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Gold River Messenger

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Family Dreams Come True



Ray Zak and daughter Kayla Zak celebrate the experience of working together and offering the family legacy of enthusiasm for food and dining. Photo by Patrick Larenas

By Patrick Larenas

RANCHO CORDOVA, CA (MPG) - Zak's Bar and Grill held its much awaited Grand Opening in conjunction with the Rancho Cordova Chamber of Commerce on Friday, November 20. The Zak "family of food enthusiasts" charged ahead with much optimism in a ribbon cutting with City and community leaders.

The bar and grill opened at the same 10750 Olson Drive location previously occupied by iconic restaurants Hooters until 2018 and formerly by Eppie's Restaurant. The restaurant and

"20-tap" bar offers a perfect ambience for dining, sports viewing, celebrations and much more. The restaurant's welcoming website states, "The Zak's have created a diverse menu for every taste. From pasta to street tacos to a bread bowl of clam chowder and vegetarian options - There's a little something for everyone."

Christopher Grieve, Executive Marketing Director for Zak's Bar and Grill, said the new food establishment "had been trying to open since Mother's Day in May, but due to the Covid restrictions imposed" were stuck waiting and asking themselves, "Are

we going to do it or not?" According to Grieve, the Zak family decided, "They were not ones to back out."

Ray Zak, General Manager for Zak's Bar and Grill, said, "If we can make it through Covid, we can make it through anything." The established family businessman is also owner of Integrity Business Partners, an ISO/MSP financial institution specializing in credit card processing solutions in Gold River.

For Ray, a father of 5 younger adults, the new food establishment is an opportunity to teach his younger

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County Gifts from the Heart Program in Full Swing



The lives of thousands of children, teens, adults with disabilities and seniors are touched each holiday season by the County's Gift from the Heart Program.

By Andrea Sandoval, Sacramento County

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The lives of thousands of children, teens, adults with disabilities and seniors are touched each holiday season by the County's Gifts from the Heart Program. For more than 30 years, this annual holiday gift-giving program that runs from mid-November until early December provides gifts to community members being served by Child Protective Services and Senior and Adult Services of the Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services.

Local community partners and individuals from area businesses, county staff, government agencies, religious organizations, service groups, professional groups and families participate in this annual holiday gift-giving drive. Each year, more than 90 community partners donate nearly 10,000 gifts to more than 3,000 children, youth, adults with disabilities and seniors throughout Sacramento County.

"This year, because of the pandemic we are doing things a little differently," said Volunteer & Student Intern Services Coordinator, Tonja Edelman. "It is going to be easier than ever to donate to those in need with our online shopping registry. You can purchase gifts from Amazon, Walmart and Target, based off our gift registry and then ship directly to Gifts from the Heart and picked up by social workers."

Seniors and adults with disabilities would be grateful to receive clocks with large numbers, radios, blankets, warm clothes, space heaters, sheet and comforter sets, mittens, gloves, 2020 calendars, puzzles, bathroom and kitchen towels, bathrobes, lotion, body wash, postage stamps, large print books, slippers, audio-books, arts & craft kits, winter jackets, coffee pots, mugs, socks, knitted caps, kitchen plate sets, large print crossword puzzles, toasters or wallets.

Children served by Child Protective Services would be thankful to receive board games, educational toys,

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River City Food Bank Named Nonprofit of the Year by Assemblyman Cooley

By Patrick Larenas

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - The Office of Assemblyman Ken Cooley (D) awarded River City Food Bank 501(c)(3) the 2020 Nonprofit of the Year recognition on Friday, October 30. Cooley joined the Arden Arcade food distribution facility located at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church to tour and witness the services rendered to those struggling with food insecurity.

Families and individuals gathered at the open house while the Assemblyman took the early moments of the morning to reflect on the symbolism portrayed on the Capitol building's pediment which inspires legislators to honor nonprofits. The statues he referred to depicted men on horseback fending off natural threats such as a mauling grizzly bear and a charging buffalo for Athena, goddess of wisdom and warfare, surrounded by the embodiments of Education, Justice, Industry and Mining.

Organizations such as River City Food Bank said Cooley are subduing the great challenges that nature now presents humanity: "that has been the mission of the

food bank," to tame the raw forces of nature on behalf of the communities served.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been such a challenge as the food distribution facility saw a 32 percent increase this year. According to the Office of Assemblyman Ken Cooley, "As employees continue to be laid off or are forced to stay home to care for their children, and begin to deplete their financial reserves, the need for food assistance is skyrocketing."

River City Food Bank executive director Amanda McCarthy said, "the partnership here with the Episcopal Diocese has been really ideal

since this area is practically a grocery store desert... and we make sure that at least 50 percent of what we provide is fresh produce." She said residents, and especially refugees, without means for transportation, greatly benefit from the food bank's presence there.

Mike Wiley board of director and past president of River City Food Bank said they are very honored to receive the California Legislature Assembly Certificate of Recognition from the 8th District Assemblyman. "This is the first time since its founding in 1968 that we have

received the Nonprofit of the Year recognition," he said.

River City Food Bank's main distribution center is located in midtown at 1800 28th Street Sacramento, CA 95816 (916) 446-2627

Food distribution hours for midtown are Tuesday - Thursday: 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. and at Arden Arcade: Friday-Saturday 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

River City Food Bank Center at St. Matthew's is located on 2300 Edison Ave. Sacramento, CA 95821.

For more information visit rivercityfoodbank.org/ ★



From left to right: Mike Wiley, River City Food Bank past president of the Board of Directors, Assemblyman Ken Cooley (D), Amanda McCarthy, River City Food Bank executive director, and Laura Knauss vice president at the morning open house event. Photo by Patrick Larenas

A Call to Action

Story and photos by Shaunna Boyd

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - The Playmakers Organization is a local non-profit that serves at-risk kids and kids with developmental differences. Playmakers founder Greg Roeszler (known as Coach Roz) started the organization in 2009 with the goal of using inclusive sports to coach character and leadership, while also providing kids with mentoring and academic support.

Coach Roz mentored Folsom local Jordan Richards – who now plays safety for the Baltimore Ravens – when he played youth football in the region. Richards joined Playmakers to give kids the same opportunities he received. And he introduced Coach Roz to Harrison Phillips – now defensive tackle with the Buffalo Bills – when Phillips was a freshman football player at Stanford in 2015. Phillips and Roz quickly formed a friendship, and Phillips became a Playmaker as well.

Together, Roz and Phillips wrote a book about their journey and their plans to take Playmakers nationwide – Beyond Coaching: Building Character and Leadership.

Coach Roz has previously written two books about the Playmakers method. His first book, Coaching Character and Leadership: A Playbook for Parents, focused on how a single parent can partner with a coach to positively affect their child's behavior and help them develop character. The second book, Coaching for a Bigger Win: A Playbook for Coaches, taught coaches how to expand their influence to be a positive presence in the lives of the kids they coach.

This new book builds on that foundation with the goal of creating a “national fraternity of Playmakers coaches all working under the umbrella of coaching character,” said Roz, who sees the book as a call to action. It's written as an introduction to the coaching clinics they plan to host across the country, with coaches as “the catalyst of a systemic change.” Roz writes: “We could use the most effective laboratory invented (the field of play) to make life changes in our society. We could be treating each other better, respectfully. We could be developing



(Left to right) Playmakers founder Coach Roz, Harrison Phillips of the Buffalo Bills, and Jordan Richards of the Baltimore Ravens use football to teach kids about character. Roz and Phillips recently authored a book together about the Playmakers journey – *Beyond Coaching: Building Character and Leadership*.



Playmakers gives kids the opportunity to have fun playing sports while also encouraging their academic and emotional development.

character-based, empathic, understanding leaders who would put our society in a better place.”

Beyond Coaching also “speaks more directly to helping at-risk kids and kids with developmental differences and the

need to relationally connect to those kids and their families,” said Roz. He explained that 70% of such kids don't have a father in their lives, and “they are more on an island than other kids.” He affirmed that reaching out and supporting kids in need is “inclusive and it's the right thing to do.” If a coach can teach his young athletes about character, compassion, and the importance of service to others, “everybody wins,” said Roz.

It was Phillips' idea that they write the book together to detail their journey and motivate others to join their mission. In the book, Phillips explains that he wanted to write a book “about the amazing things we are learning through the children we work with.”

For Phillips, “the dream is to work with thousands and thousands of children with developmental differences and special needs, bringing them nothing but joy, new experiences, inclusion, friendship, and teaching them to pay it forward.”

Roz explained that “coaches around the country have a voice and platform to communicate character and values at a level far beyond their comprehension.” But in youth sports, Roz sees far too much value put on winning the game: “That's the wrong message. ... The right message is teaching fun of the game, love of the game, and respect for each other.” Coaching character is a “greater and more impactful message,” said Roz.

Phillips writes, “I want to be that supportive, reassuring voice to kids to help spark them to live the life they deserve! The world gets out of the way for people who know where they are going. I want to help them take the first step.”

In the truest sense, the book Roz and Phillips have written is about love—love of football, love for the kids, and the love, admiration, and respect they have for each other. Playmakers is about “teaching them to love the game and love each other,” said Roz, and the goal of the book is to motivate coaches to reinvent their coaching style to show kids how to become not just good athletes, but good people.

The book is available on ThePlaymakers.org and Amazon.com. You can follow The Playmakers Organization on social media on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. ★

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Sacramento Blankets for Sacramento Kids Readies for Holiday Giveaway



The Kindergarten Project accepts blanket kits for kids. Photo: SBSK

By Claire Gliddon, SBSK

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - Every September, SBSK picks the 7 lowest-income elementary schools and finds out how many kindergarteners they have, and they make double fleece blankets (about 40" x 60") for ALL of them, and a little fleece pouch with a Beanie Baby in it to go with each blanket. SBSK gives these to the kids right before Christmas break. (Even during this time of distance learning, the teachers will get these to their students.) Some of these kids live in their cars or in places without heat. And this is ALL they get for Christmas. It is WILDLY popular with the teachers AND the kids! Spread the word, too! We've done this for 7 years and hope to continue doing it, as long as we can get Beanie Babies. In 2020, SBSK will need 998 blankets and Beanie Babies.

SBSK-SBSK is always



Volunteer Millie puts her heart into the gift blankets to be distributed. Photo: SBSK

looking for new volunteers to make blankets all year round for children in need. Kindergarten Project-SBSK is asking for donations of Joann's fleece blanket kits (48 x 60) all year long. **B e a n i e B a b y** Explanation-SBSK is asking for donations of new or "almost new" Beanie Babies all year long. If you'd like more information about SBSK, please go to www.sacblankets4kids.com and sign in!

No pressure, no timelines, no meetings...just people who enjoy blanket-making and helping a whole lot of children at the same time. Sacramento Blankets for Sacramento Kids (SBSK) is a nonprofit organization that gets volunteers to make handmade blankets (sew, quilt, crochet, knit, no-sew fleece) for children in need from infants to 18-year-olds. They do this all year long! But they also have a "special" project they do around this time of year. ★

Family Dreams Come True

Continued from page 1 kids a trade and business skills: "Distilling the traits of what it takes to be an entrepreneur is something I am doing with all my kids. And this time it's Kayla's turn!" Ray is referring to Kayla Zak, the third oldest of the family and new owner of the restaurant. "Zak's Bar and Grill is Kayla's dream come true!"

Until this point in her life the mother of three, Kayla, had been acquiring experience working for the family business-Integrity Business Partners. The father/daughter combination, together with General Manager aunt Tracy Zak, will be leading the 9 family worker enterprise together with 25 local employees. President and CEO of Rancho Cordova Chamber of Commerce Diann H



The ribbon cutting event was exciting for the family business and inspiring for City and community leaders to behold. Photo by Patrick Larenas

Rogers thanked all who came out to enjoy and said of the now busy building, "we are all excited to have someone doing something around here!" "The much anticipated Grand Opening is also a Historic Landmark for Zak's Bar and Grill," added Marketing Director Grieve, "since there are also plans

to open multiple locations in the future." Zak's Bar and Grill will observe all Covid-19 safety and health regulations. Business hours are 8 am to 8 pm during this Covid phase, but regular hours are expected to be 6 am to 12 midnight. For more information visit ZakBarGrill.com ★

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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.





A Gold River Christmas Eve

By Gold River Resident David Dickstein

Whatever you celebrate this time of year – Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Festivus, Boxing Day, Oatmeal Muffin Day or something else – I toast to the health and happiness of you and yours this holiday season. I do so not empty-handed.

my loyal readers this year, but thanks to China I'm not able to spring for everyone's association dues this month. So, instead, I'm gifting my faithful with a poem. It's a regifting of sorts – an updated merger of my favorite verses from past December columns. Hope you appreciate that it's printed on imaginary gold-leaf stationery. Here goes nothing:

Twas the night before Christmas, when all through Gold River,
Nothing was stirring; even DoorDash wouldn't deliver;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
Where rejoiced is the birth of God's cherished heir.

The children were nestled in their comfy abode,
From Gold River Station to cozy Mother Lode;
And my wife at home sleeping, and I driving 'round,
Like the community patrol spanning plenty of ground.

When out on the trails there arose such a clatter,
So I sprang from my car to see what was the matter;
From the GRDC parking lot I flew like a flash,
My speed kicked up the last of the wildfires' ash.

Sight of the school is a bit disconcerting,
Place is a ghost town due to forced distance learning;
Then out from the calm a spectacle did appear,
'Twas a miniature sleigh with eight tiny reindeer!

Above the trails so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick;
What a sight he was on this night filled with stars,
Bummer deliveries this late are banned in the CC&Rs!

"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Vixen and Prancer!"
That's right big fella, going fast is the answer!
First to Powell homes Santa started his work,
Anyone who'd stop this would be quite the jerk.

To Gold Spike and Bret Harte St. Nicolas flew,
Then dropped off more toys in Marshall and Maidu;
There was no bias between owner and renter,
But Santa did favor kids of Discovery Center.

As he went from roof to roof on his Christmas Eve run,
Santa made sure that everyone had fun;
"Ho-ho-ho!" he roared as he went down the flues,
Even for houses late on their association dues.

Busier than a bee was the man with the sack,
Until his radar device went off near the folded Outback;
Now on the prowl was Governor Newsom,
His overstepping of authority was particularly gruesome.

Gavin closed in like St. Nick was Dillinger,
Shame, oh shame on that Grinch-like non-villager;
In Carson Creek a wild foot chase ensued,
No time for milk and cookies or any left-out food.

A pursuit through Gold River moved from yard to yard,
Then Santa met his sleigh on Gold Country Boulevard;
The reindeer were waiting for their boss to arrive,
All smudged with cinders and soot, but alive!

Despite his large size and a bulky red suit,
The happy home invader fled along with his loot.
As he soared high above Eureka and Enterprise;
His dimples how merry! Twinkling were his eyes.

He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed like Bel Air's finest jelly;
Fat and plump, couldn't guess what he weighs,
Dude needs more veggies and less pizza from Blaze!

The wife said hubby's health is a cause of concern,
"Be alive," Mrs. Claus says, "and not in an urn";
The cough Santa has isn't due to bronchitis,
Ever the irresponsible one, the guy's got coronavirus!

Somehow this super spreader was no longer sought,
So without a care or a mask he endowed Argonaut;
Making one last pass through the town of Gold River,
St. Nick checked Google Maps to see where next to deliver.

Though he also gifted to the Hindu, Jew and Jehovah,
He still had toys left for kids in Rancho Cordova;
Santa sprang in his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like an Aerojet missile;
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight –
"Merry Christmas or whatever to all and to all a good night!"

David Dickstein is a Gold River resident, award-winning writer and principal at the PR firm Prose & Comms Inc. He can be reached at daviddickstein1@gmail.com.

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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. ★

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. ★

California State Parks Experience Goes Virtual for K-12 Students

California State Parks Press Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The school field trip to California State Parks is being reimagined thanks to a new partnership between California State Parks, Parks California, and Computer-Using Educators (CUE). California is home to some of the country's most unique and precious cultural, natural, and historic resources, and a new passPORTS online adventure will help make it possible for students from across the state to experience them.

The new pilot program, passPORTS, will use a blended access approach that combines quality teaching practices with the latest technology to reduce barriers to park access. Using videoconference technology and web resources, the Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students (PORTS) program introduces K-12 students to live State Park Interpreters, allowing them to connect their classroom studies within the context of California's state park system. "We are excited to embark on a new partnership with Parks California and CUE to provide deep and meaningful digital learning experiences for K12 students and invite them for an in-person class visit to our parks, recreation areas, natural reserves, and culturally important places when the time is right for schools," Brad Krey, PORTS Program Manager said. Geoff Kish, Vice President of Programs at Parks California said, "passPORTS is an exceptional opportunity for kids to connect with and learn about California's State Parks from the comfort of their home. Programs like this play an important role in making state parks accessible for all people, regardless of where they live."

This enhanced initiative builds on 15 years of successful PORTS programs with a new combination of digital instructional materials for use in the classroom, as well as in-park use, and provides funding to school districts to cover bus and transportation costs, giving students their passPORTS to the Parks. "We believe parks provide deep and meaningful interdisciplinary learning experiences for students regardless of physical, social, cultural, economic circumstance, or ability," said Scott Shepherd, Parks Access Coordinator, California State Parks. "Our work will not only increase equitable access to parks for all California citizens, but

in turn mobilize a new generation to play, learn, serve, and share in California State Parks."

The goal of the passPORTS program is to provide more students with access to California State Parks through a blended access approach, using both online learning adventures now and in-person field trips once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. "The Parks offer interdisciplinary learning opportunities which afford schools a wide variety of curriculum engagement. California State Parks encourages students to learn more about nature, science, and history," said Scott Shepherd. "These experiences not only support learning but also build respect for the natural environment and our diverse history and helps students to develop their understanding of California's unique resources."

Shepherd says, "Naturally, we want students, as well as their teachers and parents, to discover that our parks are learning laboratories, as well as places for environmental awareness, advocacy, and stewardship. But, we also want them to discover that these are places to enjoy the wonder of our state. Through collaboration with California State Parks and the K12 community, we aim to develop both sustainable and equitable access for the next generation of park visitors and champions."

For more information about passPORTS please visit our website at www.ports-ca.us.

The partner organizations involved are CUE, California State Parks, and Parks California.

The Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students (PORTS) Program is a long-standing and award-winning K-12 distance learning program that has provided over 650,000 students with real-time digital access to California State Parks content experts. Please visit ports-ca.us to learn more.

As statutory partner to California State Parks, Parks California has a simple mission – to help strengthen parks and inspire all to experience these extraordinary places. From redwood groves and desert springs to urban parks and lighthouses, the organization works with partners to steward these natural wonders and make California's parks more welcoming, accessible, and relevant to all visitors. For more information, please visit parksca.org ★

His Mission to Sniff Out Pests and Disease

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 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Detector Dog Training Center, where she was matched up with



"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

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. ★





Poppoff!

With Mary Jane Popp

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!!!** ★



By County Supervisor Sue Frost

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

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 heartbreaking 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 not far away in Roseville or El Dorado Hills.

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

GOLD RIVER COMMUNITY UPDATE

Unsustainable and Subjective: County Returns to the Purple Tier

at the businesses 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 Gold River) has more people than the City of Sacramento, yet has less than 20% of cases. Gold River shares very little in common with Sacramento City, yet gets lumped in the same category. 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 Murietta, North Highlands, Carmichael, Foothill Farms and Fair Oaks. ★

Social Security Matters

No Simple Answer to Question on When to Claim Benefits



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor



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 ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. ★

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

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

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\$1 Million in Grants Available for Area Nonprofits

By Kim Nava, Sacramento County

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - The County Board of Supervisors will provide \$1 million through the 2020 TOT Grant Program to support nonprofit organizations...

Funding for the TOT Grant Program will come from County Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenues. Transient Occupancy Taxes are levied on guests who occupy rooms in hotels, motels and other temporary lodging accommodations...

TOT Grant Program Application Dates & Details: Deadline - December 7, 2020, 5 p.m. Grant Application Period: November 6 - December 7, 2020. All applications and documentation requested in the announcement must be submitted by 5 p.m. on December 7, 2020.

notification upon submission.

Grant Program and Application Virtual Workshop: Nov. 9, 2020. The workshop includes a review of the following:

grant program and review process, application including what the Evaluation Panel looks for, timeline and submission information, and frequently asked questions.

Grant Application Review Period: Nov. 6 - Dec. 7, 2020: County staff will review applications for completeness and compliance with minimum eligibility requirements. Applicants will be notified electronically if proposals do not meet the minimum qualifications...

Grantee Award Approval: March 2021. Grant Program Hearing Notification: Applicants will receive a second electronic notification of schedule for the Board of Supervisors Hearing where recommended award selections will be made.

The Board of Supervisors will make the final determination and approval for all TOT Grant Program recipients. Budget & Debt Management will notify applicants of funding selections within 5 business days of Board Hearing approval.

Budget & Debt Management will draft and administer agreements between the County and grantees.

For more information about the grant program, visit the TOT Grant Program website. ★

SMUD Lists Unclaimed Checks

SMUD Press Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - SMUD has published the names of customers and vendors who have not yet cashed checks dated September 30, 2017 or earlier.

In order to file a claim on an uncashed check, claimant's name must be included on this list, or they do not have a valid claim.

To make a claim, call 916-732-7440 and supply the claimant's name, current address, telephone number and the address for the time period between October 1, 2016 and September 30, 2017.

Sacramento Municipal Utility District Unclaimed Monies

6201 S Street, Mail Stop B352 Sacramento, CA 95817-1818

Each year, SMUD posts this information in an effort to find the money's rightful owner. Claims must be made by 5 p.m. on December 21, 2020 or they become the property of SMUD under California Code Section 50050-50057.

Replacement checks will be issued only to the payee or upon proof of death, to the payee's beneficiary.

About SMUD - As the nation's sixth-largest community-owned, not-for-profit, electric service provider, SMUD has been providing low-cost, reliable electricity for more than 70 years to Sacramento County and small adjoining portions of Placer and Yolo Counties.

County Gifts from the Heart Program is now in Full Swing

Continued from page 1

books, arts and crafts, funky socks, warm clothes, mp3s, electronic games, backpacks, tote bags, watches, hair products, hairdryers, flat irons, basketballs, soccer balls, footballs or fuzzy blankets.

To Participate: To take part in Gifts from the Heart 2020, visit the online stores and review the registry links. Once you select your items, please have it ship by Nov. 24, 2020. The address for delivery is in the registry.

You can also drop-off new unwrapped gifts/toys for any age group by Dec. 10, 2020 at one of the County lobby locations listed below.

- 7001-A East Parkway
3701 Branch Center Road
3331 Power Inn Road
9750 Business Park Drive, Suite 220
799 G Street
700 H Street
7000 65th Street, Suite A

Those interested in donating may also write a check to the Department of Child, Family & Adult Services/Gifts from the Heart Program and mail to P.O. Box 269057, Sacramento, CA 95826-9443.

Volunteers Needed: The success of the Gifts from the Heart program not only lies with kind sponsors but also with the wonderful volunteers who dedicate hundreds of hours helping to organize and distribute gifts.

Gifts from the Heart is looking for volunteers to work at their Santa's Shop on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 10am to 12pm. Volunteers will organize toys and other gifts in categories to set up the Santa Shop.

To learn more about Gifts from the Heart, becoming a community partner, making a donation or volunteering, email Volunteer and Student Intern Services Coordinator, Tonja Edelman or call at 916-875-2027. ★

Used Batteries in Curbside Carts Are Fire Hazards

By Laurie Slothower, Sacramento County

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Sacramento County is asking residents not to put household batteries - rechargeable, or otherwise - in your curbside recycling or garbage cart.

Recently, a Sacramento County Department of Waste Management and Recycling Collection Equipment Operator was finishing his route in Antelope, when he realized that the funny smell he noticed in the back of his truck was actually a fire!

Following department procedure, he called 911, found a safe location to dump

the load, and waited for firefighters to put out the flames.

Common household batteries - such as AA, AAA, D, button batteries, lithium-ion batteries (commonly used in electronics) - are banned from landfill disposal.

Residents can drop off batteries for no charge at local area Household Hazard Waste Facilities or visit the Earth 911 or Call 2 Recycle websites for other drop off locations.

Advertisement for Pet Club featuring various pet food and supply coupons. Includes sections for Natural Balance, Avoderm, Nutro, Friskies, Earthborn, Purely Fancy Feast, Nature's Miracle, Chicken Soup, Core Grain Free, and others. Each coupon includes product details, prices, and expiration dates.

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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. ★

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