

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 21 | September 2022

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An 'all new' Home Expo

You are invited to an all-new Visalia Home Expo with over 150 exhibits and lots of new features on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 24 and 25, at the Visalia Convention Center. **3**

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Unitek Learning and Kaweah Health are thrilled to announce a new partnership to help reduce the nursing shortage in California. **4**

The pros and cons of employee handbooks

No matter what form an employee handbook takes, there are some potential pitfalls regarding handbooks that employers should know. **4**

EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 22 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.
Location: Visalia First

SEPTEMBER 23 Oktoberfest

Time: 5:30 p.m.
Location: Vossler Farms

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

TRAVEL WITH US

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

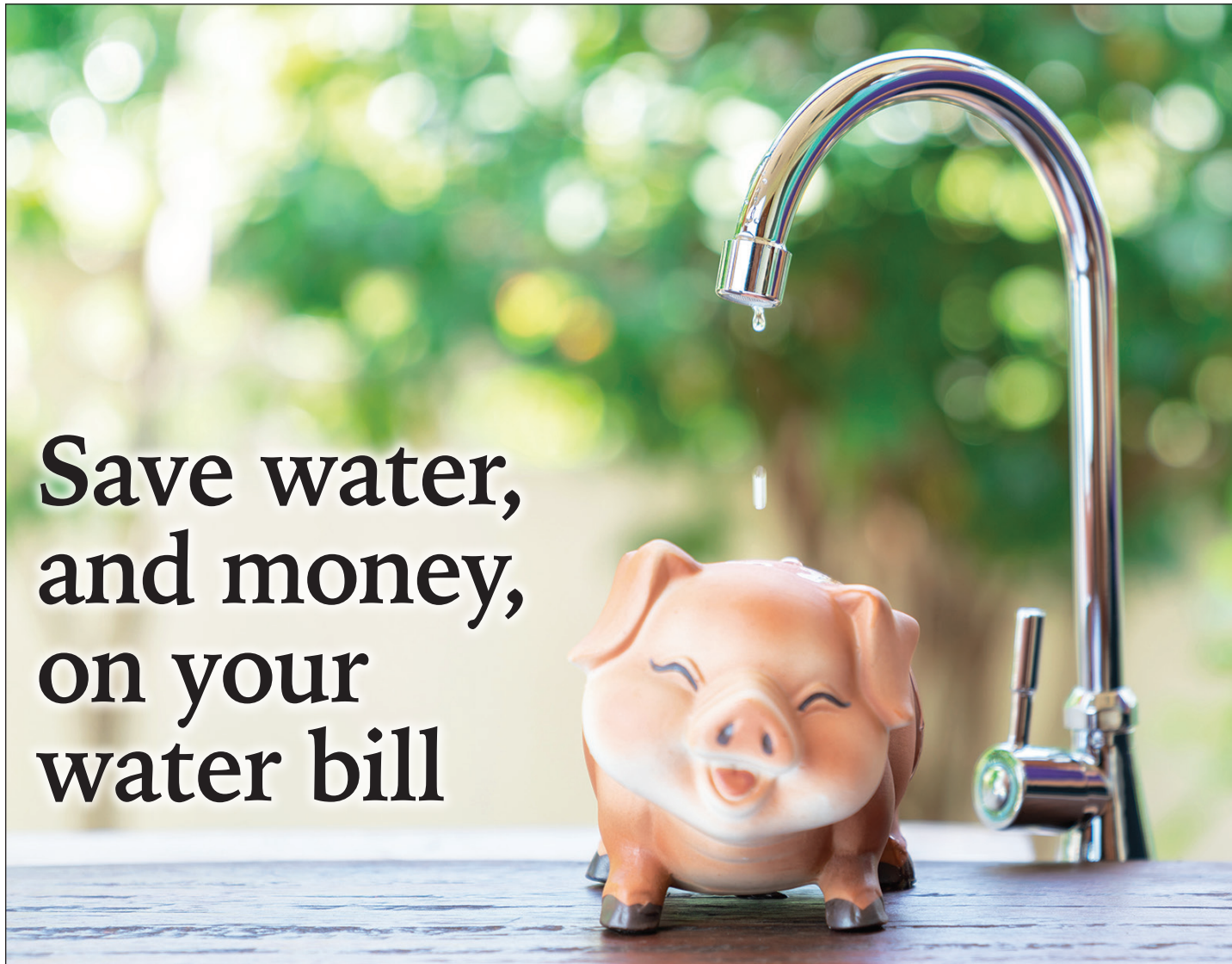


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For more information, go to
www.visaliachamber.org/travel



ZBLASTER / ADOBE STOCK

Save water, and money, on your water bill

With California's drought making headlines across the state and country, businesses are doing their best to save water every day. Worsening drought conditions have presented many challenges for us to collectively navigate, but it's important that we work together to preserve California's limited water supply, both now and for years to come. Our local water provider and Chamber member California Water Service (Cal Water) has the right tools and programs to help businesses save water and money.

Cal Water has been preparing for drought conditions for years and continues to do so by upgrading infrastructure, creating drought contingency plans, and providing free and low-cost resources to help customers save water.

Among the programs and resources, there are a number Cal Water offers for businesses, including:

- Rebates for...
 - High-efficiency toilets



- and urinals
- Smart irrigation controllers
- High-efficiency sprinkler nozzles
- Large rotary nozzles
- Spray bodies with integrated pressure regulation and check valve
- Spray-to-drip conversion
- Lawn-to-garden conversion
- Smart Landscape Tune-Up Program that includes an irrigation system evaluation along with installation of approved efficient devices and repair of most irrigation leaks at no cost
- Customized incentive program

gram
 ■ Educational resources
 Additionally, Cal Water wants to ensure customers are aware of prohibited uses of water, including these common wasteful practices:

- Applying water to outdoor landscapes that causes runoff onto adjacent property, nonirrigated areas, private and public walkways, roadways, parking lots, or structures
- Using a hose to wash motor vehicles unless the hose is fitted with a shut-off nozzle or device that causes it to cease dispensing water immediately when not in use
- Applying water to outdoor landscapes during and within 48 hours after measurable rainfall (0.25 inches)
- Irrigating outside of new construction without drip

or microspray systems

- Irrigating landscape between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.
 - Irrigating on a nondesignated watering day
 - Irrigating nonfunctional turf at commercial, industrial, and institutional properties, such as grass in front of or next to large industrial or commercial buildings (irrigating with recycled water is allowed)
- More information on these programs and a full list of prohibited uses of water can be found at drought.calwater.com.
- It will take the cooperation of governments, individuals, and businesses to ensure the state has the water it needs for everyday and emergency needs. Visalia businesses have risen to the challenge when needed, and it's time to come together again to preserve this precious resource.



Counting down the days to fall opening of new casino

Sara Mendez
Marketing and PR
Eagle Mountain Casino

In the fall of 2019, HBG Design was selected as designer and architect for Eagle Mountain Casino's highly anticipated casino relocation project. The nationally-recognized Top 10 hospitality and entertainment design firm, which has offices in Memphis, San Diego, and Dallas, started design of the project in 2020 and continued design right through the pandemic. Virtual meetings continued with the Tule River Tribe and the design advanced through all the obstacles faced from Covid-19.

"One thing that we learned during our process is that, for us, this project started fairly recently. For the Tule River Tribe, however, this project's vision began in the 1990s. It's like a 25-plus-year process of acquiring the land and envisioning a property in the Valley, closer to Porterville in the population base, so it's remarkable the perseverance that the Tribe has shown to get the project realized," said Joe Baruffaldi, AIA, Principal, HBG Design.

The Tribe met with HBG Design and shared elements of the rich tribal history, including archival images of beautiful baskets, the process of basket making along the Tule River, legends of tribal origin, and focused on the details of the higher elevations of the tribal homeland.

"As we started to get more and more involved and inspired by those Tribal themes, we began to wonder how we could integrate some of that history and some of that cultural richness of the giant sequoia tree, the mountainous region, the tales of the 'hairy man' as they call it, and the basket patterns themselves, which

See CASINO on page 3

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Parking of commercial vehicles



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

Recently the Chamber was asked to help the city craft language about commercial vehicles in residential areas. This issue is an example of what makes strong communities, how business works, and ultimately why having a chamber advocate for local business is critical.

City of Visalia ordinance code 10.16.210 in part says:

Parking commercial vehicles in a residential district. No person shall park any commercial vehicle having an unladen weight exceeding five thousand (5,000) pounds in any residential district except: (a) while loading or unloading property; or (b) when such vehicle is parked in connection with, or in aid of, the performance of a service to or on a property in the block in which such vehicle is parked.

Like many who have read that ordinance, there are some challenges in that description and rule. Most glaring is the vehicle weight limit. Most family SUVs and trucks are over this weight. Obviously, these "family trucksters" are not commercial vehicles.

No one would describe them as such. If nothing else, we need a more current definition of a commercial vehicle that extends beyond merely just weight.

Commercial vehicles now come in all shapes, sizes, and weights. Several local companies use small vans or crossovers that are certainly for commercial purposes but don't weigh 5,000

pounds. Some businesses use tall sprinter vans; some have trailers, some have diesel vehicles, and others have a fleet of electric cars.

For employers, these vehicles serve a myriad of purposes. First and foremost, response time. If there is an issue an employee needs to respond to, they can go direct. When we need those businesses, we need them there quickly. This means the tow truck gets there faster, the plumber comes directly to fix that leak, or the utility worker can save precious moments in an emergency. As a community, this response time is critical.

For many businesses, their work truck is their office. Going from site to site, these commercial businesses use their trucks to deliver their services, particularly in the trades. If they couldn't park them at home, they would need to incur additional expenses paying to store and secure them elsewhere.

A work truck or company vehicle is often used to recruit employees, retain great ones, and as a carrot to motivate others. It's also a huge perk for employees. As a kid, I had a childhood friend who had a company car. It was a big deal, and rightfully so. They had worked hard, and now the entire neighborhood knew.

But parking is a real and valid issue in some residential neighborhoods. Given the variety of vehicle sizes (and neighborhoods), this has proven to be a challenge for some neighbors.

The Visalia Chamber is proud to once again convene business leaders to tackle issues facing our community. Looking at the issue squarely, we want to understand how local businesses use commercial vehicles. How widespread are commercial vehicles? What vehicles do local businesses use, and any policies do they have surrounding employees taking those vehicles home?

The Chamber will again serve as a catalyst for a common sense solution. We'd love to hear from you if your business uses commercial vehicles. Please email info@visaliachamber.org so we can hear directly from you on this issue.

CITY UPDATE

Visalia Senior Center's fall open house

The first day of fall is right around the corner, and fun is in full swing at our very own Visalia Senior Center.

The annual Visalia Senior Center's Fall Open House is back on Thursday, October 13th

from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Visalia Senior Center, located downtown at 310 N. Locust St.

A community staple, the Fall Open House is the perfect opportunity for senior oriented businesses to connect with our 55 and better community. This special event connects families, caregivers, and older adults to local senior resources in a welcoming and relaxed setting. In addition to information and vendor booths, the Open House features entertainment, a lunch, and raffle prizes. Admission to attendees is completely free and open to all ages, lunch is available by purchasing tickets in advance.

The City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Department is now accepting applications from local vendors, and is seeking businesses and organizations, that offer resources for mature adults, to apply for a booth space and join us for this special event.



Booth space is limited, and applications will be accepted on a first come, first served basis.

Those interested in participating must submit a complete application and payment prior to 4 p.m. on Friday, October 7th. Booth assignments will be based on the order of arrival day on the day of the event. Vendor booth fees are \$55 for commercial businesses and \$35 for nonprofit organization and government organizations, nonprofit ID number required.

For more information on the Visalia Senior Center Fall Open House, contact the Visalia Senior Center at (559) 713-4381 or email the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Department at recreation@visalia.city.

For more information on community events that your business or organization can be a part of, contact the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Department at (559) 713-4365.

For the latest updates and news from the City of Visalia, visit www.visalia.city or visit them on social media @CityofVisalia.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Name: Jason M. Vasquez
Company: Central Valley Community Bank
Title: Vice President/Relationship Manager

Why do you serve on the Chamber Board of Directors?

Ever since my enrollment in the Leadership Visalia program, I have always tried to stay involved with the Chamber. Visalia is where I was born and raised, so staying involved in the community that has made me who I am is really important for me. Plus, my work values line up with the Chamber's so it's a perfect fit.

What has the chamber done in the last 12 months that has helped your business?

They have helped with making special announcements, provide sponsorship opportunities that help market our company, and have provided help to local businesses...which in return help our business.

What motivates you to work hard?

My family. To be able to provide for them and enjoy the extra curricular activities that we get to do together. They are my world and I wouldn't have it any other way. #GIRLDAD

How do you support #Loyal-toLocal?

We try to donate our time and spend our money locally as much as we can. This community has a lot to offer and we should always find a way to show our appreciation with the support. It's been a rough 2+ years, but with a conscious effort to support locally, our community will continue to thrive. My wife had started a small business last year and we see how supportive this community is first hand.



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

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

NEW

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

Business Builder Members:
 ■ Metro By T-Mobile

Small Business Members:
 ■ Jojo's Grill-A-Dog
 ■ Visalia Home Shows
 ■ East to West Barber Academy
 ■ Anderson Real Estate Group
 ■ All Topics

Small Business Nonprofit Members:
 ■ Visalia Breakfast Lions

Micro-Enterprise Members:
 ■ Kelsey Lynn Design
 ■ Josh Ormonde-Anderson Real

Estate Group

RENEWING

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

Visionary Members:
 ■ Kaweah Health

Keystone Members:
 ■ Valley Strong Credit Union
 North Visalia Branch

Community Investor Members:
 ■ Joann Stores Visalia Distribution Center*
 ■ M. Green and Company LLP*
 ■ Valley Children's Healthcare

Business Builder Members:
 ■ Echelon Executive Protection

Business Connector Members:

- Ashoori & Co. Jewelers*
- Caliber Home Loans*
- Pena's Disposal

Small Business Members:

- Creative Flowers*
- Edible Arrangements - 401
- Gilman Harris Travioli Slover
- Gunning & Gunning, C.P.A.
- Lane Engineers, Inc.*
- Lockwood Agency
- Lyle B Stillwater, M.D. F.A.C.S.*
- Revel Venues
- Rise Fitness & Performance*
- Sequoia Cigar Company
- Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency
- Valley Oaks Golf Course



Community Investor Nonprofit Members:

- CSET: Community Services Employment Training*

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Assistance League of Visalia*
- Visalia Public Cemetery District

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Visalia Sunset Rotary*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Name: Felipe E. Villegas
Company: Elite Restoration by Villegas
Title: President

I have been in the restoration industry for 20 plus years. I originally started as a carpet cleaning technician in 2002. As a carpet tech I became familiar with the industry and the restoration process. In my two years as a tech, I was dedicated to learning as much as possible with the hope to grow within the company. After my second year I was offered the promotion to a Water Mitigation Project Manager. I maintained this position for fourteen years, at which time my knowledge for the industry continued to grow. I be-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

came proficient in mitigation processes, sketching, estimating etc. I also became familiar with Xactware programs, third party administrators' expectations, and goals and daily tasks of water mitigation. I would project manage a crew of 20 technicians and confirm all performances and practices were completed correctly and to industry standards. During this time, I was given the opportunity to travel, and assist with large cat losses for water mitigation and fires I am currently the President and Owner of Elite Restoration by Villegas and have been success-

ful in this role for the past two years. I oversee a team of 10 in fire, mold, traumas, contents and general carpet and commercial cleanings, and structural repairs. In my time in the position, I have learned a whole new process of services. These experiences have been a great learning tool for myself and everyone involved. I also have completed several trainings and received many certifications as well as maintained my IICRC certs in several areas.

Elite Restoration by Villegas is a proud member of the Visa-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

We've teamed up with Family Services of Tulare County and Visalia Emergency Aid to volunteer and we plan on getting more involved as we continue to grow.

We are a family-owned and operated small local business with 10 employees. Our priority is to keep customers needs meet and ensure their satisfaction is maintained. We are excited to continue to grow within our community! The Chamber has provided Elite Restoration by Villegas with many new opportunities meet different members of our community as well as the opportunity to network. Through the Ambassador program, we were able to build a partnership with Bulldog Sports Properties on a marketing prize package.

Ask Jena

How am I able to connect with members?

We are catalyst, CONVENER, and champion of our local business community. Contact me today on ways to connect further with your fellow members!

How do I update my business listing on the Chamber's website?

Our business directory is one of our top 3 most visited pages on our website! You can update your business listing through your Member Portal. Lost your login? Contact me to reset it.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message: Jena@visaliachamber.org

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

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES with THE CHAMBER

TRIPS PROVIDED BY:
 COLLETTE VACATIONS; CST#: 2006766-20
 CHAMBER EXPLORATIONS; CST#: 2048841-40
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COWBOY CHRISTMAS

RIDING INTO TOWN
DECEMBER 2, 2022

visaliachamber.org/cta



Eagle Mountain Casino celebrated their 26th Anniversary with back-to-back giveaways to its team members in celebration of their devotion to the casino and a new year of change. All team members were awarded a paid day off and gas card, and 250 team members were awarded cash, gas, and food prizes. In addition, the casino welcomed new hire, Jessica

James as the new beverage manager.

Happy Trails Riding Academy announced the 2022 Round-Up will take place on October 7 and will include dinner, auction, barn dance, and more.

Central Valley Community Bank reported that net income for the second quarter of 2022 increased to \$0.56 per diluted common share from first quarter's \$0.51.

LMG Ag Products raised \$3,000 for their quarterly nonprofit fundraising campaign. The money raised will go towards His Heart Beats, a nonprofit who helps many local families with sick children who can't afford their health care in the Central Valley.

Family Services of Tulare County announced the Purple Party will return Sept. 30. Proceeds from the event will benefit Family Services' domestic violence shelter, Karen's House.

CSET announced they are registered as a charitable organization on AmazonSmile. By selecting CSET as your charitable organization, you will help generate donations to CSET's mission every time you shop



on AmazonSmile, at no extra cost to you.

Congratulations to **Pita Kabob** who's shawarma fries won the **Downtown Visalians'** "Loaded Fries Contest. Congratulations to **Salad Shop** who was an honorable mention in second place.

Valley Strong

Credit Union hosted a member appreciation day in August with snow cones for members. In addition, to celebrate Dogs Day, all Tulare County Branches had treats and photo opportunities for members and their pets. Each branch collected donated dog food to support local animal shelters.

Visalia Unified School District's Superintendent Kirk Shrum hosted a video story time the day before the first day of school to help students and families get ready for the "best 1st day ever".

Sierra Bancorp, parent of **Bank of the Sierra** declared their quarterly cash dividend for 2022, marking the Company's 94th consecutive quarterly cash dividend.

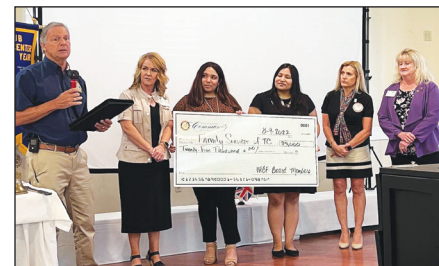
Guarantee Real Estate teamed up with Central California Food Bank to help fight hunger in the Valley. In July they helped to raise nearly \$20,000.

Salt + Light Works in partnership with **Self-Help Enterprises** hosted a groundbreaking ceremony in August for The Neighborhood Village.

Rookies Sports Bar of Visalia hosted a back



PITA KABOB



VISALIA COUNTY CENTER ROTARY CLUB

to school backpack and supply giveaway in August. A total of 300 backpacks were handed out.

Visalia County Center Rotary Club awarded **Family Services of Tulare County** with \$25,000.

Family HealthCare Network started off the week-long celebration of National Health Center Week in August with a team visit to Sequoia Commons and provided 200 COVID test kits, health information, health drinks, and a bailoterapia demo.

Fresno Yosemite International Airport has partnered with the Fresno Arts Council for a new piece of public art at the airport. Artists have until Sept. 16 to apply.

Lake Bottom Brewery & Distillery announced a new service on Wednesday featuring all Lake Bottom beers and noncraft beers at \$3 all day.

Visalia Home Shows announced the next home Expo for Sept. 24-25 at the **Visalia Convention Center**. Discounted tickets will be available online starting Sept. 6.

Legacy Real Estate hosted a back to school haircuts and snow cone event in August.

Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company hosted their Enchanted Evening fundraiser event in July. The community came together to raise \$16,000 for the theatre company.

CASINO

Continued from page 1

each hold very particular meaning. So as we started to learn about these things, it layered on to us a desire to create a property that spoke very closely to those themes," said Rob Jurbergs, AIA, Principal, HBG Design.

HBG designed the new casino property with the vision of a lodge and a more mountainous style of architecture with a home in the Valley.

"For the Tule River Tribe, it was really important to tell their story. We researched their culture; they provided books to us, and photos of artifacts. They were really open about sharing their culture, which allowed us to find patterns within baskets to incorporate into our design that would give this property a uniqueness in the market when you look at some of the other competitive casinos, because it tells their story. It would also be very meaningful to the tribal members for us to incorporate



RENDERING COURTESY OF HBG DESIGN

HBG Design took multiple aspects of the design inspiration depicting the story of the Tule River through the Tribe's native traditions, art, patterns and imagery.

basket patterns that, on the one hand, are cool casino elements and, on the other hand, recognizable to anyone with knowledge of the Tribal culture," said Baruffaldi.

HBG Design was also trying to meet the market from a business perspective. One example of this is the inclusion of a Sports bar called 'The Redwood Taphouse' in the new casino property. The city of Porterville

does not have a variety of options to view televised sporting events, and it is anticipated that this will be a hot spot for all sports lovers.

"Talking with Matthew Mingrone, the General Manager of Eagle Mountain Casino, he wanted to have a place in Porterville to go watch the game, so you start to have these business drivers that merge with these creative storytelling drivers to create an overall unique business driven property," continued Baruffaldi.

The Tule River Tribal Council as a whole were essential in helping HBG Design learn about tribal culture and embraced the idea of using the new relocation property as a platform for sharing their culture, while meeting the needs of the community.

HBG Design created specific conceptual themes after speaking to tribal community groups and Tribal leadership to showcase and present some of the more significant meanings related to the Tribe.

"The design storytelling within the property as a whole involved the development of an overall concept that ties all of the different spaces together, as a platform to create an individual identity for each restaurant or venue within the property," said Baruffaldi.

HBG Design took multiple aspects of the design inspiration depicting the story of the Tule River through the Tribe's native traditions, art, patterns and imagery.

"During our early visioning workshops, we focused in on the words 'Grounded' and 'Soaring'.

'Grounded' and 'soaring' are more conceptual terms as it relates to the concept of the Giant Sequoia tree which is so large it can only be experienced truly by either the rooted connection to the earth, the trunk, and the soaring nature of the canopy because it is so tall and dwarfs everything else in the forest. With a better understanding of the tribe's ancestral homeland and hearing the stories from tribal members related to both the Tribe's past and the desire to create a project to represent a strong future to the Tule River tribe, we started to connect the theme from "Grounded" and "Soaring." "Grounded" is about honoring the past, the heritage, the traditions, the elders, and all of the history of the tribal foundation. "Soaring" represents looking forward and creating opportunities for the Tribe with the new casino," said Jurbergs.

The giant sequoia concept was visualized in three parts: the roots, the trunk, and the canopy. Designers identified words and images that depict the nature and character of each part of the tree. An element that the Tule River Tribal Council started to understand and embrace was the storytelling behind the design and how HBG tied each of the giant sequoia aspects into different parts of the building.

Additionally, the Tule River became a key design inspiration. The river is very dynamic, and as it travels from higher elevations, it creates majestic pools of water and waterfalls.

Currently, Eagle Mountain Casino is located 17 miles east of Porterville and is a full-service casino owned and operated by the Tule River Tribe. Guests must be 18 years of age to enter. The casino is open 24/7. In addition, the Grizzly Food court is open 24/7, and the River Steakhouse is open Friday to Sunday from 5 to 10 p.m. Eagle Mountain Casino is a short drive from Bakersfield or Visalia.



PPAS / ADOBE STOCK

"Pocket Homes" can include a spacious bedroom, living area, bath and may be placed anywhere in California, Oregon, or Washington.

An 'all new' Home Expo

Steve Tarter
Show Manager
Visalia Home Expo

You are invited to an all-new Visalia Home Expo with over 150 exhibits and lots of new features on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 24 and 25, at the Visalia Convention Center.

A very special Street of Dreams is on tap at this year's show featuring Tiny Houses! Let StudioPac.us show you how to embrace the future of living with multi use area modular units to add an extra bedroom, an office, music room or bungalow. Tour PreFab Innovators backyard accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that encompass about 440 square feet. These "Pocket Homes" can include a spacious bedroom, living area, bath and may be placed anywhere in California, Oregon, or Washington.

And if you have questions, Lindsay Wood of the Go Tiny! Academy will be on hand to provide all the answers you need to get just that extra space we all need! And before you move on, check out ideas from Gowin Green, Tuff Sheds, and Synthetic Grass Solutions for outdoor living options.

If fall is your time to refresh and renew before the hordes of family arrives, then enter to win a room makeover, with 3D de-



signs provided by Gowin Home and painting services by Legendary Painting and The Home Depot. To beat the heat and ensure effective water usage, set-up an appointment with this year's Gold Sponsor, Balanced Comfort.

If your tastes are more toward the bizarre, check out the latest Halloween chills and thrills at the Spooky Halloween Store's booth inside the Home EXPO Marketplace. And stop by the new Beer & Wine Garden featuring the live music of 3 & The Machine, Sat. 1 to 4 p.m.; and That Little Band, Sun. noon to 3 p.m.

The Expo begins Saturday, Sept. 24 at 10 a.m. and runs through Sunday at 4 p.m. Tickets may be purchased online or at the door. There are still a handful of booths available—so don't wait to contact Show Management to exhibit your wares and services. For more information, email events@showcasevents.net, or call 1-(800)-700-SHOW (7469).



Training leaders for success



Raquel Garcia
Executive Director
CityServe Tulare Kings

Training leaders for success during and after COVID has required a seismic shift in the last few years, and though it has not come without challenges, it has also presented some great opportunities to redefine the way we typically "do business." Our "new normal" requires us to think differently about how we connect with others, how we tackle projects and how we lead our teams. It matters, that

we understand newly emerging needs in our industries, but more importantly, that we are talking about the techniques to hone them in.

As the Facilitator for Leadership Visalia, I have the privilege of working with business professionals who are currently leading teams or who aspire to lead others at some point in their career. Participants are there because they want to be challenged, they want to develop themselves and they want to know where they can best use their talents in the community. The program introduces a historical view of Visalia; how we started, how we have evolved and where we are today. Very quickly, we are discussing the strengths and the weaknesses of our community and areas where we as leaders, can come alongside our local officials and help to make positive change. It's true, any modern leadership journey must start with self-reflection. We dive deep into our own leadership styles and identify who we are on the team and how we can contribute to our organization. I often say "this program is a short-term sacrifice, for a long-term investment" meaning, the commitment you make to be in the program will continue to provide a return for years to come. I regularly hear this feedback from former graduates of the program who have promoted or advanced in their careers.

Our participants put their leadership talents to work with a community-based project that is intended to make Visalia just a little bit better than it was before we started. Ask anyone, it is truly, one of the highlights of the program each year. We have a lot of work to do, and of course the path ahead is far from smooth, but this program is a huge building block to help Visalia continue a long and successful post-pandemic future. Keep your eyes open for the class of 22-23, they are going to do big things!

Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



COURTESY PHOTO
The Windy and KNP Complex fires occurred Sept. 9 through Dec. 16, 2021, affecting areas within Tulare County.

Deadline approaching in California for SBA working capital loans due to the Windy and KNP Complex wildfires

Mark W. Randle
U.S. Small Business Administration

Director Tanya N. Garfield of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Disaster Field Operations Center-West today reminded California small businesses of the Sept. 21, 2022, deadline to apply for an SBA federal disaster loan for economic injury caused by the Windy and KNP Complex fires that occurred Sept. 9 to Dec. 16, 2021.

According to Garfield, small nonfarm businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture and most private nonprofit organizations of any size may apply for Economic Injury Disaster Loans up to \$2 million to help meet working capital needs caused by the disaster. "Economic Injury Disaster Loans may be used to pay fixed debts, payroll, accounts payable and other bills that cannot be paid because of the disaster's impact. Economic injury assistance is available regardless of whether the applicant suffered any property damage," Garfield said.

These low-interest federal disaster loans are available in Fresno, Inyo, Kern, Kings and Tulare counties.

The interest rate is 2.855 percent for businesses and 2 percent for private nonprofit organizations with terms up to 30 years. Loan amounts and terms are set by SBA and are based on each applicant's financial condition.

Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at disasterloanassistance.sba.gov/. Applicants may also call SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance. For people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, please dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunications relay services. Completed applications should be mailed to U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

The U.S. Small Business Administration helps power the American dream of business ownership. As the only go-to resource and voice for small businesses backed by the strength of the federal government, the SBA empowers entrepreneurs and small business owners with the resources and support they need to start, grow, expand their businesses, or recover from a declared disaster. It delivers services through an extensive network of SBA field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations. To learn more, visit www.sba.gov.

Kaweah Health joins forces with Unitek to expand workforce education



Unitek Learning and Kaweah Health are thrilled to announce a new partnership to help reduce the nursing shortage in California. Together, they seek to implement a customized workforce solution that will produce skilled and educated graduates who are ready to enter the medical field and help integrated health systems such as a Kaweah Health care for their patients.

Kaweah Health, which for 60 years has served patients in California's agriculture-rich Central Valley, has worked diligently over the years through local and regional partnerships to solve its nursing shortage, but the pandemic highlighted the need to do more.

Founded in 2002, Unitek College is a division of Unitek Learning and an accredited, private institution that combines unique academic and technical specialties to provide a superior education in the areas of health care and nursing. Unitek College offers seven convenient facilities in California with campuses in Fremont, San Jose, Hayward, Concord, South San Francisco, Sacramento, and Bakersfield.

"The pandemic has been absolutely crippling to our workforce, the majority of which are bedside nurses. It's shown us that we have to do more, we have to think outside the box to grow the next generation of nurses," said Lynn Harvard Mirviss, RN, Ed.D, and Vice President of Kaweah Health's Board of Directors. "There are many out there who like Florence Nightingale are ready to step up and serve. This partnership with Unitek is one way to help these men and women become nurses and raise the standards of care for patients."

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 complement, 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 serves as an advanced placement

track for qualifying students. "This new partnership will be an excellent opportunity for Kaweah Health employees to continue their education and to help address the nursing shortage at both Kaweah Health and across the state," said Dianne Cox, Chief Human Resources Officer at Kaweah Health. She added: "In the future, we plan to open this school to members of the community, who will be able to join Kaweah Health as an employee while pursuing their nursing degree."

"It has been a pleasure to work with the Kaweah Health Team and develop this partnership," said Karilyn Van Oosten, Vice President of Strategic Business Development at Unitek Learning. "Their commitment to the community and the workforce has been evident in every step they took to ensure that students can flourish in their facilities."

By joining this partnership, Unitek Learning has committed to providing employees of Kaweah Health with a specialized tuition rate and an opportunity to advance their health care career. Kaweah Health is committing financial resources to help offset the nursing students' tuition. Through this partnership, Unitek Learning has identified themselves as one of the nation's most dedicated academic institutions. "At Unitek, we are committed to education and workforce alignment so that the next generation can thrive," said Janis Paulson, Chief Executive Officer at Unitek Learning. "We're honored to join forces with Kaweah Health and help transform the health care workforce. As a learning institution, we want to create career-ready professionals that are needed in the medical industry. This partnership is a step forward for Unitek as we continue to educate future health care professionals."

Unitek Learning is the parent company of several distinguished learning institutions: Unitek College, Unitek EMT, Eagle Gate College, Provo College, and Brookline College. Unitek programs teach the clinical practices and theory used in the field today. Equipped with a multitude of sought-after skills, Unitek graduates are prepared to excel in many of the fastest-growing careers in health care and nursing.

THE LAW AT WORK

The pros and cons of employee handbooks



GUBLER & ABBOTT
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

By Brett T. Abbott
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Most companies have employee handbooks. Some are extensive and regularly updated, while some are just a few pages long and haven't been revised in decades. Some have been carefully reviewed by HR experts or labor law attorneys, while others have been cobbled together from the internet. No matter what form an employee handbook takes, there are some potential pitfalls regarding handbooks that employers should know.

Advantages of using an employee handbook: Handbooks commit employers to deal with situations in specific ways. They provide for consistency of treatment and reduce the risk of discrimination and retaliation claims. Employee handbooks also reduce confusion about unstated policies and benefits—less confusion results in fewer lawsuits and morale problems. Handbooks can help eliminate arguments of "arbitrary termination" and can assist in resolving complaints. Perhaps most importantly, employee handbooks aid new employees in understanding a company's policies and culture.

Concerns regarding the use of employee handbooks: Despite the numerous benefits of implementing an employee handbook, there are some possible concerns employers should be aware of. If an employer fails to abide by policies provided for in a handbook, it may be more likely to be found liable to an aggrieved employee. Employee handbooks are fodder for employee rights attorneys who look for progressive discipline policies that have not been followed or for other de-

viations from the handbook. There can also be some significant time and expense involved in creating an accurate, thorough employee handbook. Handbooks also require updating as employment laws and company policies change.

Preserving the at-will relationship: The biggest concern with employee handbooks is that the handbook will alter the "at-will" nature of employment. California courts have held that policies contained in employee handbooks can create contractual obligations (Foley v. Interactive Data Corp. (1988) 47 Cal.3d 654, 681).

To avoid this unwanted change in the "at-will" status of employees, many employers add disclaimers that the handbook does not create a legally enforceable agreement. At-will disclaimers should be prominent—on the cover or first page of the handbook. The language should state clearly that the handbook is not a contract with employees, and it expresses only "guidelines" regarding the company's "policies." Any disclaimer should also expressly state that, with the exception of the at-will policy, all other the policies in the handbook can be modified by the employer at any time without a written revision of the handbook.

This column is not meant to provide an exhaustive analysis of employee handbooks. Rather, the goal of this column is to illustrate the benefits, and potential drawbacks, associated with them. While a thorough, accurate employee handbook does take time to create and modify, employers usually find the benefits far exceed the effort involved.

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

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