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December 2026



Wishing you a wonderful Holiday Season and a Happy New Year!

Mrs. Claus knows

to check

Cloverdale Connect

to see who's been

naughty or nice!





Front Page Photo Contest Winner **Jonathan Rowlands** wins a Gift Card from **West Coast Sourdough**



29th Annual Lions Club Toy Run

Sunday, December 13, 2026, Citrus Fairgrounds



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CUSD Teacher of the Month Edith Leon
Sponsored by Dahlia & Sage Market



Cloverdale Unified School District is proud to recognize Edith Leon, English teacher at Cloverdale High School, as our Employee of the Month. Edith is being recognized for her exceptional dedication and unwavering support for our students, families, and staff.

Edith joined the district in 2023, bringing a deep commitment to fostering literacy, critical thinking, and student success at the high school level. In addition to English, Edith has taken on our 9th grade AVID class and is our team lead for SC9UP, a program we joined to support 9th graders in remaining on track for graduation.

Edith is widely celebrated for going above and beyond every single day. Driven by a deep caring for her students, she excels at meeting teenagers right where they are academically and emotionally. Her commitment to maintaining high expectations for all students and her focus on supporting all students in being successful makes her a successful and powerful force in the classroom. Students have noted that they feel challenged, supported, and welcome in her classroom; a recipe for success.

The district extends its deepest gratitude and congratulations to Edith Leon for her remarkable dedication and lasting impact on Cloverdale's youth. Thank you, Edith, for everything you do to make our community stronger!

DEADLINE 3rd Friday of every month, 5pm

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ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF CLOVERDALE

PET of the MONTH

Higgins

Such a big help with the ornaments!
Jen and Dan Cuzzi



Send your pet photos for
PET of the MONTH to:
info@cloverdaleconnect.com
Prizes courtesy of DogGonit and Cloverdale Connect

Whisker Talk
Brigid Wasson

It's holiday time and we have so much to do that it's easy to forget your pets! Here are three important tasks to complete TODAY to ensure a safe holiday season for dogs and cats.

1) Make pet sitting arrangements as early as possible. Many sitters and kennels book up in late summer and early fall, so don't call on Christmas Eve and expect availability. This may sound silly but people do it every year!
2) Check your pet's identification. This is especially important if you will have a houseful of company, or if your pet will be in an unfamiliar place with a sitter. Dogs should wear a collar with a current phone number, and both dogs and cats should be microchipped and registered. Even a normally well-behaved pet can panic and bolt when surrounded by unfamiliar people, noises, or surroundings.
3) If festivities will be in your home, set up an area like a bedroom where pets can safely hang out by themselves. This will help prevent escapes, bites, and eating rich food that can make them sick.

Stop by Curly Doodle Dog Grooming downtown for a FREE microchip scan and registration check, and a FREE ID tag any time before Christmas.

Washington Middle School Shoe Drive
Fred and Amber Cook, Coaches

Washington Middle School Track and Field Team is holding a Shoe Drive to raise money for a practice field plus storage. Track and field offers teens a mix of physical fitness, mental resilience and social connection that can transform both their personal growth and school experience. Students develop self-confidence and ownership of their achievements on their own efforts, building good health, character and community while preparing them for success both on and off the track.

Thank you for your time and generosity. We truly appreciate your commitment to our team and our community.



THE CHRISTMAS TABLE
CITRUS FAIR
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FREE COMMUNITY DINNER
EVERYONE WELCOME



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CITRUS FAIR
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  - Hang Flyers – At Cloverdale Businesses
- ☐ COOKIE BAKING – Bake & Bag at Home
- ☐ EVENT SETUP – Citrus Fair Main Hall – Contact for date
- ☐ FOOD PREP - Turkey Cooking Team / Dinner Food Prep

DURING
- ☐ GUEST WELCOME CENTER GREETER
- ☐ PHOTO BOOTH HOST
- ☐ KIDS' AREAS HELPER – Activities & Gifts
- ☐ COOKIE TABLE HOST
- ☐ RAFFLE CENTER HOST
- ☐ FOOD SERVER – Dinner / Dessert / Beverages
- ☐ DINING ROOM HELP – Help Guests, Remove Trash, etc.
- ☐ DISH WASHERS

AFTER
- ☐ CLEANUP
- ☐ DELIVER LEFTOVER FOOD

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Friday, December 4 – 9:30 am to 2:30pm
Saturday, December 5 – 9am to 4pm
Sunday, December 6 – 11am to 3pm

Cloverdale Church Guide



Good Shepherd Episcopal Church

Carols followed by Holy Eucharist

Christmas Eve – 5 PM

Sunday Services at 10 AM

122 North Main Street, Cloverdale

707-891-6015 / goodshepherdcloverdale.org





Grace Lutheran Church

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Join us for our Christmas Services!

Christmas Service and Children's Choir Performance

Sunday, December 20th at 9am & 10:30am

Christmas Eve Communion Service

Thrusday, December 24 at 5pm

All are welcome!

553 W. Second Street, Cloverdale

Across from City Park

Place your Church Ad HERE

Email: adsales@cloverdaleconnect.com

Cloverdale Connect Mission Statement

The mission of Cloverdale Connect is to bring the community together with respect and dignity; uplifting community members while avoiding divisiveness, opinion, and negativity.



PYNK Qigong and Tai Chi Thursday Class

November through March, from 10am to 11:30am

Encore Dance Theatre, 207 N. Cloverdale Blvd.

All people are welcome to come anytime. Qigong sessions massage every organ and joint of the body, for a full body practice of gentle movements, stretches and meditations for healing, stress reduction and wellness. Including classic Qigong forms Ba Duan Jin, Yi Jin Jing, Five Animals and more. Tai Chi Chuan Dragon Tiger Mountain Form at 11am

Wear slippers or only indoor shoes and comfortable clothes for unrestrained movement.

Dues are $15/session

Simu Janet Seaforth has taught Qigong and Tai Chi for over forty years. She's certified by the National Qigong Association and was a contestant on the USA team in the 2012 Wushu Championships in Huang Shan, China. She has recently written a book about her Qigong and Tai Chi experience, Little Book of Qi, Energy for Life, available through Balboa Press and on Amazon. Contact Janet by email, Choicestudios@outlook.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: SIMU JANET SEAFORTH @ 707-280-7992

Mutual Dreaming

Nora Archambeau, M.A.

"I think we dream so we don't have to be apart so long. If we're in each other's dreams, we can play together all night." Bill Watterson — Cartoonist of Calvin and Hobbes (1985-1995) and Author

A few weeks ago, I had the most wonderful event happen. I dreamt a similar dream as my friend had on the same night. After sharing our dreams the next day, I realized that we experienced the phenomenon of what's called Mutual Dreaming, "…where two or more people experience the same or strikingly similar dreams…at the same time." (AI internet) I hadn't lived this type of dreaming in a very long time. Cool! Linda Lane McGallon, dream author and researcher, puts it all into mind boggling context. There seems to be three categories we can plug our dreams into:

1. **Shared dreams**: Individuals have independent dreams on the same night with matching themes, places, or symbols, which they discover after waking up and comparing notes.
2. **Meeting dreams**: People actively encounter and interact with each other inside a dream.
3. **Meshing dreams**: The dream egos "merge," causing the participants to experience the exact same scene from a unified perspective or perform synchronized actions. (AI internet)

Meeting Dreams are those where I feel that I am on the edge of psychism, that is it's a "calling in", consciously or unconsciously, of the other person into my dreamworld. These kinds are special and should be treated with reverence. Occasionally, it is someone who has passed on to the other side. They intuit that I need to have them nearby to offer a message that will help a situation in my waking world. ***Happy "Mutually" Dreaming!***

Dream Resources:

1. *Linda Lane McGallon, Mutual Dreaming, 1997, a groundbreaking book on how to recognize, encode, and even induce mutual dreaming episodes at night.*
2. *The outstanding movie Inception, 2010, Christopher Nolan, Director.*



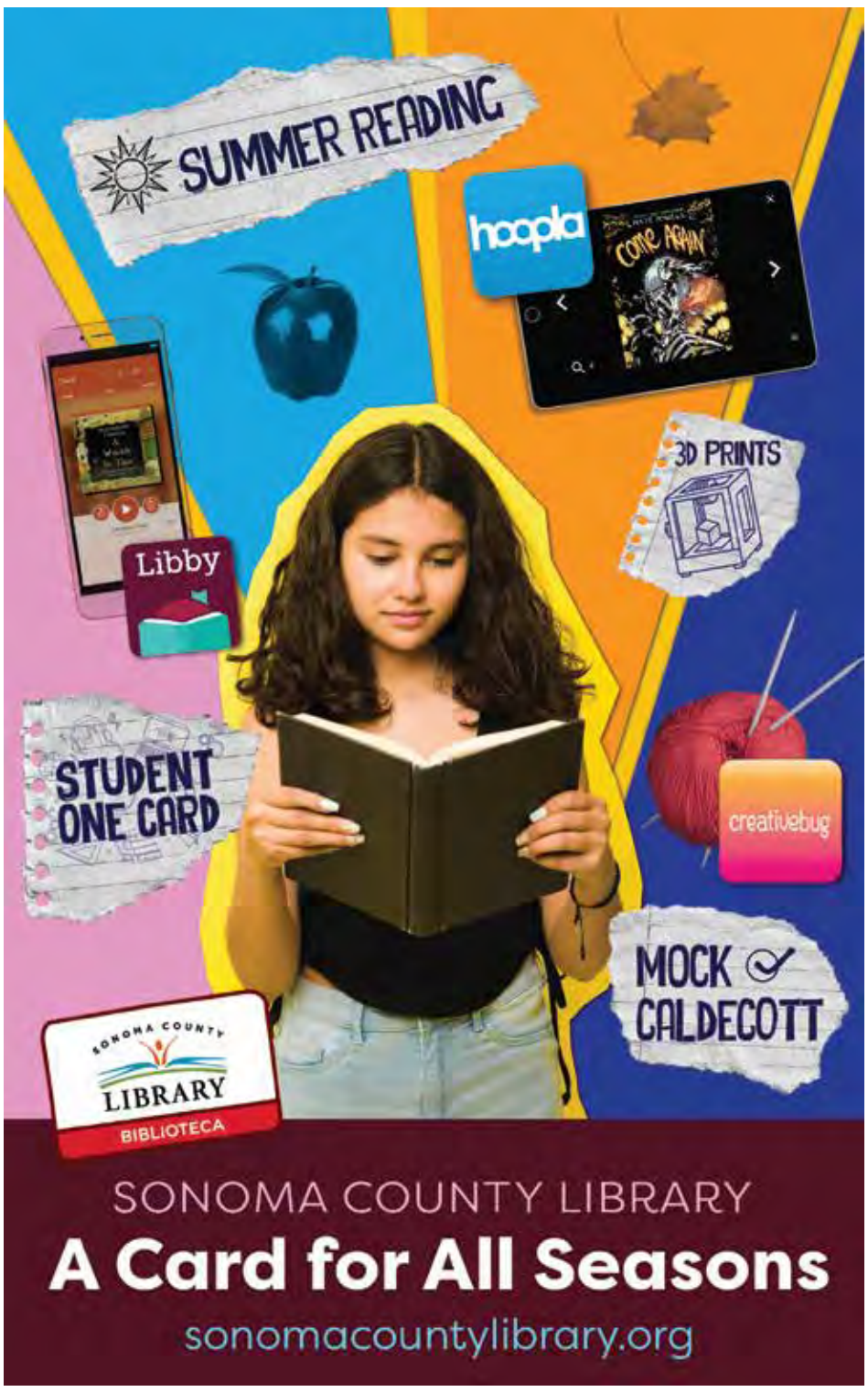


Crazy Dave to the Rescue



This is Brent who is riding from Vancouver British Columbia to Mexico. He broke a rear shifter cable just outside of town. He stopped in at the motorcycle repair shop and they gave him David Maciel's name.

Crazy Dave put the cable in and then repaired the shifter and derailleur. Brent had lost the bolt that holds the cable to the derailleur - luckily, Dave saves bits & pieces like that. Dave also gave him some replacement cables just in case and sent him on his way with a story to tell for the rest of his life. As Crazy Dave says: "Pay it forward, my friends!".





Thank You, Bram

Glenda Morgan

After seven years of faithfully leading the Clover Springs Qigong class, Bram Glaeser has officially stepped down from this role. Bram and his wife, Gretchen, moved to Clover Springs in 2012 from Healdsburg. Growing up in a Salvation Army family set him on a path of lifelong service. Bram worked as a teacher, social worker, photographer, and on the staff of a care center. He also volunteered for the Salvation Army, the Boys and Girls Club, the Boy Scouts, and the Cloverdale Senior Center.



Bram began his Qigong class in 2021 in order to share the benefits of this Chinese practice with others. He led this class without fee or charge and all donations, totaling over $15,000, went directly to the Cloverdale Senior Center. From a small beginning, the class grew to a sizable group of devoted followers. Bram took time to encourage new members and he approached every class with warmth, humor, and a desire to help others.

Bram will be deeply missed in this leadership role, but well wishes abound as he is able to spend more time with Gretchen, Pippa [the dog] and his family. The Qigong class members extend heartfelt appreciation for making our community a brighter and kinder place.

As Bram closed every class, we send him this departing sentiment, "Let all of your troubles and worries fly away". Namaste, Bram







Tune-up your Taste Buds ~ Tim Boccia

"Corner Project"

Another great Geyserville restaurant - small, but mighty! Ok, this is a restaurant (brew pub/restaurant) you really want to root for. A vision of two brothers - years of a dream coming true. The first one, a classically trained chef in charge of the food. The other, focusing on the brewing. What's amazing about this place is that they started with a single burner, and soon after, added an outdoor BBQ. The kitchen is probably 6' X 6'. There was buzz early on, which continues.

They source local meat and produce, then they figure out the menu which changes weekly.



My foodie buddy went with me and we had multiple dishes - and yes - we took food home! Ok, we ordered - Farro salad (ancient yummy, chewy grain), mac & cheese, meatloaf sandwich and the cauliflower muffuletta. A muffuletta is the classic Italian sandwich, created by Central Grocery, in the New Orleans French Quarter in 1906. It's a meat, cheese and olive salad sandwich on freshly baked, round Italian bread with sesame seeds. I get one every time I'm in New Orleans.

Corner Projects muffuletta is equally yummy. Roasted cauliflower, olives, caper, herbs and Point Reyes Toma cheese - on charred Dry Creek Bread Co ciabatta. Scrumptious. No food stains if you're careful!

I was salivating for the meatloaf sandwich I tried from long ago - you should be too! Savory and umami goodness. Angus beef and Berkshire pork, pickled red onion, Calabrian aioli, arugula on ciabatta. Sandwiches include side salad or potato salad.

How could you go wrong with mac & cheese? You can't there. Lucious, gooey cheese sauce (parm and Point Reyes Toma), Togarasi spices, sourdough breadcrumbs and chives. The farro salad - an ancient Italian grain with the chew of barley - was amazing. Delicata squash, persimmon, pomegranate, feta, sherry vinaigrette. Tune-up those taste buds!

Cloverdale Christmas Giving Program

Angela Cordova

Help Us Bring Christmas Joy to Local Families

The holiday season is right around the corner, and Michael Velasquez and I are once again raising funds for the Cloverdale Christmas Giving Program through St. Vincent de Paul.

Every year, our amazing sponsors help us provide Christmas gifts and a holiday dinner to families in our community who are facing difficult times.

Every family is carefully vetted and approved for assistance.

You can help by:

- Sponsoring a child or children
- Sending a donation via Venmo or Apple Pay
- Writing a tax-deductible check to St. Vincent de Paul

No contribution is too small!

Together, we can help ensure local families experience the joy and magic of Christmas.

For more information or to become a sponsor, please contact: Angela Cordova, 707-479-8089, call or text

Thank you for your kindness and generosity!

December Gardening Tips from Sonoma County Master Gardeners

Sponsored by Sanz Nursery

- Protect frost-tender species. You can use an anti-desiccant spray such as Cloud Cover or a spun fabric row cover. Covering plants with sheets or lightweight blankets or burlap is another option. If you use plastic sheeting, do not allow plastic to contact foliage.
- Dig up and divide grasses and perennials if the ground is not completely saturated from rain. Make sure that once you've excavated a plant to keep roots moist, set plants in a shaded area and cover roots with damp newspaper while you are working.
- If you have deciduous trees, rake up leaves as they fall. Shred large leaves before composting or run a lawn mower over them. If not shredded, large, moist leaves will mat and decompose very slowly, making a slippery, gooey mass in your compost pile or on beds. You can put them out for recycling as well, but it's best to put their nutrients back into your own garden.
- Dormant spray fruit trees and roses with horticultural oil after they have lost their leaves to control fungal infections and kill overwintering insect eggs.
- Whether using your own shredded leaves or purchased material, make sure your garden is amply mulched for the winter. Mulch will insulate roots and retard weed growth.
- Plant any remaining spring-blooming bulbs. Sow wildflower seeds.
- Clean, oil and store tools such as shovels, hoes, and pruners. Use light machine oil on metal parts to prevent rust.
- Clean out gutters to avoid overflow and direct water to downspouts.
- Winter is the season when rats forage—and damage—ornamental plants. If you have had problems in the past or if your neighbors have noticed rats, put out traps early before rats damage fruit trees, vines, climbing roses and shrubs. Rats favor heavy cover like overgrown ivy. If you have ivy, the best time to prune or remove it is winter when growth slows and soil is somewhat soft. If you wait until spring, ivy quickly grows, and roots are more difficult to remove.
- Plant amaryllis or paperwhites indoors and decorate with evergreen boughs to echo the pleasing atmosphere of an outdoor garden.

DECEMBER EVENTS CALENDAR

Cloverdale Grocery Outlet

Dec. 4 Fri.	**5-8:30pm** Cloverdale Chamber Winter Festival & Tree Lighting
Dec. 5 Sat.	**10am-1:30pm** Alexander Valley Ladies Aid Christmas Market & Bazaar Alexander Valley Hall, 5512 Highway 128
	11am-3pm Cloverdale Wine Walk, downtown Cloverdale
	5-7:30pm Claus for a Cause, photos with Santa & Mrs. Claus, 207 Gamay Dr., Cloverdale
	5:30pm Kiwanis Crab Feed, Citrus Fairgrounds
Dec. 6. Sun.	**3:00pm** Healdsburg Community Band Holiday Raven Performing Arts Theater. 115 North St., Hbg
	Cloverdale Cabaret, "A Very Merry Christmas Spectacular",Cloverdale Performing Arts Center
Dec. 11,12,13	Winnie-The-Pooh Christmas Tail + visit from Santa & Mrs. Claus, Free book giveaway Cloverdale Performing Arts Center
Dec. 12 Sat.	**10am-2pm** Pet Adoption Event I.SEE Optical, 210 N. Cloverdale Blvd.
	12noon-2pm Holiday Tea Cloverdale Senior Center 311 N. Main St.
Dec. 18 & 19	Ballet Folklorico Legado de Mis Alegria Cloverdale Performing Arts Center
Dec. 19 Sat.	**9am** Wreaths Across America Cloverdale Cemetery
Dec. 31 Thurs.	The Big New Year's Eve Concert Bash Cloverdale Performing Arts Center

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Green Thumb Garden Club of Cloverdale

Established in 1959

Grow Your Green Thumb with Us!

Green Thumb Garden Club wishes everyone a wonderful holiday season and a Happy New Year.

We meet the 3rd Wednesday of each month, September thru April, at 1:00 pm. Please come and join us.

For more information, please contact Karen Devine at 707 321-9062

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Cloverdale High School Rotary Interact Club 2026/2027..





A Christmas Letter

As the year draws to a close, we find ourselves living in a tumultuous world and uncertain times.

In my years as Executive Director of the Cloverdale Historical Society, I met many wonderful people who were kind and generous, with strong moral convictions. During this holiday season, one particular memory keeps coming to mind.

I remember Mary Ziegenhagen saying to me once, "Whatever happened to 'There but for the grace of God go I'?" I was wondering the same thing.

It's an old expression, one that Mary and I grew up hearing. Perhaps it isn't heard as often these days. But its meaning is as important today as it ever was. It is a reminder of how much of our lives are shaped by circumstances, the kindness of others, and good fortune we may sometimes take for granted.

For this Christmas, my wish is that we take a moment to think about those words: There but for the grace of God go I.

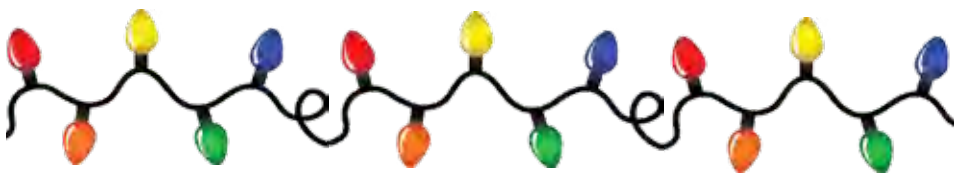
When we see someone whose life has taken a difficult turn, perhaps we can pause for a moment and imagine ourselves in their place.

We all have our struggles, and none of us knows what tomorrow may bring. So much of what we have, and who we have become, is the result not only of our own efforts, but of the people who have helped us along the way.

There but for the grace of God go I. That might have been me. As we celebrate Christmas, be grateful for what you have, for all those who have helped you along the way, and for the opportunities you have to give when you can.

Because in giving, we will find the true peace of this Season.

Elissa Morrash (DRE 01872845 is a licensed Global Advisor with Engel & Völkers Healdsburg and a Cloverdale resident. Contact her for a real estate consultation. Elissamorrash.evrealestate.com (707) 694-8821



New Tech at Cloverdale's Traffic Signals

Will Carter

This year the City of Cloverdale implemented improvements to our two downtown traffic lights. Both projects have now been completed; Tell-tale signs of these improvements are the new, small, white cameras which are now perched facing all four directions of traffic, traffic flow improvements for drivers, and new pedestrian 'buttons' which you don't need to touch.

The buttons are the most familiar improvement, as their form and function are largely the same, and you have likely noticed these improvements before in Cloverdale or elsewhere. In addition to the traditional push button, the new enclosures also have a proximity sensor, allowing pedestrians to simply wave their hand. This became popular during COVID but certainly is a nice improvement for sanitation. Most signals now also have audible announcements of the walk signal direction, allowing visually impaired and easily distracted pedestrians a confirmation of their turn at the intersection.

The second piece of equipment is further out of our eyeline: Small white cameras mounted on the structure of the signals and on nearby streetlights. This type of camera is not meant to monitor the public or to aid in enforcing traffic law but are instead a system for vehicle detection. These cameras detect non-pedestrian road-users at intersections, effectively replacing the familiar sensor loops still visible in the pavement and currently used at our other traffic lights. Those loops use electromagnetic induction to detect the presence of vehicles, which can be inadequate for motorcycles or cyclists and can only detect objects directly above each sensor. A single modern traffic detection camera can monitor all lanes in a given direction, detect smaller road users like cyclists, and even detect road users on their way to the intersection.

While improvements like this rarely get press releases or ribbon-cuttings, they are still a great example of new technology being applied in Cloverdale to improve our comfort and safety. The next time you're walking by the Citrus Fair Dr. or First St. traffic lights, look up to check out the new equipment!

Twenty Minutes Away

John Balletto's story of healing close to home



John Balletto has spent his whole life close to the land — the same four acres in Sebastopol he took over from his father has grown into more than 800 acres of vineyards bearing the Balletto name. So, when a summer campfire left him with a stubborn blister that turned into a 10-inch wound on his leg, what worried him most wasn't the injury itself. It was the timing: harvest was three days away.

"By Thursday I called my doctor, and he sent me to urgent care," he recalls. "The doctor at urgent care told me I was one step away from being admitted to the hospital." By 1 p.m. that same day, he was in a chair at Healdsburg Hospital.

What followed, he says, was six weeks of care that felt anything but rushed. Alanna Wargula, DPM, and her team took over coordinating his other appointments without being asked.

John was back leading his harvest crews within days. For a farmer whose days start at midnight and end midafternoon during picking season, that proximity was the difference between healing and falling behind on a season that doesn't wait.

When John talks about what this kind of care means for the broader community, he keeps coming back to one word: quality. "Knowing that if something happens to your family or friends, when they go to Healdsburg Hospital Wound Care, they're going to get the best care there is, probably in the country. That's a big deal," he says.

Now, as an employer of nearly 90 people, he sees that level of care as something the whole community depends on. "We have to make sure we sustain it," he says, "no matter what."

Learn more about Healdsburg Hospital and make a donation at givetohh.org/donate

Providence
Santa Rosa
Memorial Hospital





Cloverdale Library Community Connection

John Koetzner, Children's Services Librarian

Storytime Guests for the Holidays

The Cloverdale Library is wrapping up the season with a vibrant lineup of all-ages programs. One major highlight is the family Storytime on December 17th. Children's Services Librarian "Mr. John" will team up with current Police Chief Sean Jones and former Chief Chris Parker for a special Dr. Seuss reading. Chief Jones will read the story, Chief Parker will dress as the Grinch, and Mr. John will appear as the Cat-in-the-Hat. The event features giveaways, music, movement, and guaranteed holiday fun for children.

How did this unique collaboration happen? As Chief Jones explained, "This got started because Chris dresses up as the Grinch for the annual Winter Festival, which is happening on Dec. 4th this year. We are also making a Grinch appearance at Jefferson School on Dec. 18th. We were at Plank discussing other opportunities to reach more kids since it is a priority of mine, as it was Chris' when he was the Chief, and Nicole (Cloverdale Library Branch Manager) happened to walk in. So, I guess it all just came together right then. I think it will be a great opportunity to interact with the littles, and they should have a great time. Chris does a fantastic job being the Grinch!"

The library will also host multicultural holiday book displays alongside plenty of seasonal activities. Adults can join the Cloverdale Book Club or try Creative Bug watercolor painting. Teens can check out International Yums and Bedazzle This!, while younger kids can enjoy Spanish Music and Movement and regular Family Storytimes.





Happy Holidays

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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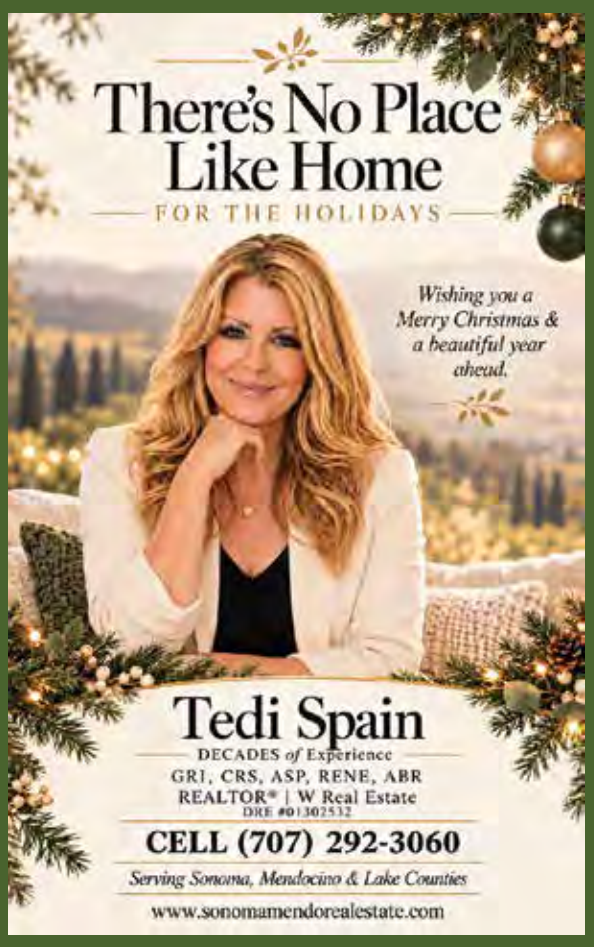
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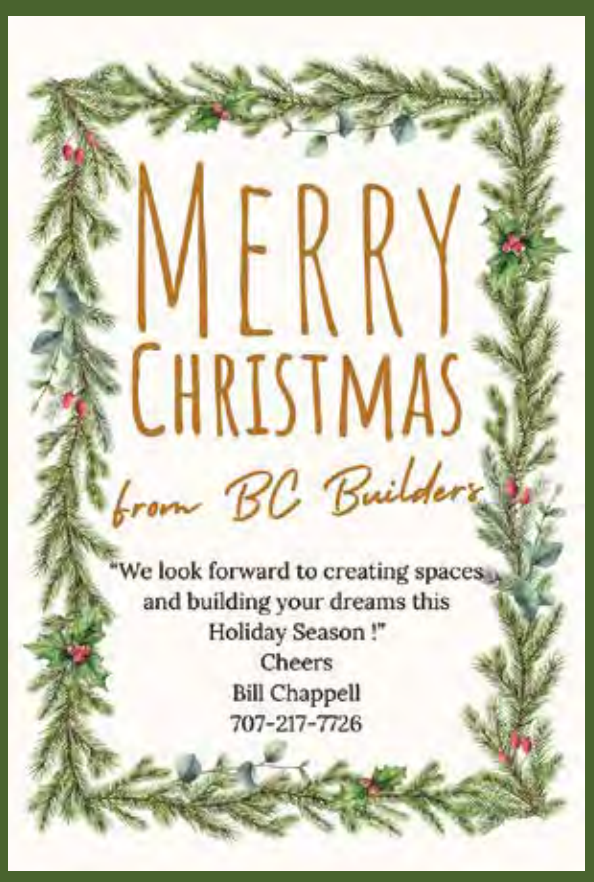
With Sincere Gratitude
The All-Green Team

The staff and board from the Senior Center wish you much joy, merriment, and good times during this holiday season.



Linda Walker, Melanie Hall, Marcelino Figueroa, Eleanore Webster, Trish Chappell, Dana Johnson, Anthony Ramirez, and Bert Bernstein.
Not pictured: Frank McAtee, Shawna Masur, and Ken Allen







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Celebrating the Life of Alice

June 10, 1946 – October 25, 2026



Alice Flegal Romain passed away peacefully on October 25, following a long and courageous battle with Alzheimer's disease.

Born in Oakland, California, to Carl and Elizabeth Flegal, Alice grew up in Fremont and graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in History. She dedicated 36 years to teaching elementary school, primarily in Cloverdale, where she inspired generations of students. She especially loved teaching children to read and took great pride in helping young minds discover the joy of learning.

Alice called Cloverdale home for more than 54 years, building a life rich with family, community, and wonderful friendships. She treasured the friends she made along the way, sharing countless memories, laughter, and adventures.

Beyond the classroom, Alice had a love of the outdoors and adventure. Whether hiking among the redwoods, camping in Yosemite, canoeing the Russian River, working in her garden or traveling with family and friends, she embraced life's experiences with curiosity and enthusiasm. Her appreciation for the beauty around her also manifested in her love for painting, finding joy in creativity and expressing her appreciation for the world around her.

Above all, Alice cherished her family and friends. She shared 55 years of love and companionship with her husband, Jim Romain, building a beautiful life filled with adventures, laughter, and treasured memories. She especially delighted in her grandchildren, never hesitating to get down on the floor to play, laugh, and share in their world.

Alice leaves behind her loving husband, two daughters, Angelina and Sara, seven beloved grandchildren, her sister and brother, and her lifelong friends.

Though Alzheimer's slowly took away many things, it never diminished the love surrounding her. Alice will be remembered for her warmth, adventurous spirit and the lasting impact she made on everyone fortunate enough to know her.

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Walt & Kelley Spain reading ***Cloverdale Connect*** *while in Murfreesboro, Tennessee at The Stones River National Battlefield site.*



Roots of Rock KOWSfm.com ~ M.J. Girard

"All is calm, all is bright" A line from the World's favorite Christmas carol, one of many that we will be hearing this December. It's amazing how during the holidays we are able to set aside our differences and celebrate the joys of our heritage, if only we could enshrine these feelings of love and friendship every day of the year, here at home and worldwide, and work together for our collective benefit. Well, I'm sure that as we continue our journey together, Peace and Harmony will become paramount, after all. No one has all the answers and those of us who appreciate that fact truly understand that we are all human after all!

This holiday season is a beautiful time to celebrate our family, friends and neighbors, one of the greatest gifts is a simple smile, given from our hearts and shared with whomever we meet.

"Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round young Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from Heavens afar
Heavenly hosts sing "Hallelujah"
Christ the Savior is born
Christ the Savior is born"

Happy Holidays from your friends at KOWS radio!

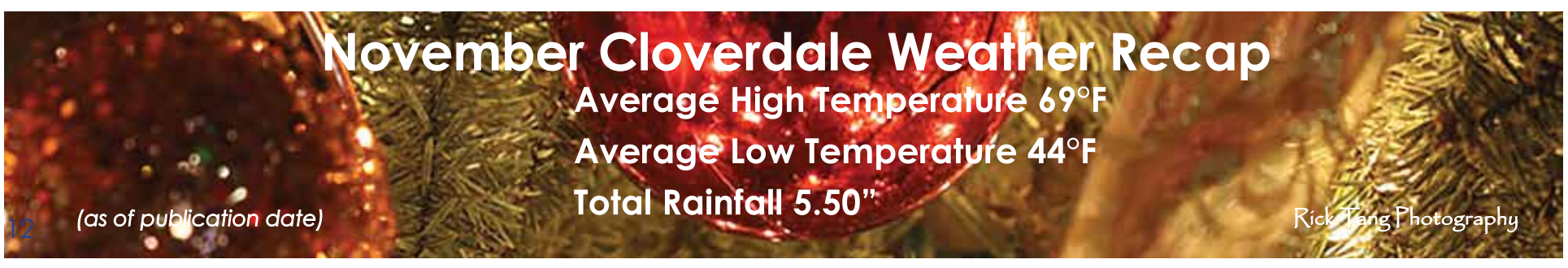
Congratulations Tate's Daniel Love



Daniel Love first joined Cloverdale Automotive & Tires in 2022 as an intern from Cloverdale High School. What started as an opportunity to learn turned into something much bigger, thanks to hands-on experience, the mentorship of Logan Tate, the support of his family, and passion for all things automotive. Daniel headed to Laramie, Wyoming, to attend WyoTech, where he graduated with the Class of 2025, earning an Associate degree in Automotive Technology and Management.

WyoTech is a top automotive school. Not only in the hands-on side of the automotive world, but the business side as well. Students earning an associate degree are required to wear a dress shirt and dress pants during the business portion of their program. A uniform is required for the hands-on portion.

Daniel returned to California and joined Tate's Tire Pros & Auto Service as a full-time automotive technician.



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First Phase of Health and Wellness Center

On November 9, community members gathered at the new Washington Street site to celebrate the official groundbreaking of the street's extension, the first step toward construction of the new Alexander Valley Health and Wellness Center.



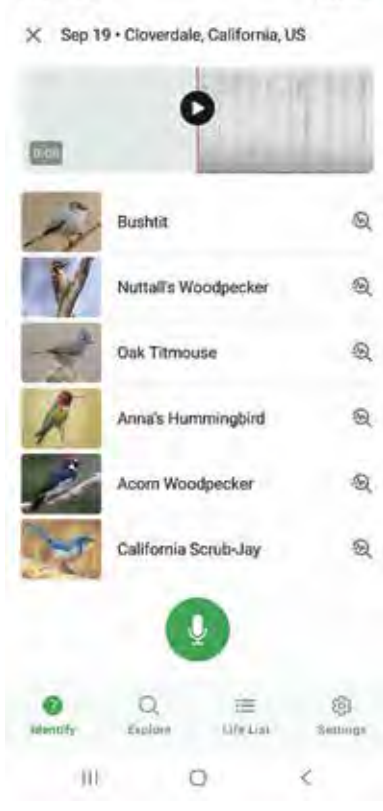
The event marks the ceremonial kickoff of this major community project led by Alexander Valley Healthcare (AVH) in close partnership with the City of Cloverdale and the Cloverdale Unified School District.

The first phase of construction, led by Wright Contracting, will extend Washington Street through to Healdsburg Avenue. It adds dedicated sidewalks, improved storm drainage, and safer access routes for students and families traveling to and from Washington School. This extension lays essential site infrastructure for AVH's future Health and Wellness Center. While full funding is still underway for the new center, vertical building construction is expected to begin in spring 2027, with completion planned for 2029. The center will bring expanded primary care, dental, behavioral health, urgent care, and other much-needed health services to Cloverdale.

AVH Chief Executive Officer Debbie Howell, Cloverdale Vice Mayor Todd Lands, CUSD Superintendent Glen Senestraro, AVH Board Chair Erika Spencer-Singson, and Wright Contracting Project Superintendent Jesse Smart then dug in with ceremonial shovels to officially break ground. Past and present AVH board members and staff soon joined them at Howell's invitation, honoring their years of dedication to the health center's mission.

For more information about progress on the future Health and Wellness Center, visit [alexandervalleyhealthcare.org]

The Magic of Merlin



Ten million. It's an astronomical number. And yet that is exactly what Merlin, the free bird ID app developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, has accomplished since launching in 2014.

The app launched in 2014 with the ability to ID 285 species—just the most common backyard birds in North America—using the five-question rubric developed with the photo ID capabilities launched two years later. In 2015, Drew Weber joined the team to broaden Merlin's geographic footprint. Drew is now the project manager on the Merlin team, and has helped expand Merlin to include 11,000 species, nearly every known bird in the world. When he comes through customs after an international birding trip, the agents get excited when he tells them what he does for a living. "We love Merlin," they say.

With Merlin, more than 10 million people are tuning into the world around them. Already there are signs that the next generation of birders is more conservation-minded. Less focused on personal lists, today's birders see birds as neighbors. They're asking questions about what birds need to thrive and what they can do to help.

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CUSD News

Glen Senestraro

As the autumn air gives way to December chill, energy across the Cloverdale Unified School District remains warm, vibrant, and productive. The closing weeks of the fall semester have brought a wave of community generosity, hands-on learning achievements, and festive preparations across our neighborhood schools. From literacy milestones in the primary grades to real-world career planning for our high schoolers, Cloverdale students and educators continue to make our town proud.

Before diving into campus highlights, the entire CUSD family extends a warm congratulations to Alexander Valley Healthcare on their recent groundbreaking ceremony for the new downtown Health & Wellness Center. Decades in the making, this milestone project marks an incredible leap forward for accessible healthcare, dental services, and pediatric wellness for our local children and families. When community infrastructure thrives, our students thrive right along with it.

Generosity and foundational learning went hand-in-hand at Jefferson this month. Students kicked off their annual winter food and book drive for local families while celebrating mid-year reading milestones across primary classrooms. Hands-on STEM lessons also connected students directly to nature, exploring how local Sonoma County flora and fauna adapt to cooler weather.

Washington Middle School students paired academic challenge with community service this December. The WMS Student Council led a successful campus-wide holiday toy and warm clothing drive, while science classes wrapped up their popular structural bridge-engineering challenge. On the courts, the boys' and girls' basketball teams tipped off league play with great sportsmanship and spirited home-crowd support.

CHS Eagle pride soared as fall wrapped up, spotlighting both vocational skills and athletics. Career Technical Education (CTE) culinary arts and ag students collaborated on farm-to-table seasonal showcases, while performing arts groups tuned up for winter performances. On the court and mat, winter sports rosters are off to an energized start.

Personalized success and future readiness took center stage at JEH. Multiple students celebrated key credit-recovery milestones to stay on pace for graduation. The campus also hosted guest speakers from regional Sonoma County trade programs and community colleges, giving students direct insight into apprenticeship pathways and post-secondary opportunities.



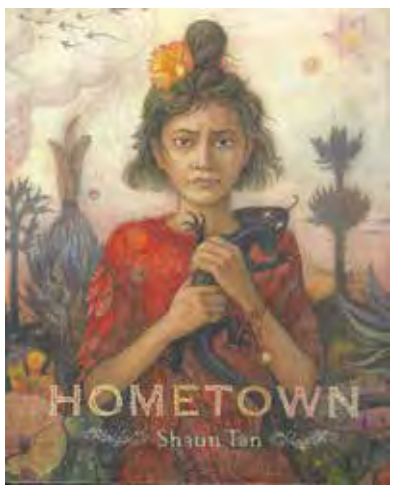
Off the Shelf

Susan Erkel Ryan

Hometown by Shaun Tan

Ages 9-102, 136 pages, graphic novel

Do you have a child in your life, anywhere from age 9 to 102, who loves clever verse, humor, and gorgeous illustrations of weirdly charming monsters and alien landscapes? Then have I got a book for you!



Hometown by Shaun Tan is hot off the press. This stunning graphic novel pulls you in from the very first page and lifts you gently into a tale of family and belonging. As you turn each page, you tumble through the daily life of a young girl and discover one bizarre graphic marvel after another. Her life, her family, and her home are completely different from ours, though to her, they are simply normal. She never questions her place in this world until a stranger arrives, a boy from space who, unlike everyone else she knows, looks just like her. He has come to take her back to what he calls her "real" home. Will she go? At its core, this is a story about strangeness, love, community, tradition, and our right to decide what home truly means to us.

Hometown is a wonderful gift for that special someone in your life. It is published by Levine Querido, www.levinequerido.com, founded in 2019 by one of my personal heroes in the publishing world, the marvelous, kind, and extraordinarily talented Arthur Levine. Publishing around 30 brilliant books a year, they champion underrepresented voices in children's literature. Alongside my local bookstore, it is the very first place I turn when looking for unforgettable books for the young readers in my life. And ***Hometown*** is truly unforgettable.

Happy Holidays, Happy Reading, and Best Wishes for the New Year - Susan



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City Council Report

Eleanore Webster

City Council dealt with several issues the last couple of months. There were a series of special meetings. For all these meetings, you can find the agenda on the City website and you can view the videos as they become available. On **October 21**, Council held a special meeting to determine whether to censure Councilmember Morgenstern for violating the Governance Manual. The options were to dismiss the matter, admonish the Councilmember's behavior, issue a warning not to engage in identified conduct, or to censure the Councilmember (officially reprimanding her, suspending her from City sponsored attendance at meetings, and removal of other privileges). Councilmember Morgenstern made a brief statement about the berating and bullying she feels she has received from some City staff members and some City Council members. The public then made comments about Councilmember Morgenstern, and about the behavior of the entire City Council. The Mayor made a motion that a warning be issued rather than censure. That motion passed.

On October 28: City Council held a regular meeting. They considered Spanish Language interpretation of City Council meetings and accepted the proposal to have a local interpreter provide these services. They then held a Q&A on the Esmeralda Project Development Agreement and Specific Plan. Questions were submitted in advance. Council reminded concerned citizens that it retains authority to review each development stage and the process includes environmental testing.

On November 4 Council held a special meeting. They first considered an update on the Six Acres Water Company consolidation project. Six Acres is a small water company consisting of about 22 homes south of Lile Lane immediately outside of the City of Cloverdale. This group wants to hook up to the City water system.

Council then moved to the next Q&A session on Esmeralda Project's EIR Addendum. Esmeralda has submitted a request for a City review of an EIR Addendum. Esmeralda representatives confirmed that the site has pollution and they have never disputed this. The process includes testing for contamination and the City has the ability to deal with the findings. Council voted to proceed after hearing public comment.

On November 11, City Council recognized the veterans of Cloverdale in National Veterans & Military Families Month. Veterans Memorial Building Rep Tom Waller was present to receive the recognition. Native American Heritage Month was also proclaimed; Angela Cordova was present to receive recognition and make comments. Public comments followed, including comments about a pending data center being considered near the Geothermal vents across the hill from Cloverdale. Council members mentioned that they are paying attention to this potential.

City Council waived the second reading of, and adopted, an Ordinance approving an Amendment and Development Agreement for the Esmeralda Development. See Agenda for Ordinances and Resolutions. The proposal includes a revised mitigation monitoring and reporting program. See agenda and video for details on the discussion.

Proactive Patrol Recovers Stolen Property

While conducting proactive patrols along the railroad tracks near the Cloverdale Cemetery, Cloverdale Police Officers located a homeless encampment.

During their patrol, officers discovered a redwood slab table matching the description of a table recently reported stolen from the Cloverdale Senior Center.

Officers were able to recover the table and return it to the Senior Center, where it belongs. Criminal charges related to the theft are pending.

This is another example of how proactive policing helps recover stolen property, protect community resources, and hold those responsible for criminal activity accountable.

The Cloverdale Police Department remains committed to keeping our community safe and protecting the property of our residents and local organizations.



Sharon (Sheri) Saruk



Sheri was born on 1/19/1945 in Limon, Colorado and passed away on 9/26/26 at home in Cloverdale, California with her sister by her side. There is a line in the Cat Stevens song "Oh Very Young" that says, "You're only dancing on this earth for a short while". Sheri definitely danced in so many ways, and we believe her soul is still dancing. You may remember seeing her dance with her sister every week at Friday Night Live. There will be a celebration of life planned for a future date. For full-length obituary, visit online at srmel.com.

Bolo: The Grinch Has Been Spotted!

Cloverdale, a familiar green troublemaker is back on our radar! Cloverdale police officers have confirmed sightings around town, and it looks like he's planning his next moves.

Mark your calendars! We've received some reliable intel on his upcoming whereabouts, and you won't want to miss the chance to catch him in action:



Friday, December 4th at the Winter Festival.

Thursday, December 17th - Family Story Time at Cloverdale Library, where our very own Chief Jones will be reading ***How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*** Rumor has it, a certain fuzzy green suspect may be making a special appearance.

Friday, December 18th - We've received a credible tip that the Grinch will be causing some holiday mischief at Jefferson School.



Holding the latest Asti Tour de Vine logo between them is past Rotary Club President Kevin Kostoff and current Cloverdale High School Rotary Interact Club President Maxine Lamaster, both happily smiling as Kevin stopped by the club's meeting to present them with a substantial donation thanking the group for their "Service above Self" efforts in making the Asti Tour de Vine the Rotary Club's most successful fundraiser ever.

Rotary's "Service Above Self"



Exemplifying Rotary's 100 years of service to Cloverdale, big smiles were all around as past Rotary President Kevin Kostoff handed the Lions Club Mark Silva a substantial donation check for the Lions Club's efforts in helping with the Asti Tour de Vine, the Rotary Club's major fundraiser.

Because of Rotary, over $30,000 was donated to the local community. Recipients not only included the Lions, but the Historical Society, Green Thumb Garden Club, Cloverdale Educational Foundation, Geyserville Education Foundation, Cloverdale Volleyball, Cloverdale Ambulance, Cloverdale High School Interact Club, The Amaturo Radio Sonoma County Club, The Cloverdale Boosters, and many more.

This is Rotary's way of thanking the community for their amazing support, and exemplifying Rotary's creedo of "Service above Self."

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Spanish for City Council Meetings

Andes Marquez

Great news for Cloverdale - starting January 2027, Cloverdale City Council meetings will have live Spanish interpretation. The ECO Group (Equity Community Organization), spent years meeting, learning how local government works, and then came to a City Council meeting this summer to tell us what they needed in their own words.

Thank you to Amy Ramirez and the Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County, and to every member of the ECO Group who kept showing up month after month. That persistence is what turned an idea into a contract. Welcome also to Manny Gonzalez, who will be our interpreter. Many of you already know him.

En Español:
Buenas noticias para Cloverdale en el Press Democrat esta mañana. A partir de enero, las reuniones del Concejo Municipal contarán con interpretación en vivo al español. Este es el grupo que lo hizo posible. No empezó en el Concejo. Empezó con ellos, el Grupo ECO (Equity Community Organization), que durante años se reunieron, aprendieron cómo funciona el gobierno local, y este verano llegaron a una reunión del Concejo Municipal para decirnos lo que necesitaban con sus propias palabras.

Gracias an Amy Ramirez y a la Healthcare Foundation of Northern Sonoma County, y a cada miembro del Grupo ECO que siguió presentándose mes tras mes. Esa constancia fue lo que convirtió una idea en un contrato. Bienvenido también a Manny Gonzalez, quien será nuestro intérprete. Muchos de ustedes ya lo conocen.

TW Flooring ~ Michele Armanino

When Tony Wachholz got a call from a frantic customer whose fish tank exploded, flooding the living room floor, Tony was there on the double! " I had to suction the water, rip up the floors and get a fan system going before we could install new flooring," says Wachholz, owner of TW Flooring. "Flooding from washers, refrigerators, icemakers and toilets can ruin your flooring if not caught right away," he says. "Fire sprinklers can randomly go off, too!"

Wachholz, who first came to Cloverdale from Wisconsin in 1971, has been self-employed for the last ten years. As an independent installer, he installs vinyl planks, engineered wood, carpet, and LVP (luxury vinyl planks). It's a family business, and his daughter Jordan works with him. "Jordan's been watching me install floors since she was three years old! I'd pick her up from school and she'd come right along with me," says Wachholz chuckling. "She's an incredible worker and very adept at construction." Wachholz's partner, Amy Roden, keeps the tech part of the business running smoothly.

"I really like living in this small town. I eat local and enjoy running into people I know," Wachholz says. The best part, he notes, is transforming customers' homes - much to their amazement!



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June Drake
Karma Dog Construction
Kathy Herman & Gary Giovannoni
Krista Rector
Laurie Kneeland
Lawrence Lossing
Lewis Nashner & Ann Flores
Louise Young
Lynn Caruso
Marilyn Heinen
Meghan Sweeney
Melanie Hall
Michael Sasso
Michele Armanino
Michelle Dalsing
Nancy Lloyd
Neva Goodman
Patrick & Irene Dodd
Rachel & Scott Allred
Randy & Erica Lane
Richard & Brooke Greene
Richard Crane
Robert & Virginia Bauer
Shelli Byers
Shirley Davis
Steve Kawa & Dan Henkle
Susan Connolly & Jason Connolly Foote
Susan Ryan
Thana Brunges
Teresa & Don Lawson
Timothy Lucas

SUPER CHAMPIONS

Aldo Raicich & Jeff
Allen Roberts
Brett Pitts
C.D. Grant & Eric Neel
Carolyn Adkins
Carolyn Ramos
Cloverdale Edward Jones
Dan Henkle & Stephen Kawa
Dan Richert
David & Beverly Mc Chesney
David & Candace Delgardo
David Karp & John Postma
Debbi & Frank Davis
Deborah & Patrick Nurisso
Deborah Hall
Denis Thoms
Dennis & Catharine Davis
Dianne Vernon
Dobie C Edmunds
Don & Dee Green
Donna Arnstein
Douglas Broberg
Earle & Susie Cummings
Edwin & Chrislyn Bowen
Francesca Giacalone
Fred & Cynthia Karlen
Gail Collins
Gaudelia D. Newhart
Gene & Carolyn Marcinkowski
Gene & Polly Lile
Geoffrey & Nancy Dalwin
George & Svetlana Artemoff
Geraldine G Burgess
Jan & Ken Screechfield
Janet & Brad Horrall
Jerry & Linda Angeli
Jill Henry
John Pearson & Tammy Azcarate
Joseph & Karen Devine
Joseph Wiedman
Josephine Saylor
Joy Camilli
Joyce Sartori
Kate Greene
Kathy Herman & Gary Giovannoni
Kiwanis Club
Linda Bennett & Eric Marquez
Linda Elliott
Lois & Preston Smith
Lucy Ogden
MR Wallace
Maria Erickson
Marilyn A Michelon
Mark Thayer & Jean Herschede
Marne Dupere
Mary Jo Winter
Melissa & Bill Cox
Michael & Dorina Olson
Mike Barnett
Mildred & Philip Thomas
Nancy Dalwin
Neena Hanchett
Neva Goodman
Pat & Cindi Buell
Paul Cowden & Chuck Levine
Paul & Rebecca Van Lith
Ray & Ann Smith
Richard & Michele Stratton
Richard Price
Ricky Serbin
Robert Maddock & Marianne Rickards
Robert Redner
Robert Scott Tim McDonald
Ron & Jane Pavelka
Rotary Club of Cloverdale
Sam & Shelley Witten
Sandra Lydy
Sara Hagen
Scott & Elaine Carlson
Sheila Kostof
Simon Cameron
Star Carpenter f
Stephen & Dianne Oliver
Susan & Phil Brooks
Susan Lile
Suzy & Jeffrey Palmer
Sydney Sciaini
Teal Johnson
Ted & Betty Dondanville
Thomas & Sharon Koch
Thomas & Susan Hrutky
Timothy & Linda Clougherty
Valerie Chestovich
Vicky Groom
Virginia & Dan Greenwald
William Piazza
William & Susan Walters
William Wagy
Wyatt Shook



Sonoma County Trading Company Moving to New Location

Beginning early January, Sonoma County Trading Company will be sharing space with I.SEE.Optical, moving to the bustling center of town. In their new space SoCo will continue to carry bulk refills & earth-friendly products, baby & kid's items, and a selection of locally made goods.

Their current location will remain open until Christmas so please plan to stop in for perfect holiday gifts. You'll find great gift ideas as they continue to receive shipments of eco-friendly products that are always great for gifting.

It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas At DogGonit

Santa Paws has come early this year, and DogGonit has some PAW-some new holiday goodies for your furry friends!

Whether you're looking to spoil your pets or stuff their stockings, DogGonit has something special for everyone!

Festive toys & plushies
Delicious holiday treats & biscuits
Tasty chews
Adorable holiday accessories
Stocking stuffers & more!

Make this holiday season extra special for your four-legged family members! Stop by DogGonIt and check out their new holiday arrivals! Grab your favorites before they're gone!

Shop local, spread holiday cheer, and spoil those paws!
115 N. Cloverdale Blvd., 707-483-7470

On the Wild Side

Jennifer Molidor

Deep within the damp, moss-carpeted redwood canyons of Sonoma County, the Pacific banana slug glides across the forest floor like a slow-moving drip of slimy liquid sun. When the autumn rains return to the Russian River valley and the coastal ridges, these bright forest dwellers emerge in abundance, fully alive in the damp coolness. This humble gastropod is a brilliant stroke of gold against dark, decaying duff.



Watching a banana slug move is to witness time slow to a geological crawl, leaving behind a shimmering, silvery ribbon of mucus. This slime is a moisture-locking armor that lets it breathe through its skin and traverse terrain of twigs and sharp pine needles. It is so slippery that predators hate eating them, yet slugs can use a string of it to climb down from high redwood branches, like a bungee cord, up to 6 to 10 inches long.

Banana slugs are the cleanup crew of the redwoods. They are detritivores, meaning they eat dead and decaying material. They taste with their eyes and have tentacles on their heads to smell their surroundings. They have thousands of microscopic teeth and a rough, tongue-like organ they use to shred their food.

They are the forest's quiet alchemist, consuming fallen leaves and wild mushrooms, turning debris into the rich, fertile soil that feeds the roots of the towering trees above. They also help clean the forest floor by eating other animals' droppings. They scrape lichen and moss off rocks and tree trunks using their thousands of tiny teeth. So even though I don't love seeing them myself, I'm "lichen" what they do for our ecosystems!

Little Free Food Pantry

Open 24/7 ~ On the porch at 122 N. Main St.

T**Generously supported in part by Grocery Outlet**



Cloverdale Senior Multipurpose Center

Melanie Hall

I would like to extend sincere appreciation to the Cloverdale Lions Club for their outstanding efforts with the **Pasta Fundraiser** in October. Members shopped, cooked, packed, and cleaned up over two days, and the entire proceeds benefited the Senior Center. We also thank **Dahlia and Sage** and ***Cloverdale Connect*** for their generous donations of ingredients and containers. These acts of service reflect what makes Cloverdale special: a small town that cares for one another and goes out of its way to support those in need. As the holiday season approaches, I am deeply grateful for our community.

The **Holiday Tea** will be held on December 12 from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., and we hope you will join us. Entertainment will be provided by the SRJC Music Collective, which includes musicians and singers from the voice and guitar classes at Santa Rosa Junior College. During the hour-long program, they will perform Christmas and other seasonal songs, featuring an a cappella group and three to four individual musicians and singer-musicians.

This time of year can be difficult for those who have lost a loved one. If you or someone you know has experienced a recent loss, we will begin an eight-week **Grief Support Group** in January. The group will be facilitated by Betty Durso, a long-time hospice volunteer, and will meet weekly on Tuesday mornings from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., beginning January 5.

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors, I wish you a healthy, joyous holiday season and many blessings in the New Year. We are thankful for you.

The Christmas Flood of 1955

Mary Jo Winter

During the last two weeks of December 1955 and into the first part of January 1956, several western states were subjected to unprecedented flooding, with Cloverdale and the surrounding Russian River basin experiencing one of the most devastating natural disasters in its history.

Fueled by a massive atmospheric river, often called a "Pineapple Express," the area was inundated with torrential rains. Between December 13 and 28th, a total of 20.87 inches fell in Cloverdale.

Culminating on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the storms submerged over 30,000 acres of land in Sonoma County, washing out or blocking transportation routes, including large portions of Highway 101, effectively isolating Cloverdale by cutting it off from surrounding towns.

The Northwestern Pacific Railroad, which ran parallel to the flood plain from Healdsburg to Ukiah, was out of operation for two weeks due to washed out tracks in several locations.

Fortunately, Cloverdale's levees held along the Russian River, although water was brushing against the crest of the embankments. The lower-lying sections of town, including areas of McCray Road, were inundated with water and thick mud, destroying or tilting homes and businesses.

Geysers Road was closed for a while due to a number of serious slides and the road being covered with sink holes. Cherry Creek Road was closed and two bridges near the upper end were washed away.

Cloverdale High School had half the gym floor under water and one elementary school reported outside wiring damage. The Cloverdale Laundromat did a brisk business, with many stopping in to dry out wet baby clothes.

As evidence of Cloverdale's resiliency, the Cloverdale Grange took first place honors for their 1956 Citrus Fair Feature Exhibit. Entitled, "Flood Disaster, Dec. 1955," it depicted a ranch house and barn submerged in flood waters with a helicopter hovering over to rescue the flood victims.

BOLT FABRIC + HOME

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219 North Cloverdale Blvd.
Cloverdale, CA 95425

boltcloverdale.com

707-894-2658



Cloverdale FFA Report

Maysin Cavness

Last month, our chapter attended Sectional Leadership Night in Healdsburg, where members had the opportunity to meet other FFA members, participate in workshops, and strengthen their leadership skills.

We also held a special Veteran's Day meeting where students learned how to properly fold the American flag and took time to write letters to veterans to show their appreciation for their service. It was a great opportunity to learn about the importance of honoring those who have served our country as we welcomed Donna Cambra as our guest speaker.



Thank you to everyone in our community who came out to support our Tri-Tip fundraiser! Our sponsors included Dahlia and Sage, Lions Club on the BBQ, Lance Villa who made the beans, and Citrus Fair donated the facilities. Be sure to stay tuned for our upcoming Chicken Q on March 3rd.

As we head into the new year, our chapter is getting back into the swing of things with our speaking competitions! These competitions give members the opportunity to build their skills, gain confidence, and learn more about agriculture. These contests range from debate, to job interview, to Spanish speaking. We also offer teams like floral design, veterinary science, and agriculture mechanics. We are excited to see our members prepare, compete, and represent Cloverdale FFA.

We hope everyone has a happy holiday season! We look forward to seeing everyone in the new year!



Cooking with David Maciel

Sponsored by Ray's Food Place

The holidays are in full swing in December which brings family gatherings and parties. I always try to find a fun festive appetizer to share or bring to a party. Italian crostini, bruschetta's cousin, are always a crowd pleaser.

This recipe is the perfect balance of creamy sweet and savory goodness all in one bite. Serving size 12 crostini. You can easily double or triple this recipe.

Goat Parmesan Cheese Fig and Prosciutto Crostini

Ingredients:

- 1 French sour dough baguette
- 2 Tbs extra virgin olive oil, or as needed
- Fine ground sea salt, to taste
- 8 oz goat cheese, at room temperature
- 8 oz block Parmigiano Reggiano cheese
- ½ cup fig spread or jam, spread is slightly less sweet than jam
- 6 slices prosciutto, sliced in half, lengthwise
- Fresh basil leaves or microgreens, as needed
- Balsamic glaze, to drizzle

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 375° F degrees.
- Slice twelve ½-inch slices from the baguette, on the diagonal. Place them on a baking sheet, brush them with the olive oil, and sprinkle a little salt on each slice. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until lightly golden and crisped to your liking. Remove from the oven and let them rest until cool enough to handle.
- Spread some goat cheese on each crostini, layer thin slice of parmigiana, then top with about 2 teaspoons of fig spread. Drape the prosciutto slices on top of each crostini and top each one with basil leaves or a small amount of microgreens and a light drizzle of balsamic glaze.
- Transfer the crostini to a platter for serving.

Let's Travel

Craig Clark

Cruising the Great Lakes: North America's Inland Oceans

The Great Lakes are emerging as one of North America's most intriguing cruise destinations, offering travelers the chance to explore vast waterways, historic communities and spectacular wilderness without leaving the continent.

Often called North America's "inland oceans," the five Great Lakes are attracting a growing number of small-ship cruises. In 2026, the region is expected to see nearly 175,000 passenger visits, about 15 percent more than the previous year.

Unlike the mega-ships sailing the Caribbean, Great Lakes vessels typically carry fewer than 400 passengers. The fleet includes Viking, Ponant, Hapag-Lloyd, Victory Cruise Lines, Pearl Seas Cruises and other operators, creating a diverse range of itineraries and onboard experiences.

One of the biggest surprises for first-time visitors is the sheer scale of the lakes. From the deck, passengers can sometimes look toward the horizon and see no land at all. Yet beyond the water are remarkably varied destinations—from cosmopolitan Toronto and historic Mackinac Island to the rugged, largely undeveloped shoreline of Lake Superior.

The region also offers a rich cultural experience. Travelers can explore Indigenous and First Nations history, discover the multicultural character of Canadian cities and visit communities that have long been shaped by the lakes and their waterways. Onboard enrichment programs add another dimension, with lectures covering everything from regional history to the dramatic wartime stories of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

For travelers who have already explored traditional cruise destinations, the Great Lakes provide something distinctly different: intimate ships, uncrowded ports, fascinating history and extraordinary scenery.

With new itineraries and ports continuing to develop, Great Lakes cruising is becoming more than an alternative to ocean cruising—it is a destination in its own right.