

# Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 7 | July 2021

## INSIDE

### Tulare County Fair and World Ag Expo return to showgrounds

After holding drive-thru, virtual events last year, the Tulare County Fair and World Ag Expo will hold in-person events this September and in February 2022. **3**

### Cal Water donation keeps aquatic center kicking

California Water Service in Visalia promises \$500,000 over 10 years for proposed aquatic center. **3**

### Back to in-person graduations and summer school

Congratulations to the class of 2021! This year was not easy for students, teachers, and staff, but together, VUSD made it through. **4**

## EVENTS

### FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

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

Time: 8 a.m.

#### JULY 22

#### Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.

Location: Visalia First

## TRAVEL WITH US

#### 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)



PHOTO BY RYAN KRAUTER, KRAUTER CREATIVE

Its unique rooftop cocktail lounge and restaurant, Elderwood, Art Deco architecture and decor, and boutique, luxury rooms make The Darling in Visalia a destination in the heart of the valley that continues to attract people from the Bay Area and Southern California.

## Tripadvisor deems Darling one of world's hottest new hotels



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

Now that travel restrictions are easing, you might have the urge to jump on a plane to a luxury hotel across the ocean. Or, you could just head to Visalia, home to one of the hottest new hotels in the world.



Last week, The Darling Hotel was ranked No. 19 on Tripadvisor's list of the "25 Hottest New Hotels in the World." The hotel, located in downtown Visalia, was awarded as part of the 2021 Travelers' Choice Best of the Best awards from Tripadvisor, the world's largest online travel platform. The 'Hottest New Hotels' list is comprised of hotels that opened July 2019 or later and celebrate the most highly rated hotels based on quality and quantity of traveler reviews.

General manager Michael Seaward said the rankings were heavily weighted on the number of positive Tripadvisor reviews, as well as few, if any, negative reviews. Seaward admitted opening

during the pandemic put the Darling on a shorter list of candidates worldwide but credited a well-trained staff, its unique rooftop cocktail lounge and restaurant, Elderwood, and art deco architecture and decor with providing a destination in the heart of the Valley that continues to attract people from the Bay Area and Southern California.

"In addition to providing a quality experience of staying at the hotel, our staff make it a point to greet people, check in with them and get to know a little bit about our guests," Seaward said. "I think this honor speaks to the relationships we build with people."

The hotel's ownership group also attributes the achievement to the hard work of Seaward and the other staff members. "We are so proud of our staff and how they've managed through a difficult period. They truly continue to be instrumental to accomplishing a key part of the vision: to create something that brings positive recognition to this city and the Valley," said Bob Ainley, a member of The Darling's ownership group.

The hotel opened on July 1, 2020, at the height of COVID-19 restrictions. Michael Seaward, the hotel's general manager, attributes much of the hotel's success to the local community. When the hospitality industry was essentially closed off for most travelers, Seaward said locals stayed at the hotel to celebrate special occasions or have ro-

See DARING on page 5

## Rawhide fills ballpark to capacity

Based on California Department of Public Health (CDPH) updated COVID-19 guidance, Rawhide was able to open at 100% capacity starting June 22

As California transitions into post-pandemic life, fans of the Visalia Rawhide will soon be able to pack out the team's newly named baseball stadium. Starting June 22, Valley Strong Ballpark will be open at full capacity. The Rawhide, following the recommendations of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), will no longer require social distancing.

"Our staff is excited to finally have Valley Strong Ballpark filled with Rawhide fans. This has been something our entire community has been working towards," said Sam Sigal, president and co-owner of the Visalia Rawhide. "We are grateful to Tulare County for all of their hard work. They have been an important resource to us throughout this pandemic."

This announcement from CDPH means there will no longer be pod seating, limited group areas, or a buffer zone between players and fans. All group outing areas can be used to full capacity and the 100-level grandstands will be available for seating. The Rawhide will also be re-instating the Kids Club, and fans can now purchase vouchers to games. Other fan-favorite promotions such as the Rawhide Weiner Club and the Rawhide Reading Program will be reinstated as well. Masks will no longer be mandatory to enter Valley Strong Ballpark if you are fully vaccinated,



but the Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency and Visalia Rawhide are recommending fans continue to wear them except when actively eating and drinking in their respective seats. The Rawhide will continue to have sanitizing stations throughout the ballpark for fans to use. Masks are strongly recommended if you have not been fully vaccinated. Out of an abundance of caution for the health of our fans, all Rawhide staff will continue to wear masks.

The safety and well-being of players, fans and staff is of the utmost importance to the Visalia Rawhide. The Rawhide and Valley Strong Ballpark will continue to follow guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), California Department of Public Health and Major League Baseball. The public's cooperation is requested in executing this plan. The Rawhide continue to ask that you please do not attend any event at Valley Strong Ballpark if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to an event. Tickets can be purchased online, as well as by calling 559-732-4433.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## CITY UPDATE

### Not my future, but a bright future



**Randy Groom**  
City Manager

In a couple of months, I will quietly slide out the door and bring to a close over 35 years of public service – a few years at the Fresno County Sheriff's office, 22 at the City of Visalia, seven at the City of Exeter, and four at Visalia Unified School District. I began my full-time career with the City of Visalia in 1985, at the age of 20. Visalia was a much smaller city then, but even today it still has the feel of a smaller town.

It is about relationships. We may have both the challenges and opportunities of a big city, but we continue to have the relationships and the values of a small town. We sometimes sell ourselves short, in a populous state with many larger, metropolitan areas. Visalia is the 44th largest city in California, but in any other western state we would generally be in the top 10 cities in the state. We continued to grow throughout the pandemic, and our attractiveness for both residents and businesses has only accelerated.

Despite the year of unprecedented interruption of "normal", Visalia has continued to grow and thrive. We have a very strong local economy. While some cities suffered greatly during the pandemic (in many cases due to their dependence on travel, tourism, and events) our community showed great economic resiliency. Sales tax revenue surprisingly increased, and property tax revenue rose as homes increased in price and sales went through the roof. All of that bodes well for the health and stability of our community.

The future is extremely bright for Visalia. Unemployment is dropping as businesses return to pre-pandemic activity levels, and employers across the city are hiring. The Industrial Park is experiencing phenomenal growth, bringing new jobs and expanding opportunities.

As I turn over the wheel of this large and complicated ship to a new captain, I feel very satisfied by what Visalia has accomplished over the past several decades, and I look forward to watching Visalia continue to thrive.

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.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### Lunch table conversations



**Gail Zurek**  
President and CEO  
Visalia Chamber

In last month's President's Corner, I shared how the labor shortage was a symptom of the pandemic with multiple causes. It's a challenge that continues today, but not the only challenge facing our community.

I recently gathered with a small group of business leaders over lunch. The conversation naturally flowed into taking inventory of strengths and challenges facing our community. Water issues, labor shortages, housing – for those experiencing homelessness and those young professionals priced out of the market, post-pandemic angst, community pools, the school system, equality, and regional economic development, all wove themselves into our lunch conversation. It was a thoughtful conversation, and I was impressed by the depth of knowledge each had on the subjects.

Near the end of our conversation, wanting to find solutions but slightly overwhelmed, I asked the group how we fix the challenges and add to the strength of Visalia. A lunch goer put down her glass of iced tea, smiled, and said, more people have to have these lunches. More people have to be willing not only to discuss these issues but know they are issues in the first place. Another lunch goer chimed in, well, that takes courage and curiosity; it takes leadership. It occurred to me that everyone at the table was a Leadership Visalia alum.

Early that week, I had the opportunity to attend the Visalia Economic Development Corporation's breakfast installation and meeting. As Justin Workman handed the gavel to Lisa

Walsh, both Justin and Lisa included Leadership Visalia in their remarks. Those remarks from earlier in the week rang in my ears sitting with the group of business leaders at lunch.

I often tout Leadership Visalia as a way for employers to invest in their workforce while strengthening and developing leadership skills. For many employers, Leadership Visalia is an unofficial requirement for management positions. This 30-year plus program has helped many in our community become better leaders at the workplace. What Justin, Lisa, and my lunchmates reminded me was how much Leadership Visalia helped develop community leaders.

We need informed thoughtful leaders to tackle the real and difficult challenges this community faces. Through the day sessions, Leadership Visalia exposes participants to topics critical to understanding where we are thriving and where we have some work to do. The sessions introduce participants to leaders active in those conversations and provide a new perspective on issues that most may passively understand. Leadership Visalia prepares leaders to be thoughtful, resourced, and innovative as they take a seat at the proverbial leadership table.

We need more leaders around that table. We need those leaders in our workplace, and we need those leaders in our community. One of the best ways to encourage leadership development is to suggest, encourage, or sponsor someone for Leadership Visalia. Often that nudge is just what someone needs to decide to pursue this opportunity. If you have considered this opportunity, consider this your sign. We need you. We need more people willing to develop as leaders, learn about this community and come together to tackle challenging issues.

Applications can be found at [visaliachamber.org/leadership](http://visaliachamber.org/leadership) and are due July 31.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



SEQUOIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Name: Joshua Banda
Company: Sequoia Symphony Orchestra
Title: Executive Director

Founded in 1959, the mission of the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra is to foster an appreciation of symphonic music and to enrich and inspire the diverse communities of the Central Valley through the transformative power of live music, education and community partnerships.

We were honored to receive the "Show Must Go On" Loyal to Local Award through the Chamber! Our latest endeavor into the digital performance sphere has been so well-received and we're proud to continue showcasing our talented community through high-quality video content that's free to the community.

We have an extremely talented group of musicians that are from our community. Many people don't realize exactly who makes up our musicians, what we do or how we do it! But we are a professional orchestra that, in addition to our new digital content, puts on live symphonic concerts annually and have done so for 61 years. Our musicians aren't volunteers, they are paid professional musicians who are all part of the Central Valley. Many of them are also local business owners, educators, and more. Outside of featured guest artists, all of our musicians are your friends, family and neighbors.

Our mission is to enrich and inspire. We firmly believe in the power of music to heal and bring people together. We get involved by providing content that brings people together behind a unified passion. Because with music, it doesn't matter what language you speak, it doesn't matter what your background is, and it doesn't matter what you look like. When you

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:

- Angelina Jones Photography
Infinite Heart Hospice

Small Business Members:

- ARA Kaweah Dialysis Center
Sequoia Tint Company

RENEWING

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

Visionary Members:

- SinglePoint Outsourcing, Inc.\*

Regional Leader Members:

- Tuocomas Federal Credit Union

Cornerstone Members:

- Vintage Press Restaurant\*

Community Investor Members:

- Joann Stores Visalia Distribution Center\*
McDonald's | RLMK, Inc.
Visalia Unified School District-Administration Department

Business Builder Members:

- Gallagher\*
National University
The Darling Hotel\*
Tulare Outlets

- Voltage Multipliers, Inc.\*
VWR International, LLC\*

Business Connector Members:

- Caliber Home Loans\*
Central Valley Business Forms, Inc.\*
Chicago Title\*
Franey's Carpet One Floor & Home Design Center
Mitchell Insurance Services\*
Paradise Pools, Inc.\*
Prestige Assisted Living\*
QK, Inc. (formerly Quad Knopf, Inc.)
Re/Max Visalia\*
ServiceMaster by Benevento\*
Unified Screening & Crushing - California

Small Business Members:

- Armstrong Property Management\*
Brewbakers
Bruce Evans Property Management, Inc.\*
Burgundy House Apartments
Care at the Courtyard
Central Valley Recovery Services\*
Clark Pest Control\*
Educational Employees Credit Union\*
Hocking, Denton, Palmquist & Company
Holiday Inn Express & Suites\*
Housing Authority of Tulare County\*
J.C. Lansdowne, Inc.\*
Jim's Formal Wear
Mangini Associates, Inc.\*

- Marriott Hotel
McAuliff & Wood Orthodontic Specialists\*
Mill Creek Management, Inc.\*
Pacific Employers
Peck Planning and Development\*
Pioneer Nursery\*
Realty Stars
Rethought Reborn Media
Robert Half International DBA Officeteam/Accountemps\*
Sciacca & Company, C.P.A.'s
Screw Conveyor Corporation
ServiceMaster by Hellstern
Sequoia Foot Care Group
Sign Time
Smokin Barrel Firearms\*
Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG)
\*Tulare County Association of Realtors, Inc
Tulare County District Attorney
Valley Industrial & Family Medical Group
Valley Steel Construction\*
Visalia Citrus Packing Group, Inc.\*
Visalia Cyclery
Visalia Plumbing\*
Visalia Senior Housing

Cornerstone Nonprofit Members:

- CSET-Community Services Employment Training

Business Builder Nonprofit Members:

- Visalia Unified Teachers Association



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ation

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Arts Visalia\*
ProYouth\*
Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Central Valley, Inc
Spirit 88.9\*
Tulare-Kings Dental Society
Visalia Rescue Mission\*

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- ABLE Industries\*
Happy Trails Riding Academy
Proteus, Inc. Employment & Training\*
Self-Help Enterprises
The Creative Center\*
Tulare-Kings Right To Life
Turning Point of Central California, Inc.
Visalia County Center Rotary Club\*

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

bring in diversity to the concert hall to listen to this live experience, everyone is focused on the beauty of the music being created. We try to inspire our audience by reminding them that this community is vibrant, diverse and full of talent that you can't help but be in awe of.

The people, the staff, the Board, our musicians, our patrons, supporters and donors are hands down the best part of working for the Symphony. As a leader I'm constantly reminded of our communities' generosity and I couldn't ask for a better role. Working for a non-profit is a lot of work and you don't always know what's going to happen next. But what I've come to learn is that we can rely on the generosity of

our little community and it brings me so much joy to be a part of that.

Leadership Visalia was huge for us! When I first started as an Executive Director with the Symphony I joined Leadership Visalia and I'm so thankful that I did. The program was great and provided me with a lot of fantastic resources that have continued to be vital for our organization as we focus on growth and long-term success. It helped plug us in with key leaders in our community and the Chamber is always there for us as a resource. Whether it's advocacy, the monthly newsletter e-blasts or news updates on social media, we believe the Chamber is a big part of our continued success.

We exist and provide unique experiences that cannot be duplicated! What's great about the Symphony is you will never experience the same concert twice. You don't even have to be a fan of classical music! We offer such a great diversity in music and showcase everything from film music to Beethoven and I encourage everybody to try out a concert at least once in their life. There's something truly special about feeling the vibrations of these all-acoustic instruments in a room with hundreds of other people. When you listen to a live concert, close your eyes and just allow your imagination to take you places with the music, you create a unique experience that you cannot get anywhere else.

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

Name: Vickie Goudreau
Company: Innovation Commercial Flooring
Title: Owner

How has the Chamber and the Ambassador Program helped you or your business to grow?

The Chamber provides so many opportunities to get involved in. I have many favorites, but the most favorite is Leadership Visalia. That gave me an inside look at Visalia that is invaluable! Serving as an Ambassador gives me opportunities to meet business leaders and support their businesses. And who knows, they may need my products and services in the future. Good business means good community and we are happy to be a small part of

that.

Why is it important to employees to get involved in the Visalia Chamber programs and events?

It's important because it's what makes for a vibrant business community. The programs and events are well thought out and orchestrated. Through many of these events, I have met amazing business leaders who have helped propel me forward along with helping our business move forward. It also gives you and your company voice when something comes up that is important to you. Being involved gives you a place at the table.

The best part of working for your company is...?

I love meeting people. By far, this is my favorite part. Another meaningful part is providing employment for others. We are just as committed to our team as we are to our clients. Seeing them happy at work is priceless.

Where is your favorite place to go in Visalia with friends and family?

The Christmas Tree Auction is the best party in the Central Valley—hands down! We have attended many. Imagine U is the most creative space for kids! Any reason to go there, a mixer or special event, is good for me. For a good cup of coffee, I enjoy Maverick's Coffee House and Component Coffee Lab. The Planning Mill is simply the best pizza ever and fun atmosphere. And I love shopping Downtown Visalia.

JR. CEO SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Name: Beau and Wes Scholl
Company: What the Freeze
Title: Owners and Operators

How did you come up with your business idea?

Wes: After the JR CEO program we knew we wanted to start our own business! So, we googled ideas! We came across a ice cream cart and knew that was our destiny!

What's the best thing you learned from the Jr. CEO program?

Beau: The best thing we learned during the program was everything! A spotlight part of the program was when we learned about handling the money of a business. It helped us come up with a plan to start our own and pay our parents back while making money too!

Why would you recommend the Jr. CEO program to other students?



Wes: I would most definitely recommend it! Its a very good way to help kids understand business ethics and improve their social skills.

What's next for your business?

Beau: In the future we might start scooping ice cream or expand to an ice cream truck. But, first we need to get a little stronger and our drivers licenses. Both would be helpful. For now, we happy with our cart!

What is your favorite local business to visit in Visalia with friends and family?

Wes and Beau: Hands down, Chapalas!



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Advertisement for Oktoberfest featuring pretzels, beer, and logos for Visalia Chamber of Commerce, Budweiser, and VOSSLER Farms. Text: VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Oktoberfest VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/OKTOBERFEST

Congratulations to the **Visalia Economic Development Corporation** who celebrated their 25th Anniversary in June!

**Fresno Yosemite International Airport** teamed up with American Airlines to welcome passengers flying on American's inaugural flight from Fresno to Chicago, a new route operating daily.



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**Tulare County Animal Services** announced they received a \$75,000 grant from Petco Love, to support its lifesaving work for

animals in Tulare County.

**The Assistance League of Visalia's** annual May Derby Daze Silent Auction and Dinner raised over \$28,000 for children

and families throughout Tulare County! The ALV would like to thank all of Visalia, neighboring areas, and sponsors with their continued help in supporting our community programs for another year.

Congratulations to **CSET** who is celebrating 45 years of community action in Tulare County.

**Prestige Assisted Living** hosted a car parade in May for their residents.

**Valley Children's Healthcare** was recognized by News & World Re-

port for the sixth year in a row as one of the best children's hospitals in the country. In addition, Valley Children's Patient fund received a \$1 million donation to assist families who have to take extended leave from work to manage childcare.

**Bank of the Sierra** provided COVID-19 funding through the Sierra Grant Program. Over \$64,000 was awarded to 17 Central Valley nonprofits during the first quarter.

Congratulations to Capt. Luma Fahoum from the **Visalia Police Department** who was promoted in May and is currently the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

highest-ranking female in the department.

**Perfection Pet Foods** is expanding by building a new mixing tower at their plant in the Visalia Industrial Park.

**Family Services of Tulare County** hosted their annual Guest Chef Series: Summer Picnic Edition in June. 200 gourmet picnic kits were distributed and over \$100,000 was raised to help children, adults, and families in Tulare County heal from violence and thrive in healthy relationships.

Congratulations to **Component Coffee Lab** who celebrated their third year in business!

The **Tulare County Sheriff's Office** and **Visalia Police Department** participated in the Law Enforcement Torch Run, accompanying the Special Olympics Torch, "The Flame of Hope", through Visalia.

Congratulations to Reggie Ellis, president/CEO of **The Sun-Gazette** who is celebrating 20 years with the newspaper!



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Eagle Mountain cheers 25 years

June marked Eagle Mountain Casino's 25th anniversary! The tribe and casino designated the entire month of June a celebration and had many events and special occasions planned for guests and team members alike.

The casino had big winnings throughout the anniversary month, with promotions like Baby Boomers, First Responders, Father's Day, and the big Anniversary Spin where forty lucky guests won a share of up to \$130,000. Then on Thursday, June 24 at 8pm 5 guests spun the Anniversary Wheel to win a share of \$25,000 cash! One lucky guest won \$10,000!



In addition to celebrating with guests, the tribe also honored current council members of the Tule River Tribe, as well as the very first tribal council members and year one team members, during a special 25th anniversary event. Additionally, for the dedicated team members, many of whom have been with the property since its opening in 1996, and many

others celebrating five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years with the casino, a special celebration took place recognizing them all for their years of service and dedication.

"It is the team members who make the difference, and we appreciate them each and every day. It is because of them that Eagle Mountain Casino has become an award-winning property known for its exceptional service providing superior guest experiences." Explains Casino General Manager, Matthew Mingrone. "To celebrate our team, we are doing 25 days of giveaways including TV's and Beats headphones as well as over \$25,000 in gift cards, along with special discounts available on property and special anniversary t-shirts."

The casino continues to focus on team and current guests while the new property off of Highway 65 in Porterville continues to progress with plans to open in the fall of 2022. The new 100,000+ square foot property will boast more slots, tables, dining options, and live entertainment. Continued updates on the casino project will be available ongoing at eaglemtcasino.com.

## Tulare County Fair and World Ag Expo return to showgrounds



By Reggie Ellis  
President and Publisher  
The Sun-Gazette



Two major county events held in Tulare have emerged from the medically induced coma imposed on the last year and a half.

On June 14, one day before California lifted most of its social distancing restrictions, the Tulare County Fair announced on social media it would return to a traditional, in-person event this year.

"It's a New Beginning" for the Tulare County Fair! the post read. "The Tulare County Fair will open on Wednesday, Sept. 15, with new rides, tribute bands, the popular Destruction Derby, fun fair food, livestock competitions and more." No additional information was provided but the post did say it would be releasing information soon on its web site, www.tcfair.org.

Many aspects of the fair were held virtually last year with online exhibits, a drive-thru food festival and a Junior Livestock Auction that was live streamed. The modified version of the fair attracted 3,500 people per day. The fair was the first drive-thru fair in the state of California. The event offered traditional and new tasty treats, including a bacon churro cheeseburger, along with displays

of local art, a dinosaur exhibit, a circus act, antique tractors, live entertainment and more.

"2021 will be an awesome year as the fair returns in more of a normal offering and including some new features," Tulare Chamber of Commerce CEO Donnette Silva Carter said. "The theme is 'New Beginnings' and very appropriate as all of us look toward a new beginning for business and community after suffering through the pandemic."

The city of Tulare got more good news the very next day when the World Ag Expo, the largest agricultural equipment show, announced it would return to an in-person event at the International Agri-Center showgrounds in 2022. The 2022 World Ag Expo is scheduled for Feb. 8, 9 and 10 at the International Agri-Center in Tulare, California. Ag businesses interested in becoming an exhibitor can request space at bit.ly/WAE-22GetSpace.

"We are excited to be back on track," International Agri-Center CEO Jerry Sinift said. "The 2020 show was fantastic but was followed by COVID uncertainty. Our team did an amazing job creating a solid digital show for 2021 and now we're all happy to be planning a live event for 2022."

Exhibitors have been renewing their spaces in droves since March with 68% of booth spaces already sold. Another 10% of spaces are pending as returning exhibitors are requesting expansion of existing space and new exhibitors are signing up for the first time. Major manufacturers including John Deere, AGCO, Case IH, New Holland, Kubo-

See SHOWGROUNDS on page 5

### LEADERSHIP VISALIA

## What Leadership Visalia means to me

Wendy K. Hewes

Assistant Corporate Controller  
California Dairies, Inc.

I have found that during my professional career that 75-80% of my time is spent managing people, and if you have managed people before, then you know that is one of the hardest jobs to do. What works for one person may not work for everybody. My desire to be a good leader when working with my team, drove me to seek out in-

sight and training to be a better motivator and mentor. I had attended an Impact Leadership Conference in March 2019 and had really benefited from the speakers and topics. This conference is where I learned about the Leadership Visalia program. Leadership to me is an aspiring role, Simon Sinek, "Start With Why" and Justin Patton, "It Starts With You", these dynamic individuals are truly inspiring and make you want to be the best that you can be. They really made me think about how to reach those goals and how to reach an audience. Considering the "ripple effect" of how what I say and do affected those around me directly and indirectly. I wanted to learn how to inspire and motivate others, communicate ideas and goals, be flexible in my thoughts and knowledge. How to instill a vision in others and maximize the efforts of my team. I wanted to be an effective leader amongst my department and to my colleagues.

The Leadership Visalia program will get you out of your comfort zone and exposes you to a variety of leadership topics. The program really opened my eyes regarding community topics and all the leadership roles in our communities

and ways that one can participate. Initially the class completed the DISC assessment on themselves and it was amazing what was discovered, not only about ourselves and others, but about the inner workings of each group. Remember what I said initially about what works for one person may not work for everybody? This is where one will learn about their goals, fears, how they are influenced, values and effectiveness, and you will see how the other character groupings work and think as well. You then see how individuals with very different character assessments make a truly awesome team. You will also learn what your leadership style is, identify where your strengths are, as well as the areas where you need to grow. I found the evening sessions to be extremely helpful as we discussed a wide range of topics. For me how to have those difficult conversations that we as leaders will have at some point in our personal and professional lives was extremely helpful in my current role today.

The Leadership Visalia Program was the most effective program I have been through to-date. It forced me to push my boundaries and discover capabilities I did not know I possessed. This program requires a commitment, the commitment that you are going to invest in yourself. When I started I had no idea where the journey was going to take me, but by the time I completed this program I knew exactly where I was headed.

### THE LAW AT WORK

## Asking a job applicant about prior salary



By Brett T. Abbott  
Gubler & Abbott LLP

A job interview can be a tricky time for an employer. The employer wants to gain as much information as possible about the job applicant, yet at the same time, California law prohibits certain questions that may be discriminatory. But what about asking a job applicant about his or her prior salary?

In 2018, a law went into effect banning employer inquiries into an individual's salary history. The law applies to all employers, including local and state governments. The law expanded upon California's equal pay protections, which require equal pay, regardless of gender, for equal work.

Under this law, an employer cannot rely upon an applicant's prior salary history "as a factor in determining whether to offer

See SALARY on page 6

## Cal Water donation keeps aquatic center kicking

By John Lindt  
Sierra2theSea.net

A city councilmember's proposal to build an aquatic center in Visalia has resurfaced with some money to keep the idea afloat.

Earlier this month, City Councilmember Greg Collins, who has been championing the project for four years, announced he had received a commitment from California Water Service to donate \$500,000 toward the aquatic center project over a 10-year period. Known as Cal Water, the private utility firm provides water service to 28 communities including Visalia.

Steve Johnson, manager of Cal Water's Visalia District, said the money would be paid for out of a special fund set aside for com-


munity projects and would not be passed on to Cal Water customers. He said the money is contingent on the city approving the facility, which has been a tough sell for the rest of the council.

"We really like this project because it benefits a large portion of the community," Johnson said. "A project like this has implications for nearly every age group and hopefully the promise of this money will help inspire other funds to help make it happen."

Collins said the money from Cal Water would be used to help offset the cost of annual maintenance which had been estimated as high as \$250,000 by the Aquatics Center Committee Collins formed in 2018.

See AQUATIC on page 5

# Ask Jena



What travel opportunities does the Chamber offer?

The Chamber has many travel opportunities planned for 2021 and 2022! Visit [visaliachamber.org/travel](http://visaliachamber.org/travel) for more information.

How can I post job openings to the Chamber's web site?

As a member you can post jobs and events to the Chamber's website through your Member Portal. Need help? Contact Jena directly at [jena@visaliachamber.org](mailto:jena@visaliachamber.org).

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message: [jena@visaliachamber.org](mailto:jena@visaliachamber.org)

## TRAVEL

with THE CHAMBER




VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/TRAVEL

**EDUCATION**

# Back to in-person graduations, summer school

Visalia Unified was pleased to offer in-person commencement ceremonies for students graduating this year. Following a survey given to parents and seniors, nearly 80% of both chose an in-person, walk-through format, which included the graduate and ten guests each. Commencement ceremonies began the morning of June 1, 2021, with Visalia Adult School awarding 63 high school diplomas, high school equivalencies, or Career Technical Education (CTE) certifications to students. Also on June 1, 2021, Mt. Whitney High School awarded 339 high school diplomas during their commencement ceremony at Mineral King Bowl. On June 2, Golden West High School awarded 355 diplomas to seniors at the Community Stadium, while Sequoia High School held a more intimate ceremony on their campus and awarded 79 seniors their diplomas. El Diamante High School and Visalia Technical Early College High School held their commencement ceremonies on June 3, 2021. El Diamante awarded 395 diplomas at Mineral Kings Bowl and VTEC awarded 42 diplomas on their school campus at the VTEC Arboretum. The week concluded on Friday, June 4,



2021, with Redwood High School awarding 533 diplomas to their students at Mineral King Bowl. The final commencement ceremony was held on Monday, June 7, 2021, at Mineral King Bowl by Visalia Charter Independent Study (VCIS) who awarded 227 senior students their

diplomas. Congratulations to the class of 2021! This year was not easy for students, teachers, and staff, but together, VUSD made it through.

Visalia Unified School District summer school began on Tuesday, June 8. VUSD planned to serve 9,800 students: 5,000 seats for high school, 2,400 seats for middle school, and 2,400 seats for the elementary sites. The high school and middle school summer school session will be a six-week program (June 8 through July 15), and the elementary summer school session is a three-week program (June 8 through June 24). This year's summer school program was a significant undertaking, but thanks to the hard work and collaboration of site and District teams, VUSD was able to provide valuable expanded learning opportunities to its students.



**REAL ESTATE**

# It's a hot seller's market



By **Jordan Mulroony**  
Rock 'n' Real Estate



and it sometimes feels like an endless amount of outbidding? The first step is a mind shift change of the word winning. Only just a couple years ago, winning as a buyer was sometimes paying less for a home than its listed price or even getting some closing cost incentive from the seller. Today buyers must change their views of winning to being able to have a roof over their head and a place to call home. Even in this market many buyers are not having to settle on the home they purchase, they are just required to put their strongest and best foot forward when writing offers.

Many ways to win in a multiple offer situation are to be preapproved by a local direct lender. Sellers often will look at two offers that are the exact same and choose to accept the offer with a local lender for ease of communication during a transaction. Loyal to local doesn't stop in the real estate market. Buyer's also must be more willing to take on repairs themselves as sellers are less likely to do repairs to a home when another buyer is willing to take a home as is. Lastly, a strong offer in this market is not only an above asking price offer, rather it has a higher purchase price along with some cash to bridge a gap in appraisal value and purchase price. This can be a deal breaker for many sellers who are looking for a certain amount of money to clear when they sell their home.

My advice to young professionals wanting to buy their own home right now would be to be patient. It can feel somewhat discouraging writing multiple offers and not winning, but there are a lot of great local real estate professionals who will help to guide you through this market and be able to hand you keys on the other end of it. Write strong and aggressive offers and be willing to give a little more to get the house of your dreams. Interest rates are very low and with a 30-year fixed rate mortgage your rate and payment will be the same for the entire term of the loan. Change your concept of winning to becoming a homeowner and you will get the home you are looking for.



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# Free OSHA-approved COVID safety training

CSET is pleased to announce Free Safety Training Approved by OSHA through our Safety Training Outreach Program (STOP). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor-Susan Harwood Training Grant, STOP offers free training sessions on COVID-19 in the Workplace. STOP has developed training to help workers address COVID-19

safety and health hazards in the workplace. Additionally, STOP engages employers and workers from small businesses, especially high priority populations like high-hazard industries; temporary workers; minority workers; low-literacy workers; and workers and employers in new small businesses. "Employers in our region de-

serve quality training for their employees," shared Raquel Roa, STOP Program Manager. "We are so pleased to share this resource at no cost, and keep employers and employees educated on the ever changing rules and regulations for COVID."

The two-hour, no cost training is available in person or via remote learning on Zoom. A certificate will be provided upon completion. Training begins with a brief overview of OSHA history, whistle-blower information, and employer and employee responsibilities on a job site. Training topics will cover the following: introduction to COVID-19, employer preparations, worker exposure, use of PPE, handwashing techniques, proper sanitizing, and social distancing. Trainings are flexible and can be scheduled at times and dates that best suit employer schedules.

This free, online training is available through September 30, 2021. We proudly provide in person anywhere! This training is also available in Spanish. For more information and to register your employees for training, contact Roxana Huerta at (559) 741-4651 or osha@cset.org.

Community Services Employment Training (CSET) inspires youth, families and communities to achieve self-reliance through innovative pathways and collaboration. Since 1976, CSET has been the Community Action Agency for Tulare County. We are a nonprofit agency established to fight America's War on Poverty.

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## RIBBON CUTTING



### Milestone Pediatrics, Inc.

3435 S. Demaree Street | (559) 746-7337 | milestone-pediatrics.com

Milestone Pediatrics, Inc. hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their new location that opened on June 14. They provide health care services for children from birth through age 21.

## DARLING

Continued from page 1

matic staccations.

"We are grateful to have the overwhelming support of our local community," said Seaward. "They really blew us away and we could not have done this without them."

Other U.S. hotels making the top 25 list include Emeline (#7) in Charleston, SC, The Rockaway Hotel (#10) in New York, NY, and Rise Uptown (#20) in Phoenix, Ariz.

The Darling Hotel is a 32-room boutique hotel located in California's San Joaquin Valley near Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The four-sto-

ry building was constructed in 1935 as an expansion of the original County Courthouse built in the 1880s. When the current Courthouse was constructed in 1958, the building was used for a variety of purposes but has been vacant since 2008.

Signs of the building's rich history echo throughout its walls. The first-floor vault has been converted to a wine cellar. Original 1930s doors and antique light fixtures have been restored and rehung. All the way to the fourth floor, where one of the executive suites retains the wood paneling from the original chambers from the buildings time as a venerable courthouse and Board of Su-

pervisors chambers.

Historic photos and blueprints of the original courthouse square, courthouse and art-deco annex grace the walls of every floor as windows into the past. The classic black and white photos complement the more modern, mixed media pieces by COS art professor Matt Rangel, whose topographic drawings of the Sierra Nevada and Kaweah watershed are brought to life with drawings of native species and hiking notes. Elements of the hotel's art deco logo design can be found in the hallway doors, patterned carpet, windows and rooftop railing.

For more information, visit [TheDarlingVisalia.com](http://TheDarlingVisalia.com).

## SHOWGROUNDS

Continued from page 1

ta, and Kioti have all committed to the February event.

"We're getting a lot of positive feedback from exhibitors," said Lisa McCrea, exhibitor services leader. "They are eager to be here with us in 2022 and are looking forward to a great show!"

The return of the live event is also an economic boon for the Central Valley and California. In 2020, World Ag Expo generated \$52.3 million in economic output, supported 568 jobs, and contributed \$20.3 million in labor income in California. Tulare County saw the most benefit where spending totaled \$30.9 million, supported 384 jobs, and contributed \$12.6 million in labor income.

"The need to hit the pause button on World Ag Expo resulted in a negative financial impact for area hotels, restaurants, and other businesses, many of which were already suffering the effects of the intermittent and partial shuttering," Silva Carter said. "From our conversations with owners and managers, we know that

they look forward to the return of the event with great anticipation. It will be nice to see the return of the over \$50 million dollars in economic impact next year as our businesses continue on the path of recovery."

The 2021 World Ag Expo Online continues to attract visitors and has new content available to users each month. June is featuring 31 dairy and livestock seminars with more than 100 exhibitors available in the same categories. July will focus on Irrigation; the full 2021 editorial calendar can be viewed at [bit.ly/WAEOnlineEditorialCalendar](http://bit.ly/WAEOnlineEditorialCalendar). Attendees can visit the online show for free and just need to set up a free My Show Planner account to view seminars. To get started visit [bit.ly/WAE-21Online](http://bit.ly/WAE-21Online).

"We are excited for the return of both the Tulare County Fair this September and the World Ag Expo in February 2022," Silva Carter said. "Both events celebrate the foundation of our community and county, provide economic impact, educate ag industry businesses and youth, provide entertainment, and create the opportunity for engagement and ag sustainability."

## AQUATIC

Continued from page 3

The council was turned off by the idea the facility may not generate enough revenue to cover the ongoing costs. Most of the maintenance would be covered by use fees charged to youth swim teams, swim lessons, aquatic therapy for those rehabilitating from injuries and water fitness for the elderly, as well as hosting travel and youth team tournaments and regional meets for high school swim and water polo teams.

"If the city were to fall short on maintenance, this could help fill in the gaps to minimize the city's subsidization of the complex," Collins said.

Collins scaled back the project based on additional feedback from council members. Collins reduced the competition lanes from 50 to 38 meters, which would allow for 12 lanes of swimming and is wide enough to accommodate a full-sized water polo area. The competition pool now has a max depth of 7 feet, which would eliminate diving but save on

See AQUATIC on page 6



PRESENTS

# The State of Tulare County

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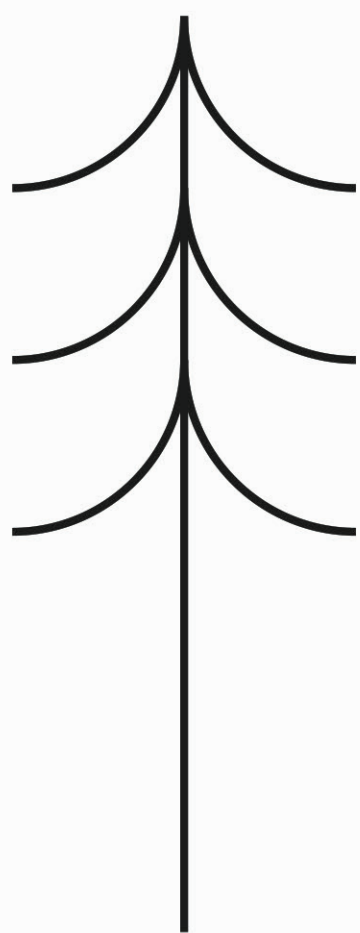
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**HEALTH CARE NOTE**

## The future of care starts here



**Kerry Hydash**  
President and CEO  
Family HealthCare Network



This month and through August, Family HealthCare Network will be seeing new medical students and residents, dental residents, and physician assistant trainees joining our team. All of these early career professionals come to our facilities every year through a series of joint partnerships with UCSF, A.T. Still University, and NYU Langone Health. These programs allow FHCN to thrive as a provider of health services, as a learning environment for students, and as a hub for health care education advancement in the San Joaquin Valley. Additionally, as a continuously hiring organization, our efforts to bring these individuals to our communities helps to stimulate the local economy. Our training programs are intended to educate students in how to provide care effectively in underserved settings, leading a number of these students and residents to decide to stay in the community at the end of their training.

Shortages of health care providers has plagued us at the local, state and national level for the last several years. Competition for the limited number of students, residents, and trainees has become increasingly tight. While it is certainly the case that Visalia and its surrounding communities have many natural features and entertainment opportunities to attract individuals to us, our experience suggests that such attractions may not-in and of themselves—be sufficient for health care. By hosting students, residents, and trainees, we can provide that extra sense of connection to the community that can entice them to remain. By opening our doors to students, we give them a perspective about our community that will make it more probable that they remain or return to FHCN at the end of their program.

We currently have over 300 students, residents, and trainees spread throughout our 41 sites spanning three counties. Our NYU Langone dental residents typically become full-time hires upon completion of their program. Our UCSF medical residents are engaged in earlier years to learn more about FHCN's hiring opportunities. Several of our ATSU physician assistant students become full time staff members upon graduation, and over the last few years through the excellent teaching of our program director, the Osteopathic students have had a 100% match into their residency program of choice. These are testaments to the incredible work of our program directors and staff who engage with students and residents and showcase our community in a positive light. We're incredible proud to have taken on this role in our communities as an educational stepping stone to increasing providers in our area.



ADOBE STOCK

**SALARY**

Continued from page 3

employment...or what salary to offer an applicant." "Salary history" encompasses both an individual's rate of pay, as well as other benefits received by the individual. In addition, employers are prohibited from seeking information about an applicant's salary history from other sources, either directly or indirectly. This means that an employer would not be allowed to ask the applicant's former employer about the appli-

cant's salary history.

There are, however, certain exemptions to the salary history restriction. First, employers can review salary history information that is publicly available pursuant to state or federal law. Second, salary history can be discussed if the applicant "voluntarily and without prompting" discloses his or her history to a potential employer. If the applicant so discloses their salary history, the employer is free to rely on that information in determining the applicant's pay.

Employers would be wise to re-

visit their recruitment and hiring policies to ensure they comply with the law.

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 (bta@thecalifornialawyers.com). For specific employment law advice or other legal assistance, contact Gubler & Abbott (559) 625-9600, 1110 N. Chinoweth St., Visalia, CA 93291 (www.thecalifornialawyers.com).



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

## Read for Life awards three scholarships

For the first time in its 32-year history, three seniors from Visalia and Tulare high schools each received Read for Life's annual Pass the Word scholarship awarded to outstanding Tulare County students who have served their community by volunteering to promote literacy.

Helaina "Lainey" Flores from Tulare Western, Mia Reynolds from Tulare Union and Lily Stetson from Redwood High School will each receive \$500 in Pass the Word scholarships from the Visalia County Center Rotary and Read for Life.

Lainey Flores performed 330 hours as a student/peer tutor and volunteer at Tulare Public Library. She organized this year's "Bounty of Books" and coordinated times with leadership students and educators to use a zoom link to enter classrooms and read to students. She also coordinated book drop-offs and returns during this time. She will attend UC Davis in the Fall.

Lily Stetson volunteered at the Visalia branch of the Tulare

County Library, served on its Teen Advisory Group, and coordinated a summer reading program which included a Life-sized Candyland and "May the Fourth Be With You" event. She will attend Fordham University.

Mia Reynolds tutored her 7-year-old brother in reading while her mother Zoom taught middle school. "We spent hours learning about insects and animals, labeled diagrams, and made information books." She will attend Utah State University in the Fall.

The award is open to all graduating high school seniors in Tulare County who have performed a minimum of 50 hours of volunteer service outside of school which focuses on improving literacy. Eligible applicants must have a minimum 3.0 GPA and plan to attend a college, university or vocational trade school in the U.S.

For information on Pass the Word, email Susan Graves at susan@readforlife.org.



## Provost & Pritchard ranked first in state



The Zweig Group, a leading publishing company, recently ranked Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group as the best firm to work for in California as part of its "2021 Best Civil Engineering Firms to Work For" nationwide survey. Provost & Pritchard ranked sixth overall, and second amongst firms of similar size across all disciplines nationwide. This marks the ninth consecutive year that Provost & Pritchard has been ranked in the top ten in the nation and the sixth consecutive year that it has been the top ranked firm in California.

The Zweig Group's "Best Firms to Work For" award is a prestigious ranking to honor the creation of outstanding workplaces at civil, structural, and multidiscipline engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, geotechnical, and environmental firms. The top firms are recognized for their ability to create these outstanding workplaces through workplace design, teamwork, excellent benefits and amenities and work culture.

"We are honored to continue to be ranked among the "Best Civil Engineering Firms to Work For" nationwide," said Ronald Samuelian, Provost & Pritchard's president. "In such an unprecedented year of staff having to work remotely, we are thankful to have such a flexible and dedicated group of talented professionals. We will continue to strive to maintain a flexible work environment with a family atmosphere and stay true to our philosophy that people who enjoy their work are happier, more productive and more satisfied."

Provost & Pritchard's final ranking was determined by the results of a confidential Employee Satisfaction Survey of full-time staff. Questions were based on a variety of topics including culture, management style, benefits, staff recognition, compensation, professional development, recruiting, and retention. Provost & Pritchard has been selected for the "Best Firms" list each of the 19 years they have participated in the award competition, including 12 top ten finishes.

Established in 1968, Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group has a strong tradition of engineering and consulting excellence throughout California. With office locations in Clovis, Visalia, Bakersfield, Modesto, Los Banos, Chico and Sacramento, the firm features a mix of seasoned professionals, complemented by younger staff with fresh ideas. Provost & Pritchard specializes in civil, agricultural, and structural engineering, environmental and land use planning, hydrogeology and geology, surveying, and construction management services in the areas of water resources, municipal infrastructure, agriculture, site development, and environmental compliance. For more information, visit www.provostandpritchard.com or email info@ppeng.com.

**AQUATIC**

Continued from page 5

the cost of construction and maintenance. In all, the changes are projected to have lowered the cost of the complex from more than \$12 million to about \$10 million.

"The unique design takes a lot of the council's concerns into consideration," Collins said.

The complex would still include a kiddie pool, which would only be open in the summer months, locker rooms, as well as two walls dedicated as a local aquatics hall of fame, featuring high school and youth swim team records. Collins presented the new version of the complex to the city's Parks and Recreation Commission on June 8 after receiving the promise of funding from Cal Water. He said he plans to meet with two of the commissioners to go over the proposal before bringing it back to the commission for a recommendation. He hopes the commission will bring their recommendation to the city council later this year.

Collins, and aquatic enthusiasts, say there is a growing need for an aquatic center in Visalia because the amount of available time in the pool is shrinking for nearly every group. He said public swim time, lap swim for exercise, triathlete training and swim lessons are constantly competing with high school swim, water polo and dive teams. Collins said the City of Visalia and Visalia Unified School District have an agreement that high school athletics get scheduling preference during the school year but that City programs exercise that right in the summer months, but there is always overlap.

The aquatic center seemed dead in the water in 2019 when the council voted 3-2 to deny Collins' request to put the facility back on the council's agenda. Collins called for the vote after the council received a thorough report from the Parks and Recreation Commission during a joint meeting on March 12, 2019.

Collins first floated the idea of an aquatics center in 2017 and asked the council to approve \$25,000 to hire a consulting firm to look into the hard costs of building a city-owned facility. The aquatics center was originally proposed as a stand-alone facility for competition, recreation and rehabilitation on the dirt lot at the corner of Burke and Oak streets across from the Visalia's Emergency Communications Center (VECC) which opened in 2017. The council had a little bit of sticker shock when the Aquatics Center Committee presented an estimated cost between \$12 million and \$15 million. There was broad support for the project from the public and the council but both seemed worried about the cost, an issue which has plagued swim complex projects in the past.