



## The Best Pizza in Town

*Continued from page 2*

sure the crust is thin and light.

54 Mint imports Italian sausage, mozzarella, burrata, prosciutto, salami, and other Italian meats used for the toppings of their pizza. My favorite, called Norcina, uses fresh cremini mushrooms, truffle pecorino, and sausage on a white dough base.

Each bite is full of different flavors. With 54 Mint, it is all about taste.

Good pizza is a slice of paradise.

*Richard Eber is a frequent contributor to The Icon. He is also a restaurant reviewer and avid wine maker. He is a member of the Contra Costa Wine Group. ■*

### ANNOUNCEMENT:

The Icon is a periodic publication designed to inform Orinda residents about important issues in their community.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

The Icon welcomes letters to the editor. Please submit letters to <info@iconnews.org>. FAX (925) 363-7798.

## Housing, Overpopulation, & Taxes

By Richard Colman

Anecdotal evidence coming from Silicon Valley goes like this: A family earning \$300,000 a year may not be able to obtain a loan for a house.

Silicon Valley, which is about 40 miles south of San Francisco, is the home of many high-technology companies such as Apple, Facebook, Intel, and Google.

An internet search shows that the Silicon Valley has a population between 3.5 million and 4 million.

Homes in Silicon Valley often cost \$2 million or more. A 20 percent down payment on a \$2 million homes would be \$400,000.

The website, <www.move2siliconvalley.com>, provides information on housing prices in Silicon Valley. According to the website, "Homes in Cupertino start at around \$1.8 to \$2 million." The headquarters of Apple is in Cupertino.

The website also gives information on a home in Los Gatos. The home has three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and an area of 2,258 square feet. The price is \$2.4 million.

How can housing prices in the San Francisco Bay Area (including Silicon Valley) be lowered?

**THE ICON IS NOW ONLINE**  
Please see <www.iconnews.org>  
The Icon's online presence will allow more frequent news updates.  
Printed editions of The Icon are expected to continue.

The California State Legislature is considering laws that will increase the supply of housing. State Senate Bill 827, which may be temporarily dead, mandates that cities must build high-rise, high-density housing within one-quarter mile of a frequently-used bus route or one-half mile of a train station, such as a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) station.



Changing the tax code might make the construction of high-density, high-rise housing unnecessary. Pictured is the Monteverde/Eden Housing project as it was being built in downtown Orinda. The project exceeds Orinda's 35-foot height limit.

Another bill, Senate Bill 828 (SB 828), which has passed the State Senate but not the State Assembly, is requiring California cities to construct more homes for low-income residents. Under a state program called the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), cities are

told how many RHNA units to build. SB 828 is requiring the RHNA numbers in cities go up by 25 percent. For example, if a city is now required to build 100 RHNA units, the new number will be 125 units.

More housing means more overcrowd-

*See Housing on page 2*

## More Healthy Bread, Maybe Not

By Dr. Laura Pawlak

The vast variety of breads available in supermarkets and bakeries reflects the unquenchable appetite of Americans for this grain-based food. Breads labeled as "whole grain" appear to be a smart way to add fiber to your diet.

Whole grains improve regularity, slow digestion, reduce appetite, improve cholesterol, and prevent spikes in blood sugar -- a major driver of obesity, high blood pressure, and Type 2 diabetes.



Challah is a traditional egg bread for the Jewish Sabbath.

A whole grain bread uses the entire grain seed: the bran (an outer layer with fiber, antioxidants, and B-vitamins); the endosperm (the middle layer of starchy carbohydrates); and the germ (the inner core, which has vitamins, minerals, some protein, and a drop of oil).

Commercial whole grain breads differ in the relative amount of whole grain content in the product. A simple calculation, called the "10 to 1 Rule," can guide you in choosing healthy whole grain breads:

*See More Healthy Bread on page 3*

# Housing, Overpopulation, & Taxes

Continued from page 1

ed schools, more traffic, fewer parking spaces, and less open space.

According to the website, <www.just-schools.gseis.ucla.edu> “one in three California students attends an overcrowded school.”

When more housing is built, more transportation projects are also needed.

On June 5, 2018, voters in the nine-county Bay Area approved Regional Measure 3, a \$4.5 billion measure for transportation projects. The measure, which required a simple majority to pass, received 54 percent “yes” votes and 46 percent “no” votes.

The basic real-estate problem in the Bay Area is that demand for housing greatly exceeds supply.

Instead of increasing the supply of housing, lawmakers should consider ways to reduce demand.

Vancouver, Canada, where real estate prices have been escalating sharply, has sought to temper housing demand by imposing a 15 percent on sales to foreign homes buyers.

In an article dated March 7, 2018, and posted on <www.calmatters.org>, reporter Matt Levin wrote: “Two years ago, under intense pressure from Vancouver residents, the British Columbia provincial government began mandating that homebuyers disclose citizenship on sales documents. The data revealed that in fact 10 to 15 percent of houses were going to neither Canadian citizens nor permanent residents.”

Levin continued, “So the provincial government slapped a 15 percent tax on all sales to foreign homebuyers. The immediate response was stunning: Within a few months, the price of a single-family property in the greater Vancouver area dropped 20 percent.”

California could also place a special tax on foreign buyers of real estate. According to Levin, “The idea of a foreign buyer tax has been floated in some quarters of California, including Silicon Valley, but has

never received significant legislative attention at the state or local level.”

Another type of tax went into effect in Seattle, Washington. On May 14, 2018, Seattle lawmakers settled on an annual \$275 per-employee tax (known as a head tax) on large businesses. The tax was repealed on June 12, 2018.

Some cities in Silicon Valley, such as Cupertino, Mountain View, and East Palo Alto, are considering implementing a head tax. San Francisco is also contemplating a head tax.

California has the seventh highest corporate income tax rate in the United States. The rate is 8.84%. A constitutional amendment in the State Assembly would raise the rate to 18.84%.

If taxes on California businesses become too burdensome, some of these businesses will move to other states or other nations.

A poll by the Bay Area Council, showed that 46 percent of Bay Area residents are likely to leave the region in the next few years. In 2017, the figure was 40 percent. In 2016, 34 percent wanted to leave. The poll was released on June 3, 2018.

Instead of California's mandating the construction of additional housing, the state should consider implementing higher taxes on businesses.

A tax on foreign buyers of California real estate, a head tax on employees of businesses, and a higher state corporate income tax should force businesses -- and the jobs associated with these businesses -- to leave.

The Bay Area now has seven million people. If 46 percent of Bay Area individuals left, the population would drop to 3.8 million.

If jobs, because of taxation, leave California, then housing prices will drop. Moreover, the need for more transportation projects will vanish. ■

# The Best Pizza in Town

By Richard Eber

One of my favorite comfort foods is pizza.

Locally, there is one restaurant that puts out a superior product. It is a small bakery-café called 54 Mint II Forno, 1686 Locust St. in Walnut Creek. It is the brain-



Pizza is being prepared at 54 Mint at 1686 Locust Street in Walnut Creek. 54 Mint has the best pizza in town, according to The Icon's restaurant reviewer, Richard Eber.

child of Claudio and Daniele, who operated a white tablecloth restaurant of the same name at Treat Blvd. and Oak Grove for several years. Their current Italian rendition is much more informal.

Outside of operating a coffeehouse-like destination in the morning, 54 Mint serves lunch and dinner featuring pasta, salads, and pizza -- all unique.

Their decorated flatbread is also unique, having its culinary roots traced back to Naples, Italy, the very region credited for being the origin of this dish that American's have embraced so much.

What makes 54 Mint so much different from its competitors? To start with, it uses an imported flour blend from Italy. This is combined with yeast and salt that is raised into small units about the size of tennis balls. From there, Chef Roberto stretches the dough into an oval shape. Rice flour is used underneath to make

See Best Pizza on page 4

# More Healthy Bread, Maybe Not

Continued from page 1

Using the nutrition facts on the label, identify the grams of total carbohydrate and fiber. Divide the total grams of carbs by 10. Is there at least that much fiber stated on the label? If so, it is considered a healthy bread.

But wait, there's something more to consider before purchasing a whole grain bread. Andrew Weil, M.D., an expert in Integrative Medicine, states: “A true whole grain food retains all three parts of the seed intact. A recent government study linked the fiber found specifically in intact whole grains to a longer, healthy life, that is, a lower risk of death at any age from conditions such as cardiovascular, respiratory and infectious diseases and possibly some cancers.”

To make bread, the intact whole grain is ground into flour. Some of the physical properties that promote good health are less effective when whole-grain seeds are processed into flour.

There are many tasty, intact whole grains available, including: amaranth; barley; brown rice; buckwheat; bulgur; cracked wheat; farro; kamut; kasha; millet; oats; quinoa; rye; wheat berries; and wild rice. Use intact whole grains as side dishes or stuffing, in soups, stews, and salads -- and as a hot, breakfast porridge.

Despite research reporting some differences in the positive effects of intact, whole grains as compared to processed (ground) whole grain flour, here's the most important message: Aim for at least three servings of whole grains every day, including cooked, intact whole grains, whole grain cereals, and whole grain breads. Enjoy!

*Dr. Laura Pawlak (Ph.D., R.D. emerita) is a world-renowned biochemist and dietitian emerita. She is the author of many scientific publications and has written such best-selling books as “The Hungry Brain,” “Life Without Diets,” and “Stop Gaining Weight.” On the subjects of nutrition and brain science, she gives talks internationally. ■*

# EDITORIAL Orinda: Going, Going, Gone?

Demands by the State of California on Orinda are seriously jeopardizing the desirability of living in Orinda.

Essentially, the state, for years, has been usurping Orinda's ability to control the city's destiny.

The state's attack has been especially obnoxious. Orinda's schools, its semi-rural environment, and its open spaces are in jeopardy.

Two state-mandated programs are depriving Orinda of local control.

One program is the Housing Element. According to the website of the California Department of Housing and Community Development, “Since 1969, California has required all local governments (cities and counties) adequately plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community.” In Orinda, recent Housing Elements have required that hundreds of new homes be constructed.

Another program is the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). The website of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) states that “. . . RHNA is the state-mandated process to identify the total number of housing units (by affordability level) that each jurisdiction must accommodate in its Housing Element.” The directors of ABAG are not directly elected by voters.

Until 2017, Orinda, without serious objection, went along with the Housing Element and RHNA. In August of that year, Eve Phillips, a member of the Orinda City Council, showed leadership when she wrote members of the state legislature, stating that the city council opposed state Senate Bill 35 (of 2017), a state-mandated land-use plan that ultimately Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law. Ms. Phillips' letter had the support of the other four

members of the city council: Amy Worth; Darlene Gee; Inga Miller; and Dean Orr.

Senate Bill 35 requires about 98 percent of all of California's cities to expedite the construction state-mandated housing, especially what is called affordable housing. Orinda is basically full and has no room for additional residences.

Amy Worth of the city council also showed leadership when, in February 2018, she wrote a member of the state Senate, saying Senate Bill 827 (of 2018) interfered with Orinda's local control. Ms. Worth's letter had the support of all other members of the city council.

Senate Bill 827, which died in a senate committee,

would have, as originally written, given the State of California control of a local community's land within one-quarter mile of a frequently-used bus route or one-half mile from a train station. The bill would have allowed construction of apartment houses up to 85 feet high. Senate Bill 827 is likely to be revived in the legislature in 2019.

Orinda appears to be doomed to having the State of California control the city. The state government wants the Housing Element and RHNA to continue.

The voters of Orinda, not the State of California, should decide how Orinda is to handle housing matters.

Orinda's voters must, in the city's November 2018 elections, make clear to all city-council candidates that local control in Orinda is absolutely necessary.

Orinda does not need any more imperialism from Sacramento. ■



Past and current legislation from the State of California is likely to eliminate local control over Orinda's use of its land. Pictured is Orinda's pristine Southwood Valley.