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Makes
National News**

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RIVER VALLEY TIMES

40TH YEAR • ISSUE 04

Serving Rancho Murieta, Sloughouse, Wilton

FEBRUARY 23, 2024

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SCOUTS SHARPEN
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ANNOUNCES NEW
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CSD Supervisor Benitez Resigns



Kelly Benitez is leaving his position as the security chief of the Rancho Murieta Community Services District to work as a police captain at a local agency. Photo by Gail Bullen

**By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Kelly Benitez, the former chief of security chief of the Rancho Murieta Community Service District (CSD), has stepped down from his position to

join law enforcement. His resignation was effective Jan. 16.

Benitez has secured a position as a police captain with an undisclosed law enforcement agency within the Sacramento Metropolitan Area. He refrained from disclosing the specific agency

because he hadn't officially assumed his new role.

Benitez initially planned to stay with CSD for at least five years after his recruitment 2 1/2 years ago. However, his plans shifted after residents voted down Measure R in November 2022.

Placed on the ballot by

the CSD Board, Measure R would have provided additional funding so CSD could deliver patrol services 24/7 without using property taxes to supplement the security budget. The underfunding stemmed from insufficient revenue generated

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**Community
Service District
Committee
Debates Use of
State Money**

**By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - The idiom "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth" might hold wisdom, but members of the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) Improvements Committee found themselves doing just that when they convened on Jan. 6.

The proverbial gift horse in question amounted to \$1.3 million in funding, courtesy of former Assemblyman Ken Cooley, nestled within the 2021 California budget. The intended purpose was to cover the entire cost of three vital CSD infrastructure projects. Among them, two aimed to replace the chlorine disinfection systems at the water treatment and wastewater treatment plants, while the third aimed at enhancing safety at Granlees Dam, the intake point for the district's water system from the Cosumnes River.

Director of Operations Michael Fritschi unveiled some sobering updates during the meeting. The initial estimate of \$1.3 million for the three projects had burgeoned to \$2.74 million, a staggering escalation in costs.

"Staff is concerned that delays in moving forward will result in increasing costs which could potentially jeopardize the district's ability to utilize the funding within a reasonable time," Fritschi said.

After a thorough deliberation, the committee devised a strategy to optimize the allocation of the state funding in light of the inflated construction costs. Essentially, the majority of the state funds would be allocated to cover the safety enhancements at Granlees Dam, originally earmarked at \$174,000 but now estimated at \$834,000. Some of the state funds had already been disbursed to engage consulting engineering firms for the three project designs.

Directors Randy Jenco and Martin Pohl directed Fritschi to expedite the Granlees Dam project bidding process. "Let's get this thing out to bid and see what it is really going to cost us," urged Pohl.

The Improvements Committee, consisting of Jenco, Pohl, and Fritschi, alongside General Manager Mimi Morris, Plant Supervisor Travis Bohannon, and other staff, meticulously analyzes

Continued on page 9

Kiwanian Tenth Annual Crab Feed is Another Sell-out



Volunteers celebrate after delivering 58 drive-through meals at the 10th Annual Crab Feed presented by the Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta on Feb. 3. Photos courtesy Catherine Blaisdell and Dia Utterback

**By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A horde of enthusiastic diners who devoured nearly 1,150 pounds of crab while keeping their thirst quenched lent a hand to two organizations supporting children on February 3.

The affair marked the Tenth Annual Crab Feed, sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta and held at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church. This crab feed stands as the primary fundraiser for the Kiwanians, who collaborate with The Knights of Columbus for this beloved event.

Jeanette Edwards, a

Kiwanian, managed ticket sales this year, stating, "Dine-in tickets sold out in the first hour on the first day of sales on Jan 6th. People were lined up outside the Local Bean, waiting for us to set up to buy tickets."

The club managed to sell 296 dine-in tickets and 58 drive-through tickets.

Expressing delight at the

response, Kiwanis Club President Angelo Lutz remarked, "Thanks to the entire community and particularly the committee members and generous sponsors for making our 10th-anniversary crab feed a terrific success. The proceeds allow our Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta to continue our projects and

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Hypnotist Entrances Volunteers at Women's Club Luncheon

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Hypnosis and hysterical laughter were synonymous at the Rancho Murieta Women's Club luncheon at Rancho Murieta Country Club on Jan. 24.

The entertainer was Dr. David Hill, renowned for his comedy hypnosis show since the 1990s when he was promoted by luminaries Frank Sinatra and Wayne Newton.

The club officers also conducted a short business meeting before the performance.

Hypnotism Show

Hill began his show with

anecdotes about his encounters with Frank Sinatra and Wayne Newton in Las Vegas in the 1990s. Sinatra, impressed by Hill's performance, insisted he sign up with his agent immediately. Newton even invited Hill to fill in for him during one of his shows in Las Vegas, a stint that lasted two years.

After Hill found a dozen women's club members willing to be hypnotized, his first order of business was putting them all to sleep. Throughout the performance he guided his subjects through a series of amusing antics: from mimicking zombies to balancing a pail of sand while balloons lifted their hands, to laughing at the tap of his

microphone, watching a hilarious movie, conversing with imaginary birds, and even playing the piano with unconventional body parts.

Among the volunteers was Kirschman, who happened to glance up as another subject began playing the piano with her legs. Kirschman began laughing hysterically causing even more hilarity among the audience and participants.

However, the highlight of the show was Deb Vining, who was most deeply hypnotized. After Hill handed her a cloth puppet, Vining believed she was dancing with Sean Connery, even stopping to pose for a photo and to sniff his cologne.

At another point in the show, Vining reacted to the theft of her bird. Then she changed her mind and told the thief to keep the bird.

Post show, club members gathered around Vining, showing her videos and confessing to stealing her imaginary bird. Vining described the hypnotic experience as strange, recalling the sensation of letting go of her body and feeling refreshed afterward.

Business Meeting

Boots Conway, who was the 2023 club president, opened the business meeting. She said that after three years as Sunshine, four years as vice president, and two years as president, she was ready to hand over the

reins to Bonnie Kirschman. "It's been fun, but it also has been work," Conway said.

Kirschman then introduced the other 2024 slate of board members. They are President - Bonnie Kirschman; Past President - Boots Conway; Secretary - Susan Kurtz; Treasurer - Ruth Lecheler-Moore; Activityline Editor and Publisher - Vickie Joyner; Activityline Layout and Design - Debra Medrano-Wertz; Interest Group Coordinator - Kathleen Barrow; Membership - Janet Nicholson and Marilyn Laver; Reservations - Cindy Shamrock and Barbara Armstrong; and Sunshine

- Cheryl Cannon.

Conway also highlighted the vacancies for vice president and publicity, emphasizing the challenge of filling the shoes of the late Nicole Sullens as the publicity chair. "She was unbelievable, but we just need somebody to do the job," Conway said.

Kirschman, also in charge of the blood drive, reported on the success of the Jan. 22 event, with 78 pints collected by Vitalant. She announced the next drive scheduled for April 29.

The club's next luncheon will be on March 27 and will feature "Easter Bonnet Bingo." ★



After being hypnotized by Dr. David Hill, on the right, Deb Vining believes she is dancing with Sean Connery. The hypnotist entertained at the Rancho Murieta Women's Club luncheon on Jan. 24. Photos by Gail Bullen



Hill begins his hypnosis show by putting his volunteers to sleep.



New board members for 2024 introduced at the luncheon are, from left, Cheryl Cannon, Barbara Armstrong, Vickie Joyner, Bonnie Kirshman (president), Boots Conway and Ruth Lecheler-Moore. Six new board members aren't pictured.



Hill encourages audience members to come up front to be hypnotized.



Club President Bonnie Kirschman, center, begins laughing so hysterically that neither she nor the audience can stop. Marilyn Haugen is on her left, and Ali Anerich on her right.



Responding to Hill's command that they laugh when he taps his microphone are, from left, Lucile Carter, Boots Conway, and Paula Swanson.



Member Vickie Joyner puts together the table centerpieces for every luncheon. She added Hershey's Kisses to her January creations.

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Kiwanian Tenth Annual Crab Feed is Another Sell-out



Key Club members volunteering as servers wait by their tables inside St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church. Photos courtesy Catherine Blaisdell and Dia Utterback

Continued from page 1 objectives of assisting children together.”

John Slamkowski reported that the Knights of Columbus raised approximately \$1,800 from their no-host bar, all of which will be donated to Special Olympics of Northern California. Slamkowski praised the collaboration, saying, “We love working with the Kiwanis Club. They make it a fun, enjoyable night. We also value their mission of donating all proceeds to those in need.”

Dubbed the “Dynamic Duo,” past Presidents Dia Utterback and Bonnie Shewchuk co-chaired the crab feed organizing committee, securing 33 sponsors and numerous valuable raffle and silent auction prizes. Shewchuk even assembled all the raffle prizes into attractive baskets in the week leading up to the crab feed.

Although the expenses were still being submitted at press time, the Kiwanians made about \$36,000 at last year’s event. “This year will be less,” Utterback conceded.

The theme, black, silver, and gold, commemorated the event’s 10th anniversary. Kiwanian Carol Prinzo



The table decorating crew members pose for a photo after finishing their work.



Sacramento Supervisor Sue Frost is pictured with Kiwanian Jack Seigel, husband Jack Frost, and staffer Forrest Johnson.

headed the decorating committee, crafting beautiful flower arrangements. A fortunate diner at each table won the flowery centerpiece as a door prize.

Chef KC Brown, also the Rancho Murieta Country Club chef, took the reins as caterer this year following the retirement of Charles Mehrten of Red Oak Barbecue. Brown and his team

effortlessly prepared about 1,150 pounds of Dungeness crab, over 100 pounds of shrimp, along with salad, pasta, and dessert. Diners could also bid on elaborate desserts organized by Patty Long.

Seventeen Key Club members from Sheldon and Pleasant Grove High Schools and the Rancho Murieta Club served the food inside the church



RJ Camacho is ready to dig into the delicious meal. His grandmother Dia Utterback is one of the two event organizers.



Trays of crabs and melted butter await delivery to the tables.



Caterer Chef KC Brown and his staff take a break for a photo.



Judith Embree left, and Lissa Crane are elated after scoring an elaborate raffle prize.



A diner surveys the entries in the dessert auction.



Fifth-grader Brody Blaisdell helps welcome guests to the crab feed.

and assisted with the drive-through. Members of Boy Scout Troop 633 helped with the clean-up the following day.

Adult volunteers, seven from the community and between 20 and

25 Kiwanians, played crucial roles in making the event a success.

Utterback emphasized the indispensable role of sponsors, noting that of the 33 sponsors this year, nine were new. Rancho

Murieta Homes and Land (Karen Hoberg) stood as the Diamond Sponsor, while Town and Country Real Estate (Ron and Ina Semaru) and Firecode Safety Equipment Inc. were Gold Sponsors. ★

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Go 4 Pizza Makes National News



The outside view of Go 4 Pizza's Rancho Cordova location. Photos by David Nguyen, G Tour Photos

Go 4 Pizza News Release

RANCHO CORDOVA, RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Go 4 Pizza, a popular local restaurant with locations in both Rancho Cordova and Rancho Murieta, CA has been honored as one of the top 35 pizzerias to watch for in 2024.

Owners Mark and Donna Kendro say: "We're thrilled to announce that Go 4 Pizza in Rancho Cordova, CA & Rancho Murieta, CA has been recognized by Pizza Today as one of the top 35 pizzerias to watch in the US in 2024! Pizza Today is the leading pizza publication in the United



Some of the tasty selections at Go 4 Pizza.

States. Out of 44,000 pizzerias in the United States, Go 4 Pizza has stood out and earned this prestigious honor in the Pizza Industry. Pizza Today felt our total operation, from sales and employee programs to community outreach, marketing, and our family-friendly

interior design is justified to be highlighted in the pizza industry. This is a tremendous achievement in our industry and reflects the dedication and passion of our team in delivering delicious and exceptional pizzas to our community. We couldn't have



Inside of the Rancho Murieta location.



The party room at the Go 4 Pizza Rancho Cordova location, available to rent out.

achieved this without the continued support of our amazing customers! We couldn't be more honored to make their list." Go 4 Pizza opened in 2009, and since then, has seen much success. But what sets them apart from other pizzerias is that it is a center for communities

and has heavy community involvement. They support local schools and sports teams by having fundraisers throughout the year, including offering their party room and party patio at no costs to sports teams' parties. Go 4 Pizza also includes live music,

weekly trivia, paint night, corn hole tournaments, comedy nights, and much more. To see their menu, locations, and more, find Go 4 Pizza's website here. To keep up with Go 4 Pizza, follow on Instagram @go4pizza2.0. ★

Rancho Murieta
HOMES & LAND

Rancho Murieta, a 3,500-acre country-club community, is an oasis of emerald fairways and manicured greens, built along the scenic banks of the Cosumnes River. It encompasses five lakes, greenbelts, rolling hills and stately oaks.

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Election Information

March 5, 2024 – Presidential Primary Election

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- Feb 5** Ballots begin to arrive by mail. Ballot Drop Boxes are now open.
- Feb 20** Close of registration. Register today!
- Feb 24** 11-Day Vote Centers open through Election Day.
- Mar 2** All Vote Centers open through Election Day.
- Mar 5** Election Day! Last day to turn in your ballot.

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Take advantage of early voting and avoid the lines! You can return your ballot in the mail, at any Ballot Drop Box, or at any Vote Center. No postage is necessary.

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Sign up for "Where's My Ballot?" with Ballottrax, a free ballot tracking and alert system. It is available to all voters who wish to track the status of their Vote by Mail ballot - from printed to accepted. This provides additional transparency to voters on the status of their ballot.

Vote Early! Vote by Mail.

SECURITY LOGS

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Following is a summary of activity for the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Security Department for the following dates. Note: these log entries are condensed. For full security log details, go to the CSD website at www.rmcsd.com. A quick link to the security logs is on the home page.

a horse event.

- Stop sign enforcement, 7:32 p.m. Murieta South Manager, two citations.
- Vandalism, 8:57 a.m. unspecified location. Graffiti was found inside a bathroom stall in the men's bathroom.
- Vandalism, 10:24 p.m.. Gazebo Park, tagging found inside men's restroom.

Feb. 8

- Two extra patrols.
- Parking enforcement, 3:06 a.m. Pescado Circle, three citations.

Note: No further log sheets were available because CSD has stopped producing the security log. See the separate story for the explanation.

Rancho Murieta

Feb. 1

- Miscellaneous, 8:50 pm. Driveway to Gibson Golf Carts, semi-truck parked after hours. The driver was delivering golf carts and was given permission by the golf cart company to park overnight.
- Resident complaint, 11:02 p.m. No field narrative was provided.

Feb. 2

- Suspicious person, 6:40 am. Adult walking around storage yard on Cantova. Patrol contacted the male adult who was retrieving his vehicle from storage.
- Motorcycle escort, 8:43 a.m. Ventana Drive.
- Stop sign violation, 11:47 a.m. Murieta Parkway and Alameda Drive. Citation issued.
- Water leak, 1:35 p.m. Murieta South, no field narration provided.

Feb. 3

- Suspicious person 2 p.m. Jackson Highway, report of a suspicious person sitting on the side of the road. Patrol contacted a female who said she was resting and would be on her way.

Feb. 4

- Two vacation checks and one extra patrol.
- Miscellaneous, 3:40 p.m. Camino De Lunda, report of downed trees, maintenance crew cleared downed trees.

Feb. 5 - Feb. 6

• Log not provided.

Feb. 7

- Three extra patrols.
- Parking enforcement, 5:236 a.m. Murieta South, two citations.
- Stolen or lost property, 6:37 a.m. Murieta Equestrian Center's manager reported that a rented, large generator with emergency lighting was stolen on Monday. Feb. 5, after

Wilton Fire

- Twenty-two medical aids between Feb. 1 and Feb. 11

Feb. 1

- Public assistance, 12:02 p.m., 11563 Colony Road.

Feb. 2

- Alarm, 10:43 a.m. 9584 Alta Mesa Road.

Feb. 4

- Wires down, 4:42 p.m. 10311 Colony Road.
- Structure fire, 4:58 p.m. 12137 Clay Station Road.
- Wires down, 5:30 p.m. 12776 Pear Lane.
- Wires down, 5:46 p.m. Clay Station and Dillard Rods.
- Wires down, 5:46 p.m. Dillard and Walmort Roads
- Wires down, 5:56 p.m. 11140 Nygard Lane.
- Fire alarm, 6:14 p.m. 9823 Tavernor Road.
- Wires down, 6:44 p.m. 10300 Dillard Road.
- Wires down, 9:49 p.m. 12188 Welch Road

Feb. 9

- Accident, 7:19 a.m. Highway 99 and Dillard, cancelled.

Sacramento County Sheriff's Office

Jan. 29

- Theft from commercial building, 10:28 am., 7200 block Murieta Drive, construction site.

Feb. 5

- Theft, all other larceny, 9:55 p.m. 7200 block of Lone Pine Drive, arena. ★

Senior Parkway Flags Deadline March 11

Do you have a high school senior? If so, now is the time to purchase a parkway flag for your 2024 graduate. Flags will fly on the north and south parkway from April until late May. Registration closes Monday, March 11. Details are at <https://rmseniorflags.com/>

Garden Club Slates Pre-Mother's Day Plant Sale

The River Valley Garden Club would like to thank the communities of Wilton, Sloughhouse, and Rancho Murieta for their continued support of our club's projects and activities. Your support of our Garden Stroll in May 2023 allowed the club to award three scholarships to outstanding community college students, and five grants to exceptional community organizations and nonprofits. The club will host a Garden Stroll every other year during the years ending in an odd number, the next one to be in 2025. During years ending in an even number, the club will host a spectacular plant sale on the Saturday before Mother's Day. This year that date will be Saturday, May 11. We look forward to seeing you there.

Lawn Begone To Be Garden Club Topic

The Feb. 27 meeting of the River Valley Garden Club will feature a talk by Master Gardeners Jan Fetler and Vivian Sellers about lawn removal and replacement with drought tolerant plants. The movement to replace our lawns has focused on reducing water usage and using plants that attract wild-life and pollinators. The meeting will be held at the RMA Building. The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for fellowship, refreshments and the raffle. The business meeting and presentation will begin at 7 p.m.

Rm Community Church Slates Breakfast, Hymn Sing

The Rancho Murieta Community Church is hosting two more events in February that are open to the community. Men of all ages are invited to our annual Men's Breakfast Saturday, Feb. 24, 9 to 11 a.m. A speaker and good food are included in the registration. Sign up today

at rmchurch.org/events/ Do you love to sing the traditional hymns? Join us for a Hymn Sing on Sunday Feb. 25 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Stay for treats and conversation.

Resident Input Sought For Rm Summer Activities For Kids

Calling all residents in Rancho Murieta and Sloughhouse. Join us for a thoughtful and collaborative brainstorming session aimed at shaping the youth activities for Summer 2024. We're hosting a nondenominational gathering for March 4, at 6 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. Come together with leaders from Kiwanis, ETC, and The Grove for an engaging discussion on joint activities for the upcoming summer. Your insights and ideas are invaluable as we work towards creating a memorable and enriching experience for our community's youth. Save the date, bring your perspectives, and let's contribute to making summer 2024 unforgettable for our young ones. You may contact Cookie Whalen at 916-337-1334 or Bob Lamvik at 415-630-0626 for further information.

Women's Club Slates 'Easter Bonnet Bingo' In March

Easter Bonnet Bingo will be on tap when the Rancho Murieta Women's Club holds its next luncheon on March 27. Decorate and wear your best Easter Bonnet and join us for Bingo. A prize will be awarded for the best Easter Bonnet. French onion soup, tea sandwiches and strawberry shortcake will be on the menu. The cost is \$35 for members and \$40 for nonmembers. The reservation deadline is March 15. The contacts are Cindy Shamrock at 916-354-1918 or Barbara Armstrong at 916-541-1884.

Kiwanis Slates Easter Egg Hunt Fishing Day

The Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta is excited to announce dates for two upcoming spring legacy projects. Our annual Easter Egg Hunt and Family Picnic Day is scheduled for Saturday, March 30 at Stonehouse Park. This perennial family favorite event is free for

Rancho Murieta families. Cookie decorating, crafts and petting zoo are offered for a family friendly fee. The following Saturday morning, April 6, is Kids' Fishing Day at Lake Clementia. Kids' Fishing Day is a fun morning for kids to learn the art of fishing. The lake area near the beach is netted and stocked with hundreds of pounds of planted fish. More details to follow regarding both events. For up to date information, please like our Facebook page "Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta" and check our website, at www.rmkiwanis.org. Our Kiwanis Club loves hosting these events for our community.

Rancho Murieta Voices Choral Group Seeking Volunteers

Rancho Murieta Voices choral group is in need of volunteers to fill two key positions in their 35 year old non-profit group. We are looking to fill the positions of Chior Master/Director and Pianist. We practice Thursday afternoons at St. Vincent de Paul Church from 2pm to 3:30pm. We perform 14 times a year at Assisted Living Homes in the local area. Please call Joanne Lehman, President, on 707-326-6885 if you are interested in getting more information.

Student Enrollment Under Way At Cres

Cosumnes River Elementary School (CRES) is enrolling students for the next school year. Come to the school office to pick up a packet during office hours between 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Completed registration packets are due by 3:30 p.m. on Feb. 21. The eligibility for transitional kindergarten age is 5 years old between Sept. 2, 2024 and June 2, 2025. The eligibility for kindergarten is 5 years old before or on Sept. 1, 2024. ★

Csd Office Now Open Friday Morning

As of January, the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) has changed its office hours. Previously, the office was closed every Friday. Now it is open on Friday from 8 a.m. until noon. The hours on Monday through Thursday are from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. ★

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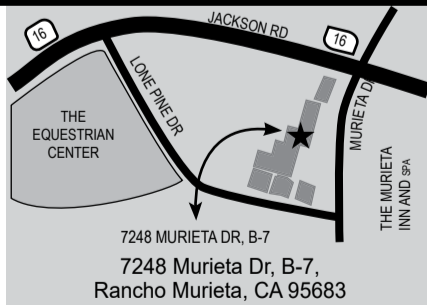
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CSD Discontinues Security Logs

CSD Security Supervisor Kelly Benitez Resigns

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - The Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) halted the publication of the security logs after Security Chief Kelly Benitez announced his resignation. The Feb. 8 log sheet was the last one Benitez distributed even though his resignation wasn't effective until Feb. 16.

Board President Tim Maybee expressed his hope on Feb. 15 that the suspension would only be short-term. However, he had yet to talk to General Manager Mimi Morris about her game plan to redistribute the security supervisor's responsibilities.

"There was a lot of stuff being managed by Kelly, and it's got to go somewhere," he said.

Maybee said they had an inkling Benitez was looking for another

position after the defeat of Measure R in November 2022. "But I thought in prior conversations that Kelly was going to give us a pretty good notice," Maybee said. "But it just didn't happen that way."

Maybee said he expected the discontinuation of the logs would be discussed at the next board meeting on Feb. 21.

Benitez used to email the daily logs to the Rancho Murieta Association and the River Valley Times, and District Secretary Amelia Wilder posted them on the CSD website. Wilder also handled the log distribution when Benitez went out of town.

The CSD security log was the equivalent of the police blotter in other community newspapers. As evidenced by social media comments over the years, the security log was the best-read section of the River Valley Times. ★

Continued from page 1
by Measure J over the past decade.

Benitez said Mark Matulich, the CSD director of finance and administration, will take over security supervisory responsibilities with help from Sgt. Mel Outram who will help handle day-to-day operations.

The arrangement will free up his salary so that CSD can hire another patrol officer. "I think that is the best thing to do because Rancho Murieta needs some patrol help," he said.

Board President Tim Maybee said he understood and respected Benitez's decision to leave. "Kelly has brought a level of professionalism and calmness to the security services, for both customers and staff," he said. "He has always been one to identify the issues and bring them forward."

Maybee said Benitez used his skills to work effectively with other law enforcement agencies. He also was "the 24-hour, on call - go to person... On numerous occasions Benitez had to come back in to staff the gates or patrol services," Maybee said.

Maybee also addressed the district budget. "Everything comes back to one issue and that is, very simply, the lack of Measure J funding. The current board has been stating this for several fiscal cycles, and it was also identified in the Grand Jury report," he said. "No one in the community can be surprised at the lack of resources currently available for security."

Benitez has extensive law enforcement experience, including 20 years with Los Angeles Police Department, where he served 14 years as a sergeant, before opting for early retirement in 2015. While at LAPD, he earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in leadership and management. After moving to the Bay Area, he worked as a police officer for the City of San Rafael and then as an investigator for the San Francisco Department of Police Accountability for five years. He accepted the CSD position in August 2021.

Upon assuming the role of CSD security chief in August 2021, Benitez prioritized enhancing professionalism and modernizing the security department, following the lead of Interim Security Supervisor Tina Tamantes. Another accomplishment was hiring good people, three as full-time gate officers and two part-time and one patrol officer who was promoted to sergeant. With continuous training and ongoing evaluations, the newest full-time employees are nearing two years on the job.

Benitez also terminated employees because they weren't appropriate for the work. "The bad news is they weren't replaced,"

he said.

On the other hand, "The officers we have left are really squared away," he said.

Benitez said another major accomplishment was improving officer safety by securing board approval to buy ballistic vests for patrol. "You have guys going to quasi-police calls all by themselves, so at least they have that level of protection," he said.

He also secured approval for the replacement of older vehicles and equipping the units with life preservers and trauma kits.

An unmet goal was setting up an emergency operations center inside the James L. Noller Safety Center, located in a trailer across from the CSD office.

Benitez cited a low turnover rate among CSD security personnel, attributing it to the organization's supportive environment. He highlighted the board's decision to introduce a second tier of pay as a morale booster and emphasized the competitiveness of CSD job offerings, particularly its comprehensive benefits package.

Since Rancho Murieta is essentially a city with 6,000 residents, Benitez believes the community should increase patrols. Ideally, two patrol officers would cover each shift, and a supervisor would overlap on nights and weekends.

Although the security department has operated three patrol officers in the past year, versus five or six positions in earlier years, Benitez believes he managed fairly well by assigning them to shifts with the most call volume. Having two Rancho Murieta Association (RMA) compliance officers working the day shift also helped mitigate the reduced coverage.

He said another factor that would help compensate for a decrease in patrol would be better coordination between CSD and RMA surveillance cameras.

Benitez said he has already begun strategizing with RMA, Sacramento County Probation, the Sacramento Sheriff's Office, and the sheriff's POP (problem-oriented police) officer to prepare for next summer. Last summer, large groups of juveniles trespassed through private property to drink and set bonfires on the South Beach. Some of the same juveniles gathered at the Gazebo for the July 4 fireworks show, one of whom set off an illegal firework that injured seven people.

Benitez has asked that at least six deputies respond to future beach incidents to cite every participant to ensure real consequences instead of just ordering them to leave. Whether that will happen remains to be seen.

Although the long

response time from sheriff's deputies continued to be an issue during his tenure, Benitez has recently enjoyed a closer connection to the sheriff's office after a Rancho Murieta resident took over as the day watch commander. He said that Lt. Greg Coquette has helped him a half dozen times.

Benitez said the extent of drinking by 13 and 14 olds probably has been the most shocking behavior he has seen in Rancho Murieta. On July 4, several kids nonchalantly admitted drinking a six-pack at the river before coming to the gazebo.

Benitez also has been shocked at how angry some residents become over small issues such as open garage doors. Benitez didn't see that level of anger even when working as a police officer in high-crime areas of Los Angeles.

When asked to speak at a security committee chaired by RMA Director Chris Childs last September, Benitez compiled some footage from the security officer video cameras to show them. Childs, who was number three at the California Highway Patrol before retiring, told the other RMA directors he was shocked by the misbehavior directed at patrol officers that was captured in the video footage.

Benitez said the gate officers encounter more "yellow language" than patrol officers because of sheer numbers. About 15,000 motorists pass through the visitor gates each month.

Another serious problem Benitez has seen in the community is the failure to report crimes to law enforcement and the security department. Residents frequently say they don't make a report because they believe nothing will happen. Others worry about property values going down in the community.

Benitez said reporting crimes to the sheriff's office is essential so that the patterns and frequencies can be ascertained to help determine response to the community. "At least make it a statistic," Benitez said.

Ideally, such crimes should also be reported to Security because the patrol officers work inside the community and can be on the lookout, he said. In a recent instance, however, a business owner refused to share surveillance video with security because they had already given it to the sheriff's office.

Even though Benitez is leaving the district, he sees light at the end of the tunnel. "I have great confidence that Mimi Morris (general manager) and Mark Matulich (director of finance and administration) will solve or greatly resolve the security and financial issues with the current work they are doing," he said. "I wish I was around to see the final outcome." ★

California Comment on the Latest National Small Business Poll

NFIB California
Press Release

Two big compliance headaches adding to the pessimism leading into 2024, says NFIB.

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)

-Tiny bits of good news could be found in the recent release of the monthly Small Business Optimism Index from the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), but they offered no serious counterweight to the pessimism small business owners have heading into 2024—a pessimism made heavier and darker by two new laws certain to give Main Street entrepreneurs compliance migraines.

"Today's Optimism Index is the 24th consecutive monthly one below its 50-year average," said John Kabateck, California state director for NFIB. "But it does not factor in the compliance misery facing small business owners who must calculate the substantial cost and time of abiding by the new federal beneficial ownership information reporting requirements under the Corporate Transparency Act and the new state requirement on every enterprise to have workplace violence prevention plans in place and constantly update them.

"Add to all of that the return of a Legislature never shy about sticking small businesses with another rule, regulation, or tax, and it's not a good time to start a business let alone keep one going."

More about the workplace violence prevention plan can be found in this article, The Top Five Compliance Headaches in 2024. The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued a final rule that sets forth beneficial ownership information reporting requirements as mandated by the Corporate Transparency Act. The rule, effective January 1, 2024, affects a broad spectrum of businesses (virtually all LLCs, corporations, and entities formed under state or tribal laws with 20 or fewer employees and \$5 million or less in gross annual receipts), and requires them to begin filing periodic reports on their beneficial owners to FinCEN.

Today's Optimism Index found 23% of small business owners reported that inflation was their single most important problem in operating their business, up one point from last month, and replacing labor quality as the top concern. Other key findings include:

-Small business owners expecting better business conditions over the next six months increased six points from November to a net negative 36% (seasonally adjusted), and 25 percentage points better than last June's reading of a net negative 61%.

-Seasonally adjusted, a net 29% of owners plan to raise compensation in the next three months, down one point from November.

-The net percentage of owners raising average selling prices was unchanged from November at a net 25% (seasonally adjusted).

-The net percentage of owners who expect real sales to be higher increased four points from November to a net negative 4% (seasonally adjusted), the highest reading since January 2022.

"Small business owners remain very pessimistic about economic prospects this year," said NFIB Chief Economist Bill Dunkelberg. "Inflation and labor quality have consistently been a tough complication for small business owners, and they are not convinced that it will get better in 2024."

Keep up with the latest California small-business news at www.nfib.com/CA and on Twitter @NFIB_CA ★



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CSD Improvements Committee Debates Use of State Money

Continued from page 1
infrastructure matters, offering recommendations to the entire board.

Losing state money

Morris initially expressed doubts about whether the SB 170 projects represented the most prudent use of reserves. "This \$1.3 million gift is turning into \$1.3 obligation forcing us to do these projects, as opposed to anything else that might be more necessary," she said.

Citing her experience with state auditors, Morris highlighted a shift in their scrutiny towards local expenditures, raising concerns about the potential ramifications of inactivity on the SB 170 projects.

"My concern is they could just come back and say, well you didn't do anything with it so you need to pay it back," Morris said. "But I don't think that would necessarily be the worst outcome because it doesn't seem like the great gift it seemed three years ago because it was insufficient to fund the projects."

Granlee's Dam is priority

Morris asked Fritschi if there were any other projects on his "gotta do" list that go back even further than the SB 170 projects. Fritschi said his priority would be the Granlees project.

Fritschi said his contact at Department of Water Resources, which is administering the state money, told him the district can move the money among the three projects "So, we could put a lion's share of resources towards one project," he said.

Fritschi said he became increasingly amazed at how high construction bids have been coming in over the past years. "So, that Granlee's bid is probably very conservative," he said.

Pohl asked him if there were a way to cut costs on the Granlees project. Fritschi said he couldn't think of anything except cutting the contingency allowance. "There are a lot of things that probably should have happened a long time ago to have a fully functioning forebay, which is really the heart

of our water system as far as intake goes," he said. "We've also got two gates that aren't there anymore and a gate that should have been replaced 15 years ago," he said.

Jenco asked about completing only part of the project. He said when Paul Siebensohn, the prior operations director, first envisioned the project he was only thinking about replacing the cover that was already there. "And, sometimes his idea was just to use our people and not even put the thing out to bid," Jenco said.

Fritschi said that in his opinion the district should move forward on the Granlees project because of what has happened in the past and how long it has taken. He also said the gates pose a safety and liability issue, which is why he included a guard in front of the gates (that was incorporated into final design by the consulting engineers.)

"So, if the gates are open, which they are most of the time, someone jumping into

the water won't get sucked into the forebay and stuck to the gates," he said. "There's no way we can stop people from walking across the dam and there are people who kayak out there."

(The past incident to which Fritschi referred was the drowning of a teenager in 2002 after the youth jumped into the water intake diversion to retrieve some swimming goggles and was trapped by the currents.)

Fritschi said his second priority would just be replacing the recycled water contact basin at the wastewater plant, which is part of the conversion to bleach project.

Morris asked if CSD staff could be used for the Granlees project as envisioned by Siebensohn.

Fritschi asked Bohannon to explain why the answer was no. Bohannon said that Siebensohn designed a bleach conversion project for the wastewater plant, bought the materials and equipment and began construction with staff before he left the

district.

Bohannon said when the consulting engineers looked at their work, they said nearly everything had to be scrapped because it wouldn't operate and wasn't appropriate. "The staff here doesn't have the knowledge to do that stuff and do it safely," Bohannon said. "Just by past experience alone, doing the work in-house has created more issues than it is solved."

When asked how much money remained from the state grant, Fritschi said his "just off the top of my head" estimate is that the district has spent \$250,000 so far to design the three SB 170 projects.

After further discussion, Morris recommended moving forward on the Granlees project. "A big chunk of the \$1.3 million has already been eroded by thinking and planning for it," she said. "My worry is that it is just going to be more expensive, so I feel like you might as well dive in and take care of it."

By the close of the

discussion, Jenco and Pohl agreed that the district should move forward on advertising the requests for a proposal in March, aiming for construction in late spring or early summer. They also directed that the district's engineering firm prepare the bid documents.

Fritschi and board members have lamented at prior meetings that CSD didn't ask Cooley for more money for the projects. When Cooley advised of the funding possibility in 2021, Siebensohn had already submitted his resignation. Given the time constraints before he walked out the door, Siebensohn probably came up with the best project cost estimates he could, according to comments at past meetings.

In other business, Jenco and Pohl tasked Bohannon with soliciting additional bids to address rust issues at the Rio Oso water storage tank, with plans to put the repair approval on the consent agenda at the upcoming board meeting on Feb. 21. ★

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