

City-Vistra Ink BESS Reimbursement Deal

Story By Neil Farrell - Photo By Dean Sullivan



It'll be one of the largest projects in Morro Bay history and the City has inked an agreement to have its costs reimbursed by the owners of the Morro Bay Power Plant.

Plant owner Vistra, dba Morro Bay Power Company, LLC, has agreed to reimburse the City for its costs in reviewing and permitting the company's proposed "Battery Energy Storage System" (BESS) facility slated for 22 acres of the power plant's 107-acre waterfront property.

The open-ended agreement started with an initial commitment of \$175,000 "to cover City staff, legal, and consultant fees and costs associated with a proposed project by Vistra," reads a staff report on the agreement. "The deposit is subject to replenishment from time to time if the fund gets depleted to less than \$50,000."

Community Development Director Scot Graham told Estero Bay News, "The reimbursement agreement covers costs since September 2021 and we are working on identifying the exact amount expended to date, but don't have that information currently. The City Finance Department,

Community Development Department and The City Attorney's Office are coordinating on this effort, but it is likely to take a couple of weeks before we have a final total."

He added that the reimbursement agreement allows for more money to be shelled out by Vistra when the fund drops below \$50,000.

As for what the project's cost — or what Vistra has been charged so far — Graham said he does have that amount. "As for costs dating back to December 2020 [when Vistra turned in its application]," he said, "those relate to just the application fees paid."

He listed the application fees as: public noticing \$256; Conditional Use Permit (CUP) \$11,215; Laserfiche filing fee \$42; and, Environmental Review initial deposit \$1,156, for a total of \$12,669.

These are all pretty standard planning fees but "do not reflect building permit cost as we don't have those yet and won't until after discretionary permits are issued...if any," Graham said.

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City Declares Key Properties 'Surplus'

By Neil Farrell

The City of Morro Bay has begun a legal process to make certain key waterfront properties declared surplus and able to be sold, which under State law requires they first be offered for residential development.

Back in February the City Council voted to declare a total of five lots as "non-exempt surplus land and not necessary for the City's use," according to the staff report from the time.

The lots are at 714 Embarcadero — a parking lot with at least two parcels — and 781 Market Street — a former restaurant and bar space and a small parking lot at the corner of Pacific and Market.

The package also includes the public restrooms at Centennial Park, a facility that sits in the heart of the Embarcadero.

The City purchased the lots in the late 1990s and early 2000s and has since that time been trying to find someone to redevelop them.

Various scenarios have been proposed and the latest incarnation of the idea was dubbed, "Market Plaza" and featured a reimagined and rebuilt Centennial Stairway and Parkway (Giant Chessboard Park) that would extend across Embarcadero to the street end between Libertine Pub and Rose's Landing.

That conceptual plan included a large parking garage at the corner of Embarcadero and Pacific with a motel on the bluff that potentially would span Market Avenue to the little parking lot on the corner.

The City paid a total of \$3.25 million — \$500,000 for the parking lot at Pacific and Market (using parking in-lieu fees) and \$2.75 million for the bluff top building and a former RV park below on the Embarcadero (using a franchise tax windfall from Duke Energy, former owners of the power plant).

The City has an appraised value for the lots of \$3.89 million and would be expected to get at least that amount.

The bluff top properties had at one time been sold to the late-George Salwasssar, who along with Distassio's Italian Restaurant owner, Ken McMillan, remodeled the top floor into an elegant restaurant and a separate wine bar.

When Salwasssar died, in the midst of the largest bankruptcy in state history, the Market Avenue properties were

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Sheriff's Use Virtual Reality for Training

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Estero Bay News' Ryan Sullivan participates in a VirTra V-300 scenario that is used for training by the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department. Photos by Dean Sullivan

A distraught mother flags down a patrol officer and says that her husband took their baby and is threatening to harm the infant. When the officer arrives on the scene, the man is outside his vehicle on a bridge with the baby in one hand, a gun in the other.

The outcome of the increasingly escalating situation depends on split-second decisions by the officer and how they respond to the actions and reactions of the father. The safety of the baby must remain the focus of attention — verbal de-escalation is the goal, but deadly force could be the reality.

The tension, adrenalin and cognitive stimulation are high, however the suspects are actors, the officer is on a stage and the crime scenario is a teaching and training simulator used by the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's

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Moving Forward: MB Chamber Kicks-off of Monthly 'Breakfast on the Bay'

Story and Photos by Judy Salamacha

At the height of the March 4 festivities during the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Gala, one could feel a boisterous community buzz, "Morro Bay 2022: Back & Better Than Ever."

The evening was dedicated to the memory of Councilman Robert "Red" Davis. A standing ovation recognized his contributions followed by a celebration of a community that is moving forward, proud to honor representatives that modeled the City's true and eclectic character: Police Chief Jody Cox, Carole Truesdale, the Morro Bay Lions Club, and Coalesce Book Store & Wedding Chapel.

Just thirteen days later, the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce kicked off their inaugural "Breakfast on the Bay" to another standing-room-only gathering of business representatives and chamber supporters from the Estero Bay and SLO County. The crowd came prepared to network their business, advocate a common cause, and announce future happenings. Again, the community buzz was evident, "Morro Bay 2022: Back & Better Than Ever!"



Councilwoman Jen Ford, Supervisor Bruce Gibson, Chamber Board President Jeff Eckles

CEO Erica Crawford welcomed all to the first monthly breakfast scheduled every third Wednesday in 2022. She credited Castle Wind and VISTRA Energy for their generous sponsorship funding the Chamber's newest program — one she and current and former board presidents, Jeff Eckles and Steve Peck, had been planning for over a year. The agenda and venue will be consistent, while the theme and presenters will change.

Crawford hopes attendees "...will discover Estero Bay news here first, rub elbows with friends and new associates,

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June Council Race Set; Camping Ban Vote Averted

By Neil Farrell



June’s Primary Election will have a match race for a seat on Morro Bay’s City Council, as nominations are now complete but won’t give voters a chance to vote on banning camping on the Embarcadero.

City Clerk Dana Swanson said Councilwoman Jen Ford has qualified for the ballot and will be challenged by long-time Morro Bay resident, James Costanzo, making his first run at local public office.

It will be Ford’s first run too, as she was appointed last summer to fill the seat vacated when Councilman Red Davis died last summer. Davis had won re-election to his second council term in November 2020 and was sworn in that December. But Davis died in July just a few months into his term and in August the City Council named Ford to fill the vacancy.

Under the City’s Municipal Codes, when a council vacancy occurs, the City Council can appoint someone to fill the seat but they have to face voters within 140 days or at the next available election, which the Council decided would be the June Primary, so as not to incur the added expenses of holding a special election. Normally, the City would have no issues for the June Ballot.

Whoever wins the seat will serve out the rest of Davis’ term, and face re-election in November 2024.

In a related matter, the City Council avoided having a second issue on the June Ballot when it accepted a citizen’s initiative calling on voters to prohibit RV camping on The Embarcadero.

A small group of residents headed up a petition drive to place the camping ban on the ballot and were able to qualify it for the vote. Council had a choice to either accept the initiative’s ban or let it go to voters.

In early March they voted 4-1 to simply have the ban added to the City Municipal codes and forego the vote. Council members acknowledged that the residents had spoken loud and clear on the camping program and they would listen to them.

The camping ban will now be drafted into a legal format by the City Attorney to add it to the muni codes. The Council will still have to vote on adding the ban to the City’s list of other bans that include a ban on drinking alcoholic in public parks, sidewalks and other public areas including the beach; and a ban on outdoor smoking anywhere in public except designated smoking areas.

The Harbor Department had started a pilot RV camping program in 2020, in large part as a response to the Coronavirus Pandemic’s impacts to its budget but also as a long-term goal of increasing its revenues.

The City has long sought to add new revenue sources to the harbor budget, which is derived almost entirely through lease payments by waterfront businesses and slip and dockage fees. It also gets some money from a paid, day use, parking program for boat trailers at the public launch ramp and a dry storage yard located in the Triangle Parking Lot.

The Department has been looking for more revenues since 2014 when Dynegy canceled its outfall lease for the

power plant’s cooling water discharge canal at the base of Morro Rock.

The power plant owners had been paying \$250,000 a year to the Harbor Fund in lease payments for the outfall canal but that was halted when Dynegy closed the plant for good in 2014 and canceled the lease.

The RV program — which at its height had just 19 available spaces in four areas — was predicted to bring in about \$150,000 a year and performed well despite getting off to a slow start.

The department operated the camping program under an emergency/temporary permit from the Coastal Commission and had already applied for a permanent Coastal Development Permit before the citizens’ petition drive.

Now the loss of the camping program, which brought in revenues with little costs, leaves the Harbor Department — faced with flat revenues and rising expenses and maintenance costs — again looking for new ways to increase its revenues.

A group of residents has embarked on another petition drive to add a \$120 a year — \$10 a month — parcel tax to the property tax bills of every privately owned parcel in Morro Bay. That petition drive has until May to gather about 830 signatures of Morro Bay registered voters to qualify for the November General Election.

As a voter initiative, it would need to garner a simple majority — 50% plus one vote — to be approved and be added to the tax bills. If the City had placed the matter on the ballot, which as a tax it is legally required to get voter approval, it would likely have needed two-thirds approval for passage, as it has a special designation for the money, namely to address the over \$10 million in unmet maintenance and repair needs to public facilities on the waterfront — from the launch ramp to floating docks and slips, to repairs to the rock riprap.

But asking voters to approve a new tax on themselves is a tricky proposition, and not a shoo-in to make the ballot let alone be approved.

City Re-bids Injection Well Job

By Neil Farrell

A key part of the City of Morro Bay’s Water Reclamation Facility Project is to recycle the treated wastewater. But while the project has already issued contracts worth over \$144 million and is over half way completed with construction, it got zero interest in drilling an injection well in the back corner of the Morro Bay Power Plant property.

That’s where the City decided was the best place to put a well to inject the highly treated wastewater coming from the new, state-of-the-art treatment plant being built on hillside property above the terminus of South Bay Boulevard at Hwy 1.

The WRF project’s ultimate goal with the \$75 million treatment plant and over \$31 million conveyance system is to inject much of the wastewater into the Morro Creek underground aquifer to serve as a buffer against possible seawater intrusion and “recycle” it for drinking water.

That would theoretically protect the groundwater wells along Lila Keiser Park, once a vital source of drinking water but rarely used since 1995 when state water was brought to town.

State water will continue to be the town’s No. 1 source of drinking water well into the future, with the recycled wastewater being added into the mix to bolster local supplies.

The City claims it can recycle enough wastewater to provide 80% of the town’s yearly drinking water demand, a hedge against years when the State Water Project cuts its deliveries, mainly due to drought conditions and limited supply coming from the Sierra Nevada Mountains’ snow-pack, where all State Water Project waters originates.

So the injection well is a vital part of the WRF’s promise of recycling the wastewater, which the City used to help secure low interest Federal and State loans.

It is frankly, a relatively minor cost in the overall \$145 million project. And yet no one bid the job before the deadline last December; and the job being listed is only for a “test” well that will help further understand the nature of the aquifer.

Under the project’s “Advertisement for Bids” the project description says: “This project includes the construction and installation of one fully-operational injection well casing as specified herein. The purpose of the proposed well is to perform injection testing to better understand aquifer characteristics and to inform the design of additional injection wells in the future. The Project has an expected duration of 60 days.”

Estero Bay News asked Public Works Director Greg Kwolek why he thought no one bid on the first go-round? He said, “Based on outreach following the first bidding, drillers indicated they did not propose because they are very busy right now, the timing requirements were tight, and they were not familiar with some of reporting requirements associated with the grant funds.”

So how did they change the second bid package to sort of “sweeten the pot” and entice drilling companies to bid? “With the second bid package,” Kwolek said, “we extended the time frames for mobilization and completing the project, removed some of the requirements that were not needed for the grant funding, and requested that the driller reach out to the City if there were additional provisions that would prevent them from proposing.”

What if no one bids again? “If there are no bids the second time,” Kwolek said, “the City would re-evaluate the option to sole source the project or to go out to bid for a third time.”

Sole sourcing would entail hiring a driller to come do the job, but even that is a bit iffy. “With the drought and changing groundwater regulations,” he said, “drillers are very busy right now and with the additional requirements associated with municipal projects vs. private projects, it is harder to get drillers to bid on projects of this type.”

So the City has reworked the bid package and put it out once again with the deadline set for 10 a.m. March 22, which was past Estero Bay News’ deadline for this edition.



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MBPD Hires New Officer

By Neil Farrell



New MBPD Ofc. Mario Cambronero, left, poses next to Police Chief Jody Cox after his swearing in ceremony in January. Submitted photo

Morro Bay Police have hired a new officer, filling one of three positions that came open with retirements of three veteran officers.

In January, MBPD Chief Jody Cox swore in Ofc. Mario Cambronero, a recent graduate of the Hancock College Police Academy in Lompoc, who filled in one of the three positions vacated when Sgts. Mark Martin, Robert Hufstetler and Dale Cullum retired (starting in March 2021).

MBPD Cmdr. Amy Watkins said they promoted Will Marvos to fill one of the sergeant positions and Ofc. Cambronero fills another vacancy. Now they have one officer and a sergeant to hire, and both positions are being advertised on the City’s website.

“We are very pleased to have Officer Cambronero as a part of our PD team,” Cmdr. Watkins told Estero Bay News, “and we believe he is a great addition to our community as well.”

According to a news release, Ofc. Cambronero “was commended by his fellow cadets for his leadership and goodwill to others needing assistance during the academy.”

He is currently undergoing a 16-week field-training program working alongside a MBPD training officer. After the training period, he will be cleared to patrol the mean streets of Morro Bay solo.

In other MBPD news, the department released results from its leash law enforcement campaign, wherein for 30 days in January officers patrolled parks and other areas looking for dogs off their leashes, in an attempt to raise awareness and compliance with the City’s leash law.

The campaign saw 82 “foot patrols” conducted throughout the city and in parks. Some 35 “contacts” were made, presumably with people who’s dogs were off leash, and 23 warnings were given. There were apparently no citations issued during the campaign.

It should be noted that all dogs must be on a leash when out in public. The exceptions are the City’s Dog Beach, located north of North Point Nature Preserve and running to Cayucos. On Dog Beach, dogs are allowed to go off the leash to enjoy the sand and surf.

The City also has an off-leash dog park located in Del Mar Park that is completely fenced, and segregated between large and small dogs. The dog park is open during daylight hours and closes at dusk, as does the entire park.

The enforcement campaign was a change from the normally, complaint-driven leash laws, meaning that police mainly enforce the leash law when someone calls to complain about an unfriendly or pesky dog running loose.

The City contracts with the County Department of Animal Services for its animal control cases.

Public Can Use the Bank of America Lot

By Neil Farrell

For 3 years residents and visitors to Downtown Morro Bay have been using the vacant Bank of America building’s parking lot as if it were publicly owned.

And now thanks to a license agreement the City signed with the building’s new owners, they can continue to use it for several months to come.

The City of Morro Bay reached agreement with SISU Collective LLC, the corporate name for Scout Coffee Co., which bought the B of A building last year and intends to turn it into a coffee roasting facility and coffee shop, to allow the public to continue to use the parking lot — the largest in the Downtown business district — until the company is done with its remodel and open for business.

The former bank building was closed in early 2018 when Bank of America closed the local branch and installed two new ATMs at the Sinclair Gas Station about six blocks down the Boulevard at the Roundabout.

This was after the bank opened its new location in San Luis Obispo at the corner of Higuera and Santa Rosa Streets.

The building is the biggest non-motel space in Morro Bay’s Downtown, and was touted as an “opportunity site”

by the Chamber of Commerce in 2019, one of three empty storefronts in the 300 block of Morro Bay Boulevard at the time.

Another of those sites, at 330 Morro Bay Blvd., was recently opened as Monarch Moon Spa, a massage and facial salon.

Scout Coffee was in the midst of obtaining building permits for its remodel and the license agreement with the City says the use will end when the coffee roasting facility is ready to open, estimated to be 6 months to a year after it gets building permits, which could land around the end of summer thereabouts.

The City is required to keep the parking lot clean and litter free while the public is able to use it.

So for the time being, if readers are planning a trip Downtown for the Saturday Farmer’s Market or are going to the Bay Theater for a movie, feel free to come in on the Pacific Street side and park in the old Bank of America lot, as has been done on weekends and after hours forever.



COVID ‘Paradox’ Continues

In what County health officials call a “paradox,” cases of coronavirus infections are in decline but deaths continue to mount.

According to a March 16 County Health Department news release, “Each surge of COVID-19 — nationwide and in SLO County — has generally been followed by a later surge in deaths, as those who have struggled for weeks with severe illness succumb to the disease.”

In SLO County COVID-19 cases continue a slow decline from the Omicron surge that hit over the past several months, however, “the impact of this surge is still seen in continued high numbers of COVID-19 deaths.”

Over a recent week, County Health said 10 COVID-19 deaths had been confirmed with victims ranging in age from their 40s to their 90s.

County Health Officer, Dr. Penny Borenstein said, “While we believe the decline in reported cases represents a true downward trend, these numbers do not represent all cases, as at-home testing has become more available. The virus is unfortunately still spreading at a higher level than any of us would like to see.”

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She added that while grateful for the decline in cases and in turn a decline in those suffering with the disease, “I also want to extend my sympathy to those who are personally feeling the continued pain of this surge in the loss of a loved one.”

The County is continuing with its testing and vaccination efforts and is urging people to take the disease seriously.

“Because treatment is most effective when started in the first days of illness,” the department said, “it is important for those who are at high risk [anyone over age 65 or who has certain medical conditions] to test early and notify their doctor of a positive test.”

Dr. Borenstein added, “This virus is not yet done with us, but we can now take actions to protect ourselves and keep it at bay.”

The County counted 147 new cases from March 9-16 bringing the daily 2-week average down to 27. The daily average was 207 just a month before.

As of March 16, nine people were hospitalized with COVID-19, which is way down from the Omicron surge’s peak of 67 in January, according to the County.

As a qualifier, the County’s numbers do not include at-home or rapid antigen tests and “Hospital counts do not include those who have COVID-19 but are primarily receiving care for another condition.”

Go online at: slopublichealth.org/vaccines or call (833) 422-4255 to schedule a vaccine appointment.

To schedule a COVID test see the County website or call (888) 634-1123.

Readers can also get free at-home test kits from Uncle Sam, see: CovidTests.gov. For COVID-19 updates in SLO County, see: slopublichealth.org/COVID19 or call the Public Health recorded information line at (805) 788-2903.

Live person assistance is available at (805) 781-5500, Mondays-Fridays, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Overnight Closures for Hwy 1

By Neil Farrell

If you’re thinking of taking Hwy 1 to Monterey next week, better be sure to do so in the daytime because it’s going to be closed for repairs overnight.

Caltrans announced that Hwy 1 at the historic Bixby Bridge would close from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Monday-Thursday, March 28-31.

Anyone coming up to the closure from either direction will be turned around and sent back the way you came, according to a Caltrans news release.

Even emergency vehicles will be stopped and it will take a half hour to clear the heavy equipment out of the way enough to let them pass. The work is a continuation of repair work that was started last July, Caltrans said.

The schedule is of course dependent on the weather, as rain or wind may affect the use of specialized equipment, Caltrans said.

“Message and directional signs will alert motorists in advance of the closure area,” Caltrans said. “These closures are necessary for contracted maintenance crews to perform repairs and inspections on the bridge support for the safety of all travelers.”

The iconic Bixby Bridge is one of the most photographed bridges in California due to its aesthetic design, graceful architecture and scenic location.

Construction was begun in August 1931 and completed in November 1932. The bridge deck sits some 278-feet above the Bixby Canyon floor below and is some 714-feet in length.

For traffic updates on other state highways, readers can call Caltrans Dist. 5 Public Affairs Office at (805) 549-3318 or see the Dist. 5 website at: <https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-5>.

Paso Murderer Pleads Guilty

By Neil Farrell

A Paso Robles man pled guilty to committing a premeditated murder and is expected to get life in prison when sentenced in April.

District attorney Dan Dow said Nicholas Christopher Ron, 25, pled guilty to the March 15, 2020, first-degree premeditated murder of Trevon Perry, 27.

Ron reportedly also admitted that he “personally used a firearm in the commission of the murder,” said D.A. Dow. “As a result of his guilty plea and admission, Ron will be sentenced to 28-years to life in state prison. The sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 12.”

Superior Court Judge Jesse Marino presided over the case and will decide sentencing, too.

Perry’s family reported him missing on March 16, 2020, the D.A. said. Within days, law enforcement began to investigate the disappearance as a possible homicide. A multi-agency, investigation was kicked off with agencies from San Luis Obispo to Southern California. Within a few months the case broke.

“On June 20, 2020,” D.A. Dow said, “Mr. Perry’s remains were discovered buried in the backyard of Ron’s relative in Riverside, California.”

While Ron was charged with murder, nine of his relatives in Southern California were charged as accessories to murder “for their varying roles in concealing the crime.”

The case got a lot of help from several agencies. “The case was investigated by the Paso Robles Police Department with the assistance of the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney’s Bureau of Investigation, District Attor-



Nicholas Christopher Ron

ney’s Central Coast Cyber Forensic Lab, San Luis Obispo County Sheriff’s Office, Riverside Police Department, Riverside County Sheriff’s Department, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department and California Department of Justice. The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorneys Mike Frye and Delaney Henretty.

Nipomo Man Convicted on Child Porn Possession

By Neil Farrell

A Nipomo man has been convicted of possessing hundreds of child pornography photos on his work computer, and faces state prison for the offense.

On March 17, District Attorney’s Office said in a news release, a jury convicted John Paul Russell, 53 of Nipomo, of possessing child pornography — “at least 600 images with at least 10 of those depicting young children under the age of 12.”

Russell came under suspicion through the work of the local child pornography task force.

“In June 2018,” the news release said, “Arroyo Grande Police Department Detective Jim Jolly, while assigned as a member of the Internet Crimes Against Children [ICAC] Task Force, received evidence that a computer in Atascadero was sharing child pornography with other computers over the Internet. Detective Jolly’s investigation traced the computer’s Internet protocol (IP) address to a business in Atascadero.”

Atascadero Police obtained a search warrant and seized Russell’s work computer. “After a digital forensic analysis on the computer and hard drives, thousands of images and some videos were located depicting child exploitative materials and child pornography,” the news release said. Those images were used to convict Russell.

A D.A. spokeswoman said Russell worked at a private company and not governmental like Atascadero State Hospital. She declined to name the business.

District Attorney Dan Dow said, “Child pornography is exploitation that causes immeasurable harm to its victims when the material is created, and again each and every time it is viewed by another person. Many child molesters possess child pornography, and they often use it to desensitize their targeted victims. Aggressively prosecuting these crimes will serve to both punish individual violators and to deter others from getting involved in this form of child exploitation.”

While some might think possessing dirty pictures on a computer isn’t the same or as bad as actual molestation,



John Paul Russell

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Dow quoted a recent article on the subject published by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: “Today’s Internet is also rapidly becoming the marketplace for offenders seeking to acquire material for their child pornography collections. “More insidious than the exchange of sexually explicit material among adults, child pornography often depicts the sexual assault of a child and is often used by child molesters to recruit, seduce, and control their victims. “Although not all molesters collect pornography and not all child pornography collectors molest children, significant consensus exists among law enforcement officers about the role pornography plays in recruiting and controlling new victims.

“Pornography is used to break down inhibitions and validate sex between children and adults as normal, and it enables the offender to have power over the victim throughout the molestation. When the offender loses interest, pictures of the victim are often used as blackmail to ensure the child’s silence, and when these pictures are posted on the Internet, they become an enduring and irretrievable record of the victimization and a relentless, shame-inducing violation of that child’s privacy.” (See: www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/191213.pdf) Russell will be sentenced on April 21 and faces a maximum of 5-years in state prison. He will also have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life.

The case was investigated by the Atascadero and Arroyo Grande Police Departments and was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Melissa Chabra, who is assigned to the District Attorney’s Sexual Violence and Child Abuse Unit.

Paso Felon Caught at the Beach

A day at the beach turned into anything but for a Paso Robles man wanted for parole violation that was reportedly also in possession of a firearm. According to Sheriff’s spokesman Tony Cipolla, at 8:10 a.m. Friday, March 11, deputies were tipped off that Michael David Fordyce, 37 of Paso Robles, a man wanted by authorities, was spotted in the 600 block of South Ocean Ave., in Cayucos.



Michael David Fordyce



“When Deputies arrived on scene,” Cipolla said in a news release, “Fordyce was gone but his car remained at that location. Deputies searched the vehicle and discovered a firearm inside the car.” A photo released by the Sheriff, shows a bolt action

rifle stuffed under the front seat of a car. That set off a manhunt that included Sheriff’s deputies, the Sheriff’s Gang Task Force, a Highway patrol helicopter, and State Park rangers with a police dog, to comb the surrounding area. Four hours later, the posse found their man. “Fordyce was located on the beach at the south end of Cayucos,” Cipolla said. “He was arrested and taken into custody without incident.” Fordyce was booked into County Jail for suspicion of being a felon in possession of a firearm, Cipolla said, felon in possession of ammunition, possession of a controlled substance, resisting a law enforcement officer, and violating his probation.

Man Guilty of Gas Can Threat at Sweet Springs Saloon

An Atascadero man has been convicted of making criminal threats to light fire to a bartender and to a local watering hole after he was 86’d for bothering a female customer. According to the District Attorney’s Office, on March 17 a jury convicted Kellen John Clarke, 59 of Atascadero of a felony for verbally threatening to light fire on a bartender working at Sweet Springs Saloon in Downtown Los Osos. The incident happened Dec. 16, 2021 after Clarke was ejected from “Sweetie’s” (as it is called in Los Osos) “for insulting a female customer,” the news release said. “Clarke returned to the bar holding a gas can and made a verbal threat to light the bartender and the bar on fire. Clarke then walked to a gas station directly across the street, where he was observed filling the can with gasoline. San Luis Obispo County Sheriff’s Deputies arrived on scene and intercepted Clarke as he walked with the gas can back toward the bartender and the saloon.”

“We are grateful to our local residents who performed their civic duty of jury service,” said District Attorney Dan Dow. “Our criminal and victim justice system would not work without conscientious community members doing their part.” At the time of the incident, Clarke was on “post release community supervision” (probation) after serving a sentence for a felony drunk driving conviction in 2020, the news release said. Clarke is scheduled to be sentenced on April 4 before Superior Court Judge Craig van Rooyen. The case was investigated by the County Sheriff’s Office with the assistance of the District Attorney’s Bureau of Investigation and was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Scott Hunter assigned to the Adult Prosecutions Unit.

Teen Suffers Major Injuries

An Oceano teenager suffered major injuries when the car she was riding in steered off the road and hit a tree, the Highway Patrol said. According to a news release from CHP Ofc. Miguel Alvarez, at 4:55 p.m. Tuesday, March 15 a 2003 Nissan was traveling on Noyes Road just west of Sunray Place in the hills east of Pismo Beach, and driven by Hector Resendiz-tabares, 18 of Oceano, when for an undisclosed reason the car drove off the right side of the road, hit two wooden post road signs and then a tree. The car came to rest on the dirt embankment, Ofc. Alvarez said. Resendiztabares was not injured but a 16-year-old girl riding in the backseat was “unconscious and unresponsive” at the scene. She was taken to Sierra Vista Hospital and was being treated for undisclosed major injuries. Ofc. Alvarez said alcohol or drugs do not “appear to be a factor in this collision.” No arrests were made. The teenage girl’s name was not released.

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Community

Online Auction Site Helps Settle One's Affairs

Story and Photo by Neil Farrell



Doug and Jennifer Little, owners of Slocal Estate Auctions, often find unusual items amongst the belongings of someone who has died, like this totally cool Paper Mache rhinoceros head.

Readers who may have lost a loved one that left a house full of stuff or simply want to de-clutter their lives and downsize their belongings can get some much needed assistance through a company in Morro Bay.

Slocal Estate Auctions is an online estate auction site owned and operated by Doug and Jennifer Little, who've teamed up with other localized auction companies with the collective website that features auctions from the Central Valley to Southern California (see: slocalstateauctions.com).

Doug explains that he was operating a store, Junque Love, in Marina Square on the Embarcadero for several years when the auction idea sort of hatched itself. And when the coronavirus pandemic response hit, made for an easy transition from brick and mortar store to ecommerce.

Junque Love, he explains, was a vintage clothing and furniture, antiques and collectibles store and "People would come in all the time and offer to sell me something. Some would come in with a pick-up full; one guy had a truck and trailer full of stuff. We unloaded the whole truck and trailer, had it stored in the store and under the stairs."

He realized he couldn't buy all the stuff people were bringing him, "You'd need football field sized warehouses; I couldn't hold it all."

Junque Love was already 5-years old when COVID-19 hit, which Doug said was followed by his being forced to close as a "non-essential" business, a term that bothers him quite a bit.

He had several retired ladies that always offered to help in the store, he recalls, and he had them working part time while he did more and more auction stuff starting in



Doug and Jennifer Little, owners of Slocal Estate Auctions, often find unusual items amongst the belongings of someone who has died, like this pair of porcelain, Japanese life-sized baby figures.

2019.

"In March 2020, the Government said I was not allowed to go into work anymore," Doug says. "That next Monday I laid everyone off and then I had to close my business."

With a large monthly rent payment due and being unable to open the store for months, he had little choice but to give it up. He'd already been doing some online selling, so making the switch to an auction site seemed natural, since the couple had done it in Northern California before they moved to Morro Bay.

The online sales, Doug said, could stay open. He said it was an essential service because it allowed people to move; and it allowed families to transact and settle an estate.

When COVID hit, it closed down in-person auction sales and some estate sales businesses closed. Some tried to do it online, too, Doug says.

Oddly enough, COVID played a big part in why and how Jen came to join her husband in this newest venture. Jen Little was the City of Morro Bay's tourism director, representing the City and providing staff for the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID), an assessment district the lodging industry formed to bolster tourism promotions.

Jen was the only tourism director the City has ever had and likely ever will have. COVID lockdown began in March 2020 and Jen said she was laid off in June after the City Council decided to suspend all tourism promotions out of fear of the virus being carried to town with the tourists. COVID shut down her job and she was laid off.

Now the TBID has again formed a non-profit corporation and taken over promotions from the City using it's own staff. She didn't even consider trying to get her old job back, and seems delighted in the auctions for a variety of reasons.

First they bought rights to the software program that's

used to display items, record bids, and collect payments for use in this region. And they've got 10 people on in their group, Jen says. Those groups hold auctions from Fresno, to Bakersfield and Arroyo Grande into Southern California. The other auction businesses pay a hosting fee and the website is chock full of auctions items.

There is no lull in their work. "The phone rings every day with people needing our services," Doug says. With estate sales, he explains, an elderly parent or grandparent dies or moves into a nursing home and "the kids come flying in from out of town to take care of things," Doug says. And when they open the door to a house stuffed with knick-knacks, antiques, furniture, clothing, and everything else imaginable, they get overwhelmed quickly.

And, remember, they live out of town and don't really have time to stick around, inventory everything and then hold garage sales."

One call to the Slocal Estate Auctions could be the answer to a lot of prayers. "The average estate sale sells 65% of the items," Doug explains. "Our online auctions invite more than the neighbors, and we ship all over the U.S."

Jen adds, "We sell 98% of everything we list."

Doug comments that their online database is constantly growing. "It smoothes out the transition for those who have to settle an estate. We live in a retirement town, everything is online with full disclosure on what is for sale and how much it sold for, and it's all documented. We can put families at ease; take out the stress for the family."

She adds that she has expertise in art from her studies at Cal Poly, and Doug knows jewelry and rare coins. Part of their service is advising people as to what something might be worth and doing a bit of treasure hunting of sorts.

Doug says he's gone to a home of someone who died to meet the family and go over what's been left behind. The first thing they want done is for all family members to walk through the home and pick anything they want to keep, that helps smooth over hard feelings that can arise later over just about anything that's left in a home.

"We always do a preview," says Doug. "We try to decide if it's something we can sell — this isn't a garage sale." He notes that a sale will get more traction online the more items they have for sale.

He and Jen methodically go through a home cataloging each item, bundling similar items together to attract bidders' attention. "We take 12,000 photographs a day," she says. They often find valuables where family members never thought to look.

Doug relates a story of a woman in Morro Bay whose mother had moved to an assisted living facility. They met at mom's home and started going through things. Not seeing much there, Doug says he asked if she had any jewelry?

Yes, and when a file cabinet drawer was opened, Doug says he was astonished at the cache of antique costume and fine jewelry they found, much of it silver and gold.

Online Auction Continued on page 9



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6-7 PM Cruise for Registrants Only
Staging Begins at 5 PM

SATURDAY, May 7th
Show & Shine 9 AM - 4 PM
11:30 AM - 1:30 PM BBQ
REGISTRANTS/SPONSORS ONLY
4PM Trophy Presentations

SUNDAY, May 8th
9 AM - 1 PM Show & Shine
1 PM Trophy Presentations



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Police Blotter



• **March 13:** Police responded at 9:06 p.m. to the 800 block of Embarcadero where some scalawags dined-n-dashed at the Port House.

• **March 13:** Police were called regarding a suspicious subject outside Albertson’s Market at 9 p.m. Logs indicated a 29-year-old squit was apparently being a pest. Police arrested the apparent persona non-grata for suspicion of trespassing.

• **March 13:** At 8:11 p.m. police contacted another suspicious fellow in the 400 bock of Quintana. The 35-year-old dude had a bench warrant and was issued another disappearance ticket and released.

• **Mach 12:** Police contacted yet another suspected swiz-zle stick out at 1:20 a.m. at Main and Harbor. The 29-year-old fellow was cited because he had a previous citation for which he’d failed to appear and now the judge wanted a word with him, fat chance of that!

• **March 10:** Police responded to the 300 block of Fair-view for a theft report. Logs indicated a firearm was lost approximately 20-years ago, and was apparently not missed until now.

• **March 10:** Police responded at noon to the 1000 block of Allesandro to speak with a citizen who said they’d had words with someone who’d vandalized their fence, so fences don’t always make for good neighbors.

• **March 9:** Police responded to the 400 block of Bonita where a citizen said he or she had lost \$3,200 in an email scam, as the Nigerian Prince strikes again.

• **March 9:** Police received a tip that a certain 50-year-old scofflaw with an expired license was driving a car in the 3300 block of Beachcomber Dr., at 9 a.m. Police stopped the scoundrel and he was cited and released but his car was impounded at Chuck’s Towing.

• **March 9:** At 7:45 a.m. police stopped a suspicious car at Toro Creek Road and Hwy 1. Logs indicated the driver, 53, was arrested for suspicion of possession of drugs for sale and possession of a glass crack pipe, no doubt for free samples.

• **March 8:** Police got a report that a missing person had been found apparently safe if not entirely sound.

• **March 8:** A woman came to the station to report that she’d been raped in Los Osos. Police referred her to the Sheriff’s Department.

• **March 8:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 8:46 a.m. on Hwy 1 at MBB. Logs indicated the driver had a suspended license so they cited him and arrested his car.

• **March 7:** Police contacted a 52-year-old fellow at 10:30 p.m. in the 900 block of Embarcadero. He had several bench warrants and was put out of our misery.

• **March 7:** Police responded to a business in the 1200 block of Embarcadero where a citizen had some gas cans and a fuel tank stolen sometime over the weekend, which

was no doubt Putin’s fault, too.

• **March 7:** Police responded to the 1700 block of Em-barcadero for a report of a stolen bicycle. No clues as to the master criminal responsible.

• **March 7:** A citizen came to the police station to report that some unknown pilferer stole his clothes and that’s the naked truth.

• **March 7:** Police responded to the 400 block of Quintana for a report of stolen catalytic converters by some unknown fiend.

• **March 7:** A 41-year-old woman who had an arrest war-rant came to the police station apparently to turn herself in. She was of course cited and released again.

• **March 7:** Police responded to a reported fire at 7:24 a.m. in the 700 block of Quintana. Logs indicated a 51-year-old apparent firebug was arrested and charged with suspicion of arson — “causing a fire of structure/forest/land.”

• **March 6:** Police responded to Rite Aid at 10:30 a.m. for a report of a shoplifting that had just occurred. Police are looking for the usual suspects, as they have no leads.

• **March 6:** Police responded at 10 a.m. to the 1100 block of West St. where some annoying flesh monkey deleted two Apple laptop computers and two purses from inside an unlocked house.

• **March 6:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 12:22 a.m. somewhere on Quintana Road. The law caught up to a 25-year-old suspected lawbreaker and he was booked into County Jail on suspicion of driving on more hooch than the law allows.

• **March 5:** Police responded to a disturbance at 11:30 a.m. in the 1800 block of Ironwood. Logs indicated a 37-year-old woman was nicked for suspicion of violating a stay-the-hell-away order.

• **March 4:** Police contacted an 18-year-old apparently lubricated lass at 10:18 p.m. at Main and Nassau. She was cited for suspicion of getting spanked in public and released to a sober friend, spared the Hwy 1 morning walk of shame.

• **March 4:** At 1:08 p.m. MBPD officers assisted the Highway Patrol and County Sheriffs “with apprehending suspects involved in a suspected auto theft from Los Osos,” as the Dudley Do-Rights triumph again.

• **March 3:** Police caught up to a familiar fellow, 51, at 9:40 p.m. in the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd. He had a bench warrant, was cited with a second and released to catch another day.

• **March 3:** Police responded to the high school where a student’s vehicle was vandalized while he was in class. Police reportedly have no leads but you can bet everyone at school knows who done it.

• **Mach 3:** Police responded at 4:10 p.m. to Pacific Pre-miere Bank in the 800 block of the Boulevard, where some vandal vandalized the ATM machine, no doubt another satisfied customer.

• **March 3:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 12:21 p.m. in the 100 block of Bolton. Logs indicated the driver, 30, had a suspended license for a previous DUI and he was cited and released but his car was arrested, which hardly seems fair.

• **March 2:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 9:15 p.m. in the 500 block of Atascadero Rd. A 37-year-old knucklehead was knocked up for suspicion of possessing brass knuckles.

• **March 2:** Police stopped a reportedly speeding vehicle at 4:14 p.m. in the 100 block of Bayshore Dr. Logs indicat-ed the lead foot, 54, had a suspended license and was cited for that, his car somehow escaping arrest and the speeding apparently forgiven.

• **March 2:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 7:33 a.m. in the 1800 block of Main. The 36-year-old mope was nicked for suspicion of being high on dope.

• **March 1:** Police responded at 9:34 p.m. to the first block of State Park Road for a reported assault and apparently walked into a family feud. Logs indicated a 29-year-old mul-ish fellow was arrested for suspicion of domestic violence, violating a stay-away court order, and child endangerment. A 23-year-old woman was arrested for suspicion of child endangerment as well. No word on what became of the endangered child.

• **March 1:** At 3:30 p.m. police contacted a suspicious woman in the 100 block of Bolton. The 29-year-old scofflaw had three bench warrants, was issued a fourth and released back into the wild.

• **Feb. 28:** At 6:12 p.m. police responded to the 800 block of Napa where Sheriff’s deputies later arrested a 27-year-old fellow for allegedly boosting a car.

• **Feb. 28:** A Morro Bay High student said someone stole his or her jacket and backpack, which shouldn’t surprise, as it’s the Home of the Pirates, not the Angels.

March for Health Month

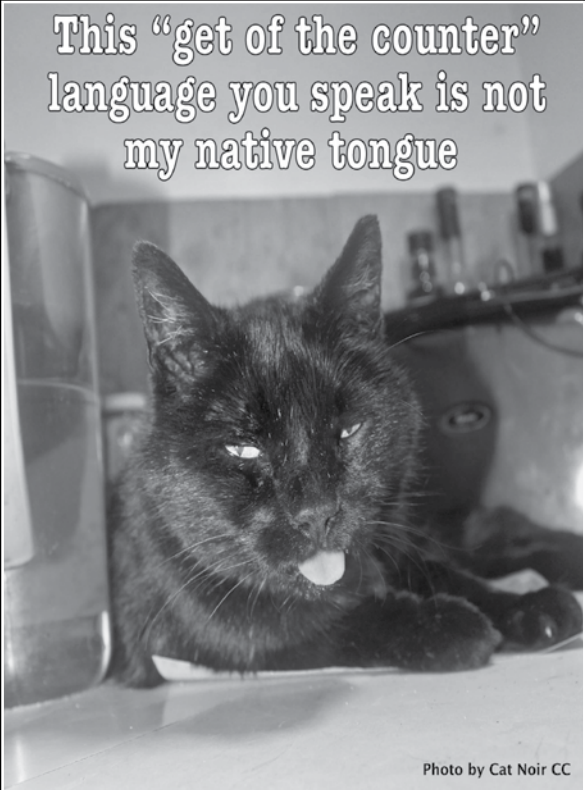


The community is invited to visit the Cambria Commu-nity Healthcare District’s booth at the Cambria Farmer’s Market on Friday, March 25. The District is promoting “March for Health Month,” focusing on physical activity and healthy eating.

Guest presenters include Michelle Zulim-Clark, public health educator from SLO County Public Health, who will offer tips on strength and balance, posture, body alignment and fall prevention.

There will also be takeaways with valuable information on healthy lifestyles. Attendees can even learn CPR to help save a life.

With a focus on advocating health and safety for the community, the District continues its plan for upcoming events and is in great need of volunteers to assist. Those willing to lend a helping hand to the community, to their friends and neighbors, are welcome to call the CCHD at 805-927-8304.



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Takin' Care
of BUSINESS

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Morro Bay Chamber
Plans Trip to Pompeii
and Amalfi Coast

The Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce announced that it will visit Pompeii and the Amalfi Coast, departing October 18, 2022 and is inviting chamber members, family and friends of chamber members to join them on this once in a lifetime experience.

Rich in culture and stunning scenery, the Amalfi Coast is the setting for the journey. Enjoy eight days to explore. Find yourself relaxing in the town of Sorrento or sightseeing along the Amalfi Coast, which includes gorgeous places such as Positano, Ravello and Amalfi. On this trip encounter the world-famous archeological site of Pompeii.

"This is truly an amazing opportunity to participate in an international journey to the irresistible Pompeii and the Amalfi Coast, where program participants can experience the country's culture, learn about its business climate, and make new friends," said Erica Crawford, chamber president/CEO.

Space is limited, so act fast. Don't miss out on this opportunity to experience Italy, exchange ideas with local business representatives, make new friends, and build new memories. To learn more, join the Chamber for a trip presentation on Tuesday, March 29 at 4:30 p.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center Studio Room (1001 Kennedy Way,



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For more information, call the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce at (805) 772-4467 or email Erica Crawford at erica@morrochamber.org

Businesses Can Help
Safe and Sober
Grad Night

The Morro Bay High School Safe and Sober Grad Night Committee is in the process of planning for an event that they believe serves to protect the most valuable asset in the community: the children. Grad Night is a parent-sponsored, non-profit event. It provides graduates with an all-night celebration full of fun yet also provides a safe and sober alternative designed to avoid the tragedies that can result from drinking and driving.

Since the inception of Grad Night, the organization reports that injuries and deaths related to graduations statewide have decreased significantly. This year's alcohol-free event will take place the day after the formal graduation ceremony on Friday, June 10, 2022.

The Grad Night Committee's goal is to make certain that every senior is able to attend the festivities by reducing admission fees through cash contributions from business and individuals before April 25. All donations are tax deductible and can be made out to and mailed to MBHS Grad Night Committee, 2235 Atascadero Rd. Morro Bay, CA 93442. For more information or to make a donation via a credit card, send and email to mbhs.grad.night.committee@gmail.com.

Cambria Chamber
Mixer April 7

The next Cambria Chamber Mixer is Thursday, April 7 in the Tin City building at 2515 Unit K, Village Lane Rd. from 5 to 7 p.m. The Scarecrow Festival Committee hosts along with SOTO's True Earth Market and Cayucos Cellars.

The Scarecrow Festival Committee is looking for volunteers, so if you have ever thought about helping with the festival but weren't sure what to do, now is the time to find out.

They are in the process of identifying the various jobs that go into putting on the event. Some are little jobs, some are supportive, some require organizational skills, some are mildly administrative, and all are very important to the success and future of the Cambria tradition. Readers interested in volunteering, the Scarecrow Festival Committee welcomes the opportunity to talk with you.

"The Scarecrow Festival benefits all of our business-

es in October and we can pay it forward with our time as volunteers," Chamber officials said. "We can also become Friends of the Scarecrow Festival and get a Scarecrow of our very own in front of our businesses."

For more information, go to cambriascarecrows.com/events or contact Diane Franciscovich at 831-596-9987.

Quick Pickle Kit
Celebrates People With
Disabilities



March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and QuickPickleKit.com DIY Pickling Kit is celebrating by providing jobs for adults with disabilities through the Achievement House.

QuickPickleKit.com, owned by Los Osos residents Andrea Wasko (pictured in green) and Meaghan Gilbert, is offering site-wide discounts and free shipping for the month of March.

"Our local, award-winning, women-owned small business thanks you for helping us provide jobs for adults with disabilities for over 25 years," said Wasko.

The company has donated a percentage of sales to The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, UC Davis Veterinary Emergency Response Team and the First Responders Children's Foundation.

Both owners are also members of the Estero Bay Community Emergency Response Team, so get your pickle on at QuickPickleKit.com and check out their products.

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.

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10 March 24, 2022 - April 6, 2022 • The Estero Bay News • Your Community, Your News

Community

Cayucos Celebrates Local Legend, Mark McVey

By Ellen Naumann



Mark McVey with his scooter purchased by donations collected by folks at Cayucos Coffee.

Mark McVey was born November 13, 1958, and passed of health complications on March 4, 2022. He is survived by his four sisters, Kelly Curry, Cindy Turner, Mandy Gonzeles, a brother, Matt McVey and many beloved nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Mark, forever remembered as a local legend, was a friend to all. Daily routes from his home in the Bella Vista RV Park, across the bridge and on to the streets of downtown Cayucos, made Mark one of the town's most recognizable citizens, and his acts of kindness, a most cherished one. His tall flag waving high from his mobile chair signaled to every dog and person who knew him that he was on his way to deliver a treat, or a paper, and always a smile.

Mark began life in Cayucos in 1998 when he moved to Bella Vista to be with his mother. "Life for Mark began in Cayucos," says his sister Kelly and judging by his genuine good nature towards everyone he met, Cayucos was made a better town with his arrival.

In his youth, Mark was an avid motorcyclist and water skier. But at the age of 35 he was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disorder, Guillain-Barré, which attacked his own immune system damaging nerves and leading to his muscle weakness and eventually, partial paralysis.

He made his home at Bella Vista with adoring neighbors and visiting friends. Along with the residents, there were the RV visitors, like me, who came to know and love Mark with every visit. The sound of his chair, or the site of his flag, was picked up yards away by my dog sending him running as fast as he could to get his giant Milk-Bone by the kind man in the chair.

Mark delivered more than Milk-Bones to the town dogs. Rising early in the morning, often before sunrise, he traveled to Cayucos Coffee, delivering candy and Super Lotto tickets in the tip jar to the staff. Then he'd motor up to the bank, the Brown Butter Cookie Company, and the shops along the way arriving at the Sea Shanty, everyone getting their treats for the day. Mark would then be sure to stop at the local paper dispenser, depositing one quarter at a time into the machine for each paper he withdrew, even if that meant a dozen or more papers. He'd deliver the news to friends in those early hours, quietly placing them at the end of a driveway held down with a rock, never seeking attention or gain in his generosity.

Mark had circles of friends throughout Cayucos, each

representing a facet of the town, unique in their offerings of conversations, experiences, and exchanges. Most notable, but only for this story, is Cayucos Coffee. Perry and his staff played an instrumental role in helping Mark get a new mobile chair, donated by the shops, surfers and patrons of Cayucos.

Mark's friendly smile was a diversion to his twisted body in a snug chair, a right foot out on the footrest with a black slipper shoe barely hanging on. He could not have been comfortable, but he never complained, even when his chairs weren't working at their best.

"Ah, it's okay!" "Don't worry about it," he'd shout out to anyone asking if they could help. But one day, Perry and the staff decided to help in a way that Mark would have done: they quietly, unassumingly found a way to get him a new chair.

With a regular manilla envelope, the words, "Donate to a Local Legend" written on it, the staff at Cayucos Coffee walked around town, asking surfers and shop owners if they'd like to help. Of course, the answer was a resounding, "yes!" Soon with hundreds of small donations and a few special extra dollars from a local eatery, Perry ordered the chair online, put it together at the shop and waited for Mark to arrive. With one staff member distracting Mark, another came around the corner riding in the brand-new mobile chair. Mark said, "What is this?" and "Why?" and "How much do I owe you?" Then silence and a shake of his head; his heart filled with grace and gratitude.

Mark, once a towering athletic young man, was physically compromised by Guillain-Barré. But his condition never once stunted or diminished his giant bright light of joy and happiness for his life, his friends, his family and for the town of Cayucos. Mark McVey will forever be a Cayucos local legend.

A memorial will be held in Cayucos on Saturday, March 26 at Hardy Park 12 p.m. – 4 p.m.. Dogs are welcome.

Womenade Estero Bay Magical Garage Sale Success

By Ruth Ann Angus



Annette Sheely, co-director of Womenade Estero Bay, at the Magical Garage Sale.

It must have been magic that worked for the Womenade Magical Fundraising Garage Sale success, at least that's what coordinator Annette Sheely thought.

"I had a dream," she said, "and with my awesome community, we made it come true.

Sheely is the new co-director of Womenade Estero Bay, and this was her first fundraiser. She thought a garage sale would be a good starting place and not something complicated. She began by asking for donations of saleable items.

"I'm blown away by how my community came out to donate three times more items than I imagined we would get," she explained. "We haven't added up all the donations yet but what I know is that it was 10 times more than what I expected."

The sale held on Saturday, March 12 at the parking lot at Sunnyside School was full of interesting things for sale.



The community came out for Womenade Estero Bay Magical Garage Sale.

The best items at a sale are often gone in a flash so it was posted that folks should get there to buy them no later than 10 a.m. At 12 Noon everything was half price. At 2 p.m. everything left was free. The event had some fun for the youngsters too. Sheely arranged for a magician to perform and there were twisty balloon animals available, and the San Luis Obispo Food Bank also offered a food giveaway for both kids and adults.

While all funds have not been counted yet, Sheely said it appears the sale raised approximately \$6000 for Womenade Estero Bay. Volunteers make up the "staff" of this organization and all donations go to provide financial assistance for those in need.

"Often people have small needs that seem overwhelming," Sheely said, "like paying their utility bill or purchasing needed medications. This is how Womenade Estero Bay helps." The organization operates in conjunction with Los Osos Cares.

"Thank you is probably an inadequate statement," Sheely said, "but I can't thank my volunteers enough. They helped collect, sort and price items and were there on sale day to lend a hand."

Sheely and Womenade Estero Bay also send a huge thank you to members of the Estero Bay community who came out to purchase items. Some people even gave more than the price of the sale items.

"Thank you to everyone who helped and came out to the sale," Sheely said, "You helped make magic!"

For more information, go to womenadeesterobay.org and losososcared.com.

Donation to Community Foundation




John Weiss recently donated to the Community Foundation of Estero Bay, Inc. Pictured are: Dan Costly, Joan Solu, Hannah Held, John Weiss and Christine McDonald Weiss

Morro Bay resident John Weiss recently made a donation to the Community Foundation of Estero Bay, Inc. (CFEB) of \$834, the remainder of his 2020 campaign for mayor funds, to the organization.

The Foundation, a local nonprofit 501-C3, will use the donation to further its mission of supporting Estero Bay youth. Area children who enroll in recreational youth sports and enrichment programs such as youth basketball, softball, little league, swimming lessons, junior lifeguards,

Donation Continued on page 12



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Events and Activities

By Theresa-Marie Wilson



Ryan Schrader, a fourth-year agricultural and environmental plant sciences major, tending plants in the campus greenhouse. He is one of five students involved in the Tomato Spectacular student enterprise.

More than 75 different types of tomato plants will be available at Cal Poly's annual Tomato Spectacular plant sale from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 1-2 and April 15-16, at the Horticulture Unit near the Poly Plant Shop.

Brandywine, Early Girl, Kellogg's Breakfast, Vintage Wine, and a selection of cherry tomato plants, including Nature's Bites, are some of the unique cultivars that will be available during the student-run enterprise project, one of several such hands-on courses offered by the university's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. This year, the program is directed by a team of five students who have grown more than 3,000 tomato plants from seed to provide home gardeners with quality plants that will produce fresh tomatoes throughout summer. Students began seeding the plants in early February and have tended to them in the campus greenhouses. The plants cost \$8 and are available on a first-come, first-served basis — with no holds or reservations made in advance. Customers are encouraged to bring boxes and/or wagons to transport plants to their vehicles. The sale takes place at the Environmental Horticultural Sciences Building (No. 48) on Via Carta Road off Highland Drive. Parking will be provided for free in lot H14. For more information, follow Cal Poly Tomato Spectacular on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CalPolyTomatoSpectacular and Instagram at www.instagram.com/calpolytomatospectacular.

Updated date and time. The Los Osos Valley Garden Club March Zoom Program is "How to Grow Tomatoes Easily" presented by Dave Freed, "The Tomato Guy" on Saturday, March 29 from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m..

Tomatoes are probably the most popular garden vegetable grown and not always the most easily grown. Freed will show how to do it. We are located in a cooler coastal climate and will need to be aware of this, but there is no reason why we can't grow tomatoes to their full potential. According to Dave, "If you don't have a 'green thumb,' I'll

Donation From page 11

kids club and Infinite Music will directly benefit. Youth from qualifying families receive a portion of the registration fees in the form of a scholarship through the CFEB.

"It is through the generous support of community members that the CFEB can continue to supply highly needed scholarships to get kids on the court, out on the field, behind an instrument, and in a pool," said Hannah Held, of the Foundation. "We are grateful that Mr. Weiss selected the CFEB for his donation. We are thankful to him for his support of the youth in our region and for being a friend of the Foundation."

For more information, go to www.communityfoundationestrobay.org

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give you one."

He will show participants what specific soils to use, what tomatoes to plant, when to plant, which fertilizers to use, and how to easily take care of those tomatoes whether grown in containers, raised beds or backyard dirt.

Join the Zoom meeting at <https://bit.ly/3pAKlts>. Meeting ID: 753 644 4586. Passcode: LOVGC.



The Annual Cayucos Dog Parade returns on Saturday, April 16. Meet at the Cayucos Pier at noon. This event is sponsored by the Mutt Mitt Project of the Lioness Club of Cayucos. Bonnets and costumes on dogs and their owners are encouraged but not required. The event is free but the Club is asking for donations of \$1/dog and \$1/person to assist in the Mutt Mitt program of supplying "poop bags" to 50 dispensers throughout the streets and beaches of Cayucos. Last year the project supplied over 300,000 bags in an effort to keep the community free of dog waste. No prizes, no judging just a fun community event for dogs and their owners. Free photo booth, raffle baskets and commemorative t-shirts will be available.

Art Center Morro Bay, 835 Main St, Morro Bay, presents "Love: Open Hearts, Open Minds" April 7 – May 23

Love has been the inspiration for the creation of more great art than any other human emotion. How do you depict love? How do you convey its complexity and intensity?

Encompassing divine and mortal love, chaste and unchaste, love is what we seek above all. Love breeds



compassion, intimacy, fear, longing, jealousy, change, unquestionable certainty, delusion, beauty, darkness and connects to the very core of the human condition. We can be euphoric, drunk and ecstatic in love.

Art speaks many languages of love - gently, slowly, kindly, playfully or critically and violently This exhibit will examine love as the greatest mystery of all.

"Love, Open Heart, Open Minds" will be on display in the main gallery concurrent with "Convergence, Wax on the Water" on display in the Virginia Russell gallery upstairs, from April 7 through May 23. This event is free and open to the public. Art Center Morro Bay is open daily from 12 p.m. – 4 p.m. There is a reception on April 10 from 2 to 4 p.m.

For more information, contact 805-772-2504 or www.artcentermorrobay.org.



The return of The Reboot • Storytelling ReImagined makes a comeback with a season of live performance storytelling in Top Dog Coffee's enchanted garden theater under the stars. The Reboot is a curated show featuring seasoned and first-time tellers sharing true tales around the unique theme for that month (always on 4th Fridays and always free). Outdoor garden seating in the fresh spring air! Just dress warm, bring a blanket (they'll have extras on hand) and a cozy friend or two. Top Dog's tasty treats and hot drinks will warm you through and through.

- April 29 • Spring Fling! Stories about spur of the moment love and other blunders
- No Reboot show in May
- June 24 • Friends in High Places – Stories about connections, rejections, and gatekeepers. True tales about calling in favors and getting over.
- July 29 • Busted! -- Stories about stellar detective work, following clues, getting caught red-handed, and tales from the apology zone.
- Aug 26 • Spin! – Stories about reframing, renaming and persuasion. Adventures in the art of stretching, scamming and weaving straw into gold.

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Community

- Sept 30 • Breaking the Code — Stories about signals, symbols and secret communications. True tales about misreading, double meanings, being stumped and solving the puzzle.
- Oct 28 • Ghost in the Machine – Stories about our love-hate relationships with devices, both brainless and smart. True tales about powering up, unplugging, and being human in these digital times.

...

Visit the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden for a week-end of Art, Plants, and Community on March 26 and 27 from 10 a.m.- 5 p.m. daily. This year’s Art in the Garden show is presented in collaboration with the SLO County Arts Council and the New Times. The show features a diverse selection of well-respected local artists, and will include jewelry, glass, paintings, ceramics, sculptures and more. Visitors will find art for the home and garden, unique gifts, as well as a blossoming arts community. Walk through the Oak Glen Pavilion and surrounding garden patios to be inspired and learn about the creative process from the artists themselves. All art will be for sale and a portion of all sales will benefit the SLO Botanical Garden. The Spring Plant Sale is happening in tandem with Art in the Garden. It’s the perfect time to add some new color to your garden! The Garden offers charismatic, colorful, and hearty plants that make a great statement without affecting your water bill. All the volunteer-grown plants will be available to the public. In addition to drought-tolerant and native plants, there will be Orchids for sale this year, in partnership with the Five Cities Orchid Society. Members Only: Shop from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. on March 26 and save 15% all weekend. Become a SLOBG Member today and get a free plant when you join or renew.



Coalesce Bookstore invites everyone to a debut author book signing on March 26 from 1 to 3 p.m. “The Conjuror” is a debut historical fiction thriller by Nick Oliveri

that follows the life of Mikalla, the Conjuror of the flourishing kingdom of Idaza. The adored Conjuror is the nation’s chief storyteller, and he weaves history and tales of Idaza to bring people together through common goals and ideals. Mikalla’s perfect life is disrupted when the king commands him to deliver a deadly message that will inevitably end in bloodshed and war. Betrayal and murder wait in the wings for Mikalla in this tale of political charade and twisted schemes. The choices Mikalla makes as the Conjuror will change everything for the kingdom of Idaza. Oliveri treasures the unique potential behind every person’s story and values sharing those tales with the world. Skilled at crafting sentences that bring his characters and narratives to life, he is passionate about the beauty of the written word. The Conjuror embodies his love of storytelling and the power our voices possess. Originally from Massachusetts, Oliveri is a San Luis Obispo native and also the co-founder of Impact Snacks, a snack company dedicated to health and environmental sustainability. He loves wine, hockey, surfing, philosophy, art, and of course, reading and writing. Oliveri is currently working on his next novel.



Check out Birds with Tome Edell on Saturday, April 2 at 8:30 a.m. Edell has tracked San Luis Obispo County birds for over 40 years. He is an eBird reviewer, serves on the board of the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay, and leads offshore boat trips for the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival. The walk takes place at Villa Creek, a prime location for bird watching with its natural habitats. Observe a wide

variety of birds including waterfowl, ocean birds (grebes and cormorants), gulls, shorebirds (snowy plover), sparrows and finches, and learn about their behaviors - feeding, vocalizations, nesting and more. Trip distance will be about 1.5 miles, a moderate 2-hour hike. Reservations required. Group limited to 15. Send an email to: Hello@CayucosLandConservancy.org Location: Villa Creek Pullout north of Cayucos on Hwy 1, south of Villa Creek Rd. Bring binoculars and wear sturdy shoes. Photo by Dr. Joel Germond

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.

‘Bird Bath Brigade’ Seeks Volunteers

By Neil Farrell



The ‘Morro Rock Bird Bath Brigade’ is asking for volunteers to help keep this birdbath, located near Target Rock, filled with clean drinking water for the area’s wildlife. Submitted photo

In what’s becoming an increasingly harsh world, it’s good to highlight a bit of humanity peeking through the fog. Such is the case in Morro Bay where some volunteers are dedicated to helping out some of the wildlife — mainly birds — that Morro Bay is famous for. Back in October 2021, explains Regina Prokop, a self-described lover of nature who moved to San Simeon because of the elephant seals of Piedras Blancas, she literally stumbled upon a calling. “I love the Rock,” she says, “I’m there all the time.” That October, she says she tripped over what she

Bird Bath Continued on page 14

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Womenade Estero Bay and Annette Sheely would like to thank the many generous donors, **INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS**, and eager shoppers for helping our Magical Garage Sale raise over \$6000 to help local men, women, and families in need.

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Community

Bird Bath From page 13

thought was a low-lying rock, one of millions that litter the whole Morro Rock area. “Then I realized it’s a birdbath,” she says.

Indeed it was a birdbath and one that has a history, too. Over a decade ago, the late-Marge Leggerton of Los Osos, a fierce defender of animals, from cats and dogs to ground squirrels, started taking care of the critters at the Rock.

Marge and some friends put out a couple of concrete birdbaths using cement to affix them in amongst the rocks. They blended in so well as to be almost invisible.

Then she and others would fill the dishes with fresh water, and put out some food too, for the squirrels and the birds.

Some in town frowned on the gesture and someone actually smashed the birdbaths with a sledgehammer. That set Marge off on a firestorm, with her paying a visit on the Harbor Department to express her displeasure. One should never mess with animal lovers.

A truce was reached and a new birdbath was installed and the practice resumed, until Marge’s death a few years ago. So while Marge is gone, the birdbath has apparently survived, no doubt filling with rainwater but otherwise unattended until Regina stumbled onto it.

“I got a 3-gallon bottle of water and a brand new toilet brush and I started filling it up every other day and then every day,” she says.

That kind of devotion to wildlife living at the edges of civilization in what can be a pretty inhospitable environment is also not new.

For many years, several people cared for the large colonies of feral cats that had been abandoned over the years at Morro Rock, left to fend for themselves, even as they bred out of control.

The feral cats were divided up into three distinct populations — grays, blacks and Siamese — each staking out territory in different areas of the Rock’s 34-acre base, making homes amongst the poison oak bushes and tumbled boulders.

Eventually, State Parks, which owns Morro Rock as part of Morro Bay State Park, decided the feral cats had to go.

Volunteers with Homeless Animal Rescue Team in Cambria and the folks who’d been caring for them got together and trapped every feral cat on Morro Rock in a campaign that took months.

All were spayed and neutered and many were tamed down and released on area ranches as mouse-catchers; while others were adopted by the public. And a few had to be put down due to illness.

They successfully removed a significant, invasive predator that had decimated the native wildlife — from songbirds to potato bugs — and did it in a humane manner. It wasn’t long before songbirds returned to Morro Rock and the ecosystem was restored.

Regina, who is planning to return to Las Vegas, bought a small sign that she installed at the birdbath asking people to pour some water into the bowl to help the animals.

She also started a Facebook Page, see: www.facebook.com/groups/375610191039747 where volunteers for the “Morro Rock Bird Bath Brigade” — as she’s dubbed it — can coordinate their efforts and share photos of wildlife at what’s becoming a true watering hole, used by all of the Rock’s denizens. She says a recent vacation opened her eyes upon her return.

“I went to Paris November 6th through the 16th,” she says. “I came back and that thing was dust dry and full of sand, and I felt so bad.”

She’s hoping that enough people will volunteer to mind the watering bowl that she can have some peace of mind that her beloved wildlife are being cared for, even if in just a small way.

It should be noted, that authorities frown on people feeding birds and squirrels “people food” — from Fritos to French fries — as it isn’t good for the animals and can lead to the critters losing their fear of man, a survival instinct.

Plus, as cute as they are, ground squirrels are wild animals and should be treated that way; the same goes for seagulls. People are often bitten by squirrels when they get too close.

But simply pouring clean drinking water into a bowl and then leaving them to it, is not the same as tossing Fritos to a flock of seagulls.

So if readers are interested in actively volunteering with the Bird Bath Brigade, go to the Facebook Page to connect with other volunteers. Or next time you’re down by Target Rock, seek out the birdbath and pour some watery love into the bowl for the animals, and for Marge and Regina, too.

CSD Seeks Second in Command

The Los Osos Community Services District is currently searching for a new second in command, seeking to fill a job with a competitive salary and benefits package but a whole lot of duties and responsibilities.

“The Los Osos Community Services District,” reads

the job description posted on the LOCSD’s website, “is currently accepting resumes for a full-time Administrative Services Manager position that will direct, manage, supervise, and coordinate assigned programs and activities within the Administrative Services Department including finance, human resources, payroll, risk management, solid waste, customer service and information systems; act as Deputy Secretary to the Board of Directors, Deputy District Clerk, and Deputy Secretary to the District; coordinate assigned activities with other departments and outside agencies; and provide highly responsible and complex administrative support to the General Manager.”

Salary range goes in five “Steps” starting at \$93,412 a year in Step 1, to \$113,838 in Step 5, but a new hire would be expected to start somewhere in the middle of the range, perhaps at Step 3 and \$103,251 a year, plus full benefits.

But don’t think this would be a cushy, desk job. From the list of duties, which contains some 30 direct duties, and four additional duties that may arise, whomever they hire would be kept busy.

Among the duties is payroll and human relations including hiring of CSD personnel, accounting and preparing all the staff reports to the board, maintaining the District website and social media, grant writing, overseeing the admin staff and the CSD office, and helping prepare the District’s annual budget, among others.

A complete job description and requirements are available on the District website, see: www.lososocsd.org/career-opportunities-administrative-services-manager.

Candidates can have a bachelor’s degree, five years of “increasingly responsible work in public administration,” or “office management experience including three years of administrative and supervisory responsibility.”

To apply, send cover letters and resumes to: ldurban@lososocsd.org. Position is open until filled.

Morro Bay Launches Business Survey

The Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the City of Morro Bay, released a survey for Morro Bay businesses in the waterfront and downtown areas. The survey has seven questions and is estimated to take five minutes. The survey is confidential. The answers will be shared in aggregate form in a report that will be published in April.

The purpose of this survey is to listen to the needs of the business community and explore possible solutions. While the Morro Bay Tourism Business Improvement District, Visit Morro Bay, focuses on bringing overnight visitors to the city, the survey seeks ideas to draw midweek and off-season customers that are local or visiting for the day.

“The business community has talked about different options for generating commerce during the week and off-peak season for years. This survey will provide data to inform decisions moving forward for events, beautifica-

tion, marketing and possibly even a Business Improvement District,” said Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce President and CEO, Erica Crawford.

In addition to the survey, the Morro Bay Chamber will conduct two focus groups with a cross section of business owners to share innovative ideas and explore funding options.

“We are very excited to launch this business survey and hear from the business owners,” said Morro Bay City Manager, Scott Collins. “As the city council begins to set priorities for the next fiscal year, we are looking for ways to collaborate with the businesses and the other organizations that are promoting our area.”

The survey is open until Sunday April 10, 2022. Morro Bay businesses can complete the survey at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/MorroBayBiz

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

The Virtual Walk

By Susan Vasquez



Clever people have recently devised ways to do what they want to do without actually doing it. Say the travel bug is biting you, as it has bitten me. We may not physically be ready to hop on a bus to faraway places, but we can almost do it, or pretend we are doing it, or do something similar that replaces the thing we really want to do. This is the world of virtual.

The trend of virtual walking – taking walks without really taking walks – has given me some lifestyle relief lately. It’s not ideal. In fact, the idea of not-stepping out while

Bookshelf Continued on page 16

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Darlene Virginia Krouse

1942 - 2022



Darlene Virginia Krouse of Los Osos passed away on March 15, 2022. She had survived a rare cancer called GIST for almost 20 years. Within the past six months she had suffered from numerous health challenges. Despite these, she kept a positive attitude with a strong determination to manage her disease and the difficulties that came with it. Her strong faith, mixed with the many connections she made helped her focus on the bright side of life. Those who knew her would say she was the sweetest, most generous person they had ever met.

Darlene was born on September 4, 1942 in Santa Maria, California. She grew up in Guadalupe and graduated with a degree in home economics from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. She started her working life as a home economics teacher at Hawthorne High in Los Angeles. She married Dennis Krouse in 1968 and started a family thereafter. They moved up to the Central Coast in 1973. As her

family grew she became a teacher's aide in second grade at Sunnyside Elementary, and later obtained her library tech certificate. She worked as a library assistant for many years at Los Osos Middle School.

Her hobbies included cooking delicious foods for her family, sewing and genealogy. Ever the giver, she loved helping to prepare monthly meals for the People's Kitchen through her church. She was a member of Womenade, which provided assistance to members of the community in need. This evolved into the Estero Bay Kindness Coalition, providing food to families in need. She enjoyed quilting and making dresses and shorts for children in the Philippines through the Dress-a-Girl/Duds-for-Dudes organization. Most everything she did involved making donations.

Darlene had a big heart and she loved her family and friends deeply. She valued eating meals together, taking group photos, spending time with family and friends. Her community was very important to her, and she dedicated herself to giving back.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Dario and Nadine Ferini.

She is survived by her husband Dennis, and her 3 children: her daughter Stephanie Krouse and family (Marc Tosches, grandson Ian, and granddaughter Gisele), her son Michael Krouse (and girlfriend Courtney), and her daughter Lori Fleming and family (husband Jeff and granddaughter Jordy), as well as her sister Alberta Lefler, niece Carey Caulfield (grandniece Kelly), her nephew Jim Lefler and family (wife Lindsay, nieces/nephew: London, Ellery, Finley and JR).

A memorial service will be held at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Los Osos on March 26 at 11am. For those who may not be able to attend, there is an option to view the service on the church's website. It is <https://www.seasparishlo.org/>

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to your favorite charity in her name.

Community



Mission Bells

My daughter, Lynne, and I travel northward on Highway 101, El Camino Real, to pick up the Estero Bay News in King City every other week. The drive gives us an opportunity to enjoy the California landscape along the way.

On our journey we pass the mission bells placed at intervals on both sides of the freeway northward. When were the bells placed along the highway, and why, has intrigued me on these trips?



A mission bell sign lining the historic EL Camino Real.

A little research produced the information I wanted to know to wit. The 15- foot cast iron bells were placed one to two miles apart along both sides of the highway from Los Angeles to San Francisco in the year 2004. They were placed at intervals to mark the Mission Trail.

The idea to create a Mission Trail with the bells began with Anna Pitcher in 1892. Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes, a member of the California Federation of Women's Clubs in 1905 did the follow up.

In 2009, new Mission bells replaced the original bells along the freeway.

Today the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) takes care of the bells maintaining their position and structure.

Bookshelf From page 14

someone else does the trekking in the place where you want to be is ridiculous. It's exactly what walking should not be. I could even sit on my comfy porch while someone else does the walking, but I haven't taken it that far yet. Being virtual, however, is better than letting myself get into a rut. It gives me a reason to laugh. Perhaps what I am feeling is the laughter of hysterical relief, but at this point, it's almost enough.

Want to walk El Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain, as I want to do? Strap on your smart phone, plug in your ear buds, call up a Youtube Camino walk, and head out your own front door. You walk along with someone who is actually walking that historical path. You're just using technology and your own community streets. In your mind, you can be in another place on the planet while your feet stay local. No air travel, no expenses-on-the-road, no proof of good health. Be you without being there. On second thought, maybe hikes like this are not that ridiculous.

On my neighborhood walk, I may be looking at my neighbor's house, a familiar sight, but I am hearing the rustle of vines in Spain's Rioja region and the slap of someone else's footsteps on a graveled pathway. On the Youtube walk, a voice calls out "Buen Camino" as I wait at the light to cross Highway 1. I find that as I continue, I begin to pace myself to match the other walker's steps. In this virtual world, I am no longer laughing, and have lost that feeling of hysteria, but the same emotional cleansing release is there. It's something new I am doing, in the midst of so much that has been repeating and repeating these past many months.

My stroll this afternoon may be the same as I have been taking almost daily for longer than I want to count, but I feel refreshed. As I listen to the adventure of another walker half-way across the world, I follow my over-worn tromp around the neighborhood. I get lost in someone else's journey while taking my own.

Isn't there an implied philosophical question that this type of walk brings to mind? Is it virtuous, this virtual world? After a couple of years of not being anywhere but home, does it matter? I suppose it's a nice surreality when we need it.

If you had asked me three years ago if I would ever take a virtual walk, I would have asked, “Why?” Now, I say, “Why not?”

Susan Vasquez has taken walks in many of the world's most interesting spots, but especially enjoys her strolls around Estero Bay. She is the author of four books, blogs at One Small Walk and is a member of the Bookshelf Writers, four Estero Bay women whose writing can be found at <http://www.thebookshelfwriters.com>

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Behavior Doesn't Happen in a Vacuum

By Lisa Ellman

Reconditioning behavior is a type of “retraining”. If your dog reacts badly to a doorbell or people or other dogs, reconditioning the response is necessary. This means teaching the dog an alternative behavior to the stimulus; something different to do instead of their typical response. Reconditioning a response is different from desensitizing your dog in that instead of providing the dog with an alternative behavior to a stimulus, desensitizing means having the dog ignore the stimulus; for example loud noises or even shoes.

When training, or reconditioning, your dog’s behavior, one constantly struggles with nature versus nurture. Nature is the ancient instinct your dog carries in its DNA. It’s not something that is learned through the dog’s environment, it’s more of an automatic reflex. The behavior can be enhanced by focusing and using said instinct to provide physical and or mental stimulation for the dog. Herding dogs, for example, have been bred for decades to do a particular job; it’s in their DNA. Those dogs that do the best job are the ones that are bred so the desired behavior is passed on. Nurture, on the other hand, is what humans provide: food, shelter, love, guidance, activities.

When addressing behaviors that you deem inappropriate for your dog it’s first critical to learn and understand what is driving the behavior; nature or nurture. Is the behavior something in your dog’s breed (DNA), or is it something your dog has learned in response to its environment? Perhaps something that is being inadvertently reinforced by humans?

Several factors can determine how long reconditioning a behavior may take. For example, how long has the behavior been going on and how old is the dog? The longer the behavior takes place, becomes “ingrained”, in the dog’s mind, and the older the dog gets, the more time it will take to change. Another factor is genetics. For instance, is this a behavior that the dog has been bred for? Guarding, herding, pulling a sled? Once the motivation for the behavior is understood it becomes more approachable because you understand where it’s coming from. Does human behavior need to change (nurture), and if it’s nature, how does one go about changing instinct?

As a trainer that prioritizes positive reinforcement to change behavior, I’ve found that envisioning a specific behavior for your dog is the most effective way to reach that goal. Think about how you would like to see your dog react, and start from there. It’s much more productive to guide your dog to the correct behavior than to penalize the wrong.

Let’s look at the doorbell dilemma for example. The human doesn’t know how to address the behavior constructively so they end up either pulling the dog away by the collar and or yelling “no.” Chaos on the part of the human, creates chaos for the dog. A calmer, positive resolution is to give the dog a place to go and stay while the door is answered. Use the doorbell as Pavlov used the bell for his dogs. A doorbell now means if you go to this spot and stay while I open the door, you’ll get a bunch of treats! Of course, this is a process. Start any behavior reconditioning work by making sure that your dog is familiar and respon-

sive to the commands used: bed, down, stay, leave it, or any other behavior commands you choose to give.

Please remember that Youtube videos and training books may be helpful in teaching basic commands, but dealing with behavior is a more unique, individual situation. The dog in the video or book is not your dog. Securing the help and advice of a professional dog trainer can almost always help you realize your goals.

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

Honor Flight Resumes Flights



When Honor Flight Central Coast California takes off from SLO Airport on Monday, April 4, it will be the first flight for the organization in the two plus years that COVID-19 shuttered trips. And the 23 veterans on board will reflect another milestone: in addition to a 99-year-old World War II veteran and nine Korean War-era veterans, for the first time in the local organization’s history there will also be a full contingent of Vietnam veterans rounding out the group.

According to Flight Coordinator Caralee Wade, nine Vietnam veterans will join other war-era comrades for the trip to visit the memorials that honor wartime military service.

“We are so happy to have a group of Vietnam veterans on this trip,” said Wade. “Some of these veterans have been waiting for years as we made our way through World War II and Korea applicants, trying to accommodate our oldest veterans first.”

Wade said the trip would be extra special as flights resume after a long hiatus. “It’s exciting to be flying for the first time in two years and to be doing so with a group that represents multiple generations of military service creates a powerful reminder of what these veterans have done for us,” she said.

One of the veterans on the flight will be San Luis Obispo resident Fred Glenn, a founder of local CPA firm Glenn Burdette. Glenn, now retired, served in the U.S. Army in the 1950’s and is looking forward to being a first-time visitor to the memorials, especially in the company of other veterans.

“My service was more than 65 years ago, but it stays with me today,” Glenn said. “I know that’s true for every veteran. I am excited to have the opportunity to visit the memorials and share experiences with fellow veterans,” he said.

According to Honor Flight Chair Bear McGill, the inaugural 2022 flight is shaping up to be a big one. “We are geared up and ready for an amazing trip to Washington, DC,” McGill said. He noted that the mix of veterans that include Nipomo resident James Porter, who served in the US Navy in World War II and at 99 years old is the oldest veteran to ever make a local Honor Flight trip, along with Korean and Vietnam veterans, will make for an emotional, uplifting trip.

“And when we return to SLO Wednesday evening, April 6, our partners at Welcome Home Military Heroes are planning a welcome home tribute that I promise will leave a proud lump in everyone’s throat,” said McGill. He encouraged local residents to join in the welcome home rally at SLO Airport. “The more the merrier,” he said, “and boy, this group deserves it.”

McGill said the flight is currently due to arrive at 9:02 p.m. on Wednesday, April 6, and that real time updates will be offered on the Honor Flight Central Coast California Facebook page.

Since its founding in 2014, Honor Flight Central Coast California has taken several hundred local veterans on all-expense paid trips to Washington, D.C. for VIP tours of the memorials that were built in their honor. All WWII, Korea, Vietnam, or other era veterans are encouraged to apply for a flight. “Our goal is to recognize every veteran in our community with a Tour of Honor,” said McGill. Honor Flight Central Coast California is a member of the Honor Flight Network of 130 independent flight hubs that operate throughout the U.S. The all-volunteer local organization is 100 percent dependent on donations to fund the trips. More information at www.honorflightccc.org.

PG&E Wants to Lower Colleges’ GHG

By Neil Farrell

Pacific Gas & Electric is proposing a new program for universities and state colleges that would reduce the schools’ emissions and aid in the fight against climate change, the company announced last week.

On March 17, PG&E said if the California Public Utilities Commission approves the program, they “would team up with the University of California and California State University systems to introduce a ‘Clean Energy Optimization Pilot’ [CEOP] to campuses across Northern and Central California.”

The company said Southern California Edison already has such a program for the schools in its service area. The program is intended to reduce so-called “green house gas” (GHG) emissions the schools release every day.

“Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is one of the most critical and impactful steps an organization can take to reduce its environmental impact,” said Aaron August, PG&E vice president of business development and customer engagement. “Innovative and collaborative programs like the Clean Energy Optimization Pilot [CEOP] are essential to the future of a clean California, and PG&E is proud to collaborate with California universities on this exciting proposal.”

PG&E’s application with the CPUC calls for spending \$50 million in “unallocated GHG auction revenues over a four-year period,” reads a news release. “Funding would result from California’s Cap-and-Trade Program, not from customer rates.”

Simply put, “cap and trade” is a common term for a government regulatory program designed to limit, or cap, the total level of emissions of certain chemicals, particularly carbon dioxide, as a result of industrial activity.

According to the website www.carbonbrief.org, “Cap and trade requires large emitters such as power plants, refineries and factories to buy permits for the greenhouse gases they release. Distributors of natural gas, gasoline, liquid petroleum gas, and diesel fuels must cover emissions from fuels they sell. The scheme limits the total number of permits available so that overall emissions stay within the cap.

California, one the US’s largest emitting states, has committed to reduce its emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.”

Tens of millions of dollars are generated every year by the State’s auctioning off pollution credits under the cap-and-trade program.

PG&E’s CEOP would reimburse for retrofitting school buildings to be more energy efficient; building new construction efficiently with energy usage top of mind; investing in on-site renewables, such as solar, and energy storage; and, installing electric vehicle charging stations and electrifying customers’ fleets to run on electricity.

If the CPUC approves of plan, PG&E said it could get started next year.



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Photo by Theresa Marie Wilson

Department.

“It’s like a video game on steroids,” said Sheriff’s spokesperson Tony Cipolla. “It’s just very immersive in terms of training and very realistic. It really puts you in the scenario.”

The VirTra V-300 is an immersive law enforcement reality-based situational training simulator with hundreds of scenarios depicting everything from armed robbery to kidnapping to active shooter incidents. VirTra stands for Virtual Interactive Coursework Training Academy.

It is a hexagon shaped platform with a 300-degree viewing surface allowing the trainee to move in the direction of the victims and criminals. Behind each of the five screens is a projector and speaker system. Each scenario involves actors, not animated or computer generated characters, that detail everything from the smallest pre-attack indicators to the chaos of screams, gunfire, victims fleeing and suspects threatening — all in real time.

Added to the reality, an instructor sitting at a table with two monitors and a keyboard controls the system and has the opportunity to change the direction of how the situation plays out based on the interchange of dialogue, actions, and reactions between the trainee and the actor on screen.

“It is an additional tool that we use to train in a safe environment,” said Range Master and Sheriff’s Armorer Ian McKnight, who instructs law enforcement personnel and concealed carry weapons permit holders. “It is a force options, decision making training tool. So it’s not a shooting simulator per se; it’s designed to get officers and deputies to think, ‘What can I do? What can’t I do? What should I do? What I shouldn’t do?’ The good part about this system is that the officers and deputies can actually make a mistake that could be potentially lethal out on the street and learn from that decision making process.”

The training is part of the perishable skills program — a post-certified course.

“Every year, the deputies go through a four-hour, perishable skills training on a lot of different things,” McKnight said, “firearms, empty handed, baton, arrest and control, Virtua and force options.”

When the lights surrounding the VirTra V-300 arena go dark, the call is dispatched over the radio, up to three trainees are faced with uncertain and rapidly evolving situations. Criminals, victims, gunshots, and information exchange come from all directions keeping the reality factor high. The floor even vibrates during a scenario that involves a helicopter.

The guns used, rifles and handguns, are real but they have been converted to run off of CO2.

“It gives a real good idea of what it would feel like if they were shooting live rounds,” McKnight said.

A Taser and pepper spray are also included in the arsenal. The trainee can be “shot” in which they receive a low electrical jolt from an apparatus worn around the belt that is controlled by the computer operator. McKnight said it is similar to being shot with a heavy rubber band.

“It’s a huge discretionary thing that the operator has to see,” McKnight said. If the student, for some reason, is in the line of fire and they don’t make any attempt to move, then we’re going to hit [the button]. But if they move, at least their brain is thinking about it. It may not be the perfect movement, but they’re thinking about moving.”

After each scenario, the instructor can immediately “debrief” the trainee replaying the incident in slow motion and discussing the thought process behind each action,



Photo by Dean Sullivan

when the weapon was seen, how many shots were fired, and where the suspect was shot. Ultimately, the information leads to areas of training that need to be focused on.

“Sometimes they get caught up and they do something that’s questionable, that we would not have done,” McKnight said adding after discussion the trainee is run through it again. “Observation skills and learning how to react quickly and correctly is one of the major results of this.”

The VirTra V-300 became a standard part of training about six years ago when the Sheriff’s Office purchased the \$450,000 system with a Homeland Security grant. They recently upgraded the package to a lease-based one that provides continued maintenance as well as new scenarios with an emphasis on reducing the intensity of the conflict as well as responding to a mental health crisis.

“What’s really important about that is the fact that it has a lot of de-escalation built into it,” Cipolla said. “The scenarios are really trying to get away from where you automatically draw a weapon towards escalation techniques that you can use. Each scenario has multiple ways that it can go, from non-lethal to Taser then to lethal force.”

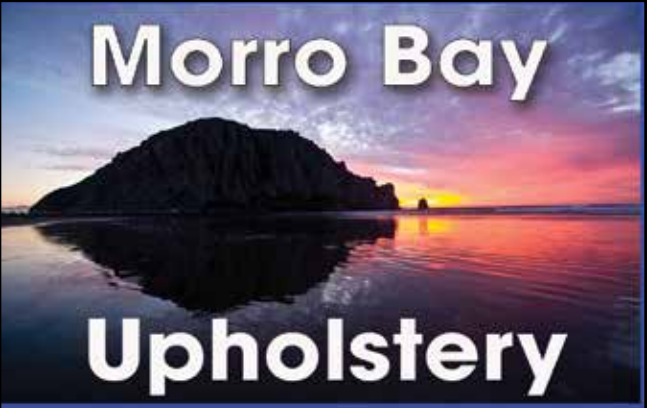
Estero Bay News’ Ryan Sullivan, a civilian, participated in a few scenarios. McKnight operated the computer deciding how the crime would unfold.

“This is incredible,” Sullivan said during his debriefing. “It is more serious than just a visual; it teaches you that not shooting is more important. It really makes you think about how you would really react just because you have a gun. Training is so important and this is an amazing tool.”

The system and upgrades are further reaching than the Sheriff’s Office; members of the FBI, the SLO District Attorney’s Office and law enforcement agencies throughout the county have used the training.


In case readers are wondering, in the scenario with the father and his baby, if the trainee fails to calm the man down and then misses the split-second opportunity to fire a clear shot, the subject, with the child, peels out in his truck with tires squealing and dust flying.

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Community

Reimbursement Deal From page 1

The environmental review for the project is well underway and a draft EIR is expected to be released in the coming weeks. Graham said they hired Rincon Consultants to do the EIR work. The City has a separate reimbursement agreement with Vistra to cover Rincon's costs.

"The City," Graham said, "has a separate reimbursement agreement with Vistra for Rincon Consultant contract equaling cost plus 25% (administration cost) for a total of \$197,029." That fund includes the environmental consultant deposit of \$1,156 mentioned above."

With big, complex projects like Vistra's BESS proposal, Graham said agencies often use this kind of reimbursement strategy.

"When you have large, complicated projects," Graham said, "it is not unusual for a jurisdiction to enter into a reimbursement agreement with an applicant to cover costs that were never anticipated under the City's current fee structure."

"As you can see, the fees paid to date for just the permits total \$12,669 and Staff time on the project has already exceeded this amount. The reimbursement agreement will allow the City to recoup staff time spent processing the application moving forward. If not for the reimbursement agreement, future staff time spent processing the application would be unreimbursed."

Vistra wants to build a 600-megawatt BESS using lithium ion batteries, and housed in three 90,000 square foot buildings, sited on the former fuel tank farm at the power plant. The oil tanks were used to store fuel oil, diesel and other fuels that were burned at the plant over the years before emission restrictions were tightened up.

In the mid-1990s the plant switched to natural gas full time and the tanks were mothballed. Duke Energy, which purchased in 1998 four of Pacific Gas & Electric's natural gas power plants, started the process of cleaning and demolishing the oil tanks, which was completed a few years later by Dynegey, the company that bought Duke's four California plants and eventually merged with Vistra Energy.

The Morro Bay plant ceased operations in 2014 and now Vistra is hoping to cash in on the State's push for renewable, carbon-free energy sources — mainly wind and solar — to reduce the carbon emissions that the State believes contribute to climate change. Indeed, switching to clean renewable energy generation is one of the main tenets of the State's efforts to fight climate change.

But wind and solar are unreliable in that they only work when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing, which means their peak energy production doesn't necessarily jibe with the peak demand, so the idea is to build such storage facilities to store excess energy when demand is low but capacity is high, and redistribute it when the demand goes up again.

Vistra has a 300 MW and a 100 MW BESS at its Moss Landing Power Plant. The 300 MW plant is currently the largest in the world and if the Morro Bay BESS is built, it will become the new world's largest battery facility.

But there's no guarantee it will ever be built as such projects have mountains of red tape to hurdle.

"Vistra needs to secure a number of permits, approvals, and entitlements for development of the Project," reads a City report, "including a Coastal Development Permit [CDP] and compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA]."

"Various elements of the Project requiring Planning Commission and City Council consideration at public hearings for recommendation or approval are expected to be forthcoming sometime in 2022, including consideration of a CDP and a CEQA Environmental Impact Report."

It should be noted that the reimbursement agreement doesn't guarantee that the City will approve the permits for the project, which also has to undergo scrutiny by the Coastal Commission, as it is seeking a CDP and the Commission will undoubtedly assume control of the permit at some point, perhaps through an appeal process as there is already growing opposition to the BESS in town.

The agreement requires the City itemize all of its applicable costs on a monthly basis and give Vistra a heads-up when it thinks costs will rise above \$100,000 in any given month.

The agreement makes no promises that Vistra's project will be approved and gives it no undue special consideration or special priority status to the project. But while that is true under the agreement, the City stands to make a lot of money if the project is built.

Vistra's initial cost estimate for the BESS is some \$490 million, of which the annual property taxes alone would be some \$4.9 million (1% of value), with the City receiving 10% of that or about \$490,000 a year. The BESS is expected to have a 20-year lifespan.

Also, the City and Vistra are negotiating on the project, which is expected to have to come up with above-normal public benefits, as the BESS is not a coastal dependent use, which is required of industrial uses in the Coastal Zone.

The old power plant was a coastal dependent use because of its once-through cooling system. But exceptions can be made if a project shows great public benefit.

Also, Vistra has committed to demolishing the three, 450-foot tall smoke stacks and the 165-foot tall power plant main building by a date certain or pay \$3 million to the City.

Surplus From page 1

seized by the bankruptcy court and were to be sold.

McMillan was in escrow to buy them when the City stepped in and pressed its rights and took the property back.

McMillan was initially renting it from the City but at \$8,000 a month, he soon found a new location up the hill at Shasta and Morro Bay Boulevard and after an extensive remodel, eventually moved there.

The City now rents out the building to Cano Realty, and Rock Harbor Marketing, owned by Councilwoman Jen Ford. She and her husband Travis rent the former wine bar space (which previously housed the Morro Bay Skateboard Museum). Ford recused herself from voting on the surplus property issue.

But under the State's "Surplus Lands Act," such unneeded properties owned by cities and counties must first be declared so, and then offered to anyone interested in building housing.

The SLA, "requires local agencies to declare non-exempt property surplus land before the local agency can sale or lease the property," City Community Development Director Scot Graham told Estero Bay News. "The SLA further requires local agencies to notify housing developers and other local agencies about the availability of the land through a Notice of Availability that is filed with the State Department of Housing and Community Development."

That process opens a 60-day window for interested parties to contact the City, but there really is no chance of these properties — located in the heart of the City's tourist areas — is going to see housing built.

"The SLA," Graham said, "does not require the City to sell the land to a housing developer and in this instance

the zoning does not allow for residential development as a primary use for the property, as it is zoned 'commercial visitor serving' [C-VS]. The City must complete the SLA process before sale of the property for any other purpose than housing."

So once the SLA process is completed, the City would be free to sell the property for redevelopment other than housing. It's been trying to find a buyer for several years, going through several real estate firms to try and land a buyer and while different entities have expressed interest; so far there's been no takers.

However, for months now the City Council has periodically talked about the properties in the context of a potential sale with a local motel owner, Hemet Patel, who is currently building an 83-room hotel on property in front of Morro Bay High School.

But how can the City justify selling public parking lots when it has both the Downtown and the Embarcadero under a parking in-lieu fee ordinance? Parking in-lieu fees are charged when a development project can't provide required number of parking spaces on site (the number depends on the proposed use), charging \$4,000 a space in Downtown and \$15,000 per space on the Embarcadero.

Graham said, "Parking will be addressed as part of any future development of the site." Which means such concerns are not part of the SLA process being done now, and would apparently be addressed at the appropriate time.

The involved parcels also include the public restroom, which logic defies as being unneeded on the waterfront. Indeed, while not "codified" in the City's ordinances, it has required private developers to build and maintain public restrooms as part of their projects.

Several projects have had to do this including the former Otter Rock Café (now Port House), the Boatyard Center, Rose's Landing, Dutchman's Landing, and Marina Square, among others.

Graham said it's a trade off. "The City does not force developers of lease sites located on the west side of the Embarcadero to provide public bathrooms," he said. "The public bathrooms are offered by the developer as extra public benefit, typically to achieve a 25-foot height for the development. The Waterfront Master Plan limits height on the west side of the Embarcadero to 17 feet. You can only go to 25' if you again provide some type of extra public benefit."

As for whether the City is still hoping to get built its "Market Plaza" concept, Graham said, "City is complying at present with the State mandated SLA process for any third party use or development of the site."

But the City floated this idea of a parking garage on the Embarcadero with a multi-story motel on the bluff for many years, even once bringing it to the City Council, where it was not well received, mainly due to the parking garage on the Embarcadero.


Does he think the Coastal Commission, which once downsized a 2-story building proposed for the Libertine and Off the Hook lease sites, lopping off the top floor to preserve views from Centennial Staircase, will allow what will seem like a five story tall edifice?

"The property is identified for development in the 2018 Downtown and Waterfront Strategic Plan as a mixed use commercial development and the site is zoned visitor serving commercial," Graham explained. "Maximum height on the lower Embarcadero fronting portion of the property is 25 feet and 30 feet up on Market [top of the bluff]. The Coastal Commission recently approved the City's General Plan/Local Coastal Land Use Plan, which identifies the land use for the property as Visitor Serving Commercial."

Asked about the sale negotiations, Graham replied, "As a matter of general policy applicable to any real estate negotiation, the City on advice of legal counsel does not generally discuss details of real estate negotiations prior to review at a public meeting."

EBN has been in contact with Mr. Patel, who said he's not made any decisions on the City's properties, and has declined comment for now.


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Kevin says,
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for the
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on the
Door"



KEVIN O'CONNOR, President

Community

Breakfast From page 1



Mayor John Headding.

and break down silos by discovering alternative opinions and options for action.” Who is encouraged to attend? She invites, “...a variety of thought-leaders and community builders to coalesce under the chamber’s big tent.” Expect breakfast and networking to open each gathering at 7:30 a.m. Be assured the quality of sweet and savory treats will remain. This month breakfast was provided by Bottle Liquor, Buttercup Bakery and SLO Roasted Coffee. Reservations for the April 20 breakfast or the entire series is open at www.morrobaychamber.org/events. Jen Ford launched agenda item #1, the first of four Open Mic Small Business Introductions. Since March recognizes Women’s History Month, the presenters appropriately modeled women-owned small businesses. Besides serving as a Morro Bay City Councilwoman, Ford’s primary day-job is co-owning and operating Rock Harbor Marketing with her husband, Travis. She is also a co-founder of the SLO Women’s March. She challenged the attendees to consider viewing each other and our “universe” with a broader lens as life continues to swirl and adjust to a new-normal. Supervisor Bruce Gibson was pleased to announce that as of Tuesday, March 15, he and fellow board members

had unanimously agreed on funding amounts for grants using American Rescue Plan Act funds in order to “...make a difference for our County’s hard working small businesses.” Apply at: <https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Administrative-Office/Featured-News/2022/Applications-Open-for-Business-Grants-Due-to-COVID.aspx>. He also indicated the board was close to funding grants for child-care providers and facilities, a business sector so needed and very close to his heart. Noting recent redistricting changes that had removed him from representing the Estero Bay, he said, “I will always be available to the citizens of the Estero Bay. I live just up the road and began my first campaigning in Morro Bay. Call anytime you need me.” Small Business Open Mic #2 introduced a gutsy Lisa Babb. She and husband Jeff opened Central Coast Cart Rentals on North Main Street because they enjoyed run-arounds around Morro Bay. Visitors thought they had rented their golf cart and wondered where to get one. They leaped into the business when the North Main auto lot closed. The property had previously offered propane tanks fill-ups. “Why not since the equipment was there,” said Lisa. However, since Jeff worked in the Valley two days a week, Lisa had to learn to fill the tanks. After a backbreaking first day providing the service, she questioned her stamina, but she was back at it the next day. A customer made it all worthwhile. He asked Jeff if it had been his wife pumping the propane the day before. When the answer was yes, the impressed customer said, “You have my business for life!” Open Mic #3 was Sierra Mace and Summer Birchell, the mother-daughter team that own and operate Gaia’s Garden offering crystals, houseplants and meditative classes. The business recently moved to Main Street behind the Ugly Mug and Legends – both small businesses also owned by women. Morro Bay Mayor John Headding offered good news and bad news in a brief State of the Bay, “Morro Bay was in budget crisis before the pandemic and with quick action by the best city manager in the county (Scott Collins), our city not only survived the crisis but came through better than before. Morro Bay is in the strongest financial position it’s been in years thanks to citizen support for Measure Q and E. “The bad news, however, is the Harbor Enterprise Fund needs our attention due to insufficient funding for

generations and needed harbor repairs incurring long term capital expenditures we don’t have.” He noted there was a parcel tax initiative created by a citizens’ group currently seeking signatures to place the issue on the next ballot. Mayor Headding also applauded an infusion of new business start-ups due to the partnership between the city and the chamber. He also stressed the water reclamation project would secure the city’s future water needs with federal loan paybacks at minimal interest costs. “Ok, you’d rather hear when street construction will finally be finished!” He closed with a shrug and a smile. “Well, I’m not really sure, maybe within four to six weeks?” Open Mic #4 brought up Savory Palette co-owners, Nancy Herrmann and Tammy Cline. They purchased the business, 601 Embarcadero below Windows on the Water, just before the pandemic shuttered them. They survived and continue to build a following offering fine wines, craft beers, tapas and a variety of musical programs, including participation ukulele and open mic nights, plus touring and local musical entertainment on Saturday evenings. Closing the inaugural program right on time by 9 a.m., Savory Palette regulars, Jeff Seales and Ray Rior-dan, demonstrated one of the original songs they love to perform on Thursday’s Open Mic Nights. It called “Going Coastal.” Request it! Guaranteed! You’ll laugh-out-loud-love-it! So, what’s next for the Morro Bay Chamber? This edition of EBN will not be out until the day after the second Embarcadero installment of Shop, Sip & Stroll first offered and enjoyed last spring, but there is definitely time to get your pass and glass for Morro Bay’s Downtown edition April 3, 5-8 p.m. Register at www.morrobaychamber.org/events. Morro Bay business merchants will not only be open for your business, but offering good cheer, plus eats and treats by local eateries and adult-beverage providers. So if I wrote it once, I’ll shout it out one more time, The new normal buzz from the community about recent efforts produced by the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce is “Morro Bay 2022: Back & Better Than Ever.”

RTA Celebrates with Ribbon Cutting for New Facility



RTA catered with friends and community partners Recently gathered to celebrate the opening of their new facility. Officially opened in January 2022, the new space is along Highway 101 at the northbound Prado Street exit. It has 28,650 square feet and houses company operations, administration, dispatch and vehicle maintenance. This includes bus parking for much of the RTA fleet. The construction was done by San Luis Obispo based Specialty Construction. The new site also allows for future inclusion of battery electric bus chargers and a solar canopy. The parcel was purchased along with Community Ac-

tion Partnership of SLO (CAPSLO) for their new homeless shelter and services on Prado Lane. The property is about 6.5 acres of land, and, in time, RTA will be neighbors with the new overpass for Prado Road to the 101. The new on-site parking accommodates approximately 73 public transit buses and vans as well as 84 employee and visitor vehicles, respectively, for a total of 157 on-site parking spaces The project cost \$27 million overall. To learn more about RTA visit their website at www.slorta.org, and if you’d like to learn about how to ride the bus, email info@slorta.org for a personal trip plan made just for you.

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City of Morro Bay Update



Photo: Visit Morro Bay

Primer on City of Morro Bay's Harbor Operations, Budget and Needs

The City has received questions about Morro Bay Harbor Department operations, management of waterfront lease sites, revenue streams and waterfront infrastructure needs. We figured the Estero Bay News would be a good venue to help explain the multitude of duties and responsibilities the Harbor Department is tasked and how the Harbor is funded.

Harbor Duties – Safety on the bay, management of waterfront infrastructure and lease sites

In the forefront are the public safety missions on the harbor, waterfront and beaches, which are accomplished by the Harbor Patrol. The Patrol conducts, among other things, boating safety and enforcement, search and rescue, vessel assist and towing, surf rescue, seasonal beach lifeguarding, marine fire-fighting, environmental protection, response and clean-up and public property and public access management. In addition to those tasks, the Patrol is responsible for general vessel assistance, managing ~40 vessel liveaboards and a liveaboard program, berthing for ~60 commercial fishing vessel in slips and on piers, management of a boat storage lot, management of a paid parking program for the public boat launch facility and general vessel and visitor assistance and guidance.

The Harbor Department also manages 30 waterfront property leases, where all the businesses on the west side of the Embarcadero are on public property lease sites subject to public overview. In these leases, the lessee builds, owns and maintains the improvements for the life of the lease on which to generate revenue and make a profit, and in turn they pay the City substantial rents. This aspect involves not just property management of 30 leaseholders and approximately 90 businesses as their landlord, but also a full financial management aspect with accounts payable and accounts receivable, auditing and debt recovery. In addition to the day-to-day, month-to-month and year-to-year management aspects of these lease sites, the Harbor Department manages the periodic capital development and redevelopment of these sites. In addition, the department manages the 125 moorings in the bay, and has an operating agreement with State Parks for management of the State Park Marina.

Finally, the Harbor Department manages its own capital program, which from an infrastructure standpoint includes several timber piers large and small, boat docks and gangways, buildings, seawalls and revetments, small parks, public restrooms, public docks and various other pieces of costly public infrastructure. This is the very infrastructure that makes the waterfront what it is, a great place for Morro Bay community members and visitors alike to enjoy and recreate in.

Harbor Expenses

From a staffing standpoint, the Harbor operations are currently all done by six full-time individuals on a current budget of ~\$2.1M in the Harbor enterprise fund. The enterprise fund format is set up where the revenues received in the enterprise fund zone are supposed to fully fund the operations, management and capital needs in the zone independent of any sales, property or hotel bed taxes, which typically flow to the City's General Fund. The General Fund supports City operations such as police, fire, public works, community development, recreation, administration, and funding for all capital needs outside of water, sewer and harbor.

Harbor Funding – Enterprise fund, supported mainly through waterfront leases

Of that ~\$2.1M budget, ~\$1.6M in revenue is received from those 30 waterfront lease sites (and 90 businesses) in the form of minimum and percent gross of sales rents. In short, all those waterfront lease sites pay a minimum annual rent based on the appraised value of the property, and on top of that a percent of their respective gross annual revenues based on the amount of percentage rent that exceeds their minimum rent. Those percent rents generally are 3% for restaurant sales, 5% for retail sales, 10% for bar sales, 5% for hotel sales and 20% for boat slip rentals. This is pretty standard up and down the coast in similar public waterfront/harbor leasing situations.

Here is a hypothetical example:

Lease Site XYZ has a restaurant and a retail shop, and their annual minimum rent to the City is \$50,000. At the end of the year they add up all their revenue receipts, and find they had \$2M in restaurant sales and \$650K in retail sales. At 3% for the restaurant sales, their percent rent is \$60,000. The 5% for their retail percent rent is \$32,500. Since their combined percent rent is \$92,500, and exceeds their minimum \$50K rent by \$42,500, at the end of the year they owe the City \$42,500 in addition to the \$50,000 they have already paid. Therefore, in sum total that lease site paid \$92,500 in annual rent to the City.

Recent Challenges in Sustaining the Harbor Enterprise Fund

15 years ago the Harbor Department's revenues exceeded expenses by a healthy enough margin to support operations and management, as well as a fairly robust capital replacement and improvement (infrastructure) program. The fund began to tip in the other direction beginning with the great economic recession in 2008 and all those visitor-serving and other revenues tanking. That was followed shortly thereafter by the cessation

of power generation by the Morro Bay power plant in early 2014 and loss of a \$275K/year lease for the cooling water outfall, just as revenues began to recover from the economic downturn. This was further exacerbated when the City of Morro Bay, like numerous cities, was hit by millions of dollars of unfunded pension liabilities in the form of the State's PERS pension reforms. Finally, in recent years harbor-related costs have increased due in large part to increased visitor and resident use of the waterfront, bay and beaches, while at the same time the revenues from the waterfront have remained relatively flat because the waterfront revenue generation is largely at its carrying capacity.

These financial headwinds come at a time when much of the waterfront's infrastructure is showing its age, with the short of it is the Harbor Department's budget has flipped from an annual surplus in the 2000's to one where it typically struggles to do better than break even. We are able to cover operations and management, however, there are insufficient extra revenues to support any significant capital needs. The Harbor needs approximately an additional \$600,000 to \$1,000,000 in annual on-going revenues to reach the level of capital funding to ensure the waterfront continues to be a place our residents and visitors can continue to enjoy for generations to come.

Creating a Sustainable Future for the Waterfront

Over the past 5-10 years the Harbor staff, Harbor Advisory Board and City Council have all explored various revenue generation and enhancement programs and initiatives to help the Harbor Department's budget, from raising all fees at or near full cost-recovery levels, the pilot waterfront RV camping program and the Harbor Department receiving, for the very first time, a share of the other City revenues, in the form of Measure E sales tax revenues. It is a complicated model, and while revenues City-wide have rebounded after the COVID pandemic drop in 2020, it is still quite clear that in the long-term funding of both the operational needs and the capital needs of the Harbor Department will be quite challenging. The City is currently exploring a range of options to address this imbalance, including, but not limited to, paid parking in the waterfront, continued funding from Measure E, and continued exploration of grant opportunities. It will take a combination of many revenue sources to help make the up the current annual \$600,000 to \$1,000,000 deficit in waterfront capital funding.

