

Benefit for Project Surf Camp Returns

By Neil Farrell



A benefit for Project Surf Camp is set for Friday, June 25 at Movement for Life Physical Therapy clinic, corner of Harbor Street and Shasta Avenue in Morro Bay. Pictured here are (from left) PJS founder John Taylor, clinic owner Michael Williams and PSJ volunteer Matt Makowetski.

As summer approaches and the coronavirus pandemic wanes, one local tradition is returning in a big way from a long, COVID-19 nap, to help those with disabilities experience the thrill of the ocean and recharge the emotional batteries of the people that make the magic happen.

“We are back!” exclaimed Project Surf Camp founder, John Taylor. Project Surf Camp is a day camp held on Morro Strand Beach that takes children and adults with autism and other conditions and teaches them about the beach environment and surfing.

The camp’s ability to bring people out of shells is legendary and Taylor, himself a leg amputee, can’t wait for it to start.

“At the end of March,” he said, “we decided to go for it.”

Last summer, they canceled surf camp, just as everything else was canceled during the height of the pandemic. Taylor said they worked out how to adhere to the CDC

guidelines to keep everyone safe. “We figured out ways that we can make this work. So we decided to pull the trigger.”

When signup for surf camp was opened in April, he said, they were 70% filled up within a few weeks (See: www.projectsurfcamp.com).

They cut the size down a third to make it easier in what is still an uneasy situation with masking and social distancing still being recommended. It also gives them some flexibility.

“We can always make adjustments,” Taylor said. “The crew is itching to get going. We talked about Project Surf Camp as being a family. It starts ultimately with the staff. We’re all best friends. And man, we missed each other.”

Surf Camp, he said, “Fills up my emotional cup.” Surf camp also makes use of volunteer buddies to work with the campers while in the surf and perhaps none are more enthusiastic than Matt Makowetski, a special needs teacher in Orcutt who always seems to have as much fun as the

Moving Forward: Bruce Badrigian, Teacher and Author

By Judy Salamacha



Bruce Badrigian, a teacher, coach, leader and survivor.

Sometimes a story erupts like the lava-river-flows of a volcano. And sometimes a story an author knows is destined to be told takes decades to mature and research. In Bruce Badrigian’s experience, a 2012 life crisis changed his habits so he could write and publish the book “Armenia’s Fingerprint, A Family’s Fight Against Genocide During WWI.”

Growing up in Worcester, MA, Badrigian heard stories about the genocide from his grandmother —her survival story watching a husband and daughters die during the “death march.” Whenever he’d meet an Armenian during his 40-year teaching career in San Luis Obispo schools, he’d ask for their story, “...because I’m writing a book someday.” Once home he’d transcribe it for his future project.

He might have researched forever had it not been for his own survival story battling pancreatic cancer in 2012. Luckily, it was discovered early enough for treatment. His recovery mandated he focus on something besides dying. The book was to be his legacy project for his children. Although it is fictionalized, it documents the strength of a people refusing to allow their culture to die. A preview of

City Budget Balanced, Rebounding Quickly

By Neil Farrell

The Morro Bay City Council will review and approve a balanced Fiscal Year 2021/2022 City Budget later this month, a remarkable achievement considering that the world has been turned upside-down since March 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic caused massive changes to people’s every day lives and businesses and threatened City tax revenues.

Indeed, it’s a almost a miracle — boosted by the generosity of local voters — that the City has gotten through it, let alone be looking at financial recovery that will leave 2020 the Year of COVID, gladly in the rearview mirror.

“This budget is a true reflection of this Council and previous Council’s proactive and conservative approach to the City’s budget and finances over the years,” City Manager Scott Collins wrote in his budget summary letter. “The Council established reserves above the Government Finance Officers Association’s recommended minimum levels. This helped the City weather the unprecedented and unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic and recover from those impacts.”

It was that hefty reserve fund that made all the difference for a City that saw the pandemic response ordered by the Governor severely impact tourism both statewide and locally. At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, restaurants and motels were closed along with all other “non-essential” businesses that included retail gift shops, of which Morro Bay has many.

And while the closures lessened a bit before last summer (and continue to lessen as the pandemic wanes), that didn’t stop visitors from flocking to Morro Bay in droves. This was bolstered by a lingering heat wave and massive wildfires in the Sierras that drove people to the relatively

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Dust-Up Over Homeless Camp Clean-Up

By Neil Farrell



Homeless campsites on the Morro Bay Power Plant property were cleared out, and there is disagreement as to how it was handled.

The clearing out of several homeless campsites on the Morro Bay Power Plant property has been met with criticism by some, with the local daily newspaper publishing online a critical story, which prompted a defensive response from the power plant’s corporate owner.

The dust-up began Tuesday, May 18 when representatives of plant owner Vistra Energy of Houston, Texas, posted the area around Morro Creek, and at Lila Keiser Park, giving notice to everyone camping in the area that

they were trespassing and setting a date for them to remove their belongings.

The park and power plant sit on opposite sides of Morro Creek but both are owned by Vistra (the City leases the park space).

The creek and sand dune areas have been used by people dating back to the Chumash and Salinan Tribes, and in modern times have been used by numerous people, some of which have lived out there for more than, 20 years.

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The Last Walk

Story and Photos by Theresa-Marie Wilson



Cal Poly student Tessa Witkofsky, center, organized the Kristin Smart memorial walk.

Purple ribbons tied to lampposts and street signs lined what is believed to be the last walk 19-year-old Kristin Smart took before disappearing 25 years ago on May 25, 1996.

About 100 people gathered to take that same walk in her memory. It started in a neighborhood at the corner of Foothill Boulevard and Crandall Way in San Luis Obispo and ended at Grand Avenue on Cal Poly campus across from Santa Lucia Hall where Smart was last seen.

Tessa Witkofsky, a chemistry junior at Cal Poly who wasn't yet born when the crime occurred, organized the walk.

"We are doing this walk to raise awareness, keep Kristin's name out in the public and to also show support to her family and to thank law enforcement for all that they are doing," Witkofsky told Estero Bay News. "I think that cases get quiet when stuff is going on behind the scenes, people sometimes get nervous that nothing is happening. We are just here to keep her name out [there]."

Witkofsky said she first heard about Kristin Smart when she started attending Cal Poly three years ago.

"Being a college woman, it is a very relatable story," she said. "It could have happened to anyone."

Many of the people at the walk have followed the Smart case since it first got media attention in 1996.

"We've be involved in this for a really long time — 25 years," said Robby Cervantes of Arroyo Grande, who at one time had a photo with information about Kristin on a race car he drove. "We had to come out here to show our support. It [the case] has been slow, but the new sheriff is doing his thing and making things come together. Now, hopefully, it will finish, and the family can have their time."

Chris Lambert, producer of the 8-episode podcast "Your Own Backyard" that explores the Smart case, also took part in the walk. Many credit him with bringing new

attention, evidence and witnesses that led to the arrests of Paul and Ruben Flores last April.

"When I took this walk in the beginning (for his podcast), it was insightful to get an idea of what it actually looked like as opposed to just reading it on a piece of paper," Lambert said. "I hope that people who take the walk are able to put themselves in Kristin's shoes and see the sights that she saw. I assume that there will be a number of people who are unaware of her story and will see a large group of people walking and ask questions."

There will be at least one more episode to the popular podcast that has been downloaded more than 10 million times since first airing in September 2019, but Lambert said he isn't sure how soon that will be.

"I will continue to work," he said. "I have tons of new interviews that I haven't shared yet. However it comes together, I'll have a new episode out, and I will continue to follow it as long as it is still a story—until she is either found or there is justice in a court of law."

For now, Lambert said it is all about Kristin. "This week, in particular, has been about memorializing Kristin and remembering Kristin as a person without all the court stuff, all of that will play out over the summer. Right now the focus is just her."



About 100 people took part the walk that it is believed to be the last walk Kristin took the night she disappeared.

As reported in Estero Bay News in April of this year, Sheriff Ian Parkinson held a news briefing outside Cal Poly's Orfalea Business School and announced that they had arrested Paul Flores, 44, at his home in San Pedro on suspicion that he murdered Smart. At the same time they arrested his father, Ruben Flores, 80, at his home in Arroyo Grande for suspicion of accessory to murder.

The Sheriff described Paul Flores as originally a "person of interest" in the case, then for years he was referred to as the "only suspect," and finally just a few months ago, he was called the "prime suspect" in her disappearance. Her body has yet to be found.

Sheriff Parkinson, who was with the San Luis Obispo Police Department when Smart disappeared on May 26, 1996, rededicated the Sheriff's Department to solving it after he was elected in 2011.

The Sheriff's Department was brought in by Cal Poly



The back of the sweatshirt worn during the walk by Robby Cervantes or Arroyo Grande.

Police fairly early in the investigation, after they were notified that Smart was missing on May 28, 1996, two days after she was last seen in Paul Flores' company.

The story at the time had Flores and another young woman helping an intoxicated Smart home from an off campus party to the dormitory where the freshman lived at the time. It was Memorial Day Weekend when she disappeared, and the campus was largely empty for the holiday.

The other girl left them and Flores was supposed to help Smart get home. She was never seen again and Flores was interviewed early on but requested a lawyer and has reportedly not spoken to investigators since.

The beginning of the unraveling of this case started several years ago when the Sheriff's Department along with the FBI conducted a search of the hillside behind the dorms at Cal Poly, near the famous "P" on the hill.

That search resulted in over 37 items of evidence being submitted for DNA testing; the results of which have never been divulged publicly.

Sheriff Parkinson said since he took office in January 2011, they've served 41 search warrants; conducted "physical evidence searches" at 16 separate locations; conducted a complete review of every item of physical evidence in the case and from all agencies involved.



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They submitted 37 evidence items from the early days of the investigation for modern DNA testing. They've recovered 193 new items of evidence and conducted 137 person-to-person interviews, and written 513 "supplemental reports" in the case.

He said the case file has over 3 terabytes of information.

"My hope," Sheriff Parkinson said, "is that we're able to take this first step towards justice for the Smart Family."

He added that the arrests were, "A bit of a relief but until we find Kristin this is not over."

The Sheriff revealed that they have had Paul Flores under electronic surveillance — email, texts and cell phone calls — since 2019. Last February, they simultaneously served search warrants at Paul Flores' home in San Pedro, as well as his mother's and his father's Arroyo Grande homes and that of his sister.

In April 2020 they served search warrants at Paul Flores' home and "recovered evidence related to the murder of Kristin Smart."

In March of this year, search warrants were served with Sheriff's investigators using cadaver dogs and ground penetrating radar, even cutting up a concrete slab at Ruben Flores' home. Still, they have not found her remains, but the Sheriff said they will continue to look for her.

The Sheriff said that forensic physical evidence was located at two of the homes they've searched that were "linked to Kristin Smart." Asked whether he thought the mother, Susan Flores, was involved, he said, "It's not what you believe, it's what you can prove."

As for the podcast, Sheriff Parkinson said Lambert had taken a local story and expanded it nationwide and internationally too. "Once it came out," he said, "we started getting new information." He said the podcast "produced information that was valuable."

He said Denise Smart, Kristin's mother has described the case as "a puzzle" with missing pieces. "This has been a puzzle," he said, "and it's been a very slow process to discover those pieces."

Though the case remains a "no-body homicide," Sheriff Parkinson said, "I'm confident we have enough of a case to prove beyond a reasonable doubt" that Paul Flores killed her.

A preliminary hearing for Paul and Ruben Flores for a judge to determine if there is enough evidence to move forward with the case is set to begin July 6. It's expected to take 12 days and will be an opportunity for both sides to present their cases.

Individuals with any information are encouraged to contact Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-7867 or online at: www.slotips.org.

Estero Bay News reporter, Neil Farrell, contributed to this story.

Morro Bay Two Department Head Openings

By Neil Farrell



Sarah Johnson-Rios is the City of Morro Bay's new assistant city manager/administrative services director and starts work the end of June. Submitted photos

The City of Morro Bay has filled the second of three department head openings, and contrary to past occurrences, the City poached an employee from Paso Robles for a change.

City Manager Scott Collins on May 19 announced that out of some 30 applicants, he hired Sarah Johnson-Rios to become the assistant city manager/administrative services director. Johnson-Rios had been the assistant city manager in Paso Robles.

But one can also add finance director to her job description, as that's who she is replacing — former finance director Jennifer Callaway, who left last fall to become the town manager at Truckee, CA. Interim Finance Director Katie Lichtig was brought on last November to fill in while Collins searched for a permanent finance director. Lichtig put together the City's 2021-2022 budget while she was here. Lichtig was formerly the city manager in San Luis Obispo but retired out of Santa Monica in 2020.

Callaway left Morro Bay in October 2020, and the city council rewrote the job description and title, adding a myriad of duties and responsibilities to the position, for which Johnson-Rios will be paid \$149,500 plus benefits.

Collins said the hiring process was intense and included interviews with a community panel, a panel of city managers, a written assignment, and interviews with City staff.

The new position will "oversee finance, communica-

tions, and information technology," Collins said, "assist the city manager in moving forward city council strategic initiatives; and support other critical internal functions such as human resources and risk management."

Collins was excited about his new assistant. "The assistant city manager/administrative services director," Collins said, "will lead a wide range of important City functions, including serving as the chief financial officer. We needed a well-rounded leader for this role and Sarah is an excellent fit. She brings a rare depth and breadth of experience across multiple disciplines to Morro Bay."

"Sarah demonstrated through the rigorous selection process that she has a wealth of knowledge regarding municipal operations and policies. She will be a tremendous asset to our City and community, helping lead the organization towards a bright future. We can't wait for her to get started!"

But he will have to wait until sometime in late June when Johnson-Rios starts her new job. She comes into a City that has weathered a fierce storm stoked by the coronavirus pandemic response and the restrictions on non-essential businesses it produced for over a year now.

There was also the immediate loss of tax revenues from tourism after the Governor ordered everyone in California to shelter-at-home to avoid spreading the virus.

The City last spring laid off over 70, mostly-part time workers in the recreation department, and several full time workers too and then spent some \$1 million of its emergency reserves to weather the pandemic's stormy seas. The cuts decimated what was a robust recreation department, which is now struggling to get up and running once again.

But the budget outlook is much rosier these days, after Lichtig and Collins put together a balanced, 2021-2022 budget that anticipates replenishing the reserves quickly and returning to all of the employees the 5%-8% pay cuts they voluntarily took last year during the budget crunch.

It didn't hurt that voters last November approved Measure E, a 1% local sales tax added onto Measure Q (from 2006) a 0.5% local sales tax. Measure E is predicted to bring in about \$2 million a year and Measure Q already is bringing in nearly \$1 million.

Both are promised to be spent on police and fire department needs, fixing roads and sidewalks, and maintenance of storm drains.

The City also now has both of its marijuana stores up and running and beginning to collect the 5% special cannabis tax the City Council levied. That tax is also expected to bring in about \$425,000 the first year, and up to \$475,000 annually thereafter.


Johnson-Rios was a Fulbright Scholar, received a Bachelor's of Arts Degree from Emory University and a Masters of Public Administration from Princeton University. She

Department Heads Continued on page 4

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Greg Kwolek has been hired as the City of Morro Bay’s new public works director. Kwolek started with the City on May 10.

has been in municipal government for 13 years and has worked as a housing administrator for the City of Raleigh, NC, and public works administrative services officer for the City of Santa Monica, CA, before becoming the assistant city manager in Paso Robles 2-years ago.

It’s the first time the City of Morro Bay, which in the past has lost police officers, dispatchers, and the P.D.’s former administrative services manager to Paso Robles, which is much larger of a city and can pay better.

Nevertheless, Johnson-Rios is happy to be coming to the Coast to work. “I am thrilled to have the opportunity to serve the community of Morro Bay in this exciting new role overseeing both administrative services and advancing broader strategic priorities for the City,” she said. “I look forward to contributing my experience to the team’s collective efforts to achieve Council’s goals of fiscal sustainability, effective communications, improved infrastructure, and land use and affordable housing progress.

“The chance to serve a wonderful community where my family already enjoys spending much of our leisure time makes me especially grateful for this role.”

Escaping Paso Robles’ infamous blazing-hot summers just might be an extra treat as well.

Johnson-Rios joins newly hired Public Works Director, Greg Kwolek who was hired by Collins April 8 and started work in the City on May 10. Kwolek was selected from some 27 applicants for the job that former P.W. Director Rob Livick stepped away from in April 2020, in favor of becoming the city engineer.

Collins said in April, “I selected Greg to join my executive team and lead Public Works, because I believe he is the right person at the right time to help get these things done. I am excited to see what the already solid Public Works team will accomplish under his leadership.”

Council Approves Salt Building Project

By Neil Farrell

The Morro Bay City Council has approved converting a mostly unused second story office space on the Embarcadero into a vacation rental unit, plus new docks, and widening of the Harborwalk at the Salt Building.

According to Senior Planner Cindy Jacinth’s staff report, the project would take two “underutilized existing office spaces” of some 839 square feet and build a single vacation rental unit and two decks totaling 998 s.f.

The project also proposes a 450 s.f. lease line amendment in the water lease area. That’s where two damaged finger slips (floating docks), would be removed and replaced, with a new gangway installed and widening of the Harborwalk from the current 8-½ feet to 10’ in width with one area expanding out to 21 feet. The expansion will require a couple of additional pilings, too.

There will also be improvements to the front façade of the HMS Salt Building, located at 571 Embarcadero, which was designed and built in 1971 by architect, the late-Jim Maul.

The Salt Building was the original home of The Hofbrau and currently is home to the Beach Burgers Restaurant, a small coffee shop and ice cream shop. There are a handful of boats docked there too.

The HMS Salt Building is one of the more unique and



Plans for the converted Salt Building on the Embarcadero.

charming buildings on the waterfront.

Also as part of the project is the installation of an elevator to meet ADA requirements for the second story rental.

Though it might seem a simple project, given it’s location on a State Tideland’s lease, it’s anything but simple. “The project is in the Commercial Visitor-Serving (WF/PD/S.4) zoning district and is located in the Waterfront Master Plan (WMP) and the Downtown Waterfront Specific Plan (DWSP) areas,” reads Jacinth’s report. “The project is also located within the Coastal Commission Original Jurisdiction, which has permitting authority for the related coastal development permit.”

Back in April, the Planning Commission unanimously

Kwolek said, “Public Works has some big tasks and responsibilities ahead, and I look forward to leveraging the Department’s strengths to meet these challenges and make a positive impact in the Morro Bay community.

“One of my central aims is to collaborate with City staff, City Council, residents and community leaders to ensure our success.”

He starts his new job at \$142,000 a year plus benefits and will oversee a department with 33 employees.

Collins must still find a new fire chief to replace Chief Steve Knuckles who retired at the end of March but stayed on as an interim chief until July, when he has to retire for sure under the public employee retirement system’s rules.

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approved the project. It automatically went to the City Council as all CDPs do, and now goes to the Coastal Commission. It was actually the planning commission's second bite at the apple for a project there.

"The PC initially reviewed the CUP amendment on Dec. 18, 2018," the report said, "and added five project conditions primarily related to restoring the building as much as possible to the original Jim Maul architecture. However, the 2018 project did not move forward to City Council for final CUP approval due to Building Code challenges related to ADA accessibility with the proposed lift and the second floor uses."

That first project asked for two upstairs units and when it came back, it was reduced to just one and an elevator put in to meet the ADA requirements, according to the report.

The relatively small Harborwalk expansion — going from 8-1/2' feet to 10' wide — is another example of an issue that the Waterfront Master Leaseholders has raised with the City's general plan/local coastal plan update process that is wrapping up now on the City level.

The issue is that for years the City had developments install the Harborwalk along the waterside of the Embarcadero with an 8-feet standard.

But with recent projects — namely the rebuilding of the seawall and docks at The Boatyard Center, and the conversion of Rose's Landing's second story into Rose's Landing Inn — the Coastal Commission required existing Harborwalk segments be expanded to 10 feet, which the WML argues is a great expense that while providing a public benefit, brings little benefit to the businesses who must pay for it.

Alleged Car Thief Arrested; Car Recovered

By Neil Farrell

A Morro Bay resident has no doubt learned a lesson after he or she left their keys in their vehicle and some opportunistic thief allegedly stole it but didn't get very far nor have it for very long.

According to Morro Bay Police Cmdr. Amy Watkins on May 18 at about 8:55 a.m. a patrol officer was at Hwy 41 and Main Street, "conducting traffic enforcement," when he noticed a man driving a green Acura wasn't wearing a seatbelt.

The officer pulled over the Acura in the 1400 block of Main. The driver yielded into a parking lot but then jumped out of the car and took off running. Officers tracked him to an alley a short distance away and he was taken into custody, reportedly with the help of some bystanders.

Cmdr. Watkins said they discovered that the Acura had been reported stolen at 7:46 a.m. May 14 by a man in the 700 block of Butte Ave. Searching the vehicle, police reportedly found suspected illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia and suspected burglary tools allegedly belonging to the suspect.

Verlon Jason Turner, 35 of Morro Bay was arrested on suspicion of vehicle theft, alleged possession of suspected burglary tools, drugs and paraphernalia and booked into County Jail.

Cmdr. Watkins added, "MBPD would like to thank the alert citizens who assisted officers on scene and remind citizens to secure their car keys and lock their vehicles."

Asked about this, she told Estero Bay News that the victim, whom she declined to name, had left the keys in the car but the car wasn't left running when Turner allegedly stole it.

The car was taken from "a residential neighborhood,"



Verlon Jason Turner

Cmdr. Watkins told EBN. "We had a similar event happen the week prior. That vehicle was low on gas and recovered on Theresa Drive in Morro Bay. [We are] Unable to prove but we suspect the same suspect on both incidents."

If anyone has information regarding this incident or other possible shenanigans Turner may have been up to, you should contact the Morro Bay Police Department at (805) 772-6225 or Crime Stoppers at (805) 781-4553.

Retired Sheriff's Deputy Arrested for Child Molestation.

A retired Sheriff's deputy was arrested and is being charged with multiple counts of child molestation, the Sheriff's Department announced.

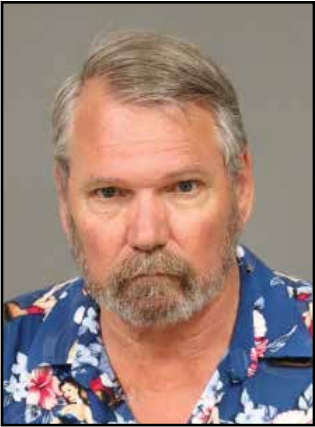
According to Sheriff's spokesman Tony Cipolla, Sheriff's deputies recently received information regarding suspected molestations of children under-14. Detectives investigated the matter and filed a report with the District Attorney's Office, Cipolla said. The D.A. filed the charges in court and Sheriff's detectives arrested the suspect last week.

James Peter Storton, 63 of Arroyo Grande, was arrested May 26, charged with multiple counts of "lewd and lascivious acts with a child under the age of 14."

Cipolla said they were not divulging more details, not even where the alleged crimes took place, "to protect the victims and their family." The arrest hit close to home for the Sheriff's Department.

"Storton," Cipolla said, "is a former [SLO County] Correctional Deputy. He retired from the Sheriff's Office 12-years ago in 2009. He was hired in 1980."

Detectives are asking the public for help in their ongoing investigation. If readers have information identifying additional victims, call the Sheriff's Office at (805) 781-4500.



James Peter Storton

Templeton Drug Bust Finds Heroin, Fentanyl, Guns



Four weapons — three pistols and an AR-15 style rifle, along with heroin, meth, and fentanyl were confiscated. Photos courtesy SLO County Sheriff's Department

Sheriff's investigators with help from federal agents arrested a Templeton man with a pharmacy-like stash of illegal drugs, weapons and cash.

According to Sheriff's spokesman Tony Cipolla at 11:45 a.m. Thursday, May 13, Special Operations Unit detectives and DHS Investigation special agents served a search warrant on a home in the first block of Brewer St.,



Sheriff's detectives seized \$10,000 in cash during a drug bust in Templeton.

Templeton.

The search, Cipolla said, uncovered several types and amounts of drugs including 5 ounces of suspected methamphetamine worth about \$1,000. The stash of drugs included: 8.5 oz. of suspected heroin worth \$7,500, and 1,000 counterfeit M30 pills containing fentanyl worth \$10,000. Some \$10,000 in cash and four firearms, including one reported stolen out of Templeton, were also confiscated.

The guns in Sheriff's photographs appear to be one AR-15 style rifle, two semi-automatic pistols and one revolver.

Domingo Guerrero, Jr., 35 of Templeton, was arrested for suspicion of possessing narcotic substances for sale and possession of illegal drugs for sale. It was unclear if he would also be charged for the weapons or possession of a stolen firearm. Cipolla said the bust is part of a frightening scourge of hard drugs and death in SLO County.

"Overall," he said, "the number of drug related deaths in the County is rising. And so is the number of fentanyl related overdoses."

There were 53 drug ODs in SLO County in 2019. Some 11 of these people also had fentanyl in their blood systems, he said.

"In 2020, there were 88 drug related deaths, of which 34 had fentanyl in their system. So far this year, there have been 17 drug related deaths and 10 of those had fentanyl in their systems."

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News Briefs

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

LOCAC Election Results

The recent Los Osos Community Advisory Council elections resulted in some familiar faces as well as some new ones serving on the council. Voters decided the outcome of four council seats one from each district. Incumbents Yael Korin and Larry Bender will continue to represent Districts 1 and 3 respectively for another four years. New to the council are James Bishop representing District 2 and Deborah Howe representing District 4.

The agency is also looking for someone who would like to help with outreach social media. “We would love an intern who could help build up our presence on social media and support us in reaching our many Los Osos residents,” their website states. “This could be a great class project and great experience for a student who is interested in local affairs, advocacy, and community work.” Anyone interested should contact Sandra at ssarrouf.locac@gmail.com. For more information on LOCAC business, go to <http://locac.info>.

District Attorneys File Lawsuit Against Early Release

What was a petition last issue is a lawsuit now. San Luis Obispo County District Attorney Dan Dow and 43 elected California District Attorneys have filed a civil lawsuit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The suit seeks to prohibit awarding additional conduct credits to more than 76,000 violent and serious offenders. The additional credits were the product of “emergency” regulations, which were passed and first made public on April 30, 2021. In adopting these regulations, and claiming an emergency, the CDCR Secretary stated these regulations were necessary to comply with “the direction outlined in the Governor’s Budget Summary” presented a year ago on May 14, 2020. By invoking an emergency, the traditional regulatory scheme and transparent public comment period was bypassed. This lawsuit requests that the Superior Court declare the regulations unlawful and prohibit CDCR from awarding these additional credits until they lawfully comply with the regulatory scheme, which would include a transparent and rigorous public comment period.

Cuesta Drama Faculty Honored

Cuesta College Drama Artistic Director bree valle was honored by the Kennedy Center with the Gold Medallion, considered one of the great honors in theatre education. Each year, the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival’s (KCACTF) eight regions honor individuals or organizations that have made extraordinary contributions to theatre production and education. The Gold Medallion is the most prestigious regional award given by the KCACTF. Cuesta College is part of Region 8, which includes central and southern California, Arizona, Utah, southern Nevada, and Guam. Cuesta College’s original production of Ghost Ship in 2019 received ten national awards from KCACTF, including Outstanding Theatrical Creation and Outstanding Director for valle. Valle has been a faculty member and artistic director of the drama program at Cuesta College since 2000 and teaches Rehearsal and Performance, Acting for the Camera, Script Analysis, and Introduction to Theatre. She grew up in Northern Canada and has studied at the University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University, and Lakehead University, and earned an MFA in contemporary performance from Arizona State University. She is the co-artistic director and co-founder of Blu Canyon Studios and has acted and directed both locally, nationally, and abroad. Valle’s passion for theatre has led her on a lifelong journey of learning, growing, and inspiring others. “Making theatre that empowers disadvantaged youth to find their voice, to cultivate their listening skills, to be kinder playmates, and to bring joy to others has been the most fulfilling journey I could have ever asked for,” said valle. “I am grateful and overjoyed to accept this honor.”

COVID-19 Assistance Phone Number Changes

San Luis Obispo County’s COVID-19 Phone Assistance Center (PAC) number is changing to 805-781-5500. This is the regular phone number for the Public Health Department. The Phone Assistance Center support will be available for residents who have questions related to COVID-19, including questions about vaccination. For a

short period of time, the old number will still direct callers to the PAC. “I want to acknowledge the many residents who have called to get accurate, up-to-date information throughout the pandemic, and the County employees who stepped out of their regular jobs to serve at the PAC when our community needed them most,” said Dr. Penny Borenstein, county health officer in a news release. “We will continue to provide this support as our community reopens further.” The PAC continues to be available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. to answer questions regarding COVID-19 vaccination, testing, and other COVID-19 based guidelines. Residents seeking a COVID-19 vaccine appointment through one of the County’s clinics can check myturn.ca.gov or call the CA COVID-19 hotline at 1-833-422-4255, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., or Saturday through Sunday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Still Time to Participate in Survey

There is still an opportunity to participate in the County of San Luis Obispo’s Behavioral Health Department survey for clients to give feedback on services received during the Covid-19 pandemic at www.slocounty.ca.gov/clientsurvey. The survey is open to all clients who received behavioral health services during the pandemic and is available in both English and Spanish. Questions cover clients’ experiences, how they prefer to receive their services (in person or online) and asks about public safety concerns. “It is important to us to make sure we are meeting the needs of our clients,” said Amanda Getten, the quality support division manager for Behavioral Health. “This last year has been extremely challenging and we want to make sure we are still meeting our clients’ needs and improving ways to bring recovery and resilience to our county.” Behavioral Health maintained its essential services throughout the pandemic and the shelter at home orders. Services have remained ongoing to provide care to community members with serious mental illness and addiction treatment needs through both in-person appointments and telehealth. The department urges the community to continue to take care of their health and wellness, and to reach out for help when needed. The survey is anonymous and will be open for entries as long as the pandemic continues in SLO County. Clients may always give feedback about services by emailing beahvioralhealth@co.slo.ca.us.

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.

Sheriff to Get 3 More Drones

There’ll soon be a new squadron of drones flying over San Luis Obispo County helping the Sheriff’s Department in its efforts to keep residents safe. The Sheriff’s Department asked County Supervisors for permission to spend some \$22,200 of a Homeland Security grant to buy three more “unmanned aircraft systems” (drones) as part of a December 2018 approval to buy an initial drone paid for out of a \$29,600 DHS grant. “Since the original approval,” reads a staff report from Sheriff Ian Parkinson, “the Sheriff’s Office requested and were approved by California Office of Emergency Services [Cal OES] to purchase up to eight unmanned aircraft systems, dependent on the final cost of each unmanned aircraft.” The department put out a request for proposals and chose a bid for three additional drones at \$7,400 each for a total of \$22,200, and eating up the rest of the initial \$29,600 grant. Drones have been getting increased usage by law enforcement, as they have proved valuable in search and rescue incidents to look for lost people, and with street demonstra-

tions to hover high above the crowd and be an “eye-in-the-sky” for police. Drones are another arrow in the quivers of police departments, much like police dogs. Police dogs were initially a luxury in police departments but have been acknowledged as valuable tools in many law enforcement situations. From sniffing out drugs and explosives to chasing down and assisting in the apprehension of fleeing suspects, police dogs, called “K-9 units” in most agencies, have become increasingly ingrained in police work and have also gone to war with U.S. troops overseas. And the price of a specially trained police dog is about \$8,000 (for just the animal), making their costs comparable to drones, minus of course the cost of specialty patrol cars, food and vet bills.



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Sex Trafficker Gets 15-Years to Life

By Neil Farrell

A Sacramento man was sentenced to 15-years to life in prison after being convicted of child sex trafficking of a teenage girl. According to District Attorney Dan Dow’s Office, Superior Court Judge Barry LaBarbara sentenced Lucion Lee Edwards Banks, 38 of Sacramento, for human trafficking the girl “by use of force, fear, fraud, deceit, coercion, violence, duress, menace or threat of unlawful injury.” Banks will also have to register as a convicted sex offender for the rest of his life.

The case started in October 2018, when San Luis Obispo traffic cop, Quentin Rouses, pulled over a suspicious vehicle and “quickly revealed evidence that Banks was involved in trafficking the young survivor for commercial sexual exploitation.” Banks has been in SLO County Jail; all this time, held on

The victim, who is now 17-years old — testified both at trial and at sentencing. According to a Tribune news article on the case, the victim told the court that she was abandoned by her mother and given to the streets on Oaklands International Boulevard, an area notorious for prostitution.

At the sentencing hearing, she reportedly said her life is much better after the SLOPD officer saved her.

“I am glad to say, I feel no more fear,” she told the court. “I am going to graduate high school. I am going to beauty school. And, also I am going to have my own apartment. I feel like if the San Luis Obispo Police Department did not make that stop, that he [Banks] would have kept hitting me and using me.”

According to the D.A.’s Office, they got help from some outside agencies, including an expert witness from the Alameda County District Attorney’s Office. “Inspector Tim Bergquist, testified on the subject of human trafficking, explaining the dynamics and sub-culture of human trafficking to the jury,” the news release said. “Alameda County District Attorney Nancy E. O’Malley has been a California statewide leader on combating trafficking and created HEAT Watch several years ago.”

Locally, several agencies assisted in Banks’ prosecution, including SLOPD, SLO County Department of Social Services, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), The Family Care Network, Alameda County District Attorney’s Office Inspector Division, SLO County D.A.’s Bureau of Investigation, Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center, and the Child Abuse Interview Team (CAIT).

Human trafficking is a growing scourge on society that the District Attorney has taken a specific interest in combatting. If you or someone you know is being forced to engage in any activity and cannot leave — whether it is commercial sex, housework, farm work, construction, factory, retail or restaurant work, or any other activity, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at: 1-888-373-7888 or Text 233733 (BE FREE).

Locally, contact Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-STOP; text “SLOTIPS” plus your message to CRIMES (274637). You can also call the District Attorney’s Victim Witness Assistance Center at (805) 781-5821 or toll-free at (866) 781-5821.

Also, see the website: www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/District-Attorney/Victim-Witness-Assistance-Center/Human-Trafficking.aspx for more information on the Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce and available resources.



Lucion Banks, 38 of Sacramento, was sentenced to 15-years to life in prison after he was convicted of forced sex trafficking of a 14-year-old Oakland girl, who was freed after a SLOPD traffic cop stopped a suspicious vehicle in October 2018.

Three Arrested in Baby Girl’s O.D. Death

By Neil Farrell

Three people were arrested in connection with the suspicious death of an infant last February up at Heritage Ranch.

According to the Sheriff’s Office, the case started Feb. 4, 2021 when a deputy responded to assist paramedics on a report of a 7-month-old little girl who was not breathing in the 5000 block of Meadow Lark Ln., in Heritage Ranch at Lake Nacimiento.

“The infant,” Sheriff’s spokesman Tony Cipolla said, “was airlifted to Twin Cities Community Hospital and then later to a children’s hospital at Stanford University where the infant subsequently died.” The child died Feb. 10 at Stanford, which is in Palo Alto, Calif..

Cipolla said doctors determined it was a potential case of “child neglect with exposure to fentanyl.” Fentanyl is a synthetic opiate much stronger than heroin that is manufactured in China and smuggled into the U.S. via Mexican drug cartels. It is responsible for many tens of thousands of overdose deaths in the U.S. over the past several years.

“Tests on the child came back positive for exposure to fentanyl and methamphetamine,” said Cipolla.

Sheriff’s detectives investigating the case found evidence that the child’s parents were suspected drug users. A search warrant was served at their Heritage Ranch home where they allegedly found suspected illegal drugs.

And, “through electronic forensic examinations,” Cipolla said, “investigators discovered an attempt to clean the crime scene before detectives could serve the search warrant.” The behavior of the parents while at their daughter’s hospital in Palo Alto have also come under suspicion.

“Evidence also revealed,” Cipolla said, “the parent’s attempt to obtain narcotics while at the hospital where their daughter was being treated at Stanford.”

After a 3-month investigation, Sheriff’s detectives on May 14, arrested the little girl’s parents, Shawn Luhm, 38, and Kayla Luhm, 31, for suspicion of willful cruelty to a child with possible injury or death. The Luhms have since pled not guilty to the charge.

Detectives also arrested Melissa Currie, 36 of Atascadero, on suspicion of being an accessory to “willful cruelty to a child with possible injury or death.”

District Attorney Dan Dow said Currie was being charged for “allegedly concealing evidence related to the child’s death,” presumably for cleaning the house of evidence.



Kayla Luhm, 31, and husband Shawn Luhm, 38, were arrested for suspicion of child cruelty after their 7-month-old daughter died after allegedly ingesting methamphetamine and fentanyl. Melissa Currie, 36, was arrested for allegedly being an accessory to child cruelty by allegedly helping to conceal evidence in the baby girl’s death.

The D.A.’s Office is asking for help with the case. “We are seeking the public’s assistance in providing any information you may have about this case. Individuals with information are encouraged to contact San Luis Obispo County Crime Stoppers at (805) 549-7867 or online at: www.slotips.org.

The County Sheriff’s Office investigated the case and is being prosecuted by Deputy D.A. Lindsey Bittner.

Poly Engineering Dean Earns Woman of Distinction Honor



Cal Poly Engineering Dean Amy Fleischer was honored at the Girl Scouts of California’s Central Coast annual celebration.

Cal Poly Engineering Dean Amy Fleischer was one of six women honored as a Woman of Distinction during the Girl Scouts of California’s Central Coast annual celebration.

The recent Breaking Barriers to Build Change virtual event honored key individuals who drive lasting change in the Girl Scout organization and beyond. The Central Coast scouting organization serves more than 8,800 girls across a region that includes San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura County, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

Fleischer, a third-generation Girl Scout whose daughter was a scout, joined the local Girl Scouts council board in 2019. Her involvement at a board level came after the Girl Scouts of the USA announced an enhanced focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM.

She has a doctorate in mechanical engineering and served as chair of the Mechanical Engineering Department at Villanova University, near Pittsburgh, prior to Cal Poly. While at Villanova, Fleischer served on the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania Board of Directors, where she promoted STEM activities, which included running Girl Scout Day at the university for eight years.

“As educators, it is important to advance opportunities in the STEM field,” Fleischer said. “We are preparing the

Honor Continued on page 9

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Police Blotter



Morro Bay Police Logs

- **May 23:** Someone in the 1100 block of Front St., found a cell phone in a black case, a wallet and driver’s license, which is more ID than ya need to vote in some parts.
- **May 23:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 9 p.m. in the 1100 block of Juniper. The 20-year-old sneetch was nicked for suspicion of being under the influence of drugs and possession of paraphernalia, his stash no doubt hidden where the sun don’t shine and the cops won’t search.
- **May 23:** Police responded at 4:42 p.m. to a car crash in the 900 block of the Embarcadero motor speedway. No injuries reported.
- **May 23:** Police contacted a wanted woman at 4:17 p.m. in the 400 block of Quintana and arrested her on a felony, no-bail \$100,000 warrant, another apparent master criminal foiled again.
- **May 23:** Police were called at 12:24 a.m. to a disturbance in the 900 block of Main. Logs indicated a man 52, and woman 36 were arrested for suspicion of going honkey-tonkin’ a tad too much and the naughty lad was also nicked for suspicion of vandalism.
- **May 22:** Police responded at 11:13 p.m. to a car crash in the 900 block of Monterey. No big to-do to report with this one.
- **May 22:** Police contacted a regular client at 10:48 p.m. in the 900 block of Piney Way. The 43-year-old scofflaw had a bench warrant and was given another citation and then unleashed onto an unsuspecting world.
- **May 22:** Police responded at 10:10 p.m. to Beach Burger in the Salt Building, 571 Embarcadero where someone stole their tip jar. Logs named the suspected thievin’ bilge rat in this apparent inside job.
- **May 22:** Police responded at 8:55 p.m. to a disturbance at the Mobile Gas Station in the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd. A 46-year-old raucous tippler was arrested for suspicion of trespassing, making criminal threats and apparently being too drunk to leave alone. He was hauled forthwith to the gaol.
- **May 22:** Police went looking for a 39-year-old scofflaw in the 300 block of Arcadia ‘cause he had four RSVPs from a judge. He was also allegedly in possession of drugs but was simply cited and released.
- **May 22:** Someone found a wallet sometime somewhere and took it to police to unravel the mystery.
- **May 22:** Police responded at 12:36 a.m. to the Inn at Morro Bay on State Park Road where they arrested some 36-year-old fellow for apparently getting sloshed and acting like an idjit.
- **May 20:** A juvenile boy told police he was being bullied at school and it “was causing outbursts at home,” no doubt

- taking it out on his poor suffering offspring bearing adult relative. Officers took a report.
- **May 21:** Police contacted another model citizen with a warrant at 6:19 p.m. in the 700 block of Quintana. Her was cited and released no doubt with a wink and a nod to appear in court.
 - **May 21:** Police responded at 3 p.m. to a car crash at Main and Harbor. Logs indicated a 22-year-old woman was arrested for allegedly driving stoned on drugs and causing an accident. She was taken for a photo sitting and a life-changing experience at County jail.
 - **May 21:** Police contacted a suspicious woman at 1:37 p.m. in the 2600 block of Main. The fraulien, 51, had a felony warrant but according to logs, “due to COVID-19 guidelines” she was cited and released, yet another sign of the approaching apocalypse.
 - **May 20:** At 3 p.m. police pulled over a suspicious vehicle at Hwy 1 at Elena. The 56-year-old rogue fellow was arrested for driving on a suspended license. He was hauled downtown booked and released and should be grateful he wasn’t toddy stricken at the time.
 - **May 20:** Someone came to the stationhouse to report that his or her bicycle was stolen from the 3900 block of S. Higuera in San Luis Obispo. Officers took a courtesy report for SLOPD.
 - **May 19:** Police contacted a man, 45, and woman, no age given, at 7 p.m. at Coleman and Embarcadero. The suspicious duo was arrested on suspicion of being stoned at the Rock.
 - **May 19:** Police contacted a disturbing man at 2 p.m. in the 2600 block of Coral in the Cloisters. Logs indicated the apparent borracho, 59, was arrested for suspicion of being gattered in public.
 - **May 18:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 9 a.m. in the 300 block of Quintana Pl., after a hawk-eyed officer saw the driver wasn’t wearing a seatbelt, a hanging offense in some towns. The dingus driver, 35, was arrested for suspicion of auto theft, as he’d allegedly swiped the car after finding the keys inside it. Her also got charged with suspicion of possessing drugs, paraphernalia, and burglary tools, as well as no valid license, begging the question “Which charge carries the harshest penalty?”
 - **May 17:** Police responded at 4:11 p.m. to the 1900 block of Main where a woman, 68, with a bell on every tooth was nicked for suspicion of being twisted in public.
 - **May 17:** At 8:58 a.m. police responded to the 1100 block of the Scott Street Alley where someone found a syringe loaded with a clear liquid and a flashlight, no doubt because one cannot shoot up heroin in the dark, it simply isn’t safe. The flashlight was booked for safekeeping and the syringe was marked for destruction, unless some fruit loop dingus wants to try and reclaim it.
 - **May 17:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 12:55 a.m. in the 1200 block of West. Logs indicated a 35-year-old fellow was arrested for suspicion of being UTI on drugs, possession of drugs and a glass crack pipe, and petty theft, no doubt to sell and buy more drugs. And when the Fooliot got to jail, they allegedly found more drugs on him and a charge of allegedly bringing drugs into a jail was added to his list of woebegone ways.
 - **May 16:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle they were tailing at 4:30 p.m. on Hwy 1 at Yerba Buena Street. The over the hill driver, 70, was arrested for suspicion of driving under the weather and taken to the hoosegow to sleep it off.
 - **May 16:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 2 p.m. in the 1700 block of Main. The 40-year-old zoom-zoomer was nicked for suspicion of being over stimulated on stimulants.
 - **May 15:** Police responded at 9:30 p.m. to a swanky restaurant in the 800 block of Embarcadero where some chiseler skipped out on his bill, no doubt wishing to avoid the poor house dining at the Port House.
 - **May 15:** Police contacted a regular customer at 7:13 p.m. at Lila Keiser Park. The 39-year-old swagman was arrested for resisting arrest, suspicion of being high on drugs, possessing heroin and drug paraphernalia. He was taken to crash at the County sober living group home.
 - **May 15:** Someone found a bicycle in the creek bed in the 300 block of Quintana and gave it to police, who are no doubt forever grateful.

- **May 15:** Police contacted a woman, 20, dawdling about at Lila Keiser Park and discovered she was allegedly in possession of a stolen bicycle. She was also allegedly in possession of drug paraphernalia and prescription drugs. She was cited and released, with the bike going back to its rightful owner.
- **May 15:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 11 a.m. in the 700 block of Quintana. He had a bench warrant and was issued another disappearance ticket and released.
- **May 14:** Police responded to a gas station in the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd., where some slugabed was hanging around. Logs indicated the 41-year-old Plod was allegedly UTI on drugs, in possession of a crack pipe and drugs, his stash apparently not yet gone up in smoke.
- **May 14:** Police responded at 8:55 p.m. to an un-neigh-borly dispute in the 400 block of Sicily. The Morro Bay felonies at the heart of the boggle were excessive late-night noise and bright, backyard lights, hanging offenses in some neighborhoods.
- **May 14:** Police found a car illegally parked in the 700 block of Harbor and towed the offensive 4-wheeled menace, off to the impound graveyard.
- **May 13:** Police contacted a regular customer hanging around in City Park at 3 p.m. The apparent zhclub, 36, had seven bench warrants and yet was issued another scrap of apparently worthless paper with a new court date that won’t be kept, and released back into City Park.
- **May 13:** Someone stole a bicycle from the 600 block of Monterey and police have no clues as to who did what.
- **May 12:** Police towed a vehicle from Hill and Main at 10 p.m. that had an expired registration. Earlier they towed a car off Hwy 1 at Yerba Buena that had been abandoned, as zero tolerance continues for DMV insurrectionists.
- **May 12:** Police contacted a regular customer at 10:40 a.m. in the 800 block of Piney Way. The 47-year-old scofflaw had three misdemeanor warrants and was given a fourth and released.
- **May 12:** Police responded at 10 a.m. to a car crash at Pacific and Bernardo. No injuries reported, but the cars will no doubt never be the same.
- **May 11:** A citizen reported a battery that apparently occurred April 25 in the 2600 block of Main.
- **May 11:** Police contacted another regular customer at 2:11 p.m. in Lila Keiser Park. The negligentleman, 52, had neglected to appear in court three times but was taken to County lockup and won’t be missing his fourth date with Lady Justice.
- **May 11:** Someone in the 400 block of Main reported a suspected case of elder abuse and police took a report.
- **May 11:** Police responded to the Lila Keiser Park den of iniquity in the 1700 block of Park St., at 1:30 p.m., where four misbegotten knaves — two men and two women — were pipped at the post for various reasons. One fellow, 51, was busted for suspicion of possessing drugs and drug paraphernalia; a 37-year-old miscreant had a warrant and he was allegedly in possession of paraphernalia and drugs; a woman, 53, allegedly had paraphernalia and drugs; and the other scofflaw-ette, 46, had four bench warrants. Officers cited and released this whole carnival of fools.
- **May 11:** Police responded to a disturbance at 6 a.m. in the 1600 block of Main. Logs indicated a 66-year-old woman was apparently having a bout of irregularity of the mouth and got nicked for suspicion of being hellified in public.
- **May 10:** Police responded at 6 p.m. to a reported assault somewhere on the Embarcadero. Logs indicated they arrested a 53-year-old ruffian for suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon and vandalism. He was tossed into the County dungeon.
- **May 10:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 3 p.m. at City Park on Harbor Street. Naturally, the apparent swamp donkey, 30, was nicked for suspicion of being UTI, a warrant, and alleged possession of drug paraphernalia, as they apparently couldn’t find his stash.
- **May 10:** Police took a report from a citizen in the 700 block of Quintana alleging “inappropriate touching.” The matter was deemed “unfounded” and the scamboogah apparently got away with it again.

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Community

Honor From page 7

next generation workforce. As we encourage young women to go into STEM fields early, we are promoting the value of diversity in engineering.”

As leader of Cal Poly’s College of Engineering, Fleischer focuses her efforts on justice, equity and inclusion, working with college leadership to implement college-wide strategic goals. She works diligently to increase safe and accessible learning environments for all students, focusing strongly on the university’s Learn by Doing philosophy as she encourages innovation through unique projects and programs.

“Dean Fleischer is an incredible leader for her college and a respected and valued member of our community, both on and off campus,” said Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore, Cal Poly’s provost and executive vice president for Academic Affairs. “Her passion and advocacy for the Girl Scouts and for creating opportunities for women in STEM is inspiring and invaluable. I am excited to see her recognized for work that means so much to her and proud to have her as a part of the Cal Poly community.”

As the leader of one of the nation’s most highly rated engineering schools — and the largest of Cal Poly’s six colleges — Fleischer has represented the university at state-wide and national events, including the ASEE Engineering Deans Public Policy Colloquium in Washington, D.C., and ASEE Engineering Deans Council Diversity Committee. She regularly advocates for STEM funding for public education and the 23-campus California State University system on Capitol Hill.

The 2021 Women of Distinction recognized six women who made significant contributions in one or more of the key focus areas for Girl Scout success: Healthy Living; Financial Empowerment; STEM; Leadership; and Community Responsibility. As determined by the Girl Scout Research Institute, girls who have positive influences in these areas are more likely to gain essential skills and find success even beyond their years in Girl Scouts.

Honorees joining STEM Innovator Fleischer included: Oxnard’s Assistant Police Chief Denise Shadinger, Civic Changemaker; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advocate Keisha Browder, CEO of United Way of Santa Cruz County; Financial Steward Michelle Yee, senior vice president, Ventura/Santa Barbara market executive at Bank of America; Outdoor Adventurist Karey Muller; and Life Skills Coach Erika Sintigo, of Santa Clarita, a human resources professional at Insperity Inc.

“Our amazing volunteers, adult awardee recipients and Women of Distinction are individuals whose lives are rooted in the Girl Scouts’ ideals of courage, confidence, and character,” said council CEO Tammie Helmuth. “They make the world a better place every day by supporting all endeavors of our girls and are the backbone of our organization.”

New Waterfront Business Open

By Neil Farrell



The Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce turned out recently to cut the ribbon and officially open, ‘The Boat Yard Market,’ 875 Embarcadero. Photo by Dean Sullivan

A new mini market, selling snacks, beer, wine and locally sourced food stuffs and gifts, has opened in the heart of The Embarcadero, and the owner sees it as a support business for his bread & butter venture of renting you-drive electric boats.

And the owner of a 40-foot luxury yacht, “Toast the Coast,” has launched a new 6-pack charter business that promises to take you.

Nick Trujillo, who has owned the Bay Cruisers electric boat rental since 2016, located in the Boatyard Center, 845 Embarcadero, just launched “Boat Yard Market,” at 875 Embarcadero in front of the Port House Restaurant, in a space that’s been mostly empty for the past several years, but had been the original home of Morro Bay Hat Co., (now at Dutchman’s Landing).

Trujillo bought Bay Cruisers from Tom and Joeli Pauley in 2016 and had been running the business for them since 2009, he explained sitting in the new market, which is nicely decorated with a country market feel to it.

“With the electric boats,” Trujillo said, “Everybody always asks where they can get beer and wine and snacks.” He noted that there really isn’t a “market” where someone can get these things. He’s long wanted to open the store and leased the vacant storefront last November. But a few unfortunate accidents, including his mother being in a serious car crash last December, led him to close his businesses to help her in her recovery.

When Port House opened after an extensive remodel-

ing and rebuilding of that lease site (which was the Otter Rock Café for nearly 25 years) and the Boatyard Center next door by SLO businessman Cliff Branch, Sextant Winery had a small shop in the space, Trujillo explained. He used to buy wine there. “I came in one day and it was gone,” he said. When he saw Branch, who is also his landlord on the docks, “I said, ‘I’ll take it,’” he added.

It’s taken this long to get the business up and rolling, including an extended time to get the Pauley’s off-sale liquor license into his name. “It took 6 months to get the liquor license transferred,” Trujillo said.

His mother, who is still recovering from the crash plans to come work in the market on weekends, and he’s happy about that. Her used car lot in Atascadero isn’t going to survive the coronavirus pandemic business crunch. He’s philosophical about that. “We [Bay Cruisers] were one of the lucky ones,” he said. “Our business was up 67% last year. My mom’s car lot took a hit and she’s closing it now.”

Though he could be considered seasoned in the boat rental business, Trujillo admits to being a novice with the new market. “I hope it works out,” he said, “It’s all new to me.”

He’s trying to sell as many locally-sourced products and items as he can, pointing out that one of the best local products, Cayucos Hot Sauce, finally came in to the store. Cayucos Hot Sauce is owned by Lars Naschime, a Cayucos native son who developed the unique recipe using special

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Woody Clark, center with the big scissors, gets ready to cut the ribbon and launch his new, 6-pack charter boat business, Toast of the Coast, based in the Boatyard Center, 845 Embarcadero. Photo by Dean Sullivan

hot peppers grown in Costa Rica, where he also manufactures the hot sauce.

He's gotten a surprise with his early clientele — guests at waterfront motels. "There's no rhyme or reason to it," he said, adding that they come in the mornings and evenings too, and for some reason he sells a lot of Advil and Aleve.

He's forever grateful for the many friends who came and helped get the market open. "It's taken a village to get through it," he said, referring to both the store and his mom's recovery from severe injuries.

"People donated their time, painting and designing the interior and logos, all kinds of stuff."

Boat Yard Market is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 10-8 weekends. Eventually he wants to adjust the hours to 8-8 to coincide better with the closing of the nearby restaurants and businesses.

And a new boat charter business has opened at the Boat Yard Center docks, which already have Rock Kayak and Bay Cruisers.

Woody Clark opened, "Toast the Coast," with a 40-foot yacht of the same name for so-called 6-pack charters.

He'll take you inside the bay, Clark said, or out on the ocean. Your group can go whale watching or fishing, cruise up to Cayucos or down to Avila Beach. He's got Champagne and liquor and is available for weddings or burials at sea. "We spread my grandmother's ashes at sea," he said.

He also books charters through Project XO, whose owner, Hannah Lique Naitove, bills herself as a "Date Night Planner," specializing in such bookings for special occasions.

It also took some doing to get up and running. He's been trying to get going for 9 months, he told EBN.

The Toast is a big, roomy boat with a cabin, a sofa couch in the salon, a shower, restrooms and even a wet bar. He calls his business a "private luxury charter."

"There's nothing like this around here," he said, "from Monterey to Santa Barbara, there's nothing like this."

He said his boat could easily fit many more than six passengers but his license limits it to just half a dozen.

To book a charter you can call Project XO at 603-313-4015 or email: hannah@project-xo.com. Or call Clark at 805-704-2628, email: woody@toastthecoast.com. His website is: www.toastthecoast.com.

Estero Bay News welcomes these two new businesses to the community and wishes them both great success.

Veteran Food Gift Card Program


Continuing to serve veterans and veteran families throughout San Luis Obispo County, the SLO County Veterans Services Collaborative and local veteran services agencies have joined forces with the Grocery Outlet chain to provide \$50 food gift cards for veterans and veteran families.

The gift cards — valued at \$10,000 total — are the result of a grant from the Bob Woodruff Foundation to the SLO Veterans Services Collaborative. The Bob Woodruff Foundation has donated many millions to the betterment of veterans and veteran families nationally with emphasis on food insecurity, mental health, homelessness, housing and employment.

The cards can be redeemed at local Grocery Outlet stores in Atascadero, San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, Los Osos and Arroyo Grande and are available for distribution at the SLO County Veterans Services Office located in the County Veterans Building, 801 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo, 805-781-5766. The gift cards are available to veterans and veteran families now.


This is the second food gift card distribution for the SLO Veterans Collaborative in the past six months. "Last Christmas we used a Bob Woodruff \$10,000 grant to distribute \$50 Vons food cards to 200 veterans and their families, partnering with 10 separate veterans service organizations," said SLO Veterans Services Collaborative Board Chair Paul Worsham. "This year we're buying food cards locally and for better control of distribution, we're limiting the number of distributors."

Teresa Novak, owner-operator of the Atascadero Grocery Outlet said, "We are proud to partner with the SLO Veterans Services Collaborative, and we genuinely welcome the opportunity to provide a means for veterans and their families to enjoy substantial savings on quality food in our stores."



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For more information regarding the SLO Veterans Services Collaborative and its programs, go to their website at slovsc1 or contact by email at info@slovsc.org and by phone at 805-270-2988.

For This Cambria Couple, it's all About the Arts

By Jill Turnbow



Mar and Shirley Kirkes-Mar continue to fulfill their love of the arts in Cambria.

Cambria is known for being an oasis for retirees. The community offers many ways to develop new interests and flourish in life's new chapter, or there are ways to dive even deeper into life-long passions. No one knows that better than arts power couple Jeff Mar and Shirley Kirkes-Mar, who moved to the seaside village to retire in 1996 and have both found ways to thrive in their passions for art, music and dance.

Jeff and Shirley met in Los Angeles when Shirley was choreographing for a ballet company and Jeff was hired to edit music tracks. Jeff quickly fell for ballet, then for Shirley, and began composing original music for the company. Jeff holds a master's degree from UCLA in music composition. As a keyboardist, he played with several bands, one in particular, The Sophisticates, a female trio, took him around the globe. That led to his next gig as the music director for the pop group The Letterman. Jeff has also spent many years as a sound editor in films and television, which led him to Shirley.

Meanwhile, Shirley was a professional dancer in Los Angeles as well as an actress on several television shows, like Laverne & Shirley, (but she wasn't THAT Shirley) as well as The Carol Burnett Show. She danced on the Dean Martin show and later was the choreographer for Steve Martin in The Three Amigos and Pennies From Heaven.

Then at the age of 50, Shirley picked up a paintbrush. "I just had an eye for it," she said. "Painting is a lot like choreography. Its placement, where things go on the canvas, is a lot like where things go on a stage. To be a good artist is also like dance. You can gain technique but to be good you have to feel it."

When they both retired to Cambria, Shirley didn't plan on dancing again. However, an opportunity arose with a Paso Robles dance studio and she began helping young girls compete in tap and ballet. She taught in Paso for 17 years. To this day she is still teaching adult tap classes at her studio in Cambria.

Jeff immediately found opportunities to work with students as well. He formed a Drum Corp at Coast Union High and has been involved with the high school musicals. "I had never worked with high school students before but now I have played for 17 musicals," Jeff said. "I love seeing the evolution of the productions and especially the growth of the students."

Jeff was also instrumental in Allied Arts move from the old Santa Rosa Schoolhouse to its current location in the old grammar school. At one time he was the president of Allied Arts and continues to work on some of the theatre productions as music director. And, Shirley continues to choreograph both the high school productions along with doing the poster art and has choreographed shows at Cambria Center for the Arts as well.

"To be surrounded by art, music and dance, it's a good life," said Shirley.

Events and Activities

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



The SLO Food Bank's Hunger Awareness Day takes place on June 4 is a countywide event to inform the community about the devastating effects of hunger in SLO County and to raise funds to support the SLO Food Bank's hunger relief efforts.

Become a Hunger Hero today and join them in the mission to alleviate hunger for neighbors in need. Transforming into a Hunger Hero is simple and has a tremendous impact. On Friday, June 4th, visit the food bank at locations throughout SLO County as they educate the public and collect vital funds to provide food and peace of mind to neighbors in need.

Cambria
Cambria Drug, 2222 Main St, Cambria, CA 93428 from 10 a.m – 5 p.m.

Los Osos
Ralph's, 1240 Los Osos Valley Rd, Los Osos, CA 93402 from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Morro Bay
Albertsons, 730 Quintana Rd, Morro Bay, CA 93442 from 9 a.m – 6 p.m.

San Luis Obispo
California Fresh Market, 771 Foothill Blvd, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405 from 9 a.m – 6 p.m.
SLO Food Bank, 1180 Kendall Rd, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401 from 9 a.m – 6 p.m.
Union Bank, 995 Higuera St, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401 from 10 a.m – 5 p.m.

Go to slofoodbank.org, to learn more about hunger relief efforts or to make a monetary donation.



The Cal Poly Wind Ensemble & Wind Orchestra presents the virtual concert "Voices in the Wind" at 3 p.m. Sunday, June 6. Most of the works on the program were composed within the last decade, including "A Mother of a Revolution!" by Omar Thomas, which was inspired by the Stonewall uprising of 1969 and brought to national attention the systemic oppression of the LGBTQ community in New York City. Faculty oboist Heidi Butterfield will perform the West Coast premiere of "Hidden Currents" for oboe and wind ensemble by Katherine Bergman. The piece depicts the seasonal changes along the northernmost stretch of the Mississippi River. Travis Cross' "Let the Amen Sound" will conclude the concert. A live Q&A session with conductors Christopher J. Woodruff and Nicholas P. Waldron and some of the performers will be held following the concert. Tickets are \$5 and are sold from the Performing Arts Center, ext. 6-4849. For more information, visit the Music Department calendar website.

Join the Central Coast State Parks Association on Friday, June 4 at 1 p.m. for their next Virtual Mind Walk: Dark Skies Over the Central Coast. During the event with Dr. John Keller celebrate wonders of the night sky that are accessible every night to both casual and dedicated observers throughout San Luis Obispo County – at least before the marine layer rolls in. They will also talk about how folks can contribute to Globe at Night, a citizen science project focused around dark sky preservation. Register at

Events and Activities Continued on page 12

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Community

Events and Activities From page 11
https://centralcoastparks.org under the Events tab.

Get your orders in for the Central Coast Women for Fisheries yearly fundraiser sale of albacore enchiladas. There are four enchiladas per try made with West Coast troll caught fish for \$12. They come with green sauce and corn tortillas or red sauce and flour tortillas. Order early because the supply is limited. Pick up day is Saturday June 19 between 1 to 5 p.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center, 1001 Kennedy Way. For orders, contact ccwf@womenforfish.org, or Lenore Ward at lenoredw@gmail.com (805) 550-0253, or Sharon Rowley srowley303@gmail.com (805) 674-4854. They will need to know how many trays and what sauce and tortilla combo you want along with your phone number.

Proceeds from the event support the non-profit's scholarship program and work on waterfront display signs of several types of local fishing. The group also has a relief fund for fishermen and their families in case of tragedies as well as educational displays and activities at public and school events. Check them out at https://womenforfish.org and on Facebook.



The San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden presents a monthly bird walk series on the 4th Thursday of every month from 8 a.m. -10 a.m. Explore the intersection of birds and botany with bird lover Mark Mushkat and docent Ken Levine, studying birdlife amongst the plants of the botanical garden. The focus is on which avian species are drawn to certain plants, what's gained or lost in the exchange, and how this understanding can shape your own landscaping efforts to the benefit of fauna and flora. Allow for a two-hour exploration on mostly flat ground. Bring binoculars (if you have them), comfortable shoes, and water.

Tickets are \$10 for Garden Members, \$20 for the general public, and free for children. All tickets include admission to the garden as well. Walks are open to all ages. Group size is limited to 12 and children must be accompanied by an adult. Ticket sales end at 4 p.m. the day before each walk, and due to COVID-19 restriction, all guests must preregister at slobg.org.

The Central Coast State Parks Association (CCSPA) is back again with the latest film screening of our Get Outside! Film Series. CCSPA in association with SLO-Motion Film and There Does Not Exist Brewery (TDNE) presents Playing with Sharks, National Geographic's latest film.

In addition, TDNE, in collaboration with CCSPA, is launching a limited edition small batch ale that supports local State Parks. A portion of the sales from this new brew will help fund educational opportunities in our parks.

TDNE will provide an outdoor venue with space for in-person guests to bring their own chairs and blankets for seating. Food will be available for purchase from Corazon 805 Tacos. Current COVID-19 guidelines will be followed throughout the event.

Takes place June 12. Doors open at 7 p.m. and films

start at 8:30 at the There Does Not Exist (TDNE) Brewery, 4070 Earthwood Lane, Suite 110, San Luis Obispo. Tickets are available at https://www.slmotionfilm.com/events/playing-with-sharks. In-person admission \$18, virtual admission for one person is \$, \$15 for two and a three or more people is \$20.

CCSPA members get \$2.00 off any ticket. All proceeds from screenings of the Get Outside! Film Series fund public outreach and education that celebrate the biodiversity of the Central Coast, where the land meets the ocean, within our local State Parks.



A Marine Swap Meet is set for Saturday, June 26 at the Morro Bay Maritime Museum, 1200 Embarcadero and they're signing up vendors now for the fund-raising event.

The Maritime Museum Association, Morro Bay Youth Sailing Foundation and the Friends of the Morro Bay Harbor Department are sponsoring the swap meet, which runs from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Vendor spaces, 10-feet by 20', are \$25 and admission is free and open to the public. To get a vendor application, see: friendsofthemhbd.org.

Fees are non-refundable unless the Marine Swap Meet gets canceled due to COVID-19, then vendor fees will be refunded.

Items you'll find include boats, watercraft, marine supplies, boat building tools and equipment, marine hardware, fishing equipment, scuba and dive gear, surfboards and surf-

ing-related items, marine and nautical art, and collectibles. Proceeds from, the Swap Meet will go towards retrofitting the Morro Bay Harbor Patrol's Radon patrol boat that was purchased from Port San Luis Harbor Patrol last December but needs new engines and a new fire canon pump among other upgrades.

Posed in the photo with Morro Bay's used, new patrol boat are from left: PSL Chief Harbor Patrol Officer, M. Ashton; PSL Supervising Officer, J. Vierra; MBHP Ofc. Dana Stein; and MBHP Supervisor Becka Kelly. Submitted photo



Rosey'n'Barb are still at it after all these years. Take a peek into the window of the Los Osos Pop Up Gallery, next to the expanded Miners' Ace Hardware store, at 1080 LOVR. The artist couple "Rosey" and Barbara Rosenthal are exhibiting their colorful paintings and original prints in this "just for looking" Community Gallery. There are no hours or operation, the art is in the window all the time.

Send your event listing at least three weeks in advance to Editor@EsteroBayNews.com. Make sure to include the who, what, why, where and when of the event and contact information. Please, type out in paragraph form rather than attaching flyers.



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Takin' Care of BUSINESS

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Rock Harbor Expands



Digital marketing agency Rock Harbor Marketing (RHM) has expanded its SLO County presence. The new office, located at 783 Market Ave., is approximately 1,400 square feet overlooking Morro Bay's Embarcadero. This new space provides RHM staff with much-needed creative meeting spaces and room to accommodate their growing team. "We are excited to relocate to our new, larger office overlooking Morro Bay's beautiful waterfront," commented Jen Ford, RHM co-founder. "This move represents another significant milestone for our home-grown marketing company. The new office space better accommodates our growing team of creative professionals. It enables us to collaborate with additional talent in a bigger way. Coming out of a year that presented a series of new challenges and earned our team a few international awards, our number one goal is to continue providing industry-leading service to our clients. This new space will easily help make that happen." Founders said the office reflects the creative culture of RHM and strives to make it a great place to work. The facility features spacious meeting areas where teams can collaborate on solutions with colleagues, customers, partners, and offsite employees.

If Working From Home Isn't for You

The pandemic created changes and opportunities in the workplace for many that will continue after COVID-19 has passed. Many workers have been given the option of working from home, and there are benefits to that including not spending time and expenses relating to commuting as well as less expensive wardrobe requirements. But there are several things to consider when choosing to work at home, according to Horizon Realty & Property Management in Morro Bay including:

- Is your home large enough to accommodate workplace needs?
- Do you have a private space, or do you work on the dining room table?
- Do you have an area to leave work in process, or do you need to put it away every evening?
- What distractions such as the kids and the dog do you deal with every day?
- Will you miss the company of my coworkers?

Recognizing the need for what could be a better option, the owners of the office building at 950 Los Osos Valley Road have constructed a suite of turnkey private offices. Each brand new, contemporary office is secure, and the rent includes all utilities and Internet as well as a food prep area and refrigerator. For more information, call Horizon Realty & Property Management at (805) 772-5657.

Beer to Support State Parks

There Does Not Exist Brewery, in partnership with Central Coast State Parks Association, will launch a new beer that supports CCSPA's fundraising efforts. The new brew launches June 10 and will be available for purchase at their location in San Luis Obispo at 4070 Earthwood Ln Suite 110. There taproom is open for drink-in service and to-go pick ups Tuesday – Friday from 3 p.m. – 8 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 12 p.m. - 8 p.m. *Are you or a neighbor Taking Care of Business? Submit your awesome local efforts for publication here. Is your business supporting our community? Maybe you're launching a new business, or you're making updates to your current business model, or re-opening. Or perhaps you have a job opportunity, or have been doing some volunteer work, or are collaborating with another business or a non-profit. Or maybe you know someone who is. Fill out our online form at EsteroBayNews.com*

A Dose of Good Dogma



I Call Your Name

By Lisa Ellman

How many times do you call your dog's name before you actually give a command? I ask this because I often hear owners calling out their dog's name repeatedly without ever giving the dog any information about a desired behavior. Sometimes I think people expect the dog to know what they want, without having to say it. I hear the dog's name most, without ever being followed by the actual behavior, when people want their dog to come. Owners sometimes refer to this as "selective hearing." What they're actually witnessing is something called "learned irrelevance." In scientific terms, according to Google, learned irrelevance "refers to a form of selective learning that develops as a result of prior noncorrelated exposures of the predicted and predictor stimuli. In learning situations that depend on the associative link between the predicted and predictor stimuli." In other words, breaking it down to the essentials of dog training, your dog has learned to ignore you because there has been no connection between the stimulus (dog's name) and the predicted stimuli (come). This is because the human has not communicated the desired behavior to the dog. All the dog hears is its name over and over, ad infinitum.

If you want your dog to respond to a behavior, it first needs to be taught what the behavior is. This involves teaching the dog to associate a word or sound with the correct response. Some trainers use negative reinforcers for this, e.g. Ecollars. If the dog ignores the trainer, it gets buzzed. My training philosophy is based on positive reinforcers; when the dog responds correctly, it is reinforced with a treat or something the dog enjoys, leading to a repetition of successful responses.

Often, the first thing I do with people is have them teach their dog to respond to the sound of its name. After the dog is taught to turn to the owner at the sound of its name, the next step is to immediately give the dog a command. So now the process becomes name, command, response. Call the dog's name, dog turns to look (attention) dog is given behavior to respond to, reward given for response.

I know it may sound easy on paper, but honestly if you take the time to practice it, sooner than later, especially when your dog is young, it becomes just another lifelong conditioned behavior. If you have young children, it's important to try and get them to learn and participate in this training as well. I've worked with many families and heard more than one child simultaneously call the dog's name repeatedly. The dog, usually a puppy or younger dog, overwhelmed by the cacophony and chaos, just tunes them out. Working with your children and the dog one on one is a great way to give them all the same (successful) experience of training, getting the right response and making a positive, respectful connection with the pup!

Good Dogma has been training humans and their dogs since 1996. Readers are invited to submit questions to gooddogma@hotmail.com. Contact information for all offered services can be found on our website www.GoodDogma.net

OUT & ABOUT WITH THE BOOKSHELF WRITERS

The BookShelf Writers consist of four Estero Bay women who have been writing & critiquing together for over five years. For more samples of their work, please visit: www.thebookshelfwriters.com

Each issue, this column will feature one of the BookShelf Writers: Debbie Black, Catherine "Kiki" Kornreich, Judy Salamacha and Susan Vasquez

Park Ridge Trail

By Susan Vasquez

Over the shoulder of the town of Los Osos is the Pacific Ocean. Shielded by a sand spit, Los Osos hides from that deceptive and ill-named body of water that is not peaceful even when it appears calm, as today. I walk at low tide east from the Pacific and watch the ocean's fingers snake their way to the back of Morro Bay until the sand sucks out the sea water and becomes a soupy mess. It pulls your shoes off if you venture out in a kayak at the wrong time of the tidal day and need to step out to unstuck your

Park Ridge Trail Continued on page 16

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CLASSES OF 2021



campers.

He and Taylor, who is also a teacher, produced a video about surf camp that was posted to the organization’s website, and the word spread quickly among the camp’s patrons.

And with the camp’s return comes the return of an annual tradition by local businessman Michael Williams of “Movement for Life Physical Therapy,” formerly known as San Luis Sports Therapy, who for 19 years has held a pre-4th of July benefit barbecue, raising money for high school sports programs and now for surf camp.

In 2019, the last time they held the barbecue, Williams said, they raised \$13,800, plus more on T-shirt sales, hats and sweatshirts. “Every year we break a record,” he said.

Taylor said, “The barbecue is an integral part of our budget. It would be significantly more difficult to run Project Surf Camp without Mike’s support.”

For Williams the annual event is a bit of relief after a most trying year.

“Last year was devastating for all of us,” he said. “On March 23 [2020] I had to lay off three-fourths of my staff. It was the hardest day of my life.” His crew in one day had to be reduced from 20 employees to five. But enough of that, he’s looking forward.

“Let’s find normalcy again,” Williams said. “I felt the barbecue was one of the biggest steps.”

The barbecue is set for Friday, June 25 from noon to 4 p.m. at the therapy clinic, corner of Harbor Street and Shasta Avenue, across from the Morro Bay Library.

The event is a potluck, Williams said, and members of the community are welcomed to bring their favorite dish to share. He’s providing the trip-tip.

There will also be a big raffle of items donated by local businesses, whom Makowetski praised for stepping up once again.

Among the items in the raffle is a 43-inch TV set from Coast Electronics, a day of bass fishing and an ocean fishing trip on the Black Pearl. “I got saltwater and freshwater covered,” laughed Williams, who personally solicits donations



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from the business community, which have always been very generous.

They are accepting donations for the raffle and monetary donations for Project Surf Camp at the clinic, which is open weekdays. Tickets for the barbecue are also available at the clinic.

Perhaps the magic of Project surf Camp will smile on the barbecue just like the campers’ smiles. “I’m just happy,” Williams said. “I know we can make this a successful event.”

Moving Forward From page 1

Badrigian’s historical fiction will appear in the next issue of Estero Bay News.

So how did Badrigian make his way to the Estero Bay? After high school he decided to enlist in the Marines. In high school he preferred sports to academics. College was his father’s plan so he wouldn’t have to piggyback three jobs to feed a family.

“My friend Michael was home on leave,” Badrigian said. “He offered to show me how to survive Vietnam. I heard the terrible things he experienced. ‘We had to do it, man. We were soldiers.’ Michael had all the signs of PTSD. I had a high draft number. I never wanted to go there.”

After Badrigian earned \$700 as a lifeguard, one of the many jobs his dad worked, he told him he was hitching to California. His father was not happy, but drove him to Turnpike Mass to see him off. They wouldn’t meet again for seven years.

Badrigian had seen a picture of Big Sur and that was where he wanted to go. He got to Newport in 1971 and bought a Harley to beeline north. Darkness and pouring rain forced him to stop in Cayucos. The laundromat was empty, but lights were on.

“After I stripped down to my boxers this surprised Black youth came in with his laundry. ‘That your Harley?’ We talked. When our laundry was done, he offered, ‘My brother and I live around the corner. Want some soup?’ The Williams brothers are still good friends. They own Williams Concrete. I stayed two-three days.”

Big Sur was everything and more. Camping for two weeks immersed him like a vortex. He headed towards Berkeley. “I didn’t like a big city, but it made me think about college.”

Cayucos would become home for 25 years. His Dad helped his brother and him buy a small house for \$6,700 in 1979. Wayne moved back home and Badrigian and his bride, Nancy — “marrying her was the best thing I ever did” — would live there until she wanted a house with space and land to grow things, including three kids: Keeland, a Cal Fire engineer, Rose, a med student and Tess, a future Fish & Game warden.

The new Californian needed a job. Old Mission School needed a bus driver. “While the students were in school, I’d take classes at Cuesta College.” When he transferred to Cal Poly he continued driving the bus and added little league coaching.

Upon graduating, Mission’s priest-administrator said, “You’ve been a good employee, never a problem.” He hired him for 6th grade at \$6,300 a year. Badrigian added coaching at Morro Bay High School. When a teaching job came up at the school at double his pay, he tried to move on. “One catch,” said the priest-administrator, “You signed a contract.” Badrigian would have honored his contract, but he was offered an out. “I won’t stand in your way, but you have to find your replacement and he has to be as good as you.” Which he did; Jeff Palaszewski retired after 26 years and Badrigian taught English at Morro Bay High for 21 years also creating his own reading program.

As a Cal Poly graduate and credentialed English and reading specialist, Badrigian has loved his 40 years recommending books. His ultimate joy is when he recognizes one of his students is excited about a book. Badrigian knows he’s achieved one of many of his goals in life — to create one more lifelong reader.

“I’m still teaching Saturdays at Cuesta because my instructors helped me find my way. I’m paying it forward.” But during the 2020 pandemic distance learning was not his thing. He took a break and is looking forward to Fall, 2021 for in person dialogue with his students.

For 40 years the Central Coast has been blessed to have Bruce and Nancy, also an educator for 32 years, inspire students in language arts, visual arts and recreational sports. Bruce would also go on to serve on community and school boards and his peers have elected him to leadership positions in their associations.

And when Badrigian’s charmed life hiccupped to battle cancer, he was far from done. He fulfilled his destiny writing his grandparent’s genocide survival story. He and Nancy visited Armenia for the 104th Remembrance in 2019. “It was emotional. There were 10,000 people there. I traveled 13,000 miles to honor my grandmother. I was on Armenian TV telling my grandmother’s story. There were 28 flags flying, representing countries their leadership had the courage to call it what it was — the Armenian Genocide.”

April 24, 2021 was a banner day for Badrigian. “President Biden fulfilled his campaign promise. And since the United States has recognized it as genocide, there will be a domino effect of other nations retelling the true Armenian story of WWI.”

City Budget From page 1

clean air and somewhat cooler temps on the Coast. But there were few aspects of normal life that were not impacted by the pandemic.

“The public health crisis,” Collins said, “upended our economy, school and health care systems, our personal schedules...essentially every aspect of lives. We changed how we interacted with our friends, families, coworkers, and the general public. We kept our distance, wore masks, and sacrificed portions of our freedom. Many Morro Bay businesses closed their doors temporarily and re-opened with entirely new ways of receiving their customers. It was a monumental shift in our daily lives. Together we took these painful, but necessary steps to help contain the virus and save lives.”

The pandemic triggered the City’s fiscal emergency plans that led to cuts in City staff and voluntary salary cuts by literally every City employee left on the payroll — from the City Manager on down the hierarchy — and other cost cutting measures that left the City on life-support to maintain critical services like police, fire and maintenance.

“I am extremely proud of how our City team stepped up to support the community,” Collins said, “while also contending with the financial fallout from the pandemic. Shortly after the local emergency was declared to fight the pandemic, City Council activated the City’s Short-Term Fiscal Emergency Plan in March 2020. The City took quick and drastic action to readjust revenue projections for the remainder of FY 2019/20 and curtail expenditures to ensure the continued solvency of the General Fund. Given the travel restrictions put in place by the Governor, the City’s consumer driven revenue sources — Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) and sales tax — were heavily impacted. In order to make up for these rapidly declining revenues, on the expense side, City staff agreed to 5% pay cuts, the Council and Planning Commissioners waived their stipends, the City Attorney and Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) Program Manager reduced their fees, reserves were drawn down in the General Fund and Harbor Fund, training and travel budgets were restricted, capital projects were deferred, vacant positions were frozen and, unfortunately, many members of our City team were let go.”

Most of those over 70 layoffs were part time employees in the Recreation Department, which was essentially closed by the pandemic response, with all City public buildings closed to the public. They — community center, vet’s hall, City Hall and others — remain closed to the public.

Though it’s been nearly 1-1/2 years since the onset of the pandemic in the U.S., the City anticipates more, tough sledding until the pandemic is truly over.

“The FY 2020/21 budget was developed with the same challenging fiscal realities,” Collins said, “and every department and line of service was impacted by these hard decisions. The Council adopted the budget anticipating significantly reduced revenues and expenses and further use of emergency reserves. [The FY 2020/21 adopted budget included a reduction of expenditures of 18% compared to

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News

FY 2019/20 and a \$1 million drawdown of General Fund reserves].”

The City and the citizens toughed it out through a tough year and appear to be coming out the other end in pretty good shape. Collins said he was amazed at the level of resiliency displayed.

“The past year tested each of our abilities, resolve and commitment to getting the job done,” he said. “That very resiliency that got us through the tough year has allowed us to the turn the corner financially.”

It also hasn’t hurt that the City had a couple of major developments regarding revenues. Last November, voters approved Measure E-20, a 1% local sales tax hike that the City predicts will bring in \$2.2 million a year (in a normal economy); and the opening of two marijuana stores — one last October and the other just last month — expected to bring in as much as \$475,000 a year through a special 5% tax on cannabis.

Measure E-20’s start was delayed from the normal Jan. 1 to April 1 as another concession to retailers to assist with the pandemic business and work limitations. So put on your shades, the City sees a bright future.

“Whereas last year we planned for drastically reduced revenues and expenses and large drawdowns of our reserves,” Collins said, “we now are rebounding to the point where we can strategically reinstate vacant positions, fund badly needed equipment replacements, reverse staff pay cuts and offer compensation increases, and begin the process of investing in our aging infrastructure.

“The rebound is dramatic, and it is only made possible by the resiliency of our community, City Council, and our City staff.”

FY 2021-22 will be the largest budget in town history. Interim Finance Director, Katie Lichtig’s, draft budget, which was released last week, reported the total budget — including the Water Reclamation Facility project spending — tops \$121.7 million, an increase of \$52.3 million over FY 2020-21.

Remove the WRF costs from the budget and the total is over \$32.8M, and increase of \$6.4M or 24% from 2020-21.

The WRF expenditures have been \$42.9M in 2020/21 and 2021/22, for a total of \$88.9M. The overall WRF project at this juncture is over \$134M and counting (this figure so far does not include costs for the reclaimed water injection wells nor the tear down of the old treatment plant).

Breaking down the \$32.8M overall budget, the general fund expenditures are listed at \$14.2M a \$1.2M or 9% increase from the previous budget. Most of this comes from increased salaries and increased benefits costs — from the CalPERS retirement costs, “Other Post-Employment Benefits” (OPEB) and health insurance increases, Collins explained.

General Fund revenues are predicted at \$14.3M, a 24.5% increase over FY 2020/21. The City also charges its enterprise funds — harbor, water and sewer — for costs to provide things like payroll, legal advice, and administration — bringing the General Fund’s predicted revenues to \$15.5M.

Collins said they predict the City quickly returning to normal. “The chief drivers of the rebound are the improved local economy and new sources of revenue,” he said. “With regard to traditional revenue sources, the local lodging industry has nearly fully recovered, bringing much needed increases in TOT revenues. Consumer spending has rebounded as well, improving our sales tax projections.”

The real estate market will also contribute. “The fire hot real estate market has also bumped up projections for property taxes,” Collins said. “Those three revenue sources account for 69% of the total General Fund revenues (including transfers in). Staff forecasts a return to pre-pandemic revenue levels in most those categories for FY 2021/22.”

(Property taxes could continue to rise in the near future, as the City’s General Plan Update contains several possible mid-sized subdivisions and housing projects that could someday be proposed but for now are simply zoned for potential development.)

And then there’s the Federal Government’s COVID

relief monies — from the America Rescue Plan Act — totaling over \$350 billion to States, Counties, Cities and tribal jurisdictions, of which the City expects to get \$990,000 sometime this month with another \$990,000 next June (2022). That alone could get the City’s reserves back to where it was.

“These funds,” Collins said, “will help the City both invest in needed equipment and rebuild emergency reserves.”

The City predicts revenues from its main tax sources as — \$3.73M in property taxes; TOT at \$3.57M; \$2.16M in sales and use taxes; \$1.3M in vehicle license fees and backfill property taxes; \$1.2M in inter-fund transfers; \$1.4M in charges for services; \$426,000 in cannabis taxes; \$600,000 in franchise fees to utilities; \$400,000 in business license fees; and \$499,000 in “use of money and property.”

As for expenses, employee costs — salaries and benefits — tops \$10.48M or some 67.6% of the total; “Services” are at \$3.1M; and “Supplies” account for \$565,000. The new budget has 7.1% increases in salaries and benefits.

“The increase,” Collins said, “is due restoring the amount equivalent to the 8% to 5% salary concessions from all employees (citywide) through Dec. 31, 2020, except those members of the Morro Bay Firefighters Association (October through December 2020), restoring several defunded positions, restoring part-time hours for recreation programming to resume, and reflecting projected negotiated pay and benefits due to agreements with the City’s bargaining groups.”

The police department continues to have the largest departmental budget at \$3.77M for 2021/22, some 26.6% of the general fund. City Administration (City Hall) is second at \$3.13M (22.1%); Public Works is third at \$2.69M (19%); with the fire department fourth at \$2.55M (18%). Community Development is fifth at \$1.05M (7.4%); with Recreation sixth at \$817,000. City Council is at \$159,000 or 1.1% of the budget.

As for employees, the City is increasing its crew from 88.1 “full time equivalent” (FTE) employees for 2020/21 to 98.1 in 2021/22.

The new hires will be one more in the administration — an administrative services analyst position “to support City goals and priorities.” They will not fill the tourism manager job that was lost with the advent of COVID-19 and the cessation of tourism promotions under the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID). Indeed, the City is backing out of the promotions business all together and TBID is once again forming a non-profit organization to take over management of its nearly \$1M a year budget (which has \$1.8M in reserves right now).

City Hall also dropped an Account Clerk I spot but added an Office Assistant IV to work the front counter, so City Hall added one net position.

The Recreation Department will add 1.75 FTE people bringing back an admin technician eliminated due to COVID-19 cuts; and adding 1.75 FTE recreation supervisors. Some recreation programs are returning including the summertime Junior Lifeguards.

Community Development Department (planning) adds back one assistant planner position cut due to COVID-19.

The Police Department is bringing back one FTE officer position, the schools resource officer (SRO), which is being funded through the school district. The PD has 21.38 FTE people, with a chief, a commander, four sergeants, one administrative sergeant, four senior officers, five officers, one detective, and the SRO, for a total of 18 sworn police personnel.

The fire department is adding 1.75 positions for a total of 15 FTEs. So the FDs crew now has one chief (an interim position while the City searches for a new full time chief); a division chief/fire marshal; three captains; eight engineers (including one new position); one firefighter and one admin tech.

There are no proposed changes to the Harbor Department’s roster of six FTE. They continue to leave vacant an administrative technician position, unfunded since FY 2019/20.

Three positions were added in the Public Works Department. The Director’s job, which had been vacant for most of 2020, was recently filled and is funded, but they

leave the maintenance supervisor job vacant. They restored one engineering technician job along with a maintenance worker II position for a total of 17 FTE in Public Works, up from 14 last year.

In the Utilities Department they created one new job — electrical and instrument technician, needed for the new WRF plant and funded for just half the year.

The City policy on new revenue sources is to treat them as 1-time windfalls for the first 2 years to establish that they will be ongoing. As for the projected \$426,000 from the 5% cannabis tax the City expects to get annually, for now they are divvying it up among future needs — vehicle replacement, \$50,000; fire department small vehicle fund, \$50,000; maintenance vehicles, \$100,000; information services internal service funds, \$25,000; \$78,000 in lump sum payments to employees; and \$250,000 to restoring the general fund reserves.

The City Council held budget hearings May 25 and 26 and is scheduled to adopt the budget at its June 22 meeting. Readers who’d like to delve into the cornfield maze of the City’s budget, can download a copy of the draft budget from the City’s website, see: www.morrobayca.gov.



There is nothing more inspiring to an artist than to see cows wandering the hills on old ranches. And so it was with me when I attended an art workshop in 1971 with Joyce Pike, one of my many art teachers.

The five-day workshop included painting on several ranches throughout the County. When my family and I moved to Baywood Park later that year, I continued to

Coffee Continued on page 16



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ride. But today, as I walk away from the coast, away from home, I head toward Park Ridge Trail in Morro Bay State Park. It's nice to watch the ocean from a distance. The path rises and falls around a hill that gives a magnificent view of the saltwater marsh in the shallow end of the bay.

Imperfect wildflowers lay along the path and up the hillside. Taller than me, the golden yarrow shines bright and the tiny baby blue eyes brush my boots. Some plants are vivid today, but remind me that the wildflower season is past prime. Cow parsnip, morning glory, sticky monkey flower, milk thistle and purple salsify are saying their goodbyes.

The hills today still carry the mist from the coast, making the air mild and my cheeks refreshed. The sun here is powerful and insistent, but waved away by the breeze. A green blush on the hillside won't be here next time I walk this path. Even today, weeks since the last rain, the hills are streaked with golden. A change has come about from winter's green. The waving ends of aging grass and flowers sway over the crest of the hill, a fading springtime pastel against the blue of a balmy sky.

I walk on a path that has been visited recently by a run of bicycles and many feet. A diligent maintenance crew has kept the main paths broad. Smaller, happenstance cutaways lead to places I didn't prepare to see today. Most are made by adventurous hikers who know the area better than I. Once I get past the first hill, I realize how broad and expansive is this parkland. There are a dozen break-off paths, some posting legitimate signs: Quarry Trail, Crespi Trail, Chumash Trail. The named trails are blazed by the park maintenance crews, but many others are side-lined single walking jaunts that lure me to break the rules. But I know it's best in all ways to stay on the cleared paths, safer for me and safer for the creatures that live here on the hillside.

I see some of these: little rabbits, a couple quails, a buzzard flying above. I hear others: a scampering away as I turn a bend, a swish around a tall bush, several bird voices I can't identify. I also see many offshoots of trails that these creatures have made, so small I am not even tempted to change my route. Running under, next to and through thorny vegetation, they seem to head toward a cleft of water that I hear but can't see.

Since moving to this area, I have been so entertained by the sea: the constant sound, the soothing beach sand, the shallow tides I can slip my toes into every day year-round. I have been facing west for years, in wonderment at this ocean home. Happily today, I am discovering a walking buffet east of my house. I can't wait for my next ramble through these coastal hills, and wonder why my feet have been so long in walking this way.

Susan Vasquez is a member of The BookShelf Writers. To see more of her work, please visit www.thebookshelfwriters.com



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HOLISTIC WELLNESS

Don't Be a Stress Statistic

By Shari Sullivan

Not too long ago during yoga training, a teacher said that nearly everyone has experienced trauma. She went on to state that even the rare person who hadn't has now, thanks to the global pandemic.

It's true for stress too. We live in a culture that holds stress in high regard. Busy is better than relaxing. Long to-do lists are a mark of achievement, and we measure our worth by how much we accomplish.

We're chronically stressed, and our health is suffering. Medical research indicates that as much as 90 percent of illness and disease is stress-related. The American Psychological Association's report "Stress in America 2021" illustrates the added impact the pandemic has on our stress level, calling it a "secondary pandemic health crisis." We're gaining weight, drinking more and feeling worse.

Managing stress takes a commitment to building resilience, buy you may actually enjoy it.

Step One
Get to know your allostatic load

Allostatic load is the cumulation of wear and tear on your body as a result of chronic or repeated stress. Your total load is the result of the big things (good and bad) like a car accident, global pandemic, planning a wedding, etc as well as ongoing (sometimes smaller) things like exposure to mold, lack of exercise, air pollution, loneliness, and poor nutrition. The American Institute of Stress has a helpful inventory at www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory.

Step Two
Get to know your triggers

Practice observing yourself. What sets you off and what might you do to change it? When I was commuting daily, I found myself getting angry most mornings as I tried to get from my house to my car. I was juggling a purse, a gym bag, lunch, coffee, a water bottle and breakfast. Inevitably I would drop or spill something, or get my hair (or hand) caught in something. Once I started using a bag to carry everything, that stressor went away and mornings were better.

Try keeping notes to provide insight — paper and voice notes on your phone are both great. Use what works for you.

Step Three
Make changes

Now that you know your stress load and triggers, and may have fixed a few small ones, it's time to slowly add in some bigger changes.

- Find more triggers to adjust, implement changes one or two at a time. Give them time to become habits before you start the next one.

- Decrease your allostatic load with cleaner options. Replace plastic water bottles with stainless steel, switch one item in your makeup bag for a natural or organic product, or change out a toxic cleaning product for a natural one.
- Address bigger triggers you can remove or adjust. Career change in order? Then start the process by updating your resume and talking with your professional network.
- Get more sleep.
- Add vegetables to your diet. Try adding spinach to your morning eggs or smoothie and frozen bagged organic veggies to soups and stews (homemade, canned or restaurant leftovers).

Shari is a certified integrative nutrition health coach with advanced training in gut health, a 20-year student of herbalism and an artist working in mixed media and metals. She will soon also be a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor.

Coffee From page 15

paint on SLO County ranches. As a credentialed teacher I created a Thursday Location Art Class through the SLO Recreation Department.

The Thursday Painters painted on more than 50 ranches. The most popular was the Froom Ranch located just west of Highway 101 and Los Osos Valley Road. We painted there several times over the years. Bill Froom was very friendly and gregarious. He was proud of the 600-acre ranch. Bill was born on the ranch in 1910 and worked on it throughout his lifetime. He gave tours to Cal Poly students for many years. He enjoyed having artists on the ranch, because he knew many of the students, who at that time were older, more established residents of SLO. On one occasion he gave me and another student a tour of the round barn (see image). He said it was the only round barn in the County. The barn can still be seen on the far side of the ranch. He showed us the horse barn and the feed storage barn and gave us some fresh water from his well. It was a day I will long remember.

I wrote about Bill (Touring the Froom Ranch – The Wild West in Los Osos Valley 2004) because he was such a colorful character. He died in 1998. His life was celebrated by the community at Madonna Inn that year. The ranch is presently owned by the Madonna family.

References: *and Rounding Up The Ranches* by Joan Sullivan 2015. *Froom Ranch Round Barn* Watercolor by Joan Sullivan 1976

Painter-Puzzle Maker Opens Solvang Gallery

A world-famous artist and jigsaw puzzle maker currently working on a puzzle of Morro Bay has opened his first art gallery in Solvang, CA.

Eric Dowdle and Dowdle Studios recently opened "Dowdle Gallery and Puzzle Parlor" with a soft opening May 26-31. A grand opening is slated from July 1-5, the company said in a news release.

Dowdle, whose colorful, fine art jigsaw puzzles have

Painter-Puzzle Continued on page 31



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