

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 3 | March 2023

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Grant will strengthen foster youth advocacy

CASA of Tulare County announced it has received a \$186,342 grant award from the California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association to strengthen foster youth advocacy programs throughout Tulare County. **4**

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Business After Hours hosted by Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers

Time: 4 p.m.
Location: Visalia First

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Ambassador Breakfast

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

APRIL 19-28, 2023

Holland Windmills, Waterways & Tulips River Cruise

MAY 2-10, 2023

Athens & The Greek Islands

JULY 19-28, 2023

Iceland: Land of Fire & Ice

SEPTEMBER 20-OCTOBER 1, 2023

Essence of France: Paris, Provence & French Riviera

OCTOBER 4-12, 2023

Highlights of England, Scotland & Wales

OCTOBER 23-28, 2023

Cuba Discovery

OCTOBER 26-NOVEMBER 9, 2023

Exploring South Africa, Victoria Falls & Botswana

NOVEMBER 1-10, 2023

Rome and the Country Roads of Tuscany

DECEMBER 4-9, 2023

Washington D.C. Holiday



Travel provided by:

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www.visaliachamber.org/travel

Local economy situated well for expansion

Economist Chris Thornberg says Tulare County has what the state economy needs to expand with willing workers, available land and affordable housing



The Sun-Gazette

Reggie Ellis
Publisher
The Sun-Gazette

VISALIA – Tulare County, and the greater Central Valley, may be in a unique position to capitalize on the next wave of economic expansion in the state.

That was the message delivered by Dr. Christopher Thornberg, founder of Beacon Economics and expert in economic and revenue forecasting, to a crowd of government and business leaders gathered for the 2023 Sequoia Regional Economic Summit. The record crowd packed a conference room at the Wyndham Hotel on Feb. 10 to receive a more positive outlook than many might have expected.

“What the Central Valley needs to do is turn off this nonsense that the Central Valley economy has a problem,” Thornberg said. “Turn off the pity party and start widening the 99.”

Thornberg said Tulare County was uniquely situated mid-way through the state to provide what the state's economy needs—more willing workers, outdoor amenities, available land, and affordable housing. The economist said the biggest problem facing the Valley isn't what it has but what it doesn't have, a good reputation. For years, politicians in Sacramento have downplayed the Valley's importance in the state's economy, ignored its natural beauty, and treated its residents as “poor slubs” living in a seemingly desolate portion of the state.

“This is a great place to live but you have to let people know you're here,” Thornberg said. Tulare County, and the Valley, are doing better than their coastal counterparts and have been for awhile. Since 2000, inland communities have added jobs and built housing at three times the rate of coastal communities. Because coastal economies are predicated on retired workers and tourism, they have been slow to recover from the pandemic. Many of the workers along the coast have moved inland in search of jobs and housing. While many of these workers are unskilled they can be provided the skills local businesses need through training.

“Training people has the best payoff we've ever seen,” Thornberg said. Tulare County has more than recovered the 14,000 jobs it lost during the pandemic by adding nearly 19,000 jobs since April 2020. Tulare County's unemployment rate is hovering at 9%, much higher than the state, but not far off from a record low of 8.2% in 2006. Tulare County's unemployment

rate is typically in double digits due to seasonal shifts in agriculture jobs. Job growth in the county was led by the transportation, warehousing and utilities sector, which added more than 2,000 jobs since February 2020. Leisure and hospitality added 1,600 jobs and construction, education and health care each added more than 1,000 jobs.

“Central Valley communities are looking good,” Thornberg said with a smile. “Industrial businesses would rather move here than deal with the border in Mexico.”

The economic pains of the pandemic were not as intense as they were for the Valley's ocean-view neighbors. Labor force declines were the slightest in the Valley and, despite rising prices and high interest rates, the Valley's housing market still remains one of the most affordable in the state. Local consumers and businesses have more money in their pockets as taxable sales base has increased in every city since 2019. In fact, 2022 was a banner year for growth as taxable sales grew by 18.4% in Lindsay, more than 10% in Woodlake, Tulare, Visalia, 7.8% in Farmersville, 3.8% in Porterville and 2.1% in Exeter. That's because workers in Tulare County have seen wages rise by 2.6% last year in addition to state and federal stimulus checks and government-funded aid programs while businesses benefited from forgiven government loans and retail prices increasing faster than costs.

While Tulare County remains one of the most affordable housing markets in the state, fewer Tulare County residents can afford to buy a home



Dr. Christopher Thornberg said Tulare County's economy is primed for expansion because of access to workers, inexpensive land and an affordable housing market.

here with prices and interest rates still on the rise. The median price of a single-family home in Tulare County increased by 9.1%, reaching \$356,700 in December 2022. A little more than one-third of local households (36%) can afford a median-priced home in the county, down from 46% from 2021. That's still double the state average (18%) and close to the national average (39%). While interest rates should stabilize soon, prices will continue to climb until more houses can be built. In December, Tulare County only had a two and a half month supply of housing inventory, only slightly better than less than two months of supply a year earlier.

“We don't have an affordability crisis, it's a supply crisis,” Thornberg said. The rental market isn't much better but could ultimately be the solution to making room for more workers to fill needed jobs. Rents increased by \$1,244 per month in the third quarter of 2022, a 14.6% increase over the previous year. That problem may already be stabilizing as vacancy rates saw a slight increase, meaning fewer people are looking at moving from their current situation. More rentals are also on the way. Multi-family construction saw its highest increase on record with 724 more multi-family permits than the prior year.

Thornberg said housing markets are predicated on a top level model, meaning that home builders build nicer homes to attract high-income households out of their current homes. This creates availability for rising wage earnings to move up and eventually creates more entry level housing. Unfortunately, many people didn't want to move during the pandemic, so no one moved into the nicer homes in other parts of the state. He said residential construction companies should refocus on townhomes and condos to create more room for those with rising incomes who may be new to the area.

“Your building permits have great numbers here,” Thornberg said.

“What recession?” Consumers and businesses worried about an impending recession shouldn't, because it's not going to happen. Thornberg said the nation is not heading into an economic recession but rather struggling to shake off a stimulus hangover. He said the inflation the economy is experiencing has little similarities to the causes of the debilitating recession in the 1970s but is a direct result of

See **ECONOMY** on page 2

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A voice for local business



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

Being a voice for your local businesses is a powerful and vital role your Chamber plays. Representing the needs of businesses is a humbling experience as we are asked to speak on the collective whole. This voice rings within halls of government,

giving perspective to the needs of the local guy/gal trying to employ our neighbors while providing a good or service that creates a local tax base. Often times this voice shares the unintended consequences legislation has on local businesses or helps lawmakers find solutions before problems exist.

As we speak on behalf of local businesses to find solutions, we have the pleasure of developing a collaborative relationship with others working to strengthen Visalia. Our District Attorney, Tim Ward, is one of those public servants who is always interested in the needs and concerns of local businesses.

Through that partnership, the Board of Directors took action to share with local judges the effect commercial burglaries have on Visalia. Below is an excerpt from the letter sent to our local superior court judge:

■ Commercial burglaries' devastating impact on local businesses and the lack of meaningful consequences leave our community in peril.

■ Small businesses are the backbone of Visalia, providing employment opportunities, contributing to the economy, and strengthening our community by providing vital tax revenue that funds essential services for all of us. However, when these businesses are victims of commercial burglaries, it can

have a lasting impact on their finances and morale. The loss of merchandise and the cost of repairs can be crippling, and the fear of future break-ins can prevent owners from investing in their businesses.

■ The lack of justice in these cases only emboldens thieves and leaves small businesses feeling vulnerable and helpless. The absence of meaningful consequences sends a message that this type of criminal behavior is acceptable and discourages small business owners from pursuing justice through the legal system.

■ We urge you to consider the broader impact of commercial burglaries on small businesses and the community and to take a firm stance in holding perpetrators accountable. Your decision can restore faith in the justice system and protect small businesses from further harm.

Will this letter revolutionize the challenges faced in the judicial system? Maybe not, but as we debated whether we should speak, several questions guided us. Does this issue affect local businesses? Yes, commercial burglaries have affected businesses of all types in all corners of our community. Is lending our perspective helpful to those making decisions affecting local business? Yes, many commercial burglaries go unreported in our conversations with local businesses. Judges would only know about the volume and impact if these actions are reported. Would our members expect us to act? Yes, this issue affects them, and if there is something we could do, we should. We did.

Time is businesses' most valuable resource. If you had more time, you would write a letter and meet with local lawmakers. But business owners only have precious little time. Instead, local businesses have invested in the Visalia Chamber as we engage on issues important to you. We're proud to represent you, and we'll keep fighting for our local business.

What recession?

See **ECONOMY** on page 2

Free tax preparation services in Tulare County

In-person and drop-off services are now available

Community Services Employment Training (CSET) is providing free tax preparation services to residents of Tulare County. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program prepares federal and state tax returns at no cost to households with less than \$60,000 in annual income. Eligible working families and individuals may also qualify for Federal and California Earned Income Tax Credits (CalEITC) that may reduce the amount of tax owed.

Tax documents can be dropped off at one of our VITA locations (see list of locations with dates and times below). Taxes will be prepared on a first-come, first-served basis. Tax preparers will connect with customers when their taxes are completed. Customers will be informed about the filing process and contacted over the phone to review, schedule a pickup, and receive authorization to e-file. In-person tax preparation will vary, depending on volunteer availability. Customers may download the required documents checklist and intake forms at www.cset.org/vita, or customers can retrieve a packet from a VITA location.

Earned Income Tax Credits

The amount of tax credits and cash back refund depends on household income and family size. Households earning less than \$30,000 may be eligible for CalEITC up to \$3,417 for tax year 2022. Immigrant workers filing state taxes with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) and current and former foster youth may also be eligible for CalEITC and the Young Child Tax Credit (YCTC). An Earned Income Tax Credit calculator is available online to estimate the tax refund that may be received from CalEITC and other cash-back credits.

Due to high call volumes, CSET will only answer questions about individual tax issues in person at tax sites. For more information on site locations and required documents please visit www.cset.org/vita or call (559) 741-4640.





PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN

Economist Chris Thornberg predicts there will not be a recession based on the numbers during the Sequoia Regional Economic Summit held at the Wyndham Visalia on Feb. 10.

ECONOMY

Continued from page 1

the government pumping too much money into the economy during the pandemic. The U.S. economy lost about \$1.1 trillion in economic activity during the pandemic but responded by providing \$6.5 trillion in economic stimulus, an overreaction that is forcing high retail prices, high interest rates and high gas prices to compensate for consumer spending and business investment binging.

“This was the greatest spike in money supply since the 1960s,” Thornberg said. “It’s kind of like drinking an entire bottle of tequila. You feel great when you’re drinking it. You’re funnier, a better dancer, everything is going your way. But you wake up the next morning and you feel awful ... and eventually it wears off. The only way out is to let inflation run its course.”

The good news, Thornberg said, is that peak inflation should be in the rear view mirror. Business owners and consumers can reasonably expect the cost of goods and services to increase about 11% over the next five years, but that is similar to normal inflation. It shouldn’t be a problem for consumers who have seen their wages rise faster than inflation. The lowest half of household incomes saw a 50% increase in net worth and the average household income recently passed the \$60,000 mark nationwide. He used an example of a made-up newscast interviewing someone filling up their gas tank complaining about high gas prices and the economy but on their way to a weekend on the lake with an Excursion pulling a speed boat.

“The economy is awful, we had to buy cheap beer for this trip,” Thornberg joked. “The average cost of gas went up by 50% but the average vehicle miles driven didn’t change. This is a false narrative we are creating.”

Thornberg said the doomsday

ers in the national media continue predicting a recession but said there are no major imbalances in the economy. Interest rates are already stabilizing and the prices of goods and services should begin coming down this year. The real problem facing the current economy is a housing shortage and a labor shortage. Earlier this month, national unemployment dipped to 3.4%, the lowest since 1969. But there are now more job openings, about 11 million nationwide, than jobless, less than 6 million, which is creating an excellent market for people already employed to seek out higher paying jobs. There are not enough people entering the labor force in California, which is experiencing a declining birth rate and an exodus of people to state’s with available housing. He also reminded the crowd there are always people who can work but are not part of the labor force because they choose not to work.

“The stoner playing video games isn’t going to pop out of his parents basement and start working again,” Thornberg quipped. “The one thing every county in America has in common is help wanted signs.”

While the basement dwellers might be a small part of the problem, the real issue was that a large portion of the population retired during the pandemic, leaving an already dwindling workforce woefully unable to fill the job growth in businesses reinvesting in operations with money from the stimulus. Thornberg said all sectors will turn to technology to find ways to get more productivity with fewer workers. The bottom line for the economy is that it does not have a demand issue, it is simply struggling to keep up with demand. That should only be a temporary problem until businesses adjust to the current available labor force.

“If the consumer is healthy, they can power the economy through all sorts of turbulence,” Thornberg said.

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:

- Cal Bennetts & All-Ways Moving

Business Connector Members:

- Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa
- United States Air Force Recruiting

Small Business Members:

- American Care Hospice
- Common Heart
- Ecomaid of Visalia-Fresno
- Family Eye Care Optometry
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Panda Express

RENEWING

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce

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

Keystone Members:

- California Dairies, Inc.*

Community Investor Members:

- Bank of the Sierra - Main St.*

Business Builder Members:

- Fresno Yosemite International Airport
- Southern California Edison Company*

Business Connector Members:

- Bank of America - Main St.
- Best Buy Market By SAVECO #13*
- BSK Associates*
- Family Eye Care Optometry
- Costco Visalia*
- Hadley-Marcom Funeral Chapel*
- Health Net, LLC*

Small Business Members:

- Amtrak San Joaquins*



- Brian Keeley’s American Floors
- California Service Dog Academy
- Seals Construction*
- Valhalla Restaurant & Gift Shop*

Community Investor Nonprofit Members:

- GateWay Church*

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Hospital Council*
- The American Legion Department of California*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Name: Dan J. Finnegan, Au.D.
Company: Visalia Hearing Center, Inc.
Title: President & Director of Audiology

Welcome to Visalia Hearing Center, a locally owned and independent private practice that provides personalized audiological and hearing aid services to the residents of Visalia and the surrounding Tulare County communities. Our services include comprehensive hearing and tinnitus evaluations, tympanometry, expert prescription hearing aid fittings and verification utilizing state of the art Real Ear Measurements, and complete servicing and repairs for most hearing aid makes and models. Our mission is to create delighted patients through exceptional service, expertise, and technology.

If you (or a loved one) are experiencing hearing issues and are interested in hearing at your best, we believe Visalia Hearing Center is an excellent choice as we are a highly trained and experienced team of



VISALIA HEARING CENTER

professionals who know how to properly fit, support and wield the tools necessary to achieve the better hearing outcomes patients and their families are looking for.

Visalia Hearing Center celebrated our 1-year anniversary on February 11, 2023!

Ear Wax and ear cleanings. YES, we clean ears! And no, we don’t use the messy and imprecise ear flushing method that most facilities utilize. Using the correct tools and the Doctor’s skills, we can safely and manually extra the ear wax from patient’s ears.

Day in and day out, it feels like we’re making differences in someone’s life. It’s

not just the patients who are helped, but their friends and family as well.

We are an independent private practice meaning we are not owned by a multi-national hearing aid company, and we have access to each of the 6 major hearing aid manufacturers. Why is this important to our community? If you go to a Toyota dealership and you ask them what car is best, they’re going to say Toyota. If you go to a Chevrolet dealership, they’re going to say Chevrolet is the best. Many locations in the hearing care sphere operate the same way. They offer one brand and fit everyone with the same technology. But not Visalia Hearing Center. We have happy patients in all six brands and if someone chooses to work with us, they can feel confident that they will be fit with the best technology for them, not just a single manufacturer.



ADOBE STOCK



Public safety and justice day session

On Friday February 10th the Leadership Visalia Group started out their busy day meeting at the VECC (Visalia Emergency Communication Center) where facilitators Sarah Case and Patrick Burks welcomed them with coffee and a little breakfast. After a brief 30 minute update Leadership Visalia was welcomed by Captain Fahoum and Sergeant Pree of the Visalia Police Department. Captain Fahoum shared a bit about her back ground and how she started in law enforcement along with her role in the department. Leadership Visalia 2022/23 project is focused on mental health awareness so Captain Fahoum and Sergeant Pree focused a lot on the Homeless situation in Visalia. They brought in Sergeant Curtis Brown to talk with us about the Hope Team and how responds to the many calls they receive regarding the homeless problem. Sergeant Curtis Brown shared the help that they offer every homeless person they come into contact with and the successes they have had on the Hope Team. Another talked about what help is offered to current and/or retired officers that maybe struggling with trauma they have witnessed or seen while on the job. Captain Fahoum was excit-

ed to share a new app that the Visalia Police Department is using for their officers to check in on that asks specific questions for them to answer for a mental health check.

After hearing from Visalia Police Department Leadership Visalia headed to the old jail on Burrell where we met Deputy Rodriguez for a tour of the jail. Deputy

Rodrigues shared his knowledge about the history of the jail, how it is currently being used to house inmates waiting for court. Deputy Rodrigues also gave

Leadership Visalia Group a tour of the tunnel where the inmates are escorted through from the jail to the courthouse. The time spent on the tour of the jail was both very informative and enlightening for the group.*

After finishing the tour of the jail at 11:30 Leadership Visalia headed to Fire Station 1 on Rd 140 and Ave 256. Upon arrival of the Fire Station Leadership Visalia was provided lunch from local restaurant Amigos courtesy of Board of Supervisor Amy Shuklian (big thank you to Amy.) After about an hour lunch there at Fire Station 1 we were greeted by Chief Norman and his amazing staff of fire fighters. Chief Norman shared with Leadership Visalia a little bit about his back ground and how he got to be chief. Chief Norman also talked about his role and how his department delt with large fires over the past couple of years.

Leaderships Visalia ended their day session on an exciting time of touring the Fire Station and the new top of the line fire engines with Chief Duffy. Some of the group were able to try on the fire fighters protective wear and test some of their equipment.

The end of the day was reserved for the Leadership Visalia Group to gather and talk about their community project and hear updates from each committee. At the end of the day everyone said their good-byes. All in all it was very good and everyone left with a new appreciation for our law enforcement and fire fighters..... THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR SERVICE!

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Layout The Sun-Gazette

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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

RIBBON CUTTINGS



St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening in February. The church is located at 5049 W Caldwell Ave.

IMPACT
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
APRIL 20, 2023

LIBBY SPEARS
FOUNDER OF BRAVO CC
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

LEE RUBIN
PUBLIC SPEAKER
MORNING PEP TALK

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/IMPACT



April 16th at **Barrelhouse Visalia**. They recently opened their new facility in February and can be found at 3330 S Fairway St in Visalia.

Eagle Mountain Casino hosted their Years of Service event for their team members celebrating five, ten, fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five years at the company. The event featured decorative table settings, a sit-down dinner, and dessert for all team members and their families.

Bank of America provided \$1.85 million in philanthropic capital to nonprofits and charities last year in the Fresno/Visalia area. In addition, bank employees donated over 10,000 hours during the year.

Farmer Bob's World will host a 5k Poker Run on April 1st and Tree to Table Dinner in the Groves on May 5th.

The Valley Eatery by Chef Tim collaborated with **Topograph** for the February issue of Lifestyle.

Fresno Yosemite International Airport (FAT) recorded an historic passenger volume of more than 2.1 million in 2022. This is a 12% increase over 2021 and the highest volume since 2019.

PAW Estate Rescue and Shelter Inc was the recipient of **Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers'** 2022 Plush Puppy Sales. Over \$1,800 was donated to the Shelter that will provide support towards spay and neuter appointments.

Central Valley Community Bank named Shannon R. Avrett as Vice President, Chief Financial Officer.

Walmart contributed \$1,000 in grants to **CSET's** Youth Leadership Programs, #LEAD and #GROW. The programs provide Tulare County young people with access to educational pathways, work experience, and leadership development activities.

Tri Counties Bank announced the creation of the Homeownership Access Program to support homeownership in historically disadvantaged communities in Northern and Central California.



PAW ESTATE RESCUE AND SHELTER INC



BANK OF AMERICA



TUCOEMAS FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Congratulations to **Mountain West Builders**, who celebrated their second year in business in February!

Tulare County Sheriff's Department hosted a Soccer Camp for more than 200 boys and girls in January at McDermonts.

Assistance League of Visalia hosted a clothing event at JCPenney. With the help of generous donations from the community and JCP, almost 200 VUSD students received new clothes and shoes. Operation School Bell was so successful, that another event will be held in March.

In an effort to broaden their scope of debt collection services, **Financial Credit Network** and **Acclaim Credit Technologies** announced they merged as of February 1st, 2023.

Congratulations to **The Darling** who was part of Booking.com's Traveler Review Awards 2023 for the third year in a row.

Congratulations to **Tucoemas Federal Credit Union**, who was voted a Certified Great Place to Work. The certification recognizes employers who create an outstanding employee experience.

California Service Dog Academy will host their 2023 Pints and Patriots Fundraiser on

COS serves up new training academies

College of the Sequoias opens a Retail and Restaurant and Hospitality Academy to help fill employment gaps as Tulare County's economic development continues to expand



The Sun-Gazette

Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette

As Tulare County continues to see growth in the retail and hospitality industry, the College of the Sequoias looks to expand learning opportunities for those in the community.

The College of the Sequoias Training Resource Center is now offering two new academies. Each program is a pilot program, one is a Retail Fundamentals Academy and the other is a Restaurant and Hospitality Academy. These were chosen due to the local labor market data that shows the need for stronger workforce in these areas. Each academy will last about a month with classes twice a week. The goal of each training session is to help boost the resumes of participants and allow for further growth in the retail and hospitality departments throughout the county.

"These academies come at just the right time to support and strengthen our local workforce," Carrie Groover general manager at the Visalia Marriott said. "Every restaurant or store has their star employees that can be promoted, or have been promoted; they need to be invested in with trainings that focus on growing them and their skills in customer service, communication and other topics."

According to a statement from COS Training Resource Center, food and drink services employment increased by 800 jobs in Tulare County from December 2021 to December 2022. COS works

closely with the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to determine the workforce areas most in need according to Jennifer Vang, COS workforce development assistant. Vang said each academy is essentially free of charge as they only ask for \$25 that will be refunded once each participant completes the course. The little cost is thanks to the subsidized Strong Workforce Grant according to Vang.

The Restaurant and Hospitality Academy will start on Feb. 27 and run until March 21. It will take place on Mondays and Tuesdays at the Marriott Hotel in Downtown Visalia. Those who attend the academy will have a chance to take the ServSafe Manager exam after the ServSafe training within the academy.

As for the Retail Fundamentals Academy, it will begin on March 6 and run until April 4. It will also take place on Mondays and Tuesdays, only it will be held at the COS Visalia campus. The Retail Fundamentals Academy is a new training that will teach participants how to successfully navigate the retail industry and also how to be a professional employee.

Topics include retail operations, customer service, workplace readiness, communication, working on a team and more. Upon completion, participants will have the chance to earn their certificate for Retail Fundamentals through an exam offered by the National Retail Foundation. New or experienced retail employees, retail leads and supervisors, retail management and owners and entrepreneurs are encouraged to attend.

For more details, or to register for an academy, visit the COS Training Resource Center website at www.cos.edu/trainingcenter. You can also contact the TRC at trainingcenter@cos.edu or 559-688-3130.

VISALIA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Forward 2030: A Community-Driven Blueprint for the Future

We are at a historic point in our district where we have two plans coming forward: strategic plan and long-range facilities master plan. Both are important and needed to provide direction on how we operate as a system, and what our district will look like facilities-wise in the future. If we develop these as two separate plans, we run the risk of trying to walk two different paths. This again places us in a Whack-A-Mole situation. However, if we take these two plans, and develop them together under one vision, then we will have a very clear and direct path to our future - this is Visalia Unified Forward 2030: A Community-Driven Blueprint for the Future.

The title itself is very intentional. We cannot develop these plans in isolation. Our community's voice is important in the development of our future. This is why we are declaring that the blueprint is community-driven. This means that we will be aggressive in going to our communities of Visalia, Ivanhoe, and Goshen to seek and gather feedback on how the future of our district should look. These feedback sessions will take place in a myriad of places including: schools, community centers, places of worship, etc. There will also be opportunities to provide feedback through surveys. Our goal is to ensure that the community plays an active role in both the initial designs of our strategic and long-range facilities master plans, as well as the draft of the final goal recommendations.

Driven by a Work Team

We will have a work team which exemplifies our district. It will include the following members: community members, parents, non-teaching staff, teachers, site leaders, and district staff. This work team will be actively engaged in the gathering of community feedback. In addition, they will be responsible for gathering, analyzing, and filtering the massive amounts of information to develop

key recommendations for goals of each plan.

High-Level of Transparency

As the plans are developed, the community will be kept up-to-date through a dedicated webpage on our www.vusd.org website under the heading Visalia Unified Forward 2030. In addition, we will make monthly updates at a Visalia Unified Board of Education meeting. We want to ensure that everyone is looped in to the design and development of our plans.

Our Core Beliefs & Commitments

We believe and are committed to

All students can achieve at high levels and demonstrate continuous growth

- Providing high-quality learning experiences that allow all students to reach their fullest potential
- Equipping students and staff with the educational tools necessary for achievement and growth

Family and community engagement is key to student success

- Providing families and community members pathways of connectivity to the education system
- Facilitating timely and consistent communication to position families to participate in their students' learning experiences

Learning environments should be safe, supportive, and innovative

- Creating physical and social-emotional safety in all learning environments
- Providing all students the academic and social supports needed to be successful
- Designing learning environments that drive innovative practices to improve student outcomes
- Ensuring all students are known by their name, welcomed each day, and connected to meaningful activities

We Need You

Please make sure to be actively engaged in the development of our blueprint for the future through the various engagement sessions, as well as any surveys which might be sent out. Your voice matters.

When we get to the end of 2023, we will present recommended goals for each plan. We are excited to see what the future holds - join us on this amazing journey!

Our Priorities

- BE READY
- BE PRESENT
- BE SUCCESSFUL
- BE CONNECTED



Ask Jena

My company has an open position, how can I get the word out?

As a Chamber Member, you can post jobs to our website! Have a position you would like us to share? Send it my way: jena@visaliachamber.org. Also, we have great employment services as members, and I know they would LOVE to help your company.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message:
Jena@visaliachamber.org

Learn more about TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES with THE CHAMBER

VISIT : visaliachamber.org/travel

Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



HEALTH CARE NOTE



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

Great things are happening at Kaweah Health despite the financial challenges that we and the entire healthcare industry are experiencing. We are executing a turnaround plan and using our strong financial base to get us back to break even. While we were saddened to see the closure of Madera Community Hospital, we are urging the State and Federal governments to take action to support hospitals or more will



close. We thank the more than 1,200 of you who have written letters to Governor Newsom to ask for his support; if you have not already, we invite you to sign your name to our letter at www.kaweah-health.org/takeaction.

Kaweah Health will weather this storm. We will continue to serve Tulare and Kings counties, just as we have for more than 60 years. Despite the operational and financial challenges associated with the pandemic, our team continues to do some amazing things.

Our most recent achievement is being named one of America's 100 Best Hospitals for 2023. We're one of 20 hospitals in California and the only hospital in the San Joaquin Valley from Kern to Madera counties to earn the distinction from Healthgrades, which evaluated patient mortality and complication rates for 31 of the most common conditions and procedures at nearly 4,500 hospitals across the country to identify the top-performing hospitals. This achievement puts us in the top 2 percent of hospitals nationwide for overall clinical performance across the most common conditions and procedures.

Our heart surgery team is also ranked in the top 50 in the U.S. by Healthgrades and is second in California only to Stanford. We

have just entered into a partnership with Stanford's cardiothoracic program to bring their faculty cardiothoracic surgeons to live and work in Visalia. This partnership is similar to our recent alliance with Keck Medicine of USC, which is enhancing urology services in Visalia at our new urology clinic in Visalia. The clinic at 325 S. Willis St., is providing patients in the region with access to a world-renowned urology program that is currently ranked in the top 10 in the nation by U.S. News and World Report. These urologists are practicing alongside local urologists Joseph Ford, D.O., Tu-Hi Hong, M.D., and Marty Prah, M.D., to ensure that Kaweah Health Medical Center patients have improved, on-call, access to care.

This month, we'll also have more family medicine physicians available to care for patients at our Tulare Health Clinic as we relocate our family medicine residency clinic from Visalia to Tulare. The 10,800-square-foot clinic is located in the former IRS building on the corner of Prosperity Avenue and Mooney Boulevard. It has 20 exam rooms, a lab onsite for patients, and three behavioral health rooms. This move gives patients a larger, newly-remodeled clinic with ample parking at 1000 N. Mooney Boulevard (across from Target). Free transportation is available for patients to the clinic, which offers same-day, walk-in services and lab draws for clinic patients. The clinic is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Appointments can be requested online at www.kaweahhealth.org/tulare or by calling 559-685-7100.

And finally, in our continuing commitment to meet the demands for mental health services in our community, we will soon open our Center for Mental Wellness in Visalia. This center, located at 301 W. Noble Ave., in Visalia, will provide outpatient therapy and counseling for people of all ages as a result of major life stresses, trauma, etc. The center will be staffed by licensed professional counselors and individuals will not need a physician's order to seek services. The clinic will accept private insurance, Medicare, and self-pay. Additional access to mental health services, including Medi-Cal patients, is available through our network of rural health clinics.

Again, we thank you for your support of us as we work hard to care for our community during this unprecedented financial time. There is excellent care available locally and we encourage you, at every opportunity, to consider seeking care in your own community.

Grant will strengthen foster youth advocacy

CASA of Tulare County announced it has received a \$186,342 grant award from the California Court Appointed Special Advocate Association to strengthen foster youth advocacy programs throughout Tulare County.

CASA of Tulare County supported 250 youth in 2022 with the dedicated advocacy of 200 CASA volunteers who donated more than 6,500 volunteer hours. The grant awarded to CASA of Tulare County is allocated from a \$20 million state appropriation to California CASA, the statewide association that serves a network of 44 local CASA programs.

"I am grateful that the California State Legislature has prioritized the valuable work of the local programs throughout the state," said Alberto Ramos, executive director of CASA of Tulare County.

"CASA volunteer involvement in foster-care cases is a cost-effective intervention. Volunteers on average provide about a quarter million dollars' worth of advocacy services, based on their volunteer work hours."

Sharon M. Lawrence, Esq., chief executive officer of California CASA, said the grant will help build a solid foundation for increasing the number of CASAs serving children in Tulare County. "Our ultimate vision is to support all children statewide who could benefit from a CASA volunteer — an estimated 46,000 who live within the foster-care system. These capacity building grants are the first step toward achieving this ambitious goal, which we hope to reach within a decade. We thank Governor Newsom and the California State Legislature for sharing our vision and supporting this vital work."

CASA Volunteers In Tulare County, CASA of Tulare County recruits, trains, supervises and supports CASA volunteers to advocate for children in foster care. Within the foster-care system in California, volunteer court-appointed special advocates are matched with a child or sibling group, and advocate on their behalf in court, in schools, in health care settings and in the community. Aside from their time spent with the



child, CASAs communicate with all of the other adults in a child's life — teachers, doctors, lawyers, biological families, social workers and caregivers. With the knowledge they gather, they request important services for a child, such as counseling, tutor-

ing, physical therapy or medical services. They also submit written reports to the court, which can be entered as evidence in the case and upon which dependency judges rely to make important decisions about the child's future.

To help foster youth in Tulare County, CASA of Tulare County is actively recruiting CASA volunteers. There are currently 326 children waiting for the advocacy services of a CASA volunteer. For more information on becoming a CASA, please contact Melinda Morales Righi, Director of Outreach and Communication, by calling (559) 625-4007 or email her at Melinda@casatulareco.org.

ing, physical therapy or medical services. They also submit written reports to the court, which can be entered as evidence in the case and upon which dependency judges rely to make important decisions about the child's future.

California CASA, a private, nonprofit organization, is the statewide association serving and supporting a network of 44 local CASA programs. California CASA provides training, raises awareness for the need for CASA volunteers, and promotes legislation that benefits children in foster care. The 44 independent, nonprofit organizations, appointed by their local Superior Courts, are in 51 of the state's 58 counties — locations where 99% of California's foster population live. In the nation — approximately 80,000 in a year.

CITY UPDATE

Help shape the future of Visalia take the public opinion survey

For over 50 years, the City of Visalia has offered an annual survey to its residents in order to evaluate City services and receive opinions from those who live, work and play in Visalia. This year's survey is now available and will remain open to all Visalia residents through March 24.

The 2023 Public Opinion Survey can be completed in English or Spanish online at www.visalia.city/survey or a physical survey form can be picked up and returned at a variety of City of Visalia buildings. In addition, an in-person survey will be conducted to ensure that more citizens are heard.

Every year, The Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) conducts the survey with approval from City Council and support from City of Visalia staff. While the foundation of the survey remains unchanged each year to highlight trends and measure comparative data, this year's survey focuses on determining what services are important to Visalians.

The survey includes questions that ask respondents to rate various City services and programs ranging



from Police and Fire emergency responses to recreational activities and road maintenance.

Respondents have the opportunity to help shape the future of Visalia by offering feedback and even their ideas directly to the City and City Council.

To aid the City's efforts in reaching all Visalians, businesses can place flyers with QR codes directing customers to the online survey at their counters or offices. To request flyers and help maximize response rates, email communityfeedback@visalia.city or call (559) 713-4404.

In addition to the Public Opinion Survey, the Visalia City Council has created another opportunity for citizens to share their feedback or ask questions in a casual one-on-one setting. Council Corner is hosted on the second Monday of each month at City Hall, located at 707 W. Acequia Ave. Walk-ins are available from 5:30 to 6 p.m. and appointments are available from 6 to 6:40 p.m. To schedule an appointment for any 2023 Council Corner, visit bit.ly/council-corner or call (559) 713-4404.



ENGLISH SURVEY



SPANISH SURVEY

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

Tuesday, March 21st 4:00-6:00PM 3541 S. Mooney Blvd

NETWORKING • CONNECTION • COMMUNITY