

# Sparks March 2023



Some of the most distinguished architecture in the El Cerrito-Kensington area can be found at Sunset View Cemetery.  
Photo by Dave Weinstein

**Tour Sunset View Cemetery.** Sunset View Cemetery, founded in 1908 and one of the oldest businesses in town, is one of the most fascinating places in El Cerrito or Kensington, which it straddles. Learn the history of this cemetery, admire the cemetery's waterfall, and find out where the bodies are buried. Tour leader is Tom Panas.

10:30 a.m. to noon. Saturday, March 18, 2023. The event is free. Attendance is limited. Rsvp is required, [davidsw Weinstein@yahoo.com](mailto:davidsw Weinstein@yahoo.com) The meeting place will be emailed to those who rsvp.



Erin Merritt had her hands full during El Cerrito's 'Neighborhood Stories,' directing action all across our city using her phone. Here she is, just as attendees are setting off in their cars.

Photo by Dave Weinstein

**El Cerrito 'theater maker,' creator of 'Neighborhood Stories,' continues to create despite debilitating illness.**

During some of the loneliest, most stay-at-home times of the Covid pandemic, some joy and live artistry came to our town thanks to El Cerrito resident and famed Bay Area theater creator Erin Merritt.

In the summer of 2020, when theaters and other entertainment venues remained mostly shuttered, Erin Merritt approached the historical society seeking assistance in a unique project she was fomenting: [Neighborhood Stories](#), a series of drive-by performances in which the audience, safely ensconced in a car, would drive from place to place in El Cerrito to watch local performers sing, dance, act or recite.

To make it really local and to celebrate place, Erin wanted some history to go along with the events. The society complied, and the historical material we provided helped inform some individual performances, and also became part of a taped soundtrack that audience members listed to as they drove from place to place, a kind of historical travelogue of El Cerrito's fascinating history.

Erin is part of that history, and an important part of the history of Bay Area theater. She has been a theater director for decades, and has said she is most proud of having formed and run for 12 years Woman's Will, the all-female theater company.

It was a pleasure attending Erin's Neighborhood Stories when it was presented in El Cerrito in May 2021, and it was wonderful providing Erin with some help. It is with tremendous sadness to learn, then, that Erin is suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a disease that has already taken her ability to speak and is continuing to progress.

Lily Janiak's [recent article in the Chronicle](#) reveals too that Erin isn't letting the disease stop her. Erin's production of 'Tea Party' by Gordon Dahlquist continues till March 19 at ACT's Rueff at the Strand Theater, on Market Street.

Erin's El Cerrito version of 'Neighborhood Stories' (her first version was in Oakland) was fun in part because of the mystery. Where will Erin's spoken instructions take us and what will we see?





The Dan Plonsey group performed during 'Neighborhood Stories' in El Cerrito. Plonsey is on sax. Photo by Dave Weinstein

In El Cerrito we saw performances tied to the city's Spanish and Mexican colonial history, and to our town's raucous past as a gambling center. Our city's poet laureate Eevelyn Mitchell performed, and so did a band led by local resident Dan Plonsey, a stalwart of the Bay Area improvisers scene.

Throughout the performance, and in Erin's taped narrative, a real love and enthusiasm for the our city emerged. About the event, Erin said, "I hope it feels a bit like a love letter to the city."



The Arlington Hills Riding Academy attracted horsemen and horsewomen for a variety of events and reasons. Andia Rasmussen, digital donation to the El Cerrito Historical Society, from the magazine California Horse Lover, February-March 1939

**Among recent donations to our archives.** Laura McDevitt donated some old bottles that were found in the El Cerrito hills, not far from the site of the former Bates mansion, which was on Bates Avenue jut below Arlington. Andia Rasmussen gave us a digital image recalling the horse stables that were formerly on Arlington, near today's Arlington Park.

**The Historical Society Board meets the second Thursday of the month** at 5 p.m., these days via Zoom. Members are encouraged to attend. Meetings rarely take more than an hour. Occasionally we need to change the date of a meeting. Our next meeting is April 13, 2023. Topics will include: upcoming programs; archiving; membership drive; and more.

**El Cerrito Historical Society is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.**

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

Time: Apr 13, 2023 05:00 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82948598500?pwd=c0s4LzN4TkxER2NzdlpjZUxuaXpUUT09>

Meeting ID: 829 4859 8500

Passcode: 828419

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**The El Cerrito Historical Society produces two publications**, the Forge, which is a print publication, which we aim to produce four times a year, and Sparks (from the Anvil), an email publication which we aim to produce monthly. Both hark back to one of El Cerrito's original settlers, William Rust, a blacksmith who worked at his anvil producing, among other things, sparks.

