

Class of 2020 Graduation Canceled—Again

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Class of 2020 students Aly Sullivan and Riley McConnell during the drive-through celebration in June at Morro Bay High School. At the time a formal graduation ceremony was in the works for August—it has been canceled. Photo by Shari Sullivan

This year instead of walking across the stage in front of family and friends to receive their diplomas, the 165 graduating seniors at Morro Bay High School will walk to their mailbox.

For the second time this year, commencement ceremonies for the class of 2020 were canceled due to the coronavirus.

On July 23 an email was sent to parents delivering the disappointing news that a formal graduation ceremony planned for early August was not going to happen.

“Increased cases, placement on the California Public Health Watch List, and common sense tells us that we cannot host the event that our students want; a ceremony across a stage in their football stadium with families cheering on,” read the letter from by Kyle Pruitt, principal at MBHS. “We know that all of you hope that we can host an in-person ceremony, but we have to accept that an August graduation ceremony is not safe given the state and local pandemic mandates.”

School campuses and in-person classes were closed

in March throughout the San Luis Coastal Unified School District in the hopes of slowing the pandemic.

In June seniors said goodbye to what is now their alma mater with a drive-through celebration. Students posed for photos and waved exuberantly to classmates, teachers and administrators believing that they would soon walk across the stage in a traditional ceremony in the school’s football stadium.

The school’s announcement came on the same day SLO County reported the highest number of COVID-19 cases in one day since the pandemic began.

“Unfortunately, the past few weeks have shown that San Luis Obispo County is not immune to the climb in coronavirus cases and deaths,” the letter continued. “While our scale is smaller, we cannot ignore the fact that our State and local government are doing what they can to keep us safe while managing to keep hospital beds available for those who fall victim to the virus. Our goal is the same, to keep you safe and healthy.”

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City to Ask for Sales Tax Hike

By Neil Farrell

With its budget in tatters due to the coronavirus pandemic response and near complete closure of the local economy, the Morro Bay City Council will ask voters to raise their taxes in November and rescue the City.

The Council voted unanimously July 14 to place a 1-percent (1¢ on every dollar) local sales tax hike on the November Presidential Election ballot.

The City said in a news release that the tax increase was to “address community-identified local recovery and emergency preparedness priorities.”

Translated that means the City is trying to soften the blow dealt when it — following orders from the Governor and County Health Department — shut down all non-essential businesses starting Friday, March 20.

Virus Closures Hit Hard

The list of closed businesses under the Governor’s orders included restaurants, of which Morro Bay has nearly 50, constituting a large share of the City’s economy.

Retail stores, hair salons, day spas, massage and tattoo parlors, and barbershops, among others, were also ordered closed by the City, bringing the local economy to a near standstill for about 4 months.

Businesses were allowed to open for a few weeks from mid-June into July under social distancing and cleanliness guidelines.

The virus response included so-called “shelter-at-home” orders, and the one-two punch hit the City’s finances like a Mike Tyson uppercut to the chin.

And just when it seemed the economy would rise up off the canvas, the Governor again shut down businesses including bars and restaurants (for indoor dining), on July 16, after the State saw a rise in COVID-19 cases, the disease caused by coronavirus.

SLO County also saw a rise in cases and deaths, but total cases in Morro Bay remains small, 17 as of July 21. (For the current SLO County numbers, see: www.emergencyslo.org/en/positive-case-details)

Revenues In Free Fall

The City has been scrambling to address the huge drop in taxes, especially transient occupancy taxes (TOT)

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One-Way Embarcadero Hits Dead End

By Neil Farrell

Changing the Morro Bay Embarcadero into a 1-way street has hit a dead end and will not see a major change to the traffic flow, at least for now.

The City Council had approved turning the Embarcadero into a 1-way street going north between Marina and Harbor Streets.

The change was designed to allow for more social distancing, as much of the sidewalks through what is considered the heart of the Embarcadero are fairly narrow and don’t allow for much social distancing.

And with the new orders from the Governor calling for everyone to wear a mask wherever people have to crowd together, the pressure to force social distancing has deflated somewhat.

The idea was to eliminate on-street parking and parking in street ends, eliminating some 97 parking spaces, dropping to a 1-lane road, and use the parking area on the east side of the street for a commercial loading zone.

The west side would be open for restaurants to put outdoor dining and retail shops to put merchandise on the street and allow pedestrians to spread out a bit.

“With regard to the Embarcadero closure,” City Manager Scott Collins told Estero Bay News, “we are postponing moving forward with it for now.”

It turned out that changing to a 1-way



street was less helpful than originally thought.

“I reached out to most businesses in the proposed closure area to discuss the program and get their input on things like trash pickup, deliveries and parking concerns,” Collins said. “With rare exception, all the businesses I talked to said they would not use the street for outdoor dining or retail. That is because they have found more conducive outdoor space for those activities.”

The Governor’s orders made the change moot. “Further,” Collins said, “the Council provided direction to staff to move forward with this closure prior to the State mask order going into effect. Now that

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Top Dog Coffee Bar: A COVID-19 Hope & Survival Story

By Judy Salamacha

California’s Governor Newsom had just announced all non-essential businesses should close. Morro Bay would not escape a worldwide pandemic’s attack on small-town America’s economy. Businesses were shuttered, public events and previously planned family gatherings were canceled. Only take-out was allowed if a restaurant chose to stay open.

Saturday, March 21, 2020 will be remembered as a day to both celebrate and commiserate for Top Dog Coffee Bar’s co-owners, Pat Bietz and Suzanne Maury and their employees. The couple planned to surprise their family-friendly and barista, Mike Nelson, on his birthday. Joyful festivities, however, were followed by an impromptu employee meeting.

“I remember Suzanne was giving food away — crying because they had never laid off employees before after fourteen years in business,” said Mike. “As she said goodbye, I took Pat aside and said it didn’t make sense. They should sell off what they had just stocked.”



Mike Nelson, Lindi Woods and Elizabeth Denny Sanitizing during Covid at Top Dog Coffee Bar. Photo by Suzanne Maury

Pat and Suzanne had traded their fast-paced lives in Southern California to purchase SLO County ranch-land. Pat “trained with one of Saucelito’s best roasters” before they opened a coffee-based business on Main Street, in the heart of downtown Morro Bay. Dog-friendly, it became a go-to

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Be a Face Mask Hero



Have you dreamed of being a modern day superhero, but the lack of phone booths to change into your costume has left you without a way to save the world? Now is your chance to make a difference.

Given the statewide mask order and the importance of wearing masks to combat the spread of COVID-19, the City of Morro Bay is launching the “Be a Face Mask Hero” campaign.

The campaign encourages residents and visitors to be a hero by wearing face mask coverings in Morro Bay.

“Wearing a mask demonstrates kindness, humility, and respect for others by helping to protect one another and be part of the solution,” a city press release states. “The City of Morro Bay remains committed to the health and safety of our community as the main priority and focus during these times and we want to encourage those visiting our community to help keep everyone safe in a positive, fun manner.”

City public safety staff will hand out stickers and other swag items to visitors and residents that they see wearing a face covering and thanking them for being a hero in our community.

The City hopes this fun campaign will encourage greater mask wearing but may issue warnings or citations to those who refuse to do their part.

For more information, contact Public Information Officer Jennifer Callaway at 805-772-6217.

Another covid-19 Death Reported; Closures Resume

By Neil Farrell

San Luis Obispo County has taken a step back in its response to the coronavirus pandemic, as an eighth local person dies and the County is once again ordered by the Governor to shut businesses.

The County Health Department on July 23 announced the eighth person to die of the virus, an octogenarian with underlying medical conditions, who was discharged from a long-term care facility with an outbreak and was hospitalized for three days before dying.

That death came just two days after a seventh person died of COVID-19. That person was also in their 80s, lived in a North County nursing home and had underlying medical issues. (Editor’s note: The number of deaths as of press time is now 11.)

“We are seeing an uptick in cases in congregate settings such as skilled nursing facilities in SLO County and we need everyone to do their part to help slow the spread of this disease,” said County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein.

According to the County, “Medical research shows that while COVID-19 has flu-like symptoms, it is more contagious than the flu among most populations and age groups.

“Older adults, individuals with health conditions, and people living in congregate settings [including residential

care facilities] are at higher risk from COVID-19. While risk increases with age among adults, younger adults and those without chronic health conditions have also faced serious illness and-19 hospitalization.”

With COVID numbers climbing, the entire county was placed under the Governor’s watch list, which led to the closure of certain businesses, just as they were getting into a groove of restricted re-openings.

The closure list includes fitness centers, churches, many offices, personal care services (nail salons, massage and tattoo parlors, estheticians, and facial services), hair salons and barbershops, and indoor malls. And for the first time “indoor protest” was included.

On July 13, bars, breweries, pubs, and brewpubs were ordered to close indoor and outdoor operations, unless they are offering meals in an outdoor setting, and can comply with previously issued guidelines.

On July 22, a fourth inmate at the County Jail tested positive for the virus. According to a Sheriff’s spokesman, the inmate started showing symptoms July 21 and was isolated. A test confirmed the infection. Also, three correctional deputies and one patrol deputy have tested positive for the virus.

All are recovering, according to the Sheriff’ Office. All inmates housed in the affected jail units are being tested and monitored for symptoms.

“Ensuring the health and safety of our inmates is a top priority,” Sheriff Ian Parkinson said. “We have instituted a number of measures to not only keep our inmates safe but everyone who works in the Jail.”

And with the virus still spreading, the County has expanded its “safe parking program” at the homeless services shelter on Prado Road in San Luis Obispo.

“This program offers an added opportunity to work towards economic self-sufficiency, while having a safe location to park,” said County Administrative Officer, Wade Horton. “We have a great relationship with CAPSLO and the city and are glad that together we could find a solution to help keep these individuals safe as we deal with the effects of COVID-19.”

County Supervisor Chairwoman, Dist. 4 Supervisor Lynn Compton released an update to the community. Compton said, “As a reminder, our mission wasn’t to stop the spread of this disease, it was to manage it so that we had the health care capacity to take care of those who are or would become sick.”

She explained that the county has some 396 regular hospital beds and 53 intensive care unit beds. Plus, they built an “Alternative Care Facility” or overflow hospital at Cal Poly that initially could handle 165 cases, but could be expanded to treat over 900. However, the \$4.5 million facility has yet to treat a patient.

“We are currently operating the ACS on a ‘stand by’ status,” Compton said. “Recent modeling has determined that 164 ACS beds could be needed in a worst case scenario. That is down from the original estimates of potentially 900 beds being needed. Additionally, we signed a mutual aid agreement with Santa Barbara County for the ACS. If Santa Barbara County’s needs for beds exceed their capacity, we have agreed to work with them.”

The pandemic has so far not hit SLO County too hard. “Overall,” Compton said, “our deaths are still low in numbers compared to other counties in California. We have had outbreaks in congregate care facilities; and we are actively trying to identify the first of such cases in each facility as quickly as possible. Once we identify one or more cases, we do aggressive testing of all the staff and all the residents.”

She added that at least 15 care facilities have had outbreaks and the County Health Department is working with them to improve their infection controls.

The County’s COVID case numbers surpassed 100 per 100,000 residents, which was the State’s threshold for landing on the Governor’s “watch list” that triggered the re-closures of businesses. Compton said they have no idea when they might be taken off the list.

“The goal of every County,” she said, “is to bring down the number of new cases on a daily basis. Please continue

to do all things that we have recommended in the past such as wearing masks indoors or where there are a lot of people around you, staying home when you are sick, keeping a safe distance from others, hand washing, keep to your own family units, sanitizing surfaces, covering your cough, sneezes, and staying close to home.” And, the Governor’s statewide stay-at-home order is still in place, she added.

Compton said they are doing “approximately 300 tests a day at our community sites, plus pop up sites that move throughout the county. We are meeting our testing metric [over 425/day] and going beyond that. We have been steady on that metric for the past couple of weeks.”

Because demand is high, they want to narrow the people who get tested. “We do have more of a demand at these clinics right now,” Compton said, “so we are asking for people at a lower risk of the disease, without symptoms, to give their spot to vulnerable person in a high-risk setting or with symptoms as things have tightened up here.”

For updates on COVID-19 in SLO County, see: ReadySLO.org or call the recorded Public Health Information Line at (805) 788-2903. A staffed phone assistance center at (805) 543-2444 is available Mondays-Fridays, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to answer questions related to COVID-19.

Correction

A story in the last edition concerning an Aug. 11 hearing for sewer charges in the Monarch Grove Subdivision in Los Osos misinterpreted the intent of the hearing.

A previous Proposition 218 process that the community underwent in April also included Monarch Grove, which hooked up to the community sewer system just last year.

There will not be a Prop. 218 process for Monarch Grove on these sewer charges.

The hearing in question is to authorize the County to attach sewer charges out of Monarch Grove onto property tax bills, “to facilitate collections,” according to the County staff report.

Property owners in Monarch Grove are free to protest their sewer bills if should they feel so inclined, but the Aug. 11 hearing will not be a Prop. 218 protest vote as we reported.

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Dead Man in Street Identified

Morro Bay Police have identified a man found dead in the middle of the street in front of the Harbor Street Firehouse.

To recap, police were called to the intersection of Harbor and Piney Way at 2:53 a.m. Monday, July 13 for a report of a man lying in the street.

According to MBPD Cmdr. Amy Watkins when police and firefighters found the man he was already dead.

Cmdr. Watkins said the man was identified as Matthew Martin Gardiner, 31. Gardiner's body showed no signs of foul play and an autopsy was performed July 16.

"The deceased displayed underlying health issues," Cmdr. Watkins said, "complicated by detected substance use."

Gardiner is the second dead person to be found in Morro Bay in the past year. Back in June 2019, Caltrans workers doing routine maintenance along the Hwy 1/ Morro Bay Boulevard exit discovered a human skull. The rest of the person's remains were found near a homeless encampment.

Coroner's investigators determined the remains were that of Gregory Paul Schweickert, 70, described as a homeless man whose last known address was in Tucson, Ariz., according to the Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff's spokesman Tony Cipolla said the Coroner's Office had the remains examined by a forensic anthropologist but the cause of death was undetermined due to the length of time the remains were at the location.

The last known contact with Schweickert, Cipolla said, was in 2016 with the Morro Bay Police Department. So, it's believed that Schweickert's body may have been at the location for 3 years. Cipolla said there is no evidence Schweickert was connected with the nearby homeless encampment.

"Based on the investigation," Cipolla said, "there is no evidence of a traumatic injury nor significant disease."

Two Men Arrested in Assault Cases

By Neil Farrell

Morro Bay Police recently arrested two men — one a local and the other an out-of-towner — in separate, violent incidents.

In the first case, police responded to the 1100 block of Embarcadero at 9:55 p.m. on Friday, July 10 for a report of an assault.

According to police, the male victim said he was



Kevin Lee Hicks

"struck in the face with a metal sign" by another man.

"The investigation revealed the victim was disposing of trash in a dumpster, while the suspect was digging through another trashcan receptacle nearby," police said in a news release. "The victim and suspect became involved in a verbal argument. The victim walked away, at which time the suspect removed a metal sign from a trash receptacle, approached the victim from behind, and struck the victim on the side of the face, severely cutting the victim's ear."

The suspect fled but was located nearby and arrested. Kevin Lee Hicks, 48 of Morro Bay was charged with suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon, mayhem, possession of illegal drugs and bench warrants.

In the second incident, police responded at 12:14 p.m. Sunday, July 12 to the Mobile Gas Station at 911 Morro Bay Blvd., for a report of another assault.

Police said in a news release, "On scene, officers determined that the suspect entered the store intoxicated and confronted the store clerk about her relationship status."

The inebriated man crossed the line. "The suspect walked around the cashier counter and removed the victim's phone from her waistband," police said.

That invasion sparked a "verbal altercation" when another store employee interceded. The suspect then reportedly assaulted the male employee and ended up striking both employees.

"The victims and the suspect all sustained injuries because of the physical altercation," police said. The suspect, identified as Andrew Robert Bergfalk, 21 of San Diego, was arrested and booked into County Jail for suspicion of grand theft, battery, and drunk and disorderly conduct, police said.

Both of these incidents are being investigated and police ask anyone with information to call MBPD at (805) 772-6225 or Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-STOP.



Andrew Robert Bergfalk

Hung Up On Hang Glider Hill



An unidentified hang glider recently had to be rescued by Cal Fire after crashing in rugged terrain on the flank of Hang Glider Hill in Cayucos.

According to Cal Fire/SLO County Fire Public Information Officer, Capt. Adam Orozco, the fire department got a 9-1-1 call at about 12:21 p.m. Sunday, July 19 of a crash landing on the hillside.

"Cal Fire SLO responded along with H70 [a Highway Patrol helicopter] to rescue the patient who sustained moderate injuries," Capt. Orozco said. "H70 hoisted the patient off the hill and the patient was transported to a local hospital."

Russel Taylor, who lives below the popular hill where hang gliding enthusiasts have been launching for many years, soaring over the coastline and landing on the bluff above Dog Beach, said it wasn't a great day for hang gliding, as there wasn't a breeze, though it was good weather for a helicopter rescue.

He said the hill is problematic. There is a lot of illegal permanent camping and campfires on the hill, and parties that leave a lot of trash about. In winter, vehicles get stuck in mud and abandoned, and have to be towed out, and there's even been a rollover accident where someone died.

"Hang Glider Hill is sort of the Wild West," Taylor told Estero Bay News. "A lot of them crash."

He added that neighbors keep an eye on the goings on and have reported many times to the County. The local citizens advisory council "has hang-glider-hill as a permanent agenda item. The Cayucos Conservancy repeatedly posts 'No Trespassing' signs up there, which are routinely removed."

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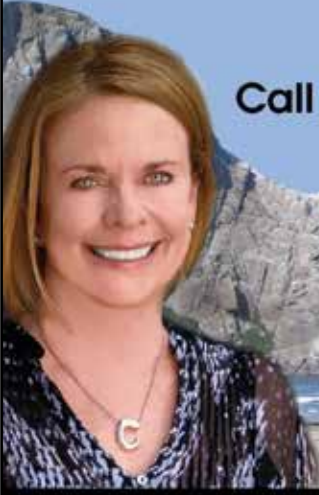
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Fire Destroys Deck; House Saved



Morro Bay firefighters battled a fire on a deck at a home in the Heights neighborhood, stopping it from spreading to the house.

According to the MBFD, they got a report of a structure fire at 5:56 p.m. Sunday, July 19 in the 200 block of Kern Ave.

The fire turned out to be on a rear deck and had spread to an outbuilding. The fire was extinguished at 6:03.

“The fire destroyed the deck and a separate small building,” Fire Chief Steve Knuckles said. “The residence did have heat damage but did not burn into the integrity of the home.”

The fire department sent an engine and ladder truck to the scene and called in assistance from Cal Fire.

The fire caused about \$40,000 in damages and Chief Knuckles said the saved house was valued at \$350,000.

The investigation as to cause was continuing, but Chief Knuckles said it was “electrical in nature.”

In the photo, firefighters pour water on the smoldering deck. Photo courtesy MBFD

Skimmers Found at Morro Bay Station



Morro Bay Police are investigating a number of nefarious credit card skimmers found by a County inspector on a local gas station’s pumps.

According to Morro Bay police at 4:50 p.m. Thursday, July 23 they were contacted by a San Luis Obispo County Weights & Measures employee who discovered an unauthorized credit card skimming device at the Sinclair gas station. Weights & Measures is a division of the County Agriculture Commissioner’s Office.

In all, eight skimmers were found on the station’s pumps. Sinclair is located at 940 Morro Bay Blvd.

Police checked the pumps at every other gas station in town but reportedly didn’t find any others.

Skimmers are electronic devices that capture and record the personal information of anyone who uses the reader. They are most often placed on ATMs and gas pumps. There was no word on how long the skimmers may have been in place or if any people have had their identities stolen.

Police are asking anyone with information about the case to contact Det. Marcos at (805) 772-6229 or SLO County Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-STOP.

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Vietnam Warship Docked At South T-pier

Story and photos by Neil Farrell



The PTF-26 (short for “Patrol Torpedo Fast” is tied up to Morro Bay’s South T-pier.



A famous Vietnam veteran has been tied up to Morro Bay’s South T-pier for several weeks now, getting ready for a trip through the Panama Canal and the Caribbean Sea, and up the Mississippi River System to a new home in Kentucky.

Morro Bay’s Larry Newland has been watching over the PTF-26 (short for “Patrol Torpedo Fast” boat) for the owners, the Seaman’s Church Institute (SCI) in Paducah, Ken.

“This is similar to the more famous PT boats of World War II,” explains Newland while standing on the wide, rear deck of the Navy war ship. There was only 26 of these made and this was the last one, number 26, he adds.

It’s also one of only four that were made with aluminum hulls — the other 22 were wood — and it’s the last PTF boat still afloat anywhere in the world, making it not only historically valuable but also exceedingly rare.

“In 1960-62,” Newland says, “the Navy needed a smaller boat, something like the PT boats from World War 2.”

The PT boats were made famous by then-Lt. John F. Kennedy, who commanded PT-109 in the South Pacific during the war, for which he gained fame and rode it to the Presidency.

Most of the PT boats were stripped and burned in Manila Bay after the war, Newland says, and only two or three PT boats survived. With the Vietnam War just gearing up, the Navy needed a new, fast attack boat.

“The U.S. Navy went to the Norwegians, who had these ‘Nasty’ class boats,” Newland says. “The Norwegians have a small boat navy not a big draft navy, there’s no cruisers or battleships. They have a lot of what’s called ‘littoral’ or close-to-shore boats. The Navy was interested in the Nasty [Tjeld in Swedish] class boats, which were 80 to 85-foot wooden boats that looked a lot like the PT boats.”

Several other countries had the vessels in their Naval fleets, including Germany, England and Turkey.

The U.S. initially ordered a dozen of the Nasty boats from Norway and then got a license to build them here in the U.S. down in New Orleans. They traded out the engines for more powerful Napier Deltic diesel motors that were used for gunboats, tanks, trains and big trucks, and were made in Britain. Each Napier Deltic engine produced 3,100-horse power, enough to make the boat hydroplane when it got up to speed, 40 knots with a top speed of 51 knots.

Those engines have since been replaced with twin Detroit 1671 engines (a 16-cylinder block each at 71 cubic centimeters). She also carried 3,000 gallons of fuel.

The boat carried a crew of 19 and the sleeping quarters below decks hint at what must have been tough duty aboard the gunboat. Narrow halls, tiny rooms and short water tight doors give the impression that anyone doing duty on one of

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Larry Newland of Morro Bay, has been watching over the PTF-26 for the owners.

handling training.”

Newland is hoping to catch a ride with the PTF-26 as it goes through the Panama Canal; something he says is on his bucket list. If nothing else, he’d like to catch up to the boat when it hits New Orleans and ride with it up the river to its new home.

Newland, who was a driving force in establishing the Morro Bay Maritime Museum for some 27 years, still carries a passion for all things maritime, though he recently retired from the museum board.

He’s down at the boat on most days for at least a little while. He emphasizes that PTF-26 is not open for tours, but there is a plaque mounted on the side that gives the history of the vessel.

People are welcomed to check out the historic warship, which will probably leave Morro Bay sometime from Aug. 20-24.

Grant Funds Judge Money Victim-Witness Center

Witnesses to and victims of crime will continue to have the County’s support after Supervisors agreed to accept a large grant from the State.

The District Attorney’s Office applied for the \$634,900 grant from the California Office of Emergency Services, to pay the bills at the County’s Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center.

The grant will cover from Oct. 1, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2021 and will completely offset the salary and benefits of the “mass victimization advocate” a position within the County OES department that coordinates all the agencies and organizations that would be needed to help people during a major disaster, such as earthquake, tsunami, wild-fire and nuclear disaster, among other tragedies.

The grant requires a local match that the D.A.’s Office

said they would fulfill with interns “who volunteer hours by providing administrative support. Cash matches will be met through already budgeted expenditures including salaries of victim advocates, office supplies, and training.”

Some \$534,000 of the grant has already been budgeted. The deadline for the grant program was pushed up from fall to summer, which explains why the D.A. asked for permission to apply for the grant in the same agenda item that Supervisors were asked to accept the award.

The necessary budget change will come back to Supervisors after the State budget is finalized and the award is confirmed by Cal OES.

The D.A.’s Office has been in charge of victim-witness services since 1977, according to a staff report. The County’s Victim-Witness program was moved into the Courtroom Annex and in 2017 was re-Christened, the “Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center;” named after the late-Judge Christopher Money, who gave some 40 years of service to the citizens of SLO County.

Money was a prosecutor for 15 years before being elected District Attorney in 1978 and re-elected in 1982. He was appointed a muni court judge in 1985 and promoted to Superior Court in 1989, where he served until he retired.

In 1977, while an assistant D.A., Judge Money helped create the Victim-Witness Assistance Center and helped establish the Women’s Shelter Program and the County’s Sexual Assault Response Team Program. He also headed up the County’s first Drug Court in 1999.

The County has been using these State grants to fund its victim-witness program since 1984.

The Center’s purpose is “reducing the effects of crime on victims, family members, and the community; increasing the efficiency of the criminal justice response to crime victims and witnesses; and preparing the Victim Witness Assistance Center for a coordinated community response to mass victimization and terrorism incidents.”

Though the Center is currently closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic response, if readers need their help, they can call, (805) 781-5800.

Sheriff To Get License Plate Reader

By Neil Farrell

The County Sheriff’s Office will be picking up a couple of pieces of equipment that will make bookings at County Jail go faster and also help fight smuggling on the North Coast.

County Sheriff Ian Parkinson got permission from County Supervisors to take some \$73,000 out of a Sheriff-Coroner’s Trust Fund filled with grant monies, to buy a LiveScan Station and an Automated License Plate Reader.

The \$16,900 LiveScan is an electronic device that takes an inmate’s fingerprints and is a far cry better than the old rolled-on ink prints.

The device is “used to scan and process the fingerprints of all prisoners brought to the jail, whether they are released on a promise to appear, post bail or are housed inside the facility,” Sheriff Parkinson said in a staff report.

“The Livescan system is a significant improvement over older methods of taking fingerprints and allows for quick verification of a prisoner’s identity.”

The County Jail sees a lot of business every day, with arrestees coming in as others are being released. A second LiveScan would speed up the whole process and provide backup.

“In addition,” Sheriff Parkinson said, “a second Livescan workstation would create redundancy in the system that would allow for the IRC to continue operations should one of the systems cease functioning. The redundancy would allow Sheriff’s IT personnel to repair the down system, without creating an exigency that could result in overtime for after hours and weekend response of IT staff.”

The Automated License Plate Reader would cost \$56,100,

and be mounted on a small trailer, so it can be positioned at different spots on Hwy 1, the main area where smugglers have landed boats and off loaded drugs and human cargo.

“The North Coast of San Luis Obispo County,” the Sheriff said, “has been the site of multiple maritime smuggling landings. This area is a remote location accessed only by one road, Highway One, which runs from Monterey to Cambria, California. The use of a mobile Automated License Plate Reader mounted on a portable trailer will enable the Sheriff’s Office to capture images of license plates for vehicles travelling in coastal areas where these landings have occurred.”

The license plate readers are equipped with an infrared camera to photograph plates at night when these smugglers operate.

Several years ago, SLO County saw a spate of Panga boat landings from Montana de Oro to Piedras Blancas, as Mexican drug cartels used the seaworthy and cheap fishing boats to smuggle pot, cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin, as well as people.

The boats often sport three big outboard motors and travel 100 miles offshore to avoid detection. In what must be a harrowing ride up the California Coast from Ensenada, the boats travel non-stop at top speed, braving swells, winds and worse. Even more boats are caught offshore and never make it to landfall.

The boat smuggling was heavy for several years as law enforcement sealed off other smuggling routes at the border and then dropped off. But it hasn’t gone away completely, as a recent case in Santa Barbara County demonstrated.

Just this past March 12, a Panga boat came ashore at Hollister Ranch in Goleta with more than 2,100 kilos (4,700 pounds) of marijuana on board. Four Mexican nationals connected to the Sinaloa Cartel (formerly run by the infamous Juáquin “El Chapo” Guzmán), were arrested by U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE), with help from the Border Patrol and Coast Guard. Each man faces 10 years in prison.

Some 14 others were waiting on the beach for the shipment, with others on hillsides acting as lookouts. The traffickers fled when ICE agents arrived. Twenty-one suspects were caught but only four retained for charges. The other 17 were released.

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Community

Sportsmen's Gun Range Reopens to New Popularity

Photos and Story by Neil Farrell

You've no doubt driven past it on Hwy 1 countless times, heard gunfire and wondered what they do out there below Hollister Peak? The San Luis Obispo Sportsmen's Association shooting range is a multi-faceted facility with a dozen areas for different types of shooting and archery, as well as being a local leader in gun safety. And while the range, like most every other business in California, was shut down for 90 days in the coronavirus pandemic response, it's open again and more popular than ever.

Indeed. The gun range has been riding a wave of popularity in shooting sports and self-defense that's also manifested in a recent run on guns and ammunition at gun shops.

From Humble Beginnings

"We've been open for 35 years," said Julia Soto, the range's general manager. It started with one small-bore public shooting range. In 1991 the "Long House" the most visible building from the highway was put in for rifle and pistol target shooting.

The education building, where safety courses are held, came next and is a short distance away; and then the shot-gun range — used for skeet and trap shooting — was put in. Also close to the highway are a target archery range



Cheyne Jackson sights in on a distant target with a Ruger .308 hunting rifle at the SLO Sportsmen's Association's Gun Range.

popular with kids, and the Hogue Action Pistol Range, where law enforcement officers often train, and where pistol-shooting championships are held.

Towards the rear of the 460-acre property are the "Back Ranges" — a long-range (up to 1,700 yards) course, and the Cowboy/Chorro Valley Regulators' Old West range. That's the site of annual quick shooting championships where competitors dress in Old West period clothes, adopting colorful nicknames and personas.

There's a range for muzzleloaders/black powder shooting and an archery "walking course" where archers follow a trail and shoot at targets in the distance.

Safety Courses In Demand

The education building has seen a lot of activity of late. Soto said they originally only put on hunter safety courses and law enforcement courses but lately, "We've been inundated with calls, it's crazy," she said.

They now hold classes that lead to getting a "Firearms Safety Certificate."

When someone buys a gun, they take a paper safety test at the gun shop as part of a background check and wait period. "What we're offering is the safety course," she said. "The NRA basic pistol safety class. You get a certificate of compliance from the NRA."

"In California," she said, "there's no shooting tests. This course is because people want to be safe" with their weapons. There's also an "Intro to handguns," an abbreviated 2-hour class for those who don't want the full, 9-hour, all-day safety course.

There's also a "Guns and Ladies" course, she said. "That's held once a month, with a female instructor. It teaches women how to shoot."

Safety Is Paramount

Soto said their safety courses emphasize four things: first treat every gun as if it is loaded; keep your fingers off the trigger until ready to shoot; never point a firearm at anything you are not willing to destroy; and, know your target and what is beyond it. (That last one is in case you miss.)

"We teach them how to load a magazine and then we



The entrance sign at the Sportsmen's Association's Gun Range shows the variety of shooting facilities on site, with the Hogue Action Pistol Range in the background.

get them shooting."

They are not allowed to rent guns, she explained, but they have some instructional guns — .22-calibers and 9mms — so one doesn't have to actually own a gun to take a safety class.

The Sport's Association has some 1,300 members, but Soto said the range is a public facility open to anyone to use for a fee. Certain people get a discount.

"Military and law enforcement are our friends," said Soto. "We like to cut them a break. And we get a lot of SWAT and sniper teams that practice here." Such teams can be from anywhere in the state and come here because of the long ranges, which go from 200 to 1,700 yards. "We're the only range in the state that goes out that far," said Soto.

Safety on all the ranges is paramount and overseen by safety officers. "We ask everyone if they've been here before and give them a little orientation speech," said Soto. They also go over the range rules and firing line rules.

Guns Must Be Legal

They allow any legal gun to be fired, which would exclude automatic weapons like machine guns and others the state has banned.

"If you bring a .50-caliber," she said, "you have to bring your own targets. I will be leaving the premises because that's going to hurt" as in extremely loud.

"We haven't had anyone come out with anything automatic, but we do have people who like to rapid-fire."

Archery's An Option

If guns are not your thing you might consider archery. A person can rent archery gear at the club and it's open to all ages.

There are two courses, Soto said, a standing course with dinosaurs and other crazy targets; and the walking range that's open once a month where targets are fake deer and bear among others, and can be set up in various configurations.

Busy Since Reopening

The range was shutdown 90 days for the pandemic, Soto said, because they were unable to meet the initial state guidelines. The facility was built and is operated and maintained by the Sportsmen's Association but the Department of Fish & Wildlife owns the land. The gun range is a concessionaire to the State.

"Since we've reopened," Soto said, "there's only been two or three days with the same numbers from prior to the shutdown. It's record-breaking, crazy." They had to open up another range so shooters could social distance.

So who uses the range? "On a weekly basis," she said, "a third are not members. Before COVID we got a lot of foreigners, people traveling from L.A. to San Francisco.

Gun Range Continued on page 9

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Police Blotter



Morro Bay Police Logs

- **July 19:** Police contacted a 55-year-old man at 11:15 a.m. in the 400 block of Bonita who was nicked for violating a stay-the-heck-away order and for being stoned on drugs.
- **July 19:** At 10:30 a.m. officers contacted yet another citizen of the year in the 500 block of Quintana. He too was tossed into the gaol for allegedly being schwacked on illegal stimulants.
- **July 19:** Police are investigating a case of petty theft in the 300 block of Dunes.
- **July 19:** Police and fire responded at 4 p.m. to the 300 block of Embarcadero. Logs indicated the man was taken to the hospital and police took his belongings for safekeeping.
- **July 18:** A citizen in the 400 block of Monterey said some scoundrel vandalized his vehicle.
- **July 18:** The opiate-fueled march to destruction continued with the arrest at 4:30 p.m. of an allegedly stoned fellow in the 900 block of Embarcadero.
- **July 18:** Police responded at 4 p.m. to a car accident in the 800 block of Piney Way. Logs indicated a 61-year-old woman was arrested for suspicion of driving wrecked and crashing into a parked car. No injuries were reported, but it's gonna hurt nonetheless.
- **July 18:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 3:55 p.m. on Hwy 1 at Yerba Buena. Logs indicated the car had a false license plate and the driver was arrested for allegedly driving wired.
- **July 18:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 12:18 p.m. in the 300 block of Quintana. The 26-year-old apparent desperado was arrested for suspicion of possessing a concealed firearm, a set of brass knuckles and two Billy clubs.
- **July 17:** Police contacted another suspicious man at 3:41 p.m. at City Park on Harbor. The 35-year-old crankster was arrested for being high as a kite on drugs and possessing paraphernalia, his stash no doubt hidden where the sun don't shine and the police won't search.
- **July 16:** Police started an investigation into a reported sexual assault.
- **July 15:** A man called police to check the welfare of his wife, who was traveling to Morro Bay from Idaho but hadn't checked in for several hours after her flight.
- **July 15:** A worker at Taco Bell on Main told police that some scalawag took his bike and no doubt made a run for the border.
- **July 15:** Police were called at 10:21 p.m. by a man who said he was walking his dog on Elm Street and some apparent Freddie Krueger threatened him.
- **July 15:** Porch pirates apparently purloined a package off the porch of a person's home in the 400 block of Morro.
- **July 15:** Police got a report at 4:30 p.m. of domestic violence in the 600 block of Embarcadero.
- **July 15:** A business in the 1700 block of Embarcadero reported a burglary and grand theft, as if the coronavirus

- closures hadn't stolen enough
- **July 15:** Police took a report of suspected dependent-adult emotional abuse in the 400 block of Elena, and police sent a report to Adult Protective Services.
 - **July 15:** Police responded at 11:38 a.m. to a disturbance in the 300 block of Sequoia. A 55-year-old hombre was arrested for suspicion of being UTI and resisting arrest, in another case of you can't shovel water with a pitchfork. And a 39-year-old man was also popped for suspicion of being thick as a tick on drugs.
 - **July 15:** Police towed away a Dodge Sportsman RV, model year, license plate and VIN number all unknown that was parked too long in the 1700 block of Embarcadero.
 - **July 14:** Police responded at 5 p.m. to Coleman Drive where a kid was bitten by a dog.
 - **July 14:** Another vehicle was towed from Kern and Pacific for an expired registration, a.k.a. getting DMV'd.
 - **July 14:** Police contacted another suspicious man, 58, at City Park whom they arrested for suspicion of being krunked on drugs.
 - **July 14:** Police responded at 5 a.m. to a home in the 2600 block of Ironwood where they located a runaway teenager from Monterey County and returned the imp to his or her no doubt worried parents.
 - **July 13:** Someone found a red, woman's wallet at Main and Shasta.
 - **July 13:** Police contacted a suspicious woman at 1 p.m. in the 400 block of Trinidad. The 32-year-old belle of the ball was nicked for suspicion of being out of her tree on drugs.
 - **July 13:** And from the "found files" — at 2 a.m. someone found some undisclosed property and turned it over to police.
 - **July 12:** Police were summoned at 6:34 p.m. to the 1500 block of Embarcadero for someone who had died.
 - **July 12:** Police towed away an offending vehicle from the 300 block of Morro Bay Blvd., for not giving the DMV its pound of flesh.
 - **July 12:** Police responded at 12:14 p.m. to an assault at the Mobile Station in the 900 block of MBB. A 21-year-old man reportedly attacked a store clerk. The apparent swamp donkey was arrested for suspicion of grand theft (from a person), battery and flapping-out in public, which explains a lot.
 - **July 12:** Police contacted a familiar foe at 9:25 a.m. on Park Street. Logs indicated the scofflaw, 47, had three, no-cite-out warrants and was buckled up and hauled to the hoosegow.
 - **July 11:** Police responded at 10:30 p.m. to Albertson's Market on Quintana for a suspicious man outside the store. Logs indicated officers arrested a 42-year-old apparent wastrel for suspicion of being high on drugs and possession of paraphernalia, his stash apparently already spent.
 - **July 11:** A 28-year-old woman turned herself in at the stationhouse for two bench warrants. She was cited and released to await her third.
 - **July 11:** A missing adult that had been reported earlier was located in the 700 block of Harbor apparently safe and mostly sound. He was moved from the lost to the found files.
 - **July 11:** Police responded at 1:55 a.m. to a domestic dispute in the 400 block of Harbor where they contacted

- a 29-year-old man. Logs indicated they didn't arrest him at the time, but State parole officers paid the louse a visit and violated him back into jail.
- **July 11:** A citizen in the 700 block of Piney Way reported the theft of a display case with knives and jewelry, but then later called to cancel the report, a case of "Never mind."
 - **July 11:** Police contacted an apparent swagman at 8:30 a.m. at Lila Keiser Park. Logs indicated the model citizen, 38, had three warrants and was also allegedly in possession of drug paraphernalia. He was booked.
 - **July 11:** Yet another popular fellow, 42, was picked up, at 8:36 a.m. in the 400 block of Nassau on a warrant.
 - **July 11:** A disturbance was reported at 12:49 a.m. in the 400 block of Dunes. A 28-year-old fellow was nicked for being spifficated in public.
 - **July 10:** Police responded at 10:10 p.m. to the 1100 block of Embarcadero. Logs indicated a 48-year-old apparent madman was arrested for suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon, possession of drugs, a bench warrant and mayhem (there's something you don't see every day).
 - **July 10:** Police responded at 9:23 p.m. to Rite Aid in the 700 block of Quintana for an assault report. No ruffians were arrested.
 - **July 9:** Police responded at 11 p.m. to Albertson's Market on Quintana Road for another disorderly fellow. The 46-year-old inebriate was nicked.
 - **July 9:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 9:30 p.m. in the 900 block of Piney Way. The 28-year-old was arrested for allegedly being buzzed on drugs.
 - **July 9:** Police contacted a suspicious woman, 31, at 5:30 p.m. in the 300 block of Atascadero Rd. She was charged with suspicion of being under the influence, in possession and having paraphernalia of illegal drugs. She was booked at the stationhouse and released to a responsible party.
 - **July 9:** Police contacted a suspicious woman, 32, at 11:21 a.m. in the 900 block of Pacific. She was also arrested for suspicion of being schwacked on drugs, as there seems to be a lot of that going around lately.
 - **July 9:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 11:19 a.m. in the 1500 block of Main. The regular Speed Racer was ticketed for reckless driving.
 - **July 8:** Yet another suspicious fellow was hanging around Rite Aid making a nuisance of himself at 8:15 p.m. Logs indicated the, 28-year-old choleric squirt was arrested for drunk in public and possession of suspected methamphetamine.
 - **July 8:** Someone broke into a car parked in the 500 block of MBB.
 - **July 8:** Police responded at 9:25 p.m. to a car crash at Hwy 1 and Yerba Buena.
 - **July 7:** At 9:30 p.m. police contacted an apparently disturbed woman at City Park in the 700 block of Harbor. The 57-year-old regular customer was arrested for suspicion of being bent in public.
 - **July 7:** A citizen told police that his wallet had gone missing and some apparent scamboogah had used his debit card to make "multiple unauthorized transactions at multiple locations," also called a larceny spree.
 - **July 7:** Police responded at 8:48 a.m. to a car crash at Clarabelle and Radcliff. No injuries reported.
 - **July 7:** Police responded at 8:13 a.m. to Sabetta's Pizza in

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• **July 6:** Someone turned in some property he or she found in the North Pit parking lot. Later, police got a call from Atascadero Police regarding some pirate they had in custody with a stolen wallet and credit cards belonging to a local fellow. He told MBPD that the stuff was stolen off his sailboat.

Investigations have identified cases spread between different households at holiday gatherings, birthday parties, graduation parties, and other medium or small-sized get-togethers, officials said. The nature of these gatherings, which often involves people from multiple households coming together for a prolonged time and are frequently held indoors or with shared food and beverages, creates

The numbers as of July 28: 1,689 confirmed cases, 1,261 recovered, 404 home, 13 hospitalized (4 in ICU) and 11 deaths.

One man from Amsterdam came in on his 50th birthday, she recalled. "He'd never even held a gun before. We let him use one of our educational guns. They all enjoy it.

"They come up here to buy from us," Wiseman said, "because they aren't available where they live. Seventy to 75 percent of them are first time gun buyers. It's a whole new market of consumers; people who have never been in favor of guns."

If readers want to know more about the San Luis Obispo Sportsmen's Association gun range, see the website at: www.slosa.org.

Community

Art Continues Despite Coronavirus

By Jill Turnbow



First prize at the at the Cambria Center for the Arts show was awarded to Judith Skartvedt with a photograph entitled "Lonesome Cowboy." Photo submitted

The Gallery at the Cambria Center for the Arts continues to engage the arts community even during these tough pandemic times. Though the Gallery is still not open to visitors, the artists are finding creative ways to provide artistic experiences for both visitors and local community members.

The current virtual art show, "Monochromatic" was the first juried show of the year and it has been quite a success

"I was impressed with the quality of submissions to this exhibit," Gallery Director, Janet Rooney, said "and extremely impressed with the professionalism of our juror, Tom Burgher."

Tom and his wife, Sherie, currently own the Seaside Fine Art Gallery in Pismo Beach. They also established the SLO-POKE Western Art Rodeo, which is held near Solvang each year in September. Tom is the chairman of the Central Coast Chapter of the California Art Club and chairman of the Pismo Beach Chamber of Commerce.

An online reception for the virtual show was held via Zoom in early July where the winners were announced. "The reception was very well attended," Rooney said.

First prize was awarded to Judith Skartvedt with a photograph entitled "Lonesome Cowboy." Second went to KC Caldwell for an oil painting entitled "Where Calmness Lives On" and third went to a mixed media piece entitled "For Natalie" by Liz Hampton-Derivan. Anne Burke, Bruce Marchese, and Art Van Rhyn received honorable mentions.

The exhibit will remain online thru August 31 at the CCA website Cambriaarts.org.

The Cambria Center for the Arts is also excited to announce a new opportunity for public art in the villages of Cambria. A call for artist begins August 3 for submissions

for an outdoor mural. A committee is currently seeking a location or perhaps two locations for a large-scale public art display. The deadline is September 18 for idea submissions. For details on the theme and locations, contact Janet Rooney at Gallery@cambriaarts.org

"I believe public art shows that Cambria is a vibrant, artistic, and culturally rich community," Rooney said. "It's welcoming to our residents as well as our visitors."

CCA is also looking for volunteers to help with the mural execution. They hope to have the paintings done by mid October. Students are also encouraged to submit and participate.

As things continue to change frequently during these times, it is advised to continue to check the website for updates.

In September, two artists will be featured in the virtual gallery, Deborah Pepin and Marvin Sosna. Both are abstract artists with varied yet complimentary styles. The online reception is scheduled for Saturday, September 5 from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Check the website for the Zoom links.

There are also two workshops scheduled in the month of September. Fabulous Fun with Fabric Paint with Jeanne Aird on Sept 12 and Laurie Hendricks will present a plein air workshop on the 21st thru the 23rd. CCA hopes it will not have to cancel these events and will monitor the county regulations and update the website.

Cancer Support Fundraiser Aug. 22

Local nonprofit, Cancer Support Community – CA Central Coast (CSC-CCC) will hold its 5th Annual un-Gala and Auction on Saturday, August 22. The gala isn't canceled or postponed, they've gone virtual, and your participation allows them to continue offering free programs to local individuals and families touched by cancer.

This year's Harvest, Hope & Healing gala theme is "A Vision of Hope." Hope is just what many of us need right now and hope is what Cancer Support Community - CA Central Coast has always offered to our participants. These unprecedented times have shown a glimpse of the uncertainty, isolation, and anxiety that cancer patients experience daily" said CSC Executive Director Shannon D'Acquisto. "During this unique time, CSC-CCC is continuing to be a community of support for its members through virtual support and wellness activities. As the mission states, we will work together to empower, strengthen, and sustain each other."

More than \$200,000 was raised for the local community last year, according to D'Acquisto. "Even though we don't expect those numbers this year, we hope to reach our new goals, to further support local cancer patients and their families being served by expanding CSC programs. Fundraising events such as Harvest, Hope, and Healing help CSC-CCC staff and volunteers to continue their programming throughout the year and provide all of the services offered free of charge."

Join in the fun with a "party in place" and sponsorship

opportunities as part of the un-Gala and Virtual Auction from the comfort of your couch. The un-Gala will include virtual cheers, and a live and silent auction. Items in the auction will include local staycations, a Costa Rican getaway and more! Table sponsors get the option to receive a small cheese platter, 2 bottles of wine and 4 glasses delivered to their door on the day of the event.

Sponsorships and un-tickets are currently available. For information on the Harvest, Hope, and Healing un-Gala and Virtual Auction, go to www.cscslo.org/gala or call the Cancer Support Community directly at (805) 238-4411.

Lions Roaming Cayucos

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Cayucos Lions Club members Phil Kiesewetter and Mark Miller remove graffiti from a lamppost. Photo by Shari Sullivan

Beware! Lions are on the hunt in Cayucos—lost antelopes and zebras are safe, but graffiti is not.

Once a week, Cayucos Lions Club members Phil Kiesewetter and Mark Miller cruise through town on bikes carrying a crate of tools and materials to remove unwanted spray paint and such from street posts, buildings, and signs.

"It is a great way to socialize with other people in town and do something good for our community," said Kiesewetter.

Anyone interesting in joining cleanup efforts is asked to call Phil at 805-900-5208.

The Cayucos Lions Club formed in 1948 becoming part of a worldwide organization with the motto "We Serve." The small beach town boasts 90 club members. Traditionally, the club organizes, manages and hosts the annual Independence Day Parade, Pancake Breakfast and BBQ. Unfortunately, all events were canceled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

They also conduct a once a month highway pickup,

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Community

Dickinson College Awards Inaugural Scholarship to Morro Bay Resident

Virginia Enney, a 2020 graduate of San Luis Obispo Classical Academy, was selected as the recipient of the inaugural Dickinson-CET Global Leaders Scholarship. This is a four-year, full-tuition scholarship awarded annually to a college-bound student who shows interest in global issues and has participated in CET high school programs for which Dickinson grants course credit.

“I am honored to be the first recipient of this scholarship,” said Enney, who participated in CET’s program in Florence, Italy. “Dickinson’s focus on a global education is perfectly aligned with my personal and career goals. The scholarship is an important tool for me as I start my journey, and I am excited to explore the opportunities it presents for me at Dickinson and beyond.”

“We are thrilled to welcome an outstanding student like Virginia to our campus and global community,” said President Margee M. Ensign. “Her desire to seek out understanding of the wider world is absolutely critical for our future leaders, and we are so encouraged to see her continue her international education with us.” Ensign announced the creation of the scholarship in 2019 as a reflection of the Dickinson’s leadership in global education and internationalization.

Enney, who hails from Morro Bay served as president of her senior class on student council and was a member of both the varsity girls’ basketball and track teams. She is also a violinist in the San Luis Obispo Youth Symphony.

“International education is important because the world and job market will continue to change rapidly,”



Morro Bay resident Virginia Enney the recipient of the inaugural Dickinson-CET Global Leaders Scholarship. Photo submitted

said Enney. “An international perspective is crucial to keep up and to navigate these future challenges.”

Dickinson recently became the school of record and credit-granting institution for CET’s expanding high school and pre-college study-abroad programs.

On the Job — Support Our Community

Photos By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Our On the Job series continues. Estero Bay News encourages people to support the community and shop local. Check upcoming issues for more people “On the Job.” Stop by area businesses and tell them we sent you.

Check businesses for hours of operation and social distancing practices, as things change rather rapidly.

Send your photos on the job with a brief description and who’s who to Editor@EsteroBayNews

Susan Stewart is the owner of Beads by the Bay located at 333 Morro Bay Blvd. where you can get beads and other supplies as well as take classes. Don’t forget to check out the garden in back.



Virtual Upcoming Event Morro Coast Audubon

Join the Morro Coast Audubon Society Aug. 17 at 7 p.m. for a virtual community program about tracking the long-billed curlew.

Long-billed curlew populations of southwestern Idaho are declining at an alarming rate placing them on Idaho’s “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” list.

With the use of satellite transmitter technology, the Intermountain Bird Observatory (IBO) is gaining valuable data as to why. Listen to first-hand field accounts from Heather Hayes, a research biologist and the community science coordinator for the IBO and learn about the biology of these charismatic birds including information about their habitats, nesting requirements and migratory journey. There will



Long-billed curlew. Photo submitted

also be a discussion about how satellite technology is not only uncovering some of their mysteries but is also connecting communities across state lines and international borders.

For Zoom meeting log in information go to <https://www.morrocoastaudubon.org/>.



Whether you are looking for fabric and more to sew face masks, create home accessories or need longarm quilting services, stop by The Cotton Ball, 2830 Main Street in Morro Bay. For a uniquely local project ask to see the custom Morro Rock batik as displayed by Becky Rogers above.

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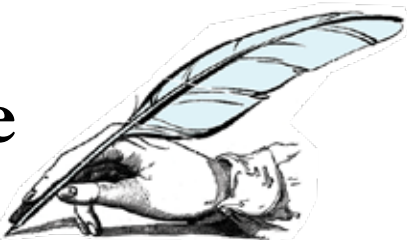
Kevin says, “Look for the ANT on the Door”

Girls Just Want To Have Fun

With a nod to Cyndi Lauper, girls just want to have fun... This group of young ladies had a blast jumping off the South T-pier last week, with one doing an acrobatic cartwheel on the pier railing, and another two summoning courage from going together off the pier, into what is calm, but pretty darn cold water (it's also frowned upon by the authorities) and in bikinis no less! Photos by Neil Farrell



Letter To The Editor



Cambria Community Healthcare District Survey

The Cambria Community Healthcare District (CCHD) has been assessing the impacts of the departure of Tenet Healthcare's Dr. Lewis a few months past. To this end, a community healthcare survey has been mailed out to all of the mailboxes in the CCHD area. This will help the board members and staff to assess what options are in the best interest of the community. The survey is also available online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZN7R35J> Please return the completed survey by August 1.

On June 24 and 25, the SLO County Public Health Department provided COVID-19 testing at the Veteran's Hall in Cambria. This event was well attended and results were sent out to those who were tested within a few days. Based on PHD statistics, our District residents have lower positive test cases than most communities in California. The CCHD remains committed to maintaining a high degree of vigilant preparedness during this challenging crisis. Over 2,000 disposable masks have been distributed by volunteers and staff to area businesses for public use. We are hopeful that this provided a bridge to where the public safety is assured, as there was a shortage of available masks a few weeks ago. As supplies of masks are becoming more readily available for the public to obtain, the District will now make them available on an as-needed request basis.

There is a concern, based on national trending data and communications received from some of our local residents, that some people are uncomfortable or even fearful of going to the hospital for care. Due to concerns related to COVID-19, there appears to be a perception that the hospitals and ambulances are already overwhelmed and/or not safe from contamination. In our area this is simply not true. At this time, we are well prepared to take care of any emergency and have implemented rigorous anti-viral/anti-pathogen routine procedures to decontaminate the ambulances. Our personnel wear the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and the patients from infection. The hospitals have sufficient staff and bed availability to handle our needs as well as the same

high level of decontamination and PPE standards. In the past few months the number of ambulance transports has declined locally, and nationally the number of deaths at home from such emergencies as heart attacks and strokes has risen dramatically. We do not want the public we serve to hesitate for any reason in calling 911 for any emergency. We are here to help you. Please call 911 if you are having an emergency.

Lastly, the CCHD has implemented an in-house billing system which has already shown to be much more effective and user-friendly for our patients and their caregivers. If you have any questions about a bill or insurance issues, please call our office for help at 805-927-8304.

Michael McDonough,
Administrator CCHD

Make Live Music Legal Again

I am writing because I am motivated to confront the county on the issue of making live music illegal. I am looking for other people who feel the same. There is no real sound logic to denying outside musical performances if held with proper precautions. One winery that cancelled an upcoming show scheduled — sold tickets to control the numbers attending and have a great big lawn to ensure people are kept distant and enforce masking. They were informed by SLO County to not hold such events. How does this even make sense? How does this even help in the struggle with COVID-19?

Because of this musicians in SLO County have no recourse to a livelihood, businesses are impacted negatively on top of suffering through all the other restrictions, and people are being denied a form of safe, soulful and mentally healthy recreation. And really for not a good reason that I can discern. It doesn't have to be this way.

So Charlie Puffer and I have gotten together with music and business friends to put a petition together to rectify this. It is available on Change.org under the title of Music Matters. We hope you will join us!

James Scoolis
San Luis Obispo

Please include your full name and town you live in on all letters sent. Although we do welcome longer opinion pieces, publishing is as space permits. Estero Bay News reserves the right to edit for length and clarity. Email letters to editor@esterobaynews.com



We are now Offering "Outdoor Dining"
on our bay side heated patio and plaza dining too.
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We will have outdoor dining in our covered heated patio or in our plaza starting Wednesday, July 15th with our adjusted hours of 11am-8pm. We'll also be offering the option of ordering take-out with our limited all day take-out menu available on our website:

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The cancelation weighed heavy on students and the school administration despite there being no way of knowing what the level of the pandemic would be four months after schools shutdown.

“We feel that nothing was enough for this class of graduates,” MBHS Assistant Principal Jeff Cadwallader told Estero Bay News. “It was a wonderful celebration in June, but we had really hoped to provide them with a more traditional experience in August.”

Congratulations are in order for the school’s valedictorian, Abigail Burrus and salutatorian, Midori Day.

This is the first time graduation ceremonies have been canceled since Morro Bay High School opened in 1956. Diplomas and diploma covers, along with a ceremony program will be sent to all seniors this week via postal mail.

Many graduates planning to go on to college have been dealt another blow to their academic experience. Universities and community colleges are still grappling with the decision to hold on-campus classes or continue with distance learning.

Cuesta College, where the majority of MBHS college bound students will begin their pursuit of higher education, recently announced that students will continue learning from home for the fall semester.

Lecture classes previously scheduled to be on campus are now entirely online. Students enrolled in a lab, activity, or performance class may still have a campus component and should continue to review the most up-to-date status of such courses on the class finder.

The semester begins Aug. 17.



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that are collected by the motels, licensed vacation rentals, B&Bs and private RV parks. The City’s TOT rate is 10%.

The City gets roughly \$3.5 million a year in TOT and the shutdown hit just as spring and summer tourism was starting. Occupancy rates fell dramatically with the shutdown. The virus response also led to the cancelation of every public event on Morro Bay’s annual calendar, many of which are major tourist draws.

Sales taxes, while lagging several months in reporting, have also taken a big hit, as have literally all the other revenue sources the City has.

Deep Cuts Made

The City has taken some pretty drastic measures, laying off nearly 100 mostly part-time employees and recently adding several full time staff to the laid-off list.

Other moves include leaving police officer positions open, along with other jobs spread across the City. The emphasis has been on keeping the police and fire departments — so-called “essential services” — at normal levels.

“With nearly 70 percent of calls to the Morro Bay Fire Department being related to medical emergencies and emergency rescue,” Fire Chief Steve Knuckles said, “the pandemic only proves the City must be prepared for any medical crisis. This measure will maintain the services provided by our local Morro Bay Fire Department so our skilled, local firefighter-paramedics can continue to respond to our local emergencies.”

Chief Knuckles is in charge of the City’s Emergency Operations Center, a City and volunteer staffed service normally used for short-term emergencies like the March 2010 Japan Tsunami, and December 2003 San Simeon Earthquake. The EOC was in full time operation for over 3 months and recently ramped down.

According to budget documents, the City is not filling or eliminating one police officer position, an assistant planner, a maintenance worker III and a part-time code enforcement officer.

Laid off workers include an assistant engineer, public works superintendent, administrative technician, recreation supervisor, a part-time office assistant, and over 70 part-time Recreation Department employees.

The City closed the Community Center, the Senior Center, the Teen Center, and Kids Club after school program. Also, all the youth and adult sports leagues that employed umpires, scorekeepers, and referees, were canceled, along with all the adult recreation classes and those instructors.

Ballot Measure Ready To Go

The City has already written the tax measure, as it will appear on the ballot.

Entitled, “Recovery/Emergency Preparedness Measure,” the text will read: “To protect City of Morro Bay’s financial stability, local property values and City services, such as maintaining Morro Bay’s local Fire/Police Departments, 24/7 paramedics, 911 emergency response, health emergency/disaster preparedness; keeping beaches, public areas safe/clean; retaining/attracting businesses; and other general City services, shall the measure establishing 1¢ sales tax providing approximately \$2,000,000 annually until ended by voters be adopted, requiring independent audits, public oversight, all funds used locally?”

This new tax measure, which has yet to receive an official name from the City Clerk, is separate from Measure Q, another sales tax hike that voters approved.

So this new measure isn’t bound to the same promised uses as Measure Q was — police, fire, streets and storm drainage.

The measure is a simple “Yes” or “No” vote and a simple majority of voters is needed to pass because it is a general use tax measure.

Unfortunately, the deadline for voters to submit arguments in favor or against the measure was set for 5 p.m. Tuesday, July 28, well before Estero Bay News’ publication date.

However, rebuttals of the arguments — pro and con — have to be turned in to the City Clerk before 5 p.m. Friday, Aug. 7. The limit is 250 words and the argument can be submitted by a registered voter or an organized group of voters. See the city clerk for more information.

The City’s impartial analysis is due to be released Aug. 17.

Outreach Already Begun

The City created “Join the Conversation,” an online community engagement effort over the last several months to come up with what citizens who responded see as priorities for City services. The priorities, according to the City, are:

- Preparing for a medical or catastrophic emergency;
- Maintaining 24/7, 9-1-1 emergency response including paramedic, police and fire protection services;
- Keeping public areas healthy, safe and clean; and,
- Protecting the financial stability of the City, its residents, and businesses.

New Rate Would Be 8.75%

The City’s sales tax rate is currently 7.75%, a figure that includes a one-half-cent local sales tax (Measure Q) approved by voters in 2006.

The additional tax would hike it up to 8.75%, the highest in SLO County, though other cities in the county are also planning to ask for sales tax hikes.

Of the State’s 7.25% sales taxes, the City gets about 1%. Measure Q was budgeted for \$1.3 million last fiscal year and has shown steady growth since its enactment.

Future Looks Dim

The 2019-20 estimated losses include \$1 million in TOT (dropping from \$3.5M in 2018-19 to \$2.5M for 2019-20); some \$300,000 in sales taxes (from \$2.1M to \$1.8M); and even \$200,000 in property taxes (from \$3.4M to \$3.2M). The City’s general fund budget tops \$12.8M.

At the end of the pandemic when the City anticipates there will be a recession, the City’s budget forecast is looking at a 5.57% drop in property taxes, 21.8% drop in sales taxes and a 48% drop in TOT in 2021.

Much of that last figure could be attributed to uncertainty over how quickly the tourism industry will rebound, as fears of the virus and the shelter-at-home orders continue.

Overall, in the City’s 10-year budget forecast, part of the budget presentations by staff, the City anticipates a \$1.75M general fund shortfall for 2020-21, and \$2.5M overall.

Bridging The Divide

The budget gap is being made up with \$1M from the general fund reserves, \$1.4M in salary cuts to general fund employees still on the job, and some \$600,000 in “operating expenditure” cuts.

Those operating cuts included defunding the tourism bureau, which also gets funding through the Tourism Business Improvement District’s 3% tax on a room night. All tourism promotions have also been halted and the City Visitor’s Center is closed, too.

It also cut out the City Council “bequests,” monies given to support local non-profit organizations.

There’s no travel outside SLO County on City business allowed, unless of course it’s mandated safety training; and the budget for “training” has been eliminated, unless it’s OSHA mandated, or required for firefighters and police.

They cut the office supply budget to a bare minimum, according to the City, and “significantly reduced supplies and contract services for items such as sidewalk repair/grinding, street patch materials [asphalt], street tree maintenance and removal.”

They also didn’t set aside any money for new equipment or replacement vehicles.

City Manager Scott Collins said, “Even with all the cuts already made in the Fiscal Year 2020/2021 Budget [pay cuts, layoffs, frozen positions, etc.], we still have a significant long-term gap remaining to fill [several million] and would need to make significant cuts to core services like Police, Fire, public space maintenance to balance the budget without a new source of revenue.”

That shortfall, due to a structural deficit, is projected to top \$3.8M by 2029 if no new revenues are brought in.

Reserves Siphoned Away

Taking \$1M out of reserves, which started the year at nearly \$4M, leaves the fund “at a dangerously low level [when FY 2019/20 use is also considered].”

All these cuts and layoffs are hopefully temporary. “Reductions should be considered short-term, mitigation measures until stabilization efforts can be achieved to restore

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And if readers think the Federal Government's multi-trillion dollar relief programs could be tapped, Callo-way's budget report said Morro Bay's losses do not qualify for CARES Act relief.

“NO! We will not give up! We will not give-in. This is your livelihood,” Lindi Woods recalled telling her employers.



Her last assignment was SLO's California Men's

Like seemingly everything with this pandemic response, things could change again. “All that being said,” Collins added, “should waterfront businesses express interest in using the street, or if other conditions related to COVID-19 heightened, we can consider rolling out the program at that time.”

She leaves a sizeable hole in his family but we can certainly say none of us will ever forget her. Happy in Heaven now...HALLELUIAH!!!

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Morro Bay Homes For Sale



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