

# SARATOGA NEWS

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## Inside

PAGE A5

**Health notice:** The Saratoga Library is cancelling all adult and children's group programs for the month of March.

PAGE A8

**Different approach:** 'Social distancing' the new normal at South Bay senior centers.

PAGE A14

**High school sports:** SCVAL and other leagues suspend play due to coronavirus concerns.

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## LITERATURE

# In touch with her local roots

Author's apricot obsession has roots in Saratoga. Page A5



FILE PHOTO

The second edition of local author Lisa Prince Newman's "For the Love of Apricots: Recipes and Memories of the Santa Clara Valley" is due out this month. Newman, who grew up in Saratoga, says her family was living farm to table 'long before that term was invented.'

# Author's apricot obsession has roots in Saratoga

By **Laura Ness**  
Correspondent

Local author Lisa Prince Newman grew up in Saratoga, surrounded by the beauty of apricot blossoms. As a child, she fell in love with apricots and has dedicated much of her adulthood to learning as much as she can about the precious fruits and their local growers in Santa Clara County.

"I connected at a deep emotional level to the landscape, the seasonal rhythms of nature, and to the extraordinary fruit we grew," Newman says. "My mother was an adventurous cook, and I learned to appreciate the 'farm to table' way we lived — using what we produced seasonally in our daily meals—long before that term was invented."

The second edition of her cookbook, "For the Love of Apricots: Recipes and Memories of the Santa Clara Valley"—which is part history, part recipe collection and part nostalgia—is due out this month. In it, Newman tells tales of the few remaining farming families who are still producing fruit, including Novakovich Orchards on Fruitvale Avenue in Saratoga and CJ Olson Cherries in Sunnyvale. Their stories tell of their dedication to a shrinking specialty industry, once considered a household commodity.

"It's interesting to look at recent data from 2017 and 2018 on apricot production in the Bay Area and California in general," Newman says. "There is a steady downward trend, I'm sad to say, which is all the more reason to highlight, as I try to do in the cookbook and my blog, that we should enjoy, support



PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA PRINCE NEWMAN

Growing up in Saratoga, author Lisa Prince Newman says she was "deeply influenced by the environmental movement of the 1970s and expansion of the field of city planning." Newman now works as a city planner in Mill Valley.

and raise awareness about California-grown apricots."

Although California still produces 78% of the apricots grown in the U.S., fruit orchard acreage is plummeting. As of 2017, Santa Clara and San Benito counties combined had just 696 acres of apricot orchards remaining, down from their peak of 8,800 acres in the 1940s. California once boasted 18,600 apricot orchard acres, but agriculture and housing priorities shifted dramatically, with apricots getting the short end of the stick.

At the peak of the orchard fruit industry, there were 125 square miles of vineyards and trees in the Silicon Valley, and San Jose was the largest canning and dried fruit packing center in the world, boasting 18 canneries, 13 dried

fruit packing companies and 12 fresh fruit shippers. Then high tech happened.

"I feel a great sense of loss about this, as do so many of my generation who grew up in the Bay Area," Newman says. "Personally, I was deeply influenced by the environmental movement of the '70s and expansion of the field of city planning. I entered that field and continue to work as a city planner (in Mill Valley) with the intention to encourage city-centered land use planning that allows agriculture, open space, recreational and watershed lands to be preserved close by city centers."

Globalization has also impacted local apricot production. Since the 1980s, inexpensive Turkish apricots have driven

down demand for and production of California apricots. But Newman says it's all in the taste.

"For those who know the fabulous flavor of a fresh Blenheim apricot grown in California and dried to perfection, cost is not a barrier," she adds. "Purchasing and enjoying California's superior-tasting fruit is an important choice that we consumers can make to encourage local agricultural production."

Fortunately, production in the Santa Clara Valley has been quite good for the last two years, keeping supplies and prices steady. Crop yield is highly dependent on the trees receiving sufficient "cold hours" during the winter months, which translates to 750 hours between 32 to 45 degrees. Then, once bloom oc-

curs, lack of rain and wind will help ensure a good fruit set, while windy weather or freezing temperatures could be disruptive.

To help preserve this beloved crop, Newman encourages people to plant an apricot tree in their backyard. "Visit and support the orchards that remain, ask your grocer and farmers market vendors to provide the best-tasting varieties of apricots, and support local land use decisions to protect and support remaining agriculture as well as to create new opportunities for agricultural development," she adds.

Through Newman's recipes, which range from appetizers to main dishes to a variety of cookies and desserts, you can taste the passion she has for the versatility apricots offer. Her book contains recipes for apricot almond coins, Swiss apricot mousse, apricot-strawberry tart and the ever-popular apricot bars, not to mention apricot liqueur.

The author also touts the apricot's health benefits. "Dried apricots are one of the healthiest and most beneficial of fruits," she says. "Apricots help improve not only anemia but also digestion through their high fiber content. Vision and skin problems are enhanced with their large concentration of vitamins A and C. The antioxidants in California apricots can also reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and stroke."

Among her book-signing appearances in support of "For the Love of Apricots 2020," Newman plans to be at the annual Saratoga Blossom Festival at the city's Heritage Orchard on Saturday, May 9, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.