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Bagging Benches for Parks



Plastic gatherers Charlotte Saylor (left), Chris Dorsey, Sharon Ruffner, Linda Rose Jones and Wendy Weinland haul a park bench – repurposed from single-use plastic – for placement in the Jack Koobs Nature Area, Carmichael.

Story and photo by Susan Maxwell Skinner

CARMICHAEL, CA (MPG) - Local non-profits are bagging benches as part of a plastic drive begun by Carmichael Kiwanis Club.

Gathering more than 500 pounds of plastic over the last six months, project supporters stockpiled enough unwanted packaging to be repurposed as a hefty park bench for the Koobs Nature Area. The harvest is traded to Trex, a manufacturer of plastic-based building materials. For each 500 pounds collected by a non-profit in a six-month period, the company donates a composite bench.

“Our club collected more plastic in six months than Trex specified,” explains project organizer Sharon Ruffner. “So we invited other non-profits to take advantage of the opportunity.”

Two Arcade groups – Women in Faith (St Mark’s United Methodist Church) and Sierra Vista Community Church – have jumped on the bag

bandwagon and will soon install their own campus benches. “This is the most satisfying project I’ve been involved with,” reports Ruffner. “It doesn’t cost anything and everybody’s so enthused by it.”

“We decided to put our first bench in the Koobs Nature Area,” she says. “Maintaining the preserve is our club’s signature project. Seating allows visitors to pause and reflect as they enjoy nature.”

“Girl Scout Troop 3191 helped by collecting plastic during our open days. They were thrilled to sit on the new bench and see what their efforts helped produce. Our second bench will go to Twin Lakes Elementary School in Orangevale.”

Stockpiling the first 100 pounds of plastic took the Kiwanians a mere six weeks. “We had no trouble meeting the 500-pound requirement in six months,” says Ruffner. “It just shows how much single-use plastic is being produced.”

The indefatigable volunteer coordinates the drive from her home. “In

the beginning, I felt plastic was swallowing me alive,” she says. “Now, thanks to 30 volunteers, we sort, weigh and quickly deliver the accumulation to several local retailers. From there, it’s shipped to the Trex headquarters in Virginia.”

Any household can support the drive. Plastic must be clean, dry and of stretchable composition. Bubble wrap, cling wrap and plastic mailers are welcome (paper labels must be removed).

Unacceptable items include: frozen food and candy packaging; plastic gloves; beverage rings; bottles and rigid containers.

Bench rewards aside, Ruffner applauds the project’s eco-benefit. “Millions of pounds of plastics are in our landfills and floating on our oceans,” she notes. “It’s exciting to find meaningful use for so many products that have been inflicted on our environment.”

Groups or individuals with plastic to contribute may contact Ruffner at Sharonruffner@yahoo.com ★

Flavored Tobacco Ban Begins In California

By Evan Symon, California Globe

The statewide flavored tobacco and e-cigarette ban went into effect on Wednesday, (December 21, 2022) impacting retailers and consumers alike less than a week after a final attempt to stop it in the Supreme Court failed.

The battle over flavored tobacco in California dates back to January 2020, when then-Senator Jerry Hill introduced SB 793, to totally ban flavored cigarettes and e-cigarettes from sale in the state. The bill had much support, and easily made it through the Assembly and Senate, although a number of amendments were added, allowing certain exceptions. Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill shortly afterwards, with the ban set to take place at the end of the year.

However, tobacco companies quickly formed a coalition and set up a ballot referendum, collecting enough signatures in time by December to delay the ban. In early 2021, enough signatures were collected to put the decision up to California voters, with the referendum going to to the November 2022 ballot. Tobacco companies fought hard to fail the referendum, now known as Proposition 31, as many felt the ban went too far, and that it would hurt many businesses as a result. Those supporting pushing for Prop 31 to pass claimed a rise in youth tobacco consumption partially attributed to flavored tobacco being on the market.

Last month, Californians overwhelmingly voted for the ban to stay in place, 63% to 37%, or, 6.8 million for the ban and 3.9 million against. With the ban now set to begin later this month, R.J. Reynolds, as well as other tobacco companies, quickly filed an emergency application for a writ injunction with the U.S. Supreme Court, asking the court to stop the ban as a last Hail Mary attempt. In their application, the tobacco companies said that the ban will cause “irreparable harm, leading to substantial financial losses and a hit to customer goodwill and its reputation.” Meanwhile, California argued that this was a state matter, and voters had already decided on it.

Flavored tobacco ban in CA begins

Without any quotes or other notes, all nine Supreme Court justices turned down the case last week, ending the last legal avenue to stop the ban and clearing the way for the

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Helping Through Gifts from the Heart



Gifts from the Heart seeks volunteers throughout the year to aid the work culminating during the holiday season. Photo courtesy of Sac County

Sac County News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Each year, tucked away inside a Sacramento warehouse, you’ll find a different kind of Santa’s

workshop. Instead of elves, volunteers are spending long hours wrapping presents. And in place of Santa, people of all ages spare their time to deliver gifts to those who otherwise might not get anything

during the holiday season. It’s all part of Sacramento County’s Gifts from the Heart program.

Gifts from the Heart is a gift-giving program developed to provide presents for babies, kids,

teens, disabled adults, and seniors. The program serves individuals in Sacramento County’s Child Protective Services and Senior and Adult Services. This holiday

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CHP Highlights New Laws in 2023



California Highway Patrol (CHP) is educating the public on traffic safety laws that were passed during this year's legislative season and signed by Governor Gavin Newsom. Photo courtesy of Michael Ludwig | Dreamstime.com

CHP News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - As we head into the new year, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is educating the public on traffic safety laws that were passed during this year's legislative season and signed by Governor Gavin Newsom. The laws take effect January 1, 2023, unless otherwise noted.

Public Employment: Peace Officers: Citizenship (Senate Bill (SB) 960, Skinner)

The law maintains that peace officers, including peace officer trainees, be legally authorized to work in the United States consistent with federal law and regulations, however, removes the requirement that they be citizens or permanent residents of the United States.

Catalytic Converters (SB 1087, Gonzalez) (Assembly Bill (AB) 1740, Muratsuchi)

These laws specifically list who can sell catalytic converters to recyclers and require those recyclers to keep documentation such as the year, make, model, and copy of the vehicle title from which the catalytic converter was removed. The purpose of these laws is to help reduce catalytic converter theft.

Vehicular Manslaughter: Speeding and Reckless Driving (SB 1472, Stern)

This law expands the criteria for "gross negligence" as it relates to the crime of vehicular manslaughter. Drivers involved in sideshow activity, exhibition of speed, or speeding over 100 miles per hour which results in a fatality could now be charged with Vehicular Manslaughter with Gross Negligence.

Motor Vehicle Speed Contests and Exhibitions of Speed (AB 2000, Gabriel)

Parking lots and off-street parking facilities are now included as locations where it is a crime to engage in a speed contest, exhibition of speed, or sideshow activity.

Endangered Missing Advisory: Feather Alert (AB 1314, Ramos)

The new "Feather Alert" allows law enforcement agencies to request the CHP to initiate an alert when an indigenous person has been kidnapped, abducted, or reported missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances, and specific criteria has been met to permit alert activation. Additionally, consistent with the Department's existing AMBER, Blue, and Silver Alert programs, this new "Feather Alert" program encourages the use of radio, television, and social media to spread the information about the missing indigenous person.

Hit-and-Run Incidents: Yellow Alert (AB 1732, Patterson)

This law authorizes law enforcement agencies to request the CHP to activate a "Yellow Alert" when a fatal hit-and-run crash has occurred, and specific criteria has been met to permit alert activation. The law also encourages local media outlets to disseminate the information contained in a Yellow Alert. The new law serves to use the public's assistance to improve the investigatory ability for law enforcement agencies throughout the state when working to solve fatal hit-and-run crashes.

Online Marketplaces: Reporting (AB 1700, Maienschein)

This law requires the Attorney General's Office to create an online reporting system for users of third-party online marketplaces to report listings of suspected stolen items. The reported information would be available to local law enforcement and the CHP's Organized Retail Crime Task Force to assist with investigations.

Bicycles Omnibus Bill (AB 1909, Friedman)

Much like the move over or slow down law, this law provides for increased protections to bicyclists by requiring vehicles passing or overtaking a bicycle in the same direction, to move over to an adjacent lane of traffic, if one is available, or slow down and only pass the bicyclist when safe to do so. The law also permits Class 3 e-bike riders to use approved bicycle paths and trails, bikeways, and bicycle lanes. The law prohibits local governments from requiring bicycle registration and allows local authorities to prohibit any electric bicycle on an equestrian, hiking, or other recreational trail.

Electric Bicycles: Safety and Training Program (AB 1946, Boerner Horvath)

This requires the CHP to work with other traffic safety stakeholders such as the California Office of Traffic Safety, to develop statewide safety and training programs for electric bicycles. This training program, which will consist of electric bicycle riding safety, emergency maneuver skills, rules of the road and laws pertaining to electric bicycles, will launch on the CHP's website in September 2023.

Pedestrians (AB 2147, Ting)

This law prohibits peace officers from stopping pedestrians for certain pedestrian-specific violations, such as crossing the road outside of a crosswalk, unless there is an immediate danger of a crash. The CHP reminds all road users of the responsibility to travel safely and look out for one another on the road.

The mission of the CHP is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security. ★

Sacramento County Searching for Shelter Operator

Sac County News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The County of Sacramento Office of Homeless Initiatives (OHI) is seeking interest from qualified organizations interested in operating a low-barrier, scattered-site interim 24/7 shelter program for persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

The program will be inclusive of both operations and re-housing services. The shelter re-housing services provider may be the same as the shelter operations provider or will work closely with the provider if a separate entity.

Sacramento County funds and supports operations of sheltering programs throughout the County, using a variety of approaches and physical buildings to address the unique needs of people living unsheltered. These shelters are low-barrier and come with access to services that help people stabilize their lives, including case management and rehousing support.

One of the core sheltering programs is the Re-Housing Shelter Network (RSN), also known as "scattered site shelter." The County typically shelters up to 155 clients in these shelters at any given time across the County. This model utilizes existing residential homes within neighborhoods to support small (typically less than 5) sheltering programs.

The RSN allows sheltering for people who cannot be supported in traditional, congregate settings, and can accommodate

varying household configurations and serve people with their pets. Each location has a 24/7 live-in site monitor that helps provide for clients' basic needs. With recent expansion in the RSN program, and the changing needs in the Sacramento shelter system, the County is seeking interest from community partners with expertise in shelter operations and/or re-housing services.

The County has been running this scattered site shelter model since 2018. Clients appreciate a smaller environment that allows them to truly experience the transition off the streets and into a house setting while having their basic needs cared for and an on-site house monitor. Clients can bring their partners, pets and possessions to the house with them. This low-barrier model helps increase the chances that potential guests will say "yes" to the opportunity.

Once in the scattered site shelter, clients have access to supportive services such as case management, rehousing services and resources to provide for one's basic needs. These supports are an important step on a client's pathway toward housing.

For more information about this particular partnership opportunity with the County of Sacramento, read the full Letter of Interest, including deadlines and pre-submission meetings that allow potential respondents to ask questions of County staff.

For more information about what the County is doing to address homelessness, visit the Homelessness Website. ★

Shooting Homicide on Westwood Lane

Sac County Sheriff's News Release

CARMICHAEL, CA (MPG) - On Sunday, January 1, 2023, at approximately 10:35 p.m., Sacramento County Sheriff's Deputies responded to the reports of a shooting at an apartment complex on the 2800 block of Westwood Lane in Carmichael.

When Deputies arrived on scene, they located an unresponsive male subject lying on the ground suffering from a gunshot wound and learned the suspect had already fled the scene. Deputies determined the subject had no pulse and was not breathing. Sacramento Metro Fire personnel arrived

on scene almost immediately thereafter and pronounced the subject deceased.

Homicide detectives and Crime Scene Investigators responded to the scene, interviewed witnesses, and gathered evidence. No further information or suspect information is available at this time.

Detectives are asking anyone with information relating to this incident, to please contact the Sheriff's Office at (916) 874-5115 or Sacramento Valley Crime Stoppers at (916) 443-HELP. Tip information may also be left anonymously at www.sacsheriff.com or by calling (916) 874-TIPS (8477). ★



3988 Orval Way, Carmichael | \$899,000

Fantastic Opportunity for multi-generational housing or an investment property that will cash flow! This spacious 2,500 square foot house has 4 bedrooms and 3 full baths. This home has a separate living room, family room and huge sunroom. The kitchen/dining combo offers plenty of storage space. Attached with a separate entrance is a 2 bedroom and one bath home. Each home has its own 2-car garage and backyard. Zoned Rd-10, it is possible to convert this home into a triplex. Great location just minutes away from excellent shops, restaurants and schools. Convenient access to freeways. Don't miss this opportunity!



3840 Valle Vista Road, Carmichael | \$789,900

This 1.8 acre horse property is tucked away in a fantastic Carmichael neighborhood! This is a possible development property but is presently perfect for your horses or personal hobbies with plenty of land for animals to roam, a fenced backyard, a 700 square foot workshop and a huge detached garage. Enjoy beautiful stone siding and thoughtful updates inside including all new flooring, a beautifully updated kitchen complete with a breakfast bar, and recently remodeled bathrooms. Open open-concept floor plan, dual pane windows that offer great natural lighting, recessed ceilings, and much more!



4620 North Avenue, Sacramento | \$679,000

From its charming exterior to its beautifully updated interior, this Sacramento home has it all! Step inside to a spacious floor plan with 4 bedrooms and 3 full baths, separate living and family rooms, and a formal dining area. The living room features beautiful hardwood flooring and a cozy fireplace for those long winter nights. Relax and unwind in the bright and airy family room, which opens up to the private backyard. The kitchen is appointed with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. Entertain outdoors with a roomy backyard, complete with a sparkling pool, outdoor patio, play structure, tool shed and more! 3-car garage with possible RV access. Just steps away from Mission Park and close to Raley's, Bel Air, great shopping and restaurants.



8223 Scarlett Oak Circle, Citrus Heights | \$549,900

This beautiful home in Citrus Heights has it all! Enjoy a spacious floor plan featuring 4 bedrooms and 2 full baths, a bright and airy living room, a separate family room with a cozy fireplace and French doors that open up to the backyard, and a kitchen/dining combo. The private backyard has a gorgeous water feature, a patio with stamped concrete, beautiful landscaping, and a huge detached workshop that could be converted into an ADU. Enjoy a large lot with RV access and pad. Must see!

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Allowing Hallucinogenic Drugs Can Lead to More Violent Crime

CDAА News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Prosecutors in California strongly object to SB 58 (Senator Wiener), which seeks the wholesale decriminalization of many dangerous hallucinogenic drugs.

“This proposal recklessly puts policy before science for numerous psychedelic drugs that have proven to be highly unpredictable and have even been connected to violent crimes,” said Greg Totten, CEO of the California District Attorneys Association (CDAА).

authors of this bill are charting a path that would allow these dangerous hallucinogenic drugs to be legalized before they have been fully understood by the scientific and medical communities.

“If the proponents want more research, that’s one thing,” Totten said. “And if they are advocating for therapeutic use under medical supervision, that is also worth considering. But science does not fully understand these drugs and that’s why this bill is so reckless, because it advocates for skipping that scientific scrutiny altogether.”

“As for dealing with drug cases involving users of hallucinogens, as prosecutors our focus has long been to seek treatment, not jail,” Totten said. “We know that we can help people get on the right track by compelling them into treatment for drug addiction, and that is only possible if there are laws that govern these controlled substances.”

The California District Attorneys Association is a statewide training and advocacy organization representing elected district attorneys, city attorneys with criminal divisions, and more than 3,500 prosecutors. ★

Gifts from the Heart

Continued from page 1

season marks 34 years for the program. At the head of it all is Volunteer & Student Intern Services Coordinator Tonja Edelman.

Gifts from the Heart works with community partners, religious organizations, and professional groups to help thousands of people each year. Dozens of volunteers dedicate their time to help pick up toys, organize donations, and drop off gifts. Tonja estimates the program will provide gifts to about 3,500 clients this year.

While people get to see the magic during the Gifts from the Heart holiday giving campaign, the program begins well before winter. Each year, Tonja starts recruiting volunteers in late summer.

After more than 30 years, there are still needs to be met. Tonja wants people to remember that it’s not just children who need holiday gifts but also teens, babies, seniors, and those aging out of foster care.

“The need is always there,” said Tonja. Gifts from the Heart volunteers say they always need delivery drivers to drop off the presents. Several of their elderly clients do not speak fluent English, so they would love to see multilingual volunteers help out.

“People really just want to feel that connection and share their culture with someone who can relate,” said one volunteer.

Kendra Flin has volunteered for the program for several years in a row. After finishing a busy master’s program, she still found time to help out this year. She hopes sharing her experience will encourage others to give back.

“The people that volunteer are so fun and amazing and supportive,” said Kendra.

A volunteer shift starts with Kendra receiving her delivery route. Each person who is receiving a gift is marked down on a sheet of paper. When Kendra goes on a delivery route, she drops off a gift for half a dozen to ten people, sometimes delivering a couple of gifts per person.

During a recent volunteer shift, Kendra’s

list included several seniors living throughout south Sacramento. She loaded up a car with gifts – many so large she had to use both hands to carry them while she walked slowly to houses and apartments.

“You are delivering directly to the client and they are just really grateful,” said Kendra.

Despite juggling large boxes and sometimes driving by homes several times before coming to the right stop – Kendra kept a smile throughout her route. And everyone smiled back. She wished each person a happy holiday as she dropped off their gift. And with each gift, she gave them something else – a joyful experience that made many of their days.

“You got me something but I didn’t get you anything,” one elderly man joked when Kendra placed his present down in his living room.

But, he did give her something. He reminded her why she loves participating in Gifts from the Heart.

“It’s about being able to give to people around the holidays,” said Kendra.

And that was not the only rewarding experience on her route. Kendra knocked on the door of an apartment where a woman with white hair and a Christmas sweater answered. When Kendra explained that she had been referred to the program by her social worker, the woman broke out into tears. She was beyond grateful that anyone had thought of her this holiday season.

“Thank you so much and bless you,” she told Kendra while pulling her in for a hug.

“That’s why we do this,” said Kendra.

After Kendra finished up her day of delivering presents, she had a message for anyone who is thinking about giving back during the holidays.

“It’s so rewarding. It’s so much fun. So, just do it,” said Kendra.

So, next year, whether it’s volunteering your time or donating, consider giving a gift from your heart.

For more information on Gifts from the Heart, including how you can become involved, visit the GFTH Questions and Answers webpage at Sac County. ★

INDOOR PICKLEBALL



Come join us at the La Sierra Community Center for indoor pickleball. Our Johnson Gym has 5 indoor courts for drop-in play.

DAYS AND TIMES:

- Starting November 29th
- Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

LOCATION:

- La Sierra Community Center (5325 Engle Rd)
- Johnson Gymnasium

FEES:

- \$5 for a day pass or \$40 for a 10-day punch card
- Purchase passes/punch cards at the La Sierra Community Center Recreation Office (5325 Engle Rd, Suite 100)








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Defendant Sentenced for Shooting Murder

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Curtis Fiorini sentenced Lorenzo McCoy to 25 years to life in prison.

On March 30, 2022, a jury convicted McCoy of the second-degree murder of Onaje Lynch. The jury also found true a personal use of a firearm allegation.

On December 7, 2020, McCoy and

the victim got into an argument behind the Wienerschnitzel in Del Paso Heights. McCoy approached the victim and put a loaded, cocked pistol to his chest. A struggle ensued and the gun fired, hitting and killing the victim. At the time of the murder, McCoy was on probation from a 2019 felony assault and was prohibited from possessing a firearm. The firearm used in the murder was never recovered. ★

Repeat DV Offender Convicted of DV, Assault, Battery w/Serious Injury

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Eduardo Godinez was convicted by a jury of domestic violence, assault by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury and battery with serious bodily injury.

The jury also found true great bodily injury enhancements and the aggravating factor that Godinez engaged in violent conduct that indicates a serious danger to society. It was also found true that Godinez has a prior 2019 felony domestic violence conviction.

Godinez and the victim began dating in February 2020. The victim reported that Godinez started physically abusing her

in the summer of 2021, but she did not report the past abuse. On February 14, 2022, Godinez became angry with the victim and repeatedly called her names and accused her of cheating.

Godinez then forcefully hit the victim in the back, causing her extreme pain. The victim went home without seeking medical attention. The next day, the victim became dizzy and passed out. She was taken to the hospital where it was discovered that one of her ribs was fractured, her spleen was lacerated and she had internal bleeding caused by the blow to her back. The victim remained in the hospital for several days.

Godinez faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. ★

Defendant Sentenced for 41 Counts of Child Molest

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Steve White sentenced Michael Leonard to 775 years to life in prison.

On March 3, 2022, a jury convicted Leonard of 41 counts of various child molestation and exploitation charges involving 12 victims. The jury also found true a multiple victim enhancement.

For nearly 16 years, Michael Leonard lured children into his home where he molested and exploited them. He met many of the victims at different children's events and venues he would frequent. Several of the victims were between the ages of 8 and 13 years old.

Leonard also communicated with minors for illegal purposes, spoke

inappropriately to children about sex and attempted to conduct an inappropriate video filming of a child. A citizen contacted law enforcement about a video Leonard wanted to make, which ultimately led to his arrest. This case involved multiple investigating agencies.

Nearly a dozen victims provided victim impact statements to the Court or attended the sentencing. Many of the victims have been haunted by his actions. Some indicated today's sentence will provide some closure.

Leonard's criminal history involving allegations of inappropriate conduct with minors goes back to the late 1990's, including two prior convictions for felony and misdemeanor annoy or molest of a child. ★

Defendant Sentenced for Fatal Stabbing in Carmichael

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Stephen Acquistio sentenced Stephen Jackson to 26 years to life in prison.

A jury convicted Jackson of the first-degree murder of Jaitu Keys. The jury also found true the allegation that Jackson personally used a knife in the commission of the murder.

On November 9, 2019, Jackson and a friend went to a high school football game

together. After the game, Jackson asked the friend to come inside his house but she declined. He then hid a device with GPS tracking in the trunk of her car. The friend left and went to meet the victim in Carmichael.

The victim joined the friend in her car and sat in the front passenger seat to talk. Jackson approached the car, smashed the front passenger window and stabbed the victim four times, including once in the heart. The friend drove the victim to the hospital where he was pronounced deceased. ★

Defendants Sentenced for Abusing 2-Year-Old Boy

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Shelleyanne Chang sentenced Yanik Kryshstal to 12 years and 8 months in prison on May, 20, 2022.

Laura Freitas was sentenced to 180 days county jail and 4 years formal probation. On April 8, 2022, Kryshstal pled to three counts of felony child abuse and admitted to personally inflicting great bodily injury. Freitas pled to one count of felony child abuse.

On June 13, 2020, a 2-year-old boy was taken to the hospital with numerous bruises all over his body. A CT scan confirmed he suffered blunt force trauma and had fluid around his pancreas, healed linear scars, burns on his leg, injuries inside his mouth, skin abrasions and burns on his hands. Child abuse doctors opined the injuries were not accidental. Witnesses confirmed Kryshstal hit and kicked the victim, sometimes using a belt or dog leash.

Kryshstal also locked the

victim in dog crates as a form of discipline, and on at least one occasion had the victim sleep outside in a dog crate overnight. Kryshstal tied the victim's arms or legs to door knobs and crib railings with handcuffs, dog leashes and necklaces. Freitas was aware of the abuse and also put the victim in dog crates as a form of punishment. Sacramento County sheriff's detectives found that Kryshstal also poured boiling water on the feet of a 3-year-old girl in 2014, which resulted in permanent scarring. ★

Defendant Sentenced for Shooting Murder, Attempted Murder on Truxel Road

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Delbert Oros sentenced Adrian Castillo on March 11, 2022, to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

On November 19, 2021, a jury convicted Castillo of the first-degree murder of Kenyatta Dawson and attempted murder. The jury also found true the special circumstance that the murder was committed during a drive-by-shooting and a personal use of a firearm allegation on both counts.

On November 8, 2019, Castillo and his juvenile friend arranged to sell a ghost Glock to a gun buyer. The parties met in the Natomas Marketplace parking lot and exchanged the gun for an envelope. When Castillo realized the buyer had shorted him, he directed his juvenile driver to follow the buyer's car. There were two other males and two females who were also in the buyer's car, with Mr. Dawson driving. No one else in the car had any interest in the gun

purchase. When Castillo's car caught up to the buyer's car on Truxel Road, Castillo opened fire with a .45 caliber Glock.

This gun had been illegally altered to be fully automatic and Castillo fired 10 rounds in a matter of seconds. Mr. Dawson was killed instantly and the victims' car sped out of control until it hit another vehicle. With the victims' car disabled and all five occupants still inside, Castillo's car approached again and he fired six more rounds into the victims' car using a second gun. The gun buyer was shot through the jaw, breaking both jaw bones, and shot through both legs.

The victims' car contained the gun bought from Castillo, but no ammunition. There was no evidence that anyone from the victims' car returned fire. Castillo fled the scene but was captured by Sacramento police detectives less than four days later. Investigators recovered both guns used in the shooting and both guns were legally purchased and registered to Castillo. ★

Defendant Sentenced for 1st-Degree Murder of Girlfriend

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Ernest Sawtelle sentenced Damion Horton to 76 years and 4 months to life in prison.

On September 13, 2021, a jury convicted Horton of the first-degree murder of Dajha Richards, discharging a firearm causing death and felon in possession of a firearm. The allegation that Horton suffered a prior 2016 strike conviction for attempted robbery was also found true.

On January 8, 2019, a 12-year-old boy called 911 to report that his 19-year-old sister, Dajha Richards, had been shot in the

chest. When sheriff's deputies arrived on scene, the victim was able to report that the father of her child and boyfriend, Damion Horton, was the person who shot her.

The victim was quickly transported to the hospital, where she was pronounced deceased. Immediately after the shooting, Horton fled the scene with the gun leaving the victim alone with their 4-month-old son and her brother. Horton turned himself in more than 24 hours after the victim's death, but the gun was never recovered. During the course of the investigation, it was discovered that Horton had an extensive history of domestic violence with the victim. ★

Defendant Convicted of Sexually Assaulting Child in Two Counties

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Roberto Lopez was convicted by a jury of two counts of forcible lewd act upon a child under 14 years old and two counts of rape of a child under 14 years old by a perpetrator more than 10 years older than the victim.

The jury also found true that the victim was vulnerable and Lopez took advantage of a position of trust when he sexually assaulted the victim.

Lopez was a family acquaintance and father figure to the victim. Lopez raped the victim when she was 12 years old, and again when she was 13 years old. The

first rape occurred in Sacramento, the second rape occurred in Yuba City. In both instances of rape, Lopez held the victim down and forced himself on her. In the final incident which lasted longer than the first, he inflicted painful physical trauma to the victim which lasted for days.

An allegation that Lopez has a prior strike conviction for possession of drugs for sale for the purposes of a criminal gang and additional aggravated circumstances will be determined at the sentencing hearing.

Lopez faces a maximum sentence of 65 years to life in prison. Sentencing is set for December 9, 2022, at 8:30 a.m. in Department 36 before the Honorable Stephen Acquistio. ★

Defendant Sentenced for Sexually Abusing 5-Year-Old Child

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Steve White sentenced Jose Navarrete to 126 years to life in prison. On June 11, 2021, a jury convicted Navarrete of 10 counts of child sexual assault charges.

Navarrete committed multiple substantial sexual assaults against the victim when she was approximately 5 years old and continued to do so for approximately three years. In August of 2018, the victim and her family reported the abuse to the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office. ★

Defendant Sentenced for Assault at Homeless Camp

Sac County DA News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The Honorable Shama Mesiwala sentenced Jeffery Cross to 25 years to life in prison.

On March 2, 2022, a jury convicted Cross of assault with force likely to produce great bodily injury, criminal threats and intimidating a witness. Allegations that Cross has prior strike convictions for involuntary manslaughter with the use of a firearm, criminal threats and first-degree burglary were also found true at sentencing.

On May 31, 2021, Citrus Heights police officers responded to a report of an assault at a homeless camp on Greenback Lane.

One victim knew Cross and stated Cross kicked him, which may have caused him to lose consciousness.

Officers observed dried blood on the side of the victim's head and a red mark in his rib area. A witness saw Cross punch and kick the victim multiple times. The witness told officers that Cross then also punched him in the face, causing him to fall backwards onto the ground. In follow-up investigations, both victims identified Cross as the person who had assaulted them from a photo line-up. One of the victims also indicated that Cross threatened him, telling him to keep quiet. ★

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CLUES

ACROSS

- Piece of data
- Baryshnikov's step
- Back wound
- Soft palate hanger
- *Any high mountain
- Tsar's edict
- Means
- Bishop of Rome's jurisdiction
- Female water-elf
- *Highest mountain
- *Sea that is also the largest lake
- A in MoMA
- *Small island
- Ignited
- Lamborghini model
- Extravagant
- 15th of March, May, July or October
- *-a-Sketch
- Technology expert
- Novice
- Damage one's reputation
- Lil' Bow Wow's first name
- Bette Midler's movie
- *Pocus
- "I'm ___ you!"
- Unit of pressure
- Denver breakfast choice
- Big rig
- *___ de Janeiro
- Excessively abundant
- Ensign, for short
- *Great ___ Reef
- *National Geographic

DOWN

- Surfer's "man"
- Tel ___ Israel
- Ditty
- Extremist
- Masters without t
- Ghost of Christmas
- Miller High Life, e.g.
- Four-eyes' gear
- Bypass
- Uber alternative
- *The largest continent
- Past participle of "be"
- Remove from political office
- Eyelid infections
- Opposite of nothing
- Burning aroma producer
- *___sphere, the solid earth
- "She is pulling my leg," e.g.
- 9 a.m. prayer
- *___sphere, air surrounding earth
- Sleeveless garment
- Blood of the gods, Greek mythology
- Harry Belafonte's daughter
- *___sphere, all water on earth

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Getting More Covered

By Elizabeth Aguilera, CALMatters.org

Hundreds of thousands of Californians previously shut out of Covered California — the state program that offers discounted health insurance — soon can participate because the eligibility requirements are changing.

Prior to the new rules, individuals who had access to an employer-based health insurance plan through a family member were not eligible for Covered California. Employer plans are often expensive for spouses or children, driving up the cost of coverage for those family members. Those caught in this unaffordable “family glitch” have few choices: buy the expensive plan, try to buy a bare-bones plan separately or go without health insurance.

In April, the Biden administration issued guidelines to fix the near-decade-long problem and last month the federal government adopted the regulation. Starting in January 2023, if a family’s premium costs more than 9.12% of the household income the family could be eligible for federal subsidies, or discounts, through Covered California.

According to the UC Berkeley Labor Center, the “glitch” impacts an estimated 615,000 people in California, mostly women and children from low and middle-income families. The center estimates that about 400,000 of those people would be eligible for financial assistance through Covered California based on their income.

“For the people impacted, it could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Anthony Wright, executive director of Health Access California, a consumer rights group. “It really does have an impact on the health and well-being of the family and their finances.”

A state analysis by Third Way, a national think tank, found that a California family of four with \$53,000 in annual earnings would likely save about \$4,340 a year in health insurance premium costs. The report shows that lower-income households would see the most significant savings.

The federal government is footing the bill for the expansion and pays subsidies directly to the health plans based on Covered California’s marketplace prices. The Congressional Budget Office reported that it would cost \$44 billion over the next 10 years to cover family members previously impacted by the family glitch.



More people will be eligible for health insurance through Covered California. Photo courtesy of Alexander Rath | Dreamstime.com

Covered California pays for outreach to families, including those who have been caught in the glitch, said Jessica Altman, executive director of Covered California. Covered California has a \$109 million annual budget for marketing and the bulk is spent during open enrollment to outreach to Californians to sign up or renew coverage.

Open enrollment started this week and runs through Jan. 31, 2023. Coverage can begin as early as Jan. 1.

California health advocates have been trying to solve the glitch at the state level for years but it was too expensive for the state to pay the cost. The federal government had to decide to fix it and fund it.

This change should help reduce the number of uninsured people in California. The state has experienced the steepest decline in the number of uninsured since the federal Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, launched in 2013. Since then, some 35 million people have enrolled in health plans nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The state’s rate of uninsured residents dropped from 17% in 2013 to 7% in 2021. More than half of the 3 million still uninsured in California are eligible for some sort

of coverage, according to UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and UC Berkeley Labor Center. The remainder, about 1.2 million, are undocumented immigrants who are ineligible for coverage through the exchange, although some may now qualify for public programs.

Any change that increases coverage for Californians, especially children, is a boon, Wright said.

“This is a big deal toward the goal of a government guarantee that everybody has access to affordable health coverage,” Wright said of the policy change. “The more we get rid of asterisks and exclusions the better.”

The change comes as employers continue to shift insurance costs to families. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, premiums for family coverage increased 22% between 2016 and 2021.

Nationally, about 5 million individuals are eligible only for unaffordable employer-provided insurance. More than half of those are children. Among adults, more women than men are caught in the glitch.

“It created an unaffordable situation for a small but meaningful group of people,” said Christine Eibner, a senior economist focused on health care at RAND, a nonprofit research

organization that published a report about the issue in 2015. “Most of them were enrolling anyhow and paying the higher premium. They could be paying 15% to 20% of their income.”

In California, of the estimated 615,000 who are stuck with high-priced employer insurance plans as their only option, researchers estimated that about 87,000 are uninsured, Altman said. About 35,000 are in the individual market paying full rates and the majority are paying for that expensive employer-sponsored coverage, Altman said.

“There are families that can save thousands of dollars — middle-income families, lower-income families — that it’s going to make a significant change for,” Altman said. “There is value in helping people who have coverage to connect with lower-cost coverage.”

If people are uninsured or have expensive coverage they are less likely to get the care they need.

Those who stretch their budgets to sign up for employer-based plans may take the least expensive plan with higher deductibles or catastrophic coverage, Wright said. That could result in people going to the doctor less or not using the plans they have because they would still have to pay out of pocket.

“We believe it’s important to have the whole family covered,” Wright said. “There is a real result of not having coverage. The uninsured live sicker, die younger and are one emergency away from financial ruin.”

The Affordable Care Act requires employers with at least 50 employees to offer health insurance to them and their dependents. Spouses are usually included but not required under the law. In California, 47% of people are enrolled in an employer-provided plan. A national study published in the Health Affairs Journal found that families spend an average of 16% of household income paying employer-based premiums.

Before the latest change, the Affordable Care Act allowed employees to obtain insurance through discounted state programs if their employer health plan cost more than 9.1% of their income, which is considered unaffordable. Employers face penalties if their workers are obtaining insurance through those state programs.

Also, prior to the latest change, the law did not define affordability for family members and employers faced no penalties related to the cost of premiums for family members. ★

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See's Candies to Consolidate



Berkshire Hathaway owned See's Candies plans a megastore at 5499 Sunrise Boulevard in Citrus Heights for the new 15-year lease agreement. The former drive-up banking lanes are shown removed on this exterior rendering. Image courtesy of Tallen Capital Partners

By Thomas J. Sullivan

CITRUS HEIGHTS, CA (MPG) - Planned construction of a new See's Candies megastore at 5499 Sunrise Boulevard in Citrus Heights, formerly home to a 10,621-square-foot Patelco Credit Union branch should move forward in early 2023 when revised drawings for a new interior floor plan are finalized and then submitted to the City of Citrus Heights for review, said the architect, Jeff Brandon, partner of Schuss Clark Brandon Architects in San Diego.

A building permit application by San Diego-based Schuss Clark Brandon Architects Inc. for interior improvements was originally filed on August 11, 2020, on behalf of their client, See's Candies, headquartered in South San Francisco, and described as "tenant improvements to an existing building."

Schuss Clark Brandon has designed several ground-up retail centers and tenant improvement spaces, according to its website.

The permit application was returned to Schuss Clark Brandon on August 16th by the Citrus Heights building department with comment for further review.

"We're in the process of finalizing our architectural drawings which include these and other changes soon," Brandon said.

The interior construction permit process is separate from overall exterior grounds improvements which are planned

by the landlord-tenant, Citivest Commercial and Residential Real Estate of Newport Beach, Calif. and Tallen Capital Partners, LLC, of Del Mar.

Tallen Capital Partners has leased the entire building to Berkshire Hathaway owned See's Candies under a new 15-year lease agreement.

"By aggressively pursuing the leasing of this asset with our national, regional and local tenant and broker relationships, in record time, we procured one of the finest retailers in the country to occupy the building," said chairman and CEO, Terrence Tallen in remarks describing the project on its website. A representative for Tallen Capital Partners did not respond to a request for additional comment.

According to Tallen's project description, the new Citrus Heights See's Candies will consolidate three other locations within its trade area for its first of a kind combination facility which include a traditional See's Candies retail store, their corporate sales facility (business to business unit) and their regional offices.

In recent weeks, work crews have been visible conducting second floor demolitions and filling dumpsters in the rear parking lot with debris.

Susan McLendon, development services technician for the city building department said the City of Citrus Heights then had some specific concerns which the city wanted Schuss Clark

Brandon to address and said she looked forward to their reply.

Separate physical exterior improvements by the landlord-tenant Tallen Capital Partners to existing landscaping are planned. The former drive-up banking lanes are shown removed on an exterior rendering of the project posted on the Tallen Capital Partners website.

McClendon said the Citrus Heights city building department hasn't yet received plans for the exterior phase of the project which will be reviewed by the city engineer before approval.

Patelco Credit Union in Citrus Heights closed its two-story branch office at 5499 Sunrise Boulevard at the corner of Uplands Way last July and has since moved to a new location in the Marketplace at Birdcage, 6100 Birdcage Lane, Suite 125.

Susan Portman, corporate director of public relations at See's Candies corporate office did not respond to a request for further comment concerning the planned Citrus Heights new location.

See's Candies was founded by Charles See, his wife Florence, and his mother Mary in Los Angeles, California in 1921. Its retail shop locations typically feature a candy counter where customers can either create their own custom-mixed box of chocolates and candies to order or purchase boxed chocolates, truffles, nuts and chews, lollipops, and sugar-free candy. ★

What Taxpayers Need to Know about Unemployment



Commentary by Jon Coupal

I sincerely hope that readers aren't turned off by the title of this column. While most taxpayers aren't directly responsible for paying unemployment insurance taxes, the truth is we all pay and, in California, we pay a great deal more than we should.

Last week I received an email from a dentist who operates a small dental office and is required to pay the unemployment insurance tax and, sadly, is paying much more than he should because our unemployment insurance program is insolvent. Like so many other measurements of California's performance relative to other states, our businesses – both large and small – are paying a penalty for the incompetence of our elected officials and bureaucrats.

Here's what taxpayers should know about unemployment insurance.

California's unemployment insurance program (UI) is funded by a tax imposed on employers. The proceeds are deposited in the Unemployment Trust Fund of the U.S. Treasury Department. States may withdraw funds from their accounts to pay unemployment benefits.

Here's the kicker: If a state's trust fund does not have adequate funds to pay benefits, it must borrow money from the federal fund to satisfy

unemployment claims. But if a state's UI Fund is insolvent for more than two years, that tax rate increases each year. The tax can be hefty, as much as \$420 per employee per year.

Like other states, California was slammed by the pandemic. Low unemployment quickly became unprecedented levels of high unemployment. While few dispute the need for workplace closures early in the pandemic, California was much slower in reopening than more freedom-oriented states like Texas and Florida. This had a direct impact on the further decimation of the UI fund.

That's just one reason why, by the spring of 2020, California's UI Fund was depleted and continued to fall further behind. This required even more borrowing from the federal government.

Even worse, California was suffering from a second epidemic: an epidemic of massive fraud in the administration of unemployment insurance claims. On Gov. Gavin Newsom's watch, the Employment Development Department (EDD) failed to process a backlog of claims for hundreds of thousands of unemployed Californians while sending out as much as \$30 billion in unemployment benefits for phony claims, including fraudulent claims paid to death row inmates.

Much too late, after several legislative hearings on the lack of oversight of EDD, there were modest corrective actions taken. But this was the epitome of closing the barn door after the horses bolted.

If anyone believes that the massive EDD fraud didn't impact ordinary taxpayers, they couldn't be more wrong. California's employers are directly responsible for the cost of EDD providing benefits

on fraudulent claims, which means that all of us must absorb the cost of this inexcusable lack of oversight.

Perhaps the most important thing for taxpayers to know about California's unemployment insurance program is how insolvent it is. EDD itself projects that at year's end the UI Fund's total debt will exceed \$19 billion. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Labor confirms that California's debt problem is the worst of any state, with an accumulated debt that exceeds the debt of all other states combined.

Again, in the competition between states, it is notable that most other states have no outstanding debt because they used Covid relief funds from Washington to pay down their UI loans. For example, Texas approved a \$7.2 billion payment and has eliminated its UI debt entirely.

What about California? Because of its insolvency, it must pay \$470 million in interest payments alone to the federal government. That's nearly half a billion that could otherwise go to education, transportation, or public safety. Worse yet, this is an annually recurring expense.

Remember just last June when California had a \$95 billion surplus? That would have been the time to increase the payments to the federal government to reduce our UI debt. But now, the LAO tells us we have a \$25 billion deficit "problem."

So let's just chalk this up as another missed opportunity for the Golden State. And citizen taxpayers, as well as California's beleaguered business community, are paying the price.

Jon Coupal is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. ★

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