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Village (Critter) Chatter

Mild summer keeps tradition of tadpole rearing alive; plus, new feathered friends

By Ashley Wilkinson Breinlinger

Springtime and the first half of the summer here in Sonoma Valley were markedly more pleasant weather-wise than we’ve seen in recent years. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, while this year we are yet to hit a 100 °F day, last year we experienced 14 days of 100 °F or higher temperatures, making 2024 the area’s record-holder for most triple-digit days.

Although our tomatoes are later to ripen, thanks to these more bearable temps (and the magic of Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control, who help mitigate mosquito infestations in Kenwood), we’ve been able to enjoy Sonoma Creek as a family even more than usual. The water in this portion of the Creek has been slower to dwindle, and although pools are shrinking, they still teem with life.

Rewinding to the final days of school this year, in late May, we enjoyed cool, nearly waist-high, flowing water, filled with tadpoles and fish fry. The native willow sprouts we planted to stabilize parts of the bank flourished, and our new trail camera captured deer, raccoon, possum, and a persistent skunk washing themselves and drinking from the Creek at night.

This summer we purchased our first fish tank, collected tadpole eggs and water snails from the Creek, and watched what ChatGPT told us were likely Western toads and American frogs hatch and grow. Like children, they grew in fits and starts — one day big and fat, the next lean and long, with new legs sprouting seemingly at random. Each day we hauled fresh Creek water to replenish oxygen, rocks, and nutrients.

It was a summer of trial and error, and a roller coaster of emotions. We learned the joy of discovering hundreds of thriv-



Photo by Ashley Wilkinson Breinlinger

Sonoma Creek looking northwest in Kenwood Village in June. The water in the area of the Creek is quite clean, but muddled with algae, which flourishes in the sunlight, and teams with critters.

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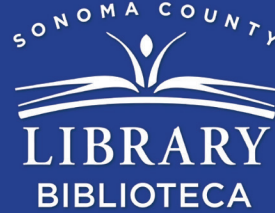
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Supporting a loved one with memory loss: what matters most

By Raj Kalra, MD

Caring for a loved one with memory loss is a deeply personal journey — one filled with love, patience, and at times, uncertainty. Whether it’s a parent, spouse, or close friend, watching someone you care about navigate the challenges of dementia can feel overwhelming. Many families wonder: Am I doing enough? How can I help them live well? What’s the right next step?

What I’ve learned, both professionally and personally, is that support doesn’t have to be perfect. Often, it’s the small, consistent things that make the biggest difference. Creating a sense of comfort, safety, and connection can greatly improve a person’s quality of life — and help loved ones and caregivers find more ease in the process.

One of the most helpful things we can offer someone with memory loss is consistency. Establishing a simple daily routine — meals at the same time, familiar surroundings, soft music in the evening — can bring calm to an otherwise confusing world. Predictability creates a sense of safety, especially when short-term memory becomes less reliable. Even small routines, like a morning walk or an afternoon cup of tea, can provide grounding.

Safety is also key, but it’s important to strike a balance between keeping a loved one safe and helping them feel independent. Removing trip hazards, simplifying the home environment, and making mobility aids easily accessible can go a long way. At the same time, giving your loved one opportunities to make choices — what to wear, what music to listen to — helps maintain dignity and confidence.

Equally important is staying engaged. Social interaction and meaningful activities can help slow cognitive decline and lift the spirit. Whether it’s enjoying a favorite song, working on a puzzle together, or spending

time outdoors, engagement doesn’t have to be complicated. What matters is that the person feels included and valued.

Supporting overall well-being also means paying attention to nutrition, movement, and sleep. Simple, balanced meals and gentle physical activity — like stretching or short walks — can support both brain and body health. Sleep, in particular, plays a vital role in cognition, energy, and vitality. Encouraging your loved one to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day can improve sleep quality and help regulate mood, focus, and daily function. Staying hydrated and managing stress also contribute to better health and quality of life.

And finally, it’s worth remembering: You don’t have to do this alone. Many families wait until they’re overwhelmed before considering memory care options, but planning ahead — and in some cases, engaging in memory care services early — can help slow further cognitive decline and support your loved one’s overall well-being. The right environment should provide compassionate, safe, person-centered care along with a healthy diet, regular activity, quality sleep, stress management, and social engagement — all of which can enhance quality of life and longevity for your loved one.

Dr. Raj Kalra is a board-certified physician in Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Pain Medicine, Lifestyle Medicine, and Obesity Medicine. He is the founder of Aroha Memory Care by MD Senior Wellness, a wellness-centered memory care community currently under construction in Santa Rosa, with completion expected later this year. Aroha is designed to support seniors in a warm, person-centered environment through compassionate, evidence-based care rooted in lifestyle medicine, wellness, and meaningful connection. The waitlist is now open. Learn more at www.arohamemorycare.com.

Carrying the light together at La Luz



Photo by Daniel R. Perales

Dancers from Grupo Folklórico Quetzalén, in colorful traditional dress, help share the symbolic candlelight with guests. La Luz Center celebrated its 40th anniversary at a sold-out Noche de Luna gala with over 280 supporters. The evening honored La Luz’s decades of service and featured emotional highlights, such as a keynote by Executive Director Leonardo Lobato, a candle-lighting ceremony led by founder Ligia Booker, and the young dancers of Grupo Folklórico Quetzalén, dressed in traditional Colima, Mexico attire. The event also marked a board leadership transition, as Beth Stelluto Dunaier assumes the role of board chair, and concluded with an outpouring of community support during the annual Fund a Need. La Luz Center is a nonprofit organization serving low-income Latino families in Sonoma Valley through programs in education, economic advancement, immigration support, and cultural expression. Its mission is to ensure equal opportunity for success by supporting individuals and families as they step into their own power, breaking generational cycles of poverty. See www.laluzcenter.org for more information.