

VIVA!

VINEYARD VALLEY NEWS

VOLUME 49

NOVEMBER 2025

NUMBER 11



NOVEMBER EVENTS

A.I. Workshop, November 5

BINGO, November 14

VVHA Board Meeting, November 19

Thanksgiving Lunch, November 27

Welcome New Advertisers on page 12!

VVHA Presesnts . . .

Vineyard Valley Residents



We're gathering to give
thanks, share good food and
enjoy good company

*Please join us on Thursday,
November 27 at noon for a
Thanksgiving Lunch with
all the trimmings.*

It would be our pleasure to serve and
celebrate with you and the only thing
you have to bring is your wit and charm.



Take out dinners will be available



NOVEMBER 2025

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

						1
Tu, Thurs Aqua Exercise with Stacey 10-11:00 AM Community Pool						
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Election Day	AI Workshop 1-3PM			
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
		Veteran's Day			BINGO (and soup!) 6pm	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
			VVHA Board Meeting 3PM			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
				Thanksgiving Lunch 12PM Thanksgiving Day		
30						

Red-VVHA Community Black-Public Observance Green-Local Event Violet-VVHA Event

2025-2026 VVHA OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

President, Janet Schmidt
Vice President, Rick Wood
Secretary, Inger Laidley
Treasurer, Henk Brok
Directors:
Eve Breckenridge
Chris Killion
Steve Kinney
Mae VanNett



Committee/Activity Chairs

VVHA Clubhouse Coordinator:
Mae VanNett

Hospitality:
Robin McGuire, Mae VanNett

Memorials and VV Clubhouse Coordinator:
Janeen di Rienzo

Directory:
Michael Merriman

Library:
Joyce Cahill, Rick Wood

Bocce Committee Chair:
Rick Wood

VVHA Website:
Michael Merriman



Non-Social Resident-formed Groups

Community Education:
Grace Kistner

Neighbor Helping Neighbor:
Carroll Cotten

If there is a death, call Janeen di Rienzo at 707-294-8307 so she can post it on the bulletin board and arrange for the \$50 donation to the organization you designate. She will explain how to schedule the clubhouse for a memorial.

November Birthdays

2 Julie Lenhart, Cheryl Olsen
4 Ferenc Brunner
10 Bobbie Jones
17 Greg Nelson, Ed Smith
25 Verna Walden
27 Joyce Cahill
30 Becky Soret

VIVA!

VIVA Mission Statement: To provide a periodic newsletter concerning current and upcoming events, VVHA news, activities, neighborly news, and other non-political and local items of interest to all Vineyard Valley residents.

Editor

Francine Freeman

Business Manager

Carroll Cotten

Advertising

Henk Brok

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Staff

VIVA

21 Del Rio Court
St. Helena, CA 94574
email: viva.vineyardvalley@gmail.com

The Prez Sez . . . by Janet Schmidt

Hello neighbors,

The fall weather with its crisp mornings and warm afternoons is here. It also has us layering our attire with a sweater or sweatshirt in the morning and shucking it for something cooler in the afternoon. I'm ready to dig out my cozy sweaters and peruse the many catalogs that land in our mailbox, and maybe purchase something for fall/winter that I can't live without!

It's also a good time to take a slow walk in the park and enjoy the beautiful changing of color in our trees and to break out all those crockpot recipes and enjoy a good bowl of stew, soup, or chili.

October brought out the pumpkins for Halloween and in November all those jack-o-lanterns will be replaced with turkeys. Speaking of turkeys, VVHA is hosting Thanksgiving dinners free of charge for VV residents who want to join neighbors in the clubhouse at noon on Thanksgiving Day. More information and a signup sheet will be posted on the VVHA bulletin board outside the mailroom.

Enjoy these fall days,
Janet

VINEYARD VALLEY HOMEOWNERS' ASSOCIATION - October 2025 Notes

The October Board Meeting was cancelled, following are notes for October:

Treasurer's report - As of September 30, 2025: Checking \$11,278.03; Savings \$9,013.95; VIVA \$3,280.55; Bocce \$1,564.30; Total \$25,136.83

Lobster Boil report - 99 people had a fabulous evening at VVHA's 3rd annual Lobster Boil! Thanks to all who contributed items to the fundraising portion of the event. Almost \$5,000 was raised, which goes into the VVHA General fund to help fund future gatherings and events!

October Bingo brought out 34 residents and friends - A total of 13 people went home with winning bragging rights, with 6 people sharing the Blackout prize!

Upcoming events in the Clubhouse: Friday Social (Oct 24), History of Vineyard Valley - 50th Anniversary presentation (Oct 29) AI presentation (Nov 5) Bingo, where Ines's Minestrone Soup will be served for dinner, Nov 14, Thanksgiving Meal (Nov 27) (November's Social is cancelled due to the Holiday).

December happenings to look forward to - December Craft Fair (Dec 7) and the Holiday Dinner (Dec 13) (December Bingo is cancelled due to the Holiday Party).

Please email with any **contact information updates** so we can have the best information for the Vineyard Valley Directory - robimac7@gmail.com or admin@vineyardvalley.org

PARK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

November 2025

Seasonal maintenance and care of your home can add to your safety and comfort as well as help control repair costs. Here are some key maintenance procedures for Fall and Winter: Check and clean your furnace and change furnace filters. Inspect roof and clean off debris, inspect gutters and downspouts and clean out debris. Check smoke and CO2 alarms. Clean patios and carports, these areas not to be used for storage. Use the green waste bin in the corporation yard for landscaping clipping and debris from roofs. Check skirting around your home and close any spaces that could be accessed by small animals. Contact the office to review any tree branches within 10 feet of any chimney or stovepipe outlet.

RULES REMINDER

Please contact the office in email vineyardvalleymhp@gmail.com or by phone, 707-963-2725 with any questions or clarification regarding the rules and regulations. Thank you.

PARKING - Parking **is not permitted** on Paseo Grande, San Lucas, Los Robles, La Cuesta, La Canada, Redondo, Laguna Seca, and San Juan as these streets are narrow and considered fire lanes which must be kept open at all times for emergency vehicles. Parking **is permitted** on Del Monte, Del Rio and Del Campo as these streets are wider and able to accommodate emergency vehicles when cars are parked on the streets. As we move into the holiday season, family and friends can be more frequent visitors, guests are welcome to park at the clubhouse parking lot. Please contact the office if you would like to request that a guest park in the corporation yard, this applies to cars only, guest RV parking is no longer available in the corporation yard.

PRIVATE COMMUNITY NO SOLICITING

Vineyard Valley is a private community for the enjoyment of residents and their invited guests. Soliciting is not permitted, including contractors, salespersons, real estate agents, those with political or religious affiliations, etc. If you are approached by a solicitor at your home or on the Vineyard Valley property please contact the office immediately, 704-963-2725; if it is after 4:00 p.m., please contact Becky Soret, 408-489-0880 or on the weekends please contact Kay Bettinelli, 831-869-5914.

RESIDENT ARTWORK

Artwork by resident artists Eve Breckenridge, Elizabeth Green, Deirdre Shibano and Sharon Slayton is enhancing the wall in the lanai. Thank you to these residents for sharing their talent with the Vineyard Valley community.

POOL CLOSING

The swimming pool will close December 1st, the last day to swim is November 30th. The saunas and therapy pool remain open all year.

WATER CONSERVATION

November is the beginning of cooler, rainy weather. This is a reminder to residents to cut back on outdoor irrigation to conserve water. If you need assistance setting your irrigation controller please contact the office.

PARK PROJECTS

The landscapers are beginning to winterize the Park. Waddle is being placed, new drains will be added, undergrounds drains have been cleaned, tree work completed and additional tree work scheduled.

With Gratitude for Our Groundskeepers



*Groundskeeping crew (partial) l-r: Fabian, Eloy, and Gabriel
note: Crew member Jose is not pictured*

Here in Vineyard Valley, we residents are fortunate to enjoy 44 acres that includes natural landscaping to inspire us throughout the seasons. What a blessing it is to have a full-time groundskeeping staff responsible for maintaining this beautiful environment: they plant, trim, prune, clean, strengthen, and generally make our gardens lovely for everyone in our community.

We are thankful to Eloy, Fabian, Gabriel, and Jose for their hard work and dedication, and we appreciate the great service and kindness they show us throughout the year.



Beyond Google Search: Get More from Your Computer

A FREE workshop for residents and their friends

Wednesday, November 5 from 1–3PM in the Clubhouse

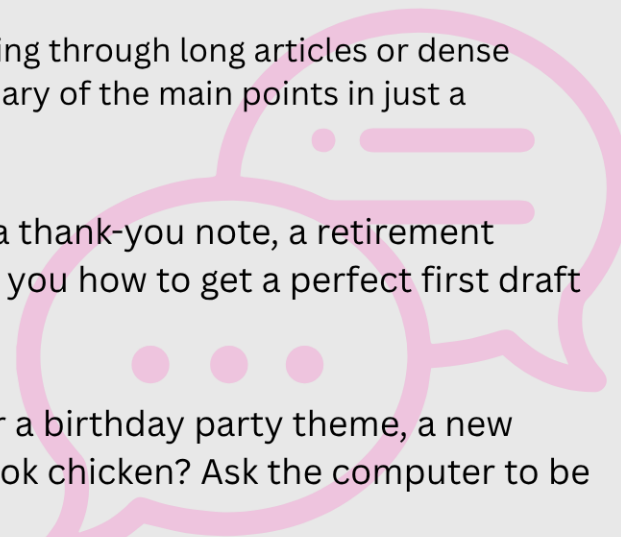
Feel free to bring your laptop, iPad or SmartPhone to play along!

You know how to use Google to search for a recipe or the weather.

Now, learn a simple new trick to make your computer do even more of the work for you—no fancy skills required!



In this hands-on class, we'll show you how to:

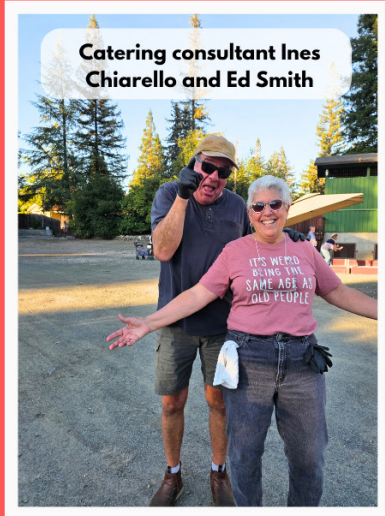
- **Turn an idea into a plan:** Need to plan a trip to see the grandkids? We'll show you how to instantly create a full, suggested itinerary, including hotels and local activities.
 - **Simplify complicated documents:** Tired of wading through long articles or dense emails? Learn a simple way to get a quick summary of the main points in just a sentence or two.
 - **Write with ease:** Stuck on what to write for a thank-you note, a retirement speech, or a letter to the editor? We'll show you how to get a perfect first draft in seconds.
 - **Brainstorm and get creative:** Need ideas for a birthday party theme, a new garden layout, or even a different way to cook chicken? Ask the computer to be your instant idea-generator!
- 

You already know how to search—now learn how to
create and simplify. And it is free!

Bring your laptop, iPad or SmartPhone to play along!

Vineyard Valley Homeowners' Association

VINEYARD VALLEY'S 3rd ANNUAL Lobster Boil Dinner & Fundraiser



Catering consultant Ines Chiarello and Ed Smith



Al fresco dining in the Corporation Yard featuring 99 residents and their guests

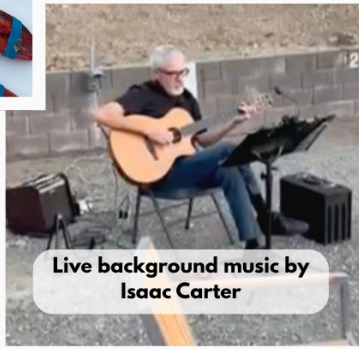


Event host Rick Wood with VVHA Board President Janet Schmidt

Michael Merriman and Gayle Davies with guest Beth inside the auction tent



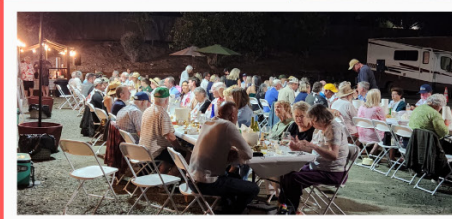
Sergio Trendy



Live background music by Isaac Carter



Mauricio of Napa Valley Lobster Co. and Ed Smith pour the dinner



Enjoying fellowship after moonrise



CLOCKWISE, from top left: Group shot; Caroline, Gigi and Debbie; In the kitchen with Ellie, Gary, Cat Janeen and Lauren; roasted mini sweet peppers; Lydia enjoying some wine with dinner; Gary, Madeline, Becky; the big bowl of salad being tossed; More sauce please; The Antipasto Table being enjoyed by all; Debbie and Caroline cutting the garlic bread; Natalie and Ben De Maio get their pasta; full room shot; Janeen's famous marinated mushrooms.

RIANDA HOUSE SENIOR ACTIVITY CENTER

Veterans Day Breakfast led by Amanda Cole, Pam McCullagh

Tuesday, November 11, 9:30-11:00 | American Legion Hall

Join us on Veterans Day for a patriotic atmosphere and a delicious breakfast to show gratitude and appreciation for our nation's veterans. **RSVP - 40 MAXIMUM**

Greeting Card Painting Class with Pam McCullagh

Thursday, November 6, 10:30-12:30 | Rianda House

Let's ring in the holidays by painting a watercolor greeting card of elegant Christmas balls. All supplies will be furnished and refreshments provided. **RSVP**

Heart Healthy for the Holidays with Dr. Maia Eng

Wednesday, November 12, 6:00-8:00 | Grace Episcopal Church, Spring Street

Dr. Maia Eng helps her patients understand and manage their condition through lifestyle changes and treatment options that align with their personal health goals. She is board certified in internal medicine as well as cardiovascular disease. She will bring helpful recommendations for remaining heart healthy during the holidays. **RSVP**

SongShine Vocal Strength Class with Dr. Eve-Anne Wilkes & Ellen Patterson

Mondays, October 6 - November 10, 1:00-2:30 | American Legion Hall

A fun singing class for adults looking to strengthen voices affected by aging or neurological conditions. Using the science-based SongShine method, you'll boost vocal strength, build confidence, and join a supportive community of singers! **RSVP**

A Novel Bunch Book Club with Patti Antonaccio

Wednesday, November 5, 5:00-7:00 | Rianda House

Join us for a monthly book club meeting fostering a love of reading, building community and exploring literary genres. Each month, a member chooses a book, leads discussion and provides refreshments. **RSVP**

Should I Stay or Should I Go? with John Herrguth

Tuesdays, November 4-25, 3:00-4:00 | Rianda House

Every senior will face an important question: Should I stay in my home, downsize or move to senior housing? Let us help your options - financially, legally and personally. Join industry experts from Live Better Financial to help you better understand how to navigate: Alzheimer's, Caregiving & Home Equity Solutions, Understanding In-Home care, Smart Financial Planning & Legal Readiness. **RSVP**

Oat Hill Mine Trail with Kerry Brackett

Friday, November 14, 10:30-11:30 | Oat Hill Mine Trailhead

Experience three miles and 500 ft elevation gain, out-and-back of the Oat Hill Mine Trail in Calistoga. A half mile from the start are beautiful views of surrounding agricultural fields. Bring water and hat! **RSVP**

Understanding Hospice and Palliative Care with Gladys Portillo

Monday, November 17, 2:15-3:15 | Rianda House

This presentation provides an essential overview of palliative and hospice care, differentiating between the two services that focus on the quality of life for individuals with serious illnesses. We will review who receives these services, the services provided by an interdisciplinary team, and key benefits such as symptom management and patient-centered care. **RSVP**

Debbie Austin Styles

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in
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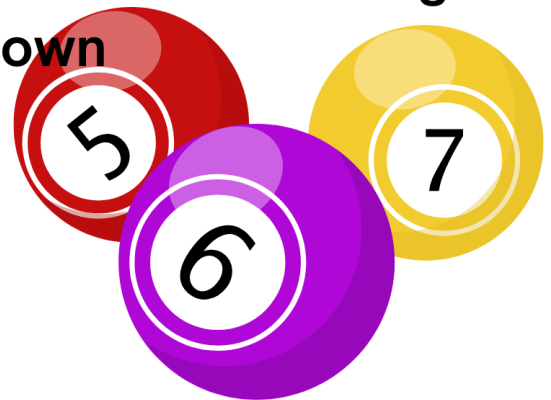
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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14
DOORS OPEN 6:00PM
GAMES BEGIN 6:30

- \$15.00 Entry Pack includes 3 x 6 games
- Packs, dauber, and dinner
- Those with specific food requirements or allergies are welcome to provide their own
- BYO beverage
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- Cash Prizes for winners!



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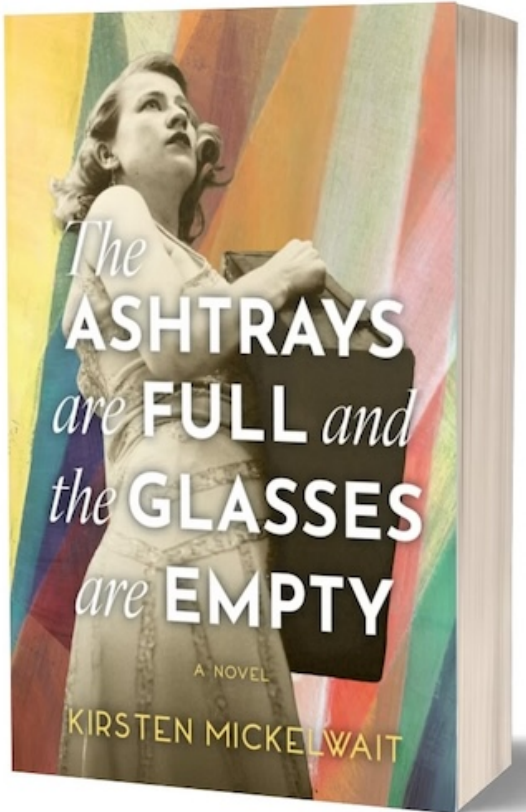


ST. HELENA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Book Signing and Reception with Kirsten Mickelwait

The Ashtrays are Full and the Glasses are Empty

November 20, 2023 | 10:30am



Look forward to a short (90-second) book trailer. Kirsten will read an excerpt, then take questions.

Follow Sara Murphy through her very modern life to reveal how heartbreak can be healed by faith, unconditional love, and a creative mind.

About Kirsten Mickelwait

Kirsten Mickelwait had a 40+ year career as a professional copywriter and editor before turning to writing fiction and creative nonfiction.

She's an alumna of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, the Paris Writers' Conference, and the San Francisco Writers' Conference. Her short story, "Parting with Nina," won first prize in The Ledge's 2004 Fiction Awards competition.



At the Heritage Center | 1255 Oak Ave. | St. Helena

The Clara of *Astragalus Clarianus*

by Mariam Hansen, St. Helena Historian

A rare little flower grows in rural fields of Napa and Sonoma Counties. One might say that another flower grew and died in St. Helena, for she was a very interesting accomplished woman. Not many plants are named for women, but *Astragalus Clarianus*, also known as Napa Milkvetch or Clara Hunt's Milkvetch, is named for St. Helena former resident Clara Adele Pike Blodgett Hunt.

Clara was the daughter of Edward and Lucy Pike and was born in Claremont, New Hampshire. She came to California when 12 years old. Before her marriage she was a successful school teacher in the East Bay. She was a great lover of flowers and had a liberal education in botany. She married her first husband, George Blodgett, in 1878 when she was 17. He died in 1883.

In 1891 she married her second husband, Daniel Otis Hunt, when she was 32 and he was 60. They made St. Helena their home. Her particular delight for many years was the study of wildflowers with which our hills and valleys abound. Her flower shows at her home or at Women's Improvement Club meetings were popular. Clara was past president of the Club and was interested in civic affairs. Her second husband died in 1915 at age 84 when she was 56.

Clara was a famous botanist in her day. A plant she discovered is named for her—*Astragalus Clarianus*. The rare species of milkvetch is known by the common names Clara Hunt's milkvetch and Napa milkvetch. It is endemic to northern California where it is known from only four or five occurrences along the border between Sonoma and Napa Counties. It is a federally listed endangered species. Clara collected the first specimen in 1909 in Conn Valley. The discovery was confirmed in 1925.

Clara Hunt's milkvetch is a low-growing annual herb with white and purple flowers that typically appear in March and April. The plants have been found in grasslands and in openings of blue oak/manzanita woodland. The plants have been found on thin, rocky clay soils that are derived from volcanic or serpentine substrates. Six historical occurrences of Clara Hunt's milkvetch are recorded in the California Natural Diversity Database: five in Napa County and one in Sonoma County.



Although one occurrence of Clara Hunt's milk-vetch is protected with a conservation easement and another is located on State Park land, the other three occurrences that are presumed to still exist are all located on privately-owned land. These occurrences on privately-owned land continue to be at risk from direct loss or modification of habitat, primarily from agricultural or urban development. In addition, Clara Hunt's milkvetch could be impacted from recreational activities, uprooting by feral pigs, competition with introduced plant species, alterations in natural fire regime and climate change. Very small populations, such as those of Clara Hunt's milkvetch, can be especially vulnerable to extinction from natural and human-caused events.



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THE TASTING ROOM

by Steve Kinney

Merryvale Vineyards

Fall is in the air and rain has driven away another fire season. We're in the final stages of Harvest here in The Valley--what better time than now to go wine tasting. As we pulled into Merryvale Vineyards, they were busy sorting through grapes of the day's pickings. Several members of the crew sift through the grapes removing spoiled or overly dry grapes and clusters thus providing a cleaner, more pure flavor.

Merryvale started out as Sunnyhill Winery in 1933. Conveniently located next to the rail tracks, that allowed their wine to get to San Francisco and beyond. In the 1940's, it became a co-op for local winemakers and changed to Sunny St Helena Winery. In 1983 it started its history as Merryvale when a small group bottled their first vintage as Merryvale. In 1986 they purchased the building, beginning extensive renovations and renaming it to Merryvale Vineyards. Then in 1991 Jack Schlatter became a partner in the winery, and in 1996 Jack and family became the sole owners. Their first vineyard purchase was the land for Profile Vineyard which has become the basis for their signature wine. Renne, their son, became CEO in 2008 and continues the family's legacy.

Our tasting was indoors, as it was a rainy cool day. We started with their 2023 Sauvignon Blanc Reserve. Aged 10 months in neutral oak, this showed a lot of grapefruit character. Very crisp acidity around a core fruit component. 2024 Pinot Noir Rosé from Stanley Ranch. This is available in a 1.5-liter bottle. Not a lot of bright pinot flavors, more tart and with subdued fruit. The 2023 Sun Chase Chardonnay comes from their most recent vineyard. It is located in the Petaluma Gap AVA in the Sonoma Coast. Aged 16 months in 30% new oak with some malolactic fermentation. Showed nice apple/pear fruit with a creamy vanilla note.



Our host, Monique, added the 2023 Sun Chase Pinot Noir to our lineup. From the same vineyard in the Petaluma Gap, this was a fairly rich Pinot with bright, dark, cherry fruit and rounded tannins. 2022 Chairman's Reserve Selection followed. A blend of 94% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Cabernet Franc. Blended and fermented to produce a stylish Cabernet Sauvignon with surprisingly soft tannins. Quite quaffable with bright dark fruit and a little tobacco on the finish. 2022 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon was the last wine on our tasting list. This was 97% Cabernet with Petite Verdot rounding out the blend. All fruit was from their Profile Vineyard above Conn Creek Road. Rich and full bodied with bright cherry-berry fruit. We asked for and were obliged with a taste of the 2023 Merlot for our finale. It's made with Napa Valley fruit from the Faust Vineyard in Combsville. Bright and layered with blueberry fruit and touches of cedar with a nice lingering finish.

There are several different tastings available here. Ours was the Winery Exclusive featuring many winery only wines. Cost was \$50 per person. We added a cheese and charcuterie plate for \$35. Also available is The Terroir Experience at \$80 and their Grand Cru Flight featuring the Profile Wines, for \$150. Merryvale is easily visited as they allow visitors to order a glass or a bottle as well. In the summer their patio features music on some evenings and, coming in January, a Trivia Night on the first and third Fridays through April. Cheers!

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Know Thy Neighbor



by Suzanne James

Our neighbor in the spotlight this month is a wine connoisseur after decades working in the restaurant and wine industries here in the Valley. He is happy to share his knowledge with our community, which he does monthly in the VIVA newsletter.

He was born in Livermore where his father was a physicist at the Livermore Lab doing fusion research seeking energy from fusion reactions. The lab had been doing this research since the 70s and “Dad loved this work!” The family moved to the Alamo area when our neighbor was five where he stayed until he left for college.

He is the oldest of three siblings, having two younger sisters. He remembers camping a lot as a family, going to Yosemite every year and climbing most of the peaks there. The family stayed in CA and later added Lake Tahoe to their camping destinations.

He describes his high school years as good as he made many friends and participated in student government.

Although he says he wasn’t that interested in academics, he entered UC Berkley after high school where he completed a degree in Political Science. However he took a different path after graduation, choosing to enter the restaurant business rather than pursuing an area related to Political Science. “My family entertained a lot, and I learned to cook early.”

His first venture was to start a small catering business in Laguna Beach with a good friend, which lasted for two years. He then worked in a series of restaurants, living in San Francisco, then Mill Valley for a couple of years.

He married his wife in 1985 and they had two children, Nathan, born in 1988, and Deana, born in 1991. Both of his adult children live in Oregon and they visit them frequently.

Our neighbor managed the California Cafe in Yountville for five years followed by a couple of years managing at Auberge du Soleil, the only restaurant in our area offering a grand view of the Valley blow from its hillside perch. He then moved on as General Manager at Piatti’s, hoping to limit work during the daytime so he could spend more time with his family at night.

His next move involved employment as a salesperson at Redwood Vintners, a small wine distributor in Novato, followed by moving on to Southern Wines & Spirits, a national distributor. His day-to-day job at Southern meant driving to restaurants and hotels in downtown San Francisco. Our neighbor stayed with Southern for twenty-five years until his retirement six years ago in 2019.

He and his wife purchased their home in Vineyard Valley in 2015 and “we were weekenders from Vallejo for the next five years.” Once he retired in 2019, he was able to spend most of the time in Napa. He intended to work part-time in a winery tasting room starting in 2020, but Covid put an end to that. In 2022 he was able to find a winery

Know Thy Neighbor



by Suzanne James

to work for in Oakville for a couple days a week. He worked there regularly for two and a half years. Now, he just works there at random times when needed.

He is enjoying retirement and the freedom it provides to pursue what is meaningful to him at this stage of life. He enjoys living in Vineyard Valley and values his neighbors. He drives for Mollie's Angels one day a week, providing transportation to those who need it for appointments. He loves to garden and takes pride in the beautification of their property. He likes to read, enjoying mysteries and "all kinds of stuff, including what's going on in the world." He and his wife savor traveling, both nationally and internationally.

He is happy to write the monthly column for VIVA, *The Tasting Room*, saying "it is fun to do, and I try to keep it local." He states he has no real 'bucket list' because "I've done a lot of the things I wanted to do. Now, travel and cooking are my continual favorites."

Our neighbor is Steve Kinney, who lives with his wife, Mae Van Nett, at 6 La Canada.

Suggestions and Referrals for this column are encouraged and welcome.



(l-r, front row): Ben DiMaio, Inger Laidley, Mary West, Jerri Patton, Polly Keegan, Ines Chiarello
(l-r, back row): Denise Marks, Andy Dietrick, Guest, Ed Smith, Doug Schmidt, David Armington

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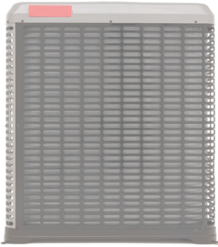
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This bright harvest moon
keeps me walking all night long
around the little pond

Autum approaches
and the heart begins to dream
Of four-tatami rooms

-from Bashō (1644-1694)

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