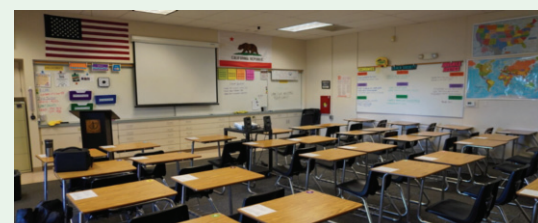


Equine businesses concerned about possible future zoning changes in unincorporated Santa Clara County
SEE PAGE 6



East San Jose school district initiates changes in how leaders are elected
SEE PAGE 5



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NOV. 14 - NOV. 27, 2025 ■ VOL. 42, NO. 24

Evergreen Times

Santa Clara County approves sales tax measure, sends assessor's race to runoff

The voters in Santa Clara County have approved an increase in the sales tax during the November 4 special election. Measure A will increase the sales tax by five-eighths of a cent over the next five years.

The measure was placed on the ballot by county supervisors to offset federal funding cuts and prevent hospital closures. Measure A is expected to raise some \$330 million per year.

Assessor's race heads to runoff

Santa Clara County voters also cast ballots for the next assessor on November 4. The opening was triggered by Larry Stone's retirement last summer. Stone was the county's longest-serving official, having held the assessor's post for 30 years.

That race will now head for a runoff on December 30, as none of the candidates received more than 50% of the vote. The top two-vote getters are Neysa Fligor and Rishi Kumar.

San Jose officials approve temporary tobacco shop ban

By Keith Menconi
San José Spotlight

The San Jose City Council has enacted a temporary moratorium blocking the establishment of new tobacco shops throughout the city as officials draw up a long-term plan to regulate such businesses.

Councilmembers voted unanimously last week to halt the issuance of new licenses for local tobacco businesses, including retailers, smoke shops and smoking lounges. The 45-day ban can be extended for up to two years, according to a city memo. It's a

response to complaints that some local shops have become avenues for the illicit sale of controlled substances, including to minors.

Councilmember Peter Ortiz, who introduced the moratorium, said these problems have taken a disproportionate toll on his own District 5, which encompasses the predominantly Latino neighborhoods of East San Jose. The district includes an especially high concentration of smoke shops — nearly seven per square mile, according to a countywide assessment conducted earlier this year. That's twice as high as the rest of Santa



Critics say the high density of tobacco retailers in East San Jose has jeopardized the health of residents in the predominantly Latino neighborhood. *Photo by Keith Menconi.*

Clara County.

"In too many cases, students can walk past two to three smoke shops on their way home from class," Ortiz said at the meeting. "When harmful products are sold without oversight, it's these same communities

already facing historic disinvestment that bear the highest consequences."

Related Stories

The temporary licensing pause gives the city time to review existing
See BAN, page 10

Alumna and Castillero Middle School Principal Crystal Campbell returns to The Original San José Nutcracker

Returning to The Original San José Nutcracker stage after more than 30 years fills Crystal Campbell with both trepidation and immense gratitude.

A principal at Castillero Middle School and lifelong supporter of the arts, Crystal's connection to San Jose Dance Theatre (SJDT) runs deep. Performing in the Nutcracker as a child shaped her passion for dance, her work ethic, and her sense of self. Now, decades later, she experiences the magic anew—from the wings, watching the Christmas tree rise and the cookies scurry under Mother Cupcake's skirt—with the same awe she felt as a young dancer.

She remembers those early days vividly: the downtown San Jose studio in its big brick building, the excitement of Saturday rehearsals, and the rush of stepping onto a massive stage for the first time. "It's indescribable," she recalls.

Among her many cherished memories, being cast as a Little Lost Cookie stands out—her first taste of the spotlight. Later, as a Party Girl and one of Clara's friends, she found herself swept up in the enchantment of the holiday story, rehearsing alongside dancers like Jennifer Watson and Holland McBride, memories that still bring her joy.

Today, Crystal experiences The Nutcracker from a new perspective—as a parent. The production has become a treasured family tradition spanning generations. Her younger brother Roberto once performed as a Party Boy; her daughters Logan and Tatiana have each taken on multiple roles, from Soldiers to Cookies and Party Girls. Most recently, her niece Ximena has joined the cast as a Soldier and Cherub. "The Nutcracker has been part of our family's rhythm for
See NUTCRACKER, page 10



Crystal's Daughter **Tatiana** as a party girl in the Original San Jose Nutcracker production in 2023. *Photo Credit - Diane Rose*

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Times Local News

Winter rain is here - be alert, be flood safe

By Shiloh Ballard

*Valley Water Board Director,
District 2*

As we enter the rainy season, I want to highlight an important seasonal reminder: flood risk is real, and preparation matters. Flooding can happen even in years that seem dry. Sudden storms or back-to-back weather systems can overwhelm creeks and cause damage with little warning.

Earlier this year, Valley Water shared an update on the progress of Phase 1 of the Coyote Creek Flood Protection Project. This work includes over 8,500 feet of floodwalls between Old Oakland Road and Interstate 280, designed to help manage higher water flows during storms and releases from Anderson Dam. While this infrastructure is a major step forward, it's just part of a broader effort to reduce flood risk in our community.

Across the country, we've seen how intense weather events and flooding can strike with little warning and catch communities off guard. Valley Water works year-round to reduce flood

risks and respond to emergencies by coordinating with partner agencies to protect lives and property, but we all need to take steps to be ready.

Parts of Santa Clara County are susceptible to flooding every year, with any chance of storms. While Valley Water's flood protection projects have improved flood protection for more than 100,000 parcels, there are still about 66,000 parcels that are in the FEMA flood zone. I invite you to visit Valley Water's flood preparedness portal, valleywater.org/floodready, to find out if your Santa Clara County home or business is in a FEMA-designated Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs). If your property is in an area shown on FEMA's flood maps, you are at high risk for flooding during a 1 percent flood event, or a flood that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year.

Also, whether you are in a FEMA SFHA or not, one of the most effective steps you can take to stay safe is signing up for emergency alerts at AlertSCC.com. These alerts provide real-time updates during all sorts of emergencies and give you time to respond. Have every member of your household register today.

Finally, if a storm is coming and you are in an area at high risk, you can use sandbags to protect your home or business. Valley Water offers free, filled sandbags for residents of Santa Clara County from November 1 through April 15 of each year. You can locate the nearest location of free filled sandbags and learn how to stack

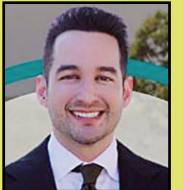


Valley Water Report

By Shiloh Ballard
VWB Director, District 2

Storm drains the focus as rain approaches

**By Domingo Candelas,
D8 Councilmember**



As we head into the rainy season, help prevent flooding in your street by adopting a storm drain!

All San José residents, businesses, schools, and community groups can help make a difference by keeping our storm drains clear. Volunteers will receive tools and training on maintenance techniques and safety.

The District 8 Community Survey is LIVE and we'd like to hear from you; filling out the survey will take no more than 5 minutes! Help my office improve our neighborhoods by giving us your feedback on the issues that matter most to you. Your response will help us ensure equity and inclusiveness when planning our events and activations for the year!

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sandbags properly at valleywater.org/flood-ready.

Let's start getting ready now and make sure we are alert and flood safe together.

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Times **Local News**

East San Jose school district initiates changes in how leaders are elected

By Lorraine Gabbert
San José Spotlight

The East Side Union High School District board of trustees has unanimously approved switching from at-large elections to district elections and adopted a final district map. The board also determined what years trustees would be up for election.

The current five trustees have staggered terms, with some ending in 2026 and others in 2028. Although trustees usually serve four-year terms, the board applied a waiver allowing an Alum Rock area trustee to serve a two-year term temporarily. This allows the district to sync up with the presidential election cycle, which experiences higher voter turnout. The trustee will appear on the 2026 and 2028 ballots. Following 2028, they will revert back to a four-year term.

"The sequencing of elections allows us look at voting trends to make sure voters have an opportunity to weigh in on their trustees when they weigh in on elections of great importance to them, such as presidential elections," Superintendent Glenn Vander Zee told San José Spotlight.

A legal claim that the district is in violation of the California Voting Rights Act prompted the change, arguing at large elections deny marginalized residents' equal representation. The district used census data to develop draft maps and trustees held eight community input meetings from April through October.

The final map will go before the County Committee on School District Organization under the Santa Clara County Office of Education for final approval. If approved, the revised district would be established in the upcoming months, with the first elections in 2026.

Board President Bryan Do said redistricting is one of the most momentous decisions the board has made.

"This could have been contentious, pitting one community (against) the other, but instead we have a collaborative, positive and



The East Side Union School District has switched from at-large elections to voting by district. Photo courtesy of East Side Union High School District.

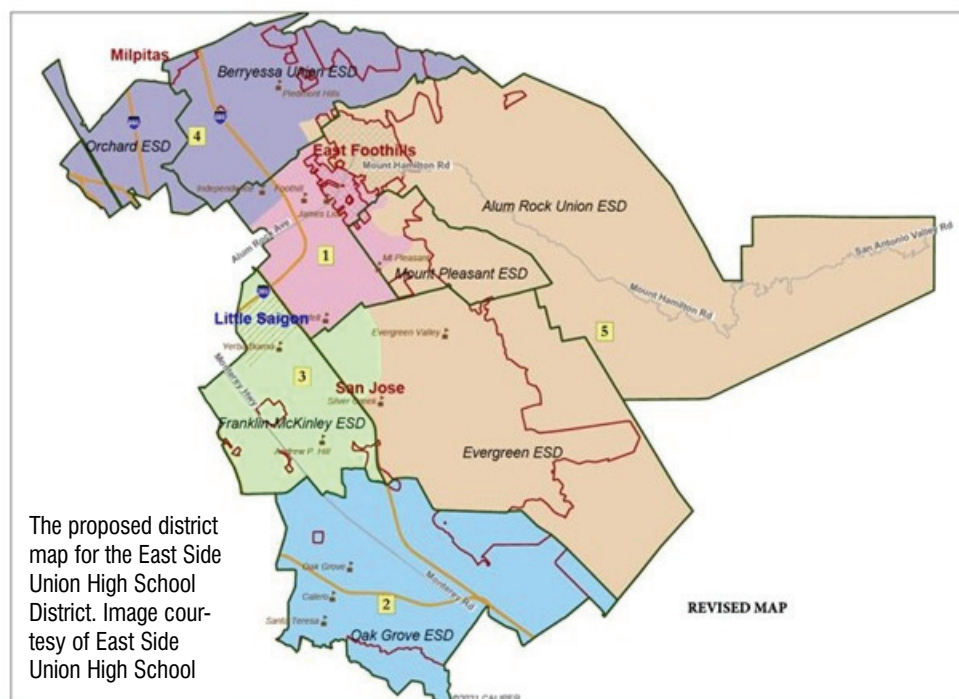
I might even say harmonious process," Do said at the meeting. "I know the decision we make today will have long-term consequences. We did everything we can to make sure that we arrived at conclusions that meet the needs of our public and our students."

Vander Zee said it's important to maximize local representation. He said while local representation is needed, every trustee should still prioritize the needs of all 20,000 students — 23,000 including charter students — and not just those from their trustee area.

"The revised map allows for the diverse constituencies to mobilize for candidates and to elect candidates that represent the diverse needs of the districts, as well as to allow smaller constituencies to weigh in on their needs," he said. "A population like the African American community, which is less than 2% of our total population, their voice could be lost. Because of the redistricting ... there are two districts where they make up almost 4%. It allows them better representation."

Although the majority of the East Side Union High School District lies within San Jose, it also includes parts of Milpitas. In creating the maps, the district contracted legal expert Justin Levitt. Levitt said federal guidelines require trustee areas to include about the same number of residents — with a maximum 10% difference between the largest and smallest districts. The district drew the maps blind to political data and where any of the incumbents lived.

"One of the things we always look at is to try to get a sense of not only the racial numbers, the ethnic numbers, but also a little bit about the different socioeconomic factors," Levitt said at the meeting.





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NEWS

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EvergreenTimes

Equine businesses concerned about possible future zoning changes in unincorporated Santa Clara County

By William Bellou
Publisher

Dana De Frates owns 15 horses at De Frates Horsemanship, an equestrian business where she and her husband operate in Gilroy. She said she's worried about possible zoning changes.

It's a 10-acre piece of land that Dana De Frates and her husband Jason call their "little patch of heaven." The couple moved from Half Moon Bay to Gilroy eight years ago.

De Frates' purchased land zoned for agricultural use in unincorporated Santa Clara County for their business De Frates Horsemanship whose mission is to educate people on how to become better horse owners.

Riders bring their equines from across the Bay Area to learn new skills, get advice on caring for their animals or rekindle the sense of childlike wonder they experienced with a new horse at the De Frates ranch.



Anxiety and uncertainty are mounting among the De Frates family and other equine business owners in southern Santa Clara County, as officials re-evaluate what types of development and operations are permitted in rural and agricultural zones in unincorporated areas. Many horse enthusiasts are particularly troubled by a draft proposal that would change rural zoning codes, seemingly removing horses from the definition of livestock and no longer allowing stables in the "ag exclusive" zone.

"My initial response was panic," said De Frates, whose business is situated in the area affected by the proposed changes.

Santa Clara County officials state that the amendments aim to standardize, clarify, and streamline current regulations; bolster

agricultural viability and land preservation; and uphold the region's rural character. Businesses properly permitted under the existing code would be able to continue operating, while the county considers an "amnesty program" for those needing to come into compliance.

Still, although De Frates has adhered to all guidelines and regulations, she remains concerned about her future. County authorities have indicated that any new or expanded property uses must comply with the revised zoning codes, potentially affecting her plans to offer breeding services, retire horses, and create a world-class training facility.

"I'm disappointed at the prospect of losing these opportunities—it feels like a let-

down for our government to restrict me," De Frates shared. "I want to make a positive impact, help others, bring happiness, and foster meaningful connections between people and their horses."

Tyler Flippo, owner of Coyote Canyon Ranch in Morgan Hill, fears that the changes could jeopardize his entire business. He boards 50 to 60 horses and farms 200 acres in the Coyote Valley, including hay production for another venture. Flippo recounted trying to obtain a permit ten years ago when he founded the ranch but found the \$10,000 price tag prohibitive—a common issue among southern Santa Clara County operators who work without permits due to high fees.

"We're caught in a difficult situation: we want to comply with the law, but the process is unattainable, leaving us cornered," Flippo explained.

Over the past month, the county has hosted several meetings to collect feedback on the proposal. Martha McNeil, director of the nonprofit DreamPower Horsemanship, attended multiple sessions and observed widespread confusion surrounding the issue.

"There are many unintended consequences I don't think county officials anticipated," McNeil commented.

Most equine businesses acknowledge the value of preserving agricultural lands but remain apprehensive about unexpected outcomes that could threaten both their livelihoods and their community.



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Proposition 50 faces legal challenges

By William Bellou
Publisher

Although California has overwhelmingly approved Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to gerrymander congressional seats in favor of Democrats for the next several election cycles, the proposition faces legal challenges.

While Proposition 50 does not affect local political boundaries, more than 70% of Santa Clara County voters went in favor of the redistricting plan.

The measure puts five GOP lawmaker seats in danger of flipping blue across California, while also fortifying five Democratic seats from turning red. But Democrats still have to actually win new seats.

California started a national movement in 2008 when voters took redistricting out of the hands of state lawmakers and into the hands of an independent, citizen-led redistricting commission. But Proposition 50 suspends that commission until the next census in 2030.

Proposition 50 proponents have promised the measure is only temporary.

"What will really happen to the California Citizens Redistricting Commission?" said Dave Johnson, chair of the Santa Clara County Republican Party "We already voted for this 12 or 13 years ago, and now it's 'on hold.' If you believe that, I have a bridge I'd like to sell you."

Lawsuit filed

A coalition of California Republicans have filed a lawsuit challenging the merits of the proposition. The lawsuit, which was filed with the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, claims the state's move to redraw its congressional lines is unconstitutional and violates the 14th and 15th Amendments for redistricting on the basis of race, "specifically to favor Hispanic voters, without cause or evidence to justify it."

"While the Constitution entrusts States with designing congressional districts, the Supreme Court has also held that states may not, without a compelling reason backed by evidence that was in fact considered, separate citizens into different voting districts on the basis of race," the lawsuit reads.



Mi Casa Cantina opens in Terminal A at San José Mineta International Airport

By Sean Eastwood
Times staff writer

Passengers at (SJC) have a flavorful new dining option: Mi Casa Cantina, now open across from the Terminal A security checkpoint.

The new restaurant joins SJC's diverse lineup of eateries, becoming the fourth new opening this year alongside Einstein Bros.® Bagels, Firehouse Subs and Pizza My Heart — with more to come.

Mi Casa Cantina offers travelers a colorful, laid-back atmosphere with scratch-made dishes and a full-service bar. The menu spans breakfast through dinner, featuring favorites like the Hatch Green Chile Burger, Street Tacos and signature drinks including the Prickly Pear Margarita and creative mocktails like PassioNate Punch.

"Mi Casa Cantina couldn't have come to SJC at a better time," said San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan. "With half a million fans set to descend on the Bay Area for the Super Bowl, NCAA Men's Basketball and World Cup in 2026, now is the time to enhance SJC's offerings and overall customer experience."



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From left: **Elspeth Luu, Claire Kim and Saarthak Shankavaram.**

San Jose Youth Symphony presents its 2025-26 Season Opener Concert to be held November 30

The Philharmonic Orchestra performs Wagner, Elgar, Shankavaram, Borne and Borodin

The San Jose Youth Symphony's Philharmonic Orchestra, under the artistic leadership of Music Director and Conductor Yair Samet, presents its 2025-26 Season Opener Concert to be held on Sunday, November 30, 2025, 5 p.m. at the Mexican Heritage Plaza The-

ater, 1700 Alum Rock Avenue in San Jose.

The orchestra will open with Wagner's splendorous and ravishing Prelude to Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, along with the world premiere of an orchestral work, Leela, by our orchestra's concertmaster and composer, Saarthak Shankavaram. The orchestra will close the concert with Borodin's exciting Polovtsian Dances.

This concert will also feature two winners from last season's 2025 Young Artists' Competition, proudly sponsored by the San Jose Symphony Foundation. Outstanding young soloists, Elspeth Luu, will perform Elgar's famous Cello Concerto in E minor, and Claire Kim, will perform Borne's Carmen Fantasy for Flute and Orchestra.

The San Jose Youth Symphony (SJYS) is one

of the oldest and finest youth orchestras on the West Coast of the U.S. Founded over seven decades ago as part of the former San Jose Symphony, SJYS has a rich tradition of musical performance and education.

The musicians of SJYS, all school-age youth, are chosen from more than 650 applicants through our annual auditions. The SJYS comprises 12 distinct performing ensembles: two full orchestras, a chamber orchestra, two flute choirs, two string ensembles, as well as winds, brass, saxophone, percussion, and jazz ensembles.

Ticket purchases are now available online <https://sjys.org/product-category/tickets>

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Make the nice list — donate blood this holiday season!

Blood donors receive festive long sleeves "Ugly Sweater" t-shirt during November

By Sean Eastwood
Times staff writer

It's the season of giving, and there's no better gift than life-saving blood donations.

Throughout November, all Stanford Blood Center donors will receive a festive, collectible long-sleeve "Ugly Sweater" t-shirt, just in time for the winter celebrations.

See BLOOD, next page



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Ban

Continued from page 1

tobacco regulations and consider how they might be strengthened to end illegal sales and unpermitted operations, according to city officials. The updated rules could increase fines for infractions. In addition, they might also introduce density controls to limit how many smoke shops are permitted in a single city district.

Other elected leaders echoed Ortiz's call for urgent action, including Mayor Matt Mahan, who said boosting the city's enforcement efforts will also be key to reigning in bad actors.

"At the end of the day, unless we ensure consistent application of the rules and actual consequences ... it's very hard to change behavior," Mahan said.

A group of councilmembers — including Ortiz, Domingo Candelas, Pamela Campos, George Casey and David Cohen — first proposed the moratorium in May. In making their case for the measure, they warned the city has seen a rise in the number of complaints about unlicensed tobacco businesses in recent years.

Santa Clara County officials support San Jose's latest effort to clamp down on tobacco products. In a letter sent to councilmembers, County Executive James Williams applauded the moratorium and urged city officials to consider even stricter regulations.

"While the City's current tobacco policies provide protections in certain settings, impor-

tant gaps persist that put residents at risk," Williams wrote.

San Jose has been tightening regulations on tobacco retailers for years. In 2022, the city banned the sale of flavored tobacco and e-cigarettes to discourage their use by young people. Last year officials introduced a permitting system intended to more closely monitor shops for the sale of illicit drugs.

The city has tracked rising incidents of illegal sales from local storefronts of prohibited items, like flavored tobacco, synthetic cannabis products and nitrous oxide used for recreational consumption, often referred to as "whippets."

Of the 101 businesses that have sparked complaints from residents related to such illicit sales, 30 were operating without a tobacco retail license, Deputy Code Enforcement Director Rachel Roberts told councilmembers.

Councilmembers also voted unanimously Tuesday to join other jurisdictions in banning the sale of nitrous oxide products marketed for recreational use. Supporters of the ban point to the negative health risks of the inhalable narcotic and warn that the disposable canisters used to distribute nitrous oxide gas are often left on the ground, contributing to the city's litter problem.

It's illegal to sell nitrous oxide for recreational use in California. However, because the substance has legitimate uses as well, including for medical and dental treatments, products that contain the gas exist in a legal gray area that critics say offers opportunities for widespread abuse.

Nutcracker

Continued from page 1

decades," she says. "It's such a gift to share the stage and the magic with my own children."

When her daughter Tatiana was cast as Clara this season, the moment was one of shared disbelief and emotion. "We were at the kitchen table with Tatiana's grandparents when we opened the SJDT email. We must have all seen the word Clara at the same time. I lost my breath and shed tears alongside my parents, who supported me through my own Nutcracker years." Watching her daughter take on such an iconic role brings a sense of wonder and pride. "It's hard to focus on my own role as a Party Scene Parent when Tatiana is dancing," she admits with a laugh. "Ballet is such a personal journey, and most of the time parents don't see that growth up close. It's a rare gift."

Crystal hopes Tatiana will savor every moment—from rehearsals to fittings to each magical performance. "She often says The Nutcracker is the highlight of her year. I hope she continues to feel that joy and gratitude."

As SJDT celebrates its 60th anniversary, Crystal is reminded of her own milestone performance—dancing in the 25th anniversary production. "I can't believe the remarkable legacy this show has built. To see my daughter carry on the tradition in the 60th anniversary feels like a dream come true."

She's also seen how current production has evolved while maintaining its timeless

charm. "I love that so much of the original choreography and tradition remain, but now there are even more opportunities for students to explore new roles and grow as dancers. The emphasis on consistent training and technical standards has made a real difference in their preparation."

Crystal understands deeply the transformative impact of creative expression. "Performing in The Nutcracker inspired my own pursuit of excellence and dedication in all areas of life," she reflects. "I hope audiences feel the holiday magic and appreciate how the arts shape and enrich our children's lives." She especially values that the production features live music performed by the Cambrian Symphony under the direction of conductor Scott Krijnen, whom she knows from her work at Castillero. "It elevates the experience for dancers and audiences alike."

When asked about her favorite parts of The Nutcracker, Crystal smiles. She's always moved by the swelling music during the growing Christmas tree scene and the emotional depth of the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier pas de deux. Knowing that Tchaikovsky composed that section while mourning his sister gives it a poignancy that resonates deeply with her.

Some of her fondest memories are from backstage—Secret Santa exchanges, elaborate scavenger hunts, and moments of laughter with friends like Jennifer Watson and Melissa Orth. "Those little traditions are what made it all feel like family," she recalls.

Could she describe The Nutcracker in three words? "Magical. Timeless. Family."

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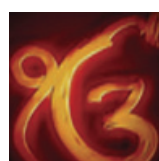


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