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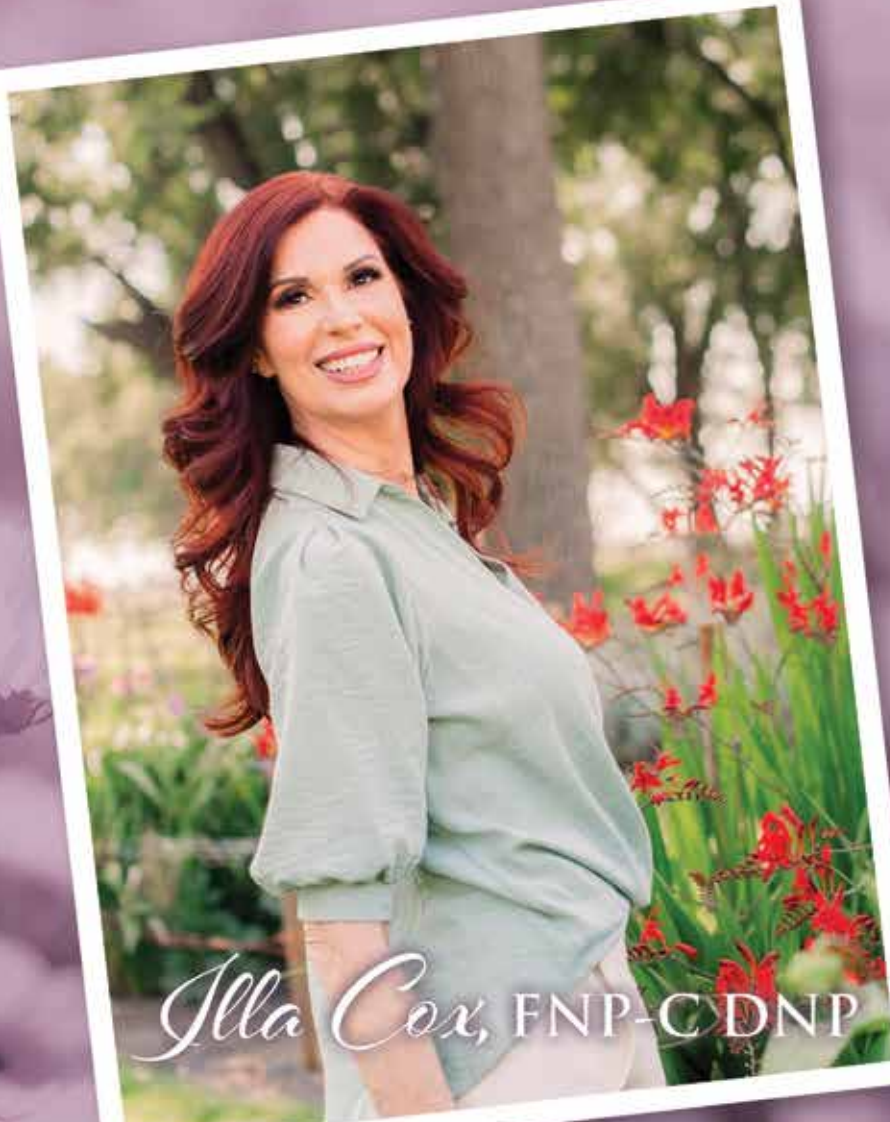
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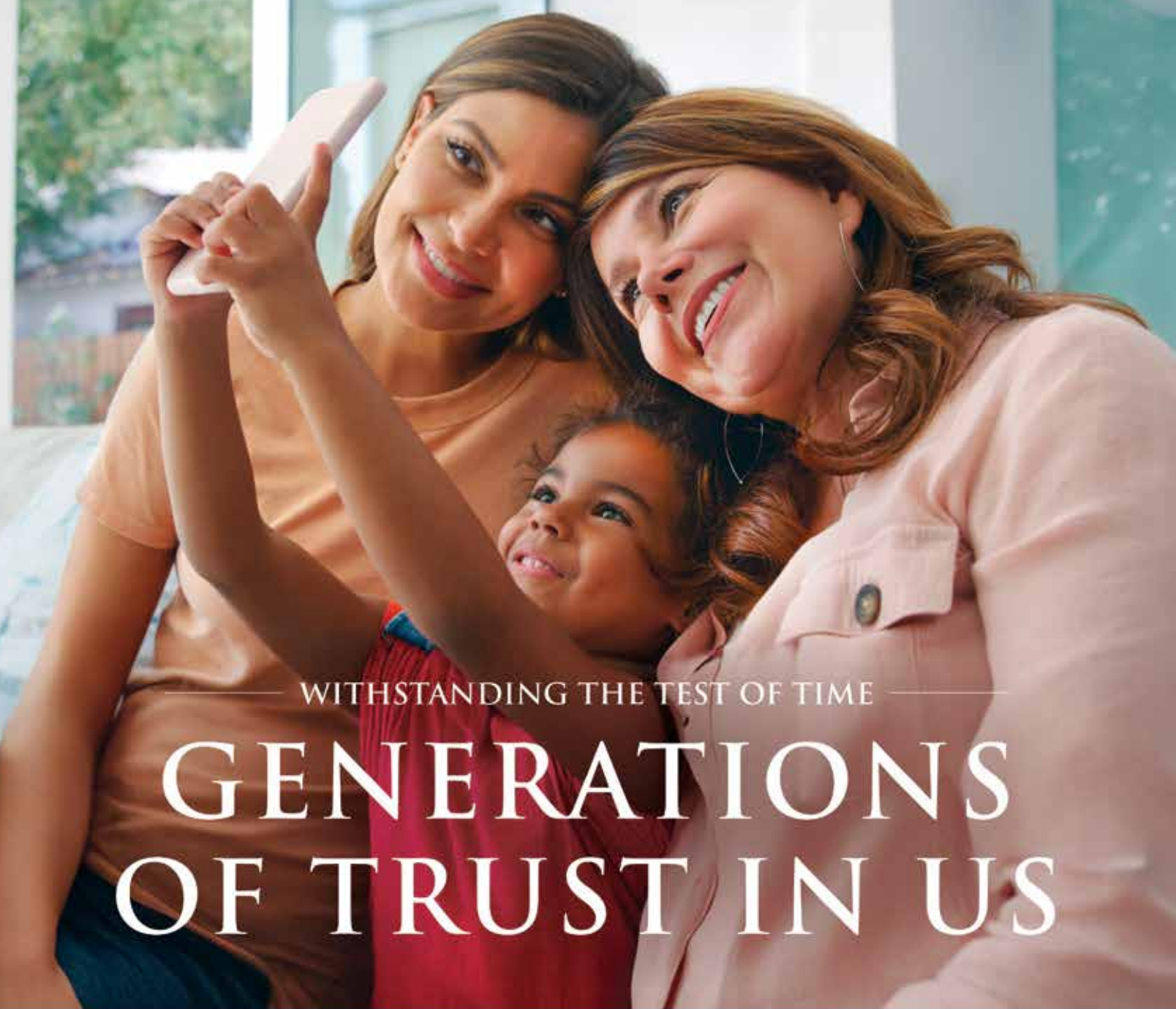
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INSPIRATIONS

Coach Katelyne Herrington: "Respect isn't given freely; it's earned through consistency."

The mental and physical demands of competitive swimming make it one of the most challenging of all sports. Perseverance, motivation and accountability are among the many skills that Katelyne Herrington displayed during her years of competition, and today as the first female head coach of men's and women's swim teams at UOP, she is encouraging those qualities in her student athletes.



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BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Gratitude

As I prepare to send my kids back to school later this month, I can't help but look back at our many obligatory front-porch photos. This year, my son, Caden, will be starting his junior year, and my daughter, Leah, is off to the eighth grade. When people used to tell me to enjoy my kids because they grow up fast, I never realized just how quickly it goes.

Looking at the collection of first-day photos taken in front of our house over the years brings a wave of memories and emotions. From holding their hands as we headed to Vinewood Preschool (a huge shout-out to Teacher Debi—if you know, you know she's the best!) to walking them to Vinewood Elementary almost every day and now watching them get themselves to school all on their own, time truly flies!

Over the years, my kids have had amazing teachers who have met them right where they needed to be. Caden and Leah have two very different personalities and watching them learn from both the same teachers and new ones has been incredible. To the educators who have greeted us with warm smiles and open arms year after year, thank you. From teaching my children how to write and read their first words to now guiding them through complex history projects (shoutout to my husband Aaron – 8th grade history teach-



er at Morada Middle School) and college prep, you have been our constants. You didn't just educate my kids; you partnered with our family. You offered grace and patience, providing a safe, nurturing environment that allowed them to flourish and grow into exactly who they were created to be. Thank you to every teacher who has taught the Sass kids!

My gratitude also extends far beyond the classroom walls. To the coaches who spend countless evenings, early mornings and weekends on the fields, on the pool deck, at the track and on the courts—thank you. You give so much of your own free time, often away from your own families, to invest in ours. You have taught my kids resilience, teamwork and how to navigate both success and failure with character. But what

touches my heart the most is watching how you care for all the kids. You serve as mentors, sounding boards and advocates for teenagers who desperately need positive role models in their corner.

I hope you enjoy this Back-to-School issue, which is filled with stories of educators and coaches who choose to make a difference in the lives of the next generation. They are the heart and soul of our community, and I am incredibly grateful that they show up every day. Now, it's time for some back-to-school shopping to make sure we nail that next porch photo!

Enjoy every moment,

Anna

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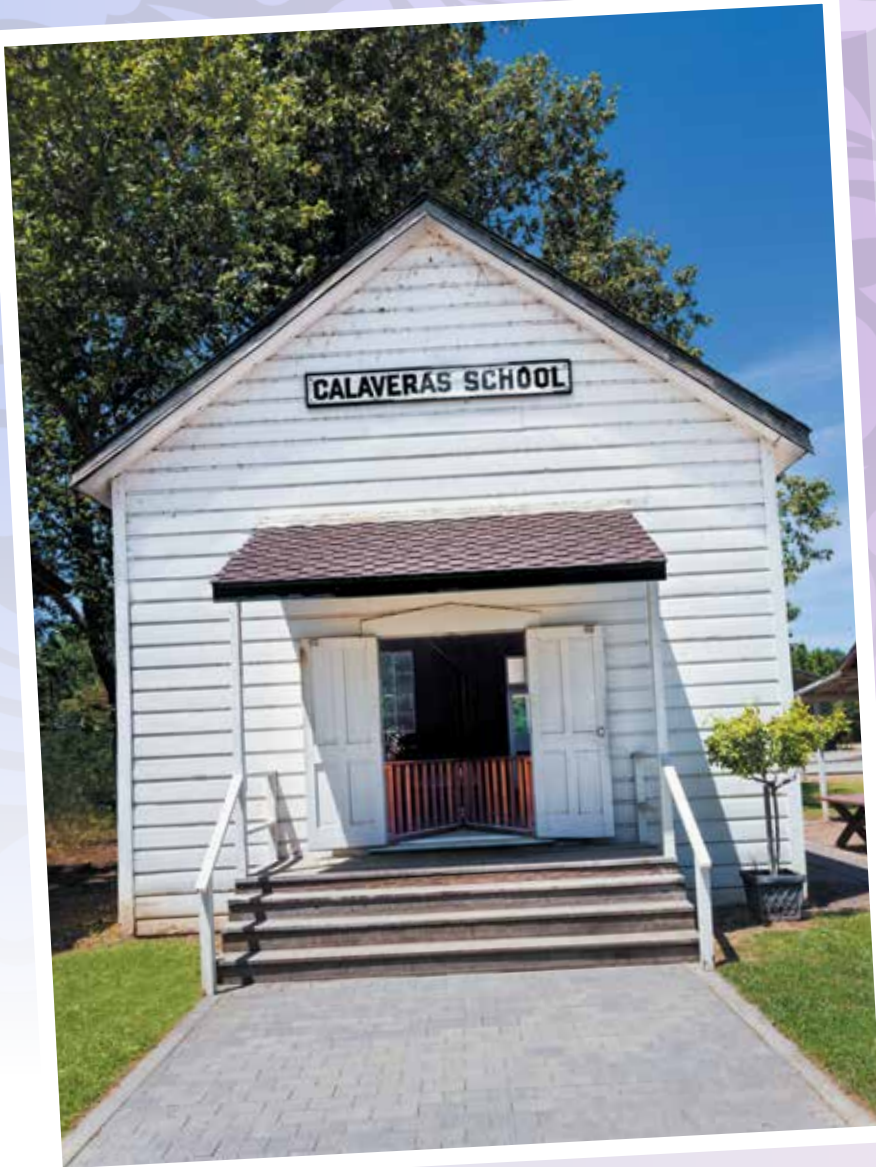


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Beauty of the Valley



The Calaveras Schoolhouse at Micke Grove is one of San Joaquin County's most treasured historic landmarks, offering a glimpse into what education was like in the late 1800s. The one-room schoolhouse served local students during a time when children of different ages learned side by side under the instruction of a single teacher.

Today, the carefully preserved building allows visitors to step back in time and experience what school was like for children of a bygone era. Its simple design, period furnishings and educational exhibits help students participating in Valley Days field trips gain a firsthand understanding of local history and the daily experiences of children who attended school more than a century ago.



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.

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



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Katelyne Herrington

“Respect isn't given freely; it's earned through consistency.”

BY JO ANN KIRBY

PHOTOS BY KEVIN RICHTIK, CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

Katelyne Herrington, the first woman in University of the Pacific history to serve as head coach for both the men's and women's swim and dive teams, has taken University of the Pacific's NCAA Division 1 program to places they've never been, and she has her sights set on much more.

Under her leadership, the men's program won its first Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Conference Championship. The shiny championship rings awarded for that accomplishment were the first step in what is her ultimate goal. “I want to take a swimmer to the NCAA Division 1 national championships,” said the 34-year-old Stockton native, who is heading into her eighth year as head of both the men's and women's teams. She says it with an earned confidence that has been a long time in the making, starting at the pool she now commands. “This is actually where I learned to swim,” she said of the Chris Kjeldsen Pool at the Douglass M. Eberhardt Aquatics Center on the Pacific campus in Stockton. On a recent sunshiny day in June, her athletes were teaching young children how to do a freestyle stroke just like Pacific athletes before them taught Katelyne.

Pushing Her Limits

What began as a love of being in the water evolved into a passion for competing, learning and understanding how far she could





push herself both physically and mentally. “Swimming is one of the few sports where your success is directly tied to the work you put in every single day. There are no shortcuts,” she said. “The sport taught me resilience, time management and perseverance, lessons that continue to impact my life long after my competitive career.”

Katelene would fall in love with both swimming and Pacific, attending swim camps on the campus and training with Tiger Aquatics, a year-round competitive swim club for athletes ages 6 to 21. After swimming for Tokay High School in Lodi, Katelene was recruited by University of Nevada Las Vegas, where she was a two-time Division 1 All-American, a two-time Mountain West record-holder and a four-time Mountain West Academic All-Conference honoree. The talented athlete qualified for the 2008 Olympic Trials and competed in the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials. Although she graduated in 2014, she still holds the UNLV school record in the 100-yard butterfly. Katelene earned a bachelor's degree in hotel administration from UNLV in 2014 and a master of arts degree in health and exercise sports science at Pacific in 2026.

That hotel admin degree would come in handy planning travel logistics when she turned her sights on college coaching. The daughter of a longtime college coach, Katelene grew up watching her dad with a whistle and knew the transformative impact a good coach has on their players. “Swimming gave me so much growing up, and I wanted the opportunity to give back to the next generation of athletes,” she said. “I love helping young men and women discover what they are capable of accomplishing.”

A Family's Example

Katelene remembers hearing stories about her dad's athletes, listening to him talk about their successes and struggles, and watching him open their Stockton home for a family dinner or holiday meal. “What stood out most was that he always saw his athletes as people first and athletes second,” she said. “He genuinely cared about who they were beyond their sport and invested in helping them grow as individuals.”

Her father, Todd Herrington, said Katelene's competitive spirit and experience are what it takes to be a motivational coach. “Katelene has the tools and the ability to teach, coach and motivate her athletes through the highs, lows and the in-betweens with her big heart and her love for the sport of swimming,” he said.

She learned from her father a balance of accountability and compassion that has become the foundation of her own coaching philosophy. “I want my athletes to know that I care deeply about their success in the pool, but even more importantly, I care about the person they were becoming outside of it,” she said. “The relationships we build and the impact we have with one another often last far longer than any race result.”

Career Path

The path to a head coaching job requires persistence. Just 6 percent of NCAA Division 1 head coaches in men's sports were women and only 43 percent of NCAA Division 1 head coaches in women's sports are female, according to demographics data for 2024-2025 provided by [ncaa.org](https://www.ncaa.org).

Katelene's coaching career started at UNLV, where she served as a volunteer assistant coach immediately after graduation. “Early in my career, I wasn't just navigating a male-dominated profession, I was doing so as a young female coach,” Katelene said. “There were times when I felt pressure to prove myself and demonstrate that I belonged on the pool deck.”

Her mother, Kari Herrington, said Katelene's success deserves to be celebrated and acknowledged because it's proof positive that Katelene belongs in spaces that remain dominated by men. “I think it's important that she's such a huge role model for women,” Kari affirmed. “She gives her athletes the confidence to go after their own dreams or a goals no matter how difficult the path can seem.”

While being in a male-dominated field could be daunting, Katelene soon realized she didn't need to try to fit in to be taken seriously. She said it became so important to her to be authentic and stay true to her values. She was hired as director of operations for the swimming and diving program at University of New Mexico before returning to Stockton as an assistant coach at University of the Pacific. From there, she landed her first head coaching job at Fresno Pacific University.

Move to UOP

Several years later, she interviewed for the Pacific Tigers head coaching job when it became available and became the University of the Pacific's head coach for men's and women's swim and dive program in 2019. It was important for her to be close to her friends

**“I want to
take a swimmer
to the NCAA
Division 1 national
championships...”**

**Pacific Men's and Women's
Swim & Dive Head Coach
Katelnye Herrington**



and especially her family, since her father had been diagnosed with Parkinson's.

It's clear she loves where she is in her career. "As I gained experience, I learned that respect isn't given freely; it's earned through consistency," she said. "I also discovered being a leader was one of my greatest strengths. And this gave me the confidence to continue to work hard, set goals for myself and my program."

Her parents, who have always been her biggest fans, attend all the competitions to watch her coach and cheer on the Tigers, even out of state, just as they did throughout her entire swimming journey. "They have been incredibly supportive throughout both my swimming and coaching careers," she said. Her dad is known for volunteering on the Pacific pool deck, always with a stopwatch!

Sitting in her office, just steps from the pool, Katelyne says her time at Pacific has been a full-circle moment that had impeccable timing. "It's been so special for me," she said. "I never imagined coming back to Stockton but for me it was the people and my family who drew me back." And that helps sell Stockton when she recruits athletes to commit to Pacific. "I think it helps when they learn I grew up here and what my experiences have been," she said. "It really is the people who make the place."

that they are experiencing. "I understand firsthand the demands and sacrifices required to compete at a high level," she said. "I know what it's like to manage early morning practices, academic pressures, travel and the expectations athletes place on themselves." That experience helps her coach with empathy while still maintaining high standards.

One athlete said that his coach's experience has taught him one extremely important thing. "There's always something left in the tank, no matter how tired you feel from training or a race," Nate Rasmussen, who is going into his junior year, said. Her background as a D1 athlete has contributed greatly to the program because she's brought high-quality adjustments, tiny adjustments to their techniques that are extremely important, Nate said. "One thing I appreciate about Katelyne's coaching style the most is that she's a great listener and is willing to try and help the situation any way possible, whether it be in the pool or out," the sports management major said.

A typical day for Katelyne starts at 4:30 a.m., when she gets ready for her day. A two-hour team practice starts at 5:30 a.m. After that she has office time until 1 p.m. During that time, she will do stroke analysis, work on team lineups, travel logistics, scout the

"I want my athletes to know that I care deeply about their success in the pool, but even more importantly, I care about the person they are becoming outside of it. The relationships we build and the impact we have with one another often last far longer than any race result."

Coach Katelyne Herrington

Maintaining Tradition

As her father did, she hosts team dinners for her athletes. It's a tradition that will be a big undertaking when her roster grows to 60 athletes. She and her two assistant coaches, Tim Buisson and Nate LeRoy, have forged a team culture that creates a family atmosphere in which athletes feel supported, valued, and connected to something bigger than themselves. "The strongest teams aren't just built through training; they're built through shared experiences, trust and meaningful relationships," she said. Some of their favorite team building activities outside of their rigorous training schedule have included a trust walk, scavenger hunt, paper bag skit, pie eating contest, gingerbread house competition, class dinners, cooking competitions, team trivia and movie nights in the pool. Forging close connections can be especially welcoming to student athletes who are far from home. Some, even international athletes, stay and train over the summer.

It also helps that her swimmers know she was an accomplished D-1 athlete who has been through the same challenges and victories

competition and work on recruiting the next class of athletes. A second practice is held from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. The remainder of her day is spent on fundraising and making alumni connections.

She is close with her family, which includes an older sister and a younger sister whose children call her Aunt Kiki. Katelyne met her boyfriend at UNLV when they both swam for the Rebels. As a former athlete, she said he understands the whys of her workload. "He understands the commitment and he's a good sounding board," she said. She's taken up sourdough baking—her sourdough starter is named Betty—and she has been taking CrossFit classes. She is also into running. "My inner athlete has not left," she said. In fact, she still makes time to swim twice a week and has competed in several open-water swims.

The championship ring sits high on a shelf in her office and she seems almost too humble to try it on for a visitor. But she took it out of the box and showed it off, proof that hard work and commitment to the process pays off. "Oh yes, this ring was just the first step," she said. ♦





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CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

LET'S CHECK UP ON... BACK TO SCHOOL, BACK TO YOU: WHY WOMEN NEED A HEALTH RESET TOO

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

As summer comes to an end and children head back to school, many women find themselves breathing a sigh of relief. The return of routines, schedules and structure can feel like a fresh start. Yet while we are busy organizing backpacks, sports schedules and family calendars, many women overlook one important person who could benefit from a reset: themselves.

In my medical practice, I often see women who have spent the entire summer taking care of everyone else's needs while putting their own health on hold. By the time fall arrives, they are running on empty. They tell me they feel exhausted, irritable, mentally foggy and disconnected from the energetic version of themselves they once knew.

Many assume this is simply part of being a busy woman. Sometimes it is. But often there is more to the story.

For women in their late 30s, 40s and 50s, hormonal changes associated with perimenopause and menopause can amplify the effects of chronic stress. Sleep becomes lighter. Recovery takes longer. Weight may accumulate despite healthy habits. Anxiety, mood changes and brain fog can become increasingly common.

The good news is that small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference.

As we enter a new season, I encourage women to focus on four pillars of health.

First, prioritize sleep. Sleep is not a luxury; it is a biological necessity. Poor sleep impacts hormones, metabolism, mood and cognitive function. Aim for seven to nine hours whenever possible and create a consistent bedtime routine that supports restorative rest.

Second, nourish your body with protein-rich meals. One of the most important conversations happening in medicine today is the importance of preserving muscle mass, particularly

for women entering midlife. Muscle supports metabolism, bone health, balance and healthy aging. Prioritizing protein throughout the day can help support energy and maintain lean body mass.

Third, make movement non-negotiable. Exercise does not have to mean spending hours at the gym. A daily walk, resistance training a few times per week or finding an activity you genuinely enjoy can significantly improve physical and mental health. Movement is one of the most powerful tools we have for managing stress and improving longevity.

Finally, create space for stress recovery. Many women spend their days in a constant state of productivity. The nervous system was never designed to operate at full speed indefinitely. Even a few minutes of deep breathing, meditation, prayer, journaling or quiet reflection can help shift the body from a state of chronic stress toward healing and recovery.

The back-to-school season is often viewed as a fresh start for our children. I believe it can serve the same purpose for women.

Instead of focusing solely on what needs to be accomplished, ask yourself a different question: What do I need to feel healthy, energized and well this season?

You do not need a complete life overhaul. You do not need perfection.

You simply need permission to place yourself back on your own priority list.

Because when women take care of themselves, they are better equipped to care for the people they love—and they deserve to thrive, not just survive, in every season of life. •

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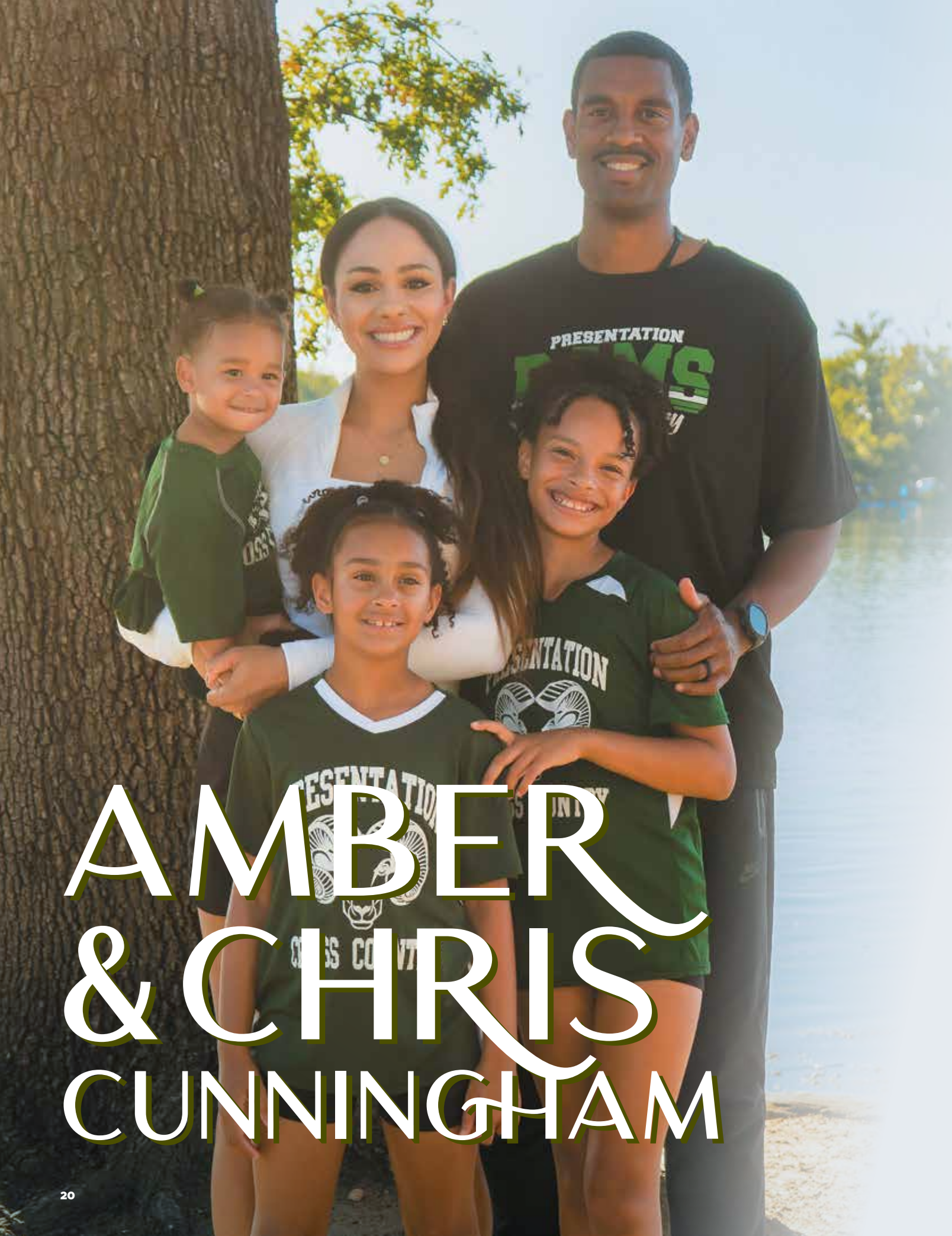


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AMBER & CHRIS CUNNINGHAM

BY JO ANN KIRBY | PHOTO BY HAYRE PHOTOGRAPHY

Amber and Chris Cunningham volunteer together as cross country coaches for the Catholic Youth Organization at Presentation School in Stockton. Chris has a career as a vice president of sales for a tech company while Amber works as an associate marriage and family therapist. They moved from Stockton's Brookside neighborhood to Lodi several years ago with their three children.

Q: Describe your role with CYO.

A: We volunteer as the cross country head coaches and members of the CYO Advisory Board. Our role has allowed us to take a hands-on role in helping shape the future of the sport within the Diocese of Stockton. We collaborate closely with other parishes, help coordinate meets and work together to create meaningful opportunities for student athletes. One of our favorite experiences was helping coordinate a meet at the University of the Pacific, which was an incredible opportunity for the kids. We have big dreams for the future of the program and love being able to contribute to something that impacts so many families.

Q: What do you love about working with students?

A: "Working with young people is incredibly rewarding because you get to watch them discover they are capable of more than they believed. Through cross country, kids learn discipline, resilience, confidence and how to push through challenges," said Chris. "There's something powerful about watching a young person realize 'I can do hard things,' and seeing that mindset begin to carry into the rest of their life."

Q: What is the most rewarding part of coaching?

A: "Watching students grow in confidence and belief in themselves. Kids who begin the season thinking certain challenges are impossible often finish the season accomplishing things they never imagined they could do," said Amber. "What makes cross country especially meaningful is that it becomes a true family sport; siblings grow up in the program together, toddlers run alongside practices, and entire families come together to support one another. It creates a really special sense of community that goes far beyond running."

Q: What is the biggest challenge of training in our Valley heat?

A: There is definitely a tension between pushing toward growth and protecting well-being, and we navigate that by helping kids better understand and listen to their bodies. We try to give them the language and confidence to recognize when it's time to keep pushing and when it's time to take a break. We also partner closely with parents because they know their children best and can help us understand when their child may need extra encouragement or extra rest. One thing we emphasize often is that preparation starts days before a meet. What you eat, drink and how you care for your body on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday directly impacts how you feel and perform on Saturday. We want kids to understand that taking care of themselves is part of becoming a strong athlete.

Q: What's important when coaching youth sports?

A: "Accepting imperfection and understanding that you cannot make everyone happy is an important part of coaching youth sports," Amber said. "There will always be moments where people think something should have been done differently, and good coaches have to re-

main confident and rooted while also staying humble enough to learn from helpful feedback. Consistency, integrity and leading by example are also incredibly important."

Q: What else is important in coaching?

A: "One of the most important qualities in coaching youth sports is the willingness to keep learning and evolving. I coach basketball and cross country, and both sports have taught me the importance of developing adaptable athletes," Chris said. "No race, practice or game is ever the same, so we try to help kids become resilient, disciplined and able to respond to different challenges and environments. More than anything, kids respond to sincerity. They know when a coach genuinely cares, is prepared and is trying to help them become their best."

Q: What do you love most about your community?

A: We love the slower pace of life compared to the Bay Area and Southern California, where we are originally from. We appreciate the small businesses, diversity, family-centered culture and the beauty of being surrounded by farmland and agriculture. The strong sense of community and involvement through our children's Catholic school has inspired us to become deeply involved in our children's education and athletics.

Q: How are you inspired to serve?

A: We both feel deeply passionate about helping people maximize their potential. Whether through coaching, mentoring, therapy or leadership, we love encouraging others to push past perceived limitations and grow into the best version of themselves. Amber works with teens and young adults as a therapist, while Chris coaches at both the youth and high school levels as well as leads a sales team in the technology sector; in every setting we feel called to help people build confidence, resilience, discipline and hope.

Q: Chris, what sparks joy in your life?

A: Spending time with Amber, watching our kids blossom into who they are becoming, learning, growing in my faith, Nitro cold brews and wandering through used bookstores all spark joy for me.

Q: How about you, Amber?

A: Some of my most joy-filled moments are the simple ones at home in between all the practices and busy schedules. There's nothing better than enjoying Chris' barbecue while the kids swim and having a great college, NBA or WNBA basketball game on in the background.

Q: What do you like to do for fun, Amber?

A: Outside of work, I really enjoy working out, spending time in the Bible and trying to grow into a better wife, mother and Christian each day. Taking care of my health helps me show up better for my family, and fitness has become an important part of my lifestyle. I love staying connected with family and phone calls with my wonderful family help me feel supported. Most days, you'll probably find me driving the kids to their activities while listening to praise and worship music with an iced coffee in my hand. Stand strong through the next century despite whatever challenges may come its way. ♦



A STRONGHOLD FOR STOCKTON'S FUTURE THE URSULA MEYER LIBRARY & COMMUNITY CENTER

BY RACHEL FENTON | PHOTOS BY
ARCHITECTURAL NEXUS & PHOTOGRAPHER BENTO VIANA

Libraries are strongholds of civilization. In a library, all status markers fade away. Everyone is welcome regardless of background or bank account. Information and resources are not kept behind a paywall, instead remaining free for public use and education. When we invest time and energy into our community's libraries, we invest in the future of hundreds of thousands of lives, from the person checking out the latest best-seller to the young future engineer playing with the 3D printer in the library's maker space.

Stockton's newest library, the Ursula Meyer Library and

Community Center, opened its doors to the public on April 30, 2026, and it has already made a lasting impact on the community. Xia Thao, the new library's interim librarian, is also a library manager and a life-long Central Valley resident. She grew up walking to Stockton's Margaret Troke Library as a child with her sisters, coming home with armfuls of books. "I always loved reading," Xia said. She is thrilled to continue to share her love of reading with the community she loves so much.

The Ursula Meyer Library and Community Center was a labor of love, taking over a decade of careful design and construction.



The building itself is playful and soothing with swirling motifs throughout both its structure and décor that are reminiscent of the venation in tree leaves. “I love how modern it is,” Xia said. “The color schemes are very bright and inviting.”

The library was designed by Architectural Nexus, and as they say in their description of the project, it was intentionally made to be a place that “[blurred] boundaries between recreation and library.” Not only is it a place where people come to rest and read; it is also a bustling community center with its own wellness facilities, outdoor seating, outside gym and an indoor fitness area. “It’s basically a single facility [for] parents, teenagers, grandparents, children from toddler to tweens,” Xia said. “It’s intended for the whole family. We really try to make our spaces where the whole family can learn and gather together.” The library also offers a variety of activities and events, from a beginner’s sewing class and a 3D printing class to magic shows and archery classes.

The namesake of the library, Ursula Meyer, was a staunch defender of public libraries and the services they offer, and she dedicated her life to furthering their reach. “She’s recognized as a statewide and national advocate for literacy and youth engagement,” Xia said. Born to a Jewish family in Poland, she fled the impending rise of fascism to the United States with her family in 1938. They settled in California, and Ursula found her vocation working in the public library system. She became the director of library services in San Joaquin County in the 1970s, and con-

tinued on to serve a term as the president of the California Library Association. The California Library Hall of Fame sings her praises, saying, “She was known as an outspoken advocate for public library services and intellectual freedom.” Now, Ursula is immortalized in both the California Library Hall of Fame and in the Stockton library named after her and her legacy.

The Ursula Meyer Library and Community Center is more than just another city library; it’s a place that cultivates Stockton’s future, ensuring that even the most disadvantaged members of our community have access to the resources they need. The funding for the facility was provided by Measure M, a one-quarter cent tax dedicated to library and recreation services that Stockton’s voters approved in 2016. “That funding has not only fund-

ed a wonderful facility like us, but also made it possible for both library and recreation/community centers to expand with different types of programs,” Xia said.

Now we can see the benefit of our tax dollars ourselves: a child’s eyes lighting up during weekly Story Time; a young reader checking out a stack of books as tall as they are; a senior teaching a skill to the next generation. And over all of it, the librarians keep watch. “We really put our whole heart into it. We really believe in public libraries,” Xia said. “I find my job incredibly rewarding.”

Visit the Ursula Meyer Library and Community Center at 1461 E Morada Ln, Stockton, California; call (209) 875-3521 for more information. ♦



Meet Me at Midnights

LODI'S NEWEST INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOP

BY RACHEL FENTON



There's a certain magic that's unique to bookshops. The air inside them thrums with the power of stories pressed between pages and ink. Whether mysteries, philosophy, romance, fantasy and classics, all books offer their readers a portal to new people, new worlds and new ideas. Amanda Zimmerman and Selena Moffett had a shared dream to open a bookshop where people could experience that magic and bring together those who enjoy all that books have to offer. Through the combination of their hard work, unbridled passion and decades-long friendship, *Midnights Bookshop* in Lodi transformed from a dream into a re-

ality and opened its doors to the public in April 2026.

Amanda and Selena grew close through a book club that Selena and her sister hosted with a few other friends. Amanda had never considered herself an avid reader, though she loved learning. "I developed a curiosity in learning," she said, "and reading was a part of that." The first book she picked up with the book club was *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, a well-loved classic that spans over 1,000 pages. Instead of being intimidated, Amanda was intrigued. "I really enjoyed the community and talking and having discussions," she said. "A book club really opened it up

for me. I could try different things!” The experience transformed her relationship with reading, helping her see how it’s not only a solitary activity, but also a way communities are gathered and strengthened. “It really does come down to community and having a space for people to connect on a human level. Books can be that bridge,” Amanda said.

Their experience within their book club inspired them to take the initial steps toward opening *Midnights Bookshop*. “Independently, Selena and I both had dreams of opening bookshops,” Amanda said. Selena was the one who approached her first, suggesting that they do it together. Together, they jumped feet-first into the adventure, starting out small with a pop-up shop to test the waters and see what the community response was, and they were blown away. “We started popping up at breweries, at wineries, the farmer’s market and we just had an overwhelmingly positive reaction from almost everyone who came up to us,” Amanda said. “The support that we’ve gotten from every place we’ve popped up, it fills my cup.”

When Selena found the location at Kettleman Station, it seemed like a sign. The owner and the property manager both were incredibly welcoming and supported their vision. “It just felt right,” Amanda said. The space was a blank canvas, waiting for them to bring it to life. They spent weeks transforming the white walls into a “dark academia” atmosphere with rich woods and deep colors that complete the feeling of a cozy library. It’s perfectly accented by a fireplace, leather wingback chairs, and a stunning mural of the night sky that Amanda made herself along with sculptural artworks formed from book pages.

Although they both have their own full-time jobs, both Selena and Amanda work their schedules to ensure *Midnights Bookshop* can have its doors open to the community as much as possible. “It doesn’t feel like work to me. It really fills me up; it’s energizing,” Amanda said, describing her weekends working at the bookshop.

They have several events planned for the future, such as trivia nights on popular works, working with local authors to host talks and signings, poetry nights and more. The community has continued to rally around the newest local spot. “It’s been a joy to be a part of all of it, and to have people cheering for us the whole time,” she said.

There are always naysayers who believe that physical books and bookstores will go extinct in the current digital age, but *Midnights Bookshop* stands in spite of their cynicism. The store is connected with both bookshop.org and libro.fm for those who want to support independent bookstores while shopping for digital products such as ebooks and audiobooks, but there are also plenty of customers who show up for the physical experience of choosing a book from the shelves. “People want something different,” Amanda said. “That’s why independent bookstores are on the rise.” Whether you’re looking for Dostoevsky or *Dungeon Crawler Carl*, an avid reader or just getting started on your bookish journey, *Midnights Bookshop*’s door is open. ♦

Find Midnights Bookshop at 400 E. Kettleman Lane, Suite 11, in Lodi, California, call 209-400-7521 or visit midnightsbookshop.com. Hours are Thursday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.



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Dr. Rommel Bal

BY JO ANN KIRBY



Dr. Rommel Bal is a dentist and an elected member of the Lodi Unified Board of Education representing Trustee Area 6. She has practiced dentistry in Stockton since 2005. A big supporter of the arts, she previously served on the Stockton Chorale Board and sponsors their concerts every year; she has served as president of the San Joaquin Dental Society and is currently vice chair of the SJDS Foundation. Dr. Bal told us a little about her life and what inspires her to give back to her community.

Q: What brought you to Lodi?

A: I grew up in India and moved to San Joaquin County in 2002. My husband and I met in dental school and I decided to move to his hometown, Stockton! We lived in Stockton until 2012 and then found a place between the two cities so we could be close to both.

Q: Tell us about your family!

A: My husband, Shami, is a Stocktonian. Born in Oakland while his parents were graduate students in UC Berkeley, they moved to Stockton in 1973. He graduated from Stagg High and absolutely loves this city with all its good and bad. My boys are both Lodi USD graduates. Agam graduated from UC Berkeley last year and hopes to be of service to this community in a healthcare field. Armaan has similar plans with a focus on dentistry. Wherever life takes them, we always talk about returning home to San Joaquin County. Our chocolate lab, Fudge, has so much love to give and take. It's never enough with cuddles and hugs.

Q: What motivated you to choose dentistry?

A: I don't have a clear recollection of when I decided, but I've always wanted to be a dentist. It began as a fascination and evolved into a passion.

Q: What inspired you to pursue a seat on the Lodi Unified Board of Trustees?

A: One of the biggest strengths of our community is the diversity it holds. People of different ethnic, religious, socio-economic backgrounds make this a loving, accepting, giving community. When the position for the board opened up I felt there was so much I could give back and help with, I didn't feel any hesitation to apply. It was another way of giving back to the beautiful community that we have built in the San Joaquin County.

Q: How are you able to help support students, educators, staff and the community as a board member?

A: As a member of the Lodi Unified School District Board of Education, I'm part of the team that represents community decision making for our children's educational futures. I'm proud to collaborate with passionate professionals as we work on strategic planning frameworks, college and career readiness programs,

and weigh options to keep the district fiscally responsible.

Q: What are some ways that you try to make a difference in your community?

A: I'm a big believer in volunteer service. Personally, I am involved in conducting the yearly Give Kids a Smile event in my capacity as a member of the San Joaquin Dental Society. Every February, we gather volunteers and dentists and provide free dental care to children that need it. Another way I try to give back is through my own dental office's Tooth For Turkey event. Since 2007, we celebrate Thanksgiving by offering dental checkups, X-rays and dental cleaning to anyone that brings in Thanksgiving food items. At the end of the day, we donate all of the collected food to the kitchen at St. Mary's Dining Hall to help bring Thanksgiving to those in need.

Q: What other ways do you promote positive healthcare outcomes?

A: I have been an active member and donor to Operation Dez Strong, or ODS. Dez is my good friend Kamni Del Barba's son. He was unfortunately injured in the process of training to be a National Guardsman, which resulted in the loss of his leg due to necrotizing fasciitis, or NF. Operation Dez Strong was created to help kids with missing limbs get the care they need and the prosthetics to help them live active and healthy lives while also working to bring awareness to NF.

Q: What brings you the most joy?

A: Being a mom is my greatest joy. My children bring me peace to the core. Seeing them grow up to be kind, gentle, responsible adults has given me the kind of happiness that words will never express.

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

A: A hot cup of Lavazza coffee and an easy read book.

Q: What is your favorite quote?

A: "Work hard, Believe in One True God, share with others (your food, wealth and happiness)." ~Nanak.

Q: What's on your bucket list?

A: I actually have a tub list. This world has shrunk but we have so much to see. ♦

SASS! CELEBRATES

SASS! Public Relations celebrated its 20th anniversary with delicious food, desserts, a candy bar, drinks, ice cream, root beer floats and live music on May 14, 2026, at their offices in Lincoln Center. Carrie Sass and her business partner, Anna Sass, started the boutique public relations firm 20 years ago in Carrie's house. It has grown and flourished over the years thanks to their great teamwork. A special SASSTASTIC shout out to all who made SASS! Public Relations' 20th anniversary celebration so special including Carmen Gutierrez of Delicious Boards, Mike "The Bundt King" Robison of Nothing Bundt Cakes, George Gibson and the Georgetown Band, the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce, amazing clients, friends and neighbors. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN







From First Issue to School Tradition

How Stagg High Built a Student Magazine Movement

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHAWNNA WEBER

In April 2025, Stagg High School in Stockton published something it had never created before—a student print magazine titled *The Crown*.

What began as a single, sponsored project quickly became something much more.

Within weeks of releasing the first issue, the response from students, teachers and the broader community was so enthusiastic that the school moved immediately to produce a second issue, this time dedicated to graduating seniors. What started as an experiment had already begun to take root.

Today, just over a year later, Stagg High has published four issues in the 2025–26 school year and is well on its way to establishing a lasting tradition. What’s happening at Stagg High is not unique. This model is proving to be both practical and replicable for schools across San Joaquin County and beyond. Franklin High in Stockton, for example, recently published its first-ever magazine, *The Hive*, following a very similar approach.

A Community Effort from the Start

The initial spark came from a collaboration that brought together education, community organizations and local business.

Support from the Junior League of San Joaquin County and sponsorship from a local business, Edgewood Business Solutions, Inc., made it possible for Stagg students to bring their first magazine to life. That early backing removed what is often the biggest barrier, cost, and let students focus on creating something meaningful.

“At the Junior League of San Joaquin County, or JLSJC, our mission is to advance women’s leadership for meaningful community impact through volunteer action, collaboration and training,” said Margarita Reyes, magazine program chair and a past

president of JLSJC. Formerly known as Junior Aid of Stockton, JLSJC is on its 98th year of service to San Joaquin County and looks forward to continuing its legacy of service as it heads into its centennial year in 2027. “We are thrilled to have Stagg High School as our inaugural funding recipient. It was a joy to see how connecting resources, providing initial funding and support empowered and amplified student voices through the magazine program. We look forward to expanding this opportunity to other high schools seeking to launch their own student-led magazines and create platforms for student expression and storytelling.”

What made this especially feasible was a new model for student publishing. Using aPrintis, the school was able to produce its first issue, a 16-page, full-color, glossy, premium-quality magazine with 100 copies, for approximately \$220. At a price point once considered out of reach for this level of quality, the project became accessible from the very beginning.

“As a strong supporter of youth education and student voice, I’m always looking for meaningful ways to support our local schools,” said Shawnna Weber, CEO of Edgewood Business Solutions, Inc., and a former president of the Junior League of San Joaquin County. “When I learned about aPrintis’s publishing model and the price point, it was a no-brainer to introduce them to JLSJC. Seeing Stagg High students bring that vision to life has been both rewarding and inspiring.”

Starting Small, Thinking Big

Rather than aiming for scale immediately, the school intentionally started small.

That first issue, just 100 copies, was enough to build excitement, showcase student work and demonstrate what was possible. Because the up-front cost was modest, the barrier to getting start-

ed was low, and the need for large-scale fundraising was reduced.

This “start small” approach proved critical. It allowed the program to focus on quality, participation and momentum rather than logistics or budget constraints.

Students Take Ownership

What made the project special wasn’t just the final product—it was the process.

Students collaborated on writing, photography, design and editing. They worked to deadlines, made creative decisions, and saw their ideas come together in a tangible, professional-quality publication. For many, it was their first experience creating something for a real audience, not just for a grade, but for classmates, teachers, families and the wider community.

That shift changed everything. “I’m proud of Stagg students for stepping up, embracing the opportunity, and truly owning it,” said journalism advisor Chris Valdez. “It’s been incredible to see the program grow, with more student involvement, greater initiative and improved quality with every issue.”

When students know their work will be read by people they know, the level of care, creativity and accountability rises. The magazine became more than a project; it became something they were proud to contribute to and share.

“Creating our first school magazine was an unparalleled leadership and creative experience for me and our entire team,” said Savannah Advincula, managing editor of *The Crown*. “It’s something we’ll carry with us and showcase as an early achievement in whatever paths we pursue.”

Building a Sustainable Model

After the success of the first two issues, Stagg High set an ambitious goal. The school planned for four issues during the 2025–26 school year and successfully delivered all four.

As the program grew, so did the funding model. While the initial issues were fully sponsored, the school began incorporating community fundraising. Using aPrintis’s zero-cost fundraising tools, the school raised more than half of the printing costs through sponsorships and community support.

Because the overall cost per issue remained low, fundraising became more achievable and more inclusive, allowing the broader community to feel invested in the publication’s success.

More Than a Publication

The impact of the magazine has extended well beyond the classroom.

Each issue has become something students and staff look forward to, something that captures moments, celebrates achievements and reflects the spirit of the school. Copies circulate through classrooms and homes and are shared with families and visitors.

In a very real sense, the magazine has become an ambassa-

dor for Stagg High, representing its students, its culture and its community in a tangible and lasting way.

The quality of the publication plays an important role. When a magazine looks polished and professional, it invites readership. It signals care. It draws people in and keeps them engaged. “School magazine creation has been a whole new experience for us,” said Savannah. “It’s a way to connect with everyone, collaborate and create something that feels timeless.”

A Platform for Student Voice

For many students, the magazine became a platform to tell stories that matter. “This was personal for me,” said Ariella, news lead of *The Crown*. “I care deeply about how Stockton is portrayed, so writing about the city’s cultural richness and diversity gave me a meaningful outlet.”

“It was great to have a place to showcase our band and highlight Spirit Week and other events,” added Avian, another editor. “It’s something everyone in the school can relate to and relive.”

A Model Other Schools Can Follow

What makes Stagg High’s experience especially compelling is how achievable it is. The program did not require a long-established journalism department or a large budget. It started with:

- A small group of motivated students
- One or two staff members guiding the effort
- A modest initial print run
- Early community support

From there, it grew through student ownership, community engagement and a model made practical by affordable, high-quality publishing.

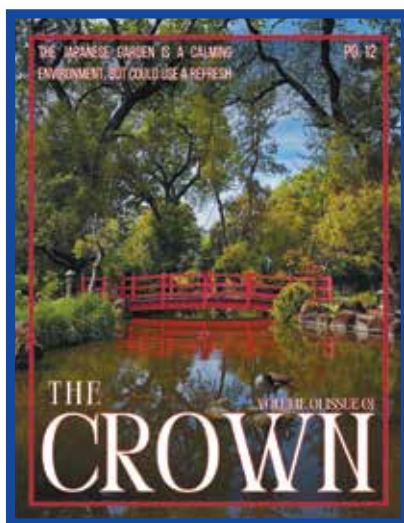
Today, the school is not just producing magazines; it is building a tradition. “Over the years, we’ve seen that even in a digital-first, AI-driven world, school magazine publishing not only builds powerful, transferable skills for students but also brings their communities together in unique ways,” said Vivek Garg, CEO of aPrintis. “Stagg High’s journey is a great example of what’s possible and what every K-12 school can achieve.”

Looking Ahead

Stagg High plans to continue publishing in the years ahead, with even greater community involvement and student participation. What began as a one-time project has become part of the school’s identity, an ongoing opportunity for students to create, collaborate and contribute to something larger than themselves.

For the Stockton community, it stands as a powerful example of what can happen when barriers to high-quality publishing are removed, when affordability, community support and student creativity come together.

When affordability, community support and student creativity align, even a small beginning can grow into a lasting part of a school’s identity. ♦



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HORIZON PRESCHOOL

Nurturing the Future



BY RACHEL FENTON

Horizon Preschool is a place where children flourish. The only faith-based preschool in east Lodi, it fills the neighborhood with the sounds of laughter and play as 3- and 4-year-olds chase roly-polys, go on scavenger hunts for leaves, or munch on vegetables they grew themselves in their little garden. “The heart behind the preschool has always been for it to be a neighborhood preschool,” said Katie Stanley, the director of Horizon Preschool. “It is our deep desire that the school would be a service for our neighborhood.” A life-long resident of Lodi, Katie has dedicated her career to nurturing a bright future for the city’s youth.

Katie’s ministry with children began after she graduated from high school and moved to Mexico to work at a residential school for the deaf. She was the dorm parent for all of the girls at the boarding school, where children came from all over Mexico to stay for the majority of the year. “I would teach Bible classes and Sunday school classes,” Katie said. “I loved it.” She spent ten years working with the school, learning Mexican Sign Language and mentoring the children under her care. When she moved back to the United States and to her hometown of Lodi, Katie began taking different classes to further her learning and pursue her dreams. She also began working at one of the local elementary schools as a paraeducator and volunteering at One-Eighty, a program dedicated to helping teens and families by providing counseling services, homework clubs and other resources designed to help underserved neighborhoods flourish.

Soon, Katie found herself on staff at One-Eighty and running one of the homework clubs. She met Liz Stevahn and Debi Hyzdu through the program and soon became a part of making their dreams a reality. “They had a dream years ago of starting a preschool,” Katie said. “They talked about how they sat in the

park while Liz was running the homework club and while the kids were playing, and thinking about the kids in the neighborhood.” Horizon Community Church had been hosting some of their after-school programs, and when Debi and Liz approached the pastor and the elders about partnering with the church to form a preschool, they were met with enthusiastic support. Soon, Horizon Preschool became a reality. “It’s amazing what you can do when you have multiple people supporting and coming alongside you,” Katie said. “It still astounds me how many people have decided to come alongside the preschool.”

In their fifth year, Horizon Preschool welcomed the largest group of students yet. Now, as they prepare for the new school year, they look forward to nurturing a new group of curious and eager students. “That’s one of the things I absolutely love,” Katie said. “We get to truly know each child by name, and their personalities and quirks and frustrations. They’re awesome kids.” They never want financial constraints to keep a child from joining their classes. “Every single student receives reduced tuition because of generous donations from different organizations and churches and individuals in our greater community,” Katie explained. “If you need a place, we have a place.”

Horizon Preschool’s focus is always, first and foremost, making the world around them a better place and encouraging others to do the same. “We’re not all going to run a preschool,” Katie said with a laugh, but she urges others to consider the ways they can nurture their greater community. Even those of us who have no children remember what it was like to be a child ourselves, growing up in a world shaped for us by the adults who came before. The greatest gift we can give to the next generation is a community that takes care of its neighbors and nurtures child-like curiosity and joy in all its members, ages one to one hundred. ♦

ST MARY'S CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

Saint Mary's High School celebrated 150 years of Catholic education, tradition, and community on Sunday, May 17, 2026, when they gathered on the football field at the college prep high school for Breaking Bread on the 50 Yard Line — a Ram Family Farm-to-Fork dinner experience featuring wine and ingredients sourced from local Ram family businesses. The evening included student and alumni entertainment, signature cocktails, campus tours, a hosted dinner led by Mr. Pete Murdaca '07 of Pietro's of Lodi, and concluded with a spectacular anniversary fireworks show. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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TWENTY-NINE YEARS OF CELEBRATING FAMILIES!

SEPTEMBER 19

BY JO ANN KIRBY



Family Day at the Park is celebrating its 29th year of highlighting reading and literacy with a community celebration that is a free family event. This year's Family Day returns to Weber Point Events Center in downtown Stockton from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 19.

"Family Day in the Park was one of the first events we put on for the community and it's longevity is testament to how much the community enjoys the one-day event," said Carrie Sass, who has been organizing the event with her daughter-in-law Anna Sass at SASS! Public Relations. "Since its inception, it keeps growing and the community keeps showing up both to support it and to enjoy the day."

Family Day is presented by the Library and Literacy Foundation of San Joaquin County and *The Record*. "We are thrilled to have this annual event that encourages reading and literacy, especially now when so many children have cell phones or tablets that might distract them from picking up a good book," Anna Sass, one of the event organizers, said. "We typically have about 80 community nonprofits, service organizations and businesses that host booths at the event and we ask each one to host an interactive project that kids can work hands-on."

Family Day stands out with massive balloon displays welcoming attendees to Healthy Highway, Safety City, Recreation Road, King Author's Court, Transportation Nation and more. The day kicks off with a mascot parade in Safety City. Last year, the University of the Pacific Power Cat was joined by mascots from Delta College, the Stockton Kings, the Stockton Ports and a whole host of superheroes. Everyone is invited to march along and, of course, there are plenty of photo opportunities. Later in the day, superheroes and princesses from University of the Pacific read stories to the children in attendance. And at King Author's Court, local authors read their storybooks.

"Family Day at the Park is a truly unique event focused on kids," Anna said. "The local businesses and nonprofits come up with extremely creative, interactive experiences and the event simply wouldn't be possible without their support. From taking home a free book and learning about bike safety to exploring the city's water hyacinth boat, there is an endless variety of activities for kids to enjoy."

The event features live music, clowns and other performers. There will be food and refreshments for purchase and many of the vendors give out freebies such as free books, treats or little novelty toys.

To learn more about the event or to become a sponsor, go online to familydayatthepark.com or call SASS! Public Relations at (209) 957-7277. ♦





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EMPTY NEST, NEW SEMESTER

What to Do With
the Room They
Left Behind

BY KATHLEEN JENNISON
PHOTOS BY KEVIN RICHTIK, CAROLINE PHOTOGRAPHY



Every August, there is a familiar ritual playing out across the country. Cars are packed. Dorm rooms are assembled. Family photos are taken. Parents offer advice their children may or may not remember. Then everyone comes home. Well, almost everyone.

For many parents, the back-to-school season brings a milestone that doesn't get nearly as much attention as college move-in day. They return to a house that suddenly feels different. A little quieter. A little emptier. And often, there's a bedroom sitting down the hall that raises an unexpected question: Now what?

As an interior designer, I've learned that this moment is rarely about the room itself. It's about what the room represents.

WHEN THE HOUSE NO LONGER MATCHES YOUR LIFE

When children leave home, the routines change almost overnight. The schedules that once revolved around school calendars, sports practices and family dinners begin to shift. Yet many homes continue functioning as though nothing has changed.

The empty bedroom becomes a visible reminder that life has entered a new chapter.

That's why I encourage homeowners to resist the urge to make

immediate decisions. The goal isn't to erase the past. It's to thoughtfully consider what this next season of life actually requires. A room can honor where you've been while supporting where you're going.

DESIGN FOR THE LIFE YOU LIVE MOST

I often remind clients not to design their homes around the people who visit three to five days a year. Design for the other 360.

A current project is a perfect example. My client is turning her two sons' former bedrooms into guest rooms. One son is married with a new baby, and the youngest is away at college. She is also reworking the kids' old game and TV room into a more intentional exercise and yoga space. The equipment was already there, but now the room will have better furniture, functional storage for weights, mats and small equipment, and a design direction that supports how she actually wants to live.

When the kids came home for a visit recently, they protested the loss of the giant, worn-out sectional. "But Mom, where are we going to sit when we come visit?" It's a fair question. Also, a very familiar one. So, we talked about how often they would realistically be home. The answer was likely holidays.

That is the moment homeowners have to be honest with themselves. If the house is mostly lived in by one or two people now, it

should not remain arranged around the version of family life that existed ten years ago. Visiting children and grandchildren should feel welcome, of course. But welcome does not have to mean the entire house stays frozen around their occasional visits.

The goal is not to make the home less family oriented. It is to let the home grow up with the family. Many people assume an empty bedroom automatically becomes a guest room. Sometimes that's the right answer. Often, it isn't.

Instead of asking, "What should this room be?" try asking a different question: "What is missing from my life right now?"

For some homeowners, the answer is a dedicated home office. For others, it's a reading room, art studio, exercise space, sewing room, music room or a quiet place to practice yoga. I've worked with clients who finally created a space for painting after decades of putting everyone else's needs first. Others transformed former bedrooms into welcoming guest suites for visiting children and grandchildren without preserving every detail exactly as it was. The most successful spaces reflect how life is being lived today, not how it was lived ten years ago.

PERMISSION TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY

This is often the hardest part. Many parents feel guilty changing a room that once belonged to their child. They worry they're erasing memories or sending the wrong message. In reality, most adult children don't expect their bedroom to remain frozen in time. They're busy building lives of their own. Meanwhile, parents deserve a home that supports their lives, too.

One of the most rewarding parts of my work is helping clients realize they have permission to make different choices. Permission to rearrange furniture. Permission to repurpose rooms. Permission to stop designing around a version of life that no longer exists. A home should evolve as the people living in it evolve.

KEEP THE MEMORIES, NOT THE MUSEUM

Repurposing a room doesn't mean every memory has to disappear. A favorite photograph can be framed. Meaningful keepsakes can be displayed. Special items can be preserved with intention. But a room filled with untouched boxes and furniture that no longer serves a purpose isn't preserving memories. It's simply postponing decisions.

The same principle applies to design. The most meaningful homes aren't the ones that keep everything. They're the ones that keep the right things.

A NEW CHAPTER DESERVES A PLACE TO LAND

Back-to-school season has always been associated with fresh notebooks, new schedules and new opportunities. We tend to think of those things as belonging to our children, but they're available to us as well.

The empty nest years often create space for new interests, new routines, new relationships and new possibilities. Home should reflect those changes. The room down the hall doesn't need to become something dramatic overnight. But it may be ready to become something different.

Sometimes the first step in embracing a new chapter is simply giving yourself permission to redesign the space where it will unfold. ♦



Kathleen Jennison is the owner and principal designer of KTJ Design Co., a full-service interior design firm specializing in helping clients create homes that support life's next chapter.

404 N. HARRISON | STOCKTON, CA 95203
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JEWISH FOOD FAIR CELEBRATES 51 YEARS

Temple Israel celebrated its 51st Jewish Food Fair on Sunday, June 7, 2026. From 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., people participated in a variety of activities from the silent auction, a raffle and even the Judaica shop. The fair also shared its heritage through their traditional Jewish food, live music, baked goods, folk dancing and more. With free admission and parking to the fair, all were able to enjoy and celebrate Jewish community. There was a delicious brunch of corned beef on rye or a bagel with lox and cream cheese, with both meals including a pickle and cole slaw. Yet with all that, what was especially important about this year's fair is that it was Rabbi Jason Gwasdoff's final Jewish Food Fair since he is retiring after more than 30 years at the synagogue. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



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FESTA ITALIANA!

Festa Italiana! took place June 7, 2026, at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds, where Pasquale Esposito, The Trucco Band and The Anthony "Nino" Lane Band were among the performers. Attendees enjoyed wine tasting, a Boss of the Sauce contest and chef demonstrations. A big shout out to Festa's presenting sponsors, A. Sambado & Sons and the Cortopassi Family Foundation and the many other sponsors whose generosity made this community celebration possible. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN



LET THE MUSIC MOVE YOU

Community Concert Bands

BY TIM DALY

Patricia Lindenberg started playing flute in 4th grade, joined the band through school and even performed flute duets on the streets of San Francisco in the early 70s. But it was the Stockton Concert Band that produced a special determination to get the music just right. “I used to practice until I was so tired, I’d have to lie on the floor instead of going upstairs to bed,” said Patricia. “I can be a nut about the music.”



Stockton Concert Band and the Lodi or Tracy groups are concert bands composed of adults like Patricia, who is a retired yoga instructor, a lot of current and former music teachers and a fair number of current music students. It’s where you find folks who enjoyed school band so much they can’t put their instruments down. Some pick up an instrument after not touching it for years to relive the

joy of group-playing, as I do. Students participate because it’s a chance to further their music education.

Forty years ago, successful Stockton businessman Dorsey Meyer and music lover and Lincoln High music director Arthur Holton met with local band directors to discuss the idea of creating a community concert band. Dorsey would handle the business side, and Art would be the director. Together, they carried the ball forward. Art is still the director of the Stockton and Lodi bands. “There are hundreds of thousands of people graduating from high school and college music, and there needs to be a place for them to play,” said Holton. “Community bands have been the answer.”

Concert bands might play patriotic music in July, Broadway show tunes in the fall, holiday melodies in December and pretty much every other type of music the rest of the year. There are an estimated 2,500 community bands across the U.S. The Stockton band has a roster of about 100 members, with Lodi and Tracy each boasting about 50.

“You can’t go back to your football, basketball, baseball days, or whatever it is you loved to do. Your body doesn’t want to do that anymore,” said Holton. “Music is something you can continue to do the rest of your life.” Many local band members are

still working and include a dentist, doctor, bookkeeper, finance manager and insurance agent.

The Stockton group practices once a week at Delta College and performs several times a year. Sometimes those performances happen far from home as Holton has arranged performances at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, in Hawaii and Europe. The Stockton group has a reputation for taking on and succeeding at challenging arrangements.

Marcus Rowe II, a student and music major at Delta College, plays euphonium, a higher-pitched tuba in the band. A self-described instrument nerd, Marcus also plays violin, trumpet, trombone, clarinet and saxophone. “I like playing different in-



SAVE THE DATE

STOCKTON CONCERT BAND

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Fall Festival of Bands, 9-29-26

Holiday concert, 12-1-26

Community Band concert, 3-2-27

40th Anniversary Celebration, 5-11-27

struments and feeling how different they play and sound,” said Marcus. “I like contributing to an ensemble, and playing with the older folks has been great. It is so nice to see people pick it up again after stopping after high school or college.”

As for the next year, both Marcus and Patricia know exactly where they’ll be every Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m., practicing the new and demanding songs to be performed by the Stockton Concert Band. ♦



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.

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SHARE HOMES

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Share Homes is making a difference in Lodi and the county with five programs including foster care, adoption, supervised visitation, counseling and education. Share Homes looks out for children who need a temporary or permanent home. They help match potential adoptive parents with children needing permanent homes and provide foster parents to county social services for the State of California. They also conduct monitoring and offer support to make sure the foster and adoptive homes are compliant with state regulations.

"Share Homes is a treatment agency and helps children achieve their goals with certain disabilities and diagnosis," said Malcolm Berean, who is co-executive director of Share Homes with his wife, Mary Molini Berean. "Share Homes facilitates reunification with biological families when appropriate and transitions the children to adoption if their biological parents or relatives are not progressing in their treatment plan."

Many children in the foster care system are being reunified with relatives or non-related extended family members. Share Homes has a census that varies but currently there are dozens of other foster children, including sibling sets, who need placement. The co-executive directors and their staff work diligently to find good, stable homes for children in need and encourage would-be foster parents to explore the possibility making space in their homes and hearts.

Melisa Graves, a Stockton Unified teacher, has been providing such care for children for the past nine years and highly recommends working with the nonprofit. She was moved to become a foster parent with the goal of adopting children. "Share Homes is very professional but they are also kind and loving," she said of the support Share Homes gives its families. "They organize events for the children and families, such as movie nights, banquets and bowling. It's a great way for parents to connect and they invite the entire family." Melisa has seven adopted children living with her in her Morada home, including two whose adoption was recently finalized.

Board member Kristi Kooger said that because it's a small agency, the staff really get to know the kids they are serving. Malcolm and Mary go the extra mile to ensure the children in their care are safe, secure and receiving the services they need, she affirmed. "They've really adapted through changing regulations," she said of state licensing requirements that can change unexpectedly. "They adapt in ways to help the children, serve the community and also remain financially sound."

The support Share Homes offers its children and families is unique and special. "Share Homes has a toy drive that starts in November for our Christmas party for the children and we are looking for donated gifts to distribute to the children," Mary said. "We would also like to have an appreciation event for our foster and adoptive parents with appreciation gifts and have a movie or bowling event for the children."

Share Homes appreciates support from the community and has an account with the Lodi Community Foundation, the Children's Endowment Share Homes Adoption Agency at lodicomunityfoundation.org/childrensendowment, that accepts donations. Donations can also be made online through sharehomes.com.

Another important way the community can support Share Homes is by spreading the word that there is an urgent demand for foster parents. Mary and Malcolm understand that it isn't always feasible



for a person to take on an extra child but they say financial help is available for fostering. Foster children deserve a home where they can thrive. "There are teens in foster care that just want a safe place to live while they work on their emancipation goals," Mary said. "There are many teens who are working toward graduating from high school and graduating from trade school. Foster children can remain in care until they are 22 to achieve graduation or completion of trade school."

Leslie Reese, a social worker for Share Homes who monitors foster homes, said that the most important thing a foster parent can do is to make the child feel at home in a safe, secure environment. "They just need to be allowed to be children and not worry about adult things," she affirmed.

The directors of Share Homes say there is a great need for foster and adoptive parents, especially for large sibling sets, older stable teens and specialized parenting for children dealing with issues such as ADHD. As of mid-June, Share Homes had approximately 20 children in placement, many of whom are waiting to be adopted, and there were 35 children waiting for an appropriate placement. Overall, Share Homes has helped 3,000 children and found permanent homes for 250 youth in the past 39 years.

Share Homes has two upcoming foster care and adoption orientations at 6:30 p.m. on July 8 and July 22. The process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent will be explained at these meetings. Share Homes is located at 300 W. Lodi Avenue in Lodi. For more information, call (209) 334-7376, text (209) 327-9224, or visit sharehomes.org.

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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BENEFIT FOR STOCKTON ANIMAL SHELTER

Cool Cats & Barking Dogs took place May 8, 2026, at the lovely Villa Angelica estate in Stockton. The dress code was country casual and many attendees sported cowboy boots at the Western-themed event. There was live music, passed appetizers, open bars and a silent auction. The event raised money for the Stockton Animal Shelter. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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Sedona & Raspberry

LABRADORS TO THE CORE!

BY HERLIFE STAFF | PHOTO BY WENDY DEBENEDETTI

Q: What's your full name?

R: Raspberry. I'm a six-year-old black Labrador Retriever.

S: And I'm Sedona, a fox red Labrador.

Q: Tell us about yourselves.

R: I would describe my personality as sweet and calm. I love meeting new people, and I don't tend to get overly excited or jumpy.

S: I am calm, obedient and loving.

Q: What's your favorite vacation spot?

R: Any camping trip with my family. I love when we camp near the water. The ocean waves are a little bit scary though; I don't really like how much they move. I would rather approach the water myself.

S: I love long walks around Lodi Lake. Camping with my family is my favorite vacation.

Q: What's your best play spot?

S: I love going on my daily walks to Lodi Lake. There are so many dogs and smells, and we always see other humans with treats in their pockets who love to share with us.

Q: What's your guilty pleasure?

R: When my mom lets me sit on the couch with her. Shhh, don't tell my dad.

S: My guilty pleasure is food! I never get enough and my sad eyes prove it.

Q: What's your canine obsession?

R: I am obsessed with food! It doesn't matter what type it is, fruits, vegetables, bread, etc.

S: I am slightly obsessed with greeting people at the door with a toy in my mouth, especially my mom. Sometimes I will hold onto

the toy for a very long time.

Q: What's your favorite treat?

R: I enjoy any snack I am offered, but I really get excited about ice cubes, I just love how crunchy they are.

S: My favorite most wonderful treat is salmon. I can never get enough.

Q: Where do you go for pampering?

R: I am really not very fond of baths, but boy do I love being dried off with a towel; it's like a full body massage. Then I get my nails painted, which I think is a little silly, but the kids at the library really seem to like it.

S: I get pampered at home and I love it when my dad gives me a bath and trims my nails.

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

R: In addition to being a part of the Paws to Read program at the Lodi library, I also work full time as a therapy dog at the dental office where my mom works as a dental hygienist. I was born as a puppy to train for Guide Dogs for the Blind. I did really well with my training, but not quite good enough to stay. My mom took over my training when I was 11 months old. I really didn't have enough confidence to be a guide dog, so they career changed me and my mom adopted me when I was 18 months old. She then took me to be certified as a therapy dog. I really love my career and my family.

S: I love all people and other dogs, especially the ones who have treats to give. I was born in Merced, California. I came to live with my family when I was seven weeks old.

Q: Who are your human parents?

A: Reno and Wendy DeBenedetti. ♦

CELEBRATE COMMUNITY EVENTS

JULY 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

Concerts in the Park

Victory Park

Info: visitstockton.org

JULY 17

Friday Night Market

San Joaquin County Fairgrounds

Info: visitstockton.org

JULY 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

Lodi Certified Farmers Market

School Street

Info: visitlodi.com

JULY 18

Stockton Summer Fest 2026

The Moose Lodge

Info: eventbrite.com

JULY 3

Unity in the Community

Banner Island Ballpark

Info: simpletix.com

JULY 19

**Child Support Services
Block Party**

Pixie Woods

Info: visitstockton.org

JULY 4

**4th of July Parade
& Celebration**

Downtown Stockton

Info: visitstockton.org

JULY 19

Italian Heritage Day

Stockton Gun & Bocce Club

Info: bersaglierisociety.com

JULY 4

July 4th Celebration

Lodi Lake

Info: visitlodi.com

JULY 20

**Love Lodi: Back to
School Party**

125 S. Hutchins St.

Info: visitlodi.com

JULY 10-19

Head Over Heels Musical

Tille Lewis Theatre

Info: (209) 954-5110

JULY 25

**Hospice of San Joaquin
Garden Party**

Private Residence

Info: hospicesj.org

SAVE THE DATE

AUGUST 1

Stuck in Lodi Car Show

120 S. School St.

Info: visitlodi.com

AUGUST 12

Sip n' Stroll

Brookside Classics

Info: hospicesj.org

AUGUST 21

Ducky Derby

Lincoln Center

Info: nochildabuse.org

AUGUST 22

WOW Into the Future

WOW Science Museum

Info: WOWScienceMuseum.org

AUGUST 28

Music Under the Stars

Private Residence

Info: hospicesj.org

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Don't forget that one!



If you have Medi-Cal, visit [BenefitsCal.com](https://www.benefitscal.com) to update information check renewal status, and complete renewals online.

As families prepare for a new school year, access to care is one of the most important items on the checklist.

Keeping Medi-Cal coverage active helps ensure your family can access important care like well-child checkups, immunizations, preventive care, and doctor visits when your child needs them most.

If you or someone you know has Medi-Cal, don't lose coverage. Complete your Medi-Cal renewal so your child stays healthy and ready to learn all year long.

Health Plan
of San Joaquin

1-888-936-PLAN (7526)
www.hpsj-mvhp.org