



# Alamo Today & Danville Today News

JANUARY 2022

## WINTER NIGHTS: SHELTERING FAMILIES, FOSTERING HOPE, RESTORING INDEPENDENCE

By Jody Morgan

Founded in 2004 under the auspices of the Contra Costa Interfaith Council, Winter Nights Family Shelter, Inc. (WN) secured independent non-profit status in the spring of 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic struck. WN is one of several shelter programs in Contra Costa County dedicated to keeping families together.



Sunday Meal Team: St. Timothy's team enjoys serving Sunday dinner to WN clients. Photo courtesy of Joann Oliver.

Preserving the integrity of the family unit helps children cope with the stress of homelessness. More than 60 local faith communities work together providing



Ametiszt and daughter Addy are happy to be part of the WN Continued Success alumni program. Photo courtesy of WN.

overnight shelter, meals, and much more, while WN staff members guide homeless families in achieving self-sufficiency and securing stable housing. Responding to ever-escalating needs, WN recently added the Safe Parking and Continued Success Programs.

During a year not compromised by COVID concerns, WN welcomes carefully screened applicants to spaces provided by local congregations in their facilities for two weeks at each location.

Every family has its own tent for

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## GIRLS ON THE RUN

By Linda Summers-Pirkle

On a crisp fall Saturday morning, a group of girls ages 8-13, along with their coaches, family, and supporters, met at a San Ramon park. The event that day was a 5k run, the culmination of 10 weeks of hard work and practice. That same day, similar groups gathered across the nation in hundreds of parks and fields to celebrate their personal running triumph. Each year, more than 200,000 pre-teen girls across the US participate in the Girls on the Run (GOTR) program. Since 1996, over two million girls have participated in the program.

I joined them for that "day of celebration" - the final GOTR session. The exuberance and elation of the young women, both before and after the run, was palpable. One participant shared when she first started the journey, "I did not know running around a track equaled a mile!" Now, she was out there, not only running a mile but completing a 5k race.

Girls on the Run, a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a physical activity-based positive youth development (PA-PYD) program designed to enhance girls' social, emotional, and physical skills as well as behaviors to successfully navigate life experiences. Established in 1996 in Charlotte, North Carolina with a team of 13 girls, GOTR has grown to serving 200,000 girls annually in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. GOTR was named "Most Influential in Health and Wellness" by the National After School Association.



Celebration 5K GOTR run.

Besides supportive family members and friends, the program's success is based on a dedicated volunteer coaching staff. Coach Karen Rice is a board-certified Health and Wellness Coach. After 20 years of experience as a Marketing Tech executive, she made a career change to re-focus on empowering people to adopt a more holistic lifestyle. She shared her enthusiasm for GOTR, "The program is well thought through in a progressive (lesson by lesson)

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## The Editors

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## CLIP NOTES *By Jody Morgan*

Sharing gardening success stories is certainly satisfactory but exchanging tales of horticultural errors is often more enlightening. One of my most monumental mistakes involved nurturing the nasty along with the nice. Having gardened all my life in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, I knew nothing about growing citrus trees when we moved to Danville many years ago. Lured to the corner of my new yard by an enticing fragrance, I was delighted to discover lovely white flowers

gracing low-growing branches. Small green oval fruits soon replaced the blossoms. Eventually my patience was rewarded with a fine crop of Meyer lemons.

The previous owners of the property had permitted a robust evergreen tree to rise above the fruiting branches. It was obviously some kind of citrus. I couldn't find a grafting union. Nevertheless, the taller growth may have represented rootstock used to impart strength and hardiness to the lemon. Perhaps, it was a sport that would prove worthy of cultivation. Branches unlike an existing specimen that display desirable characteristics may be grown out and marketed as new cultivars. Sometimes a hybrid sports growth that proves to be a reversion to one of its parents. What, after all, is a Meyer lemon?

Born in 1875, Frans Nicholas Meijer emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in 1901. After anglicizing his name to Frank N. Meyer, he was hired by the United States Department of Agriculture to find crop plants worthy of cultivation. In 1908, Meyer brought the lemon variety that bears his name from China where it had been valued since ancient times as an ornamental tree or dwarf container specimen. The precise ancestry of the Meyer lemon is unknown. Whether by intent or chance, a thousand years or more ago, a mandarin orange/pomelo hybrid and a citron are thought to have cross-pollinated to produce the original Meyer lemon plant.

Americans loved the sweet fruit, but soon found Meyer's lemon was prone to carrying citrus tristeza virus. It didn't harm Meyer's introduction but threatened California's commercial citrus groves. Early in the 1950s, Joe Grimshaw and Dillon family members Floyd and Don, Sr. from Four Winds Growers identi-

fied a virus-free clone. Developed and certified by the University of California, Riverside, the "Improved Meyer lemon" was released for sale in 1975. All Meyer lemons sold in the US today are descendants of that clone.

Optimistically, I counted flowers appearing on the upper branches of my unidentified citrus as a positive sign. Based on the armature of thorns as big as my thumb that lined its limbs, I was sure no deer or other four-legged foragers would be dining on the tree. For want of an appropriate botanical name, I called my green giant "Thor the Thug."

Good news! Thor's flowers produced round fruits. Maybe an orange? The fruits kept growing until they were the size of soccer balls. A grapefruit, perhaps. But the fruit didn't grow in grape-like clusters, the habit that inspired a Jamaican farmer to call it "grapefruit." Maybe it was yielding pomelos (aka pummelos), the largest citrus fruits.

First discovered in Barbados in the 1750s, grapefruit may have been produced serendipitously or intentionally as a hybrid of *Citrus grandis* (the pummelo) and *Citrus sinensis* (the sweet orange). By 1823, the grapefruit tree had entered the US, but its thick skin originally made it unappealing.

Thor's fruit had extremely dense skin. The flesh inside was stringy and dry. Had I waited too long to harvest? Subsequent trials yielded the same results. The tree I had been carefully pruning and feeding was a horticultural horror. Somehow the Meyer lemon branches near its base managed to continue to thrive in Thor's shadow, but I bet they would have been more productive with a less aggressive companion crowding their space.

The longer you garden, the more likely you are to have embarrassing failures to your discredit. Nevertheless, the resilience plants exhibit inspires gardeners to follow suit. Whenever I feel prone to question the wisdom of spending hours cossetting my green pets only to discover a four-footed or many-legged predator, winged warrior or pathogen has ravaged my garden, I recall Ruth Bancroft's cheerful acceptance of her own errors. After losing 95% of her succulent collection to an unusual cold spell the first winter she set the plants in ground, she replanted. When a plant failed, space opened up for something new. Her dry garden gradually grew into the remarkable landscape that inspired Frank Cabot to launch the Garden Conservancy.

## Nights continued from front page

privacy. Their possessions are carefully packed and moved to the next shelter. Faith groups unable to offer living space co-host, sharing meal service and other volunteer roles such as organizing children's activities, stocking the kitchen with supplies, doing laundry, and backing up the overnight supervisor. On weekdays,



Tents at St. Timothy's: "When I see the shoes neatly lined up outside the tent I know this is a family that has made a home with us." Photo courtesy of Joann Oliver, St. Timothy's

children are driven to the schools in which they are enrolled. Parents with jobs are supported in getting to their places of employment. Those seeking work receive help in preparing resumes and applications at the Oasis Day Center where showers are available on weekdays. Weekends, the Bay Church brings their three-stall shower van to shelter locations that lack showers. One unit has a tub for bathing young children.

Who are WN's clients? Families suddenly facing altered circumstances frequently figure among our friends and neighbors. Jo Kerner, long-time volunteer WN grant writer, remarks, "I have encountered an

amazing number of highly successful individuals who have been homeless or faced the anxiety of being on the brink of losing their homes as they struggled to pay the mortgage and support young children."

One mother, who kept her situation secret from friends, lived in her car with her teenage daughter for several months before entering the WN Shelter program. She writes: "There is a new kind of homelessness today -- people like me who

## WALNUT CREEK GARDEN CLUB



WALNUT CREEK  
GARDEN CLUB

You are invited to visit meetings and to become a part of the Walnut Creek Garden Club! You'll find friendly members with varying interests, including:

- Creating and improving gardens with new plants and techniques
- Supporting garden education in local schools
- Supporting local environmental charities with community grants
- Learning about the fun of arranging flowers
- Volunteering to help local gardens, fundraisers, and plant sales

The group meets the second Monday of each month at 9:30<sup>AM</sup>, September through June, at The Gardens at Heather Farm, 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek.

The group welcomes the vaccinated public to their next meeting to be held **January 10<sup>th</sup>**. Shawna Anderson from Orchard Nursery shares her pruning tips for all types of roses. She will demonstrate techniques and the best tools for the job. Shawna is a garden consultant and designer and shares her passion for gardening through her business: Thrillers, Fillers and Spillers.

If you are interested in joining the Club or for more information, please visit [www.walnutcreekgardenclub.org](http://www.walnutcreekgardenclub.org).

have jobs, who have children with activities. I refuse to break down behind it. I have my dignity, my integrity."

Ametiszt, another formerly homeless mother featured with her daughter Addy in Jim Harrington's *East Bay Times* article (11/21/2021), is proud to let others see their grateful, smiling faces. Happy in their own home now, Ametiszt reports: "All this is possible because I was at Winter Nights shelter and they helped me get my car fixed, they helped me keep my job."

"Hearing firsthand the stories of families supported by WN keeps me motivated to spend the hours required to file applications and repetitive reports for government grants," Kerner explains. Interviews with current WN clients provide details that make application responses compelling. For example, the story of a mother who came from plenty, never expecting to be homeless,

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## DIY PLANNING PITFALLS

By Robert J. Silverman, Esq.

Last month, I wrote about serious problems often associated with do-it-yourself (DIY) estate planning. This is my follow-up article about a very interesting DIY case that I'm handling now.

Decades ago, two elderly siblings (fictitiously, "Mary" and "Larry"), owned a single-family home. They wanted it to be a "legacy property" for their large, close family - enabling any of ten close family

members to live in it, as needed.

This could have been structured in any number of ways, depending on what Mary and Larry wanted. The two typed up their own "Grant Deed" form under which all 12 people, including themselves, were granted a 1/12<sup>th</sup> interest in the home.

A deed should expressly specify the manner in which title is to be held by the grantees (transferees), but this one did not. Typically, for a large group of co-owner grantees, title is taken formally as "tenants-in-common" (TIC). Under TIC, each co-owner has the right to transfer, during life or upon death, his or her respective interest, as he or she wishes. Alternatively, grantees can take title as "joint tenants," which would render the person who happens to survive the other 11 co-owners the sole owner of the property. Parenthetically, given the special, family legacy purposes of Mary and Larry, the possible use of a modified "life estate" might have been very useful instead of adding their 10 family members to the deed as co-owners.

To make matters more complicated, the following language was typed into the deed: "In the event of the death of any owner of this property no portion of this property will pass from the original owners by sale or inheritance. This property is to remain intact until such time as the last survivor is deceased."

Ambiguity abounds! Were all 12 grantees the ones being referred to as the "original owners" OR just Mary and Larry? What does it mean that the

property must "remain intact until such time as the last survivor is deceased"? Did Mary and Larry really intend this to be a blanket prohibition on sale until the last of the 12 co-owners was deceased? Is it reasonably implied that the home could be sold sooner if all then-living co-owners agreed? Finally, was it intended that, upon the death of the last of the 12 co-owners, the property would be sold and that sale proceeds would be distributed equally among the estates of all 12 deceased co-owners OR only to the estate of the last one of the 12 co-owners to die?

Today, eight of the 12 co-owners are deceased. None of the four living co-owners needs or wants to live in the home. The home is vacant and in disrepair, though quite valuable. The four living co-owners and the estates of the eight deceased co-owners all want the home to be sold ASAP.

Complex court action will need to be instituted in an attempt to reconcile the DIY deed's ambiguity so that clear title can be transferred to a buyer. This will include a petition, under which the family asks the court to reform the deed to comport with what is believed to be Mary's and Larry's intentions when executing the deed long ago. Additionally, an order will be sought to compel the sale of the home, with proceeds to be split among the family, as intended.

The very substantial expense, time, and inconvenience for family members could have been avoided if Larry and Mary had consulted with an experienced attorney. Upon receipt of advice and assistance from counsel, these generous, well-meaning folks would have learned how to optimally and efficiently fulfill their wishes and their legacy.

**[Estate Planning | Trust Administration & Probate | Real Estate | Business]**

**Please contact me to request a complimentary: i) "Estate Planning Primer"; ii) Real Estate titling brochure; iii) introductory meeting. I am an attorney with R. Silverman Law Group, 1910 Olympic Blvd., Suite 330, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; (925) 705-4474; [rsilverman@rsilvermanlaw.com](mailto:rsilverman@rsilvermanlaw.com).**

*This article is intended to provide information of a general nature, and should not be relied upon as legal, tax and/or business advice. Readers should obtain specific advice from their own, qualified professional advisors.*

  
R. Silverman  
LAW GROUP

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highlights the abandonment many clients suffer. "Overall, it's been a humbling, life-changing experience and I have a whole new family, including the staff, who have become our friends too," the mother said.

Bill Shaw assumed the responsibilities of WN Executive Director in July. He writes: "Our strength is our ability to meet the changing needs of the growing population of homeless families in Contra Costa County. Each family's circumstances are different, and it is our goal to work with each of them to provide support services that address their particular needs and assist them toward stable and affordable housing."

Love is a major ingredient in WN's recipe for success. Shaw relates: "After 11 years with Winter Nights, I have a deep love and respect for the many families whose lives our program has touched and for the many congregations and volunteers who make this program possible." Judy Stillman, WN Executive Director from 2014-mid-2021, comments: "Winter Nights is so successful because of the goodness of people. Volunteers love working with WN because giving time, feeding people, and interacting with them means so much more than simply donating money."

Despite their many different religious beliefs, volunteers supporting WN enthusiastically express their joy in serving together. St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Danville began hosting WN in 2005. Beth Chaim Congregation has been co-hosting since 2007. They share set-up and break-down of the shelter space and each take a week in charge of meals and other services. Joann Oliver, St. Timothy's Coordinator, says, "It's rewarding to provide a homelike environment for the families knowing they are also getting the support they need to get back on track and into stable housing." Naomi Ehrlich, Beth Chaim Coordinator, adds, "It's an amazing experience to involve our whole community, but especially our children who can assist in volunteering with childcare."

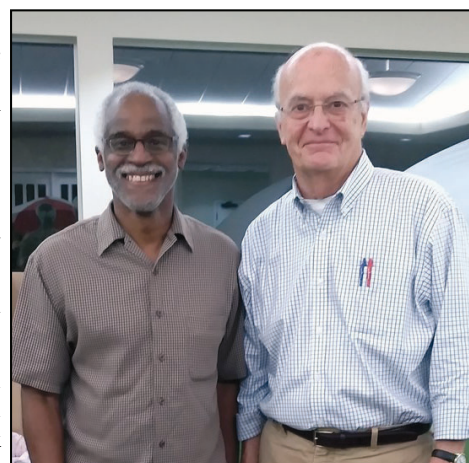
Children relax as they become part of the WN family. Oliver remembers the night they spontaneously put on a performance of *Frozen*. "The kids knew every song and dramatic gesture. Of course, they received a standing ovation!"

Nancy Garnick and Kal Peters are stepping into the role of Coordinators for San Ramon Valley United Methodist this year. St. Isidore co-hosts with Danville Congregational Church making some dinners. In this year's 36-week schedule, they serve together in March.

Garnick describes the 2020-2021 situation. COVID kept volunteers out of shelters. Clients stayed 24/7 in locations able to offer space for four continuous weeks. "While it was frustrating and disappointing that we couldn't host the clients on our own church property, it was gratifying to know the Winter Nights staff and our church had worked out a solution where clients could safely stay offsite (at San Damiano, a retreat center) and we could still provide meals for them."

Stillman and Kerner joined WN as volunteer tutors in 2008. The Traveling Tutor program that was developed gives WN children consistent support from tutors following along as the shelter moves from place to place. The Reading Program charts each student's progress and awards completion of a certain number of hours of reading every week. In early December, Lynne Noone, Deputy County Librarian at Contra Costa County Library, brought books for shelter families and signed them up for library cards with access to all online services including eBooks and audio books.

Stillman continues to organize the Monthly Homeless Summit (now offered on Zoom) giving staff and volunteers a forum to share information. Oliver explains: "It's helpful to know things like what the families prefer for meals or snacks, whether children are sleeping through the night, and what activities the families enjoy doing."



WN Executive Director Bill Shaw, left, with WN Board President Dan Swander, right. Photo courtesy of WN.

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## THE EYES ARE THE MIRROR OF THE SOUL

By Dr. Barbara Persons

As the saying goes, “The eyes are the mirror of the soul.” In this way, the eyes’ clarity and youthful appearance can provide indication of both health and vitality. As we age, our eyes can be diminished due to excess skin and bags around them. A furrowed, drooping brow further alters the alert and engaging appearance of our eyes. Beauty rest and good health go a long way, but sometimes it isn’t enough to counteract the hooding and tired appearance that many people experience by age 40.

### TRADITIONAL EYELID SURGERY

Blepharoplasty surgery, commonly known as eyelid surgery, is the best way to correct droopy, hooded eyelids and sagging skin that creates folds or disturbs the natural contour of the upper eyelid and can sometimes even impair vision. The procedure takes one hour and does not require general anesthetic. Recovery takes about one week. Surgery can be performed on the upper lids, lower lids, or both. The procedure restores the youthful appearance of the eyes by removing fatty tissue and excess skin while tightening the lax muscles that develop around the eyes.

An upper blepharoplasty procedure involves making a small incision in the natural crease of the upper eyelid. Excess skin is removed, lax muscles are tightened, and small amounts of fat are removed. Sometimes, grafting may be used to fill areas which have hollowed, such as the tear troughs. For lower eyelid tightening, a small incision is made just below the lower eyelash or inside the lower eyelid. The upper and lower eyelid lift may be done separately or at the same time.

### FACIAL REJUVINATION

For those seeking full periocular rejuvenation to combat horizontal forehead lines, sagging, or heavy brows and wrinkles between the eyebrows frequently referred to as “elevens,” I recommend also considering a brow lift. I most commonly use the endoscopic approach which involves a few small incisions hidden in the hairline through which the brow is lifted. Like blepharoplasty, this procedure may be performed under local anesthesia.

Further facial rejuvenation can be achieved through the use of CO<sub>2</sub> laser skin resurfacing of the eyes, face, neck, and chest to tighten the skin and remove fine lines. Skin resurfacing takes one hour, and downtime averages ten days. However, at Persons Plastic Surgery, we have developed RecoverX to accelerate post-procedure skin repair. Patients have even cut recovery time in half! The non-irritant, fragrance-free, paraben-free product reduces redness and swelling and promotes faster skin healing. The proprietary formulation draws moisture from the air into the skin without clogging pores and continues to enhance skin tone, texture, and appearance hours after application.

To achieve full facial rejuvenation, the combination of blepharoplasty surgery and a CO<sub>2</sub> Laser maximizes benefits while decreasing recovery to a single period. I look forward to meeting with you at my practice in Lafayette to discuss what may be best for you.

**Barbara L Persons, MD, FACS is a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon and owns Persons Plastic Surgery, Inc., located at 911 Moraga Rd, Suite 205 in Lafayette. She can be reached at 925.283.4012 or drpersons@personsplasticsurgery.com.**

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In 2018, WN piloted a project, now available year-round called the Safe Parking Program. Overnight supervision in a secure lot brings families living in cars off the street. Support services available to WN Shelter families are open to Safe Parking clients. Current capacity is 16-18 individuals in 13-15 cars. In November, there was a five-car waiting list. Fearful of being separated from his children, one father, whose wife had died earlier in the year, initially refused to move the family's live-in car off the street. Once convinced Safe Parking would keep them together, he was finally able to sleep through the night and go to work every day. The family may soon move into their own home.



WN Office Manager Teri Lundvall reads to girls as COVID kept volunteers out during the 2020-2021 shelter season. Photo courtesy of WN.

Finding housing for a family of five is more difficult than finding a place for a single individual. Hope Solutions Housing Navigation and County Coordinated Entry programs provide an essential service in locating housing for large families. In 2020, recognizing that a bit of additional aid is sometimes critical for keeping families in their homes, WN began connecting quarterly with alumni in the Continued Success Program. One month's rent, money for emergency car repairs, or a donation of furniture can be crucial to maintaining hard-won independence.

Ann Lawrence joined WN as a volunteer with St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Orinda a few years after WN was launched. Now serving on the Board as Development Director, she also puts together *The Good News Letter*, a monthly update on WN activities posted online and the best way to learn about WN and the amazing variety of volunteer support provided. Highlighted in the November issue, Tyler, a Walnut Creek Troop 302 scout, gathered a trailer-full of items from clothing to games for WN as his Eagle Project. Riley, a high school senior planning to study astronomy in college, brought a high-powered telescope for shelter families to view Mars and the craters of the moon.

In 2021, the Winter Nights family was honored with several prestigious awards. Gwen Watson, co-founder of WN, received the JustFaith Ministries Award. WN received one of Bay Area News Group's 2021 Share the Spirit Awards and grants. Awards from the Contra Costa Council on Homelessness recognized Continued Success for Innovation and WN Board Member Carmella Kowall, a Family Shelter alumnus, "For Thriving in the Face of Homelessness."

Learn more at [www.cccwinternights.org](http://www.cccwinternights.org) or call 925-414-3883.



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