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Gold River Messenger

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Open Bocce Play Comes to Gold River Park



Cordova Recreation & Park District has supported the conversion of an abandoned pit into open play Bocce ball courts, with the project advancing toward a board item that could be placed on the July budget planning meeting for the 2026-27 fiscal year. Photo courtesy of Mark Ziegler

By Mark Ziegler

GOLD RIVER, CA (MPG) - Inspired by pre-existing bocce ball courts and leagues in locales surrounding Gold River, a grass roots group of Gold River residents began open play bocce ball in early September 2025, hoping to bring this recreational activity to the Gold River community.

Rediscovering the long-abandoned horseshoe pit in the Gold River Park adjacent to the Gold River Discovery School, it was imagined that the space could be repurposed to immediately support open



A group of Gold River residents have introduced bocce play on Wednesdays in addition to Thursdays at Gold River Park, drawing a crowd of Gold River Discovery School students. Photo courtesy of Mark Ziegler

play bocce ball. informed upon review of "Open" bocce rules are the United States Bocce

Federation website. Additional descriptions of more advanced league and professional play include "Punto, Raffa and Vollo" games.

The United States Bocce Federation is a nonprofit, charitable corporation organized to promote the sport of bocce, and it is a member of the Federation Internationale de Boules and the Confederazione Boccistica Internazionale. Bocce is played worldwide.

According to their rules everyone can play. There is no race, sex, or age discrimination in the sport of bocce. You need a set of 8

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February Raises Awareness of Teen Dating Violence

Soroptimist International of Rancho Cordova and Gold River

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - Romantic relationships between teenagers are incredibly complicated. The undertaking of a relationship, very often, requires more maturity than most teens have developed. These relationships are more likely to be riddled with problems include communication, jealousy and selfishness.

As a result, teenagers are more likely to be involved in relationships that are unhealthy, violent and/or abusive. If you are a teenager involved in a romantic relationship it is important to understand the behaviors that may point to an unhealthy and/or abusive relationship.

For Parents/Guardians: Reg Flags in Teenage Relationships

Unhealthy or abusive relationships can take many forms, and there is no single behavior that automatically defines a relationship as unhealthy. However, certain behaviors should raise concern. If your teen shares that they are experiencing any of the following, or if you have noticed these warning signs, it may indicate trouble in their relationship. These behaviors include excessive jealousy or insecurity, invasions of your teen's privacy, unexpected bouts of anger or rage, unusual moodiness, pressuring a partner into unwanted sexual activity, blaming your teen for problems in the relationship while avoiding personal responsibility, controlling tendencies, an explosive temper, preventing your teen from going out or communicating with others, constantly monitoring your teen's whereabouts and checking in on their activities and companions, making false accusations, vandalizing or damaging personal property, taunting or bullying and threatening or causing physical violence.

If your partner frequently engages in these behaviors, it may be wise to speak with someone with whom you feel comfortable. Adults who have experience with relationships may be able to provide advice that can help you to determine if you are in any danger.

For Teens: "If You Think You Are in an Abusive Relationship"

If your partner exhibits any of the behaviors

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Local Teens Deliver Thousands of Valentines to Children's Hospitals

Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation News Release

GOLD RIVER, CA (MPG) - Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation is preparing for its largest Valentine's Day Drive yet, with more than 3,500 handmade Valentines and an anticipated 1,500 toys and teen items collected for children's hospitals across the country.

Founded in 2024 by Aislyne Hartman, a senior at Oak Ridge High School, and Sophia Alonso, a junior at Ponderosa High School, Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation was created to encourage youth-led philanthropy while focusing on children and teens facing medical challenges. What began as a small local effort has grown into a multi-county initiative involving dozens of schools and over 3,000 student volunteers



This will be the third year Sophia Alonso and Aislyne Hartman deliver toys and teen items to Shriners Children's Hospital in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of Norcal Gift From The Heart

working together to spread kindness. "This year's response has been amazing," said co-founder Aislyne

Hartman. "Seeing thousands of handmade cards filled with encouraging messages from students of all ages reminds us how

powerful simple acts of kindness can be."

Many of the Valentines and donated items will be

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Open Bocce Play Comes to Gold River Park

Continued from page 1

balls, and a ninth target ball called a “jack” or “pallino.” Games can be played one-on-one (singles), pairs (doubles), triples or foursomes. Official courts are rectangular 86.92’ in length and 13.12’ in width, however “unofficial” courts are found throughout the United States varying in size. Court surfaces have great variation such grass, carpet, crushed stone, dirt, oyster shells and clay.

Early this past fall, a small local group of bocce enthusiasts confronted the existing defunct horseshoe pit at the park. Constructed 30 years ago, the structure was a very formal concrete curb foundation enclosing a 60 x 45-foot pad filled with decomposed granite. The horseshoe features remaining included a couple submerged deteriorated timbers. Much of the pad consisted of weeds, large craters filled with mounded cobbles and trash.

Observing this obsolete hidden treasure, the group readily determined it was possible to play the center third of the court which was relatively intact. The first challenge was inviting the residing

flock of Canadian geese to vacate this section of the park. After completing that task and an hour of raking, hoeing and shoveling, open bocce play commenced in Gold River to the delight and excitement of the bocce players. One of the main benefits realized was the ability to play in our own “backyard” and not have to drive to a remote location.

The group, via communication by an informal growing email list, continued to play on Thursday mornings throughout the fall. Volunteer work by the group was focused on weed and debris removal, cobble stone abatement, ant colony closure and countless repeated episodes of raking and re-raking the decomposed granite surface to get to a smooth surface suitable for bocce play.

Each week the size of the group continued to grow as word of mouth spread. Upon realizing the potential for progress on this project, the group members began to discuss future possibilities for the site. Mid autumn, an email was sent to the Cordova Recreation and Park District explaining the group’s “organization” and informal goals

of continued improvements to the bocce court, as well as initiating a discussion to construct real bocce ball courts there.

The next day, three members of the park district development and planning staff, startling a bocce volunteer raking the surface, walked on site to identify this structure which had been lost to park district memory. Having received and reviewed the email request, the district staff appeared pleasantly surprised to learn of the local group converting the lost space to a functioning recreational resource in their domain.

They opined that the site really was ready made to proceed with planning to convert to bocce courts. They shared that the district has recently supported the construction of bocce courts at other parks and appeared interested to hear of this endeavor. Armed with cameras and measuring tape, the staff established an initial project framework to support bocce court development in Gold River going forward.

Next steps for the group included scheduling a meeting with the Gold River representative

on the Cordova Recreation and Park District Board. On Sept. 29, in the pouring rain, the bocce group met at the park with Mark Matus, Gold River director on the park board. He too was very enthusiastic to hear of the group’s efforts and was supportive of advancing the project toward a board item that could be placed on the July budget planning meeting for the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Continuing with weekly play has illuminated a growing list of positive revelations. Compared to 30 years ago, the park now provides wonderful shade compliments of the mature trees surrounding the bocce court. What great foresight the district had to plant those and to be the recipient of that resource today.

Gold River and the surrounding areas house a demographic of middle and senior age residents who benefit from the fun, low impact, competitive and social elements of bocce ball. Gold River Park truly has grown into a space that feels like somewhere you want to hang out with your neighbors and retreat from the day day-to-day routines we all experience.

One more unexpected lively occurrence is due to the bocce court’s proximity to the San Juan School District’s Gold River Discovery School. When the group is playing, many of the students are at recess or PE class and stop to spectate and cheer on some of our amazing shots! It is amazing how such a simple moment can turn a 70 and 13 year old’s day into a golden encounter.

In the new year, the park district staff once again engaged with the group on progress with improvements to the existing court and updates to plans of constructing formal courts by revising and utilizing the present foundation. The group has introduced bocce play on Wednesdays in addition to Thursdays and would like to put together opportunities for mixed and women’s bocce.

Webpage development for posting on social media is being considered. The group hopes to share and expand this activity throughout the community.

For more information, contact bocce member Mark Ziegler at 916-549-7975, marklziegler@gmail.com. ★

Local Teens Deliver Thousands of Valentines to Children’s Hospitals

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delivered to Shriners Children’s Hospital in Sacramento, but due to the overwhelming number of cards collected this year, the foundation will also send overflow Valentines to Marshall Hospital in El Dorado County and Oklahoma Children’s Hospital, in Oklahoma, extending the impact of the drive beyond California.

In addition to supporting pediatric patients, Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation is expanding its mission again this year through an intergenerational giving initiative. In partnership with AARP and Wish of a Lifetime,



Student Ambassador, Alexis Davis, delivers roses to seniors at Creekside Oaks Retirement Community in Folsom. Photo courtesy of Norcal Gift From The Heart

the foundation will help deliver more than 500 roses to senior centers across Sacramento and El Dorado Counties, ensuring older adults also feel remembered and valued on Valentine’s Day. The

initiative connects student volunteers with community elders and reinforces the importance of compassion across generations.

Co-founder Sophia Alonso said, “We never want cards to



The foundation provides all the necessary cardmaking supplies to schools in the community as part of their Valentine Drive. Photo courtesy of Norcal Gift From The Heart

go to waste. Knowing that we are supporting children and seniors makes all the hard work worth it.”

Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation accepts donations and

volunteers year-round. For more information or to get involved, visit Norcalgiftfromtheheart.org or follow Norcal Gift From the Heart Foundation on Facebook and Instagram. ★



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SCOE Holds Ceremony for Fall Graduates

Achievements Demonstrate "A Foundation No One Can Take Away"

Sacramento County Office of Education News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The new year got off to an inspirational start as 145 students from Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) schools and student programs received diplomas at a ceremony on Jan. 6 at the Scottish Rite Masonic Center.

In his keynote address, Pastor Timothy Raymond Jemmott of the HAWK Institute ("Pastor Tim" to students) praised the graduates for continuing to strive despite significant difficulties.

"You did not quit," he said. "Some of you came through things that no one knows about. Late nights. Early mornings. Heartbreaks. Losses. Heavy responsibilities. And still, you continued."

The pastor also commended the "village" of teachers, staff, administrators, counselors, and family members who helped students get to this moment.

"You are standing here today



More than 100 students from SCOE's Community School and Senior Extension programs received their diplomas in a ceremony this January. Photo courtesy of SCOE

because a community surrounded you, they lifted you, they pushed you – and they believed that you were worth the investment."

Deputy Superintendent Nancy

Herota also congratulated the graduates for their hard work and resilience in the face of unusual obstacles. She reminded them that their future may be brighter given all they've been through,

quoting American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin: "If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go."

Among the graduates was

Alicia Rositas, who earned her diploma through SCOE's Senior Extension Program. Despite significant personal hardship, Alicia finished her coursework while welcoming her daughter, displaying resilience and perseverance to complete her studies.

Daniel Hernandez, principal of Ethel Phillips Elementary School and president of Capitol Charter, has nominated Alicia for regional recognition through Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Region 3. She is now enrolled in college and aspires to a career in healthcare.

For Alicia and each of her fellow graduates, a diploma represents the culmination of one chapter and the promise of more successful chapters ahead.

"Today we are here to honor not just your completion," Pastor Jemmott said. "We are here to honor your continuation."

"This achievement is now a part of you, a foundation no one can take away," concluded Deputy Superintendent Herota. ★

Children's Oral Health Matters



Nearly one in four California children aged 5 to 11 have untreated tooth decay, a rate higher than the national average, and it remains the most common chronic disease among children. Photo courtesy of Freepik

Sacramento County News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - Sacramento County Public Health (SCPH) remains committed to reducing preventable dental disease and expanding access to care during National Children's Dental Health Month and throughout the year.

Nearly one in four California children aged 5 to 11 have untreated tooth decay, a rate higher than the national average, and it remains the most common chronic disease among children. Tooth decay causes pain, infections, missed school days, learning setbacks and costly emergency visits.

Sacramento County has nearly 287,000 children aged 14 and under, representing more than 18 percent of the county's population. SCPH Oral Health Program data shows many children continue to face barriers to routine dental care, particularly in communities with limited access to providers.

The good news is Sacramento County Public Health offers education and service resources for families to better care for their children's oral health.

How Families Can Protect a Child's Oral Health

Brush children's teeth twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste. Daily habits reduce the risk of cavities and support long-term oral health.

Schedule a child's first dental visit by age one.

Limit sugary foods and drinks.

Use preventive treatments such as fluoride varnish and dental sealants when recommended. Fluoride varnish and sealants reduce cavity risk when used early.

Oral Health Resources for Children and Families

Sacramento County Public Health Oral Program: Call (916) 875-5869 or email oral-health@sacounty.gov to get connected to dental care and for additional resources.

Sacramento Covered: Call (916) 414-4833 or visit <https://cohewo.org/> to find a dentist or insurance. Assistance is available in many languages.

Early Smiles Sacramento: Call (916) 245-1674 or visit www.centerfororalhealth.org/early-smiles-sacramento/. The Center for Oral Health program assists with connecting underserved children with the dental care they need.

It's a true team effort to improve children's oral health in Sacramento County. It requires action from local governments, families, schools, healthcare providers and community partners.

To learn how to make an appointment with a Medi-Cal dentist, and for more oral health resources and dental care information, visit the Sacramento County Public Health Oral Health Program website. ★

McDaniel Named Women's Transportation Seminar Member of the Year



Pictured is Mikki McDaniel, Sacramento County Department of Transportation (SacDOT) principal planner. Photo courtesy of Sacramento County

Sacramento County News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) Sacramento Chapter has named Sacramento County Department of Transportation (SacDOT) Principal Planner, Mikki McDaniel, the organization's member of the year at the annual Women's Transportation Seminar Scholarship and Awards Program in Sacramento on Jan. 28.

McDaniel first joined SacDOT as an assistant civil engineer in 2019, after moving over from the Department of Regional Parks. At SacDOT, she has led the development of the Sacramento County Active Transportation Plan. The plan is a guide for county staff, public officials, residents and developers to build a balanced transportation system that supports and encourages active modes of travel.

McDaniel sees herself as a public servant whose mission is to get people where they need to go by bus, bicycle, walking and rolling. Several of her projects at SacDOT highlight her drive to improve alternative forms of transportation around unincorporated Sacramento County. They

include the County's Zero Emission Bus Plan, Safe Routes to School Program, Bell Streets Safe Routes to the School, Stockton Boulevard Complete Streets and the Whitney Avenue Road Diet and Multimodal Improvements Project.

"It wasn't a natural fit – Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) Receptions Chair, but I learned a lot from being the gatherer. We need joyful spaces to meet with our colleagues from other agencies – to learn and connect – it all translates into better projects for Sacramento County in the end," said McDaniel.

With degrees in engineering and city and regional planning, McDaniel was promoted to her current role as principal planner where she is now spearheading a unique project that will provide safer pedestrian travel and better accessibility for the elderly and members of the disability community.

McDaniel says the recognition from the Women's Transportation Seminar is a real surprise and hopes to continue assisting Women's Transportation Seminar in promoting the advancement of women in the transportation industry. ★

Sacramento County Honored with North State BIA 'Friend of Housing' Award

Sacramento County News Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG) - Sacramento County has been recognized by the North State Building Industry Association (BIA) with its prestigious Friend of Housing Award, honoring the county's ongoing efforts to improve housing development processes and make Sacramento County the best place to build in the region.

The award was presented on Friday, Jan. 30, during the North State BIA Installation of Officers

Dinner, marking a rare distinction for the organization. Traditionally awarded to an individual, this year's honor was presented to the entire Sacramento County team in recognition of broad, organization-wide improvements that support housing development.

The recognition reflects Sacramento County's commitment to improving customer service, modernizing internal processes and updating county codes, fees and programs to create a more efficient, transparent and responsive development experience



Sacramento County was awarded the Friend of Housing Award on Friday, Jan. 30, during the North State BIA Installation of Officers Dinner. Photo courtesy of Sacramento County

for applicants and partners. These changes are designed to reduce barriers, improve predictability and foster stronger collaboration with the development community.

"Receiving this award is a meaningful acknowledgment of the significant progress our teams have made to better serve our customers and support housing production," said

Dave Defanti, Deputy County Executive for the Community Services Agency.

"This recognition reflects our commitment to improved processes, strong customer service and being a trusted partner. I'm incredibly proud of the work being done across Sacramento County to help get much-needed housing built."

In recent years, Sacramento County has implemented a series of improvements aimed at streamlining development review, enhancing the customer experience

and creating a more business-friendly environment, all while maintaining the county's commitment to public health, safety and community standards.

While this recognition is an honor and milestone for Sacramento County, the work is ongoing.

"This award is not a finish line, it's a very good sign that we're on the right path," said Defanti. "We will continue to improve, innovate and partner with our community to ensure Sacramento County remains the best place to build in the region." ★



Heartspace Valentine

Ladies and Gentlemen, did anyone teach you about him or her before you got into a relationship? Most likely not! But **Susan Allan** says we really need some tips if you are tired of imploding and exploding partners. And here's a real reality check. Most relationship pain is not caused by lack of love. So what does cause that pain?

Susan says it's the work that is the foundation of **Heartspace**, and boils down to a live trilogy which teaches what most of us were never taught about dating, partnership, and intimacy. She gets into it all in "Three Essential Guides of Lifelong Love." With her 25 years as a coach, I'm sure she has probably heard it all or most of it. She has taught **Heartspace** to thousands of people, and told me on POPPTALK that it's clear that relationships don't fail because of a lack of love. They fall apart when couples don't understand what is required...SKILLS! So she shared these Top Ten **Heartspace** Tips for Creating Lifelong Love.

- 1. Consciously Choose Your Partner.** Love thrives with someone whose values and goals align with yours. Never settle for a mismatch.
- 2. Discuss These Heartspace 19 Domains Of A Successful Marriage And Agree On Specifics.** A. Sex B. Monogamy. C. Morality D. Love E. Health F. Money G. Investments H. Appearance I. Home J. Careers K. Fun L. Family M. Meals N. Children O. Child-raising P. Lifestyle and Hobbies Q. Religion and Spirituality R. Chores S. Retirement.
- 3. Attraction Is Not Compatibility.** Great chemistry cannot be altered. Find that someone and build compatibility that sustains love.
- 4. Study Your Partner's World View**

And Motivate Instead Of Arguing Or Ignoring.

5. Use The Language Of Feelings And Needs Developed By Nonviolent Communication. Love grows when partners express needs instead of judgments.

6. Always Calm Yourself Before You Communicate. Brain-Breathing is the gateway to peaceful, productive conversations throughout marriage.

7. Master Your Conversation To Prevent Conflict By Transforming Conversations Into Peaceful Solutions.

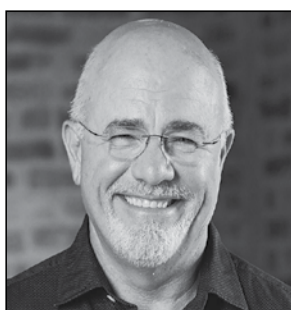
8. Recommit Yourself To Mastering Marriage Daily, So It Keeps Evolving.

9. Create Intimacy On All Levels. That includes emotional safety, thrilling touch, and sacred sexuality.

10. Practice Loving Your Partner Every Day. Lifelong love means choosing empathy, honesty, and cooperation, especially during challenges.

According to Susan, When love is approached consciously, relationships don't just survive, they evolve, deepen, and become more fulfilling every day and decade, so that vow of two into one is fulfilled. I can attest to that conscious relationship. My dear Rick and I were married 53 years when he passed, but that spirit of his being with me continues to this day over two years after his passing. Love is a building process and every day a new brick is added so that that relationship I call it your construction of love. If you need more information, check out "Three Essential Guides of Lifelong Love" and discover what Susan Allan calls her Heartspace LOVE Trilogy. ★

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY AND ALL YEAR LONG LOVE!



Dave Ramsey

Dave Ramsey Says They Represent Security to Her

Dear Dave,

My wife and I have paid off all of our credit card debt, but she doesn't want to follow your suggestion to cut up the cards and close the accounts. She wants us to keep the cards in a safe deposit box at the bank, and use them for nothing but emergencies. I think this has something to do with the fact she grew up in a poor family. We're doing okay, but it makes me wonder if some part of her is afraid of being poor again. We both know this isn't what you recommend, but what can I do to convince her we should get rid of the credit cards once and for all?

– Geoff

Dear Geoff,

Honestly, I'm not sure I'd approach this with the idea of convincing her of something. Under the circumstances, maybe it'd be a better idea to start off by having a gentle, understanding conversation, and

talking things through.

I say this because one of the things you mentioned is that she grew up poor. In my mind, this could mean that the credit cards represent security for her. But, if you had \$10,000 or so set aside for emergencies, you'd have the security of knowing that a transmission repair, or a new water heater wouldn't really be an emergency—it'd be reduced to a minor inconvenience. On top of that, having an actual cash emergency fund sitting there would mean you wouldn't have to go right back into debt again when something goes wrong.

There are lots of deep emotions involved in this situation, Geoff. Let her know you understand her concerns, and that you respect and sympathize with everything she has experienced. But also explain how financial security wouldn't be disappearing by doing this. The credit cards would be replaced by your very own money. In addition, you'd also be substituting what the credit cards do

with a debit card.

After this, ask her if there's a reasonable amount you two could have in the bank that would make her feel comfortable, and take away the worry and stress. Talk it out, see if you can settle on an amount, and then agree that when you've saved and hit that number, the cards get cut up and you close the account.

You'll have to be patient and understanding. Above all, you'll have to communicate and work together as a team on this. But trust me, it'll be worth it!

– Dave

Dave Ramsey is a nine-time national bestselling author, personal finance expert and host of The Ramsey Show. He has appeared on Good Morning America, CBS This Morning, Today, Fox News, CNN, Fox Business and many more. Since 1992, Dave has helped people take control of their money, build wealth and enhance their lives. He also serves as CEO for Ramsey Solutions. ★

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Gold River Messenger

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February Raises Awareness of Teen Dating Violence



There are steps you can take to protect yourself. Trust your instincts — if you feel you are in danger or in an unhealthy relationship, it is important to end it. Photo courtesy of Freepik

Continued from page 1
 mentioned above, or if they have physically harmed you in any way, there are steps you can take to protect yourself. Trust your instincts — if you feel you are in danger or in an unhealthy relationship, it is important to end it. If you are afraid to confront your partner or concerned about how they might react, there are many resources available for help, guidance and counseling. If you believe you are in an abusive relationship, you should consider reaching out to a trusted friend, teacher, parent, or mentor, spending more time with people you feel comfortable with, getting involved in activities you enjoy that connect you with positive influences, seeking guidance from a school counselor or therapist, or calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233). Studies have found that negative or abusive behaviors in unhealthy relationships are more likely to increase over time. Abuse escalates as the relationship progresses and victims are more likely to sustain substantial injuries or harm. If you believe that you may be in an abusive or unhealthy relationship do not hesitate to ask for help. Teenage dating violence is more common than you know; you are not alone.

Data shared above from teendvmonth.org/resources/signs-teen-dating-violence/

Where Soroptimist International Stands

“Soroptimist International is committed to end all forms of violence which affect women and girls disproportionately. Gender-based violence occurs in the family

and in the general community. Whatever form it takes, gender-based violence is deeply rooted in historical inequalities, power imbalances and gender-based discrimination. Gender based violence is a violation of human rights and affects the ability of women and girls to reach their full potential and participate in society.”

How Soroptimist Can Help

Soroptimists feel that awareness and education are powerful tools to stop intimate partner violence in all its forms. If your teen has an abusive partner, or if you just suspect they might, we encourage you or your teen to contact WEAVE’s 24-hour hotline at 916-920-2952, the Sacramento Family Justice Center at 916-875-HOPE (4673) or by calling 2-1-1 or even 9-1-1 if your teen’s immediate safety is in danger. Ensuring that women and girls have the opportunity and ability to complete school and earn a livelihood plays a significant role in reducing vulnerability.

Soroptimist is an international 501(c)3 non-profit organization who seeks to improve the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment. The name, Soroptimist, means “best for women,” and that’s what the organization strives to achieve. Soroptimists are people at their best, working to help other women to be their best. Please email sircgr2009@gmail.com to receive more information about Soroptimist International of Rancho Cordova & Gold River, how to become a member, or just learn how you can volunteer with our club members, or visit soroptimistranchocordova.org/ ★

Lawsuit Seeks Habitat Protections for California’s Southern Sierra Nevada Fisher



The fishers of the southern Sierra Nevada are medium-sized furry carnivores. Photo courtesy of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Center for Biological Diversity News Release

FRESNO, CA (MPG) - The Center for Biological Diversity sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Jan. 15 for failing to finalize critical habitat protections for the Southern Sierra Nevada fisher.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service’s delay in protecting the forested lands that Southern Sierra Nevada fishers call home threatens the very survival of these adorable mammals,” said Andrea Zaccardi, carnivore conservation legal director at the Center. “By protecting the places where fishers live we can help them recover while also safeguarding California’s cherished wild landscapes.”

The fishers of the southern Sierra Nevada are medium-sized furry carnivores who are in the same family as weasels, mink, martens and otters. They depend on features found in old-growth forests such as tree cavities and downed wood.

Only found in North America, fishers were once well distributed throughout their historical range. But habitat destruction and climate change have contributed to their range-wide decline. Continued threats related to wildfires and wildfire suppression, increased temperatures resulting from climate change, disease and predation, exposure to

rodenticides, collisions with vehicles and potential effects associated with small population size put the fishers at further risk of decline.

Following years of efforts by the Center and other conservation groups, the Service listed the southern Sierra Nevada population of the fisher as endangered in May 2020. The agency first proposed 554,454 acres of critical habitat in California’s Tulare, Kern, Fresno, Madera, Mariposa and Tuolumne counties in 2021, and added more than 40,000 acres in late 2022. Despite those proposals, the agency never finalized critical habitat designation and protections for the Southern Sierra Nevada fisher.

The designation of critical habitat is an important step in the fisher’s recovery. A Center study found that plants and animals with federally protected critical habitat are more than twice as likely to move toward recovery than species without it.

Last year the Service denied federal protections to a separate population of fishers found in northern California and southern Oregon, despite significant range loss due to logging, historic trapping, rodenticide poisoning and climate change.

The lawsuit on Jan. 15 was filed in federal court in the District of Columbia. ★

Social Security Matters

Why is my Social Security Retirement Benefit So Small?



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: Can you help me understand? I have paid into Social Security since I started working in 1978. I did have a lot of tax deductions, but I don’t understand why I only receive \$350 a month from Social Security. **Signed: Befuddled Senior**

Dear Befuddled Senior: Your Social Security benefit is based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 years over your lifetime that you earned the most while contributing to the Social Security program (however, your benefit isn’t based on your contributions to SS). Your average lifetime earnings amount is called your “AIME” or “Average Indexed Monthly Earnings,” which are adjusted for inflation for years before you turn 60. Your earnings (your net earnings if self-employed) are provided to the SSA by the IRS. Your average lifetime earnings number (your “AIME”) is subjected to a formula which calculates your “Primary Insurance Amount” or “PIA,” which is the SS benefit you receive if you start benefits in the month you reach your full retirement age. Your personal full retirement age (FRA) depends on the year you were born which, if you were born in 1960 or later, is age 67.

However, if you claim Social Security before reaching your FRA, you will get only a percentage of your PIA (reduced from what you would get if you claimed at your FRA).

For example, if you claimed at age 62, you would only get 70% of the amount you would have gotten had you waited until age 67, or if you claimed at age 63 you would get 75% of your age 67 benefit. The reduction is less as you get closer to your FRA; if you claimed at age 65, you’d get about 87% of your full retirement age amount.

You can see your lifetime Social Security earnings record at your personal “my Social Security” online account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount (you will need to first create that online account), or you can call Social Security at 1.800.772.1213 to request an “Earnings Statement” be sent to you. That statement will show your lifetime earnings by year, the 35 highest of which were used to calculate your PIA (your Social Security benefit at your FRA). Generally, your Social Security FRA benefit will be about 40% or less of your average indexed monthly earnings.

So, to recap, your SS retirement benefit isn’t based on your contributions to the program; it’s based on your average monthly lifetime earnings. If you had less than 35 years contributing to the program, SS would still use 35 years in the benefit formula by using zero dollars in earnings for some number of years, which would result in a smaller AIME. Thus, if you claimed before your full

retirement age of 67, your SS benefit was reduced because you claimed early. And if you had less than 35 years of SS-covered employment, your AIME was less, resulting in a smaller PIA. And that is likely why your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is low.

One other thought to consider: if you are married and your spouse’s monthly SS benefit is considerably more than yours (e.g., more than twice as much as yours), you may want to explore your options for spouse benefits.

I hope this explains how your SS benefit is calculated, but if you still question your monthly SS retirement amount, I suggest you first obtain your “Earnings Statement” to review the lifetime earnings SS has on file for you. If there are any discrepancies in your Social Security’s earnings record, there are correction remedies available to you. If that is the case, please feel free to contact us again for more information.

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 (amac-foundation.org/programs/social-security-dvisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amac-foundation.org. ★

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