

# Fair Oaks

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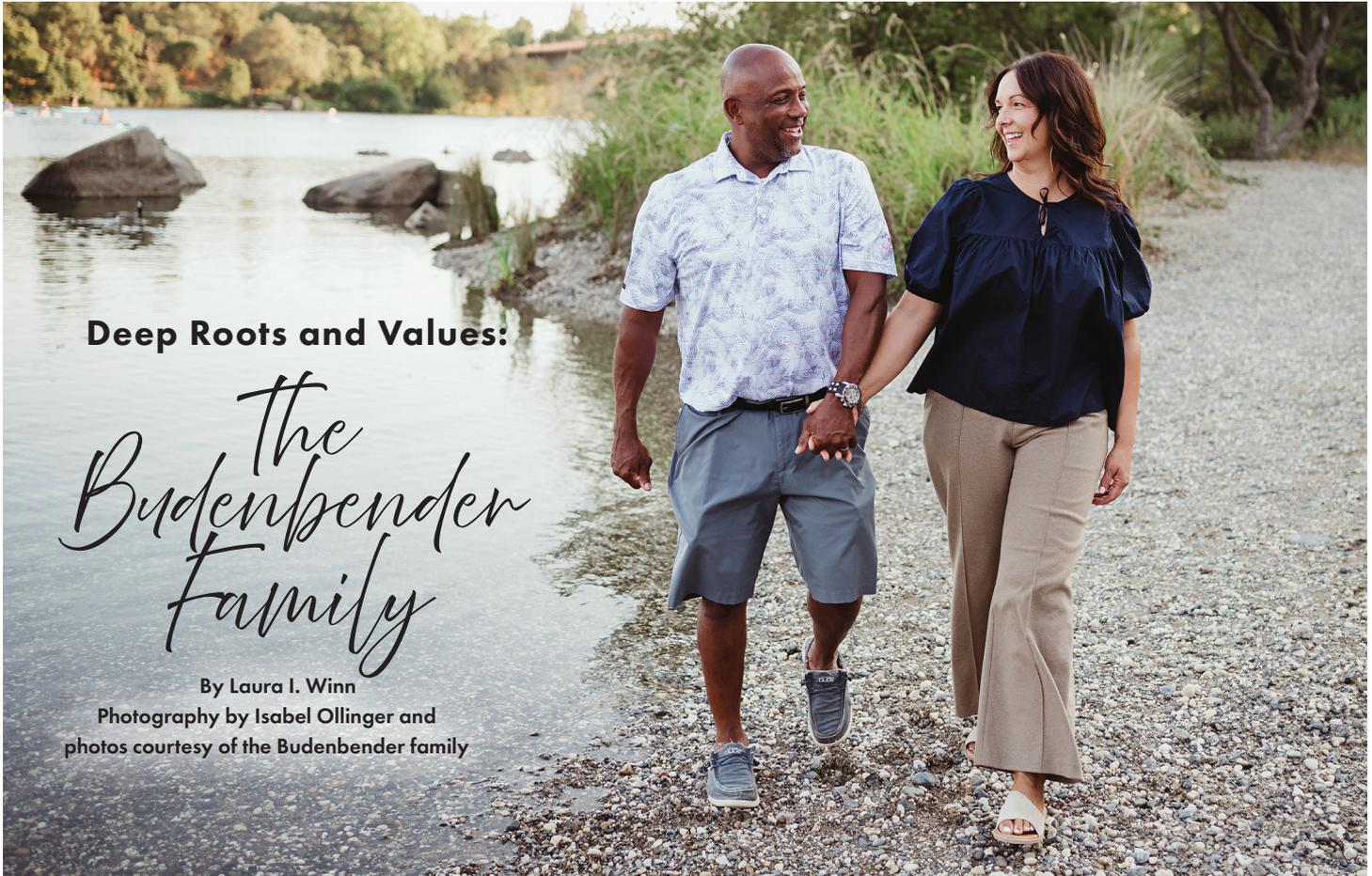
September 2025

DEEP ROOTS AND VALUES:

*The Budenbender  
Family*

Photography by Isabel Ollinger Photography

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**Deep Roots and Values:**

*The Budenbender Family*

By Laura I. Winn  
 Photography by Isabel Ollinger and  
 photos courtesy of the Budenbender family

Chris and Zara Budenbender have lived in their Fair Oaks home for 20 years, but their roots in the community are planted even deeper. Chris, a small business owner of 28 years, and Zara, a teacher in her 16th year at Bella Vista High School, have lived and served in the area for almost 50 years. "We know someone almost everywhere we go," said Zara. "It is one of my favorite things. Sometimes we take bets on how soon we will see someone we know."

The Budenbender's story began in 1997 when Chris and Zara met at a congregation for college students of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although Chris had played football at Casa Roble Fundamental High School and Zara was a former volleyball star at rival Bella Vista, the two had never before crossed paths because Chris is 10 years Zara's senior. Instead of Friday night sport lights, it was their shared family values and religious faith that brought the two

together. Coaching and cheering on the gridiron sidelines would come later.

In those early days of budding love, Zara attended Sacramento State where she earned a full-ride volleyball scholarship as a defensive specialist and rose to the rank of team captain. It wasn't long before Chris knew the driven Zara was "the one" and the couple were married in 1999 with a family of mini athletes to follow. In 2001 while five months pregnant, Zara graduated with a

Bachelor of Science in audiology. Over the next several years, daughters Jozi and Jada and son Jace completed the family of five.

Although Zara initially worked in finance while Chris owned and operated Attention to Detail mobile car detailing, Zara found her calling working with teenagers as a volleyball coach and substitute teacher. While Jozi, Jada and Jace attended elementary school in the San Juan School District, Zara attended night school to earn her master's in education

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and received her teaching credential in 2011.

At her high school alma mater, Zara has taught health, advised student government and helped students achieve the college dream through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. "Teaching in the same school district as my kids was very ideal as a mom," said Zara. "We had the same holidays and summers off together. It was a dream come true."

Come summertime, the self-dubbed "Buda Fam" would take off in their RV to visit theme parks and friends and family across the West, especially in Idaho, Utah and Arizona. "Our best memories together are when our entire family is together – playing card games, camping, laughing," said Zara. And that includes while dressed in matching family outfits. "Surprisingly, the kids go along with it," she added.

Unsurprisingly, the couple's children have followed in their parent's agile footsteps. While Zara coached Bronco volleyball at Bella Vista and Chris coached Ram football at Casa Roble and coached for the Jr. Rams feeder program, their children competed as multi-sport athletes.

Jozi (23), a current graduate student with a degree in psychology from Brigham Young University, played competitive soccer for six years and was a member of Bella Vista's tennis and volleyball teams. Jada (22), a 2025 graduate of Utah Valley University with a bachelor's degree in marketing, made her splash on the high school's dive, volleyball and golf teams – all while earning the highest grades to graduate as a class valedictorian scholar. And finally, the youngest, Jace (18), a freshman at American River College, put his athletic prowess to work on the high school's wrestling and football teams. Jace had plans to play college football but suffered an injury requiring surgery his senior year.

Despite Jace's setback, football has remained a staple that binds the Budenbender bunch together, even as they are spread across states. "Football is our family obsession," said Zara. "We can't wait for football season to start every year."

Jace, Jada, Jozi,  
Zara and Chris



Jozi, Zara, Jace,  
Chris and Jada



Jace, Zara, Jada,  
Chris and Jozi



Sports are a way of life for the Budenbender family. Now "empty nesters" Chris and Zara have made time to paddleboard and bicycle together. An avid pickleball player, Chris has also completed two full Ironman events and 10 half events. Zara has refereed volleyball at the high school and college level, including NCAA Division II. "The dream is to make it to NCAA Division II!" she said.

In addition to their sporty hobbies, Chris and Zara have stayed busy tackling extensive do-it-yourself projects around their home and living out their values as enthusiastic volunteers around town. Together, they have remodeled about 90 percent of their property, piloted beautification projects at Bella Vista, served meals with their church ward, and spooked up fun at Halloween festivals for elementary students.

And the pair are forever running into former classmates, teammates, students and athletes, or the parents, grandparents and siblings of those past pupils and players. It's merely a matter of counting the minutes before they see another familiar face.

"I love living where I teach and being a teacher in the wild," said Zara. "I have really good relationships with my students. Why wouldn't I want to see them at the grocery store? We are so proud to be a part of the Fair Oaks community." ■

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