

# www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 20 | August 2022

## INSIDE

### B of A funds CSET youth employment program again

For the ninth year in a row, Bank of America is helping fund the summer youth employment program operated by CSET. **3**

### The Mix sets table for 5 eateries downtown

Warehouse and distribution veteran Bruce Nicotero takes over as executive director for the Visalia Economic Development Corporation, which markets the Visalia Industrial Park. **5**

## EVENTS

### AUGUST 4 Business After Hours

Time: 4 p.m.  
Location: Marriott Hotel

### AUGUST 10 Travel Slideshow

Time: 12 p.m.  
Location: Virtual + Chamber Office (registration required)

### AUGUST 25 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.  
Location: Visalia First

### FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

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

Time: 8 a.m.

## TRAVEL WITH US

### 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

### FEBRUARY 21-28, 2023

Ecuador & Galapagos Islands Cruise

### MARCH 9-18, 2023

Shades of Ireland: St. Patrick's Day Ireland

### APRIL 19-28, 2023

Holland Windmills, Waterways & Tulips River Cruise

### MAY 2-10, 2023

Athens & The Greek Islands

### MAY 7-22, 2023

Flavors of Portugal & Spain

### JUNE 10-21, 2023

Croatia & Its Islands

### JULY 19-28, 2023

Iceland: Land of Fire & Ice



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations  
CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations  
CST #2048841-40

For more information, go to  
www.visaliachamber.org/travel



As of July 1, more customers are now eligible for no-cost energy-saving home improvements through the Energy Savings Assistance (ESA) program.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCALGAS

## SoCalGas offers free programs to more households

Southern California Gas Company expands eligibility standards for program offering free energy efficiency upgrades to low-income families



The Sun-Gazette

By Danielle Gutierrez  
Reporter  
The Sun-Gazette

More low-income households in Tulare County can now qualify for home assistance with updated guidelines from Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) for their Energy Savings Assistance program.

As of July 1, more customers are now eligible for no-cost energy-saving home improvements through the Energy Savings Assistance (ESA) program. Over 1.6 million homes in the company's service territory have been enrolled in the program since 2002. Those numbers are expected to rise as more households become eligible for qualification. The new guidelines expand eligibility criteria for customers whose income is up to 250% of federal poverty guidelines, compared to the previous criteria of 200%. The previous income eligibility guidelines for a family of four were up to \$55,500, but now a family of four that earns up to \$69,375 can be eligible for no-cost energy efficiency upgrades.

In 2020, 17.1% of Tulare County residents were classified as being in poverty and the average household income in Tulare County was \$52,534, according to the U.S. Census. Last year in the county, 2,300 customers had their homes treated by the ESA program. This year, an estimation of 50,000 customers are currently eligible, according to SoCalGas estimations. Now, customers could save up to 20% annually on their natural gas bill depending on the energy efficiency upgrades performed.

The ESA program provides attic insulation, furnace repair/replacement, clothes washer, water heater repair/replacement, water heater blankets, door weather stripping, caulking, low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators, minor repairs to doors and windows and other services to eligible customers.

Customers can qualify for the ESA program based on if they have an individual in the home who falls under the income guidelines or participates in a public assistance pro-



gram. These programs include Medi-Cal/Medicaid, CalFresh, the National School Lunch Program and others. The program is open to renters and homeowners and income levels are updated annually to adjust for federal poverty guidelines.

The ESA program's revised income guidelines were the result of Senate Bill 756, authorized by San Diego Senator Ben Hueso. He believes this program is an important tool for our state in the fight against climate change.

"Energy efficiency upgrades reduce energy utility bills, increase a family's quality of life and comfort, support economic development and move the state closer toward its climate goals," Hueso said.

He also added that the ESA program's budgets are usually not fully expended, with hundreds of millions of dollars remaining unspent each year. This new law will help distribute those funds by expanding eligibility to include more low-income clients.

Veronica Medrano, a SoCalGas customer from Montclair, said she and her family are grateful for the weatherization repairs of SoCalGas and their contractor ACS Group. "We received a new furnace and they installed a new water heater and we also qualified for a new washing machine. Our home is now more energy efficient," Medrano said. "This program has changed our lives."

Another SoCalGas customer assistance program is the California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) program, which will continue to provide a 20% discount on the monthly natural gas bill for customers who participate in certain public assistance programs or fall within 200% of federal poverty guidelines. A family of four that earns up to \$55,500 is now eligible for the CARE discount.

To learn about SoCalGas' customer assistance programs, including the CARE program, or to sign up for the Energy Savings Assistance Program, visit [socialgas.com/assistance](http://socialgas.com/assistance) or call 800-331-7593. Information is available in the following languages: Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### The Christmas Tree Gala



Gail Zurek  
President and CEO  
Visalia Chamber

"What's happening with the Christmas Tree Gala?" might be one of the questions I get asked most often. Last year set a new standard. Those in attendance are still talking about it; those that missed it want to make sure they don't miss it this year.

The pandemic has caused businesses to rethink how they do just about everything. The Chamber is no different. In addition to leaning into advocacy and providing real tangible resources during this time, we had to rethink how we designed and delivered events. Overall this was a fantastic opportunity. This process allowed us to examine the traditions, functionality, and relevancy of the Christmas Tree Gala. The Visalia Chamber Board of Directors and Staff have wrestled with the purpose and value of this forty-year-old event, not only for the Chamber but also for our broader community.

Last year's smashing success proves that change can be a breath of fresh air. It allowed us to tackle systematic event design challenges with a can-do rather than a have-to approach. We have talked to sponsors, donors, charities, VIPs, and general admission guests to understand the future of the Christmas Tree Gala. All that's to say, everything was on the table to be examined. So

here is some of what we've learned.

Our community loves a good theme. Last year's speakeasy was embraced by nearly all attendees. It was hard to find even one person who didn't dress with a bit of a nod towards the '20s. This year the Board of Directors committee pretty quickly settled on a Cowboy Christmas, a nod to our local agricultural industry. Fans of the show Yellowstone will feel like they walked on the Dutton Ranch and spent an evening in John Dutton's home. Our partners Expo Events, who created a beautiful speakeasy out of Bello Vita's courtyard, will transform the Agri-Center with their décor, theming, and design. As a Chamber with a regional footprint, it makes perfect sense to host Cowboy Christmas at Agri-Center, a chamber member for well over a decade. So just like last year, start planning those outfits now. Although, in this community, most of us already have boots.

What charities want and need has also changed throughout the years. After many conversations, we know charities used to rely on the Christmas Tree Gala very differently forty years ago than they do now. Then most charities did not have their own gala where they asked people to attend and give. When the Christmas Tree gala began, they asked donors to make year-end gifts at the Christmas Tree Gala. Now, these charities have their own galas and charity-specific avenues to receive those donations. In addition, the time and expense of contributing a Christmas tree were becoming prohibitive for many. Even as we had tried other solutions in the past, we heard from many charities that, while they love the Christmas Tree Gala, they couldn't

participate this year.

So, as we have had to do with so many aspects of this event, we examined it from all sides. After conversations with charities, donors, and our Board of Directors event committee, in addition to a pre-event social marketing campaign directing our community to donate to charity members, we will provide QR codes directing attendees to donate to those organizations. This eliminates the expense of designing a tree and finding volunteers to bring and "talk it up" the tree during the event. Those charities only need to continue being members. One charity will be featured each year. Every year there will be an application and lottery process for this spot. This solves some significant logistical challenges the Chamber faced and is responsive to the concerns we heard from various constituents. This year we will feature the Visalia Police Explorers, who have leveraged Christmas Tree Auction successfully in the past, use this as their major fundraiser, and attendees absolutely love them.

We love a great community-wide Christmas party. This year VIP and Lounge guests will have access to the Chuck Wagon with a full plate of great BBQ. We'll have four different bars, including a giant 360 bar with seating surrounding it. And while dancing is a huge focus, there are plenty of other places to chat, explore and have a fantastic night. We have artist renderings and plenty more surprises to come. Our social channels will be sharing all kinds of exciting news as we get closer.

It was wonderful to see so much excitement return to this mainstay gala. Change can bring new life, and a great Christmas Tree Gala with friends and colleagues supporting this community will always be in fashion.

## 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:

- MindDivers
- Trilogy Personnel & Land Management

#### Small Business Members:

- Modern Edge Insurance Brokers, Inc.
- Nichols Farms

### RENEWING

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

#### Keystone Members:

- 4Creeks, Inc.\*

#### Community Investor Members:

- Central Valley Community Bank
- McDonald's | RLMK Inc.
- Visalia Unified School District-Administration Department

#### Business Builder Members:

- Mountain West Builders\*
- The Darling Hotel\*
- Tri Counties Bank\*

#### Business Connector Members:

- Central Valley Business Forms, Inc.\*
- Freestyle Event Services\*
- QK
- Ruddell Stanton Bixler Mauritsen & Evans, LLP

#### Small Business Members:

- Ainley Alipaz Webb
- Dennis R. Keller Consulting Civil Engineer, Inc.

#### Integrated Care Systems

- Kens Stakes & Supplies, Inc.\*
- Newmark Grubb Pearson Commercial
- NSE Insurance Agencies, Inc.\*
- Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group
- Realty Stars
- Redi-Rooter Plumbing\*
- ServiceMaster by Hellstern
- Shipman Tree Service\*
- The Perez Law Firm\*
- Trish Arnold, LPL Financial\*
- Vintage Visalia
- Visalia Auto Body\*
- Visalia Citrus Packing Group, Inc
- Visalia Plumbing Inc.\*

#### Business Builder Nonprofit Members:

- Visalia Unified Teachers Association\*

#### Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Central Valley Christian School\*



- Central Valley Regional Center\*
- Spirit 88.9\*

#### Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Arts Visalia\*
- Happy Trails Riding Academy
- Self-Help Enterprises
- The Creative Center\*
- Valley Life Charter School\*
- Veterans Memorial District\*
- Visalia County Center Rotary Club

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

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Name:** Amy & Marc Dwelle  
**Company:** Cellar Door  
**Title:** Owners

We are a restaurant that specializes in small plates meant for the whole table to share. Almost all of our produce is sourced from local farms. Our menu changes constantly based on what ingredients are in season.

We recently started a lunch program. We have also started a morning program with amazing coffee, and espresso drinks, and a variety of breakfast items as well as baked goods.

We have hosted a lot of events throughout the years with some very famous artists playing on our stage. Some of the artists that have played through the years are Cold War Kids, Foster The People, and also an impromptu concert by Billy Corgan and Dave Navarro.

We provide food and entertainment as well as a safe space for the people of the community through our restaurant, our concerts, our venue, and our lounge bar which specializes in pre-prohibition cocktails.

We appreciate the chamber's support of the Loyal to Local campaigns. We are open as a venue, a cafe, a restaurant, and a lounge all day.



### ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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

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

©2020, Visalia Chamber of Commerce. All rights reserved. Reproduction by any means of the entire contents or any portion of this publication without written permission is prohibited. The appearance of any advertisements in the publication does not constitute support or endorsement for any product, person, cause, business, or organization named therein, unless specifically noted otherwise in the advertisement.

### CONTACT US

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



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

**JOIN US**



**BUSINESS AFTER HOURS**

**August 4, 2022  
4:00pm - 6:00pm**

**HOSTED BY**



**RSVP: visaliachamber.org/bah**

**Tri Counties Bank**, in partnership with the Community Foundation of North State, issued more than \$100,000 in scholarship in May to graduating high school seniors throughout California. Scholarships ranged between \$1,000 to \$2,500 each.

**Eagle Mountain Casino** hosted a job fair in July with the Employment Connection in Porterville. Over 100 open positions were available, including new casino relocation positions that will be open in the late fall.

**Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group** welcomed external affairs specialist Becca Quist to their team. Quist comes with a strong background in developing water-related outreach and communications programs. In addition, Provost & Pritchard announced the introduction of their Caves & Tunnels team. The team is new to Provost & Pritchard and brings an expansive portfolio of more than 350 cave and tunneling projects over the past 30 years.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**CSET** partnered with **Anthem Blue Cross** to raise awareness across Tulare County about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Visalia Mall** announced Pandora Jewelry



as their newest addition to available retail at the mall.

**Soccer City 1852 Visalia** announced 1852 Brew Co. plans to open doors on August 4th. Each of the six beers on tap is designed and concocted by brewmaster, Will Peltzer and uniquely named with a nod to soccer.

**Tachi Palace Casino Resort** hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to commemorate the grand opening of Yokut Hall and the return of bingo. Bingo has had a long tradition with Tachi Palace since the casino started with South Gate Bingo in 1983. Bingo will be available Tuesday-Saturday.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Tulare County Board of Supervisors** presented a proclamation recognizing June 2022 as Elder Abuse Awareness Month in Tulare County.

Congratulations to **The Darling** they celebrated their second

birthday in July!

**Pipeline Church** launched a new website and app. Visit [www.pipeline.church](http://www.pipeline.church) to learn more.

**Visalia Players** hosted a kick-off event in July, announcing their 2022-2023 season. Visit their website to learn what's in store.

**Topograph** launched a six-part series called "Making Your Business Known" to help businesses get clear and confident in their marketing and communication.

**California Service Dog Academy (CSDA)** partnered with the **Visalia Rawhide** and other partners to host a dog treat drive in July to benefit the dogs of CSDA. Guests of Valley Strong Ballpark who brought a bag of dog treats to the game, would receive a free pasture ticket.

**The Vintage Press** announced the return of their monthly Lunch & Dinner Recipe Club events. Each month, Chef David Vartanian demonstrates the preparation of a signature lunch or dinner. Guests enjoy a lively, interactive discussion then a delightful meal with paired wine from their cellar.

Congratulations to **CSET's** executive director, Mary Alice Escarrega-Fechner who celebrated 10 years in the role. She has served CSET for over 28 years.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Bank of America funds CSET youth employment program for ninth year in a row**



For the ninth year in a row, Bank of America is helping fund the summer youth employment program operated by Community Services and Employment Training (CSET) in Visalia. In late June, the bank presented CSET with a \$20,000 grant to support the program, which is a unique opportunity for Tulare County youth to gain knowledge about joining the workplace while earning a stipend to assist them reach their future goals.

CSET elaborated on the partnership in their recent report:

"Over the last eight years, CSET and the Bank of America Charitable Foundation have prepared hundreds of youth and young adults for good careers that match their interests. This enduring partnership helps young people break through the cycle of intergenerational poverty through education, mentorship, skill development, and job training.

Young people who participate in the Work Based Learning Program not only receive important training as they prepare to enter the workforce, they also receive comprehensive wraparound services from CSET that provide access to safe housing, parenting resources, justice system navigation, healthy food, income tax preparation services, drug and alcohol abuse prevention information, and pathways to career exploration and educational attainment. Your investment in this program allows young people to earn essential wages while gaining workplace skills that will carry them throughout their lives. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our next generation of leaders!"

After the presentation, a group of BofA volunteers gave a well-received financial training class to the 19 teens participating in this year's program, using the bank's free Better Money Habits program as their train-

ing tool. In addition to the grant to CSET, Bank of America also awarded grants to Family Services of Tulare County for its supportive housing program and the Visalia Emergency Aid Council for its Fight to

End Hunger program. In all, the bank this year contributed \$278,000 to 15 nonprofits serving the region.

**Ask Jena**

**I'm a Chamber member already, how do I get more involved?**

There are multiple ways to be more engaged with the Visalia Chamber! Contact me directly and I would love to set-up a time to chat.

**Can more than one employee be a member of the Chamber?**

Once your company becomes a member of the Visalia Chamber, all of your employees become members! Have your team sign up on our website for updates on future events, mixers, committees, and more.

**Have a question about the Chamber?**

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

**CITY UPDATE**

**Lighting up Downtown Visalia**

We're lighting up downtown Visalia! The Downtown Streetlight Project is now underway, having kicked off the second week of July. City of Visalia staff are working with construction manager NV5 and contractor A-C Electric to replace the Downtown's street lighting system on Main Street with an upgraded, modern electrical system and decorative lighting features.



- The main streetlight work will occur on:
- Main Street from Willis Street to Ben Mad-dox Way
  - Acequia Avenue from West Street to Bridge Street
  - Center Avenue from Willis Street to Santa Fe Street
  - Court and Locust Streets from Mineral King to Oak Street

Pavement rehabilitation will be on Main Street from Willis Street to Santa Fe Street following completion of the streetlight work on Main Street. This work will be completed by A-C Electric Company's subcontractor, Yarbs Grading and Paving, Inc.

Current work includes Phase #1—Main Street, with demolition of existing curbs and sidewalks, potholing of utilities and boring conduit on Main Street. Project work hours are Sunday through Thursday, 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

As more detailed phasing and schedule updates are available, this information will be provided to the public via weekly Update Meetings on Tuesdays at 7 a.m., at 210 Café, 210 W. Center Ave. For those who would like to receive updates directly, text notifications are available by texting DTLighting to 74121.

The Downtown Streetlight Project has an anticipated completion date of April 2023.

For more information on the project, visit [www.visalia.city/dtlighting](http://www.visalia.city/dtlighting). Here you'll find a rendering image of the new streetlights, the kick-off meeting presentation and much more.

For questions or concerns, contact Kirt Carr, NV5 Construction Manager at (559) 481-9255 or [kirt.carr@nv5.com](mailto:kirt.carr@nv5.com) or Frank Senteno, City Engineer, City of Visalia, at (559) 713-4331 or [frank.senteno@visalia.city](mailto:frank.senteno@visalia.city).



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN

**Now More Than Ever**

**OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS LEADERS**

**to be Catalysts for Positive Change!**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE EXTENDED!**

**LEADERSHIP VISALIA**  
VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**DEADLINE AUGUST 5, 2022**

**MORE INFORMATION: (559) 734-5876**

**INFO@VISALIACHAMBER.ORG**

THE LAW AT WORK

# New EEO guidance on COVID-19



**By Brett T. Abbott**  
Gubler & Abbott LLP

On July 12, 2022, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) expanded their assistance related to COVID-19, addressing certain questions related to employers. Some key updates can be found below.

**Screening employees for COVID-19 must be job-related and consistent with business necessity**

According to the EEOC, employers must now take into account a number of factors before they are allowed to perform on-site COVID-19 testing. Employers must “assess whether the current pandemic circumstances and individual workplace circumstances” justify testing employees to prevent a workplace spread. The EEOC follows the broad-based ADA requirement, which states that any mandatory medical test of employees be “job-related and consistent with business necessity.” In applying this standard, several fac-

tors will be analyzed, including the level of community transmission, employee vaccination status, the ease of transmission of the current variant(s), the possible severity of illness from the current variant, and working conditions. Employers should review the latest CDC guidance to determine whether testing is appropriate under the new EEOC Guidance.

**Antibody testing cannot be required before allowing employees to re-enter the workplace**

A recent report from the CDC found that antibody testing is not a reliable source to show “whether an employee has a current infection, nor establish that an employee is immune to infections.” As a result, the EEOC now advises that an employer cannot require antibody testing before allowing employees to re-enter the workplace. However, as discussed above, a COVID-19 viral test may still be used, under certain conditions, to screen employees for infection.

**COVID -19 testing may be conducted for job applicants**

After a conditional job offer is made to an applicant, employers are permitted test applicants for COVID-19, as long as the employer consistently tests all entering employees in that position.

**A job offer may be withdrawn after an employee tests positive for COVID-19 under certain conditions**

Finally, the EEOC states that a job offer can be rescinded due to a positive COVID-19 viral test, if (1) the job requires an immediate start date, (2) CDC guidance recommends the person not be in proximity to others, and (3) the job requires such proximity to others, whether at the workplace or elsewhere. Current CDC guidelines regarding when and how it is safe for an individual to safely enter a workplace or otherwise work in the presence of others should be evaluated prior to making this decision. Given that some individuals may only need a short period of time to isolate/quarantine, employers should consider whether they can adjust a start date or permit remote work in the interim.

In conclusion, the EEOC’s updated guidance makes clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and employer obligations will continue to evolve based changing conditions.

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. Chinowth St., Visalia, CA 93291 (www.thecalifornialawyers.com).



pandemic circumstances and individual workplace circumstances” justify testing employees to prevent a workplace spread. The EEOC follows the broad-based ADA requirement, which states that any mandatory medical test of employees be “job-related and consistent with business necessity.” In applying this standard, several fac-

VISALIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Forward Together...



**By Kirk Shrum**  
Superintendent  
Visalia Unified School District

Hello Visalia Community, I am honored to serve as your Visalia Unified School District superintendent of schools. When the Board of Education selected me, they made it clear they expected improved results from our students, and I readily accepted that call! I am proud to work for a Board that places students and staff first and knows that a strong, successful school system is vital. Our community deserves nothing less than exceptional, and this Board and I are committed to the work ahead.

The last few years have been challenging for us all, and we are experiencing the impact of those challenges daily. We see increased gaps in our students’ academic performance, more challenging behaviors, and that many individuals have experienced loss and trauma. But throughout it all, despite the numerous obstacles, our teachers and staff have continued to show up and find new ways to connect with and educate our students. I am proud of our team, and I ask this community to show them the respect and honor they have earned. Now more than ever, we must lead with and model respect and kindness in all of our interactions. It’s what our students, staff, and each of us deserve.

As we look to the coming year, we know that the COVID pandemic continues to be a reality; however, much has changed since the pandemic began. Although we see the impact the past couple of years has had on all of us, it is encouraging that we now have many tools available to us to help combat the pandemic. I am also glad to see the California Department of Public Health solidify this in their updated guidance, which states: “Disease management strategies in K–12 schools are guided by the principle that safe, in-person learning is critical to student well-being and development. COVID-19 is here to stay, but we have learned methods and gained tools to decrease its impact on our health and well-being. California’s schools can manage this disease in sustainable and adaptive manners.”

Additionally, I believe the best decisions for VUSD are made at the local level, by our elected School Board; therefore, I will continue to advocate for local control when it comes to decisions that impact our schools.

In the coming year, I know we must urgently address the learning gaps that continue to impact our students’ academic results and ensure every student and staff member feels supported and safe at school. To accomplish this, we will prioritize four key actions this year:

Be ready: All students and staff are ready to learn and work at high levels, and there is clarity with what we teach, how we support, and how we monitor progress for growth and improvement.

Be present: We will continue to focus on strong attendance for students and staff.

Be successful: Focused Instructional Leadership Teams and Professional Learning Communities will facilitate students’ learning. District support will be aligned, so there is consistency and fidelity of practice across the District with our core instruction.

Be connected: Every student is known by name, and every stu-

See SHRUM on page 5

Business Summer Speaker Series

Power Up Your Business!

TICKET  
**\$42**  
EACH

Aug. 11th at 8am

## Jeff “Skunk” Baxter

Jeff “Skunk” Baxter is a guitarist and founding member of Steely Dan, and lead guitarist for The Doobie Brothers during the 1970s. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of The Doobie Brothers in 2020. Currently he works with The US Department of Defense as a defense consultant, chairing a Congressional Advisory Board on missile defense, and at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. “Skunk” is also a nationally and internationally renowned public speaker on the topics of innovation and asymmetrical thinking in business. This is rock n’ roll thinking like you’ve never imagined it!

CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO & TICKETS

For more details and to order tickets visit: <https://k100summerspeakerseries.eventbrite.com>

**Event location:** 700 East Mineral King Avenue (between Burke and Santa Fe) Visalia, CA 93292

Schedule/speakers may change due to Acts of God, Acts of War, Health and Safety Issues. Suitable dates/substitute speakers will be arranged.



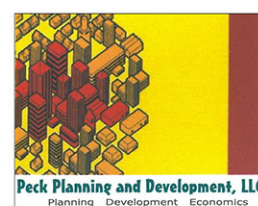
VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



## THE STATE OF TULARE COUNTY



### THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



California Water Service Company | Central Valley Community Bank | Central Valley Dairy Breeders & Commercial Properties & Investments (CPI) | College of the Sequoias | County of Tulare | County of Tulare Resource Management Agency | CSET | Gallagher Benefit Services | Kaweah Health ProYouth | Tucoemas Federal Credit Union | Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency | Visalia Unified School District

# The Mix sets table for 5 eateries downtown

Warehouse and distribution veteran Bruce Nicotero takes over as executive director for the Visalia Economic Development Corporation, which markets the Visalia Industrial Park



By John Lindt  
Sierra2thesea.net

Cities with vibrant downtowns know they rely on local restaurants and bars to set the table for success with a mix of great taste and a dash of local flavor. That's why one local business owner is trying to bring as many of them into one place as possible to reinvigorate a block of Main Street Visalia which has yet to recover from a devastating fire two and a half years ago.

The Sun-Gazette

Grant Smith, whose family owns Rent To Own in Visalia, is assembling a group of marquee local eateries to fill the two-story building located at 213-217 W. Main St. He has partnered with his brother-in-law Jeff Bischofberger, of JRC Investments in Long Beach, Calif., to house five locally-owned restaurants in the renovated building dubbed "The Mix."

"We like this project because it is bringing in local businesses, not big corporate businesses," Smith said. "We feel like downtown should be local otherwise we will lose what our downtown really is."

Smith and Bischofberger began working on the project just before COVID and it has taken two and a half years to pull it all together. The cornerstone of the project will be second-story dining overlooking Main Street served up by Fugazzis. Smith said he knew he needed a draw like Fugazzis to anchor the project and it was a natural fit because the California bistro had been looking at the site as a possible location for several years. Fugazzis owner Mike Fligor was not available for comment but sources say he will keep the existing location at Main and Locust streets.

Expected to open in early 2023, The Mix will also include Main Street mainstay Quesadilla Gorilla, and two mobile businesses making their first go at brick and mortar locations, Bombshell Beans and Scoops ice cream, sharing the downstairs space.

Miguel and Mikayla Reyes are modeling their new Quesadilla Gorilla location after their San Luis Obispo and Hanford spots with a full bar featuring tequila-inspired cocktails, such as margaritas, and craft beer. The site will also become the new headquarters for the restaurant franchise as the lease on its original location across the street is set to expire this fall. The new site is larger and will have indoor seating, something Miguel said they were never able to offer at its current downtown location.

"It's sad to see the [original location] go but this location will allow us to offer more to our guests," Miguel said.

After three years of growing his business on the road, Bombshell Beans owner Steve Mohr said he is excited about the prospect of taking his coffee truck concept and turning it into a traditional coffee shop.

"We've had to move around so much it has been difficult for people to find us," Mohr said. "It will be nice to be in a location that is visible in downtown and should be busy since we're moving in with local rockstar restaurants."

The coffee shop will allow Bombshell to do blended drinks, something he can't do from truck because there isn't access to enough water for cleaning the blenders, and begin offering its own brand of canned energy drinks. Mohr said the new shop will also give him a homebase to begin building a fleet and a franchise of coffee trucks. He said customers can look for one of its newest trucks to begin serving coffee outside of Galaxy Theatre in Tulare later this month.

"The future of Bombshell Beans is bright," Mohr said. "We are really excited about this opportunity."

Justin Kauffman started Scoops ice cream cart in 2018 and has steadily risen in popularity at local events with its premium and delicious ice cream, sundaes, and other tasty treats. He said he was excited about the potential to expand into his first permanent location alongside other popular local restaurants.

There is one space left to fill in the building in the downstairs open "food hall" format. Renderings show a cheese shop but Smith said that was just an idea to round out the illustration and there are not currently any leases signed and no serious talks with any businesses for that spot.

"We feel like this really brings something new to downtown we haven't really seen in this area," Smith said.

The building was formerly occupied by Quality Jewelers, which closed after 39 years in business, and Ziayas, a family-owned studio and gift shop that provides wellness tools, accessories, and home essentials with a focus on community, healing, and sustainability, which relocated to the 800 block of Main Street. The block was also vacated by Pacific Treasures, which relocated to the 100 block of East Main Street, following a devastating fire the night after Christmas in 2018. The fire completely destroyed the building which housed a collection of popular eateries including Mamma K's and Cafe 225 and caused major smoke and water damage to Little Italy Restaurant and Exotica Hair Studio.

The three-alarm fire caused extensive damage causing the building's entire roof to cave in. The scars of the fire remain today. The front of the shops remain boarded up and spray painted with an artistic lettering of Visalia to distract from the vacant buildings. Nearly all of the businesses folded up shop for good. To date, The Mix is the only project in the works to rebuild and reinvigorate what was once a bustling block of Visalia's downtown.



RENDERINGS COURTESY OF JRC INVESTMENTS

The Mix will be a collection of five, locally-owned eateries housed at 213-217 W. Main Street.



The two-story building will feature Fugazzis bistro upstairs and Quesadilla Gorilla, Bombshell Beans and Scoops ice cream downstairs.



Fugazzis' second-story restaurant will overlook downtown and will be in addition to its current location on Main Street.

**Oktober Fest**  
September 23rd  
Eat, drink, and be merry

**VOSSLER Farms**  
VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**Budweiser**

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/OKTOBERFEST

## SHRUM

Continued from page 4

dent and staff member feels they belong. The "One Visalia Connected" initiative will focus on connecting every student to a meaningful activity.

"One Visalia Connected" will build opportunities and partnerships within the District and our community to connect students to meaningful activities. This can be arts, sports, internships, and mentorships—just to name a few. We know that when students are connected they feel better about themselves and have better attendance and grades. I ask the community to partner with us as we begin to develop this initiative that will lead to Visalia being known as the district and community that is connected with 100% of its students!

I am confident in this community, our educators, and our students and families. I believe in the work we will all do together to accelerate the achievement of every student and the relationships we will build along the way.

I call on the Visalia community to join the School Board, myself, and our district as we move forward together.

I believe in, I belong in, I am VUSD!

# Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

**CHAMPION:**



**VISIONARY:**



**REGIONAL LEADERS:**



**KEYSTONE:**



**CORNERSTONE:**

CIGNA, CSET, E.D.I.S., LAMP LITER INN, M. GREEN & COMPANY, MILLIPORESIGMA, SOCCER CITY 1852 VISALIA, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON

**MEDIA PARTNERS:**



**HEALTH CARE NOTE**

## Partnerships bring on urology clinic and nursing school



**By Marc Mertz**  
Chief Strategy Officer  
Kaweah Health



Today, we want to make you aware of our efforts to improve access to specialty care to those who live and work in Tulare County, one of the most clinically-underserved counties in California. There is just one primary care physician for every 2,350 people in Tulare County, a doctor-to-patient ratio that ranks 49th out of 58 California counties. The need is also great for specialty care. A recent community needs study conducted by the Coker Group found that while there should be 11 urologists in Tulare County, there are only four. And, those who have Medi-Cal, which is 55 percent of our population, have virtual no access to urology services close to home.

To address this community need, we are launching a collaboration with Keck Medicine of University of Southern California (USC) this fall. Together, we'll open a urology clinic in downtown Visalia – just one block east of the Medical Center – where men and women of this community can access a world-renowned urology program currently ranked in the top 10 in the nation by U.S. News and World Re-

port. Kaweah Health will run the clinic in coordination with Indebir S. Gill, M.D., chair and distinguished professor of urology at Keck School of Medicine of USC and executive director of USC Urology, part of Keck Medicine. Dr. Gill's team of highly specialized, reputable and internationally-known experts, will provide general urology services and subspecialty care. Specifics on hours, specialties, and scheduling an appointment at the clinic will be announced soon. Through this collaboration with USC Urology, we can ensure that our Medical Center patients have regular, on-call access to a urologist.

This partnership will complement the work of our excellent existing urologists in Tulare County such as Joseph Ford, D.O., Tu-Hi Hong, M.D., and Marty Prah, M.D., who provide access to all individuals no matter what type of health care coverage they have. We also believe this collaboration will help us recruit additional urologists to the area. Urology has been No. 1 on our recruitment list for years. Yet despite all our efforts, it remains a difficult specialty to recruit. We strongly believe that this partnership with USC will help us recruit new urologists who want to live and practice medicine in Tulare County, but who are also drawn to the opportunity of being faculty at a world-renowned academic medical center. Once recruited, the urologists will see patients in the new urology clinic as well as in our rural health clinics. Again, we'll have more information available soon on this collaborative effort with USC Urology.

Our Tulare Clinic, which opened last year on the corner of Prosperity

Avenue and Mooney Boulevard, is also now providing specialty care services. In addition to the excellent primary care already available, patients of the clinic now have access to specialty services such as pediatrics, cardiology, orthopedics, diabetes care, surgery, and urology with more specialties on the way. This expansion of services in Tulare is allowing us to bring specialty care to a community that remains underserved. The Tulare clinic accepts patients with commercial insurance, Medicare, and Medi-Cal coverage. To schedule an appointment, please call 559-685-7100.

We're also working hard to grow our workforce and address the nursing shortage being felt locally and nationally. In addition to our strong partnerships with local nursing schools, we very pleased to announce a newly-formed partnership with Unitek Learning, the parent company of several distinguished learning institutions. Together, we will produce skilled and educated graduates who are ready to enter the medical field and serve our community.

Through this partnership, employees of Kaweah Health can start their career in nursing through Unitek's Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) as soon as 2023. At full completion, the Kaweah Health school of nursing powered by Unitek will graduate up to 50 Kaweah Health RNs a year. The college also offers an LVN to BSN option for the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

It's an excellent opportunity for our employees to continue their education and in the future, we plan to open this school to members of our community, who can join Kaweah Health as employees while pursuing their nursing degrees. Unitek Learning has committed to providing employees of Kaweah Health with a specialized tuition rate and an opportunity to advance their health care career and Kaweah Health will be committing financial resources to help offset nursing students' tuition.

We hope that you are as excited as we are about these new developments to address our community health needs. As we welcome fall, we hope that your family, friends, and employees remain healthy, but also reassured by this expansion of services in Tulare County.



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN

## Citrus growers give resounding support for Citrus Research Board

Citrus growers vote in support of keeping the Citrus Research Board, which helps investigate disease, pests, production and postharvest technology and new varieties



**By Maddi Langton**  
Assistant Editor  
The Sun-Gazette

California citrus growers expressed overwhelming support during a scheduled referendum over the Citrus Research Board (CRB) in June.

"We are pleased to once again receive the support of the industry," CRB president Marcy Martin said. "We look forward to continually improving upon the scientific pillars that allow the California citrus industry to thrive."

Support from growers was nearly unanimous: 97.8% of eligible citrus producers that voted, representing 99.51% of the entire state's citrus volume. The referendum was conducted on June 11 by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and must be completed every five years.

Over the past five years, the CRB has worked continuously to advance findings within four research priorities: vectored disease, pest management, production and post-harvest technology and new varieties. Much of the research has focused on the deadly disease huanglongbing (HLB). Advancements have been made to keep infections from spreading in California as HLB has devastated other citrus-growing regions including Florida. But the diligence of California's growers has kept the disease from entering any of the state's commercial

groves.

The referendum allows for a tax the grower must pay per box of citrus that is produced, known as a box-tax. The collected tax money then goes to the CRB to support research.

CRB puts out a quarterly magazine, Citograph, to show projects and highlights of what they have been working on. According to Valley grower Greg Galloway, this magazine allows himself and other growers to see where their box-tax money is going. The magazine covers a wide variety of topics, offering educational pieces for growers. Galloway said seeing the numbers this year speaks volumes as to what most growers think of the referendum and CRB.

"CRB is doing a great job of sharing the data and the results of these research projects," Galloway said.

The tax does not only help the grower. The research as a result of the tax can extend beyond the grower to the shipper or someone doing the research. But Galloway said CRB always does a good job making the end result about the grower as they are the ones paying for it.

After the vote on this referendum, the program will run until September 2027.

"Since the referendum results exceed the criteria required for continuation, [CDFA] has authorized the program to continue operating for another five-year period," CDFA marketing branch chief Joe Monson said.

The CRB administers the California Citrus Research Program, the grower-funded and grower-directed program was established in 1968, under the California Marketing Act. It was used as the mechanism enabling the State's citrus producers to sponsor and support needed research.

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES  
with  
THE CHAMBER

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

**JOIN US FOR AN UPCOMING TRAVEL SLIDESHOW!**

**AUGUST 10, 2022**

**VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON**

**LEARN MORE : [visaliachamber.org/travel](https://visaliachamber.org/travel)**