

Check out our **BIG**  
Holiday Gift Section  
Starts on B1

# CLAYTON PIONEER

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**BILL WALCUTT**  
**MAYOR'S CORNER**

*Proud moments  
from the mayor*

I know you are going to be disappointed, but I have to say it: This is my last Mayor's Column. By the time this Pioneer comes out, Clayton will have a new mayor and vice mayor and the Golden Gavel and the Magic Writing Pen will have been passed on to the new mayor. It is hard to believe that it has been 12 months and 24 Mayor's Corner's since I took over as mayor.

I will bet that you thought I was writing this column. Well, I hate to admit this, but it was the Magic Writing Pen that was doing the writing. In order to keep these columns short, each new mayor is given a limited supply of ink that must last all year – and mine is about to run dry.

It was an honor serving you as mayor. What a great year for our little city. I feel lucky that I had the opportunity to serve as mayor at a time when so many of the projects we have all been working on for so long came together.

It was also a pleasure working with city staff. We are

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For  
Home  
Decorating  
and  
Cookie Contest  
Entry Forms

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## Clayton lights up for the holidays



Tamara Steiner/Clayton Pioneer

**AFTER LEADING THE CROWD** in an off-key but spirited version of "Jingle Bells," Mayor Bill Walcutt and Santa Claus began the countdown to the magic moment when the city's Christmas tree lit up to a chorus of oohs and aahs from the crowd.

TAMARA STEINER  
Clayton Pioneer

It's official. The holidays have arrived in Clayton.

The annual CBCA sponsored Tree Lighting Celebration downtown kicked off in style last Saturday with a short concert by the Mt. Diablo Elementary School Chorus at the Museum.

Led by director Michael Hanna, the kids opened their three song performance with the sweet sound of "Silver Bells," followed by the brisk and difficult "Sleigh Ride" and closing with a rousing rendition of "Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer."

Santa then appeared from inside the museum, announcing to a very happy crowd of children "I did not see one Clayton kid's name on the naughty list this year." Santa and Mayor Bill Walcutt then led the crowd in the traditional march down Main Street to the town tree.

Clayton Community Church once again provided free cider and donut holes to the crowd.

Even Moresi's Chophouse got into the spirit with an outdoor bar serving coffee and hot chocolate – both kids and adult versions.

## Winemaker starts with a dream – and finds success

Clayton resident  
Sterling Albert  
earns accolades

ANDRÉ GENSBURGER  
Clayton Pioneer

Sterling Albert is a winemaker with a mission; he will not settle for anything less than the best. The Clayton resident, who owns and operates Sterling Albert Winery in Concord, knows that the competition is fierce and the business is not for those without knowledge, experience and an innate sense of the faith underlying the whole process.

And he does this without pretension. He loves the art and the business of making wine.

"Wine is made in the vineyard," Albert said, searching for a way to explain the instinctual,

almost maternal nurturing of the vine that requires a decent scientific foundation, as well as a passion for the organics involved.

"It's soothing to the soul," he added. "Nurturing plants is a lot of hard work. There are many decisions you make and they all affect the product."

He uses grapes grown in various wine countries, selected to a standard that he acknowledges is "strict." He uses nothing but "an almost pure organic compost," not wanting to eliminate the need to protect the crops with fungicides where necessary.

"Only the best grapes get picked," he explained, "yet nothing goes to waste." The rest of the grapes are sold to other wineries or winemakers. The grapes aren't defective – just not up to his standard. He knows the flavor profiles he wants for his wines.

### HIGH-END PROCESS

Albert will not compromise on his standards. This same way of thinking can be found in his

choice of equipment: high-end stainless steel fermenters and pressers from Germany, designed for functionality and

not aesthetics. All this can be found in his 3-year-old, 5,000 sq. ft. location in an industrial park on Mason Circle in Concord.

Albert custom-designs wine tanks, with a storage side and a fermentation side allowing for

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André Gensburger/Clayton Pioneer

**CLAYTON WINEMAKER** Sterling Albert stands by the fermenting vats in his Concord winery.

## Planning Commission approves TCSP amendment deleting meeting halls

TAMARA STEINER  
Clayton Pioneer

The Nov. 20 Planning Commission meeting was once again standing room only when nearly 100 Claytonians crowded into the Library Community Room for a public hearing on some proposed changes to the Town Center Specific Plan (TCSP).

Up before the commission for approval was an amendment

to the Land Use Chapter of the TCSP, deleting meeting halls and places of assembly, which would include churches, from the permitted land uses in the Town Center. With a use permit, these uses would be allowed in all other areas of the city.

The TCSP calls for two story commercial buildings in the commercially zoned Town Center. The city wants to eliminate such uses as meeting halls, theaters, and bowling alleys in

order to encourage an unbroken row of retail shops.

During the public hearing, Shawn Robinson, pastor of Clayton Community Church (CCC), announced that the church had closed escrow that morning on the 1.66 acre parcel next to their offices in the old Pioneer Inn building on Main Street. This brings the church's downtown holdings to 2.16 acres.

CCC wants to build a two-building complex with a worship

center and community theater in one building and offices and classrooms in the other. To conform to land use requirements in the Town Center, they have indicated that they may dedicate some of the ground floor in the office building to retail use.

According to Robinson, the church was relying on the un-amended land use chapter of the TCSP, which included meeting halls and places of assembly on

A series of delays has pushed back the opening of The Grove to Jan. 12, announced Project Manager John Croswhite at the Nov. 20 City Council meeting. Right up until then, Croswhite maintained that the park would be finished in time for the tree lighting on Dec. 1.

Some of the delays were caused by change orders requested by the city, said Councilmember Dave Shuey. Products were late in getting shipped and timelines were underestimated, he explained.

It took several days longer than planned to remove the trees along Marsh Creek Road, and difficulty in getting the prefabricated restroom building shipped from Reno added more time.

"It wasn't any one thing," said Councilmember Julie

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