

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 7 | July 2023

INSIDE

I am prepared for the first day of school

As we start to think about the first day of school, we know there are a few key items on your mind as well as on the mind of our students. **3**

Visalia Chamber of Commerce Awards

The Chamber celebrated its 68th Annual Awards Ceremony at the historic Fox Theater, recognizing outstanding businesses and individuals who have made a significant impact in the community. This prestigious event highlights accomplishments that exemplify excellence, innovation, and dedication to the betterment of Visalia. **4**

EVENTS

JULY 27 Ambassador Breakfast

Time: 8 a.m.
Location: Visalia First

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES

Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

TRAVEL WITH US

SEPTEMBER 20-OCTOBER 1, 2023

Essence of France: Paris, Provence & French Riviera

OCTOBER 4-12, 2023

Highlights of England, Scotland & Wales

OCTOBER 23-28, 2023

Cuba Discovery

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

JUNE 20-27, 2024

Alaska: Call of the Wild

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



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
CST #2048841-40

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

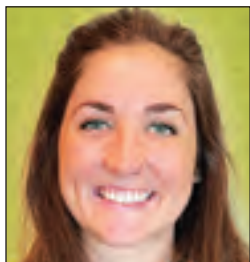


PHOTO BY KENNY GOODMAN

While currently closed, both the Gateway Shuttle and the Sequoia Shuttle typically run from the Thursday before Memorial Day through the Sunday after Labor Day.

Sequoia Gateway Shuttle hits operational roadblock

Visalia Transit makes decision to postpone their Gateway Shuttle service which transports park visitors to the Sequoia National Forest until Highway 198 reopens



The Sun-Gazette

Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette

Tourists beware, as the Valley's Gateway Shuttle may not be open when coming to visit Sequoia National Park due to road closures from severe rain which caused mudslides and road damage on the way to the park.

After severe rain hit the Central Valley in February and March, Visalia Transit has postponed their Gateway shuttle service until the road opens again. Their decision to postpone was based on the closure of the highway in the park from Hospital Rock to the Giant Forest Museum. Though not an easy decision to make, Caleb Bowman, transit management analyst said they weighed other options, but ultimately determined the postponement was the best.

"It is with a heavy heart that we have decided to postpone the Gateway Shuttle service until Highway 198 opens and is safe for passenger travel," Bowman said. "Visalia Transit apologizes for any inconvenience or disruptions to travel arrangements this may cause."

According to the National Park Service website the only way to access the sequoias, including Giant Forest, the General Sherman Tree and Grant Grove is through the Big Stump entrance

station on Highway 180.

"Maintaining safety and a high quality of service are our top priorities," Bowman said. "[The Highway 180 entrance] would take away from the visitor experience by adding additional travel time, limiting their time in the park and would ultimately be unreliable due to unknown traffic conditions."

The average travel time from the Valley floor to the Giant Forest Museum is around two and a half hours according to Bowman. He said by taking the highway 180 route, it would add an additional one and half to two hours, taking away from time passengers would have in the park.

Bowman said the National Park's projected re-opening date for Highway 198, and thus their shuttle, is July 1. However, that date is not set in stone as things with construction can and often will change. For individuals who plan to purchase or may have already purchased tickets for July 1 and surrounding dates, Bowman said the agency will do their best to keep individuals updated on the progress of the project. He added they are aware that people travel from out of the state and sometimes the country to visit the Sequoias, so they want to give people as much time as they can to change their plans if need be.

"We are trying to give anybody that does reserve July 1 or beyond...at least a two week notice," Bowman said. "Visalia Transit or the city... want[s] to make sure that we're giving enough advance notice for them to change their plans if they choose to. And then hopefully, reduce the

See SHUTTLE on page 6

Local businessman Knopf honored across counties

QK company honors retiring Michael Knopf with Chairman Emeritus title, Fresno City Council proclaims May 16 the day for successful homegrown businessman



Maddi Langton
Assistant Editor
The Sun-Gazette

One award after another, a local businessman whose accomplishments have not gone unnoticed received an honorary position in the company he helped create over 20 years ago.

On June 12, QK, an engineering and consulting company, announced that longtime chief executive officer Michael D. Knopf is transitioning from chairman of the board, to Chairman Emeritus. This is one of Knopf's final steps in his retirement process which he began in 2018 after being a central part of the company since 1998. Chairman Emeritus is a sort of honorary position that allows him to still have his hand in the business.

The city of Fresno also honored him by proclaiming May 16 to be "Michael D. Knopf Day." Knopf said it is a tremendous honor to have the community celebrate him in such a way.

"It was such an honor and such a surprise," Knopf said. "I mean, I've never heard of anything like that, so it was really a special moment for me, for them to present that."

QK was created in 1998 when Knopf's firm, Knopf Engineering, merged with Quad Consultants and he served as CEO from 2005-2018. Knopf said he ran his own company for 21 years before the merger as well. He added the recent managerial transition has been easy for QK because they have always made it a top priority to make sure the organization would be sustainable beyond management and retirement of its key leaders. Knopf said he would not have been able to do it without Janel Freeman who

See KNOPF on page 6



PHOTO COURTESY OF QK, INC.

QK named Michael Knopf chairman emeritus, and the city of Fresno honored the businessman by proclaiming May 16 to be "Michael D. Knopf Day."

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A brief hiatus



Dear community,

For over 40 years, the Christmas Tree Auction has united our community, supporting local charities and businesses during the holiday season.

In recent years significant increases in costs and logistical hurdles paired with changing local charities' needs pose obstacles to the

smooth operation of the Christmas Tree Auction. We recognize that these challenges demand our attention and require innovative solutions. Therefore, we have made the difficult decision to pause the Christmas Tree Auction this year.

During this brief hiatus, our Chamber staff is working to find innovative solutions to address these challenges while ensuring the event's sustainability. We remain committed to serving our membership and making Visalia an even more remarkable place to do business.

Join us for workshops to develop your business plan, Paws & Connect - Networking Unleashed (a fall networking expo), and an exhilarating Spring-Tini event. These initiatives provide resources and opportunities for your success.

Change can be challenging, but through perseverance and innovation, we grow as a community. Your unwavering support is invaluable as we find the best path forward. Let's embrace this moment as an opportunity to adapt and emerge stronger than ever.

In Partnership,

Gail Zurek
President and CEO

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

Q: Why is the Christmas Tree Auction being paused this year?

A: The Christmas Tree Auction is being paused this year due to significant increases in costs, logistical hurdles, and changing local charities' needs, which have made it difficult to operate smoothly.

Q: Are there any plans to address these challenges and resume the auction in the future?

A: Yes, the Chamber staff is actively working during this hiatus to find innovative solutions that address the challenges and ensure the sustainability of the Christmas Tree Auction. The goal is to resume the event in the future.

Q: What other events or initiatives can we expect in the meantime?

A: While the Christmas Tree Auction is paused, there are other events and initiatives planned to support the community and local businesses. These include workshops to develop your business plan, Paws & Connect - Networking Unleashed (a fall networking expo), and an exhilarating Spring-Tini event.

Q: How can I participate and contribute to the success of these initiatives?

A: Your participation and support are invaluable during this time. You can participate in the workshops, attend the fall networking expo, and join the Spring-Tini event. These initiatives provide resources and opportunities for your success and help strengthen the community. To learn more visit our website visaliachamber.org.

CITY UPDATE

City Project Tracker

Roadway projects are underway in various quadrants of Visalia as the City undertakes improvements to roads, signals, sidewalks and more.

With numerous projects in progress and more slated for the coming months, the City of Visalia website now hosts the Project Tracker. A new, online space, the Project Tracker has been created to keep citizens and businesses informed on roadway projects throughout the City.

The Project Tracker, located at www.visalia.city/projecttracker, provides an overall view of projects underway in Visalia, and allows visitors to access greater project details by clicking the link of their choosing. Interested in the latest update on the Riggan Widening Project? Click on the Riggan link located on the homepage and find an overview of the work, with the option to dive into the details of each section.

Visitors will find a summary explaining the purpose of each project, the cost, details on funding sources, information on partnering agencies and a work schedule. As appropriate, maps with details on road closures, detours and traffic patterns are included

for each project. A Frequently Asked Question section is included, and the project manager's contact information rounds out each specific project page.

Each project featured in the Project Tracker has been identified as a major project that, while undertaken to improve thoroughfares and help drive our City forward, impacts the traveling public. With that in mind, the Project Tracker is updated as quickly as possible when new details are available to help citizens and businesses stay in the know.

Quickly navigate to the Project Tracker on the City of Visalia website by heading to www.visalia.city/projecttracker. Bookmark the page and check back often to stay up to date. The Project Tracker does not encompass every construction project in progress by the City of Visalia, or by other organizations within Visalia, but will feature major projects.

For questions or more information, contact the City of Visalia's Engineering Division at (559) 713-4444 or email communityfeedback@visalia.city.

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Name: Bob Ainley
Company: Ainley Alipaz Webb LLP
Title: Partner

Why do you serve on the Chamber Board of Directors?

I serve because business owners willingly take on such enormous challenges and risk in order to better their own lives, as well as create the jobs and prosperity on which our community depends, and the Chamber can help equip and unify its members so that they do not have to face these challenges alone. I believe in that mission and the importance of

a strong and unified business community.

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

Several Chamber members, and Gail in particular, have been a welcome sounding board at many different times regarding concerns with local government and the near-term economic outlook.

What motivates you to work hard?

Curiosity. I have the immense privilege of getting to engage in work that requires constant learning and intellectual exercise... largely at the expense of actual exercise. I have always been very intellectually curious and it's very rewarding to work at growing my knowledge base and being able to offer that knowledge and advice to others.

What is your favorite game or sport to watch and play? Or who is your favorite team?

My wife and I are big college football fans. I'm an Oregon Duck and she is a Georgia "Dawg." It sounds silly, but the unique aspects of school pride and variety that embody college football brought two very different people together and I'll always appreciate that.

Who would you want to be stranded with on a deserted island?

Anyone who knows how to make a sea worthy boat from scratch... no sense starving to death with Socrates and I need my wife back at home making sure our soon-to-be-fatherless daughter is raised right.

Does your family have a "motto" – spoken or unspoken?

My dad would never let us quit once we've started. That's probably the closest thing to a motto we have and I plan to carry that forward with my kids.

Who was your favorite teacher in school and why?

My 6th grade teacher, Ms. Gaddy, for being so caring and patient with me as I continued to emotionally struggle with the loss of my mom. I was not an easy student at the time. A close second is Lee Terkelsen, my Golden West photography teacher, who helped me discover a talent within me that continues to be very special and creatively fulfilling.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Name: Vickie Goudreau
Company: CORE
Title: Marketing and Business Development, Flooring

CORE is the Central Valley's interior solutions firm, offering well-designed solutions to work, learn, and heal. CORE came together in January of 2009 assembling a team that has worked together for years, has considerable depth, and decades of industry knowledge. CORE team members have worked on many of the largest and most complex projects in the Valley. The principals of CORE lead a team of some of the most gifted Interior Designers, Account Executives and Project Coordinators. The CORE team is able to marry the competing elements of style, function and cost to deliver outstanding solutions for our clients. We are proud of what we've achieved... not just individually, but together. CORE, a commercial interi-



or design and furnishings company and Innovation Commercial Flooring, a commercial flooring contractor, announced their merger in November, creating an industry leader in commercial spaces in the Central Valley. The combined flooring entity operates under the name Innovation Flooring, a division of CORE. CORE's CEO, Tom Zimmerman, and President, Andrea Benson, continue to lead the team with the support of Wayne Goudreau as Vice President of the Flooring Division. This merger

enhances CORE's mission to broaden its service offering for its clients, while continuing to maintain its position as an industry leader in the market. Our work doesn't stop at the studio. As part of the Central Valley community, we find a way to connect support and philanthropy to almost every project. Every year, CORE engages in dozens of philanthropic efforts. We are especially proud of our work with CASA of Tulare County and the Central California Food Bank. Since the beginning, we

have donated nearly \$500,000, keeping this investment within the communities we serve.

Being a member of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce gives us an inside view of business life, not only in Visalia, but also in Tulare County as their reach and influence covers a large swath of the South Valley. As an Ambassador, I have the privilege of creating connections with other businesses and community members while attending Ribbon Cuttings, Mixers and an array of other events purposefully designed by the Chamber of Commerce to promote a vibrant business community.

We wish Visalia knew that CORE is a strong supporter of the Central Valley as a whole, with team members throughout the Tulare county region. From larger urban areas to rural agricultural communities, CORE is the Central Valley's furniture and flooring expert.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



United Health Centers hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening of their 4038 S. Mooney Blvd. location in Visalia.



In celebration of Family Services of Tulare County's 40th Anniversary, the organization hosted a ribbon cutting at their new location at 744 E. Douglas Ave.



Hadley-Marcom offers free aftercare concierge service

Full-circle aftercare helps families wrap up nonlegal estate issues after the funeral

Hadley-Marcom Funeral Chapel, with two locations in Tulare County, has announced that they now offer Full-Circle Aftercare at no charge to all the families they serve. Full-Circle Aftercare helps families with the little things that need to be

done after the loss of a loved one which can be emotionally taxing and difficult for families to complete.

"A recently-issued government report stated that 82% of widows and widowers who are receiving Social Security survivor benefits are actually entitled to a higher monthly benefit payment," said Eddie Pena, General Manager at Hadley Marcom. "In addition to helping with government benefits, the Full-Circle Aftercare program also covers finances, insurance, estate issues, and protection services." Instead of handing the grieving family a checklist of things to do, Full-Circle Aftercare personally walks the family through each step, makes all notifications for them, and assists in wrapping up the non-legal estate issues completely and correctly. It even stops junk mail. Full-Circle Aftercare takes a process that usually requires most families about 18 to 24 months to get completed. And on average, it's completed in one to two days with the family working with Full-Circle Aftercare directly.

"Losing a loved one isn't easy. The pain is compounded by dealing with the stress and worry of wrapping up the estate issues and notifications after the funeral service," added Pena. "Our Full-Circle Aftercare program helps take care of the necessary tasks for families, so they can mourn with their family and friends without having to worry about things being overlooked and forgotten."

About Hadley-Marcom Funeral Chapel: Hadley-Marcom Funeral Chapel has been serving Tulare County since 1892, offering burial or cremation services to all ethnic, cultural, and religious denominations with the same personal, yet professional service for over 125 years. To learn more, visit hadley-marcom.com.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS THE STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG

Congratulations to **4Creeks** who celebrated their 15th anniversary in June! To mark their celebration, the company launched a new logo.

Assistance League of Visalia will sponsor a back-to-school clothing event at JCPenney on July 30. Operation School Bell will also include a book and hygiene kit for Visalia Unified School District students.

American Care Hospice was recognized and awarded Gold in the 2023 The Fresno Bee Best of Central California, The People's Choice.



AMERICAN CARE HOSPICE

Casino partnered with California State University, Bakersfield, to provide scholarships to students and athletes. In addition, the



Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) welcomed a new provider, Anna Womack, PA-C to their family medicine team at Tulare Hillman health center. FHCN also revived Family Movie Night in June.

Eagle Mountain

ceeds go towards reaching their '40 for 40' campaign goal of \$40K in their 40th year.

Congratulations to **The Salad Shop** who celebrated 5 years in business in May!

Visalia Rescue Mission (VRM) hosted the 5 Diamonds Motorcycle Club for their 12th Annual Fundraiser benefiting VRM. Over

Casino announced a partnership with Stafford's Chocolates to bring locally crafted chocolates to guests at their new location. The chocolates are featured on desserts and a signature drink at the bar called "The Chocolate Martini" and assorted chocolates are sold at the Yokuts Coffee House.

Family Services of Tulare County launched their official 40th Anniversary t-shirt in June. All pro-



KAWEAH HEALTH

\$21,000 was raised.

Valley Children's Healthcare was one of only 25 hospitals in the U.S. on Money.com's Best Hospitals for Pediatrics list.

Kaweah Health celebrated their first employee to ever reach 50 years of service, Rosalie Goulbournne. They also hosted the 8th Annual Graduate Medical Education graduation in June, honoring 44 doctors from six specialties. Since its start 10 years ago, 42% of doctors have chosen to stay and serve in the Central Valley.

Component Coffee Lab hosted a birthday celebration in June marking 5 years for the business!

Valley Strong Credit Union sponsored **Visalia Emergency Aid's (VEA)** Turkey Trot event, allowing VEA to purchase over 39,000 pounds of nutritious foods and snacks to feed families with children, seniors, veterans, and an additional 1000 children during the Holiday Season.



THE SALAD SHOP



VALLEY STRONG CREDIT UNION



Tulare WIB gets over \$700K equity grant

A more even-handed approach to employment stands to make its way through Tulare County as the Workforce Investment Board seeks to spend over \$700,000 on equitable employment opportunities.

The Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County (WIB) has been awarded a grant of \$738,340 to support its efforts in developing a skilled workforce in the region. The funding will particularly focus on addressing employment gaps and providing access to quality jobs for disconnected youth in America and people with disabilities.

The grant, from state and federal agencies, will support the WIB's access to careers and employment (ACE) program. ACE will offer work-based learning, transitional jobs, on-the-job training and cohort-based training to disconnected youth and people with disabilities in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, transportation and logistics.

ACE is a collaborative effort that includes key partners such as Employment Connection of Tulare County, Community Services Employment Training (CSET) youth@work, Department of Rehabilitation of Visalia (DOR), Visalia, Tulare, and Porterville Adult Schools, South Valley Industrial Collaborative, Tulare-Kings Healthcare Partnership, Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE) youth@work and Ticket to Success and EDD Wagner Pysar Department.

A career coach will guide participants in identifying their career path and creating a plan that leads to a good quality job with livable wages. An integrated resource team will meet regularly to implement co-enrollments and co-case management strategies and provide a network of supportive services.

"We are committed to providing equitable access to training and quality jobs for all members of our community, and ACE is a critical step towards achieving that goal," Peck added.



Adventure awaits, but it won't wait forever.



VISALIA SCHOOL DISTRICT



MONKEY BUSINESS / ADOBE STOCK

I am prepared for the first day of school

As we start to think about the first day of school, we know there are a few key items on your mind as well as on the mind of our students. Several studies, including John Hopkins University, cite the following as best practices on starting school on the right foot: engage in conversations about the start of school, prepare and practice routines, and determine a plan for before and after school.

Communication - Talk to your child about school life and get to know your child's teacher(s). Several schools will offer an open house or have a welcome party before the start of school to help families connect with each other and connect students to their schools and teachers prior to the first day. This is also a great time to establish drop off and pick up locations with your child.

Routines - Routines are an essential part of everyday life. Make it fun by creating a to-do list on a whiteboard or creating a game. Leave enough time in your routine for your child to eat before school starts or to arrive at school when free breakfast is being served. If your child is walking to and from school, we urge you to walk with them during their first



few days of school, to help familiarize them with the route, and learn safety behaviors.

Bus Transportation - Families and students who depend on VUSD bus transportation will have a new communication platform beginning in August that will provide families with status updates on their students' bus. More details to come on the platform, however, we need all families to update their phone numbers and email addresses to receive updates. Families can update their information through PowerSchool.

Schools will soon begin to send out letters that may include a dress code, school supplies, and other important items. All elementary schools and K-8 Schools will have the same starting and end times (8:10 a.m. to 2:55 p.m.). Final bell schedules will come from each school site. We look forward to an exciting first day of school.



How do I learn more about Leadership Visalia?

Have questions or want to know if Leadership Visalia is the right program for you? Contact me directly to chat further! Applications are due July 31st.

How do I host a Ribbon Cutting?

We love celebrating with members! Are you a new member, recently relaunched your business, or are you celebrating a milestone anniversary? Contact me today to book a ribbon cutting.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message: Jena@visaliachamber.org



PAWS & Connect

NETWORKING UNLEASHED

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/PAWS

Visalia Chamber of Commerce Awards



The Visalia Chamber of Commerce celebrated its 68th Annual Awards Ceremony at the historic Fox Theater, recognizing outstanding businesses and individuals who have made a significant impact in the community. This prestigious event highlights accomplishments that exemplify excellence, innovation, and dedication to the betterment of Visalia.

The Annual Awards Ceremony honored achievements in various categories, including Non-Profit of the Year, Small Business of the Year, Medium Business of the Year, Large Business of the Year, Woman of the Year, and Man of the Year.

The journey from nominee to finalist in the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Awards is a remarkable achievement. Each year, the Chamber receives numerous nominations highlighting dedicated local businesses making a difference. A diligent committee carefully evaluates submissions and selects exceptional businesses in each category as finalists. Being recognized as a finalist demonstrates remarkable accomplishments, community impact, and commitment to excellence, setting these businesses apart as leaders in their fields.

Among the outstanding nonprofits recognized as finalists for the Nonprofit of the Year award were Able, Inc; Arts Visalia; California Service Dog Academy, and Salt and Light Works. Salt and Light Works emerged as the recipient of

the 2023 Nonprofit of the Year award for their unwavering commitment to empowering individuals facing adversity.

In the Small Business of the Year category, the finalists included Quesadilla Gorilla, Soccer City 1852 Visalia, The Sun Gazette, and Topograph. Topograph was named the 2023 Small Business of the Year for its dedication to helping other small businesses and growing a strong workforce.

The Medium Business of the Year category showcased the accomplishments of Echelon Security Group Inc, QK, Singlepoint Outsourcing, Inc., and Valley Strong Credit Union. QK received the 2023 Medium Business of the Year award for its 50-year history of developing this community and its people through engineering, land surveying, and planning services.

The Large Business of the Year category featured impressive finalists, including California Water Service, Eagle Mountain Casino, Orthopaedic Associates Medical Clinic, Inc, and Visalia Rawhide. California Water Service, known as Cal Water, was announced as the 2023 Large Business of the Year for deep involvement through its employees to support various community organizations and nonprofits.

Sarah Ashoori was honored as the 2023 Woman of the Year for her philanthropic endeavors and exceptional leadership in supporting local nonprofits.

Marty Zeeb, a native Visalian, received the 2023 Man of the Year award for his dedication to improving Visalia and his long-standing support of community organizations.

Board Chair Garth Gipson highlighted the Visalia Chamber's remarkable growth, with a 25% increase in membership and a 90% retention rate. This reflects the value and support the Chamber provides to local businesses.

Chamber President and CEO Gail Zurek emphasized the Chamber's role in advocating for important business issues and promoting smart ordinances. The organization fights commercial property crimes, ensures access to state funding for water systems, and opposes legislation that hampers business operations.

The Visalia Chamber expressed gratitude to sponsors, including Elite Medical as the Title Sponsor, and recognized the dedication of its staff, volunteers, and board members in making the event a success.

The 68th Annual Awards Celebration provided an opportunity to reflect on the Chamber's accomplishments and express gratitude to its members. The event celebrated the resilience and commitment of the local business community in making Visalia a thriving place to live and work.

For more information about the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, please visit www.visaliachamber.org.





Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

Kaweah Health, like all hospitals across California and the nation, is continuing to face difficult financial times driven largely by record-setting inflationary costs, but we continue to provide the best care possible to our community as our employees and leaders rise to the challenges with determination and resilience.



I have continued to work with our legislators on solutions to the funding challenges faced by Kaweah Health and many other hospitals. With the passing of SB/AB 112, we saw a positive signal that the State has recognized the seriousness of the plight community and rural hospitals face across California. The \$150 million Distressed Hospital Loan Program is a step in the right direction to helping at-risk hospitals get back on solid footing, and it is a sign that lawmakers are listening, but more help will be needed to fix the problems hospitals are confronting. The \$1.5 billion appropriation requested by the California Hospital Association was not included in the 2024 State budget, and a multi-year managed care organization tax proposed by the Governor will likely not provide any immediate relief to hospitals.

Another bill we are keeping a close eye on is SB 525, which passed the Senate on May 31. The bill would require a minimum wage of \$25 per hour for healthcare workers beginning June 1 2025. We are concerned about the potential financial impact on not just the hospital, but on the community as well if SB 525 is passed. On a state level, the bill will add \$9-13 billion in annual costs to hospitals and would increase costs to Kaweah Health by about \$25 million annually. The consequences could be catastrophic for many hospitals, resulting in the closing of services, outsourcing of certain jobs, or shutting down altogether. On a local level, businesses would have to raise their wages or potentially lose employees to Kaweah Health in sectors like housekeeping, security, maintenance, food service,

KNOPF

Continued from page 1

was the chief financial officer (CFO) to his CEO.

"We manage our ownership transition, and our leadership transition as kind of an active part of our overall strategy as a company," Knopf said.

As Chairman Emeritus, Knopf will continue to influence QK's strategic direction, advising now CEO Ron Wathen, CFO, Amber Aguayo and the QK Board. According to a press release from QK, this honor recognizes Knopf's unwavering commitment and outstanding contributions to the growth and stability of QK, as well as his impact on the broader community. His guidance will be invaluable in nurturing the next generation of QK leadership and driving the continuity of the firm's strategic initiatives.

"We are grateful for Mike's unyielding dedication and exceptional leadership," Wathen said in a press release. "As Chairman Emeritus, we are thrilled that he will continue to provide his wisdom and mentorship to the QK team."

Knopf said he has a tremendous amount of confidence in the new leadership of the company he helped build. Knopf said sometimes a product of the present age is a better leader than a product of a former age, in which he is of the

ladder. And though it is not always the case when there is a changing of the guard, Knopf knows his company is in good hands.

"I truly appreciate, and I have just the most amazing, utmost confidence in the current management team there," Knopf said. "I've often said, when I stepped down and Ron and Amber replaced me, I felt like the company for this day in time, really got an upgrade."

Knopf first began his transition to retirement in 2018 when he stepped out of his role as CEO and went to a shorter work week. As Wathen took over as CEO, Knopf was still working in the office and he said he was able to focus on more specialized areas to support management and the company. After a year, he retired from the office completely, but continued his role as chairman of the board as an outside member. As he was prepared to take a full step into retirement this year, he discovered the company wanted him to maintain a connection to the firm as Chairman Emeritus.

"They wanted to keep me available and connected with the company as well as to provide kind of a lifetime honor for my career, rather than having me just sort of disappear off the back door," Knopf said. "So it was quite an honor."

HEALTH NOTE

transportation, and more. I encourage the Chamber to take a close look at SB 525 and consider opposing it to help protect our local economy.

Regardless of these challenges, I look forward to continuing to work with our legislators to bring more funding and higher Medi-Cal reimbursement rates. In the meantime, I will continue to do television, radio, and newspaper interviews, all for the purpose of spreading this message and helping secure vital financial resources for Kaweah Health and all California hospitals.

Here at the hospital, the steps we have taken to reduce our costs and increase our revenue are working. Our total losses in January through March shrank to about \$3 million, and we are optimistic that these efforts will continue pushing us back into the black in the coming months. Our ability to come together as an organization to solve new challenges is a testament to the leadership throughout our hospital and the resilience and determination of our employees.

While we set our sights on improving the healthcare landscape in which we operate, we continue to improve the quality of healthcare in our community with our services, facilities, and partnerships. The new Kaweah Health Center for Mental Wellness on Noble Avenue in Visalia is hard at work, offering individual, marriage, family, and child and adolescent therapy to the community. A new medical clinic in the Visalia Industrial Park of northwest Visalia is scheduled to open in September, bringing needed access to services to the western edge of town. Our partnerships with Stanford Health's cardiothoracic program, USC's urology program, and the Cleveland Clinic's Heart & Vascular Institute, have bolstered the already-outstanding specialty care available to the area. Our long-standing partnership with Valley Children's Medical Group has elevated the level of pediatric care available in the area.

The people of Tulare County can do a lot to help support quality healthcare close to home by taking advantage of the great primary and specialty care, labs, and testing available locally. When people receive care at Kaweah Health, it is an investment in the community because we are here to serve the people of Tulare County first and foremost. As we move into the new fiscal year, Kaweah Health's leadership and employees will persist in meeting the challenges we face and setting our sights on growing stronger and emerging as a better organization.

Experience

With over 40 years of experience, as a civil engineer, land surveyor and business owner, as well as 24 years as a "QKer," his wisdom and leadership have been instrumental in the growth and development of QK. He explained that throughout the several decades he has been working in the industry, he has seen a multitude of changes from things such as computers coming to use, to changes in how public policy is handled.

Knopf said when he started, there was a lot more engagement on the part of engineers, the public and advocacy groups before a project was completed, whereas in today's day-and-age that is not so much the case. He said he encourages everyone in his company to be involved with their community in more ways than simply through their work.

One of the things Knopf said he is most proud of is when he was able to co-chair a campaign for the Visalia Unified School District and help get a bond measure passed.

He was able to get a group of individuals together who were the "most visible and active proponents and critics" of the bond measure. Once everyone was able to sit in a room and discuss the issues, and discover the facts and truths of what the district needed, Knopf said they were able to get the information

out to the public. Eventually the bond measure passed allowing the district to build a \$120 million worth of buildings.

"That was a huge effort, it took a long time, but just taking again an analytical kind of an engineering approach and problem solving approach able to get two sides that were very emotionally divided...and get them to center around a common solution that they could all campaign for, I was very proud of that," Knopf said.

The business

Knopf Engineering began and was once headquartered in Visalia. However, Knopf said since the merger, the company really began to grow. According to the press release from QK, his visionary leadership and trailblazing spirit have steered QK through both high and low points, including the tumultuous period of the Great Recession. Despite the various speed bumps any company can go through, they remained strong and with the times.

They originally had about four locations, and that has now grown to be a regional company with offices up and down the state and many remote workers. This year, QK won the Visalia Chamber of Commerce medium business of the year award, as well as City of Clovis Chamber of Commerce business of the year award.

SHUTTLE

Continued from page 1

impact to their travel itinerary."

Though the shuttle is not operating to take passengers into the park, the internal park shuttle, known as the Sequoia Shuttle, will continue to operate daily from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. This shuttle is available for individuals who are able to transport themselves up the mountain and offers transport from landmark to landmark. Bowman said Crescent Meadows, Moro Rock, Giant Forest Museum, lower Sherman Tree, Wolverton, upper Sherman Tree parking lot, Lodgepole area and Wuksachi are all serviced by the internal shuttles.

"You can park and leave your vehicle all day and then you utilize our shuttles to get to the main attractions," Bowman said.

Additional updates on Visalia Transit's Sequoia Shuttle service will be made available on social media @sequoiashuttle and at www.sequoiashuttle.com. For questions or more information, individual can call the Visalia Transit Sequoia Shuttle line at 1-877-287-4435.

The shuttle service is a seasonal service typically offered off and on throughout the year. Both the Gateway Shuttle and the Sequoia Shuttle typically run from the Thursday before Memorial Day through the Sunday after Labor Day according to Bowen. The Sequoia Shuttle also typically operates Thanksgiving through the following Sunday and again from Christmas Eve through New Year's Day, depending on weather conditions; however, the Gateway does not operate during the Thanksgiving and Christmas season.

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