

THE SANTA MONICA STAR

Also covering
The Greater
Westside

Volume XXV Number 2

Connecting You With Your Community

February 2026

Congratulations to Our Newlyweds!



Julia and Richard Lombari, longtime Pacific Palisades residents



Montana Avenue business owners Laura Moeller Aicklen and Ryan Aicklen

When Richard Lombari returned to California from Miami in 2019, it was for one reason that mattered most – family. He wanted to be close to his two adult daughters and become a part of a community that had always felt like home. Shortly after COVID hit, he was hired to lead a real estate company in the South Bay, a role that allowed him to stabilize a business while also beginning to rebuild his own sense of community connection.

By 2023, Richard felt drawn back to direct sales in the Santa Monica area, and to deeper community involvement. He gravitated toward non-profit work and joined the Rotary Club of Santa Monica,

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By Gigi Appelbaum-Schwartz Laura Moeller Aicklen and Ryan Aicklen have long bonded over a shared love of coffee and a desire to nurture warm, welcoming environments: their passion traces its roots back to the very beginnings of their relationship.

After meeting for the first time at West Hollywood’s Roger Room, a small, atmospheric cocktail bar known for its understated, intimate vibe, the couple felt an instant connection, and from there, their worlds blended seamlessly.

Though Laura, born in Germany, grew up in the Palisades and Brentwood, and Ryan left his birthplace of Camarillo to live in a variety of cities across the U.S.,

(Continued on Page 8)

Pacific Palisades: Home is Where Community Lives

By Richard Lombari

One year after the Palisades Fire changed Pacific Palisades forever, “coming home” no longer has a single meaning. For some families, it means unlocking their front door again. For others, it means a weekly drive back to familiar streets, schools, and gathering places. And for many, it remains a future hope – delayed not by desire, but by circumstance.

We often say that home is where the heart is. But in the Palisades today, a deeper truth has emerged. Home is where community lives. And, long before walls are rebuilt, community has been holding this place together.

The fire altered not only the physical landscape, but the emotional geography of the Palisades. Streets that once moved with predictable rhythm – school drop-offs, evening walks, weekend errands – now feel quieter, suspended between what was and what will be.



Community members at an event by the American Legion members.

Walk through the Palisades Village today – both north and south of Sunset Boulevard – and the absence is unmistakable. Very few original homes are still standing. In their place are empty lots, fenced parcels, and streets that

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A History of Valentine’s Day

By Julia Abbott

While we all adore the gifts from friends, family, and lovers, very few people know about the actual history of Valentine’s Day. The holiday comes from the Roman festival of Lupercalia, once held in mid-February.

The festival, which celebrated the coming of Spring, was basically a giant matchmaking party. At the end of the fifth century, it was not Christian enough for Pope Gelasius I, who replaced Lupercalia with St. Valentine’s Day.

It came to be celebrated as a day of love around the 14th century. However, as there are several Christian martyrs named Valentine, the day may have taken its name from any number of them. This includes a priest who was martyred about 270 CE by the emperor Claudius II Gothicus. This priest signed a letter “from your Valentine” to his jailer’s daughter, whom he befriended



Sending Valentines to family and friends has been a longtime tradition.

after healing her from blindness.

Another possible option is St. Valentine of Terni, a bishop, although the two Valentines may be one and the same. See the confusion?

Another theory is that St. Valentine defied the Emperor’s edicts and secretly married couples to save husbands who would be sent to war, and it is for this reason that this day is associated

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Roth’s Market was a popular place to shop in the Pico Neighborhood. Above, customers wait for the grand opening of the new market.

Discovering How Everyday Cooking Helped Shape Santa Monica’s Cultural Identity

The Santa Monica History Museum has recently opened *Food & Family: African American and Intercultural Traditions in Santa Monica*. It is an exhibition that highlights how everyday cooking and shared meals helped shape Santa Monica’s cultural identity throughout the 20th century.

Food & Family traces the evolution of African American and intercultural food traditions in Southern California – particularly the influence of the Great Migration and global immigration on the region’s culinary landscape.

Through photographs, cookbooks, oral histories, utensils, and rare archival materials from the Quinn Research Center (QRC) and the Museum’s own collection, the exhibition shows how food has served as a powerful connector across neighborhoods, generations, and cultures according to Lisa Dannenbaum, Museum staff.

Presented in the Museum’s Quinn Gallery, the exhibition celebrates the ingenuity of home cooks whose traditions continue to influence the city’s diverse food culture today.

“This exhibition reminds us that food unites people from all walks of life,” said Carolyn Edwards, co-founder of the Quinn Research Center. “Food not only provides nourishment, but can be a bridge

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What's Happening on the Westside

• **February 1-28 - Black History Month Reading Challenge** - Visit smpl.beanstack.org to register. Explore and honor the rich history, culture, and achievements of Black men and women through books, featuring titles receiving a Coretta Scott King Book Award. These awards are given to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults who demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values. Log your reading and activities to earn badges and entry into a bookpack drawing. For ages 12-17.

• **Friday, February 6 - For youth and families, the Santa Monica Library will host "Read with**

Roger" - at the Ocean Park Branch. The program allows children ages five to 11 to practice reading aloud alongside Roger, a wonderful certified English Labrador and peer support K-9 with the Santa Monica Fire Department. Sessions are scheduled in 15-minute intervals.

• **Saturday, February 7 - Attend an Open House for Reed Park Community Garden and Miles Memorial Playhouse** - 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Also ongoing through March 29, a comedy, *Three Conuts*, written by Howard Teichman and Steven G. Simon will be presented Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays, at 2 p.m. For details, call 323-821-2449.

• **Saturday, February 7 - Sunday,**

April 12 - Architectural Compositions - a photography project by John Rock, an architect based in Santa Monica. California Heritage Museum. Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

• **Saturday, February 14 - During sunset hours on Valentine's Day, you are invited to experience ATTUNE in Tongva Park** - It's a multilocal outdoor light and sound art exhibition in partnership with NXT Art Foundation. Celebrate the spirit of the Santa Monica community while taking a moment to relax, release stress, and immerse yourself in a transformative light and sound journey led by artists. The event is free to the public, and you are encouraged to bring picnic blankets and

chairs. 4:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

• **February 16 - Bring your children to a M.A.D. Creators Camp for music, drama and art** - Confident Concerts, led by Cayley Rose and her associates, will introduce children, ages four to ten, to a full day of creating and engaging in music, art, and dance through writing songs, choreographing dance, and creating visual art. For more details, go to madcamps.org.

• **Sunday, February 22 - Recovery Expo** - a major quarterly event designed to bring together homeowners, renters, business owners, building professionals, and regional agencies to support the ongoing rebuilding and long-term

(Continued on Page 4)

Enjoying 50 Years of Santa Monica's Community Gardens

By Sarah Caso

This year marks 50 years since the City of Santa Monica first implemented their Community Garden Program (CG). Main Street Community Garden opening in 1976, offering 60 plots for individuals. Main Street CG has since expanded alongside the opening of five other community gardens.

While many of these gardens have individual plots, three offer communal growing spaces. They are Ishihara Park Learning Garden, Marine Park Community Garden, and Reed Park Community Garden. These gardens are managed by community vol-



Volunteers above at a Volunteer Workday at the Main Street Community Garden.

unteers, who handle planting, harvesting, composting, mentor-

ing, and other maintenance during volunteer workdays.

However, the history of community gardening in Santa Monica goes back much further. During World War One, food shortages in Europe led to a dependence on gardening in the United States. Gardening had become part of school curriculum earlier in the 1900s, and the demand from the government for citizens to grow produce led to the creation of the United States School Garden Army by the Federal Bureau of Education. In Santa Monica, War Gardens were planted in the green space between the street and in empty lots. In Santa Monica, high school students planted 10 acres

of produce alongside 2.5 million children growing food in schools around the country.

During the Second World War, a similar dependence on community gardening arose. This time with Victory Gardens, community members took over empty lots in Southern California. A model garden was planted on Stanley and Wilshire Boulevard, and a garden

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Happy February Birthdays to:

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

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Discover the Arts and Activities

Chamber Music Palisades Presents Beethoven, Farrenc, Martinu, and a World Premiere

On Wednesday February 4, at 7:30 p.m., in the sanctuary of the Brentwood Presbyterian Church, join Chamber Music Palisades (CMP) for a world premiere of *Due Voci* for flute and cello composed by Lolita Ritmanis, a Grammy, Emmy, and SCL Award-winning member of the international film music community and a faculty member at the USC Thornton School of Music. Ritmanis will speak at the concert about her new work.

Featured performers are Susan Greenberg, flutist; John Walz, cellist; and Canadian pianist Barry Tan. Alan Chapman, KUSC host and longtime Chamber Music Palisades associate, will provide his

informative in-person program notes. In addition to the Ritmanis piece, the program will include works by Beethoven, Farrenc, and Martinu. See their website for details.

Tickets are available for \$35 online at cmpalisades.org, or at the door the evening of the concert. The church is located at 12000 San Vicente Blvd, with free parking in the parking lot located off Bundy, on the east side, between San Vicente and Montana Ave. The entrance to the concert is the door closest to the corner of San Vicente and Bundy, facing San Vicente. Reservations are not needed. Admission is free for full-time students with ID.

Recurrence: Solo Exhibition by Leo Marmol

Leo Marmol is a Los Angeles-based artist and architect. He is a founding partner of Marmol Radziner and is known for his leadership in architecture and his expanding presence in fine art. A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and an inductee of the Interior Design Hall of Fame, he holds a degree in Philosophy, a foundation that informs the conceptual rigor and inquiry central to his visual practice.

Working primarily with oil paint and cold wax medium on canvas or wood panel, Marmol's negotiation of material is vital to his practice. Marmol's paintings explore the nature of color and personal history through abstraction.

The exhibition dates are February 5-March 1 at Chuck



Artist Leo Marmol

Arnoldi's Venice Studio. Viewing by appointment, email sea@laartseen.com.

Come to the 18th Annual Rotary Club of Santa Monica Wine Festival on March 7

The 18th Annual Rotary Club of Santa Monica Wine Festival returns on Saturday, March 7, transforming the Skirball Cultural Center into an evening inspired by the glamour and romance of *Moulin Rouge*. From 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., guests will enjoy an immersive night of fine wines, a delicious dinner, and lively entertainment, including Can-Can dancers and music that bring the theme to life. Both live and silent auctions add to the excitement, making the event a standout on Santa Monica's social calendar.

This year's featured charity is School on Wheels, an organization dedicated to providing tutoring and educational support for homeless and foster youth. By attending the festival, guests directly contribute to helping vulnerable students achieve academic stability and success. Tickets are available at www.RotaryWineFest.com. For information about sponsorships, advertising opportunities, or general inquiries, interested parties may contact Andrea Gressinger, Co-Chairperson, at 310-940-1024.

Thoughts From a Second-Time Father

Sharing New Experiences



By Michael Margolin

Part of the joy of my kids getting older is being with them when they experience new things for the first time.

Over New Year's, we went to Idaho to visit some friends and family. We surprised the kids with this trip, and stayed with family friends whose two younger kids are close friends of Jake's and Alexa, in particular. We put a note in a jacket Alexa got for Christmas, that let her know she would be going to Idaho to visit one of her best friends. I got the reaction I wanted from her since the joy of this surprise brought her to tears. So the Monday after Christmas, the four of us embarked on our journey to Idaho.

Alexa is 12 and Jake is nine and for their ages, they have a decent amount of flights under their belts. And thankfully, traveling with them is easy. Enjoli does not get rattled when it comes to travel hiccups and so if they keep taking after her, they will continue to be good traveling companions.

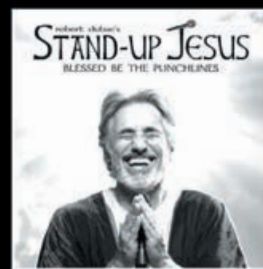
The first night we were there, we went ice skating with the family of six we stayed with. This new experience for the kids was a fun one. Cold, but fun. The temperature was in the mid 20s and since the kids are kids, we went and got frozen yogurt after and walked around and looked at the still-displayed Christmas lights.

The next day, the father and two boys we stayed with took me and Jake fishing. Something we had both done before. Not in freezing temperatures, but still a familiar hobby. It goes without saying that Idaho is much different than many parts of California. Part of which includes well-known public land where you can shoot guns.

We all very much enjoyed our time away on our trip. I remind Alexa that it is easier to do these things because she and Jake are good kids. It helps that they have parents who like to try new things as well.

Mike Margolin has been writing for us since his daughter Alexa was born 12 years ago and son, Jake, nine years ago. He also coaches each child's soccer team.

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February: A Reminder to Share Our Hearts



By Cheryl Thode

February has a way of slowing things down just enough. The holidays are behind us, routines are back in place, and Valentine's Day ar-

rives as a reminder – not to do more, but to notice more. It's an invitation to share our hearts in small, everyday ways that actually stick.

What I appreciate most about Valentine's Day is that it belongs to everyone. It's not tied to one season of life or one kind of family. Whether you're raising kids, spending time with grandchildren, or enjoying a quieter chapter, the heart of the day stays the same – connection. Sharing our hearts doesn't require big gestures, it just requires showing up.

Valentine's Day started simply. It's named for St. Valentine, a Christian martyr remembered for his compassion and care for others during a difficult time.

Long before store-bought cards and candy-filled displays, the day was marked by handwritten notes and thoughtful gestures. At its core, Valentine's Day has always been about offering what you can, where you are – something families naturally understand.

In our home, sharing our hearts looks pretty ordinary, and that's exactly the point. We gather around the table to make valentines together. The kids decorate cards for each other, for grandparents, teachers, and friends. As we work, stories come out – what Valentine's Day looked like when we were growing up, shoebox mailboxes, and the excitement of choosing just the right card. The

kitchen usually plays a role too. Sometimes it's heart-shaped pancakes, sometimes cookies, and sometimes a favorite family meal made together. Everyone pitches in, and no one's keeping score.

Sharing our hearts also means slowing down enough to notice the people right in front of us. It's taking time to listen, to laugh, and to be fully present – even when the day is busy. It's letting kids help, even when it's messy. It's choosing togetherness over perfection, and remembering that love often shows up in the unplanned moments.

We also look for small ways to extend our hearts beyond our home – writing a note to a teacher, dropping off a treat for a neighbor, reaching out to a family member we haven't talked to in a while, and taking a moment to pray for someone who could use encour-

agement. These simple acts remind children, and adults, that love isn't limited to one day or one place.

As a mom, I've learned that these moments matter more than anything that looks perfect. Kids remember the warmth, not the decorations. Grandparents remember the joy of being included. And, even in quieter seasons, sharing our hearts keeps us connected to one another and to God.

As Mother Teresa said, "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving." Valentine's Day gives us a reason to live that out – by sharing our hearts freely, right where we are.

This Valentine's Day, what is one simple way you can share your heart – with your family, a friend, or someone who could use encouragement? I challenge you to go and do it. God Bless!

A History of Valentine's Day (Continued from Page 1)

with love.

The forefront of the holiday we know and love, messages and valentines, appeared in the 1500s, with sweet homemade cards. With commercialization in the late 1700s, commercially-printed cards began circulating.

The U.S. caught on a little late, as the first commercial valentines here were printed in the mid-1800s. And, Valentine's Day today?

The ever-present heart emphasizes love. Birds have become a common symbol, as the avian

mating season occurs in February.

Gifts include candy and flowers, particularly red roses, a symbol of beauty and love.

Valentine's Day is celebrated in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Spain, Scandinavia, France, Singapore, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Philippines, Lebanon, Mexico, and South Korea. In Israel, the Jewish tradition of Tu B'Av is the equivalent of Valentine's Day. In Taiwan, Qixi Festival and White Day are celebrated. In Japan, the holiday is celebrated by women

giving men presents, and men responding with presents whose value is two or three times as much. The Philippines takes the cake, with February 14 being the most common wedding anniversary, and mass weddings of hundreds of couples are common on that date.

We have many choices when it comes to showing we care about another person. As Valentine's Day approaches, consider buying a special card, red rose, or See's candy this year for that special person.

What's Happening on the Westside

(Continued from Page 2)

recovery efforts across both Malibu and Pacific Palisades. Sponsored by the Malibu-Pacific Palisades Chamber of Commerce. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Pacific Palisades street closures from Alma Real Drive to La Cruz Drive (left to Swarthmore and right to Sunset).

For information on updates, exhibitors, and volunteer opportunities, visit www.palibu.org.



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Happy Valentine's Day to Joanne, the love of my life.
- KINGSLEY

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To Evelyn - Happy Valentine's Day.

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



Eddie, the Stache



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*Priscilla, Alejandro & Miguel Padilla,
God has certainly blessed us with each of you. You are beautiful and amazing with loving and huge hearts. We love you today and every day.
-Mom & Dad*

*Stella,
Thanks for always being there for me and for being you. I love you more today than ever before.....I love you with all my heart.*



On The Menu

Romantic Restaurants with a View



By Lori Berezin

February, with Valentine's Day right in the middle, reminds us of romance. The holiday dates back to an ancient Roman fertility celebration called Lupercalia. Regardless of its past, February 14 celebrates romantic and platonic amore.

There are plenty of romantic restaurants in Santa Monica. Here are a couple that combine food and views in memorable ways. Love is in the air, 18 stories high, at The Penthouse Restaurant atop the posh Huntley Hotel in Santa Monica. They say you taste first with your eyes. If that's true, then not only is plating important, but so is the décor and view. This enchanting spot will always remind me of romance. It's where my husband proposed to me over dessert years ago.

Aside from the majestic panoramic view of the blue Pacific and surrounding mountains, The Penthouse Restaurant offers a variety of delicacies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Perhaps weekend brunch, or Happy Hour (offered Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.), is more to your liking. Either way, you're in for a treat with their superb coastal-inspired cuisine.

Dinners offer an array of succulent steaks, lamb, chicken, and seafood that includes extravagant Wagyu steaks and decadently delightful signature seafood towers. Nothing says romance more than sweet passionfruit crème brûlée or dark chocolate mousse, aptly named Valentino. Try one of their craft cocktails, such as Freshlove, which includes Ketel One Vodka and Giffard Madagascar Vanilla Liqueur. They also provide live jazz on Thursday nights from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., to cap off your romantic evening.

You can also book The Penthouse for wedding celebrations and special events. Contact them



Enjoy mouthwatering seafood and more at the Huntley Hotel's popular Penthouse restaurant.

for further information and hours. **1111 2nd Street, 310-393-8080.**

Another renowned rooftop restaurant boasting lovely views of the Pacific and surrounding cityscape is Calabra at the Santa Monica Proper Hotel. The hotel's understated sand-colored interior, uniquely decorated by Kelly Wearstler with vintage and modern pieces, reminds one of a night in Casablanca and a day on the California coast.

Their Mediterranean-inspired menu incorporates farmers market produce, grass-fed meat, and sustainable seafood. Calabra's Proper Hour makes your taste buds sing, whether you choose a sampler combining hummus, baba ghanoush, muhammara with roasted red pepper and walnut dip, or aromatic za'atar lavash made from Middle Eastern za'atar spices on thin lavash flatbread. Sweet harissa honey wings, Greek fries served with garlic, lemon, oregano, and feta dill aioli, dates stuffed with savory goat cheese, and bacon mousse, topped with toasted Marcona almonds, look and taste exotic.

Catch a vivid orange sunset from their indoor-outdoor rooftop during Proper Hour. They also serve brunch, lunch, and dinner. **700 Wilshire Boulevard, 424-390-0737.**

Should you desire to extend your evening, both these locations offer stylish hotel rooms to dream the night away.

Senior Care

Here are Fun Ways Seniors Can Enjoy the Upcoming Valentine's Day



By Tim Petlin

In February, love is in the air – and seniors are no exception. Whether dating, married, or single, Valentine's Day is a great reminder to connect with others and celebrate love in all its forms.

• Rekindling Romance for Couples - Long-term couples may find Valentine's Day has become routine, but it doesn't have to be. Try recreating your first date at home with some favorite music, meaningful foods, and shared memories. Looking through old photos or revisiting special places can spark connection.

For those with health or mobility challenges, intimacy can be simple and meaningful – holding hands during a movie, sharing a quiet conversation, or giving a gentle hand massage. Emotional closeness matters at every age.

• Finding Connection in Senior Communities - Many senior living communities host Valentine's Day events. Even if group activities don't usually appeal to you, attending a party, craft session, or dinner can be a great way to meet new people.

If no events are planned, consider starting something small, like a coffee social or photo-sharing gathering. Often, others are just waiting for someone to take the first step.

• Staying Connected Through Technology - Technology makes it easier to stay close to loved ones who live far away. Video calls,

emails, and eCards can turn Valentine's Day into a shared experience. For something more personal, sending a handwritten card or letter can feel especially meaningful.

• Self-Love Counts, Too - Valentine's Day doesn't require a partner. Treat yourself kindly – enjoy a favorite book, meal, or hobby. Writing a note to your younger self or reflecting on the love you've experienced over the years can be a powerful reminder of a life well lived.

• Safe Ways to Celebrate in the Community - Senior centers, libraries, and places of worship often host Valentine's events. Volunteering is another wonderful option, offering purpose and connection through helping others.

• Staying Safe While Dating - If you're dating, safety comes first. Meet new people in public places, tell someone where you'll be, and keep your phone charged. Avoid sharing personal or financial details too quickly, and watch for red flags like requests for money or rushed relationships. AARP offers helpful resources on romance scams targeting seniors.

• The Heart of the Matter - Valentine's Day is ultimately about connection – to others, memories, and yourself.

For more information, contact Right at Home of West Los Angeles at www.rahwestla.com, at 310-313-0600, or email Tim Petlin at timp@rahwestla.com.

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Understanding Your Options When Arranging In-Home Care



By Ben Adel

When a loved one begins to need help at home, families often focus on finding safe, dependable care. However, it's crucial to recognize that arranging in-home care can involve significant legal and financial responsibilities. In some cases, a household may even be considered an employer under the law, making the structure of care an important factor.

Families typically choose among three primary approaches:

- 1. Hiring a caregiver independently.** This offers direct control, but may create obligations concerning wages, recordkeeping, and employment laws. Insurance is another consideration, as families might be responsible for work-related incidents depending on their policies and the terms of the arrangement. It's wise to review responsibilities thoroughly before proceeding because rules vary by location.
- 2. Using a referral service.** These services connect families with caregivers, but usually do not employ the caregiver themselves. As a result, families may still be responsible for employment matters,

insurance, and daily management. Screening, insurance coverage, and support can differ widely among referral services.

3. Engaging a licensed homecare agency. Agencies are regulated by the state and generally employ caregivers directly, handling payroll, background checks, and insurance. They also help with scheduling and resolving service concerns, offering a more comprehensive and managed solution.

Because employment and licensing rules differ by state, families should seek up-to-date information and professional guidance when making decisions. Understanding how each care model operates enables families to make informed choices, reducing uncertainty, and stress during a challenging time.

Ben Adel is cofounder of Luxe Homecare, a Brentwood-based homecare agency offering services on the Westside of Los Angeles and Santa Monica. They offer round-the-clock support, including registered nurses (RN and LVN) and rehabilitation services.

Think your loved one might benefit from extra support? Contact the Luxe team at 310-459-3535 or visit luxehomecare.com.

Pacific Palisades: Home is Where Community Lives

(Continued from Page 1)

feel paused in time. There are a few dozen homes in various stages of reconstruction: framed walls rising, concrete pours curing, crews moving deliberately.

But those active sites are the exception. Many thousands of homes have not yet broken ground at all. What remains is a physical reminder of how early we still are in this recovery – where intention to rebuild is widespread, but the ability to do so has been slowed by forces far beyond an individual homeowner's control.

Yet even amid that absence, life persists. One of the most visible signs is Palisades Garden Cafe, one of only a few restaurants to survive the fire. On any given morning, it is humming with activity – neighbors catching up, volunteers coordinating, families reconnecting. Just three doors down, the American Legion has served as ground zero for community support. Since the fire, it has hosted multiple organizations daily, some for weeks or months at a time, including federal, county, and local agencies, long-term recovery groups, and dozens of volunteer organizations.

The one-year anniversary of the fire passed just a few weeks ago, but it did not pass quietly. Multiple remembrance events took place throughout the day, drawing large community participation and coverage from both local and national news outlets.

At the American Legion, a respectful and deeply moving ceremony acknowledged families who lost loved ones in the fire. American flags were folded and presented to those families, honoring both their loss and their resilience.

Some families have returned full time, determined to reestablish daily life amid construction noise



The American Legion held a ceremony honoring those who lost loved ones in the fire.

Photos by Rich Schmitt

and unfinished surroundings.

Others live elsewhere but come back constantly – driving children to Palisades schools, attending practices, meeting friends, or checking on the status of their lots or ongoing construction.

What has surprised many of us is how much of the Palisades' identity has survived without its physical structures. Traditions continue. People show up. Meetings, commemorations, volunteer efforts, and casual encounters still happen – even if attendance is thinner and venues temporary.

Community events now carry a different weight. They are not just social – they are affirmations. Each gathering says we are still here.

But for those who remain connected, whether living here now or planning to come back later, the commitment is clear. This community is holding space. It is waiting. Homes may eventually be rebuilt, one house at a time. But belonging is rebuilt, person by person. Home is where the heart is. But in Pacific Palisades, home is where community lives, and waits.

Entertaining With Ease

What Makes You Enjoy Entertaining?



By Maureen Molé
Ah, February, the month of love. Experts tell us relationships are important with spouses, partners, family, and friends. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, we should engage often with others and do things we enjoy – things we love to do.

So, this month, think about not only WHO you love, but WHAT you love to do. For me, I love to entertain at home. Yes, it's easier to go to a restaurant, but it is so much more personal at home. It's a generous act of love to entertain at home.

So here are a few things that make me happy about my parties at home. I love when:

- Guests are excited about my party when I issue the invitation.
- I plan the menu, whether it's a get together for appetizers only, lunch, dinner, brunch, or a dessert party.
- Guests share the cooking and each brings a dish.
- I use a dark tablecloth because it doesn't show stains.
- Setting colorful table settings that are eye-catching.
- I use attractive and colorful plas-

tic plates that make the clean up much easier.

- Using place cards so I can better foster conversations among my guests.
- I place a little gift at each person's place setting – seasonal candy wrapped in cellophane, a mint, a tiny vase with fresh flowers, a tree ornament, etc.
- Using a serving piece for an unexpected use such as lining a champagne bucket with a fabric napkin and serving pretzels in it, or using champagne flutes to serve cold soups.
- Guests arrive on time.
- Guests stay out of my kitchen.
- I hear laughter at my party.
- Guests happily participate in the theme of my party, i.e., games, costumes, tree or egg decorating.
- Guests leave at a reasonable time.
- Guests call or send a written thank you.

I hope what I love to do inspires you to plan a get-together with those you love.

Maureen Molé is the author of Entertaining at Home, a product spokesperson, and lecturer. Follow her on Instagram #Entertain_at_Home_with_Maureen, or email MaureenMole@gmail.com.

Start Planning Now for a Thriving Spring Garden

Family Features - While winter weather puts outdoor gardening on pause in most parts of the country, the colder months offer a perfect opportunity to begin preparing for a lush garden come springtime.

With a little creativity, and some extra time spent creating a plan, you can set yourself on a path toward success before the growing season even begins.

- **Assess Your Space and Research Ideas** - Evaluate your current garden, taking note of what worked well last season and where improvements can be made. Use this downtime to sketch an updated layout, research companion plants and decide which fruits, vegetables, or flowers you want to grow next based on what did (or didn't) work last spring.
- **Build an Updated Blueprint** - Winter is the ideal time to upgrade your garden design and make tweaks for efficiency. Use the off-season to consider crop rotation patterns for optimal soil health as well as ways to maximize your space such as raised beds, trellises or containers. You can also



Plan ahead for your new Spring garden filled with fresh herbs.

make a list of materials needed for any new features you may be adding, such as an irrigation system, and map out their placement so you're ready to build as soon as the weather allows.

- **Nourish the Soil** - Even if the ground is frozen, you can prepare your garden beds by adding compost, leaves or organic matter in late winter, ensuring nutrients are available when spring arrives. Also remember to test your soil's pH level now, which can help guide your fertilization plan.
- **Start Seeds Indoors** - If you're eager to get your hands dirty,

(Continued on Page 12)

Passing Through the Pico Neighborhood

Stop in at the Jus' Family Cafe & Coffee Bar

By Clara Wright

The long-awaited dream of owner Robbie Jones has finally come to life with the opening of Jus' Family Cafe & Coffee Bar in our Pico Neighborhood.

It was a pleasure to stop by to speak to Robbie about her new venture located at 1819 Pico Blvd, Suite A, Santa Monica, directly across the street from Santa Monica College.

Robbie invites you to stop by and witness history in the making while sipping on the best Ethiopian bean, Black Sugar. Known for its rich body and naturally sweet notes, every cup reflects her commitment to quality, culture, and craft.

Also on the large menu are beignets, tempting pastries, Southern fried chicken wings, coffee, fresh sandwiches, and salads. Teas and refreshing lemonades are also served.



Robbie, above right, with Clara Wright, looks forward to welcoming you to her new store, Jus' Family Cafe & Coffee Bar.

Hours at the Coffee Bar are Saturday and Sunday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

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From the Santa Monica Pier

Where Love Meets the Sea



By Jim Harris

Just prior to one of our annual performances of the "Save the Pier!" play a few years ago at the Pier's west end, a large crowd of people gathered in that area's southside bleachers. Our curious cast and crew paid close attention, for we had hoped that they were there to watch the play. Instead, we found ourselves privy to a very romantic marriage proposal. It was wonderful, and it was perfect!

Matrimonial proposals at the Pier are actually very common, and we have happily welcomed the occasional wedding or wedding reception here as well. The Pier is a great place to fall in love and to celebrate love. And, that is why we run our annual online campaign, "Month of Love."

"Month of Love" is an invitation for anyone and everyone who has met their true love, enjoyed a wedding proposal, or tied the knot here at the Pier to share their love story. We reach out to the Pier

community for their stories and publish them on our social media.

I recall one particularly moving story shared with us of a couple who got engaged inside the old Boathouse restaurant (where Bubba Gump Shrimp Company sits today), and then a generation later, their son-in-law proposed to their daughter on Pacific Park's Ferris wheel. Becoming betrothed on the Santa Monica Pier is their family tradition!

If you have a love story set on the Pier that you would like to share – and would like us to share with the Pier community – please send it to us through our website: santamonicapier.org/month-of-love.

We look forward to hearing from you, for we love Pier love stories!

Jim Harris is the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Pier Corporation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to the preservation, enhancement, and curation of the pier visitor experience. Also known as the "Pier Historian," he is the author of Santa Monica Pier: America's Last Great Pleasure Pier.

Laura and Ryan (Continued from Page 1)



Members of both the Aicklen and Moeller families attended the October 30 wedding ceremony at MacArthur Place Hotel in Sonoma.

a shared apartment in Santa Monica, where they began roasting coffee on a one-kilogram machine. Soon, this hobby blossomed into a business selling bags of home-roasted espresso blends, which later became the brick-and-mortar store they own today – Primo Passo Coffee in Santa Monica.

In December of 2023, while on vacation in Hawaii, the couple came across a small, secluded beach they had all to themselves. As Laura emerged from a swim in the ocean, Ryan surprised her by getting down on one knee and asking her to marry him. Their wedding in October, 2025 later mirrored the intimate atmospheres of both their meeting and engagement places: the Fall weather contributed to a soft, warm, and calm ceremony shared only with close family. Laura remembers how they and their guests "sat beneath a pink sky, with lights strung above [them] and golden-yellow trees surrounding [them], creating a setting that felt almost unreal." She shared that every moment of the wedding felt like its own world, from their "First Look," to the walk down the aisle with her father, to an unfor-

gettable meal, love-filled toasts and a long night of dancing with their favorite people.

Now, as a married couple, Laura and Ryan fuel their passion for coffee by continuously advancing their craft through ongoing sample roasting, cupping, and exploration of new origins and blend profiles.

Laura's artistic background contributes to their store's unique brand – every coffee label is individually hand-painted and complemented by original greeting cards that they say define their visual brand identity.

Their inventive coffee lines include their flagship "Monet Blend," and their "Bodhi Bear" coffee line, named after their beloved one-year-old white husky, of which a portion of proceeds are donated to animal foundations such as the Lange Foundation.

Ultimately, Laura and Ryan have managed to channel their shared passions for warmth, community, coffee, and charity into a thriving business and a long-lasting, loving relationship. We wish them all the best in their future together and are inspired by their creative and warmhearted spirits.

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Community Service on the Westside

What's Happening at The Santa Monica Elks Lodge?



By Michelle VanLerberghe

Each February, the Santa Monica Elks Lodge brings together students, educators, families, and community members for our annual Youth Awards Night. This special evening highlights the many ways the Elks invest in and support the youth of our community.

During the event, the lodge will award scholarships to six local graduating seniors in recognition of their academic achievement, leadership, and commitment to service. We will also honor our Students of the Month, and select a Student of the Year along with recognizing a Teacher of the Year, for their dedication to education and mentorship.

Youth Awards Night also features the presentation of awards for the "What Does Service to Your Country Mean to You?" Americanism Essay Contest. This program encourages students to reflect on citizenship, patriotism, and service. Awards will also be presented to participants in our Hoop Shoot contest, which promotes perseverance, confidence, and good

sportsmanship.

In addition, the lodge will recognize winners from our essay, poster, and video contests as part of the Elks National Drug Awareness Program. This program is the largest volunteer drug awareness program in the United States and focuses on educating youth about making healthy, drug-free choices.

The Santa Monica Elks proudly support several local Girl Scout troops, and many scouts will be recognized for their volunteer service. This year, the lodge will present the first ever Elks Legacy of Service Awards. It was developed to replace the National President's Volunteer Service Award, and recognizes sustained youth service.

Youth Awards Night reflects the Elks' ongoing commitment to young people through scholarships, education, recognition, and service opportunities. By investing time, resources, and volunteer support, the Santa Monica Elks help prepare the next generation to lead, serve, and succeed in our community.

We also have newly-renovated facilities available for your next event. Call our office at 310-452-3557 to schedule a visit.

The Santa Monica - Pacific Palisades Lions Are Always on the Go



By J. Kingsley Fife

February is a special month because we celebrate Valentine's Day. Where did this day come from? We must go back to its vague early beginnings in the 5th century BC when Romans celebrated a festival on February 15 for the fertility god Lupercus. Leaping forward to the next chapter, we have Valentine, a secret Christian priest, in 3rd century Pagan Rome. He performed many healing miracles and secret Christian weddings. To help the persecuted early Christians, he would cut hearts out from parchment paper, and give them to strengthen their hope. He was beheaded by Emperor Claudius in 269 AD for re-

fusing to deny Christ. Later, after the Roman Empire became Christian, he was given sainthood and a Valentine Festival developed from this every February.

Consequently, February has become the month of love and giving. We like to say that we Lions celebrate the spirit of giving and love ALL year long. We just had our big food bank drive led by Lion Brian Ransom. Our meeting place was filled with bags full of food items of all sorts that we're giving to the Westside Food Bank. The Lions' motto is "We Serve," and that's what makes Lionism so satisfying.

Would you like to learn more about Lionism? We'd love you to be our guest at our next dinner meeting. Contact me at jkfife88@yahoo.com.

Exciting Speakers to Address Us



By Mitchell Kraus

February is shaping up to be a lively and inspiring month at the Rotary Club of Santa Monica, where the calendar is full of meaningful conversations, community impact, and plenty of camaraderie. Rotarians proudly live by the club's three F's – Fun, Fellowship, and Philanthropy (ok, not an F, but you read this far, right?) – and this month's events showcase all three.

The club meets almost every Friday at noon at the Hilton Santa Monica, and visitors are always welcome. Each meeting features engaging speakers, great conversation, and a warm introduction to Rotary's mission of "Service Above Self."

On February 6, Rotarians welcome Danait Berhe and Tiana Shambayati from School on Wheels, a non-profit dedicated to help students experiencing homelessness succeed through education. Their presentation will

highlight the organization's impactful tutoring and mentoring programs and tell how community members can get involved to support local youth.

On February 20, acclaimed poet Catherine Theis will present "The Life & Times of a Poet," offering an insightful and creative look at the power of poetry, storytelling, and artistic expression – a reminder that Rotary nourishes the arts as well as civic life.

Closing out the month, Raymond A. Jackson, Commissioner of the California Coastal Commission, will share insights into protecting California's iconic coastline while balancing environmental stewardship, public access, and responsible development – a topic especially close to home for Santa Monica residents.

Beyond weekly meetings, Rotary is always rolling up its sleeves. Those interested in volunteering are encouraged to reach out! There are ongoing opportunities to support local non-profits, youth

(Continued on Page 10)

An Update From the SMBWC



By Patricia Webber

The Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club (SMBWC) members extend our hearts and hands to our own members, as well as the members of the Pacific Palisades Women's Club on their continuing recovery from the devastating fires of January 2025.

Our Club has seen encouraging membership growth this past year. Many of the newest members joined because of their interest in card playing and Mahjong. Membership Chair and 2nd VP on our Board of Directors, Holly Franke, asks all members for suggestions for furthering community involvement and attracting more members. In 2025, we welcomed 25 new members! As one of the most historic clubs in Santa Monica, we take seriously our mission and the maintenance and upgrades to our 110-year-old facility. In December, we participated in a project for Happy Trails for Kids Winter Camps, a program for children in foster care. We donated a total of 63 \$25 Target gift cards

which were delivered to the Happy Trails office in time for the holidays. We hope these gift cards made each child there feel a little more special.

The Walking Group begins again on Saturday, February 7. Additional dates for this popular activity are planned for March 7. Contact Alicia Syres, Events Chair, at alicia.syres@yahoo.com.

Anyone interested in learning the SMBWC canasta version is invited to contact Sue Price McGough at sue.mcgough@yahoo.com. She and others will be happy to teach this very easy game.

Our Artists, Crafts & Conversation group meets on Tuesday from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. If you paint, draw, collage, embroider, sew, crochet, make jewelry, or are interested in learning any of these skills, contact Joan at joanie.tee@gmail.com.

Due to Club member allergies and other conditions, pets will no longer be allowed in the Club. Certified Service Pets will be allowed. For info, call us at 310-395-1308 or go to smbwc.org.

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Historic Broadway Spotlight

The Influence of the Crescent Bay Masonic Lodge

By Michael Ano

In Santa Monica's Broadway neighborhood, the Crescent Bay Masonic Lodge No. 19 stands as a testament to a nearly forgotten chapter of the city's history. The land for the lodge was purchased in 1910 by Arthur Burkes, a Mason who envisioned a fraternal space in Santa Monica. Upstairs, the lodge hosted Masonic meetings, reserved exclusively for African American men, while downstairs, the hall opened its doors to the wider community.

The Masonic Lodge was marked in city directories as a "colored" lodge, reflecting both the racial segregation of the era and the necessity for Black-led spaces. "For people along Broadway, there were few spaces where they could gather for weddings, receptions, political meetings, or holiday events," recalls local historian Carolyn Edwards. "Many hotels and event spaces either excluded Black residents or charged prohibitive rates. The Masonic Hall was a safe, welcoming place for the community."

The lodge became the birthplace of several local institutions. First AME Church began meeting in the hall before acquiring its own

building at 19th and Michigan. It hosted social events for youth, such as the "Star Lighters," children of Masons and Eastern Stars, and dances with community leaders like Thelma Terry.

By the 1960s, as civil rights legislation expanded access to public and private spaces, the lodge's role as the only available venue began to change. Yet, its historical significance remains. It is one of the last remaining buildings in the Broadway corridor that was owned and operated by people of color, a tangible reminder of the city's layered history.

The building's uncertain future raises broader questions about what Santa Monica chooses to preserve. Why have some long-recognized civic and social institutions been protected, while sites central to Black community life remain at risk? Why are City Hall and other civic landmarks widely celebrated, while the Masonic Hall's role as a cultural, social, and political anchor on Broadway is largely overlooked? These buildings, communities, and stories deserve recognition as a living record of a thriving community that helped shape the neighborhood and the city itself.

Discover How Everyday Cooking

(Continued from Page 1)

to bring cultures and generations together to see ourselves as part of a larger community."

QRC is an archive of Black family history and Santa Monica Bay culture. It was established by Carolyn and Bill Edwards as a tribute to the legacy of Dr. Alfred T. Quinn, a prominent Santa Monica Black educator and community leader.

About SMHM: Since 1975, the museum has been sharing the rich, diverse history of the Santa

Monica Bay Area. The museum is committed to serving the community by providing access to dynamic exhibitions – highlighting the depth and complexity of regional history through their extensive collection of historical objects, and an exceptional image archive.

The Santa Monica History Museum is located at 1350 7th St. Hours are Thursday, 2 p.m.-5 p.m., and Friday through Sunday, from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Phone: 310-395-2290.

Battle of the Badges Blood Drive

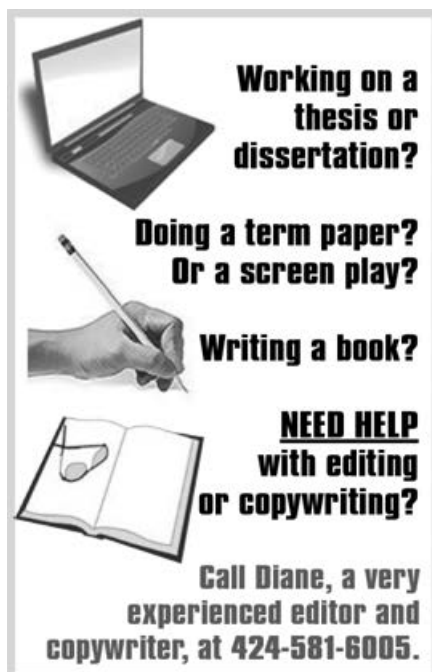
Southern California first responders' top priority is to help others in harm's way. For the 20th campaign since 2007, first responders will further their commitment to helping others and saving lives by bolstering the community's blood supply. During the Battle of the Badges blood drive, L.A. County law and public safety agencies compete to see who can recruit the most blood donors.

Angelenos can join the fun and friendly competition at locations throughout Southern California by donating at a Battle of the Badges blood drive until March 31, 2026. Everyone who donates at a Battle of the Badges blood drive will receive a commemorative T-shirt, while supplies last.

"The need for blood is constant – every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood," said Jacquelyn

Clites, chief executive officer of the American Red Cross Los Angeles Region. In 2025 alone, the campaign collected 4,198 pints between January 1 and April 30, with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department leading as the top collecting agency with 832 pints.

For details on all Los Angeles County Blood Drives, contact Hannah Klain at 213-347-4775.



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Paws and Claws

How Can I Prepare for My Pet in a Disaster?



By Dr. Frank Lavac, MS, DVM

Q: With fires, floods, and earthquakes common place, what should I do to prepare for disasters for

my pets?

A: This is an excellent question. Make sure that your neighbors have access to your home or apartment, as you may not be at home when a disaster occurs.

Develop a "Pet-Go Bag." Have food and water for seven days. Store a back-up supply of medications for two weeks.

Develop a contact list that includes emergency hospital and your veterinarian's information.

Keep a list of your pet's current medical conditions and possibly current medical records.

Keep current photos of your pets and microchip information.

For more information, go to VeterinaryPartner.com - "Helping Animals During a Disaster," and also, AVMA Pets and Disasters: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/emergency-care/pets-and-disasters>.

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

Adopt a Pet



Meet Buddy. He's a one-year-old husky mix who came through their community outreach program. He's a playful young dog who would be a great hiking or adventure buddy. Buddy is young and eager to please. He is smart, friendly, and good with dogs and people. For more details, go to www.DowntownDogRescue.org.

Exciting Speakers
(Continued from Page 9)

programs, and community initiatives.

Whether you're looking to give back, expand your network, or simply enjoy good company and good conversation, February with Rotary offers all three F's – and then some.

Visit www.rotaryclubofsantamonica.org to learn more information.



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Julia and Richard (Continued from Page 1)



The wedding ceremony on the beach was a highlight of the event as it united both families of Julia and Richard.

where he served as membership director and photographer. Rotary became both a professional and personal anchor – a place where service, fellowship, and shared values intersected.

At the same time, Richard was spending more time on local Facebook groups, engaging in conversations with residents of Pacific Palisades, a community where he hoped to specialize professionally and remain personally invested.

One profile in particular stood out – Julia Nilsen. Their online exchanges quickly revealed a shared spirituality, thoughtful perspectives, and a natural ease in responding to one another’s ideas and concerns. Lunch soon followed, and with it, an unmistakable connection.

As they spent more time together, it became clear how much they shared – a love of music and film, curiosity about travel, appreciation for good food (and Richard’s cooking), and a deep commitment to family. When their grown children eventually met, all went smoothly.

When the Palisades Fire struck, Richard and Julia were living together. The crisis tested everything, yet it also solidified their partnership. Side by side, they navigated displacement, recovery, and countless logistical and emotional challenges, eventually relocating to a rental home in the Marina while Julia’s home underwent rebuilding.

In the midst of that demanding season, they held onto something joyful ahead. Richard had successfully bid on a trip to Italy at the Santa Monica Rotary Wine Festival in the Fall of 2024, originally planning to celebrate his birthday. That trip became some-

thing far more meaningful. During an elegant dinner at Il Falconiere in Cortona, Tuscany, Richard proposed. As he later recalled, “When the server brought out my birthday cake, I handed her my phone and asked her to record my proposal – before I blew out the candles.”

Julia, an attorney and Certified Divorce Coach, serves on the Pacific Palisades Community Council and is the founder of the Butterfly Foundation, a non-profit that supports women.

Richard is a real estate broker who serves as 2nd Vice Commander of the Pacific Palisades American Legion, a board member of the Santa Monica Family YMCA, Vice Chair of the Pacific Palisades Long-Term Recovery Group, a Palisades columnist for *The Santa Monica Star*, and a board member of the Children’s Compassion Network.

On September 6, 2025, they were married at Will Rogers State Beach in Pacific Palisades, surrounded by only their immediate family. Pastor Justin Anderson of Calvary Palisades officiated the ceremony. Looking back, Richard reflects, “Having our six adult children, two grandchildren, and Julia’s mother present at our intimate sunset ceremony by the sea was the highlight. It was a weekend that united our families – a destination wedding in the place we love most, and a powerful reminder of God’s promise to bring beauty from ashes.”

May the years ahead bring calmer waters, continued growth, and abundant joy. —D.M.

Enjoying 50 Years
(Continued from Page 2)

center at 2234 Adams Blvd. taught gardening classes multiple times a week. By 1943, there were 20 million Victory Gardens in the United States.

For the 50th anniversary of Main Street Community Garden, they will be celebrating throughout the year with various events.

The main celebration can be found at santamonica.gov/events. A huge thanks to local artist, Sahana Lindsey, for creating their 50th anniversary logo.

Is Your Birthday on July 4?
Join others with July 4 birthdays to ride in the Santa Monica July 4 Parade on Main Street.

Contact organizer
Jeff Jarow for more details:
Call 310-395-2663



~Joe Analco



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Planning Ahead

Do a Review of Your Estate Plan



By Lisa Alexander, Esq.
An estate plan can be signed, put in the drawer, and never looked at again. The year 2026 is the time to take your estate plan out of the drawer and give it a

good review.

What should be the focus? You can start with locating all your documents.

Next, review all the gifts. Do you still have a relationship with everyone you named? If you made a gift of a specific asset, do you still own it? Do monetary gifts need to be increased to keep up with inflation? A gift intended to cover four years of college tuition may now only cover a year or two.

Are the ages for distribution to children or grandchildren still appropriate? Will a child be prepared and mature enough to handle a substantial gift at age 18, or 21, or even 25? You may have new concerns about protecting a child from a failed marriage or creditor issues. Or, maybe you now want to skip over children and leave to your grandchildren instead.

Naming the right Trustees is important. Are the Trustees older than you and are they still good candidates? If you named children as Co-Trustees, do they get along? If you named children in birth order because you did not want to hurt feelings, is

the eldest the best suited? Or maybe you face the common situation of not having anybody to name. You might consider interviewing a few licensed professional fiduciaries as an option.

If you are a married couple, does your Trust require division into separate subtrusts when one of you dies? This was the gold standard of estate planning to protect against estate tax when the estate tax exemption was much lower. In the year 2000, the estate tax exemption amount was \$650,000. Today it is \$15,000,000. Division into separate subtrusts is now less about estate tax planning than personal choice. Is such required division still right for you? If so, there may be options to add flexibility and to protect against capital gains tax consequences.

Finally, there should be an up-to-date schedule of Trust assets (often referred to as "Schedule A") or at the very least a broad assignment of assets to the Trust. The schedule of assets can be used to avoid probate of an asset that never made it into the Trust if it is listed on the schedule.

You can put it all back in the drawer until next year, but if something needs to be updated, make your estate plan a priority on your "to-do" list for 2026.

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Main Line: 310-395-6555**

Big Goals and Big Fun All Happening at the Santa Monica Family YMCA



By Araceli Alejandre
The Santa Monica Family YMCA is your one-stop destination for fun, fitness, and family connection in

2026! We're excited to share all the ways we're supporting kids, teens, and parents with programs designed to make life easier and more joyful for the whole family!

Looking for a stress-free way to celebrate your child's next birthday? Celebrate with us at the YMCA! Families can now host birthday parties for kids ages up to 10 years. We handle the set-up, break down, and clean up, so parents can focus on food, friends, and fun. Parties include decorations, music, and a bounce house – everything you need for an unforgettable day. To learn more or to book a party, contact kayla@ymcasm.org.

Parents can also take advantage of our free Child Watch and Kids

Club, included with a YMCA membership. Enjoy up to two hours to work out, relax in the spa, or get work done while your children are cared for in a safe, engaging environment. Child Watch serves ages six weeks to seven years, and Kids Club is available for ages eight to 12.

For families with teens, we're proud to offer Model United Nations, a civic engagement program for middle school students interested in leadership, global issues, and community involvement.

Have health goals for the new year? There's no better time to start than now. Throughout the month, the YMCA is waiving initiation fees and offering 10% off all personal training packages, making it easier than ever to invest in your wellness.

At the Y, we're here to support every stage of family life. Come be part of it! Go to smfamilyymca.org for more details.

Start Planning Now (Continued from Page 7)

consider starting your seeds indoors. Early seed starting gives plants a head start, allowing you to transplant stronger seedlings outdoors when temperatures warm.

• **Get Organized** - Use the slower pace of winter to clean and sharpen your garden tools, sort through leftover seeds and make a supply checklist so you're ready to dig in when warmer days arrive.

Find more advice to get your garden ready to burst to life in spring at eLivingtoday.com.

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