

# www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 6 | June 2021

## INSIDE

### Loyal to local nominees

The chamber accepted "Loyal to Local" nominations of businesses that have shown great creativity and resiliency during the past year. The online award ceremony will be held on the chamber's Facebook page on June 10 at 6 p.m. **3**

### Kuubix expanding at lightspeed

Since incorporating in 2017, Kuubix is now considered one of the fastest growing companies in the United States. Earlier this year, Inc. Magazine ranked Kuubix No. 10 on its list 2021 list of fastest growing companies in California. **5**

## EVENTS

### FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

#### Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

#### JUNE 10

#### Loyal to Local Awards

Time: 6 p.m.

Location: Facebook Live

#### JUNE 21

#### YP Talks

Time: 6 p.m.

Location: YPN Facebook Live

#### JUNE 24

#### Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.

Location: Visalia First

## TRAVEL WITH US

#### JULY 16-24, 2021

The Colorado Rockies

#### OCTOBER 4-11, 2021

Colors of New England

#### OCTOBER 9-16, 2021

New England Rails & Trails

#### NOVEMBER 2-9, 2021

Irish Discovery

#### DECEMBER 3-8, 2021

Music Cities Christmas

#### DECEMBER 5-9, 2021

Santa Fe Holiday

#### JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 6, 2022

Tropical Costa Rica

#### FEBRUARY 15-24, 2022

Sunny Portugal

#### MARCH 6-20, 2022

Colors of Morocco

#### APRIL 19-26, 2022

Highlights of Italy's Amalfi Coast

#### MAY 18, 2022

#### JUNE 7 & 15, 2022

#### AUGUST 16, 2022

#### SEPTEMBER 13 & 21, 2022

Oberammergau Passion Play Germany & Austria

#### JUNE 11-17, 2022

Landscapes & Lighthouses of Coastal Maine

#### OCTOBER 4-12, 2022

Normandy, Paris & the Seine River Cruise



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations  
 CST #2006766-20

Mayflower Tours  
 CST #2044099-20

Chamber Explorations  
 CST #2048841-40

For more information, go to  
[www.visaliachamber.org/travel](http://www.visaliachamber.org/travel)

## VISALIA LEADERSHIP

# Backpacks without barriers

### Heather Reed

Human Resources Manager  
 Family Services of Tulare County

The difficulties many have faced over the last year has left members of our community in more need than ever before. Our homeless neighbors have been struggling daily to find access to food, shelter, and hygiene products. Without a place to call home, many people experiencing homelessness must carry their belongings with them at all times. By collecting backpacks for Boston's homeless, you help to ensure that people in need are able to safely carry their clothes, food, medications and other essential items. The Leadership Visalia Class of 2020-2021 is proud to shine a light on this year's community-based project: Backpacks without Barriers.

Backpacks without Barriers is Leadership Visalia's project to help alleviate some of the issues they are grappling with. Through a partnership with The Warehouse, a local organization that has the trust and understanding of the homeless community in Visalia, our Leadership class will turn over this project as an annual event for them to carry on. On Wednesday, April 28th Leadership Visalia distributed over 200 backpacks to those in need from two locations in Visalia, The Warehouse and The Sequoia Lodge. The packs were filled with items such as: toiletries, carabiner clips, gift cards, reusable water bottles, flip flops, resource materials, and more. Leadership Visalia also handed out 150 lunches thanks to Furryous Fire BBQ, and close to 80 wound care kits. Mother Nature worked in our favor providing plenty of shade for the thirty-plus individuals lined up outside of The Warehouse. At the same time folks were lined up to receive their goods at The Warehouse, Leadership Visalia class members were going door to door at The Sequoia Lodge and greeting the grateful individuals and families there. Some even took a moment to share their story and express their gratefulness for this project and several other people that have been so encouraging and helpful. Back at The Warehouse, individuals were grateful that they were able to pick their backpack color and the type of chips they wanted for lunch. Emmy, from The Warehouse was able to connect with individuals that haven't been in for services in months. The morning consisted of needing hands, smiles, and grateful hearts.

See **BACKPACKS** on page 6



PHOTO BY THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
 Visalia Leadership is attempting to help homeless anyway they can. Most recently they began their 'Backpack without Barriers' program where they handed over 200 backpacks to needing homeless residents.

## THE LAW AT WORK

# Preserving "at-will" employment relationship



### By Brett T. Abbott

Gubler & Abbott LLP

In California, "employment, having no specified term, may be terminated at the will of either party on notice to the other" (Dore v Arnold Worldwide, Inc. (2006) 39 C4th 384, 391). Thus, California is an at-will state, meaning employees may quit without notice and, absent a specific employment contract, be terminated without notice. It is in every employer's best interest to keep the at-will relationship intact. If the at-will relationship is modified, situations can arise where the employment relationship can only be terminated upon a showing of good cause. There are several ways in which the at-will status of an employee can be modified.

Certain employer actions can give rise to an enforceable expectation by the employee that he or she may only be terminated for good cause. Some examples include assurances of job security, regular promotions, salary increases, and bonuses. Some creative attorneys will even use birthday cards with innocuous statements from supervisors—"What would we do without you?"—as evidence that an employee expected that termination could only be for good cause.

However, verbal assurances, or regular promotions and salary increases, do not automatically establish an implied contract, i.e. where termination can only be for good cause. Several courts have concluded that without more, "promotions and salary increases are natural occurrences of an employee who remains with an employer for a substantial length of time... and should not change the status of an 'at-will' employee to one dischargeable only for just cause" (Miller v Pepsi-Cola Bottling Co. (1989) 210 CA3d 1554, 1559).

See **AT WILL** on page 6

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

# Help wanted's more significant plague



### Gail Zurek

President and CEO  
 Visalia Chamber

Help wanted signs are everywhere. From the local coffee shop to the industrial park, Visalia businesses are hiring. The unintended consequence of so many open positions could leave our local businesses damaged long after all their positions have been filled.

Local businesses responded to a Visalia Chamber member survey asking about open positions. Two-thirds of respondents said they had an open position, multiple positions, or planned hiring within the upcoming month. Some of the respondents' businesses were forced to close or reduced during the pandemic. As those businesses look to reopen to full

capacity, they need to rehire staff to meet the needs of that capacity. Other respondents had businesses that grew during the state's stay-at-home order and are trying to keep pace with their growing workload. Others had employees who retired, left the workforce, and now needed to fill those open positions.

There is certainly commentary about the effect of the federal stimulus act on local workers' economic decisions. For some, this is a driver on their decision not to return, at this point, to the workforce. For other potential new hires, eliminating a traditional school day forces tough conversations about the cost of child care, children at home alone, and/or the logistics of getting children to and from a school site. Often they find that it's simply easier, at this point, to remain home. Still, other potential hires are genuinely scared to return to a position that works with the general public. They may have lost a loved one or have personal health concerns, and fear working with the public may lead to a health issue for them. A year ago, there are certainly community

members that were part of our workforce that now, for a variety of reasons, are no longer seeking employment.

What does this employment crisis mean for the rest of us? Why ought the average Visalian be concerned with an open position? Because it's about to change much of what we love in this community. First, if you haven't already noticed, many businesses are having to reduce production. That could mean they can't repair your car as quickly; maybe your favorite restaurant has reduced hours and entire days they're closed; producing products now takes longer to make or to package. We are used to speed, and when it isn't happening as quickly, we get frustrated. This leads to a larger and longer-term problem. The next step actually will drive many local businesses into a deadly spiral.

Let's look at our neighborhood restaurant. We supported them during the stay-at-home orders; when they only had dined out, we were happy to sit at their sidewalk tables; we cheered when we could once again dine

See **WANTED** on page 2

## CITY UPDATE

# Roadway repairs all over Visalia

Initial results from the recent Public Opinion Survey confirmed that Visalians have a high interest in road improvements throughout the community. While COVID-19 threw us a curveball, the City of Visalia's essential workers have continued bringing the City Council's plans for roadway improvements to fruition to meet this need.

Completed a month ahead of schedule, the Tulare and Santa Fe Roundabout has improved traffic circulation at a challenging intersection. It is reducing congestion and has improved pedestrian access. With the installation of new streetlights and a new bus stop, the Roundabout's opening serves as a reinvigorating reminder of the momentum we are seeing on several roadway improvement projects. It is worth remembering that Santa Fe Street remains an underutilized north/south alternative that can provide a quick trip from Houston Avenue on the north past Caldwell Avenue on the south.

The City Council continues to focus on widening and lengthening the perimeter roadways of Riggan, Shirk, and Visalia Parkway in a focused effort to improve north/south and east/west alternatives. In fact, the widening of Riggan Avenue is part of the work underway now as traffic signals are being installed at the intersections of Giddings Street and County Center.

We continue to work with Caltrans on their project to improve traffic circulation around Lovers Lane and Highway 198, recognizing that a full, proper reconstruction of that interchange is virtually impossible. The project will make some moderate improvements in all four quadrants of the interchange and will soon be heading into the final two phases, which consist of right of way acquisition and design completion (done concurrently) before construction is slated to begin in October 2023.

The City Council and staff have been working diligently to take advantage of funding opportunities at all levels (federal, state, and regional) to not only make progress on these important perimeter arterial roadways but to advance and accelerate them where possible.

As we experience growth, we recognize some of the emerging traffic congestion areas like Mooney Boulevard and Visalia Parkway and we are working to make significant improvements to improve traffic flow in this and other areas around the city.

For the latest updates and news from the City of Visalia, visit [www.visalia.city](http://www.visalia.city) or visit them on social media @CityofVisalia.

**WANTED**

Continued from page 1

indoors. For many, the take-out orders seem to be a distant memory, and the “we’re in this together” feeling fades a bit as time goes on. Now when we place an order, a hurried server quickly takes our order and rushes off to an even more over-worked kitchen staff to begin making your order. The server covers more tables, so by the time he takes your order, you’re already a bit concerned that it “took some time” before someone took your order. The kitchen staff is half of what it used to be. It works to make the orders, but the previous efficiency of a well-staff kitchen is no longer there as cooks scramble to do the job of three missing people. Back at the table, you notice it is taking a while. You ask the server, who apologizes but seems distracted. He is; he’s got double the tables all asking the same thing. When the food comes, you’re momentarily happy but frustrated that the order is slightly wrong. You’d asked for the sauce on the side, and it’s not. The server apologizes. Your frustration grows. You tell your dining partner, “this used to be a great place. They’ve really slipped.” You share your experience with others and post something on a review site.

This is the larger long-term problem. This bad experience is shared, others hear it, or worse, read it on a review site, and soon others decide not to go to that business. Fewer people go to eat, profits drop, the business struggles to keep those they do have employed, and ultimately, some may have to close their doors. No one wants to see that.

The solution? The solution is what Visalia is known for and what we’re good at. Giving grace, support, and understanding to the local gal trying to make it work. Smiling at those serving us, knowing they’re doing more than they were before. Those front-line folks are not responsible for the hiccups caused by a staff shortage, and if it were up to them, those issues wouldn’t be there. They are working hard to cover all the bases. Give a bit of understanding to local businesses as they figure out how to serve customers given the staff shortage. Hold off on the judgment and instead see this as a temporary reset issue. Look for the good and share the great. All too often, we’re quick to point out the challenges and slow to report the good. Report the good to friends, neighbors and, by all means, share the good on the review sites.

This problem will find a solution. Unemployment will end, and school will go back. Our workforce will again find its way into filling open positions. In the meantime, give our local guys a break.

**ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION**

Business Update is the official monthly publication of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, 222 N. Garden St., Ste. 300, Visalia CA 93291, (559) 734-5876. Periodicals, Postage Paid at Visalia, CA 93277; Publication No. USPS 494-660. Annual Subscription rate \$15. Postmaster: Send address changes to Visalia Chamber of Commerce, 222 N. Garden St., Ste. 300, Visalia, CA 93291. Advertising information, call Jena at (559) 734-5976 or email info@visaliachamber.org.

Editor ..... Gail Zurek  
Layout ..... The Sun-Gazette

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Visit www.visaliachamber.org

**Community Loyal Members** | *A thriving community starts here!*

**NEW**

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce would like to welcome our newest members. We encourage individuals and businesses to support chamber member businesses.

**Business Connector Members:**  
■ Miller Memorial Chapel

**Small Business Members:**  
■ Rusty Roots Show, LLC  
■ Milestone Pediatrics, Inc.

**RENEWING**

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce thanks the following companies for renewing their commitment to the community of Visalia.

**Keystone Members:**  
■ Eagle Mountain Casino\*

**Cornerstone Members:**  
■ Employer Driven Insurance Services (E.D.I.S.)  
■ M. Green and Company LLP\*

**Community Investor Members:**  
■ Gropetti Automotive\*

**Business Builder Members:**

■ County of Tulare Board of Supervisors\*  
■ Echelon Executive Protection  
■ Mission Linen Supply\*  
■ Pacific Southwest Container  
■ SoCalGas  
■ World Wide Sires\*

**Business Connector Members:**

■ A & W Restaurant\*  
■ Chukchansi Gold Resort and Casino  
■ Dan Freitas Electric, Inc.\*  
■ Lawrence Tractor Company\*  
■ Oak View Apartment Homes\*  
■ Roller Towne  
■ Ryan Purkiss - Thiesen-Dueker  
■ Financial Consulting Group\*  
■ R-N Market  
■ Suncrest Bank  
■ Visalia Ceramic Tile, Inc.\*

**Small Business Members:**

■ Alex’s Paint & Body  
■ BJ Perch Construction Inc.\*  
■ Comfort Suites-Downtown\*  
■ CRS Farming, LLC\*

■ Derrel’s Mini Storage  
■ EMD Networking Service\*  
■ Empire Supply Co., Inc.\*  
■ Farm Credit West  
■ Forcum/Mackey Construction  
■ Frank’s Appliance Sales & Service  
■ Frazer, LLP\*  
■ Hampton Inn\*  
■ Houk & Hornburg Inc.  
■ International Agri Center  
■ J.R. Nelson’s Roofing, Inc.  
■ Kentucky Fried Chicken - Noble  
■ Paynter Realty & Investments, Inc.\*  
■ Pine, Pedroncelli & Aguilar, Inc.  
■ Sherwood Law Offices  
■ Spraying Devices Inc.  
■ Visalia Auto Body\*  
■ Visalia Eye Center\*  
■ Visalia Family Practice Medical Group\*  
■ Vollmer, Daniel, Gaebe & Grove, CPAs  
■ Williams, Brodersen, Pritchett & Burke LLP  
■ Zeeb Commercial Real Estate\*



**Business Builder Nonprofit Members:**

■ Visalia Emergency Aid Council\*

**Business Connector Nonprofit Members:**

■ United Way of Tulare County\*

**Small Business Nonprofit Members:**

■ CASA / Court Appointed Special Advocates of Tulare County\*  
■ Central California Blood Center\*  
■ Family Services of Tulare County\*  
■ Sequoia Symphony Orchestra\*  
■ Soroptimist International of Visalia\*

\* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

**LOYAL TO LOCAL AWARDS**

**Loyal to Local nominees**



On June 10 at 6p.m., the Visalia Chamber will host virtually the Loyal to Local Awards. The awards will be used to highlight local businesses that have shown great creativity and resiliency during the past year. The public was asked to nominate a local business by April 12.

**QUESADILLA GORILLA**

**Name & Title:** Miguel + Mikayla Reyes, CEO/Owners

**Years in Business:** 7.5 years

**How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

During COVID-19, we knew the importance of staying as “Loyal to Local” as possible to ensure the sustainability of our community. We stayed open, we offered discounts to front line workers, we created new and innovative ways for our customers to order safely and conveniently and our staff to feel safe returning to work, we offered delivery, we supported our staff financially with our government funding, we catered at a discounted rate for many of our health care workers.

**What do you love most about our Community?**  
The support! SO many locals have surrounded us and offered support in so many different ways. They are passionate about their town, and passionate about seeing local businesses thrive. Without the support of our community, surely we would not be here today.

**CHAPALA GRILL, INC.**

**Name & Title:** Pedro Méndez/President

**Years in Business:** 17 years in business

**How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**



The best way to stay “Loyal to Local” during COVID-19 is simply by supporting local, family-owned businesses. Weather it’s a beauty salon, restaurant, furniture store, delivery service, boutique or grocery store. It’s about supporting the small business and the hard-working families who get up every morning to go to work to put food on the table or send their kids to college. It’s about sticking together and helping each other survive this pandemic.

**What do you love most about our Community?**  
I love my community. Visalia has been great to us. We are a tight community with people who actually care and support each other. As a business our doors would not be open today had it not been for the support we received from our customers. When this Pandemic started, we weren’t sure what was happening, we weren’t sure if we were going to make it through this, but I soon found out how much love and support this community has for us.

Takeout went through the roof! Some would order takeout three times a week! When it got to 109 degrees during summer people didn’t mind sitting in the heat. They did that for us. They could have gone anywhere else in town, but they chose us. They chose Chapala Grill. I will never forget that.

I can’t tell you how many breakfast burritos we delivered to the doctors and nurses in the hospital from people who appreciated their hard work and dedication when COVID cases were at a max!

Companies like Robyn Icenhower Properties started posting signs around town that said “Visalia Strong” and “Community Strong”! This had a big impact. Customers started tipping a lot more than average to support our staff.

I can go on for hours on the many ways this community has helped us get through COVID. That is why we like to give back every chance we get. It feels good to give back to a community

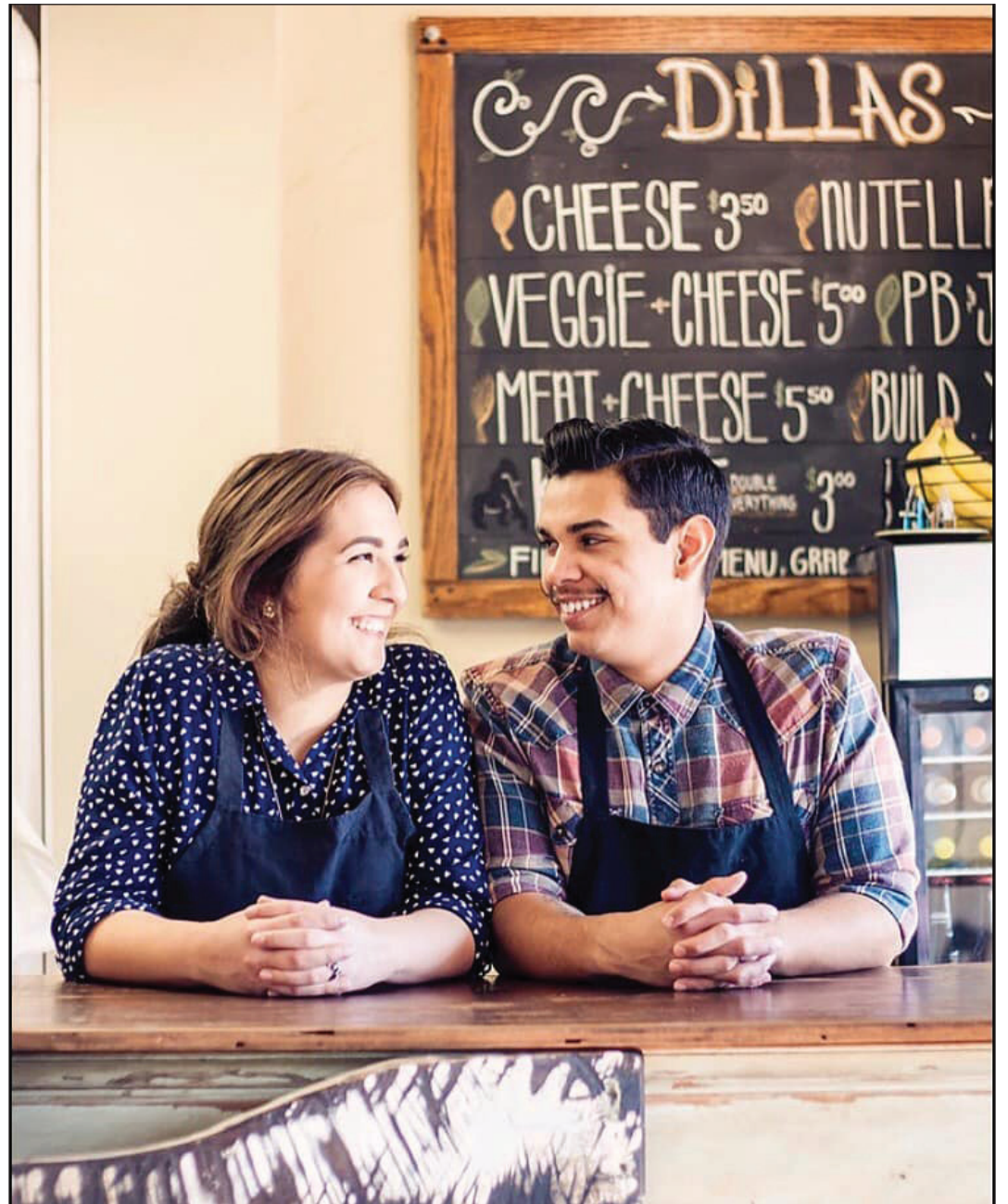


PHOTO COURTESY OF QUESADILLA GORILLA

A lot changed during the pandemic, least of which was the way customers order takeout. Quesadilla Gorilla was quick to accommodate their customers with a safe and easy way to order.

that has given so much to us. Stacie Morris and Gail Zurek were awesome through all of this. Sending messages and updates on what we could and could not do, they provided tons of information on COVID and kept us up to date on the government mandates. They were amazing.

**VISALIA CYCLERY**

**Name & Title:** Travis & Julie Wales - Owners

**Years in Business:** 50 Years

**How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

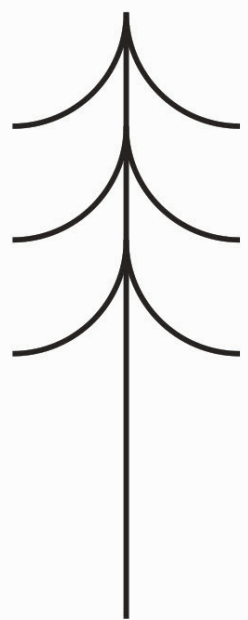
Over the last year during these COVID-19 times Visalia Cyclery quickly realized that being outdoors, staying active, getting sunshine, and remaining healthy were essential to the safety and wellbeing of our community. We immediately invested heavily in providing our community with the best quality products and resources to turn to cycling as an alternative active lifestyle. While many were out of work Visalia Cyclery, an essential business,

doubled its staff and worked around the clock to provide the highest quality services to our growing cycling community. In

addition to these changes, we have been honored to work closely in supporting other local groups/businesses as well; from utilizing local restaurants to cater our events, to attending Visalia City Council meetings to assist in developing bike lanes and paths, to supporting local cycling club events, we are thankful for the people in and around Visalia.

**What do you love most about our Community?**

Visalia Cyclery is blessed to be a business that is not just work, but a real lifestyle. Our customers are not just numbers, they are our friends. We take the extra time to get to know our community and put on events that benefit and support others. Our days off are usually spent on bike rides with our customers and our community. Visalia and it’s bordering communities are the best period and we are honored to be a part.



**A Strategic Marketing & Design Company in Visalia, California.**

Learn more at [tpgrph.com](http://tpgrph.com)

**Topograph**



**YP Talks**

**JUNE 21**  
@ 6 PM



[facebook.com/VisaliaYPN](https://facebook.com/VisaliaYPN)

**Provost & Pritchard** announced that T. Brooks & Associates has become a division of their office. T. Brooks has the combined experience of over 50 years as environmental and roofing consultants.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PROVOST & PRITCHARD



**Bank of the Sierra** announced their first quarter earnings of 2021; a 42% increase in net income and a 9% increase on deposits.

**The Darling Hotel** was awarded one of the Hottest New Hotels in the World by TripAdvisor. They were one of only four U.S. hotels to make the list!

Congratulations to **Tri Counties Bank** on their new Downtown Visalia location. Their new Visalia branch opened on May 24 at 618 W. Main Street.

**Family HealthCare Network** announced in May, pa-

tients can now text FHCN to schedule their next appointment. FHCN continues to make COVID-19 vaccines available at select locations across Tulare, Kings, and Fresno Counties, offering all three vaccines.

**The Tulare County Board of Supervisors** announced Sheriff Deputy Joseph Banda as Employee of the Year for 2019 and IT Customer Service Manager Jeffrey Meader for 2020.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TULARE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Congratulations to **Arts Visalia** who is celebrating twenty years!

**Tulare County Sheriff's Office** deputy Matthew Morales led a birthday parade for World War II Veteran 97-year-old Vito Masterangelo of Visalia. In addition, the Sheriff honored 28 fallen Tulare County law enforcement officers during a ceremony at the Tulare County Peace Officer Memorial.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TULARE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

**Central Valley Community Bank** announced their first

quarter earnings of 2021; a 11.59% increase in deposits and 9.8% increase in total assets.

Congrats to Jordan Mulrooney of **RE/MAX Visalia** who was awarded The Spirit of RE/MAX Award for 2020!

**The Business Journal** was awarded two awards in the 2021 George F. Gruner journalism competition. Edward Smith took top honors in the Best News Story for his story headlined "Building on Blackstone" and Frank Lopez earned an honorable mention in the Public Service category for his piece headlined "Need an employee? This program could foot the cost."

**Kawah Health** hosted their 2021 Kaweah Health Starlight Awards, recognizing their employees who deliver excellent care and service with compassion. Kaweah Health's Employee of the Year was Molly Niederreiter, Therapy Manager.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KAWEAH HEALTH

Congratulations to **Visalia Rawhide's** broadcaster Jill Gearin, who became the first woman to broadcast in Triple-A when she filled in for the Reno Aces broadcast team!



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOTAL NUTRITION

Total Nutrition engaged in an all around approach to help their community. The company started their "Feed a Family" campaign where every week the community would vote on a deserving family in need to win a family style meal from a local restaurant. Both helping a family and supporting the business.

**TOTAL NUTRITION VISALIA**

**Name & Title:** Tanya Pennington-Miller Owner/President  
**Years in Business:** 8

■ How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?

At the very beginning of the shut-down, we recognized there were families out of work as well as children who were no longer getting school lunches. We immediately began a "Feed a Family" Campaign where throughout the week, our community would vote on a deserving family to win a family style meal from a local restaurant. Not only did a local family get fed, but we were also happy to be supporting a local restaurant as they were also under distress with the new mandates. Plus our community got to feel like they were a part of helping with their votes! The most amazing thing about this campaign, was that we had other local business jump on board so that we were able to feed several local families per week...and therefore support more local restaurants each and every week! The bottom line is we felt so incredibly grateful to be considered an essential business to be able to keep our doors open, and we wanted to be able to help our community in any way we could.

■ What do you love most about our Community?

Our community is LOYAL. This is why we have been able to have our doors open for 8 years.

**THE WOODLANDS VISALIA**

**Name & Title:** Sam Ramirez, Owner  
**Years in Business:** Opened September 2020

■ How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?

When we first began building our outdoor venue, we had no idea COVID would be so long lasting. Despite that we pushed forward, recognizing that when things began to reopen that we could provide a safe opportunity for our community to gather. We knew people wanted options to get out of the house and we could help. We partnered with local food trucks, pop ups and restaurants to bring food fests to the community. Giving people a much needed break from home and a way to support their favorite local eatery. We created a unique Christmas celebration event and hired over 22 local staff to help bring this event to life. Over 5 weeks we saw over 8k people come out to enjoy the event and it allowed us to engage with local entertainment, food vendors and suppliers.

■ What do you love most about our Community?

No one has ever given up. Whether it be our guests, the Chamber or other local business partners, we've been fortunate to work with a group of people who found opportunity during the pandemic and finding new ways to do business and thrive in this environment. We have received tremendous support from our community. We have been grateful that we've been able to demonstrate that if you put together a quality event and work in good faith with vendor partners for the community the result can be incredible.

**SEQUOIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

**Name & Title:** Joshua Banda, Executive Director  
**Years in Business:** 62

■ How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?

When canceling our concerts became our reality, we immediately knew we needed to take quick and decisive action to continue to serve our mission. Our mission, after all, is to foster an appreciation of symphonic music and to enrich and inspire the diverse communities of the Central Valley through live music, education and community partnerships.

Our job is to celebrate great orchestral music and we had to learn how to do that in a new way, using a new medium when our mission as a community organization was desperately needed. We asked ourselves how we could continue to use orchestral music to bring our community together. Our solution was Musical Uplink, a brand new and first-of-its-kind series that is available to everyone. Not just our subscribers and not just for people who buy tick-



**RIBBON CUTTING**



ImagineU Children's Museum held a ribbon cutting on May 14 in celebration of reopening. 210 N. Tipton Street | (559) 733-5975 | imagineumuseum.org

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
**Oktoberfest**  
Budweiser VOSSLER Farms  
VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/OKTOBERFEST

**NOMINEES**

Continued from page 3

**THE SALAD SHOP**

**Name & Title:** John & Mara Lawson, owners  
**Years in Business:** 3 years on June 1st



■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

We had just gotten the keys to our new shop downtown (with seating) on March 1st. When things were first shut down, we were worried about staying open, for sure. Then, we quickly realized there was a huge need in our community. There were so many people who were at home and didn't have access to fresh produce. We started our delivering boxes of fresh produce to people in the area. We teamed up with a local church to deliver boxes to their senior members located all throughout Tulare County. We also teamed up with individuals who wanted to donate boxes to people who were high risk and weren't leaving their homes. Doing these boxes had a ripple effect because it also helped our produce guy stay busy. He said that some weeks we were the only restaurant ordering anything from him, so he was thankful for that.

During the first few months when things were shut down, we absorbed the costs of delivering so that customers wouldn't have to pay for it when they weren't leaving their homes. Today, we still continue to offer our own delivery (including no-contact and curbside) instead of contracting with delivery services so that we can keep the costs down for our customers. Doing that also allows us to be able to guarantee the quality of the service they receive. We enjoy the personal interactions with our customers!

We continue to support other local businesses by offering their products in our shop (like baked goods & coffee); we use local distributors instead of national chains; and whenever we get the opportunity to dine out, we choose locally owned restaurants.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

We love how much local business is supported. We felt it when we first opened, and it was reinforced during 2020. There is such a strong sense of community and belonging here and we enjoy getting to know our customers personally. We are very thankful for how welcoming everyone has been to our little shop.

**ROLLER TOWNE OF VISALIA**

**Name & Title:** Alice Mendoza • General Manager  
**Years in Business:** 46 years in August



■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

We did our best to keep us on social media just so people knew we were still here, closed but still here. We fought to keep Scholar Day Camp going even though it was a loss for us, but we could not turn our backs on parents that desperately needed a place for their kids to go and study at.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

The support for small business. We have had sooo many great responses and sent a lot of love. I have been here since it was open so to me this is my baby. I may not own the business but I fought like it was my own. If I didn't have the love and support from the community, I do not know how I would have gotten through all of it.

**PRECISION PREP**

**Name & Title:** Lauren Evangelho, Owner  
**Years in Business:** 6



■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

We were one of the first to offer free delivery as we updated the website in real-time, and kept free delivery for almost the entire year while we were on lockdown orders. We immediately looked for ways to help when the pandemic started, and began our 'Feeding the frontline Initiative', where customers could purchase a meal for a frontline/essential worker and we would match their donation with a second meal. We raised over \$5,000 from the community, and Precision Prep donate over 1,100 meals to 19 different facilities within Visalia and Tulare County (hospitals, nursing homes "COVID hotspots," grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) that employed frontline and essential workers. We realized early on that people were struggling with not being able to go out to eat and were having to cook at home more often now, so we produced 33 live streaming broadcasts of FREE online cooking classes to help them learn important kitchen skills and help them transition to the new way of life. Our 'Kindness Campaign' was started in late 2020 to help bring us into the new year with hope and kindness for one another after a tragic and heartbreaking year. We offered our customers the option to either get 15% off their order if they needed it, OR donate their 15% discount amount to charity. We saw \$375 raised, which was split between Food Link of Tulare Co, and Visalia Emergency Aide, and will help feed 7 families for a month and buy 800lbs of fresh produce for the local non-profit food pantry.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

They have proven over this past year that



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRECISION PREP

The owners of Precision Prep sprung into action after the pandemic began. Like many businesses they were forced to innovate. They changed their website to meet their customers demand while also beginning their 'Feeding the frontline initiative' where customers could buy meals for front line workers.

when times are tough, we all come together to do what we can to help. I've never seen so much selflessness, helpfulness, love and appreciation as I've seen in this past year in our community and it has truly inspired me to continue to give more of myself.

**HAPPY TRAILS RIDING ACADEMY**

**Name & Title:** Leslie Gardner, Executive Director  
**Years in Business:** 37

■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

While its programming and fundraising efforts were modified significantly due to the pandemic, Happy Trails' commitment to reciprocating the support it has received for nearly four decades only grew stronger. The staff and board prioritized identifying

local people and businesses to patronize and support during fundraising, program development, property projects, and community involvement.

Happy Trails hosted three successful virtual fundraising events as an alternative to its regular in-person gatherings. Tulare Church of the Nazarene and the Visalia Rawhide both made their facilities available as host sites for the 2020 events. Dick's Sporting Goods provided nearly 1,000 tennis balls for the fall 2020 and spring 2021 ball drops. James Costa of Costa Spraying, Inc. offered his helicopter for the 2021 Day at the Races event. Sue Sa's Creative Catering provided great food at both modified Races events. Prizes for the last three virtual fundraisers were supplied by HR Mobile, GA Motorsports, Smokin' Barrel Firearms, Michael's Custom Jewelry, The Darling Hotel, and 10 local restaurants. Event t-shirts were provided by Cal Apparel. Gifts of gratitude for the immense community support it took to revamp these endeavors came from Bee Hive Bake Shop, Stafford's Chocolates, True Gold Honey, Bravo Farms, Plano Jerky, and Setton Farms.

Happy Trails remained loyal to its mission to safely provide equine-assisted services to children and adults with disabilities. The staff spent 90 days after the shutdown in March drawing up protocols to get participants and volunteers safely back on the property and reopened at partial capacity on June 1. EcoLab, the Deisman family, Sierra Sanitation, Sign Time, HR Mobile, and Circle N Stables & Saddle Shop ensured the property was appropriately equipped to carry out new infection control protocols. Hamstra Dairy kept the herd fed with their second donation of a year's worth of hay.

To stay safely connected with as many constituents as possible before resuming services, thirty Facebook Live videos were hosted over the summer. Specials guest features included community members such as Flint Epps of Voice of the Valley, Jeannie & Michelle of Oak Street Studios, Craig & Jennifer Van Horn of A&W, Bob McKellar of Farmer Bob's World, Assemblyman Devon Mathis, Supervisor Pete Vander Poel, Sam Sigal & Tipper of the Visalia Rawhide, Visalia Fire Battalion Chief Dan Wristen, and Andre Gaston. Instructors sent hand-written notes from IDEA! Printing & Graphics to their students and valentines to veterans at the VA hospital. FunFlicks brought out a movie screen and Galaxy Theatres provided popcorn for a drive-in movie night in the parking lot. As modified programming continued to expand, participants and volunteers worked hard to prepare for the annual on-site horse show at the end of 2020. Cal Apparel decked everyone out in event shirts to commemorate the occasion and another step toward normalcy.

Happy Trails also responded to a need in the community by adding an additional service. While the barn gates had re-opened to existing participants, an increasing number of phone calls were coming in requesting mental health services for those struggling

with isolation during the pandemic. Happy Trails partnered with a local mental health professional and began a pilot mental health service incorporating equines in February.

Happy Trails continued to rely on the support of our local service clubs, school teams, and corporate outreach/giving groups to keep its 25-acre property looking amazing. Halsey's Tree Service, Dust Control Etc., Double Oak Dairy, United Rentals, Alpha Mack Fab, Luis's Nursery, and Jake Russell provided their specialty services in bigger property projects.

With indoor gatherings on hiatus, Happy Trails offered parts of its facility as an outdoor, physically distant gathering place. The lawns and sensory trail served as a meeting venue for various service clubs. The Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers utilized both arenas and much of the open space during their Ag Olympics event. KSEE 24's Emily Erwin took a tour and featured Happy Trails' services in a Central Valley Today news story.

The staff and volunteers of Happy Trails also gave their time and effort to local nonprofits in the following ways: hosting Visalia Chamber's Gail Zurek for a weekly "Coffee with the CEO" broadcast; building a house for Habitat for Humanity; packing food boxes at the Salvation Army; supplying trees to both the Hanford Chamber of Commerce/Kings United Way and St. Anthony Retreat Center's Christmas tree auctions; and silent auction items for several other nonprofit events. These and other outreach efforts were shared on social media outlets with the hashtag #LoyalToLocal.

The organization and its staff received recognition for its work and partnership with Visalia Partners in Education (Outstanding Industry Partner), Kings Partnership for Prevention (2020 Greatest Contribution to Youth Development), SoCalGas, and the G for Kids Foundation. Happy Trails was also a featured charity for the Gropetti Automotive Family's end-of-the-year giving campaign, and highlighted in a radio ad by E.M. Tharp.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

Support. Members of this community relentlessly give to over 300 nonprofits to ensure that essential services remain available to those who need them most. The support Happy Trails has received since 1984 and especially in the last year cannot be underscored enough. The staff and board that steer this organization are in awe at the community's generosity at a time when it would have been easy to turn inward. Truly, without the support of its community, Happy Trails would not be able to deliver on its mission to provide equine-assisted services to a population that lost many critical resources in the midst of the pandemic.

**ELITE CORPORATE WELLNESS/MEDICAL SERVICES INC.**

**Name & Title:** Nicholas Gambini—Owner/CEO  
**Years in Business:** 17

■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**



Elite has always been passionate about serving our local community. Elite operates multiple clinics (City of Visalia's Health & Wellness Clinic, United Ag Health and Wellness Center, VUSD Health and Wellness Clinic, & Healthwise Medical Clinic) within Visalia city limits. These private concierge healthcare facilities provide personalized high-cost patient care, with a dedicated medical staff, for employees and their family members. Our goal is to spend more time with our patients, eliminate wait times, focus on all aspects of a patient's health and wellness, and overall improve their quality of life while lowering risk for future health concerns. COVID-19 drastically changed our day-to-day operations and the way we assist our

patients. Our traditional medical practice visits have dropped considerably since the pandemic and our telehealth care has considerably grown. Visits for preventative/chronic care were canceled/postponed, patients needed help with COVID testing, COVID care for positive patients, and eventually vaccinations have altered day-to-day operations.

Along with continuing the day-to-day patient care through our Visalia facilities we took an active role in providing daily testing to the community. Elite and its facilities provided over 10,000 COVID tests directly within Tulare County. Once vaccinations were available, Elite partnered with Tulare County Department of Public Health to access and administer vaccines. Elite has provided over 7,500 vaccines in the last 2 months and that will continue to grow with many 2nd doses and new patients being vaccinated every day. Elite has provided vaccinations for local seniors, first responders, educators, food & ag organizations, and now with the opening of eligible tiers, many other members in need of the COVID-19 vaccinations. While we look forward to returning to a more normal day-to-day patient care experience at our facilities, we are extremely proud to have been a part of assisting our community during this time of need.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

Having facilities and operations throughout the regional west coast, I have the opportunity to visit many places. Even with all the great experiences, I'm always excited to come back to Visalia and the San Joaquin Valley. My wife and I love this City and the support the community has for each other. You don't find that in a lot of places. We are proud to call this home and raise our family within this community.

**COMPONENT COFFEE LAB**

**Name & Title:** Jonathan Anderson Gregory Amend, Miguel and Mikayla Reyes: Owners  
**Years in Business:** 4



■ **How did you remain Loyal to Local during COVID-19?**

We put a lot of effort in building relationships with local businesses. New partnerships with The Salad Shop and Guest Kitchen Appearances from our friends at Tacos Lucha.

■ **What do you love most about our Community?**

Our community is so special. We loved being able to support our hospital heroes with coffee and donut donations which was majority funded by our wonderful patrons. Our guests were so patient with us during all the constant change to our business and how they interacted with us. From limiting payments to only Card Transactions, Wearing Masks, and offering Mobile Order service, our fans have been so wonderful and accepting. We couldn't have made it without you.

**SJVC sees increase in trades, industrial training**

Those looking for a career in HVAC and industrial maintenance will find there are plenty of opportunities to get started in Visalia.

San Joaquin Valley College's Visalia campus, located at on West Mineral King Avenue where it turns into Kelsey Street, has expanded into a 20,000 square foot building for vocational training in heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVAC-R) as well as industrial maintenance technology (IMT). HVAC-R students learn to install, repair, or maintain those systems while IMT students learn to detect, diagnose and correct errors in industrial machinery before the machine or the products it produces are damaged. SJVC's program provides IMT students with the basic knowledge of industrial electronics, robotics, and PLC (programmable logic controller) equipment.

With the recent explosion of new, larger tenants at Visalia Industrial Park, it's no wonder why there has been more interest in locals wanting to complete and education in related fields just up the road.

During the day, SJVC's enrollment is about 24 students with three instructors and four other staff members for the HVAC-R and IMT programs. At night, the college doubles enrollment to about 55 students for the two programs.

In fact, demand for the programs was so great, SJVC opened the new building prior to completing its application for a conditional use permit. The oversight was corrected last week when the Visalia Planning Commission approved the college's permit for the building.

Previously used for auto consignment sales, the building, located at 8233 W. Hillsdale Ct., is not only home to classrooms for both program, but also storage areas for the labs for those classrooms as well as offices for administrative staff. The mixed-use facility is on land zoned for service commercial, so it required a conditional use permit to bring it into compliance for the different types of uses.

**CONTACT US**

Send briefs via e-mail to amanda@visaliachamber.org  
 Call 734-5876. Mail to: Visalia Chamber of Commerce 222 N. Garden St. #300 Visalia, CA 93291  
 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

**Ask Jena**

Am I too late to apply for this year's Leadership Program?

Applications for the 2021-2022 Leadership Visalia program are due July 31, 2021. Please visit visaliachamber.org/leadership to download the application.

How can I become more involved with the Chamber?

We understand businesses are busy! There are multiple ways to be involved with our Chamber. Please contact Charlie Saponara to learn how to become more involved: charlie@visaliachamber.org.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message: Jena@visaliachamber.org

# Kuubix expanding at lightspeed

Kuubix Energy, Inc. is the fastest growing solar company in California, 47th fastest growing company in the nation



PHOTO COURTESY OF KUUBIX ENERGY, INC.

Kuubix Energy, Inc. is one of the fastest growing companies in the nation. Inc. Magazine ranked Kuubix No. 47 out of 5,000 on their 2020 list of fastest growing companies, and then ranked them No. 10 on their 2021 list



**Reggie Ellis**  
President and Publisher  
The Sun-Gazette

A Visalia-based solar company is seemingly expanding its business at the speed of light.

Since incorporating in 2017, Kuubix is now considered one of the fastest growing companies in the United States. Inc. Magazine, which annually ranks companies on their rate of growth, ranked Kuubix No. 47 on its 2020 list of the 5,000 fastest growing companies. Earlier this year, Inc. ranked Kuubix No. 10 on its 2021 list of fastest growing companies in California and No. 1 for the fastest growing solar company in California. The ranking noted the company's nearly 2,000% growth in the last two

years alone.

"Kuubix was recently named by the Inc. 5000 as one of the fastest growing companies in the U.S., and in the last few months we have done a complete overhaul of our operations and brought in a team of executives that ensures our ability to continue this growth," Kuubix CEO Josh Butt said.

Three longtime friends Tyler Pender, Josh Buffington, and Mark Orwig combined their skills in September 2016 to begin planning a solar company. They officially incorporated the company under the name Kuubix, a play on their logo based on a Rubik's cube, in 2017. The name is now an acronym for its core principals of: Knowledge, Unity, Unconventional, Balance, Integrity, and eXcellence.

The three men took out a loan of \$11,000 to buy materials from a local provider on their first job and made enough money to pay back the loan and start a business. Pender was already selling solar in the Central Valley in 2016 when he convinced Buffington and Orwig to start their company in Visalia. Buffington's operational and logistical experience, combined with Orwig's legal and human resources skills and Pender's sales helped fast track the company's plans for expansion in the residential solar market.

"The owners work well together," said Geoff Howard, VP of Kuubix Home. "They all have different personalities but those differing points of view allow them to question each other, think differently and strike a balance between that and benefits the company."

Howard said the company has grown from the three co-owners to more than 200 employees and 25 dealers. In 2019, the company hired a new executive team. Two key hires during expansion have been Dan Sokyra, VP of Operations, who has worked in solar for 10 years, and Egil Rosten, a Norwegian native with a similar solar tenure who is now VP of Sales working out of California's Castro Valley. Howard brought a business background, including renewable fuels energy, when he joined the company. Rosten said one of the unique things about Kuubix is its operational model and proactive approach to customer service.

"We essentially took a dealership model," Rosten said.

Many solar companies try to do everything in house and end up hiring too many employees too quickly without developing a reputation for the actual work of installing systems. Rosten said Kuubix spent its first few years finding and developing quality installers and can essentially install a system in about six hours if everything goes right.

"It's hard to find good installers in the industry, so we did the hard part first," Rosten said.

Once they had an efficient system, Kuubix then began contracting with select solar sales people who were not only paid on sales but are also provided leads and technical support while meeting with clients. At the root of company's expansion is the concept of "lean innovation," a fancy way of saying they embrace new technology to improve customer experience, cut down on bureaucracy and streamline the development of their product. For Kuubix, this meant developing project tracking and management software that could notify dealers and customers of changes or delays in a project due to a material shortage,

inclement weather or the permitting process.

"At the core of every residential solar project is that this is a home improvement project," Rosten said. "In this industry, reputation is everything, and we have built a reputation for keeping our customers up to date on their project by making sure we show up on time, finish on time, build what we promised, and clean up when we're done."

Kuubix also operates its own call center, staffed by real people, who work just as hard making calls to customers as they do answering them. Howard said the call center takes a more proactive approach to customer service. Instead of waiting for customers to call with questions about their solar project, scheduling conflicts or any complaints, employees at the call center do periodic check ins with customers to make sure they are happy with all aspects of the service.

"Instead of waiting for customers to call us with problems, we call them to let them know what the problems are and how we are handling them," Howard said.

The call center also provides live technical support for dealers who may have a question while meeting with a client. Dealers can also follow up on leads and set appointments through the call center. Howard's latest role in the company is heading up Kuubix Home, a new branch which will provide maintenance and cleaning on all Kuubix installed solar systems. As a certified installer for Tesla Powerwall's, Howard said Kuubix can install the electric battery system that can store 13.5 kilowatt hours of usable electricity generated by your solar panels.

"We had clients in Bay Area who never lost power during the rolling blackouts this year because they had enough stored energy to power their home," Howard said. "We would not have been selected as a certified Tesla installer without having a good reputation with our customers."

The company expects to continue its rapid expansion after a recent announcement it had secured a major private investment. A month ago, Kuubix announced an agreement with Israeli solar developer Solegreen LTD (TASE: SLGN). The publicly traded company designs, builds and operates power-generation facilities using renewable energy. It currently has approximately 23MW installed PV capacity, 49 megawatt (MW) in advanced construction, and 680 MW in its pipeline.

Under the terms of the agreement Solegreen is expected to invest up to \$104 million in the company over the next two years in the form of equity and convertible loans.

"Expansion into the U.S. market was one of our main objectives for 2021," Solegreen Chairman Gal Bogin said. "Kuubix's track record for rapid growth and the strength of their management team make them uniquely positioned for continued growth and expansion and an ideal partner for Solegreen."

The investment will enable the company to continue its expansion of residential and commercial installation capacity in California, Texas, Nevada and Florida. On the residential solar side, Kuubix said substantial funding will be allocated to build a robust direct-to-consumer marketing operation. This will accelerate the growth of Kuubix's dealerships by assisting with lead generation and appointment setting. Moreover, considerable focus will be placed on best-in-class solutions for sales enablement and communication.

"The partnership with Solegreen will free up funds to go deep with selected dealerships to help them grow in all our markets—California, Texas, Florida, and Nevada this year and then nationwide in 2022," Butt said.

Howard and Rosten said Kuubix's success shouldn't affect the company's plans to keep its headquarters in Visalia. Both men pointed out the central location along Highway 99 and the low cost of living which allows the company to keep salary's competitive while employees spend comparatively less of their take home pay on housing and property.

"Not only do the owners have a personal connection to Visalia, it is also an ideal location between two of the largest solar markets in the country, so there is tremendous reach from here," Rosten said.

Howard added, "This is a great place to do business and you can offer a livable wage."

# Recreation Ballpark changes name

The Visalia Rawhide have reached an agreement to sell the naming rights of Recreation Ballpark to Valley Strong Credit Union

The home of the Visalia Rawhide has a new name. The team along with Valley Strong Credit Union announced yesterday that Recreation Ballpark will be renamed to Valley Strong Ballpark beginning next month.



The Visalia City Council and Major League Baseball approved the name change last week. When First Pitch, owners of the Visalia Rawhide, took over the team prior

to last year's canceled season, they entered into a contract with the city of Visalia which allowed them to sell the naming rights to the stadium to generate revenue for the team. First Pitch fielded several offers and selected Valley Strong Credit Union. The contract between First Pitch and Valley Strong Credit Union will run for 10 years.

City Councilmember Greg Collins was the lone dissenter in the 3-1 vote to approve the name. He said the city already supports the team with about \$200,000 per year and the city spends about \$100,000 in maintenance and utility payments per year for the stadium.

"It's been Recreation Park for 75 years," Collins said. "I don't see the need to, number one, rename it and, number two, I disagree with the fact that it is a city facility yet people are benefiting from the renaming of it."

Collins noted the previous contract retained naming rights for the city and said he was in disagreement with a private entity earning revenue from a city facility. Mayor Steve Nelsen said the current contract does provide naming rights to the Rawhide and the council had already voted on the contract for a new 10-year deal.

"We're following the contract," Nelsen said. "They made the effort to get the naming rights."

According to Rawhide president and co-owner Sam Sigal, they decided to go with Valley Strong because they're a brand that cares about the city of Visalia. Sigal and his family moved to the area less than two years ago and fell in love with the city. With Valley Strong's recent expansion into Visalia, he deems it important to have partnered with a brand that shares a similar appreciation for the area.

See RAWHIDE on page 6

# Bringing together a diversity of service



The Visalia community benefits greatly from a variety of social and community service organizations whose missions are in some way focused on assisting those in need. Such was the topic for the Leadership Visalia cohort's final, 100% virtual day session. The Social and Community Services day session was facilitated by Leadership Visalia's Michelle Goans. Michelle included the topic of organizational and service provision equity to the list of topics covered by each speaker. A focus on equity issues provided additional insight and meaningful conversation to the day session.

Roberto De La Rosa, Jr., CFO, O. LA. RAZA Immigrants' Rights Centers, was the first speaker of the day. Roberto provided an overview of the immigration and citizenship services their six legal service centers provide. Roberto also discussed the importance of nonprofits in the betterment of our community and shared his thoughts on Leadership Visalia participants volunteering for non-profit board service. He encouraged participants to evaluate their skills, find an organization with a mission that aligns with their passions and to volunteer with a purpose!

Another guest speaker, Ampelio Mejia, Executive Director of Arts Consortium - My Voice Media Center, helped the cohort understand the importance of mental health awareness and how mental health may be positively impacted through

the Arts. Ampelio promoted My Voice Media Center which helps community members with mental illness to express themselves through art, media, photography, music, writing, etc. Ampelio shared that it is important to focus on internal narratives, healing and recovery for those with mental illness. The program is free to all participants and has had positive outcomes for those who have participated.

Next to share with the class was Carla D. Calhoun, Deputy Director of Community Services Employment Training (CSET). Carla promoted community solutions through workforce development, educational and career programs, as well as programs to assist those in need. CSET creates opportunities for youth and adults to be competitive in our community. Carla shared that we must not only ensure the doors of opportunity are open, but also, we must equip individuals to walk through those doors.

Nick Vargas, Director of Development and Strategy, The Source LGBT+ Center, was the group's next speaker. Nick shared that The Source provides resources and programs to the LGBT+ community, as well as education and LGBT+ community advocacy within Visalia. The Source supports the LGBT+ community by providing programs such as helping those living with HIV, as well as providing information on HIV prevention and awareness. Nick shared the story of the organization's formation, which came about because there was a lack of services available to the LGBT+ community at the time. This story provided inspiration and an example to Leadership participants who might consider some day forming a service organization to fill a need related to their passion.

The day session wrapped up with a panel discussion on What Makes a Good Board Member? The panel featured Crystal Jordan, Owner and President Armstrong Community Management, Steve Creel, Senior Pastor Visalia United Methodist Church, and Nathan Hall, Deputy Chief Credit Officer, Suncrest Bank. The panel shared a variety of information on how to find an organization on which to serve as a board member, what should be considered before joining a board, as well as what it means to be a good board member, once appointed. They suggested that if Leadership Visalia participants are interested in getting involved in our community, they should reach out to our communities' non-profits, ask for information and get involved: volunteer, become a board member, attend community events, donate and promulgate. By working together our community prospers!

**NOW MORE THAN EVER OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS LEADERS TO BE CATALYSTS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE!**

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**LEADERSHIP VISALIA**  
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# Thank you

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**MEDIA PARTNERS:**



**HEALTH CARE NOTE**

## Kaweah Delta is now Kaweah Health



**By Gary K. Herbst**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Kaweah Health

It has been a busy couple of months in healthcare, and thankfully, for the first time in a long time, it has not been because of COVID-19. By now, many of you have heard the momentous news—Kaweah Delta is now Kaweah Health. We made this decision carefully, after pondering a rebranding for the last 10 years, watching well-known hospitals and health systems—Sutter Health, Stanford



Health, Scripps Health, etc.—change their names to reflect their broadening offering of services and their changing role in their communities. These hospitals rebranded themselves to reflect the changing role of hospitals from healers of sickness and injury to champions of health and wellness. This too, is our story.

Over the last 60 years, Kaweah Delta has become much more than a hospital or medical center and has grown exponentially from our beginnings as a 68-bed community hospital to a health system with eight campuses across Tulare and Kings Counties, anchored by a 435-bed acute medical center located in downtown Visalia. We truly have become a comprehensive, state-of-the-art, integrated health system that's been nationally recognized for the quality of care we provide. We've been named one of the best 250 hospitals in the nation by Healthgrades for three years in a row and one of the nation's top 50 cardiac surgery programs for four years in a row. We're also the only cardiovascular affiliate of the Cleveland Clinic in California. We've partnered with USC and Valley Children's Hospital to help raise the level of care available to children and adults in our service area. Lastly, we are a fully accredited teaching hospital with close to 130 residents training in six different residency programs.

Like other hospitals and health systems, we also embrace the patient as a consumer, and know brand and brand loyalty mean everything. A healthcare organization's brand is what makes all of its services and facilities recognizable, accessible, and preferred. Branding is about growth. It's about making your organization stand out. It's about how a simple image, or logo, can convey an expectation of outstanding, world-class quality and experience, without the use of a single word.

Two years ago, we focused our thoughts on rebranding when we adopted a new mission and vision statement and en-

hanced our foundational pillars to better reflect our purpose, our passion, and why we exist. The first line of our mission statement now reads: Health is our Passion—not healthcare but "health," like a marriage vow that promises to take care of you in both sickness and health.

Some have asked why rebrand now in the midst of the pandemic, when many including those of us in healthcare are hurting financially and have had to make difficult decisions along the way. The truth is it's the perfect time to reinvent, to redefine, to modernize and to distinguish Kaweah Delta from everyone else. We have suffered greatly over this past year and we need something like this to restore our hope and our optimism. We need to rebuild our financial reserves and our performance and that can only come from growth where Kaweah Delta is viewed by our community and service area as the provider of choice. We need to capture that brand loyalty and eliminate confusion to help our community know that Sequoia Regional Cancer Center, Sequoia Prompt Care, Visalia Medical Clinic, Therapy Specialists, and the Lifestyle Center are all part of Kaweah Delta.

Never has there been a year in Kaweah Delta's history like the one we just lived. I don't want it to be the year we remember for all of the pain, suffering, sadness, and exhaustion we experienced. I'd rather it be remembered as the year Kaweah Delta was reborn, reignited, and re-energized. The year it rose like a "phoenix from the ashes"—stronger, smarter, and more powerful. We are modernizing our brand to show the world that we are innovative, confident, compassionate, and progressive—and as a symbol of who we are today, Kaweah Delta has evolved to become Kaweah Health. Our new name and logo honor our history, unite us as one, and propel us on our journey to world-class care.

We firmly believe Kaweah Health to be an investment in our future. No organization can safely "cut" its way back into prosperity—that can only come from growing your market and your share of the market. This is what will allow us to give pay raises, offer great benefits, fund our retirement plans, and allow us to continue to invest in new services, new technologies, new facilities, and recruit and retain the best and brightest employees and providers.

We estimate the cost of rebranding our organization will cost approximately \$600,000 to \$700,000, largely for the cost of new signage, many of which were scheduled for replacement. If Kaweah Health stands for another 60 years like Kaweah Delta did, that would equate to just \$10,000 per year, or .00125% of our \$800 million annual operating budget. We also hope to further defray this cost through potential fundraising with our community as part of our 2021 Modernization Campaign, just launched by the Kaweah Delta Hospital Foundation in March.

I hope you all join me in celebrating the rise of Kaweah Health.



PHOTO BY JERMAINE JOHNSON II, THE SUN-GAZETTE

Rawhide has reopened their newly renamed Valley Strong Ballpark for the 2021 season after taking 2020 off from the pandemic. This year the Rawhide will be able to defend their California League title they won in 2019.

**RAWHIDE**

Continued from page 5

"I don't think there could be a better name for a ballpark in Visalia, California than Valley Strong," Sigal said. "When you put a name on one of the most visible buildings in the city for multiple years, it has to signify the location. I think their entire brand, their company, what they offer, and what they stand for is that powerful."

According to yesterday's joint

press release, the partnership will offer Valley Strong a high-visibility opportunity to strengthen its brand within Tulare and Kings Counties community and surrounding areas. Currently, Valley Strong has two branches in Tulare County with three additional branches anticipated in the next couple years.

"Valley Strong is committed to building long-lasting relationships within our communities" Valley Strong's executive vice president/CFO Nick Ambrosini said. "Partnering with the Visalia Rawhide, gives us the opportu-

nity to be a part of this amazing organization, serving our Tulare and Kings counties members."

The partnership will create a pathway for Visalia Rawhide, a Low-A Affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks, and Valley Strong to work together to co-brand and rename the ballpark, while also leveraging their trusted brands in other park events including fireworks shows and various festivals.

The Rawhide starts its season on May 4. Valley Strong mascot, Rocky Raccoon, will be throwing out the first pitch.

**AT WILL**

Continued from page 1

The best course of action is to include express language in an employee handbook, or separate agreement, which makes the at-will relationship clear. The handbook language or agreement should state that the at-will relationship can only be modified in writing by the president/owner of the company. It's also crucial to have the employee sign-off on his or her copy of the employee handbook, showing that he or she understands and agrees to be bound by the at-will relationship.

This safeguard was crucial in one case in which a 20-year employee sued his employer, alleging that there was an implied contract wherein the employee could only be terminated for cause (Starzynski v. Capital Public Radio, Inc. (2001) 88 Cal. App.4th 33). After working for the company for over a decade, the employee signed an at-will agreement which stated that only the company's Board of Directors could modify the agreement. A supervisor assured the employee, both before and after he signed the at-will agreement, that the employee would only be terminated for just cause. The court ultimately ruled that the supervisor's verbal promises of continued employment did not create an implied contract because the employee signed a clearly-written at-will acknowledgment. Absent that agreement, the court likely would have found in favor of the employee.

This article is for education and information purposes only; it should not be construed as legal advice. If you have an employment law question for inclusion in a future article, contact Brett T. Abbott at Gubler & Abbott (brett@thecalifornialawyers.com). For specific employment law advice or other legal assistance, contact Gubler & Abbott, (559) 625-9600, 1110 N. Chinowth St., Visalia, CA 93291 (www.thecalifornialawyers.com).

**BACKPACKS**

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Backpacks without Barriers made a real difference in the lives of those struggling with in Visalia. The Leadership Visalia classes exceeded their original goal and could not have done it without the support of caring people like: Caity Meader, Edgardo Monroy, Esta Smith, Esta Willman, Jake Sorensen, Judy Lawsen, Mary Jo Estes, Patrick Salazar, Mary P. Foster, Rachel Caggiano, Randall Ranger, Richard Feder, Stephanie Burrage, William SA, and our local business sponsors.