

City Gives Up On Desalination

By Neil Farrell



A City water crewman takes apart a high pressure pump at the defunct desalination plant.

In the early 2000s, Morro Bay had perhaps the best drinking water portfolio of any city in San Luis Obispo County with State Water and a drought buffer allocation, the Chorro and Morro Creek groundwater basin wells, and a reverse osmosis desalination plant.

It was expensive but all appeared to be solid assets.

But a lot can happen in 20 years, and the City now finds itself abandoning desalination, and giving up the water in Chorro Valley, which before State Water arrived in the mid-1990s, provided the lion's share of the town's drinking water.

As for the future, the City's \$130 million Water Reclamation Facility or WRF will become the back-up source, injecting water into the ground at a site off Hwy 41 and pumping it out through the Morro basin wells, located in and around Lila Keiser Park.

Joe Mueller, the City's Utilities Division Manager, said the Carollo Engineering report, a.k.a. the "OneWater Plan"

from October 2018, analyzed the current status of each water source and frankly, the results were not good.

Mueller, who came to Morro Bay in 2017, said the desal plant was built in 1992 under an emergency order. "The construction was not the best," he said. "They built it and then put it in mothballs right away."

The first time they had to use the plant for an emergency, Mueller said, it plugged immediately with iron oxide (rust) that came through five, brackish groundwater wells strung along the 1200-1300 blocks of the Embarcadero that fed the plant.

That initial stumble meant having to add a large settling tank, so the iron oxide could settle out of the water before being sent into the plant for filtering through five, filter "trains," each with eight tubes of filters.

Big pumps forced the seawater through the tubes and out the other end came drinkable water. It was state-of-the-art at time, Mueller said.

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Sales Tax Hike Gets a Name; Arguments Filed

By Neil Farrell

Morro Bay's proposed sales tax hike that will go before voters in November now has an official name, and an impartial analysis has been submitted along with pro and con arguments.

Named, "Measure E-20: Morro Bay Local Recovery/Emergency Preparedness Measure," E-20 would enact a 1-percent (1¢ on every dollar) sales tax on "gross receipts of retailers from sale of most tangible personal property sold in the City at retail," reads the impartial analysis by City Attorney, Chris Neumeyer.

"The measure also places an excise tax upon the storage, use or consumption in the City of most tangible personal property purchased from any retailer for storage, use or consumption in the City of most tangible personal property purchased from any retailer for storage, use or other consumption in the City at a rate of one cent per dollar of the sales price of the property."

That would also include any delivery charges that are subject to State sales or use taxes, regardless of where something is delivered. What is and isn't taxable with E-20 is defined by the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, according to Neumeyer.

The City Council can change what is included under the new tax, but must ask voters to increase it. The tax will be in effect until ended by voters through another ballot measure.

Increase On Top Of City Tax

E-20 would be in addition to the already enacted Measure Q (M-Q), a half-cent sales tax approved by voters in 2006.

M-Q revenues have steadily risen since enactment, and now raises about \$1 million a year under normal economic conditions, and was promised by the city council to be used for police and fire department needs, fixing streets, and maintaining storm drains.

A large part of the M-Q monies is paying off the Har-

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New School Year to Begin with Distance Learning

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Schools in the San Luis Coastal Unified School District will begin the new school year with distance learning with hopes to allow some in-person instruction.

Schools in the San Luis Coastal Unified School District can still apply for a waiver exempting them from the State's ban on in-person instruction, but, for now, that isn't part of the plan for fall.

"Our school board has approved distance learning through December," Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services, Kimberly McGrath told Estero Bay News. "Our hope is to apply for some small group in-person learning with teachers that volunteer to work with students in person."

San Luis Obispo County was placed on the State's COVID-19 County Monitoring List on July 16 resulting in the ban. How-

ever, the State allows local health officers to grant waivers to elementary schools for in-person instruction when requested by a local superintendent (or equivalent for charter, private, and parochial schools) and in consultation with labor, parent and community organizations.

"We will continue to prioritize and prepare for safe in-person learning for elementary school students as provided for in the State's guidance," said County Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Brescia in a news release.

Submitted waiver applications must

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COVID-19- DiStacio's of Morro Bay: Another Small Business Survival Story

By Judy Salamacha



Ken MacMillan, owner of DiStacio's of Morro Bay, visiting with local patrons Lori French and Susan Stewart. Photo by Judy Salamacha

Ken MacMillan made an intentional decision to leave his corporate America career to move to the Central Coast and work with family. He grew up in the heart of Boston's Italian district where Old Country traditions and recipes were passed along to the next generation at the dinner table. Many of Ken's siblings migrated to California's Central Valley and Coast to open their version of an Italian-style family restaurant based on Mama Rosa DiStacio-MacMillan's 100-year-old marinara.

Ken's parents, Bill and Ada "Rosa" MacMillan, opened the first Rosa's in Visalia in the 1960s then another in Bakersfield in 1972. Rosa led the way to SLO County opening Rosa's Italian Restaurant in Pismo. Their policy at each new restaurant was to welcome patrons as family and give back to their adopted communities. On Thanksgiving, however, Mama Rosa closed her restaurant to the public and cooked for family to be together.

Ken and wife Judy decided it was

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Supervisor Adam Hill Dies



San Luis Obispo County District 3 Supervisor Adam Hill has died. He was 54.

“It is with sadness that we have been informed that Supervisor Adam Hill has passed away,” The County of San Luis Obispo said in a statement. “This is shocking and tremendously painful news. While we are unaware of the details at this time, we ask everyone to let the proper authorities do their jobs and investigate. Please respect his family’s privacy at this time.”

No further details have been released at this time.

Hill was elected as a county supervisor in 2009 representing portions of City of San Luis Obispo, the communities of Edna Valley and Avila, the City of Pismo Beach and the City of Grover Beach. He was re-elected in the primary election held in March of this year.

Hill had been open about his ongoing battle with depression.

In July, he released a statement saying, “Persistent, and at times, painfully debilitating depression, has necessitated my seeking more intensive and focused treatment at a residential health program.

“While I have been working closely with county staff on the many challenging issues our community faces, I have not been able to recover and heal as sufficiently as needed, and chose to seek specialized care at this time.

“Many people are suffering right now, and the way forward for all of us, ultimately, is to overcome polarizing and alienating tendencies that fuel suspicion, antagonism, and violence. Our common humanity is injured badly by this, but renewed every time we show compassion and a willingness to understand and respect others.”

Grants Would Boost Fire Department

By Neil Farrell

The Morro Bay Fire Department is applying for two federal grants — one that would buy new protective gear and the other would pay for two firefighters.

The Fire Department was given permission in July to apply for an, “Assistance to Firefighters Grants” (AFG) from the Department of Homeland Security for personal protective equipment; and a “Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response” (SAFER) grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency that would pay for two firefighters for three years.

According to a staff report from Fire Marshal Matt Vierra and Fire Chief Steve Knuckles, the AFG would be used to buy turnout gear including boots, gloves, and head protection “for all full-time staff at the cost of \$37,388 with no local match required.”

The SAFER Grant “covers 100% of the ‘fully burdened’ salary, i.e., salary and benefits, of a firefighter position, which is \$120,675 annually, or \$241,350 for the two positions annually.”

The department is asking for a total cost of \$724,000 over 3-years. Again, there is no local match required, “because of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The grant won’t mean more firefighters on the crew, but would help out the City after the coronavirus pandemic response cut off much of the City’s tax revenues and devastated the budget.

“If awarded,” the report said, “the Fire Department will maintain its current staffing level with no proposal to increase staffing, thereby supplanting General Fund expenses by that amount.”

A \$724,000 boost would help a lot, especially if the voters don’t approve Measure E-20, the City’s 1-percent sales tax hike at the November Election.

“The primary goal of the AFG and SAFER Grants is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire-related hazards,” according to the report. “This is done by providing direct financial assistance to eligible fire departments, nonaffiliated Emergency Medical Services organizations, and State Fire Training Academies.”

This is driven by the pandemic. “With the financial crisis created by COVID-19, DHS/FEMA recognizes the financial hardship for cities to maintain its fire department staffing. This year’s extremely competitive national SAFER Grant will fully fund current positions already in place for 3-years with no obligation to maintain those positions after 3-years.”

The government had a similar program in place after the Great Recession of 2008. The AFG recognizes that firefighting is dangerous work.

“We now know that the risk of occupational cancer is among the greatest threats faced by modern firefighters,” the report said, “and continually updating the personal protective equipment will improve the overall health and safety of firefighters.”

New safety standards for 2020 include “two advanced cleanings are now required each year, and protective clothing should be subject to advanced cleaning whenever it is exposed to products of combustion [e.g., fire gases and smoke particulates]. This updated requirement will create challenges for many fire departments that currently do not have the resources to provide frequent cleaning of turnout gear, which in return could shorten the life span of the PPE.”

Personnel are the targets of the SAFER Grant Program. “The NFPA states for suburban areas an agency should provide 10 firefighters within nine minutes at 80% of the time for a fire in a single-family residence. Current automatic contracts bring only two fire engines and one chief officer from neighboring agencies for a staffing level of six. The average response from Morro Bay Fire is currently three paid and one reserve. The alarm also includes the request for the fire chief, fire marshal, and reserve firefighters.”

The anticipated grant funding awards are scheduled for sometime in Fall 2020.

SLO County COVID-19 Deaths Continue to Climb

By Neil Farrell

San Luis Obispo County deaths from COVID-19 have continued to climb, jumping from nine on July 24 to 17 on Aug. 11 and also growing in the County Jail as a fifth Sheriff’s deputy tested positive for the virus.

According to a Sheriff’s Department news release, the deputy started showing symptoms on July 23, “while in quarantine at home for a known exposure to a person with COVID-19.” The bad news came back 2-days later. “That now makes a total of five Sheriff’s Deputies who have tested positive for the virus: three Correctional Deputies and two Patrol Deputies. Four are recovering at home and one has returned to work.”

As for guests at the iron bar hotel, “the total number of inmates who have tested positive remains at four.”

According to guidelines from the Health Department the outbreak at the jail would be declared over when there are no new cases in 14 days from the date of the last positive test, July 22.


The Sheriff’s Office monitors all staff for symptoms of COVID-19 at least once per shift. Anyone with symptoms is isolated and tested. Inmates who have been exposed to the virus are quarantined and monitored.

County Needs Help Tracing

The County Health Department has put a call out to people who’ve tested positive for the coronavirus to answer the phone and cooperate with its effort to trace exposure.

“Together we can slow the spread of COVID-19 in SLO County” County Public Health Officer Dr. Penny


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News

Borenstein said on July 24. “You can help keep SLO County healthy, open and strong by literally answering the call. “There are positive cases in our community who are not answering our phone calls nor are they calling us back. We are counting on people who recently got tested for COVID-19 to answer the phone and speak with one of our public health officials so that we can all slow the spread.”

Anyone who tests positive and cannot be reached via phone or text message, will receive a letter in the mail from the County Public Health Department requiring them to isolate at home, the County said.

“Our team respects your privacy,” Dr. Borenstein said. “We cannot legally share your personal information with others or with other governmental agencies. If you have tested positive, we will call you and ask how you are doing, issue isolation orders, and help connect you with care and services, if needed. Answer the call and help us slow transmission.”

Gatherings A Problem

The County is warning everyone to avoid social gatherings, even family get-togethers and celebrations. “More cases in SLO County are tied to members of several different households getting together with others through parties, celebrations, and other in-person social gatherings,” said Dr. Borenstein. “Protect your friends and family by avoiding gatherings. I know this is a difficult ask, but it is a key way we can help slow the spread of COVID-19 to keep SLO County healthy, open and strong as this pandemic continues.”

Tracers have identified cases spread at holiday gatherings, birthday parties, graduation parties, and other medium or small-sized gatherings, but haven’t traced cases back to the numerous public demonstrations with hundreds of people that have been held since June 1.

The nature of these social gatherings — bringing together people from multiple households for a prolonged time, often indoors or with shared food and beverages — create an environment where COVID-19 can easily and quickly spread, according to the County.

“Nobody wants to infect loved ones,” Dr. Borenstein said, “but it’s happening in SLO County. We each have the ability to stop it and slow the spread of this disease. Staying in touch and celebrating life events is still important. But now is not the time to gather in person, especially if you are or someone you know is particularly vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illness.”

Majority of Deaths Are Elderly People

The County’s deaths from COVID continue to be elderly people in poor health. And the new deaths have been traced to outbreaks in North County elder care facilities.

Deaths Nos. 9-16 were all elderly patients with underlying health conditions, and No. 9, a person in his or her 70s, is believed to have caught the virus while on a trip, according to the County.

“The patient had been hospitalized for more than 2 weeks beginning about a week after taking a trip out of state,” the County said. The 10th and 11th deaths were in their 80s with health issues, too. “Both residents lived at Vineyard Hills Health Center, a skilled nursing facility in Templeton that is experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19 among residents and staff. Three residents and one former resident of the facility have died due to COVID-19 since the outbreak began.” Death No. 12 was also over 80 and lived at Vineyard Hills. The 13th and 14th deaths were in their 80s and one lived at a care facility in Atascadero; and the other lived at Vineyard Hills, and had been hospitalized for just a few days. He or she became the fifth death at Vineyard Hills, according to the County.

No. 15 was over 100-years old and lived at another “congregate care facility” that is in the midst of an outbreak. The 16th person to die was in their sixties and had chronic health conditions.

UPDATE: A 17th death was reported on August 11. They were in their 90s and vulnerable to serious illness due to chronic health conditions

Testing Continues

With the number of cases slowly climbing and now topping 2,254 since April 1, the County continues with its testing program, opening a site in Atascadero. The Atascadero pop-up testing site is located at the Atascadero Lake Pavilion, 9315 Pismo Ave., off Hwy 41. It will be open Mondays-Thursdays, through Aug. 20 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The County also has two permanent testing sites — in Grover Beach at Ramona Garden Park, 993 Ramona Ave.; and the Vet’s Hall, 801 Grand Ave., in SLO. Both are open Mondays-Thursdays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

“If you are experiencing symptoms or are a contact of a known case, please get tested and then isolate yourself to avoid potentially spreading the illness while you await the results,” said Dr. Borenstein. “While testing continues to be a somewhat limited resource, we are happy to be able to provide this new testing option for the community. Our sites in Grover Beach and Atascadero now have a lot of testing appointments available.” Private clinics such as the Urgent Care in Morro Bay also do COVID testing by appointment.

Testing through the County is available at no cost to patients. For those with health insurance, information will be collected when registering for an appointment for billing purposes, but no co-pay is required. Make an appointment online at: EmergencySLO.org/ testing.

Schools Could Reopen

With the school year fast approaching, the Health Department and County Superintendent of Schools have

asked districts to apply for a waiver, so local school kids can go back to the classroom.

County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. James Brescia and Dr. Borenstein sent a joint letter to local elementary school leaders July 29 letting them know how to apply for a waiver through the County Health Department. (See story on page 1)

Kids Not At Great Risk

Dr. Borenstein doesn’t think kids are at too great a risk. “COVID-related risks in schools serving elementary age students are different from the risks to staff and students in schools serving older students,” said Dr. Borenstein. “There appears to be a lower risk of child-to-child or child-to-adult transmission in children under 12-years old, and the risk of infection and serious illness in elementary school children is considered low.”

The County acknowledged the mounting frustration over who’s getting sick and dying contrasted with a blanket shelter-at-home order and business closures that are placing a lot of economic pressure on everyone.

“I empathize with the frustration people feel,” COVID-19 spokeswoman Michelle Shoresman told EBN, “wanting to pinpoint exactly why the virus is spreading. Unfortunately, it points back to all of us. We are all part of the problem and solution.”

The original directions for fighting the virus remain. “We all need to take precautions each day to slow the spread including: staying home when sick, wearing a face covering in public, washing our hands frequently, staying 6 feet from others, and not gathering with those we care about who live outside our households. [I know this last one is the hardest.]” Shoresman said. “Healthier, less affected individuals [who contract the virus] coming in contact with more vulnerable individuals is what puts them at risk.”

Meanwhile, in Morro Bay the City has launched another public information campaign — “Be a Face Mask Hero” — designed to get everyone to wear a mask and offering a prize to those who do.

“The campaign encourages residents and visitors to be a hero by wearing face mask coverings in Morro Bay,” reads a news release on the campaign. “Wearing a mask demonstrates kindness, humility, and respect for others by helping to protect one another and be part of the solution. City public safety staff will be handing 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.”

To keep up with the County’s COVID-19 news releases, 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.



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Sheriff IDs Owner of Severed Foot

The mystery of the owner of a severed foot found in rural Templeton has been solved, the Sheriff's Department announced.

"The Sheriff's Office has identified the individual whose foot was found near Santa Rita Road in rural Templeton on July 26," reads a news release. "With the help of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office and its rapid DNA process, this individual was identified as a surviving victim of a traffic collision on July 17."

That crash occurred when the unidentified man's car crashed into a guardrail and caught fire on Southbound Highway 101 just north of the Vineyard Drive off-ramp in Templeton.

"Both of the victim's legs were severed in that collision," the Sheriff's Office said. "One foot was recovered at the scene. The other foot could not be located." The department did not identify the crash victim.

The car crash happened some 3 miles from where the foot was found on Santa Rita Creek Road by a man riding his bicycle on the popular biking road.

It is suspected that animals carried the foot away from where it came to rest in the accident.

Loss of Eelgrass in Estuary May Cause Widespread Erosion



The large-scale loss of eelgrass in the Morro Bay estuary is causing increased shoreline and estuarine erosion.

The large-scale loss of eelgrass in the Morro Bay estuary may be causing widespread erosion, according to a new Cal Poly study.

In recent years, Morro Bay's iconic eelgrass beds, which provide the estuary's primary living habitat, experienced a massive die-off, declining more than 90 percent since 2007. Efforts to restore the eelgrass have had mixed success in many parts of the bay, and this seagrass is now only found near the harbor mouth and sporadically in other regions of the estuary.

Seagrass systems are found throughout the world and provide many ecosystem services including fish nursery habitats, forage for migratory birds, nutrient cycling, carbon storage and sediment stabilization.

"The loss of eelgrass in the Morro Bay estuary is analogous to the loss of trees in a rainforest," said Ryan Walter, lead author and a Cal Poly physics professor. "Not only do you lose the plants, but you also lose all of the services that they provide for the entire ecosystem."

Eelgrass is a flowering underwater plant with quarter-inch-wide leaves that can grow up to lengths of 3 feet. Its beds are always completely submerged, and their roots, or rhizomes, anchor the grass to sandy or muddy bottoms.

By slowing down currents and decreasing wave forces, seagrasses help stabilize sediment and prevent erosion. Over the last century, the bay has been building up sediment quickly and is dredged annually, with the Army

Corps of Engineers doing a more extensive dredging of the harbor about every five or six years.

"These erosional changes are sizeable considering that Morro Bay, a modified estuary, has historically suffered from accelerated sedimentation," Walter said.

Globally, seagrasses in the nearshore coastal environment are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Generally, losses of seagrasses can lead to increased shoreline and estuarine erosion.

On the other hand, it is possible that the erosion in Morro Bay may create new opportunities for seagrass recovery by increasing the depth and suitable habitat for eelgrass in certain locations.

Recent restoration attempts by the Morro Bay National Estuary Program have been successful, and there is evidence of a partial recovery in portions of the bay. Tracking changes in sediment in places like Morro Bay will become increasingly important as climate change is expected to drive sea level increases and shoreline change.

"Morro Bay is an estuary of national importance that is under transition with systemwide eelgrass loss, subsequent sediment loss, and now some signs of eelgrass recovery," said coauthor Jennifer O'Leary, a former California Sea Grant extension specialist. "Understanding the dramatic changes in Morro Bay can help identify important factors for management and conservation of eelgrass-dominated systems globally."

Ag Repowering Grants Available

Farmers can tap a new grant program and replace dirty diesel farm equipment with clean electrical gear, under a new program from Monterey Bay Community Power (MBCP).

MBCP, which currently supplies electricity to Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo and other cities in SLO County, launched its "Agricultural Electrification Grant Program," intended to support "the replacement of fossil-fuel powered equipment with new electric equipment including tractors, coolers and boilers, forklifts, light and heavy-duty vehicles, diesel powered irrigation pumps and more."

MBCP put up \$160,000 for the grant program and is looking for farmers and growers to apply for the grants, at \$20,000 each in a competitive bidding process. The money will be divided up with \$80,000 set aside for Monterey County ag businesses; \$40,000 for Santa Cruz County ag businesses; \$20,000 for San Benito County; and \$20,000 for ag businesses "within the cities of San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay."

Finding an ag business within the City of Morro Bay might be hard to do, given that there is little ag zoned land within the City Limits, and while hemp and marijuana are hot commodities right now, the City's cannabis ordinance prohibits growing the evil weed in town (except for personal gardens of weedens).

Nevertheless, MBCP is putting a spotlight on ag businesses because they reportedly account for 8% of California's "Green House Gas" or GHG emissions, according to MBCP's news release.

"Aimed at accelerating the adoption of new all-electric agricultural equipment to decrease reliance on fossil fuels," MBCP said, "the Ag Electrification Grant Program supports local agricultural industry in the transition from fossil-fuel powered ag equipment to all-electric equipment."

MBCP CEO, Tom Habashi, said, "MBCP continues to design and fund impactful programs that create meaningful greenhouse gas reductions and the electrification of our Central Coast. MBCP is excited to start accelerating the ag industry's desire to reduce the climate impact their operations have locally and collectively."

The program is expected to provide grants to a minimum of eight ag customers, up to \$20,000 each, to "assist with fuel-switching or electrifying Ag equipment," MBCP said.

Farmers are eager for cleaner technology, according to MBCP, "in order to curb their carbon emissions and improve air quality for surrounding communities and farm

workers."

This first \$160,000 is just the beginning, as MBCP plans to continue the ag electrification program annually and expects next year's program to be bigger.

Norm Groot, chairman of MBCP's Community Advisory Council and executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, said, "Supporting the agricultural sector through this grant program will be a great start for MBCP to begin to invest in electrifying our region's ever important industry. The agricultural industry continues to implement key strategies to reduce cost and meet environmental goals and MBCP is poised to be a strategic partner to help advance them."

This first year will be a learning process and the company said it plans to launch larger energy programs specific to the Ag sector next year, "after learning more about what electrification projects and GHG reducing efforts are most important to local Ag customers."

For information about MBCP's Energy Programs, see: mbcp.org/energy-programs. Applications will be accepted through August 22.

Pocket Park/Rain Garden To Help Clean Bay

Story and Photos By Neil Farrell



The Tideland's Pocket Park will capture and filter runoff from a boat wash-down station before it empties into the bay.

The City of Morro Bay is putting finishing touches on a project that will help keep the bay a little cleaner and do so in a passive, attractive and functional manner.

The City's Environmental Program Manager, Damaris Hansen, has led the project, which started with a visit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). Regulators wanted the City to capture and filter runoff from a boat wash-down station before it empties into the bay.

Hansen landed a \$57,000 grant through the Local Government Commission or LGC, a statewide non-profit group "who works throughout California to support livable communities," Hansen said in an email. LGC tapped the National Recreation and Park Association for the money.


The plan was to build a small "pocket park" that would have a "storm water rain garden" to "treat runoff from the parking lot, and boat rinse station, which currently enters the Bay without treatment," Hansen said.

So how does this thing work? "Rain gardens are a designed, depressed area with plants and engineered soil that soak up storm water while filtering out pollutants in storm water," Hansen explained. "The way the storm water rain garden works is by capturing the storm water, which carries sediments and pollutants, as this water travels down the street gutters."

"The storm water will be diverted into the rain garden, where the water spreads out into the rain garden and the plants trap litter and coarse sediments. The water then seeps down into the soil media below, trapping fine sediments and pollutants."

"The cleaned water is then collected in the underground pipes and then flows into the bay."

No energy is needed for the passive filtering system



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The pocket park has a few decorative features, boulders arranged around the perimeter with an ADA accessible walking path. Rick Engineering did the original design.

but eventually the City will have to go in and clean out the sediments. A similar system was built in the Cloisters Park where a small pond filled with reeds captures runoff from Hwy 1 and the Cloisters neighborhoods.

It is now in need of dredging, which Hansen said will be very expensive.

Back in September 2019, the City advertised for bids on the Tidelands Pocket Park job. “Unfortunately,” Hansen said at the time, “the bids received were well above our budgeted amount. Therefore, the City is currently looking into completing portions of the construction project and hiring out other portions to hopefully be able to come in within our budget.”

With the pocket park now almost finished, Hansen said they are awaiting delivery of an arched bench that will be installed. The bench has three spots left for memorial plaques, she said, and the City is working down a waiting list to see if anyone wants to have the memorial brass plaque for a loved one go onto the bench.

“This will look a lot better when we get the plants in and spruce it up a little,” Hansen said. They have two Cypress trees they will be planting there as well. So far the grant has paid for it all, she said, with the City maintenance crew doing the lion’s share of the work. They did bring in a contractor to pour the cement paths and the curbs.

The boat wash station has also been reopened, and Hansen said the water from that facility is draining into the catch basin as designed.

The pocket park has a few decorative features, boulders arranged around the perimeter with an ADA accessible walking path. Rick Engineering did the original design.

“The grant requires a targeted education and outreach component to a specific group,” Hansen said, “given the small size of the park, seniors were chosen as the target group. The grant team held an outreach meeting at the Senior Center on March 15 (2019) and received feedback as to what features the seniors would like to see at this park. Rick Engineering developed the design and has incorporated feedback from this meeting into the design.”

RTA Award New HQ Contract

By Neil Farrell

The county transportation agency awarded a contract to build a new headquarters in San Luis Obispo, after the first round of bids were all contested and then thrown out.

The Regional Transportation Agency or RTA board awarded a \$16.8 million contract to Specialty Construction, Inc., of SLO to build a new “Bus Maintenance Facility” and agency headquarters on a 6.44-acre parcel the agency owns at 253 Elks Ln., SLO.

That property is part of a larger parcel where the County built the Prado Homeless Services Center fronting Prado Lane. The RTA HQ will front Elks Lane.

The project would build a single-story, 28,650 square foot bus maintenance facility with over 2,600 s.f. of mezzanine/equipment platform. It will house the RTA’s dispatch center and administration offices, too.

It will replace a rented facility the agency currently uses in a building located off South Higuera Street behind



The Regional Transportation Agency recently awarded a \$16.8 million contract to Specialty Const., Inc., to build a new headquarters and bus maintenance facility on Elks Lane in SLO. The rendering here is of the new HQ.

Trader Joe’s Market.

RTA’s had a tough go of it getting the \$31 million overall project to the construction stage. It’s been trying to build the new HQ for more than 9 years, according to Geoff Straw the RTA executive director.

The agency finally took construction bids last April, with two bidders responding, Specialty and Newton Construction, also of SLO.

Newton’s bid was for \$17.2M and Specialty’s bid was \$18.3M, but Specialty filed a complaint about Newton’s bid package and after Newton returned the favor, RTA was forced to reject both bids and go out for bids again, on an accelerated schedule.

New bids were revealed on July 8 with three bids coming: Specialty Construction for \$16.8M; Newton Const. at \$17.2M; and Katch Environmental for \$17.5M.

Straw told Estero Bay News that Katch failed to submit additional documents the agency asked for and so they deemed that bid “non-responsive.”

Straw said Katch was third in the bidding and most likely decided not to invest any more time or money into it, for why they didn’t respond to RTA’s requests.

He said they were expecting to get final building permits last week from the City of SLO, which has overseen the entire project through the environmental review, permitting and building phases. Specialty would probably get started on the job this week, Straw added.

The construction contract is for 564 days, and Straw said the schedule calls for “substantial construction” to be completed by the end of December 2021, with RTA planning to occupy the building in January 2022.

Also, as part of the final contracting process, the RTA board approved documents to borrow up to \$25M to finance the job. RTA spent over \$6M getting to the construction stage.

Specialty Const., is the same company that built Morro Bay’s Harbor Street Firehouse and Straw said they’ve done many public facilities jobs in SLO County.

The RTA is a “joint powers authority” or JPA amongst the County and all seven incorporated cities in SLO County. It runs the South County Transit and the Paso Express bus systems, as well as the RTA buses that crisscross the County multiple times a day and make up the heart of the public transportation system in SLO County.

Sheriff Busts Big Pot Gardens

The County Sheriff’s Office led a raid on two unpermitted, illegal marijuana gardens, arresting five men and confiscating illegal guns and millions of dollars worth of the evil weed.

According to Sheriff’s spokesman, Tony Cipolla, on July 30-31, the Sheriff’s Department and several other law enforcement agencies “investigated two illegal trespass cannabis grows in Northern San Luis Obispo County. The cultivation sites were located in the area of Parkhill Road and Huer Huero Road.”

The officers cut down some 5,000 plants at various stages of maturity that were “being illegally cultivated.”

It was a full court press of agencies that took part. “Members of the Sheriff’s Special Operations Unit, Sheriff’s Cannabis Enforcement Unit, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Homeland Security Investigations, Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), Cal Fire, [County] Code Enforcement, California Department Food and Agriculture — Cal-Cannabis, and the U.S. Forest Service Bureau of Land Management were involved in the investigations.”

The Sheriff’s Cannabis Enforcement Unit spotted the pot gardens a few days before the raid “during a reconnaissance mission,” Cipolla said. “Evidence at the scenes indicated both grow sites may be part of a Mexican National cultivation operation. This type of operation, besides being illegal, produces many environmental hazards from the chemicals and pesticides used on the plants to the generation of large amounts of trash.

“A container of Carbofuran was located at one of the properties, which is an illegal, dangerous toxic pesticide known to be extremely hazardous,” Cipolla said. “Nearby water sources were affected and diverted to water the cannabis plants.”

“If these plants had

been allowed to mature,” Cipolla said, “it is estimated the retail value of the cannabis would have been approximately \$5 million.”

Five men were arrested and charged with numerous narcotics and weapons violations, but Cipolla said they were released without bail within hours.

The arrested men were: Carlos Martinez Espinoza, 35 of Delano, Calif.; Antonio Mendoza Alvarado, 26, Delano; Hector Fernando Zepeda Miranda, 36 of Santa Maria; Jaime Rivera Mercado, 44 of Stockton; and Benjamin Rivera Mercado, 42 of Lodi.

Cipolla added, “Five weapons were seized including a fully automatic AK 47 style assault rifle with a 30-round magazine and 100-round drum style magazine. One of the suspects, Antonio Mendoza Alvarado, had a criminal history with ties to a criminal street gang out of Delano, Calif.

“Due to the zero-bail policy, all persons arrested, for the various felonies committed, were released back into the community within 8 hours of being booked into San Luis Obispo County Jail.”



Carlos Martinez Espinoza



Hector Zepedamiranda



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Community

A Curlew’s Journey —
From Idaho to
Morro Bay

By Neil Farrell



A Long-billed Curlew named Dozer was recently spotted mingling with other curlews on Morro Strand Beach. Dozer, along with another curlew named Neil, were banded by the Intermountain Bird Observatory of Boise, Idaho and both wound up in Morro Bay. Photo by Petra Schaaf

Morro Bay can sometimes get rather odd visitors and the recent encounter of a local bird watcher who spied two, banded, long-billed curlews on Morro Strand Beach is a timely tale as well.

Los Osos’ Petra Schaaf told Estero Bay News of an encounter she had on Father’s Day, Sunday, June 21. And with Morro Coast Audubon Society organizing a virtual lecture event on Aug 17 with Heather Hayes, a research biologist and the Community Science Coordinator for the Intermountain Bird Observatory in Boise, Idaho, the timing couldn’t be better.

“The MCAS presentation,” Schaaf said, “was prompted by the fact that two, Long-billed Curlews, banded in Idaho in May, showed up in Morro Bay in June.”

She was walking the Strand and noticed something odd about a particular bird.

“At first I only saw this odd thing sticking up on the bird’s back,” Schaaf said. “I thought it was something detrimental to the bird. They do pick up the weirdest things. When I saw the bands, though, I knew it was a tagged bird.” The bird’s leg sported a bright green band and was obviously part of some study.

“I took a long video of the legs to get a good view of the band numbers,” she explained, “always important when reporting sightings of banded birds. After some Googling, I discovered the existence of the Intermountain Bird Observatory and reported my sighting. I learned that I had spotted Dozer!”

The folks at IBO were excited because Dozer had been banded along with another curlew named “Neil” as part of the “Curlew Project” study, and finding them in Morro Bay was a first.

The birds “are the very first curlews from any of their

breeding research study sites to migrate directly to Coastal California to overwinter. Also, it is rare that they get photos/videos of tagged birds, let alone photos good enough to read a leg band number.”

Schaaf discovered that Dozer, “was banded and fitted with a satellite transmitter in May 2020 by the Intermountain Bird Observatory at his breeding grounds in Indian Valley in the West Central Mountains of Idaho. He migrated out about June 17.”

That long, spiky thing sticking out of Dozer’s back was a GPS device and so the low-jacked bird had his movements traced by researchers from the time he and Neil departed Idaho, about 2 weeks earlier than normal and took separate paths to get to California.

And what tales they might tell. “The satellite transmitter data indicated that Neil was near Modesto, Calif., and Dozer was outside of Reno, Nevada,” reads a post on the project’s Facebook Page. “Within a few short days, the next transmissions from both birds were pinged from the Morro Bay area.”

Morro Bay does have a reputation as a marvelous vacation spot for migrating birds hence the Annual Winter Bird Festival. The researchers are really excited about the discovery.

“This is extremely exciting as these are the very first curlews from any of our breeding research study sites to migrate directly to Coastal California to overwinter!”

Dozer’s and Neil’s roughly 850-mile migration is helping figure out the migratory patterns of these birds, which are protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Act and whose very existence hangs somewhat precariously.

“So why is this new research discovery so important? Because as we piece the migratory connectivity puzzle together, we can work toward ensuring conservation measures are in place to protect the habitats and resources curlews need along their migratory routes throughout their entire annual life cycle,” the IBO’s post reads.

Readers who want to find out more about Dozer’s and Neil’s big adventure and the IBO’s work can tune into the MCAS meeting on ZOOM. The meeting is set for 7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 17. See: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88550168592?pwd=UTHmRm9zdDNlOWc5c1lpZWJ6SDh0UT09>. Meeting ID is: 885 5016 8592 and the Password is: 502604.

Program highlights with Hayes include: curlew biology; population declines in Idaho; satellite transmitter research; the migration journey; and, outreach efforts.

Hayes works on many research projects that include the Long-billed Curlew Satellite Tracking Program; the 8-State, Western Asio flammeus Landscape Study or WA-FLS, a community science program for short-eared Owls; and also the IBO’s Hummingbird Monitoring Program.

Schaaf’s videos and photos of Dozer, with the odd-looking spear in his back can be viewed online at: www.flickr.com/photos/jack-petra-clayton/sets/72157715313977862.

And checkout the IBO Curlew Crew’s Facebook Page at: www.facebook.com/IBOCurlewCrew.

Editors note: Dozer is still in the area! He was re-sighted by Carol Comeau on August 7 at North Point, Morro Bay.



A tribute to Cambria filmmakers Kyle and Carlos Plummer is part of Summer Fest. Photo submitted

“We were so fortunate that we had already completed a successful festival before the Covid-19 shutdowns. And we have been watching and taking note of other festivals around the country and how they adapt to a virtual format.”

One pass for just \$10 will give viewers access to all of the films. It will also include access to recorded Q&As with filmmakers and a live-streaming discussion as well as an online after-party on Saturday, August 29. Passes are available at cambriafilmfestival.com

Some of the highlights of this mini-fest include the 2018 Audience Award winning feature, “Wild Prairie Rose.” Also featured is the latest from the 2019 opening night filmmaker, Dina Mande. Dina has a new documentary film about Paso Robles winemakers called “Tin City.” Additionally, the festival will explore the local filmmaking scene with an updated reprise of the 2020 Local Filmmaker showcase. Finally, there is a tribute to Cambria-based filmmakers, Carlos and Kyle Plummer.

“The Plummer brothers are remarkable,” said Frahmman. “if you have not been able to see a lot of their work previously, now you can.”

Also instrumental in organizing Summer Fest is Director of Operations Judy Levine, who has spearheaded the research and guided the committee through the technical issues.

“We’re a excited to be adding a virtual element to our festival,” Levine said, “because we realize it will allow people outside of Cambria to enjoy these films and gives flexibility for people to watch on their own schedules. I think we’ll continue beyond 2021 as well, because is enriches what we offer. We are able to provide more unique content in the virtual world. Filmmakers, directors, actors and producers, who might otherwise be unable to travel, will now be able to participate. We feel this will be a great benefit to our viewers.”

The full Cambria Film Festival is slated to return February 4 through 7, 2021. Hundreds of films have already been submitted, all dealing with romance and the complexities of love. The Festival will showcase between fifty and sixty shorts, and ten or more feature films. Check the website for details on when the 2021 festival tickets go on sale.



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Cambria Film Festival
Heats up the Summer

By Jill Turnbow

August 27 through the 30, the Cambria Film Festival will present Summer Fest, a virtual mini-fest. This first-time festival will feature some of the highlights from the first three years along with a few extra bonus features. This is a chance for festival lovers to experience the films from the comfort of their home.

"We have always wanted to host an event in the summer," said Cambria Film Festival Director, Dennis Frahmman. "This seemed to be a good way to introduce the concept of a virtual festival to our attendees. We're still not sure what we will be able to present live at the full festival in February. But we know there will be a virtual element.

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Community

Online Concert Benefits Food Program

By Neil Farrell



Local string band, The SLO County Stumblers, will headline live-streamed benefit concert and album release party benefitting the Estero Bay Kindness Coalition's 'Bags of Love' food program for local school kids and their families.

School may not be in session but that doesn't mean a pressing problem of food insecurity for many students has gone away, and a local non-profit group is asking the public for help with its mission of making sure kids have enough to eat.

The Estero Bay Kindness Coalition, which was started about 2-years ago by Cayucos' Bobby and Denise de Lance-lotti, is holding an online musical concert and fundraiser to benefit the Coalition's efforts to provide children and their families with groceries every week during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Dan Clement, who along with his wife Jude, volunteers with the Coalition, said that during school the non-profit organization sends local school kids home on Fridays with a backpack filled with food donated by the community.

The kids bring the empty backpacks back to school on Mondays, where volunteers collect them and the process repeats at the end of the week. The program is dubbed "Bags of Love."

"This program began when teachers in our local schools noticed that some students were showing up at school on Monday mornings unable to fully function be-cause they were not getting enough to eat at home during

the weekends," Clement said.

The pandemic response, which in mid-March closed schools indefinitely, understandably affected the program.

"When COVID-19 hit," Clement said, "we began delivering groceries directly to the homes of more than 200 students in need who attend local elementary and middle schools and their families. The number of food-insecure families continues to grow, with no sign of abating any time soon. Our organization lacks the resources needed to keep up with demand."

The Clements are sponsoring a live-streaming concert fundraiser to help buy food for the families in the program, set for noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 15.

The concert will feature a live performance with Ban-ger Dan, a local banjo picker extraordinaire, and the SLO County Stumblers, an old time American string band.

The concert will be held at the Pozo Saloon, and streamed live online. See: <https://ticketsauce.com/e/stumblers/preview> for information and a link to the show.

The fundraiser includes a raffle for donors with some great prizes — two nights at the McCall Farm B&B in Cambria; dinner for two at Robin's Restaurant in Cambria; Moonstone Cellars Wine; and hand-crafted kitchenware from Kehoe Iron Cookware in Los Osos. Any donation will automatically enter you in the raffle for these prizes.

The concert coincides with the Stumblers' release of their first album, "All the Good Times," available on vinyl, CDs and digitally (see: <https://slocountystumblers.band-camp.com/releases>).

The band features fiddler Casy Meikle, guitarist Stuart Mason, banjo player Daniel Bohlman, and Jerry James on bass. According to the band's website, "The Stumblers play hard-driving old time fiddle tunes and spirited songs, heavily influenced by the golden-era string bands of the 1920s and '30s."

Though the live stream is free, you must register beforehand, see: <https://ticketsauce.com/e/stumblers/tickets>. All donations are welcomed.

"We have been doing home deliveries for 90 plus families with two bags of groceries and a bag of fruit and vegetables for the past 16 weeks. The need is greater than the resources we currently have. Every dollar we fundraise goes directly back into feeding the community," the de Lancelottis said in an email.

With the Clements sponsoring the event, all proceeds will go into the program. According to the Coalition, a donation of \$80 will buy enough food to feed one family for a month. The goal of the fundraiser concert is \$5,000.

When school's in session, Bags of Love feeds kids at Baywood and Monarch Grove Elementary Schools in Los Osos, Cambria Elementary, Cayucos Elementary, Del Mar in Morro Bay, and the Morro Bay Montessori-Charter School (located at the old Morro Elementary). It's also in

the Cambria and Los Osos Middle Schools.

Every Wednesday and Thursday teams of volunteers assemble at the program's Morro Bay and Los Osos food pantries, where they unload trucks, unpack boxes, load shelves, pack grocery bags, and load the bags into cars and vans for delivery.

Work Begins on Human Bean Coffee Shop

Story and Photo By Neil Farrell



An old car wash was demolished and underground work is well underway for a new, Human Bean drive-thru coffee shop at 839 Morro Bay Blvd., in Morro Bay.

Work has begun on a new drive-thru coffee shop in Morro Bay on the site of an old car wash across the street from the police station.

Located at 839 Morro Bay Blvd., the old car wash had been in business since 1966, according to a City report. In February, plans were approved to demolish the car wash and build a Human Bean coffee franchise.

The car wash was quickly demolished in July and its bones hauled away, and grading and underground work is now well underway.

The triangle-shaped property is some 3,920 square feet. A 600-square foot, drive-up coffee shop building/ki-ask will be built situated towards the back of the site.

The car wash's original two driveway entrances will remain with traffic flowing entering from the western driveway and exiting on the eastern driveway. It will have two entry lanes for ordering that will merge into one at the pick-up window. There will also be a walk-up window. It

Coffee Shop Continued on page 9

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Police Blotter



Morro Bay Police Logs

- **Aug. 2:** Police contacted a suspicious woman, 32, at 4:30 p.m. in the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd. Logs indicated the saucy lass was allegedly stuck like chuck and about to get into her car and drive schwacked.
- **Aug. 2:** Police responded at 4:15 p.m. to a domestic disturbance in the 1100 block of Embarcadero. The Bickersons chilled out without the need of a hoosegow timeout.
- **Aug. 2:** Someone in the 1200 block of Embarcadero said his or her wallet was stolen along with a bag of other stuff.
- **Aug. 2:** Police stopped a suspicious car at noon at Beach and Morro. Logs indicated the driver, 37, was “knowingly driving on a suspended license.” The scofflaw’s mother responded to the scene to pick up his car and he was cited and released, no doubt soon to have a bench warrant.
- **Aug. 1:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 7:15 p.m. in the 500 block of Shasta. Logs indicated the 44-year-old interloper was cited and released for suspicion of trespassing.
- **Aug. 1:** Police responded at 12:31 p.m. to Albertsons for a report of someone making threats. Logs indicated they contacted a 44-year-old apparent pest and cited him for suspicion of trespassing, with a warning to “stay away from Albertson’s.”
- **Aug. 1:** Police responded at 6:17 a.m. to the 2600 block of Main where they arrested a juvenile boy for allegedly leaving the scene of an accident that he caused because he was fit-shaded. Logs indicated police took the liquored up lad to the hospital to be checked out for injuries and then off to kiddie jail he went.
- **July 31:** Police contacted a suspicious woman, 33, at 9:30 p.m. in the 800 block of Piney Way. Logs indicated the dingus was arrested for suspicion of “being under the influence of a controlled substance, being in possession of a controlled substance/paraphernalia, and possession of a bladed weapon.”
- **July 31:** Police responded to the beach off Atascadero Road to assist County Mental Health by taking a juvenile boy to French Hospital for a “mental evaluation,” also called a 72-hour timeout.
- **July 31:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 4:23 p.m. at Main and Rennel. Logs indicated the apparently disgruntled fellow, 48, was arrested for suspicion of resisting arrest and being high on speed, which explains a lot.
- **July 31:** Some apparent swamp donkey stole an Estero Bay News rack from Foster Freeze in the 800 block of Piney Way, which ought to be a hanging offense.
- **July 31:** Police responded at 7:43 a.m. to a domestic disturbance in the 400 block of Embarcadero. Logs indicated a 28-year-old piojo was arrested for suspicion of domestic

- battery.
- **July 31:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 7:10 a.m. in the 800 block of Quintana. The 32-year-old fellow had a warrant out of Ventura County was checked into the iron bar hotel to await a no doubt happy homecoming.
 - **July 30:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at noon in the 2800 block of Main. A 41-year-old woman was arrested for suspicion of driving stoned on go-fast powder, possessing meth and paraphernalia.
 - **July 30:** Police responded at 6:35 a.m. to the 1500 block of Main where a citizen reported a case of suspected extortion and apparent squatting on private property.
 - **July 29:** Police responded at 2 p.m. to a fight inside a residence in the 300 block of Sequoia. Police apparently broke up the melee and declared a draw.
 - **July 29:** Some graffidiot left his mark in the 400 block of Morro Bay Blvd.
 - **July 29:** Police responded at 1:33 a.m. to a disturbance in the 500 block of Morro. Logs indicated a 51-year-old raucous fellow was making folks uncomfortable outside the Comfort Inn.
 - **July 28:** Police responded to a reported domestic dispute at 7:30 p.m. in the 400 block of LaJolla. Logs indicated it wasn’t a domestic abuse situation but rather a “dispute over property.”
 - **July 28:** Police were notified of suspected case of child abuse in the 2000 block of Juniper.
 - **July 28:** Some scoundrel stole a bicycle from the 500 block of Quintana. Ironically, the day before, a bicycle was found abandoned in the 200 block of Beach, because the Lord giveth and then taketh away.
 - **July 27:** A citizen in the 2800 block of Hemlock told police he or she was scammed out of \$900 worth of gift cards.
 - **July 27:** Police responded to the 1000 block of La Tunas where a citizen reported an unauthorized use of his or her credit card. Police believe it may be related to a recent case when skimmers were discovered on several gas pumps at the Sinclair Gas Station.
 - **July 27:** A citizen in the 200 block of Harbor reported being ripped off by some chiseling fraudster.
 - **July 26:** Police contacted a suspicious subject at 5:11 p.m. at Beach and Main. Logs indicated the She Devil, 39, was nicked for suspicion of resisting arrest and steaming on drugs, her second run-in in as many days.
 - On July 25 at 5:54 p.m. in the 300 block of Surf, the same Squit was nipped for being zig-zagged in public, rating about a six on the crazy cat lady scale.
 - **July 26:** Police towed some apparently offensive utility trailers from the 1000 and 900 blocks of Quintana for sitting in one place too long.
 - **July 26:** Police contacted a suspicious subject at 1:36 p.m. in the 2800 block of Main. The 55-year-old scofflaw had a warrant out of Kings County, he was of course cited and released, as the wheels of the bus go round and round...
 - **July 26:** Someone reported a car crash at 12:23 p.m. in the 300 block of Embarcadero. No word on the carnage.
 - **July 26:** A citizen in the 400 block of Morro Bay Blvd. reported losing something apparently not worth listing in logs; and another poor citizen in the 300 block of MBB reported fraud and a scam.
 - **July 25:** Police and firefighters responded at 7:33 p.m. to Morro Bay Golf Course where a 22-year-old woman was injured in a golf cart accident, which sounds about par for the course.
 - **July 25:** MBPD went to San Luis Obispo with their drone, apparently to spy on an angry mob of peaceful protesters marching through Downtown.
 - **July 25:** Police went to the City lifeguard tower on the beach at Morro Rock where graffidiots apparently left their mark.
 - **July 24:** Police responded at 3 p.m. to City Park on Harbor Street for an unruly woman. Logs indicated they arrested some raucous hellcat, 33, for suspicion of getting’ jiggy where the tourists can see. She got booked.
 - **July 23:** Police responded at 9:17 p.m. to a business in the 1100 block of Embarcadero, where they said a customer stole a bag full of cash.

- **July 23:** Police responded to the 400 block of Hill where a citizen reported getting annoying texts and calls, and if they figure out how to make it stop, please share that with everyone.
- **July 23:** Police responded at 4:49 p.m. to the Sinclair gas station at the Roundabout when a County weights & measures inspector found a bunch of credit card skimmers on their gas pumps.
- **July 23:** Police responded to a disturbance at 3:11 p.m. in the 2700 block of Dogwood. A 36-year-old woman was nicked for violating a stay-the-hell-away order, and cooled her jets in the cooler.
- **July 23:** Police responded at 12:30 p.m. to the 700 block of Quintana where someone said his or her electric bicycle was stolen, and will no doubt be abandoned, soon as the juice runs out.
- **July 22:** Someone found a GoPro camera with a telescoping handle somewhere in Cayucos and gave it to MBPD to unlock the mystery.
- **July 22:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 1:16 p.m. in the 1000 block of Kennedy Way. The 42-year-old fellow was nicked for suspicion of being stinky on drugs and possessing paraphernalia, his stash no doubt hidden where the sun don’t shine and the cops won’t search.
- **July 22:** Police responded to the 400 block of Pacific for a credit card fraud report. The victim was defrauded of \$3,331.43, approximately.
- **July 22:** Police responded to a domestic disturbance at 9 a.m. in the 900 block of Marina. Logs indicated they arrested a 25-year-old louse for suspicion of abuse of his spouse.
- **July 21:** The Coroner’s Office was called out at 4:55 p.m. to the 400 block of LaJolla St., and you know that can’t be good.
- **July 21:** At 1:18 p.m. police responded to a disturbance in the 1000 block of Front St. A 44-year-old woman was arrested for suspicion of being zonked on dope.
- **July 20:** A citizen in the 300 block of Jamaica reported falling victim to a phone scam. No word on how much the scamboogah took them for.
- **July 20:** Police responded at 8 a.m. to a home in the 100 block of Main where some scoundrel broke into a locked house. No word on what they found worth stealing.

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Coffee Shop From page 7
won't have any on-site seating.
According to the company website, (see: www.thehumanbean.com), The Human Bean, was begun in 1998 in Ashland, Ore., and is now a chain of some 91 drive-thru coffee shops in 11 States.
Stores are a mix of company and franchisee owned, with headquarters now in Medford, Ore. The applicant for the Morro Bay store was listed as Moss Lane Ventures, LLC, which is based in Stockton, Calif., according to Bizapedia.com.

The Natural World Foot Stomping Egret

Story and Photo By Ruth Ann Angus



A Snowy Egret on concrete embankment showing yellow foot.

Snowy egrets like to dance. At least that's what it looks like when they shuffle their bright yellow feet in the muddy bottom of ponds and bays. They are searching for their favorite foods, mainly small fish, frogs, and snakes.
Foot probing, stirring, and raking are names for the various methods used by this talented two-stepper, who swishes one foot through the mire while expertly balancing on the other.
Snowy egrets measure about 22 to 26 inches long and are the smaller of the two egrets we see at Morro Bay, the other being the great egret. Snowys have a slim neck, thin black bill, black legs with yellow feet.
It is thought that since their feet gleam this bright color, the sight of one flashing by startles fish and frogs into motion. Once seen, the Snowy skewers them on its long-pointed bill. This fishing method is called, "foot stirring."
Another way a Snowy hunts is by using "foot probing." This approach has them sticking a foot deep into the mud-

dy bottom and moving it about. "Foot raking" on the other hand has the bird's foot barely scratching its toes across the bottom. Then there is "foot paddling" where the bird jams its foot into the mud and jiggles it up and down. All these techniques seem to be characteristic of Snowy egrets.
Larger egrets and herons use a subtler method of hunting. Standing stock still in shallow water they wait patiently for an unsuspecting fish to swim by. Then with lightning swiftness they attack, spearing the unfortunate prey.
Snowy egrets nest in mixed colonies with other herons and egrets. After courtship Snowy egrets construct a platform nest of sticks either on the ground or in a bush or tree. The female lays from one to six pale blue or greenish eggs. Incubation, performed by both sexes, takes 20 to 24 days, and once hatched, the young stay in the nest for about four weeks.
During nesting season both Great and Snowy egrets develop long graceful plumes on their backs and heads. It was these plumes that were so attractive to ladies in the latter part of the 19th century to decorate their hats.
Snowy egret plumes were in greater demand than those of the Great egret so these smaller birds were killed in large numbers. It takes about four birds to supply an ounce of plumes and it is estimated that more than 192,000 birds were killed along with eggs and young being killed in rookeries. All egrets are now protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

Pharmacist on COVID-19 Front Lines

Photo and Story by Neil Farrell



Dr. Sumanta Paul took over Morro Bay Drug & Gifts a year ago, and finds himself on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic.

Taking over an established business is almost never easy for the new owner, especially one as intimate with its customers as a pharmacy.
But Dr. Sumanta Paul took the leap of faith last year when he purchased Morro Bay Drug & Gift from Dr. John

Headling (now Morro Bay's mayor) and escaped the Central Valley for the Central Coast.
Dr. Paul got his education at Long Island University in New York and at the University of Colorado in Denver, he explained last week, sitting for an interview before opening the pharmacy for the day.
He's been a pharmacist for about 12 years, working in Bakersfield for 5 years and in Sacramento before that. He bought the Morro Bay store about a year ago.
"I was tired of the heat," he says, giving a familiar refrain for those who've moved to the Coast from the Central Valley. It's the first pharmacy he's owned and like many other new business owners he's had some difficulties.
"Every transfer [of ownership] has ups and downs," he says. "We've had some issues but things smoothed out." And then the Coronavirus Pandemic hit.

"We are frontline workers," he says. And while other businesses have cut hours or closed, he's kept the store's regular hours. "I kept the same hours to help the community. With COVID, at the beginning when it hit, people got scared. We were very, very busy then it did slow a little bit, like any other business."
He's followed CDC guidelines, measuring out social distancing by putting down blue tape on the floor. Signs on the front door ask people to wear masks and not to come inside if they are sick. They've offered additional services to customers, too.
"If they are sick," he says, "we ask that they don't come in. We offer curbside delivery or home delivery free of cost, so people will stay home."
He monitors the County Health Department's COVID website (see: ReadySLO.org) to keep up on everything. "Since the 4th of July," he says, "they said a second wave was coming, and it's here as predicted."
With COVID (the disease caused by Coronavirus), it's a difficult situation, as the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has yet to approve a treatment.
"There are no recommended therapies for COVID," Dr. Paul says. "Whatever we see, it's off label."
That means while drugs like Hydroxychloroquine and Remdesivir have been in the news of late, with some doctors touting their benefits and others condemning their use as unproven and dangerous, it leaves pharmacists in the middle.
"There are no FDA approved therapies, no specific medications for COVID," says Dr. Paul. He notes that despite positive studies with Remdesivir in Japan, "We're not supposed to disperse any drug if it's not approved."
He adds that when the news about Hydroxychloroquine and its effectiveness on the virus in the early stages of infection came out, it caused a run on the more than 60-year old drug. "When it hit the news," he explains, "all of a sudden people started storing it up, and it was not

Pharmacist Continued on page 10



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Pharmacist From page 9

available.”

The drug store does a lot more than just dispense medication, as Dr. Paul explains they do a lot of vaccinating, too. “We give a lot of flu shots, pneumonia and all kinds of vaccines, tetanus booster shots. I will have the COVID-19 vaccine immediately after it’s available. Whatever needs to be done to serve the community, that’s what I do as a healthcare professional.”

As a pharmacist, he’s got a pretty good bead on his customers. So is Morro Bay a healthy town?

“Morro Bay is a very healthy town,” he says, in comparison to other places he’s practiced. Though there are a lot of older patients here, he’s impressed by the resiliency of many of them.

He talks about a 94-year-old woman patient who takes care of herself. He offered her their automatic refill service thinking it would make sure she didn’t miss prescription refills, but she declined the offer. And yet, every month, he says, she calls in her refills on time.

What’s the best thing about being a pharmacist? “I am the most easily available healthcare professional. People can ask any kind of healthcare question.”

And what’s the worst thing? “Sometimes we get really busy, and it’s hectic. Everybody wants your attention at the same time.” Right now, he’s the only pharmacist at the store.

Though it’s small square footage-wise, it’s a pretty complete pharmacy. Dr. Paul explains that they do compounding of drugs, and are the only “pet-friendly” pharmacy in the area. “People come in with their pets,” he says, “and we can treat their pets.”

Morro Bay Drug & Gift is located at the corner of Morro Bay Boulevard and Shasta Avenue, and is open Mondays-Fridays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and closed on Sundays.

Adapting to Coronavirus Restrictions

Photos and Story by Neil Farrell



Great American Fish Co.



Dutchman's Landing



Giovanni's Fish Market



Carla's Country Kitchen

The shutdown of the economy and shelter-at-home orders coming out of Sacramento have devastated local economies including Morro Bay’s. But resilient business owners are adapting to try and meet the restrictions and guidelines and still remain open.

Morro Bay’s restaurants have been busy setting up outdoor eating spaces in parking lots, decks, plazas and in one case along the Harborwalk.

In the photos here, Great American Fish Co., has seating along the front of the building and in a patio adjacent to the front doors.

Giovanni’s Fish Market has opened a new takeout window in the space that used to be The Coffee Pot Restaurant until recently when the owner decided to retire and give up the business.

Owner Giovanni Degarimore said in a social media post that the new takeout window was so that local residents wouldn’t have to wait in the market’s ordinarily long line at the first takeout window. He’s placed tables and chairs in part of the parking lot out front and along the water, but owing to the popularity of the place, long lines are forming there too.

Nearby, Stax Wine Bar has put tables out front. Rose’s Landing is making use of an outdoor pocket park/plaza, even as the second story is being transformed into motel rooms. Associated Pacific crane barge has been setting pilings along the waterside for floating docks and boat slips.

Dutchman’s Landing has put tables in a small plaza in the middle of the lease site and along a breezeway between the two buildings.

And Carla’s Country Kitchen on Beach Street, which already had a small patio, has used hay bales to delineate an outdoor seating area in its parking lot. Hungry Fisherman, also on Beach, is using some of its rear parking lot for seating.

The City put a couple of picnic tables in Giant Chessboard Park, believed to be the ones they removed from the Shasta Avenue Pocket Park after homeless people started



Chessboard Park

congregating there and smoking cigarettes.

And of note in North Morro Bay, Maya’s and Taco Temple have set up outdoor eating areas in their parking lots. Taco Temple erected a stylish, wood-framed patio topped in palm fronds for a decidedly tropical look. It too is getting a lot of use out of an existing outdoor seating area.

Some restaurants, notably Thai Bounty on Embarcadero, Mi Casa on Morro Bay Boulevard and Bayside Café, among others, already had large outdoor dining areas, with Bayside Café expanding into its parking lot at the State Park Marina to make up for unusable indoor dining.

The creativity and change in atmosphere that’s come with the adaptations has given diners a fresh experience, even at their favorite haunts.

It should be noted that most all restaurants in town are open for takeout and many will deliver, too. It’s hoped that locals and visitors will turn out to help the nearly 50 restaurants in town to survive the pandemic closures so they can continue to provide jobs and tax revenues to the City.

The inter-connectedness between businesses and the fiscal health of the City government and in turn on the quality of life enjoyed by residents has never been so exposed or tenuous.

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Community

On the Job — Support Our Community

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Our On the Job series continues. Estero Bay News encourages people to support the community as well as 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



The team at Cambria Ambulance Paramedics, 2535 Main St., was recently dispatched to assist the Cambria Fire Department with a commercial structure fire posing an immediate threat to other structures. Fortunately, no one was hurt; however, the business involved was a total loss. Pictured (Outside): Delaney Vaden, Katie Bramlette, (Inside): Michael Bryant, Jami Ray.



Plants are a great hobby or home improvement project during the pandemic. Lorri Nelson, Marcel Addis-Jackson and April Ziering are there to help at Miner’s Ace Hardware in Morro Bay located at 510 Atascadero Road.

Kiwanis Club Barbecue Big Success



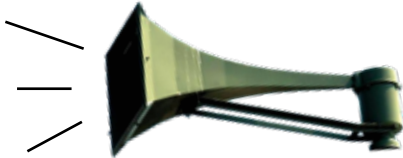
Kiwanis Club of Bay-Pos members Al Strunk, in black mask, and Gary Katayama help in preparing the club’s signature dish, oak barbecued tri-tip, for a fundraiser held in Los Pos on August 8. Selected Morro Bay High School Seniors in the class of 2021 will be the ultimate beneficiaries as the proceeds will go towards the club’s annual presentation of scholarships.

Scholarships for three deserving seniors of the Morro Bay High School Class of 2021 have survived the challenges of fundraising posed by the pandemic thanks to the generosity and support of community members. The Kiwanis Club of Bay-Pos drive-thru Tri-Tip Barbecue Fundraiser held on Saturday was deemed a “stunning success,” by club organizer George Janeway. “An amazing number of people came out in support of our local students, for which the club is very thankful,” Janeway said. Dedicated teams of club members—masked, gloved and distant—divided chores to lighten the load. Some manned the fire

pits, others cut and seasoned loaves of oven ready garlic bread, while still others wrapped the meals and delivered them to the parade of cars filled with hungry folks whose smiles could be seen in spite of the masks they wore. Although the total raised is still waiting final counts, the three \$1000 scholarships offered by the Kiwanis Club have been fully funded. The mission of Kiwanis International is to serve the children of the world. The Kiwanis Club of Bay-Pos also specializes in serving the children of Los Pos, Baywood and Morro Bay. If interested in receiving more information about joining the Kiwanis leave a comment on their Facebook page under Kiwanis Club of Bay-Pos.

Annual Siren Test

The San Luis Obispo County Early Warning System sirens will be tested on Saturday, August 22. Sirens will sound at 12:00 p.m. and again at 12:30 p.m. for three minutes. During the tests, no action is required on the part of the public. Local radio and television stations will conduct normal programming during the tests. If you hear sirens at any other time,



tune to a local radio or television station for important emergency information. When at sea, tune to Marine Channel 16.

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Local Garden Club has Roots in the Community

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Los Osos Valley Garden Club Members after tour at Los Osos Valley Nursery. Photo submitted



This pot popping with eye-catching succulents is at the entrance to Los Osos Post Office. Photo submitted

They might have dirt under their nails and an occasional weed in their hair, but they leave a place looking more beautiful than when they found it.

The Los Osos Valley Garden Club has been beautifying the community and educating folks since 1933 as the first California Garden Club, Inc. in the county.

They recently received three first place awards from CGCI for their work on the pollinator garden at the Los Osos Library. The non-profit was recognized for Civic Development, Operation Wildflower and Pollinator Education.

“Our club was thrilled and very proud to receive three first place awards,” said Wendy McKeown, president of the 14-member LOV Garden Club. “California Garden Clubs, Inc. is the largest nonprofit, volunteer gardening organization in California and has over 350 garden clubs, plant societies, affiliates and youth groups representing more than 21,000 members. So, winning three first place awards with CGCI is a significant achievement.”

Members of the LOV Garden Club began installing the pollinator garden at the Los Osos Library in March of 2019. The club’s vision was to create a garden in front of the library parking lot that would provide habitat for local hummingbirds, butterflies and bees.

“The library serves as a community gathering space,”

said McKeown. “People from our area and surrounding areas visit the library for books, resources, children’s story time, poetry readings, and classes. We felt that the exterior of the library needed to be just as welcoming and cared for as the interior of the library.

“We also felt it was a great opportunity to educate the public about how drought-tolerant and California native plants could be used in the landscape for beautification and promotion of pollinators such as bees, butterflies and hummingbirds for a healthy environment.”

Plants were donated by the Los Osos Middle School Native Plant Restoration Project or purchased at local nurseries. Sea Pines Golf Resort in Los Osos donated the mulch.

The LOV Garden Club promotes local gardening and landscaping projects through educational talks, tours, hands-on projects and charitable contributions that include donating gardening books, vegetable flats and plants to other organizations as well as gifting monetary funds to the Los Osos Middle School’s California Native Plant Program, the Los Padres National Forest for forest restoration and the SLO Food Bank.

Preservation of the environment, beautification projects and community donations are all part of the mission of LOV Garden Club, but relationships also take root.



Los Osos Valley Garden Club’s award winning pollinator garden project at the Los Osos Library. Photo submitted

“Members enjoy forming friendships with like-minded gardening enthusiasts, and learning gardening skills through attending workshops, lectures and field trips,” McKeown said. “We also enjoy encouraging the love of gardening in others, especially the children of our community.”

Currently, due to the coronavirus protocols, members can’t hold regular in-person meetings, but plans are in the works to monthly meetings via video conferencing — the public is welcome to participate.

Anyone interested in joining the LOV Garden Club is encouraged to attend a meeting first, virtually for now. Annual membership dues are \$25 for an individual membership and \$35 for a family membership. More information can be found on their website at lovgardenclub.org. Questions should be directed info@lovgardenclub.org. Green thumbs are welcomed, but are not a requirement.

“We welcome all levels of experience,” McKeown said. “We are all here to learn and grow at our club.”

Central Coast Writers Conference Goes Online

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



The annual Central Coast Writers Conference will continue this year with all classes and speakers in real time via Zoom.

Proving that the pen is mightier than COVID-19, the 36th annual Central Coast Writers Conference sponsored by Cuesta College will return this year offering an online event on September 24-26.

“As always, our conference is ideal for writers of all ages and experience levels,” said CCWC Executive Director Teri Bayus. “Our presenters are fabulous, experienced, and the best in their industry when it comes to teaching screenwriting, novel writing, beginning writing, poetry, business, and more.”

Attendees of the “Best Conference in the West,” as named by The Writer magazine in 2019, will still be able to enroll in master classes on that Thursday and choose from more than 100 workshops on Friday and Saturday via Zoom, a cloud based video conferencing tool, and never have to get out of their pajamas.

“You’ll have opportunities to engage with other writers, presenters, and staff from all over the country, if not the world, all from the comfort of your own home.” Bayus said. “It’s an introvert’s dream!”

Master Classes are \$150 per course path. They include:

- Pre-Writing Your Novel with Bryan Young — go from

zero-ideas to having a novel ready to write.

- Finding, Faking or Forgetting Your Voice with George Yatchisin and Chrissy Yost — tools to develop your poetic voice.

- Nonfiction Success Skills and Strategies with Felicia Slattery — explore the income potential of building a complete business around your book and area of expertise.

- How To Write A Perfect Television Pilot with Linda Aronson — learn how to create and interweave a multiple-plot serial that run across a season’s worth of episodes.

- Stoking the Creative Fires: the Nine Stages of Writing with Phil Cousineau — explore the history of creativity, from painting and writing to photography, movies, and business with an emphasis is on the practices, exercises, and sparks that enable us to sustain a creative life in any chosen field.

The \$225 registration fee for Friday and Saturday includes a recorded copy of every class, excluding master classes, for all attendees to expand the learning experience.

“We’ve never been in a position to record and then offer every single solitary workshop before,” Bayus said. “Because it’s all on Zoom, it’s easily recorded and everybody who signed up has access to it all afterwards. You are

literally getting 110 writing workshops.”

Workshops are taught by big hitters in the writing world including Ricky Roxburgh, Natalie Obando-Desai, Jonathan Maberry, Katya Cengal, and Doug Richardson.

“I’m bringing back some of our old favorites,” Bayus said. “Because this year is so different, I wanted to make sure that I gave everybody a little bit of the old to remind them that what the conference was like, and then a little bit of something new.”

Thursday night features a keynote with former Cambrian Christopher Moore author of seventeen novels, including the international best-sellers “Lamb,” “Noir,” and his latest, “Shakespeare for Squirrels.” Discover the elements you need to find success as a writer, and how you control only one of the three. He will also do a real time Q&A where zoomers can ask him anything.

Friday opens with a Jordan Rosenfeld keynote based on her book- “A Writer’s Guide to Persistence.” She will share how to focus on writing that means something to you while being curious, purposeful, and resilient. Learn to love revision, create boundaries around your writing, and how to go deeper into the work when rejections fly.

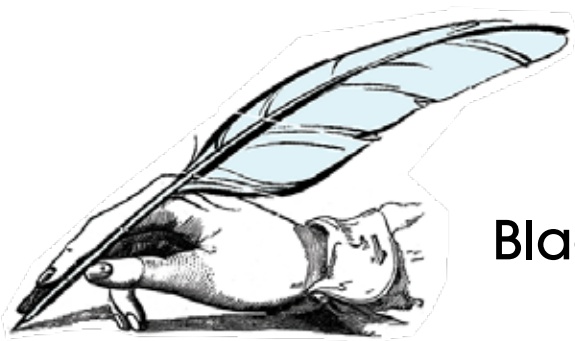
Classes go from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday followed by a virtual networking kind of “bug on the wall” event where multiple members of the staff will talk, and people can listen in and ask questions.

Saturday classes are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a closing keynote by Monica Piper who will talk about losing the stress and finding the funny moments in life and in your writing. Piper wrote for “Roseanne,” for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe, “Mad About You” and “Veronica’s Closet” before become the head writer and producer of the “Rugrats” for which she won an Emmy.

“Over the past several months, we have learned how important human connection is, even if it is only online,” Bayus said. “This will give you an opportunity to meet up close, but not from the back of a classroom. There is an element to Zoom that is more intimate because you are in their house; they are in their natural habitat, they haven’t put on their game face. It’s more honest. Their dog might walk into the room, you can look at what’s on their bookshelves or the walls behind their head.”

For more information and to register, go to www.CentralCoastWritersConference.com or contact Teri Bayus at centralcoastwritersconference@gmail.com.

Letters To The Editor



Cutbacks Not Tax Increase

I do not want to put any more free tax relief monies into the hands of the Morro Bay City Council. The city manager needs to come up with bonafide solutions: not simply hiring consultants at \$85,000 to sell residents on a miss-represented sales tax increase. Where is it going to stop?

The City cannot and should not simply constantly go back to local residents for more taxes. It is over!

Just like any other government entity or company, look for real staff cuts and lower salaries. Make physical changes. Just get in the game and stop spending ridiculous amounts of money on bulletproof walls and security cameras.

It's time for a change!

*James Curnutt
Morro Bay Resident*

Proposed Sales Tax Increase Wrong Tax-Wrong time.

In a recent edition of the Estero Bay News there was a very large article on the proposed Morro Bay sales tax increase.

The article defined the problem but failed to explain how we got there and what alternatives are available.

The last election, 2-years ago, the mayor-elect pointed out how there was a \$500,000 per year shortfall in the budget and they would have to use reserves going forward if major changes were not instituted. Nothing was done.

If the cuts that have just been put into effect were done then, the emergency reserves of the City would not be almost gone.

Now the COVID-19 crisis has hit us and the reserves are not enough to carry us.

The answers are clear. When you compare Morro Bay to other Cities in the County you will find that we have a very high ratio of number of City employees for each Citizen.

Because of this, the salaries and benefits paid to the employees is almost double the cost-per-citizen for Morro Bay when compared to other Cities. This cannot continue after the current crisis is over. The budget must be cut.

Going forward we need to keep all salary reductions in place until we can recover. This may take two to three years. All new hiring must be frozen. All operating cuts must be maintained for the same period.

Further the City should not propose a sales tax increase. Rather, we should follow the pattern that Pismo Beach has taken. We should increase the bed tax because the visitors place an extra load on our public safety officers and staff and they should help carry the load.

Vote "No" on the sales tax increase (Measure E-20) and elect a Mayor and Council persons who will follow through and place our City on a stable financial foundation.

*Barry Branin,
Morro Bay*

Why is State Park Road Closed?

Does anybody know why the State Park road between South Bay Blvd. and the campground is closed? Has there ever been any explanation for this? Having that road open saves a lot of time getting to certain parts of south Morro Bay. Just sayin'.

*Gregory King
Los Osos*

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

Black Lives Matter, Period

Let us state clearly – Black Lives Matter. Women's March San Luis Obispo unequivocally stands with the young black voices at the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement in San Luis Obispo. We recognize these young people as brave, unrelenting leaders in the work to dismantle the structural racism on which our country is built.

It is not just the actions of a few but the perspectives of the many that must change. Anyone listening in SLO County knows that this community is not equally welcoming to all, structural racism does exist. We see this in the blackface and nooses at Cal Poly, the racist graffiti at Grover Beach Elementary, and the videos of residents using racial slurs in broad daylight. We know this from the lack of representation in government, on boards, and in business leadership. We hear this when Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) say, "We are not welcome here."

It takes immense courage to step up when those around you dismiss your experience and your existence as irrelevant. It takes even more courage to continue fighting for justice when the community you live in questions the peaceful means by which you fight. The arrest of young local organizers goes beyond the need for courage – it calls on each of us to act.

We must move beyond saying Black Lives Matter to acting as if Black lives matter. We must move beyond telling BIPOC how to peacefully protest, and support them in real ways when they do – even when it causes discomfort. We must recognize that when a young black woman feels the need to scream repeatedly that she is not resisting arrest there is clearly something wrong with our system. It is time for us to fix it.

Women's March San Luis Obispo unequivocally acknowledges the danger people of color face everyday. The power structure is not balanced, and the fight for justice has never been fair. There are deep wounds from lasting oppression. Criticism of tactics is not a substitute for dismantling racism.

Rather than diminishing the work of those taking a chance to lead, let's reflect on what work needs to be done by each of us. If we do not like the means by which change is being demanded, then we have to find our own opportunities to change the system.

As local black leaders have said, there is room for every person in this movement. Let's engage in constructive action. Black Lives Matter, period.

*Women's March
San Luis Obispo
Organizers*

Kudos and Manure

Firstly, I would like to commend you on the quality of the articles and journalism in the Estero Bay News. I look forward to each edition and thoroughly enjoy reading your publication.

I'm writing today to bring your attention to a subject that doesn't get much coverage, but I believe should be brought to the attention of your readers. As residents of our beautiful Morro Bay, all pet owners are encouraged to be courteous and clean up after our pets. I believe that most respect this and are responsible pet owners. I've even seen reminders in your newspaper on this same subject.

The point that I'd like to bring forward is the large and increasing number of horse owners that take their animals onto the beach and leave piles of crap all over for everyone else. Its seems counter intuitive that dog owners must pick up every small pile and yet horse owners are somehow exempt from cleaning up after their animals. Furthermore, the majority of the beach in Morro Bay is posted as a "No Dog" zone, yet horses are free to go everywhere. Each week I see more and more horses on the beach and mess left behind. The beach is also now being used much more since the COVID-19 crisis and there are many families and children enjoying it, as there are fewer places to go for recreation. It's very maddening to walk down the beach and have to constantly watch out and step around huge piles of horse crap. Perhaps I'm viewing this wrongly, but it seems like a double standard.

*Todd Schnack
Morro Bay*

Shutdown the Screen and Get Moving

With much of the country still staying at home to stop the spread of coronavirus, a new Cal Poly study on how to reduce the time spent in front of video screens is even more applicable than researchers initially thought.

Sedentary screen time – watching TV, streaming movies, playing video games – consumes more than half of Americans' available leisure time. Aside from work and sleep, Americans spend more time in front of our screens than doing anything else.



Calo Poly's Sarah Keadle is working on an app to reduce screen time.

All this sitting is far from harmless. Sedentary time increases risk for chronic disease, and previous studies have shown that sedentary screen time increases that risk more than other sedentary behaviors.

Finding the best ways to get people away from their screens and get them moving is the goal of a new study led by Sarah Keadle, a professor in Cal Poly's Kinesiology and Public Health Department.

"Given how consistent the evidence is that screen time is bad for health, it was surprising that there had not yet been a large study in adults to test what approaches to reducing screen time work the best, or a study that accounted for all the new ways people engage with screens like streaming services and social media," Keadle said.

Using StandUPTV, a smartphone-based app, Keadle and her colleagues at Cal Poly and Arizona State University will test three strategies: receiving adaptive text messages, being locked out of further screen time, or earning back screen time through exercise. Through these interventions and a self-monitoring routine, the research team hopes to help people cut their sedentary screen time by 50%.

Researchers will also examine how reductions in sedentary screen time impact physical activity, sleep, diet, mood and disease risk factors.

"Our main goal is to figure out the best way to reduce screen time, but we will also get important new information about what else changes in people's lives when they reduce screen time," Keadle said. "We will be measuring their physical activity, snacking and diet, sleep and risk for disease, which is a really important step in figuring out why screen time is consistently linked to poor health."

The research team is currently recruiting participants for the study. Eligible participants must be ages 23-64, own a smartphone or tablet, and have internet access with no limit on the amount of data. Anyone interested in participating or learning more about the study can call 805-756-5506.



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The City in 2009 added two new trains of filters designed to filter groundwater from the Morro Creek wells, which had become too high in nitrates, and while those filter trains work whenever the Morro wells are pumped, the desalination side has sat mostly unused.

Since it was completed, Mueller said, the desal plant has produced just 6.6 million gallons of water. “That’s about 2 months worth of water,” Mueller said. “That’s all it’s produced.”

The plant’s been snake-bit since day one. “They had a lot of challenges,” Mueller said. “They used two different types of filter systems. In early 2000 they put in a new [settling] tank and it got plugged up too.”

Originally, the City was going to discharge the brine waste from the desalination process through the sewer plant undersea discharge pipe — jointly-owned with the Cayucos Sanitary District — but the CSD objected. So the City piped the brine out a separate line discharging into the power plant’s outfall canal at the base of Morro Rock.

Mueller said the discharge left a long brown stain in the water. “It was a huge violation,” and so they then rerouted the discharge water through the sewer treatment plant. “That didn’t work either,” he said. “It killed the biology of the sewer treatment plant.”

They used it for about 5 years from 2002-08, Mueller said, and it produced maybe 10 days of drinking water. It didn’t produce a single drop in 2005.

The plant’s permitting was odd as well, as Mueller said the Coastal Development Permit only allowed it to run 15 days a year anyway, and no more than 5 consecutive days. Asked why that was? Mueller shrugged and said he didn’t know. “It was just in the permit,” he said. “It was another challenge on the seawater side.”

In 2017 the City needed to test the seawater wells and when they opened up the vaults, the pumps were ruined. “None of them worked,” Mueller said. “The electrical systems were not rated for seawater. They had the same kind of electrical boxes you can buy at Miner’s Hardware. They were all corroded and rotted. Only two of the five wells we were able to get samples out of them.” In essence you had 30-year-old wells sitting unused in seawater.

On top of that, the plant itself hadn’t run since 2008 and membranes in all the filter trains were dried out and ruined, too. “You cant’ store those membranes dry,” Mueller said.

The plant’s pumps that push the water pressure up to 1,000 psi, “were not safe anymore. There was a blowout at one time that blew out the wall.”

He added that he once spoke with a high school teacher who said the pumps “whistled and howled” whenever they ran. The pumps were “piston” pumps and obsolete. The company that made them went out of business, so parts aren’t available to fix them.

The OneWater Plan concluded the desal plant was past its useful life and since it sits in a flood plane and tsunami run-up zone (just as the sewer treatment plant does), if the City wanted to borrow money from the State to fix it, it would have to be relocated away from the coast.

Mueller said the City crew has been dismantling the seawater part of the plant over the past several weeks; they’ve been able to do 90% of the work in-house and recycle much of the plastic and metal.

“The whole plant had to be replaced,” he said. When running, the plant could produce about 750,000 gallons a day but half the water was drinking water and half was going back into the ocean. It was expensive too, \$2,932 an acre-foot, compared to State Water’s \$1,500.

Instead the City turned to the WRF project, and decided to hang onto State Water as the primary source. The City’s wells would be the new emergency supply. But that too had problems, as the Chorro Creek well field, which once produced nearly all the City’s water, had come under pumping restrictions written into the prescriptive water rights permit from the State.

The City can’t pump almost all of those wells whenever the flow in Chorro Creek falls below 1.4 cubic feet per second, roughly the same flow that comes out of a low flow showerhead. The restriction put Chorro Creek wells out of reach in summer, when demand is high and the creek at its lowest.

And wouldn’t you know it, the Chorro Creek wells were all ruined, too.

“We haven’t used the water rights in Chorro Valley since 2010,” Mueller said, “about the same time we put in the brackish water filters” at the desal plant.

The Chorro basin is also high in nitrates and Mueller said there was no way to treat that water before it reaches the City’s tank farm on Kings Street. And there were also several City water customers out in Chorro Valley who couldn’t get treated water from the City and were being provided well water.

The City was still obligated under its permit to test those wells every month so Mueller said they contacted the State Department of Drinking Water and “de-powered” (disconnected from electric service) the pumps.

“It doesn’t change the permits,” Mueller explained. “And we’re saving all the lab testing costs. Same for the desal wells. We can’t physically use them.” He estimated the testing costs run about \$30,000 a year.

So desalination and Chorro Creek are out as City water sources. The City does have an ace in the hole, however. Mueller said they have an agreement with the California Men’s Colony to access water from Whale Rock Reservoir that would be treated at CMC’s treatment plant and sent back to Morro Bay through the Chorro Valley Pipeline, which brings State Water to the City.

“Morro Bay has no rights to Whale Rock water,” Mueller said. “Essentially, we’d be buying CMC water.”

So now the City is down to State Water and the Morro basin wells, and plans are now to use the WRF’s “Indirect Potable Reuse” or IPR recharging capability to supplement the Morro basin groundwater.

So the WRF, when it’s finally up and running will discharge the highly treated wastewater into the ocean and only inject into the ground when the Morro wells are scheduled to be pumped. The injected wastewater must sit two months in the ground before being pumped out. So the City will have to start injections well in advance.

Mueller said, “If we don’t put the wastewater in the ground, we will have seawater intrusion if we continue to use the Morro Creek wells. IPR was the only thing that made sense for our town. State Water is the most economical and high-quality and we’re still going to be paying for it until 2038.”

He added, “There may be a day when we can stop State Water and use the IPR but that day’s not here yet.”

How is Morro Bay’s water supply today? “We’re in better shape than our neighbors,” he said. “We can run for a couple of months if State Water went down. And if something happened to the desal plant we can turn to CMC.” The desal plant will continue to be used to filter Morro Creek basin water and will still have just the two brackish filter trains (each with 18 tubes).

So the WRF and its IPR at a cost of \$130 million, becomes the City’s back-up water supply. Morro Bay residents may have thought the IPR was going to run all the time, it’s not.

“We’re proposing,” Mueller said, “to run the IPR three to four days a month. That’s all we’re going to run it.”

If readers would like to see an easy to understand explanation of the City’s plans for the water system, Mueller’s staff has put together a video. Estero Bay News will post that video on our Facebook Page and website (estero-baynews.com).

The City’s final OneWater Plan is posted on the City website, see: www.morro-bay.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/12500/OneWater-Plan-Final.

bor Street Fire Station.

It too is a general fund tax and the City’s Citizen’s Finance Committee reviews the City’s use of those monies. The committee will also review spending of the new, E-20 taxes, should it get over 50% “Yes” votes. The prediction is that E-20 will raise \$2 million a year.

E-20 Uses Listed

The analysis includes a list of targeted uses for the new taxes, though it’s a “general use tax,” meaning it can be used for any general fund expenditures.

Stated purposes are (but not limited to): maintaining the local police and fire departments; maintaining around-the-clock paramedic fire crews and 9-1-1 dispatching; maintaining the City’s health emergency/disaster preparedness; keeping beaches and public areas clean and safe; and, retaining and attracting local businesses.

The new tax would not be charged on groceries, prescription medicine and real property, according to Neumeyer’s analysis that also declares that 70% of these new taxes will be paid by visitors and non-residents, “and thus will contribute to the City’s ability to maintain general public services used while visiting.”

Supporters Stress Local Control

Supporters of E-20 extoll the need for the tax hike “to ensure the City of Morro Bay is prepared for any health crisis or catastrophic disaster,” according to the argument in favor of E-20 that will appear in Sample Ballots. “Today it is more important than ever that Morro Bay maintains our LOCALLY CONTROLLED police and fire departments rather than contracting these out to outside agencies.”

The argument goes on to ask, “Did you know 70% of the calls to the Morro Bay Fire Department are for emergency rescue and medical emergencies?”

“Vote YES on E-20 to prevent significant reduction to the service of our Morro Bay Fire Department so skilled, local firefighter-paramedics can continue to respond to our local life-threatening emergencies and save lives!”

The argument also says, “Yes on E-20 makes sure visitors pay their fair share for using our services, roads and beaches.

“Yes on E-20 protects Morro Bay’s small harbor town character by keeping our public areas healthy, safe and clean and protecting our local property values.

“Vote Yes on E-20 to protect the financial stability of Morro Bay, its residents and local businesses.”

And, “A penny on a dollar purchase is a small price to pay to help our community recover from the pandemic.”

Rob Kitzman, Janet Gould, Stephen Peck, Jane Heath and Ken Vesterfelt signed the pro argument.

Opponents Say E-20 Misleading

In the “con” argument against E-20, opponents say, “The proposed increase in Morro Bay’s sales tax adds an additional burden to our local residents and small businesses, all of whom are struggling to stay afloat in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

The con argument says that while the name is “Local Recovery/Emergency Preparedness Measure” the tax hike was first introduced before the pandemic.

“Although labeled ‘Recovery,’ it is proposed as a permanent tax increase with no ending date. The City Council’s proposed user sales tax increases from .5% to 1.5% per dollar. This is a 200% tax increase.”

The argument said that local businesses are experiencing hard times due to the pandemic and any tax increase that adds to the cost for their customers will impact sales.

“Our small businesses are vital to Morro Bay’s future,” the argument says. “We need to help them not burden them.”

It also points out that residents have already been hit with “large increases in utility rates, most notably the increase in sewer/water bills. For example, 300% sewer/water since 2015, and garbage increase 20.5% just this year.”

The con argument implicates the city council made

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poor spending decisions. “The current mayor and city council have not properly managed the income to the City,” the argument says. “An example of their wasteful spending is this ballot measure: paying consultants \$85,000 to help get this sales tax increase passed.”

It offers an alternative to hiking taxes. “A better alternative to a sales tax increase is requiring our city manager to cut the overall general fund budget by 10%, in addition to cuts already made. A better long term plan will provide a long term fix to the City’s economic woes and preserve our first responders.”

The con argument was signed by John Weiss, Richard Sadowski, and Dan Sedley of Citizens for Affordable Living, the main opposition group to the City’s \$130 million new sewer plant and wastewater recycling system, now under construction. Weiss is running for Mayor and Sadowski signed as a city council candidate.

Voting Time Nears

Registered voters will soon receive Sample Ballots in the mail and these arguments will be printed in them, along with whatever rebuttal arguments are submitted for publication.

This year’s Nov. 3 Presidential Election is shaping up to be one for the ages due to the coronavirus pandemic. Changes include: every registered voter will receive a ballot in the mail and can either fill it out and mail it back, or they can drop it off at drop boxes the County Elections Office plans to put out in every community in SLO County. (Look for one to be erected at Morro Bay City Hall.)

There will be just one, in-person polling place at the Morro Bay Community Center on Election Day. The City normally would have two.

The County Clerk’s Office is looking for election workers and volunteers after some 46% of the volunteers from the March Primary Election said they will skip November due to concerns about the virus.

And 46% of the polling sites countywide also canceled, forcing the County Clerk to find new polling places, and ones that are large enough to ensure there can be social distancing for voters.

Even “Election Day” is changing, as polls in California will be open for 4-days instead of just one.

And a U.S. Presidential Election will begin for the first time ever, perhaps fittingly this year, on Halloween, Saturday, Oct. 31 and continue daily through Tuesday, Nov. 3.

DiStacio’s From page 1

time to permanently reconnect with their son by working together on Mark’s dream for his own restaurant. It has always been about the food for Chef Mark, already seasoned well by those who’d been in the family business for years. For Ken, his years of implementing best business practices offered a perfect partnership to create a family owned small business.

In 2011 they decided to memorialize Mama Rosa’s maiden name and opened DiStacio’s in Los Osos. Success encouraged expansion to Morro Bay’s Embarcadero in 2015. Following the family tradition of giving back to the community, Ken recognized an opportunity to consolidate facilities and spend more time working with Mark by restoring a City-owned longtime empty eyesore overlooking Morro Bay’s bay-front happenings. After a major investment to recreate a true taste of Italy, locals and visitors soon discovered Italian-style family friendly service with affordable cuisine and forever views.

Then three years ago plans changed. Not totally of their choosing another move was required. And probably due to his ingrained support of community and active support of the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce board for numerous years, Ken chose to stay in Morro Bay. He purchased two commercial properties on Morro Bay Blvd. and restoration began again for DiStacio’s of Morro Bay.

“When we moved downtown, we knew we would need to change,” said Ken. Overlooking the Embarcadero, tourists easily found them, but locals would need to make DiStacio’s a preferred destination. “Business was going along as predicted. Our third year was to be our turnaround year. We were definitely on the upswing.”

And then Covid-19 hit hard in March. Ken said, “We thought we were safe. We had outdoor dining and could socially distance our tables. We didn’t expect a shutdown and I never thought of closing down, but I knew we needed to create a take-out business we didn’t have. We were also forced to cut staff. It was Mark cooking and Marci and I handling orders.”

Soon he realized they had achieved building their locally based clientele. “People were glad we were open and I was overwhelmed by their generosity. Some tipped almost as much as the cost of the meal. I was still spending twice as much to serve half as many, but we were making it.”

By Memorial Day we were allowed to open for inside dining. “Some wondered what took us so long. With little notice it took awhile to order the supplies we needed to offer a safe, comfortable experience.”

Then, without warning, in July the Governor announced another shutdown. “We were led to believe we



Charbroiled filet Mignon

would always get a two-three day notice when things would change, but that didn’t happen.” By design DiStacio’s had plenty of patio and parking lot space for outdoor eating. “We were set up, but I felt bad for others.” He echoed a letter from the Chamber to the City recommending they approve non-traditional outdoor space for dining. “We need to support each other if we are going to stay in business.”

So how has DiStacio’s survive COVID-19 so far? Ken offered a few tips:

- Hire employees with personality - you can teach them skills;
- Store only 2-3 days of product. Keep it fresh, but be prepared for change;
- Limit menu items;
- Get to know and work with business neighbors and be friendly with local customers. They will be around long after the tourists go home this fall and winter;
- Understand, “WE DIDN’T CAUSE THIS.” Apply for the government assistance even if you put it in a CD and pay it back. It is never good business to not protect our businesses from the bad times.
- Use the slower times to look for new ways to improve business.

“And for sure, not just as a longtime Chamber board member,” added Ken, “but rather as a small business in Morro Bay that has benefited from the services provided by our understaffed Chamber during COVID-19, please, support the Chamber today. CEO Erica Crawford has worked nonstop for all our businesses, not just members. She’s provided the most current updates and where to find the resources we need. I hope our business community will reward the Chamber’s efforts by being as generous as our customers have been with their tipping. Please, join and participate.”

Distance Learning From page 1

follow State guidelines which include mask wearing from 3rd grade up, staff/family education, distancing, health screening and training. Establishing a point of contact between the Public Health department and individual schools would be required to facilitate procedures should cases break within a school setting.

“We want a rapid communication channel within any school to address any such outbreak within a school setting, be it with a student or staff.” said SLO Board of Supervisors Chairperson Lynn Compton in a social media post.

At this time, the majority of county schools are continuing with distance learning that began in March.

Waivers are issued based on the most current scientific data and a review of local epidemiological data, in consultation with California Department of Public Health, along with other public health considerations, County officials said.

“COVID-related risks in schools serving elementary age students are different from the risks to staff and students in schools serving older students,” said County Public Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. “There appears to be a lower risk of child-to-child or child-to-adult transmission in children under 12-years-old, and the risk of infection and serious illness in elementary school children is considered low.”

Dr. Brescia and Dr. Borenstein sent a joint letter to local elementary school leaders inviting them to apply for a waiver through the County Public Health Department.

“The health-related risks for elementary age children

who are not provided in-person instruction are significant, including lower rates of immunizations, higher rates of undetected child abuse and neglect, and other indicators of public health and wellbeing,” the letter stated.

“Moreover, in-person instruction is academically and socially critical for younger students, in alignment with State standards. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly harmed by a lack of access to in-person instruction. Schools serving elementary school students are also in a better position to put into place effective risk-reduction strategies to protect both teachers and students, including creation of small, stable classroom cohorts. Further, elementary school students without access to in-person school are far more likely than older students to require alternative group childcare arrangements when schools are closed, and as such, closure of elementary schools is less likely to significantly reduce transmission.”

Because the State currently prohibits middle schools opening under any conditions, districts could consider those campuses for additional space for elementary levels, Compton said.

That could possibly accommodate further distancing for those elementary schools looking to open.

Waiver requests are expected to take at least one week for review after submission.

“We have not applied for a waiver yet,” said McGrath. “We need to continue with our collaboration and communication. We do not have plans to bring back an entire elementary school.”

SLO County must remain off the County Monitoring List for at least 14 days before broader in-person instruction may reopen. School starts August 24.

School District Website Information

- Weekly meals will continue to be provided to students by food services.
- The district will coordinate with the cities of Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo as well as the YMCA and other non-profits to provide options for families and staff who require childcare beginning at the start of the year.
- We will provide all students with Chromebooks and WiFi hotspots as needed.
- We will coordinate with our site administrators and staff to ensure students have access to instructional materials at home.
- We will provide small group specialty classes for specific student populations who require in-person learning and support while we remain in the distance learning model. These classes will be closely monitored by district staff in partnership with the San Luis Obispo County Public Health department.
- Students who wish to participate in extracurricular activities may do so outside of the school day once it is safe and we receive the necessary guidance.
- The Family Resource Center will continue to provide for basic needs. If you or someone you know needs assistance, please do not hesitate to contact them at 805-596-4033 or email at frc@slcUSD.org.



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