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AMERICAN RIVER Messenger

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Serving Fair Oaks, Orangevale & Sacramento County

DECEMBER 4, 2020

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Great Wall of Susan Completed at Ancil Hoffman Park



Supervisor Susan Peters (left) and Regional Parks director Liz Bellas admire new fencing at Ancil Hoffman Park.

**Story and photo
by Susan Maxwell Skinner**

CARMICHAEL, CA (MPG) - A decorative fence has replaced almost a mile of battered chain-link in Ancil Hoffman Park. An eyesore to many visitors, the old barrier separated the park golf course from Tarshes Drive for decades.

Susan Peters – who ends her 16 year tenure as County Supervisor next month – commissioned new construction as one of her final beautification projects for District 3. Totalling nearly \$146,000, the cost was funded partly by the Regional Parks Golf fund but mostly by a discretionary allowance that enables Supervisors to assist chosen projects. “I’ve been wanting to get this done for 30 years,” Peters said. “To me, it’s a great enhancement. The fence style doesn’t stand out like it’s new; it looks like it

belongs in this beautiful park.”

Already dubbed “The Great Wall of Susan” the barrier is six feet high for much of its 4000 foot length. Remaining portions are two feet lower, allowing comfortable leaps for deer migrating from the golf course to the Effie Yeaw Nature Preserve. “The movement of animals was an important design consideration,” explained Regional Parks Director Liz Bellas. “One of the best things about visiting Ancil Hoffman is seeing wildlife in its natural habitat.”

Indeed, the 170-acre reserve (acquired for the American River Parkway in 1960) is famed for critter inhabitants. Barred only from the Main Event restaurant, wild animals enjoy right of way on park roads and throughout the 18-hole golf course. By night, raccoons and bunnies scurry over tees. Foxes and bobcats prowl the greens. A nonchalant coyote visits so

regularly that golfers time their drives to avoid the canine they call “Wiley.” River otters come inland for autumn feasting on Carmichael Creek crawfish. Bucks lock antlers on the fairways and in spring, does birth their Bambis in bunkers.

The new fence was designed with a break at San Lorenzo Way. The gap allows deer and turkey moms to shepherd babies across Tarshes Drive to the nature preserve.

Even in its 6 ft. segments, the barricade can be cleared by adult deer. To prevent in-flight injuries, upper bars are picket-free. “We’ve seen some horrific wounds caused by spear-topped fences some residents have built nearby,” reports a park hiker. “It’s a relief that the County thought about wildlife safety when designing the new barrier.”

Ancil Hoffman Park is located at 6700 Tarshes Drive, Carmichael. ★

Providing Shelter and Much More

**From Sacramento
County**

There’s no simple solution; homelessness is a complex issue. Every individual is different and needs their own unique approach.

Through its initiatives and its array of services, Sacramento County is finding more ways to help those who need a place to live as well as to break the cycle of chronic homelessness.

“People are not just being sheltered,” explains Cindy Cavanaugh, Sacramento County’s Director of Homeless Initiatives. “They’re moving towards ending their homelessness.”

During these unprecedented times, Sacramento County is working hard to help people experiencing homelessness. COVID-19 adds another layer of complexity.

“COVID has been a challenge, but we were able to respond on a county-wide basis,” Cavanaugh says. “Working with our partners, we added nearly 600 shelter units for those most at risk, provided necessary supplies and sanitation to those living outside, and did proactive testing as well. We are now working on services and rehousing those we’ve brought inside.”

Before the pandemic, Sacramento County already was experiencing an uptick in homelessness. According to the 2019 Sacramento City/County Continuum of Care Point-in-Time Count, an estimated 5,570 people are experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County on any given night – a 19% increase since 2017.

About 70% are unsheltered. Of those 5,570 individuals, 12% are children and 8% are transitional-aged youth, ages 18 to 24. While the county has seen an increase in homelessness overall, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness decreased, including a 7% drop of those unsheltered. According to the study, about 36 out of every 10,000 Sacramento County residents are experiencing homelessness.

Many of the existing County services and efforts aimed at combating homelessness are not visible or well understood – particularly to those not using them.

“The system of homeless services and support has very few designated points of entry. Navigating the system can be challenging,” says Homeless Services Program Manager Julie Field in the County’s Department of Human Assistance. “We have worked to streamline the ‘front door’ and minimize confusion for persons trying to change their course.”

As the largest provider of social services, Sacramento

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A Hot Wheels Legend



Hot Wheels Garage of Legends selected Riley Stair's 1970 Pontiac Trans Am as the first-place winner from the finalists incorporating the design and build into the brand's storied 52-year history. Photo by Thaddeus James

**Submitted by John Engleman,
Mitchell Communications Group**

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG)
- Sacramentan Riley Stair's 1970 Pontiac Trans Am won the Saturday,

November 14th Hot Wheels Legends Tour finale and it will now be made into a Hot Wheels diecast car to be sold worldwide. Stair competed against 8 other tour stop winners (and a Mobil One Fan Favorite winner, and

4 foreign winners) for the right to have his Pontiac immortalized at Jay Leno's Garage in Burbank, California.

His car was voted the top car by four of the six judges, including Snoop

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United Way Launches Shine Your Light Campaign



United Way Volunteers wrap holiday gifts for local foster youth as part of a past volunteer experience. Photo credit courtesy Thebaud Communications

By Kristin Thebaud

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - At the end of a year that has been dark for many communities across the country, United Way California Capital Region is asking residents across the region to join its Shine Your Light holiday campaign, which includes opportunities for community giving and safe volunteering during the holiday season. Visit YourLocalUnitedWay.org/Holiday-Giving.

"This is a year no one will forget – a year filled with deep pain, division and hardship," said Stephanie Bray, president and CEO, United Way California Capital Region. "Children are being asked to attend school virtually and help younger siblings. Parents have lost jobs that support their family's needs. Neighbors are struggling to stay afloat while small businesses close around them. During this dark year as we enter the holidays, we are asking residents across the greater Sacramento area to join our Shine Your Light campaign by contributing to our nonprofit partners' gift drives, volunteering and making financial donations."

For the Shine Your Light campaign, United Way has gathered the needs of nearly 50 local nonprofits across the region on its website, including which need clothing, blankets, shelf-stable food, hygiene items, winter items, holiday gifts, gift

cards and volunteers this holiday season. Shine Your Light participants also can make a financial donation to United Way California Capital Region to help lift up neighbors who are struggling, including children, foster youth, students impacted by COVID-19 and families trying to make ends meet. As part of the campaign, United Way's Women United action group that supports local foster youth is matching new donations to the group until they reach \$35,000, giving donors the opportunity to double their gift.

"In these difficult times, your gift can be a much-needed light in someone's life during the holidays and in the months to come," Bray said.

For nearly 100 years, United Way California Capital Region has brought local people together to make community change happen. Today, the nonprofit is bringing people together across Amador, El Dorado, Sacramento, Placer and Yolo counties for its Square One Project, a 20-year promise to significantly increase the number of students in our region who graduate from high school ready for success in college and beyond. United Way believes ending poverty starts in school and is working to ensure kids meet important milestones and their families receive support and resources. To learn more and make a donation, visit YourLocalUnitedWay.org. ★

Alternatives to 9-1-1 for Mental Health Response

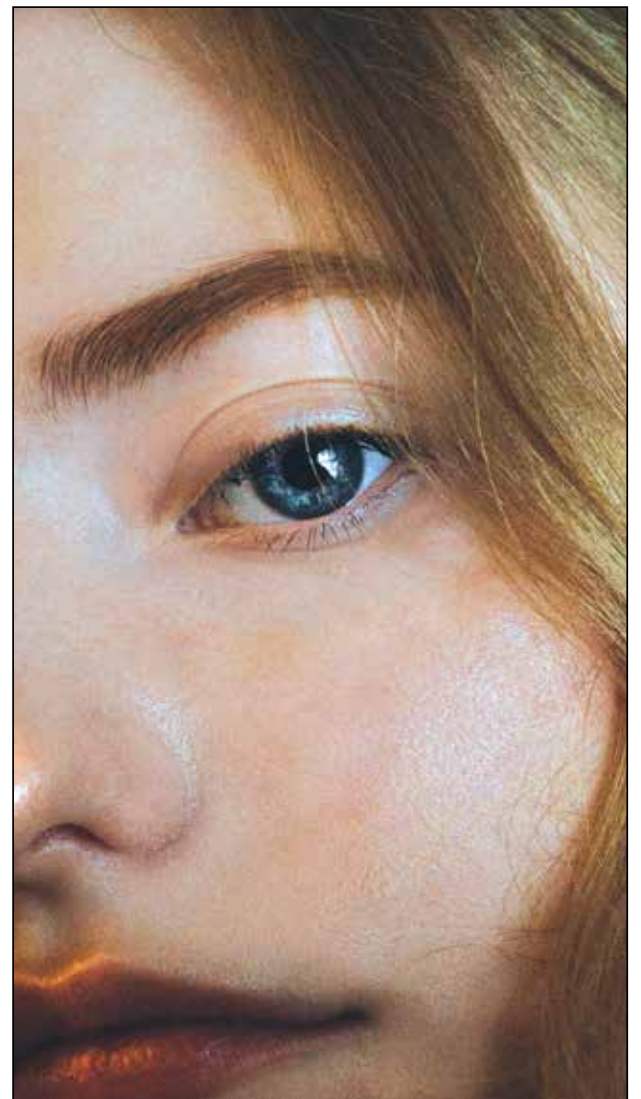
By Kim Nava, Sacramento County

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Sacramento County Behavioral Health Services is seeking community input on alternatives to calling 911 in a behavioral health or quality of life crisis. The public is invited to provide comments sharing their thoughts and suggestions in this online survey. The survey will be available online through Friday, Nov. 13.

The Alternatives to 911 pilot program stemmed from a Board of Supervisors discussion in September budget hearings. District Two Supervisor Patrick Kennedy directed Health Services staff to propose alternatives to law enforcement responses to quality of life issues that can be better addressed by mental health professionals.

"It's important to develop a more appropriate and robust system for care for individuals in crisis," said Kennedy. "We need to meet the needs of people outside of the criminal justice system and take a public health approach to their quality of life issues, both in the moment of crisis and long term."

The goal of the program is to increase mental health response to calls for service; decrease law enforcement need to respond to mental health distress, crisis or other quality of life issues; decrease unnecessary emergency department visits and



The goal of the program is to increase mental health response to calls for service; decrease law enforcement need to respond to mental health distress, crisis or other quality of life issues. Photo by Chloe Amaya from Pexels

psychiatric hospitalizations; and decrease relapse into crisis by linking to ongoing outpatient mental health services.

"The direction from the Board was very clear on this pilot program: to minimize law enforcement involvement and provide greater efficacy while responding to mental health crises in the community," said District One Supervisor and Board Chair Phil Serna. "It is important to

get input from the community and develop a program based on that feedback, and I encourage people to provide their thoughts on the matter."

County staff will continue to obtain community input through December, review and analyze proposed models, assess cost and provide a proposal for a pilot program to the Board of Supervisors in February 2021. ★

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\$1.29	\$1.59	\$5.99	\$2.29	\$1.49	
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EUROPEAN GROCERY

\$3.19	\$6.99	\$1.99	\$3.99	\$2.99	
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A Hot Wheels Legend His Mission to Sniff Out Pests and Disease



Stair gave the 1970 Trans Am a radical treatment of modifications to enhance the performance of General Motors' second generation F body. Photo by Thaddeus James

Continued from page 1

Dogg and Hot Wheels Senior Design Manager, Brian Benedict. It wasn't something that the humble Stair saw happening, but he said excitedly "It feels great!"

"To be honest, I didn't think I would win," said Stair. "I was reserved to the fact that to get to that point was all that I needed. I'm ecstatic that my nephew is going to be able to play with a copy of the car I built."

Stair got the car bug from his father. "Growing up, I just gravitated to it," said Stair. "Because of my Dad, I was always

around cool older cars." So why did a 20-something decide to go with an older car? "It was what I knew," he said. "It's from a time period when cars were more pure and honest."

He bought the car in Chico from a Craigslist ad, and it had been sitting, not running for 8-10 years. Challenge accepted, "I picked out the car and started out to build something start to finish, and really pushed myself and my skills. I really tested myself with this car."

A video of Riley's Trans Am can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN-US2P1ie0 ★

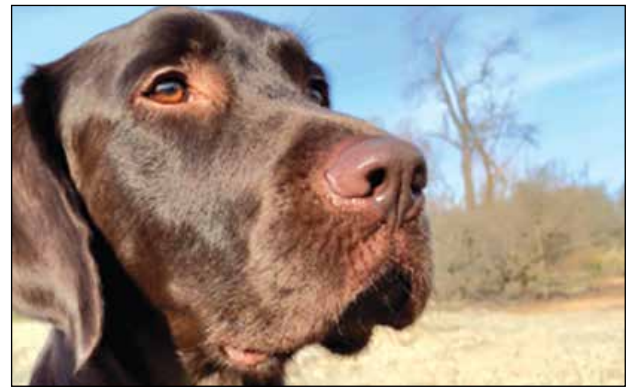
By Kim Nava, Sacramento County

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - To protect against possible crop contamination from the interstate and international shipping of fruits, vegetables and plants, tight controls have been established among trading partners for product inspection and certification. But for those who do not follow the rules, California has K9 detectors on the front-line, and Sacramento County has a new pup on the block.

Like most of the Agricultural Detector K9's in California, "Kernul" was rescued from an animal shelter and given a very important job: to protect the California economy and environment from devastating agricultural pests.

Kernul's handler is Michelle King, who worked hard for the opportunity to become a K9 Handler. After a few years of excellent performance as an Inspector for the Sacramento County Department of Agriculture Pest Exclusion program, she landed this very exclusive role.

King's first task was to attend a 10-week course at



"Kernul" was rescued from an animal shelter and given a very important job: to protect the California economy and environment from devastating agricultural pests. Photo courtesy Sacramento County

the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Detector Dog Training Center, where she was matched up with Kernul, who was certified through AKC Canine Partners as a "Canine Good Citizen."

"Kernul had a personality that was very sweet and sensitive, and possessed a very strong drive for treats," said King. "He was a perfect match for me, and together we excelled at everything we were challenged with."

When the team returned to Sacramento at the beginning of November 2019, they began their on-the-job training. Kernul's first few months were spent memorizing the scents of target items

such as nursery plants, flowers, bulbs, seeds, roots and a large variety of fruits and vegetables. Michelle worked on strengthened relationships with parcel shipping facilities and strategized the best places to intercept contraband.

The two are now an expert team; one of 13 Agricultural Detector K9 pairs in California. Almost daily, the unit discovers unmarked packages containing non-native pests and diseases, harmful to our environment and agricultural systems. The good news is that Kernul has a nose for this type of work! When he's not working, he likes to snuggle, swim, jog and play ball. ★

It's Time to Nominate Your Favorite Business



By Dot Boyd, Fair Oaks Chamber of Commerce

FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG) - Last month, Fair Oaks

celebrated its 125th birthday! I hope you caught the article by Shauna Boyd (no relation) and the photo of some of the Fair Oaks Historical Society members on the front page of the November issue. Thanks to the FOHS, founded in 1975, we all can enjoy the FO History Center and a lively Facebook page. Details at www.fairoakshistory.org. This summer, Fair Oaks Recreation &

Park District turned 75. You can read all about the district's interesting history at www.forpd.org. Last but not least, FO Chamber of Commerce turned 66 on Nov 17th! Happy birthday to us! Although the office is "virtual" for the time being, you can see what's going on at www.fairoakschamber.com and on Facebook at The Fair Oaks Chamber of Commerce and at Fair Oaks Chamber of Commerce

Ambassador. Find us on Instagram at #myfairoaks and our Youth Outreach (FOYO) at #fairoaksyouth.

It's time to nominate and vote for your favorite businesses in Fair Oaks at www.bestoffairoaks.com. To be eligible, a business must either be a current member of Fair Oaks Chamber or be located in the 95628 zip code. Voting ends 12/24/20 and winners will be announced on January

21st, 2021, either in person or virtually. This event is hosted by FOYO and money raised from ads and sponsorships supports our youth scholarships. So, no matter what, everyone wins!

It's the holiday shopping season and we know that you have many choices when shopping for goods, services, and gift cards, now and throughout the year. Every dollar that

you spend with Fair Oaks businesses helps our community thrive. Most of our local businesses are family owned, and many of us live right here. Would you please visit our Business Member Directory at www.fairoakschamber.com before you shop on-line? We would love that! Thank you for supporting local this holiday season. Happy Holidays to you! See you in Fair Oaks! ★



My decisions now keep the holidays safer.

Taking action today protects all of us tomorrow.

Give the gift of a healthier, safer holiday season. As cold weather gets closer, keep your loved ones safe by getting tested for COVID-19, wearing a mask, physical

distancing and avoiding large gatherings. Practice good habits and take care of each other.

Visit SacCountyCOVID.com to learn how you can make a difference.



Proposition 15's Defeat a Victory for California's Future



**Commentary
by Ted Gaines**

As the media focuses overwhelmingly on the drawn-out presidential election, we shouldn't ignore the defeat of Prop. 15, a massively consequential outcome for Californians. Even in this most liberal state, where sales taxes, income taxes and gas taxes march ever upward, Prop. 15's loss shows that Prop. 13 taxpayer protections remain important, popular, and necessary.

Once again, Prop. 13's deep roots proved tough to tear out. Prop. 15 was the latest of many attempts to dismantle the state's most famous taxpayer reform. Prop. 15 would have eliminated a key business property protection by subjecting these properties to reassessments at least every three years, exposing them to massive tax increases far above the 2-percent cap guaranteed by Prop. 13.

It would have gutted the agricultural industry by requiring reassessments of barns, silos, processing facilities, mature fruit and nut trees, and other property that currently falls under Prop. 13's protections. Small business owners with "triple net"

leases, already reeling from COVID, would have faced a wave of property tax increases as they look to rebound.

California's business climate is already terrible – it's earned CEO Magazine's worst place to do business "honor" for a decade straight – and Prop. 15 would have certainly made it worse. But besides avoiding the direct damage Prop. 15 would have inflicted on business, its election day defeat is important for the precedent it continues.

Prop. 13 is the single most important tax law in California and must be defended completely. Voters sent yet another signal that it cannot be weakened. It can't be torn down piece-by-piece. It can't be carved up for special exemptions supposedly aimed only at big business.

Voters know that once Prop. 13 suffers a single chip in its exterior then the entire pillar is primed for collapse. This time it was big (and small) businesses in the crosshairs, but next election cycle it will be homes worth more than \$2 million, then assessments every 20 years, then they will be coming after YOUR home. A Prop. 13 patchwork of gradually shrinking exclusions would soon exist only as a memory.

I've spent nearly two decades in public service as a taxpayer advocate and champion of Prop. 13. The law is a savior for over-taxed Californians. It's saved homeowners and

business property owners billions over the past 42 years and provided them with a stable, predictable bill every year, allowing for planning and budgeting and eliminating the tax spikes the led to closed store fronts and seniors losing their homes in the 1970s. Prop. 13's enduring effectiveness is what makes it a constant target.

A check on taxes is also a check on government growth and a boon for the economy. Defeating Prop. 15 will keep more than \$11 billion a year out of government slush funds and in the pockets of business owners who can use it to expand, invest, and hire more employees. That is critical as California businesses scramble to stay alive and rebuild out of the pandemic.

To create a vibrant post-COVID economy, we must be partners in prosperity with our private sector. Defeating Prop. 15 stops our tax climate from getting worse and everyone interested in a thriving California economy should celebrate its loss, for now, but be ready to defend Prop. 13 again in 2022.

Senator Ted Gaines (Ret.) was elected to represent the Board of Equalization's First District. He is a leading taxpayer advocate and is committed to providing trustworthy and transparent representation for nearly ten million constituents in 30 counties of northern, eastern, and southern California. For more information, visit www.boe.ca.gov/Gaines. ★



**By County
Supervisor
Sue Frost**

Through the generosity of the American River Messenger, this column serves to provide an update about matters affecting the unincorporated community of Orangevale.

In the midst of rising COVID cases statewide, on November 13th Sacramento County was officially demoted to "purple tier" status, the State's most restrictive level. These restrictions include, among other things, the closure of indoor operations for gyms, fitness centers, and restaurants. This move by the State will have a devastating impact on local businesses already shutting down at a heart-breaking rate. It ignores what science is telling us.

If something doesn't change in the immediate future, these businesses are going to be going into the winter months being forced to only be open outdoors. It will be incredibly difficult for businesses to convince customers to eat dinner outside in the cold when they could eat indoors a few miles away in Roseville.

Our public health department already knows what is causing our increase in COVID cases: private gatherings and outbreaks in some long-term care facilities. It is not a major problem at the businesses

Orangevale Community Update

Unsustainable and Subjective: County Returns to the Purple Tier

that are being forced to close operations and where safety measures, such as social distancing, have been successfully implemented. Shutting them down when they are not significantly contributing to the problem is unnecessarily harmful.

Our public health department also already knows that well over half of the COVID cases are coming from the City of Sacramento, even though they represent only about one-third of the County population. The Unincorporated Area of the County (which includes Orangevale) has more people than the City of Sacramento, yet has less than 20% of cases. Orangevale shares a border with Roseville, and shares more in common with them than Orangevale shares with Sacramento City. Our State policies should allow us to take things like this into consideration. Yet, California remains ignorantly adhered to flawed policies that hurt our community, even when given a clear pathway to do things more efficiently and safely.

You may have seen it in the news, but in early October, I signed onto a letter along with several other local and State leaders, that was written to Governor Newsom and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly. In this letter, we requested that the State allow Counties like Sacramento to reopen communities by zip code where COVID metrics meet the

State's requirements for progressing to the next color-coded tier. As of writing this article, that letter has not even been responded to, let alone considered.

A balanced zip-code approach isn't some bogus theory that lacks a scientific basis. A zip-code based approach is precisely what is being utilized in America's most populous city, New York. They use a targeted approach to address clusters of COVID cases by targeting the most affected zip-code hot spots. Doing so allows them to allocate important medical resources to the targeted communities that are most in need. This approach also ensures that communities not experiencing an increase in positivity are not negatively impacted by restrictions that are not necessary.

I am going to keep fighting to put pressure on the State to allow us to consider more sensible policies locally in Sacramento County, and I won't stop until this pandemic is over.

Thank you for reading – and as always, if you want to contact me, call me at 916-874-5491, or e-mail me at SupervisorFrost@saccounty.net.

Sue Frost represents the 4th District, which includes all or part of the communities of Citrus Heights, Folsom, Orangevale, Antelope, Rio Linda, Elverta, Gold River, Rancho Marieta, North Highlands, Carmichael, Foothill Farms and Fair Oaks. ★

Ask Toni

How to Apply for Medicare Online when turning 65!



Toni King

Hi Toni:

I am turning 65 in March 2021 and I was surprised when Social Security told me to go online to sign up. Due to COVID-19 there is not a local Social

Security office open that can help me if I have a problem with the online application. The Social Security rep suggested that I need a "My Social Security Account" to begin the process.

I am concerned that if I go online, I will have to begin receiving my Social Security check. I do not want to not begin my Social Security check until I am 70.

Can you please explain in simple terms where to go online, so that I can enroll in Medicare the right way? Thanks in advance,
~ Carla from Arizona

Carla:

With budget problems, Social Security discovered how much payroll or should I say "our" tax dollars could be saved by finally going online to have people file for their Medicare cards when they were turning 65 and not receiving their Social Security check.

Unless you are receiving your Social Security check at least 90 days prior to turning 65, then Medicare has no idea that you are turning 65 and should be receiving your Medicare card with Parts A and/or B because Social Security doesn't know that you are turning 65.

Social Security processes all Medicare applications for Medicare. Medicare does not enroll their own applications.

Carla, you mentioned that you are not receiving your Social Security check, not working full time with true company benefits and that Social Security advised you to enroll online. The best timeline is 90 days prior to turning 65 to the month prior to your 65th birthday and you should visit www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare to enroll for Medicare to begin the 1st day of the month you turn 65. When you begin the process of enrolling in Medicare, Social Security will ask if you have a "My Social Security Account."

If you do have a "My Social Security Account:"

- Please have your username and password to begin enrolling in Medicare Parts A and/or B application.

If you do not have a "My Social Security Account:"

- Carla starting a "My Social Security Account" does not begin your Social Security check.

- Please register yourself and your spouse for a "My Social Security Account" months before applying for Medicare so that you are ready to apply when turning 65.

- Visit www.ssa.gov/myaccount to open up a personal "My Social Security Account." Let's discuss how to apply online and a few of the problems we are discovering when helping others apply for Medicare online when turning 65.

With COVID-19 closing local Social Security offices, now one must call your local Social Security 800 number and inform the Social Security agent that you are not able to open a "My Social Security Account" and are locked out. Ask for help.

Information on application to apply for Medicare is below:

1. Begin with your information: Name, Social Security number, Gender and Date of Birth
2. Contact information with address, phone number, email address
3. Citizen information regarding you
4. Questions about your health benefits
5. Then submit your application online and view your receipt which explains what additional information may be needed such as marriage license when you are short of 40 quarters and applying under your spouse's Medicare benefits or must mail your citizenship papers.
6. View your "My Social Security Account" for your Medicare number and Part A and/or B dates or wait for your new Medicare Card to arrive in the mail.

Toni King, author of the Medicare Survival Guide® is giving a \$5 discount on the Medicare Survival Guide® Advanced book. Email Medicare questions to info@tonisays.com or call 832/519-8664. ★

Social Security Matters No Simple Answer to Question on When to Claim Benefits



**By Russell Gloor,
AMAC Certified Social
Security Advisor**

Dear Rusty: I'm almost 59 and hope to retire from working soon. Should I take Social Security as soon as possible, or wait for the maximum amount? **Signed: Planning Ahead**

Dear Planning Ahead: I'm afraid there's no simple answer to your question, except "it depends." It depends on your health; it depends on your need for the money when you retire; and it depends on your life expectancy. Plus, your marital status may also influence your decision on when to claim.

First of all, you cannot claim your Social Security retirement benefit until you are at least 62 years old. But if you claim at 62 your benefit will be cut by 30% from what it would be if you waited until your full retirement age (67). You actually have an 8-year window starting at age 62 and lasting until age 70 to claim your Social Security benefit. The earlier in that window you claim, the smaller your benefit will be. And the longer you wait to claim (up to age 70), the higher your benefit will be.

At age 70, your benefit



will reach maximum at 24% more than it would be at age 67, and 76% more than it will be at age 62. Essentially, if you are in good health, don't urgently need the money earlier, and expect to enjoy at least "average" longevity (about 85 for a man your age today), you will not only get a much higher monthly benefit, but also collect much more in cumulative lifetime benefits by waiting until age 70 (or as long as you can) to claim. Of course, no one knows how long they will live, but there are online tools which can assist you with estimating your life expectancy. One relatively simple and user friendly tool is available from Social Security at this link: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/population/longevity.html>.

Conversely, if you are not in good health and don't expect at least average longevity, or if you urgently need the money when you retire from working, claiming earlier may also be a prudent choice. If you are married and you predecease your wife, her survivor benefit will be based upon the benefit amount you are actually receiving, so by waiting to get a higher benefit for yourself you are also enhancing your wife's

eventual benefit as your widow, should you pass before her.

Be aware too that, should you decide to go back to work, until you reach age 67 you'll be subject to Social Security's "earnings test" which limits how much you can earn before Social Security takes back some of your benefits (the 2021 limit is \$18,960 and if that were exceeded, they'd take back benefits equal to half of the amount it was exceeded by). The earnings limit changes annually but goes away at your full retirement age.

So, these are the things you should consider in deciding when in that 8-year window to claim your benefits. I cannot directly answer your question for you, but I hope the above gives you what's needed to make an informed decision on when to claim your Social Security benefits.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadviser@amacfoundation.org. ★

Caring for the COVID-19 Caregiver Advocated by Navy PA

By Douglas H Stutz,
NHB/NMRTC
Bremerton Public
Affairs Officer

BREMERTON, WA (MPG) - As the effort to help stop the spread of COVID-19 continues, a Navy physician assistant (PA) from Sacramento, California, and a Elk Grove High School 1999 graduate, is also supporting care for COVID-19 caregiver's health, wellness and resilience needs.

For Lt. Jeffrey E. Osborn assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton's, the ongoing pandemic outbreak has him helping maintain the warfighting capability of commands in the third largest fleet concentration, as well as provide resources for the command's healthcare workers.

"The current pandemic has caused massive social upheaval and levels of stress only comparable to multiple deployments," said Osborn, who has taken the lead to chair NMRTC Bremerton's Provider Wellness/Impaired Provider Prevention Program. "People are having difficulty finding child care and balancing work, parental duties and even fulfilling the role of teachers."

According to Osborn, attached to NMRTC Bremerton's Branch Health Clinic Bangor, the goal of the program is to ensure patient safety while acting as an advocate for credentialed healthcare providers.

"As with all functions at the hospital, our number one goal is always improving patient safety," Osborn said. "In this care prevention, early identification, treatment and rehabilitation of possibly



As a physician assistant, Osborn works hand-in-hand with supervising physicians and surgeons, and is proficient in areas such as emergency medicine and family practice, along with handling primary care issues and overseeing other members of the medical team such as hospital corpsmen. Photo credit Navy Office of Community Outreach

impaired healthcare providers is the focus."

The program is a Defense Health Agency requirement and is comprised of multiple professions such as credentialed provider, mental health and nursing staff representative(s).

There's a number of services that can be provided, including mental health, substance abuse rehabilitation referrals, even help with work schedule issues for someone struggling with significant life events.

"We act as a voice of advocacy for staff. Our program provides routine information on building resiliency with a goal of prevention of impairment," stated Osborn, adding that the program routinely reaches out to the medical community with discussions and briefs on a regular basis, such as sharing during new provider orientation and during the occasional medical staff meetings. "Additionally,

we focus on early identification and treatment always with the goal of rehabilitation and return to clinical duties." "Now more than ever it is critical that we work together as peers to provide support and feel comfortable checking in with each other to make sure that none of us are struggling in silence," Osborn stressed. "Medical providers in particular tend to downplay their own problems trying to focus on providing care. It is up to us to look out for each other."

As Navy Medicine continues to respond to the pandemic's lingering impact physical, mental and emotional impacts with a ready medical force ensuring there's a medical ready force, the added responsibilities have led to concerns about burn-out and complacency.

"Healthcare workers are especially impacted by this as they fill a critical role on the front lines of addressing the

pandemic," stated Osborn. "This has put increased stress on our staff as they work to provide critical care to our community while accepting increased risk of exposure and the fear of potentially spreading of the virus to family and friends."

For Osborn, the path to his current position has been based more on the journey than the actual destination. Although the Pacific Northwest has made a lasting positive impression.

"I enjoy my time as a Navy provider. The job has unique challenges and opportunities that my civilian peers never get to experience. As someone who has been active duty with a long break in between periods of service, I can safely say that there is no place that has a similar sense of community and camaraderie as the military. The friendships and experiences will truly last a lifetime," exclaimed Osborn,

noting that being able to engage in operational medicine – whether in the field or at sea – offers unique challenges in distinctive settings unlike any typical hospital and clinic environment.

Navy Medicine has taken Osborn far afield, across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, from the arid African coastline of Djibouti to the tropical jungles of Sri Lanka. He also deployed in support of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve and provided an array of medical care to joint and Coalition service members in Iraq and Syria

Yet well before his current role, Osborn joined the Army after graduating in 1999 from Elk Grove High School. He served as an airborne infantryman for four years, then diligently worked as an emergency medical technician and earned his Bachelors of Science degree in Medical Microbiology from

University of California, Davis. He followed up by graduating from Touro University California with a dual Master of Public Health and Master of PA studies in 2013. He joined the Navy as a direct accession soon after.

"While in PA school I spent a considerable amount of time trying to decide where to practice and the kind of patient population to treat," Osborn related. "I wanted to serve again after an almost 10 years break. I spoke with medical recruiters from all the military branches and was impressed with the chief hospital corpsman that I worked with. I was interested in the large scope of Navy Medicine encompassing both the blues side as well as the green side working with sailors and Marines."

As a physician assistant, Osborn works hand-in-hand with supervising physicians and surgeons, and is proficient in areas such as emergency medicine and family practice, along with handling primary care issues and overseeing other members of the medical team such as hospital corpsmen. Working with those hospital corpsmen is the best part of his job.

"The PA profession was born out of the hospital corpsman rate," said Osborn. "Many current corpsmen and medics are the future of the PA community. Corpsmen are the first link in the chain of survival following trauma or injury in operational environments."

Osborn's role as a Navy PA is also part of that chain of survival, from training corpsmen to providing care to those in need with the Provider Wellness/ Impaired Provider Prevention Program. ★

Recycling Competition Awards \$140,000 to California Schools

By Bernice Creager,
Keep California
Beautiful

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Keep California Beautiful was joined by representatives from the California Department of Resources for Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and the American Chemistry Council to announce the results of the 2020 K-12 Recycling Challenge and the changes to the contest for 2021.

"We are fortunate to have support from a wide variety of industries and state organizations to continue educating, engaging and encouraging California students to recognize the value of recycling," said Ray Scott, Keep California Beautiful Board President.

The K-12 Recycling Challenge is the only school program in the state promoting California's diversion rate goals through collaborative efforts including industry, state agencies, non-government organizations, public and private schools, and waste haulers. The annual competition is endorsed by CalRecycle and is supported by corporate donations from a wide variety of industries including the American Chemistry Council,

American Beverage Association, the Carton Council, Dart, Pepsi, Metropolitan Recycling, LLC. and others.

Since its inception in 2015, the K-12 Recycling Challenge has awarded more than \$140,000 to winning schools across the state and helped divert more than 7.7 million pounds of recyclable material from California's landfills.

"We know that teaching the value of recycling at an early age works, and we recognize the benefit these habits will have in the long term," said Lindsay Stovall, American Chemistry Council Director of State and Regulatory Affairs. "It is a privilege to partner with Keep California Beautiful to support this important recycling competition."

"Thanks to Keep California Beautiful and its 'K-12 Recycling Challenge,' millions of California students have recycled more than 7 million tons of material," said Ken DaRosa, acting Director of CalRecycle. "That's millions of tons of metal, glass, paper and plastic kept out of our landfills and off of our streets."

In addition to the annual recycling competition, Keep California Beautiful has received the support of CalRecycle and Caltrans on other events, including the Great American

Cleanup which takes place every Spring.

"Caltrans collects nearly 300,000 cubic yards of litter a year from the state's highways – enough to fill 18,000 garbage trucks," said Caltrans Director Toks Omishakin. "California needs the public's help to keep our highways and the environment free of litter and safe for all Californians."

While the competition will feature three new components in 2021, KCB and its partners are looking forward to continuing to promote education and awareness about recycling in communities across the state.

About Keep California Beautiful

Keep California Beautiful (KCB) is a non-profit organization dedicated to alternative waste management, beautification, community networking and outreach. KCB provides resources and support to more than 200 California communities annually to assist with cleanup, beautification and enhancement projects.

Since 1991, KCB and its partner programs have sponsored over 14,372 events involving over 855,958 volunteers, and have collected over 26,238,000 pounds of litter and trash from California's highways, public lands, waterways and beaches. ★

Covid, Scmovid! Interact Club is Still in Service Mode



Amanda Young, Jacob Wright and Noah Wright catch some warm sunlight with their End Polio Now shirts on! Photo: Rotary International of Fair Oaks

By Fred Rowe,
Rotary International of Fair Oaks

FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG) - The coronavirus pandemic has sent a lot of entities into suspend or shut-down mode, but the Interact Club at Bella Vista High School has found a way to continue making their ideal of service a reality despite online learning, online club meetings and online whatever. As the high school affiliate of the Rotary Club of Fair Oaks, they try to live Rotary's motto of "Service Above Self".

Over a five day period that included World Polio Day, October 24, they participated in a modified version of the Rotary club's project "Move For Polio", in which they ran, walked or biked, and the club pledged to donate \$5 per mile up to \$500 to PolioPlus, Rotary's fund for polio eradication. The seventeen participants easily made the mileage to qualify for the \$500 donation.

Starting soon, ten Interactors will participate in a "reading buddies" project with ten second-graders at Northridge Elementary School. The club purchased

twenty copies of "Frog and Toad Are Friends", ten for each set of students, and partners will discuss what they read using an online app monitored by the second grade teacher, who just happens to have been an Interactor when she attended Bella Vista HS. Small world.

On November 21, four Interactors showed up to help the Rotary Club do their quarterly cleanup of Madison Avenue adjacent to Bella Vista, AND they helped the Rotarians maintain their waistlines by helping to put away the donuts that magically appeared. That same day, several club members used appropriated club funds to purchase and deliver nine turkeys to the Fair Oaks-Orangevale Food Bank to help alleviate an unexpected Thanksgiving turkey shortage.

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, the club board encouraged members to pick three influential people in their lives and send them a "Thank You" letter to express their gratitude and offer some holiday cheer, pandemic be darned. It may sound trite to say this, but it's true... with kids like this leading the way, the world is bound to be a better place in years to come. ★



By Marlys Johnsen Norris,
Christian Author

Often people think that God will answer their prayer request immediately never realizing that there is something in their past that needs to be dealt with before God will even hear a request. All spoiled children think their request must be answered right away!

Any kind of sin can negate God even hearing the request! A prayer will never be answered for anyone that holds unforgiveness in their heart. A person needs a sincere deep self-examination about their life. If a sin

Find "Joy" in Your Life - Today!

memory exists of unforgiveness, we know that our God will only answer it quickly after we tell Him we forgive that person.

We all seek to experience the happiness "joy" arises in our souls that make us extremely happy. **"Joy" is a blessing that comes from the unconditional love of God!** It is infused with a remembered answered prayer or eventful blessing in our life experience of freshness and vitality. It is a time when our sincere knowledge of a loving great God who is the "I Am" and the Creator of all that exists and is real in our lives.

All our offered prayers have long lives! God answers them in His time

frame, not ours because He knows best. Our God has all the answers to life and to death as well. God knows the beginning and the end! Once we have repented and asked God to forgive our misdeeds, God answers all our prayers at just the right time.

"Joy" comes in the morning! Another words as soon as it is the right time for them to be answered every prayer is answered by our loving and merciful God.

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Bug! Bug! Where's The Bug?

By Rev. James L. Snyder

As far back as I can remember, every time I would leave the house, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage would say, "Be careful. Drive safely."

It's as though she doesn't think I could drive carefully without giving me some instructions. I think it has become just a routine for her.

Although I've not had many accidents, they still are accidents. Although most of them were not my fault, I still got blamed.

"Well," my wife explained to me, "you were the one behind the wheel, so it has to be your responsibility. You should know how to control your car."

Every year when it comes time to renew our insurance, she reminds me, "Don't forget to renew our insurance because you just might need it this coming year."

My wife had various places to go last Thursday, which is a normal thing for her. She's always busy, particularly visiting thrift stores.

One thing about my wife is that she does not like insects.

As she was driving, she felt something on her leg. She simply shook it off and kept driving. She is always a very well focused

person, and she was entirely focused on getting to her next destination. All the while, something seemed to be crawling up her leg.

Then she stopped at a red light. There was a car in front of her which she didn't pay much attention to. While she was stopped, she thought she would look into what was crawling up her leg.

Her foot was on the brake pedal, and as she looked down, she saw a bug crawling up her leg, which threw her into a frenzy. She jumped, her foot got off of the brake pedal, and she reached down to grab the bug and throw it out the window.

As she did this, her car lunged forward and hit the back of the car in front of her.

Officially, this was an accident. She got out, and the man in the car in front of her got out, and they looked at the damage, fortunately, there was very little damage. They exchange insurance cards and names, and so forth.

Then she went home. I was already home, and as she came in the door, her cell phone rang, and it was our insurance company. I sat there, overhearing all the information about her "accident."

She hung up the phone, looked at me, and said, "It

wasn't my fault. It was that stinking bug's fault."

"But," I said as soberly as possible, "weren't you behind the wheel?"

She just looked at me with both hands on her hips and then turned around and walked away.

Nobody was hurt, not even the vehicles themselves. But it was an "accident."

The next morning she had to go somewhere else, and as she opened the door, I said to her very carefully, "Be safe. Drive carefully."

She looked back at me and said, "Very funny."

It's so wonderful to have the upper hand finally.

As she closed the door behind her, I chuckled and then thought of a Scripture verse. "Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

One thing I have learned in life is to be careful what you allow to bug you.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-216-3025 or e-mail jamsnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com. ★



Dare to Live Without Limits

by Bryan Golden

One Small Step at a Time



"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." – Chinese Proverb

Getting started on a journey, especially a long one, seems daunting. Your attention is focused on the end of the journey instead of the beginning. How long it will take, as well as the obstacles which must be overcome, fill your thoughts.

Every journey begins with the first step. A step which appears too large is intimidating. Small steps are much more manageable. You are more likely to take a small step than a large one. Taking a small step gets you started. Since small steps aren't overwhelming, you are more apt to continue moving ahead.

Taking your first small step is the most important one. It is the action which gets you started. Once you are moving forward, the momentum makes it easier to keep going. Each step leads to the next. Success breeds success.

Consistency is more important than speed. Taking step after step should become a routine habit. Big accomplishments are achieved one small step at a time. The tallest brick buildings are constructed one brick at a time. Marathon runners take one stride at a time. Successful weight loss occurs by losing one pound at a time.

Earning a college degree later in life while you are

working, is another example. The concept of all the effort required in order to graduate is scary. How will you find the necessary time? But if you break it down to one course at a time it becomes manageable. For your first course, pick one which meets one night a week.

Now you have a small step strategy which is workable. You are ready to embark on the path towards your goal. By attending one class a week you are on your way. Although you will require more years than someone who is going to school full time, you will earn your degree.

Failure occurs only when you give up. If you don't start, nothing will happen. Make your first step small enough so that you will get started. Any step, no matter how small, moves you forward.

After the first step, keep taking steps. Each day, take at least one step. The endless progression of steps is highly effective. Make no excuses, just keep taking steps. If you stumble, regain your balance and keep going. If you fall, get back up and keep going.

Keep track of your progress. It's easy to overlook how much you have accomplished. If you're saving money, write down your balance after each deposit. If you are going to school, make a list of the courses you have completed. If you are on a diet, keep a log of your weight.

Each step you take is a goal accomplished.

Be patient. Achieving your goal is a process. You don't arrive at the finish line after one step. You won't reach your desired weight after cutting back for one meal. You won't get in great physical shape after one visit to the gym.

You won't earn your college degree after one class. Time goes by regardless of what you are doing. It really doesn't matter how long it takes to achieve your objective. People who do nothing, accomplish nothing. Get started today so that tomorrow you are one step ahead.

Start from where you are right now. Don't wait for your situation to change or improve. Today is the day you take your first small step. Don't allow doubt, fear, worry, or uncertainty to become roadblocks.

Taking small steps is productive. You feel so much better when you are making progress towards your goals. Being in control of your life is always preferable to waiting to see what happens.

NOW AVAILABLE: "Dare to Live Without Limits," the book. Visit www.BryanGolden.com or your bookstore. Bryan is a management consultant, motivational speaker, author, and adjunct professor. E-mail Bryan at bryan@columnist.com or write him c/o this paper. © 2020 Bryan Golden ★

Providing Shelter and Much More

Continued from page 1

County offers an array of programs and services aimed at helping individuals and families experiencing homelessness to regain health, income and permanent housing stability. Its sheltering network includes long-established local shelters, dozens of individual homes as well as more than 200 residential units on the Mather campus in Rancho Cordova.

"We've heavily invested in rehousing," Cavanaugh says. "County departments across the spectrum – from public defender to family services, behavioral health to human assistance – are finding new ways to help people leave homelessness more quickly, stabilize and rebuild their lives. This not only serves the individual, but the community at large."

Homelessness Response

Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance provides a robust multi-departmental response to homelessness from immediate crisis response services to rehousing, and longer-term stabilizing services that help individuals transition to permanent housing stability.

Eduardo Ameneyro, DHA Homeless Services Division Manager says, "Just through DHA alone, we have more than tripled our homelessness budget and have created a foundation of flexible services and programs that can expand as resources are secured. Increased collaboration among local partners ensures we can cast the widest array of services and serve persons who would otherwise not have received services."

CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP): Supports CalWORKs recipients experiencing homelessness with obtaining permanent housing. Includes assistance with move-in costs and limited-term rental subsidies.

Family Homelessness Response and Shelter System: Works to reduce barriers to accessing emergency shelter for families experiencing homelessness by: centralizing registration via an electronic portal; allowing pets; expanding the definition of a family; removing restrictive

funding; and removing time limits.

Mather Community Campus: Provides shelter and transitional housing programs for single adults, families with minor dependent children and Former Foster Care Youth including: Shelter for up to 140 single adults; Transitional Housing for up to 25 families; and Transitional Housing for up to 58 Former Foster Youth with 10 additional units provided off-campus.

Flexible Supportive Rehousing Program: Provides intensive case management and permanent housing services to 250 frequent users of County jail and Behavioral Health Services

Flexible Housing Pool: Provides limited-term intensive case management services and housing services for persons and families experiencing homelessness. Participants of this program are referred in through collaboration with county Departments, local cities, the Continuum of Care and Outreach Navigation services.

Homeless Prevention and Intervention Services for Transition Age Youth: Provides prevention, diversion and intervention services for youth aged 18-24 years who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Full-Service Rehousing Shelter: Provides shelter, case management and rehousing assistance for up to 115 persons experiencing homelessness, based on referrals.

North A Street Shelter: Provides outreach and shelter services for 80 individuals in the River District.

Return to Residency: A bus ticket is provided for persons newly arriving in Sacramento County, faced with homelessness and no means of support. The destination must be the person's verified place of residency where housing and ongoing support have been confirmed.

For more information on the County's Response to Homelessness visit our website.

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Orangevale Has a New Honorary Mayor



Outgoing Orangevale Honorary Mayor Julie King, with new 2020/21 Orangevale Honorary Mayor Cliff Wylie. Photo by MaryAnne Povey

By MaryAnne Povey

ORANGEVALE, CA (MPG) - Did you hear the news? Orangevale has a New Honorary Mayor! And in typical Orangevale fashion, this year's candidates; Cliff Wylie, Warehouse Interiors, Luz Johnson, LPL Financial, Jonathan Spangler, Freedom Insurance and Sean Palmer, Palmer Real Estate, didn't let a worldwide pandemic stop them from breaking a record, collectively raising over \$30,000 in the past six months! The top fundraising candidate, Cliff Wylie, brought in over \$13,000, earning him the top spot and the title of Orangevale Honorary Mayor for 2020-2021.

In lieu of the announcement being made at the annual Harvest Dinner which was postponed this year, all four candidates were recognized during a small gathering at Tonno's Bar & Grill in Orangevale. Each candidate received Certificates of Appreciation from Assemblyman Kevin

Kiley, and Sacramento County Supervisor Sue Frost, who attended the event and gave high praise to the candidates for doing an exceptional job fundraising for so many wonderful charities including: Clean & Sober Recovery Services, The Orangevale Women's Club, Del Oro Resource Center, the Orangevale Rotary Charitable Foundation, and the Orangevale-Fair Oaks Food Bank.

The Orangevale Chamber of Commerce was uncertain whether to hold the annual event which has been a tradition since the 1980's but had a five year break before candidates Julie King and Jeff Chaix brought the race back to life last year.

"We had such great momentum and then Covid hit. But with four outstanding candidates willing to take on the challenge, how could we say no?" said Chamber President Brad Squires, "We all wanted to give the community something positive to focus on and I'm happy to say we made a good decision! We were able to celebrate in a safe, socially distanced way."

Outgoing Honorary Mayor Julie King was all smiles during the ceremony and although her time as Honorary Mayor was cut short due to the pandemic, she was grateful for the opportunity and the outpouring of community support.

"In a year with so much adversity and so many challenges, you all killed it!" said Julie King, Honorary Mayor 2019-2020, "Thank you all for doing such an amazing job and validating this process. I hope your life flourishes as much as mine from this experience"

Congratulations to our new Honorary Mayor, Cliff Wylie, to all the candidates and to the community for so generously supporting this year's campaign!

To find out more about the Orangevale Chamber of Commerce, go to www.orangevalechamber.com. ★

The Lights are on for Dovewood Court!

A Message from Dovewood Court Residents

ORANGEVALE, CA (MPG) - Dovewood Court residents recently met with County representatives to discuss the upcoming Christmas season and lighting of the street. Like everyone we are trying to grapple with what it means to exist and operate in a Corona virus world. We understand how important what we do is for the community, from the thousands of dollars of food and donations collected for Food For Families and our local food banks, to the joy the lights and displays on our street has brought to generations of residents in our area.

Today these feelings of joy and civic pride are juxtaposed with the heavy responsibility we feel to be responsible neighbors and not contribute the deadliest plague of our generation. To borrow a phrase from a long time Dovewood Court resident, "This is our gift to the community". None of us want it to be the gift of Covid. As such, the Dovewood Court Christmas lights will be significantly scaled back for the 2020 Christmas Season and we are asking for your help in implementing some procedures this year to help keep our amazing community safe.

First, some houses will not be decorated, and the decorations of most others significantly scaled back. Our homeowners feel very strongly about their responsibilities to the community to both decorate and not decorate given the circumstances. There are valid reasons on both



Joy to the World! The light show is here! Photo by Jay Rowan

sides of this argument. Ultimately it is up to each of the homeowners on our street to do what they feel is in the best interest of their family and community. I assure you that all of us love Christmas and wouldn't live here if we didn't. None of us took the decision we made lightly, so please be respectful of those who have decided to limit decorations.

Second, the canned food drive for Food for Families will continue, however, there will be no volunteers to help place food in the cans or collect cash for donations. If you would like to contribute you can bring canned food with you, donate to Food for Families when you check out at Raley's, or take donations directly to the Orangevale and Twin Lakes food banks.

Third, if you would still like to have your holiday tradition of visiting Dovewood Court, please drive through instead of walk. Most of the other streets that are doing Christmas light shows this year will be drive-thru and we want to follow suit. The parking lots

at the Grange Hall and Christ the King Church will be closed this season and parking on side streets around Dovewood is limited.

Lastly, no one likes to sit in traffic and as normal we expect fairly heavy traffic this year with all the people driving through. Traditionally the highest volume times for visitors are Friday-Sunday 7:30 pm -9:30 pm and pretty much every day of the week before Christmas from 7:30 pm -9:30 pm. Christmas Eve is typically the most crowded day and is normally very busy from open to close. To avoid sitting in traffic for hours, come early in the season, Monday-Thursday, pretty much anytime, and before 7:30 pm on the weekends.

Thank you for your understanding, and we hope to be back in 2021 bigger and better than ever.

Dovewood Court will follow the traditional start and end dates and times for the lighting season. We will start Sunday 12/6/20 and end 12/27/20, hours are from 5:30-10:00. ★

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Christmas Hope

I have been thinking long and hard about what I wanted to share with you in my Christmas column. Usually I go for some of the traditions and the fun things like St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, the Christmas tree tradition, Rudolph, that rascal red-nosed reindeer, even the notorious fruitcake. But, for the life of me, it is very difficult with the pandemic we are facing, and over 260,000 deaths of so many loved ones of all ages, I am finding it so hard to feel cheerful in any way. No worries. The tree will go up. Some decorations will be out, but no parties and get together with friends to smile and wear silly sweaters and head crowns that light up or passing out candy and presents with delight. So I took a moment to really think about what Christmas is all about. It really isn't about all those presents and trappings we have come to love. It's so much more than that. I was sitting quietly one evening and staring up at the sky, and it came to me. What about that very night in that humble stable and what it all really meant. And then it came to me as I marveled at the beautiful night sky. There was a Christmas star. The stars that appear in the sky today are some of the same ones that were there two thousand years ago. Was there a nova at the time of Jesus birth? The exact time of his birth still has scholars scratching their heads, and astronomers cannot place a new

star anywhere near the possible time. But the Wise Men followed a star. So was it a true miracle? Some star gazers suggest if we move the birth of Jesus to springtime of 6 B.C., we can attribute the star to the time the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were close together in the heavens. They formed a triangle in the group known as Pisces. The Wise Men were astrologers and studied the stars and the planets and they knew, according to Jewish Rabbis, of the triangle and that it had appeared before the birth of Moses. Perhaps they interpreted it as a sign of the great event that was about to happen...the birth of Jesus...in the land of the Jewish people. Could it have been the star of Bethlehem? Pisces did become the special constellation of the Hebrew people.

So I took comfort in the story of that star, and the incredible influence the birth of Christ has had on all the world. And life does not seem so bad. We've had some major and frightening medical issues in our family, but knowing that there will always be hope because of that star on that fateful night, will get us through some very tough times yet to come especially with this pandemic. Keep the faith and know there will be a tomorrow filled with joy because of Christmas. To one and all, an extra prayer tonight and a very **MAGICAL MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!** ★

School Closures May be Killing our Kids



By Dan Walters
CALMatters

Throughout California, academic grades for children forced into makeshift learn-at-home arrangements rather than receiving classroom instruction have plummeted – and that's among kids who are actually signing on via computer.

Too many public school students still lack the necessary equipment and internet access, but even when they have them, they may be left on their own as parents, unable to work from home, go to their service jobs. Thus, what used to be called truancy, just not participating, is also rampant.

What's been happening, or not happening, in the huge Los Angeles Unified School District typifies a statewide syndrome.

"The drop in grades, which also is affecting other school systems, was disclosed Monday when LA Unified released a chart based on 10-week interim assessments," the Los Angeles Times reported. "Poor grades surged in the district's lower-income communities, which also is where student attendance rates are lower and where the COVID-19 pandemic has hit especially hard."

"The attendance figures and interim assessments don't reflect the desire or capability of students,"

District Superintendent Austin Beutner said in broadcast remarks. "They're eager to learn and every bit as capable as they were before school facilities closed. But the struggle to cope with COVID-19 and online learning for children and their families is very real."

As the Los Angeles experience underscores, this catastrophe mostly affects children in low-income families, just as COVID-19 has a disproportionately heavy health impact on those same families. And even before the pandemic struck, those children were already, as a group, falling behind their more privileged peers – a syndrome dubbed the "achievement gap."

The long-term effects of truncated educations are obvious. The achievement gap, already yawning, will widen even further, dooming more children to lives of economic struggle, and the state will be deprived of the well-educated workforce it needs for 21st century prosperity.

It may be even worse. An academic team examined the potential effects of interrupting classroom learning and reported last week that it will mean a greater loss of life in the long run.

The study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, estimates that 24.2 million children aged 5 to 11 each lost a median of 54 days in school last spring. That, the researchers said, translates into 5.53 million fewer years of life due to lower educational achievement, nearly four times the estimated 1.47 million years of life that would be lost had

schools remained open. "In this ... model of years of life potentially lost under differing conditions of school closure, the analysis favored schools remaining open," the study concluded. "Future decisions regarding school closures during the pandemic should consider the association between educational disruption and decreased expected lifespan and give greater weight to the potential outcomes of school closure on children's health."

Most schools remain closed because local education officials and their unions are at odds on the conditions of reopening. The latter are seeking virtually impossible guarantees of protection before returning to the classroom. It's nothing short of educational apartheid, not fundamentally different from the separate-but-unequal segregation in the South during the pre-civil rights era.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has been unwilling to intervene – apparently not wanting to confront school unions. However, he's insisted that his management of the COVID-19 pandemic is driven by science and equity, not politics, and in this case, now we have a scientific conclusion that continuing to keep children out of school could shorten their lives.

Newsom and other decision-making adults must get all kids back in the classroom ASAP. It's a matter of life-and-death.

Dan Walters has been a journalist for nearly 60 years, spending all but a few of those years working for California newspapers. ★

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 - Pathetic
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 - Pico de gallo
 - WWII side
 - Like word of mouth
 - Church song
 - *Victoria in Zimbabwe or Horseshoe in Canada
 - *Home to Rock of Cashel and Blarney Castle
 - Massachusetts university
 - "___ Be Home For Christmas"
 - Olympic torch, e.g.
 - On the move
 - Menu words
 - *Golden Gate or Mackinac
 - Goodbye, to bambino
 - Ruling in Islamic law
 - Variable, abbr.
 - Can, with thou
 - South American monkey
 - *Versailles or Buckingham
 - Thus far
 - Yoko's John
 - Collectively
 - Party bowlful
 - Memory failure
 - Goals
 - *St. Basil's or Canterbury
 - Independent, slang
 - Initial stake
 - Field of Dreams state
 - More than one stylus
 - Barnes and Noble or Barnum and Bailey
 - Jaunty rhythm in music
 - Don Quixote's enemy
 - Urge Spot to attack
 - Besides
- DOWN**
- BBQ side
 - Taxon, pl.
 - Fail to mention
 - Bygone Spanish money
 - Jeweler's unit
 - Egg-like curves
 - *The Western one in Israel or the Great one in China
 - *La Sagrada Familia or St. Peter's
 - Having wings
 - ___ of Man
 - Scottish cap
 - Ceiling panel in the Pantheon
 - Type of wheat
 - Cuban dance
 - Glacier matter
 - Medieval knight's spiky weapon
 - Coffee shop order
 - *Home to Taj Mahal
 - Phonograph record
 - Artist's support
 - Back, at sea
 - Director Reitman
 - Indian restaurant staple
 - Giant Hall-of-Famer
 - *Moulin Rouge or Netherland's landmark
 - Incense without prefix
 - Weasel-related onomatopoeia
 - Enigma machine's output
 - One born to Japanese immigrants
 - Roman magistrate
 - Hawaiian veranda
 - V.C. Andrews' "Flowers in the

Crossword Puzzle Solutions on Page 8

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12				13			14				
15				16			17				
18				19			20				
	21					22					
	23	24				25			26	27	
28				29		30	31		32	33	
34				35		36			37		
38				39			40		41		
	42			43			44		45		
				46			47	48			
	49	50				51			52	53	54
55						56			57		
58						59			60		
61						62			63		

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7			2		5			
	8				1	6	3	
		1	6			7		
		5	4					1
	4		5	6		3		
3				9	7			
	5		2	1				
4	9	2			3			
1		3				2		

Solutions on Page 8

Find Puzzles on Page 8

S	T	O	P			C	O	W			B	A	I	T					
L	A	M	E			C	A	V	A		S	A	L	S	A				
A	X	I	S			O	R	A	L		P	S	A	L	M				
W	A	T	E	R	F	A	L	L			E	I	R	E					
						T	U	F	T	S		I	L	L					
						F	L	A	M	E		A	C	T	I	V	E		
A	L	A				B	R	I	D	G	E		C	I	A	O			
F	A	T	W	A		V	A	R			C	A	N	S	T				
T	I	T	I			P	A	L	A	C	E		Y	E	T				
						L	E	N	N	O	N		I	N	A	L	L		
							D	I	P		L	A	P	S	E				
						A	I	M	S		C	A	T	H	E	D	R	A	L
I	N	D	I	E			A	N	T	E			I	O	W	A			
S	T	Y	L	I			P	A	I	R		L	I	L	T				
M	I	L	L				S	I	C				E	L	S	E			

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Sudoku Puzzle on Page 8

6	7	1	9	3	2	4	8	5
9	2	8	7	4	5	1	6	3
5	3	4	1	6	8	2	7	9
2	8	5	4	7	3	6	9	1
7	4	9	5	1	6	8	3	2
3	1	6	2	8	9	7	5	4
8	5	3	6	2	1	9	4	7
4	9	2	8	5	7	3	1	6
1	6	7	3	9	4	5	2	8



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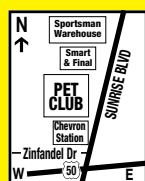


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