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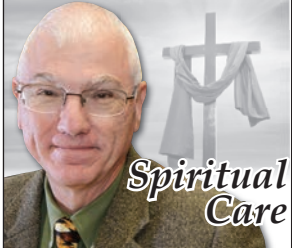
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**CARING FOR
THE TALENT?**



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RMA Urged to Automate Escuela Gate for Escape

Story and photos
by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A long-standing disagreement over automating remote gates for emergency evacuations was brought to the Rancho Murieta Association Board on Dec. 10.

The issue surfaced during the public comments portion of the meeting, which allows members to address the board directly on topics not listed on the agenda. As a general practice, the RMA Board does not respond to public comments, except in limited circumstances.

Greg Pryor, president of the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Council, began the public comment by reading a two-page letter outlining the case for automating the Escuela Gate to enable its use during emergency evacuations. Two additional members of the Fire Safe Council, along with three other residents, strongly supported the gate automation.

The Fire Safe Council has long advocated the automation of the Escuela Gate on the north side and the Bent Grass Court gates on the south, allowing them to be opened alongside the two main gates during an emergency evacuation. Under the council's proposal, the incident commander or their designee would use a cell phone to unlock the gates with a code stored at the inter-agency fire dispatch center.

The remote gates are currently secured with Knox Locks, which police and fire personnel can open using a key.

As expressed at recent meetings by RMA General Manager Rod Hart and Director Patrick O'Hern, the RMA position is that the gates should only be opened once a fire responder is on the scene to direct traffic. Both have emphasized that the health and safety of the community are their top priorities. They have warned that opening the emergency gates before a first responder's arrival could lead to chaos, mainly if a resident crashes while exiting onto the roadway.

The Fire Safe Council has long advocated for automating both the Escuela Gate and the Bent Grass Court gates. However, the letter Greg Pryor read to the RMA

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Parade, Craft Fair, Santa Make Wilton Festive



Cub Scouts pause during the Wilton Winter Festival parade, which began at the firehouse and concluded at the Wilton Community Center. Photo by Gail Bullen

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

WILTON, CA (MPG) - The 16th annual Wilton Winter Festival took place on Dec. 7, featuring the largest parade in the event's history and festive holiday activities at the Wilton Community Center. The celebration attracted several hundred attendees.

The Sacramento County Area 4 B Council (Parks & Rec) sponsored the event. The lead organizer was Patsy

Nemetz, who chairs the council.

"Our event was great," she said. "We enjoyed fantastic weather, a record-setting parade, festive holiday music courtesy of Drew Gray Media, and various vendors.

"This year, we introduced a new Santa's Workshop area featuring free crafts and cookie decorating for kids. Guests also enjoyed the usual meals prepared by Maryann Evans and Dillard School volunteers, a visit with Santa, and free cookies and

cocoa."

The parade is always the central attraction at the festival. The route begins at the Wilton Fire Department station at Wilton Road, travels north on Dillard Road past the viewing stand in front of the Wilton Bible Church, and ends at the community center off Colony Road.

Parade organizer Lynn Holliday said the parade drew 27 entries, the most since the festival began. "We

Continued on page 2

Parade, Craft Fair, Santa Make Wilton Festive

Continued from page 1

also kept the roads closed longer than we ever had," she said.

Holliday was particularly pleased with the participation of a horse group and a 1940 John Deere tractor. "I always joke that we must have horses and a tractor because, you know, this is Wilton."

The parade also featured three classic Studebakers and a 94-year-old patrol car from the California Highway Patrol Museum.

Other highlights included a flatbed trailer from Wilton Animal Rescue showcasing some of their rehabilitated dogs, a rumble-ready Grinch cruising in a golf cart, Rangeview 4-H club members holding chickens and goats, Cub Scout Pack 16 carrying a banner and a giant candy cane, two floats honoring veterans, and the Living Water Church float, where the "Little Drummer Boy" played professional-grade drums with enthusiasm.

This year's Grand Marshal was Corky Donnelly, who managed Shelton Feed & Supply for 40 years. According to Nemetz, the council chose Donnelly for the honor because of his lasting impact on the Wilton community. "His steadfast commitment to helping others has made a real difference in our community for generations," she said.

Another standout participant was Sacramento County Supervisor Pat Hume, who delighted the crowd by tossing candy from a vintage Mustang.

The highlight for kids was a jolly Santa Claus, who arrived at the end of the parade riding inside a fire truck. After being dropped off at the community center, Santa took his place on the outdoor stage, where youngsters lined up to share their Christmas wishes as festive holiday music filled the air.

Volunteer Codi Craig organized the craft fair, which featured 30 vendors displaying their goods on the driveway behind the community center. Most of the items were handcrafted, including sewn and knitted textiles, Christmas ornaments, soaps, freeze-dried candies, and jewelry. The Wilton History Group also participated, selling calendars and T-shirts at its booth.

"The vendors were happy with the turnout," Craig said. "Regardless of how much money they made, they came out to be part of the community."

Inside the community center, attendees enjoyed breakfast and lunch prepared by Dillard



Riders from Black Diamond Equestrians captivate the crowd. Photos by Gail Bullen



Santa waves to the crowd from the Wilton Fire District truck, marking the final entry in the parade.



Ava Behmer and Adaline Moore are thrilled with horse-themed ornaments as they explore the vendor booths with their families.



Parade Marshal Corky Donnelly acknowledges greetings from many well-wishers.



Volunteers Julia Funakosho, left, and Sophia Richardson hand Keira Kachadorias a free Home Depot kit after her visit to Santa's Workshop inside the community center.



Charlotte Moore tells Santa her hopes for Christmas.



A Wilton Animal Rescue volunteer shows off one of four rescue dogs participating in the parade.

Elementary teacher Maryanne Evans and a team of school volunteers. Evans also organized a 10 a.m. concert featuring the school choir performing a selection of Christmas tunes.

Nemetz said the Santa's Workshop was new this year. "Volunteer Stephanie Bruce took the idea and, with her usual boundless energy, created the fun and inviting atmosphere and procured the

craft materials," she said. "Kids were able to decorate a paper Christmas tree with sticker ornaments, make mini snow globes, make Christmas ornaments using pipe cleaners and beads, and decorate a sugar cookie with icing and sprinkles."

Children at the event were given a "Passport" that encouraged them to collect stamps by participating in crafts, watching the parade, and visiting Santa. Upon turning in their completed passports, kids were rewarded with a candy cane and a small project kit donated by Home Depot.



Longtime volunteer Nancy Fox visits with Eileen and Eli Hiatt as they pick up homemade cookies.

"The Santa's Workshop feature was such a hit that we ran out of some of the crafts — a testament to its popularity and something

to improve upon next year," Nemetz said.

View more photos at TheRiverValleyTimes.com.



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Chili Cookoff Benefits Burn Institute



Thanks to the overwhelming success of the Wilton Firefighters Association Chili Cookoff on Oct. 12, the association was able to donate \$10,000 to the Firefighters Burn Institute during a brief ceremony on Dec. 14 at the main fire station. In the right photo, Joe Pick, executive director of the Firefighters Burn Institute, is joined by Codi Craig from the Wilton Parks & Recreation Council, Bill Kirkland of the Wilton Firefighters Association, and Randy Upham, president of the Wilton Community Center non-profit, as they display a giant check. In the photo above, members of the firefighters association proudly pose with Pick. The Firefighters Burn Institute, in partnership with UC Davis Medical Center, supports the Firefighters Burn Institute Regional Burn Center, which provides comprehensive care for burn patients. Courtesy photos

Two CSD Employees Receive Longevity Awards

Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Rancho Murieta Community Services District Directors honored two employees for their dedication and loyalty during a special board meeting on Dec. 6.

General Manager Mimi Morris presented certificates of appreciation to Gate Officer Karen Hessler, who has served the district for 20 years, and Chief Plant Operator Travis Bohannon, who has been with the district for 15 years.

As she presented Hessler's certificate, Morris noted her significant impact on both the community and the organization.

Board President Stephen Booth congratulated Hessler on behalf of the board and jokingly remarked, "I want to know how the district violated child labor laws by

employing you 20 years ago."

Director Linda Butler also expressed her gratitude. "Never anything but a smile. Always courteous. It's just a pleasure," she said.

"She knows more people than anybody in Rancho Murieta," added Director John Merchant.

After Bohannon stepped forward to accept his certificate from Morris, Board President Stephen Booth commended him for his exceptional service to the district. Booth acknowledged Bohannon's recent role as interim operations manager, bridging the gap between Michael Fritschi's resignation and Eric Houston's hiring.

"You did very well for the district," Booth told Bohannon.

Director John Merchant also expressed his gratitude. "I really appreciate all of the help and information you've gotten me when I asked for it," he said. ★



Gate Officer Karen Hessler, left, and Chief Plant Operator Travis Bohannon are honored with certificates of appreciation, presented by General Manager Mimi Morris during the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board meeting on Dec. 6. Photo by Gail Bullen

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WE SUPPORT FIRST RESPONDERS

CSD Outlines Water and Sewer Line Relocations in Village

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A presentation on the planned relocation of all water and sewer lines in the mobile home park drew a crowd of over 60 residents when Rancho Murieta Community Services District General Manager Mimi Morris and Operations Director Eric Houston met Dec. 9 with the Murieta Village Association Board.

Morris opened the meeting with an apology for the delay in addressing the issue, explaining that a water line retrofit had been included as a capital improvement project in 2021.

“Over \$850,000 was allocated for the project, and somehow, it never happened,” she said.

However, Morris emphasized that the CSD Board had recently voted to restart the project, approving \$100,000 for preliminary design work during their October meeting. Houston estimated the total project cost at \$3 million.

Morris explained that the current water and sewer system is problematic because the original pipes were installed beneath homes when the Village was built 50 years ago. Modern standards require pipes to be placed in the streets, where access and maintenance are much easier.

“Your current configuration is a ticking time



Rancho Murieta Community Services District Operations Director Eric Houston and General Manager Mimi Morris meet with the Murieta Village Association Board and more than 60 residents on Dec. 9. Photo by Gail Bullen

bomb,” she said.

The planned relocation project addresses these deficiencies, ensuring that the district assumes responsibility for water lines up to the meter and sewer lines up to the cleanout. At the same time, homeowners will be responsible for maintenance beyond those points.

The new water meters will be installed at the end of each driveway, while the new sewer cleanouts will be on the opposite side. Homeowners will be responsible for covering the cost of constructing new lines that connect their homes to the district’s connection points.

The financial impact of the project on homeowners was a major point of discussion, with an estimated cost of approximately

\$5,000 per lot — a considerable expense for many senior residents. Morris acknowledged the burden and explained that the district aims to contract with a single vendor to manage all connections, enabling homeowners to spread payments over three to five years. If a property is sold, any remaining financial obligation would transfer to the new owner.

Eric Houston outlined the timeline and technical aspects of the project, emphasizing that it will impact 189 lots and is expected to take three to five years to complete, as the work will be done in phases.

He explained that the project will require significant road excavation and resurfacing, with paving restricted to the months

between April and October due to weather limitations. The preliminary design and mapping phase, which will determine the locations of existing meters, cleanouts and connections, is expected to take at least six months. Consequently, construction is not anticipated to begin for at least a year.

Residents voiced several concerns during the meeting, including whether driveway damage could be avoided.

Houston explained that while the district would make every effort to minimize disruptions, some driveways might need to be excavated depending on the lot configuration.

As for the existing water and sewer lines, Houston noted that many of the old lines would likely remain

in place.

“Anything that’s currently in the ground will be grouted so it won’t collapse,” he said.

Residents raised concerns about the Village’s high-water pressure and asked whether the project could include pressure-reducing valves. Houston explained that pressure-reducing valves are typically the homeowner’s responsibility but pledged to evaluate whether the district could incorporate them into the project.

Both Morris and Houston emphasized the district’s commitment to minimizing costs and disruptions for residents.

Morris reiterated that the board would continue exploring options to reduce the financial burden on homeowners, stating, “Our

goal is to keep the financial impact as low as possible because this is a significant burden.”

They also assured residents that they would provide regular updates and anticipated meeting with the Murieta Village Association Board several more times as the project progresses.

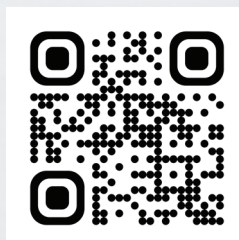
In the meantime, Houston encouraged residents to report any leaks or unlocated issues to the district immediately.

“We will come out,” he said. “You will no longer need to find your own vendor unless the issue is entirely on your side and your responsibility. If it’s on the district side, we’ll handle the work so you don’t have to incur that cost or wait for reimbursement.” ★

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RMA Board OKs Annexation, Big Purchases

Story and photos by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - The Rancho Murieta Association Board convened twice within two days earlier this month.

The first meeting, held on Dec. 10, was the regular monthly session. During this meeting, the board elected new officers, voted 5-1 to annex three lots, approved nearly \$250,000 in equipment purchases, and received updates from General Manager Rod Hart and committee chairpersons. Additionally, the board addressed public comments, including statements from six residents advocating for the automation of Escuela Gate to facilitate evacuations. For more details about the gate, see the article on Page 1.

The second meeting, held on Dec. 12, was the 2024 Annual Meeting and Election of Officers. Originally scheduled for November, it was postponed a month due to insufficient ballots returned to meet the quorum requirement.

Elections

The board unanimously elected new officers within minutes at the first meeting, although the vote was only 6:0 since Director Renee Bechthold was unable to attend. The board elected Directors Pat O'Hern, president; Tom Reimers, vice president; John Van Doren, treasurer; and Chris Childs, secretary.

The board also unanimously approved the appointment of chairs for various committees, with most assignments remaining unchanged. However, Van Doren will replace O'Hern on the Architectural Review Committee, and O'Hern will replace Director



Inspector of Elections Jim Moore administers the oath of office to Directors Tom Reimers and John Van Doren at the Rancho Murieta Association's Annual meeting on Dec. 12. Both ran unopposed for a second term. Photos by Gail Bullen

Danny Carrillo on the Maintenance Committee.

O'Hern addressed the board with a prepared statement.

"I just want to thank the other directors for the trust and support they have given me by electing me to be the president," he said.

He also acknowledged the contributions of his predecessor, Scott Adams, over the past two years.

"His hours of research, devotion to excellence, and vision coupled with his extensive institutional knowledge of the community," O'Hern said, "I am certain I will call on him for his valuable opinions."

Annexation

Under new business, General Manager Rod Hart requested approval to annex three lots that are part of the Residents of Murieta Hills East, currently under construction. The lots are located on Puerto Drive and are sandwiched between existing homes. Hart explained the annexation would help maintain the continuity of the neighborhood.

Director Danny Carrillo opposed the proposal. He said it would primarily benefit the developer and suggested that the association should get some "exactions" as a result.

Developer Bob Keil and audience member Tom Shewchuk were quick to dispute Carrillo's assertions. Shewchuk argued that Keil was actually losing money with the annexation, as the three lots would no longer be part of his association.

Regarding the prospective buyers of the three lots, including himself, Shewchuk stated, "We want to be in RMA. We want to be like the other neighbors."

The board ultimately voted 5-1 to approve the annexation, with Carrillo dissenting.

Equipment purchases

In other action, the board approved nearly a quarter million dollars in equipment expenditures, which were almost completely covered by reserves.

The largest expense was \$130,000 for a new street sweeper. Carrillo questioned whether leasing or contracting the service would be more cost-effective. After assurances that purchasing was the most economical option, the board voted unanimously, 6-0, to approve the purchase.

The board also approved \$83,547 for two zero-turn mowers, exceeding

the reserve allocation by approximately \$4,000.

Finance Manager Colleen Hagyard received unanimous approval to spend \$8,141 from reserves to upgrade the association's NEC phone system, extending its lifespan until 2030. She noted that replacing the system now would cost \$40,000.

Other business

General Manager Rod Hart reported that he was monitoring the Rancho Murieta Community Services District's (CSD) plan to increase barcode fees. The CSD Board had initially approved raising the fee for a new car barcode from \$10 to \$25 and introducing a \$10 annual renewal fee. Additionally, the CSD aims to establish a system for issuing barcodes to contractors and vendors, but this will require a mutual agreement with the RMA.

There was also consensus that the Communications Committee should begin informing residents about Greenfield Communications' plan to discontinue the ranchomurieta.org email service in March.

Hart also provided a report on behalf of the Recreation Committee,



Newly-elected Board President Patrick O'Hern presents an award to Director Scott Adams in recognition of his service as the board president in 2023 and 2024. Tom Reimers and John Van Doren also received awards recognizing their prior three years of service.

chaired by Director Bechthold. He praised the committee and Bechthold for organizing another successful Christmas Tree Lighting event on Nov. 29.

Hart also outlined changes to this year's annual holiday lighting contest. Due to the board moving its December meeting up by a week, prizes couldn't be awarded at the meeting because judging was still underway.

Once judging is complete, Hart said, lawn signs will be delivered to the 50 winners, and the \$50 gift certificates will be mailed. He noted that the staff encountered difficulties obtaining Visa gift cards this year "because they think we are money laundering," so they opted to purchase Bel Air gift cards instead.

Shewchuk also spoke during public comments. He said he would like to see the formation of an inter-agency water committee involving CSD, RMA, and the Rancho Murieta Country Club.

Annual Meeting

At the delayed annual meeting on Dec. 12, Director of Inspections Jim Moore announced that a quorum of 20% — or 465 votes — had been reached. He also confirmed

that incumbents Thomas Reimers and John Van Doren were re-elected to second terms.

The original November annual meeting could not proceed because it required a quorum of 931 members returning their ballots, but only 717 were submitted. However, a recent state law allowed the board to reschedule the meeting within 20 days, requiring only a 20% quorum for the second attempt.

As is tradition at the annual meetings, Hart used his woodworking skills on beautifully crafted awards to recognize board members at the end of their terms. O'Hern presented those awards to Reimers and Van Doren. Additionally, he presented Adams with a different award for his two-year tenure as board president.

O'Hern also introduced a new tradition by presenting Adams with a commemorative brick acknowledging his service. The brick will be installed at the Legacy Brick Patio in front of the pickleball court at Stonehouse Park. Hart said he plans to compile a list of past honorees to ensure they also receive commemorative bricks.

The board next meets at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 21. ★

RMA Urged to Automate Escuela Gate for Escape

Continued from page 1

Board on Dec. 10 focused exclusively on the Escuela Gate. When asked by the River Valley Times why the Bent Grass gates were not included, Pryor explained that the Fire Safe Council intends to seek assistance from the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (CSD) for automating those gates, as they are located on CSD property.

Pryor letter

In his letter, Pryor highlighted the community's vulnerability during catastrophic events, such as large-scale fires or floods. He noted that traffic experts estimate it would take 1.5 to 2 hours to evacuate through the main gates under normal conditions.

"Fire experts concur that under average red flag wind conditions, a wildfire, once it entered the community, could spread through the community in between half an hour and an hour," his letter said.

In a crisis, a first responder could be delayed in reaching Escuela Gate with a physical key because of other pressing demands or personnel shortages. "The current situation of having only one open gate per community imposes an unnecessary and dangerous threat to all residents," his letter said. "An inability to timely evacuate could result in serious injury or death to residents or others."

Automating the Escuela Gate would help minimize or eliminate evacuation delays caused by waiting for a fire responder to arrive, though responders would reach the scene as quickly as possible. Pryor's letter cautioned that neglecting to address evacuation preparedness could jeopardize the community's FireWise designation.

He also noted that the gate automation proposal has been reviewed and supported by several agencies, including the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, the Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services, the County Department of Transportation, Caltrans, and county counsel.

"Not a single agency voiced opposition



Greg Pryor, president of the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Safe Council, seeks Rancho Murieta Association approval to automate Escuela Gate for use in an emergency. He spoke at the Dec. 10 board meeting. File photos by Gail Bullen

or identified barriers to gate automation for use during the event of an emergency," his letter said. "It is baffling that the only known opposition to automating the Escuela gate comes from the RMA Board."

Pryor's letter concluded by emphasizing the RMA Board's responsibility to act in the best interests of the homeowners, urging them to take immediate action to automate the gates.

Other comments

Resident Patrick Salo urged the board to recall the traffic backups at the gates during past July 4 holidays. He expressed concern that failing to automate the Escuela Gate in an emergency could leave residents trapped. "It's going to be on your hands if there are casualties and people die," he said.

John Long, a retired traffic engineer with 45 years of experience, responded to an RMA claim that opening the Escuela Gate before the arrival of a first responder would create chaos. Long acknowledged the concern and consulted with engineers from Caltrans and the Sacramento County Department of Transportation. "We agreed that placing a stop sign outside the gate would be the same as Lone Pine or Stonehouse, which have stop signs," he explained. "If you have an emergency, there's not going to be a first responder there directing traffic."



Resident Rob Schultz asks for a formal board vote on automating the gate and suggests a community survey. Schultz wrote the grant application that landed Rancho Murieta a \$4.3 million Cal Fire fuel reduction grant.

Long foresees chaos resulting from backups on Murieta Parkway, which could stretch up to a mile and a half if the main gate remains the sole exit during an evacuation.

The most poignant comment came from Rancho Murieta resident Sharon McGowan, who lived in Paradise during the Camp Fire. The blaze forced her to evacuate, leaving her home in ruins. "Do any of you want to be responsible for people burning up in their cars because they can't get out," she asked the board. "So, please reconsider your decision."

Resident Marjie Salo told the board that she, too, was concerned about having only one way out on each side of the community.

The final speaker was Rob Schultz, an IT specialist who wrote the grant application for the \$4.3 million Cal Fire Grant for wildfire fuel reduction that is currently underway. Schultz began by thanking the RMA Council for their service, saying it was a thankless job.

Schultz urged the board to vote on the gate automation issue, pointing out that previous RMA directors had approved funding for the gates, but something changed afterward. He highlighted a critical problem with keeping a gate locked until a first responder arrives: while Station 59 firefighters are familiar with the gate, they will likely be occupied fighting the fire. Meanwhile, firefighters coming



Traffic engineer John Long disputes an RMA contention that the gate should remain locked until a first responder arrives to direct traffic.

from outside the area "may or may not know there is a gate around the corner behind the bushes with a bunch of people behind it."

Schultz pointed out that there is precedent for automating gates. While the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District does not have fire codes specifically addressing emergency evacuations, other jurisdictions do.

He referenced an ordinance from the Santa Barbara County Fire Department that outlines requirements for gates in gated communities: "They shall be electrically operated, have battery backup, and may be of the swing, lift, or sliding type. Manual gates are not allowed for roadways or gated communities."

In closing, Schultz reiterated his request for the board to vote on the gate automation issue and proposed surveying the membership for their input.

Although the board rarely responds during public comments, President Scott Adams clarified that the board had never voted to automate the gates.

Pryor countered, stating that he had attended a meeting where gate automation was an agenda item and that the board had approved funding. He added that the River Valley Times had recorded the meeting and urged Adams to review the minutes.

Adams replied that he would check the minutes and emphasized that he was offering a point of clarification. ★

Large-Scale Bird Fighting Ring Investigated in Herald Area

Sacramento County Sheriff's Office News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Two weekends ago, Sacramento County Sheriff's Office Central Division Patrol Deputies responded to a residence in the south area of the county on Borden Road in southern Sacramento County, regarding a large group of vehicles.

Upon their arrival, approximately 40 to 50 individuals fled the area on foot and by vehicle. Multiple vehicles crashed through neighboring fences, and several were left abandoned at the scene.

Suspecting the individuals fled because of a large-scale bird fighting event discovered on the property, Central Division deputies and detectives from the Sheriff's Special

Investigations Bureau (SIB) authored a search warrant, where they recovered seven birds that had been tortured. More than 200 total birds were located on the property, with clear indications of their being raised as fighting birds. Detectives also located numerous antibiotics and drugs used in growing and treating fighting birds, along with vials of painkillers. Sacramento County Animal Control assisted in taking multiple birds for protection, along with the injured birds that will be humanely euthanized due to their extreme injuries.

The Special Investigations Bureau will work with Animal Control and the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office during this investigation. The California Department of Food and Agriculture



The bird fighting ring was found on Borden Road east of Herald. Photos courtesy of Sacramento County Sheriff's Office

has been contacted for further testing of the birds. Bird fighting rings have been related to the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), which has impacted farmers throughout California. The investigation will

be ongoing, and numerous arrests are anticipated. If anyone suspects any mistreatment, abandonment or any event that leads to the torture of animals, the Sheriff's Office encourages all people to report it immediately by contacting



More than 200 birds were found on the property.

the Sheriff's Office at (916) 874- 5115 or Sacramento Valley Crime Stoppers at (916) 443-HELP (4357). Tips leading to an arrest are eligible for a CASH reward of up to \$1,000, and tipsters remain anonymous. Tips are paid in cash, and you are never asked for identification. Contact Sacramento

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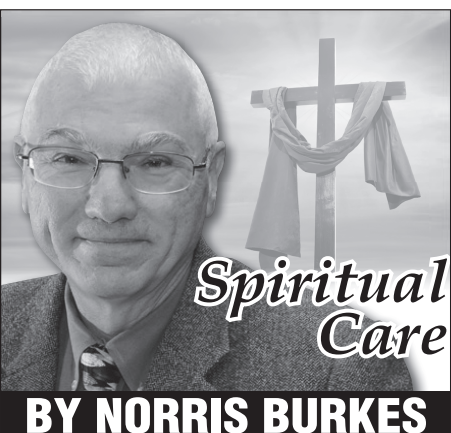
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Definitely NOT the Best Christmas Ever



BY NORRIS BURKES

This is the time of year when writers like to recount their "Best Christmas ever."

Their stories often include a video of a slobbering puppy leaping from a ribbon-covered box or a marriage proposal, or my favorite, a deployed soldier surprising her family with an early homecoming.

But if you've read my column long enough, you'll know that this columnist seeks to fill the holes of the unexpected. So, today, I recollect my very worst Christmas ever!

I was only 4 years old, but savvy enough to ask my parents why our Charlie Brown Christmas tree was so bare. I didn't understand why my father, a poor ministerial student, had nothing to place under the tree.

However, I became cautiously optimistic on Christmas Eve when my dad called us one-by-one into his study cubby.

My sister came away with a new doll. My brother followed holding a kinetic car, the kind you roll backwards to wind up the energy.

Score! Seeing that kind of haul, my kinetic energy was pushing full throttle.

I approached my dad's desk and climbed into his loving lap.

"I have something very important to tell you," he said.

My little eyes reflected with the anticipatory joy of Tiny Tim.

"There is no such thing as Santa Claus," he said. "We celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, not Santa."

My eyes blinked with tears. Could it get any worse for a preschooler than that?

Yes, actually, it could.

When I asked about my present, my dad told me that I'd be sharing the kinetic car with my brother.

"Does it get it any sadder?" you ask.

In fact, it did..

I joined my brother on the kitchen floor where we took turns sending the car careening back and forth like a game of catch.

Twenty minutes into the game, my 5-year-old brother began speculating on how the car mechanism worked.

"Let me take it apart," my brother begged with screwdriver in hand. I was curious, too, but I would only agree if he promised to restore it to working condition.

He promised.

Ten minutes later, with wheels, chassis and motor spread on the kitchen table, the car was humpty-dumptyed.

Saddest, worst, most disappointing Christmas ever, right?

So, why would I write about a Christmas memory worthy of Debbie-downer?

As foul as it was, it still points toward some spiritual takeaways of Christmas.

First, Christmas needn't be all about materialism, about what we buy or what we consume. It might also be about sacrifice.

My sacrifice fed my brother's mechanical mind. He explored the workings of the tiny engine, gaining early insights into motion, potential energy and kinetic energy. He may have failed the car restoration business, but he became an electronics repairman and later started his own electronics business.

Second, my worst Christmas inspired me to share what we are given. Christian scripture reminds us, "To whom much is given, much shall be required."

I didn't get much, but in sharing it, I perhaps inspired greater generosity. For years to come, my brother modified other gifts into things much more interesting.

One year he rigged a toy tank to burst from a record player box and shoot rubber bands. Another year, he removed the capacitor from an old radio to make an electric shock device capable of repelling the school bullies.

I've shared this sad story with my wife many times over the years. So, last week I told her I'd have my best Christmas ever if she'd give me a miniature Schnauzer puppy for Christmas.

At first she said no, but after reading this column, she assured me that our neighbor would likely "share" his new puppy.

So much for the worst Christmas ever. ★

SECURITY LOGS

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.

Dec. 1

8:46 a.m.: Abandoned disabled golf cart reported, Jackson Road by Equestrian center.

Dec. 4

12 a.m.: Follow-up, Alameda Drive: Gipson Golf Carts was informed there was abandoned golf cart on Jackson Road; patrol was not able to locate. Later findings reported theft of three golf carts occurred at Gipson Golf Carts. Theft was reported to the Sacramento Sheriff's department. Cameras in the area are being reviewed.

Dec. 5

4:55 a.m.: Missing person reported, Lobo:

Resident called and informed South Gate dispatch she woke up to find her husband missing and that she has contacted Sacramento Sheriff's Department due to her husband having dementia. Patrol followed up with reporting party and was informed Sacramento Sheriff's Department located her husband and returned home with no injuries.

6:22 p.m., Juvenile delinquency, Murieta Gardens: Report of juveniles causing a disturbance. Patrol made contact with reporting party, who stated they were conducting illegal activities. Patrol made contact with juveniles and advised them to leave immediately.

Dec. 6

8:54 p.m., Stonehouse Park: Report of juveniles driving golf cart and e-bike in grassy area by planters at Stonehouse Park performing donuts. Upon patrol's arrival juveniles were gone.

2:13 p.m., Via Bernini: Report of vendors in The Retreats soliciting on Via Bernini. Patrol arrived and cleared the area; unable to locate.

Dec. 7

5:47 p.m., Brisa Lane: Complaint of barking dog for two hours. Patrol responded; quiet on arrival.

6:10 p.m., Trinidad Drive: Resident reported that someone threw a lemon at back window of home. The reporting party believes the suspect had been walking along the golf course; unable to give description. Patrol checked area, unable to locate suspect.

Dec. 9

3:50 a.m., Carreta Lane: RMA rule violation; resident parked overnight on street in front of home. Citation issued.

3:59 a.m., Lindero Lane: RMA rule violation; resident parked on street without 24-hour pass for vehicle and boat trailer on street. Citation issued. ★

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Wilton Parks & Rec Seeks Board Candidates

Known informally as Wilton Parks & Rec, the Sacramento County Service Area 4B Council is seeking applicants for two vacancies on the board and more volunteer support.

Any inquiries for volunteer opportunities or council applications can be directed to Veselkaa@saccounty.gov.

Garden Club Offers Smokey Bear Contest

The River Valley Garden Club is in search of budding artists interested in participating in the club's Smokey Bear and Woody Owl contest.

This annual contest is organized for children in grades 1 through 5 living in Rancho Murieta, Wilton, Sloughouse and surrounding areas. The club will supply paper for the poster.

The due date for the local contest is Jan. 6, 2025. Winning posters from the club competition will be submitted to compete at the state level California State Garden Clubs, Inc. (CGCI) on Jan. 24, 2025.

First place winners from the state level will be awarded \$25 cash prize by CGCI for each grade. Posters should be submitted no later than Jan. 6, 2025, to the River Valley Garden Club.

Please contact Jayne La Grande at

916-708-6764 or jmlagran@gmail.com for contest rules, poster paper, submission or more information.

Sweats for Vets Sought

Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta is once again asking for monetary donations to its Sweats for Vets program that will run through the end of December.

This is the 15th year of helping veterans who are hospitalized at the Sacramento Veterans Administration Medical Center in Mather.

Please make your check out to Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta Sweats for Vets. Cash donations and Walmart gift cards are also welcome.

Mail donations to Kiwanis at P. O. Box 855, Rancho Murieta, or put them in a drop box at the RMA building. If you have any questions, call Diann Swan at 916-354-0656.

Wilton Bingo Jan. 4

The next bingo will be on Saturday Jan. 4. Doors open at 5 p.m. with food available for sale and bingo starts at 6 p.m. in the Wilton Community Center (9717 Colony Road, at Dillard Road).

All proceeds go to two non-profits: the local Park Council and the Wilton History Group. Questions, call Lorraine Robinson at 916-212-8896 ★

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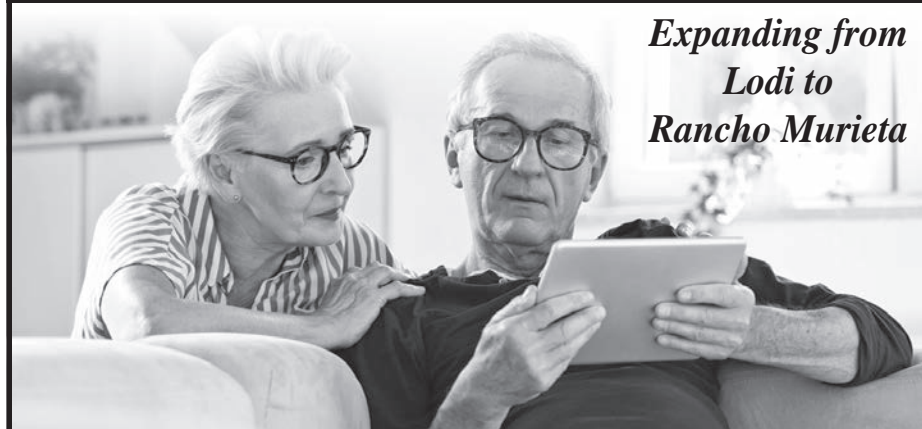
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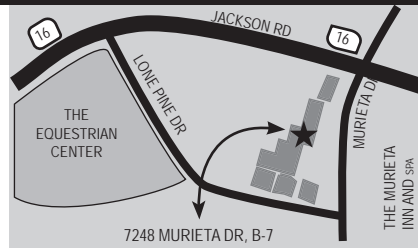


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Hornet Football Coach Resigns

By Daniel Canfield

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - On Friday, Dec. 6, Sacramento State University announced that Hornet Football head coach Andy Thompson had resigned to pursue other career opportunities. Thompson's departure after two years at the helm of the Hornet Football program comes at the conclusion of a 2024 campaign that saw the Hornets finish with a 3-9 overall record and 1-7 in Big Sky Conference play. Sac State dropped the final five games of the 2024 season including the annual causeway classic matchup with UC Davis which was played on Nov. 23 at Hornet stadium.

The official news release from the university includes a gracious statement from Athletic Director Mark Orr regarding Thompson's tenure with the Hornets. "We want to thank Coach Thompson and his family for all they have done for Sacramento State football over the last five seasons," Orr said. "Under his watch, the program has achieved its highest level of success. We wish him the best of luck in the future."

In his two years as head coach Thompson posted



Sac State's Football program is in search of a new head coach to replace Andy Thompson who resigned on Dec. 6 to join the Stanford University football coaching staff. Photo by Sacramento State Athletics

an overall record of 11 wins and 14 losses. In his first year as head coach in 2023, the Hornets enjoyed an 8-5 record and made it to the second round of the 2023 FCS Playoffs. Unfortunately, that success was not seen again in the disappointing 2024 season.

Thompson had been on the Hornet coaching staff since the 2019 season.

As defensive coordinator, Thompson was instrumental in the Hornet football program earning Big Sky Conference titles in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Following the conclusion of the 2022 season, Thompson was promoted to the Hornet head coach position which had been vacated by Troy Taylor who left Sacramento State to take

the head football coaching position at Stanford University.

On the heels of the official announcement from Sacramento State Athletics regarding Thompson's departure on Dec. 6, Stanford University officially announced that coach Thompson would be joining the Stanford Football coaching staff

as Stanford Football's assistant head coach and co-defensive coordinator. Reuniting Thompson with his former boss and former Hornet head coach Troy Taylor.

The Hornet Football program owes a debt of gratitude to Coach Thompson as his involvement with the program led to success and accolades

not previously enjoyed by the Hornets. Best wishes to Coach Thompson in his new position, as long as Stanford football's interests do not conflict with Hornet football's interests.

Sacramento State officials announced that a national search will begin immediately to find the next head coach for the Hornets. ★

Christmas Berries Grace American River Parkway

By Derek Minnema

Christmas berries adorning the American River Parkway with their brilliant red clusters have symbolically been spreading Christmas cheer along California's waterways since long before the state was settled.

Spanish missionaries arriving in the late 18th century were struck by the resemblance of the plant to European holly, traditionally used as Christmas celebrations throughout Europe. The plant's association with Christian symbolism was immediate and profound. The bright red berries, appearing at their peak during the Christmas season, were seen as representing Christ's blood, while the sharp-toothed evergreen leaves reminded the faithful of the crown of thorns placed upon Jesus's head during the crucifixion.

This symbolism resonated deeply with early Christian settlers, who saw divine providence in finding such a powerful reminder of Christ's sacrifice in their new homeland.

The berries' annual December emergence aligned perfectly with Advent, the Christian season of preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth.

Just as the Star of Bethlehem guided the Wise Men, these red berries served as natural guides along the paths of early Christian travelers in California.

Today, along the American River Parkway in Fair Oaks, these biblical berries continue their winter display, creating a timeless connection between past and present.

On a crisp December morning, with temperatures hovering around 55 degrees, mountain bikers and equestrians shared the damp trails, their paths lined with the festive shrubs, their paths lined with the festive shrubs. Recent rains had left the soil perfectly tacky for bike riding, and the air carried that distinctive winter freshness that makes every breath feel like a blessing.

The integration of natural space and residential areas in Fair Oaks creates a unique community character that reflects the peaceful coexistence of nature and civilization. Unlike many Sacramento suburbs that surrendered to high-density development, Fair Oaks has maintained its semi-rural atmosphere, with the American River Parkway serving as a green ribbon that ties the community together.

The Christmas berries mark the changing seasons along the parkway's winding trails, their transformation from white spring blossoms to red winter fruits mirroring the Christian liturgical calendar.

The berries begin to turn red as Advent approaches, reaching their peak brilliance during the Christmas season, when Christians worldwide celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The berries' persistent presence through winter mirrors the endurance of faith, while their sharp leaves remind believers of Christ's later sacrifice.

As another December unfolds, I find myself increasingly grateful for these simple gifts, open spaces that give us room to breathe, trails that bring neighbors together and



Planted on Landis Avenue by early Carmichael colonists, an ancient persimmon tree is framed by winter berries. Photos by Susan Maxwell Skinner

these beautiful berries remind us of Christmas past and present.

Whether watching a friend's horse carefully traverse the path or pausing to let a mountain biker pass with a wave and a smile, I'm reminded that the best Christmas presents don't come wrapped in paper.

They grow wild along our trails, they float down our river and they live in the hearts of the community we've built together.

Derek Minnema is a Fair Oaks resident, who can be reached at DerekMinnema.com.

★ Overlooking San Juan Rapids, winter berries brighten a December sunset.



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CSD Board Changes Leadership at Special Meeting

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A Rancho Murieta Community Services District special board meeting on Dec. 6 was special in more ways than one. In addition to being an extra meeting, it also marked a significant shift in the board's leadership.

Over the past four years, Directors Tim Maybee, Randy Jenco and Martin Pohll held the majority with 3-2 votes. However, following the results of the November pass-through election, the new majority now consists of Directors Stephen Booth, Linda Butler and John Merchant.

Pohll, Jenco and Maybee previously served on the Rancho Murieta Association Board before running for the Community Services District Board in 2018. Pohll lost to Butler in that election but was appointed to fill a vacancy in 2020. After Pohll opted not to seek another term in the November election, Merchant and Booth were the only candidates to file for the two vacancies.

Over the past four years, Butler often found herself in the minority on key board votes, initially alongside Merchant until his resignation in fall 2022, and later with Booth, who was appointed to fill Merchant's seat. During this period, the board tackled a wide range of issues, with the community's water supply being among the most critical.

Butler and Merchant are longtime members of Save Our Lakes & Open Spaces, a community action group advocating for responsible development, with Merchant serving as its vice-president. Merchant also led a recent petition drive urging the board to impose a water moratorium on new development. Booth, meanwhile, has repeatedly voiced serious concerns during board discussions about the community's future water supply.

A notable example of the board's prior division occurred during the August meeting, when members debated whether to provide water to 240 lots in two subdivisions approved by Sacramento County about 20 years ago. District counsel Patrick Enright recommended issuing the will-serve letters to avoid potential litigation. However, he clarified that the situation with the Rancho North subdivision was entirely different, as the county has not yet granted it entitlements.

Jenco moved to approve the issuance of the will-serve letters, reasoning that opposing them would be futile. He argued the district would likely face a lawsuit the following week and ultimately be compelled to provide water, incurring

significant litigation costs that would burden the district and its ratepayers. Butler and Booth advocated for either denying or postponing Jenco's motion until the completion of the Integrated Water Master Plan, but they were outvoted 3-2.

Elections, Appointments

The special meeting began with the election of board officers despite the absence of Jenco and Maybee. With Butler, Stephen Booth and John Merchant forming a quorum, they voted unanimously to elect Booth as president and Merchant as vice president.

Booth also announced the assignment of directors to established board committees.

"I will personally email each of the directors, asking them to serve in the capacities that I've outlined," Booth said.

Booth then proposed the establishment of a new ad hoc committee to serve as a liaison between the board and staff in six areas. The first is the completion of the annual audits; the second is conducting a peer review and completion of the Integrated Water Master Plan; the third is seeking alternate potable water sources for the community; the fourth is preparing CSD to become an urban water district; the fifth is the already initiated security realignment; and the sixth, "any implementation that may be sought of Water Code 350." (The code is a legal provision that empowers the governing board of a public water agency to declare a water shortage emergency.)

Following the unanimous approval of the ad hoc committee, Booth announced that he would appoint himself and Merchant to serve as its members.

Enright inquired about setting a term limit for the ad hoc committee, as such committees are typically temporary. Booth responded that they would establish a six-month term and then assess whether to extend it if any tasks remained incomplete.

Audience member Tom Shewchuk expanded the discussion on ad hoc committees by suggesting the creation of a community water ad hoc committee. His proposal included representatives from CSD, the Rancho Murieta Association, the Rancho Murieta Country Club and the broader community, with the potential addition of business owners and developers.

"At the least, we need to get more structure between RMA, CSD and RMCC about the water ... With the water situation and the social media attention it's been getting, I think we need to do something other than what we have been doing for the past X



Secretary Amelia Wilder administers the oath of office to John Merchant and Steve Booth at the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board meeting on Dec. 6. Both were unopposed candidates for two vacant seats in the November election. Courtesy photos



As the new board majority, Directors Linda Butler, left, Stephen Booth and John Merchant discuss issues at the meeting.



Audience member Tom Shewchuk urges the board to form a new water committee. Courtesy photo

years," Shewchuk said. "I think the way to show the community we're doing something about it would be to form this ad hoc committee that spans all three organizations."

Board Workshop/Community Outreach

Booth responded to Shewchuk by "sharing a couple of thoughts." He noted that the previous practice of regular meetings between the general manager and board president from all three entities had recently lapsed. Booth said he had asked Community Services District General Manager Mimi Morris to reach out to the other organizations but doesn't anticipate the meetings resuming until after the new year.

Booth also mentioned plans to schedule a strategic planning session for the board, describing it as "a workshop for us to identify the priority issues and develop some strategy on

how to tackle those issues."

Booth told Shewchuk that some of the issues the board will discuss in the workshop will overlap with Rancho Murieta Association and Rancho Murieta Country Club, "and we will have to see where that takes us."

Booth noted that he had not previously shared his final point with the board or anyone else.

"At our strategic planning meeting, I'd like us to talk about the formation of some sort of community outreach group," he said.

While uncertain about the exact structure, Booth expressed interest in inviting community members to meet with a few board members to "help us with that strategy in terms of moving forward."

"I'd like to ask members of our community to really help share the good things that are going on here," Booth added. "We still have some bumps in the road, and we still have some snags. But some

good things are going on here."

Regarding Shewchuk's request for a water committee, Booth said the timing of the proposal "was most appropriate." He explained that the board had already embraced the concept on several levels and that it would be included in discussions about creating a vehicle for fostering greater community engagement.

"Everything you said is great," Shewchuk responded, "but it doesn't cover what I think is needed at the working level."

Merchant told Shewchuk he agreed with his points but noted that structuring such a group would take time. Merchant referenced to a series of meetings that Sacramento County planners convened in 2016 with the Rancho North developers and other stakeholders, down to the ranchers.

Shewchuk said that sounded more like what he wanted, although he appreciated what Booth had said.

"I want some time to think that through and talk to some folks, particularly at the club and the RMA, to see where they are," Merchant told him.

When Booth invited further public comments, Bill Gere approached the podium and questioned why public planning meetings were not being held.

Merchant clarified that county planning was not yet involved because Rancho Murieta Properties still needed to finalize its application for the Rancho North development. He

added that once the county deems the application complete, it will request a water supply assessment from the Community Services District. This assessment will rely on data from the Integrated Water Master Plan to evaluate whether the community's water resources are sufficient to support the development.

"That's where we officially notify the county, by law, what the position of the CSD is," Merchant said.

He noted that the county planning process would move forward after receipt of the assessment.

Merchant then reminisced about a series of community meetings he and former General Manager Ed Kraus organized in 2005 to explain "exactly who we are and what we do." He suggested the possibility of creating a "CSD Academy" for current residents to provide similar insights.

"You would find it amazing if you really gain a complete understanding of what a district of less than 3,000 residential connections actually does, which is a lot more sophisticated and complicated than some of our surrounding neighbors," he said.

Booth wrapped up the meeting by announcing that he would be unavailable to collaborate with Morris on setting the agenda for the Dec. 18 board meeting and requested Merchant's assistance.

"That will be the new approach on a journey," Booth said. ★

Capitol Hosts 93rd Annual Tree Lighting

Governor's Office Press Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - A cherished holiday tradition, this year marked the 41st consecutive year that California's Governor and First Partner have hosted a child receiving support from one of California's 21 nonprofit regional centers to light the California State Capitol Christmas Tree. Nine-year-old Carter Morris from Merced was selected by Central Valley Regional Center to represent the more than 450,000 Californians with intellectual and developmental

disabilities who receive services.

"Happy holidays, California! It was an honor to stand with Carter in solidarity with all of California's kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities, to light the Capitol Tree this year. The holiday season is about gratitude, being together with loved ones, and giving to those less fortunate than ourselves, and I am so pleased to usher in this time of joy with Carter and his family," Gov. Gavin Newsom said at the tree lighting ceremony.

First Partner Jennifer Siebel

Newsom commented on the occasion, "The holidays are a powerful reminder to lead with empathy and compassion, spreading joy and kindness to those around us."

"This year's California State Capitol Tree Lighting was especially meaningful as we joined Carter and his family for this beautiful tradition. Standing with them, we were reminded of the strength and resilience of our communities and the importance of coming together to celebrate hope and connection during this season." ★



Gov. Gavin Newsom and family gather at the 93rd annual Capitol Christmas Tree lighting ceremony on Dec. 11. Photo courtesy of Governor's Office

Serving You: The Honor of My Lifetime

By Sue Frost

As my tenure as Supervisor for District 4 comes to a close, I am overwhelmed with appreciation. It has been a profound honor to serve the diverse and vibrant areas of Sacramento County. From the soulful avenues of North Highlands to the tranquil settings of Rancho Murieta, each community has its own unique charm, and a collective will to enhance our region.

During my years in office, I've had the pleasure of seeing and contributing to significant

improvements that have positively impacted the lives of our residents. Together, we have achieved notable progress, all aimed at enriching the Sacramento region.

We successfully allocated \$4.5 million in ARPA funds to bolster services and housing initiatives across District 4. These projects have spurred growth and enhanced the quality of life in our communities.

Significant projects include the revitalization of the Rio Linda Firehouse and restoring Fire Engine #2 to operational status.

These upgrades are critical, ensuring that our emergency services are well-prepared to safeguard our community. Community gatherings like the Rio Linda/Elverta Country Faire and the Christmas Light Parade have not only spread cheer but also fostered a strong sense of togetherness.

I had the privilege of leading efforts that substantially supported local veterans' services, aiding veterans and non-profits, and fostering economic vitality. The enhancements to the Orangevale Library and our support

for the Orangevale History Museum have played pivotal roles in preserving local heritage and expanding access to educational resources. The Orangevale-Fair Oaks Big Day of Service exemplifies the positives that arise from community cooperation and common goals.

In safety and preparedness, we secured a significant \$400,000 grant from Caltrans to fortify emergency evacuation routes for Rancho Murieta, enhancing the area's readiness for any emergency.

This year, I played a pivotal role in fostering

unity and collaboration in North Highlands by engaging with local leaders committed to enhancing well-being and economic vitality.

This collaboration led to the successful "Celebrate North Highlands" event, which brought together over 2,000 residents on Sept. 28 to celebrate the spirit of the community.

I have always stood firm in my commitment to our local economy, advocating for a strategic approach to reopening that maintained the competitiveness of our businesses and kept our shopping local.

My commitment to openness and honesty has been central, admitting to and learning from any missteps to maintain

a transparent relationship with you.

Reflecting on these efforts, I am proud of what we have accomplished together.

Serving you has been a tremendous privilege, and I am thankful to have been part of your stories and your advocate.

Thank you for your trust, your active participation and your steadfast commitment to our community. Although my role as supervisor is concluding, my dedication to supporting and uplifting our region remains steadfast.

If you would like to stay in touch, please feel free to reach me at sue@suefrost.com. Thank you all for a wonderful and impactful journey. ★

Hundreds Join Surprise Party for Frost

By Elise Spleiss

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Hundreds of well-wishers kept the secret from guest of honor Sue Frost that she was about to have an unforgettable evening on Saturday, Nov. 23.

Colleagues, family and friends from many counties were all quietly inside the Orangevale Community Center by 5 p.m., when shortly after, the door opened slowly. Frost entered and photographer Cathy Kurtz took eight rapid photos before Frost realized what was happening. Her husband, Jack, made a thumbs-up, happy that this secret had finally been revealed and he could relax.

Before becoming a county supervisor, Frost was elected to the Citrus Heights City Council in 2012, served as

Vice-Mayor in 2014 and eventually served as Mayor in 2015. In 2017, Frost assumed the role of District 4 County Supervisor, being reelected in 2020 with her term ending Jan. 6, 2025.

The well-planned and well-executed event on every front was managed and produced by All Events Management Group, Lisa Montes. "Milestones," one of their specialties, was achieved in every way this night.

The program began with a video, asking friends and colleagues to say one word about Frost and other memories. Part of the video prompted a standing ovation by the Sacramento Taxpayers Association as it began with the slow, unfolding text with the works of Frost, set to the music of "Star Wars."

Words attributed to Frost by many included in grace under fire, grass

roots, community, authentic, determined, genuine, common sense, calm and collected, dedicated, tenacious, true to your word, principled and much, much more. One speaker recognized Frost as being best known for listening and helping people.

One description that got much applause and agreement was that Frost is the "most nonpolitical politician."

Others described how Frost thinks carefully about each issue, analyzing it carefully, and does research before making her decision. She also has no qualms about explaining her decision, no matter how it will be taken and sticking to that decision.

Examples given were being instrumental in helping make major changes across the board and across the state to combat the negative effects that Covid was



Sue Frost walks into her surprise party at Orangevale Community Center. Photos by Cathy Kurtz

producing, such as keeping children out of school and closing down businesses.

Frost also helped save the hotel in Rancho Murieta and other small businesses by fighting county bureaucracy.

A large part of the evening was taken up by many proclamations and awards given out, along with many more stories and memories by speakers from the

audience, adding their experiences and appreciation for Frost's work.

Jack Frost, thinking he would get the last word in after 12 years, realized that was yet to happen. He did thank God and all who have helped them.

He also thanked Rosario Rodriguez, who owns a taqueria in Folsom, "for the wonderful dinner." Rodriguez will be installed

as District 4 Supervisor, filling Frost's spot.

Jack Frost also thanked sponsors Sacramento County Probation, Sacramento Taxpayers Association, Howard Jarvis Tax Association, American Legion Post 637 and Stones Casino. The dessert was provided by the Orangevale Chamber of Commerce.

Carlos Verette acted as emcee and as deejay, filling the room with music.

This evening was one to remember.

A prayer was said, thanking Jack and Sue Frost for all they have accomplished in the last 12 years and hoping they find ways to continue to make a difference in the new chapter of their lives.

View more photos from the Sue Frost surprise party at TheRiverValleyTimes.com. ★

California Respects the Power of Your Vote

By Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., California Secretary of State

Californians can confidently claim this: California has made more significant reforms to our election laws and expanded voting rights than any other state.

The relevance of this accomplishment deepens as we prepare to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act next year. This landmark legislation began to undo our country's long history of voter suppression, intimidation, and disenfranchisement that far too many Americans experienced at the polls for decades.

My own parents, who were sharecroppers, were denied their right to vote in the Jim Crow era South. Before moving to Los Angeles from Hope, Arkansas, my parents, David and Mildred Nash, could not vote. My father was an adult with six children before he registered to vote and was only able to exercise that constitutional right for the first time here in California.

As California Secretary of State, I do not take the progress we have made over the years lightly. My staff and I hold sacred the obligation to ensure that our elections are safe, free, fair, and accessible to all. Therefore, before certifying the results for this year's election on Dec. 13, we have taken a number of steps to ensure that every vote is counted. We have also made sure that our ballot counting process is credible and free from interference.

To meet that deadline without a hitch, California requires elections officials in all 58 counties to turn in their official results by a certain date. This year, that date was Dec. 6.

By law, every eligible voter in our state receives a vote-by-mail ballot. This ensures all registered voters can exercise their right to vote.

Whether you placed your ballot in a designated drop-off box, voted by mail, or cast your ballot at a polling center, votes are safe and secure. And we allow voters to sign up to receive text message, email, or voice call notifications about the status of their own ballots by using the Where's My Ballot? tool. To learn more or to sign up, paste this URL in your web browser: <https://california.ballotrx.net/voter/>

The ballots of Californians who voted by mail are also protected. The United States Postal Service partners with the State to make sure ballots are delivered on time. All mailed-in ballots are sent by First Class mail with a postage paid envelope provided to every eligible registered voter.

Election Security is our number one priority. That's why my office designed and implemented a program to back up that commitment. For more information, visit this URL: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/election-cybersecurity>

Additionally, California takes preventive actions to make sure our voting technology keeps our elections safe and protects everyone's votes.

For example, county voting systems are not connected to the internet, which protects them from cyber-threats. The State also performs regular and rigorous testing to make sure the voting systems are working optimally, and only authorized personnel are granted access.

Staff members are also given phishing and cybersecurity training.

VoteCal, the state's centralized voter registration system, is also key. The system is regularly updated, and it is used as a resource for counties to verify voter signatures.

California also provides security at all counting locations and makes sure ballot drop-off boxes are secured and monitored.

And all election processes are open to observation during specified hours.

In my role as Secretary of State of California, there is nothing more important to me than defending our democracy. I am committed to safeguarding voting rights, and to leading our state in upholding the highest democratic standards by implementing policies and practices that Californians and all Americans can trust and look to for instruction and hope.

You can contact the California Office of the Secretary of State at 1-800-345-Vote or elections@sos.ca.gov with inquiries or to report suspected incidents or irregularities. Additional information can be found at www.sos.ca.gov and the office's social media platforms:

Instagram: [@californiasos_](https://www.instagram.com/californiasos_)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/CaliforniaSOS](https://www.facebook.com/CaliforniaSOS)

X: [@CASOSVote](https://twitter.com/CASOSVote)



Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.

Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



Things can change quickly in Kings Town, and the happenings of the past week certainly demonstrate exactly that.

The hardcourt gladiators from Sacramento are currently on a torrid 3-game winning streak, looking ahead to Monday night's game against the Denver Nuggets.

If you hadn't paid attention and just tuned into the Kings, you'd discover a team that is just finding themselves 26 games into the regular season, after losing every game in the preseason.

Fans and pundits alike have riddled the airwaves with remedies for multiple losing streaks, along with advice to coach Brown as to who should be his starting five.

I am more than happy to announce that coach Brown's decision to finally insert Malik Brown into the King's starting lineup has produced four wins in the last five games, and everyone is now wondering why it took three seasons to figure this one out.

But rather than casting aspersions, I will take the high road, and just give him an attaboy for making a decision that was long overdue. Malik is thrilled to be where he always thought he should be, and now coach Brown can simply focus on his bench that is currently ranked in the bottom of the league.

Kevin Huerter is showing signs of returning to form and seems to be comfortable taking the 6th man position that was formerly Monk's, so it's really the next three or four rotations that are going to tell the tale.

What has created chaos with the team is the night-in and night out inconsistency as to who will sit the night out completely, or who will garnish the majority of the minutes.

Big man Alex Len cannot catch a break, as he all too often finds himself at the end of the bench being a spectator for the entire game. This 7-foot giant has NBA game, and from my perspective, it's up to coach Brown and his staff to build this big man's confidence. One way you do that is by giving him a consistent rotation that he can count on every night.

Len has played several good games and shows real promise, only to find

himself relegated to the bench the very next game with no explanation except for the dreaded, coaches' decision.

The Kings can keep scouring the league for another trade/acquisition, or just look at their own bench, and perhaps realize that there is more talent already on this team than they are giving them credit for.

I for one believe that Alex Len has a big upside, but it takes a coach and staff that are willing to build a player's confidence if you want to see the desired result.

So far, I'm giving this staff a failing grade as it relates to evaluating talent, and you need to look no further than the inexplicable trade of Davion Mitchell to qualify my comments.

The Kings are still feeling the void left in Mitchell's absence, and all he is doing in Toronto is making Canadian fans fall in love with him. From the Kings bench to the Raptor's starting point guard, Davion is making the Toronto GM look like a basketball wizard.

The Kings cannot afford to continue undervaluing talent, or simply not see the forest for the trees. Let's get everything out of the team currently constituted, and that means starting with consistency as it relates to players coming off the bench. If Huerter is the 6th man, who is #7, 8, and 9? At this point no one but coach Brown knows, and he doesn't know until just before gametime.

Here's the good news! At 13-13 it's time to hit the reset button. Yes, the Kings are at 500, and now is the time to start making a run that can propel this team to the playoffs.

The starting five of, Fox, Monk, DeRozan, Murray, and Sabonis are a formidable group to guard, and I look forward to watching this team come out of the blocks on all 8 cylinders every night.

So, take heart Kings fans, because the best is yet to come, and that's without a trade or an acquisition.

Merry Christmas to one and all and go Kings!

Your thoughts are always welcome at vgharrisingsfan@gmail.com. ★