

CONNECTION

Sharing the day-to-day learning experience

at

Community Homes & Services

PO Box 744, Novato CA 94948

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www.communityhomesandservices.com

Happy Hanukkah!

This year, Hanukkah takes place December 14-22, 2025. It is a Jewish holiday that celebrates light, hope, and a small miracle.

More than 2,000 years ago, a group called the Maccabees won back their temple. When they lit a special lamp, there was only enough oil for one night, but it lasted for eight nights. Because of this, Hanukkah is known as the *Festival of Lights*.

This month, Dave F. (right) wanted to teach us about Hanukkah, so everyone created their own menorah art using yarn and paper plates. Projects like this engage people and give people something they can feel proud of when they finish.



Happy Hanukkah!

While we worked, Dave F. answered some of our questions about Hanukkah:

Q: What is Hanukkah?

A: It's a Jewish holiday.

Q: How many nights does Hanukkah last?

A: Eight nights.

Q: What is a menorah?

A: That's the thing you put candles in. It's kind of like a candelabra.

Q: What do families do when they light the menorah?

A: They open presents.



Q: What is a dreidel and how is it used?

A: It's like a top. You spin it around.



Q: What kind of gifts do people give during Hanukkah?

A: They give you puzzles (Dave F. is our Puzzle King!) and money.

Q: How do you feel when you see the menorah lit each night?

A: I feel happy.

Q: What part of Hanukkah do you like the most?

A: Opening my gifts.



Q: If you could create your own Hanukkah tradition, what would it be?

A: Working on a family puzzle together on Hanukkah.



DECEMBER 2025 NATIONAL DAYS



**Learn a Foreign Language Month, Root Vegetables
Universal Human Rights Month, and Exotic Fruit Month**

12/1 - Rosa Parks Day, Pie Day, Antarctica Day

12/2 - National Day of Giving, Special Education Day, Fritters Day, Mutt Day

12/3 - Roof Over Your Head Day

12/4 - Wildlife Conservation Day, Cookie Day, Sock Day, Intl Cheetah Day

12/5 - Faux Fur Friday, Bathtub Party Day

12/6 - St. Nicholas Day, Microwave Day

12/7 - Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, National Slime Day

12/8 - Pretend to be a Time Traveler Day, Brownie Day

12/9 - Christmas Card Day, Pastry Day, Weary Willie Day

12/10 - Dewey Decimal System Day

12/11 - National App Day

12/12 - Gingerbread House Day, Poinsettia Day

12/13 - Day of the Horse, Cocoa Day, Violin Day

12/14 - Hanukkah Begins

12/15 - Intl Tea Day, Cat Herders Day, Cupcake Day, Bill of Rights Day

12/17 - Wright Brothers Day, Maple Syrup Day, Say it Now Day

12/18 - National Twin Day, National Re-gifting Day

12/19 - Ugly Christmas Sweater Day

12/20 - Go Caroling Day

12/21 - Winter Solstice, Humbug Day, Flashlight Day

12/23 - Roots Day

12/24 - Christmas Eve, Eggnog Day

12/25 - Christmas Day, HOLIDAY- CLOSED

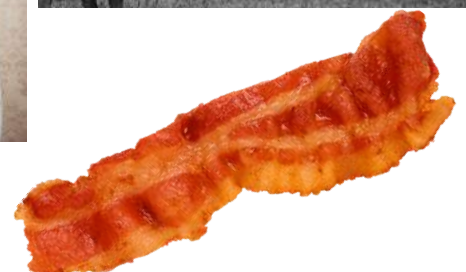
12/26 - Thank You Note Day, Candycane Day

12/27 - Fruitcake Day

12/28 - Chocolate Candy Day

12/30 - Bacon Day

12/31 - New Year's Eve, National Champagne Day



Take a Hike!

As you know, some of us love going on hikes. And we are fortunate to live in a place where we can hike all year long! It's a great time to talk with friends, get in some exercise, and breathe in some fresh air. Sometimes we get to see some animals, trees, or flowers!

Most of us already have hiking gear, but did you know that you can check out items for your hike from the Marin library?

<https://marinlibrary.org/faqs/how-do-i-borrow-a-hiking-backpack-from-the-library/>

Enjoy a visit to a local park with a hiking backpack from the library. Backpacks check out for one week and can be renewed. You can check out a backpack from any Marin Library branch. They're not holdable, but you can check current availability in the library catalog:

The California State Library Parks Pass Backpacks must be returned to the library where they were checked out. Each backpack includes:

- Binoculars
- Hiking poles
- CA State park pass
- Pocket guide: CA Wildlife
- Pocket guide: CA Trees & Flowers
- Microscope
- Flashlight
- Horn
- Compass
- 3 dry bags (these keep items like your phone dry if you happen to drop them in a lake or a stream)



If any of you do check out a Parks Pass Backpack, let us know what kind of microscope is included!



Hiking is Fun!

Some of us remember that fitness and exercise are important parts of our lives. Our students have enjoyed a number of hikes in Marin County including:

- The Bay Trail at Hamilton in Novato where flat waterfront paths make it easy to enjoy views of the marsh and the bay.
- Olompali State Historic Park has shaded oak trails and gentle climbs.
- 558-acre Indian Valley Open Space Preserve by Indian Valley College offers tree-shaded walks during the summer and a cool waterfall (after winter rains).

Time on these trails brings fresh air, steady movement, and the joy of being in nature.



***Happy December
Birthday!***

12/10 - Dave F. and Thea

12/16 - Martha

12/17 - Chris

12/30 - Phoebe



Knowledge Class Excerpt:

The Golden Gate Bridge

The Golden Gate Bridge is a California icon, and one of the most recognizable structures in the world. Last month James, Donald, Tess, Patrick, and Joe did a knowledge class on it, so here's an excerpt

The Golden Gate Bridge / Facts & Talking Points

Built between 1934 - 1937, the Golden Gate Bridge is an iconic piece of Bay Area history. Let's learn more:

- The bridge is 8,981 feet long. That's 1.7 miles/2.7 kilometers!
- There is a coffee shop called the Round House Café on the south side. There's also a gift shop, of course.
- There is something very cool near the Round House Café: a cross section of the bridge's cable system.



- This large cable (right) is actually made of 27,572 smaller galvanized steel cables. Each cable is just 0.192" wide. The



galvanized carbon steel wire comprising each main cable was laid by spinning the wire, using a loom-type shuttle that moved back and forth as it laid the wire in place to form the cables. The spinning of the main cable wires was completed in 6 months and 9 days.

- All the steel used in the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge was made by Bethlehem Steel at its foundries in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. 83,000 tons of steel went into the bridge. That's about the same weight as 7,000 school buses.

The Cost to Build the Golden Gate Bridge

- The bridge cost \$23,843,905 to build in 1934. Adjusted for inflation, that's \$461,241,067!
- At the time of its construction the Golden Gate Bridge was nearly twice the length of any other suspension bridge in the world. It held this record until New York's Verrazano-Narrows Bridge was constructed in 1964.
- To build the south tower structures, divers played a critical role descending up to 110 feet into the tumultuous waters of the Golden Gate Strait. They placed dynamite charges and removed loose material down to bedrock with high-pressure hoses. Later, they descended to guide the positioning of the forms and funnels used to place the concrete for the south tower fender.



James and Patrick walked across the bridge!



Exercise Ideas & Discussion Stimulants

- Have you ever walked across the Golden Gate Bridge?
- What kinds of animals do you think live around the Golden Gate Bridge? Sea lions, porpoises, 250 species of birds, coyotes, bats, deer.



Upcoming King Tides: December 2-7, December 30-January 5

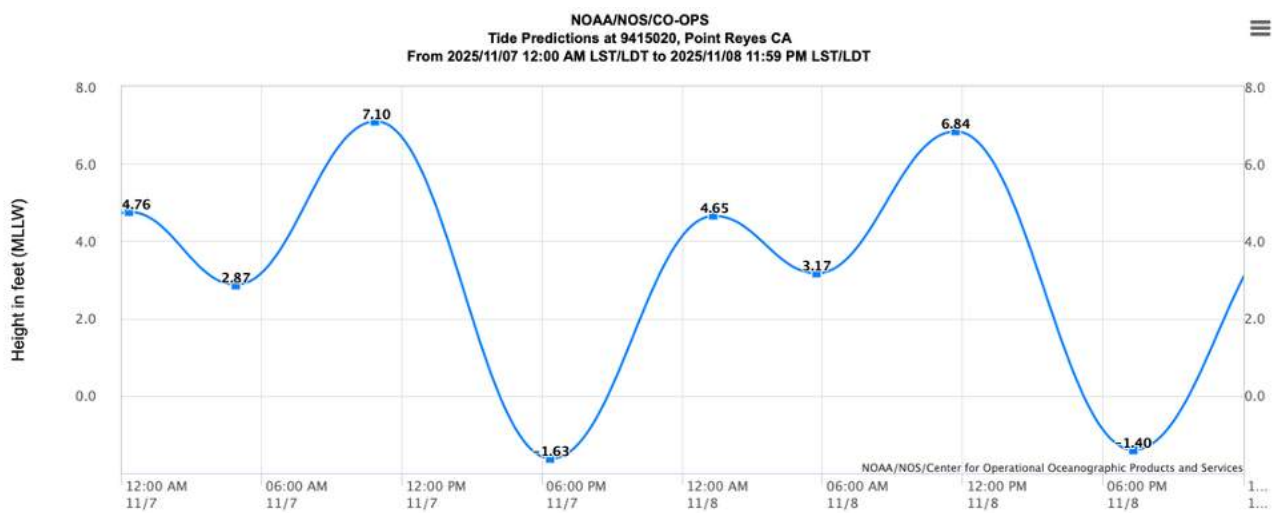
Have you ever gone to the beach and noticed that the sandy beach was really small? And the water level was really, really high? When this happens, it's called a *king tide*.

A king tide is a **super** high tide. It happens when the moon is very close to the Earth, and the sun, moon, and Earth all line up. The moon's gravity pulls on the ocean and makes the water rise higher than usual. This only happens a few times a year. It's not a storm and it's not a flood. It's just something the ocean naturally does.

In Marin County, sometimes the king tides flood low-lying areas such as parking lots or bike paths. The next king tides are coming soon. You can see them on these dates: December 2 through December 7, then again on December 30, and also from January 1 through January 5. The best time to go is during the morning high tide. You can check tide charts online to see the exact times:

<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/noaatidepredictions.html?id=9415020&legacy=1>

And here is what the tide chart looked on during our last king tide on November 8:



If you go to see the effects of a king tide, wear waterproof shoes or galoshes, because the water might be high enough to cover sidewalks or roads in some places!



King Tides Have a Funny Name

The name "king tide" is not a scientific term — it actually comes from Australia and New Zealand. People there used it to describe the highest tides of the year, like the "king" of all tides. The name stuck probably because it's simple and easy to remember.

Scientists usually call it a *perigean spring tide*, which means:

- Perigean = the moon is closest to Earth
- Spring tide = the sun, moon, and Earth are in a straight line, pulling the ocean more than usual

We think "king tide" is a lot easier to say — and a lot more fun!



(Above) The Mill Valley bike path during a king tide in 2024 is part of the California King Tides Project.

Scientists study king tides to see what the future might look like if sea levels keep rising. That's why people take pictures of king tides and share them with science projects. In California, there's something called the King Tides Project where anyone can send in photos of a king tide. If you want to go see a king tide, go with a friend or a group. Stay safe and don't walk into deep water. Bring a camera and have fun watching nature do something amazing.

King tides help us understand the Earth. And they're a great reason to get outside and explore your local coast.

Some people like to go walking on the flooded bike path during a king tide.

Do you think it would be fun to walk on a flooded bike path?



Winter Celebrations Around the World

December is a time when many cultures celebrate light, hope, giving, or spending time with family. Different traditions come from different places, and learning about them helps us appreciate our diverse community.

Christmas is celebrated by many people who honor the birth of Jesus, and by others in a more secular way with music, decorations, gift-giving, and gatherings. Many families enjoy trees, lights, cookies, and spending time together.



Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that celebrates a miracle of light lasting eight nights. People light candles on a menorah, play the dreidel game, and enjoy foods cooked in oil.

Kwanzaa is an African American celebration from December 26 to January 1. It honors community, creativity, and African heritage. Families light seven candles and focus on values like unity, cooperation, and purpose.

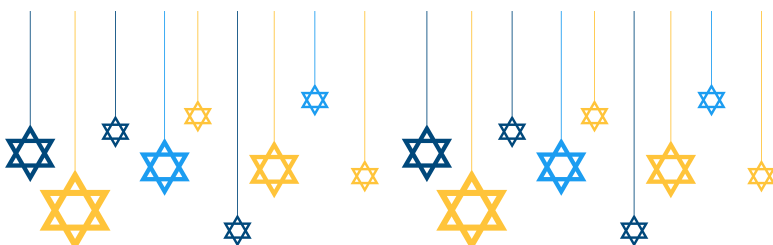


Las Posadas is a Mexican tradition leading up to Christmas. People walk through their neighborhoods, sing, and reenact the journey of Mary and Joseph. Communities share food, music, and piñatas.



Ōmisoka in Japan takes place on December 31. Families clean their homes, prepare special meals, and welcome the New Year with fresh intentions and good wishes.

Although these holidays are different, they share similar themes: light during dark days, hope for the coming year, and the importance of community. December gives us a chance to slow down, learn from each other, and appreciate what brings us together.



Ian Bretner

CH&S STUDENT PPP

Ian Bretner is an intelligent, talented, and creative young man who continues to grow and make great strides every day. He is especially gifted in mathematics, not only with algebra, fractions, addition, and subtraction, but also with geometry, where his problem-solving skills shine. Ian is a builder at heart, able to put together puzzles, models, and Legos with ease. Ian's independence is growing stronger every day. Ian is excellent at following instructions and shows professionalism and productivity in everything he does. With his handsome smile and warm personality, Ian brings joy, inspiration, and pride to everyone around him.

Ian

- Is peaceful and focused
- A wonderful artist with a strong creative spirit.



- He enjoys quiet moments with a book or walking in nature.
- Ian is polite and courteous and respectful of everyone and carries himself with kindness.
- He particularly enjoys music by rapper and songwriter Kygo.
- Ian loves to laugh with his great sense of humor, whether enjoying comedy or his favorite movies like Cars and Captain Underpants.
- Most importantly, Ian is dedicated to his family!

Watch Ian's PPP video on our Instagram account

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DRdAKlgkvuw?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Iris' Critter Corner

December 4th: Wildlife Conservation Day & International Cheetah Day
December 14th: National Monkey Day

I had a cheetah named Nala at the game reserve in Malawi. My friend gave her to me as a cub, with her brother named Timothy. We had cheetahs and lions in the game reserve. They got along together. They'd play together. When they got big, they'd go and hang in the trees with the lions. I always get calls on the two-way radio, "Iris, there's a lion, come and get it!" And I'd fly up to Botswana to go and get it. Then we'd take the barge back, I didn't mind, I knew the boat people would allow me to take a lion with me.

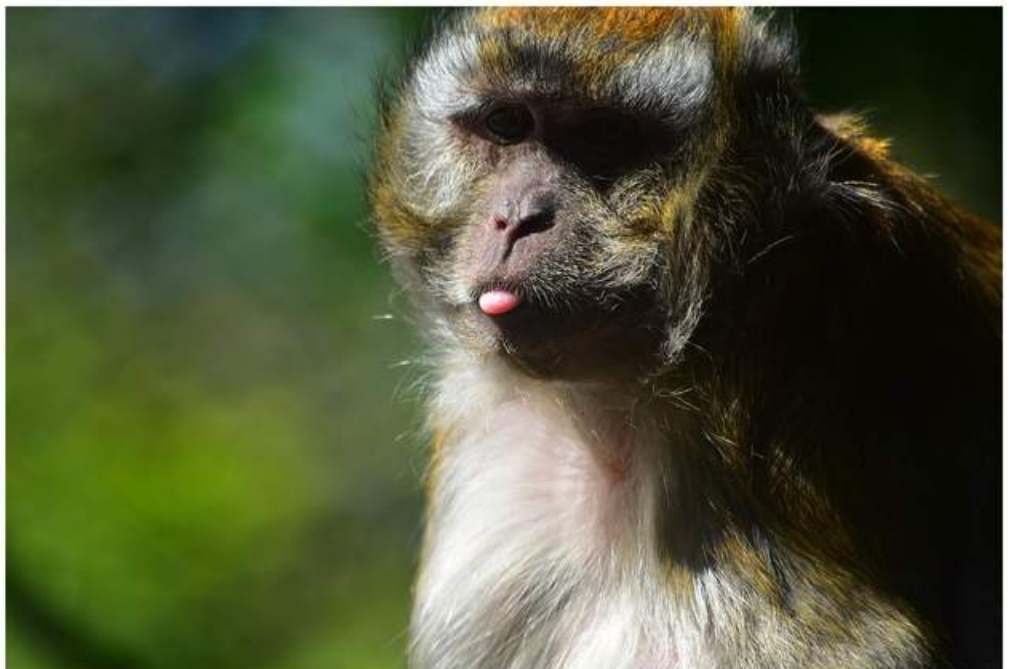
Sometimes cheetahs forget to put their tongues away!



Sometimes cheetahs forget to put their tongues away!

We had feral monkeys that lived in the house with us—one was nice, one was mean. Remember that story where the mean monkey was sleeping in my closet and my mom woke him up and got bitten? I put a note on the door that said "Danger-monkey sleeping!" but she didn't see it. "Iris, your monkey bit me!" I said, "Well, you should've read the sign. I tried to warn you."

She told me not to take a monkey to the club because he'd bite people, but if he was with me, he'd be fine. I bought him a Coke and he'd drink the whole bottle. You can't bite anyone when you're drinking a bottle of Coke, right?



Monkey blep!

Celebrating Christmas:

A Season of Traditions, Family, and Joy

Christmas is celebrated on December 25th, and for many people, it's a time filled with warmth, tradition, and togetherness. While Christmas has religious roots, today it is also widely celebrated by people of many different backgrounds.

For many, Christmas is about spending time with family and friends, sharing meals, giving gifts, and enjoying the spirit of the season. People decorate their homes with lights, hang ornaments on Christmas trees (*mmm*, don't you love that fresh-cut pine smell?), and play cheerful, holiday music that fills the air with joy and memories of Christmases past.



Families might have their own special traditions—like baking cookies, watching holiday movies, opening presents, or wearing matching pajamas. Some people enjoy writing cards, volunteering, or just taking time to relax and reflect on the past year. Even if someone doesn't celebrate Christmas in a religious way, it can still be a meaningful time to show kindness, help others, and celebrate love, hope, and the generous Christmas spirit.

Whether you're with a big group or spending the day quietly, Christmas can be a wonderful reminder to appreciate the friends, family, and staff in your life!

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY IS 12/15

Bill of Rights Day is celebrated every year on December 15th. On that day in 1791, ten very important rules were added to the U.S. Constitution. These rules are called the Bill of Rights and they protect our freedoms.

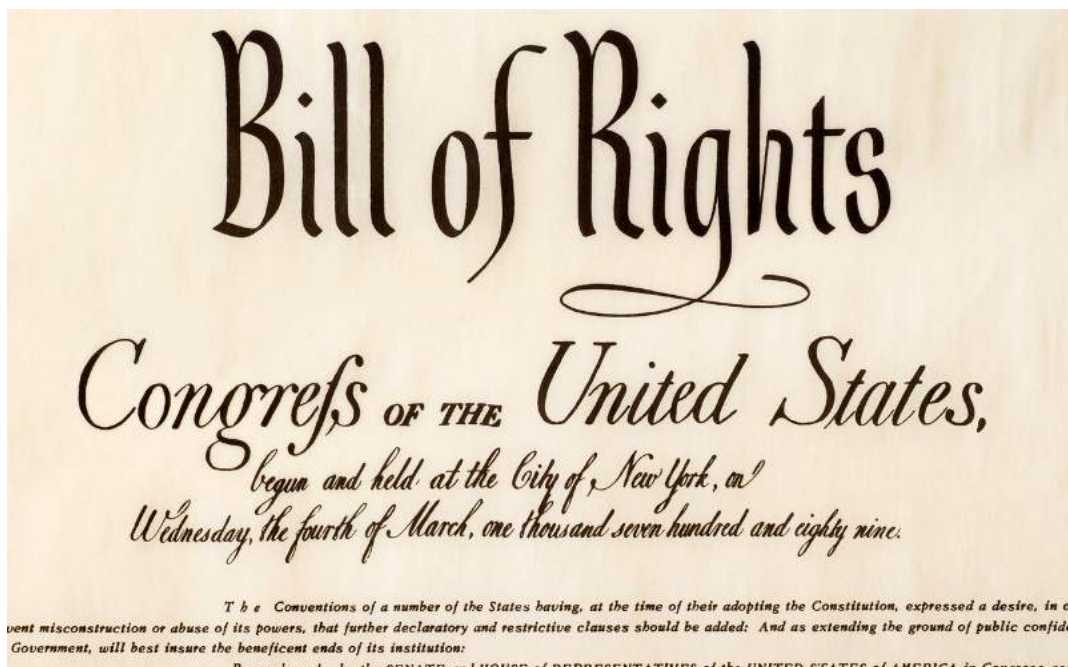
Even today, these rights help make sure people are treated fairly—no matter how they communicate, move, learn, or where they were born. As you know, everyone in the U.S. deserves to be treated with dignity.

A brief history

The U.S. Constitution was written in 1787, but it didn't include a clear list of individual freedoms. Some people were worried the government could become too powerful. James Madison worked to fix this by writing 10 amendments—changes to the Constitution—that would guarantee protections for the people. These 10 amendments became the Bill of Rights and they still protect us today.

Here are just a few of the rights we all have:

- **Speak Freely** (1st Amendment)
 - We can say what we believe!
- **Be Treated Fairly in Court** (5th & 6th Amendments)
 - *Everyone* has the right to a lawyer, and a fair trial.
- **Privacy Matters** (4th Amendment)
 - Police can't search your home or phone without permission or a judge's okay.
 - *Everyone* deserves privacy.



BILL OF RIGHTS FOR YOU

- **No Cruel or Unfair Punishment** (8th Amendment)
 - People with disabilities and others cannot be treated cruelly or unfairly by police, courts, or anyone in power.
- **All People Have Rights** (9th Amendment)
 - Even if a right isn't listed, it still matters. We *all* have the right to live safely and be respected!

Rights are not just for certain people. They're not just for people who talk a certain way or who are U.S. citizens. They belong to *everyone* including:

- People with physical and intellectual disabilities
- People who use wheelchairs or communication devices
- People born in other countries
- People with different skin colors, languages, and religions



These rights belong to YOU.

- Have you ever felt like someone didn't treat you fairly? What helped?
- Why is it important for all people—especially people with disabilities—to know their rights?
- Can you think of a right you use every day (like speaking, privacy, or having help in court)?
- What does “being equal” mean to you?

The Bill of Rights is more than an old document.

It's a promise that all people in America—including YOU—have rights that must be protected. Let's keep learning, speaking up, and supporting one another!

Remember When?



Stay Strong and Independent: Easy Exercises You Can Do Every Day

Staying active helps us to be able do the things we love such as walking out to the van, getting inside, standing and waiting for your Whistlestop ride, going shopping, or going to a restaurant for a meal out. Can you imagine what it would be like if you couldn't do things like that anymore?

Here are some easy exercises that can help you stay mobile and...

- Get in and out of chairs more easily
- Walk without getting tired
- Keep your balance so you don't fall
- Feel happier and have more energy!

The good news?

You don't need special equipment or a gym. These exercises use movements you already do every day!

Easy Exercises to Try

- **Sit to Stand** Practice getting up from a chair and sitting back down slowly. Do this 5-10 times. This helps you get up easier at home, at restaurants, or anywhere you sit.
- **Marching in Place** Stand and lift one knee up, then the other, like you're marching. Hold onto a counter or sturdy chair if you need to. Do this for 30 seconds. This keeps your legs strong for walking.
- **Heel Raises** Stand behind a chair and hold on. Lift up on your toes, then lower back down. Do this 10 times. This helps with balance and makes walking easier.
- **Arm Circles** Stretch your arms out to the sides. Make small circles forward, then backward. Do this 10 times each way. This helps you reach for things on shelves.

Remember: Start slow. It's okay to take breaks. Do what feels comfortable for you.



10-minute Workout for Older Adults

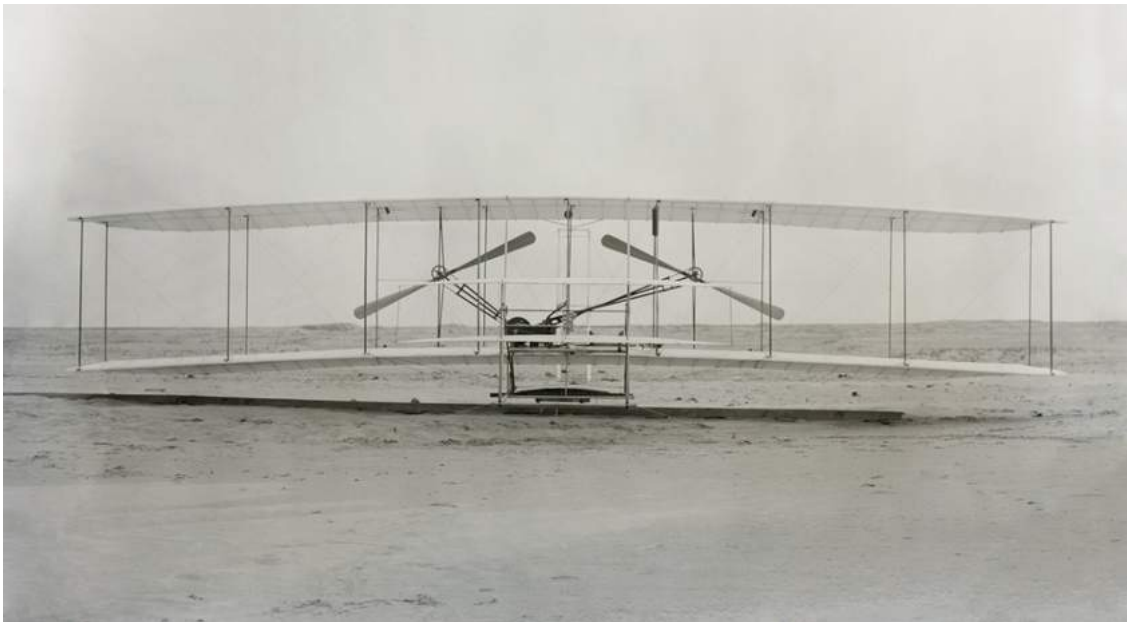
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The Wright Brothers

by Connor Richey

National Wright Brothers Day is celebrated on December 17. The Wright Brothers invented the very first airplane. Orville was born on August 19, 1871 in Dayton, Ohio and died from a heart attack on January 30, 1948 in Dayton, Ohio. Wilbur was born on April 16, 1867 in Millville, Indiana and died from typhoid fever on May 30, 1912 in Dayton, Ohio. Their first powered aircraft was called the Wright Flyer, also known as the Kitty Hawk Flyer I, and the 1903 Flyer. It first flew on December 17, 1903. They began the pioneer era of aviation. The flight took place near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The Wright Brothers also did bicycle repair, rental and sales business in 1892. They also hosted printing offices and shop.

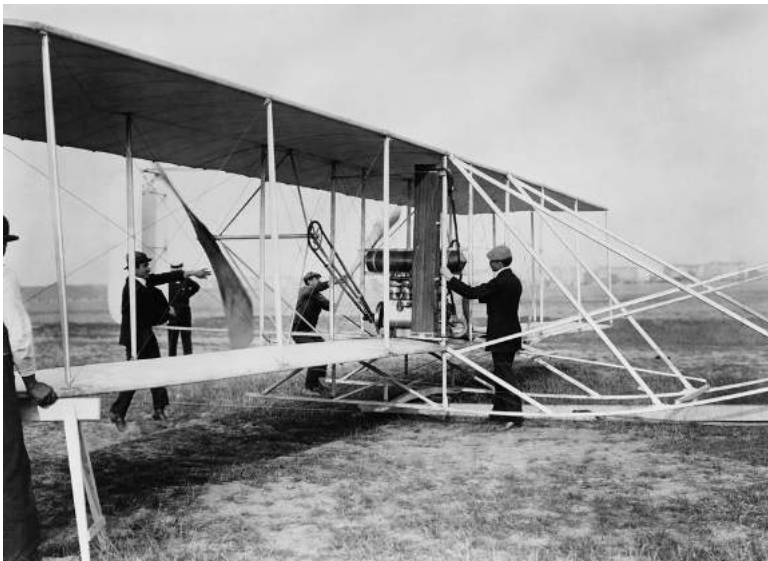
The Wright Flyer was the first aircraft flown four times. It was flown near the town of Kill Devil Hills, which is approximately four miles or six kilometers south of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The Flyer was developed from the Wright Glider that was tested at Kitty Hawk between 1900 and 1902. The Wright Flyer was an experimental aircraft that flew 852 feet above ground during its fourth and last flight. The Flyer was made from ash wood, camber, and cotton. They also invented their three-axis control system, enabling the aircraft to be actively steered to control its stability. Their aircraft controls made fixed-wing powered flight achievable, becoming the blueprint for all fixed-wing powered aircraft since. Unfortunately, it was damaged when it landed and destroyed minutes later by strong winds. It was shipped back to Dayton, Ohio, and never flew again, but it was later restored and displayed on several occasions.



The Wright Brothers 'machine' the plane in which they made the first powered controlled flight in a heavier-than-air airplane on December 17 1903.

Connor Writes About the Wrights

The Wright Flyer was developed into the Wright Flyer II and the Wright Flyer III, which were experimental aircraft, as well. The Wright Flyer II flew in 1904 and the Wright Flyer III first flew in 1905 and retired in 1908. The Wright Flyer II is not on display at any museum, but was dismantled after its test flight in 1904. The Wright Flyer III today is on display at the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park in Ohio. The original Wright Flyer became a part of the historic aircraft collection under the Smithsonian Institution in 1948. After a bitter and long conflict between Orville and the Smithsonian, the institution ended its rejection of the Wright Flyer as the first successful airplane. The Flyer today is a museum piece at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC.



(left) Orville Wright with his airplane in Berlin, Germany, at Tempelhof Field, 1909. Orville stands near the engine, as two men turn the propellers to start the engine



(Right) Allen Ryan and Wilbur Wright in discussion, c. 1909-1912. Ryan was chairman of the Committee for the GREAT AERIAL TOURNAMENT at Belmont Park, in Oct. 1910.

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Exercise Can be Fun!

Let's learn from our grand Poobah Chas, exercise does not always look like a sweaty gym workout. You do not have to hit the treadmill or swim laps to get your body moving.

A game of basketball with a good friend like Harold, a round of golf (or hitting some balls with friends) are great ways to get you on your feet, have fun, and build strength and boost your mood.

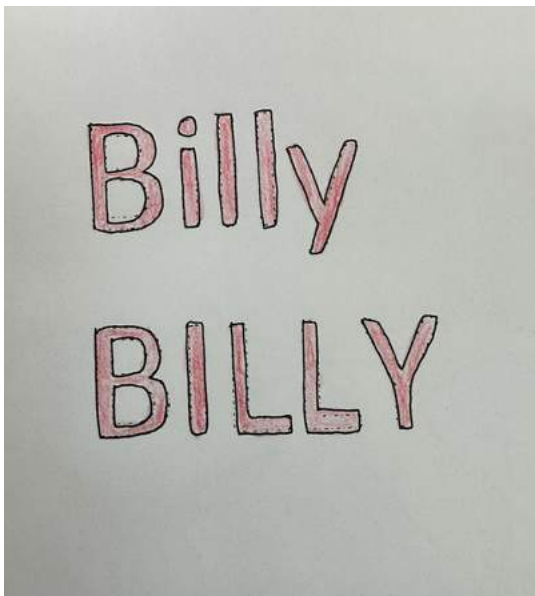
When movement feels fun, it becomes easier to make it a healthy part of your life!



**FEEL
GOOD**



Check Out Our Artwork



Andrew's Corner

"Andrew, have you written about that before?" When it comes time to choose a magazine article topic, this is something we find ourselves asking regularly! And the answer is often, yes, yes he has! Like his PPP says, Andrew's list of passions and pastimes just keeps growing and growing. As does his list of writing credits! Here is a list of article titles Andrew has chosen, researched, and written for CONNECTION the past five years:



Bio: Andrew Newson is a student at Life College and is 25 years old. He likes comic books, video games, hiking, exploring new places with his mom.... and babies. He is an authority in all things Star Wars, Star Trek and great places to go in the Bay Area. He is currently learning Mandarin and loves to research and learn new things.

- The Legend of Zelda
- Yu-gi-oh
- Nutcrackers
- Looney Tunes
- Tom and Jerry
- The Sycamore Gap Tree of the Robin Hood Tree
- Studio Ghibli
- Green Lantern
- The Flash
- Squirrels
- Video Games Based on Comic Books
- Unicorns
- Cereal
- Year of the Dragon
- Yokai
- Jack Kirby
- Pikas
- Spider-Man
- Mochi
- The Far Side
- King Kong
- Batman
- Wallace and Gromit
- Animal Idioms
- Mantises
- Weird Al Yankovic
- United Arab Emirates
- Constellations
- Opposoms on the Dark Side
- Super Smash Bros.
- Las Vegas
- The Amazing Armadillo
- Tokusatsu: Japanese Special Effects
- Where Did Video Games Come From?
- Flying Squirrels
- Sumo Wrestlers
- Vampires in Romania? It's a Myth
- Why Leaves Change Color
- The Sea Anemone
- Baby Seagulls
- How Godzilla Got That Roar... and Other Behind the Scenes Facts
- I Think I Will Starve if I go to Japan
- Vincent Van Gogh's Sunflower Paintings
- Why My Favorite Mythical Creature is a Basilisk
- "Meep Meep!" Roadrunners are Fast but they Can't Fly
- From Klingon to Na'vi, Invented Languages are Fun!
- Why We Love Baby Animals

Quite an impressive body of work!

Archived issues of our magazine are available on our website at

<http://www.communityhomesandservices.com/newsletters.php>

Ōmisoka in Japan - December 31

Ōmisoka is the Japanese celebration of New Year's Eve. Just like people in the United States gather for countdowns and fireworks, families in Japan come together to clean, eat special foods, and get ready for a fresh start.

Many families begin with Ōsōji, a deep cleaning of the home. It's more than tidying up—it's a way to sweep away bad luck or problems from the past year and welcome good fortune into the new one.

In the evening, people often eat Toshikoshi Soba, a bowl of long buckwheat noodles with chopsticks. The noodles represent a wish for long life and a smooth transition from one year into the next. Eating them slowly is part of the tradition!

Have you ever ate a meal very slowly?

Have you ever tried to use chopsticks?



At midnight, many temples take part in Joya no Kane, the ringing of a large bell 108 times. In Buddhism, the number 108 represents human desires that can cause worry or stress. The sound of the bell is meant to clear the stressful feelings and help everyone start the year with calm minds.

Have you ever heard a bell ring?

Where was it?



After midnight, many people visit a shrine or temple for Hatsumōde, the first prayer of the new year. Families pray for health, happiness, and prosperity, and sometimes buy lucky charms to bring home.

Ōmisoka reminds us that the best way to start a new year is with gratitude, family, and a clean slate—both at home and in our hearts.



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