

Love blooms when the community cares

My parents have always made it clear that they love each other as much as a man and a woman can love each other. They've given me a great example of a positive and enduring relationship, and I've always enjoyed their little antics. With Valentine's Day coming up, or, as I like to call it while I wait for my Prince Charming, Single's Awareness Day, I can't help but feel the romance. I took my dad shopping for my mom's Valentine present the other day, and he already had an incredibly sweet idea.

When I was younger, my father planted two rose plants in the front garden, one for my mother and one for me. Another time, he left chocolate kisses around the house for us. And, outside of the once-a-year day, Dad never misses an opportunity to have a random dance to music on the radio with his beautiful wife or princess of a daughter.

Valentine's Day has had a presence in area stores for a month now, and, pardon the clichéd statement, but love is in the air. Tuesday, Feb. 7 marks the last day for folks to sign up for the Partners for Twain Harte Valentine Dinner at the Twain Harte Golf Course, which will start at 6 p.m. on Saturday and will include lasagna for dinner and music by The Lava Cats for entertainment. Tickets are \$20, available by calling the golf course at 586-3131.

For those who miss their chance to sign up for the Twain Harte get-away, the Sonora Emblem Club is taking reservations for its fourth annual Sweetheart Dinner and Dance, which it hosts on Feb. 14 at the Sonora Elks Lodge. Open to the

public, the event begins at 4 p.m. with a no-host bar. Following a New York steak dinner at 6 p.m., Country Flavor plays music for guests' dancing pleasure. Tickets are \$15 per person or \$25 per couple.

According to Laurel Utecht, press correspondent for the Emblem Club, funds from the dance and other Emblem events go toward high school scholarships, veteran activities, literacy programs, teen drug prevention projects and other community projects.

"Emblem was born, so to speak, in 1917 when the wives of Elks gathered at the Providence, R.I., Elks Lodge during World War I to wrap bandages for wounded soldiers," Utecht said.

Utecht, who has served as the club's president twice in the past, said the women decided to form a women's organization that was nationally chartered in 1926. Sonora Emblem Club No. 124 was chartered in 1947.

"We are dedicated to charitable acts in the community and bear true allegiance to the constitution and the flag of the United States of America," Utecht said. "The Emblem Club is important to me and all our members, as it provides an avenue to assist those who are in need. This particular event is one of our major fundraisers and also provides a nice evening out to celebrate the romance of Valentine's Day."

Utecht started the event after area dancers who regularly attended dances at the Elks Lodge mentioned it would be nice to have a dance floor to dance on instead of a tile floor. That gave Utecht the idea, and she raised \$4,000 to purchase a

Emigrant Basin Pack and Social Club Scholarship Dinner

WHEN: 5 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Sonora Elks Lodge, 100 Elk Drive, Sonora

TICKETS: \$20 for adults; children get in free at 532-8283 or 768-1126

portable wooden dance floor. The grand opening of the new floor became the first Sweetheart Dinner and Dance; all of the donors attended as special guests.

"Romance is fun!" Utecht said. "Dancing is fun! Eating a great meal is fun! Being with the wonderful people that live in Tuolumne and Calaveras counties is fun!"

Other great meals and events without romantic associations will occur this weekend, as well. The Emigrant Basin Pack and Social Club holds its 11th annual Scholarship Fundraising Dinner at the Elks Lodge at 5 p.m. Saturday, with barrel-roasted pork, Keith Keenom's Mountain Fever Band performing music and drawings for added fun. Tickets are \$20; kids get in free.

"This is our 11th year, and to date, we have given over 25 scholarships," said Joel Casler, an original member of the club. He added that the club has offered scholarships to students at each of the high schools in the Sonora area.

"We are a group and we work as

a group," Casler said. "We enjoy what we do and who we do it for. I, as well as each member, understand the importance of community involvement and overall goodwill. We are fortunate that we have found a way to give back to our area and to have a great time and a lot of fun doing it."

Other events include the 2012 Omega Nu Rummage Sale at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Friday and 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturday. There is a \$15 fee for snacks and wine on Friday and admission is free on Saturday.

The Mother Lode Adventist Junior Academy (80 N. Forest Road, Sonora) hosts its fourth annual dinner and silent auction at the school gymnasium from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$15 at the door; proceeds support the school's computer and scholarship funds.

Calvin Taylor, pianist and recording artist, appears in a live

Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



Emblem Club Sweetheart Dinner & Dance

WHEN: 4 to 10 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 14

WHERE: Sonora Elks Lodge, 100 Elk Drive, Sonora

TICKETS: \$15 each or \$25 per couple by calling Janet Hart at 533-3386 or email info@sonoraemblem-124.com

concert of sacred music at 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Sonora Seventh-day Adventist Church (40 N. Forest Road, Sonora). There is no charge for admission; call 532-3337 to learn more.

Love – of each other and for our community – is certainly in the air.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

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The Banana Ranch – wink, wink

Prostitutes were in California before the Gold Rush and were often the first to leave a gold camp when it was on the decline. The wise prostitutes of the Gold Rush era were often shrewd judges of a community's economic status. The number of prostitutes in a community was an indication of the money available there. It was believed that when the girls showed up, the town was booming; but if the girls left town, the community was going bust.

The first California prostitutes were in it for the money, plus a variety of interesting reasons. For the first time, women who came west could choose their own destinies and were not at the mercy of men. They could be in business for themselves. But the life of a prostitute wasn't glamorous. Prostitutes feared

diseases and pregnancy; they were often outcasts from their families, as well as society in general. Living in a house with other women of the same fate gave them the comfort and security of not living alone.

The Mother Lode clung to its houses of prostitution long after most cities had succumbed to the law. The law against prostitution was, in fact, passed in 1872, yet in the foothills, brothels continued to thrive for decades. There were several across the Mother Lode that continued operation until the 1950s. There was one near Chinese Camp in Tuolumne County; one near Paloma in Calaveras County; and

Bonnie Miller

Mining the Past



there was a notorious red light district in Jackson in Amador County. But none were as famous as the one south of Angels Camp called the Banana Ranch.

The Banana Ranch was a quiet brothel owned and operated by the most proper of madams, Vera Gayle Reynolds. Everyone knew her as Gayle. Her past is a bit hazy, but she

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