

15 MINUTES

## Making that dough

As an infant, Mary Oliver teathed on the heels of hard, crusty sourdough bread loaves from a San Rafael bakery. As she grew up, the Bay Area native developed a passion for baking, inspired by her mother. After moving to Chico and retiring from a job in the tech industry, she began sharing her love for fresh-baked sourdough with family and friends. But it wasn't until after winning Best of Show at the Silver Dollar Fair last year that she launched Baby's Breads—"Baby" being the nickname good-natured, older co-workers gave her as a teen. She sells her bread on a limited basis and hosts workshops to teach people how to make and bake their own. Next up: Feb. 8 and 29 at Christine Mac Shane's studio, 561 E. Lindo Ave. Go to [babysbreads.com](http://babysbreads.com) to find out more.

### How did Baby's Breads launch?

When I moved up here about 16 years ago ... really good sourdough was not something that was easily available. I tried my hand at a sourdough starter [multiple times] and failed miserably. About two years ago, somebody had posted on Facebook that they were selling sourdough starter, so I was like, *That's it!* She helped me a little bit with how she made her bread, and then I did a lot of research online and just kind of



PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

came up with my own recipe. I had bread coming out of my ears. I was giving it away to friends and family and they were like, "Oh, my gosh, this is amazing!" Everyone was like, "You really should sell this bread—it's really good." And then I thought, well, maybe I could teach [people how to make] the sourdough ... then they can take it home and bake it.

### What should participants expect?

They each get their own little jar of starter to take home. I give them a demo of how to feed the starter. I [also] prepare the dough for everybody, so the 36-hour fermentation process has already been done at my house. And then we do our first stretch and fold. It's basically sourdough's version of kneading. And then ... comes the shaping. We talk about how to score the bread, which is cutting into it,

which tells the steam where to go. Then we start talking about how to bake it, some of the tricks that I've learned on how to get a nice golden crust versus a dry loaf.

### What is it about sourdough that you love?

Sourdough is healthier for your body [when] it's done with a long fermentation [process]. It's easier for the body to digest, it doesn't spike blood sugars and it just tastes so good. I've had a lot of my friends who have diabetes or blood sugar issues come to the workshops so that they can learn how to make this bread at home. It just warms my heart when I can impart that wisdom to somebody else [and] it's going to be so much more healthful for their body.

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## THE GOODS

## Chamber sets goals for 2020



by  
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Every year, the **Chico Chamber of Commerce** puts out a report addressing major factors affecting our economy. While last year that report focused on the impacts of the **Camp Fire**, this year it's more or less back to normal. Well, except for the fact that many of those post-fire impacts still are being felt.

The chamber's 2020 report, released last week to coincide with the mayor's **State of the City** address, identifies several areas that need improvement, namely public safety, lack of workforce housing, road conditions and unfunded pensions. Sounds like business as usual to me.

That includes misleading information regarding crime—the report's conclusion reads, "The increase in violent crime must be addressed by city leaders and public safety personnel in cooperation with business leaders." Note that **Chico PD** reports that overall crime went *down* 2 percent in 2019 over the previous year, with violent crime dropping 9 percent.

"Public perceptions are one indicator of safety that cannot be dismissed in the discussion and the remedies identified to improve overall community safety," it continues. I dare say it's reports like this one that add to a public perception of Chico being unsafe. I urge our business community to keep up with the **Retail Watch** program, which targets shoplifters, and I encourage the chamber to vet its materials more carefully. Everyone makes mistakes, but spreading inaccurate information such as this perpetuates the narrative that Chico is dangerous.

**FAREWELLS** The year is barely underway and we already have a few casualties in the restaurant world. Last week, **Newton "Sipho" Merritt** posted a video online alerting his customers of the closure of **Sipho's Jamaica**. The island-themed restaurant will be sorely missed, but I'm happy to report Merritt says he'll continue to host his monthly parties, plus he'll do catering. So, that curried goat and oxtail stew are still within reach.

Also saying goodbye is **Ike's Smokehouse**, home of the best ribs in town (in my opinion, at least). The trailer used to park most days outside of **Ray's Liquor** on Walnut Street, and owner **Ike Anderson** says he's returning to his roots—**CJ's Last Chance Diner**, on The Esplanade north of town, which he owns with his mother. So, there, too, is a silver lining.

**AWARDS SEASON** There's no question our neck of the woods is home to some fantastic produce, as well as prepared foodstuffs, and the annual **Good Food Awards**—which recognize exceptional craft-foodmakers—offer more proof. This year, Chico's **Lassen Traditional Cider** took home an award for its Newtown Pippin cider and **Pacific Culture** was recognized for its cantaloupe habanero kombucha. Not too far from here, **Salt and Savour** out of Dunsuir won for its apple ginger sauerkraut. I haven't had the pleasure of trying the latter two, but I can attest to the crisp deliciousness of **Ben Nielsen's** Newtown Pippin cider. Cheers!

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