

## Reflecting on the Holidays: Past and Present



**Ariel Silverman**

Usually the holidays are a time I associate with visiting my family. One of the silver linings of this year has been that I've gotten to spend way more time with my family than I had expected after moving back from New York City to Santa Monica during quarantine. Normally, we spend the holidays catching up and hearing about each other's lives. This year, since we're all caught up, we're going skiing!



**Alex Hofmann and Sister Lisa**

Alex's favorite holiday traditions in Philadelphia are the light show at the Wanamaker's building and the Dickens Christmas Village in Center City. He says it's "a bizarre hodgepodge of out-of-date animatronics and surprisingly good background theming, narrated by none other than Dame Judy Dench." Alex appreciates that holiday decorations have gone up earlier this year and is planning to find "new traditions [like] drive-in Christmas movies and drive-through Christmas lights" in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He is also excited for Christmas-themed drinks and glühwein, and his recently adopted

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Qin Sun Stubis**

Now that our kids are grown, our holiday tradition revolves around our shelter dog, Banjo. After a special dinner on Christmas Eve, our kids accompany him upstairs to scout out signs of Santa outside the window as we put the gifts under our Christmas tree to surprise him. When the signal is given, Banjo dashes down the

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Stacy Brody**

Based in Bethesda, MD, Stacy usually celebrates Hanukkah with her family, and Christmas with her partner Anthony's family. While Hanukkah is not the most important Jewish holiday of the year, making latkes is a vital (and delicious) tradition. Stacy and Anthony also have a tradition of getting Chinese food on Christmas Eve, which this year will become takeout. She appreciates the season as a time to get together with family and appreciate the beauty and light of decorations. Even though their gatherings will be virtual this year, Stacy says, "I think there are still ways to make it special."



**Jeff Condon**

Santa Monica native Jeff shares that his favorite holiday tradition is having Christmas day breakfast at Canter's Deli or the Pantry in downtown L.A. His favorite holiday

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Zanny Jacobsen**

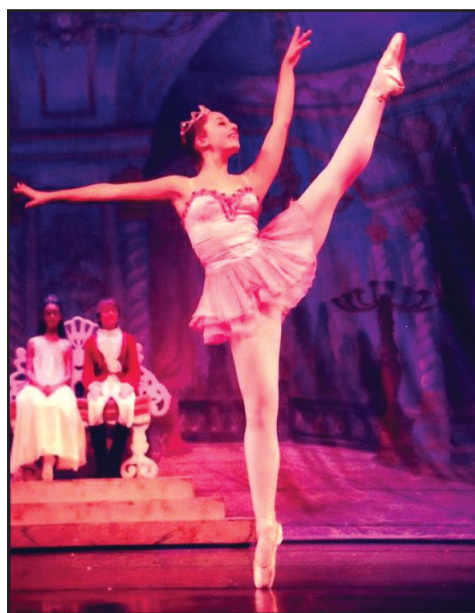
Zanny, who grew up at the border of Brentwood and Santa Monica, has lots of fond memories of local holiday landmarks. The Montana Avenue Christmas walk "has been a staple for years," she says, while the Santa Monica ice rink is a recent holiday favorite. Growing up, Zanny danced in performances of *The Nutcracker* each holiday season, and her family visited the Nativity scenes set up by local churches in Palisades Park. Her family's other traditions include caroling and decorating gingerbread cookies on Christmas Eve, and Mexican food and bowling on Boxing Day. "Because we live in California, we don't see that many seasonal changes," Zanny says, "but I really do feel a shift at Christmas time." She appreciates the excitement, coziness, and togetherness of the season. Even though they won't be able to gather with extended family this year, she still plans to decorate the halls at home with Christmas spirit.



**James Shabinsky**

Family holiday get-togethers have always been a fun tradition when we eat and drink wine and enjoy each other's company. But, ever since moving across the country to California, I rarely get to see my

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Leigh Rybak**

My favorite holiday memories are from the 14 years of my life in which Thanksgiving, my sister's birthday, dancing in the Nutcracker, and December holidays blended together. Although I stopped dancing after age 18, I still try to fill my holiday season with the same essences – family time, passion, great food, and hard work.

**Kate Engelman**

My favorite holiday food for Hanukkah is latkes. I use my grandfather's baked latke recipe as it's perfectly crispy without having too much oil. I also make homemade applesauce. My grandmother used to "borrow" apples from her neighbor's to make chunky applesauce for the latkes.

*(Continued on Page 4)*



**Mitchell and Cynthia Kraus**

What special holiday foods do you like at home? Briskets are often served at a Hanukkah dinner. But from local businessman Mitchell Kraus, a different take. "So, the story on the brisket goes like this. When we were engaged, Cynthia went to her first Jewish holiday celebration at our house. My mother is a vegetarian. We have other vegetarians and non-mammal eaters in the household so the brisket was never served. That night Cynthia asked me what the point of marrying me if she didn't get brisket at the holidays. I passed that on to my mom, and she and some of her other Jewish friends held a special class to teach Cynthia how to prepare a brisket. Now, my wife Cynthia, who was raised Catholic, makes one of the best briskets in town. (I was raised Jewish and am known for my port-glazed Christmas goose.) Cynthia has since taken that recipe and adjusted it here and there, depending on what we have in the kitchen and her mood."

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# A New Look to Year-End Tax Planning in 2020



**By Carolyn Hemann, CFP**

At this time of year, you often hear advice to take steps before year-end to limit your tax liability. Yet, 2020 is a unique year in a variety of ways – while many of the normal rules regarding managing income and timing deductions still apply, new provisions for 2020 have been implemented by The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act that may impact your year-end tax planning. Consider if any of these actions make sense for you.

• **Reconsider required distributions** - Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from workplace retirement plans or IRAs are optional due to The CARES Act in 2020. If you haven't yet taken your RMD for this year, you can let your

money continue to grow. If you have taken your RMD, there is a 60-day window where you can re-deposit those funds in your IRA and eliminate the claim to an RMD. As another option, if you have earned income from work, you may want to take all or part of your RMD for this year and invest some or all of the proceeds in a Roth IRA. This allows you to build up your Roth savings, which ultimately can qualify for tax-free distributions later in retirement and aren't subject to RMD rules.

• **Capitalize on deductions** - The standard deduction for 2020 is \$12,400 for a single person and \$24,800 for married couples filing a joint return. At that level, most people claim a standard deduction rather than itemizing deductions. In 2020, you can claim an additional \$300 for cash contributions to qualified charities. Be sure to

take advantage of that opportunity before the end of the year. This is a one-time deduction for those who don't itemize.

• **Take early withdrawals if needed** - If your financial circumstances have been directly affected by COVID-19 (such as a job loss), or you or others in your household have been diagnosed with the virus, you can tap your retirement savings. If you have not yet reached age 59.5 years old, you can do so without penalty if you qualify, but the early distribution must occur before the end of the year. The tax burden associated with these early distributions can be spread out over three years.

• **Harvest investment gains or losses** - Given the market's volatility this year, you may want to consider "harvesting" capital losses. This is accomplished by selling investments in a loss position and using

those losses to offset gains you realized when selling other investments. Capital losses can also be used to reduce up to \$3,000 of earned income in a given year.

• **Be prepared for changes** - Since an election has recently taken place, there could be changes in tax laws that might impact everything from tax brackets to estate tax laws starting next year. This may be an additional consideration as you make your year-end plans. Be sure to consult with your financial advisor and tax advisor before finalizing your decisions.

*Carolyn Hemann, CFP, is a Private Wealth Advisor with Hemann, Preator & Associates, a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Service, Inc. in West Los Angeles. She has been in practice for over 30 years. She can be reached at 310-477-2500.*

## Planning Ahead

# Deciding About Holiday Checks and Gifts



**By Lisa C. Alexander, Esq.**

As we near the end of the year and parents and grandparents are thinking about writing holiday gift checks, a common question is how much can they give? The gift limit since 2018 is \$15,000. The amount is indexed for inflation and can be increased by fixed increments of \$1,000. But there is no change scheduled for 2021. The gift limit will remain \$15,000 next year. You can give \$15,000 to as many people as you want per year without having to report the gift to the IRS on a Gift Tax Return. A married couple can combine their tax-free

gifts and can write checks for up to \$30,000.

In addition to direct gifts, you can make indirect gifts by paying tuition or pay for medical expenses on someone else's behalf, so long as the payments are made directly to the school or university or the medical care provider. Such gifts do not count against the \$15,000 gift limit and do not need to be reported to the IRS on a Gift Tax Return.

If you are motivated to make larger gifts, you can use the end of the year to your benefit. You can make a gift of the maximum gift free amount by December 31 and make another gift of the maximum gift free amount the next day on January 1, using the annual

exclusion for each year.

If you make a gift in any one year of an amount over the \$15,000 gift limit, you must report the gift to the IRS on a Gift Tax Return. The Gift Tax Return is due with your Federal Income Tax Return on April 15 of the next year. But, you will not have to pay any gift tax until you have used up all your lifetime estate and gift tax exemption which is currently \$11,580,000. This amount is scheduled to increase to \$11,700,000 as of January 1, 2021. Note that unless there is a change in the Estate and Gift Tax

laws, the exemption amount will be cut in half as of January 1, 2026 and will be reduced to approximately \$6,000,000. Happy Gifting!

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Clergy Corner

Surviving This Season



By Reverend Carolyn Baskin-Bell

As the last prayer of 2019 was released into the atmosphere and the countdown to the new decade of 2020 resounded, we had no idea that the new year involved a *Season of Pandemics*. Many of us entered 2020 with the anticipation to achieve those aspirations we held to excel in our profession or business; purchase property or a new car; engage in more physical exercise; lose those excess pounds gained over the holidays, or to embark upon that lifetime dream vacation. However, in March 2020, many of our goals and aspirations shifted. When the COVID-19 Pandemic emerged, our means of physical survival moved to sheltering in place at home; thoroughly washing our hands; wearing a mask, and practicing physical distancing. Regardless of our faith tradition, this Season offers us the opportunity to reflect and reconnect to the spiritual source which equips and empowers. Prayer and meditation are essential tools to guide us and provide spiritual strength to survive this Season. Personal, familial, as well as corporate prayer are essential for survival during this Season of Pandemics. Communicating with the power that lies within us produces strength, courage, and

determination to tackle the disruptions and disappointments we may encounter. Meditation opens the pathway to reflect inward and explore our innermost feelings and emotions. Self-reflection challenges us to evaluate how we feel about ourselves as well as humankind. Despite the physical distance, we are also finding ways to create closer communities during this time. We are urged to extend ourselves beyond the boundaries in which we exist by reaching out and communicating with an individual from another background, culture, or faith community. Other forms of community care have been to contact a shelter or rehabilitation agency in regard to their need of support, or connecting with parents who need assistance with home schooling. These are just a few of the ways to express our faith and pour into those around us. Finally, as we enter 2021, may our aspirations promote love, peace, and joy in all of our interactions. We will Survive and Thrive Together!

Reverend Carolyn Baskin-Bell is the Senior Pastor of First AME Church, Santa Monica.

Editor's Note: Each month we are asking a clergy member from our local churches or temples to do a column on dealing with COVID-19.

St. Monica Church's Mothers of Monica are Bringing the Village to Moms During COVID-19



By Cheryl Robertson Thode

While it is true that it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to support a mother. However, the pandemic has created new challenges for mothers of all ages. From prohibiting various outdoor activities, to closing various child-care locations and school venues, to restricting grocery and other shopping, to limiting social gatherings and events, our motherhood "villages" have shrunk immensely. One of the hardest losses for mothers has been the shuttering of church doors. At a time when spiritual and communal support are needed the most, the pandemic forced church closures and prohibited large group gatherings. This loss of community was greatly felt by many mothers, including myself. Appreciating this spiritual and communal void, St. Monica Catholic Church launched the ministry, Mothers of Monica (MOMs). Spear-

headed by Debora Sanchez and myself, at its core, MOMs is a group of Christian mothers working together to reflect on and discuss the unique challenges of juggling motherhood, family, faith, work, and self. Based on the outpouring of support and enthusiasm, the MOMs ministry answered a call. We are now 55 members strong and have mothers "Zooming" into our meetings from all walks of motherhood. They include a new mom of a three-week-old to mothers of teenagers to "grand" mothers, to even a mom from Denmark! The common message is one of "community." Mothers of Monica creates a space for mothers to share with each other, to teach, to learn and above all, to provide a "village" to help them on their own spiritual journey. If you, or someone you know, is a mother in need of a group of mothers to share with and grow her own village, please visit our website at the link below and register to be a Mother of Monica. (<https://stmonica.net/ministries/fellowship-groups/moms>)

December Eating Doesn't Have to Lead to a January Weight Loss Resolution

By Dr. Sheila Forman

With Thanksgiving behind us, we may already feel a bit stuffed to the gills. Afterall, Thanksgiving is a holiday that has the built-in potential for overeating. I mean, when else do you get mashed and sweet potatoes, turkey, stuffing, apple, pumpkin, and pecan pies served at one meal? There is nothing wrong with enjoying yourself at Thanksgiving or any other holiday meal. The problem becomes when Thanksgiving (or dare I say, Halloween) leads you to think "tis the season to over-indulge." Sure, you can binge your way through the holidays and set up your annual New Year's Resolution to lose weight, or you could choose to do something else. Before we get to my tips for surviving the holidays without excess weight gain, let's explore why peo-

ple overeat during the holidays in the first place. In a very non-scientific way, I have deduced three reasons for all that eating: (1) the food is there. Foods that are usually kept out of one's home find their way in via gift baskets or hand-delivered homemade treats; (2) people give themselves permission to gorge on all these holiday goodies by anticipating the above-mentioned New Year's Resolutions and requesting gym memberships as holiday gifts. This is the same as the old standard, "I'll start on Monday," that precedes most diet attempts; and, (3) the holidays are stressful. If you are prone to stress eating, you may find yourself dipping into those holiday baskets more often than you like. Anticipated visits to or from relatives can spike distress.

(Continued on Page 4)



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Reflections From The East

A Special Holiday Season for a Very Challenging Year



By Qin Sun Stubis

The year 2020 has been a very emotionally charged year for America, polarized by sadness and joy, hate and love, disappointment and hope, and desperation and resilience. As COVID ravages our nation, we fight against pain and stress with endurance, bravery and determination, yet this battle is still far from over.

We'll remember this year as the one during which we lost our normal rituals and rhythms of life, a year when we didn't get to enjoy so many of the things that we take for granted, such as family reunions,

birthday parties, concerts, and sporting events. Some couldn't even visit their elderly parents or relatives, or witness their children getting married.

As the virus raged out of control, our physical circle shrank to include just the few with whom we share our living space, relying on them for consolation and support as we hunker down in our homes and do our share to contain the virus.

After a long year of avoiding the outside world and practicing social distancing, our patience has worn thin and we grow restless. We yearn for change and excitement, for, after all, we are social creatures whose basic needs include attend-

ing gatherings and seeing others.

Sometimes we simply crave something different to break the monotony in our daily routine. That is why this holiday season will weigh even more significantly in our lives than ever before, playing the role of an important celebration after a very long and harsh year.

This year, our holiday lights will shine more brightly and cheerfully, giving us the promise and hope that we will finally win the battle against our microscopic enemy. Our holiday greeting cards will carry more loving and meaningful messages because distance has truly made our hearts grow fonder toward all our loved ones, including that chatty uncle and critical

aunt we are scared of meeting every year.

As for the Stubis family, we cannot wait for that special day of getting a Christmas tree and having it decorated with the many meaningful ornaments we've saved through the last few decades. We look forward to gathering in front of a roaring fire, accompanied by our favorite holiday music. Being a food-loving family, we're excited about preparing our annual holiday dinners. We shall raise our glasses and toast each other for making it through this difficult year and just being together during this especially deserved holiday season.

You can always reach me at [qstubis@gmail.com](mailto:qstubis@gmail.com).

December Eating Doesn't Have to Lead (Continued from Page 3)

Being strapped for cash or feeling obligated to give gifts can also be part of the dilemma. And, this year we have the coronavirus to contend with.

If you recognize yourself as one who overindulges or stress eats during the holidays, here are some ideas to help change your ways.

**(1) Choose to eat mindfully.** Whatever food you choose to enjoy, make it special. Don't wolf down the leftover pie while standing barefoot in front of the fridge. Instead, put the pie on a plate, grab a nap-

kin, sit down at a table and savor every bite. **(2) Give yourself permission to indulge in your favorite foods and leave the rest.** There is no real need to pile your plate high with foods you can eat at other times or get at other places. Instead, choose your favorites and give yourself permission to have seconds and even thirds, if you want.

By giving yourself permission, you alleviate any guilt that you may associate with eating those foods, and when you savor them as sug-

gested above, you will enjoy them even more. **(3) Find other ways to cope with your stress.** We all feel stress. It's how you handle that stress that makes or breaks you. Instead of reaching for a gingerbread cookie, how about taking a walk, reading a book, meditating, or calling a friend.

Make a list of five things you could do when you feel stress and do them. The more stress you manage, the less food you'll eat. Don't get me wrong, of course, I want you to enjoy the holidays, including all

the goodies offered – not just all of them or all at one time. Think about your choices. Check in with your body, and if stress is the reason you want to eat, pull out your list and do something else to ease the strain.

*Dr. Sheila Forman is a clinical psychologist based in Santa Monica who provides teletherapy services. For more information, call 310-828-8004 or go to [www.DrSheilaForman.com](http://www.DrSheilaForman.com).*

Reflecting on the Holidays: Past and Present (Continued from Page 1)

Kate Engelman



Kate Engelman is lighting the menorahs during the Hanukkah holiday with her family members.

Alex Hofmann

tradition of a yuletide cake. "It seems like we are all looking forward to the holiday season more than ever as a chance for renewal and promise of a better year to come," Alex says. "Our traditions may be changing this year, but it seems more important than ever to mark the passing of time with a gathering of those we love most."

stairs, his floppy ears airborne. His red-and-green elf hat puts him in a great holiday spirit, getting him excited about all the treats and toys

Jeff Condon

food is cookies of every kind!

Celebrating in 2020 will include requiring family members not in our bubble to inform us of negative COVID-19 tests prior to admission to my house for the annual Condon Hanukkah Party! Because celebrating **safely** in the face of adversity makes that celebration **more** special. We shall not succumb!

he is about to receive. We enjoy watching his shining eyes and wagging tail as he sniffs and hunts for his next present.

James Shabinsky

family, (not since last Christmas) and now it means that much more to me. This year, I'm lucky enough to bring back my girlfriend who lives in Santa Monica to the East Coast to meet the whole family. I'm looking forward to introducing her to our family traditions!

*Special thanks to Kalina Silverman and Anne Wallentine for collecting the memories for this feature.*

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Passing Through the Pico Neighborhood

Festive Cookies for Winter Holidays

Chef Jahrid, our local middle school chef, was able to visit his older brother who lives out of town recently. Together they created these cookies, and we are told they had a good time while making them, especially doing the frosting.

Dairy-Free Holiday Cookies

Ingredients:

- 2-1/2 cups all purpose flour
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup vegan butter
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

Icing:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 Tbsp. light corn syrup

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 375F, and line cookie sheets with parchment paper.
- Mix shortening and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla extract.
- Fold in flour, powdered sugar, baking powder and salt.
- Scoop 1/4 cup dough onto cookie sheet about an inch apart.
- Bake cookies for 10-12 minutes, or until cookies have spread and dough is cooked.
- Remove from oven and let cookies



Chef Jahrid is ready to celebrate the holiday season.

set and cool for about 5-7 minutes. • Then remove cooled cookies from the baking sheet to frost.

Dairy-Free Icing

Whisk all icing ingredients in a bowl. Decorate as desired. This icing will take several hours to harden completely. Enjoy your holiday celebration!

Byte by Byte

Top Tech of 2020



By Miceala Shocklee

The year 2020 is coming to a close, and how 2021 will go is anyone's guess. To close out the year, we're taking a look

back at some of the most important players from science and technology over 2020:

1. Firefighting Technology:

From the Australian wildfires of early 2020 to the blazes across the West Coast of North America in summer and fall, firefighters and the technology they use to protect themselves and combat out-of-control flames have certainly been among some of the most life-saving products of science of 2021.

2. Medical Technology: Medical technology basic and advanced has been a frontrunner among 2020

science tools. Ventilators, masks, vaccines and more have become household conversation topics to a greater depth than ever before.

3. Voting Technology: How the voting system is designed, from how votes are made to how they are counted, has been up for discussion and debate more than ever before. 2020 has reminded us that science has a firm place in democracy.

With the wheels set spinning in many areas of research and design, who knows what scientific advances and necessities 2021 will bring?

Dr. Miceala Shocklee is a Caltech alumna and graduate of the University of Edinburgh veterinary school. Her reporting interests include the intersection of science, technology, conservation, and the written word.

Teen Scene

Cultures Bloom During the Holiday Season



By Julia Abbott

When December rolls around, all the different cultures of L.A. come into bloom. Now, some believe the different holidays

of these two cultures support the "divide" between America and Iran.

As the child of an American father and an Iranian mother, I feel I

have a distinctly unique insight into Iranian culture and history, and how connected Iran is to America. I grew up hearing about the beauty and richness of my mother's roots, while growing up in a city eponymous with the United States. I've always dreamed of visiting Iran's exotic lands and hearing my mother's tongue in the streets of Tehran.

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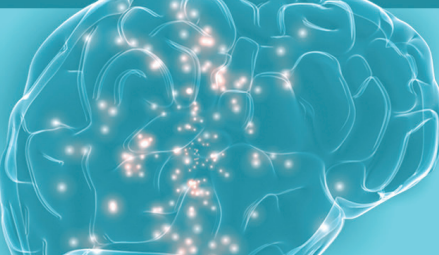
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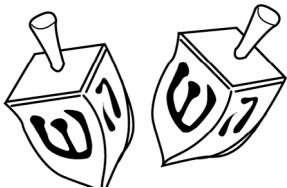
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From the Santa Monica History Museum



Skiing at Hotchkiss Park, 1969 — An unidentified young woman stands at the top of the ski run made of artificial snow at Hotchkiss Park. Courtesy: Santa Monica History Museum, Bill Beebe Collection [For historical reprints, please contact SMHM and specify image #3.2.10270.]



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Thoughts From a Second-Time Father

When Life Gives Us Lemons ...

**By Michael Margolin**  
Like most other important days this year, Halloween was quite different than it usually is. My wife Enjoli and I briefly discussed whether or not to take Alexa and Jake out trick or treating. By briefly, I mean I asked her if we should partake in the normal activity, and before I could get the whole question out, she was shaking her head.  
So that settled that. I began to feel disappointed for the kids. After all, they were getting the short end of the stick on this holiday. Of course, 2020 has dealt plenty of people the short end of the stick. This would simply be one Halloween for my seven- and four-year-old that would not include wandering around our neighborhood collecting candy.  
We decided to have one of Enjoli's best friends come over with her two kids, and we would have some activities and games and plenty of candy. These are friends who have shared the same kind of quarantine bubble with us over the past eight or nine months. I lost track of the days and weeks a long time ago,

and I know I am not alone in that sense. Alexa and Jake had a great time with their friends, and Halloween was a success.  
Every once in a while, I would go out front to see if there were any goblins or ghouls, and I saw but a handful. Our neighborhood is usually a hotbed of laughter and joy and other sights and sounds that come with a busy place during Halloween. That certainly was not the case this year. It was simply a sign of the times.  
Several days before Halloween, I reminded Alexa that we would not be trick or treating. It did not phase her at all. She predicted that this Halloween might even be more fun than the typical one. To me, she was not only embracing the fact that the situation was what it was and that there was nothing we could do about it. We were simply making lemonade out the lemons that this pandemic has given to us. Lessons like these are those that I try to instill in my children that seem to surface in some of the times they are needed most.  
*Michael Margolin is the father of two young children. He is an avid sports fan and was a soccer coach on Alexa's team when they were playing.*

Cultures Bloom (Continued from Page 5)

My mother has a great sense of pride and reverence for her culture. My siblings and I often hear about the great poets and writers, such as Ferdowsi, Hafez, Saadi, and Rumi. In my high school, we have read Rumi's works in English class. Those memories are sweet and moving; however, as an avid student of history, I was more interested in the greatness of the Persian Empire. In 550 B.C., the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great soon became the world's first superpower. In a sharp break from other such rulers, Cyrus respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. This became a successful model for centralized administration and a working government for the benefit of its subjects. As a point of interest, this is also one of the fundamental ideals in American government.  
Additionally, archeological finds have uncovered that, not only did the Persians not enslave their workers, but there is evidence of paid maternity leave for women - 2500 years ago! Cyrus proclaimed that all people had the right to choose their own religion, and established racial equality, which, incidentally, is also a tenet of

the U.S. Constitution.  
These decrees were recorded on a baked clay cylinder with cuneiform script. Known today as the Cyrus cylinder, the great leader is immortalized with this ancient record that is now recognized as the world's first charter of human rights. This is deeply intertwined with American history, as it was an inspiration for the U.S. Bill of Rights hundreds of years later.  
Iran has a deep and layered history, one filled with accomplishments. The achievements of Iran have permeated into nearly every aspect of American life, further linking our two countries. While the bond is often in turmoil, with different leaders often having different views, it is not a bond that can be broken simply based on one (or both) government's changing policies. The people of Iran love the people of America and vice versa.  
Our countries are linked, with common beliefs that stretch back for many centuries. That kind of bond outlasts governments and leaders; it is the bond of two peoples, forever connected.  
*Julia is a local high school student.*

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# Community Service in Santa Monica

## Santa Monica Rotary Club Roundup

**By Kathy Shepard**

Happy Holidays! It has been a busy and meaningful past few weeks for the members of the Rotary Club of Santa Monica. As always, we are committed to community service and have participated in a beach clean-up, delivered meals to seniors and others who need them, volunteered at food pantries, virtually walked to help find a cure for Alzheimer's disease and donated several cars full of much needed household items for young Marine families at Camp Pendleton.

While volunteering in our community is vital and important, providing cash grants to deserving organizations is also part of our mission to help. Our club's 13th International Wine & Food Festival and Auction held in November was a rousing success. Through the "Fund-A-Need" portion of the program, we raised \$10,000 for our featured charity, Upward Bound House. We also raised thousands of additional dollars while enjoying friendship and great food and wine

at the virtual event. Proceeds will be used to fund grants to non-profit organizations.

The Rotary Club of Santa Monica is currently accepting grant applications for its Community and Youth Grants program from local non-profit organizations. These grants are intended to fund up to \$3,500 for needs organizations have related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information can be obtained by contacting the Rotary Club of Santa Monica at [rotaryclubofsantamonica@verizon.net](mailto:rotaryclubofsantamonica@verizon.net). Please note that organizations must provide proof of non-profit 501(c)(3) status, requested supporting materials, and be able to verify that the funds align with Rotary's service mission and benefit Santa Monica residents or nearby communities.

For more information about our club, events, and virtual meetings, please visit our website, email Savi at [rotaryclubofsantamonica@verizon.net](mailto:rotaryclubofsantamonica@verizon.net), or call our office at 310-917-3313.

## Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club Review



**By Susan Barry**

It is more than repetitive to say, "It's a challenging time!" As Thanksgiving has passed with many traditions being reimaged, the December holidays are perhaps the most significant for families, friends, giving, receiving, and deep gratitude.

Somehow, turkey doesn't taste the same over Zoom, and no one is there to pour the wine! At this time of year, the Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club is normally creating cards, wrapping gifts for children in Los Angeles and Mexico, planning club celebrations, and looking forward to a busy new year of activities.

We have managed to have a few small socially distanced gatherings, but it's not quite the same. Along with the festivities, much of our energy is spent in supporting the activities of the club to raise money for other non-profit groups. Everything in the new normal now

requires greater creativity, flexibility, and patience to bring our mission forward into the new year. Non-profits are stretched to their limits, and the needs of our community every greater. So it's a time to pause and take a deep breath, knowing through the ingenuity of women in challenging times, we'll continue to find ways to support our dearest causes.

We look forward to the new year for our club, our members, and our community. We send best wishes for your creative solutions to visiting with those you love and sharing time together, even if safely over the internet or socially distanced with your masks on! We hope you, your friends, and your families are well and stay well until 2020 and "these challenging times" have passed.

We look forward to returning to our beautiful club home, inviting new members to join us there, and continuing our vibrant place in the community! For further information, please call the Club at 310-395-1308.

## The Lions Planning Holiday Meetings



**By Linda Levee**

The Santa Monica Lions Club is still active. Many of the Lions Clubs around the world have been looking for new ways to

connect with the public and bring in new members. We do not have to go too far. We are so lucky to continue our relationship with the Santa Monica Salvation Army.

Although we are unable to assist them by bell ringing on Red Kettle Day as we have done for at least the past 50 years, their directors, the Wickle's, Chris and Erin, have agreed to give us a small virtual concert. The two will be playing the guitar and singing carols. Our collection will be virtual to the Salva-

tion Army, and if you wish to help us you may make donations directly to them.

We had our joint meeting in November with our newly formed Leo Club, and they are busy putting together ideas for helping others who need food, clothing, and basic necessities in the community.

We wish everyone of our followers and readers a very happy holiday-season, and in whatever way you can encourage family, friends, and others to celebrate safely under guidelines set up by the CDC. Wash hands, wear masks, and meet friends outdoors, or have virtual meetings and parties.

Please contact me at [levelhead@levelhead.com](mailto:levelhead@levelhead.com) if you wish to have more details regarding the welcoming Lions Club membership.

## Remembering Ruth Lillian Perlmutter

Ruth Lillian Perlmutter passed away peacefully on November 19, 2020, in Santa Monica, CA. She was a long-time Santa Monica resident. Ruth was born on July 6, 1930, in Springfield, Massachusetts to Jacob and Sadie Gitberg.

She had a younger brother, Wallace. Ruth was a very loving, warm, caring, and kind person. She loved to help others, and for many years, she supported and was involved with Jewish organizations, including Hadassah and ORT. She enjoyed dancing and playing mahjong with her friends.

Devoted to her family, she was a beloved wife, mother, and grandmother. She is survived by her husband of 62 years, Dr. Avraham Perlmutter, her children, Michael (Pam), David (Wendy), Sharon (Andy), and Keren, and her grand-



Ruth Lillian Perlmutter

children, Emily, Josh, Zachary, Rachel, and Alex.

A private service was held at Hillside Memorial Park. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be given to Hadassah.



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Paws and Claws

Grain-Free Diets for Dogs



By Dr. Frank Lavac  
MS, DVM  
**Q: Is there any current information on feeding grain-free diets in dogs?**

**A:** The FDA first published an alert in July 2018, warning that grain-free diets could lead to cardiomyopathy in some dogs.

Since 2015, there have been over 1100 reports of dilated cardiomyopathy in dogs. With this disease, the heart becomes enlarged and weak. The exact reason that grain-free diets are linked to heart disease is not clear. It may be partially related to taurine deficiency, but this does not appear to be the entire cause.

Grain-free diets were originally touted as a healthy alternative to diets containing grain. For further information, Google the U.C. Davis study on grain-free diets.

Some signs of cardiomyopathy include pale gums, increased heart rate, difficulty eating, weakness and loss of appetite. Ultimately, a veterinary cardiologist would be needed to confirm the diagnosis of cardiomyopathy.

If you're presently feeding a grain-free diet, I recommend consulting your veterinarian to discuss quality diets for your dog. You can also look at FDA information online that refers to "Understanding non-hereditary DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy)."

Dr. Frank Lavac can be reached by calling 310-828-4587.



Adopt a Pet



Hello there! My name is Toad. I'm a female terrier mix born on 6/30/2020. I have scruffy fur and blue eyes that will melt your heart. I'll do best with a family that is prepared for the rewards and challenges of raising a young puppy. I'm healthy, up to date on vaccinations, spayed and microchipped. For more details, call 1-866 LUV-WAGS.



Seen each year in her Santa hat, JoyCatchers Founder, Charla King, dons her apron made by a JoyCatchers volunteer and helps assemble Tree Decoration Kits. (Story to right.)

Since 2006, JoyCatchers has gathered volunteers together to decorate trees to give to seniors and veterans in our community. This year, with Covid restrictions, JoyCatchers came up with the idea to do individual mini-tree decoration kits to be given to veterans and seniors for them to catch the joy of decorating their own personal tree.

Where they are unable to give to seniors in facilities due to Covid restrictions, the kits will be given to their essential healthcare workers. The response has been overwhelming. JoyCatchers is working with a few people at a time outdoors while wearing masks and so-

Brain Matters

Exciting Strides Forward for Parkinson's Disease



By Dr. Melita Petrossian  
"But there isn't anything I can do about it, right, Doc?"

I get asked this question by my Parkinson's disease (PD) patients all the time. There's a perception that because there isn't a cure for PD, that means there's no treatment, no way to improve symptoms, no way to improve quality of life. This is absolutely WRONG – there's always more we can do!

For PD, lifestyle measures such as exercise and diet play a huge role in quality of life. Even when the gyms are closed, there are classes through Zoom, YouTube videos, and ways to use simple equipment to get a good workout at home. Beyond that, there have been **nine** new FDA-approved medications for the treatment of PD symptoms just in the past six years. These medications include Nourianz, Inbrija, and Kynmobi, which are used when response to carbidopa/levodopa becomes erratic and patients experience "off" time (time when the medications aren't working).

Some of the medications, including Nuplazid and Northera, are used for non-motor symptoms of

PD such as hallucinations and blood pressure drops.

Many patients with PD may be good candidates for deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgery, which is a way to reduce "off" time, increase the amount of time the medication is working ("on" time), reduce tremor, and reduce dyskinesias (involuntary movements related to treatment). DBS is like a pace-maker for the brain. DBS is not new – it's been FDA-approved since 1997 – but there have been new advances in DBS technology that are exciting.

DBS batteries are now thinner and smaller, so they're less prominent when implanted. Rechargeable DBS batteries can last up to 15 years before needing replacement. And finally, we're now able to sense the signals of the brain itself using Medtronic's BrainSense technology, which will help guide more accurate stimulation.

Dr. Petrossian is the Director of the Pacific Movement Disorders Center. As a specialized movement neurologist, she cares for patients with Parkinson's disease, essential tremor and cervical dystonia, as well as a wide range of other movement disorders. Contact Pacific Movement.org on email or call 310-582-7433.

JoyCatchers Putting Together Tree Decorating Kits for Seniors, Veterans, and Healthcare Workers

cial distancing to get as many of the kits prepared as possible to fulfill the 1000+ requests. Many caring people make this possible including Bob Rosenbloom, owner

of Bob's Market, who is supplying the bags for the kits. To learn how you can help, visit the non-profit Mar Vista Charity at www.joycatchers.org.

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# Why Swimming is My Positive Addiction

Jeff Condon, local estate planning attorney and author of two books about the subject, sometimes writes about his career with advice for our readers. This month, he said to himself, “Meh! Forget that stuff! For once, dare to be different and write about something that you feel passionate about that has nothing to do with your day job.”

So, here is Jeff’s article about swimming. “Actually,” he explains, “it’s more of a confessional to my OCD-like compulsion to swim at a level higher than which I am capable. I am 59 years old. Since age 41, I have swum nearly every single day with my swim club, Southern California Aquatics (based out of the Santa Monica Swim Center). This is not a ‘lap-swim-and-get-out’ thing. It’s an intense hour with coaches giving sets that are often beyond your ability to make.

“I am **never** satisfied with ‘noble failure.’ I am consumed with swimming better, faster, and more efficiently so that I can make the base set by the coach. I have to leave the pool knowing I left ‘it all’ in the pool. This is an every day thing. My late father called it my ‘positive addiction.’ Sure, it’s not the kind that destroys you. But, it’s still an addiction with all the classic traits



Attorney Jeff Condon

of one – especially the aspect of it running your life.

“I swim even when – and especially when – I don’t feel like it. Which is, pretty much, every single day. Who wants to get up before sunrise? Who wants to go from warm and comfy to wet and cold? I don’t! Neither do you! I go to bed each night with an uneasy dread over how tough it will be to get up, jump into usually cold water and suffer through whatever torture is conjured up by the coach-of-the-day. But, when that alarm goes off at 4:40 a.m. and I complain to myself that I don’t want to get going, my brain/inner voice shouts, ‘Who cares what you want? This is what you are going to do!’ This schizophrenic-type back-and-forth takes place in my head every single morning.

(Continued on Page 12)

# From Me to You...



By Diane Margolin

Each year, the Rotary Club of Santa Monica salutes outstanding public service workers. It is one of my favorite meetings. Donna Byrd and Dr. Joseph Metoyer have coordinated the event for the past several years. Plaques are given to the honorees. This year, it was a Zoom meeting where we were introduced to Santa Monica Firefighter Andrew Klein; Director of Education Technology Services for the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, Bertha Roman; SMPD Officer Evan Raleigh; and Motor Coach Operator, Aristeo Salazar.

Each of their supervisors told us how these people have gone above and beyond what is expected on their jobs. It is always impressive to hear, and it makes us feel good that we have such caring people working around Santa Monica.

In past winter issues, I have given suggestions for gifts to give people who are homebound. How different things are this year, as we all know. I thought stamps, stationary, maybe a basket of different flavored jams or honeys would be appreciated. Yes, I always get back to suggesting food for gifts.

I’ve written about Savitri Labensart who started baking wonderful breads when her opportunities to sing in public were put on hold. She continually creates delicious

new breads which she delivers herself. If you want to taste one, call her at 818-943-3150.

One of our longtime favorites over the past 30 years is Neli’s restaurant on Stoner Ave. in West Los Angeles, near Olympic and Barrington. The food is delicious and reasonably priced. They always deliver to Santa Monica, and this month, if you show them the ad in our paper, there is no charge on Mondays for that service. Each day, there is a daily special, such as Chicken Florentine or Salmon Veracruz, which is often enough for two or three meals. There is also a weekly dessert special. Sometimes, it’s Danish coffee cakes or a pie. Their freshly-baked goods, especially the giant muffins, have long been customer favorites. An assortment of muffins (blueberry, pumpkin, cinnamon pecan, and carrot, to name a few), makes a great gift.

A wide variety of salads, from Chinese Chicken, to Cobb, to Chef, or my new favorite, Kale and Herbed Quinoa, is served daily.

To find out more about their sandwiches, hamburgers, quiches, and breakfast dishes, call 310-477-0031, or go to Neli’s menu online at [www.NelisCatering.com](http://www.NelisCatering.com). Ask for owner Amy and tell her Diane sent you.

Wishing you all the safest and healthiest holiday season this year and hoping that we can still take time to express gratitude for our many blessings.

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## Why Swimming

(Continued from Page 11)

“So, why do I still swim in the context of such dread? Because swimming makes you feel like yourself. Because swimming gives you a physique of a person years younger. Because swimming allows you to order dessert on Date Night. Because swimming gives you daily friendly camaraderie with people of all types, genders, and colors that you may never otherwise encounter. And, because swimming makes you feel special since 99% of the populace can’t do what I do at my age.

“For me, the most important benefit of swimming is that it helps me think that I can defy the aging process. Defying age is a terrific motivator. It makes you get in the water. It forces upon you the self-pressure to maintain that default swim-base. All of which helps you achieve the ultimate goal of staving off death. I don’t know about you, but I can’t die. I have massive claustrophobia.

“So, this is the ‘Swim Brain of Jeff Condon.’ Maybe one day I will learn to turn off the need for such intensity in a sport that most people associate with dreamy and relaxing qualities. For now, this is the side of me that no one, especially my swim buddies, sees or suspects or, really even cares about. It’s one that I’ve been wanting to ‘let loose’ on an unsuspecting public, and I thank *The Santa Monica Star* editor for giving me this opportunity.”

**Jeff Condon can be reached at 310-393-0701.**



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