

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 10 | October 2023

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Darth Vader, banned music, ballet, and more in store for the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra

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Family to serve nostalgia at Visalia eateries

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EVENTS

OCTOBER 26
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

DECEMBER 4-9, 2023
 Washington D.C. Holiday

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



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



SYDA PRODUCTIONS / ADOBE STOCK

The nation's largest fast food chains and restaurant associations are fighting a bill that would force corporations to bear legal costs for their franchisees but likely at the expense of their autonomy to make their own decisions in local markets.

State fast food bill stirs pushback from local owners

If passed, AB 1228 expects fast food corporations to bear legal and other costs when it comes to fast food restaurant owners at local levels



The Sun-Gazette

Darren Fraser
 Reporter
 The Sun-Gazette

When California Assemblymember Chris Holder (D-District 41) introduced Assembly Bill 1228 earlier this year, his presumed intent was to ensure fast food corporations stand shoulder-to-shoulder with fast food restaurant owners who are sued—or faced with other civil or legal issues—and share whatever fines or other action.

However, opponents of AB 1228 say that, if passed, the bill will destroy the owner's—franchisee's—autonomy. They say if AB 1228 becomes law, franchisors—fast food corporations—will have the final say in all things related to running the franchise, including hiring, firing and day-to-day store operations.

Holder introduced the bill Feb. 16, but it has had a tumultuous history, bouncing in and out of committee. It failed to come out of committee this past July; as a result, it will be tabled for the remainder of the legislative year.

A Feb. 17 Sacramento Bee story noted that advocates of AB 1228 are saying this bill is necessary because the current franchise model does

nothing to protect owners from financial and legal liabilities. They also contend the current system exposes workers to wage theft, discrimination and harassment.

"Just like they (fast food corporations) set menu prices, it's time they ensure we have living wages and safe work environments," Maria Hernandez, a Jack in the Box employee, said in the Bee story.

The Sun-Gazette reached out to Holder for comment on the bill but his office did not comment as of press time.

Stop AB 1228 Coalition

The Stop AB 1228 Coalition includes chambers of commerce from all over California. It includes the California Hawaii NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), National Action Network chapters from six counties, multiple restaurant owner and operator associations, industry and community associations—including the California Restaurant Association and the International Franchise Association—and 45 fast food brands, including McDonald's, Burger King, Del Taco, Subway and Wendy's.

According to the "No on AB 1228" website, which is seeking to stop the bill from passing to "stop the attack on local restaurants," if the bill is passed it would cause local restaurants to shut down; ultimately eliminating jobs and leading to higher food prices, as well as to frivolous lawsuits filed against restaurants.

On the site, Percy Johnson—who owns seven McDonald's franchises in Sacramento County—

See AB 1228 on page 4

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A letter and FAQs

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, and an exhilarating Spring-Tini event. These initiatives provide resources and opportunities for your success.

Change can be challenging, but we grow as a community through perseverance and innovation. 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.



Gail Zurek
 President and CEO
 Visalia Chamber

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, 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.



PHOTO BY KENNY GOODMAN

Visalia lands a spot on 'Great Places to Live' list

City makes Kiplinger Personal Finance's list of "11 Great Places to Live in California" for things like its affordable housing and being rooted in an agricultural area



John Lindt
 Publisher
 Sierra2theSea.net

While local officials have been touting Visalia as a great place to live for decades, a national magazine recently named the city to its top 11 places to live in California.

The personal finance publication Kiplinger named Visalia to its list in an Aug. 12 article, saying: "If you want affordable housing in an agricultural area surrounded by orchards, groves, farms and roadside stands, try Visalia."

Part of the appeal of Visalia is its still affordable housing compared to the rest of the state. The article notes that you can buy a single-family home for \$367,273, the median home price in the area, and the median rent is \$1,775. In addition to homes with relatively low price tags, the article boasts of Visalia's agricultural setting and availability of some of the finest fresh fruit in the nation.

"Right now it's peak season at Visalia Farmers' Market for stone fruit, squash, sweet corn, okra and leafy greens, and also sells sourdough bread, meat, eggs, flowers, honey, nuts, olive oil, jam, essential oils and offers free water when temperatures hit triple digits (summer heat waves are real and ongoing)," the article reads.

The article also praises Visalia's downtown as vibrant in an area where most central commercial districts have been relegated to a second-hand shopping experience.

"Unlike neighboring towns where strip malls and big-box stores have turned downtowns into ghost towns, Visalia's is comparatively active," the article states. "Attribute that energy to music and movies at Main Street's Fox Theatre and the presence of students from College of the Sequoias, one of California's 116 community colleges."

The magazine did not mention the city's proximity to Sequoia National Park. That's good news for the town's overall image, as it is normally the only thing propelling Visalia into the top tier of these types of listicles.

City may limit VRBO's

The city of Visalia may regulate short-term rentals (STRs) in town, including those marketed by online booking sites Airbnb and VRBO. In a search of the Airbnb site, city staff identified between

See GREAT PLACES on page 2

CITY UPDATE

Retail follows rooftops

With the revitalization of the Sequoia Mall underway, Visalia is once again poised to welcome multiple new businesses to town. Exciting times as these often bring inquiries about the City's role in bringing in new retailers and industry. Most concisely put, Visalia attracts business through a business-friendly climate, sound planning principles and practices, and thoughtful and appropriate land use policies.

The City organization does not build or operate private business, and does not decide who comes to Visalia. Decisions are made by property owners, developers, and business owners. The City creates the environment in which good business can operate with the least interference, but with appropriate controls. The key piece is the difference between a primary and secondary job in economic development terms, and how they are interrelated.

A primary job is one that produces goods or services for customers that are predominantly found outside the local community. This imports new wealth into the local economy. Once an employer is paid for those products or services, they redistribute that new wealth

into the community through wages and suppliers, which translates into local expenditures including consumer spending and housing.

Secondary jobs are those that serve the local community itself, such as automotive services, retail, dining, and entertainment jobs. Therefore, the goods and services produced are enough to serve a portion, or all, of the local community. However, because Visalia is a regional shopping and services hub, we benefit from a secondary jobs sector that truly serves a larger regional community and in certain cases acts as a primary job sector.

The common saying is that retail follows rooftops. As such, efforts prioritize attracting new, and expanding existing primary jobs with the aim of growth. From business friendly processes to partnerships, there is much more that goes into the work. For more details, visit www.visalia.city/economicdevelopment or www.visaliaedc.com.

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



Cal Water named one of 'World's Most Trustworthy Companies'

In its inaugural list recognizing trustworthy companies worldwide, Newsweek magazine has named California Water Service Group (Group) (NYSE: CWT) one of the "World's Most Trustworthy Companies." The honor was given to Group by Newsweek and Statista Inc., a leading statistics portal and industry ranking provider, based on feedback and analysis regarding trust among customers, investors, and employees.

Fifty-five companies were honored in the energy and utilities category; Group was one of only five water utilities recognized. The full 2023 list recognizes the top 1,000 of the largest stock-listed companies by revenue and spans 23 industries from 21 countries. The rankings were determined based on market definition-companies with annual revenue over \$500 million USD; an independent survey of more than 70,000 participants submitting 269,000 evaluations; and a social listening analysis of more than 975,000 company mentions. Group was previously named one of "America's Most Trustworthy Companies" for the second time in March 2023.

"California Water Service Group has always been committed to operating ethically and transparently, and doing the right thing for our customers, communities, employees, and stockholders," said Martin A. Kropelnicki, Group Chairman & CEO. "We are humbled

to be considered not only one of America's Most Trustworthy Companies, but now also one of the World's Most Trustworthy Companies, and we will continue to work hard to maintain our customers', investors', and employees' trust every day."

The full listing and more information about the award are published online at www.newsweek.com/rankings/worlds-most-trustworthy-companies-2023.

California Water Service Group (NYSE: CWT) is the largest regulated water utility in the western United States. It provides high-quality, reliable water and/or wastewater services to more than 2 million people in California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Washington, and Texas through its regulated subsidiaries, California Water Service, Hawaii Water Service, New Mexico Water Service,



and Washington Water Service, and its utility holding company, Texas Water Service.

What sets Group apart is its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its customers, communities, employees, and stockholders. Guided daily by their promise to provide quality, service, and value, Group's 1,200+ employees lead the way in working to protect the planet, care for people, and operate with the utmost integrity. Integral to Group's strategy is investing responsibly in water and wastewater infrastructure, sustainability initiatives, and community well-being. The company has been named one of "America's Most Responsible Companies" and "World's Most Trustworthy Companies" by Newsweek and a Great Place to Work®. More information is available at www.calwatergroup.com.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Name: Ryan Wall
Company: 7 Points
Title: Brand Manager

7 Points was born at the turn of recreational cannabis legalization in 2018. Operating out of a former Sun Pacific citrus packing facility in Woodlake, 7 Points adopted The Central Valley's rich citrus history and adapted it to a new and ever evolving industry. In 2020, 7 Points opened a non-storefront cannabis delivery service running from Fresno-Kern County holding a wide inventory with the top brands across the state.

News:
We are excited to be hosting our second ever cannabis event in downtown San Luis Obispo on September 15th! This will be an open consumption event and only the second in the city's history. We plan to return to the Central Valley with events in the Fall of 2023.

About us:
We are one of the very first cannabis delivery brands operating out of The Central Valley and boast the widest range of products across all of the competition. We also offer an express option with 1 hour delivery windows to match the needs of our customers.

Getting involved in the community:

7 Points is actively looking to support and attend more local events across Visalia and Tulare County. We have also hosted our own cannabis-focused events which give cannabis consumers of all types a safe place to gather and enjoy our products, host local artists, vendors, and food trucks.

The best part of working for 7 Points is:

Being in such a dynamic and evolving industry! With years of misinformation and criminalization being associated with cannabis, we feel a sense of pride and responsibility to help the people we serve get the best experience and products available.

How has the Chamber helped us:

By providing multiple options and resources for us to expand our reach and get in front of new potential customers.

Top thing we wish Visalia knew about our business:

We're here to help you. 7 Points was born and raised out of Tulare County and hold a special place for its residents who are looking for the best cannabis experience possible.

GREAT PLACES

Continued from page 1

340 to 867 spaces listed in Visalia, depending on availability and dates. VRBO showed a total of 93 properties available to reserve.

This week, the planning commission studied the regulation idea. While council may not want to limit availability of STRs, they want to monitor their location and insure they collect bed tax on the units. They are likely to have an approval process under a new ordinance, according to a staff report. There is support for limiting the number of STRs in proximity to each other.

Large water tank would be screened by trees

Cal Water is proposing its latest 1 million gallon water tank in northeast Visalia, which would be screened by trees. The tank would be located at 738 N. McAuliff Street. The project was discussed this week at the planning commission.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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

Editor Gail Zurek
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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SEQUOIA SYMPHONY

BRUCE KIESLING MUSIC DIRECTOR

Darth Vader, banned music, ballet, and more in store for the Sequoia Symphony

The Sequoia Symphony Orchestra now has single tickets on sale for all concerts this 2023-2024 season! This season promises to leave audiences in awe as the orchestra returns to the historic Visalia Fox Theatre in October.

Executive Director Marina Rojas is excited for audiences to experience the season. "Our Music Director, Bruce Kiesling has put together an amazing season, filled with familiar and new music to wow our audiences. These are the concerts people will be talking about for a while." Two film concerts are included this season, Empire Strikes Back and Elf. These concerts are a new way for audiences to experience these classic films. The orchestra plays along with the film, providing a full, immersive listening experience.

Kiesling shares, "This season is a jubilant celebration that delivers remarkable music through the virtuosity of our talented musicians, encapsulating some of the most extraordinary tales in the annals of musical history. From the captivating family-friendly film series gracing the months of October and December to the resounding echoes of Gershwin and Copland's quintessential American compositions in November and April, each of these performances showcases melodies that have fostered profound connections with our growing audience throughout our community."

Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back in Concert

- Friday, October 20 and Saturday, October 21 Power to the Piano with special guest Dominic Cheli - Saturday, November 18

Elf in Concert - Friday, December 1 and Saturday, December 2

Giselle featuring the State Stree Ballet Company - Saturday, February 10 Banned and Boycotted - Saturday, March 9

American Icons with special guests Time for Three - Saturday, April 20

There are two notable guest artists this season, Dominic Cheli and Time for Three, the latter returning to the stage after their recent Grammy win. "As always, our season includes the brilliance of cherished guest artists, including pianist Dominic Cheli, and the viral Time for Three string trio, riding high on the heels of their Grammy-award-winning album. We invite you to immerse yourself in this eclectic array of performances that promises an unforgettable musical experience," comments Kiesling.

All concerts begin at 7:30 P.M., with doors opening at 6:30 P.M. Before each concert (except the film concerts), our Maestro, Bruce Kiesling will host a pre-concert talk with the audience at 6:45 P.M.

For more information and tickets, go to SequoiaSymphonyOrchestra.com or call 559-732-8600.



California's insurance market in crisis a looming threat



Jake Sorensen
Sorensen Agency

Is California teetering on the edge of an insurance market crisis? For decades, Californians have basked in the sunshine of relatively low home and auto insurance premiums compared to the rest of the country. But recent natural disasters, soaring crime rates, and a web of regulations have brought a storm to the Golden State's insurance landscape. Many of you may not be aware of the impending insurance crisis that has already arrived in California and is impacting parts of the nation.

Historical Context. Before delving into the current state of the market, let's rewind and understand the history of the insurance industry in California. In 1988, the state passed Proposition 103, officially known as "The Insurance Rate Reduction and Reform Act." This legislation aimed to regulate property and casualty insurance rates and introduced several crucial provisions:

- Rate Regulation:** Proposition 103 granted the California Department of Insurance (CDI) the authority to oversee insurance rates for various policies, including auto and homeowners' insurance. Insurance companies were required to seek CDI approval before implementing rate changes, preventing unfair hikes.
- Rate Rollback:** The law mandated insurance companies roll back their rates to 1987 levels and offer refunds to policyholders if rates were excessive. This rollback translated into significant savings for California consumers.
- Consumer Advocacy:** Proposition 103 established the Office of the Consumer Advocate within the CDI, advocating for fair and reasonable rates on behalf of the public.
- Transparency:** The law increased transparency within the insurance industry, necessitating insurance companies to disclose information about their rates, profits, and expenditures. This transparency aided regulators and consumers in comprehending rate determinations.

While consumer protection is essential, over-regulation can stifle business, potentially leading to challenging situations for consumers. Insurance companies are businesses that need profitability to provide services. More choices for consumers increase the chances of finding affordable coverage tailored to individual needs. However, excessive regulation and bureaucratic delays within the CDI impede insurance production, prompting carriers to exit the state.

The California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (Fair) Plan. Some homeowners are already familiar with the challenges of obtaining home insurance and resort to the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (Fair) Plan. This state-mandated program serves residents unable to secure coverage in the traditional market due to high-risk factors like wildfires. However, the Fair Plan offers limited coverage, primarily for Fire, Wind, and Hail, leaving significant gaps, such as general liability, for consumers. Annual premiums under the Fair Plan are often 3-5 times higher than traditional home insurance, making it financially burdensome. Furthermore, this program is funded by insurance companies operating in California, who share the risk based on market share.

The Perfect Storm: A Confluence of Factors. Leading up to 2020, consumers reveled in unbelievably low home and auto insurance premiums. However, this optimism was short-lived as a series of events unfolded. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains, causing construction and automobile repair delays. Inflation and rising labor costs further strained the insurance

landscape. To alleviate some consumer burden, the CDI mandated auto premium reductions and imposed a two-year moratorium on rate increases through the rate filing approval process outlined in Proposition 103. Civil unrest resulted in billions of dollars in property damage and theft, coinciding with a surge in natural disasters. Increased claims coupled with rising repair costs created a perfect storm, jeopardizing insurance company profitability.

The Role of Reinsurance. Reinsurance, often called "insurance for insurance companies," is crucial. It allows insurers to transfer some insured risk to a reinsurance company, reducing the impact of catastrophic claims and ensuring solvency. However, the reinsurance market has tightened, making it challenging for insurance companies to secure coverage. Rising costs and reduced availability are pushing insurers to reconsider their capacity.

Actions Taken by Insurance Companies. In the first quarter of 2023, the property and casualty market suffered over \$7 billion in losses. Insurance companies realize they cannot sustain such losses. Homeowners' insurance has been hit the hardest. Presently, 99% of insurers writing home insurance in California have stopped accepting new business. This poses a predicament for new homebuyers and strains smaller carriers still accepting new business, resulting in prolonged wait times and delays in underwriting disputes. Major carriers like State Farm, Farmers, and Allstate have also ceased taking on new clients. Berkshire Hathaway's subsidiary, AmGaurd, is exiting the state and non-renewing 50,000 active policies in California.

Challenges in the Auto Insurance Market. Auto insurance is also feeling the strain. While Proposition 103 mandates that insurance carriers cannot deny good drivers, many have introduced hurdles. Waiting periods, stringent document requirements, and elevated underwriting guidelines have become the norm. All carriers are tightening their underwriting criteria, sometimes declining coverage based on the type of vehicle, like Kias or Hyundais, due to increased auto theft.

Strategies to Mitigate Risk. Large and small insurance companies are seeking ways to reduce risk exposure until they can achieve profitability. This includes not accepting new business, strengthening underwriting guidelines, non-renewing customers for minor violations, and raising rates. While insurers file rate increases with the CDI, the traditionally sluggish approval process, exacerbated by increased filings, may delay relief by at least another year or more.

Lobbying for Urgent Action. Lobbyists and representatives from large insurance companies are lobbying in Sacramento, seeking expedited rate filings. Their intent is not greed but a desperate plea to safeguard the insurance market's existence in California. So far, their pleas have been disregarded, with the CDI showing no urgency.

Impact on Consumers and Related Markets. Customers with insurers that remain in California but no longer accept new business will likely see significant premium hikes. Rate filings have already indicated increases of 30% to 50% in both home and auto insurance. Expectations are that premiums could double over the next 1-2 years. Moving poses challenges as carriers may not rewrite home insurance policies, potentially eliminating bundle discounts.

Broader Implications. The crisis extends beyond consumers and insurance professionals to the real estate and lending markets. Current lending requirements demand home insurance policies for closing escrow. Rising insurance premiums, coupled with escalating interest rates, are negatively affecting buyers' purchasing power, potentially stalling the housing market.

A Call to Action. While insurance may not be the most exciting topic, its role in our financial security cannot be understated. Waiting for

See **INSURANCE** on page 4

RIBBON CUTTINGS



The Tulare County Workforce Investment Board hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of Employment Connections rebrand. The Visalia location is at 4025 W. Noble Ave., Ste. B.



Mike Young of Edward Jones hosted a ribbon cutting at their 527 S. Pinkham St., Ste. B location in Visalia. Call 732-2836 for your financial service needs.



New member 7 Points hosted a ribbon cutting in August. Visit their website 7points.biz for product information.

Congratulations to **The Planning Mill**, who is celebrating their 10th Anniversary in business!

CSET's Youth Workforce team held a scholarship dinner to celebrate Tulare County students who were awarded scholarships from the CSET and Bank of the Sierra Partnership Fund.

Family HealthCare Network welcomed their newest provider at their Visalia Oak health center, Sinit Berhe, FNPC.

Congratulations to **Quesadilla Grill** who celebrated their 10th Anniversary in business in September!

Assistance League of Visalia is celebrating 25 years of service in Tulare



County by providing clothes, hygiene kits, and books for 250 deserving VUSD students. **American Care Hospice** celebrated their 4th Anniversary with an Ice Cream Social. Congratulations!

Family to serve nostalgia at Visalia eateries

George family is planning to open an "All American" hot dog stand on Tulare Ave next year and a replica of the original Mearle's College Drive-In in 2025



John Lindt
Publisher
Sierra2theSea.net

Like the Energizer Bunny, you can't slow down 88-year-old developer Johnny George.

Johnny and his family made the news earlier this year with their audacious plan to resurrect Mearle's Drive-In on South Mooney Boulevard, complete with a drive-in theater in the back. Now he is bringing back footlong dogs as part of his nostalgic, "All American" Hot Dog stand.

The new hot dog stand is planned on Tulare Avenue in Visalia
See NOSTALGIA on page 4

VISALIA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Visalia Unified releases preliminary state data for 2022-23



Overall State Test Scores (CAASPP)**

	ELA		Mathematics	
	Students Meeting/Exceeding (On Grade-Level)	Students Nearly/Not Meeting (Not on Grade-Level)	Students Meeting/Exceeding (On Grade-Level)	Students Nearly/Not Meeting (Not on Grade-Level)
2021-22	41%	59%	24%	76%
2022-23*	42%	58%	27%	73%

*Tentative as scores might change due to calculation changes at the state.
**Students test in grades 3-8 and 11

On Sept. 12, 2023, we presented our preliminary student data to our Board of Education. We followed the presentation with four videos in four weeks reviewing the data and how families can partner with our district to ensure their students succeed in their grade-level.

Two years ago, as we were coming off the pandemic, the state modified the test to support the transition back from remote learning. This year our scores remained mostly level with slight improvements in some areas and slight decline in others. Last Spring our students in grades 3 - 8 and 11 took the state English Language Arts and mathematics tests, also known as the CAASPP. The purpose of these two tests is to measure a student's mastery of their grade-level standards.

While we are pleased with some results, we are not satisfied overall and know that our students are capable of much more. That is why our teachers and site leaders have been working collaboratively in learning teams, known as Professional Learning Communities, to review student work and make teaching changes in real-time based on what each student needs.

For example, in English Language Arts, students must demonstrate mastery in four major areas: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Research/Inquiry. Students are exposed to questions and readings that they have never seen before. The questions are not just multiple choice, but they also include listening and writing areas.

The ELA test measures, reading, writing, listening, and speaking which are all vital skills that are fostered throughout the K-12 system. Specifically, our TK, K, 1st, and 2nd, grade teachers work hard to build a strong foundation for each child's academic future.

What can you do as a parent to help your student be prepared and ready for this year's ELA state test in the spring?

- Have conversations with your children. Research

tells us the sheer amount of language a child is exposed to in the early years has a huge impact on their success in school and in life.

- Read with your students and have them do the following:

- Retell what they read to others in your family.
- Have them write a short paragraph about what they read and what it means to them.
- Have them write their own stories.

- For students in grades K-8, have them use online tools like i-Ready MyPath, and Paper tutoring

- For students in grades 7-12, encourage them to practice writing and submit their writing for feedback on our free Paper Tutoring.

The more you build a love for reading and writing at home, the greater chance you expose your student to new worlds, new vocabulary, and sharpening new skills.

What we are committing to this year to prepare your students in English Language Arts includes the following:

- A focus on phonics in grades K-2. Phonics instruction teaches the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. This is important for students to learn how to read by third grade.

- Having all teachers who teach English Language Arts in grades TK-12 work together in their Professional Learning Communities to do the following:

- Look at student work.
- Identify strengths and

weaknesses in student learning.

- Identify the strategies they will use to work on their weaknesses.
- Making sure all of our teachers understand how to use the books and tools they have to teach your students through our Balanced Models of Instruction.

Mathematics

The mathematics test measures students in grades 3-8 and 11 in three areas: concepts and procedures, problem solving and modeling with data analysis, and communicating reasoning.

We know that we had some great gains as high as 4% in grades 4-6. So, one of our areas of focus is to learn from these grade-levels and schools what they did well, so we can spread that throughout the entire district, including grades above and below.

What can you do as a parent to help your student be prepared and ready for this year's math state test in the spring?

- Find opportunities at home for your student to practice their math skills. For example, baking and cooking are great ways for students to learn about fractions. We know that fractions are a key element to students being successful in high school math.

- For students in grades K-8, have them use online tools like i-Ready MyPath.

- For students in grades 4-12 who are struggling at home with math work, they can use our free online tutoring service Paper. The tutors will help them solve the problem,

not just give them the problem.

Just like in English Language Arts, a love for math can be built at home when students see how they will use it in their everyday lives.

What we are committing to this year to prepare your students in Mathematics includes the following:

- Having all teachers who teach mathematics in grades TK-12 work together in their Professional Learning Communities to do the following:

- Look at student work.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning.
- Identify the strategies they will use to work on their weaknesses.

- A focus on Math 1 in high school and middle school is based on a solid K-8 math foundation so that our students will graduate college and career ready.

- Making sure all of our teachers understand how to use the books and tools they have to teach your students through our Balanced Models of Instruction.

Again, we urge you to partner with us on your students' learning. We encourage you to sit with your student and review with them their test scores from last year. Share with them areas you noticed they did well and together create a goal for this school year.

Thank you for partnering with us in educating your children, our students. us with educating your children, our students. I believe in, I belong in, I am VUSD.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN RED CROSS CENTRAL CALIFORNIA REGION

Red Cross debuts new emergency response vehicle

Every day, the American Red Cross Central California Region delivers help and hope to people in need, all made possible thanks to the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors. In the Central Valley, the Red Cross responds to hundreds of disasters each year, from home fires, to wildfires and more. Red Cross volunteers provide vital assistance – like food, shelter, emergency supplies, health services and more – to those affected.

"Thanks to Bank of the Sierra and their generosity, Red Cross volunteers have a new tool to deliver the Red Cross mission during disasters. This new Emergency Response Vehicle will help neighbors in need and deliver comfort and care where it's needed most," says Lori Wilson, executive director of the Red Cross Central Valley Chapter. "The American Red Cross is on the frontlines of disaster response, supporting families across the country who are struggling to cope. This new vehicle will serve as a beacon of hope."

More frequent and intense disasters are ravaging communities and upending lives. As extreme weather events increase, more people need help from the Red Cross. This investment in disaster relief services comes as Tulare County becomes one of 15 communities across the country that has a Red Cross Community Adaptation Program, which will focus on building strong partnerships with local nonprofits to increase access to health and mental health services, nutritious food and safe housing in the face of climate emergencies.

"We are thrilled to have



helped the Red Cross build and deliver a new, state-of-the-art Emergency Response Vehicle to the Central Valley," said Kevin McPhail, Bank of the Sierra President and CEO. "I'm thankful that our Bank had the opportunity to support a project that will have an incredibly positive impact on the communities both our organizations serve."

The Red Cross currently has 400 Emergency Response Vehicles stationed across the United States, including eight across the Central California Region. The Red Cross deploys Emergency Response Vehicles into disaster-affected areas, where Red Cross volunteers can utilize these vehicles to deliver food and water, emergency supplies, clean-up kits and more – serving as our hope on wheels.

Iconic Red Cross Emergency Response Vehicles have been in use for decades. Next-generation vehicles, like the one recently unveiled in the Central Valley, have many new features that help volunteers assist disaster survivors more efficiently. Wider windows, brighter lighting, and increased interior space mean a more comfortable experience for those accessing Red Cross services such as water and meal distribution, case-work, delivery of emergency supplies and more. Next-generation Emergency Response Vehicles are also more fuel efficient, have lower maintenance costs and have longer lifespans than previous models.

Catalyst Bible College opens in Visalia

Regan Munsey
CBC Representative

Visalia First is excited to announce Catalyst Bible College, a 4-year college powered by Vanguard University located in Visalia Ca. After a pilot year, official classes started on August 28, 2023 to more than 35 students through in person and online. The new area college has an unmatched tuition of 34,000 for four years with a goal to graduate all students as debt free as possible.

To help launch CBC and to strengthen our community, The Pinnacle Conference will debut on October 19 with World Class Leaders coming in person to the valley to speak in a full day leadership conference. Speakers include Shannon Bream, Marcus Buckingham, Vanessa Van Edwards, Jon Acuff, Dr. Mark Rutland, Hal Donaldson, Sam Chand and Dr. Mark Merrill. Proceeds



from the tickets will go towards the college.

Tickets are available now.

On September 27, at 10 am, at 3737 S. Akers, Catalyst Bible College will hold its Grand Opening celebration and Pinnacle Conference Launch.

Visalia First Assembly is coming up on 100 years in the Central Valley and wants to continue to pour into this region. "Catalyst Bible College exists to continue giving to this community, world, helping stu-

dents graduate as close to debt free as possible," shared Pastor Mark Merrill, Lead Pastor of Visalia First and President and C-Founder of CBC," Merrill continued, "At CBC everyone majors in changing the world."

"Upon graduation, students' degrees will be issued by Vanguard University, providing our valley students high quality education at an attainable price," said Dr. Jason Kennedy, CBC Provost. Currently CBC offers degrees in Early Childhood, Psychology; Human Development, Theology; Ministry & Leadership, Management and Business Administration.

For more information on Catalyst Bible College, visit CatalystBibleCollege.org or call 733.9070. For information on the Pinnacle Conference, visit ThePinnacleLeader.org.

*Adventure awaits.
but it won't wait forever.*



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Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



Community Loyal Members

A thriving community starts here!



NEW

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

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Karing 4 Kids Foster Family Agency

Small Business Members:

- Graze Craze
- Maison Law
- The American Legion Sierra Post 785
- Token Farms

Micro-Business Members:

- TedXVisalia

RENEWING

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

Keystone Members:

- 4Creeks, Inc.*
- Visalia Mall*

Community Investor Members:

- Central Valley Community Bank, N. Floral St.
- Gateway Financial Planning Group

- Sequoia Gateway LLC
- Visalia Hearing Center, Inc.*
- Visalia Unified School District, Administration Department

Business Builder Members:

- Altura Centers for Health
- Hydrite Chemical Co.*

Business Connector Members:

- Armstrong Community Management
- Hadley-Marcom Funeral Chapel*
- MindDivers
- RPS Real Estate
- Walmart Neighborhood Market
- Don Celillo Electric Company*

Small Business Members:

- Amtrak San Joaquins*
- Ashoori & Co. Jewelers*
- AT&T
- BarrelHouse Visalia
- BJ Perch Construction, Inc.
- Chimienti & Associates Insurance Services*
- ClearConverse, Inc
- Courtyard Aesthetics*
- Integrated Care Systems*
- Kaweah Container, Inc.*
- Lucky Day Laundry Wash and Fold Services*
- Megan Ide, DDS & Shirley Lei, DDS*

- Morgan Stanley
- Nothing Bundt Cakes
- Paloma Development Co.*
- Partyworks, Inc.*
- Personal Express Insurance*
- Pools Plus*
- San Joaquin Valley Homes*
- Sequoia Vein & Wound
- Equity Group, Inc.*
- Visalia Adventure Park, Inc.

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- Bethlehem Center*
- Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Central Mother Lode Regional Consortium
- Family Builders Foster Care, Inc.*
- Visalia Gleaning Seniors*
- Visalia Sunset Rotary*
- Valley Life Charter School*

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.



Mearle's Drive-In & Theater sign at the south east corner of Mooney Blvd. and Road 264. PHOTO BY KENNY GOODMAN

NOSTALGIA

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in front of the family's sprawling former olive plant property. Johnny has converted the facility into a myriad of leased spaces ranging from office users, a candy distributor and cold storage clients.

Johnny plans to open the new hot dog eatery early next year. He says he came to Visalia when he was just six months old and lived in the "Okie Barrio" while growing up here. He started a roofing business 87 years ago in Visalia, and worked closely with Visalia's beloved Mearle's Drive-In, even hosting his business meetings there. John was a regular at Mearle's, eating breakfast and lunch in the historic diner. The diner closed in 2006 and was then converted into a Habit Burger in 2012.

In January, Johnny's grandson Cris announced the family had set out to rebuild a nearly exact replica of Mearle's College Drive-In on Mooney Boulevard near Mooney Grove park. The entire project will be headed by the George family's two businesses: J.F. Enterprises Inc. and the George Family Trust. If all goes according to plan, the new Mearle's will be a twin of the first one, just modernized as far as the kitchen and other appliance updates go.

Attached to the back of the diner will be a drive-in theater that will be free of charge with up to 100 parking spots. In addition to making the moving showings free, the George family is also hoping to make the food in the diner affordable. The menu will be very similar to the original, and Cris George said that they are aiming to keep the prices at the very lowest possible.

The nostalgic restaurant is

expected to open sometime in 2025.

New spaces open up on Mooney

Developers on Mooney are looking to lease six new storefronts in coming months. At Sequoia Mall, owner Dave Paynter has filed plans for three new retail spaces south of Hobby Lobby that are 7,800, 4,588 and 4,193 square feet. Paynter wants to host more national retailers as he rebrands the mall into an open-air shopping center.

Paynter is likely to rename it to something like Sequoia Commons to reflect the change. None of these spaces—all north of the Barnes and Noble bookstore under construction—have a name attached to them yet.

Further north on Mooney, the Orosco Group has decided to divide up the former Union Bank building into three leased spaces at Walnut and Mooney next to the Visalia Mall.

The former bank building is 5,800 square feet. Plans call for two 1,440-square foot spaces for retailers or restaurants and a larger 3,200-square foot space. The property has 60 parking spaces it can use. Orosco bought the building for development about a year ago after Union Bank closed in Visalia.

Rally's plans twin stores on Mooney, Dinuba boulevards

Following the trend seen in the past few years, Rally's Hamburgers is wanting to duplicate their planned double drive-thru on Mooney in the fast growing north side of town. The new location would be on Dinuba Boulevard at the

Riverbend Village shopping center near Riggan.

Their South Mooney store has yet to break ground at Visalia Parkway. Both Mooney retailers are busy planning a new co-work space to the north, ranging from Target and Ross to Panera Bread, In-N-Out and El Pollo Loco.

Co-work spaces coming to downtown

Partners Saegan Moran, Jalisca Thomason and Megan Welker are busy planning a new co-work space called Kinwork at 607 E Main St. in a former thrift store space. The 3,500-square foot building will be divided into eight private offices, three art studios and a large conference room. The space includes an outside patio in the back.

Next door will be a new sandwich shop called Subs & Stuff with Mexican dishes as well.

Seagan, an art instructor at College of the Sequoias says co-work space is becoming more popular; particularly among the younger crowds who don't want a full time office nor do they want to just work from home, but want a flexible work space where "community is really important to them."

Seagan said the new complex may not open until spring or even summer because of all the construction that is needed. Permits for the work are pending.

Another co-work space is in the works on School Street at Johnson on the west edge of downtown. Called "The Nest" the space includes both co-work space and a community kitchen for would-be chefs. The building is just across the street from the popular indoor soccer facility, 1852 Visalia.

AB 1228

Continued from page 1

noted in an article published in the Sacramento Bee that he is in fierce opposition to the bill, as it would force national fast-food corporations to exert more control over locally franchised restaurants like his.

"This misguided bill attempts to make national fast-food corporations legally liable for employment and personnel decisions made at my local restaurants," Johnson said. "By creating a new avenue to file lawsuits against fast-food corporations, AB 1228 means more lawsuits against local restaurant owners, too."

AB 257

Holden is a former fast food franchise owner, which explains why he introduced AB 1228 this year and why he introduced AB 257 last year.

On Sept. 5, 2022, Governor Newsom signed AB 257, which enacted the Fast Food Accountability and Standards Recovery Act (FAST Recovery Act). It established the Fast Food Council within the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) to serve as the governing body on all things related to the fast food industry.

Unlike AB 1228, AB 257 did not contain language relating to corporate franchisors. In the Sept. 5, 2022 press release to celebrate Newsom's signing, Holden said, "Once AB 257 goes into effect, it will have immediate impact on elevating the voice of the fast food worker, by giving them a say in determining workplace standards. Calling out workplace inequities around wages, safety, or issues of harassment and retaliation."

INSURANCE

Continued from page 2

a complete crisis is unnecessary. Rate increases are inevitable, but the industry should not collapse, leaving consumers without options. The CDI must recognize the urgency and work with insurance companies to restore business.

Your Voice Matters. To effect change, engage your local state representatives, share your experiences, and educate your network about the issue. The insurance commissioner is elected; use your voice at the ballot box. California's policies on crime, the environment, economics, and health affect the insurance industry and your financial well-being. Please don't wait until it's too late; act now to secure California's insurance future.

