



Bridge House Café Celebrates Grand Opening

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PTA Scores with Mother-Son Dodgeball Night

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RIVER VALLEY TIMES

42ND YEAR • ISSUE 2

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JANUARY 23, 2026

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PASSMORE NAMED TEACHER OF MONTH



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HOMELESSNESS ONE OF NEWSOM'S BIG LIABILITIES



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FOUR WINS A SHOT IN THE ARM



PAGE 6



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CSD to Hold Hearing on Development Moratorium



This image appears in a Jan. 15 Substack post by Destination Rancho Murieta, an anonymous group proposing the permanent conservation of open spaces instead of a development moratorium. Courtesy photo

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Following a divided board vote, the Rancho Murieta Community Church on Cantova Way. However, the district canceled that meeting due to a conflict with the church and has

would temporarily halt new water connections for future development. The district had widely advertised that the board would hold the hearing Jan. 27 at Rancho Murieta Community Church on Cantova Way. However, the district canceled that meeting due to a conflict with the church and has

rescheduled the hearing for 6 p.m. Feb. 10 at the Rancho Murieta Country Club.

Which Developments Would be Affected?

If approved, the moratorium would apply only to the proposed Rancho North subdivision, which has been reduced from 925

to 561 lots. A water-emergency declaration would not apply to the Residences or Riverview subdivisions, Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder has confirmed. In a Jan. 12 email shared by Residences developer Bob Keil, Wilder wrote: *Continued on page 2*

Post Office Lobby Hours Expected to Change



Lobby hours are expected to change because of a recent break-in at the Rancho Murieta post office.

Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - An immediate decision to reduce lobby hours at the Sloughouse Post Office following a break-in discovered Jan. 5 has been rescinded ... for now.

After a break-in involving several post office boxes was discovered Jan. 5, the acting postmaster posted a written notice advising patrons that lobby hours would be reduced. The notice stated the lobby would close at 8 p.m. and reopen at 6:15 a.m., and that additional security measures were being implemented.

However, three days later, the acting postmaster contacted the River Valley Times to say the early closure was being rescinded pending approval from headquarters. The lobby is typically locked around 11 p.m. and reopened about 6:15 a.m.

The acting postmaster said she could not provide details about the incident because it is under investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. She also declined to give her name, saying she is not authorized to speak to the press.

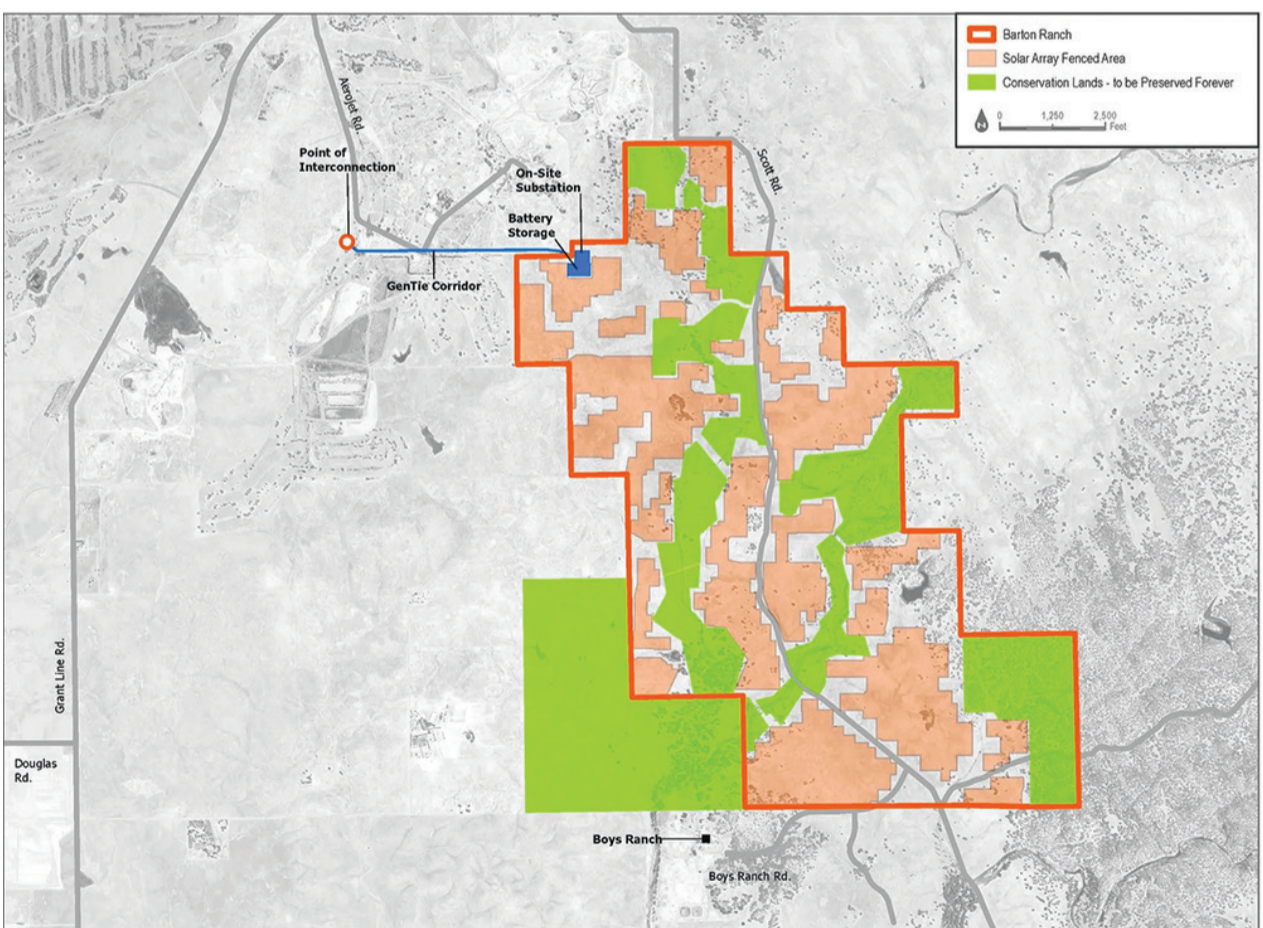
She urged residents to remain vigilant about checking their mail regularly.

"We need to make the public aware that they should be picking up their mail on a daily basis, not thinking that it's not going to happen to them," she said.

The acting postmaster also encouraged residents to sign up for Informed Delivery through the U.S. Postal Service website. Informed Delivery is a free service that allows patrons to digitally preview their

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Coyote Creek Solar Project Faces Uncertain Path Forward



A Sacramento County graphic shows the footprint of the Coyote Creek Agrivoltaic Ranch along Scott Road. SMUD backed out of the project on Jan. 5. Courtesy photo

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Despite Sacramento Municipal Utility District's decision to walk away from a power purchase agreement, the developer of the controversial Coyote Creek Agrivoltaic Ranch says it intends to press ahead, leaving the 200-megawatt solar project facing an

uncertain and potentially more complex path forward. The proposed 1,412-acre solar facility would be located on the Barton Ranch along Scott Road north of Rancho Murieta. SMUD announced on Jan. 5 that it was canceling the power purchase agreement with D.E. Shaw Renewable Investments, citing project uncertainties, including supply

chain constraints, rising prices, tariffs, schedule delays, environmental impacts and pending litigation. New York-based DESRI said it plans to move forward with the project, stating in an emailed response cited in a Jan. 7 Sacramento Business Journal report that "we are moving forward with the development." DESRI representatives did not

Continued on page 5

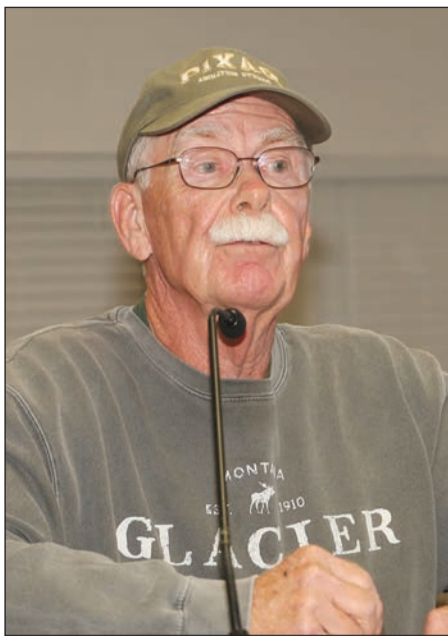
CSD to Hold Hearing on Development Moratorium

Continued from page 1

“The District includes the Residences and Riverview in the current population, and they are entitled to receive water services from the District, should water be available. You are not subject to the emergency declaration.”

Both subdivisions were entitled by Sacramento County nearly 20 years ago and hold will-serve letters from the district. The Residences include 198 lots and Riverview 140. However, the district has not committed to allowing water connections for the second phase of the Residences, as discussions continue about construction of a third water tank to supplement the Rio Oso Water Tank.

The board has not discussed how it would handle water-connection requests for the remaining lots at Riverview, which is served by the larger Van Vleck tank.



Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board President John Merchant is the primary supporter of a development moratorium. Before joining the board, Merchant and other members of Saving Our Lakes & Open Spaces (SOLOS) circulated a petition that drew more than 2,000 signatures. File photo by Gail Bullen

draft 2024 Integrated Water Master Plan or related planning documents, though their feasibility and timelines vary.

The IWMP evaluates water supply under a modeled historic drought comparable to 1977-78. Under those conditions, the analysis shows the district would have little remaining supply buffer for existing customers and that full buildout would result in significant water shortfalls without new supply sources, additional storage or severe demand curtailments. The study does not conclude that the district would lack sufficient water during typical drought years or under average hydrologic conditions.

The district has contracted with a Folsom-based consulting firm to identify potential sites for new groundwater wells, a process that is underway. It has also resumed efforts to seek state approval to convert Clementia from a recreational lake into a drinking-water reservoir; a process district officials have described as complex, lengthy and potentially requiring legislative or regulatory action.

Water banking is identified by state officials as a long-term drought-resilience strategy, but one that requires planning, permitting, infrastructure and water-accounting systems that are still being developed statewide, meaning

implementation typically takes years.

While the IWMP models expanded use of reclaimed water, it limits that analysis to non-potable applications such as irrigation and demand reduction and does not evaluate recycled wastewater as a future drinking-water source, reflecting the regulatory, technical and timeline constraints associated with converting recycled water for potable use.

Board Vote and Opposition

At the December meeting, Merchant and Directors Linda Butler and Bill Gere voted to proceed with a public hearing on a water-emergency declaration. Director Tim Maybee voted no, and Director Randy Jenco voted present. Both Maybee and Jenco had previously opposed the action at past meetings.

Jenco has repeatedly warned that a development moratorium could lead to litigation. In written comments following the Sept. 17 vote, he said, “The only result of a moratorium will be a rush to lawsuit by landowners ... The CSD ratepayers will end up paying the costs for defending the district and all damages incurred.”

Messaging Urges Alternative Approach

In a Jan. 15 post, Destination Rancho Murieta – an anonymous Substack publication that describes itself as a group of Rancho Murieta residents – urged residents to oppose a development moratorium and instead pursue permanent land conservation.

The post argued that land acquisition would deliver lasting water benefits while warning that a moratorium could expose ratepayers to litigation costs and stagnate property values.

The publication has previously published posts aligned with positions taken by Rancho Murieta Properties, which owns the proposed Rancho North development. The post was also shared on Nextdoor.

The Substack post did not specify whether open space proposed for conservation would be part of the Rancho North subdivision. On Dec. 17, 2024, Rancho Murieta Properties removed plans to develop 136 residential lots around the back lakes from its development application with the county.

The River Valley Times has not been able to identify a spokesperson for Destination Rancho Murieta. The

Development Moratorium Debate Began in July 2024

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Efforts to declare a water emergency began in July of 2024. This story is online at therivervalleytimes.com with links to previous coverage.

2024 Articles

“Moratorium Petition Drive Launches after CSD Board Meeting” on July 17, 2024 – RVT July 22, 2024.

“Water Tank, Development Moratorium are Topics at Improvements Meeting” on Aug. 7, 2024 – RVT Aug 27, 2024.

“CSD Covers Water Plan, Suit over Development Moratorium” on Oct. 16, 2024 – RVT Oct. 24, 2024.

2025 Articles

“SOLOS Presents Water Moratorium Petitions to CSD” on Dec. 18, 2024 – RVT Jan 3, 2025.

“CSD Board Tackles Water Issues” on March 19, 2025 – RVT March 28, 2025.

“Board Votes 3-2 to Begin Water Moratorium Process” on Sept. 17, 2025 – RVT Sept 22, 2025.

2026 Article

“Community Services District Sets Water Emergency Hearing” on Dec. 17, 2025 – RVT Jan. 9, 2026. ★

newspaper emailed Carol Anderson Ward, a principal investor in Rancho Murieta Properties, seeking clarification on whether a conservation proposal would proceed if the district declares a water emergency and a development moratorium. No response had been received as of deadline.

Destination Rancho Murieta posted again on Jan. 20. It argued that Rancho Murieta is not facing an immediate water shortage and urges the board to slow down and fully analyze legal risks, infrastructure funding, impacts on property values and district independence, and alternatives like land acquisition before declaring a water moratorium.

This story is at therivervalleytimes.com and on Facebook. ★

District Posts Water-Shortage Statement

At the December board meeting, Keil asked Board President John Merchant to explain his reasoning for declaring a water emergency. Since then, a statement titled “Emergency Water Shortage Meeting” has been posted on the district’s website.

The statement reads:

“The district underwent significant transitions in 2025, with water sustainability and community development becoming our primary areas of focus. As new construction continues, we must address critical questions regarding our capacity to serve existing residents while accommodating future growth.

“While we historically relied on studies indicating sufficient supply from the Cosumnes River and our reservoir system, the draft 2024 Integrated Water Master Plan has provided a necessary course correction: it clarifies that RMCSO lacks adequate water to sustain the community during drought conditions.

“... A moratorium would provide the window necessary to evaluate supply augmentation. Our team is currently investigating new wells, water banking, use of Clementia reservoir and the potential conversion of recycled water for potable use.”

(Editor’s note: The statement is quoted as posted on the district website.)

What the Planning Documents Show

Several of the supply options cited in the district’s statement are addressed in the

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Bridge House Café Celebrates Grand Opening



The Rancho Murieta-based Baggs Grove smooth jazz ensemble plays during the evening celebration. From left are Jeff Jenson, drums; Marc Valencia, bass; Tom Bagley, guitar; Jeff Bagley, guitar; and Charles Ross, saxophone.

Story and photos by Gail Bullen River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)

The Bridge House, a new café, wine bar and gift shop in Murieta Plaza that has been operating since Nov. 29, marked its official grand opening Jan. 10 with a daylong celebration.

The event included a morning ribbon-cutting ceremony, food and drink tastings, displays of local artists' work, and a live jazz performance in the evening.

One of the most heartfelt moments came at 10 a.m. during the ribbon-cutting. Founder Deb Brittan and fellow principals Michelle Stewart, Heather Jenkins and Norma Marie Mitchell gathered employees behind them before snipping the ribbon together.

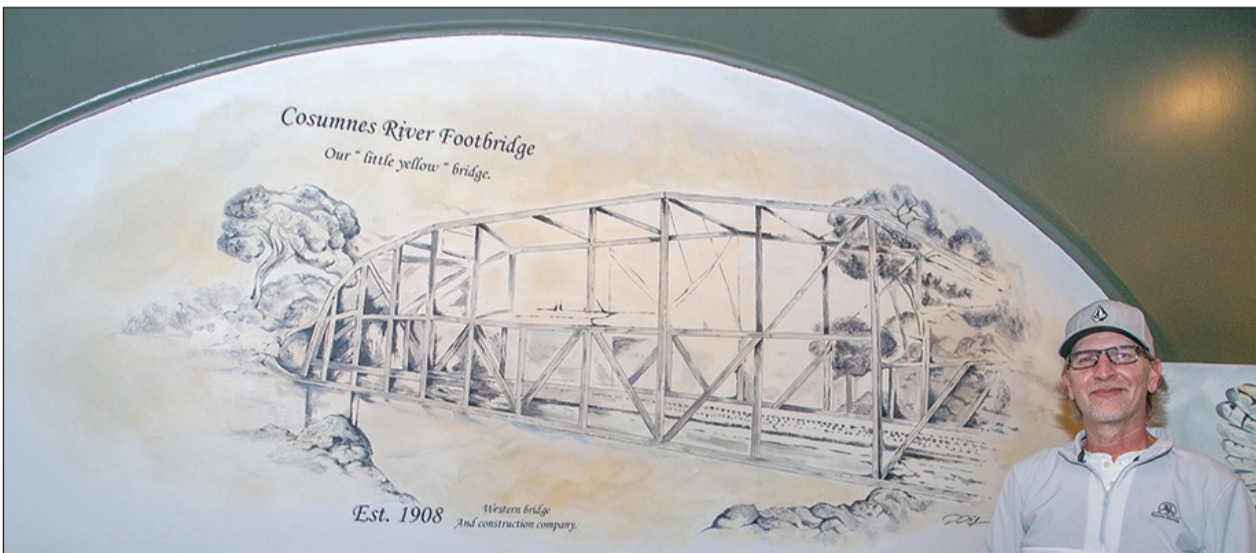
Brittan expressed her gratitude to the team and the community, thanking those who offered encouragement, donated time and talent, and helped bring the project to life. She emphasized that the café would not have been possible "without these beautiful people that are standing around me."

Brittan then invited Phil Fuller, lead pastor of the Rancho Murieta Community Church, to offer a blessing.

Fuller affirmed Brittan's vision for Bridge House, acknowledged the team assembled to carry it out, and committed the space to that purpose. He expressed the hope that Bridge House would bring the community together, foster connection and hope, and help transform lives through the people who serve there.



Cutting the ribbon at the grand opening of the Bridge House Café on Jan. 10 are, from left, Michelle Stewart, Deb Brittan, Heather Jenkins and Norma Marie Mitchell.



Rancho Murieta artist David Epler poses beside the mural he created for the café's entryway.

Post Office Lobby Hours Expected to Change

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mail and track packages before they arrive at their mailbox or post office box.

Customers who experience mail theft should first report it to the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and obtain a case

number before reporting the incident to the post office, she said.

She also noted that many Rancho Murieta residents have security cameras.

"If they suspect something, they should take a video clip of that and bring it to the

post office and notify the sheriff's department," she said.

The lobby remains accessible during regular business hours, as well as after hours on weekdays, weekends and holidays.

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Girl Scouts of Northern California Kicks off Cookie Season

Welcomed Exploremores to Cookie Lineup, Bay Area's Adobe a National Sponsor

Girl Scouts of Northern California News Release

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, CA (MPG) - Girl Scouts of Northern California kicked off their 2026 Girl Scout Cookie season on Jan. 12. Girl Scouts throughout all 19 counties from Gilroy to the Oregon Border will embark on the highly anticipated cookie season, exploring more possibilities through the largest girl-led entrepreneurial program in the world.

From Jan. 12, consumers can support their local girl entrepreneurs by ordering from the iconic cookie lineup online at ilovecookies.org. Local shoppers can also locate cookie booths starting Feb. 4 for in-person cookie sales. The 2026 Girl Scouts of Northern California cookie season runs through March 15, and all cookie flavors are \$7 a box (shipping fees additional).

"Exploremores", a rocky road ice cream-inspired sandwich cookie, will join the legendary lineup for the 2026 cookie season. Filled with delicious flavors of chocolate, marshmallow and toasted almond-flavored cr me, Exploremores reflect the spirit of exploration at the heart of every Girl Scout.

The new flavor will be the 9th cookie flavor to join Northern California customer favorites such as Thin Mints, Caramel deLites, Peanut Butter Patties, and Trefoils. Exploremores will be available for purchase online and in-person during booth sales. Visit www.ilovecookies.org for more information.

"What better way to kick off the new year than with a new cookie for the 2026 cookie season," said Mary-Jane Strom, CEO of Girl Scouts of Northern California. "Behind every cookie sale is a Girl Scout learning essential life skills far beyond just selling cookies. Buying or donating cookies is a delicious and easy way to help cultivate



As this year's national sponsor of the cookie program, Bay Area-based Adobe will encourage girls to express their individuality and think creatively as they pursue their goals this cookie season. Photo courtesy of Girl Scouts of Northern California

future leaders, innovators, and change-makers. It is a win-win for all."

The Girl Scout Cookie Program provides invaluable entrepreneurial skills for Girl Scouts across the country and funds a variety of experiences. Each cookie season, Girl Scouts develop important life skills like goal-setting, decision-making, money management, people skills and business ethics through the Cookie Program.

One hundred percent of the proceeds from the cookie program are used locally and provide critical funds for girls' access to affordable programming, the outdoors, camp and program centers, STEM, financial aid and volunteer support services. Girl Scouts and their troops depend on these funds to support their community service efforts.

This year, over 14,000 Girl Scouts in Northern California will



"Exploremores", a rocky road ice cream-inspired sandwich cookie, will join the legendary lineup for the 2026 cookie season. Photo courtesy of Girl Scouts of Northern California

participate in the cookie entrepreneurship program with the goal of selling over 3 million packages of cookies.

As this year's national sponsor of the cookie program, Bay Area-based Adobe will encourage girls to express their individuality and think creatively as they pursue their

goals this cookie season. Through a national educational video featured on the Digital Cookie platform, Adobe will equip Girl Scouts with essential skills in online communication and responsible digital design. By sharing these creative tools, Adobe is supporting Girl Scouts to become confident digital

creators and entrepreneurs.

Girl Scouts of Northern California serves over 46,000 youth and adult volunteers across 19 counties from Gilroy to the Oregon border. Girl Scouts bring their dreams to life and work together to build a better world. Through programs from coast to coast, Girl Scouts of all backgrounds and abilities can be unapologetically themselves as they discover their strengths and rise to meet new challenges — whether they want to climb to the top of a tree or the top of their class, lace up their boots for a hike, advocate for climate justice, or make their first best friends.

Backed by trusted adult volunteers, mentors and millions of alums, Girl Scouts lead the way as they find their voices and create change on the issues that matter most to them. To learn more about Girl Scouts of Northern California, visit www.gsnorcal.org. ★

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Daniel M. Folsom, California, Loretta Chamberlain, Chamberlain, former Buffalo Bills player, world class fisherman, and avid duck hunter passed away peacefully on January 11, 2026, in Folsom, California, at the age of 88. He joins his wife Patricia Chamberlain with the Lord in Heaven. He is remembered with love by his family, including his 2nd wife

Loretta Chamberlain, daughters Kim and Debi, along with several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His legacy of faith, fishing, family, and football endures.

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Local Supervisors Step into Top Board Leadership Roles

Sacramento County News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The annual vote to elect a new chair and vice chair of the Board of Supervisors was held Jan. 13. Supervisor Rosario Rodriguez of District 4 was elected chair, and Supervisor Pat Hume of District 5 was elected vice chair. Rodriguez represents Rancho Murieta, and Hume represents Wilton.

“It is an honor to serve as chair of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors in 2026,” Rodriguez said. “I step into this role with a clear focus on results, respect and responsibility.

“Many of our residents are struggling, and they deserve a county government that acts with urgency and delivers measurable outcomes. Respect begins with listening to the people and the communities we serve and ensuring their voices are reflected in our decisions. Responsibility means turning those voices into action.

“As chair, I will run disciplined, productive meetings and demand results, accountability and follow-through on every commitment we make,” she added.

“Working with my fellow supervisors, county staff, and community partners, I will advance solutions that strengthen neighborhoods and ensure Sacramento County operates transparently, effectively and with real impact for the public.”

Rodriguez assumes the chairmanship as Sacramento County faces rising housing costs, public safety concerns and growing demands on county services.

Board chair responsibilities include the following:

- Presides over board meetings; the vice chair assumes the role in the chair’s absence or inability to act.

- Rules on procedural matters and questions.

- Recognizes board members wishing to speak on an item.

- Votes on all matters before the board, participates in discussion, makes motions without relinquishing the chair and seconds motions without relinquishing the chair.

- Serves on other boards and commissions as a representative of Sacramento County and acts as a point of contact for



Sacramento County Supervisor Rosario Rodriguez is the new chair of the board, and Supervisor Pat Hume is the vice-chair. Courtesy photo

public questions related to board meetings, including coordination of resolutions and presentations, and general matters not

specific to a district. The chair and vice chair serve one-year terms. ★

Coyote Creek Solar Project Faces Uncertain Path Forward

Continued from page 1

respond to requests for comment from the River Valley Times.

“We commend the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors for their bold leadership in unanimously approving the Coyote Creek Agrivoltaic Rancho last November,” Hy Martin, chief development officer of DESRI, told the Business Journal.

Martin was referring to the Nov. 18 decision by the supervisors to approve the project over the objections of environmental groups, off-roaders and tribal representatives. The six-hour hearing drew an overflow crowd, with most of the 130 speakers opposed to the project.

Supporters cited the benefit of keeping the land in agriculture, increased tax revenue and union-wage jobs. They also said that utility-scale solar was necessary to meet SMUD and county climate goals.

Ken Casparis, a county public information officer, said the county was aware that SMUD had canceled its power purchase agreement to serve as an off-taker for solar power generated by Coyote Creek.

“The project applicant may continue to explore additional off-take agreements consistent with existing approvals, so the county is still assessing the impact of SMUD’s decision,” he said in a Jan. 10 email.

SMUD’s withdrawal does not automatically eliminate the project’s ability to connect to the electrical grid. However, selling power to another buyer or into the wholesale market operated by the California Independent System Operator would likely require new or amended agreements with SMUD to use its transmission or distribution facilities, adding time, cost and complexity.

The project also faces legal challenges. Two lawsuits filed after the county supervisors approved the solar project on Nov. 18 challenge the county’s decision under the California Environmental Quality Act, arguing that the environmental review was flawed and failed to adequately address impacts to oak woodlands, streams and sensitive species; and to tribal cultural resources.

Project Background

The applicant for the Coyote Creek solar project was Sacramento Valley Energy Center, a subsidiary of DESRI, a New York-based renewable energy



The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors unanimously approves the project on Nov. 18, despite objections from environmental groups, off-roaders and tribal representatives. Courtesy photo

developer and operator that develops, acquires, owns and operates long-term contracted solar and wind projects nationwide.

DESRI has a portfolio of utility-scale solar and battery storage facilities, including projects serving the Sacramento Municipal Utility District in Sacramento County at the Rancho Seco Solar II facility and the Sloughhouse Agrivoltaic Solar Project.

The project would be constructed on the Barton Ranch, which would remain under the same ownership. Located south of Rancho Murieta, the ranch encompasses about 2,700 acres of grassy and wooded hillsides on both sides of Scott Road.

The proposal called for developing approximately 1,412 acres for a 200-megawatt solar array capable of powering up to 44,000 homes, along with a 100-megawatt battery storage system designed to deliver electricity for up to four hours. All electricity generated under the original plan was to be supplied to SMUD.

Project plans also included seasonal sheep grazing around the solar arrays, strategic landscaping to reduce visual impacts, and the permanent preservation of 1,150 acres adjacent to the solar facility.

The site is also located near California State Parks’ Prairie City State Vehicular Recreation Area off White Rock Road. DESRI pledged over \$2.5 million for improvements to the park.

SMUD Cancellation

A power purchase agreement (PPA) is a long-term contract in which a utility agrees to buy electricity at a set price from a developer that finances, builds, owns and operates a solar facility, providing revenue certainty while supplying renewable power. Lenders and investors rely on PPAs because the guaranteed revenue over 15 to 30 years allows developers to secure construction loans, attract equity investors and obtain lower-cost financing.

Without a PPA, projects typically face higher financing costs and increased exposure to market volatility, and many cannot move forward unless they secure another long-term buyer or rely on wholesale power sales.

At the request of the River Valley Times, SMUD spokesperson Gama Ortiz provided a copy of SMUD’s Jan. 5 notice terminating the PPA with Sacramento Valley Energy Center, LLC, an affiliate of DESRI. The notice cited reasons for the decision.

First, the PPA required the project to begin operating by Sept. 30, 2024. The developer claimed force majeure events delayed construction, but SMUD disputed those claims and terminated the contract, citing delays that extended well beyond one year.

Second, the seller informed SMUD that, due to delays, global events and other factors, it could no longer deliver power at the agreed contract prices

and sought higher rates for both the solar and battery components. SMUD responded by declaring an event of default, citing the developer’s inability to meet its pricing obligations.

Third, the notice stated that SMUD appreciated the effort to provide affordable, clean, renewable energy, but that “the original project and the original economics of the same no longer exist.” The notice added that the seller had represented that the project had stakeholder support, including from the Wilton Rancheria, but noted the tribe had since filed one of multiple lawsuits challenging the project, “so that does not appear to be the case.”

SMUD Board Meeting

Before SMUD canceled the power purchase agreement, its involvement in the project drew strong opposition during public comments at the utility’s Dec. 11 board meeting.

Nineteen speakers raised concerns about the irreversible loss of heritage blue oaks, destruction of wildlife habitat and biodiversity, inadequate or implausible mitigation measures, including one-acorn-for-one-old-tree replacement and short monitoring periods. Speakers also cited cultural and tribal impacts, as well as long-term ecological harm.

Several speakers warned that addressing the concerns promptly could help preserve SMUD’s standing

in the community, while failing to do so risked long-term reputational damage.

The board took no formal action, but Vice President Dave Tamayo requested a staff briefing on SMUD’s contractual and legal options for reconsidering the Coyote Creek project and asked that the options be discussed publicly, if feasible.

The River Valley Times asked the SMUD spokesperson whether the briefing or public discussion had occurred after that meeting, but Ortiz did not respond.

Lawsuits

The California Four Wheel Drive Association and two other off-road recreation nonprofits filed the first writ of mandate lawsuit on Dec. 16 against Sacramento County and its Board of Supervisors. The suit names SMUD, Sacramento Valley Energy Center, DESRI and Barton Ranch as real parties in interest: entities that did not make the governmental decision but have a direct legal or financial stake in the outcome.

That lawsuit alleges the county violated the California Environmental Quality Act and the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Act by approving the Coyote Creek project based on a flawed environmental impact report.

The plaintiffs argue the report failed to adequately analyze or mitigate impacts to wildlife, oak woodlands, water resources and the nearby Prairie City State Vehicular Recreation

Area, and failed to consult with state parks officials. The plaintiffs are asking the court to set aside the approvals and halt construction.

A second lawsuit, filed Dec. 18 by the Environmental Council of Sacramento and the California Native Plant Society against the county and board, named Sacramento Valley Energy Center LLC as the real party in interest. It also alleges CEQA violations, arguing the environmental review inadequately addressed impacts to oak woodlands, rare plants, wildlife, groundwater and Prairie City SVRA, and improperly deferred key mitigation measures.

Wilton Rancheria filed the third lawsuit on Dec. 19, alleging CEQA violations related to impacts on tribal cultural resources. The tribe contends the county approved the project despite acknowledging significant and unavoidable harm to culturally significant lands and unlawfully terminating government-to-government consultation required under Assembly Bill 52.

Asked for comment, Casparis said the county doesn’t comment on active litigation.

With SMUD out, three lawsuits pending, and no replacement buyer announced, the future of Sacramento County’s largest proposed solar project remains unresolved.

This story is at therivervalleytimes.com and on Facebook. ★

Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



What a difference a week makes!

Losers of seven straight games and looking like cellar dwellers, the Kings went to a youth movement that saw the hometown boys win four consecutive games and nearly made it five straight as they fell to the Portland Trailblazers for the third time this season.

The mini winning streak had a cold water in the face effect for many pundits and fans, as the Kings easily handled the Rockets, Lakers, Knicks and the Washington Wizards.

Even more surprising was the way the Kings put away the competition, as they won by double digits in each of the 4 wins.

A shot in the arm? You bet it was, and it should give the organization a moment of pause as they reassess what they have regarding talent that resides on this team.

Right in the middle of this euphoric 4-game run was none other than 6'11" big man Dylan Cardwell, that has come out of nowhere to become a fan favorite. Just 24 years old, the Kings have stumbled onto a diamond in the rough, and no one on this team plays with greater enthusiasm than Cardwell. Comparisons are being made of Dennis Rodman, as Cardwell bounces down the court with arms uplifted, energizing the crowd and getting fans on their feet.

Not known for his scoring, Cardwell went undrafted a year ago, and the Kings signed him to a 2-way contract for this season. Smart move and one that's already paying off.

Cardwell might not get 20 points per game, but his affection for blocking shots and playing ferocious defense is just what the Kings needed to get them back.

The question will be as the trade deadline approaches, will the Kings realize what they have in Cardwell and value him to the point of not including him in a trade. Don't do it! And by the same token, do not trade Precious Achiuwa!

For the first time in many years the Kings can put a big lineup on the floor and it's showing results.

As the center piece of the Kings Domantas Sabonis was sidelined with a knee injury, coach Christie had no choice but to use both Achiuwa and Cardwell side

by side, and the results were astounding.

Not to be forgotten is rookie Maxime Raynaud who although not as impressive, is coming along, and I'm hopeful the Kings hang onto Raynaud as well.

The idea of blowing up this team in my opinion was never a good one, and I am in favor of the Kings either finding a trade that will add a topflight scorer, or worst case scenario, hold down the fort, work with the existing squad, and make your move in the next draft.

OKC and others have proven that the draft can be your friend. If the Kings can begin to assess talent, there is a real possibility that the upcoming draft, that is predicted to be a talent laden one, can produce another player of DeAaron Fox quality.

Every reason to start getting excited Kings fans.

Domantas Sabonis is back, and will Christie have the wherewithal to play Cardwell and Sabonis at the same time. Is it just a pipe dream to have Achiuwa, Cardwell, and Sabonis all playing on the court at the same time? Wow, what a rebounding trio, and with scorers like Murray, DeRozan, and Lavine to compliment the big men, what might this team look like.

Say your prayers for coach Christie that the talent fairy will tap him on the shoulder and give him good common sense to see what he has right before him.

As I have said many times before, look no further than your bench to find talent, and stop sending quality players away where they make teams better.

The Sacramento Kings really are better than their 12-31 record reports, and the second half of the season really does matter.

Scott Perry, don't make hasty decisions, and let this team continue to gel while giving the youth of the team a chance to show what they're made of.

If you haven't gotten out to a game there is no better time than right now. These guys will get you on your feet over and over again!

Go Kings and let's tweak things and by all means not blow it up!

All the best! ★

Homelessness Crisis Remains One of Newsom's Biggest Political Liabilities



By Dan Walters, CALMatters.org

While delivering his final State of the State address and proposing his final state budget last week, Gov. Gavin Newsom clearly sought to neutralize an issue that has haunted his political career for more than two decades and could torpedo his hopes of becoming president: homelessness.

First, a bit of history.

Just months after being elected mayor of San Francisco in 2004, Newsom unveiled a plan he said would clear city streets of homeless people in 10 years. Fourteen years later, while running for governor, Newsom declared that homelessness in San Francisco had "never been worse."

He said eradicating homelessness would be a high priority and promised to appoint a homeless "czar" who could cut through red tape and intergovernmental friction to get the job done. Later, when pressed by reporters over the czar pledge, he snapped, "You want to know who's the homeless czar? I'm the homeless czar in the state of California."

Despite that self-appointment and devoting almost all of his 2020 State of the State address to homelessness, the number of unhoused Californians continued to rise to record levels. As it did, Newsom began blaming local governments for not spending

state homelessness grants effectively and threatened to withhold annual funding.

However, in 2024 State Auditor Grant Parks excoriated Newsom's own California Interagency Council on Homelessness for failing to effectively monitor and coordinate homelessness programs — even though the state had spent more than \$20 billion during Newsom's governorship.

He later reorganized the council and last year it issued a glossy "Action Plan for Preventing and Ending Homelessness." Newsom hailed it as "not just a report of our investments, but a directive for continued accountability and action towards specific quantifiable goals."

It listed multiple things that should be done to alleviate the homelessness crisis, but never mentioned how its lofty goals should be achieved nor said anything about how the state's deficit-ridden budget would pay for them.

In last week's State of the State address, Newsom sang the political version of the World War II tune, "Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive," cataloguing his accomplishments during the last seven years, including progress toward eliminating homelessness.

"When I began as governor, there was no homeless plan, no mental health plan and certainly no housing plan," Newsom told legislators. "There was no accountability and little investment. The responsibility fell to cities and counties, with little interest from Sacramento."

Newsom ticked off the efforts he had made and bragged that, "Early data, just compiled, shows that the number of unsheltered

homeless people in California dropped 9% in 2025," while "the nation saw an 18.1% overall increase in homelessness. Our investments are paying off."

He could not, however, resist another jab at local officials, saying he is "providing counties what they've been asking for: the predictable funding for housing and substance abuse treatment. No more excuses — it's time to bring people off the streets, out of encampments, into housing, into treatment. Counties need to do their job."

County officials took umbrage. The California State Association of Counties, in a statement, complained that Newsom's budget shifts the financial burden for several health and welfare programs to county governments and fails to protect them from federal reductions.

The organization also cited the new budget's omission of an annual bloc grant for homeless programs, and the administration's stalling the delivery of cash from a past allocation, "which was approved by the Legislature 18 months ago."

While Newsom cites a 9% drop in homelessness, if true it would be from a base of nearly 200,000 Californians without homes. There are still plenty of squalid encampments to be videotaped and featured on ads attacking a potential presidential candidate named Newsom two years hence.

Dan Walters is one of the most decorated and widely syndicated columnists in California history, authoring a column four times a week that offers his view and analysis of the state's political, economic, social and demographic trends. ★

Social Security Matters

I'm Divorced; Can I Get Benefits from my Ex-husband?



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: After 16 years of marriage, we were divorced. I have never remarried, but he has. When he starts collecting Social Security (he is 64 now and still working), is it true that I can claim ex-spousal benefits or does that go to the current wife? How would I find this info? **Signed: A Divorced Spouse**

Dear Divorced Spouse: The fact that your ex-husband has remarried has no influence on your ability to collect benefits based on his record. If you are eligible for ex-spouse benefits (because you did not remarry), you can get those benefits regardless of whether his current wife collects benefits on his record. In other words, both you and his current wife can both collect spousal benefits from your ex-husband's earnings record.

Your eligibility for an ex-spouse benefit is determined by comparing your own SS retirement benefit amount at full retirement age (FRA) to his — if your

own SS benefit at your FRA is less than 50% of your ex's FRA benefit entitlement, and you were married to your ex for more than 10 years, are not currently married and are at least 62 years old, then you can get a "spousal boost" (an amount added to your own Social Security retirement amount). In fact, if you have been divorced for over two years, you can get an ex-spouse benefit even though he is not yet receiving his own SS retirement benefit.

Be aware, however, if you claim any Social Security benefit (both your own SS retirement amount and your ex-spouse "spousal boost") before you reach your full retirement age, the monthly amount you get will be reduced according to how much before your full retirement age you claim. Spouse and ex-spouse benefits reach maximum at your full retirement age but are reduced if claimed earlier than your full retirement age. Claiming your benefits as an ex-spouse will also result in you receiving your own SS retirement benefit (reduced if you haven't yet reached FRA).

I suggest you contact Social Security at 1.800.772.1213 to make a telephone appointment to evaluate whether you are entitled benefits as an ex-spouse. If your own SS retirement benefit at your FRA is less

than half of your ex's FRA entitlement, you will be. To apply for those benefits you will need a copy of your divorce decree (and perhaps your marriage certificate), and your ex-husband's Social Security number (if you do not have his SSN, you can provide his date and place of birth and his parents' names, and SSA will likely be able to locate your ex's SS record).

SSA will be able to tell you what your total monthly benefit as an ex-spouse will be when you meet with them, at which point you can decide whether to claim your benefits early or wait until your FRA to achieve your maximum amount as an ex-spouse.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. ★



Finally, the United States will follow through on its NATO commitments.

That'd be the cheeky interpretation of President Donald Trump's announcement, via Truth Social, that he wants the U.S. defense budget to be \$1.5 trillion. This would represent a stunning 50% increase over the current budget and put the U.S. right around 5% of GDP, the target level that NATO countries recently adopted at Trump's insistence.

The details and follow-through will matter, but on its own terms, the Trump declaration is of epic significance.

Such a historic buildup would meet the moment -- it's never made sense that the U.S. would enter a period of heightened risk of great power conflict at a time when it has difficulty replenishing its missile stocks.

It would match the predictions of a president who enjoys throwing his weight around. If Trump wants to speak loudly and carry a big stick, it requires the resources to build and maintain the stick.

And it would match his vision of a world-class military. You can't have a Golden Dome -- Trump's project for an enhanced missile defense -- or a Golden Fleet -- his notion of a next-generation navy -- without a Golden Defense Budget.

The scale of spending contemplated here is truly astounding. A \$500 billion increase would rough-

Yes, We Need a \$1.5 Trillion Defense Budget

ly match the total annual spending of all non-U.S. NATO countries. The percentage increase would be the highest since the Korean War and double the biggest annual increases of the Reagan years.

"We still talk about the Reagan buildup," Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said in a speech last month, "and my kids and yours will someday talk about the Trump buildup."

The Trump proposal would not just be a down payment on that promise, but a big step toward fulfilling it.

If our military is highly proficient -- as demonstrated in the Venezuela raid -- it also doesn't have the materiel to wage a protracted major war.

Defense analyst Mackenzie Eaglin of the American Enterprise Institute has long been ringing the alarm. She recently noted that during the short Israel-Iran war, we fired 150, or one-quarter, of our THAAD missiles, exceeding our annual purchase rate by three times. In the Red Sea, the Navy fired more Tomahawks in January 2024 than it bought in all of 2023.

These shortfalls, as Eaglin points out, are especially disturbing when compared to the building capacity of our adversaries. Whereas the Russians make more than 300,000 artillery shells a month, we make only 40,000 155mm shells. "Beijing builds six naval combatant ships," she writes, "for every 1.8 ships the U.S. builds."

Even The New York Times -- not known for

beating the drums for more defense spending -- devoted a splashy editorial last month to the sorry state of our military-industrial base.

In his new book, "War and Power," scholar Phillips Payson O'Brien relates how wars between great powers are usually not won by brilliant battle plans, or by the commitment or proficiency of the troops. Rather, it is productive capacity -- and the ability to degrade that of the enemy while maintaining or increasing your own -- that makes the difference.

The Nazis weren't going to win the Battle of Britain when the Brits were producing twice as many aircraft as Hitler.

On top of this, a nation needs to make shrewd choices about what it is building (the Nazis also had the wrong planes for the Battle of Britain -- bombers with payloads that were too small and fighters with limited range).

The U.S. needs to make sure that it is not overinvesting in the weapons systems of the past, although a defense budget on the scale that Trump is discussing would relieve some pressure from these choices. We could very well have our traditional subs and jet fighters, and our cutting-edge drones, too.

Trump's taste for gilding everything can be over the top. It'd be a national service, though, if he manages to make the U.S. defense budget golden.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. (c) 2026 by King Features Synd., Inc. ★

Elementary Educator is ABC10 Teacher of the Month

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

SLOUGHHOUSE, CA (MPG) - Vandy Passmore, a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher of Cosumnes River Elementary School, has been recognized as Teacher of the Month for January 2026 by ABC10, a designation announced in a televised segment that aired Dec. 31.

The honor is part of ABC10's long-running Teacher of the Month program, presented in partnership with SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union and Sacramento State College of Education, which highlights educators making a positive impact on students, schools and families throughout the Sacramento region.

Passmore, who has taught for 26 years, teaches math, reading, writing, social studies, science, physical education, visual and performing arts, and technology.

In the ABC10 segment, Passmore credited her students for sustaining her enthusiasm in the classroom.

"It's the students: They keep my passion for teaching alive," she said. "I just love my students."

When asked what inspired her to



An ABC10 "Teacher of the Month" segment that aired Dec. 31 features Vandy Passmore of Cosumnes River Elementary School, recognized as Teacher of the Month for January 2026, as she is interviewed by television reporter Mark S. Allen. Courtesy photo

become a teacher, Passmore said she wanted to make a lasting difference.

"I wanted to change lives, and I love seeing the 'aha' moment every day in their lives," she said.

Principal Ashley Hannon praised Passmore's humility and dedication during the segment.

"She is the type of person who is so humble," Hannon said. "Everything that we all feel about her - to see it come to life and to see it told to her - is always such a great experience. She's amazing. I'm so happy for her."

Several of Passmore's students were also featured in the broadcast, describing her as "incredible," "an amazing person" and "very kind and sweet."

As part of the recognition, Passmore received a plaque and a \$1,000 award from SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union. She is also eligible for ABC10's Teacher of the Year honor, which includes a \$5,000 prize to be announced in spring 2026.

Passmore said she was surprised and grateful for the recognition.

"Thank you so much," she said. "I am so honored and blessed. I just have the



Vandy Passmore works the registration table during a PTA event at Cosumnes River Elementary on Jan. 10. Photo by Gail Bullen

best students this year, and I love my job."

Beyond her classroom teaching, Passmore has played a leadership role at Cosumnes River Elementary, previously serving as chapter adviser for the National Elementary Honor Society, a national program that recognizes students in grades 4-6 for character, citizenship, leadership and service. During her tenure, she organized induction ceremonies honoring fifth- and sixth-grade students from 2017 through 2019.

Passmore also shared advice for families during the segment, emphasizing collaboration between home and school.

"Education is a shared partnership," she said. "When families and teachers work together, students are best supported in becoming independent lifelong learners." ★

SECURITY LOGS

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

Dec. 31

2:35 p.m., A guest of a Reynosa Drive resident was in North Gate visitor lane. Driver and resident passenger presented a current guest pass to the gate officer, who opened the gate arm. Gate arm remained in open position when vehicle proceeded toward the gate. Once vehicle rear end lined up with a gate arm, gate arm started to close and made contact with vehicle's trunk, slightly damaging radio antenna. Damage does not allow antenna to retract into closed position.

Jan. 1

1:55 p.m., Dispatch was notified by a resident that a blue pickup was in the back area near Lake Calero "doing donuts." Patrol arrived to the area and observed a blue pickup near the Lake Calero levee. Patrol attempted to make contact with the pickup, but the vehicle left the area.

Jan. 3

8:49 a.m. While patrolling Lake Calero, a Black 2008 Chevy Silverado 2500 was observed stuck in a flooded-over road track south of Lake Calero near Gnome Trail. Dispatch was notified after retrieving license plate information.

3:45 p.m., Call of suspicious vehicle across Ventana Drive. Patrol made contact with reporting party, noted as same vehicle that was previously reported stuck at Lake Calero. Pickup belongs to guest at Ventana Drive who was last checked in at 12:22 p.m. Patrol unable to contact resident. Sacramento Sheriff's Department was contacted to move vehicle.

Jan. 4

12:01 p.m. Dispatch was notified of a suspicious vehicle, green minivan, located in front of Zeta Broadband at Cantova Way. Patrol made contact with a female adult asleep in the back of the van. She was informed she was trespassing on private property and must vacate the area immediately. Subject was compliant and vacated the area without further incident.

1:08 p.m. Dispatch was notified of a black truck reported to be driving recklessly in the Ventana area. Patrol arrived in the area and located the black truck, made contact with the driver, identified as guest of Ventana Drive. Advised to drive safely and follow community rules or he would be trespassed and no longer permitted in the community. Driver was compliant and agreed to follow community rules.

2:20 p.m. Report of street flooding at Pescado Circle and Lago Drive near Pescado Circle 12 Park. Upon arrival, RMCS D patrol located strong water leak front of Pescado Circle 9 Park, with water coming from under the ground, seeping in between asphalt and the concrete sidewalk, and water coming from the street water valve. RMCS D Water Department advised and enroute.

Jan. 6

2 a.m., Report of vehicles speeding on De la Cruz. Party reports third night in a row that vehicles have sped down De la Cruz and to Lake Clementia and back out onto Murieta Parkway. Arrived at Murieta Parkway, Lake Clementia and de la Cruz. Subjects gone on arrival. Remaining in area.

3 a.m., Report of vehicle speeding in area near Callaway and Murieta South Parkway. Vehicle is black Lexus. Subject was observed and cited for failure to stop at stop sign on De la Cruz and Murieta Parkway shortly before incident. After

running stop sign, subject was seen leaving North community and heard speeding down Jackson Highway. Call about a vehicle speeding in south came in shortly after.

Found subject turning from Reynosa and exiting south community upon arrival. Advised dispatch to notify Sheriff's Department or CHP for any more incoming calls due to reckless, dangerous behavior. This is ongoing issue with this resident. In past interactions subject appeared intoxicated and stated, "You have to catch me." Following this individual seems to make matters worse.

Jan. 10

1:36 p.m. Patrol was dispatched to a parking complaint on Via Bernini. Party stated that vehicles were blocking the roadway and making it impassable. Upon arrival it was observed that though vehicles were parked on either side of the street, there was room to pass. Patrol cleared the scene.

Jan. 11

11:43 a.m. Patrol was dispatched to a call for service regarding an individual operating a dirt bike in between the area of Lake Clementia and Lake Chesbro. Officer was unable to locate any subjects in either area, nor heard any disruptions.

Jan. 13

12:12 p.m., Sgt. Arino was dispatched to a welfare check to Rio Circle. Reporting party stated he has not talked to his father in five days. Upon arrival Sgt. Arino made contact with a neighbor, asking if they had seen the resident; they stated it had also been awhile.

Sgt. Arino attempted contact at the front door but was unsuccessful. Two Amazon packages were found at the door. After conducting a perimeter check of the residence all doors were found to be secured.

Sgt. Arino observed through open windows a vacuum cleaner plugged in and meat that had been defrosted in the sink. Multiple calls were placed to the residence, all being unsuccessful. Reporting party was notified to contact Sacramento County Sheriff's Department to conduct a further welfare check and possibly gain entry.

1:34 Sgt. Arino, after conducting a welfare check of residence, contacted Sac Metro Fire to gain access to Rio Circle. SMFD gained entry through a rear window. Preliminary search of the house was conducted resulting in SMFD finding the male resident deceased. Next of kin was notified. Coroner was contacted by SMFD.

Jan. 15

7:55 p.m., Report of debris on Jackson Road obstructing flow of traffic in westbound lane just west of Rancho Murieta CSD Security. Upon arrival, patrol located numerous clothing items scattered in the westbound lane for approximately 100 yards. RMCS D activated patrol vehicle emergency lights, stopped Jackson Road westbound traffic for several minutes and cleared the traffic lane of the debris. Traffic unobstructed both ways.

Jan. 16

3:32 p.m., Patrol observed a male adult sitting on the side of Jackson Road near Murieta South Parkway. Patrol made contact with the subject and ascertained that he was homeless, hungry and stranded.

He requested transportation to the next town in an effort to get back to San Francisco. Patrol advised that he was unable to transport but gave him some food and water. Man stated that he hadn't eaten in two days.

Officer advised him to please stay back from the highway and wished him luck in his endeavors. ★

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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Blood Need Urgent at Jan. 26 Drive

Vitalant, the Sacramento blood bank, is calling for more donors because of a critical blood shortage, and Rancho Murieta residents can help.

Vitalant will hold its next Rancho Murieta Community Blood Drive from noon to 6:15 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 26 at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 14673 Cantova Way. The event is sponsored by the Rancho Murieta Women's Club and the Knights of Columbus.

Appointments can be made online at donors.vitalant.org using blood drive code SMFM053 or by calling Vitalant at 877-258-4825. Walk-ins will be accepted as space permits.

Donors will receive a \$2 off coupon from Go 4 Pizza and be entered into a drawing for a \$50 Go 4 Pizza gift card donated by Carole Thames of Town and Country Real Estate. Vitalant also will hold a separate drawing for one of 26 \$500 gift cards.

Eat well and drink plenty of water before donating, and bring a photo ID. For eligibility questions, call 877-258-4825 or visit vitalant.org. One donation can save more than one life: There's no substitute for volunteer blood donors.

Camellias Featured at Jan. 27 Garden Club Meeting

The Rancho Murieta Garden Club's Jan. 27 member meeting will focus on camellias, with guest speaker Greg Gayton of Green Acres sharing tips on growing and maintaining these winter-blooming shrubs.

Gayton typically brings

plants to give away when he speaks.

The Rancho Murieta Garden Club will also distribute its 2025-26 Member Handbook and California Garden Clubs Inc. nursery discount cards.

Thanks go to Margaret Watson Hopkins for creating the handbooks.

Peggy DeMello is preparing a raffle with prizes, and Diane Goebel will provide refreshments. Guests are welcome, and the first meeting is free for new attendees.

Doors open at 6 p.m. for refreshments and the raffle, with the program beginning at 7 p.m.



Deadline to Order Senior Banners is Jan. 31

The deadline to order senior banners for the Class of 2026 is Jan. 31. Scan the QR code to access the order form, cost, picture size for uploading and payment detail.

Email questions to RMSENIORFLAGS@gmail.com. Snag your Rancho Murieta Parkway senior banner today.

Special Speaker Set for Feb. 4 Caregiver Support Meeting

The Rancho Murieta Caregiver Support Group meets on the first Wednesday of each month from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the RMA Building. The next meeting will be held

Feb. 4, and no signup is required to attend.

The group offers a supportive, confidential space for caregivers navigating the challenges of caring for a loved one.

Meetings are facilitated, and privacy is a priority.

A special speaker will join the Feb. 4 meeting to provide guidance on navigating caregiving resources, including affordable home care, adult day-care facilities, financial assistance and safety considerations.

For more information, contact Nan Parquette at 916-354-2281.

CSD Launches New Community Alert System

The Rancho Murieta Community Services District has launched a new alert system to notify residents about emergencies inside the community. The SISA Smart Alert Platform by HQE Systems is replacing the CodeRed system that was in place for years.

Staff has moved most telephone numbers from CodeRed to SISA. Residents may now enroll directly at rmcsd.sircom.org/subscribe. Once you have enrolled, you will be able to update addresses, phone numbers and email address at rmcsd.sircom.org/account.

The new system was first used on Jan. 4 to notify residents about a water-main break on Pescado Drive. Residents also are encouraged to sign up for the Sacramento County Emergency system to be notified of area emergencies such as fires, floods and evacuations at www.sacramento-alert.org. ★

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PTA Scores with Mother-Son Dodgeball Night

Story and photos by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

SLOUGHHOUSE, CA (MPG) - Cosumnes River Elementary School's multipurpose room echoed with cheers, laughter and the thud of rubber balls on Jan. 10 as the school's PTA hosted Legends & Their Ladies in a dodgeball tournament designed to give mothers and sons dedicated time to bond.

The "Game On!" event brought together boys from transitional kindergarten through sixth grade and the important mother figures in their lives for an evening that combined teamwork, friendly rivalry and plenty of fun.

The night began with mixed teams organized by grade level, allowing moms and sons to play side by side. As the evening progressed, the format shifted to head-to-head matchups dubbed "Legends vs. Ladies," in which mothers faced off against their sons to loud applause from the sidelines.

After a dinner break, playful consolation games mixed age groups, before championship rounds returned to the original teams, culminating in a final showdown between sixth-grade boys competing for the title.

PTA President Courtney Reid said the idea behind the event was to create something active and inclusive.

"We always try to come up with a fun, memorable name for our events," Reid said. "Since we wanted to include all mother-figure participants, we chose to use 'ladies,' and 'legends' just seemed like the perfect complement."

The decision to center the night around dodgeball came after considering several options.

"We knew we wanted an activity that was physical and allowed the moms and sons to work together," Reid said. "After hearing positive feedback about similar events from parent groups at other schools, we settled on dodgeball."

According to Reid, the concept exceeded expectations.

"It went better than I could have imagined," she said. "When they weren't playing, the kids were just as engaged watching and supporting their peers. It created great bonding not only between moms and sons, but also across grade levels."

Food was intentionally kept simple so the focus could remain on the games. Pizza, cookies, chips and "dirty sodas" – flavored soda drinks served by local vendor Palm Tree Pop – were offered during an intermission around 5 p.m., allowing players to refuel before heading back onto the court.

The event was organized by Reid and PTA Treasurer Christine Walker, with Mackenzi Berkheimer serving as day-of coordinator. Additional help came from PTA board members Michelle Mazzola, Meredith Wilkins and Brittany Bunnell, as well as school staff and parent volunteers. New principal Ashley Hannon and teachers Melissa Fite and Vandy Passmore attended to cheer on participants, while paraeducator Denny Elgin and several dads volunteered as referees. Dan Reid served as the tournament emcee.

The evening was also intentionally designed as a counterpart to another



Emcee Dan Reid signals the start of another moms-vs.-sons game during a PTA-hosted dodgeball tournament at Cosumnes River Elementary School on Jan. 10.



Mothers discover they have just as much fun on the court as their sons.



The youngest medal winners enjoy the moment alongside their mothers.



Students enjoy pizza during the tournament intermission.



A mother-son team sprints into action as play resumes.



Players from both sides scramble for control of a dodgeball.

longstanding PTA tradition.

"This event is designed to be the equivalent of our Daughters & Dates Dance," Reid said, noting that while many PTA events are open to entire families, these gatherings are meant to provide focused bonding time.

Reid said some of the most meaningful feedback came from mothers who were initially hesitant about the event.

"I think I had five different moms tell me they were kind of dreading the event because they didn't love the idea of dodgeball ... and then ended up loving it," Reid said.

One comment, she added, stood out in

particular.

"One sixth-grade mom said the only reason she came was that it's her son's last year at CRES," Reid said. "She later made a point of finding me to say it was the favorite PTA mother-son event she's attended in all seven years."

That response helped organizers confirm that the combination of playful competition, teamwork and shared experience struck the right balance.

"After this dodgeball tournament, I think we've finally found an event that's truly worth repeating," Reid said. "It's definitely our plan to hold it again next year."

See more tournament photos at therivervalleytimes.com. ★



As the last player standing on his team, Dax Sutliff gets help from Principal Ashley Hannon.



The "Legends" line up and prepare to take on the "Ladies" in a friendly dodgeball matchup.



Jack Price eagerly tries a "dirty soda," decorated with a festive umbrella.



Quick footwork and fast reactions help players dodge a flying ball.

Museum Executive Director Amanda Meeker Set to Retire

California Museum News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - California Museum Executive Director Amanda Meeker announced that she will retire in the summer of 2026, after more than a decade in the role and 28 years of service to the Museum. A respected cultural leader, Meeker has dedicated her career to advancing the Museum's mission to educate people about California's rich history, diversity and culture.

During her tenure, Meeker has played a central role in solidifying the California Museum's position as a trusted civic institution, expanding its reach, modernizing its exhibitions, strengthening its public-facing programs and deepening its commitment to inclusive, community-centered storytelling. Under her leadership, the Museum has become known for elevating underrepresented histories and tackling contemporary issues shaping California today.

"Amanda has been pivotal in establishing the Museum's identity as a center of storytelling representative of the diverse people and cultures that make up the Golden State," said Anne Marie Petrie, Chair of the California Museum Board of Trustees. "Her passion for public education and her steady leadership has advanced the Museum's ability to share knowledge, spark dialogue, and inspire civic engagement."

Meeker joined the then-Golden State Museum as its first official employee ahead of its opening in 1998, after having supported its development as a student intern. From the start, she helped shape the Museum's vision, developing exhibitions and programs that reflected California's complex social, political and cultural



California Museum Executive Director Amanda Meeker announced that she will retire in the summer of 2026. Photo courtesy of the California Museum

history. Since being appointed executive director in 2015, she has guided the Museum through a period of unprecedented growth and change, increasing its relevance to the communities it serves.

Throughout her career, Meeker has been known for her collaborative leadership style, fostering strong partnerships with educators, community organizations, artists, scholars and civic leaders across the state. Her work has reinforced the Museum's role as a place of historical storytelling and as a dynamic forum for public engagement.

"It has been a privilege to steward the California

Museum's mission over the years, working alongside dedicated staff, board members, educators and community partners who believe in the power of history to inform and inspire positive change," Meeker reflected. "The Museum's strength comes from the people whose stories it uplifts, and I'm confident it will continue to grow as a space where Californians see themselves reflected for generations to come."

The California Museum Board of Trustees has engaged executive search partner Isaacson Miller to help identify Meeker's successor, someone who will build on her

legacy while leading the institution into its next chapter.

"Amanda's retirement marks the close of a remarkable career. The Board expresses its deep appreciation for her vision and integrity that helped define who we are today," Petrie remarked. "Her legacy of leadership will continue to inspire those who follow her footsteps in maintaining the museum's mission. But most of all she will be missed for her kindness and incredible capacity to care for all of us here and her community."

As she prepares for retirement, Meeker looks forward to traveling and pursuing personal projects, while

remaining an advocate for museums and public history.

The California Museum - home of the California Hall of Fame—focuses on the state's rich history, its diversity and its unique influence on the world of ideas, innovation, art and culture. Through interactive experiences, the Museum inspires visitors to make a mark on history. Located at 1020 O Street in the March Fong Eu Secretary of State complex, the Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. General admission is \$8-\$10. Plan a visit at californiamuseum.org ★



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