

# Living

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Los Altos Hills  
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**Los Altan transforms fruit into  
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## **Also inside:**

- **Girl Scouts bolster bees**
- **Beloved mailman retires**
- **Cauliflower oatmeal**
- **Muralist publishes book**

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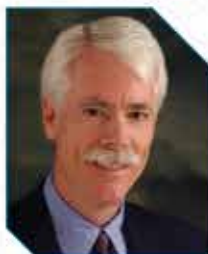
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**Cover photo:** Los Altos resident Nuchi De Giuli samples the fruits of her jam-making labors.

PHOTO BY ERIC DAVIDOVE/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

# Bee prepared

*Two local Girl Scouts focus on native species for Silver Award project*



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

**Girl Scouts Dhrithi Vishwa, left, and Izzy Sehnert display wooden homes created for mason bees native to the Bay Area. The girls are working toward earning their Silver Award with the project.**

**By Christina Cheng**

Town Crier Editorial Intern

*Usually, the term* “save the bees” refers to honeybees – the bright-yellow insects depicted in popular culture.

For Girl Scouts Izzy Sehnert and Dhrithi Vishwa, however, their bee-focused Silver Award project is set on reviving and spreading awareness about a lesser-known species – the native mason bee – through building and installing bee houses throughout the community, including in backyards.

Former Los Altos resident Izzy, an eighth-grader at Senha Intermediate School in Half Moon Bay, and Mountain View resident Dhrithi, an eighth-grader at Bullis

Charter School, are members of local Troop 61025. After earning the Bronze Award as a troop by financially assisting social workers, Izzy and Dhrithi were inspired to pursue the Silver Award together. It’s the highest award a Cadette (a middle-school-aged Girl Scout) can earn, achieved through a project focused on improving the community.

“I really liked the fact that we could actually help people,” Izzy said. “We did (the Bronze Award) as a troop, but I wanted to challenge myself and do it with others to make a big difference in the community.”

When Izzy and Dhrithi started planning their project last summer, they wanted to focus on the more

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well-known honeybees after a suggestion from their troop leader but soon realized such a project would not be feasible.

“Our original plan was to have a bee-hive on top of a library or in a community garden where they could harvest the honey and sell it to fund the place,” Dhrithi said. “But then we realized that wouldn’t work, since people weren’t too keen on the idea of having just bees flying around.”

One of their advisers, a beekeeper, suggested using the lesser-known mason bees. Through research, Izzy and Dhrithi found that mason bees are nonaggressive, solitary and pollinate at a higher rate than honeybees. However, their numbers are declining because they can only fly a few hundred yards.

“Whenever they’re living on a produce farm, they can only get nutrients from one specific plant. That’s why they’re dying off easier,” Izzy said. “We decided to put them in the backyard to have them get more nutrients without flying so much.”

Dhrithi added, “I think that also people tend to kind of



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

**Dhrithi Vishwa arranges the reed “nesting” materials used to attract and house mason bees, natural pollinators of native plants.**

forget about (mason bees). “It’s usually about honeybees because people want the honey, but I think it’s also important to spread awareness that there are other types of bees, and ones that are native to California, that are slightly declining in numbers that we need to focus on.”

*Project logistics*

Izzy and Dhrithi built bee-house kits that include 10 mason bees, a bee house, mud or clay (for the bees to protect their eggs), a water dispenser to keep the mud moist and an instructional pamphlet on how to care for the bees. They received 14 bee houses from their adviser and bought the bees online, negotiating a discount as a result of their project. The bee homes can be installed in backyards – with some specific requirements.

“You need to have it on a wall, hung up 6 to 7 feet above the ground, and it needs to be on a wall that gets sunlight from the morning – specifically the south or southeastern side is the ideal place,” Izzy said. “You also need to have plants and flowers in your backyard that produce pollen and nectar.”

With the bee houses ready, Izzy and Dhrithi advertised their project on Nextdoor, drawing enthusiastic replies.

“We got a lot of responses, so we had to stop it. ... We have a wait-list too now, and we really weren’t expecting that much of a response from everybody,” Dhrithi said. “It was kind of overwhelming at first, but it was also really cool because we thought only a few people would respond.”

The girls hope their project spreads awareness about and improves the plight of mason bees.

“They’re not quite endangered yet, but they are slowly declining,” Dhrithi said. “So we hope to make even a small impact to stop that decline a little bit.”

**For more information on the project, email the girls’ mothers at [sehnertx4@gmail.com](mailto:sehnertx4@gmail.com) or [vishwa.ranjitha@gmail.com](mailto:vishwa.ranjitha@gmail.com).**

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# Stamp of approval

*Beloved Hills mailman hangs up his shorts after three decades of service*



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

**Cruz Aragon at Foothills Nature Preserve in Palo Alto, where he'd sometimes stop for a break.**

**By Megan V. Winslow**  
Staff Writer/meganw@latc.com

*Herodotus is often credited* for the U.S. Postal Service’s unofficial motto: “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” At the time, circa 500 B.C., the ancient Greek historian referred to a fleet of mounted couriers entrusted with military dispatches during the Greco-Persian wars.

Over the course of nearly three decades delivering correspondence and packages to Los Altos Hills residents, USPS mail carrier Cruz Aragon experienced his own fair share of inclement weather – and trying conditions. As noted in a letter he left customers in February to announce his retirement, at times he was yelled at, laughed at, spat at, attacked by dogs and even bitten.

“For 29 years in Los Altos Hills, it’s not really easy,” said Anli Zhao, the Los Altos-based postmaster and Aragon’s boss. “You’re driving up hills. But he’s excellent. The carriers and the customers love him.”

Fittingly, Aragon’s letter focused on the “good moments.”

“I have fond memories of some of my postal customers’ kinder-age children, excitedly awaiting the daily mail’s arrival,” he wrote. “Also watching those same children grow from a child, to married with children, or moving away to college or university, even MIT, with promising professional careers.”

Customers along route No. 12 know Aragon for his warm smile, hiking boots and shorts, an informal uniform he wore no matter what the weather. A Newark resident, he began working for the USPS 34 years ago. When the postal employee assigned to the Los Altos Hills route retired, Aragon pursued the position. So-called bids for available routes generally go to the employee with the most seniority, but no one else wanted the Hills route; the streets were and still are narrow and, as Zhao said, hilly.

“Since I was a floater to do different routes, this was one of my favorites because it’s very scenic. ... I just took a chance on bidding on it,” Aragon said last month during an interview with the Town Crier.

He had parked his tell-tale red, white and blue truck at Foothills Nature Preserve off Page Mill Road, a favorite break spot, and could see all the way to San Francisco

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from Vista Point.

“Even though I was pretty young, I got it because a lot of people didn’t want it because of all the driving,” he continued. “It was the farthest route from the post office as far as driving distance.”

And so Aragon began serving the 323 homes scattered between Moody and Page Mill roads.

Over approximately five hours, Aragon navigated up nearly to Monte Bello Preserve. He worked Mondays through Saturdays, with Sundays and a rotating day off.

Over the years, customers came to appreciate Aragon’s courtesy; he greeted everyone by name and even inquired about loved ones’ ailments.

“He’s always been really, super kind and just a very caring person, always if you’re out there willing to chat and just really friendly and very caring,” said Kim Harper, who has lived in Los Altos Hills since the 1980s.

*A pal to even pooches*

Perhaps the most common USPS trope involves a dog nipping at the feet of a mailman trying his best to reach the mailbox. But even canines liked Aragon. His secret? Carrying a bag of treats designated just for them.

“We had five dogs at one time, and they would sit and line up at the gate when the mail was coming,” Harper

said. “It was so cute because they were, like, (lined up) big to small. They would all go to the gate, and they would sit. And he would break off pieces of cookie for the little ones and give the big ones a big one, and it was so cute. They just looked forward to him coming.”

Liz Wilson, another Hills customer, said she and her friends appreciated Aragon’s commitment to his job – especially in their fairly remote neighborhood, where mail theft is a common problem. Sometimes he watched home surveillance video with them so he could identify thieves if he encountered them, and he kept his eyes open for discarded envelopes along the road.

“He has really protected us from having our packages stolen because if they don’t fit in the box, he brings them to the house,” said Wilson, a resident for 21 years. “That’s such a human, caring behavior. I think there’s some cost to him for that because for a while, he had a route and a half to do in a day, so it made his route much longer.”

Some Hills residents reciprocated by baking him cookies, making him homemade candy and, during the holidays, leaving him greeting cards containing gratuities.

Despite those tokens of kindness and the entreaties to stay from co-workers, Aragon has his mind made up. As the new owner of a digital 35mm camera, he plans to enroll in photography classes during his well-earned leisure. 🐾



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# Labor of love

*Local artist publishes handbook to inspire others*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MORGAN BRICCA

Los Altos-based artist Morgan Bricca, above, is known throughout the Bay Area and beyond for her colorful murals. Recently, she published a book, below, that describes her personal journey from the corporate to the creative world.

**By Marie Godderis**

Town Crier Editorial Intern

## *Los Altos resident Morgan Bricca*

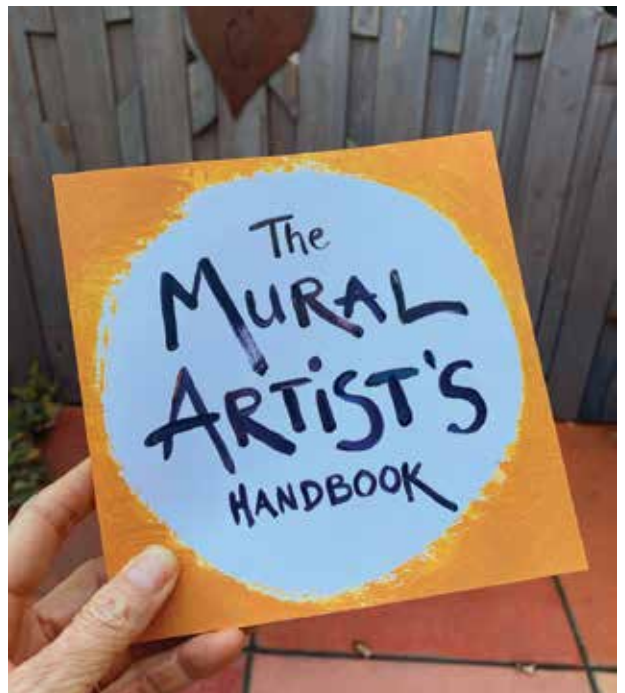
has turned her unusual talent – transforming walls into stories – into a profession, and now she’s written a book about her career as a muralist.

Bricca recently published “The Mural Artist’s Handbook” in hopes of empowering others to follow their artistic aspirations and turn them into independent businesses.

In 1999, Bricca left her corporate tech job for a slower-paced life and to let her inner “handywoman” blossom. She took on home improvement projects, created mosaic countertops and eventually painted her first full floor-to-ceiling mural in her condo.

“I loved losing myself in the creative process of the labor,” Bricca wrote in the book, which she self-published in November.

Soon after her career change, Bricca began taking on



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commissioned work and became a self-sustained artist. “The projects kept coming, and I just pursued that,” said Bricca, who has no formal art training. “I have really experienced a lot of serendipity and synchronistic events. My whole career has been marked by a lot of good fortune and events unfolding that lead me a certain way.”

Twenty years later, Bricca has completed 524 mural projects. Many of them have been in the Bay Area – including locally at Almond, Covington, Oak Avenue and Springer elementary schools – but she has also traveled to Portugal, China, Boston and Portland, Ore., to create her art.

Bricca noted that her most memorable project was painting 15 murals across a small island in Portugal.

“That was really a dream come true for me,” she said. “It’s all about the adventure of mural painting, the unlimited creative license, painting in a beautiful place, the life-style. The island only has about a 1,000 people on it and there’s very little art on the island, so I was really able to transform it with my art.”

From painting to writing

Bricca said the idea of writing a book had been on her mind for more than a year, but the project didn’t take shape until she joined a writing workshop during the



Morgan Bricca, above, completes a mural on Flores Island of the Azores. A page from her book is pictured right.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF MORGAN BRICCA

quarantine. She wrote the first draft in six weeks and published it within four months. The book recounts her personal journey through anecdotes, provides practical advice on materials and techniques, and offers guidelines on how to develop a sustainable career in art.



In addition to the book and a blog she started, Bricca hosts the podcast “If These Walls Could Talk,” which explores other local artists’ work and the mural art community. It is available on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Stitcher and Pocket Casts.

“I don’t fit into any sort of established real art culture, so I felt like starting my own podcast was a way to share my point of view and promote other artists I wanted to highlight, which has been really cool,” she said. “Also, I feel like I’m forming a community of like-minded artists who, like me, don’t fit into traditional street-art culture but see the value of murals and are working professionals as mural artists, and I love sharing those voices on my podcast.”

*For more information on Bricca’s work and “The Mural Artist’s Handbook,” visit [morganmurals.com](http://morganmurals.com) and [muralartistshandbook.com](http://muralartistshandbook.com).*

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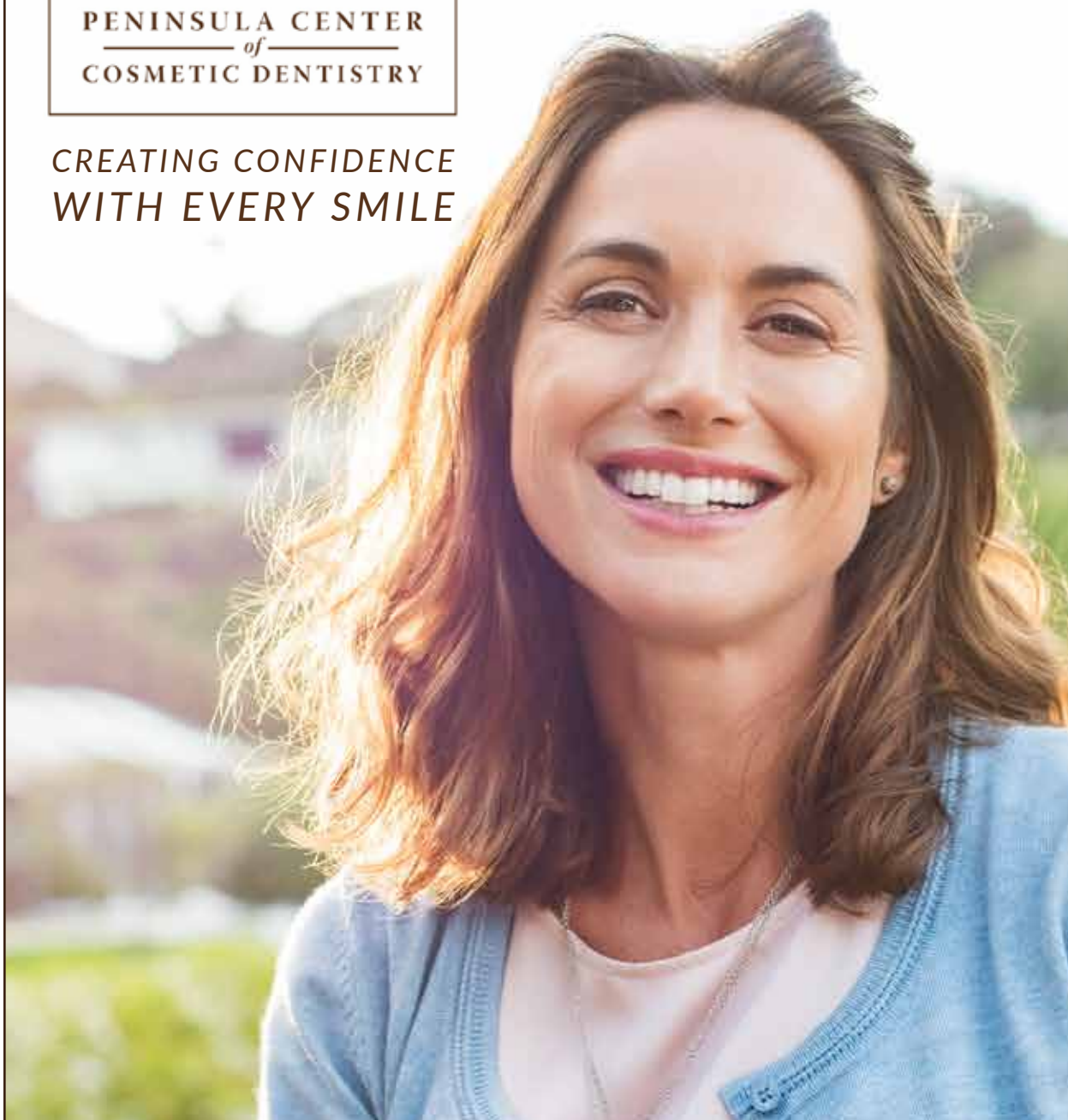


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# Cauliflower at home

*A peculiar porridge's journey from recipe to business development*



COURTESY OF JACQUELINE SUN

Los Altos native Jacqueline Sun, left, and her classmate Taylor Hurley have spun a popular recipe into a product line aimed for supermarket shelves, capitalizing on the increasing appreciation for varied and veggie-heavy meal options.

**By Eliza Ridgeway**

Staff Writer/elizar@latc.com

**Los Altos native Jacqueline Sun** grew up interested in healthful eating, haunting local farmers' markets with her parents and well versed in the composting that is less standard in her current location, a college in the Midwest. She joined a business fraternity, and when a fellow business major's impromptu blog – started during the doldrums of quarantine – saw unexpected traction on the subject of cauliflower oatmeal, they sensed an opportunity.

"We're interested in bringing back real, whole foods, and making food that tastes as good as it makes you feel," she said of their nascent enterprise, which makes shelf-stable, ready-to-eat cauliflower oatmeal (just add hot water).

"I started trying it and loved it," Sun said. "It's pretty much an oatmeal with a hidden veggie added in."

Cauliflower hails from the same family of edibles as

mustards, kales and cabbages (its name comes from the Italian for "cabbage flower"), and in recent years its florets have been roasted, grilled, fried, pickled, riced, rendered into finely ground meal and sliced as "steaks." You'll find it in smoothies, fried rice, fettuccine alfredo, mac and cheese, pizza crusts and meatloaf.

When J.M. Lupton wrote "Cabbage and Cauliflower for Profit," the work's 1895 preface noted that the cauliflower was "almost unknown in some markets." In contrast, a book listing 75 "feel-good" recipes for cauliflower described it as "the world's most versatile vegetable."

## **Readying a recipe for supermarket shelves**

Sun and her business partner, Taylor Hurley, wanted to create something for the traditional supermarket oatmeal aisle – a pouch that could sit on the shelf in the pantry, lasting for months, as a breakfast option built around freeze-dried cauliflower. After calling around to

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freeze-dried cauliflower sources from Australia to the Netherlands, they found a source.

“We felt like breakfast wasn’t complete enough – carbs aren’t enough to keep you full until lunch,” Sun said.

Their idea for adding cauliflower to a traditional oatmeal, thus boosting daily vegetable intake, has been augmented with other ingredients as well. In addition to a 1:1 ratio of cauliflower to oats, they added a rice protein powder so that each serving has 10 grams of protein, and flax seeds to reach 7 grams of fiber per serving. Based on experiment, Sun observed that Americans used to a low-fiber diet find that high numbers lead to systemic distress.

In their continuing pursuit of the fondly familiar American oatmeal taste, they knew they’d be adding sweetener – despite a personal preference for dates, they thought a majority of people might prefer the milder flavor of coconut sugar after testing across friends and acquaintances.

“We wanted it sweet enough that you can eat the oatmeal alone and it tastes good, and we wanted to keep it under 10 grams of sugar,” Sun said.

She started talking with University of Michigan alumni who had gone on to create food brands to learn about early staging and manufacturing. She and Hurley dubbed their nascent endeavor Brassi (a nod to cauliflower’s member-



COURTESY OF JACQUELINE SUN

**Find riced cauliflower – top bowl – fresh or frozen in local supermarkets to make your own version of a Brassi breakfast.**

ship in the brassica family of vegetables) and have funded themselves initially.


Sun discovered that there were so many emerging consumer-packaged-goods brands that many manufacturers and packaging enterprises allowed for very low minimums of a few thousand units at a time.

“I think just the two of us, we wear all the hats, from manufacturing to marketing to business model and financing,” Sun said. “Sometimes we do get a little burnt out, especially during the taste-test period. I ate so much oatmeal for breakfast, try some for a midday snack, try some after dinner – there were some days when I was, like, ‘Nope, no more.’”

She said having a co-founder to share the initial rush with – they just launched pre-orders, while also studying as full-time students – has helped maintain balance.

A common next step for a product like this would be to find a co-packer that can manage all of the manufacturing for Brassi and find a distributor to manage logistics for distributing the product, leaving Sun and Hurley in a more strategic, less hands-on position. Sun said they’re playing with an expanded line of oatmeal flavors but also exploring savory products like risotto that could expand Brassi into lunch and dinner. Asked whether broccoli oats were also on the horizon, Sun said they perceived an American reserve about green flecks in breakfast comfort food.

“There’s a lot of people on Instagram who do zoats – zucchini oats – there are a lot of different options,” she said. “What I love about cauliflower is that it is so neutral, you can do whatever want to it and incorporate it into any meal.”

**For more information on Brassi, visit [eatbrassi.com](http://eatbrassi.com).** 



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Bonnie served local community in the traditional accounting industry and firms over 22 years. That combination of business and tax knowledge with an entrepreneurial spirit in both English and Chinese allows Padgett clients to rest assured that any tax or compliance issues will be readily resolved; so they can focus more time on what matters most-improving business’ financial performance.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACQUELINE SUN

In addition to a classic apple topping, try chocolate, coconut, honey or nut/seed butter added to cauliflower oats.

## Recipe

Jacqueline Sun and Taylor Hurley shared a variation on the recipe that started the product development process for Brassi. It doesn't require freeze-dried cauliflower, and all ingredients are available at typical Bay Area grocery stores.

### At-Home Vanilla Cinnamon Cauli Oats

- 1/3 cup frozen riced cauliflower
- 1/3 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 serving vanilla protein powder
- 1/2 tablespoon ground flax seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons coconut sugar
- 3/4 cup water
- Sprinkle of salt

Combine ingredients in pot on medium-high heat. Stir and cook 3-5 minutes until desired consistency. Top with favorite toppings. Sun and Hurley recommend a spoonful of nut/seed butter, fresh fruit, chopped nuts and a drizzle of maple syrup or honey.

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# ‘Manflu’ spreads

*Former MV resident releases debut novel*

By Nina Crofts

Town Crier Editorial Intern

## *For many people, the pandemic*

has been an opportunity to explore new interests. For Simone de Muñoz, it was writing a book.

The former Mountain View resident’s debut novel, “Manflu,” was released March 26 by Acorn Publishing. It tells the story of Dr. Morgan Digby, a vaccine researcher in a time when women run the world after a pandemic has killed or weakened most of the world’s men. As Digby rushes to find a vaccine for manflu, her world quickly becomes more complicated as she cares for her sick husband and meets a new neighbor vulnerable to the disease.

Given the timing of the book’s release, one might expect de Muñoz – who works as a principal analyst for Mountain View’s Community Services Agency – was inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic. Well, not exactly.

While the book draws from the current global situation by detailing the experiences of essential workers amid a pandemic, de Muñoz said she was actually inspired by her experience in public policy and by the political climate in the U.S. – particularly after the 2016 election.

“I was thinking about a new creative project, and I had the idea that all these men in power have maybe not been doing the best job,” the San Francisco resident said. “What would happen if women were in charge? I thought, you know, ‘What if there’s a pandemic that only impacts men, and we can move them out of the way and give women a chance to be leaders and run the country?’”

## *Firsthand experience*

De Muñoz said her background in public policy – and working daily with those who come to CSA for assistance – helped her visualize situations that she worked into her novel. Her job gave her more insight into people’s experiences and how public policy directly affected them.

“We lost a lot of volunteers that were in the high-risk groups, so I was helping in the food pantry for the first few months of the pandemic,” she said. “I saw that there were these two worlds: the tech world that we have in Silicon Valley – people who are doing really well, people who can

work from home – and then the world of people who need services, people who are struggling, people who work in the service sector.”

The author said her firsthand experience and zeal to represent the world with women in charge fueled the writing of the novel and the characteristics of the main character, Dr. Morgan Digby.

“We had politicians like Trump calling the virus the ‘China flu,’” de Muñoz said. “As a reaction to that, the main character who is finding this vaccine is actually Chinese American. We’re seeing a lot of Asian attacks and bias right now, and my book is going to show what Asian Americans can do, looking to the positives that people bring.”



Simone de Muñoz's novel follows a woman's efforts to stop a pandemic.

COURTESY OF  
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Continued from Page 20

“What if there’s a pandemic that only impacts men, and we can move them out of the way and give women a chance to be leaders and run the country?”

With more people at home and having more time to read, de Muñoz hopes they will support her book, which she described as a “timely pandemic novel” and a “needed escape.”

“This is not a book where you’re going to feel bogged down,” she said. “The pace is quick and there’s a love story; there’s a lot going on that will just take you outside of your life. I’d say the target audience is women of all ages, who will really be able to relate to this main character, getting so much done despite difficult circumstances.”

To purchase “Manflu,” visit [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or order it at local bookstores. 🐦



COURTESY OF SIMONE DE MUÑOZ

Simone de Muñoz’s public policy background helped provide insight into how public policy affects people.



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# Finding her jam

*Los Altos resident donates profits from preserves to charity*

**By Kate Armanini**  
Town Crier Editorial Intern

*Nuchi De Giuli estimated* that she spends at least one day a week making jam, though that number rises to four or five during the fruitful summer months.

That's just business as usual for De Giuli, the founder of Jamforgood, which sells home-made fruit preserves and marmalades to raise money for charity.

"My family has always cooked a lot, as Italian families often do," the Los Altos resident said. "I was already making jam for my family, and I thought I should be able to help out."

*Continued on Page 26*



ERIC DAVIDOVE/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

**Los Altos resident Nuchi De Giuli mashes fruit in her kitchen to make jam she will ultimately sell.**



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Continued from Page 23

De Giuli isn't able to pinpoint the exact start of Jamforgood. She said she began sharing her jam in the early 2000s, mostly for school and family events, and it evolved into a charitable venture.

These days, she sells her jams at \$8 a jar, each labeled and wrapped in a burlap cover and twine.

Although De Giuli often buys non-native fruit to make jam, she also depends on community support to keep her nonprofit venture going. Supporters include Los Altos resident Rebecca Sherwood, who first heard about Jamforgood on Nextdoor. De Giuli had posted that she was looking for people with excess fruit to donate. Sherwood, who has a calamondin tree, reached out and offered to share her bounty.

"A lot of people don't feel good about having really nice fruit not being used," Sherwood said. "It's really easy – Nuchi just comes right over and is very happy to get it."

A few months later, Sherwood bought three of De Giuli's preserves: pear and chocolate, papaya ginger lemon



ERIC DAVIDOVE/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

**Nuchi De Giuli sources fruit for her jams from local residents who donate excess bounty from their gardens.**

and kumquat. She said the jam was "really good."

De Giuli has relied on fruit donations from dozens of people like Sherwood over the years. All fruit is usable as long as it's ripe, according to De Giuli.

"I'm trying to use excess, surplus food that would go to waste," De Giuli said.

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Pastor Dave Moore and family  
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A ‘win-win’ venture

All of De Giuli’s profits from the jam go directly to Los Quinchos, a nonprofit organization in Managua, Nicaragua, that provides shelter and care to abandoned children. In recent years, De Giuli estimated that she has raised between \$5,000 and \$6,000, and she pays for the jars out of pocket.

De Giuli’s family has been involved with Los Quinchos for many years. Her mother was an active volunteer there, and now De Giuli herself visits frequently. Her trips not only enable her to see what Los Quinchos needs, but also how donations are being spent.

“When we get there, we may find light bulbs that don’t work, electricity wires that have been stolen, roofs that are leaking,” she said. “All the money that comes in goes to the children.”

During recent visits, De Giuli has shared her craft with the children Los Quinchos serves, teaching them to make jam from the readily available Nicaraguan mangos.

“I like to show them how they can use whatever the environment offers,” she said.

De Giuli summed up her mission: “My jams are very low in sugar, sustainable and from local fruit. It’s a win-win, because you get jam and get to donate to a good cause.”

*To purchase jam and to donate fruit, email Nuchi De Giuli at [jamforgood@gmail.com](mailto:jamforgood@gmail.com).*



ERIC DAVIDOVE/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

The profits from Nuchi De Giuli’s jams support a Nicaraguan charity that helps abandoned children.

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# Black and thriving

*Life in Los Altos gets better with a 'welcoming committee'*



COURTESY OF KANESHA BAYNARD

New members of the Silicon Valley Black Girl Magic Group assemble with existing members during a brunch and vision board gathering.

By Kanesha Baynard

***When my husband and I*** became parents, we made a commitment to raise our children

with progressive values, a desire to protect the environment, an appreciation for being outdoors and a focus on turning walls into bridges by helping to build inclusive communities. When we relocated to Los Altos in late 2012, we initially thought we had checked all of those boxes.

Our arrival into Los Altos provided the excitement of exploring a new town, making new friends and enjoying all that the Bay Area has to offer. We quickly became involved with our local schools, took part in neighborhood street parties, met new and interesting people and found our new town to be pleasant and easygoing. It was an idyllic transition, but something was missing.

## BOLD LIVING

About four months after our relocation, I asked a new friend – who is a white woman – “Where are the Black people in Los Altos? The only Black people I’ve seen are the ones I live with. For a place that constantly talks about diversity, I’m finding it lonely here. I need at least one Black friend. Do you know anyone? Can you set up a grown-up play date for me?”

Within a week, my friend sent an email introducing me to another Black woman who lived in Los Altos. The Black woman was Toni Moos.

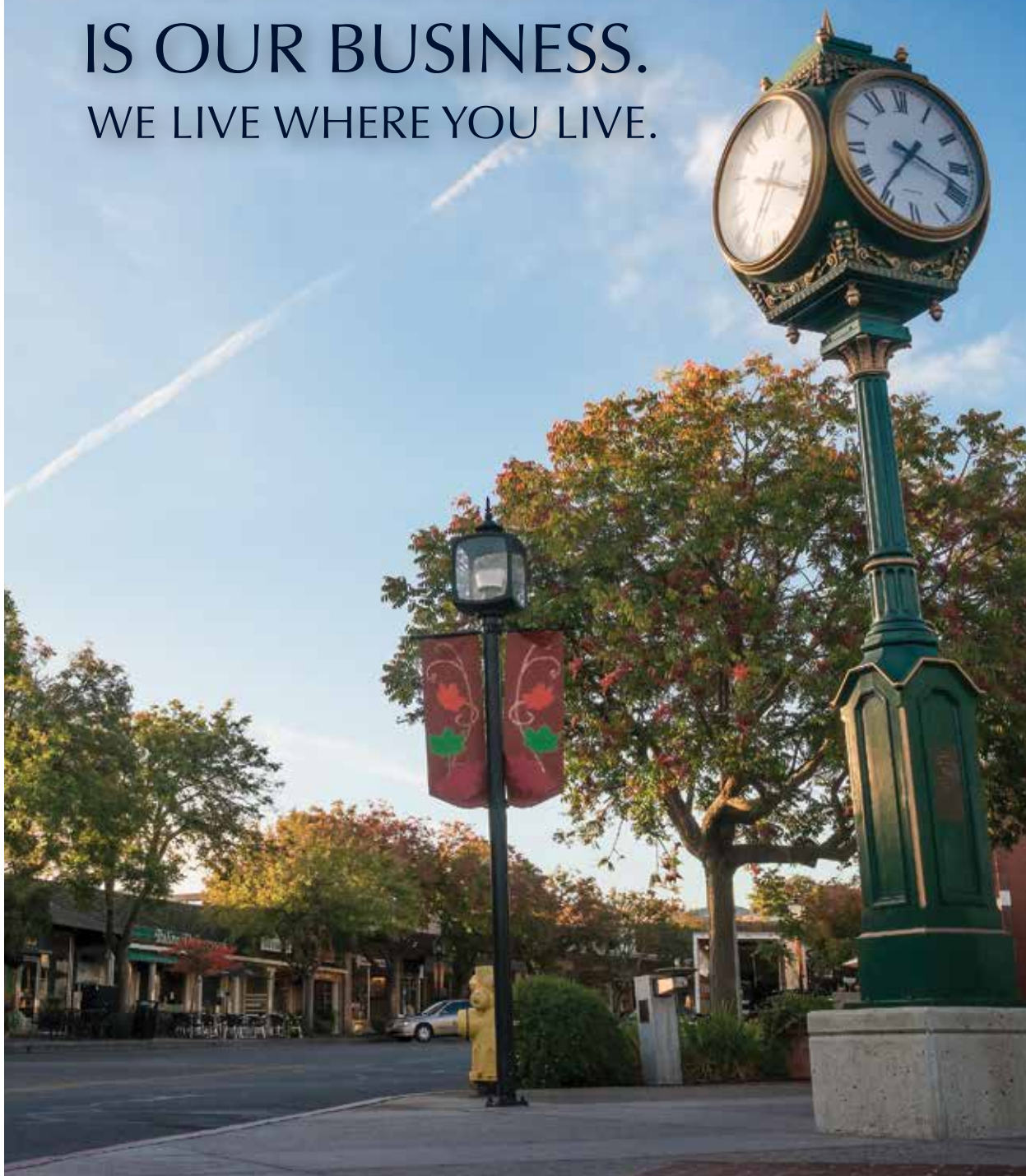
Our initial interaction lasted two hours, because we were ecstatic about meeting each other. There was an instant connection in what it meant to be living in a community with a handful of Black families. We talked about

*Continued on Page 30*



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*Continued from Page 28*

where to go to get our hair done because Los Altos didn't provide salon services for textured hair. We shared the challenges of protecting Black children in a community where they tend to be the "only ones" in their classes. We explored our experiences in dealing with questions we received from non-Black Los Altans as to how and why we were living in this community, where exactly our homes were located and how we could afford to live here.

We talked about the stares we received while window shopping in downtown Los Altos and how we conditioned ourselves to always have a friendly look on our faces when people were observing us. We reflected on how exhausting it was to initially feel safe within a group of Los Altans only to have that shattered when something racist was said in a casual setting and no one but us flinched.

Soon I met another Black woman who was new to Los Altos. Her youngest child was in the same class as my son. I saw her at drop off and when our eyes met, we quickly made our way over to each other. I quickly told her I knew one other Black woman in our community

*Continued on Page 33*





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COURTESY OF KANESHA BAYNARD  
SVBGMG members visit the de Young Museum in San Francisco, left, and pick flowers in Half Moon Bay, above.



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Continued from Page 30

and that we should all meet for coffee. Being in the company of these two Black women felt nourishing and safe. I felt seen, understood and unburdened.

***Harnessing the power of Black magic***

I decided that day that I wanted to create a space for Black women to feel supported, thrive, grow and experience daily joy – while living in Los Altos.

I shared my idea with Toni about creating this safe space. I talked about us both being connectors and that we could be the initial hub to lay the foundation for this group. We brainstormed some ideas for names and settled on the Silicon Valley Black Girl Magic Group (SVBGMG). Our guiding principle for the SVBGMG was to be the “welcome committee” we wished we had when we arrived in Los Altos.

The SVBGMG started with two people, and in eight years, we have grown it to a membership of 23 Black women who reside in Los Altos, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Saratoga and Sunnyvale. It is an incredibly diverse group of women who are educators, artists, best-selling authors, philanthropists, medical professionals, engineers, mothers, single, partnered, natives and transplants – the

Continued on Page 34



COURTESY OF KANESHA BAYNARD

**Silicon Valley Black Girl Magic Group members gather for an outing at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.**



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list goes on.

The SVBGMG provides a safe outlet for us to discuss a variety of challenges that directly affect Black people. We help each other navigate daily racism and provide support tools so that members don't have to feel alone. We share strategies for our overall mental wellness, because Black women are the most negatively targeted racial group in this country. We create space to celebrate, unwind and have fun, because experiencing joy is revolutionary.

By having the SVBGMG as a touchstone, all of us are able to show up fully within the greater community and offer contributions that elevate the desirability of living in a place like Los Altos. Last year showed many in our local community the amount of learning and unlearning that needs to happen to make communities more inclusive, welcoming and safe for all of us. The SVBGMG is proud to be a catalyst in helping us all move in a kinder direction.

*Kanesha Baynard is an author, creativity expert*



COURTESY OF KANESHA BAYNARD

**The ladies of the Silicon Valley Black Girl Magic Group prepare to share a meal and discuss challenges while dining at Oak + Violet in Menlo Park.**

*and productivity specialist. She founded the Bold Living Today community, which helps people disrupt unfulfilling patterns through creativity. She also leads small groups for teens, educators and adults on creating inclusive communities and building ally skills. For more information, visit [boldlivingtoday](https://boldlivingtoday.com).* 🐦

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Thoughts from members of the Silicon Valley Black Girl Magic Group

• “It’s often exhausting to be a Black person in America, but it’s even more so when you live in a pre-dominantly white space, so having a group of women who inherently understand that, as they are living that same day-to-day life, means not having to explain.”  
– Toni, mother of 4

• “I rarely see Black people in Los Altos, so when I saw a mom and daughter, looking to be about the same age as my little brown girl, at the Los Altos Library, I waited to talk with them. This mother understood and wasn’t off-put by my eagerness to speak with her. We had a friendly chat, exchanged numbers, and that night she added me to the group text with a warm welcome. This group has been affirming and supportive even though some of us have yet to meet in real life. There is no application or membership fee. There is only friendliness and a desire to be connected with and champions of Black women.”  
– Catherine, mother of 1

• “The group means so much to me. Seeing the WhatsApp notification feels like my friends from home are about to educate me on something extremely im-

portant. When you get Black women together, they thrive, uplift and support. This group is a safe space where we can share our lived experiences. I love that this group is accessible for a quick dinner, a walk or even guidance on parenting Black children on the Peninsula.”

– Dana, mother of 1

• “It’s nice to have a space where my experiences of being Black in Silicon Valley are not met with contempt or questioning, but rather a diverse group of women who can relate. It keeps me sane. It reminds us of what an exceptionally small minority I am in this techy context. I frequently look up the statistics and I see that in California, the population of Black people overall is somewhere around 5%, but in Los Altos it’s like less than a quarter of 1%. That is exceptionally small. It’s also telling.

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been disappointed meeting Black people who once lived here after they’ve already moved out. The fact that they move out is further evidence for me that the experiences I have here are very much real and difficult.”

– Deneva, mother of 1

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# Rethinking the vet visit

*How to ensure trips to and from – and time at the vet – are stress-free and safe for pets*



MATTHEW ADJEMIAN/SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

**For safety reasons, cats and small dogs should not travel on laps to and from a veterinary clinic – or while en route to other locations. Instead, transport them within a carrier, Dr. Kenton Taylor, D.V.M., recommends.**

By Kenton Taylor, D.V.M.

## ***Trips to the veterinarian***

can be stressful for pets and their owners. For some dogs and cats, car travel can result in motion sickness, further exacerbating their distress. Planning and preparation prior to travel can make the trip less distressing for all.

### ***Carriers***

Cats and small dogs should be transported in a carrier. Ideally, the carrier should have a front and top opening, with easy removal of the top portion. Cats prefer sturdy carriers, as they offer better support. They are most comfortable with the familiar and should be given time to get used to being in the carrier before travel, so leave the carrier out for the cat to regularly sleep in. Put the carrier in a preferred resting area with the top off, if needed at

## PET PAUSE

first. Place an item – for example, a fleece jacket or blanket with your scent – in the carrier, as well as toys, food or treats in or around the carrier.

Transport cats in separate carriers. Of course, there are times when you may need to go to the veterinarian right away and your cat is not yet accustomed to the carrier. Start by putting the carrier in a small room without hiding places and then bring the cat in and shut the door. If the carrier has a top opening, then gently cradle your cat and lower it in. Otherwise, remove the top half and after placing the cat in the carrier, calmly replace the top. Having the cat's usual bedding or clothing with your scent can help calm it.

If your cat is anxious or squirms when picked up, making it difficult to hold, then try placing the opening

*Continued on Page 38*

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## PET PAUSE



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

**In multi-pet families or those with children, it is best to slowly reintroduce pets to the home following a vet visit.**

*Continued from Page 36*

of a pillow case over them and then gently roll them into the pillow case and twist the opening closed. Put the pillow case with the cat in it gently into the carrier. For some cats, being "hidden" in the pillow case for the trip is calming. Some cats do best with the carrier covered, while others prefer to look out.

### *In the car*

During the trip to the vet, the safest place for a carrier is behind the passenger seat or, less desirably, strapped in with a seat belt. Pets loose in the car can be a danger for them and hazardous for your driving. Dogs have jumped out of car windows at busy intersections, and hit the seat or dashboard when thrown forward by a sudden stop. Small pets can wander near the foot pedals, interfering with needed braking. Medium to large dogs should be fitted with a harness and seat belt. The Center for Pet Safety ([centerforpetsafety.org](http://centerforpetsafety.org)) offers information on pet restraint devices.

### *Medications*

For some pets, just bringing them hungry and having their favorite treats at the visit makes for a great experience. For others, the anxiety level is overwhelming and medications prior to travel can help. Sedative, anti-anxiety or pain-relieving medications can be used to reduce the stress of the car ride and reduce anxiety upon arrival at the veterinary hospital. Pain can lead to anxiety, and anxiety can amplify the pain experience.

Medications are best tried first at home before the day needed, as some pets can become more excited or



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

**Consider taking Fido for a short walk after returning from a vet visit. It might help calm him before reintroduction.**

irritable, necessitating a different medication or perhaps a higher dose to produce the desired effect. If motion sickness medications are needed, they should be given one hour prior to travel.

## Reintroduction to home

In multi-cat, multi-dog households or households with children, a delayed reintroduction when you return home from a vet visit is recommended to avoid a pet’s potentially aggressive behavior. If anesthetics or sedatives were given to your pet, then avoid reintroduction until there has been a complete recovery.

With dogs, taking them for a short walk after arriving home is helpful. With cats, leave the returning cat in the carrier for a few minutes to see how other pets in your household react. The unfamiliar smell of the veterinary hospital on the returning cat can cause it to be mistaken for a stranger. If other pets seem anxious, then keep the cat in the carrier and let it loose in a separate room by itself for a day. Otherwise, if all pets are calm, then let the returning cat out of the carrier. Sometimes taking all of your cats to the veterinarian at the same time helps, because then all will have the scent of the veterinary hospital.


While veterinary visits are not always as enjoyable as playing fetch or lying in the sun, they don’t need to be stressful.

***Dr. Kenton Taylor is a veterinarian at Miramonte Veterinary Hospital, 1766 Miramonte Road, Mountain View. He is a Fear Free Certified professional (fearfreepets.com). For more information, call 962-8338.*** 🐾

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– Text and photos by Megan V. Winslow

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