

15 MINUTES

## Free expression

About six months ago, local artist Janet Lombardi Blixt moved her business, Chico Art School, from its old spot on Broadway (above House of Rice) to the corner of East Third and Wall streets, where she currently occupies a small but vibrant gallery space. Every inch of the cottage's interior is covered in color, from one of Lombardi Blixt's paintings to bright bouquets of flowers to cups filled with brushes and colored pencils. Lombardi Blixt, who has been named Best Local Artist by CN&R readers seven times, has been able to make a living as an artist for the entirety of her adult life. After spending years doing graphic design work, then creating art for model homes, she turned her focus to teaching. For nearly a decade, Lombardi Blixt has been giving art lessons to children and adults through Chico Art School, where she teaches roughly 12 classes a week and works within six different mediums. Go to [chicoartschool.com](http://chicoartschool.com) for more.

### What's your favorite medium to work in?

My personal interest in art came when I was about age 7, and I started with oil painting and pastels. I'd say that's where my heart is.

### Who are you most influenced by?

There are contemporary art-



ists I follow on Facebook, but from the past it would be Van Gogh, Monet, Cezanne—all of the impressionists. I'm really drawn to their work.

### How do you feel about the Chico art scene?

I would love to see it expand more. I've been to other small towns where they do monthly art events. We used to do that, but it takes somebody with a lot of energy to spearhead that. I think it would be great if we could take over a vacant building once a month. Maybe get the restaurants on board.

### Did business change for you after the Camp Fire?

After the fire, I decided to offer free lessons to the children [who] were displaced. And that was really well-received; a lot of those classes filled and a lot of those students came back for

my classes. It was neat to see the kids being able to talk about their experience and get it out on paper. It's affected everybody. Art is very therapeutic for healing emotions, and I'm happy to help provide that.

### You have a sign that says "ish is good" hanging in your gallery. What's the significance?

It's inspired by a book called *Ish*, by Peter H. Reynolds. It tells the story of a kid who throws away his drawings after someone makes fun of them, but his little sister saves all his crumpled work and displays them, because she enjoys them. The drawings aren't perfect, but they look enough like certain things. One is house-ish, one is tree-ish. Ish becomes a freeing idea, and it's a philosophy I like to teach here in my lessons.

—RACHEL BUSH

## THE GOODS

## Looking at 2019, refining Paradise



by  
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This coming year has to be better than the last one, right? I have to think so. As Paradise begins to rebuild, one of the biggest questions is going to be whether the town will finally be able to install a sewer system. That one seemingly small detail could well determine the new face of the Ridge.

What many Chicoans don't quite understand is that the lack of a sewer system has stunted growth for Ridge communities. I've heard restaurant owners grumble about the limitations on staffing and customer capacity due to septic needs. Some even didn't have public restrooms or used disposable dishes to cut back on water usage.

Just this past year, La Comida owner Michael Pavis was faced with the difficult decision of whether to keep his Paradise restaurant open. He cited the lack of a wastewater treatment system as one of the reasons for closing after 49 years on the Ridge. Walmart walked away from plans to build in Paradise because of lack of sewer (the idea of being welcomed to town by a big-box store always felt wrong to me anyway). And plans for a new Safeway on the Skyway—approved before the Camp Fire—had included an on-site wastewater treatment facility, which is cost-prohibitive for most small businesses.

Making matters worse, the cost of pumping a septic tank rose dramatically this past year due to the landfill running out of space.

Businesses are slowly reopening their doors, which is providing some hope for the future amid the gloom. But while some return and others rebuild, many will sadly not. I have a feeling the nature of the town will be dictated by whether or not there's a sewer system. With so much work to be done, what better time than now?

Mayor Jody Jones has been working toward a plan to hook in to Chico's sewer system for years; maybe in 2019 she'll finally get her wish.

CANNABUSINESS Oroville has approved commercial cannabis as well as taxation for it. I suspect the tides will shift, however, with its new council this month. My sincere hope is that the new panel will be open to discussions about the matter rather than throwing all the past year's work—and taxpayer money spent on consultants, a ballot measure, etc.—in the round file.

As for Chico, which will be taking up the matter at an upcoming council meeting, hopefully progress can be made in 2019 toward finding sensible ways to regulate and allow for this new industry. It's an opportunity for growth that shouldn't be overlooked.

SPEAK UP The Chico Chamber of Commerce is surveying local businesses on the effects of the Camp Fire. The questions are simple and revolve around displaced employees, how many lost their homes and how many have left the area due to the fire. Put in your two cents here: [tinyurl.com/chambercampfire](http://tinyurl.com/chambercampfire).

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