

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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EVENTS

JUNE 8

68th Annual Awards

Time: 5-7 p.m.
Location: Visalia Fox Theatre

JUNE 22

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

NOVEMBER 1-10, 2023

Rome and the Country Roads of Tuscany

DECEMBER 4-9, 2023

Washington D.C. Holiday

FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 6, 2024

Best of Australia and New Zealand

MARCH 12-26, 2024

Jordan and Israel: Cultural Crossroads

MARCH 17-23, 2024

New Orleans and Cajun Country

APRIL 24-MAY 1, 2024

Nashville, Smoky Mountains and Bluegrass

MAY 24-JUNE 2, 2024

Memorials of World War II

JULY 17-25, 2024

Great Canadian Cities

SEPTEMBER 20-26, 2024

New York City and the Hudson River Valley

OCTOBER 1-9, 2024

A Culinary Journey Through Tuscany

OCTOBER 21-29, 2024

Highlights of the Douro with Spain



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

Local business makes Konglike climb for expansion

Quesadilla Gorilla receives state approval to begin franchising their business throughout California, makes moves in Valley expansion and up and down the coast



The Sun-Gazette

Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette

Quesadilla lovers from up and down the coast of California may begin to see one of Visalia's favorite home-grown restaurants pop up nearby before the end of the year.

On April 4, Quesadilla Gorilla owners Miguel and Mikayla Reyes finally received state approval to franchise their business within California. The couple began the process in October and Miguel said he is relieved they can now begin the process of talking to some potential franchisees. They currently have a handful of leads in the Valley as well as some up and down the coast. Despite taking six months to get the show on the road, Quesadilla Gorilla still plans to open 12 locations in California before the end of the year.

"So we kind of dialed back just a little bit as far as our projections. Our goal for the remainder of this year is still 12 franchises," Miguel Reyes said. "[We are] mainly focusing on California this year and part of next year, only due to that being the majority of where our brand awareness is. And then expanding our horizon out of state after that."

After the 12 franchises have been opened this year, Miguel said they are aiming for 18 additional openings in 2024. Currently he said they are in talks with a potential franchisee in Merced. There are also interested parties in Kingsburg and Exeter, but Miguel said they are determining if the

pull is strong enough, especially in a small town like Exeter. Outside the Valley, the restaurant is looking particularly in college towns. He said they have leads in the Rancho Cucamonga, Orange County and San Diego areas.

Miguel said they are looking for strong and involved owner operators for their franchises. Currently they are relying on their own marketing to current customers who would be interested in setting up their own Quesadilla Gorilla shop. He said within the next few months, they will most likely begin "aggressively advertising" with strategic markets in mind.

"So right now we're doing mainly our own marketing to our current customers," Miguel said. "So a lot of our leads have been customer based."

Additionally, the Reyeses are looking for individuals who will look out for their community as a whole, including their staff members. The need to make sure staff is properly trained and taken care of is a high priority according to Miguel. Additionally the Reyeses are putting a lot of their efforts into the operational side to make it easier on their franchisees.

"We're putting a lot of training and focus on our infrastructure and making sure they have everything to succeed," Miguel said. "But it's still going to need that operator who is hitting the streets and marketing locally and connecting locally."

The franchise's focus is to expand throughout California and build their brand recognition. Eventually they will expand their marketing outside California and begin expanding into the surrounding states. In the beginning they will most likely stay in the Western states and into the Texas area. They do currently have a few leads in Washington, but they are still waiting for their Franchising Disclosure Documents (FDD) in the state before they can move forward.



Quesadilla Gorilla started its quick serve business in this small location next to the Visalia Fox Theatre in Visalia but is now planning to open franchises across the state.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Gail Zurek
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

Many know 30-year plus-year-old Leadership Visalia program, but as we begin accepting applications for a new class, we're excited to share ways we've grown and enhanced this exciting program.

This 9-month program allows participants to grow as leaders within the company and Visalia. Employers often enroll employees slated for the senior management track to enhance their skills. Business owners leverage Leadership Visalia to better understand our community's issues and challenges. Everyone mentions the powerful connections made within the class and through mentors, speakers, and the program.

The program has five major components. **Professional Development Sessions** – These sessions focus on Leadership Development. Utilizing guest speakers, top leadership development books, and information gathered from the evaluation feedback, participants tackle their leadership challenges. From communication strategies, team dynamics, managing with purpose, and time management strategies for busy leaders, participants are given real tools to address their concerns.

Community Leadership Day Sessions – Even lifelong Visalia residents share that Community Leadership Day Sessions teach them something about this amazing community. Community Leadership Day Sessions prepare participants to knowledgeably become part of positive solutions and help drive Visalia forward. Each session addresses major components in making

Visalia a thriving community. These sessions taught by industry leaders give participants real Visalia information about what's happening here in our community. We strongly believe that Leaders must understand an issue before being tasked with solving it.

Mentorship – The benefit of having thirty-plus years of graduates is seen in our mentorship program. Mentors provide perspective on participants' leadership development and often prove quite useful as participants navigate the growth that comes from this program. Mentors from all industries and sectors meet individually with participants four times during the program.

Class-Based Community Project – This is where the rubber meets the road for many. It is powerful to see what a group of leaders can accomplish when they focus together. However, getting a group of leaders together to focus provides its own lessons in team development, communication, and time management. Previous projects include helping COS start a professional clothing bank for students to access, a Water conversation program for students, and a vegetable garden for seniors.

Evaluation Feedback – We're formally bringing this component back into the program. Participants will receive feedback three times during the program from their employer, mentor, and program facilitator. This feedback shows participants and their employers how the participant is utilizing this program to develop and grow. Collectively this feedback is used to address topics in the Professional Development Sessions.

This program helps leaders grow. If you know a leader that could benefit from this growth encourage them to apply. We find that applicants often ponder applying for years before they do. Graduates always say it was the best decision they could have made. If you'd like more information, visaliachamber.org/leadership.



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

The Darling hotel expands its brand

Ownership group plans to remodel adjacent building into more rooms, larger kitchen and conference center



John Lindt
Sierra2theSea.net
The Sun-Gazette Contributor

Despite opening in the early days of the pandemic, The Darling hotel has seen rapid success reminiscent of its Roaring '20s motif.

The four-story boutique hotel with its rooftop lounge has risen to such heights in downtown Visalia it now needs more hotel rooms and a larger kitchen. Luckily the hotel has the room to grow thanks to an adjacent, single story building and parking lot ownership purchased from the county in the deal to buy and renovate the historic courthouse building at the corner of Court and Center streets in 2017.

Located at 100 E. Center Ave., the 12,000-square foot annex building will be remodeled as additional hotel rooms, a conference facility, kitchen and even a liquor store. Matt Ainley, a member of the hotel's ownership group Courthouse Square Ventures, recently filed plans to remodel the former Tulare County Probation offices adjacent to the hotel and emphasize its art deco style to match that of the main hotel.

Since opening in 2020, The Darling has captured the attention of the hotel industry, historic preservation community and locals alike. Just a year after opening, the hotel was ranked No. 19 on TripAdvisor's list of the "25 Hottest New Hotels in the World" in May 2021. The hotel was awarded as part of the 2021 Travelers' Choice Best of the Best awards from TripAdvisor, the world's largest online travel platform. The 'Hottest New Hotels' list was composed of hotels that opened July 2019 or later and celebrated the most highly rated hotels based on quality and quantity of traveler reviews.

Later that same year, The Darling was presented with a prestigious Preservation Design Award for Rehabilitation at the 38th Annual California Preservation Awards. The winning projects highlighted innovative approaches to preservation.

"This project sought to respectfully revitalize a significant but forgotten piece of Visalia's vibrant history with a strategy to celebrate existing elements at all scales, while honestly rehabilitating the building for modern purposes," the judges wrote in their description of the project.

The four-story building was constructed in 1935 as an expansion of the original County Courthouse built in the 1880s. The 22,300-square foot modern structure is considered a gem of the Public Works Act of the New Deal with its art deco architecture and decor. The building housed the County Board of Supervisors, Treasury, Auditor, Assessor and Purchasing departments until 1952 when it became the acting Courthouse after the original courthouse was damaged by an earthquake, which was constructed in the 1880s at the corner of East Center Avenue and North Court Street in Visalia.

CITY UPDATE

Corporate Games is back

With the demands of a busy workplace, it can be difficult to identify easy and fun opportunities for team building. Whether your organization is small and mighty or growing by leaps and bounds, Visalia Parks & Recreation has programs and events that could be the perfect fit to help grow employee morale and organizational pride. In fact, one local favorite, the Visalia Corporate Games, is back for 2023.

Mark your calendars for September 16th through October 6th and start brainstorming team names, because the 12th Annual Visalia Corporate Games will soon be here. A three-week long Olympic style competition between Visalia area businesses and employee-based organizations, registration opens on August 1st.

According to Forbes, team-building builds trust, mitigates conflict, encourages communication and increases collaboration. While engaging employees in fresh and engaging ways can provide a myriad of benefits, it can also serve as a driver to attract new talent when prospective employees learn that

employee engagement is part of the company culture.

The 12th Annual Visalia Corporate Games will feature fun events that test both brains and brawn, with the ultimate goal of providing space for local organizations to come together while encouraging healthier lifestyles through participation and fun. A great component of Corporate Games is that employees can participate directly through their registered team, or cheer on and encourage their teammates from the sidelines. Unique team names, matching outfits and cheerleaders welcome!

For more information on the 12th Annual Visalia Corporate Games, or to receive information on community events that your business or organization can be a part of, contact the Visalia Parks & Recreation Department at (559) 713-4365 or email recreation@visalia.city.

For additional information about group activities and events, check out the Live & Play summer 2023 activity guide online now at www.liveandplayvisalia.com.



BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



MOUNTAIN WEST BUILDERS

Name: John Rios
Company: Mountain West Builders
Title: President

Design, construction, repairs and restorations – Mountain West Builders provides a multi-faceted approach to just about any type of construction need. We bring a refreshing level of structure, organization and professionalism to this industry that has been diminishing decade over decade. We value and respect our client's goals and strive to complete each project having exceeded our clients' expectations. Tell us what you need done - and we will make sure it is done right and done well.

Mountain West Builders is a Minority-Owned Business. And we are more than just construction! Based on your need we will work as a project manager, general contractor, construction firm, or sub-contractor. From idea, or dream, to completion, in every step of a project, we do not skimp on attention to detail, design, budget and organization. We are a fully licensed, bonded, and insured one-stop-shop to get your project done on time and on budget.

From a social responsibility perspective, Mountain West Builders is involved in com-

munity organizations and supports multiple non-profits. We encourage our employees to be involved in their church and uphold Christian values. Potentially most important, Mountain West Builders strives to provide stable, consistent employment in an industry known for layoffs and gaps between jobs. This consistency provides an opportunity for our employees to perform their best.

Working for Mountain West Builders allows extensive creativity, limited only by rules and regulations meant to keep both the client and employees safe and within parameters necessary to complete jobs efficiently and effectively. While consistently operating with integrity and passion, we take pride in the work we do and conduct ourselves professionally in the workplace. Employees are encouraged to think critically and resolve issues with creative solutions through each workday and throughout the course of a project.

Being a member of the Chamber is more than just a mark of community support. It provides opportunities for marketing and networking with other business owners and members of the community. Doing business in Califor-

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.

Small Business Members:
■ Key Staffing, Inc.

RENEWING

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

Keystone Members:

- Eagle Mountain Casino*
- Soccer City 1852 Visalia*
- Tucoemas Federal Credit Union

Community Investor Members:
■ Kawneer

Business Builder Members:

- Echelon Security Group, Inc.
- Gallagher Insurance
- Gropetti Automotive*

- Mountain West Builders, Inc.*
- SoCalGas
- Voltage Multipliers, Inc.*
- World Wide Sires, Ltd.*

Business Connector Members:

- A & W Restaurant*
- Chicago Title*
- Citizens Business Bank
- Dan Freitas Electric, Inc.*
- Era Valley Pro Realty*
- IDEA! Printing & Graphics, Inc.*
- Miller Memorial Chapel
- Transit Media Inc.

Small Business Members:

- Alex's Paint & Body*
- Forcum/Mackey Construction
- Frank's Appliance Sales & Service*
- Frazer, LLP
- Gilman Harris Travioli Slover
- International Agri-Center
- J.C. Lansdowne, Inc.*
- Klink Citrus Association
- Mangini Associates, Inc.*
- Milestone Pediatrics, Inc.*
- Paynter Realty & Investments, Inc.*
- Pine, Pedroncelli & Aguilar, Inc.*



- Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group*
- Sequoia Foot Care Group
- Spraying Devices
- The Barn*
- Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG)
- Visalia Plumbing, Inc.*
- Wood Orthodontics
- Zeeb Commercial Real Estate*

- Small Business Nonprofit Members:**
- CASA / Court Appointed Special Advocates of Tulare County
 - Proteus, Inc. Employment & Training
 - Rancho Robles*
 - Seven Oaks Church*
 - Sequoia Symphony Orchestra*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

Tucoemas gets \$2.5M from Equitable Recovery Program
The credit union's Pathways Program helps residents with financial literacy



Funding for Tucoemas' Pathway Program is making financial literacy education more accessible to Tulare County.

The Equitable Recovery Program recently awarded Tucoemas Federal Credit Union a \$2.5 million grant to assist residents of Tulare County. The program exists to increase equity of communities struggling as a result of the pandemic. Tucoemas uses funds to encourage financial literacy in Tulare County through their Pathways program.

In 2022, Tucoemas paid out \$206,000 to their Pathways program participants. Tucoemas invested nearly \$5 million into the community through local partnerships, programs and initiatives.

The grant given to Tucoemas is specifically directed towards low income communities to help those who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The CEO of Tucoemas, Brice Yocum, explained how Tucoemas plans to use the funds.

"Those funds will be really put toward helping low to moderate income families meet needs, whether that's through small dollar loans, or secured credit cards or financial education, things like that," Yocum said.

Tucoemas is putting most of the funds into their pathways program. The program incen-



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

tivizes low income residents of Tulare County to meet with a certified financial counselor for three months with \$300 they can use to apply for a secured credit card.

The program then helps them set up a budget and meet once a month while participants build their credit.

"What it does is, we actually incentivize people financially to go through about a three month program that is led by one of our certified financial counselors, and they develop goals and a budget to reduce that or to increase their savings," Yocum said.

Yocum continued to explain that not all of the grant will be allocated to the pathways pro-

gram. Tucoemas will be using some of the funds for small dollar loans as well.

"We will do some small dollar loans and those typically have pretty forgiving and understanding qualifications because the point of this money is really to get into the community and so we try to look for any way we can to get people qualified," Yocum said.

There are some documents necessary for small loans, however the only qualification for the Pathway program is participants must be a Tulare County citizen.

For more information about Tucoemas Federal Credit Union's services and programs, visit www.tucoemas.org.

Four local cities among fastest growing in state

Visalia, Dinuba, Tulare and Woodlake are among the 100 fastest growing cities in California; housing growth outpaces population growth but not by enough to solve the existing shortage



John Lindt
Sierra2theSea.net
The Sun-Gazette Contributor

Four Tulare County cities were among the fastest growing in the state in 2022.

Visalia ranked 25th in the state for population increases adding 965 residents in the last year, while Dinuba ranked 68th adding 247 people, followed by Tulare (220 people) at No. 74 and Woodlake (102 people), which ranked 102 of the state's 482 incorporated cities. As a percent of population, Dinuba and Woodlake outpaced Visalia and Tulare with 0.98% and 0.84% increases, small gains but far larger than the state's overall loss of 0.2% of the population. The numbers were announced May 1 as part of the state's annual demographics report from the California Department of Finance.

Delano and Kingsburg, which both have a small portion of their cities in Tulare County, saw even larger increases. Kingsburg was the ninth fastest growing city, with an increase of 3.48% to 12,865. Delano was just shy of Visalia's with an additional 945 residents despite being about one third the size, 51,727 people compared with Visalia's 143,031. As a percentage of population, Delano was the 23rd fastest growing city with a 1.86% increase.

In general, only counties in the Central Valley and Imperial Valley saw increases in population while every coastal county except San Benito (0.2%) saw declines. Of the ten largest cities in California, only three gained population: Sacramento had the largest percentage gain in population (0.2 percent, or 1,203) followed by Bakersfield (0.2 percent, or 882) and Fresno (0.1 percent, or 599). San Joaquin County, Kern County, Butte County and Yuba County all had cities where housing production drove population growth.

See GROWING on page 6

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Visit www.visaliachamber.org

Ask Jena

How do I partner with the Chamber on a workshop?
We love to partner with our members to share their expertise with members! Contact me today to learn more.

How do I connect with another member?
You can connect with members in-person through various Chamber events and mixers or virtually through your Member Portal.

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

Bank of America volunteers Ashley McIntosh, Rebekah Lenaburg and Kellie Elzy delivered 250 care kits for domestic violence victims to Family Services of Tulare County. The nonprofit's BreAnna Trejo was happy to accept the donations.

Congratulations to **Eagle Mountain Casino** who hosted their grand opening and ribbon cutting in May of their new casino!

CSET hosted its 8th Annual Regional Education Youth Summit in May. The annual event informs local young people about careers available in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM).



BANK OF AMERICA

Bank of the Sierra awarded \$125K in Grants during its first quarter of 2023. Recipients in Tulare County included **Assistance League of Visalia** and **Visalia Emergency Aid Council**.

Domingo Lopez has been appointed the position of District Manager for the **Visalia Public Cemetery District**. Domingo was the former grounds supervisor for the cemetery and was interim manager for 90 days before his appointment by the Cemetery Board of Directors. The Cemetery also celebrated the reopening of The Heritage Chapel in May.

Congratulations to **Tucoemas Federal Credit Union** who is celebrating their 75th Anniversary!

Assistance League of Visalia (ALV) is developing a volunteer program for high school students. Please contact ALV directly for more information.

Girl Scout Troop #3717 hosted their 2nd Annual Dog Treat Drive in partnership with the **Visalia Rawhide** to benefit the dogs of **California Service Dog Academy**.

The Darling Hotel will be offering historical tours of their Annex Building. The guided tour will give guests a glimpse into the building's past and first hand look of its transformation into a modern-day hotel and rooftop restaurant.

Texas Roadhouse participated at Career Day at Strathmore Middle School.

Family HealthCare Networks' (FHNC) The Book Nook has shifted their hours for the summer season. They will be open Tuesdays-Fridays 10am-7pm and Saturdays 10am-3pm. FHNC also kicked off their series of local Health Fairs with a Cinco de Mayo event in Woodlake, which included a combination of fun family events, great local food, and important health services.

Tulare County Sheriff's Office hosted a grand opening in celebration of the Tulare County Sheriff's Engraving Program.

Congratulations to **Tachi Palace Casino Resort** who hosted a ribbon cutting in May in celebration of their 40th Anniversary!

Able Inc. has opened an on-line store, featuring Able Inc merchandise including a wide selection of logo t-shirts, hats, hoodies, and more. Each purchase supports Able's mission.

Fresno Pacific University Visalia Campus will host an open house on June 12th in celebration of their 20th Anniversary.



TEXAS ROADHOUSE

Grants of up to \$500 still available to help customers pay gas bill

Gas Assistance Fund has distributed over \$2 million dollars, helping over 10,000 families. Approximately \$3 million dollars remain to support eligible residential customers pay for their natural gas

Today SoCalGas announced that approximately \$3 million dollars of the committed \$6 million is still available in the company's Gas Assistance Fund to support eligible customers in paying their natural gas bill. This year, over 10,000 SoCalGas customers have already benefited from the Gas Assistance Fund, which helps income-qualified customers pay their natural gas bill with a one-time grant of up to \$500. The company's contribution to the Gas Assistance Fund in the 2022-2023 grant cycle was the largest in the fund's 40-year history.



we expanded the eligibility requirements and encourage customers to visit our website to see if they now qualify," said Gillian Wright, Senior Vice President and Chief Customer Officer. "We also offer useful resources on energy conservation, assistance programs to manage energy consumption, and make energy-efficient home improvements to help lower customer bills."

"Since 1983, the Gas Assistance Fund has helped over 240,000 Californians facing financial hardship afford basic necessities," said Elise Buik, President & CEO at United Way of Greater Los Angeles. "With SoCalGas's large contribution this year, United Way has dramatically expanded our reach to help thousands of individuals, older adults, and families across our region."

"The expanded grants have been able to make a meaningful impact in the families we serve," said Amy Zhao, Program Manager at Chinatown Service Center, a non-profit organization that assists customers with participation in the program. "Gas Assistance Fund grants play a crucial role in sparing our community from the agonizing decision of prioritizing

between feeding their families or covering essential utility expenses."

"Thanks to the partnership between SoCalGas and United Way of Greater Los Angeles, families have an opportunity to receive funds that ensure access to an essential utility," said Senator Steven Bradford. "Six million dollars is a huge commitment to the community, and it's great to see these two organizations come together and make a difference in the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors."

In addition to the Gas Assistance Fund, SoCalGas offers other programs that can help qualified customers save money on their monthly gas bills. The Medical Baseline Allowance provides qualified customers additional natural gas at the baseline rate and the California Alternative Rates for Energy

(CARE) program can help eligible customers save 20% on their monthly gas bills. The free Ways to Save tool may also help customers find ways to save on natural gas bills, with a personalized savings plan that offers a household energy analysis, customized energy-efficiency recommendations, bill comparisons, and energy usage comparisons. Customers can also sign up for Bill Tracker Alerts to monitor gas consumption and take steps to reduce usage to avoid surprises on their bills. To see more programs that can help customers save money and energy, visit www.socalgas.com/save-money-and-energy.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Able Inc. hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their new location's open house. The organization is located at 2505 N. Shirk Rd. in Visalia.



Mission Bank hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening at 5415 Avenida De Las Robles in Visalia.



Panda Express celebrated with a ribbon cutting to mark their newest Visalia location at 4505 S. Mooney Blvd.

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS

ANNUAL AWARDS
THURSDAY, JUNE 8
CELEBRATING

NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR
WOMAN OF THE YEAR
MAN OF THE YEAR

SMALL, MEDIUM,
LARGE BUSINESS OF
THE YEAR

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ADOBE STOCK

Newest Panda Express woks into town

Panda Express opens newest location on Mooney Boulevard, offers first 88 guests a free gift full of merchandise and coupons

After the newest Panda Express cut the ribbon for their new business, members of the community can now enjoy fresh food and receive a complimentary gift.

On Friday May 12, Panda Express celebrated the grand opening of its newest restaurant with the Visalia Chamber of Commerce. The first 88 guests received a special gift full of merchandise and coupons. The store is located at 4505 S. Mooney Blvd, in the up and coming area near Texas Roadhouse across from Target.

“Our entire Panda team is grateful to serve the Visalia community by providing new jobs and supporting local organizations through fundraising opportunities,” Letty Wendels, Panda Express area coach of operations said. “We hope to be a lasting part of the community and welcome all guests into our doors to try our American Chinese favorites and discover their own.”

The new Panda Express location offers all of Panda’s iconic dishes, including the world-famous original orange chicken, award-winning honey walnut shrimp and guest-favorite broccoli beef entrée. Panda Express is the largest Asian dining concept in the U.S. according to a press release from Panda Express. Local store hours are Sunday through Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. with extended drive thru hours open daily from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m.

As a family-owned and operated company committed to supporting the communities it serves, Panda has set out to create multiple employment opportunities for local residents. According to the press release, they offer one of the highest starting wages in the restaurant industry and comprehensive benefits. A majority of Panda general managers earn \$100,000 annually.

Since 2021, Panda has hired nearly 40,000 new associates and continues to hire more. Associates will grow professionally, personally and financially at Panda, as the company provides a wide range of training programs. They also offer professional and personal development courses through the University of Panda. Wages start at \$17 per hour for all front of house hires and \$18 per hour for all new back of house hires. Panda is nationally recognized as a top employer by Fortune’s 100 Best Companies to Work For, Great



Place to Work Certification and People’s Companies That Care list. Those interested in a career with Panda Express can visit pandacareers.com.

At each Panda Express location, associates ring a bell each time a guest donates to the Panda Cares in-store donation box. Panda Cares Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Panda Express, donates 100 percent of the funds collected to local nonprofit organizations that support the health and education needs of underserved youth. Any organization registered as a nonprofit/501(c)(3)/tax-exempt organization can sign up for the Neighborhood Fundraisers. Panda donates 20% of pre-tax event sales from in-person and online orders submitted through the Panda Express website or mobile app at the selected Panda location. Organizations can learn more about fundraising opportunities at community.pandaexpress.com.

On a mission to inspire better lives, Panda Express is the largest Asian dining concept in the U.S., family-owned and operated since 1983 by cofounders and co-CEOs Andrew and Peggy Chermg. According to the press release, Panda Express is best known as a trailblazer for creating a wide variety of industry-first recipes, including the original orange chicken and award-winning honey walnut shrimp. These dishes have defined the category of authentic American Chinese cuisine.

Each dish at Panda Express is thoughtfully crafted with quality ingredients and inspired by bold Chinese flavors and culinary principles. The restaurant brand has more than 2,500 locations and has introduced American Chinese cuisine to 12 international countries.

Powered by this global family of associates, Panda Cares, Panda’s philanthropic arm, has raised more than \$329 million and dedicated countless volunteer hours in bettering the health and education for over 13 million youth, as well as supporting communities in need since 1999. In 2021, Panda Express established the Panda Community Fund — a five-year, \$10 million community investment and response program that supports immediate and sustainable solutions from national and local organizations to uplift diverse groups, including people of color and other marginalized communities. For more information about Panda, visit pandaexpress.com.



On behalf of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and staff, we extend our gratitude to our long-standing members who have supported our local business community. Congratulations on your milestone member anniversaries and your commitment to maintaining a thriving local business economy that contributes to our vibrant and unique community! Please be #LoyaltoLocal and support all Chamber Members. You can find a full list of members on our website, visaliachamber.org.

Chamber member anniversaries

- 75 Years**
 - Bueno Beverage Company
 - Empire Supply Co., Inc.
 - Housing Authority of Tulare County
- 60 Years**
 - Visalia Mall
 - Vollmer, Daniel, Gaebe & Grove, CPAs
- 55 Years**
 - Sequoia Foot Care Group
- 50 Years**
 - KMPH Fox 26/The CW KFRE 59
- 45 Years**
 - RE/MAX Visalia
 - United Way of Tulare County
- 40 Years**
 - Bruce Evans Property Management, Inc.
 - Family Services of Tulare County
 - Kens Stakes & Supplies, Inc.
 - Principal Financial Group
 - Tucoemas Federal Credit Union
 - Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County
- 35 Years**
 - Pioneer Nursery
 - ServiceMaster by Hellstern
 - Super 8 Motel
 - Visalia Unified School District
- 30 Years**
 - Colima Mexican Restaurant
 - Family HealthCare Network
 - Newmark Grubb Pearson Commercial
 - Sign Time
 - The Business Journal
- 25 Years**
 - Chimienti & Associates Insurance Services
 - Sequoia Parks Conservancy
 - Sequoia Symphony Orchestra
 - SinglePoint Outsourcing, Inc.
 - Sue Sa’s Creative Catering
 - Visalia Fox Theatre
- 20 Years**
 - Visalia Public Cemetery District
 - Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel
 - Classic Charter
 - Seals Construction
 - KRC Safety Co., Inc.
 - Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group
 - The Perez Law Firm
- 15 Years**
 - 4Crees, Inc
 - Chukchansi Gold Resort and Casino
 - College of the Sequoias
 - Courtyard Aesthetics
 - Kaweah Health Foundation
 - Pena’s Disposal
 - Valley PBS
- 10 Years**
 - Creative Flowers
 - J & D Lighting & Alarm
 - San Joaquin Valley Homes
 - The Valley Voice
 - The Mill Pizzeria & Tap Room
- 5 Years**
 - Assemblyman Devon Mathis
 - Assistance League of Visalia
 - Becca and Her Camera Photography & Design
 - Cal-Valley Insurance Services
 - Component Coffee
 - FoodLink for Tulare County, Inc.
 - Fresno Yosemite International Airport
 - Just Between Friends Visalia/Fresno
 - Morgan Stanley
 - Peck Planning and Development
 - Personal Express Insurance
 - Round Table Pizza
 - Sequoia Gateway LLC
 - Seven Oaks Church
 - TechCare360 Inc.
 - Tulare County District Attorney
 - Valley Children’s Healthcare

Visit Visalia sees boom in tourism economy

Visit Visalia announced their tourism economy is booming after 2020 numbers, but still lagging behind the record numbers in 2019

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Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette



Nellie Freeborn, executive director of Visit Visalia said. “Visitor

Following the pandemic, Visalia and Tulare County have made great efforts in their marketing to recover from the steep decline in tourism. The economic impact tourism report shows their hard work has paid off by making tremendous improvements from 2020 and not far behind 2019.

“In spite of the pandemic, Visalia had a record-breaking year in 2021, reporting the highest hotel occupancy rate and ADR [average daily rate] in nine years,”

spending is catching up as well, at just 10% below 2019 levels in Tulare County.”

In a report released by Visit California on the economic impact of travel in California, visitor spending in Tulare County has increased by 59.4% since 2020. Currently the visitor spending numbers are 9.9% short of the levels recorded in 2019, which was a record year for the tourism industry according to Freeborn. Tourism jobs have seen a 17% increase from 2020 and are only 3.1% behind where they were in 2019. The visitor generated tax revenue in Tulare County has increased to \$12.9 million, from \$8.8 million in 2020 and \$11.9 million in 2019.

Freeborn said during the pandemic, California tourism was hit hard because of the restrictions and as a result lost business to other states with destinations. She said the state is on the right track, but not quite where they were in 2019, “It’s great to see a lot of the

See **TOURISM** on page 6

Top 10 reasons to hire a photographer for a headshot

Trisha Dean
Owner
The Good Life Photography

Whether you’re a new business building your website for the first time or a well-established business revamping your online presence, the cost of professional photography might prompt you to wonder if you might be able to get by without it... After all, you couldn’t you just take some pictures yourself? Or, use stock photos? There are other, more important things you should be spending your organization’s funds on than professional photography, right? ... Wrong!

The truth is that every business no matter the industry can benefit from having a professional headshot of themselves and their staff on their website. No matter who your customers are, or what you are selling, quality photography, and showing the people behind the business, is an important asset that will contribute to your overall branding and success. When it comes to business expenses that are absolutely worth it, professional photography should be at the top of the list.

I bet you have a hundred or more reasons why you don’t want to have your headshot done... I get it, no one really enjoys to be photographed, but it doesn’t have to be a bad experience! Hiring a professional who knows what they are doing is the key to a great shot and a great experience all around. Looking natural, good lighting, genuine expressions are so important to a great headshot and a professional should help guide you through the process. We even help with what to wear and how to do your hair!

Here are the top 10 reasons to hire a professional to do your headshot:

- Professionalism. First and foremost it gives you credibility and professionalism. Potential clients, investors, and collaborators who find you online, either on social media or the website, are more likely to take you seriously.
- First Impressions. Did you know that we are judged by someone within 11 seconds of meeting or being seen? This seems crazy but isn’t it a good idea to take advantage of those 11 seconds (or probably way less online) and put your very best self forward? Like it or not, it’s true that we judge a book by it’s cover. People want to work with real people. So let me help you put your best self out there.
- Customers Want to Get To Know YOU! Believe it or not, a good headshot will give your potential customers and idea of who you are, a great smile can go a long way. Stock photos are one alternative that some organizations consider when they feel a photo shoot with a professional photographer might be out of reach. That is not the best way to showcase your business. Why? Because they are not photos of you or your business! Even having your real customers featured



on your social media and website gets soooooo much more attention.

- When people visit your website, they want to get to know you and your staff! Stock photos don’t help them do that. They could give people a false impression of what you have to offer. The best way for potential customers to get to know your business is by showing them actual photos of your business, your team members, and your products.
- Confidence. A great CURRENT headshot will help you feel confident and professional when you are calling on a potential client. I always suggest having professional makeup and hair done. I work with local professionals that can get you ready in studio so you don’t have to travel all over town or try to do it yourself before your session. It’s amazing how much more confident it can make you feel.
- Stand out above the rest. A great profile photo on social media will set you apart from the competition. Believe it or not, you can’t imagine how many people cut out a shot of them from a random wedding with their arm around an ex. Usually it’s a grainy cropped photo, this is not a good way to show who you are or what you are about. Remember, it is your first line of introduction, make it great!
- Visual Reminder of who you are. How many times have you been to a function and met someone you wanted to connect with for business? A good, clean headshot can be a visual cue for someone to remember you. I also use mine on my email signature. Every time I send one, or reply, there is my face. Take a look down below :)
- Consistency. There is a lot of talk now about branding your image. Many people think of branding as something only for a large company but it is also applicable to individuals. I see it all the time, someone works for a large company but the company doesn’t have consistent professional headshots. Some are cut outs at weddings, no profile shot at all, some against a wall with a phone and bad shadows

on their face... Now, can you imagine pulling up a company profile, seeing the drop down of their employees and seeing them ALL look professional. This is a huge value for the company image. After all, a company is made up of its people, wouldn’t you want your company to show well on all media platforms?

- Images Can Help You Get Found On the Web. If your business has a website, you may have heard of search engine optimization, or SEO. This is the practice of strategically optimizing various elements of your website in an effort to help it perform better in the search engine ranking results. There are many elements to SEO, and one major element is images.
 - Optimized photos can help your website get found in the image results like Google Images and perform better in the overall search results. They can also help to engage customers and keep them on your site for longer, or encourage them to choose you over a competitor.
 - Professional Photos are Versatile Assets. When it comes to marketing your business online “content is king.” This has been the case for a while now, and it definitely still holds true. But what many don’t realize is that photos are content, and they are a powerful, versatile form of content at that. Online, photos can be used to make your website infinitely more engaging. They can be used to build your brand on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google My Business and more. They can also be featured in blog posts and articles... the possibilities are endless. Offline, photos can be used in brochures and promotional materials of all kinds. By investing in professional photography, you provide yourself with new, helpful ammunition that can be used to enhance your marketing efforts in a plethora of ways.
 - A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words. You’ve probably heard this numerous times before. These days pictures are worth at least a thousand words, probably more! Photos enable you to show your clients and customers what you have to offer rather than tell them. People like to see things for themselves before making a decision. The internet has made this possible, which means photos and videos of your products and offerings are much more valuable than ever before.
- I hope that this has inspired you to consider The Good Life Photography for your next headshot or product/customer images. I would love to meet with you at your business and see how we can help each other. I can’t wait to hear from you!

Sun-Gazette adds owners, buys Fresno County paper

Paul Myers becomes co-owner of Sun-Gazette parent company; ownership purchases Mid Valley Publishing's operations including its newspaper and printing house

Mineral King Publishing, Inc., parent company for The Sun-Gazette newspaper, inked a deal in mid-March that grew their business by three times and simultaneously expanded their reach into Fresno County. The purchase was effective as of May 1, but the deal has been a year in the making.

Mid Valley Publishing, the umbrella company of what was formerly the Reedley Exponent, Sanger Herald and Dinuba Sentinel among others, consolidated their individual newspapers into one product in 2019: the Mid Valley Times. The company also ran a commercial printing press, serviced legal notices and ran advertising in their paper. However, following the economic torments of the pandemic and the death of their publisher Fred Hall in March 2022, the company's ownership group was weighing whether to close the entire operation. Fortunately Ellis and Myers were seeking a new opportunity to expand their brand of local journalism established by The Sun-Gazette in Tulare County.

"We felt like we were doing well as a newspaper but also as a business here in Tulare County, and I think we didn't know how good we were going to be unless we tested ourselves somewhere else," Myers said.

Perhaps done out of order, Myers and Ellis took over the operations of Mid Valley Publishing entirely in late May 2022, under a management contract with their company Mineral King Publishing. The Mid Valley ownership group spent the next few months assessing the company's assets, debt, income and cashflow.

"Honestly, this is not the way to buy a company. Typically you want to buy it and then come in and run it, but we were very sure that the company would have folded with people leaving or equipment failures if we didn't step in," Ellis said.

By September, Myers and Ellis hadn't even begun to touch the journalism product the company made. Instead, while they waited on what the cost of the company would be, they revamped the entire operation from the ground up.



PAUL MYERS



REGGIE ELLIS

New schedules for commercial print clients needed to be implemented to streamline press production and eliminate costly overtime. New computers needed to be purchased for every department. There was a dire need for new cloud based systems that interacted with new software and hardware. Sales commission rates and policies were changed to help the sales-

person make more per ad, but not paid out until it was collected. Everything was changed in one way or another, down to the pay-date schedule that would dramatically hurt the company during the months they could least afford it.

"Plugging the leaks in the boat with efficiency were a major part of the process, but the root of the problem is that they were charging too little because nobody knew what anything cost the company," Ellis said.

Adding ownership

Myers, who had been editor for The Sun-Gazette since February 2016, had agreed to become an owner of Mineral King Publishing in September 2022. Holding a masters in public administration the editorial direction of The Sun-Gazette has been a mix of community based news with a healthy dose of government focused coverage. He has been a pivotal part of the company since it nearly closed its own doors in October 2015, and then its recovery from 2016 forward.



"The end of 2015 were some dark, dark days. And the years immediately following were not much brighter," Myers said. "I think we didn't really begin to hit our stride business wise until 2019, and even then there were starts and fits."

The pandemic for Mineral King Publishing was a difficult time, as it was for almost every business. But it also presented Myers and Ellis with an opportunity to find new ways to streamline their business further. Coming out of 2020 and 2021 the editorial department began to make its true strides seeking sustainability—if that exists for local journalism at all.

"It was about late 2021 when I took a really hard look at the way we were doing stories, and I found a new way to produce our news without it being too intensive for Reggie and I, who were constantly working on stories and the business," Myers said.

Shifting to a daily online model and putting those—and other stories—into the print product, attracted new reporters to The Sun-Gazette. The time Ellis wasn't spending writing stories was opened up to seek new advertisers or innovative business opportunities. By March 2022 the opportunity to expand the company presented itself.

New opportunities

Myers and Ellis hadn't gotten to a point where they could unveil the new look and direction of the Mid Valley Times until October 2022. Much like The Sun-Gazette, they did away with the sprawling coverage of useless crime reports. They moved toward more city council and school board coverage that will actually impact residents in the coverage areas. What largely remains is the good com-



PHOTO BY PAUL MYERS

The Sun-Gazette newspaper is owned by Mineral King Publishing, which also became the owner of the Mid Valley Times in Fresno County on May 1, 2023.

munity news that comes from chamber events and nonprofits, along with high school sports.

The move away from a voyeuristic crime rag to more in depth journalism was not initially well received. Emails flooded in from readers who felt the need to tell Myers that they were unsubscribing because of the lack of crime-blotter content. Others were implored to tell office staff that they were unsubscribing because the font size changed from a glaring 12 point font to an industry standard 10 point font.

However, the tide turned after the beginning of the year. In particular among community stakeholders that run nonprofit organizations, administrators and readers invested in their community.

"I am a huge fan of the direction the Mid Valley Times is heading. I have noticed more focused coverage on the news that impacts our local communities and the reporting is much more detailed," Reedley Chamber of Commerce CEO Erik Valencia said about the change. "We are fortunate to have a local paper we can trust and works hard to provide us with accurate infor-

mation."

Looking forward

After a fair bit of back and forth between Mineral King Publishing owners and Mid Valley Publishing's six member ownership group, the two companies struck a deal to purchase Mid Valley's operations. Inked on March 15, it was off to the races to complete a massive transition.

"When you think about everything a company does, and everything it has in terms of branding, vendors, employee documents, payroll services, et cetera, et cetera, it's a heavy lift to make all those changes in six weeks," Ellis said.

The newspapers have been run simultaneously by Myers and reporters in both their Exeter and Reedley office since July 2022. There should be little difference in terms of coverage for either product except for plans to add more support staff and reporters.

"Reggie and I have a heart for this industry. We want to see sound local journalism continue wherever it is, and this was a great opportunity to see if we can be a part of that," Myers said.

Costco wants second store in northwest Visalia

Visalia city officials, existing store managers say a new Costco Wholesale is planned for the corner of Shirk Road and Riggan Avenue

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Sierra2theSea.net
The Sun-Gazette
Contributor

The only thing more exciting to Visalians than getting a second In-N-Out Burger restaurant is getting a second Costco, a rare feat for a city of less than 200,000 people. Mayor Steve Nelsen said not only is Costco interested in building a second store in northwest Visalia, he thinks "it could happen quickly."

Nelsen recently mentioned Visalia's largest retailer has reportedly tied up land at the northeast corner of Shirk Road and Riggan Avenue, open land currently zoned for industrial use. Nelsen says he does not believe rezoning the corner for retail commercial use should be a big deal and that construction of retail warehouses like Costco is similar to the "tilt-up concrete" technique used to erect industrial buildings faster and more efficiently.

"I don't see any reason why we could not have this store up and running in a year and half," Nelsen said.

Nelsen wasn't the only city official to acknowledge the nation's fifth largest retailer's plans for northwest Visalia. Councilmember Liz Wynn said she heard the location "is a done deal" at a recent public meeting. Even administrative staff at the existing Costco in Visalia said the rumor was true when asked about the second location in town but said it could be a few years before the store was operational.

The Visalia Costco remains one of the busiest retailers in town and is said to be near the top in sales in the chain, according to local real estate experts. In 2018 it was estimated the store generated \$230 million in sales annually and increasing every year. The current Costco is likely the top contributor to Visalia's all-important sales tax revenue with an anticipated increase year after year. Visalia sales tax revenue was up 14% in 2020-21. The trend has helped spread the notion that Visalia is experiencing "boom times"—something this news will do little to cool off.

Northside growth

Like other national retailers in Visalia, growth in the north side of town has brought a number of the popular Mooney retailers like Target to set up shop six miles north of the traditional retail strip to the city's newest commercial thoroughfare, which is filling-in fast. Dinuba Boulevard has already drawn crowd pleasers like In-N-Out and El Pollo Loco and now Tractor Supply is coming too.

Instead, Costco made a big leap where there are no other retailers to the west, an area booming with industrial buildings. Shirk is where Visalia's industrial area turns to residential heading east. The property Costco has selected is owned by the farmer/developer Ritchie/Vidovich partnership who have big plans for some 320 acres behind the new Costco.



ADOBE STOCK

Costco is seeking a second location in northwest Visalia.

The store's exterior layout will no doubt try to separate the retail activity from the nearby industrial blocks where up to 3 million square feet of warehouses are on the drawing board. This combination could be cause for concern as shoppers and commuters will intersect with workers, big rigs and delivery vans from Amazon and UPS. It will be a signalized intersection but already has rush hour level traffic from Amazon's fulfillment center.

The jump west might seem odd but it does follow Costco's pattern of building on the edge to town. The existing Visalia store was built on the southern side of town in 2007 before houses filled in and now houses are popping up to meet the Hanford store at the intersection of Highways 43 and 198. Buying commercial land on the edge of town is cheaper than building in town and Costco knows shoppers will beat a path to their door wherever it is.

The location also has the opportunity to draw from northern Tulare County and southern Fresno County bringing new shoppers to this Costco just 15 minutes from Dinuba, and about 20 min-

utes from Kingsburg and Reedley. Currently, the closest store for those communities is Clovis.

The only Valley cities with two Costco stores, Fresno and Bakersfield, have a population three to four times larger than Visalia. But a look at pending subdivisions and multi-family projects along with the impressive industrial pipeline must have spread the fever to Costco site-locators that this city's prospects are good. Now everyone wants to know when Trader Joe's will get the word?

Job growth

Costco will likely build a 160,000 square foot store on about 20 acres with an expected cost around \$80 to \$100 million, according to the box retailer's industry standards. In 2021, Costco was ranked No. 10 on the Fortune 500 rankings of the largest United States corporations by total revenue. As of March 2022, Costco has 828 warehouses worldwide, including 572 in the United States.

In February 2021, Costco announced that it would be raising the starting rate for its hour-

ly store workers in the United States to \$16 per hour. Today it is \$20 per hour with reports of mostly happy workers. The average store has 250 to 300 employees.

One of the most famous items sold at Costco is their cooked chicken—a generous 3-pound bird that is fully cooked and seasoned, and they sell for just \$5—cheaper than most supermarkets. Costco loses money by keeping the price so low, but a surge in revenue has coincided with chicken sales, the company's top executive W. Craig Jelinek said at a virtual shareholder meeting in January. The company serves 101 million chickens every year. A chicken in every pot, so to speak.

Costco operates an international chain of membership warehouses, mainly under the "Costco Wholesale" name, that carry quality, brand-name merchandise at substantially lower prices than are typically found at conventional wholesale or retail sources. The warehouses are designed to help small-to-medium-sized businesses reduce costs in purchasing for resale and for everyday business use. Individuals may also purchase for their personal needs.

Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



HEALTH CARE NOTE

Here to help alleviate Medi-Cal benefit concerns

Specialists are ready to help with spring re-enrollment and recertification questions

Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) is prepared to help the people of Tulare, Kings, and Fresno Counties sort through their questions, comments, and concerns related to the ongoing re-enrollment and recertification processes for Medi-Cal benefits.

Through the duration of—and immediately following—the COVID-19 pandemic, California residents who had previously qualified for Medi-Cal were not required to complete an annual redetermination for continued coverage. However, following the end of California's declaration of a state of emergency, Medi-Cal recipients will now be expected to go through a recertification process to determine their Medi-Cal eligibility. Members of FHCN's Community Health team anticipate a percentage of people could no longer qualify for Medi-Cal, but representatives are prepared to help pa-



tients and community members complete this process and find alternatives within Covered California.

If you have any questions regarding your Medi-Cal situation, or would like to explore the options available to you, please contact one of Family HealthCare Network's Enrollment helplines:

Fresno County: 559-608-6501
Tulare County: 559-741-4366

At Family HealthCare Network, our mission is to provide quality health care to all. As a private nonprofit Federally Qualified Health Center, FHCN includes 48 sites and

over 300 clinical providers throughout Tulare, Fresno, and Kings Counties. Our services include family medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, adult and children's dentistry, pharmacy, internal medicine, behavioral health, nutritional counseling, health education, case management, community health and outreach, and eligibility assistance.

Family HealthCare Network is recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) as a Patient Centered Medical Home and is dually recognized by The Joint Commission with its Gold Seal of Approval® for Patient Quality and Safety and as a Patient Centered Primary Medical Home.

For more information, call 1-877-960-3426, visit our website, Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

GROWING

Continued from page 2

In Tulare County, five of the eight cities and the unincorporated areas increased housing at a rate faster than the population growth. Visalia increased housing units by 1.4% compared with 0.7% in population growth; however, that is not enough to solve the housing shortage for the population that is already here.

And things won't be getting better any time soon based on preliminary permit numbers so far this year. Visalia has permitted 73% fewer new homes in the first four months of the year compared to the same period in 2022. Builders permitted only two new homes in April, according to the latest City of Visalia figures. Home builders

had permitted 245 new homes by May 1, 2022, but so far this year, the city has issued only 66 new single family residential permits. The trend puts Visalia on pace for the slowest new home construction year in decades. Overall, the total value of all permits is also down by 62% although residential remodels for the year to date are up. High interest rates have slowed building plans as well as the sale of existing homes in the city.

State trends

Stable births, fewer deaths, and a rebound in foreign immigration slowed California's recent population decline in 2022, with the state's population estimated at 38,940,231 people as of Jan. 1, 2023.

The 0.35-percent popula-

tion decline for 2022, roughly 138,400 persons, marks a slowdown compared to the recent decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2021 and 2022, California's population decreased 0.53% or 207,800 persons, due mainly to sharp declines in natural increase and foreign immigration. For 2022, natural increase—the net amount of births minus deaths—increased from 87,400 in 2021 to 106,900 in 2022. Births decreased slightly from 420,800 in 2021 to 418,800 in 2022, while deaths declined gradually from 333,300 persons in 2021 to 311,900 persons in 2022.

Foreign immigration nearly tripled in 2022 compared to the prior year, with a net gain of 90,300 persons in 2022 compared to 31,300 in 2021. While foreign immigration to

California has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels, natural increase has not rebounded. Total births remain low due to fertility declines; while deaths have eased gradually from their pandemic peak, they remain elevated. With slower domestic in-migration and increased domestic out-migration, likely the result of work- from-home changes, declines in net domestic migration offset the population gains from natural increase and international migration.

Statewide, 46 of the state's 58 counties lost population. The ten largest percentage decreases were: Lassen (-4.3 percent), Del Norte (-1.3 percent), Plumas (-1.2 percent), Santa Cruz (-1.0 percent), Marin (-1.0 percent), Tehama (-1.0 percent), Napa (-1.0 percent), Lake (-0.9 percent), Monterey (-0.8 percent), and Los Angeles (-0.8 percent). The state's three most populous counties all experienced population loss: Los Angeles declined by 73,293 persons (-0.75 percent), San Diego by 5,680 persons (-0.2 percent), and Orange by 14,782 persons (-0.5 percent).

In the state, Lathrop in San Joaquin County was the fastest growing city adding 3,505 new residents and bringing their population to 35,080. Paradise in Butte County was the fastest growing city as a percentage of the population, with an increase of 24.09% or 1,775 people.

TOURISM

Continued from page 4

marketing initiatives that the state tourism office is putting into place, both for tourism and for meetings and conventions to help mitigate some of that leakage and get the business back into California."

As of March 2022, Visalia proper has already seen an 8.4% increase from last year in their occupancy rate—the ratio of rented spaces to available space—according to Freeborn.

When you ask, we do more than listen—we act!

Recently several members of the Visalia Chamber expressed concerns about commercial crimes and inquired how to protect their businesses, report incidents, and interface with law enforcement. As a conveyor of leaders focused on being a catalyst for change, the Visalia Chamber of Commerce hosted the Business of Law and Order with a panel that included; District Attorney Tim Ward, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, Visalia Police Chief Jason Salazar, and Tracy Robertshaw with Neighborhood Preservation/Code Enforcement.

The workshop, attended by over 40 business leaders, allowed attendees to ask panelist questions about when to call 911 vs. the non-emergency line when to report crimes and the process that happens for the different types of crimes, organized retail crimes, trespassing concerns, statistics on local business crime and ways to help law enforcement. The information provided was helpful as business leaders partner with law enforcement to take steps to secure their businesses and keep their employees safe.

Members' support of the Visalia Chamber makes conveying these leaders possible. It strengthens the value of being a Visalia Chamber of Commerce member. If you are interested in Visalia Chamber membership, more information can be found at visaliachamber.org/membership.

Always Here Our providers are always here to care for your entire family.

Call 877-960-3426 or visit us at fhcn.org/AlwaysHere to schedule an appointment.

Over 48 locations in Kings, Tulare, and Fresno Counties

Our Visalia Locations:
401 E. School Ave.
400 E. Oak Ave.
536 N. Court St.
2333 S. Mooney Blvd.
501 N. Bridge St.

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS
EDISON SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
An EDISON INTERNATIONAL Company

PRESENTS
THE STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Visalia (Founded 1852) **County of Tulare** CALIFORNIA

Bello Vita Venue
4211 W Goshen Ave
August 24, 2023 11:30am-1:30pm

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG