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From the Ground Up to General Manager, Rod Hart Retires After 45 Years



Rod Hart, the Rancho Murieta Association's then-maintenance manager, reacts as Stonehouse Park is dedicated in his honor in October 2022. From left are then-RMA Board President Rob Brown, then-Rancho Murieta Community Services District President Tim Maybee and Summerfest Board President Sherry Carrillo. Now the RMA general manager, Hart retires on May 1.

Story and photos by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - When Rod Hart sat down for his job interview with the Rancho Murieta Association in 1981, he was asked a simple question: What is your

long-range goal? Hart didn't hesitate. Looking at then-Maintenance Manager Bob Cook, he answered: "I want his job." Forty-five years later - after rising from a laborer earning \$6.50 an hour to maintenance manager and, ultimately, general manager - Hart is retiring, having shaped nearly every

corner of Rancho Murieta along the way.
Early Roots
Before he arrived in Rancho Murieta, Hart's path was anything but conventional. At age 13, he was already working.
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Easter Egg Hunt Draws Families to Stonehouse

Story and photos by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Stonehouse Park filled with the sounds of laughter and scrambling feet on April 4 as hundreds of children dashed across the grass for candy-filled eggs at the Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta's annual Easter Egg Hunt and Family Picnic.



Children dash for eggs at the Annual Easter Egg Hunt and Family Picnic hosted by the Kiwanis Club of Rancho Murieta.

Organizers did not provide an official attendance count, but the turnout appeared larger than last year's estimated 450 attendees. More than 4,500 plastic eggs filled with candy and stickers were scattered across the softball field and divided into three age groups, giving children multiple chances to dash, scoop and fill their baskets. Between the second and third hunts, one eager participant got a head start. Lacey Carbonetti, 3, ran onto the field ahead of the signal, basket in hand. Her brother, Cameron, 5, chased after her, calling, "I've got the egg," before their mother told him to put it back, resetting the moment before the next hunt. Beyond the egg hunts, families enjoyed a range of activities, including Easter crafts, cookie decorating,

glitter tattoos and a petting zoo. "The children enjoyed making Easter crafts as mementos of the hunt, and their decorated cookies probably went home in their tummies," said co-organizer Bronwyn Anthony. She added that the petting zoo was "always a big hit," especially this year with baby animals "just the right size for youngsters to pet, almost eye to eye." The Murieta Dance Company's Mini Competitive team performed its routine "Loyal, Brave and True," drawing applause from the crowd. Music and announcements from DJ Chris Perris



The Easter Bunny (Scarlett Runton) poses for a photo with Jaey Ijjapureddi.

CSD Weighs Security Cuts, RMA Takeover



Security staff reductions aren't expected at the gates.

Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - The Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board has voted not to fund a \$206,732 security shortfall, a decision that will reduce staffing, as it explores a possible takeover of the department by the Rancho Murieta Association. The dual tracks emerged during April 15 board discussions after Finance Administrator Cecilia Min placed an item on the agenda seeking direction on the 2026-27 budget: specifically, whether property tax revenue could be used to cover the deficit. In a 4-1 vote, directors said no, instead directing all property tax revenue to reserves and requiring security costs to be reduced to match Measure J funding. At the same meeting, the board also reopened discussions about transferring security operations to the RMA. Director Randy Jenco made the motion on funding, stating the budget should be structured so "operating expenses be reduced to match the operating revenue," with property taxes "earmarked 100% to the reserves." The motion passed 4-1, with Director Linda Butler casting the lone no vote. **Grand Jury Shapes Funding Decision** Director Tim Maybee said the Sacramento County Grand Jury had previously warned against relying on property taxes to fund security. "They said that Measure J needs to be self-funded; using property taxes would be ill-advised, since it should be going to reserves," Maybee said. That guidance framed the board's decision, even as Min raised the option of using unrestricted property tax revenue to close the gap. Instead, directors emphasized aligning costs with available revenue: a move that shifts the burden to spending reductions.
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CSD Fast-Tracks Culvert Fix Over Flood Concerns

By Gail Bullen
River Valley Times
Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - A divided Rancho Murieta Community Services District board voted April 15 to declare an emergency and move forward with replacing failing culverts at the Murieta Equestrian Center: a roughly \$300,000 project aimed at preventing upstream flooding in Murieta Village and nearby commercial areas if the damaged structures fail during a major storm.

The board approved the emergency declaration and a \$69,656 engineering proposal to manage the project on a 4-1 vote, with Director Bill Gere opposed.

The decision followed a contentious April 7 Improvements Committee meeting, during which Gere repeatedly challenged whether the situation met the legal definition of an emergency and objected to bypassing the district's standard bidding process.

Severe Deterioration, Flood Risk

At both meetings, District Engineer Joe Domenichelli and project manager Jeff Pearson described culverts in advanced stages of failure.

Pearson said entire sections of multiple pipes are corroded, missing or collapsed, leaving little structural integrity in places.

"Entire lengths of all three pipes are corroded and missing ... the entire section of two pipes in the middle is collapsed," he



Repairs to culverts at the Murieta Equestrian Center become a point of contention as Rancho Murieta Community Services District officials debate whether the project qualifies as an emergency. The photo does not show internal damage that experts say could lead to failure. Courtesy photo

said. Domenichelli told the board the structure has shifted significantly and poses a safety hazard, particularly under storm conditions.

If the culverts fail, both men warned, debris and collapsed material could block the drainage channel, causing water to back up through the system.

"If that collapses ... Laguna Joaquin doesn't drain," Pearson said.

Domenichelli said that backup could push water upstream into Murieta Village and, in a larger storm, toward commercial areas, increasing both flood risk and the district's potential liability.

July Construction Window

Pearson said the project was ready to go, with July identified as the safest construction window due to dry conditions and reduced

operational conflicts. At the board meeting, equestrian center manager Maryann Subbotin said she had cleared the facility's July calendar - at high cost - to make the work possible.

"We do ask you ... to please consider staying on course with July," she said, noting the center hosts more than 60 events annually and can draw hundreds of horses and nearly 1,000 people on a busy weekend.

Pearson and Domenichelli said delaying the project could push construction into the rainy season or require waiting another year.

Emergency Definition

Gere continued to press his objections at the board meeting, arguing that the project does not meet the legal threshold under the California Public Contract Code.

"This is a roadway over a culvert that's been there for 40 years, and it's rusty," Gere said. "That does not rise to anyone's definition of what an emergency is."

He said declaring an emergency would improperly allow the district to bypass public bidding and potentially avoid environmental review.

"When you call something an emergency, you don't have to go to public bid ... and you're exempted from things like CEQA and permitting," he said, calling it "an abuse of the public process."

District counsel Patrick Enright disagreed, saying the legal standard allows emergency action when delay would increase the risk of damage or harm.

"That is our legal opinion; it's an emergency in the sense that it needs to be done before the next rainy season," Enright said.

Gere had cited state law

defining an emergency as a sudden, unexpected occurrence requiring immediate action, arguing the situation did not meet that threshold.

Enright pointed to a different section of state code governing public contracting, which allows public agencies to proceed without full competitive bidding if delay would prevent a timely response to an emergency.

When Gere pressed for a specific code citation, Enright pushed back: "So you just wait until the area is flooded and then declare the emergency?"

Gere rejected that reasoning, arguing the potential impact did not justify bypassing standard procedures.

"It didn't flood this year, and if it does, it's ... water running over a bunch of dirt," he said.

The exchange underscored a core disagreement: Gere framed the issue as a matter of timing and process, while Pearson and Domenichelli described a deteriorating system with potentially significant downstream consequences.

Bidding Compromise

Gere argued the district should expedite a standard bid process rather than waive it.

"The biggest complaint here ... is not a definable emergency where you can just throw all of our rules about bidding out the window," he said.

Pearson and Domenichelli said a full request-for-proposals process would make it impossible to meet the July deadline.

Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder said she could obtain three bids quickly because Pearson had referred

three contractors who had worked for the district before.

"I can start work on them tomorrow and probably have them by Monday or Tuesday," she said.

Pearson emphasized that materials and contractor schedules required immediate action.

"You have to get the thing out tomorrow," he said.

After extended discussion, the board agreed to amend the resolution to require at least three bids, with authority delegated to Wilder, Interim Operations Manager Travis Bohannon and the district engineer to review proposals and select a contractor without returning to the board.

CEQA and Permitting Constraints

Domenichelli said declaring an emergency is also key to securing a CEQA exemption and coordinating with regulatory agencies. Without it, he said, permits from agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and state water regulators could take months, effectively eliminating the opportunity to complete the project before the next rainy season.

Lone Dissent

Gere cast the only no vote.

"I vote no. I think it's a mistake and it's an abuse of the public process," he said.

Despite his objections, the board majority concluded that the condition of the culverts - and the risk that failure could back water up through the system during a major storm - justified immediate action.

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



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A Sit-Down with Doris Matsui

Congresswoman Weighs Political Priorities, Reelection

Story and photo by Idaly Valencia

ELK GROVE, CA (MPG) - With a reelection campaign underway and a district shaped by recent redistricting, U.S. Rep. Doris Matsui said she is leaning on experience and long-standing public service as she prepares to again represent California's 7th Congressional District.

In a recent interview with the Elk Grove Citizen, Matsui reflected on her work representing California's 7th Congressional District and outlined the priorities shaping her 2026 reelection campaign, including health care access, infrastructure investment, climate resilience and emerging technology policy.

She said her approach to governing is grounded in lived experience and a belief that effective representation comes from understanding the communities a lawmaker serves.

"It really means that you want to make a contribution," Matsui said. "You want to help out; you want to be part of the community and not be separate from it and engage other people, so they feel the same way too. And so that's really the way I look at what I'm doing. It's about, 'How can I help?'"

Matsui has represented the Sacramento region in Congress since 2005, previously serving California's 5th and 6th Congressional Districts, before assuming her current seat in 2023.

Today, the 7th



U.S. Rep. Doris Matsui is pictured after an interview with Messenger Publishing Group at Rescate Coffee on March 13, where she discussed the priorities shaping her reelection campaign as the midterm primary approaches.

Congressional District spans Sacramento's urban core and extends into suburban communities such as Elk Grove and rural areas including Galt and Rancho Murieta, as well as portions of San Joaquin and El Dorado counties following recent redistricting.

Matsui noted her upbringing in Dinuba, a small Central Valley community near Fresno, as foundational to her political outlook. She explained how she grew up in a farming family and said those early experiences shaped her understanding of community responsibility and mutual support.

"In a small town, everybody knows you," Matsui

said. "People take care of each other, help each other out... and those values really stuck with me."

Matsui said that perspective continues to inform how she approaches her work in Congress, particularly as she represents both rural and urban communities with differing needs.

Among her top priorities, Matsui said, is access to health care. Her legislative work in the area includes having advocated for the Affordable Care Act and ongoing efforts to expand access and reduce costs. She described health care affordability as one of the most pressing concerns facing constituents.

"We all know health care

is too expensive," she said. "When you have an unexpected medical bill, it can throw your whole household budget off."

Matsui said those challenges are felt across the district, including rural communities where residents often face longer travel times to hospitals and fewer medical providers compared to urban centers such as Sacramento.

Beyond health care, Matsui said infrastructure and climate-related challenges remain central to her work, particularly flood control, wildfire risk and the state's water supply reliability. She told Messenger Publishing

Group that shifting weather patterns and more extreme conditions underscore the need for continued investment rather than one-time solutions.

"We can't just build infrastructure and think it's done," she said. "You still have to maintain it, make it better and all of that."

During her two decades in Washington, Matsui has helped to secure funding for regional efforts, including more than \$3 billion for flood control and management projects.

In agricultural areas such as Galt and surrounding parts of the county, Matsui addressed concern over rising costs and market pressures continue to affect farmers.

"Farming is really a big economic driver in California, and we have probably the most quality farming here in Sacramento County," Matsui said. "And the cost of living is really hurting them (farmers) a great deal; I hear about that an awful lot."

Matsui, who serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said one of the most pressing emerging issues facing Congress is the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI). She said AI has the potential to improve health care, research and administrative systems but also raises concerns about privacy, safety and regulation.

"It could be really helpful or really harmful," she said. "You still need certain guardrails, and you don't want to say you can't do whatever, but you need to protect people."

She added that lawmakers face a challenge in balancing innovation with oversight, particularly as federal debate continues over how aggressively to

regulate the technology.

With challengers competing for the seat in the upcoming election cycle, Matsui said her message to voters in the June primary centers on experience and commitment to public service. She said her campaign is focused on offering stability given her background during what she described as a particularly uncertain time in governance.

"What is shaping my campaign is that I think this is not an ordinary time at all in this country," she said. "And I really believe you need, at this moment, is a person with the experience."

She added that her focus is not about political power but effectiveness in addressing urgent issues.

"This is not about wanting power," Matsui said. "It's about trying to do the best thing and the most effective thing."

Across the interview, Matsui returned repeatedly to the idea of public service as the foundation of her work in Congress. She said her perspective is shaped by both her upbringing and her long experience in public office, where she said helping constituents remains the central motivation.

Looking ahead, Matsui said her focus remains on representing the diverse needs of Sacramento-area communities using the same tools that have yielded results for progress in the region while continuing work on national policy challenges.

"The work I do is really for the benefit of my constituents," she said. "It's about making sure people have a better life."

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

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Storm Exposes Limits of ‘Band-Aid’ Fixes at CSD



Interim Operations Manager Travis Bohannon outlines storm damage to facilities during the Rancho Murieta Community Service District Board meeting on April 15.

Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - Rancho Murieta Community Services District Interim Operations Manager Travis Bohannon told the board April 15 that recent storm damage and a rise in major water main breaks show the district can no longer rely on temporary fixes to keep its water and wastewater systems running.

“A lot of band-aids got ripped off this weekend,” Bohannon said.

The storm that prompted his report hit between April 9 and 12, bringing high winds, lightning and nearly 2 inches of rain, with the worst conditions occurring April 11-12.

One failure was serious enough that the board added an emergency declaration to that night’s agenda. During a storm-related power outage, the generator at Main Lift South – a major wastewater lift station – failed to start.

Bohannon said the unit had lost its prime and that “its whole priming unit burned up.” He presented a proposal to remove the damaged component for repair, a process expected to take about two weeks, while installing a backup generator on site to protect the lift station during additional outages. The estimated cost is \$19,982.

In his monthly operations report, Bohannon described additional storm-related issues.

At the Rio Oso tank, a backup generator also failed to auto-start during a power

outage. Staff later found corroded electronic control cards and connections. After cleaning them, the generator could run in manual mode but still would not reliably start on its own.

The district’s communications systems also faltered. Tank level signals from the Van Vleck Tank travel over direct-buried AT&T lines that Bohannon said fail several times a year.

During the storm, the tank’s level transmitter repeatedly failed, and three transducers blew under electrical stress. Because Van Vleck’s readings tell the treatment plant when to shut off, operators had to manually monitor levels and adjust operations to avoid overflows or wasting treated water.

Bohannon said the storm-related failures come as the district is also seeing an increase in major water main breaks, some of which are costly to repair. He cited a recent in-house repair on Pescado Circle that cost about \$25,000.

He commended district staff for responding to the storm, telling the board they “did a great job out there.”

But Bohannon cautioned that the district has been “lucky” to avoid more serious consequences.

Bohannon urged the board to move forward with needed budgets and capital improvements, concluding: “We can’t kick the can anymore because there’s no can left to kick.”

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



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MEMORIAL



ROBERT KENT WILSON • 1/14/1939 – 2/28/2026


Robert Kent Wilson, 87, of Rancho Murieta, passed away peacefully at home on Feb. 28, 2026, surrounded by family.

Robert was born Jan. 14, 1939, in Independence, Kansas, to Woodrow and Frances Wilson. He spent his early years in Texas before returning to Kansas. He graduated from the University of Kansas and remained a life-long and devoted Jayhawks fan.

He began his career in the early days of the technology industry in the 1960s with IBM, going on to work with pioneering companies including Intel, National Semiconductor, Motorola and others. His work took him across the United States and around the world.

After retiring in 2004, Rob co-founded Hi Sense Soft, a technology company producing security tokens for U.S. banks. The company opened factories in China, and Rob spent years traveling internationally to grow the business before it was sold.

In 2014, Rob published “25 Lessons



Learned from 50 Years in Hi Tech: A Personal and Professional Journey.”

For 26 years, Rancho Murieta was home. He enjoyed golf, the camaraderie and the small-town atmosphere. He found fulfillment volunteering at CRES Elementary, helping kindergarten students learn to read.

Rob was outgoing, intellectually curious and known for his sharp wit and sometimes outrageous humor. Competitive and driven, he approached life with passion and determination.

In his later years, Rob cherished time with his family in ways he had not been able to during his career, when he was “out slaying dragons.” A man of deep faith, he prayed daily throughout his life.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Barbara; his children Derek (Danielle) and Carrie (Amir); and his grandchildren Satya, Emmette and Avram.



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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/ 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.

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.



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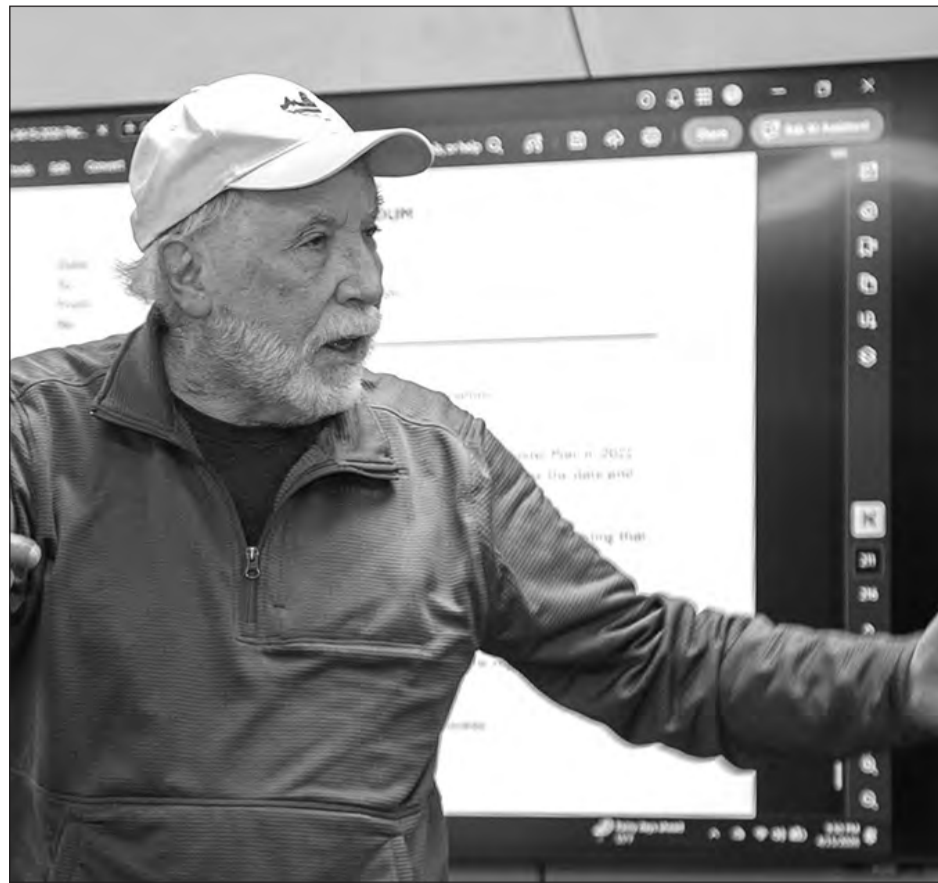


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CSD Covers Many Issues in Lengthy Meeting



Board President John Merchant presents a resolution honoring retiring Rod Hart at the April 15 Rancho Murieta Community Services District meeting.



Jim Farrell, author of the Integrated Water Master Plan work group report, tells the board he is willing to meet with consultant Lisa Maddaus.

Story and photos by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG) - The Rancho Murieta Community Services District considered myriad issues in a five-hour meeting on April 15. A highlight was a resolution honoring Rod Hart, who is retiring as the longtime general manager of the Rancho Murieta Association. The board also revisited its draft Integrated Water Master Plan and took in staff reports, including a detailed financial update.

Additional stories in this issue cover four other topics discussed at the meeting: a proposal for more groundwater exploration, recent storm damage to CSD facilities, a culvert repair at the equestrian center, and upcoming changes to the security department.

Board Honors Hart

The board unanimously approved a resolution recognizing Hart's 45 years of service to the association.

Reading from the resolution, Board President John Merchant cited Hart's "exceptional leadership, vision and dedication," and said his work helped shape Rancho Murieta into a "safe, welcoming, vibrant" community.

Directors echoed that praise. Director Linda Butler said even a plaque or statue would not fully capture his contributions, while Director Tim Maybee said his impact will be long-lasting.

Hart, in brief remarks, credited volunteers and board members for the community's success.

"It doesn't happen without all of you," he said, adding that from his own experience serving on boards, he appreciates the

work of the CSD directors.

IWMP Remains Unsettled

Another discussion on the district's draft Integrated Water Master Plan came up with the agenda item seeking direction from the board.

Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder said the item was brought forward to determine how to proceed with completing the plan.

The discussion reflected ongoing divisions from the Improvements Committee. Director Randy Jenco said the plan should be completed and noted he still had "two pages" of unanswered questions, arguing it is needed to give the district a defensible legal position. Director Bill Gere favored bringing IWMP consultant Lisa Maddaus back to address those questions.

Merchant suggested a meeting between Maddaus and Jim Farrell, who authored the IWMP work group report. The IWMP work group, formed in April 2025, reviewed the draft plan and issued its findings in August 2025.

Maybee also suggested seeking input from a new water attorney, while developer representative Jeff Pearson questioned why developers had not been included earlier.

Farrell explained that Merchant left developers out of the IWMP work group because it was intended to represent the community. Many felt developers had been manipulating the water studies and would "run us out of water."

Farrell said his goal is a straightforward working session with Maddaus and bring back a report.

"I'm not going to bring it back. She's not going to bring it back. Lisa and I are going to bring something back," he said.

The board ultimately voted 3-2 to move forward with a meeting between Farrell and Maddaus, with Merchant, Gere and Director Linda Butler in favor and Jenco and Maybee opposed.

Finance Report

Finance Director Cecilia Min reported the district is working to catch up on its financials, with plans to submit its 2023-24 and 2024-25 statements to the auditor in May.

She said reserves stood at about \$5.2 million as of the end of February – a level she indicated is low relative to the district's overall assets – but projected they could rise to about \$7.1 million next year if the proposed budget is approved.

Min described the \$3.4 million capital improvement plan for 2026-27 as a "wish list" that will be pared down at an upcoming Improvements Committee meeting.

Min said the proposed 2026-27 administrative budget includes adding an accounting position and upgrading a technician to a staff accountant to address years of incomplete financial records.

As of February, the district showed an operating loss of about \$163,000, which she said was offset by property tax revenue.

Other Business

In other action, Merchant announced the district has selected a candidate for a water attorney and will begin contract negotiations with Jennifer Buckman of the Sacramento-based BKS Law Firm. Buckman has more than 20 years of experience in water, environmental and public agency law.

District Counsel Patrick Enright asked the board to revisit the role of the

Administrative Oversight Subcommittee, noting that such committees are intended to be temporary. Merchant said the committee has evolved into a tool for more direct communication with Wilder, while Gere said it remains useful for staying informed. The board agreed to continue the committee for now while Wilder serves as interim general manager.

Director Randy Jenco reported the Water Vision subcommittee has not met since the last board meeting, but said members are waiting to work with a water attorney and reiterated their recommendation to move forward with the Dunn groundwater proposal.

Sgt. Brandon Arino reported attending a recent security conference, saying he was intrigued by a patrol robot on display but did not believe it would be practical for use in the district.

Maybee commended a letter from Nellie Bloom included in the board packet but, as is typical, not read aloud at the meeting. Bloom urged the board to prioritize improving public access to board and committee meetings, citing applicable law. She said the meetings are difficult to follow because of poor audio quality.

"These are not minor inconveniences. They are real barriers to public participation," she wrote.

Her recommendations included restoring Zoom or comparable live remote access, providing full written transcripts of meetings and improving the quality and reliability of audio recordings.

"At least we now know what we have to do and what we don't have to do," Maybee said of her letter.

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.

April 14

6:15 p.m., During a routine patrol check of the North back area near Lake Calero, patrol observed a Ford pickup, registered to Venado Drive, traveling toward the southwest area with a bed full of debris, including palm branches. Due to wet and muddy road conditions, patrol was unable to follow. Patrol remained in the area until the vehicle returned. Upon contact, the driver admitted to dumping debris. At the direction of patrol, the driver returned to the site and removed the debris. The vehicle

was later observed leaving the area with the previously dumped material.

April 17

5:14 p.m., Officer Passer observed two juveniles at the intersection of Murieta Parkway and Camino Del Lago with an e-bike modified to resemble a 50cc dirt bike. Contact was made with both subjects (13-year-old and 14-year-old, both residents). Officer Passer educated them on current e-bike and e-scooter regulations and instructed them to walk the bike home and refrain from operating it until it meets legal requirements. Subjects complied.

7:28 p.m., While on patrol near the yellow bridge off Highway 16, Officer Passer observed two unoccupied vehicles: a black Chevy Tahoe and a silver Chevy Trax. A cursory search of the

area led to contact with two separate groups fishing under the bridge. The first group consisted of one individual associated with vehicle 2. The second group consisted of four led by an individual associated with vehicle 1. None were RMA residents. All subjects were issued verbal trespassing warnings and escorted out of the community without incident.

April 18

2:41 a.m., Patrol responded to a vandalism report on Via Bernini. The reporting party stated that a group of young males was on the golf course behind the residence at approximately 2 a.m. and threw lemons at his home and a neighboring residence. No damage was reported. Upon arrival, patrol observed a black golf cart with one male occupant leaving the area. Patrol followed the cart as it

crossed the wooden bridge to the south. A search of the area behind Via Bernini was conducted; subjects were gone on arrival. Patrol continued checking surrounding areas, including Lake Clementia and the Clubhouse, with negative results. Similar incidents have recently been reported in the Retreats.

April 19

10:43 a.m., Officer Passer was dispatched to a report of a suspected non-resident vehicle at the peninsula of Lake Calero. Upon arrival, Officer Passer located a white 2024 Toyota Tacoma parked at the end of the peninsula. A records check revealed the vehicle had gained entry into the community under false claims of visiting the country club. Officer Passer contacted four adult male subjects. When questioned, one subject stated

he believed he could access the community freely because he knew a resident. The subject was unable to provide a Country Club membership number and refused to identify any resident they were visiting. All subjects were advised they were trespassing. Due to entry under false pretenses and refusal to provide valid visitor information, the subjects were permanently trespassing from the community. A note was placed in the RMCC system to deny future access to the involved vehicle.

2:46 p.m., RMCS D Patrol responded to a report of juveniles fishing at the 10th Fairway pond on the South Golf Course. Upon arrival, three juvenile residents were contacted. Subjects were advised of trespassing and that fishing is prohibited in the area. The group complied and left without incident. ★

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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Wildfire Preparedness Day Slated May 2

Sacramento County and the Rancho Murieta Regional Fire Safe Council will hold the annual Wildfire Community Preparedness Day from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, May 2 at the Tractor Supply parking lot in Rancho Murieta.

It is designed to provide valuable educational information to community members throughout the South County. Our goal is to engage the community, increase wildfire preparedness and connect people with local and regional agencies and resources.

This effort aims to bring together partners across all levels to support wildfire preparedness education, risk reduction strategies and resource awareness.

Plant Sale Extravaganza Set May 9

The River Valley Garden Club will host its annual Plant Sale Extravaganza from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, May 9 in the Rancho Murieta Association parking lot at 7191 Murieta Parkway.

The sale will feature flowers, vegetables, herbs, succulents, houseplants and garden art. A master gardener will be available throughout the day to answer questions.

Returning this year is a children's activity table. New additions include floral design demonstrations at 9:30, 10:30 and 11:30 a.m. The event offers an opportunity to shop for Mother's Day gifts.

For more information, contact Nancy Compton at ncompton43@att.net or pde-mello22@gmail.com.

Blood Drive Slated April 27

Vitalant will hold its next Rancho Murieta Community Blood Drive from noon to 6:15 p.m. Monday, April 27 at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 14673 Cantova Way. The event is sponsored by the Rancho Murieta Women's Club and the Knights of Columbus.

Appointments can be made online at donors.vitalant.org using blood drive code SMFM053 or by calling Vitalant at 877-258-4825. Walk-ins will be accepted as space permits. Donors will receive a coupon for a free donut from Local Bean Café. Donors also will be entered into a drawing for a \$50 credit for the Murieta Inn8 Cupola Spa donated by the Murieta Inn and \$50 card for the Local Bean Café donated by Carole Thames of Town and Country Real Estate.

Eat well and drink plenty of water before donating, and bring a photo ID. For eligibility questions, call 877-258-4825 or visit vitalant.org.

One donation can save more than one life; there's no substitute for volunteer blood donors.

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 Rancho Murieta Association 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.

Rod Hart Celebration May 1 to Feature Hot Dogs, Leis

The Rancho Murieta Association has scheduled a May 1 celebration for Rod Hart, who is retiring as general manager after 45 years. It will take place at Stonehouse Park from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. There will be hot dogs and drinks available.

This event is open to the community, so members are welcome to stop by, wish Haart well in his retirement and enjoy a hot dog. Residents who want to do more to recognize Hart can attend a lei-making workshop between 9 to 11 at the Calero Lake Park memorial bench being hosted by long-time resident Pamela Haines. She will provide supplies so residents can make leis in Hart's favorite colors: red, white and blue. She also hopes residents will wear white to celebrate and show off the leis to their best advantage.

Caregiver Group to Meet May 6

The Rancho Murieta Caregiver Support Groups meets every month on the first Wednesday. Meetings are in the RMA Building from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. and open to anyone who has a need.

This group offers support and researched resources that can be of help

to the caregiver and loved one. The next meeting is on Wednesday, May 6. There is no sign-up. For more information, call Nan at 916-354-2281.

Sunshine Gardening to be Featured April 28

The Rancho Murieta Garden Club's April 28 member meeting will focus on Sunshine Gardening. UC Master Gardener Jane Sutliff will present some simple solutions for seed germination and for choosing, growing and caring for plants. 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 7:15 p.m. The meeting takes place at the RMA Building.

CSD Board Meeting, Budget Hearing Set May 27

The Rancho Murieta Community Services District has rescheduled its regular May board meeting from May 20 to May 27. The meeting will include the first public hearing on the proposed 2026-27 budget.

Wilton Bingo Returns May 2

The next bingo will be on Saturday, May 2 in the Wilton Community Center, 9717 Colony Road. Doors open at 5 p.m. with food available for sale and bingo starts at 6 p.m.

All proceeds go to two nonprofits: the local Park Council and the Wilton History Group. ★

CSD Weighs Security Cuts, RMA Takeover

Continued from page 1

Cuts Likely to Affect Patrol Staffing

The direction leaves staff to return with a revised budget that reduces security spending to match revenues. While no specific layoffs were approved, patrol operations have historically been the most flexible part of the department, making them the most likely area for cuts.

Board President John Merchant acknowledged

the potential impact.

"Hey, (Proposition) 218 says you're getting an increase, and you don't like it. And, in addition to that, we're cutting security," Merchant said, describing how the decision could be received by residents.

Butler opposed the motion. She has chaired the Security Committee for more than a year and has worked with Security Sgt. Brandon Arino to stabilize staffing at the gate

and build out a four-officer patrol model.

Barcode Fee Effort Stalled

The district's earlier attempt to fund expanded security through a barcode decal fee has stalled.

First proposed in late 2024, the fee drew public pushback after it was noticed and was later withdrawn. The board revived the effort in March 2025, but staff reported

significant implementation challenges, including difficulty integrating barcode data with utility billing.

By June 2025, directors were told the rollout would be "nearly impossible" to add a fee to the July utility bill, and the ordinance was tabled for at least six months. It has not resurfaced in subsequent public discussions.

RMA Takeover Gains Traction

In a separate discussion, the board considered initiating formal talks with the Rancho Murieta

Association about taking over security operations.

A draft letter included in the consent calendar asked the RMA to consider the "feasibility of taking over the Security Department functions" and to indicate its interest by June 30.

Maybe pulled the item from the consent calendar, saying the issue was too significant to be addressed with a brief letter and calling for a more defined framework for discussions.

Merchant said the idea originated with the association.

"They called us," he

said. Directors agreed the letter should be rewritten to better outline expectations, including timelines, objectives and key issues such as taxes, staffing obligations and potential asset transfers.

The board directed Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder to revise the letter and initiate direct communication — including a phone call between leadership — before formally advancing the request.

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

etc!

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2. How would the reduction or elimination of School Arts Programs affect our Society?
3. What is it about the Arts (dance, music, visual art, theater) that sets your heart and soul on fire?

Entry Forms Available at RMA Building or By Request at philan.etcrcm@gmail.com

Information:
Stephanie Stanislaus
916-354-0901

Submission Deadline:
May 30, 2026

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Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



The Ping Pong Balls Are Coming

Yes, the NBA regular season is over, and our hometown ballers are once again watching from the sidelines.

With a grand total of 22 wins the 2025-26 season turned out very different from what the Sactown faithful envisioned.

Within a couple of weeks, the ping pong balls will determine the order of the upcoming draft, and as the Dallas Mavericks can attest, anything is likely to happen.

The Kings franchise and fans collectively will hold their breath, as anything can happen when it comes to the first five picks.

Without a doubt the Kings will get a high draft pick, but the real question is, how high.

Experts and pundits from all corners believe we're looking at one of the deepest drafts in many years, and that bodes well for Sacramento.

But what can we take away from a season bereft with disappointments.

For one thing we can look forward to a starting unit at the start of next season that is 100 percent healthy, and hope that the first-round draft choice in the upcoming draft makes an immediate impact. Something like De'Aaron Fox did when he became one of the best point guards in the history of the Kings franchise.

And what should we make of Keegan Murray after a season of injuries? Will this talented wing man once again return to a consistent 3-point shooter as he was in his rookie year just four short seasons ago?

Keegan had an amazing rookie season followed by one head scratching season after another as his 3-point shooting declined year after year.

Keegan set an NBA rookie record by recording 206 3-pointers, and Sacramento fans thought this was just the beginning.

Sadly, although Keegan shot an amazing 41 percent from beyond the arc, he would not accomplish this again. In the following three seasons Murray shot 35 percent, 34 percent, and in an injury shortened 2026 a dismal 27 percent.

So, will the real Keegan Murray please stand up. The Kings will in all likelihood hold onto Murray and resist trade offers, as his value has slipped just as his percentage has.

The real question is can this talented player

return to form and show Kings fans that his rookie year was no fluke.

I believe he can and he will.

Zach Lavine has received considerable criticism for his drop in 3-point shooting this year as well, but the question is can Zach return to normal next season and provide Murray with someone that carry spread the floor.

Once again, I believe that's exactly what Lavine can do, and if he does, and Domantas Sabonis can stay healthy, look out western division, because here comes the Kings.

We don't know what GM Scott Perry is thinking of, and whether he will keep this group together, but we honestly never had a real opportunity to see this group play together.

Let's not forget that DeMar DeRozan is one of the most talented mid-range shooters in the league, and like Zach Lavine, can open the floor for others.

The point guard position is once again the conundrum it has been since the departure of DeAaron Fox, and we must wait and see if the draft will provide front court help or perhaps the point guard the Kings have been looking for.

Devin Carter and Nique Clifford had moments this past season, but neither has made the statement that says the point guard for the future has arrived.

Not to be forgotten is the arrival and surprisingly so of Dylan Cardwell and Precious Achiuwa. Both players acquitted themselves admirably, and Kings fans will be watching to see if one or both can take that next step in their NBA career and become a force to be reckoned with.

A lot to chew on for the Sacramento faithful, and opinions are all over the board, but for my money I hope that Scott Perry looks hard before he leaps.

There is a lot of talent on this team right now, and the real question is whether they can gel.

A winning franchise is much closer than last season's 22 wins would make you think, so say your prayers Kings fans and keep your fingers crossed.

We are one impact player from watching a playoff team so keep your eyes on those ping pong balls and let's all root together! ★

Candidates For Governor Ought to Get Serious About These Pressing Issues



By Dan Walters, CALMatters.org

Eric Swalwell's abrupt departure from the campaign for governor due to revelations about sexual transgressions leaves nine men and women remaining as serious contenders for spots on the November ballot.

So far their campaigns have produced a scattershot of positions and promises that have only occasionally touched on California's real world issues. However, by sheer coincidence, there's been a recent flurry of think tank reports and articles on those issues that should be required reading for would-be governors and moderators of forums to question the candidates.

In no particular order:

Schools

The Public Policy Institute of California delved into the worrisome lack of academic achievement among in California's public schools. It notes that in state tests just 49% of students met or exceeded state standards in English language and 37% in math.

Results of federal tests were even less satisfactory, with only 29% of fourth-graders and 28% of eighth-graders proficient in reading and 35% and 25%, respectively, in math.

Mississippi, long a laggard in academic skills, got serious about raising reading

comprehension by adopting phonics. California, after years of political debate, finally semi-adopted phonics, although not completely requiring it. An article in Atlantic magazine reveals that in Mississippi, just adopting phonics was not enough; statewide mandates, coupled with state oversight, were needed to make phonics work — a suggestion maybe California needs to follow suit.

Jobs

Outgoing Gov. Gavin Newsom loves to brag about California's \$4 trillion economy but rarely mentions the darker side — several years with virtually no job growth. The Public Policy Institute of California digs into that stagnation and reports, "Job gains have been limited to a few key sectors like health care and local government, while stock market gains have been driven by AI. Unemployment has not increased much in the past two years, though it remains higher than in 2022 and above almost all other states.

"One major challenge for the next governor will be providing expensive services like health care to a growing older adult population while the share of workers shrinks," PPIC says.

The conservative Pacific Research Institute plows the same economic ground in a report. "The data shows that California's economic challenges are no longer theoretical — they are measurable and worsening," said Wayne Winegarden, one of the report's authors. "The state's weak job growth and shrinking private sector signal that California is at a crossroads. Without meaningful policy reforms, the gap between California and the rest of

the country will continue to widen."

One aspect of California's economic sluggishness is an outflow of workers due to its sky-high living costs. Another report from the Public Policy Institute of California says the state has seen a net loss of nearly 1.3 million people since 2020. The outflow, coupled with a record low birth rate, makes California especially reliant on immigration for new workers, which in turn is affected by turmoil in federal immigration policy.

Homes

A study by UC-Berkeley's California Policy Lab delves even further into the state's loss of population to other states, citing high living costs, especially for housing, as the prime factor.

It notes that "in 2012 the state's median household income was roughly sufficient to qualify for a mortgage on a mid-tier home, but it now falls substantially short of the level needed to qualify for even a bottom-tier home."

However, those who abandon California more easily become homeowners due to much lower prices and see improvement in their overall financial wellbeing.

This is not an exhaustive catalogue of California issues that the campaigns for governor should address. Water supply and homelessness also need attention, as well as the insurance crisis and the state's chronic budget deficits. But these reports are a good start for serious debate.

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. ★

From the Ground Up to General Manager, Rod Hart Retires After 45 Years

Continued from page 1

cleaning and polishing floors at his school and working at a drive-in store in Tennessee before his family moved to California. He later graduated from Folsom High School, where he wrestled and played football, and began working as a freshman at the Folsom Dam mechanic and welding shops, where he continued throughout high school.

He later managed multiple gas stations before leaving that job abruptly after being wrongly accused of theft.

"I quit right there," he said. "I wasn't going to work for an organization that would accuse me without proof." He later learned that the district manager had rolled back the meters.

After moving into construction work, a winter layoff led him to Rancho Murieta and a job that would become a lifetime career.

"I wanted a place to stay, start a family and build something," he said.

Building a Career

Hart began as a common-area maintenance worker, digging trenches and installing irrigation lines. "When I started, the community really didn't go much past Laguna Joaquin," he said.

Over the next 12 years, he worked his way up through a series of positions: from laborer to foreman to mechanic. He was initially turned down for the maintenance manager position because he did not have a bachelor's degree, but was later asked

to take the job when the successful candidate failed to complete probation. He would go on to hold the role for roughly 30 years before stepping into the general manager position three years ago.

"Every job is about attitude and wanting to learn," he said.

Bridge Unites Community

Two of the most transformative projects during Hart's tenure came to define Rancho Murieta.

The first was the wooden bridge over the Cosumnes River connecting the north and south sides of the community: a project Hart calls the most significant he witnessed.

Hart credited Randy Jenco, owner of Viking Construction, with leading construction of the bridge, with support from then-General Manager Greg Vorster. The bridge was dedicated in 2007.

"There was definitely a sense of division between North and South prior to that bridge," Hart said. "A lot of that went away once we finally got a bridge installed."

Accidental Amphitheater

The second defining project was the Lake Clementia amphitheater, an unexpected feature that took shape during the expansion of Lake Clementia Park.

"When I started, Clementia Park had a small lawn, a little sand on the beach and no real infrastructure," Hart said. Over time, the park expanded significantly, adding



Rod Hart wraps up three years as the Rancho Murieta Association's general manager.

amenities and improving shoreline access.

The amphitheater, now a centerpiece for concerts and events, came about almost by accident.

Working with Operating Engineers Local 3, Hart and his crew needed fill for the Clementia parking lot. "We decided, well, let's just go ahead and take a bunch of dirt out over here, and we'll tell everybody it's an amphitheater." They graded the slope and seeded it with grass.

At the time, the decision drew criticism. "I got scolded: 'You'll never use it,'" he recalled. "But we needed the dirt."

Today, it is the community's most unique feature: an amenity more typical of a resort town than a small gated community.

Projects Big and Small

Hart's imprint extends far beyond those headline projects, so much so that only a handful can be highlighted.

At Stonehouse Park, he helped to transform former wastewater ponds into a multi-use community

space with baseball, soccer and lacrosse fields, along with a range of recreational amenities. In 2022, the RMA Board dedicated the park to Hart during a Summerfest ceremony in recognition of his 40 years of service.

He also oversaw improvements at Laguna Joaquin and Riverview parks, as well as the development of Greens Park.

Hart also helped to build the association's maintenance shop, completing the concrete work alongside his brother and working with the full staff on the rest of the construction.

"That was my job for an entire year," he said. He also helped to transform a former developer's sales office into the current RMA building. Earlier, the association operated out of a small office attached to a fire station it built to attract a fire department, and before that, out of a single-wide trailer.

Piece by Piece

Much of the work on projects over the years was carried out not through large contracts, but by

RMA staff, often while balancing their day-to-day responsibilities.

"We only have so many people," Hart said. "When we're working on projects, we're not maintaining the assets, so we have to stop, go back, maintain then come back to the project."

A People-First Approach

Despite the scale of his accomplishments, Hart consistently deflects credit.

"I'm nothing without the team," he said. "I'm here to make heroes, not be a hero."

He emphasized creating a supportive, respectful workplace and applied that same approach with residents.

"I don't even start talking until they're done," he said.

"I get paid to try to put a smile on everybody's face," he added.

Shaped by Mentors, Continuity

Hart credits former General Manager Greg Vorster with shaping his leadership style, particularly in staying steady under pressure and being honest when he didn't have answers.

"You can still smile through adversity," he said. He also credited the many RMA boards he worked under, saying their support was essential to advancing projects.

Continuity has been key to the association's success, he added, noting that many staff members have decades of experience.

Beyond RMA

Hart's connection to

Rancho Murieta also shaped his personal life.

He met his wife, Danette, while she was working at the Country Store. They have been married 44 years, raised three children and now have nine grandchildren.

The couple lives in El Dorado, where Hart serves on the board of the local community hall and helps to manage a private campground near Loon Lake.

Looking Ahead

In retirement, Hart plans to spend more time on woodworking, metal fabrication, hiking and camping. While he has a long road trip planned — starting in Bodega Bay and heading north toward Canada — he said he plans to stay close to home at first to assist the next general manager during the transition.

A Lasting Legacy

Looking back, Hart said what kept him in Rancho Murieta for more than four decades was simple.

"This community gives me way more than I could ever give back," he said.

From the trenches he dug as a young worker to the parks, the bridge and the amenities that now define the community, Hart's legacy is visible throughout Rancho Murieta.

He came looking for a place to build something. He stayed long enough to build nearly everything.

RMA is planning a community celebration for Hart from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. May 1 at Stonehouse Park.

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

Split Vote Halts CSD Groundwater Study

Story and photo by Gail Bullen
River Valley Times Reporter

RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)

- A proposal to take the next step in identifying new groundwater sources for the Rancho Murieta Community Services District stalled on April 15, as Board President John Merchant drew a line over property rights, insisting the district should not spend money studying water on land it does not control.

The debate capped a two-meeting arc that began April 7 at the Improvements Committee, where consultants and developers outlined a path forward for locating new wells to augment the community's water supply.

At the center of the dispute: whether the district should move ahead with a roughly \$90,000 geophysical study – funded by developer-paid augmentation fees – before securing agreements with property owners where potential wells might be located.

Study Builds on Earlier Work

The proposal by hydrogeologist Patrick Dunn and geophysicist Sage Wagner would use seismic and electrical resistivity testing to identify underground water-bearing zones.

Dunn said the work builds directly on a desktop analysis completed by Water Systems Consulting – approved in July 2025 for \$80,700 and delivered Jan. 12, 2026 – which identified six to seven potential well sites, with about three considered viable.



Hydrologist Patrick Dunn outlines his proposal to use geotechnical methods to identify potential groundwater sources at Rancho Murieta Community Services District meetings on April 7 and 15.

Unlike that earlier effort, Dunn's proposal would involve field-based testing – often described as “boots on the ground” – to more precisely locate water-bearing formations.

When the board approved the WSC study in 2025, there was no similar concern about identifying potential water sources on property the district does not own, so long as the sites were within district boundaries.

Using aerial data from the California Department of Water Resources, Dunn said the new study would focus on locating alluvial materials – water-bearing sands – over fractured bedrock, and prioritizing sites near existing infrastructure to reduce costs.

Wagner described the process as a noninvasive means of evaluating subsurface conditions.

“This is a typical step one,” Dunn said. “It’s investigative. It tells you whether you want to pursue that property.”

“You don’t have a doctor perform surgery before doing X-rays,” he said. “We’re providing information from the ground surface without drilling a well.”

Those findings would

then be “ground-truthed” through test holes and water-quality sampling before any production wells are installed.

Dunn outlined a phased approach: geophysical testing, then exploratory borings to about 300 feet, followed by water quality testing, all before committing to the far more expensive step of drilling production wells.

He said drilling costs have risen sharply – from about \$125 per foot in earlier years to more than \$500 per foot today – making it critical to identify the best locations before committing to full-scale wells.

Origins in Improvements Committee

The proposal traces back to the April 7 Improvements Committee meeting, where Jeff Pearson, project manager for Rancho Murieta Properties, said he brought Dunn back after reviewing the area’s water history and earlier studies.

“Every serious study” pointed back to Dunn, Pearson said, citing the hydrogeologist’s previous mapping, test drilling and identification of potential well sites more than a decade ago.

Pearson said Dunn had identified two promising well locations in 2012 and 2013, but the district never followed through on developing those sites.

He said the new proposal builds on the district’s recent WSC study and refines potential sites using more detailed field data and updated tools.

Pearson also noted that at least one potential site – near a retention pond by the hotel – is on district-owned land, and that Dunn incorporated a location previously identified by WSC in its proposal.

Committee members discussed costs of roughly \$95,000 for the study and project management, along with broader questions about how and when to pursue new water sources.

Ownership Debate

At the April 15 board meeting, Merchant said the science behind the proposal was not the issue; ownership was.

“My concern is not in the process at all,” he said. “My concern is doing the process at a time when we have upfront understanding of where this project goes in terms of ownership and priority.”

Merchant warned that identifying significant groundwater on private land without agreements in place could put the district at a disadvantage. He said the district could be “putting ourselves in a very expensive position” if it identifies water on land it does not control.

Director Randy Jenco pushed back, calling the study a continuation of work already underway.

“This is just an extension of what WSC already did,” he said, noting the study would refine earlier findings.

Jenco said the work would be funded through developer-paid augmentation fees, not by ratepayers.

District counsel Patrick Enright questioned Merchant’s approach. He said the district needs information first to determine which properties are worth pursuing before negotiating with landowners. Requiring ownership agreements in advance, he said, “is putting the cart before the horse.”

Enright added that the district has delayed similar efforts for years.

“We’ve been through this for 10 years,” Enright said. “We need to move forward.”

Director Bill Gere expressed concern about costs and funding strategy, while Director Linda Butler questioned whether the study should proceed before key issues – including ownership and timing – are resolved.

Processes Reduce Risk

Pearson and Dunn said the study would reduce financial risk by narrowing viable sites before costly drilling begins.

Dunn said he didn’t anticipate any issues obtaining a right of access from the owners, noting that the testing is temporary and nonintrusive.

Ongoing Stalemate

The exchange highlighted a broader divide on the board over how aggressively to pursue new water supplies.

Jenco warned that delaying action could leave the district in the same position years from now.

“Although I won’t be here, we’ll be having this same conversation 10 years from now,” he said.

Vote Reflects Split

The divide ultimately played out in a 3-2 vote, with Merchant, Butler and Director Bill Gere voting against moving forward, and Jenco and Director Tim Maybee voting in favor.

Future Discussions

Later in the meeting, concerns raised by Merchant about groundwater ownership resurfaced under an agenda item to approve a resolution outlining agreements between the district and landowners for test wells.

Merchant had first introduced the resolution in March but withdrew it after sharp criticism from Jenco, Maybee and two members of the Water Vision subcommittee, who argued it could delay efforts to secure new water supplies.

He brought the item back to the Improvements Committee on April 7, where no action was taken, and again to the board on April 15.

Merchant ultimately withdrew the resolution a second time after Maybee proposed a compromise: set the measure aside and refer the groundwater ownership questions to the district’s new water attorney. Maybee said the attorney could develop an appropriate legal framework and draft agreements, potentially by July, allowing the board to proceed with the Dunn proposal.

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

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Easter Egg Hunt Draws Families to Stonehouse

Continued from page 1
provided an upbeat backdrop, guiding families through the schedule and highlighting performances and activities. Anthony said Perris “does a great job” keeping the event running smoothly.

Putting on the event required weeks of preparation and a large volunteer effort.

“The stuffing of eggs takes a small, well-coordinated army,” said Kiwanian Cookie Whalen.

That effort included the Cosumnes River Elementary K-Kids, Rancho Murieta Girl Scouts, parent volunteers and Key Club members from Rancho Murieta, who worked together to fill thousands of eggs ahead of the event.

On the day of the event, Kiwanis members, Key Club volunteers and others staffed activity booths, sold tickets and helped to keep things running smoothly.

Organizers also encountered an unexpected challenge: spotty Wi-Fi disrupted the event’s card reader, causing some transactions to fail. Whalen encouraged anyone who missed a payment to visit rmkiwanis.org and donate.

Organizers also thanked the Rancho Murieta Association Maintenance Department for helping stage the event, including setting up tents and tables.

“The Maintenance Department was absolutely fabulous,” Anthony said.

The organizers said the event delivered what the community has come to expect. “We are very



Eleanor White gets up close with two baby goats at the petting zoo.



Kiwanian Sharon Shenfield applies a glitter tattoo to Haley Shuey’s arm.



Murieta Dance Company performers finish with pizzazz.



McKenzie Pierce enjoys the moment as her daughters McKenna, left, and Eliza open their plastic eggs.

pleased with how well the event went,” Anthony said. “We are delighted to provide this festive event for the children and their families of Rancho Murieta.”

Whalen echoed that sentiment, saying it was “a pleasure to see so many families enjoy the wonderful day.”

From the first dash

across the field to the last swirl of cotton candy, the annual tradition once again delivered a morning of simple joys for Rancho Murieta families. ★



A blue-tongued Collin Gossen enjoys his cotton candy.



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