

# THE SANTA MONICA STAR

Also Covering  
The Greater  
Westside

Volume XXV Number 1

Connecting You With Your Community

January 2026



Bonnie Boswell, an award-winning producer, reporter, and talk show host will be the keynote speaker for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s celebration on Monday, January 19.

Bonnie Boswell is an Emmy Award-winning producer, reporter, and talk show host. She currently serves as executive producer and reporter for Bonnie Boswell Reports on PBS. Her PBS projects include the 2024 Emmy-winning *Saving Moms*, a documentary on maternal health, and *A Conversation with Pastor James Lawson and Attorney Bryan Stevenson*. She also produced *The Power*-

broker: *Whitney Young's Fight for Civil Rights*, about her uncle, which First Lady Michelle Obama presented at the White House.

At NBC-Los Angeles, Bonnie was a community reporter and produced *Seeds of Peace*, a Golden Mike Award-winning documentary. She holds degrees from Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## Palisades: The Most Wonderful Day of the Year

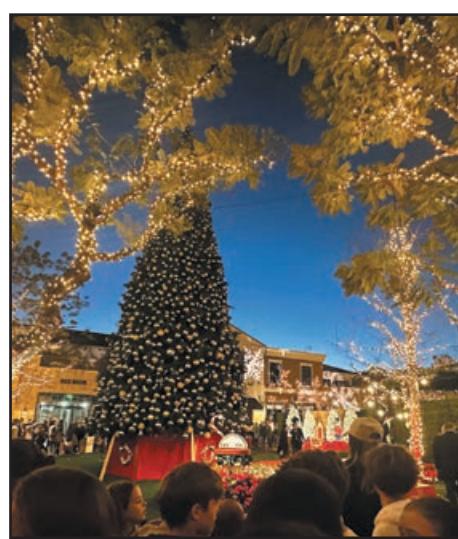
By Richard Lombari

Saturday, December 6 may very well go down as the most wonderful day of the year in Pacific Palisades – and without question, the best day of 2025.

Not because of the lights, music, or celebrations themselves, but because, for the first time since the wildfire reshaped our landscape and our lives last January, the entire community seemed to breathe again.

The day unfolded from warm afternoon sunlight to a glowing twilight, into a joyful, music-filled night, each moment drawing neighbors closer and reminding us of who we are.

The morning and afternoon began in Marquez Knolls, where the Property Owners Association hosted its long-awaited block party along Duende Lane and the surrounding streets. It was the first true neighborhood gathering



Thousands of neighbors turned out for the Christmas tree lighting on December 6.

since the wildfire. Long rows of tables stretched across the pavement, lined with neighbors catching up and rediscovering one another. Food trucks added to the

(Continued on Page 10)

## The 41st Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Takes Place January 16 - 19

All community members are invited to attend the special events beginning with the MLK Freedom Celebration and Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. on Friday, January 16, sponsored by the Santa Monica Area Interfaith Council at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Ocean Park Blvd. and 14th Street.

On Saturday, January 17, at 3 p.m. in Barnum Hall on Santa Monica High School campus, the Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra will present its annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. concert.

The theme of the 2026 program is "Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere." Be inspired by keynote speaker Bonnie Boswell on Monday, January 19 at 9 a.m. at the John Adams Middle School Performing Arts Center, 2425 16th St. After Bonnie's pro-

gram, go over to the Community Involvement Fair in the Arts Center to meet members of many nonprofit organizations. The Fair starts at 12:30 p.m.

This impressive free celebration is presented by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Westside Coalition and sponsored by the City of Santa Monica, Santa Monica College Associates, Santa Monica College, Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, SGI-USA, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica Bay Area Human Relations Council as well as a variety of other organizations and individuals. The celebration will be live-streamed through the website.

Also for more information, visit [www.mlkjrweside.org](http://www.mlkjrweside.org); Facebook: [mlkwestsideorg](https://www.facebook.com/mlkwestsideorg); and email: [mlkwestsidecoalition@gmail.com](mailto:mlkwestsidecoalition@gmail.com).



The Music Mends Minds musicians inspired the guests to dance and sing.

## Music Mends Minds Concert

Music Mends Minds (MMM) held its annual holiday concert last December at the Brentwood Presbyterian Church, with the room truly rockin' & rollin' for the holidays. Seniors living with Alzhei-

mer's, Parkinson's, and other cognitive challenges took to the stage – and the aisles – singing, dancing, and reminding everyone that joy never disappears.

The celebration included a special moment of recognition when Councilwoman Traci Park presented Music Mends Minds with a Certificate of Congratulations, honoring our partnership and program expansion to the Felicia Ma-hood Senior Center. "Music Mends Minds is setting an example of building stronger, healthier communities," she shared.

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**Do You Recognize  
These Neighborhood  
Celebrities?**

(Answer on Page 11)



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# What's Happening on the Westside

• **Thursday, January 8 - Get together with other Pokémon trainers** and play the Pokémon Trading Card Game. Beginners are welcome and can play other Pokémon-themed games Pokémon Club. 3:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Pico Library Branch, the Annex. Ages 5-11.

• **Saturday, January 10 - Eighth Annual Polar Bear Plunge set at the Annenberg Community Beach House.** Beach house opens 10 a.m. Ocean plunge 10:15 a.m. through 2 p.m. when event ends. 415 Pacific Coast Hwy. Call 310-458-4904 for more details about drinking hot chocolate, photos with Pat the Polar Bear mascot, and other activities.

• **Sunday, January 11 - Santa**

## Monica Vinyl Market - 12 p.m.-

4 p.m. at Santa Monica's hometown brewery, Santa Monica Brew Works. Did you know vinyl music is back? This is also a great place to sell your old records! Picture a dozen private record dealers offering all sorts of music genres, old and new, all on vinyl. Instagram: @santamonicavinylmarket.

• **Wednesday, January 14 - Seniors, want to learn about AI and Chat GPT?** Come to the Santa Monica Family YMCA at 11 a.m. to learn about the latest computer programs. For details, call Matthew at 310-393-2721, ext. 116.

• **Thursday, January 15 - Vision Boards for Teens.** Main Library, Youth Activity Room. 4 p.m.-5 p.m. Teens will design a visual

collage to keep them inspired with their wishes and goals for the new year. A vision board helps them reflect on their intentions and is made to keep them motivated towards achieving their dreams. Materials provided; BYO personal pictures optional. For ages 12-18.

• **Saturday, January 17 - In person auditions for the Kentwood Players West Coast Premier of Guilty Pleasures,** 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday, January 18 - 6 p.m.-10 p.m. Westchester Playhouse, 8301 Hindry Ave. In this unabashed screwball comedy by Ken Levine, two couples embark on a romantic cruise with hopes of rekindling their relationships. A playful challenge and a series of misunderstandings produce a hilarious few

days at sea in this fast-paced, witty and very adult romp.

• **Wednesday, January 21 - Preserving Your Visual History** -Join professional photo organizer and photography instructor Peter Bennett for an inspiring talk on how to preserve your family's visual history. Learn practical steps for organizing and archiving both your digital and physical photos, and turning names and dates into powerful, personal stories. You'll also learn how to safeguard your memories from potential risks like wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters, so your family legacy can be passed on for generations to come. 6 p.m. - 7 p.m. Main S.M. Library, Multipurpose Room.

• **Thursday, January 29 - Retirement Planning Workshop,** Pico Branch, The Annex. Join Justin Hinton from Money Management Educators for an informative workshop designed for adults who want to build a secure financial future. 6 p.m.-7p.m. Learn about retirement planning, savings options, relevant terminology, and strategies to build long-term financial well-being.

## Kahunas Patrol of Troop 223: Resilience, Service, and Brotherhood in the Face of Adversity

By James Huff

This past year, the Kahunas Patrol of Troop 223 in Pacific Palisades has faced challenges few could have anticipated. In January 2025, deadly wildfires swept through the community, leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. Many members of Troop 223 lost their homes, while others saw their neighborhoods and routines upended. For the Scouts, these were not just news stories - they were personal losses, etched into their daily lives.

In the aftermath of the fires, as families navigated uncertainty and



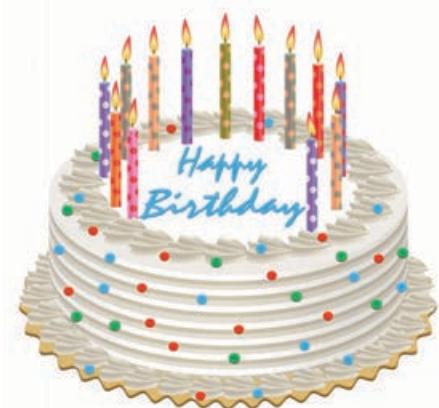
The Kahunas Patrol took a tour of the office of HGA Architects.

grief, Troop 223 emerged as a haven of normalcy and together-

ness. Meetings continued, albeit sometimes in borrowed spaces or makeshift settings. The familiar rhythms of Scout life - setting goals, earning merit badges, and sharing stories around a campfire - offered comfort and structure. For many Scouts, the troop became more than an extracurricular activity; it became a support system, a place to rebuild not just routines, but also hope.

This year tested the Scouts' core values like never before. Resilience and adaptability, often discussed in lessons and activities, took on real-world significance. Scouts learned to adapt to new housing arrangements, to work together

(Continued on Page 11)



## Happy January Birthdays to:

Monty McCormick, Kathryn Jeffery, Kera Blades-Snell, Tom Larmore, John McIntire, Kathy Shepard, Bill Dawson, Molly Smulian, Judy Neveau, John Lehne, Larry Maher, Julia Miele, Klaus Mennekes, Vickie Laham, Alan Paar, Mitchell Kraus, Mike Stark, Connie Maguire, Jack Rainsford, Linda Levee, Mike Stark, Lan Nguyen, and Joan Sitnick



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# Discover the Arts and Activities

## Music Mends Minds

(Continued from Page 1)

Their flagship group, The World Famous 5th Dementia Band, performed *Stand by Me*, filling the room with connection and hope. As the music played, seniors sang along, danced in the aisles, and filled the space with pure joy – made even more unforgettable with legendary songwriter Mike Stoller, in attendance.

As founder Carol Rosenstein says, “Music can restore joy and connection, even in the face of memory loss. MMM creates musical support groups for individuals with Alzheimer’s, dementia, Parkinson’s, traumatic brain injury, PTSD, and other neurological disorders. This support has taken the form of 50 bands, drum circles, and other music groups in over 10 countries and is still growing. Our goal is to restore the rhythm of life, reconnecting and empowering all individuals and communities suffering from neurodegenerative diseases and more, through music.”

Plan on attending a concert in February at the Brentwood Presbyterian Church. Contact [info@musicmendsminds.org](mailto:info@musicmendsminds.org) for details.

## Thoughts From a Second-Time Father

### Discussing New Year's Resolutions



By Michael Margolin

It has occurred to me that I have never talked to my kids about New Year's resolutions before. I have set resolutions before that do not seem to stick.

They are not life-changing types of goals. But like plenty of people, I have thought of old habits I would like to break or new ones I would like to get into. Also, I have thought about why I need a new year to try these things out. If something comes with a health benefit, why wait? People work in different ways during different times and I can certainly see how setting deadlines to begin or end habits or tendencies would be good guidelines to start and finish.

I suppose I would just like my kids to begin healthy habits when they realize they are necessary and end any poor ones they might have picked up that do not really offer them any positive type results.

Jake's first year of jiu jitsu ended with him getting a new belt. I have been so impressed and very proud of how he has stuck with this sport. Jake likes to play sports and we can rough-house, but he is not always rough and tumble.

And, I was wondering what types of responses he would have if his face was met with an errant palm, elbow, or forearm. It does not happen often, but when it has, he has stayed in the moment, and been able to shake it off. His confidence, toughness, and resilience all on display at the same time.

## Upcoming Art Exhibits

Bruce Lurie Gallery will be a part of The LA Art Show, MODERN + CONTEMPORARY from January 7-11, 2026. His artists' work will be on display in Booth #904. The show will be in the West Hall at the Los Angeles Convention Center, 1201 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles.

### Hauser & Wirth Downtown LA

Occupying a former flour mill, Hauser & Wirth Downtown Los Angeles presents art exhibitions, events, and learning activities which connect with the local community in a vibrant architectural space.

#### On View This Winter:

‘Lee Lozano. Hard Handshake’ and ‘Flora Yukhnovich. Bacchanalia’ are on view beginning January 18. ‘CRADLED’ is on view in through January 4, weekends only. Entry is always free. No advance booking necessary.

#### Holiday Hours:

The gallery will be closed from December 24 – 26 (Christmas), and December 31, 2025 – January 1, 2026 (New Year). Contact Information: 213-943-1620.



Snowwhite, Fairy godmother, Dorothy, and Cinderella from the Santa Monica Playhouse world premiere Family Theatre musical comedy, opening January 17. From left, Micala Peltz, Cydne Moore, Isabel Lindley, and Holly Gibson, back, in which not one, not two, but THREE Dorothys discover the best things about friends, family, and ... home.

## ★ JANUARY AT THE PLAYHOUSE ★



**BOB DULAC'S  
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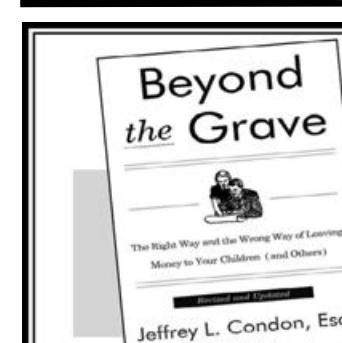


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## Reflections From The East

**By Qin Sun Stubis**

In 1993, when my husband and I first started out together on Long Island in New York, we scraped together enough money to purchase our first car. It was a new model Geo Prizm with 21 miles on it, the most expensive thing we had ever bought. We loved its sleek black color and gentle curves, and affectionately called it "Black Jack" for good luck.

For the next 19 years, Black Jack accompanied us on our life's journey, playing a part in our engagement and marriage, the birth of our two children, high-speed trips to local ERs, fun-filled family vacations, first days of school,

concerts and sporting events, graduations, and even moving from one place to another.

To us, Black Jack was an important family member, and our love for it only grew through time. It got an annual checkup just like we did. We diligently washed it, cleaned it, and garaged it. Every time we arrived at a destination, I would pat it and give it praise. "Good job, Black Jack."

The car aged with grace. To this day, I can still remember every dent and scrape on it, each marked with a special story involving a falling tree branch or a runaway shopping cart. Then came the time when Black Jack could no longer be our reliable travel companion. I was heartbroken. We made an important decision to donate it to benefit a worthy charity

cause, American Humane Society.

When a truck came to tow it away, my flowing tears formed a curtain in front of me. I was overcome with emotion. Goodbye, Black Jack. I'll always keep you in my heart! I promised. I stood by the road in frigid air, still waving long after it was gone.

To my surprise and comfort, my new car came with a license plate containing the numbers 3, 6, 3, which in Chinese means "Separation, Happy, Separation." I felt it was a message of love from Black Jack so I named my new car "Silver Jackie."

Sometimes I laugh, thinking how I foolishly developed such a deep bond with a car, knowing that a machine is not capable of sharing emotions or transmitting a secret message to me. Neverthe-

less, my heart brims with love whenever I think of Black Jack, even after all these years.

Black Jack also taught me a lot about life. How it endured wear and tear through the years reminded me to protect myself. I'm not a machine, and yet, my body ages just like one. My life depends on taking care of myself, avoiding or fixing the little dents and scrapes of existence as best I can, and enjoying the ride. On behalf of myself, my family, and the lessons I learned from a very wise car, I wish all my readers a happy and healthy new year!

**You can always reach me at [qstubis@gmail.com](mailto:qstubis@gmail.com), or please visit me at [www.QinSunStubis.com](http://www.QinSunStubis.com). You can find a copy of my book, Once Our Lives, online at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).**

## Starting the New Year With Intention

**By Cheryl Thode**

January always catches me off guard. One minute I'm tripping over discarded wrapping paper and trying to remember which relative gave which child which toy, and the next minute the world is buzzing about resolutions, vision boards, and fresh starts. Meanwhile, I'm just trying to locate matching socks for my boys and convince them that candy is not a breakfast food.

Even in the chaos of raising little ones, beginning the year with intention feels important. The trick is choosing goals that are realistic for families like mine – families where mornings are loud, shoes are always missing, and someone inevitably spills something right when you're trying to leave the house. Big dramatic resolutions rarely stick, but simple, such as choosing what I call our family's "weekly reset." Nothing fancy or elaborate – just a small weekly tradition that brings everyone together. For us, it started with

Saturday pancakes.

No matter how wild the week gets, we all know that on Saturday morning dad will be flipping pancakes, (mostly round, occasionally lopsided), and sitting down together. Sometimes, we're all still in pajamas, sometimes the boys are bouncing in and out of their chairs, but it's ours. Whether your family leans toward Friday movie nights or after-dinner walks, picking a simple ritual helps everyone feel grounded without adding stress.

Instead of overhauling the entire household, I focus on one area of family life to simplify. Last year, it was school mornings, which had become a daily scramble of snack-packing, sock-finding, and negotiations that could rival international diplomacy. We made a few small changes – laying out clothes at night, packing backpacks before bed – and somehow everything felt lighter.

This year, I'm tackling weekend night dinners. If I can manage to plan even three meals ahead, I consider it a win. Focusing on one bite-sized improvement means I don't burn out by mid-January.

The kids actually love helping to shape our family goals. I used to think resolutions were just for adults, but even little ones can share what they want more of in the new year. When I asked my boys, one said, "more park days," and the other said, "more dance parties." Easy enough.

We added both to our family list, alongside my husband's request for more time outside, and my desire for at least a tiny pocket of calm each week. Letting the kids contribute not only gives them ownership, but reminds me that their priorities (fun, connection, movement) are often the ones we forget as grown-ups.

None of these goals matter much if the parents are running on empty. Carving out small moments to recharge isn't selfish, it's essential. Whether it's slipping out for a solo walk, reading a few pages of a book before bed, or sitting in the car for two extra minutes before going inside, those tiny resets add up. When I take those moments, I'm a kinder, calmer version of myself, and the whole house feels the difference.

Life with little kids is unpredict-

able, so I try to follow what I call the 80 percent rule. If we manage to stick to our family goals most of the time, great. If a week goes off the rails, which it often does, we simply start again the next one. Kids don't need perfect routines or perfectly motivated parents. They just need us to keep showing up.

As we step into a new year, don't worry about reinventing your whole life. Choose one or two simple goals that bring more ease and joy into your home. Embrace the messy, magical season you're in. The best family resolutions aren't about doing more. They're about doing what matters most with the little people we're lucky enough to raise.

Go make your own family "reset" traditions and enjoy the New Year. Happy 2026, and God Bless!



Joe Analco

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## On The Menu

## Stick-to-Your-Ribs Comfort Food



## By Lori Berezin

Comfort food feels like a much-needed hug on a rainy day. Some times, you've just got to have it. Fortunately, Santa Monica

offers plenty of comforting options. Here are a couple of my favorites.

I tend to avoid eggs. They make me feel sleepy due to their relaxation-promoting tryptophan. Sometimes, however, I simply can't resist having one.

I recently visited one of our city's longtime favorites on the Third Street Promenade, Barney's Beanery. Fascinated by its celebrity history, I'd been a fan of their West Hollywood location years ago.

Founded by John "Barney" Anthony in 1920 in Berkeley, California, the restaurant opened in Southern California in 1927 along the famed U.S. Route 66, now Santa Monica Boulevard, in West Hollywood.

The Santa Monica location opened around 20 years ago. While I didn't see anyone famous, I still enjoyed their hearty Mexican breakfast while people-watching on their colorful outdoor patio. The stars of the meal were two cheesy enchiladas. A side of scrambled eggs and tasty rice served as costars. Their expansive menu includes everything from Route 66 pizza to Barney's Sliders, with caramelized onions, pickles, American cheese, lettuce, tomato, and Barney's sauce, and lots more.

Inside, memorabilia, from hub caps and license plates to a large assortment of celebrity pictures, adds to the overall eclectic ambiance. There's also a long indoor bar and pool table. They serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily.



Try feasting on the hearty Mexican breakfast at Barney's Beanery.

## 1351 3rd Street Promenade, 310-656-5777.

What could be more comforting than Texas-style BBQ? Unless you're a vegetarian, of course. I'm not, although I absolutely support them. I still, however, crave ribs on occasion, so I thought I'd try the pork ribs at Bludso's.

Born and raised in Compton, Kevin Bludso, aka Big Kev, has family roots that reach to Texas. That's where he learned the delectable art of BBQ from his grandmother during the summer.

Kevin brought his culinary knowledge to sunny SoCal, where he started a catering company. He opened his first restaurant in Compton in 2008, followed by one on La Brea. Later, he and Noah Galuten co-authored a James Beard Award-winning cookbook, *BBQ Cookbook: A Family Affair in Smoke and Soul*. Then, in July 2023, Kevin launched Bludso's BBQ in Santa Monica.

I ordered succulent pork ribs with a side of coleslaw. The BBQ sauce, which you can also purchase, is alone worth the trip. It perks up your tastebuds with a tantalizing blend of tomatoes, brown sugar, cayenne pepper, mustard powder, cider vinegar,

(Continued on Page 6)

## Passing Through the Pico Neighborhood

## Leave Room for the Magic



## By Stacy McClendon

My mind was just illuminated to the fact that yet another year has come to a close, which means we're being given a clean slate, once again. I see this as a blessing and a chance to craft and live out the life that brings us joy and satisfaction in 2026.

I start thinking of my new year months prior to the close of the prior year. I just can't help myself! I love reviewing what I accomplished, seeing what I scrapped, and what projects I need to continue teasing out.

While planning my day/week, I always make sure to leave some time with no tasks assigned.

(Continued on Page 11)

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## Senior Care

## New Year Wellness Goals for Seniors



## By Tim Petlin

A new year offers seniors a fresh chance to focus on simple wellness goals that support independence, energy, and overall quality of life. These goals don't need to be dramatic – small, realistic steps often make the biggest difference.

## • Why Realistic Goals Matter

**for Older Adults** - For seniors, wellness is about feeling your best each day, staying safe, and remaining engaged with the people and activities you enjoy. Setting goals that match your current abilities prevents frustration and helps you build steady, meaningful progress. Always check with your doctor before starting new routines.

## • Start With a Senior Wellness Check-In

- Before setting goals, take a moment to assess:

- Physical health: mobility, endurance, chronic conditions
- Mental wellness: memory, mood, stress levels
- Social connections: regular interactions with friends or family
- Nutrition: whether meals are balanced and consistent

## • Achievable Physical Activity Goals

- Gentle movement is especially important for seniors. Try:

- Increasing daily steps by 10-20%
- Doing chair exercises twice a week
- Joining senior-friendly classes like tai chi, water aerobics, or gentle yoga
- Adding simple movements – like

heel raises – into daily routines

## • Nutrition Goals for Senior

**Health** - Small changes can improve energy, digestion, and heart health:

- Add one serving of vegetables per day
- Drink a glass of water with each meal
- Try one new healthy recipe weekly
- Reduce sodium by cooking more at home and reading labels

## • Stay Social and Connected

Social activity plays a major role in senior wellness. Consider:

- One weekly phone or video call with family or friends
- Joining a club, class, or volunteer group
- Accepting at least one social invitation each month

## • Don't Skip Preventive Care

- Schedule annual checkups and screenings early in the year
- Review medications with your doctor
- Stay current on recommended vaccines

• Track progress – A simple journal can help you stay consistent. Note how you feel each day and celebrate small wins.

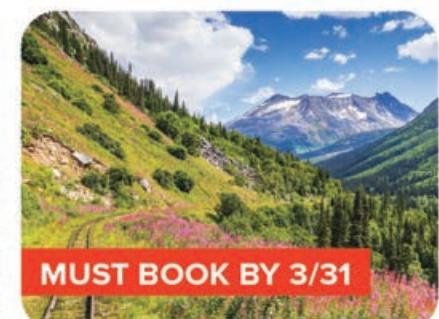
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## Introduce Your Children to the Joy of Music



Several of the students got together for a photo in-between lessons.

**By Ann Pittel**

Did you receive something special as a gift over the holidays? Here's a New Year's gift that lasts a lifetime: the joy of making music!

For 55 years, Cornerstone Music Conservatory has helped thousands of students – from toddlers to seniors – discover their musical voice. As one of our community's longest-standing arts institutions, we offer private and group lessons in all instruments, plus voice, conducting, and composition, in all styles – classical, jazz, or pop. Whether you're a total beginner or preparing for conservatory auditions, you'll find a welcoming home here.

With experienced and caring teachers, a nurturing environment, and a vibrant community of students, Cornerstone is a place where confidence grows, friendships form, and music becomes a lifelong companion. And, there's no better moment to begin.

Music studies have been shown to boost academic performance, strengthen focus, and enhance emotional well-being – benefits that last far beyond the lessons themselves.

In honor of our 55th year of exceptional music education, when you mention that you read about us in *The Santa Monica Star*, we're offering an extraordinary 55% off the first month of all lessons.



This teacher is pointing out the notes to her piano student.

This offer is only valid through February 28, 2026. It's our New Year's way to encourage you to join our happy musical families, reconnect with an old instrument, or let your child explore something new and inspiring. Call 310-820-1620 soon to reserve your special spot.

### Let's Goal Together at the Santa Monica Family YMCA



**By Araceli Alejandre**

As we turn the page into a brand-new year, the Santa Monica Family YMCA is inviting the community to embrace 2026 with purpose and achievable goals. Our January membership promotion, proudly themed “Let's Goal Together,” is all about inspiring individuals and families to take meaningful steps toward healthier, happier living.

Whether your focus is fitness, connection, stress reduction, or simply trying something new, we're here to help you set those intentions...and to stick to them!

Beginning December 26, 2025 and running through January 31, 2026, the Santa Monica Family YMCA invites everyone to explore our offerings and discover how we can support your wellness journey. A new year brings new motivation, and there's no better time to explore the programs, equip-

ment, and community that make the YMCA such a unique resource here in Santa Monica.

Guests are invited to come in for a personalized tour, where our friendly staff will guide you through our fitness centers, heated indoor pools, basketball gym, senior centers, family spaces, and more. Touring the Y is the perfect opportunity to ask questions, learn about memberships, meet our staff, and feel the welcoming environment that sets us apart.

Setting goals is easier when you have a community cheering you on. That's why “Let's Goal Together” is more than a slogan. It's an invitation to join a supportive network of neighbors all striving toward better health in the new year. Whether you're starting fresh or building on progress, we're excited to help you make 2026 your strongest year yet. Let's kick off the new year together.

Go to smfamilyymca.org for more details.

### Stick-to-Your-Ribs Comfort Food (Continued from Page 5)

Worcestershire sauce, and liquid smoke. The crunchy coleslaw complements perfectly.

Other meaty offerings include BBQ chicken, chicken salad, pulled pork, brisket, turkey, and more, plus tempting sides and

desserts, such as blackberry cobbler and banana pudding, all created with a whole lotta love. They're open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. **1329 Santa Monica Blvd., 310-310-2775.**

## Entertaining With Ease

## Plan a Small Party With a Few Close Friends



**By Maureen Molé**

Happy New Year! Let's make some positive changes this year. Most of us already know what experts are saying about our society. People are isolated, feeling lonely, and not engaging with others. This malady extends from teens spending too much time on video games, to adults who have stronger relationships with their telephones than with family and friends, and seniors who have sworn off cooking, parties, and even people.

It's time for a change. Plan a party, a small get-together, or a lunch with a few friends. Put the phones down, turn off the video games, and plan to be in the moment with some loved ones.

I was heartened to hear that the 1982 Martha Stewart cookbook, *Entertaining*, is being reissued. While my style is totally different from Martha's, it is encouraging to hear that some people are still interested in entertaining. Yay!

Last year in my January column, I recommended a Regifting Party, a Sunday Brunch, and a Potluck Dinner. The idea is to reach out and engage with others.

Don't wait for others to contact you, be the first to plan a get-together.

I was also encouraged when I visited the Williams Sonoma website ([williams-sonoma.com](http://williams-sonoma.com)). In the section Entertaining and Design Inspirations, I saw many how-to options relating to entertaining at home. Sections include how to set a table, buffet, stock a bar, and fold napkins. There's a guide to wine and beer glasses, how to build a food board with sweets or a charcuterie platter of cheeses and meats.

So, there's no acceptable excuses for staying isolated this coming year. Stop gazing into the digital abyss and call some friends and family. Even if you contact only one or two, invite them to your home. Encourage your teens, preteens, and senior family members to do the same. If you do, we will all feel so much better, emotionally happier, and connected in the new year, 2026.

**Maureen is the author of *The Book of Entertaining at Home*, a product spokesperson, and lecturer. Follow her on Instagram#Entertain\_at\_Home\_with\_Maureen, or email [MaureenMole@gmail.com](mailto:MaureenMole@gmail.com).**

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**Luxe Homecare Provides Services to Help Seniors Maintain Their Independence**

Managing a home health care agency is a continual challenge with rewards for Luxe Homecare owners Ben Adel and Fay Vahdani.

About 15 years ago, Ben finished working on his MBA at UCLA. Fay, a young mother of one daughter, was not sure what direction she would move in. Her background had been in fashion and marketing.

She and her husband were told that it would be wise to make sure their business involved seniors. She got her CNA license and also was chosen by the head nurse to shadow her to learn more. One thing that is impressive about Fay is her obvious enthusiasm in whatever aspect of her field she chooses to be a part of.

The couple opened a small office on Sunset Blvd. in the Pacific Palisades. With Ben's financial knowledge, he focused on billing and other details of the homecare business. They got office supplies, furniture, and soon, employees and patients followed.

When Fay looks back, she notes, "Every day is a challenge, every day is a learning lesson." Ultimately, Fay became more involved in the Palisades community. She joined the Women's Club and became the chair for the annual 90th birthday celebration for senior members. The event was put on hold when COVID made a difference in everyone's lives.

In order to expand their business, Ben and Fay hired consultants to help them to be able to



**Fay Vahdani and Ben Adel**  
Owners of Luxe Homecare

offer nurses, social workers, speech, occupational, and physical therapists, and eventually a hospice care unit.

When the Palisades Fire occurred last January, Fay contacted her caregivers and arranged for her drivers to get the caregivers and patients out of the Palisades. Fay's quick action to be sure her patients were safe led to many articles and media contacts that are hanging on the walls of their offices. Fay describes, "When we go through hardships, God opens doors for you. It will come back to us as a higher power is looking after us."

After losing their Palisades office, they opened one in Brentwood on San Vicente Blvd. She got supplies and office furniture from a thrift shop. She explained, "If I have a goal, it will happen."

**(Continued on Page 12)**



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## From the Santa Monica Pier

**The Pier Belongs to You****By Jim Harris**

In case you haven't noticed, I like to talk about the Pier. Yes, it's my job, but since the Pier has been such a big part of my life for the past 36 years, it's also my home, and I'm very proud of my home. That is why whenever I am off of the Pier at an event or a conference, or even representing the Pier's merchandise booth at our local open streets events, my primary subject of conversation is always the Pier. It's a joy to share, and more importantly, to listen to other people's perspectives.

In these conversations I learn of the many reasons that people love the Pier, how often they visit, what their favorite experiences are, and how we can improve. I also quite often hear from people who never visit the Pier, and those are typically the longer and more interesting conversations.

I have been told that the Pier is too crowded, too touristy, and too expensive. I understand that perception, but the reasoning behind

it is unfortunately misguided.

Yes, the Pier draws crowds as a seasonal tourist attraction, but for much of the year and much of each day, the Pier offers a peaceful morning or evening walk, often among other Santa Monica locals. For those who haven't taken that morning walk or enjoyed a sunset from the Pier's west end, I highly recommend that you do, for there is no greater way to be reminded of the fact that you live in a unique beachside community.

As for the perception of expense: A walk on the Pier is free. During that walk, you might want to take note of the pricing at the Pier's restaurants and retail merchants. They're actually quite comparable to the prices at other such venues.

In any conversation that I have with our local community, I am also sure to remind people of one thing – The Santa Monica Pier is owned by Santa Monicans. The Pier is yours, come visit and enjoy it.

**Jim Harris is the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Pier Corporation.**

**Teen Talk****A Report From a Busy High School Student****By Michelle Li**

New Year's resolutions may be slowly losing their grip, but local teenagers are still thinking about self improvement when they have time.

Grace has a whole list going – taking better care of her hair so it's not as dead, cutting back on hot chips, finding a hobby she actually enjoys, and learning to speak her mind more. It's the kind of mix that shows how teens are thinking about everything from basic self-care to emotional honesty.

Rosalie's resolution hits on something a lot of young people are wanting to, "spend less time on my phone and on social media and more with the people I love." Screen fatigue is real, and it seems like more teens are recognizing the value of face-to-face connections over endless scrolling.

Mental health is also a priority. One student wants to give herself more "me-time" and draw more consistently – like, way more than once a month. It's about finding balance, and actually sticking with the things that bring joy, instead of letting them fall by the wayside.

But, not everyone's on board with the whole resolution tradition. Anna wants to go on a hike every morning before school, but she calls it her prereresolution because she thinks, "resolutions are stupid and you should always achieve to be better." And, Fisa's pretty honest about the whole thing, "I don't really do resolutions because I'm always upset when I don't fulfill them."

Maybe that's the real trend here – Gen Z moving away from arbitrary yearly milestones and towards self-improvement at their own pace.

In theory, planning a party shouldn't require downloading another app. You could just text and make a group chat. Here is the thing about group chats – they get messy fast. Someone never responds. Three people ask about parking. Someone adds a friend. All of a sudden there are 47 unread messages asking if they should bring something.

The *Partiful* platform solves this by letting you send one link that has all the information already laid out. Your friends click it, say yes or no, and that's it. No endless back-and-forth. No scrolling through a chaotic thread to find the address again. The best part is the receiver doesn't have to download the app to accept the invitation!

What's interesting is how the app reflects the way Gen Z actually socializes. Everything's casual, but also weirdly organized. You want people to show up, but you're not sending formal invitations. You're putting a meme at the top of the invite and adding sparkle animations, but you're also tracking dietary restrictions, and setting a guest limit.

The features are surprisingly practical. You can poll people on what date works best instead of the usual, "does next Saturday work?" texts that go unanswered. You can blast updates to everyone without creating a group chat. You can even hide timestamps so it's less obvious when you're inviting someone last minute.

Cancel culture is perhaps one of the most interesting facets of Gen Z's online presence. Although not unique to this generation, cancel culture has certainly evolved with the rise of short form media as well as social media in general.

Before the advent of social

**(Continued on Page 11)**



## Historic Broadway

## Juanita's Beauty Salon

By Michael Ano

On a fall Friday, I spoke with Terri de la Peña about her mother's salon, Juanita's Beauty Salon. Terri shared stories of resilience, creativity, and care that shaped Santa Monica's Broadway corridor nearly a century ago.

Opened in 1931 by 22-year-old Mexican immigrant Juanita Escobedo (later de la Peña), the beauty shop first operated between 18th and 19th Streets before moving into the family's home on 15th Street. Juanita and her mother, Higinia Alarcón, arrived in Santa Monica over 100 years ago, settling along Broadway. They built a business, purchased property through a foreclosure sale, and created a space where neighbors felt welcomed and cared for. Terri still keeps her mother's appointment book – filled with familiar local names, written softly in pencil.

Palisades: the Most Wonderful Day of the Year  
(Continued from Page 1)

festive atmosphere with a mix of savory dishes and sweet treats. Children raced past, dogs wandered between groups, and conversations unfolded about the progress of rebuilding, insurance frustrations, and the emotional toll of temporary housing. What emerged was more powerful than any planned program: a renewed commitment to each other, and a sense that the neighborhood's strength was returning, one conversation at a time.

As the sun dipped behind the hills, residents made their way toward Palisades Village for the annual Christmas tree lighting. This year's turnout – thousands strong was the largest since the fire. At the center of the Village stood a 50-foot white fir, adorned with 3000 lights and more than 1500 ornaments. Holiday crafts kept children busy, choirs filled the air with music, and Santa delighted young ones as he moved through the crowd. Two children were invited to step forward and flip the oversized candy cane lever, sending a ripple of anticipation through the packed Village.

When the tree burst into light – radiant against the evening sky – the cheers were exuberant, but the emotion beneath them ran even deeper. For many fire survivors, attending their first major community event since losing their homes, standing beneath that brilliantly glowing fir felt like reclaiming a part of themselves. The moment captured what so many had been yearning for: hope, warmth, and the reminder that the community's spirit had endured.

As night settled in, the celebration continued at the Ronald Reagan Palisades American Legion Post 283 for the Palisades Bocce League Holiday Party. The Post was beautifully decorated with wreaths, garlands, and twinkling holiday lights, giving the hall a warm and inviting glow. A live band led by Jimmy Dunne energized the room with holiday classics and spirited sing-alongs,

Juanita's Beauty Salon functioned not only as a business and a home, but also as a symbol of possibility. The salon's story shows what it means to plant roots, invest in your block, and help shape its identity. The former salon buildings – including the original 18th-19th Street storefront, now an auto body shop – carry histories that remind us that every block in Santa Monica bears the imprint of families who built community long before redevelopment reshaped the landscape.

Terri remembers her mother and grandmother as "tough cookies," women whose determination left a lasting impact. Remembering Juanita's Beauty Salon today honors their legacy and offers inspiration to the generations growing up in the neighborhood – showing how the history of a single building can hold the strength, dreams, and stories of an entire community.

while gospel singers filled the hall with soulful harmonies that drew applause after nearly every number.

The Bocce League presented its annual awards, honoring sportsmanship, teamwork, volunteerism, and resilience – qualities that held special significance in a year marked by upheaval. Guests celebrated not only the achievements of the season, but the shared resolve that had carried so many through an extraordinarily difficult year. The festivities included singing contests, lively dance competitions, and a spirited musical chairs showdown that filled the room with laughter and friendly competition. It was joyful, heartfelt, and exactly the kind of gathering people had longed for.

Driving home, the full arc of the day lingered vividly: neighbors reconnecting on sunlit Marquez streets, a brilliant fir tree illuminating the Village at dusk, and holiday music drifting from Post 283 into the cool evening air.

December 6 didn't erase the challenges still ahead. Many families remain in temporary housing, rebuilt timelines stretch long, and unresolved insurance claims continue to weigh heavily. But for one extraordinary day, none of that defined us.

We were defined by community. We talked, hugged, sang, and laughed. We rediscovered the comfort of being together. And, we were reminded that resilience isn't measured by structures rising from the ground – it's measured by people rising for each other.

On December 6, the best day of 2025, the Palisades found its light again.

**Richard Lombari** is a Pacific Palisades resident, Real Estate Wealth Advisor with Sotheby's International Realty, 2nd Vice Commander of American Legion Post 283, Vice Chair of the Pacific Palisades Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG), and Board Member of the Santa Monica Family YMCA.

## Paws and Claws

## When Is it Safe to Vaccinate My Dog?



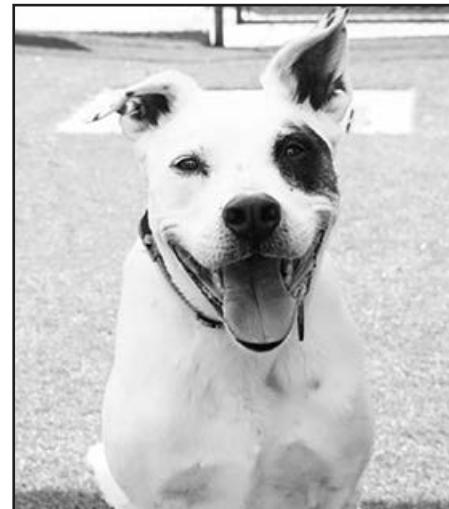
By Dr. Frank

Lavac, MS, DVM

**Q: I am concerned about giving my dog his vaccines any more. The human vaccine controversy has made me reluctant to vaccinate. What are the facts?**

**A:** Vaccines in dogs are still very important. I started practice in the '80s when Parvovirus lead to the death of many young dogs before

## Adopt a Pet



"Target" is such a good boy! He is very friendly, loves belly rubs, playing fetch, and playing with squeaky toys. He also walks great on a leash and he won't turn down his favorite duck treats. Please contact the Santa Monica City Shelter or go to smasf.org.

we had an effective vaccine.

Widespread canine rabies vaccination has led to the elimination of canine rabies in the U.S. In the Mideast, India and Africa, canine rabies is still a concern. In India, it is estimated that 18,000 to 20,000 human cases of fatal canine rabies occurs annually.

Canine distemper has been markedly reduced by vaccination. There are some vaccines that we consider "core" or essential and some that are optional depending on lifestyle and exposure to other dogs. Appropriate vaccination in puppies is particularly important. Discuss vaccination with your veterinarian. For further information on vaccination, google "AAHA vaccination guidelines."

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



## Star Comments



"At a recent community event, a woman introduced herself, saying she has enjoyed reading my monthly columns. I have gained several new clients who contacted me after reading my articles. My articles raise my visibility in the community and I enjoy writing them."

Lisa C. Alexander, Esq.  
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## Thoughts From a Busy High School Student

(Continued from Page 8)

slower, meaning "canceling" was less widespread. It was managed through traditional media, such as TV or tabloids. Certain people could omit certain news from being spread.

Social media has greatly changed celebrity culture. The famous are no longer distant, protected with PR, but are now under constant scrutiny. The public audience has more power than ever to judge and hold celebrities accountable. Most of the time, "canceling" involves requesting removal from the public space.

## Kahunas Patrol of Troop 223

(Continued from Page 2)

despite emotional strain, and to support one another through acts of kindness – big and small. The troop leaders encouraged open conversations about loss and recovery, fostering an environment where Scouts could process their experiences and draw strength from their shared journey.

Despite the upheaval, the Kahunas Patrol refused to let adversity define their year. In the Fall term, they proudly continued their tradition of three signature outings: a career trip, a good turn trip, and a fun trip. These excursions were more than just a break from the routine – they were opportunities to reconnect, engage with the broader community, and rediscover joy.

The career trip took the Scouts to a local architecture firm, HGA Architects, where they learned about design, sustainability, and problem-solving. The experience was particularly meaningful this year, as the Scouts saw firsthand how architects help communities rebuild after disasters. They toured model homes, discussed the importance of resilient structures, and even sketched their own visions for future neighborhoods.

In the spirit of service central to Scouting, the Kahunas Patrol or-

## Leave Room for the Magic

(Continued from Page 5)

food in person and sit down to eat, park 1-1/2 blocks away from the store of your choosing, shop and walk back to your car, and talk to/meet someone new while out and about.

You'll notice stress decrease, you'll enjoy much needed downtime, and you'll meet new people, which can turn out to be future friends, business partners, significant others, or just a great connection. I wish you a 2026 filled with eventful, inspiring, and fun encounters!

**Stacy McClelland is a longtime Pico Neighborhood resident and Santa Monica City staff member.**

## The Santa Monica - Pacific Palisades Lions

(Continued from Page 9)

one of our dinner meetings. For more info, contact me at jkfife88@yahoo.com.

Cancelling can be caused by old videos resurfacing – testaments to the celebrity's bad behavior, etc. What social media has done is that it has allowed people to be in control, as opposed to the traditional media sources.

In some cases, cancel culture can also be very volatile. After a cancellation, one heartfelt apology can make the public swoon and move on. In fact, when so many "cancellings" happen, it is hard to keep track of everything.

**Michelle Li is student at Santa Monica High School.**

ganized a good turn trip focused on sorting supplies at the American Legion Palisades Post 283 Fire Relief Distribution Center.

As 2025 drew to a close, the Kahunas Patrol of Troop 223 stands as a testament to the power of community and the enduring spirit of youth. The challenges they faced would have daunted many, but these Scouts have emerged stronger, more empathetic, and deeply connected. Through career exploration, service, and shared adventure, they have not only rebuilt their routines but have also played a role in rebuilding the fabric of Pacific Palisades itself.

The Scouts and leaders of Troop 223 extend their gratitude to the wider community for its support. They invite all to join them in celebrating not just survival, but the remarkable resilience and hope that grows when neighbors stand together. Troop 223 welcomes new members to this incredible group of young people. For information on how to join, please contact Greg Frost at frostfamily@frostinvestigations.com.

**James Huff is the current patrol leader for the Kahunas.**

## Answer to Our Neighborhood Celebrities

(Continued from Page 1)



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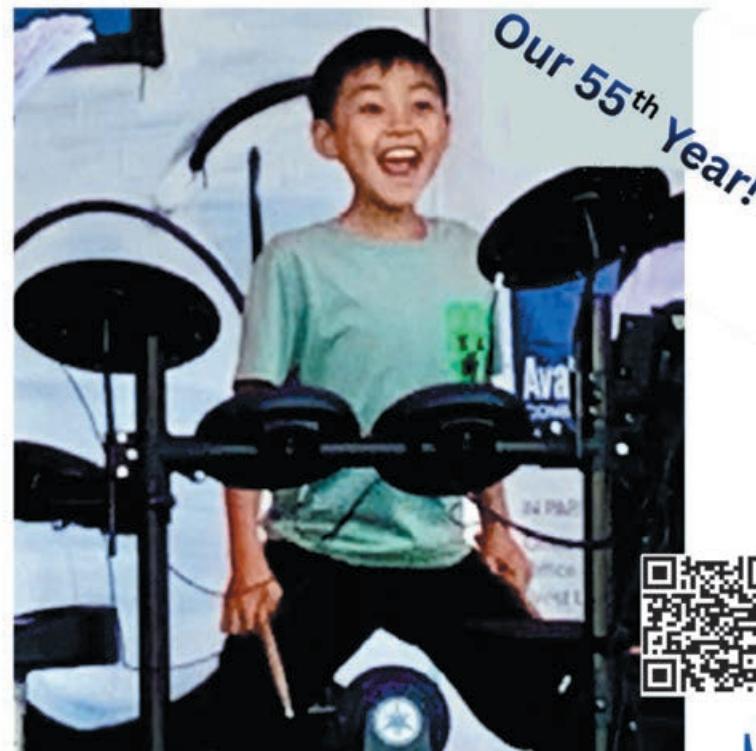
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## Planning Ahead

## Road Map for Successor Trustee



**By Lisa Alexander, Esq.**  
It is a lot of work to be named as Successor Trustee of a Trust. In most cases the Trustee is stepping in without much information to go by other than perhaps an outdated schedule of Trust assets. You can make the job easier by gathering key information ahead of time to serve as a kind of road map for your Successor Trustee.

Family and beneficiary information. It will be helpful for your Trustee to have current contact information for your family and other beneficiaries of your Trust. For beneficiaries who are not immediate family members, it can be helpful to know the relationship.

Current assets list. The schedule of assets attached to your Trust is likely outdated. Keep a current list of assets with bank or brokerage name, branch location if applicable, name of any advisor associated with the account, and account information.

Life insurance. Keep a list of life insurance policies with the name of the insurance company, the agent, the policy numbers, and the named beneficiaries.

Usernames and passwords are critical. In addition to your various online accounts, make sure your Trustee can access your cell phone and computer.

Cryptocurrency has become common. You need to leave

instructions for accessing your crypto holdings or they risk being lost forever.

Location of valuables. Do you have a home safe and if so, what is the combination? Or do you have another safe place in your home where you keep your jewelry, coins, or cash? If you have a safe deposit box, your Trustee needs the key, the box number and most importantly the bank branch where the box is located. It would also be extremely helpful to make an inventory of items kept in a safe deposit box.

Professional advisors. Your Successor Trustee will be grateful for a list with contact information of your professional advisors such as your accountant, investment advisor, insurance agent, property manager, and any other legal professionals. This will save your Trustee time and ensure smooth transition.

Tax returns. Prior years' tax returns can provide vital information. If you prepare and file your own tax returns, make sure they are accessible, either as hard copies or accessible on your computer.

The information on this list will give your Trustee a head start. You may think of other information and by all means you should include it.

**Lisa C. Alexander, Esq.**  
**JAKLE, ALEXANDER & PATTON, LLP**  
**2001 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 420**  
**Main Line: 310-395-6555**

## Luxe Homecare Provides Services to Help

(Continued from Page 7)



Several members of the office staff pose for a photograph with Fay and Ben before going in to a meeting.

With each of their individual strengths, Fay explains, "We work with our hearts, we know the patients' stories and backgrounds. We treat each patient as they deserve to be treated."

There is so much more to learn

about Luxe Homecare. Call 424-260-5150 to find out the benefits of being an employee, details of the various services they offer, and be sure to read more in next month's issue. —D.M.

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