

# Business Update

www.visaliachamber.org

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Vol. 43, No. 13 | January 2024

## Local readers embark on a literary challenge 'Under the Stars'

Tulare County Library's "Winter Reading Challenge: Stories Under the Stars" invites readers to embark on a cosmic literary adventure



Prepare to be starstruck by a world of books as the Tulare County Library's renowned reading challenge prepares to take residents on a journey through the cosmos of literature, beckoning readers of all ages and skill sets to come together for an immersive experience.

Tulare County Library's highly anticipated annual event, the "Winter Reading Challenge: Stories Under the Stars," is set to captivate readers of all ages, languages and proficiency levels. From Jan. 2 to the 31st, bibliophiles and book enthusiasts can unite for a literary journey that promises engagement and enrichment.

For the youngest members of our community, children aged 0

to 5, the challenge invites them to embark on an adventure of their own by completing 10 books this winter, either solo or with the guiding hand of a parent. Meanwhile, participants in the Kids, Teens and Adults categories are encouraged to read for at least 10 days throughout this period.

While readers are encouraged to choose any books they would like, the county library has also put together a list of recommended reading material with celestial themes. This includes titles for young audiences such as "A Bed of Stars" by Jessica Love, "The Stuff of Stars" by Marion Dane Bauer and "The Astronaut Who Painted the Moon: The True Story of Alan Bean."

As for older audiences, there are also some educational literary pieces like "Calculating The Cosmos: How Mathematics Unveils The Universe" by Ian Stewart and "Astrophysics For Young People In A Hurry" by Neil DeGrasse Tyson.

This star-studded book list can be accessed at [tularecountylibrary.beanstack.com/lists](http://tularecountylibrary.beanstack.com/lists) by clicking on the "O Winter Reading Challenge 2024: Stories Under The Stars" tab.

So, how does one become a part of this exciting literary venture? Starting Wednesday, Dec. 27, interested parties can register either online or in person. After that, on Jan. 2, participants can commence their reading adventure and begin logging their progress.

To facilitate this, participating readers can pick up bookmark logs for tracking their reading days at their local Tulare County Library branch. Alternatively, they can conveniently go online to the link [tularecountylibrary.beanstack.com/reader365](http://tularecountylibrary.beanstack.com/reader365), or download the Beanstack Tracker app, available for Android and iOS devices in the App Store or



The Tulare County Library will hold its annual Winter Reading Challenge, with this year's theme being "Stories Under the Stars," throughout January.

Google Play.

Also remember—it's essential to record reading days on Beanstack, or present them at your local branch by Jan. 31, to qualify for the challenge drawing.

For anyone eager to participate online, follow these steps:

**Register:** Create a Beanstack account and sign up for the Winter Reading Challenge.

**Track:** Document your progress by entering each book read or tracking the number of days in your online log. Achieve a progress badge with every book (0-5) or day read. The more you read, the more badges you collect.

**Progress:** Once you've conquered 10 books (0-5) or 10 days, your challenge is complete.

If someone would prefer the traditional approach to this activity, here's how to play using a paper log:

**Register:** Acquire a reading bookmark log at your nearest Tulare County Library branch.

**Track:** For every book (0-5)

read or day completed, fill in a circle on your log.

**Progress:** When you've reached the impressive milestone of 10 books (0-5) or 10 days, submit your log at your branch.

Tulare County Library's mission is to serve all residents of Tulare County with a network of 17 community-based locations, an adult and family literacy center, Pop Up Tulare County outreach and bookmobile services, as well as a vibrant online presence at [www.tularecountylibrary.org](http://www.tularecountylibrary.org).

Stay connected and informed by following the Library on Facebook at "Tulare County Library," Instagram at "@tularecountylib," or on X at "@TulareCountyLib" or simply check out your local branch's page.

Dive into the world of reading and embark on an unforgettable journey with the "Winter Reading Challenge: Stories Under the Stars."



## VUSD Forward: Leading with Vision

As we move into the new year, I am thankful for this amazing community, our students and families, our staff and teachers, and our Board of Education. Visionary leadership is necessary to ensure all students receive high quality instruction, and it is vital for the stability and direction of our school district. I am excited to share that our Board of Education was recently recognized by the California School Board Association as Governance Team of the Year. This is an incredible honor and well earned.

This past year, our Board focused on developing foundational policies to move Visalia Unified forward such as our Core Beliefs and Commitments and mission statement, "Every student learning everyday." This visionary work and commitment to student learning is what earned our Board this CSBA honor.

Moving VUSD forward requires a focused and visionary Board of Education and a supportive community—I am thankful to have both. Our community has shown up for our district in incredible ways. Most recently, I watched our teachers, fam-

ilies and community partners from Neighborhood Church come together to relocate students from several classrooms of an elementary school to the church, which was made necessary by an urgent need for repairs. Neighborhood Church not only made this successful transition – literally overnight – but they also went above and beyond to ensure our parents, students, and staff felt welcomed in their temporary space. We are grateful to have so many impactful community partnerships.

We also have a thriving Extended Learning Opportunity Program that gives thousands of students the ability to participate in after school, weekend, and extended break enrichment programs. Through the actions of our board, we have athletics, visual and performing arts, and other offerings that continue to focus on connecting every student to meaningful activities. We know that when students are connected to extra curricular activities, they have better attendance and academic outcomes. These are just a few examples of our One Visalia

See VISION on page 3



Tucoemas Credit Union is partnering with Grand Canyon University to offer employees, such as Natasha Santeliz, scholarships and educational opportunities.

## Tucoemas helps employees access higher education

Credit union creates multiple paths to pursue higher education, opportunities and life skills for their employees who might not have access to it otherwise



**Karis Caddell**  
Reporter  
The Sun-Gazette

Tucoemas is enhancing its commitment to employee education and community involvement through a partnership with a university, offering scholarships and educational opportunities.

Tucoemas has extended its efforts to increase its staff's access to education and, overall, their contributions to the community. To accomplish this, the credit union partnered with Grand Canyon University to provide scholarships and greater access to education to its employees.

The credit union also played a pivotal role in helping fund several scholarships for the College of the Sequoias, furthering educational opportunities for residents, according to the news release of this announcement.

"I realized how there's a direct correlation between poverty and a lack of education...helping people get an education helps lift them out of poverty," Tucoemas CEO Brice Yocum said. "There's so many benefits that come with (higher education) that we wanted our team to at least have that opportunity."

The credit union places a priority on employee growth, offering frequent training and certification opportunities, according to the release. In the past six years, Tucoemas has helped to foster three bachelor's and two master's degrees for its team members, with an additional 12 employees currently pursuing their degrees.

Not only does the company provide a path to pursue higher education that is more financially accessible, but it provides flexible work hours that make education more accessible as well. Tucoemas allows employees in the program to have scheduled study breaks at work to make sure they have time to prioritize school.

It doesn't end there, either, as taking classes with Grand Canyon University is not the only opportunity employees get to increase their training and education.

"If folks in the organization think getting their bachelor's degree isn't in their wheelhouse, or isn't what they're comfortable with, then we try to connect them internally with programs at Cornell or USC, or other established institutions of higher education, and then sponsor them to go through different leadership development

See TUOEMAS on page 3

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### Welcome 2024



**Gail Zurek**  
President and CEO  
Visalia Chamber

As we stand at the beginning of a new year, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared as members of the Visalia Chamber. The challenges and triumphs of the past have shaped us, and as we step into 2024, I am filled with

optimism and a deep sense of pride for the vibrant community we've collectively fostered.

In the ever-evolving landscape of business, The Visalia Chamber of Commerce understands that the road to success is rarely smooth. The uncertainties and obstacles can be daunting, yet it is precisely in these challenges that we discover our resilience and the strength of our collective spirit.

2023 brought its unique set of trials, and yet, it was also a year marked by collaboration, determination, and shared success. The Visalia Chamber stands not just as an organization but as a beacon of support and partnership for each business within its fold. Our commitment to personalized solutions, robust connections, meaningful celebrations, and advocating for your needs with government bodies remains unwavering.

In Visalia, where businesses thrive, we find the pulse of our community. It is the diverse array of enterprises, each with its unique story and contribution, that paints the canvas of Visalia's vibrancy. From a microenterprise trying to move from part-time hustle to permanent status and large global companies whose heart for our local community is as big as the global, Visalia is a better community because of the contributions of local businesses. Visalia businesses aren't just interested in the status quo, they drive to be the very best in their field and as a representative of this community. As we enter 2024, our shared goal is not just to weather the storms but to boldly explore new opportunities and seize fresh possibilities.

At the core of the Chamber is the acknowledgment that your success is our success. The Visalia Chamber is not merely an entity; it is a collec-

tive force that propels members toward greater heights. In the spirit of the upcoming year, we are excited to partner again, offering personalized solutions that cater to your distinct needs. Your victories are ours to celebrate, and your challenges are opportunities for us to develop resources that not only help you but your neighbors as well.

Connections form the lifeblood of any thriving community, and the Visalia Chamber takes pride in being the conveyor that unites businesses, fosters collaborations, and nurtures lasting relationships. As we welcome 2024, let us renew our commitment to building networks that transcend traditional boundaries, opening doors to possibilities that we might not have imagined individually.

Celebrations, both big and small, are the milestones that make our journey memorable. From this very newsletter to our Annual Awards celebration, we want to revel in our collective triumphs, be they a successful venture, a milestone anniversary, or a breakthrough innovation. The Visalia Chamber is here to amplify these moments, ensuring that your achievements resonate not only within your business walls but throughout our vibrant community.

Advocacy lies at the heart of our mission. We understand the intricacies of business, and we represent your needs with government entities. Your concerns are our concerns, and through collective advocacy, we can influence positive change, ensuring a business-friendly environment that benefits us all.

The Visalia Chamber is your steadfast ally, your advocate, and your partner in growth. Through thick and thin, in moments of triumph and challenge, we are united by our commitment to seeing each business within our community not just survive but thrive.

Your partnership is the cornerstone of our success, and together, I am confident that 2024 will be a year marked by unprecedented achievements. If you have been waiting to join the Visalia Chamber – 2024 is your year. Membership has perks beyond your business, perks that strengthen other businesses and create the Vibrant Visalia we all love. Membership details can be found on our website [visaliachamber.org/membership](http://visaliachamber.org/membership) or by calling our office 559.734.5876

Here's to a prosperous and fulfilling 2024!

## INSIDE

### Economic development is like a game of chess

Devon Jones, Economic Development Manager for the City of Visalia, is a key player who knows the game backwards and forwards. But he didn't count on a new piece being added during the match: COVID-19. 2

### Employers plead for help in wake of legislative madness

2023 was a very busy legislative year in California. The following are some important changes facing employers in the new year. 3

## EVENTS

**JANUARY 25**  
Ambassador Monthly Meeting  
Time: 8 a.m.  
Location: Visalia First

## TRAVEL WITH US

**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**  
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For more information, go to [www.visaliachamber.org/travel](http://www.visaliachamber.org/travel)

**AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT**

**Name:** Anthony Elliott  
**Company:** Cline's Business Equipment  
**Title:** Sales Manager



ANTHONY ELLIOTT

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

It's great being involved in the local economy, with other like minded business people. It has been rewarding to see businesses start and expand. We partner with all types of industry, so it's nice meeting owners and managers of these same businesses at events. We have been in the community for over 40 years, and it's continued to help with our name recognition and customer loyalty.

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

Having a strong Chamber Ambassador Group is crucial to growing and improving the overall business climate of the city. I am newer to Visalia (2018) and I have always been impressed with the local businesses and their support of one another. That starts with an involved group of Ambassadors who share the same goals.

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

The owner and GM care about the employees, and it shows daily. It makes you want to work harder when you know the company's success will benefit you directly. They've built a great company and atmosphere, I am very thankful to

have taken this role a year ago.

**Where is your favorite place to go in Visalia with friends and family?**

When it's just me and the wife, we love walking downtown and eating dinner at The Elderwood or Bistro di Bufala. Usually rolled ice cream afterwards. If we are with our two young boys, they love Red Robin, walking the mall, and getting See's Candy. You might also find us at a COS football or basketball game. Huge sports family!

**HEALTH NOTE**

**A more stable year ahead**



**By Gary K. Herbst**  
 Chief Executive Officer  
 Kaweah Health

As 2023 comes to a close, I am proud of all the work done by the Kaweah Health team during such a challenging year. There were many ups and downs, but we continue to steadily build as we emerge from the global pandemic. Throughout all of the challenges Kaweah Health has faced in recent years, one thing remains the same — I am honored to work with such a dedicated and resilient team who remain focused on providing the best care possible to our community, no matter what obstacle may come our way. The work of everyone here at Kaweah Health continues to inspire me and hopefully our local community as well.

I am very happy to report that Kaweah Health's financial condition continues to improve and stabilize. In the first five months of the new fiscal year, we have outperformed our budget, generated a modest profit, and increased our number of days cash on hand (an important measure of liquidity and balance sheet strength). By comparison, our bottom line is more than \$30 million above this time last year. This financial stabilization is a testament to the strong team at Kaweah Health who has been able to create solutions across all of our departments to help put us "back in the black." While recovering from the global pandemic is a difficult process, we see that we can actually emerge as a stronger, more resilient organization.

In October, Kaweah Health was excited to welcome Dr. Michael McLean, cardiothoracic surgeon and Stanford Medicine faculty member, to the community of Visalia. Dr. McLean is the first of three Stanford Medicine cardiothoracic surgeons who will live and work in Visalia as part of the Kaweah Health Cardiothoracic Surgery Program, working together with the Stanford Medicine Cardiac Surgery Program. The Kaweah Health Cardiothoracic Surgery team has

been providing world-class cardiac care for many years, and working together with Stanford Health Care will help ensure that our community continues to have access to high-quality care for many more years to come.

Also in October, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 525, requiring a mandatory \$25 minimum wage for all employees of the health care sector by 2033 or sooner. The bill will absolutely create funding challenges for all hospitals, but especially ones serving rural communities or high Medi-Cal patient volumes. Since signing the bill, Governor Newsom has publicly stated he is seeking major reforms to the law, in an effort to reduce its \$4 billion cost to the State in the face of a record budget deficit of \$68 billion. It is unclear what the changes will be, whether to the funding structure, scope of the law's applicability, or its timeline, but we remain strongly opposed to SB 525 and are deeply concerned about its long- and short-term financial impacts.

On December 2, Kaweah Health took part in a massive, multi-agency emergency response drill staged at Orosi High School and organized in part by the Tulare County Office of Education. During the drill, the Tulare County Sheriff's Office simulated an active shooter situation, with response from multiple law enforcement agencies, fire and emergency services, California Highway Patrol, the FBI, and more. At several of our health system campuses and affiliated clinics, we conducted a mock code-triage response, used for the arrival of a sudden, large patient volume. As a level III trauma center, Kaweah Health Medical Center regularly trains for a variety of potential disasters to ensure we are always ready when called upon during an emergency. While we hope never to have to face a situation of this magnitude in our area, these drills help ensure our preparedness to meet the needs of our community.

Please remember that local residents can support quality healthcare in their community by using the excellent primary and specialty care, clinics, labs, testing, and more that are available locally. Some of the best care in our area is right in our backyard. And as always, Kaweah Health is here, committed to serving the people of Tulare County.



**Economic development is like a game of chess**

**By Maria Rodriguez Ornelas**  
 Kaweah Health

Life is like a game of chess, in order to move forward you have to make a move. But, even a seasoned player with tactics and a streak of success can flop. One wrong move, and it's checkmate.

Economic development is truly a game of chess. Devon Jones, Economic Development Manager for the City of Visalia, is a key player who knows the game backwards and forwards. But he didn't count on a new piece being added during the match: COVID-19. How can you make any move when you don't know what this new piece can do? Stalemate... or is it?

COVID-19 changed the rules of the game. Mr. Jones moved his pieces cautiously, following his opponent's unpredictable moves. The pandemic caused a devastating financial impact on businesses, employees, and consumers. Businesses began to close. Employees were furloughed or laid off. People couldn't leave their homes, so they stopped shopping locally or doing the leisure activities they most enjoyed throughout the city. Visalia became a ghost town for some time.

And, what about the pieces waiting to be moved? How long would it take before they knew their fate? Business leaders gave



SUBMITTED PHOTO

their perspective. They faced downsizing, supply chain disruptions, never-ending changes in regulations, lack of information, and a shift in priorities for the workforce. Businesses knew that to stay relevant, they had to come up with innovative solutions. Whether it was curbside pick-up, working from home, or changing their product entirely like Chris Wilson, owner of Beatwear Inc., who transitioned from selling dance wear to uniforms. Others like Sam Sigal, President and Co-Owner of Visalia Rawhide completely reinvented the way they kept their sports entertainment alive in the community. There were a few fortunate who saw business thrive as was the case for Ace Hardware Distribution Center. Jenea Martin, Human Resources Coordinator for the company, saw increased revenue, but also a shift in what the workforce valued.

A competitive salary is enticing, but COVID-19 became a shock that displaced many pieces on the chess board. Getting and staying in a job no longer depended solely on paying the bills. Mental wellness and workplace culture became a determining factor in how aspiring candidates and long-time employees made their moves. This is precisely where the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) of Tulare County, one of many resources in the community, aims to connect businesses with qualified candidates. Jennie Campos Bautista, Deputy Director of Operations for WIB, explained the power of partnership in the community. Businesses are only as successful as the people they hire. Creating a pathway for unemployed or low-income individuals to explore a wide range of careers, learn about scholarships, and discover training opportunities can encourage them to better their financial situation, as well as mitigate workforce shortage for many businesses. Plus, through close partnerships, candidates can easily find a workplace that aligns with their mission and vision. This has become increasingly important in the overall employee retention rate and satisfaction, which was evident during an Ace Hardware Distribution tour given to the Leadership Visalia cohort.

But why do thriving businesses choose Visalia? Retail development is a crucial piece in this

match. Visalia is a hub for businesses, greatly due to its prime location as it sits between Bakersfield and Fresno. But having the piece on the board is half the battle. It's important to move it strategically to create harmony in the game. Creating spaces that bring people together makes the shopping experience a family-friendly adventure for the community. It becomes the place where you live, play, and work. Richard Feder, Senior General Manager overseeing the Visalia Mall, said the mall is sit-

See LEADERSHIP on page 4



SUBMITTED PHOTO

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**PROGRAM & SPONSORSHIP INFORMATION:**



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AMERICAN LEGION SIERRA POST 785

Quail Park at Shannon Ranch hosted a free breakfast in November for The American Legion Sierra Post 785. Also, in the month of November, Sierra Post 785 hosted a Thanksgiving social to give thanks to volunteers in addition collected many items for Toys for Tots.

Congratulations to Tulare County Farm Bureau who was a finalist for the Large County Farm Bureau of the Year at the CFBF Annual Meeting Awards Dinner in December.

A&W announced the launch of their online ordering. Text ORDER to 57501 to learn more.

Visalia Medical Clinic donated over 80 turkeys to Visalia Rescue Mission to help fill over 170 Thanksgiving dinner plates.

AgWest Farm Credit donated \$14,800 to FoodLink Tulare County. The donation will make it possible for additional students to participate in the Smartpacks Program, a program that provides food for



students who are at risk for hunger.

Congratulations to Texas Roadhouse who celebrated their one-year anniversary in December!

Tulare County Sheriff's Office hosted a free Winter Wonderland in December, a three-day walk-thru holiday lighting event at Mooney Grove Park.

Congratulations to Zeltmacher Structural Design who moved to their new location at 200 N Santa Fe St in December.

Family HealthCare Network welcomed their newest providers Nitya Jhaveri, DDS and Nauman Qureshi, MD to their Visalia School health center.

Tulare County Federal Credit Union hosted a Toys for Tot drive at all their Tulare County branches in December.

Assistance League of Visalia helped 10 families from Visalia Unified School District celebrate Christmas with gifts and groceries.

Congratulations to Happy Trails Riding Academy, who celebrated their 40th year of service to the community this month! In addition, Happy Trails reported that their Annual Round Up raised just under \$120,000 in support for their equine-assisted programs.

Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG)'s 2023 Walk & Roll Art contest concluded with seven Tulare County students (grades kindergarten to high school) being awarded bicycles from Visalia Cyclery and safety gear for their artwork, encouraging active transportation and clean air efforts.



TCAG

CITY UPDATE

Shaping Visalia's next 100 years



2023 closed out Visalia's 100th year as a Charter City, and what a year it was! As we look towards the future in this new year, Visalia's next 100 years looks bright. Ready to be a part of building the decades to come? If you're looking to dig deeper and connect with our community, serving on a City of Visalia Committee or Commission is one way residents can contribute to Visalia being a great place to live, work and play.

"By serving on a City advisory committee or commission, you can help plan Visalia's future," shared City of Visalia Mayor Brian Poochigian. "A great deal of personal satisfaction can be received through public service. The knowledge and experience gained is invaluable."

Currently, the City's Citizens Advisory Committee has two seats to be filled, the Parks & Recreation Commission has one Commissioner position to fill and the Measure R Citizens Advisory Committee has one position to fill.

City Committees and Commissions serve in an advisory capacity for the City Council.

Each is different, but they all receive public concerns, review policies and regulations, provide valuable insight and are instrumental to the public process.

The City Clerk's office is continually accepting applications, which are kept on file for a period up to two-years. Vacancies evolve and an updated list is always available at [www.visalia.city/maddylist](http://www.visalia.city/maddylist) under "Current Vacancies." As vacancies occur, applications are submitted for interviews. Final selections are then presented to the Visalia City Council for approval. Those appointed can serve up to three two-year terms for Commissions.

City committees and commissions will reflect, to the extent possible, our community and are comprised of individuals who have come together to help make a difference and keep Visalia thriving. If that interests you, learn more about the process at [www.visalia.city](http://www.visalia.city) or contact the Clerk's office directly at [cityclerk@visalia.city](mailto:cityclerk@visalia.city) or (559) 713-4512.

TUCOEMAS

Continued from page 1

programs," Yocum said.

According to Yocum, the program started right after he became the CEO of the company. He was having a conversation about the need for higher education in the Valley with someone he knew working at Grand Canyon University, and through that connection, was able to set up a long-term partnership.

"They've really excelled at... in my experience, providing education for working adults," Yocum said. "It was just a really good fit."

There is also assistance in paying back student loans and paying tuition for employees who are interested and committed to pursuing higher leadership roles at Tucoemas.

Tucoemas is also actively involved in the Neighborhood Degree program, whose mission is to "move Visalia forward, one student at a time." This program helps students prepare for a degree after High School with the ultimate goal of transforming their sphere of influence. As noted in the release, "this is another way Tucoemas invests in creating a brighter future for Visalia and its residents."

The credit union also puts a high importance on financial literacy, and offers a free financial education program called

"Pathways to Financial Freedom." The program incentivizes low-income residents of Tulare County to meet with a certified financial counselor for three months, with \$300 they can use to apply for a secured credit card. The program then helps them set up a budget and meet once a month while participants build their credit.

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

Through this program, Tucoemas has sponsored 12 team members to become certified financial counselors to further support financial security in the Valley.

These initiatives focused on education and community development, are one of the factors that went into Tucoemas Federal Credit Union being certified as a Great Place to Work for two consecutive years. As Visalia faces educational challenges, Tucoemas stands to actively support education, empowerment and the communities it serves.

"Within the walls of Tucoemas, education isn't just encouraged—it's invested in," Tucoemas said via press release.

Employers plead for help in wake of legislative madness

2023 was a very busy legislative year in California. The following are some important changes facing employers in the new year.

Minimum Wage (Hold onto your wallets)

As some of you may know, the Minimum Wage is now tied to the Consumer Price Index and can be raised at the discretion of the Governor anywhere from 0% - 3% annually. Which means we are looking at an increase to \$16 per hour for all employees in 2024. There remain some local (city or county) minimum wages that exceed the new State wage.

In addition, the introduction and passage of SB 525 increases the minimum wages for Health Care Employees by creating a multi-tiered statewide minimum wage schedule for health care workers employed by certain covered health care facilities. The bill covers nearly all healthcare facilities that are not owned, controlled, or operated by the California Department of State Hospitals, tribal clinics exempt from licensure, and outpatient settings operated by federally recognized tribes. It also creates a very broad definition of who is a healthcare worker.

This law begins June 31st with varying increases. We are not done there when it comes to minimum wage. AB 1228 created a \$20 per hour minimum wage for California's fast food restaurant employees. This law takes effect April 1, 2024, and creates a schedule of increases through 2029.

Paid Sick Leave Increases

SB 616 amended the existing Healthy Workplace, Healthy Families Act of 2014 by greatly expanding the amount California employers must provide to their employees from three days/24 hours to five days/40 hours. The bill also increases the carryover and cap on Accrued paid sick time to 10 days/80 hours while continuing to limit the Use per year to 5 days/40 hours. Accrued time must accrue at a rate sufficient for the employee having their entire accrued amount by the 200th day of work.



Off-Duty Cannabis Use and Drug Test Results

AB 2188 and SB700 created two new laws regarding cannabis use and drug test results. AB 2188, signed in 2022, prohibits an employer from discriminating against individuals in hiring, termination, or any term or condition of employment, or to otherwise penalize an individual for cannabis use or drug test results under certain circumstances, such as off duty use or when a test result shows only non-psychoactive cannabis metabolites in their system. The new law does not allow employees to use or possess marijuana while at work and employers should continue to enforce their Drugfree Workplace Program.

SB 700 provides remedy through the Civil Rights Department of the State of California for discrimination based on prior cannabis use and prohibits employers from requesting information from an applicant for employment regarding prior use of cannabis. There are exceptions for situations in which the employer is permitted to consider or inquire about that information by law.

Workplace Violence Prevention Program

SB 553, which takes effect July 1, 2024, creates a requirement for all employers to produce a comprehensive workplace violence prevention program as either a part of an Injury and Illness Prevention Program or a "stand alone" plan. Employers must train employees on the program as well as maintain records regarding workplace violence incidents.

See EMPLOYERS on page 4

VISION

Continued from page 1

Connected initiative in action; working for the betterment of our community, and we should all be immensely proud of this work.

Moving forward also requires strategy and plans. To that end, we are developing two plans that will map the future of our district. VUSD Forward 2030: A Community-Driven Blueprint for the Future is our plan that encompasses both a long range plan for facilities and strategic plan for academic growth. Close to 17,000 community members participated in surveys that contributed to the development of these plans. Additionally, the plans will be based on data generated from two recent independent reviews focused on our facilities and academic results that includes how we use our resources. To maintain our commitment to transparency, information from these reviews will also be shared in forthcoming board meetings. Below is a high-level summary of the current state of our two plans:

- Our strategic plan has three themes and twelve focus areas from which specific initiatives and actions will be taken. The entire plan will be ready for implementation in the 2024-25 school year. The three themes are:
  - High Expectations, High Achievement: We set clear, consistent, and ambitious expectations for learning that allow us to reach our highest potential, creating opportunities for all students and staff.

- Empowering Students: We create and maintain learning environments that set every student up for success by supporting their well-being and ensuring they thrive.
- Engaging the Community: We build trust and partner with our parents, families, and community to create meaningful and lasting relationships to further our mission.
- This spring the Long Range Facilities Master Plan (LRFMP) will be developed and will include utilization of facilities, future growth, and community spaces worthy of our community. In March and April, we will be holding community meetings for you to see the ideas generated from this plan and to provide input before any recommendations are made to our Board.

I am very excited about how we are moving forward and recognize that we have much work to do to ensure our mission is realized. While we see some bright spots in our academic outcomes, overall we continue to lag behind what I know we are capable of achieving. We will have relentless intentionality on instruction and student connectivity to ensure all students excel at their highest potential.

I am confident that with the visionary leadership of our Board, and the development of our strategic and long-range facilities plans, we will continue to move VUSD forward in a direction that will make us all proud. Join us this second semester, to help our students finish strong.

RIBBON CUTTING



The American Legion Sierra Post 785 hosting a ribbon cutting in December. Contact commander Christopher Dushane at (559) 362-2614 on how to become a member.

**Blissfully Yours**  
**BRIDESMAIDS BRUNCH**

**"LIVE" WEDDING SHOW & "SHOW"**

RED CARPET ENTRANCE - MIMOSA BAR  
 MEET & MINGLE WITH SELECT WEDDING VENDORS  
 APPETIZERS - FASHION SHOW  
 ON STAGE DEMOS, PRESENTATIONS & MORE!  
 MATINEE SHOWING OF BRIDESMAIDS THE MOVIE AFTER THE STAGE SHOW

Visalia FOX THEATRE  
 Bliss EVENTS GROUP  
 DO NOT MISS OUT GET YOUR TIX NOW!  
 SUNDAY 1/14/24 | TICKET PRICE: \$10 | EVENT STARTS AT 12 PM  
 BE EARLY! | UNTIL 4PM'ISH | IT'S A BRIDAL PAAARTYY! | BE EARLY!

# Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

**CHAMPION:**



**VISIONARY:**



**REGIONAL LEADERS:**



**KEYSTONE:**



**MEDIA PARTNERS:**



## Tri Counties Bank launches scholarship program for graduating high school seniors

Tri Counties Bank, in partnership with the Community Foundation of the North State, announced today the launch of its annual scholarship program, which awards high school seniors graduating in spring 2024 and pursuing higher education at trade schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.



a unique brand of Service With Solutions® for communities throughout California.

**EVENTS**

Continued from page 1

ting at 98% occupancy, which is better than the national average. And despite the financial losses brought by the pandemic, consumers came roaring back and business is thriving once more. But, are there businesses more essential than others? That was a common question during the pandemic. Frankly, we all are. Every business. Every leader. Every employee. Every member of the community is a moving piece playing an essential role in the economic development of Visalia.

\$110,000 annually to students who demonstrate interest in public service, community engagement and business entrepreneurship. The program offers two types of scholarships:

**Income Based — Sixty (60) \$1,500 scholarships** are awarded to students with a Student Aid Index (SAI) of 0 or less, and a minimum GPA of 2.5.

**Merit Based — Twenty (20) \$1,000 scholarships** are offered to students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher.

“A key element of fulfilling our mission is to invest in our students, who will, in turn, strengthen our communities,” said Rick Smith, President and CEO of Tri Counties Bank. “We look forward to another year of rewarding community-minded and intellectually-gifted students.”

Scholarship applications are due by 11:59 PM on March 13, 2024. Students who are awarded a scholarship will have the

funds sent directly to their school or university of choice to help fund education-related expenses.

Students interested in the scholarship program can apply at [TriCountiesBank.com/scholarship-assistance](http://TriCountiesBank.com/scholarship-assistance).

Scholarships are available for students with a home address in the following 27 counties: Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Kern, Lake, Madeira, Mendocino, Merced, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Mateo, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba.

Established in 1975, Tri Counties Bank is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tri-Co Bancshares (NASDAQ:TCBK) headquartered in Chico, California, with assets of almost \$10 billion and nearly 50 years of financial stability. Tri Counties Bank provides

**EMPLOYERS**

Continued from page 1

**Reproductive Loss Leave for Employees**

SB 848 allows eligible employees to take up to five days of unpaid leave following a “reproductive loss event.” Employees experiencing a reproductive loss and wishing to take a leave must be employed with an employer with at least five employees for at least thirty days prior to be eligible for the leave. The law defines a “reproductive loss event” as “the day or, for a multiple-day event, the final day of a failed adoption, failed surrogacy, miscarriage, stillbirth, or an unsuccessful assisted reproduction.”

These are only some of the most impactful laws coming in 2024. Please be sure to consult with your HR Consultant or Legal Council for guidance in your industry or situation.

## RETURNING

### MARCH 14, 2024

# IMPACT

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Learn More:

[visaliachamber.org/impact](http://visaliachamber.org/impact)

## BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

## LET'S CONNECT!

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

4PM - 6PM

Hosted by

9000 W. Airport Dr. Visalia 93277

REGISTER NOW