

TOPANGA NEW TIMES

VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS

October 30, 2026 Vol. 7, No. 22



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ON THE COVER

Trick or treat? This year’s election is a real thriller, but unlike the characters in a horror film, voters have the power to determine the outcome of this story on November 3. Early voting is available from now until election day at the Topanga Library. A convenient and secure drop off box is also available there, and voters can walk in and hand their ballot to poll workers, if they prefer, but it’s too late to put ballots in the mail—they won’t arrive in time to be counted. Happy Halloween, and don’t forget to vote!

Cover Art & Design by Urs Baur ■

An Open Letter from Topanga Wildlife Protectors

Topanga, we need to talk.
We need to talk about the poison we’re putting out around our homes and businesses, the wildlife we’re unintentionally harming, and the idea that we can solve one problem without creating another.
We know the frustration. Rats in the walls. Wires chewed through in cars. Rodents nesting in air-conditioning ducts, raiding garbage cans, and finding their way into kitchens. These are real problems, and no one is suggesting we simply learn to live with them in our homes and places of business.
But before we reach for a rodenticide bait box, we need to ask ourselves a bigger question: What else are we poisoning when we poison a rat?



Bobcats live right among humans in Topanga Canyon. They are quiet neighbors, rarely seen. They hunt for rabbits and rodents—including gophers, mice, and rats—in our gardens as well as in the wild, and that puts these beautiful native cats at risk from rat poison. Mountain lions are also at risk from rodenticides, and so are house cats. Poisoning rats poisons cats, wild and domestic. Photo by Denis M. Hannigan

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TOPANGA NEW TIMES CREW

Bonnie Morgan
Suzanne Guldimann
Jimmy P. Morgan
Claire Fordham
Ivan Kashinsky
Brian Chapman
Urs Baur
Olivia Pool
Chloe Chapman
Nathalie Krull
Robin Cordes

www.topanganewtimes.com
Reach us at hello@topanganewtimes.com
For advertising inquiries contact ads@topanganewtimes.com

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Topanga New Times is published bi-weekly and delivered to every address in Topanga. Copies are also available at many locations throughout the Santa Monica Mountains, from Pacific Palisades and Malibu to Calabasas and Woodland Hills.

Because here in Topanga, we don’t live apart from nature. We live within it.
The owls calling from the oaks, the hawks circling overhead, the bobcats moving through the brush, and the coyotes traveling our ridgelines are not just beautiful features of canyon life. They are part of a complex, interconnected ecosystem. Rodents are part of that ecosystem, too. They are a primary food source for the very animals that help keep their populations in check.
Nature has its own pest-control system. And we are putting it at risk.
Secondary Poisoning
When a rodent consumes an anticoagulant or neurotoxic rodenticide, the poison doesn't necessarily end with that animal. A poisoned rodent can become easy prey for an owl, hawk, bobcat, coyote, or other predators. When that predator eats contaminated prey, the poison accumulates in its body, sometimes with devastating consequences.
This is known as secondary poisoning, and it is one of the reasons rodenticides pose such a serious threat to wildlife.
Here in Topanga, this isn't just a distant environmental concern. Topanga Animal Rescue reported to us that the testing of injured or deceased bobcats found in Topanga and the Santa Monica Mountains over recent years has shown that 75 percent of those tested were positive for rodenticides. That is a sobering finding. It suggests that exposure to rat poison has become a serious concern for the very wildlife that shares our canyon.
There are also recent reports of an increase in poisoned animals in the neighborhoods of Grandview, Entrada, and Artique. These reports are a reason for all of us to pay closer attention to what is being used in and around our homes and businesses, and to consider the consequences that may extend well beyond our property lines.
The problem isn't confined to a single property. Poison placed beside one house or business can affect an animal that hunts across an entire canyon. One bait box can become part of a much larger chain of exposure, reaching animals that never came anywhere near the original source of the poison.
There is no such thing as a private transaction between a homeowner and a rat when the rest of the food web is involved. And
cont. on p.4

DISCOVER



La Lechusa, shapeshifter! *Digital illustration of La Lechusa is by Suzanne Guldemann*

She flies on silent wings. Her appearance is an ominous omen. Those who respond to her eldritch call are doomed. Don't look. Whatever happens, do not follow her cries into the darkness. Those who do are rarely seen again. Her name is La Lechuza, and she is a vengeful spirit, a night terror, a shape shifter who can appear as a woman or as a great, white owl.

Most stories about La Lechuza originate in Northern Mexico and Texas, but this dark legend has an unlikely connection to the Santa Monica Mountains.

Lechuza beach and canyon are located in western Malibu. The beach is a beautiful one, with rock formations and secluded coves. The canyon, often spelled Lechusa, is a small one, located in mostly undeveloped open space between Decker and Encinal canyons. There's a seasonal stream there that runs through rugged terrain.

There are mundane reasons why this geographical location is named Lechuza. The word means "barn owl" in Spanish—the ordinary, common avian variety, *Tyto alba*, and there are still plenty of owls here.

Chumash language specialist Richard Applegate, writing for the Journal of California Anthropology in 1974, speculated that Lechuza was derived from the Chumash word "Lisiqsihi," a Ventureño name for "beachworm," and there is no shortage of beachworm colonies on this stretch of coast. Their fragile sand castles are everywhere at low tide, and are said to also be the source of the name Sequit Canyon, nearby.

However, one of the earliest written references to this place is on Malibu Rancho landowner Matthew Keller's 1870 plat map of the area, and it is written on this map as "La Chusal," another of the names of the supernatural owl woman La Lechuza.

So, which is it? Was this beach and canyon the home of owls, a supernatural entity, or just a humble worm?

Actor, activist, and fifth-generation Californian Leo Carrillo was convinced that the canyon was home to La Lechuza, the owl woman, and the evidence to support this extraordinary claim is a family story handed down to him by his father. Carrillo shared the legend in his 1961 autobiography, *The California I Love*, published shortly after his death in 1961.

When Leo Carrillo was a small child, his father once took to a cave in Sequit Canyon, not far from Lechuza canyon and beach, and told him a story about his grandfather, José Raimundo Cabrillo, and his encounter with the Owl Woman of Malibu—La Lechuza.

José Raimundo Carrillo was one of the soldiers who accompanied the first Portola Expedition from San Diego to Carmel in 1769. He was serving at the Presidio of Santa Barbara, when he took a solo hunting trip into the Santa Monica Mountains.

The story doesn't include dates, but this was most likely prior to 1804, when Malibu was awarded to another veteran of the Portola Expedition as a land grant, and no later than 1806, when José Raimundo Cabrillo was transferred to San Diego. He became the commandant of the Presidio of San Diego and served there until his death in 1809.

According to Leo Carrillo's father, José Raimundo was a fearless explorer and hunter who was famous for killing grizzly bears armed with only a shield and a sword. On this trip he was hoping to kill a mountain lion to make a rug for the home he was building up north. It was spring, and

creeks were running, and there was plenty of game, and no sign of other people.

Far up the canyon, he found a cave. Instead of mountain lions, it was occupied by a woman dressed in deerskins, and her three children. There were stone tools, a pile of tanned skins, and a stone metate for grinding seeds and acorns.

José Raimundo was intrigued. He began leaving gifts of meat for the family.

He had two additional encounters with the woman and her family. During the first, the woman was attacked by a mountain lion. José Raimundo rushed to help but the woman's oldest son who was no more than five successfully fought off the big cat.

José Raimundo visited the woman's home a final time before leaving the canyon. Leo Carrillo writes that the cave was dark, but that the woman's eyes shone in the firelight, huge, and dark and reflective, like the eyes of an owl, and that José Raimundo was suddenly filled with the conviction that this was not a mortal woman, but was instead the dread spirit La Lechuza. However, instead of hexing him, the woman smiled at him and offered a "sign of good fortune and farewell," the "Indian equivalent of the Spanish Vaya con Dios (go with God)."

Reassured, he rode away, convinced that La Lechuza had given him her blessing.

"My father told me this story at the cave itself in Malibu Sequit Canyon when I was very small," Leo Carrillo wrote. "The Owl Woman lived not far from my present adobe home. I think perhaps her spirit has blessed me, as she blessed my great-great-grandfather. At least I like to believe so and to express my thanks, too, to La Lechuza."

Leo Carrillo was a passionate advocate for land conservation. His actions on the State Beach and Parks Commission helped lay the groundwork for the creation of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Leo Carrillo State Park, a unit of the SMMNRA, protects much of the area José Raimundo would have explored on that hunting trip, potentially including the cave of the owl woman.

The story strongly suggests that the woman José Raimundo encountered in the Malibu back country was a Chumash woman making a life for herself and her children in a world that had been completely upended in the space of just a few years by genocide. Almost the entire Indigenous population had been rounded up and sent to the missions or else they had died of diseases brought by the colonists. Then again, she might have been La Lechuza. Either way, José Raimundo met her with kindness and received a blessing in return.

There is no way of knowing how the story ended for the owl woman of the Santa Monica Mountains, but it seems likely that José Raimundo's story is the source of the place name Lechuza, and that this Chumash woman lives on in the name, transformed by the power of the storyteller from mortal woman to supernatural owl spirit. ■

TNT Editor Suzanne Guldemann is an author, artist, and musician who lives in Malibu and loves the Santa Monica Mountains. She has worked as a journalist reporting on local news and issues for two decades, and is the author of 13 books, including two local histories and a novel. She can be reached at suzanne@topanganewtimes.com

An Open Letter ... (cont.)

the consequences can be difficult to see. We may never know that the owl which stopped calling from a familiar tree, the hawk which no longer circles overhead, or the bobcat we haven't seen in months has been affected by the poisons we put into the environment.

Wildlife doesn't always die where we can find it. The harm can be quiet, scattered, and easy to overlook.

But invisible doesn't mean harmless.

If we lose the predators, the problem becomes worse.

Imagine a Topanga with fewer owls, fewer hawks, fewer bobcats and coyotes.

Now imagine the rodents are still here.

Owls are among nature's most effective rodent hunters. A single owl family can consume as many as 4,000 rodents in a year. Think about that: thousands of rodents removed from the food web naturally, without bait boxes or toxic chemicals. When we expose owls and other predators to rodenticides, we risk undermining one of the most valuable natural checks on rodent populations.

Poisoning predators doesn't guarantee fewer rodents. In fact, removing animals that naturally prey on rodents can undermine one of the ecological checks that helps keep their populations in balance. It can cause a rodent population increase on the property using the poison as rodents have litters every 3-4 weeks, which is faster than poison can kill them. And now, you have also killed the natural predators via secondary poisoning. Rodent populations are influenced by many factors, including food, shelter, reproduction, and other predators, so the outcome isn't as simple as replacing one animal with another.

But the contradiction is clear: we can harm the wildlife that helps control rodents while continuing to create the conditions that allow rodents to thrive.

As long as our homes and businesses offer easy access to food, garbage, water, and shelter, rodents will have reasons to stay. And if we respond by putting out more poison without addressing those underlying conditions, we risk repeating the same cycle.

More rodents. More poison. More wildlife at risk.

Is that really the future we want for Topanga?

Look for alternatives.

Protecting wildlife does not mean ignoring rodent problems. It means addressing them in ways that are effective, responsible, and less harmful to the ecosystem we all share.

It also means understanding that the law has changed. California has enacted significant restrictions on anticoagulant rodenticides. California Food and Agricultural Code § 12978.7 prohibits many uses of these products, including most residential uses of certain anticoagulant rodenticides, subject to specific exceptions. Additional restrictions took effect in 2024 and 2025. Violations can carry substantial penalties, including civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per day for violations covered by the law. The rules depend on the active ingredient, the setting, and any applicable exceptions, so residents and pest-control professionals should check the current requirements rather than assume a product is legal for a particular use.

And here's an important distinction: some rat poisons may still be legal for certain uses such as bromethalin, a neurotoxin. That does not make them wildlife-safe. Legality is not the same as a lack of

risk to owls, hawks, bobcats, coyotes, and other animals that may eat poisoned rodents.

So what can we do?

It starts with prevention: sealing holes and gaps around buildings, securing garbage and compost, installing screens on doors and windows, storing pet food and birdseed in rodent-resistant containers, cleaning up fallen fruit, and eliminating easy access to food and shelter.

It means using exclusion and other non-poison approaches to keep rodents out of our homes, rather than relying on toxic bait as the first line of defense.

And when a rodent problem requires professional help, it means asking for an integrated pest management approach that prioritizes prevention, exclusion, monitoring, and nonchemical controls. Ask pest-control professionals specifically about wildlife-safe methods, and don't assume that a product is safe for wildlife simply because it is sold for residential use.

No single solution will prevent every rodent problem. But we can make better choices, reduce the conditions that attract rodents, and avoid adding unnecessary toxic threats to the food web.

We can protect our homes without sacrificing the animals that make this place special.

Living in Topanga is a privilege and a responsibility.

We live here because Topanga is more than a place to sleep at the end of the day. It's the canyon itself: the oak trees, the open hillsides, the night sounds, the wildlife that moves through our yards and across our trails.

That natural world is part of our community, even when we don't see it. It doesn't recognize property lines, and it can't distinguish between poison intended for a rat in one backyard and the contaminated prey it encounters in the next.

The choices we make on our own properties can have consequences far beyond them.

So before putting out another bait box, we ask you to pause. Consider what the poison can do beyond its intended target. Consider the owl hunting after dark, the hawk searching the hillside, the bobcat moving through the brush, and the coyote crossing the road at dawn.

Consider what it means to protect a home or business if the methods we use to do so threaten the very ecosystem that surrounds it.

Topanga Wildlife Protectors, a local group of Topangans working on an outreach and education campaign to address the recent uptick in poisoning deaths reported, believes we can find a better balance. We can take rodent problems seriously while taking wildlife protection seriously, too. We can make informed decisions, choose less harmful methods, and help our neighbors understand why these choices matter. We encourage you to help us spread the word, get involved, and support our Topanga campaign by visiting bit.ly/topangawildlife.

Let's keep our homes protected, our food webs intact, and our canyon alive with the wildlife that belongs here.

Because if we poison the predators, we risk losing some of nature's best allies against the very pests we're trying to control.

And once they're gone, we may discover that the problem was never just the rats.

To learn more about poison alternatives, visit: PoisonFreeMalibu.org, @poisonfreetopanga and TopangaAnimalRescue.org

With care for our homes, our wildlife, and the canyon we share,
Topanga Wildlife Protectors ■

artbeat

Topanga Actor's Company is Back at the Library!

Topanga Actors Company will continue their now ten years of free, innovative programming with programs on two Sundays in November and December. Enjoy the free events where talented cast members will interpret stories by Isaac Asimov, David Mitchell and Agatha Christie.

On **November 15th**, TAC presents stories by masters of the supernatural: Isaac Asimov and David Mitchell. Read by Harry Hart-Browne, Madi Fairfield, and Zeke Reed. Music by Mike Saul.

The program will last about 70 minutes. The audience is invited to join the cast in a talk-back while munching on seasonal goodies.

Topanga Library, November 15, at 2 pm. No tickets, no hassle, free library parking. Suitable for a teenage audience and adults.

For more information, email: topangaactorscompany@theatercompany.org

Save the afternoon of **December 13**, for TAC's holiday romp: *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* by Agatha Christie. ■

Topanga Symphony Concert November 22, 2026.

The Topanga Symphony, Santa Monica Mountain's only community orchestra, announces a free concert performance on November 22, 2026, at 3:00P.M. at the Topanga Community Center. Jerome Kessler, as Music Director and Conductor will feature soloists Rebecca Beato, violin, and Yuri Santos, viola, performing *Sinfonia Concertante, K. 364* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The program will also include *Symphony #4 in E minor, Op. 98* by Johannes Brahms.

A native of Salvador, Brazil, violist Yuri Santos is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the Colburn School, studying with Prof. Tatjana Masurenko. He is a first-prize winner of the Beethoven-Haus Bonn String Quartet Competition, Macauley Chamber Music Competition, and South Florida Young Artist Solo Competition, and has received the Music Society of Coral Lakes and Edward H. Benenson awards.

Rebecca Beato is currently in her third year of her undergraduate violin studies with Robert Lipsett at The Colburn School in Los Angeles, California. She previously studied with Viktor Basis at the Special Music School for 10 years and with Li Lin at the Juilliard school for a year. Rebecca is a top prize winner of the Sphinx and Aspen Competitions as well as a Semi-Finalist in the 10th Louis Spohr International Music Competition. ■

EDITORIAL

We had Red Flag warnings, an extended Public Safety Power Shut-Off, and a fire last week. We have severe coastal hazards this week, and there's the potential for heavy rains and flooding in the forecast. All of that, together with a highly fraught, high-stakes Election Day on Tuesday, November 3, and it is not surprising that so many of us are experiencing anxiety and a persistent feeling of existential dread.

Halloween offers a welcome moment of distraction from the chaos this year. The holiday has the potential to be a wet one, but rain is unlikely to dampen the spirits of canyon families, who are innovative and resilient. However, canyon drivers need to use extra caution, as rain combined with the potential for trick-or-treaters to be out on the roads is a double hazard.

Daylight saving ends at 2:00 a.m. on the morning of November 1. The current political climate is so dysfunctional that not even a bipartisan proposal to end the endless cycle of falling back and springing forth managed to pass this year. It's probably just as well. When the president weighed in on the issue he promoted permanent daylight savings. Numerous studies on the impact of the time change on sleep cycles, heart and mental health and circadian rhythm suggest that permanent standard time would be the better

option for human health.

Either way, a majority of Americans would be glad to try picking one time and sticking with it. Washington's inability to deliver even this long-sought, remarkably uncontroversial piece of legislation says volumes.

Has there ever been a more exhausting election cycle? Entire forests have been sacrificed for the mountains of mailers that have choked the mailbox for weeks—many of them clearly the work of AI. Is anyone ever influenced to pick this candidate over that one based on an oversized glossy mailer—or ten or twelve or twenty of them?

Whether or not that toothy grin and red-white-and-blue color scheme inspires confidence—imagine how much worse it is in the battleground states where the senate majority is in play?—this election is important. Topanga voters won't be deciding who controls Congress, but there are many issues and state-level races on this ballot that will impact all of our lives directly. It's a long and complicated ballot, and that can be off-putting, but it's worth persevering. Our votes carry not only the weight of our convictions, but also the weight of everyone who chooses not to vote. They leave the people who do vote with the responsibility of deciding everyone's future.

California election officials are strongly recommending that anyone who hasn't mailed their ballot back yet consider dropping it off in person at a voting center instead of trusting the USPS to get it there in time to be counted. The voting center at the Topanga

Library is open October 31–November 3, and there are ballot drop boxes at libraries and government offices all over Los Angeles County.

Elections have consequences. They can be disappointing, but also sometimes almost miraculous.

The California red-legged frog, a species that was fast-tracked on the road to extinction, received a reprieve because voters cared enough to pass legislation to help fund the recovery of this endangered species.

Once completely extirpated from the Santa Monica Mountains, the frogs are now back. Several small but growing populations of these large and charismatic amphibians have been reestablished in recent years. The frogs have survived wildfire, drought, and storm flooding, and continue to thrive.

At their October meeting, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy awarded a Proposition 4 grant to the Friends of Oak Park Open Space Community Foundation to help red-legged frog recovery work in the Las Virgenes Creek watershed. Habitat restoration and conservation projects like this one benefit not only the frogs but a host of other threatened and endangered species that also depend on the same habitat. Californians historically care about the environment and are willing to pitch in and help save even something as small as a frog.

The impact of this project will be felt throughout the watershed and the web of life that depends on it.

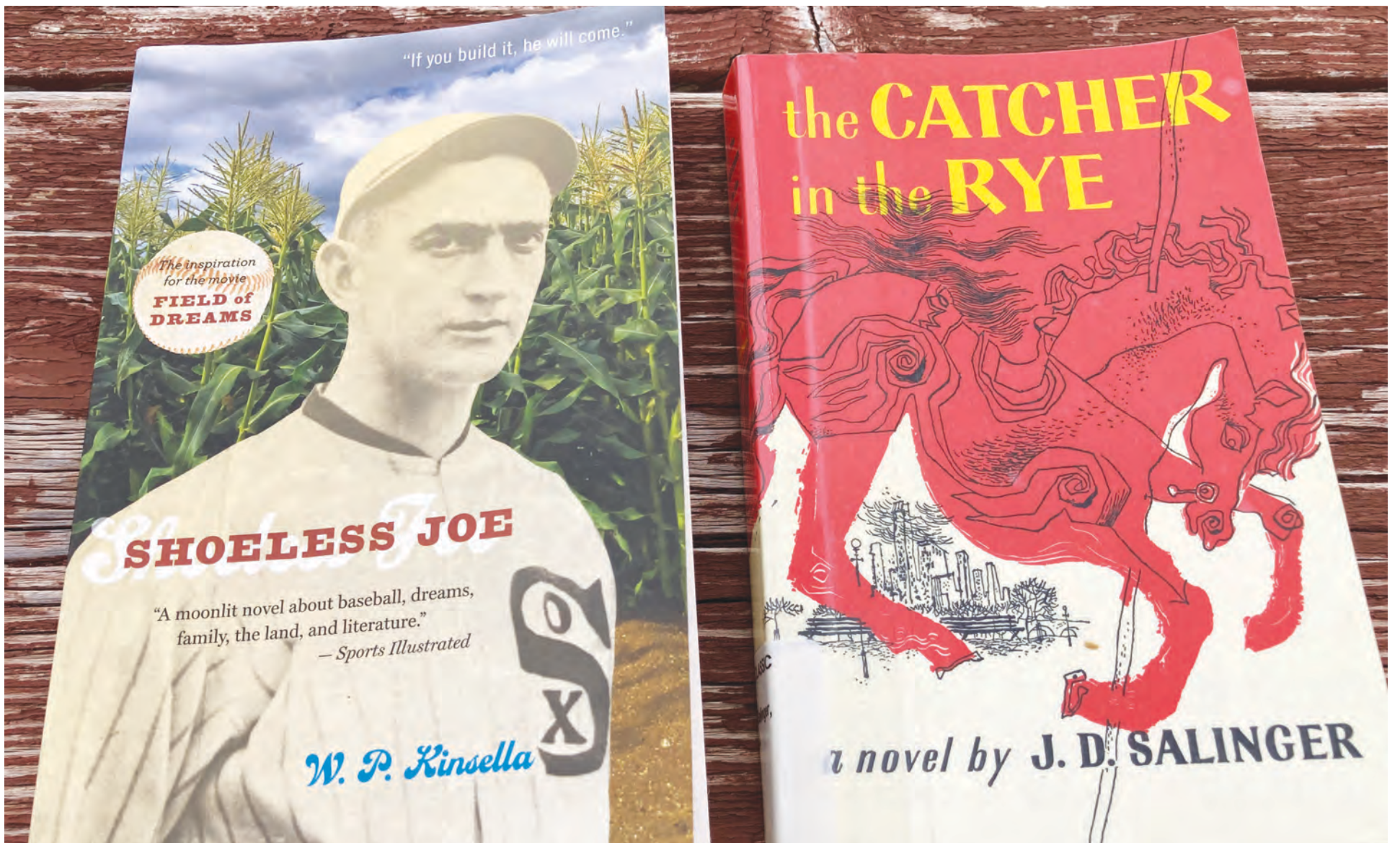
Stay safe, be well. Happy Halloween! ■



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BOOKS & SUCH



Holden Caulfield & Shoeless Joe

by Jimmy P. Morgan

As one of the most popular and relevant books from the twentieth century, *The Catcher in the Rye*'s most interesting characteristic is that the thoroughly authentic teenage angst expressed by its narrator, Holden Caulfield, has many adults continuing to scream that, three-quarters of a century on, they don't want young people reading it. Of course, it is just this type of screaming that puts the book on a young man's mind in the first place.

In more tolerant neighborhoods, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) has been an enduring staple of high school English courses and has made Holden Caulfield an iconic symbol of the teenage American male. As many teenage males will continue to attest, awakening to the realities of the human world into which we are born is often quite unpleasant. While most of the adults in Holden's world are "phonies," one old teacher helps set the young man straight. "Among other things," the mentor tells Holden, "you'll find that you're not the first person who was confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior." All who have once been a teenage American male get that one.

As to really getting to know Holden Caulfield, I have a confession to make. Perhaps it was all that moving around in my youth that I somehow missed the class which showcased *The Catcher in the Rye*; my way of admitting that I only first read the book a week ago. And, to begin explaining the title of this piece, it was Shoeless Joe Jackson of the 1919 Chicago White Sox baseball team that finally got me there; with an assist from Kevin Costner.

Many of you are familiar with *Field of Dreams* (1989) starring Costner and James Earl Jones. Costner plays a reluctant Iowa farmer, Ray Kinsella, who is struggling to pay the farm's mortgage. The corn in his field is tall, nearly time for harvest. One evening Ray hears a voice, "If you build it, he will come." Then he hears it again. A few days later, Ray begins plowing down enough corn to construct a baseball field. The only person who believes that Ray is sane is his devoted wife Annie; and, of course, all of Kevin Costner's many fans who know that, any magic in one of his films deserves the benefit of any doubt one may harbor.

Once the field is constructed, Shoeless Joe Jackson of the 1919 White Sox shows up with seven of his fellow ballplayers that were banned from the game after the 1919 World Series; accused of throwing the Series for a big payday from the real crooks. While the guilt or innocence of the eight ballplayers has been debated for more than a century, the eight guys in Kevin's ... that is, Ray's... ballpark just wanna play ball (the deeper story of these ballplayers is told in *Eight Men Out* (1988) starring John Cusack and Charlie Sheen).

When Ray hears another voice, he's off to New England to hook up with the reclusive and iconic 1960s counterculture writer Terence Mann (James Earl Jones), author of *The Boat Rocker*. They go to a Boston Red Sox game where other weird things happen. Then they end up in Minnesota where they hook up with none other than Moonlight Graham. Moonlight is another ballplayer from the early 1900s that lived in an age when they dished out really cool nicknames; and ballplayers were of a more humble variety, too.

One night in Minnesota, Ray and Moonlight visit a ballpark... under the moonlight of course... and Ray says, "A ballpark at night is more like a church than a church..." I can smell the dewy grass as I type...

Ray, Terence, and Moonlight then head back to Iowa so Ray can show his new friends that he really did build a ballpark in his cornfield.

Field of Dreams is one of those great movies that deserves re-watching once in a while, especially if you bring along one of the dozen or so people in the country who haven't seen it. And, if you want to see things a bit more up close and personal, Major League Baseball has conducted an annual Field of Dreams baseball game since 2021, Iowa corn and all.

So, how does this strange path get me to Holden Caulfield? Well, after re-watching *Field of Dreams* recently—having been prompted by those unseen algorithms that seem to know me pretty well—I recalled that, among the many personal possessions my dad left me a few years ago, were a number of baseball books. Among

them, I discovered *Shoeless Joe* (1982) by W.P. Kinsella. Hmmm? Kinsella? (If that's not enough to pique your interest, a guy named *Richard* Kinsella pops up in *The Catcher in the Rye*.)

I still haven't gotten to Holden yet, have I? Well, here it is. Remember the reclusive author Terence Mann played by James Earl Jones? It turns out that even though *Field of Dreams* has some real history baked into it, Terence Mann is a fictional character —*The Boat Rocker* is fake too—made up by Kevin and the other movie people who are familiar with these things.

When I read *Shoeless Joe*, upon which *Field of Dreams* was based, the reclusive author on the page is not Terence Mann, but rather, the very real J.D. Salinger whose *Catcher in the Rye* introduced generations of young men, and one old guy in Colorado to, you guessed it, Holden Caulfield.

As it turns out, J.D. Salinger, an iconic counterculture writer that helped birth the 1960s, and who appears to be just as reclusive as the fictional Terence Mann, got word that he was being portrayed in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*. Not wanting to be misrepresented in print, J.D. called up his lawyers to check up on W.P. However, when J.D. discovered that W.P. had done a pretty decent job with J.D., he told his lawyers to back off.

When it came time to make the movie though, the producers were on alert for the potentially litigious J.D., so they created Terence Mann; one of the great characters in cinematic history played by James Earl Jones.

Don't feel bad if you're confused because I'm right there with ya... well, not really, because I've been pondering all this for the past ten days, especially in my effort to justify a Books & Such piece titled "Holden Caulfield and Shoeless Joe." And now that you know the story, the title begins to ring a bit, don't you think?

Even with all that explained so clearly, another mystery remains: How did Shoeless Joe lose his shoes? Like many historical trivia stories such as this, the answers vary, especially depending upon whether one thinks Joe is a crook or not for throwing the 1919 World Series. I don't have an answer here for you on this point, but I will encourage you to ponder this observation from W.P. Kinsella's Ray Kinsella as he sits in the bleachers of his Iowa ballpark: "And [Joe] sat down on the tender green grass of the outfield, untied his shoes and pulled them off, peeled off his socks and stuffed them in his shoes... Then he stood up and walked a few steps, and the look on his face would have inspired soldiers and poets and pinch hitters to perform as never before."

That's beautiful writing to a reader... and magical poetry to an old guy that used to hang out in left field waiting for the ball to come his way. ■

Jimmy P. Morgan is a retired American History Teacher who writes about Politics, Social Justice, the US Constitution, Culture, Education, Baseball, Books, and more. You can find him on his deck reading or just go to his Substack for more of his musings: JimmyPMorgandayz.substack.com or email JimmyPMorganDayz@gmail.com



Tanya Starceвич
Topanga Tanya
310-739-4216
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tanyastarceвич@gmail.com
www.canyoncoastalestates.com



1437 Seventh Street Suite 250
Santa Monica, CA 90401

"Just above and beyond all expectations! Tanya is incredibly reliable, responsible, and on top of everything. This was our first rodeo — we had absolutely no idea what we were doing — and she guided us through the whole process from start to finish. Somehow she made it feel easy and calm, which is pretty amazing. Tanya answered every single question, remembered everything, genuinely cared, and was taking care of a million things at once. She clearly loves what she does and is really, really good at it. Tanya is officially our realtor forever."

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RUSTIC LODGE



2521 Topanga Skyline \$2,100,000
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JUST LEASED



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ADORABLE

OLD CANYON



1640 OLD TOPANGA \$1,995,000
2 Story - 4 Bed 3 Bath + Pool

DUPLEX W/VIEW



19639 VISION Drive \$1,675,000
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1167 Cherokee \$900,000
3 Bed 2 Bath + Garage + Yard

FOR AN HONEST OPINION AND TRUSTED GUIDANCE CALL TANYA STARCEVICH AT 310-739-4216 TODAY!



Members of the Topanga Arson Watch gather for a meeting at the Topanga Library. All of the members are neighbors who volunteer their time to help keep the canyon safe. New volunteers are always welcome. Learn more at <https://www.arsonwatch.org> Photos courtesy of Arson Watch

Arson Watch: Watching Over Topanga for 40+ Years

by Michelle Lange, Arson Watch Volunteer

For more than 40 years, Arson Watch volunteers have watched Topanga's roads during its most dangerous conditions. Much of their work happens in the short window of time before an emergency—when a blocked gate, a curl of smoke or one careless decision can change everything.

On October 15, Milton Stumpus saw black smoke and became the first to report what would be called the Bryson Fire in Malibu. As he spoke with 911, the smoke turned to visible flame. He stayed on scene until the fire crew from station 99 arrived minutes later and released him.

Milton is with the Malibu Arson Watch team and knows what fire can take: he lost his home in the Palisades Fire. On this day, he was the first to see the smoke and raise the alarm.

Another volunteer passed the same spot shortly before the fire ignited. That's why Arson Watch needs enough people on the roads for as long as possible during Red Flag and other emergency conditions. One patrol may end; the need for another set of eyes doesn't.

For more than four decades, Arson Watch volunteers have served as trained eyes and ears across the Santa Monica Mountains. The program is affiliated with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and operates under the guidance of the Lost Hills Sheriff's Station. Volunteers patrol during Red Flag conditions, communicate by radio and report hazards. They are not police officers or firefighters. Their job is to notice, assess, communicate - and know when to step back.

The name can create the wrong picture: volunteers hunting through the canyon for an arsonist. The reality is quieter and, in some ways, more complicated. A cigarette tossed from a window. A car blocking an emergency gate. Metal striking metal in dry grass. Smoke rising where no smoke should be.

Arson accounts for only a fraction of California wildfires. Many begin with equipment failures, power lines, lightning or human carelessness. Will Alford put it bluntly: "The things that we've stumbled across on our patrols are not always arson. They can be ignorance."

During the Palisades Fire, volunteers encountered a man at Dirt Mulholland preparing to set up a barbecue, eat dinner and spend the evening outside while the fire was already burning nearby. At home, lighting a grill can feel routine. In the wildlands during dangerous fire conditions, it is anything but routine.

I have seen how quickly ordinary fun can become a fire risk. During my Arson Watch training, a seasoned volunteer and I persuaded three high school students not to take fireworks onto a hiking trail. At Topanga Beach during a Red Flag Warning, I watched an engagement party release a sky lantern. Fortunately, the wind carried it over the ocean. After I explained the danger, the group apologized and put away the remaining lanterns.

There have been people cutting rebar in tall grass and others smoking in high-risk areas. Each action can look small enough to dismiss. In a dry canyon, small is how many emergencies begin.

The goal is persuasion, not confrontation. Volunteers explain the risk, ask the person to stop and report the situation through the proper channels. When something feels unsafe, they back away. Watching over the canyon does not mean pretending to have authority the volunteers do not possess.

In January 2025, the scale of the work changed. The Palisades Fire forced residents from their homes, closed roads and stretched emergency resources across several communities. For Arson Watch, a conventional patrol was no longer enough.

Will Alford and Richard Brody stepped into whatever roles the community needed. Their days included helping at road closures and with traffic flow, watching evacuated areas for signs of looting and continuing to patrol Arson Watch routes. They stayed in daily contact with local law enforcement and helped orient first responders and news crews arriving

from outside the area—people who did not know Topanga's roads, access points and neighborhoods.

They delivered water and fuel to homebound residents. They checked on pets and other animals. They met people at road closures, collected food and supplies, and carried them back to first responders.

For evacuated residents, the hardest part was often not knowing. Alford and Brody recorded daily video updates and sent group texts describing conditions in the canyon. The messages could not erase the uncertainty or bring anyone home sooner. But they gave displaced neighbors a trusted view of what was happening in the place they had been forced to leave.

None of this resembled an ordinary patrol. Yet none of it came from nowhere. It grew from the same foundation Arson Watch had spent decades building: local knowledge, established communication, relationships with law enforcement and a willingness to show up. During a disaster, that knowledge becomes a form of infrastructure.

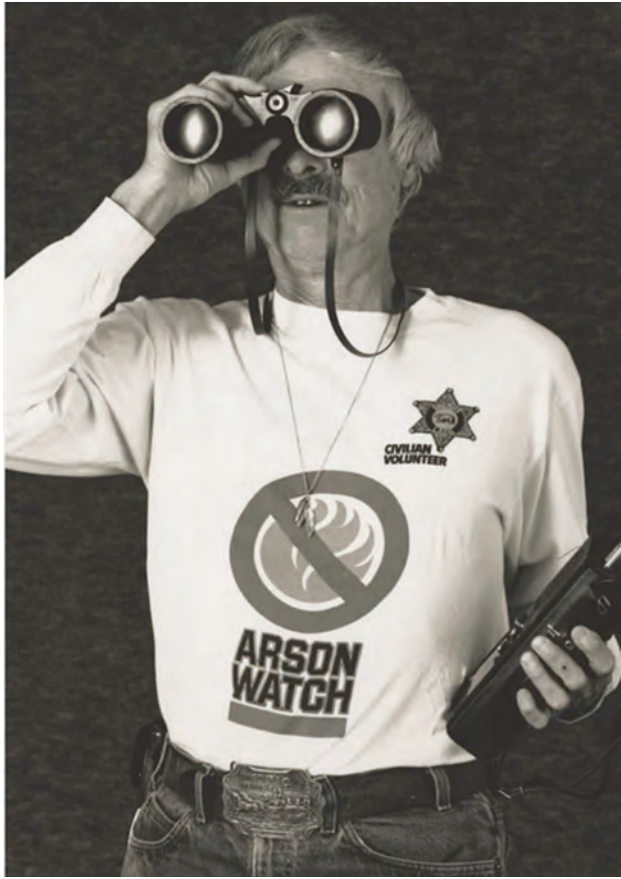
A Watch Built Over Decades

That foundation began in 1982 after an intentionally set fire in Dayton Canyon. Actor and Liberty Canyon resident Buddy Ebsen learned that the blaze had been caused by arson and joined with his daughter Cathy and Topanga resident Allen Emerson to organize neighbors.

The idea was straightforward: train local volunteers to patrol the mountain roads they knew, make their presence visible, and work alongside law enforcement to identify danger early.

Emerson turned that first burst of concern into something durable. When the Topanga Town Council asked for someone to organize the effort, he was reportedly the only person who raised his hand. He kept it raised for the next 25 years, coordinating Arson Watch until his death in 2007.

Neighbors came to know him behind the wheel of the mobile command



unit, wearing a Sheriff's Department volunteer vest and working the radio. He helped write the Topanga Disaster Survival Guide and was part of the small founding group behind what became the Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness (TCEP). The network that proved so valuable during the Palisades Fire was already taking shape.

The reasons people join have changed with each generation of volunteers, but the emotional calculation is often the same: watch from home, or find a way to help.

One Arson Watch volunteer remembers watching a fire climb a hillside toward homes she

unit, wearing a Sheriff's Department volunteer vest and working the radio. He helped write the Topanga Disaster Survival Guide and was part of the small founding group behind what became the Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness (TCEP). The network that proved so valuable during the Palisades Fire was already taking shape.

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Longtime Arson Watch volunteer Scott King posts a sign on Topanga Canyon Boulevard. Having Arson Watch volunteers on patrol in the Santa Monica Mountains helps keep everyone safer.

had never considered vulnerable. Her own home stood in an even more heavily wooded area. "I just had to be more part of the solution rather than sitting at home and watching it happen," she said.

Scott King joined in 2002 after the September 11 attacks, initially fearing that the Santa Monica Mountains could become an easy target for someone intent on starting fires. He now believes that assumption was probably wrong. The desire to protect his community remained.

"To me the transcendent threat here in the Santa Monica Mountains is fire," King said. "So I need to be doing something about keeping us all safer. Arson Watch fills that need."

The Next Watch

Arson Watch today is more structured than the organization many longtime volunteers first joined. One volunteer who leads recruitment efforts points to better-prepared meetings, shared spreadsheets and WhatsApp channels that help volunteers stay organized and connected. Friends of the Community Arson Watch and Disaster Services helps fund equipment, training and outreach.

The watch is also part of a wider preparedness network. Volunteers participate in ReadyFest and work alongside TCEP, Station 69, the Lost Hills Sheriff's Station and other emergency-preparedness, conservation and fire-safety organizations. Home hardening, defensible space and knowing how to report smoke are part of the same work: reducing risk before an emergency begins.

But the organization still faces a difficult gap between the people who support the mission and those who complete the application and training. At the time of these interviews, Topanga had 59 volunteers. The goal is 100.

Why 100? "More eyes and better coverage across our community," Riggs answered.

The number becomes meaningful on a map: no Arson Watch volunteer currently lives on Greenleaf, where a resident might spot smoke from a home, vent or nearby brush before it's visible beyond a curve or ridgeline. Since volunteers can't always be available, a strong roster helps keep key routes and high-risk posts covered when something happens. One more volunteer is not simply another name on a roster. It is another part of the canyon watched by someone who knows it.

Volunteers complete background checks and training and contribute at least 30 hours a year through patrols, meetings and community events. Red Flag activations do not arrive when the calendar is convenient. The commitment is flexible, but it is real.

Not every resident will join. They can still learn what smoke to report, why a blocked gate matters and when outdoor work can create a spark. A safer Topanga depends on more than 100 trained volunteers. It depends on thousands of people understanding that familiar activities become different choices during high wind and low humidity.

Back on that dark road at Saddle Peak and Stunt, Stateman did not put out a fire or confront a suspicious stranger. She simply stayed visible. Two neighbors slowed down and thanked her.

There is no incident report for the fire that never starts. No siren announces the moment someone changes their mind. Much of Arson Watch's value lives in that unmeasurable space.

The goal of 100 begins there: one more trained person on one more road, paying attention. In Topanga, watching over the canyon has always been work, best shared. ■



Arson Watch volunteer Michelle Lange, pauses for a photo while on patrol in the canyon. Working under the guidance of the Lost Hills Sheriff's Station, Arson Watch volunteers patrol the Santa Monica Mountain Communities during Red Flag conditions and high-risk periods, deterring risky behavior, spotting hazards early, and serving as the eyes and ears of our mountain communities

What Arson Watch Watches For

A Red Flag patrol is less about searching for an arsonist than noticing everyday activity that could become dangerous:

Smoke where it should not be—whether from brush, a campfire, barbecue, chimney or fireworks

Smoking or cigarettes tossed from vehicles

Weed trimming, metal cutting or other work that can create sparks

Vehicles parked in dry grass, where a hot muffler could ignite vegetation

Cars blocking trailheads, emergency gates or access roads

Overgrown brush and other visible fire hazards on public land

Activity that appears unusual for the location or dangerous under current conditions

Volunteers observe, document and report. They are not law enforcement officers or firefighters, and personal safety comes first.

What Our Community Can Do

You do not have to join Arson Watch to help protect the canyon.

During Red Flag conditions, rethink ordinary activities. Avoid fireworks, outdoor flames and work that can create sparks near dry vegetation.

Keep emergency access clear. Do not block trailhead gates, fire roads or other access points.

Report smoke early. If you see or smell smoke, call 911. Give the clearest location you can and describe what you see.

Notice without confronting. If someone's behavior appears dangerous, prioritize your own safety and contact the appropriate authorities.

Harden your home. Maintain defensible space, reduce combustible material near structures and keep emergency information current.

Consider joining Arson Watch. Volunteers complete an application, background checks and training, then contribute at least 30 hours annually through patrols, meetings and community events.

Help grow the watch. At the time of these interviews, Topanga had 59 volunteers and a goal of 100—enough trained neighbors to provide broader coverage throughout the canyon.

Learn more or apply: arsonwatch.org



Michelle Lange has called Topanga home since 2020, sharing life in the canyon with her husband Todd, two cats, one dog, and sons who love escaping here with friends. A longtime marketer now focused on ocean tech and conservation, she volunteers with Topanga Arson Watch out of a shared love for the people, wildlife, and wonderfully quirky community that makes Topanga a place worth protecting.



The Hyperactive 82-Year-Old

by Claire Fordham

Jeff Kline driving this Silk Cut Jaguar at Le Mans in 1989 *Photo courtesy of Jeff Kline*

Claire Fordham interviews retired race driver Jeff Kline

Whatever Jeff Kline turns his hand to, he does it brilliantly. He's been a phenomenally successful businessman and salesman, but it's as a racing driver and husband that Jeff has truly excelled. Buckle up for a story of speed, success, resilience, and true love.



Retired racing driver Jeff Kline. *Photo by Claire Fordham*

In his helmet-wearing heyday, Jeff won twice at the infamous Daytona 24 hour race, in 1981 driving a Porsche and in 1987 driving a Factory Pontiac Spice GTPL, secured three class wins at the legendary 12 Hours of Sebring race, and competed in the 1989 24 Hours of Le Mans driving for TWR Silk Cut Jaguar.

Jeff dominated the Sports Car Club of America Nationals between 1966 and 1978, winning 87 races. Jeff also won four pro races at Elkhart Lake Wisconsin, one of the world's fastest permanent road racing tracks. He won 19 professional races all over the USA.

Cheering Jeff on was his high school sweetheart and now wife of almost 60 years, Judy—who did take some time off from supporting Jeff to raise their daughter, Morgen, and study to be a therapist. After qualifying, Judy spent 22 years as the clinical director at a school for children with behavioral problems. So, no slouch herself.

Born in 1944 in the small steel mill town of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Jeff Kline says he was kind of a juvenile delinquent. "I didn't break any laws, but I was kind of uncontrollable as a child. I think I'm ADHD or whatever it's called. I'm very action-oriented, high-energy. I absorb information quickly. Judy calls me a recovering hyperactive child. But in those days, when I was 14, my parents thought the best course of action was to send me away to the Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

"My dad was probably going through a mid-life crisis because, in 1957, when he was 42, he bought a 1957 Karmann Ghia. So when I wanted to go somewhere I couldn't walk to, I'd borrow the car. Mostly with permission, but if it was the middle of the night, I would push it around the corner before starting the engine.

"I would go to open fields and drive my dad's Karmann Ghia sideways, spin around. It was fun and I realized I could control the car doing it. But, you know, saying you want to be a race driver is like saying you want to be an

actor. You have to fight your way to the front of the group, because everyone, every kid, wanted to be a race car driver. You need money to be a racing driver and I didn't have any. But I was a hustler and I strategically befriended the right people. I was willing to do the grunt work to get myself there."

In McKeesport where Jeff grew up, his school pal Mitchell had wealthy parents and they bought him a brand-new Corvette. "Mitch wanted to race it, so I would go with him and help him repair the car."

Jeff hated it at the military academy and asked to come home, but his father refused. "So I left on my own, aged 15, and took a bus to an old school friend who was at college in Pennsylvania.

"When I woke up in the morning, my dad was standing over me, very aggravated. He wanted me to go back, but I wouldn't. So I went to public school for a year and a half, and then we moved to West Los Angeles in 1961 - the day before my senior year in high school, aged 17."

University High School is where Jeff met Judy "the most beautiful girl in the school." And they've been together ever since. The couple married when Jeff was 22 and Judy was 21.

"While I was at the military academy," said Jeff, "my roommate's father had a Jaguar and my roommate used to talk about this car all the time. Because my family home was 300 miles away, I would go to my friend's house for weekends. One of his neighbors raced Porsches. This was around 1959, 1960. We'd look at the cars and I found them really interesting," said Jeff, who (unsurprisingly) got his driver's license at 16.

Shortly after the family moved to LA, Jeff's dad needed a new car. "I talked him into getting a used Austin Healey. I don't know what he paid for it. But the first time he drove it when it rained, he got drenched because it had side curtains instead of windows. That was enough for him and he gave the car to me."

Finally old enough to get a racing license (the minimum age was 21), Jeff's first race was in the Austin Healey. "I have no idea where I came, but I know I broke the transmission shifting into first gear. My first real race was in 1966 driving a Lotus I bought while on active duty for the National Guard."

The Austin Healey broke down often. "I took it to a repair shop in West LA, right near University High School, kind of halfway between school and Judy's home. The people who worked there had race cars, so I started coming back and asking if I could clean parts, do this or that. I was persistent enough that they accepted me. I no longer had to pay for repairs on my Austin Healey and I was around race cars."

Jeff and Judy went to races as spectators. One of their first dates was to a race at Dodger Stadium. Judy had to hide in the Austin Healey to get in as Jeff couldn't afford the entry fee. "I'd watch and take it all in," said Jeff. When he sold the Austin Healey, Jeff bought a Mini Cooper and began competing in that. "Sometimes it would just be cones in a parking lot."

Jeff recognizes that reliability is more important in a race car than speed (the old racers' maxim is: to finish first, first you have to finish). His favorite car to race was a Pontiac Spice, a General Motors factory run car. "I drove fast and I drove skillfully. I set 15 lap records, 13 pole positions and six wins in that Pontiac Spice in 1987—all over the United States."

According to Jeff, part of being a good racing driver is anticipating danger from other drivers. Did he ever crash badly? "Less than three or four probably in all my career. But I did crash at Daytona once. It was kind of humorous. There were two similar cars in front of me, both GTP car—800 horsepower, 1800 pounds. We were all passing a guy in a different,

lower class. The first two overtook him and he didn't realize there was a third coming (me) and he turned in on me and I hit a wall.

The nose came off and sailed 100 feet in the air and disintegrated right in front of me as it landed. Scared the living daylights out of me. My parents were at an amateur race where I flipped over in an Alpha in 1969. They never came to watch me again."

Judy never wavered in her support of Jeff's racing career. She was usually there on Sunday race day, but avoided the track until then, choosing to spend her time studying and exploring until the actual event.

"I never really worried about the danger," said Judy and has this advice for anyone interested in the secret to their long and happy marriage. "If your spouse is passionate about something, be supportive of it."

In 2010, on a plane coming back from racing at Goodwood in England, Judy told Jeff that was her last race. "A race for me had become like spending all day in Vons parking lot," she said.

Having started racing in 1966, Jeff drove his last race at Daytona in 2000. Then he went into racing vintage cars, owned by wealthy people around the world, who paid Jeff handsomely to race their precious machines for them. "I drove probably close to a hundred of those. I was also paid expenses, so I could take Judy with me. Monaco, Goodwood (which Judy found too posh), Paris. All over."

These historic racing cars are big business. Jeff raced a 1937 Alfa Romeo Formula One car that subsequently sold for \$6M. A Ferrari he drove went for \$12M.

When Jeff raced as an amateur from 1965 to 1978, he didn't get paid, but it didn't cost him anything. "All my expenses were covered and I never spent any of my own money on racing. Most of the people I was racing against were spending their own money."



This 1937 vintage Alfa Romeo with Jeff Kline at the wheel, later sold for \$6M. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kline

Jeff drove for the works factory teams at Alfa Romeo, Mazda and Pontiac (General Motors). He drove Ferraris and Porsches for private owners. From 1979 to 1985, Jeff was part of the works' Mazda team. "From 1985 until the early '90s, when I raced for General Motors in different divisions, I did get paid really well but throughout all that time I always had a real job, even when I was earning more money annually as a race driver."

Jeff was a District Manager for Bristol Myers and developed marketing programs for them. After Bristol Myers, Jeff became a regional VP of sales and marketing for Merck (now GSK) with 180 people reporting to him. All his employers gave Jeff as much time off as he needed. He'd work Monday to Thursday, then head off to race weekends, and be home by Sunday night.

From 1985 to 2000, this extraordinarily high achiever, ran a Venture Marketing Group where he did tech consulting and created 14 tech startups. Two of them went public.

After 87 wins out of more than 200 amateur races, Jeff won 19 of his 136 professional races. "That doesn't sound like a lot, but many racing drivers never win a race. I just like to win. At the time, I was in the top five of all-time winners in the series I raced in."

While Jeff was out there clipping apexes and racking up laps, Judy was studying for her masters, raising their daughter, and taking care of the house.

In 1972, the Klines bought the land their Topanga home is built on and have lived there ever since. "We've evacuated three times," said Jeff. During the Palisades fire, they relocated to their daughter's house in Mar Vista. The upside was spending more time with Morgen, her husband, Yuji, and 16-year-old grandson Theo, a junior at Pali High.

Jeff retired from professional racing in 2001 at age 57, but continued to drive Vintage Cars professionally around the world until 2024. He retired from his consulting business and working in 2000.

Judy continued to work in her private practice in the Palisades and also as Clinical Director at a school for children with behavior problems, as well as kids on the spectrum.

After he retired, Judy got tired of Jeff being in shorts and a tee shirt all the time and only interacting with his bicycle. She said to Jeff, "you like cars, why don't you go find a job selling them rather than puttering around here everyday?"



Jeff Kline driving the 1987 Spice Pontiac GTPL in which he held 15 lap records, 13 poles and six wins including the GTPL Class at Daytona 24. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kline

Jeff went to Bob Smith BMW assuming they would never hire a 60-year-old, but they did. "My computer experience got me the job as internet manager," said Jeff.

"By year two, I was #42 out of 4200 sales people in the USA. I retired from Bob Smith as the Internet Sales Director in 2013 at 69 - one month shy of 70. I continued to go back weekly to train salesmen and managers until Covid in 2020."

Judy suffered a broken necrotic hip, which was misdiagnosed in 2018. After a second opinion, she had a hip replacement in September, 2019. That hip replacement exacerbated her already present fibromyalgia and Jeff became Judy's caregiver.

Jeff still loves cars. He's owned 20 Porsches and eight BMW M3s. He currently drives a BMW X3 SUV as it accommodates Judy's wheelchair easily. It's also good for transporting Jeff's bicycles. "I cycle 8,000 miles a year," said Jeff. "I either run or cycle every day."

Even at 82, Jeff is still fit. Which is why he was cycling again just two months after a recent knee replacement. "The doctor said he's never seen anyone of any age recover from a knee replacement as quickly as I did."

Does he eat a healthy diet? Once Jeff and Judy had stopped laughing at that question, Jeff said, "I like hot dogs. Or tuna. One meal a day. I make healthy food for Judy."

Jeff learned to cook so he can make meals for his wife. "He's wonderful," said Judy. Before illness struck, the couple would run 10K races together.

Jeff is always busy. He fixes and makes things in his garage. The Klines' favorite pastime these days is to watch Formula One Grand Prix racing on TV. Lewis Hamilton is their favorite driver. And they love the Netflix F1 documentary series *Drive to Survive*. In December, Jeff and Judy will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. After all they've been through, they're still very much together. And still laughing. ■



Jeff and Judy Kline in Riverside, 1987. Photo courtesy of Jeff and Judy Kline.

Claire Fordham is a British Transplant to Topanga. She has worked for the BBC, ITN and SKY News as a reporter, and wrote a weekly column for Britain's biggest selling newspaper, *The Sun*. Claire has written and published two books and helps other people write their memoirs. Claire is delighted to come full circle and write for her local publication. Telling other peoples' stories is her favorite way to write.

GOODLIVING

Pumpkin Spice Blondies

by Nathalie Krull

Chickpeas may seem an unlikely ingredient in a decadent dessert, but this fiber-and-protein-packed legume disappears into this chewy, satisfying sweet, giving it a nutritional boost without sacrificing flavor or texture. Pumpkin Spice Chickpea Blondies are perfect for a potentially rainy Halloween weekend. It's a delicious and versatile recipe that can be dressed up with toppings or enjoyed as a dessert, snack, or even as a breakfast treat. *Photos by Nathalie Krull*



These pumpkin spice chickpea blondies are soft and fudgy, and packed with warm autumn flavors. Made with wholesome ingredients like protein-rich chickpeas, creamy almond butter, and pumpkin puree, this better-for-you treat delivers the cozy taste of fall with a sneaky boost of fiber.

They are wonderfully moist, naturally gluten free, vegan, and easy to whip up in just a food processor. Top them with your favorites... chocolate chips, walnuts, pecans, sprinkle with cinnamon, or vanilla sugar. I haven't tried it, but if you want to boost the protein even more, you could try adding a scoop or two of vanilla protein powder to the batter before you cook them. Get creative!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup pumpkin puree
- 1/2 cup almond flour
- 1/2 cup old fashioned oats
- 1 can 15.5 ounces of chickpeas (garbanzo beans) rinsed and drained



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1/3 cup maple syrup, or sweetener of your choice
1/2 cup almond butter, or another nut butter of your choice
5 medjool dates-optional
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon pumpkin spice
1 teaspoon powdered ginger. optional
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
Optional toppings: chocolate chips, walnuts, pecans, extra cinnamon, vanilla sugar, or anything else you can think up.

Pumpkin Spice Time...

This recipe is so simple. Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees. Put the oats in the food processor first, and blend until they turn into oat powder. Next, add all the additional ingredients—pumpkin puree, almond flour, chickpeas, maple syrup, almond butter, dates, baking powder, pumpkin spice, ginger powder, vanilla extract, and salt—to the food processor with the oats, and blend until everything is well combined, and smooth.

Prepare a baking dish by greasing it with coconut oil. Pour in the batter, and smooth it out evenly. Sprinkle the top with your toppings. Place in the preheated oven and bake for 40-50 minutes. The edges should turn a golden brown, and the center should be firm. Allow to cool before slicing. Best if stored in the fridge for up to 5 days, or you can freeze them for up to 3 months. Bring these blondies out at your next autumn gathering, or keep a batch tucked away in the fridge for a wholesome, ready-made afternoon treat. They pair perfectly with a cold glass of plant-based milk, a scoop of vanilla ice cream, or a cup of morning coffee. Pack them into lunchboxes for a midday protein boost, or save them for a guilt-free late night bite that delivers all the comfort of fall baking without any of the heavy sugar crash. Slice them up, share them with friends, and see if anyone can guess that a simple can of chickpeas created such a decadent treat. Wishing you good health, and good luck on all of your cooking adventures. ■

Nathalie Krull homeschooled her children with other families in Topanga and has built her reputation over the years as a skilled and adventurous kitchen wizard. She is a holistic health coach, certified by the Institute of Integrated Nutrition. She approaches food as one part of a whole system approach to wellness. Reach her at nathalie@groundedwellness.net

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Harter Hall's Second Act

by Andrea Alegria

Built in the 1940s during the San Fernando Valley's post-war building boom, Harter Hall at Woodland Hills Community Church has a rich history—Martin Luther King, Jr. gave two sermons at the church in 1961—and fabulous Mid-Century architectural bones, hidden under tired paint and musty old carpet. Musician Gerrit Kinkel saw potential in the old building for something amazing: a vibrant space for live music, arts, culture, education and community.. *Photos by Emily Sue*

How two musicians and a community of volunteers brought an overlooked Woodland Hills landmark back to life.

So much history. So much potential. Yet there it sat, an empty stage in an 80-year-old building, its aging walls in desperate need of a coat of paint, and its floors covered in a musty, stained brown carpet.

The space called out to Gerrit Kinkel like an unfulfilled promise of something great. In his mind, he could already see his jazz band playing there. He could picture the dimly lit, cozy, and elegant room buzzing with cocktail-sipping guests dressed to the nines, while the brightly lit stage came alive against the dark curtain drapes, filling the room with vibrant sound.

For years, every time he was there on the campus of the Woodland Hills Community Church where his kids attended nursery school, Kinkel's thoughts would wander to the hall and its possibilities. An accomplished musician with three Grammys under his belt, he grew up playing in a brass band in Austria, where music and community were deeply intertwined. He longed to recreate that sense of connection—a place where you might bump into your neighbors, hear great music and experience something special without the special-occasion price tag.



Gerrit Kinkel met fellow musician Wayne Wilkins at Woodland Hills Community Church. The two men worked together to transform the disused hall into a jewel of a space, ready to welcome the community.

But it wasn't until Kinkel met fellow musician Wayne Wilkins at a church event last year that all that imagining turned into action. Wilkins, a classically trained pianist, producer and composer of many hits including Natasha Bedingfield's "These Words," had been a member of the church for 15 years. He had been building musical programming there, including an open-mic night called Thursday Night Live. Kinkel first encountered Wilkins working behind the scenes at one of those events—setting up microphones, helping the performers, playing the piano to accompany their songs—and he recognized something familiar.

"He's somebody like me!" he said. "I saw how hard he worked. He had that attitude, of going above and beyond. He was always trying to lift everything and everybody up."

The two hit it off and bonded over their shared goal of turning that hall space into something great. Their idea quickly grew into a grassroots effort to transform the aging building called Harter Hall into an intimate, affordable home for live music, family programming and community events.

The transformation began with air conditioning, funded in part through a combination of grant money and a contribution from a church member. Then new flooring was installed, in part through proceeds from one of Wilkins' concerts. Next came lighting, sound, curtains, new paint, new fixtures and a host of other improvements, funded by roughly \$30K raised from a group of six community members, inspired by Kinkel and Wilkins' vision.

There was no architect or interior designer. No sweeping demolition or rebuild. Instead, the project relied on the creativity, expertise and generosity of community volunteers who were willing to roll up their sleeves to make theW pair's vision a reality. One person sourced new curtains that would line the stage and walls directly from a manufacturer, securing a deeply discounted rate. The curtains would give the room a cozy, intimate feel and also soundproof the space. Another volunteer figured out how to set up an entirely new stage-lighting system for less than \$5,000. A community member with an engineering background designed custom brackets for the lights including the room's signature five-foot chandelier.

Both Kinkel and Wilkins spent countless hours, scraping, sanding, painting and tinkering in the space to get it ready. One of their first projects became symbolic of the entire transformation: restoring the front door.

"We stood there looking at it and thinking, 'What can we do with this door?'" Kinkel recalled. The large entrance door was painted a pale, washed-out green that did not fit the new aesthetic they envisioned for the hall. "And then we just said, 'Okay, let's just see what's underneath.'"

So they started chipping away at the paint.

"Once you take the knife and you start chipping, you can't go back. You just have to keep going," Kinkel said. "And then it's a question of, can you? I mean, do you have the muscle?"

Wayne recalls standing there with a heat gun against the door for two days, stripping layer after layer of paint.

"It was so hard, there were so many coats of paint! People would come up to us and say, 'What have you guys just done?'" Wilkins recalled. "Because once we started, the door looked much worse than it did before. I think people were thinking, 'These guys obviously don't know what they're doing.'"

But beneath all those layers, they discovered something worth saving: beautiful solid wood and striking brass brackets that had also been painted over.



Harter Hall hosts an intimate live jazz concert. Upcoming events include an evening of sophisticated live jazz with the Miles Davis Sextet, and a children's concert with harpist Alison Bjorkedal, who welcomes all ages for a morning of magical harp music and fairytales. <https://www.harterhall.org/>

"We just had to keep chipping and chipping away until that was restored," Kinkel said. "And it takes time and it takes effort. And it takes multiple people going at it because, by yourself, you just think, 'This is never ending.'"

That idea of finding the beauty underneath came to define their entire project. As they peeled back the layers, they began uncovering the history of the place itself.

Harter Hall has a rich history, deeply entwined with the development of the San Fernando Valley. In the 1940's, Rev. Ellsworth Smith—who is said to have founded 101 Christian congregations during his pastoral career—started the effort to build a community center on four lots on the corner of Canoga Avenue and Dumetz Road.

The buildings that eventually took shape, including Harter Hall, are notable examples of mid-century modern design and represent an important chapter in the Valley's post-war community development.

In the following decade, the campus became part of a community being reshaped by the rapid growth of the aerospace industry. Many of the families who lived in and around the area were connected to Rocketdyne, one of several manufacturers in the area serving the Defense Department and employing more than 1,000 people. The company would become best known for its work developing and testing the F-1 engine, which powered the Saturn V during the Apollo missions.

Rocketdyne's presence helped drive an influx of families into the Valley in the 1950s. As industry expanded, the landscape changed with it - small residential lots and agricultural fields gave way to suburban neighborhoods, schools, churches, and commercial centers.

For more than 80 years, Harter Hall and the campus have served as a gathering place for the community. Boy Scout troops have met there. So has the Woodland Hills Chamber of Commerce. More than 15 recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous have used the space, along with the church's nursery school. A local community theater company also uses the hall regularly.

And the site holds an even deeper space in Los Angeles history.

On January 15, 1961, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave two sermons at the Woodland Hills Community Church. He was invited by the Reverend Fred Doty to speak on racial equality, in what became one of King's first visits to the Los Angeles area.

At the time, King's visit was particularly significant. The surrounding community was overwhelmingly white, and discriminatory housing practices remained widespread.

More than six decades later, that history remains embedded in the walls of Harter Hall, a place that has spent generations serving as a gathering point for people, ideas and community.

"It's about creating the environment for people to connect," Kinkel said. "Like everything in life, the environment you're in is everything."

Finally, after months of hard work, on Saturday night, September 21, Kinkel and Wilkins stood on the stage of a transformed Harter Hall, welcoming guests to the first event following the renovation. The room had been reimagined as an intimate, cabaret-style venue. Guests in cocktail attire sipped craft cocktails at small round tables illuminated by tiny table lamps, all beneath the impressive chandelier. The dark curtains washed in green light gave the space the cozy, sophisticated vibe of a hidden speakeasy.

Then the music began. Kinkel took the stage with his Jazz Symposium band, playing the trumpet, alongside sax, flute, piano, bass

and drums. Vocalist Charlotte Gibson brought the room to life with a performance that celebrated two landmark jazz albums: Sarah Vaughan with Clifford Brown and Clifford Brown and Max Roach.

"Knowing Harter Hall as long as I have, it was amazing to see it transformed," said Emily Sue, who volunteered to photograph the event with her business partner Sarah Vinson. Sue has attended countless events at Harter Hall over the past 12 years, both through the church and the nursery school that her kids attended.

During the three years she served as moderator of the church leadership—and continuing today as a member of the leadership team—she has advocated for making the church campus more accessible to the broader community.

"It was very well put together," she said of the renovation. "Every detail was very intentional. It made the event feel very elevated."

The community's contribution to the transformation extended to her own family. Her

husband, Todd, used his engineering skills to design and 3D print a mechanism that allows the curtains to be flipped—revealing either their black or white side.

"It was fantastic! Like being transported back to the 1950s in a speakeasy," said Feisser Stone, founder of Barlingual, a full bar events and catering company, deeply connected to the Topanga community.

Stone, who knows Kinkel through their Topanga social circles, ran the bar that night. "I created the bar menu to have a feel of the Roaring '20s, and to give it a little bit of a jazz sass too," Stone said.

The concert was sold out - a fitting debut for a room that had been brought back to life not through major reconstruction, but through the vision, determination and collective effort of the people who believed there was something worth saving underneath.

Wilkins also plans to bring his own concert to the hall, although a date has not been set yet. Unlike Kinkel's jazz performances, Wilkins is envisioning an experience that incorporates large screens projecting images throughout Harter Hall, creating a more immersive combination of live classical music and visual storytelling.

Now that the space can provide a reliable, quality and intimate setting for live performances, the pair is excited to draw on their network of artists and begin curating programming specifically for the community.

"From children's programming, to art exhibitions, to immersive experiences... we really want to create value, and build trust among the community, so they know that when they come here, that they will see quality," Kinkel said, explaining that Harter Hall will be home to much more than his jazz concerts. He's especially excited about the upcoming family programming.

"Once a month the space will host a Family Series on Saturday mornings to provide kids and families highly curated musical experiences, meant to introduce young audiences to music through the lens of culture and storytelling," he said.

The first family event, *Flower Songs of Meso America*, featuring Christopher Garcia & Family, introduced children to extraordinary Indigenous instruments through music, storytelling, and hands-on discovery.

Kinkel explained that internationally acclaimed multi-instrumentalist and educator Christopher García has spent more than three decades traveling the world, performing, composing and studying with master musicians across five continents. Alongside his wife and daughter, he will take families on a musical journey through the sounds, stories and traditions of the Indigenous peoples of North America and Mesoamerica.

"His passion is sharing the remarkable voices of traditional instruments—from carved wooden drums and ancient flutes to shell trumpets, rattles and instruments many children may never have seen or heard before," he said.

At \$20 per adult, with young children admitted free, Kinkel and Wilkins hope to build a regular audience of parents looking to give their kids a more elevated musical experience - one that comes in an equally special setting.

"We just want to bring people in, bring people together, through amazing music and art experiences," Wilkins said. "This is about creating community." ■

Andrea Alegria is a mom, writer, and Topanga local with a love for the stories, characters, and hidden histories that give her community its soul.

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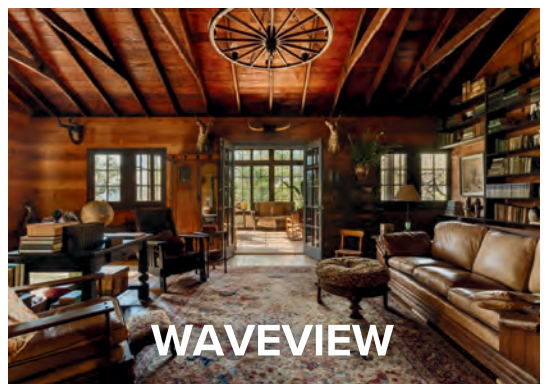
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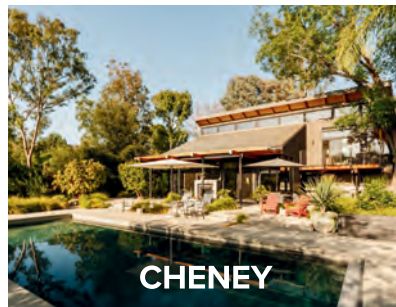
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