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POCKET NEWS

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GEORGE FLOYD PROTEST HELD IN MAYOR'S NEIGHBORHOOD

Chants of 'Black Lives Matter' heard in the Pocket

see page 3



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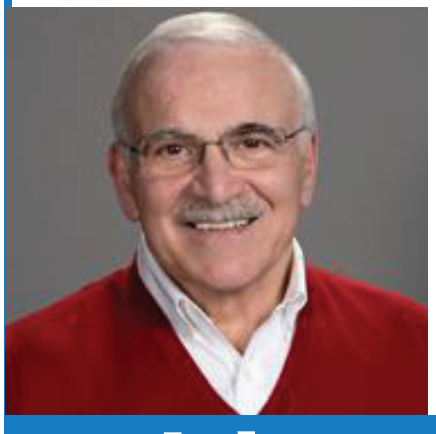

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Door to Door
with PAT LYNCH

Perfect storm

Commenting on the stark divisions in this country, someone on Facebook noted, "I haven't lost friends over politics. I've lost friends over morals." I wish I could identify this person to credit him or her for a precise observation.

On our block, a microcosm of urban Northern California, we make moral choices daily. Most of us avoid crowds, not only for our own safety, but because we don't want to endanger others. Most of us wear the masks. We don't care if the president mocks us. We know the virus did not observe the shutdown and is as potent and patient as ever. We know we could have it with no symptoms, but pass it on to someone who could be dead in a week. So we mask up.

When restrictions were lifted, chiefly for economic reasons, I watched a news show featuring a crowded beach extravaganza somewhere in the South. A prodigious mass of humans squished together, few observing the distance requirements. A reporter tromped across the sand to a young woman applying tanning lotion and asked if she was afraid of violating requirements and getting Covid. "I hope I don't get it, and I wash my hands a lot," she said. She bestowed a sweet, wide smile on the reporter. "But if God wants me He'll take me."

So I ended up talking to the TV again. "Hey, what if the guy next to you doesn't want to go to God right now? What if he wants to live to 96 so he can learn what Mars is like?

What did this girl not understand? Her religion seemed small and personal, and didn't appear to include a concept of responsibility for others. A more humane value system was needed on that beach, and in all the overcrowded beaches, bars, and gathering places in this opened-up, infected country.

Then, propelled by sorrow and fury, came protests for the death of George Floyd. Unlike the armed, white protesters who stormed state capitols with guns, Nazi and Confederate flags, these African American protesters were unarmed. Many unarmed white supporters joined them. These initial demonstrators provided another feast for the virus. Then came right-wingers like Boogaloo Bois and Proud Boys (two of current white nationalist and anarchist groups who infiltrate demonstrations to turn the public against them), to provoke arson and mayhem. And then the random looters arrived. And then the police and National Guard, all massed together in smoky cities in the dark. Covid doesn't care who's right or wrong. But it knows a banquet when it sees one.

On the Sunday, May 31, Johns Hopkins reported a Covid increase of 20, 000 cases. Minnesota governor Walz said, "I am deeply concerned about a super-spreader type of incident. We're going to see a spike. It's inevitable." One sad irony is that African-Americans are a uniquely vulnerable population for this virus, and some demonstrators may return it to a community beset by the health susceptibilities linked to structural racism. And, as noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, "racism is a public health issue." It is a public enemy that, unlike flood and blizzard, does not go away.

In this country we haven't been able to unite against this common enemy for the public good. We haven't been able to unite against Covid 19 either. This is a demonstrable failure of national leadership, but also shows flawed mor-

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Cover photo by:
Steve Crowley

George Floyd protest held in mayor's neighborhood

Chants of 'Black Lives Matter' heard in the Pocket

By LANCE ARMSTRONG

About 2,000 people lied on Greenhaven Drive, near the Pocket area residence of Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg, on June 5 in protest of the killing of George Floyd.

Floyd died on May 25 after a white Minneapolis police officer reportedly knelt on the back of his neck for nearly nine minutes during an arrest in which he was accused of trying to spend a counterfeit $20 bill at a deli.

The wide circulation of a witness video led to protests and unrest across the country.

A private autopsy that was commissioned by Floyd's family determined his death was a homicide, and that he was killed by asphyxiation through compression to his neck and back. Former Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin was charged with second-degree murder.

Organized by Black Lives Matter Sacramento, the Pocket area gathering was highlighted by the dominant scene of people lying in the street for eight minutes and 46 seconds – the length of time that Floyd was restrained with Chauvin's knee before he died.

Prior to the "die-in," the multiracial crowd began to form and sit on Greenhaven Drive, in the area of Greenstar Way.

Many people held signs, while most attendees chanted Floyd's name and various phrases such as "Black Lives Matter."

While taking a break from leading a chant of "No justice, no peace," Pocket resident Allegra Taylor, of the advocacy group, Sacramento Area Congregations Together, explained the importance of the event.

"This day is important to be out here to remember the lives of not only George Floyd, but Breonna Taylor," she said. "We have a local life here we want to remember, (and also) Antonio Thomas. We want to remember all of those who have died unjustly because of a system that is fixed, and we want that system changed.

"We want to abolish it and create a new system, and the only way to do that is to take advantage of this time while everybody is awake. That we are not just talking about injustices, that they are real."

Although Black Lives Matter (BLM) Sacramento did not respond to this paper's request for comment by deadline, the organization's website alleges a lack of accountability in local law enforcement, and a City Council that has not brought "substantial and equitable change to the city and all of its people."

BLM Sacramento also calls for the council to become independent from law enforcement.

With the very noticeable absence of Steinberg at the event, he later explained why he did not attend the gathering in his neighborhood.

"(Black Lives Matter) did not want it to be about me, even if it was directed at me," he said. "I watched (a live broadcast in his home), and I took it in, and I know my obligation is to think deeper and to act more boldly."

Steinberg also described his feelings about witnessing this event.

"It was a powerful, impactful event for me personally," he said. "I thought it was beautiful. I thought it sent the message in a very profound way, and I would call it one of the more impactful evenings of my entire career, even though I wasn't physically present because the organizers did not want me there."

Several other people shared their thoughts on the event, Floyd and their desires for changes.

Pocket resident Ella Kelley shared her thoughts on Floyd's death.

"When I saw it, it was like 'Here we go again,'" she said.



Photos by Stephen Crowley

In memory of George Floyd who was killed last month while lying on a street in Minneapolis, protesters gathered on Greenhaven Drive during the "die-in" event on June 5 in front of Mayor Darrell Steinberg's home.

"I was born in Mississippi, so I went to an all-black school. I had to fight my way to and from school with the white children. I would get a spanking when I got home, because I had rocks in the front of my dress, because I had to fight to get an education.

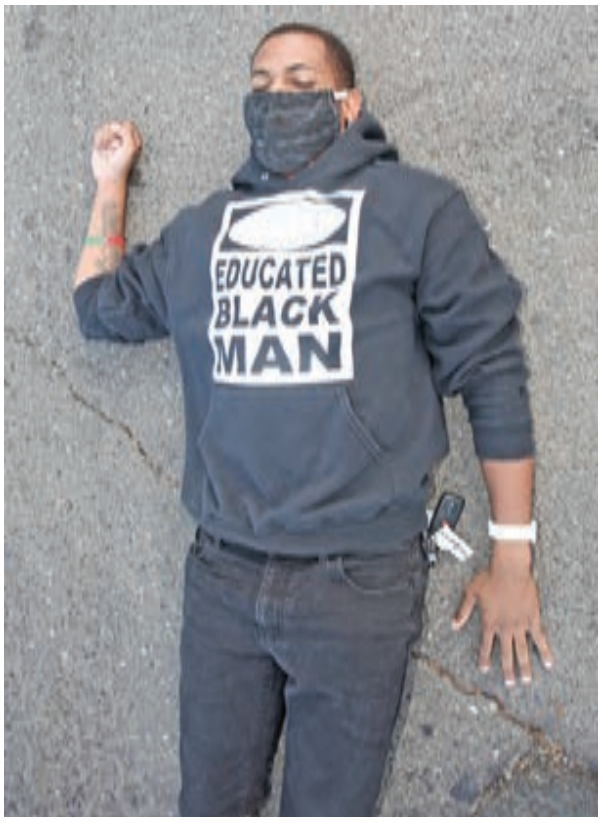
"My parents brought us to California, because we wanted a better life, and we're dealing with the same issues here. So, it's like enough is enough."

Kelley told the Pocket News that more laws need to

see PROTEST page 4









Protest:

continued from page 3

be made that would protect blacks.

"We've got a lot of laws on the books; we need more," she said. "And with those laws, we need to enact them, as well. Talk's cheap. We need action. No more promise of the 40 acres and the mule. None of that. Make it happen."

Another Pocket resident, Gordon Ho, noted why he attended the "die-in."

"It's bigger than us," he said. "Al the black people that have been killed by police, all the injustice that wasn't captured on camera. Nowadays the camera enables us to see the truth what the black people are going through all these years. So, I just wanted to be out here and support them."

Ho added that he believes that police should be held more accountable for their criminal actions.

"So many times, they would be caught, but they wouldn't be charged or they would be fired and then they would be rehired," he said. "We've got to make sure we weed out all the bad apples. We understand that not all cops are bad, but we really need to make sure that those bad cops are (held) responsible."

West Sacramento resident Amanda Yarrington recalled when she first heard about Floyd's death.

"I can't say that I was initially very surprised that it happened," she said. "I think he's just kind of the catalyst for this whole movement right now that's going on. But I think it's been in process for a long time. It's not really shocking to hear about an incident like that happening, unfortunately."

Pocket resident Vanessa Lewis mentioned that she has a fear of raising two blacks sons in a country where black people are being killed by police.

"It's really scary raising black boys and knowing that they could possibly be killed by the police," she said.

"As a black woman, it's really scary. It gives me the chills. It frustrates me, it angers me. I'm really upset about it. We're humans, too. That shouldn't be happening. It's not a joke. It's irritating."

Lewis also called for the reformation of police departments.

"There needs to be a police reform," she said. "They need to dismantle it.

"The community really needs to be involved, so we can know what exactly is happening on the inside. Why isn't body cams on? If we were to get into an incident, we're going to be charged for it. Why aren't the police being charged like us, like the citizens? It's really frustrating."

While observing the large crowd at the event, Lewis recognized a movement in a positive direction.

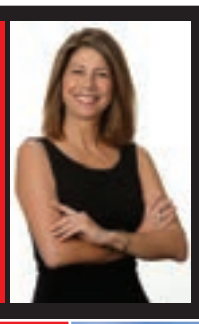
"This makes me really, really proud," she said. "This is amazing. This is a great turnout.

"If people are coming out here for things like this, nobody is coming out here for us to be separate. People are coming together. This is what we want. This is what we need. Give us what we need."

Lewis, however, stressed that much more needs to be done, beyond the protests.

"(These protests) are steps, most definitely," she said. "But the steps need to be taken."

SusieSellsSac.com



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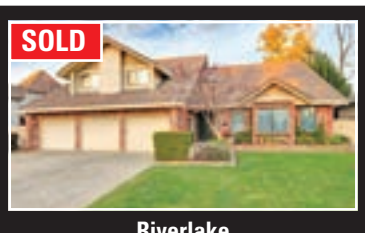
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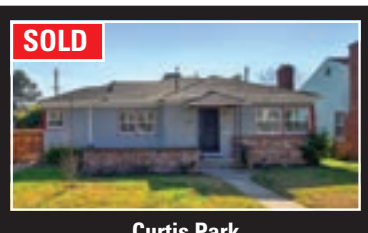
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Faces and Places: Black Lives Matter protest

Photos by Monica Stark

After a week of worldwide protests and acts of rebellion against police brutality in the aftermath of the homicide of George Floyd and all victims of police violence, on Saturday, June 6 there was a march that began at the Golden 1 Center, ending at the capitol. Here are photos from the end of the march.









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Dear folks with heart and compassion,

Remember three years ago when "Black Lives Matter" was a radical chant that was "poorly named and divisive" and now it is on your Netflix home screen and your mayor is saying it in speeches?

Remember when all you wanted was "Don't ask, don't tell" and thanks to tireless work we have marriage equality?

Don't squander this moment. The movement to defund is morally just. The abolitionists are right. Don't be the cringey "but what about" moderate who would settle for "nicer masters" and thinks civil rights is "too much too fast" and queer folks should "just keep that to themselves." To use Lamar J. Pringle's example: Don't be the folks in 1852 trying to balance new slave states and free states. You never look good in the history books. In fact, you've never been right in American history.

Besides, if enough of us say "defund," you moderates will get the reforms you're already willing to settle for. After all, none of you would go into a car dealership asking for the price you want. You'd anchor low to get there. It is called strategy.

Now is not the time to be the white moderate of yesteryear --or the brown faces of white moderation. Stop complaining that the "messaging is bad." It really isn't. Now mainstream media is covering defunding the police, actual policy change is happening with police in schools and police budgets, and we have traction in part because of the financial impact of COVID on municipal budgets.

Now is the time to ask for more, not less. Say it with your chest! Don't fumble the pass.

But whatever you do, don't condescend the people who gave you this platform by doing decades of research and advocacy ground work. The words you're looking for are: Thank you!

Sincerely, Flojaune Cofer

Op-ed: Decarcerate Sacramento calls on the city and county of Sacramento to move toward sustainable justice

By Decarcerate Sacramento

Sacramento residents, and communities across the globe, are at a pivotal decision making juncture about how the world we want to live in should look, both through and beyond this Covid-19 crisis and the crisis of legitimacy facing law enforcement. Meanwhile, Sacramento County officials continue to make these important decisions, including budget decisions, with severely limited access for the impacted public to meaningfully weigh in.

A June 11 press statement from Sacramento County noted they are using this time to "work with department heads to develop plans for expenditure reductions as a result of anticipated revenue reductions." They are planning the deep cuts they will serve us, without our presence or participation. On Monday morning, officials were invited to listen to the community live or via teleconference, as we modeled accessible decision making spaces that honor public sentiment, especially during this critical time. Now is a time to make way for community voices, particularly Black voices, as we envision an equitable and just future for Sacramento.

In listening to those voices, Decarcerate Sacramento, in chorus with growing numbers of organizations and individuals across the world, "is calling on our elected officials to stop feeding our precious tax dollars into unaccountable and militarized law enforcement agencies that cause significant harm in our communities." That money should have long ago been re-invested in community programs and support, the type of quality of life improvements that keep our neighborhoods healthy and safe, that keep crime rates low and families thriving. Education, housing, and healthcare are just some areas in desperate need of an infusion of resources to create the community of safety we all desire and deserve. For too long the narrative of public safety has successfully ushered our dollars away from our well being and into riot gear, weapons, and criminalizing under resourced Black communities and other communities of color.

The tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Rayshawn Brookes by police, have brought us into a national moment of reflection and reckoning. The institution of policing itself is being called into question; both its past and present violence in Black, brown and poor communities, as well as its legacies and origin in white supremacist violence and control.

We stand in solidarity with the Abolition movement, as well as Black Justice Sacramento, in calling for these necessary steps to move forward toward sustainable justice and lasting peace.

- Defund Police
- Demilitarize Communities
- Remove Police from Schools
- Free People from Prisons and Jails
- Repeal Laws Criminalizing Survival
- Invest in Community Self Governance
- Provide Safe Housing for All
- Invest in Care Not Cops

FUNDING FACTS

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• Sacramento Sheriff's Department currently receives over $372 million every year, which is 80% of all funding allocated for elected officials and over one third of the entire budget, and their budget increases every year.

• Sacramento County recently approved a $7 million dollar design/build contract to begin planning to expand the Main Jail downtown. This is just the beginning of what we know will be an extremely expensive project, with devastating human and financial costs. We demand the Board of Supervisors cancel the contract and invest the $7 million in community-based resources.

• Our jail population was reduced by over 30% due to COVID-19 related releases, and the County should be focused on continuing down this path by reinvesting savings, in housing, mental health care, and reentry efforts led by impacted people — not giving more money to the Sheriff.

CITY OF SACRAMENTO

• The Sacramento Police Department is slated to get $41,727,000, an ~51%, of 20/21 Measure U funding, out-

see JUSTICE page 9



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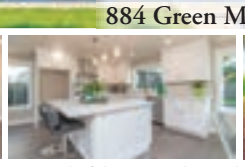



This amazing property sits on a wonderful street in the Pocket. Gorgeous kitchen with new white cabinets, quartz counter tops, stainless steel appliances, pendant lights, beautiful backsplash, pot filler and more. Spectacular new features include engineered wood floors, quality carpet/pad, windows, front door, lights, interior/exterior paint, baseboards, landscaping, interior doors, can lights, crown molding, shutters, hardware, sliding glass door, faucets, stone fireplace facing, light switches and the list goes on. All the bathrooms are completely remodeled with marvelous finishes. Enjoy the fantastic master bath with walk-in shower, modern tub, quartz counter tops, and beautiful tile!

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The Pocket Has More Pride Than Ever!

By Devin Lavelle

I've been proud to share with you a few of the positive stories emerging from our community's response to COVID over the last few months. We have such a strong, caring community with caring people, eager to step up and help neighbors in need.

On that note, we at the Community Association are thrilled to share that Pride of the Pocket has been rescheduled. It will be held on September 24th, rain or shine, so to speak. If conditions allow, it will be held at the Didion/Lewis Park Amphitheater, as originally planned. If we are not able to gather in person, the show will go online.

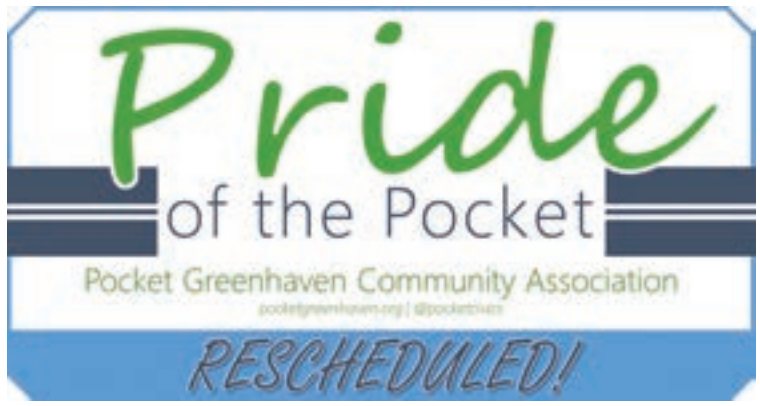
While it was disappointing to have to reschedule, the timing was fortuitous because our community really showed its mettle over the ensuing months – and we have so much more to be proud of. As Pocket Greenhaven Community Association President, Will Cannady describes it:

"Pocket/Greenhaven neighbors have faced the COVID-19 Pandemic with strength and resilience. From positive chalk messages sprawled on sidewalks to neighbors helping neighbors and immense support for our local businesses, we have remained Pocket Strong. I take pride in living in a community that goes out its way to help support one another during these hard times."

So our question to you is, what people and groups in our community exemplify Pocket Strong? Who have you seen go above and beyond to bring strength, support and joy to our community during these difficult times?

The Pocket Greenhaven Community Association is calling on you to nominate them for recognition at the Pride of the Pocket! We have extended the nomination deadline until July 20. Please submit them here: pride.pocketgreenhaven.org.

Our Association will be handing out several awards. In addition, Sen. Richard Pan, Asm. Jim Cooper, Sup. Patrick Kennedy and CM. Rick Jennings will be participating and recognizing community members as well. Con. Doris Matsui, SMUD Dir. Rosanna Herber and Trustee Darrel Woo have also been invited to participate.



Over the last several months, we have shown how strong we are as a community. We have shown we have more reasons to be proud than ever before! And we have a lot to celebrate! We hope you will celebrate with us and join your Pocket Greenhaven Community Association on September 24th. Get your free tickets here: pride.pocketgreenhaven.org.

Door to Door:

continued from page 2

al choices on our part. We haven't made this a safe country for everybody. Driving while black, walking down the street while black, jogging while black--these can still be deadly hazards in racialized America. And today in the USA we have 109,580 Covid deaths and nearly two million total cases. There will be more tomorrow, of course, and in two weeks we'll learn if super spreaders will have triggered skyrocketing numbers of highly contagious infected.

Some people, like the girl on the beach, trace their morals to religious belief. Others say moral practice derives from reciprocal altruism, which in evolutionary biology is a supposition that nature has programmed us, for the survival of our species, to sometimes behave unselfishly, and to presume fellow sapiens will reciprocate. That's how we learn to count on one another. "If I weren't for this Corona disease, I'd be out there protesting the other disease," neighbor Marie said. "And I'd resent the hell out of those looters and provocateurs who tried to make us look bad."

It reminded me of what I seen on TV. A tall, muscular man in dark clothing, including complete head covering so you couldn't identify him, used tools to break through a shop door. Two female protesters ran to him, shouted to him to stop. He grabbed the first young woman and brutally flung her to the sidewalk. She scrambled up, and by then others had run over and the man merged into the crowd. It was a perfect moral snapshot of depravity and courage. And of course Covid saw it all.

Then came Trump and his use of American troops to rout peacefully assembled American citizens so he could take a theatrical stroll to a church where he smirked and waved a bible. This was creepy because we don't so far have a state religion in this country. Or do we? Or was the spectacle supposed to make us forget that we endure this administration's multiple failures, first to recognize the disease threat (remember the "hoax?"), and then to combat it with a national testing and tracing program? Or was the bible display supposed to make us forget that Trump refused to apologize for the full-page ads he took out in '89 calling for the death of the innocent Central Park Five (one Latino kid and four African American kids wrongly imprisoned for rape)?

I don't know. But I know we are plagued. The whole world is plagued with these diseases. As I write the White House is barricaded like a palace in an authoritarian state, and troops without insignia formed around protesters. No insignia means no identification and no identification means no accountability. I don't know how secret police fit in a free country.

I do know this: race hatred is a mental deficiency that retards humanity. I know the USA has 4% of the world's population and 24% of its Covid 19 (Johns Hopkins/Washington Post). I know we should trust science. I know our constitutional freedoms need protection. I know our burdens are ancient and complex. I know if some of us get Covid, we die. I know black lives matter.

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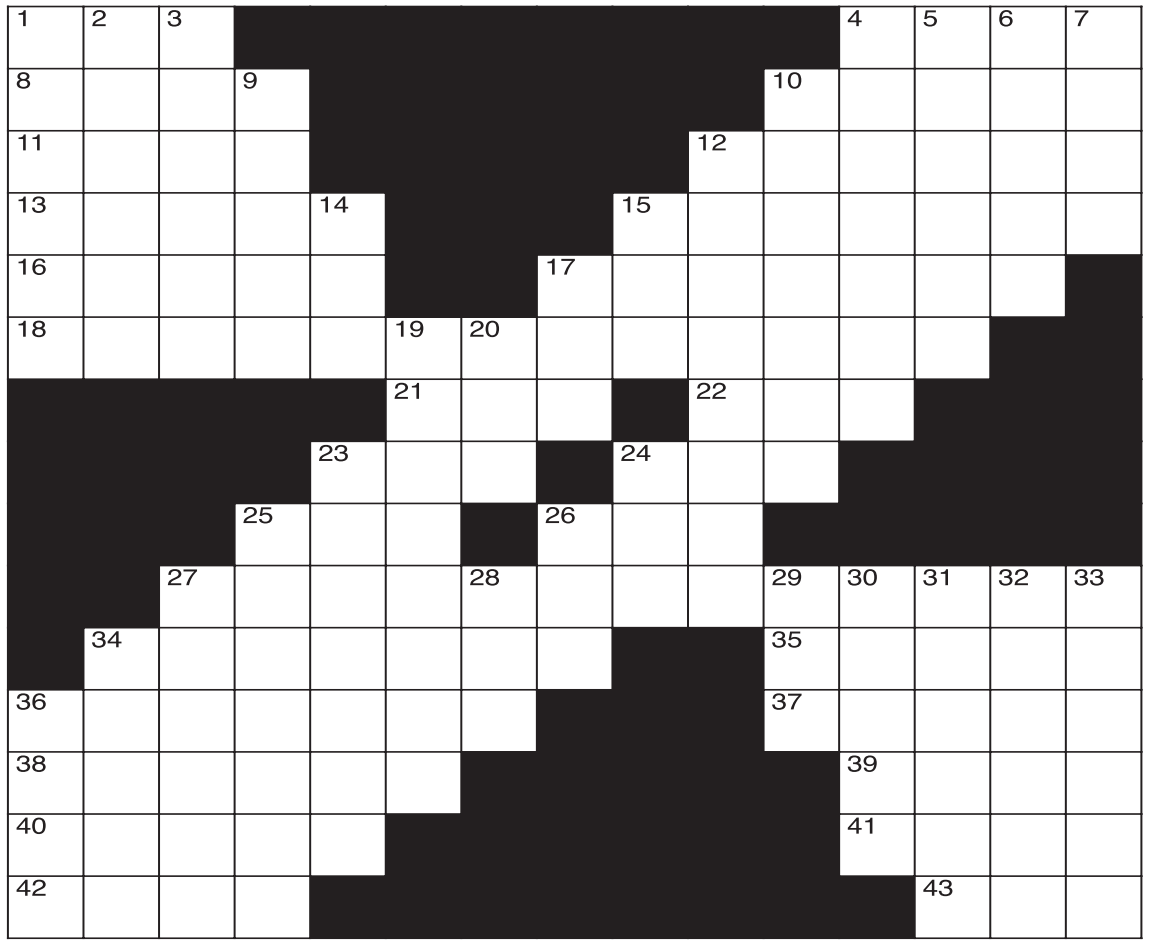

CLUES ACROSS

1. Sound unit
4. Trim by cutting
8. Small buffalo
10. Ancient manuscript
11. Look angry or sullen
12. Glum
13. Northern Zambia peoples
15. Central
16. Collector of birds' eggs
17. Misbehavior
18. Top of the line
21. Political action committee
22. Have already done
23. Al Bundy's wife
24. Entertainment channel
25. Holiday (informal)
26. The common gibbon
27. Legendary actress
34. Seasoned sausages
35. Bluish greens
36. Ridiculed
37. Three-dimensional arrangement
38. Emerged
39. Type of protein
40. Denmark natives
41. Leak slowly through
42. Expression of sorrow or pity
43. Midway between south and southeast

CLUES DOWN

1. Artistic dancing
2. Plenty
3. Act leisurely
4. Serve as a warning
5. Admired lovingly
6. Leftover oil from distillation process
7. Company officer
9. Egyptian unit of capacity
10. One transmits information
12. Middle layer of an embryo
14. Form of "to be"
15. Cairo Regional Airport
17. Partner to cheese
19. Sample
20. A shirt may have none
23. Public gatherings
24. Disallow
25. Overnight suitcases
26. French river
27. Where boats dock
28. Top of a pot
29. Type of drug
30. City along the Rhine
31. Animal disease
32. They go in martinis
33. A way to break away
34. Intermediate ecological stage
36. Baby term for father

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TODAY'S WORD

Sacramento Zoo now open



Sacramento County recently approved the Sacramento Zoo's reopening plan which follows a carefully phased approach that strictly limits attendance.

The Sacramento Zoo opened June 15 with enhanced protocols and procedures in place to ensure the health and safety of zoo guests, staff and animals including:

All tickets must be purchased and reserved in advance online. Timed tickets will be available for specific dates to ensure that appropriate visitor capacities and physical distancing are maintained throughout the day.

Zoo members must reserve tickets in advance online as well. Ticket price included in membership.

Visit the zoo's website at "Plan Your Visit" to reserve tickets.

Face masks are required for all staff and zoo visitors over two years old.

Guests will be asked to maintain a six-foot distance between your group and others when visiting. Physical distancing signage will be placed throughout the zoo.

The zoo is instituting a paperless system – both for transactions and zoo maps.

Sacramento Zoo has consulted with experts at zoos across the country as well as with local health and government officials to develop a comprehensive reopening plan designed to ensure the health and safety of zoo visitors, staff and animals. Details and timed tickets are available on the zoo's website in the "Plan Your Visit"section.

"We are happy to provide a safe outdoor recreation opportunity," stated Sacramento Zoo Executive Director, Jason Jacobs. "As a nonprofit organization, the Sacramento Zoo relies on admission and membership revenue to operate the zoo and to care for the nearly 500 animals that call the zoo home. Since early March, we have added several new animals to the zoo including ostrich, alligators and a new female giraffe. We look forward to sharing these and other amazing animals with our community."

Justice:

continued from page 6

weighing all other community improvements combined, with Youth, Parks and Enrichment getting only $14,403,000 total. This is in direct contradiction to Mayor Steinberg's Measure U campaign promises.

- The City's 20/21 Budget forecasts this same disparate Measure U allocation for the next 5 years, with the $41,727,000 toward SPD growing to $48,155,000 by 24/25.
- The overall City of Sacramento 20/21 Budget increased the Sacramento Police Department's allowance by $10,476,000, for a total budget of $157,505,000. The total for Youth, Parks and Community Enrichment is $43,501,000.

SCRAMBLERS

solution

1. Mature; 2. Fate;
3. Dilate; 4. Reach

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Celebrate Father's Day at the Ballpark

Get out of the house and celebrate Father's Day at Sutter Health Park with catch on the field! This package also includes a ballpark favorites picnic lunch on the concourse and a personalized message from you to dad on the video board. Time slot reservations will be available every hour from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and spots are limited.

Ticket prices are, for adults, $25; and for children, ages 4 to 12, $15

Ticket includes: lunch (choice of hot dog or sausage); choice of beer (21+), soda, or water; chips; access to catch on the field; new souvenir baseball for catch and to take home and a personalized message or photo for dad on the video board.

What Should You Expect?
A great time with dad, of course! And to make sure everyone has a great time and stays safe we'll have stickers, signs, and staff to help guide you and answer any questions you may have. All tickets will be mobile so that you are the only one who needs to hold it. Stickers and our guest service team will help remind guests about social spacing while entering Sutter Health Park.

Once inside, you will be directed to your right where stanchions and stickers will guide you to Oso's (concession stand) where you will pick up your hot dog or sausage, chips, and either beer, soda, or water. Again, your phone will need to be scanned to pick up your food so please have it ready, just like at the airport.

Children, ages four and younger are free of charge, however, kids' meals will not be available so we encourage parents to bring food from home if they did not purchase a ticket for a youngster. Picnic tables will be spread out throughout the concourse and you are welcome to sit wherever you like. Again, please remember to only sit with the people you came with. Once you are finished eating and leave the table, our cleaning team will sanitize it and prepare it for the next guest.

One More Beer? - Yes, please! Additional beer, soda, and water will be available for purchase at the "Brew House" portable. Please remember ballpark rules, only two beers per guest may be purchased at a time.

If you pre-purchased any merchandise it will be available for pickup on the concourse side of the On Deck Shop located behind home plate. If you did not pre-purchase, you didn't miss out. You may still purchase from select cool items like hats, t-shirts, and golf shirts for dad.

The reason you came, to play catch on the field. There will be one set of stairs leading to the field on the First Base side. Once you have reached the field, a guest service attendant will give you a brand new souvenir baseball and let you know which station you may play catch at. To return to the concourse, please use the "Exit Only" stairs located on the Third Base side of the field. Again, we will have signs and staff to help guide you.

When you are leaving, we will ask that you follow the signs to the "Exit Only" gates behind home plate. Please also remember to visit rivercats.com for upcoming events.

The Sacramento River Cats & Sutter Health Park cannot prevent you [or your child(ren)] from becoming exposed to, contracting, or spreading COVID-19 while utilizing Sutter Health Park's services or premises. It is not possible to prevent against the presence of the disease. Therefore, if you choose to utilize Sutter Health Park's services and/or enter onto Sutter Health Park's premises you may be exposing yourself to and/or increasing your risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

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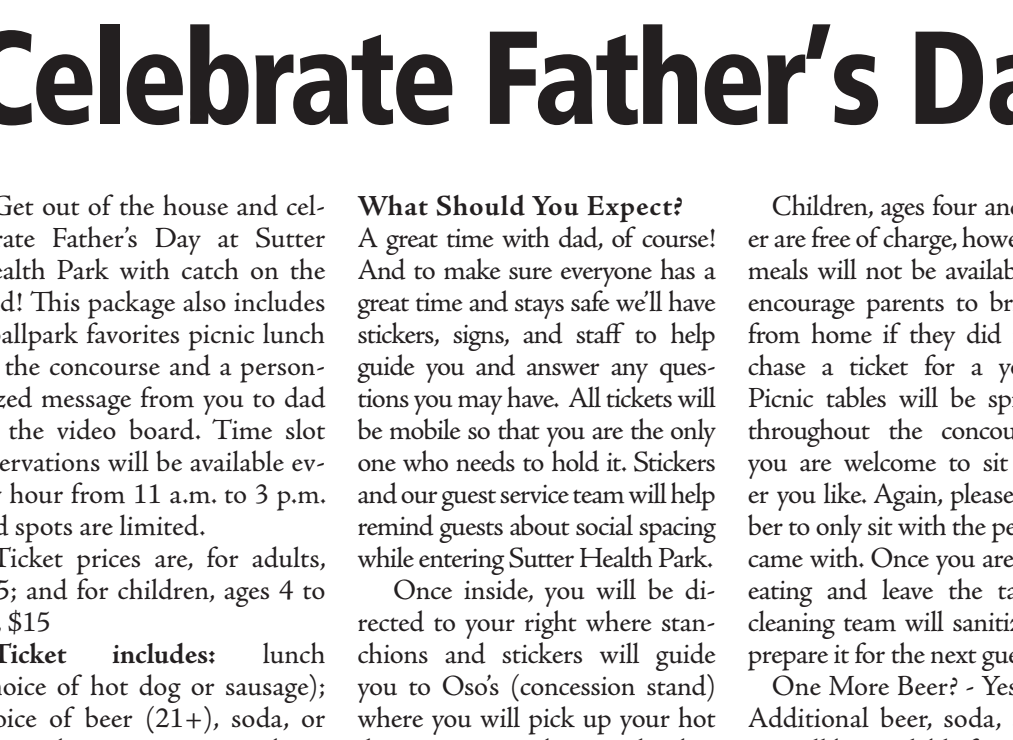

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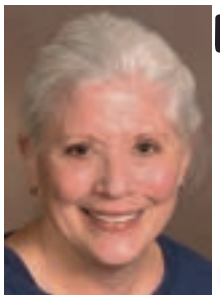

THIS 'n' THAT

by Carol Bogart

Closing Down the Stress Valve

There are times I'm glad I'm not a street reporter anymore. This is one of them. It's all gotten to be just too much, hasn't it? A pandemic like we've never seen in the last 100 years. Pandemonium in our streets. Heat waves and curfews that make us stay inside, just when we thought we might get out a little.

I'm on stress overload and maybe you are, too.

So this week, I'm taking a break from all of that, because, well, because I need to. Instead, I'll share with you my possum stories (opossums, to be accurate, although growing up, everyone I knew just called 'em possums).

So, anyway, if you'll forgive the shorthand, I first learned about 'possums when, looking under the hedge for a lost ball, I found, instead, a long-dead kitten. The neighbor kid (who'd thrown the ball), exclaimed, "Possum!" "Possums," Tommy, 7, said with certainty, "will kill a kitten."

Well, being 5-years-old and gullible, I took that statement to be fact. For 30 years, I hated possums. When I was driving and spotted something lying in the road, I'd stop if I thought it could be saved. Even saved a stunned fox once. But, if, when I got close, the pile of grayish fur turned out not to be a cat, I'd swerve, while thinking to myself, "just a 'possum," and keep on going.

(Truth be told, a possum is a different animal. Cuter. Looks a bit like a koala. Lives in Australia.)

My antipathy toward opossums softened when I met 'Marcie.'

I was freelancing for a Cleveland TV station. The assignment desk needed a story for me to do. I said, "How about I do a feature on the Nature Center?"

Most such places love free publicity and the Nature Center was no exception. It's wildlife guide introduced us (me and my shooter) to long-time residents of the center: a crippled hawk, and Marcie. Each had had an unfortunate encounter with a car couldn't survive in the wild. Instead, the two educated and entertained grade school kids. And clueless reporters who knew squat about opossums except that they killed kittens.

That day, I learned that opossums are the only 'marsupial' in North America. "Marsupial" means that, like a kangaroo, opossums have a pouch. In that pouch, again like the kangaroo, the female opossum carries, and suckles, offspring. They do NOT eat kittens. They gorge on ticks, thus protecting dogs from heartworm.

"Okay," I thought. "Not such horrid creatures after all."

I asked the center's wildlife guide if he'd stand with me with Marcie as I did my liveshot. He said, "Wouldn't you like to hold her?"

Masking my reluctance, I said, "I'll need a chair." (I didn't want to drop her or otherwise upset her.) Involved stand-ups were popular, I knew. Viewers like it when you DO something.

So, I cradled Marcie in one elbow and we went live. As I was explaining about opossums being North America's only marsupial, I looked down to smile at Marcie.

Her face split open in a big wide yawn. Teeth. All I saw was teeth. LOTS of teeth. I shrieked. The nature center guy retrieved Marcie, the producer cut back to the anchors, and they wrapped things up.

I went back to the station to rework the piece into an anchor voiceover for a later show. The minute I walked in, the news director said, "Let's go in my office." "Oh boy," I thought. "Here we go." With his back to me, he cued my liveshot. With Marcie and I facing each other, our mouths wide open, he turned, laughing, and told me, "Best stand-up in the show!"

Forever after, I've been a true fan of 'possums.

I love that there are wildlife rescue and rehabilitators in Northern California who specialize in raising joeys. They look for mama opossums on the road. If the mama doesn't make it, the rehabilitators remove the tiny joeys from the pouch and then hand-raise them. Amazing, given that they look like newborn hamsters. Or maybe popcorn shrimp. Anyway, they SAVE THEM! Only such rehabilitators, with permission from the state, are allowed to release them when they're grown. And regular people, like you and me, are not allowed to own one as a pet. However nice they might prove to be.

So, I hope you haven't minded my not writing about virus deaths and looting. I needed to share something that brings me joy. Like 'possums and their little joeys.

Carol Bogart hopes, if you ever see an opossum in the road when you're driving, you'll try not to hit it. It may only be stunned, plus opossums really do 'play dead' when they're really scared. Given a few minutes, the opossum might get up and amble off, saving herself – and her babies. Questions, comments? Contact Carol at carol@bogartonline.com.



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An opossum has 50 teeth but, if cornered, is more likely to feign a heart attack than try to bite you.

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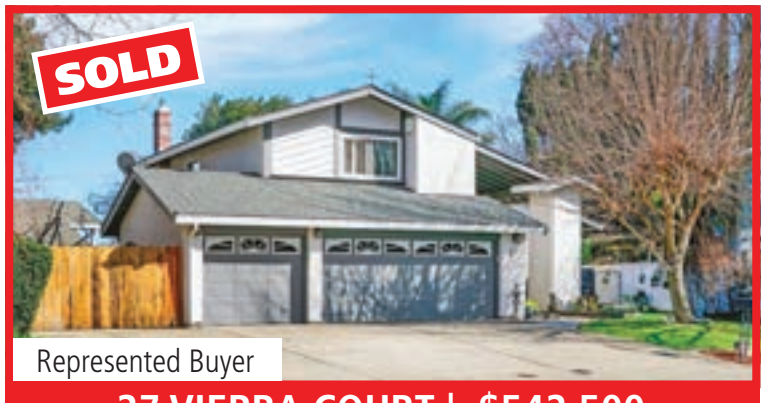

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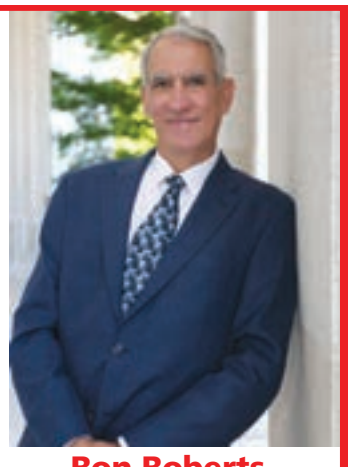

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Photos by Stephen Crowley

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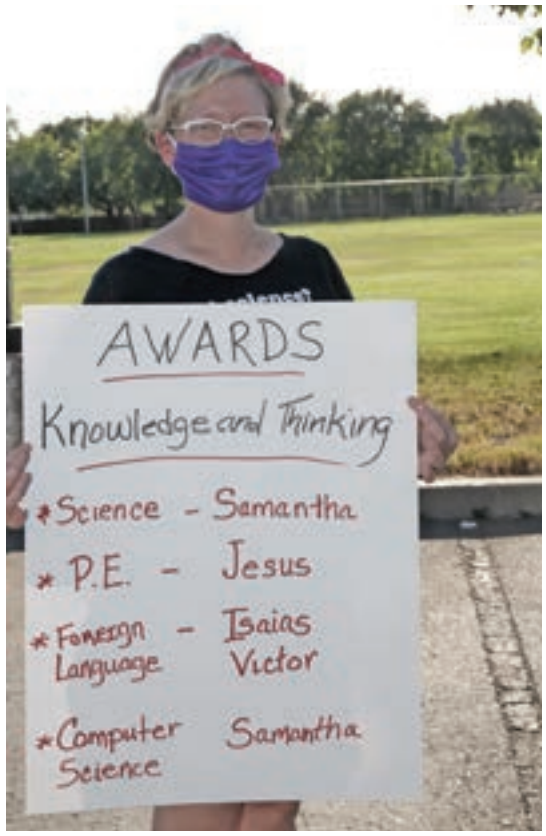









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