



Creating Valentines for people we care about is something we often look forward to.

February is Filled With Holidays to Celebrate With Friends and Family

By Gigi Appelbaum-Schwartz
February is a month of celebration filled with many holidays to enjoy. Some, like Black History Month or Valentine's Day, are more well-known, but others might come as a bit of a surprise.

To start, there's Black History

Month, which, as implied, encompasses the entire month, and is happening at this very moment.

Beginning as a weeklong celebration in 1926, the holiday was created by historian Carter G. Woodson with the intention of it

(Continued on Page 7)



The Binge Free Festival was going to open in October '24, but a water disaster severely damaged the theater's Main Stage auditorium. Repairs are ongoing and the new festival will open in the Other Space.

The Binge Free Festival Opens at the Santa Monica Playhouse on February 25

The Binge Free Festival, the month-long festival of FREE shows at the Santa Monica Playhouse, returns for the ninth time this February. They're calling this one BFF '24 in '25. Why? The festival was originally scheduled for

October 2024, but a water disaster that severely damaged their Main Stage auditorium mandated a postponement to facilitate repairs.

Fortunately, their two other stages, The Other Space and The Artists' Entrance Studio, were unaffected, and shows have continued. They plan to re-open the Main Stage at the opening of their October Binge Free Festival.

The Santa Monica Playhouse has been a cultural treasure in our seaside community for 64 years. Now, the Playhouse is giving love back with its Ninth Annual Binge Free Festival, five weeks of free performances,

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Home is Where the Heart is



This devastating sight of one or many houses burning has affected all of us on the Westside.

From the Ashes: The Heart of a Home

Editor's Note: In February of last year, Richard wrote an inspiring column on what it means to have a home. This is the companion piece for this year. Last year's column follows on Page 8.

By Richard Lombardi

In my 35 years in real estate, I've come to understand that a house isn't just a structure; it's where life unfolds. It's where memories are made, where love thrives, and where connections deepen. The recent fire in the Palisades, which claimed our home, reminded me that while the walls and roof may be gone, the true heart of a home remains.

Our home was more than a house; it was a hub of joy, laughter, and love. It's where my grandrascal, Aurora, loved to be chased around the couch, her giggles filling every corner of the room. It was a gathering place for my fiancée Julia's kids and their friends, who would watch movies, soak in the hot tub, and celebrate holidays when they couldn't be with their families during college. And, it was a space where Julia, with her elegant touch, hosted everything from charity fundraisers to intimate family gatherings, making everyone feel at home.

Among the many losses in the fire was a gold necklace with an Italian horn, a family heirloom steeped in love and meaning. I had given it to my father after a trip to Italy, right before the birth of my first daughter, Lauren. My dad wore it every day until he passed, after which my mother cherished it just as deeply. When she passed, Lauren asked me to promise that I'd pass it to her someday.

Losing that necklace has been one of the hardest parts of this journey. It was more than just a piece of jewelry; it was a symbol of

our family's connection and resilience. When I told Lauren about its loss, I felt the weight of breaking my promise. But as we talked, I realized that the love and legacy it represented remain intact, carried forward in our memories and shared stories.

Amid the rubble, my youngest daughter, Brittany, offered a reminder of what truly matters. She said, "Dad, I'm amazed at how you take things in stride and start taking the next steps." Her words struck me deeply. Maybe it's my military training that taught me to face adversity with resolve. Or, maybe it's the knowledge that what we've lost doesn't define us; it's how we move forward that does.

Losing our home and the tangible pieces of our family's history is devastating, but it's also a reminder of the things fire can't touch. The love, laughter, and memories created within those walls live on.

To Julia, whose grace has always been the heart of our gatherings, thank you for creating a home where everyone felt welcome. To Lauren, know that while I can't pass down the necklace, I'm passing down the love and strength it symbolized. And to Brittany, your words remind me that even in the face of loss, we have the power to rebuild.

The fire may have taken the walls and roof, but it could never touch the heart of our home. That heart beats stronger than ever – in Aurora's laughter, in Julia's warmth, and in the love that connects us all. As we take the next steps together, I know we'll create something extraordinary again, because the essence of a home isn't in what we lose, but in the spirit we carry forward.

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California Composting Regulation at Three Years

By Sarah Caso
California Climate
Action Corps Fellow

Have you noticed the increase in green bins over the past two years? These bins have risen in prominence thanks to SB 1383: a pollution-reduction policy aimed at limiting emissions from food sent to landfills.

In 2025, the goal for the program is to reduce organic waste disposal by 75% and to divert 20% of disposed edible food.

When food is disposed of at landfills, the decomposition emits methane and other air pollutants. This statute transforms the decomposition process into one that produces biofuels, electricity, and nutrient-rich soil. It requires green waste collection services to be provided to all residents and businesses in California.

The statute focuses on sending green waste to industrial composting facilities, but for those who would rather keep the cycle local, home composting and local small-scale community composting are ideal methods. The Santa Monica Community Gardens currently has two inground three bin composting systems. One is at Ishihara Park Learning Garden and the other is at Marine Park Community Garden. The hubs keep the green waste cycle local by taking waste from the garden and turning it into nutrient-rich soil which is used in



Volunteer gardeners at Ishihara Park Learning Garden prepare finished compost for use as soil enrichment.

the community gardens to grow more produce for the community.

The Santa Monica Community Garden compost bins also serve as community composting hubs. Residents can become members of the hub (free) to gain access to the bins to drop off their scraps. Once the food scraps have turned into nutrient-rich soil, members can take the finished compost to use in their own garden. The

composting hub not only limits the distance that green waste travels to be recycled, but it connects the community while educating them on sustainability. If you are interested in joining the compost hub, reach out to isabel.filson@santamonica.gov, or come by Marine Park Community Garden on Saturday, March 22, at 10 a.m. for a training session.

Santa MoniCARES and Local Community Partner Together to Support Palisades Fire First Responders and Evacuees

In response to the impact of the Los Angeles wildfires, Santa MoniCARES is connecting with generous Santa Monica businesses and community members to collect donations, provide discounts,

and offers to first responders and evacuees during this difficult time.

“Our hearts are with you all as we witness the devastating impact of the wildfires throughout the Los

Angeles region,” said Misti Kerns, President/CEO of Santa Monica Travel & Tourism.

“I am so thankful to our many generous community members offering their support to those affected by the wildfires and am deeply grateful to all of the first responders and city staff who are working tirelessly to help those in need. Our top priority continues to be the well-being of our residents, businesses, visitors, first responders, and our neighboring community members. We hope these donations and offers can be of support during this difficult time.”

All specials and offers compiled are shared at <https://www.santamonica.com/santa-monica-hotel-rates-for-palisades-fire-evacuees/> as a resource for evacuees and first

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Event Will Benefit Victims of the Fires

The Rotary Club of Santa Monica will host its 17th Annual Wine Festival & Masquerade Ball on Saturday, March 1, at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

Given the devastation to homes and lives in our area, the focus of this year’s event will be to help the victims of the fires rebuild their lives. This will take years, and the Rotary Club of Santa Monica is committed to helping our community recover from this tragedy for as long as it takes.

You are invited to join them for an unforgettable evening of elegance, philanthropy, and fine wine tasting. This year’s event is themed as a “Masquerade Ball.” The night promises to be a magical experience, featuring an enchanting Venetian ambiance, combined with live and silent auctions. During the evening, attendees will be served a full gourmet dinner and taste international and

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Happy February Birthdays to:

Jerry Dobkin, Libby Atwater, Sara Frank, Rick Kennedy, Ken Waltzer, Timur Berberoglu, Priscilla Margolin, Gavin Powers, Preston Powers, Pam Andrews, Darby Navin, Kylee Navin, Katie Parr Morgan, Shirley Wilson, Adam Bernard, and Daniel Bennett.

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From the Santa Monica Pier Guy

A Talk Through Pier History



By Jim Harris
The Pier's 115-year story is fascinating, a true roller coaster ride of incredible peaks and seemingly unconquerable valleys. Its cast of characters includes a bevy of heroes, some widely praised and others unsung, as well as a few dastardly villains. Actually, let's refer to them as misguided. Its chapters include threats, both environmental and political, with the Pier not only surviving, but ultimately thriving as the victor. The tale makes for great theater with important lessons about resilience and perseverance.

For the past many years, I have been the faithful keeper and narrator of the Pier's story, researching, learning, and then sharing and writing about it. You may be familiar with my book *Santa Monica Pier: A Century on the Last Great Pleasure Pier*, which was recently praised by the *Los Angeles Times* as a book that every Angeleno should have on their coffee table. All humility aside, I agree with the *Times*!

Whether you have read the book or not, or whether you intend to buy a copy and read it or not, there is now another way to learn the story: the Santa Monica Pier Corporation's new free program,

A Talk Through Pier History.
A Talk Through Pier History is a companion to our historical walking tour program, *A Walk Through Pier History* which we launched in 2023. The "Talk" presents the linear timeline of the Pier's story from its modest beginning to the present day, and the "Walk" is a journey that shows participants what happened where. Both are fully enriching, great fun, and highly educational.

The first *A Talk Through Pier History* will take place on Thursday, February 13 at 6 p.m. inside the Loeff Hippodrome (200 Santa Monica Pier). If you wish to attend, please RSVP to info@santamonicipier.org.

If the February 13 date doesn't work for you, don't worry, for I will be doing these "Talks" on a regular basis and will announce more dates soon. Please visit our website: santamonicipier.org to learn about all of our wonderful programs.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at the Pier.

Jim Harris is the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Pier Corporation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to the preservation, enhancement, and curation of the pier visitor experience, as well as an accomplished author and playwright.

Architecturally Speaking

How to Build a Fire-Resistant House



By Elisa Garcia Garcia Architects
In 1977, our office burned to the ground in the Sycamore Fire in Santa Barbara. At the time, it was

my father's firm, but I remember the devastation well. With an office in Santa Barbara since 1976, sadly, we have had to rebuild so many homes destroyed by fires for clients. Many of those clients have asked us to design their new home in a fire-resistant manner.

There are many precautions you can take to make your home as fire-resistant as possible. Here are some of the ways to design your house to protect it against wildfire. In general, concrete is an excellent material to work with when constructing a fire-resistant home. It's noncombustible, it takes a long time for heat from a fire to damage its structure and load-bearing ability, and it stops fire from spreading. A concrete and steel structure with no wood is ideal along with roofing, siding, and windows that are fire-resistant as well.

• House Location on Property
Wildfires typically blaze through faster on an uphill incline compared to ground level, so consider this in selecting your house location on your property. Maximize the distance between your home and trees and bushes using a driveway, patio, low-growing fire-retardant plants, and fire-resistant materials as multiple layers of defense to buy you time as a wildfire



Fire resistant home construction is now at the forefront of discussion for architects and builders alike.

Photo by Jeff Whyte

approaches. Your driveway should be wide enough for firefighters to park, move, and reverse their fire truck, while still being able to haul their equipment up to your home. Strategically place exterior lights on your roof so your home is clearly visible and easy to find for firefighters.

• Foundation
Use insulated concrete forms (ICFs). ICFs are polystyrene blocks that connect together like pieces of Lego to create your home's shell, locking out sound and weather. They're made up of concrete, making them one of the most fire- and heat-resistant construction materials. ICFs can withstand fire for a maximum of four hours. They've conventionally been used in the construction of commercial and institutional buildings but homebuilders can use ICFs too. ICFs cost about one to four percent more than typical wood frame houses without built-in fire protection. However, this extra cost is worth the investment, as ICFs lock in heat and cooled air, which can escape through

(Continued on Page 5)

The Red Cross Salutes Contributions of Black Americans This Month

Black History Month centers around the outstanding achievements of Black Americans. With the theme "Black Excellence is in Our Blood," the American Red Cross honors the vibrant legacies of trailblazers whose collaborative spirit of excellence continue to shape their humanitarian mission.

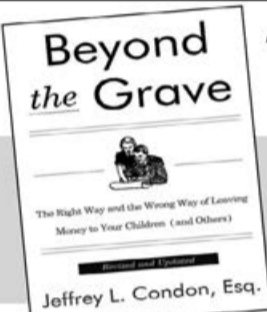
Frederick Douglass, a prominent Black abolitionist and author who escaped slavery, supported Clara Barton's efforts to establish the American Red Cross. Having been impressed by Barton's aid to Black soldiers during the Civil War, and her desire to improve the protection of the wounded during wartime, Douglass signed the original Articles of Incorporation for the Red Cross in 1881.

Howard University, one of the nation's top Historically Black College or University (HBCUs), formed

its Red Cross Unit in March 1917 under the leadership of Red Crosser Hallie E. Queen. Determined to aid the war effort, students met daily to make 1,000 hospital supplies before the semester ended, and coordinated entertainment for Black soldiers stationed at Fort Meade. Howard University carries on this tradition today through its Red Cross Club, which hosts blood drives and completes community service projects.

Dr. Charles R. Drew, a surgeon and pioneer of modern blood banking, was named the first medical director of the Red Cross National Blood Collection Program in 1941. His work with the Red Cross helped save the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians during World War II. Dr. Drew's efforts to increase the


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Reflections From The East

A Mother's Love Letter From Long Ago



By Qin Sun Stubis
Love is in the February air because of Valentine's Day, a time designated for us to freely express our thanks and gratitude to those we love. We proudly

display our affections through a bouquet of flowers, loving words, a warm embrace, or perhaps a candlelit dinner. It is a day we want those around us to know how much we appreciate having them in our lives.

Although a Western tradition, at some point during the past three decades after I left Shanghai, this infectious holiday quietly traveled in reverse across the ocean to China. Now known as "Lovers' Day," young people in large coas-

tal cities fashionably celebrate it just the way we do here with roses, poems, chocolates, and kisses – a world away from how love was expressed when I was growing up in the 1960s.

It was the start of the ten long years of the Cultural Revolution when love and devotion were reserved exclusively for high political purposes. I don't remember my mother ever kissing me, or my mother and father ever displaying affection toward one other. Our family's love was always implied but never openly said.

The first time my mother used words to express her love for me was through a handwritten letter. At the time, I was in New York City, having just become a mother myself, while she remained at home in Shanghai missing me.

Writing was the only way we stayed connected.

Nevertheless, it often took weeks, if not months, for a letter to arrive, and sometimes I would not hear from her for what seemed like an eternity. As a result, receiving a letter from her was always a special event. I would hold it against my beating heart before I carefully opened it to reveal her precious words. I would read it again and again to myself, pretending my mother was speaking to me in person.

In her letters, she mostly talked about ordinary family matters, what was happening around her, and her strong religious beliefs as if she were having a chat with me. Her missing and loving me were more embedded in the minute details she wrote, which only her

daughter could detect.

Then, one day, an unexpected miracle happened when I opened one of her letters: Instead of calling me by my name, she started it out with "My dear loving daughter" and ended it with "Love you, Mom." She used words to express her love for me for the first time in my life! I was in tears. I always knew she loved me but finally, she felt comfortable enough to enshrine it in actual words.

That night, as I kissed my own baby and put him to bed, I thought of myself as being a little child, hugged by my mother as she bid me goodnight.

You can always reach me at qstubis@gmail.com, or please visit me at QinSunStubis.com. You can find a copy of my book, *Once Our Lives*, online at Amazon.com.

Grace From the Ashes



By Cheryl Thode
As I write this column, I have been reflecting on the emotional roller coaster we, as Angelenos, have been on. I had intended to focus

this month's column on love and showing love to yourself, others, and especially your kids during the stressful moments of our daily lives.

I wanted to discuss how I often

find myself caught up with my endless to-do lists and responsibilities pulling for my attention and focus; and how I forget to be present and aware of the simple, beautiful, and important things going on around me.

I had planned on reminding you to take time to appreciate the little things, like your kids playing in the yard, an evening sunset, the smell of dew on the morning lawn, or your child's unencumbered laugh.

However, after this past unifying

wildfire experience, I believe no one reading this paper needs to be reminded of what is precious, wonderful, and fleeting in their lives. I am certain that each and every one of you, whether you were personally affected by the fires, knew someone affected, or just felt the change in our city's energy, you took some time to reflect on what mattered to you, what you would save if you needed to flee, what was irreplaceable, and what you could do without.

It is these grounding moments

that bring us back to the fragility of humanity. They remind us that time is limited, our futures uncertain, and that we all need each other to survive.

So, instead of my initial plan, I wanted to write about a topic that could hopefully build upon all of our collective recent reflections on what matters most. In this wonderful month of February, where we celebrate love for our partners and others, I wanted to encourage you all to spread grace, especially to yourself.

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Mini Message Bulletin Board

To Evelyn - Happy Valentine's Day.

I appreciate you for making our lives so wonderful for so many years. I look forward to sharing many more happy adventures with you.



Eddie, the Stache

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- KINGSLEY



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-Mom & Dad*

Clergy Corner

Valentine's Day Brings Us Thoughts of Love



By Reverend Greg Batson
The holiday that we most associate with the month of February is Valentine's Day. Celebrated on February 14, it originally commemorated St. Valentine, a Roman priest in the third century CE who was martyred on this date.

Of course, Valentine's Day is now associated with romantic love, red roses, chocolates, and Cupid as its primary symbols.

Yet, there are many different types of love that we should be aware of as expressed in Greek, the original language of the New Testament in the Bible. There is eros, the romantic love shared between a couple. There is also philia, friendship, that describes the mutual connection that two people feel for each other spirit-

ually. There is storge, which is associated with familial love. And, then there is agape, which is the highest form of love, for it signifies both self-giving and covenantal love. It is agape that is used to describe the love of God for human beings.

We live in a world that is filled with sorrows for many, including war, hunger, and oppression. The need for us to share love with one another is as great as it has ever been. My hope is that this Valentine's Day, we not only show our love for spouses and partners, but for all humankind. Remember that love is multilayered for all of us, both seeking and sharing it.

Rev. Greg Batson
Santa Monica First
United Methodist Church



How to Build a Fire-Resistant House

(Continued from Page 3)

the walls, thus saving energy. ICFs also create shear walls that extend throughout the structure, making them more resistant to earthquakes.

• Roof

While Southern California architecture leans towards stylish Spanish tile roofs, the style is notorious for cracks and openings that allow embers to sneak into and start burning the wood underneath. You can construct a fire-resistant roof using Class A, fire-rated materials that interlock tightly with metal, concrete, slate, and tiling, and built over top a fire-resistant cap sheet for extra protection. A steeper roof pitch is better than a flat one because embers roll off your home before they can burn through. Small flying embers carried by wind are usually the culprit behind 90 percent of fires spreading. Embers

can fly for miles, ending up in gutters and smoldering for hours before starting a secondary fire. For increased safety, choose metal gutters over vinyl, which could melt and drop fire onto the sides of your home. Always keep your gutters clean. Dead leaves are tinder waiting to ignite.

In coming months, Elisa will highlight siding, windows, doors, decks, fencing, landscaping, sprinklers, power, and house styles to consider when rebuilding a fire-resistant home.

Elisa Garcia has been an architect for several years. Her firm, Garcia Architects, has offices in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.

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Passing Through the Pico Neighborhood

Pacific Catch Has Landed in Santa Monica



By Stacy McClendon
Pacific Catch opened its first Westside location in Santa Monica on the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Second Street in December, 2024. This company founded its first location on Chestnut Street in San Francisco in 2003. They now have a total of 15 locations.

The restaurant celebrates food and flavors of the Pacific Rim and offers an expansive menu that features tantalizing appetizers, such as Poke and Ceviche, Sushi, Fresh Catch Fish, Fish and Chips, steak, burgers, and more. All fish is wild-caught or sustainably-raised.

I had an opportunity to enjoy the restaurant at a soft-opening on December 2, one week prior to the restaurant opening. The setting is bright and airy with a beach vibe and plenty of plants throughout. There is a wonderful mural on the wall that helps pull you further into the space. A large open bar sits in the center of the restaurant.

I overheard people at both tables next to me raving about the restaurant, how they have



The Mixed Catch Platter that I ordered was so delicious!

frequented it for years in the Bay Area, and how happy they were to have it in their own backyard now.

My waiter Samuel was very attentive as he served me Sushi Tacos Trio, a Mixed Catch Platter, Pineapple Right Side Up Cake, and a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. Everything was extremely fresh, delicious, and laced with unique flavors throughout.

Jim, the manager of Pacific Catch, shared that he's "in the people business and loves serving good food, to good people, as it's a perfect mixture."

I look forward to returning with my family and friends and spreading the word of their opening.

Sounds Like LA is Here to Stay



Sounds Like LA (SLLA), formerly Santa Monica Youth Orchestra (SMYO), recently underwent a name change and launched a new website to better represent their mission and current offerings in the community. The new name change represents the wider scope of work offered and students being served.

SMYO was founded in 2012, and began offering an orchestra program at Virginia Avenue Park in the Pico Neighborhood. The program has since expanded to include multiple programs across Santa Monica and Los Angeles. Their range of programs offered spans many genres, disciplines, and cultures.

SLLA has their sights set on expanding their offerings to include new locations and school sites.

They will do this by allowing their mission statement, "Sounds Like LA offers tuition-free music education and public concerts to diverse communities in the L.A. area, harnessing the power of music to bridge economic and cultural differences, and to foster personal and social change," to propel them forward into new territories.

SLLA will perform in the third Annual Westside Mariachi Festival which will be held on Sunday, February 16 from 1 p.m.-7 p.m. at the Moss Theatre, 3131 Olympic Blvd., in Santa Monica.

This festival merges communities and cultures, celebrates the rich tradition of Mariachi and Folklorico, and introduces kids who wouldn't normally meet, but have this tradition in

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A Sports Dream Fulfilled



By Michael Margolin

Not long ago, I wrote about my first trip to a sporting event. It was in July of 1988. I went to Dodger Stadium with my dad and grandfather, and saw Fernando Valenzuela pitch. I remember seeing the field through the openings of the concourse on the way to our seats. I was thinking that I could not believe how immaculate and green the field was, and how the stadium and the rest of the seats towered over the diamond. Finally, when we settled into our seats, my nine-year-old eyes were wide open in surprise.

In October of last year, Enjoli and I decided we would make a trip to Kansas City to see the Chiefs play. I have been rooting for them since I was about 12, and had made one trip to Kansas City 20 years ago. With Alexa being 11 and Jake eight, they are certainly old enough to remember a trip like that. The game we saw took place in early December so we would all have plenty of time to look forward to this event.

I have always felt it is important to have things to look forward to. I was very much anticipating the look Alexa would have on her face when we finally got in the stadium. If you are now aware, the Chiefs have had a lot success in the last five to six years, and that



The favorite parts for the kids were getting close to the players during their warmups, being together on a trip, and watching the game!



The reported attendance was 73,571 fans!

happened to be when Alexa really started paying attention. She has been spoiled. I was born in 1979, and some of my earliest sports memories are watching Magic and Bird battle. I grew up rooting for Magic and Kareem so I was spoiled in my early years ... a lot. I do not take those memories for granted.

On the day of the game, we got to the stadium, along with thousands of other fans, several hours

(Continued on Page 9)

The Binge Free Festival

(Continued from Page 1)

workshops, and music in Santa Monica's ONLY fringe festival.

The BFF's primary focus is on Santa Monica and Los Angeles-based artists, but there will be exciting international artists on view as well.

Santa Monica Playhouse is located at 1211 Fourth Street, just below Wilshire Blvd. There is a municipal parking facility across the street. All events are FREE, but reservations are REQUIRED. Some events are family-friendly. See the descriptions below. There will be something for everyone.

To reserve your FREE tickets for an event, call 310-394-9779, ext. 1, or email theatre@santamonicaplayhouse.com. When making reservations, state the name of the show that you want to see, how many seats you wish to reserve, your full name, and your contact number. The Festival will run through March 30.

Binge Free Festival '24 in '25 is presented through generous grants from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County



Maegan Mandarino is in Big Hair which will be performed on March 22 at 5:30 p.m.

Department of Arts and Culture, the City of Santa Monica, the Santa Monica Arts Commission, the We Are Santa Monica Fund, and Playhouse PALS.

The roster of shows follows: Tuesday, February 25-OPENING NIGHT-7:30 p.m. *Fill Your Pockets with Sunshine*; Thursday, February 27-7 p.m. *There's Something Seriously Wrong with Cyrus*; Friday, February 28-7 p.m. *Lear and the Midwife*; and Saturday, March 1, 1p.m.-2:30 p.m. *How to Live Like a Millionaire When You're a Million Short*.

Sounds Like LA is Here to Stay

(Continued from Page 5)

common. SLLA will perform alongside other L.A. area youth groups at a grand finale by Mariachi Sol de Mexico.

Visit Sounds Like LA to donate and learn more about this organi-

zation. All contributions received help maintain tuition-free participation for every student, regardless of background.

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Love Links

College Neighbors Evolve From Close Friends to World Travelers

It is always exciting to read about how the bride and groom met and the steps they took towards knowing they wanted to get married.

Kira Lavac has been in our pages each year when we ran photos of fathers and their children as she was growing up. Her dad, Dr. Frank Lavac, is the Santa Monica veterinarian who has written a column for us since the paper began. So, it is always fun for me to write about someone I've known as a child. Below, Kira shares her story with us.

Kira grew up in Venice, moving to Malibu to attend middle and high school there. She also attended the Westside School of Ballet in Santa Monica where she trained under Yvonne Mounsey for 15 years. Kira's mom was part of the ballet school staff. Her husband, Mark Arthur, grew up in San Ramon in Northern California.

Somehow the fates brought them together when they were college students at UC Santa Barbara in 2014. They lived on the same floor of an apartment complex in Isla Vista. They quickly became friends, when studying, going to comedy shows, for bike rides, running errands, and supporting each other through life experiences.

After being close friends for six months, both Mark and Kira real-



Kira and Mark at their wedding held in The Ritz-Carlton by the sea in Santa Barbara. Photo by Jillian Rose

ized that their friendship had turned into deeper feelings, and they dove in headfirst into their relationship!

Their love of travel immediately bonded them, and Kira joined Mark on multiple medical missions in South America. They had about one-and-a-half years soaking in the sun at UCSB together before Kira graduated, and their years of long-distance began.

They made the most of it by

having FaceTime dates, surprising each other, going on trips, lots of airports, tears, and supporting one another through their unique phases of life. Although it was painful to be away from one another, long distance allowed them to travel to some fun places, such as New York City, Bali, Santorini, Chicago, Singapore, Paris, London, and Prague!

In 2020, their four years of long distance finally ended when Kira moved to Albany, New York, where Mark was attending medical school. They were in heaven, not only living in the same city, but living together!

They began another adventure in 2022 and moved to Phoenix, Arizona, when Mark matched into the University of Arizona Phoenix residency for orthopaedic surgery where he is working now.

Eventually, Mark romantically proposed to Kira on the roof of the apartment complex overlooking the ocean in Isla Vista, where they had met seven years prior. Kira was completely shocked and immediately said "Yes!"

Kira graduated from Prescott College with a Master's in Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling in 2024. She is now a Licensed Associate Counselor at Psychological Counseling Services in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Mark and Kira were married on November 23, 2024 at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, on the bluffs overlooking the ocean. As Kira recalls, "Special memories of the



Mark and Kira had a traditional Indian ceremony in San Ramon.

wedding included having friends and family from all walks of life and all over the world attend and support our love and celebration."

Kira added the officiant was Rahul, their best friend. She expresses, "It was so special to have someone who knows us and our love story so intimately officiate at our wedding." Also, she said that when she and Mark changed into traditional Indian clothing and danced, "This was a surprise to all our guests!"

The couple had a second traditional Indian ceremony (Maru Veedu) in San Ramon four days later.

As they reflect on their many years together, they are grateful for their incredible life together so far, and even more excited to look ahead towards their future! —D.M.

February is Filled With Holidays

(Continued from Page 1)



Happy Birthday Abe and George

coinciding with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two prominent figures in African American history. The celebration was expanded to span the entire month in 1976, providing an even more extensive opportunity to recognize and appreciate the significant impact of African Americans on the nation's history and culture.

Moving towards specific days, the first notable holiday of the month is Groundhog's Day, which takes place on February 2. Stay tuned to see if Punxsutawney Phil (the famous groundhog) will see his shadow, or if Spring will arrive early for us this year!

Maybe the most exciting holiday of the month: February 9 is National Pizza Day! Order a pie to celebrate – you deserve it.

The Lunar New Year began on January 29 and will be celebrated until February 16. It is the Year of the Snake! February 9 is Super Bowl Sunday, so get ready to root for your favorite team! (Alternatively, gear up for the Puppy

Bowl – the true competition of the day).

Then, there's the famous February 14: Valentine's Day. The history of Valentine's Day is one shrouded in legend. One story tells how Saint Valentine, a priest in the third century AD, defied his emperor's marriage ban for young men and continued to perform marriages for young couples in secret. Legend says he was executed on February 14 for his actions, memorializing the day forever in history. Another story claims that Valentine, while imprisoned, sent a letter to a girl signed, "From your Valentine," and the phrase has carried on to this very day. Either way, Valentine's Day is one to be spent with your loved ones, and we hope that yours is filled with joy!

February 17 is President's Day. Arriving on the third Monday of every February, the holiday celebrates the birthdays of both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, while, most importantly, giving many people a day off from work and school to relax! I think Washington would want you to get some extra sleep in, so make it count.

To finish off the month, February 28 is National Chocolate Soufflé Day, so feel free to enjoy a tasty treat as you wait for March to begin!

We wish you the happiest of Februaries, however you plan on celebrating this month!



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GENERAC

Home is Where the Heart is

(Reprinted from February 2024)

By Richard Lombardi

Home is where the heart is, and as Valentine's Day approaches, our thoughts turn to the enduring love affair we have with our homes. These cherished spaces hold the tapestry of our lives, weaving together memories that linger long after the paint has dried and the furniture has settled.

For many, childhood homes evoke a nostalgia that transcends the limitations of size or amenities. Perhaps lacking the sleek, modern features of today's residences, those homes were the backdrop to laughter, family gatherings, and the magic of holidays. They were not just structures, but vessels of love, where every nook and cranny held a story.

The journey of creating a first home is a testament to youthful ambition, filled with a sense of accomplishment, pride, and newfound independence. Young singles or couples, armed with dreams and paintbrushes, embark on the adventure of turning a house into a home.

The to-do list grows, evolving in financially-mandated phases, and with each completed project, a milestone is etched in the story of their shared life.

As families expand and little feet patter through the hallways, homes can sometimes feel like they are shrinking. The need for more space, better schools, or a shorter commute begins to shape the narrative of the next move. The quest for a larger home becomes not just a physical upgrade, but a pursuit of enhanced comfort and convenience for the growing family.

Homes, whether modest or grand, serve as more than just shelters. They are vessels of memory, providers of security, and even markers of status. In each room and every corner, lives unfold, leaving imprints of joy, challenges overcome, and the passage of time. As we celebrate love on Valentine's Day, let us also celebrate the enduring love affair with our homes, where the heart finds its truest sanctuary.

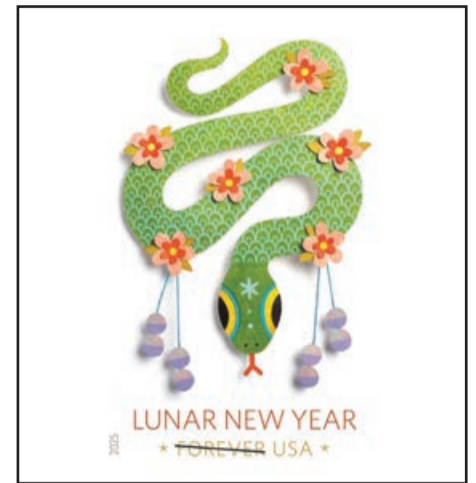
Celebrating Chinese New Year: A Snake or Little Dragon?

By Qin Sun Stubis

This past January 29 marks the beginning of another Chinese New Year, the Year of the Snake. Interestingly, if you ask those born at this particular point in the 12-year cycle, many will tell you that they were born in the Little Dragon Year.

As you may know, the dragon is a powerful Chinese mythical creature, and a snake, in some ways, physically resembles a miniature dragon. Since many people don't like to associate themselves with the more infamous characteristics of snakes, such as being tricky, deceitful, and devious, they would rather call themselves "little dragons" instead.

Whether a snake or a little dragon, the power of this birth animal should not be underestimated. Those born in a Snake Year



The USPS just unveiled the latest Lunar New Year Stamp. Over 20 million are now on sale.

are known for their wisdom, intellect, and intuition. They are charismatic, creative people who are witty and full of ideas. So, if you

(Continued on Page 10)

Santa MoniCARES and Local Community

(Continued from Page 2)

responders seeking relief.

Opportunities to support include financial and goods donations, volunteer assistance, and business specials aiding first re-

sponders and evacuees. To share your offer of support, please visit santamonicares.org, or call 310-319-6263.

Event Will Benefit Victims of the Fires

(Continued from Page 2)

local wines from boutiques and exclusive wineries.

For 103 years, Santa Monica Rotary members have helped to make a meaningful impact in the Santa Monica community.

Please get your tickets today! Tickets are \$250 through February 15, and \$300 up to the day of the event on March 1. Wear your finest formal wear and elegant mask for this impressive af-

fair, where every detail is designed to inspire, delight, and deliver the warmth of community spirit in support of a great cause. Secure your tickets now and come to help them make a difference.

The event will be at the Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd. near Mulholland Drive from 6 p.m.-10 p.m. Visit www.Rotarywinefest.org for ticket purchases.

Grace From the Ashes (Continued from Page 4)

When we spread grace to someone, we treat them with kindness, understanding, and forgiveness, regardless of who they are, what they have done, and what they may do. Spreading grace means being patient, listening, offering support when needed, being present and experiencing events as they unfold, practicing gratitude, and most importantly, letting go of any negative feelings against yourself or others that are robbing you of your happiness.

Similarly, showing grace to yourself means treating yourself with compassion, empathy, and mercy. "Self-grace" can help you let go of personal criticism and shame, and move forward with a sense of self-compassion. Starting today, I encourage you to 1) Accept your flaws, everyone has them; 2) Practice self-compassion, there is no place for negative self-talk; 3) Forgive yourself, your mistakes are opportunities for growth; 4) Take care of yourself, give yourself attention and love; 5) Practice gratitude and acknowledge what you're proud of; and finally, 6) Let go of the need to be perfect, perfection does not exist.

While you may be practicing giving grace to others, give grace routinely, or are working on this skill,

the action of giving grace is one that always comes back to its giver one-hundred fold. I will be the first to admit that I am not perfect at showing others grace, or myself for that matter. I am constantly working on it.

However, by showing a little more compassion, understanding, or love to another person who crosses my path, I, too, receive grace back. As I said in the beginning of this column, I often let the stress of my job, role as a mother and wife, drive to be a good and helpful daughter, and my want to be as supportive as possible to my friends block my view of the present and what is happening right in front of me.

Practicing grace has provided me with the "pause" to reflect and stop the rat-race.

As we move through the events of January and into the future, giving grace to your children, your partner, your parents, friends, coworkers, fellow neighbors, the strangers that come across your path, and especially yourself, will not only bring happiness to your own life, but also help our neighborhoods rise from the ashes. Love to you all. God Bless and May Grace Be With You.



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Community Service on the Westside

Love Your Heart This Valentine's Day!



By Araceli Alejandre, COO
High blood pressure, often called the "silent killer," affects millions of people and often goes unnoticed until serious health complications arise. Regular blood pressure screenings are a critical step in taking control of your health. These quick and painless tests provide valuable insight into your heart health and can help identify potential issues before they become severe.

Knowing your numbers empowers you to take action. Elevated blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other life-threatening conditions, but early detection allows you to make lifestyle changes or seek medical care to reduce those risks. Simple steps like adopting a heart-healthy diet, engaging in

regular physical activity, and managing stress can significantly impact your blood pressure and overall well-being.

In honor of Valentine's Day, the Santa Monica Family YMCA invites you to "Love Your Heart" on Friday, February 15, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. for FREE blood pressure screenings. This event is open to the entire community, reflecting our commitment to improving the health and wellness of all.

Take advantage of this opportunity to learn your numbers, understand what they mean, and receive guidance on how to maintain a healthy heart. Whether you've had screenings before or this is your first time, this is a chance to prioritize your health and show your heart some love. For details, contact the Santa Monica Family YMCA at 310-393-2721 or visit our website at ymcasm.org.

An Update From the SMBWC



By Pat Webber
The Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club (SMBWC) Board of Directors and all our members extend our condolences to

to the members of the Palisades Woman's Club who have endured the tragedy in their community.

In last month's column, I mentioned the Club's holiday project for Happy Trails for Kids Winter Camp, a program for children in foster care. The Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club, and our members' goal was to surpass last year's project of donating \$25 Target gift cards for the kids attending their Winter camp. Last year, we donated a total of 35 gift cards.

This year, we are delighted to announce that a total of 65 \$25 Target gift cards were delivered to

the Happy Trails office in time for the holidays! Happy Trails and the SMBWC Board are grateful for the generosity of our wonderful members.

The Club is available to rent for events. Dates in these Winter months are filling up. Any companies or organizations wishing to use our beautiful facility are urged to contact the Club at 310-395-1308. Also, there are great views on our website (smbwc.org) that show the ballroom and balcony.

Members and guests continue to play bridge, canasta, and Mah Jong at the Club on Mondays; Arts, Crafts and Conversation on Tuesdays; Duplicate Bridge on Thursdays; and Book Club on the last Tuesday of the month in the evening. See our website SMBWC.org for more information.



A Sports Dream Fulfilled

(Continued from Page 6)

early. Midwest fans are incredibly friendly. We tailgated with a large group of very organized folks who welcomed everybody, including Charger fans. The Chargers were the opponent that night.

After hanging out with them for a while, we went into the stadium. We sat in the upper deck, but were allowed to get down to the field ahead of time to watch the players warm up. The expression on Alexa's face had to be very similar to the one I had at Dodger Stadium 35 years prior. Colors and sounds popping all over the place with the night sky as the backdrop. I will never forget the look she had. A look of awe and amazement that made my sports fan heart smile. Her expression alone made the whole trip worth it.

The game was decided in the final second. As the time on the game clock dissipated, I mentioned how the games are much more intense when you witness

them in person. Alexa agreed without being able to crack a smile. So with one second on the clock, the Chiefs attempted a field goal that doinked off the left upright, and caromed through, securing the win for the home team. There are not many happier places I have been than in that stadium at that moment to see a team I have loved for more than 30 years win a game in such dramatic and somewhat unconventional fashion!

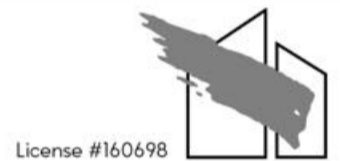
To have my own family of fans now behind this team as well is pretty special. If you are a sports junkie the way I am, this does not take much more explaining. Perhaps Alexa or Jake will be reflecting and witnessing with their own offspring in another 35 years. And, maybe if I am lucky enough I will be there for that too.

Mike Margolin has been writing for us since his daughter Alexa was born 11 years ago.

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The Red Cross Salutes

(Continued from Page 3)

blood supply led to the use of bloodmobiles and other collection, preservation, and distribution processes still used today.

Commemorate Black History Month by rolling up a sleeve to

give blood. Use the Red Cross Blood Donor App, or RedCrossBlood.org/OurBlood or call 800-RED CROSS (800-733-2767) to schedule an appointment today.

Celebrating Chinese New Year

(Continued from Page 8)

were born in the Year of the Snake, be proud.

However, snake years are known to be challenging times to test your inner strength and intelligence. Making the right decisions and seeking new opportunities will help you survive this serpen-

tine sojourn and come out triumphant.

You can always reach me at qstubis@gmail.com, or please visit me at QinSunStubis.com. You can find a copy of my book, *Once Our Lives*, online at Amazon.com.

Paws and Claws

Read, Set, Go – For Pets



By Dr. Frank Lavac, MS, DVM
Preparing for your own evacuation should also include a plan for your pets. Delays in caring for your pet,

could endanger you and your family. Indeed, the key word is PREPARE.

- Assemble an evacuation kit:
 - Two weeks' supply of food
 - Cage/Carrier
 - Essential veterinary records and proof of ownership
 - Make sure your pet is micro-chipped and is wearing a collar and ID tag. Attach an AirTag (iPhone) or SmartTag (Android). There are now GPS collars as well.
 - All necessary medications.
 - Veterinary Hospital contact information as well as ER contact information. Your personal contact information.

- Leash, collar, and/or harness. Harnesses are the most secure.
- Make sure a friend or family member has access to your pet and the evacuation kit in case you are not home.
- First aid kit. It's ideal to have several of them, so that one can be kept in the car, home, and with a neighbor/friend.
- Make sure that you have pictures of your pet along with vital statistics (weight, color, breed, unique markings, etc.) in case your pet is lost.

There are many things to consider in an emergency situation. During stressful times, it's easy to forget unless there is a formal list/preparation.

For more detailed resources, visit AVMF.org, Ready.gov, laanimal.services.com/emergency-preparedness or cdc.gov/healthypets/emergency-preparedness/preparedness-kit.

If you have any questions, you can contact Dr. Lavac at 310-828-4587.



Adopt a Pet



Lionel is such a sweetie, very friendly, and a goofball. He knows his basic commands, will happily sit for treats, and is also dog friendly. Lionel is a neutered male, white and black Dogo Argentino. The City of Santa Monica Animal Shelter staff thinks he is about six years old. If you are interested in adopting Lionel, or any of the available animals, please visit the animal shelter located at 1640 9th St., Santa Monica. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. (Closed 12 p.m.-1 p.m. for lunch). 310-458-8595.

Planning Ahead

Property Tax Relief After the Fires



By Lisa Alexander, Esq.
As I write this article, the Palisades Fire is still raging. I am hearing from so many of our clients and friends who have lost their

homes. We've seen pictures of the devastation, but many are still waiting to know if their home was burned or spared. I want to express my sorrow to all of the fire victims.

In the aftermath, while people are sorting out insurance, living arrangements, replacing essentials, and trying to move forward, April 10 property tax payments are around the corner. The rare, good news amidst all the loss is there may be tax relief available.

Under California law, if your property was damaged or destroyed in the Palisades Fire (or Eaton Fire or other declared disaster), you may apply to the County Assessor to have the assessed value of your property reappraised. Property taxes would be reduced to reflect the damaged condition of your property. To qualify you must file a claim with the County Assessor within 12 months. The claim is made by filing the Assessor's Form: "Appli-

cation for Reassessment: Property Damaged or Destroyed by Misfortune or Calamity" (Form ADS-820). The form is available on the Los Angeles County Assessor's website assessor.lacounty.gov.

Another bit of relief is possible deferral of your property tax payment. If you pay your property taxes directly, not through an impound account, you can request deferral of your property tax payment by filing Form ADS-820.3 "Property Tax Installment Deferral Application – Property Damaged or Destroyed by Misfortune or Calamity," also available from the Los Angeles County Assessor's website.

The home page of the Los Angeles County Assessor's website now has a link for Disaster Relief. There are Fact Sheets, forms, and a tab with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). By the time this article is published, I expect there to be much more information and guidance available for property tax relief. If you are a victim of the fires, I hope this is helpful to get you started.

Lisa C. Alexander, Esq.
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An Update From ERBA Markets

New Year, New Cannabis Regulations



By Stephen Freedman

Every new year brings reflections and resolutions for the months ahead. In addition to these January staples are the swath of new local and federal laws and regulations that will govern our everyday lives. This year brings many new and potential changes to the cannabis industry, both on the legislative and judicial side.

The biggest change is the allowance of “cannabis cafes” in California. Consumption spaces, like the Ganja Garden at The Woods WEHO, are now permitted to serve nonmedicated beverages and food to guests. This is a major, and commonsense win for the industry as discussed in this column previously.

Additionally, hearings and reviews will begin this year regarding the rescheduling of cannabis to a Schedule III substance. While there were many who hoped this would be concluded by the end of 2024, it was not meant to be. Additionally, it is likely this process will extend into next year, with the multiple steps in the process, as well as the litany of lawsuits

that will likely follow each advancement.

A major court case that many are watching is Canna Provisions, Inc. v. Garland. This case revolves around a group of cannabis companies challenging the Controlled Substance Act (CSA). Plaintiffs argue that the CSA, as written, is an overreach by congress under the Commerce Clause because it criminalizes legal intrastate conduct within states where cannabis is legal. The basis for this argument is that the federal governments regulating intrastate commerce is no longer relevant due to the fact the Feds have taken a hands-off approach to cannabis enforcement since the legalization in many states, along with several memorandums, riders, and institutional practices within the branches of government. The case was dismissed but is currently under appeal.

As cannabis continues to proliferate across America, we can expect many more regulations, laws, and cases to come down, hopefully allowing the industry to move closer to the mainstream.

Stephen Freedman is the Regional Manager of the ERBA Markets, the WOODS, West LA, Venice, Culver City, and WeHo.

From Me to You...



By Diane Margolin

The past week of watching the ruin of homes and businesses around us, and feeling the losses of many friends has brought out a response of overwhelming support. People all over the greater Los Angeles area have started donating clothing, food, toys, pet food, baby food, and much more.

I was impressed to hear on the radio that donations had come in from every state in our country, and from 140 other countries.

With the restless environment many of us have felt recently, it was a comfort to know that in difficult times, people, no matter your background or beliefs, rally around to help.

Many of you probably have received calls and emails from friends and family all over our country, as I have, to find out how we are doing.

Recently, I was speaking to Evelyn Rudie at the Santa Monica Playhouse. I asked her if she had been hearing from people far away. “Yes,” she told me. “We’re getting emails from all around the world.”

She continued, “We got a donation just yesterday from a young man who was our youth tour guide on our first trip to Japan in 1989. He was 11 years old at the time. We hadn’t heard from him in at least 20 years. He wrote to say that he is now a pediatrician, with a wife and two children. I still picture him as a rambunctious pre-teen who wanted to take us all

over Kyoto so we could see “Everything!”

The outpouring of love and support, both from folks around the globe who just want to make sure you’re all right, to all of the community members who are doing so much to help out – it’s heartwarming, and heartbreaking, at the same time,” she concluded, sharing what many of us feel.

Evelyn also added that “In February, that wonderful play, *End of Times Therapy* – is having four performances to help Save the Main Stage at the theater. But, they are also giving tickets to all first responders, fire service, and police.” It plays Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 4 p.m., February 15 through 23. See their ad on Page 3 for details.

The City of Inglewood always has the most wonderful activities to celebrate holidays. This month, their Black History Celebration will be a Family Festival to be held on Saturday, February 22 from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. There will be live entertainment, arts and crafts, health screenings, a food court, vendor booths, art exhibits, and more. Call 310-412-8750 for information.

We are going to be collecting books for children who lost their homes in the fires. Please join us. Details in the ad at the upper right. Thank you.



**The Santa Monica Star
The Rotary Club of Santa Monica
and The Santa Monica Family YMCA
Are Collecting Books for Children Who
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