

# www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 15 | March 2022

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## EVENTS

### MARCH 24 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.  
Location: Visalia First

### MARCH 31 Business After Hours

Time: 4 p.m.  
Location: Quail Park at Shannon Ranch  
3440 W. Flagstaff Ave., Visalia

### FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

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

Time: 8 a.m.

### FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

### YPN Monthly Meet-Up

Time: 5:30 p.m.  
Location: TBA on YPN Facebook

## TRAVEL WITH US

### APRIL 19-26, 2022 Highlights of Italy's Amalfi Coast

### APRIL 25-MAY 1, 2022 Southern Charm

### JUNE 11-17, 2022 Landscapes & Lighthouses of Coastal Maine

### SEPTEMBER 3-11, 2022 Western Canada's Rockies, Lakes & Wine Country

### OCTOBER 5-12, 2022 New England Rails & Trails

### OCTOBER 23-27, 2022 Spotlight on San Antonio

### OCTOBER 29-NOVEMBER 6, 2022 Wonders of the Danube River Cruise

### NOVEMBER 1-8, 2022 Irish Discovery

### DECEMBER 1-5, 2022 Christmas Markets of Montreal & Quebec City

### MAY 7-22, 2023 Flavors of Portugal & Spain



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CST #2006766-20

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CST #2044099-20

Chamber Explorations  
CST #2048841-40

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www.visaliachamber.org/travel

## Restaurant owners, employees feeling pressure from unstable economy



PHOTOS BY RIGOBERTO MORAN

Chapala Grill has been short staffed for months and has struggled to entice new employees to come into the fold. As a result they have taken care to ask customers to bear with them through service.

Prolonged pandemic has put local business owners and workers in a tight spot as inflation drives prices up and workers demand more wages



**Ben Irwin**  
Reporter  
The Sun-Gazette

Pedro Mendez comes from a family of generational Central Valley restaurant owners who've devoted their lives to creating places for others to eat, laugh, make memories and enjoy life. Mendez has owned Visalia's Chapala Grill for 18 years, and his parents also own Azul in town.

The last two years of the pandemic have been hard on restaurant owners like the Mendez's and businesses that deal directly with people. In 2020 the federal government helped businesses hit hard by the pandemic with the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. The state paid out billions in unemployment to Californians out of work. But those times have long since passed.

A 7% inflation rate in the United States—the highest in over four decades—combined with ongoing supply chain issues have driven overhead through the roof for businesses like Chapala Grill. Men-



dez said prices for their raw materials, beef, pork and produce are "ridiculously high right now," and buy-order minimums that were \$300 are now \$550, increasing the risk of not having enough food, or too much—both options are an operating loss for restaurants.

Mendez said he's been blessed to have held on to the same tried-and-true crew for years, with the exception of a few cooks and employees who have left since the pandemic began. He's operating Chapala Grill short-staffed and having to charge more to loyal customers for less service.

"Even when we've increased our prices, when I'm making more money, we're still losing money, because everything is so expensive," Mendez said. "We have a sign on the front door that says,

See **ECONOMY** on page 5

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### Want to sharpen your saw?



**Gail Zurek**  
President and CEO  
Visalia Chamber

"We must never become too busy sawing to take time to sharpen the saw." -Dr. Stephen R. Covey. What have you done lately to invest in the development of your team? Perhaps, an even better question is, when was the last time you invested in developing your own leadership skills?

Life gets busy. It's easy to get pulled into a million different directions between work, home, and dealing with the pandemic's changing nature. We all have been guilty of falling into the "I'm so busy" routine and forgetting to reinvest in our staff and selves. Do you want to break the cycle? Do you want to do as Dr. Covey suggests in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and sharpen your saw?

This April, we are once again hosting IMPACT Leadership Conference. Building on 30 plus years of success with the Leadership Visalia program and the two previous successful IMPACTs, this day-long conference encourages participants to grow and develop as leaders, be more effective team members, and sharpen their saw. While it is easy to focus on the needs of an organization, supervisors, or staff, Impact Leadership Conference helps each of us focus on personal accountability as a tool for growth.

Last year, we had a virtual conference with an in-person lunch. Honestly, we weren't sure how that would be received or if it would be an effective learning method. It was a huge success. Breakout sessions conducted virtually created space where participants could see each other (rather than just the back of heads in a traditional in-person breakout session.). Beyond seeing each other, participants could interact electronically via text, reactions, or even ask a video question. The questions were more substantial, and this led to

better learning outcomes. It also meant participants could be in their office, home, or participate anywhere. In today's short-staffed world, this virtual conference allows employees to virtually be at two locations at once.

We also learned the value of being together. Lunch was wonderful, both the food and the company. Networking and connecting with other professionals are critical. Last year at lunch, participants didn't want to leave lunch to attend the virtual afternoon keynote. This year we made a change based on that feedback. This year, after our in-person outdoor lunch at The Woodlands, we move inside for an in-person keynote address. You aren't going to want to miss this.

Our afternoon in-person keynote, Lee Rubin's unique background as a Captain of the Penn State Football team and a Corporate Human Resources professional has prepared him to deliver big-time talks on big stages. He's shared timeless truths on Peak Performance and Teambuilding with such organizations as Johnson & Johnson, SHRM, and Intel. Become a celebrated national speaker looking at how teams can grow, develop and strengthen. Lee will share "5 Components of Extraordinary Teams." His message is timely. Many teams say the stress of the last two years has created or highlighted deep team divides. Lee's encouraging message gives tangible tools and a path towards a healthy team. He consistently gets rave reviews as a highly sought speaker. I'm excited that we snagged him, and he'll be joining us in person.

Feedback from previous IMPACT conferences taught us that local employers love saving travel costs without compromising valuable content. Plus, this year's hybrid model eases staffing issues. Young professionals are thrilled to be exposed to so many experts in one place. Business owners know the value of new perspectives that will drive innovation. As a Chamber, we're thrilled to once again host a Leadership Conference of this caliber in Visalia. This is certainly one you will not want to miss. Please join us. Registration details can be found on the Chamber's website, [VisaliaChamber.org/Impact](http://VisaliaChamber.org/Impact).

## CITY UPDATE

### Visalia launches first Clean California program in the state

Visalia is now officially the first in the state to launch a maintenance program with the Clean California initiative.

"This is a true example of agencies coming together for the benefit of the folks we all serve," shares Mayor Steve Nelsen. "Thanks to relationships and communication, we're addressing a need and a concern involving the 198 and state routes here in Visalia."

A transformative initiative to remove litter, create jobs and beautify California, the Clean California Litter Removal Program was approved by the Visalia City Council in October 2021. The Council approved funding for the three-year program, bringing \$556,000 from the Clean California grant program to cover project costs.

Now launched, the Litter Removal program has added additional clean-up crews to highway 198 and other state routes in Visalia like Mooney Boulevard/63. Crews will collect and recycle litter and hazardous waste along the roadways in partnership with the State's California Comeback Plan.

"It's always easier when you have a willing partner to get into these kinds of initiatives," provides Diana Gomez, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 6 Director. "It would be very difficult for Caltrans to roll out Clean California on its own, so we really appreciate the partnerships."

The program is made possible by the Clean California Local Grant Program and Caltrans District 6. The City of Visalia has contracted with Community Services Employment Training (CSET) to be the managing arm of the program and the crews on the ground.

"CSET has been around since 1986, providing services through our Conservation Corps, beautifying the communities that we serve," adds Mary Alice Escarsega-Fechner, CSET Executive Director. "We can't do it alone and we're super excited about this opportunity with Caltrans and the City, to I say, springboard Clean CA."

For more information, contact Jason Serpa, City of Visalia Public Works Department, at (559) 713-4533 or [jason.serpa@visalia.city](mailto:jason.serpa@visalia.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.



## SJV Homes pulls almost 500 building permits in '21

Home building company closed 449 homes last year, plans on six new communities to open in '22



The rental market in Tulare County has been abysmal, and housing prices are not much better. The only answer to the problem is to build more homes and that is what some developers have tried to do.

San Joaquin Valley Homes (SVJ Homes) announced on Thursday, Feb. 10 that they closed 449 homes in 2021 and are opening at least six new communities and selling out at three other neighborhoods.

SVJ Homes was particularly busy in Tulare and Kings counties last year, with more building permits pulled than any other builder, including some of America's top public homebuilders. It pulled 481 building permits in 2021. They stated that momentum will continue into 2022 when they open new communities on top of the 12 that are currently up for sale.

San Joaquin Valley Homes (SVJ Homes) is a local homebuilder with deep roots in and a strong commitment to the Central Valley. Founders Joe Leal, Jim Robinson and Randy Merrill share a vision to build quality new homes in carefully planned neighborhoods for people who love the Valley and want lasting value. In 2013, SVJ Homes combined forces with Presidio Residential Capital, a real estate development management firm in San Diego. It has since closed more than 2,500 homes and is now one of the busiest homebuilders in the San Joaquin Valley. Visit [www.sjvhomes.com](http://www.sjvhomes.com).



San Joaquin Valley  
HOMES

MEMBERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



**Name:** Wilhelmina Santana  
**Company:** Visalians Friends of the Fox Theatre  
**Title:** Executive Director

We are a performing arts venue hosting myriad of events to include live theatre, comedy, concerts, and Visalians' community favorite "Movie Nights at the Fox."

- I am a:
- Lifetime member of the International Society of



WILHELMINA SANTANA

- Female Professionals
- Recipient of the Meritorious Service Award—Kiwamis Club of East Fresno Medallion #140
- Member of the local chapter of SHRM

The best part of working for the Visalians Friends of the Fox Theatre is the support you get from the Board of Directors. The staff at the Visalia Fox Theatre is excited and eager to bring back quality events.

ANNOUNCEMENT



MARILOU MONSIVAIS

Pine, Pedroncelli and Aguilar, Inc., is pleased to announce that Marilou Monsivais has been named a new partner of the firm effective January 1, 2022.

She joins Partners: Gamaliel 'Gil' Aguilar and Joanna Mofett; and Consultants: William 'Bill' Pine, Karen Pedroncelli, Rich Artis, and Aprille Wait.

Marilou has been an associate with the firm for over 14 years. She holds an accounting degree from California State University, Fresno and is a Certified Public Accountant. She specializes in tax planning, tax preparation, and financial statement preparation.

We are excited to welcome Marilou as the firm's newest partner, and look forward to her continued commitment to providing our clients with quality service.



Certified Public Accountants

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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 Call 734-5876. Mail to: Visalia Chamber of Commerce 222 N. Garden St. #300 Visalia, CA 93291  
 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

SoCalGas among first utilities in the nation to transition its over-the-road fleet with hydrogen fuel cell electric

Delivery of Toyota Mirai hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles begins fleet transition

Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) today announced that it took delivery of 23 Toyota Mirai hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles (HFCEV), marking the company's first purchase of hydrogen-powered vehicles. The company plans to expand its fleet of HFCEVs to 50 next month, making SoCalGas among the first utilities in the nation to start transitioning to hydrogen. These HFCEVs are an important step for SoCalGas in decarbonizing its fleet and supports the company's Net Zero 2045 climate goal, which includes replacing 50% of its over-the-road fleet with clean fuel vehicles by 2025 and operating a 100% zero-emission fleet by 2035. View footage of the Toyota Mirai HFCEVs here.

"California companies must work together in the fight against climate change," said State Senator Susan Rubio. "The transportation sector is one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions in California and these types of efforts will help the state meet its climate goals."

"Each vehicle in our light duty over-the-road fleet is driven an average of 10,000 miles per year. The zero-emissions Toyota Mirai HFCEVs have a driving range of 400 miles and since they run on hydrogen the only by-product is water," said Sandra Hrna, vice president of supply chain and operations support at SoCalGas. "Transitioning some of our fleet to HFCEVs will help us reduce emissions, moving SoCalGas closer to our net zero goal and helping California reach carbon neutrality faster."

"Longo Toyota is honored to



partner with SoCalGas on their strategy to reduce emissions from their vehicle fleet and we are excited to help them with the acquisition of 50 new Toyota Mirai fuel cell electric vehicles," said Doug Eroh, president and general manager at Longo Toyota. "The Toyota Mirai is fueled with hydrogen and makes its own electricity on board while only emitting clean water from its tailpipe. We look forward to working with SoCalGas in the years to come on the acquisition and service of their clean vehicle fleet."

The light-duty vehicle industry has started to shift towards zero emissions vehicles, currently dominated by battery EVs (BEVs) and complemented by hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles. SoCalGas' recently released economy-wide technical analysis reveals that in the light-duty vehicle sector, BEVs and HFCEVs could address different use cases. For vehicles with longer range requirements or higher utilization needs, such as taxis, ride-share fleet, or SoCalGas' own fleet, HFCEVs could be cost competitive in the 2020s.

Earlier this year, in partnership with Hyzon Motors, SoCalGas announced plans to deploy its first hydrogen-powered fuel cell electric utility truck. As part of the partnership, Hyzon will deliver a Class 3 commercial service body utility truck to SoCalGas in 2022. The truck is expected to reach a maximum

See SOCALGAS on page 4

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.

Keystone Members:

- T-Mobile

Small Business Members:

- KOA Visalia

RENEWING

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

Cornerstone Members:

- Southern California Edison Company

Community Investor Members:

- SS Shirts

Business Connector Members:

- BSK Associates\*
- Fresno Yosemite International Airport
- Giant Chevrolet Cadillac
- Lotus Fresno

Marriott Hotel

Small Business Members:

- Brian Keeley's American Floors
- Cal-Valley Insurance Services
- Little Italy Restaurant
- Pacific Capital Strategies, Inc.
- Salt + Light Works\*
- Seals Construction\*
- The Mill Pizzeria & Tap Room
- Visalia Sales Yard\*

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Central Valley Regional Center\*
- Farmer Bob's World
- Saint Anthony's Retreat and Conference Center
- Transitions Children's Services

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Hospital Council\*
- Visalia Fox Theatre

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

RIBBON CUTTING



ARA Kaweah Dialysis Center

3446 S. Mooney Boulevard | (559) 741-9263

ARA Kaweah Dialysis Center held a ribbon cutting on Feb. 15 in celebration of their grand opening.

T-Mobile begins hiring for hundreds of jobs at brand-new Kingsburg customer experience center

As progress continues on the construction of T-Mobile's new Customer Experience Center (CEC) in Kingsburg, CA, the company is now looking to hire numerous roles for its award-winning Team of Experts service model. The new CEC, located at 333 Sierra Street, is currently slated to open in the second quarter of 2022.

Beginning this month, T-Mobile is aggressively hiring for Associate Experts and other frontline positions to work at the Kingsburg CEC. As part of the Team of Experts, they will provide the company's customers with a dedicated team of highly trained representatives that can deliver a best-in-class customer care experience. Potential candidates can find out more information—and apply—on T-Mobile's Career website and by visiting the Associate Expert and other Kingsburg CEC job postings.



In total, the company's new CEC is looking to ultimately add 1,000 employees from the wealth of talent in California's Central Valley—from Fresno to Kingsburg, Visalia to Hanford—and everywhere in between! Employees will be eligible for T-Mobile's great benefits, including:

- Competitive pay
- Paid time off
- Health benefits (medical, dental, vision)
- Tuition assistance & ongoing education
- T-Mobile discounts
- Family resources (childcare, surrogacy,

See T-MOBILE on page 4

JOIN US



BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

March 31st, 2022  
 4:00pm - 6:00pm

RSVP: visaliachamber.org/bah

HOSTED BY





**Eagle Mountain Casino** recognized eight of their team members with the prestigious Eagle Award. The award recognizes team members who exemplified the core values of what makes the culture of the Casino. The acronym E.A.G.L.E. stands for

Extraordinary, Achievement, Greatness, Leadership, Excellence.

Congratulations to Robert McKellar of **Farmer's Bob World** who was recognized by Senator Melissa Hurtado as the 2021 Farmer of the Year-Senate District 14.

**Bank of the Sierra** named Sean Hart as Vice President, Senior, Commercial Loan Officer for the Bank's Real Estate Industries Group and Lee Ann Pearce as Senior Vice President, Senior Commercial Agricultural Loan Officer. In addition,

Sierra Bancorp, parent of Bank of the Sierra, announced record 2021 earnings.

Congratulations to **The Darling Hotel** who announced they won a 2022 Travel Review Award from Booking.com!

**The College of the Sequoias** Foundation announced they had received \$5.4 million in gifts from a family trust, the largest gift in the college's 95-year history.

Central Valley Community Bancorp, the parent company of **Central Valley Community Bank** reported strong growth for the 2021 fiscal year, including an increased net income for the fourth quarter of \$0.57 per diluted common share.

**CSET** is providing free tax preparation services to Tulare County residents. The program prepares federal and state tax returns at no cost to households with less than \$57,000 in annual income. More information can be found at [www.cset.org/vita](http://www.cset.org/vita).

The **Visalia Rawhide** will host their annual job fair on March 5 at Valley Strong Ballpark. Applications can be found at [www.milb.com/visalia](http://www.milb.com/visalia).

Congratulations to **ERA Valley Pro Realty** who celebrat-



TRISH ARNOLD

ed 5 years in February!

**BSK Associates** announced two projects the company acted as consultants on received awards from the American Council of Engineering Companies. In addition, the company is expanding with a new analytical lab in Fresno.

Trish Arnold, of **LPL Financial** was honored as one of LPL's Financials' Top Financial Advisors. The elite award is presented to less than 7% of the firm's more than 19,000 financial advisors nationwide. Congratulations!

**Fresno Yosemite International Airport** was recognized as number one for passenger growth in the Pacific Region. Congratulations!

**Valley Children's Hospital** has established the first Cochlear Impact Center in the Valley. The center will provide children needing cochlear implants a place to visit specialists who can see them in a single location, rather than travel between centers.

**Assistance League of Visalia** will hold five Operation School Bell events to clothe Tulare County children in need. Two events in February and three events in March, ALV volunteers will join forces to provide new clothing to approximately 100 children.



ROBERT MCKELLAR



## Leadership Day Session: Public Safety & Justice

By Karishma Fazalbhoy  
Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency

The fifth day session for Leadership Visalia was held on February 18, 2022 at the Tulare County Probation Department's newly located headquarters at 3241 W. Noble Ave, Visalia CA 93277. The day session was effectively facilitated by Sharon Allison Crook (Notary Public) and Nick Huerta (owner of the Pickled Deli). The outlined Agenda included a myriad of speakers from the public safety and justice areas of expertise.

The day started out with an extensive tour of the Tulare County Probation department which was led by Margarita Luna (Deputy Chief Probation Officer). The department recently moved into 85,000 sq feet of converted office space that formerly housed Visalia Kmart. The Probation department is committed to an evidence-based approach to public safety that promotes positive behavior change. They serve the needs of both Juvenile and Adult clients through collaboration with several community partners. The Connections Center is first of its kind in Tulare County, CA which is a one-stop shop that connects youth, adults, families, and the public by providing mental health services, education, vocational training, as well as drug and alcohol recovery services at one central location. This center is the brainchild and vision of Chief Probation Officer Michelle Bonwell. There are (13) community partners that provide services at the Connections Center. Out of the whole Probation department, the Connections Center takes up



SUBMITTED PHOTO

25,000 sq feet. It is interesting to note that with their Wellness initiative, there is soothing music in the background throughout the building which provides an instant feel of relaxation and comfort.

The morning session included a panel discussion on public safety. The guest speakers were Visalia Police Chief Jason Salazar, Tulare County Assistant Sheriff Chris Wenzinger, Tulare County Fire Chief Charlie Norman, and Deputy Chief Probation Officer Margarita Luna. They started with speaking about their individual roles and tenure in their respective positions. It was interesting to note that Assistant Sheriff Wenzinger was a former graduate of Leadership Visalia. The discussions were focused on different hot topics affecting the community starting with measures taken to reduce crime rate in the community. One of the statistics discussed was when comparing the years 2017 versus 2022, the overall crime rate was down approximately 32%. VPD had become more effective in building partnerships in the community to address crime issues. To address the is-

sue of homelessness, the VPD HOPE (Homeless outreach program) partners with Tulare County Mental Health and continues to conduct outreach and provides support to the homeless population by linking them with partner resources. Similarly, Chief Norman discussed the massive City/County collaboration that took place while addressing the challenges with the KNP/Windy fires. With the growing number of dead trees in Tulare County, the Tree Mortality task force collaboration is effective in addressing the clean up of those trees which pose as hazards. Both Assistant Sheriff Wenzinger and Deputy Chief Probation Officer Luna focused on the importance of building more partnerships in the community with the collaborative approach of serving the residents of Tulare County. The panel also discussed some exciting upcoming projects: the Fire department has (17) new pieces of equipment coming in,

See LEADERSHIP on page 5

## Comcast RISE expands marketing and technology resources to all women-owned small businesses



Comcast RISE is a multi-year commitment to provide marketing, creative, media, and technology services to small businesses owned by people of color. Comcast recently expanded the program to include all women-owned small businesses. There are already over 300 California small businesses receiving Comcast RISE services.

Comcast is accepting applications for the next phase of RISE until June 17. If your business qualifies, you'll have the opportunity to receive one or more of the following business services:

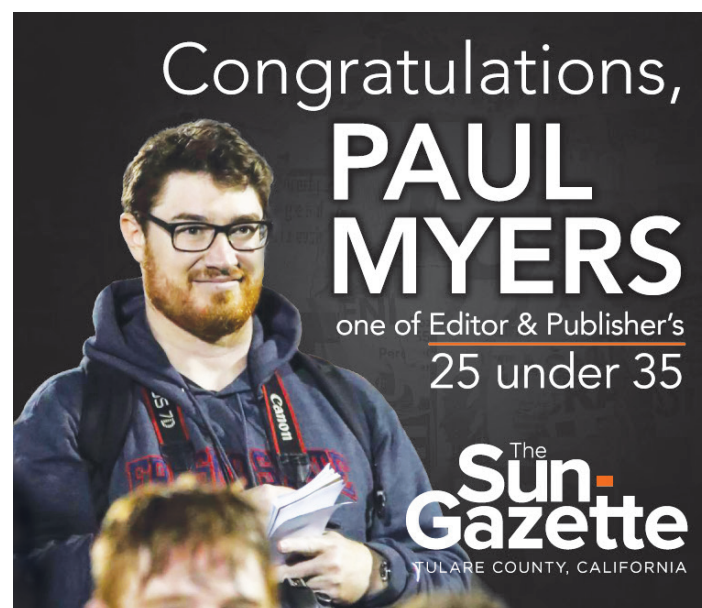
- Marketing and advertising

- consultations
  - Media placements over a 90-day period
  - Commercial creative production services
  - Technology services from Effectv and/or Comcast Business
- As we know from the recent wave of COVID cases across

the country, the work to recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic is far from over. That's why Comcast is proud to further their efforts to help small businesses owned by people of color weather the storm with our new Comcast RISE Business Directory. This resource, which can be found at [california.comcast.com/comcastrise](http://california.comcast.com/comcastrise), is a user-friendly digital map for laptops and mobile phones that collates and presents key information about local businesses throughout Northern and Central California, who have benefited from the Comcast RISE program. Having an easy-to-use business directory will provide local consumers with the information they need to become aware of, locate and contact these small businesses for all their "shop local, shop small, shop diverse" needs.

"Women can sometimes be left out of conversations around funding and technology. If our business isn't technology-focused, we can find ourselves left out of finding ways technology can advance our business. But every small business can benefit from a technology upgrade, whether you are in the hair, food, or mannequin industry," said Judi Henderson, a RISE Investment Fund recipient and owner of Mannequin Madness in Oakland, "Comcast recognizes the many challenges women business owners encounter and the RISE grant is helping put women at the forefront."

Visit [ComcastRise.com](http://ComcastRise.com) to review the selection criteria and apply. The application is open and will close on June 17.



## Blissfully Yours

## WEDDING EXPO

## IS BACK!

### MARCH 6, 2022



SCAN FOR INFO!  
VISALIA CONVENTION CENTER  
559-736-0566

HAPPY  
*Saint*  
PATRICK'S  
DAY

THURSDAY  
MARCH 17

Ask  
Jena



How can I market my business to other Chamber members?

There are multiple ways to connect with fellow Chamber members. Contact me to learn how you and your business can be featured in the Member Portal!

Does the Chamber have mixers?

Business After Hours is back! Join us in March at Quail Park at Shannon Ranch and continue to visit our website for future announcements: [visaliachamber.org/bah](http://visaliachamber.org/bah).

Have a question about the Chamber?

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



PHOTOS COURTESY OF QK

Visalia engineering company QK, Inc. was given an award for their work on an emergency project that helped prevent erosion following the Creek Fire in Fresno County in 2020.

# Visalia firm wins award for engineering excellence

American Council of Engineering Companies awards QK for its emergency project to help prevent erosion following the Creek Fire in Fresno County



A Visalia engineering firm was honored Feb. 3 for its role in identifying erosion and best solutions along critical infrastructure following the devastating Creek Fire.

QK, Inc., formerly known as Quad Knopf, Inc., was awarded an Engineering Excellence Commendation Award by the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC)—California for its Post-Fire Runoff Erosion Control Project following the 379,000-acre Fresno County Creek Fire that occurred in 2020.

The project was an emergency response for the county of Fresno to quickly implement a plan for best management practices (BMPs) that would stabilize slopes and protect infrastructure.

Forecasted winter weather conditions dictated the emergency timeline and so QK specialists in Stormwater Pollution Prevention and Erosion and Sediment Control responded to a request for services from the county.

Once teams were deployed, QK used GPS technology software to assess damage and needs. The software specialists photograph, markup, and geotag each individual location. With the assistance of our Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team, an assessment layer was able to be added to the county's existing map, assisting the county to physically see and identify priority locations for BMPs.

Part of QK's responsibility was to locate and assess culverts and damage done by both the fire, and the equipment needed to fight it. Culverts allow water to pass under roads and bridges

to prevent flooding and erosion.

The software helped QK calculate the type and quantity of best management practices needed and was used to assist the county in prioritizing and staging projects. QK also managed the implementation of best management practices by the California Conservation Corps (CCC), without whom the work couldn't have been completed as swiftly as it was. The best management practices were in place prior to the first snowfall and the county acknowledged they were working. Because of this work, 12 water systems affecting more than 675,000 county residents were protected.

More detail can be found at [www.qkinc.com/uncategorized/qk-creek-fire-post-fire-erosion-control-project](http://www.qkinc.com/uncategorized/qk-creek-fire-post-fire-erosion-control-project).

Another firm with a Visalia office was among the ACEC's 2022 award winners. Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group, with offices in Clovis and Visalia, received a Merit Award for their work on the Turnipseed Water Bank Phase III Expansion Project in Tulare County. In all, sixteen projects earned the prestigious Honor Award distinction, 20 were recognized with Merit Awards, and 10 Commendation Awards were granted.

"These ACEC California engineering firms are being honored for their exceptional degree of innovation, intricacy, accomplishment, and value," said Brad Dieder, executive director of ACEC California. "Californians deserve a reliable drinking water supply, safe and efficient transportation systems along with safe bicycle and pedestrian routes, structurally sound stadiums and residential buildings, and better infrastructure on all

fronts. Our firms are committed to building a better California."

The winner of the Golden State Award, an honor bestowed on the best overall project, will be announced at the Engineering Excellence Awards virtual celebration Feb. 3, 2022. The awards celebration is also a fundraiser for the ACEC California Scholarship Foundation 501(c)3, which provides scholarship awards to graduate and undergraduate students who are recognized for their notable and outstanding academic achievements.

Honor Award winners are eligible to enter the national level Engineering Excellence Awards competition in Washington, DC.

ACEC California's annual Engineering Excellence Awards competition recognizes outstanding achievements in engineering and land surveying projects completed by California firms. Entries are accepted into one of 12 project categories: studies, research and consulting engineering services; building/technology systems; structural systems; surveying and mapping technology; environmental; waste and storm water; water resources; transportation; special projects; small projects; energy; and industrial and manufacturing processes and facilities.



## SOCALGAS

Continued from page 2

power of 200 kilowatts, with a range of 300 miles and will be built on the existing chassis OEM used by SoCalGas, minimizing the updates needed for

operations, servicing, and training.

With the addition of the 50 Toyota Mirai HFCEVs, a third of SoCalGas' over-the-road fleet currently operates on clean fuels. The company is on track to achieve its goal of 50% by 2025. Today, SoCalGas is active-

ly engaged in more than 10 pilot projects related to hydrogen, including a partnership with Netherlands-based HyET Hydrogen on technology that could transform hydrogen distribution and enable the rapid expansion of hydrogen fueling stations for HFCEVs like the Toyota Mirai. The technology would allow hydrogen to be easily and affordably transported via the natural gas pipeline system, then extracted and compressed at fueling stations that provide hydrogen for HFCEVs. The transition to hydrogen is a prime example and yet another way SoCalGas is demonstrating its commitment to being the cleanest, safest, and most innovative energy company in the country.



PHOTO COURTESY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY  
In 2020, SoCalGas began dispensing California-produced renewable natural gas (RNG) at many of the natural gas fueling stations it operates across the state.

## About SoCalGas

Headquartered in Los Angeles, SoCalGas is the largest gas distribution utility in the United States. SoCalGas delivers affordable, reliable, and increasingly renewable gas service to 21.8 million consumers across 24,000 square miles of Central and Southern California. Gas delivered through the company's pipelines will continue to play a key role in California's clean energy transition—providing electric grid reliability and supporting wind and solar energy deployment.

SoCalGas' mission is to build the cleanest, safest and most innovative energy company in America. In support of that mission, SoCalGas is committed to the goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in its operations and delivery of energy by 2045 and to replacing 20 percent of its traditional natural gas supply to core customers with renewable natural gas (RNG) by 2030.

## T-MOBILE

Continued from page 2

adoption, wellness support, etc.)  
■ Investments (401k plans, annual Employee Stock Grant, stock purchase plan)

"T-Mobile is famous for care because we have the very best team in wireless that delivers the very best experience for our customers every single day," said Callie Field, T-Mobile's Chief Customer Experience Officer. "I'm thrilled that we are adding 1,000 more talented people from the Kingsburg area to our squad who will bring T-Mobile's personalized Team of Experts ser-

vice and that Un-carrier style California Love to life for our amazing customers!"

Considered the Un-carrier for its unlikely approach to solving customer's biggest wireless pain points, T-Mobile also delivers the largest, fastest and most available next-generation 5G network that offers reliable connectivity for all. Plus, T-Mobile's customers benefit from a combination of value and an unwavering commitment to the customer experience—for which employees at the new Kingsburg CEC will play a huge role in satisfying for customers across the Western U.S. Find out why we want more passionate employees to join the Un-carrier revolution, here: <https://www.t-mobile.com/careers/culture-and-benefits>.



# IMPACT

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

APRIL 21, 2022

**ECONOMY**

Continued from page 1

“We’re short staffed, your order might not come out as fast as normal, please bear with us.” Ninety-nine percent of our customers are regulars, and they understand because everywhere they go, they see the same thing.”

Chapala Grill used to operate seven days a week; now Mendez said they are closed on Sundays and from 2 to 5 p.m. everyday just to catch up and give his employees a breather. At Azul they are down to one cook, and Mendez said his parents have had to close Mondays and Tuesdays for the last four or five months. His mother has been coming in to help out a few days a week, but Lupus and other health issues have sidelined her for months. Mendez said times are harder than ever now.

“Not even through the whole 2008 recession did I feel like it was this stressful,” Mendez told The Sun-Gazette. “My parents have been in the restaurant business for over 45 years, they started up in Watsonville. They’ve never dealt with anything like this whole employee shortage thing.”

**Where are all the workers?**

Nick Huerta owns downtown Visalia’s The Pickled Deli. Like Chapala Grill, he’s been fortunate enough to have a core group of employees who have held the line with him through the pandemic at the quick-service deli. Huerta attributed The Pickled Deli’s employee tenure to a positive workplace environment.

“I would say I have about 60% who’ve been with me since the start of the pandemic,” Huerta said. “I think that’s because I’m active, I’m there, I’m in the weeds with them. I think that’s what really makes a difference. Retention is good because we’re involved in our restaurants...how much is it worth to be in a good, friendly, caring environment that we have fun at?”

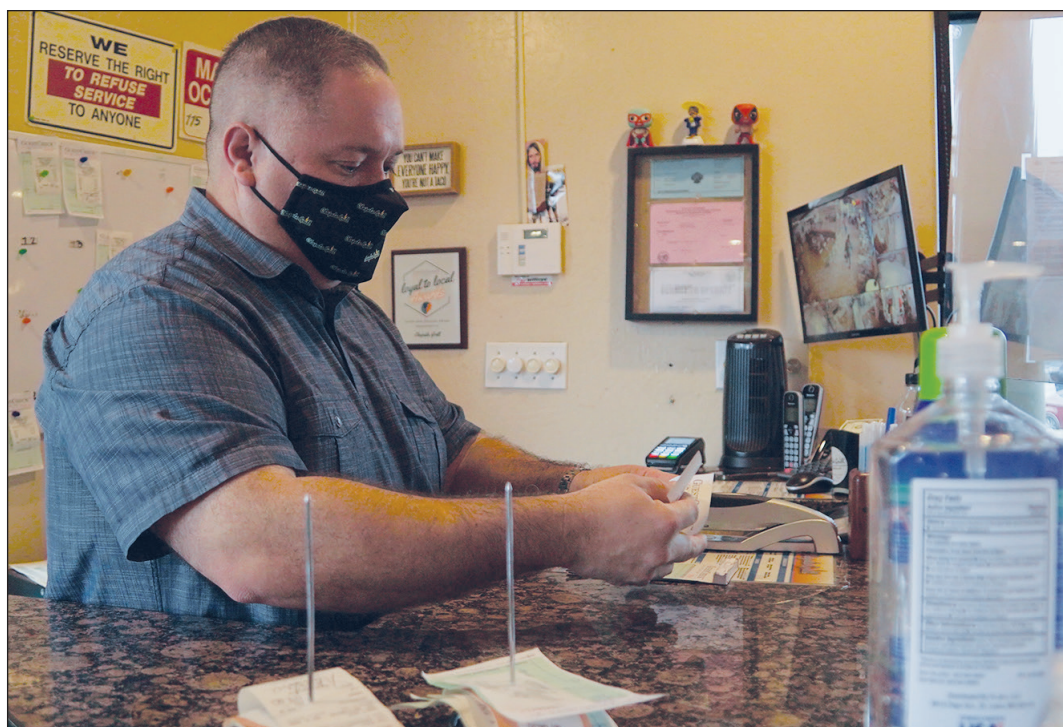
But positive work culture alone won’t hold the line forever. Good employees, like anyone else, can only run short-staffed for so long before burn-out sets in, and business owners risk losing their best employees.

State Employment Development Department data shows the unemployment rate decreasing, but as Calmatters reported on Monday, Jan. 24, the most recent Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Small Business Voices survey, 98% of small business owners in California say difficulty hiring is affecting their bottom line. Visalia is no exception. Both Huerta and Mendez have experienced the same phenomena when trying to refill their ranks: lots of calls from people interested in a job, but few, if any, show up to the interview.

“I get the feeling that some people are still hesitant to find employment,” Huerta said. “Unemployment is still kind of poisoning the well, unfortunately.”

At Chapala Grill, Mendez had over 30 interviews scheduled in the last few months. Only two showed up, and both are no longer working at the restaurant.

“When they call, they say they have a ton of experience, that they’ve worked in a ton of different restaurants before. The few that actually came, we



Chapala’s owner Pedro Mendez takes payment from a customer in Visalia. He has become a larger part of his restaurant’s workforce as employees have only trickled back following the end of unemployment insurance.

tried them out, and they couldn’t even chop an onion,” Mendez said. “Not only that, but they’re asking for \$18 an hour...we can’t even afford to pay \$18 an hour right now.”

Mendez said a starting line cook at Chapala Grill makes \$16 an hour. He understands that life under pandemic requires constant risk evaluation, and some are clearly saying the pay is not enough.

“If someone shows up to work and they start getting a headache, they’ve got to go home, because you don’t want to put the rest of the crew at risk,” Mendez said. “We just have to follow the guidelines and not take a bigger risk. We have a waiter here whose father has cancer, and he’s going through chemo. Definitely don’t want to put him at risk of bringing COVID home and passing it onto his dad. It’s tough.”

California has long been a millennial first-time homebuyers nightmare largely because of Proposition 13, which has incentivized older Californians to not sell their homes through significant property tax breaks, driving up the cost of housing in the golden state. As a result, many young adults in California live in multi-generational homes with their parents and even grandparents.

When the catastrophic nature of the pandemic was realized in March of 2020 and businesses, schools, universities shuttered their doors and daily life came to a grinding halt, many young Americans moved back in with their families. Pew Research Group data shows that in Sept. 2020, for the first time since the Great Depression, a majority of young adults aged 18 to 29—52%—were living with their parents.

During this time, unemployment rates skyrocketed to levels also not seen since the Great Depression. Federal and state government unemployment bonuses began rolling out to those

who’d lost their jobs, and many Californians were making more in unemployment than they ever did at their minimum-wage service industry jobs.

Unemployment bonuses tapered off by October 2021, and in Tulare County, young adults were asked to re-emerge into independent life in an extremely impacted housing market where more demand than supply has caused housing prices to soar. The inability for young adults to move out and gain some independence has left those looking for work having to constantly evaluate risk versus reward of potentially exposing their older loved ones to disease.

All the while, the virus rages on, in the first month of 2022 infecting more Americans than ever. In early January, the U.S. Census Bureau’s “household pulse” survey clocked about 8.8 million people who were out of work because they were sick or caring for someone with symptoms of COVID-19, the highest number by far since the survey began circulation in mid-2020 in the early days of the pandemic.

Inflation has driven the cost of living up, and workers have demanded more wages. Inflation has also raised the overhead for businesses to stay afloat, and payroll is generally the most expensive part of running a business. Economists are seeing prices rise across the globe, and where globalization was a stabilizer against inflation in the 2008 economic crisis, The Washington Post reports that it appears to be driving inflation up this time around. There doesn’t appear to be a quick fix. Business owners like Mendez and employees looking for acceptable work are left with more questions than answers.

“We’re doing the best we can with what we have, and that’s all we can do, really,” Mendez said.

**LEADERSHIP**

Continued from page 3

VPD continues to grow their unmanned aerial vehicles fleet, and are in the process of opening new headquarters.

Later in the session, we welcomed VPD Sergeant Mona Whaley and American Ambulance Operations Manager Dave Byl. VPD Sergeant Whaley was a former participant of Leadership Visalia and is with the police department for (18) years. Operations Manager Byl shared that he was a paramedic before he promoted to Manager and a former participant of Leadership Reedley. They both shared stories of their achievements and challenges throughout their leadership journey. Sergeant Whaley emphasized the importance of having youth police officers on school campuses to promote positive interactions between the officers and the students. Similarly, Operations Manager Byl discussed the partnership shared with County of Tulare Health and Human Services Agency as they are contracted as a health partner for vaccine administration.

Our afternoon session started with a presentation on Human Trafficking provided by the Tulare County Sheriff’s department. It was extremely informative as we received information on how to distinguish between trafficking and smuggling, recruitment methods used, and viewed the educational video of operation Baby Face. After this presentation, we welcomed our next panel of guest speakers Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward and Superior Court Judge Gary Johnson. Some of the ongoing challenges discussed were change in laws, staffing shortages, and the demand for more resources to tackle growing mental health issues in the community. It was interesting to note that there is an overall decline in violent gang crime and residential burglaries, however the domestic violence reports have increased, and vehicular roadway deaths have doubled. The importance of strong collaboration between District Attorney’s office, law enforcement, and offices of State and US Attorney general was emphasized in serving Tulare County residents.

The day concluded at the COS campus with the viewing of the newly wrapped “Giant threads clothing closet”, and we had further discussions on our class project. The clothing closet looked very attractive and welcoming and easily captured our undivided attention. For more information on how you can help fund the project, please email Charlie@visaliachamber.org.

**Kaweah Health named one of Healthgrades’ best hospitals**

Visalia hospital is among the top 5 percent of U.S. hospitals for clinical outcomes

By Laura Florez-McCusker  
Director of Media Relations  
Kaweah Health



Kaweah Health has been named one of America’s 250 Best Hospitals™ for the 4th consecutive year, placing it in the top five percent of hospitals in the country and an overall leader in clinical excellence, according to Healthgrades. Kaweah Health is one of two hospitals in the Central Valley to achieve this distinction and the only one in Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties.

“We don’t do what we do for awards, but the recognition is a testament to the excellence and compassion of our employees, medical staff, and volunteers,” said Gary Herbst, Chief Executive Officer of

Kaweah Health. “At the same time, we will never stop improving for our patients. They deserve world-class care and health is our passion, excellence is our focus, and compassion is our promise.”

From 2018-2020, patients treated in hospitals achieving this Healthgrades’ recognition on average had a 27.8 percent lower risk of dying than if they were treated in hospitals that did not receive this award, as measured across 17-rated conditions and procedures where mortality is the outcome. In fact, if all hospitals as a group performed similarly to Kaweah Health and other 2022 Healthgrades’ America’s 250 Best Hospitals, 160,256 lives could potentially have been saved from 2018-2020.\*



To assess overall hospital performance, Healthgrades reviewed outcomes across more than 31 of the most common procedures and conditions. Recipients of this award have consistently delivered better-than-expected outcomes for their patients.

“It is a great achievement to be awarded as one of Healthgrades’ America’s 250 Best Hospitals,” said Brad Bowman, MD, Chief Medical Officer and Head of Data Science at Healthgrades. “Now more than ever, patients are learning the importance of taking control of their health and using resources like Healthgrades to find the perfect hospital and caregiver match. We commend Kaweah Health for providing superior service and committing themselves to keeping their

communities safe.”

Kaweah Health was recognized with the following clinical achievements in 2022:

- Cardiac Surgery Excellence Award™ for 6 Years in a Row (2017-2022)
- Nation’s Top 5% for Cardiac Surgery for 5 Years in a Row (2018-2022)
- Nation’s Top 10% for Cardiac Surgery for 6 Years in a Row (2017-2022)
- 5-Stars in Coronary Bypass Surgery for 6 Years in a Row (2017-2022)
- 5-Stars in Valve Surgery for 2 years in a Row (2021-2022)
- 5-Stars for Treatment of Heart Attack in 2022
- 5-Stars for Treatment of Heart

See HOSPITAL on page 6

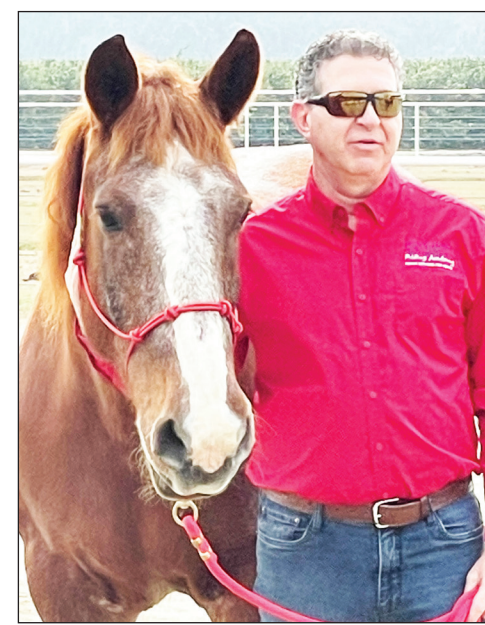


PHOTO COURTESY OF HAPPY TRAILS RIDING ACADEMY

**Happy Trails held open house**

By Nicole Payne  
Director of Services  
Happy Trail Riding Academy

Happy Trails welcomed 20 local service-members and their families to an open house on Saturday, January 29. Staff provided a tour of the facility, highlighting the 20-stall barn and two-acre Sensory Trail, and described

how the Equine Services for Heroes (ESH) program started in 2013 and grew to its current state. Four current participants in Happy Trails’ veteran program provided their own testimonials, sharing how being in class and developing a partnership with a horse and other servicemembers in their class has benefited them both on the property and beyond. “Each week I became more comfortable. I had total trust in Splash. My mom could see a difference in my mood,” shared Navy veteran Ysabel Cardona. “It’s the best thing to try. My healing process is very important, and I’m all in.” Army veteran Herb Schneider echoed, “You always leave in a better mood than when you came.” Following the tour, Tulare AMVETS Post 56 fed 75 people a delicious hamburger lunch with all the fix-in’s. Happy Trails was grateful to have had community partners Tulare AMVETS Post 56 and A Combat Veteran’s Hope on site providing additional resources to veterans.

For more information about the Equine Services for Heroes program, please call Happy Trails at (559) 688-8685.



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**2022**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
		7	8	9	10	
3	14	15	16	17		
20	21	22	23	24		
27	28	29	30	31		

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## Blissfully Yours Wedding Expo 2022



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLISS EVENTS GROUP

The South Valley's largest wedding expo is Back! The Blissfully Yours Wedding Expo is set for Sunday March 6, 2022 at the Visalia Convention Center! If you're planning a wedding or any other kind of special event this is where you need to be!

2022 & 2023 are on track to be the busiest in decades for weddings and other live events. Get the jump on planning this Sunday March 6th You can never be too early, even for 2024 events, yes really! By planning early you'll get the vendors you want and need before they're sold out and unavailable.

Arrive early for the Champagne Pre-Party to get tips from Specialists on the Pro Panel while you sample light bites starting at 11:30 AM. One hundred swag bags will be given to the first 100 Brides or Grooms with promos + goodies by Estée Lauder, L'Oréal and others. The Pre-Party will also feature live entertainment and photo booths by Bliss Events Group.

The Main Exhibit Hall opens at 12:30 PM It will be filled wall to wall with some of the Central Valley's Premier Wedding Vendors. Come meet & mingle with Decorators, Photographers, DJ's, Coordinators, Florists and many other event specialists. Get inspired by the Instagram worthy displays, taste the samples of food, spirits and sweets all day long. A special beauty section will have live tutorials by Macy's. The expo will feature an all new Fashion Experience by Ivory Bridal Boutique!

We will cap the show with prize giveaways & Gift Sets by YSL, Valentino, Viktor & Rolf, Mugler and Giorgio Armani.

Food vendors will be available for great eats in the front outdoor courtyard on Acequia Ave.

The 2022 Blissfully Yours Wedding Expo is brought to you by Absolute Comfort Limousine, Bliss Events Group, Details Party Rentals, Ivory Bridal Boutique, Estée Lauder and L'Oréal Brands Fragrance.

Get everything you need for your special event in one place, in one day at The Blissfully Yours Wedding Expo!

For more info visit [www.BlissfullyYoursExpo.com](http://www.BlissfullyYoursExpo.com), call 559-736-0566 or scan the code below with your phone.

## Rawhide announces coaching staff

Rawhide welcomes new coaches for the 2022 season

The Arizona Diamondbacks announced their coaching staffs for their Minor League teams for the 2022 season, including the group that will lead the Visalia Rawhide, their Single-A affiliate. At the helm for the Rawhide will be Manager Jorge Cortes.

Cortes will start his first season in Visalia as Manager. 2022 will mark his sixth season with the Diamondbacks and first season managing. In 2019, he helped the Jackson Generals become Southern League Champions. Cortes spent last season as the bench coach for the Reno Aces.

Gabriel Hernandez will be the new Rawhide pitching coach in his third season as a coach with the Diamondbacks. Hernandez was the pitching coach the last season for the Arizona Complex



Team. He became a coach in the Diamondbacks organization after his two-year scouting career with Arizona.

Ty Wright will serve as the hitting coach under Cortes in 2022. This season is Wright's first with the Diamondbacks. He spent 12 years in the Cubs organization, seven as a player and five as a coach.

Cody Ransom, who will be the Rawhide Bench Coach, spent the last two seasons as a coach for the Arizona Complex League team. Prior to coaching, Ransom played professionally for 17 seasons with 11 of them in the Major Leagues.

Cortes' staff and the Rawhide open the 2022 season at Valley Strong Ballpark on April 8th versus the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes.

## HOSPITAL

Continued from page 5

Failure for 2 Years in a Row (2021-2022)

### Neurosciences

■ Stroke Care Excellence Award™ for 4 Years in a Row (2019-2022)

• Nation's Top 10% for Treatment of Stroke for 4 Years in a Row (2019-2022)

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of Stroke for 8 Years in a Row (2015-2022)

### Pulmonary

■ Pulmonary Care Excellence Award™ for 9 Years in a Row (2014-2022)

• Nation's Top 5% for Overall Pulmonary Services for 2 Years in a Row (2021-2022)

• Nation's Top 10% for Overall Pulmonary Services for 9 Years in a Row (2014-2022)

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease for 2 Years in a Row (2021-2022)

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of Pneumonia for 9 Years in a Row (2014-2022)

### Gastrointestinal

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of GI Bleed in 2022

### Critical Care

■ Critical Care Excellence Award™ for 3 Years in a Row (2020-2022)

• Nation's Top 5% for Critical Care for 2 Years in a Row (2021-2022)

• Nation's Top 10% for Critical Care for 3 Years in a Row (2020-2022)

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of Sepsis for 10 Years in a Row (2013-2022)

■ 5-Stars for Treatment of Respiratory Failure for 4 Years in a Row (2019-2022)

Healthgrades.com offers an in-depth look at Kaweah Health's performance and profile to explore the highest quality care in Visalia today. Consumers can also visit the site for more information on how Healthgrades measures hospital quality and its methodology.

We travel not to escape life but for life not to escape us

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