

State Park, County Campgrounds Reopen

By Neil Farrell



A line of cars waits to get into Morro Bay State Park Campground on the first day it reopened. Photo by Shari Sullivan

The State Parks Department has relented somewhat in its coronavirus pandemic response and reopened several local campgrounds, with of course guidelines on wearing masks and social distancing.

SLO Coast Superintendent, Dan Falat, announced Sept. 16 that the Morro Bay State Park Campground and Morro Strand State Beach Campground in Morro Bay, and Hearst San Simeon State Park would reopen on Saturday, Sept. 19 for campers with reservations, no so-called walk-ups allowed.

However, the campground at Montaña de Oro will remain closed along with the Spooner's Ranch House and visitor's center. Morro Bay Natural History Museum and Hearst Castle remain closed.

"Each campsite," Falat said in a news release, "will allow up to eight people from the same immediate household and two vehicles maximum. Group campsites will remain closed in order to avoid large gatherings."

All State Park campgrounds were closed last March, as the State ramped up its coronavirus pandemic response that included shelter-at-home orders for all residents, and the closure of "non-essential" businesses, which included all state park campgrounds including the Oceano Dunes.

In Morro Bay it also led to the closing of Lower State Park Road at South Bay Boulevard, much to the consternation of drivers coming from Los Osos who have grown accustomed to using the road as a shortcut into Downtown Morro Bay.

Though the State Park Marina and Bayside Café, as well as the Morro Bay Golf Course were open, people had to drive all the way into town via the highway and then back out Main Street to get to them.

The state park itself was open for hikers and bicyclists but not vehicles. Six months later, the situation has eased somewhat.

"Based on current data reported by the California Department of Public Health," Falat said, "State Parks is working with local and state officials on a phased and regionally driven approach to increase access at park units where compliance with state and local public health ordinances can be achieved."

Falat explained, "Park system operations have been modified to provide an outdoor experience that reduces the risk of exposure to COVID-19, and modifications at each park may vary."

For the local campgrounds the rules include:

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School District Looks at Housing Project at Morro Elementary

By Neil Farrell



This 'tiny home' (500 square feet) built by Berkshire Hathaway is an example of one type of housing that could go in at Morro Elementary School. Photos courtesy SLCUSD

What to do with an old school? That's the question the San Luis Coastal Unified School District is mulling over, as it looks to a potential future of tight budgets with the closing of Diablo Canyon Power Plant.

For the past few years, after Pacific Gas & Electric announced it would close Diablo Canyon when its final license ran out in 2025, the District has been preparing for a huge drop in its annual property tax revenues.

San Luis Coastal is a "basic aid" district, meaning it derives most of its revenues from local property taxes, Diablo Canyon being the largest single entity paying into the District.

The District put together a Blue Ribbon Committee to study the issue and the committee made its report to the District in 2017. Among the many recommendations to increase revenues, was to either maximize leasing potentials at the District's three, closed elementary schools or sell them as surplus property.

The closed schools are Morro Elementary in Morro

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City To Give Up Tourism Promotions

By Neil Farrell

They tried it their way and now the City of Morro Bay wants to return to a previous model for tourism promotions, as the coronavirus pandemic response opens a window to changing how marketing is done and by whom.

The City Council agreed with recommendations made by a special committee and the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) board, most importantly, to put the marketing efforts back under a private non-profit corporation and take it out of City Hall's bailiwick.

That's how the TBID promoted the City from the inception of the tourism marketing assessment district in 2009 until it was taken over by City Hall in 2016.

Back then, the City said it wanted tighter control over the messaging, the City's branding, and the types of promotions that were done. One of the first things it did was return to a City-copyrighted slogan — "Discover Your Better Nature."

In what was a controversial move, the City took control over the TBID assessment monies (3% tax on a room night), and created a Tourism Department under the City administration, hiring a full-time tourism director, Jennifer Little, plus a full-time and a part-time staffer.

It also contracted with Mental Marketing to coordinate the actual promotions — online, social media and traditional (print) media advertising.

The TBID board was relegated to an advisory function with the City Council making final decisions on budget and pro-

motional planning.

System Worked Before Takeover

Things had been going well, with transient occupancy taxes (10% of the cost of a room night) growing quickly, rising from some \$1.5 million a year, to nearly \$4 million in 2019.

The promotions helped moved TOT into second place on the City's tax revenues list ahead of sales taxes. Property taxes are still No. 1 on that list.

TOT has been the lone tax source that has shown good, steady growth over the past several years.

Goal was 'Heads in Beds'

TBID formed with the goal of increasing occupancy rates — putting "heads in beds" — and it has considerably, but occupancy has leveled off over the past couple of years.

Even so, TOT has increased annually, attributed more to motels charging more per night for rooms, than an increase in occupancy.

Last year, the Council voted to include so-called short-term rentals (vacation rentals), in the assessment district but held off on adding RV parks for now.

There have also been discussions about either adding restaurants and retail shops to the TBID through some fee arrangement, or creating a separate assessment district for these types of businesses?

One big question with this idea is should such an assessment district include all restaurants (and shops) be included, including those on North Main Street and

Tourism Promotions Continued on page 15

Helping Seniors Stay Connected at Home

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Caption: Volunteer Paul Wolff finishes new ADA Compliant handrails for member Susan Carleton. Photo submitted

While industries across the state are gradually reopening under new modifications, vulnerable members of the population are still cautioned to stay at home. Seniors are among that population.

Governor Gavin Newsom said in a recent press release unveiling the Blueprint for a Safer Economy, "Until an effective vaccine is distributed, Californians must wear a mask every time they're with people

outside their household. Residents must take activities outside and maintain distance even with loved ones who do not live with them. Californians must realize that the safest place to be is still at home. And the elderly and those with medical conditions should still stay away from others as much as possible."

For seniors that often means more separation from family members who don't

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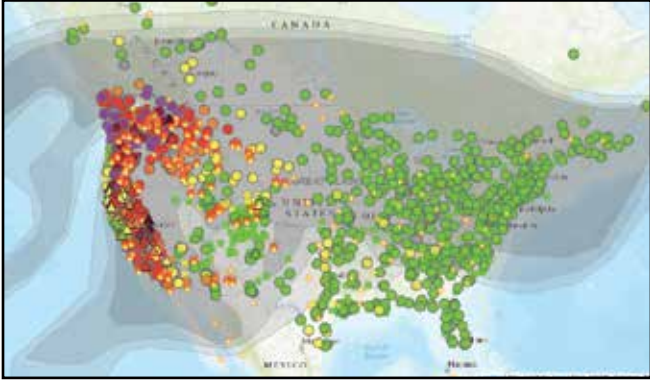
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Wildfires and Air Quality

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



A map from AirNow.gov shows the air quality ratings and the smoke plume across the United States on Sept. 15.

The smell of smoke in the air and hazy skies has become somewhat commonplace lately as a result of multiple wildfires blazing throughout California and parts of the Pacific Northwest. The impact on local air quality can change every day and even throughout the day.

“The past month in general we have experienced some of the worst air pollution we have seen in our area in some time,” said APCD Air Quality Specialist Meghan Field. “Morro Bay this week [beginning Sept. 13] experienced Very Unhealthy (purple on the AQI scale) on Monday and today moved into the Unhealthy (red) category. So while we are seeing some improvement, and expect to see more improvement this week, we are still being impacted from smoke from wildfires outside of our county.”

The negative impacts on local air quality will likely continue with the potential for a prolonged wildfire season, which, according to the Cal Fire website, is estimated to have increased by 75 days across the Sierras and seems to correspond with an increase in the extent of forest fires across the state.”

As of Sept. 22, the website lists 7,982 fires, 3,627,010 acres burned, 25 fatalities and 7101 structures destroyed so far this year. This year’s acres burned is 26 times higher than the acres burned in 2019 for the same time period.

Wildfires produce a range of harmful air pollutants, from known cancer-causing substances to tiny particles that can aggravate existing health problems and increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

APCD Recommendations

The APCD recommends checking its website at <https://www.slocleanair.org/air-quality/air-forecasting-map.php> daily to be aware of local conditions.

“On that website we have current conditions at our monitoring stations across the county as well as forecasted conditions for a 6 day period so people can see what we expect the week to hold,” Field said. “It’s important to remember though that smoke plumes can be unpredictable and can change rapidly, so it is important to check conditions regularly. When there are significant air quality events going on too, we keep our social media followers up to date as much as possible too. Lastly, we have a great resource called our AirAware text notification system. People can sign up to get alerts for various items, one being smoke impacts and the other being unhealthy air quality at <https://www.slocleanair.org/air-quality-alerts.php>.”

Generally, if you smell smoke or ash is visible in the air, County APCD officials recommend all adults and children avoid strenuous outdoor activity, remain indoors as much as possible, and set any heating/air conditioning/ventilation systems to recirculation. The public is advised to consult your doctor if you are experiencing health problems.

Very sensitive individuals such as infants, as well as children and adults with existing respiratory or heart conditions may experience adverse health effects on days that are orange on the color-coded map.

It is recommended that you avoid ash cleanup on cars and other materials until conditions improve. If you have to clean up ash, the following is recommended:

Use a damp cloth and spray areas lightly with water,

take your vehicle to the car wash; wash off toys that have been outside in the ash; clean ash off pets; due to the corrosive nature of ash, avoid any skin contact with the ash (wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts); and do not use leaf blowers.

Cloth masks will not adequately protect you from inhaling wildfire smoke. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cloth masks are encouraged to protect others from the liquid droplets that are expelled when we speak, cough or sneeze from going into the air. Residual spray when you speak produces larger droplets than the PM2.5 particles produced during wildfire events.

For a list of links to find out more information online, go to <https://bit.ly/3hJP9Gv>



A diagram depicting how to create a cleaner air space indoors provided by the California Air Resource Board.

Pets and Wildfire Smoke

Your pets can be affected by wildfire smoke. If you feel the effects of smoke, they probably do, too!

Smoke can irritate your pet’s eyes and respiratory tract. Animals with heart or lung disease and older pets are especially at risk from smoke and should be closely watched during all periods of poor air quality.

The EPA provides this information:

Smoke can irritate your pet’s eyes and respiratory tract. Animals with heart or lung disease and older pets are especially at risk from smoke and should be closely watched during all periods of poor air quality.

- Coughing or gagging
- Red watery eyes, nasal discharge, inflammation of throat or mouth or reluctance to eat hard foods
- Trouble breathing, including open-mouth breathing, more noise when breathing
- Fatigue or weakness, disorientation, uneven gait, stumbling
- Reduced appetite or thirst

Recommended Actions

When smoke is present:

Keep pets indoors as much as you can, with doors and windows closed. Bring outdoor pets into a room with good ventilation.

Smoke is especially tough on birds. Keep them inside when smoke is present.

Keep indoor air clean: do not fry or broil foods, vacuum, burn candles, use a fireplace or woodstove, or smoke tobacco products. These activities add particles to your home.

Spend less time outdoors and limit physical activities when it is smoky. For example, when it’s smoky, it’s not a good time for you and your pet to go for a run. Let dogs and cats outside only for brief bathroom breaks if air quality alerts are in effect.

Be ready to evacuate: Include your pets in your planning. Have each pet permanently identified, for example with a microchip. Know where they will be allowed to go if



Pets are impacted by air quality and should be watched. Photo by Theresa-Marie Wilson

there is an evacuation – not all emergency shelters accept pets. Know where your pets might hide when stressed, so you won’t have to spend time looking for them in an emergency. Get pets used to their carriers and have your family practice evacuating with your pets. Covering carriers with sheet during transport may calm a nervous pet.

If you must leave your pet behind, never tie them up.

Get more tips and information on caring for pets and livestock during wildfires via the American Veterinary Medical Association.

City Supports Green Stormwater Basins

By Neil Farrell



Rendering shows a long row of colorful vegetation growing in a bioretention stormwater basin being proposed for the Morro Rock parking lot.

The City of Morro Bay has thrown its support behind an effort to install storm-water runoff, catch basins in the Morro Rock parking lot, a project being led by a non-profit surfing organization.

The City Council signed a letter of support for the Surfrider Foundation in its efforts to secure State grants through the “California Coastal Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project” to install so-called “bioretention” systems (underground catch basins) in parking lots at four popular California surf spots — Morro Rock, Rincon Point, Malibu Beach, and Huntington Beach — from the Ocean Protection Council or OPC, using funding from Proposition 68, the Coastal Resilience Act.

The passive systems use natural elements like soil types and plants to filter rain runoff before it reaches the ocean

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The rendering shows a preliminary layout for linear, bioretention, stormwater catch basins that are being proposed for the Morro Rock parking lot. Renderings courtesy City of Morro Bay

where Surfrider's members ride the waves. A similar system was recently installed on the Embarcadero just north of Tidelands Park.

"The priority issue area for this round of Proposition 68 funding," reads a staff report from the City's Environmental Programs Manager, Damaris Hanson, "is coastal resiliency and nature-based adaptation strategies to address sea level rise impacts."

City staff has been meeting with the project team, headed up by Daniel Apt, president of Olaunu, to get Morro Bay included in his project to install so-called "bioretention systems" that collect and clean rain runoff before it enters the ocean.

"The primary purpose of this project," the report said, "is to reduce polluted storm-water runoff, to protect the ocean, waves, and beaches in California and educate surfers and the public about green, stormwater infrastructure."

Apt's team would pursue and manage the grants, if they are awarded, and oversee "construction and inspections, host commissioning/education events, and conduct water quality monitoring and operation and maintenance for the first 3 years of the project."

Nothing about the project has gone beyond the "conceptual" phase, Hanson told Estero Bay News, but they do have a preliminary cost estimate of \$700,000, "but again, the project scope and cost estimate are only in concept design."

She noted that the grant program does not require a City match. Most grant programs do require as much as 25% matching funds but that can be in the form of staff time and effort getting a project permitted and built as well as managing the grant.

The project will have three, linear, underground

storm-water retention basins with the longest running just inside the City's line of large rocks that delineate the parking area from a walkway at the lip of the riprap. In renderings included with the agenda item, the retention basin is shown as a long strip of greenery with flowers and other plants.

"The design includes re-grading and compaction of decomposed granite, directing the surface water to the bioretention areas where the water will be treated, and pollutants removed."

Morro Rock parking lot, the largest seaside parking lot in SLO County, is dirt with no storm drainage at all. Rain-water tends to gather in the many sinkholes that develop as soil sinks in between the rocks below the surface.

The City has contemplated many times paving the lot but there's really no underlying road base to support the asphalt.

Hanson acknowledged there could be some issues with the underlying substrate below the parking lot's dirt surface. "Because this project is in concept design," she explained, "the underlying substrate has not yet been fully vetted. Most likely the bioretention design will have an under drain because of the underlying materials."

Now, the City dumps fill dirt and grades the lot smooth a couple of times a year, but it soon sinks again forming a landscape that mirrors the moon and its many craters. It makes for challenging driving.

The project won't be vetted locally, as the State has jurisdiction.

Hanson confirmed that the project will need a coastal development permit and because the site is in the Coastal Commission's "original jurisdiction" the Commission will handle the CDP issue, and Olaunu and Surfrider will be responsible for the paperwork.

The Harbor Department this summer has done quite a bit to try and bring some order to what has traditionally been somewhat of a chaotic mess. The department chalked in lines to delineate parking rows and spaces, and created a layout for parking, and also recently set out cement blocks and anchor chains to direct cars entering the lot and moving the exits further west.

The City doesn't have to do much with the project. "As part of support for the project the City of Morro Bay will commit to collaboration with the Surfrider Foundation and the Olaunu Team on the project including providing review and input on planning and design, educational signage and the operation and maintenance plan; attendance to inspections and training performed by the Olaunu Team and the ribbon cutting event lead by the Surfrider Foundation; and ongoing coordination during the project."

"Additionally, the City commits to assuming the operations and maintenance of the bioretention system after 3 years of operation and maintenance performed by

the Olaunu Team and the Surfrider Foundation." No City monies are needed for the grant program.

If all goes well, the OPC's grant schedule is: Letters of intent due Sept. 14; application review and evaluation from Sept. 14-Oct. 1; selection of applicants to submit full proposals Oct. 2-Nov. 13; and review and evaluations of applications Nov. 16-Jan. 1, 2021.

From Jan. 4-Feb. 5, 2021 the OPC will do interviews and conduct site visits, and eventually make recommendations to the OPC board sometime next February, with grant awards expected sometime next Spring.

County Focus Turns to Suicide Prevention

By Neil Farrell



San Luis Obispo County Health Officials continue to fight the coronavirus pandemic with new confirmed cases continuing to build but slowing somewhat; and making a shift in focus to mental health issues during September, which is "National Suicide Prevention Month."

At a Sept. 15 news briefing, County Suicide Prevention Coordinator, Alysia Hendry, said, "It is a time to collectively acknowledge that suicide is a leading cause of death in our country and in our county, and also a time to honor those we have lost to suicide, along with their friends and families, and everyone who faces the challenge of waking up every day, living with the pain that sometimes makes this world seemingly unbearable."

Hendry, who is co-chair of the Suicide Prevention Council added, "San Luis Obispo County has had its fair share of difficult times in recent months. And while we wish there was a secret recipe or magical pill that could resolve these challenges, we remain hopeful that our

Suicide Prevention Continued on page 4

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community will prove to be resilient as we navigate these difficult times together. It is true that we do not know the lasting economic, social and emotional effects that will be felt across the county in the months and years to come.”

Meghan Boaz Alvarez, clinical director at Transitions-Mental Health Association and co-chair of the Suicide Prevention Council, said, “Individuals with mental health issues may have a harder time than usual, and people without any underlying mental health conditions might be finding themselves struggling with depression, anxiety, or even just the effects of the ongoing isolation and disconnection from family and friends.”

Many people are struggling with depression, she said, anxiety, and the effects of the COVID-19 shelter-at-home orders. “Depression, anxiety, drug or alcohol problems,” Boaz Alvarez said, “all of these things can be warning signs of suicide, but it’s also important to remember that individuals who don’t have any of those problems can be at risk. Any one of us can reach a point where our resources are tapped and our ability to cope is just stretched too thin.”

Look for Signs in Others

Boaz Alvarez urged people to look for signs in the behaviors of others, from feelings of hopelessness, to statements like, “My family would be better off without me,” are clear evidence that someone could be going through a hard time.

“Usually we tell people to look for withdrawal from family and friends and isolation, discontinuing usual activities,” Boaz Alvarez said. “I feel like that’s a tough one to assess for right now, because most of us are a little disconnected from our family and friends and usual activities. So what I would say about that is pay attention to those who are close to you. Look for signs of disconnection.”

Changes in mood or behavior, anger and irritability are also signs of concern. She urged people to speak up, ask how a person you have concerns about is doing? Show concern.

“We know from our interviews with suicide attempt survivors,” she said, “that on the day that they made their attempt, if somebody had said, ‘Hey, are you doing okay?’ or reached out to them, it might’ve changed the outcome. And that simple act is something that anyone of us can do.”

Transitions will be started a couple of new programs soon to bridge some of the gap from the needs to the available resources for people in crisis — a therapy clinic offering short-term counseling at now cost; and a support program through texting.

County Public Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein, said, “we in public health and myself are acutely aware that there’s a lot more going on in the world than the communicable disease or the virus that transmits known as COVID and all the impacts. And along with that, to talk about suicide prevention is incredibly important as it relates to this disease and our community in general.”

In the latest COVID stats, as of Sept. 21, the County reported 3,438 confirmed cases since the pandemic hit in March. Some 3,177 people have fully recovered. There were 218 people with the virus recovering at home and 13 people in the hospital, with five in intensive care units. Virus deaths have to reach 27.

Of the cases, 24.99 % were attributed to community spread, and there were 289 cases reported among the inmates and staff at CMC.

Thus far, 184 people have been hospitalized county-wide, 38 have gone into ICUs. According to the County, there were 369 hospital beds available and 53 ICU beds.

“We have under 200 people who’ve been there for a number of days,” Dr. Borenstein said, “who are considered active cases and able to transmit in the community setting who are among those who are recovering at home.”

Cases by city are: Paso Robles with 820; SLO-581; Atascadero-363; Nipomo-338; CMC 289; Arroyo Grande-214; Grover Beach-158; Templeton-127; San Miguel-117; Oceano-105; Los Osos-56; Pismo Beach-63; Morro Bay-55; Cambria-34; Shandon-43; Santa Margarita-31; Cayucos-17; Creston-15; and San Simeon-six.

Finally Some Good News County Moves to Red Tier

(The following information was released minutes before press time)

County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein confirmed today that more

San Luis Obispo County businesses can reopen indoor operations with modifications and capacity limits — per the State’s tiered, color-coded Blueprint for a Safer Economy — but warns of a potential backslide as new COVID-19 cases spike this week.

On September 22, SLO County met the State’s red tier case rate and positivity rate criteria for two consecutive weeks. As a result, the risk of COVID-19 in SLO County has been downgraded from widespread to substantial, and SLO County can now move from the purple tier, the most restrictive tier — to the red tier effective immediately.

“While we celebrate this small success, we must stay

vigilant,” Dr. Borenstein added. “Our progress depends on each person in SLO County. We need everyone to do their part to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.”

The State’s Blueprint allows counties in the red tier to reopen indoor operations for some additional business sectors and allows for certain activities to resume. Local businesses must follow all State guidance for their industry and self-certify that they are ready to reopen.

“Outdoor operations remain the safest environment to slow the spread of COVID-19 and should be supported whenever feasible,” Dr. Borenstein said. “If we see an increase in the spread of COVID-19 here, we will move back to purple and most indoor operations will close again very soon.”

Recent case investigations have identified cases spread between different households at gatherings. The nature of these gatherings (bringing together people from multiple households for a prolonged time, often indoors or with shared food and beverages) creates the perfect environment for COVID-19 to spread easily and quickly.

What about the rest of society? What will happen with things like recreation classes and organized sports? So life back to normal is when we get out of the tiers entirely. “So even in the least restrictive tier, yellow,” she explained, “we’re still not talking about big concert venues, we’re still not talking about parades, we’re still not talking about large weddings. So it’s a step back toward where we had been, but we still have a long way to go.”

She added that “normal” life might not return for 6 months, a year or maybe even longer, depending on when a vaccine is developed and wide spread. She also fears a

Activity	Red Tier	Purple Tier	Yellow Tier	Orange Tier
Alcohol consumption	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Animal care	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Arts and entertainment	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Business operations	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Child care	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Construction	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Education	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Employment	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Food and beverage	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Government	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Health care	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Home care	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Hotels and lodging	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Manufacturing	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Media and communications	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Non-profit	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Personal services	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Professional services	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Real estate	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Religious	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Retail	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Transportation	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Utilities	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Workplaces	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed

recurrence of the disease, as has been seen in Europe. “This county has been relatively spared all of that drama and trauma, but it is a communicable disease,” she said. “We still remain at risk if we were to let our guard down, so I’m constantly thanking our community for doing all that they are, saying that there is more that we can do so we can get our case numbers down.”

“I often get asked, are we ever going to get back to life as we know it?” she said. “I do believe that is the case, but we need to be patient and we need to reach out to our friends in different ways to make sure that we feel safe and secure and happy in this new form of life for the foreseeable future.”

If readers are interested in getting tested for COVID, they can go online to: readyslo.org for a list of community testing location, and can also get tested at local clinics and Urgent Care facilities.

A pop-up testing site in Morro Bay has closed and moved to the Atascadero Lake Park Pavilion. A testing site is also set up at the SLO Vet’s Hall on Grand Avenue off Monterey Street.

To see the full chart, go to: <http://esterobaynews.com/county-focus-turns-to-suicide-prevention/>

Froom Ranch Mixed Use Project Plan Approved



The recently approved the Froom Ranch Specific Plan

Close to 600 new homes could be built as part of a project off Los Osos Valley Road. The San Luis Obispo City Council recently approved

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News

the Froom Ranch Specific Plan that will guide the future of development on the 43.5 acres of the 109.7-acre Froom Ranch property located off Los Osos Valley Road, south of The Home Depot across from the multiple car lots.

The Froom Ranch Plan proposes a mix of land uses, including up to 404 units of independent and assisted senior housing in a Life Plan Community known as Villaggio at San Luis Obispo. The remaining portion of the site would include up to 174 multi-family residential units, 30,000 square feet of neighborhood commercial uses, and a hotel in addition to open space preservation, and a public trail-head park. The project was reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission on August 12.

The project also proposes to relocate, rehabilitate, and adaptively reuse four historic structures within the Froom Ranch Dairy Complex to the new public trailhead park, including the Main Residence, Creamery/House, Dairy (Round-Nose) Barn, and Granary.

In addition, City Council directed the developer of the project, John M. Madonna, to incorporate the following conditions into the project:

1. Include at least one area for active recreation in the Madonna Froom Ranch portion of the project;
2. Include an interconnected network of pedestrian paths in the Villaggio area that connect to the public sidewalks and Froom Ranch trail;
3. Provide additional design guidance for multi-family housing above the 150-foot elevation line to be sensitive to historic resources in the area, with a farmhouse vernacular architectural style; and
4. No portion of Villaggio would be located above the 150-foot elevation, and the entire Upper Terrace would be zoned Conservation/Open Space.

The project has undergone multiple additional advisory body reviews, including two early pre-application reviews in 2016; three conceptual reviews in 2017 and 2018; five advisory body reviews during circulation of the Draft EIR in 2019; review by the Airport Land Use Commission in July 2020; and review by the Cultural Heritage Committee in July 2020. Now that the Specific Plan has been adopted, annexation and development applications for land within the Specific Plan area are possible.

Construction could start in about two years.

Chamber Sponsors Virtual Forums

Morro Bay voters will have a chance to see their candidates for City Council answer questions from the public at two virtual forums sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.

The first virtual event is set for 5:20 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 24 and is free for Chamber of Commerce members, and \$8 for non-members. See: www.eventbrite.com/e/meet-the-candidates-tickets-120661952147 to register and to buy tickets.

A second virtual forum, this one free to the public, is set for 5:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 28 and will be moderated by the League of Women Voters. It will be broadcast on Charter Cable Ch. 20, and streamed online at: slo-span.org.

Voters can email questions for the candidates to: info@lwslo.org with the deadline set for 5 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25.

The forum will be archived on slo-span.org for on-demand viewing, with special thanks to AGP Video.

The Chamber of Commerce has also posted an online Q&A with four general questions focusing on the business community's concerns. See: www.morrochamber.org/2020-candidates-for-local-office to access that information.

Voters should be getting ballots in the mail the first week of October and voting this year will be over 4 days — from Halloween (Oct. 31) through Tuesday, Nov. 3.

The lone polling place in Morro Bay is slated to be up at the Community Center to cast ballots in person, and an election drop box is supposed to be set up at City Hall. Ballots can also be mailed in through the Post Office.

Power Company Changes Name



A community energy company that supplies electricity to over 30 cities and counties has changed its name, the company said, to better reflect their customers and service territory.

The "Monterey Bay Community Power" changed its name to "Central Coast Community Energy" (CCCE), the company announced on Sept. 4.

"This new name," reads a news release from CCCE, "reflects the expanded service use area now covering 33 communities, including additional communities in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, as well as Del Rey Oaks in Monterey County starting in early 2021.

"These communities join their existing service area in Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. This will unify access to clean energy and local control for over 400,000 residential, commercial and agricultural customers on the Central Coast."

Monterey Bay Community Power formed in February 2017 in Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties and most of their incorporated cities, too.

Morro Bay and the City of San Luis Obispo both joined in December 2018 after their city councils voted to switch electricity providers within their borders. The switchover actually happened in January 2019.

Switching from Pacific Gas & Electric to Monterey Bay Community Power was touted as a way to support and encourage development of clean energy technologies and savings over what utility companies charge. The company also vowed to use profits to fund energy projects and grant programs.

The community power company essentially acts as a middleman, buying non-greenhouse gas emitting energy sources (hydro, geothermal, wind and solar) and transmitting it via PG&E's wires to customers. PG&E charges for the service that is paid for by customers.

In December 2019, the County of Santa Barbara and the cities of Del Rey Oaks, Paso Robles, Pismo Beach, Grover Beach, Arroyo Grande, Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Goleta, Carpinteria, and Solvang joined the association.

CCCE will take over in those cities and rural Santa Barbara County in January 2021. And local customers will start seeing the CCCE name in October and November, the company said.

With the name change, there's a new web address for the non-profit company, see: 3Cenergy.org.

City Pays \$500,000 for WRF Easement

By Neil Farrell

The City of Morro Bay has reached a deal on a permanent easement and greater access to the site of its new sewer treatment plant, and also agreed to help the property owners change their land into a denser residential zoning.

In early July, the City Council approved a "Purchase and Sale Agreement for Permanent and Temporary Easements" with a group of people who share ownership in a 44-acre parcel adjacent to the Water Reclamation Facility (WRF), being built now on a site above the terminus of South Bay Boulevard.

The City will pay \$495,000 (plus closing costs of \$5,000) for the easements, which a staff report said address an access problem the City has known about for some time.

"The City purchased a site for the WRF," said a report by the City Attorney, Chris Neumeyer, "which did not have direct and adequate access from the nearest street. In

addition, the City needed additional space for access for construction of the WRF and for a construction staging area."

Of interest, the City purchased the 27.5-acre plant site for \$325,100.

Part of the need for the easement results from a landslide that has forced the City to seek a larger area to store dirt.

Last November, the City entered into a "Right-of-Entry Agreement" with the owners of the property that gave the City adequate access to the site. Meanwhile, the parties continued to negotiate and the project got underway earlier this year.

That temporary agreement cost the City \$178,500 and was for 10 months. The \$178,500 is included in the overall \$495,000 price, according to the report; so the City agreed to pay an additional \$316,500 to seal the deal.

Had they not reached agreement, the City said it was prepared to go to court under eminent domain.

The purchase price includes compensation "for the impact of the easements and the WRF project on the value of the remaining property," Neumeyer's report stated.

The agreement includes a vow by the City to support a zoning change.

"As was also provided in the Right-of-Entry Agreement," the report reads, "the City agrees to cooperate with the property owners in processing and considering a zone change application from the existing Suburban Residential/Planned Development Overlay (R-A/PD) to a more dense zoning, including, but not limited to, Multiple-family residential (R-3) for the approximately 44-acre parcel."

Asked if such a change would be through the County or City, or if the plan was to eventually annex that property, City Manager Scott Collins said the agreement included, "discussion of facilitating the process to increase density on the remaining portion of that small easement [not to be confused with the Tri-W site]," Collins explained. "That portion of property is within the City if I am not mistaken. We have not discussed annexation for a while, that could come up in the future once we have completed the project."

Previously, the City had carved out a 27.3-acre parcel for the plant site from a larger property, agreeing to support having the property brought under the City's sphere of influence, as it was before 2007. Fears in town are that the owners could try to be annexed and then subdivide the pastoral hillsides that border the city.

The project's \$1.28 million "property acquisition budget" would cover the costs for the easements, according to the staff report. And Collins said, "The purchase price is accounted for in the original budget estimate for the project."

The City is under orders from the Regional Water Quality Control Board to reach full secondary treatment — essentially to finish the new sewer treatment system — by February 2023. "Failure to comply by the deadline would result in the City being subject to substantial fines and penalties," according to Neumeyer.

Grant Sought for Drug Treatment Program

San Luis Obispo County is applying for a nearly \$1 million grant to help fight the abuse of opioids and illegal stimulants, with a beefed-up in-house and outpatient counseling program.

The County Behavioral Health Department is seeking a "Comprehensive Opioid Stimulant and Substance Abuse Site Based Program" (COSSAP) grant for \$900,000 covering a 3-year period from Oct. 1, 2020 through Sept. 30, 2023 (\$300,000 per year).

The County Health Agency found out about the grant program in early May and applied for it right away, as the deadline was May 22. That meant because of the quick deadline, the agency had to go before Supervisors Sept. 1, for post-approval of the application they'd already sent in.

If the County gets the grant, "the funds will support the department's capacity to provide peer recovery support

Treatment Program Continued on page 6



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News

Treatment Program From page 5

services to an estimated 200 individuals suffering from opiate use and stimulant use disorders,” reads a staff report. “The target population is adults who have both opiate use disorder and stimulant use disorder, primarily methamphetamine, who are at high-risk for overdose.”

SLO County has in recent years, seen an explosion of methamphetamine and opioid use, in particular heroin, and the ills of drug addiction exacerbate some of the county’s other problems, like a lack of affordable housing.

“San Luis Obispo County is one of the least affordable housing markets in the nation,” the County report said.

“The department proposes providing recovery support services in the form of a Recovery Residence stays [drug and alcohol-free living] to all COSSAP participants in San Luis Obispo County who need this level of care.

“All recovery residences provided funding with this grant will be Medication Assisted Treatment [MAT] compliant in order to serve those with opiate use disorders.”

If they get the money, the County plans to hire one, limited time, “Behavioral Health Clinician III [licensed practitioner of the healing arts] to conduct assessments for residents leaving emergency rooms in San Luis Obispo County after an overdose. It would also support additional Recovery Residence funding for the existing law enforcement Community Action Teams who pick up individuals for early intervention in the community; and funding to aid those who are arrested, cited and released from the County Jail for drug offenses.”

The County will also hire a “Peer Recovery Coach” to work with participants and manager of the housing facilities. “This position would provide important peer support including modeling hope and recovery, mentoring, engagement and community networking support that has previously not been available from the agency,” according to the County.

The program’s goal is to turn people’s lives around. “Participants in the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Site-based Program,” the report said, “will have achieved and sustained a lifestyle of sobriety and recovery, including learning skills to better manage their lives.

“There will be decreased criminal recidivism, decreased impact on the criminal justice and behavioral health care systems, and re-stabilized lives, which will contribute to the County vision of a safe and healthy community.”

Modesto Man Arrested for Human Trafficking



Anthony Richardson Gaines

The County Sheriff’s Office busted a Modesto man on suspicion of human trafficking after they rescued a pregnant, 31-year-old woman who was being pimped locally.

According to Sheriff’s Spokesman, Tony Cipolla, on Aug. 18 investigators with the Sheriff’s Counter Human Trafficking Team “conducted a proactive operation to rescue a potential human trafficking victim. The victim was pregnant, commercially sexually exploited, and controlled by a trafficker. Through an undercover prostitution sting the female was contacted and a male counterpart was identified.”

The suspect, identified as Anthony Richardson Gaines, 33 of Modesto, Calif., was released from custody due to the State’s no-bail policy, the need for follow-up investigations, and COVID-19 concerns.

“After a follow-up investigation,” Cipolla said, “the Counter Human Trafficking investigators were able to secure an arrest warrant for Richardson Gaines for the crimes of human trafficking, pimping, and a prison prior enhancement.”

On Aug. 18, with the assistance of the Modesto Police Department Investigations Division and the non-profit organization DeliverFund, Cipolla said Richardson Gaines was arrested in Modesto and was extradited and booked into the SLO County Jail.

The human trafficking squad is a new and unique operation. “The Sheriff’s Counter Human Trafficking Team,” Cipolla said, “is a partnership between the Sheriff’s Special Operations Unit, the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney’s Office Bureau of Investigations and the District Attorney’s Victim Witness Division.”

The Team, he added, “primarily targets victims of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Counter Human Trafficking Team has been operational since January 2020 and has focused its attention on proactively targeting traffickers who sexually exploit victims, sex purchasers who drive demand, and providing resources to the victims of exploitation.”

The Counter Human Trafficking Team also trains law enforcement and a wide variety of community partners.

Poly Earns Best Awards in U.S. News & World Report

For the 28th straight year, Cal Poly has been named the best public, master’s-level university in the West by U.S. News & World Report’s annual America’s Best Colleges guidebook.

The 2021 guide, released Sept. 14, provides data on more than 1,800 colleges and universities and rankings for more than 1,400 institutions. It lists Cal Poly in third overall in the West — up one from last year and an improvement of nine spots from 2019’s rankings.

In addition, several College of Engineering programs were ranked as the best in the nation among public educational institutions, and Cal Poly was ranked as the top western school for veterans among public and private institu-



Cal Poly ranked “best” in several categories of the annual U.S. News & World Report.

tions that participate in federal initiatives helping veterans and active-duty service members pay for their degrees.

The Western regional list includes public and private institutions in 15 states that provide “a full range of undergraduate and master’s-level programs but few doctoral programs.” (Universities that grant doctoral degrees, such as those in the University of California system, are listed in a separate category.)

Cal Poly placed highly in several additional rankings for regional universities, including:

- Repeating as best Top Public Schools in the Western U.S. among institutions that operate under the supervision of state governments and funded, in part, by tax dollars and state subsidies. These universities often offer discounted tuition to residents of their states.

- Tied for first (with Evergreen State College, a public liberal arts and sciences college of about 3,000 students in Olympia, Washington) for Most Innovative Schools — institutions that are making the most innovative improvements in terms of curriculum, faculty, students, campus life, technology or facilities.

- Best in the West (up from second last year and an improvement from sixth-place two years ago) for most veteran-friendly universities — a listing that shows the top-ranked schools that participate in federal initiatives helping veterans and active-duty service members pay for their degrees.

- Ranked as best public university in the West — and second overall behind Mills College, a small private liberal arts and sciences college in Oakland, California — for undergraduate teaching program.

- Once again ranked eighth on the list of best master’s/bachelor’s engineering programs in the nation — the fourth-best public university and top public California university on the list. Among specialty programs, Cal Poly’s industrial/manufacturing program was ranked No. 1; aerospace/aeronautical/astronautical engineering, computer engineering, civil engineering and electrical/electronic/communications all ranked No. 2; mechanical engineering and biomedical engineering ranked at No. 3. In each specialty program, Cal Poly was the best public university in the U.S.

Ranked in the top 100 (tied at 96th) in the Top Performers on Social Mobility category among western schools that “advance social mobility” by enrolling and graduating large proportions of disadvantaged students awarded with Pell Grants. The bulk of these federal grants are awarded to students whose adjusted gross family incomes are under \$50,000.

The U.S. News rankings methodology focuses on academic excellence, with schools evaluated on hundreds of data points and measures of academic quality, such as graduation and freshman retention rates. The first edition of the rankings was released in 1983, and they have continued to evolve with more schools and data points for college-bound students to consider.

This year’s rankings data predate the coronavirus pandemic, so the impact of COVID-19 on higher education is not reflected in how schools performed overall.



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News Briefs

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Last Days to Take Census

Census field workers have come and gone, but the deadline to respond to the 2020 U.S. Census online or by phone is September 30.

It is critical that County residents self-respond to the 2020 Census as soon as possible. Residents can complete the Census in less than 10 minutes online at my2020census.gov or by calling 844-330-2020.

Participation in the Census helps ensure fair and equitable representation in government, as well as funding to provide services to residents, including health and human services, transportation projects, schools and emergency services such as the County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Census data can also help boost the local economy, as companies use the information to decide where to open new locations. Residents who have questions about the Census or would like assistance with responding to the Census may call the County's Census Questionnaire phone line at 805-781-5011. Assistance in English and Spanish is available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Wednesdays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Hospitals Receive Perfect Scores in LGBTQ+ Health Care Equality

Two SLO County Hospitals received perfect scores for embracing and adopting LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices.

Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center in San Luis Obispo and Twin Cities Community Hospital in Templeton completed an assessment by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

In the Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) 2020, 495 healthcare facilities achieved a top score of 100 and earned the coveted "Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality" designation.

Participants are assessed on four criteria: non-discrimination and staff training, patient services and support, employee benefits and policies, and patient and community engagement.

In its 13th year, the (HEI) is the national LGBTQ benchmarking tool that evaluates healthcare facilities' policies and practices related to the equity and inclusion of their LGBTQ patients, visitors and employees. The HEI 2020 evaluates more than 1,700 healthcare facilities nationwide.

Virtual Fashion Show Fundraiser to Stop Domestic Violence

A virtual fashion show fundraiser to stop domestic violence and increase safe dating awareness takes place



October 17 starting at 9:30 a.m. on Zoom.

Founded in 2015, the SLO County based Fashions for a Purpose has raised over \$100,000 to support victims of all forms of domestic violence. Their goal is to raise \$20,020 in 2020 to

This event features Fashions presented by Amy Curti Independent cabi Stylist, a live auction, speakers, and a cash reward.

Tickets range in price from \$25 to \$75 and can be purchased at my805tix.com under Fashions for a Purpose.

For more information call (805) 929-5282, or email FFAP805@att.net or visit our website www.fashionsforapurpose.org or see us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/events/1743784282427303/

County Democratic Party Recommends Shah for Board of Supes

The San Luis Obispo County Democratic Party (SLOCDP) Central Committee voted unanimously to recommend that Governor Newsom appoint Grover Beach Councilwoman Mariam Shah to fill the vacant District 3 seat on the County Board of Supervisors.

In late August, SLOCDP began conducting a series of interviews with the six SLO County Democrats that sought SLOCDP's recommendation: Erica Baltodano,

Dawn Ortiz-Legg, Peg Pinard, Mariam Shah, Erica Stewart and Kara Woodruff.

"We are so impressed by the courage, commitment and generosity of the extraordinary six women who stepped forward and volunteered to serve our County as a member of the SLO Board of Supervisors," noted SLOCDP Chair Rita Casaverde. "After carefully evaluating all of the self-nominated candidates on their expertise, experience, energy, enthusiasm and electability -- and after consulting with our neighbors in District 3 and across the County -- Mariam Shah stood out. We believe that the transparency and thoroughness of our recommendation process will provide the governor the insights needed to help him make his decision."

Mariam Shah, a life-long Democrat, was first elected to the Grover Beach City Council in 2014, and re-elected in 2018. A graduate of the Georgetown University Law Center, she and her husband Asad Shah, a physician, have two children.

Morro Bay Classic Canceled



Chris Bath of Morro Bay battles with David Baker of Santa Maria in the 2019 Morro Bay Skateboard Classic. Photo by Mariah Fluitt

The annual Morro Bay Skateboard Classic race, held in downtown Morro Bay each year during the Harbor Festival, is cancelled for 2020.

Due to ongoing restrictions on public gatherings and an abundance of caution surrounding COVID-19 cases in SLO County, organizers of the race, Gary Fluitt and Jack Smith have cancelled the October race.

"After discussing it with the City and racers who were needing to make travel plans, we decided it would be best to cancel the event and set our sights on 2021," said Gary Fluitt. "We're going to miss having our friends in town for that weekend, but it's not looking good for our county at the moment and October is going to be here before you know it."

Send your news, community and business briefs to Editor@EsteroBayNews.com. Be sure to include the who, what, why, where and when information along with a contact person.

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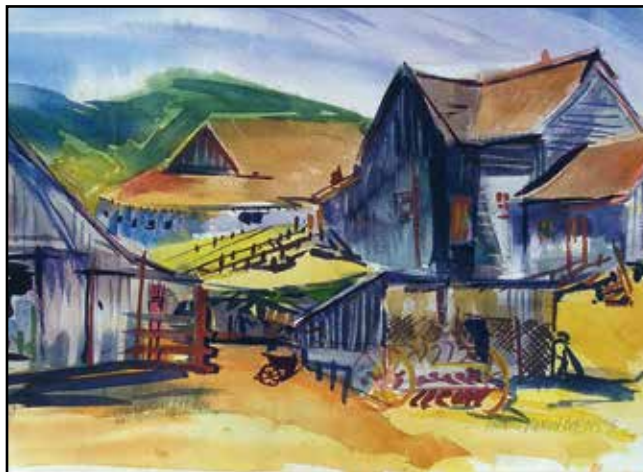
Police Blotter



Morro Bay Police Logs

- **Sept. 6:** Police responded to a reported assault at 8:25 p.m. at some undisclosed location. They encountered a suspicious man walking down the street and arrested the apparent scamboogah, 25, for suspicion of domestic violence and vandalizing a vehicle.
- **Sept. 6:** A citizen told police he or she had their Apple iPhone stolen somewhere on the Embarcadero, no doubt a victim of the tourist tax.
- **Sept. 6:** Police responded to a domestic disturbance at 1:19 a.m. in the 2100 block of Ironwood. Logs indicated officers tracked their slippery suspect down in Los Osos and arrested the 40-year-old bounder for suspicion of burglary, vandalism, domestic violence and making terrorist threats. He chilled off in the cooler.
- **Sept. 5:** Police were called to deal with an apparently disturbing fellow at 8:47 p.m. in the 800 block of Embarcadero. A 37-year-old raucous imbiber was nicked for suspicion of flapping-out in public.
- **Sept. 5:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 5:15 p.m. in the 900 block of Morro Bay Boulevard and arrested the 48-year-old driver for suspicion of driving on a bender in the Roundabout.
- **Sept. 5:** Police responded to Bonita Street where they arrested a scofflaw for violating a court order to stay away from an elderly woman he's accused of abusing.
- **Sept. 5:** Police responded at 9:40 a.m. to a couple in the 300 block of Surf. Logs indicated they arrested a woman, 44, for suspicion of possessing drug paraphernalia and being schwasted. A man, 55, went along for the ride charged with suspicion of UTI.
- **Sept. 4:** Police contacted a suspicious man bustin'-a-fooligan at 7:12 p.m. at Tidelands Park. The dingus, 45, was nicked for suspicion of possessing and abusing illegal drugs.
- **Sept. 4:** Police responded to the 3100 block of Main for a Morro Bay felony — a woman found a dead cat in her trashcan in this week's example of why we need SWAT.
- **Sept. 4:** Police responded to Miner's Hardware to investigate the fraudulent use of a credit card by some swindler.
- **Sept. 4:** Police and fire responded at 12:34 p.m. to the intersection of Quintana and Kennedy Way for a 3-car pileup. No word on the extent of the carnage.
- **Sept. 4:** Police responded at 10:40 a.m. to a disturbance in the 300 block of Surf. Logs indicated they arrested a 49-year-old man for suspicion of having drug paraphernalia, disturbing the peace, and of course a bench warrant. He was transported to County Jail for a trip through the revolving doors.
- **Sept. 4:** At 9:30 a.m. police contacted a familiar foe with a bench warrant at Lila Keiser Park and scooped the 49-year-old fellow up in a dragnet.

Community



FROOM RANCH. San Luis Obispo

It's hard to believe the Froom Ranch will change dramatically when an independent and assisted living senior housing project will be built against the Irish Hills within the next few years. I painted on the ranch many times with the Thursday Painters, and became acquainted with Bill Froom, who was a great recontour, and enjoyed having the class paint on his ranch. He knew many of the older students.

Bill said his father, John, lived in the creamery and worked on the ranch 31 years before he married Harriet Perry in 1902. She came from Ireland and worked for the Welsh family on Clark Valley Road.

When Bill's father died in 1929, Bill, who was one of five children, took over the cattle ranch. It was during the Depression years and he remembered getting 15 cents an hour working for his neighbors.

Bill was very proud of his family ranch and over the years he gave tours to Cal Poly students. When Maggie Jorgensen and I were given a private tour, Bill took us through all of the buildings explaining when they were built and what they were used for. He said in the 20s and 30s men who worked on the ranches lived on them too. He said Jim Aiken built the round barn (background of painting) for \$1500 in 1902 that included materials and labor.

He later related to me that when he could no longer pay the taxes on the 500-acre ranch, Alex Madonna bought the ranch and established the foot hold as we know it today.

Reference: *Touring The Froom Ranch by Joan Sullivan.*

Visitation Restrictions Lifted at Skilled Nursing Facilities

SLO County is lifting the local executive order restricting visitors at skilled nursing facilities that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic.

However, County public health officials agree with the State's visitor limitation guidance that our local skilled nursing facilities allow only one visitor with the patient at a time.

The order took effect on June 5 and was intended to protect SLO County community members who are most vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illness.

"Visitors are an essential part of patient care and recovery and play an important role in the mental well-being of patients at skilled nursing facilities," said County Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. "Please do not visit if you have any COVID-19 symptoms or suspect that you have the virus or have been exposed to it recently. You may even want to get tested before you visit, as an added precaution. Please also follow all of the facility's instructions on personal protective equipment and health screenings."

All skilled nursing facilities are required to expand their existing infection control policies to include the development and implementation of a CDPH approved COVID-19 mitigation plan.

Visitors should be wearing their own cloth face covering upon arrival to the facility per CDC recommendations. If they are not, they should be offered a facemask or cloth face covering, as supplies allow, and instructed to wear it while in the facility.

"Throughout this pandemic, we've worked to balance the science of transmission with the needs that we, as humans, have for connection," Dr. Borenstein said. "At this time, we believe the right processes are in place to effectively manage both."



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San Luis Obispo 1336 Madonna Road San Luis Obispo, CA 93401 805 544-5400

Paso Robles 1171 Creston Rd. # 109 Paso Robles 805-369-2811 coast-electronics.com

- **Sept. 3:** Police responded at 6:36 p.m. to a disturbance in the 900 block of Embarcadero where they encountered an apparently disgruntled fellow pitching a fit and scaring the straights. The 25-year-old squit was arrested for suspicion of UTI.
- **Sept. 3:** Police responded to a disturbance at 2:24 p.m. at Albertson's Market on Quintana and apparently hit a nefarious jackpot. Two men, 51 and 28 were nicked for suspicion of being forshnicked on drugs, and another model citizen, 22, was arrested on "multiple warrants."
- **Sept. 2:** Police responded to Flying Dutchman's Restaurant on Embarcadero where some pirate paid for a meal with counterfeit cash, and may they choke on it.
- **Sept. 2:** Police responded at 2:30 p.m. to Silver City MHP in the 500 block of Atascadero Rd., for a stolen car

and elder abuse report.

- **Sept. 2:** Police responded at 1:45 p.m. to Lila Keiser Park where someone found 10 bicycles and frames in Morro Creek, with no doubt a hundred more awaiting discovery.
- **Sept. 1:** Police responded at 3:15 p.m. to a smash-n-dash at Cork 'n Bottle Liquors in the 300 block of Atascadero Rd., involving an apparent rogue PG&E truck that fled the scene.
- **Aug. 31:** A citizen in the 300 block of Fresno told police that some sneak thief stole their car keys.
- **Aug. 31:** Police responded to check the welfare of someone apparently in crisis in the 800 block of Pacific. They confiscated two firearms just to be safe.

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Community

Let There Be Scarecrows

By Jill Turnbow



A group of scarecrows are ready to take over the town for the 12th annual Cambria Scarecrow Festival. Photo by Paulla Ufferheide

October is one of the most anticipated months in Cambria due to the extreme popularity of the Cambria Scarecrow Festival. This year's Festival will still happen, but there have been some changes due to the pandemic restrictions. Organizers are doing everything they can to stay within the county's health and safety guidelines, so they have restructured the displays to keep visitors safe.

This year the Festival will set up five separate viewing areas to display the estimated 150 scarecrows.

"With so many businesses and restaurants bringing their operations to the sidewalks, we didn't want to add to the congestion, so we felt like having designated sites was the perfect solution," Scarecrow Festival President, Paulla Ufferheide said.

The designated viewing areas are spaced throughout the villages of Cambria, each with one-way walkways in order to safely social distance. The slated five viewing areas are:

- The old Brambles parking lot in the East Village on Burton Drive
- The Mid Village in front of the Santa Rosa Catholic Church on Main St.
- The Pinedorado Grounds on Main St.
- The lot next to the Shell Station in the West Village
- The area next to San Simeon Bar & Grill

"The San Simeon display is especially unique this year," said Ufferheide. "We will feature 'Maude Zombie' who is running for Mayor of San Simeon. She will preside over a rally of her Zombie followers."

One of the biggest challenges this year's Festival has been in the fundraising.

"Our preliminary events have all had to cancel and our rental program was put on hold," Ufferheide said. The Festival organization stores the scarecrows during the year and, previously, businesses were able to rent a scarecrow for the month. "And the storage units are not cheap" added Ufferheide.

Other elements of the Festival have also been cancelled due to COVID-19. Scarecrow building that typically begins in April was cancelled due to the restrictions on groups gathering in workshops. Many diehard volunteers rose to the challenge and built their scarecrows at home.

"We can't have our usual team setting up the displays either," said Ufferheide. "We typically have 40 or 50 volunteers, but with the individual viewing areas, smaller teams can set up a step at a time. We want our volunteers to stay



Scarecrows offer healthy snacks during a previous Cambria Scarecrow Festival. Photo by Michelle Sherman

safe, too."

This year marks the 12th year the Festival has taken place, and the creative team has big plans for the fall of 2021 in hopes of making it even bigger. But the 2020 event promises to be fun and inviting for visitors and locals to enjoy.

The Festival runs from October 1 through November 1. Visit the website Cambriascarecrows.com where you will find an interactive map to locate all the scarecrows on display. While on the site you can participate in an important survey as well as donate to save a scarecrow. This year the scarecrows are not being judged, but you can vote for your favorite.

"We wanted to continue the Scarecrow Festival this year, even with the limitations put on us by these crazy times," Ufferheide said. "We did it for the smiles. We need smiles more than anything right now — a reason to be outdoors and enjoy the day. We need a break."

Human Bean Sprouting Fast

Story and Photos by Neil Farrell

Workers with Kirk Construction General Engineering Contractors of Atascadero were pouring concrete curbs for drive-up lanes at a new Human Bean drive-thru coffee house, at 839 Morro Bay Blvd., across the street from the Morro Bay Police Station.

Readers may have noticed the construction when it started at the beginning of August, and might think the building was put up magically by Harry Potter, as it was that fast.



Indeed, a witness across the street at Pacific Premier Bank said the building came in one piece on a trailer, and was lifted and dropped into place in an afternoon.

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 but it 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.



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Community

City Launches 'Business Hero' Campaign

By Neil Farrell

Four local businesses were the first honorees under a new City program, recognizing efforts to endure the coronavirus pandemic, while staying open for business.

Over the past several weeks, the City launched a "Be A Face Mask Hero" and "Be A Trash Hero" campaigns, "to encourage positive, responsible and safe behaviors in our community in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Jennifer Callaway, who is the City's public information officer for the City's virus response efforts, as well as finance director and public works director. "The campaigns have been successful, as the City sees increased compliance with face covering usage and less litter in our community thanks to all our local trash heroes who volunteer countless hours picking up litter."



Alyssa Hudson is day manager at The Galley Grill & Bar, which received a 'Business Hero Award' from the City for their efforts to establish outdoor seating in a breezeway between the Galley and the Port House to the south, and successfully adapting to the business restrictions of California's pandemic response. Photo by Neil Farrell

and impactful to our small business community, requiring proprietors to shutter for some period and upon reopening, adjusting their service models to keep their employees and customers safe."

The campaign is a way to acknowledge the challenges businesses have had to endure to survive and for being "creative, flexible, and responsive."



Father-son team, Michael (left) and Alex Wolfe are shown with the Morro Bay 'Business Hero Award' they received from the City for their efforts to work through the Coronavirus Pandemic response. Photo by Neil Farrell

The anti-trash effort includes putting out many more garbage cans along the waterfront, coupled with hand-washing stations and big feather-style banners, which ironically businesses are technically not allowed to display under the City's sign ordinance.

The City has now launched a third Heroes campaign, "Business Hero," with the motto: "Not all superheroes wear capes, some stay the course in hard times."

Callaway said, "The Business Hero Program is the City's way of thanking our local, small businesses for being resilient and persevering through these ever-changing pandemic times. COVID-19 is particularly challenging



Fitness Works, 500 Quintana Rd in Morro Bay, moved equipment outside to help keep people in shape during the pandemic. Photo by Neil Farrell

The City plans to honor four businesses every month, one from each of the four businesses zones in town — the waterfront, Downtown, Quintana Road and North Main Street.

The first four awardees are: The Avocado Shack, located at 2190 N. Main St.; Fitness Works, 500 Quintana Rd.; Top Dog Coffee, 857 Main St.; and The Galley Grill & Bar, 899 Embarcadero.

"These businesses," Callaway said, "have worked hard to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and modifications to remain open and continue to provide services to our community."

"From creatively providing outdoor fitness opportu-

nities, outdoor dining, providing spacing and routing lanes that are adequate to meet physical distancing requirements, to wearing face coverings and observing sanitation and disinfecting standards."

The City launched the Business Hero Campaign Sept. 8 recognizing them during the City Council meeting. Callaway told Estero Bay News that the businesses were picked by City staff using a number of criteria, including whether there have been code enforcement complaints filed by the public over adherence to the City's Coronavirus guidelines.

"We get a lot of calls about certain businesses," Callaway said, "not following the guidelines." She, Community Development Director Scot Graham, City Manager Scott Collins and others chose the first honorees.

The businesses will get "Business Hero" signs to display in their windows or to hang on the wall, "as a reminder of the City's gratitude and appreciation for staying the course, staying open, and being resilient," Callaway said.

The City is also emphasizing the importance — perhaps now more than ever — of supporting local, small businesses during the coronavirus business closures.

Cambria Boasts Aesthetic Solution to Magazine Racks



Beautify Cambria's recent project is a magazine kiosk was created out of individual racks. Photo: Back row: James Mundy, Jason Anderson, Randy Arnett Front row: Cheryl McDowell, Mary Ann Carson, Claudia Harmon Worthen. Right, Cheryl Raiter, Lee Ann Vermeulen, Roland Soucie and Linda Haskins. Photo by Dean Sullivan

On a late Sunday afternoon in 2015, after the tourists had left Cambria and downtown was quiet, three Beautify Cambria Association volunteers drove around hoisting old, abandoned magazine stands into a pickup truck headed for the recycling center.

"We felt like thieves in the night," says Beautify Cambria president Claudia Harmon Worthen, "even though there was no one to call for permission."

For the almost 100 remaining racks, an alternative solution was needed. Each publication had its own kiosk, leading to rows of plastic boxes in various shapes, sizes and

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New Book Details Morro Bay in WWII

By Neil Farrell



colors, many of them damaged, grimy or dilapidated.

“We thought it would be a win for everyone — the magazine distributors, the adjacent businesses and consumers — to provide an aesthetically pleasing alternative that was clean, consistent and that fit the Cambria ambiance,” said Vari MacNeil, Beautify Cambria co-founder and president emerita.

That solution was unveiled on September 15 when a beautiful, multi-magazine kiosk was installed in front of the Cookie Crock Market, 1240 Knollwood Cir. Replacing eight individual racks, the custom designed unit is made of a durable, exterior-grade plywood with a baked-on finish, self-closing tempered glass doors and a copper roof.

The kiosk was built by local craftsmen based on a design by interior designer Harmon Worthen. Scenic Coast Cabinets engineered the cabinet, PolyPro installed the glass and Lafferty Heating created the copper roof.

Beautify Cambria is thankful for a generous donation from the Cambria Community Council that made this project possible.

Beautify Cambria plans to continue converting existing kiosks around Cambria. When the free magazines and newspapers are eventually replaced by online versions, the kiosk is ready and fitted with moveable shelves to turn the cabinet into a free lending library.

Beautify Cambria is a non-profit dedicated to preserving and enhancing Cambria’s unique ambiance. The organization is best known for designing, installing and maintaining the downtown Cambria trash/recycling receptacles with flower gardens on top. Learn more about Beautify Cambria and the organization’s other projects at beautifycambria.org.

Military history buffs can pick up a new book recounting Morro Bay’s role in World War II, when the sleepy little harbor town was transformed into a major training base during the Great War.

“When Morro Bay Went to War,” by Joseph M. Dunlap, published in December 2019, is now available at the Morro Bay Maritime Museum, 1210 Embarcadero, as a fundraiser for the museum.

Dunlap’s book uses words and black & white photos to chronicle the evolution of the harbor from a little fishing port and town of around 1,000 residents, into a major training facility first for Army soldiers and then for Naval Marines that were being sent into harm’s way in the Pacific to fight Imperial Japan.

Dunlap’s Foreword says, “With its well protected bay, close proximity to Camp San Luis Obispo, and remote location, it [Morro Bay] became the perfect setting for training soldiers in the finer points of amphibious landings and assaults away from prying eyes.”

The book notes that dedication ceremonies for the new, “Morro Bay Naval Station,” were held Nov. 16, 1941, just three weeks before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and thrust the U.S. into the war.

“An administration building and a few support buildings were the initial structures of the base,” Dunlap wrote, “and on Friday, 5 December 1941, just two days before America’s entry into the war, ground was broken with the beginning of clearing of an area known as the ‘Willows,’ behind the area occupied by the now-retired power plant.”

Both the Army and Navy made use of Morro Bay for training and took over much of the coastline north of Morro Rock and also the Sandspit, which was used for artillery practice.

Several photos show massive explosions in the sand dunes of what is now Montaña de Oro State Park.

The book includes a section about the legendary “trestle” a bridge that was built spanning the inner harbor from the foot of today’s Beach Street to the Sandspit, allowing easy access to the peninsula for trucks and other vehicles.



Photo shows Morro Bay’s legendary trestle bridge that spanned from shore (at today’s Beach Street) across the harbor to the Sandspit.

Today, a group of timbers on the Sandspit near the sea lion dock, is all that remains of the trestle.

Other photos show various landing craft aground on the Sandspit as men and heavy equipment, including mobile Howitzers, unload.

On the “Acknowledgements” page, Dunlap thanks several local people who helped with the book providing historic photos, including Paul Bradford, David Middlecamp with The Tribune, John Stephen Crews, Roy Kline, Cathy Ryan and Glenn Silloway of the Historical Society, and Thomas Wilmar.

Though the museum’s exhibit building is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic response, if readers want to buy a copy



Marines climb cargo nets dangling over the side of a training wall that was constructed on the North T-pier.

WWII Continued on page 13

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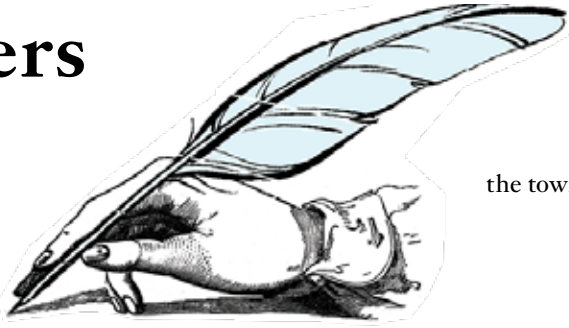
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Letters To The Editor



Look for the Truth

Council candidate Ms. Betty Winholtz recently wrote in Morro Bay Life about the Water Reclamation Facility, "There are options. For example, it's less expensive to stay at the current site where the Water Board's standard will be met when Cayucos goes offline. The City receives no fines. Coastal Commission has no jurisdiction if it's not new. Sewer and water rates would have to be reduced."

I asked our Plant Manager about Ms. Winholtz' claim and received this answer –

1. The water plant does not meet current standards and cannot meet current standards without an upgrade, regardless of the amount of effluent that flows into it.

2. The plant was built in 1953 and was designed to meet 120/70 BOD/TSS requirement. Current requirement is 30/30. (BOD is organic food left in the water and TSS is total solids left in the water.)

3. The plant currently operates under a Time Schedule Order (TSO) issued by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and that acts as a temporary permit waiver with an expiration date of February 28, 2023.

4. In early 2000 the City hired a professional engineering firm to complete an evaluation of the current facility. The evaluation determined that, to meet the 30/30 requirement, upgraded technology is needed.

5. In 2013, a new plant design was completed at the existing location based on the 2000 engineer's evaluation. The Coastal Commission unanimously rejected the City's application to build a project at that location and refused to issue a CDP.

Bottom line is that the current plant will never meet today's discharge requirements without extensive upgrades and the Coastal Commission denied a permit in 2013 to make those upgrades.

At that public hearing on January 10, 2013, when the California Coastal Commission considered the City's application to build a new plant at the existing site, Ms. Winholtz, speaking for herself and others, exclaimed, "We ask for your denial."

I urge Morro Bay voters to look for the truth behind every claim made by candidates for public office. Truth is the lifeblood of Democracy.

Robert "Red" Davis
Morro Bay

Editor's note: Mr. Davis is an incumbent Morro Bay City Councilman running for reelection.

Vote Pierson and Gray

As proud residents of Cambria for more than two decades, we are pleased to support two outstanding candidates for the Cambria Community Services District Board this year: David Pierson and Tom Gray.

Each has served our community with distinction and each is prepared to continue to work with diverse community interest groups to find workable solutions to our local problems. These are intelligent, hard-working individuals who encourage civil discourse; they listen well and they treat all citizens with dignity. They are the kind of "good government" leaders we need during the challenging times in which we live.

Like many others in our town, we are particularly concerned about two significant challenges that Cambria faces: (a) we need infrastructure to provide a sustainable water supply and (b) we need good fire protection/forest management programs. We are confident that David Pierson and Tom Gray will provide the leadership needed to bring

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the town together with sound solutions to these issues.

Bob and Susan Detweiler
Cambria

A Common Sense Approach to Vacation Rental Regulations

As the largest professional manager of vacation rentals in Morro Bay, Beach-N-Bay Getaways and URelax Vacation Rentals have worked with the city and participated on the committee to develop reasonable and common sense regulations for vacation rentals going forward. These regulations include restrictions on occupancy, parking and noise along with clear signage to identify licensed rentals to neighbors and other provisions to create a safe and controlled environment for guests to enjoy the city without disturbing neighbors. These steps along with vastly increased money for enforcement through higher permit fees will greatly improve the quality of life for residents and provide funds for the city to act against unlicensed illegal vacation rentals. We do understand that a few rentals have disturbed neighbors and we welcome most of these rules to rectify the situation.

One provision we do not agree with is the proposed lottery system, which will arbitrarily take away people's vacation rental licenses in a lottery process that the city staff has described as difficult if not impossible to administer fairly. Many of these license holders have operated for years without a single complaint and have always paid tax to the city, helping improve the city for residents and guests alike. Instead of a lottery we ask for a natural attrition process. As owners move into these homes to retire or decide to sell the home, the number of vacation rentals will decrease and new ones will not replace them due to the new density requirements, which will not allow vacation rentals in close proximity to each other. The city staff has pointed out that they see an attrition rate of over 20 licenses each year, over 10% of the total active licensed rentals. We ask that the city allow the new rules and natural attrition to alleviate the situation rather than force people out of their licenses. Many of these owners have sunk their life's savings into these homes in the hopes of retiring to Morro Bay one day. The lottery and loss of license would devastate these owners.

In working with the city, we have discovered that the bulk of complaints are against illegal vacation rentals and second homes, which do not fall under vacation rental rules. These homes are often confused with licensed vacation rentals as the current method of identifying licensed rentals is poor but will be dramatically improved under the new ordinance. This, along with the call-in hotline for complaints, will provide neighbors with a much better resource to deal with any issues that arise. We do not feel it is fair to act against licensed rentals for the actions committed by other homes. Our website, ShareMorroBay.com, includes a list of all the licensed vacation rentals to make it

Community

easier for neighbors to identify illegal rentals so the city can take action.

The maps of the beach tract and other areas showing all license vacation rentals can look unsettling, but a quick search of advertising and the tax reporting shows that there are far fewer active vacation rentals than it would seem.

The map of the beach tract from Sienna to Orcas that appeared in the last Estero Bay News [Vol. 2 Issue 18] showed 40 rentals, but only about half are active. Of the 250 licenses, we know that there are only about 150 active Full-Home VRs. The new ordinance would eliminate licenses that are not active, and it would result in significantly fewer rentals.

The financial impacts would not just be felt by homeowners and managers. There are dozens of housekeepers, window washers, maintenance providers and others that would be severely impacted by the lottery system. These are people that live and work in the area, have families to provide for and yet they could be devastated. The city's loss of income means more city employees remain laid off or furloughed, and less services to residents. Is there enough evidence that vacation rentals are so harmful to justify these negative effects?

We ask the city and the residents of Morro Bay to allow the new rules and natural attrition of rentals to take its course before forcing people out of their licenses and dreams. Morro Bay has been a tourist destination for decades and vacation rentals are a critical part of the visitor-serving community, especially for families where hotels will not work. Many of these families visit Morro Bay each year. For them, an opportunity to spend some time at the beach with their children and grandparents is the highlight of their year. Let's not take that away from them.

Robert Elzer
Morro Bay

Vote For Betty

Intelligence, integrity, heart. This is what we will have with Betty Winholtz on our City Council.

Roger Ewing
Morro Bay

Cambrians Get Out and Vote

Cambrians, think of this: the November ballot is offering you a chance to put your Community Service District board on its best footing in years with your votes for both Dave Pierson and Tom Gray.

Dave has already served three years on several CCSD committees, as the board president during reorganization, and is now a candidate for another two-year term. Tom has been chair of the North Coast Advisory Council, now serves on the county's Water Resources Advisory Committee and probably knows more about solving Cambria's

Letters Continued on page 15

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352 Ivar Street, Cambria
- SOLD**
2946 Water View Drive, Paso Robles
- SOLD**
4650 Turnbleweed Way, Paso Robles
- SOLD**
1754 11th Street, Los Osos



Photo shows the high training walls that were erected on the North T-pier in this photograph taken from about where the South T-pier now stands.

of Dunlap's book, they can call Bonnie Johnson at (602) 526-4367 and arrange to meet at the museum to purchase a copy.

The book sales are one of several programs the Museum has going right now, as it tries to survive the coronavirus shut-down and continue to chronicle the area's maritime history with exhibits of historic boats and other gear, including a whaling blubber cooking pot, submarines, and a bathysphere.

A special outdoor exhibit by the Salinan People celebrating their maritime culture over the thousands of years the

tribe occupied this area, is also starting to be set up.

The Museum is taking donations for its commemorative bricks and benches programs. For \$125 donors can have whatever they want within length limits, etched onto a normal-size red brick (4X8), or a larger brick (8X8) for \$250.

The bricks and benches donations can be arranged through Johnson, as well. The Museum website: www.morrobaymaritime.org, has information on these programs and more, including applications for volunteers to help keep the Maritime Museum afloat.

Helping Seniors From page 1

share their home as well as the rest of the community possibly resulting in loneliness and depression.

SLO Village, a countywide membership organization that supports seniors living independently in their own homes as they age, is working to change that with new programs to help isolated residents stay active, engaged and connected to family and friends.

"Our services are needed now more than ever," said Meredith Bates, SLO Village volunteer coordinator and member of the board of directors. "Our members are missing visits from family members and connections with SLO Village folks helps fill that void. The pandemic has left many feeling lonely and loneliness has been compared as health hazard equivalent to smoking 1/2 a pack of cigarettes per day.

"Most older adults want to remain in their own home because they can keep their own schedule, it's cost effective and familiar. When older adults were surveyed, 90% wanted to age in place. Many older adults do not want to become a burden to their family and need to be able to care for themselves as much as possible as they age."

SLO Village, founded in 2016 as a seniors-helping-seniors organization, offers members everything from social connection and education to help with grocery shopping, transportation and household tasks through connections to volunteers.

Membership in the organization is open to SLO County residents 60 years or older. The annual membership fee with full access to all services is \$500 per individual or \$750 for household. Access includes a screened network of service providers for home repairs, yard work, or any service required to live at home. These vetted vendors often provide their services at a discount to Village members.

Currently, there are 43 full members ranging in age from 62 years-old to 103 with the average in their 80s.

Volunteers are at the heart of the organization. Right now, there are 53, up from 42 since the pandemic started, and more are always welcome.

"We carefully screen our volunteers and they must pass a background check," Bates said. "One advantage for our volunteers is that they don't need to commit to specific days or hours, they accept assignments that fit with their schedules and interests."

Volunteers provide transportation, assistance with shopping and household chores, gardening, light home repairs and maintenance for members.

"Our volunteer base has held steady and we have some super volunteers that are continually active," Bates said. "We have a phone tree that connects volunteers and members to check in regularly. We make extra efforts to check on our members without computer access."

The biggest need at this time is people who can do shopping for members, drive them to medical appointments and help with technology. There is also opportunities for volunteers interested in remote opportunities such as helping with the phone tree, a pen pal program and hosting zoom activities.

Richard Kriet, a retired physical therapist who has been a SLO Village volunteer for about two years, does a lot of gardening for members, gives rides to folks and, pre COVID-19, swam about once a week with another member who is about to turn 104 years-old.

"You always get the feeling that you are doing something useful, which is really nice, and it is really immediate," said the 67-year-old. "There are some really incredible people that are members, so I get the chance to get to know them and interact with them. I can truthfully say I've always felt like I've gotten more out of it than I've given in every instance."

The challenges created by COVID-19 required the group to retool many of its offerings virtually overnight to address needs of active seniors who could not leave their homes. That meant suspending the popular luncheons and in-person get togethers, which were very popular among members.

"Before COVID, we regularly had around 50 folks participate in our monthly luncheons, and we held quarterly all-Village events," Bates said. "Most older adults relish the idea of meeting new people and having novel experiences. Our luncheons offered a meal as well as connections between members and volunteers. Just because people age (doesn't mean) they aren't still curious."

Maintaining the level of entertaining, active, and social experiences within covid-19 restrictions meant new approaches to programs.

"We put our heads together and came up with new ideas that have proven popular and very much in demand," said SLO Village executive director Kerry Sheets. "We would never have guessed a pandemic would help us expand, but that's exactly what has happened."

Some of the programs and services now available:

- Porch Visits a volunteer brings his or her own chair to visits a housebound senior. Visits are conducted outside at the member's home, with both parties six feet apart and wearing masks. Request For porch visits have soared. For some isolated seniors, the visits mark the only personal contact shared since COVID precautions began.

- Fun Bags for members – Goodie bags are stuffed with gratitude journals, coloring sheets and colored pencils, personal notes written by children and volunteers, puzzles, note cards for members to send to friends and family and fire department "File of Life" materials and are delivered to members.

- Zoom webinar presentations (including tech help for seniors needing a little how-to guidance) include topics like Best Practices for Staying Healthy during COVID-19 and Staying Mentally Healthy During COVID-19.

- Member check-in phone calls are made by volunteers. Email blasts with reminders about heat wave management and other concerns are sent frequently.

- Bi-monthly movie discussions via Zoom reviewing SLO Film Festival offerings and other films are underway, as are weekly Zoom happy hours and coffee chats. A book group is in formation.

- Grocery shopping, medical appointment transportation and other help requests have increased and are being met by Village volunteers.

"Some of our more popular activities are on zoom at present are weekly coffee chats, happy hour on Saturdays, and movie night," said Bates. "We cannot have indoor in-person activities. However, we transport members with our safety protocol to medical appointments, we help with yard work and handyman chores. Our social events are on zoom. We can have small gatherings at local parks with masks and social distance."

Information about SLO Village is available on the group's website at www.slovillage.org.

SLO Village is a founding member of Village Movement California. There are 50 Villages statewide, more than any other state. It is also part of the national Village Movement.

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- Face coverings — currently, the San Luis Obispo County health orders require face coverings when campers cannot maintain a minimum 6-foot distance from other campers and those not from an immediate household;
- Guest passes — guest passes or courtesy passes will not be issued to non-registered campers or friends;
- Share the road — drivers, cyclists and hikers are urged to be cautious and to share the road. When Morro Bay Campground opened to campers, Lower State Park Road also opened to vehicular traffic for visitors and local residents;
- Parking — day use areas and parking lots remain open to the public, but overnight parking restrictions will be strictly enforced; and,
- Keep clean and be prepared — not all restrooms are open to the public. Bring soap/sanitizer and pack out all trash. If you are camping in an RV, use the restrooms in your own unit to help reduce the use of the shared restrooms at campgrounds.

All is not back to normal, however, the public is still under the Governor's orders.

"The reopening of some campgrounds does not mean things are going back to normal," Falat said. "Gov. [Gavin] Newsom continues to ask Californians to stay close to home, maintain the proper physical distance, wear a face covering and avoid congregating with others outside their immediate household."

And park rangers will be watching for compliance with the rules. "State Parks will continue to monitor visitation and physical distancing across the State Park System," Falat said. "If unsafe conditions develop, parks and beaches may need to decrease access in certain areas."

If readers want to go camping, they need to go online to: ReserveCalifornia at: www.reservecalifornia.com or call (800) 444-7275. Hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

In other parks news, San Luis Obispo County Parks and Recreation is lifting restrictions it had on its campgrounds at local lakes and regional parks.

According to the SLO Parks Department, the County was going to reopen with modifications portions of El Chorro Regional Park and the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden, located on Hwy 1 across from Cuesta College.

Campgrounds at Lopez Lake, Santa Margarita Lake, Coastal Dunes RV Park and Oceano Memorial Park had been open to local residents only, but according to a news story in The Tribune, the County opened the campgrounds to anyone starting last weekend.

County Parks Superintendent, Nick Franco said, "This is based on the decline in new cases, low hospitalization rate and no tracing of transmission to campgrounds. Campsites are spaced safe distances from each other, restrooms and showers are sanitized daily, and physical distancing is required during registration and camping."

The County too isn't booking group campsites to cut down on large crowds, and group activities, playgrounds and other gatherings continue to be prohibited.

The County and State Parks are also placing restrictions on campfires due to the high fire threat. SLO County will not allow any campfires and State Parks allows them only in fire rings, no campfires on the ground are allowed.

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Bay, Sunnyside in Los Osos, and Old Pacheco School in SLO. Parts of Sunnyside have already been leased out to different entities, including Cal Fire, which has a training facility on campus, so it is already making some money for the District.

Pacheco, located near Cal Poly, currently houses Teach Elementary, so that left Morro Elementary School to focus on.

Housing Is Best Option

The District Trustees are now contemplating various scenarios for Morro Elementary with a neighborhood of manufactured homes providing affordable housing for District employees, being the one that's risen to the top.

"Back in 2001," Assistant Superintendent for Business Services Ryan Pinkerton told Estero Bay News, "there was a loss of unitary taxes [major drop in revenues] and it necessitated the closure of some sites [Morro Elementary, Sunnyside Elementary, Old Pacheco-campus by Cal Poly]."

"With the loss of population and lack of growth on the coast, there was never a need to turn these sites back into schools. Nor do we see a need for them in the future."

Time is wearing on the schools, which are among the oldest in the District. "These campuses are getting very old and in need of major modernization in the coming years," Pinkerton added.

The growing maintenance issues will soon outstrip the revenues coming in. "We have done some work on asphalt and utilities," he explained, "but the list of needs is long and growing. The cost of modernizing those campuses will cost millions more than we will make in leasing the property."

Morro Elementary's buildings are leased by some churches, and a charter school, which uses the newest of the buildings on campus.

Diablo Closure Will Hurt

The Diablo Canyon closure is the next big issue with regards to the District's revenues.

"Diablo Canyon closure is causing our unitary tax to drop and we assembled the Blue Ribbon Committee to give us an outside look at our budget issues," Pinkerton said. "One of their recommendations was to look at these surplus properties and see if we could turn them in to revenue generators. Selling a school site gives us one-time money that can only be used for facilities. It will not help our bottom line or create ongoing revenue."

The District approached City planners about the school site. "We had an initial meeting with the City of Morro Bay staff to see what they would want to have on the property," Pinkerton said. "Housing seemed like the biggest need, as they view that part of town as residential and near the water as more commercial growth."

The high cost of housing in Morro Bay had another consequence, pushing local workers to find cheaper housing elsewhere, commute into town to work and then take their paychecks back home with them.

"They also discussed the fact that it was hard for business to flourish with people coming into the city to work, but then leaving and living elsewhere," he said. "It is tough for those Downtown businesses to stay afloat."

The City also said there was a need for warehouse space but housing was the top priority for the old school.

Housing Group Helps

Meanwhile an activist group, "The Hourglass Project" (now called REACH) has been advocating for affordable workforce housing and the District contracted with them to analyze the school site's possibilities.

"We had some discussion with them about our surplus properties," Pinkerton said. "The Board of Education agreed to a contract with REACH and the Deloitte Group to give us a better understanding of the possible development scenarios for the site."

The study looked at various types of housing — apart-



This stylish home was included in a school district study as an example the type of manufactured homes that could be installed with the redevelopment of Morro Elementary School in Morro Bay.

ments, and modular homes — as possibilities, along with selling the property vs. leasing it out.

But selling, with its 1-time nature, and restrictions on use of the proceeds, wasn't really an option.

"Based on the costs of development and the current economic situation we are in, housing and apartments didn't fair well," Pinkerton said.

Costs were high with the District actually building the housing, and if all the District had was lease payments, "the profit margin would be slim for the district."

Modular Homes Looks Best

Though no decisions have been made, Pinkerton said the "modular home option offered a much cheaper opportunity that the District could work with a for-profit entity and potentially derive a larger ongoing revenue source."

Essentially, the District would obtain permits and then build the infrastructure — putting in the utilities, roads, sidewalks, etc., and create the building pads — then tenants would buy a modular home and have it installed on a pad.

The analysis, entitled, "Development of the Village at Morro El," (dated Sept. 10), said the purpose was "To build a manufactured home community that will provide the District with housing options intended for District employees and local community workforce... To develop a sustainable, mixed-income, and inter-generational housing model for the Morro El site, that combines educational opportunities (both in the existing charter school building and other campus facilities) intended to include recreational options for a vibrant community... To open the opportunity to create affordable housing options for the community, including SLCUSD District employees. This effort is intended to bring teachers, staff, and their families, into the community they serve."

The proposal is to have a private company, a so-called "For Profit Entity" or FPE that would be connected with the District's fundraising arm, San Luis Coastal Education Foundation, to oversee the District's installation of the infrastructure. The FPE would then act as management of the development.

"This model is sustainable," reads the report, "relieving the District of any operational role in the day to day management."

Resident Wants to Save the School

During the Board's Sept. 1 meeting a local resident, who said she attended Morro Elementary, asked that the Board hold off on any decisions and allow her to gather forces and raise money to reimburse the District and allow the community to keep what she called a "cultural and historic" site.

Indeed, Morro Elementary was built in the 1930s and served the community until it was closed in 2001. Today, the school's large grassy field is used for youth and adult sports, with the churches and charter school using the buildings.

Pinkerton was cool to the idea. "While setting up a group to fundraise for the site is a well intentioned desire," he said, "it is not a realistic option. Nor does it help us with revenue generation."

150 Units Possible

In the report, the school's available buildable area is listed at 7.75 net acres (subtracting out the existing build-



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KEVIN O'CONNOR, President

ings); at 15 units per acre, for a total of 113.2 units (housing spaces). Scatter in a few mini homes, at 500 s.f. each, and the total bumps up to 147-150 units.

As for revenues, the study said at \$750 a month, a 150-unit development would produce \$112,500 a month or \$1.3 million a year gross.

At the top end — \$900 a month — the 150 units bring in \$1.6M a year. The District is assumed to spend \$5 million to get the site ready for the homes.

Next Steps

So what's up next? Pinkerton said they would be meeting with City officials to get their input and take that to a future School Board meeting. "We need to find out about zoning, development requirements and overall planning needs," he said. "They will have to make a decision at some point based on the information they receive to move forward or not with one of the options."

If readers feel this idea is moving along with little input from the public, Pinkerton said that won't be the case as it progresses.

"I'm sure that if any development does occur," he said, "there will be public meetings and an opportunity for the public to weigh in, as there are in all developments in the city."

"Of course, our Board of Education meetings are also all public meetings where this information will also be shared."

Tourism Promotions From page 1

Quintana Road, or just the ones in the tourism-heavy areas like the Embarcadero and Downtown?

City Swaps Laws

The City Council also voted to re-constitute the TBID model under a different State law.

The TBID was created under the "Parking and Business Improvement Area Law of 1989" and will now be under the "Parking and Business Improvement District Law of 1994."

The main difference in the two is that the 1989 law requires assessment districts to undergo a protest vote of district members every year. The 1994 law requires a vote every 5 years.

"It is a time intensive process and, in many respects, creates a smaller window to execute on long-term objectives," reads a staff report from City Manager Scott Collins. He estimated the costs for making this switch at \$50,000 to \$75,000

and recommended hiring a consultant to do the paperwork.

Collins told Estero Bay News, "The consultant would be paid through TBID assessments, not City funds. It was strongly recommended by folks who have participated in transitions in the past to use outside professional assistance."

Tourism Was Already Troubled

City tourism in 2019 was sailing into rough waters already, as several regular events — Santa Crawl, tall ship visit, Amgen Tour of California — got canceled for one reason or another.

And then the pandemic hit on March 20 and every public event — the Kite Festival, Car Show, Art in the Park, 4th of July, Harbor Festival and Avocado Margarita Festival among numerous others — got canceled due to the shelter-at-home orders from the Governor and setting up the businesses for a "lost summer."

Pandemic Changed Everything

With the advent of the pandemic shutdowns, the City decided to quit all promotions as they were in conflict with the idea of sheltering at home. It also canceled Mental Marketing's contract, and lay off the tourism director and one of two staffers.

"Due to COVID-19 financial impacts," Collins said, "we laid off Jen Little and Liz Gilson [part time]. Megan [Leininger] is still on staff." Collins added that Leininger, "Helps administer the TBID meetings, coordinate with State and Visit SLOCAL and communicates with hoteliers and vacation rental owners and other maintenance duties. The City Tourism Department has not been dissolved, more like in holding pattern."

Next Steps?

What's going to happen next? Collins said, "There

are many steps from here on out, but direction is to have separate non-profit manage the tourism marketing function moving forward beginning in July 2021."

The City took the promotions away from TBID and its non-profit organization, to have control over the spending of what it considered "public monies." Who's going to be in charge now?

"Under this proposed new model," Collins said, "the City would have oversight by ultimately approving the district plan and would review the budget annually [just as Visit SLOCAL is reviewed by the Board of Supervisors and Board approved the district plan]."

"The district plan would include among other things, the board make up, which may have a city councilmember, staff or appointed community member on the board."

Decision Made by Committee

This arriving back at the beginning wasn't done in a vacuum, it was arrived at via a committee.

The City formed the "Morro Bay Tourism Stakeholder Group," consisting of hoteliers, vacation rental owners, Visit SLOCAL representatives, restaurateurs, and a few community members, according to Collins, meeting five times in June-July to hash out the future promotions model.

The City also hired Kathleen Marcove of Marcove Executive Training to facilitate the meetings and draft a report for the Council.

"The group reviewed material, heard from experts on best practices and, through consideration of these materials and robust discussion, formulated three key recommendations for the TBID Board and City Council's consideration," Collins said.

Those three basic recommendations were:

- Support efforts to switch from the 1989 law to the 1994 law;
- Convene a transition team to design a new tourism management model with the City playing a supporting role rather than the leading role; and,
- Diversify the visitor profile by creating a new identity for Morro Bay, moving away from a primarily budget (inexpensive) destination to one that also attracts a wider spectrum of visitors, in terms of income levels.

That last one has long been a desire of the tourism industry, seeking to target wealthier people from Southern California and the Bay Area, and still cater to Morro Bay's traditional tourists, from the Fresno and Bakersfield areas.

The TBID board supported the stakeholder's recommendations, adding that the City should use TBID monies to set up the non-profit.

TBID Money Still Being Collected

With zero promotions being done right now stemming from the Governor's pandemic response, the City hasn't stopped collecting the TBID assessments.

So what have they done with the over \$223,000 collected from March to the beginning of August?

"We are keeping the lights on at this point," Collins said, "part-time staff, website and a few other things. Monies received and not spent are being held in the TBID assessment accumulation fund; those funds are being held for when paid marketing makes sense again. And can assist with the transition to the new model."

According to City records, from July 2019 to June 2020 the TBID assessments collected over \$651,200. But that includes the months of March, April, May and June 2020 when society was under strict, lockdown orders from the State, and tourism was being actively discouraged by the City.

Indeed, last April had the worst TOT totals for the City since TOT was first enacted in the mid-1960s with the town's incorporation, with just \$26,900 being collected with an occupancy rate of 16% and \$8,400 in TBID charges.

For comparison, last March's occupancy rate was 31% (\$65,600 in TOT) before the lockdown hit on March 20.

But once the health emergency due to coronavirus is lifted, the tourism should pick up again, evidenced by the jumps in July, which totaled some \$2.95 million total receipts (\$292,500 in TOT) and added \$110,400 to the TBID coffers, after just a slight easing of restrictions by the Governor. SLO County remains in the highest level of lockdown.

Visitor's Center Still Closed

The City also shuttered its Visitor's Center, which had been run under contract by the Chamber of Commerce but was given up in April after the City closed it along with its other facilities in the pandemic response.

Collins said that's another of the things they still must decide.

There was some effort to possibly move the visitor's center down to the Embarcadero where the visitors mostly are. But a proposal put forth by the Chamber was rejected by the City Council.

Asked about this, Collins said, "Nothing new on the Visitor Center future at this point."

There has been some discussion that the traditional visitor center model with a physical location people can actually visit, could be outmoded, with today's visitors mostly using their cell phones to get tourist information.

Letters From page 12

water problems than anyone. More information on Tom's background is available at his website: <https://www.tomgrayforccsd.com>.

Both men are the best-qualified candidates in the field and, with respect for Cambria's past and care for its future, offer the best hope for preserving the Cambria we enjoy. As the man said, "Peace in our time." Think of that!

Connie Jordan
Cambria

Trump Should be Held Accountable for This!

In my 68 years I've never seen anything like this. Not once, but three times over the past month or so, I've sent my bills out by snail mail. Yes I know I am old school, but that is how I like doing it. In all three cases it took over nine days for my checks to get to their location, nine days, and some of them are in San Luis Obispo.

I did a small test and sent two letters to my sister in Arroyo Grande and both of them took over a week to get there.

With COVID-19, voting by mail is crucial and to undermine and dismantle the mailing system before this election should be reason alone for Trump to forfeit this election. Isn't it a felony to mess with the mail?

This is a cowardly action to cheat his way to get elected. If the most important position in the world cannot be won fair and square, this is how we lose democracy in this country.

Jack Fillmore III
Los Osos

Don't be so Selfish

Regarding the recent complaints on this editorial page about the State Park Road closure: It's hard to see how a minor inconvenience traveling to a restaurant occasionally should outweigh the ability of people who live nearby to enjoy safe, daily recreational opportunities within walking distance.

The out-of-town, unmasked hoards have rendered the Embarcadero unusable much of the time by locals adhering to safe Covid practices. So, Greg King thinks we should drive 10+ miles to Montano de Oro, instead of using the park next door, in order to make his drives to Morro Bay a few minutes shorter. Shelby Rinck's mention of "27 stop signs on Morro Bay Boulevard" is a ridiculous exaggeration, and they can easily be avoided.

The two of them would rather burden the people who actually live here to save themselves a few minutes. That's a pretty selfish attitude.

Susan Schneider
Morro Bay

Editors note: State Park Road reopened on Sept. 19, but that could be temporary depending on the future of the pandemic.

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