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HELLO LAFAYETTE!



Can you believe school is almost back in session? We hope everyone soaked up a wonderful, safe summer!

This month, we're so excited to share a batch of fun and heartfelt stories with you. A big thank you to everyone who shared their story, and a **special shoutout to Craig Isaacs for his gorgeous photos** — he truly has a gift for capturing the moment!

We're also celebrating **Michelle and Amanda Alessandria of OPEN EDvantage** this month. You'll get to know their process and passion for working with students, plus find a handy College Visit guide for our rising juniors and seniors.

You may have noticed we've added more pages! This means more stories and more value for the local partners who make this magazine possible. As we grow, we're looking to welcome a few more great Lafayette businesses — so send us your recommendations, and don't forget to share your own story with us!

We'd love to hear from you at Lamorinda@n2co.com.

Warmly,

Your *Greet Lafayette* Team
Lamorinda@n2co.com
GreetLafayette.com



YOUR GREET LAFAYETTE CONTRIBUTORS & TEAM

Thank you to everyone who made this special issue possible!



Tom Hui
Meet Your Neighbor



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Charitable Passions



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Learning & Education

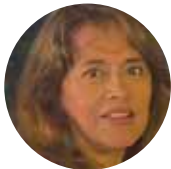


Noelle Brown
Pets With Personality



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Greetings from Mayor Anduri



WITH SCHOOL BACK IN SESSION later this month, bringing more people onto our streets and sidewalks, the City needs your help with our Slow Down Lafayette campaign.

All of us want our streets to be safe. And the most important thing each of us can do to improve traffic safety is to drive at or below posted speed limits.

Speed increases both the likelihood of collisions and the severity of injuries when collisions occur. If we recognize posted speed limits as a Lafayette civic value — something that each of us does as a Lafayette resident to make all of us safer — we will indeed be safer.

The Slow Down Lafayette campaign is multifaceted, involving education, engineering, and enforcement. Our City staff and police will continue to provide public information on how to be safer drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

We have made changes to our streets to make them safer, including \$1.3 million in improvements around schools, and will continue to make improvements. We have stepped up traffic enforcement, and we will continue to do so. In fact, Lafayette Police issued twice as many traffic citations in 2025 as they did in 2023.

All these efforts are starting to show results. The number of collisions in Lafayette, including collisions involving injuries, decreased over the past two years.

We are headed in the right direction. Let's keep going. Observing the speed limit is something each of us can do as members of the Lafayette community to keep everyone safe.

Please let me know if you have suggestions for future topics for the Mayor's column at canduri@lovelafayette.org.



You Are Invited!

We invite business owners, professionals, and Lamorinda residents to join us for the following networking opportunities. Please plan to join us!

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5 —

Greet Happy Hour (5 - 7 pm)

Western Flyer Brewing, 3660 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette

WEDNESDAY, AUG 26 —

Greet Networking Lunch (11:30 am - 1 pm)

La Chamba Taqueria,
484 Center St., Moraga



Scan here
to RSVP

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2 —

Greet Happy Hour (5 - 7 pm)

Canyon Club Brewery, 1558 Canyon Rd., Moraga

BY INVITATION

Greet Gatherings

Greet and *BeLocal* business partners and select community members are invited to attend. We come together 4 times a year at **Local Vines** to mingle and engage in conversations that more intentionally connect and bridge our businesses. Email Christine.Raymond@n2co.com to learn more.

Greet Restaurant Tastings

Residents and participating business partners come together to make friends and enjoy delicious food! Residents can email Lamorinda@n2co.com to be added to the invite list.

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

MEET TOM HUI THE LONG RUN

*FROM COACHING YOUNG ATHLETES
TO LAUNCHING AI STARTUPS, TOM HUI
NEVER STOPS MOVING FORWARD.*

When Tom Hui joined the cross-country team as a freshman at Alameda High School, it happened almost by accident. During a physical education fitness test, he mistakenly cut the course short, convincing the track coach that Tom was a standout runner.

Reality set in quickly. In his first cross-country race, Tom crossed the finish line dead last. But instead of quitting, he stayed. “My teammates were incredibly supportive,” Tom recalls. “I had fun, and it never dawned on me to quit.”

After his junior year, a series of disappointments and a lack of recognition caused Tom to tell his coaches he would not return for his senior year. However, Tom’s neighbor and friend, himself an accomplished runner, gave an interview to a local newspaper, announcing that Tom would run 1,000 miles over the summer to prepare for his senior year.

With the goal now in print, Tom felt he had no choice but to follow through. Over the next 100 days, he logged 1,011 miles. He tracked his progress and even taped his goals to his bedroom wall, so it was the first thing he saw each morning.

By the time senior year began, the transformation was remarkable. Tom’s coaches initially thought he had cut the course short again because he was more than a minute faster than the team’s second-fastest runner. Tom became co-captain, earned All-League honors, and helped lead Alameda High School to league and division championships. His

*“I SEE POTENTIAL IN EVERY
RUNNER, EVEN THE SLOWEST
ONES. I TELL THEM THEY
JUST NEED DISCIPLINE AND
CONSISTENCY.”*

favorite race came at the North Coast Section Championships at the Lafayette Reservoir, where he set a personal best.

Running has remained an important part of Tom’s life. He has competed in national marathon and cross-country championships, Bay to Breakers, the Dipsea Race, Lake Tahoe Relays, and numerous marathons.

Tom most recently shared that passion as a track and field coach at Bentley School after earlier coaching roles at Stanley Middle School and Alhambra High School. His last season at Bentley was especially rewarding, with many runners achieving personal bests. While he recently stepped away from coaching to focus on launching two new companies, he says helping young athletes discover their abilities has brought him great satisfaction. “I see potential in every runner, even the slowest ones,” Tom says. “I had very little natural athletic talent myself. I tell them they just need discipline and consistency.”

That same determination shaped Tom’s professional career. He founded two companies serving the ambulatory surgery center industry, both of which became industry leaders before being acquired. Now, at 74, he’s coming out of retirement to launch two AI companies focused on software development and business operations.

Tom has called Lafayette home since 2007. He’s been a member of Oakwood Athletic Club for more than 20 years and enjoys attending the Lafayette Art & Wine Festival, and playing classical piano. Born in Hong Kong, Tom immigrated to the United States with his family at age eight. His parents made the journey so their children could benefit from educational opportunities.

Inspired by their example, Tom has made education and mentoring a priority. He serves as a trustee for the University of Oregon Foundation, regularly guest lectures in UC Berkeley’s Berkeley Method of Entrepreneurship program, mentors



Tom (front row, right) with the Alameda High School cross-country team at the 1973 Lake Tahoe Relays.



Coach Tom Hui with members of the Bentley School girls' 4x800 relay team.

aspiring entrepreneurs, and, together with his wife, manages a private family foundation supporting education, medical research, scholarships, and community organizations.

More than four decades after accepting the 1,000-mile challenge, Tom Hui is still running strong.

A special thank you to Realtors Stella Tsakonas and Stephanie Mull for sponsoring the Meet Your Neighbor section.

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Tom Hui at the track.
Photo by Craig Isaacs,
BlueGoo Photography

Recipe for Community

Mother-daughter team Rebecca and Lillian Calahan Klein created Sweet Savory and Special, where food, community, and opportunity come together.

PHOTO BY CRAIG ISAACS, BLUEGOO PHOTOGRAPHY

Every spring, neighbors on Victoria Avenue gather for one of their favorite traditions: a progressive dinner. This year, the main course came from someone they’d watched grow up.

Lillian Calahan Klein and her mother, Rebecca, prepared the menu through Sweet Savory and Special, their new catering venture. The idea grew from a vision to create opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like Lillian, while giving back to the organizations that have helped shape her life.

For the Calahan Klein family, it was a full-circle moment. The family moved to Lafayette in 2005 and quickly became part of the close-knit neighborhood. Over the years, neighbors watched Lillian grow into the young woman now serving them dinner. Looking out for others has always come naturally to Lillian. Victoria Avenue is known throughout Lafayette as a Halloween destination, drawing hundreds to the street each year. When Lillian noticed that children and adults with mobility challenges couldn’t easily reach the front porch, she set up a table at the curb to make trick-or-treating easier for all.

During summers at Camp Awesome, Lillian noticed some younger campers feeling a bit overwhelmed. She brought art supplies, set up a table and invited them to join her in making beautiful creations. Camp director Jonathan “Ace” Katayanagi noticed and invited Lillian to become a junior recreation leader, giving her the nickname “Meepster.” It was her first job and an early sign of the leader she would become.

Cooking became another way Lillian cared for others. Rebecca and Lillian enrolled in Diablo Valley College’s culinary arts program, where they learned side by side. During the pandemic, concerned about neighbors who couldn’t shop, they cooked and

delivered meals up and down the street. They also baked nearly 100 “Challahs for Heroes” for caregivers and residents at Merrill Gardens, where Lillian’s grandmother, Muriel, lived.

After culinary school, however, finding meaningful employment was a challenge. Like many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Lillian discovered that employers often overlooked her abilities. Rather than trying to fit into a workplace that wasn’t designed for her strengths, she and Rebecca decided to build one around them.



Rebecca and Lillian Calahan Klein, founders of Sweet Savory and Special, use seasonal, organic ingredients, including these peaches and zucchini from Sunflower Hill Farm.



During the pandemic, Lillian and Rebecca attended DVC culinary classes virtually and shared food with neighbors.

CHARITABLE PASSIONS



Lillian after her first day of baking in Sweet Savory and Special's commercial kitchen in Berkeley.

“Success is possible if the design is right,” Rebecca says. With Rebecca’s experience building companies and nonprofits, they turned that vision into reality.

Family gave Lillian her first opportunities. Her sister, Katherine, and brother-in-law, Alex, asked her to create their wedding cake. Friends ordered Mother’s Day cakes, birthday desserts, family meals, and food for community events. One celebration led to another, and Sweet Savory and Special was launched.

The name reflects what Lillian loves to create: sweet treats, savory family recipes, and special-occasion favorites like birthday cakes and challah. But “Special” carries another meaning. “It’s incredibly special and inspiring to work alongside my daughter,” Rebecca says.

Giving back is at the heart of their mission, especially their support of Special Olympics Northern California. Ask Lillian about the organization, and it’s easy to see how much it means to her. Through swimming, soccer, the Health Messengers program, and Athlete Leadership, she found confidence, lifelong friendships, and a voice as an advocate representing Special Olympics in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

“Special Olympics has transformed my life,” Lillian says. “And unlike so many programs for people with special needs, I’ll never age out. I can compete my whole life. I hope our company’s support helps Special Olympics serve more families in Northern California.”

Lillian catered this year’s progressive dinner for Victoria Avenue and Moraga Road neighbors in Janice Jensen’s garden.



Sweet Savory and Special also supports Sunflower Hill, which provides housing and programs for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. With a new residential community opening in Lafayette, that partnership feels especially close to home.

Learn more at sweetsavoryandspecial.com.

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Artist Angélica Samamé

BOLD COLORS AND CREATIVE FREEDOM

Angélica Samamé

Born and raised in Peru, artist Angélica Samamé brings the richness of her cultural heritage to every piece she creates. She has called Lamorinda home for more than four decades, living in Moraga for many years before settling in Lafayette 18 years ago.

Angélica's love of art began in childhood, but her artistic journey truly blossomed in 2000. Since then, she has dedicated herself to exploring creativity through art classes, workshops, and independent study. Working in acrylics, watercolor, pastel, ink, and papier-mâché, she is especially drawn to bold color, expressive forms, and experimentation.

Her paintings are inspired by both classical and contemporary artists, including Amedeo Modigliani, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, Hessam Abrishami, and Manuel Anoro. She is particularly fascinated by cubism and abstraction, styles that encourage freedom, emotion, and discovery.

For Angélica, painting is an intuitive process. Rather than beginning with a fixed composition, she approaches each blank

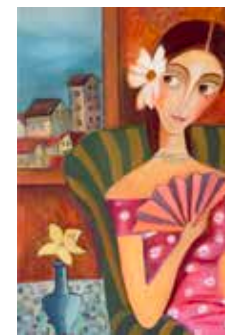


Kitty Cat

Women are a central theme in Angélica's work, portrayed in both traditional and contemporary facets of life.



Let's Talk



Maria

“My artwork is about creation and experimentation. I improvise and let the painting guide me.”

canvas with openness and curiosity. As colors and shapes emerge, figures and ideas begin to reveal themselves. “My artwork is about creation and experimentation,” she says. “I improvise and let the painting guide me.”

Women are a central theme in her work, portrayed in both traditional and contemporary facets of life. More recently, she has also been experimenting with whimsical abstraction and papier-mâché sculpture, creating colorful cats with human characteristics and playful personalities.

Angélica views art as an ongoing adventure — a lifelong investigation into creativity, imagination, and self-expression. Her future plans are simple and heartfelt: to keep painting and exploring new artistic directions, including blending her Peruvian culture with abstraction. Her advice to emerging artists is equally direct: “Follow your dreams.”

Over the years, Angélica has exhibited her artwork at Lafayette City Hall, the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, and other venues throughout Lamorinda.

Angélica's paintings are currently on view through August 16 in the Moraga Art Gallery's summer exhibition, “Connectivity.” To learn more, visit angelicasamame.com.

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Where Ideas Take Flight

PHOTOS BY DOMINIC CURCURO

LOCAL VINES is more than a spot to sip great local wine and catch up with friends — it's become the home base for real conversation focused on our shared community. *Greet Lafayette* hosts its **Greet Gatherings** here each quarter, built on one simple idea: honest conversation beats elevator pitches every time.

These aren't typical networking events. Yes, guests are introduced and they get to know one another, but we couple this with intentional, more in-depth conversation about topics that matter to all of us. In doing this, we get to know more about everyone, not just what they do for a living.

The first gathering, on April 29th, tackled artificial intelligence, with attendees swapping favorite AI tools and discovering new ones together. It set the tone: eye-opening, lively, and genuinely substantive.

On June 18th, the group reconvened to talk sustainability — how to keep useful items out of landfills through reusing, repurposing, and passing belongings on to new homes. The consensus: there's something deeply satisfying about giving old treasures a second life. Discussions led to creative ways to accomplish this.

Greet Gatherings are where relationships grow, experiences and different perspectives are shared, and ideas take shape. Some choose to dive in to develop and activate an idea, while others contribute simply by being part of the conversation.

The next **Greet Gatherings** are in September and November — invitations, topics, and details to follow. Each of these gatherings is designed to deepen connections and encourage the community to show up for one another. To learn more, reach out to Christine at Christine.Raymond@n2co.com.

Put Local Vines at the top of your list of favorite spots — a warm setting for connecting with friends and colleagues, with a full calendar running from Meet the Maker tastings to jazz nights and cider workshops.

Aug 9, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Meet the Maker: Raisin d'Etre
Aug 15, 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm – Generations in Jazz
Aug 23, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Meet the Maker: Rancho del Hambro
Aug 30, 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Make Your Own Cider Workshop with Mount Diablo Cidery
Sep 13, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Meet the Maker: Crane Terrace
Sep 27, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Meet the Maker: Reliez Valley
Nov 8, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm – Meet the Maker: Mount Diablo Cidery

Visit local-vines.com/events to learn more and RSVP.



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3958 S Peardale Drive	\$7,495,000	\$9,600,108	7	6	5+	5270	0.69
1570 Rancho View Drive	\$4,995,000	\$4,750,000	33	5	4.5	4948	0.6
1089 Rahara Drive	\$4,250,000	\$4,560,000	8	4	2.5	3271	0.55
3853 Palo Alto Drive	\$3,950,000	\$3,950,000	0	4	3	3311	0.43
786 Los Palos Manor	\$3,495,000	\$3,490,500	4	6	4.5	4047	0.46
21 Cosso Court	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	0	3	2.5	2522	0.96
1122 Via Media	\$2,885,000	\$3,300,000	7	4	4	3530	0.62
1 Scenic Lane	\$3,495,000	\$3,260,000	34	4	3	4120	2.69
304 Willoughby Court	\$2,299,000	\$2,950,000	9	5	3	3442	0.87
1099 Oak Hill Road	\$2,749,000	\$2,850,000	19	5	3.5	3205	0.64
1125 Glen Road	\$2,150,000	\$2,810,000	9	4	3.5	2442	0.54
3024 Bradbury Drive	\$2,395,000	\$2,725,000	0	4	3.5	2570	0.36
3926 S Peardale Drive	\$2,495,000	\$2,725,000	7	4	3	2218	0.41
3175 Surmont Drive	\$2,595,000	\$2,595,000	10	4	2.5	2964	1.35
805 Tanglewood Drive	\$2,349,000	\$2,500,000	5	4	2.5	3059	0.48
11 Diablo Vista Way	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	0	5	3.5	2948	0.95
1126 Hidalgo Court	\$2,295,000	\$2,468,000	17	4	2.5	2030	0.24
3958 Los Arabis Drive	\$2,499,000	\$2,450,000	18	4	2	2686	0.84
3345 Ridge Road	\$2,195,000	\$2,405,000	8	3	3	2282	0.55
1119 Oak Hill Road	\$2,185,000	\$2,365,000	9	4	3	2531	0.48
665 Sky Hy Circle	\$2,385,000	\$2,335,000	22	4	2.5	3184	0.31
3196 Lucas Circle	\$2,195,000	\$2,300,000	3	4	3	2606	0.43
1239 Sunrise Ridge Drive	\$2,250,000	\$2,125,000	91	5	3.5	3653	0.28
306 Maverick Court	\$1,998,000	\$2,100,000	6	4	3	2692	0.32
1715 Greenhills Court	\$2,150,000	\$2,025,000	12	4	3.5	4139	0.86

Information compiled from MLS on 6/24/2026



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Raised with Purpose

Noelle Brown shares why helping prepare future service dogs for Canine Companions has become a rewarding way to give back. | INTERVIEW WITH NOELLE BROWN



Noelle Brown and Paidas, a black Labrador Retriever she co-raised, at the Canine Companions Matriculation Ceremony in May 2026.

How did you first get involved with puppy raising? I became a volunteer puppy raiser in February 2023. I wanted to find a meaningful way to give back, but wasn't sure how volunteering would fit into family life. When I learned about the impact service dogs have on people with disabilities — and how many volunteers it takes to prepare each dog — I decided to get involved with Canine Companions.

What is Canine Companions? Canine Companions is a nonprofit that provides highly trained service dogs to children, adults, and veterans with disabilities at no cost to recipients. For more than 50 years, the organization has relied on volunteers and donors to help prepare these dogs to transform lives.

Tell us about the puppy you recently co-raised. He's a handsome black Labrador Retriever who earned the name "Paidas the Great," because he carries himself with a healthy level of self-confidence. Paidas was the second puppy we've raised through Canine Companions, following Danica IV, another black Lab. Many people don't realize that co-raising is an option. Families can share responsibility for a puppy, making the commitment more manageable while exposing the puppy to different people and experiences.

How does it work? Puppy raisers receive dogs at about 8 weeks old and spend roughly 18 months focusing on socialization, basic obedience,

and everyday experiences before the dogs move on to professional training at Canine Companions' Northwest Training Center in Santa Rosa. Canine Companions provides in-person and remote class training and support.

What's a typical day like? Is there a clever way to say potty breaks, naps, walks, and cuddles? Because that's a big part of each day! But underneath the everyday puppy routine, we're constantly working on socialization and exposure. Paidas and Danica accompanied us to parks, stores, restaurants, and everyday errands so they could learn to stay calm and confident in a variety of environments.

I've been fortunate that many of our local restaurants and businesses welcome future service dogs in training. Those experiences are an important part of preparing puppies for the work they'll eventually do.

What's been most rewarding? Becoming closer to my community. At a time when many of us could use a little more connection, raising a puppy has created opportunities to meet people I might not otherwise have met and have conversations that otherwise wouldn't have happened.

I've come to appreciate that no service dog is raised by one person alone. There are volunteers, professional trainers, donors, puppy sitters, and countless others who contribute to a dog's success. Being a small part of that larger effort has been incredibly rewarding.

How do you feel when it's time to say goodbye? There's definitely some sadness, but mostly it's a feeling of pride. By the time puppies leave for advanced



A Canine Companions service dog meets its new recipient.

training, you've spent more than a year helping prepare them for their next chapter. Watching them move on feels a little like sending a child off to college. You're excited to see what comes next and hopeful about the difference they'll make in someone's life.

How can others get involved? Start by visiting the Canine Companions website. You'll quickly fall in love with the puppies, learn about the people they help, and discover the many ways volunteers contribute to the mission. There are opportunities to raise puppies, transport dogs, volunteer at events, or support local chapters. Visit canine.org or call 1-800-572-BARK.



The Brown family celebrates the matriculation of their first Canine Companions puppy, Danica IV, in May 2024. Back row (l to r): Booker, Emerson, and Greg. Seated: Noelle, Danica IV, and Camilla.



Noelle and Paidas at last year's Lafayette Art & Wine Festival, one of many public outings that helped prepare Paidas to become a service dog.

“Watching them move on feels a little like sending a child off to college.”

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Do you have a Pet that you'd like to celebrate? Email lamorinda@n2co.com.

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We've all stood there wondering if something goes in the blue, green or black bin. Now, RecycleSmart residents can text **“Hello Recycling Bin”** to **(925) 940-5795** for on-demand sorting information! Wondering which bin the milk carton goes in? Text Hello Recycling Bin!

Michelle Alessandria and Amanda with Livie, the newest member of the OPEN EDvantage family.



OPEN EDvantage: Supporting the Whole Student

PHOTO BY CRAIG ISAACS, BLUEGOO PHOTOGRAPHY

At OPEN EDvantage, the mission is simple but powerful: help students discover their strengths, build confidence, and find a clear path toward their future. Through personalized tutoring, college advising, executive functioning coaching, and advocacy services, founder Michelle Alessandria and her daughter Amanda support the whole student, not just their grades.

“We are much more than a tutoring company,” Michelle explains. With a team of experienced tutors, educational specialists, and college advisors,

OPEN EDvantage works with students to improve in the classroom, build executive functioning skills, prepare for college, or navigate an IEP or 504 Plan.

Their goal is always the same: help students understand who they are and what success looks like for them. As the parent of former Division I student-athletes, Michelle brings firsthand insight into the unique balance student-athletes must strike between academics, athletics, recruiting, and college planning.

Michelle founded OPEN EDvantage after more than 20 years in education

“Michelle and Amanda have built an impressive business helping local students and families. Their academic and college guidance is thoughtful and comprehensive — from subject-specific tutoring to the college application process. They were instrumental in supporting our child’s learning, test prep, and study strategies, building real confidence along the way. I highly recommend OPEN EDvantage!”

—PEGGY CARUSO, LAMORINDA RESIDENT

as a classroom teacher, special education teacher, and educational advocate, work that revealed many families need guidance beyond what schools alone can provide.

Amanda, a UCLA graduate and former Division I rower, grew up watching her mother support students and families and now works alongside her as a college advisor, blending two generations of experience and perspective. Michelle’s son Giorgio is also a UCLA graduate and former Division I water polo player, giving their family firsthand experience with the college recruiting process and the balance between academics and athletics.

The team enjoys working with curious students who are open to feedback and ready to invest in their own growth. One recent student had no idea what he wanted to pursue after high school until career exploration helped him discover a passion for emergency services. He’s now thriving in the Contra Costa County Search and Rescue program, a reminder of why the OPEN EDvantage team loves what they do.

College admissions have changed significantly in the past five years. With more schools becoming test-optional, students are applying to more colleges than ever, intensifying competition. Authenticity now matters more than ever, as colleges look for genuine engagement over a checklist of activities.

For Lafayette families considering tutoring, Michelle’s advice is clear: don’t wait until there’s a problem. Building strong study habits, executive functioning skills, and independence

early pays dividends throughout high school and beyond, and often improves the parent-child relationship by removing homework battles from the equation.

Michelle has been part of the Lafayette community for more than three decades as an educator, mentor, coach, and parent, including mentoring new teachers through St. Mary’s College. Amanda, a graduate of the Acalanes Union High School District, is proud to

COLLEGE VISIT: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TOUR

Websites and rankings only go so far. Visiting in person and asking the right questions helps you tell whether a school actually fits you.

- Before You Go**
- Always sign up for an official tour in advance — spots fill fast, especially in spring and summer, and registering ensures you get info sessions, student panels, and recorded attendance (some schools track this as “demonstrated interest”).
 - Start visits in sophomore or junior year, or the summer before senior year.
 - Visit a mix of campus sizes (small, medium, large) rather than dozens of similar schools.

- Academics**
- What’s the average class size for first-year vs. upper-level courses?
 - Are classes taught mostly by professors or teaching assistants?
 - How accessible are professors outside class?
 - What research or internship opportunities exist for undergrads?

- Student Life**
- What do students do on weekends?
 - What are the most popular student organizations?
 - How easy is it for first-years to get involved?

give back to the community that shaped her own educational journey.

At OPEN EDvantage, every student is different — and that’s exactly what Michelle loves most about this work. “I enjoy the puzzle of understanding each student’s unique strengths, challenges,

interests, and goals, then helping them find the support they need to succeed,” she says.

Connect with Michelle at 925-655-8600 or go to open-edvantage.com to learn more.



Michelle and Amanda visit the University of Washington during a college campus tour.

- Support & Career Resources**
- What tutoring, writing center, or academic support is available?
 - What career services help with internships and job searches?
 - What percent of students complete an internship before graduating?

- Housing & Daily Life**
- Are first-years required to live on campus?
 - What are housing options after freshman year?
 - How does the dining plan work, and how easy is it to get around?

Ask Your Tour Guide

- Why did you choose this college?
- What do you like most about it?
- What do you wish you’d known before you started here?

Bottom line: A tour isn’t just about seeing buildings — it’s about picturing your future there. Come with questions, and you’ll leave with real answers.



For additional helpful resources, go to open-edvantage.com or call 925-655-8600.

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VISIT AND LEARN MORE.

boys team charity

Local Families Team Up to Give Back

BY KATE BEROLZHEIMER

In Lafayette, boys team charity (btc) is bringing families and the community together, one service project at a time. From furnishing apartments for families in need to volunteering at local events, boys and their parents roll up their sleeves for hands-on service work across Contra Costa and Alameda Counties.

A national volunteer organization for boys in grades 7-12 and their parents, btc has built a strong presence in the Lamorinda area. Founded in 2001, it now includes 44 leagues across 10 states. The Lamorinda League, primarily based in Lafayette, joins nearby East Bay leagues in Orinda and the newly formed Hacienda League in Moraga in a shared mission: getting boys and their parents to volunteer side-by-side.

One recent standout effort was a senior project completed in partnership with Grateful Gatherings, in which btc fully furnished an apartment for a local mother and her children. Members collected furniture, household goods, and everyday essentials to transform an empty space into a warm and welcoming home.

Another longtime favorite is btc's annual Holiday Adopt-a-Family program, where teammates and parents shop for gifts for families in need, then gather over pizza and holiday cookies to wrap presents. btc members are a familiar presence in the local community. They regularly volunteer at the Youth Homes Thrift Shop, sorting donations and supporting the organization's work with youth and families in the area. They



Allison, a btc coach, volunteers alongside her son and a fellow teammate at this year's Taste of Lafayette, where btc families helped local merchants collect tickets and pass out samples in support of local businesses.

What sets btc apart from many youth volunteer programs is the teamwork between parents and sons working side-by-side.

also participate in community events such as the Taste of Lafayette, where they help local merchants collect tickets and pass out samples in support of local businesses.

What sets btc apart from many youth volunteer programs is the teamwork between parents and sons working side-by-side. There is no drop-off, drive-away, and pick-up. The time together, showing up and doing the work, is part of what makes it meaningful. Along the way, boys also form friendships with peers who share a commitment to giving back. As one btc teammate from the Class of 2028 put it, "It's really fun to meet new people and see the community come together."



As part of a senior project with Grateful Gatherings, btc members collected furniture and household essentials to create a welcoming home for a local mother and her children.



The finished apartment after btc members helped transform the space.

One of the most rewarding aspects of btc is watching boys grow and gain confidence over time. Seventh graders often need guidance picking out age-appropriate gifts and sticking to a budget. By the time they are seniors, those same boys are confidently leading the shopping trips and making thoughtful decisions on their own. They also develop a deeper understanding of the impact of service itself. As one teammate summed it up, "It makes you feel good to give back to the community."

Partnerships with local nonprofits also include White Pony Express, Points of Light, Choice in Aging, Aegis Senior Living, and other organizations serving Contra Costa and Alameda Counties.

For Lafayette families looking for a purposeful way to connect while giving back, btc offers a program built around the idea that service is better together!

Learn more at boysteamcharity.org/chapter/lamorinda.

Writer Kate Berolzheimer lives in Lafayette and is a senior at The College Preparatory School.

Special thanks to Realtor Brian Rochford of Rochford Real Estate for sponsoring our Student Life section.

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Learning More Than Martial Arts

Campolindo junior Saihba Viridi shares how Taekwondo became more than a sport, helping her build confidence, find community, and grow into a leadership role.

BY SAIHBA VIRDI

I started Taekwondo in sixth grade after trying softball, soccer, and volleyball. Taekwondo is a Korean martial art and combat sport that focuses on precision in forms and sparring. Practitioners work on a variety of kicks, as well as exercises that improve stamina, speed, and accuracy, such as pushups, situps, and lunges.

That isn't all, though. The basics — stances, blocks, and sparring footwork — that make up the foundation of Taekwondo are vital to practice. These exercises are done almost daily, instilling a sense of discipline in the martial artists who practice them consistently.

Personally, I have never been good at sticking with activities long-term. But five years after I started Taekwondo, I'm still training. I tried to figure out what made Taekwondo



Campolindo junior Saihba Viridi (right) and fellow student Eliora Gomes at Diablo Martial Arts in Lafayette.

different from all my other sports, and realized it was the people I surrounded myself with.

In Taekwondo, the goal is less about beating others and more about personal achievement. And it shows even today. My teachers aim to make me a faster sparrer without the expectation of making me the best. They aim to make me stronger, without constant comparison. Being given the ability to improve without the pressure of performance has helped me continue practicing and also develop an intrinsic motivation to be better.

Halfway through my freshman year, I was given the opportunity to teach at the studio. I felt hesitant at first. I was worried I wouldn't know enough or be good with kids, and was convinced I would end up failing. But my teachers, friends, and parents encouraged me, so I ended up teaching twice a week.

When I started, I was so nervous that I spent most of the time trying to look like I knew what I was doing instead of actually teaching. Slowly, I became more confident because I knew what I had to say could positively impact the kids I was teaching. I felt driven to make them better, to see them improve their forms and kicks. I also felt connected to the people I taught with and the people I practiced Taekwondo with, because it became such a big part of my life.

Taekwondo has provided me with skills that have helped me grow physically and mentally, as well as a community of people I trust.

Writer Saihba Viridi lives in Lafayette and is a junior at Campolindo High School.



Saihba competes at a Taekwondo tournament.

Special thanks to Realtor Ashley Battersby for sponsoring our Learning & Education section.

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Saint Mary's head baseball coach Eric Valenzuela led the Gaels to a second straight West Coast Conference Tournament championship.

“Relationships are everything.”

—ERIC VALENZUELA

SETTING THE STANDARD

Behind Saint Mary's championship seasons are two coaches with unique styles, a shared commitment to their student-athletes, and a belief that winning starts long before and after game day.

BY CHRISTINE CAMP

Winning seasons are measured by championships and postseason appearances. Winning programs are measured by something harder to define. Spend time with Saint Mary's head baseball coach Eric Valenzuela and head softball coach Sonja Garnett, and one thing becomes clear: neither spends much time talking about wins. They talk about people, culture, and relationships. About helping young athletes become better teammates, leaders, and people.

This spring, that philosophy produced one of the most successful years in Saint Mary's athletics. The Gaels baseball team captured its second consecutive West Coast Conference Tournament championship, returned to the NCAA Tournament and finished the season ranked No. 20 in the final Perfect Game poll — the highest national ranking in program history. Along the



The Gaels celebrate after clinching the West Coast Conference Tournament championship.

way, Saint Mary's earned the program's first NCAA Tournament victory and stunned No. 1 UCLA twice in regional play.

Just across campus, the softball team claimed its third straight WCC regular-season championship. They advanced farther in the NCAA Tournament than any team in program history, continuing a remarkable rise under Garnett's leadership. The accomplishments are impressive. The coaches are even more so.

CARRYING THE TORCH

Eric Valenzuela doesn't see himself as the beginning of Saint Mary's baseball. He sees himself as part of its story. As he reflected on the season, he spoke as much about former coaches, alumni, and the players who came before this year's team as he did about championships. Success, he believes, is something each generation inherits and has a responsibility to leave stronger than they found it. “We just kind of took the torch and kept it rolling forward,” he said.



Under head softball coach Sonja Garnett, the Gaels claimed a third straight WCC regular-season championship and made the deepest NCAA Tournament run in program history.

That perspective explains why relationships sit at the center of everything he does. Recruiting isn't simply about talent. It's about finding players who embrace the culture, trust one another, and understand what it means to represent Saint Mary's.

The results speak for themselves. Conference championships. National recognition. NCAA milestones. Players earning individual honors. Yet Valenzuela is already looking ahead. The season may be over, but recruiting, player development, and building the next team never really stop. His greatest pride isn't a ranking or a trophy. It's watching players leave Moraga prepared for whatever comes next.

BUILDING BELIEF

If Valenzuela's philosophy (as a peer mentor to Garnett) is centered in legacy, Sonja Garnett's begins with belief. “Half of it's belief, and sometimes it's getting them to believe in themselves,” she said. That simple idea has helped shape one of the West Coast Conference's most consistent softball programs.

Garnett understands that confidence doesn't simply appear on game day. It's developed through preparation, trust, and creating an environment where student-athletes feel supported while being challenged to grow.

Recruiting follows the same philosophy. Every athlete, she says, gets one opportunity to choose where they'll spend their college years. Finding the right fit matters just as much as athletic ability because the goal isn't simply to win games - it's to help young women flourish during one of the most important chapters of their lives. Her players know that commitment extends beyond the field. “I feel like my family and my team are one and the same,” Garnett said.

It's a statement that explains why former players remain connected to the program long after graduation and why today's athletes continue building on the culture she has established. The conference championships are evidence that the philosophy works. The relationships are the reason it endures.



BEYOND THE SCOREBOARD

Saint Mary's has become one of the West Coast Conference's most respected athletic programs because coaches like Eric Valenzuela and Sonja Garnett understand that success isn't built in a single season; it's in the everyday.

In weight rooms before sunrise. On buses after difficult losses. During recruiting conversations with families. In practices where accountability matters as much as talent. And in quiet moments, when a coach helps an athlete believe in something bigger than the scoreboard.

For the Lamorinda community, these teams are more than conference champions. They are a reflection of what Saint Mary's does best: develop young people who compete with purpose, represent their college with pride, and leave the program stronger for those who follow. The banners and trophies will always mark this remarkable season. The cultures these coaches continue to build may prove to be their greatest victories.

BUILD YOUR OWN WORM FARM

BY RECYCLES MART



RECYCLES MART HAS A GREAT IDEA for a home composting project. A worm farm is a low-cost, low-effort way to reduce waste, help the environment, and get free, high-quality fertilizer in return.

What you'll need:

- Two same-sized, dark, opaque plastic bins (14 gallons works well) plus one lid
- A drill with a ¼" bit
- Shredded plain newspaper (skip the shiny/waxy pages)
- Red wiggler worms, about ½ pound
- Water and a small amount of food scraps

For a ready-made option, discounted Can-O-Worms compost bins are available through RecycleSmart at recyclesmart.org/compostbins.

Building it:

1. Drill holes in one bin: lots along the upper sides for air, and around 50 in the bottom for drainage (don't forget the corners!).
2. Stack the drilled bin inside the un-drilled one — this catches the "worm tea" that drains out. Use a brick or rocks to keep a small gap between them if needed.
3. Shred newspaper, fill the inner bin about halfway, and dampen it with water (damp, not soggy).
4. Add your worms, cover them with bedding, then pop the lid on — worms like it cool, dark, and quiet.

Feeding tips:

- Feed about once a week, ¼–½ cup of scraps at a time.
- Worms love fruit and veggie scraps, dry bread/pasta/cereal, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, and crushed eggshells.
- Skip citrus, dairy, meat, oils, sauces, cardboard, and glossy paper.
- Chopping scraps (or freezing them and then thawing them) helps worms break them down faster.

Upkeep:

- Keep the bin out of direct sunlight and away from freezing temperatures.
- Too wet? Add dry shredded paper. Too dry? Add a little moisture.
- The dark liquid that collects below is "worm tea" — dilute it 5:1 with water and use it on plants.

HARVESTING CASTINGS: When the rich, coffee-ground-like castings are 3-4 inches deep, it's time to harvest.

- Push everything to one side, add fresh bedding and food to the other side, and within a month the worms migrate over — leaving clean castings behind for you to collect.
- An alternative way is to dump everything out onto a tarp on a sunny day, and the worms will migrate to the bottom of the pile because they don't like light. Then just scoop off your castings!

Thank you to RecycleSmart for providing us with helpful tips and educational programs here in Lamorinda!



To learn more about worm composting, visit recyclesmart.org/wormcomposting.





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