

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 5 | May 2023

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Kaweah Health: 'We are not closing'

We are not closing. We are not filing bankruptcy. We are not being purchased by another hospital or health system. We are not closing in 50 days or on June 30, 2025. **3**

EVENTS

MAY 11 Business After Hours Hosted by Mitchell Insurance Services

Time: 4 to 6 p.m.
Location: 1624 E. Caldwell Ave.,
Visalia

MAY 23 The Business of Law & Order

Time: 1 p.m.
Location: The Hyde,
3200 W. Mineral King Ave., Visalia

MAY 25 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



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
CST #2048841-40

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

SBA offers businesses aid following devastating storms

The U.S. Small Business Administration opens up a business recovery center at the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board



Lacey Patrick
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

After a series of storms engulfed the county in damages, small businesses began their long road to recovery. To speed up the process, a business recovery center was set up in the county.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the California Small Business Development Center announced the opening of an SBA Business Recovery Center in Visalia on Monday, April 10. The recovery center will be located at the Tulare County Workforce Investment Board, and will provide a wide range of services to businesses impacted by the recent winter storms. The deadline to apply for property damage is June 2, 2023. The deadline to apply for economic injury is Jan. 3, 2024.

"Due to the severe property damage and economic losses inflicted on California businesses, we want to provide every available service to help get them back on their feet," SBA's Director Tanya N. Garfield of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Disaster Field Operations Center-West said.

According to Director Rich Mostert of the Valley Community Small Business Development Center, business counselors can provide business assistance to clients on a wide variety of matters. The assistance provided is designed to help small business owners re-establish their operations, overcome the effects of the disaster and plan for their future.



RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

Local businesses who were negatively affected by this year's devastating storms can get financial assistance, advice and free evaluations at the U.S. Small Business Administration's new SBA Business Recovery Center in Visalia.

"Services include assessing business working capital needs, evaluating the business's strength, cash flow projections, and most importantly, a review of options with the business owner to help them evaluate their alternatives and make decisions that are appropriate for their situation," Mostert said.

Businesses of any size and private nonprofit organizations may borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory and other business assets. These loans cover losses that are not fully covered by insurance or other recoveries.

"SBA representatives will meet with each business

owner to explain how an SBA disaster loan can help finance their recovery. They will answer questions about SBA's disaster loan program, explain the application process and help each business owner complete their electronic loan application," Garfield said.

For small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture, and most private, nonprofit organizations of any size, SBA offers Economic Injury Disaster Loans to help meet working capital needs caused by the disaster. Economic Injury Disaster Loan assistance is available regard-

See SBA on page 4

Businesses be warned, tax scams are on the rise

The Better Business Bureau warns businesses to be wary of scamming companies that guarantee qualification of the Employee Retention Credit



After a tax credit was offered to businesses throughout the state after the pandemic, scammers began to take advantage of the credit for their own profit.

On April 14, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) warned business owners that there has been an increase in scammers offering them tax credits for which they are not actually eligible. The Internal Revenue Service warns about scams revolving around the Employee Retention Credit (ERC), a tax credit for businesses that continued paying employees during the COVID-19 shutdowns or had a significant income decline during the eligibility period.

"Think twice about promises of huge refunds. Scammers use the same tactics for many different cons," the BBB stated in their press release. "Tax credit schemes are no exception. Scammers count on an emotional response to a promise of fast, free cash before reason sets in. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

While most eligible employ-



VITALII VODOLAZSKYI / ADOBE STOCK

The Internal Revenue Service warns about scams revolving around the Employee Retention Credit (ERC), a tax credit for businesses that continued paying employees during the COVID-19 shutdowns.

ers have already claimed this credit, unscrupulous companies are advertising ERC services to draw in businesses that are not eligible for the credit. The scammers then try to get their hands on personal information for identity theft. In some cases, they may charge people for dishonest services. The best line of defense according to the BBB is to get informed, this way employers are able to spot the scams before they fall for it.

Scam process

The scams usually begin with

an ad online or on the radio, and they claim the government still owes businesses an ERC, which they can claim on their taxes this year. The scammers also ask people to call a number or visit a website for more information. A quick chat with the customer service representative or looking at a website convinces victims of the scam that qualifying for the ERC is extremely easy.

If contacted, the company will tell people they qualify for the credit without knowing anything about the business or

how they handled COVID-19 shutdowns. They then ask the employer to provide sensitive information, including Social Security numbers, employer identification number (EIN) and other details the scammer can use to commit identity theft. If employers hesitate to provide personal information, the scamming companies quickly assure they only want to help employers get the money their business is entitled to.

The company charges a service fee in other scam versions to help employers get the credit. Unfortunately, if employ-

ers accept their services and claim a credit they aren't eligible for—even if done in good faith—they could face serious consequences, including paying back the credit with penalties and interest. Ultimately, the IRS will hold them responsible for any inaccurate information on their tax return, not the scammer.

The BBB warns employers to not believe marketing materials that guarantee qualification for a tax credit. Anyone who makes guarantees without knowing anything about a business is likely "up to no good," according to the BBB.

CITY UPDATE

City launches monthly opportunity to meet directly with a council member

Have an idea? Want to share your opinion? The City of Visalia has created a monthly opportunity for residents to meet directly with not only be heard, but to meet directly with a City Council Member in a casual and individualized setting.

Although members of the community are always welcome to attend City Council Meetings on the first and third Monday of each month, Council Corner is a new, monthly opportunity to meet directly with a Visalia Council Member, in-person, one-on-one.

Open to Visalians of all ages, Council Corner allows residents to get to know their Council Members and provides a space for various topics of discussion. Council Corner attendees are invited to bring questions on City business, discuss items of concern, or even share happy community news.

Meetings are available in 10-minute increments. Walk-ins are welcome starting at 5:30 p.m. and appointment times begin at 6:00 p.m. on the second



Monday of each month. Council Corner is held at City Hall West, in the Conference Room, located at 707 W. Acequia Ave., Visalia.

This month's Council Corner will be hosted by Visalia Mayor, Brian Poochigian, on Monday, May 8. To make an appointment for this month's Council Corner—or any 2023 Council Corner—scan this QR code or visit www.bit.ly/councilcorner.

For more information regarding Council Corner or how you can involve Visalia City Council in your community events, call (559) 713-4404.

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



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

'What gets celebrated, gets repeated'



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

"What gets celebrated, gets repeated," Stephanie Benthin, Missional Strategist from Neighborhood Church, said at a recent meeting. Around the table were leaders from all walks of life looking at processes to improve how our community

interfaces with our local public schools. It was a simple justification to recognize those who "get it right." I quickly scribbled it down in my notes. Simple, yes, but immensely powerful, too.

The statement doesn't include a value calculation. It does not say only good things are celebrated. Only good things are worth repeating, even if that may be true. The heart behind the message, you will repeat what you value; you value those things you give energy to. As I look around, it's all too easy to celebrate, to give energy to many things I wish we wouldn't celebrate. One can't go through life ignoring the negative. Honest assessment is a healthy part of business and life. Tackling complex problems demands energy. But living only in that space sets us up to only see problems.

When we celebrate, changes happen in our brains. Serotonin, Dopamine, and Endorphins are released, are moods are boosted. It's our brain's natural drug. We love it. We want more of that feeling. At a basic level, we seek to repeat that behavior; as Stephanie said, "What gets celebrated gets repeated." This creates a positive chain to create the type of behavior we all want and need.

This is the perfect framework for why the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards are critical. On June 8th, we will again gather to celebrate businesses and leaders among us. Being in business isn't for the faint of heart and deserves celebration. Annual Awards allow us to gather to celebrate these local businesses that, on top of the regular demands, have made a real and lasting impact on our community.

We learn more about each other, we're inspired, we celebrate, and we recognize that for which we want to repeat.

Please celebrate with us on June 8th at the historic Fox Theater in downtown Visalia. Last year we received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the new location, time, and design. Attendees loved the setting and the ability to go support local restaurants after the program with their teams and loved ones.

For more information about this great event, who is being recognized, and how you can sponsor or get tickets, please go to visaliachamber.org/awards.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Name: Jason Sturtevant
Company: ACE Hardware
Retail Support Center
Title: Retail Support Director

Central Valley distribution center for local ACE Hardware stores services stores from Oakland down to the Los Angeles market. ACE will hit its centennial anniversary in 2024. The company started with a single product back in 1924, can you guess what that was? A sponge!

We focus a significant amount of effort raising money for local Children's Miracle Network hospitals. We will also be volunteering our time to local non-profits throughout



the Central Valley. ACE puts a heavy focus on employees including generous retirement planning, growth opportunities, and providing a work environment they can feel safe and proud to be a part of.

The Chamber has been a great partner to raise awareness of our entry into the community. They have helped provide us with a voice and the ability to connect with several local business leaders and or-

Community Loyal Members

A thriving community starts here!

NEW

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

Community Investor Members:
 ■ Mission Bank

Business Connector Members:
 ■ Good Times Café
 ■ Valley ENT

Small Business Members:
 ■ AQUA4D U.S.
 ■ Rapid Care Center of Visalia

Small Business Nonprofit Members:
 ■ Grace Lutheran Church & School

RENEWING

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce thanks the following companies for

renewing their commitment to the community of Visalia.

Regional Leader Members:
 ■ California Water Service Company*
 ■ San Joaquin Valley College, Inc.*

Community Investor Members:
 ■ College of the Sequoias*
 ■ Save Mart Supermarkets

Business Builder Members:
 ■ Legacy Church*

Business Connector Members:
 ■ Elite Restoration by Villegas*
 ■ Lee's Air, Plumbing & Heating
 ■ Roller Towne
 ■ Sequoia Financial, LLC*
 ■ Tachi Palace Casino Resort
 ■ Urbane Cafe

Small Business Members:
 ■ Cal-Valley Insurance Services
 ■ Comfort Suites-Downtown*



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

■ Hampton Inn*
 ■ Law Offices of Sherwood & Marvin
 ■ Modern Edge Insurance Brokers, Inc.*
 ■ Nichols Farms*
 ■ Security Self-Storage*
 ■ The Mill Pizzeria & Tap Room
 ■ Valley Yellow Pages

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:
 ■ Visalia Fox Theatre*

Small Business Nonprofit Members:
 ■ PAW Estate Rescue and Shelter, Inc.

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

Hotel named Best of Wyndham

The Wyndham Visalia at 9000 W. Airport Drive, Visalia today announced it has been awarded the annual Best of Wyndham Award which recognizes the brand's top performing hotels and their staff.

In celebration of the achievement, Samantha Rummage-Mathias, General Manager, accepted the award from Wyndham Hotels & Resorts leadership.

"We are so proud to receive this honor for the third time, as our team has worked incredibly hard to consistently deliver a high level of service to our guests," said Rummage-Mathias. "To be part of an elite list of 57 hotels around the world to receive the award, with only 18 recipients in the USA and just 2 in California, Wyndham Visalia Hotel and Resort and Wyndham Anaheim Hotel and Resort, is a testament to the dedication of our team and our steadfast commitment to our guests. We look forward to welcoming even more travelers in the year to come!"

To be eligible for the award, hotels must have demonstrated strong guest satisfaction, had all their staff complete Wyndham's required health & safety trainings, and remained in good standing with the brand in the past year.

The Wyndham Visalia is a 256-room hotel with well-appointed guest rooms and suites, offers two pools (heated indoor and outdoor), hot tub, 24 hr fitness center, 22,000 sq ft of meeting space, complimentary



business center, full service restaurant and lounge with complimentary Wi-Fi and ample complimentary parking.

Count on Wyndham® to give travelers what they really need out of a hotel stay: a good night's sleep. The namesake of the world's largest hotel company, Wyndham hotels across five continents in urban and vaca-

tion destinations help travelers discover comfort wherever they are. Hotels are simply comfortable, balancing a gentle harmony of calming elements and chic innovation throughout its smartly detailed guest rooms, distinct dining options and flexible meeting and event spaces. Learn more at www.wyndham.com.

Our employees are our #1 asset, and we consistently strive to create the best working environment.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Eagle Mountain's grand opening is May 9

Eagle Mountain Casino's story humbly began in June of 1996 when the casino opened its doors with a few mobile trailers, a hotdog and hamburger stand, three blackjack tables, and just over 300 video lottery terminals.

Over the next 27 years, Eagle Mountain Casino became "The People's Casino."

On May 9, 2023, Eagle Mountain Casino begins a new chapter and opens the doors to its new property, located at 1850 West Street, off Highway 65 next to the Porterville Fairgrounds in Porterville, CA.

The Tule River Tribe, owners and operators of Eagle Mountain Casino, recently celebrated their 150th anniversary of sovereignty this past January. The opening of the new casino location will be another milestone in the tribe's storied history.

"On behalf of the Tule River Tribe, I want to congratulate the Eagle Mountain Casino team for their dedication and hard work. They are the backbone of our success. We are grate-

ful for them and all our patrons that would drive the road to the reservation to go there and enjoy some of the best entertainment in our area," said Neil Peyron, Chairman of the Tule River Tribe.

Porterville City Manager John Lollis is excited about the relocation of Eagle Mountain Casino and says the Tule River Tribe and the City of Porterville are working together to build economic development, tourism, and branding effort for Porterville.

The highly anticipated new casino property will double in size, growing to over 100,000 square feet, featuring new dining options, 1,750 slot machines, 20 table games, and a 2,000-seat state-of-the-art event

center.

The new property will employ over 1,000 team members and boost economic growth for the local community and businesses. Vendors selected to work with the new property have local ties, including Pacific West Sound, Innovative Lighting, Stafford's Chocolates, JR Meat Company, Visalia Tile, Stinson's Business Supplies, and many other local contractors. All other vendors selected to be involved with the design of the new property were carefully chosen as they aligned with the vision, the culture, and all essential tribal aspects.

HBG Design was selected as the designer and architect for

See EAGLE on page 3



VUSD finishing strong

Summer is around the corner and summer school enrollment is well underway for children K-12 in 23 schools across the district. All schools will offer lunch and afterschool programs. As we head into summer and the end of the school year fast approaches, we want students to make lasting and memorable experiences. That's why we've teamed up with community partners to help students finish this year strong.

Together with the Visalia Police Department, the City of Visalia, and the Youth Services Program, VUSD is committed to providing staff with the tools and resources they need to address any concerns and finish strong. Last month, we released a 'Finish Strong PSA' encouraging parents to stay vigilant, students to stay engaged in school and activities, teachers to provide support for families, and the community to report any

potential threats to school safety to the police department. You can view the PSA on our website or social media channels.

You can help students finish strong by motivating them to:

- **Be present** – on time and ready to learn
- **Get involved** – share your ideas and be a willing participant
- **Do your best** – give 100% on every assignment
- **Ask for help** – teacher, peer, and/or paper tutoring
- **Be kind** – to both yourself and others

In addition, we want everyone to remind students to follow the rules. Maintaining safety and security on school campuses is a community responsibility and we ask every parent, teacher, and community members to join us in helping our students finish strong.

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

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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

Ask Jena

How do I sign up for the Leadership Visalia program?

The application period will open in June. Visit the Chamber's website to sign up for updates!

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

LEADERSHIP VISALIA
 VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SKILLS

RESPONSIBILITY

TEAMWORK

LEADERSHIP

COMPETENCE

SUPPORT

COMMUNICATION

visaliachamber.org/leadership



NICHOLS FARMS

Able Inc. hosted Free to be Me Night at the Visalia Rawhide April 25th game.

Nichols Farms' team came together and donated clothing, groceries, toys, pet foods, blankets, pistachios, and more to help those impacted by the flooding in April.

Congratulations to **California Water Service** who was named to Newsweek's 2023 Most Trustworthy Companies in America.

TriCo Bancshares, parent company of **Tri Counties Bank**, has earned the #10 spot in the 2022 Ranking of U.S. Community Banks between #3B and \$10B in assets by S&P Global Market Intelligence.

CSET celebrated the groundbreaking of the Visalia Navigation Center in April. The Navigation Center will be a 100-bed facility that will provide safe, secure, temporary housing for the unhoused, as well as provide on-site resources and services.

Happy Trails Riding Academy was honored by the **Tulare County Board of Supervisors** in recognition of Autism Awareness Month in April.

Dutch Bros donated over \$16,000 to **Salt + Light** through their DUTCH LUV Day in February.



HAPPY TRAILS RIDING ACADEMY

EAGLE
Continued from page 2

Eagle Mountain Casino's highly anticipated casino relocation project and designed the new casino property with the vision of a lodge and a more mountainous style of architecture with a home in the Valley. The relocation also expands the gaming floor to 100,000 square feet of slot machines and table games. "For the Tule River

Tribe, it was imperative to tell their story. We researched their culture; they provided us with books and photos of artifacts. They were open about sharing their culture, which allowed us to find patterns within baskets to incorporate into our design that would give this property a uniqueness in the market when you look at some of the other competitive casinos because it tells their story," said Joe Baruffaldi, AIA, Principal, HBG Design.

When the new property opens on May 9, it will be the first time Eagle Mountain Casino will serve alcohol. "We will have full cocktail service throughout the casino floor," said Bradford Hamilton, Food and Beverage Director at Eagle Mountain Casino. The new property will also feature a 2,000-seat state-of-the-art Event Center, 24-hour Acorn Diner, Cedar Food Court, Yokuts Coffee House, and the award-winning River Steak-

house. The Redwood Taphouse will feature 208 seats with 24 slot machines in the bar. In addition, 66 TVs will be visible throughout the whole restaurant. The Center Bar will wow guests with its exquisite details of a Sequoia Tree and will be featured in the center of the gaming floor with slot machines at the bar.

"Congratulations to the Tule River Tribe and the Eagle Mountain Casino team for opening our new property. We're happy to say that the new property is Tule River through and through, as there are artifacts and basket weaves throughout the property. This is truly Eagle Mountain Casino and the Tule River Tribe's accomplishment. We're happy to be able to tell you we are open for business, and we can't wait to see the smiles on your faces", said Matthew Mingrone, General Manager at Eagle Mountain Casino.

HEALTH CARE NOTE

We are not closing



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

We are not closing. We are not filing bankruptcy. We are not being purchased by another hospital or health system. We are not closing in 50 days or on June 30, 2025. These are among the numerous rumors out there about Kaweah Health, but none of them are true.

What is true is that hospitals across the country are suffering mightily right now as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Every day we read another story about hospitals or health systems closing units, closing satellite hospitals, filing for bankruptcy protection, laying off thousands of employees, defaulting on debt, and watching their credit ratings plummet.

Kaweah Health is not immune from these same forces affecting the financial conditions of hospitals around us. However, our board of directors and management team did not sit around and watch — they sprang into action last summer and developed a plan that would put us on the road to financial recovery, a plan we call Back in Black.

As painful as certain elements of the plan have been — laying off staff, cutting and freezing salaries of our leaders, closing services, and delaying a decision to match our employee contributions to our 401(k) plan — these actions are working. The plan has also resulted in the renegotiation of agreements with health plans, suppliers, and other vendors, which has bolstered our revenues and reduced our expenses. We also continue to grow our revenue through the development of new, profitable services like the Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness, which celebrated its grand opening in March; a new clinic in the industrial park of northwest Visalia, scheduled to open in September; and our Family Medicine Residency Clinic, which moved from our downtown campus to our Tulare Health Clinic, triggering a significant increase in our Medi-Cal funding.

While we are still operating in the red, our financial performance has been steadily improving since October, with December and January posting the smallest operating losses of the year. While we fully expect to end the fiscal year on June 30 with an operating loss for the year, we are forecasting to end the last two months of the year in the black.

RIBBON CUTTING



Common Heart: A Coffee Market
In celebration of their grand opening.
Visit them at 520 S. Mooney Blvd.

BANK OF AMERICA

Volunteers deliver nearly 7,500 personal care items to shelter

Domestic violence victims often have to flee a dangerous situation at a moment's notice with only the clothes on their backs. To fill an often-overlooked need, Bank of America volunteers recently fanned out throughout Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties for the fourth year in a row to distribute care kits containing basic hygiene and clothing essentials to local domestic violence shelters. This year, the campaign collected nearly 100,000 sanitary pads, pairs of underwear, lip balm and other everyday necessities.

Bank employees delivered 250 care kits, consisting of nearly 7,500 items, to the Family Services of Tulare County shelter in Visalia. Due to the flooding in Tulare County, the volunteers also provided 200 additional kits containing some 6,000 items to the Family Re-

source Center that will be used to assist flood victims.

Care kits were also provided to the Kings Community Action Organization in Hanford and the Marjaree Mason Center in Fresno. Supplies also were provided to organizations serving Bakersfield and Southern California.

This year's drive was greatly assisted by the support of I Support the Girls and generous donations from LOLA, a woman-owned company that is reinventing feminine care, and Victoria's Secret. Bank of America encourages employees to volunteer their time to local non-profits by giving paid time off to volunteer and providing grants to organizations where employees volunteer. In the Fresno/Visalia market alone, employees donated over 10,000 volunteer hours in 2022.



Bank of America volunteers Ashley McIntosh, Rebekah Lenaburg, Kellie Elzy, and BreAnna Trejo.

BUSINESS AT Breakfast
Developing a Business Plan

In this Valley Strong Credit Union workshop, business owners will learn the eight parts of a business plan and what to consider when writing a business plan. At the end of the workshop, business owners will have a blueprint or first draft of 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 CREDIT UNION

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Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



Agriculture and Water – Day Session

The 2022-2023 Leadership Visalia class came together on April 14th for a Day Session focused on water and agriculture. Facilitated by Andre Pecina and Jonathan Bethany, this session provided an opportunity for class members to learn about the vital role that water plays in the agricultural industry of the Central Valley, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing this sector.

A deep understanding of the relationship between water and agriculture is important for sustaining food security and environmental health. Water management practice must also consider the needs of other sectors, including industry, development, environment, and residential uses.

After a quick orientation and opening, the session began with the State perspective, presented by Assemblyman Vince Fong of the 32nd Assembly District. As a member representing a great deal of agriculture in the district, Assemblyman Fong's office has been instrumental in assisting constituents with the process of accounting for flood protection lapses and the procedure for reimbursement of those costs to agriculture. In the immediate future, funding those reimbursements will be a priority, as farmers report their damage from floods. The state may have to bridge the gap in the short term while programs and grants are worked out to address the damage. A key issue



in the legislature when addressing water remains the lack of awareness in California urban areas about how food and water gets to them. Education in both the rural and urban areas needs to address this to bring about general mindfulness of how critical water matters have become in our state. An understanding of how water availability in rural areas can affect the urban resident is vital to addressing the topic in budget negotiations in legislature.

The second discussion in the day session was with Congressman Jim Costa, representing California's 21st congressional district. As a third-generation family farmer in the San Joaquin Valley, the congressman has extensive experience addressing water and agriculture. He

serves on the House Committee on Agriculture, and is the Ranking Member of the Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Subcommittee. Representative Costa began with a frank assessment: The water system in California is broken. On average, municipalities use 10% of water in the state, while agriculture and the environment use the other 90%, and each of these sectors is oversubscribed. After the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in 2014, local sustainability issues were tasked with developing groundwater sustainability plans on the local level to mitigate overdraft within 20 years. On the federal level, many of the initiatives focus on improvements to build more water storage. The B.F. Sisk Dam safety modifica-

tion project will add stability to the structure in the event of an earthquake, but will also raise the level of the dam 10 feet, allowing the reservoir to store an additional 130,000 acre-feet of water.

As the topic shifted to educating our youth about the water issues of the state, STEM Content Specialist Scott Duersken from VUSD joined the group with an overview of K through 12 education on Earth and Space Science. The district curriculum starts in kindergarten with a basic understanding of weather and climate, natural processes, hazards, and how humans can impact the Earth's systems. Each following grade will show a shift in focus for the students, covering the areas of Earth's Space in the Universe, Earth Systems, and Earth and Human Activity. As the students progress through primary and middle school, the emphasis changes each year through these main areas of study, and additional topics in each area. As the students enter high school, their studies reflect all of the three main areas, and more in-depth learning for each.

At this point, the class participated in a hands-on learning experiment. After dividing into groups, each group was assigned the task of building a system to filter dirty water and remove contaminants using some raw materials and tools. The project was a study in inventiveness, and an exploration of teaching methods.

After a lunch at the VUSD office, the group traveled to Ivanhoe to visit Farmer Bob's World at McKellar farms for an up-close view of agriculture and water together at work. Bob "Farmer Bob" McKellar welcomed the group personally, and began with his background in agriculture before speaking about the specifics of the 100-acre farm. Part of the operation is now devoted to "Farmer Bob's World" where the public can take a tour, learn about agriculture and farm management, and even pick some oranges to take home! Bob's goals for teaching youth about agriculture are straightforward. Teaching young people about the role ag plays in our community is key, especially in rural areas.

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS

ANNUAL AWARDS
THURSDAY, JUNE 8
CELEBRATING

NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
WOMAN OF THE YEAR

MAN OF THE YEAR

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/AWARDS

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

MITCHELL INSURANCE SERVICES

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

register:
visaliachamber.org/bah

NETWORKING • CONNECTION • COMMUNITY

SBA
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less of whether the business suffered any property damage. For homeowners or renters, the SBA disaster loans are a source of money to pay for repair or replacement costs not fully covered by insurance or other compensation. Homeowners may borrow up to \$200,000 to repair or replace their primary residence. They may also borrow up to \$40,000 to replace personal property, including vehicles.

"The center will provide a one-stop location for businesses to access a variety of specialized help. SBA customer service representatives will be available to meet individually with each business owner," Garfield said.

SBA representatives will meet with business owners and residents at disaster recovery centers located throughout the impacted area as they are established. For a list of locations, or to receive additional disaster assistance information, visit SBA's website at www.sba.gov/disaster. Applicants may also call SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information. For business owners who are unable to visit the business recovery center, they may apply online using SBA's secure website at disasterloansassistance.sba.gov.