fundraiser was held March 20, 2026, at The River Mill in French Camp. The nonprofit is committed to providing trade school and college scholarships, ensuring that former foster youth have equal access to education and a chance to build a successful future. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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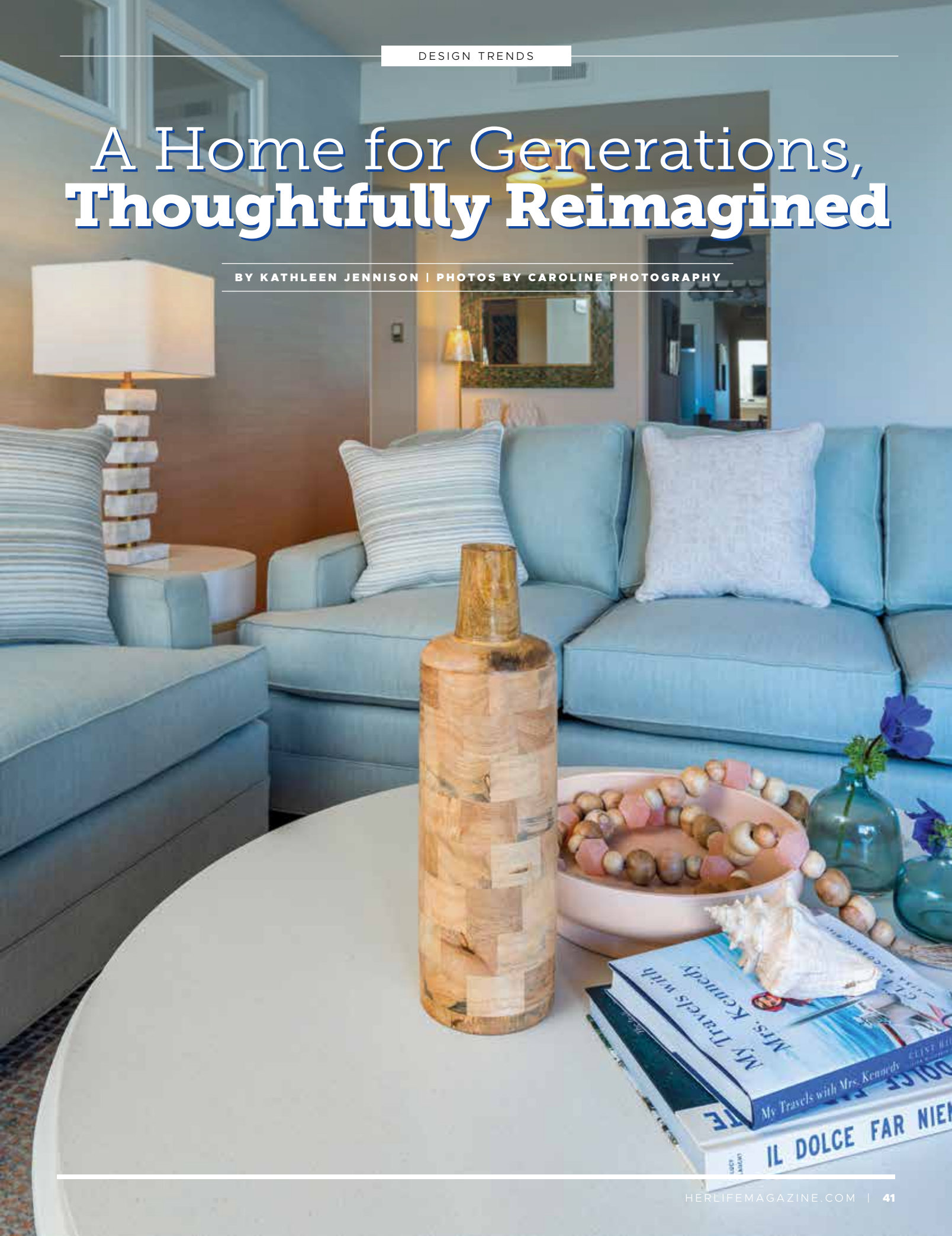
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A Home for Generations, Thoughtfully Reimagined

BY KATHLEEN JENNISON | PHOTOS BY CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY





There are homes you design, and then there are homes you inherit. The difference isn't just age or architecture. It's memory.

For Allen and Mary, their Santa Cruz beach condo has been part of family life since the 1970s. It's where summers stretched long into the evening, where multiple generations gathered and where the rhythm of the ocean became part of everyday living. Over time, though, the space no longer reflected how they used it, or how they wanted it to feel moving forward.

This wasn't their first time working with KTJ Design Co. In fact, it was their fifth project together. That kind of relationship shifts the design process in a meaningful way. There's an ease, a shared language and a level of trust that allows for deeper, more thoughtful decisions.

For this project, the goal wasn't to erase the past. It was to carry it forward, with clarity and intention.

Coastal Without the Cliché

Designing a beach home often comes with expectations, light blues, seashells and overt nautical references. But Allen and Mary wanted something more refined, something that felt connected to the coast without being overly literal.

The design team responded with a layered approach rooted in natural materials and subtle references. Grasscloth wallcoverings add warmth and texture. Woven light fixtures, wicker benches and whitewashed wood introduce an organic softness. The palette stays within a range of soft blues, warm neutrals and crisp whites, evok-

ing the coastline without imitating it. The result is a home that feels calm and grounded, where the influence of the ocean is present but never overstated.

Design That Responds to Real Life

One of the most impactful changes in the home didn't involve color or furniture, but structure. A room originally labeled as a "library" had long functioned as a makeshift bedroom. It opened directly into the living space through a series of wide bypass doors, offering little privacy and limiting how both rooms could be used.

The solution required rethinking how the space functioned. The oversized opening was reduced and replaced with a single door, instantly creating a more private and defined bedroom. To maintain airflow and connection to the rest of the home, interior windows were added along the shared wall, allowing ocean breezes from the rear sliding doors to circulate through the space. The transformation is subtle when viewed in isolation but significant in how it changes daily life. What was once an in-between space now feels intentional and complete.

Elevating Through Lighting and Detail

Throughout the condo, lighting plays a quiet but transformative role. In the entry and hallways, semi-flush fixtures were selected with intention. The family is tall, and maintaining clear headroom was a practical consideration that influenced the design. These choices may seem small, but they reflect a larger philosophy that good design responds to the people who live in the space.

In the kitchen, which had been recently remodeled, new pendant lights and counter stools were introduced to bring the room into alignment with the rest of the home. The materials and finishes echo the broader palette, creating a sense of continuity.

Bedrooms received varying levels of attention depending on need. The guest room was refreshed with updated artwork and lighting, while the main bedroom underwent a more complete transformation, with new furniture, bedding and layered details that create a restful, retreat-like atmosphere.

Where Personality Lives

Beyond layout and materials, the most meaningful moments in a home often come from the details that reflect the people who live there. For Allen and Mary, that meant incorporating personal touches that feel collected rather than styled. Whale bookends, curated books and small decorative objects bring warmth and character into the space.

Mary's reaction captured this perfectly. "The whale bookends and blue books are just darling." These elements may be small, but they're essential. They turn a well-designed space into one that feels lived in, loved, and distinctly personal.

The Value of Trust in Design

Working with a designer for the first time often comes with uncertainty. Questions about cost, process and value naturally arise. By the fifth project, those questions have been answered

through experience.

"Wow. Everything looks so good. It's so elevated. You guys did an amazing job," Mary shared. Allen added, "It looks like a totally different condo." That transformation didn't come from a single dramatic change. It came from a series of thoughtful decisions, made with clarity and confidence, each one building on the next. For KTJ Design Co., that's where the real value lies. Not just in creating beautiful spaces, but in guiding clients through the process in a way that feels steady, intentional, and aligned with their lives.

A Home That Moves Forward

In the end, this Santa Cruz condo is still the same home it has always been. It still holds decades of memories. It still welcomes family and friends. It still lives in rhythm with the ocean just outside its doors.

But now, it also reflects the present. It supports how Allen and Mary gather, relax, and move through their days. It feels lighter, more functional, and more aligned with who they are now. For a home that has already lived many lives, that may be the most meaningful transformation of all. ♦



Kathleen Jennison is the founder of KTJ Design Co., creating thoughtfully designed homes that support clients in their next chapter with clarity, confidence, and ease.

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RECIPE & PHOTO PROVIDED BY BELLYFULL.NET



Stock photo by Vecteezy

INGREDIENTS

2 cups fresh raspberries
¼ cup chia seeds
½ cup sugar
1 cup water

DIRECTIONS

Place all ingredients in a medium-sized heavy metal pot; bring to a boil. Reduce heat so the contents of the pot don't splatter everywhere but still bubble in the pot. Stir constantly so the mixture doesn't stick and the seeds don't burn! Stir and boil until the mixture has reduced and thickened to the point that it drips off the spoon slowly, about 5 minutes. Pour into clean glass jars, leaving a half-inch clearance from the top. Allow to cool for 1 hour. Seal with lid and place in the fridge overnight to continue cooling. ♦

TIPS

1: Enjoy this jam spread on toast or homemade crepes.

2: Garnish a cheesecake.

3: Gift a jar to your mom!



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Rae Coffee Company

Local Entrepreneur Launches After Overcoming Trailer Setback

BY HERLIFE STAFF | PHOTO PROVIDED BY RAE COFFEE COMPANY

What began as a frustrating setback has turned into a growing small business success story in the Lodi community. After plans for a mobile coffee trailer were halted during an inspection process, local entrepreneur Tyler Rae chose not to walk away from her vision. Instead, she pivoted.

Determined to move forward, Tyler launched Rae Coffee Company, a mobile espresso cart specializing in handcrafted coffee and matcha, serving events throughout Lodi and surrounding areas. While the trailer project faced delays during inspection, the business itself is fully approved and permitted through the local health department.

“Getting stopped during the trailer inspection process was definitely discouraging,” Tyler said. “But I knew I still wanted to bring this to life, so I found another way to make it happen.”

With a streamlined mobile setup, Rae Coffee Company delivers a full espresso bar experience directly to customers. The cart features freshly brewed espresso drinks, lattes and premium matcha beverages made with high-quality ingredients, offering a boutique café feel at weddings, corporate events, fitness studio gatherings, private parties and community events.

“At Rae Coffee Co, I’m committed to serving locally roasted coffee and showing up for the community,” she said. “Specializing in private pop-up events, we bring the coffee shop to you.

Learn more about what we offer on the services tab!”

The concept is simple: bring specialty coffee directly to people where they are. Each event is designed to feel elevated yet approachable, with drinks crafted by a trained barista and a menu that blends classic favorites with modern options. From iced lattes to vibrant matcha, Rae Coffee Company focuses on quality, consistency, and creating memorable guest experience. “Whether it’s a local farmers market or a private celebration, my goal is to help people make memories one cup at a time,” she said.

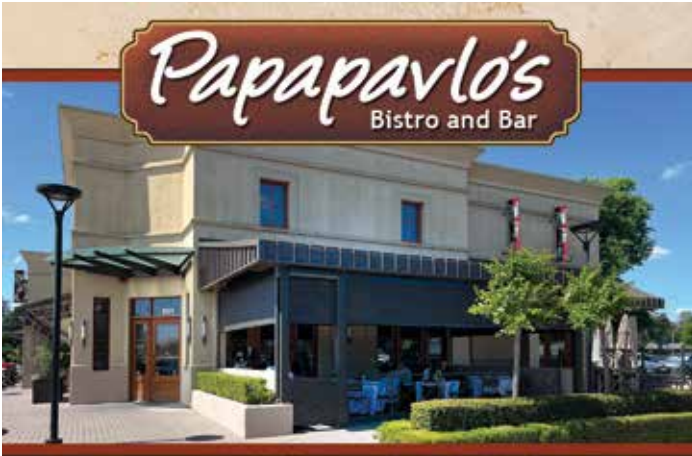
For Tyler, the journey has become about more than just coffee. “Building this business taught me that things do not always go as planned,” she said. “You can either stop there, or you can adjust and keep going. I chose to keep going.”

Since launching, Rae Coffee Company has quickly gained traction, booking events across Lodi and nearby communities. The business is becoming a go-to addition for hosts looking to offer something elevated and memorable for their guests. ♦

Rae Coffee Company is currently accepting bookings for upcoming events in Lodi and surrounding communities. For bookings, event inquiries, or media information, contact Tyler Rae, Rae Coffee Company at (209) 227-4788 online at raecoffeeco.com.

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LESSONS OF GIRL SCOUT COOKIE SALES



KIDS SHINING BRIGHTLY

BY JO ANN KIRBY
PHOTOS BY TONYA TACLA PHOTOGRAPHY

Girl Scout season is over for one Lodi high school student, but the skills she's learned during the past years will stay with her forever. "I have sold Girl Scout cookies since the age of five," shared Wilder Neff, a 17-year-old senior who attends Aspire Benjamin Holt College Preparatory Academy in Stockton. "I think I've sold about 9,057 packages of cookies. Until 2021, I was sharing sales with my sister."

Selling Girl Scout cookies has taught her volumes about sales and marketing. "I've learned to greet every possible customer, ask for the sale, perform quick math and how to communicate with people," the Lodi native said. "I have also learned how to keep track of money, sales and potential customers for following years." When she was younger, her mom helped design door hanger fliers for the neighborhoods and created spreadsheets to keep track of customers and sales. But Wilder soon took on more responsibility and built on her mom's efforts. "On top of helping me, she organizes all the booth sales for my troop," Wilder said. "Without her help, I don't think my Girl Scout membership would have been as long as it has and the amount of cookies sales I've had would be much smaller."

Her involvement in scouting has also taught her about perseverance. As a sophomore in high school, she wanted to quit and felt overwhelmed but she realized it had a big place in her life. "It has taught me so many things such as how to make friends, how to manage myself in unpredictable situations and how to be innovative and resourceful in everyday life," she said. "I'm proud of myself for pushing through and learning to understand the value of Girl Scouts now that my time as a youth Girl Scout is ending."

With high school graduation coming up, she now has her sights set on college; she's planning a career in nursing that involves helping children. She hopes to attend the University of California, Irvine, to pursue a bachelor of science degree in biological sciences and become



a registered nurse. "While I'm there, I hope to be involved with my community, whether that is through the honors college, campus clubs or internships." She intends to use her education to pursue a career in nursing either as an intensive care unit nurse or pediatric nurse. "My interest in nursing has been informed by my passion for caring for others," she explained. "This passion has rubbed off onto my hobbies. I picked up crocheting two years ago and I've used my hobby to create plushies to sell and donate to my school's crochet club for children's hospitals."

Wilder said her biggest mentor and cheerleader is her mom, who has been a big help with Wilder's cookie sales and her academic success. "She is always there to push me to do things I don't have the motivation to do, such as harder classes, scholarship applications and applications for difficult colleges," she said. Wilder said her parents' decision to send her to a small charter school with a specific focus has allowed her to have the resources required to develop the intelligence and grit to apply to and be accepted into some very competitive universities. "If I had gone into a bigger high school with less of a focus on college, I'm not sure if I could have achieved this level of academic success," Wilder said.

Wilder has a great future ahead and a firm foundation with lots of support from her family, friends and her cookie customers who will not miss her! ♦



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LET THE MUSIC MOVE YOU

Staging Live Music With Passion

BY TIM DALY

Jessie's Grove owner and winemaker Greg Burns remembers instantly the performance that convinced him live music at the winery was the right thing to do. This was nearly 25 years ago when the winery was in the early stages of mixing wine tasting and tunes.

"It was underneath the big tree out there, with a beautiful sunset happening, and three musicians were playing Creedence Clearwater's *Stuck in Lodi*," said Greg. "I thought to myself, for people from the outside who don't know Lodi, this is stuck ON Lodi. This gets in your blood, and it becomes part of you."

Staging live music isn't a casual endeavor for the staff of Jessie's Grove. It's a passion, with performances happening all year, every Friday, Saturday and Sunday — rain or shine. The property's pasture can hold up to 1,500 music lovers. A more intimate space is just outside the tasting room, where a hundred or two gather for local musicians.

Jessie's Grove isn't the only San Joaquin County winery to offer live music to customers. Dozens of wineries do the same. You can find information on VisitLodi.com and visitstockton.org

One local band to take advantage of the winery opportunities is the Valley Groove Band, which performed one recent afternoon at Jessie's Grove. Afternoon gigs are a major plus for the group.

"It's the best," said band leader Randy Coss. "As our guitar player says, I can play, pack, go home and watch the rest of the Giant's game. That's the beauty, start at 4 o'clock and we're done at 7."

Lead singer Rachel Starr (who studied opera as a music student at UOP) loves the added opportunities to perform. "I've lived in Lodi for 35 years, and it's just been within the last few years where I've started to see more bands at wineries and breweries."

At that recent afternoon gig, Rachel put all those singing lessons to good use, belting out a very impressive version of Aretha Franklin's *Rock Steady*. She rejected the suggestion hard-driving, soulful songs might not work well for a wine-sipping afternoon audience. "I think they are an R&B, Motown crowd, especially with wine-sipping," said Rachel. "That's the whole vibe now in this area. It's hanging out with friends, listening to good music, getting a show while drinking local wines? I think it's amazing."

Even with the wine industry experiencing a recent downturn, Randy said it hasn't impacted bands like his. Plenty of booking possibilities remain. "If I wanted to book the band in Napa, I know I could. If I wanted to book the band in Reno, I probably could do that. In Livermore, with all the wineries over there, I could probably do that, too. But we have plenty right here, in the



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beautiful Lodi and Acampo area."

Jessie's Grove was first a ranch, then a farm growing wheat and watermelons. Wine grapes came later, and the winery started up in 1998. And the family feel has never been lost — Greg Burns is the great grandson of Jessie (Spenker), who took over management of the business in 1929. The idea of being a gathering spot for locals has also survived all those generations.

"We've been on this property since 1868. And we've always been involved with the community and events. Going back, we have a record of events happening here and in the late 1800s," said Greg. "We have this beautiful property. We want to go back to our roots and make it accessible for people to enjoy. What better way?"

John Fogerty (Creedence Clearwater Revival) has a Friday night gig in late June scheduled in the Sacramento area. Imagine if he and some friends ended up at one of the many local wineries that weekend for a bit of relaxation, sun, and music. He'd probably learn it's not so bad being stuck in Lodi after all. ♦



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.

VIETNAM VETERANS WALL VISITS STOCKTON

The Moving Wall Breakfast Fundraiser was held at the Hilton Stockton on March 27, 2026, to bring the community together in support of honoring Vietnam veterans and their families. Proceeds helped fund the upcoming visit of the Moving Wall, the only half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. The replica will be on display in Stockton from May 14 through 18 at Weber Point Events Center, Stockton. This powerful exhibit offers a meaningful opportunity for reflection, remembrance and education and will be free and open to the public 24 hours a day throughout its stay. For more information, visit stocktonmovingwall.com or email stocktonthemovingwall@gmail.com. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



HEROES AWARD DINNER

The Rotary Club of Stockton hosted its annual Heroes Award Dinner on March 25, 2026, at the Stockton Golf and Country Club to recognize outstanding members of local law enforcement and first responder agencies for their courage and service. Heroes' Night brings the community together each year to honor individuals whose actions reflect exceptional dedication to public safety and Service Above Self. Honorees included Detective Jordan Rosas of the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department, Officer Sawan Verma of the Stockton Police Department, Officer Julius Muniz of the California Highway Patrol, and Captain Xavier Ricci of the Stockton Fire Department, for actions that protected lives and strengthened the community. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



READING SUPPORT FROM FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS: READING EDUCATION ASSISTANCE DOGS

BY REBECCA FLANSBURG

Whether your child is a strong or a struggling reader, sometimes a little encouragement and support can come from not only an unexpected place, but in form of a furry listener with four legs and a wagging tail.

Throughout history dogs have been used to help in just about every aspect of human life. They've been used as burglar alarms, spies, eyes, hands, cancer detectors, and of course, companions, just to name a few. Since 1999, they have also been officially used as reading companions.

Intermountain Therapy Animals began a literacy program with therapy dogs in Salt Lake City to assist children in becoming better readers and to encourage improvement in communication skills. Now, more than 15 years since its inception and with more than 3,000 teams of trained dogs and their owners, this worldwide organization is helping kids not just to read and communicate better, but also cultivate a love for books and the written word.

But becoming a reading therapy dog is more than just enlisting Fido to connect with kids while they read. Dogs and their owners must register with one of the therapy pet training programs such as Pet Partners or Therapy Dogs Inc. and undergo training through



the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.®) program. The R.E.A.D. program improves children's reading and communication skills by employing a powerful method—reading to an animal. R.E.A.D. companions are registered therapy animals who volunteer with their owner/handlers as a team, going to schools, libraries and many other settings as reading companions for children. Once the dog and owner get their paperwork approved, they can go into any number of venues as a registered R.E.A.D. team and enjoy the pleasure of opening the world of books to children. These trained teams can be found throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa,

Scandinavia and other countries.

WHY ARE READING THERAPY DOGS IMPORTANT?

When you stop to consider that nearly 80 percent of people identified with learning disabilities are reading disabled, it's encouraging

to know that research shows that simply reading to a dog can help improve reading skills. Programs in libraries, schools and other institutions are helping kids of all abilities turn on to books as they read to a four-legged listener.

These reading therapy dogs are doing a lot to help children conquer their fear and/or embarrassment around their lack reading abilities. Some children improve their reading levels by as much as three or four grade levels over time while participating in animal-assisted therapy with regular contact.

Children who have difficulty reading suffer in many ways and problems become compounded over time. Insufficient reading skills can have a major impact upon a person's entire life affecting all areas. It's not just about reading books; illiteracy can mean an inability to deal with simple tasks such as directions for putting a toy together. These problems compound as the child enters adulthood and needs to do things such as study for a driver's test, fill out a job application or read directions on a prescription.

BENEFITS OF READING WITH A DOG

It's a fairly well-known fact that pets, especially dogs and cats, can have a calming effect on people, and studies have demonstrated that companion animals lower blood pressure and reduce stress. Research has also shown that increased blood pressure and high stress levels inhibit the learning process. When children read with a dog present, they tend to be calmer and more relaxed.

Michelle McCaughtry, R.E.A.D. program member and owner of a

reading therapy dog named Lulu, had this to share about the benefits of four-legged reading buddies. "Most kids become motivated when they are reading to a dog," she shared. "Our reading assistance dog Lulu is very patient and calm and likes to snuggle up to the young readers who visit her. If our young readers are physically touching Lulu as they read, they automatically relax and the words seemingly become clear and easy for them to read. We've also found that readers who are very shy and self-conscious about reading in front of others don't feel that way when they read to Lulu. They know that Lulu will never judge, interrupt, criticize, laugh, correct them or hurry them along. She will just lie there and let them read; she's a perfect listener."

Breaking through the fear and angst of reading by reading to a canine companion can put a child on the road to a life-long love of books and open up a world of possibilities. The love of reading at a young age will help our children carry that love forward into adulthood, and good reading skills are critical for readers of any age. If a reading assistance dog can help someone get to that point of loving reading, it's one more wonderful thing a dog can do.

Even more, it's very rewarding for the human portion of the team. If you believe your canine companion would be suitable for this crucial job, don't hesitate to find your local pet partner or therapy certifying group and get started! ♦

SOURCES: nmu.edu, petpartners.org, therapyanimals.org and therapydogs.com.

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Caddy Mulligan

THE FELINE GOLF LEGEND

BY HERLIFE STAFF

Q. What's your full name?

A. Caddy Mulligan, Purr-fect Put-ter, Greenskeeper Extraordinaire and undefeated champion of the living room links. I'm a Lynx Point Siamese; the links run through my blood, born to golf!

Q. How would you describe your personality?

A. I'm confident, precise and high maintenance in true champion style. Life is my course, and I play every day like it's a major—four snack rounds, twilight rounds before dinner, waking up my mommy for 4:00 a.m. breakfast balls, and perfecting my kitty litter bunker like a sand trap every golfer fears. I always aim to break the course record to beat my masters, Sam and Frances.

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

A. I never step foot outside my four-walled oasis; after living in the streets, I know the value of my country club life forever! My hammock in front of the TV from Auntie Pam is perfect for logging hours of observation, FaceTime with my cousins Mia, Natalie and Elliana in sunny San Diego and strategic TV naps. My tower from Uncle Josh in Hawaii gives me the ultimate eagle-eye view. I have my indoor putting green and golf simulator to practice my paw swing anytime. The backyard fairway is my main course, where I patrol like a member of the gallery and serve as marshal with keen security for my humans' house, keeping all hazards in check. I love racing my parents up the stairs and arriving on command when Mommy hollers, "Come, come!" at every meal tee time. The electric blanket tent is my private bunker for strategic naps and planning my next play.

Q. Tell us about Paw Patrol.

A. I created a Paw Patrol exclusive club membership with my neighbor cat friends to inspect the greens before my grandpa tees up with his Dawn Patrol buddies. I supervise my humans' safety, hide from new visitors when I need quiet, and VIP access is extended to my babysitter Amaya Jordan as well as my grandparents—bonus points on my leaderboard for their clubhouse visits.



Q. Do you have a guilty pleasure?

A. Chasing wine corks, laser pointers, rubber running bracelets and golf balls. Smelling Daddy's golf shoes after a fresh-cut grass victory lap is divine. I help Daddy as greenskeeper on his laptop while he earns his Masters at UOP and provide extra grooming after rubbing his beard. I even help design their golf clothing line; yes, it includes pet clothes named after yours truly! Tiger Woods inspires my putting, but Happy Gilmore inspires my flair and attitude. Tissue paper hazards and empty boxes are my personal training grounds for birthday rounds and hazard drills.

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

A. Fancy Foods Seafood Varieties, Meow Mix Kibble topped with Friskies seafood treats and squeezable Kindfull™ delicious surprises. Every snack is a hole-in-one on my taste scorecard.

Q. What are your favorite things about your life?

A. Cuddling on Daddy's chest for morning purrs, massaging Mommy's legs, running up and down the stairs and curling up under my electric blanket tent are all part of my daily course management. I celebrate every birthday with spoilt gifts from my parents and grandparents. Life revolves around golf, cuddles, snacks, style and keeping my humans safe and entertained.

Q. Where were you adopted from?

A. For my Daddy's birthday present, I was adopted from East of Eden Animal Rescue in Tracy by Mommy, who I help by giving back through hundreds of community service hours creating programs for foster youth throughout Stockton where I call home sweet home now.

Q. Who are your human parents?

A. Sam and Frances Cogo, my forever clubhouse champions! As they say, "Happy Gilmore swings, Tiger Woods inspires, and Caddy Mulligan purrs." ♦



*Happy
Mother's
Day!*

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Points
2026
SEASON
IS HERE



**GET
YOUR
TIX!**



CELEBRATE COMMUNITY EVENTS

MAY 2

Kentucky Derby West
Oak Farm Vineyards
Info: hospicesj.org

MAY 14-18

The (Vietnam) Moving Wall
Weber Point Event Center
Info: (209) 608-7070

MAY 25

Lodi Blooms Memorial Day
5K Run/Walk
11560 N. Sacramento St.
Info: chinchiolofarming.com

MAY 2

Chanticleer: An Orchestra of Voice
Hutchins Street Square
Info: (209) 327-1875

MAY 16

Community Health Fair
1151 W. Robinhood Dr.
Info: stocktoncommunityhealthfair.com

MAY 3

Lodi Street Fair
Downtown Lodi
Info: visitlodi.com

MAY 16

Linden Cherry Festival
18100 E. Front Street
Info: visitstockton.org

MAY 7

Live Music: Johnathan Seiberlich
Live Music: Johnathan Seiberlich
Info: hagginmuseum.org

MAY 16

Black Foodie Festival
Victory Park
Info: (209) 279-8299

MAY 9

Stockton Symphony: Grand Epic
Atherton Auditorium
Info: stocktonsymphony.org

MAY 17

Breaking Bread on the 50 Yard Line
St. Mary's High School
Info: (209) 957-3340

MAY 14, 21, 28

Lodi Certified Farmers Market
Downtown Lodi
Info: visitlodi.org

MAY 20

State of the City
Adventist Health Arena
Info: stocktonchamber.org

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

JUNE 7

**Festa
Italiana**

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds
Info: festa-italiana.com

JUNE 27

**Runabouts
on the River**

Stockton Sailing Club
Info: acbsrotr.com

Stockton families start here.

From the time you find out you're expecting, you dream of the first moment holding your baby. And St. Joseph's Medical Center's Family Birth Center is here to help make that first "hello" as special as your new bundle of joy. We have a team of experts ready to guide you throughout your journey—from our 24/7 onsite laborists, to our specially trained doctors, nurses and lactation specialists who can support you during your stay and after you go home. And with our Level III NICU, babies who require a little extra TLC get the specialized care they need—all under the same roof. Get to know more about us by taking a virtual or in-person tour. Learn more at dignityhealth.org/stockton/maternity.

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Your health is one of your greatest investments. This **Women's Health Month**, take time to care for yourself — one small, meaningful step at a time.

Simple ways to boost your well-being:

-  **Move With Purpose**
Stay active in ways that fit your life — walk, garden, or stretch. Every bit counts.
-  **Nourish Your Body**
Eat a balanced diet that supports your health. If you have conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, talk with your provider about what's right for you.
-  **Prioritize Restful Sleep**
Aim for 7–9 hours each night. A calming routine and less screen time can help improve sleep quality.
-  **Manage Stress, Your Way**
Find what helps you reset — meditation, yoga, breathwork, or a good book.
-  **Stay On Top of Preventive Care**
Routine screenings like pap smears, cholesterol, and blood pressure checks support early detection and better health.

For more resources, visit
www.hpsj.com/womens-health



SUPPORTING WOMEN'S HEALTH IN OUR COMMUNITY

Through our partnership with Alinea Medical Imaging, Health Plan proudly brings mobile mammogram services directly to our communities, making breast cancer screening more accessible for local women. **In 2025 alone, 35 mobile mammogram events were hosted and 908 women were screened.**

These events — hosted in partnership with trusted local providers like Community Medical Centers, Golden Valley Health Centers, San Joaquin Health Centers, Dignity Health and Del Puerto Health Center — help remove barriers to care by bringing life-saving screenings closer to home.

Because when access improves, outcomes do too.

