

Morro Bay Bird Festival 2024



Kelly Vandenhuevel of Pacific Wildlife Care at the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival opening reception with her 13 year-old Red Tailed Hawk, Denali. Denali was featured on the front page of the Estero Bay News five years ago. Photo By Dean Sullivan.

More than 1,000 participants, leaders, and volunteers attended the Morro Bay Bird Festival this weekend. Visitors from 30 different states enjoyed five days of beautiful, clear weather and the 209 species of birds that graced the festival. Highlights included a black skimmer seen at the Marina Boardwalk, two harlequin ducks seen from Estero Bluffs, and a burrowing owl. Morro Rock's resident peregrine falcons were also extremely popular with festival attendees.

"Out of state participants raved about our gorgeous local scenery and coastline," said Festival Chairperson Jeanette Stone. "Visitors also commented on how kind and welcoming the Morro Bay Community is to the birders."

Community Family Day was attended by more than 150 local children and their families. The kids enjoyed fun crafts like making bird feeders and owl hand puppets, nature journaling, and dissecting real owl pellets. Local conservation non-profits also presented informational activities to help introduce young citizens to nature and conservation topics. Pacific Wildlife Care brought several of their Wildlife Ambassadors, including a raven, Virginia opossum, American kestrel, and gopher snake. Parents and grandparents enjoyed browsing the vendor bazaar which featured beautiful art for sale, as well as four optics companies selling binoculars and spotting scopes.

Bestselling Author Jennifer Ackerman gave three presentations about birds, on topics like bird intelligence and owls. Ackerman's keynote speech at Cuesta College CPAC was all about owls and current research on these intriguing birds. Her presentation included photos and videos of owl species from across the world.

Renowned birding expert Jon Dunn led many walks throughout the weekend and impressed festival participants with his encyclopedic knowledge of bird taxonomy and identification. John Muir Laws taught a master class on nature journaling and closed the festival out with a presentation during the closing dinner ceremony.

Laws encouraged everyone to slow down and use three questions when looking at birds or out in nature; "I notice, I wonder, It reminds me of." These questions can serve as prompts for deeper study and wonder when exploring the world around us.



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Additional Mountain Lion Sightings Reported Following Death of One



A mountain lion paw print was seen in the Sweet Spring Nature Preserve on Jan. 7. The shoe size, for comparison, is a women's 8-wide. Photo by Alison Dimond.

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Mountain lion sightings in neighborhoods in Los Osos have people buzzing. What many thought was one big cat roaming through the area is likely more.

A mountain lion believed to have made El Morro Elfin Forrest part of its territory is dead. Since then, glimpses of pumas and tracks left behind indicate more of the majestic big cats are passing back and forth— authorities say it's normal.

"People are sometimes surprised to hear that half of California is considered mountain lion habitat," Tim Daly, information officer for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, told Estero Bay News.

On Jan. 7 Alison Dimond, who lives across the street from Sweet Springs Nature Preserve, was out for a morning walk and discovered a mountain lion paw print around 7 a.m. (see photo).

"We mountain bike at Montano de Oro and are aware of snakes, coyotes, mountain lions and bears," Dimond said. "I am alarmed but know wild animals live in the parks and normally do not harm humans. I hope the animal can stay safe."

Sweet Springs, located off Ramona Avenue in Los Osos, is owned and managed by Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS).

"The latest sighting at Sweet Springs was in the morning of January 8th, based on a sighting of the animal and tracks found later," said Dr. Marie Goeritz, land chair for MCAS as well as a zoologist and biology instructor at Cuesta College. "The first Sweet Springs report of a mountain lion came in early September, when a passerby mentioned to one of our ambassadors that he had just witnessed a mountain lion taking down a deer in West

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Moving Forward: Introducing the New Owners of The Morro Bay Theater



The week of October 16, 2023 Mary Lou Jannopoulos turns over the keys to Scott and Cameron Wilson celebrating a new era of family ownership for The Morro Bay Theater. Photo submitted by Cameron Wilson

By Judy Salamacha

"Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue, and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true," wrote L. Frank Baum, author of "The Wizard of Oz." As my first 2024 column for Estero Bay News, I wanted to share at least one example of a Morro Bay community dream that came true in 2023. I had no idea my intend-

ed example to introduce the new owners of our local movie theater came with an announcement of a premier blockbuster movie by Director Jay Silverman starring Beau Bridges on January 20 with guest appearances and proceeds benefiting Morro Bay High School Arts! Check out 805Tix.com.

But first the backstory! In 2021 EBN's reporter Neil Farrell announced that after 25

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Queen's Reign Coming to an End

Photos and story by Neil Farrell



One of Morro Bay's longest standing Downtown businesses is closing at the end of January, as the owner plans to sail off into retirement.

But readers shouldn't fret too much, the location will stay filled under new management and feature new items, as well as leftover clothing from a closing sale going on now.

Pam Woodruff, owner of Queen's Closet women's clothing boutique at 315 Morro Bay Blvd., is walking away from the business she's owned for the past decade. Queen's Closet goes back much further, she says, taking a few moments to speak with a reporter. It's been in business for over 29 years, she adds, and was first owned by two sisters for the first 19 of those years.

Queen's Reign Continued on page 18

Brew Pub Gets a Concession; Council Likes Redevelopment Plan

By Neil Farrell



The Morro Bay City Council approved a lease amendment for a small brewpub on the Embarcadero, compromising a little bit after a small army of customers and employees stood up for the owners and stood up to the City during public comment.

It was one of two major decisions the City Council made regarding leases on the waterfront, as they also approved a conceptual plan to redevelop four small, under-performing lease sites at the south end of The Embarcadero..

Lease for Three Stacks

The Three Stacks & A Rock pub, located at 595 Embarcadero in the building that housed the Morro Bay Aquarium for some 50 years, has been trying to get a longer-term lease done with the

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Limekiln Bridge Replacement Project Kicks Off



This drone photo shows the Limekiln Creek Bridge on Hwy 1, located just north of Lucia, which is being replaced due to 'chloride intrusion' rusting out the rebar inside the bridge's concrete pillars. Caltrans plans to have a replacement bridge in place by November 2030. Photo courtesy Caltrans

By Neil Farrell

Caltrans is starting work on a major bridge replacement for Hwy 1 near Lucia, holding an online, virtual information meeting yesterday to introduce the public to what promises to be a long and very expensive fix to the State's most scenic stretch of coastal highway.

Called the "Limekiln Creek Bridge Replacement Project," Caltrans proposes to replace the 580-foot long concrete bridge that stands high above the beach at Limekiln State Park. It is one of several historic bridges on the stretch of Hwy 1 through Monterey County and Big Sur.

"Caltrans proposes to replace the existing concrete Limekiln Creek Bridge in Monterey County on Highway 1 near Lucia," reads the project description on Caltrans' website. "Within the limits of the proposed project, Highway 1 is a 2-lane undivided highway with two, 10- to 12-foot lanes and 0- to 4-foot non-standard shoulders. The proposed project lies exclusively within the Limekiln State Park property."

Access to the State Park and Beach is via an off ramp at one end of the bridge and people access the white sand beach by walking underneath the bridge. Built in 1957, the existing bridge has eight tall piers and abutments at either end of the bridge.

The eventual construction zone will span from Post Marker 20.9 to 21.3, according to Caltrans' online map.

As with other stretches of the Big Sur Highway, the area has problems. "The purpose of the project," Caltrans reports, "is to ensure the reliability of Highway 1 for the traveling public, support the movement of essential goods and services, and maintain coastal access along this section of the Big Sur Coast by addressing chloride intrusion in Limekiln Creek Bridge and slope stability problems."

A Caltrans team investigated the condition of the bridge's concrete in 2012 and discovered the chlorine intrusion within.

According to the website concrete.org.uk: "Chloride ingress is a common cause of deterioration of reinforced concrete structures. Concrete may be exposed to chloride by seawater or deicing salts; chloride initiates corrosion of the reinforcement, which through expansion disrupts the concrete."

So while chloride (basically salt) doesn't harm the actual concrete, it can corrode the steel reinforcing bar with, which in turn makes a structure unstable and subject to potential collapse.

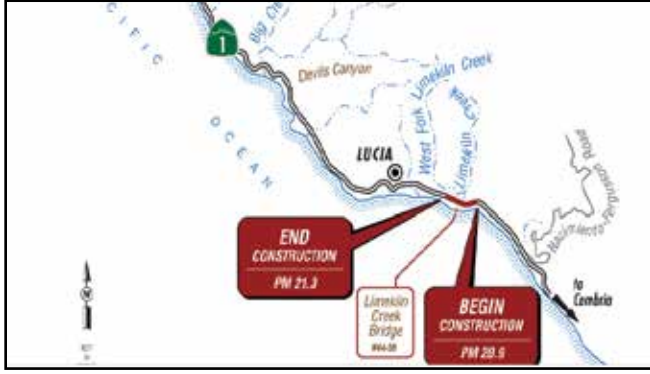
If its caught early, there are simpler ways to combat chloride intrusion, including using "Electrochemical Chloride Extraction" (ECE), passing an electrical current through the pillars to withdraw the chloride from the concrete, which is then sealed to keep from corroding again.

That's what was done with the Big Creek Bridge on Hwy 1, just a few miles north of Limekiln, according to a Caltrans spokesman. But Limekiln was apparently too far gone for that fix.

"There has been irreversible damage to the superstructure and substructure elements," Caltrans reports, "caused by chloride intrusion from pervasive salt-laden fog. This has resulted in frequent concrete cracking and reinforced steel and cable corrosion."

Also, "There have also been recurring slope stability problems at the north abutment caused by powerful waves. There have been attempts to stabilize this slope; however, it is not possible to permanently stabilize it." Ironically, the south side of the creek mouth is solid granite.

Another State agency's actions have led to the bridge's complete replacement. "There is a permit requirement [Coastal Development Permit 3-09-020] from the California Coastal Commission to remove the existing slope armoring," Caltrans said, referring to piles of boulders placed at the foot of a seawall. "As



A map shows the scope of the Limekiln Creek Bridge. Photo courtesy of Caltrans

a result of these issues, the need for replacing the existing bridge was identified by the Structure Maintenance and Investigations peer review committee in its October 2012 meeting."

But with the decision to remove the armoring and replace Limekiln Creek Bridge comes the question of funding. Caltrans has over \$100 million in hand. The website lists the State funding sources at \$11.74 million; Federal monies at \$90.62M; and total construction costs at a whopping \$102.36M. Such State and Federal highway maintenance monies are generated through taxes on fuel.

According to the work schedule posted by Caltrans they plan to be done with environmental review in March 2024 and finish the design and be ready for bids in June 2026. The plan is to start construction in July 2027 and finish the new bridge in November 2030.

The project EIR analyzed different options for doing the job and Caltrans Dist. 5 spokesman, Kevin Drabinski, said the intention is to keep traffic flowing on Hwy 1 during the lengthy construction.

That's potentially good news for the tourist towns on Hwy 1 that can see business negatively affected by road closures. Major landslides and in some cases multiple landslides each of the past several winters has meant road closures, long delays and even complete detours inland to Hwy 101 for the estimated 5 million vehicles a year that traverse that magic coastal highway to visit the Central Coast.

Lila Keiser Park to Get Needed Repairs



This photo taken by the City of Morro Bay in July 2022, shows a large area of the Lila Keiser Park parking lot that has completely failed. That lot and the police department's annex yard will get repaired and repaved. Photo courtesy City of Morro Bay

By Neil Farrell

The City of Morro Bay is out for bids on a little spring maintenance project and get caught up on a couple of repair jobs that have been in the pipeline for some time.

Bids were due Jan. 18 on a project to repair and repave the parking lot at Lila Keiser Park and the other will fix up the surface of the police department's annex yard, located across Morro Bay Boulevard from the police station. That's where equipment used by the department, like road barricades for road closures, are kept, along with found or seized property, like errant bicycles, are stored.

The jobs entail new "pavement installation and rehabilitation at both lots and some ADA [disability accommodations], concrete and striping improvements for Lila Keiser in the parking lot as well," City Engineer Eric Riddiough told Estero Bay News.

He added that money for the project, which carries an engineer's estimate of \$200,000-\$250,000, according to Riddiough, is coming out of the General Fund.

He said both projects "have been in the budget for a couple

of years." The police annex lot goes back to the 2020/21 fiscal year and Lila Keiser Park was budgeted last year (2022/23).

But as with any project, the costs won't actually be known until the bids are opened and a winning bidder selected and approved by the City Council. And even then, Murphy's Law applies with any construction project and the ultimate cost won't be known until it's completed.

In a staff report entitled, "Lila Keiser Parking Lot Rehabilitation and ADA Upgrades," and dated July 2022, the Lila Keiser Project description reads, "The project is to repair, rehabilitate, and restripe the asphalt parking lot at Lila Keiser Park. In addition, there is need to upgrade ADA-accessible parking to the lot. The park site is not city-owned, but it is the responsibility of the city to maintain the facilities, including the parking lot."

That document also estimates fixing Lila Keiser Park's parking lot at \$120,000.

Vistra Energy, which also owns the old power plant property, owns the park property too, along with other parcels on either side of Morro Creek, leases the park to the City for basically nothing. Among the City's numerous parks, Lila Keiser (along with Del Mar Park) is an active recreation park with two baseball diamonds, a picnic/barbecue area, a snack bar, horseshoe pits and a children's playground. It's the home field for the local youth soccer leagues, as well as Little League and girls and adult softball. Both diamonds also have lights for night play.

Under the heading "Project Justification," Riddiough said, "Lila Keiser Park is a city park that is used consistently by residents for sports activities and recreation with amenities such as a children's playground, baseball/softball diamonds, soccer fields, and picnic areas. These recreational activities contribute to community health and wellness."

"Repair, rehabilitation and restriping of the parking lot would improve access to the park through vehicle parking."

Lila Keiser Park is named for 1970s Morro Bay Councilwoman Lila Keiser, who was a champion for children and recreation, but it's showing its age.

"The condition of the lot in many areas," Riddiough said, "is poor, and the asphalt lot has exceeded its useful life. If the improvements were not funded, consolidated maintenance will have to spend added time doing small repairs associated with ongoing parking lot pavement failures and complaints received from the public."

Given its relatively small size, it shouldn't take long to whip Lila Keiser Park back into shape. The police annex is not open to the public; however, readers can expect to see at least construction road warning signs go up along the Boulevard during the job.

Riddiough said they expect to award a contract sometime in February. Normally, contractors have just a few weeks to get mobilized and start working, so readers can probably expect to see the work being done in late March or early April, depending of course on the weather.



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News

D.A. to Open Child Abuse Center

By Neil Farrell

The County District Attorney's Office is setting up a new home for a program designed to help childhood victims of abuse.

County Supervisors recently green-lighted a lease for office space in San Luis Obispo to house a "Children's Advocacy Center" or CAC that would provide a safe space where law enforcement can conduct victim and family interviews and investigate abuse crimes.

According to Acting District Attorney Eric Dobroth, the idea of CAC's goes back some 35 years but wasn't defined to the point where an accreditation system was set up until the passage of Assembly Bill 2741, which took effect on Jan. 1, 2021.

"This legislation," Dobroth said, "describes what is required for a CAC to be accredited through the National Children's Alliance."

Dobroth has been filling in for D.A. Dan Dow for a couple of months now, as Dow, who is a Lt. Colonel in the California National Guard, is currently deployed to the Middle East and is due to return home sometime in April.

He explained that the NCA has three levels of participation — Affiliate Membership, Associate Membership and Accredited Membership. SLO County has long had a CAC here and is now going to seek accreditation for its program, and a big part of that is to find the program a home.

In 2018, the District Attorney's Office and Public Health began a partnership with the Center for Family Strengthening to develop the concept of a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) for San Luis Obispo County.

The idea was to establish a single place where child abuse investigations could be conducted, as well as victim and witness interviews, in private and out of respect to the young victims.

"The goal of the partnership," Dobroth said, "was to develop a single safe and trauma informed location where child victims of physical and sexual abuse take part in a single comprehensive forensic interview administered by a District Attorney's Office Child Forensic Interviewer; participate in a forensic medical exam administered by a Public Health doctor or nurse to gather physical evidence in a criminal investigation; and receive comprehensive advocacy services necessary for physical and mental wellbeing and healing."

One of the first steps was to form a "Multiple Disciplinary Team" or MDT. In SLO County the D.A.'s Office's so-called Child Forensic Interviewers, Public Health Doctors and Nurses, Suspected Abuse Response Team (SART), Law Enforcement, Child Welfare Services, Lumina Alliance, and the Center for Family Strengthening, came together to start the program. But there've been hiccups.

"The existing process," Dobroth said, "requires child victims and their families to go to several locations for investigative and advocacy services. A general law enforcement interview is typically conducted in the field or at the station house. More in-depth Child Forensic Interview occurs at the District Attorney's Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center located in the downtown Courthouse Annex, advocacy services and resource

referrals are provided at this location as well. A forensic medical examination takes place at a Health Agency location on Bishop Avenue."

Bouncing traumatized child victims around and asking a lot of questions each step of the way can be troubling.

"Requiring a child victim and effected family members," Dobroth said, "to relocate several times to receive services at a time of turmoil is not trauma informed and not consistent with best practices for a CAC."

According to the "best practices" policies of the State and Federal Governments, this isn't how a CAC is supposed to operate. "State and National CAC best practices," Dobroth said, "mandate that the child victim and supporting family undergo a child forensic interview and forensic medical examination and receive advocacy services at a single location co-occupied by the CAC team."

"San Luis Obispo County is one of the few counties in California that does not have an established brick and mortar CAC that co-locates forensic interviews, forensic medical exams, and other advocacy services."

He added that the courthouse is a very public building and the Bishop Street medical facilities are shared with the County Drug and Alcohol Services and the Probation Department.

Coming into compliance with the NCA's accreditation requirements falls on the D.A.'s Office, which reportedly has found a good place to set up shop.

They found a location at 3220 S. Higuera St., in SLO in an office complex that houses numerous doctor offices and other businesses as well as the State Department of Housing & Community Development Center, among numerous others.

The building is known as the Water Building and the County is leasing the space from Walter Bros. Const. It won't be cheap but the D.A.'s Office is covering the start up costs out of its budget.

Lease payments are \$6,835 a month through fiscal year 2027-28 with start-up costs pegged at \$195,000.

The startup money is coming from savings from vacant positions within the D.A.'s Office and a special "Automation Trust Fund" (\$53,000).

"In FY 2023-24," Dobroth said, "salary savings from the District Attorney's Office is projected for year-end at approximately \$300k, which will cover the initial startup costs in year-one. General fund support is being requested for the remaining FYs for a total of \$271,044 for the 42 months remaining of the lease."

Annual lease payments for the CAC were listed by the report, with FY 23/24 costing \$36,000; \$73,000 for FY 24/25; \$75,000 in FY 25/26; \$79,000 in FY 27/28 and \$40,000 for a partial year in FY 28/29. All of this must come from the County General Fund, however, Dobroth said they are seeking grants to offset the costs.

In the end though, the County feels it's worth it. "Opening a brick-and-mortar CAC within San Luis Obispo County," Dobroth said, "will reduce barriers by bringing together multi-disciplinary teams in one centralized location. By affording the child victims and their families the opportunity to receive services in one easily accessible and private location, barriers to access services are reduced increasing the participation rate of the child victims and their families and ultimately resulting in a healthier future for the child victims."

And the SLO County D.A.'s Office has of late been aggressively prosecuting men accused of multiple sex acts with children, winning long prison sentences in several troubling cases.

Road Safety Plan Released

Morro Bay's road safety plan has been released for public comment and one public meeting on the document has already been held.

The City of Morro Bay announced Dec. 10 that its "Local Roadway Safety Plan" or LRSP, had been posted on its website and public comments were being taken now. (See: www.morrobayca.gov/1058/Local-Roadway-Safety-Plan-LRSP to review the plan.)

The City got a grant from Caltrans to conduct the study, hiring consultants, Kimley-Horn, to work with City staff, advisory boards, the public and representatives from other public agencies, on the plan.

Basically, the LRSP identifies, analyses and develops ways to improve road safety on the City's network of roads, about 33 miles of them within the City Limits. Part of this is to analyze crash data to find locations in town that have high incidents of car crashes and to look at how various physical barriers "inhibit safety for all roadway users." A previous crash data analysis, done as part of a project to build a roundabout at Main Street and Hwy 41, identified that intersection as having the highest number of crashes of anywhere in the city.

It's driven by "the Four E's of Safety" — engineering, enforcement, education and emergency response — "to encourage safer driver behavior and better severity outcomes."

According to the plan summary, goals of the LRSP include:

- Identify areas with a high risk for crashes;
- Illustrate the value of a comprehensive safety program and the systemic process;
- Plan future safety improvements for near-, mid- and long-term; and,
- Define safety projects for HSIP and other program funding consideration.

Among the many safety issues the plan developed a half dozen to emphasize: speeding; cut-through traffic; drivers ignoring signals and stop signs; lighting; pedestrians; and bicycles.

Readers can see the draft plan, which was discussed by the Public Works Advisory Board at its last meeting, at: www.morrobayca.gov/1058/Local-Roadway-Safety-Plan-LRSP. Comments on the plan can be emailed to: LRSP@morrobayca.gov.

The plan, once PWAB is done with it, would go to the City Council for adoption and would serve as a guide for the staff to prioritize projects that would improve road safety in town and to seek funding to pay for it.

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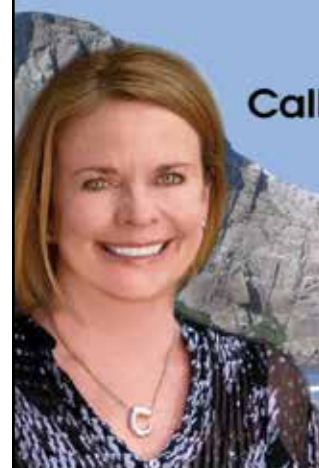
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City Crews Make Storm Repairs



When the Pacific Ocean went on a tear, throwing monster waves up against the shore in December and early January, Morro Bay City maintenance workers sprung into action to repair the extensive damage and flooding. Public Works Director Greg



Kwolek shared photos taken by Maintenance Supervisor Carlos Mendoza and his crew, as they worked to repair the parking lot and rip rap at Morro Rock. They brought in loads of fill dirt and graded the parking lot smooth again, after the waves and rain did their usual number on the dirt lot. The work led to the closure of Coleman Drive leading out to Morro Rock, as the conditions were deemed unsafe (such events tend to draw thousands of storm watchers to the Rock and cause traffic jams for emergency vehicles). The crews dealt with flooding at the intersection of Atascadero Road and the Embarcadero, outside the old sewer plant office. And they used a loader to shore up damage. Kwolek said so far, except some eroding at the creek mouth, Morro Creek, the city's main flooding hazard, has not overflowed. Submitted photos

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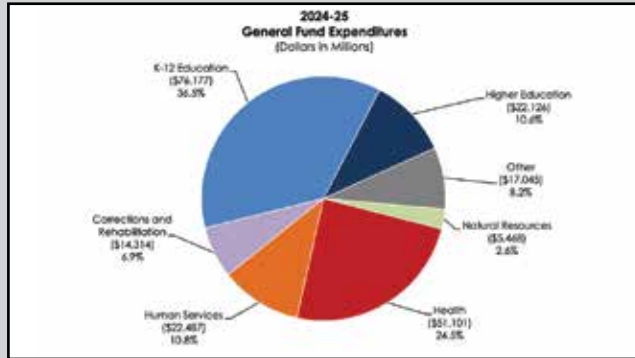
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Estero Bay News Briefs

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Addis Supports Newsom's Budget



A pie chart showing general fund expenditures for the proposed 2024-25 state budget.

Assemblymember Dawn Addis (D-Morro Bay) supports the 2024-25 the \$291 billion state spending plan proposed by Governor Gavin Newsom. The goal is to close a projected \$37.9-billion budget deficit.

"With the fiscal outlook of state and the anticipated budget deficit, I applaud Governor Newsom for taking the right steps to ensure we have a balanced and measured budget," Addis said in a new release. "This year will require diligence and strong collaboration between the Administration and the Legislature to ensure we maximize our resources for all Californians. I am confident that we will make the best decisions for our state, even in uncertain and challenging times."

The budget could see cuts in funding housing for the homeless and climate change while delaying a \$25 per hour minimum wage increase for healthcare workers.

K-12 school programs and mental health programs are expected to keep funding similar to last fiscal year.

The new fiscal years begins July 1. To view the proposed budget, go to <https://ebudget.ca.gov/>.

Primary Election Ballots Coming

Ballots for the March Primary Election will land in SLO County mailboxes soon. Make sure your voter registration status, mailing address, and party preference are up-to-date.

Find information at slocounty.ca.gov under the County Clerk.

COVID-19 Isolation Rules Change

Updates to COVID-19 guidance at the state level mean members of the general public with COVID-19 who feel well, have improving symptoms, and have been fever-free for 24 hours (without fever-reducing medicine) may leave isolation, followed by a period of strict masking around others for 10 days. A negative antigen test is not needed to exit isolation. Previously,

Californians were able to leave isolation after five days, followed by a period of strict masking for 10 days.

The change became effective January 9, with a new state order. It does not apply in health care settings, which are still covered by AFL 21-08.9. For other higher-risk settings such as congregate living facilities, the Public Health Department continues to provide local guidance.

"The most important thing to remember is to stay home if you are sick — that's been true throughout the pandemic and remains true with this change," said Dr. Penny Borenstein, county health officer.

"If you are feeling much better and no longer have a fever, you can end your isolation while being vigilant to mask around others," Dr. Borenstein said. "That means avoiding situations where you might take off your mask, like eating at a restaurant. Please be honest with yourself about your symptoms and take care to protect yourself and others."

Still Time to Register for Cuesta Spring Semester



Register now at Cuesta College campuses.

The spring semester at Cuesta College technically began Jan. 16 at Cuesta College, but registration continues through Jan. 28, with instructor approval.

Students can find a comprehensive listing of classes on the class finder and register for courses at bit.ly/cuestaregistration. The term runs through May 17. Cuesta College also offers less-than-full-term courses that run between three and 17 weeks. Course fees for credit classes are \$46 per unit, and noncredit courses are free.

"This spring, Cuesta College is proud to announce the launch of new cohorts, programs, and course offerings in areas such as aviation maintenance, nursing & allied health, and ranch education," said Superintendent / President Dr. Jill Stearns.

"These are specifically designed to meet the growing demand and workforce needs of our local and regional communities and build skills in as little as two years."

For questions regarding classes and registration, call (805) 546-3140, email register@cuesta.edu, or visit the Cuesta College Admissions & Registration webpage.

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

COLLEGETOWN

By Michael Walker



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News

Pacific Wildlife has New Pack Leader



Kristin Howland is the new executive director for Pacific Wildlife Care. Photo submitted

By Neil Farrell

A local non-profit dedicated to the care of sick and injured wildlife has a new leader of the pack, the group announced in early December.

Pacific Wildlife Care, an all-volunteer organization celebrating 40 years helping the wildlife of SLO County, announced a new executive director, replacing the former director who is now officially retired.

"The Board of Directors of Pacific Wildlife Care," reads a news release from PWC, "is pleased to announce the selection of Kristin Howland as its new executive director."

Howland comes over from the State Parks Foundation, where she was that non-profit's executive director. She replaces former Morro Bay City Councilwoman, Christine Johnson, at PWC's helm.

She brings a lot of experience to the job. "Howland's background as an executive director," PWC said, "combined with a deep passion for environmental education and living compatibly with wildlife will help further advance the mission of the organization that will celebrate its 40th Anniversary in 2024."

The chairwoman of the board welcomed the new executive.

"We are thrilled," Marcelle Bakula, Chairwoman of PWC's Board of Directors said, "to welcome Kristin as our new Executive Director. She will bring experience, enthusiasm, and a diverse set of skills to our organization. We feel fortunate to bring on an experienced non-profit leader with local roots in San Luis Obispo County."

Howland started her new job on Jan. 2 and will have two main duties — running the day-to-day operations of the organization in both the field picking up animals, and at the PWC Rehab Facility located on the power plant property; with her other big chore doing fundraising to help the group move into a new facility.

That new facility is planned for a donated piece of land on Buckley Road near the SLO County Airport in rural San Luis Obispo. The property was donated to the group a few years ago

and is planned to be a new, state-of-the-art facility more centrally located in the county. That should make it easier for volunteers to respond to calls from the public reporting animals that need help.

It will also allow them to move out of the current facility, which is frankly getting on in years. Also, its long-term lease for the property expired in 2021 but they have so far been able to stay while working on a new center. Plant owner, Vistra Energy, have not publicly said what will happen to PWC's facility when they begin construction of a Battery Energy Storage System or BESS proposed for the other side of the 100-acre plant property.

There was some concern that the Buckley Road site would be included in a contaminated area with an underground plume of trichloroethylene or TCE, an industrial solvent that causes health problems/ TCE in the groundwater was discovered in 2016 by the Dist. 3 Regional Water Quality Control Board, which is in the process of an enforcement action in the case.

According to the CDC, Trichloroethylene "is a colorless liquid with a chloroform-like odor. Trichloroethylene may cause irritation to the eyes and skin. Exposure to high concentrations can cause dizziness, headaches, sleepiness, confusion, nausea, unconsciousness, liver damage, and even death."

However, RWQCB Project Manager Dean Thomas told Estero Bay News that PWC's site is some three-fourths of a mile outside the identified TCE plume, which is no doubt very good news for the group.

Also, PWC in April 2021, asked the Board of Supervisors to waive some \$207,000 in planning and building fees for its project, which Supervisors approved.

Howland, "will launch the public phase of an on-going capital campaign," the group said. It's a daunting task ahead for the tiny little nonprofit.

Howland brings 20-years of diverse experience in non-profit leadership and environmental conservation. She was a State Park Ranger for over 13 years in SLO County and she was also Director of Education at Catalina Island Conservancy. Most recently she was the Executive Director of the Central Coast State Parks Association, "showcase her expertise in managing natural spaces, developing educational programs, and leading nonprofit initiatives dedicated to conservation."

The Foundation is a non-profit group that works with and supports the State Parks, including running the Natural History Museum in Morro Bay State Park. The Foundation also works down at Oceano Dunes SVH and Pismo State Park and its famous Monarch Butterfly Grove. She also has experience in National Parks and Forests, which PWC believes will be "a well-rounded perspective and valuable skills to contribute to Pacific Wildlife Care's mission in wildlife rehabilitation and education."

She's very happy with her new job. "Protecting wildlife and crucial habitat," Howland said in a statement, "has always been my passion, and I'm thrilled to join Pacific Wildlife Care as the new Executive Director. I look forward to combining my experience in conservation, education, and non-profit leadership to further the organization's mission to give wildlife a second chance in San Luis Obispo County. Together, we'll strive to make a lasting impact on the well-being of our natural world."

Begun in 1984, PWC has for over 39 years been "supporting San Luis Obispo County wildlife through rehabilitation and educational outreach. PWC is SLO County's only licensed rehabilitation center that cares for injured, ill, orphaned, and pollution-damaged birds, land/air mammals, and reptiles/amphibians.

The organization began with just a few local wildlife lovers who wanted to help sick, injured and orphaned wildlife throughout the county. It's the only organization licensed by State Fish & Wildlife to respond to oil spills and assist with saving mostly seabirds soiled by muck. See: pacificwildlifecare.org for more information about the group.

Fresno Man Gets Life for 2020 A.G. Murder

A Fresno man has been sentenced to life in prison for the "senseless" 2020 murder of an Arroyo Grande woman, the District Attorney's Office announced last week.

D.A. Dan Dow's office said the convicted murderer, Kayonie Eliaz Mendibles, 21 of Fresno, was given 25-years to life in State Prison after confessing to murdering Marion Jeanine Vore on Nov. 27, 2020 at a rural residence outside Arroyo Grande. Mendibles had pled guilty to the first-degree murder charge back in October and knew what his fate would be.

"On Oct. 30, 2023," the news release said, "Mendibles pleaded guilty to first degree murder knowing that he would receive a 25-years to life sentence."

Assistant District Attorney Eric J. Dobroth, who is leading the D.A.'s Office while Dow is on military deployment in the Middle East, said, "While we cannot comprehend the incredible grief and outrage resulting from the senseless murder of Marion, we sincerely hope that completion of the criminal case provides some closure for the Vore Family and friends."

In the charging document released by the D.A.'s Office, Mendibles is charged with "willfully, deliberately and with premeditation" murdering Vore, and use of a "deadly weapon — a belt. He did so while robbing and kidnapping her, according to the document, charges that were listed as enhancements on the first degree murder charge.

The case was investigated by the SLO County Sheriff's Office and the prosecutor was Dep. D.A. Julie Antos.

Dobroth added, "We are grateful for the thorough work of Sheriff's Detective Greg Smith and his team in gathering the evidence necessary to hold Mr. Mendibles accountable."

Nipomo Man Guilty of Rape, Gets Life

A Nipomo man has been found guilty of raping and impregnating a teenaged girl victim and sentenced to life in prison.

According to the District Attorney's Office, the crimes occurred April 29, 2021 at a residence in Nipomo. The case involved a 17-year-old girl and Florentino Marcelino Ramonsantiago, 30, of Nipomo. Ramonsantiago stood accused of forcibly raping a 17-year-old girl, a heinous act that resulted in her getting pregnant. That led to the filing of an additional



Kayonie Eliaz Mendibles



Florentino Marcelino Ramonsantiago

Guilty of Rape Continued on page 8



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Polar Bear Dippers Wade Into 2024

Photos and story by Neil Farrell

Thousands of revelers packed Cayucos Beach on New Year's Day to celebrate the 44th Annual Carlin B. Soulé Memorial Polar Bear Dip, though not as many folks braved the turbulent, chilly waters and made the actual plunge as years past.

As always the action on the beach before the noon dip began was wildly fun, with groups of dippers coming in costumes that included a bunch of little pigs, cowgirls, bees, Star Wars characters, pirates, Umpa-Lumpas and Willy Wonka, butterflies, a family celebrating their daughters successful kidney transplant after seven years, and Show White and her Seven (not so small) Dwarfs.

Emcee, Phil Howard, now in his 26th year with the microphone, asked for the dipper who'd come the farthest and two (well three) made the initial cut — one was from Costa Rica, another from Prague, Czech Republic, and in the case of the Stars Wars characters, from a galaxy far, far away... The young woman from Prague took the prize certificate, suitable for framing.

The oldest person was 78 and the youngest, dressed as a pirate, was 10 months (Howard quipped that the child's fake beard threw him off). The wackiest costume was an elderly gentleman in top hat, blue bath robe and

smoking a fat cigar, who upon being pointed out stepped up and dropped his robe revealing just a white sash across his beer belly, an adult diaper and a sly smile, to peels of laughter from the boisterous crowd.

Officially, high tide was at 1:29 p.m. at 3.67 feet but as high noon approached, the waves crept further and further onto shore, squeezing the available beach down and concentrating the crowd. Some pretty large waves were crashing a bit too close to the crowd for comfort.

When noon came, the normal mad dash into the waves — this year reduced to about 10 yards — didn't happen. Folks started venturing tentatively into the water, as the recent spat of huge monster waves in the area was apparently making everyone a bit more sober to what was ahead (waves the week before Christmas had crashed completely over the beach and onto Front Street).

A beach strewn with driftwood, including numerous tree trunks, made for some tricky footing on the sand, as well.

The Carlin B. Soulé Memorial Polar Bear Dip is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and is put on with the assistance of Cal Fire, Morro Bay Fire and Harbor Patrol, lifeguards, Coast Guard and Sheriff's Department, who watched over the proceedings from land and sea, and made sure everyone that went into the water came out safely.



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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

Author Carol Alma McPhee Remembers Her Friend Ann Fitzgerald

By Judy Salamacha

January 2024! Have you discovered a locally written book lately? Indulge me as I officially thank Linna Thomas, Coalesce Book Store, and Carroll Leslie, Volumes of Pleasure Book Shoppe, and their staffs for all they do to accommodate readers and local authors! For the last couple years, my focused contribution to the Bookshelf Writers column has been to feature local authors. Writers love to write, but we rarely like to write about ourselves or promote our works!

Thomas and Leslie have always featured local authors by creating special sections for our books, selling them, and even scheduling book signings to introduce us. As a published writer myself I understand how exceptionally supportive their efforts have been for local writers. Believe me, not all bookstores carry locals' books unless we're listed on the New York Best Sellers list. From our hearts, thank you!

One way I know I can say "thank you" especially to Linna as she starts her 51st year in business in Morro Bay is to recognize her friend, Carol Alma McPhee. She is one of the many published authors Linna has nurtured. Her latest publication is "Releasing the Light A Journal of Caring." McPhee writes in the acknowledgements, "This book would not exist without the long-time encouragement and support of Linna Thomas and the welcoming ambience of Coalesce Bookstore, Morro Bay."

In 2001 McPhee committed to writing a daily journal. It was

her process to make sense of her time spent – her last twenty-six months with her companion, Ann Fitzgerald. For 25-years their relationship included writing together, including co-authoring "Feminists Quotations" and "The Non-Violent Militant: Selected Writings of Teresa Billington-Greig." When Ann was diagnosed with cancer McPhee decided to move into Ann's home. Although she admits she was never meant to be a caregiver, she became her primary caregiver until the end.

At the same time, McPhee maintained daily visits to help an aging husband. She also kept in touch with her three daughters, growing grandchildren, community friends, and continued her own personal writing. Mid-way through her caregiving tenure, she reminds Ann, "I want this to be clear. I'm not here because you need taking care of. I'm here because this may be our last days and I don't want to miss any."

Some will call it the ultimate sacrifice, but for McPhee her journal reflections seem to conclude a personal quest. She writes about seeking "... a life knowing you were missing something without time to find out what." She also adds various frustrations. "Keeping a journal is a joyless act. I don't know if it will help me understand the experience."

It took twenty years after Ann was gone plus the encouragement of Linna to share her journal experiences. In the introduction to readers, she writes she never intended to publish it, however, "It's my hope that other couples on similar quests for peace, love, and companionship during the ordeal of a final illness can find solace here."

Routine details fulfill McPhee's promise to explain what individuals and couples might experience. It was a roller coaster ride anticipating the worst news, settling into living with the diagnosis, allowing hope during a brief remission, and then facing the fear of death when the cancer returns to cause more progressive debilitating pain.

And yet the mundane McPhee describes becomes like "... a chessboard of moves from light to dark – dark to light." The readers learn intimate details about shopping for groceries, her daily visits to take care of her husband's needs, the barrage of endless doctor's appointments, learning to advocate for critical information, maintaining an ever-changing medication plan to alleviate the constant pain, and maybe the biggest challenge being balancing caregiving while encouraging and allowing Ann's independence as she tries to maintain various daily functions.

When Ann was feeling stronger, they would seek a bit of joy and normalcy eating out at their favorite Morro Bay restaurant or attending school concerts featuring McPhee's grandchild and

Ann's namesake. Holidays and birthdays were celebrated and mutual opinions about politics of the day were discussed. Philosophical readings and life lessons were shared. They would come to realize "The human spirit can survive even the worst circumstances."

Ann questioned, "Why write?"

"To bear witness," said McPhee.

Ann also asked, "Are you scared?"

"I'd be a damn fool if not," McPhee answered adding it was mostly fear of being left alone.

Ultimately it was a friend and bookstore owner, Linna, who convinced McPhee to "bear witness" to their story because Linna believed their story had a message that needed to be documented.

How might anyone heal from the trauma of loss? Writers write but anyone can record memories to try and make sense of the hurt that is happening. And this deliberate act of writing just might become the mental magic needed to heal those left behind.

Events and Activities

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

The Feline Network Humane Organization is looking for folks to help stray cats and give back to your community. They are looking for volunteers to help with the Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) Program in the Nipomo and 5-Cities areas. You provide your time; they provide all of the tools you need to prevent cat overpopulation and improve the lives of cats in our community.

For the past 22 years, the Feline Network Humane Organization has provided TNR education and services within SLO County. It is a non-profit humane organization established to reduce cat overpopulation through spaying/neutering and public education and to rescue homeless cats and kittens and place them in permanent homes.

The Feline Network is an all-volunteer organization that works with local veterinarians who generously donate their time and provide medical services at discounted fees. They average 1,500 spay/neuters each year.

For information on adoptions, low-cost spay/neuter, help with feral cats or to volunteer or donate, contact them at 805-556-0717 OR (549-9CAT) or online at www.felinenetwork.org.

•••

The Morro Bay High School Drama Program invites all to their presentation of "Little Women" performed Friday, 1/26 at 7 p.m., Saturday, 1/27 at 2 p.m., Saturday, 1/27 at 7 p.m., Friday, 2/2 at 7 p.m., Saturday, 2/23 at 2 p.m., Saturday, 2/23 at 7 p.m. All shows are in the Morro Bay High School Theater, 235 Atascadero Road, Morro Bay. Tickets are \$12/child and \$15/adult. Tickets can be purchased at www.mbhsdrama.com. For questions contact K. Kostecka at kkostecka@slcUSD.org or 951-428-7592.

Pictured are: Jocelyn Ocampo-Mateo as Amy, Josephine Davis as Jo, Justine Mayo as Beth and Valerie Merson as Meg.

•••

On Sunday, January 21, from 2-4 p.m., join the Los Osos Valley Garden club for a presentation by Thomas Gratz of Hitachi Zosen Inova (HZI). Gratz was involved in the development and commissioning of the San Luis Obispo Kompogas Facility as well as other projects in the U.S. HZI's state-of-the-art anaerobic digestion facility in SLO has been converting organic waste into carbon-neutral biogas and high-grade natural compost since September 2018.

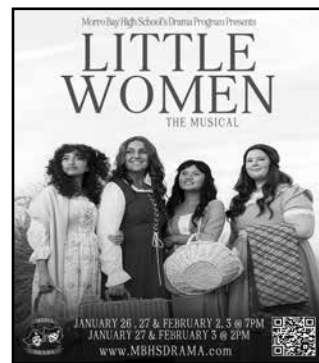
Gratz will discuss how to utilize organic waste as a resource to produce renewable energy and beneficial soil amendments, instead of disposing of it in landfills where it creates greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate warming. He will explain the differences between composting and anaerobic digestion, which is the process used at the SLO Facility. A member talk by Dave Keitel on Home Composting will precede Gratz's presentation.

The meeting takes place at First Baptist Church of Los Osos, 1900 Los Osos Valley Rd., Los Osos (cross street Lariat Drive) and is free and open to the public. No signup/registration is required to attend. If you have any questions, email club President, Wendy McKeown at info@lovgardenclub.org.

•••

Guest artist Anne Hege and Cal Poly Music Department faculty member Julie Herndon present an electronic music concert at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 8, in Room 218 of the Davidson Music Center (No. 45).

Hege, in her "Divining Wisdom Part II," will weave together works for her analog live-looping recorder with compositions for live voice, electronics and video.



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WEDS 1/24 6PM	LITTLE GIANTS	CAL POLY ALUM JOHN MADDEN FEATURES IN THIS CLASSIC FAMILY FOOTBALL FLICK SHOT IN ARROYO GRANDE
THURS 1/25 6PM	BOTSO	ACCLAIMED DOCUMENTARY ABOUT LOCAL MUSIC TEACHER AND ARTIST BOTSO KORISHELLI PROCEEDS GO TO SLO YOUTH SYMPHONY

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Events Continued on page 9

Police Blotter



- **Dec. 24:** Police contacted an suspected tipsy woman plodding down the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd., at 2:32 a.m. Logs indicated the apparent train wreck, 31, was arrested for being drunk off her caboose.
- **Dec. 23:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 9:41 p.m. in the 700 block of Quintana. The 58-year-old serf had a warrant out of Kings County but was only cited again and let go.
- **Dec. 23:** Police towed yet another offensive vehicle from the 600 block of Pacific.
- **Dec. 22:** Police contacted a suspicious dude at 11:37 p.m. in the 200 block of Harbor. Logs indicated the 42-year-old model citizen had a "non-citable" warrant and was hauled away to the Kansas Avenue spa & resort. While being booked, logs reported that a jailer discovered a plastic baggie of suspected illegal drugs somewhere on his person, "Say good-night Gracie..."
- **Dec. 22:** At 9:09 p.m. in the 700 block of Kern police contacted a suspicious fellow, 37, who of course had a warrant. He was cited again, adding to his collection of worthless paper.
- **Dec. 22:** Police responded to a disturbance at 6:12 p.m. in the 2300 block of Hemlock. Logs indicated some 75-year-old geezer was arrested for violating a stay-the-hell-away domestic violence court order, vandalism and a felony warrant.
- **Dec. 22:** Police responded to South Bay Boulevard and State Park Road where some no doubt climate denier stole solar panels.
- **Dec. 22:** Police responded to the 700 block of Harbor for a theft of auto parts or accessories report. Some master criminal apparently stole a license plate and sucked gasoline out of a presumably parked car.
- **Dec. 21:** Police responded at 1 p.m. to the 600 block of Quintana where a woman said she was bitten by someone's black lab/pit bull mix dog as she was walking into a store. No word on what became of the mangy mongrel responsible or the dog.

- **Dec. 21:** Police contacted a suspicious woman, 25, at 12:07 a.m. in the 400 block of Elena. Logs indicated she was allegedly too drunk to care for herself or others and was checked into the County B&B to sleep it off.
- **Dec. 19:** Police responded to the 400 block of Yerba Buena where a man said his grandson "got a tattoo without permission." Police are investigating, as it's illegal to tattoo someone without permission if they're under 18. No word on what the tattoo was, although "I Love Grandpa" seems unlikely.
- **Dec. 19:** Police responded at noon to a disturbance in the 300 block of Quintana. Logs indicated someone apparently needed a mental health day or three.
- **Dec. 19:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow, 27, at 12:55 p.m. in the 500 block of Quintana who had quite a pair of bench warrants.
- **Dec. 18:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 12:32 p.m. at South Bay and Quintana. The 41-year-old citizen of the year was arrested for suspicion of possessing illegal drugs and six outstanding warrants.
- **Dec. 18:** Police responded at 11 a.m. to the 300 block of Kodiak, as some poor soul has passed away.
- **Dec. 18:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 11:26 a.m. in the 700 block of Quintana. Logs indicated the 37-year-old repeat customer was arrested for suspicion of shoplifting, obstructing/evading police, a felony warrant, and probation violation, a case of some people never learn.
- **Dec. 16:** Police contacted a suspicious man at 3:23 p.m. in the 300 block of Yerba Buena. Logs indicated the palooka, 34, was arrested for suspicion of battery.
- **Dec. 15:** Someone in the area of Embarcadero and Coleman Drive turned in a phone and solar panel that they apparently found.
- **Dec. 15:** Police responded at 8 p.m. to Embarcadero and Coleman for a car crash. Sorry, we've no horrific injuries to report.
- **Dec. 15:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 6:25 p.m. at Embarcadero and Coleman, an apparent hot spot for nefarious activity in recent days. Logs indicated the 24-year-old driver was arrested for suspicion of driving on a toot. Logs indicated he was hauled to the police station but was released into the custody of a sober, responsible adult.
- **Dec. 13:** Police towed off two parked vehicles from the 900 block of Allesandro because the DMV beast hadn't been fed in over 6 months.
- **Dec. 12:** Police contacted a suspicious character at 9:48 p.m. in the 900 block of Allesandro. The 38-year-old scarecrow had one felony warrant and 10 misdemeanor warrants, and Toto was off to see the wizard.
- **Dec. 12:** Police contacted a familiar female at 8 a.m. at Main and San Jacinto. The 59-year old only had one measly bench warrant and so was cited and released.
- **Dec. 11:** In the 1700 block of Embarcadero, police towed off a motorcycle just because the registration wasn't paid up. They also towed away a vehicle from the 900 block of Pacific for the same persnickety reason.
- **Dec. 11:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at 10 p.m. in

- the 700 block of Quintana. The 44-year-old slacker had a bench warrant and was cited and let go.
- **Dec. 10:** Police contacted a suspicious fellow at the suspect time of 2:49 a.m. in the 800 block of Embarcadero. The sneaky sneak tried to sneak by with a pair of bench warrants, but police had a sneaking suspicion and he went to the hoosegow.
- **Dec. 9:** At 12:20 p.m. in the 300 block of Quintana Pl., police got into an apparent car chase with a driver who no doubt wasn't much impressed by the pretty red and blue lights. Logs indicated he or she was ticketed for suspicion of reckless driving, evading and giving a fake name.
- **Dec. 8:** Police were called at 10:47 p.m. to a disturbance in the 2100 block of Seaview. Logs indicated a 35-year-old lady was arrested for suspicion of domestic violence and chilled out in the cooler.
- **Dec. 8:** Police were called at 1 p.m. to the 900 block of Allesandro for a reported prowler lurking about. A crime report for suspected vagrancy was started.
- **Dec. 8:** Police contacted a suspicious woman at 11:17 a.m. at the Creekbed Estates in the 700 block of Quintana. The scofflaw had bench warrants, which warranted banishment to the Tower.
- **Dec. 8:** Police contacted a couple of suspicious men at 11 a.m. in the 200 block of Atascadero Rd. Both naturally, had three bench warrants — one got hauled off to County Jail and the other was cited and released to apparently catch another day.
- **Dec. 8:** Someone found some items somewhere in the 800 block of Morro Bay Blvd., thought for some reason by somebody to have been stolen sometime prior.
- **Dec. 7:** Police responded to City Park on Harbor Street where a citizen said some apparently maniacal ruffian assaulted him.
- **Dec. 7:** Police responded at 10:49 a.m. to the 200 block of Atascadero Rd., for a disturbing fellow causing a ruckus. Logs indicated the tortured soul was taken in for a 72-hour timeout.
- **Dec. 6:** Police contacted a swizzle stick stirring things up in the 900 block of Morro Bay Blvd., at 8:45 p.m. Logs indicated the 36-year-old chap was arrested for resisting arrest and drunk and disorderly, which might explain a lot.
- **Dec. 6:** At 4 p.m. police logged a report that a missing person had been located, apparently safe.
- **Dec. 6:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at 1:08 a.m. in the 900 block of Pacific. Logs indicated the driver, 38, was cited for driving on a suspended license, a hanging offense in some parts.
- **Dec. 5:** Under the heading "Having a bad night..." At 1:48 a.m. at Main and the Boulevard, police stopped a suspicious vehicle. The 25-year old woman driver was arrested for suspicion of driving bent, as well as domestic battery on a spouse or cohabitant. She was hauled off to the hoosegow, putting her out of our misery for now.
- **Dec. 5:** At 2:09 a.m., well past the decent folks' curfew, police contacted a suspicious fellow traipsing along at Main and the Boulevard. Logs indicated the 45-year-old devotee of Bacchus was arrested for suspicion of being too drunk not to arrest.
- **Dec. 3:** At 2:41 p.m. in the 800 block of MBB, police contacted a regular customer, 49, with warrants. She was given another disappearance ticket and set free again.

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Guilty of Rape From page 5

charge of inflicting great bodily injury, according to a news release. The prosecutor said it was something out of a horror movie. "The violence and trauma suffered by the young survivor," Dep. D.A. Kristin Barnard said, "is what one would see in a horror movie. The sheer courage it took for this young lady to report and later detail this crime to a jury is remarkable. We are thankful to the jury for their focused attention in this very emotional and raw case and acknowledge the impact it has had on them as individuals."

The County Sheriff's Office investigated the case and Barnard works in the D.A.'s Sexual Assault Prosecution Unit.

Ramonsantiago was sentenced to 25-years to life in prison for his crimes.

But the news isn't entirely bad. The victim, according to Assistant D.A. Eric Dobroth, decided to keep her baby and gave birth to a healthy little boy. She and her child are reportedly living with family.

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**Would that be dinner
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Community

Events From page 7

Herndon will perform a selection from new works for extended keyboard instruments augmented with electronics.

Hege's tape machine, which she constructed in 2009, is a portable instrument with three hacked cassette players — one recording tape head and two playback points running a handmade tape loop.

The works will be juxtaposed with pieces from her New Prosthetics project from 2006-20, in which live vocal processing and electronics extend and expand the power of the voice in an augmentation of the human body. The set explores the creation of balance between these very different worlds.

Herndon performs a selection from her "Electronic Etudes," a collection that seamlessly integrates acoustic keyboard instruments and live electronics, ranging from the intricate world of recording and audio effects to the realms of analog and digital synthesis. "These pieces for extended keyboard instruments explore the body's relationship to the piano, the keyboard, the synthesizer and other forms of tempered technology," she said. Each piece explores the nature of touch and gesture relating to the piano and its performance practice.

The concert is free and open to the public. For more information, visit the Music Department's calendar website or call 805-756-2406.

•••

The following are free events brought to you by the Los Osos Library 2075 Palisades, Ave, 805-528-1862.

• **Book Discussion** - Thursday, January 18, 5:30-6:45 p.m. Since December was cancelled because of the rain, we will be having a "Celebration of Reading". Bring your favorite book to share! No need to sign up ahead of time. Just show up! Call the library for details.

• **Button Making** - Friday, January 19, 2:30-4:30 p.m. Zap! Pow! Learn how to create characters, draw backgrounds, build a story and more during a fun comics-filled afternoon! Paper, pens and pencils provided - you bring the inspiration. For ages 8-18.

• **Beginner Coding** - Friday, January 26, 2 - 4 p.m. Hands on coding fun for kids! Come tinker with Cubetto robots, a Let's Go Code set and a Robot Mouse. For ages 3+.

• **Teen Advisory Board Interest Meeting** - Saturday, January 27, 3 - 4 p.m. Calling all teens! Looking for volunteer or community service hours? Help Librarian Emily create a new Teen Advisory Board! Participation can be listed on job, scholarship and college applications. Help plan teen events, create content for

social media, create contest ideas, recommend books, movies and more. Tell us what rad stuff you want to see happen! There will be snacks. For ages 12-18.

•••



There is a Call to Artists for March /April at Cambria Center for the Arts. Community artists are invited to submit two- and three-dimensional art for the upcoming Cambria Center for the Arts (CCA) exhibit entitled, "Bird's Eye View: The Architectural Landscapes of the Central Coast."

The show opens on March 1, 2024, and runs through April 28, with an artists' reception on Saturday, March 2 from 4:30-6 p.m. in the evening. Artists may submit their work online from February 23 until February 27, or, alternatively, may drop off their art on the Exchange Day, February 27, from 10 a.m. until noon. For details regarding submission requirements, the CCA website: www.cambriaarts.org.

The featured artist will be local resident Tigg Morales. Tigg has created art throughout her life in one form or another, including interior design and architectural drafting. She received a degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in graphic communications. Eventually, she found her way to painting. She works with both oils and watercolors, in her studio and outdoors. She is inspired by the natural beauty of the sea, the trees, and the charming communities tucked along the coastline.

Tigg's paintings capture various views across San Luis Obispo County, merging natural and architectural elements that cannot be seen from street level.

Photo courtesy of CCA.

Free upcoming January programs at the Morro Bay Library - 625 Harbor St, (805) 772-6394

• **Legos** - Wednesday, January 17, 3 - 5 p.m. Come to the Morro Bay Library and build amazing creations with Legos!

• **Teen Advisory Board** - Saturday, January 20, 3 - 4 p.m. Looking for volunteer or community service hours? Help Librarian Emily plan teen events, create contest ideas, recommend books, movies and more. There will be snacks. For ages 12-18.

• **Beginner Coding** - Wednesday, January 24, 3 - 5 p.m. Hands on coding fun for kids! Come tinker with Cubetto robots, a Let's Go Code set and a Robot Mouse. For ages 3+.

• **Nintendo Switch** - Wednesday, January 31, 3 - 5 p.m. Master your gaming skills and make new friends with our Nintendo Switch! We will provide one Switch for up to 4 players at a time - feel free to bring your own too. Games include Mario Kart and Just Dance.

•••

Art Center Morro Bay Presents Birds of the Winter Garden Interactive Watercolor Workshop on January 26, 2024 from noon - 3 p.m. This 3-hour workshop introduces students to the basics of drawing and watercolor painting techniques, mixing colors and color application.



This class will emphasize the steps artists take to create accurate images of birds using watercolors.

Students will experience step-by-step demonstrations that allow for individual guidance and real-time interactions between the teacher and participants. The goal will be to complete a watercolor painting of a winter garden scene with a bird as the subject.

This class is appropriate for those with no prior experience, or anyone who wishes to improve their skills. Questions should be addressed to Fred Ventura at fred@venturaes.com or (805) 709-2281.

To see a list of supplies and to register go artcentermorrobay.org.

•••

SLO County Libraries have a notable authors appearing in January. Author and journalist Roger Rapoport will make two appearances at SLO County Libraries: 1/30, 3 - 4:30 p.m. at the Atascadero Library; and 1/31, 6 - 7:30 p.m. at the SLO Library Community Room.

Rapoport will speak about his book "Searching for Patty Hearst," which will be published by Lexographic Press in January, around what will be the 50th anniversary of her kidnapping. The book delves into some of the unanswered questions regarding what was one of the most famous American kidnappings of the 20th century.

•••

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

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Obituaries

Keith Allen Taylor 1943 - 2023



Keith Allen Taylor, age 80, of Morro Bay, CA, passed away on November 9, 2023. He was born on June 2, 1943. Keith was a loving husband, father, grandfather, and brother.

Keith served in the United States Marine Corps for three years, proudly contributing to the defense of our nation. After his military service, he pursued a successful career as a machinist and eventually became a business owner. Keith was known for his dedication and expertise in his field.

Outside of work, Keith enjoyed spending time with his family. He had a passion for cars and sports, and he cherished moments spent with his biological family.

Keith is survived by his son, Scott Taylor, daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Taylor, grandson, Gage Taylor, and sister, Gail Outlaw. He was preceded in death by his wife, Cheryl Taylor in 2012.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests that contributions be made to Toys for Tots in memory of Keith. This organization held a special place in his heart, as he believed in bringing joy to children during the holiday season.

Keith Allen Taylor will be deeply missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him. May his soul rest in peace.

Lorabelle Mae Ray 1933 - 2023



Lorabelle Mae (Terra) Ray was born in Morro Bay, California in 1933. She passed away in the company of family in November 2023 in Visalia CA.

A Celebration of Life will be held on February 17, 2024, at 1 p.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center (in the Multi-Purpose Room) at 1001 Kennedy Way, Morro Bay.

Nancy Mercer Fraim 1950 - 2023



Nancy Mercer Fraim passed away on December 26, 2023, in Morro Bay, California.

The daughter of Joel and Maude Mercer, she was born in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, in 1929. In 1950 Nancy graduated from the Memorial Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware with a degree in nursing. She then relocated to Chicago where she obtained her specialty degree in obstetrics. She was proud of her career as a nurse, working first as an obstetrics nurse in a hospital and later in a physician's office.

She married Norman Fraim in 1954. She relocated in the 1960s to Boulder Colorado where she raised her family and later lived on the Central Coast of California. Nancy was very active in several social causes, including The Cancer Society and The Humane Society.

Nancy is survived by her daughter Barbara Fraim Meyer, her son David Fraim, and her adored grandchildren, Bryan and Riley Fraim and Nathan and Ella Meyer. She was predeceased by her husband, Norman, and her daughter, Kathy.

Nancy was dearly beloved as a gentle and kind soul who cared deeply for her family, friends and animals.

Concettina (Lee) Arnold 1920 - 2023



Concettina Lee was born in Puebla, Colorado. The family moved to Los Angeles when she was 11 years old. She is a product of the Los Angeles City Schools graduating from Lincoln High School, followed by a Bachelor of Science from UCLA and

Community



HISTORY NUGGETS

What are Natural History Nuggets?

By Dean Thompson

I lived in the parking lot of Morro Rock for 100 days back in the spring of 1985. It was there that I realized how useless some of the skills I honed over the years really were. It was my job as a raptor biologist to be there monitoring the endangered peregrine falcons.

That year was a unique opportunity because the falcons had just moved from the west side of the rock, where it was almost impossible to watch them, to the wind sheltered south side where people could drive up in their cars, sit in their lawn chairs and watch these masters of the sky.

It was late afternoon when I, and an amazing naturalist named John Schmidt, were watching the parade of gulls, pelicans and cormorants fly north by the rock when we both noticed a bird unlike all the others. We managed a look at it for maybe 15 seconds before it disappeared behind the rock. We looked at each other and discussed the bird, the flight profile, the long sharp bill, the deep wingbeats. We eliminated options, looked at the field guides and confirmed that we had just seen a Brown Booby, a rare sighting in this area.

We were proud and congratulated ourselves to have deciphered the sighting then John said, "Do you realize how economically useless these skills are to most people out there?"

So true, but both of us felt they were valuable to have. One of the definitions from the Oxford Dictionary of a nugget is "a valuable idea or fact." As a lifelong naturalist, I am awash with little nuggets about the natural world. Valuable? Maybe, I'll let you readers be the judge. It's information I have gleaned over the years of noticing things in nature and asking, "I wonder why?" then researching it. I am proud to call myself a naturalist and have been practicing the craft for almost 40 years.

What is a Naturalist? As defined by Webster's: 1. A scholar or student of natural history. Which leads to the question, what is natural history? Webster's: "The scientific research of plants, animals, and natural phenomenon, usually leaning towards the observational rather than experimental."

Naturalists observe nature and then attach meaning to what



Naturalist Dean Thompson teaching California Conservation Corps members about animals. Photo by Chris Cameron

Obituaries Continued on page 16

History Nuggets Continued on page 12

2024

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College Readiness 101

By, Robin Haas, M.A., Ed.

College 101: Demystifying Deferrals and Waitlists

After many months of toiling over college applications high school seniors are anxiously awaiting the initial group of admissions decisions to arrive in their inboxes. While some students who applied Early Decision (ED) or Early Admissions (EA) have already received an offer, others are not so fortunate. Picture the following scenario: Eager to receive an update from one of your dream schools, you rush to check your portal or email. Much to your dismay, however, you discover that you have been deferred or waitlisted. Now what do you do? Which is better, being waitlisted or deferred? What should you do about it?



First of all, let's unpack the differences. When an immediate decision on your application is not possible, colleges and universities may opt to defer or waitlist an applicant. Either way, the ultimate decision of your application for admission is going to take a while, sometimes a long while. Those students who receive a deferral letter most likely applied to their "dream school" using its EA or ED plan or plans. Perhaps the institution requires more time or information about your application in order to deny or grant you admission. Consequently, they have chosen to boot your application to the Regular Decision (RD) pool for future consideration. When you get deferred, it is usually because your application was not an obvious admit choice but has potential for consideration. Ouch! Try not to take it personally. Sometimes a school just needs to wait to see how you will stack up to the typically larger, regular applicant pool. And, quite honestly, that may have nothing to do with you.

Let's look at the bright side of getting deferred — now you are released from previous obligations to the institution that might have existed as a result of their EA or ED policies. If you applied ED and got deferred, consider yourself doubly blessed because now you have the opportunity to compare your future financial aid packages from other institutions. Had you been accepted ED then you would have had to forfeit the option to attend another school as well as pull all of your other applications. Now you are in the driver's seat, you get to reassess and prioritize other pending applications. And, while you are waiting for the final word,

you can continue to move forward with other applications and consider other offers. Most likely, you can expect to learn your fate around the same time as most regular decision applicants, or by May 1 at the latest.

Getting a waitlist letter, on the other hand, is another ball of wax. A waitlist letter means that the institution, for whatever reason, was unable to make an immediate offer of admittance, under the condition that a space opens. Yikes! Sometimes schools add students to the waitlist because they just don't have enough seats available, even for excellent students like you. Students are waitlisted in order, which means as the dust begins to settle and the admitted students make their choices, the institution has a list of those waiting in the wings who may take them up on their offer. Sometimes there are circumstances such as standardized tests or grades that do not quite measure up to those applicants who were obvious admits. These students may get waitlisted.

To make matters more complicated, each school will have its own unique method of how they defer admission, with some schools only deferring a very small portion of early applicants while others defer all students to the regular pool who were not offered admittance. This policy can fluctuate from year to year. This can be extremely frustrating, to say the least. For this reason, it is incumbent upon the applicant to carefully read the information provided in the deferral letter to determine if any related data was provided. If the reason is unclear, do not be shy. Do some research or pick up the phone and call the admissions office.

Regardless of whether you are deferred or waitlisted, it's better than getting flat out denied. You've still got a shot! And, with a little effort and luck, you've still got a chance! Either way, be sure to read the details of your letter and make sure that you respond to your waitlist offer or deferral in a timely manner. In some cases, you may be able to update your application with more information to tip the scale in your favor.

Robin Haas, M.A.Ed. is the founder of Haas College Connections and can be reached at Robin@HaasCollegeConnections.com. She is a member of the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA) and earned a Certificate in College Counseling with Distinction from UCLA.

History Nuggets From page 10

we have seen. Park Service folks call that interpretation.

Interpreters according to Webster's "translate or express the sense of another language." What is language? One definition is an organized form of communication used by a community or system. Language can consist of words, gestures, sounds, songs, expressions, and figures of speech. It can be spoken, written on paper, typed in code, etched in stone, pressed into clay, chalked in on slate or even expressed with paint on canvas or blood on hides. Just like the language found in nature.

When we see tracks pressed into the clay by a river, we're reading the signs of the area. Discarded feathers, bits of fur, bird-songs, patterns of scat, scrapes on a branch or tree can communicate much to an experienced naturalist.

The wind rippling the water or patterns on the surface of a river can communicate information to experienced sailors, or fishermen. When outside our senses are being bombarded with stimuli from nature and we are constantly translating this language of nature into human understanding. That is the nature

A Dose of Good Dogma



We Can Be Heroes

By Lisa Ellman

In 2005, Isabelle Gullo, with a background in journalism, was a volunteer at the Santa Barbara (SB) Animal Services. She loved what she was doing, helping homeless pets, but she also knew it wasn't enough.

In 2009, with her then husband, Carlos, and other shelter volunteers, she co-founded, and became executive Director of, CARE4PAWS (C4P).

The acronym translates to Community Awareness Responsibility Education. An organization built to keep pets healthy and in homes. Establishing programs in both English and Spanish, the organization continues to improve knowledge, and accessibility to pet resources across cultures, including a mind shift in communities to support spaying and neutering their pets.

C4P not only began providing free and low-cost spaying and neutering, but also initiated "Project Responsibull," a training intervention program involving pitbulls. They took this program around to schools, educating youngsters about the breed.

By 2019, C4P had helped 8,000 pets. By 2023, 16-17 thousand animals were helped. Creating and maintaining a partnership with the food bank, they are also able to provide animal food, including horse, bird, rabbit and chicken feed. In SB county there are 12 resource centers for pet food and supplies (blankets/

of naturalists.

Naturalists enjoy having this knowledge and understanding of the natural world, but many of us want to share our sense of wonder with others. For me personally, and probably for others as well, I want people to enjoy and understand the language of nature to the point where I don't have to interpret it for them, and they become fluent in the language of nature.

Thanks to the folks at Estero Bay News, I'll get to share some nuggets with you in the months to come. I hope you enjoy them and find them valuable.

*Note: Credit must be given to Rocky Ross, Curator and Host of The Reboot Storytelling event at Top Dog Coffee in the summer. She came up with the name Natural History Nuggets for the stories I told.

Dean Thompson is a naturalist and storyteller who has worked as an educator, and field biologist for the last 42 years, mostly in the Estero Bay area.

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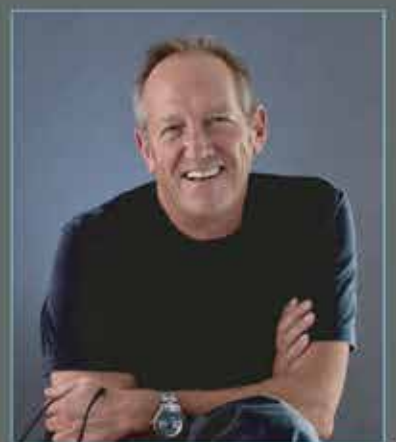
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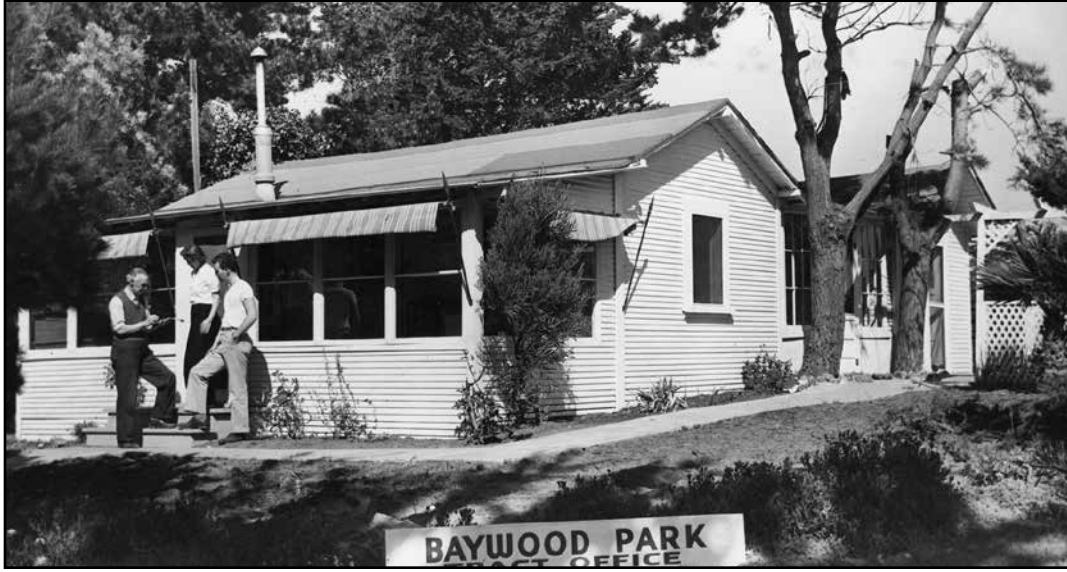


History

THEN & NOW

A look at our local history, from way back when to now!

Then



By Lynette Tornatzky

This house, now a rental cottage of the Back Bay Inn on 2nd Street, was constructed of two smaller cottages (out of the four, built in 1940, and originally located on the present site of the Back Bay Inn).

The homes were built by Richard Otto, the second large landowner of what he called the "Baywood Park Estates," now the town of Los Osos. He sold 25 foot-wide lots out of his sales office in the Chapman Building in Los Angeles, which he later moved to this building as there were then several developers in

town selling lots.

Otto's 32-page sales brochure stated, "Baywood Park Estates is conceded, by practically all who have been there, to be the most beautiful spot on the Pacific Coast.

With the improvements being made, Baywood Park Estates will soon be known for what it really is — the 'Paradise of the Pacific.' Lots will then be sold for many times the prices for which they are now selling."

Photo: Sullivan Studios Collection



Now

pet beds), that will also deliver. Isabelle estimates they provided around 2-tons of free pet food per year, until COVID hit in 2020. Then the amount increased to about 4-tons per week!

In 2012, C4P added a mobile vet clinic. Prior to that they had been using brick & mortar clinics. After fund raising for three years, they now utilize three mobile vet units and each 37 foot unit includes dual surgery suites. With a day to day, full time, core veterinary team on staff, the units provide free/low-cost vaccinations, deworming and microchipping services.

Recruiting veterinarians for the program involved asking them to volunteer their time at first. They utilized word of mouth to find doctors as well as technicians. Community volunteers also joined in to help. Now, there is a great need for groomers, if you know of any that would be interested in volunteering their time and equipment, please ask them to reach out.

The need is so great to reduce shelter populations, that C4P offered a "Spay-a-thon." Four teams of vets, over two days, carried out 131 spays.

C4P operates now in both SB and San Luis Obispo counties and provides a community outreach consulting program for groups or organizations that inquire about starting up a unit in their own area.

C4P also partners with Street Dog Coalition, specifically for unsheltered families. Dr. Alex Gomes donates exams, nail trims and flea treatments.

In 2020, C4P initiated a collaboration with agencies that aid (human) domestic violence victims, providing foster care and or boarding for their pets. Other (human) agencies in SB and SLO counties, have collaborated with C4P and can pass along information for pets in need.

CARE4PAWS depends on the public's participation; word of mouth to get the information to people that will benefit from their free/delayed services. If you'd like to get more information about this remarkably, generous organization reach out to them. The website is CARE4PAWS.org

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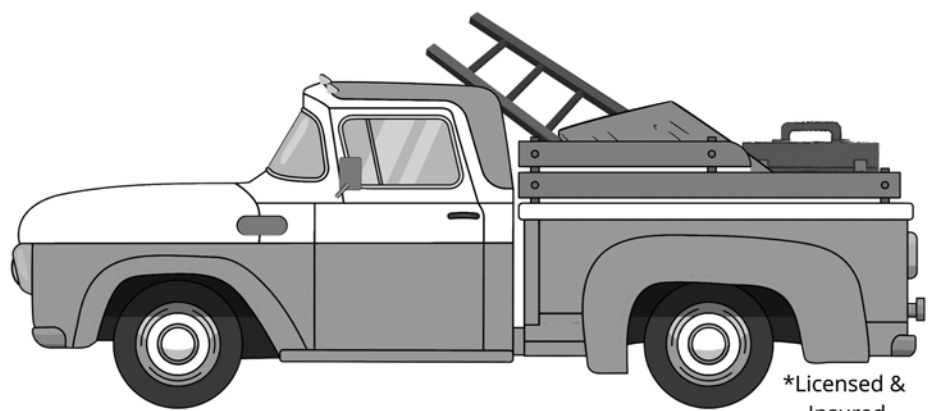
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Sports

Pirates Make All-League Teams for Fall 2023

By Neil Farrell

Morro Bay High School's Fall 2023 sports seasons are over now, and winter sports well under way. But first there's a little matter of post-season honors to acknowledge.

The Central Coast Athletic Association or CCAA, the organization of 11 Central Coast high school athletic programs, consisting of the Ocean and Mountain Leagues, named its MVPs, First and Second Team All-League Honors and several Morro Bay High Pirates were so honored.

Cross Country

In the best performance of the Fall Sports season, the Girls Cross Country team won the Ocean League title and placed two girls on the First Team All-League.

Freshmen runners, Taylor Shelby and Wendy Wilson were both named First Team All-Ocean League. The two also finished 1-2 in the League Championship Meet leading the Lady Pirates to a and Ocean League Championship, and into the CIF playoffs, where the lady Pirates went all the way to the State Meet.

Second Team All-League honors went to freshman, Lilith Buller, and senior, Jane Hotaling.

For the Boys' Team, Ocean League Champion, Otis Kelly, a senior, and Eli Waldman, a junior, earned First Team All-League honors and freshman, Lucas McAlpine was Second Team All-League.

Girls Volleyball

In Girls' Volleyball, Atascadero was the Ocean League Champions winning behind MVP Trinity Silva, and under Coach Christina Silva. No Morro Bay High players were named to the First Team All-League list but two made Second Team All-League.

Alana Shields, a sophomore, and Elaina Core, a junior were both named Second Team All-Ocean League.

Honorable Mention went to Morro Bay sophomore, Reese Kelly.

Girls' Water Polo

Due to past successes, Morro Bay's water polo teams play in the Mountain League along with the larger local schools, and this year's Mountain League Title went to Arroyo Grande High School.

AGHS' Natalia Whitfield was league MVP and Winning Coach was AGHS' Steve Allen. Goalie of Year went to Bay Burnett.

Morro Bay's senior center Josephine Davis was named First Team All League.

Second Team All League went to Tessa Standridge, a junior who plays attacker. Honorable Mention went to MBHS' Quinn Wilson, a senior attacker.

On the Boys' Team side, Mountain League Champions were SLOHS and Coach Grant East. Robert Tiede was the MVP and Goalies of Year were: Sevedrin Lunceford of SLOHS and Hale Durbiano of Santa Ynez HS.

No MBHS players were named First Team All League, however, junior Ryker Robson was named Second Team All-League and Honorable Mention went to Emory Wishon, a senior.

Girls Golf

The Lady Pirates Girls Golf Team plays in the Ocean League and one Lady Pirate stood out for the team. Golf has two All-League distinctions — one based on the league tournament and one on a compilation of scores over the season. In both cases, one Lady Pirate made the cut.

Lucy Fortini was named First Team All-League for both divisions.

Girls Tennis

According to the CCAA's lists, no Morro Bay High girls tennis players made all league this year.

Football

Though Morro Bay had a break-even season, finishing the year 7-6, they still made it to the Semi-finals of the Div. V CIF Central Section Playoffs, a title they won just a couple of years ago, en route to a Second Place finish in the State Finals.

The Ocean League Champ was Atascadero High School and the MVP of the League was AHS' QB Kane Cooks. AHS Coach Victor Cooper was the Championship Coach; Offensive MVP was Jace Gomes of San Luis Obispo High; Defensive MVP was Mason Degan of Atascadero; and the All Purpose Player of the Year went to Kohen Sizemore of Templeton.

Morro Bay had one player land on the First Team All-League list, running back, Nami Hoag, a 5-foot 9-inch, 200-pound senior.

Morro Bay had three players — all seniors — make the Defensive First Team All-League. Defensive lineman, Nicholas Reid, who stands 5'10" and 245 lbs.; defensive back, Caleb Calhoun, 5'9", 175; and linebacker, Manny Diaz, 5'11", 175, were all honored.

Senior, Brody Rust, a defensive lineman who goes 6' and 225 lbs., made Second Team All-League on Defense.

Offense Honorable Mention went to senior quarterback, Ian Lambright; and Defensive Honorable Mention went to defensive end, Jackson McMahon, also a senior.

Pirates Compete in State Cross Country Meet

By Neil Farrell

Morro Bay High School's Cross Country season came to a close at the State Meet in Clovis at the end of November, and while the teams had a great season none of the runners took home State honors. But there were some excellent performances.

Senior, Otis Kelly, who was the top Pirates boy's runner all season, made the State Meet as an individual when the team's season ended at the CIF Sectionals.

Kelly finished the Div. 4 race in 26th place and out of the medal hunt. Still, first-year head coach, Jennifer Frere said his time of 16:01.8 landed him "fourth on the all time top-performers list for MBHS."

It's a distinction that places him among the all-time best runners in one of the best prep cross country programs in the State.



The Morro Bay High Girls' Cross Country Team finished 19th in the Div. 4 State Meet. Shown here after the meet are from left: Asst. Coach Jackie Wilson, Shelby Taylor, Wendy Wilson, Astrid Barnett-Davis, Noleena Fahy, Coach Jennifer Frere, and Asst. Coach Adam Massini. Photo courtesy MBHS Cross Country

Isaiah Festa, a 3-time State Champion, twice in Cross Country, and once in track (3200m), is the Pirates' No. 1 all time runner.

In that Div. 4 race, the winner was Emmanuel Perez of Cathedral H.S., who ran the 3-mile Woodward Park Course in 14:45.5. The Div. 4 boy's race had 203 runners and it was St. Francis of La Cañada that won the State Championship.



Six Morro Bay High Cross Country runners competed in the recent State Cross Country Meet. They were left to right: Mia Bennett, Noleena Fahy, Astrid Barnett-Davis, Lily Buller, Shelby Taylor, and Otis Kelly. Photo courtesy MBHS Cross Country

For the MBHS Girls, the team finished 19th and the freshmen led the squad.

Ocean League Champion, Shelby Taylor continued her dash through the CIF Playoffs finishing 22nd in the Div. 4 race, out of 195 runners.

Taylor was, "The fastest MB freshman ever," Coach Frere said, "and fourth on the all-time top performers list for MBHS." The best of all time MBHS runners is Coach Frere (nee Lacovara), who won the State Cross Country Championship when she was at Morro Bay High School on this same Woodward Park course.

Morro Bay senior, Mia Bennett was 108th, clocking 20:55.3; and freshman, Lilith Buller was 143rd (21:54.4). Senior Noleena Fahy was 161st (22:12.4); and sophomore, Astrid Barnett-Davis

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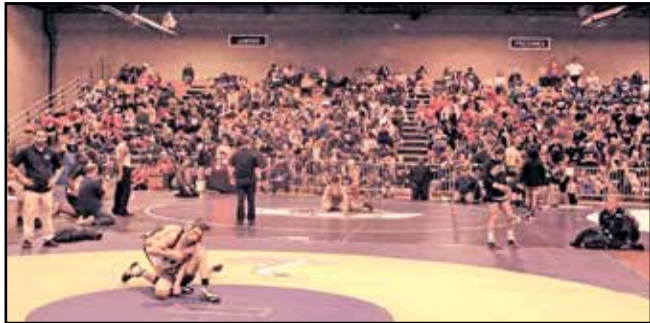
was 182nd (25:42.4).

Junipero Serra Catholic H.S. of San Mateo won the Div. 4 State Championship. There were 197 runners in the Div. 4 girls' race.

State Champion was Chiara Dailey of La Jolla H.S., who clocked 17:09.2 for the 3-mile course.

The girl's team will lose just two runners to graduation and should have an even better showing next year.

MBHS Hosts CIT Wrestling Tournament Friday-Saturday



This photo from the 2016 CIT Wrestling Tournament shows the size of the crowd at Morro Bay High watching the bouts on multiple mats below. Photo by Neil Farrell

If you are a fan of high school wrestling and want to experience a packed gym filled with raucous fans, this weekend is your chance to see some of the best in California.

Friday-Saturday, Jan. 19-20 is the 68th Annual Sam Boyd California Invitational Tournament (CIT for short), hosted by Morro Bay High School. The early-season tournament is larger than the State Finals Tournament in terms of sheer numbers of athletes that enter what is among the most competitive and prestigious wrestling tournaments of the prep sports season.

Dozens of school teams and an estimated 1600 athletes and fans will descend on Morro Bay for the CIT.

The double elimination tournament grapples on 10 Mats in the school's two gyms with seven mats laid out in the "new" gym and three in the "old" gym. And at the finals Saturday afternoon, a single mat will sit in the middle of the darkened gym, a spotlight on the two combatants, adding much dramatic atmosphere to the championship round.

The tournament will be run on track wrestling and live streamed through K&D Productions on either their own platform or FLO Arena, according to the event flyer distributed by the school.

Wrestlers in 14 weight classes — from 109 pounds to 288 — will compete. Each champion will get a CIT Champion T-shirt and Champion's Patch with team trophies for first-third plus a Small Schools Championship. There will also be Outstanding Upper and Lower Class Wrestlers, a Fastest Fall Award and the Sam Boyd Champ of Champions Award for the tournament's most

outstanding wrestler.

Sam Boyd, Sr., was a legendary wrestling, football and basketball coach for some 35 years at MBHS who started the CIT back in the 1970s and was the CIT Tournament Director for 20 years before his tragic death in a 2007 abalone diving accident off Ft. Bragg, Calif.

His namesake tournament is a fitting and lasting tribute to Coach Boyd's passion for the original Olympic sport.

The Green, Green, Grass of Home...



Like something out of a song, bursts of green grass emerging from dormancy and spring-like weather on Jan. 10 brought this small herd of white tail deer out to forage in a field along Hwy 1. A large flock of wild turkeys have also been seen foraging in the vicinity of the County's solar farm on Oklahoma Avenue. Sights like these, plus the myriad of other wildlife that can be seen in Chorro Valley — from birds of prey to cougars and wild hogs — make the drive from SLO to the Coast interesting. But readers should be cautious driving Hwy 1, as deer often forage on the wrong side of the highway fence and could pose a danger should they try to play 'Frogger' with traffic.

— Photo by Neil Farrell

In Print and Online



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Letters

To The Editor



Wind Energy, not so Green

John Lindt's "Viewpoint" (12-14-2023) regarding the industrialization of Morro Bay makes a smart point: this coastal area of the County was industrially exploited for decades before Morro Bay became a city.

He makes another excellent point: "All those old fossil fuel facilities contaminated our soil, pumped lung-harming particulates and greenhouse gases into the air and polluted our marine estuary with wastewater needed to cool the plant ... We should be glad to say goodbye to all that."

That's where my agreement with him ends. Dig a little deeper, and you'll find wind energy is not so green. It's not efficient. It's not environmentally friendly. The companies are predominantly foreign-owned. The engineering is yet to be figured out on how to build, install, operate, and maintain floating turbines in the Pacific. Our ocean is a vastly different environment from the Atlantic and North Sea. It is 3,000+ feet deep, requiring football-size floating platforms to keep the turbines upright.

As in Europe, our utility bills will jump. Part of the State's debt is money promised to the energy companies. The National debt is the same. The level of impact to humans and the environment demands deliberate, comprehensive analysis. Stakeholders are all of us: not just the owners and consultants making money. Not just the politicians who jump too quickly.

You can learn more at REACTalliance.org.

Margaret C. Carman
Morro Bay

Thank You from Kiwanis

The Kiwanis Club of Bay-Osos in Los Osos would like to thank all of the members of our community who supported our recent See's Candy fundraiser. Many of our customers made donations in addition to buying candy!

Because of your generosity, we raised more than \$6,000. These funds will be used to support our elementary, middle, and high schools; local youth programs; the Tolosa Children's Dental Center; and Morro Bay High School scholarships, to name a few.

We welcome new members who share our enthusiasm for service to the community. If you would like to join us, please call Deanna Sweeney at (805) 471-1082.

George Janeway
Los Osos

Letters Continued on page 16

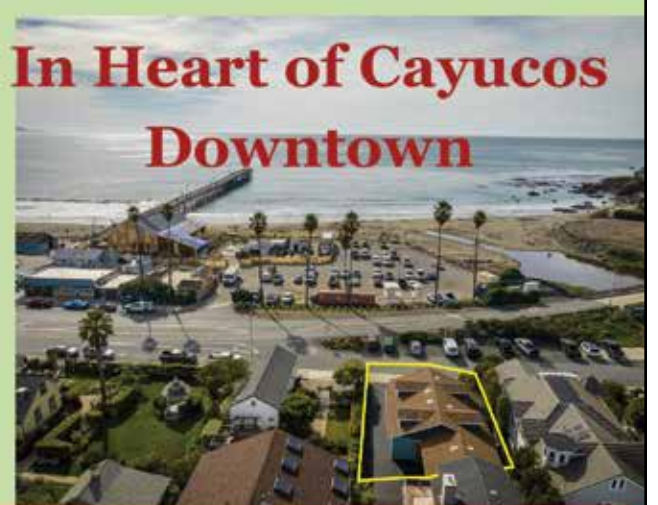
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Community

Letters From page 15

Vote Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

As a mother and grandmother, I share Cynthia Hawley's concerns about the upcoming Presidential election, as stated in her letter "New Candidates Needed" (Estero Bay News 12-14-2023), and I am writing to share some excellent news. In reality, there is a third option!

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is a once-in-a-generation leader who has stepped up to run out of love for our country and a strong sense of duty. He's had a long and successful career as an environmental attorney, suing and winning cases against some of the worst corporate polluters, such as Monsanto and their toxic weedkiller, Roundup, as well as General Electric and DuPont. At 69, Kennedy has never held elective office, yet his understanding of the workings of government and diplomacy is as deep as any career politician. I am thrilled that I finally get to vote for someone I believe in, and not just the least bad option!

Nattalia K. Merzoyan
Morro Bay

Los Osos Chamber Recognizes Light Winners

Well, well, well, aren't we just a bunch of stellar decorators in Los Osos! The Los Osos/Baywood Park Chamber would like to extend a massive thank you to all the incredible individuals who went above and beyond. You all truly rocked our world this Holiday Season! A massive round of applause to everyone who participated in "Light Up Los Osos." We couldn't be more grateful for your dedication to spreading holiday cheer.

Now, let's give a big high-five to the winners of our chamber's contest. Drumroll, please! The "Community Pick" award goes to none other than the magnificent display at 1661 18th street. Not only did that block win the prestigious "Best Block Award", but it also became the ultimate eye candy for all the lucky travelers on South Bay Blvd. Trust me, those impressive decorations were like a magnet, attracting everyone within a 5-mile radius. Pure magic, we tell ya! If our town had an Olympic team for festive decorations, these guys would be taking home the gold. With all the dazzling displays of lights at 1785 13th Street it was deemed the "Best Residential." It was the crème de la crème of residential light shows. With lights that could blind you with their brilliance, action that could rival a Hollywood blockbuster, and a radio connection that could make Marconi himself blush, this address clearly knows how to keep the neighborhood buzzing. And let us not forget the "Honorable Mentions," those entries that dared to go above and beyond the ordinary, injecting life and excitement into their humble abodes. 2376 Palisades Ave, 872 Highland Dr, 1790 11th Street, and 1238 1st Street bravo, our illuminated friends, bravo! And a very special shoutout to 1238 1st Street for being our very first Baywood entry!

We really want to thank the über generous pizzerias for donating gift cards – they definitely know how to spread the holiday cheer. The winners of the Light Up Los Osos contest hit the jackpot! Not only did they get some fancy certificates from the Chamber, but they also scored themselves a gift certificate to either Brightside Pizza or Central Coast Pizza. Talk about a tasty reward!

Even though some well-decorated houses didn't officially join the contest, we want to give them a high-five for lighting up our town and remind them to hop on the competition train next year. We appreciate each and every one of you!

Our 2023 Light Up Los Osos Winners are:

- Community Vote - 1661 18th Street
- Best Residential - 1785 13th Street
- Best Block - 1600 Block of 18th Street
- Honorable Mentions - 2376 Palisades Ave, 872 Highland Dr, 1790 11th Street, and 1238 1st Street
- Best Business - No business entered but a special shout out to the businesses on LOVR that decorated so beautifully!

The 2024 Light Up Los Osos extravaganza could truly be a spectacle for the ages. With dazzling lights and stunning displays, Los Osos/Baywood Park will shine brighter than ever before. Get ready to be wowed next holiday season. Keep shining bright, Los Osos/ Baywood Park!

Alyssa Petersen
Los Osos Chamber

Rescue Thank You

On Friday, December 22nd, the first day of my Christmas holiday vacation, I decided to start my time off with a hike of Black Hill, something I have done almost daily since moving to Morro Bay seven years ago.

After scaling the the hill and coming back down to the "easy" line trail heading south towards South Bay Blvd, about a 1/2 mile from the State Park entrance on Balboa on a relatively slight downhill, somehow my left foot slipped in mud from recent rains, but my right foot grabbed and the result was my right leg folding under my full weight resulting in ripping my quadriceps tendon in three locations and basically leaving me unable to move at all from laying half on the trail and half in the brush.

Fortunately, I was able to access my phone and get a hold of my wife who immediately contacted 911 and in turn the great folks of the Morro Bay Fire Department.

This letter is really just my opportunity to publicly thank the fantastic response and care that I received from the four Fire Dept. members, and one state park ranger that rescued me. They are:

Capt. Michael Talmadge
Engineer Kevin Hames
Engineer Mike Kelly
Firefighter Tanner Russell
Ranger Tyler David

All trained and reporting to Fire Chief Dan McCrain of the Morro Bay Fire Department and Supervising State Park Peace Officer Roger Colligan for the State Park.

They took me out 1/2 mile on a one wheel balloon tire gurney and got me to the ambulance within 30 minutes of my accident, and I had a successful surgery at French Hospital and with Dr. Sean Devine within 24 hours.

I have never had to experience emergency response like this (and I hope I never do again,) but I want to go on record to first say thank you but also to let the community know how lucky we ALL are to have public servants like those mentioned above.

Ray Riordan
2023 board chair,
Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce

Obituaries From page 10

a Master of Science from USC. Her first teaching job was biology and home economics at McFarland High School in Kern County. The remainder of her teaching career was in the Los Angeles Unified School District, teaching Junior High School and becoming the Science Department Chair. In 1958 she was recognized with the National Science Secondary Teachers Association Award. She became a UCLA demonstration teacher, a counselor, assistant Principal, and ultimately, Principal of Lawrence Junior High School. She served as the Region Director of Instruction for 7 Junior High Schools in the inner city. In 1983 she was recognized as one of the Outstanding Principals in the state, by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.

When Lee moved to Cayucos in 1958, she hit the ground running with her leadership and organizational skills. She co-founded Cayucos Beautiful for Community Betterment with her husband, Allyn. From 1992-1994, she chaired the momentous Pier Plaza project, which necessitated intensive involvement with state as well as county agencies, and community organizations. Funds to support the cost of the Plaza were raised in four months after all the groundwork was laid. The center of attraction in the Plaza is "The Great Communicators" dolphin sculpture.

She served on the board of the Cayucos Art Association, organizing gallery sitting volunteers, monthly demonstrations, and fundraising in support of an art teacher at the Cayucos School. Lee raised the support funds for seven years until the responsibility was assumed by the Cayucos School Foundation. In 2003, in recognition of her efforts in establishing the Cayucos School GATE program, the Teacher Resource Center, and the K-8 Art Program, Lee was recognized by Phi Delta Kappa as a "Lay Person of the Year." In 2012 she was proud to be selected one of the Cayucos Women of the Year, by the Cayucos Education Foundation, in recognition of her work with Cayucos Elementary.

In 1992, she and Allyn were the first couple to be named Cayucos Citizens of the Year, by the Chamber of Commerce, and in 2014, she and Allyn were recognized by the Friends of the Cayucos Library as Distinguished Volunteers.

Lee was a wonderful cook and liked to entertain. She was also generous in sharing her experience and considerable financial expertise with friends who needed help in this area. Her organizational skills were great.

She is predeceased by her first husband Milton Orth, and her second husband of 44 years, Allyn Arnold. She is so grateful for her many caregivers: Emily, Colleen, Connor, Danielle, Frankie, Kim, Michie, and her favorite neighbor, Laurie Niblock. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Cayucos Education Foundation, or the Cayucos Land Conservancy.

Letter To The Editor Policy

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



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Community

Mountain Lion From page 1



A sign put up by the Morro Coast Audubon Society at Sweet Spring Nature Preserve after evidence of a mountain lion was found in the more than 32-acre property. Similar signs are at the Elfin Forrest. Photo by Dr. Marie Goeritz

Sweet Springs. We weren't quite sure what to make of this report because it was in the middle of the afternoon, we couldn't track down the person who saw it, and we couldn't find any signs of a kill. But in the next few days and weeks, reports of mountain lion sightings in Baywood started popping up, so we decided to put up warning signs at Sweet Springs."

Although alarming, there are likely more lions in the area than people think, but the number is difficult to determine.

"We don't have an estimated population for that area," Daly said. "With these animals being so mobile, county by county numbers aren't possible. Talking with the local biologist in that area, mountain lion activity is not considered unusual."

In March of 2023, Estero Bay News reported that an adult mountain lion was captured on a trail camera in the front yard of a home on the 1100 block of 8th St., about a block from the El Moro Elfin Forest Nature Preserve.

Gene "Skip" Rotstein, a retired high school biology teacher and board member of the Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest, told us his camera caught another lion on Jan. 5 of this year. The first lion is the one believed to be hit and killed by a vehicle on Dec. 26.

"I reviewed my mountain lion videos from Nov 22 through January 5 and realized we have two mountain lions," Rotstein said. "They have been appearing on almost alternate days. I summarized the information in the 'Dead Mountain Lion Mystery' [on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/Msi-zspeyAI>]. A previous witness told me the dead lion appeared to be a young male, but no picture was supplied. My cameras have only recorded one lion (January 5) since December 26."

Information about the deceased lion could take a while. "A necropsy has not yet been done to help us learn age, sex, etc.," Daly said.

This reporter talked to people at both the Elfin Forrest and Sweet Springs Nature Preserve. They were aware of cougar activity but were not overly phased by it.

Husband and wife Pat and Theresa Perry, whose home abuts the Elfin Forrest where they take walks nearly every day, say they are not really concerned for their safety.

"It doesn't surprise me at all," Pat said. "We see deer and coyotes all the time. Where there are deer there are going to be mountain lions; that's just the way it is. I am concerned about little kids."

The couple say they know what to do in case they run into a lion during their walks. Experts say to stay calm, don't run, do

not crouch, or bend over. If the lion moves in your direction try to appear larger by raising your arms and speaking firmly in a loud voice. If the lion continues toward you, the National Park Service recommends on their website to throw things at it. "Aim for its body as accurately as you can but avoid aiming at its head. Aiming at its head could result in the cat being blinded in one eye, which could make it more dangerous to other hikers who later visit the park. Mountain lions are very dependent upon their sight—particularly depth perception—in order to successfully hunt their natural prey."

It might seem relaxing to put on your earbuds while out for a walk in nature, but it is not wise. Be aware of the sights and sounds around you. Finally, should a lion attack, fight back with all you got.

"Humans usually don't trigger mountain lion attacks because we look and move very differently from their typical prey," said Goeritz. "As long as the mountain lion shows normal behavior and is afraid of humans, I'm not too worried, especially at Sweet Springs where there's almost always other people during daylight hours."

"It might help to know that mountain lion attacks on groups of people are almost completely unheard of. Having said that, I would probably be at least mindful when walking a dog alone in Baywood, at the moment. It's also a good idea to keep little kids close when hiking in mountain lion territory."

The mention of Baywood specifically is based on anecdotal reports of lion sightings (see map) in the area increasing.

"I'm curious about the idea that there was/is a female in the Elfin Forest area that had cubs, and we're now seeing a lot of the more unexperienced young ones as they are starting to disperse," Goeritz said. "The one that was hit on South Bay Blvd in December was a young male, and many of the recent sightings also sound like it's a juvenile mountain lion. On the other hand, some of the Elfin Forest videos suggest the presence of a large female. But this is all speculation on my part."

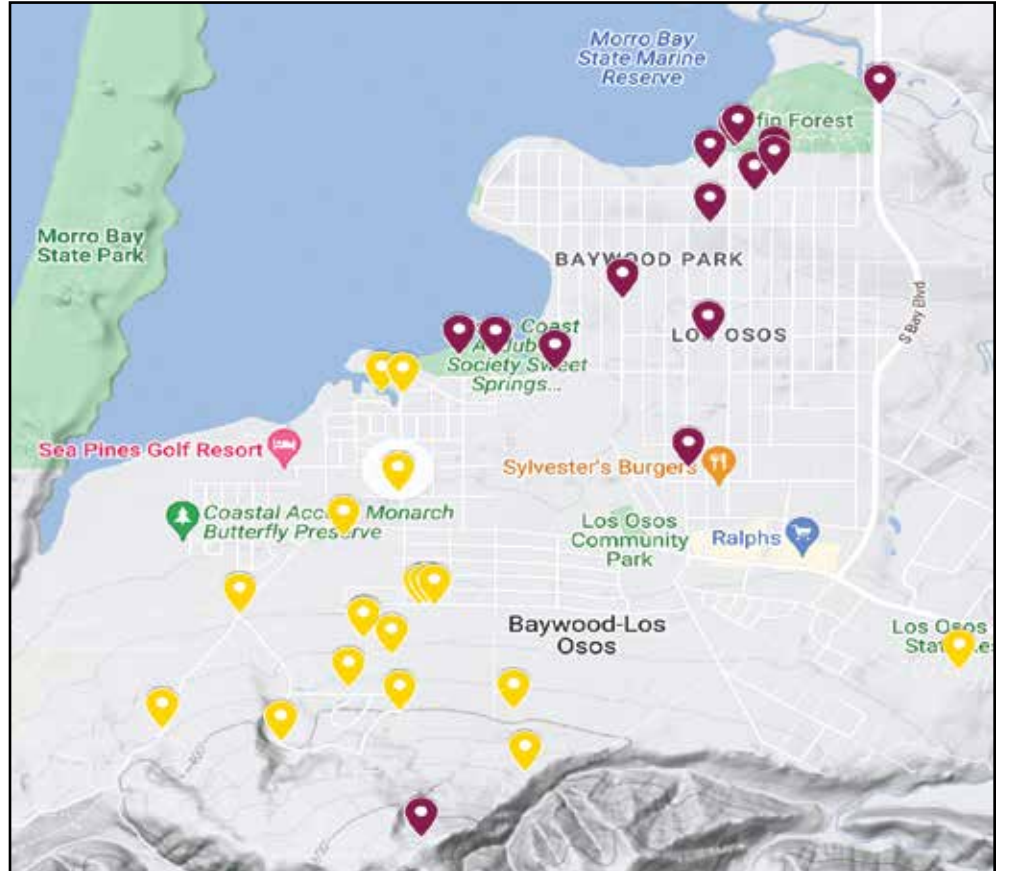
Goeritz, said that the number of people visiting Sweet Springs has not declined since signs warning signs went up.

Although the risk of being attacked by a mountain lion is very rare, caution is a part of that.

"As always we ask people to be careful at night and early mornings — to act big and noisy if they see a mountain lion," Daly said.

Even though a lion was captured in the Perfumo Canyon area in San Luis Obispo last March and was relocated after a dog was killed while out for walk with its owner, the CDFW does not typically relocate cougars.

"There are times when a mountain lion (or bear) is so deep within a community and can't get out, or doesn't seem to be trying, or has been drugged and needs to be removed, that we might take it back to what's called 'nearest suitable habitat,'" Daly



A map showing reports of mountain lions in the area. Sightings in maroon are since March of 2023, and sightings for the previous year (2022) are in blue. Submitted by Dr. Marie Goeritz

said. "But, in general, we don't trap and relocate when a mountain lion is in or near a community, acting as a mountain lion. They cover so much territory [average 100 square miles] this is simply moving the problem from one community to another. And it's also possible for the mountain lion to return to the same area after being moved."

California Department of Fish and Wildlife defines a mountain lion attack as an incident resulting in direct physical contact between a human and a mountain lion resulting in physical injury or death to the person. An attack is verified only when a physician, law enforcement officer or CDFW personnel determine the injuries were caused by a mountain lion. The list of attacks, located at wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Mountain-Lion/Attacks, show people from 5 to 70 years old. Since 1986, there have been 21 verified attacks in CA — four were fatal.

To report mountain lion activity, the CDFW ask folks to use their Wildlife Incident Reporting system at wildlife.ca.gov/wir to notify them.

"When there's a threat to public safety, we work with the public to educate on staying safe and reducing encounters," Daly said. "When there's actual contact with livestock, we try and visit the site and assist the homeowner with steps to prevent further contact. On the rare occasion contact happens with a person, our law enforcement staff get involved in trying to locate the animal. When there's an actual threat to public safety, we hope residents are contacting their local law enforcement. That's how we often learn of wildlife issues in various communities."

Mountain lions are classified as a 'specially protected' species in California following the passage of the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990.

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Cheers to a New Year!

As the calendar turns the page, we wish you the very best in the year ahead.

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Community

New Owners From page 1



During The Morro Bay Theater's featured movie presentation of 'Wonka,' Cham Louie impersonates Willie Wonka with sidekick Cameron Wilson, new owner/general manager of the theater, to the delight of movie patrons. Photo submitted by Cameron Wilson

years The Bay Theater owner, Mary Lou Jannopoulos said, she had "held out as long as she could during the pandemic closures..." (but) the last single-screen, storefront theater exclusively showing movies in San Luis Obispo County was officially up for sale. As a family owned and operated business, she added, "We didn't get rich...but (it was) profitable up to 2020...It breaks my heart to have to sell it."

Farrell's story caused a firestorm of concern by Estero Bay patrons. Letters to the editor, posted concerns on social media, and even a brief campaign to find a buyer or raise funds to purchase it - guaranteeing it would remain a community entertainment resource. Jannopoulos would continue to serve the community offering movies and special events until 2023 when she accepted the sales' offer of Scott and Shannon Wilson of San Diego.

After meeting the Wilson's son, Cameron, who is the onsite owner/general manager, I am convinced the community dream also held by the Jannopoulos family has come true. The Wilson family intends to build on the community asset they purchased. In fact, they have worked closely adopting Mary Lou's best business practices and have demonstrated they intend to keep pricing affordable, collaborate community activities that make sense for a movie theater, offer current and classic films as well as the best popcorn in town and maintain their long-term loyal staff, including Heather Jannopoulos,

New Year's Eve Cameron took time to share his family story

with me. "Mom and Dad met attending Cal Poly and still visit friends here. They love the area. It was my sister, Michaela Lusteg, who told Dad about the business. She lives in Atascadero and is the chef at Halfway Station on Hwy 41. My dad recently sold a golf simulator company he developed in 2009 and she knew he was looking for a new investment.

"Dad intends to be very involved in the business. He stayed with me for two-months while we trained with Mary Lou." They kept the business open during the escrow for Cameron and Scott to have hands-on experience learning everything about the business - from running the projector to nightly cleaning the popcorn machine. Together buyer and seller decided the perfect movie to launch the new ownership. "Barbie' was a risk since it had been out for a time," Cameron said about their launch week beginning October 16. "Mary Lou and her girls ran it Monday and Tuesday and then mid-week we had a Barbie-style celebration when Mary Lou officially turned over the keys to us. The community all showed up in their pink. I am still feeling the positive energy from my neighbors and appreciation from the community that we are still a movie theater."

What is Cameron's background? He graduated from film school, but it was his musical career he decided to pursue. He sang and played base-guitar with a group that toured the USA after graduation hoping to fulfill their dreams of making it big. Once they landed in New York City, however, the love bug bit him. He met his life partner, Rachel Louie, and stayed. She is on the management team of a storefront set fabrication company producing numerous Manhattan display windows. Eight years later when Scott asked him if he wanted to operate a movie theater in Morro Bay, Cameron knew it was the right career move for him. "Rachel has visited several times. She will be following soon."

The Wilson family does not intend to change much. They are still working with film broker, Ken Kruse, and consulting with the Jannopoulos family to select the films that best fit the Estero Bay residents and visitors viewing interests. For example, Cameron and Scott believed timing was important to show the film "Killers of the Flower Moon" directed by Martin Scorsese. Note: Cameron loves to showcase the directors of films. Patrons will see directors' names sharing the movie marquee announcements typically reserved for the film's featured stars.

Testing out film preferences of the community, Cameron has tried split schedule for movie bookings. He believes there is often a different audience in the afternoon than for an evening screening. Recently he screened "Eileen," a psychological thriller, in the afternoon and in the evening screened "The Boy & the Heron," a new fantasy adventure by Academy Award winning director Hayao Miyazaki.

The Wilson family anticipated The Morro Bay Theater would selectively collaborate on Estero Bay community events, but Cameron didn't expect the first one to happen so soon - and so big - after their grand opening. Mayor Carla Wixom brought him an offer he couldn't refuse - maybe even a bonus dream come true!

Last spring Hollywood director Jay Silverman and members of his production crew were scouting a location site for his newest movie, Camera. Morro Bay was perfect, they decided. By happenstance they stopped to eat at Carla's Country Kitchen and met General Manager Haley Foerst, who happens to be Mayor Carla Wixom's daughter. Excited, a Hollywood producer/director chose their restaurant, she introduced the crew to her mother and a bond was forged.

As Mayor Wixom told me, "One of the best parts of my job is connecting the dots to make something positive happen for Morro Bay." When filming last fall, Silverman mentioned to her he hoped to premier the film in Morro Bay. She introduced him to Cameron, who was able to schedule Friday, January 20 at 5pm. Not only is film star Beau Bridges scheduled to make a guest appearance, but Silverman will be on hand to announce his preference that all proceeds will benefit Morro Bay High School Arts Program. Tickets available at 805Tix.com if not sold out by EBN's publication date.

"Camera" is an uplifting story that centers around a boy named Oscar, play by ingenue actor Miguel Gabriel, who moves to a fishing town with his struggling widowed mother. He's picked on and bullied and yet still sees great beauty. When he finds a broken camera and meets Eric, an eccentric old repairman (Beau Bridges), magic begins to happen.

Check out the website www.morrobaymovie.com for other special events coming up. Cameron has scheduled the classic "Citizen Kane" and the award-winning local film "Botso" produced by Tom Walters.

Estero Bay residents, the best way we can continue our dream-come-true is support The Morro Bay Theater by choosing to enjoy our movies at our own local movie theater.

Queen's Reign From page 1



Pam Woodruff, owner of Queen's Closet in Morro Bay is closing her women's clothing shop and retiring at the end of January. Photo by Neil Farrell

"Back then it was just a plus-size store," says Woodruff. "I opened it up to missy, petite and plus sizes." That's because while Morro Bay could be said to have a wide variety of retail stores - from gift shops to butcher shops - "It didn't have a true women's store that encompasses all sizes."

The store has been on Morro Bay Boulevard for 18 years, Woodruff says. The space, one of the more sizable little shop spaces in Downtown, was the town's first department store before Queen's Closet moved in.

"Back in the day," Woodruff recalls, "this store had everything - children's, men's and women's clothing. I have customers who still remember that department store."

Woodruff, who was heavily involved with the business community including through the Merchant's Association (now disbanded), and understands the nuisances of trying to run a successful small business in this town. The recent pandemic caused a lot of damage.

"Since COVID," she says, "its reduced the business by more than 50%. Luckily, I had a great landlord. COVID ruined a lot of industries, not just retail. Just look at the restaurants." She adds that restaurants, once the backbone of the town's tourism economy, are struggling to regain customers after having such a hard go of it during the pandemic response lockdowns and mass restrictions.

Indeed, the State led the lockdowns push with small cities like Morro Bay simply enforcing the State mandates on the economy, part of the effort to stop the spread of the virus.

"It's coming back," she says of business, "but it takes time." She explains that she has people coming into the store who freely admit they had not gone "shopping" very much for three years because of COVID. "And I don't blame them," she says.

Queen's Closet, as with many local shops, has loyal subjects. "I've had women customers tell me they bought three 'mother-of-the-bride' dresses from here," Woodruff says.

That's the type of store Queen's Closet has been for decades - some place where a woman can find a dress for those more elegant and more formal occasions, and accessories to go with the outfit.

"I've been part of the community a long time," she reflects.

The Downtown business climate is in a sort of flux, as several new businesses have opened on the Boulevard and Main Street over the past couple of years, but Woodruff says it hasn't been easy.

"The cost of living has increased dramatically," she says, "in all aspects of doing business." She cites the recent garbage hike approved by the City Council. "Garbage is up to \$70 a month," Woodruff says. "And that's for one can of garbage."

The price of wholesale goods and even things like delivery fees have all risen too.

But it's the most basic of business expenses - rent or lease payments - that have strained Downtown businesses the most. "[rich] People have been coming up here and buying up commercial properties and maximizing the rents," Woodruff says. She clarifies her criticism to say that it's mostly the property management companies that have been responsible for the sky-high rent increases. She was lucky to have avoided that pitfall.

"I was fortunate to have the landlord that I did," she says. "It's the same landlord for the past 25 years, which makes a big difference."

She's excited for the space's next life, which will be as a home goods retail store. Two local women, who are also cousins, Stephane Slater and Becky Garcia, will open "Mariposa Ex-

Community

change.” Slater says they will be doing some remodeling when they get the keys and hope the space isn’t closed for very long. They seem eager to get started.

Woodruff says she will still be open normal business hours through the end of January when the new shopkeepers will take over, and Woodruff sails away.

She’s having a 50-percent off sale and hopes that long-time customers — friends really — will come by and visit. So what’s her next move?

“I want to travel,” she says, smiling because it seems that’s what every retiree plans to do. “I want to go visit friends on the East Coast.”

Woodruff says while retirement will be a welcomed change, she is nostalgic over what’s been the major part of her life for so long. “I’ve enjoyed the people,” she says. “They were fulfilling. All the customers here have been amazing, more like friends. It makes me sad to leave. But I’m very excited for the new owners.”

Redevelopment Plan From page 1



Rendering shows ‘Bayside Landing & Suites’ a proposed redevelopment for the south end of The Embarcadero, as it might be seen by a seagull flying overhead. Renderings courtesy Gene Doughty

City since opening about 18 months ago.

The owners, Chuck and Ananda Nettin, had posted about the upcoming Council meeting on their Facebook Page, urging customers to come out and support them in their dealings with the City.

“As some of you may know,” reads the post that was put online a couple of days before the Council meeting on Jan. 9, “we entered into an agreement with the City to take over their abandoned building & transform it into the business it is today. The deal was, they would consider the money we spent and negotiate a fair and equitable percentage rent. Unfortunately, the city is not honoring their contract with us.”

Instead, they wrote that the contract proposed by the City would mean Three Stacks paying “the highest percent rent for anyone on the Embarcadero. 10% on any beer/wine sold without food on gross sales.”

At the meeting speaker after speaker, including one who came in from Cambria, told the City that the business was a beloved and special place where both locals and tourists can feel comfortable and mingle. The Nettins were congratulated and thanked for all the hard work and large amount of money they put into the building, some \$400,000. The Council was urged to pull the item and allow for further negotiations on the percentage tax, and to help out a small business.

In his staff report, Harbor Director Ted Schiafone said the Lease became “effective May 1, 2022, for a 10-year lease term with a base rent of \$23,000; no percentage rent for the first 12 months; and the option to convert to a ground lease after 5 years upon mutual agreement.”

Both sides would probably agree they couldn’t reach an agreement, but they had opposing opinions as to why.

“All other businesses,” Three Stacks’ post reads, “are allowed to deduct their base rent (monthly rent) from their % rent. The City is also revoking this from us. Therefore, not only will we be paying the highest % rent, we will be the only business on the Embarcadero that will not be able to deduct our base rent from percent rent. This will result in our slow death and potential to go out of business.”

The owners also said form the podium that the City came in with a firm 10 percent and would not budge, accusing the City of not negotiating at all. Let alone in good faith.

EBN asked Schiafone about this. “As reported to Council last night,” Schiafone told Estero Bay News, “staff met with the tenants multiple times, had numerous written correspondence and met in Closed Session. The tenants also met individually with council members, city manager, and a representative of the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce. This process occurred for nine months without coming to an agreement. The lease stipulates that if an agreement cannot be reached, percent rent as listed in the Harbor Department Lease Management Policy will apply.”

Ordinarily on the City controlled lease sites (nearly all of the Embarcadero’s western side), the City retains ownership/control over the land and the leaseholder owns the improvements — from



Bayside Landing & Suites as seen at ground level from across the Embarcadero.

the buildings and fixtures, to the utility hook ups, a so-called “ground lease” — but Three Stacks is a bit different.

When Dean and Bertha Tyler were forced to close the Aquarium it was after a bidding process wherein they lost out to the Central Coast Aquarium, a non-profit educational organization and facility in Avila Beach.

The Avila nonprofit won the bidding with a wonderful proposal to build a stylish, modern aquarium, and establish a true tourist attraction.

But the Aquarium’s plans fizzled and they eventually abandoned the project, turning the lease back to the City. Meanwhile, the other bidders the Tylers died — first Dean and then Bertha, who were both in their 90s.

Ordinarily with such bidding wars, if the top bidder fails the City would offer it to the other, assuming that bid was also acceptable. The Tylers bid was not acceptable to the Council at the time, and the building sat vacant for some time.

The lease the City and Three Stacks signed was not a typical



Bayside Landing & Suites as would look from a boat.

“ground lease” resulting from a competitive bidding and selection process.

Instead it’s more of a tenant-landlord or “building” lease, as the City owns both the land and the building, though it was the pub owners’ money that fixed it up and turned it into a welcoming and beloved place.

And with the traditional ground leases, the rule of thumb has always been to grant 10 years on a lease for every \$250,000 invested, up to 40 years, so by that standard, Three Stacks with \$400,000 invested should get at least a 20-year lease.

But Schiafone said, “This is a building lease and not the typical ground lease we have with other tenants. There is not a rule of thumb regarding that investment.”

In the end, Schiafone said the Council made one compromise. “Council approved the amendment with one modification,” he said. “Percent rent for alcohol sales will be 5% for the first two years and then go to 10% after that time period.”

Schiafone said in his report that at the full 10-percent, it would have increased the annual rent from \$23,000 by an additional \$25,000 (to \$48,000 a year). But that full, daunting amount would be reduced somewhat by the Council’s vote. Whether it’s enough to keep the tiny brewery open for their loyal customers, will be the key.

New Life for Old VRs

In another waterfront matter, the City Council approved a “consent of landowner” agreement with Paul Gillen, the owner of Associated Pacific Constructors, a marine engineering and construction company, to redevelop his maintenance yard and three tiny lease sites on the Embarcadero’s south end.

Two circa-1940s-50s cottages used to be leased to the late Reg Whibley, who ran one as a vacation rental and lived in the other. Whibley was also the founder of Associated Pacific and sold out to Gillen upon his retirement nearly 20-years ago. The third, southern-most site has always been vacant and is mostly over the water.

Gillen’s proposal, called “Bayside Landing and Suites” is being designed by local architect Gene Doughty, and would tear down the two vacation rental units and replace them with a new 2-story building and a total of eight units — five downstairs and three upstairs — with decks on the water side.

The 10-foot Harborwalk would be extended from Estero Inn next door and carried behind the existing 2-story Associated Pacific office building.

That existing building that now has a maintenance shop on the ground floor and offices upstairs, would be remodeled and repurposed into retail shops and a restaurant. Upstairs would be “beer / wine and light food service,” reads Gillen’s bid letter, with the kitchen located downstairs. A public restroom would also be put in.

These lease sites have water areas too and the proposal is to build slips for boats, which is what Associated Pacific does up and down the California Coast. This plan also means Associated Pacific’s local construction business would continue to wind down.

“Associated Pacific,” Gillen said, “is in the process of downsizing their construction operations so the lease site now lends itself to a redevelopment of not only this site but proposing a



Bayside Landing as it would look from the top floor room at the Embarcadero Inn across the street.

larger and more cohesive project that will encompass the current vacation rentals and vacant lease parcels to the south.”

The Council’s vote last week is but the first step in a long and winding yellow brick road to development.

Schiafone said, “This simply allows Associated Pacific to submit their proposed plans to the Planning Commission. This is the start of the process. Nothing has been approved regarding the proposed development. The Planning Commission meetings are open, so residents, businesses and any other stakeholders will have the opportunity to weigh in. Council will make the final decision as to the development of this project.”

Actually, all projects on the Embarcadero automatically go to the Coastal Commission, which claims original jurisdiction over the State Tidelands property.

Gillen’s proposal includes a somewhat conservative budget. For total development costs he lists \$2.5 million; add 20% in contingencies and the total proposed construction costs rise to about \$3 million.

He further breaks it down to \$2.65 million in costs for the land portions and \$343,000 in waterside improvements. Adding in all the other expenses that come with a waterfront project and he’s projecting the project to cost \$3.3 million.

For the Harbor Department, Schiafone projects the revenue from the three sites to rise from currently \$35,000 a year to over \$170,000 a year.

On Jan. 11, just before deadline, Schiafone issued another official statement:

“This tenant had free rent for 32 months from August 2019 to May 2022. Starting May 2022, they paid \$1,916 per month base rent for approximately 3,800 square feet of space.

“That is approximately 50-cents per square foot per month. They also did not pay any percentage rent during that time. Other restaurants on the Tidelands that are managed by the City, paid between \$2 to \$5 per square foot per month in base rent. The lease called for percentage rent to begin May 1, 2023. That is what this lease amendment calls for.

“The City has followed the terms of the original lease and has been very fair in dealing with this tenant.”

He said the City has a responsibility as stewards of what is actually State-owned and City-managed public property. “As trustee of State Tidelands, the City is responsible to manage those properties in a financially prudent manner so that it can be maintained and available to the public. To do that we must obtain rent rates that allow the City to meet those obligation. The City is pro-business and wants this tenant to be successful, however, we cannot subsidize rent for this business. Doing that would be considered a gift of public funds.”



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