

FEATURES

John Wilk is Rec. Department's new Sports Coordinator

By Jay Russell

The Recreation Department, on October 11, designated John Wilk as Sports Coordinator for all youth sports from kindergarten through eighth grade. Wilk has been with the department for five years as Facilities Coordinator, responsible for scheduling events at city rental buildings.

Steven Chavarria, the former Sports Coordinator, resigned on October 8.

For the time being Wilk is managing and coordinating the rentals of the Rec. Department facilities and overseeing youth sports. Applications for the Facilities Coordinator position closed November 5. When a new person is hired, Wilk will be able to focus his attention solely on the elementary and middle school sports teams.

Wilk has a degree in Kinesiology (exercise science) from Cal State East Bay where he mainly focused on nutrition and wellness. After graduating, he worked at the Cal State Athletic Department for five years as the Athletic Equipment Manager. There he facilitated the operation of games on campus, and ran summer camp programs, which serves him well in his responsibilities for the sports programs at Piedmont.

"I am definitely looking forward to the change and the challenge. It is more a lateral move. I am still a Recreation Coordinator, just moving into a different assignment with sports. It will be great to expand my knowledge, and take a lot of the skills and education I learned at Cal State



John Wilk takes over the position of Sports Coordinator at Piedmont Recreation Department with responsibility for teams from kindergarten through eighth grade.

and apply it to the sports program here," Wilk explained.

Wilk was a competitive cyclist in the past, and continues to ride, but just for fun.

"Cycling was the thing that pushed me to go to school to study exercise science," he said. "I think one of my favorite programs here is track and cross country. This is one of our largest teams. We typically have around 70 athletes. Our coaches are great and have been very welcoming to students and athletes of all abilities."

Wilk is also very excited about the K-8 basketball programs.

"Coming out of Covid we still have close to 500 kids signed up to participate in the basketball programs. It is definitely a big undertaking but is really fun

once it gets going. It's going to be exciting to see kids playing in the gyms again."

Piedmont is unique with a city agency operating what customarily would be a school program. For more than 30 years all K-8 sports programs have been operated by the Recreation Department. This dates to a time when Recreation Director Mark Delventhal went to Middle School Principal John Morrison and offered to help the school by managing its sports programs for students in grades 6-8, including securing coaches, officials, and having uniforms for the athletes.

Wilk currently shares these responsibilities with Recreation Supervisor Jackson Stearns while doing double duty as the Facilities Coordinator.

Lisa Riddiough's novel *Elvis and the World as it Stands* now available

By Allyson Aleksey

Former Piedmont resident Lisa Riddiough's first novel, *Elvis and the World as it Stands*, published in August, is now available for purchase online and in select stores.

Riddiough's debut novel is appropriate for students age 10 and up and is a narrative of loss and chosen families, told from the point of view of a newly-adopted kitten named Elvis. Riddiough said she drew the story from her own experience as a volunteer for East Bay SPCA, and decided upon the unorthodox approach of using an animal as the protagonist and narrator.

In the book, Elvis is adopted by the Pemberton family, but in the process is separated from his sister, Etta. Elvis' mission is to be reunited with Etta.

"I volunteered with the East Bay SPCA's feline department with my daughter Julia, and there were many kittens over that period that were adopted out to their forever homes, but in the process were separated from [siblings] they had bonded to," she said. "I wanted to explore that feeling of not having control over what happens to you."

Riddiough mirrored the feelings of hopelessness Elvis the cat felt to his human companion and deuteragonist Georgina Pemberton, a 10-year-old girl who is navigating the grief of her parent's separation.

The book balances these heavy themes of divorce and loss with the light-hearted animal characters that become Elvis' friends



Author Lisa Riddiough

and confidants, which includes an overly-optimistic hamster and an inquisitive goldfish.

"I have an ensemble cast of animal characters that live in the home Elvis is adopted into. I tried to bring in humor to balance the heavier topics," Riddiough explained.

Georgina's affinity for Lego toys and building well-known skyscrapers with them allows the book to touch lightly on 9/11, extending the theme of "a loss of control." The title *Elvis and the World as it Stands* makes reference to the kitten who is beginning to make sense of the world around him.

"The events surrounding that day (Sept. 11) made a lot of adults around the world feel a sense of losing control," Riddiough said. "But the important [message in the novel] is, how do we move forward? For Elvis and Georgina, it is with the support of friends and family, and a strong sense of purpose."

Riddiough began taking writing classes in her mid-forties through the University of California extension. When writing her first book, she said she was "amazed" at how much she learned through the publishing process and working with an agent. The story sold at the beginning of the COVID lockdown and was published in August this year.

Riddiough's next book, *Letters to Live By: an alphabet book with intention*, will be released in January 2022. The book is dedicated to a Piedmont middle school teacher who Riddiough said her children greatly admired.

Signed copies of *Elvis and the World as it Stands* are available at A Great Good Place for Books bookstore in Montclair Village. Riddiough currently lives in Sacramento.



Book jacket of *Elvis and the World as it Stands*.

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