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James Speranta:

Inner Resilience from Living a Normal Life





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Content Due	Issue Month
December 10	February
January 10	March
February 10	April
March 10	May
April 10	June
May 10	July
June 10	August
July 10	October
August 10	October
October 10	November
October 10	December
November 10	January

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Dear Fellow Monroviaans,

In your plans to prepare for Halloween, how long did you allow for pumpkin carving? If you want to break the record for pumpkin carving in the Guinness Book of World Records, you'll need to do it in 16.47 seconds. This record was set by New Yorker Stephen Clarke on October 31, 2013. He had some practice, though. Clarke set the world record for carving a ton of pumpkins – 3 hours, 33 minutes, and 49 seconds – in 2008. Maybe Clarke's speed will inspire you to carve not just one, but two or three pumpkins.

If you're not already inspired by learning about Clarke's pumpkin carving world record, you'll certainly be inspired by our cover story. We're following up on our June 2019 cover story about the Speranta family and James Speranta's cancer treatment journey. We celebrate with James and his family as he rings the bell, signaling his "treatment is done, this course is run." In other articles, our experts help us understand home filtration, and they share more reasons to consider a reverse mortgage. We've got the inside scoop on the commercial real estate market, and if you're in the mood for a mystery, a local author has a new book to entertain you.

Halloween allows us to give into the mystery of life and our place in it. Everyone's favorite monster, Frankenstein, penned by Mary Shelley, says, "There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand." May you have time for pumpkin carving and savoring the mysteries of this fall season.

Happy Halloween!



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James with the nurses at City of Hope

James Speranta:

Inner Resilience from Living a Normal Life

By Nan Kuhlman | Photos by Russell Hollinhurst

The Speranta family's world changed when their son James Speranta was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in 2018. Monrovia Living chronicled the first part of James's cancer treatment at the City of Hope in the June 2019 issue. This has been a three and a half year journey that started in March of 2018, moving from the intensive phase in January 2019 to the two and half year maintenance part of the program which ended in July 2021. Though the pandemic made a difficult situation more challenging, James and the Speranta family found inner resilience by helping James continue to do what he loved with the support of the community.

James's maintenance treatment turned out to be more rigorous than he had anticipated. He continued to have weekly chemo treatments and lumbar punctures with chemo injected into his spine, along with steroids. The side effects of these treatments were quite brutal with great physical and emotional impact. He was grateful to be able to go back to school though it did entail more

careful planning. "If anybody was sick in my class at Monrovia High School (MHS), we would be notified," James says. "I could not stay in the sun for very long so I had to be in the shade and wear a hat which made this difficult. Sometimes I would feel sick and nauseous, but Monrovia High School made accommodations for me always. However, I just wanted to be like everybody else and go to school."

James also wanted to swim and play water polo again. Initially, people were concerned for his health. "It seemed to freak people out because, at the time, I had no hair. I was bald from the treatments, and I think people were afraid that somehow getting back in the water would hurt me," James says. "Monrovia High School reached out to my parents, saying they would need a letter from City of Hope to clear me [to swim]. My parents were adamant that I hit the ground running, but this seemed to make some people uneasy at school." James's mother Nicola Speranta approached the doctors at City of Hope to obtain the necessary



permissions, and after a number of conversations, they issued a letter to MHS clearing James to swim.

James rejoined the swim team and started practicing. “Many days after school, I would feel tired and exhausted from the chemo,” James says. “I would call my mother and say, ‘I feel tired tonight.’ And she would say, ‘Just get in the pool and swim a couple of laps. I’m coming to get you.’ I would end up being there for at least half an hour swimming because the water felt so good.”

Due to the portacath in his chest, James could not play water polo. If the port were hit or damaged, it could endanger him because it was connected to his jugular vein. James grew depressed throughout his treatment, and it didn’t help that he could not play water polo. Nicola designed a special vest to protect the port in James’ chest with the help of a local engineer who worked as a scuba diving instructor and had knowledge of wet suit construction. City of Hope reviewed the vest and again sent a letter to MHS, clearing him to play water polo. “Nobody that we knew of had played water polo with a port-a-cath in their chest,” James says. Wearing the vest during water polo matches did create some additional hurdles, however. The MHS water polo team had

to provide the letter from City of Hope to opposing teams to show that James needed to wear the vest to protect his chest, not to provide him any additional advantage during the game.

The pandemic removed a lot of the initial support the Speranta family received because of the lockdown. “When the pandemic hit, it took away all the support and all of my friends,” James says. “To be honest, it made things lonely. Sometimes I felt like I did not want to be the poster child for cancer, but that was because I was so angry and confused.” James missed the support of the school, his teachers, and his friends. “It made a big difference to have people talk to me and come up to me. Knowing people were donating blood in my name made a difference,” James says.

While the pandemic initially brought the Speranta family home and allowed plenty of time for cards, dominos, and chess, it limited James’s ability to be physically active outdoors. Before the lockdown, James always kept moving and exercising. However, being immunocompromised due to chemo treatments, along with the unknowns at the time about how COVID-19 spread, restricted him to home and limited his activities and movement. Constipation was a side effect of chemo, and within a few weeks of the pandemic shutdown and limited activity, James found himself doubled over in pain. At City of Hope, high security due to the pandemic delayed his admittance. Morphine was not strong enough to help his pain, and the staff worked to find something else to help.

Experiences like these are tough to forget, and James prefers to look forward rather than backward. “In a way, I have blocked and shut out what I went through because it felt like a nightmare,” he says. “I have anxiety over the thought that I might get cancer again, so I don’t want to give it too much thought. I don’t want to go back.” For him, living as normal of a life as possible was key to making it through his treatment, and having others who weren’t afraid to be with him or talk to him made all the difference. “I learned that I’m a survivor and I’m strong,” James says. “I would say to children who are diagnosed with cancer, stay strong and know that it’s not the end of the world. You’re still alive.”



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It's a Magical Life: The Monrovia Guild CHLA

By Nan Kuhlman

The Monrovia Guild Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) will be hosting their annual fundraising luncheon on October 23, 2022, with the theme of "It's a Magical Life" at the Embassy Suites by Hilton, 211 E Huntington Drive, Arcadia, at 11:30am. Tickets are \$70 and available from guild members with more event information available on the group's Facebook page (Monrovia Guild Children's Hospital Los Angeles).

The luncheon event is the group's primary fundraiser, and it will feature raffle tickets for prizes, as well as wine tickets for \$20 to participate in a "grab bag" where wine bottles are wrapped and sold incognito. A boutique with specialty items for purchase is also part of the event with all proceeds donated to CHLA. The highlight of the event is the speaker who shares a personal story about the care received from CHLA.

The group also supports CHLA with the donation of new children's clothing and toys, and at Christmas, the Monrovia Guild will sponsor another toy drive that will be open to the public. Details about that upcoming event can be found on the Monrovia Guild Facebook page.

President Sally Adams explains that the group is trying to get the word out that they are active and getting back to normal after the pandemic shut down: "We hold monthly meetings at the Foothill Presbyterian Church's Fireside Room at noon on the 2nd Thursday of the month (except July & December). We also participated in the great Monrovia Day Parade this last May and plan to join the Monrovia Christmas Parade in December." Be sure to check out the group's Facebook page for more information about the luncheon fundraiser in October!



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Old Town Pizza: Same Great Food but Better

By Nan Kuhlman



Jake Benitez,
Old Town Pizza

Old Town Pizza, located at 338 Myrtle Avenue, Monrovia, has new ownership and a new outlook to offer its patrons. Owner Jake Benitez, a Sierra Madre native, hopes to encourage more people to dine in by giving the space a facelift, especially the patio area. “I’m here every day because I care and want to make Old Town Pizza what it can and should be,” he says. “The great food will remain the same, but I want to make this spot more compatible for hanging out with friends.”

One important change is that Old Town Pizza is now open every day at 11AM, closing at 9PM on Sunday-Thursday and 10PM on Friday and Saturday. A Happy Hour featuring wine and beer will be available Monday-Thursday 3PM-7PM, and the patio will be open soon for Happy Hour. Online ordering is available at the updated website OTPizzaMonrovia.com with local delivery available (including Bradbury and some areas of Duarte and Arcadia). Deliveries outside the delivery area can be handled by UberEats, GrubHub, and DoorDash.

Benitez intends to apply his previous experience in both business and the restaurant industry to Old Town Pizza. “Through high school and college, I worked at Village Pizzeria and Matt Denny’s Alehouse in Arcadia. It was fun to me,” he says. Benitez also has business experience, having worked for almost 15 years in the financial industry. He was looking for a new passion: “I got burned out on [the financial industry], and I wanted something different. Old Town Pizza seemed like a good new home.” His experience at mom-and-pop restaurants, rather than corporate restaurants, gives him a unique business perspective. “At mom-and-pop shops, you have the freedom to

do what’s right for the customers,” he says.

Benitez also found his restaurant experience helpful for developing social skills: “When you’re waiting tables, you get to meet people and mingle. You’re forced to get rid of your social anxiety.” Since he is an extrovert, working well with people comes naturally. “I love working with people, whether it’s our patrons who come in to enjoy a good meal, our kitchen workers, cashiers, or drivers,” Benitez says. “I have a great staff that works like a well-oiled machine. As a result, I have time to come out to the dining room and meet our patrons.”

Benitez is excited about being a part of Old Town Monrovia. “We’re right here in the downtown area, across from the library. It’s so fun meeting other downtown business owners and being a part of the Monrovia Chamber of Commerce. I look forward to getting involved in the community.” Monrovia Living is pleased to welcome Old Town Pizza to our growing group of advertisers!



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Home Air Filtration

By Bob Helbing, President, Air-Tro, Inc.



The last two years have seen a sharp rise in homeowner interest with filtering the air in their home. COVID and wildfire smoke have made everyone conscious of the importance of indoor air quality. But what's the right solution?

If your home has central heating and air, you have much of the solution already in hand. Every central system has a filter, designed to protect the system from dust and dirt. With some judicious alterations, these filters can be upgraded to also protect against biological contaminants like bacteria and viruses while also capturing wildfire soot and odor.

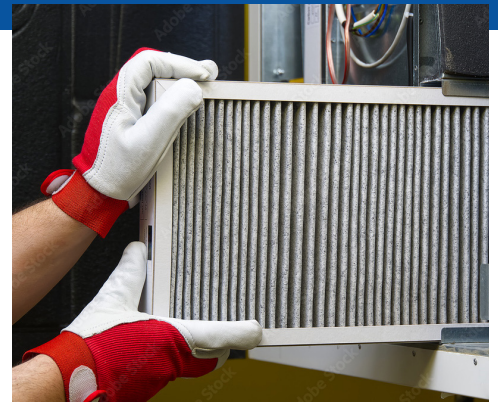
The standard used to rate filter effectiveness is the Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV). Standard spun-fiberglass filters are MERV 1, sufficient to keep coils and blower wheels clean but not effective enough to remove contaminants that irritate people. A MERV8 filter will capture droplets, the usual host of bacteria and viruses. A MERV13 will capture smoke particles, from both tobacco and wildfires, but won't fully remove the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that make up the smell. To strip those out, another device such as a photocatalytic oxidizer (PCO) or ultraviolet lamp needs to be installed.

Higher MERV ratings come at a cost. They're more expensive and their thicker media restricts airflow, making the furnace blower motor work harder. In some cases, the restriction results in system underperformance, as air flow goes too low for the system to properly heat or cool your home. PCOs and UV lamps don't restrict airflow, so they make a good combination with a mid-range filter like a MERV8.

As you can tell, there are a lot of choices available to homeowners. If you're allergic to pollen, a MERV8 is fine. If you're allergic

to chemicals, a MERV8 won't help but a PCO will. If you have chemical sensitivity, you may want to go with activated carbon (like that used in fish tank filters). If you're taking allergy medication, you should be particularly interested in better home air filtration. Improved indoor air quality could mean you need less treatment, and yet you're still more comfortable.

Indoor air quality has always been important for you and your family. But now we're more aware than ever of how much it matters for your health and comfort. If you have questions, ask the indoor air quality experts at Air-Tro. Call us at (626) 357-3535 if you'd like to learn more.



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New Release: Part Two of Bungalow Heaven Mystery Series by Local Author Faye Duncan

By Christina Przybilla, Christina Marlene Design and Decorating Den Interiors



It's been a long and much anticipated wait since local author Faye Duncan published her first novel, *Murder on Wilson Street* from the Bungalow Heaven Mystery Series in 2016. The new sequel,

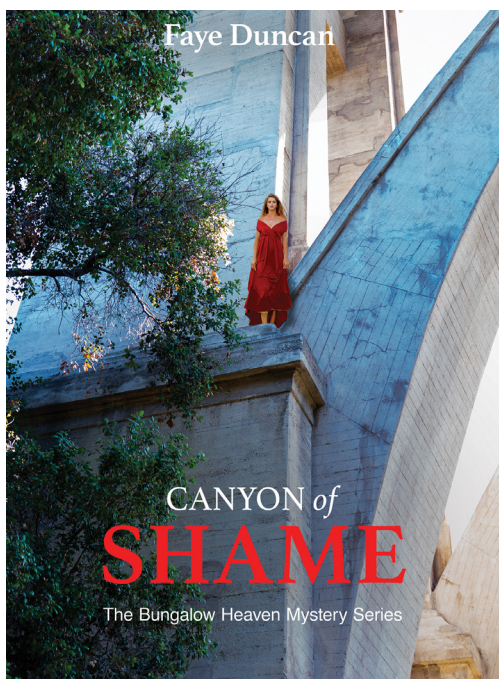
titled *Canyon of Shame*, was released by Jan-Carol Publishing Inc. in June 2022.

Through the perspective of the main character, the settled Detective Peter McGinnis from the Pasadena homicide unit with a passion for racehorses, and his partner, the very young and attractive lieutenant George Savalas, Faye Duncan takes us to the many landmarks and popular places of the San Gabriel Valley, such as the Santa Anita Racetracks, Eaton Canyon, the Rose Bowl, and as always, to the inside of at least one craftsman home from the Bungalow Heaven landmark district, whilst trying to solve the murder of a young woman, and its possible entanglement with a prominent Black Lives Matters case that detective McGinnis is currently required to testify in.

"Anyone can read this book, but the story is mainly written for local people from Altadena, Pasadena, Monrovia, and the San Gabriel Valley," says author Faye. If you are a mystery maven and love recognizing the places you frequent each day in the book that you're reading, chances are you might just love this piece.

Enjoy a brief excerpt from the newly released book:

"The Fiat passed underneath the Holly Street walking bridge. Its



dark, water-drenched concrete arches loomed threateningly in the torrential rain. Unit 24 and Savalas followed as the Fiat climbed up the steep hill, nearing the Colorado Bridge. The four massive arches of the Arroyo Seco Bridge were entwined in a wild jungle of ancient Oak treetops that swayed in the wind. Broken leaves and branches fell into the Arroyo Park below. A heavy gust of wind nearly threw Savalas off track. 'Wow!' he said, straightening his steering wheel.

McGinnis, who had never let go of the handle on the doorframe, did not flinch. 'Correct me if I'm wrong,' he said. 'But can it be that she is slowing down?'

Sure enough, before any of the cops were aware of what was going

on, Marisella abruptly stopped and jumped out of her vehicle at the Arroyo Seco Trail entry. She disappeared nearly instantly under the cover of trees on the trail.

'Shutterbusters!' McGinnis cursed and unstrapped himself. He was not looking forward to getting drenched in the rain..."

To read on and find out how this ends, *Canyon of Shame* is now available at Vroman's, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble. For information on the author, visit fayeduncan.com or fkduncan.com.

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How A Reverse Mortgage Can Help You Retire Better *(Part 2)*

By Denny Black, Old Town Mortgage



In the September 2022 issue of *Monrovia Living*, we published part 1 of “How a Reverse Mortgage Can Help You Retire Better. We talked about using a Reverse Mortgage to pay off and manage debt, building a rainy day fund, protecting your retirement investments, and delaying taking Social Security.

In part 2, we’ve got a few more ideas about how accessing the equity in your home can improve your retirement.

Help your family

Your children may be looking to purchase their first home and start building equity. If they don’t need financial help, perhaps you can start building a strong financial foundation for your grandchildren.

Take your passion to that next level

Maybe you love photography and feel you could really elevate the quality of your work with an investment in a new lens or computer program that you haven’t pulled the trigger on because of the expense. Maybe you want to spring for a painting or interior design class, or purchase a new woodworking tool. A Reverse Mortgage can give you the financial freedom to explore and expand your passions.

Help others

A Reverse Mortgage can also allow you to do more for others. It can free you to do more volunteer work or financially support an organization that has always owned your heart. It can allow you to plant the seeds to create the legacy by which you want to be identified and remembered.

As you can see from just these few examples, there are many ways you can put a Reverse Mortgage to work to help you retire

better. So how does a reverse mortgage work?

How a reverse mortgage works

A Reverse Mortgage is a financial tool that allows you to convert some of the built-up equity in your home into cash. Unlike a traditional home equity loan or line of credit that you begin repaying soon after your loan closes, a Reverse Mortgage loan doesn’t have to be repaid until you leave your home.

I would love to speak with you and your family about whether a Reverse Mortgage should be a part of your retirement plan. We’ve had the honor of helping many local seniors; after witnessing the positive effects and options, I obtained a HECM for my wife and myself. Having it in place gave us the ability to finalize our retirement plans and added financial security in these uncertain times.

While Reverse Mortgages are financially rewarding, they are also complicated. I’ll happily take the time with you and your family to explain how a Reverse Mortgage works, help you determine the best funding strategy and walk you through the process. I’m located in Monrovia, have done business locally for more than 25 years, and am a proud member of Monrovia Rotary Club.

I look forward to being of service!



Denny Black
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2022 Commercial Market Update and Outlook

By Linda Vidov, Top Commercial Realty, Inc.



The industrial market in the San Gabriel Valley has seen the lowest vacancy rates over the last two years. This year has proven just as strong with vacancy falling to 0.8 percent at the end of the second quarter. Asking rents have continued to increase dramatically, estimated at over twenty percent from the first quarter of 2022. The average market asking rent increased to \$1.62 per square foot (PSF) on a triple net lease (NNN) basis. There are currently just over two million square feet under construction, most of which is pre-leased. The San Gabriel Valley has had the strongest activity of all the greater Los Angeles sub-markets in the second quarter of 2022.

Private investors accounted for most of the market sales activity followed by institutional investors. A large lease transaction that will bring many jobs to the San Gabriel Valley was completed by Home Depot. They will move into approximately 500,000 square feet in Irwindale during the third quarter. The San Gabriel and greater Los Angeles markets continue to experience low supply and high demand. It is expected that we will see some changes in the leasing activity

and vacancy rates through the next few quarters due to tenants moving to new locations and new construction coming to the market.

The office market in the San Gabriel Valley experienced a slight increase in the vacancy rate in the second quarter due to new construction delivered in Pasadena. The vacancy rate slightly increased to approximately twelve percent. Vacancy was also affected by sublease space coming to the market. The average asking rate for office held firm at \$2.56 PSF. Construction activity for office space in the San Gabriel Valley remains low. Pasadena delivered the first phase of 10 West, which is a large development underway. Dine Brands leased 92,670 square feet in the project. Another large lease was completed in Monrovia with Terry Therapeutics leasing 49,000 square feet at the Monrovia Tech Campus on Royal Oaks Drive. The outlook for office space is a bit uncertain with companies struggling to bring people back to the office and difficulties with employee retention. Changes in the economy also affect the health of the office market looking ahead.

If you have questions on your commercial property or the market, please feel free to contact me by phone: 626-358-8287 or email: Linda@TopComRealty.com.

Featured Article

Image Courtesy: Michael Deal/Twitter



Deal brother's path to football stardom paved by parents

By Andrew Florio,
BVM Sports Journalist

BVM
SPORTS

Devean Deal is in his second season with the Tulane Green Wave, while Markis Deal plays his senior season as a top-100 high school football player in the country. Part of their success comes from their quick development that was expedited with them sharing a house with their defensive line coach and dad, Michael. "Our dad knew the game and he knew people that knew the game," Devean said. "We just got to absorb information from everyone. Whether he was coaching or not, you could always ask him a question." ... Scan to continue reading



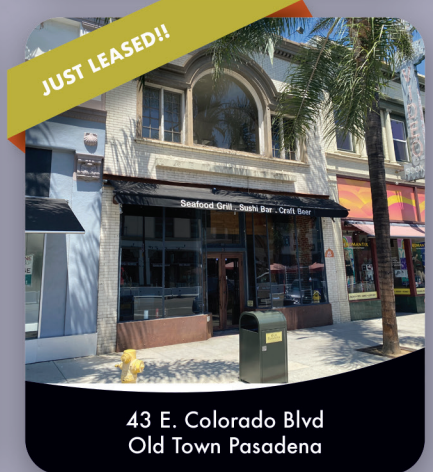
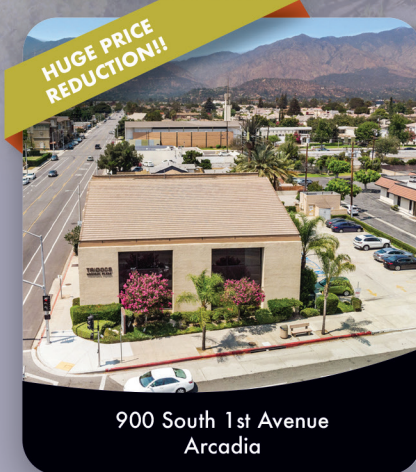
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Cost: Free

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Sat., October 15

Blue Grass Festival 2022

@Sage Granada Park United Methodist Church, 1850 West Hellman Ave., Alhambra
This festival features the Miskey Mountain Boys who have performed at the Hollywood Bowl, Disney Studios, the Tournament of Roses, as well as radio, television, and film.

You'll enjoy their signature blend of jazz, classical, and swing with traditional Bluegrass, a new genre they call Classgrazz.

Time: 7:00pm-9:00pm

Cost: Free if RSVP through Eventbrite or \$20 at the door

Contact artistic director Bill Yee at (626) 230-5435 or email bizwind@yahoo.com.

Sun., October 16

Tour of the Historic Lanterman House

@Lanterman House, 4420 Encinas Drive, La Cañada Flintridge

The Lanterman House was built with unique features to take advantage of the Southern California climate. For example, the house is completely surrounded by a patio, accessed by a grand total of 32 French doors! You'll enjoy a 60-minute guided tour of this fully restored building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Masks are required.

Time: 1:00pm-2:00pm

Cost: \$5/adults, \$3/senior citizens and students, children under 12 free

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/tour-of-the-historic-lanterman-house-tickets-388720522547?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

Sun., October 23

Peace Awareness Labyrinth & Gardens Tour

@Peace Awareness Labyrinth, 3500 West Adams Blvd., Los Angeles 90018

Enjoy the Meditation Garden and Labyrinth as a quiet sanctuary to contemplate life's bigger questions. Masks are not mandatory but encouraged.

Time: 2:00pm-3:00pm

Cost: \$6

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/peace-awareness-labyrinth-gardens-tour-tickets-148371466049?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

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Centennial Celebration!

By Robin Boyd, First Presbyterian Church of Monrovia

First Presbyterian Church (FPC) of Monrovia is honored to commemorate 100 years of worship, service, and love in their special location on the corner of Myrtle and Foothill. A Centennial Celebration event will be held on Sunday, October 16, from 12PM to 3PM outside on the church patio. This event is open to the community, along with FPC's Sunday Worship Service at 10:30AM. Come enjoy delicious food, tours of the sanctuary and preschool, historical displays, and family-friendly activities!



FPC of Monrovia, circa 1920s



FPC of Monrovia, 2022

FPC Monrovia was first formed in 1888 by 29 faithful ranchers and farmers. The church moved from meeting in stores and halls for the first decade to eventually being able to build a small wooden church on the corner of Myrtle and Lime. In the decades to follow, the congregation outgrew the small wooden church. In the early 1920s, with much dedication, FPC was able to purchase and excavate the new and larger lot. After a year of building, the church dedicated its new structure. Now for the past century, Monrovia's have enjoyed seeing the charming, Spanish-style church at the peak of downtown. They have heard the sweet hourly chimes from the tall and memorable bell tower; they have been moved to reverence amidst the high-ceilinging sanctuary and filled with awe while gazing at gorgeous stained-glass depictions of heroes of the faith. Many lives have been blessed in this house of worship over the decades. In addition, FPC's preschool has been bustling with youthful joy since 1951.

All are welcome to the event on Sunday, October 16, from 12PM to 3PM as well as FPC's Sunday worship service at 10:30AM. You'll also get to meet FPC's new pastor, Pastor Joel Larson, whose timely arrival is a fitting addition to FPC's celebratory year!



1435 South Shamrock Ave., Monrovia, CA 91016
Phone: 626-303-0336



Be Like Pedro

By Nan Kuhlman

I've written before about our middle dog, Pedro Ramon Kuhlman. You can read about his picky eating habits in my website's blog post called "Love Is Never Wasted," but today I want to talk about Pedro's slowness.

If Pedro is eating, he will never be the first dog finished. He begins his mealtime ritual with a period of staring at the wall, which I refer to as his moment of offering thanks. Once he's eating, he often stops to pause and close his eyes. Maybe his teeth hurt (all 4 or 5 of them), or maybe he can't believe he has to eat the same dog food twice a day, every day. But he could be savoring his food, a trait not often seen in dogs.

When we walk, he is always trailing behind, not because he doesn't like to walk – he's often first to show up when I put my fanny pack on – but because he is... well, slow. He walks slowly, and even when I call him to come in from the backyard, he takes his sweet time.

Living in a world that seems to chant "Faster, faster" in our ears, I am starting to see the value in Pedro's approach. He doesn't rush through the daily-ness of life like I do. He takes time to stretch out on the warm concrete of the driveway and close his eyes, even if he knows he has to go inside soon. According to Pedro, slow is the way to go. He may be right.

You can read more short Noticings like this one at www.NanKuhlman.com!

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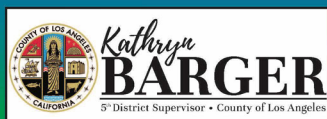
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