NOVEMBER 2026

greet LAFAYETTE

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Post 517 members Peter Koebler and Mike Gilson

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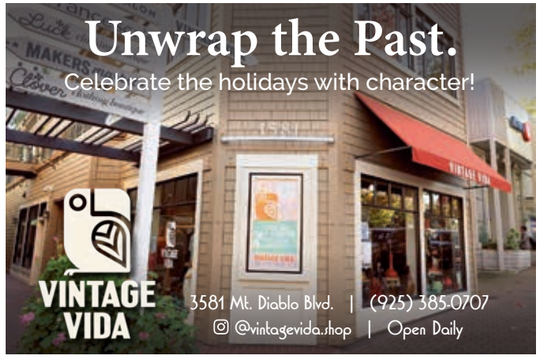
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Remember Small Business Saturday on November 28.

Please let these stores know you saw them in Greet Lafayette!













HELLO LAFAYETTE!

NOVEMBER IS A TIME to reflect on service, gratitude and the people who make a difference in our community. With Veterans Day this month, we're especially grateful for those who have served our country and continue to serve their communities.

In this issue, we highlight **Lafayette American Legion Post 517** and its support of local students attending California Boys & Girls State, and we remember **Ashley Dias** and the lasting impact his selfless actions continue to have on our community five years later.

We also share the story of the nonprofit **Youth Homes** and its continuing work with young people and families, and two Lafayette **Girl Scouts** who gave back to Happy Valley Elementary through their Silver Award project.

Our Business Spotlight shines on **Aegis Living Moraga**, where wellness is a whole-person approach — nurturing mind, body, and spirit.

As we head into the holiday season, we hope these stories are a reminder of the generosity, service and community spirit all around us.

With **Small Business Saturday** coming up on November 28, it's a great time to support Lafayette businesses. Check out our **Shop Local** page.

Wishing you and your family a very Happy Thanksgiving!

Warmly,
Your *Greet Lafayette* Team
Lamorinda@n2co.com
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greet

YOUR *GREET LAFAYETTE* CONTRIBUTORS & TEAM

Thank you to everyone who made this special issue possible!



Lafayette Post 517
Student Life



Youth Homes
Charitable Passions



John Kennett
Lafayette History



Pamela Freund-Striplen
Learning & Education



Dias Family
In Memory of Ashley Dias



Julie Peterson
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Colleen Naftali LPIE
School Scene



Lulu Braunstein
Town Hall Theatre



Catherine Hattersley & Riley Lonergan
Girl Scouts



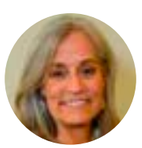
Carl Anduri
Mayor of Lafayette



Aegis Living Moraga
Business Spotlight

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Greetings from Mayor Anduri



As we observe our November holidays, honoring and thanking our veterans and giving thanks for all our blessings, we are moved to think about what each of us can do to make our world a little better.

During 2026 and 2027, the City is encouraging and supporting one seemingly simple habit that can make a big difference: placing our food scraps in the green cart instead of the landfill cart.

The City has worked closely with RecycleSmart, our local agency that manages our garbage, recycling, and composting, to determine that this one action can make the biggest positive impact with the least effort.

A study conducted by RecycleSmart earlier this year found that only around 40% of Lafayette households are putting their food scraps into the green cart. If we can increase that number to 75%, the reduction in greenhouse gases would be equivalent to taking 200 cars off the road for a year — every year.

Yes, food scraps can be messy, but keeping them out of the landfill helps reduce methane pollution and turns them into valuable compost that releases nutrients to the soil and helps gardens, farms, and landscapes grow.

Collecting food scraps is easier than you think. Visit RecycleSmart.org/houses-green-cart for tips on easy, clean food scrap collection at home. And if you call Republic Services at (925) 685-4711, they will bring you a free 3-gallon kitchen food scraps container.

A little bit of extra work by each of us can make a lasting difference.



P.S. I hope to see many of you at this year's Community Thanksgiving Breakfast on November 17. Visit lafayettechamber.org/breakfast to register. This event fills up quickly!



You Are Invited!

HELLO, EVERYONE!

We're taking a break from hosting our networking *Greet* events in November and December. We'll share our plans for January in the December issue, and we look forward to seeing you in 2027!

GREET GATHERINGS

All *Greet Lafayette* and *BeLocal* business partners are invited to attend. We come together four times a year to mix, mingle, and have conversations that connect our businesses in more intentional and creative ways. **To learn more, email Christine.Raymond@n2co.com.**

GREET RESTAURANT TASTINGS

Residents and participating business partners come together to make friends and enjoy delicious food. **Residents should email us at Lamorinda@n2co.com to be added to the invitee list.** Select business partners will be invited as well. We're in the midst of planning a few right now!

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Post 517 Commander Mike Gilson (left) with retired Navy Rear Adm. Peter Koebler, who attended Boys State in 1986. Photo by Craig Isaacs, BlueGoo Photography

LAFAYETTE POST 517

A STATE RUN BY STUDENTS



Campolindo senior Zayden Bronson (left) with fellow delegate Nick Rashidi at California Boys & Girls State in Sacramento, 2026.

LAFAYETTE POST 517 SENDS LOCAL STUDENTS TO SACRAMENTO FOR A HANDS-ON LESSON IN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC LIFE.

For one week each summer, California high school students step into the roles of candidates, elected officials, lawmakers, and judges.

It's all part of the American Legion's California Boys & Girls State, a civic leadership program that brings together about 1,000 students to Sacramento for a firsthand look at how government works, from city councils to the three branches of state government. Students who have completed their junior year are nominated by their schools and selected by local American Legion posts.

Campolindo senior Zayden Bronson was among six local students sent by Lafayette American Legion Post 517. Delegates also came from Bentley School, Miramonte and Berean Christian.

"I wanted to participate in Boys & Girls State because I'm interested in local and state government and wanted to learn more about how it works," Zayden says. "The program gave me a hands-on way to do that."

Students formed their own "cities" and "counties" and were assigned to one of two political parties, Whig or Federalist. They could run for positions at the city, county, and state levels.

"We campaigned, gave speeches, and voted; other positions were appointed by those already elected," Zayden says. "Once elections ended, most of us had roles, and for the rest of the program we passed laws, held trials, and made policy, just like a real state would."

The American Legion established Boys State in 1935 to give young people a greater understanding of government and civic participation. California's program became coed in 2023 and is now known as Boys & Girls State. Alumni include former President Bill Clinton, Neil Armstrong, Bruce Springsteen, and Michael Jordan.

LAFAYETTE POST 517: GENERATIONS OF SERVICE

Lafayette American Legion Post 517 was chartered in 1933 and today serves veterans throughout Lamorinda, Alamo, Walnut Creek, and Pleasant Hill.

The Post meets at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building, bringing veterans together through regular gatherings, speakers, and community events while connecting them with benefits, services, and resources.

Its involvement with Boys & Girls State dates to the 1940s, says Post Commander and Lafayette resident Mike Gilson. "I think this program is more critical today than perhaps at any time in the 90-year history of the program," Mike says. "These local young men and women are no doubt the future of our country."

Post 517 member and retired Navy Rear Adm. Peter Koebler attended Boys State himself in 1986. "I know firsthand what a positive impact it can have on a young person," he says.

Former local delegates have gone on to attend the Naval Academy, West Point, Harvard, Princeton, Cal, UCLA, USF, and Davidson. Support from Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary, Realtor Omar Khan, and Post 517 members allows delegates to attend at no cost.

To learn more, visit al517.org and californiaboysandgirlsstate.org.

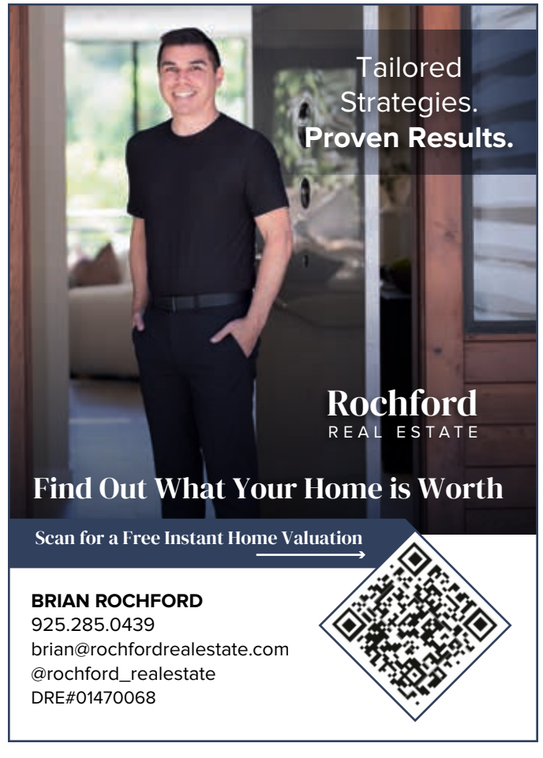


Lafayette Post 517 members join veterans at Merrill Gardens for the annual Veterans Day luncheon in November 2025.

A MONUMENT TO SERVICE

Outside the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building, a granite monument honors Contra Costa County service members who died in the line of duty since 9/11. Post 517 Commander Mike Gilson helped lead the memorial effort. The monument was dedicated in 2018, marking 10 years since Lafayette native Senior Airman Jonathan Vega Yelner was killed in Afghanistan.

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



Remembering Ashley Dias

PHOTOS BY CRAIG ISAACS, BLUEGOO PHOTOGRAPHY



Ashley's parents, Gloria and Fabio Dias (center), with his brother, Trevor Dias, cousin Dr. Minerva Pillai, sister Vanessa Dias, and niece Angelique Dias-Vanni.

Five years after Ashley Dias gave his life protecting students outside Stanley Middle School, family, friends and community leaders gathered to honor his life and legacy.

For Ashley's mother, Gloria Dias, it is still difficult to comprehend how much time has passed.

"The last words he spoke to me were, 'See you later, Ma,'" she said. "Even after five years, he remains by my side every single day, guiding me, comforting me, and making me laugh with his outrageous jokes."

Gloria described Ashley as someone who was always smiling and bringing joy to others, with a love of family, sports, food and travel.

His niece, Angelique, now a sophomore at Acalanes High School, remembered the everyday moments she shared with her uncle.

"Some of my favorite memories aren't complicated or huge," she said. "They're the simple things. He took me out to play basketball. He took me to different places to try food and go taste testing. He was someone who cared about people and was willing to put himself in harm's way."

On Sept. 8, 2021, Ashley was serving as a crossing guard outside Stanley when an SUV struck him. He pushed students out of the vehicle's path before he was hit, an action credited with saving their lives. He was 45.

When Ashley learned crossing guards were needed at Stanley, the middle school he once attended, he "didn't hesitate to help," Gloria said. "That's the kind of person he was."

Lafayette School District Superintendent Brent Stephens called Ashley a hero for his courage that day and his everyday service to the community.

Pete Callahan, chancellor of the Knights of Columbus, reflected on the family and faith that shaped Ashley, noting that Ashley's father, Fabio, is a longtime Knight and former Grand Knight. "We also honor the parents who formed such a hero," Callahan said.

Ashley's legacy can be seen throughout Lafayette, including memorial plaques at Lafayette Plaza and outside Stanley that are reminders to drive safely and protect children and the community.

Since Ashley's death, the city has adopted a Vision Zero policy, made traffic safety improvements near schools, and launched the Slow Down Lafayette campaign.

Mayor Carl Anduri said Lafayette will not forget Ashley. "Ashley saved lives five years ago," he said. "His example and his memory continue to inspire us as we seek to honor and remember him by making Lafayette safer for everyone."

Ashley's sister, Vanessa Dias, spoke about their close relationship and shared a phrase Ashley often said: "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." "I'm grateful for the memories I have with my brother," she said. "He will always live in my heart."

His brother, Trevor, remembered Ashley as "the greatest brother any kid could have." Reflecting on Ashley's decision to protect the students, Trevor said, "I know he would do it time and time again." He also recalled that Ashley returned home from San Francisco to help care for their mother, Gloria, during serious medical complications.

Cousin Minerva Pillai helped organize the Mass and remembrance program, emceed by Tony Moniz. Aunt Dr. Daphne Pillai, speaking by video from Mumbai, recalled her last conversation with Ashley just two weeks before his death, filled with his infectious laughter. Ashley's cousin and close friend Franav Pillai shared a video highlighting his life.



Gloria and Fabio Dias beside the memorial plaque at Lafayette Plaza Park honoring their son, Ashley, and reminding drivers to slow down.

Gloria thanked the Lafayette and school communities, St. Perpetua, and her Goan community for supporting the family.

"It takes a village of help, love, faith, grace, and gratitude to get you through hard times," she said. "Ashley brought so much light, laughter, and love into our lives, and no amount of time can take that away from us. Ashley, your memory lives in our hearts forever."

She closed with a gentle reminder: "Death leaves a heartache no one can heal. Love leaves a memory no one can steal."

A special thank you to Realtors Stella Tsakonas and Stephanie Mull for sponsoring this section.



Family, friends and community members gathered at St. Perpetua Catholic Church on Sept. 8 to remember Ashley, five years after his death.



Gloria Dias shares memories of her son. "Ashley brought so much light, laughter, and love into our lives."



Honoring Those Who Served

BY JULIE PETERSON
THURSDAY FELLOWSHIP COORDINATOR, LOPC



LOPC Thursday Fellowship honored seven local veterans at its 2025 Veterans Day gathering. From left: Bill Bowman, Lyle Deck, Michael Irby, Jim Fulford, Frank Grannis, Roger Fry, and Joe Roebuck.

IN NOVEMBER, we pause to remember and honor those who have served our country. At Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church (LOPC), that tradition is especially meaningful at Thursday Fellowship, where local veterans are recognized and celebrated.

Thursday Fellowship provides a social network for seniors in the community. Each Thursday, September through June, volunteers offer guests a morning craft, prepare and serve lunch, and provide afternoon entertainment. Participants may attend with caregivers, making the gathering a place for friendship and connection.

Last Veterans Day, Thursday Fellowship honored seven veterans: Bill Bowman, Lyle Deck, Michael Irby, Frank Grannis, Roger Fry, Joe Roebuck, and Jim Fulford.

Their stories span branches and eras of the U.S. military. Lyle Deck served in Korea in the Air Force as an airman second class and as a radar operator. Michael Irby served first in the Army as a corporal, working as a clerk and stenographer for the general staff in Korea. Twenty years later, he served in the Marine Corps as a sergeant and aircraft rescue firefighter. “I had a great career,” he reflected.

Frank Grannis served in the Navy during World War II, training for the invasion of Japan before the invasion was canceled. Roger Fry served in the Army, working on battle maps on Alaska’s Arctic Slope, while Joe Roebuck served as a Navy lieutenant junior grade in naval security at Pearl Harbor. Jim Fulford also served in the Army.

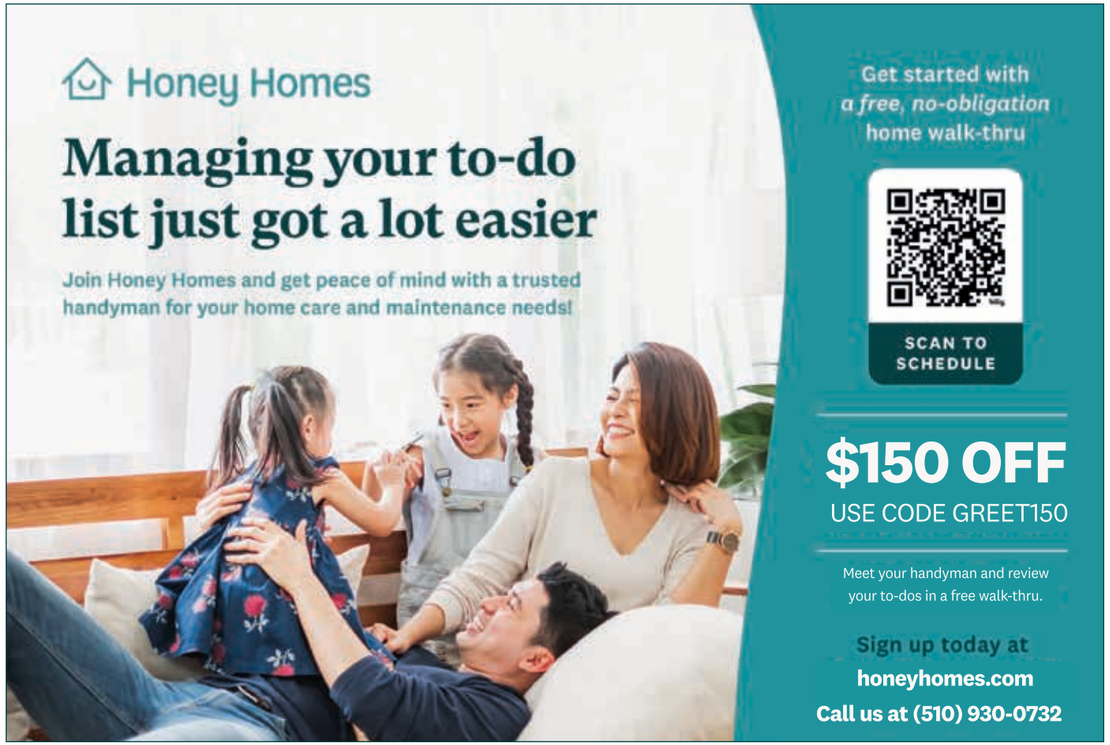
Thursday Fellowship is grateful for the opportunity to honor these veterans and celebrate their service, stories, and place in our community.

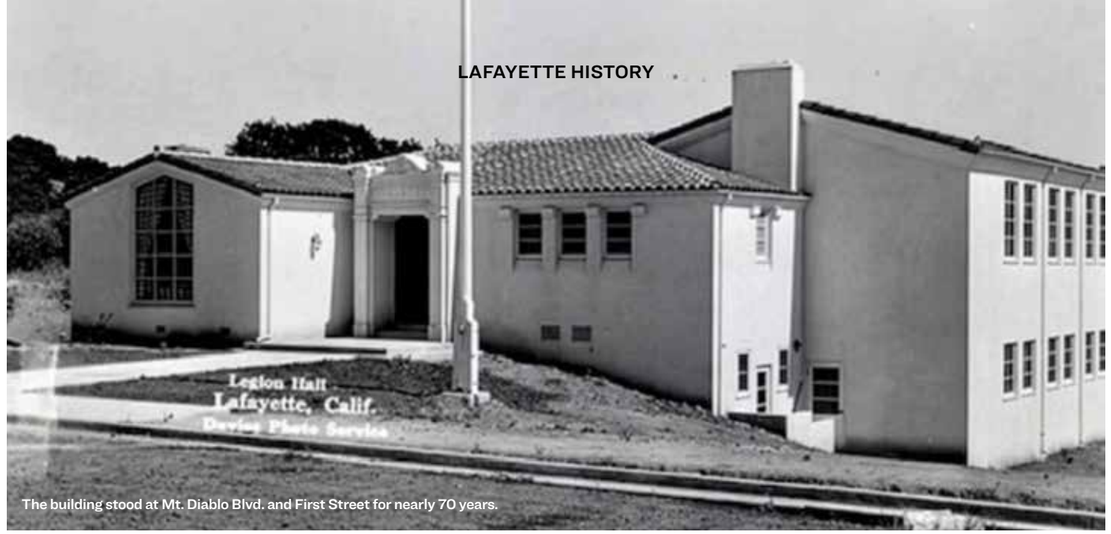
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Special thanks to RecycleSmart for sponsoring this Veterans tribute.









The building stood at Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street for nearly 70 years.

LAFAYETTE'S VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING:
WHERE THE COMMUNITY CAME TOGETHER

BY JOHN KENNETT, LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY | PHOTOS PROVIDED

Long before Lafayette had a modern library, a city hall, or many of the community buildings we know today, there was the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building.

Sitting at the southeast corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and First Street, the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building was a familiar part of downtown for nearly seven decades. Built in 1938-39 as a Works Progress Administration project, it was dedicated in mid-1939 as the American Legion Post 517 Hall. Over the years, it became commonly known as Legion Hall.

With its white stucco walls, Mission-style tile roof, and decorative Spanish-style entrance, the building had a distinctly California look. Above the front door, "Veterans Memorial Lafayette" was set into the concrete capital — a reminder of the building's purpose and the veterans it honored.

The Veterans Memorial Building was one of the places where Lafayette came together. The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars held meetings there, but the building was about more than meetings. It gave local veterans a place to come together, find support and camaraderie, and stay connected with others who had served. The Masons' Acalanes Lodge, Job's Daughters, and DeMolay used the building. There were public meetings, community dances, youth dances, wedding receptions, crab feeds, and club meetings. It even served as a polling place.



Children gather behind the Veterans Memorial Building, whose basement served as a schoolroom during Lafayette's postwar baby boom.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Lafayette was bursting with children as the postwar baby boom got underway. While new schools were being built, the basement of the Veterans Memorial was pressed into service as a schoolroom.

Before Lafayette became a city in 1968, the building was an important center of community life. It was a place to meet, celebrate, dance, discuss local issues, and simply be together.

But by the late 1990s, the old building was showing its age. It needed extensive work and lacked the accessibility features needed by many of the older veterans who used it.

Meanwhile, Lafayette's library was running out of room. The 42-year-old library on Moraga Road had become so cramped that the staff joked they had to discard an old book every time a new one arrived.

The centrally located Veterans Memorial property offered the perfect place for a new library. But there was a problem — the veterans were still using it, and the building meant a lot to them.

A solution was eventually worked out. Through a land swap involving the City of Lafayette, the City of Walnut Creek, and Contra Costa County, the veterans would receive a brand-new facility farther west on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, while the City would gain the downtown property for the new library.

The new Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center, at 3780 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, was designed to provide veterans with a modern facility that could better meet their needs. Completed in late 2005, it gave veterans a new home while allowing the old downtown property to be used for the library.

The veterans moved into the new facility during the winter of 2005-2006. In 2006, the old Veterans Memorial came down.

For those who remembered the building, it must have been hard to see such a familiar Lafayette landmark disappear. The dances, meetings, schoolchildren, and veterans who had filled its rooms were now memories.

In its place rose the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, which opened in 2009 — another place for the community to gather, learn, and celebrate.

The old Veterans Memorial building is gone, but its place in Lafayette's history remains.

For nearly 70 years, the words "Veterans Memorial Lafayette" stood above that downtown doorway, honoring those who served while welcoming the entire community through its doors.

This Veterans Day, it's worth remembering not only the building, but all the people and all the memories that passed through its doors.



The words "Veterans Memorial Lafayette" were inscribed above the doorway, honoring those who served while welcoming the entire community.

Special thanks to Aegis Living Moraga for sponsoring our Lafayette History section.

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Girl Scouts Give Back

Ninth-grade Girl Scouts Riley Lonergan, a student at Carondelet High School, and Catherine Hattersley, a student at Acalanes High School, have been Girl Scouts together since kindergarten at Happy Valley Elementary.

As they considered their Silver Award project, the highest award a middle school Girl Scout can earn, they looked back on their memories at Happy Valley. They wanted to give back to their elementary school and provide a way for students to self-regulate their emotions and calm down before entering the classroom.



The sensory snake path at Happy Valley Elementary helps students practice numbers, movement and self-regulation while having fun.

For their Silver Award project, they spray-painted a colorful sensory snake path along the transitional kindergarten hallway. The wavy snake-shaped path is numbered from one to 100. In addition to serving as a self-regulation tool, students can use the snake to learn colors and numbers while jumping or skip-counting along the path.

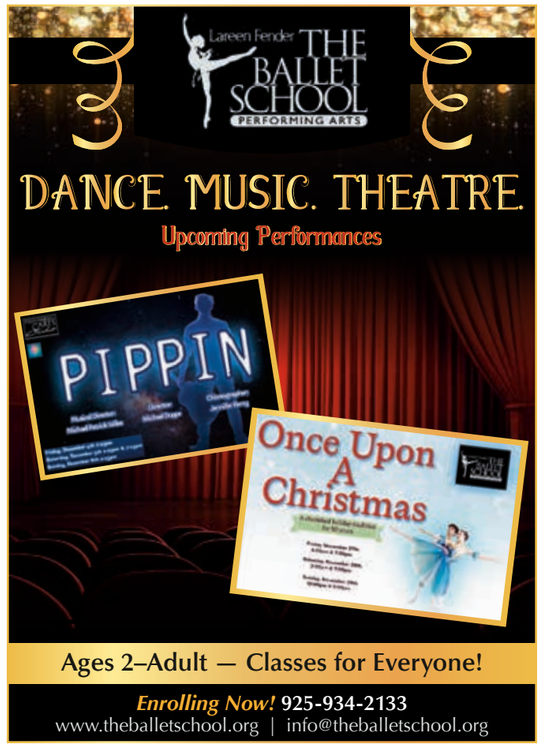
Riley and Catherine have taught students how to use the snake so they can, in turn, teach others how and why to use it. The project has also taught the girls leadership and the importance of communication and organization.

"We learned so much about collaborating, planning, and executing a project by working for the Silver Award," Riley and Catherine said. "We loved working together!"



Catherine Hattersley (left) and Riley Lonergan

They are happy to be a resource to anyone who would like to create a sensory snake path at their school. They hope this project will create great memories for the little kids at Happy Valley, just like they have of their time there.





Grateful and Thankful

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3814 Happy Valley Road	$4,795,000	$4,250,000	14	4	3.5	3399	1.32
3907 Happy Valley Road	$3,995,000	$3,550,000	93	5	3.5	3890	0.75
70 Ridgecrest Court	$2,995,000	$2,995,000	49	5	3.5	4016	0.44
10 Diablo Oaks Way	$2,895,000	$2,767,800	7	4	3+	3320	1.42
490 St Marys Road	$2,695,000	$2,705,000	13	4	2.5	3195	1.50
3388 Rossi Street	$2,495,000	$2,700,000	4	4	3	2537	0.37
3301 N Lucille Lane	$2,600,000	$2,600,000	0	4	3	2515	0.23
1066 Dolores Drive	$2,600,000	$2,600,000	0	3	3	3475	1.34
3265 Greenhills Drive	$2,249,000	$2,525,000	6	5	3.5	4244	0.50
808 Rosedale Avenue	$1,825,000	$2,500,000	2	3	2	1832	0.23
2 Leeward Glen	$2,595,000	$2,500,000	18	5	3.5	3570	3.05
130 Arbor View Lane	$2,395,000	$2,280,000	76	4	4.5	3897	0.58
957 Reliez Station Road	$1,998,000	$2,260,000	3	5	3	3528	0.44
1009 Regio Court	$2,195,000	$2,175,000	30	5	3	3045	0.43
1035 N Thompson Road	$2,198,000	$2,050,000	72	4	3.5	2966	0.25
1066 Via Baja	$1,895,000	$2,000,000	13	4	2.5	2931	0.49
857 Las Trampas Road	$1,949,000	$1,930,000	9	4	2+	3168	0.56
1346 Reliez Valley Road	$1,875,000	$1,925,000	11	3	2.5	2176	0.52
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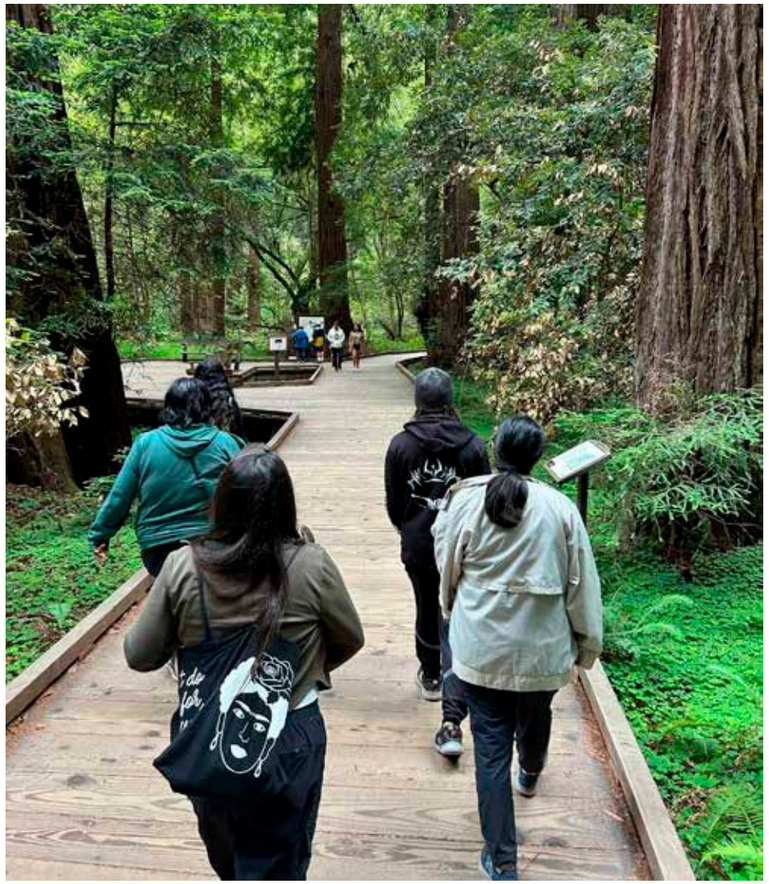
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Youth Homes

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A group of clients during an eco-therapy trip to Muir Woods.

For more than 60 years, Youth Homes has been part of the Lafayette community, supporting youth and families facing trauma, instability and other challenges.

One of its strongest local connections was Cherry Lane, a residential home that operated in Lafayette from 1994 through 2025. The residence first served young adults transitioning out of foster care and later youth and teens who could no longer safely remain at home and were at risk of entering foster care or juvenile detention.

More than shelter, Cherry Lane offered those who stayed there a reminder that they were surrounded by a community that cared about them and their futures.

In late 2025, Youth Homes made the difficult decision to close its residential program. Continuous changes in contract funding and the youth services landscape made running a 24/7, year-round residential home increasingly difficult to sustain.

"Home" remains at the center of Youth Homes' work. Today, the nonprofit continues to provide mental and behavioral health services in homes, schools and the community to help youth remain safely at home — or return home when it can be done safely.

Youth Homes serves more than 200 youth, teens and young adults every year. Many have experienced abuse, neglect, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse or other trauma and could not otherwise afford the level of care they need. Through mental health services, family support and therapeutic experiences, Youth Homes works to help them feel safe, build confidence, strengthen relationships and create lasting change.

Youth Homes also works with families and caregivers, providing education and practical assistance. Sometimes that means a winter coat or grocery gift card. Other times, it can mean covering an apartment security deposit so a family can stop living in their car.

Lafayette community member Lori "Lolo" O'Keefe has seen the impact firsthand as a volunteer at the Youth Homes Thrift Shop in Pleasant Hill, which helps support the organization's programs. An active St. Perpetua parishioner and boys team charity (btc) coach, Lolo says volunteering gives her another way to give back.



A young client enjoys equine therapy.



A few of Youth Homes' highly skilled and dedicated team members.



Former Youth Homes client (right) with her therapist as she shares how Youth Homes changed her life.

"Volunteering at the Thrift Shop is a way I can contribute to the youth enrolled in our incredibly supportive organization," Lolo says. "I especially enjoy hearing from graduated youth who reminisce about the bright spots of love and kindness they received from our programs while experiencing hardships during their time spent in and out of the broken foster care system."

Youth Homes emphasizes that those hardships do not define the youth it serves. They are also talented, unique kids who want to play, spend time with friends and have fun.

Throughout November, Youth Homes will hold its annual Community Cares online fundraising campaign, with donations helping ensure local youth continue to have access to care. Other ways to get involved include shopping or volunteering at Youth Homes Thrift Shop, located at 15b Vivian Drive in Pleasant Hill.

To learn more, volunteer or donate, visit youthhomes.org.

youth homes

"I love seeing Youth Homes clients' eyes light up when they shop at our store (for free), and I've also had the pleasure of seeing some of our clients gain work experience there."

—LORI "LOLO" O'KEEFE



Youth Homes Thrift Shop volunteers, Cyndy Jacobsmeyer (left) and Lori "Lolo" O'Keefe.

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Connecting with nature through gardening

Aegis Living Moraga is not just a senior living community but also a trusted resource for families throughout Lamorinda. Aegis offers support wherever senior adults are in their journey, from light assisted living to advanced memory care.

"Everyone's journey is different, and knowing how to navigate all the options can be challenging," explains Stephanie Eukel, marketing director and family liaison. "Whether you select Aegis Living Moraga or not, we want to be of service to those who are making these important decisions." Stephanie guides families through the transition process, addressing concerns and ensuring a smooth experience from the first inquiry.

That commitment to service shines through in every aspect of community life. Residents enjoy a blend of independence and support, with amenities ranging from chef-prepared meals and social activities to housekeeping and laundry services. Each day, the Life Enrichment Team provides activities that span five Wellness Pillars: Social, Nutrition, Movement & Nature, Cognitive Wellness, and Mindfulness & Breath. The community's intimate size creates an environment where genuine connections flourish when residents participate in special dining and themed events, Book Club, Men's Club, Community Outings, Art, Games, Exercise, Travelogues, and Continued Learning Opportunities.



Getting creative with arts and crafts



Singing along at karaoke

The community offers flexible living arrangements, from spacious studios to one-bedroom apartments on a long-term basis, as well as 30-day stays in furnished apartments that let residents and families experience firsthand what life at Aegis truly means.

Most important, Aegis Living Moraga creates a setting where residents thrive while maintaining their independence. As Stephanie notes, the enthusiasm among residents and staff is contagious — so much so that adult children touring for their parents often ask, "When can I move in?"

Contact Stephanie to schedule a visit and learn more about options for the next chapter: 925-483-7347; stephanie.eukel@aegisliving.com.

Aegis Living | MORAGA
Assisted Living | Memory Care

SPENDING TIME TOGETHER OVER THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays often bring families back together, including relatives who haven't seen much of each other lately. These visits can make changes in a senior loved one easier to notice — and they're a natural opening to offer support and care.

If your parent or senior loved one is skipping meals, missing bill payments, or withdrawing socially, these signs often point toward a bigger conversation about care. Start with specific observations and focus on what support might help your loved one restore safety and connection while maintaining as much independence as possible.

Watch for a pattern, not a single incident. Adult children may minimize these changes, especially if acknowledging them is painful. However, recognizing a pattern early can prevent a bigger problem later.

Common signs include:

- An overgrown yard or a home falling into disrepair
- A fridge with little fresh or prepared food
- Unpaid or unopened bills
- Isolation after giving up driving, with fewer visits from friends or neighbors
- Vision or hearing loss affecting everyday safety
- A recent fall or noticeably unsteady balance
- Confusion or forgetfulness, which may signal dehydration, infection, or early memory loss

Any single sign may be manageable with extra help at home. Several together typically point toward a safer, fuller option such as an assisted living community. If you're unsure, a visit with your parent's doctor can help determine whether these changes reflect a temporary issue or a longer-term need for support.

Independence, Safety, and Trust

Many older adults cherish their independence. If your aging parent isn't talking with you about the changes they're experiencing, they may fear losing control by confiding in you.

For adult children: Encourage your parent to share what matters to them as they age. Respect their values, and ask how they would like to be supported. Honor their need to remain independent, while staying mindful of their safety, both physical and emotional.

For senior adults: Stay open to input from people you trust, especially when they notice changes that put your safety at risk. Share your wishes and how you envision your path, and plan together for the scenarios ahead.

The Story Behind the Music

Pamela Freund-Striplen brings Cultural Crossroads*, her concert exploring Czech composer Dvořák's American influences, to his homeland.*



The musicians bringing "Cultural Crossroads" to the Czech Republic, from left: percussionist Will Clipman, baritone Robert Sims, violist Pamela Freund-Striplen and Native American flutist R. Carlos Nakai. Photo by Robert Doyle

This December, Lafayette musician Pamela Freund-Striplen will travel to the Czech Republic with a musical project years in the making.

The project began with a question about Czech composer Antonín Dvořák: Why was one of his best-known string quartets nicknamed the "American"? Finding the answer introduced Pamela to a part of his story she had never learned in music school.

Dvořák came to the United States in the late 1800s to explore what distinctly American classical music could sound like. During his time here, he was introduced to African American spirituals and developed a fascination with Native American music. Pamela began exploring that part of Dvořák's story, and over the years her research grew into Cultural Crossroads: Dvořák in America, a multimedia concert that brings the history to life through music, video, and images.

Pamela's curiosity reflects a lifelong love of music. Her mother, a painter and musician, once told her that if she played in an orchestra, she would always have friends. "She was right," Pamela says.

Music is also how Pamela met her husband, clarinetist Tony Striplen. The two were performing with San Francisco Opera's touring company, Western Opera Theater, when a "tour romance" began that has lasted more than 40 years.

In 1996, Pamela and Tony moved to Lafayette with their son, Matthew, largely because of Bob Athayde's music program at Stanley Middle School. "We wanted our son to have a great public school education that really values the arts," she says.

Pamela founded the Gold Coast Chamber Players in Alameda in 1987 and led the organization for 35 years. After moving to Lafayette, she brought the chamber music series to the community in 1999, where she continued presenting musicians from around the world and developing educational programs for local students.

Her latest project, Cultural Crossroads, premiered in 2022, with early performances at the Lafayette Library. It has since toured nationally, including a performance at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.



The "Cultural Crossroads" ensemble performs at Duke University during its national tour. Pictured with the Ciompi Quartet are Will Clipman, Robert Sims, Pamela Freund-Striplen, and R. Carlos Nakai. Photo by Mark Manring



Pamela with her husband, clarinetist Tony Striplen, and their son, Matthew, who studied music with Bob Athayde at Stanley Middle School.



Lafayette residents Alan Cox and Jackie Carson hosted a wine tasting at Deer Hill Vineyards to raise funds for Pamela's upcoming Czech tour. From left: Bill Scanlon, Jackie Carson, Pamela Freund-Striplen, Theresa Fields, and Alan Cox. Photo by Craig Isaacs, BlueGoo Photography

"This project is more than just a concert," Pamela says. "We're weaving together an important story about race, music, and the ways cultures influence one another." She says audiences often stay afterward to ask questions and continue the conversation.

Now Pamela is bringing the project full circle. In the Czech Republic, the ensemble will perform with one of the country's leading quartets, sharing with Czech audiences the story of how Black and Indigenous music influenced Dvořák during his years in America.

For Pamela, performing in Dvořák's homeland has special meaning. "It feels like bringing the story home in the most literal and emotional way," she says. In addition to performances at Dvořák's summer home and the Liechtenstein Palace in Prague, the ensemble has received an invitation to perform at his birthplace in Nelahozeves—an extraordinary opportunity that will only be possible with the support of local sponsors and supporters.

To learn more about Cultural Crossroads: Dvořák in America, visit pfsmusic.org.



Pamela and the "Cultural Crossroads" musicians rehearse for a performance at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Photo by Pamela Hyde-Nakai

> **"We're weaving together an important story about race, music, and the ways cultures influence one another."**
>
> —— PAMELA FREUND-STRIPLEN

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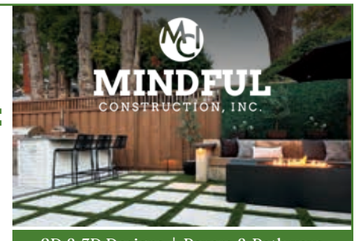
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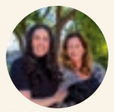
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50 YEARS

Music Comes Full Circle at Stanley

BY COLLEEN NAFTALI, LPIE

Step into Stanley Middle School's music rooms and you may hear a band finding its rhythm, an orchestra shaping a passage, or a chorus preparing to perform. At the center of that energy are music teachers Todd Minson and Eric Price, two professional musicians with something else in common: both once sat where their students sit now.

Minson attended Springhill Elementary, Stanley, and Acalanes; Price went through Burton Valley, Stanley, and Acalanes. Though several years apart, they shared influential teachers. Today, they are carrying forward a Lafayette tradition of music education that reaches far beyond notes on a page.



Stanley Middle School music teachers Todd Minson (left) and Eric Price

INSPIRED HERE AND CALLED BACK

For Minson, music initially competed with another childhood passion: baseball. But by his senior year at Acalanes, he knew music was his path. Inspired by Arlene Fox, Bob Athayde, and Rick Meyer, he imagined becoming a teacher, though college first led to about 20 years as a professional musician.

Minson later served as an LPIE music mentor alongside his former teacher Athayde. When Athayde prepared to retire, he encouraged Minson to apply. Now in his fifth year at Stanley, Minson leads the band and chorus.

Price found his instrument in an unforgettable way. He began piano lessons around age four, but during an elementary-school instrument demonstration, Fox tried the bass. Its vibrations shook the floor. Price remembers thinking, "Wait a second. This is something I can do?" The bass became his calling. He studied music at UC Davis, earned a graduate degree from Shenandoah Conservatory, then spent roughly 15 years performing and teaching in the Bay Area.

Price considered classroom teaching when the pandemic interrupted his work as a musician and traveling coach. His former Stanley strings teacher, Loretta McNulty, invited him to substitute as she prepared to retire. He now teaches orchestra and strings. For both, coming back feels personal. "It's nice to give back to a community that gave me so much," Minson said. Their return passes the baton from the teachers who built the program to former students guiding its next generation.

A PLACE TO BELONG AND GROW

Minson and Price want capable musicians, but honing technical skills is not the program's only purpose. Ensembles cultivate teamwork, empathy, discipline, and resilience as students listen closely, accept feedback, and recover from mistakes. As Minson put it, "Music can help you become a better human being."

Price reminds students that mistakes are a natural and useful part of music class. A difficult measure can be slowed down, separated into smaller skills, and tried again, building confidence that carries into presentations, team projects, and other challenges.

Minson has watched that growth unfold. He remembers one student who arrived very shy, playing quietly with her hair covering her face. By the end of eighth grade, she played, spoke, and carried herself with confidence. Music class was not the only reason for that transformation, he said, but it gave her a place to grow. "We're a team," he tells students. "We're here to encourage one another and lift each other up."

That sense of belonging can mean a great deal in middle school. "Students often tell me this is the bright point of their schedule and their day," Price said. He hopes they remember creating with friends and entering a room where the difficulties of the day could briefly melt away.

OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE NOT GUARANTEED

Stanley's program gives students experiences many young musicians elsewhere never receive. They can participate in band, orchestra, chorus, and before-school jazz, combine ensembles, perform in Wildcats on Stage productions, and bring their own ideas to the program. One student suggestion even led to a pilot ensemble that brought strings and band students together.

Performance opportunities connect students with audiences throughout Lafayette and beyond. Stanley musicians appear at community events such as the Lafayette Reservoir Run and It's a Wonderful Life, perform for younger students at elementary-school concerts, and join neighboring schools at the annual Jazz Café. Top ensembles also participate in festivals where adjudicators provide detailed feedback. Lafayette residents see the results at concerts, celebrations, and traditions where young musicians contribute to the cultural life of the town.


Student musicians perform at the annual Stanley Jazz Café.

The program's strength rests on decades of commitment from teachers, families, school and district leaders, community partners, and LPIE. That support helps put school-owned instruments into students' hands, reducing the chance that cost will determine whether a child can play. Minson has taught at schools where a lack of instruments meant students had to enter a lottery for one, rent an instrument, or choose something else. At Stanley, access to instruments opens the door for more students to participate fully.

LPIE-funded instrumental instructors and music mentors add another layer of support. These specialists can take a small group of student musicians, identify exactly where they are struggling, and offer practical adjustments that help them move forward. Meanwhile, the classroom teacher can work more closely with the remaining ensemble instead of asking students to wait while one section receives attention.

That individual attention can help students feel seen. A mentor might notice that a student had a hard day, point out what's going well, and make one frustrating problem feel manageable. Without those instructors, Price explained, the program loses some of the individualized care, flexibility, and encouragement that help beginners move in a positive direction.

KEEPING MUSIC WITHIN EVERY STUDENT'S REACH

In Lafayette, a program this rich can easily feel like a natural part of school. But, as Price noted, "Music is not guaranteed in most middle schools across the country or even in our state." Stanley shows what becomes possible through sustained access to the arts and how those benefits continue across generations.

Minson hopes students keep music in their lives, whether professionally, in a community ensemble, or simply at home for the joy of it. Most of all, he and Price hope students leave with happy memories, lasting friendships, and the knowledge that they found a place to create, persevere, contribute, and be heard.

Learn more at LPIE.org.

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Panto Comes to Town

Local playwrights bring a British holiday tradition to Town Hall Theatre.



Town Hall board members (from left) Heather Cousins, Kathleen Olson and Lulu Braunstein wrote and will direct "Robin Hood of the Reservoir." Photo by Craig Isaacs, Blue Goo Photography

Lamorinda audiences will get a taste of a centuries-old British Christmas tradition as Town Hall Theatre debuts an original panto, "Robin Hood of the Reservoir," running Dec. 11–19.

Panto, short for pantomime, has little to do with silent miming. The genre loosely follows a fairy tale or folklore and blends physical comedy, music, dance and topical humor into a rollicking family show.

The show reimagines the legend of Robin Hood: When the greedy Sheriff of Lamorindingham sets his sights on building waterfront condos at the town's beloved reservoir, Marian, Robin, and their friends must scheme to stop him.

"Robin Hood of the Reservoir" was written and will be directed by Town Hall board members: Heather Cousins, Lulu Braunstein and Kathleen Olson.

Cousins, the drama teacher at Miramonte High School, has previously staged pantos with her students. "It is fun for all the family, jokes for all ages, and just a good time!" she said. Cousins grew up performing in pantos at the now-closed Moraga Playhouse. Olson shares that connection. She met her husband, Eric, while performing there years ago.

For Braunstein, who grew up in England, panto is second nature. "Everyone in the UK goes to panto around Christmastime," she said, recalling that her father wrote and directed pantomimes for the British Army wherever the family was stationed. "It has been a huge amount of fun writing this for our local community, and I would absolutely love for this to be the start of a new tradition at Town Hall."

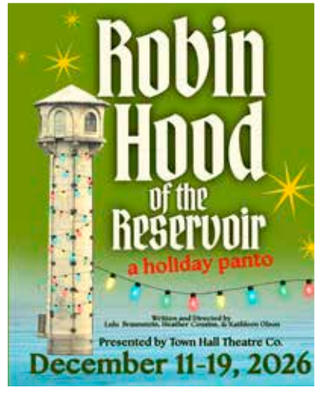
Braunstein outlined several hallmarks audiences can expect. Comic older-woman roles, known as "Dames," are traditionally played by men in exaggerated costumes. The young hero, the "Principal Boy," is often played by a woman. Audience participation is central, with call-and-response lines such as "He's behind you!" Booing and hissing at the villain are expected. The humor works on two levels: slapstick and silly songs for children, and winking jokes for adults.

Celebrity cameos are also a panto staple in Britain, where soap opera stars, reality TV personalities and musicians headline productions. Lamorinda's version won't feature marquee names, but Braunstein promised surprises: "Our show may not have true celebrities (yet), but you can bet you'll be surprised by some of our guest performers."

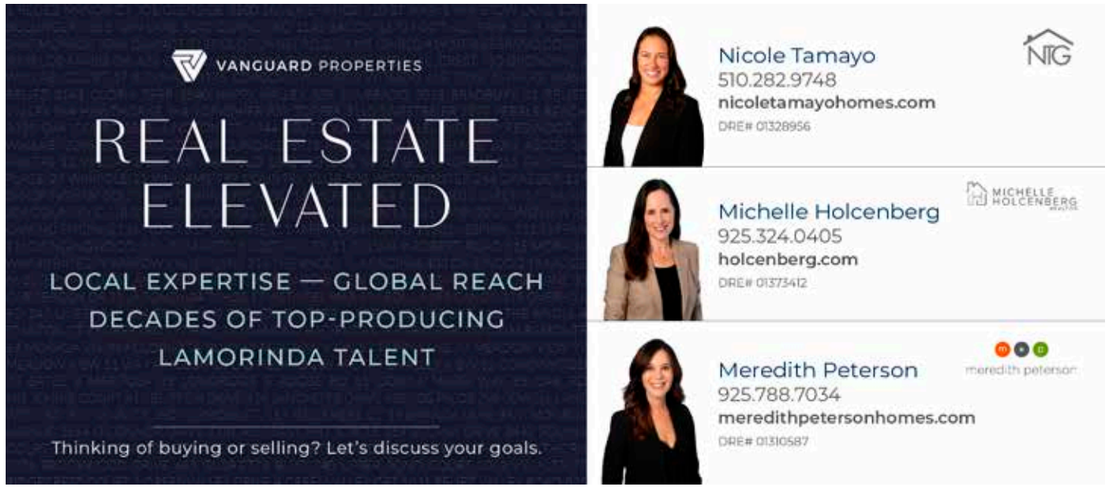
Panto's roots lie in Roman theater's "pantomimus," a masked, music-driven performance, and medieval English mumming plays. The more direct lineage runs through Italian commedia dell'arte, whose stock characters and slapstick made their way to England, inspiring the 18th-century "harlequinade" with its magical transformations and stage trickery.

By the Victorian era, panto had shifted toward the fairy-tale format recognizable today and become a fixture of the British Christmas season.

Now, that tradition arrives in Lamorinda. **Visit townhalltheatre.com for tickets and more information.**









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