

# San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM • SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025 • CONTAINS RECYCLED PAPER • \$3.00

## New destination for restaurants



Photos by Gabrielle Lurie/The Chronicle

Elena's is among the West Portal food and wine businesses that have opened within blocks of one another in S.F. in the past year.

### As other S.F. areas languish, 'very cool' West Portal thrives with openings

By Elena Kadavy

On a packed summer night at Elena's, the bustling new Mexican restaurant in San Francisco's West Portal neighborhood, Diana Zogarcic overheard diners at the table next to her. Wouldn't it be great, they wished, if there was somewhere close by to get ice cream?

Zogarcic looked at her watch. Shaws, the 93-year-old ice cream and candy shop she runs across the street, was already closed.

The next day, she extended Shaws' evening hours. Sales increased by about 10% to 15%.

It's not just Elena's, which reportedly drew waits as long as four hours in its first few weeks. As post-pandemic slumps and



Sushi restaurant Lion West Portal has taken over the site of the former Fuji Japanese Restaurant.

*"For those of us who grew up on this side of town, the thought of someone traveling to West Portal to dine was*

In the past year, at least seven food and wine businesses have opened within blocks of each other: Elena's, the marble-clad cafe George's Donuts & Merriment, Thai spot Khao Tiew, wine bar Binu Bonu, sushi restaurant Lion West Portal, bing-su shop Snow Bliss and Indian restaurant Copper Chimney. And more are coming: San Francisco's Proposition Chicken, Vietnamese fast-casual spot Dragon Eats and Spangler's Market, a specialty grocery store from Half Moon Bay, are all heading to West Portal Avenue.

To John Duggan, a longtime resident and co-owner of Elena's, it's been a major shift. "For those of us who grew up on this side of town, the thought of

## Plant cutting for fire safety pushed

Newsom tells state to step up on rules

By Julie Johnson

Gov. Gavin Newsom is ordering the state to speed up its rulemaking for wildfire safety around homes in fire-prone areas that would ban most plants and combustible materials like mulch and wood fencing.

The rules would require people to clear an area within 5 feet of homes — dubbed "zone zero," or an ember-resistant zone — of any flammable materials, with the exception of mature trees. The rules would apply throughout unincorporated California, and in city neighborhoods where the risk of fire is rated "very high," in accordance with the state's fire risk designations.

Newsom signed the order Thursday after returning from Washington, D.C., where

*Fires continues on A9*

## A scramble to shield USAID from Musk

By Raheem Hosseini

Marcia Davidson was commiserating with colleagues on Signal's encrypted messaging platform when she learned the world's richest civilian blocked congressional Democrats from entering her employer's Washington, D.C., office Monday.

Davidson, a senior education adviser at the Agency for International Development — better known as USAID — knew then that Elon Musk's capture of her micro-agency with the humanitarian remit



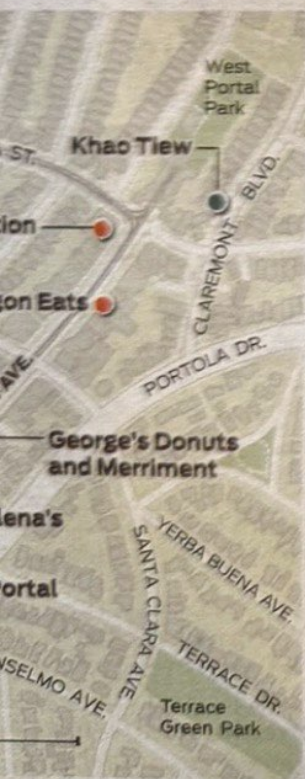


Photos by Gabrielle Lurie/The Chronicle

Portal is a popular neighborhood stop for takeout pizza and pantry staples.

## West Portal

Expected to open soon



Contributors  
Todd Trumbull/The Chronicle

ers donated \$1 million to Donald Trump's presidential inaugural committee).

West Portal's appeal for business owners is obvious. It's an enduring, multigenerational neighbor-



Shaws is a 93-year-old ice cream and candy shop in West Portal, a multigenerational neighborhood.

hood, filled with young families and longtime residents. It's walkable and has its own Muni station. (The neighborhood was born after the Twin Peaks Tunnel opened in 1918, providing a public transportation route to downtown San Francisco.) Kids still flock to Shaws after school, while their parents line up at Elena's or get a drink at the decades-old Philosopher's Club on Ulloa Street. West Portal manages to feel "sleepy and vibrant at the same time," Elena Duggan said.

Almost all of the new businesses are run by

people who live in or near West Portal or have long-time connections to the neighborhood. Zogaric, a video producer who moved to the neighborhood in 2016, brought Shaws back to life after the candy store closed in 2020. The owners of the Sardinian-focused Binu Bonu, who previously ran Italian institution La Ciccia in Noe Valley, also live nearby.

the early 2000s, a young Tamir Erdenebat working the sushi counter at Fuji Japanese Restaurant on West Portal Avenue dreamed of start-

ing his own restaurant in the neighborhood. He went on to open sushi restaurants throughout San Francisco, including the popular Elephant Sushi in Russian Hill. Late one night last year, while sitting in his car eating a Beep's burger, he serendipitously spotted a "for lease" sign in the window at his former employer at 301 W. Portal Ave. In November, Erdenebat opened Lion West Portal, a sleek restaurant with seasonal and vegan sushi that was booked solid for its first two months. Many customers remember him as "chef Tom" from his years at Fuji.

"It was my dream to get a place where I started. This is the restaurant I want to retire on," Erdenebat said.

Ari Feingold, owner of Proposition Chicken, has also long wanted to open a restaurant in West Portal. More than a decade ago, he lived in Twin Peaks, but West Portal was where he went to eat and run errands. So when salad chain Lemonade closed at 16 W. Portal Ave. and the building's landlord called him, he jumped at the opportunity. Proposition Chicken will open this spring with its popular fried and rotisserie chicken, and a large outdoor patio with a fireplace and string lights. Just down the street, Dragon Eats has taken over 51 W. Portal Ave., according to city records, and Spangler's will bring a butcher counter, sandwiches and grocery staples to 186 W. Portal Ave.

"It's having a moment," Feingold said of West Portal. But he doesn't want to see it change. "What I hope to happen is it can keep the character of what it's always been, which to me is an unpretentious, very cool neighborhood in San Francisco."

Reach Elena Kadavany:  
elena.kadavany@  
sfchronicle.com; Bluesky:  
@elenakadavany.bsky.social