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# Pocket News

VOL 34 • ISSUE 9 *Bringing You Community News For Over 30 Years* MAY 9, 2025

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OUTSTANDING  
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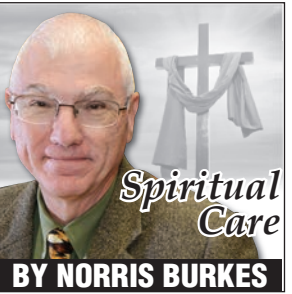
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## Celebrate Mom at Farmers' Market



Nuno Family Farms is a Certified Organic Farm, and all of its produce is grown using sustainable practices.

**Story and photos  
by Stephen B. Clazie**

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - The GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market is a real lifesaver for the last-minute shopper. Most ladies enjoy shopping. The morning can start at 9 a.m. with a cup of coffee, mocha or hot chocolate from the coffee truck. While sipping that, it's nice to stroll over to Sweetbrier Bakery for a scone ... and maybe a loaf of bread or a baguette. There is a variety of food items to

taste and enjoy. One of the most popular is the Frenchy Gourmet Yogurts. They offer a wide selection, and customers can buy three different types for a discounted price of \$22. A visit to the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market wouldn't be complete without stopping by Efron's Nuno Family Farms. They are a Certified Organic Farm, and all of their produce is grown using sustainable practices. Efron said, "Every plant we grow is started from seed, by hand, and all

seed is organic, heirloom, open-pollinated, and non-GMO." It's easy to prepare some fresh veggies for dipping in a sauce available from North African Passion. Vic Cima, the farmers market's general manager, said customers can shop from home. Cima explained, "You can go to ghpfarmersmarket.com and click on 'Vendors' to see what they offer." He added, "We invite you to come and check us out!"

*Continued on Page 3*

## Zoo Relocation Canceled Due to Financial Concerns

**By Sean P. Thomas  
MPG Staff**

**ELK GROVE, CA (MPG)** - A highly anticipated plan to relocate the Sacramento Zoo to Elk Grove has been shelved, prompting disappointment among city leaders and residents who had hoped the \$300 million project would bring economic and cultural benefits to Elk Grove. The Sacramento Zoological Society announced last week it would not move forward with the relocation, citing concerns over the financial viability of the project. The decision ends a multi-year partnership with the City of Elk Grove, which had already invested approximately \$4.5 million into land acquisition and planning for the project, according to city officials. "It was disappointing. There's no other way to say it," Councilmember Rod Brewer said. "We enthusiastically supported the project and had been working to excite the public on



Rendering courtesy of city of Elk Grove/Sacramento Zoological Society

bringing the zoo to Elk Grove. Even with some of the rumors and financial uncertainty, I didn't expect this outcome." The proposed relocation was intended to address major challenges faced by the Sacramento Zoo at its current 14-acre site in William Land Park. The Elk Grove plan included a phased buildout on a

65-acre portion of a 100-acre parcel the city had purchased specifically for the project on Kammerer Road. Phase one alone would have spanned 28 acres, about twice the size of the existing zoo, and featured large, open habitats including a savannah exhibit with multiple species such as giraffes, ostriches,

antelopes and a full pride of lions. "The current zoo only has one rhinoceros. The new zoo would have had as many as six, all in a shared environment," Brewer said. "This was going to be an entirely different level of experience." The new facility also would have expanded

*Continued on Page 7*

## Plant More Trees, Cut Energy Costs, U.S. Bill Says

**Office of Rep. Doris  
Matsui News Release**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - On Arbor Day, April 25, Rep. Doris Matsui (D-CA) and Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) reintroduced the TREES Act, a bill that will help homeowners lower energy costs, increase tree canopy in underserved communities and help mitigate the effects of climate change through residential tree planting. The TREES Act would create a cost-share grant program at the Department of Energy to provide \$50 million in funding to plant a minimum of 300,000 trees annually in residential neighborhoods through 2028. The program seeks to prioritize low wealth communities as well as areas with low tree canopy and heat islands. "Urban forests are critical to addressing climate change and air pollution," said Rep. Matsui. "Sacramento is the City of Trees, and through the proactive efforts of local organizations and partners we are working hard to build out a more equitable urban tree canopy across our city. The benefits at the local level are clear: we can lower energy costs, reduce temperatures on our streets, improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff and beautify our neighborhoods, all leading to healthier and more climate resilient communities. The TREES Act incentivizes successful programs like ours and scales them to the national level. By creating a competitive federal tree-planting grant program, we can empower communities to improve access to green space and clean air, reduce consumer costs, and help fight climate change," said Matsui. "Kansas Citizens know all too well that extreme heat waves are becoming increasingly frequent, costly, and dangerous to communities in the urban core due to the heat island effect exacerbating the historic rise in temperatures we're seeing around the globe," said Rep. Emanuel Cleaver. "By providing states and municipalities the resources necessary to expand tree canopy in cities, we can not only boost

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# Aggie Square Innovation District Opens in Sacramento



Aggie Square, on the UC Davis Sacramento campus, will encompass 11 acres and 1.2 million square feet at buildout. Photo courtesy of UC Davis

By James Nash

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Opening a new chapter in the University of California, Davis’ role as a regional engine of innovation and economic growth, Chancellor Gary S. May joined city of Sacramento leaders, developer Wexford Science & Technology LLC, business partners and community members on Friday, May 2 to inaugurate Aggie Square, the \$1.1 billion innovation district that will bring together the university’s cutting-edge research with private-sector companies and startups. The chancellor also announced new partnerships to accelerate life sciences ventures at Aggie Square.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony marks the culmination of eight years of planning and development of the 11-acre site on the UC Davis Sacramento campus, but it is only the beginning of the story of Aggie Square as a catalyst of collaboration and

innovation in the life sciences and other fields, a hub of education and discovery at one of the nation’s top research universities, and a community asset for Oak Park and surrounding neighborhoods.

“Today’s opening celebration marks a major milestone for UC Davis as Aggie Square becomes the region’s newest innovation district. It’s where the brightest minds from UC Davis, industry leaders and startups will come together and spark collaboration and innovation that will benefit our region and the world for generations to come,” May said. “Aggie Square is a reality thanks to the dedicated efforts of thousands of people from the university, the city of Sacramento, our neighboring communities, Wexford Science & Technology and the hardworking builders and contractors, all of whom have helped bring this vision to life. This is a moment we can all be proud of, and it truly showcases the power

of our private-public partnership.”

Partnerships to support innovators

On May 2, UC Davis, Wexford Science & Technology and FLANN Inc. — a South Korean firm that supports Korean biotech and pharmaceutical companies expanding into the United States — announced a new partnership. Together, they will launch a soft landing program at Aggie Square within Connect Labs by Wexford, designed to support cohorts of up to 10 early-stage South Korean life science companies as they establish a foothold in the U.S. market. This initiative strengthens Aggie Square’s position as a global gateway for innovation and international collaboration in the life sciences.

“UC Davis, the city of Sacramento and Wexford Science & Technology have long shared a vision for creating a premier innovation district that attracts cutting-edge



The School of Medicine’s wet lab is part of about 300,000 square feet of collaborative research and education space in Aggie Square. Photo courtesy of UC Davis

research, sparks groundbreaking discoveries, and serves as vibrant community and innovation hub that enriches the entire Sacramento region,” said Ted Russell, president and CEO of Wexford Science & Technology. “Today, that vision comes to life with the opening of this intentionally designed first phase: a place purpose-built to foster connection, creativity and community. We’re excited to see these spaces activated through vibrant programming, dynamic events and ongoing collaboration between UC Davis researchers, industry partners and the broader Sacramento community.”

May announced a partnership between UC Davis and HM Venture Partners, a healthcare venture capital firm that works with high growth biotech and med-tech companies globally and in all stages. Supported by the Greater Sacramento Economic Council, HM Venture Partners will act as an advisory partner to the Investing in the Future of Medicine Fund, led by UC Davis Health Ventures.

UC Davis also announced an agreement with The March Group, a Davis-based

venture capital firm, to work together to develop a business accelerator and associated fund, based on intellectual property coming from UC Davis.

“Aggie Square is more than a collection of new buildings; it’s a place where research, business and community come together,” said Sacramento Mayor Kevin McCarty. “Today’s event marks the start of Sacramento’s next chapter in life sciences, technology and opportunity.”

**Development Includes Labs, Classrooms, Apartments**

The first phase of Aggie Square, unveiled on May 2, delivers 767,000 square feet of transformative development that anchors the district’s bold vision. This milestone includes three state-of-the-art buildings featuring wet and dry laboratories, modern classrooms, collaborative community spaces and a variety of flexible-use areas. Included in this phase is Connect Labs by Wexford, a flexible, scale-in-place lab and innovation infrastructure that will include pre-built and furnished lab, support and

office spaces with a curated set of amenities, services and shared equipment for emerging and growth companies, particularly in life sciences, biomedical engineering, technology and data sciences.

Also opening is ANOVA Aggie Square, a thoughtfully designed residential building offering 190 apartments and 252 beds to support the innovation community. The phase is rounded out by a 1,550-stall parking garage, providing essential infrastructure to support this dynamic new hub of research, learning and engagement.

The university will occupy 60% of the commercial space in Phase 1 while the remaining 40% will be leased by private industry.

The Veterinary Genetics Laboratory, known for its pioneering animal DNA testing and genetics services, also is expected to move to Aggie Square.

Future phases are likely to include additional life sciences and engineering spaces, as well as additional innovation infrastructure to support the scaling of startups and growth companies. ★

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# Celebrate Mom at Farmers’ Market



Mateko’s Portico Baskets are made of elephant grass and dyed with flower petals rather than chemicals.

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They also have vendors selling candles, perfumes and clothing items. The market’s Susan Riddle says, “We have wonderful and creative vendors that offer some outstanding items. Great gifts!” Mateko’s Portico Baskets has many gift items for mothers. Her baskets are made of elephant grass and dyed with flower petals rather than chemicals. The baskets can be used for shopping, carrying wine (her wine baskets are the most popular) and more.

Before heading home for the day, it’s easy to end on a high note by picking up a beautiful bouquet of flowers for \$19. Either before or after visiting the farmers market, it’s always a treat to take Mom to Elks Lodge 6’s special Mother’s Day Brunch between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m. on Sunday, May 11. Elk Lodge 6’s Glen Smith said, “The menu will feature an egg casserole, fruit salad, and ham carving station, plus the regular menu of bacon, sausage, waffles, pancakes, biscuits and gravy, coffee and juice.” The price is \$17.50 for adults, \$8 for kids aged 5–10 and free for children under 5. That same afternoon, Elks Lodge 6 will host its traditional Mother’s Day Tribute starting at 1 p.m. This special ceremony lasts less than an hour, and event chair Shannon Lewis said, “All attending will receive a white carnation if their mother is deceased or a red one if their mother is still alive.” Lewis also said, “We hope to have a soloist, Elk member Audra Jefferson, perform a song of her choice.” ★

# From Kabul to Sacramento: A Friendship Reunited



Sixth graders Yalda and Tarawat first met years ago in Afghanistan. When their paths separated, they did not expect to meet again, especially not in a classroom in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of San Juan Unified School District

## San Juan Unified School District News Release

**SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG)** - After leaving Afghanistan, sixth grader Yalda started over in the United States at Thomas Edison Language Institute. Everything felt different, but to her surprise, someone from her past was sitting just a few desks away: her childhood friend from first and second grade, Tarawat. Tarawat, also a sixth-grade student at Thomas Edison, was just as surprised. “I didn’t recognize her at first,” said Tarawat. “She looked so different.” “She was shocked to see me too,” Yalda said. “She asked, ‘How did you end up here?’ I couldn’t believe seeing my best friend here.” They first met years ago in Afghanistan. They sat next to each other in class, helped one another with schoolwork, and shared a diary filled with drawings, stories and memories. When their paths separated, they did not expect to meet again, especially not in a classroom in Sacramento. “She used to say, ‘One day we’ll see each other again,’” said Tarawat. Sixth-grade teacher Tonya Zimmerman remembers how the class reacted to the reunion.

“When Yalda came, Tarawat happened to be out that day. The next day, the kids were saying, ‘They know each other!’ It was such a sweet moment. They were so happy.” Both girls say seeing each other again has helped them adjust to school in the U.S. “Coming to a new country, everything feels new; the language, the city, even the people,” said Yalda. “But having a friend with you makes it easier.” Zimmerman said that a sense of connection makes a big difference. “I can’t imagine starting in a new place without knowing the language,” she shared. “Having that support and creating a classroom where every student feels they belong is so important.” Now, the two friends say they are dreaming big. “We’re planning to keep studying together and one day become doctors,” said Tarawat. Their story is a reminder that even when the world feels big, moments like this can make it feel small again. Watch the video of their story, called “From Kabul to Sacramento: A friendship reunited at Thomas Edison Language Institute,” through the San Juan Unified School District’s YouTube channel. ★



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## A group of 12 people, including Rotary members and guests, posing in front of a brick building. A white defibrillator is mounted on the wall. Banners for the Rotary Club of Arden Arcade and the National Heart Foundation are visible in the background.



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# Outstanding Citizen Awards Ceremony Honors 13 Citizens

**Sacramento County District Attorney's Office Release**

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho presented the Outstanding Citizen Award to 13 victims and witnesses who have shown uncommon courage by participating in the criminal justice process under extraordinarily challenging circumstances.

The awards were given out April 25 at the Board of Supervisors' Chambers on H Street in Sacramento.

A Beacon of Hope Award was also presented to an individual or organization showing compassion and dedication, thus enhancing victim advocacy and public safety.

**Citizens Harrell Fischer, John Stubbe and Damarla** were recognized and awarded for their assistance in the People versus Mandiko Kwadzo case (case number 20FE011791).

On July 27, 2020, West Sacramento Police officers responded to a report of shots fired inside a residence. Moments later, a witness reported seeing the victim, Carliena Clayton, and the defendant having an argument on the driveway of that residence. The victim was then seen getting into a car with her four small children and the defendant getting into the passenger seat as she pulled out of the driveway. When officers arrived on scene, they found evidence of a shooting inside the residence.

That night, Harrell Fischer was at Cliff's Marina in Sacramento County when he heard a gunshot followed by a car crashing into the Sacramento River. He called a friend, John Stubbe, and the two went to the crash scene to help. They found the victim's car partially submerged in the river, with the defendant standing nearby, not doing anything to help. When they looked into the car, they found the victim unresponsive in the driver's seat and her four children in the backseat. The oldest child, Damarla, 6, had already unbuckled all their seatbelts but the youngest child, 2, was still in her car seat. Fischer and Stubbe got the children out of the car to safety. Responding California Highway Patrol officers found the victim did not have a pulse, with severe bleeding from her head. At that time, officers believed it was a car accident until Damarla told officers that the defendant shot his mother. It was later determined that the victim suffered two gunshot wounds to her head. Damarla, Harrell Fischer and John Stubbe all testified at trial and were instrumental in obtaining guilty verdicts in this case.

The defendant was convicted of first-degree murder with a firearm allegation and felon in possession of a firearm. He was sentenced to 53 years to life in prison.

**Citizen Gigi Barrios** was recognized for her help in the People versus Dominick Roberson case (case number 22FE019182). On Nov. 18, 2022, Gigi Barrios was working at the Medical Safe Haven. A pregnant patient named Precious came into the clinic for an appointment. Gigi knew Precious well and immediately recognized something was wrong.

Precious avoided eye contact; she was vague and hesitant when Barrios asked her questions and seemed distressed when she received text messages. Precious said that her baby's father was the cause for her agitation. Barrios finally got Precious to reveal that her unborn child's father was in the clinic parking lot and was threatening to kill her. He had a gun and he had been trafficking Precious since she met him months earlier.

Barrios jumped into action, making sure that clinic staff called 911 and personally reached out to Sacramento Police Department human trafficking detectives that Barrios knew from her collaborative work throughout the county. Sacramento officers and detectives quickly arrived to the clinic, detained the defendant and found a gun in his car. Precious was terrified of her trafficker, but with



**From left, Harrell Fischer, Damarla (middle) and John Stubbe received Outstanding Citizen Awards by Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho for their courage demonstrated in the People versus Mandiko Kwadzo case from 2020.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office



**Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho presented to the River City Waterway Alliance a Beacon of Hope Award for their continuous efforts keeping the river waterways clean.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office



**Joseph Bayless, Brandon Gross, Devonte Rainey, Michael Armendariz, Brian Saldivar and Jose Garcia all received Outstanding Citizen Awards for their help in the People versus Kryn Spear case from 2022.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office

Barrios by her side, was able to explain that the defendant groomed her, portraying himself as a boyfriend before taking her to the "blade" to engage in prostitution. He made Precious give him all the money she made.

He regularly beat and threatened Precious, he threatened her family and controlled her life. Precious gave detectives access to her phone, where they found messages that corroborated what Precious told them. The defendant was arrested that day and Sacramento police detectives ensured that Precious got to a safe house, where she stayed through the birth of her child and through the trial.

The defendant was convicted of a variety of human trafficking charges and sentenced to 71 years to life in prison.

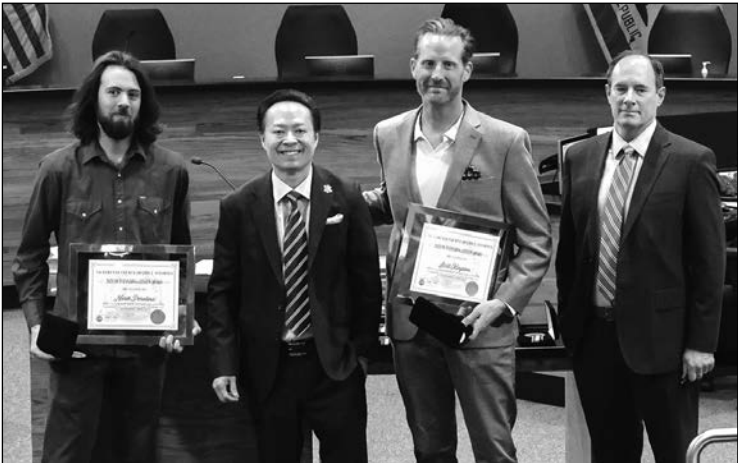
**Residents North Peredina and Scott Kingston** were recognized for their support in the People versus Tycho Roney case (case number 24FE003928). North Peredina is the general manager of Paco's Bike Shop in Midtown Sacramento. The bike shop was burglarized with a loss of more than \$28,000 in high-end bikes and \$13,000 in property damage. Peredina reviewed their interior surveillance cameras and saw the defendant drop into the business from a breached roof skylight. The profile of the defendant's face was momentarily caught on the surveillance video.

After reporting the crime, Peredina set out to find the stolen bikes. When he saw a man with one of the bikes, Peredina immediately reported it to the Sacramento Police Department. Detectives responded to the area and spotted a similar-looking bike outside a tent. After confirming it was one of the stolen bikes, they found the defendant inside the tent along with the clothes from the burglary, a loaded 9-millimeter semi-automatic handgun and methamphetamine. Peredina positively identified the defendant as the person in the surveillance video and with the stolen bike.

Scott Kingston is in commercial real estate. Kingston rallied attention to this case, including writing passionate pleas to city leadership for the need to



**Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho presented Gigi Barrios with an Outstanding Citizen Award on April 15 for her assistance in the People versus Dominick Roberson case from 2022.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office



**North Peredina and Scott Kingston were both recognized with an Outstanding Citizen Award for their help in the People versus Tycho Roney case.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office



**From left, victim advocates Lisa Corral and Colette Brown are with Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho who recognized them both with a Beacon of Hope Award for their contributions in the Domestic Violence Unit.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento County District Attorney's Office

address retail crime and public safety in the city. As a business leader, Kingston encouraged city leaders to address these issues or businesses would leave. Peredina's proactive response to the burglary and Kingston's challenging of the conditions that were leading to

rampant crime helped lead to the arrest and conviction of the defendant. In a broader sense, their actions helped restore faith in public safety and the criminal justice system for a business community plagued with repeat thefts.

The defendant was convicted

and sentenced to six years in prison.

**Citizens Joseph Bayless, Brandon Gross, Devonte Rainey, Michael Armendariz, Brian Saldivar and Jose Garcia** were awarded for their help in the People versus Kryn Spear case (case number 22FE008691).

On May 26, 2022, Veronica Vargas was driving through the intersection of Power Inn Road and Elsie Avenue with her 4-year-old daughter, Samantha, in the back seat. At that same time and intersection, the defendant ran a red light at 89 miles per hour and broadsided them with his dually truck. The collision's force flipped the victim's car onto its roof.

Brian Casado was the first person who stopped at the scene after the crash occurred. He rushed over to the victim's vehicle and saw and heard the little girl in the back seat. He tried to help other bystanders get the victims out of their car. Joseph Bayless and Brandon Gross also stopped at the scene and tried to help Veronica and Samantha. The three men stayed with Samantha, reassuring her she would be OK until the first responders arrived.

After the crash, the defendant got out of his truck and began walking away from the crash scene. Devonte Rainey stopped at the scene to help the victims and followed the defendant as he recorded and took pictures of him. Michael Armendariz saw the crash scene and came across Rainey, who told him that the driver who caused the crash was trying to get away. Armendariz stopped his car and went hands-on with the defendant to detain him.

Brian Saldivar and Jose Garcia also saw the crash scene and helped Armendariz detain the defendant until California Highway Patrol arrived. The defendant had a blood alcohol content of 0.251% and was on probation for a prior Driving Under the Influence conviction at the time of this crash.

The defendant was convicted of gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and a number of additional felonies driving under the influence-related charges, hit-and-run causing death and or permanent injury and a great bodily injury allegation. He was sentenced to 13 years and eight months in prison.

## Beacon of Hope Award Recipients

**Victim advocate Lisa Corral** works tirelessly in the Domestic Violence Unit, where she has helped thousands of domestic violence victims and supports the unit attorneys. The Domestic Violence Unit is unlike any other unit in that the victim advocate is involved immediately at the beginning of the case, at filing and sometimes when a case is not filed. The Domestic Violence Unit is also a unique assignment because not all victims want our help and can be resistant to us. Corral is patient and works through these challenges, with the mission to keep the victims of domestic violence safe.

**The River City Waterway Alliance** is made up of a volunteer team of 30 to 40 experienced waterway stewards who work tirelessly to keep the river waterways clean and safe for people and endangered salmon species. The alliance recruited volunteers pulled 2.8 million pounds of trash or 1,400 tons of trash, to date.

It's not just litter and trash. They recover large hazardous waste items, including propane tanks, household appliances, electronics, clothes and other personal items. Unhoused encampments all along the river levees are the primary source of the items found in the waterways. The amount and type of waste being tossed into our waters are a significant environmental and wildlife hazard. Alliance volunteers are continually cleaning these waters even as more garbage, junk and hazardous items are thrown right back into those same waters. It is a never-ending struggle for them; however, they remain devoted to keeping the waters and the environment clean and safe for people and wildlife. ★



# Plant More Trees, Cut Energy Costs, U.S. Bill Says

Continued from Page 1

the beautification and restoration of places like Kansas City, but we can also lower energy costs and temperatures to the benefit of local residents. That’s precisely what the TREES Act will do, and why I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with Congresswoman Matsui.”

“The TREES Act brings together environmental

stewardship and economic relief, lowering energy costs while making our communities cleaner, healthier, and more vibrant,” said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick.

“This is about investing in where we live, expanding green spaces, improving air quality, and creating lasting value for families in Bucks County, Montgomery County,

and beyond. It’s a smart, bipartisan solution that delivers where it matters most: at the roots of our neighborhoods.”

“We support the TREES Act and all it does to benefit communities across the country,” said SMUD Chief Executive Officer and General Manager Paul Lau.

“Today we celebrate our trees and our

continued partnership with the Sacramento Tree Foundation which has planted more than 630,000 trees in our local neighborhoods. This urban canopy helps to cool our cities and homes and clean our air through carbon sequestration.

“The value they add is immeasurable. The TREES Act will continue to foster our ability to create cleaner, healthier and more sustainable communities for everyone. Thank you

for this continued effort,” said Lau.

“Trees help to create livable and loveable communities,” said executive director of the Sacramento Tree Foundation Jessica Sanders.

“We applaud the TREES Act for recognizing that we need action now to create a collaborative community focused on making our communities healthier and more resilient. The TREES Act will allow our children to grow up in tree

lined communities with healthy air and healthy neighborhoods.”

“This bill isn’t just about planting trees, it’s about improving lives,” said Joel Pannell, American Forests vice president of Urban Forests Policy.

“The bipartisan TREES Act delivers local benefits that communities will feel for generations, from cleaner air to lower utility bills, proving that smart, shared solutions can still bring people together.” ★

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# Zoo Relocation Canceled Due to Financial Concerns

*Continued from Page 1*

conservation efforts and created more immersive visitor experiences. It was expected to draw as many as 1 million in annual visitors and \$249 million in economic impact in its first five years of operation, according to Elk Grove officials.

In a news release, Mayor Bobbie Singh-Allen called the decision to shutter the zoo move “disappointing.”

“This is a deeply disappointing outcome for all of us who believed in the vision for the zoo and what it could have meant for our community and the region,” Singh-Allen said.

Despite Elk Grove fulfilling its obligations under the cost-sharing agreement and drawing up preliminary designs, the zoo ultimately chose to recommit to its Sacramento location.

Officials from the Sacramento Zoological Society cited slow fundraising progress and financial instability as primary factors in pulling out of the deal.

The Zoological Society had raised \$17.5 million in pledges, only \$1.9 million of which was actual cash on hand.

The Zoological Society was supposed to raise \$50 million in actual cash donations before the shovels went into the ground in 2027. The \$1.9 million in cash that had been received by the city will be returned to the Zoological Society, which will return it to the donors.

“When both of those things didn’t mesh, I definitely understand why they walked away,” Brewer said.

City leaders made clear that the decision was not theirs and emphasized their readiness to continue the partnership if the situation changed.

“They decided to pull back. We didn’t say, ‘Don’t ever come back,’” Councilmember Darren Suen said. “If they wanted to talk about it again, or if someone else wanted to re-engage, we wouldn’t turn them away.”

Though disappointed, both Brewer and Suen remained optimistic. The land acquired for the project remains untouched and its value has increased, Brewer said, and it could yield returns if the land is sold or repurposed.

Both viewed the zoo’s departure as a potential opportunity to pursue other

developments or revisit the zoo project in the future if leadership changes. Zoo Director Jason Jacobs, a key figure in the partnership, left the post in October. Interim CEO Robert Churchill has been in the seat since.

“We weren’t just taking a calculated risk on a civic amenity. We were trying to sustain something iconic for the region,” Suen said. “Sometimes things don’t work out, but the plans are still there. If the climate changes, we can dust them off.”

Many Elk Grove residents had looked forward to the zoo as a positive addition to the community. The city’s desire for more regional attractions made the zoo plan particularly appealing.

Outside of Safeway at the corner of Laguna and Franklin Boulevard, several residents voiced disappointment with the project’s demise.

“It’s disappointing; I would have liked it to move here,” said Elk Grove resident Aaron Wells.

Bruce Wallace, another resident, echoed the sentiment: “It would have been a lot of jobs for Elk Grove; it’s a shame it fell apart.”

Others were more measured in their reaction.

“I know a lot of people were looking forward to it moving here, but yeah, it’s not the worst thing that it’s not,” said Mark Cramer, also of Elk Grove. “The cost was always a problem for me, and I’ve talked to a few people that were unsure of the traffic it might add.”

Still, city officials stressed that they’ve learned from the experience and will remain focused on bringing a similar project to Elk Grove.

“We weren’t trying to swing for the fences or grab the spotlight,” Suen said. “We analyzed the zoo opportunity like we do every other project, with our residents in mind. That will always be our focus.”

While the zoo won’t be coming to Elk Grove, councilmembers highlighted ongoing efforts to develop other projects and amenities in the city.

“The desire to bring attractions and amenities that families and individuals can enjoy hasn’t changed,” Brewer said. “We’re going to keep our options open. We’re not in a hurry, and we’re certainly not desperate.” ★

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# California Leaders Introduce ‘Safe Homes Act’ for Wildfire, Insurance Solutions

**Office of Assemblymember Lisa Calderon News Release**

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)**

- On April 30, state and community leaders supported a bold new initiative to confront California’s worsening wildfire and insurance crises: the California Safe Homes Act (Assembly Bill 888). Driven by years of extensive community outreach and unprecedented stakeholder engagement, the act represents a transformative step toward wildfire resilience and insurance affordability. The California Safe Homes Act passed the Assembly Insurance Committee on a 16 to 0 vote.

“Investing in mitigation is crucial to overcoming this insurance crisis. We are not powerless in this fight. We need to equip consumers with the resources to undertake necessary work,” stated

Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara, the sponsor of the California Safe Homes Act. “We have traveled across every region of the state, listened to thousands of Californians, collaborated with local communities and firefighters, and consulted with insurance leaders from other states and countries. One thing is clear: wildfire safety works, and we must scale it like never before.”

“Investing in proven safety measures to make California safer from wildfires is essential to protecting lives, homes, and access to insurance,” said Assemblymember Lisa Calderon, author of the California Safe Homes Act. “Assembly Bill 888 is a step in the right direction to assist California residents and create more resilient communities throughout our state.”

The California Safe Homes Act is designed to make homes safer from wildfires while increasing

access to insurance. The act will fund critical mitigation efforts, including fire-safe roofing, defensible space within the first five feet of a home, also known as “zone zero,” and community-level wildfire protection strategies.

These are some of the most impactful and costly measures, and homeowners have consistently told the Department of Insurance they want to do this work but simply cannot afford it. California Safe Homes puts money back in people’s hands to pay for these essential projects.

The initiative builds on Safer from Wildfires, developed by the Department of Insurance, which lays out ten proven, achievable wildfire safety actions. It is the first plan of its kind in the nation, created proactively to reduce wildfire risk before disaster strikes.

“Protecting homes before a hurricane ever happens has helped bring

affordable insurance back to Alabama. Natural disasters like windstorms, earthquakes, or wildfires will come no matter what we do. That means you must find ways to build stronger before the event so you will have less damage after the event,” said Alabama Insurance Commissioner Mark Fowler, who told about the success of the Strengthen Alabama Homes grant program. “It’s actually a pretty simple concept. Assembly Bill 888 will help you pave that way.”

“I have sought clear, workable examples from beyond our borders,” said Commissioner Lara. “Through my leadership in the National Association of Insurance Commissioners and visits to other states, I have observed successful strategies in action. Disaster mitigation programs are the cornerstone of our National Climate Resilience Strategy, effectively protecting homes

against perils, stabilizing markets, and providing consumers with more options. I’m honored to welcome Commissioner Mark Fowler, a leader and visionary in this field.”

Leaders from across sectors are supporting the bill, including nonprofits like United Policyholders and community officials.

“Creating defensible space and hardening our homes against wildfire is a shared responsibility, but for many homeowners, the cost is simply too high,” said Tanya Harlow, fire safe coordinator, El Dorado County Office of Wildfire Preparedness and Resilience. “California Safe Homes will provide much-needed support to help make our communities more resilient to wildfire.”

“We have worked with thousands of people in California and across the country to be prepared before a disaster ever happens. Home hardening and defensible space are proven ways to reduce wildfire risk and keep homes insured, and homeowners need help making these improvements,” said

Amy Bach, Executive Director of United Policyholders, whose Wildfire Risk Reduction and Asset Protection program (WRAP) is a national model for community education. “The California Safe Homes Act puts money in people’s hands to do to their part and rewards those taking action to protect themselves and their neighbors.”

“As we speak, the City of Berkeley is in the process of adopting new Zone Zero requirements for more than 1,800 residents who live in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. We don’t want cost to be a barrier that prevents homeowners from making these critical improvements,” said Berkeley City Councilmember Brent Blackaby. “The California Safe Homes Act will help finance this defensible space and home-hardening work at scale, which will make each homeowner safer, make their neighborhood safer, and make all of Berkeley safer.”

The Act will be heard next in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. ★

## ABOUT TOWN

**Concerts in the Park**

Concerts In The Park will feature over 35 local and national bands at Cesar Chavez Plaza. The free shows start at 6 p.m. Upcoming headliners are:

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**Area Museum Experiences**

A sampling of must-see and must-do experiences and special activations offered by local museums include the following:

**California Museum** – Honor, Recognition &

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**California Automobile Museum** – Sixty Years of Mustang. A comprehensive history of the Mustang, from when it first hit the roads in 1965 to the current era of Mustangs.

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For more on Sacramento area museum offerings, visit [sacmuseums.org](http://sacmuseums.org).

**Elks Lodge 6 Calendar of Events**

Elks Lodge 6 Sunday Breakfast, 8:30 am-11 am; \$15 tax included.

Yoga, Monday 12 p.m., Wednesday 3:30 p.m. Lodge members free.

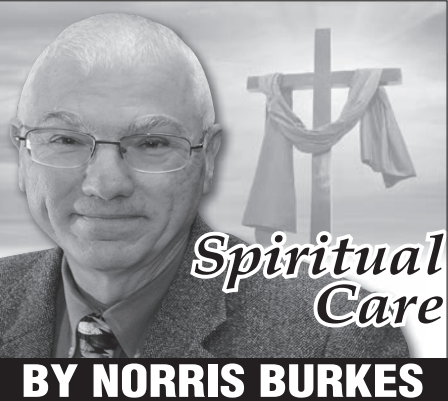
Martial Arts, Monday 5 p.m.

Pickleball, Monday, Wednesday, 9 a.m.-12 p.m.; Thursday, 4:30-7:30 p.m.; Sunday, 4-7 p.m.

Karaoke Nights, Thursdays and Saturdays, 7 p.m.

Wednesday Night Dinner, 5:30 to 7 p.m. See elks6.net for weekly menu. ★

# Flying on a Wing and a Prayer



Amidst the Cinco de Mayo celebrations last Monday, I couldn’t avoid thinking of May 6, 2009, the day I returned from deployment in Iraq on a chartered World Airways DC-10.

After spending four months serving the wounded at the Air Force Field Hospital in Balad Iraq, my only thoughts on final approach into Baltimore/Washington International Airport, were of home.

Our landing attempt was anything but welcoming as our plane bounced like a porpoise on the waves. Security cameras recorded a large puff of smoke from our wheels. Eyewitnesses would later tell FAA investigators that they thought the plane was going to flip.

A second bounce delivered at an estimated 3.2 Gs and plastic ceiling molding fell on us as oxygen generators swung like piñatas. Several seat backs snapped backward while passengers along the left windows watched the yellow centerline, and I watched our wing drift over the grass.

We sailed back into the air as the cockpit voice recorder captured pilot Craig Gatch asserting: “8535 heavy declaring an emergency go-around.”

When we regained some altitude, my fellow passengers spoke in muffled voices. No one wanted to be the first to cry, but clearly no one wanted to die without protest. Some were praying or holding hands or just staring at their feet.

I rested my forehead on my seatback to pray, even as I wondered if I heard a judgmental voice in it all. My shortcomings felt as though they were being weighed on the scale of a spiritual assayer. Was there a deity somewhere with a one-piece eyeglass assessing my life with a doubtful squint?

Had I been a good husband and dad? Or had I been too absent, physically and spiritually? Was it OK to feel scared? Or should I gather my wits and start a rousing chorus of

“Amazing Grace?”

I kept praying, spending the next few minutes asking God, “What about all these passengers?” A soldier was about to meet his new son for the first time. An airman was trying to make a marriage work again. They all wanted another chance. Would they get that chance?

In a center aisle seat, catty-corner from me, a young officer was wiping her tears. I stretched across the aisle to offer my hand as a reminder she wasn’t alone. I wanted to hold it until we landed, but the awkwardly angled reach caused me to break loose and rejoin her hand with the chaplain assistant sitting beside her.

As we reapproached the airport, the flight attendants told us to grab our ankles and lower our heads. Then the pilot added his instruction to “brace for impact!” But instead of impact, we landed as calmly as if we were sailing across a mountain lake.

Slowly we looked up from our crash/prayer position and started clapping like we had never expected another tomorrow.

Before we deplaned down portable stairways, five people were removed for medical care, including the first officer with a broken back. Behind us, debris littered an unusable runway.

Few of us could make much sense of the incident. Many would say to me things like, “Chaplain, we expected to die in Iraq, but never in Baltimore.”

FAA investigators declared the plane a total loss because the main spar was broken, (the structural member that supports the wings.)

This meant our pilot literally risked losing our wings during his 10-minute go-around. But I suppose that’s what airmen mean when they describe a harrowing flight as “flying on a wing and a prayer.”

Even today, my airplane remains at the airport where its continentally stippled for parts. For those curious, I posted links to the security footage and the accident report on my website

This column is excerpted from my book “Hero’s Highway.”

Sign up to receive this weekly column in your email box at <https://thechaplain.net/newsletter/> or send me your email address to [comment@thechaplain.net](mailto:comment@thechaplain.net).

All of Norris’s books can be ordered on Amazon. Autographed copies can be obtained on his website [www.thechaplain.net](http://www.thechaplain.net) or by sending a check for \$20 for each book to 10566 Combie Rd. Suite 6643 Auburn, CA 95602. ★

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# Sac State Celebrates Philanthropist Tschannen’s 100th Birthday

By Jonathan Morales

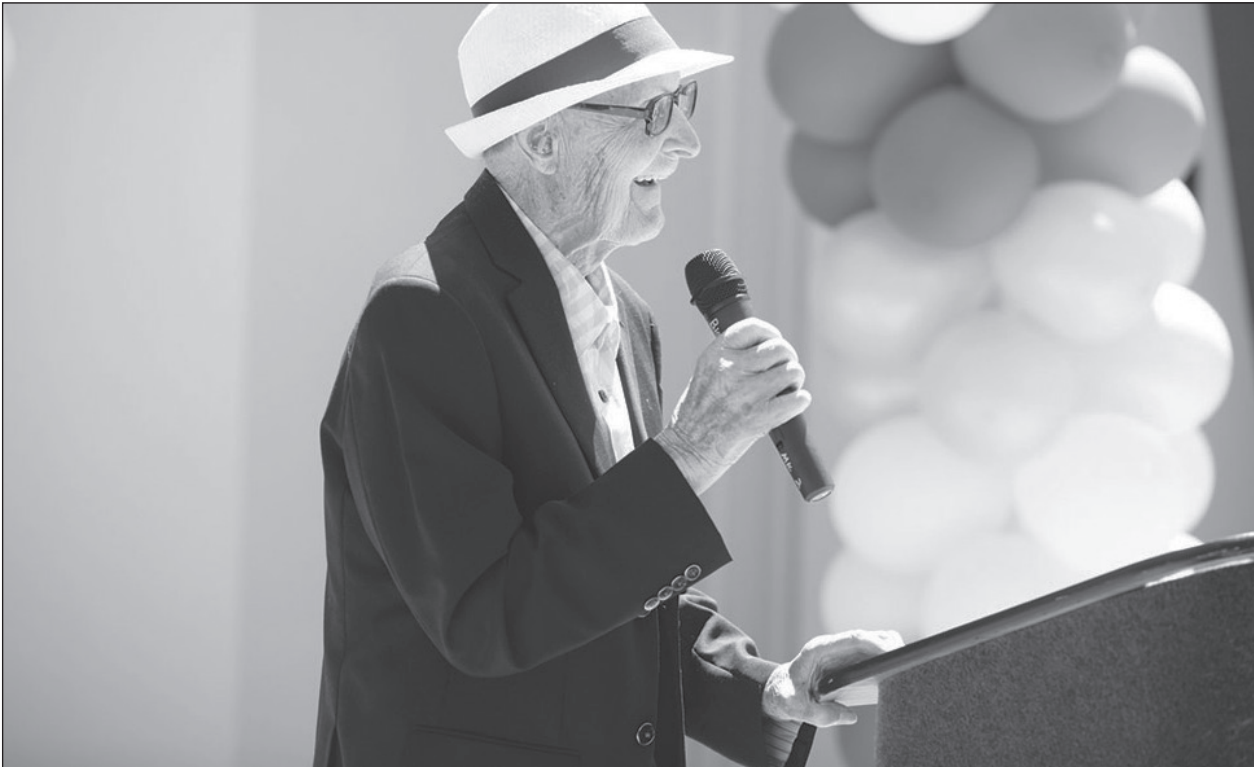
**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - The Sacramento State community gathered May 1 for a celebration as big as the generosity of its honoree.

Just outside the building that bears his name, Sacramento philanthropist and Sac State supporter Ernest E. Tschannen was feted and serenaded during a campus celebration of his 100th birthday.

Tschannen has donated more than \$20 million to Sac State, including \$9 million to help construct the Tschannen Science Complex, which opened in 2019.

“Ernest, we are so grateful for your support,” said Michael Reza, Sac State’s vice president for Advancement. “Happy 100th birthday. Thank you so much.”

Since its opening, thousands of students have had the opportunity to research and learn in the science complex’s state-of-the-art labs and classrooms. In



Ernest E. Tschannen speaks to the campus community during the celebration on May 1 outside the Science Complex. Photo by Andrea Price/Sacramento State

addition, the adjoining Sac State Planetarium has been a popular venue not just for the campus community, but for local schoolchildren and others who have attended a show.

Addressing the crowd,

Tschannen highlighted his journey from a young boy in Switzerland to a successful real estate investor in the United States. In addition to his contributions to Sac State, Tschannen has donated to

several other causes, organizations and education institutions.

“I am glad I live in America. I am very appreciative to be here,” Tschannen said, citing the opportunities the country

has afforded him and friendliness of its people. “I became successful because I live in a fantastic country.”

Following Tschannen’s remarks, Sac State President Luke Wood led

the crowd in the singing of “Happy Birthday” before the guest of honor blew out the candles on a cake featuring a miniature Herky and large numbers reading “100.”

Before and after the ceremony, several of Sac State’s science departments and student organizations tabled nearby, offering interactive activities for visitors. The chemistry club demonstrated how lava lamps work and the Department of Geography explained how to interpret satellite images. Herky also held out a pair of weights and spun around on a stool as part of a demonstration from Physics and Astronomy students.

To learn more about Tschannen and to make a contribution to support future Sac State students, visit [csus.edu/giving/your-impact/ernest-tschannen.html](https://csus.edu/giving/your-impact/ernest-tschannen.html).

*Jonathan Morales joined the Sacramento State communications team in 2017 as a writer and editor. ★*

# Matsui Condemns GOP Effort to Repeal Clean Air Waivers

Office of Congresswoman Doris Matsui News Release

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (MPG)** - On April 30, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-07), co-chair of the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, released the following statement rebuking House Republicans’ effort to eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Air Act waivers for California’s

Advanced Clean Trucks, Advanced Clean Cars II, and Heavy-Duty Low NOx Omnibus rules:

“The evidence is overwhelming: clean air saves lives. That is why I have spent my career in Congress fighting for stronger emissions standards and cracking down on toxic air pollution,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “For over 50 years, California has used its Clean Air Act authority to lead the way on strong,

forward-thinking air pollution standards. Our policies serve as a national blueprint, showing how to cut emissions, drive innovation, create good jobs, lower costs at the pump and protect families from harmful pollutants. This is a blatant, unlawful attempt to undermine decades of progress and double down on dirty fossil fuels. We must stop wasting everyone’s time and start working for the American people.”

Last month, the Government Accountability Office reiterated a 2023 decision that California’s Clean Air Act waivers were not subject to the Congressional Review Act (CRA). The Senate Parliamentarian has affirmed this determination, ruling that the Congressional Review Act cannot be used to overturn California’s waivers.

Congresswoman Matsui has spearheaded efforts in Congress calling

for stronger emissions standards for cars and trucks. Under the first Trump Administration, the congresswoman led opposition to President Trump’s attempts to revoke California’s pollution standards, and the Congresswoman successfully fought for the reinstatement of California’s authority under the Biden Administration.

In March of 2021, she led a letter with 70 of her

colleagues urging the Biden Administration to take action to reinstate California’s Clean Air Act waiver and restore the Obama-Biden tailpipe emission and fuel economy standards.

In July of 2021, she led a follow up letter with then Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone and 139 of her colleagues to reiterate the importance of reinstating the California Clean Air Act waiver. ★



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[www.recsac.org](http://www.recsac.org)

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# Odyssey of the Mind Celebrates Neurodivergence

By Kristina Rogers

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Each child comes with an individual set of strengths and challenges they will take into the world with them.

Odyssey of the Mind, or OM, zeros in on the power of brain diversity to reach victory together.

It is a volunteer-run after-school program serving grades from kindergarten to college level. The program works by providing a list of “problems” in various categories that teams can choose from, such as building a vehicle, constructing a robot or designing an innovative contraption.

The Holy Spirit Parish School’s Odyssey of the Mind team designed a dinner party based on the beloved book “Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.” The team created a fantasy kitchen called “Holy Gobstoppers,” a machine turning healthy food into “fun food.” What kid doesn’t dream of that? Although entertaining, it took much work. The team had to develop a story, write the script, and build the sets and costumes, much like a theater production.

The team’s coach, Odyssey of the Mind alumna Monica Robinson, helped bring the program to Holy Spirit.

“There’s nothing else like this,” Robinson said. “You need different brains to make this work. Everything is run by the kids. I can help coach and guide them but can’t lead them in a particular direction. They own it.”

Parent Diedre Seefeldt had her concerns in the



Holy Spirit School competes at the NorCal Odyssey of the Mind State Tournament. Photo courtesy of Monica Robinson

beginning: “I’ll be honest. I thought it was going to be a mess, but in the end, it turned out great. They did everything. It’s weird when you back away and find the kids can handle the problem-solving all by themselves.”

And that’s the point. Helicopter parents should not apply. Kids are expected to be resourceful and learn from their own mistakes. They are encouraged to push boundaries and face uncomfortable moments, too. In these efforts, they build confidence in their individual talents. Since 1978, when Odyssey of the Mind was founded by Dr. Sam Micklus, generations of students have experienced the program.

Leonardo Da Vinci School parent Julia Willsie,

also an Odyssey of the Mind alumna, said, “I was into sports as a kid but OM gave me the confidence to believe that my mind is a powerful tool and I can succeed using my brain, not just sports.”

Willsie attended the world competition in fifth grade and now her son, Jacob, is following in her footsteps.

“It’s nice to have the freedom to make my own decisions,” Jacob said. “But it’s not just me; it’s my team making decisions. We take our ideas, squish them together and move them around.”

And that’s the beauty of their work. The youth collaborate with teammates they might not hang out with on a regular school day. They find strength in their differences and learn

to create something as a group.

Jacob is interested in aeronautical engineering.

“This has helped me learn more about the engineering part and how to use tools like soldering metal,” Jacob said.

His passion for the field has only grown. Many successful adults have gone through the Odyssey of the Mind program, including world-class surgeons, professors, successful entrepreneurs and NASA scientists. Today’s Odyssey of the Mind participants can use the program as a resume-builder for college admissions.

The youth also benefit by learning to speak up and advocate for themselves. During a recent state tournament, the Holy



The Leonardo Da Vinci Team works on its Odyssey of the Mind projects.



Natalie Altare plays her part with the Leonardo Da Vinci team.

Spirit team initially lost. The judges explained that the team didn’t follow the project rules. Team members Kennedy and Sally disagreed, saying that they were wrongly eliminated. They chose to plead to a tribunal of three adults with parents out of the room. Ultimately, they won and are moving forward to the world competition.

“I felt pressure and was a bit nervous. If we didn’t get those points, I’d be sad,” Kennedy said. “Then we ended up winning and we are really happy.”

Sally added, “I’m glad I stood up to the adults. I like debating and it turned out well.”

Both girls walked in to reasonably discuss the situation and were ready to accept the final decision, exhibiting a level

of maturity that will help them advocate for themselves as adults.

“We were so proud of them for making the case. We weren’t expecting to move forward but now we are attending Worlds,” Seefeldt said. “This experience will live with them the rest of their lives.”

Leonardo Da Vinci and the Holy Spirit team will attend the Odyssey of the Mind finals in Michigan from May 21 to May 24. Hundreds of teams from across the globe will join them. It’s the first time in 10 years that a Sacramento team will be represented in Odyssey of the Mind World Finals.

To learn more about the OM program and get involved, [norcalodyssey.org](http://norcalodyssey.org). ★

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