



From the President

KEVIN O'NEAL

LAST MONTH, a small family-run business, Tobacco Outlet, was burglarized for the sixth time. While we might become numb to the stories of retail theft, robberies, and burglaries that are all too common these days, this one was particularly painful. After a pursuit by ECPD, the thieves decided to go the wrong way on I-580, colliding with two other vehicles. The driver of one vehicle died, and the other was severely injured. Innocent people on their way to work. A wake of destruction, all stemming from some damn fools' poor decisions.

Think for a moment of the family of the driver who died. Think of the family of the driver who barely survived. Think of the family whose business was thrashed beyond recognition. Every one of those families' livelihoods has been thrown into chaos.

Any one of those families could be your own. That is the cost of these crimes. There are no victimless crimes. Insurance money doesn't bring back the dead or heal trauma. The experience can be isolating and lonely because who can relate to such a random act?

I'm asking you to relate. Force yourself to put your feet in the shoes of the survivors.

■ See From the President, page 7



John C. Saastik

Byline PROFILE

Meet Chief of Police Paul Keith

BY ROBERT ROGERS

PAUL KEITH may be El Cerrito's top law enforcement official, but that doesn't mean he's retired his crime-fighting cape for a suit and tie.

Days before a detailed chat in his office, Chief Keith found himself sprinting across Poinsett Park—in dress shoes—in pursuit of a carjacking suspect. He was posted on the perimeter, but sometimes emergencies take unexpected turns.

The suspect streaked by Keith's field of vision. The chase was on.

The suspect was young and fleet, but Keith had a couple advantages. One, the suspect bolted out of his loose-fitting sneakers. Two, Keith's mind is his best asset.

"I knew I had a chance when he lost the shoes, so then, as we keep running, I said 'hey you should give up, you're not going to get away!'" Keith said, chuckling at the memory. "Sometimes I like to talk to people I am chasing because they'll get distracted, maybe even look back at me and trip or something."

This suspect didn't give up. But the Chief still got his man.

"My knee is still sore, but I am otherwise okay," said the affable Keith.

Ever since Keith was tapped to serve as Chief in 2016, he's stressed principles like retention of exemplary officers, reducing violent crimes, theft, and burglaries, working with residents, and using efficient technology to augment the effectiveness of his force and enhance community safety.

Eight years later and firmly entrenched as a respected, effective police leader in the region, he's happy

■ See Chief Paul Keith, page 4

★ NEW MEMBERS ★

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100percentchiropractic.com

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appleberryplumbing.com

Committee for a Plaza Station Library

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c4psl.org

Club Pilates El Cerrito

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925-392-1188
clubpilates.com/elcerrito

NitPixies Organic Lice Removal

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510-372-0024
nitpixies.com

Seeds of Love Collective

Camp Herms • El Cerrito 94530
510-485-6464
seedsoflovecollective.org



Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

BRavo ZULU [well done] to Chris Jones and his wonderful staff at EC Recreation for putting together one exceptional crab feed on March 9th. The event was sold out

□

More bread for workers (unless you bake it). Effective on the first of this month is a \$20 per hour minimum wage for California's fast food workers. ("Fast food" is defined in the law.) However, workers at restaurants with on-site bakeries (like Panera) that sell stand-alone bread, may *not* be entitled to a pay raise.

Bloomberg News reported that the exemption to the new rate was connected to opposition from Greg Flynn, whose company operates many restaurants and is a significant donor to our Governor. But the "Guv" says Panera is *not* exempt from the law. Best advice: be a legal beagle and read the fine print.

□

Marshalls

Moving to El Cerrito Plaza on April 18th is Marshalls. A bigger, better store.

□



John C. Stashik

Ping pong is a new recreational option at 10016 San Pablo Avenue in the We Perform center, across from Pastime Ace Hardware. For rates, hours, and a summer camp, call 510-332-3233 or visit wepperform.org.

□

Pickleball is to come to the Richmond Craneway Pavilion with 13 regulation size indoor courts, lounge, pro shop, and a restaurant and bar. However, anti-pickleballers are protesting, so it's a guess as to an opening date.



Plywood covers this local business at 10180 San Pablo Avenue after a burglary early on March 19th. A pickup truck smashed into the building and its crew took merchandise. ECPD chased the suspect's vehicle to the I-80/I-580 maze but quickly ended the pursuit as the suspects made a u-turn into oncoming traffic, crashing and killing another driver and injuring the operator of a second vehicle. The two suspects were both injured and are in custody. The loss to the business owner could be \$55,000 and there is no insurance coverage for this type of business. The owner states it has been hit by criminals five other times. A Go Fund Me account has been opened for donations to help the family owned business rebuild. **Scan the QR code above to donate.**

□

More fitness. The construction at 270 El Cerrito Plaza (former Citibank), is for Club Pilates which opens this month. clubpilates.com/elcerrito for more info or call 925-392-1188.

□

Commercial space. Abbey Carpet & Floor has left the city and that means an almost 5000 sq. ft. building (with parking) is available for lease or sale at 10351 San Pablo Avenue. Pickleball players, maybe this is just what you need. If interested, email Ron Codron at ronec@comcast.net.

□

Auto Zone is coming. The company purchased the former CVS property at Portola Drive and after some construction activity there will be another source for parts and accessories. That will make two such stores as O'Reilly Auto Parts is also at the same shopping center.

□

April Dolly's report. Cheese Wheel Pasta has been such a hit that Dolly has ordered another 95 lb. wheel of Parmesano Reggiano from Italy. You know where: 10172 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito.

□

A rough road. The Avenue north of Potrero is a mess as the "complete

streets" project is underway. When I asked Public Works Director Yvettah Ortiz about it, her response was "John, I'm making the street *better*." Of course! Ms. Ortiz always has the correct answer.

□

514 Lounge. In addition to Duane Patton's music on First Fridays, add third Saturdays to your calendar. That's the 49th Street Cigars-to-Go event and the next one is April 20th. This intimate full service cocktail lounge is at 11236 San Pablo Ave.

□

Banter is no longer El Cerrito's "No Name" wine bar at 10368 San Pablo Ave.; they've finally painted a sign on the building. Claire and Devin got some ink in a March *Kensington Outlook* review, too.

□

Season 65 has been announced at Contra Costa Civic Theatre and here are the shows:

Hamlet and Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead	September 2024
Doctor Doolittle (new)	Nov.-Dec. 2024
Fairview	February 2025
Fiddler on the Roof	June 2025

Visit cctt.org for more information and tickets to support and enjoy live theatre right here in El Cerrito.

■ See Past Prez Palaver, page 3

PAST PREZ PALAVER

Continued from page 2

Rialto Cinemas Cerrito theater screens “October Sky” on April 4th (1 p.m.) and April 6-7 (10 a.m.). The movie is free; popcorn, pizza, not free.

Willie Nelson appears at the Greek Theatre in Berkeley on April 24th. That will be just ahead of this 91st birthday. Age is really just a number.

Measure R. As president in Fall 2010 I had then city manager Scott Hanin and his assistant, Karen Pinkos, address our board of directors and explain the need for a half cent sales tax hike. My board studied the issue and the Chamber supported the measure.

In 2014 voters approved an extension of Measure R which was a one cent sales tax increase. That measure ends on March 31, 2027. The Chamber did not take a position in 2014 due to a lack of a quorum.

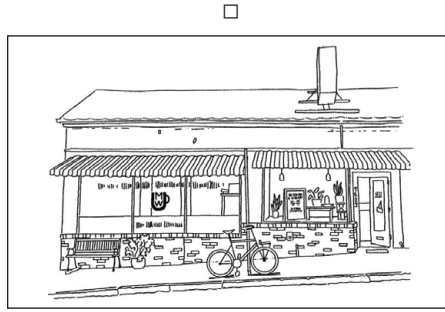
When Measure R (version 2) was on the ballot, many thought the sky was falling with El Cerrito potentially having one of the highest sales tax rates in the state. Scott Hanin nailed it when he told us few people would drive to Fairfield, for example, to save a few cents on a purchase.

At this point in time, El Cerrito has a 10.25% rate and it is not the highest in the area.

Albany.....	10.75%
Alameda.....	10.75%
Berkeley.....	10.25%
Emeryville.....	10.50%
Hercules.....	9.25%
Oakland.....	10.25%
Pinole.....	9.75%
Richmond.....	9.75%
CoCo County (unincorporated).....	8.75%

When language is written for another extension of Measure R, I'll support it and hopefully this Chamber does as well. The tax generates about \$4 million, and there is no way I want to go back to City staff layoffs and service cuts as we had four years ago. You get what you pay for and vote for.

New trail maps are out and the third edition shows all El Cerrito public paths, trails, and stairways. Produced by the El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, they include every inch of every route.



Upper Fairmount news. The building housing Freddie’s Shop and MudWorks Pottery is for sale. Hannah Orth is the new owner of MudWorks and reports a three year lease has been inked. No word from owner Jon Amolo about Freddie’s but if his neighbor can stay put then most likely his unique shoppe can as well.

Returning next month is the always popular Hillside Fest. Look for the brochure and map at various places around town (see at right). Additional information is available at this website: ectrailtrekkers.org.

Strive Real Estate. Everyone meets at Dolly’s and so it was an absolute delight to see Detra Harris there. Her big news is moving the business across the county line from Albany to El Cerrito. Specifically: 462 El Cerrito Plaza, Suite 729, El Cerrito 94530 (in the mezzanine).

Trending. Contra Costa Labor reports Antioch Hillside Starbucks is now a union shop. The store in San Pablo is to have an NLRB vote soon. So look out El Cerrito: coffee workers are on a roll and are seeking some recognition for their work. Signed contracts are what count.

10th Annual El Cerrito
Hillside
Fest 2024

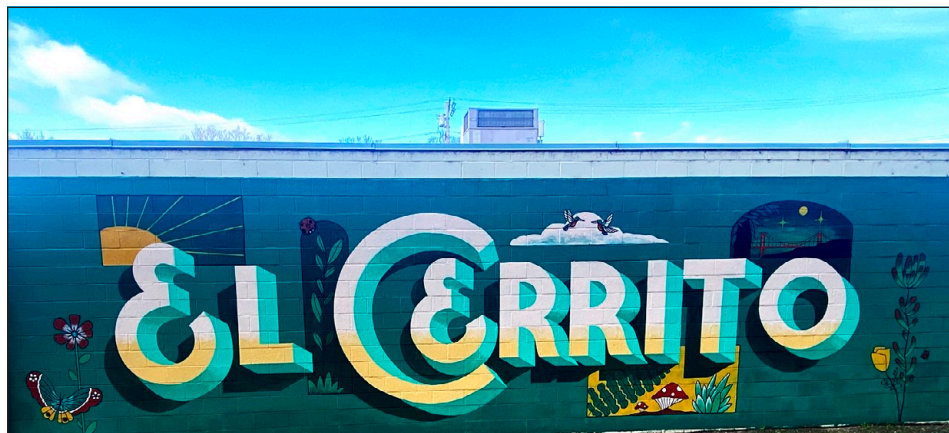
Saturday May 4
Sunday May 5
Various Times

Locations throughout the
Hillside Natural Area.

FREE

Presented by El Cerrito Trail Trekkers and El Cerrito's Environmental Quality Committee

Finally, I mentioned Sushi Matsu and their remodeling plan some months ago. It's still on and Amazing Angie is working on new tables, designs, and how to make it all happen quickly. For now, just eat.



This new mural is on the former Cerrito Printing building visible from the Bruce King Memorial Dog Park off Potrero Avenue. Thank Jayne Ramirez for providing the “canvas” for this artistic piece.

CHIEF PAUL KEITH

■ Continued from page 1

with the progress but driven for more. He wants his city safer. He wants businesses to do better.

Keith is a technophile who's always hunting for technology that balances civil liberties with public safety.

"The future where I see it is a fully connected city in terms of surveillance networks, preemptive alerts



License Plate Reader program...is both a retroactive and preemptive tool. It also acts as an early warning system so that if a wanted car comes into town, it will immediately alert our officers and allow us to intercept it.

when we have people driving in with cars associated with crimes, and a real-time crime center," Keith said. "We want better tools with which we can safely apprehend people, safely pursue people, and switching, along with agencies across West County, to a real-time crime center model where we bring together all the information pieces into an interface that better accesses and acts on data."

The approach appears to be paying off. While crime has spiked in other areas, El Cerrito's rates are relatively steady. Retail crime rates are higher than he would like, but not out of control. Violent crime remains relatively low. Department morale and public perception of the department are riding high.

Keith points to his department's new Flock License Plate Reader program, supported by the City Council and installed in July 2023. It will track plates coming in and out of the City and give detectives new tools to go back and analyze captured plate data to solve crimes.

It's both a retroactive and preemptive tool. "It also acts as an early warning system so that if a wanted car comes into town, it will immediately alert our

officers and allow us to intercept it."

Along with data and technology, communications with the public and local leaders have always been a key priority for Keith. Early in his tenure, Keith launched a blog on the ECPD website explaining the rationales and philosophies behind the department's approach. At one point, he noted that traffic laws would be taken seriously under his watch due to data showing that far more people are injured in road mishaps than violent crimes. The department's Instagram page is more merry than mayhem.

Keith says his goal is that El Cerrito will have a "truly modern" police department in five years, with real time crime-detection cameras in busy commercial districts and overhead surveillance drones as rapid first responders to crimes. He points to the Chula Vista, California, Police Department as a model from which he has drawn some inspiration.

"Drones can give you a lot of flexibility, like a cheaper, faster, safer helicopter," Keith said. "They can help us diagnose a situation and provide critical information before officers even get



Drones can give you a lot of flexibility, like a cheaper, faster, safer helicopter... They can help us diagnose a situation and provide critical information before officers even get there...

there, and can provide options for safer pursuit of fleeing suspects."

Keith knows that to keep crime down and maintain El Cerrito's charm and diverse and thriving business districts, he has to do a lot with a little.

The department is down to 33 sworn officers, with four unfilled slots he hopes to staff up soon.

Keith's work has drawn admirers across the region, including County Supervisor John Gioia.

"Chief Keith is a strong public safety

leader who works well with our community and understands the value of equity and justice in community policing," Gioia said. "That's why he is well-respected by local residents."



We take theft and all crime very seriously here; we want people to know this isn't the place to engage in those crimes.

One of the key challenges Bay Area police agencies face today is sophisticated retail theft rings, driven by both lenient penalties and the changing landscape of second-hand resell technology. Thieves know the consequences will be light in terms of fines or jail, and the ability to anonymously move large volumes of stolen goods means there is big money to be made.

The risk/reward calculation for a savvy retail thief is enticing.

"It's a whole new world out there," Keith said. "But we take theft and all crime very seriously here; we want people to know this isn't the place to engage in those crimes."

In a similar vein, Keith says that residents and merchants should work to harden their homes and businesses against theft. Alarm systems, good lighting, locking up valuable merchandise, cameras, and private security are all good ways to prevent crime before it occurs.

Keith is a proud grad of UC Berkeley and he joined the El Cerrito department after graduating from the Contra Costa County's police academy in 2000.

From there, he ascended the ranks quickly, becoming a detective investigating financial crimes, a corporal, a sergeant, a detective sergeant, a lieutenant and, finally, a captain and the department's second-in-command, before becoming Chief in 2016, at the youthful age of 38.

"I love serving the City of El Cerrito and I'm excited for our future," he said.



Authentic, Fast and Fresh: Larb Thai Food & Tapas

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CATALINA HU

PEPPERMINT TREE Plaza has become quite a culinary destination with a cluster of restaurants featuring cuisines from around the world. Located on San Pablo Avenue just south of Lincoln Avenue, you will find the strip mall of international eateries: a pizzeria, a Thai restaurant, a Thai grocery store, a sushi shop, an Italian deli, a Vietnamese sandwich shop, plus a Mexican food truck!

Larb Thai & Tapas is one of the oldest and busiest restaurants in this mall. Ever since it opened in 2016, customers have been lining up for authentic Thai food. Like many El Cerritans, I was worried that our restaurants couldn't survive the pandemic lockdown. Perhaps it was the recommendation on KQED's "Check, Please! Bay Area" (season 15, episode 12 aired Thursday, June 18, 2020). Larb Thai's loyal customers masked up and continued to line up outside of its doors for takeout orders.



As soon as you enter the restaurant, you will be greeted with its friendly staff. Water is served immediately in fancy silver Thai water bowl. The casual restaurant has an industrial vibe with its walls adorned with vintage metal signs and corrugated metal sheets. Some of the tables are paired with antique theater seats. The humorous signs and unique décor make the dining experience even more entertaining.



On a recent visit I ordered fried taro, fried tofu, Drunken Noodles (a.k.a. "Pad Kee Mao") with tofu, and spicy eggplant rice plate.

Being a spiceophile, I crave for Drunken Noodles and spicy eggplant regularly. Larb Thai is where I get my fix for these dishes. The fried taro nuggets were surprisingly good even though they were not spicy. They were super crispy outside and soft

inside but not greasy at all. The batter was perfectly seasoned to complement the natural flavor of taro. A sweet and sour dipping sauce was served with the fried taro.

Larb is the specialty here, and I have tried many different kinds in the past. Larb is originated from northeast Issan region of Thailand. It's a meat salad that's prepared with fish sauce, lime juice, Thai basil, cilantro, mint, chili, etc., and eaten with fresh romaine lettuce leaves. We are fortunate to have Larb Thai in El Cerrito to serve a variety of Larb dishes including many vegetarian options. They are perfect with Thai beer on warm summer days. If you love Thai food and beer, be sure to try Tom Yum beer while dining at Larb Thai & Tapas.

Larb Thai is not serving desserts currently. If you are like me, who enjoy a little sweet something after a meal, I highly recommend walking two doors away to Dolly's for a selection of authentic Italian desserts.



Larb Thai Food & Tapas

10166 San Pablo Ave. • El Cerrito, CA 94530 • 510-524-8988
larbthaitapas.com • Closed on Tuesdays

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7:30PM**

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

As of the writing of this article, we don't know the contact points for the other victims, but we do know Omar of Tobacco Outlet. Because they have been repeatedly burglarized, no company will insure their loss. So, I'm asking our community to lend them a hand in whatever way makes sense. Perhaps you have a display fixture you can spare, construction talent to offer, or just a supportive word. Show them that they are not alone.

To help his family to recover the financial loss there is also this GoFundMe: <https://bit.ly/3IRgupV>. Or you can scan the QR code on page 2.

This is a heavy topic for a Chamber newsletter. As you've seen in past issues, I like to keep things positive and forward-looking in my articles to our members. Sometimes, we have to get serious and tackle the tough stuff. This is an opportunity for us, as the El Cerrito business community, to pull together and share our challenges with each other.

How to say this... We are not alone. You are not alone.

FORUM

Thursday, April 11th, from 2-4 p.m., we are hosting a Chamber Members' Forum. The aim of this forum is to identify shared challenges as well as the resources within our community to tackle them. Chamber board members and representatives from the City of El Cerrito Community Development Department will be there. Working collaboratively together, we can make positive changes in our community.

Please join us. Sign up using this link: elcerritochamber.org/forum.

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BYLINE

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Our small nonprofit Chamber relies predominantly on member dues, fundraising, and volunteer board members to run programs for our members and increase revenue for all member businesses. Support the *Byline* by subscribing. You can do that for \$60 per year. See elcerritochamber.org/subscribe for details.



SEE YOU SOON
MEMBER

FORUM

RSVP

APRIL 11, 2024 elcerritochamber.org/forum

Community Center
7007 Moeser Lane · El Cerrito
2-4 p.m.

We're gathering with members to share about the Chamber leadership, budget, and current priorities, as well as learn from *you* about ways to strengthen the Chamber.

RIBBON CUTTINGS

Club Pilates Wed., April 3rd, 10:30 a.m.
270 El Cerrito Plaza

100% Chiropractic Sat., April 13th, 10 a.m.
230 El Cerrito Plaza

- ★ Buyers
- ★ Sellers
- ★ Probate
- ★ FSBO
- ★ Divorce
- ★ Expired



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