

Valley Life

Business: Tonic for the skin and soul
Sonoma skin serum mixes essential oils. **B7**

Pets: Who's a good dog?
If yours isn't, a free class can help. **B9**



Food&Wine

Kathleen Thompson Hill

Happy Valentine's Day
You know what to do, hopefully.

Last minute Valentine's treats

- Les Pascals Patisserie**
Les Pascals Patisserie in Glen Ellen just chimed in with its Valentine's menu and it's worth a trip to beautiful downtown Glen Ellen.
Try their homemade dark and milk chocolate hearts; chocolate tablets, French mendiants in white, dark, milk and ruby chocolate, and pink meringues.
French mendiants are a traditional French confection made of chocolate disks studded with mixed nuts and dried fruits, which Les Pascals says represent the four mendicant or monastic orders.
- Relax and Eat Bread at the Panel**
Sonoma's almost underground bread bakers, Relax and Eat Bread, will offer grilled cheese sandwiches on their handmade bread along with a "lovebirds special" on Friday, Feb. 14, at the Panel Wine Lounge. Trivia at every table. Tea, beer, wine and espresso available. 4 to 8 p.m. 938-7152
- Murphy's Irish Pub Valentine's Dinner**
Murphy's last minute entry into Valentine's dining is a "four course prix-fixed menu" to include a crab cake, beet salad, entrée choice of grilled Day Boat scallops, buttermilk chicken breast, grilled loin of lamb or mushroom risotto, all followed by a strawberry tart. Sonoma band Shameless will serenade for a dinner and dancing evening. \$40. 5 to 9:30 p.m. 464 First St. E., Sonoma. 935-0660.
- Sunflower Caffé**
Sunflower Caffé invites people to bring their dogs in for Valentine's "Puppuccino" with their housemade dog biscuit made with oat flour, peanut butter, banana, olive oil, salt and pasture-raised eggs. First five customers will get a gift bag of these dog biscuits. 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. winter hours. 421 First St., W., Sonoma. 996-6645.
- Harvey's Gourmet Donuts**
Harvey Cohen resumes his Friday night donut pop-ups with "the best donuts ever" served hot. Loads of locals enjoy their donuts, coffee and root beer at these events. 19030 Railroad Ave., Sonoma. Harveysdonuts.com.


Ramekins to close temporarily May 1

Last Friday cooking instructors received emails from Ramekins Culinary School management saying the school would be "put on hold during major renovations" of the building – specifically, all would be "put on hold after the end of April until renovations have been completed."

The purpose of renovating has several possibilities including actually remodeling of the teaching kitchen to the left just beyond the reception desk as one enters Ramekins.

The email also said that management has "some amazing plans going forward."

Reactions from most instructors ranged from astonishment and shock to sadness. Many of the instructors simply love to share their knowledge of food from different countries and disciplines while earning a little money, and have been doing so at Ramekins for up to 20 years.



Ramekins will put its cooking classes on hold beginning May 1 for a building renovation.

Stuck in Sonoma with the leaf-blower blues again

Darryl Ponicsan's latest novel strikes some as satire, others as too close to home

By **CHRISTIAN KALLEN**
INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

When an angel – nude, wingéd, café-au-lait in color – is shot by police in the quiet town of Maragate, she falls dead at the feet of a newcomer, D.K. Keeskeméti, uttering her last words, "Hope is alive."

So begins Darryl Ponicsan's new novel, "Eternal Sojourners," clearly a thematic departure from his previous book, "Last Flag Flying," which was a return to the characters of "The Last Detail" 40 years later.

But while Ponicsan was working on that book – which became a film starring Bryan Cranston in the old Jack Nicholson role – he had simultaneously undertaken a revolt against the prevalence of leaf blowers among landscapers in Sonoma, where he was living at the time, in 2013.

"Last Flag Flying" was the ninth book Ponicsan had written, along with four mysteries under the pen name Anne Argula. "It's the kind of work that requires concentration, which was hard to come by in pre-ban Sonoma," the author told the *Index-Tribune* in a recent correspondence.

A former Navy sailor, teacher and social worker, Ponicsan has lived in a variety of places, including a stint in Southern California and several years in the Seattle area. He and his third wife, Cecilia, bought a house in Sonoma in 1999, and though they now live part of the year in Palm Springs, "Eternal Sojourners" shows as much as anything how inspirational Ponicsan finds Sonoma, for better and for worse.

"An impetus for the book was my sincere confusion over how a destination town with so much going for it could subject its residents to obvious health risks and maddening noise," he said.

As he told the city council in numerous appearances in 2013, he found the noise of leaf blowers disruptive to his work, and supporters of the machinery "mean-spirited."

"I have spent hundreds of hours researching and thinking about gas powered leaf blowers and during some of that time imagined that they must be an invention of the devil."

Then he mused, "Hmmm. Might be a book in that."

Ponicsan's crusade took place just two years after the city council had limited the noise of leaf blowers in 2011, and reduced their hours of residential operation. But Ponicsan and others argued that other communities such as Carmel had banned leaf blowers altogether years earlier without adverse effects on landscaping businesses. He



SUBMITTED

Part-time Sonoma resident Darryl Ponicsan's latest novel is 'Eternal Sojourners,' set in a town much like Sonoma. In his latest book of essays, 'I Feel Bad About...,' he admits to being colorblind and his fondness for the male accessory known as a 'murse.'

eventually circulated a petition that gained 300 signatures to pressure the city council to take up the issue again, and continued making regular appearances at council meetings to protest the noise.

Early in October of 2013, the city council approved 3-2 an ordinance to ban gas-powered leaf blowers, the loudest offenders. But two weeks later, one councilmember – then-Mayor Ken Brown – changed his vote when it came up for adoption, scuttling the

ban and causing a whirlwind of controversy.

Ponicsan seemed to throw in the towel after that reversal, but he's not one to forgive and forget. The protagonist of "Eternal Sojourners" is likewise a writer, and the more he becomes accustomed to his new home town – a small out-of-the-way place called Maragate – the more he becomes bothered by the incessant tornado of its leaf blowers, and the army of landscapers who wield them.



'I FEEL BAD ABOUT...'
'Eternal Sojourners' was released in 2019 by Skyhorse Publishing (Simon & Schuster). It's available in hardcover at Readers Books and as an e-book.

Another book by Ponicsan, his first non-fiction, will be released on April 1. "I Feel Bad About My D#@k" is inspired by Nora Ephron's "I Feel Bad About My N*#k," says the author, as a series of brief humorous essays about being Darryl, being a man, and growing older. He admits to being colorblind and finding a "murse" – a male purse – an extremely useful accessory, among other topics. It will be published by Pleasure Boat Studio.

Several passages in the book are descriptive screeds against blowers – and one of them was posted by "Darryl P." on the Sonoma Nextdoor website on Nov. 12, 2019, the date that "Eternal Sojourners" was published:

"Men with hurricanes in their backpacks attacked a dozen fallen leaves on a lawn not much bigger than a hotel room, sending them 20 feet into the air toward the street or into the neighbor's yard. Turning back, they would invariably find a leaf or two had landed back on the lawn, and they would renew their attack on a single leaf, with a force nearing 300 mph of generated wind. Satisfied that no leaf remained, the men would blast away at anemic bushes, killing the odd bee and butterfly but clearing out any hidden leaves, which only put more of them back on the lawn...."

After Brown switched his vote, Cecilia Ponicsan penned a letter to the *Index-Tribune* excoriating the mayor, and predicted a 2014 passage of a leaf blower ban. She was too optimistic: it wasn't until 2016 that the issue came before the council again, and in November of that year Measure V to restrict leaf-blower use, passed by a narrow 19 votes in the general election.

Meanwhile Ponicsan was

See Ponicsan, B11

■ GO. DO. NOW. ■

- Girl Power**
A full century ago, the decades-long efforts of American suffragettes culminated in ratification of the 19th amendment, belatedly granting 50 percent of the population the right to vote. Mark the anniversary at the Museum of Sonoma County, where a provocative exhibit highlights the contributions of local feminists and examines the challenges and obstacles that face women still. We've come a long way, baby, but we're not yet arrived. We've got promises to keep, sisters, and miles to go before we sleep.
Tuesdays through Sundays, until September, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 'Suffrage to #Me Too,' 425 Seventh St., Santa Rosa, \$0-10.
- Here Kitty-Kitty**
Pussypalooza is at the Santa Rosa Fairgrounds this weekend, where 200 pedigreed cats and kittens will expertly ignore your overt fascination, adoptable shelter kitties will be available to love, supplies and sundries will be on hand for purchase, and a fun silent auction will help benefit North Bay animal charities. Cats in costumes strut mere whiskers away from an informational booth staffed by UC Davis veterinary personnel, a purrfect yin/yang for cat fanciers.
Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 14 and 15, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Cat Show at Sonoma County Fairgrounds, 1350 Bennett Valley Road, Santa Rosa, free-\$6.
- Abracadabra**
Mario Marchese, the "Maker Magician," has gigged "Sesame Street" and toured with David Blane, who subsequently anointed him "the best kids' magician in the world!" His shtick is original and funny, oddball and interactive, and it will inspire kids big and small to think differently about the world. With DIY robotic creations, upcycled props and new school slapstick, Marchese somehow elevates the mundane to the magical, a trick every last one of us might endeavor to learn.
Saturday, Feb. 15, 2 p.m., "The Maker Magician" at Sebastiani Theatre, 476 First St., \$12-18.
- Bang the Gong**
On a soft mat in a cozy room, you lie down with strangers and await transformation. It arrives in the form of a meditative "sound bath," the newest, buzziest treatment for modern afflictions. Visiting gong master Danny Goldberg MCs the show, with singing crystal bowls and tinkling hand cymbals, perhaps even a digeridoo hum here and there. It's totally weird in the most wonderful way to be bathed in vibrations and peaceful intentions, so open your mind and go.
Saturday, Feb. 15, 5 to 6 p.m., "Gong Meditation" at Bikram Yoga Sonoma, 721 W. Napa St., \$30-35.
— Kate Williams

See Food & Wine, B4

This Week in Music

By TIM CURLEY
INDEX-TRIBUNE MUSIC WRITER



Brother Spellbinder is headed for the Starling stage.

THE SET LIST

- **EL VERANO INN**, 705 Laurel Ave. 935-0611
Saturday, Feb. 15: Tilted Halos. 8 p.m.
Sunday, Feb. 16: Sunday Night Blues Jam. 8 p.m.

■ **FRIDAY FARMERS MARKET**, Depot Park, 270 First St W.
Friday, Feb. 14: Stewart Degner. 9:30 a.m.

■ **HOPMONK TAVERN**, hopmonk.com 691 Broadway, 935-9100
Saturday, Feb. 15: Wendy DeWitt. 8 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 18: Trivia. 7 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Open Mic. 7:30 p.m.

■ **MACARTHUR PLACE**, macarthurplace.com 29 E. MacArthur St. 938-2929
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Monica de Silva and Chad Alger. 7 p.m.

■ **MOOSE LODGE**, sonomamoose.org 20580 Broadway, 996-3877
Thursday, Feb. 20: Membership Drive Open Mic. 7:30 p.m.

■ **MURPHY’S IRISH PUB**, sonomapub.com 464 First St. E, 935-0660.
Friday, Feb. 14: Nate Lopez. 6 p.m., Shameless. 8 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 15: Mark Larson and the Smart Fellers. 8 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 17: Mondays With Murr, aka “Jammin’ with The King”. 7:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Trivia Night. 7:30 p.m.

■ **SONOMA COMMUNITY CENTER**, sonomacommunitycenter.org 276 E. Napa St.
- 938-4256
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Gospel Choir. 7:30 p.m.

■ **SONOMA SPEAKEASY AND AMERICAN MUSIC HALL**, sonomaspeakeasymusic.com 452 1st St. E. #G
Friday, Feb. 14: Speakeasy House Band 5 p.m. The Sidemen, 8:30 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 15: Scarlett Letter. 8 p.m.

■ **STARLING BAR**, starlingsonoma.com. 19380 Sonoma Highway, 938-7442
Saturday, Feb. 15: Brother Spellbinder. 8:30 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 20: Monica da Silva. 8 p.m.

■ **THE REEL AND BRAND**, thereelfishshop.com 401 Grove St. 343-0044
Friday, Feb. 14: “Johnny and June Forever” Valentine’s Dinner and Show. 6 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 15: Westside Sessions, featuring Adam Traum and Josh Yenne. 3 p.m. Satchmo’s Ghost. 8 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Fund-raiser for the Family of Allen Chamberlain. 5 p.m.

■ **TIP’S ROADSIDE**, tipsroadside.com. 8445 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood 509-0078
Sunday, Feb. 16: Brunch and Blues, with Byron Onisko. Noon

■ **VINTAGE HOUSE**, vintagehouse.org. 264 First St. E. 996-0311
Wednesday, Feb. 19: Vintage House Singers (ongoing class). 10 a.m.
Thursday, Feb. 20: Ukulele (ongoing class). 1:30 p.m.
- If you want your gigs listed, email Tim Curley at eltimcurley@gmail.com.

Folk rocker Abby Posner ‘loops’ through Sonoma

Singer brings her one-gal band to Epicurean Connection

Abby Posner is headlining the next installment of the “Live Music and Dinner Series” at the Epicurean Connection on Feb. 18.

Longtime Sonoma chef, cheesemaker and culinary educator Sheana Davis operates the intimate event space on Eighth Street, where she hosts parties, meetings and, occasionally, live music.

Davis will take off her cheesemaking garb and don her host outfit Tuesday, as she is bringing the talented Posner to sing her songs of life to the small

‘I use the looper for added spice.’
- Abby Posner

gathering.

Posner has played at the Epicurean Connection several times in the past and has always treated the audience to her tasty songs while here in Sonoma.

Posner is Colorado-born and Los Angeles-raised. She graduated from Valencia’s California Institute of the Arts in 2006. Living in the Santa Monica area ever since, she’s been playing and teaching music to any and all.

“Playing music is all I’ve ever done, all I ever wanted to do,” Posner said in a recent telephone conversation. “I play Americana, folk, blues and roots music. The new folk genre. People compare me to the Lumineers and Mumford and Sons. I play original music, with a few covers sprinkled in. Some Dylan, on obscure TLC song.”

Citing her early influences as “the music my dad played around the house when I was a kid,” Posner mentioned Doc Watson and Bill Monroe as specific artists who meant a great deal to her as a young musician.

Despite dabbling in such a tradition rich genre as folk music, Posner has become quite adept at using what’s called a “looper” while performing her solo act. Loopers have become very popular in



Abby Posner will provide the music, Sheana Davis will provide the dinner.

recent years. They allow the musician to play, for example, a rhythm part on the guitar, and record it for “looping” playback, all the while adding other layers on top. Perhaps a percussive beat rapped out on the body of the guitar is looped onto another guitar lick, allowing the performer to strum and sing while the listener hears a “band”

through the speakers.

“I use the looper for added spice,” Posner said. The conversation actually revealed that she is quite a gear head, and travels with several guitars and even a banjo.

Her travels on this mini tour take her to Oregon and Washington, with the stop in Sonoma her last before heading home.

Davis plans to host a music and dinner show monthly, depending on when guest performers are traveling through the area.

Tickets are \$25 and include the live music, dinner and a complimentary drink.

Contact Davis at sheanadavis@gmail.com for reservations and more information.



ROBBI PENGELLY/INDEX-TRIBUNE

Jodi Stevens, owner of the Sonoma Speakeasy and American Music Hall, says the live music will amp up once again this weekend.

Soft opening at Sonoma Speakeasy

Venue owner Jodi Stevens hopes to welcome music fans on Feb. 14

Shuttered since December of 2018, the Sonoma Speakeasy and American Music Hall hopes to hold a “soft opening” tonight, Feb. 14, just in time for its fans to enjoy Valentine’s Day in their old haunt.

Co-owner Jodi Stevens said that the flooring is installed, the kegs lines are purged, and the newly enlarged stage is freshly carpet-

ed. The hope is to open for two nights, then continue to fine-tune the improvements.

“We were hoping to stay open during the time we wanted to make some minor improvements,” Stevens said. The city wanted a more formal approach to things, and they decided to expand and improve the building while closed.

Consult Jodi Steven’s and Sonoma Speakeasy and American Music Hall’s Facebook pages for up-to-date information.

T-Luke, Tight Suits and beads!

6th annual Saints and Sinners Ball set for Feb. 22 at the Reel

With springtime hard on the horizon, it is time for the longest lasting party of them all, Mardi Gras. New Orleans, Louisiana is the U.S. home of the celebration, the party central of the bead set. The festivities there go 24/7 for two solid weeks. Here in California, the biggest night of the two-week celebration is the Saturday before Fat Tuesday, and this year it falls on Feb. 22. On that night, the Reel and Brand is hosting the 6th Annual Saints and Sinners Ball.

As has been the custom here in the Valley of the Tunes, a member of the Domingue family will shepherd us through the Mardi Gras night. For almost 30 years in several different locations it was Richie Domingue and his band Gator Beat driving the party. Now we have his son Luke, fronting the band T-Luke and the Tight Suits, doing the honors.

T-Luke, given name Lucas, aka Bobo, is the main “tight suit.” His band runs through a selection of swinging and danceable music, from the genre of the night, Cajun, to R&B to rock ‘n’ roll. He tosses in some original songs and some blues for good measure. The music is infectious, and the



Son of a Gator man: T-Luke carries on Mardi Gras tradition.

costumes folks are requested to wear this night should be outfitted with rug cuttin’ shoes.

The tickets for the event include the two bands, T-Luke and the Tight Suits, and the Black Sheep Brass Band as the opening act. Black Sheep will be driving over from Sebastopol, where they have honed their “all-acoustic, New Orleans jazz/hip-hop marching band influenced style.” In the fine tradition

SAINTS & SINNERS BALL
When: 8:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 22
Where: Reel & Brand
Performing: Black Sheep Brass Band, T-Luke and the Tight Suits

‘People should dress up. That’s why it’s called a Ball.’
- Carolyn Domingue

Ball starts outdoors with the traditional Umbrella Parade. Highly decorated umbrellas give way to the “front line,” the brass band signaling the bon temps rouser of the night.

“People should dress up,” says Carolyn Domingue, T-Luke’s mother. “That’s why it’s called a ball.”

A fashion tip to that end... local Johnn “King Daddy” Murphy, ex-New Orleans resident, said “It’s all about the beads. The things people do with the plastic beads is crazy, myself included.”

The very colorful and festive evening gets going at 8:30 p.m. The house suggests making dinner reservations, as the event usually sells out.

Tickets are available online at Eventbrite.com.

FILM REVIEW

Birds of a feather, snarky together

Harley Quinn gets the ‘squad’ back together in ‘Birds of Prey’

By KIRK MICHAEL
INDEX-TRIBUNE FILM CRITIC

“Birds of Prey” is a new DC Comics film brought to you by the thought exercise, “What if Deadpool were a lady?” The wise-acre heroine Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) rises before us like Botticelli’s Venus with a tattoo that reads “ROTTEN” across her jawline.

Post-“Suicide Squad,” Harley’s broken up with the Joker (Jared Leto is nowhere to be seen here) and has become a rather aimless Gotham club kid, “I have all my best ideas drunk.” Like Deadpool, Harley provides a home for snark, an unusual pet (in this case a giggling hyena), and lesser well-known characters from the comic book archives. She eats cheese curls topped with Easy-Cheese, a mélange of artificial fromage no doubt before its time.

Harley smashes up the club of kingpin Roman Sionis (Ewan McGregor), a thin character that McGregor tries to make more interesting with patent leather gloves and an excess of swishiness. His henchman is Victor Zsasz (Chris Messina), a man attempting to look and act exactly like the CGI hyena.

Seeking an escape from toxic masculinity, Harley runs into supporting characters that are unfamiliar to filmgoers but assuredly canonical in the DC Comics universe. There’s lounge singer Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell), who can shatter ear drums when she’s done for the night. There’s the Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), whose superpower apparently involves wielding a crossbow and wearing a hooded cape. At first they’re chased



Harley Quinn needs some ‘girl time’ after breaking up with the Joker.

BIRDS OF PREY
‘Birds of Prey’ is showing at the Sonoma 9 Cinemas. Rated R. Running time 1:49. Visit cinemawest.com.

around by Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), a cop using classic tough lines like, “Did I stutter?” But it turns out the whole police force is corrupt — it’s not Commissioner Gordon’s Gotham PD anymore! — so she has to make her own justice.

Harley also mentors the young thief Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco) who has swallowed a priceless diamond. Our heroine, showing that she cares, plies the girl with laxatives instead of gutting her like a fish, which is Roman’s plan.

Director Cathy Yan begins with a fairly complicated flashback structure as Harley tries to recall character backstories in her jumbled memory. For a while, it seems she might be an unreliable and mostly unlikable narrator, which would be



Harley Quinn enjoys a diversity of styles.

somewhat interesting... But once the squad comes together it’s a straight-ahead fight fest topped with a few of what Hollywood would consider “badass feminist” bon mots. Stylistically, you

drops on ’70s and ’80s songs. There’s a cover version of Pat Benatar’s “Hit Me with Your Best Shot” and the original cut of Heart’s “Barracuda” to score a by-the-numbers crash-bang battle at an abandoned amusement park.

Despite its Billboard hit conservatism, “Birds of Prey” does what it can to be a movie of its moment — one reason Roman hates Harley is that she voted for Bernie Sanders. Working class superheroes are apparently part of his coalition against the billionaire elites.

As always, there are plenty of expensive needle drops on ’70s and ’80s songs.

feel Yan almost reaching Joel Schumacher’s sleaze-camp in “Batman Forever” but she ends someplace much tamer. As always, there are plenty of expensive needle

STREAMING

Scenes from an apocalypse in progress

‘Fast Color’ characters tackle new realities

By KIRK MICHAEL
INDEX-TRIBUNE FILM CRITIC

“Fast Color” begins with a downbeat voiceover and a series of shots reminiscent of the opening to “No Country for Old Men.” It seems people are living in the near future during an in-progress apocalypse — the landscapes look parched because there’s no water, and little food. Perhaps Ruth (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) is coming home to West Texas, or does every place just look like West Texas now?

In this thirsty (and musky) world, Ruth makes things worse with a harmful, out of control superpower. She has seizures that cause earthquakes and disrupt an already fragile ecosystem. She heads to the place where she grew up to reconnect with a matriarch called Bo (Lorraine Toussaint) and a young girl named Lila (Saniyya Sidney).

The kid can de- and re-construct objects with her mind, which begs

FAST COLOR
‘Fast Color’ is streaming on Amazon Prime. Rated PG-13. Running time 1:42. Visit amazon.com.

the question — if she can make a wrench out of some metal shavings can she make a Twinkie out of sawdust, or perhaps a rain cloud out of some water droplets? More than magical elements, “Fast Color” is focused on the importance of inter-generational storytelling — in a beautiful and surely true to life moment, Ruth shows Lila a vinyl copy of “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill” because it’s a cultural artifact of the highest order.

Director Julia Hart has made a low budget, slow burn sci-fi in the vein of Shane Carruth’s brilliant “Upstream Color.” Most of the effects are accomplished without CGI and the best moments are between characters figuring out how to move in new realities.



Gugu Mbatha-Raw in ‘Fast Color.’

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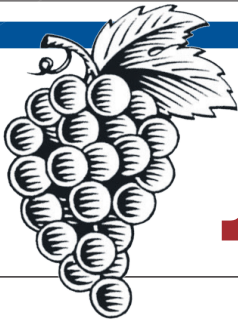
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A Taste of

Food & Wine

Continued from B1

Built and founded by Sonoma developer and philanthropist Suzanne Brangham, Ramekins Culinary School never was a great moneymaker, but offered tremendous outreach to Sonoma Valley and to the food-curious throughout the United States.

This writer remembers interviewing several culinary stars at Ramekins during the Brangham years — from Jacques Pépin and Georgeanne Brennan to Michael Chiarello and Chuck Williams. In fact, Brangham hosted Chuck Williams’ 90th birthday party at Ramekins in 2005 to benefit the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art even though she had already sold the facility, and the nearby General’s Daughter, to Sarah and Darius Anderson. In 2019 they sold the property, as well as Cornerstone Sonoma marketplace on Highway 121, to Stacy and Ken Mattson.

Under Brangham’s ownership, Ramekins earned the IACP Cooking School of the Year award, which was awarded personally by Jacques Pépin in Dallas, Texas.

Now the General’s Daughter has been closed for “renovations” and is planned to reopen this spring as a new restaurant called Georgette, while Ramekins Culinary School has gone dark for remodeling as well.

Garagiste Festival reminder

Cynthia Cosco will pour her local Passaggio wines tomorrow, Feb. 15, at the 10th annual Garagiste Festival at the Sonoma Valley Veterans Memorial Building before it moves on to Solvang, Los Angeles and Paso Robles.

The festival offers samplings from 40 micro-production commercial win-

For lovers only ...



This plate'll get your Valentine's engines revving, says Natalie MacLean.

Sommelier, food and wine pairing expert, and wine writer Natalie MacLean came up with a fun list of food and wine pairings that appear to have aphrodisiac properties, inherent either in the foods, the wines or the combination of both.

MacLean claims that some foods became thought to be sexy because they resembled male private parts, such as “avocados, which according to the Aztecs, grew on the testicle tree to their female counterparts such as

oysters and figs.”

Others believe that chili peppers increase heart rates, make some people hot and sweaty and, thereby, increase passion.

Check out these matchups: oysters with crisp dry white wine or sparkling wine; asparagus with sauvignon blanc; soft cheeses with buttery chardonnay; pine nuts with sauvignon blanc or pinot grigio; Acai berry (thought to be a natural “blue pill”) with a full-bodied red such as shiraz or grenache;

strawberries and whipped cream (maybe even dipped in chocolate) with ice wine; and chocolate with port.

MacLean claims that Casanova used to drink a cup of hot chocolate a day. Message conveyed.

And finally, bacon with a full-bodied savory red wine. MacLean says that just the smell of food can stimulate desire such as pumpkin pie and lavender for men and cucumber and licorice for women.

eries pouring more than 100 wines from Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Sierra Foothills, Lodi, Santa Cruz and beyond.

This year’s wineries include 12 that have never participated at a Garagiste Festival before, including wines from Katie Bund-

schu’s Abbot’s Passage (she also has a shop here in Sonoma), 601 Cellars, Aesop Wines, Brombeere Wines, Carboniste Mod-

ern Sparkling, JonEVino, Oceano Wines, Ondule Wines, Purple Dragon Cellars, Ricci Vineyards, Sutro Wine Co. and Zo Wines. Tickets at door or at Eventbrite.com: \$65 to \$130 VIP. VIP includes Girl & the Fig box lunch, special tastes and chocolates.

Ty Caton new release party Saturday

Keep your Valentine’s treats coming and attend Ty Caton Vineyards February New Release Party on Saturday, Feb. 15 at his winery on Eighth Street

East. Enjoy light appetizers, music and discounts while tasting new releases including 2018 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Upper Bench Merlot, Ballfield Syrah, Estate Petite Sirah and loads more. \$20 public or \$25 at door, free to wine club members plus three guests. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. 21684 Eighth St. E., Suite 460, Sonoma. Reserve at 938-3224, ext. 1. Or wine-club@tycaton.com.

Japanese ceramics

See Food & Wine, B5



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Sonoma Valley

Food & Wine

Continued from B4
and cooking class

The Sonoma Community Center will host a Donabe clay pot ceramics workshop with master potter and chef Michiho Fukumori from Iga, Japan, where the local volcanic clay comes from. Apparently every household in Japan has one of these pots. Our son and daughter-in-law cook rice in one and swear that it's the best ever. It's Japan's culinary equivalent to American cast iron pans.

Fukumori is a sixth-generation Donabe ceramicist and a trained chef and will bring unglazed Donabe pots from her Iga studio for students to glaze and fire at the Community Center's kiln on Saturday, Feb. 15. On Sunday, Feb. 16 the class moves to Shige Sushi in Maxwell Village shopping center for Fukumori to teach Japanese one-pot cooking in the pots guests have helped create. \$250 plus \$75 materials.

Chili Bowl Express rolls through

The Chili Bowl Express fundraiser for the Sonoma Community Center rolls into town on George Washington's actual birthday, Saturday, Feb. 22.

Guests get to choose their own bowl made by local ceramicists before they go into the kitchen to select a chili to fill the bowl, all the toppings imaginable and cornbread made by local bakers.

Chefs who will be making and donating the chili include John McReynolds of Stone Edge Farm, Kathy King and Denise Hazleton of Sonoma Overnight Support, Knights of Columbus, the Swiss Hotel, Sonoma Hills Retirement Center, Delicious Dish, Salt & Stone, Tom Jenkins (former owner of Sonoma's Best), Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa, Picazo Café, Linda Goudy, Epicurean Connection, HopMonk Tavern, Lisa Lavagetto of Ramekins, the Ackerly Sisters of Sonoma Market, Lauren Wayson, Jacob's Pizza, Wild Thyme Catering & Events and Teen Services. Vegan choices available. Silent auctions, ceramics demonstrations, fund a need, and desserts with beer and wine available.

Three seatings at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 and 6 p.m. \$30 early seatings, \$60 evening seating includes cocktail hour at 5 p.m. includes ceramic cup, cocktails, and chili with bowl. 276 E. Napa St., Sonoma. Tickets at 938-4626 or sonomacom-

French Camembert purists need to relax

The traditionalist side of the French Camembert argument have won the 12-year national culture controversy. They say Camembert must only be produced with unpasteurized milk produced by cows that graze

The traditionalist side of the French Camembert argument have won the 12-year national culture controversy.

on Normandy grass, according to thelocal.fr. The purists claim that the soil, grass and waters from Normandy, as well as the cows, contribute to Camembert's unique qualities, insisting that other milk should not be used to sully the pure product.



Camembert lobbyists: The product shall not be sullied!

munitycenter.org.

Beltane Ranch Pruning Party

Beltane Ranch's annual pruning party is a super fun way to learn how to prune vines, understand what different cuts mean to the plant, get down and dirty, and consume great food and wine created at the ranch.

On Saturday, Feb. 20 you can have a role in "kicking off the growing season" by prepping the vines to do their best. Learn from pros and champion pruners, drink Beltane's estate wines and learn about them, stop for a snack as you check in and get "tools of the trade." It's hard work (do as much as you can) and you will love it, rewarded with winemaker-led tastings, Beltane Tacos made by chef Greg and Evelia, and a pig roast on an open fire pit along with pineapple, organic winter vegetables and handmade-before-your-eyes tortillas.

As you finish your vineyard experience warm up by the fire and enjoy the Polo & Mariachi Azteca's uplifting music. Guests also get to take home Beltane crew T-shirts and pruning shears that they use that day. Wear rubber boots, and if you don't have any Beltane will get some for you at extra charge. Rain or shine. Wine club members \$110, public \$150. 11 a.m. to 4

p.m. 11773 Sonoma Highway, Glen Ellen. Tickets at beltaneranch.vinespring.com. 833-4233.

Stone Edge Farm's dinner series

Edge chef Fiorella Butron is a certified Ayurvedic practitioner among other talents and she has planned a most interesting nine-course menu that "observes healing principles" for every body type and personality characteristic. She says the meal will delight your senses and leave you feeling restored with mindful eating and strong social connections to promote health.

On Friday, Feb. 28, the menu will include Yukon gold potatoes with stinging nettles and watercress; Mendocino uni (sea urchin) with citrus and coconut; beets with kelp, spiced pumpkin seeds and cherry syrup, Dungeness crab with fermented pepper aji Amarillo and purple cel-

ery; carrot soup with turmeric; quail with parsnip purée and black trumpet mushrooms and chicory root; persimmon sorbet with kir and vodka; purple corn crepes, dark chocolate, persimmon, honey pollen Jujube, maca, and more dark chocolate. Plant-based menu also available. \$250 public, 20 percent less for wine club members. 6:30 p.m. 139 E. Napa St., Sonoma. RSVP to 935-6520 or concierge@stoneedgefarm.com.

Winning Breathless Wines

Congratulations to former Sonoma resident Sharon Cohn and her Breathless Wines for winning the Sparkling Wines Sweepstakes in the recent San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. Cohn and winemaker Penny Gadd-Coster triumphed with their Sonoma County Blanc de Noirs (\$32), Gadd-Coster has made wine at Jordan Winery, J

Vineyards & Winery, and Rack & Riddle, specializing in the Méthode Champenoise sparkling wines, and lists the famed André Tchelistcheff as one of her primary mentors.

The winning wines are available for public tasting Saturday, Feb. 15 at the Fort Mason Center

Festival Pavilion in San Francisco.

Sharon Cohn is also a member of the Cha Chas, who help with extracurricular activities at Valley of the Moon Children's Center.



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Business

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Property management, cannabis, tourism, TV and more

Business news from in and around Sonoma Valley

New company: Toni Morgan and Sean Mahoney have launched a new property management company, Morgan Birch, that specializes in providing a wide range of private home management services for part-time home owners in Sonoma and Napa. “From simple errands to special requests, our goal is to take care of all the details of a client’s property so they can take full advantage of your time there,” says Morgan. Services include construction project management, basic home maintenance, home set-up for guest arrival, event coordination and more. morganbirchco.com.

New cannabis job: Sonoma Hills Farm, a craft cannabis farm and culinary garden located in Petaluma, has appointed Aaron Keefer as vice president of cultivation and production. Keefer was most recently the head culinary farmer for the Thomas Keller



Author Sean Mahoney and entrepreneur Toni Morgan run the new property management company Morgan Birch. Morgan also owns the LollapaSnooze sleepover rental company.

Restaurant Group, which includes the French Laundry. Sonoma Hills Farm plans to be a cultural and educational intersection of small farm cannabis and traditional agriculture. The farm will cultivate cannabis for consumers as well as high-end culinary and hospitality clients. Last fall, the farm was granted the first 1-acre conditional use permit

for a cannabis grow in Sonoma County. The first harvest is planned for late 2020.

Wine and beer sought: Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce is gathering a list of Sonoma Valley beer and wine companies that are interested in providing their products to be sold at the Tuesday Night Market in 2020.

In a change from year’s past, wineries and breweries will not need to sell directly, the sales will be handled by the Chamber, in partnership with the City of Sonoma. For more information, mail mark@sonomachamber.org as soon as possible.

Stompers news: Sonoma Stompers 2020 season tickets are on sale now. In 2020, the Stompers will be hosting games against the Napa Silverados, Vallejo Admirals and new expansion club California Dogecoin, which will be based out of Fairfield. 2020 is the seventh season of professional baseball in Sonoma. The first week of league play will be in late May, with 40 home games. stompersbaseball.com.

Lunch and Learn: The Sonoma Chamber is hosting a Lunch and Learn event about 2020 Workplace Trends with Nelson Staffing at HopMonk Tavern at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 25. Attendees will receive a hard copy of the 2020 Advisor and Salary Guide. Visit bit.ly/2RUYNuQ to register.

Gourmet Food and Wine Tours: The company is offering a new Sonoma History Scoop Tour starting Feb. 15, featuring a stop at Sweet Scoops. Gourmet Food & Wine Tours, founded by Renee ReBell, is celebrating its sixth year of offering walking tours, which have now expanded to include options in Napa, Yountville, St. Helena and Sausalito. The Sonoma Scoop Tour runs Saturdays for 1.5 hours and adults are \$30, kids are \$25 and under 6 are free.

Volunteers needed: The Sonoma International Film Festival is March 25 to 29. Volunteers are needed as film venue assistants, backlot assistants, wine team, runners and more. There is a volunteer “Casting Call” at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, at the Sonoma Community Center. sonomafilmfest.org. Email questions to kim@sonomafilmfest.org.

Email business news to managingeditor@sonomanews.com.

REAL ESTATE

Sold in Sonoma

Properties sold in Sonoma Valley, the week ending Feb. 8

INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF REPORT
91 Vista Circle
Sold for \$153,000
3 bedrooms/2 baths
1,248 SF
377 Avenida Barbera

Sold for \$540,000
2 bedrooms/2 baths
1,382 SF

381 Walnut Ave.
Sold for \$928,000
3 bedrooms/3 baths
1,784 SF

4042 Pepperwood Court
Sold for \$363,000

2.51 acres, land
250 Maple Avenue, Kenwood
Sold for \$600,000
2 bedrooms/1 bath
894 SF
16795 Mission Way
Sold for \$2,995,000
5 bedrooms/5 baths
3,821 SF



381 Walnut Ave. previously sold for \$815,000 in March 2017.

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Sound healing really reverberates.

Healing practitioners offer sunset renewal

Free sound healing sessions available

INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF REPORT

Sonoma Healing Boutique is joining with other like-minded practitioners to offer a free “Sunset Renewal” event from 5 to 8 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 16 at 10 Waterman Ave.

Healing Boutique owner Shama Besley is organizing a “collaborative and enriching evening to celebrate life, renewal and change.”

Shamanic Sound Healer Jennifer Grais will be holding three free 10-15 minute sound healing sessions once an hour beginning at 5:30 p.m. in celebration of her latest album, *Sacrament*. The Sound Healing Sessions

are available on a first come basis and is limited to 15 guest at a time. Feel free to bring your favorite cushion.

Deb Titus of Sacred Song Lines will be showcasing raw healing crystal clusters and nature-based artwork.

Kathleen McCauley Anast will be representing her Healing Grief In Sacred Sound Series held at Westerbeke Ranch.

Nibbles and tea will be served.

Parking is limited, walking and car pooling are encouraged.

For information, visit sonomahealing.com.

Sonoma man creates body-safe tonics

Adam Wicht spreads the love with new essential oils

By LORNA SHERIDAN
INDEX-TRIBUNE MANAGING EDITOR

When Adam Wicht read that Marin County has the highest rate of cancer among women aged 18-55 years old and held the title for highest average number of individual cosmetic products used in a single day, he grew concerned for his wife Jenne, who had grown up there.

“I was disturbed that the world of beauty and cosmetics was so unregulated, freely using ingredients that were on the list of cancer-causing carcinogens,” said Wicht, 38.

Wicht became determined to create a product that not only wasn’t detrimental to one’s health, but instead was effective, organic and had multiple applications: as a moisturizer, a makeup remover, sunburn and rash relief, an under-eye serum, a hair defrizzer, a bathtub companion and more.

In just a few days, he had established the name Boditonic and began testing out recipes of organic essential oils. He wanted them to combine the positive attributes of cold-pressed sesame oil to create a multi-use product rich in vitamin E, B-complex vitamins and high in omega-6 that has anti-aging, anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial properties as well as natural UV protection.

His next step was a company in Petaluma that offered olfactory evaluations to test scent combinations.

“The best I can describe the experience is it’s akin to a wine tasting here in Sonoma... tons and tons of



Adam Wicht moved to Sonoma in 2013 with his wife Jenne.

‘People should be as concerned about what they are putting on their body as what they are putting in their body.’

- Adam Wicht

varietals that all have their own characteristics and benefits,” he said.

After a full day of smelling close to 100 different essential oils, he and Jenne returned home with a cross section of options to play with.

“In what felt like the blink of an eye, we developed the first two ‘flavors’ of Boditonic: Original and Baby,” said Wicht.

Today, Boditonic is avail-

able online at boditonic.com, \$40 per 3.8 ounces, as well as in Sonoma at the Loop on the Plaza and at Purely Sonoma on Broadway. Each bottle lasts a month or longer, says Wicht. He recommends daily use of a full-body application after a shower. “Depending on the time of day or my mood, I’ll do Original in the morning to invigorate and Baby in the evenings to relax into a



The Boditonic Baby formula is for both adults and children.

JAK.W.

Jenne Kirscher and Adam Wicht co-own Jak.W. in the old Feed Store at 539 First St. W. The Wichtes have lived on the west side in Sonoma since 2013, and have two young sons. The Jak.W. team represents furniture, flooring and home decor lines and provides furnishings to hotels, restaurants and corporate offices. In Sonoma, their focus is on home products that “enhance the Sonoma way of life.” jak-w.com.

great night’s rest.”

He’s currently working on other flavors as well as expanding the product line.

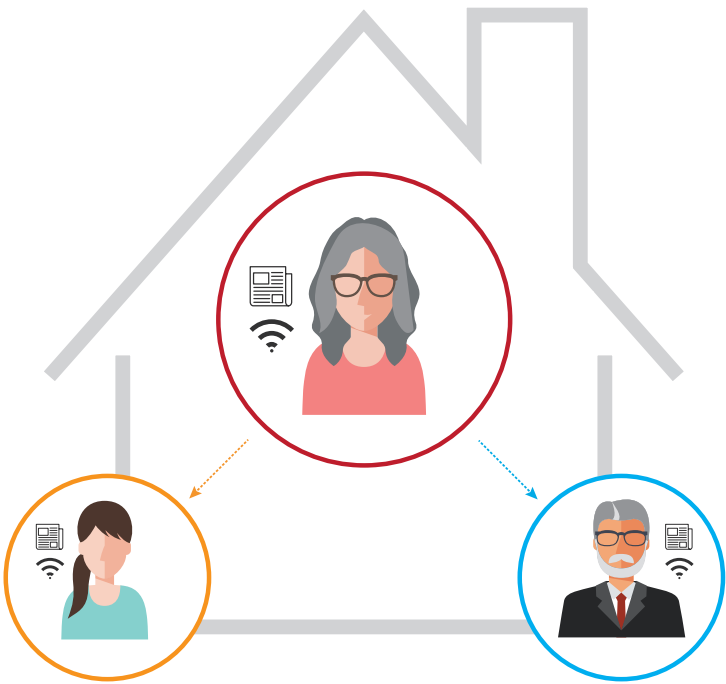
“I’ve been playing with a sea-salt body scrub that is amazing, but we don’t yet have a date when it will hit the market,” said Wicht.

Contact Lorna at lorna.sheridan@sonomanews.com.

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6th Annual New Business Expo

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| eTrikeCo - Electric Tricycles | Suncraft Fine Foods |
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| Boys & Girls Clubs of Sonoma Valley | Social Advocates for Youth |
| La Luz Center | Sonoma Valley Community Health Center |
| R. I. S. K. Sonoma | Sonoma Valley Women's Club |
| | Vintage House |

If you are a Nonprofit in Sonoma Valley and would like free booth space at our 6th Annual New Business Expo, please email Carmen@SonomaChamber.Org

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Wine rebels at Garagiste Festival

Event features wine makers taking unconventional paths

By PEG MELNIK
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The French term “garagiste” originated in the ‘90s with small scale, independent-minded wine producers from the Bordeaux region of France. They made wine that was — while not necessarily created in a garage — nontraditional, with a very short aging period.

Since its first event in Paso Robles in 2011, the Garagiste Wine Festival has borrowed the term as a nod to those entrepreneurial renegades who chose an unconventional path.

At the Garagiste Wine Festival in Sonoma on Feb. 15 (the Garagiste Festival Northern Exposure), you’ll get to meet some of the rebels who are under the radar in Wine Country.

“The winemakers are the ones who will be pouring,” said Doug Minnick, Garagiste co-founder. “We want people to get a chance to meet the winemakers and hear their story. You might meet people living on a shoestring budget. Or people who are second careerists, like a doctor. Or people who are the children of famous winemakers now pursuing their own label. It’s not just about the wine. It’s also about their story.”

The Grand Tasting, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., is \$65, with a VIP package priced at \$130 (which allows entry at noon). More than 40 winemakers from Northern California will be at the Sonoma



The Garagiste Festival features winemakers who do not have their own tasting rooms.

Veterans Memorial Hall to show their wines. For details, visit garagistefestival.com.

This is the third regional festival in Sonoma. About 300 attendees are expected, according to Minnick, who considers himself the consummate matchmaker.

“These people don’t just want to taste wine, they want to discover it,” he said. “And these wineries are the boutiques of the boutiques.”

Wineries that produce 10,000 cases or less a year fit the description of “boutique.” This

festival showcases winemakers who produce 1,500 cases and fewer.

‘I always had the dream of creating my own label, and it’s very home-grown. I keep the books, make the wine and sell the wine.’

— Bart Hansen

“Our audience is a little further on their wine journey, and wine priced at \$30 to \$80 won’t scare them away,” Minnick said.

Unlike major wine producers, most of the wineries at the festival don’t have tasting rooms

or distributors. Sidestepping the traditional model for selling their wines, these winemakers opt for innovative methods. They include creating wine clubs, building allocation lists of people who commit to regularly buying their wines, networking on social media and even producing podcasts.

Bart Hansen, a boutique producer, likes calling his own shots. He worked for larger wineries for most of his wine-making career, and his credits include Kenwood Vineyards, Benziger and Imagery Estate.

GARAGISTE WINE FESTIVAL

When: 2-5 p.m. (earlier access with VIP or Rare & Reserve tickets), Saturday, Feb. 15

Where: Veterans Memorial Hall, 126 1st St. W., Sonoma

Admission: \$65-\$130, plus fees

Information: garagistefestival.com

Hansen, 54, decided to focus on his own brand in 2007, naming it Dane Cellars after his son. He produces just 500 cases a year out of a Sonoma warehouse on 8th Street East.

“I always had the dream of creating my own label, and it’s very home-grown,” he said. “I keep the books, make the wine and sell the wine.”

Hansen markets the wine through a weekly podcast called “The Wine Makers,” which already has 100,000 downloads on iTunes.

“We boutique producers are our own bosses,” he said. “We don’t have pressure from a distributor saying, ‘We don’t want you to make chenin blanc. We want you to make chardonnay.’ We’re all about doing our own thing.”

Hansen said what he loves most is following his passion with the varietals he wants to make. His lineup includes chenin blanc, zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon, grenache and mourvedre.

“I love the experience of meeting the people who are drinking my wine,” Hansen said. “I tell them our story. We all have a story.”



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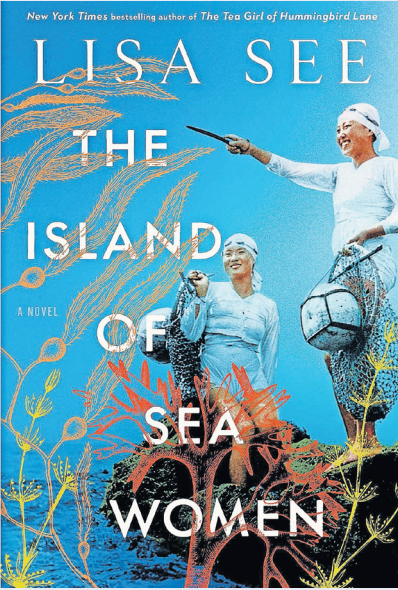
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■ SONOMA’S BESTSELLER LIST ■

The top-selling fiction titles at Readers’ Books, the week ending Feb. 11



FICTION HARDCOVER

1. **“The Island of Sea Women” by Lisa See**
On an island off the South Korean coast, two girls from different backgrounds begin a life-long friendship as they become part of Haenyeo — women deep sea divers, where the women are the income earners and the men tend to the children.
2. **“American Dirt” by Jeanine**

- Cummins
After a drug cartel kills most of her family, a young mother and her 8-year-old son flee their home in Acapulco and begin a harrowing journey cross the northern border to the United States.
3. **“Lady Clementine” by Marie Benedict**
Historical fiction of the life of Clementine Churchill, who is portrayed as every bit as ambitious and influential as her Prime Minister husband.
4. **“Such a Fun Age” by Kiley Reid**
In this smart and timely debut novel, a 25-year-old African American woman, while babysitting, is unjustly accused of kidnapping the child of her privileged white employers. A series of events follows that examines race relations, social media, modern parenting and political correctness.
5. **“Olive, Again” by Elizabeth Strout**
Eleven years after the publication of the Pulitzer Prize-winning “Olive Kitteridge,” the beloved curmudgeon returns, along with the interconnecting stories of her fellow townspeople in Maine.

FICTION PAPERBACK

1. **“There There” by Tommy Orange**
- A contemporary chronicle of Native Americans in Oakland, CA, as their daily lives lead up to the inaugural Big Oakland Powwow.
2. **“An Old Man’s Game: An Amos Parisman Mystery” by Andy Weinberger**
A retired Los Angeles detective is brought back to solve the mysterious death of a charismatic rabbi, in this entertaining debut novel from Andy, owner of Readers’ Books.
3. **“The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane” by Lisa See**
A young girl in a remote Chinese village, gives up her illegitimate baby. After the daughter grows up in California, the two women wonder about each other.
4. **“The Overstory” by Richard Powers**
Nine central characters explore their relationship to nature, through the lens of environmental activism.
5. **“The Care and Feeding of Ravenously Hungry Girls” by Anissa Gray**
Debut novel from the award winning CNN journalist, the story of a trio of adult sisters in which secrets and lies must be confronted when one of them is sent to prison.

Sit, Bowser, sit! Dealing with difficult dogs



Unleash your inner ‘dog trainer.’

Show Mr. McWoofers who’s boss with training class at Vintage House

INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF REPORT
Vintage House will be holding a free class on Monday, Feb. 19 about dealing with difficult dogs. The class will discuss what makes a dog difficult, how to recognize a difficult dog, and how to manage difficult dogs. “Handling all dogs, especially the difficult dog, can make a real difference in keeping you as well as the people around you safe,” said class instructor Gardner Smith. Smith will demonstrate the use of his favorite tools for handling difficult dogs in a variety of situations safely. Register online at vintagehouse.org/events/?eid=6332.

Find more local entertainment events at sonomanews.com

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Sonoma County Movie Trivia:
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A: The Animal, co-starred Colleen Haskell, who was on the first season of Survivor.

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Darryl Ponicsan also wrote the screenplay for the film ‘Taps.’

Ponicsan

Continued from B1

withdrawing from Sonoma civic life, and now spends much of the year in Palm Springs, returning to Sonoma for summers (when it’s too hot in the desert). It’s a move he prefigured with a passage in another new book he released recently, “I Feel Bad About...,” a series of self-obsessed vignettes in the style of Norah Ephron’s “I Feel Bad About My Neck.”

“If I moved to a warm climate I could wear a nice straw hat, something with a wide brim and a hatband of hibiscus flowers. The cigar would be fine, then I could add rum and get away with it... And that is how I came to move to the desert.”

But the protagonist and the writer are not the same person, as novelists invariably stress. “I understand how the average reader will assume every novel is autobiographical, and he’s not entirely wrong,” Ponicsán said.

After realizing that he’s trapped in the town where he finds himself by circumstances that seem vaguely mysterious, the novel’s protagonist DK becomes more if warily fond of Maragate – a place where even locals struggle to explain why tourists would want to go there, where people swoon at the “magenta moment” of sundown for no particular reason, where

the whole town turns out weekly to the Spanish Plaza to become besotted on artisanal gin and jerky, where going to the Fourth of July parade and fireworks is a civic duty, and where the repeated phrase “It’s a little slice of heaven” begins to sound like self-hypnosis.

As DK becomes more irritated by and vocally opposed to leaf blowers, he takes on the town’s perennial, seemingly unbeatable mayor directly, even narrowly winning the election to replace him – then finding himself all but fully incorporated into the town’s own mystique.

Maragate, clearly, is not

aside, the Ponicsáns have put down roots in Sonoma. Married 40 years, they moved here full-time in 2008, they vote here, and they have funded the Shoes for Kids program at La Luz. True, they live part time in Palm Springs, but they only headed there in 2016 when the writer needed a quiet place to work – away from leaf blowers.

Still... it’s fair to say many of the nods, winks and nudges in the novel will bring Sonomans a flash of recognition, usually along with a smile. That is, unless it’s yourself that you recognize.

“It’s been my experience that it is a non-issue now and I am really cool with that,” says Ken Brown today of his role in the leaf-blower controversy.

While there may not be a movie in it – as there have been for several of Ponicsán’s earlier books – not every book is written to become a movie; some are written for different reasons.

The book came out in the fall, to generally favorable reviews. But says the author now, “I don’t get the sense that any Sonomans got their panties in a twist over this book. And if they did, they could overcome it on any given Tuesday night with a corn dog and a nice pinot noir.”

Contact christian.kallen@sonomanews.com.

‘It’s the kind of work that requires concentration, which was hard to come by in pre-ban Sonoma.’

- Darryl Ponicsan on writing

Sonoma: it’s spelled differently, Mayor Hirkill bears scant resemblance to Mayor Brown, and after 200 pages or so it turns out to be in Utah. As the story unspools the allegorical thread is revealed to be about the afterlife, about being consigned to Hell after all, with or without Hope. (The epigraph alone should give it away: “The Gates of Hell are locked from the inside,” according to C.S. Lewis.)

“I tried to maintain as long as I could the question of whether this guy’s in purgatory or just another small town in America,” writes Ponicsán.

But parables and parody

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MEET THE PEOPLE BEHIND YOUR NEWS



Lorna Sheridan

Managing Editor

Lorna Sheridan joined the Index-Tribune as an education columnist in 2010 and as a full-time staffer in 2015. She is the paper’s business editor and oversees its arts and entertainment coverage, as well as being a staff writer for general news.

Lorna has covered everything from high-profile local criminal investigations to the devastating October 2017 fires. Nearest and dearest to her heart, however, is her coverage of the Sonoma Valley schools, and she spends as much time as possible visiting the local school campuses, looking for story ideas.

Lorna’s efforts this year earned her and the I-T multiple honors in the California Newspaper Publishers Association annual awards –including top prizes for coverage of business, housing and art and entertainment. She looks forward to another year writing about all the Sonoma Valley news that’s fit to print.

The Sonoma Index-Tribune

LOCAL MATTERS

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Sunday Masses English	7:30, 9:00, 11:00 a.m.
Weekday & Saturday Masses	8:30 a.m.
Wed. Evening Spanish Confessions	6:30 pm.
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PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Sonoma Charter School Test Scores for Third Grade Reading and Math Exceed State and County Results

Community Partnership with Local School Study Finds Two Essential Elements Linked to K-3 Student Success

Early education initiatives are seldom the top priorities for business executives, unless you’re Gary Nelson.

Five years ago Nelson turned his attention back to public education, not as a concerned parent but, rather, as a concerned executive of a top-rated personnel firm. “We started seeing more and more candidates with skill gaps in the areas of critical thinking, math, and writing -- the stuff you depended on the schools to provide.”

The Challenge

Nelson rounded-up education minds to tackle the problem at the entry point to school.

“My challenge to the school was simple: Reach every student where they are and bring them up to or above grade-level performance in English Language Arts and Math by the end of third grade,” recalls Nelson. The challenge was named the Grade-Level Proficiency Project (GLPP) and was applied to the Sonoma Charter School. To support the challenge, the Nelson family provided funding for the study.

Proficient by Grade Three

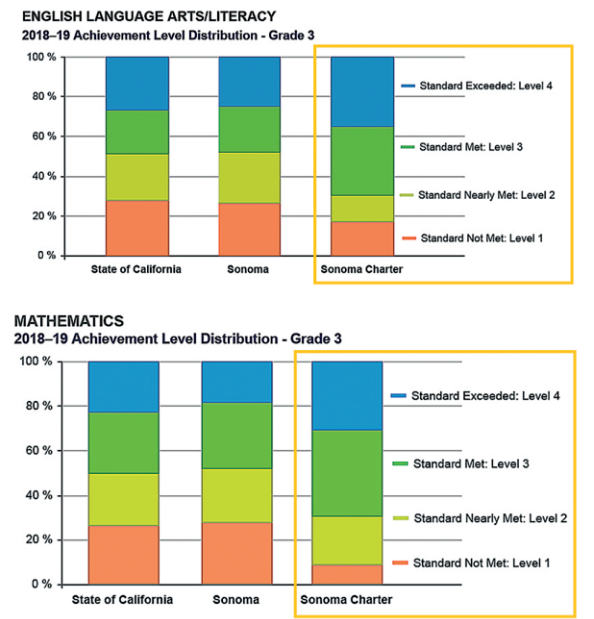
The goal of the GLPP was to bring all students to proficiency in literacy and math by third-grade by utilizing a unique approach that combines common school-based ingredients:

- Adaptive Online Curriculum that supplemented a school’s core curriculum.
- Adaptive Instructional Coaching Model with focused instructional strategies for small group differentiation and achieving incremental growth for all students.
- The use of Professional Learning Communities to build school culture of continuous improvement and collaboration of best practices.
- Multi-measure Academic Assessments to inform instruction

Two-years into the implementation of the action research pilot, GLPP, Sonoma Charter saw the results all schools want to see: Filling student skill gaps and increasing performance using multiple academic measures.

“The 2019 results on the state test (CAASPP) for our third-graders confirmed all the work was worth it, with **70% of our students**

meeting/exceeding standards for English and **69% meeting/exceeding standards for Math,”** exclaimed school’s director, Marc Elin.



The State averages were approximately **50% for third graders** in Math and Literacy. Sonoma County averages were also at **50% for third graders** in Math and Literacy.

Sonoma Charter School becomes a reality 26 years ago!

Entrepreneurs, like Nelson, are used to seeing a need and creating a solution.

The first educational need he saw was related to the public school options his kids had 26 years ago. “My wife, Marcia, and I were looking for something different for our kids. We learned that we weren’t the only ones,” recalls Nelson.

The Nelsons recruited a group of like-minded parents wanting a rigorous and creative K-8 curriculum delivered through project-based learning that included visual and performing arts. Equally important to these parents was the philosophy of whole child education -- a supportive school community that attended to the mind and heart of every student.

Fortunately for the group, this was the same time that the charter school movement was just starting in California. The group did their homework, wrote a charter school petition, and started the innovative and wildly successful Sonoma Charter School (ninth oldest charter school in California).

“This could have only happened with the flexibility that a charter school start-up allows”

which Nelson compares to the business-incubator model with which he has found similar success.

The Social-Emotional Side of Learning

“As intriguing as the GLPP academic results were, we also wanted the K-3 study to include how social and emotional wellness affects academic success and the readiness for learning,” recalls Elin.

Added to the third year of the K-3 study was a Social-Emotional

Learning and Wellness (SELWELL) program implemented in a partnership with the Hanna Institute. SELWELL focused both on school-wide practices along with specific programmatic elements for students in grades K-3 that emphasized self-regulation, social empathy, and self-esteem. Components of the school-wide SELWELL program included school-based counseling, classroom curriculum, and positive behavior/intervention practices.

Data measurement tools in the area of social-emotional learning are just emerging in the field of educational research. In our SELWELL project study, we were able to apply the newly designed Harvard Holistic Student Assessment which measures student data in four critical areas: Active Engagement, Assertiveness, Belonging, and Reflection. “Integrating the social-emotional data into our other performance indicators gives us a better composite profile reflecting the whole-child. It’s important for staff to see the direct relationship between emotional readiness and academic performance,” notes Elin.

Replicating Success

“At the five-year mark of the K-3 study at Sonoma Charter School, it is so rewarding to see how the GLPP combined with SELWELL can produce a complete picture of readiness and success for every student. We are now ready to replicate this same effort with a second school in Sonoma County for the 2020-21 school year,” comments Melanie Blake, leader for the Nelson Innovative Education Projects.

The next school will follow the same action research/implementation plan used at Sonoma Charter:

- 3-4 year funding model from the Nelson Family.
- A needs assessment to ascertain GLPP/SELWELL “best practices” goals for “school 2” site.
- GLPP academic component and instructional coaching applied in the first-year.
- SELWELL applied during year-two of implementation.

Sonoma Charter School will continue to serve as the “lab school” for the GLPP/SELWELL initiative -- providing other educators the opportunity to see the successful practices applied in a school setting.

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