

Carquinez

COVERING LIFE ON THE STRAIT

**PANDEMIC
PARTY GUIDE**

HOW TO KEEP IT
SAFE, FUN & LOCAL
PAGE 19

MEET XULA AND
HER ARTISTIC
OWNERS
PAGE 22

WE RALLY TOGETHER

The Carquinez region comes together to prove that kindness is contagious, too.



SALONS REOPEN

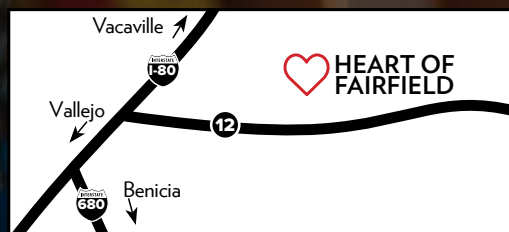
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DR. CHRISTINE WU: PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH

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OCT 24 DAY OF THE DEAD
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2pm – 6pm

NOV 11 VETERANS DAY PARADE
12:30pm – 2pm
Commemoration & Concert
10am – 12pm

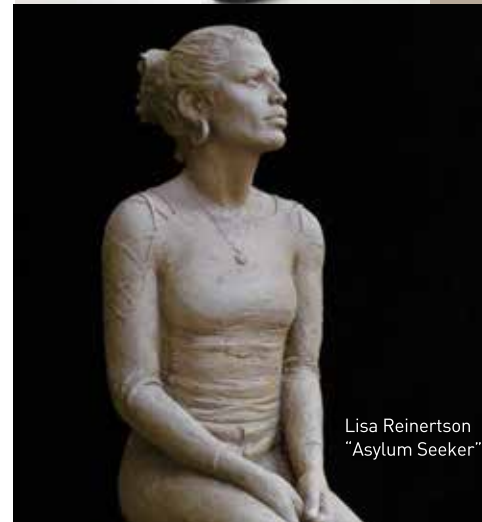
NOV 28 SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY
All Day

DEC 4 CHRISTMAS TREE-LIGHTING & HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES
6pm

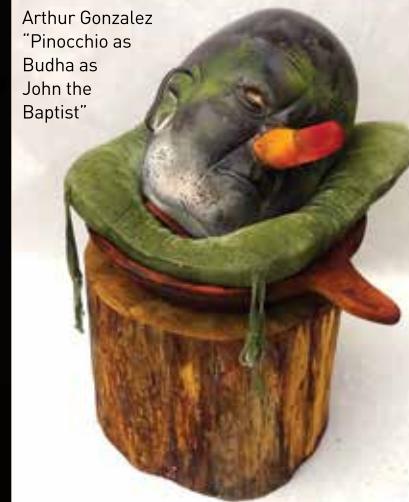
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Letters

WE LOVE HEARING FROM YOU!

I recently received the Spring issue and it is fantastic! Thank you so much! I have lived in Crockett for five years and thoroughly enjoyed learning about all of the local businesses and events that I had no idea existed. I also thought it was well designed, the photography was spectacular, and the writing was also really clever. Well done! — Leslie S., Crockett

I worked in the magazine industry for 20 years, [and] what you are doing is really amazing and vibrant! As a part-time Benicia resident, I'm so happy you've started this publication! I've subscribed and can't wait for future issues. — Mike H., Benicia

Congratulations! Great magazine!
— Dorothy L., Vallejo

Drop us a note via email at deanne@carquinezmagazine.com or snail mail at: **Carquinez Magazine, PO Box 1937, Benicia, CA 94510**



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To steal a phrase, "The kid can hit!"

DID YOU KNOW?

LOCAL BASEBALL SLUGGER
On June 11, Petaluma native Spencer Torkelson made history when he was taken first overall in the MLB draft. That got us to thinking: **Who was the last Carquinez resident to be drafted and make it to the Big Show?**
You don't have to look too far back to find out. In 2015, Vallejo native and Benicia High graduate **Willie Calhoun** was selected in the fourth round by the Los Angeles Dodgers. (Yuck!) Fortunately, the young slugger was traded to the Texas Rangers in 2017, where he made his Major League debut, hitting a single in his very first at-bat.

Carquinez

summer 2020



Benicia artists and mask makers Bodil and Larnie Fox

Come Together

WHEN THE CORONAVIRUS PLUNGED THE REGION INTO CRISIS, THESE LOCALS STEPPED UP TO HELP THEIR COMMUNITY. **PAGE 22**

strait side

» Meet the brilliant character behind Vallejo's indie bookstore and keep track of what's open.

PLUS: Get the latest on the pandemic from Dr. Christine Wu, Solano County's deputy health officer. **PAGE 9**

party guide

» Make your socially distant gathering safe and festive with our special pandemic party guide. **PAGE 19**

sip & savor

» Take a sip of heaven with the award-winning selection of beers at Del Cielo Brewing Co. in Martinez.

PLUS: Add some romance to your quarantine with a date-night dinner from Provisions in Vallejo. **PAGE 35**

ON OUR COVER
Couple, artists, and owners of El Comalito Collective Edgar-Arturo Camacho-Gonzalez and Abel Rodriguez with their dog, Xula. See more on **PAGE 22.**

Cover photography by Lia Cecaci



SO MUCH LOCAL BEER!
PAGE 19 & 35

Hot weather means cold beer.

—PUBLISHER DEANNE O'CONNOR, ON DECIDING TO INCLUDE LOTS OF LOCAL BEER IN THIS ISSUE



STYLISTS GET BACK TO BIZ

Split ends? Roots showing? Beastly beard?! Closed for more than two months, salons and barbershops are ready to give you a much-needed makeover. **PAGE 14**

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Carquinez

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The Carquinez Bridge at night
by Ian Rizzari @rizzvisuals



A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR

STRONGER TOGETHER

On one hand, living through this time has been a drain on every reserve I have—emotional, physical, and of course, financial. It's been tough to stay positive and productive during this current time.

On the other hand, for us storytellers, it's been fascinating to witness: the chaos, the rapid change and the pain always associated with that kind of change, the resolve of people all over the world to fight—first for our health, and then for equality and justice.

This is the stuff of the greatest stories throughout history. And we're all part of it—together. Even though we're still (for the most part) distant from each other, we've found ways to unite and support one another during this time.

And that's the part of the story we chose to tell in this issue: how we rallied together to keep our spirits high and our hope intact. The way people have gone the extra mile for one another is truly uplifting. Reading these stories helped me remember that, and I hope it helps you, too.

Sincerely,

Deanne O'Connor
Owner, Publisher, and
Creative Director,
Carquinez

Carquinez in Crisis



I'll admit—it's hard to feel hopeful right now. The crises are so many that it's hard to know where to start. Yet, I believe there are

reasons to celebrate.

I am inspired by those gathering peacefully in our city streets, united by the desire to see a fairer, more just world for themselves and their neighbors. They have displayed incredible courage, leadership, and American spirit—unarmed except for their belief that we are all created equal.

I am inspired by the good Samaritans who have stepped up for our community. We cover some of their stories in our latest feature on the coronavirus pandemic, from the Vallejo couple who opened up their home to thousands through virtual paint parties to the Martinez restaurateur who supplied

meals to hungry families. Despite their own setbacks, they and many others like them responded to the ongoing crisis by asking: How can we help?

I am inspired by our first responders—the healthcare workers who keep us healthy as well as the law enforcement officers who remember that their duty is to protect and serve, not to menace and brutalize our communities.

In the last issue of this magazine, I wrote about how we could weather any storm together. I still believe it. We are at our best when we stand up for each other—whether we're marching to protest injustices, buying local to support small businesses, or simply giving to those who need it more than us.

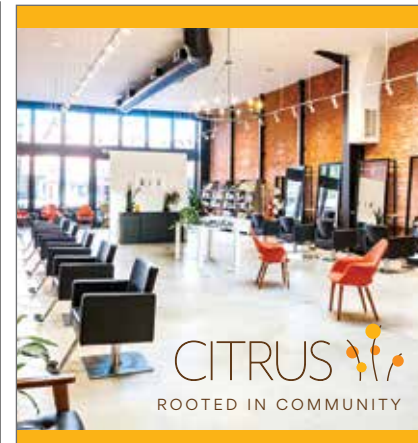
We are, now more than ever, stronger together. As we move forward, let's remember to listen and learn from each other so that when our neighbors need us, we are ready to stand with them.

Stay healthy and stay safe,

Casey Cantrell
Executive Editor, Carquinez

FROM TOP: IAN RIZZARI; ALAN NIKU

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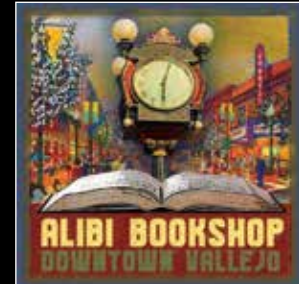
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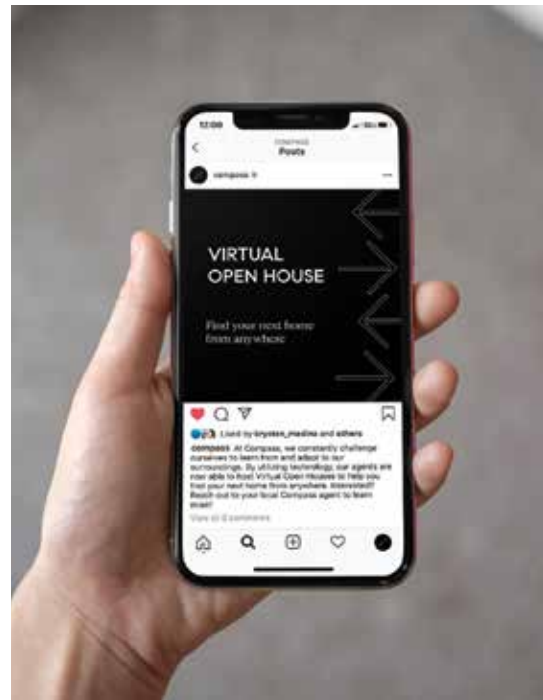
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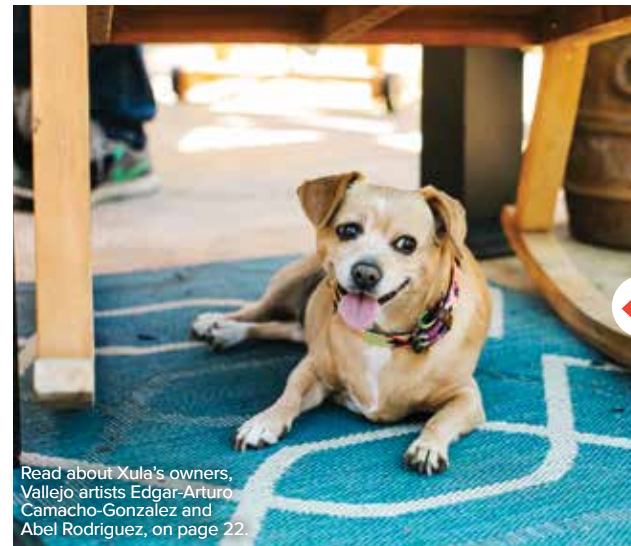
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ANNABELLE MARIE LIA CECACI



Read about Xula's owners, Vallejo artists Edgar-Arturo Camacho-Gonzalez and Abel Rodriguez, on page 22.

{local talent} spotlight



ANNABELLE MARIE is the founder of VOENA Children's Choir in Benicia. Started in 1994, the renowned choir has toured around the world, including performances at the White House, the Vatican, and the opening of the 2012 London Olympics.

A classically trained musician, vocalist, and composer, Marie has spent nearly three decades inspiring her students and helping them realize their potential. Believing that every child carries an innate musical talent, she has a strict no-audition policy, meeting with each of her students at their skill level as she inspires them to tap into their creative spirit.

While the pandemic has disrupted many of the choir's planned concerts, Marie has forged ahead with her students. Read more of her story on page 22.



CALI GODLEY is a photographer based in the Bay Area. She pursues photography to connect with her community and provide creative services to growing organizations, publications, and brands. See more of her work at cali-godley.com or follow her on Instagram at [@caligodley](https://www.instagram.com/caligodley).



ALEJANDRA SARAGOZA is an editor and writer based in the Bay Area. Her work has been published in HuffPost, *Via*, *Diablo*, and *Touring & Tasting*. She can usually be found cheering the Warriors, sipping a cocktail, or grabbing a bite. alejandrasaragoza.com



LIA CECACI lives in Martinez with her husband and two dogs. They run a leather goods business in downtown. Lia has been behind a camera professionally since 2008. Lia shot the cover and the feature story on page 22. You can see more of her work at oh-honestly.com.



LAUREN BONNEY is a Bay Area writer and editor specializing in lifestyle, travel, culture, fitness, and food and drink. She has a soft spot for cheese and a great cup of coffee. Follow her gastronomic discoveries at [@bonneyeatworld](https://www.instagram.com/bonneyeatworld).



NAT AND CODY GANTZ are a husband-and-wife photography team in San Francisco. They photograph food, products, and portraits but mostly love meeting new people and seeing what they do. They also love to cook, surf, hike, and spend time with their baby boy.



MEGAN MCCREIA is a San Francisco-based journalist. Her work has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Sunset*, *Via*, and *Mabuhay*. She co-authored Other Places Publishing's guidebook to the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. [meganmccreia.com](https://www.instagram.com/meganmccreia)



BOB SCHNELL is a recent transplant to Marin County. He provides headshots, portraits, brand, and small-product photography. In his free time, he enjoys exploring the natural beauty of Northern California with his fiancée. See his work at certaingravityphoto.com or at [@Certaingravityphoto](https://www.instagram.com/certaingravityphoto).



LAURA MING WONG has been ringside at boxing matches in Oracle Arena, on stage with rap artists in Oakland, and inside science labs. As a lifestyle photographer who calls the Bay Area home, she's lucky to be able to capture memories and encourage connections within our diverse community. [lauramingwong.com](https://www.instagram.com/lauramingwong)

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strait side

Good Reads

ALIBI BOOKSHOP OWNER KAREN FINLAY BRINGS GREAT BOOKS, COMMUNITY SPIRIT, AND GOOD OLD-FASHIONED FUN TO DOWNTOWN VALLEJO.

BY MEGAN MCCREA // PHOTOS BY CALI GODLEY



CALI GODLEY

HIT THE BOOKS

From classics to modern releases, Alibi Bookshop has the perfect read for you. [Page 10](#)



Find titles for the kids, and the kids at heart, at Alibi Bookshop.

Bookshop at 624 Marin Street. “It was thrilling, exhilarating, exhausting, celebratory, and full of love,” she recalls. “One of the best days of my life.”

Since then, she’s kept plenty busy: ordering and shelving books, finessing window displays, running Alibi’s social media accounts, and most importantly, transforming the beloved bookstore into a true community space. There’s the book club on Thursday nights and the writers’ group on Wednesdays, a silent reading club on Tuesdays, and story time on Saturdays—plus regular readings and speaking events with renowned local authors such as Trevor Allen, Mary Brown,

and Wayne Goodman.

Finlay complements these traditional word-nerd activities with a healthy dose of riotous fun. For her birthday—coincidentally the same day as Bloomsday, which commemorates the life and works of famed Irish novelist James Joyce—she invited customers to join her for rainbow sprinkle cake; another time, a ‘60s-themed read-aloud included a rollicking performance by the fringe-wearing Devil-Ettes. “I think we might be the only bookstore that’s hosted go-go dancers,” Finlay says.

Naturally, the past few months have looked much different for Alibi. Closed to the public since March 15, most of the shop’s operations—including the monthly book clubs—have since transitioned online. Customers can purchase books through Bookshop, a digital marketplace for independent bookstores, then swing by Finlay’s house for a socially distanced pickup. “When people order,” Finlay says, “they’ll slip us notes that say, ‘We love you,’ and ‘We can’t wait for you to come back.’”

She can’t wait to come back either. “I’m honestly going to be so happy,” she says. “I’m looking forward to seeing everyone and hearing about their day, what they’re reading. We’re excited to see our people again.” •

Anyone who’s seen her—grabbing coffee at Moschetti, browsing treasures at Eco Thrift, or talking books on Facebook Live—knows Karen Finlay has a deep closet. She can go full Francophile in a striped top, silk scarf, and black beret; celebrate Aloha Friday with a flowery dress and shell earrings; or veer culinary with a Joy of Cooking apron and a blouse festooned with silverware. But perhaps no outfit fits her better than her recent Halloween costume: a circus ringmaster, complete with red skirt suit, black bowtie, and top hat. In fact, the pink-haired 51-year-old has played the part nonstop since April 30, 2019—the day she and her husband, Jon Burchard, got the keys to Vallejo Bookstore.

Back in late 2018, Finlay was working as a national accounts manager for Chronicle Books when the bookstore’s previous owner, Shannon Hartlep, approached Finlay and her husband about buying the shop.

“We thought about it for a month,” Finlay says. “I feel like everything in my life directed me here. My first job in high school was at Upstart Crow & Company. I got a degree in creative writing. I worked in publishing. All along, I dreamed of opening my own bookstore.”

That dream came true on June 1, 2019, when Finlay opened the doors to the newly minted Alibi



TAKE YOURSELF ON A VIRTUAL VACATION WITH ONE OF THESE SUPERB BOOKS PICKED BY KAREN FINLAY.

***The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, Suzanne Collins**

“The eagerly anticipated prequel to *The Hunger Games*. Set 64 years before the first novel, it’s the story of Coriolanus Snow and the 10th Annual Hunger Games.”

***The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Ernest J. Gaines**

“This 1971 novel by former Vallejo resident Ernest J. Gaines—whom we sadly lost last year—is the fictional autobiography of Jane Pittman. From the Civil War to the civil rights era, Jane tells the story of African American history and struggles.”

***Nothing to See Here*, Kevin Wilson**

“Lillian’s life is on a dead-end track when her former roommate asks her to be caretaker to her stepchildren on her beautiful Tennessee estate. It sounds too good to be true, and it is: The children have a tendency to spontaneously combust. This book is quirky, charming, and heartwarming—literally.”

For even more book recs, visit carquinezmagazine.com.



Back to Business?

CONTRA COSTA AND SOLANO COUNTIES ARE IN STAGE 2 OF REOPENING. HERE’S A ROUNDUP OF WHAT’S OPEN—AND WHAT’S NOT.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

What’s open right now?

Healthcare facilities, pharmacies, grocery stores, and banks remain open. Outdoor facilities—including skate parks, athletic fields, and golf courses—and most state parks allow for limited recreational activities with proper social distancing. Small outdoor gatherings with members of your social bubble are permitted. Retail shopping; hair and nail salons; childcare and summer camps; and services that require no close customer contact, such as housekeeping, car washes, and pet grooming are permitted. Restaurants are open for pickup, delivery, and outdoor dining. Worship services may resume at 25 percent of capacity.

What’s scheduled to reopen on July 1?

Indoor dining, bars, and wineries; gyms; arcades, bowling alleys, and billiards; and museums.

What’s still closed?

Concert venues, nightclubs, movie theaters, and community centers as well as personal services such as nail salons and tattoo parlors studios remain closed. Live sports and festivals, high-contact recreational activities, and use of playgrounds are prohibited.

Are masks required in public?

California currently requires masks be worn in most public spaces.

SOLANO COUNTY

What’s open right now?

Healthcare facilities, pharmacies, grocery stores, and banks remain open. Dine-in restaurants, bars, and wineries; retail, nail and hair salons, and gyms; movie theaters; and zoos, museums, and galleries may operate with social-distancing restrictions. Outdoor facilities—including skate parks, athletic fields, and golf courses—and most state parks allow for limited recreational activities with proper social distancing. Worship services may resume at 25 percent of capacity. Racetracks may reopen, and professional sports may resume with no spectators. Low-risk activities with social-distancing restrictions are allowed.

What’s still closed?

Concert venues, nightclubs, and community centers remain closed. Live sports and festivals; high-contact recreational activities; and use of playgrounds are prohibited.

Are masks required in public?

California currently requires masks be worn in most public spaces.

Information compiled as of June 22. For the most up-to-date information on your county’s reopening status, visit contra costa.ca.gov and solanocounty.com. •

Q

&

A

Dr. Christine Wu is the deputy health officer at Solano County Public Health and one of the many health officials leading the charge to protect the public from the ongoing pandemic. We talked with the public health expert to discuss the pandemic, how to keep yourself safe, and what comes next in the reopening process.



Solano County
Deputy Health Officer
Dr. Christine Wu

As cities and counties cautiously reopen, many Carquinez residents are left with questions: Is it safe to go out? Is there going to be another outbreak? Should I just stay home?

Solano County is currently in Stage 2 of reopening. What can people expect going forward? I think what we're doing is we're entering a new normal. In Solano County, our residents have done a really great job in following the shelter-at-home orders so far, and we haven't seen the sustained community transmissions of COVID-19. Stage 2 of [California's] plan allows for our low-risk activities

as well as some of our medium-risk activities to reopen, so what people can expect to see are businesses posting signage with some key prevention practices in place. Medium-risk businesses [such as] in-person dining establishments or hair salons may require that [staff and patrons] wear face coverings to decrease the potential spread of virus. It's more important than ever for people to be responsible for

SAFETY TIPS DR. WU RECOMMENDS HOW YOU CAN CHOOSE SAFER ACTIVITIES WITH A SIMPLE PHRASE: **PEOPLE, TIME, SPACE, AND FACE.**

PEOPLE "Think about the people involved," says Wu. "You want to choose to be around fewer people, ideally in a smaller grouping. Their exposures are going to be your exposures."

their own safety and to ... take all necessary precautions.

Many people are anxious about whether it's safe to return to public life. What steps can people take to keep themselves protected?

As we reopen, it's more important than ever for those who are more vulnerable to the negative outcomes of COVID-19 to continue to self-isolate. These would include our older population [and] those with chronic health conditions—they should continue to stay home.

If you do choose to go out, choose outdoors over indoors. Choose to be around fewer people who are outside of your household circle. Limit the time you're out in public. We need to continue to practice social distancing, including physical distancing; wearing a face covering when that physical distancing is not feasible; washing your hands before and after touching public surfaces; practicing cough and sneeze etiquette, [such as coughing or sneezing] into your elbow or a tissue; and maintaining cleanliness and disinfecting high-touch surfaces regularly.

What activities are safe? Are there any particular activities we should avoid for now?

The first thing I want to say is that there really is no zero-risk activity. On our website, we list a bunch of low-risk activities. It includes outdoor recreational activities like hiking, golf, tennis, boating. Just about any outdoor activity is safe.

The main activity that is too risky is large gatherings in small spaces, where you're socializing with people you don't normally live with. We're seeing that large family gatherings with people from all over are actually causing the spread of COVID-19, so I don't recommend people do that.

TIME Consider how much time you want to spend away from home—and with other people. "The longer you are exposed to someone, the higher your risk," says Wu.

There's a lot of confusion surrounding the coronavirus. What do we know, and what do we still need to find out?

We know it is highly contagious and mainly [spreads] through our saliva and respiratory secretions. We know it's easily killed with common household disinfectants. We know that most people who are infected do not develop severe illness. But if you are a part of that older population, especially if you have chronic health conditions, oftentimes you do have worse outcomes when you contract the virus.

What we don't know is why some younger people, including young children, actually have very severe reactions that can even cause death.

"...you can have both the flu and coronavirus. That's why I continue to promote that people get their flu vaccine."

Many are predicting there will be a resurgence of the virus in the fall. Is that likely? If this virus is similar to [other] respiratory viruses, it's likely to return in the fall. I think it's still a bit

early to tell if reopening will cause a surge in cases or if there will be a break in the summer and then a return in the fall. But if we all continue to practice social-distancing measures ... it can really decrease the spread of any respiratory virus.

Some officials are concerned about dealing with the flu on top of the coronavirus. Are you worried about that?

I do have those same concerns. This past year, we had a really bad flu season, and some people have been questioning whether it could've been the coronavirus coming on earlier than we knew about. Because you can have both the flu and coronavirus.

SPACE "Maintaining physical distance is more important than ever," she says. Keep at least 6 feet away from others, and allow for more space "if your activity involves heavy breathing, speaking, or singing."

That's why I continue to promote that people get their flu vaccine. As soon as it's available, I really encourage everyone to get vaccinated.

What steps is the county taking to prevent further outbreaks?

Solano County has been actively investigating all outbreaks to prevent further transmissions once we identify a case. We work with multiple partners, including hospitals and healthcare staff, to ensure capacity for a surge in cases. We've been working with governmental agencies ... to coordinate the guidance with our multiple business partners to ensure safe operations as we're reopening.

We've also been preparing a large workforce of contact tracers to investigate outbreaks, and we're doing surveillance testing of ... nursing homes, jails and their staffs, [and] healthcare organizations. And we're continuing to expand testing to meet the needs of the community.

Who should get tested?

We should get tested as much as feasible. [Testing] is readily available in Solano County for anyone, regardless of insurance status and symptoms.

This is an anxious and scary time for a lot of people. What message do you have for the community?

If we continue to practice these safety guidelines for ourselves, that's the best thing we can do. I want to reassure people that this, too, shall pass.

It's no secret that many of us have been spending a lot more time on Netflix. What have you been watching lately?

One of the shows I used to like to watch a lot was *The Amazing Race*. Recently, they put it on Amazon Prime, all 20-odd seasons of it. I never got past season two or three, so it's been a lot of fun to travel, so to speak, through the show.

For more information, including a list of permitted activities as well as how to get tested, visit solanocounty.com/covid19.

FACE Perhaps no accessory is more important nowadays than a mask, says Wu. "Wearing a face covering can block much of the spread of germs from person to person."



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Barber Mike Castillo poses in “the selfie room” at Edge of Colors in Vallejo.



barber_mike707 and you thought cutting hair was EZ lol

THE FIX

During the lockdown, who among us *wasn't* tempted to try a little D.I.Y. haircare? Meet four local barbers and stylists ready to fix what you did to yourself.

By Deanne O'Connor
photography by Laura Ming Wong

vallejo

When you take a seat at Edge of Colors Barber Shop, you're not just getting a haircut—you're also spending time with the best damn conversationalist around.

"Your skills need to be the best they can be, but if you don't know how to talk to people, it won't matter," says owner Mike Castillo. "You can't just buy a chair and wait for people to show up."

And whatever his clients want to talk about, he's game. "Whatever guys want to be when they come into my shop, that's what they are," he says. "If they tell me they have superpowers, I ask them which ones."

After shutting down in March due to the pandemic, Castillo finally reopened on May 28—much to the relief of his shaggy regulars.

While he continues to offer all of his regular services—including a stop in the shop's "selfie room"—Castillo has instituted some changes to keep his clients safe: no more than 10 people in

the shop at one time, and clients must wear masks unless receiving a hot towel service, a shave, or a face massage. In between appointments, Castillo spends 15 minutes thoroughly cleaning the shop.

"Everything anyone could have possibly touched during their appointment is wiped down," he says. "It's like we're handling plutonium in here."

But Castillo doesn't mind; it just means more one-on-one time with each client. He's looking forward to hearing everyone's quarantine stories—with an offer of a beer or two from the shop's fridge.

"I've saved marriages, I've prevented murders from happening, I've saved kids from being put out," he says, laughing.

If true, his business may be more essential than we thought. 1729 Springs Rd., Vallejo, edge-of-colors-barber-shop.business.site



martinez Candice Gliatto may have started out doing hair, but she's a born businesswoman. She credits her family for her entrepreneurial drive.

"Both of my parents were business owners. Probably because we're unemployable," she says with a wry smile.

After graduating from high school, Gliatto attended beauty school while partnering with a family friend to start a salon business in 2003. By 2009, she had saved enough money to open Citrus Salon in a small spot along Main Street—all before she was 25 years old.

"I was a salon owner right out of the gate. I wanted to be in downtown Martinez because I love it here," she says.

Almost immediately, Citrus Salon was a success, becoming a vital part of Martinez's up-and-coming downtown scene. Gliatto moved her shop to a larger space, and she brought on all of her stylists as employees. (Most salons typically rent out booths to independent hairdressers.) She moved the shop again in 2017 to its current location, making another big change in the process—she put down the shears and clippers to focus on running the business full-time.

"I just had a really clear vision for how I wanted to grow the business, so I needed to be able to implement certain structures to keep it consistent across the board," she says. "As the salon grew, my passion was more about building the business and helping my team create really meaningful and successful careers."

Eleven years later, the love she has for Martinez is still there, and the passion she has for helping others in their entrepreneurial pursuits extends far beyond the cozy styling chairs at Citrus Salon.

"She's amazing," says Ryan Geiser, owner of nearby Taco Daddy's. "When I was opening my business, she was on the board of Main Street Martinez and was so helpful. I really have a lot of respect for her and how she treats her people. Her crew is her family."

The salon reopened June 18 and now accepts online appointments. 620 Main St., Martinez, citrus-salon.com

"I wanted to be in downtown Martinez because I love it here."

CANDICE GLIATTO, OWNER OF CITRUS SALON

"Doing lashes is very calming, and it feeds my OCD soul."

KRISTIN BOQUIREN, OWNER OF LASHES BY KB



benicia What started two years ago as a side hustle for Kristin Boquiren quickly became her passion.

"I was working as a dental hygienist in San Francisco three days a week, and I wanted to make more money," says the owner of Lashes by KB. "My own lash artist told me that since I was used to using both of my hands in my work as a hygienist, it would be a cool and easy transition to do lashes. I was like, okay, let me try it."

She enrolled in an eyelashes class and fell in love with it right away. Two months later, she launched her business on Instagram.

"Doing lashes is very calming, and it feeds my OCD soul," she says. "It's therapeutic for my clients, too. It's a chance for me to have this one-on-one relationship with women who I ordinarily wouldn't talk to. I love it!"

On March 16, she was forced to stop taking clients and begin homeschooling her two kids instead. But she has continued serving some of her clients by creating custom sets of false eyelashes for them.

"That was an idea I've always had in my mind, because I've had brides ask for custom lashes," she says.

Unlike other salons, Boquiren had to wait longer to start booking appointments again due to the close proximity required to apply lashes to clients. Clients must now wear masks, and she takes their temperature when they arrive. They also have to fill out a COVID-19 consent form before their appointment.

Despite the extra hurdles, Boquiren is simply happy to be back to doing what she loves. (707) 771-9636, @lashesby_kb



"I didn't have a thing of finding out what I wanted to do. I just have always known."

BRANDY ROBINSON, OWNER OF STRAIGHT OR KNOT

Above from left: Stylists Elizabeth Brown, Gabrielle Dunlap, Niah Bohannon, and Straight or Knot owner Brandy Robinson model their masks.

fairfield To say that Brandy Robinson, the owner of Straight or Knot, loves her job would be an understatement.

"There has not been a day when I did not want to go to work," she says. "If I'm feeling bad, if I have a headache, if something bad has happened in my life—going to work has always made me so happy."

Perhaps it's that daily dose of workplace satisfaction—plus her infectious calm, soothing demeanor—that makes her clients so devoted to her.

"I had a lot of people sending me money during the pandemic," she says. "All I could do is say thank you to God because I feel like this is the way we were being taken care of during that time. I still had to take care of the salon as well as home. [The donations] did sustain me."

While it's common for stylists to enter the industry at a young age, Robinson may have found her calling earlier than most.

"It started when I was like 3 [years old]," she explains. "I knew all my life that

this is what I'd do. I didn't have a thing of finding out what I wanted to do. I just have always known."

Growing up in Richmond in the 1980s, she started by cutting her dolls' hair, then her brother's hair. By her teens, she graduated to practicing on her friends.

Her foray into coloring was more of a mixed bag. She secretly lightened her hair with Sun In but pretended she had no idea what her mother was talking about when she noticed the change. It was when Robinson tried dyeing a friend's hair with red Kool-Aid that the jig was up.

"We got in trouble," she says, laughing.

After that, she decided to learn the proper way. She entered into the cosmetology program at Solano Community College at 17 and worked in several salons around Fairfield until opening up her shop in 2011. Straight or Knot prides itself on being a multicultural salon where everyone is welcome.

"We do cuts, color, natural services, braids, relaxers, weaves," says Robinson. "For women, our hair is so important. We could have on a crappy outfit and have a bad day, but if our hair is done, we feel good. I have had so many tears, so many hugs, so many gifts, so many people say, 'You changed my life! I think I'm kind of addicted to that feeling.'" 844 Texas St., Fairfield, straightorknot.com •



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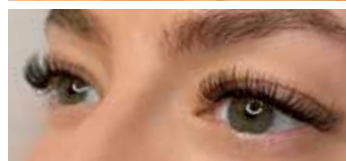
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HOW TO THROW A FUN, EASY, AND SAFE

Pandemic Party

By Lauren Bonney



Homage pizza kits and local beers will make your party fabulous!

The sun is shining, the weather is hot, and it's time to party! Well, sort of.

As regulations begin to relax, don your best mask, give those hands a 20-second scrub, and enjoy great food and even better company with three easy SMALL GATHERING ideas that support local businesses to boot!

WINE AND CHEESE

GIVE THIS PARTY STANDARD A LOCAL UPDATE.

When it comes to wine tastings, few know better than Wendy De Coito. In 2018, the fifth-generation Suisun Valley native opened **The Filling Station**—a vintage gas station—inspired tasting room—to spotlight local vineyards and artisan winemakers who don't have tasting rooms of their own. The Filling Station also offers a variety of local goods, such as jams, olive oils, and artisan popcorn.

EASY, GO-TO WINE & CHEESE PAIRINGS

Here are some of De Coito's suggested pairings for that perfect glass of wine to go with just the right bite of cheese. 2529 Mankas Corner Rd., Fairfield, suisunvalleyfillingstation.com

WINE: 2019 Eclipse white pinot noir, Tolenas Vineyards and Winery

This deliciously crisp summer wine is similar to a chardonnay but has a velvety-smooth texture and fruit-forward notes. The soft wine is killer with aged cheeses.

CHEESE: Gouda, Asiago, and Manchego

WINE: 2018 Sir Pig dry rosé, Rockville Cellars

This rosé has a wonderful aroma and flavor profile thanks to a blend of grenache, counoise, and tempranillo grapes. Couple it with a salty cheese, and it's time to party.

CHEESE: Feta, Pecorino Romano, or dry Jack (aged for at least one year)

THE WINE: 2018 Love zinfandel, The Filling Station

Fruit-forward and light in body, the estate-grown zin works well as a summertime sipping red wine and is best complemented by cheeses that offer a bit of funk or tang. (Psst, blue cheese on a crunchy cracker with a drizzle of honey is really good.)

THE CHEESE: Blue cheese, chèvre, Brie, and Parmesan

PRO TIP: Precut your cheese into bite-size chunks and use toothpicks to limit your guests' contact with the food.



Suds & Slices

BEER AND PIZZA ARE GREAT BY THEMSELVES, BUT WHEN SHARED WITH YOUR PANDEMIC CREW, YOU'VE GOT THE MAKINGS OF A MEMORABLE SUMMER HANGOUT.

If you've ever dreamed about flinging a wheel of pizza dough in the air while singing "That's Amore," now's your chance. Head to **Homage** in Martinez and pick up a pizza kit to feed your fellow slice lovers.

Choose from seven kits, including a classic pepperoni and mixed veggie, the Forestier (sausage, green olives, mushrooms, and spinach), and the Farmer's

Wife (soppressata, cabernet-poached figs, fiore di latte cheese, and arugula). Each kit comes with four personal-size dough balls, San Marzano tomato sauce, and fresh mozzarella, plus cookie dough for a sweet treat to bake fresh at home. Order your kit online and choose between pickup or delivery. (Note: Deliveries must be ordered two days in advance.) 712 Main St., Martinez, homagemartinez.com

THE BREWS THE CARQUINEZ REGION IS BLESSED WITH A PLETHORA OF LOCAL BREWERIES. HERE ARE A FEW SUDS THAT GO GREAT WITH A CHEESY SLICE AND EXCELLENT COMPANY.



VALKYRIE BLONDE ALE
Five Suns Brewing

Golden blonde with a white, foamy head, the Valkyrie has lightly roasted malt flavors and a lemony zing. This light-bodied brew pairs nicely with any pizza, and it's great on a hot day. 701 Escobar St., Ste. C, Martinez, fivesunsbrewing.com



BALLS BACK PALE ALE
Del Cielo Brewing Co.

Featuring bright citrus notes with hints of pear, watermelon, and stone fruit, this pale ale will cut through the richness of your 'za without overpowering the flavors. 701 Escobar St., Ste. A, Martinez, delcielo brewing.com



HYDRAULIC SANDWICH IPA
Mare Island Brewing Co.

This IPA elicits notes of citrus and guava without too much hop, perfect for leisurely sipping. It goes great with bold flavors, such as pepperoni and olives. 289 Mare Island Way, Vallejo, mareislandbrewingco.com

THE PANDEMIC HOST WITH THE MOST

Malena Clegg and Krystal Endsley, the bosses behind Martinez's event planning and coworking space **The Gala**, offer helpful advice to keep your small gathering safe and fun for everyone.

SWEET ENDINGS

FORGO THE TRADITIONAL DINNER PARTY AND HOST A DESSERT-AND-COFFEE SOIREE. WHETHER YOU'RE THROWING A MORNING EXTRAVAGANZA OR A POST-SUPPER AFTERPARTY, IT'S THE BEST TIME TO INDULGE IN THE SWEETER THINGS IN LIFE.



VALERIO'S TROPICAL BAKE SHOP

Steeped in Filipino tradition, Valerio's serves up uniquely flavored and scrumptious baked goods such as the Haba Haba Macapuno—a sweet pastry loaf filled with a choice of coconut, cream cheese, or ube (purple sweet potato) and covered in a buttercream-like frosting. Or consider taking home a cassava cake, an uber-moist cake made with grated cassava, coconut, and condensed milk, and topped with a rich layer of custard. 3495 Sonoma Blvd., Ste. B, Vallejo, valeriotropical bakeshop.com



HUMMINGBIRD BAKERY & DESSERT BAR

Gorgeously decorated cakes, tarts, pies, eclairs, and more shimmer in the display case at Hummingbird Bakery & Dessert Bar. From the decadent chocolate raspberry mousse cake to the bakeshop's signature hummingbird cake, any of the artfully made baked goods and patisserie delights will add a bit of "wow" factor to your casual gathering. 3272 Sonoma Blvd., Vallejo, hummingbirddesserts.com



STARBREAD

StarBread makes a variety of comforting baked goods such as donuts, mini cupcakes, and more, but no trip here is complete without an order of the shop's famous Señorita Bread. The soft, warm, slightly sweetened rolls of dough come in several flavors, including cinnamon, nutella, and cream cheese, and will have your guests begging for seconds. 3718 Sonoma Blvd., Vallejo, starbreadca.com

ARE YOU INTO FITNESS? TRY FITNESS WHOLE TART IN YOUR MOUTH!



A few days before your party, check in with attendees to make sure everyone's healthy, and take temperatures before guests enter your home.

Use disposable plates and silverware to cut down on both cleanup and the risk of virus exposure.

Use preassembled plates rather than platters in order to minimize exposure.

Designate a bartender to dole out drinks so only one clean set of hands is touching barware.

Provide guests with cleaning or sanitizing stations with access to soap and water or hand sanitizer.

Encourage your guests to decorate their face masks and host a mask contest, awarding prizes for the funniest, prettiest, or most creative designs.



Roasted Heaven

COMPLEMENT YOUR DESSERT WITH THE PERFECT COFFEE BLEND.

Fabrice Moschetti, owner of Moschetti, Inc. in Vallejo, knows a thing or two about coffee. Since immigrating from France in 1990, the java guru has spent almost three decades sourcing, roasting, and blending coffee beans from all over the world to brew up delicious cups of Joe.

"There's no rhyme or reason.

There's no right or wrong," he says of roasting and creating blends. "It's cool to be able to create different levels of flavor. It's about discovering how it tastes—the terroir—and [that] depends on where it was grown and how it was harvested."

As for your dessert-and-coffee party, Moschetti recommends looking for a balance between your drinks and sweets. For rich desserts such as creme brulee and chocolate cake, the roaster suggests a more fruit-forward bean—the high acidity level in the coffee will help cut through the sugary richness. For treats with a warm spice profile, Moschetti says you can't go wrong with a Central or South American bean (like Guatemala or Brazil), which exhibit nutty notes that will enhance the flavors of your desserts.



PRO TIP: Sit outside or go for a summer evening stroll with your coffee for plenty of fresh air and room to stretch out.

Come Together

As the Bay Area reels from the coronavirus pandemic, the Carquinez community has rallied to provide help where it's needed.

BY CASEY CANTRELL // PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIA CECACI

Annabelle Marie serenades her Benician neighbors at sunset.

It is 6 p.m. when Annabelle Marie steps into her backyard on the Benicia waterfront.

As she sets up her amp and tunes her violin, neighbors raise wineglasses in greeting while others gather along the rocky crevices of the shoreline.

After a moment, Marie takes a breath, raises her bow, and plays. The dulcet tones of "Ave Maria" float across the water. Neighbors come out of their homes. Passersby on a distant walkway stop to listen. For a few minutes, the entire city of Benicia seems to fall still, entranced by the music. As Marie fingers the final notes, scattered applause and whoops fill the air.

Every evening for more than three months, the classically trained musician and founder of the world-renowned VOENA Children's Choir has transformed her backyard into a stage, performing from a revolving playlist of 11 songs and giving Benicians a welcome respite from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

"People are thirsty for music. They're thirsty for this emotional expression of what they're feeling," says Marie, who has been dubbed "The Violinist by the Water" by residents. "We have a lot of older neighbors who will not miss a night. It lets them know they matter."

Marie's waterside concerts are just one example of the many acts—both big and small—carried out by local artists, business owners, and volunteers to support a region staggered by the global crisis. From virtual paint parties and making masks for medical providers to financial assistance and donating meals to the needy, here's how the Carquinez community has come together to lift each other up.

"People are thirsty for music. They're thirsty for this emotional expression of what they're feeling."

—Annabelle Marie

Change in Plans

Bodil and Larnie Fox were supposed to be enjoying retirement.

When shelter-in-place orders were first announced, the Benician artists and longtime nonprofit professionals were looking forward to holing up with their art projects. About a week later, the couple found themselves in charge of a massive mask-making effort that would consume all of their free time.

"We were thinking we would have plenty of time in our studios," says Larnie. "It was everyone else who was supposed to be working."

The twist of fate came during an early morning walk on March 20, when the couple ran into their neighbor, Marcella Spurgeon, a labor and delivery nurse at Kaiser Permanente Vallejo Medical Center.

"She was upset, because her hospital wasn't providing personal protective equipment," says Larnie.

"One day, you'd go in and get your mask, your hat, your gloves," explains Spurgeon. "The next day you came in, there was nothing."

Bodil, a textile artist, asked if some hand-sewn masks would help. Marcella replied with an enthusiastic yes.

"I was going to make a few masks for my neighbor," says Bodil. "Then I made a few for her colleagues."

As the project continued to grow and grow, Bodil learned that a friend, Ruby Wallis, had created a simple, easy-to-make cloth mask that was large enough to cover an N95 mask. The Foxes then produced a YouTube video providing step-by-step instructions based on Wallis' technique.

But the project took off on March 25 after Benicia Council Member Steve Young promoted the effort on social media. Soon enough, the Foxes were inundated with requests for masks—as well as community members looking to help.

Putting their nonprofit skills to good use, the couple started organizing. On March 31, they had recruited 25 mask makers for the project. By the end of April, that number had ballooned

to more than 50. A month later, the Foxes were overseeing a group of nearly 80 volunteers pushing out thousands of masks.

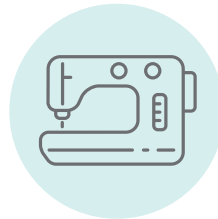
"It grew very organically," says Larnie, adding that he and his wife worked 12-hour days for three weeks before taking a day off on Easter Sunday. "We were in the right place at the right time."

The couple converted their front porch into a drop-off location, supplying volunteers with materials and guidance while collecting masks to distribute to medical workers. As of May 20, the group has donated more than 7,200 masks—plus an assortment of protective gowns, 3D-printed face shields, and other vital equipment—to 60-plus medical facilities.

"I cried," says Spurgeon. "I was so grateful. It humbles me. I've never been so proud to be in my town."

Healthcare workers are not the only beneficiaries of the mask-making effort. Despite several calls from residents to make wearing masks compulsory, the Benicia City Council voted not to require face coverings. In response, Bodil and Larnie gave 500 masks to Young to provide to local businesses. (The City Council later unanimously passed a face mask mandate for indoor and enclosed public spaces.)

"Our policy has been to donate our masks to healthcare workers and their clients," says Bodil. "We hope this donation will prevent the virus from spreading and keep people from ending up in the ICU."



BECOME A MASK MAKER

SUPPORT A GOOD CAUSE AND GIVE BACK TO YOUR LOCAL HEALTHCARE WORKERS.

Got some extra fabric lying around? Looking for a sewing project to occupy your time? Contact Bodil Fox at bodilfox@gmail.com to learn how you can help, or watch her mask-making how-to video at youtu.be/Uyh6iAKqrao.



PANDEMIC TIMELINE

FEB. 27 The first confirmed case of community spread in the U.S. is reported in Solano County.

MARCH 11 The World Health Organization declares the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic.

MARCH 17 Contra Costa County announces stay-at-home orders. Solano County would follow suit three days later.

APRIL 28 Gov. Gavin Newsom releases the “Resilience Roadmap” for the gradual reopening of California.

APRIL 30 California tops 50,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

MAY 8 Solano County enters Stage 2 of reopening.

MAY 19 Contra Costa County enters Stage 2 of reopening.

MAY 22 California officials approve Solano County’s move into Stage 2.5 of reopening.

MAY 27 The U.S. surpasses 100,000 confirmed deaths from COVID-19.

JUNE 15 California passes 150,000 confirmed cases and 5,000 deaths from COVID-19.

Meals on the House

As the coronavirus swept through the Bay Area, small business owners watched as their bottom lines plummeted, with customers staying home and shelter-in-place orders shuttering non-essential businesses. Perhaps no line of business has been more impacted than the restaurant industry, which has seen already thin profit margins disappear into the red.

Opened in 2017, Bar Cava Wine Bar & Eatery quickly became a mainstay of downtown Martinez’s burgeoning culinary scene, regularly hosting bustling crowds. But now, the narrow dining room sits empty most days as owner Corey Katz takes orders online and over the phone.

“It’s definitely not the same, that’s for sure,” he says glibly.

Katz estimates that the restaurant pulled in \$2,000 each night before the pandemic. By May, that figure had dropped to \$200. He had to furlough his entire staff with the exception of a lone cook. His applications for disaster relief loans seemed to be going nowhere.

Despite his setbacks, the restaurateur didn’t stop doing what he does best: serving his community.

It started with a \$500 donation from his landlord. After purchasing supplies with the money, Katz took to Facebook with a simple message: *If you’ve lost your job and need food, text me.*

Almost immediately, Katz received word from dozens of people—single moms, elderly people, families who couldn’t afford rent. He also heard back from another group: those looking to help.

“Real estate agents started hitting me up,” he says. The agents, along with friends and his landlord, began purchasing Bar Cava gift cards, which they then donated back to Katz to “feed anyone who needs it.”

Altogether, Katz has raised more than \$5,000—including \$2,000 of his own money—to support the region in a number of ways, including providing meals to the homeless and teaming up with Mountain Grounds in Martinez to donate coffee and pastries to Contra Costa Regional Medical Center.

Bar Cava isn’t the only restaurant helping out: Noonie’s Place in Vallejo donated meals to first responders; Vic’s in Martinez provided hundreds of free grilled cheese sandwiches to kids; and in Port Costa, Bull Valley Roadhouse raised more than \$42,000 through a GoFundMe campaign for their employees after the restaurant was forced to close.

“If someone’s down worse than you, you give them your shirt,” says Katz. “If I have \$10 and you have nothing, I’ll give you \$5. That’s what you do.”

As the coronavirus swept through the Bay Area, small business owners watched as their bottom lines plummeted, with customers staying home and shelter-in-place orders shuttering non-essential businesses. Perhaps no line of business has been more impacted than the restaurant industry, which has seen already thin profit margins disappear into the red.

Good Business

For some businesses, giving back has led to unexpected success.

Inside a red-brick warehouse on Mare Island, workers at Savage & Cooke hustle to keep up with orders. But it’s not award-winning bourbons and whiskeys that the distillery’s employees are bottling.

In late March, owner Dave Phinney decided to completely halt production on spirits and instead put his resources into making hand sanitizer. By May 15, the distillery had produced more than 100,000 gallons, packaged in 8-ounce, 9-ounce, and gallon containers that are donated or sold through its website.

“I’ve been busier than ever,” says Phinney, who credits local and state officials for tearing down “walls of bureaucracy” in order to make the transition possible. “I’m not even thinking about when things will get back to normal.”

For most businesses, the “new normal” means shorter hours, laid-off employees, and fewer customers. At Savage & Cooke, Phinney actually brought in extra staff.

Thirty-five workers, to be exact—all of whom were recently furloughed or laid off from restaurants and bars.

His efforts haven’t gone unnoticed. On June 1, state Sen. Bill Dodd named the distillery the Senate District 3 Business of the Year.

“Dave’s ingenuity and thoughtfulness has allowed him to produce a potentially lifesaving product while protecting his workers from unemployment,” said Dodd in a statement. “This is the very essence of why small businesses are so important to our community. ... My hat is off to Dave and his team.”

Phinney admits to “a crisis of conscience” that he is thriving at a time when others have lost their jobs and businesses. But a run-in with his general manager, Lauren Blanchard, reminded him of the importance of what he and his team were doing.

“She was getting tired of me,” recalls Phinney. “She said to me, ‘I’ve been saving all the thank-you letters you’ve been getting, and it’s in the hundreds already. If you feel bad, you can read them.’”

He got the message loud and clear, he says. “I told myself, ‘Just shut up and do your job.’”



Savage & Cooke’s
Dave Phinney

Doing Their Part

For decades, the Carquinez Strait’s oil refineries have been a steady cornerstone of the community, supplying jobs and financial security to a region accustomed to economic volatility.

That role has been tested during the health crisis, as health restrictions and plunging demand for oil continue

to disrupt refinery operations. The most drastic consequence of the slowdown came in late April, when Marathon Petroleum Corporation idled its Martinez refinery and laid off nearly 1,000 contractors. As of June 16, the refinery remains shut down.

But even as production faltered, the refineries threw their financial weight behind the communities that host them.

On March 19, Valero Energy Corporation, which runs a refinery in Benicia, announced that it would commit \$1.8 million through its foundation to communities where the company operates, including \$100,000 to Solano County.

“The health and the safety of our employees, our families, and our communities are critically important,” Chairman and CEO Joe Gorder said in a statement. “We are blessed to be able to continue supporting our community partners as we all work together to overcome this extraordinary situation.”

One recipient of that support was the Benicia Community Action Council (BCAC), a nonprofit that has provided aid to disadvantaged residents since the 1960s. Among its many programs, the charity provides hot meals to homebound seniors as well as mortgage and rental assistance to low-income residents. Since March, both programs saw dramatic spikes in demand, says

Executive Director Viola Robertson. In April, BCAC spent more than \$67,000 on mortgage and rental assistance alone, more than double its average of \$30,000.

“I was working from seven in the morning to seven at night, seven days a week,” says Robertson. “It’s never been as bad as this.”

Without extra funding, “we would’ve had to shut down,” says Robertson. Luckily, the financial backing from Valero as well as an uptick in community donations saved BCAC from closure—and ensured the nonprofit’s clients would keep receiving the help they needed.

“It means a lot to me. It shows me that all of our work is not in vain,” says Robertson. And with the renewed support, she offers a promise: “I’m never going to let any seniors go hungry.”

The big players are not the only ones helping out; small businesses are doing their part, too.

On March 17, J&D Custom Embroidery in Martinez closed down when Contra Costa County’s

shelter-in-place order went into effect, but the shop was still receiving orders from its customers. One of those customers, Marc Trapani of Rotator Taproom in Walnut Creek, brought up the idea of doing a fundraiser together.

“He wanted to do something for teachers or healthcare workers,” explains co-owner Chris Simoni, who spearheaded the fundraiser. “We looked at a couple of charities, and we landed on [the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano], because we realized the demand was going to be overwhelming for them.”

Their intuition proved correct as the nonprofit saw the number of people visiting its distribution sites increase by up to 50 percent in the month after a pandemic was declared.

Simoni tapped into his shop’s network of customers as well as his own personal contacts, with J&D giving two free T-shirts to everyone who donated \$100 or more.



GIVE BACK
SUPPORTING YOUR COMMUNITY IS AS EASY AS HITTING THE DONATE BUTTON.

Benicia Community Action Council accepts donations of money, household goods, and food. Visit bencac.com for more information on how you can help.

A little more than a month later, Simoni and his team had raised more than \$11,000 from 40-plus donors—enough to pay for more than 22,000 meals.

“I’d like to thank [J&D co-owner] Dennis Davis for helping put the fundraiser together,” says Simoni, “and obviously a huge thanks to everyone who donated.”



Viola Robertson of Benicia Community Action Council



Artists Abel Rodriguez and Edgar-Arturo Camacho-Gonzalez lead a virtual paint party at their Vallejo home.

of the choir. In one video—a cover of the Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love”—the performers sing at home, their voices coming together as their images rearrange into a heart.

The online performances provide her students a sense of normalcy, says Marie.

“It helped them realize they’re not alone,” she says. “The first thing they always say to me is, ‘It’s so good to see our friends again.’”

“We’re Family”

This year, the traditional marks of summer like music

festivals, sporting events, and holiday parades will be conspicuously absent. Restaurants will continue to operate with social-distancing guidelines; stores will see fewer customers; downtown crowds will be sparse. Cities, hospitals, and schools will anxiously prepare for the fall—and a possible resurgence of the coronavirus.

What comes next remains unknown. But one thing is clear—the business owners, creators, and philanthropists who make up the character of the region will continue to adapt and support their community.

“[Our gallery is] a community and cultural space,” says Rodriguez. “We thrive when our community is in need.”

“It’s all about gratitude,” says Bodil. “It’s a community coming together.”

And for all the uncertainty that the region faces, there is no doubt that the community will persevere.

“We’re family,” says Katz. “Lean on me, and I’ll lean on you. We’ll get through this together.” •

MORE INSPIRING STORIES

Visit carquinezmagazine.com to read about other ways the community has stepped up during the crisis, including the Martinez seamstress who went from making gowns to making masks.

The Show Must Go On

Sitting at a dining room table buried under painting supplies, Edgar-Arturo Camacho-Gonzalez dabs a small paintbrush into a glob of bright yellow pigment, carefully adding the finishing touches to his painting—a reproduction

of Diego Rivera’s *The Flower Vendor (Girl with Lilies)*.

But even though he’s sheltered at home, the artist and cofounder of El Comalito Collective is far from alone. Online, nearly 2,000 people follow along as Camacho-Gonzalez cheerfully provides instructions in English and Spanish over Facebook Live.

For months, the region’s vibrant art scene has operated in isolation—an often painful experience for those used to sharing their artwork with each other and the community.

Nevertheless, artists and gallery owners alike have worked hard to stay connected and to showcase new pieces inspired by the ongoing crisis.

For Camacho-Gonzalez and his husband, Abel Rodriguez, that means opening up their Vallejo home for free virtual paint parties every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to help people take a break from their pandemic-induced anxieties—a decision they call “an act of resistance.”

“Art is essential. It allows folks to practice self-care,” says Rodriguez. “You can choose to engage in the negative discourse, the racism, the anti-Asian sentiments. Or you can choose to take care of yourself.”

“When you make art accessible to the community, [that’s] empowerment,” says Camacho-Gonzalez. “They can take these skills and continue that self-care.”

In Benicia, VOENA is finding new ways to help young performers stay connected.

The pandemic has affected artists of every stripe, and the lauded children’s choir was no exception. Heading into spring, Marie and her students were gearing up for what promised to be a busy concert season when all their plans were upended.

“I panicked a bit,” says Marie. “We’re a performance-based choir. I didn’t want to face the truth at first that all our concerts might be canceled.”

But as the health crisis became impossible to ignore, Marie grew resolute. “All I thought was, what could I do so that these kids don’t feel abandoned?” she says.

She began coordinating with her students to produce “virtual choirs”—a series of slickly edited YouTube videos pieced together from recordings submitted by members

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AROUND THE CARQUINEZ STRAIT



SINCE YOU'RE HOME, WHY NOT BREAK OUT THE BIKE? HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE CYCLING SPOTS FROM A LOCAL BIKING EXPERT.

BY MEGAN MCCREA

PAT MAZZERA

Take a ride across the Carquinez Bridge.

CARQUINEZMAGAZINE.COM

TIPS FOR THE ROAD

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RIDE WITH THESE TIPS AND TRICKS FROM PEGASUS BICYCLE WORKS' CHRIS RODRIGUEZ.



GET EQUIPPED

Don't have your own bike? You can rent one (see box) or buy your own. If you plan to buy, Rodriguez recommends going to an actual bike shop. "At a big-box store," he explains, "the bike isn't professionally built; it could fall apart in a matter of days." By contrast, a bike shop offers bicycles "built by someone who knows how to work on bikes."



START SLOW

As with any sport, cycling takes time and practice to master. Rodriguez advises new and rusty riders to take it slow. "Start on paved trails, get some miles, get some climbing in your legs," he says. "Then, when you're ready to hit that dirt, go hit it."



CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

With so many trails, it can be hard to know where to start. Rodriguez loves the Central Contra Costa Regional Trails maps, available on East Bay Regional Park District's website, which detail the length and difficulty of many local trails. "They're giant, and you can put together all sorts of cool rides," he says. You might also get ideas from other cyclists via Strava, MapMyRide, and other apps.



BE PREPARED

Anyone who's gotten a flat tire knows it's a bummer. Check and inflate your tires before every ride, and bring along "a tube, tire lever, pump, and the ability to fix a flat," says Rodriguez.



SHARE THE ROAD

Whether you're riding on single-tracks, city streets, fire roads, or multiuse paths, it's likely you'll be sharing the road with pedestrians, cars, and other cyclists. To do so safely, stay on your side of the street or path and let others know you're coming. (Note: Cyclists are required to have a bell on multiuse paths in the East Bay Regional Park District.)



Chris Rodriguez, owner of Pegasus Bicycle Works in Martinez

FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS,

Chris Rodriguez has sold and repaired bikes for the Carquinez community, but he's never experienced a time like this. Since shelter-in-place orders began, the owner of Martinez's Pegasus Bicycle Works has watched demand for his services skyrocket.

"No one in the bike world has seen anything like this—ever," he says.

Looking to jump in the (bike) saddle yourself? Here are five rides recommended by Rodriguez—plus tips for making the most of your time on two wheels.



GEORGE MILLER TRAIL

This 1.7-mile trail linking Martinez and Port Costa proves you don't have to tackle tough climbs to earn epic views. Built on a renovated section of the old Carquinez Scenic Drive, the paved path weaves through oak-covered hills along the strait, playing peekaboo with its shimmering waters. Says Rodriguez: "Honestly, the George Miller Trail is one of the best gifts this area has to anybody who's riding."



BRIDGE-TO-BRIDGE LOOP

Think of this 20-plus-mile route as the George Miller Trail's supersized sibling. Take the George Miller Trail to Port Costa, then continue on Pomona Street in Crockett to the Carquinez Bridge Trail. Once over, follow Sonoma Boulevard before turning right on Solano Avenue. Turn right on Benicia Road, then follow the road to the Benicia State Recreation Area's bike trail. Take Military to Adams Street, then turn left on Park Road to get to the Benicia-Martinez Bridge bike path. Finally, take Marina Vista Avenue to Escobar Street before turning right on Talbart Street to reach Carquinez Scenic Drive. Along the way, you can marvel at the views of the strait and listen for singing shorebirds in the wetlands of Southampton Bay.



BRIONES REGIONAL PARK

Miles of trails lace this 6,255-acre park, beckoning with steep climbs and amazing vistas. To admire the scenery without overdoing it, take Old Briones Road to Valley Trail. These fire roads follow Bear Creek through the woods along the valley floor. "Multiple fingers come off that trail," Rodriguez says. While the path itself is flat, "you can decide if you want to take one of those trails and climb to the ridge."



BRIONES CREST TRAIL

The 6.4-mile Briones Crest Trail hits the high points, tracing the park's ridgeline past Mott Peak and Briones Peak. The fire road often climbs sharply but rewards the persistent. "It's just gorgeous up there," says Rodriguez. "On a clear day, you can see Mount Tamalpais, San Francisco, Mount Diablo, the whole East Bay."

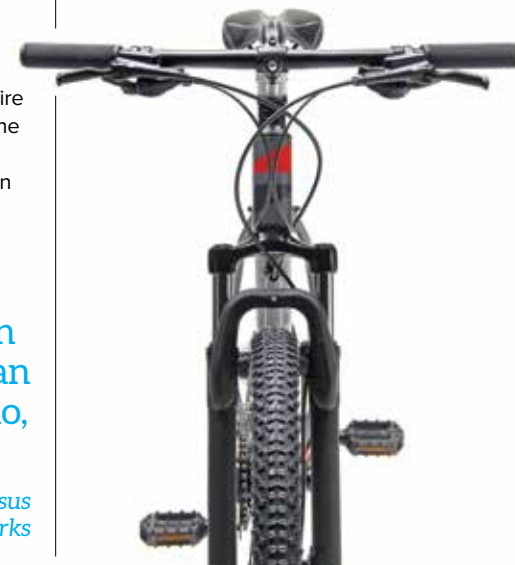
"On a clear day, you can see Mount Tamalpais, San Francisco, Mount Diablo, the whole East Bay."

— Chris Rodriguez, owner of Pegasus Bicycle Works



BRIONES CREST TRAIL TO DIABLO REGIONAL TRAIL

For major bragging rights, start with a ride on Briones Crest Trail, then continue on the equally gnarly Lafayette Ridge Trail. It connects to Briones–Mount Diablo Regional Trail, which runs through Lafayette and Walnut Creek, ending at Macedo Ranch in Mount Diablo State Park. Once there, you might follow in Rodriguez's tracks, ascending Dan Cook Trail, pushing on to Diablo's 3,849-foot summit, descending the mountain's north gate side, and winding past Old Borges Ranch back to Macedo Ranch. "In that ride, you hit most of [Diablo's] environmental zones, from open, oaky grassland to rocky caves," he says. This venture is not for the faint of heart, though—a round trip will clock in at a truly eye-opening 75 miles! •



WHERE TO BUY

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BY ALEJANDRA SARAGOZA
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Sample the latest creations with a flight at Del Cielo Brewing Co. in Martinez.

CARQUINEZMAGAZINE.COM



From left: Del Cielo Brewing Co. owners Luis Castro and Cielomar Cuevas; explore the unique flavors of Castro's award-winning beers.

welcoming brewery felt like stopping by a friend's house—just as intended.

"We've always had the mentality that *mi casa es tu casa*," says Castro. "The brewery is an extension of my home. You're coming to my house, and I want you to have the best experience."

The self-taught brewer began crafting his own beers five years ago, inviting friends and family over to his house for beer-release parties. After netting several prizes in home-brewing competitions, Castro decided to turn his passion into a bona fide business, quitting his finance job and securing funding through small-business and personal loans and Kickstarter donations.

A little more than two years ago, he opened the doors to his dream brewery, making Del Cielo the newest addition to Martinez's buzzy craft-beer scene. The name—which translates to "from heaven" in Spanish—reflects the inspiration behind the brewery.

"We want each sip to be a heavenly experience," he says. "We always want people to be amazed by the quality of our beers and the unique ingredients we use."

Hopheads will certainly feel on cloud nine at Del Cielo. The 17 rotating beers on



SHUTTERSTOCK

"The brewery is an extension of my home. You're coming to my house, and I want you to have the best experience."

—Luis Castro, owner of Del Cielo Brewing Co.

tap feature a variety of unique flavors and styles that speak to Castro's heritage.

A native of Colombia, Castro pushes boundaries with his brews, incorporating ingredients that highlight his homeland as well as his California spirit. A newer release, the Paloma cocktail-inspired Qué Pasó Gose? is spiked with pink Himalayan salt, grapefruit, and Colombian lime for a refreshing bite. The top-selling Órale Mexican lager is also a winner—literally—and a prime example of the style, while the citrusy Hoptinez is a distinct take on a West Coast IPA, with less bitterness and more focus on hop flavors and aromas.

Each and every Del Cielo beer comes with a compelling backstory, but few are more touching than the tale behind the award-winning and beautifully fruity Guava Dreams.

"The first time I brewed that beer, it reminded me of a summer afternoon at my grandma's house," Castro says. "She had a huge guava tree in her backyard. [They] would fall on the floor, and the whole patio would smell like guava."

Castro arrived in the U.S. in 2006, earning degrees in economics and finance before pursuing an MBA in Cleveland, Ohio. That's where he met Cielomar—and where he was first introduced to the fascinating world of craft beer.

"I used to drink the worst beer because that was all I could afford in college, so when I graduated and got a job, I was like, now I can be fancy," Castro recalls. "I started experimenting with other beers, and I was like, oh my God. I just wasted years of my life drinking crappy beer."

With a budding interest in craft beer, he and Cielomar regularly planned road trips to breweries across the

Midwest and the East Coast. But their entire world changed when they moved to the Bay Area in 2010. "It was like a new universe. The quality of the beer was different," says Castro. "We spent so much time going to breweries, and I realized there is no limit to what you can do with beer."

Castro wants others to come to the same realization by providing an assortment of innovative beers—and the lockdown isn't slowing him down. Along with staples such as the Hoptinez and Marina Vista IPAs, the master brewer is coming up with new additions, such as the cheekily named Three Whaze kettle sour (passion fruit, boysenberry, and hops walk into a bar...) and the beer pong-inspired Balls Back ale (a light, tropical brew).

"I still want people to have that *oh shit!* reaction when they taste my beers," he says. "I always want to share new beers with people and get them excited."

Of course, he can't wait until he can share his brews in person again. In the middle of June, the brewery began allowing guests to stay and sip on the patio with proper social-distancing measures. (As of press time, indoor seating remains closed to the public.) However, Castro stresses it's critical for everyone to continue showing their support—not only for Del Cielo, but for other local businesses as well.

"Please buy [locally]," Castro says. "I want people to support our neighbors, too. We're all in this together, so we need to share the love." 701 Escobar St., Ste. A, delcielobrewing.com



Right: Go loco for Latin-style brews in beautifully designed cans.

On a normal Saturday, Del Cielo Brewing Co. would be buzzing with activity. With the summer sun streaming through the massive windows, customers would fill the airy industrial space, schmoozing as they sip on pints of liquid gold.

But for more than three months, the once-bustling bar where patrons would spend their afternoons and evenings chatting with the bartenders has stood eerily empty.

In March, shelter-in-place orders forced owner Luis Castro and his wife, Cielomar Cuevas, to close the brewery to the public. With coronavirus quickly spreading across the U.S. and the world, the couple had to balance the need to maintain operations and keep as many of their staff employed against the

health risks to themselves and their workers.

So far, the couple has managed to continue producing craft beer under the new, stressful conditions. Instead of pouring pints for thirsty patrons at the bar, however, the Castros offer to-go brews via curbside pickup, home delivery, and next-day shipping for aficionados near and far.

"The community has been really supportive," says Castro. "We come to the brewery every day and see lines of people or cars waiting for beer. It's a reminder that people actually like what we're doing."

Indeed, since its founding in 2018, Del Cielo has cultivated an ever-growing loyal following, and it's easy to see why. In pre-pandemic times, a visit the

Provisions owner Nicole Hodge sits in front of the new art installation at her Vallejo restaurant.



Make it a date night (at home) with Provisions.

Provisions for the Community

A VALLEJO CHEF ADAPTS TO “THE NEW NORMAL” IN ORDER TO SERVE HER CITY THE BEST WAY SHE KNOWS HOW. **BY LAUREN BONNEY // PHOTOGRAPHY BY CALI GODLEY**

I don't know exactly what led me here," reflects Nicole Hodge, chef-owner of Provisions in downtown Vallejo.

Having just started her fledgling catering company, League of Chefs, Hodge found herself inexplicably drawn to the waterfront town when she answered a Craigslist ad for a professional kitchen in Vallejo. She quickly got to work hosting gourmet pop-up dinners, plating decadent five-course meals for eager guests.

In May 2018, Hodge opened Provisions, a cafe and retail store. Though she says the transition from catering business to full-fledged restaurant was “insane,” it was the kind of problem she thrives on.

“For me, I love challenges. Running a business is great for my mindset,” she says.

“Same goes for cooking. If something is messed up or you need to get 300 pounds of chicken by tonight, cook it all, and feed people—I love all of that.”

Despite her passion for culinary problem-solving, Hodge never intended to run a catering business, let alone a restaurant. In fact, Hodge's career path was pure happenstance.

It began in her early 20s, when a pair of friends asked her to cater their wedding on a tight budget. “I was like, ‘Oh, I can do that. I can figure out how to feed 200 people for \$150,’” says Hodge, who had no professional catering experience at the time. “Then it turned into a thing where people actually liked what I was making.”

Flash forward to 2020, and the restaurateur was running not one but two

successful culinary businesses, receiving plenty of accolades for her sophisticated-yet-accessible cuisine.

And then, the pandemic changed everything.

“We were quite busy [when the coronavirus] hit, and I shut our doors well before we legally had to,” she says.

Undeterred, Hodge spent many sleepless nights rearranging her business model to take on the crisis. Leaning on

“The city of Vallejo is the best place I've ever, ever owned a business. I feel like I work for [the people], and they work for me. I love this city.”

—Nicole Hodge, chef-owner of Provisions

her catering background, she crafted up wholesome meals for takeout and delivery as well as an online market for basic grocery needs—a service that several of her customers rely on heavily.

“It's been really rewarding,” says Hodge. “It feels really nice to keep a lot of older people out of grocery stores. I've had some [customers] not go to the store at all because they get all their stuff from us.”

But no service has been quite as popular as the Friday Night Date Night—a pre-made three-course dinner for two, available by preorder.

So far, it's been a hit. The service has “single-handedly kept our doors open” while providing customers a sense of normalcy, says Hodge.

Now that things have settled into a new normal, Hodge finds herself with yet another challenge—accommodating her eatery for a COVID-19 world. During the cafe's closure, Provisions underwent a series of renovations, doubling the amount of space inside; adding a parklet for outdoor dining; installing 20 beer taps and stocking up on loads of wine; and shifting her menu to a prepackaged, picnic-style eating experience.

Like everyone else in the restaurant industry, Hodge is still figuring it out. But she is grateful for the staunch support she has received from her community.

“I feel like the city of Vallejo is the best place I've ever, ever owned a business,” says Hodge. “I feel like I work for [the people], and they work for me. I love this city.” 300 Virginia St., Vallejo, leagueofchefs.com

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DINING & DRINKING GUIDE

STUCK ON WHERE TO ORDER YOUR NEXT MEAL? CHECK OUT THESE PROFILES OF SOME OF THE AREA'S TASTIEST RESTAURANTS.

\$ = \$10 AND UNDER | \$\$ = \$11-\$30 | \$\$\$ = \$30 AND OVER

BENICIA
LUCCA BAR & GRILL

Benicia's local bar and grill has a friendly atmosphere, great food, and refreshing drinks. Offering a seasonal beer garden with live music Thursday through Sunday, Lucca has set the standard for local entertainment.

439 First St.
 (707) 745-3749
lucbarbenicia.com
 @lucbarandgrill
 \$\$

PEARL THAI CUISINE
 Discover authentic flavors at this homey restaurant.
 870 Southamptn Rd.
 (707) 747-9777

pearlthaicuisine.com
 @pearlthaicuisine
 benicia
 @pearlthaicuisine
 \$\$

CROCKETT/ PORT COSTA JUDY'S PLACE
 This small Salvadorean eatery tucked away

on Pamaona Street in Crockett packs a big punch, delivering fresh ingredients with Latin flare.
 1207 Pomona St.
 (510) 787-7768
 @judysplace
 crockett
 \$\$

THE HONEY HOUSE CAFE
 Located inside the Burlington Hotel, this spacious, bright cafe offers a simple menu and a sunny, beautiful place to relax. The coffee is super strong.
 2 Canyon Lake Dr.
 (510) 787-6795
thehotelburlington.com
 @thehotelburlington
 @honeyhousecafe
 \$\$

MARTINEZ HOMAGE
 The lunchtime eatery pairs age-old cooking techniques with locally sourced ingredients to create incredible dishes.
 712 Main St.
 (925) 957-9063
homagemartinez.com
 @homagemartinez
 \$\$

LA PRIMAVERA
 For 30-plus years, this hole-in-the-wall has been serving up authentic Mexican dishes in a welcoming environment.
 1311 Pine St. Ste. 1
 (925) 229-2199
laprimaverarestaurant.com
 @laprimavera
 restaurant
 \$\$



BENICIA
ROOKIES SPORTS BAR & GRILL
 Your favorite local hangout in downtown Benicia, serving up modern American fare with a twist. Features 32 rotating craft beers, wine, and specialty cocktails. Orders available for takeout. Hours subject to change.
 Mon., Wed.–Thurs.: 4–9 p.m.; Fri.–Sun.: 1–8 p.m.
 321 First St. | (707) 746-7665
rookiesbenicia.com
 @rookiesbenicia
 \$\$

VALLEJO
MICHAEL WARRING
 Michelin-caliber fare minus the price tag and the zip code. Chef Michael Warring serves an artfully crafted, seasonal six-course prix fixe that will have you rethinking fine dining. By reservation only.
 8300 Bennington Dr.
 (707) 655-4808

michaelwarring.com
 @michaelwarring
 \$\$\$

RUTHIE'S CARIBBEAN KITCHEN
 Classic Caribbean dishes—including tender strip steak with veggies and spicy jerk chicken wings—are the star at this stylish modern restaurant.

2632 Sonoma Blvd.
 (707) 731-0452
ruthiescaribbeankitchen.business.site
 @ruthiescaribbeankitchen
 \$\$

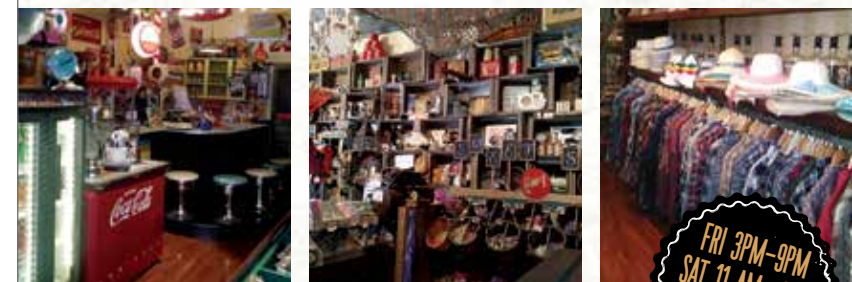
MARTINEZ

VIC'S
 Our family-owned and operated restaurant provides an unforgettable dining experience, from our warm welcome to the care in the food we serve and sincerity in our service. We create food and togetherness. Vic's will have a special place in your heart! Open for takeout.
 Tues.–Fri.: 8 a.m.–3 p.m.; Sat.–Sun.: 9 a.m.–2 p.m.
 1500 Pacheco Blvd. | (925) 387-0886
vicmartinez.com
 @vicmartinezca | @vics_martinez
 \$\$



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17 Canyon Lake Dr, Port Costa, CA
 @pcmercantile

FRI 3PM-9PM
 SAT 11AM-9PM
 SUN 11AM-5PM

COURTESY OF ROOKIES SPORTS BAR & GRILL

COURTESY OF VIC'S

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