



Mothers Honored
at GreenHaven
Market

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Now Plays
130 Instruments

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Pocket News

VOL 34 • ISSUE 10 Bringing You Community News For Over 30 Years MAY 23, 2025

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INSIDE

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RIDES AGAIN



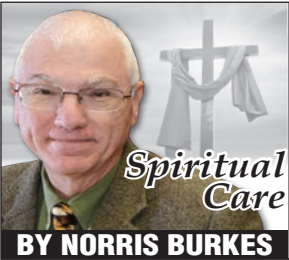
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ART FIESTA
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Weather Hampers Bike Safety Rodeo

Story by Stephen B.
Clazie and photos by
Clazie and Bill Torngren

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The weather was lousy. Riding a bike is a sunny-day activity. Kindergartners through fifth-graders were invited to learn safe-riding skills on their bicycles and scooters at a bike rodeo hosted by the California Highway Patrol's Sacramento Office and the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market (GHP) on Sunday, April 27.

But the weather was not cooperating during the event, held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Elk Lodge 6's parking lot, 6446 Riverside Blvd.

The Pocket News featured the safety event on its front page. The Sacramento City Unified School District sent out more than 6,000 emails to parents of children at seven elementary schools. None of that mattered because the weather was terrible.

The children who did show up had a great time. The CHP conducted its bike rodeo that focused on teaching safe-riding skills, including proper stopping at stop signs and lights,

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David Moore gets a two-wheel-up salute from CHP officers for being the first to complete the CHP Bike Safety Rodeo.

Newsom Wants Cities to Get Tougher on Homeless Encampments

State Releases
\$3.3B in Funding



By Sean P. Thomas
MPG Staff

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Gov. Gavin Newsom on May 12 announced a model ordinance designed to help cities and counties manage homeless encampments, while also releasing \$3.3 billion in Proposition 1 funds to expand behavioral health housing and treatment options across California.

The announcement, detailed in a news release from the Governor's Office, outlines a hypothetical framework for local governments to establish rules and enforcement procedures that prioritize notice, shelter and support services. The model ordinance includes requirements such as a 48-hour notice before encampment clearance, coordination with service providers and storage of displaced belongings.

"There's nothing compassionate about letting people die on the streets," Newsom said in a statement "Now, we're giving [local leaders] a model they can put to work immediately — with urgency and with humanity — to resolve encampments and connect people to shelter, housing and care."

The ordinance would ban sleeping, including in a sleeping bag, in one space for more than three consecutive nights in a row. Based off the ordinance, people would be forced to pick up and move at least 200 feet every night.

The ordinance follows Newsom's 2024 executive order urging jurisdictions to act swiftly using existing state and local resources. It also builds on legal precedent affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, which clarified local authority to

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United Way Expands Collegiate Income Program



United Way's Women United action group provided the funding for the pilot year and will continue to fund the Sacramento State cohort this year. Photo courtesy of United Way California Capital Region

**United Way California
Capital Region News
Release**

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Twenty former foster youth studying at Sacramento State and University of California, Davis, received their first

payments from United Way California Capital Region's Collegiate Guaranteed Income program that will provide them with \$500 a month for one year.

Some of the checks were distributed at a joint press conference with the two universities where

United Way announced the expansion of the program to include another year of funding for the 10 Sacramento State students in the pilot program that launched a year ago, as well as the inaugural year of funding for 10 students at UC Davis, distributing a

total of \$120,000 over the next year to support these students.

"Over the past year, we have witnessed the hard work and resilience of these 10 Sacramento State students, and we are thrilled to provide them

Continued on Page 2

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Pony Express Rides from Sacramento to St. Joseph

National Pony Express Association News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The Annual Re-Ride of the historic Pony Express mail service will be conducted from June 11 through June 21 by the National Pony Express Association (NPEA).

The event, celebrating the 165th year anniversary of “the Pony”, will start in Sacramento and end in the city of St. Joseph in Missouri, traveling west to east this year.

Personal and commemorative letters will be carried in a mochila (a leather square that is placed over the saddle with four locked cantinas to hold the mail) by horse and rider relays from the Sacramento River to the Missouri River.

The first rider will depart Old Sacramento at 2 p.m. (Pacific Time Zone) on June 11, and the last rider is scheduled to arrive at the Patee House in St. Joseph, Missouri, at 7:30 p.m. (Central Daylight Time) on June 21.

The route will follow the Pony Express National Historic Trail, a component of the National Trails System. The mail will travel 1966 miles across California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas to Missouri.

Approximately 600 member riders from the National Pony Express Association’s eight state divisions will ride relay-style, 24 hours a day, until the mochila is delivered in St. Joseph, Missouri. Each rider will take the Pony Express Oath prior to riding with the mochila, just as the riders did in 1860.

The annual Re-Ride is a 10-day, 24 hours-a-day event honoring the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company. The company carried letters and telegrams from April 1860 to November 1861, between St. Joseph and Sacramento, proving the central route through Salt Lake City was passable year-round. Their intent was to win a federal mail contract, which unfortunately never materialized.

Are you interested in



The first rider will depart Old Sacramento at 2 p.m. (Pacific Time Zone) on June 11, and the last rider is scheduled to arrive at the Patee House in St. Joseph, Missouri, at 7:30 p.m. (Central Daylight Time) on June 21.

participating in the annual Re-Ride? Get your mount legged up to ride a leg in the annual Re-Ride. Reach out to a state president near you and find out about riding in this year's Re-Ride. Several states have ride sections available; come experience the thrill of being a Pony Express rider! For more information, visit the state officer directory online at nationalponyexpress.org/about/national-directory/.

Send a letter through the Pony Express! The commemorative letters carried this year will be a vignette of Pony Express history in Nevada. Letters can be purchased by the public for the 1860 price of \$5 each. Personal letters are also available for \$10 each. All letters will be carried on horseback from Sacramento to St. Joseph, Missouri. They will be stamped as having been officially carried by Pony Express and then delivered via the United States Postal Service. The letter application form can be obtained by downloading it from the National Pony Express Association website at nationalponyexpress.org/re-ride/send-a-letter/.

During the Re-Ride, updates and information about the progress across the Pony Express trail can be found at [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/expressrider/)



During the Re-Ride, updates and information about the progress across the Pony Express trail can be found at facebook.com/expressrider/ Photo courtesy NPEA.



The Annual Re-Ride of the historic Pony Express mail service will be conducted from June 11 through June 21 by the National Pony Express Association (NPEA). Photos courtesy of the National Pony Express Association (NPEA)



The mail will travel 1966 miles across California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas to Missouri.

[expressrider/](https://facebook.com/expressrider/). A Global Positioning System (GPS) device will be carried in the mochila that will transmit real-time location of the mail.

The National Pony Express Re-Ride 2025 schedule, with links to detailed state schedules, is available on the National Pony Express Association’s website at nationalponyexpress.org/re-ride/current-ride/.

The National Parks Service (NPS) will have an interactive map to follow the transmissions at nationalponyexpress.org/re-ride/follow-the-ride/. Status updates will also be posted on the website, photos and videos on the National Pony Express Association Facebook page.



United Way Expands Collegiate Income Program

Continued from Page 1

with an additional year of guaranteed income so we can see them through to graduation, while also extending this opportunity to 10 former foster youth students at UC Davis,” said Dr. Dawnté Early, president and CEO, United Way California Capital Region. “We know the disheartening statistics that currently show only 3% of former foster youth will obtain a college degree. We at United Way refuse to accept that status quo and instead are mobilizing our community to create change and build a future where former foster youth can reach their full potential and thrive. These 20 students at Sacramento State and UC Davis are changing the educational landscape for themselves and future foster youth.”

United Way launched its Collegiate Guaranteed Income program in May 2024 as a pilot with 10 Sacramento State students in the university’s Guardian Scholars Program for former foster youth. The 10 students received \$500 a month for a year and were surprised in April to learn they will receive an additional year of guaranteed income to help them through their junior and senior years of school so they can obtain their degree. United Way’s Women United action group provided the funding for the pilot year and will continue to fund the Sacramento State cohort this year.

“Sacramento State is honored to have taken part in the pilot phase of United Way California Capital Region’s Collegiate



Twenty former foster youth studying at Sacramento State and University of California, Davis, received their first payments from United Way California Capital Region’s Collegiate Guaranteed Income program. Photos courtesy of United Way California Capital Region

Guaranteed Income program and support its continued expansion,” said Sacramento State President Dr. Luke Wood. “This initiative has played a vital role in easing the financial challenges our students face as they transition out of the foster care system. We remain committed to this important partnership and to building opportunities that help our students achieve their educational aspirations.”

With the success of the pilot at Sacramento State, United Way is expanding its Collegiate Guaranteed Income program to UC Davis, providing funding for 10 students in the university’s Guardian Scholars Program.

“UC Davis Guardian Scholars are some of the most ardent and dedicated students I know,” said Dr. Gary S. May, UC Davis chancellor. “We are grateful to United Way for expanding its Collegiate Guaranteed Income program to our community of former foster youth.



The Collegiate Guaranteed Income program brings together United Way’s experience working with foster youth with its expertise in guaranteed income.

Guaranteed income will give these 10 students the opportunity to focus more on their educational goals and less on how they will afford rent, groceries and transportation.”

The Collegiate Guaranteed Income program brings together United Way’s experience working with foster youth with its expertise in guaranteed income. United Way has been supporting foster youth for more than two decades and launched the first Guaranteed Income program of its kind in the California Capital Region in July 2021, following

that up with additional rounds of funding in partnership with the City of Sacramento, County of Sacramento and local nonprofits.

United Way California Capital Region has been a driving force across the region for more than 100 years, listening, responding and taking comprehensive action to meet local needs. From advancing youth opportunities and helping kids excel in school, to strengthening local communities and investing in families’ financial security and health, United Way mobilizes



Some of the checks were distributed at a joint press conference with Sacramento State and University of California, Davis.



With the success of the pilot at Sacramento State, United Way is expanding its Collegiate Guaranteed Income program to UC Davis.

communities to build a future where everyone can reach their full potential and thrive. Working across Amador, El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo counties, the local United Way also provides books and literacy tutoring, addresses housing and food security, leads the region’s largest tax preparation initiative, works with foster youth across school districts and leads the Community Schools initiative in West Sacramento. To make a donation: www.YourLocalUnitedWay.org.

The Guardian Scholars Program at Sacramento State is designed to support current and former foster youth students by increasing graduation rates and their overall success. Students who have experienced the foster care system have unique needs and challenges. This program offers various services

to support their journey at Sacramento State. For more information: <https://www.csu.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/guardian-scholars/>.

The UC Davis Guardian Scholars Program is committed to improving educational outcomes for students with lived experiences in foster care, child welfare or out-of-home placement by providing services and support to meet their needs through transition, graduation and post-graduation planning. The program strives to maximize educational opportunities and university experiences through its comprehensive services and holistic advising to help students achieve their academic and personal goals.

For more information: <https://opportunity.ucdavis.edu/programs/guardian-scholars>.

Mothers Honored at GreenHaven Market



Elks Lodge 6 member Darryl Tatum prepares waffles to be topped with strawberries.

Story by Stephen B. Clazie and photos by Stephen B. Clazie, James Nevans, and Bill Torngren

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market (GHP) switching from Saturdays to Sundays proved to be a great success on Easter Sunday. The change, made at the beginning of this year, allowed vendors to offer better fruits and vegetables on Sundays.

Organizers wondered if customers would enjoy spending Easter Sunday at the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market. They promoted it as a real lifesaver for last-minute shoppers. They also figured that many women enjoy shopping.

The morning began at 9 a.m. with a cup of coffee, mocha or hot chocolate from the coffee truck. While sipping a warm drink, it was easy to stroll over to Sweetbrier Bakery for a scone and maybe a loaf of bread or a baguette.

Elks Lodge 6's Vic Cima and Glen Smith were each in charge of different events at the Lodge on Easter Sunday. Both noted the large number of young mothers in attendance.

"There were a few families with a red wagon being pulled by the oldest child, with siblings sitting in the wagon holding a bouquet from KC Flowers for Mom," said Cima, the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market general manager. "In some wagons, fruits and vegetables were tucked between the riders' legs. It was as if Mom knew a visit to GHP wouldn't be complete without stopping by Efron's Nuno Family Farms."



KC Flowers had an excellent day at the GreenHaven-Pocket Farmers Market. Displaying a beautiful bouquet, from left, are Brittney Vang, Chong Vang and Sarah Vang, who is holding a copy of the Pocket News featuring a story about "Celebrate Mom at the Farmers Market."



Past Exalted Ruler Ron Roberts, who conducted the Lodge's Mother's Day Tribute, is pictured with Audra Jefferson, who concluded the event with two beautiful songs. She and her brother, Aaron Jefferson, also a Lodge member, both participated in the tribute.

Cima also noted that it seemed many of the young mothers had visited the market's website.

"They seemed to know the vendors as though they had been on ghpfarmersmarket.com," he said.

Smith, who chaired the Elks Lodge 6's special Mother's Day Brunch, said that the 90 guests all enjoyed the special menu featuring egg casserole, fruit salad and a ham-carving station, plus the regular menu of bacon, sausage, waffles, pancakes,

biscuits and gravy, coffee and juice.

"We did have a number of young mothers there but no newborns," Smith said.

All of the tables were beautifully decorated with flowers in the center.

Flowers were also a part of Elks 6 Lodge's traditional Mother's Day Tribute, which began at 1 p.m.

"All attending received a white carnation if their mother was deceased or a red one if their mother was still alive," Lodge Chaplain Shannon Lewis explained.



Sacramento Elks Lodge 6's Exalted Ruler, Rob Moore, announces the Lodge's \$11,040.12 contribution to the Major Project. California-Hawaii Elks Association President Marty Mello, from Woodland Lodge No. 1299, is seen watching from the left.

The Elks' "Exalted Ruler's Handbook" states, "The family responsibility of every officer comes first."

Elks Lodge 6's Exalted Ruler, Rob Moore, has two very young children, so it was no surprise that he asked Past Exalted Ruler Ron Roberts to conduct the Lodge's Mother's Day Tribute. Rob had just returned from Anaheim, where he attended the California-Hawaii Elks Association convention. It was clear that he had also taken the opportunity to visit Disneyland before returning 405 miles north to Sacramento.

James Nevans said, "Just so you know, I was in Anaheim mainly on Elks Lodge business. Sacramento Elks Lodge No. 6 contributed over \$11,000 of the nearly \$5 million raised for the Major Project, a procession of lodge donations supporting in-home therapy for disabled children."

Nevans also noted, "We ranked third out of nine North Central District lodges in per-capita giving."

He made it home in time to attend the Elks' traditional tribute to mothers.

Elks Lodge 6 Loyal Knight Nicole Holton Alvarado said, "It was a very memorable tribute to have Audra Jefferson close out our Mother's Day Tribute with two beautiful songs."

Audra and her brother, Aaron Jefferson, who is also a member of the Lodge and serves as Lecturing Knight, both took part in the tribute. Audra sang "You Are So Beautiful" and Natalie Cole's "Inseparable." ★



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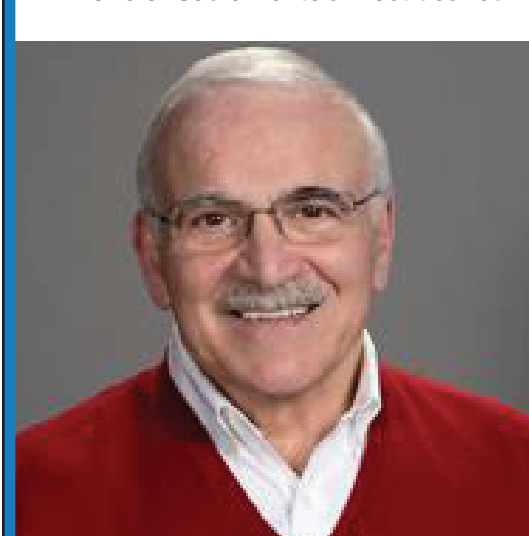
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Weather Hampers Bike Safety Rodeo



California Highway Patrol Officer John Ortega is welcomed to the Greenhaven Pocket Farmers Market by Elk Lodge 6 Exalted Ruler Rob Moore.

Continued from Page 1

...rider balance, turning and maintaining a safe speed.

The first 100 children to complete the course received a free cookie from Sweetbrier Bakery at the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market.

They had their choice of a sprinkled cookie, chocolate chip or monster cookie. All of the children received a badge from the CHP.

“We’ve had the California Highway Patrol at our market before and kids got to sit in a patrol car, but this is the first time we’ve ever hosted their rodeo,” said GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market’s event coordinator Susan Riddell. “We were really happy to host this very worthwhile community event.”

Elks Lodge 6 Exalted Ruler Rob Moore said, “In



Students go through the rodeo course set up at Elks Lodge 6.

California, pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities account for 20 percent of all traf-

fic-related deaths within CHP jurisdiction.”

As a parent of two small children, Moore is proud that the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market sponsored this important activity for children from seven local schools. His oldest son, David, is 5, and he was the first child to complete the course.

Riddell said, “Bike rodeos are a great way for kids and their parents to learn about biking safety through hands-on practice.”

Youth who braved the weather had plenty of fun and enjoyed stopping by Sweetbrier Bakery to select a free cookie of their choice for completing the course.

Vic Cima, the GreenHaven Pocket Farmers Market general manager, said, “This was



Lucy watches her older siblings on the CHP Bike Safety Rodeo course and encourages her father, Marc Lee, to give her a ride on the course.



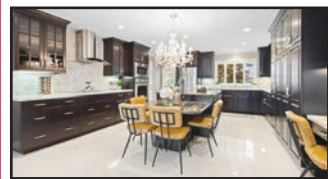
Elks Lodge 6 Exalted Ruler Rob Moore watches his son select a free cookie from Daniel Gomez’s Sweetbrier Bakery for completing the CHP Bike Safety Rodeo.

a great community project that we will sponsor again and we hope for better weather next time.”

Riddle also said, “I would like to let the people

know if they missed the bike rodeo to check the Pocket News. Through the summer, we will be having more events with CHP and bike safety.”

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License to Kill

By Robert Lewis,
CalMatters.org

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA (MPG)

- Ivan Dimov was convicted of reckless driving in 2013, after fleeing police in Washington state while his passenger allegedly dumped heroin out the window. Before that, he got six driving under the influence (DUI) convictions in California over a six-year period. None of that would keep him off the road.

The California Department of Motor Vehicles reissued him a driver's license in 2017. The next year, on Christmas Eve, he drove drunk again, running stop signs and a traffic light in midtown Sacramento, going more than 80 miles per hour, court records show. He T-boned another car, killing a 28-year-old man who was going home to feed the cat before heading to his mom's for the holiday.

Kostas Linardos had 17 tickets, including for speeding, reckless driving and street racing, and had been in four collisions. Then, in November 2022, he gunned his Ram 2500 truck as he entered a Placer County highway and slammed into the back of a disabled sedan, killing a toddler, court records show. He's now facing felony manslaughter charges.

In December of last year, while that case was open, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) renewed his driver's license.

The California Department of Motor Vehicles routinely allows drivers like these, with horrifying histories of dangerous driving, including driving under the influence, crashes and numerous tickets, to continue to operate on our roadways, a CalMatters investigation has found. Too often they go on to kill. Many keep driving even after they kill. Some go on to kill again.

With state lawmakers grappling with how to address the death toll on our roads, CalMatters wanted to understand how California handles dangerous drivers. We first asked the district attorneys for all 58 counties to provide us with a list of their vehicular manslaughter cases from 2019 through early last year. Every county but Santa Cruz provided the information.

Because California has no centralized court system and records aren't online, we then traveled to courthouses up and down the state to read through tens of thousands of pages of files. Once we had defendants' names and other information, we were able to get Department of Motor Vehicles driver reports for more than 2,600 of the defendants, providing details on their recent collisions, citations and license status.

The court records and driving histories reveal a state so concerned with people having access to motor vehicles for work and life that it allows deadly drivers to share our roads, despite the cost. Officials may call driving a privilege, but they treat it as a right, often failing to take drivers' licenses even after they kill someone on the road.

We found nearly 40% of the drivers charged with vehicular manslaughter since 2019 have a valid license.

That includes a driver with two separate convictions for vehicular manslaughter, for crashes that killed a 16-year-old girl in 2009 and a 25-year-old woman in 2020. In July of last year, the Department of Motor Vehicles issued him a driver's license.

The agency gave licenses to nearly 150 people less than a year after they allegedly killed someone on the road, CalMatters found. And many drivers accused of causing roadway deaths don't appear to have stopped driving recklessly. Records show that nearly 400 got a ticket or were in another crash, or both, after their deadly collisions.

"It is somewhat shocking to see how much you can get away with and still be a licensed driver in the state of California," Placer County District Attorney Morgan Gire said. "I don't think anyone fully understands what you need to do behind the wheel to lose your driving privilege."

Almost as interesting as the information in the drivers' Department of Motor Vehicles records is what's not there.

Hundreds of drivers' Department of Motor Vehicles records



Jerrod Tejeda holds a framed photo of his daughter Cassi Tejeda, at his home in Visalia on March 6. Photo by Larry Valenzuela, CalMatters

simply don't list convictions for manslaughter or another crime related to a fatal crash, we found. The apparent error means some drivers who should have their driving privileges suspended instead show up in Department of Motor Vehicles records as having a valid license.

The cases we reviewed cut across demographics and geography. Defendants include farmworkers and a farm owner. They include off-duty police officers and people with lengthy rap sheets, drivers who killed in a fit of rage and others whose recklessness took the lives of those they loved most, high school sweethearts, siblings and children.

The tragedies span this vast state. From twisty two-lane mountain roads near the Oregon border to the dusty scrubland touching Mexico. From the crowded streets of San Francisco to the highways of the Inland Empire. From Gold Country to Timber Country, to Silicon Valley, to the almond capital of the world. So much death. More people than are killed by guns.

Dangerous drivers are able to stay on the roads for many reasons. The state system that targets motorists who rack up tickets is designed to catch clusters of reckless behavior, not long-term patterns. And while there are laws requiring the Department of Motor Vehicles to suspend a driver's license for certain crimes, like driving under the influence, there is no such requirement for many vehicular manslaughter convictions.

It's often up to the Department of Motor Vehicles whether to act. Routinely, it doesn't.

The Department of Motor Vehicles declined to make its director, Steve Gordon, who has been in charge since Governor Gavin Newsom appointed him in 2019, available for an interview to discuss our findings.

Chris Orrock, a Department of Motor Vehicles spokesperson, said the agency follows the law when issuing licenses. "We use our authority as mandated and as necessary," he said.

Even when the Department of Motor Vehicles does take away motorists' driving privileges, state officials, law enforcement and the courts are often unable or unwilling to keep them off the road. We found cases where drivers racked up numerous tickets while driving on a suspended license and faced little more than fines before eventually causing a fatal crash, even though authorities could have sent them to jail.

Taking away someone's driving privilege is no small decision. It can consign a family to poverty, affecting job prospects, childcare and medical decisions.

Still, the stakes couldn't be higher. More than 20,000 people died on the roads of California from 2019 to early 2024.

Kowana Strong thinks part of the problem is that lawmakers and regulators are too quick to treat fatal crashes as an unfortunate fact of life, as opposed to something they can address.

Her son Melvin Strong the Third, who went by his middle name, Kwaun, was finishing college and planning to start a master's program in kinesiology. He was killed by Dimov, the driver with six prior driving under the influence convictions.

Kwaun was a bright and innocent young man, she said, just starting



Cassi Tejeda and Courtney Kendall. Photo courtesy of Butte County District Attorney

his life.

"It's just another accident as far as they're concerned," Kowana Strong said.

Young people think they're invincible. It's the old who know how unfair life is, Jerrod Tejeda said.

His daughter Cassi Tejeda was just 22. She was months from graduating from Chico State with a bachelor's degree in history and a plan to be a teacher. Outgoing and athletic, she wanted to travel, see the world and make her own life.

She had a girlfriend who was visiting. Courtney Kendall was 24 and a student at Louisiana State University.

On a Sunday afternoon in January 2022, a Volvo sports utility vehicle (SUV) topping speeds of 75 miles per hour ran a red light and smashed into their Jeep, court records show. The collision killed them both.

"The most difficult part, besides the incident, is every day that goes by you're always wondering what if. What would they be doing today?" Jerrod Tejeda said. "Would they be married? Would they have developed into the career that they chose? Where would she be living?"

Tanya Kendall lamented not being there to protect her daughter, hold her hand or say goodbye.

"Instead, I was left with the unbearable task of choosing what outfit she would be buried in. Buried, Your Honor. Not the gown she would wear to her graduation from Louisiana State University, the one she will never attend," the mother wrote in a letter to a Butte County judge. She added that she and her husband stood in their daughter's place, accepting her diploma.

Such pain was preventable.

The driver of the Volvo, Matthew Moen, had a blood alcohol level more than three times the legal limit, according to court filings. And it wasn't his first time drinking and driving. Moen was caught driving drunk in Oregon in 2016. He never completed the requirements of a diversion program and had an outstanding warrant at the time of the fatal crash, the Butte County district attorney's office said. In January 2020, he was convicted of driving under the influence in Nevada County for driving with a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit, given a couple of weeks in jail and put on probation for three years.

His license was valid at the time of the fatal 2022 crash, records show.

Across the country, states grapple with how to effectively spot and punish drivers who could be a danger on the road. Often they rely on a basic point system, with drivers

accruing points for various types of traffic violations and thresholds for when the state will take away a motorist's driving privileges. But like many, California has such high limits that drivers with a pattern of reckless behavior can avoid punishment.

The state suspends a driver's license for accumulating four points in a year, six points in two years or eight points in three years. What does it take to get that many points? Using a cellphone while driving is zero points. A speeding ticket is a point. Vehicular manslaughter is two points.

Between March 2017 and March 2022, Trevor Cook received two citations for running red lights, got two speeding tickets and was deemed responsible for two collisions, including one in which someone was injured, court records show. (A third red light ticket was dismissed.) At-fault collisions add a point to a driver's license, according to the Department of Motor Vehicles. But the incidents were spaced out enough that none resulted in a suspension.

So Cook had a valid license on April 14, 2022, just a month after his last speeding ticket, when he blew through a Yolo County stop sign at more than 100 miles per hour.

At that exact moment, Prajal Bista passed through the intersection on his way to work after dinner and a movie with his wife, according to details of the crash that prosecutors included in court filings. Bista was driving the speed limit and on track to make it to work 30 minutes early.

The force of the collision nearly split Bista's Honda Civic in half. Investigators determined Bista had been wearing his seat belt, but the crash tore it apart. They found his body 75 feet from the intersection.

On March 28, 2024, Cook pleaded no contest to felony vehicular manslaughter.

Just a month later, on April 30, the Department of Motor Vehicles issued Cook his current driver's license, agency records show. Less than two weeks after that, he got a ticket for disobeying a traffic signal.

Melinda Aiello, chief deputy district attorney in Yolo County, said her office didn't know anything about the new license or the red light ticket until contacted by CalMatters. What's more, the manslaughter conviction, like hundreds of others we found, isn't listed on Cook's driving record.

Cook's license was still listed as valid in California Department of Motor Vehicles records as of early 2025. But for now, he's off

the roadways. Last summer, Cook started serving time in state prison.

"It's stunning to me that eight months later, his license is still showing as valid and the conviction for killing someone while driving is not reflected in his driving record," Aiello said. "You killed somebody. I'd think there might be some license implications."

Orrock, the Department of Motor Vehicles spokesperson, said he couldn't speak directly to why so many convictions are missing. But, he said, "we acknowledge that the process and coordination between the judicial system and the Department of Motor Vehicles must continually evolve to address any gaps that have been identified. And we're looking into that."

Roughly 400 drivers accused of causing a fatal crash since 2019 received a ticket, got in another collision or did both after the date they allegedly killed someone on the road. (The reports don't show whether the drivers were found at fault, only that they were involved in an accident.) That's about 15% of the drivers for whom we could get Department of Motor Vehicles reports.

Drivers like William Beasley.

From 2011 to 2016, Beasley collected five speeding tickets and a citation for running a red light in Sacramento County, court records show. Then around 9 a.m. on a sunny Tuesday in October 2019, he killed a man.

William and Deborah Hester were crossing the street to go to a dentist appointment at a veterans facility when Beasley's silver pickup sped toward them. They thought they would make it across. But the truck didn't stop. At the last minute, William Hester shoved his wife out of the way. She heard the truck smash into her husband's body and screamed, according to court records.

Beasley still didn't stop. He fled the area and tried to hide his truck. Investigators used nearby cameras and license plate readers to track him down days later. Beasley admitted to being in a collision.

He later pleaded no contest in Sacramento to hit-and-run and misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter. A probation report in the case revealed Beasley was nearly blind in his left eye.

"Mr. Hester is with me every moment of my life," Beasley said in an interview. "I took away a father, a grandfather, a husband, and they consider me a murderer. That's not who I am."

"My accident with Mr. Hester was just that, an accident. Nothing more," he said, adding that he worked as a courier for years and sometimes got speeding tickets because he was rushing.

In May 2020, the Department of Motor Vehicles took away his driving privileges.

In November 2022, Beasley got his license back, "because I could and I needed to," he said, adding that people deserve second chances, particularly for accidents.

Almost immediately, less than three weeks after getting his license, he was in another collision, his Department of Motor Vehicles report shows. In early 2024, he got in yet another. His license was suspended when his car insurance was canceled, records show.

"It makes no sense to me that they would give him a license and give him the opportunity to hurt someone else," said Loriann Hester Page, William Hester's daughter.

Her father's death broke the family, she said. He drove a tank in the Army, played guitar in a band, and liked to ride horses.

"My dad was such a wonderful, kind man," she said. "He would always walk in a room and wanted to make everyone smile."

Beasley said he doesn't plan to drive again.

"I am 75 years old," he said. "I am blind in one eye. I have had a situation where a man was killed, he lost his life. I am not going to repeat that situation at all."

This is the first piece in a series about how California lets dangerous drivers stay on the road. Sign up for our License to Kill newsletter to be notified when the next story comes out and to get more behind-the-scenes information from our reporting. ★

67th Art Fiesta Showcases Talent and Giving Spirit

Sacramento Suburban Kiwanis Club News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The Sacramento Suburban Kiwanis Club is proud to host its 67th Art Fiesta on Saturday, June 7 and Sunday, June 8 at the Scottish Rite Masonic Center in Sacramento.

This two-day, family-friendly event is free to attend and features fine art, emerging student talent and a deep commitment to community, all while kicking off summer with a celebration of creativity and connection.

This year’s Art Fiesta includes an exciting new addition: a student art exhibit

showcasing the work of 7th-12th-grade students from the San Juan Unified School District. These rising artists will have their pieces displayed, and some 70 professional painters, photographers, ceramicists, glass and woodworkers, textile artists and jewelers from across the region will offer their work for sale.

The event has supported the Sacramento Suburban Kiwanis Club’s mission since 1952, to improve the world one child and one community at a time. Proceeds from the Art Fiesta help fund Key Clubs (youth leadership programs) and Boys/Girls State, and vital support services, most notably for the Kiwanis Family House, located near UC Davis Medical Center

and Shriners Hospital. Other beneficiaries include, but are not limited to, River City Food Closet, Stanford House, Opening Doors, Next Move Homeless Services, Sierra Arden Neighborhood Food Closet, Coats for Kids, Crisis Nursery, Wellspring Women’s Center, Process Theatre, and Sacramento Children’s Home.

“This event is a perfect blend of art, community, and purpose,” said Tom Fleishmann, president of the Sacramento Suburban Kiwanis Club. “By simply showing up, you’re making a difference, supporting students, uplifting local artists and helping families in need. Plus, it’s a great way to kick off the summer with something truly meaningful and beautiful.



The Art Fiesta will feature this landscape painting by Tom Sorenson. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Suburban Kiwanis Club

The artwork makes a wonderful addition to your home or as a valued gift.”

Admission and parking are free for the event, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 7 and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, June 8 at the Scottish Rite Masonic Center is at 6151 H St., Sacramento. For more information, visit sacramentosuburbankiwanis.org. ★

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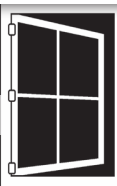
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Newsom Wants Cities to Get Tougher on Homeless Encampments

Continued from page 1

According to the Governor’s Office, the model ordinance includes provisions to prohibit long-term camping in a single location and blockages of public sidewalks, while also ensuring reasonable efforts to connect unhoused individuals with services before any action is taken.

The policy is modeled after the state’s own efforts, which have resulted in the clearance of more than 16,000 encampments and removal of over 311,000 cubic yards of debris since July 2021, according to the Governor’s Office.

Officials describe the approach as scalable, effective and grounded in public safety and dignity.

In conjunction with the ordinance, the state

is making \$3.3 billion in Prop. 1 funds available to local communities. The funding, approved by voters, will be directed toward expanding housing and behavioral health treatment for the most seriously ill and unhoused Californians.

Advocates for the homeless repeatedly argue that the state does not have enough supportive housing and shelter beds to funnel those removed from tents and sidewalks into better conditions. The governor often voices his frustration over the lack of progress at the local level, casting homelessness as a humanitarian crisis and a health and safety issue.

Newsom suggested that cities do not prohibit encampments if there are no available shelter beds.

While the Governor’s

Office cannot force local municipalities to act, can pressure local governments by withholding funding for cities or counties.

The Governor’s Office said more than \$27 billion has been invested during Newsom’s tenure to address homelessness statewide. The state has also created a transparency platform — accountability.ca.gov — that tracks local governments’ progress on homelessness response, housing and behavioral health efforts.

According to the website, Sacramento County constructed 22,311 housing units between 2019-2023 and has tamped down people living without shelter by 40.8% since 2023.

While homelessness has risen nationwide by more than 18% in 2024,



Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a model ordinance designed to help local municipalities ban homeless encampments and prioritize housing and supportive services. Photo courtesy of Gov. Gavin Newsom’s Office

California has limited its increase to 3%, according to the news release. The state has also seen reductions in veteran and youth homelessness, bucking national trends.

“There are no more excuses,” Newsom said in the news release. “The tools are here. The time for inaction is over.” ★

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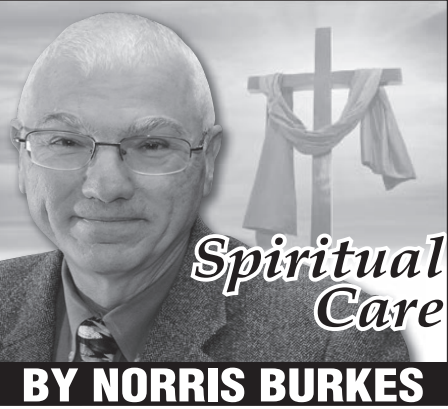
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I often felt that if I hadn’t become a chaplain, I’d have become a safety officer.

For example, whenever I volunteer with Chispa Project in Honduras, I’m the guy who steadies the ladder, double checks that the lunch produce is washed correctly and then I police the perimeter for bad guys. (Bad guys don’t mess with Chaplain Safety Officer.)

The irony is that my interest in this subject comes from the tragedies I’ve witnessed in my chaplain career. In death’s aftermath I’ve offered comfort to those whose loved ones were accidentally struck, shot, suffocated, burned, poisoned, fallen or electrocuted.

From those tragic encounters, I’ve developed a preoccupation with safety that my children say has cost them some of their freedoms. I’ve always made them wear hats in the sun, helmets on the bike trail and seat belts in the car. For safety’s sake, I’ve made them chew slowly, run quickly and sleep adequately.

They learned pretty well, but never did I realize just how much their training might come back to benefit me.

In 2011, my wife and I flew to Denver to spend a few days with our daughter, Sara. We had no agenda. Just a little rest and relaxation.

Following our late-night arrival, we were ushered into our accommodations, a garage conversion with an open-flame furnace. Playing the fastidious safety inspector, I checked to make sure that Sara had vented the heater properly through a nearby window. She had. Then, I tested the smoke and CO2 detector. Everything worked properly.

Becky and I said our good nights and settled in for a cozy winter sleep, snug

under blankets, basking in a glowing heat.

About 2 a.m., we were jolted from bliss with a high-pitched alarm. I saw no smoke, so I focused my squinting eyes on the CO2 detector. Carbon monoxide levels were pushing high enough to send us singing in the celestial choir with Jesus himself.

We immediately turned off the heater, opened all the windows, and retreated to the living room, shutting the garage door behind us. After 20 minutes, levels returned to normal, and we re-retired to bed — sans heater but with a double scoop of blankets.

If you’re anticipating my point here, you’re probably looking for me to quote the Christian Scripture, “It is appointed unto a man once to die and after that the judgment.”

Those familiar with this Scripture often use stories such as these to admonish people to live full throttle, seize the day and live every day as if it were their last.

There is some wisdom in those truisms, but honestly, I don’t want to live every day like it’s my last.

I also need some days to be “regular.” I need days that start with a decent breakfast, some time in my pastor’s office and a drive home with takeout pizza to watch “Amazing Race” with my amazing wife.

Nothing wrong with that. We all need some routine days where we hold those whom we love, exhale gratitude for the life we are granted and refuel our needs for the next day.

Perhaps today wasn’t your best day. If today was only average, then I say, be content that you had no close calls with death to throw you into an existential funk. You don’t need to always be prompting yourself with the morbid thought that this day might be your last.

But more than anything, I say, “Stay safe. For safety’s sake, live your life. There will likely be a tomorrow.”

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.

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

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:

- May 30 – Phantogram
- June 6 – Dexter and the Moonrocks
- June 13 – The Expendables
- June 20 – Winona Fighter
- June 27 – Jackie Greene

Area Museum Experiences

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

California Museum – Experience four decades of powerful activist printmaking in “Mission Gráfica: Reflecting a Community in Print,” a striking exhibition that showcases the rich legacy of Mission Gráfica, a renowned community print center in San Francisco. Featuring 42 vibrant screenprints from influential artists such as Carmen Lomas Garza, Rupert Garcia, and Favianna Rodriguez, the exhibit explores themes of cultural celebration, political resistance, and social justice—from gentrification and gender equality to international solidarity. June 8-Sept. 14. Details at californiamuseum.org.

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. Highlighting stories from prolific names in Mustang history like

Saleen, Shelby and Iacocca. Interactive experiences and digital displays showcase the iconic Mustang image over the decades.

Details at calautomuseum.org.

California State Railroad Museum– The Chinese Railroad Workers’ Experience offers visitors a view of the Chinese workers who built the western portion of the nation’s first Transcontinental Railroad. Marginalized by history, the Chinese workers were more than a nameless group of laborers.

Details at californiarailroad.museum.

Laser Light Shows at SMUD Museum of Science and Curiosity

Get ready to experience your favorite musical artists like never before. The UC Davis Multiverse Theater at MOSAC is thrilled to announce a brand new music laser series to the planetarium!

This immersive music experience, paired with spectacular full-dome lasers, is the best way to listen to your favorite artists outside of a live performance. With a robust library of classic rock, pop music, and family-friendly favorites playing over our 25,000-watt Dolby 5.1 surround sound system, our laser shows will surely provide a whole new music experience! Details at visit-mosac.org.

For more on Sacramento area museum offerings, visit sacmuseums.org.

Water Discovery Day May 31

City Department of

Utilities staff on May 31 are inviting customers to “Water Discovery Day,” an event designed to help people learn about how the city collects, treats and distributes drinking water.

The event will feature tours of the city’s Sacramento River Water Treatment Plant as well as booths with information on how the department operates.

Up to 225 people can register for the tours, which will be offered from 9 a.m. to noon. Registration is required to attend and opens May 21 at 8 a.m.

Each tour lasts about 40 minutes and will educate attendees on several stages of the water treatment process.

Tours are on foot and include several sets of stairs. A modified tour is available for attendees with access needs.

Register at cityofsacramento.gov/utilities/projects/water-discovery-day.

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.

 ★

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Neil Nayyar Now Plays 130 Instruments

By Sean P. Thomas
MPG Staff

ELK GROVE, CA (MPG) - Few musicians can claim to have mastered more instruments than most can name, but Neil Nayyar is no ordinary artist.

Born and raised in Elk Grove, Nayyar has achieved widespread recognition for his rare and extraordinary talent: By the age of 13, he had already set a world record for playing 107 musical instruments, a number that has since grown to an astonishing 130.

His journey began long before he could walk, inspired by a simple line in a book his father read during Nayyar’s time in the womb. Today, Nayyar is not only a multi-instrumentalist, but also a singer in multiple languages, an author and a live performer who blends genres.

In this conversation with MPG staffer Sean P. Thomas, Nayyar opens up about the origins of his musical abilities, the challenges of picking up unusual instruments like the theremin, the vision behind his album “Breaking Barriers” and what continues to drive his creative exploration.

ST: You play an incredible number of instruments, most than I’m sure most can name. How did that all begin?

Neil Nayyar: It actually started when I was in the womb. My dad randomly picked a book from the library, and it mentioned that if you played Mozart’s music to a baby in the womb, the child

might become a musician. My parents tried it. Then when I was 6, they took me to a free drum class. After just one lesson, I was playing fluidly like a pro. Then after that my parents decided to challenge me and gave me another instrument, which was the guitar, and after learning the guitar, I went to the piano, to the flute, to the saxophone, on and on and on. Then at the age of 12, I set my first world record playing 44 musical instruments in 2017. I later broke my own record by playing 107 instruments in 2019. Now, I can play 130.

Q: Most people can’t even name 50 instruments. How do you find all these different ones?

A: Many came from local music stores in Sacramento and Elk Grove like Music Go Round, Tim’s Music and Klein Music. Some rarer instruments I’ve had to order online, sometimes from international shops.

Q: Your latest album, “Breaking Barriers,” uses a wide variety of instruments. How did you approach putting it together?

A: My mentor, Mr. Prasanna, who is actually a world-renowned guitarist, said, “Hey, Neil, how about you make an album with all your instruments?” I decided to create each song from each genre, across different genres and cultures. We decided, for example, to have like an Arabic song with Arabic instruments, a Chinese song with Chinese instruments, Indian song with Indian instruments, and so

forth.

The hardest part when recording in the studio was that I had to bring 10 instruments at a time to the studio. Record all 10 instruments, go back to my home, bring another 10 instruments, go back to this studio, record them. Go back and forth. That was the crazy part. recording, going home, and repeating the process.

One track, “Exploring Worlds,” now that song it has all 107 instruments in one track and that is the longest track on this album just under 10 minutes. It has three genres, starting with a pop and rock feel, going into Irish and going into another different genre.

Q: You also sing in multiple languages. How did that come about?

A: I said I wanted to try something different; I wanted to see how I would sound if I were singing different languages. I tried singing, I think a little bit of Spanish, that worked out; I tried reading Chinese. I tried doing Hindi, or Ukrainian or other types of languages. And I said, “Wow, I guess it’s possible” and people kind of liked it, too. It’s a rare thing to see: someone singing in that language even though they are not from that country.

Q: Do you have a favorite instrument?

A: It would have to be the sitar. It’s a string instrument from India, famously played by this popular guru in India called Ravi Shankar. The sound is very different.

It has its own different



Neil Nayyar will perform at the Sacramento County Fair on May 24 and the California State Fair on Jul 12. Photos courtesy of Neil Nayyar



Neil Nayyar plays his favorite instrument, the sitar.

frequencies or vibrations. It has this kind of twangy sound. It has also been used by many bands, actually, for instance the Beatles, The Who, the Rolling Stones and Metallica.

Q: Was there an instrument that really challenged you?

A: The theremin. It’s an electric instrument with two antennas. That was a tough one. So, you have, on the right, you have one antenna for changing the note, and on the left, you have another antenna, which is changing, like, the volume of the note. The hard part is standing still because if you move one inch here or there, then the sound will change and

then you have to return the whole thing. You can only move your wrist up and down,

Q: You were born and raised in Elk Grove; what’s the music scene like there?

A: Yes, both born and raised. My singing teacher, Raquela Burt, is based here and also produced my album. She has really inspired me and has been really helpful on my musical journey. I took my first drum class through Cosumnes Community Services District, which led me to New Songs Music School in Elk Grove. That’s where things really took off.

Q: Is there an instrument you haven’t been

able to get your hands on yet?

A: The Bandura, a Ukrainian string instrument similar to a harp. It’s quite large and hard to find, especially because of the ongoing war. I’ve been searching for it for two years now.

Q: What’s next for you?

A: I’ve got several upcoming performances: May 24 – Sacramento County Fair at 12 p.m. May 29 – AARP virtual event for API Heritage Month July 12 – California State Fair at 5 p.m. Sept. 5 – National anthem performance at Sacramento River Cats game.

On top of that, I published a book titled “Passion to Exploration of 107 Sound Machines.” It showcases each instrument I play, with illustrations, history and how to play them.

I wrote it because so many people—sometimes from countries these instruments originate from—had never even seen them.

That surprised me and inspired me to share their stories. ★



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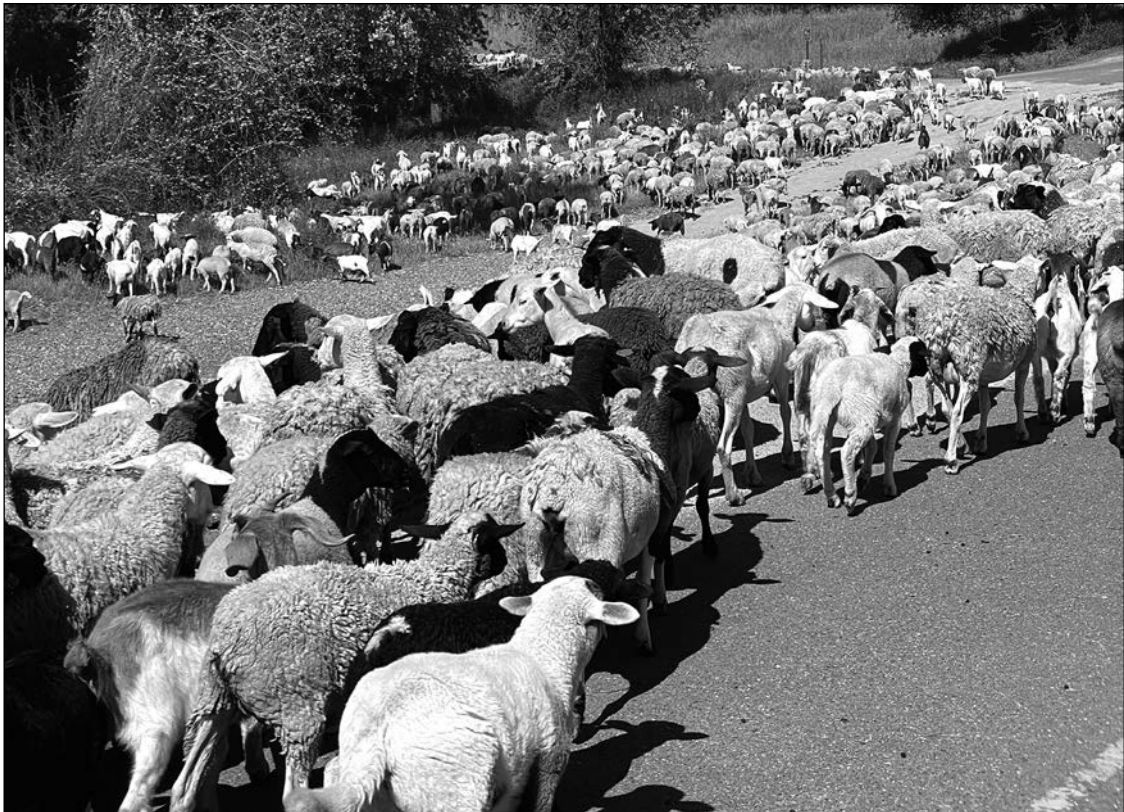
We’ve Got Ewe-nique Fire Fuel Reduction Techniques

Sacramento County News Release

SACRAMENTO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - Have you herd the good news? Our four-legged firefighters are here and they’re ready to bleat back wildfire risks! The Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks is ramping up its multi-faceted strategy to reduce wildfire risk, protect wildlife habitats, and safeguard both our natural resources and the neighborhoods that border our parks.

For its 2025 Fire Fuel Reduction Action Plan, the Department of Regional Parks has lined up sheep and goat grazing contracts, is utilizing park maintenance crews (and other manned crews through contracts with the California Conservation Corps and Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps) to maintain firebreaks and is issuing fuel reduction permits by request to property owners bordering Regional Park properties.

“Fire is an ever-present danger in our Regional Parks, and with another moderately wet winter and spring behind us, the risk will only grow as vegetation dries out,” said Liz Bellas, director of Regional Parks. “I’m incredibly proud of the proactive work our staff and partners are doing to stay ahead of these risks. From hand crews and firebreaks to grazing programs and community partnerships, we’re



Goats and sheep are ideal for vegetation management to help reduce herbaceous fuels over larger areas and in areas with difficult terrain that are difficult to maintain with manned crews. Photo courtesy of Sacramento County

doing everything we can to protect our parks and the people who live near them.”

To reduce the potential number and size of wildfires in the Sacramento County Regional Parks system, a variety of fire management techniques are being implemented. Firebreaks, a combination of mowing, soil discing and herbicides will be used where appropriate to create perimeters around open fields, along fence lines and behind

neighborhoods. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of June.

Ladder Fuel Hand-Crews is another technique. In limited, hard-to-reach areas, hand crews will remove vegetation that could provide a path for a fire to spread upward into tree canopies, where it is much harder to control.

Grazing is also being employed as part of the vegetation management plan. There

are thousands of acres of natural landscapes in the Sacramento County Regional Parks system. Goats and sheep are ideal for vegetation management to help reduce herbaceous fuels over larger areas and in areas with difficult terrain that are difficult to maintain with manned crews. Grazing is expected to occur through the end of June and some areas might be grazed in the summer to manage late emerging yellow star-thistle.

Residents can participate in the fire management efforts through annual encroachment permits. Those who live adjacent to Regional Parks’ properties can apply for free annual encroachment permits to maintain a firebreak behind their property line. These permits allow residents to string-trim herbaceous vegetation up to 50 feet beyond their private property line. To request a permit, provide your name, address and contact information to Regional Parks at parksinfo@SacCounty.gov.

In addition to these proven fire-fuel reduction measures, our Ranger Division is continuing its education and enforcement campaign related to illegal fires and cooking along the parkway in an effort to reduce the number of new fire outbreaks.

Visitors to Sacramento County Regional Parks should be aware of the following regulations. Open-flame fires are not allowed and barbecuing is only permitted in designated picnic areas. Smoking is only allowed in developed picnic areas, on asphalt surfaces, within golf courses and on levee tops along the American River Parkway.

Visit regionalparks.sac-county.gov/Rangers/Pages/FireRiskReduction.aspx to learn more about the 2025 Fire Fuel Reduction Action Plan for Sacramento County Parks. If you see a fire burning in our Regional Parks, call 9-1-1. ★

Sacramento Book Festival Created for All Ages



Catriona McPherson



James Rollins



Sharon Johnson-Fujimoto

California Writers Club-Sacramento Branch News Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - Excitement is growing throughout the regional reading community about the May 31 inaugural Sacramento Book Festival presented by the California Writers Club-Sacramento Branch.

More than 130 local authors will tempt readers with their books for adults and children from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 31 at the Shepard Garden and Arts Center adjacent to McKinley Park, 3330 McKinley Blvd., East Sacramento. Authors from every neighborhood in the Sacramento area will meet readers.

In addition, popular authors of mystery, thriller, romance, sci-fi/fantasy, historical fiction and Black women’s literature will participate in panel talks throughout the day.

The Kids Zone will host activities and readings with children’s authors.

The schedule and information about the attending authors, as well as on the festival’s other activities, can be found online at SacramentoBookFestival.com.

Festival volunteers briefly interviewed three attending authors to whet reader appetites: James Rollins, Sharon Johnson-Fujimoto and Catriona McPherson.

Rollins, the No. 1 New York Times best-selling author of international thrillers and high fantasy, has sold more than 20-million books.

One of the first authors on board with the festival, Rollins shared his enthusiasm about the event.

“While I’ve not ventured far from the Sacramento Valley, having only moved up to Tahoe, I look forward to returning to my roots. My veterinary practice was in the Greenhaven/Pocket area, so an event at McKinley Park is like coming home,” Rollins said. “At the festival, I’m glad to share how a local veterinarian became an author. And not just the author of one genre of fiction but of two: action thrillers and high fantasy. I still continue to write in both fields, with ‘Arkangel’ being my latest Sigma thriller and ‘A Dragon of Black Glass’ continuing a four-book fantasy series. Hopefully, I’ll also have further news about Sigma being picked up by Amazon MGM for a streaming series.”

Starting off the day in the Kids Zone will be children’s author Fujimoto-Johnson.

Fujimoto-Johnson is a Japanese American author-illustrator of two children’s picture books, “The Mochi Makers” and “Shell-Song: Based on a True Family Story.”

“The Mochi Makers” celebrates the joy of a girl and her grandmother spending the day making mochi together. “Shell-Song: Based on a True Family Story” also focuses on family and tradition by drawing on the experiences of the author’s grandfather.

“When I was a young girl, I inherited my grandfather’s seashell collection. He had collected these shells in a Japanese American incarceration camp in Hawaii during World War II. My grandfather’s shells carried his story across generations to me,” Fujimoto-Johnson said. “It is such an honor to share his story in my new book, ‘Shell-Song,’ the first children’s book to address the incarceration camps in Hawaii. Digitally collaged into the artwork for this book are my grandfather’s actual shells (and) texture from my grandmother’s wedding kimono.”

Sacramento gained one of its most well-known authors, McPherson, when she emigrated from Scotland.

“I write all over the mystery map: pre- and post-WWII detective fiction and modern psychological thrillers, all set in Scotland. It was a concern when I immigrated to California, let me tell you,” McPherson said. “Turns out you lovely American readers have voracious appetites for both. Thank you, Masterpiece Theater, I reckon; between the period drama and the Nordic Noir, I fit right in. That said, I also write comic mysteries about a Scot who’s moved to a ‘fictional’ college town in NorCal (it’s Davis) and nothing makes me happier than sharing them with local readers who get all the references. I say it with love ... but I still say it.”

McPherson will be part of the historical fiction panel and signing.

The 130-plus authors will be seated at tables, ready for visiting with readers of all ages and sharing their tales.

Food will be available from the Ju-Ju Burgers and ShakesFood Truck.

The Sacramento Book Festival’s host, the California Writers Club-Sacramento Branch, is celebrating its centennial year this year. The California Writers Club-Sacramento Branch has 175 members, aged 17 to the 90s. For more information about the California Writers Club-Sacramento Branch, go online to cwcsacramentowriters.org. ★

Connections Academy at Gateway Offers K-10 Virtual Schooling

The tuition-free virtual public charter program is now enrolling for the 2025-2026 school year

Connections Academy at Gateway News Release

MCCLELLAN, CA (MPG) - Connections Academy at Gateway, a program within Community Collaborative Charter School that is part of Gateway Community Charters, is a new tuition-free online charter school program that will begin operating for the 2025-2026 school year. Through this partnership, the online program will provide innovative, high-quality, standards-based educational opportunities for all students. This program will be open to students in grades K-10 living in Amador, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Sutter, and Yolo counties. Connections Academy at Gateway is now enrolling for the 2025-2026 school year.

Connections Academy at Gateway will offer families the nationally recognized Connections Academy program and award-winning curriculum. In collaboration with Community Collaborative Charter Schools, the online program will combine California-credentialed teachers, a rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum, technology tools, and social engagement to create a student-focused learning experience.

A common need expressed by many families is the desire for greater flexibility in the learning environment. Connections Academy at Gateway will meet the needs of students who will benefit from the flexibility to fit school into their lives and seek academic challenges in line with state standards with a fully online program. Teachers are trained to deliver instruction and provide individualized support to meet each student’s academic needs and learning preferences in a virtual environment. A parent, or another adult “Learning Coach,” will play a key role alongside the California-credentialed teachers to set daily routines, monitor student progress in the home, and track attendance. Learning Coaches will be trained and supported by robust resources and communication tools designed to help families succeed.

The new online program will provide students access to core classes and engaging electives, as well as virtual clubs, field trips, events, and activities throughout the year. The flexible schedule allows students time to play sports, explore art, volunteer, or pursue their passions outside of the virtual classroom.

Families will benefit from Connections Academy’s College and Early Career Readiness program for middle and high school students equipping them with durable skills like leadership, critical thinking, and teamwork. Students can participate in career exploration and industry networking opportunities to build confidence, make connections, and find direction to prepare for their future.

“Connections Academy at Gateway is an exciting new partnership bringing the nationally recognized Connections Academy

program to students in the Northern California region through Gateway Community Charters,” said Dr. Donna Hutchison, Vice President for Educational Partnerships in Pearson’s Virtual Learning division, which delivers Connections Academy online learning solutions. “For over two decades, Gateway Community Charters has been a leader in providing high-quality, innovative education, and this collaboration expands those opportunities by offering a flexible, tuition-free online learning option tailored to self-motivated, tech-savvy students. Together, we are committed to empowering families with a personalized approach to education that fosters academic success and community connection.”

Connections Academy at Gateway will serve a maximum of 500 students in grades K-10 during its first year. As a public-school program, there are no fees or tuition to attend Connections Academy at Gateway and all students are required to meet the same academic standards and take the same assessments as traditional public school students.

“We are thrilled to introduce Connections Academy at Gateway, a program of our Community Collaborative Charter School, by expanding our commitment to providing high-quality, innovative education options for students across the Sacramento region and beyond,” said Jason Sample, CEO and Superintendent of Gateway Community Charters. “By partnering with Connections Academy, we are offering families a flexible, personalized online learning experience that empowers students with the skills and support they need to succeed in an ever-evolving world.”

Interested families are encouraged to visit the website at connectionsacademy.com/california-gateway-online-school/ or call 1-833-591-0251 to learn more.

About Connections Academy at Gateway

Connections Academy at Gateway is a tuition-free, online public charter school for K–10 students in Northern California, serving nine counties. Launching in the 2025–2026 school year in partnership with Community Collaborative Charter School, it offers a high-quality, accredited virtual education through the nationally recognized Connections Academy program. The school emphasizes academic success, life skills, and personalized support to help students thrive and become confident, resilient learners. Learn more at connectionsacademy.com/california-gateway-online-school.

About Gateway Community Charters

Community Collaborative Charter School is part of Gateway Community Charters, which has served families in Sacramento and Yolo counties since 2003. Now operating nine schools across 22+ locations, the organization provides quality public school choices to over 5,800 students. Learn more at gcccharters.org or call 916-286-5129. ★