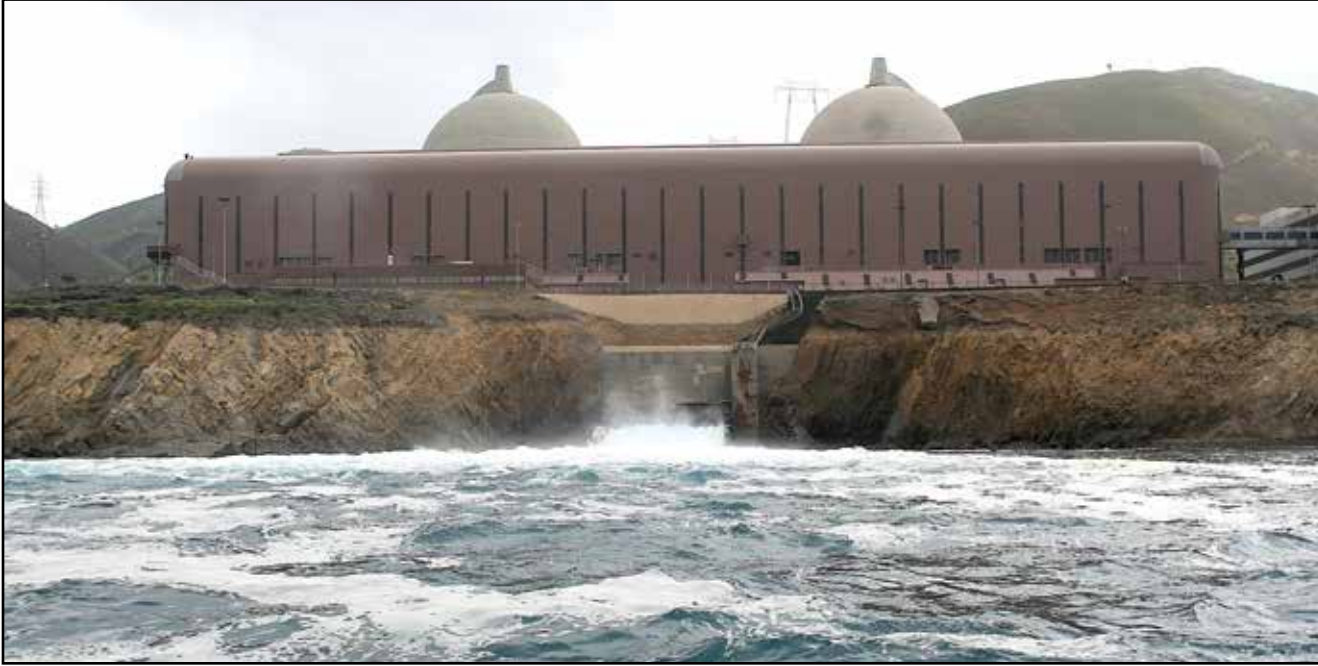


Supervisors Rallying Support for Diablo Canyon



Here's a look at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant and its cooling water outfall taken from a boat off Diablo Cove. Photo by Neil Farrell

By Neil Farrell

Local governmental agencies have signed on to a letter drafted by County Supervisors supporting the continued operations of the State's sole remaining nuclear power plant, and asking that the plant owners start fully paying taxes again, too.

In December, County Supervisors approved sending a letter to the State Legislature urging support for continued operations at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant for another 20 years.

"As the host county for California's only operating commercial nuclear power plant," reads the letter from Supervisors, "which provides approximately 9% of the State's total generation of power, San Luis Obispo County recognizes Diablo Canyon as a critical component of the State's clean energy infrastructure. Extending the plant's operational life for up to 20 years would provide stable, carbon free base load power that strengthens grid reliability, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and advances California's clean energy and climate goals."

The letter calls for a few other things to also be done, including "support coastal land conservation and public access near the facility." But the main thing is they want Pacific Gas & Electric to return to paying tens of millions a year in "Unitary taxes."

"Continuation of operations, however, must be accompanied by fiscal fairness for the communities that host and support the facility. We therefore urge the Legislature to restore pre-decommissioning unitary taxation for DCCP during any extended period of operation.

"Historically, unitary tax revenues have been distributed to the County, cities, school districts, and special districts, supporting essential public services, educational programs, infrastructure maintenance and public safety. Restoration of this tax structure is critical to maintaining the fiscal stability of local governments public agencies."

PG&E had agreed in 2016 to close Diablo Canyon when its two operating permits for its two nuclear reactors expired in 2024 and 2025, after negotiating with environmental groups who had been opposed to the company's attempts to obtain new operating licenses from the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the agency that regulates and oversees all atomic energy use in the U.S., including power plants.

PG&E had been well into the NRC's lengthy re-licensing process and was being fought every step of the way by anti-nuclear power groups, when the deal was struck to close Diablo Canyon down.

Part of that deal was a law passed by the Legislature that allowed PG&E to depreciate the value of the plant for tax purposes.

Support For Diablo Continued on page 16

Sheriff's Report on ICE Draws a Packed House



San Luis Obispo County Sheriff Ian Parkinson recently presented the annual Transparent Review of Unjust Transfers and Holds Act (TRUTH Act) report to the County Board of Supervisors.

By Neil Farrell

It was supposed to be a routine report by the Sheriff's Department, but when it comes to the issue of immigration enforcement, nothing is routine these days.

At the Jan. 27 County Supervisor's meeting a massive crowd filled the Supervisors' Chambers, spilling over into an overflow room and onto the sidewalks at the County Government Center to hear Sheriff Ian Parkinson's annual Transparent Review of Unjust Transfers and Holds Act (TRUTH Act) report.

Assembly Bill 2792 set up the State's reporting system to monitor whether local law enforcement agencies are complying with the mandate to not assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency's efforts to round up and deport undocumented immigrants, a key aspect of the Sanctuary State policies.

The law requires a public forum be held if a local law enforcement agency returned notification responses to ICE over the prior calendar year (2025).

"The purpose of the forum," Sheriff Parkinson's report explained, "is to provide information to the public about ICE's access to incarcerated persons and to receive and consider public comments."

The County gave notice in December that the forum would be held, and opponents of ICE's deportations had

Report on ICE Continued on page 17

Love Letters to the Dead

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

For those grieving the loss of a loved one, Valentine's Day can intensify feelings of loneliness and sorrow. A death doula can help navigate the bereavement process.

Jessica Brittany Gilder is a death doula and grief guide in Los Osos who owns Metamorphosis Death Care & Memorials to help people process the varied and individual world of grief.

When someone loses a loved one, "grief is now a part of them, just as it will be, eventually, for every one of us," Gilder told Estero Bay News. "It won't get better, or go away, but it will change. It grows, and adapts, alongside us, for the rest of our lives. Death and loss are so very big, and they shape us, just as all the other major and minor life events do."

Gilder's services include end of life paperwork/planning (advance directives, pre-planning for death/funerals/memorials); facilitation of difficult conversations with families (choosing or declining treatment for certain terminal illness, internment choices like cremation, burial, green burial); guidance on the process and choices available in the moments after death; education about home funerals; lega-



Jessica Brittany Gilder is a death doula and grief guide based in Los Osos. Photo submitted.

cy projects; memorial service planning and facilitation; support for family and caregivers (referral to hospice services, household support like small errands, and referrals to grief and caregiver support groups); and vigil sitting, which is a continual presence in the days and hours leading up to death.

"I am no stranger to death and have walked hand in hand with grief most of my life," Gilder said. "Death/loss and grief have shaped who I am and how I view and understand life and the world. After the

Love Letters Continued on page 22

Our Stories: Morro Bay Theater Benefits Community Groups

By Judy Salamacha



During this annual celebration time for excellence in the movies industry, let's congratulate Cameron Wilson and Rachel Louie during their second anniversary owning and operating the Morro Bay Theater. What a treat not to have to leave town to comfortably enjoy a first run — even an Oscar winning film — on the big screen. Not only did the Wilson family "save" a beloved icon when Mary Lou Jannopoulos retired after 25 years, but the couple has embraced her original concept of a community theater. This

Bay Theater Benefits Continued on page 22

D.A. Warns of Real Estate Fraud

By Neil Farrell



Theft of someone's property through fraudulent means is a growing concern across the nation, and according to the District Attorney's Office, San Luis Obispo County is included in the list of places where this is occurring.

"The first known incident," a District Attorney's Office news release said, "was reported to the Office of the District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud Unit in April of 2023."

That case led to creating an information sharing network made available to all real estate professionals "and other entities involved in real estate transactions" in SLO

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Wrestling
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Arguments For/Against Sunnyside Tax Being Made Now

By Neil Farrell

A special property tax measure in Los Osos to raise money to purchase the old Sunnyside School property and pay for its on-going upkeep will appear on the June Primary Election Ballot, now that County Supervisors have given the go-ahead.

And the clock is ticking for ballot arguments and rebuttals to be filed if they are to appear in election materials.

County Clerk-Recorder, Elaina Cano, asked Supervisors on Jan. 27 to approve placing Measure B-26 on the June Primary Ballot.

The request came from the Los Osos Community Services District Board, which itself had been petitioned in December by a citizens group seeking to purchase Sunnyside School and use it for community needs, such as playing fields, and parklands among other, yet to be decided, potential uses.

Essentially, the citizens would buy it and the CSD would run and maintain it.

Under State Law, Cano said, "when a district located within the County of San Luis Obispo schedules an election to submit a question to the voters or to elect an office on the same date as a statewide election, the district's governing body must adopt a resolution requesting consolidation of its election with the statewide election. Consolidation ensures that the district's measure or office appears on the same ballot as statewide offices and measures."

The CSD had to submit the request "no later than 88 days prior to the scheduled election date." The LOCSD Board of Directors approved making the request at its Jan. 12 meeting, after Cano's office had verified that at least 10% of the registered voters had signed the petition.

The June Primary will also have the race for Dist. 2 County Supervisor on the ballot; the first time Los Osos will get to vote on that office since 2018.

And with long-time Supervisor Bruce Gibson announcing last May that he would not seek re-election, it will be the first time in nearly a generation (since 2007) that Dist. 2 will have no incumbent running.

So, turnout should be good for the election, as there are so-far only two people — Michael Woody and Jim Dantona — who have announced they will run, making the Primary Election likely to be the deciding contest for Gibson's replacement.

The official filing period is Feb. 9-March 6 and because Gibson is not in the race, it will be extended to March 11, according to the County Elections Office website.

In her signature verification form, Cano describes B-26 as "Ordinance imposing a special tax for parks and recreation in the Los Osos Community Services District," which means all private properties within the CSD's service area would be affected. The District's various service zones encompass the entirety of the Los Osos community, both the neighborhoods "in" town and outlying subdivisions like Cabrillo Estates and Sunset Terrace/Monarch Grove on the west and up to Los Osos Creek on the east side.

The verification document said they had collected 1,507 signatures and 1,278 had been verified as "sufficient." There were 229 "insufficient" signatures and 45 were duplicates, according to the County document.

The exact language of Measure B-26 — a "Yes" or "No" vote — reads: "To provide open space and recreational facilities by creating a new community park with sports fields, shall the Los Osos Community Services District citizens' initiative measure be adopted establishing a parcel tax of \$185 parcel/year for 15 years, then dropping to \$100 parcel/year (with CPI adjustments), to raise approximately \$1,114,255 annually for 15 years for acquisition, and



Aerial photo shows Sunnyside School in Los Osos outlined in red. Los Osos voters will decide in June whether to tax themselves to purchase the long-closed school and repurpose it for a park and other community needs. Photo by Dean Sullivan

\$602,200 annually after that for operations/maintenance, until ended by voters, with public disclosure, and local citizens' oversight?"

In essence, the full tax would last for 15 years, unless another citizen's group comes around and manages to get a ballot measure certified and approved to end it before then.

Otherwise, after 15 years, it will automatically reduce and continue in perpetuity, unless again, another voter initiative comes along to end or amend it.

And since voters would have decided it, it would require another vote to extend it or end it early.

And because a citizen's group, "Sunnyside Park Citizen's Coalition," (SPCC) gathered the signatures and petitioned the CSD for the special election, under State Law it only requires a simple majority approval to be enacted.

Had the CSD (or any government agency) been behind this, it would have triggered a two-thirds approval requirement, as it is a special tax for a specific purpose, as opposed to a general tax increase.

Originally, the tax measure was predicted to be headed for the November General Election, but the SPCC wanted it sped up.

"The timing of the election," said LOCSD General Manager Ron Munds, "was based on several factors but the Sunnyside Park Citizen's Coalition pushed to have it in June.

"SPCC was able to collect the enough signatures and have them verified by the Clerk/Recorder's Office to qualify for the June election, so the CSD moved forward with the necessary paperwork."

The CSD has been working with the citizen's group on this, hosting a well-attended town hall meeting at Sunnyside School, and having its engineering firm do preliminary studies and estimates on what it will cost to buy it and maintain it as well as looking at what potential uses it might have.

With these hurdles already overcome, the County set the deadlines for ballot arguments for Friday, Feb. 6. "This deadline," reads the notice put out by the County Clerk-Recorder, "has been determined by the County Clerk-Recorder to be a reasonable date, based upon the time necessary to prepare, print, and distribute the arguments to the voters as provided by law."

She added that arguments for or against the measure "may be submitted by the Governing Board of the district or any member or members of the governing board authorized by the board, any individual voter who is eligible to vote on the measure, any bona fide association of citizens, or any combination of these voters and associations."

Munds said the LOCSD Board would not be submitting any arguments.

"Since this is a citizen's initiative," Munds told EBN, "the CSD will not be submitting an argument, the SPCC will be doing that. From the beginning, the CSD has maintained that purchasing the school is a decision the community needs to make and, if the ballot measure is successful, the CSD is willing to take on the commitment to finalize negotiations with the school district to try to make it happen."

The San Luis Coastal Unified School District declared

Sunnyside, and Morro Elementary in Morro Bay, to be "surplus properties" and ordered they be sold to bridge a gap in its budget.

Under State Law, they must first offer school-owned properties to local governmental agencies, which have a certain amount of time to formally declare interest in acquiring them. In the case of Sunnyside, this special tax vote will decide if the community will purchase Sunnyside.

And in Morro Bay, pushed by another citizen's group, the City Council is negotiating the potential purchase of Morro Elementary.

Should either or both of these efforts fail, the school district would be free to sell to a private entity for potential re-development, though the potential uses are still limited.

The School District made these decisions when it faced a severe budget shortfall in 2025, due to the loss of property taxes (unitary taxes) from the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, which had been slated to close in 2025, but could now remain open for 5 or as long as 20 years.

Efforts are now underway by the County to force

Correction



Last week's story about new contracts for Cayucos' water purveyors included a photo of the wrong facility. This photo is of the Cayucos Water Treatment Plant.

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News

Pacific Gas & Electric to resume paying property taxes on Diablo Canyon. At stake is millions of dollars annually for the school district, the County and to a lesser extent, the City of Morro Bay and even the Cayucos Sanitary District.

As for potential arguments on Measure B-26, if more than one is received the County Clerk-Recorder's Office will pick one to appear in election materials.

Currently, with the deadline for arguments now passed, whoever submitted them will now be given time to submit a rebuttal. The deadline for those is Tuesday, Feb. 24, to be included in election materials.

The Clerk's Office will have a 10-day period to review and potentially challenge the validity of any of these arguments.

To be valid, the arguments must be in the proper format and include certain wording, and must be true and correct, as well. So, any misinformation or lies would disqualify an argument from being included.

County Raising Road Impact Fees

By Neil Farrell

San Luis Obispo County has slightly raised its road impact fees, part of a required annual report, but folks on the North Coast probably don't need to be concerned, as the anemic growth here has kept the County from collecting very much money, and in turn doing much work.

County Supervisors approved increasing the roads fees, paid by new development projects, by 1.9% after averaging inflationary increases over the past three years.

The County is divided up into seven so-called "fee areas" — Avila (San Luis Bay), North Coast, San Miguel (North County), Nipomo (South County), Templeton, Los Osos (Estero), and State Route 227 (rural SLO), according to a report out of the Transportation Division of Public Works.

Under State Law (Assembly Bill 1600 and Gov. Code 66006(b)) and in turn County Ordinance 2379, the County adjusts the road fees every year for inflation, which is calculated using figures from the Engineering News-Record, which looks at engineering/construction cost increase from 20 cities scattered across the U.S.

These cost increases are calculated every year, and the County takes an average of the past three years to develop the current rate hike.

From 2023-2025 costs rose 1.79%, 1.51% and 2.39%, which when averaged gave the County the 1.90% increase that is in effect for 2026.

But road impact fees vary depending on the type of new development — i.e. commercial vs. residential, or single-family home vs. an apartment building — and the North Coast and Los Osos haven't grown a lick, and so very little

fees have been paid.

In Los Osos the fees are rising from \$3,811 to \$3,895 for residential developments, of which there were zero last year.

How much a particular development pays in road impact fees is based on "peak hour trips" and in Los Osos that means how much more traffic is likely to be using the roads.

According to the official Resolution passed by Supervisors: "The number of peak hour trips caused or generated by the residential use(s) and the number of peak hour trips caused or generated by the non-residential land uses shall be separately determined and then,

"The total road improvement fee for the new development shall be computed by multiplying the number of peak hour trips determined in subparagraph above for each land use by the appropriate road improvement fee for each land use and then summing the results."

If a new house gets built in Los Osos, and it generates two peak hour trips, the builder would have to pay \$7,790 in road impact fees.

But in 2025, there were no building permits issued that would trigger these impact fees, so the County collected nothing.

There is some fees money being held in reserve, according to the Resolution. As of July 1, 2024 — the start of the 2024-25 fiscal year — the County had \$93,036 in reserves for this fee area. It added some \$3,643 in interest payments, and spent \$28, to bring the total roads fees being held for Los Osos to \$96,652.

According to the report, "The Los Osos Circulation Study contains a list of recommended improvements for all modes of transportation in the community as well as an adopted Capital Improvement Program for funding by Road Improvement Fees and other sources."

That's a fairly long list of projects, numbering 60 with varying levels of costs and work needed.

Among the bigger projects on the list are: \$1.1 million for drainage upgrades on LOVR from Palisades Avenue to Ravenna Avenue, with another \$1.34M for the same work from Ravenna to Doris Avenue; \$1.56M to realign intersections on Ramona Avenue from 4th Street to Ravenna; and \$1.05M to widen South Bay Boulevard to four lanes from Santa Ysabel Avenue to the Urban/Rural reserve Line.

South Bay would also be widened to four lanes from El Moro Avenue to Nipomo Avenue at the cost of an additional \$1.69M.

Right now, with so little money in the impact fees fund, the only thing on the County to-do list for Los Osos is to spend up to \$2,000 on a traffic study.

While impact fees might be few and far between on the North Coast, the County is collecting lots of money from other unincorporated county towns. In FY 2024/25 it collected \$1.57M and spent it on a variety of projects in places like Nipomo, Avila Beach and Templeton.

It should be noted that impact fees are not the sole source of funding the County has for road projects. Most of the road monies come out of gasoline taxes.

For example, the County is currently replacing the Los Osos Creek Bridge on South Bay Boulevard at a cost of about \$24 million and none of that is being paid for with impact fees.

CHP Runs Down New Traffic Laws



In California, the start of a New Year means a bunch of new laws hitting the code books and the California Highway Patrol issued a list of the ones they enforce that drivers and residents might not be aware of. Among the new laws for 2026 are:

- Assembly Bill 486, which makes it a misdemeanor to possess a "key programming device, a key duplicating device, or a signal extender with the intent to commit burglary," the CHP said. The offense can result in up to 6-months in County Jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

- AB 486 "expands existing law by adding those three tools to the list of tools illegal to possess with the intent to commit burglary."

- AB 544 "mandates that electric bicycles must have a red reflector or a solid or flashing red light with a built-in reflector on the rear during all hours of operation, not just during darkness as the law previously required."

The new law "also allows the CHP-developed online electric bicycle safety and training program to fulfill the safety course requirement for minors who receive a helmet violation involving electric bicycles."

- Senate Bill 586 redefines the terms "off-highway electric motorcycle" or "eMoto" as "a vehicle that is designed primarily for off-highway use; is powered by an electric motor that does not require a motor number; has handlebars for steering, a manufacturer-provided straddle seat, and two wheels; and is not equipped with manufacturer-provided pedals, according to the CHP."

Traffic Laws Continued on page 4

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News

Traffic Laws From page 3

The law also classifies an off-highway electric motorcycle as an off-highway "motor vehicle" (OHV), subject to the same rules and regulations. This includes a requirement that a person operating an OHV wear a safety helmet and that every OHV, not registered under the Vehicle Code, display an identification plate or device issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles."

• AB 382 deals with speed limits in school zones. "Assembly Bill 382 allows local authorities to lower the school zone speed limit from 25 to 20 miles per hour by ordinance or Resolution through Jan. 1, 2031. After this date, the speed limit will automatically decrease from 25 to 20 mph in school zones when proper signage is posted."

• AB 289 deals with safety in construction zones and robo-cops. It "authorizes the Department of Transportation [Caltrans] to establish a work zone speed safety system pilot program. The program will utilize a fixed or mobile radar or laser systems to detect speeding violations and capture a clear photograph of a vehicle's license plate."

"Citations will be issued to the vehicle's registered owner with specified requirements and procedures for program implementation, citation issuance, review, and appeal."

• AB 390 also deals with speed limits in work zones. "Assembly Bill 390 expands the 'slow down and move over' law to include any highway maintenance vehicle or stationary vehicle using flashing hazard lights or warning devices such as cones and road flares."

When approaching such a vehicle, drivers "must move into a lane that is not next to the stopped vehicle or slow down to a safe speed if changing lanes is not possible."

• AB 1014 "authorizes the Department of Transportation to reduce a speed limit by 5 mph on a highway, and mandates warning citations during the initial 30 days after a speed limit is lowered."

• AB 875 deals with apparently abandoned or broken-down vehicles. The law "authorizes a peace officer to impound a vehicle for at least 48 hours if the vehicle has fewer than four wheels but does not meet the definition of an electric bicycle; is powered by an electric motor capable of exclusively propelling the vehicle over 20 mph on a highway and the operator is not licensed to operate the vehicle; or is a Class 3 electric bicycle being operated by a person under-16."

"A safety course may be required as a condition of release if the impoundment involves a child under-16 years old operating a Class 3 electric bike" (as described in Section 312.5 of the California Vehicle Code).

• SB 1271 "focuses on improving the safety standards for electric bicycles, powered mobility devices, and related lithium-ion batteries."

"It requires these devices and their components, such as batteries and charging systems, to be tested by accredited laboratories to meet specific safety standards. The bill mandates labeling these products to show compliance with safety regulations, ensuring consumers are informed."

It also prohibits distributing, selling, or leasing e-bikes and related equipment unless they meet these standards, "aiming to reduce risks like fire hazards and electrical mal-

functions."

Also, beginning Jan. 1, 2028, "the bill would prohibit a person from renting or offering for rental an electric bicycle, powered mobility device, charging system, or storage battery unless it has been tested to the specified safety standard."

• AB 1777 creates new authority for a law enforcement officer "to issue a 'notice of autonomous vehicle (AV) non-compliance' to an AV manufacturer for an alleged traffic violation committed by one of their vehicles."

"Beginning July 1, 2026, AB 1777 establishes additional requirements for how AVs that operate without a human operator in the vehicle interact with first responders, including a requirement for manufacturers to provide a 2-way device in the vehicles to communicate with first responders."

The provisions of AB 1777 would go into effect once the Department of Motor Vehicles adopts necessary regulations, the CHP said.

Six Arrested in Human Trafficking Operation

By Neil Farrell

A Los Osos man is among six men arrested as part of a statewide task force to combat human sex trafficking, the Sheriff's Department announced.

According to a news release from Sheriff's spokesman, Tony Cipolla, during January, "The San Luis Obispo County Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force participated in Operation Reclaim and Rebuild in order to combat human trafficking within our area."

This operation was a coordinated effort throughout the state and multiple agencies within San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara County participated."

According to a statement from the District Attorney's



Gael Pitaabarca



Artuto DeLeon



Gonzalo Luna Penafort



Ashvir Singh



Stephan Mueller




Esteban Ceja

Office, "this operation by the Task Force was directly aimed at disrupting networks of human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation occurring on the Central Coast, identifying and assisting survivors of trafficking, and reducing the demand for trafficking and exploitation of minors by identifying and prosecuting would-be purchasers."

Over the course of the operation, investigators from SLO and Santa Barbara Counties made six arrests and rescued three female sex trafficking victims, two adults and

Human Trafficking Continued on page 17




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New Los Osos Well Completed

By Neil Farrell

It's been a long time coming but Los Osos Community Services District's new drinking water well is finally done and ready to pump.

Called the "Program C Well," the new water well is located at the south side of Los Osos Valley Road near the end of South Bay Boulevard on Bay Oaks.

According to a report from the LOCS D staff, "On Jan. 27, the project contractor, consultants and staff were able to complete the startup of the Bay Oaks well. All systems are operational and the permit from the Division of Drinking Water has been received."

The LOCS D has been working on the new well, which taps the upper ground water aquifer, since 2018. It involved much study, environmental review, and installation of a significant water line to deliver the water to the system.

"The well will add operational flexibility to the aging water production and distribution system," the report said. "Many thanks to all the people that have worked diligently on this project over the years."

Digging the new well is part of a management plan the LOCS D, Golden State Water Co., S&T Mutual, and SLO County put together following a judge's order directing the water purveyors to work together to manage the groundwater basin, Los Osos' sole source of drinking water.

That court order came during the height of the Los Osos Sewer Wars, after a Recall Election flipped the board majority to the "Move the Sewer" folks, which in turn halted a community-wide sewer project shortly after it had broken ground in 2005.

That led to millions in fines being imposed by the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the defaulting of a State Revolving Fund loan, bankruptcy for the LOCS D and pretty much utter chaos in the politics of a massive sewer project.

Eventually through an act of the State Legislature control of the sewer project was handed back to the County, which pushed it through and completed it in 2016.

Though not directly sewer related, the basin management played out during this time and resulted in formation of the Basin Management Committee. From that body came the Basin Management Plan that is seeking to better utilize the available ground water and try to lessen seawater intrusion that has been happening mainly along the corridor from Sweet Springs east nearly all the way to Palisades Avenue.

Drilling new, relatively shallow water wells on the east side of town away from the seawater intrusion is a big part of that.



For decades, and continuing today, the town's drinking water has been drawn from the lower aquifer, in wells as much as 800 feet deep.

Until 2016, when the sewer started up, every home and business in town utilized a septic system that discharged the primary-treated effluent into leach fields, essentially taking water from deep down, running it through homes and businesses and disposing of it — partially treated — into the upper aquifer via the leach fields.

So, while seawater has been intruding into the lower basin, the thinking is to tap the upper basin to lessen the pumping from below.

Also, the LOCS D is in the process of potentially snaking a pipeline down South Bay Boulevard to Hwy 1 and connecting with the Chorro Valley Pipeline that delivers fully treated drinking water from the State Water Project to Morro Bay.

At this time, the LOCS D is looking at bringing 200-acre feet a year to supplement the groundwater and further lessen pumping the over drafted basin.

County Buys Paso Building for Mental Health Crisis Center



This office building in Paso Robles is being purchased by SLO County to establish an in-patient mental health crisis facility for adults and children.

By Neil Farrell

County Supervisors have taken a giant leap towards establishing its first mental health care facility for adults and children, acquiring a 3-story building in Paso Robles.

In a project that began in November 2024 with the approval to seek grant funding from the State's Prop. 1, this latest step was to approve acceptance of a \$21.63 million grant from the Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program (BHCIP) and enter into a Program Funding Agreement with Advocates for Human Potential, Inc., according to a staff report from County Behavioral Health Department.

The grant requires a matching amount of \$2.16M, which the County is paying for with \$1.62M out of the Opioid Settlement Funds, and \$540,000 in savings from the Mental Health Services Act. Both are 1-time sources of

monies.

The Community was lucky to have been chosen for the competitive grant program. "The State received 294 BHCIP Round 1: Launch Ready grant applications totaling over \$8 billion," the report said. "In May 2025, the State conditionally awarded approximately \$3.3 billion to 124 projects statewide."

The grant money will allow the County to purchase a 3-story former Community Health Centers of the Central Coast medical office building located next to the Post Office in Downtown Paso (416 Spring St.). The County also has a Behavioral Health outpatient office in the same area.

Community Health Centers agreed to sell the building to the County for more than \$6.8M. The property is already marked as "Sold" on various real estate websites.

The County expects the sale to be completed by the end of March. That will start up the extensive renovations that are expected to be finished sometime during the 2028/29 fiscal year. The grant monies must be spent within five years or before June 30, 2030, so there should be plenty of wiggle room on the timeline.

The County intends to create a 16-bed psychiatric health facility — 12 beds for adults and four for children, the report said.

It will also build an eight-bed adult crisis residential treatment program and a two-bed children and youth "crisis residential treatment program, with space to expand to add two additional beds (four total beds) if fiscally sustainable."

Readers might think that doesn't sound like much, given the extent of the much-publicized mental health crisis happening everywhere, but compared to what the County has now, it's a big improvement.

"Currently," the report explained, "both youth and adults from San Luis Obispo County are sent out of county each year for behavioral health treatment due to the lack of local facilities and treatment."

"There are no youth behavioral health crisis treatment beds in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties, and there is only one 16-bed inpatient psychiatric health facility in San Luis Obispo County. The proposed behavioral health treatment facility would enable more individuals to receive care locally rather than out of county."

The building sits on 0.89 acres and covers some 21,039 square feet off-street with parking.

"The property is walkable to many services, public transit, adjacent to the Post Office, the County Department of Social Services, and a Health Agency building providing Behavioral Health outpatient and Public Health services. The property historically has been a healthcare facility."

The big grant should pay for everything they need. "In addition to acquisition," the report said, "the BHCIP grant will cover construction design drawings and permitting, interior demolition and renovation of a 3-story building to become a behavioral health treatment facility, furniture, fixtures, and equipment, project management and oversight by County Public Works, site work to meet accessibility requirements, and post-construction commissioning."

County staff will now get to work on a Request for

Crisis Center Continued on page 6

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County to Get Emergency Response Trailer from COVID Trailer Sales

County Office of Emergency Services is buying a new emergency response trailer after getting rid of travel trailers intended to help the homeless during the COVID pandemic.

According to a report from OES' Scott Milner, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services gave the County 14 travel trailers in April 2020.

The travel trailers were "to be used in response to the emergency, specifically to address homeless needs in the community during the proclaimed emergency," Milner said. "The State transferred the trailer titles to the County."

County Supervisors didn't formally accept the trailers until last June and then declared some of them to be "surplus."

"Five of the trailers," Milner said, "were donated to non-profits, three are being utilized by Public Works, one is being utilized by the Sheriff's Office, and one is being utilized by OES for the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES). The remainder of the trailers [four] were sold at public auction."

Supervisors had also approved OES using the money from the sale of the trailers to buy itself a trailer that would be specifically built with features and gear OES needs to respond to emergencies, a so-called "field response trailer."

OES and the County Purchasing Department worked together to order the trailer and Milner had to return to Supervisors to adjust the budgets to first reflect the money from the sales and then to properly allocate money to the buying of the new response trailer.

The new emergency trailer is costing some \$48,000, which Milner said is enough to purchase it outright. He didn't say if that expends all of the money from the travel trailer auction sales, but any leftover money would remain in the County OES' reserve fund.

Morro Bay, SLO Teens Arrested in Arizona

Two teenagers from San Luis Obispo County were arrested in Scottsdale, Ariz., accused of taking several people hostage in what authorities have described as a, attempted home invasion robbery.

According to news reports police responded to a 9-1-1 call at 10:44 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 1 at a home in Scottsdale.

Officers arrived to find an alleged home invasion robbery in progress, with one suspect struggling with a male resident and a woman screaming for help.

The two suspects reportedly fled out the back door when officers arrived and drove away but were soon caught after they turned down a dead-end street at a local strip mall, and were arrested.

According to reports, police said the two juvenile suspects allegedly posed as delivery service employees. They reportedly forced their way into the home with three people inside at the time.

Scottsdale police said the suspects restrained two of the victims in the home and the third victim hid in the residence.

According to one report, police are planning to charge the pair as adults and charges include suspicion of kidnapping, burglary, criminal impersonation, disorderly conduct, felony flight and three counts of aggravated assault.

The two were identified as Skylar LaPaille, 16 of Morro Bay and Jackson Sullivan, 17 of San Luis Obispo.

Crisis Center From page 5

Qualifications/Proposals for design and construction services, the report said.

Over the next two years they anticipate awarding the contracts for design and construction, obtaining permits and starting construction.

Then they must select program operators and "obtain State approvals for operations," with the target completion date sometime in FY 2028/29.

FUN FACT:



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Estero Bay New Briefs

By Theresa-Maria Wilson

Helping Seniors Eat Nutritiously

As housing and healthcare costs climb, poverty among older Americans has surged to 15 percent — the only age group to see an increase, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. In San Luis Obispo County, where seniors make up 28 percent of the population, hunger is becoming a visible and growing reality for our older neighbors, according to the SLO County Food Bank.

Barriers such as social isolation, transportation hurdles, and technology gaps prevent many older neighbors from accessing help. This lack of consistent access to nourishment increases the risk of malnutrition, chronic illness, and mental health challenges for seniors.

The SLO Food Bank has programs specifically tailored to meet their nutritional needs. Through their Senior Home Delivery Program, groceries are brought directly to homebound seniors in partnership with Ride-On Transportation. Additionally, monthly Seniors' Farmers' Markets provide free, fresh produce to low-income seniors at local housing complexes and mobile home parks. The SLO Food Bank's CalFresh Outreach team also helps educate seniors about CalFresh and the application process to sign up for benefits.

"Seniors in our community are having to make impossible choices every day," said Molly Kern, CEO of the SLO Food Bank. "We are hearing from older neighbors who are struggling to cover their rent or mortgage, skipping meals just to make ends meet, or losing their entire food budget to a single unexpected medical bill."

Any senior experiencing food insecurity is encouraged to contact SLO Food Bank at 805-238-4664 or visit findfoodslo.org to be connected to resources and support near them.

Feb. 28 Deadline for \$300,000 in Scholarships

February 28 is the deadline to apply for Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E) scholarship applications for college-bound high schoolers as well as current college and continuing education students with a primary residence in PG&E's service area in Northern and Central California.

More than \$300,000 is available through scholarships created and funded by PG&E's 11 employee resource groups (ERGs) and two engineering network groups (ENGs). "These groups help advance a culture at PG&E where all coworkers are valued, included and supported. The funds are raised entirely through coworker donations, coworker fundraising events and the company's coworker giving program." Said PG&E representatives in a news release.

These scholarships are awarded annually to help offset the cost of higher education. ERG and ENG scholarship winners will each receive awards ranging from \$1,000 to \$6,000 for exemplary scholastic achievement and community leadership.

Cat Noir CC

The Other Dwarf

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Once upon a time in a land far away, there lived a princess who had a gaggle of small gods that followed her everywhere. She also had an evil stepmother. (What is a fairytale without holding women to extremes of beauty yet blaming them for everything?)

The evil one had a gadget designed to make life easier by keeping track of the important stuff. Every day she said, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"

Day after day, the mirror replied "Thou, O Queen, art the fairest of all."

"HELLO," a little spark plug of a dwarf named Virgil yelled. "Have ya seen me?"

The queen gasped at the nerve of the little one while the mirror piped in, "You, my queen, are fair; it's true. But that Sultry, Sexy, Snarky, Sleepy cat is so much hotter than you."

Just then, the princess strolled in eating an apple. Her seven closest furry dwarves spotted the Virgil; a lot of hissing and slapping ensued. The oblivious princess chewed away and suddenly dropped dead.

When he spotted a sunspot, Virgil leapt on the departed. He yawned in her face creating a glow of green gas. All the dwarfs and the evil queen waited for the princess to come back to life. They waited, casting glances at Virgil who was grooming his parts.

"Dude, save her. This is the way it is done," said a talking bird.

PG&E ERG and ENG scholarship information, including criteria and applications, is available at pge.com.

Since 1989, PG&E's ERGs and ENG's have awarded more than \$6 million in scholarships to thousands of recipients. More than 6,500 of PG&E's 28,000 coworkers belong to ERGs and ENG's. Each group is open to all coworkers and helps further the company's commitment to serving its hometowns and increasing coworker engagement.

Besides the ERG and ENG scholarships, the Pacific Service Employees Association, a nonprofit mutual benefit organization serving PG&E coworkers and retirees, also provides scholarships for dependents of company coworkers. In addition, The PG&E Corporation Foundation provides STEM scholarships through its Better Together STEM scholarships program.

New Planning Tool to Strengthen Urban Wildfire Mitigation

A new guidebook to improve wildfire mitigation work in urban areas, developed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Cal Poly's Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Fire Institute, is now available. It provides step-by-step guidance to construct a policy driven scorecard focused on strengthening mitigation plans and actions.

The two-year effort to develop the tool, called the Plan Integration for Resilience Scorecard for Wildfire, was done in partnership with Texas A&M and is now available to all community planners, emergency managers and other administrators at no cost.

As more frequent and severe wildfire and urban fire events are increasing losses of life, property, habitat and ecosystems in California, the United States and across the world, the Cal Poly WUI Fire Institute in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences is working on solutions through innovative research, training and education to create safer and more fire resilient communities in California and the West.

Researchers and students from multiple colleges and disciplines tailored a technique used in the eastern U.S. for flood mitigation for wildfire mitigation. The unique approach integrates with municipal spatial mapping tools that provide key data points that can help city leaders better understand the risks. The research was funded by a grant awarded to the WUI Fire Institute by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

The Scorecard for Wildfire provides an organized, vetted database of the community's wildfire-risk-affecting policies from across the network of local plans, scored according to their likely effects and their geographic focus. Along with associated maps, derived from the scorecard results, this organization and novel perspective allow local staff to visually analyze areas in their community where policy guidance conflicts, and places that may require greater focus on wildfire resilience.

Visit the WUI Fire Institute website at fire.calpoly.edu for information on how to get the guide.

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

"What the hell," said a deer who just happened to wander in. A teapot started singing, and everyone yelled. "Wrong house, try the castle."

Due to lack of space, we fast forward this story.

AND, Virgil lived happily ever after. The princess had a proper burial, without a strange prince into necrophilia fawning all over her glass coffin, and the evil queen opened an apple cider factory.



Follow Cat Noir CC on Facebook and Instagram.

Community

Learn How To Keep Your Home Firesafe



By Keith Pendleton

The Cambria Focus Group for FiresafeSLO will host a board meeting Tuesday, February 24, to schedule 2026 public information presentations according. The meeting is scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church, 2250 Yorkshire Dr. in Cambria.

Surrounded by forests, Cambria seems to be a California epicenter for fire-safe challenges. Many Cambria residents have received notices from their homeowner's insurance providers saying their insurance may be cancelled. Some notices listed changes or improvements that could remedy coverage cancellation.

This writer received such a notice specific to the home roof condition. Put a new roof on the house within six months (a completion-date was listed) and your policy will remain intact. Yes, satellites are monitoring your home! Many other residents were notified that their insurance

company was leaving the California market, and no remedy was possible except to find a new insurer.

Fortunately Cambria is a Fire-Safe community with many resources including a network of San Luis Obispo County firesafe neighborhoods. Last March, FiresafeSLO.org coordinated with the Cambria Community Services District/Cambria Fire Department to hold several neighborhood meetings at the Cambria Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall. Notices were sent out to Cambria neighborhoods letting residents know what timeslot their neighborhood presentation would be. The same presentations are expected to be scheduled this year.

These presentations teach fire-safe information to attendees to allow them to make their homes and properties safer from fire hazard. FiresafeSLO.org website lists much of the information presented and lists brochures and fliers available for more graphic detail. Firesafe Community Certification allows for fire insurance discounts from most area providers.

The basic wildfire program is to remove flammable vegetation from within five feet of the house. There are three safety zones listed in the brochures extending up to 100 feet surrounding the home structures. Another consideration is putting together a go-bag in case of evacuation and to learn evacuation routes for your neighborhood.

San Luis Obispo County Certified Firesafe Communities include: Arroyo Grande/Las Ventanas, Avila Valley, including Baron Canyon, Indian Knob and San Luis Bay Estates, Los Osos/Cabrillo Estates, Cambria, Lake Nacimiento including Oak Shores, Heritage Ranch and Southside Communities, as well as LakeLopez/Ranchita Estates.

Being a Certified Firesafe Community offers insurance discounts for homeowner's fire insurance from a list of companies listed on the firesafeslo.org website. Readers can also check with your insurance agent to see if you get the discount based upon residency in the neighborhoods listed above.

Peppino D'Agostino Plays Coalesce Chapel



Classical guitarist, Peppino D'Agostino, returns to Coalesce Wedding Chapel Friday, Feb. 20. Submitted photo

Classical guitar music is returning to Morro Bay when world-renowned guitarist Peppino D'Agostino plays Coalesce Bookstore Wedding Chapel.

D'Agostino will perform at 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 20 at the Chapel, located at 845 Main St. Tickets are \$25 and available at the bookstore or reserved over the phone at (805) 772-2880. Tickets are cash only; credit cards will be required to reserve in advance and only charged upon no-show. Doors open at 6:30.

Born in Sicily, D'Agostino left Italy over 30-years ago with a dream of "playing with the greatest guitarists." He emerged on the scene in the early 1980s as a leading member of the second wave of the great finger-stylists that helped redefine the instrument in the '90s.

He plays with remarkable technique, and a penchant for open tunings and percussive effects, which are the basis of his unique compositional style that has been inspiring musicians and audiences alike for decades.

Add to that his natural warmth, playfulness, and broad musical tastes and you have the recipe for what he calls "minestrone music." His album "Every Step of the Way," was named one of the Top-3 acoustic guitar albums of all time by readers of Acoustic Guitar Magazine.

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Police Blotter



- **Feb. 1:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at Bottle Liquor in the 900 block of Main. Logs indicated the scofflaw had expired registration and allegedly tried but failed to get away with phony tags, a case of Homey don't play that.
- **Jan. 31:** Police responded to a car crash somewhere in town at 3 p.m. No injuries were reported but the car will never be the same.
- **Jan. 31:** Some poor schmoe ended the year on a low note when he or she was picked up on a bench warrant.
- **Jan. 30:** At 11:38 p.m. police cited some lead foot tearing it up at Morro Rock and cited the dingus for reckless driving.
- **Jan. 30:** Police were called at 7:42 p.m. to a disturbance at Albertson's Market in the 700 block of Quintana Rd. Logs indicated they arrested some annoying flesh monkey causing a hoo-ha-ha. Logs indicated the fellow was allegedly drunk and disorderly, and naturally when they frisked him, they allegedly found suspected illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia and a concealed knife. The repeat customer also had at least two previous convictions for drugs reinforcing the notion that the nail that sticks out gets hammered.
- **Jan. 29:** Police responded to a reported burglary at 2:04 p.m. at an undisclosed location presumably in town. Logs indicated the felonious fellow also allegedly exhibited a deadly weapon not a firearm, listed as a misdemeanor, with the burglary called a felony.
- **Jan. 29:** Police responded to a disturbance at 1:05 p.m. at the Family Partnership Charter School, located at the old Morro Elementary on Monterey. Logs indicated they arrested the source of the nincompoopery and charged him with trespassing, possession of drugs and paraphernalia, and having an open hooch container in public, which explains a lot.
- **Jan. 29:** Police responded to another car crash at 10:21 p.m. but logs didn't say where it happened or if anyone was injured, not exactly a fountain of information.
- **Jan. 27:** Police responded to a disturbance at 9:09 p.m. at Central Coast Glass where they nicked some hoodlum with a bench warrant.
- **Jan. 27:** Police responded at 4:54 p.m. to the Morro Bay Bike Park on Little Morro Creek Road for a reported grand theft. The usual suspects were no doubt rounded up.
- **Jan. 27:** Police responded at 1:48 p.m. to the Morro Strand State Beach Campground at the end of Yerba Buena. Logs indicated they nicked somebody for alleged possession of illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia, another case of arriving on vacation and leaving on probation.
- **Jan. 26:** Police contacted a suspicious subject at 11:24 p.m. who had an out-of-county warrant. He or she was treated to a stay at the County health spa.

- **Jan. 26:** At 11:49 a.m. police took a report of someone falling prey to swindlers and cheated out of over \$400.
- **Jan. 26:** Police pulled over a suspicious vehicle at 12:20 p.m. at Anytime Fitness on Quintana Road. Logs indicated the driver didn't have a license and was cited and sentenced to purgatory at the DMV.
- **Jan. 15:** Police, hunting up disciples of Bacchus, at 10:41 p.m. stopped a suspicious car on Hwy 1 at San Bernardo Creek Road. Logs indicated the driver had allegedly been saying hello to his buddy, Johnnie Walker, and his brothers Black and Red.
- **Jan. 25:** At 1:50 p.m. police roused some Jeremiah Johnson in the 300 block of Surf and cited the slacker for illegally camping in public.
- **Jan. 24:** Police responded at 8:10 p.m. to Hwy 1 and Atascadero Riad, for an apparent hairy crack up car crash, if the skid marks running across the highway can be considered a hint.
- **Jan. 24:** Police were called at 11:16 p.m. to the 2600 block of Ironwood for a reported missing person.
- **Jan. 22:** Police responded at 11 a.m. to a reported vandalism in the 400 block of Main at the Pizza Port. No word on what the graffidiots damaged.
- **Jan. 21:** Police stopped a suspicious vehicle at the highly suspect time of 11:12 p.m. in the 1600 block of Main, the heart of the danger zone. The driver was nicked for suspicion of driving deep in his cups.
- **Jan. 21:** Police responded to the 900 block of Morro

- Bay Blvd. for a reported case of some apparent Nodcock allegedly committing elder abuse causing bodily injury and then resisted arrest and allegedly battered a police officer.
- **Jan. 21:** Police towed off an offensive vehicle with an expired registration in the 900 block of Quintana Rd. The owner is now sentenced to spend eternity at the DMV, while their vehicle suffers the indignity of impoundment.
- **Jan. 20:** Police responded at 8:23 p.m. to a disturbance in the 400 block of Main. Logs indicated some bent fellow was popped for allegedly being drunk and acting dastardly.
- **Jan. 29:** Police responded at 12:51 p.m. to the 100 block of Gilbert where someone said his or her car had suffered the slings and arrows of a crash-n-dash.
- **Jan. 20:** Police responded to a suspicious subject call at 9:30 a.m. in the 700 block of Quintana Rd. Logs indicated they arrested some repeat offender fool for suspicion of possessing drugs at McDonalds, a case of dang boy, there's gotta be a safer place to party.
- **Jan. 19:** Police contacted a suspicious subject at 8:49 p.m. in the 1300 block of Main. Logs indicated the reprobationer had been naughty with a warrant and a pocket full of drugs, so he or she was violated and booked into the hoosegow.
- **Jan. 19:** Police responded at 2:31 p.m. to the 300 block of Java. The residents were boggled 'cause they'd been burgled. Logs indicated someone made off with over \$950 cash making it a felony grand theft and no doubt launching a task force to hunt up the scoundrel.



HISTORICAL SOCIETY of MORRO BAY

The Mysterious Case of the Headless Corpse: Part 1

This is the story of events that occurred in "Morro" in 1867. It is based on original court records – signed statements of witnesses, the jury and the coroner – into the cause of death of a corpse found on the beach in Morro Bay. Part I is a summary of the evidence the jury heard before issuing a verdict: you can form your own opinion. Part II will share the verdict.

In July of 1867 Franklin Riley discovered a body on the beach below his house, which was close to present-day Main Street and Morro Bay Boulevard.

Riley is the acknowledged founder of Morro Bay. In 1867 Riley was living on land that became his official "homestead" in 1872. During the inquest, the coroner referred to Riley's "land" and "property," so it was already seen as his.

The body was unusual: it was missing its head and hands. On July 28, 1867, at 10 a.m. a coroner's inquest into the death was held. The foreman of the nine-member jury was J. H. Hollister a prominent landowner in San Luis Obispo County. The jury reached its verdict later that day after receiving sworn testimony from Riley, his wife Hannah, George Stone, John Bains, and Hollister (both Bains and Hollister were also on the jury, likely a conflict of interest today).

Riley testified the body was that of Sheldon Parsons – a man who lived near him and who had been missing for several months. He recognized the "boots and the pants" on the corpse. Riley and his wife knew Parsons well. He was living on Riley's land (possibly as a boarder), he often ate with the Riley family, and they knew of his comings and goings.

The jury heard conflicting testimony about Parsons'



state of mind and his intentions. Three people saw Parsons on Monday, May 13, 1867, the day before he was last seen: Bains, Hollister, and Riley. Riley and Hannah saw him on Tuesday morning when he had breakfast at the Riley house. Afterward Parsons headed toward his house and Riley spent the morning about a mile down the beach working on a log. When Riley sent his son to check on him because he didn't appear around noon for dinner, Parsons' door was locked and apparently no one was home.

Riley testified that Parsons appeared to be in his right mind but "seemed very discouraged" because he was in debt. He had borrowed money, including approximately \$100 from Riley himself, to buy a reaper and mower that had subsequently broken down. Riley also testified that he told Parsons he could take his time to pay the money back. Bains testified that initially Parsons seemed discouraged, but then he became "livelier" and asked Bains to look for work for him.

Hollister reported that he looked at the damaged reaper, thought it could easily be repaired, and knew a

Headless Corpse Continued on page 21

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Community

Quick Pickle Business for Sale



Andrea Wasko and Meaghan Gilbert when they received the U.S. Small Business Administration's 2019 Small Business Persons of the Year from Representative Salud Carbajal.

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

The owners of the Los Osos based Connoisseur Creations, who are known for the creation of the Quick Pickle Kit, are selling their business.

"Last year was a tough year as I lost my mother, Georgianna, who was one of the founders of our company," Wasko told Estero Bay News. "We utilized her recipes in developing the Quick Pickle Kit as well as our jarred products. We started our plant-based food company in 1996 to celebrate the recipes and memories that have been in my family for over 100 years."

Developed by Andrea Wasko and Meaghan Gilbert utilizing Andrea's mother Georgianna's recipes for dill, bread and butter, and sweet pickles, the kit includes jars, spices, and recipes.

Highlights of the business are listed as turnkey operational on day one, no brick and mortar required, products

can be manufactured anywhere, 18 stock keeping units (SKUs) ready to convert to sales, a broad customer base with growth potential, and lean operations and low overhead.

"Our goal has always been to honor the labor that goes into creating delicious, healthy offerings that families and friends can share," Wasko said. "After spending many years in the medical field, I became passionate about preventative health. I believe that making mindful choices around food can significantly impact our well-being. Our focus has always been on offering great-tasting, sustainable food while honoring the people who grow and prepare it. Healthy eating is, in our view, the best preventative medicine for mindful aging and longevity."

Over the years, Wasko and Gilbert provided work for developmentally disabled adults, donated their time as guest lecturers at a local middle school to share their experience as leaders and entrepreneurs, financially supported First Responder Children's Foundation COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, partnered with The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County for the month of September to donate 10% of sales toward their conservation work in SLO County, and celebrates diversity and the Gala Pride & Diversity Center that supports and empowers people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions to strengthen and united our Central Coast Community among other community service organizations.

"We would like to keep our business local since we provide local jobs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," Wasko said. "Our profits also support local non-profits."

Together, the businessowners received the U.S. Small



Los Osos based Connoisseur Creations, a local business known for the Quick Pickle Kit, is for sale.

Business Administration's 2019 Small Business Persons of the Year as well as are active with Estero Bay Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and support first responders during emergencies.

For more information, contact Andrea Wasko at 408-981-8263 or email andrea.wasko@gmail.com.

Events and Activities

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Get Tickets today. Join the Los Osos Valley Garden Club for a delightful event featuring a traditional afternoon tea with finger sandwiches, homemade scones, sweet treats and a premium selection of teas. Proceeds will fund local community beautification, educational workshops, and sustainable gardening projects in the Los Osos area.

Attendees have the opportunity to participate in a take-home fascinator or boutonniere workshop at 1:30 p.m. or arrive by 2 p.m. to enjoy traditional afternoon tea. Pour a second brew and watch fabulous floral design presentation. All arrangements will be auctioned, and proceeds will benefit the LOVGC general fund.

Tickets are \$50 per person and available until 2/12 at lovgardenclub.org.

Volumes of Pleasure Bookshope staff will host their 21st Chinese New Year celebration, Saturday, February 28 at 3 p.m.

The Cal Poly Lion Dance Team and Band will be out front of Volumes of Pleasure bookshop to bless our community and delight attendees with their performance of this centuries-old Lion Dance ritual.

This year is the Year of the Fire Horse. In Chinese astrology the horse represents freedom, strength, and determination. The element of fire brings energy and passion. This combination gives individuals the opportunity, if they choose to except the challenge, to make this year one of liberation and powerful personal transformation.

Volumes of Pleasure is located at 1016 Los Osos Valley Road, Los Osos. They can be reached at 805-528-5565.

Courageous Citizenship in the 250th Year of America. Now is the time for both our leaders and us, as citizens, to demonstrate courage as we engage in civil discourse during this significant year — the 250th anniversary of the founding of our great American experiment. In this pivotal moment, Braver Angels offers valuable resources to help us

Events Continued on page 11



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Community

The Los Osos/Baywood Park Chamber of Commerce hosted its 2026 Community Awards Dinner, bringing together Chamber members and the community to celebrate outstanding local individuals, businesses, and organizations. The evening was once again led by Master of Ceremonies Leonard Moothart, and the Chamber also introduced its 2026 Board of Directors.

The Citizens of the Year awards were presented to Elizabeth Denny, recognized for her work with multiple community causes and organizations presented by Dean Sullivan, and Margarete Schmidt, honored for her leadership in spearheading the purchase of the Cuesta Inlet, with the award presented by Pandora Nash-Karner.

Additional awards included:

- 2025 New Business of the Year: Beach Hut Deli, presented to Joanne Fritts by last year's winner, Mason Randall of Blueplate

- 2025 Business of the Year: Brightside Pizza, awarded to owners JJ and Ashley Bright by Todd Lavelle, representing the Baywood Inn

- 2025 Nonprofit of the Year: Kiwanis of Bay-Osos, presented by a representative of FEMEF (Friends of El Moro Elfin Forest)

- 2025 Volunteer of the Year: Karen Sweeny, presented by Colleen Vecchetti and Gary J. Freiburg

All award recipients received certificates from local government dignitaries.

Guests enjoyed a delicious BBQ dinner featuring chicken and tri-tip prepared by Kiwanis of Bay-Osos, with desserts generously donated by Carlock's Bakery. Live music was provided by Hip Transplant from the Cuesta College Music Program.

The Chamber thanks the community, sponsors, and volunteers whose continued support makes this annual celebration possible. Photos by Dean Sullivan

Los Osos Community Awards Dinner



The Los Osos/Baywood Park Chamber of Commerce 2026 Board of Directors: President Dean Sullivan, Estero Bay News; Secretary Billy Burke, Los Osos Cares; Director Gary Dove, SBCC; Director Karen Sweeny; Immediate Past President Colleen Vecchetti, Movement for Life; President-Elect Keyna Torres, Los Osos Valley Memorial Park; Director Jim Stanfill, Rotary Club of Los Osos and Treasurer Annie Wahler, Kiwanis of Bay-Osos. Photo by Shari Sullivan



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Community

Events From page 9

become more skilled and comfortable in having conversations across our differences.

Braver Angels, the nation's largest grassroots depolarization movement, has been dedicated to bringing Americans together across political divides since 2017. Their mission centers on equipping citizens with the skills and confidence needed to speak our truths without fear and to listen respectfully. By fostering trust and understanding, Braver Angels encourages us to find common ground and, at times, work together to solve problems in the spirit of traditional American collaboration.

On February 18, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in San Luis Obispo, Braver Angels' CEO, Maury Giles, will speak about the importance of courageous citizenship. Maury has been an involved leader in Braver Angels for many years. As a lifelong Republican from Utah and now CEO, he serves as a courageous conservative leader and ambassador for the movement. Maury brings a lifetime of experience leading mission-driven organizations and is now at the forefront of building capacity for civic engagement through Braver Angels.

The guiding vision of Braver Angels is: "... an America where courageous citizenship is the honored norm." By equipping citizens to have open and respectful conversations, Braver Angels helps us learn to understand different perspectives, build trust, and move forward together as a nation. When we talk and listen to one another, we help America live up to the vision of its founding fathers.

Sign up to hear Maury Giles speak on February 18 in San Luis Obispo. For more details and to register, visit <https://braverangels.org/events/> (look for the February 18th event).

For more information contact Kate Christensen at kchristensen@braverangels.com.



The Cal Poly "Sounds of Groove" Winter Jazz Concert is set for 7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 27, in the Performing Arts Center. The University Jazz Band's set will include Dave Samuels' Latin fusion composition "Rendezvous,"

Jacob Mann's funk-driven piece "Kogi," and Toshiko Akiyoshi's blues shuffle, "Tuning Up." Among the combos' performances will be an arrangement of Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower," "Peace" by Horace Silver, and "Llorarás" by Oscar D'León.

Included in the combos' performances will be an arrangement of Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" by Dan Reagan, Steve Turre and Andy Gonzalez; "Peace" by Girace Silver; and "Llorarás" by Oscar D'León. Jamaal Bap-tiste directs the University Jazz Band, and Dylan Johnson directs the Jazz Combos.

Tickets are available at Pacslo.org for \$17 and \$22 general, \$12 students and Jazz Federation members.

The American Association of University Women, Morro Bay Branch welcomes Mariam Shah to their February meeting to discuss Planned Parenthood's services to local women, including their Women's Clinics. The meeting is Saturday, February 14, beginning at 10 a.m. at Saint Peter's Episcopal Church, 545 Shasta, Morro Bay. They welcome anyone to attend the meetings who is interested in the AAUW mission to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy and education. For membership information please contact Mary Jefferson at mjefferson91@hotmail.com.



Join the Cayucos Land Conservancy for a fun and fascinating presentation on the reptiles and amphibians of California with Dr. Emily Taylor, Professor of Biological Sciences at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, on February 18, from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. in the main hall at Cayucos Landing. No RSVP needed.

Dr. Taylor conducts research with her students in physiology, ecology, and conservation biology, and is the author of the California Herping Guides, a three-book series dedicated to helping people find and appreciate California's snakes, lizards, and amphibians.

Dr. Taylor plans to bring several live, Cal Poly ambassador animals (including snakes and other reptiles) to safely observe.

Learn more at EmilyTaylorScience.com or follow her on social media @snakeymama. Photo by Gregg Segal



The Morro Bay Art Association members' exhibit "A Shift in Perspective" is featured in the main gallery at Art Center Morro Bay, 835 Main St., Feb 19-Mar 30 In the Main Gallery. This is a must for anyone looking to engage with thought-provoking themes that challenge conventional norms and encourage a re-examination of assumptions. The exhibit showcases a range of artistic interpretations that reflect diverse viewpoints, making it a rich tapestry of ideas and expressions. Expect to see an array of innovative techniques across various mediums, including painting, sculpture, photography, and digital art, all designed to push the boundaries of traditional artistic forms.

Visitors are prompted to think critically about their own viewpoints and how these shape their understanding of the world, making the exhibit a source of inspiration and reflection.

There is an artist's reception on Sunday February 22 from 2-4 p.m.

In the Russell Gallery is "Aquarius" the Central Coast Watercolor Society's annual juried exhibit. The Featured 3D artist is Ross Neder with his Blown Glass exhibit. Photo is Kath Reiderman's "Waiting Tables"

The Reboot Speak•Easy Presents thrier 8th annual post-Valentine's Day Storytelling Show, "Love and Other Blunders." Enjoy a curated line-up featuring legendary storytellers Michael Kaplan and Jean Moelter and dynamic new voices sharing true personal stories all about the glorious and flawed ways we love. With storyteller and host

Events Continued on page 12

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Community

Events From page 11

Rocky Ross, plus the crowd favorite “Impromptu Pudding” where five audience members get a chance to share their own 99-second stories. The fun takes place Friday, Feb 20 at the Inn at Morro Bay, 60 State Park Rd. in Morro Bay. Doors open 6:30 p.m. The show is at 7pm. Come early for happy-hour no-host bar and best seating. The event is free, but donations are appreciated. For more info: fb.com/the.reboot4u, the.reboot4u@gmail.co.



The Central Coast Dance Community invites you to an evening of live music and dancing on Saturday, February 28, at the Morro Bay Veterans’ Hall. The event runs from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m..

The evening begins with a dance lesson from 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. led by popular instructor Linda Drake. Following the lesson, the Dylan Johnson Quartet will perform from 6:15 to 8 p.m. Dylan Johnson is a member of the Cuesta College faculty and the director of the Cuesta Jazz Combos. He is a renowned local bassist whose new quartet specializes in music for the ballroom dance community.

In honor of February, attendees are encouraged to wear red. Admission is \$10 and includes both the lesson and the live performance.

The Central Coast Dance Community is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing live music and dance opportunities in Morro Bay. In addition to these monthly Saturday evening dances, the group meets every third Wednesday at the Morro Bay Community Center for a 12 p.m. potluck followed by dancing until 3 p.m..

For more information, go to <https://www.morrobaydances.com/upcoming-events> or contact Linda Shorb at 805-215-6176 or LindaShorbPHM@gmail.com.

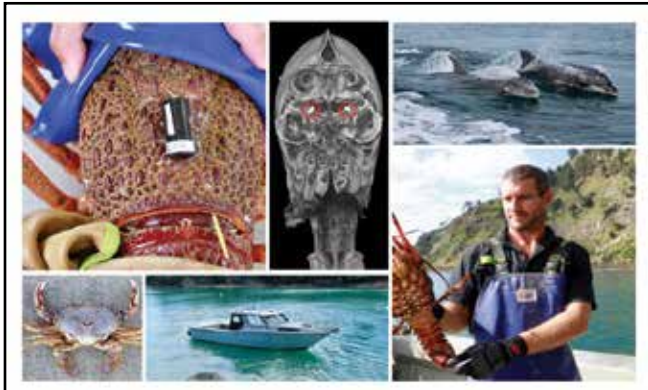
Seven Sisters Folklore Society presents A Midwinters Night with Mama’s Broke on Wednesday, Feb 18 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Milking Parlor at the Octagon Barn, 4400 Octagon Way in San Luis Obispo.

Mama’s Broke is a powerful Canadian folk duo that delivers a compelling performance with heart and raw energy. Although highly influenced by their Canadian roots, Lisa and Amy are based out of nowhere and everywhere.



Their two strong voices blend to create haunting harmonies, while they artfully juggle fiddle, banjo, guitar and mandolin, and incorporate traditional dance and foot percussion into their performance. Their original—and often dark—compositions push the boundaries of tradition and the constraints of genre. Drawing from old-time, Quebecois, blues, punk, Celtic, Balkan and doom metal, they create a soundscape that is both familiar and new.

The driving force behind this band is – and has always been – the commitment to challenge borders between people, places, and traditions while encouraging freedom of expression and community through music. In that vein, there will be an old-time jam session at 6 p.m. before the show at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$25 advance (\$15 Under 18) / \$30 door (\$20 Under 18). Tickets are at Eventbrite.com. For more information, call 831-235-2874 of bohlman.daniel@gmail.com.



Morro Coast Audubon Society’s February Zoom Community Program is “Sounds in the Ocean: From Ventriloquist Lobsters to Dancing Crabs,” presented by Marie Goeritz, Ph.D. on Monday, February 16 at 7 p.m.

For Zoom Information, see the MCAS Events Calendar at <https://www.morrocoastaudubon.org/calendar>. All MCAS Zoom Community Programs are free and open to the public. All ages are welcome. No signup/registration required to attend.

When we think of sounds in the ocean, we think of whales and dolphins, but the underwater soundscape is far richer and more diverse than that. In this presentation, Dr. Marie Goeritz will explore the hidden world of animal-generated sound beneath the waves, with a special focus on invertebrates. From snapping shrimp to crabs and lobsters, many animals produce and respond to sound in ways that shape their behavior and interactions with their environment. Drawing on examples from across the marine world and insights from her own research, Dr. Goeritz will introduce how crustaceans use the ocean’s soundscape as a sensory cue for orientation, how they generate sound, how they detect and respond to it, and how they even use sound in courtship-like dances during mating.

Dr. Goeritz is a neurobiologist and educator whose work explores how animals sense and interact with their environments. She earned her Ph.D. in Zoology and has conducted research at the University of Cologne, Cornell University, Brandeis University, and the University of Auckland. Her research is focused on the nervous systems of crustaceans, linking neurophysiology and anatomy with behavior and ecology. She currently teaches biology at Cuesta College and serves on the Board of Directors of the Morro Coast Audubon Society as lands chair.

Anyone with questions can send them to Wendy McKeeown, community programs chair at CommPrograms@morrocoastaudubon.org.

Orchestra Novo presents Chamber Music in Los Osos at “Michael Nowak and Friends.” Award winning pianist, Robert Thies, returns to the Central Coast in an All-French program featuring music of Debussy, Ravel, and Faure assisted by violinist Brynn Albanese, violist Michael Nowak, and cellist Titus Shanks. It takes place at the Trinity United Methodist Church, 490 Los Osos Valley Rd, Baywood-Los Osos, on February 15, at 3 pm. Tickets are \$39.34 for general admission at <https://my805tix.com/e/thies>. Student tickets at door \$15 with student ID.



Unwind into the weekend with the peace and beauty of the harp in the peace and beauty of SLO’s historic church. Presented by Jennifer Sayre, harpist and former harp instructor at Cal Poly and Cuesta College. She has performed with local classical ensembles and numerous national and international groups.

The free Peace, Beauty, Harp takes place Fridays, February 20–March 20, 4:30–5:30 p.m. St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, corner of Pismo and Nipomo streets, San Luis Obispo.

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Letters To The Editor



Retraction — Letter Alleged False Claims About Renee Good

In Vol #8, Issue #2, Estero Bay News published an opinion piece from John Curtis under the title “Carbajal got Good Wrong,” which included inflammatory language regarding Renee Good, who was fatally shot by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent in Minneapolis on Jan. 07.

We have since determined that the information referenced was inaccurate and unsubstantiated. We try to give voice to all opinions, even those with which we do not agree, but our editorial policy is not to publish any content that is erroneous. We apologize that we were unable to adequately verify the inaccuracies in this letter before publication and for any resulting confusion or misunderstanding.

The letter has been removed from our website, and we retract the claims made therein.

We appreciate the strong response this letter received and are grateful for our engaged, thoughtful community. Below are responses submitted for publication.

*Dean Sullivan, publisher
Theresa-Marie Wilson, editor*

Letter is full of Vitriol and Misinformation

John Curtis’s letter about the shooting death in Minneapolis of Rene Good is so full of vitriol and misinformation that it hardly deserves a response, but I would point out some facts that he passes over. Until an investigation of the shooting is complete, no determination can rightly be made about the culpability of the parties, so it would behoove Curtis to be more cautious about his finger pointing. I would point out that ICE officers are in Minneapolis to arrest immigrant criminals. Rene Good was a US citizen, and the activity she was engaged in, taking videos of ICE operations and warning immigrant residents of Minneapolis that ICE agents were in the area are not criminal activities; they are protected under the US Constitution’s guaranteed right to free speech. The videos that millions have people have seen show her saying “I’m not mad at you.” to the officer who came up to her car window.

These videos of the incident do not show that she had turned the wheel of her car toward the officer near the front of the car, but that she had turned the wheel away from that officer. And if the officer had been following ac-

cepted police practice, he would not have placed himself in the left front of the vehicle anyway. The videos do not show that the car hit the officer, they show the officer walking with no limp or incapacity down the street after the incident. They show that one of the officer’s shots came from the left front, going through the lower left windshield. The other two were from the side of the car, going through the driver-side window, so the officer was clearly not in harm’s way when he fired those two shots. If his life was not in danger, then he had no reason to take any of those shots. A proper investigation will determine whether these observations are accurate. Until then, Curtis should go back to living in his right-wing cesspool.

*Charles Peterson
Los Osos*

Truth Wins in Renee Good Case

Hello! I love Estero Bay News and I’m writing to you hoping that you will print a correction to misstatements in Mr. Curtis’s letter declaring that Renee Good, whom an ICE agent fatally shot in early January 2026, was a criminal. This is the first I had heard that charge, so I searched on the Snopes’s website to see what they had to say about it. (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/renee-good-criminal-record/>) The story states: “Searches of criminal record databases in Colorado, Missouri and Minnesota — states where Good had reportedly lived — for Renee Good, Renee Sheppard and Renee Macklin (Good’s name during marriages to her former husbands) uncovered no records matching the screenshot circulating online.

“Given the above, the criminal record could not have belonged to Good; therefore, we concluded that social media users miscaptioned the screenshot. It was not clear where the criminal record screenshot originated from or whether it belonged to a real person who shared a name but not a birthdate with Good.”

Although Mr. Curtis is entitled to his opinion, I don’t believe he is entitled to make inflammatory incorrect statements pass by unchallenged by the truth.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,

*Kim Ramos
Morro Bay*

Demanding a Retraction

I am writing to demand a full retraction of the defamatory letter to the editor published in your recent edition, which falsely accused Renee Nicole Good of “allegedly abusing two of her children” involving burning them with cigarettes. This baseless claim is entirely untrue, as confirmed by fact-checks and public records showing no such criminal history or incidents.

Such accusations are libelous per se, damaging Ms. Good’s reputation in our community without any factual basis. Your paper republished this falsehood, exposing both you and the writer, John Curtis of Los Osos, to potential liability under California defamation law.

I request that you immediately publish a prominent retraction on the front page or letters section, stating clearly

that the allegations against Renee Good are false, apologizing for the error, and clarifying that no evidence supports them. Per California Civil Code § 48a, this must occur within 20 days of my notice to limit your liability.

*Bill Alpert
Morro Bay*

Blatant Lies

“Carbajal got Good Wrong” perpetuates blatant lies about the character of the murder victim, Renee Good.

Responsible publications issue public responses and/or apologies for repeating such spurious claims, for not performing a modicum of basic fact checking for such inflammatory allegations, PRIOR to publishing such material.

*David Drenick
Morro Bay*

Truth Should have been Included

Allowing a letter to the editor in the January the 29th to February the 11th, 2026 edition in the Estero Bay News to be published without the truth attached to the rants was highly irresponsible and very libelous.

John Curtis’ letter repeated false information about a murdered USA citizen in the streets of our country. Allowing all of the mis and disinformation to be published without fact checking would be the responsibility of your publication. Please, I ask you to do your own fact checking and then if you’re satisfied publish a retraction or a correction to this letter by John Curtis. Allowing this misinformation to stay as is, just fans the division we have in our country, and has to be addressed when it is spotted and brought to light.

*Nancy Pickering
San Luis Obispo*

Letter is Inaccurate

Regarding Mr. John Curtis’ editorial opinion, after reviewing factual information regarding Ms. Good’s background information and the accurate analysis of the incident that led to her death, I find Mr. Curtis’ attempt to vilify this woman and Representative Carbajal both bigoted and disgusting. I encourage anyone who is on the fence regarding this tragic incident to do your own research and form your own opinions.

Mr. Curtis’ screed is evidence of the bigotry and close-mindedness that has infected 30% of our population.

I’m thankful that he is not one of my neighbors.

*Tom Wilker
Los Osos*

Letter Highly Irresponsible

Find your publishing of John Curtis’ letter to the editor in the January 29 - February 11, 2026, edition of Estero Bay News to be highly irresponsible. Mr. Curtis lies in making

Letter Continued on page 14

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Community

Letters From page 13

incendiary comments about the late Renee Good in his letter, to wit: "You seem to conveniently forget that Ms. Good was a criminal, now a dead criminal, for allegedly abusing two of her children, by burning them with cigarettes..."

Mr. Curtis repeated misinformation about Renee Good that showed up on social media following her death. News outlets and fact-checkers from multiple outlets have rated these claims as false, noting that the "criminal records" being circulated about Renee Good were fabricated.

I appreciate you wanting to provide your readers with an outlet to publish their opinions. However, I believe you have a responsibility to all your readers to not publish obvious lies intended to smear other people, living or dead.

Paul Zive
Morro Bay

Water From Where?

I wish Neil had explained how the Cayucos treatment plant "gives the town drinking water." (Estero Bay News Vol #8, Issue #2 "County Extends Water Plant Agreement.") He mentions a "reservoir," the wells — is there an injection process from the treatment plant? After which water is drawn from the ground and sent for further treatment before delivery to households? It's not a toilet-to-tap process, is it? One very tight paragraph would resolve the basic technical questions for your readers.

Jeff Wheelwright
Morro Bay

Vaccine and Autism

I do believe that my Asperger's Autism was caused by a vaccine at the age of 3-years-old and later diagnosed in late Spring of 2010, regardless of what Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said as our health secretary. As a result of having that vaccine, the vaccine overwhelmed my nervous system resulting in insomnia, in which I have to be on medications to treat the symptoms of Autism. I also have been bullied when I was a teenager, because boys used to make fun of me.

In closing I have found healing to deal with my Autism, in long term mental health help this time.

Scott C. Presnal
Morro Bay

Letter 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.

The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the newspaper, its staff, or its publisher.

Email letters to editor@esterobaynews.com.

Obituaries

David Michael McDonald 1954 - 2026



David Michael McDonald, age 72, passed away peacefully at his home in Los Osos on January 7, 2026.

David was born and raised in Los Angeles to Richard and Stella McDonald, both of whom preceded him in death, along with his brother Bob. In the 1970s, he made his way to the Central Coast, where he built a life deeply connected to nature and community.

A tree surgeon and arborist by trade, David spent his working years caring for trees and the land he loved. In retirement, he continued that work in his own way, cutting and selling firewood. He was most alive when camping, fishing, gazing at the stars, and spending time in the woods. He loved a good BBQ cookout, bringing people together with food, conversation, and music.

David had an endlessly curious mind and was known by many as a "human encyclopedia." He loved studying encyclopedias and the Bible, could speak thoughtfully on almost any subject, and took genuine joy in learning. Several friends described him as one of their best friends, a testament to how deeply he connected with people. He loved animals, appreciated all genres of music, and lived a "waste not, want not" life, saving and reusing what he could with care and intention.

A devoted Jehovah's Witness for most of his adult life, David's faith guided how he lived, how he treated others, and how he viewed the world. His spiritual beliefs, love of learning, and deep reflection shaped the thoughtful, compassionate person so many knew him to be.

His home reflected who he was: filled with nature imagery, meaningful keepsakes, and reminders of his mother Stella's warmth and personality. David had a big heart and quietly helped many people over the years, often opening his home to those in need.

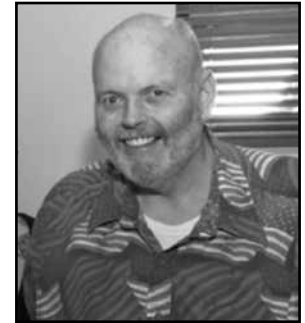
David is survived by his children, Sophia McDonald and Paul LaTorella, their partners, Chip Laugharn and Kristina Kolkowski; and his grandchildren Jack Laugharn, Calvin LaTorella, and Eli Kolkowski. He is also survived by his brothers Ron and Glen McDonald, and many nieces, nephews, extended family members, and friends.

In the weeks leading up to his passing, David was lovingly cared for by his daughter Sophia and former wife Christine McDonald-Weiss, who were by his bedside every day. In his final hours, he was surrounded by his children and their families, along with Christine and her brother Andre LaTorella.

A Celebration of Life will be held on February 21 at the Los Osos Community Center, beginning at 12 p.m., with food, drinks, and live music to honor and celebrate David's life. All are welcome. Food and drinks will be provided while available. A memorial service will be held earlier that day at 10:30 a.m. at the Morro Bay Kingdom Hall.

David will be remembered for his generous heart, curious mind, love of the outdoors, and the many lives he touched.

Joseph Richard Grimm 1960 - 2025



Joe was born on April 29, 1960 and passed away on December 30, 2025. He was born in San Diego, California to Deanna Bennett Flanagan, who preceded him in death.

Joe is survived by his wife, Cheri Reed Grimm, and his daughter, Christina Marie Grimm.

Joe served in the United States Army from April 1979 to April 1982. He served honorably as a welder and helicopter mechanic. Following that, he got his real estate license and became a property manager. Joe, Cheri, and Christina moved from San Diego to Los Osos at which time Joe became a truck driver for several years. When he retired from driving trucks, he became the owner/operator of Active Care In-Home Services, an agency providing in-home care to the elderly and others needing assistance. He retired from that after several years of providing service to people in need.

When not at work, he volunteered in his community through the local Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis Club, and coached softball for his daughter's teams. Joe believed very strongly in making sure that everything he was involved in, he did to the best of his ability, for the benefit of those around him.

In March 2024, Joe, Cheri, and Christina moved from

Community

Los Osos to Mexia, Texas, where they bought a small ranch and began operating the Working Draft Ranch. Joe's time was spent supporting Christina's efforts to rescue, rehabilitate, and rehome or provide sanctuary for everything from pigs to goats to sheep – but mostly draft horses. His favorite activity was being on the road with Christina, hauling animals in her horse trailer from and to the Working Draft Ranch.

Joe was a kind and loving man who loved and supported his family in the most amazing manner, giving of himself daily to help them have the life they all wanted. We will miss him.

Mary Jean Munro 1929 - 2025



Mary Jean Munro nee McNeil was born in Santa Maria in 1929 to Jeanette and Fred "Fritz" McNeil, whose families homesteaded in Arroyo Grande and Pozo some 50 years earlier. Thus Mary Jean grew up (childhood in Arroyo Grande) with beloved grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins on both sides of Cuesta Grade.

Her father called her "Little Mary Sunshine." She graduated from SLO High School in 1947. On Leap Year's Day, 1948, she married Cal Poly agriculture student and US Navy veteran Alexander "Sandy" Munro, who'd fallen in love with the gorgeous green-eyed redhead at a dance.

For the next 64 years, he would call her "Red" and together they'd smoke many dance floors. After college,

Sandy managed various small cattle ranches; she had their first son in late 1948, twin boys within the next year, and two years later, another boy.

By the early 1950s, they lived on a ranch in the mountains behind Hearst Castle. The drafty old home had no electricity and lots of termites, yet Mary Jean loved her soaring ocean view, gas-powered washing machine, and miles of clothesline for diapers.

In 1957, she had a baby girl. In 1959, the family moved into Cambria, where Sandy opened Sandy's Fountain & Grill. It prospered well. Mary Jean worked by his side and made the tiny cafe's signature pies. Sandy, however, though keeping ties with ranch friends, decided to switch from horses to boats as a sea-going cowboy. They sold the Grill and in 1963, he apprenticed with veteran fishermen and embraced a long, profitable career in commercial fishing, with Mary Jean's full support. They moved to Morro Bay in 1964.

In 1969, Sandy brought home a young deck hand from Chile who needed an American sponsor so he could attend Cal Poly. The adoption "took" and from that point on, Mary Jean had another son (and Cal Poly a new student). She was a superb cook who always had plenty for big appetites and extra guests. At her huge, crowded dinner table, mealtime conversation and laughter went for hours.

She had many talents. In her life, she worked as a full-time newspaper reporter (The Morro Bay Sun, mid 1960s), a skilled executive secretary for several San Luis businesses, and pursued an English degree from Cal Poly. She and Sandy became international travelers, briefly living in Pago Pago (American Samoa) for a fishing project, and visiting Europe, South America, and China. Upon retirement, they sold their Morro Bay home, bought a fifth-wheel trailer, and spent five years exploring the United States before re-settling in Atascadero, and later Arroyo Grande. Ultimately, Mary Jean came to accept the Central Coast as one of the most beautiful places in the world. Her perspective was tinted by impressions of days long gone as told to her by local old-timers.

Under the name M.J. Munro, she wrote three books, authentic-romantic chronicles of both ranch and fishing

lives of the Central Coast's past inhabitants: "O'Halloran Land" (2001), "Tracks on the Big Sur" (2003), and "Porpoise in Quicksilver" (2015). She died Nov. 15, 2025, three months shy of her 97th birthday, attended by loving friends and family at Casa de Flores in Morro Bay. She was preceded in death by husband Sandy (2012), foster son Jaime Lopez-Balbontin (2016), son James "Jimmy" Munro (2017), and daughter-in-law Kathy (2021). She is survived by sons Tam, Pete, and Don, daughter Jan, son-in-law Steve, daughters-in-law Julie and Rosann, her brother Fred, and many cousins, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Her memorial will be 2 - 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 28, at her cousin's home at 535 Mehlschau Rd. in Nipomo. Those who knew and loved her, bring food to share if you can and join us in celebrating a life well and fully lived.

Takin' Care of BUSINESS

By Theresa-Marie Wilson

Morro Bay Chamber's Breakfast on the Bay Returns

The Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce is kicking off 2026 with its first Breakfast on the Bay on Wednesday, February 18, from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center.

"This engaging morning event will center on the theme 'The Road Ahead,' bringing together local business owners, community members, and civic leaders to connect and learn about what lies ahead for Morro Bay," the Chamber said.

Attendees will have the opportunity to meet the Chamber's new Chief Executive Officer, Tina Clark, and welcome John Craig, Morro Bay's new city manager, as they share their visions and priorities for the year ahead."

The program will also feature an update from Michael Wambolt of Visit Morro Bay, who will discuss Highway 1 reopening promotion efforts and what they mean for the community. "Breakfast on the Bay brings the business community together each month for timely updates, meaningful connections, and thoughtful discussion," said Chamber CEO Tina Clark. "We encourage our members and the broader community to join us, connect with one another, and stay informed with what's happening in Morro Bay."

Tickets are at bit.ly/3O1SFSf

For more information, visit bit.ly/4ceKxb5 or call (805) 772-4467.

Takin' Care of Business Continued on page 18

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News

Support For Diablo From page 1

When the County and school district cried foul, another deal was struck wherein PG&E paid tens of millions to the County to disperse to the other agencies to make up for the lost tax revenues.

But in 2022, with the State experiencing brown outs in the summer months when electricity demand is highest, the State Legislature asked PG&E to remain open an additional five years (to 2030). That's how long it was estimated it would take to reliably replace the 2,200 megawatts of energy the plant produces with renewable, carbon emissions-free sources like wind and solar.

PG&E agreed, and sought a five-year license extension from the NRC, but was told the agency would only grant a 20-year extension.

Meanwhile, the depreciation went forward and PG&E's Unitary Taxes dropped considerably, depriving the local agencies — especially SLO County and the San Luis Coastal Unified School District — of millions in annual revenues.

According to the County, "Prior to the 2016/17 decommissioning efforts, the County, local cities, schools and special districts received approximately \$21 million annually in unitary taxes attributable to Diablo Canyon Power Plant (DCPP). Unitary tax receipts have since been reduced to \$8M as the assessed value of the plant has declined pending its planned closure.

"The renewed extension of operations of the DCPP will require significant new investment, which under unmodified unitary tax regulations, would increase the taxable plant value and return essential unitary taxes to the region."

With PG&E now well into the re-licensing process for that 20-year permit, the agencies are seeking to restart the money flow now that the one-time payments have dried up and they face tight budgets.

"Legislation enacted to extend the operations," the County report said, "includes provisions to exempt the new investment in DCPP from taxable value, preventing the restoration of unitary tax revenues to the region."

The County asked the Legislature to find some other revenue replacement, if the Unitary Taxes can't be restored.

"If restoring the pre-decommissioning unitary tax treatment proves infeasible," the County's letter reads, "we request alternate financial mitigations to the County and local jurisdictions impacted by exemptions of taxable value on the DCPP during the period of extended operations established by the statutory prohibition against including operating costs in PG&E's rate base."

The County is also looking to conserve the 12,000 acres of land surrounding the plant, which stretches from Montana de Oro State Park around Point Buchon to Avila Beach. Included in that land are coast-

al bluffs, rocky shorelines, coastal plains, oak woodlands and numerous archaeological, Native American sites. It's a beautiful, mostly untouched slice of Coastal California and most everyone supports preserving it and opening it up to passive uses.

"In tandem with extended operations," the letter reads, "we support further conservation and public access frameworks for lands surrounding Diablo Canyon."

"Protecting these coastal and natural resources ensures long term environmental stewardship, while providing opportunities for responsible public access and public benefit. This balanced approach of clean energy, fiscal stability, and environmental conservation serves both local communities and the broader interests of the State."

But doing this could affect the assessed value of the overall property and lessen the tax burden. The County thought of this too.

"In addition, future DCPP allocations related to changes in the values being assessed for portions of the property that may legislatively transition from highest and best use assessed acres of land towards lower value assessed acres of land due to new conservation restrictions should not financially penalize the affected region with lower assessed revenue figures."

The letter "respectfully requests" the Legislature to:

- Support the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's regulatory approval process and establish a state licensing pathway to authorize DCPP to operate for up to 20 additional years.

- Enact legislation restoring historic pre-decommissioning unitary tax treatment for Diablo Canyon Power Plant including land valuation for the duration of its extended operations or provide alternate equivalent financial mitigations.

- Support the California Coastal Commission's land conservation and public access plan for lands surrounding Diablo Canyon, in coordination with appropriate regulatory and conservation agencies.

Supervisors asked other agencies to sign on to the letter and some have already done so, as they too have skin in this game.

The Cayucos Sanitary District voted in January to support the letter. "In the event

of Diablo Canyon's closure, or continued operation of Diablo Canyon with downzoning of surrounding properties due to conservation efforts, the District would likely see tax revenue reductions of approximately \$25,000 per year," reads a staff report from the CSD's Jan. 15 meeting.

In Morro Bay the tax hit is a bit more.

In a Jan. 20 report, new City Manager John Craig reported that the City had gotten \$154,000 in Unitary Taxes from Diablo Canyon for the 2021-22 fiscal year; \$142,000 in 2022-23; \$125,000 in 2023-24; \$115,000 in 2024-25; and, \$103,000 in 2025-26.

The SLO City Council also was asked to sign on to the County's letter, but the Council chose to form an ad hoc committee and send its own letter.

Supporting or opposing a single issue or project didn't jibe with the City's normal legislative policies. The ad hoc committee consisted of Council Members Jan Marx and Michelle Shoresman.

"Council opted not to sign the letter," reads the SLO City Council's staff report, "and instead appointed an ad hoc committee to provide direction to staff on preparing a draft letter aligned with guiding principles and the City's Legislative Platform, and to return to Council for approval at the Feb. 3, 2026 City Council meeting."

"The City's focus has been on ensuring that any continued operation prioritizes public safety, provides appropriate fiscal mitigation for local impacts, and incorporates long-term land conservation planning," the report said.

The draft letter that came out of the ad hoc committee's work, "urges State legislation to:

- Support coastal land conservation and public access planning.

- Restore lost tax revenues for local governments and school districts impacted by continued DCPP operations.

- Ensure public safety, fiscal equity, and long-term planning during the current extension through 2030 and any future operations."

The plant is currently operating under Senate Bill 846, which granted continued operations for 5 more years.

Last June, the NRC declared, after

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completing safety and environmental reviews of the plant, that it was safe to continue operating for another 20 years, though the overall re-licensing process is still ongoing.

And as the County's letter mentions, the Coastal Commission also looked at Diablo Canyon and issued a permit to continue operations that included conservation requirements for the overall property.

Among the pending issues to be resolved is the continued use of seawater for cooling steam at the plant, so-called once-through cooling. The Regional Water Quality Control Board is reportedly looking at that issue.

The cooling system had been a major hurdle for PG&E's efforts at re-licensing, as once-through cooling was supposed to be phased out and ended a decade ago, by orders of the California State Water Resources Control Board.

Switching cooling systems at Diablo Canyon has been estimated to cost over \$1 billion.

It was the use of once-through cooling system that doomed Duke Energy's efforts to replace the Morro Bay Power Plant in the early 2000s.

Duke spent an estimated \$35 million trying to get permits for its replacement project, which was dropped after the SWRCB's once-through cooling order was approved.

Report on ICE

From page plenty of time to rally their troops and let the Sheriff and Supervisors know how they felt about ICE and the Trump Administration's deportation efforts.

What ensued was nearly five hours of public testimony from both sides of the issue, with the vast majority of speakers railing against ICE and criticizing the Sheriff's Department for cooperating at all with ICE.

The official TRUTH Act report is only four pages long and goes into explanations about the various requests the department regularly receives from ICE asking for information and access to jail inmates.

"ICE requests include detainer, notification, transfer, and interview requests," the report explained. "Requests were honored only when they met the legal criteria under California Law."

Government Code Section 7282.5 lays out all the various crimes that give the OK to let ICE in.

The list of laws that qualify someone to be essentially turned over to ICE is lengthy and spelled out over a dozen or more Penal Codes.

But primarily they involve serious or violent felonies, and felonies punishable by imprisonment in State Prison.

The Sheriff's report said, "Releases to ICE occurred only when permitted by State Law, and the Sheriff's Office did not honor 48-hour ICE detainer requests."

ICE agents can also ask to interview people in jail, but the Sheriff said an inmate must give written approval to be

interviewed. The inmate also has the right to refuse to be interviewed.

There is no question about whether the Sheriff's Department is "sharing" information about those it has in custody, because the Sheriff's Department website lists all currently incarcerated people as a matter of public information accessible to anyone over the Internet.

"Release information is updated once a release date is established and is not available for individuals with pending cases that have not yet been adjudicated," the report explained.

So, if ICE wanted that information, it can simply log onto the website and click on the "Jail Information/Who's in Custody" tab on the drop-down menu.

Still, the Sheriff said they do not work with ICE. "The San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office does not enforce federal immigration law, does not conduct deportations, does not request immigration status, and does not conduct immigration sweeps."

The report compared the 2024 TRUTH Act stats with 2025, and the numbers, while relatively small compared to what's been done in larger cities, did not set well with the anti-ICE folks.

In 2024 they recorded a total of 111 ICE requests received. In 2025 that number jumped to 287.

In 2024 none of the 111 requests were complied with, the report said.

In 2025, 204 of the 287 were not complied with, so 83 requests were complied with.

In 2024 they released one inmate to ICE and in 2025 the number jumped to 69.

In 2024, they honored the only U.S. District Court warrant they got and turned that person over to the U.S. Marshall's Office.

In 2025, they got 19 District Court warrants and 15 were turned over to ICE, with four requests still pending.

In 2024, ICE requested to interview four inmates and none were allowed. In 2025 the number jumped up to 11 but again, none were allowed.

The TRUTH Act report lists the things the Sheriff's Department does vs. what they don't do.

They do publicly provide all incarcerated persons release dates via the website; allow Due Process Rights under California Law (SB 54); comply with the State Department of Justice reporting; inform inmates they can refuse to be interviewed by ICE; give an inmate a copy of any ICE requests for them; and they help undocumented victims get U-Visas.

Created in 2000, the U non-immigrant status or U Visa, is for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity.

There's a long list of crimes for which a victim can

apply to Federal authorities for a U Visa.

The U visa doesn't cover all crimes, but it does include domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and felony assault, among others, according to the website Womenslaw.org.

Under the heading "What we DO NOT do," the Sheriff listed enforce Federal Immigration Law; deport anyone; have authority over ICE; ask about immigration status; conduct immigration sweeps; nor hold or detain anyone in jail for extra time, so-called detainers.

The report concludes with, "The Sheriff's Office does not invite or facilitate civil immigration enforcement actions in the community. Our role is to protect the community."

In advance of the forum, District Attorney Dan Dow released a statement seeking to warn protestors that while they have the Right to Protest, they won't be allowed to "cross the line into violence or other criminal conduct. When protest activity becomes unlawful, it may result in arrest and prosecution, just as with any other criminal behavior referred to our office."

D.A. Dow said, "I will always support the rights of people to protest; however, I strongly urge them to do so safely and within the limits of both Federal and California Law. Any behavior that is violent or otherwise criminal will detract from the weight and value of your political speech and may lead to arrest and prosecution."

"We encourage everyone to exercise their rights peacefully, responsibly, and safely. Our office remains committed to upholding the Constitution, protecting public safety, and ensuring equal justice under the law for all."

Despite reassurances that his department was following State Law in its dealings with ICE, speaker after speaker criticized the Sheriff for handing anyone over to ICE, and the oft heard rallying cry "ICE Out," was uttered by many.

There were also numerous speakers who expressed support for the Sheriff's Department and ICE's efforts.

County Supervisors supported ICE opponents and Dist. 2 Supervisor Bruce Gibson made a motion to direct the County to look into passing a local ordinance.

The motion called for County staff to look into giving undocumented immigrants taxpayer monies, channeled through local non-profit groups.

The motion seeks to make the County Jail lobby a private space and barring ICE Agents from "private government spaces."

That aspect seems to try to address a profanity laden confrontation that occurred in December, when anti-ICE protestors stormed into the County Jail lobby and confronted ICE Agents who were inside. A body camera video of the encounter was released on social media in December.

Gibson's motion was to also prohibit commandeering of public spaces and requiring the Sheriff's Department to

Report on ICE Continued on page 23



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Human Trafficking

From page 4

one under-18 juvenile girl.

Among the arrestees is a San Diego man who authorities believe has been conducting human trafficking up and down the state.

According to the District Attorney's Office, which participated in the operation, "Esteban Ceja, 30 of San Diego, was arrested and charged with numerous felony crimes related to sexual trafficking of a victim using force and fear to accomplish the commercial sexual exploitation of the victim.

"Ceja is also charged with two felony counts of pimping and two felony counts of pandering as well as one count of providing false identifying information to law enforcement."

He is reportedly a twice-deported, undocumented immigrant, too.

"A review of the individual's criminal history," the D.A.'s Office said, "reveals that he was twice previously removed from the United States by the Department of Homeland Security in 2018 and 2020."

The D.A. qualified that information by reiterating that Ceja "is legally entitled to the presumption of innocence until they are proven guilty in a court of law by judge, jury, or their plea."

They are attempting to further define just how far his criminality stretches. "There is an ongoing investigation concerning Esteban Ceja and his trafficking activities," the D.A.'s Office said, "that are believed to span from San Diego and the Inland Empire to Northern California and many locations in between."

"Anyone with information about this individual is encouraged to contact San Luis Obispo Crime Stoppers."

Of the five others caught up in this operation, three were caught in SLO County and two in Santa Barbara County. They are:

- Stephan Mueller, 62 of Los Osos, charged with suspicion of meeting with a minor for lewd purposes (PC 288.4(B)) and contact with minor for sexual offense (PC 288.3(A)).

- Ashvir Singh, 22 of San Luis Obispo, suspicion of meeting with a minor for lewd purposes (PC 288.4(B)).

- Gael Pitaabarcá, 25 of Paso Robles meeting with a

minor for lewd purposes.

- Gonzalo Luna-Penafort, 22 of Santa Maria meeting with a minor for lewd purposes (Santa Barbara County case)

- Arturo Deleon, 39 of Santa Maria meeting with a minor for lewd purposes (Santa Barbara County).

- Esteban Ceja, 30 of San Diego Human Trafficking (PC 236.1(B)); Pimping — two counts (PC 266H(A)); Procures another person/prostitution — two counts (PC 266I(A)(1)) PC 266I(A)(1) Procures another person/prostitution; and False Representation to a Peace Officer (PC 148.9(A)).

The Human Trafficking Task Force was formed by District Attorney Dan Dow in 2014, The task force includes investigators from the SLO County Sheriff's Office's Special Operations Unit, Special Victim's Unit, and Major Crimes Unit; DeliverFund; California Highway Patrol's Investigative Services Unit; FBI Santa Maria Field Office; Santa Maria Police Department; SLO County Probation Department; Grover Beach PD; SLO County District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations along with their 3CFL Unit; and the SLO County District Attorney — Christopher G. Money Victim Witness Assistance Center.

This particular operation included officers with the Santa Maria PD.

D.A. Dow commented, "Prostitution demand fuels a lucrative market that traffickers exploit with victims — including children — even here."

"Our local anti-trafficking operations target this commercial sex demand to curb daily exploitation of minors and adults. Warning to sex buyers: reconsider, as your actions heighten risks for ~300,000 American children annually. You can and will be prosecuted if caught."

D.A. Dow added "Our partnership with DeliverFund powered our central coast operation's success — disrupting trafficking networks, rescuing victims, and arresting a trafficker and five men communicating with or attempting to meet with juveniles for sexual purposes."

"Most importantly, with their help, we were able to rescue three trafficking victims. DeliverFund's support made our community safer."

Takin' Care of Business From page 15

Frank Lanzone to Retire from KCBX



Frank Lanzone will retire from KCBX after 45 years. Photo courtesy of KCBX

After 45 years of leading KCBX Public Radio, President and General Manager Frank Lanzone announced he will retire. He will continue to serve as executive director of the Live Oak Music Festival.

Lanzone first came to KCBX as general manager in April 1980. Since then, he successfully guided KCBX through many significant transitional periods related to ebbs and flows in federal funding, right up through the present-day elimination of federal funding for public media and the closure of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

During his first year at KCBX, Lanzone increased (and achieved) the fundraising pledge drive goals and continued to cultivate successful, long-standing fundraising events, including a series of big band concerts, an annual public auction at Mission Plaza, an art auction in a private home, and a KCBX afternoon wine tasting, which grew into a four-day event that became known as the KCBX Central Coast Wine Classic, running from 1985 through 2003. In 1989, Lanzone and a small team of dedicated volunteers hosted the first Live Oak Music Festival.

In 1981, Lanzone and Steve Urbani, KCBX co-founder and board chair, oversaw the installation of five translators to serve Cambria, Cayucos, Avila Beach, Shell Beach, Santa Ynez, and Santa Barbara, expanding the reach of KCBX programming to the surrounding communities. Lanzone also grew the station significantly by establishing the KCBX Newsroom in 2014.

"Since joining KCBX in 1980, Frank has built upon our humble beginnings and made the station a strong, success-

ful community asset," said Steve Urbani in a news release. "His ability to establish a news department is a tribute to his management and fiscal abilities. Even more, Frank has become one of my very best friends."

It could be said that Lanzone was destined for career in radio, judging by his interests in technology that were evident as early as age 5 and evolved into a passion when he found the radio and TV broadcast station at the College of San Mateo. "During my college years, I watched my classmates all head for commercial jobs in San Francisco, but I never left public radio," said Lanzone. "In fact, my first job in public radio in 1970 – the same year NPR was incorporated – was made possible by the very first CPB grant available to stations. Today, the satisfaction of being part of an amazing team of people is as strong as it was 45 years ago."

As Lanzone winds down his work at KCBX Central Coast Public Radio, Assistant General Manager Chris McBride steps into the role of president and general manager and continue to guide KCBX through this next phase, with her sights set on the next 50 years and beyond.

Poly's VITA Tax Assistance Program Underway for 2026

January marks the beginning of the 2025 tax filing season. Tax filing for businesses and individuals started Jan. 27 with a deadline of April 15. Trained Cal Poly accounting students will offer free tax help on campus through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program on Saturdays from through March 14 from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the Third floor of the Orfalea College of Business Building (Building 003, next to the Alex G. Spanos Stadium on California Boulevard) on campus.)

The first Cal Poly VITA clinic took place in 1972 and continued off and on through 1992 when it then became an annual event. Since 2005, Orfalea College of Business students have prepared nearly 10,000 returns, assisting about 950 San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara County residents each year. Student volunteers staff on-campus VITA clinics and in Santa Maria, working with the United Way of Northern Santa Barbara County. Each student is IRS-certified to prepare returns using basic forms, such as 1040, 1040A, 1040EZ, 540, 540A, 540EZ, and some supporting forms. Orfalea College of Business faculty and volunteer CPAs review and file the returns.

This year's VITA program is led by faculty members Trisha Daughtrey and Steven Danowitz. The service will also be offered at two off-campus locations in Oceano and Santa Maria from Feb. 7 through March 14.

For more information, to download forms, or to make an appointment, go to orfalea.calpoly.edu/volunteer-income-tax-assistance

Tickets on Sell for State of Downtown SLO

Downtown SLO will hold the 2026 State of Downtown on March 2, marking the return of the event formerly known as the Annual Breakfast, after a four-year hiatus.

The State of Downtown will be hosted at La Esquina Taqueria, 1051 Nipomo Street, San Luis Obispo, where attendees can enjoy cocktails, appetizers, and food while connecting with fellow business and civic leaders.

At the event, Downtown SLO will share highlights from their 2025 Annual Report, showcasing the impact of the organization over the past year, along with upcoming downtown activations and visions for the months ahead.

The event is open to all interested in engaging in meaningful collaboration to explore growth opportunities and solutions to support a thriving downtown San Luis Obispo.

Individual tickets are on sale now at DowntownSLO.com/StateofDowntown. They are \$70 for Downtown SLO members and \$85 for non-members.

Bachelor Pet at Woods



Looking to take home someone to love this Valentine's Day. From February 11 to 15, Woods Humane Society will host a "Bachelor Pet" adoption event, reducing adoption fees for adult dogs and cats to just \$14 (plus license fees for adult dogs). This special Valentine's season event brings adoption fees down from the shelter's typical range of \$65 for senior cats to \$150 for adult dogs.

Inspired by popular reality dating shows, the Bachelor Pet aims to draw attention to the many local dog and cat "contestants" who are waiting at Woods to find their matches.

"We have so many dogs and cats who are eager to bring joy, companionship, and unconditional love to a special person this Valentine's Day season and beyond," said Woods' CEO Emily L'Heureux. "We hope this fun take on reality TV inspires the public to open their hearts to animals in need in the shelter, and that the reduced fees remove barriers to adopting."

Woods currently has 55 adult pets available, ranging from 5 months to 10 years of age, including a diverse mix of breeds from Alaskan Malamute to Pekingese, and everything in between. All adoptable animals have been spayed/neutered, vaccinated, microchipped, licensed, and treated for parasites. Adoptions also include a voluntary 30 days of pet insurance and a free wellness exam at a local vet clinic.

Woods Humane Society is located at 875 Oklahama Ave., San Luis Obispo, CA 93405 and at 2300 Ramona Rd., Atascadero, CA 93422, and is open to the public daily from 12-5 p.m., with adoption hours from 12-4 p.m. For more information about Woods, visit www.WoodsHumane.org or call (805) 543-9316.

Creston Classic Rodeo Donates \$25,000



Creston Classic Rodeo Board Members Jeff Rigby, Donna Giubbini, Linda Rohrer, Jeff Van Nest, C.A.T.C.H. representative Sheila Lyons, Board Members Tom Bordonaro, Chuck Martin, and Bob York.

The Creston Classic Rodeo (CCR), a local non-profit organization dedicated to benefiting the Creston community, donated \$25,000 to two community organiza-

Takin' Care of Business Continued on page 20

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Sports

Results in C.I.T. Tournament

Photos and story by Neil Farrell

The Annual Sam Boyd Memorial California Invitational Tournament saw over 50 high schools from Northern, Southern California, the Central Coast, Central Valley and even one school from Nevada converge on Morro Bay High School for two days of intense grappling action.

When the sweat on the mats was cleared, Oakdale High School was the team winner scoring 243 points. Servite, a private Catholic school in Anaheim was second with 209.5 points and Bakersfield High third with 162.

Fourth Place went to Valencia High of Valencia with 146 points, and Fifth Place went to Clovis East H.S. with 131.

SLO County's Paso Robles High was sixth with 128; Reedley High was seventh with 125.6; and Bullard High from Fresno was eighth with 124.

In ninth place was Redwood High from Larkspur, Calif, with 121.5 points and in Tenth Place was Clovis West with 120.

No Morro Bay wrestlers medaled this year but there were some medalists from San Luis Obispo High, Paso Robles, Cabrillo and Santa Ynez to represent the Central Coast.

Top finishers by weight class were:

- Boys Varsity, 106 pounds: first place went to Aiden Talavera of Reedley who beat second place finisher Kayden Khim of Clovis West, 8-0.

Third was Elham Hashimi of Livermore; fourth was Landon Quirk of Nordhoff; Daniel Serrano of Clovis East was fifth; Aiden Calvert of Franklin was sixth; Rey Villarreal of Peninsula was seventh; and Oakdale's Grant Dixon of Oakdale finished eighth taking the final medal.

- 113 lbs: Uriah Correa of Servite beat Caden Herrera of Bakersfield 16-3 to take the title.

Jaden Chan of Ayala was third; Shawn M. Price of Mission Oaks (Tulare) was fourth; Cristian Bustos of Reedley was fifth; sixth went to Ezekiel Hernandez of Oakdale; seventh to Luis Juarez of Pioneer Valley; and in eighth place was Aiden Medina of Firebaugh.

- 120 lbs: Francisco Hernandez of Bullard beat Caleb Cisneros of Selma 8-1 to win the title.

In Third Place was Oscar Mendoza of Servite; fourth went to Jordan Medrano of Cesar Chavez High (Stockton); fifth was Alex Ramos of Clovis West; sixth was Jeovanni Guerrero of Clovis East; seventh was James Fukuchi of Cerritos; and eighth was Jason Ybarra of Pacifica (Garden Grove).

- 126 lbs: Massimo Ortiz of Servite beat Manuel Gutierrez of Selma, 7-2 to win the crown.

Third Place went to Vincent Peyron of Mission Oaks; fourth to Jayden Olivas of Clovis East; fifth to Aron Guardado of South High (Torrance); sixth was Osiel Perez of Redwood; seventh was Matthew Ramos of Exeter; and eighth was Ezekiel Bayardo of Immanuel (Reedley).

- 132 lbs: Slater Hicks of Valencia pinned second place finisher Johnny Benitez of Redwood in 2:58 (second round).

Third Place went to Johnathan Olmos of San Luis Obispo; fourth to Johna Rusca of Reedley; fifth to Brakstyn Herrera of Sierra Pacific (Hanford); sixth was Dominic Lopez of Hughson; seventh was Emiliano Lopez of Bullard; and eighth was Ace Gibson of Simi Valley.

- 138 lbs: Silas Varner of Bakersfield pinned second place Liam Henson of Mission Oak in 3:03 (second round).

Third Place went to Julian Espinoza of Cerritos fourth was Drake Mello of Paso Robles; fifth to Jimmy Alvarez Jr. of Millikan (Long Beach); sixth to Landon Mason of Hughson; seventh to Aeden Ortega of El Diamante (Visalia); and eighth went to Andrew Wallace of Cabrillo (Lompoc).

- 144 lbs: Daniel Baeza of San Dimas beat second place finisher Xander Fronhofer of Nordhoff 14-10 to win the tournament.

Third Place went to Isaiah Gonzales of South High; fourth to Michael Perez of Firebaugh; fifth to Hunter Artim of Servite; sixth to Garrison Choi of Cerritos; seventh to Curren Lane of Santa Ynez and eighth to Ty Greer of Murrieta Valley (Murrieta Calif.).

- 150 lbs: Vincent Hanna of Servite pinned Evan Payne of Valencia in 3:56 (second round).

Third Place went to Elias Gonzales of Sanger; fourth to Austin Brown of Clovis West fifth to Elias Salloum of Ayala (Chino Hills); sixth to Wyatt Bassett of Bakersfield; seventh to Alex Andre of Simi Valley; and eighth to Zeke Meza of Oakdale.

- 157 lbs: Chris Creason of El Diamante won by technical fall 20-1 over Jesse Meza of Oakdale.

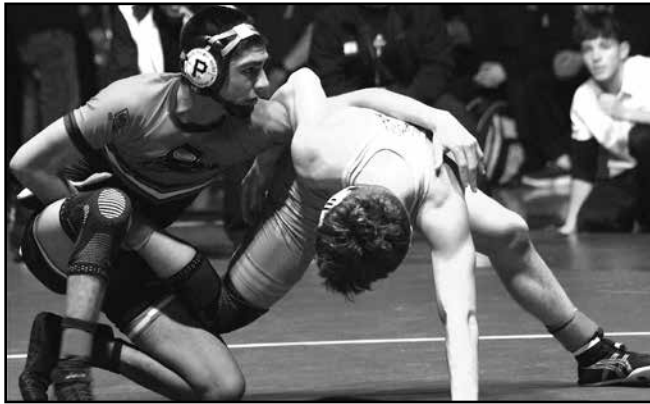
Third Place went to Ray Juarez of Bakersfield fourth to Logan Lopez of Clovis East; fifth to Andre Sedeno of Camarillo; sixth to Cooper Culver of Chico; seventh to Israel Mercado of Oakdale and eighth to Shamar Burnett of Bullard.

- 165 lbs: Carson Melendy of Churchill County in Fallon Nevada pinned Second Place finisher Nathan Paul of Bakersfield Christian in 5:44 (third round).

Third Place went to Mason Eliyiu of Ayala; fourth to



Former Morro Bay High wrestling coach and long-time referee Dan Duclos (center) is flanked by former wrestlers and local kids after being given the first Sam Boyd Award for his contributions to the school wrestling program, the CIT Tournament and the sport.



Massimo Ortiz of Servite wrestles Manuel Gutierrez of Selma in the 126-pound class at the CIT Finals. Ortiz won 7-2 to win the title.



Slater Hicks of Valencia wrestles Johnny Benitez of Redwood in the 132s. Hicks pinned him in the second round to win.



Daniel Baeza of San Dimas wrestles Xander Fronhofer of Nordhoff in the 144 lb class. Baeza won 14-10 to win the tournament.



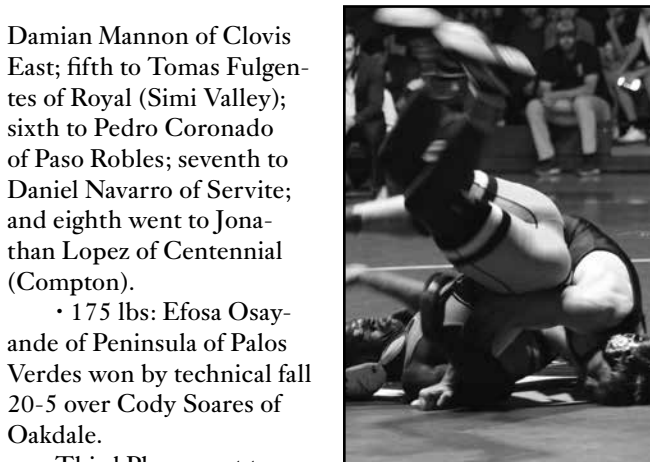
Wes Burford of Oakdale pinned Edwin Hopkins of Westminster in the second round to win at 215 lbs.



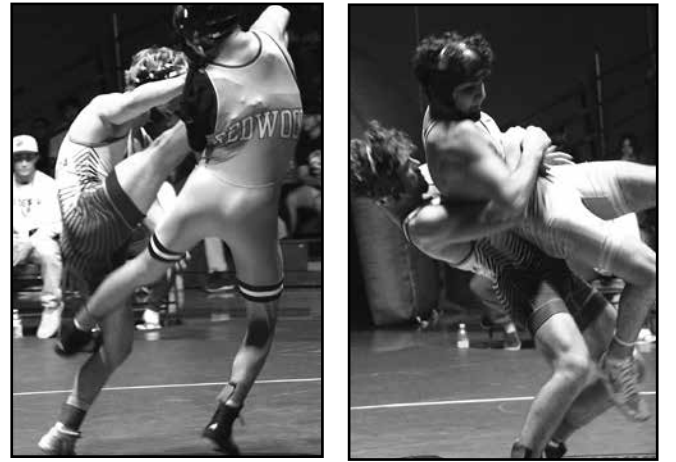
Carson Melendy of Churchill County in Fallon Nevada pinned Nathan Paul of Bakersfield Christian in the third round to win at 165 lbs.



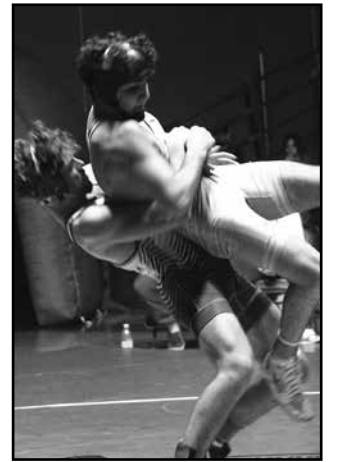
Xander Birakos of Oakdale pinned Ronin Davis of Liberty 16-seconds into the 192-lb match.



Efosa Osayande of Peninsula of Palos Verdes won by technical fall 20-5 over Cody Soares of Oakdale in the 175s.



Slater Hicks of Valencia wrestles Johnny Benitez of Redwood in the 132s. Hicks pinned him in the second round to win.



Vincent Hanna of Servite pinned Evan Payne of Valencia in the second round to win the 150 lb weight class.

Damian Mannon of Clovis East; fifth to Tomas Fulgentes of Royal (Simi Valley); sixth to Pedro Coronado of Paso Robles; seventh to Daniel Navarro of Servite; and eighth went to Jonathan Lopez of Centennial (Compton).

- 175 lbs: Efosa Osayande of Peninsula of Palos Verdes won by technical fall 20-5 over Cody Soares of Oakdale.

Third Place went to Angelo Adame of Matilda Torres (Madera); fourth to Jayden Gonzalez of Shafter; fifth to Conception Salas Jr. of Sanger West; sixth to Alex Rosa of Firebaugh; seventh to Horacio Jacuinde of Bullard; and, eighth went to Jeremiah Galloni Rodriguez of Westminster.

- 190lbs: Xander Birakos of Oakdale pinned Second Place Ronin Davis of Liberty in just 16 seconds in the first round.

Third Place went to Ronan McAllister of Livermore; fourth to Drake Fields of Sanger; fifth to Alejandro Rodriguez of Bakersfield; sixth to Colby Thompson of Chico; seventh to Michael Hernandez of Centennial and, eighth went to Michael Fleurant of Valencia.

CIT Tournament Continued on page 20

FUN FACT:



100% of people who pick up the paper, read the paper

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

Absolution Cellars: A Welcoming Place



Dirk and Tania Neuman, the owners of Absolution Cellars in Morro Bay

By Judy Salamacha

During 2026 this writer's contribution to this column plans to showcase Estero Bay businesses and nonprofit activities that encourage a sense of belonging where all feel valued, respected, and included. These welcoming spaces offer more than friendliness. Whether a local or visitor, everyone deserves a warm, sensory-rich atmosphere that will encourage participation. For example, if you haven't visited lately, drop by Morro Bay's Absolution Cellars owned and operated by Dirk and Tania Neuman. They have expanded their gathering space at 845 Embarcadero.

Winemaker Dirk loves to talk about his wines, their signature artistic labels and Morro Bay. When he was eleven years old his dad took him on a cross-country road trip from Minneapolis to San Diego to Seattle and home again. "I remembered the ROCK!" he exclaims. His enthusiasm was, well, absolutely "absolute."

Fast forward 30-years, he was working in South Florida's corporate real estate marketplace. "I was so busy with work and parenting my two children I wasn't taking my earned time off. Graciously my parents stepped in to help. I was able to plan side trips adjacent to my quarterly work trips." His favorite place to go was always Morro Bay where he'd regularly base his stay while discovering other SLO County and California communities.

"I loved Morro Bay's small coastal town feel even when it was foggy." In 2013 "...with no plan, kids graduated and some consulting to finance his way, he packed up. Confidently, he thought, 'I'll figure it out!'" By 2014 he had connected with winemakers and assisted in some wine making. He was infatuated. He knew he wanted to belong to this supportive industry group of winemakers because those he had met would actually send him to their neighbors to try their wines.

Dirk and Tania have settled on vineyard acreage in Atascadero -- just over the hill from Morro Bay. He continued to feed his winemaking hobby learning the industry by developing relationships with other growers. Once he realized he was ready to build his own business, he didn't want to wait "...2-3 years for the journey it would take -- from picking grapes to having a good red wine that is ready to drink." And Dirk already knew where the best grapes were grown for each varietal he intended to produce so decided to purchase from the growers. He currently sources grapes from 11 growers throughout five Central Coast and Monterey Counties.

As a former marketing professional, Dirk also made some critical decisions. "I realized visitors didn't come to Morro Bay for wine tasting, but I believed once here they would appreciate a place to enjoy and learn about Central Coast wines."

At the time there were two other wineries in Morro Bay as opposed to 150 in the Paso Robles wine area. As luck would have it MCV Wines at 845 Embarcadero was moving to Pasa Robles, which meant Absolution Cellars and Chateau Margine would become neighbors. Dirk also enjoys reminding his patrons his favorite English Rock Band Muse made "Absolution" famous. All seemed destined to come together when he officially opened February 2020 -- except it was 2020!

Dirk recalls, "While the state considered us an essential business and allowed us to produce and sell our product, we could not conduct tastings, so I would put the bottles out, hoping the artwork would attract people's attention and at least tell them the story about the wine in the hopes they would take a bottle home. This lasted from mid-March through June, when outdoor tastings were allowed again."

His strategy to showcase his unique artistic labels from the gallery collection of licensed artwork from Aja Trier of Sagittarius Gallery helped them survive their first year. Additionally, he continues to be grateful as "the Morro Bay Chamber was particularly helpful during this time." The winemaker would also learn that talking about his wines was good for business, and the topics people preferred to hear about were the history of the grape, the vineyard where it grew, foods to partner with his wines -- not necessarily what flavors the winemaker expected his guest should be tasting as they sipped.

"By 2021 when onsite winemaker tastings were able to resume sales and wine club memberships grew." Chamber events like Shop, Sip & Stroll were also a boost. "When invited to host the wine at the Chamber's annual Gala it was easy for us to give back for all they had done for us." And although he felt the business was a couple years away from doubling their space when Chateau Margine moved on, he knew streetside presence would be key to a stronger future.

Dirk enjoys giving Absolution club members and visitors unique experiences. He likes to collaborate with neighboring businesses to create offsite adventures. For example, Winemaker Sundays combines a leisurely walk to learn more about Morro Bay, lunch at a bayside restaurant plus time learning about Absolution wines and winemaking. Dirk also partners with Dane Jacobs, owner of Lost Isle Adventures, for Rare Library Wines Tasting Cruises on the Tiki boat. And on March 3, First Tuesday Sip & Shuck returns offering Winemaker tastings and Grassy Bar Oysters prepared by Margot. Check for more opportunities at www.absolutioncellars.com and reserve space.

Absolution Cellars now has space for casual walk-in patrons, additional room for club members and outdoor seating. Cheese plates are also available to snack on while tasting. Small group gatherings like wedding receptions, mixers, meetings etc. are options. Pitch something to Dirk, Tania or Brook. They enjoy considering innovative ideas.

CIT Tournament From page 19

• 215 lbs: Wes Burford of Oakdale pinned Edwin Hopkins of Westminster in 2:59 (second round) to win the CIT title.

Third Place went to Caleb Ocampo of Exeter; fourth to Daniel Escobedo of Millikan; fifth to Ethan Ono of Dos Pueblos (Goleta); sixth to Fernando Avila of Bullard seventh to Daniel DeVries of Arroyo Grande; and eighth went to Noah Yasko of Simi Valley.

• 285 lbs: Matthew Cooley of Oakdale blanked Enrique Segura of Redwood, 8-0 to take First Place.

Third Place went to Noah Huss of Moorpark; fourth to Matthew Milner of San Luis Obispo; fifth to Andru Balladarez of Edison (Fresno); sixth to Bedros Behnam of Clovis West; seventh to Luke Kingman of Murrieta Valley; and eighth went to Adrian Valenzuela of Pioneer Valley.

Tournament officials also handed out some honorary awards.

The Vaughan Hitchcock Award, named after the legendary Cal Poly wrestling coach who started the CIT back in the 1960s and ran it until he retired after which it was moved to Morro Bay in the 1970s by the late Sam Boyd, was given to the family of Santa Maria High wrestler Noah Lawson, who wrestled at the CIT from 2014-17. Lawson was a U.S. Marine who was killed in action.

The family of Righetti High wrestler, Jason Bautista was also given a Hitchcock Award after he died in a car accident in 2020.

Former Morro Bay High Wrestling Coach and long-time referee, Dan Duclos was given the first Sam Boyd Award in this the 45th year he's been involved with the tournament.

And legendary referee, Doug Perrin, was also given a Sam Boyd Award for helping referee the CIT (and prep wrestling dual meets) for 51 years.

Takin' Care of Business From page 18

tions following the successful conclusion of the 29th annual Creston Classic Rodeo.

This year, CCR donated \$15,000 to Creston Activity Town Center Helping Hands Fund (C.A.T.C.H.), which operates the Creston Community Center. The center, located in Creston's former firehouse, has been transformed into a welcoming community hub serving Crestonians of all ages.

An additional \$10,000 was donated to the Creston Community Association's Pool Fund, which helps operate and maintain the Creston Pool keeping it open and free for local children and families.

"These donations are what the Creston Classic Rodeo is all about," said Tom Bordonaro, president of the Creston Classic Rodeo. "We are incredibly proud to be able to give back to our community, support these vital local organizations, and continue providing a cherished hometown event that brings people together year after year.

"None of this would be possible without the tremendous support of our sponsors, volunteers, and the entire community. We are deeply thankful to everyone who contributes their time, energy, and resources. Their support is the reason the Creston Classic Rodeo continues to succeed and to give back in meaningful ways."

The Creston Classic Rodeo has become a longstanding local tradition, combining rodeo entertainment with a strong commitment to community involvement. Proceeds from the annual event are reinvested directly into Creston, supporting programs and facilities that enhance quality of life for residents.

"The support from the Creston Classic Rodeo makes a real difference," said Sheila Lyon with C.A.T.C.H. "These funds help us continue improving the Creston Community Center and expanding the programs and services that bring our community together. We are extremely grateful for CCR's ongoing commitment to Creston."

Mark your calendars: the 30th annual Creston Classic Rodeo is scheduled for September 11 and 12, 2026. For more information, visit CrestonClassicRodeo.org.

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News

community? Maybe you're launching a new business, or you're making updates to your current business model, or re-opening. Perhaps you have a job opportunity, or have been doing some volunteer work, or are collaborating with

another business or a non-profit. Or maybe you know someone who is. Submit your awesome local efforts for publication to EditorEBN@gmail.com.

Headless Corpse From page 8

man who could do it. Parsons thought that was a good idea but also told Hollister he might want to sell out and leave the county. He said he would take \$1,000 for all that he had, including horses, reaper, and crops.

Hannah testified that she had also talked with Parsons two days before he disappeared when she had given him a letter he had received; he seemed sad after reading the letter. Finally, Stone testified that the last time he saw Parsons he "seemed to be in good health and in good spirits."

What's mysterious about this case is what's missing from the testimony. How

much money did Parsons (if, indeed, the body was Parsons) borrow and from whom? What was in the letter he received? Another close friend was mentioned (Mike Ruez) but he did not provide testimony. Where was Parsons' body between May and July? Clearly, Parsons had assets, including multiple horses, and people willing to help him. What do you think the jury decided?

Sources: Photo of 1870s reaper Wisconsin Historical Society; coroner's inquest document History Center of SLO County. If you have questions, comments or a photo to share, please contact us at info@historicalmorrobay.org.

By the Sea Stages A Romance for Valentines Day

By the Sea Productions opens their 10th season with "The Last Romance" by Joe DiPietro. On his daily walk, Ralph meets the elegant Carol walking her dog. Ralph revives his youthful charm to woo Carol, despite his lonely sister's jealous objections. With the background of a classic opera aria, this senior romance results in the trip of a lifetime and a happiness that was almost lost.

Rhonda Crowfoot directs this charming love story featuring Don Gaede and Kate Kravets as the couple, Rosemarie Lagunas as the sister, and David Trajan as the opera singer.

"The Last Romance" plays Valentine's Day weekend only, February 13-15, at 545 Shasta Ave. in Morro Bay. Show times are 7 p.m.



Rosemarie Lagunas, Don Gaede, Kate Kravets and David Traja. Photo by Janice Peters

Friday and Saturday, and 3 p.m. on Sunday. Reservations and tickets at bytheseaproducts.org or call 805-776-3287.

Annual City-Wide Yard Sale, March 20-22

By Neil Farrell

Morro Bay's annual treasure hunt is coming up in March and potential sellers are being urged to sign up today to get their bazaar on the official event list.

The 25th Annual City-Wide Yard Sale weekend is set for 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday-Sunday, March 20-22.

With well over 100 yard sales taking place that weekend, bargain hunters will get help with navigating the sales via an official yard sale list.

Morro Bay residents can sign up their sale for inclusion, email to: info@morrobay.org or call 805-225-7411, Ext. 2. Free to Morro Bay businesses and residents.

Give your name, address, email address and a brief description of items and days you will participate. Deadline to get on the list is 3 p.m. Friday, March 13.

Sponsored by the Tourism Business Improvement District's/Visit Morro Bay, the City-Wide Yard Sale is a whirlwind of activity as bargain hunters crisscross the town trying to visit as many sales as they can. Traffic is crazy and drivers and pedestrians are advised to be watchful.

The TBID said, "The City-Wide Yard Sale is more than just a shopping event—it's a longstanding tradition that showcases all of the best parts of what it means to be part of the Morro Bay community. Open to visitors and locals alike, this event truly aims to bring all types of shoppers and sellers together for a weekend of exploration and fun. So, whether you're buying, selling, or simply enjoying the inviting atmosphere, this is definitely an event you won't want to miss out on!"

Normally, the Yard Sale is held in conjunction with the garbage company's Annual Spring Clean Up Week, but this year's clean up week is set for Monday-Friday March 2-6.



One never knows what kind of treasures you'll find during Morro Bay's Annual City-Wide yard Sale, this year set for March 20-22. Photo by Neil Farrell

That's when Morro Bay Garbage Company customers can put extra trash out for free pick up with some "bulky" items requiring special notifications. MB Garbage customers should have already been notified of the Spring Clean Up Week via email, according to a company representative.

According to a post on the City of Morro Bay's website, "Residents may place up to six additional 32-gallon size bags of trash at no charge. Residents may also place bulky items on the street for an additional charge and must contact Morro Bay Garbage at 805-543-0875 to schedule the pick up."

With Spring Clean Up Week already passed, the Yard Sale Weekend should have nothing left but the best stuff, right?

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News

Love Letters From page 17

anguish and struggle of it all, it actually has very much helped me to grow and learn to accept and prepare for the reality of impermanence.”

Gilder experienced significant loss starting in her teen years. Her father passed unexpectedly in his sleep when she was 15. Then when she was 24, her mother passed tragically in a substance related accident, leaving her to care for her 12-year-old sister, along with her own 1-year-old-son with special needs. Within two years, she divorced and became a single parent. When she was 30, her best friend from kindergarten was killed in a motorcycle accident.

She recently completed a four-month online, with live interaction, end of life training via Death Doula LA as well as participated in an in-person volunteer training with Hospice of SLO, a volunteer non-medical hospice serving SLO County. She plans to further her education and coursework with the International Network of End-of-Life Doulas Association, as well as the National End of Life Doula Association. She is considering schooling to become a funeral director as well.

“I feel that I am able to help folks in their grief because I am not afraid of it,” Gilder said. “It is my hope that people will quickly feel safe with me, just by my presence and energy, and have the inner knowing that I understand, that they are safe with me, and that I am available to listen, even if what I’m listening to is silence. Much of the time in grief, words are unnecessary, if not actually harmful. I always tell friends who are in grief that I am just a phone call, text, or message away, but also very aware that it’s up to me to reach out with a kind word, gesture, or helping hand, because in grief, just putting into words what you need or what you are feeling is often too much to ask.”

Gilder will hold “Love Letters to the Dead” at a Galentine’s Day fundraiser at Goddess Temple Central Coast, 550 Morro Bay Blvd. in Morro Bay on Valentine’s Day from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. She will offer a grief processing activity designed to honor your own grief while supporting the ongoing nationwide collective grief project called Postal Service for the Dead.

Postal Service for the Dead is project that began in Los Angeles in December 2022 where people send handwritten letters to people in their lives that have died. Participants will create a card/collage/letter to send to the deceased person(s) they are missing this season. Supplies are provided to mail your creation to Postal Service for the Dead where volunteers will receive it, keep it sealed and unread,



To help with the grief of losing a loved one, send a letter to them via Postal Service for the Dead.

read privately, or shared to the project’s social media to help others, per the writer’s instructions. Cards can be kept as well, but stamps will be provided if mailing feels right.

“I feel that when one writes a letter, expressing what they are feeling, it gives a physical form to those feelings,” Gilder said. “Something that can be held, and witnessed, and moved. Mailing your letter might help feel as if you’ve released some of those heavy feelings, and free up some space inside your body, allowing you to feel a little lighter. Grief and those big heavy feelings can really weigh you down, like dragging around a bag of bricks everywhere you go. Letter writing can help lighten that load by letting some of the baggage go.”

The Galentine’s Day fundraiser at Goddess Temple Central Coast is open to the public. There will be a clothing swap, potluck, and opportunities to participate in healing sessions such as card readings, as well as receive a community blessing from the temple Priestess. Find out more about the temple at goddessemplecentralcoast.com.

For information about Gilders services, readers can follow her on Instagram at @metamorphosis_death_doula or email her at jessicabrittany@myyahoo.com. A website is under construction but coming soon. She can also be reached at (805)904-5414.

Bay Theater Benefits From page 1



Cameron Wilson and Rachel Louie are the owners of the Morro Bay Theater. Photo by Jody Hollier

was a major reason, and nod to both previous and current owners the Morro Bay Theater, was awarded the 2024 Business of the Year.

Cameron explained, “Mary Lou had already built the template and occasionally worked with groups on special movie events.” Since January 20, 2024, he and Rachel have regularly reserved Monday evenings to partner with organizations for the mutual benefit of all. They treasure each new relationship made while partnering to help these groups raise needed funding. In return, they hope they have influenced those who love watching movies on the big screen to come out for both the Monday night benefit movies and the first-run films they are offering.

Most recently they hosted the Morro Bay Bird Festival registrants and interested community movie goers to the classic film, “The Big Year” starring Jack Black, Steve Martin and Owen Nelson. The purpose? One of the keynote presenters, Greg Miller, was the real-life inspiration and birding consultant for Jack Black’s character during the filming of the movie. After the film, Miller shared his unique experience sharing time and birding information with all three movie stars.

It all started when Mayor Carla Wixom was contacted by the production crew of the 2024 film “Camera,” directed by Jay Silverman starring Beau Bridges. They had selected Morro Bay as the location to film. Once completed, Silverman hoped to premier his film at the Morro Bay Theater but due to industry rules, pre-launch films could be shown, but not for the production company’s profit. He asked Mayor Wixom to suggest a nonprofit group to host and earn the proceeds. She suggested the Theater Arts Department of Morro Bay High School. “It was a hit,” said Cameron. “We added a second showing and the student group collected around \$5,000. We have been doing Monday Night Movies with other nonprofits since.”

How does it work? The group brainstorms with Cameron to select available movies that will be popular and/or consistent with the goals of the group. They pay a preset rental fee for the theater to cover the movie rental and staff operations. Invited guests and day-of public walk-ups purchase tickets and the group collects full proceeds for the evening’s viewing. Staff enjoys greeting guests and manages the concession stand sales. Groups have gotten creative by offering additional fundraising opportunities like purchased wine-tasting or a silent auction. Before and after the film, the group has time to thank sponsors and offer Q&A with topical guests.

“Monday Night Movies has been a successful program we hope to continue and even build on,” said Cameron. And as a big believer of giving back to show appreciation for their community support, he has joined the board of directors of the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce. He suggested he and Rachel are also brainstorming some additional future benefits to be offered during movie nights.

Meanwhile, some groups continue to book annually. Others like Morro Bay’s Rock Radio 107.3 schedules quarterly movie nights. “They go all-out to have some fun” Cameron explained, “They encourage role-playing based on the characters in the film, offer awards for best costume, plus offer a silent auction. “Cheech & Chong” is next on April 20.”

Other examples include the Kindness Coalition, which typically selects a coastal nature film. Kathryn de Lancellotti works with Cameron to select additional short films as a bonus. She also brings in local musical talent. The Morro Bay Maritime Museum schedules annually offering fishing industry and maritime related films. This year on May 18 the group has selected “The Hunt for Red October” which features the DSRV submarine that showcases MBMM’s parking lot entrance on the Embarcadero. Another example is Lilliana and Jeff Plumber, co-directors of this month’s Cambria Film Festival. They often offer short films produced by local talent and members of the Cambria Central Coast Film Society. The proceeds provide scholarships for local emerging film creators.

Cameron and Rachel were not total neophytes in the film industry when they decided to accept management of their family-owned operation. Both were film majors in college — he at UCSD and she at NYU. They met in New York while he was on tour with his band and ended up staying in New York to work with her building film sets for the company she had worked with for several years. “Now that we live in the middle of California, we are the hub for family and friends to visit here in Morro Bay,” Cameron said. Her family is from San Francisco, and his parents still live in San Diego. “Our New York friends fly into LA and it’s just a couple hours to get to Morro Bay.”

Getting Cameron and Rachel back to the West Coast was strategic intent by both their families. “My sister Mia Wilson Wing lives here and heard the Bay Theater was for sale.” Their parents Scott and Shannon Wilson, being graduates of Cal Poly, still love visiting. Scott, an entrepreneur of several business ventures, had just sold his golf simulator business and wanted to reinvest some of the proceeds in the arts. It became the perfect ulterior motive to entice Cameron and Rachel to leave New York.

Cameron explained, “During my visit to see the theater, Mia told us how much Morro Bay valued the theater, so my dad was satisfied it would receive continued community support.” Mia, however, cautioned if purchased there would be expectations that the Wilsons should maintain some of the things that had kept the Jannopoulos family in

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News

business for years when so many other community theaters were folding.

Cameron's first impression was "Why would we want to change a thing?"

But let's not forget the Morro Bay Theater shows blockbuster and independent films seven days a week. "December through March is an interesting and popular time to attend the movies," Cameron said. "We have booked several of the films nominated for awards during the Academy Awards and Golden Globes. 'Hamnet' has already played, but watch for 'Train Dreams,' 'Bugonia,' 'Sentimental Value,' and 'Sinners.'"

"I can't book all of them," Cameron added. "I have learned what Morro Bay viewers prefer, typically drama, romance and comedy. I've never booked a horror slasher film." He admits some of the classic horror films have been offered during a Monday Night Benefit event.

So, what is the best way for the community to provide support, so the Morro Bay Theater remains our movie theater for eons to come? As the saying goes – See something! Say something! Cameron demonstrated how well this simple offering works for them. "Last month 'Song Song Blue' was a favorite. The grapevine chatter from friend to friend plus the repeat business made our attendance for that film huge." And they also sell yummy real-butter popcorn!

For more information about Morro Bay Theater, go to www.morrobaymovie.com or call (805)772-2444.

Real Estate Fraud From page 1

County.

"This provided real estate professionals with a direct point of contact in reporting suspected real estate fraud," the D.A. said.

It appears to be working well. "Since the communication network was created, District Attorney Investigators have identified 120 properties in San Luis Obispo County that have been targeted.

"Many of the properties have been targeted multiple times. In almost all instances, a potential sale was blocked due to this reporting system."

So far, they said they're battling a thousand. "There are no successfully completed fraudulent sales in San Luis Obispo County that have been reported to us as of this date [Jan. 29, 2025]."

Eric Vitale, senior investigator with the Real Estate & Financial Crimes Division, told Estero Bay News, "Probably one of the reasons that SLO County is being targeted so heavily is due to the values of the vacant lots. Morro Bay and Los Osos are targeted heavily."

They even conducted a few undercover stings in the war against these thieves. "District Attorney Investigators," the release said, "have conducted numerous covert operations to learn the strategies being deployed in these fraud schemes."

"They have identified 24 notaries whose commission stamps have been compromised and 70 bank accounts that were being used for the movement of the funds. Many of the accounts were opened by people whom they themselves had fallen for a different fraud scheme."

The news release relayed information about one such sting operation that nabbed a crook, A Nigerian man from Florida.

"After a year-long covert operation related to an attempted fraudulent sale of a vacant lot in Nipomo, District Attorney Investigators baited an individual to San Luis Obispo on the premise he would be collecting the proceeds from the fraudulent sale.

"On Nov. 21, 2025," the D.A. said, "Oluwaseun Okuwa, a Nigerian and resident of Miami Gardens, Fla.,

met with undercover investigators at the San Luis Obispo County Regional Airport after he exited his flight.

"Okuwa was shown a certified check, issued in his name in the amount of \$304,000."

He first had to sign fake documents before they could make the arrest. "Okuwa then signed a document claiming he was a family member of one of the property owners and that he had been directed to collect the proceeds from the sale of the property on their behalf."

Investigators had already checked with the actual owner of the lot, so they had him dead to rights.

"The property owner had previously confirmed they did not know Okuwa and had never authorized anyone to try and sell their vacant lot," the release explained.

Once he signed the document, he was arrested by D.A. Investigators and charged with "attempted grand theft," a felony. This led to getting a search warrant to comb through his phone by the D.A.'s Central Coast Forensic Lab, which led to another case, this one back on the East Coast.

"The analysis netted additional evidence implicating Okuwa to other criminal fraud activity to include a fraudulent real estate transaction in Virginia.

"The property owner and handling escrow company were immediately notified and the transaction was stopped."

Turns out he was connected to organized crime.

"Text communications between Okuwa and members of a Transnational Organized Crime Group were also located in Okuwa's phone. The communications included the orchestration of fraudulent activity."

Okuwa pled guilty to the felony charges and was sentenced Jan. 22 to 12 months in County Jail for attempted grand theft and six months for identity theft, the D.A. said.

The transnational aspect of the case, as well as the interstate nature of a Florida man trying to commit fraud in California, brings the FBI into the matter.

"According to the FBI," the D.A. said, "Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) groups are associations of individuals who operate, wholly or in part, by illegal means.

"There is no single structure under which TOC groups function — they vary from hierarchies to clans, networks, and cells, and may evolve into other structures.

"TOC groups are looking to make money and often commit crimes such as drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, firearms trafficking, illegal gambling, extortion, creating and selling counterfeit goods, property smuggling, and cybercrime. The vast sums of money involved can compromise legitimate economies and have a direct impact on governments through the corruption of public officials."

Vitale added, "The average property value being targeted county wide is about \$300,000. The highest being \$1.8 million in Pismo Beach.

"I have had a couple in North County exceeding \$1 million."

The question arises about local vacant lots, especially in Cayucos, which has subdivisions that exist only on paper, the so-called "paper lots" on the hillside above Gilbert Avenue.

Those would seem to be ripe for fraudsters to target people who don't know that the County has declared them to be unbuildable due to the steep slopes and potential for landslides.

"Yes," Vitale said, "there are some paper lots in the Cayucos and Cambria area that are in the low \$20,000's. Again, my average [124 properties targeted] is about \$300,000."

Having this scourge reach SLO County prompted the D.A.'s Office to conduct a series of seminars on real estate fraud, one for the public and one for real estate professionals that were held in January.

D.A. Dan Dow issued some tips on how these scams work:

- They begin by impersonating legitimate property owners in San Luis Obispo County.
- They then remotely contact unsuspecting real estate agents and request the property be listed for sale.
- When an offer is accepted from a legitimate buyer, a transaction is initiated with a title company.



Oluwaseun Okuwa of Florida was sentenced to a year in County Jail after being busted trying to sell a SLO County vacant lot that he didn't own, in a local case of real estate fraud, according to the District Attorney's Office. Photo courtesy SLO County Jail

• The impersonators request the documents get sent to them by way of email, citing they are out of the area and cannot meet with the escrow officer in person.

• Often, the impersonators claim they are undergoing cancer treatment and must utilize their own notary. The required escrow documents containing forged signatures and a fraudulent notary stamp are then shipped back to the title company.

If readers would like to know more on these criminal organizations, the FBI has a web page dedicated to them, see: www.fbi.gov/investigate/transnational-organized-crime.

The D.A.'s Office also has some advice for owners of undeveloped properties. "Owners of undeveloped lots that do not have any encumbrances are encouraged to check their property address using a trusted real estate website such as Zillow or MLS (Multiple Listing Service) to determine if their property has been fraudulently listed for sale.

"Additionally, owners may conduct a property title search using the County Clerk-Recorder website official record search (see: sanluisobispo-county-ca-web.tylerhost.net/SLOWeb).

If you discover that your property has been fraudulently listed for sale or sold, contact District Attorney Senior Investigator, Eric Vitale immediately at (805) 781-5868 or via email at: evitale@co.slo.ca.us.

Report on ICE From page 17

give quarterly reports on ICE interactions and to investigate what other counties are doing about the issue.

The Supervisors also voted unanimously to form an ad hoc committee with Supervisors Dawn Ortiz-Legg and Jimmy Paulding that would work to develop options to help the undocumented immigrant community.



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