



Soroptimist International of Rio Vista 2025-2026

2025-2026 Club Officers

President: Evelyn Nodal (second term)

Vice President: Jennifer Emigh

President-Elect: Wanda Apel

Secretary: MJ Caesar

Treasurer: Vivian Nodal

Assistant Treasurer: Toni Tucker

Member Liaison: Lori Oleksiewicz

The Club's first fundraiser sets the fundraising tone for the rest of the year. The Meat, Heat and Chill Raffle was a huge success!

Meat, Heat and Chill Fall Fundraiser



Soroptimists Kick Off Meat, Heat and Chill Raffle

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista is excited to kick off their newly renamed, “Meat, Heat and Chill” Raffle. It’s their first fundraiser of the year — all to support scholarships for women and girls in our community! This summer-themed raffle is packed with prizes perfect for fun in the sun, and for the first time, reaturing three exciting prizes:

1st Prize: 100 lbs. of premium meat
2nd Prize: A top-brand grill
3rd Prize: Ice chest & grill tool set

Ticket prices are: 1 Ticket for \$10 or
2 Tickets for \$25. The drawing will be
held at the annual Rio Vista Bass Festival
on October 11th.

Buy Tickets from any Soroptimist member. You’ll see the group selling tickets August 23rd at Hog August Bites, September 13th at Airport Days and October 11th at Bass Derby.

Whether you’re yearby or far away, you can still join in! Virtual Tickets are available — head to the Soroptimist International of Rio Vista website at <http://siriovista.org/> and click on the UPCOMING EVENTS link to grab yours.

Money from this fundraiser supports several noteworthy scholarship endeavors. These include thousands in annual scholarships to worthy graduating RVHS seniors and the Women’s Empowerment Awards to deserving women needing assistance with their educational goals. In addition, Soroptimist International of the Americas nationally recognized Live Your Dram Award (offering scholarships for head of household skills training or education), Founder Region Violet Richardson Award (recognizing high school volunteer efforts) and Fellowship Awards (providing Doctoral candidate scholrships),

Make a difference for women and girls in our community and mapbe win something awesome while you’re at it.

(Rio Vista Beacon, August 13, 2025)



Soroptimist & S-Club Serve Chili & Ribs at Hog August Bites

Rio Vista High School S-Club and supporting Soroptimist members and volunteers braved large crowds of voracious chili and rib eaters, serving thousands of samples as part of the Hog August Bites People's Choice judging events.

S-Club is a service club for high school students in our community supported by Soroptimist International of Rio Vista. Money from this fundraiser will be spent on their new project for the year, to be determined at their first meeting in September.

Soroptimist club members also sold tickets for their 2025 Meat, Heat and Chill Raffle. Ticket sales were brisk at 1/\$10 or 3/\$25 with buyers eager to win over 100 pounds of meat (first place), a high-end grill (second place) & BBQ tools (third place). Raffle proceeds support various Soroptimist

scholarships in the community.



Emelia Seiferling, Kay Kelley & Mandy Elder sell tickets.

(Rio Vista Beacon, September 3, 2025)



Soroptimist at Bass Derby

Fundraising Activities at HAB, Airport Days, Farmer's Market and Bass Derby



Club members showed up to sell the tickets at Airport Days and have fun.



Soroptimist at Bass Derby

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista was busy at the Bass Derby Festival, selling wine and culminating several months of ticket sales with a drawing for 100 lbs of meat plus other great prizes.

“Meat, Heat and Chill” raffle winners were first place winner Paula McEvoy - 100 lbs of meat, second place winner Tess A-S - Weber BBQ, third place winner Pat Spencer - Yeti cooler, and fourth place winner Jordan Nodal - Bank of Stockton donated basket.

The club extends a huge thank-you to the Rio Vista Chamber of Commerce for doing such a marvelous job on this year's Bass Derby Festival! The club is grateful to have been part of this wonderful community event — and for the chance to raise funds to support the club's mission to help women and girls reach their full potential.

Thank you to everyone who stopped by, bought raffle tickets, spun the wheel, or shared a glass of wine with club members — your support truly makes a difference.

(Rio Vista Beacon, October 29, 2026)



*Selling tickets for the Meat, Heat & Chill Raffle fundraiser happened for several months during Hot August Bites, Airport Days, Farmer's Market, and culminated at the Bass Derby. The club also poured wine at a few events as a “side” fundraiser. “Meat, Heat and Chill” raffle winners were first place winner Paula McEvoy - **100 lbs.of meat**, second place winner Tess A-S -**Weber BBQ**, third place winner Jordan Nodal - **Bank of Stockton donated basket**.*

Getting the Word Out

One of the most important aspects of finding scholarship winners is getting the word out to the schools and the community. SIRV is very fortunate to have a wonderful partnership with the Rio Vista Beacon. Almost weekly, SIRV makes the paper either with pictures and a news event or announcing that we are looking for young women and girls to apply for our yearly scholarships. The club also actively posts on Facebook and Instagram.

Soroptimist Announce 2026 Live Your Dream Award

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista is excited to announce the 2026 Live Your Dream scholarship. Soroptimist invests in women and girls, focusing on the one area that has the most impact on transforming lives and communities—education. By empowering women and girls through access to education and training, the lives of individuals, families, and whole communities can be improved.

When women learn, families live healthier lives. When girls go to school, they are more likely to get better paying jobs and their financial contributions to their families increase. When girls have educated moms, they are more likely to be enrolled in school and to reach higher levels of education.

Are you currently enrolled in an undergraduate or vocational skills program? The \$2,500 Live Your Dream Award assists women in our community who

provide the primary source of financial support for their families, giving them the resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects. Recipients may use the cash award to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education or skills training — such as tuition, books, childcare and transportation. Ultimately, a Live Your Dream Awards finalist has the potential to receive up to \$16,000 if they win at higher levels in the Soroptimist organization.

The Live Your Dream Award provides over \$3 million in cash awards to head-of-household women in need each year. Since the program's inception in 1972, more than \$40 million has helped tens of thousands of women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families.

(Rio Vista Beacon, September 10, 2026)

Club Members Attend District Meeting



Club Members attended the District Meeting held in Concord on October 4, 2025. Pictured above left to right: District II Director Dana Holve; Kay Kelley, F.R. Fellowship Director, District II; Charlene Spinner; Wanda Apel, Vice President; Michelle Burnett; Vivian Nodal, Treasurer; Toni Tucker; Evelyn Nodal, President.

Recruitment Efforts



The Membership Committee has come up with several clever ways to entice new members to join the club.

We ran an invite to our Ice Cream Social “Meet and Greet” in the Beacon. Thanks Beacon for great coverage. On Tuesday, October 21 from 6pm to 8pm we enjoyed the ice cream and the women who came to share it with us.

Soroptimist to Host Ice Cream Social “Meet and Greet”

“Soroptimist International of Rio Vista invites women of all ages to an exciting Ice Cream Social “Meet and Greet” on Tuesday, October 21, from 6pm to 8pm. Held at the Rio Vista Bakery, the event offers a sweet opportunity to enjoy delicious ice cream while connecting with local members of the Soroptimist organization.

The ice cream social is open to anyone interested in learning more about Soroptimist International and the important work they do in supporting women and girls in achieving their dreams through

education, empowerment, and development programs. Meet current members, ask questions, and discover how you can get involved in this meaningful mission.

Whether you’re looking to network, learn about volunteer opportunities, or simply enjoy a fun night out with the community, the ice cream social promises a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Bring a friend and indulge in a treat while learning how Soroptimist makes a difference locally and globally.”

(Rio Vista Beacon November 12, 2025)



The Club Welcomes New Members!

The membership recruitment efforts paid off!

Welcome Cathy Von der Porten

At the program meeting on September 17th, Soroptimist International of Rio Vista welcomed new member Cathy Von der Porten.

Cathy hails from Cincinnati, Ohio, and moved with her family, including six siblings, to Lafayette, California, in 1968.

She graduated from Reed College in 1977 and holds a master's degree in Public Policy from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA, which she earned in 1979. Cathy worked as a Policy Budget Analyst at the Small Business Administration (SBA) in Washington, D.C.

After moving back to the Bay Area in 1982, Cathy worked for Arthur Andersen and Hambrecht and Quist. She retired in 1994 to care for her young son.

Cathy relocated to Rio Vista in 2019, is a widow, and has two children. Her son runs a consulting business in Oakland, while her daughter lives in Boston and works in the biotech industry.

(Rio Vista Beacon, October 1, 2025)



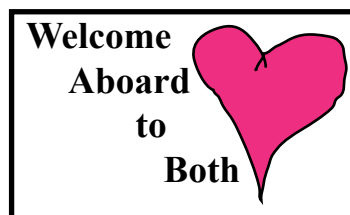
Welcome Shavonne Saroyan

At the November 5 business meeting SIRV welcomed Shavonne Saroyan.

Shavonne was born and raised in San Francisco and spent 40 years living in Oakland. Three years ago, she and her husband, Wayne, along with their dog, Kayla, moved to the Liberty/Summit area of Rio Vista.

During the first half of her career, Shavonne traveled the world as a professional evaluator in the hospitality industry. She later served as Executive Assistant to the President and Board of several nonprofit organizations. In her free time, she enjoys gardening and reading especially urban fantasy, science fiction and Marvel comics.

(Rio Vista Beacon, November 19, 2025)



Violet Richardson Award

In early December, 2025 this article, followed by an article on December 10th, appeared in the Beacon, inviting young women to apply before December 15th.



Soroptimist Kicks Off Violet Richardson Award

As a volunteer service organization, Soroptimist believes that by acknowledging young women's volunteer involvement now, they will grow up to be vital active members of the community.

Are you:

- Caring, compassionate, creative and most of all committed to making the world a better place?
- Demonstrating leadership and initiative in both identifying a problem and in trying to solve it?
- Making significant and noteworthy accomplishments as a volunteer?

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista seeks to honor a local young woman between the age of 14 and 18 for volunteer action with an award of \$500. The deadline to apply is December 15, 2025.

The award is named after Violet Richardson, the first president of the first Soroptimist club in Alameda County in 1921. Richardson believed in personal responsibility and the motto, "It's what you do that counts."

She lived her life accordingly, as an active member in her community who was committed to creating opportunities for girls and young women. Soroptimist established this award to honor the memory of this unique woman and her dedication to volunteer action.

Soroptimist Recognizes Members



Members really appreciated being recognized for their service to the club at the January 7 meeting.

Thanks to all these women for their help and dedication over the years and hopes they will continue to support Soroptimists' vital work – uplifting women and girls and building a brighter future for all.

- 5 Years of Service
Wanda Apel, Becky Burch, Jennifer Emigh, Suzanne Goldberg, Minnie Howell, Greta Jenkins, Kay Kelley, Toni Tucker and Kathy Wright.
- 10 Years of Service
Lupe Finch and Laurie Oleksiewicz.
- 15+ Years of Service
Charlene Spinner, Vera Sunada, Susan Whitesell.
- 25+ Years of Service
Mandy Elder.
- 40+ Years of Service
Jo Harlow.
- 45+ Years of Service
Dr. Emilia Seiferling.

(Rio Vista Beacon, January 14, 2026)



Start Your Day With Soroptimist



Come join us and learn more about Soroptimist's mission and community involvement

"Start Your Day with Soroptimist" is a welcoming event and is an opportunity for everyone interested in learning more about Soroptimist's mission and community involvement, to connect with current members and discover how they can become involved.

Enjoy some delectable pastries, a cup of coffee, or a decadent mimosa while engaging in conversation in a relaxed atmosphere. Whether you are curious about the organization's work to empower women and girls or looking for a meaningful way to serve your community, this event is the perfect starting point.

(Rio Vista Beacon, January 14, 2026)

Live Your Dream Award



Marianna Tendick

*Andrea Nathhanly Mandujano
and President Elect Wanda Apel*



*Committee member Suzy Goldberg, Andrea and daughter,
Marianna and son and Wanda Apel*

At the Soroptimist International Rio Vista meeting on January 7th, two amazing young women were awarded grants totaling \$2,500 each to help them complete their education and fulfill their dreams.

The first award was given to Andrea Nathhanly Mandujano. She has overcome many obstacles to reach her goal of becoming a Medical Assistant and Phlebotomist. Andrea's ultimate goal is to become a nurse. She is a single mother of a 9-month-old child, whom she cares for while attending Blake Austin College. She is the primary financial supporter for her child. This grant will help her finish her schooling and achieve her goal.

The second award was given to Marianna Tendick. Her goal is to earn her bachelor's degree. She is a transfer student at Diablo Valley College. She is studying Pre-Law.

As a single mother to an 8-year-old special needs son, she decided that she wanted more for herself and her son since she was not getting any support from her son's father. Marianna's end goal is to become an attorney to help women navigate the legal system. The Live Your Dream grant will give her the leg up she needs to make her dreams possible.

The Live Your Dream Award is A Soroptimist International Americas Program that provides over \$2.8 million in cash awards to head-of-household women in need each year. Since the program's inception in 1972, more than \$40 million has helped tens of thousands of women achieve their dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. A study conducted by The Fels Institute of Government, a research and consulting organization based at the University of Pennsylvania, confirmed the program's efficacy and impact. It improves the recipients' quality of life, builds their confidence, strengthens their self-determination, and makes them want to, in turn, help others. Helping women in this way has been shown to lead to stronger communities, nations, and the world.

(Rio Vista Beacon, January 21, 2026)

70th Anniversary Gala & Women of Achievement Awards



70th Anniversary and Women of Achievement Awards Recognizes Local Women

For 70 years, Soroptimist International of Rio Vista has been proud to call this community home — and this milestone anniversary belongs to **Rio Vista as much as it belongs to Soroptimist.**

On **Saturday, March 7, 2026**, Soroptimist International of Rio Vista invites the community to celebrate at its **70th Anniversary Gala, featuring the Women of Achievement Awards**, hosted at the Monarch Grill. This special evening will honor inspiring local women, celebrate decades of service, and raise funds to support women and girls as they build bold, successful futures.

From the very beginning, Soroptimists' work in Rio Vista has been fueled by community support — local businesses, families, sponsors, volunteers, and neighbors who believe that when women and girls thrive, the entire community thrives. These 70 years of impact would not have been possible without Rio

Vista showing up, cheering loudly, and giving time and time again.

A Night to Celebrate — and Have Fun Doing It

This 1970s-inspired gala promises an evening full of connection, celebration, and joy. Guests will enjoy a welcome reception, dinner, the Women of Achievement Awards, and fundraising activities that continue throughout the night — all wrapped in music, laughter, and community spirit.

The Women of Achievement Awards will recognize remarkable women whose leadership, service, and dedication have made a meaningful difference in Rio Vista and beyond. Their stories reflect the very values Soroptimist stands for: courage, compassion, resilience, and the power of lifting others as you rise.

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Impact That Lasts Far Beyond One Night

The funds raised at the gala directly support Soroptimist programs that change lives — scholarships for women pursuing education or vocational training, mentoring and career development opportunities, and programs that empower girls to dream big and believe in their potential. And the results speak for themselves.

Women and girls supported by Soroptimist International of Rio Vista have gone on to complete degrees, launch careers, support their families, and become leaders in their workplaces and communities. These success stories don't just change individual lives — they strengthen families, workplaces, and the future of Rio Vista.

Be Part of the Next 70 Years

Together, let's honor the Past, celebrate the present and invest in the future — because when Rio Vista supports women and girls incredible things happen.

(Rio Vista Beacon, January 7, 2026)

The Club first created the WOA Award in 2024

2024 Women of Achievement Event

Recognized Women in our Community



L-R: Andrea Brimmer, Maureen Reis, Gwendolyn Sampson Brown, Stacia Olson, Katherine Wright, Jeannie McCormack, Margaret Anderson, and Amy Schmidt.

Soroptimist Women of Achievement!

Natalie Crew

Tami Mitchell

MaryEllen Lamothe

Lorelyn Hechtman

Andrea Cross Pearson


 Saturday, March 7, 2026 4:00 PM
 Monarch Grill - 1000 Summerset Dr
tinyurl.com/Soroptimist70


SOROPTIMIST
 Investing in Dreams

Soroptimist Announces Women of Achievement Honorees

The Women of Achievement Awards are part of the upcoming Soroptimist International of Rio Vista's 70th Anniversary Gala. SIRV is proud to announce the 2026 Women of Achievement award honorees:

- Natalie Crew — Past City Treasurer, AFS Coordinator at RVHS, and past two-term Soroptimist President — dedicated to youth, education, and civic service.
- Lorelyn Hechtman — Rio Vista Food Pantry leader and current Food Coordinator — a champion for families in need.
- MaryEllen Lamothe — Co-founder of Rio Vision, Planning Commissioner, Spirit of Solano Award recipient, and Past Soroptimist President — shaping community planning and vision.
- Tami Mitchell — Founder of the Rio Vista Farmer's Market, Downtown Association President, and 2025 RV Chamber Volunteer Award recipient — driving community revitalization.

- Andrea Cross-Pearson — Owner of Ben's Friends, Downtown Association Board Member, and 2025 Spirit of Solano Award recipient — advocating for local business and connection.

The club will provide additional information about each of the award honorees as it becomes available.

Sponsorships and ads help ensure Soroptimist can continue its mission while also showcasing the local businesses and organizations that believe in investing locally and empowering women and girls.

The event takes place March 7, 2026 at the Monarch Grill, 1000 Summerset Dr, Rio Vista, CA. Whether you attend with friends, host a table, sponsor the event, or place an ad, your participation helps write the next chapter of Soroptimist's impact in Rio Vista and River Delta communities.

(Rio Vista Beacon, February 4, 2026)



The 1970's-inspired gala celebrated 70 years of women whose leadership, vision, and service shaped our community. The 70th Anniversary Gala also honored five amazing Women of Achievement. The first two Beacon articles featured honorees Natalie Crew and Lorelyn Hechtman.



Natalie Crew

Decades of Dedication to Family, Youth, and Community

A Lifelong Commitment to Rio Vista, Natalie Crew has been a dedicated and influential volunteer in the Rio Vista community for decades, generously giving her time, energy, and leadership to organizations that support youth, families, and civic life. From 1974 to 1990, she played a pivotal role in local youth development through the Rio Vista PTA and Red Cross Swim Lessons for schools, and for 14 of those years she also coached the Rio Vista Sharks Swim Team, helping generations of young swimmers build confidence and life-saving skills.

Fostering Growth in Youth and Families

Natalie's commitment to children and families extended into education and service, where she taught catechism for seven years, served as a Cub Scout leader for both of her sons, and volunteered as a room mother and classroom helper throughout their school years. She was also actively involved with Rio Vista CARE, contributing six years to the Panther Pal Program and serving as Chair of the Super Slalom Windsurf Tournament for four years, raising funds to support local youth programs.

program and serving as Chair of the Super Slalom Windsurf Tournament for four years, raising funds to support local youth programs.

Leading by Example in Civic and Nonprofit Spheres

Her leadership reached the civic and nonprofit levels as well. Natalie served six years as City Treasurer, one year as PTA President, and held multiple leadership roles within Soroptimist International, including President (two years), Treasurer (two years), First Vice President, and Second Vice President.

A Lasting Impact on the Community

Balancing her extensive volunteer service while raising a family and working part-time, Natalie Crew exemplifies a lifelong commitment to community service and leadership. Her lasting impact continues to be felt throughout Rio Vista.



MaryEllen Lamothe

A Legacy of Community Enrichment

MaryEllen Lamothe has played a pivotal role in shaping community spirit and bringing economic vitality to Rio Vista. Her influence can be seen in numerous local initiatives, from beautification projects to beloved community events.

Driving Economic Vitality

After moving here in 2005, newly married to a Rio Vista businessman, she volunteered at the Chamber of Commerce where she soon became a board member, then President. When the Chamber director resigned just weeks before Bass Derby, she stepped in as chairman and continued to coordinate Bass Derby activities for the next two years. In 2013, MaryEllen partnered with Vera Sunada to open BrandYou, a clothing consignment store. Most funds raised by BrandYou were donated directly to the community. The partners managed the store for two years, making a significant contribution to the town. MaryEllen also devoted her time as a Commissioner on the City of Rio Vista Planning Commission, where she was involved in making important decisions regarding development and zoning for the city.

Formation of RioVision

Prior to the establishment of RioVision in 2012, MaryEllen encouraged the American Institute of Architecture to support an application for their Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) grant. This grant led to an economic development report, which was later adopted by the City Council and used for planning. After the R/UDAT report was complete, MaryEllen and others moved forward to establish RioVision as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

Main Street Beautification

One of the first RioVision projects was revamping the 77 Main Street planters. MaryEllen took a hands-on approach, leading fundraising efforts and personally participating in laying bricks and landscaping. This project evolved into the Trim 'N Tidy program, which continues to maintain all the planters. Additionally, MaryEllen organized RioVision's first major fundraising event—the 2015 Holiday Home Tour—which showcased local homes and is now held every other year in odd years. Through her involvement with Rio Vista's Planning Commission and RioVision, MaryEllen made a lasting impact on local development.

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista

As an active member of Soroptimist International of Rio Vista, MaryEllen played a significant role in the club's involvement with the McCormack Ranch Sheepdog Trials, including overseeing the design and production of commemorative t-shirts for these events. She also introduced the first Home Tour as a club fundraiser.

A Lasting Impact

MaryEllen's vision, creativity, dedication, and organizational skills have led to notable improvements throughout the town and its community. She contributed significantly to nonprofit and municipal organizations, all while managing the Highway 12 Diner with her husband Howard.



Tami Mitchell

Champion of Rio Vista's Community Spirit

Early Roots and Lasting Connections

Tami Mitchell grew up in Rio Vista, where the town's small and close-knit community played a pivotal role in shaping her dedication to fostering strong local connections. After spending several years living in the Bay Area and Denver, Tami returned to Rio Vista to handle her father's estate. This experience reaffirmed for her just how much she valued the unique sense of belonging and community that the town offers.

Leadership & the Farmer's Market Initiative

Motivated by the vision for economic vitality outlined in the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) report, the Rio Vista Downtown Association spearheaded the launch of the Rio Vista Farmer's Market. Their goal was to create a vibrant community gathering place as well as a nurturing environment for small businesses to grow. As a board member and now president of the Rio Vista Downtown Association, Tami and board members Brian Spradling, Edwin Okamura, Cliff

McGahey, Andrea Cross-Pearson, Brooke George, Beth Amatrone, Hector De La Rosa, Kara Samaniego, and an amazing team of volunteers have been instrumental in the ongoing success of the farmer's market.

Tami's hands-on involvement included personally recruiting vendors, managing logistics, and ensuring the market offered a welcoming atmosphere complete with live music and a diverse array of products. Thanks to her leadership, the hard work of the board, and robust community support, the farmer's market has flourished, reaching a peak of 35 to 38 vendors.

Economic and Community Impact

The farmer's market has had a profound effect on downtown Rio Vista. By drawing crowds to the area, it increases foot traffic and boosts the success of nearby small businesses, particularly on market days. Vendors appreciate the genuine support from the community, noting that even though the market may not match the size of markets in larger cities, the residents of Rio Vista not only buy their goods but consistently express their gratitude for their participation. Local shops benefit from the increased activity and the visitors who linger downtown, making the market a catalyst for both economic growth and strengthened community engagement.

Downtown Revitalization Projects

Beyond her work with the farmer's market, Tami also serves on the lighting committee with Hector De La Rosa and Cliff McGahey and other projects that include facade improvements and the introduction of a new lighting initiative designed to enhance Main Street. Upgrading streetlights and installing string lights will not only create a more inviting atmosphere for events like the Friday night concert series but also extend the hours during which people can enjoy the farmer's market and other downtown activities. As president of the Rio Vista Downtown Association, Tami and the board continue to work on other town revitalization efforts.

Tami (continued)

Ongoing Commitment to Community

Tami Mitchell's enduring passion is centered on nurturing and expanding the collaborative spirit that defines Rio Vista. Through her leadership and dedication, she continues to help the community thrive and preserve the unique character that makes Rio Vista special. *(Rio Vista Beacon, February 18, 2026)*



Andrea Cross-Pearson

A Journey of Hospitality and Community

Early Life and Career Foundations

Andrea Cross-Pearson began her career in Southern California, building a passion for hospitality with nearly forty years in restaurants and catering. She relocated to Solano County in 2014 to be near family, bringing extensive experience from roles ranging from hostess to manager. After earning her BA at California State University, Long Beach, Andrea took on leadership positions in catering, eventually serving as Director of Catering at several establishments after moving to Fairfield.

The Covid pandemic prompted Andrea to reconsider her path, especially as her mother, Linda, in Rio Vista, faced health issues. Combining households for support and encouraged by her family, Andrea returned to her goal of opening her own restaurant in 2021.

Establishing Ben's Friends of the Vine

Together with her family, Andrea explored several communities in Solano County, including Fairfield, Benicia, and Suisun, before deciding that Rio Vista was the ideal location for their vision. In July 2022, Ben's Friends of the Vine opened its doors. The restaurant was named in memory of Andrea's late dog, Benson ("Ben"), whose joyful and loyal personality inspired the establishment's welcoming spirit. Ben's Friends quickly became a place where friendships flourish over delicious food, fine wine, and a shared love of dogs. The motto, "Ben's Friends is a place where friends meet, and friends are made," has resonated with patrons from the very beginning.

Partnership with Douglas Pearson and Musical Influence

Just before the restaurant's launch, Andrea met Douglas Pearson, a talented musician and artist. Their relationship blossomed, culminating in marriage in November 2023. Douglas became a vital part of the business, contributing his artistic and musical talents. Alongside his sister, Kelli Pearson, who is also a musician, Douglas helped make live music a key feature of the Ben's Friends experience. Andrea attributes much of the restaurant's creative success to Douglas's unwavering support and ability to turn ideas into reality.

Ben's Friends Community Patio Initiative

Among the couple's most notable achievements is the creation of the "Ben's Friends Community Patio." Through their collaborative efforts, Andrea and Douglas received enthusiastic support from Rio Vista

(continued on next page) 17

Andrea (continued)

residents and civic leaders. Completed in Fall 2024, the patio provides guests with a welcoming outdoor space to relax, connect, and enjoy the vibrant atmosphere that defines Ben's Friends.

Inclusivity and Community Support

Reflecting the restaurant's inclusive philosophy, guests are encouraged to bring food from any local restaurant to enjoy on the patio. This practice not only supports neighboring businesses but also reinforces Ben's Friends as a central gathering place for the community. It fosters an environment where people come together to share meals and celebrate the spirit of Rio Vista.

Community Engagement and Leadership

Andrea and Douglas's commitment to building community extends beyond the walls of their establishment. They actively participate in local events such as wine tastings, art nights, charity fundraisers, and music festivals. Through their ongoing efforts to connect with neighbors and support important causes, they have helped strengthen Rio Vista's sense of unity and enriched its welcoming culture. Their leadership and enthusiasm have made them integral to the community, inspiring others to embrace and celebrate Rio Vista's unique charm.

(Rio Vista Beacon, February 25, 2026)



The 70th Anniversary Gala

What a Night to Remember



State Senate Honors Soroptimist 70th Anniversary



District Representative, Dr. Gethsemane Moss presents certificate to S. I. Rio Vista's President Evelyn Nodal on behalf of Senator Cabaldon at the club's April meeting.

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista marked a milestone at its April 15 meeting when Dr. Gethsemane Moss, District Representative for California State Senator Christopher Cabaldon, arrived to present the club with an official certificate recognizing its 70th anniversary — a formal acknowledgment from Sacramento of seven decades of service to the women and girls of Rio Vista.

Dr. Moss, who serves as the senator's district-level liaison for Solano County communities, brought greetings and the certificate on behalf of Senator Cabaldon's office. The presentation was a fitting tribute to a club whose members have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of women and girls through service, scholarships, and advocacy since the club's founding.

Dr. Moss brings a distinguished background to her legislative role. With a 24-year career in education spanning elementary and middle school teaching, high school administration, and service with the Solano County Office of Education, she has long championed advocacy and community connection. She also serves as a Suisun City Commissioner

for Recreation, Parks, Marina, and Arts.

Senator Cabaldon, who took office in December 2024, represents California's 3rd Senate District, which includes Rio Vista and spans Solano, Yolo, Napa, Sonoma, Contra Costa, and Sacramento counties. He is the first Filipino American to serve in the California State Senate and previously served more than two decades as Mayor of West Sacramento.

For Soroptimist International of Rio Vista, the certificate from the state legislature was a meaningful recognition of the club's lasting contributions to the community. Since its founding 70 years ago, the club has championed causes ranging from local scholarships for women and girls to statewide Soroptimist programs that support survivors of human trafficking and women returning to school.

The club expressed its gratitude to Dr. Moss and Senator Cabaldon's office for taking the time to honor this anniversary and for their continued support of Rio Vista's community organizations.

(Rio Vista Beacon, April 29, 2026)



Total raised
from the
70th Anniversary Gala
was an
impressive
\$20,295.00

Violet Richardson Award



Left to right: Brooklyn Saldana, Smiah Holley, Yoseline Lomeli Lopez, Scout French and Noelle Nelson, Soroptimist member and RVHS Principal.

High School Students Awarded for Volunteer Efforts

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista awarded four outstanding Rio Vista High School students the Violet Richardson Award for their community service at the February 4 business meeting.

The Violet Richardson Award honors young women ages 14 to 18 for volunteer work such as fighting drugs, crime, and violence; cleaning up the environment; working to end discrimination, poverty, and other community issues; and supporting other important community efforts.

The award is named after Violet Richardson, the president of the first Soroptimist club in Alameda County in 1921. Richardson believed in personal responsibility and lived by the motto, "It's what you do that counts." She lived her life accordingly as an active member of her community, committed to creating opportunities for girls and young women. Soroptimist established this award to honor her memory and dedication to volunteer action.

This year's recipients each received a \$500 award for their service to the community.

The first award went to senior **Brooklynn Saldana**, who actively engages in community service, particularly supporting women and children. Her

activities include coaching girls in sports, volunteering as a swim and volleyball coach, and participating in the Soroptimist S-Club, where she helped create toiletry kits for struggling or homeless women.

Beyond teaching sports and academics, Brooklynn emphasizes values such as sportsmanship, teamwork, perseverance, respect, and good behavior. She consistently exceeds expectations in her volunteer roles by attending swim meets, building rapport with children, and helping address behavioral and learning challenges. Brooklynn values the relationships formed through community service, which strengthen her connection to the community and inspire her future path of service.

The second awardee is sophomore **Scout French**, a volunteer at the Rio Vista Library. Coming from a military family, Scout views libraries as safe spaces and second homes, especially when moving to new places. Volunteering at the library has helped Scout overcome shyness, build confidence, develop new skills, and form meaningful friendships. The Rio Vista Library serves as a vital community resource, offering programs for all ages such as anime clubs,

(Continued on next page)

Volunteer Efforts *(continued)*

gaming hours, and creative activities that foster learning and connection. Scout has assisted with programs, organized events, and even won a Teen Photo Contest. Scout also founded Besties of the Library, a junior organization under the Friends of the Library that expands volunteer opportunities and supports library programs through fundraising. Volunteering has instilled confidence, responsibility, and a strong sense of belonging.

Senior **Samiah Holley** is the third recipient and has volunteered for over six years at her grandfather's church, City Church 2:42. Built by her grandparents, the church serves as both a place of worship and a refuge for individuals experiencing homelessness, with a mission to foster faith and community connection. Samiah shared that volunteering has strengthened her bond with her family and her faith while helping her grow personally. She serves as Media Manager, overseeing soundchecks, projecting lyrics and messages, and making announcements during services. The church has been a significant part of her life, serving as her daycare, preschool, youth center, and second home. Samiah has dedicat-

ed more than 250 volunteer hours, inspired by her grandfather's example and the church's mission to help others.

The final award was given to senior **Yoseline Lomeli Lopez**, who transferred to Rio Vista High School during her sophomore year and quickly became involved in several organizations, including the S-Club, Rotary Interact Club, Latino Club, and St. Joseph's youth formation program. Through S-Club, Yoseline participated in events such as the Soroptimist Women of Achievement Awards and Hog August Bites to support local causes. She was elected Co-Vice President her junior year and later served as Vice President during her senior year. As a leader, she helped organize projects including menstrual care bags for schools and Christmas gifts and dinners for families in need. Yoseline also volunteered for three years as an Altar Server at St. Joseph's Church, mentoring younger children and eventually being recognized as Altar Server Captain. She credits these experiences with teaching her integrity, determination, and compassion, values she now uses to inspire other young girls to become involved in community service.

(Rio Vista Beacon, February 18, 2026)

The club invited guests to join them in celebrating International Women's Day at a Mini Film Fest highlighting famous and incredible women for their contributions and achievements.

Members and guests enjoyed the meal at the Monarch Grill, visiting with each other and watching the impactful film.





Soroptimist Wine and Dessert Potluck

On Friday evening, April 24, Soroptimist members and guests gathered at Lupe Finch's home in Rio Vista Trilogy for a delightful Wine & Dessert potluck. With 16 attendees and a wide selection of homemade treats, the evening featured great wine, delicious food, and lively conversation.

The club was pleased to welcome several non-member guests and hopes they enjoyed the event. Members look forward to connecting with these potential new members and sharing more about Soroptimist International of Rio Vista. The groups hopes to welcome new members in the near future.

(Rio Vista Beacon, May 6, 2026)



Soroptimist Attends 50th Founder Region Conference

Members of Soroptimist International of Rio Vista attended the 50th Founder Region Conference May 1-3. More than 275 members representing 50 clubs across the Founder Region gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the 2024-2026 biennium. As an election year, the conference also included voting for the Founder Region Board and the Founder Region Fellowship Board of Directors.

Rio Vista Delegates and Attendees: President-Elect Wanda Apel, Secretary Marie-Jos'ee (M.J.) Caesar, and Assistant Treasurer Toni Tucker served as club delegates. Alternate Delegate Charlene Spinner attended with members Kay Kelley and Becky Burch.

Founder Region Fellowship: Rio Vista member Kay Kelley was elected President of the Founder Region Fellowship Board for the 2026-2028 biennium. The Fellowship Program, the identifying project for Soroptimist Founder Region, raises funds for financial awards that help women in the final stage of their doctoral programs completing their degrees.

Conference Highlights:

Theme: Advocating for Women's Mental Health

Fellowship Awards Ceremony: Eight doctoral candidates, from universities within the Founder Region, were awarded \$10,000 each.

Business Meetings and Fellowship Elections: Regional business issues were addressed and Founder Region Fellowship and Board elections were conducted.

Regional Awards: Live Your Dream, Violet Richardson, and S-Club Member of the Year were awarded.

Awards and Programs Recognized:

Violet Richardson Award: Honors young women ages 14-18 for volunteer work that strengthens communities (for example, addressing crime and violence, caring for the environment, and reducing discrimination and poverty).

Live Your Dream Awards: Provides education awards for women who are the primary financial supporters of their families, helping them improve education, skills, and employment prospects.

S-Club: Mentors high-school-age girls and encourages volunteerism and leadership.

(Rio Vista Beacon, May 13, 2026)

Women's Empowerment Award



Soroptimist Empowers Four Local Women With Scholarships

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista awarded four local women with Women's Empowerment Awards at their May 20 meeting. Kenny Landers, Morgan Arroyo, Lilly Burch, and Zoe White each received \$2,000 to support their educational goals.

The Women's Empowerment Award is one of many noteworthy scholarships the club supports. These include Soroptimist International of the Americas nationally recognized Live Your Dream Award (offering scholarships for head of household skills training or education), Founder Region Violet Richardson Award (recognizing high school volunteer efforts) and Fellowship Awards (providing Doctoral candidate scholarships). The club also awards thousands in annual scholarships to worthy graduating RVHS high school seniors.

In 2018, the club created the Women's Empowerment Award to meet a need for women locally who don't qualify for the specific requirements for other Soroptimist International of the Americas and Founder Region sponsored awards programs yet were very deserving and needed assistance with their educational goals.

These various scholarships support the Soroptimist mission to provide women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment and reach their full potential.

(Rio Vista Beacon, June 10, 2026)



CLOCKWISE: WOMEN'S RIGHTS CHAIR MINNIE HOWELL DELIVERS BAGS TO NORA MARTINEZ OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER AND ZAIDA MUNGARAY OF RV CARE. WENDY ROSS OF ST VINCENT DEPAUL SOCIETY RIO VISTA RECEIVES BAGS.

Soroptimist Brings Hope to Women

For someone fleeing abuse or exploitation, safety often begins with a single act of kindness. A warm pair of pajamas, a toothbrush, a notebook, or a knitted scarf may seem simple—but for a woman or girl arriving at a shelter with little more than the clothes she is wearing, those can offer comfort, dignity, and the first reminder that she is not alone.

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista Women's Rights committee members recently assembled Bags of Hope for local women in need. Not all bags have the exact same items but may include shawls, leggings, crocheted scarves, hats and lap blankets, bras, t-shirts, socks and sunglasses. Toiletries include toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouth wash, dental floss, deodorant, sanitary napkins, lotion, hand sanitizer, soap, shampoo, conditioner, combs, brushes, razors, pens and journals.

Most items are donated by Soroptimist club members. The Women's Rights committee also extends a special thanks to Nancy Lillegard, who contributed the knitted items.

Bags were distributed to St. Vincent de Paul's Society, Rio Vista C.A.R.E. and Solano County Family Resource Center.

Since 2019, SIRV has provided Bags of Hope each year to support women and girls facing crisis. Past President Kay Kelley, said the local chapter launched the project in response to Soroptimist International of the America's 2018 call for member clubs to expand hands-on efforts to assist women and girls in need.

"Bags of Hope" is one of many SIRV's projects that support women and girls.

(Rio Vista Beacon, July 1, 2026)

Soroptimist Club Installation is Jam-Packed

Soroptimist International of Rio Vista gathered on June 17 for a jam-packed installation event that blended fellowship, celebration and a renewed commitment to service. Members and guests enjoyed an impressive buffet prepared by Sam’s Catering before turning their attention to an afternoon program recognizing leadership, scholarship and the club’s ongoing mission to support women and girls.



The program opened with heartfelt remarks from 2025-2026 President, Evelyn Nodal, who reflected on the club’s accomplishments and the spirit of service that continues to guide its work. Her words set a warm and inspiring tone for the installation, highlighting the importance of friendship, leadership and community impact.

(Rio Vista Beacon, June 24, 2026)



Shalea Dawnelle Rhett



Alondra Rivera



Yoseline Lomeli Lopez



A highlight of the gathering was the presentation of scholarships to deserving high school seniors. The awards underscored the club's long-standing commitment to helping women pursue education and training opportunities, a central part of Soroptimist's mission to empower women and girls through access to education and career support. Six scholarships of \$2,500 were awarded. Scholarship recipients in attendance provided information about their backgrounds and spoke about their aspirations for the future.

Alondra Rivera is attending Sacramento State or St. Mary's University and hopes to be a Registered Nurse followed by Paralegal certification.

Yoseline Lomeli-Lopez aspires to attend Harvard Medical School after receiving her BA specializing in Neuroscience.

Shalea Dawnelle Rhett plans to attend Solano Community College and UC Davis and major in Health Sciences as a Dermatology Physician's Assistant.

Not in Attendance, *Delilah Dockery* will attend UC Merced and aspires to become a Civil Rights Attorney. *Samiah Holley* will attend her dream college, UC Berkeley, and plans to major in architecture. *Adrianna Mena-Mejia* is attending San Jose State University: her goal is become a Registered Nurse.



Following the scholarship presentations, President Evelyn conducted the final business meeting of the year that included the installation of a new member, Robin Rasbury. The welcome marked an important moment of growth for the club as it continues to expand its network of women dedicated to service and community leadership.

The meeting also featured the installation of the 2026-2027 slate of officers. Past president, Emilia Seiferling conducted the installation. Installed were President Wanda Apel, Vice President Jenny Emigh, Secretary Sandy Price, Corresponding Secretary Shavonne Saroyan, Treasurer Becky Burch and Assistant Treasurer Toni Tucker. Not in attendance, Club Liaison Sarah Stevens.

(Rio Vista Beacon, June 24, 2026)



Lupe Finch, Membership Chair, called Susan Whitesell to the front for recognition and a special thank you for opening her home for the final event of the club year to honor our high school scholarship winners and their families and the installation of the 2026-2027 club officers. Susan was not in town at the time club members were honored for their years of service to S.I.R.V. at the January club meeting. Lupe presented her with her certificate for her 15 years of club service.



It was a wonderful evening filled with lots of recognition and good memories. Evelyn's theme: "Fellowship, Friendship and Fun" has certainly been true of her two years as president of Soroptimist International of Rio Vista. An important part of preserving the history of the club since 1956, when it was chartered until 2026 when the club celebrated its 70th birthday, has been the scrapbooking that has preserved the history and legacy. Jo Harlow presented the 2025-2026 scrapbook to Evelyn. Though Jo has prepared the scrapbook for the last two terms of Evelyn's presidency, she gave a great deal of credit to the Publicity Committee for their work taking pictures, sending articles of the club's doings to the Rio Vista Beacon, postings on social media and participating in community events.



Out-going President called her board members forward to thank them and recognize their service to the club for the 2025-2026 club year. She presented each member with a journal titled:

"May you be proud of
The work you do . . .
The person you are and . . .
The difference you make"

Certainly a very busy, successful year. Club members truly appreciated the hard work of Evelyn and her board.

