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RIVER VALLEY TIMES

42ND YEAR • ISSUE 5

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Golf Cart Driver Injured on Jackson Highway



A white vehicle moves eastbound on Jackson Highway toward Murieta Drive in Rancho Murieta. A van traveling in the eastbound lane ran a red light and struck a golf cart crossing the highway on a green signal Feb. 27, seriously injuring the driver.

**Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter**

RANCHO MURIETA CA (MPG) - A 69-year-old Rancho Murieta man was seriously injured Feb. 27 when the golf cart he was driving was struck by a Ford Aerostar van on Jackson Highway at Murieta Drive, according to the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District and the California Highway Patrol. The collision occurred at

approximately 7:13 p.m.

Capt. Mark Nunez, the Sac Metro Fire spokesperson, said the incident was initially reported as a walk-up medical aid at Station 59. The individual reported a vehicle accident at the intersection of Jackson Highway and Murieta Parkway.

Fire crews responded to the intersection and located one patient, Nunez said. He did not have the patient's gender information. The

patient was transported to the hospital, Code 3 by Medic 59, with moderate to severe injuries.

When contacted on March 2, CHP Sgt. Ben Ashby said the golf cart driver was a 69-year-old man from Sloughouse. He said the van's driver was a 19-year-old man from Jackson.

Ashby said the department's incident log and face sheet for the uncompleted report did not include

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Pickleball Club Continues to Thrive



The Rancho Murieta Pickleball Club's logo is designed by Carl Gaither. Courtesy Photos

**By Alan Chase,
President
Rancho Murieta
Pickleball Club**

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)

- The Rancho Murieta Pickleball Club was established in 2019 to promote and celebrate the sport of Pickleball, which was invented in 1965 in the United States and is now considered the fastest-growing sport in the country. The first group of players began by drawing chalk lines for pickleball play on the South Murieta tennis courts. That early interest eventually led to a collaboration with the Rancho Murieta Homeowners Association to build two dedicated pickleball courts at Stonehouse Park in North Murieta by converting part of the outdoor basketball courts.

As the sport's popularity grew and the club's membership approached 200 players, the two courts were no longer sufficient. An agreement was reached with Summerfest, the Rancho Murieta Association and other private donors to fund the construction of six additional pickleball courts at Stonehouse Park, located west of the North Gate.

The current board of the Rancho Murieta Pickleball Club includes President Alan Chase, Vice President Patty Lew, Treasurer Linda Haviland, Secretary Wendy Lovatt-Dougherty and Secretary Cookie Whalen.

The club's logo also has a local story. Several years ago, when the organization was just getting started, members discussed creating a logo to represent the club. Member Carl Gaither, drawing on his experience as an art director in graphic arts, volunteered to design one. After submitting three designs that were not selected, Gaither returned to the drawing board and

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Sock-Hop Theme Highlights Elementary Dance



Dressed for a 1950s sock hop, Mark Ray and his daughter Laren pose for a photo at the Daughters & Dates Dance sponsored by the Cosumnes River Elementary PTA on Feb. 21.

**Story and photos
by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter**

SLOUGHHOUSE, CA (MPG) - A classic 1950s sock-hop theme brought poodle skirts, ponytails and plenty of laughter to the annual Daughters & Dates Dance hosted by the Cosumnes River Elementary School PTA. Held Feb. 21 in the school's

multipurpose room, the "Sock Hop & Soda Shop" event drew about 120 girls and their fathers or "father figures" for two hours of dancing, dessert drinks and photo opportunities.

The dance, which ran from 6 to 8 p.m., is one of the PTA's most popular events of the school year. Organizer Meghan Kassel said the evening is designed to create a

special space for girls to spend time with someone important in their lives.

"This is the fifth year that I have organized the annual Daughters and Dates event at CRES," Kassel said. "It creates a special space for daughters and their dates to slow down and connect. By hosting it each year, we give the girls a night where they

Continued on page 12



The club officers are, from left, Secretary Wendy Lovatt-Dougherty, President Alan Chase, Treasurer Linda Haviland, Secretary Cookie Whalen and Vice President Patty Lew. Photo by Tim Dec

Fire Safe Council Reviews Ladder Fuel Success

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A wrap-up presentation on the CAL FIRE grant that reduced ladder fuels in and around Rancho Murieta, as well as the potential for a new grant, were notable topics at the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Safe Council's quarterly Zoom meeting on March 3.

The council also discussed plans for National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, which will take place May 2 in the Tractor Supply parking lot, as well as home-hardening training, efforts to recruit new council members, and other updates.

CAL FIRE Frant

Registered forester Phyllis Banducci began the meeting with slides from the final report she is preparing for CAL FIRE. Banducci, a Rancho Murieta resident, supervised on-the-ground work to reduce ladder fuels on 950 acres of woodland in and around Rancho Murieta, funded by a \$4.5 million grant the Fire Safe Council secured in 2022 and administered by Sacramento County Regional Parks.

Banducci showed before-and-after slides of the work on a ranch along Scott Road, behind the Calero Reservoir, in the Deer Creek Hills Preserve and at several locations along Parkway Loop. But she was most enthusiastic about slides showing the work at Greens Park, saying it was a key treatment area because it is so close to homes.

Banducci said contractors working under her supervision finished their work a year ago, clearing the tree understory, removing ground fuels consisting mostly of blackberry bushes, and covering the ground with wood chips. However, they were unable to use heavy equipment in the wetlands.

More recently, the Rancho Murieta Community Services District brought in CAL FIRE inmate crews for ditch maintenance. They used hand tools to clear vegetation in the wetlands. The Rancho Murieta Association Maintenance Department then followed up with herbicide treatment. Neither of those efforts was part of the grant.

WUI Fuel Reduction Green Park Rancho Murieta – Manual and mechanical fuels treatments



A slide showing fuel-mitigation work at Greens Park is part of a wrap-up presentation about the recently completed \$4.5 million fuel-reduction project at the March 3 meeting of the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Safe Council. Courtesy photos



Cosumnes Ladder Fuel Reduction Forest Health Grant

July 2022 through March 2026.

A slide showing fuel-mitigation work at Greens Park is part of a wrap-up presentation about the recently completed \$4.5 million fuel-reduction project at the March 3 meeting of the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Safe Council. Courtesy photos

“They have cleaned it out ... so that area just looks incredible, and those homes right up against Greens Park are more protected than ever,” she said.

Banducci also clarified that the grant covered two types of work. The most significant was the reduction in ladder fuels in the wildland-urban interface. It also funded ecological restoration in the Deer Creek Hills Preserve, including treating invasive plants and planting native oaks.

Banducci said the saplings were planted in cages to protect them from cattle and deer, with chips from nearby fuel-reduction work spread around the trees to help retain moisture and suppress annual grasses: an effort she said is “looking good” so far.

Kelly Hopkins, executive director of the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, added that all the trees were grown from acorns collected within the preserve and raised in isolation at Helix Nursery to avoid importing pests or disease. She said the conservancy will continue

watering and maintaining the site, aiming to make it the most successful planting project yet at Deer Creek Hills, even though some natural die-off is expected.

Banducci concluded her presentation by thanking the Fire Safe Council “for making all of it happen.”

Pryor returned the thanks.

“It almost seemed like a miracle that we were able to pull off that end around to get you involved,” he said. “For a while it looked like we weren’t even going to get a forester, and I’m so glad we did, because you cared so much about this area; that was such a critical element of the project.”

Second Grant

Brenna Howell, the Fire Safe coordinator for the Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services, briefed the group on the possibility of another grant. Howell, a Rancho Murieta resident, regularly participates in Fire Safe Council meetings.

Howell reported that the 2026 State Fire Capacity

Program has opened a new round of grants offering up to \$200,000 per project. Unlike recent planning-focused grants, this opportunity emphasizes on-the-ground mitigation, including fuel reduction, chipper programs, preparedness activities and planning efforts such as a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The grant will require a local match, and Howell is reviewing whether in-kind volunteer time can count toward that requirement. She said she will circulate a written synopsis so the council can consider potential project ideas for Rancho Murieta.

Pryor asked Banducci whether there were other areas where an additional grant could be used for fuel reduction. Banducci replied that she does not see many truly new areas needing initial treatment, because most of the oak overstory stands were already included in the current project, and the areas she excluded were largely open grasslands with minimal oak cover.

Instead, she said the priority now is maintenance – returning to treated areas in two or three years for “some light treatment” to manage regrowth – and possibly using future funds to re-approach a few landowners who did not participate the first time, particularly along the dirt portion of Latrobe Road.

Banducci also explained that because the \$4.5 million project used the Cal VTP Environmental Impact Report, the CEQA environmental review for future vegetation work in these areas, including pile and broadcast burning, is already complete. She called this a “huge” advantage and cost savings, noting that landowners can now work with CAL FIRE to adjust existing vegetation management plans and move ahead with new treatments more easily. At this point, she said, “It’s just a matter of getting the funding to do the work.”

Wildfire Preparedness

The discussion also touched on preparations

for Wildfire Community Preparedness Day on May 2 in Rancho Murieta. Council member Karen Hoberg, a realtor, said she had verbal permission from Tractor Supply to use its parking lot for the event. Howell said she has identified 11 to 12 agencies to invite, and they will be asked to set up their own booths to share information and materials.

Pryor said the Rancho Murieta Association has also offered to bring its masticator to the public education effort. He added that the May 2 event will help maintain the community’s Firewise status, which allows residents to qualify for discounts from their insurance companies.

Other Business

Hopkins reported that she drafted text for a Google Form to help recruit new council members. She asked council members to review the draft language, confirm they are comfortable with it, and then decide how and where to share it.

Howell also advised the group about the upcoming “CAL FIRE Qualified Entity” training scheduled for May 4 and 5. The training prepares participants to visit neighborhoods and advise homeowners on home hardening and defensible space. She emphasized that she would like Fire Safe Council members and volunteers to attend the free training. She will provide the details and sign-up information.

Pryor also reported that a preliminary draft of the Rancho Murieta Resiliency Plan is nearing completion. The Fire Safe Council was instrumental in getting the project off the ground. The plan is being led by the Sacramento County Department of Transportation (SacDOT), through Caltrans, under the Climate Adaptation Planning Grant, and aims to address critical infrastructure challenges in Rancho Murieta highlighted by nearby wildfires and the 2023 New Year’s flooding event.

Pryor said he and retired traffic engineer John Long will review the draft and decide how to respond and whether they can support it.

The Fire Safe Council’s next meeting is slated for June 2.

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



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Garden Club Digs into Worm Composting

Story and photos by
Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - From honoring a local legacy to exploring sustainable gardening practices, the River Valley Garden Club covered plenty of ground Feb. 24 before diving into the surprisingly fascinating world of worm composting.

Held before a full room of members and guests, the meeting included club business, a memorial tribute to a longtime Rancho Murieta developer and a lively presentation by Master Gardener Susan Muckey, who cheerfully describes herself as someone who “loves to talk about worms.”



Master Gardener Susan Muckey explains a worm's anatomy as part of her presentation about vermicomposting at the Feb. 24 meeting of the River Valley Garden Club.

how personally involved he was in shaping Rancho Murieta's appearance.

“He also did the architectural rules and the landscaping rules for Rancho Murieta and the CC&Rs,” she said.

General Hoberg didn't just hire landscapers; he moved the boulders himself.

“All those big boulders in the shopping center and the waterfalls, he did all of those himself on a little Bobcat, moved them all in, designed it all and put all the plants in,” Hoberg said.

He also planted the redwood trees that still shade the plaza today.

Karen Hoberg also invited members to her son Alexander's upcoming Eagle Scout Court of Honor. The club had donated \$200 to his Eagle project at Cosumnes River Elementary School, where he built raised garden beds

protected with special mesh fencing to keep wildlife out.

Worms: Reader's Digest Version

The evening's main presentation belonged to Susan Muckey, a Sacramento County Master Gardener who previously taught a hypertufa class for the club and now focuses on worm composting.

“I was a piano teacher. I don't have a science background,” she told the group. “So you're going to be getting sort of the Reader's Digest version.”

That version included an engaging overview of worm anatomy, feeding habits, reproduction and how to build and maintain a home worm bin.

The worms used in composting are red wigglers, not the earthworms typically found in garden soil.

“The red wigglers do

not live in the ground,” she explained. “If you put a red wiggler in your garden bed, they're going to either die or they're going to find another place that they would rather be.”

Instead, they thrive in leaf litter and decaying organic material.

“They're garbage eaters. They're not soil dwellers at all,” she said.

Perfect Pet

Throughout her talk, Muckey mixed practical advice with humor.

Worms, she said, are “like the perfect pet ... They really just mind their own business. You're not going to have them making any noise. They're not going to create any problems. You can go away on vacation.”

If traveling, gardeners can simply bury a squashed pumpkin in the bin beforehand.



From left, Donna Hansen, Connie Berensen and Margaret Watson Hopkins get a close-up look at red wigglers writhing in their castings.

“You don't have to pay your neighbor to come over and feed your worms,” she said.

Worms also require a carefully balanced environment.

“They breathe through their skin,” she explained, so moisture levels cannot be too wet or too dry.

When it comes to food, worms prefer fruits and vegetables, especially sweet or soft scraps.

“They particularly like cantaloupe. They particularly like melons,” she said. “If you put a piece of watermelon in there, they kiss you because they kind of have a sweet tooth.”

Moldy food works best. “The rottener, the better. The moldier, the better. They love it,” she said.

Citrus, onions, garlic, pineapple, meat, dairy, oils and fats are off limits.

Black Gold

Muckey demonstrated how to build a simple worm bin using a dark plastic container with air holes drilled along the sides and bottom. Bedding can be shredded newspaper or pine or fir shavings – “not cedar, not redwood,” she emphasized – moistened to the consistency of a wrung-out sponge.

Over about six months, the original bedding and food scraps transform into rich, dark compost.

To separate worms from finished castings, Muckey suggested dumping the compost into small piles

on a tarp outside. Because worms avoid light, they burrow downward, allowing gardeners to scrape away the top layer of castings until only a wriggling cluster remains – a task best done wearing gloves.

Another option, she joked, is to sit in front of the TV and pick the worms out by hand.

“You can watch a show and do something good at the same time,” she said.

Wigglers Up Close

To conclude her presentation, Muckey walked through the audience, holding a paper plate of worm compost and live red wigglers, giving members a close-up view of the writhing mass.

“They like to hang out with each other,” one member observed.

Red wiggler worms used for vermicomposting are available from online worm growers and sometimes from local nurseries or bait shops.

The evening began with reminders about upcoming events, including a March 13 seed-starting workshop and the club's May 9 plant sale fundraiser.

From honoring a community legacy to exploring the secret lives of worms, the meeting reflected the club's blend of service, education, and down-to-earth enthusiasm ... slime and all.

View more photos at therivervalleytimes.com and on Facebook. ★

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Pickleball Club Continues to Thrive



A drone image shows the pickleball courts at Stonehouse Park. Photo by Goose Photograph

Continued from page 1

developed a simpler concept featuring a pickleball streaking through the air to capture the speed of the game. The design was accepted by the club. As Gaither later noted, sometimes the simplest design

works best.

The Rancho Murieta Pickleball Club is open to new members who live inside the gates of the community. Annual membership is \$30. For more information, contact mpickleball@gmail.com. ★



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Golf Cart Driver Injured on Jackson Highway

Continued from page 1
 information about the cause of the collision or who was at fault. He added a box was checked, indicating the golf cart driver was “under the influence.”

Although the report remained unfinished as of March 6, Officer Angie Monroe, public information officer for the CHP’s Sacramento East Area office, provided additional information.

While the incomplete report indicated the driver of the Ford Aerostar van had run the red light, it did not indicate whether he was speeding or had been cited. Monroe had more information about the other driver involved in the collision.

“The driver of the golf cart was ejected and landed on the roadway, causing a laceration to the back of their head,” Monroe said in a text message, adding that the individual was transported to Kaiser South Sacramento.

“After clearing the crash scene, the investigating officer responded to the hospital to perform a DUI investigation and subsequently arrested the golf cart driver on suspicion of DUI,” she wrote. “That party was released due

to the extent of injuries, which were considered major.”

The River Valley Times has been unable to obtain a condition report from Kaiser’s public affairs office since the accident.

Witness Accounts

Multiple residents posted about the accident on social media shortly after it occurred. Some described the incident as a red-light violation involving the eastbound Ford van. The online CHP incident report initially referenced a possible hit-and-run, but subsequent entries indicated the vehicle had pulled into a nearby parking lot.

Rancho Murieta resident Jay Triplett said he was inside the Chevron station when he heard the collision.

“There was no skid mark. I couldn’t see any skid marks, so the person definitely ran a red light,” Triplett said.

Triplett said he went to check on the van’s driver after seeing others assisting the golf cart driver. The van had come to rest in front of El Dorado Savings Bank.

Triplett said he asked the young driver if he

was drunk, and the driver responded that he was not. He said the driver told him he was traveling about 50 mph.

“No way that was 50 mph,” Triplett said.

Triplett also said the driver told him he did not have a driver’s license but had planned to obtain a permit.

Another resident reported seeing a CHP officer conduct a field sobriety test on the van driver. Triplett said he did not witness that.

Security Log

Rancho Murieta Community Services District Patrol Officer J. Passer also responded to the scene. Although the name of the golf cart driver was redacted in his log entry, the report indicated the individual lives on Guadalupe Drive. Passer wrote that he provided a statement to CHP and assisted with traffic control until he was released from the scene, according to the Security Department log.

Prior Accident

The recent collision is not the first serious crash at the Jackson Highway and Murieta Drive intersection. On July 29, 2024,

a stolen Hyundai Elantra being pursued by the California Highway Patrol ran a red light and broad-sided a Rivian SUV that was crossing the highway on a green signal before striking a pole and bursting into flames.

Two occupants of the fleeing car later died from major injuries. The three occupants of the Rivian were hospitalized with moderate injuries. Three teenagers riding two golf carts had been about to cross the highway but avoided the collision when a girl in the lead cart spotted the speeding vehicle and warned the driver, who braked before entering the intersection.

Caltrans

Residents once again expressed frustration about vehicle speeds along this stretch of highway, which has a posted speed limit of 55 mph but runs directly alongside a residential community. Residents frequently report that many vehicles exceed the speed limit.

The Murieta Drive intersection is of particular concern because residents frequently cross the highway by golf cart to access the commercial area across

from the gated community. Security logs indicate that accidents at the intersection are fairly common.

In early 2018, the Rancho Murieta Association and the Rancho Murieta Community Services District jointly requested that Caltrans reduce the speed limit from 55 mph to 45 mph between Murieta Parkway South and Murieta Drive.

Then-District 3 Director Amarjeet S. Benipal denied the request in an April 2018 letter to the RMA Board. He noted that Caltrans had conducted a traffic safety investigation on Highway 16 between Dillard and Ione roads in February of that year.

Benipal wrote that collisions were concentrated between Murieta Parkway and Murieta Parkway South, where the roadway was striped for no passing. He cited several rear-end collisions westbound approaching Murieta Parkway, as well as collisions involving deer or drivers attempting to avoid them.

However, Caltrans determined that the speed limit could not be reduced because state law requires speed limits to reflect the

85th percentile speed of motorists traveling the roadway under free-flow conditions. Lowering the speed limit below that threshold, he wrote, could produce “counterintuitive results.”

Benipal said that Caltrans was planning two improvements: trimming trees and clearing brush to improve sight distance for westbound drivers approaching the Murieta Parkway signal

and relocating the flashing “signal ahead” sign to improve visibility for eastbound drivers approaching Murieta Parkway.

The River Valley Times contacted the Caltrans District 3 public affairs office on March 2 to confirm those improvements and to request information on at least two additional safety changes implemented since 2018. One was the removal of the double centerline striping between Murieta Drive and Kiefer Boulevard. The second was the installation of orange lane delineators on Jackson Highway east of Murieta Drive in 2025. As of March 6, Caltrans had not responded.

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

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Well Kings fans, with a 15-50 record and a paltry 17 games to go, is there reason to celebrate the Kings?

If your name is Russell Westbrook there is! Helping the Kings to a 126-110 win over the Chicago Bulls Sunday night at Golden One Arena, Westbrook put on a show with his record setting 208th triple double of his NBA career.

It will likely not be the last, perhaps not even the last this season, so yes, there is reason to celebrate.

For the faithful that turned out to see a spirited Kings team take the court, you were treated to a combination of young and old, as youngsters like Maxime Renauld put up 26 big points to go with 11 boards, and Daeqwon Plowden got his first start of the season adding 16 points of his own.

Once again, Sunday night's win proved when inspired this team can not only put up points but play together. Although the Kings allowed far too many layups throughout the game, overall, they played a complete game and never allowed the Bulls to think they had a chance at winning.

It was the kind of win Kings fans have been hungry for, and it bodes well for the future.

Of course, much depends on how this team finishes and how the ping pong balls bounce. Without question, the Sacramento Kings will secure a very high round draft choice. My hope is that Scott Perry has his sights set on A.J. Dybantsa from the Utah Cougars. At age 19 and already at 6'9", A.J. could very well still be growing, and the Kings are in sore need of players that can play the four and five position.

Dybantsa recently made headlines when he scored 20 or more points for the 24th time this season. Without question he can score, and the Kings need to look no further than A. J. if this talented young man is still available when their first-round selection occurs.

You will hear much debate on this issue, as many pundits and fans have been extolling the virtues of Darryn Peterson from the University of Kansas. At 6'6"

Darryn is unquestionably a great college player and ranked No. 1, but he represents another guard on a team that is in desperate need of front court depth.

The other candidate is 6'9" Carmeron Boozer of Duke University, and it's hard to find fault in that selection. Cameron is the son of former NBA great Carlos Boozer, and at 6'9" and 250 pounds and only a freshman in college, this young man portends to be a carbon copy of his old man.

So, for this writer's draft picks in order, it would be A.J. Dybantsa, Cameron Boozer and then probably draft and trade Darryn Peterson.

The real question is will the Kings have the opportunity of drafting in the No. 1, 2, or 3 position?

Anyone's guess, but with just 17 games to go the interest is heating up, and how these three plays in the upcoming NCAA tournament will likely tell the story of how they will be drafted.

For me, the good news is that the Kings discovered Precious Achiuwa and Dylan Cardwell, and these two big men need to be coveted, not traded. Both big bodies are what Domantas Sabonis has been waiting for and with the likely addition of a high and capable draft choice just around the corner, fans are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I would be remiss if not to mention the stellar play of one Malik Monk who led the team over the Bulls with 30 points off the bench. This stevedore of the hardwood deserves a chorus of at-a-boys for the professional way he has handled his business this season. A constant topic of trade all season long, Malik has been the bastion of how a pro goes about his business, and I for one hope to Malik in a Kings uniform next season.

Once again, we need to hear talk of third man of the year and look for Monk to be the first player off the bench each game.

Keep the faith Kings fans, because this team is about to undergo a facelift, and with it a team that gives Kings fans playoff tickets every year.

All the best!

★

Democratic Angst and Gerrymandering Threaten California's Political Reforms



By Dan Walters,
CALMatters.org

Turmoil within the California Democratic Party over this year's election for governor and fallout from the party's naked grab of congressional seats could have long-term effects, undoing two important political reforms — the top-two primary system and redistricting by an independent commission.

The turmoil is over having nine Democratic candidates for governor, creating the possibility that two Republicans could finish one-two in the June 2 primary, thus resulting in a GOP governor being elected in November.

A recent Public Policy Institute of California poll of voters found that Republicans Steve Hilton (14%) and Chad Bianco (12%) are 1st and 3rd in support, with Katie Porter (13%) the leading Democrat, followed by Eric Swalwell (11%) and Tom Steyer (10%). The other six Democrats are all 5% or less.

Filing for the primary ballot closes this week, and Rusty Hicks, the Democratic state chairman, is publicly pleading for lower tier Democrats to drop out and thus reduce chances of a 1-2 GOP finish.

This week, in a public letter, Hicks said a 1-2 GOP primary outcome may be implausible, but "it is not impossible, and I know we are collectively committed to taking the steps required to avoid that possibility."

So far, none of the bottom six has volunteered to quit. The angst is likely to fuel efforts to do away with the top-two system and return to closed party primaries, thereby eliminating any possibility of a future backdoor Republican win.

Neither party liked the top-two system when it was proposed during a stalemate on the state budget in 2009. Republican Sen. Abel Maldonado, backed by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, said he'd vote for the budget only if Democrats placed the top-two system on the ballot, arguing that it would reduce polarization.

Democrats caved and Proposition 14, creating the system, was approved by voters in 2010. Given their dislike of the top-two system in the first place and what happened this year, it's highly likely Democratic leaders will seek to eliminate it.

Leaders of both parties also disliked it when Charles Munger Jr., a wealthy Stanford University scientist, proposed the state shift the redrawing of legislative and congressional districts away from the Legislature to an independent commission. Munger, backed by Schwarzenegger, contended it would end self-serving gerrymanders.

A Munger-financed ballot measure in 2008, Proposition 11, created the commission for legislative districts, and in 2010 Proposition 20 extended the commission to congressional districts. The commission drew new maps after the 2010 and 2020 censuses.

Last year, however, to counter a Texas effort to shift five congressional seats from Democrats to Republicans, Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed and voters passed Proposition 50. It

gerrymanders California's 52 congressional districts to gain at least five Democratic seats this year.

Newsom said the gerrymander was needed to blunt President Donald Trump's efforts to skew the 2026 congressional election. Newsom promised that the radically revised districts would last for only three election cycles, and the commission system would return after the 2030 census.

But will it? Let's assume that the gerrymander gives Democrats five more California seats, creating a 48-4 partisan split. California is destined to lose at least four and perhaps five seats in total after the 2030 census, due to population stagnation. Nationally, blue states such as California and New York will lose congressional seats to faster-growing red states such as Florida and Texas.

Restoring the commission system could reduce Democratic ranks by as many as 10 seats, since the state's more conservative interior counties are outpacing the liberal coastal region in population growth.

For all of these reasons, California Democratic leaders will be under tremendous pressure from the national party — and the Democrats who won seats in 2026 — to minimize losses. They can only do that by eliminating the commission and returning redistricting power to a Democratic-controlled Legislature.

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

Is There Income Tax on Social Security Benefits?



By Russell Gloor,
AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: The Trump Administration is saying that now there will be no taxes on Social Security benefits. Since we're getting ready to start our 2025 income tax return, can you explain how this all works? **Signed: Confused Taxpayer**

Dear Confused Taxpayer: You are obviously referring to the so-called "one big, beautiful bill" and how that bill affects income tax on your Social Security benefits. And this is because of the publicity surrounding the so-called "one big, beautiful bill" (OBBB) enacted last year, which claims to "eliminate income tax on Social Security benefits." Well, that bill did, yet technically didn't, fully eliminate income tax on benefits." Allow me to explain.

The OBBB does eliminate income tax on most SS benefits, but it does so in a somewhat unique way — by providing an additional \$6,000 (per person) deduction to your federal taxable income as reported to the IRS. Thus, you will pay less total income tax when you file your taxes with the IRS because of that additional deduction to your taxable income. The extra deduction is available to those over age 65 and is meant to offset the income tax

which will still be levied by the IRS on the SS benefits you received in 2025.

Essentially, the rules governing income tax on Social Security benefits have not changed. The IRS will still levy income tax on your SS benefits if your combined income from all sources (known as your "provisional income") is over \$32,000 as a married couple filing jointly, or more than \$25,000 if you file as an individual. If your provisional income is below the threshold for your IRS filing status, you will pay no income tax on your received 2025 SS benefits. But if your provisional income exceeds the threshold for your IRS filing status, then somewhere between 50% and 85% of your received SS benefits will be taxed (how much SS income to be taxed depends on your combined income in 2025).

By now, you should have received form 1099-SSA which advised of your 2025 Social Security income, including any income tax you had withheld from your SS benefits. This income should be reported when submitting your 2025 income tax return. If your "provisional income" is over \$32,000 as a married couple filing jointly (or over \$25,000 as an individual filer), then your 2025 SS benefits will still be taxed by the IRS. But when completing your 2025 Income Tax Return, you will also be able to claim an additional \$6,000 per person (\$12,000 if you file jointly), which will likely offset any income tax you must pay due to the SS benefits you received in 2025. If you use a tax preparer (or tax preparation software), they will guide

you through this calculation. Note, too, that the \$6,000 per person deduction amount will be less if your combined taxable income is more than \$150,000 as a married couple (or more than \$75,000 as a single filer).

Be aware, though, that the OBBB is temporary tax accommodation which expires after tax year 2028. And that's because the process used to pass the bill in Congress (a "budget reconciliation" process) didn't actually change SS law; rather it provided a way around it to offset income tax paid on SS benefits.

So, to recap, the IRS can still levy income tax on your received Social Security benefits but, because of the OBBB, you will likely also (depending on your provisional income level) receive an extra deduction which offsets any taxes calculated on your Social Security benefits.

Finally, be aware that if your first husband also predeceases you, you will then become eligible for a surviving ex-spouse benefit from him, even if he has remarried.

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The Disgraceful Ravings of Candace Owens

and interest anew with something even more perverse. And what is more demented than portraying the wife of the victim of a shocking assassination as a black widow?

Whereas most of have seen in Erika Kirk a Christian woman bearing up under an intolerable burden and stunningly forgiving the alleged murderer of her husband, Owens purports to see Clytemnestra, the mythical Greek figure who betrayed her husband Agamemnon upon his return from the Trojan War.

The title of her series is "Bride of Charlie." Get it? Like the "Bride of Frankenstein." As a so-called investigator, Candace Owens is like Perry Mason if the fictional attorney had been a schizophrenic high on crack. Her method is to pile will-o'-the-wisp connections one on top of another, often buttressed by flagrant factual mistakes, and insist that if she's debunked, it just shows how she must be on the right track.

Her mantra is that "we don't know-know, but we know" -- in other words, her malicious, irrational intuitions are superior to actual knowledge backed by facts. She now says that "Erika Kirk should be dragged into a police precinct for questioning," and anyone who disagrees is "a full-blown fraud." According to Owens, "the amount of evidence that is now piling up, I would say, against Erika Kirk, is almost akin to an NBC Dateline episode."

Usually, conspiracy theories spring up around as-

sassinations that are hard to fathom or have some ambiguity about them. It is clear that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing JFK, but it's understandable that there have been questions about the event. It is the depraved achievement of Candace Owens to make a bonkers true crime drama, with all sorts of mysteries and twists, out of an open-and-shut murder case.

Kirk's accused killer, Tyler Robinson, had a motive, left a trail of damning evidence and confessed to multiple people. To dismiss all this and call for Erika Kirk to be frogmarched into a police station is so mad it makes Owens' conviction that both the moon landing and dinosaurs are fake look well-grounded by comparison.

It is a symptom of our time that such malevolent buffoonery is rewarded with a huge audience. It is impossible to discredit Owens because she is not in the credibility business to begin with. In the attention economy, denunciations are just as useful as praise, especially if a media figure is posing as a brave truth-teller -- so brave that, in this case, she's willing to drag through the mud a mother of two who saw her beloved husband murdered less than six months ago.

It's not just that decency is not necessary in the Candace Owens business model, it would be an obstacle.

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

Water Supply, Safety Center are CSD Topics



The Rancho Murieta Community Services District Improvements Committee recommends demolition of the district's deteriorating safety center, located across from the district office. File photo

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Conserving existing water and identifying new sources for Rancho Murieta dominated the discussion at the March 3 meeting of the Rancho Murieta Community Services District Improvements Committee.

Committee members discussed a proposed electromagnetic survey to locate groundwater, a study of the Rio Oso water tank, the need for a leak detection study and the likely demolition of the district's deteriorating Safety Center building.

The committee – composed of Directors Randy Jenco and Bill Gere along with Interim Operations Manager Travis Bohannon, Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder and staff – reviews infrastructure issues in detail and makes recommendations to the full board.

Electromagnetic Survey

Jenco, who also chairs the district's Water Vision Working Group, reported they would meet the following day to hear a presentation from hydrogeologist Patrick Dunn about using a geophysical electromagnetic survey to identify potential groundwater sources.

"He has some ideas on where it would be beneficial for us to spend some money to do that so that we zero in more closely on where the water is," Jenco said.

Dunn prepared an extensive groundwater study for the district in 2014. He was recently hired as a consultant by Rancho Murieta Properties, which is developing the Rancho North subdivision.

A geophysical electromagnetic survey measures differences in electrical conductivity in underground soils and rock formations to help identify areas more likely to contain groundwater.

Jeff Pearson, the RMP project manager and a member of the working group, said the process involves placing a conductor in the ground and measuring electrical resistance across a large area.

Different soil types conduct electricity differently, Pearson said. Water-bearing alluvial soils exhibit an electrical signature distinct from that of clay or other

formations. Mapping those differences helps engineers to identify formations more likely to hold groundwater before drilling wells. Pearson said a similar electromagnetic survey has already been conducted in the west of the Anderson Ranch area west of Rancho Murieta.

Jenco said that after hearing Dunn's presentation, the group will decide whether to bring the concept back to the Improvements Committee and, eventually, to the full board for consideration.

Water Usage Studied

Jenco also reported that a water-use analysis is being conducted by Tom Shewchuk, a member of the Water Vision Working Group.

Using district billing records, Shewchuk is analyzing water use by neighborhood and home type. Preliminary findings suggest older homes use significantly more water than newer ones, largely because modern plumbing fixtures and landscaping are more efficient.

Jenco also noted that the district's overall water use has declined as conservation and efficiency measures have taken hold over the past 20 years.

"That's a mixed blessing," Jenco said, noting that while conservation reduces pressure on water supplies, it also reduces district revenue because customers are billed largely based on water consumption.

District Seeks Water Attorney

Jenco said the district will need a water attorney to assist with several complex issues tied to long-term water planning.

One involves the possibility of re-permitting Lake Clementia so it could again be used as a drinking water source. Another involves negotiating agreements with property owners where groundwater wells might be located. Because both issues involve complicated areas of water law, specialized legal expertise will be needed before the district proceeds.

Wilder said District Counsel Patrick Enright has been asked to provide a list of attorneys who specialize in water law so the board can review potential candidates.

Rio Oso Tank Study

The committee also reviewed a proposal to study the condition of the Rio Oso water tank. Bohannon asked the committee to recommend board approval for a \$24,780 study to determine whether the tank should be rehabilitated or replaced.

Domenichelli & Associates would inspect the tank and prepare a report recommending whether repairs or full replacement would be the best option.

The study would provide an independent evaluation before the district commits to a costly project.

Leak Detection

Committee members also discussed conducting a water leak detection study, particularly in the pressure zone served by the Rio Oso tank.

Bohannon said pumps serving the tank appear to run continuously, even late at night when water demand should be minimal.

"I've actually been there at night," he said. "The percentage doesn't go down."

Because irrigation typically begins early in the morning, the constant pump activity raised questions about whether water was escaping from the system.

Bohannon said a leak detection study and improved monitoring equipment could help to determine whether water is being lost through underground leaks. Utility Supervisor Corey Carskaddon is getting estimates for the work.

Developer Seeks Progress

During public comment, The Residences Developer Bob Keil raised concerns about the unavailability of the district's contract engineer, who has been having health issues.

Keil said his engineer has been trying for two months to obtain revised numbers from Joe Domenichelli, following earlier estimates for tank size and gallons per day calculations that he had agreed were too high.

"I'm not blaming him, but we need a Plan B," Keil said. "We're going to be months and months."

Wilder said Domenichelli has returned to work and is feeling better.

Safety Center May be Demolished

The condition of the district's aging safety center was also discussed.

The small trailer across from the district office once housed the James L. Noller Safety Center, with an office, lockers for patrol officers and space for Volunteers in Partnership with the Sheriff.

Wilder said the structure has extensive dry rot and water damage and that parts of the exterior are literally falling apart. Mold has also been detected in the building.

At one point, the district considered rehabilitating the structure and even ordered replacement windows for the project. But after contractors inspected the building, they determined the damage was too extensive for repair. As a result, the district still has 10 unused vinyl windows purchased for the project that Wilder wants to sell as surplus.

Committee members briefly discussed whether the building could be sold or given away if someone agreed to remove it. But Jenco cautioned that doing so could create liability issues because of the known structural damage.

Staff said the district previously received a demolition estimate of about \$16,000, which could drop to roughly \$15,000 if furniture and electronic waste are removed first.

The committee agreed to forward the issue to the full board for direction.

Other Business

In other business, the committee reviewed continuing the district's annual Veolia service contract for technical support of the membrane water treatment plant, discussed installing a backup system for the plant's SCADA monitoring system, and reviewed storm damage to a road and a damaged pipe in the Lake Clementia spillway.

Bohannon also recommended installing two fire hydrants on Murieta Parkway so a long section of water main can be flushed more effectively to maintain water quality. The board will decide whether to spend around \$11,000 for the improvement.

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

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.

Feb. 22

4:27 p.m., While conducting a patrol near the Cosumnes River, Officer Perepelka observed smoke and the odor of a fire. Contact was made with four juveniles who were actively maintaining a bonfire. The subjects were directed to extinguish the fire and complied without incident. Area cleared of fire hazards.

4:37 p.m., North Gate staff reported a dark-colored SUV tailgating behind a resident vehicle to avoid registration. Vehicle information was not obtained. Patrol review of North Gate cameras yielded negative results due to equipment malfunction.

Unable to locate.

Feb. 25

9:55 a.m., Officer Passer responded to a report of a missing juvenile, 14. The subject description and last known clothing were obtained. Officer conducted area checks of common locations including parks, lakes, trails, Wood Bridge and river access points. The juvenile was not located. Officer standing by for further information.

Feb. 26

5:47 p.m., Patrol responded to a report of a male adult loitering on foot near the Taco Bell drive-thru. Upon arrival, contact was made with the shift manager, who requested the individual leave the property. The subject stated he was waiting for a ride from a friend employed at Bel Air. At management's request, the subject was advised to leave the property and complied without incident. Subject walked

toward the Bel Air location. Area clear.

Feb. 27

6:04 p.m., Officer Passer responded to a report of a possible gas leak at Pera Drive. The resident advised a gas odor was detected in the garage near the water heater. With resident permission, the area was checked. No odor was detected by responding officer. Fire Department personnel arrived shortly thereafter and conducted additional checks. No gas leak was detected and readings were within normal limits. Scene cleared.

8 p.m., A gray minivan reportedly ran a red light at Murieta Parkway and Highway 16 and collided with a golf cart. The golf cart operator, of Guadalupe Drive, sustained a head injury and was transported by EMS for medical evaluation. CHP assumed control of the investigation. Officer Passer provided a statement to CHP and assisted

with traffic control until released from the scene.

10:40 p.m., Patrol responded to a noise complaint at Greens Park. Upon arrival, subjects were gone. Empty beer cans and broken bottles were located in the playground area. Area cleared.

March 2

9:09 p.m., Patrol responded to a report from an RMA Maintenance employee regarding a male subject who appeared disoriented near Stonehouse Road and the RMA Yard. Upon arrival, patrol observed the subject walking through a nearby field carrying a case of beer. The subject appeared steady on his feet and did not appear disoriented. No further action required. Area clear.

March 5

12:05 a.m., Patrol was dispatched to the Murieta Inn regarding suspicious persons. Upon arrival, Officer Davis made contact with the night manager,

who reported that five guests (three adult males and two adult females) who checked in earlier had been loud and belligerent, generating complaints from other guests. Management addressed the issue with the group and advised them that continued behavior would result in removal from the property. The individuals complied, and no further complaints were reported. Officer Davis cleared the call and resumed routine patrol.

March 6

3:54 p.m., Patrol responded to a welfare check regarding an elderly male wandering near Rio Blanco Drive and 9 Park who appeared confused and unable to recall his address. Upon arrival, Officer Passer made contact with the reporting party and the subject. Dispatch identified the individual and contacted a family member. Officer Passer remained on scene

until the family member arrived and safely escorted the subject back to his residence on Cazador Lane.

March 8

10:54 a.m., Patrol responded to a complaint regarding a subject fishing with multiple lines in the water and possessing a caught fish. Officer Passer made contact with one juvenile male and two additional juveniles. The subject was advised of RMA rules and regulations regarding fishing and use of waterways. A verbal warning was issued. The juveniles were compliant and the matter was resolved without citation.

5:28 p.m., Patrol responded to a report of teenagers performing donuts in trucks near Lake Clementia. Upon arrival, patrol was unable to locate any vehicles matching the description. Area checked and cleared. Patrol resumed routine operations. ★

Snowpack Remains Below Average Despite February Boost

California Department of Water Resources News Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG)

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) recently conducted the third snow survey of the season at Phillips Station. The manual survey recorded 28 inches of snow depth and a snow water equivalent of 11 inches, which is 47 percent of average for this location. The snow water equivalent measures the amount of water contained in the snowpack and is a key component of the Department of Water Resources' water supply forecast. Statewide, the snowpack is 66 percent of average for this date.

The snow survey results show an increase from last month's measurements following a series of cold, major snow-producing storms that ended a five-week dry period. Unfortunately, the recent storms were not enough to get the state back to average conditions for this time of year. Warmer storms early this week also caused snowmelt at lower elevations.

"Although the storms we saw in mid-February were some of the coldest and best snow-producing storms we have seen since 2023, they were not enough to get us back to average conditions," said Andy Reising, manager of DWR's Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting Unit.

"The snowpack is in better shape than it was one month



The Department of Water Resources (DWR) recently conducted the third snow survey of the season at Phillips Station. The manual survey recorded 28 inches of snow depth and a snow water equivalent of 11 inches, which is 47 percent of average for this location. Photo courtesy of Department of Water Resources

ago, but we only have a month left of our snow-accumulation season and time is rapidly running out to catch up. Statewide, we are only about 57 percent of where we hope to be by April 1."

Storms this season have also been unevenly distributed across the Sierra Nevada. While the Southern Sierra Nevada is 90 percent average for today's date, the Northern Sierra Nevada, where several of the largest major water supply reservoirs are located, is only 46 percent normal for this date.

"Water supply in California increasingly depends on a small

number of big storms," said DWR director Karla Nemeth. "We face higher drought risk when they don't arrive and greater urgency to modernize infrastructure to capture water when they do. The dramatic wet-dry swings this winter remind us again that ever-warmer average temperatures have reshaped the California water cycle. We must adapt."

On average, the largest snow-producing months in the Sierra Nevada are December, January, February and March. Historically, the snowpack peaks on or near April 1, after which the snowpack

transitions to generating runoff into California's rivers and reservoirs.

While the snowpack remains below average, major reservoirs statewide are currently 122 percent of average. State water managers, including the State Water Project, continue to focus on efforts to capture and store as much water as possible. The monthly snow surveys play a critical role in how the State Water Project allocates water each year.

On average, the Sierra snowpack supplies about 30 percent of California's water needs. Its natural ability to store water

is why the Sierra snowpack is often referred to as California's "frozen reservoir." Data from these snow surveys and forecasts produced by DWR's Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting Unit are key factors in determining how DWR manages the state's water resources.

DWR conducts four media-oriented snow surveys at Phillips Station each winter near the first of each month, January through April and, if necessary, May. The next survey is tentatively scheduled for April 1.

For California's current hydrological conditions, visit <https://cww.water.ca.gov>. ★

California Comment on NFIB's Latest Jobs Report

National numbers not reflective of state's below national average on optimism

National Federation of Independent Business News Release

SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG) - The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), monthly Jobs Report released March 5 showed that the Small Business Employment Index ticked up nearly 1 point to 103.5, a 2.3-point increase above the 2025 average of 101.2, and 3.5 points above the historical average of 100.

"Glad to see the positive national numbers holding. Although our Jobs Report is not broken down by state, our new state-specific Small Business Economic Trends report is, and it shows optimism among small business owners here below the national average. This has to change. We recommended some policy changes the Legislature can take to get California back on track and this week released a poll of our California small-business-owning members," said NFIB California State Director John Kabateck.

NFIB's Jobs Report is a national survey of NFIB-member small-business owners, not broken down by state. The NFIB Small Business Employment Index is a new measure of the current state of the small business labor market. The Index integrates actual and planned changes in employment and employee compensation into a singular data



While the overall market remains in balance, employers need more skilled workers to fill open positions. Photo courtesy Freepik

point. A higher Index reflects an overall tighter labor market; a lower Index reflects an overall weaker labor market.

"February's numbers show a growing tightness in the small business labor market. While the overall market remains in balance, employers need more skilled workers to fill open positions," said NFIB Chief Economist

Bill Dunkelberg.

Highlights from the Latest NFIB Jobs Report include the following.

A seasonally adjusted net 12% of owners plan to create new jobs in the next three months, down 4 points from January and the lowest level since May 2025. Despite the decrease, hiring plans are close to their

average of a net 11%.

In February, 15% of small business owners cited labor quality as their single most important problem, down 1 point from January and the fourth consecutive monthly decline. The last time labor quality, reported as the single most important problem, was this low was in April 2020. Labor costs, reported as the single most important problem by small business owners, remained at 9%.

Seasonally adjusted, a net 34% of small business owners reported raising compensation in February, up 2 points from January and the highest level since March 2025. A net 22% (seasonally adjusted) plan to raise compensation in the next three months, unchanged from January.

Keep up with the latest California small business news at www.nfib.com. Follow us on X @NFIB_CA and on Facebook @NFIB.CA.

For over 80 years, NFIB has been advocating on behalf of America's small and independent business owners, both in Washington, D.C., and in all 50 state capitals. NFIB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, and member-driven association. Since our founding in 1943, NFIB has been exclusively dedicated to small and independent businesses and remains so today. For more information, visit nfib.com. ★

CalHR Named Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award Winner

California Department of Human Resources News Release

SACRAMENTO REGION, CA (MPG)

The California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) has been named a 2026 Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award (GEWA) winner for strengths development. The award recognizes organizations that create workplace cultures that help people do their best work.

"As we work to modernize and streamline state government operations, prioritizing employee engagement is not just good practice, it is essential for delivering better services efficiently," said CalHR Director Monica Erickson. "Winning this award affirms our commitment to treating employee engagement as a strategic priority. Our success with strengths development sets a powerful example for how investing in people drives effectiveness across California's government. By helping people work from their strengths, we

improve how CalHR serves state departments and ultimately how the state serves Californians."

CalHR launched its Getting Started With Strengths roll-out in 2025 and embedded CliftonStrengths into onboarding, leadership forums and internal communications. To date, 85 percent of CalHR employees have completed the CliftonStrengths assessment, reflecting strong internal participation. The CliftonStrengths assessment is an online tool from Gallup that helps people discover their natural talents and how they think, feel and act. Based on decades of research, it shows 34 common talent themes.

CliftonStrengths gives individuals and teams a simple way to understand and use their strengths. This supports leadership and professional growth by focusing on what people do best. CalHR has reported measurable gains in employee engagement scores since the program's launch, including: supporting recruitment efforts

with over 150 statewide recruiters providing job information and guidance to more than 3,400 participants across 36 events; enhancing employee benefits customer service through a redesigned website with over 871,000 views and an innovative chatbot that provided timely answers to over 4,500 benefit-related questions, helping employees and their families make informed decisions about their health and financial wellbeing; and delivering 2.5 million hours of training through 225,000 course enrollments to over 100,000 active users, empowering state employees to develop skills and advance their careers.

In a public sector environment where employee engagement is often overlooked, CalHR's recognition stands out. Previous Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award Winners for strengths include Charles Schwab, Mercedes-Benz and Mercedes-AMG, Southwest Airlines, U.S. Bank and other multinational companies.

CalHR delivers critical services

that impact the lives and careers of more than 227,000 public employees and 237,000 retirees across California, represented by over 150 state departments. By leading this approach, CalHR is paving the way for other state agencies to harness employee engagement as a driver for improved service delivery statewide.

The initiative was piloted within CalHR and is only available to only CalHR staff. CalHR intends to expand the model to support other state departments in the future and is designing the program to be scalable across the broader state workforce. State of California department leaders who are interested in employee engagement can visit the Employee Engagement webpage for more information at: benefits.calhr.ca.gov/state-employees/engagement-resources/employee-engagement/public-service-recognition-week/.

For a complete list of GEWA winners, visit: www.gallup.com/workplace/702278/announcing-2026-gallup-exceptional-workplace-award-winners.aspx.

Learn more about the awards at www.gallup.com/workplace/329768/gallup-exceptional-workplace-awards.aspx.

About CalHR

CalHR is responsible for all issues related to employee salaries and benefits, job classifications, civil rights, training, exams, recruitment and retention. For most employees, many of these matters are determined through the collective bargaining process managed by CalHR. For more information about CalHR, visit www.calhr.ca.gov/.

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Class of 1981 to Reunite July 25



The Elk Grove High School's Class of 1981 will hold its 45-year reunion on Saturday, July 25 at The Rancho Murieta Inn & Spa, 7337 Murieta Drive. Courtesy photo

Elk Grove High School Class of '81 Reunion Committee News Release

ELK GROVE, CA (MPG) - Elk Grove High School's Class of 1981 will celebrate its 45-year reunion on Saturday, July 25. The reunion committee has been working non-stop to plan a memorable event and this year is no exception!

The event will be held at The Rancho Murieta Inn & Spa, 7337 Murieta Drive in Rancho Murieta. The evening begins with a no-host

bar at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner at 7 p.m. There will be dancing, raffle prizes, our favorite tunes and lots of fun!

Those interested in attending are encouraged to register early to get the best price. Early-bird registration will be available from now through June 30 at \$50. From July 1 to 17, registration will cost \$60. No registrations will be taken at the door. Registration is available online at forms.gle/Nrewx1N81R7xx7jPA.

For those who'd like to golf, there will be a

separate event on Friday, July 24 at WildHawk Golf Club, 7713 Vineyard Road in Sacramento.

Sign up for a foursome and spend the morning on

the course. Tee time starts at 10:30 a.m. Single golfers are welcome, and we will find a group for you.

This is not a walk-on event; those interested

must register for golf when registering for the reunion.

There are a limited number of hotel rooms available for those who'd like to stay overnight.

Contact the Rancho Murieta Inn & Spa at 916-354-3900 and mention Elk Grove High School Reunion for a discounted rate (\$220/room). ★

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

VFW to Remember Vietnam Vets on March 29

The Rancho Murieta Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars will host a local observance of National Vietnam War Veterans Day at 1 p.m. Sunday, March 29 at the gazebo.

The program will feature a vocalist, a trumpet player and tributes honoring Vietnam War veterans for their service and sacrifice. Attendees are encouraged to share their own remembrances. The VFW will host a social hour before the ceremony, and the VFW Auxiliary will provide refreshments afterward.

For more information, contact Jay Solomon at 916-479-0441.

Bookmobile Celebrates Women's History Month

The Sacramento Public Library Bookmobile visits the Rancho Murieta Village Clubhouse every Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon.

Visitors can sign up for a library card and check out books, magazines, DVDs and audiobooks. Book clubs can also request a "Book Club in a Box," which includes 10 to 12 copies of a selected title.

March is Women's History Month, and the Bookmobile will feature books for adults and children highlighting the contributions of women throughout history. The library's annual seed packets—including flowers, herbs and vegetables—are also available this month.

Easter Egg Hunt April 4

The Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta will hold its annual Easter Egg Hunt and no-host Family Picnic from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 4 at Stonehouse Park.

Children, their families and their guests are invited to attend the Easter Egg Hunt, which will feature more than 4,500 plastic

eggs filled with stickers and candy.

During the event, children can visit the petting farm, make Easter crafts, decorate Easter cookies and get glitter tattoos for family-friendly prices.

Tickets for activities, as well as popcorn, juice and water, will be available for purchase Saturday morning with cash or credit card. There will also be photo opportunities with the Easter Bunny. The Fire Department will display its trucks and equipment if not on a call, and the Sheriff's Department will host an information table.

The Easter Egg Hunt will be divided by age groups on the softball field outfield with starting times of 11:20 a.m. for ages 2-4 (egg hunt with stickers), 11:40 a.m. for ages 5-7 (egg hunt with candy) and noon for ages 8-10 (egg hunt with candy).

The Murieta Dance Company will conclude the event with a performance at 12:30 p.m. The

event will take place rain or shine.

The Kiwanis Club thanks the Cosumnes River Elementary K-Kids and the Rancho Murieta Key Club for stuffing all 4,500 plastic eggs, the RM Key Club for helping with activities and refreshment sales, and Scouts from Troop 633 for helping set up and take down the event. The club also thanks the Rancho Murieta Association for its help in making the Easter Egg Hunt a joyful occasion for local families. For more information, contact Bronwyn Anthony at (916) 384-6444.

Vernal Pools Featured March 24 at Garden Club Meeting

The Rancho Murieta Garden Club's March 24 member meeting will focus on "The Importance of Vernal Pools," with guest speaker Professor Jamie Kneitel, chair of the CSU

Sacramento Department of Environmental Studies. She will discuss the seasonal biodiversity of our local regional wetlands.

Guests are welcome, and the first meeting is free for new attendees. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for a social hour, refreshments and a raffle, with the program beginning at 7 p.m. The meeting takes place at the RMA Building.

Scouts Slate Shredding Event

Got a pile of paperwork ready to go? Scout Troop 633 invites the community to a secure paper-shredding event from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 2 at the RMA Building parking lot. It's an easy way to declutter, safeguard your information and support local Scouts.

The suggested donation is \$15 per banker's box, reflecting increased truck and fuel costs this year. ★

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Sock-Hop Theme Highlights Elementary Dance

Continued from page 1

feel celebrated, valued and proud to share time with someone who supports them.”

A Nostalgic Theme

This year’s theme was inspired by a nostalgic soda-shop idea Kassel encountered while visiting a “dirty soda” pop-up that served creative dessert drinks.

“It immediately brought to mind the idea of a classic soda shop, ‘50s vibe,” she said. “When my oldest daughter was in kindergarten at CRES, the dance had a sock-hop theme, and it created such sweet memories. Now those students are in middle school, and my youngest daughter attended her first daughters and dates dance as a kindergarten. It felt special to bring the theme back for a whole new group of girls.”

Thousands of balloons were used to transform the multipurpose room into a colorful space with arches, towers and oversized displays shaped like a jukebox and an ice-cream sundae.

Each girl received a wrist corsage – a tradition included in the price of admission – adding a formal touch to the festive evening.

Dancing and Desserts

While many fathers and daughters shared dances together, much of the evening featured groups of girls singing along to their favorite songs and dancing with friends. At one point, the girls formed a lively conga line that wound across the dance floor



Father Santos Basquez spins his daughter Lolianna into a playful dip on the dance floor.

while fathers stood along the edges of the room smiling and watching the fun.

Many families embraced the sock-hop theme. Girls arrived wearing poodle skirts, ponytails and pastel jackets, while many fathers sported white T-shirts and jeans reminiscent of the 1950s style. Others chose a more formal look, with some fathers in suits and daughters wearing elegant dresses.

Music for the evening was provided by DJ Drew of Drew Gray Media of

Wilton, who kept the dance floor lively with age-appropriate hits that the girls eagerly sang along to.

The DJ also brought a photo booth setup with a large mirror that functioned more like a photo studio than a traditional booth. Attendees could take pictures throughout the evening and receive printed photo strips as keepsakes. A projection screen above the DJ booth displayed photos in real time as guests texted images from their phones

to a designated number.

Sweet Treats and Dinner Options

In keeping with the soda-shop theme, the PTA created a custom drink station featuring dessert beverages with playful names such as “Jukebox Juice,” “The Pink Poodle” and “The Beach Boys.”

While many families went out to dinner beforehand, the event also offered food on site. A Drewski’s food truck parked outside the multipurpose room



Scott and Audrey Matter strike their best pose in the photo booth.



Girls enthusiastically sing along to the pop hit “Golden” from “K-Pop Demon Hunters.”

served grilled cheese sandwiches and pulled-pork sandwiches for families who wanted a meal before dancing.

Community Effort

The evening was made possible through the work of numerous volunteers. Balloon decorations were designed and assembled by Haley Wong and several friends, while the entire CRES PTA contributed to planning and organizing the event.

For Kassel, the

popularity of the dance reflects its deeper meaning for families.

“It becomes more than just music and decorations,” she said. “It’s laughter on the dance floor, twirls in pretty dresses and memories that last long after elementary school ends. For many of the girls, it’s one of those magical, confidence-building nights they will always remember.”

View more photos at therivervalleytimes.com and on Facebook. ★

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