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# RIVER VALLEY TIMES

42ND YEAR • ISSUE 11

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## Sheriff's Inspection Finds No Active Encampment Behind Rancho Murieta



Rancho Murieta resident Carole Thames displays aerial photographs of a suspected homeless encampment during Sacramento County Supervisor Rosario Rodriguez's community meeting at the Rancho Murieta Association Building on May 4. Thames' concerns prompted a county investigation of the property. File photo by Gail Bullen

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - A Sacramento County Sheriff's Office inspection found no active homeless encampment on property behind Rancho Murieta that had concerned residents earlier this spring, although county officials continue to review the presence of several recreational vehicles on the site.

The inspection followed concerns raised by Rancho Murieta resident Carole Thames during Sacramento County Supervisor Rosario Rodriguez's community meeting

on May 4. At the meeting, Thames displayed aerial photographs she believed showed a growing homeless encampment on property near Stonehouse Road and Latrobe Road, and warned that the site could pose a wildfire risk to nearby homes.

Following the meeting, Thames continued communicating with county officials. She said the Sheriff's Office also used a helicopter to survey the property on May 6 after she provided updated information about the site.

In an email Thames later forwarded to the River Valley Times, Sacramento County Sheriff's Deputy

Matthew Bollinger reported that he visited the property on May 20 with county code enforcement officials and a community prosecutor from the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office.

"We met with the gentleman who maintains the property on behalf of the owner, and did a thorough inspection," Bollinger wrote. "I'm happy to report there are no encampments on the property, or anyone else staying there on an overnight basis."

According to the email, officials found two RVs used for storage and a third used as a pen for rabbits.

Continued on page 9

## Four Teens Identified in Fatal Scott Road Crash

Story and photo by Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - Four of the five teenagers involved in the fiery May 17 crash on Scott Road near Rancho Murieta have now been publicly identified, including two Rancho Murieta teenagers who remain hospitalized with serious injuries.

According to the Sacramento County Coroner's Office, 16-year-old driver Ariyonna Orozco and 14-year-old Piper Reese Conkling of Wilton died in the crash.

A California Highway Patrol news release said the crash occurred at approximately 12:29 a.m. May 17 when a northbound 2023 BMW X4 crossed into the southbound lane on Scott Road north of Latrobe Road, left the roadway and collided with a tree. The vehicle then caught fire.

Passing motorists stopped and helped remove several occupants before the SUV became fully engulfed in flames. CHP said three juvenile passengers suffered "moderate to major injuries" and were transported to area hospitals.

As of May 23, the identity of the female passenger in the back seat who survived the crash had not been publicly confirmed.

The other two surviving passengers have been identified through Meal Train pages shared on Rancho Murieta social media pages.

One Meal Train identified Rancho Murieta resident Rhys Mitchell, son of Rancho Murieta Community Church Communications Coordinator Norma Mitchell, as recovering from serious injuries sustained in the crash.

Another Meal Train organized by the Pleasant Grove High School basketball community identified Canyon Light, described as a "dedicated Pleasant Grove student athlete," as recovering from injuries.

Although the other four teenagers involved attended Pleasant Grove High School, Orozco's mother, Jennifer Orozco, said her daughter lived in Yuba City and attended River Valley High School there. She said her daughter previously attended schools in the Elk Grove Unified School District before moving to Yuba City.

Jennifer Orozco also said  
Continued on page 2

## Levee Erosion Near Airport Prompts Repair Planning

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - Preliminary planning is underway to repair approximately 300 feet of levee erosion between the Jackson Highway Bridge and the north end of the Rancho Murieta Airport runway after Reclamation District 800 trustees approved survey work and funding for a new access ramp during their May 21 meeting at the Wilton Community Center.

Trustees also learned that sheriff's deputies recently removed a homeless campsite from a district levee off Meiss Road east of the Sloughouse Kitchen, a topic of added interest as concerns about homeless encampments have also surfaced in the Rancho Murieta area.

RD 800 maintains approximately 34 miles of levees along the Cosumnes River from Rancho Murieta through Wilton and Sheldon. The district is still paying off debt incurred during the devastating January 2023 storms while continuing to address



The levee road west of the Cosumnes River is shown with Highway 16 and the Yellow Bridge in the background. Reclamation District 800 plans to repair erosion-damaged riprap on the river side of the levee east of this location. The repair area is not visible in this photograph but is identified on the accompanying map. Photo by Gail Bullen

erosion, flood-prevention projects and other maintenance needs along its levee system. The levees provide flood protection for agricultural lands, homes, businesses and public infrastructure within the district.

**Levee Repair**  
The Rancho Murieta erosion problem was

first reported by Trustee Leland Schneider during the board's April meeting. Schneider told fellow trustees he had discovered a section of levee that was being steadily eroded by river flows, even though the Cosumnes River was running at relatively modest levels.

At the May meeting, district engineer Patrick Ervin

said approximately 300 feet of the waterside levee slope has been damaged. The erosion is located on the right bank of the Cosumnes River between the Jackson Highway Bridge and the north end of the Rancho Murieta Airport runway.

Trustees approved \$7,825 for North Star  
Continued on page 5

# SUV Crashes into Rancho Murieta North Gate

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times  
Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - A white SUV crashed into the Rancho Murieta North Gate late May 17, overturning after striking the gate structure and causing major damage to the entry area, according to Rancho Murieta Community Services District security logs and information provided by the California Highway Patrol.

The crash occurred at approximately 11:15 p.m. at the North Gate on Murieta Parkway just off Jackson Highway.

According to one RMCSD security account, the inbound vehicle was

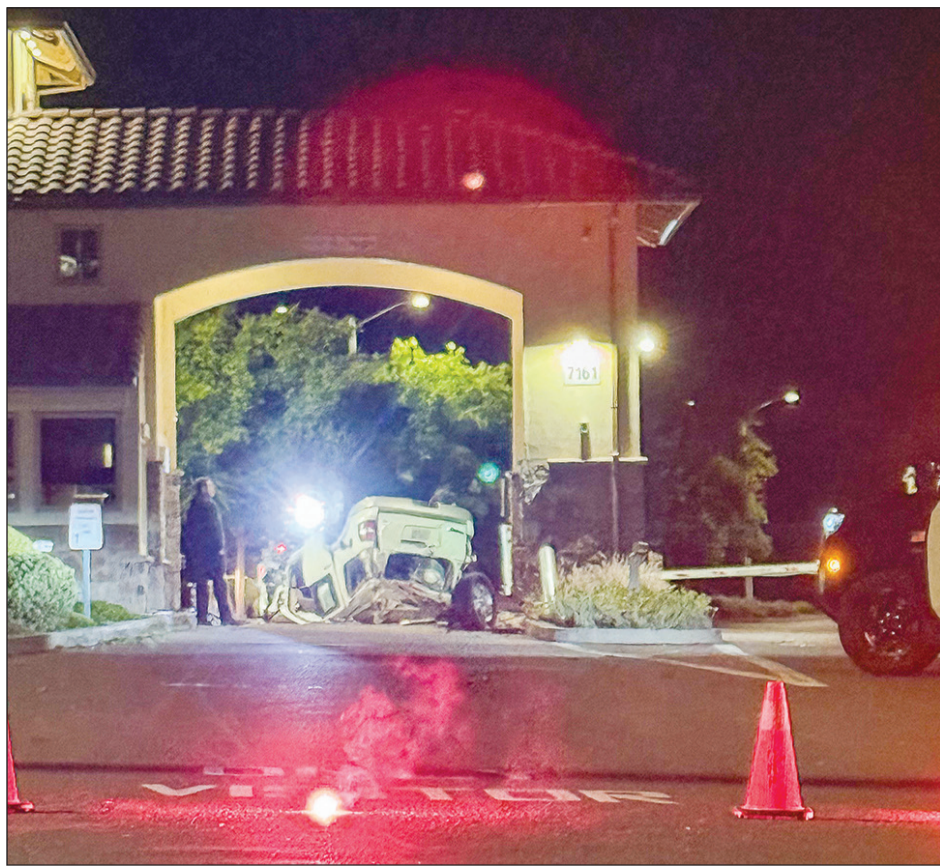
traveling “at a high rate of speed” when it changed from the inner resident lane into the guest lane, striking the median and a pole before colliding with the gate structure and overturning.

A second security account stated that a white Ford Explorer traveling westbound on Jackson Highway turned northbound onto Murieta Parkway “at a high rate of speed” and collided with a metal bollard between the visitor lane and the first resident lane. The impact reportedly caused the SUV to become airborne, strike the gatehouse and entry hardware, and overturn beyond the visitor lane arm.

CHP spokesperson Officer Angie Monroe said the male driver, who was the sole occupant of the vehicle, crashed into the Rancho Murieta security kiosk and overturned in the visitor lane, causing substantial property damage. CHP said alcohol was a factor in the crash.

The security officer who arrived minutes after the crash observed three bystanders attempting to assist the trapped driver, according to the security log.

Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District personnel arrived within minutes and extricated the driver from the vehicle before transporting him by ambulance to a local



A white Ford Explorer rests on its roof after crashing inside the visitor lane at the Rancho Murieta North Gate on May 17. The driver, who CHP said was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, was transported to a hospital with major injuries. Courtesy photo

hospital for treatment.

Monroe said the driver, a Sacramento resident in his late 30s, according to DMV information, was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence but released to the hospital

because of major injuries.

A security officer who was inside the kiosk at the time of the crash witnessed the collision but was not injured, according to CHP.

The crash caused significant damage to the North

Gate, including a broken window, destroyed gate arm and damaged scanner equipment, according to the security log.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★



Flowers surround a tree outside Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District Station 59 in Rancho Murieta in memory of two teenage girls who died in a solo vehicle crash on Scott Road on May 17. Two of the three surviving passengers are Rancho Murieta residents.

## Four Teens Identified in Fatal Scott Road Crash

Continued from page 1

she has been overwhelmed by community support following her daughter's death.

“I’m so overwhelmed with just gratitude from everybody,” she said. “People have offered so much to me and my family ... it is absolutely amazing.”

Social media posters throughout the week expressed grief over the

tragedy and concern that many young people were stopping along Scott Road to leave flowers and memorial items at the crash site, a narrow and dangerous stretch of roadway.

Community members encouraged mourners instead to leave flowers next to a tree at Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District Station 59 in Rancho Murieta.

Pleasant Grove High

School also referenced a memorial near the school's main entrance gate with an Instagram post showing dozens of flowers and memorial items.

A candlelight vigil for Orozco and Conklin was held the evening of May 22. The CHP continues to investigate the cause of the crash.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★

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# Budget, Water Issues Dominate CSD Meeting

Story and photo by Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - Rancho Murieta residents could see higher utility bills and fewer security patrols next year under a proposed Community Services District budget that would increase rates by 31.5% while eliminating two patrol officer positions.

The budget proposal, progress on long-delayed audits, future water-supply planning and new Brown Act requirements were among the major topics discussed during the Rancho Murieta Community Services District's May 27 board meeting.

Separate stories in this issue cover the district's emergency sewer-main repair east of the Yellow Bridge, a lengthy debate over the Water Vision Working Group, and a threatened legal claim filed by River Canyon Properties.

Before the public meeting, the board met in closed session regarding the River Canyon Properties claim. Board President John Merchant reported no reportable action.

The board also recognized James Colas and Jason Dill for 20 years of service to the district.



Rancho Murieta Community Services District employees James Colas, left, and Jason Dill are recognized for 20 years of service to the district at the May 27 board meeting. Joining the celebration from left are Cory Carskaddon, utilities supervisor; Amelia Wilder, interim general manager; and Travis Bohannon, interim operations manager.

Min also reviewed the district's Capital Improvement Program, which identifies major infrastructure projects planned for the coming fiscal year. The proposed CIP was reduced from approximately \$3.4 million in the preliminary budget to about \$2.198 million in the revised version.

Min told directors that grant funding should become a priority as the district moves forward with future capital projects, noting that outside funding can help to offset costs.

### Audits Nearing Completion

Min provided encouraging news on another issue closely watched by residents: the district's overdue audits.

She said the audits for fiscal years 2022-23 and 2023-24 are with the auditor and are expected to be completed within approximately three months. While final audits are expected to include some of the same concerning findings identified in previous audits, reflecting conditions that existed during those years, Min said other deficiencies have already been corrected through changes to procedures and financial controls.

Min has spent the past year working to eliminate its audit backlog while improving accounting practices, reconciling accounts and updating financial records.

### Search for Additional Water

The second-longest discussion of the

evening centered on a well-siting study prepared by Water Systems Consulting.

Consultants identified six potential locations for exploratory groundwater test wells and emphasized that the study is intended to identify promising drilling sites rather than future production wells.

Water Vision Working Group member Tom Shewchuk provided the only detailed analysis of the report during public comments. He said the group viewed the RM-5 site on Equestrian Center property as the most promising new municipal well location, while noting that two lower-yield sites could still have value for irrigation or other non-potable uses.

### Brown Act Changes

District Counsel Patrick Enright reviewed recent changes to California's Brown Act and new state requirements for fiscal and financial training of local officials.

The presentation covered remote participation rules, public access requirements and mandatory financial training for elected officials and certain district employees.

During public comment, the River Valley Times asked whether the district could conduct hybrid or livestreamed meetings although the district is exempted because of its small size, Enright said there is no legal barrier to doing so and that the primary consideration would be

the cost.

### Other Business

Director Linda Butler announced she is stepping down as chair of the Personnel and Security committees for health reasons.

Butler also reported that the Camera Working Group has completed its current assignment and will not meet for the foreseeable future.

She said the group has reached a point where professional assistance will be needed before additional progress can be made on the district's security camera program.

In her general manager's report, Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder reminded residents that four of the district's five board seats will be on the November ballot and encouraged interested residents to consider running for office. She also reported that recruitment for a permanent general manager was nearing completion, with candidate reviews expected to begin in June.

The board also approved a lengthy consent agenda covering personnel, operational and administrative matters and reviewed the upcoming June committee and board meeting schedules.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook.

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# Ceremonies Honor Veterans and Fallen Service Members



Chaplain Don Craig delivers the opening prayer during the Rancho Murieta Veterans of Foreign Wars Memorial Day ceremony on May 25. Listening, from left, are Greg Verdon, David Walters, Bill McCarver, Post Commander Michael Mineni and Jeni Lawson. Photo by Gail Bullen

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times  
Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)**

Three Memorial Day weekend events in Rancho Murieta honored fallen service members, supported veterans in need and paid tribute to the American flag.

The Rancho Murieta Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars sponsored a Buddy Poppy distribution in front of Tractor Supply on May 23 and a Memorial Day ceremony at the Gazebo on May 25. Scout Troop 633 also held a flag retirement ceremony at Lake Calero on Memorial Day evening.

**Poppy Drive**

Members of the VFW distributed Buddy Poppies outside Tractor Supply on May 23 as part of a nationwide program that has supported disabled and needy veterans since 1922.

Organizer Jennifer Lawson said the event was a great success.

“Tractor Supply has been a great supporter of the VFW,” Lawson said.

“They were so amazing and supportive of us being there. We couldn’t be more thankful to them for their hospitality, or more thankful to the community for so generously donating to needy veterans in our community.”

VFW members use the event not only to raise funds for veterans in need but also to help connect veterans and their families with Veterans Administration services.

**Memorial Day Service**

The Memorial Day service at the Gazebo drew approximately 40 attendees who gathered to remember the men and women who gave their lives in military service.

Post Commander Michael Mineni welcomed the audience and thanked members of the VFW Auxiliary for providing refreshments and organizing a fellowship hour before the ceremony. He also recognized Gold Star families across the nation, noting that more than 1 million Americans have died in defense of the

country. “Memorial Day is not just the start of summer,” Mineni said. “It is a sacred day of remembrance.”

Assistant Post Commander Bill McCarver led the audience in patriotic observances, including the Pledge of Allegiance. Chaplain Don Craig delivered the opening prayer, while Jeni Roland sang the National Anthem.

During his remarks, Mineni reminded attendees that Memorial Day honors generations of Americans who died while serving their country. He also urged continued support for veterans who returned home from war.

“It’s our duty to support and uplift them, ensuring that they have access to the care and resources that they need,” he said.

Several audience members then shared personal reflections. Dan Pennington recalled growing up in Appalachia during the Vietnam era and losing numerous friends who never returned home. He also asked attendees to remember service



Hunter Steichen and Jackson Johnson participate in Scout Troop 633’s annual flag retirement ceremony at Lake Calero on Memorial Day. Photo by Gail Bullen



Members of the Rancho Murieta Veterans of Foreign Wars conduct a Buddy Poppy drive in front of Tractor Supply on May 23. From left are Bill McCarver, Bravo the dog, Marcus Negrete, Michael Mineni, Cory King, Austin Parks, Lily Barnett, Don Craig, Gene Cameron, Dan Pennington and Jay Solomon. Photo courtesy of Jeni Lawson



Post Commander Michael Mineni recognizes two of the oldest veterans attending the Memorial Day ceremony. From left are World War II veteran Richard Fenarol and Korean War veteran Tom Thompson. Photo by Gail Bullen

members currently serving around the world.

McCarver, a former military dog handler in Vietnam, paid tribute to the dogs that served alongside

American troops.

“During Vietnam, there were 295 handlers killed, over 500 dogs killed, and we left 4,500 dogs there that didn’t come home,”

McCarver said. “So, we remember them, too.”

Mineni also recognized the two oldest veterans in attendance: World War II veteran Richard Fenarol and Korean War veteran Tom Thompson. Their introductions drew warm applause from the audience.

The ceremony concluded with the playing of Taps and a closing prayer by Craig before attendees remained for refreshments and fellowship.

**Flag Retirement Ceremony**

Later that evening, Scout Troop 633 conducted its annual flag retirement ceremony at Memorial Grove near Lake Calero.

Approximately 10 Scouts participated in the ceremony, which included readings about the history and meaning of the American flag. Retired Navy Capt. Chuck Jamison once again provided patriotic bagpipe music throughout the program.

Scoutmaster Jason Dodson said the troop retired approximately 300 worn and tattered American flags. The event ran from 5 to 8:30 p.m. as the Scouts respectfully placed the flags into the fire one at a time, continuing the tradition of properly retiring American flags that are no longer fit for display.

The ceremony offered a solemn conclusion to a day dedicated to remembering the sacrifices made by generations of American service members and their families.

See more photos at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com). ★

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# Developer Threatens Lawsuit Against CSD Over Water Meters

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times

## RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)

A threatened lawsuit by a Rancho Murieta developer moved into public view after Rancho Murieta Community Services District counsel released a government claim and draft complaint filed by River Canyon Properties LLC, which alleges the district is improperly withholding water meters needed for residential construction.

The documents were released May 29 in response to a California Public Records Act request submitted by the River Valley Times after the matter appeared on the district's May 27 closed-session agenda under "Conference with Legal Counsel – Existing/Threatened Litigation."

District Counsel Patrick Enright said no lawsuit has yet been filed against the district.

"To directly answer your question: No lawsuit has been filed against the District by River Canyon Properties, LLC as of the date of this letter," Enright wrote in a response to the newspaper. He added that the district had received a Government Claims Act claim, notice of a forthcoming lawsuit, a public records request and a litigation hold demand from the developer's attorneys.

The claim alleges the district has breached, or is anticipatorily breaching, a 2014 Financing and Services Agreement known as the 670 FSA by refusing to issue water meters for River Canyon's development, the Residences of Murieta Hills East and West subdivision.

Before filing a lawsuit against a public agency, California law requires a claimant to first submit a Government Claims Act claim, giving the agency an opportunity to review and potentially resolve the dispute before litigation is filed.

The claim specifically identifies Interim General Manager Amelia



Homes under construction in the first phase of The Residences of Murieta Hills subdivision are shown in the foreground. In the background is the project's second phase, where grading and underground utility work began in 2025. River Canyon Properties alleges uncertainty over future water-meter issuance has delayed further development of the 198-lot subdivision. Photo by Gail Bullen

Wilder, District Counsel Patrick Enright, Board President John Merchant and "potentially others" as participants in the alleged conduct.

The 670 Financing and Services Agreement (FSA) is separate from the Rancho North FSA and was entered into in 2014 by the district and several landowners and developers. Both 2014 agreements were designed, in part, to help fund multi-million-dollar upgrades to Water Treatment Plant 1 and related water infrastructure needed to support future development.

The Residences project, developed by Bob and Michele Keil and their partners Doug and Lori Veerkamp, includes 198 approved lots. The first phase contains 68 lots, while the second contains 130.

### Complaint Alleges Improper Conditions on Water Service

The draft complaint opens with a blistering attack on the district, accusing it of "blatant extortion" and arbitrary abuses of power. River Canyon alleges the district is improperly withholding water meters despite contractual obligations and previously issued will-serve commitments.

According to the complaint, the district is

demanding that River Canyon post a \$1.2 million letter of credit to secure disputed reimbursement claims, secure approximately \$900,000 in obligations under the separate Rancho North FSA, pay an additional \$756,011 in fees, and contribute toward the construction of a new water tank and groundwater wells expected to cost between \$8 million and \$10 million.

The draft complaint further alleges that the district is treating River Canyon differently than another developer governed by the same 670 FSA. According to the filing, the district allowed a letter of credit associated with The Retreats development to expire and released that developer from reimbursement-related security requirements without requiring an indemnification agreement.

River Canyon argues that, by imposing additional conditions on its project while releasing another developer from similar obligations, the district is using its control over utility service to extract unauthorized fees and infrastructure commitments. The complaint characterizes those conditions as "draconian" and alleges the district is "weaponizing its monopoly power over utility

services" to obtain concessions not required under the 670 FSA.

### Relief Sought

River Canyon contends the district's actions constitute a breach of the 670 FSA. The complaint alleges that the continued refusal to issue water meters threatens to trigger breaches of the developer's agreements with third parties. The developer is seeking a writ of mandate compelling the immediate issuance of water meters and declaratory relief affirming its rights under the 670 FSA.

### Dispute Over Water Storage Requirements

The lawsuit threat is the latest chapter in a long-running disagreement over water service for the Residences subdivision.

The requirement for additional water storage first became public in September 2025. In a Sept. 16, 2025, letter to River Canyon attorney Gary Perry, District Counsel Patrick Enright wrote that before additional water meters could be issued, the district and River Canyon needed to address storage capacity in the Rio Oso and Van Vleck Ranch tanks.

Enright proposed a framework for planning a new water tank, including

the selection of a site, estimated construction costs and allocation of costs among River Canyon, the district and other developments that would benefit from the facility. The letter stated that the district acknowledged the new tank would also benefit existing customers by improving system reliability and maintaining water service during periods of high demand.

The letter became public during Oct. 2 and Oct. 3, 2025, district meetings after developer Bob Keil described it as "nothing short of extortion." Several directors said they had not previously seen the letter. At the Oct. 3 special board meeting, Board President John Merchant said the letter was not one he had asked Enright to write. Merchant said the response was prompted after Keil demanded water meters and threatened litigation if they were not issued promptly.

Merchant had been serving as the sole member of the board's Administrative Ad Hoc Committee since former Director Steve Booth left the board. At the Oct. 3 board meeting, Merchant noted that Director Bill Gere had already begun assisting him following his recent appointment to the board. Directors then formally reconstituted the committee and appointed Gere to serve alongside Merchant. According to discussion at the meeting, the committee's primary duties were to answer staff questions and help oversee the search for a permanent general manager.

The dispute intensified on Nov. 19, 2025, when Interim General Manager Amelia Wilder sent a letter informing Keil that a third water storage tank would be required before the district would issue a water meter for the 51st lot in the 198-lot Residences subdivision.

Less than a month later, at the Dec. 4 Improvements Committee meeting, Wilder publicly backed away from the Nov.

19 letter, stating that it was "not valid or accurate" and had been rescinded pending further discussion about water demand, emergency storage needs and developer fees.

### Questions About Board Authority

The issue resurfaced Feb. 18, 2026, when directors considered formally rescinding the Nov. 19 letter. Director Tim Maybee questioned how such a consequential policy decision had been communicated without formal board action.

The discussion occurred even as district representatives and developers continued to explore potential solutions to the tank issue, including possible sites, costs and funding arrangements for a third water tank.

Merchant said the Administrative Ad Hoc Committee had directed Wilder's letter, while Gere stated he did not participate in drafting the Nov. 19 letter. Merchant described its release as the result of "a misunderstanding during a late-night closed session at the November board meeting."

District Counsel Enright responded that, regardless of the committee's role, an ad hoc committee does not have authority to make or reverse board decisions and that any such directive should be authorized by the full board.

He told directors he was preparing a new letter outlining exactly what the district was seeking from the developer.

### District Response

The district has not publicly responded to the specific allegations contained in River Canyon's Government Claims Act claim and proposed lawsuit.

In his May 29 letter, Enright emphasized that releasing the documents did not constitute an admission of any allegation and that the district reserved all legal defenses.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★

## Levee Erosion Near Airport Prompts Repair Planning

Continued from page 1

Engineering to survey the erosion site and gather information needed to prepare repair plans. Ervin said the work will be completed at the same time as a larger levee centerline survey already planned by the district, reducing costs by avoiding a separate mobilization.

The board also authorized up to \$25,000 to construct a new ramp to the levee, allowing trucks and heavy equipment to reach the erosion site.

Ervin said Schneider identified a source of free fill material from infrastructure work at The Residences of Murieta Hills development. Veerkamp Construction has agreed to truck the excess dirt to the site and stockpile it at no cost to the district for use in building the ramp.

Initially, the ramp will consist of compacted dirt. Ervin said the district may later surface it with rock to provide all-weather access, either as part of the erosion repair project or before the next winter season.

Ervin said the access improvement would benefit the district beyond the current project.

"Right now in a flood situation, if we have to get over there to the other side by the airport, we couldn't get there," Ervin told trustees.

Although the erosion is not considered an emergency, Ervin said the district hopes to complete repairs this summer if it can obtain permits in time.

Ervin said the best scenario would be for the project to qualify under the district's existing maintenance agreement with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, potentially requiring only state approval. While the approximately 300-foot repair exceeds the length normally covered by the agreement, he said regulators have granted variances for similar straightforward projects in the past.

If federal permitting becomes necessary, Ervin said the district may still qualify for exemptions or streamlined approvals through the U.S. Army



An overhead view shows the location of levee erosion that Reclamation District 800 plans to repair this year. It isn't considered an emergency. Photo courtesy of Reclamation District 800

Corps of Engineers.

Ervin expressed optimism that the project's simplicity could work in the district's favor.

"There's no endangered anything. I mean, there's nothing out there. It's just dirt and weeds. There are no elderberries, thank God," he told trustees.

### Homeless Campsite

Maintenance Supervisor Trevor Dosh reported that sheriff's deputies had recently removed a homeless campsite from a levee off Meiss Road east of the Sloughhouse Kitchen.

Dosh said he discovered several vehicles and a campsite on district

property but chose not to approach the occupants after observing a gun on a table.

"I didn't even ask them to leave," Dosh said. "Straight up, I called the deputies."

According to Dosh, the campsite included tarps strung between vehicles, substantial amounts of trash and a water heater. He said the occupants were smoking while camped on the levee, raising concerns about a possible grass fire.

Deputies ultimately cleared the site.

### Emergency Planning

Ervin reported that consultant Brenda Howell

has prepared a draft Emergency Operations Plan and that revisions are underway.

Once completed, the district will begin work on a flood contingency map identifying evacuation routes, known levee trouble spots and other information needed during flood emergencies.

The Emergency Operations Plan was one of the recommendations made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers following its review of the district's levee system.

### Storm Debt

The board also received an update on outstanding

FEMA reimbursements related to the January 2023 flood response.

Ervin said approximately \$235,000 in FEMA management costs remains in "pending award" status. FEMA officials have indicated that the claim requires additional review due to its size, but no timeline for payment has been provided.

RD 800 borrowed approximately \$6.5 million following the January 2023 storms to fund emergency levee repairs and flood-response activities. By January, outstanding debt had grown to about \$7.9 million after additional borrowing and financing costs. Since then, millions of dollars in reimbursements from FEMA, the California Office of Emergency Services and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have been applied to the district's debt.

According to the district's May finance report, the outstanding balance has now been reduced to approximately \$3.7 million.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★

# District Repairs 35,000-Gallon Sewage Leak



A sewage cleanup closes one lane on Jackson Highway east of the Yellow Bridge on May 17. Photos courtesy of Rancho Murieta Community Services District



Sewage sprays from the corroded connection that failed.

By Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times  
Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - An estimated 35,000 gallons of sewage escaped from a failed sewer connection near Rancho Murieta's Yellow Bridge on May 17, triggering a 15-hour emergency response that cost the Rancho Murieta Community Services District \$106,189.

Despite the size of the release, district officials say no sewage reached the Cosumnes River or nearby storm drains.

"We did not spill a drop of sewage into the Cosumnes River or into

any of the storm drains," Chief Plant Operator Travis Bohannon told the district's Board of Directors during a May 27 report on the incident.

The leak occurred along Highway 16 east of the Yellow Bridge, where a 21-year-old saddle connection linked a 2-inch PVC line from the Starter Shack lift station to a larger sewer force main carrying wastewater to the district's treatment plant. Bohannon said the all-thread hardware securing the saddle rusted through, causing the connection to fail and sewage to surface above ground.

Bohannon said he received a call Sunday

morning from resident Leland Schneider, who reported the problem. When he arrived, Utility Supervisor Corey Carskaddon was already on scene with a vactor truck removing sewage and constructing a barrier to prevent contamination from reaching the river.

District crews also blocked nearby storm drains while vacuum trucks removed wastewater from the spill area.

To prevent additional sewage from escaping while repairs were underway, the district shut down pumps at Main Lift North and Lift Station 6B. Six vactor trucks and one larger pumper truck were

used to transport sewage that would normally have flowed through those facilities. The collected sewage was hauled to the district's wastewater treatment plant.

According to Bohannon, most of the trucks were stationed at Main Lift North, the district's largest wastewater pumping station, while one truck handled flows from Lift Station 6B.

"There is not much storage capacity," Bohannon said in a written response to questions from the River Valley Times. "That is why we focused most of the trucks at MLN since it is the district's main sewage station."

The repair site required the closure of one lane of

Highway 16 for approximately 15 hours. Traffic control contractors coordinated the closure with Caltrans while crews excavated the failed connection and completed repairs.

Eight district employees and seven workers from contractor TNT Industrial Services participated in the response. Crews repaired the leak early Monday morning and later returned to backfill the excavation, restore the site and test the system.

Although the final cost came in below initial estimates, Bohannon said the incident highlights the challenges of maintaining aging infrastructure.

"It did come in a lot lower than what we had anticipated," he told the board. "But it seems like the days of the small, inexpensive repairs are behind us."

Bohannon also praised district employees and contractor crews who worked through the emergency.

"I want to give my staff kudos for answering their phones and coming out and helping," he said. "A lot of us were here for 24-plus hours getting this going."

The board unanimously approved the emergency repair expenditure on May 27.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★

## Kings Korner

By V.G. Harris



### The Finals Are Revealing

Well, if we listened to the experts and the NBA prognosticating, we would shortly be crowning the Oklahoma City Thunder with their second Larry Obrien trophy in as many years.

By now we all know that coming from a 3-2 deficit, the upstart San Antonio Spurs did what few thought was possible and not only won two games in a row to win the western divisions championship but put the exclamation mark on their final victory by winning on the opposing teams home court. A herculean task accomplished, and once again the experts let us know that you can watch the finals if you wish, but the outcome is all but decided.

Victor Wembanyama had already put on his superman's cape and punished what most pundits believed was an organization that had put together one of the best consummate teams that anyone had seen in years. Yes, and that's not to say that the Oklahoma City Thunder are not every bit of that, but tremendous credit needs to go to the San Antonio Spurs for putting on an epic performance and one of the best playoff series seen in years.

All that said, the well-rested New York Knickerbockers have been waiting in the wings and would like to be heard from.

Heard from they were, doing the unthinkable by defeating the Thunder on Oklahoma City's home court two straight games, and setting the experts back on their heels in amazement.

NBA fans got an up front and personal look at how team basketball is supposed to be played, and without an MVP or a 7-foot-4 center, the Knicks have posted a commanding two-game lead as the two teams convene at Madison Square Garden Monday night for game three.

Surprising? I would have to say yes, but encouraging is a more apt description.

Although the Knick's had a solid regular season record of 53-29, it paled in comparison to the Thunder's 64-18 or that of San Antonio who posted 62-20.

The city of New York is going crazy as their beloved Knicks haven't secured an NBA championship in 53 years.

Not since Willis Reed, Bill Bradley, Dave Debuscherre, Walt Frazier and Earl the pearl Monroe graced the hardwood of Madison

Square Garden have the New York fans tasted the ultimate success.

New York is a long way from Sacramento to be sure, but don't think that Kings fans aren't paying close attention to what has become a true surprise.

The very fact that the Knick's have won 13 consecutive playoff games is nearly record setting, and two more wins would not only secure the championship, but tie them for the most consecutive playoff wins in NBA history.

Those games have yet to be played, and San Antonio may have something to say about the outcome to be sure, but the fact that without a true superstar the Knick's are boat racing through the playoffs, should give Sacramento fans something to ponder.

Some would argue that Karl-Anthony Towns and Jalen Brunson are superstars and they may have a legitimate argument but credit the Knicks with building a team in the real sense of the word.

As the finals will finish shortly and one of these two teams will be crowned the champion, and heads turn to June 23 when the NBA draft takes place.

General Manager Scott Perry has remained somewhat of an enigma, but that is about to change.

The ability to truly judge talent will be on full display, and a trade just before the draft remains a possibility.

Will the Kings shore up the backcourt and give Domantas Sabonis some help, or once again try to find the point guard of the future after they inexplicably let DeAaron Fox slip between their fingers.

Will Ja Morant enter the picture by way of a trade is still a possibility, but can the organization look past his transgressions that have put him in the doghouse of the Memphis Grizzlies.

One of the more interesting NBA drafts is about to begin and never let it be said the Sacramento Kings didn't have a chance to enhance their team, because this draft is deep in talent, and one of these hopefuls is about to don a Kings jersey.

Enjoy the finals Kings fans and dream the dream, because that's what New Yorker's are doing right now!

All the best! ★

## California's Population is Stagnating as Immigration and Birth Rates Decline



By Dan Walters,  
CALMatters.org

California's population exploded during and immediately after World War II, from 6.9 million in 1940 to 19.9 million in 1970, thanks to waves of migrants from other states drawn to California's surging economy and the famous postwar baby boom.

California absorbed its 13 million new residents by expanding its public infrastructure of schools, colleges, highways, parks and water systems and by welcoming immense private investment in new housing, new retail complexes, new factories and new office buildings.

Population growth slowed in the 1970s in the aftermath of the baby boom and as an economic evolution, from manufacturing to technology and services, changed the job market. The leading politician of the decade, Gov. Jerry Brown, declared that California had entered "an era of limits" and major infrastructure expansion was no longer needed.

However, the 1980s saw a new population surge, driven by immigration from other countries and a new baby boom. California's population jumped by 6 million — 5-plus million of them babies — during the decade, a more than 25% gain.

The increase was so large, relative to the nation as a whole, that California was awarded seven new

congressional seats after the 1990 census.

Unlike California's expansive reaction to its postwar population increase, the 1980s boomlet sparked an adverse reaction in the 1990s, including new laws aimed at denying public services to undocumented immigrants and a power struggle within the Sierra Club over immigration's impact on the environment.

Meanwhile, population growth slowed again, and in this decade virtually halted as immigration and birth rates declined and substantial numbers of people left California, thanks largely to the state's sky-high living costs.

A recent study by researchers Hans Johnson, Julien LaFortune and Eric McGhee at the Public Policy Institute of California found that the total fertility rate has dropped from 2.21 children per woman in 2007 to 1.48 in 2023, far below what demographers call the "replacement level of 2.1 necessary to keep a population from declining."

The state lost a congressional seat after the 2020 census and is likely to lose several more after the 2030 census. However, the impacts of California's population plateau extend far beyond politics.

"A smaller population can offer benefits; it reduces pressure on housing and infrastructure needs," the researchers wrote, "easing congestion and reducing the need for expansive public works projects." They also cited potential improvements in the environment and increasing per pupil spending on education as enrollment declines.

"At the same time," they added, "fewer births — and a smaller population — may

bring challenges: they could accelerate K-12 enrollment declines and strain the state's economic and safety net systems as fewer workers support a larger share of older Californians. Labor shortages could also hinder California's economic development."

Those are all valid points and many more potential impacts could be mentioned. But the underlying issue is whether political policies will reflect the new demographic reality.

The post-World War II population explosion manifested itself in a bipartisan effort to do what was needed to make the transition relatively painless. We haven't seen such political adjustment to changing demographic trends since.

Meanwhile, the state's population is twice what it was in 1970 and we still depend on what politicians wrought in the post-war era — such things as the State Water Plan and our extensive freeway network.

A stagnant population eases pressure for new infrastructure but we still need to maintain what we have and expand it to meet current needs. However, water projects have languished and we no longer build new highways.

Jerry Brown, who proclaimed the "era of limits" in the 1970s, returned to the governorship in 2011 and declared, "I want to get shit done."

There's still much that should be done.

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. ★

# SECURITY LOGS

Following is a summary of activity for the Rancho Murietta 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](http://rmcsd.com).

## May 18

Patrol responded to a vehicle accident at the North Gate resident lanes. An inbound vehicle traveling at a high rate of speed changed from the inner resident lane into the guest lane, striking the median and a pole before colliding with the North Gate structure and overturning.

Patrol arrived at 11:17 p.m. and observed three subjects attempting to assist the trapped driver. Sac Metro Fire and ambulance personnel arrived at 11:22 p.m. California Highway Patrol arrived on scene at 11:30. The driver was extricated by fire personnel and transported to a local hospital for treatment. The vehicle sustained major damage and significant structural damage was observed to the North Gate area, including a broken window, destroyed gate arm and damaged scanner equipment. The vehicle was removed from the scene and cleanup was completed.

## May 19

6:32 p.m., patrol responded to a report of a male subject possibly preparing to jump from the County bridge. Reporting party advised the subject had thrown a rope over the side of the bridge. Upon arrival, patrol did not locate anyone on the bridge. Patrol then contacted a group consisting of one female adult and two male adults near the river. The group stated that prior

to patrol's arrival, two male subjects had jumped from the bridge into the river. Patrol requested proof of a current Cosumnes River Parks and Recreation daily pass. The group was unable to provide a valid pass and was advised they were trespassing. The group was instructed to leave the area and advised it would take approximately 30 minutes to gather their belongings before clearing the area.

## May 21

11:08 a.m., Security Supervisor Arino was dispatched to a report of a transient male behind the barber shop. Upon arrival, contact was made with a subject matching the description. Subject stated he was walking from Sacramento to Jackson. Subject was advised of the complaint and intended for customers conducting business with merchants. Subject stated he would leave the area and proceeded toward the Country Store to purchase cigarettes. Dispatch was advised to contact Sacramento Sheriff's Department if additional complaints are received regarding the individual.

## May 22

At approximately 12:10 p.m., while conducting routine patrol, Officer Passer observed a male adult with short dreadlocks wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, blue pants rolled to the knees, and tan military-style boots lying in the shaded seating area in front of Burger King located at Jackson Road. Subject was alert and conscious upon contact. Dispatch advised a similar contact had been made with the subject the previous day.

Subject stated he was waiting for a taxi he contacted approximately 30 minutes prior. Subject was advised not to lie down or sleep in the area. Officer Passer remained on scene monitoring the subject.

## May 24

Poncho Conde Circle: Patrol located a strong water leak shooting approximately 10 feet into the air. RMCSO Water Department was advised and responded on scene at approximately 4 p.m. Source of the leak was determined to be an irrigation system. Water Department personnel shut off the water and stopped the leak.

## May 25

5:54 p.m., Guadalupe Drive: During a routine patrol of the North Back Area/North Beach, patrol observed a Chevrolet pickup carrying three passengers in the bed of the truck. Patrol contacted the driver after the vehicle parked and advised him of the violation. The driver stated he believed it was permitted on private property within Rancho Murietta. Driver was again advised of the violation and notified that a citation would be submitted to RMA Compliance for processing.

11:25 p.m., While patrolling the Chesbro North Lake back area, RMCSO Officer Davis observed a blue golf cart occupied by two white male juveniles performing donuts near the entrance to the Water Treatment Plant. Officer Davis contacted the driver and passenger and advised them that operating a golf cart in that manner would not be tolerated within the community. Both juveniles refused to

identify themselves and became disrespectful toward Officer Davis. The golf cart barcode was checked through Dispatch and returned to Cozumel Drive. Officer Davis instructed all involved subjects to leave the area, and they complied. A citation was issued to the residence for Improper Use of Community Streets/Common Area.

## May 29

10:32 p.m., Patrol Officer Anderson responded to a report of a large group creating a disturbance at Riverview Park. Upon arrival, patrol observed three golf carts and multiple juveniles in the park after hours, in violation of RMA Rule IX, Section 2 (Park Hours). One golf cart was identified and a citation was issued. Drug paraphernalia was located near the restroom area where two subjects were observed fleeing upon patrol's arrival. The group was advised that the park was closed and directed to leave the area. All subjects complied and departed.

## May 31

6:20 p.m., RMCSO Patrol Officer Perepelka responded to a report of paddleboards on Lake Chesbro. Officer Perepelka observed two paddleboards and one canoe on the lake and directed the occupants to exit the water. The subjects complied without incident and were advised of lake regulations prohibiting body-contact activities. A citation was issued for violation of RMA Rule IX, Section 2 (Swimming in Lake Chesbro). Area cleared.

## June 2

5:57 p.m., Patrol responded

to a report of two juveniles allegedly jumping from the Jackson Road bridge into the river. Upon arrival, no activity was observed on the bridge. Patrol located a group of male juveniles at the river and made contact. The group denied jumping into the river. Subjects were advised of Cosumnes River Park regulations and were unable to provide a valid daily park pass. The group was directed to leave the area and complied without incident. Area clear.

6:01 p.m., Patrol responded to a report of a significant water leak near Via Sereno 3 Park. Upon arrival, patrol observed a strong flow of water originating from what appeared to be a water main valve located in the common area near Via Sereno. The resident at Via Sereno reported a loss of water pressure. No additional reports of water service interruptions were received from nearby residences. The RMCSO Water Department was notified and responded to investigate.

## June 4

3:59 p.m., Guadalupe Drive, RMCSO Patrol responded to a welfare check request after a mother reported being unable to contact her daughter for approximately 24 hours. Upon arrival, patrol located an unsecured front door with no signs of forced entry.

After announcing their presence, patrol located the resident asleep inside the residence. The resident was found to be in good health and not experiencing a medical emergency. She was advised of the welfare check request and contacted her mother in the presence of patrol. No further action was required. ★



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# RMA Revives Security Committee, Reviews South Gate Renovation Plans

Story and photos by Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - The Rancho Murieta Association Board of Directors on May 19 reactivated its Security Ad Hoc Committee to study whether RMA could eventually assume responsibility for security services within the gates of Rancho Murieta and reviewed conceptual plans for a long-awaited renovation of the South Gate entrance.

The meeting came two days after two serious traffic incidents on May 17. A crash on Scott Road claimed the lives of two teenagers and seriously injured three others, including two Rancho Murieta residents, while a separate vehicle crash later that evening damaged the North Gate entrance structure.

Board President Patrick O'Hern opened the meeting by expressing condolences to those affected by the Scott Road crash.

"We would offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of the young people involved in the tragedy," O'Hern said. "We also extend our wishes for full recovery to those who were injured."

O'Hern also reported on the North Gate collision, which occurred shortly before midnight May 17 when a vehicle lost control and struck the gate structure, damaging the gatehouse cover, building and gate arms.

"Our crew have been assessing the extent of the damage, and we will be



Architectural Review Manager Mark Parsons, left, and Maintenance Manager Troy Schaffner discuss conceptual plans for a long-awaited renovation of Rancho Murieta's South Gate entrance during the May 19 RMA Board meeting. Compliance Manager Chris Smith, right, listens to the presentation.

working with our insurance to make the necessary repairs as soon as possible," he said.

## Security Study Resumes

Director Chris Childs said the Security Ad Hoc Committee was originally formed to evaluate options if the Rancho Murieta Community Services District stopped providing security services. Its work was suspended in 2024 after the district indicated it would continue operating security. The issue resurfaced after CSD recently requested discussions regarding the feasibility of RMA assuming responsibility for security functions within the gates.

The board unanimously approved reactivating the committee. Members include Childs, directors John Van Doren and Tom Reimers, residents Raelyn Mobley, Julia Jonas and Greg Mason, and former RMA Board President Jim Moore.

"It's a big one," Childs said. "It's going to take us a lot of months to come up with an answer that would be reasonable for the board

to consider, for the community to consider at large."

O'Hern said residents would be involved in the process before any final decisions are made.

## South Gate Renovation Takes Shape

The board also received its first detailed look at conceptual plans for renovating the South Gate entrance, a project that has been discussed for years.

O'Hern said the Maintenance Committee wanted board feedback on the concept before staff spends money obtaining detailed bids and construction estimates.

Architectural Review Manager Mark Parsons said the project would begin with the removal of turf in the center island and its replacement with shrubs and perennial plantings.

"When I sat down to talk with Rod (Hart) about the amount of water that we're using in South Gate, it's a substantial amount," Parsons said. He said the grass would ultimately be removed and replaced with landscaping requiring less

irrigation.

Maintenance Manager Troy Schaffner said the landscaping changes would also help prepare the association for future state water-conservation requirements.

"The main goal of this is to give it a good update, but one of the goals of mine is to reduce water and to change the landscaping to help with that, especially with some of the new California laws that are coming into place," Schaffner said.

Parsons then described what he called a complete facelift for the entrance.

"We're basically going to give everything a facelift," he said.

Parsons said the current entrance reflects what he described as a "Mexican motif." Existing plaster finishes would be replaced with a fine sand-finish stucco, while the water-feature wall would be rebuilt using Carmel Mountain stacked stone and incorporate a large Rancho Murieta logo. The same stone and color palette used at the North Gate would be carried into the South Gate renovation.



Damage is visible at Rancho Murieta's North Gate after a vehicle crashed into the entry structure shortly before midnight on May 17. The repairs are being coordinated through the association's insurance carrier.

The proposal would restore a water feature to the South Gate after the previous fountain was removed earlier this year. The new water feature would be smaller than its predecessor and would consist of vertical water jets recirculating through a retention basin below.

Parsons said trellis-style structures resembling heavy timber would be constructed of lightweight aluminum and installed over the entry lanes and welcome wall.

"We're trying to tie the North and the South together," he said.

Director Scott Adams said he liked the similarity between the proposed South Gate design and the appearance of the North Gate.

"It does look a lot like it's going to look like the North Gate," Adams said. "I like that there's going to be a similarity between the two."

While praising the overall design, O'Hern said he wanted additional information about the proposed fountain before the project proceeds.

The board reached consensus supporting the concept and directed staff to begin developing cost estimates for future

consideration.

## Other Business

In her first board meeting as Rancho Murieta's new general manager, Vicky Lentz told directors she was honored to return to the community where she previously lived and served on the board. Adams welcomed Lentz and said the community was fortunate to have her leadership.

Adams and O'Hern also thanked Schaffner, Compliance Manager Chris Smith and other staff members for their response to the North Gate crash and repair efforts.

Recreation Committee Chairman John Haviland reported on plans for July 4 activities and a proposed CPR training program for residents.

During public comments, River Valley Times reporter Gail Bullen questioned the apparent discontinuation of resident access to board agenda packets. As is customary during public comments, the board did not respond.

The board's next meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 16.

This story is at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com) and on Facebook. ★

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Start your Fourth of July festivities at the Kiwanis Fourth of July Pancake Breakfast from 7 to 9:30 a.m. July 4 at Stonehouse Park.

The delicious breakfast includes pancakes (with optional blueberries), sausages, eggs, juice, water and coffee.

Ticket prices are: \$6 for adults and children 6 and up; children 5 and under eat free. Ticket prices on July 4 are \$9 for adults and children 6 and up; children 5 and under free.

Tickets can be purchased online (rmkiwanis.org) starting Saturday, June 13. In-person sales start at the RMA on Monday, June 15 during regular business hours, cash or check only. There are no online sales on July 4.

## Bookmobile Schedule Changes

Starting in June, the Bookmobile from the Sacramento County Library will only be coming to Rancho Murieta on the first and third Wednesdays.

The next visit is June 17. The time will change, too, from 10 am until noon.

This schedule change will allow the library to serve additional communities.

The Bookmobile parks in the Village Clubhouse parking lot and with inclement weather, will be inside the Clubhouse.

The summer reading began in June with special activities including face painting and balloon animals when it ends in July.

## June 24-25: Rancho Murieta Resilience Plan Community Work Sessions

Community members are invited to participate in the second round of public work sessions

for the Rancho Murieta Resilience Plan, a project led by the Sacramento County Department of Transportation (SacDOT).

The first session will be held from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 24 at Rancho Murieta Community Church, 14670 Cantova Way, Suite 101, Rancho Murieta.

A second session will be held from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Thursday, June 25 at The Villas at Rancho Murieta, 7085 Murieta Parkway, Rancho Murieta.

Both sessions will feature the same agenda, including a project update, an introduction to proposed

flooding and wildfire mitigation strategies focused on Jackson Highway, and opportunities for residents to speak directly with the project's technical experts. Community members are welcome to attend either or both sessions.

Residents who would like to receive future project announcements may submit their contact information at tinyurl.com/RMRPSignUp.

## CSD Announces Openings on Four Board Seats

Rancho Murieta residents will elect four directors to the Rancho

Murieta Community Services District Board in November.

Residents interested in serving their community are encouraged to run for office.

The candidate filing period opens July 13 and closes Aug. 7.

Nomination papers are available from the Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections Office, 7000 65th St., Suite A, Sacramento.

Additional information is available from the Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections Office website, elections.saccounty.gov. ★

# Sheriff's Inspection Finds No Active Encampment Behind Rancho Murieta

Continued from page 1

Bollinger wrote that no RVs were being used for habitation or camping.

The inspection followed Thames' alerting authorities that three RVs remained on the property.

According to Thames, sheriff's officials had believed the problems on the property had been resolved following enforcement efforts last year, until she provided updated aerial photographs that revealed additional RVs.

Bollinger wrote that county code enforcement officials advised the property representative that the presence of multiple RVs could require a conditional use permit. He also noted that multiple RVs visible on the property could create the impression that camping was taking place.

According to Bollinger's email, the property

representative said the RVs were temporary and that the long-term goal was to remove them from the property.

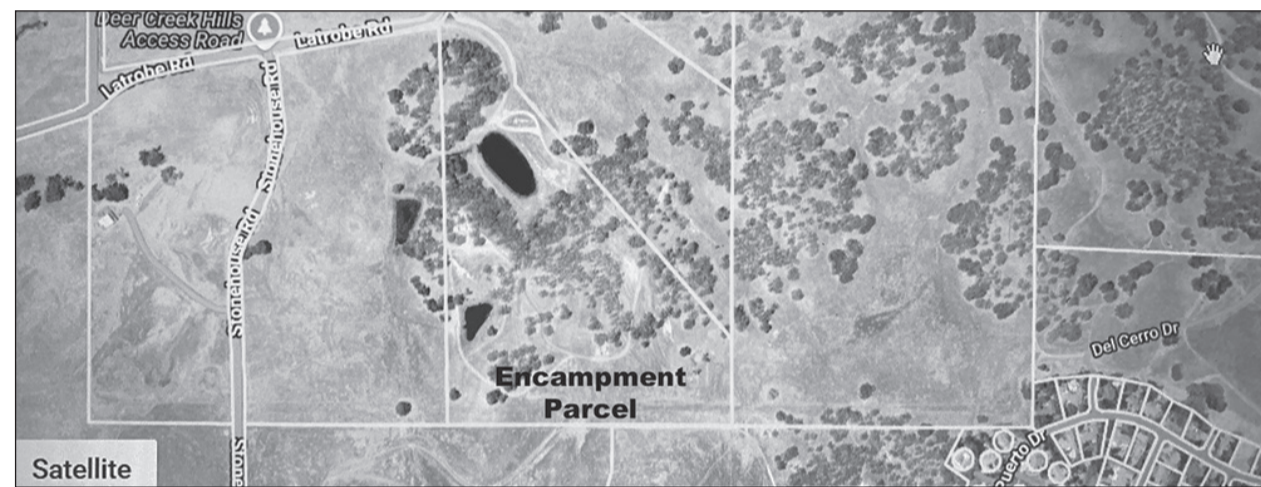
For Thames, the issue has never been simply the presence of RVs.

"What prompted me was that the fire season has started," she said. "If there are any homeless encampments surrounding the back of Rancho Murieta, or popping up along the river, we need to know about them."

Thames said her concerns were heightened by conditions she observed at the same property last year.

"The mess from last year was despicable," Thames said. "There was garbage everywhere. You could clearly see people were staying there. There were water storage tanks and everything."

She said another resident originally reported the



A satellite map shows the property where residents suspected a homeless encampment had reemerged behind Rancho Murieta. The encampment was located on the second parcel east of Stonehouse Road, on private property behind Rancho Murieta. Photo courtesy of Carole Thames

situation to authorities last year but declined to identify the person.

Drone photographs from 2025 provided to the River Valley Times show multiple RVs, trailers, debris and scattered materials on the property. Thames said sheriff's officials later assured residents that the site had been cleaned up.

The property remains a concern to nearby residents because it lies roughly 1,000 feet from Rancho Murieta homes and near Stonehouse Park.

"We just have to be really aware of our surroundings," Thames said. "We don't need people out behind us starting fires."

Although the recent

inspection found no active encampment, Thames said she and other residents plan to continue monitoring the area.

"We'll try to get photos every couple of months," she said. "The residents of Rancho Murieta and Sloughouse just want to be fire safe with the surrounding neighbors."

The inspection appears to have resolved immediate concerns about overnight camping on the property. However, county officials are continuing to review whether permits are required for the RVs remaining on the site.

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

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# Water Vision Fight Sparks Accusations of Developer Influence, Secret Meetings



President John Merchant and Director Bill Gere listen to a contentious discussion about the possible disbanding of the Water Vision Working Group at the Rancho Murieta Community Services Board meeting on May 27.

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

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - Accusations of secret committees, developer influence, anti-growth politics and even a “horrible memory” flew between directors and audience members on May 27 as a Rancho Murieta Community Services District discussion about the Water Vision Working Group devolved into one of the board’s most contentious exchanges in recent months.

The sharpest differences emerged between Directors Bill Gere and Randy Jenco. Gere argued that Jenco was “aligned with the developer” and criticized the Water Vision Working Group as a “secret little committee.”

Jenco countered that the group’s efforts to develop new water supplies repeatedly encountered resistance.

“It’s almost like you don’t want to find the water,” he said.

Although the dispute began when Gere questioned whether the Water Vision Working Group should be disbanded, it ended with two unanimous board actions aimed at better defining both the group’s role and the district’s broader water-planning efforts.

The board appointed five members to the Water Vision Working Group in November: Director Randy Jenco, the chair; Rancho Murieta Association General Manager Rod Hart, who has since retired; resident Tom Shewchuk; Interim Operations Director Travis Bohannon and Jeff Pearson, a project manager for Rancho Murieta Properties. Amelia Wilder, interim general manager, also attends the meetings.

## Questioning Group’s Future

Gere opened the discussion by arguing that the group had largely completed the task for which it was created: assisting Water Systems Consulting in identifying potential groundwater well sites.

He criticized the group’s operations, saying it does not publish agendas, keep minutes or meet at designated public times. Calling it a “secret little committee,” Gere said it was “high time that we brought it under control.”

District Counsel Patrick Enright cautioned that the group was not operating independently.

“It’s a working group created by board members,” Enright said.

Jenco strongly disagreed with Gere’s assertion that the group had only one assignment.

“The very first one was to oversee the well site plan,” Jenco said. “We were given three or four more tasks by this board. The motion was made, and it passed.”

When asked by Jenco, Enright agreed

that because the board had assigned those responsibilities, another board vote would be required to disband the group or limit its duties.

Board President John Merchant reiterated concerns he has raised at previous meetings, arguing that the district should have legal agreements in place before expanding groundwater investigations, including a recent Dunn Engineering proposal to study whether groundwater could be found closer to the district’s reservoirs. The board voted 3:2 not to fund the project in April.

Jenco defended the group, saying its membership included staff, community representatives and only one developer representative.

“You are way off base on the whole process and what we do,” Jenco told Gere. “Travis is on the committee. Amelia sits in on the committee. We’ve got members of the public on the committee. We’re trying to move the process forward.”

Gere responded sharply. “What you said is silly, Randy. I mean, you’re an aligned developer; you’re aligned with the developer,” Gere said.

He then suggested district staff would simply go along with whatever ideas the group developed, saying Wilder and Bohannon would “sit there and listen to anything that you guys gin up.”

Jenco replied that the board itself had created the group and assigned its responsibilities.

“The idea that we’re going to somehow negotiate an agreement with the property owners is ludicrous,” he said.

Gere countered that the group had worked with Dunn Engineering to develop a \$90,000 proposal to find more water without first going through the Improvements Committee.

As the debate intensified, Director Tim Maybee strongly objected to Gere’s suggestion that staff would simply follow board members’ directions.

“I think it’s horseshit,” Maybee said. Turning to Wilder and Bohannon, he added: “As a sitting board member, I absolutely apologize to you.”

Maybee argued that before directors considered eliminating or restructuring the group, they should first review its original assignments and determine which had been completed. He then suggested postponing any decision about the group’s future until that information could be assembled and reviewed at the next board meeting.

## Public Comments Deepen Divide

When public comment opened, the disagreement intensified.

Pearson rejected Gere’s claim that the group was primarily about facilitating development, calling many of his statements “completely incorrect and fabricated.” He later urged Gere to review the record, saying he appeared to be “having

a challenge with recalling what has happened in the past.”

Pearson said the group’s strength came from bringing together people with different viewpoints, including community members, staff, board representation and a developer representative. “We each come from a different direction for a common goal,” he said. “Collaboration is the best way to get things done.”

Without that collaboration, he warned, the district would lose an important forum for solving complex water issues.

Shewchuk said the group’s first charter was to recommend potential test-well locations, but that work was not complete. Although Water Systems Consulting had finished its siting report, the group still needed to integrate those findings with the 2013 Dunn Engineering study and evaluate whether groundwater could be located closer to the district’s reservoirs under the newest Dunn proposal.

He noted that Pearson had even suggested exploring another well location outside developer-owned property.

“I stand behind Jeff that he is not acting as a developer in this group. He is not,” Shewchuk said. “I’ve been in every meeting. He doesn’t act like a developer. You have not been to any of them, so you can’t say,” he told Gere.

“That is absolutely absurd,” Gere replied.

Shewchuk said the group’s second charter involved examining how to pursue permitting for Lake Clementia as a potable water source. Work on that assignment had not yet begun because members were waiting to consult with the district’s newly hired water attorney, who had canceled two appointments.

He said other assignments included auditing district water use and evaluating whether the district should complete its Integrated Water Master Plan or move directly to an Urban Water Management Plan.

“We’re not done,” Shewchuk concluded. While the board could terminate the group by motion, “that would be a true shame in my opinion.”

The most personal criticism came from developer Bob Keil.

“So, Bill, you’ve shown your true colors tonight,” he said.

After Gere asked what he meant, Keil replied, “First off, you say things that aren’t true. You do have a horrible memory, and I’m concerned.”

Keil specifically challenged Gere’s claim that the group was dominated by developers and questioned why he was criticizing the Water Vision Working Group as secret when he had also voted to authorize another small working group involving Jim Farrell and consultant Lisa Maddaus.

“Bill, this again concerns memory,” Keil said. “You voted to have Jim Farrell represent CSD in discussions with Maddaus.

Do you remember that vote?”

Keil argued that resistance to the group’s work reflected broader opposition to future development.

“Every time we come close to a solution, the three SOLOS members on the board stop it,” he said.

Gere rejected the accusation. “I’m not a SOLOS member, never have been, never will be,” he replied. “I stop people from trying to get around the rules.”

Keil disagreed, saying water issues were being used to block future growth.

“It’s very apparent that you’re using water to stop development,” he said.

When the discussion returned to the board, Jenco said the group continually encountered objections whenever it made progress toward identifying new water supplies.

“I hate to say it, but I think Bob (Keil) has a point,” Jenco said. “It’s almost like you don’t want to find the water.”

## Board Reaches Resolution

A resolution emerged after Wilder asked directors for guidance.

Maybee argued that two separate issues had become intertwined. The first was whether the Water Vision Working Group had completed its assigned tasks, and whether directors fully understood how it was formed and the responsibilities it had been given. The second was Merchant’s broader concern that the district lacked a clear framework for tracking major water-related projects and responsibilities.

The board unanimously approved Maybee’s motion directing staff to compile information on the group’s formation, assignments and accomplishments.

Directors then unanimously approved a second motion, proposed by Merchant, directing the Improvements Committee to develop a matrix categorizing major district projects and responsibilities into fiscal, infrastructure and legal tracks, and to send it to the board.

Director Linda Butler said the action finally provided a roadmap for moving forward.

“Now we have a plan,” she said.

For months, Butler has argued that the board needs a strategic plan to guide operations and long-term decision-making.

Much of Gere’s criticism focused on the Water Vision Working Group’s lack of agendas, minutes and publicly noticed meetings, leading him to describe it as a “secret little committee.” Gere currently serves on the district’s Administrative Ad Hoc Committee, which similarly operates without published agendas, meeting minutes or regularly scheduled public meetings, although its activities are reported during board meetings.

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

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# ETC Opens 25th Anniversary Season with Record Kickoff Attendance

Story and photos by Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - More than 400 people attended Entertainment, Theatre & Culture for Rancho Murieta's annual kickoff event on May 17, helping to launch the organization's 25th-anniversary concert season and setting the stage for the first concert of the summer on June 20.

The strong turnout reflected the community support that has sustained ETC for a quarter-century. Founded in 2001, the volunteer-run organization brings live entertainment to Rancho Murieta while supporting local programs, including scholarships and school art initiatives.

Held at the Rancho Murieta Country Club, the free kickoff event featured DJ music, wine tastings, gourmet food samples, raffle prizes, artwork by local artists and a preview of ETC's 2026 concert lineup. Attendees also had an opportunity to purchase memberships and discounted concert tickets.

"We estimate that more than 400 people attended this year's Kickoff Event, surpassing last year's estimated attendance of 350," ETC Board President JT Turner said. "We were thrilled with the turnout and the enthusiasm from the community."

A special poster contest celebrating ETC's 25th anniversary drew entries from 12 students ranging from transitional kindergarten through 11th grade. The contest invited Rancho Murieta students to create artwork celebrating



ETC Board Member Brenda Allen-Booth and Board President JT Turner distribute raffle prizes during the organization's May 17 kickoff event at the Rancho Murieta Country Club.

either ETC's 25th anniversary or the nation's upcoming 250th anniversary. Although organizers originally planned to select one winner per grade level, only 12 entries were received, so ETC chose to recognize all participants.

The students recognized were Jack Coleman, Emily Leslie, Jude Holmes, Charlotte Leslie, Carter Coleman, Sabrina Maas, Esme Arceo, Jack Leslie, Benjamin Musick, Abigail Leslie, Aubrey Pritchard and Zachary Holmes. Each student will receive a free concert ticket, have his or her name printed in the season's first concert program, and be recognized from the stage at the June 20 concert. A standout entry was a three-dimensional train engine created by fifth-grader Benjamin Musick.

The kickoff also featured an art display coordinated with the Rancho Murieta Fine Arts Association. Paintings by Pamela Szemesi, David Epler

and Rebecca Reilly were exhibited alongside metal-print photography by Paul Anderson and a photo collage, "ETC Over the Years," created by Lynn Baugher.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was a raffle featuring gift baskets assembled from donated items. Turner credited Board Member Brenda Allen-Booth with organizing the effort.

"Brenda devoted countless hours to collecting donated items and assembling the gift baskets," he said. "The baskets were beautifully put together and reflected a tremendous amount of time, effort and attention to detail. We're incredibly grateful for her dedication and the important role she played in making the event a success."

The celebration now shifts to the Lake Clementia Amphitheater, where The Blockbusters will open ETC's summer concert season on

Saturday, June 20. Gates open at 7 p.m., and the concert begins at 8:30 p.m.

The high-energy band specializes in music from the 1990s and early 2000s, blending rock, pop, dance, hip-hop and grunge hits into a nonstop sing-along and dance-along experience. Dressed in video-store uniforms, the musicians pay tribute to the era that inspired their act while performing many of its biggest hits.

The June 20 show is the first of five concerts scheduled during ETC's silver-anniversary season. Additional performances include Billy Joel 2 Elton - Face to Face on July 11, Titans of Rock on Aug. 1, Hip Service on Aug. 22 and Rhinestone Rodeo on Sept. 5.

Turner said the organization's sponsors, members and volunteers remain essential to ETC's success.

"The sponsors, members and our amazing community are the backbone of ETC," he said. "Many of



Laura Koontz pours wine samples for attendees during the ETC kickoff event.



Cathy Burnett looks over entries in ETC's 25th anniversary poster contest.



Issuing tickets and memberships during the ETC kickoff event are, from left, Sheila Foley, Barbara Foley, Jim Moore, Denise Gere and Ann Woll.

our sponsors and members have been with us for years, and their commitment to ETC demonstrates just how much they value community, connection and local traditions."

The easiest way to purchase memberships and

tickets is through ETC's website at etc-rm.org. Tickets will also be available at the gate on concert nights, and nonmembers may purchase advance tickets at Ace Hardware.

See more photos at the-rivervalleytimes.com. ★

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# Beep Beep Fun Run Tops Goal, Raises More Than \$35,000 for PTA

Story and photos by Gail Bullen  
River Valley Times Reporter

**RANCHO MURIETA, CA (MPG)** - More than 360 Cosumnes River Elementary School students hit the grass running May 1 as the school's annual Beep Beep Fun Run raised \$35,615 for programs, supplies and activities that benefit students throughout the year.

The fundraiser, organized by the CRES PTA, exceeded its \$35,000 goal and drew participation from all 368 students on campus. Students ran in grade-level groups while parents, teachers and volunteers cheered them on. The event featured music, a roadrunner mascot, frozen treats and plenty of school spirit.

This year's run was held in the spring rather than the fall, a decision PTA President Courtney Reid said was made to help prepare the organization for a leadership transition next year.

"After four years, I'll be rolling off, and one of my biggest goals was to leave the incoming board in the strongest possible position for success," Reid said. "By holding the fundraiser in the spring, we were able to build up the PTA's funds going into next school year so the new board can focus on learning the ropes, planning fun events for students and families, and continuing to support all the amazing programs PTA funds."

Reid described the fundraiser as "a final send-off"



The Road Runner builds excitement for the Beep Beep Fun Run held at Cosumnes River Elementary on May 1. The CRES PTA presented the event. Michelle Mazzola is wearing the costume.

and an opportunity to help the next generation of PTA leaders inherit both a strong volunteer organization and financial stability.

One visible change this year was the decision to provide every student with a Fun Run T-shirt.

"We really wanted every student to feel included and connected to our school community, so we decided to bring that tradition back this year," Reid said. "The shirts ended up being such a fun addition to the Fun Run, but our hope is that students will continue wearing them throughout the year on Spirit Days so we can keep building school pride and community at CRES."

The event also marked the second year the PTA handled the fundraiser entirely on its own, rather than using an outside fundraising company.

"By handling everything in-house, we're able to keep costs very low, which

means a much larger portion of the money raised goes directly back to supporting our students, teachers and school programs," Reid said.

Of the total raised, \$28,615 came through online donations collected by students and their families through the 99Pledges platform. An additional \$7,000 came from local business sponsorships. Sponsor logos were printed on the backs of the Fun Run shirts as a thank-you for their support. Platinum sponsors included Rancho Murieta Homes & Land, Rancho Victoria Vineyard & Winery, Gibson Golf Carts, HASA and Hunt Propane.

The PTA's fundraising goals highlighted a variety of projects supported by the money raised, including classroom supplies, educational assemblies, library books, recess equipment, sports uniforms and community events. Funds

also help pay for IXL Learning and Accelerated Reader, two programs used by students throughout the school.

"The PTA supports the school in so many essential ways that I think many parents may not fully realize," Reid said. "Over the past several years, our PTA has worked hard to help relieve that burden and ensure teachers have what they need while also giving students access to high-quality resources."

She said PTA funding helps cover classroom materials, instructional programs, field-trip assistance, library books, sports uniforms and educational assemblies.

"Our goal this year was really to help families better understand that PTA fundraising goes far beyond fun events like the Harvest Festival or Field Day," Reid said. "A significant portion of the funds directly supports academic



Teacher Michelle Myers races through the tunnel with her students.



Principal Ashley Hannon high-fives student KK Brooks.

programs, classroom resources and opportunities that benefit every student at CRES."

The event was powered by PTA volunteers. Reid coordinated the overall event, while incoming PTA President Christine Walker oversaw the Fun Run shirts and business sponsorships. Other volunteers handled communications, refreshments and student prizes. One crowd favorite was volunteer Michelle Mazzola, who spent hours wearing the school's Road Runner mascot costume while dancing and cheering students around the course. Students cooled off with

Otter Pops after completing the run and later enjoyed chocolate chip cookies during lunch.

Reid said moving the event to spring came with some risks but ultimately paid off.

"Thankfully, it worked out perfectly for us, and we ended up with the most beautiful day," she said.

Looking back, Reid called the event a success.

"Overall, it was a successful and meaningful event, and we're really proud of how it came together," she said.

See more photos at [therivervalleytimes.com](http://therivervalleytimes.com). ★



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