

Danville Patch

Exchange Club Celebrates 100 Years

The Exchange Club of the San Ramon Valley joins its national club in celebrating a century of service.

By [Linda Park](#)

The National Exchange Club, with its San Ramon Valley chapter, celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

The organization was founded in 1911 by Charles Berkey in Detroit, MI. It is now the largest national service club.

“The 100th anniversary is pretty exciting for the organization, because it affects some 34,000 people across America,” said Karen Stepper, president of the Exchange Club of the San Ramon Valley and Mayor of the Town of Danville.

The members meet once a month to listen to guest speakers and to network with each other.

The San Ramon Valley chapter was restarted in October of 2005 by Stepper to continue the projects that she and other members of the 680/24 Exchange Club started.

“The Exchange Club started with exchanging ideas,” Stepper said. “They’re the ones who made commercial airlines work so well by putting all the arrows on the barns back then, because the airlines couldn’t see where to go.”

Stepper said the two main focuses of the club are patriotism and child abuse prevention.

Part of the patriotism focus is the Freedom Shrines, a wall of founding documents in original handwriting. This includes copies of speeches from past presidents, historical figures, and other important documents in U.S. history.

“It’s important to all of the people who are out there, and that they know how to use these tools to support our government and to ask the right questions,” Stepper said. “I think that getting these documents out to our future is a way of making them part of the solutions.”

There are currently 12 Freedom Shrines in the San Ramon Valley. They can be found at California, Dougherty Valley, Monte Vista and San Ramon Valley high schools, Iron Horse, Charlotte Wood, Los Cerros, Diablo Vista and Windmere Ranch middle schools, St. Isidore School and the Danville Library. There is also a portable Freedom Shrine.

“The Freedom Shrines are encouraging the youth of America to appreciate the history and documents of the U.S. government so they can perpetuate that,” said Lee Halverson, events vice president for the San Ramon Exchange Club.

The exchange club also has a scholarship program. Students are invited to listen to speakers, and then write an essay based on what they learn from the speakers and the Freedom Shrine documents.

They are given a topic revolved around the Constitution and a current topic impacted by America's founding documents. This year's topic is government mandates and whether they should exist.

The awards are \$1,500 for first place, \$1,000 for second place and \$500 for third place.

"They can go to the [website](#) and see that they could enter," Stepper said. "Our goal is to have more and more kids enter every year."

Adding to its mission for patriotism and the future of America, the Exchange Club also focuses on child abuse prevention.

While there is not a Child Prevention Center in the San Ramon Valley, the club still provides pamphlets and resources for the local community and hosts community events to raise awareness.

The club will host a "Believe in Blue" child abuse prevention project at Lunardi's Market in Danville on April 16 from 9 a.m. to noon.

"We have a lot of wonderful materials from national to hand out. And people forget that this can happen anywhere, in anybody's home," Stepper said.

She stressed that handing out the material is not accusing people of abuse, but providing knowledge. Additional information is also provided, such as setting up a code for emergencies and setting up internet security.

"So we hope they'll come by on Child Abuse Day," she said. "It's not only about child abuse prevention; it's also about making your child safe."

The club is open for anyone to join. It is a non-political organization for like-minded people to share ideas and learn from the various speakers who attend the club's meetings.

Past speakers include the director of the Cancer Control Center, publisher for the Contra Costa Times, BART director and the senior vice president of Merrill Lynch.

"It's more of a community club," Marvin Remmick, the treasurer of the San Ramon Exchange Club, said. "The speakers shine light on what is going on in the community."

Remmick pointed out that being part of the Exchange Club is a good way to network and get to know the community and challenges that other businesses are facing.

"When we meet once a month for these wonderful speakers, it's also a chance to network with your elected officials," Stepper said. "And a chance to ask them questions if you have concerns in your community."

For additional information about the Exchange Club of the San Ramon Valley or its scholarship program visit www.srvexchangeclub.org.