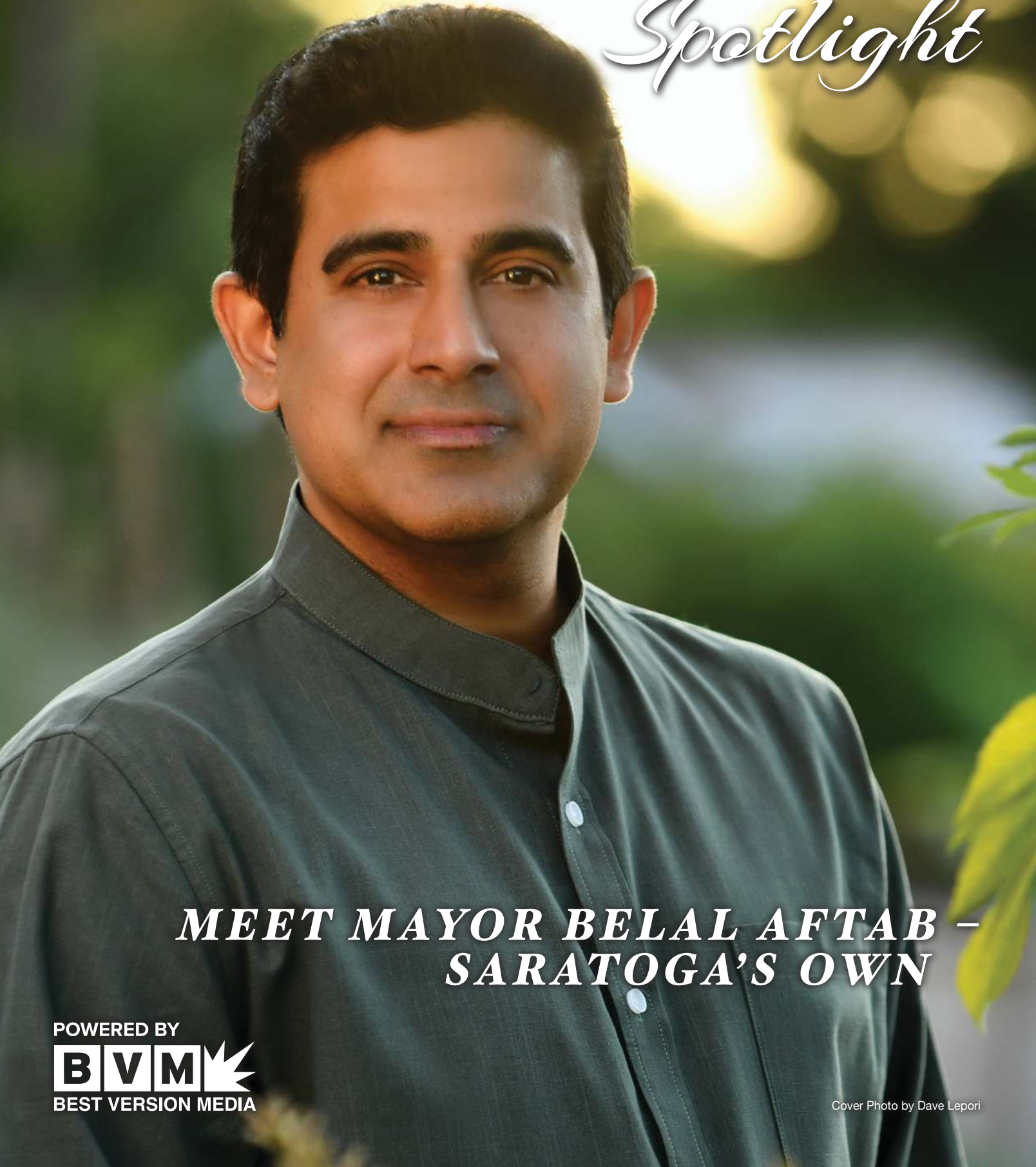


SARATOGA

Spotlight



***MEET MAYOR BELAL AFTAB –
SARATOGA'S OWN***

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Cover Photo by Dave Lepori

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April 8	May
May 8	June
June 8	July
July 8	August
August 8	September
September 8	October
October 8	November
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MEET MAYOR BELAL AFTAB – SARATOGA'S OWN

By Carol Gerwitz | Photos by David Lepori

Politics presents Saratoga Mayor Belal Aftab with significant opportunities to implement his problem-solving skills, a task he finds both enjoyable and challenging. Belal became particularly aware of politics in the aftermath of 9/11. He was attending Bellarmine at the time, the only Muslim in his class, but no one paid attention to his religion. Suddenly, after 9/11 people started making assumptions about individuals based on their religion and cultural background. This was a defining experience for Belal, leading him to believe that government had a crucial role to play. He admired how former Congressman Mike Honda handled these responsibilities, and it inspired Belal to work for the Congressman during his high school years. Belal went on to attend U.C. Berkeley where he majored in business and minored in English.

Belal's parents immigrated to the United States from Pakistan. Born in Mountain View, Belal and his family moved from San Jose to Saratoga when Belal was age 2. Although Belal lives in The Village, he spends a remarkable amount of time visiting his mother Samina in her El Quito neighborhood and feels he has two homes in Saratoga. His sister Nadia, her husband Zishan and their children Deen and Rania live in Moraga, and Belal sees them as often as his busy schedule allows.





In addition to serving as mayor, for the past eight years Belal has worked at Stripe, a financial technology company, where he has held six different roles. He currently works with small businesses around the world, helping them grow by using the tools that Stripe provides. Following college Belal worked at Goldman Sachs, which gave him the opportunity to live in San Francisco and Dubai with extensive travel to New York and London. After working for an investment fund Belal realized he wanted to build a business so he worked at a start-up for a couple of years. His ties to his hometown and family were strong, and Belal returned to the Bay Area.

Mayor Aftab served five years on Saratoga's Traffic Safety Commission, twice as chairperson. This role immersed him in both city-wide and street-level problem-solving and deepened his engagement with city staff. Recognizing an opportunity to offer fresh perspectives and leadership, Belal successfully ran for the Saratoga City Council in 2022. As he optimistically puts it, the council presents "no shortage of interesting topics to work on." He served as Vice Mayor in 2024, and was elected Mayor in December 2024.

Belal is a consummate traveler and considers himself fortunate to have been able to both travel and live abroad. He has been to 35 countries and six continents—he has not yet made it to Australia. When asked if he had a favorite place to travel, he responded that his favorite urban spot to visit outside the United States is Hong Kong. As far as locations of natural beauty, Yosemite is a favorite and is "tough to beat." He also finds his homeland, the mountainous region of northern Pakistan near Kashmir, to be incredibly beautiful.

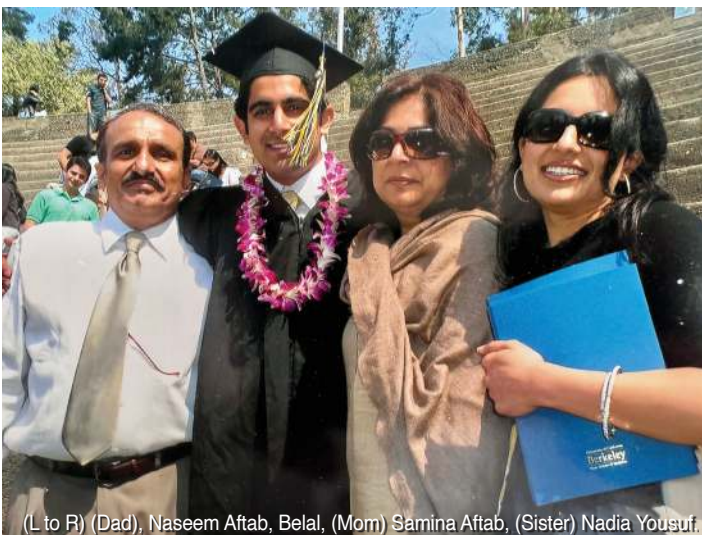


When asked about any travel adventure stories, Belal shared that he has ridden on a camel more than once (always an adventure in itself) and that, for the price of a camel ride in Dubai, a camel owner in Pakistan would let you take a camel home for an entire day. He had an adventure on what was planned to be a horseback ride while visiting Quilto Lake in Ecuador with two childhood friends from Saratoga, Salman and Danyal Kothari. However, when they arrived at the lake, donkeys were saddled up and ready, not horses. After a discussion with the guide and assuring him that they did, in fact, know the difference between donkeys and horses—"you can't fool us"—they acquiesced, mounted up, and set off. Belal's donkey was the most adventurous of the donkeys and kept straying from the trail. The ride came to an abrupt end, however, when they spotted a fire farther up the trail. They reversed direction, returned the donkeys and spent the next ten or so hours hiking an alternate route. "We got to see things that we wouldn't have gotten to see otherwise," commented Belal, making the most of the situation.

Belal feels fortunate to have grown up in Saratoga, and he's grateful to now live and serve the community there. He enjoys working out, exploring new restaurants, and sports. He cheers for the local teams and those that have recently moved. A particular thrill was in 2012 when he was walking by the stadium when the Giants were playing a World Series game and an individual was outside selling tickets at a deep discount. Belal bought a ticket and unexpectedly and delightedly enjoyed seeing a World Series game, which the Giants won. Belal is also actively involved with the West Valley Muslim Association and its community-related activities.

"We need each other more than ever," states Belal. He stresses kindness, which starts with getting to know neighbors and coming together as a community to better the community and to combat isolation, some of which is a result of Covid and some because citizens have lost connections due to their kids' growing up and moving away. Belal strongly urges Saratogans to participate in community events such as Saratoga Nights which runs through October on the first Thursday of the month from 5:00 to 8:00 pm. He also encourages volunteerism; invaluable, long-standing organizations such as the Rotary Club of Saratoga and the Saratoga Historical Foundation are challenged in finding next generation leadership.

Belal's term as mayor concludes in December 2025. He'll then proudly remain one additional year on the city council, continuing to apply his problem-solving skills and serving the citizens of Saratoga.





BE A MEDICARE EXPERT FOR YOUR CARE

By Lucille Maravilla

If you want to understand how Medicare works, it's important to know the rules regarding Medicare enrollment and coverage:

1. Mind the Calendar. If you miss Medicare Parts A and B enrollment, you won't have coverage plus you will incur lifetime fines for late enrollment in Part B. Additional information about Medicare supplements and drug plans or Medicare advantage plans can be found at medicare.gov

2. Choose Doctors Carefully. Medicare doesn't provide your health care—your doctors do. Find out if they accept Medicare. Participating providers accept Original Medicare's fee schedule as their full payment. (You or your Medicare supplement might be responsible for deductible and copay amounts.) Nonparticipating providers accept Medicare's approved payment schedule but are allowed to charge up to 15 percent more. Providers who opt out can charge whatever they want. Do your doctors have the focus that you need? Find doctors who specialize in caring for older people.

3. Avoid 'Surprise' Bills. Check in advance to see if your doctor accepts Medicare and if Medicare covers your treatment or the procedure you need. (Check covered services at Medicare.gov) If you receive an unexpected bill, don't pay it right away. Verify that it was submitted to Medicare and/or your insurance company and that the correct billing code was used. If a claim is rejected, you can file an appeal. Many times, you may be able to negotiate a lower amount.

4. Know Your Rights. If a Medicare claim gets denied, you can appeal. Call the Medicare Rights Center Hotline at 800 333-4114. Key points about the appeal process: You can designate someone (or several people) to represent you. It doesn't have to be a lawyer.

Ask your doctor to put in writing why you need—or needed—the service, medication or equipment. You can appeal a discharge from a hospital or skilled nursing facility; often you may be able to stay in the hospital at no additional charge. If your health could be seriously harmed by waiting for an appeals decision, ask for a quick answer within 72 hours.

5. Take What's Offered. Don't leave free care on the table. Annual wellness visits are free. There is nutrition assessment and counseling for diabetes or kidney disease. Medicare pays for 8 counseling sessions to help kick a nicotine habit. Medicare.gov provides a full list of covered services.

6. Keep Good Records. Your medical information and history should be kept up to date to avoid confusion regarding your health, past or present. Record health conditions and, when diagnosed, hospital dates and procedures, prescription drug lists and dosage, medical equipment you are using, contact information for your preferred pharmacy, insurance policies, emergency contact and durable power of attorney or health care directive, and list all health care providers.

7. Be Open to Change. Even if you are happy with your current Medicare coverage, you should review it annually with your agent to see if you can get better coverage or a greater deal. A good agent has this information.

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MAYOR'S CORNER LOSS HAS MANY FACES

By Mayor Belal Aftab

Summer often arrives with a blend of sunshine and sorrow for me. Fifteen years ago, this month, my father died in a commercial aviation accident, a moment that split my life into a before and an after. Father's Day and midsummer headlines—whether news of an airline crash in India or conflicts swirling far from our quiet streets—remind me how suddenly life can change.

Loss has many faces. Some endure long journeys through illness, others face the shock of an instant tragedy, and some grieve companions with paws instead of words. The route may differ, but the destination—the ache of absence—is universally understood.

Why share this as your mayor? Because grief does not respect titles, postcodes, or calendars. I have learned, in council chambers and grocery aisles alike, that every person carries an invisible backpack of worries: an unconfirmed diagnosis, a job lost, a loved one slipping away. When we cross paths—on Big Basin Way, at the Farmers' Market, or online—we rarely glimpse that load. A gentle word or patient ear can lighten it more than we know.

Over the past year, I have heard from neighbors recovering from major heart surgery, caregivers stretched thin, and families mourning sudden accidents. Their stories arrive by email, during office hours, in personal conversations, and sometimes in the passionate public comments that precede a vote. Critique is part of civic life, and I welcome it; still, I remind myself to listen first and take nothing personally. Behind every opinion is a human being with a story that matters.

If Saratoga becomes known as a city that chooses kindness—even marginally above

average—I would count that a civic victory. Kindness is not abstract. It shows up in everyday gestures: letting someone merge on Saratoga Sunnyvale Road, thanking a crossing guard, checking on the senior down the block who hasn't put out the recycling bins.

Here are three simple, actionable ways we can practice community care this month:

- 1. Reach Out.** Think of one person you haven't seen in a while—maybe a neighbor whose porch light seems dimmer lately. Send a quick text, drop off a flower from your garden, or invite them for a walk under our oaks. Presence often speaks louder than perfect words.
- 2. Use City Resources.** Saratoga's website lists local support groups and volunteer openings (saratoga.ca.us/volunteer). If you have a gift for listening, consider grief support programs at West Valley Community Services or working with our senior center. Serving on a city commission is another "light weight" way to learn about local government while giving back.
- 3. Lead by Example Online.** Much of our interaction now occurs behind screens on places like NextDoor or Facebook. Before pressing "send," ask whether your comment builds understanding or piles on hurt. A respectful tone can keep digital debates from spilling into real world resentment.

Small acts matter. I was taught that even a smile is a charitable gift. Science backs this up: simple expressions of warmth can lower stress hormones for both giver and receiver.

Multiply one smile by 31,000 residents, and we are engineering a public health intervention disguised as friendliness.

We are fortunate to live in a city blessed with natural beauty and rich history. But no redwood or heritage building can console a grieving parent or calm an anxious teen; only people can do that. Many of us already serve through synagogues, churches, mosques, sports leagues, and nonprofits. I encourage you to widen the circle—invite friends into your community rituals and be ready to accept their invitations in return. The skills that built faith centers, companies, and youth teams can also strengthen our civic fabric. Compassion and kindness are contagious. Let us choose to meet one another with patience, generosity, and grace. In doing so, we honor those we have lost and ensure Saratoga remains not just a beautiful place to live, but a gentle one.

See you on the sidewalk—with a smile.

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7



SANTA CLARA COUNTY SUPERVISOR'S CORNER

PROACTIVE AND PREPARED: KEEPING DISTRICT 5 SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE

By Margaret Abe-Koga

As summer temperatures rise, so does the risk of wildfires, especially in Santa Clara County's wildland urban interface, where neighborhoods border dry hills and forests. At the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, we are taking proactive steps to protect lives and landscapes, and we invite every family to do the same.

On May 20, my colleagues and I approved the installation of 50 AI-powered fire detection sensors across our most fire-prone areas, focusing on the eastern and southern parts of the county. AI, or artificial intelligence, is one way that we can harness technology to give residents a small advantage in rural and semi-rural areas. Some cameras will connect the current sensor array that is already located in Los Gatos Creek Watershed with sensors in Palo Alto, Stanford, and Woodside. These sensors constantly monitor air quality and use pattern recognition to detect smoke, a technological advantage that provides precious minutes for our fire officials to act before a spark turns into a disaster. It also buys a little time for our residents to evacuate via roads, that may be narrow, winding or only one way in and one way out.

While we can modernize how we respond to wildfire risks, preparation at home always remains essential. I want to recognize the Santa Clara County Firesafe Council Firewise Community Program in Los Gatos for bringing neighbors together to reduce wildfire risks through home hardening, vegetation management, and community education.

For everyone concerned about wildland fires, please note that these key steps can make all the difference in an emergency:

- Sign up for SCC Alerts at sccalerts.org to receive emergency notifications.
- Create a family communication plan with multiple escape routes, including for pets.

- Pack a go-bag with essentials like documents, medication, and water.
- Familiarize yourself with evacuation protocols.

Preparedness is a shared responsibility, and safety, like governance, requires foresight.

In that spirit, but on a county-wide level, the Board of Supervisors recently adopted a \$13.7 billion budget for fiscal year 2025–2026, shaped by serious challenges. The newly passed HR 1 bill, signed by President Trump on July 4, cuts deeply into Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). At the same time, the state budget that went into effect July 1 reduces Medi-Cal funding.

These two programs directly support the health and well-being of our most vulnerable residents, and we could face a loss of up to \$2.5 to \$3 billion in combined funding.

This is a genuinely dire situation, and it is a clear signal that localities are on their own. Across the country, counties are bracing for consequences that could destabilize our health systems. Here in Santa Clara County, we're not yet at the brink, but thousands risk losing coverage, and we must act with urgency and ingenuity. I am deeply disappointed in Congress's failure to meet this moment. Now, more than ever, we need partnership.

The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors passed a balanced budget for this fiscal year, but expenses continue to grow faster than revenue. That's why I've consistently advocated building financial reserves. A 10% rainy-day fund could yield \$30–\$50 million annually in investment returns, resources that can help close gaps when emergencies strike.

I do not support new taxes to do that. Instead, I believe we must modernize operations,

invest in cost-effective services such as mobile healthcare, and leverage public assets, such as long-term leases on county-owned land to create sustainable revenue.

Whether addressing fire prevention or fiscal planning, I am committed to proactive and responsible governance. As we move forward, guided by our mission of One County, One Future, our community deserves transparency, innovation, and leadership that puts people first.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Margaret Abe-Koga represents District Five, which includes Los Gatos and eight other cities. It stretches from Palo Alto in the north to parts of the Almaden Valley of San Jose in the south.



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CANCER CAREPOINT 13TH ANNUAL *Garden Party*

SET FOR AUGUST 24TH AT NESTLDOWN



Left to right: Jen Landes, RN, Sandi Frazer, Gay Crawford, Jan Willoughby, founding board members and speakers at the 2024 Montalvo Garden Party, and Morrigan Bruce, Chief Operating Officer.

By Liz Rosinsk

Cancer CAREpoint, a non-profit based in San Jose, is set to host its popular Garden Party Fundraiser on August 24 from 4:00-7:00 pm at Nestldown in the Santa Cruz Mountains, with delicious food provided by Le Papillon Restaurant

The organization, which was founded in 2010 by Bill Piche and Gay Crawford, with the support of Samaritan Medical Center responds to the critical gap in psychosocial and practical support for cancer patients, survivors, and their families.

Thirteen years ago, what began as a simple gathering has blossomed into one of Silicon Valley's premier summer events. The Garden Party now welcomes over 350 guests each year and raises more than \$1 million in support of the Bay Area's only community-based nonprofit offering personalized, one-on-one cancer support services.

This year, one of the featured speakers at the Garden Party, Hannah Haworth, will share her story of being diagnosed with cancer as a young mom, just five days after her daughter's first birthday. She credits the services she received at Cancer CAREpoint as instrumental throughout her cancer journey, helping her make sense of her diagnosis and not feel so alone.

Another featured speaker at the Garden Party will be Joelle Kaufman, author of "Crushing the Cancer Curveball: A Playbook for the Newly Diagnosed and Their Family and Friends."

In addition to the insightful speakers, there will be delicious food and drinks, raffle prizes, and fabulous live and silent auction items. Some of the featured items include a luxury trip to Hawaii, a private retreat

to a Wine Country Villa, and a Joe Escobar diamond bangle valued at over \$8,000.

Cancer CAREpoint receives no federal or state funding and depends on grants and donations to keep serving the community.

"The generosity of our donors, sponsors, and supporters is what enables us to continue our mission of providing free cancer care services to those in need," said Pam Klaus, Executive Director of Cancer CAREpoint. "No one should ever have to face cancer alone."

Since opening the Cancer CAREpoint Resource Center in San Jose in 2012, the organization has served over 12,000 individuals. The non-profit provides emergency funding support, professional counseling, support groups, nutrition education, wig fittings, and health and wellness classes.

Cancer CAREpoint currently serves people from regions across the Bay Area and has various online programs. To inquire about care and services, visit www.cancercarepoint.org.



Jen Landes, RN, past board chair, Theresa Bumb, Secretary, and Sarah Schiltz, current board chair.

RETURNING HOME? DETERMINING RECOVERY OPTIONS FOR A LOVED ONE AFTER A HOSPITALIZATION

By Lisa Bryant

It is an incredibly stressful and traumatic experience to have a loved one face a serious medical issue and hospitalization. In the moment, you are focused on the minute-to-minute recovery and not necessarily thinking about what happens when your loved one is well enough to leave the hospital. However, it is important to prepare for the next steps.

As soon as possible, you need to begin having a conversation with the hospital's discharge planner (sometimes referred to as a social worker). They can provide you with the necessary information to allow you to begin planning including:

- When they expect to discharge your loved one
- The level of care that your loved one will need after they leave the hospital (e.g., rehab/skilled nursing care, in-home care, and other services your loved one may need to make a smooth transition)
- A list of recommendations and resources for both your loved one's care and support and for yourself—you need to surround yourself with a good support system, so you do not burn out

Your loved one may be able to return home immediately after a hospital stay. You should consider if you need to adjust their home to ensure that they are safe and that you have the tools available to provide them with the best care. It may be beneficial to engage with a home health care agency that understands how to handle and care for the initial needs of someone who has just been discharged,

and to ensure that your loved one's primary caregiver does not injure themselves or your loved one. You need to consider whether you have adequate resources to pay for this care, as only long-term care insurance and/or private pay will pay for this care.

If you cannot afford in-home services and/or if your loved one's condition remains severe, they may be discharged to skilled nursing, also known as rehabilitation. If your loved one is on Medicare, they will get an incredible amount of services and care for the first 20 days of their stay. If you expect that they will need more time in the facility to recover, then you will typically have to begin paying a co-pay (pending their insurance) for days 21-100. If your loved one does not continue to make medical progress or they exceed their Medicare days, then you will be expected to begin private paying for your loved one's care—Medicare eventually stops paying. The private pay rate for a nursing facility often costs \$10,000 to \$20,000 per month; however, it is possible to get this care paid for through proper Medi-Cal planning. If you would like more information regarding paying for long-term care through Medi-Cal planning, please call Bryant Elder Law at (408) 286-2122 to schedule a no-cost consultation to discuss your options.

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IS STRESS RUNNING YOUR LIFE? THE SECRET TO PEACE MAY START IN YOUR GUT

By Shubhangi Kapatkar, Ayurvedamrut Wellness Center

If you're feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, mood swings, or burnout, the solution might lie not in your mind—but in your gut.

Ayurveda, India's 5,000-year-old holistic system of medicine, is increasingly recognized globally for its integrative and preventive approach to physical, mental, and emotional health. In Los Gatos, this ancient wisdom is now available in a modern, accessible form through the work of a dedicated Ayurvedic wellness expert and founder of Ayurvedamrut Wellness Center.

"Healing the mind often begins by healing the gut," says Kapatkar, a certified Ayurvedic Practitioner and educator. Through therapies like warm oil massage (Abhyanga), detox programs, and tailored diet and lifestyle support, she helps clients reset their nervous system and reconnect with inner calm.

Her approach includes easy-to-digest foods, calming herbs, structured sleep routines, and daily self-care practices to gently cleanse and balance both body and mind.

This September, Shubhangi Kapatkar will present "Gut-Mind Connection and Emotional Detox through Ayurveda" at the 70th International Ayurveda Conference in Milpitas, CA—speaking alongside 32 global experts, and just after the legendary Dr. Vasant Lad. Her participation underscores her growing influence in the Ayurvedic world, establishing respected and rising leader in the field of Ayurveda.

To explore more about her work or register for the conference, visit www.ayurvedamrut.us.



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Shubhangi Kapatkar
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QUICK GYNO IS OPEN TO SERVE YOU

By Nohra Adams

I'm Nohra Adams, PA-C and founder of Quick Gyno, and I just wanted to share how truly special our Open House on May 17th, 2025 was. It was a joy to welcome friends, family, and supporters from Los Gatos and across the greater Bay Area into our office at Vasona Station Center. Seeing our community come together to celebrate this milestone reminded me exactly why I started Quick Gyno—to create a warm, respectful environment where women feel heard, supported, and empowered.

At the Open House, I had the chance to share our mission: We'll get you in quick, but we'll take our time with you. That means honoring your time while never rushing your care. We believe that every woman deserves a provider who listens fully, explains clearly, and takes the time to understand the whole picture. Since opening our doors for patient care on March 10th, 2025, we've been honored to serve this community with time, heart, and purpose. Thank you to everyone who has supported us—we're just getting started!



For more information, please go to www.quickgyno.com



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THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE - A BOLD STEP FORWARD | STRATEGY & EQUITY AT THE HEART OF WEST VALLEY COLLEGE'S MISSION

By Jennifer Taylor-Mendoza, Ph.D. President, West Valley College

Dear Neighbor,



At West Valley College, we're committed to creating pathways that uplift every student, reflect the rich diversity of our community, and build on the economic vitality of our region. I'm excited, therefore, to share with you the launch of our new Strategy and Equity area, led by a new vice president of Strategy and Equity, Andrea Vizenor.

This new role signals a bold and necessary step forward. Equity and long-term strategy are not separate goals—they are foundational to how we serve our students and community. This division will help us better align our vision with inclusive, student-centered approaches, while strengthening relationships that drive real change.

Vice President Vizenor brings over 20 years of experience and a deep commitment to building strong, mission-aligned collaboration across three core areas: philanthropy, partnerships, and community.

Cultivating connections and engaging with donors—including individuals, family foundations, and corporate partners—whose values align with our work in equity, workforce development, and student success will be at the forefront of the Strategy and Equity team's work.

With a focus on broadening partnerships, we will expand collaboration with K–12 schools, transfer institutions, and industry. Our aim: increase access for first-generation and multilingual learners in areas such as work-based learning opportunities, particularly in high-demand and emerging fields such as health care, technology, and artificial intelligence.

We're creating more ways to listen to and collaborate with families, cultural groups, and community leaders. Through inclusive events and co-created solutions, we aim to close equity gaps, expand opportunity, and strengthen connection to our mission.

This new division will bring together teams leading campus work in career education, dual enrollment, adult transitions, continuing education, identity-based programs, and more—fostering innovation and cross-campus collaboration. It will also help us tell our story in more powerful ways, deepening connections with donors and partners who share our vision.

Ultimately, this is more than a new title or department—it's about building a college where students don't just enroll: they belong; they achieve, and they lead. We are proud to take this next step forward, together with our dedicated faculty, staff, and community partners.



REGISTRATION SATURDAY

August 16, 2025 | 9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

West Valley College | Student Services Center
14000 Fruitvale Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070

In-Person at the Student Services Center

- ▶ Register for classes
- ▶ Meet with a counselor
- ▶ Talk to the Admissions & Financial Aid team
- ▶ Get hands-on-help and all of your questions answered
- ▶ Take a campus tour



For more info visit:
[westvalley.edu/
reg-saturday](https://westvalley.edu/reg-saturday)

Event Parking in Lot 4

Fall Semester Starts August 23

Apply and Register Today:
westvalley.edu/onboard





THE WILDLIFE CARE CENTER IN SARATOGA

By Holly Cormier

The Wildlife Care Center in Saratoga opened its doors this year. This state-of-the-art facility, located at 24103 Congress Springs Road in Saratoga, is open 7 days a week from 9 am to 6 pm.

Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA's wildlife rehabilitation program operates from the center, providing exceptional free care for sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife, rehabilitating them and releasing them back to their natural habitat. The center is staffed by a dedicated team of employees and volunteers who work together to provide the highest standard of care. This year, we anticipate caring for over 10,000 animals across 180 different native species.

To raise and rehabilitate animals, the hospital has two nursery rooms, an enclosed balcony for acclimating nursery patients, a raccoon nursery, a specialized seabird treatment area, two isolation rooms for critical patients, two exam and treatment rooms, and a surgery suite. There are several outdoor enclosures and pools where animals can be raised and rehabilitated in an environment that is similar to their needs. The center also has a captive breeding program for imperiled species.

The center features a dedicated intake building where the public can bring sick, injured, and orphaned animals needing care. We also offer an extensive education program for youth, including the Learning Path with self-guided tours during regular hours and docent-led tours by appointment to learn about native plants and wildlife.

The Wildlife Care Center may be contacted at (650) 340-7022 or online at www.phs-sPCA.org.

Photo References: US Army (left), US Coast Guard (right) perform search and rescue missions

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SPOTLIGHT ON GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: A RETURN VISIT TO NEW TAIPEI CITY

By Kookie Fitzsimmons, Council Member, City of Saratoga



Returning to New Taipei City this May felt like reconnecting with a good friend. I had the privilege of returning to New Taipei City, Taiwan—our Friendship City—to continue building on the relationships and opportunities sparked during our inaugural visit in October 2023. From cultural exchanges to meaningful youth collaborations, the bond between Saratoga and New Taipei City continues to grow stronger.

Our Friendship City status was officially established on October 5, 2023, when I, as Mayor, visited New Taipei City to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Approved by the Saratoga City Council the previous month, the MOU set the stage for promoting friendship, cultural understanding, educational exchanges, and economic collaboration. At the press conference, I shared how Saratoga values diversity and looks forward to partnering on initiatives that reflect global perspectives.

Saratoga Spotlight | August 2025

New Taipei City, the most populous city in Taiwan, is a hub of technology and culture. With over 4 million residents and a thriving tech industry, it also boasts rich educational and cultural resources—many of which we had the opportunity to explore firsthand.

The highlight of both visits has been the vibrant youth exchange. Since our initial visit, more than 40 Saratoga and Los Gatos high school students traveled to Taiwan for an eight-day cultural trip. In return, New Taipei City sent 25 students each during Spring and Fall 2024, visiting Saratoga schools, Hakone Gardens, and City Hall for presentations and dialogue.

This year, three Saratoga High students also collaborated with peers in New Taipei City to present on CO2 emissions at a United Nations global event. This type of project showcases the powerful educational opportunities created through our partnership. A heartfelt thank you to Friendship Committee Chair Katherine Tseng, whose vision and leadership have made these exchanges possible.

During our recent visit, we toured schools showcasing smart learning and virtual reality, as well as a forum on AI and sports technology. We also experienced Taiwan's vibrant culture—from hiking Elephant Mountain to attending the World Masters Games at the Taipei Dome, where 104-year-old badminton player Lin You-mao stole the show.

Additional highlights included a scenic high-speed rail ride to Taichung, a visit to a family-run mushroom farm, learning about water conservation at Baileng Canal, and hands-on cultural activities at THE CAN in Sanxia, where we made tofu and indigo-dyed t-shirts.

As I look to the future, I am excited to continue expanding this meaningful partnership.

Thank you again to Katherine Tseng and all those who have helped bridge our two cities through education, culture, and friendship.

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Spotlight



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