

# On building tradition

Hello again. As I sat in the Grand Theatre Center for the Arts on Friday night listening to "A New Orleans Christmas with Jeff Bordes and Friends," two things occurred to me: Jeff and his friends put on a REALLY fun show and I might be watching the start of another Tracy tradition.

Now, as most of you might know, I grew up in Tracy. So I am aware of many traditions past and present. Homecoming parades. Santa in that cool, pointy hut. Fourth of July fireworks in the park. I have seen them through the eyes of a child and those of an adult.

But it occurred to me that outside of the Tracy Dry Bean Festival, which no longer exists,

I don't know if I've seen the birth of another tradition. For those of you new to the city, I posit the following: Traditions are the only way Tracy goes from the place you commute from every day to your hometown.



**INSIDE INFO**  
MICHAEL ELLIS LANGLEY

Families form their own traditions and a group of neighbors may form another layer with annual parties. But you believe Tracy is your hometown when you look forward to something every year.

You don't have to involve yourself in local politics or service organizations — though I hope you will — to make Tracy yours. When it comes to forming traditions both in your family and for our whole community, you just have to show up. If you stand

shoulder to shoulder with fellow residents you have never met to watch Santa light a tree at the Downtown Plaza, you are doing something for the whole town. You are creating a sense of shared community and bringing us all closer together.

Jeff created an amazing show with internationally renowned keyboardist Don Lewis, Tracy native and singer Victoria Matthews, local guitarist and owner of Main Street Music Ken Cefalo, saxophonist Isaiah Collier, Mike Rinta on trombone, bassist Andrew Currier and drummer Darius Minaee.

I hope to see them again next year. I hope to see you sitting down the row from me at the Grand.

■ Ask editor Michael Ellis Langley a question about Tracy, journalism or the Tracy Press at [mlangley@tracypress.com](mailto:mlangley@tracypress.com) or 830-4231.

## YOUR VOICE

### Site 300 oversight too important to lose

EDITOR,

Are you familiar with the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board?

The Center of Public Integrity discovered DNFBSB's own chairman, Sean Sullivan, proposed to eliminate the group in a private letter to the White House dated back in June of this year.

Congress chartered this board to prevent safety hazards for workers exposed to radioactive and toxic materials at nuclear testing facilities and to protect the communities and environment surrounding them.

I don't understand why they would eliminate a group that watches over facilities like Site 300, located on Corral Hollow just down the street from the Carnegie vehicular recreation park. They were the only independent group giving advice and recommendations to ensure safety.

Now only those that have a direct financial or political stake in the success of the lab will be left. I can only hope that it doesn't compromise our community's safety.

Elizabeth Forrest, Tracy

# Sponsor a wreath to honor a veteran

Have you heard about Wreaths Across America? This national program, which takes place every December, honors and remembers veterans by placing Christmas wreaths on their graves.

Wreaths Across America was originally started in 1992 by Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Co. of Harrington, Maine, who placed Christmas wreaths on veterans' graves in Arlington National Cemetery.

Although Wreaths Across America has taken place annually for more than two decades now in communities across the nation, the program only made its debut here four years ago thanks to a handful of local Gold Star Mothers.

"I got involved because my son is buried in the Little Arlington section of our cemetery and I wanted to get him a wreath," said Tracy resident Julia Conover, whose son Lance Cpl. Brandon C. Dewey was killed while serving in Iraq in 2006. "I know I can't do anything for Brandon like buy him Christmas presents, but I can buy him a wreath and honor him along with the other veterans."

Conover recruited other local Gold Star Mothers to help in this endeavor, including Jan Martinez and Loretta Bridges. Martinez's son Pfc. Jesse J. Martinez was killed while serving in Iraq in 2004 and is

buried in the same row as Dewey.

"This event helps because you know there is a lot of support behind you," Martinez said. "Wreaths Across America supports the veterans that served and sacrificed for our country. I do this for my son and to give back to our veterans."

She said people can sponsor a wreath through Wreaths Across America for \$15, and \$5 of that amount goes to directly the local group to buy more wreaths. "We are very committed to this program."

"Even though my son isn't buried in Tracy, it still means a lot to be able to go out and honor all our veterans," said Bridges, whose son Staff Sgt. Steven Bridges was killed while serving in Iraq in 2003 and was laid to rest in a national cemetery in Washington state. "To see how this community comes together each December to do this, it warms my heart. Every year this event grows. People are often surprised at how many veterans we have in our cemetery and how far back they date. I am so appreciative for everyone that helps with this."

I remember that first event back in December of 2014, with only a small crowd gathered and about 200 wreaths to go around. I knew from that experience that I would be back the following year.

A little over 2,000 veterans are buried in Tracy Cemetery, and some of those graves date back more than a century.

This is the biggest year for the local Wreaths Across America effort since it started four years ago. There are now more than 1,200 wreaths to go around.



Press file photo

The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. Dec. 16 at the Tracy Cemetery, 501 E. Schulte Road.

The San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery will also have a Wreaths Across America event the same day at 9 a.m. at 32053 W. McCabe Road in Santa Nella.

I don't know if it's the solemn nature of the event in conjunction with the winter weather or something entirely different that brings home the reality of how this program pays tribute to our departed service members and the many sacrifices made.

■ Anne Marie Fuller is the president of the James McDermott Unit 172 American Legion Auxiliary and the chaplain of the Veteran of Foreign Wars Auxiliary Post 1537. She is also the vice chair of the Tracy Arts Commission and a member of the Tracy Crime Stoppers board of directors. Contact her at [annemarie@columnist.com](mailto:annemarie@columnist.com).

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The Tracy Press is published Fridays at 95 W. 11th St., Ste. 101, Tracy, San Joaquin County, California. Subscription in specified delivery areas is \$52 a year.

We can also mail the Tracy Press. Mail subscriptions cost \$52 per year.

Mailing address: P.O. Box 419, Tracy, CA 95378-0419. Telephone: 835-3030, Fax: 835-0655 Email: [tpleters@tracypress.com](mailto:tpleters@tracypress.com)

Editorials reflect the opinion of the editorial board. Members are Will Fleet, Michael Ellis Langley and Samuel H. Matthews.

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All letters must include the name, address and daytime phone number of the writer. Only the name will be published.