

# ~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

## Audience at sold-out Historical Society event learns about local Native American sites



Photo Vera Kochan

**James Benney discusses Native American sites located in the East Bay.**

**By Vera Kochan**

Many Lamorinda residents are aware that Saklan Indians once inhabited the region as part of a larger nation known as the Bay Miwok. However, few are aware as to the extent these tribes, and many others, lived in this area surrounding what we know today as Mount Diablo.

The Moraga Historical Society welcomed guest speaker James Benney, a member of the East Bay Hill People organization, to enlighten the sold-out crowd in the Casita, at the town's Hacienda de las Flores on Aug. 20, with a brief history of the Native Americans who once lived in the shadow of Mount Diablo.

Benney, a house painter by trade, acknowledged "not a drop of Native American blood in my veins," but that he was intrigued with the topic while a student at the University of California at Berkeley after taking a hike with a friend and discovering bedrock mortar (a circular depression in a rock outcrop historically used for grinding food). During that time, he came across hundreds of bedrock mortars without even knowing what they were,

but thought it was a shame that others didn't know of their existence.

Through his research, Benney has learned that there were eight Saklan villages along Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette: one at the intersection of Moraga's Canyon Road and Pinehurst, a larger tribe at the intersection of Canyon Road and Country Club Drive, one at Saint Mary's College, Lafayette Community Center, McDonnell Nursery in Orinda, the San Leandro Reservoir, Rossmoor, the Bentley School in Lafayette, Wagner Ranch, and a gated community in Lafayette at the end of Pleasant Hill Road along with the Orinda Country Club's 11th hole, which were the sites of sacred burial grounds.

Benney explained that Mount Diablo had been considered sacred to the Native Americans for 10,000 years. The Volvon tribe lived in that vicinity and were deemed the keepers of Tuyshtak (Dawn of Time). "Mount Diablo has been considered a sacred place by tribes from as far away as San Francisco and Nevada. In the Brushy Peak area [south of Mount Diablo] artifacts have been found that have come from tribes all over the United States – it was a major trading

hub. Whatever made it sacred for 10,000 years – it still seems sacred."

Sadly, the eventual elimination of the Bay Miwok tribes can be attributed to European diseases, enslavement by the missions, and even manslaughter. Benney stated that many Native Americans were so afraid of being killed that they denied their heritage by claiming to be Mexican. Prior to that, they lived much like any modern community today, gathering around water and food sources, having children, defending their territory, and dealing with all types of extreme weather.

Benney has written a book titled, "Native American Indian Sites in the East Bay Hills: A Guidebook" which discloses hundreds of bedrock mortar locations in the hopes that it will encourage visitors to learn more about the peoples who were the caretakers of the land all those years ago and to visit the sites with respect and contemplation. However, he has met with resistance from several stakeholders such as Native American descendants and the East Bay Regional Park District who fear the possibility of vandalism or defacement. During the MHS event, a few attendees expressed their concerns to that effect, while others would love to visit the sites to soak up the atmosphere while imagining what it was like to live under the shadow of Tuyshtak.

Benney hopes that today's descendants will use the many sites for occasional ceremonies or as tribal gathering places, because he feels that it would be a shame if they were left to the elements and disappear forever, rather than teaching and reminding people of the ancient culture that once called all of those places home.

"The greatest threat I see," stated Benney, "is ignorance and bulldozers."

For more information visit: [www.eastbayhillpeople.com](http://www.eastbayhillpeople.com).

## Singer brings cabaret show to the first place she experienced live theatre



Laurie Roldan Photo provided

**By Sharon K. Sobotta**

When Laurie Roldan, a singer and mom approaching her late 50s, prepared to become an empty nester as her daughters headed off to college, she took stock on what her next chapter should look like and what kind of legacy she'd like to leave behind in the world. "I've always been passionate about singing. I've been doing that for 30 years. When I was thinking about my life and what I should do next as my daughters auditioned for colleges, my voice instructor suggested that I think about doing a cabaret (a one woman show)," Roldan says.

Several years later, after lots of soul searching, reflecting, writing and curating life experiences to the tune of Karen Carpenter's music, Roldan is ready to bring her cabaret, "Laurie Sings A Song For You" to the Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette. Roldan's

show will run Sept. 9, 10, 15 and 16 at 2 p.m. and will have a special opening night complete with champagne and conversation at 7 p.m.

As the daughter of a musician father who played the clarinet, Roldan grew up to the tunes of Peter, Paul and Mary, the Mamas and the Papas and a host of other folk musicians, but she says no one inspired her quite as much as Karen Carpenter. "I grew up in Moraga and I used to lay by the speakers and listen to Karen Carpenter's music and sing along with that," Roldan says.

As Roldan reflected back on her own life and the kind of stories she wanted to tell in her cabaret, the music of Karen Carpenter was the soundtrack to so many of her memories. "After a lot of write-throughs and revisions, I decided ultimately that I would be doing a show about my life and my story through the music of Karen Carpenter."

Roldan says the Town Hall Theatre has always held a special place in her heart. She remembers watching "A Christmas Carol" there in the mid-1970s, which was her first theatre show ever. "I remember the building, the bar area where I went to meet the actors after the show and it had a real impact on me."

And Roldan says, it's only fitting that her show should be in that same special place, where people have been living out versions or aspects of their

dreams for years. "I want people to leave my show knowing that it's never too late to live out our dreams." Although Roldan's show may be inspired by her lived experience, she promises that along with the specificity is relatability.

"We've all struggled with something or been affected by anxiety and all had to grieve at some point, and many of us have struggled with big things like motherhood," Roldan says. "I want people to know that no matter what, we should never stop dreaming."

Dennis Markham, the managing director of Town Hall, says it's an important homecoming for Laurie Roldan's show. "Coming together and celebrating our community and the individuals in it has been something that has been baked into this building even before it was a theatre. As much as we want to honor new stories, it's important for us to uplift the stories that are already here."

Markham is excited to see Roldan's full show in the very same building where she saw her first show some five decades earlier. "There's a nice symmetry to that. And, anyone who comes to see Laurie Roldan's show, can both celebrate her story and think about the stories they may have to tell – whether it's a musical, a short play or another form of storytelling."

To purchase tickets for "Laurie Sings a Song for You," or learn about the forthcoming offerings of Town Hall Theatre, visit [www.townhalltheatre.com](http://www.townhalltheatre.com)

35 years of experience in architectural design

**KAPLAN ARCHITECTS** [www.kaplanarchitects.com](http://www.kaplanarchitects.com)  
(510) 361-0223

**TREE SCULPTURE**

**COMPLETE TREE CARE**  
*Proudly serving the East Bay since 1965!*

Fully Insured ❖ Certified Arborists ❖ License #655977  
**(925) 254-7233 ❖ [www.treesculpture.com](http://www.treesculpture.com)**

LOOKING FOR A RELAXING, RETREAT-LIKE SETTING FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT?

TRY BOOKING AT CREEKSIDE COMMONS OF LAFAYETTE!

FIND US AT:  
925-283-3724  
[CREEKSIDECOMMONS.ORG](http://CREEKSIDECOMMONS.ORG)  
[KARI@OSLC.NET](mailto:KARI@OSLC.NET)

**TOWN HALL THEATRE COMPANY**  
**SPECIAL EVENT**

*Laurie Sings a Song for You*

A Cabaret Concert Inspired By The Music Of Karen Carpenter

September 9, 10, 15, 16 at 2pm  
September 9 at 7pm

**DIRECTED & CO-PRODUCED BY:**  
LAURIE ROLDAN

**MUSIC DIRECTION BY:**  
BRETT STRADER

**FEATURING:**  
ANITA COLOTTO  
MICHELLE IANIRO  
DEVON MINSON  
NICK PEREZ  
SCOTT WELSH

**TOWNHALLTHEATRE.COM**  
925.283.1557  
3535 SCHOOL ST. LAFAYETTE, CA