

A LOS ALTOS TOWN CRIER PUBLICATION | FALL 2025

# LIVING IN

LOS ALTOS | LOS ALTOS HILLS | MOUNTAIN VIEW

## IN THIS ISSUE

Discovering the Raw  
Beauty of Local  
Wildlife Photography  
& How to Give Back  
to our Community

## ROOTED IN HISTORY

Discover the Past at  
the Los Altos History  
Museum

## LOCAL ARTS ABOUND

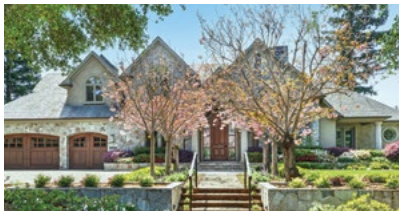
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Expressions Close  
to Home



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1023 Katrine Court, Sunnyvale | \$2,598,000  
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10920 Kester Drive, Cupertino | \$2,498,000  
Sold in 9 days at over the asking price!



1274 Sharon Park Drive, Menlo Park | \$2,495,000  
Represented the buyer.



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## Los Altos Town Crier

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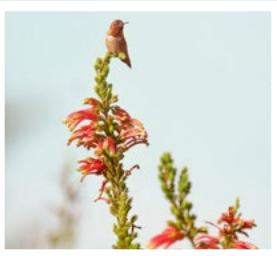
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Hundreds of subscribers receive the Town Crier in neighboring communities as well as out of state. The Town Crier can be purchased at newsstands in Los Altos and Mountain View.



# Young photographer trying to save endangered wildlife, one note card at a time



BY LISA ZIVANIC | TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

Since winning a photography contest last year for his image of a juvenile black hawk eagle, 10-year-old Aayush Gunari has transformed his passion into a mission by using his artistic abilities to enact change.

Going beyond just capturing wildlife through his lens, Aayush is now selling notecards, notebooks and calendars featuring his photos, donating proceeds to organizations that help endangered animals. The Los Altos resident has already donated \$500 to The Opera, an international organization supporting endangered yellow-eyed penguins.

“... It really felt good that I was actually making a difference,” Aayush said. “And I heard that this hasn’t been such a good year for the yellow-eyed penguins, but that motivated me even more to keep going, because they really need our help.”

Aayush, who is entering fifth grade at Oak Avenue Elementary School, said he started taking photos approximately a year and a half ago. A family trip to Costa Rica last summer piqued his interest in photography, in particular when his mom, Suchita Rao, was taking photos of birds. Rao said she’s been taking wildlife and landscape photos for more than 15 years.

“At first (my mom) was a bit reluctant, because it was a big camera, but eventually she started letting me take photos,” Aayush said. “So then that’s when I took a picture of a juvenile black hawk eagle in the Monteverde Cloud Forest.”

He entered that photo in The Week Junior’s 2024 National Nature Photo Contest – and it won. The photo appeared in the September 2024 issue of The Week Junior, an educational magazine for kids. ➤





Aayush Gunari, a local fifth-grader, found his passion for wildlife photography from his parents. He decided to raise money to save endangered wildlife by selling notecards with prints of his work. PHOTOS COURTESY OF AAYUSH AND ARUN GUNARI



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The win encouraged Aayush to pursue photography. After using Rao's old Nikon D90, Aayush now snaps shots with a more advanced Sony Alpha 1 mirrorless camera – a surprise gift from his parents.

"Now that I was taking photos, I thought, 'Why can't I use these photos to help the endangered animals?' So, with the help of my parents, we created small greeting cards and calendars with my photos on them, and we sold them," Aayush said.

Rao added that selling the cards and calendars have taught her son to persevere, since there is a lot of trial and error in photography.

Aayush sells his work for \$10-\$20, donating all the proceeds to The Opera and the World Wildlife Fund. He sells his photos at pop-ups at Cranberry Scoop in Los Altos, REI in Sunnyvale and school events. He sets up shop at Cranberry Scoop monthly.

Given that Aayush, his mom and more recently his 5-year old younger brother, Rohan, are involved with photography, the business has become a family affair. Dad Arun Gunari is also involved, helping design the cards and calendars. Together, they package the photos and organize the pop-up tables.

Aayush is the primary salesperson at the pop-ups, where he educates potential customers. Aayush recalled ➤





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Aayush Gunari sells some of his notecards in front of Cranberry Scoop in downtown Los Altos. He poses with Ellen Biolsi, owner of Cranberry Scoop, during a notecard pop-up earlier this year. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ARUN GUNARI

an instance at a recent pop-up where his work resonated with a community member.

“She was so moved by my cause that she said to keep her cards ready, and then she walked 15 minutes to the bank, got cash and came back, and made it a point to buy the cards,” Aayush said. 🌸

*For more information on Aayush’s work and pop-up schedule, find him on Instagram @savewildlifeforall or visit his blog memorieswithbrasa.com.*

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PAGE 8 | LIVING IN MAGAZINE | SEPTEMBER 24, 2025





# SAFETY RESOURCES

Let's build a safer, more resilient community together.



## Are you ready for the next earthquake?

October is Earthquake Preparedness Month—create a family plan, secure heavy items, and stock your emergency kit.

Then join millions for the Great ShakeOut on October 16 at 10:16 AM: Drop, Cover, and Hold On!

Learn more at [shakeout.org/California](https://shakeout.org/California)

To enhance wildfire resilience across **all levels of our community**, LAHCFD offers a range of programs tailored to address risk—from large-scale fuel reduction efforts to individual emergency preparedness.

### RESIDENT / PROPERTY LEVEL PROGRAMS

#### Here is how you can prepare:

- Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Assessment & Rebate Program
- Defensible Space Brush Chipping & Debris Removal Program
- Defensible Space Fuel Reduction Monthly Drop Off
- Emergency Preparedness Classes & Training



### NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL PROGRAMS

#### Here is how your neighborhood can prepare:

- Firewise USA
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) / Teen CERT



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### COMMUNITY LEVEL PROGRAMS

#### Here is how LAHCFD helps prepare the community:

##### Integrated Hazardous Fuel Reduction

- Evacuation Route Projects
- Community Strategic Fuel Break
- I-280 Shaded Fuel Break Project

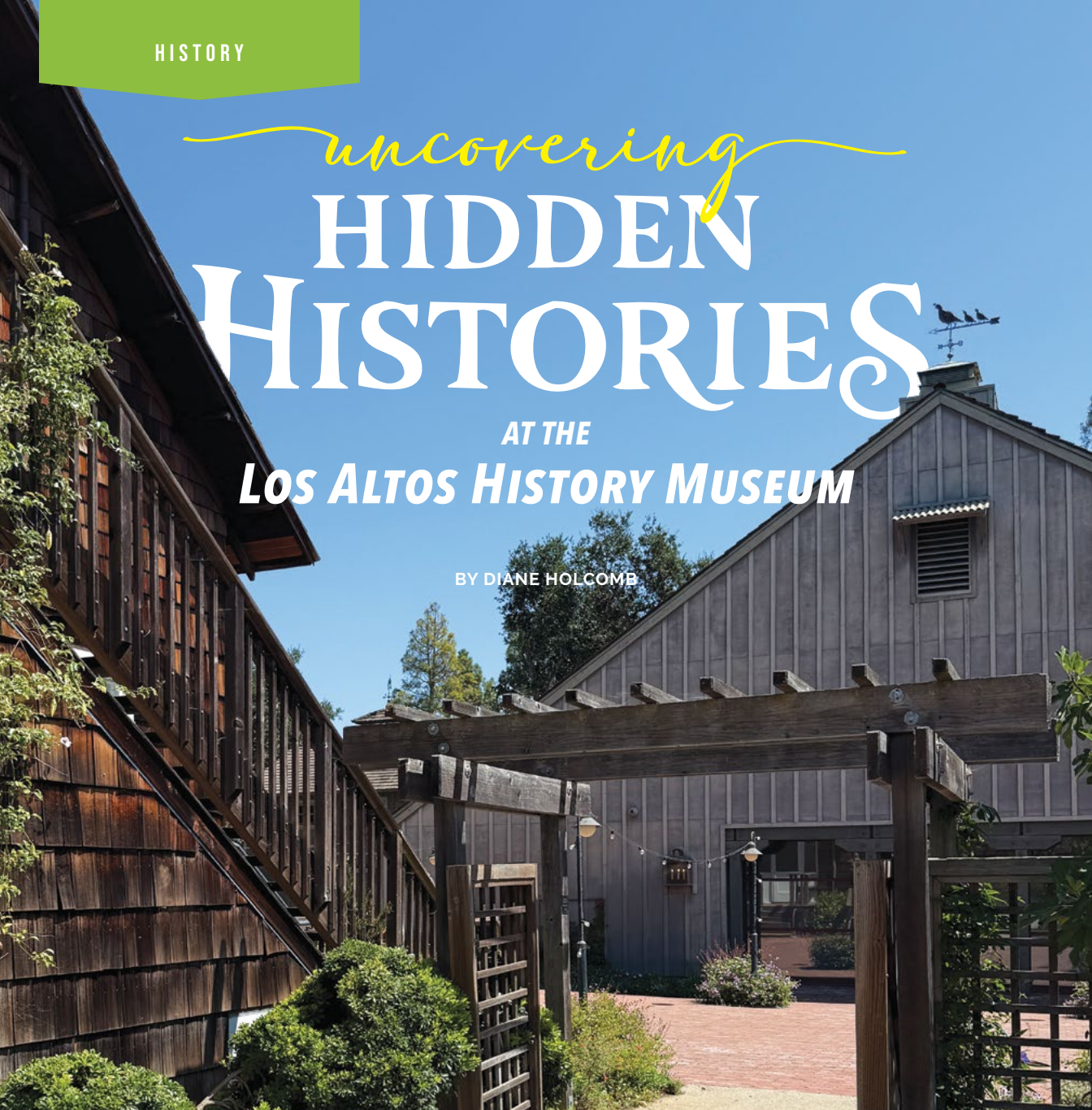




# uncovering HIDDEN HISTORIES

AT THE  
**Los Altos History Museum**

BY DIANE HOLCOMB



**L**os Altos and the surrounding region have transformed dramatically over time – from the agricultural “Valley of Heart’s Delight” to the technological hub known as “Silicon Valley.” Yet the area is far more narrative-rich and complex than commonly known. Many of these lesser-known stories might have gone untold if not for the Los Altos History Museum.

Located in the Los Altos Civic Center between the library and community center, the museum occupies a three-story building constructed in

2001. Inside, visitors will discover two galleries and a gift shop, while behind the scenes, the building houses a collections vault that preserves more than 20,000 historical objects and administrative offices that support the museum’s operations. Outside, the museum’s historical J. Gilbert Smith House stands surrounded by gardens and a welcoming courtyard that hosts weddings, celebrations and community events. Volunteers help care for the adjacent heritage apricot orchard, preserving a link to the region’s agricultural past. ➤





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The museum’s roots trace back to the J. Gilbert Smith House, a redwood-shingled craftsman home built between 1901 and 1905 by one of Los Altos’ early residents and apricot growers. Furnished with 1930s period decor, the house offers a glimpse into the daily life of an orchardist’s family. Designated a local historical landmark and a California State Point of Historical Interest in 1987, the home also features an exhibit chronicling the Smith family’s story.

The museum’s main building invites visitors to explore changing exhibitions and the interactive, multimedia permanent exhibition, Making Connections: Stories from the Land. Designed to engage all ages, this immersive experience honors the diverse cultures and communities that have shaped the region – from the Indigenous Ohlone to Spanish missionaries, Mexican rancheros, immigrant farmers and modern tech innovators. A highlight is the model train diorama of 1932 Los Altos,

enhanced with augmented reality to bring local history to life.

Outdoors, the Transforming the Land exhibit showcases the area’s agricultural prime, with a sulfur drying shed, apricot cutting shed,

antique farm tools and a restored 1915 tank house. Kids especially enjoy the hands-on features, like climbing aboard a tractor that “roars” to life and peeking into a vintage three-person outhouse. ➤

*main building*



The Los Altos History Museum is a way for the local community to learn about Los Altos’ roots, along with the roots of surrounding areas. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOAN NGUYEN

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**Court Ruling Fails to Halt Commission Collusion and Price Fixing in Real Estate**  
- *The DeLeon Insight*  
(May 2025)



**Off Market Listings - A Hidden Sale or a Discriminatory Practice?**  
- *The DeLeon Insight*  
(May 2025)



**Agents Push for "Pocket," "Private," or "Exclusive" a.k.a. Hidden Listings**  
- *The DeLeon Insight*  
(July 2025)

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## *transforming the land*

Beyond its walls, the museum offers more ways to engage with local history. Visitors can listen to oral history clips, watch past programs, shop for gifts and Los Altos-themed merchandise online and take a virtual tour of the J. Gilbert Smith House.

Throughout the year, the museum hosts educational programs, neighborhood block parties and beloved family events like the Apricot STEM Fair

in July and Train Day in September. Its annual themed fundraiser offers a memorable evening that blends local history with elegantly catered food, live music, silent and live auctions, and a Fund-a-Need appeal to support a specific museum goal. Proceeds from the event fund exhibitions, educational outreach and preservation efforts, making a lasting impact on the community. ➤



The Los Altos History Museum is situated next to the Smith House, once owned by the Smith Family, that overlooked an apricot orchard. Many of the old buildings and structures around the museum were once used by workers at the orchard. PHOTOS BY LUCY CHEN | TOWN CRIER



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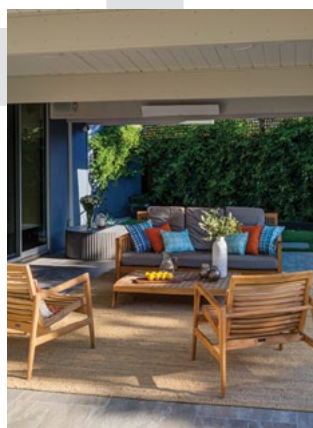


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## apricot cutting shed

Volunteers are essential to the museum's success – they care for the garden, mount exhibits, record oral histories, recruit members and support day-to-day operations. Museum members enjoy benefits including free or discounted admission to programs and events, and, at higher levels, reciprocal access to over 1,400 cultural institutions nationwide.

This treasured community resource thrives thanks to the generous support of donors, members and volunteers. ❖

*To plan your visit or learn how to get involved, visit [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org).*

*The museum is open to the public Thursday through Sunday, from noon to 4 p.m., with free admission.*



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BY NOOR KHAN  
TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

Many Los Altos residents might recognize Los Altos Rotary Fine Art in the Park and the Kiwanis Pet Parade as iconic local events, but they may be less familiar with the organizations behind them.

The Rotary Club of Los Altos and the Kiwanis Club of Los Altos are both local branches of international service clubs, and both play more of a role in the community than most residents may know.

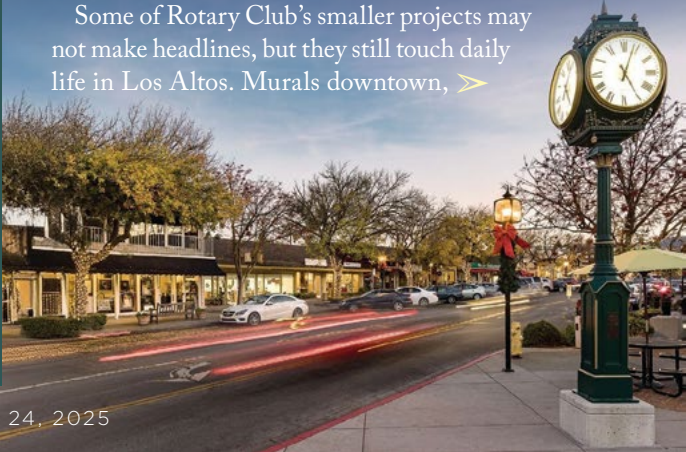
**ROTARY**

This past August marked 50 years of Fine Art in the Park, perhaps the Rotary Club’s best-known event. Over the course of two days, the event showcases the work of more than 150 artists and draws visitors from in and around Los Altos.

“In an age of AI and algorithms, I think validating that imagination matters,” said Rotary Club of Los Altos President Crysta Krames, who has been a Rotarian for 16 years. “We care about the soul of the community, and art highlights that.”

The event generates roughly \$500,000 in proceeds each year, according to Rotarian Sandy Mingia. A cut of that money goes directly into the organization’s various service projects, Krames said.

Some of Rotary Club’s smaller projects may not make headlines, but they still touch daily life in Los Altos. Murals downtown, ➤



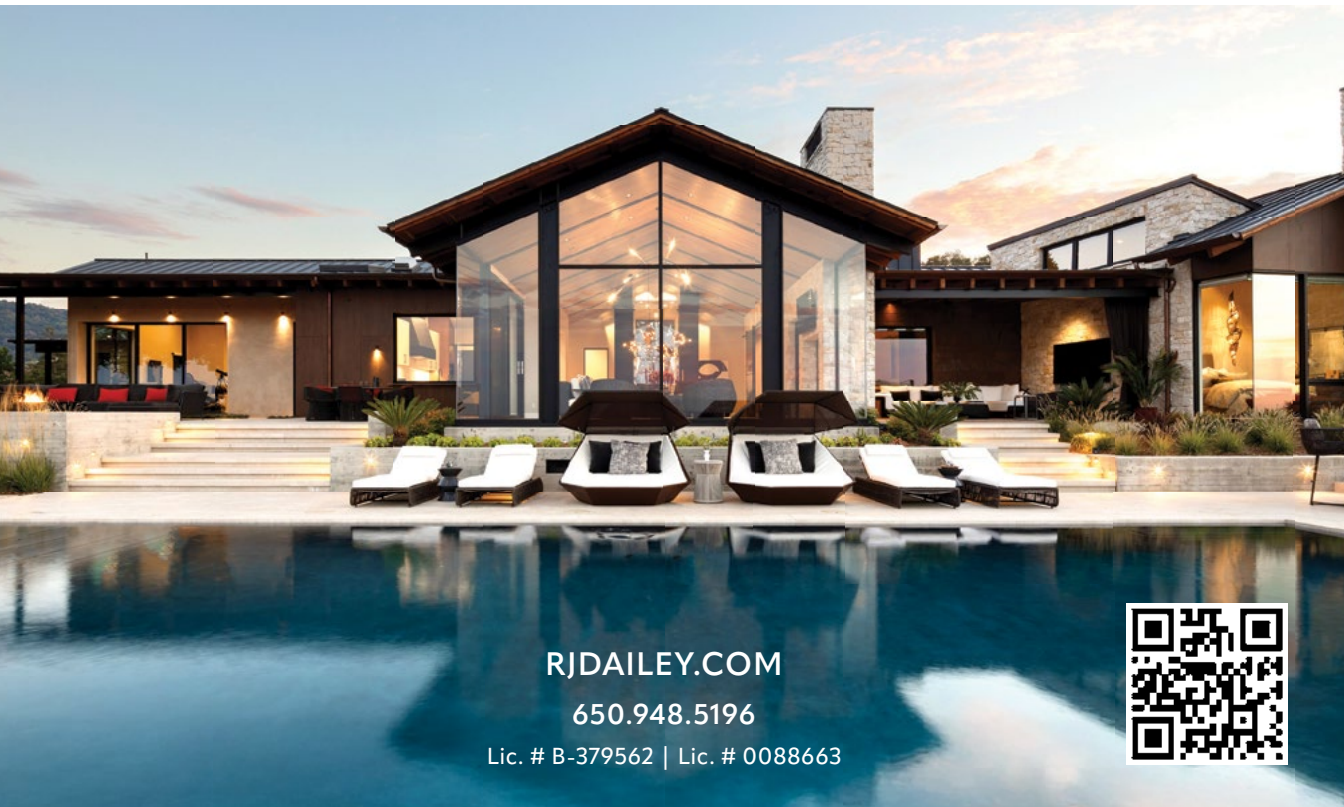
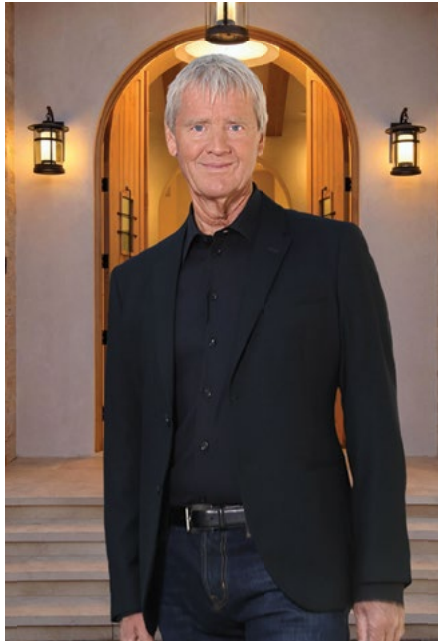


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such as the one in Veterans Plaza and at 200 Main Street, bear plaques reading “Rotary Club of Los Altos.” Mingia highlighted other efforts, like installing water fountains for people and pets at Lincoln Park and fundraising to add electricity for park events.

“We look where there’s a need, where we can make our world better, make the world prettier, more peaceful for other people,” Mingia said.

**KIWANIS**

What drew Martha McClatchie to Kiwanis was simple enough: the club’s motto, “Serving children of the world.”

“I just thought there couldn’t be a more perfect organization for me to be interested in, because I love being around children,” McClatchie said. “I’ve done Girl Scouts, I’ve done summer camps, and so the opportunity to be able to help more children in a broader context with a group of people who also think that that’s important, is what resonated with me overall.”

After 13 years in Kiwanis, she served as president from 2016–2018 and is now the club’s treasurer.

When neighbors ask about her Kiwanis work, McClatchie said she often hears: “Why do I need a club to volunteer?” Unlike volunteering at schools, hospitals, or through an employer – where logistics are handled behind the scenes – Kiwanis steps in to coordinate efforts where less structure exists.

“The event happens, and it’s nice to have everyone at an event and have it go smoothly,” McClatchie said. “But to me, a lot of the planning that is involved is probably as fulfilling.”

While the club may be known for events like the Christmas Tree Lot and the Pet Parade, which celebrated its 78th year in May, McClatchie honed in on the willingness of her fellow Kiwanis members to jump in wherever help is needed. She recalled an afternoon spent clearing an overgrown path at Hidden Villa with a group of Kiwanis members.

“Now, was that fun clearing the weeds? No, but there were a lot of people there, and everyone had tools, started to sing their own songs, and we had a picnic lunch right after that,” McClatchie said. “It’s those kinds of people, >





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Members of the local Kiwanis and Rotary clubs are active in the local community. From raising money to benefit those in need to being active in cornerstone Los Altos traditions, their impact is felt widely. TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTOS AND PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTHA MCCLATCHIE AND SANDY MINGIA

they’re just service minded. If there’s something that needs to be done in the community, they’ll do it.”

### INTERNATIONAL

While belonging to the global organizations of Kiwanis International and Rotary International, local members often adapt the organization’s larger initiatives to fit their communities – and sometimes launch projects of their own. Fundraising for global initiatives is part of the Kiwanis Los Altos branch’s work, but McClatchie shared that the educational component has significant value for herself and other members.

“(Prior to joining Kiwanis) I didn’t appreciate to what extent I would learn new things,” McClatchie said. “Like I didn’t know that neonatal tetanus was still an issue in countries – why haven’t we eradicated that yet?”

Education has also been a key aspect of Los Altos Rotary’s history: in 1989, the club was a notable proponent of AIDS awareness and published a 30-minute video called “The Los Altos Story” that was distributed worldwide, translated into six languages and won a Peabody Award for Broadcasting Excellence, according to the Los Altos Rotary AIDS Project website.

“Decades later, it’s not where our new members are focused,” Krames said. “But we like to use it as an example of how a single Rotary Club’s vision sparks this change around the globe, because Rotarians are people of action.”

In addition to homegrown initiatives, members of Los Altos Rotary have been part of countless trips across the world in an effort to set up self-sustaining projects; Mingia recalled Los Altos Rotarians going to the Andes in Peru to help farmers make rich soil with compost. ➤



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“We start out by providing them to them, then we make it a local project,” Mingia said. “Get some of their skin in the game, so that they own their lives.”

In sharing her own approach to Rotary, Krames referred to the theme for her presidential team: “Unite for good.” Members are able to align themselves with Rotary’s “Avenues of Service” as they see fit, from Veterans Support to the growing Climate Action pillar.

“How could you not want to be part of such a powerful, human-centered organization doing the work to move the needle forward, even when sometimes you feel like you’re not always celebrated for that?” Krames said.

**FOSTERING COMMUNITY**

Both organizations have opportunities to participate at varying capacities: Rotary offers a formal Satellite Club and Kiwanis welcomes volunteers for specific projects.

Some members can’t seem to get enough.

“(Rotary is) a reason to get up in the morning,” Mingia said. “(I know I’m) going to accomplish things with friends and, being retired, that I am going to continue learning, my brain is not going to become stagnant.”

Similarly, the Kiwanis Los Altos website describes the club as a “Kiwanis Family.”

“I wasn’t expecting the camaraderie,” McClatchie said. “I wasn’t looking for friends, per se, but it is really nice when you’re around a bunch of people who are very like minded.”



Rotarians install a bear along State Street in Los Altos for the 2021 Fine Art in the Park event. The bear was part of a Rotary fundraising event that sponsored artists and the club’s other charitable endeavors. TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

This like-mindedness appears to unite members of both clubs.

“I say that you don’t come to Rotary to build your resume, you come to build a meaningful life,” Krames said. “But often your resume, just like your character, benefits as a direct result of your engagement.” 🌸

*To join or for more information on the Rotary Club of Los Altos, visit [portal.clubrunner.ca/4000](https://portal.clubrunner.ca/4000). To join or for more information on the Kiwanis Club of Los Altos, visit [losaltoskiwanis.org](https://losaltoskiwanis.org).*



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Options

# abound for local youth interested in theater

"Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean"

BY CHLOE ESHAGH  
TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

The Los Altos and Mountain View area is home to several theater companies that encourage young people to participate in the performing arts.

Los Altos Youth Theatre, Peninsula Youth Theatre and Upstage Theater provide youth with year-round opportunities to learn, perform and grow both onstage and behind the scenes.

## LOS ALTOS YOUTH THEATRE

LAYT is part of the Los Altos Stage Company and stages shows that offer students a more intimate, focused theater experience, according to education director Kristen Walter. Walter emphasized the program's small cast sizes and individual attention.

"When you do a show at LAYT, you are automatically guaranteed a ton of stage time," Walter said. "We don't double cast our shows. There are no kids at LAYT that fade into the background. There's no background.

They're it. So we do get to know these kids really well."

Walter added that while LAYT charges a \$750 participation fee, the program doesn't require parent volunteer hours. Instead, LAYT uses the fees to hire a professional creative team, including set designers, choreographers and set painters.

Each season consists of three shows: a fall, winter and summer production. Rehearsals typically run for six to seven weeks. However, the planning begins months earlier. In addition to productions, LAYT offers summer camps and creative workshops where students take on more than just acting roles.

"Not only were the kids in the show, but they also created all of the props. ... I taught them stage painting, like scenic painting techniques," Walter said. "They learn a lot about theater through that process."

For Walter, theater is about more than just performance. It's about developing empathy and life skills.

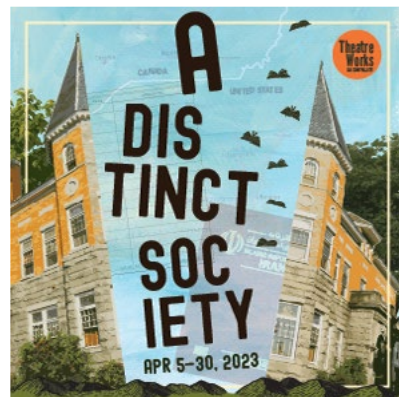
"Theater, in and of itself, is like an empathy gym," she said. "Thinking quickly on your feet, problem solving,

working as part of a team – those are all skills that you will use anywhere you go."

## PENINSULA YOUTH THEATRE

PYT stages plays and musicals throughout the year in downtown Mountain View. Students are encouraged to participate in a variety of its programs, according to Connor Day, PYT's managing director. She added that students are also encouraged to "go out and do their school musicals or try other theater companies."

As a nonprofit organization, PYT receives about 30% of its income ➤





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from grants, local foundations and individual donors, Day said, while the rest comes from ticket sales and tuition fees. However, tuition covers only about 60% of the actual cost per student, and Day said PYT offers scholarships to ensure that its programs remain accessible.

“Our kids are getting trained by folks who do theater for a living,” Day said. “We do offer a lot of volunteer opportunities for responsible teenagers to get backstage and support our technical aspects.” Teens at PYT can work alongside professional designers, stage managers and technicians. Day said opportunities include shadowing lighting designers, assisting with sound equipment, helping in costume construction and serving as teen assistant stage managers during musicals.

“Our focus has a big emphasis on teamwork and responsibility,” Day said. “We want to bring kids together in an artistic setting to create something as a group and learn all



the important things about how the arts bring people together to make something larger than they would be able to do on their own.”

UPSTAGE THEATER

Upstage Theater is another Mountain View-based company offering youth-focused productions, but with a teen-led approach. Upstage runs during the academic year, staging

shows in October, March and May at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts. Each summer, it hosts a fundraiser cabaret to support the next season.

The teen-run company stands out for its commitment to accessibility and authenticity, according to Jacks Ezakadan, Upstage’s artistic director for 2025–26. The theater company ➤

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"Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean"



"Lizard Boy"

avoids junior versions of plays and musicals and charges no participation fees.

"A lot of community theater companies that are for teenagers will cost money to participate, and we didn't want to do that," Ezakadan said. "We want to allow teenagers to take

on roles that they wouldn't be able to in school theater: to direct, to design, to actually lead productions."

Because there are no fees, Upstage relies entirely on ticket sales and donations – most often from parents of cast and crew or other community members, according to Ezakadan, the former stage manager. Occasionally, it receives corporate donations.

To promote its productions, Upstage focuses heavily on both digital and physical marketing strategies.

"Most of our advertisement is done through social media – Instagram, TikTok and Facebook," Ezakadan said. "Instagram and TikTok tend to target teenagers, but Facebook tends to target their parents. We also do physical advertising, like posters around the community for anyone who feels like going to a show and sees our poster in attempts to target both teenagers and adults." ☆

*For more information on Los Altos Youth Theatre, visit [losaltosstage.org/los-altos-youth-theatre](http://losaltosstage.org/los-altos-youth-theatre).*

*For more information on PYT, visit [pytnet.org](http://pytnet.org).*

*For more information on Upstage Theater, visit [upstagetheater.net](http://upstagetheater.net).*



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