

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 4 | April 2023

INSIDE

The Book Nook celebrates local teen author with First Friday Spotlight

When the First Friday Art Walk returned to Downtown Visalia on March 3rd, local art lovers found a truly unique experience at the heart of The Book Nook on Main Street. **3**

Visalia Unified unveils 'What's New?' for the 2023-2024 school year

We are excited to share some of the incredible opportunities that will be available for Visalia Unified School District (VUSD) students during the 2023-2024 school year. **4**

COS's political science department celebrates women

In celebration of women's history month, three local women join together to discuss their roles in local politics. **5**

EVENTS

APRIL 20 2023 IMPACT Leadership Conference

Time: 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Location: The Woodlands & Bello Vita

APRIL 27 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

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

MAY 24-JUNE 2, 2024

Memorials of World War II



Great Wolf Lodge was in the process of planning a 500-room hotel and indoor waterpark at Caldwell Avenue and Highway 99 before pulling out of the project in late February. RENDERING COURTESY OF GREAT WOLF LODGE

Great Wolf packs up Tulare County project

National waterpark resort chain says it will not build at Caldwell and Hwy 99 to focus on existing sites already under construction elsewhere and invest in existing resorts



The Sun-Gazette

A national waterpark resort is pulling out of Tulare County, taking millions in tax dollars and thousands of jobs with them. In a Feb. 24 email, Great Wolf Lodge released a statement to The Sun-Gazette saying the company had reached "mutually agreeable" terms to terminate its deal with the Sequoia Gateway at Caldwell Avenue and Highway 99. Great Wolf was planning to build a 525-room hotel and indoor waterpark on 35 acres of the highway commercial center. The resort complex would have also included restaurants, a meeting space, spas, and a family activity center.

Jason Lasecki, corporate communications

Reggie Ellis
Publisher
The Sun-Gazette

director for Great Wolf, said the company's decision to pull out of the project in Tulare County was to focus on other sites already under construction.

"As we look to expand the Great Wolf Lodge experience to more families, our current priorities are to continue investing in our existing resorts, successfully open the resorts currently under construction and pursue growth in areas most under-served by Great Wolf Lodge," Lasecki said in the statement.

Tulare County Economic Development Director Mike Washam said the timing of Great Wolf's decision had more to do with an opportunity for the developer to sell the land to someone else. Washam said there is another developer interested in purchasing the entire 35 acres so the project could end on good terms for all involved.

Washam went on to say Great Wolf already had five parks under construction and had concerns about the cost of construction materials, high interest rates and a labor shortage. He said the company did not say if the project would still be viable if it had moved faster through the design and plan-

ning phase.

"I think potentially it could have gotten done a little quicker and potentially would have been under construction by now and it would have been one of the ones that got through, while maybe one of the other parks would not at this time," Washam said. "But I can't confirm that."

The last major preconstruction item was to finalize a sewer agreement between Great Wolf, the developer and the City of Visalia. Unfortunately, some of the company's other projects were progressing faster through the preconstruction process and the agreement was not complete by the time another offer was made on the land.

"We are extremely appreciative of both Tulare County and the City of Visalia for their partnership throughout this exploration process," Lasecki said.

Visalia Mayor Brian Poochigian said the city was disappointed by Great Wolf's decision not to locate in Visalia but that they appreciated the cooperative effort between the company, county and city throughout the process.

See GREAT WOLF on page 4

Financial markets shaken by bank failure

Trish Arnold
Financial Advisor
LPL Financial

Financial markets were shaken as Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), the California bank subsidiary of SVB Financial Group (SIVB), fell into FDIC receivership. SVB is the first FDIC-insured institution to fail since 2020 and the largest by assets since Washington Mutual failed in 2008. Prior to the latest distress, the bank held more than \$200 billion in assets. SVB's failure was then followed by another, crypto-focused Signature Bank. The news, not surprisingly, caused market participants to speculate if there will be another shoe to drop. For some, these developments have brought back painful memories of the financial crisis 15 years ago.

Before explaining what happened, let's start with the most recent headlines. In March we got word that the U.S. government would step in to prevent contagion by offering SVB customers access to their uninsured deposits. And by designating SVB as a systemic risk to the banking system, the Federal Reserve (Fed) and U.S. Treasury Department are able to use emergency lending authority to help prevent runs on other banks (by making it easier to borrow against depreciating securities without suffering the balance sheet damage SVB experienced). The top priority in this situation was to prevent runs on other banks, particularly the many small and mid-sized banks not under the watchful eye of the Fed and not subject to sophisticated stress tests.

Now to the 2008 comparison. Back then, the problem was far-reaching credit risk—junk mortgages on virtually every financial institution's balance sheet (and the balance sheets of many non-financial institutions). Credit risk is not the problem this time, it is interest rate risk. Rising interest rates caused the value of the bonds on SVB's balance sheet to lose value. Once those securities were marked to market, as is prescribed by accounting

See BANK on page 5

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Wait, am I the only one?



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

This question reaches the Visalia Chamber in several different forms. Sometimes business leaders call to ask if other businesses are having challenges with hiring or reinvestment questions or a host of other issues and concerns. The question also pops up when working with public agencies. Finding the intersection between public and private, we often serve as a translator helping both sides find common ground. Businesses calling to ask these questions are asking for resources, help, reassurance, and solutions. As your Chamber, we understand these calls very differently.

As a collective, these calls from businesses represent trends, concerns, and issues facing our business community. These calls show the things business leaders need help with, things businesses need to be successful, and questions they can not quickly answer. Some of our most significant work advocating for local business has grown from these calls. From developing a microbrew district to having Tulare County included in Covid relief dollars to developing a youth entrepreneurship program, these calls have driven our work in making Visalia a vibrant community full of successful businesses.

So, what have the calls been about lately? What are the needs and concerns of our business community? Several more interesting calls surround safety, security, and the partnership between law enforcement and local business. What is the

role of local businesses in securing their business property, employees, and customers? When should they engage with the police on these matters? What are issues that should be prosecuted? What is the value of prosecution to the business, community, and in a broader perspective? These calls often begin with "I've heard" or "a neighboring business told me," but all point to, at best, misinformation and, at worse, a disconnect on how a partnership with law enforcement ought to work.

When I received several calls from various businesses, I first asked other businesses if they were experiencing similar issues. When I found that this issue seemed to stretch beyond one business or type of business, I reached out to law enforcement leaders. In my experience, these leaders want businesses to succeed. They are supportive of finding solutions to allow all businesses to thrive. There is a disconnect between what businesses are hearing and experiencing and what our law enforcement offer as resources and support. Perhaps a misunderstanding that needs a conversation.

This is the value of the Visalia Chamber. As a convener, we bring people together to discuss and define these issues, address fundamental concerns, and allow everyone to move toward solutions. To that end, we will be hosting The Business of Law and Order this May. A City of Visalia and Tulare County law enforcement panel will share resources and eliminate misunderstandings. Perhaps more significant than that, they want to engage in dialog about how to best support your business within the confines of the law and justice system.

If you would like to have a seat at this important conversation, please contact info@visaliachamber.org.

Say 'yes'

Have you ever watched the TV show, "Say Yes to the Dress", on TLC where eager brides are searching for the perfect wedding dress for their big day? They visit the famous bridal boutique, Kleinfeld Bridal, in New York City with big hopes and lots of excitement at stake. They may even have a set budget in mind before saying "yes" to the wedding dress of their dreams.

Similarly, businesses or organizations that want training for their employees may also shop around before saying "yes" to a curriculum or a group that can provide the employee training they desire. Proper employee training is vital for any employee, and it goes without saying that most employees could use the support as they learn to navigate their new workplace environment, take on new skills for their job, and improve on their skills or weaknesses. But not all organizations have an employee training program established that can help take their employees to the next level.

Although many companies have their own "in-house" training tailored for their employees, many companies do not have a set training program. Consequently, they will often have to seek out consulting or training services for help. But just like shopping for a wedding dress, it's not a surprise when the employer forks out a large sum of money into the training services for their



employees. Or in the worst-case scenario, if the training is too expensive and out of the budget, employers will have to dismiss the desire for training until the company's budget can allow for it. However, here in Tulare County, one organization has been providing workforce training at a reduced or no cost to the employer thanks to their training reimbursement program.

The College of the Sequoias (COS) Training Resource Center has been of service to many local businesses around the Tulare and Kings counties and has provided various types of workforce trainings, in response to employer demand. To help local businesses, the COS Training Resource Center utilizes its contract with the Employment Training Panel (ETP) to offset employer's training costs. In the end, it's money for businesses to use to upskills their workforce, improve employees' abilities and increase employee retention.

ETP is entirely funded by the Employment Training Tax paid by California employers. The program is performance-based, providing reimbursement to em-

See COS on page 6



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
CST #2048841-40

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

Impact Leadership Conference to bring together community leaders for networking and education

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its annual Impact Leadership Conference, scheduled to take place on April 20, 2023. The conference brings together community leaders from various industries to network and learn from some of the most successful and influential leaders.

The Impact Leadership Conference is a valuable opportunity for attendees to gain insights, knowledge, and skills from successful leaders in different fields. The conference offers a chance to learn from renowned keynote speakers, participate in educational sessions, and network with other community leaders.

This year's keynote speaker is Libby Spears, a renowned speaker, author, and leadership consultant. Libby Spears is known for her expertise in communication, leadership development, and change management. Her presentation, "Meet me around the Campfire," will provide attendees with practical strategies for improving communication skills and building better relationships with their teams.

"We are thrilled to have Libby Spears as our keynote speaker for the Impact Leadership Conference," said Gail Zurek, President and CEO of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce. "Her expertise in leadership and communication is sure to provide valuable insights and strategies for our attendees."

In addition to the keynote presentation, the conference will feature educational sessions led by experienced leaders in various industries. Attendees will have the opportunity to learn about leadership and management techniques, best practices for organizational success, and much more.

The Impact Leadership Conference is an excellent opportunity to network with other community leaders, learn from successful leaders, and gain valuable insights and skills to improve leadership effectiveness.

To register for the Impact Leadership Conference, please visit visaliachamber.org/impact. Early bird pricing is available until March 31, 2023.



B of A buys 100 boxes of cookies from excited Girl Scouts in Visalia

Girl Scout cookie sales in Visalia have been a bit slower than usual this year, so the girls of Troop 7015 were especially thrilled when a Bank of America vice president strolled up to the cookie table in front of the Save Mart on West Goshen Avenue last Saturday, asked them how sales were going, and then announced that she was going to buy 100 boxes.

It's the fourth year in a row that Bank of America has bought a big order of cookies from a lucky troop in the Fresno/Visalia area. Veronica Lopez, the bank's business banking senior relationship manager who announced the big purchase, said the bank supports the program for several reasons.

"Besides the fact that the Girl Scouts is an incredible organization with fantastic cookies, we're also supporting financial literacy from a very young age," Lopez said. "By selling cookies each spring, the girls learn a lot about sales, marketing, finance, budgeting and planning – many of the same financial education skills the bank offers free to residents."

Troop Leader Sarah Gibson said the girls staffing the table were overjoyed at the big sale.

"They were really excited, and it was a big treat for all of us," Gibson said. "We try to make

Community Loyal Members

A thriving community starts here!

NEW

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

Business Connector Members:

- Motto Mortgage Destination

Small Business Members:

- Central Valley Hypnotherapy
- D.R Horton Central Valley
- Mini Dumpsters of Visalia

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- United Health Centers

RENEWING

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

Business Connector Members:

- Bank of America - Main St.
- Elite Medical - RTO Systems Incorporated*
- TechCare360 Inc.
- Tri-Anim Health Service, Inc.*

Small Business Members:

- Bryan Company
- Bryson Cancer Care, Inc.*
- Carroll's Tire Warehouse*
- Elaine Rider/State Farm Insurance



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

- Agency*
- Four Seasons Handy Market*
 - Goodies Cookies & Specialty Cakes
 - Gunning & Gunning, C.P.A.*
 - Historic Seven Sycamores (Wedding & Event Venue)*
 - Kids2Dentist, LLC*
 - Main Street Office Suites / Ouzounian Properties*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

our troop free for all our families, and cookie sales support memberships, badges, vests and outings. We don't ask the families to pay for anything unless it's really out of the ordinary."

She agreed that besides fundraising, the girls learn important life skills. Gibson said the young girls in particular are ahead of their grade level in math due to learning how to multiply boxes sold and that all gain valuable soft skills such as speaking confidently in public.

There are 22 girls this year in Troop 7015, ranging from Daisies and Brownies up to Juniors. Next year, a couple of Juniors will even move up to become Cadets.

Of course, the good news about slower sales is that area residents have two more weeks to stock up on Thin Mints, Samoas, Adventurefuls and all the other varieties of deliciousness to keep them in cookie heaven until next spring.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Visalia-based Girl Scout Troop 7015 was overjoyed when Bank of America bought 100 boxes of cookies from them in front of the Save Mart store on West Goshen Avenue. From left are BofA's Ashley McIntosh; Girl Scouts Bradie Lenaburg, Evelyn Gibson, Sadie Gibson and Ava Gibson; BofA's Veronica Lopez; and troop co-leader Rebekah Lenaburg.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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

Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

©2023, Visalia Chamber of Commerce. All rights reserved. Reproduction by any means of the entire contents or any portion of this publication without written permission is prohibited. The appearance of any advertisements in the publication does not constitute support or endorsement for any product, person, cause, business, or organization named therein, unless specifically noted otherwise in the advertisement.

CONTACT US

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



VISALIA CHAMBER ANNOUNCES BOARD SLATE FOR 2023

Pursuant to the bylaws of the Chamber, a nominating committee was appointed by the board to solicit candidates for the board. The opportunity to apply was also promoted through the Chamber newsletter earlier this year. The nominating committee has recommended, and the board has accepted, the following to be candidates for the board: Samantha M. Rummage-Mathias, Tony Evangelo, Chad Vawter, and Randy Wasnick. The bylaws require that we notify the members of this slate of candidates, as well as the opportunity for members to nominate other candidates by petition.

In order to nominate an alternative candidate for the board, a petition signed by fifteen members of the Chamber must be received by the Chamber within 10 days of this notification (Wednesday, April 5, 2023). If no additional nominees are submitted, the proposed slate listed above will be elected to serve on the Board starting July 1, 2023. If one or more names are submitted by petition, then a ballot will be sent to all Chamber members to elect the new directors for this term. If you have questions about this notice or the process for selecting board members, please contact Gail Zurek at the Visalia Chamber of Commerce at 559-734-5876.

LIBBY SPEARS
FOUNDER OF BRAVO CC
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

LEE RUBIN
PUBLIC SPEAKER
MORNING PEPTALK

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/IMPACT

MEMORIALS OF WORLD WAR II

featuring the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landing

Departure Dates: May 24-June 2, 2024
10 days - 12 meals

Learn more, visit

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/TRAVEL

Visalia Chamber of Commerce: (559) 734-5876
Provided by: Collette Vacations. CST#: 2006766-20

Learn more about TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES with THE CHAMBER



The annual award is bestowed upon those Century 21 System sales affiliates that earn the Century 21 Centurion award and the Century 21 Quality Service Pinnacle Producer award in the same calendar year. Sales affiliate Evoy Saees was also recognized with the Century 21 2022 Quality Service Pinnacle Producer Award, too.

Farmer Bob's World has partnered with **Central Valley Regional Center (CVRC)** to provide an opportunity for CVRC members with developmental disabilities to come and enjoy Farmer Bob's World.

Valley Strong Credit Union hosted Member Appreciation Day in February. Branches provided refreshments and goodies to patrons with the opportunity to win local gift cards.

Assistance League of Visalia will host a fun Evening at The Derby at Visalia Country Club on April 29th. The event will feature a silent auction, races, prizes, and dinner.

Tachi Palace Casino Resort announced multiple construction enhancement projects to their property in celebration of the casino and resort's 40-year anniversary. A grand opening is scheduled for May to celebrate the improvements.

Save Mart Companies hosted a Friends Feeding Friends food drive in late 2022. More than 12,000 pounds of food was collected and distributed in March to Central California Food Bank. The food collected will create more than 14,500 meals for families throughout Central California.

Re/Max Visalia participated in Kid's Day 2023 collecting donations for Valley Children's Hospital

Congratulations to **Topograph** who won a Best of Show award for their work with **Component Coffee** and a Silver award in identity design for 1852 Brew Co. Topograph was honored at the 2023 American Advertising Awards Fresno.



RE/MAX VISALIA



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

The Book Nook has brought a bookstore back to downtown Visalia for the first time in decades. On March 3, the bookstore hosted a poetry reading by a Redwood High student.

The Book Nook celebrates local teen author with First Friday Spotlight

Fifteen-year-old Visalia native was featured guest reader at art hop

When the First Friday Art Walk returned to Downtown Visalia on March 3rd, local art lovers found a truly unique experience at the heart of The Book Nook on Main Street. 15-year-old local author, Donya Hassanshahi, was featured as the guest reader, as she shared selections of poetry from her first published book.

Hassanshahi, a sophomore at Redwood High School, started writing her poetry during her COVID-19 quarantine in September 2020. Over a span of nearly 2 1/2 years, Hassanshahi's one-time exercise in expressing her feelings ultimately led to her writing more than 100 poems, all centered around her growth from adolescence into young adulthood during a global pandemic. As she entered her sophomore year at Redwood, Hassanshahi fine-tuned her col-



lection down to her 85 best poems, which were published together as one complete book in January 2023.

"People my age don't get many opportunities to share themselves like this," said Hassanshahi. "I'd love to inspire other young adults my age, but I also hope adults can see that teenagers have a different view from what they typically expect. I hope someone who finds my book feels inspired, and says 'Well, if a 15-year-old can write and edit a book on her own, why can't I?'"

Hassanshahi's book, *The Fairy Without Wings* is available

at The Book Nook, which officially opened its doors in October 2022. Owned and operated as a division of Family HealthCare Network, The Book Nook serves as the newest addition to FHCN's literacy initiative with the goal of increasing literacy rates through Visalia and the surrounding communities.

"Donya is an exceptional example of the stories we love to see throughout the San Joaquin Valley: someone who is fearlessly pursuing her dreams," said Kerry Hydash, President & CEO of Family HealthCare Network. "We are so excited to celebrate Donya's story at The Book Nook on Friday, as part of our continued commitment to the children of the communities we serve."

Quality of Life – Day Session

Rik McNeil

The Leadership Visalia group for 2022-2023 gathered for a day session addressing the Quality of Life on March 10, 2023. The group was hosted at the Workforce Investment Board on Main Street in Downtown Visalia, where they enjoyed breakfast while preparing for an exciting day.

After orientation, the first session began. CEO and R.N. Darren Peterson of American Care Hospice addressed the group to discuss maintaining quality in the final season of life through hospice care. Darren was joined by his wife Diana Peterson, Hospice Liaison and R.N., and Community Outreach Director Sharon Crook-Allison, a Leadership Visalia alumni. After beginning a career in law enforcement, Darren was drawn to nursing, completing his education and obtaining his R.N. license. He didn't expect to enjoy hospice work, but quickly found satisfaction in helping his patients navigate a difficult time while maintaining dignity and a degree of control over their last stages of life. While working in hospice care, he watched many companies be swallowed up by larger corporations and became concerned over the quality of care provided. He decided to start American Hospice Care to provide the level of care that he believed all hospice patients are entitled to. Darren believes that maintaining quality of life for a patient rests on the care team and their responsibility to develop a plan of care directed by that patient. The team at American Care Hospice includes Registered Nurses, Physician Assistants, Social Workers, Licensed Practical Nurses, Home Health Aids, and others who work toward a plan of care that addresses the patient's changing needs as they shift focus from a cure to experiencing the end of life with respect, comfort, and dignity. During the session with Darren, some members of the group related their own experiences with hospice care, both good and bad. Through discussion, it became apparent that consulting hospice care earlier in the process will directly affect the quality-of-life experience for the patient and their loved ones. American Care Hospice was recognized



This year, Darren's team received recognition as a Level 2 hospice care provider, and for their We Honor the Veterans program. American Care Hospice co-ordinates a volunteer program for community members who can visit or run errands for patients while they settle into hospice care.

Tosha Pequeno joined the group for the next discussion. Tosha has been with Valley Strong Credit Union for over 18 years, beginning with the High School Branch program at Ridgeview High in Kern County in 2004. Tosha relocated to Visalia in 2020 to help lead the opening of Valley Strong branches in Tulare and Kings County, and immediately focused on outreach and developing strong roots within the community. In her dialogue with the group, Tosha discussed the importance of financial health as a quality-of-life issue, beginning with financial literacy to establish an early and comprehensive relationship with personal finances. Valley Strong offers financial courses, credit education, budgeting assistance, and a gamified mobile app to help develop financial skills and knowledge. Additionally, Valley Strong offers free informational workshops on a variety of important financial topics, including budgeting, financial emergencies, mortgages, and identity theft. In the time since Tosha relocated, she's become a valued member of the community, working closely with Visalia Rawhide, the International Agri-center, and is a board member for the Visalia Chamber of Commerce. In addition to her discussion of financial quality-of-life, Tosha outlined some of the benefits of community involvement Visalia, citing the collaborative nature of the people, and the willingness to welcome new partnerships and ideas.

After a short break, the Leadership Visalia group took a short rainy walk to Oak Street Studios Fitness, where Michelle Miller and Melissa Hulsey introduced Leadership Visalia to another issue in quality-of-life: maintaining health, mobility, and fitness. Michelle related her journey to opening the studio, and the satisfaction she gets through working with clients in Pilates. Melissa shared that her journey with Pilates began when she sought relief from back pain over 10 years ago. A career in marketing dictated many hours at a desk, and she experienced pain daily. Through Pilates, she was introduced to the reformer and learned to strengthen her core, alleviating the pain and immediately improving her overall health and quality of life. The class then divided into two groups, with one group learning to work with the spring-controlled reformer for a full-body workout to promote strength, flexibility, and balance. The other half of the class ad-

joined to the adjoining studio to participate in a TRX workout, challenging the body's core in every exercise to develop balance and core strength. After 15 minutes, the groups switched machines and rooms so that each could experience the other workout.

After an invigorating half-hour session, the two groups convened again, and walked several blocks to the Visit Visalia visitor center on Main Street. In the center, Tourism Marketing Director Suzanne Bianco discussed the purpose and mission of the Convention & Visitors Bureau in bringing meetings, conventions, and visitors to Visalia through incentives, presentations, and marketing of the venues, hotels, and facilities available for visitors. Tourism is a major economic driver in the region, contributing to our local businesses, and bringing valuable revenue to the area to drive quality-of-life. Recently Visalia was designated the first-ever Certified Autism Destination in the country by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. Local tourism partners have made a focused effort to address the needs of autistic travelers and their families. A recent study showed that 87% of parents with an autistic child do not travel. The new designation and recognition allow travelers to access the knowledge and assistance to enjoy accessible travel to Visalia and the nearby national parks.

The group then walked the short few blocks back to the Workforce Investment Board, and enjoyed a tasty lunch provided by Visalia Eatery, and sponsored by Valley Strong Credit Union. During lunch, Leadership Visalia discussed progress and strategy for the community project for the 2022-2023 class, a mural to call attention to a promote mental health in the youth in our area.

After lunch, the next session began, with Stephanie Young J.D., who provides paralegal services in the South Valley. Stephanie introduced Visalia attorney Michael Brown to the discussion, allowing the group to focus on quality-of-life through estate and medical planning, and how each can vastly affect live-changing events. The examples given made a strong case for maintaining control over how one's estate and property is handled in the event of death or incapacitation. Statistics shared in the discussion made it clear that many people don't plan for these events, and the effect on what they wish to leave behind for their heirs is startling.

The day session on quality-of-life was unfortunately interrupted by a real-life development, as our valley was experiencing higher-than-normal rainfall and flooding potential. The facilitator and several community leaders in the group were notified of a possible impending flood danger and made the decision to cut the day short for the safety of those involved.

Ask Jena

How can I partner with the Chamber on a workshop for members?

We love to partner with members! Does your business offer a resource for fellow members and our community? Contact me directly to brainstorm on ways we can partner.

Have a question about the Chamber? Send me a message: Jena@visaliachamber.org

BUSINESS AT Breakfast

Developing a Business Plan

May 10th, 8:30am-9:30am

Complimentary for Visalia Chamber & Valley Strong Members
\$20 for non-members - includes Breakfast & materials

Quail Park Shannon Ranch
3440 W Flagstaff Ave, Visalia, CA 93291

Learn More & Register: visaliachamber.org/workshops

Questions: (559) 734-5876; info@visaliachamber.org

Provided & Presented by:

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VALLEY STRONG

Visalia Unified unveils 'What's New?' for the 2023-2024 school year

We are excited to share some of the incredible opportunities that will be available for Visalia in Unified School District (VUSD) students during the 2023-2024 school year. Our teams have been diligently implementing this year's objectives while developing new opportunities to enhance student learning. VUSD's focus for this upcoming school year is strengthening the foundation for learning and advancing academic opportunities for all students.

Advanced Learning Opportunities – VUSD will begin to plan and build opportunities for elementary students to engage in above grade-level experiences that extend their learning. High school students will have access to additional college course options (Dual Enrollment) and guaranteed college admission opportunities through increased partnerships with local and national universities. VUSD will increase access to academic honor programs (i.e., Beta Club, National Honor Society, etc.) for our middle and high school students.

Visual and Performing Arts in Grades K-12 –

With the passage of Proposition 28, VUSD will expand the current Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) curriculum, including providing weekly art and music to students in transitional kindergarten through 3rd grade.

Aligned Scheduling in Elementary Schools –

All elementary schools will have the same start and end times for all students.

Investment in Math 1 and Phonics –

Every student in grades kindergarten through 2nd grade will receive phonics instruction from a Board adopted phonics curriculum. This provides our primary students with a strong foundation to prepare them to read by third grade. Additionally, Math 1 in middle school will receive high school credit to allow students to access higher level math courses in high school and help meet or exceed math requirements necessary for a post-secondary education.

Expansion of Dual Immersion Programs –

Our current Dual Immersion Program will expand to



Willow Glen Elementary.

- Advancing Safety and Security** – Board investments in safety and security will continue to be realized throughout the system with the implementation of our bus app (Transfinder), visitor and volunteer sign in and staff emergency alert system (Raptor). Additionally enhancements in single point of entry and cameras are in development. The district will continue to also focus on both staff and student safety training.
- One Visalia Connected** - When students are connected to a meaningful activity, they do better in school. The district will increase efforts to ensure students are engaged and will continue to advance opportunities for students who need support above and beyond what is possible outside of the classroom.

In addition to the above foundations for learning and advancing academic opportunities, the district knows that engaged families also support student achievement. Therefore, the following change for the 2023-24 school year will occur:

- Streamlining the Volunteer Process** – The volunteer registration process is moving online, saving parents time at registration by filling out one form for all of their students across all district schools.
- Increased Community Engagement** - There will be multiple opportunities for the community to provide feedback through the Visalia Forward 2030 listening sessions and the Board Member community connections.

“Our board has declared that every student can learn at a high level. And these expansions are an investment and commitment by our board to our students, staff, and community. We welcome families to enroll in a VUSD school,” said Superintendent Shrum.

GREAT WOLF

Continued from page 1

“It is unfortunate that the current national economic conditions and anti-business regulations coming out of California have resulted in their decision,” Poochigian said.

Great Wolf did not mention state regulations as a factor in its decision but did say it was “excited to continue supporting California’s robust tourism economy with our 500 and 600 room resorts in Northern and Southern California. Less than a four-hour drive distance away from a majority of California residents, these two resorts currently provide a close, convenient and carefree getaway for families in the state, while also providing more than 1,300 direct jobs and significant tax revenue.”

The city of Visalia was expected to capture the greatest share of off-site visitor spending for both general retail and food service, about \$15 million annually as well as supporting 227 jobs in local cities, according to an economic impact study done by Sacramento-based Economic & Planning Systems, Inc. (EPS) in summer 2022.

Under a tax incentive play approved by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors on July 26, 2022, the county would rebate Great Wolf 100% of the transient occupancy tax (TOT), also known as a bed tax, it collects on the resort for the first five years, 75% in years six through 10 and 50% of the tax collected in years 11-15. Beginning in year 16, the county would collect 100% of the TOT, or about \$6.5 million annually. Great Wolf would have used the tax rebates to pay their deferred impact fees without interest over the five-year initial period to alleviate up-front costs of building the \$228 million project.

The analysis by EPS showed the resort would receive about \$87 million over 15 years from the TOT rebate while the county would receive \$33 million over 15 years. The report also estimated the county would re-

ceive an additional \$1.5 million per year in property, sales and other taxes, totaling \$22.5 million over the same 15-year timeframe. In all, the county expected Great Wolf to generate more than \$8 million in tax revenue per year. That’s far more than the estimated \$238,000 the county will provide the property in services, such as public safety. EPS said Great Wolf would have had a total economic impact from both direct and indirect sources of \$1.7 billion in Tulare County.

Great Wolf would also have been a major job creator. EPS estimated construction of the 35-acre resort would have generated about 1,000 jobs. Once open, the hotel and waterpark would have employed an estimated 660 people or more, as the actual number of rooms could be as high as 700.

Visalia Chamber CEO Gail Zurek called the loss of millions in sales tax dollars and hundreds of jobs “heartbreaking” and said local officials should look at this as an opportunity to evaluate how it will handle future projects of this magnitude.

“While it is easy to blame the economy or state policies, we need to look hard at what worked and what didn’t so we can be successful next time,” Zurek said. “This evaluation process is critical in understanding the most effective ways to meet the needs of businesses.”

Washam said Great Wolf’s decision to terminate this project at this time does not shut the door on a possible return to the area for another waterpark resort in the future. He said Tulare County is strategically located between Great Wolf’s existing resorts in Manteca, Calif. and Anaheim, Calif. and is part of an overall strategy within the state.

“When they are ready to put a place back in California this area will definitely be the location ... fingers crossed,” Washam said. “We’re trying to leave everyone on good terms and hopefully something will work out in a few years.”



ADOBE STOCK

Renewable natural gas is made from waste created by landfills and wastewater treatment plants. SoCalGas is also committed to investing in its gas delivery infrastructure while keeping bills affordable for customers.

SoCalGas to give \$10 million to support low-income families, seniors and small restaurant owners impacted by unprecedented regional gas market prices

Thousands newly eligible for winter bill assistance after SoCalGas bolsters United Way’s Gas Assistance Fund with historic \$5 million contribution

Chris Gilbride

Office of Media and Public Information
SoCalGas

Southern California Gas Co. (SoCalGas) today announced \$10 million in shareholder funding to help customers with bill assistance and to bolster community resources for those who may be struggling financially.

The company committed \$5 million in shareholder funding to the Gas Assistance Fund, a program administered by the United Way that provides income-qualified customers with one-time grants to help pay their natural gas bills. The contribution is the largest in the fund’s 40-year history and will help the United Way expand access to the program to thousands of additional Southern Californians this winter.

SoCalGas also announced it will contribute \$4 million from its donor advised fund to relaunch its popular Fueling Our Communities program, a collaboration with local food banks and nonprofits that has provided free meals and groceries to thousands of Californians facing food insecurity since 2020.

In addition, SoCalGas will contribute \$1 million in aid from its donor advised fund to small restaurant owners through the Restaurants Care Resilience Fund, a fund that was started in 2021 to help small restaurants with improvements, upgrades, employee retention and to manage debt, losses and rising costs.

“This winter’s unprecedented natural gas prices, on top of already high inflation, have been a real hardship for many Southern Californians, especially our most vulnerable, our seniors, and people facing difficult circumstances,” said SoCalGas CEO, Scott Drury. “Thanks to the incredible work of the United Way, and the network of tireless, nonprofit leaders who support our work in the community, we will be able to help many more of our neighbors, families, and small businesses in cities and towns across Southern California this winter.”

“These contributions will provide much-needed relief for some of our most vulnerable residents at a time when cold temperatures make it harder to turn down the heat,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger. “As we learn more about the West Coast market conditions that led to unusually high bills, proactive partnerships like this one are addressing the immediate very real needs of our community. I continue looking forward to what soon may be a return to more normal natural gas prices.”

Expanded access to gas assistance fund

SoCalGas’s latest contribution to the Gas Assistance Fund will help the United Way expand income eligibility for the program and increase the grant amount available to each qualified customer from \$100 to up to \$400 for the remainder of the 2023 program. Additionally, income-eligible older adults (55+) and those facing certain financial hardships may be eligible for extra grant funding.

“Over the last four decades, the Gas Assistance Fund has helped hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Californians who face difficult choices during cold months between staying warm and other basic necessities like food and medicine,” said Elise Buik, president & CEO at United Way of Greater Los Angeles. “This historic contribution will help the United Way dramatically expand our reach and allow thousands of individuals, older adults, and families across our region to remain healthy and housed this winter.”

Fueling our communities in 2023

The Fueling our Communities Program began in 2020 as a collaboration between SoCalGas and five regional nonprofits to provide free meals to individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the program’s first summer, SoCalGas and its partners provided more than 140,000 meals to 40,000 individuals from underserved communities across Southern California. With its latest \$4 million contribution, SoCalGas aims to significantly expand the Fueling our Communities program via new and existing partnerships with food banks and nonprofits with a focus on serving families and seniors in need.

Supporting small businesses

The Restaurants Care Resilience Fund was started in 2021 to help small restaurants with improvements, upgrades, employee retention and to manage debt, losses and rising costs. SoCalGas has supported the fund since its inception.

“What started as a lifeline to restaurants during the pandemic has grown into a robust fund to assist small restaurants with grants to strengthen their businesses and invest in their people,” said Alycia Harshfield, executive director of the California Restaurant Foundation. “SoCalGas’ incredible generosity, commitment, and leadership has a lasting positive ripple effect, and we are proud to partner with them again to make such a meaningful impact.”

Market conditions improve

After a significant drop in inventory from January’s unprecedented natural gas commodity prices, market prices for March 2023 usage are currently forecasted to be significantly lower than February’s



prices. In addition, the restoration of service to an out-of-state pipeline, which has been offline for two years, is expected to increase supply capacity to the Southwest. Consistent with regulatory requirements, SoCalGas will file March core procurement prices (rates) with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) at the end of February.

The core procurement rate reflects the price SoCalGas pays for natural gas for residential and business customers. That rate changes each month. SoCalGas does not set the price for natural gas. Instead, natural gas prices are determined by national and regional markets. SoCalGas buys natural gas in those markets on behalf of residential and small business customers, and the cost of buying that gas is billed to those customers with no markup.

What caused prices to spike in January?

According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), a number of factors have contributed to higher natural gas commodity prices:

- Widespread, below-normal temperatures on much of the West Coast, including Washington and Oregon;
- High natural gas demand for heating by customers in areas with below normal temperatures;
- Reduced natural gas supplies to the West Coast from Canada and the Rocky Mountains;
- Reduced interstate pipeline capacity to the West Coast because of pipeline maintenance activities in West Texas (the out of state pipeline mentioned earlier in this news release); and
- Low natural gas storage levels on the West Coast.

According to the EIA, the U.S. set a natural gas consumption daily record on Dec. 23, 2022, further exacerbating supply and demand challenges.

Several experts discussed these market conditions at a California Public Utilities Commission public hearing earlier this month.

Is additional help available?

In light of unprecedented market conditions, the California Public Utilities Commission voted earlier this month to accelerate the California Climate Credit. As a result, SoCalGas customers will receive a credit of \$50.77 in their February or March bill, depending on their billing cycle.

In addition, SoCalGas continues to encourage customers to take advantage of programs and services that can help manage usage and save costs.

Eligible customers may sign up for a Level Pay Plan (LPP), for example, which averages their annual natural gas use and costs over 12 months. There are also financial assistance programs for eligible customers who are experiencing hardships.

SoCalGas’ free Ways to Save tool may also help customers with energy savings options through a personalized savings plan that offers a household energy analysis, customized energy-efficiency recommendations, bill comparisons, and energy usage comparisons that could help save on natural gas bills. Customers can also sign up for weekly Bill Tracker Alerts to monitor natural gas consumption, take steps to reduce usage, and avoid bill surprises.

Customers can visit socialgas.com/ManageHigherBills for more information on the factors that lead to higher bills and ways we can help.

About SoCalGas

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

SoCalGas’ mission is to build the cleanest, safest and most innovative energy company in America. In support of that mission, SoCalGas aspires to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in its operations and delivery of energy by 2045 and to replacing 20 percent of its traditional natural gas supply to core customers with renewable natural gas (RNG) by 2030. Renewable natural gas is made from waste created by landfills and wastewater treatment plants. SoCalGas is also committed to investing in its gas delivery infrastructure while keeping bills affordable for customers. SoCalGas is a subsidiary of Sempra (NYSE: SRE), an energy infrastructure company based in San Diego.



PHOTO BY KENNY GOODMAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

The convention center at the Lamp Liter Inn has been taken over by Visalia-based Revel Events Company to reinvigorate the venue to fill a need for meetings and events.

Venue group to operate the former Lamp Liter Inn Convention Space, rebrand as 'The Hyde'

Sam Ramirez
Revel Events Co.

Local venue operator, Sam Ramirez, Founder of Revel Events Co, part of The Naxon Group, says they will begin managing events of the former Lamp Liter Inn Convention Space this month. A new operator has acquired the Inn portion of the property, leaving the convention space, bar, and resultant with no operator. This resulted in the convention space cancelling several social events as well as local business and service organizations regular meetings. When property owners, the Hyde Family, realized the challenge this presented to clients of the former Lamp Liter they contacted Revel Events to help ensure the successful execution of all promised events.

"Although we're still exploring more permanent plans our goal now is to ensure that all the families and service clubs



who've committed to this space continue to have the option to host their events," said Ramirez. Revel Events has begun to contact former clients and encourage anyone who was previously booked and had their event canceled to reach out to them for new options. "When we realized the situation that was created, we knew we had to do what we could to assist the clients who'd made plans and we're glad to be working with Sam and his team to continue seeing those through," said Bri-

an Hyde.

Ramirez says in the coming months they'll begin exploring options to continue serving the community with the bar and bring back some unique options for the diner. "This property has a rich history in Visalia and we're looking forward to engaging the community invite them to share how they believe we can help return the spaces to their former prominence," said Ramirez. "We're proud to be able to steward it through this transition".

With other local venues in Revel Event's portfolio including, Bello Vita, the Woodlands, Watermill Grove and The Mason, Revel Events is positioned to assist clients with other arrangements as well.

Those interested in events at the former Lamp Liter should reach out to Revel Events Co at www.reveventsco.com or by calling them at 559-372-9822.

Kaweah expands mental health care

Kaweah Health opens Center for Mental Wellness in Visalia, five professionals provide services to the community Monday through Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette

Despite financial troubles causing building closures and company layoffs, Kaweah Health was able to open a much needed mental health facility for the community.



On March 8, Kaweah Health opened their Center for Mental Wellness in Visalia. This extension of care is part of its continued commitment to meet the demands for mental health services in the Central Valley. The center will provide outpatient therapy and counseling for people of all ages. The 1,200-square-foot center will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and is located at 301 W. Noble Ave., Visalia. The need for mental health care in the county has been around for some time, and only grew for many throughout the pandemic.

"Due to the limited number of mental health providers, we know how difficult it can be to get in to see a therapist. We're here to help," Theresa Croushore, Kaweah Health's director of behavioral health service line said.

The Center for Mental Wellness is just one of the many projects Kaweah Health is working on to meet demands for mental health services in the Central Valley. A total of five professionals will be working as a team to help serve the community. They will offer patients services in individual therapy, family therapy, child and adolescent therapy, couples counseling, specialized therapy groups, EMDR therapy, trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy and play therapy.

The clinic accepts most private insurance, Medicare and self-pay; appointments can be made by



calling 559-624-6875. Additional access to mental health services, including Medi-Cal patients, is available through our network of rural health clinics.

Gabriela Martinez, a licensed marriage and family therapist, serves as lead psychotherapist of the four-therapist team. Martinez graduated with a master's degree in counseling from California State University, Fresno in 2003 and has been working in the field of mental health for the past 20 years. Martinez will be joined by the following psychotherapists: Maria Mendoza, a licensed marriage and family therapist; Analis Lopez Gonzales, an associate clinical social worker; and Vanessa Gutierrez and Julie Andress, who are both associate marriage and family therapists. Together the group provides services for those as a result of major life stresses, trauma, etc.

This is all part of Kaweah's plan to continue to expand their mental health services. According to a press release from Kaweah Health, last year, they were awarded an \$8.7 million grant to fund the construction of Tulare County's first mental health hospital for youth. The grant will fully fund construction of a 22-bed wing to Kaweah Health's Mental Health Hospital.

Also last year, Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and Kaweah Health were jointly awarded a \$4.9 million grant from California Health Facilities Financing Authority for the creation of a child and adolescent Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU). The 12-bed CSU, is expected to open late this summer in Visalia and be open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It will provide crisis intervention services for children and youth under age 21.

Cal Water contributes to seven Visalia organizations

California Water Service Group donates roughly \$51,500 to seven local organizations in Visalia to help better the lives of residents



Lacey Patrick
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

Local community organizations were given a total of \$51,500 in donations from CalWater in order to make the lives of residents better in the city of Visalia.

On Feb. 22, the California Water Service Group (Group) announced it would be donating \$1.57 million to community organizations, first responders and students in 2022. Among the recipients of these donations are seven local organizations in Visalia, including the Visalia Emergency Aid Council who received \$11,000 in funding from the Group. This is part of the Group's commitment to enhancing the quality of life for those it serves. The utility and its employees gave another \$34,270 through an employee charitable donation-matching program.

"We are dedicated to making our communities a better place to live and work, and to supporting organizations that make a meaningful difference for those in our service areas," the Group's CEO Martin A. Kropelnicki said in a statement.

The local organizations who received funding from the donations are: Visalia Emergency Aid Council, \$11,000; Lions Club, \$8,000; Children's Museum of the Sequoias, \$5,000; Downtown Visalians, \$10,000; United Way of Tulare County, \$5,000; Valley Oak SPCA, \$5,000; and Kaweah Delta Hospital Foundation, \$7,500.

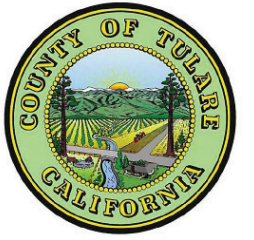
Director of communications Yvonne Kingman said that the VEAC received funding for their winter hunger relief program this year. The Children's Museum funding will go towards constructing their new "wonderful water" exhibit, meanwhile Kaweah Delta's funding will go towards their modernization campaign. The other organizations will be using the funding for their general uses and purpose.

"Knowing, also, that our employees are the backbone of our presence in these communities, through our matching program, we support the causes close to our team members' hearts and augment their efforts to help their communities thrive," Kropelnicki said.

Last year, the Group allocated 27% of its community giving efforts specifically to support at-risk, underserve, and disadvantaged communities. An additional 20% went to community improvement efforts across the utility's service areas, 17% for educational grants, and 14% to support firefighters, police officers and first responders. The remainder of the donations assisted various initiatives, such as support for veterans, animal welfare and healthcare.

The other recipients of the donation funding include Garden Pathways, Salinas Public Recreation Unlimited, Maui Food Bank, Valencia Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence and Gig Harbor Peninsula Fish Food Bank. According to the Group's press release, all recipients share in their commitment to helping people live better lives.

Through its employee charitable donation-matching program, Group matches up to \$250 per employee per calendar year. All contributions are part of the Group's philanthropic giving program and do not affect customers' rates.



Tulare County opens new public health clinic

Tulare County Public Health is proud to announce the grand opening of its new Tulare County Public Health Clinic in Visalia. The 4,750-square-foot facility is designed to offer specialty services, including various immunizations, tuberculosis treatment and prevention programs, and services for other communicable diseases. The County of Tulare invested \$3 million to construct the new clinic complete with three exam rooms, an x-ray room, waiting rooms, and office space.

The clinic will house the Tulare County Public Health Immunization Program in providing various recommended vaccinations and immunizations to residents and those traveling abroad. The Tuberculosis (TB) Control Program will also be available at this new location by providing clinical screening, diagnosis, and treatment. The Tulare County Public Health Clinic is specifically designed and built to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and is ideal for treating communicable diseases, including Tuberculosis, COVID-19, or Mpox (monkeypox) by utilizing a Negative Air Pressure System. Tulare County Public Health also plans to add additional clinical and health education services at this new location for the future in coordination with the nearby Visalia Health Care Center.

BANK

Continued from page 1

rules, SVB was no longer capitalized as well as it needed to be, prompting the FDIC to place the bank in receivership.

But that wasn't the whole story. SVB's niche customer base was another big problem. Its emphasis on early-stage venture capital customers meant its deposit base was more concentrated and less sticky. Many of those start-up companies burned through a lot of cash recently, while funding options such as initial public offerings dried up.

One other unique element of this story is SVB's mismanagement of its balance sheet. Its heavy exposure to interest rate sensitive Treasury and other government securities, with insufficient interest rate hedging activities, left the bank particularly vulnerable to a run. Once the bank was known to be facing solvency issues, word traveled fast through the venture capital community and the deposits fled as fast as these entrepreneurs could log into their online accounts.

With the federal backstop now in place and few, if any, other large banks facing similar interest rate risk, any further spillover should be limited. One potential silver lining is the Fed will likely slow its rate hiking campaign until confidence in banks is restored.

So what should investors do? Some caution is warranted as sentiment around the banking system remains fragile. But we believe tactical investors should maintain multi-asset allocations at or near benchmark levels. And don't lose sight of opportunities to potentially add risk after the SVB distress passes. Conditions will improve before long, in our view. For longer-term, strategic investors with well-balanced allocations, we would not make any changes at this point.

In closing, SIVB's niche clientele and its balance sheet mismanagement were distinctive contributors of the bank's downfall. Meanwhile, the government's actions to backstop deposits and provide short-term funding to banks that need it, greatly reduce the odds of a systemic crisis. We may see a bit more market volatility than we would like to see in the short term, but this is not another 2008.



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

Ace is the place for new jobs

By John Lindt
Sierra2theSea.net

Visalia is now officially the place for Ace.

The new 1.1 million-square foot Ace Hardware logistics center on Plaza Drive held a grand opening on March 2 with Mayor Brian Poochigian cutting the ribbon.

"We are really excited to have Ace invest in our community providing good jobs to the residents of Visalia," Poochigian said.

Ace Hardware Corporation, the world's largest hardware cooperative with 3,600 affiliate retailers, announced plans in August 2021 to open a new Retail Support Center in Visalia, Calif. The new facility has been under construction for 16 months and will employ more than 400 people in the area. It will also augment the company's Rocklin, Calif.

(Greater Sacramento Area) and Prescott Valley, Ariz. distribution centers and will be centrally located in California, between Sacramento and Los Angeles.

The company was brought to Visalia by Arizona-based developer Seefried Industries. They are leasing the building to Ace. Seefried is developing two more spec projects in Visalia including a 553,500 square foot facility next door to the new Ace complex. They also have a contract to develop a huge, 280-acre industrial park north of Riggan Street and just west of Shirk Avenue.

The Ace building is located

See ACE on page 6

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Ace Hardware Distribution Center celebrated their grand opening with a ribbon cutting. The one-million square feet facility is located at 2045 N Plaza Drive.



Family Eye Care Optometry located at 5501 W Hillsdale Ave, Ste. #D, hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening. Schedule an appointment by calling (559) 625-5464.

Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



COS

Continued from page 1

players for employees who complete training and remain employed for a specific time. As a joint business-labor state agency, it funds training to ensure that employers have the skilled workers they need to compete locally and globally.

The COS Training Resource Center recently heard from Eddie at Kawneer, who attended the Supervisory Academy, "I have used many of the techniques we have learned, especially about changes in the workplace and reading personalities. I feel it has made me a more valuable team member and it has opened my eyes to perception."

In addition, from a Better Buys survey, it was discovered that 92% of employees value access to professional development, and companies can have a 34% higher retention rate for employees with this access. Evidently, training is essential for all companies in the current "Great Resignation" age. While keeping your employees and their talents, your employees need to know that you, as an employer, are investing time and money into their professional growth. The next time you decide to hunt for the perfect employee training for your organization, you might end up saying "yes" when you check out the trainings offered by the COS Training Resource Center.

To inquire more information about training or ETP with the COS Training Resource Center, email trainingcenter@cos.edu, phone (559) 688-3130 or visit cos.edu/trainingcenter.

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.



ENGLISH SURVEY



al 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/councilcorner or call (559) 713-4404.



SPANISH SURVEY

ACE

Continued from page 5

at 2045 N. Plaza Drive, on an 81-acre site just over two miles north of the interchange of state routes 99 and 198. It features a cross-dock configuration, offering 155 dock-high and four grade-level loading doors, 40-foot clear height and 140-foot-deep truck court. An approximately 20,000-square-foot office is part of the development as well as a 348,528-square-foot potential future expansion. Contractor on the big project was Clayco.

Ace officials are proud of their

new California facility.

"Ace Hardware continuously evaluates distribution capabilities to ensure we meet our growing business demands and offer the best support and service to Ace retailers and our wholesale customers," said Jeff Gooding, corporate vice president of marketing, Ace Hardware. "Opening this new facility is essential for Ace to keep up with our historic growth and better serve our network of retailers, and ultimately, our Ace customers."

The Visalia facility features new technology, a climate-controlled environment, and improved automation to help streamline and

enhance operations—and importantly includes room to expand.

Ace has recently built or is in the process of building several new facilities around the country as the company continues to grow. Ace's network of distribution facilities, strategically located around the world, serve more than 5,500 retail locations. The new Visalia distribution center will serve more than 300 Ace-affiliated stores in multiple states.

The need for more warehouse space was mentioned in the company's third quarter earnings report in November. Ace's wholesale operating expenses increased \$24.9 million, or 15.8%, from

the third quarter of 2021 partially due to "greater lease expense driven by the expansion of our warehouse space and increased advertising expenses." The hardware cooperative's wholesale operating expenses as a percent of wholesale revenues increased to 9.0 percent in the third quarter of 2022 from 8.6 percent in the third quarter of 2021 as the company reported record third quarter revenues of \$2.2 billion, an increase of more than \$230 million over 2021. Net income was \$100.6 million for the third quarter of 2022, an increase of \$1.3 million from the third quarter of 2021.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Kaweah Health hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the grand opening of their Center for Mental Wellness. The center is located at 301 W Noble Ave.



Rush Bowls hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their new Visalia location at 3225 S Mooney Blvd.



Sequoia Vein & Wound hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening. They are located at 4050 S Demaree St. Schedule an appointment by calling (559) 713-6478.



Valley Pacific Petroleum celebrated the grand opening of the newest CNG station with a ribbon cutting. The station is located at 8835 W Goshen Ave.

BUSINESS SAFTER HOURS

Thursday, May 11th 4:00-6:00PM 1624 E. Caldwell Ave

NETWORKING • CONNECTION • COMMUNITY