

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 9 | September 2023

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EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 14 Business After Hours

Time: 4 to 6 p.m.
 Location: World Wide Sires
 5545 Avenida de los Robles, Visalia

SEPTEMBER 21 Oktoberfest

Time: 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.
 Location: Vossler Farms

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK FOR DATES Coffee & Conversation with Your Chamber CEO-Facebook Live

Time: 8 a.m.

TRAVEL WITH US

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



DUSKO / ADOBE STOCK

Minimum wage in California will increase from \$15.50 to \$16 in January as part of legislation allowing the state finance director to adjust the rate annually for inflation.

Minimum wage hike challenges local business growth

Increase in state minimum wage creates complicated considerations for the Central Valley's small business community



The Sun-Gazette

Serena Bettis
 Reporter
 The Sun-Gazette

California's hourly minimum wage will increase once again this coming January, from \$15.50 to \$16, and a 2024 ballot measure could lead to an even greater hike within the next few years.

The increase, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2024, will impact all businesses regardless of staff size, and the minimum annual salary for full-time exempt employees will also increase from \$64,480 to \$66,560. Gail Zurek, president and CEO of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, said that while beneficial in some

aspects, the increase brings about additional challenges for local businesses.

"I think it's important to say that on the surface, everybody wants our neighbor and community to have a wage that allows them to have housing and food and provide for their families," Gail Zurek, president and CEO of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, said. "That has never been an argument that businesses have had. The challenge comes in the details."

Local impact

In the Central Valley's unique landscape, a minimum wage increase can have a different effect than other parts of California.

"It definitely impacts small businesses as far as eating into their

profit margins, but typically what I think happens is ... it will go back to the consumer," Erik Valencia, president and CEO of the Greater Reedley Chamber of Commerce, said. "It does make it difficult because some businesses don't want to raise the prices on their customers."

Valencia said that the region may see a greater impact because it tends to have more small businesses than other parts of the state. Smaller businesses mean that cost increases take up a larger percentage of their bottom line compared to those of bigger retailers.

"Particularly, (in) a state with the fifth largest economy in the world, when you make one blanket statement for a state this large and this diverse, many communities aren't considered in that conversation," Zurek said.

For Sam Ramirez, owner and operator of Revel Events Co. in Visalia, the minimum wage increases haven't always translated to the amount they are able to charge clients, so there is sometimes concern with how they are going to accommodate the wage increases.

He added that Revel Events pays all of their employees above minimum wage to start with, and the increases make it more difficult for them to remain competitive.

Increasing the minimum wage gives people more buying power, but that's not the full picture. For any employer, a wage increase incurs larger costs than just what's going into the employee's pocket because they also have to pay into things like worker's compensation insurance, unemployment insurance and other payroll taxes.

Ramirez said that small businesses in general can be "crushed by the amount of taxes" it takes to operate, and "anytime that tax rate

See WAGE on page 2

Get a taste of autumn at Oktoberfest

Visalia Chamber of Commerce prepares to host their annual Oktoberfest on Sept. 21

The Sun-Gazette Staff Report

Prepare your gullet and grab your ID, because Oktoberfest is back for its 10th year at Vossler Farms and is arriving just in time for cooler, double-digit weather.

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce has officially announced that tickets are now on sale for their hit event Oktoberfest, which will be held on Sept. 21, starting at 5:30 p.m. For anyone that doesn't have a calendar handy, the 21st is a Thursday, which marks a return to prior years, as the event has been held on Friday for over a decade.

"We've moved it to a Thursday this year...in response to Vossler Farms really growing," said Gail Zurek, the chief executive officer of the chamber.

The reason for this is simple: Vossler Farms' business has grown exponentially since they began hosting the event in 2013, which required the chamber of commerce to hold it earlier in the season.

"When we started out at Vossler, they were young and new, and they used Oktoberfest as a way to kick off their pumpkin patch," she said. "Since then, they [Vossler Farms] have become so big and so popular that we've had to move it up a week."

See OKTOBERFEST on page 3



KREGER PHOTOGRAPHY

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Networking is for the dogs



Gail Zurek
 President and CEO
 Visalia Chamber

We all know that networking is often seen as a necessary evil, like eating your veggies before dessert. For many, networking can sometimes feel like entering a room full of strangers armed with nothing but your business cards and an optimistic

smile. It's a challenge most of us don't exactly relish. But here's the thing – connections are the lifeblood of any successful business. Whether it's finding new clients, potential partners, or collaborators, having a solid network can open doors you never even knew existed.

Networking is also helpful when you're new in town. Making connections beyond work helps connect you with others with similar interests or passions. A good friend said that once she was out of school, making friends seemed really hard. Networking is that link to finding "your people."

So, what if networking could be fun, relaxed, and downright adorable? Enter Paws & Connect, Networking Unleashed, a game-changing concept that brings together the worlds of business and furry companions in a beneficial and delightful tail-wagging way. Imagine making those vital connections while your four-legged best friend is beside you. No longer unsure how to begin a conversation? Dogs are built-in conversation starters at Paws & Connect, meaning no more awkward networking.

How does it all work? Simple. You can bring your furry buddy to the event, creating an instant icebreaker that's as furry and friendly as possible. Let's face it: dogs have an uncanny ability to make people feel at ease, and when barriers drop, conversations flow naturally. That

potential client or collaborator you've wanted to approach? Your canine companion might give you that extra nudge to strike up a conversation.

For those of you who prefer to be the center of attention (and who doesn't love a bit of spotlight?), you can set up your own business booth at the event. Booth space allows others to come to you, learn about your business, and make connections directly. It is a fantastic way to make an impression and start meaningful conversations without feeling like you're playing a high-stakes networking game. It creates a wonderful visual reminder of your business.

Plus, this is different from your typical stuffy conference room affair. Paws & Connect is outdoors at Valley Strong Ballpark. On October 24th, the fall evening will be filled with wagging tails, happy barks, and a relaxed vibe that encourages genuine connections. You'll find yourself chatting about business strategies while playfully tossing a tennis ball for your dog – now that's a scenario we can all get behind.

So, how can you be part of this tail-wagging extravaganza? Head over to visaliachamber.org/paws to get all the juicy details, including tickets, booth space, and sponsorship. Mark your calendars, bring your pooch, and get ready to meet like-minded individuals in a setting that's as comfortable as your favorite pair of slippers.

Networking might not always be our favorite activity, but it's undeniably essential for business growth. With Paws & Connect, the Visalia Chamber is giving you a new way to embrace networking – one that involves furry friends, easy conversations, and a whole lot of fun. So, get ready to unleash your network potential and create connections to drive your business forward. We can't wait to see you and your four-legged pals there – tails and all!

CITY UPDATE

Mobile food vendor resources

Seeking information on mobile food vendors in Visalia? The City of Visalia's Neighborhood Preservation Division is here to help small vendors operate legally and successfully. In fact, we recently released our Code Enforcement "A Guide For Better Visalia Communities - Mobile Food Vendor Guide" outlining how to get started, how to operate legally, and with details on helpful resources.

For those new to the concept from a municipal perspective, a mobile food vendor refers to a person who is engaged in the sale of foods from a truck, trailer or other movable wheeled equipment during specified hours of operation. Certain permits and certificates are required in order to operate legally. By obtaining these permits, vendors demonstrate their commitment to operating cleanly and safely, and ensuring the health of customers.

To get started on the local level, a Business Tax Certificate is required, available from the City and a Temporary Conditional Use Permit may be required. Depending on where the vendor is located, a Stationary/Mobile Vendor Permit may need to be obtained as well. Moving up to the State



and Federal level, at least one employee must be certified in food safety and of course, all businesses are required to file State income taxes. In order to operate legally, vendors must abide by the requirements such as temperature control, hygiene and identification signs, as determined by the Tulare County Division of Environmental Health.

While the process contains a series of steps, the City of Visalia aims to provide the necessary resources and information for mobile food vendors to meet the requirements to operate legally, minimize the risk of foodborne illnesses, and succeed in their business.

Code Enforcement's "A Guide For Better Visalia Communities - Mobile Food Vendor Guide" is available online now in both English and Spanish at www.visalia.city/code under "Helpful Links."

For questions for more information, contact City of Visalia Code Enforcement at (559) 713-4187 or email community-feedback@visalia.city.

For more information on City of Visalia, visit www.visalia.city or visit them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn @CityofVisalia.



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
 CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
 CST #2048841-40

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



BofA awards \$90K in grants to nonprofits serving Tulare County

Bank of America recently awarded \$90,000 in grants to four nonprofits serving Tulare County. Two of the grants were aimed at supporting workforce training programs that help diversify and upskill the region's workforce to help business owners find qualified employees.

Community Services Employment Training (CSET) received a \$30,000 grant to provide youth internship stipends to help youth in CSET's six programs overcome barriers to success through education, mentorships, life skills and work experience. The bank provided a \$15,000 grant to GRID Alternatives to help provide entry-level solar installation training to low-income residents in the region, including Tulare County.

In addition, two grants were aimed at providing for basic needs.

The Visalia Emergency Aid Council received \$15,000 to help fund food programs aimed at the working poor in Tulare County, and the Central California Food Bank received \$30,000 to help fund its innovative Groceries to Go program that serves over 4,000 people in the region, including families in Tulare County.

In all, these four nonprofit organizations have received over \$315,000 in grants from Bank of America over the years. Grants are designed to address issues fundamental to economic mobility, including workforce development and education, community development, and basic needs.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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Visit www.visaliachamber.org

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Name: Randy Wasnick
Company: 4Creeks, 4CG Construction, Topograph, Sentinel, Artemis
Title: Director

Why do you serve on the Chamber Board of Directors?

I want to give back to the community that has blessed me for many years. Being on the Board of Directors is an opportunity to serve the community and businesses in a new way. I'm excited and feel honored to use my time, effort and resources to help make Visalia a better place.

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

Being part of the Chamber provides us a platform to include the community around us, in all that we do. This past month we celebrated 4Creeks' 15 year anniversary as a company, and it was a great moment to look out in the crowd during our event and see so many chamber members celebrating with us.

What's your favorite holiday?

Christmas. I'm definitely one of those guys playing Christmas songs/carols on November 1st (much to the chagrin of those in my office). As soon as Halloween is over, it's all about Christmas (sorry Thanksgiving but you are merely on borrowed time).

What's your favorite family tradition?

Attending Reno Hot August Nights Car Show (the first weekend of every August).



SUBMITTED PHOTO

We've attended since I was 13 and have enjoyed it ever since. I along with my family have a passion for classic cars, and being able to work on them is rewarding (my dad and grandfather are much more knowledgeable than I am-I try). It's awesome and something I look forward to every year.

Is your glass half full or half empty?

I'm definitely a glass "half full" kind of person. Going into business with my partners in 2008 during a recession taught me that good people and learning/growth opportunities are out there. I am a firm believer that worry, and negativity require much more effort, and take up way too much space in my mind. I've been blessed and able to surround myself with good people and systems, making it much easier to stay positive. I'm truly blessed with an awesome team both at home and at work, that makes viewing things as "half full" a no-brainer in my mind.

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

Name: Mary Escalera
Company: Texas Roadhouse
Title: Local Store Marketer

How has the chamber and the Ambassador Program helped you or your business to grow?

The Ambassador Program has helped me network with other businesses and professionals in the community which have furthered help strengthen new and existing business relationships. I'm able to share with them all the things Texas Roadhouse has to offer like our Partners in Education, Fundraising for local sports teams/non-profit organizations and most are unaware of our business partnership opportunities and co-branding gift-card advertising. The Chamber Ambassador program has opened up new opportunities for us and let's me share with them all the numerous information that Texas Roadhouse has.

Why is it important to employees to get involved in the Visalia Chamber programs and events?

Being involved in the community has always been important to me and I love that Texas Roadhouse does too. Being a member of the Visalia Chamber Programs has given me access to business leaders in the community and has helped me learn more about businesses in our neighborhoods and has allowed me to share our story and the mission Texas Roadhouse has.

The best part of working for your company is...?

It's definitely our Core Values; Passion, Partnership, Integrity, and Fun with Purpose. These Core Values form the foundation of who we are as a company and how we interact with respect, appreciation, and fairness towards one another every day. My most favorite thing as a LSM is going to local businesses and organizations with Fresh-Baked Bread and other goodies as I get to share our story.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

The BRAVE Project Visalia

BANNERS RECOGNIZING & ACKNOWLEDGING VISALIANS ENLISTED



Name: Dustin Cole
Company: The Brave Project Visalia
Title: Executive Director

The BRAVE Project Visalia aims to honor and appreciate the selflessness and dedication of our local service members who are serving our country both at home and abroad. We believe that there is no better time than the present to celebrate and recognize these inspiring individuals.

We are dedicated to showing our appreciation for those currently serving in the five branches of the Armed Forces through the installation of military banners across the city. Thus far, we have proudly installed over 400 banners in Visalia.

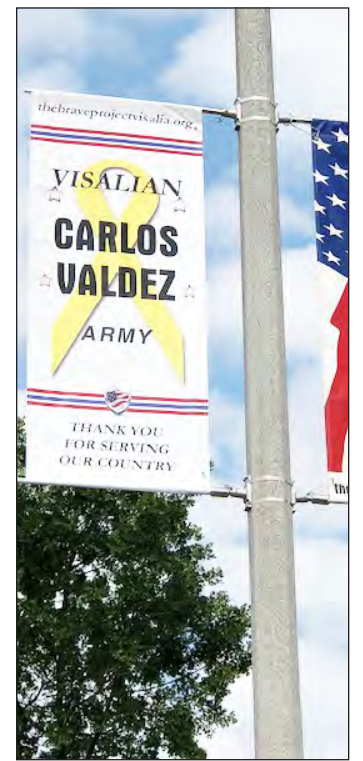
Not only do we celebrate those currently serving, we also recently started honoring Veterans. Akers & Goshen is Named Veterans Avenue of Heroes, this is where we have started the process of honoring those who have served. We can be seen at many local events, providing information about what we do, Parades car shows, military appreciation events. Veterans Flag Day, etc.

The Best part of providing this service to the community is to see the joy and pride it brings to the families and service members and also the community at large, when people find out what I do they express their love and admiration for the project.

The Chamber has allowed me to take The Brave Project Visalia to a new level of exposure, with countless resources and contacts that have opened many doors to which I have gained support. The Brave Project Visalia will work with families who may want to obtain a banner, but are dealing with financial difficulties. Please check out thebraveprojectvisalia.org for more information.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS



WAGE

Continued from page 1

is affected, it's got to give somewhere else in that business."

Zurek said that as it becomes more expensive to employ people, it "forces employers to figure out how to do more with less." She added that employers may reduce their labor size, which often "squeezes out" youth labor.

"It also means that employers have to be thoughtful about how they grow," Zurek said. "Bringing somebody on is a much more expensive piece."

Ramirez said with a labor-driven business like his, they have to look at how to be more efficient in their growth. The minimum wage increase—among other economic factors—informs the choices they make around investing in the business and investing locally, he said.

"We would love to be able to

grow and add some additional resources inside the company, but because of uncertainty around supply chain, cost of goods, minimum wage—there's so many factors that we just can't forecast—it makes us really hold back and think ... because we just don't know what it's going to look like," Ramirez said.

Valencia and Zurek said that local businesses always want to ensure people have a living wage, but current conditions make business operations more challenging.

"We have such a diverse business community ... I think it makes it really hard to apply those standards across the board," Ramirez said.

Where it came from

California Department of Finance director Joe Stephenson announced and certified the increase on July 31, as re-

quired by the state's labor code. The requirement was part of an amendment to the labor code passed by the state legislature in 2016 that phased in the \$15 minimum wage.

The labor code stipulates that once minimum wage for all employers is above \$15, the state finance director must determine annually before Aug. 1 whether or not the minimum wage needs to be adjusted for inflation.

If that is the case, the wage is increased by the smaller of two calculations: either 3.5% of the current minimum, or by the rate of change reported in the averages of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the most recent fiscal year over the fiscal year before it.

Basically, the state compares inflation rates—how much the cost of consumer goods has gone up—from the last two years to assess the need for a minimum wage increase. If the rate of change in the CPI averages as negative, the minimum wage does not change. If the rate of change is less than 3.5%, that rate is used to calculate the minimum wage increase.

According to the determination and certification Stephenson submitted to the state, the department of finance calculated that the United States Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (U.S. CPI-W) "for the 12-month period from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, increased by 6.16% compared to the 12-month period from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022."

Because 6.16% is larger than 3.5%, the increase was based on 3.5% of the current minimum wage and rounded to the nearest 10 cents, making the new minimum wage an even \$16.

Where it's going

Also of concern for local businesses is a measure that will appear on the 2024 state ballot, known as the "Living Wage Act of 2022."

If passed, the initiative would amend the labor code to extend the phased minimum wage increase to reach \$18 by Jan. 1, 2026.

The initiative proposes to increase the minimum wage for employers with 26 or more employees to \$17 by Jan. 1, 2024, and \$18 by Jan. 1, 2025, and to increase the minimum wage for employers with 25 or fewer employees to \$16 by Jan. 1, 2024, \$17 by Jan. 1, 2025 and \$18 by Jan. 1, 2026.



It's time to Fetch Some New Connections!



NETWORKING UNLEASHED



visaliachamber.org/paws



Cutler-Orosi Back to School Health Fair in August, handing out 500 backpacks.

Zeltmacher Structural Design Engineering, Inc. announced employee Heladio Ceballos became a licensed professional engineer in August. He has been with the company since 2014.

The **Visalia Police Department** partner with **Kaweah Health's** Pediatric Unit by visiting healthcare staff and uplifting the spirits of hospitalized children.

Eagle Mountain Casino hosted a Season Kickoff Party in August, featuring television action, radio host, and host of "Access Hollywood", Mario Lopez. The event was hosted at the Redwood Tap-house.

Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers hosted a fundraiser in August, with 15% of proceeds donated to Maui Relief.

The Sequoia Community Corps, a division of **CSET** launched the Giant Sequoia Emergency Response Grant, an initiative geared towards protecting the majestic Giant Sequoias in the Sequoia National Forest.

Pita Kabob was featured on **ABC30's** "Dine & Dish" segment in August.



VISALIA POLICE DEPARTMENT AND KAWEAH HEALTH



PITA KABOB AND ABC30

COS makes Forbes' Top 100 as a 'best small employer'

Visalia's College of the Sequoias ranks 97 in the top 100 of Forbes' America's Best Small Employers list for 2023



Brock Linebaugh
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

The College of the Sequoias (COS) was just named one of the top 300 best small employers in America by Forbes, ranking in at number 97. While skeptical at first, the faculty was nothing but excited once they learned how thorough the ranking system was.

"You just never know what the validity of some of the articles that are put out, or how legitimate (their) data is," said Lauren Fishback, the school's marketing and public relations director. "We were really excited once we found out more information."

The news first broke at the facility when a member of the staff brought the article to the attention of Brent R. Calvin, the president of the school. While members of the community had mentioned it previously, the staff didn't really believe it until they did some digging.

"We like to kind of look at and dive a little bit deeper as to what measurements are being used to determine this information," Fish-

See COS on page 4

Bank of the Sierra awards \$40K to Self-Help Enterprises

Bank of the Sierra is proud to announce it donated \$40,000 to Visalia-based Self-Help Enterprises (SHE) through its Sierra Grant Program. The donation was one of several grants awarded during the second quarter of 2023 to local nonprofit organizations in the Bank's footprint. Since the program's inception, more than \$3.8 million has been awarded.

The \$40,000 grant is one of the largest Bank of the Sierra has funded as part of its Sierra Grant Program. The grant will support Self-Help Enterprises' initiatives, including affordable housing, homeownership, housing rehabilitation, sustainable energy, and emergency services including water access. More details on SHE's programs are as follows:

Build your own home: SHE's staff supervises construction for eight to 12 families who have agreed to help build each other's homes. Family members pour foundations, install wiring, lay tile, and more for each new house as part of the construction process. **Housing Rehabilitation:** Deferred payment loans make essential repairs to older homes possible. These fixes may include electrical, plumbing, and roofing repairs. **Sustainable energy solutions:** SHE's Sustainable Energy Solutions Team connects disadvantaged communities to resources that provide access to affordable energy and clean transportation infrastructure. **Emergency services:** Vulnerable populations receive education about natural disasters, including flood, fire, earthquake, and pandemic preparations. Families are helped with water well replace-



ment, water filtration, and access to clean water.

"Self-Help Enterprises is thrilled to have the support of Bank of the Sierra," said SHE CEO Tom Collishaw. "This grant will help us produce more high-quality affordable housing and help residents access clean drinking water in the Central Valley."

"We want to help make every community that we're a part of better," said Kevin McPhaill, Bank of the Sierra President and Chief Executive Officer. "That includes investing in organizations like Self-Help Enterprises that help our communities every day through housing and clean water programs."

About Self-Help Enterprises

Self-Help Enterprises is a nationally recognized community development organization whose mission is to work together with low-income families to build and sustain healthy homes and communities. Since 1965, SHE's efforts have touched the lives of over 65,000 families. The organization has helped more than 6,200 families build their own homes, rehabilitated over 6,300 unsafe homes, developed over 1,300 units of affordable rental housing, and has provided technical

assistance for reliable access to safe drinking water and sanitary sewer infrastructures to more than 160 small communities. SHE's commitment to providing resources and training for individuals builds highly effective leaders in communities that also promote collaborative solutions for improving communities.

About the Sierra Grant Program

Since its inception in 2004, the Sierra Grant Program has been responsible for donating over \$3.8 million to organizations that improve local communities. For more information, visit the bank's website at BankoftheSierra.com/SierraGrant.

About Bank of the Sierra

Bank of the Sierra is in its 46th year of operations and is the largest independent bank headquartered in the South San Joaquin Valley. Bank of the Sierra is a community-centric regional bank, which offers a broad range of retail and commercial banking services through full-service branches located within the counties of Tulare, Kern, Kings, Fresno, Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara. The Bank also maintains an online branch and provides specialized lending services through agricultural credit centers in Templeton, and a loan production office in Roseville. Bank of the Sierra was recognized as one of the strongest and top-performing community banks in the country, with a 5-star rating from Bauer Financial.



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN / THE SUN-GAZETTE

College of the Sequoias students walking under the patio.

OKTOBERFEST

Continued from page 1

While this may sound like a hindrance, Zurek looks at it as a job well done.

"It's a good problem to have, because it means we've partnered with a good local business, and that business is growing, the community supports it," she said. "Prior to being out at Vossler, it was actually on a Thursday, so it's a return to that."

Speaking of things returning, the event will largely be the same as it has in previous years. Aside from the changing of days, Oktoberfest will carry on its tradition as a celebration of community, food and beer.

"There's good bands, the beer is always great and there's great food," Zurek said. "It's just good to be around people, and hear people happy."

Last year, the event sold out of their 1,500 tickets, which Zurek predicts will happen again this year.

"You know, it's pretty exciting [because] it's such a fan favorite," she said. "We sell out every year. People just love being at a Pumpkin Festival, they love that farm vibe for a better word."

Due to how much the community has enjoyed the festival in past years, Zurek recommends buying tickets now, especially since they'll be discounted until Sept. 8.

"So right now we have an early bird special ticket price," she said. "In September, tickets are raised. They'll go from \$55 to \$60."

To get tickets, residents can visit the Visalia Chamber of Commerce's web site, where information about the festival can be found under the events tab.



What's Paws & Connect?

This new Chamber event is designed for young professionals, business owners, and individuals seeking to promote their businesses. Contact **Charlie Saponara** for more info on how your company can be a part of this event!

Is it too late to sign up to be a vendor at Oktoberfest?

No! Contact our office to learn more about how to participate. This event exposes your business to 1,500+ attendees! You don't want to miss out on this marketing opportunity.

Have a question about the Chamber?

Send me a message:
Jena@visaliachamber.org

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OKTOBERFEST
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 21
BEER · MUSIC · FOOD
VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Budweiser
VOSSLER Farms
VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/OKTOBERFEST

Adventure awaits.
but it won't wait forever.

TRAVEL WITH US
VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Trips presented by Collette Vacations (CST#: 2006766-20) and Chamber Explorations (CST#: 2048841.40)
Visit Our Website For More
visaliachamber.org/travel

Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



California Water earns Great Place to Work Certification for 8th consecutive year

In recognition of the utility's commitment to its employees, the Great Place to Work Institute has named California Water Service Group (Group) (NYSE: CWT) a Great Place to Work for the eighth year in a row. The Great Place to Work award is based entirely on what current employees say about their experience working at the company.

The two-part certification includes a Culture Audit and a Trust Index. All full-time employees were asked about their experiences, and the results were compared to other top

U.S. workplaces to determine the company's placement.

Over the past year, while continuing to focus on keeping team members safe and healthy from the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses, Group returned to more in-person collaboration opportunities and employee-related celebrations, events that helped foster camaraderie and boost team morale. The company also expanded its employee communications program to keep team members throughout its five states better informed and engaged.

Additionally, Group enhanced

its already robust benefits package by offering a new "at-risk pay" (ARP) plan to its employees; it is a component of the company's total compensation strategy that is paid on top of employees' existing salary.

The ARP plan, which supports the company's "One Team, Same Direction" philosophy, is based on achievement of local and company-wide performance metrics and allows participating employees to share in the success of the company.

"Our purpose as a company is to enhance the quality of life for not only our customers and communities, but also our employees, and we are honored to again be named a Great Place to Work," said Martin A. Kropelnicki, Group Chairman and CEO. "Earning this certification for the eighth consecutive year tells us that our efforts are meaningful to our team members, which is important be-



cause when we take care of our employees, they can focus on taking care of our customers and communities."

"The Great Place to Work certification is a highly coveted achievement that requires consistent and intentional dedication to the overall employee experience," said Sarah Lewis. Kulin, Vice President of Global Recognition at Great Place to Work. "By successfully earning this recognition, it is evident that California Water Service Group stands out as one of the top companies to work for, providing a great workplace environment for its employees."

California Water Service Group invites job seekers to pursue a career with a purpose-driven company, dedicated to improving the quality of life for the 2 million people it serves, by visiting www.calwatergroup.com/careers.

RIBBON CUTTINGS



Miller Memorial Chapel hosted a ribbon cutting in honor of their newly modernized Brooks Hall. They can be contacted at (559) 732-8371.



In celebration of Teaspoon-Visalia's grand opening on August 5th, a ribbon cutting was hosted at their 3229 S Mooney Blvd location.



Holvik Family Health Center hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony. Located at 221 E Caldwell Ave, the center is now accepting new patients. They can be contacted at (559) 732-4726.



Valley Oak Credit Union located at 600 W Main St hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their mural, dedicated to the community of Visalia.

Elimination of cash payments in the field

Due to the economic hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in March of 2020 California utilities including SoCalGas implemented a moratorium on disconnecting residential customers with unpaid bills. SoCalGas resumed collections activity for Non-Residential customers early this year, and resumed collections activity for Residential customers on August 4, 2023.

Collections are attempted by letter, email, phone, and in-person at customer's homes. To enhance the safety of SoCalGas employees who visit customers' homes for collection purposes, as of August 23, 2023, SoCalGas field employees will no longer accept cash, checks, or money orders ("cash payments") for the payment of bills.

However, SoCalGas field employees can assist customers in paying their bill through a variety of options:

- My Account - online payment portal
- Customer Contact Center - customers can set up



- BillMatrix - facilitates customer credit card and debit card payments

As always, customers can also pay in person at SoCalGas payment offices or authorized payment locations, or pay by phone, email, direct debit, debit/credit card, or home banking.

Additionally, SoCalGas continues to provide assistance options to avoid disconnections, including extended payment plans and debt forgiveness through the Arrearage Management Plan.

Working with customers to make bill payment easy is part of how SoCalGas innovates better than any other energy infrastructure company in North America.

COS

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back said. "Once we dove deeper into the details, we were like 'oh wow, they did a great job!'"

Forbes' ranking system drew from a pool of 10,000 small businesses, identifying them by the number of employees they had. As a global media company that focuses on business, investing, technology etc., their definition of a small employer was "companies employing between 200 and 1,000 employees."

After partnering with Statista, a market research firm, Forbes employed a large array of assessment tools—ranging from anonymous surveys to text anal-

ysis of various social sites—in order to compile the list down to the top 300 employers.

Education was the most represented industry on the list, accounting for 20% of the 300 employers, meaning there were approximately 60 schools featured. Only 16 schools made the top 100, including COS.

Serving over 12,000 students across its three campuses, COS is a vital part of Tulare County. According to Fishback, the faculty is full of wonderful people, who only want the best for their students.

"A majority of the people who work here are really lovely individuals, who have really good intentions," she said. "We want the best for our students."

The school has over 55 career technical education programs, participates in 14 different sports, and also has several student help programs, such as the English as a Second Language program.

"We have such a large variety of courses, programs, certificates, degrees," Fishback said. "Even if you don't want to complete a certificate or a degree, you can just come and take an art class or a dance class."

While the fall semester is already underway, prospective students can visit the COS web site to learn more about their programs and how to apply for the spring semester.

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