

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 42, No. 24 | December 2022

INSIDE

Kirk Shrum: Reflections on the first three months of the school year

As I wrap up my entry plan and first six months as Superintendent, I want to thank you for being so welcoming and inviting as I joined this great community. I have had the opportunity to meet many parents, community leaders, students, and staff since being named superintendent. **3**

Kaweah Health CEO Gary Herbst writes a letter to the governor

District hospitals and the teams behind them – doctors, nurses, medical providers, etc. – have been “good soldiers” over the course of this pandemic. **4**

Eagle Mountain Casino donates 100 turkeys to help local families

Eagle Mountain Casino donated 100 turkeys to the Salvation Army of Tulare County for families in need of a Thanksgiving meal. **4**

EVENTS

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

TRAVEL WITH US

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

OCTOBER 4-12, 2023

Highlights of England, Scotland & Wales

OCTOBER 23-28, 2023

Cuba Discovery

NOVEMBER 1-10, 2023

Rome and the Country Roads of Tuscany

DECEMBER 4-9, 2023

Washington D.C. Holiday



Kaweah Health workers and members of the Visalia Breakfast Lions Club deliver Thanksgiving meals to families of 100 hospice patients on Nov. 21.

Kaweah Health Hospice delivers holiday dinner to doorsteps

Kaweah Health Hospice partnered with Visalia Breakfast Lions Club to provide a fresh Thanksgiving turkey and fixings to 102 families who have a loved one receiving hospice care

The Sun-Gazette

In partnership with Visalia Breakfast Lions Club, Kaweah Health Hospice provided Thanksgiving meals to over 100 patients.

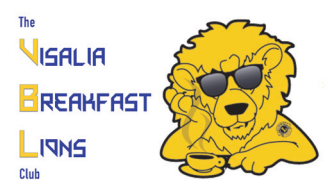
On Nov. 21, Kaweah Health Hospice and Visalia Breakfast Lions Club worked together to deliver a fresh turkey and fixings to 102 families who have loved ones receiving hospice care. The Lions Club was responsible for providing the turkeys while several entities within Kaweah Health contributed to providing the fixings. Additionally, some additional meals were provided to a few Home Health and Rural Health families as well.

“This is so our families don’t have to deal with more than they are dealing with,” Tiffany Bullock, director of Kaweah Health Home Health and Hospice said.

Kaweah Health Hospice staff, along with staff members from



the Rural Health Clinics, Sub-acute, Urgent Cares, Home Health, the Kaweah Health Executive Team and the Kaweah Health Hospice Foundation Board, contributed all of the “fixings” to go with the turkey. Additionally, members of Kaweah Health’s NPC Post-Acute team volunteered their time to bag up fixings for



Kaweah Health Hospice staff members.

Kaweah Health Hospice, a di-

See HOSPICE on page 2

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Genius with a plan



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

“An idiot with a plan can beat a genius without one” – Warren Buffett

I have had the opportunity to meet many a passionate genius with the next “best” thing. They are full of ideas, passion, and initial drive.

Often, I think their “best” thing really is pretty good. I see the value for our community and think the market could support their idea. But as another great saying says, “the devil is in the details.” Often, those people try to blaze a path without understanding where they are headed. Consumed with their vision, they can be hesitant to plan beyond their own view, ignore listening to others, and resist using valuable resources.

Don’t be the business leader who doesn’t plan and take full advantage of every resource around you.

As a Chamber Member, you are not alone. We are on your team. Your success drives us. As you end 2022 and begin planning what will once again be a business year like no other, let me draw your attention to three essential resources available for Chamber Members.

Business Owners Seeking Solutions – This group is business owners (or very top management) that gather to tackle complex issues benefiting from the knowledge within the group. While our industries may be different, there are some business problems that we’ve all tackled. A group will be forming in January to look at various topics, including Growing Pains - how to successfully scale to the next level, strategic responses to a shifting

workforce, and creating efficiencies in public sector partnerships, among other topics. Each group will be deliberately small, allowing owners to get to know each, build trust while learning from each other. If you are interested, please send an email to info@visaliachamber.org.

Economic Roundtable – Economic news is relative. While global and national economic news can be found with a click of a button, it is vital to understand how those forces are felt locally. In conjunction with the Sun-Gazette newspaper, we will host a quarterly economic roundtable to discuss how the global, national, and local economy is affecting our local businesses. This roundtable will lead to a quarterly economic update published in the Sun-Gazette that will give you Chamber members an insight into your local business economy.

Impact Leadership Conference – Mark April 20th in your calendar. This hugely successful conference will again return, pairing an engaging national keynote speaker and breakouts led by local thought leaders. This day is a mix of inspirations and tangible how-tos. Part of the day is in-person, and the other part is online. This mix allows flexibility with staffing coverages and creates efficiencies previous participants have raved about. Our national speaker will be announced soon, but trust me, you won’t want to miss this year. The breakout sessions are real standouts. Every year, participants tell me how much they value those sessions and how much they have learned. If there’s a breakout topic you wish we’d cover, reach out. Many are developed from conversations we have with members. There are sponsorship opportunities, group ticket deals, and plenty of ways for you and your team to benefit from this amazing day.

Be a genius with a plan. Take advantage of the chamber membership resources around you, and together we will build a better Visalia for everyone.

THE LAW AT WORK

Are rounding policies in danger?

By Brett T. Abbott
Gubler & Abbott LLP



GUBLER & ABBOTT
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Over the past decade, California employers have reasonably relied on rulings from courts upholding the validity of time rounding systems, so long as they are neutral in their application. However, in a sharp departure from prior cases, the Sixth District Court of Appeal recently ruled that even a neutral rounding policy that, on average, may slightly favor employees in terms of compensable time may present potential exposure for claims of unpaid wages if a particular employee can demonstrate that the rounding policy disadvantaged him and deprived him of wages in any particular pay period.

In *Camp v. Home Depot*, the class of plaintiffs challenged Home Depot’s time rounding policy that rounded employees’ time punches to the nearest quarter-hour and asserted that this policy deprived them of wages based on time actually worked.

Here were some of the key agreed-upon findings in the *Camp* case:

- 56.5% of shifts resulted in employees receiving pay that was equal to or greater than their actual work time based on the rounding policy; while
- 43.4% of shifts resulted in employees losing minutes of work time due to rounding;
- for pay periods where work time resulted in additional minutes in favor of employees, the average gain was 11.3 minutes; while
- for pay periods where work time resulted in lost minutes to employees, the average loss was 10.4 minutes.

One of named plaintiffs conceded that she was overpaid and could not state a claim for unpaid wages. Another plaintiff, however, demonstrated that Home Depot’s rounding policy resulted in him losing 470 minutes due to rounding, or approximately 7.83 hours over the course of approximately 4.5 years.

The Court of Appeal concluded that a genuine issue of material fact existed as to whether Home Depot’s rounding policy resulted in employee *Camp* not being paid for all the time that he worked. The Court reasoned that nothing in the Labor Code or applicable Wage Order specifically permitted rounding, and instead, the relevant statutes required employees to be paid for “all time worked.” Moreover, recent decisions from the California Supreme Court confirmed that the underlying public policy of protecting employees’ compensation of even small amounts of work time.

The *Camp* Court limited its holding to the facts of this case and did not purport to prohibit all employer time rounding practices, or address situations where neutral rounding policies may be permissible due to the demonstrated inability to capture the actual minutes worked by employees. It also expressly declined to rule whether an employer who has the actual ability to capture all employee work minutes is always required to do so.

Nonetheless, this decision has the potential to be used to challenge any rounding practice in California. This case should serve as a reminder to California employers to re-evaluate any rounding policies/practices and determine whether this decision presents new compliance considerations.

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

CITY UPDATE

Year of growth

As we look back at 2022, it is clear that Visalia continues to move forward and we are seeing growth throughout the community!

Plans underway now in our Industrial park, new residential subdivisions and major retail corridors like Mooney, Dinuba and Riggan and downtown, are all contributing to a more diverse and expanded Visalia in years to come.

Notable highlights include:

- As of October 31st, there have been 691 new multi-family unit permits issued (more than the last nine years combined), and 516 new single-family permits issued, the fifth straight year to exceed 500 new units.
- 2022 is the fourth year in a row to have over one million square feet of new commercial permits issued.
- The Ace Hardware distribution center (bringing 400 jobs) is nearing completion at Plaza and Ferguson.
- A second Amazon facility (bringing 500 jobs and one of only three of its kind in the nation) is now operating its first phase.
- New food offerings include (or soon will!): Texas Roadhouse, JoJo’s Grill



A Dog, Butter+Milk, Mo-chido, House of Juju and the Boiling Station.

■ Hilton Garden Inn is nearing completion off of Plaza, as is United Health Centers on Mooney and

Family Healthcare Network Downtown.

■ The announcement that the Sequoia Mall will begin its refurbishment with the addition of Sprouts and Nordstrom Rack.

The City of Visalia will continue to focus on growing job opportunities in the community to grow rooftops and in turn, generate construction, more retail and service demand in the community.

We will continue to capitalize on being the only California market in the Wall Street Journal and Realtor.com’s Top 20 Emerging Housing Markets Index and the fourth fastest growing metro in the U.S. (U.N.’s 2018 World Urbanization Prospects) while offering the most affordable homes in the state according to Homearea.com and retaining the sense of community that makes Visalia a great place to live, work and play.

For more information on City of Visalia, visit www.visalia.city or visit them on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @CityofVisalia.



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

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Name: Stacy Heaton
Company: California Dairies, Inc.
Title: Director of Communications

Why do you serve on the Chamber Board of Directors?

I serve on the Visalia Chamber Board because it is both personally and professionally rewarding. During my time in the Chamber's Leadership Visalia program, I witnessed the support the Chamber gives to our community and businesses. The Chamber champions to create a sustainable community for generations to come. Serving serves as a way to give back and engage in the community. California Dairies, Inc. (CDI), has much to offer the community, and I can serve to bridge any gaps or connect the two.

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

The Chamber advocates for all businesses, regardless of size, addressing policy and community concerns to the proper audiences. They also provide numerous networking opportunities, business education, and development opportunities. We have witnessed the value of having our staff participate in the Leadership Visalia program.

What's your favorite holiday?

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I love all of the traditions surrounding this time of year. I enjoy decorating several trees around my home, attending the Christmas Tree Gala, bundling up to watch the parade, making tamales with four generations of my family, and baking treats to share with others.

Is your glass half full or half empty?

My glass is overflowing with high-quality dairy products from local CDI farmers.

Who was your favorite teacher in school and why?

My favorite teacher was Mrs. Richardson, an English teacher at Redwood High School. I am naturally introverted. She created a learning environment where I felt comfortable. She encouraged me to be creative and to challenge myself. Her investment in me instilled confidence and took me out of my shell. She inspired me to continue to challenge myself and to take paths that are not necessarily the easiest, but lead to growth and beautiful destinations.

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.

Community Investor Members:
■ Visalia Hearing Center, Inc.

Small Business Members:
■ Bobby Salazars Mexican Foods
■ The Joint Chiropractic - Visalia
■ Relyk

Micro-Enterprise Members:
■ JMatthewsCreative

RENEWING

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

Visionary Members:
■ Family HealthCare Network

Keystone Members:
■ Visalia Medical Clinic*

Community Investor Members:
■ SS Shirts

Business Builder Members:
■ Financial Credit Network, Inc.*

Business Connector Members:
■ Just Between Friends Visalia/

Fresno
■ Valley Pacific Petroleum

Small Business Members:
■ Ashwood Construction, Inc.*
■ BarrelHouse Visalia
■ Dignity Health Management Services
■ Graham & Associates*
■ GreenBean*
■ Johnson & Black, LLP*
■ Martin & Martin Properties LLC*
■ Milan Institute
■ Pacific Capital Strategies, Inc.
■ Personnel Solutions Unlimited, Inc.
■ Principal Financial Group
■ Residence Inn by Marriott Visa-



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

lia*
■ Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT)*
■ Sequoia Painting LLC*
■ Summit Homebuilders, Inc.*
■ Tulare County Office of Education
Small Business Nonprofit Members:
■ Executives Association of Tulare County*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

MEMBERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



Name: Steve Shahan
Company: SS Shirts
Title: Owner

SS Shirts has been providing quality custom screen printing and embroidery for over 30 years. We work with companies and select artists to create the perfect design for your next order.

For over 20 years we have been the official souvenir vendor with the World Ag Expo and the California Antique Farm Equipment Show.

SS shirts is a family business owned by Steve and Kim Shahan. We provide services for orders all over the community, anything from schools to businesses, to events, we have provided quality service for it all. With the help of Marlene, our office manager of 29 years, Jeff, our shop manager, and our shop workers Brayden and Serenity; along with our new M&R Ten Color screen printer, we have become an even more successful and efficient business.

The best part of the company is that it still remains a mom and pop shop. We're not trying to be a huge corporation, just a successful and quality business.

We partner with the Chamber on designing and producing Oktoberfest t-shirts. There's not a middle man at SS Shirts. We work with our customers directly to provide products we know you'll love and hopefully keep you coming back for more. We take incredible pride in our work every day.

HOSPICE

Continued from page 1

vision of Kaweah Health, is a not-for-profit hospice that has been providing end-of-life services for adults and children in Tulare and Kings counties for over 35 years. The organization works to relieve pain and suffering at the end of life, as well as provide emotional support and spiritual counseling.

Cydney Alvarado, a registered nurse, for Kaweah Health Hospice said she was grateful for the opportunity to help her patients and their families outside of the care she already provides.

"My patients aren't just patients to me," she said. "They become part of our family, so to be able to give them such an awesome gift is so meaningful to me."

Patients and their families are offered a variety of services via a team approach. The team consists of a physician of choice, a nurse, a hospice aide, a chaplain, a social worker and bereavement counseling. The team is designed to assist families in navigating through this final chapter of life.

Kaweah Health is a publicly-owned community healthcare organization that provides comprehensive health services to the greater Visalia region and Tulare County. With more than 5,000 employees and 700 medical staff, Kaweah Health is committed to meeting the community's health needs through state-of-the-art medicine, high-quality preventive services and specialized health centers and clinics. For more information, visit www.kaweah-health.org or follow Kaweah Health on Twitter and Facebook.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Mountain Mike's Pizza hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their new location at 3103 S Mooney Blvd.



In celebration of the remodeling of Rescue Treasures located at 2523 S Mooney Blvd, Visalia Rescue Mission hosted a ribbon cutting grand re-opening ceremony.



Ryland Dogs LLC Jojo's Grill-A-Dog hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening at 5101 W Walnut Ave.



Eager Studios hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand reopening in October. Under new ownership, Eager Studios is located at 2332 W Whitendale Ave.



New member Sno Shack Central Valley hosted a ribbon cutting. They can be booked at (866) 263-9853.



American Red Cross of Central California celebrated their new Visalia location with a ribbon cutting. Their new office can be found at 200 W Main St, Ste. B.



In celebration of their new Visalia location and services, Balanced Comfort hosted a ribbon cutting. Schedule service at (559) 314-6337.



The Real Estate Connection hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for their Valley Homes Airbnb Properties and venue. They can be contacted at (559) 799-1073.



The Good Life Photography hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of becoming a member. Sessions can be booked at (559) 284-3811.

Tri Counties Bank launched its 16th Annual Tis the Season Food Drive in partnership with The Salvation Army. The food drive aims to collect more than 80,000 pounds of canned and non-perishable food items through December 23.

Roller Towne is hosting a Toy Drive this holiday season. Donations can be dropped off through December 19th.

JoJo's Grill-A-Dog announced that they now offer catering.

Tulare County Board of Supervisors appointed Israel Sotelo Jr. as the new Chief of Staff. Sotelo will aid County Supervisors in coordinating work of Board Representatives, constituent services, department budget, and public affairs. He will also oversee the Board's legislative advocacy programs and communicate the County's position on Federal, State, and various governmental regulations affecting the County.

Visalia Mall will host Pictures with Santa through December 24th. Special nights include pet pictures with Santa and Santa Cares Day on December 4th. Visit visaliamall.com to learn more.

Tulare County Sheriff's Office partnered with local churches, including Pipeline Church, to hand out 800 Thanksgiving meals to Tulare County families.

SoCalGas partnered with Google Nest to donate 500 smart thermostats to help customers save energy.



Revel Venues announced the purchase of Koetsier Ranch, now known as Watermill Grove. The new venue features modern indoor space along with a covered outdoor pavilion that can accommodate over 400 guests.

Bethlehem Center has teamed up with Angel Tree to sponsor 100 children. Sponsorships will be accepted through December 16th.

Christmas Season will be back at **Vossler Farms**. To January 8th, guests can enjoy ice skating, holiday hayrides, mini golf, and more! To learn more, visit vosslerfarms.com

Valley Life Charter raised funds in November for **Sequoia Riverlands Trust** during their Dollar Dress Day.

Bulldog Sports Properties reported a record crowd of 37,107 at the October 29th Fresno State Bulldogs football game against San Diego State. The 'Dogs held onto the Old Oil Can Trophy for a second year in a row by doing the unthinkable, scoring 15 points in 13 seconds. The game ended in 32-28 victory.

ProYouth, in partnership with **Tulare County Health and Human Services**, has 73 students enrolled from 7 different school sites in the Insight program. Students have learned the basics of photography and are currently working on self-expression and self-awareness through "Here I Am" poems.

Tulare Outlets hosted a "Grand Giveaway" on Black Friday. Five lucky shoppers won a \$1,000 shopping spree.

The Darling announced they have joined Charlestowne Hotels to help the hotel grow in opportunity, hospitality, and logistics.

Pita Kabob hosted their Friends Giving Bottle Share in November.

Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group welcomed four additional California-based professional engineers to their team.

Congratulations to **Eagle Mountain Casino** who was voted best Live Music, Best Steakhouse, Best Locally Owned, Overall Restaurant, Best Steak, and Best Soup by The Porterville Recorder's Reader's Choice Awards.

Assistance League of Visalia continues to clothe **Visalia Unified School District** students for school at JCPenney. 1,500 books have been distributed for home libraries and 500 hygiene kits are packed and ready to distribute to deserving kids and adults in Tulare County.

Able Inc., formerly Able Industries, Inc. hosted a VIP grand opening event on December 2nd.

Sequoia Symphony Orchestra collaborated with '90s boy band musicians to release a Christmas classic single. The song and video are available on the symphony's web page and on streaming services worldwide.

The 2022 Giving Tuesday Community Campaign of Tulare County featured many local nonprofit organizations to raise funds and awareness to support important initiatives in Tulare County, including: **Arts Visalia, CASA of Tulare County, CSET, Family Services of Tulare County, Proteus, Inc., ProYouth, Sequoia Riverlands Trust, United Way of Tulare County, and Visit Visalia.**

Forward Together: Reflections on the First 3 Months of the School Year



By Kirk Shrum
Superintendent
Visalia Unified School District

Hello, Visalia Community.

As I wrap up my entry plan and first six months as Superintendent, I want to thank you for being so welcoming and inviting as I joined this great community. I have had the opportunity to meet many parents, community leaders, students, and staff since being named superintendent.

Immediately upon becoming superintendent, the board and I reviewed feedback from our community, families, staff, and students that was gathered through surveys and forums, and we took decisive action. Your voice matters. The following key investments can be attributed to our Board listening and responding, and we are just getting started!



ACADEMICS

- Established a three-year math requirement for graduation
- Began offering a 24/7 online, chat-based tutoring system for students in grades 4-12 called Paper

STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY

- Implemented Raptor Technologies—a comprehensive visitor and emergency management platform with real time support for staff
- Approved a robust transportation information system called Transfinder to keep track of bus riders in real-time and communicate alerts to families
- Hired additional site and district personnel focused on safety and student conduct

COMMUNICATIONS

- Developed an intentional communications plan with daily engagement via four major social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok)
 - Hosted and implemented roundtables and advisories to gather stakeholder feedback
- Our Board also knew that in order to provide direction for the future, we needed a vision, so our Board developed core beliefs and commitments. I am proud that our Board spent the entire month of August thinking deeply and intentionally about what the district should believe in and be committed to.

Our core beliefs and commitments provide a strong framework for key areas of focus.

Additionally, they unify the Board and district staff to ensure we are all focused on the main thing—the betterment of our students. The key investments and development of our core beliefs and commitments were necessary to ensure that our students receive the highest quality educational experience.

This October, we received our student results from last spring's state tests in English language arts and mathematics for students in grades three through eight and eleven.

The results below represent the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on their grade-level standards.

- 41.75% English language arts
 - 24.88% mathematics
- Visalia Unified outperformed Tulare County's average in almost all student groups, and was the second highest performing district in the county as a whole.

I want the community to know that coming out of this pandemic, our staff, students, and families have worked hard

to keep students focused on academics, and I am proud of their efforts. I also want you to know that we are not satisfied with these scores. I have declared publicly that we will be the highest performing district in the county, and then the highest performing district in the Valley; and in future years, the highest performing district in the state.

We need to produce the highest-quality academically and socially rounded graduates—with all graduates being college and/or career ready. This will be the fulfillment of our Board's beliefs and commitments. Our students' success rests not only on the shoulders of our district, but the entire community.

This is why our Board developed the One Visalia Connected initiative. Research confirms that when a student is connected to a meaningful activity or mentor outside of the classroom, the likelihood of them excelling rises. The goal of this initiative is to connect every student to a meaningful activity, thereby increasing their chances for success.

To develop this initiative we have been engaged in hearing

from leaders throughout Visalia including: civic, community-based organizations, education, faith, and industry. In addition, we have been seeking feedback internally through my Superintendent's Advisories which include staff, students, and families.

I am confident that connecting with our students on a deeper level will be transformative for all of Visalia. I am so proud of the work each of our 3,500 staff members do each and every day to ensure that our students receive the best education possible.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. If we truly want to see our students succeed, they need to see us be One Visalia Connected. Our Board has provided us with the first foundational steps in moving forward together, and we are committed to continuing to create ongoing opportunities for listening and feedback sessions. Please join the Board, myself, and all of our Visalia Unified team in opening up every opportunity for our students to be successful.

I Believe In, I Belong In, I am VUSD.

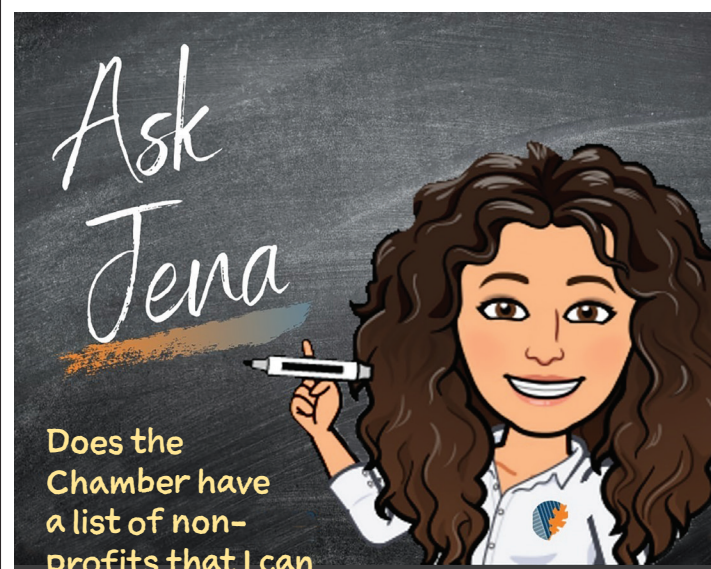


Planning and Development Day Session

On Friday, November 18th, 2022 the Leadership Visalia Group was hosted at the Family Services Education Center by Facilitators Nate Ortiz and Monica Rodriguez. The morning began with a thirty-minute greeting as attendees enjoyed a continental breakfast. After all, were settled in, the group had the opportunity to hear from Mike Olmos a retired City of Visalia Planner. Mike Olmos did an amazing job describing in detail the process of planning and development throughout the city of Visalia. The group had many questions and was very receptive to learning more about Mike's experience as a city planner. The group was then re-introduced to Steve Nelsen who wears many hats for the City of Visalia, therefore the group had the privilege of having him present this time as the CEO of Downtown Visalia. Steve informed the group of all the upcoming renovations that are happening downtown along with the cost of many current projects. He shared information about upcoming events and future planning ideas. Steve's quick-witted and friendly personality was a great way to start a fun Pictionary activity in which the group had to draw images of iconic buildings in Visalia and guess what building it was. This activity was very entertaining and revealed the competitiveness of the group.

After lunch created by El Jardin, a small downtown local business, the group gathered for the second part of the day session. For this portion of the day, the presenter was Devon Jones the Visalia Economic and Development Manager. Devon presented information about how the tiers work in allowing growth for the City of Visalia. Devon was enthusiastic about the information making for an awesome educational presentation. The group had many questions and was extremely engaged. Following this presentation, the group participated in an ongoing art-based puzzle activity. Each attendee was given a blank puzzle to create something that inspired them about Visalia using colorful markers. At this time of the day they were asked to break apart their personally drawn puzzle and trade it with someone sitting at another table. The at-

tendees then had to rebuild the puzzle discovering the art created by their fellow-attendee. The final presenter of the day was Ruben Olguin Broker Associate and owner of Design and Development Inc. Ruben is a wealth of knowledge and has a passion for historic homes, he gave the group a personal tour of the Iconic Laurelwood house located in the heart of Visalia. He shared the history of the home and provided information on the amazing collection gathered by the original owner of the home. This event concluded the day session and everyone said their goodbyes.



Does the Chamber have a list of non-profits that I can give back to?

The Chamber has many non-profit members who could use your support. You can find our searchable directory at visaliachamber.org.

What does the Chamber have planned for 2023?

Stay up to date with the Chamber! Make sure to follow our Facebook (@VisaliaChamberofCommerce) and Instagram (@visaliachamber) pages for the latest news and announcements.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message: Jena@visaliachamber.org

CSET recruiting volunteers for free tax assistance program

By Jeff Forbes
Communications and Information Systems Director
CSET



Community Services Employment Training (CSET) is recruiting local volunteers to assist with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

(VITA) program. VITA provides tax preparation and electronic filing services at no cost to Tulare County households with less than \$58,000 annual income. In 2022, VITA preparers helped file 3,281 tax returns for low- and moderate-income residents, returning more than \$5.3 million to Tulare and Kings County residents. For the 2023 VITA tax season, approximately 100 volunteers will be needed to serve as IRS certified tax preparers.

"CSET is looking forward to

cash-back tax credits, such as the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credit

(EITC). Retired financial professionals, as well as adults and high school youth exploring careers in the finance industry would serve as excellent volunteers. Bilingual volunteers are highly needed for this upcoming tax season.

CSET's VITA program will conduct volunteer training online for the 2023 tax season. Tax preparation drop-off services will be offered to the public beginning February 2023. VITA volunteers will be providing tax preparation services in five primary locations: Earlimart, Oroqui, Porterville, Tulare and Visalia.

For more information and to apply online, visit www.cset.org/vita.

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Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



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KEYSTONE:



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HEALTH NOTE

A letter to the governor



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health



Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Kaweah Delta Health Care District's Request for Financial Assistance

Dear Governor Newsom:

District hospitals and the teams behind them – doctors, nurses, medical providers, etc. – have been “good soldiers” over the course of this pandemic. They have provided heroic, selfless care to their communities, but they are now suffering deeply and need your help. The COVID-19 pandemic, and its aftermath, have brought District hospitals to the brink of financial collapse. Without your help, soon it will be virtually impossible for Medi-Cal patients to receive anything but emergency medical care in the State of California.

My name is Gary Herbst and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Kaweah Delta Health Care District (“Kaweah Health”), a political subdivision of the State of California, and the largest of the 33 district hospitals still operating in California. I will use Kaweah Health to illustrate the dire situation that district hospitals currently face.

This public, community-owned, 613-bed hospital and health system located in Visalia, California, in the County of Tulare, serves a two-county population of approximately 600,000 people and is situated in the heart of California’s agricultural basin—the Central Valley. With almost 60% of Tulare County’s population enrolled in the State’s Medicaid program (“Medi-Cal”), Tulare County ranks number one out of the State’s 58 counties. Not surprisingly, Tulare County, and many of its neighboring counties, also rank worst in the State in number of physicians per 1,000 population; access to clinical care; premature death; overall health outcomes; health behaviors; and number of persons under 18 years old living in poverty.

Despite being an incredibly-busy hospital each year (seeing 81,000 patients in our ER; more than 112,000 in our urgent cares; more than 124,000 in our clinics; delivering more than 4,500 babies; and performing almost 10,000 surgeries), and one that is considered efficient, cost-effective, and award-winning (in February, Healthgrades named us as one of America’s top 250 hospitals in the U.S. for clinical outcomes), the pandemic has been financially devastating. Since the pandemic arrived, Kaweah Health has:

- Sustained a cumulative operating loss (total revenues minus expenses) of \$127 million (through September 30, 2022), offset in part by federal Provider Relief Funds of \$61 million;
- Lost \$29 million from operations in the first three months of our fiscal year;
- Witnessed our cash reserves plummet from 130 days cash on hand at the start of the pandemic to just 84 days cash on hand (September 30, 2022); and,
- Learned we will soon be in default on over \$200 million in revenue bond debt, far from our pre-pandemic position as one of the financially-strongest hospitals in the Valley with a credit rating of A3 from Moody’s Investors Service.

The cause of our financial condition is multi-factorial:

- The repeated closure of elective surgeries and procedures over the course of the pandemic in compliance with the State’s executive order;
- Steep declines in patient volumes as people feared and still fear coming to the hospital;
- The care and treatment of thousands of severely-sick COVID-19 patients with virtually zero increase in reimbursement rates from Medicare, Medi-Cal or commercial payers (at one time, Kaweah Health had more COVID-19 inpatients in its hospital than any other hospital in the State);
- An unprecedented dependence on highly-expensive contract labor to fill hundreds of workforce vacancies (\$81 million spent since March 2020; we currently have 240 traveler nurses and 500 employee vacancies);
- Tens of millions spent on overtime and extra-shift bonuses; and,
- Some of the highest inflation rates we have ever experienced resulting in the skyrocketing cost of drugs, supplies, food, energy and every other resource that goes into taking care of a patient.

Sadly, with virtually no hope for further COVID relief funds from either the federal or State government, we are faced with no choice but to begin laying off staff (likely in the hundreds), closing services (we just announced to staff that we are closing our skilled nursing unit and our neurosciences clinic), stopping elective surgeries and procedures that are provided at a loss (largely affecting the Medi-Cal population), and taking any and all other steps necessary to stem our losses. It is gut-wrenching and agonizing to say the least.

As a further result of our current financial crisis, our plans to achieve the State’s mandated seismic compliance by the year 2030 have evaporated. We do not have the funds to build the \$730 million, 10-story patient tower to replace over 200 non-compliant acute care inpatient beds, surgical suites, and our pharmacy, dietary/cafeteria and PACU, all located in downtown Visalia in a building built in 1969. While this building lies within one of the lowest seismic-risk areas in the State, we have been granted no relief from the requirements of SB1953. Without an exemption from or significant modification to SB1953, Kaweah Health will be forced to close many of its beds and services.

Governor, I’m delighted that our State government has been able to generate close to a hundred billion dollar budget surplus this past year, but I implore you, please remember the “good soldiers” of your State’s district hospitals. In appreciation of their selflessness, please dedicate one-time funding to help assist district hospitals in their financial recovery efforts and reform Medi-Cal reimbursement so that we can avoid disparities in the care of your poorest Californians. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Delta Health Care District

Eagle Mountain Casino donates 100 turkeys to help local families

Eagle Mountain Casino donated 100 turkeys to the Salvation Army of Tulare County for families in need of a Thanksgiving meal.

“We are so appreciative of Eagle Mountain Casino’s generous continued donation” said Hollie Slater, Donor Relations Director at The Salvation Army Golden State Division.

Due to recent shortages, it was difficult for the Salvation Army to receive the donated turkeys in time.

“The rising prices along with the shortages was going to make it very difficult for families to purchase a turkey for Thanksgiving and we are thankful for Eagle Mountain Casino’s generous donation during these difficult times”, said Slater.



The official turkey distribution date for Tulare is going to be November 21st for pre-registered families.

“We have been supportive of this cause for many years, and I know turkey prices have been through the roof this year and a national turkey shortage. We ordered early as we wanted to be able to do our annual donation to the Salvation Army”, said Ador Cardenas, Marketing Director at Eagle Mountain Casino.

In addition to the donated turkeys a full box of trimmings and canned goods will be included for families in need to enjoy a full Thanksgiving dinner. “Thank you to Eagle Mountain Casino for their support every year, and because of their support many families will have a better Thanksgiving sharing a hot and nutritious meal”, said Major Julio Vasquez, the core officer for the Salvation Army of Tulare County.

For more information on how you can receive more information about the Salvation Army of Tulare County or donate please visit their official facebook page or www.tulare.salvationarmy.org.

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 – Sunday from 5pm – 10pm. Eagle Mountain Casino is a short drive from Bakersfield or Visalia.

The new casino property is scheduled to open soon, off Highway 65 in Porterville, CA, next to the Porterville Fair Grounds. The new property will double in size, growing to over 100,000 square feet, featuring new dining options, 1750 slot machines, 20 table games, and a state-of-the-art event center.