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# AMERICAN RIVER Messenger

VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 7

Serving Fair Oaks, Orangevale & Sacramento County

APRIL 10, 2026

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## Volunteer at Heart



Anupama Shojai is a senior care advisor for CarePatrol. Photo courtesy of Anupama Shojai

By Judy Andrews

**FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG)** - In a community filled with generous people, being named the Fair Oaks Chamber's Volunteer of the Year is a significant achievement. Earlier this year, at the Best of Fair Oaks Gala, Kimberley Pitillo, CEO and president of the Fair Oaks Chamber, announced Anupama Shojai as the 2025 Volunteer of the Year. Shojai is a business owner and entrepreneur who consistently supports others through her work, her family, her community and her active involvement with three local chambers.



Anupama Shojai was named the Fair Oaks Chamber's Volunteer of the Year. Photo courtesy of Michelle Massaro

We recently caught up with Anupama Shojai to learn more about the inspiring volunteer.

Born and raised in Chennai, India, Shojai moved to the U.S. in 1995 to pursue a master's degree in electrical and computer engineering at Oklahoma State University. Shortly after graduating, she secured a position with a high-tech company in Cupertino, where she met her husband, Masoud Shojai. The couple moved to El Dorado Hills in 2007, and Anupama took some time off work to raise their three children, now ages 24, 20 and 17.

In 2011, Anupama Shojai returned to work as an instructional designer

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## FORPD Board Announces Rachel Anne Gray Scholarship Awards

By Shaunna Boyd

**FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG)** - At the March meeting of the Fair Oaks Recreation and Park District (FORPD) Board of Directors, Recreation Supervisor Mary Stoakley announced this year's recipients of the Rachel Anne Gray Scholarship.

Gray was a beloved and very involved community member who passed away in 2012 at the age of 21. The memorial scholarship was established in 2014, and over the years nearly \$45,000 has been awarded, impacting 56 local youth.

As a prior recipient, Stoakley said it is always a "full-circle moment" for her to present these awards: "It's awesome to get to see the future of our upcoming generations. They are all incredible kids."

The \$1,000 scholarship was awarded to Griffin Keel, a senior at Bella Vista High School who captains both the cross country and track teams. In addition to serving as president of the Spanish Honor Society and participating in Key Club and other school organizations, he is also a local tutor, helping younger students learn. Keel plans to pursue a career in nursing, with a focus on oncology or emergency care.

Nora Gutierrez was awarded the \$1,500 scholarship. She has pursued advanced coursework at Bella Vista through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, as well as earning the Seal of Biliteracy in American Sign Language. She plans to major in biochemistry to become a forensic pathologist.

Funding for the Rachel Anne Gray Scholarship comes from the annual Lake Natoma Trail Run, which will be held on June 6. To register or learn more, visit <https://www.forpd.org/422/Lake-Natoma-Trail-Run>.

Rachel's dad, Tom Gray, spoke during public comments to thank the Board for their continued support: "Every year it's an incredible thing to see her name, her legacy, continue. ... There're some incredible young kids coming up. ... Our future is bright." He asked to work with staff and the Board of Directors to ensure the scholarship fund continues in perpetuity.

The Board then considered allocating

*Continued on page 2*

## Helping Hands OV Distributes 253 Easter Baskets to Local Children

Helping Hands OV News Release

**ORANGEVALE, CA (MPG)** - On March 28, Helping Hands OV brought the community together for a joyful day of connection, service and celebration at its Spring Community Carnival and Easter Baskets for Kids in Need program, held at the Orangevale Grange.

The free, family-friendly carnival welcomed local families for a day filled with games, activities and springtime fun. Community organizations and groups hosted interactive carnival booths, providing engaging experiences for children of all ages while connecting with families throughout the day.

A highlight of the event was the opportunity for families to take free photos with the Easter Bunny, made possible thanks to



A highlight of the Spring Community Carnival was the opportunity for families to take free photos with the Easter Bunny. Photo courtesy of Helping Hands OV

the generous support of Rose Senior Placement and Cathy Kurtz Photography.

Alongside the carnival, Helping Hands OV successfully distributed 253 Easter baskets to local children in need. Through

the organization's adopt-a-child-style program, community donors selected children by age and gender and created thoughtful, customized baskets to ensure each child felt seen, valued and appreciated.

"This event truly represents what our community is capable of when we come together," said Sydnie Anderson, president of Helping Hands OV.

Helping Hands OV

*Continued on page 2*



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# FORPD Board Announces Rachel Anne Gray Scholarship Awards

*Continued from page 1*  
funding from the Gum Ranch Landscape and Lighting account to cover resurfacing repairs for the splash pad at Gum Ranch Park.

The splash pad is one of the most popular amenities in the park, and it is busy throughout the May–October season. Due to frequent use, the rubberized surfacing has peeled back from the underlying concrete and now requires repair.

Parks and Facilities Manager Sean Ventura said the original installer doesn't offer patch repairs, and so the estimate for a complete replacement of the rubberized surface would be almost \$40,000. Ventura looked into other companies to replace the surface, but he said all the quotes were "ridiculously high."

After reviewing how other parks manage similar amenities, Ventura identified a polymer-modified cementitious coating, similar to what is used around pools. A full replacement using the new material will only cost around \$2,288, plus staff time to complete the work. Ventura said this is a long-term solution, because it will offer a safe surface that will hold up over time.

Director Delinda Tamagni said, "Thank you for taking the time to look for different options."

During public comments, Gum Ranch resident Elizabeth Williams said, "Thank you for being so diligent in trying to find a lower-cost solution. It's just a popular park. That splash pad is jammed all summer long."

The Board voted unanimously to approve the funding for the splash pad repairs.

The Board also considered approving SCI Consulting to prepare the annual Engineer's Report for three assessment districts for fiscal year 2026-27.

The report is the first step in the annual process to determine the assessment amounts for the Fair Oaks Parks Maintenance and Recreation Improvement District, the Phoenix Field Landscape and Lighting Assessment District, and the Gum Ranch Landscape and Lighting Assessment District.

During public comments, Elizabeth Williams expressed concern that the report considers Gum Ranch Park a neighborhood park, which doesn't take into account its frequent use by the general public.

Director Ralph Carhart said that the

objective of this report is to ensure that the assessment funding collected within that district is set aside for specific use within that district – but he added that money from the FORPD general fund also supplements all the parks as well.

District Administrator Mike Aho explained that a neighborhood park is a specific definition for a park under five acres without a designated parking area. He said the designation doesn't mean its use is exclusive to that neighborhood, since all parks are open to the general public.

"Gum Ranch is a unique beast because it's such a cool park," said Aho.

The Board voted unanimously to allow the consultant to move forward with the report, and they expect to review and discuss the completed report at the June meeting.

They also finalized the transition of the Fair Oaks Recreation and Arts Foundation into a separate and independent entity, comprising up to nine members.

Under the updated bylaws, two board members will continue to hold seats on the foundation board, with Chair Raymond James Irwin and Director Carhart volunteering to serve in that role.

District Administrator Aho recruited candidates from the community to fill some of the initial foundation seats, and two were ready for appointment.

Cassie Kendall grew up in Fair Oaks and was a Rachel Anne Gray Scholarship recipient. She works in public affairs and wants to start volunteering to increase youth involvement in theater and the arts.

Michael Cole lives in Fair Oaks and is raising a family here. He is passionate about supporting local art and wants to improve access to art within the community.

The foundation board voted unanimously to approve the new members, who then took their seats at the table. Next, Directors Tamagni, Darren Mounts and John O'Farrell all offered their resignations from the foundation board, which were unanimously accepted.

The newly independent foundation board set their next meeting for April 15 at 4:30 p.m.

Both meetings were adjourned, and the next regular meeting of the FORPD Board of Directors will be held on April 15 at 6 p.m. ★

# Helping Hands OV Distributes 253 Easter Baskets to Local Children



Volunteers accessorized with bunny ears, greeting children with smiles and a day of springtime fun. Photo courtesy of Helping Hands OV

*Continued from page 1*  
extends its heartfelt thanks to all participating organizations who provided free family fun, as well as the many community members who donated to support the Easter basket program. The organization also recognizes the incredible team of volunteers whose time, energy and dedication made both the carnival and distribution seamless and successful.

The event also included a food drive benefiting the Orangevale–Fair Oaks Food Bank, helping support local families facing increased need.

Helping Hands OV is a 100 percent volunteer nonprofit dedicated to connecting

the community through acts of service, supporting seniors, families, individuals with disabilities and others in need throughout the region.

Community members are encouraged to learn more about upcoming programs and events by visiting [helpinghandsov.org](http://helpinghandsov.org). Those interested in getting involved are invited to attend the organization's monthly meet-up and meeting, held on the second Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. Details and locations are updated regularly on the website calendar.

For more information, visit [helpinghandsov.org](http://helpinghandsov.org). ★

# Explore Summer Learning Opportunities in San Juan Unified

## San Juan Unified School District News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Students across San Juan Unified School District will have opportunities to learn, explore and stay engaged this summer through a variety of programs designed to support academic growth and hands-on experiences.

Programs include the Camp Invention Summer Program, where students can explore creativity and problem-solving through interactive activities, and the Early Learning Academy, which helps young learners build



Summer programs offered by San Juan Unified School District include a specialized summer program for newcomer English learners to boost English language skills and build confidence before the school year. Photo courtesy of San Juan Unified School District

important early skills as they prepare for school.

High school students can also participate in credit recovery opportunities to help them stay on track toward graduation.

Families can learn more about available programs by visiting [sanjuan.edu/summer](http://sanjuan.edu/summer), where information will be updated as additional details and opportunities become available. ★

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# Women's Empowerment Receives \$50,000 from Wells Fargo

## Women's Empowerment News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Wells Fargo recently granted \$50,000 to Women's Empowerment for its housing and workforce development programs for Sacramento women experiencing homelessness.

"Wells Fargo continues to be one of our most steadfast supporters, always prioritizing the women and children in Sacramento who are experiencing homelessness and ensuring they have the tools they need to find jobs with upward mobility and safe homes they can afford," said Lisa Culp, executive director, Women's Empowerment.

Grant funds will support Women's Empowerment's initial nine-week employment readiness and empowerment programs for its graduates and



Women's Empowerment celebrates the graduation of its quarterly program for women experiencing homelessness in December 2025. The nonprofit recently received a grant from Wells Fargo to continue its work. Photo courtesy of Women's Empowerment

its Trellis Gardens transitional workforce housing program.

Women's Empowerment is celebrating its 25th anniversary

this year as the most comprehensive job-readiness program

in the Sacramento area designed specifically to help women break the generational cycle of homelessness for themselves and their children. Since 2001, more than 2,000 women have graduated from the program with their more than 4,000 children. Women's Empowerment is funded through private donations from the community and grants. To make a donation: [www.womens-empowerment.org](http://www.womens-empowerment.org).

Wells Fargo is committed to helping communities thrive with financially resilient families, vibrant small businesses and affordable places to call home. The company's grant-making focuses on financial mobility, housing access and affordability, and small business growth. Wells Fargo has donated more than \$2 billion over the past five years through its foundation. For more information, visit [www.WellsFargo.com](http://www.WellsFargo.com). ★

# Volunteer at Heart

*Continued from page 1*

and trainer at Mentor Graphics (now known as Siemens EDA) based in Fremont. After 12 years and several promotions, she decided it was time to change careers due to looming layoffs in the high-tech industry.

Following guidance from a career counselor, Shojaei entered the senior care industry and bought a CarePatrol franchise in 2024.

"As a volunteer at heart, working in a field where I could help others definitely resonated with me," Shojaei shared. "I knew nothing about the senior care industry when I got into this field, which is why I decided to go with a franchise. CarePatrol provided all the training and tools I needed to succeed in my

new business."

CarePatrol consists of certified senior advisors, like herself, who operate 220 locations across the U.S., including 25 areas in California. As a small business owner, Shojaei serves the communities of Carmichael, Fair Oaks, Gold River, Arden Arcade, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento.

As a senior care advisor, Shojaei helps families explore options for their elderly loved ones who can no longer stay at home. She visits clients at their homes, hospitals, or skilled nursing facilities and does not charge for her services. Instead, she is compensated by the communities she recommends, such as assisted living, independent living and board-and-care homes. When

she is not meeting with clients, Shojaei tours local communities and meets with staff.

"My goal is to help older adults preserve their dignity and thrive in their new environment," she said. "Guiding families through this process is what makes me passionate about the work I do."

In addition to the senior advisor certification required for her advisory role, Shojaei is a certified dementia practitioner and a certified placement and referral specialist. Her understanding of diseases like Alzheimer's enhances her work. She also volunteers with the Alzheimer's Association as a community educator.

Following her career change in 2024, Shojaei joined the Fair Oaks Chamber to expand her

network and offer her skills as a volunteer. Last fall, she played a primary role in the chamber's honorary mayor program, supporting candidate Heather Ford and campaign volunteer leader Rachel Griffith. Shojaei volunteered to assist where needed and ended up managing several tasks on Ford's campaign. Her efforts did not go unnoticed.

"Anupama is the perfect volunteer," said Griffith. "She initially stepped up to help us with graphic design and creating flyers, but she also improved our process for organizing events and much more. She is someone you want to have on your team."

Ford added, "I couldn't be more grateful for the way Anupama offered her time, knowledge, talents, education,

and hard work to support my 3-month fundraising campaign. She puts creativity and heart into everything she does."

At home, Shojaei is just as active in her children's lives. Currently, she is the president of Boys Team Charity, where she mentors high school boys, like her son, who hold leadership roles. In addition to serving on the Fair Oaks Chamber board, she is a board of director on several professional boards, including the National Placement and Referral Alliance of Sacramento and the Sacramento chapter of Case Management Society of America.

For Shojaei, "Giving back is a way to be an active citizen in my community, because one person can make a difference." ★

# Allergy season is in full bloom.

## Find relief with same-day care.

It's that time of year. Runny nose, sore eyes, and—bless you. If you're experiencing the effects of seasonal allergies, we can help. Dignity Health offers convenient same-day care options throughout Greater Sacramento to get you through the season—including Express Primary Care in Elk Grove and Roseville, and Urgent Care in Midtown Sacramento and Woodland. Get in, get seen, and get on with your day. Visit [dignityhealth.org/get-care-today](http://dignityhealth.org/get-care-today) to schedule an appointment.





# COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Informing, Empowering and Engaging Readers with Their Community



## Regrowing America's Skills for Success Through Literacy

*The Benchmark That Shapes Everything After*

By Patsy McGavock  
JustServe.org

Think back to the first story that unlocked new possibilities for you. Literacy is a well proven indicator of success in both career and life, a gateway to lifelong independent learning.

For too many students, and adults, today, that gate never fully opens

Fifty-six percent of U.S. adults read below a sixth-grade level. That's the point where readers move beyond supported learning to independent thinking — where comprehension, analysis and real-world application begin.

A critical shift also happens in third grade, called "the great divider," when students move from learning to read to reading to learn.

When those benchmarks aren't reached, life outcomes follow. Studies show lower income higher incarceration rates — more than 70% of incarcerated adults read below a fourth-grade level — and difficulty navigating medical and financial information or advocating for oneself.

According to the California Department of Education, in 2024 about 43 percent of California third graders met that benchmark, rising to 50 percent in sixth grade and 56 percent in eleventh grade.

There is good news. "The state of literacy is in an overhaul," said Heather Brant of San Juan Unified School District. "We are poised for significant systemic shifts." Not because of new information, but because the way things have been done over the last 20 to 30 years is not producing strong readers and writers.

The 2022 podcast "Sold a Story" highlights how

competing philosophies, phonics-based and whole language, led to a middle-ground approach that treated reading as a natural process, often encouraging students to guess words using context rather than decode them. Yet the science of how we learn to read shows structured instruction is necessary; connecting letters to sounds, not context clues alone.

"We need to understand that skills, in both reading and writing, must be explicitly taught," Brant said. "The majority of students don't inherently learn to read." She added that it's not a shift to phonics alone. "We are not abandoning one for the other. We're saying they all need to be taught."

"Sold a Story" sparked a national conversation, leading to legislation supporting early literacy through universal reading screeners in transitional kindergarten through second grade, expanding to fifth grade by 2027. In San Juan, teachers send home results with targeted skills for families to practice together. Students are encouraged to read aloud and do the work with the words, while adults read more complex texts for enrichment.

"There needs to be family involvement in our children's education," said Natalia Aguirre-Mazzi, family engagement coordinator at San Juan Unified School District.

The greatest indicator of student success is a consistent adult. Research shows 60 to 85 percent of outcomes are tied to factors outside the classroom, especially family environment.

Children whose parents read with them at least three times a week are two to three times more likely to perform at grade level.

The number of books in a home remains one of the strongest predictors of success.

"Programs can be great — but everyday life is powerful," Brant said. "Talk to your children about words and patterns. Make it fun. Make it a discovery."

Supportive interactions can extend beyond the home.

"The most valuable thing a community can give, beyond funds, is its time" Aguirre-Mazzi said. "For students who don't have that one person, being that adult matters."

In San Juan Unified, the pathway starts with the Family and Community Engagement Team. Volunteers apply, get cleared and are matched with a local school to support classrooms where help is needed most. Organizations can also ask how to help.

"Be flexible," Brant advised. "It won't always look the same; schools have unique cultures, and classrooms change year to year."

Beyond volunteering, it could be donating books, supporting library programs, brainstorming with School Site Councils, or advocating for funding and staff support.

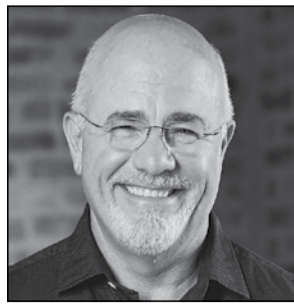
At its core, this work is about surrounding students with encouragement, access to books, and consistent practice.

"Do what you can, with the capacity you have," Brant said. "Just one step, one shift."

Because literacy is not only about school.

"Literacy opens up your world."

For many, that world is still waiting. In Part 2, we'll look at how communities can help rebuild literacy in adults and break the generational cycle that begins long before a child enters a classroom. ★



Dave Ramsey

## Dave Ramsey Says

*Time to Sell a Car?*

Dear Dave,

I have two cars. One is paid for, and I owe \$23,000 on the other. These are my only vehicles. I'd like to sell the one I still owe money on, but no one wants to pay enough to cover the balance. I make \$85,000 a year, and I also have enough money in savings, with plenty left over, to cover the difference on one of the offers. Still, I was wondering if there's a rule of thumb to determine whether or not to sell a car in this kind of situation?

— Jimmy

Dear Jimmy,

If you really love the car, and by really focusing and saving like crazy you can pay off everything else in your life, except your

home in 18 to 24 months, I'm okay with you keeping the car. But if you can't? Sorry, It's time to sell.

But I want you to hear this next part loud and clear. It also may be time to sell if the if the total value of all your vehicles—I'm talking cars, trucks, boats, jet skis, and their relatives—is equal to half, or more than half, of your annual income. Why? Because these are all things that depreciate quickly. You don't want half of your income wrapped up in things that are going down in value.

You can probably pay this thing off in less than two years if you really focus on making it happen, and you haven't got a bunch of other debt. But if you don't like the car, or you don't want to work that hard to keep it, then sell the thing and write a check for the difference. I mean, when it's all said and done,

it's just a car. And anyway, you said you'd have plenty of cash left over in savings if you went this direction, right?

But remember, if this is your decision, start rebuilding your savings to its previous level right after by putting what would have gone for car payments back into your savings account. You never know when life might throw something unexpected at you!

— 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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## AMERICAN RIVER Messenger

Serving Fair Oaks, Orangevale and Sacramento County since 2006

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# Get Ready for California's 2026 Primary

## Your Questions About Voting, Answered

By CalMatters Staff  
CalMatters.org

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Where do I vote? Am I registered to vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail? Get the answers to your election day questions ahead of California's June 2 primary election.

**How do I vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail?** Yes. Under state law, vote-by-mail ballots are sent to every active registered voter.

**When will I receive my mail-in-ballot?** Counties will begin mailing ballots May 4.

**How do I return my mail-in ballot?** Mail it to your county elections office; to be counted, ballots have to be postmarked on or before June 2 and received by election offices by June 9. Drop it off at a ballot drop box, vote center or polling location anywhere in the state. Ask someone you trust to do it for you, but that person can't receive payment for doing it.

**Can I vote in person? Where is my polling place or vote center?** Yes, although mailing your ballot as soon as possible is the best way to get your vote counted fast. You can find out where to vote in the following ways. Visit <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>, text "VOTE" to GOVOTE (468-8683), call the secretary of state's hotline at (800) 345-VOTE, check your county Voter Information Guide or contact your county elections office

If you live in one of 30 counties, you'll have increased options, including as many as 10 days of in-person early voting.

**How do I register to vote? Am I registered to vote?** You can check the secretary of state's website (<https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>). You'll need to enter your name, date of birth and either your California driver license, identification card number or the last four digits of your Social Security number. If you don't have those available, contact your county elections office or the secretary of state via email or phone at 800-345-8683.

If you've changed your name since the last time you voted, or if you moved and didn't notify the Department of Motor Vehicles or U.S. Postal Service, you may have to register again. If you haven't voted in several consecutive general elections, your registration may have been canceled.

**How do I register?** Visit <https://registertovote.ca.gov/>. You'll need the same information as above.



Where do I vote? Am I registered to vote? Does everyone get a ballot in the mail? Get the answers to your election day questions ahead of California's June 2 primary election. Photo courtesy Freepik

If the DMV has your signature on file, you'll be able to complete the process online. If not, you'll need to print, sign and mail your completed application to your county elections office. You can also pick up a paper application at elections offices, any DMV office and at many post offices, public libraries and government offices. You'll be contacted when your application is approved, or if you need to provide more information.

**What happens if I miss the voter registration deadline?** The last day to register online for the primary election is May 18. If you are registering or re-registering less than 15 days before May 18, you must complete same-day voter registration and request your ballot in person at your county elections office or polling location.

**How do I change my political party if I'm already registered?** You'll need to re-register to vote.

**What if I need help with voting? What if I need voter information in a language other than English?** The secretary of state's office has voter instructions in the following languages: Spanish, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. Your county elections office may offer additional languages.

**When will I receive my voter guide?** The statewide voter

information guide will be available online by April and will be mailed to voters later that month.

**What am I voting on?** The June primary election is the first opportunity for Californians to choose which candidates will appear on the general election ballot in November. Unlike some other states, California's primaries are nonpartisan, so the top two vote-getters in each race will advance to the November election, regardless of political party.

The ballot is packed with state and federal races, most notably the race to succeed Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is term-limited and cannot run for reelection. In addition to the governor's race, voters will be asked to choose candidates for Congress, the state Legislature and a slate of statewide offices including insurance commissioner and treasurer.

**Can I leave work to vote?** Yes. California requires time off for voting if employees don't have enough time outside work hours. You can take as much time as you need, but employers are only required to pay for a maximum of two hours. Employers may require advance notice. The time off must be at the beginning or the end of your shift. Employers are required to post a notice about this 10 days before a statewide election.

**How can I track my ballot?**

Visit [california.ballottrax.net/voter/](http://california.ballottrax.net/voter/) to register for California's BallotTrax tool, where you can check your ballot status and opt in to receive email or text notifications.

**Is my ballot safe?** Yes, voting by mail or dropping your ballot in an approved drop box is a safe and efficient way to vote. Fraudulent voting is uncommon and incredibly difficult given California's strict voter verification procedures. Mail-in ballots will only be sent to voters whose address and identity have been verified by county election officials. Their vote will only be counted once those officials verify that the voter's signature on the envelope matches the one on file.

You can find more information about California's election and voting process on the secretary of state's website. The office takes any allegations of election fraud seriously. Anyone can submit a complaint using the following form [sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voter-complaint](https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voter-complaint).

**What if I have special circumstances? What should I do if I marked my ballot wrong, or otherwise messed it up?** If you haven't turned it in yet, you can exchange your mail ballot for a new one at an elections office, ask an election official at the polling place for a new ballot, or

vote using a provisional ballot. If you have mailed or turned in your ballot, there's no way to fix it. Contact your county elections office for a new ballot.

**What if the signature on my ballot doesn't match the one on file?** County election officials check the signatures on the return envelope against signatures on your voter registration card to make sure no one tries to improperly cast your ballot. It still remains confidential; the ballot is separated from the envelope before it is counted.

Voters with ballots with missing signatures or ones that don't match are notified and given an opportunity to correct the problem before the election is certified.

**What happens if I don't receive my ballot?** Contact your county elections office.

**Help! I dropped off my ballot to a drop box in the wrong county.** Don't worry – the county will pass it on to the correct elections office.

**I forgot to detach the stub from my ballot. Can I open the sealed envelope and reseal it myself?** You can, but the secretary of state's office recommends contacting your local county elections office. They'll ultimately be processing your ballot, and they can offer the best guidance on whether you should reopen it or just leave the stub attached. ★



## Election Information

### June 2, 2026, Statewide Direct Primary Election

Vote Early and Vote by Mail



**May 4** Ballots begin to arrive by mail. Official Ballot Drop Boxes are now open.



**May 18** Close of registration. Register today!



**May 23** 11-Day Vote Centers open through Election Day.



**May 30** All Vote Centers open through Election Day.



**June 2** Election Day! Last day to turn in your ballot.

### Vote Early! Don't wait for Election Day.

Take advantage of early voting and avoid the lines! You can return your ballot in the mail, at any Official Ballot Drop Box, or at any Vote Center. No postage is necessary.

### Track your Ballot!

Sign up for "Where's My Ballot?" with BallotTrax, a free ballot-tracking and alert system. It is available to all voters who wish to track the status of their Vote by Mail ballot from printed to accepted. Scan the QR code or visit [www.wheresmyballot.com](http://www.wheresmyballot.com)



Vote Early! Vote by Mail.

# Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



## The Season is Almost Over

The time has come to reflect on the 2025-26 season for the Sacramento Kings, and without a doubt it was a season of ups and downs.

Injuries are a part of the game, and every team has their fair share, but the Kings were decimated like never before and never recovered from the ubiquitous effect it had on the entire team and its fan base.

After inexplicably trading away Jonas Valanciunas, the Kings decided to roll the dice with rookie Maxime Rayaud, and gamble that he could capably hold down the fort in the event of an injury to Domantas Sabonis; a gamble that was ill conceived and was nothing more than a cost-saving measure that invariably left the Kings shorthanded.

Yes, Maxime had his bright spots, and if nothing else the organization had the opportunity to allow this 7-foot rookie to get his feet wet in the NBA. Baptism by fire it was, and in my book, Maxime proved himself a capable back-up center. As for a starting NBA center, I don't believe that's what the Kings have in their second-round draft choice of a year ago.

Their first-round draft choice Nique Clifford has been praised by many and certainly was given all the playing time he wanted, but like his counterpart, Nique had some glaring holes in his NBA game.

Appearing in 68 games, Clifford averaged nearly 25 minutes per game while scoring just 7.7 points per game. His 31 percent from 3-point land was one of the reasons the Kings rank dead last in 3-point shooting this year, and although his 41 percent from the field is not impressive, it's his 68 percent from the free throw line that is truly glaring.

I expected more from Clifford, and although I'm not giving up on him, no starting point guard in the NBA can put up such numbers and expect to play on a winning team.

So, what does that say about the role of the point guard as it relates to the Sacramento Kings? Are they still looking? I would hope so, because there is no one talking about Russell Westbrook coming back next season, and without him, that leaves Devin Carter to split time with Nique Clifford.

The Kings find themselves in the same

position they were in a year ago, when they signed Dennis Schroder to be the starting point guard for the team. It wasn't long before he was replaced by Russell Westbrook in the starting lineup and eventually traded as he never seemed to find any rhythm with the team.

So, as the Kings find themselves in a quandary with regards to their point guard, the question begs, what will they go after in what has been lauded as one of the best draft classes in many years?

Both Dylan Cardwell and Precious Achiuwa have not only acquitted themselves well this season, they have opened eyes all over the NBA. Resigning these young big men will be a source of focus during the off-season, as well as drafting someone that can give the Kings more front court depth.

Domantas Sabonis remains the foundation piece that barring injury, is the one spot on the team that can be counted on day in and day out. Consistency is his middle name, and no team needs consistency more than the Sacramento Kings.

Daequon Plowden and Killian Hayes have been late season bright spots, but both represent solid bench players and not the starters that the Kings need.

Well, Scott Perry, time to put on that GM hat and show this fan base how you can build a team capable of making the playoffs every year.

Time to become the ossified GM that the Kings need. And that doesn't extend to just the players, as the coaching staff remains a mystery.

Free throw shooting remains a source of embarrassment, and that is a direct result of coaching.

It's time to form new habits and build a culture of winning. Easier said than done and staying away from injuries will be constantly on the watch list.

Three games to go Kings fans, but it's likely your hometown ballers will secure a high round draft choice in the upcoming NBA draft.

Keep the faith Sacramento because even just one player can tip the scales and bring light to a team in real need.

All the best! ★

## This isn't a Race for California Governor; It's More Like a Game of Chicken



By Dan Walters, CALMatters.org

Political media habitually use "race" to describe contests for public office. However the word implies movement and therefore would be inaccurate if applied to this year's election of a new governor.

Sixty-one names will be on the June 2 primary ballot, including 10 leaders who profess to be serious about seeking the office.

However, they aren't racing. Rather, the eight top-polling Democrats seem to be in a children's game, sitting in a circle staring at each other, waiting for someone to blink. Meanwhile, the two top Republicans are taking potshots at each other, potentially undermining the GOP's only chance to elect a governor for the first time in two decades.

For weeks voter polls have found that three Democrats are locked in a tie, albeit at a puny level, around 10%, while the other five Democrats are buried in single digits.

California's top-two primary election system has all candidates listed on the same ballot, regardless of party, with the two top finishers then advancing to the November general election.

Given the size of the field, anyone garnering around 20% in June would probably earn a place in the runoff — or about twice what the three

Democrats at the top — Katie Porter, Eric Swalwell and Tom Steyer — currently have.

With mail voting set to begin in a month, the calendar is beginning to be a factor. Every ballot that's mailed removes that voter from having his or her mind changed. One should expect, therefore, that those with even semi-realistic chances of making the cut would be waging all-out campaigns by now.

However, the only highly visible campaign is that of billionaire Steyer, who's not only hopping around the state for personal appearances but shelling out millions of his own bucks for television and internet ads.

Much of Steyer's campaign is aimed at Swalwell, who has obtained substantial union support, most prominently from the California Teachers Association. Swalwell also benefits from the threats of Donald Trump's FBI to release files from its investigation of Swalwell's relationship with a supposed Chinese spy.

Steyer and Swalwell seem to be vying for the most left-leaning bloc of Democratic voters, while Porter is coasting on the name identification gained during her losing campaign for the U.S. Senate two years ago and hoping that being the only woman in the trio will lift her into one of the top two finishes.

Democratic Party leaders are openly worried, though, that the two Republicans — Steve Hilton and Chad Bianco — could finish 1-2, thereby ensuring the election of a GOP governor. They would like the five lower-tier Democratic candidates to

publicly surrender, thereby enhancing chances that a Democrat would make it to November.

However, members of that Democratic quintet show no signs of quitting, and if they continue to soldier on, despite scant support, the possibility of a 1-2 Republican primary finish continues.

The GOP's only chance of achieving such an upset would be for Hilton and Bianco to operate as a team, pushing their support — 16% and 14% respectively in the latest poll — to the magic 20% level. However, they are campaigning as opponents, even though if just one of them makes the November ballot he would almost certainly lose to whichever Democrat survives the primary.

This static, who-will-blink-first scenario does contain one surprising aspect — the failure of San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan to unleash the blitz he needs to climb into contention, despite having apparently unlimited support from wealthy Silicon Valley figures who want a tech- and business-friendly governor.

On Wednesday, Politico reported there was a shakeup in the Mahan campaign due to what were termed differences over strategy. Maybe that explains why his campaign has been so anemic after his much-ballyhooed late entry. He hasn't been racing much either.

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

## Social Security Matters I'll Be 65 Soon and am Working. Must I enroll in Medicare?



By Russell Gloor, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: I will be 65 in October and I am working full-time. My goal is to work until age 67, which is my full retirement age, or until age 70. I heard I have to apply for Medicare Part A only. Is this true or will I be penalized? And do I have to go to the Social Security office to do this, or can I do it online? And then will they be still giving me my Medicare through the next five years of working, or do I have to pay for something? I will have my own healthcare insurance. Thank you for your help. **Signed: Confused**

Dear Confused: There are two things you should be aware of:

1. You do not need to claim Social Security benefits when you enroll in Medicare

2. You do not need to enroll in Medicare at age 65 if you have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer ("creditable" is a group plan with at least 20 participants)

Thus, it is perfectly okay for you to delay taking your Social Security benefits until age 67 (your SS full retirement age), or even until age 70 when you will get the maximum SS benefit you are entitled to. And if you now have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer,

you can delay enrolling in Medicare until such time as your employer's healthcare coverage ends. When you stop working, you will enter a Medicare Special Enrollment Period (SEP), during which you can enroll in Medicare without incurring a Late Enrollment Penalty.

Whenever you decide to enroll in Medicare (or Social Security), you will not need to visit your local SSA office to do so. You can enroll in Medicare either online at [www.ssa.gov/medicare/](http://www.ssa.gov/medicare/) sign-up or you can call SSA at 1.800.772.1213 to make an appointment to enroll in Medicare on the telephone. Similarly, when you are ready to claim Social Security, you can do so online at [www.ssa.gov/apply](http://www.ssa.gov/apply) or you can call 1.800.772.1213 to make an appointment to apply for SS over the phone. To apply online, however, you should first create your personal "my Social Security" online account at [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount). Creating your online SS account now (at age 65) will facilitate later online enrollment and will also provide you with an estimate of your SS benefit amounts at various ages — e.g., now at age 65, at your FRA of 67, or at age 70. And that should help you decide when it is best for you to claim Social Security.

A few final points:

- You should verify with your employer's health insurance provider that they don't require you to enroll in Medicare at age 65. Most employer plans don't, but some do.
- You don't need to enroll in Medicare Part A or Part B now as long as your employer's coverage is creditable. And it's

okay to enroll in Medicare a couple of months prior to your employer's creditable healthcare coverage ending (when you stop working), requesting that your Medicare coverage starts when your employer's healthcare ends. This will ensure that there is no gap in your healthcare coverage. If your employer coverage is creditable, you will not suffer a Medicare Late Enrollment Penalty for enrolling after age 65.

- If you claim Social Security benefits at any time prior to your full retirement age (FRA) and are still working, you will be subject to Social Security's Annual Earnings Test (AET), which limits how much you can earn before they take away some of your benefits. The AET lasts until you reach your FRA (67), after which you can earn as much as you like without your SS benefits being affected.

- Whenever you claim your Social Security benefits, you will be required to take Medicare Part A, which is coverage for inpatient hospitalization services. Medicare Part A is free because you are also eligible for Social Security. But you don't need to enroll in Part A at age 65 unless you also claim Social Security.

- Medicare Part B, which is coverage for outpatient healthcare services (doctors, medical tests, etc.), is optional if you have creditable employer coverage as explained above. You do not need to enroll in Medicare Part B (for which there is a monthly premium of \$202.90 in 2026) until your employer's creditable healthcare coverage ends, even if you claim Social Security earlier. ★



It's not just Israel.

One of the least convincing arguments of opponents of the Iran war is that it is a conflict initiated by the Jewish state for its own benefit -- the U.S. is just along for the ride.

This view not only discounts the U.S. interest in defanging Iran but also neglects that there are other countries in the region besides Israel and Iran and that they, too, have a stake in the outcome of this war.

If there's anything that Iran has succeeded in doing over the first month of battle, it is further demonstrating the intolerable threat that it represents to the region.

The so-called Gulf Cooperation Council states -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- have the misfortune of being located just across the Persian Gulf from Iran, putting them on the front line of the war.

A key element of Iran's strategy has been to impose economic pain on these states to force them to press the United States into staying its hand.

While the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz is indirectly harming the United States by driving up the global price of crude and other materials, it is a direct blow to the Gulf states, since the Saudis, Kuwaitis and Emiratis send the majority of their oil

through the waterway.

The Iranians have struck the Gulf states with missiles and drones by the thousands. The ongoing blitz is damaging energy infrastructure and destroying the reputation of the Gulf states as an oasis of calm and economic development in an otherwise turbulent region.

There's no insurance policy against having a fanatic millenarian state as a neighbor, while nothing quite concentrates the mind like an unprovoked drone attack on one of your luxury hotels -- or your airports, oil fields and data centers.

Iran likes to pretend that it is only striking at military infrastructure, but that's absurd.

As long as Iran is run on its current basis, it is a grave danger to these countries, which, prior to the war, tried to keep their heads down or even get closer to Iran as a way to mitigate the threat.

This is the approach that the Saudis tried after an Iran-backed attack hampered the country's oil production in 2019.

That experiment is now done. According to published reports, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, privately urged Trump to launch the war even as the Saudis talked up diplomacy in public, and now MBS has been telling Trump to go all the way and topple the Iranian government.

The New York Times relates that the Saudi

leader "is concerned that if Mr. Trump pulls back now, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East will be left to confront an emboldened and furious Iran on their own."

The UAE has been a particular Iranian target. Its ambassador to the U.S. wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* recently, "We need a conclusive outcome that addresses Iran's full range of threats: nuclear capabilities, missiles, drones, terror proxies and blockades of international sea lanes."

One is tempted to conclude that the Gulf states are "all neocons now." That would be overstating it, though. Despite getting hit by Iran, Oman is maintaining its traditional posture as a mediator and Qatar is always a bad actor.

Much depends on how the war ultimately turns out, but it is easy to see the Gulf states looking to the United States for greater security guarantees and warming up further to Israel, which is demonstrating the military might to confront an Iran that has no compunction about lashing out at states that are doing it no harm.

It may be easy for hostile U.S. observers to portray the Iran war as about Israel and only Israel, but the Gulf states unfortunately know better -- and have the battle damage to prove it.

Rich Lowry is editor of *The National Review*.

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## Iran's Other Enemies

# Big Day of Service is May 16



By Judy Andrews,  
Fair Oaks Chamber  
of Commerce

**FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG)** - The Big Day of Service is looking for volunteers to support 70 fantastic community projects on Saturday, May 16, in Orangevale, Fair Oaks and Citrus Heights. There's a project suitable for every age and activity level. Plus, don't miss the morning kick-off rally at the Bella Vista football field. Gather your friends and family or sign up as an individual today at [www.bigdayofservice.us](http://www.bigdayofservice.us).

The Woman's Thursday Club of Fair Oaks is hosting their annual Plant Sale on Saturday, May 2, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the club's parking lot at 10625 Fair Oaks Blvd. Available plants include indoor and outdoor varieties, such as perennials, vegetables, seedlings, bouquets, succulents, and more. You'll

also find garden décor, vases, and pots. Cash-only donations will be accepted.

## Coming Events

**April 25 – Kid's Art Festival** at Fair Oaks Park (11549 Fair Oaks Blvd), from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Join the Fair Oaks Recreation and Park District and the San Juan Unified School District for a free community kid's event focused on creativity, featuring make-and-take art stations, dance and music performances, an art show, food trucks, and more. For more information, visit [www.forpd.org/257/Kids-Art-Festival](http://www.forpd.org/257/Kids-Art-Festival).

**May 2 – Annual Plant Sale** at Woman's Thursday Club of Fair Oaks (10625 Fair Oaks Blvd.) from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cash-only donations please.

**May 13 – Senior Luau** at Fair Oaks Community Clubhouse (7997 California Ave.) from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Join the Fair Oaks Recreation and Park District, in partnership with the Fair Oaks Rotary, for a delicious catered lunch and fun-filled Hawaiian luau entertainment. Tickets are \$25 per person. For more information and to purchase

tickets, visit: [www.forpd.org/587/Senior-Luau](http://www.forpd.org/587/Senior-Luau).

**May 16 – Big Day of Service** in Orangevale, Fair Oaks, and Citrus Heights. View projects and sign up at the website: [www.bigdayofservice.us](http://www.bigdayofservice.us).

**May 17 – Garden Gala for the Arts** at Fair Oaks Horticulture Center (11549 Fair Oaks Blvd.) from 4-9 p.m. Join the Fair Oaks Recreation and Park District for a celebration of arts and culture under the trees, featuring delicious cuisine, live and silent auctions, live music, and more. Space is limited, and tickets are required to attend. For more information, visit: [www.fairoaksarts.org/582/Garden-Gala](http://www.fairoaksarts.org/582/Garden-Gala).

**May 30 – Community Garage Sale** at Fair Oaks Park (11549 Fair Oaks Blvd.), from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Shop or sell items at the Fair Oaks Community Garage Sale. Sellers must pre-register and pay for booth space before April 30. Space is limited. If you would like to participate, register today at [www.forpd.org/469/Community-Garage-Sale](http://www.forpd.org/469/Community-Garage-Sale).

See you in Fair Oaks! ★

# American River Parkway Foundation Hosts Annual Spring Clean-Up

## American River Parkway Foundation News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - The American River Parkway Foundation's (Parkway Foundation) Spring Clean-Up is taking place Saturday, April 18. Join hundreds of other volunteers as they remove trash, pull invasive plants, lay mulch, paint picnic tables and beautify the 4,800-acre American River Parkway. In addition, a construction team will be replacing the roof on the Cottonwood Gazebo at William B. Pond Park.

The Spring Clean-Up will take place in 7 locations along the Parkway: Ancil Hoffman Park, Howe Avenue, Sunrise Recreation Area, Cottonwood Gazebo, Discovery Park, River Bend Park and Watt Avenue River Access.

"The American River Parkway is a true urban jewel. The American River Parkway Foundation is able to accomplish what we do on the Parkway because

of our volunteers," said Dianna Poggetto, Parkway Foundation executive director. "Thank you to the businesses, groups, families and individuals that will be dedicating part of their Saturday to make the Spring Clean-Up a success."

To sign up visit: <https://arpf.org/events/springcleanup/>

## About the American River Parkway Foundation

The American River Parkway Foundation (Parkway Foundation) is the only nonprofit organization focused on active conservation of all 23 miles of the American

River Parkway (Parkway). Through managing programs like volunteer clean-ups, infrastructure improvements, trail maintenance, fire mitigation and education, the Parkway Foundation leads and inspires the community to conserve and nurture the Parkway as a unique, accessible resource for everyone to enjoy.

Learn more at [www.ARPF.org](http://www.ARPF.org). ★



With Mary Jane Popp

## Finding Peace

Do you ever wonder, with all that is happening in our country and around the world, if we will ever find peace? According to Susan Allan, "Peace isn't going to find us; we must find peace", and that is her mission. I asked her how can we come together when the world is struggling with anger, either their own or someone else's? All you have to do is look at how many people suffer from PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and they have never even been near a battlefield and they waste their lives on anger and fear. So, we got to the essence of trying to make peace the goal when she was on my POPPTALK Radio Show. It's chronic anger she told me. She knows because she survived a life-threatening divorce because she knew how to calm herself before she said a word. She realized that the first thing she needed to do was empathize with her former husband's panic about money, if she planned to survive. In a few minutes, his Vietnam-generated PTSD episode was over, and she calmly and secretly planned her dog's and her departure, and she is now 28 years later and alive. That's when she created the 6 Part Conversation for everyone who would need to do what she had done and other dangerous situations. Now she shares how to communicate the skills that transform relationships, careers and so much more.

**1. CALM YOURSELF FIRST.** Pause before speaking. A few slow conscious breaths can prevent words that escalate a situation.

**2. LOWER YOUR TONE OF VOICE.** A calm voice signals safety and helps others settle down.

**3. START WITH EMPATHY.** Saying "I

can hear that you feel worried and need some help" allows people to be heard and diminishes defensiveness.

**4. REPLACE DEMANDS WITH REQUESTS.** Try asking, "Would you be willing to...?" instead of issuing commands.

**5. TRANSLATE COMPLAINTS INTO NEEDS.** Behind most criticism is a deeper need for respect and understanding.

**6. REMEMBER THE GOOD MOMENTS.** Reminding someone of positive shared experiences after they receive empathy from you softens emotional walls.

**7. CREATE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER.** Shift the conversation toward making a cooperative and practical plan. USE A POWERFUL BREATHING SKILL TO RESET YOUR BRAIN. Emotional regulation, beginning with brain breathing, prevents conflicts from spiraling. **8. CONSIDER THE BEST STRATEGIES TO MEET EVERYONE'S NEEDS, NOT JUST YOUR OWN.**

**9. CHOOSE PEACE OVER WINNING.** Protecting relationships is more valuable than winning arguments.

Susan Allan is a renowned coach, certified mediator and author of several books. But her heart is in the creation of The Peace Forum and Heart space trainings. For nearly 30 years, millions of people have learned how to create lasting peace, love, and cooperation using her 7 Stages of Peace. If you want to see more of what you can do to make peace a priority in your life, you can go to [www.susanallan.org](http://www.susanallan.org). Life can be super stressful, and we need to have all the tools we can get to survive! YOU CAN AND YOU WILL! ★

# CalKIDS Partners with CSAC, Connecting 100,000 Students to CalKIDS Scholarships

## CalKIDS News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - As California students finalize financial aid applications and college plans this spring, more than 100,000 students have claimed over \$50 million in CalKIDS Scholarships in the past six months, helping families access money already set aside to support higher education and career training.

The milestone reflects expanded collaboration between the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) and CalKIDS, a program of the ScholarShare Investment Board (SIB), which is administered by the California State Treasurer's Office.

"Collaboration across state agencies helps make programs like CalKIDS work more efficiently for California families," said California State Treasurer Fiona Ma, CPA, chair of the SIB. "By coordinating efforts and sharing data, we're not only connecting more students with scholarships already waiting for them – we're creating a more seamless pathway to financial security for California families, helping them cover costs like tuition, books and career training."

## About CalKIDS

Launched in 2022, the CalKIDS Program provides scholarship accounts to eligible California children and public-school students to help pay for higher education or career training. Eligible public-school students can receive scholarships worth up to \$1,500, and every child born in California on or after July 1, 2022, receives a CalKIDS Scholarship worth up to \$175.

Students can use their CalKIDS Scholarships between the ages of 17 and 26 for qualified higher education expenses, including tuition, fees, books, supplies and computer equipment at accredited community colleges, universities and career training programs.

## Partnership Expands Access

The milestone comes as CSAC and the SIB expand collaboration to connect more students with their CalKIDS Accounts in K-12 and higher education.

Through a secure data match of more than 2.4 million records for high school and college-age students (age 14 and older), CSAC can identify eligible students and connect them with their CalKIDS Scholarship Accounts through the WebGrants 4 Students portal that

families already use when applying for financial aid at the California Student Aid Commission.

"By integrating programs into our existing technology across state agencies, we are effectively connecting systems and ensuring that more California students are aware of all programs that help make college affordable," said Dr. Daisy Gonzales, executive director of CSAC. "We are grateful to the State Investment Board for their hard work and trust to connect eligible students with CalKIDS Accounts. When a student completes a FAFSA or California Dream Act Application, our system will now prompt students who are eligible for CalKIDS to claim their account, and students and parents will receive intentional communications about their eligibility, with aligned cooperation between K12 institutions and their higher education destination of choice."

Partnerships such as this show the potential of improving Californians' lives through strategic coordination and interagency shared vision.

"The partnership with CSAC has been instrumental in helping us identify and connect more students with their CalKIDS Scholarships," said Cassandra DiBenedetto, executive director of the SIB. "By turning eligibility into real access, more students are discovering and claiming their scholarships, easing financial barriers and expanding access to higher education."

## What's Next

The next phase of the partnership is expected to launch spring 2026 and will include a new WebGrants 4 Students report allowing high school counselors to track CalKIDS Account claims among their students in grades 9 through 12. A CalKIDS dashboard will also be released to help schools, families and policymakers better understand program participation and expand awareness of CalKIDS.

In alignment with CSAC's Student Success Blueprint, this partnership advances breaking down silos and utilizing data sharing to streamline access to programs that support basic needs such as CalFresh and MediCal. Together, these efforts aim to ensure more California students claim state resources already waiting for them that make college or career training more affordable. ★

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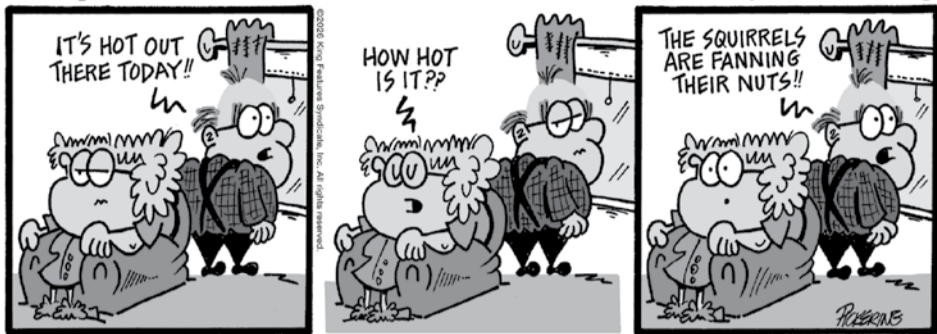
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# COMICS & PUZZLES

## The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



## Out on a Limb

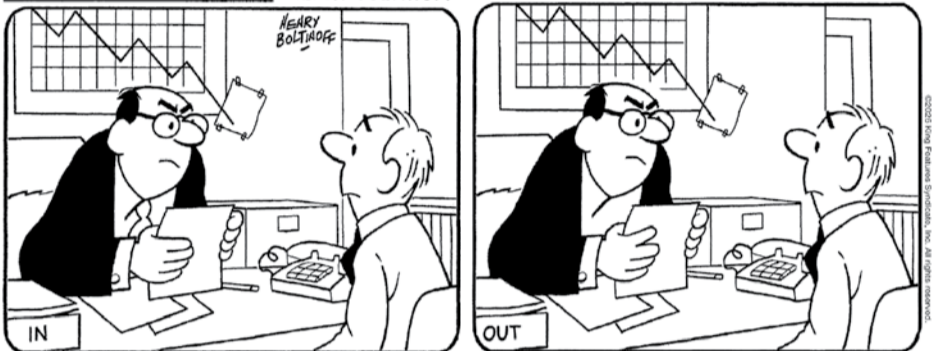
by Gary Kopervas



## HOCUS-FOCUS

BY HENRY BOLTINOFF

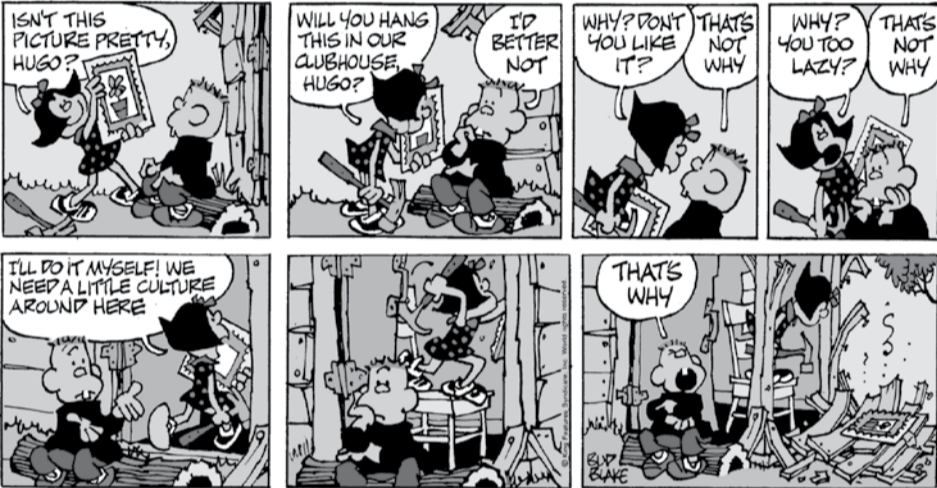
Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. The is missing; 2. Word on box is different; 3. Finger is moved; 4. Pencil is moved; 5. Wall is wider; 6. Chart on wall is moved.

## TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



## GRIN AND BEAR IT

## Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



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- CLUES**
- ACROSS**
- Ira \_\_\_ of NPR
  - Mr. Turkey
  - Gives the boot
  - Between octet and decet
  - Ginger one
  - Spherical bacteria
  - Popular ursine meme star
  - Public health org.
  - Mountaineer's tool (2 words)
  - \*Fly larva
  - \*World's noisiest insect
  - Comic book shriek
  - Like some excuses
  - Food safety org.
  - Man Ray's genre
  - Temporarily, legally speaking (2 words)
  - Like unpleasant awakening
  - 4th down kick
  - Quarter-round molding
  - Computer operating system
  - Metal bar
  - Mine passage
  - Antonym of exhume
  - Expert
  - Strip of wood
  - Throws
  - It will
  - Concurrence word
  - Silo contents
  - Romanian money
  - \*Bee's bounty
  - \*Boll weevil, e.g.
  - Aquarium scum
  - \*Lightning bug trap?
  - Brandish
  - Part of a flower
  - Bonanza find
  - Courtroom excuse
  - Whiskey grain, pl.
  - Coniferous tree
  - #52 Across, pl.
- DOWN**
- Econ. measure
  - Good earth
  - Wintour of "Vogue" fame
  - Marsh plant
  - Not impromptu
  - Diplomat's asset
  - Antediluvian
  - Hajj destination
  - Cocaine plant
  - Got an A
  - March Madness org.
  - \*Number of legs on an insect
  - Famous Roman orator
  - Giraffe's striped-legged cousin
  - Mischief-maker
  - Opposite of energetic
  - \*\_\_\_ fly, first living creature sent to space
  - "I don't know," casually
  - #43 Across, pl.
  - \*\_\_\_ beetle, world's strongest insect
  - \*Shape of a ladybug or carpet beetle
  - Not tomorrow, not yesterday
  - Like basketball's final eight
  - \*Lepidoptera members, not butterflies
  - Demi Moore and Bruce Willis, e.g.
  - Reason for suit
  - Tutu fabric
  - Duran Duran's 1984 hit, with The
  - "Monkey \_\_\_, monkey do"
  - Wiggle room
  - "Have a great time!"
  - Useful
  - Performance with acts
  - Lecherous look
  - "Betcha Can't Eat Just One" brand
  - Tea or beer
  - Hawaiian flower garlands
  - Major European river
  - Acronym, abbr.
  - "Roses \_\_\_ red"
  - Bad-mouth, slangily

**CROSSWORD**

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# CHP Urges Drivers to Follow Hands-Free Law as Distracted Driving Awareness Month Begins

## California Highway Patrol News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Distracted driving causes hundreds of crashes across California each year, and violations of the state's hands-free cellphone law remain an ongoing concern. As part of Distracted Driving Awareness Month, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) is urging drivers to put down their phones and stay attentive to help make roads safer for everyone.

Every year, CHP officers issue more citations to drivers violating California's hands-free law, highlighting the ongoing challenge to change driver behavior. In 2025, the CHP issued over 111,700 citations for distracted driving, nearly 20% more than in 2024.

The consequences of distracted driving extend far beyond just a citation and can include crashes resulting in serious injury or death. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that 3,275 people died and nearly 325,000 others were injured in distraction-related crashes in the U.S. in 2023.

Any activity that diverts attention from driving — such as using a cellphone, eating, adjusting controls or interacting with passengers — increases the risk of a crash.

“Every crash caused by distracted driving can be avoided. Too often, drivers look away from the road, risking their lives and those of others,” said Commissioner Sean Duryee. “No text, call or notification is more important than safety.



Every year, CHP officers issue more citations to drivers violating California's hands-free law, highlighting the ongoing challenge to change driver behavior. Photo courtesy Freepik

Put your phone down, eliminate distractions and drive as if someone's life depends on it — because it does.”

Safe driving requires full attention. Road conditions and traffic can change quickly, and distractions reduce reaction time. In California, distracted driving was reported to have caused over 3,400 crashes between 2020 and 2025, injuring more than 1,600 people, according to the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System.

### Lose the Distractions

California law prohibits drivers from holding or using a cellphone while driving unless the device allows hands-free, voice-operated use. Drivers who cannot use hands-free features



Drivers can reduce risk by eliminating distractions such as enable “Do Not Disturb” or use apps that block notifications, place phones out of reach, set music or podcasts before driving, secure pets and loose items and avoid eating or drinking while driving. Photo courtesy Freepik

— except to dial 9-1-1 — should ask a passenger for help or pull over and park in a safe location before using a device.

Drivers can reduce risk by eliminating distractions such as enable “Do Not Disturb” or use apps that block notifications,

place phones out of reach, set music or podcasts before driving, secure pets and loose items and avoid eating or drinking while driving.

### Talk to your Teens

According to the NHTSA, 7% of drivers ages 15 to 20 involved in fatal crashes were distracted — the highest proportion among all age groups.

The CHP encourages parents and guardians to demonstrate safe driving habits and discuss the risks of distracted driving with teens.

The CHP's Start Smart program provides driver safety education for newly licensed teens and their parents. Classes are offered at CHP offices and community locations statewide. For more information, contact your local CHP Area office.

### Education and Enforcement

CHP officers will also conduct a 24-hour Maximum Enforcement Period beginning at 6 a.m. April 28 to reinforce that distracted driving is dangerous and preventable.

Last year, the CHP deployed 100 low-profile, specially marked patrol vehicles across the state to help combat reckless and aggressive drivers who are putting lives at risk on California's highways. These vehicles are designed to blend into traffic and detect these dangerous motorists before they realize they are being monitored.

This April, the CHP urges all drivers to eliminate distractions, stay focused and help keep California's roads safe.

The mission of the CHP is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service and Security. ★

# Get Your Car Ready for a Summer Road Trip

*National Car Care Month is a good reminder that good vehicle maintenance may prevent a costly repair*

## AAA Mountain West Group News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - AAA emergency road service providers across the country came to the rescue of stranded motorists more than 30 million times in 2025. Many of those calls for service could have been avoided with proper vehicle maintenance. April marks National Car Care Month, and AAA Mountain West Group (MWG) is reminding drivers that routine vehicle maintenance can ensure your vehicle is ready for your next road trip.

“Summer heat takes a toll on cars. Taking care of your car now may help avoid a more expensive repair bill down the line,” said John Walter, Executive Vice President, AAA Mountain West Group Auto Repair. “AAA Auto Repair Technicians are committed to offering outstanding service to ensure your vehicle is always in peak-performance and ready for the road ahead.”

### Essential Vehicle Maintenance Tips from AAA

**Oil Changes.** Aim for an oil change every 3,000 to 7,000 miles depending on your vehicle and driving habits.

**Battery Testing.** Have your battery tested ahead of long trips or every three months. Extreme heat may shorten a battery's service life. AAA Members get mobile battery delivery, testing and diagnosis and on-the-spot replacement and installation.

**Maintain Proper Tire Inflation.** Check your tire pressure monthly. Proper tire pressure prolongs the life of your tires, ensures safety and improves fuel efficiency.

**Tire Rotations.** Rotate your tires roughly every other oil change. This helps prevent uneven wear and is important for safety and longevity.



Many of those calls for service could have been avoided with proper vehicle maintenance. April marks National Car Care Month, and AAA Mountain West Group (MWG) is reminding drivers that routine vehicle maintenance can ensure your vehicle is ready for your next road trip. Photo courtesy Freepik

**Fluid Level Checks.** Your car relies on various fluids to operate properly. Check your levels before long trips or every three months.

**Multipoint Vehicle Inspection.** Comprehensive check-ups are essential. Schedule a multipoint inspection at least once a year to catch potential problems early.

**Find a Trusted Mechanic:** AAA-Owned and AAA Approved Auto Repair Centers are evaluated against AAA's rigorous, industry-leading standards, ensuring that drivers receive high-quality service every time.

### AAA Celebrates 50 Years of AAA Approved Auto Repair Excellence

Since its inception in 1975, the AAA Approved Auto Repair (AAR) program has connected drivers with auto repair services that uphold the highest standards of quality and affordability. AAA now owns and operates 50 shops across Northern California, Arizona and Nevada.

AAA Members receive the following benefits at AAA Auto Repair. 10% off labor, up to \$751, 24-month/24,000-mile warranty on parts and labor and

digital vehicle inspection report sent to your phone with every service at all AAA-Owned or AAA Approved locations.

While the owner's manual for your vehicle is the best source for specific maintenance schedules, you can always consult with certified technicians at AAA-Owned Auto Repair centers and AAA Approved Auto Repair Facilities for advice.

### About AAA Mountain West Group

AAA Mountain West Group is a membership and full-service leisure travel organization,

proudly serving over 6.8 million Members across Alaska, Arizona, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, Utah and Wyoming. Named one of Forbes' Most Trusted Companies in America, AAA delivers unmatched expertise and value through roadside assistance and electric vehicle (EV) resources, along with comprehensive auto repair, travel, insurance, financial and home security services. Powered by 5,300 dedicated Team Members, AAA is on a mission to revolutionize solutions that help our Members. ★

# Strader Announces First Piece of Coaching Staff with the Addition of JJ Wozniak

## Sacramento State Athletics News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - With nearly two decades of experience as a coach at the Division I level, JJ Wozniak has been named an assistant coach with the Sacramento State women's soccer program beginning with the upcoming 2026 campaign Head Coach Tim Strader announced March 24.

"JJ is someone I've developed a close relationship with—as both a friend and a fellow coach—since his time at UNLV," Strader said. "His ability to connect with student athletes, his strengths as a recruiter with deep ties throughout the Central Valley and Northern California, and his commitment to player development are all qualities I'm excited for our student athletes to experience. "We have big goals as a program to compete for championships and make deep postseason runs, and JJ brings a wealth of experience that will complement the strengths of our coaching staff, both as a former goalkeeper and as a tactician. I'm thrilled to welcome JJ, his wife Carrie, and his son Jacob to our Hornet soccer family."

Wozniak joins the Hornets' sideline after spending five seasons (2021-24) at nearby Pacific, joining the staff as an assistant coach prior to the 2020 campaign, which was delayed until the spring due to the pandemic, before taking over as Co-Head Coach for the final four years.

In July of 2021, he was elevated to the position of Co-Head Coach and made an immediate impact, guiding the Tigers to a 10-6-3 overall record — the program's best in 12 years — including an 8-1-1 non-conference record. The team finished with nine shutouts on the year as junior Brenna Crump was named the West Coast Conference



**JJ Wozniak has been named an assistant coach with the Sacramento State women's soccer program.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento State Athletics

Goalkeeper of the Year and Wozniak was named the WCC Coach of the Year along with Co-Head Coach Danesha Adams.

A year later, Wozniak helped Pacific out to another quick start with a 5-0-6 mark in non-conference play, including a win over perennial power Santa Clara, and finished with 10 points in the WCC standings — an improvement of two points over the previous season and finished 7-3-10 overall.

In all, three of his four seasons as Co-Head Coach ended with records of .500 or better, which included a 9-9-1 mark in 2023. He left Stockton having won 28 matches and drawing 15 more.

Prior to taking the position with the Tigers, Wozniak was the Associate Head Coach at UNLV from 2015-19, helping lead the Rebels to the 2016 Mountain West Conference regular season and conference tournament titles while posting a 57-40-7 overall record during his tenure.

He helped guide UNLV to four consecutive double-digit win seasons while in Las Vegas, including a 16-4-3 record during that championship 2016 campaign en route to an NCAA Tournament berth. While with the Rebels, Wozniak mentored 15 All-Mountain West selections, including the 2016 league offensive (Lily Sender) and defensive (Chidera

Akubilo) players of the year, and the program's first-ever All-American in Sender.

A native of San Diego, Calif., Wozniak's collegiate coaching career began as an assistant coach in charge of goalkeepers for the Fresno State men's program from 2000-03, then served three seasons as the top assistant for the men's program at Belmont University from 2011-13.

Outside of his collegiate experience, Wozniak held the title of Director of Coach for Cal Odyssey SC from 2002-2011 and again from 2014-2015. He first started with the program as an Assistant Director of Coaching and Director of Soccer Operations in March of 2002 before being promoted to Director of Coaching in April of 2007. Wozniak's teams saw much success, as California Odyssey was one of the original 63 clubs invited into the US Soccer National Development Academy. The program won five national championships under Wozniak's guidance while having back-to-back Development Academy National Finalists in 2009 and 2010.

He also served as the Director of Coaching for Downtown Las Vegas SC from 2015-2017, while also coaching ECNL and ECRL teams for Heat FC from 2017-2020.

Wozniak played collegiately at Saint Louis and Fresno State, twice earning all-region honors and Mountain Pacific Sports Federation laurels in 1995. He went on to a professional career in Major League Soccer with the LA Galaxy and San Jose Clash (now Earthquakes) as well as time in the USL and USISL where he was named the league's goalkeeper of the year award in 1997 and 2001.

Graduating from Fresno State with a degree in sociology in 2000, Wozniak also holds a National "B" Coaching License from the United States Soccer Federation. ★

## Reid Paskey Joins Republic

### FC First Team on USL Academy Contract



**Sacramento Republic FC announced the addition of Academy player Reid Paskey to the club's First Team roster.** Photo courtesy of Sacramento Republic FC

## Sacramento Republic FC News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Sacramento Republic FC announced the addition of Academy player Reid Paskey to the club's First Team roster. The defender has signed a USL Academy Contract, pending league and federation approval, and will be eligible for selection immediately.

"We continue to see our academy players benefit from this opportunity, whether it's making an appearance for the First Team or preparing them for the next steps of their soccer journey," said Republic FC Head Coach Neill Collins. "We're confident that Reid will embrace this next step, continue his development and represent the club well."

A Sacramento native, Paskey is set to graduate from C.K. McClatchy High School this spring and has committed to play Division 1 soccer at Stanford University in 2027. Paskey joined Sacramento's youth development academy in 2024 and was on the academy U17 team that advanced to the semifinals in the MLS Next Cup, the most impressive run of any Republic academy team since 2022 with three victories in the tournament. Before joining Republic FC, he played with regional clubs Davis Legacy and

Sacramento Alliance SC.

Paskey joins the ever-growing group of now eight current and former Academy players on this year's First Team roster. Da'vian Kimbrough, Blake Willey, and Chibi Ukaegbu have risen through the ranks and have signed professional contracts with their hometown team, while Rohan Chivukula, Luke Strassburg, Brooks Doolittle and Jackson Montero have signed USL Academy Contracts. USL Academy contracts allow academy players to train and compete with the First Team while maintaining their NCAA eligibility.

Since its inception in 2015, Republic FC's Academy has created a strong, local pipeline of youth players ready for professional-level competition, with over 40 players earning the opportunity to join the First Team on USL Academy contracts and over 25 going on to sign professional contracts with Republic FC or other clubs. In 2025, players from Sacramento's youth academy combined for 80 gameday roster selections, 56 appearances and over 3,000 minutes.

The region's top youth players will have an opportunity to join Republic FC's Academy — the only youth-to-pro pathway in the region — at tryouts on April 30 to May 1. For more information or to register, visit [SacRepublicFC.com/Academy](http://SacRepublicFC.com/Academy). ★

## Beavers Standout at Hawk Invite



**The ARC team delivered an impressive performance at the Hawk Invite, highlighted by standout efforts across both diving and swimming events.** Photo courtesy of American River College

## American River College News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - The ARC team delivered an impressive performance at the Hawk Invite, highlighted by standout efforts across both diving and swimming events.

Ashley Johnson led the way in diving, claiming first place in both the 1-meter and 3-meter events. Bridget Adams secured a strong third-place finish, while Arie Black and Maddie Warden added depth to the squad by rounding out the top 10.

In the pool, Lydia Vlahos dominated the distance events, turning in the top overall performance in both the 500 and 1650 freestyle. Brooke Boyer also had a breakthrough swim, posting a lifetime best in the 200 breaststroke and breaking the three-minute barrier with a time of 2:56.21.



**The meet concluded on a high note for the women's team, who captured the final event with a victory in the 200-freestyle relay.** Photo courtesy of American River College

Clara Walker and Mya Thomas also had a strong showing, excelling in the backstroke events (50 and 200) and each recording season-best times in the 50 freestyle.

The meet concluded on a high note for the women's team, who captured the final event with a victory in the 200-freestyle relay. The team of Anabel, Amber, Mya and Sasha combined for a strong finish to secure the win. ★

## Gianna Nocetti Earns Second Big West Player of the Week Honor



**UC Davis senior attacker Gianna Nocetti has been named the Big West Player of the Week following a standout performance that led the No. 16 Aggies to a perfect 3-0 weekend in Southern California.** Photo courtesy of UC Davis Athletics

## UC Davis Athletics News Release

**DAVIS, CA (MPG)** - For the second time in the season and her career, UC Davis senior attacker Gianna Nocetti has been named the Big West Player of the Week following a standout performance that led the No. 16 Aggies to a perfect 3-0 weekend in Southern California.

Nocetti fueled a road trip highlighted by a 12-11 victory over No. 15 UC San Diego—the program's first regulation win over the Tritons since 2022. The

senior recorded a hat trick in all three contests against UCSD, Brown and Cal State Fullerton, totaling nine goals, two assists and six steals on the weekend.

A specialist at the start of periods, Nocetti went a perfect 12-for-12 on sprints over the three-game stretch. She currently leads the team in steals (35) and leads the Big West in both sprint wins (62) and sprint win percentage, while ranking No. 6 nationally in total sprint wins.

The finale against Cal State Fullerton served as a career milestone

for Nocetti, who recorded her 100th career assist. She now totals 40 goals and 40 assists on the year, making her the only player on the roster to reach the 40-mark in both categories so far this season.

Through six conference games, Nocetti ranks among the Big West leaders in multiple categories, including No. 1 in sprint wins and No. 2 in both steals and field blocks. She also sits at No. 5 in the conference in total points during Big West play and No. 6 in assists per game. ★

# City 4-Ball Championships Return to Bing Maloney

71st Men's and 4th Senior tournaments take the course



Bill Bunce and Bob Niger win Fourth City Senior Mens 4-Ball Championship. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Golf Council



Ryan Sloane and Taylor Travis win 71st City Mens 4-Ball Golf Championship. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Golf Council

### Sacramento Golf Council News Release

**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - Ryan Sloane and Taylor Travis won the 71st City Mens 4-Ball Championship March 29, at Bing Maloney Golf Course. Bob Niger and Bill Bunce won

the Fourth City Mens Senior 4-Ball Championship. Tom O'Neil was tournament chairman for the Sacramento Golf Council. Eskaton Village Carmichael sponsored the tournament. The tournament was open to men with a GHIN of 5.0, seniors ages 55 above with a GHIN of 9.4. ★

# Easter Junior Golf Tournament Champions

### Sacramento Golf Council News Release

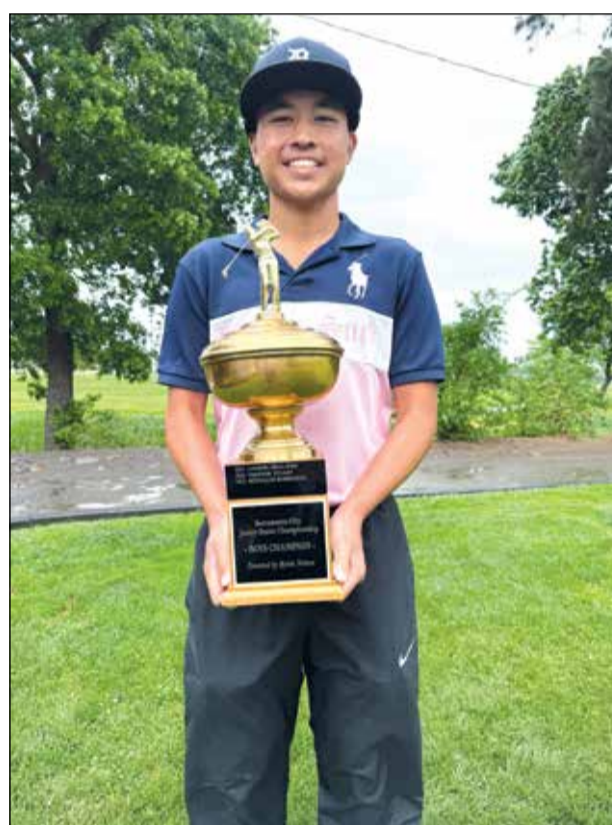
**SACRAMENTO, CA (MPG)** - The Sacramento Golf Council announced the winners of the 76th Annual City Junior Easter Golf Championships, played at Bing Maloney Golf Course, March 31-April 1. Golfers aged 7-18 competed in the two-day tournament.

The overall boys 14-18 champion is Landon Abalateo, who finished with a score of 70, 67 for a total of 137. The overall girls 14-18 champion is Ella Lawson, who finished with a score of 75, 68 for a total of 143.

Additional division winners include Arden Xu (Boys 16-18) with 140, Jay Hsu (Boys 14-15) with 145, Sai Kaneshiro (Girls 16-18) with 148, Yilin Xia (Girls 14-15) with 145, Race Roizen (Boys 12-13) with 153, Elise Layton (Girls 12-13) with 146, Oliver Her (Boys 10-11) with 64, and Ziqi Zhou (Girls 10-11), who won with a score of 63 in a play-off over Livy Woodward. In the youngest divisions, Ziyue Zhou (Boys 7-9) won with a score of 70, and Calliopoe Riella Yap (Girls 7-9) took first with a score of 60. Juniors ages 7-11 competed on the Bing Maloney Express Nine course. ★



Ella Lawson. Courtesy photo



Landon Abalateo. Courtesy photo

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Chicken Drumstick

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