

CONNECTION

Sharing the day-to-day learning experience

at

Community Homes & Services

PO Box 744, Novato CA 94948

415-408-3604

www.communityhomesandservices.com

A New Year and a New Overlook

The Golden Gate Overlook renovation was finally completed in December, 2025, after so many years of planning and being in the works. And so Chris, Jonas, Andrew, Billy, Jian, and Ian went right down there to see it for themselves.

They found it to be safer and more stable than before, though parking seems more limited, and the walk seems to be longer and steeper. It is all, however, very much worth the effort as there are more and better places to stop, slow down, take photos, and enjoy the scenery.

Nothing like being outdoors on a beautiful winter day on the Bay with friends... so relaxing! so exhilarating!

And, of course, that scenery just can't be beat!



Fika

Audrey's group (Frank, Valerie, Steve, and Linda-as well as Pat, Pam, and Donald) has been learning about and practicing *fika* as part of their day. *Fika* is a tradition from Sweden that focuses on taking a break. Forbes Magazine calls it "a premium coffee break." It usually includes coffee or tea, a small snack, and time spent together. The goal is to slow down, pause and enjoy socializing with friends or colleagues.

Fika has been part of Swedish culture for hundreds of years. As coffee became popular, people began setting aside time to sit, talk, and connect. Over time, *fika* was built into the day and treated as an important time to gather together.

Fika is different from what many of us Americans do. Often, we grab coffee while checking emails, rushing between tasks, or thinking about what comes next. *Fika* asks you to stop doing and start being. You sit down, put distractions away, and focus on the people around you.



As we would expect, *fika* has been helpful with Audrey's group. A friendly break like this can pull us out of our heads if we are stuck on a thought or if feeling stressed out. It creates a calm space to relax, reset, and enjoy simple conversation. By slowing down together, *fika* helps everyone feel more present, connected, and ready to take on the rest of the day!



JANUARY 2026

NATIONAL DAYS/WEEKS/MONTHS

January National Months

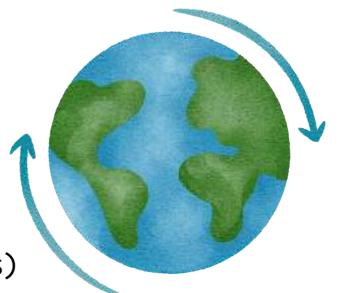
- National Mental Wellness Month
- National Braille Literacy Month
- National Poverty in America Awareness Month
- National Thank You Month

National Weeks in January

- National Healthy Weight Week (January 19-25, 2025)
- National Activity Professionals Week (January 26-February 1, 2025)

National Days

- January 1 - New Year's Day and Global Family Day
- January 4 - World Braille Day (good for sensory or learning activities)
- January 5 - National Bird Day (good for nature discussion or art)
- January 6 - Take a New Year's Well-Being Check Day
- January 8 - Earth's Rotation Day
- January 10 - National Cut Your Energy Costs Day (good for practical life skills)
- January 13 - Make Your Dream Come True Day (good for goal-setting activities)
- January 14 - World Logic Day
- January 15 - National Hat Day
- January 16 - Religious Freedom Day
- January 18 - Winnie the Pooh Day
- January 20 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- January 21 - International Hugging Day (focus on consent and comfort)
- January 23 - National Handwriting Day hello
- January 25 - National Opposite Day (good for playful group activities)
- January 29 - National Puzzle Day
- January 30 - School Day of Nonviolence and Peace



January 29 – National Puzzle Day

Dave F. is Not the Only Student Who Loves Puzzles!



Dave F. (below) is the king of 1000 piece puzzles!



But other students also solve puzzles. Steve (above) is working on a Cheerios box and logos of items we are familiar with can make solving the puzzle more fun.

How do you eat your Cheerios?

Our brains are very good at recognizing familiar logos, so we can spot them faster than new or confusing images. Studies show that familiar logos are easier to find, which can make puzzles feel less frustrating and

more rewarding. Cheerios box exercise. It helps train visual memory and pattern recognition while still feeling playful and satisfying.

NATIONAL BUFFET DAY

with Amy, Carolyn, Daniel, and Darnell

On January 2nd, National Buffet Day recognizes restaurants where you serve yourself from a bunch of different foods at one price—it's all you can (care to) eat. Buffet was originally a French term for a side table where food was displayed, buffets became popular in 16th century France among the nobility who used them to showcase their wealth with elaborate food displays.

The modern all-you-can-eat buffet style emerged in 1940s Las Vegas, where casino owner Herb McDonald created the "Buckaroo Buffet" at the El Rancho—a late-night spread designed to keep gamblers in the casino longer. The Swedish smörgåsbord also influenced the American buffet style, contributing the idea of multiple courses available all at the same time.

For Daniel, buffets mean Indian food and dining with his grandma. He has not done this yet, but he is looking forward to this particular buffet. He talked about the Lotus Café in San Rafael, which is also connected to a market. His favorites are easy to name: #1 is chicken tikka masala. He loves the sauce, the soft meat, and the spices. It's reddish and comforting. #2 is saag paneer because he likes spinach in general, and this dish has plenty of it. #3 are samosas; they look like a pastry appetizer but are savory, filled with potatoes, spices, herbs, and sometimes vegan meat. Daniel said, "they taste kind of like a vegan ham-and-cheese croissant, without the ham or the cheese." Hmm. Try to imagine that!

Butter chicken is good too. Chicken curry and lamb curry come next, both orange and rich. But his real favorite is the naan bread. Garlic naan. And "the naan that is an Indian version of pesto." Daniel uses the naan like a utensil, scooping up everything else. He also likes pakora vegetable fritters and tandoori chicken, which he says tastes buttery. Daniel said he doesn't usually get dessert at a buffet—he said he usually feels too full.

Have you tried any of these foods at an Indian buffet?

Daniel also remembers the buffets during his video game camp days in Berkeley, with a cafeteria above the camp where everyone ate together.

Good times!



BUFFET MEMORIES

Carolyn remembers the yummy food at the Chinese buffet in Novato, which used to be next to the Marin Community Clinic. Amy remembers that same Chinese buffet which has, sadly, closed down. "It had really good lemon chicken," said Amy. Darnell also remembers that popular Chinese buffet: There was a lot of good food such as sushi (hey, that is not Chinese food!) and lemon chicken.

What are your favorite buffet foods?

We talked about fortune cookies at Chinese restaurants. Did you know that fortune cookies were actually invented in California, not China? They originated in San Francisco or maybe Los Angeles—there's some dispute—in the early 1900s and they were likely created by Japanese immigrants. The most credited story points to Makoto Hagiwara at San Francisco's Japanese Tea Garden around 1914. Chinese restaurateurs adopted them so, ironically, fortune cookies are virtually unknown in China itself.



Amy also remembers the buffet at Circus Circus in Reno. The last time she went was about fifteen years ago. It was loud, crowded, and full of people who had been up all night gambling. Breakfast included greasy corned beef and hash, scrambled eggs, fruit parfaits, and soda. "The food was really good," said Amy who thoughtfully plans her buffet plates and never gets seconds. Other buffet memories are more mixed. Amy mentioned that some Reno breakfast buffets can be overpriced and the eggs can be overdone and rubbery. But one good thing was that kids could try any food they wanted at a buffet.

Carolyn remembers a steakhouse buffet on the East Coast called The Ground Round. She remembers her mom bringing a big purse and sneaking out a bunch of peanuts.

Daniel has advice for National Buffet Day

- Be careful about what you eat.
- Don't eat too much.
- Don't eat something just because it's there.
- Eat what you actually like. If something only tastes okay, you don't have to finish it.

Dean Martin—The King of Cool



Dean Martin had one of the smoothest, most relaxed voices in music history. People called him “The King of Cool.”

That good feeling still holds up today—just ask Dave F., a longtime and very devoted Dean Martin fan.

As his solo career took off, Dean Martin became close friends with Frank Sinatra. Along with Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop, and Peter Lawford, they became known to the public as the *Rat Pack*. Interestingly, the group never liked that name themselves—they called each other “*The Summit*” or “*The Clan*.” Still, the Rat Pack label stuck, and it came to represent style, friendship, music, and a lot of laughs.



Dean Martin wasn’t just a singer—he was also a successful movie star. One of his most famous roles was in the classic Western *Rio Bravo*, where he starred alongside John Wayne. In the film, Martin played a troubled but talented deputy, showing audiences that beneath his laid-back image, he was a serious and capable actor.

Born Dino Paul Crocetti, Dean Martin recorded many songs people still love today, including “Everybody Loves Somebody,” “That’s Amore,” and “Ain’t That a Kick in the Head.”

Dave even owns a special

LP, Dean “Tex” Martin, where Dean sings country-style songs arranged by Marty Paich, showing a different side of his sound.

Decades later, Dean Martin’s music and movies still bring smiles. His voice feels warm, familiar, and timeless—like a good, old friend dropping by with a great story, lots of laughs, and a great song, right Dave?



RING OUT, WILD BELLS

by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) was an English poet and the leading literary voice of the Victorian era. He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1850 by Queen Victoria, succeeding William Wordsworth, and served for 42 years, writing poetry that spoke to the moral, social, and emotional concerns of his time. Living during a period of great change, Tennyson often explored themes of loss, renewal, justice, and hope. Poems like Ring Out, Wild Bells continue to resonate because they call for compassion, honesty, and positive change—values that remain relevant today.

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more,
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.



Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

CH&S Reading Comprehension

Name: _____ Date: _____

Gray Whales

Ready to Read READING COMPREHENSION

Gray whales make a long trip each year. Gray whales swim past Point Reyes and mid-January is the peak time to see them. Thousands of whales travel from Alaska to Baja California. They swim south to warm water. Being born in warm water helps baby whales survive.

The trip is very long. A gray whale can swim over 10,000 miles in one season. This is one of the longest animal trips in the world. Many whales swim close to shore. People can see them from land. Some good places to watch the whales are the Point Reyes Lighthouse, Bodega Head and Mendocino Headlands State Park.

More than 1,000 whales can pass by in one peak day. People may see whale tails, spouts, fins, or big splashes. Some whales swim alone. Others swim in small groups. Watching whales can feel calm and exciting. It helps people feel close to nature and the ocean.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Gray Whale review questions:

1. True or false: Gray whales swim south in mid January.
2. Where do the whales start their trip?
 - a. Novato
 - b. Mexico
 - c. Alaska
 - d. Florida
3. True or false: Gray whales swim to cold water to have babies.
4. About how many whales can pass Point Reyes in one busy day?
 - a. about 10
 - b. 100
 - c. Over 1,000
 - d. 5000
5. How do whales travel, alone or in groups?
6. True or false: The whales can only swim for short distances.
7. Why do you think people like to watch whales?



(Below) It looks like James has found a great place to look for gray whales!



[@Communityhomesandservices](#)

Nino last month...



Nino and Snoop on a Stoop show off our Christmas books! Library Shelfie Day is Jan. 28.

We accept and appreciate donations
of any size or kind.
All donations to CH&S are
tax-deductible.
CH&S is a 501(c)(3) non-profit
organization.

Tiger Cat Storyboarding, Part 2

with Jonas, Andrew, Valerie, Linda, Tyrone, Billy, Mike, Burt, Phoebe, Frank, Steve F., Josh, Jian, Andrew M., Chris, Pat, and Audrey



Time has passed since Tiger the cat first went to McDonald's (remember that story from our November 2025 Magazine?) Tiger overcame his shyness and ordered a cheeseburger and fries.

Tiger still lives in his box by Miracle Mile. He comes back to his box and he sees a pigeon is sitting on it. "Excuse me," Tiger says. "You're on my house."

"I just flew in from Alaska," says the pigeon. "My wings are tired. Can I rest here?"

"Oh my gosh, go ahead," Tiger says.

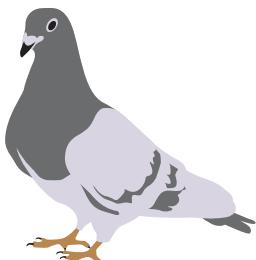
Tiger has some leftover fries from his latest McDonald's order. (Do you like French fries?)

"Would you like one?" Tiger asks the tired pigeon. The pigeon starts to eat the fry so fast that one of his tail feathers falls out. Tiger sniffs the feather.

"Cat food!" says Tiger.

"Am not," says the pigeon. "My name is Finnus."

"Cat food could be called Finnus," Tiger says.



Tiger and Finnius

Finnius poops on a leftover French fry.

"NOOO!" Tiger yells as he puts the rest of his French fries into his box.

Finnius the pigeon thinks about his actions—it's New Year's, so maybe he should apologize.
"I'm sorry," says Finnius.

Tiger purrs "rawr" and smiles. "I'm sorry too," says Tiger.

They play ball inside Tiger's box home. Accidentally, Tiger pops the ball with his claws.

"That's okay," says Finnius.

They sit together and sing "Auld Lang Syne" because it is New Year's and we can make apologies and we can start over!



We Love Bowling!

Bowling has always been a fun game and many of our students really enjoy it. It is simple to learn, social, and feels SO good when you get a strike or even knock down just a few pins.

Bowling was especially popular in the 1950s (see black and white picture below), when people dressed up and spent their evenings at the bowling alley with friends and family.

Today, bowling has a new look. Alleys now offer night bowling with neon lights, glowing pins, and bright fluorescent colors.



The lights make the game feel exciting, turning bowling into a fun experience for everyone!



Happy January Birthday!

1/8-Meredith
1/11-Jason
1/12-Jennifer and Randall
1/14-Jian
1/17-Tyrone
1/24-Carolyn
1/30-Suzie
1/31-Mike R.

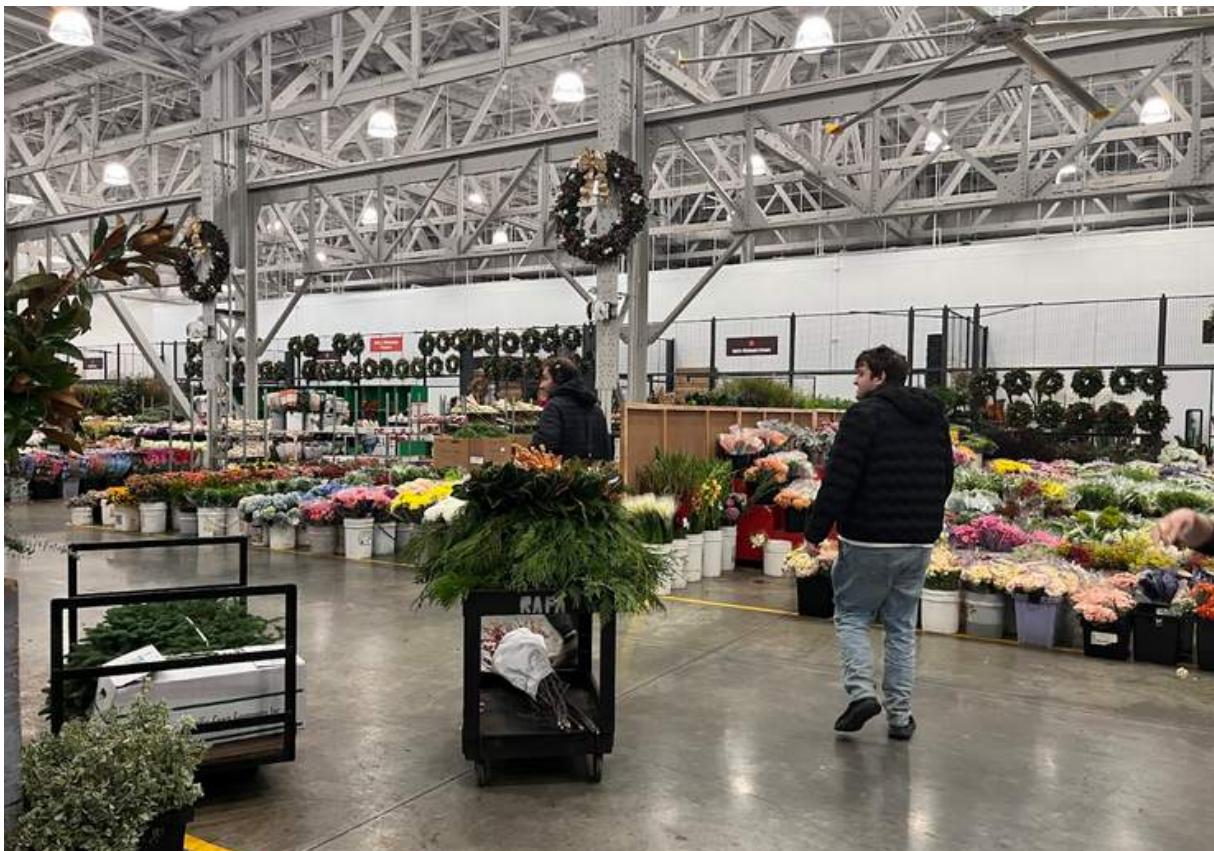


Field Trip Facts

By Connor Richey

On Monday, November 24, 2025, I went with Jennifer's group into the city to go to the flower market and I saw an old Amtrak AEM-7 electric locomotive sitting in a railyard and some Caltrain electric trains. While we were at the flower market, I saw some Caltrain electric trains rushing by, and I saw some cats so I petted them and picked them up to kiss them on the cheek and cuddle with them. Then after we went to the flower market, we went to the Fairmont hotel to see a house made from real gingerbread cookies. There was a train set and a snow village inside. I also saw some cable cars and I enjoyed hearing them.

San Francisco cable cars are the last cable cars in the world that are operated by humans. They are San Francisco icons, the world's only moving landmarks. They are operated by the San Francisco Municipal Railway system. The first cable car was built and tested on August 2, 1873. It was called the Clay Street Hill Railroad, and it was demolished in 1942, not for technological failure, but due to transit arrangement changes related to a competition merger. Today's cable car lines are the California Street Line opened in 1878, the Powell-Mason Line opened in 1888, and the Powell-Hyde Line opened in 1957.



415-897-8676
PO Box 744 Novato CA 94945
Community Homes & Services

January 2026

Connection Magazine

