

www.visaliachamber.org Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 15 | March 2024



PHOTO BY RIGOBERTO MORAN

Buckle, a clothing store known as a "denim destination", plans to open a storefront in the Visalia Mall this August. The retailer will replace another store Azkara, which plans to relocate in town.

State bill aims to crack down on retail theft

Proposed Assembly Bill 1960 seeks harsher punishments for retail theft totaling over \$50,000 of stolen property



Karis Caddell
 Reporter
 The Sun-Gazette

A new piece of legislation has been brought to the table to further crack down on retail theft in the state, and although the bill is still in the early stages of its life, local agencies have already given a vote of support in order to address.

On Jan. 29, Assemblywoman Esmeralda Soria introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 1960 to address rising retail theft across the state, and hosted a roundtable with law enforcement leaders and law enforcement challenges facing the Central Valley. AB 1960 would

provide prosecutors the ability to hold criminals accountable by imposing a stiffer sentence for retail theft.

"Our communities are hurting. Crime, especially retail theft, is not only a problem in my district," Soria said via press release. "This is an issue affecting the entire state. We must address it with urgency and action. This bill will do that and our cities will be safer as a result."

The bill reinstates a tiered penalties enhancement system if the value of the stolen or damaged property is exceptionally high. Specifically, it would provide a sentence enhancement of up to five

See AB 1960 on page 2

INSIDE

CSET rolls out tax aid for Tulare County residents

Qualifying Tulare County residents can receive free tax preparation assistance from nonprofit Community Services Employment Training (CSET) thanks to their Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. **2**

The Chamber's Future CEO Program

In an era where entrepreneurship is increasingly celebrated, the Visalia Chamber's Future CEO Program stands out as a beacon of opportunity for young minds eager to explore the world of business. **3**

EVENTS

MARCH 21 Fifth Annual IMPACT Leadership Conference

Time: 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 Location: Bello Vita Venue
 4211 W. Goshen Ave., Visalia
 Tickets: visaliachamber.org/impact

MARCH 28 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.
 Location: Visalia First

TRAVEL WITH US

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



Travel provided by:

Collette Vacations
 CST #2006766-20

Chamber Explorations
 CST #2048841-40

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

Visalia Mall cinches new clothing retailer

Buckle connects with the Visalia market this August, replaces clothing retailer Azkara which is leaving the mall to relocate elsewhere in town



The Sun-Gazette

John Lindt
 Contributor
 The Sun-Gazette

The Visalia Mall will try on a new clothing retailer this year to replace one that is relocating within the city.

Los Angeles-based clothing retailer Azkara will shut the doors on their storefront in the Visalia Mall in the next few weeks, making room for a new retailer, Buckle, to move in, mall general manager Rick Feder said. Representatives from Azkara say they are working to relocate their store elsewhere in Visalia.

Feder said Buckle will be opening at the mall in August. The Buckle, Inc. is an American fashion retailer selling clothing, footwear, and accessories for men, women, and children. They footwear, swimwear, fragrances, sunglasses, bags and purses, wallets, and other accessories. It markets

itself as a "denim destination" marketed to "fashion-conscious 12-to-24-year-olds."

The Buckle is one of the leading retailers of medium-to-better-priced casual wear for men and women with 447 retail stores in 42 states compared to 441 stores in 42 states. The nearest store locations are in Bakersfield and Fresno.

When asked how business was going at the Visalia Mall, Feder said the holiday season was good with about a 2% growth in sales and the busiest sales day being Black Friday. But sales were below the national average at 3 to 4%.

New Hyundai lot

The Bakersfield owner of the Visalia Hyundai dealership plans a new sales complex off Plaza Drive on the west side of Visalia. Patrick Beck bought the Visalia automotive franchise from Groppetti Automotive over a year ago. They are currently located at 220 S. Ben Maddox.

Beck wants to build the dealership near Lampe Motors to be located at the Northwest corner of W. Hillsdale Avenue and N. Century Street, according to preliminary plans filed with the city.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Meaningful connection



Gail Zurek
 President and CEO
 Visalia Chamber

Networking can truly take your business to the next level. For some, that's exciting; for others, it's terrifying. But networking is not just a buzzword; it's a powerful tool to create meaningful connections, open doors to new opportunities, and

drive your business forward.

You're in luck - There are a number of opportunities at the Visalia Chamber to leverage this powerful tool. In the next few months, add Business After Hours, SpringTini, and Chamber Ambassadors to your calendar.

Business After Hours are quarterly gatherings that provide golden opportunities for you to mingle with other business leaders, exchange ideas, and showcase your business. Whether you're a seasoned networker or just dipping your toes into the networking pool, Business After Hours offers a relaxed and welcoming environment where you can make genuine connections that could lead to collaborations, referrals, or even new clients. So, mark your calendars and make it a point to attend—you never know who you might meet!

In April, we'll host SpringTini—an event that's not just about cocktails and appetizers (although those are definitely a plus!). It's about immersing yourself in the spirit of spring while rubbing elbows with fellow business owners and community members. Think of it as a chance to connect with other business leaders in a vibrant and social setting. So, grab a ticket, bring some business cards, and get ready to network while enjoying delicious treats and live music. It's networking with a twist and a fantastic way to make a lasting impression on potential clients and collaborators. Last but certainly not least are the Chamber



ADOBE STOCK

Ambassadors. This fantastic group is the backbone of the Visalia Chamber. These folks are like your personal cheerleaders within the business community. They're there to welcome new members, spread the word about networking events, and help you navigate the ins and outs of chamber membership. Think of them as your secret weapon for unlocking the full potential of your chamber membership. So, don't hesitate to reach out to them, ask questions, and tap into their expertise—they're here to help you succeed!

Networking can be intimidating, and putting yourself out there can feel daunting. But trust me when I say that the benefits far outweigh your nerves. Networking isn't just about making sales pitches; it's about building relationships and fostering community within the business world. Frankly, those connections, this community, are what make Visalia so incredibly special. Take a deep breath and dive in—you've got this!

As always, contact our office or website for specific details about all of these opportunities. We're here to help you, and we're confident that when you connect with others, your business will thrive.



ADOBE STOCK

The State Capitol Building's dome in Sacramento.

CITY UPDATE

Winning never gets old

Winning never gets old! With the Visalia Senior Games back for 2024, our city is once again primed to celebrate active aging and community building.



Kicking off on Sunday, March 17, participants in Visalia and from throughout California (the western United States and beyond!) are again invited to take part in one of the area's premiere 50 and better events.

Revamped for 2024, Visalia Senior Games is a multi-month event that allows participants to take part in the full gamut of games as they run through the spring season. From Archery to fan favorite Pickleball, the Visalia Senior Games and the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Department promote healthy, active lifestyles for adults ages 50 and better.

Most recently held in November 2023, the Visalia Senior Games has moved permanently to the spring season, running from March to end of May. The Games bring with them positive economic impact, competitors, supporters, and cheerleaders of all ages.

Those visiting Visalia are invited to stay and play, making their Visalia Senior Games a time to enjoy the area. Before,

between and after events, those visiting Visalia can enjoy all the city has to offer with art, history, shopping or just unwinding after a day of competition with dinner, drinks, or entertainment.

The purpose is deeper than dollar signs, however, as the Visalia Senior Games presents an opportunity to build community and camaraderie, promote the benefits of active living and showcase all that Visalia offers.

If your businesses or organization would like to support the Visalia Senior Games 2024, promotional opportunities are available. To learn more, contact the Visalia Parks & Recreation Department's Laurissa Roggenkamp, Recreation Manager, at laurissa.roggenkamp@visalia.city or at (559) 713-4336.

For those ready to compete, registration for Visalia Senior Games 2024 is open online now by visiting www.visalia.city/seniorgames.

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

AB 1960

Continued from page 1

years when the property loss is more than \$50,000.

Although the law is still in its beginning stages, Stuart Anderson, communication director for Tulare County District Attorney, said the district attorney's office would stand behind the bill in support of the issue it is looking to address.

"Though just introduced with the full legislative process in front of it, on its face, our office would support this legislation's intent to address retail crime in our state," Anderson said.

Not only that, Fresno Police Chief Paco Balderrama also gave a statement of support for the bill via the news release, where he said retail theft and organized retail theft have "become an increasingly growing problem in California the last few years."

"Enhanced penalties to hold criminals accountable will make a significant difference in protecting our businesses and those who frequent them," Balderrama said.

According to a press release from Soria's office, AB 1960 is also supported by the Madera County District Attorney, Merced County District Attorney, California District Attorneys Association as well as the Orange County District Attorney.

"This legislation helps us make sure the punishment matches the crime," Madera County District Attorney Sally Moreno said in the press release. "This will make sure that people who steal large amounts, over \$50,000, are held accountable. It allows us to zero in on those who take advantage of and victimize our neighbors in this way. It's time for greater accountability in California."

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 Members:

- Building Dreams Together
Central Valley Community Foundation

Small Business Members:

- Extra Caring Homecare, LLC
Long Shot Brewery

RENEWING

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

Champion Members:

- Bueno Beverage Company

Community Investor Members:

- Mission Bank*

Business Builder Members:

- Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel*
Southern California Edison Company*

Business Connector Members:

- La Quinta Inn*

Small Business Members:

- Berkshire Hathaway Home Services California Realty*
Bryan Company*
Carroll's Tire Warehouse*
Common Heart
El Rosal Restaurant*
Family Eye Care Optometry
Four Seasons Handy Market*
Main Street Office Suites / Ouzounian Properties*
Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT)*
Tulare County Office of Education
Valley Expetec*

Business Builder Nonprofit Members:

- Crescent Valley Public Charter*

PROUD MEMBER VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Business Connector Nonprofit Members: Center for Spiritual Living Visalia Small Business Nonprofit Members: American Red Cross of Central California * Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

Name: Heather Marquez
Company: Employer Driven Insurance Services, Inc.
Title: Community Development, Compliance Services & Marketing Manager

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

The Chamber has exposed me and E.D.I.S. to others in the community that we would not have otherwise come to know. We've forged valuable relationships with key community contributors, and we've been able to stay up to date on all things Visalia and government as a result. I've grown personally in my interactions with the community through the Chamber and E.D.I.S. has grown its local network substantially.

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

It is a great way to meet your fellow business partners and get your business name out there. Also, when needs arise you know where and who you can turn to for help with that need. For instance, if someone you know is looking for a financial advisor, hospice care, event planning or even a realtor you can direct them to a fellow Chamber Member. I have met some great people in the short amount of time that I have been an ambassador and feel I can even call these people my friends.



The best part of working for your company is...? Being able to meet new people. I enjoy being out in the community, meeting new faces and businesses and spreading the good news of what E.D.I.S. is and has to offer.

Where is your favorite place to go in Visalia with friends and family? I love to go to Barrelhouse. I'm a sucker for live music and food. They always have a great selection of artists and food trucks. It's very low key, safe and family oriented.



HEATHER MARQUEZ

CSET rolls out tax aid for Tulare County residents

Tulare County residents who earn less than \$60,000 annually receive free assistance with filing their federal income tax return through Community Services Employment Training



Serena Bettis
Reporter
The Sun-Gazette

With the tax filing deadline just two months away, qualifying Tulare County residents can receive free tax preparation assistance from nonprofit Community Services Employment Training (CSET) thanks to the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.



In-person and drop-off tax preparation services for English and Spanish speakers are accessible at specific times and locations through April 12. Available to those with low to moderate incomes, VITA is an IRS grant program that provides funding to community organizations so they can in turn help residents properly file their taxes.

"The IRS in the last 25 years has been working really hard with partners across our nation to ensure that people with few resources are able to file a quality tax return at no charge, so they're able to do it and they can keep all of those tax credit dollars in their pocket so they can use them for themselves," Raquel Gomez Collins, CSET community initiatives division director, said.

CSET has participated in the program for about 20 years, first partnering with United Way of Fresno County before applying to the grant program individually.

"In our community, it was started by a couple of volunteers; they were IRS employees who knew about VITA and wanted to help their neighbors," Gomez Collins said.

Individuals and families who earn less than \$60,000 annually are eligible to receive the tax preparation services. Gomez Collins said that while CSET focuses on helping people who are Tulare County residents, they do connect residents from neighboring counties with free tax prep services in their area.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSET

Each year, CSET helps thousands of residents prepare and file their income tax returns for free through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

Gomez Collins stressed that this is a completely free, volunteer-based program. The grant CSET receives from the IRS helps them operate the program out of their offices with support from their employees, but the rest is driven by community volunteers.

In 2023, Gomez Collins said CSET trained about 200 volunteers, and had 78 complete the tax season with the program. CSET helped prepare 3,898 tax returns in 2023, and their goal for this year is to help with 4,000. CSET also provides assistance with applying for the California Earned Income Tax Credit.

What to expect and prepare

Gomez Collins said that it is vital for people to come prepared with all of the documents needed to complete their tax returns.

Anyone who is accessing in-person services must bring a photo ID and their social security card, along with the social security card of anyone else they are including on their tax return, such as their dependents or spouse.

Also needed is all income documents for 2023, including all W-2s and 1099 forms. Gomez Collins said that if someone is missing

See TAX AID on page 3

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Name: Jose Arias
Company: The Creative Promo
Title: Owner

The Creative Promo specializes in a variety of promotional and marketing materials. With over 9 years of experience, the company offers services such as promotional products, embroidery, screen printing, Heat Transfer, banners, canopies, table covers, office printing, signs, websites, social media marketing and more. We offer quick turnaround time, with the added convenience of same-day pickup options in some products

Our industry is one of the fastest growing and we have over 5000K suppliers that offer great quality products and quick turnarounds. Need something creative to offer to your clients. Visit us at The Creative Promo.

Despite only being in operation for a year and a half, The Creative Promo has demonstrated a strong commitment to community service. Sponsoring over 10,000K with different organizations in just one year. Reflecting a significant dedication to making a positive impact.

The owner is actively involved in the Sunset Rotary Club, a group focused on volunteering and community assistance, and adds depth to the company's commitment to social responsibility. Being part of such a community-centric organization often aligns with values of service, leadership, and making a difference at the local level. The mission of the club is to provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.

Allowing creativity to have no boundaries, and balancing a flexible schedule, and the relationships we built with our clients is what makes the company special. Networking with the Chamber and going to mixers have really helped our business grow. Relationships are our key to building our business. We pride ourselves on giving great quality service to our clients. The passion that goes into every project is unbelievable. We make sure you leave happy and with a smile. As online has made it easier to order, remember helping a local small business can have a bigger impact on our community than ordering online. We can offer that same service and products.

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

©2024, Visalia Chamber of Commerce. All rights reserved. Reproduction by any means of the entire contents or any portion of this publication without written permission is prohibited. The appearance of any advertisements in the publication does not constitute support or endorsement for any product, person, cause, business, or organization named therein, unless specifically noted otherwise in the advertisement.

CONTACT US

Send briefs via e-mail to amanda@visaliachamber.org Call 734-5876. Mail to: Visalia Chamber of Commerce 222 N. Garden St. #300 Visalia, CA 93291 Visit www.visaliachamber.org

Spring-tini VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTED BY: VALLEY CREDIT UNION STRONG LIGHT BITES • MUSIC MINI-SPECIALTY COCKTAILS APRIL 2023 THE WOODLANDS VISALIACHAMBER.ORG / SPRINGTINI

Health Net awarded \$2 million in grants to 47 independent physician practices throughout California. The grants will remove barriers that may limit physician practices' ability to take advantage of the Equity and Practice Transformation (EPT) Provider Direct Payment Program.

To promote literacy this school year, **Assistance League of Visalia** donated 4,500 books to children throughout Tulare County for home libraries.

Family HealthCare Network welcomed Melissa Quill, PA-C, to their Visalia School health center in addition to Jesse Duro, PA-C to their Ivanhoe health center.

The American Legion, Sierra Post 785 created a Gaming Committee in February. On March 8th, from 5pm to 10pm, Game Night will feature free pizza, drinks, video games, and board games. In addition, Sierra Post 785 has multiple raffles and fundraisers to raise funds geared towards American Legion Charities, including a gun raffle, coin show raffle and discount ticket books.

The **Tulare County Farm Bureau** hosted the Blue Jacket Bonanza ceremony in January, as part of the TCFB Education and Scholarship fund.

Self-Help Enterprises' Vice President, Besty McGovern-Garcia was honored



SELF-HELP ENTERPRISES



with the Ruby Award by **Soroptimist International of Visalia**. Soroptimist will also host their Spring Fling, Enchantment Under the Sea on March 16 at **Historic Seven Sycamores**.

Congratulations to **Happy Trails Riding Academy** who are celebrating their 40th Anniversary this year!

Holiday Inn Express & Suites welcomed their new Area Operations Manager Vince Romo.

Valley Strong Credit Union released its 2023 Impact Report detailing the com-

pany's corporate social responsibility commitments and it's continuing efforts to bring financial education to the communities in which it serves. Milestones included, Valley Strong team members contributed over 6,000 volunteer hours, over 5,800 students taught financial literacy, students in high school branches accomplished 260 hours of education and hands on experience, more than \$2 million dollars donated to non-profits, and was awarded the 2023 Social Impact award from California and Nevada Credit Union Leagues.

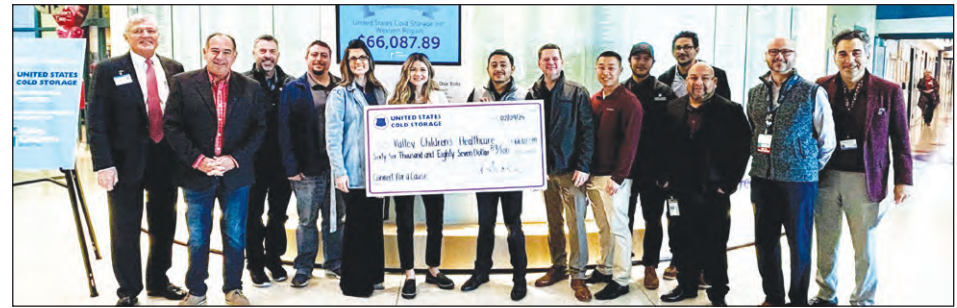
Valley Children's Healthcare was gifted more \$66,000 from United States Cold Storage, Inc. as part of their 2023 "Connect for a Cause" campaign.

Orthopaedic Associates Medical Clinic, Inc. opened an orthopaedic urgent care clinic, open Monday through Friday.

Visalia Rescue Mission announced Rescued Treasures will begin to carry a range of appliances and furniture from renowned brands.

Vintage Press Restaurant was featured on **ABC30's** Dine & Dish segment, highlighting Chef David Vartanian and VP's culinary delights.

Salt + Light Works hosted their first Community Forum in February at **210 Café**.



VALLEY CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE



Gaining knowledge and appreciation for the faces behind public safety and justice badges

Kurt Hardcastle
Business Teacher
Visalia Unified School District

On Friday, February 9th, Leadership Visalia focused on the importance of public safety and justice in our community. The Public Safety & Justice Day Session featured a lineup of various locations, including, the Visalia Fire Department Training Center, Tulare County Sheriff's training department and the Tulare County District Attorney's Office. At each of these locations, the class met with leaders who serve Visalia and Tulare County to understand how these organizations maintain their vigilance and keep our community safe.

Fire Station 55

On this crisp sunny winter morning we were welcomed to the home of Fire Station 55, where we were greeted by Karl Krauss, Training Captain for Visalia Fire Department. The day kicked off with a tour of Station 55. We were led through their dining room and kitchen, where like all families the fire fighters break bread and discuss the day and build camaraderie between each other.

This station houses 3-5 fire personnel who serve twenty-four-hour shifts. While all fire stations are strategically placed to have proximity to the public and property, this location was set with its proximity to the Visalia Industrial Park as it also houses the Visalia Fire Department Hazardous Material Response Team.

We rounded out the tour of the five-acre lot by touring the state-of-the-art training facility. The brick building looks like a typical two-story brick building. However, once inside the use of the building serves



LEADERSHIP VISALIA

as a center train and create fire ready projects to assist in the development of our local and state firefighters. The building shows evidence or recent training with empty rooms, and shadows of smoke, with puddles on the floors, and pipes that control the flow of propane throughout the building. Based on the location and facility serves as an excellent training ground.

Round Table Discussion

We followed up our tour with a round table discussion on public safety. We were joined by experts in their field: Visalia Fire Capt. Karl Krauss, Visalia Police Lt. Mona Whaley (Night Watch Commander) and Lt. Bobby Rader, with the Tulare County Sheriff's Department

The discussion centered around the passing of Proposition 47 and its impact

on our local communities, as well as on the unhoused community and its current strain on our emergency systems. Lt. Whaley spoke about the non-emergency numbers to access referrals and assistance; and the unhoused outreach programs available in the community, such as the Hope Team. Services for the unhoused are increasing and the public will need to become familiar with the various programs to ensure the appropriate programs are contacted when a need arises.

Simulation Training

After lunch we met out at the Sheriff's Adult Pre-Trial Facility where we met Sgt. Russell Murphy. Sgt. Murphy exhibited a real-world example of body cameras of several peace officers. We then separated

See LEADERSHIP on page 4

FUTURE CEO



Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders: The Chamber's Future CEO Program

In an era where entrepreneurship is increasingly celebrated, the Visalia Chamber's Future CEO Program stands out as a beacon of opportunity for young minds eager to explore the world of business. Presented by ServiceMaster by Benevento, this innovative program offers a comprehensive digital curriculum designed to ignite the entrepreneurial spirit in children, providing them with the fundamental tools to kickstart their own ventures.

Recently honored with the prestigious Outstanding Chamber Program Award from the Western Association of Chamber Executives (W.A.C.E.), the Future CEO Program solidifies its position as a leader in youth entrepreneurship education, recognized for its excellence and innovation.

The program operates under the philosophy of "work at your own pace," offering a flexible learning environment that allows participants to embark on their entrepreneurial journey at any time leading up to the culminating event, Future CEO Day. With the Spring Session commencing on February 21, 2024, and Future CEO Day scheduled for May 4, 2024, aspiring young CEOs have ample time to engage with the material and prepare for their moment in the spotlight.

At the heart of the program lies a carefully crafted curriculum tailored to resonate with young learners. Whether they envision themselves running a hot chocolate stand in the fall or an orange juice stand in the spring, participants are guided through the essential steps of conceptualizing, launching, and managing their own business venture. Through engaging webinars produced by Visalia Chamber staff and featuring insights from local business leaders, students delve into key areas of business acumen, including:

- **Business Fundamentals:** From filing a DBA to setting up a bank account, participants gain a foundational understanding of the administrative processes involved in establishing a business entity.
- **Cost Models:** Exploring the intricacies of cost analysis and pricing strategies, students learn to navigate the financial aspects of running a business, laying the groundwork for profitability and sustainability.
- **Safety/Food Prep:** Emphasizing the importance of safety protocols and food preparation stan-

See FUTURE CEO on page 4

CSET

Continued from page 2

even just one income document, CSET cannot complete the tax return. For example, if someone had three different jobs in 2023, they must bring all three W-2s they should have received.

CSET's website has a full checklist of other information that is needed for tax return completion, including daycare expenses, higher education expenses and documents to support itemized deductions.

For those using in-person services, Gomez Collins said volunteers will greet individuals who are lined up at their office before they even open to answer any general questions and ensure people have all of the documents they need.

If someone is using the drop-off services, Gomez Collins said CSET will provide them with a folder that contains an intake form, instructions and information about other resources. The person must then return the folder with the form completely filled out and with copies of all the required documents.

A completed, correct form along with copies of the required documents must be provided to VITA volunteers so that they can efficiently and correctly complete a person's tax return.

Any amendments to tax returns, mistakes that need corrected or missing information can take away from the number of people the volunteers are able to help, Gomez Collins said. Further, CSET asks that people not approach them if they are "shopping around" for tax preparation services to see what their refund might be so volunteers can focus on individuals who need assistance.

Tax prep services are offered in both English and Spanish, and Gomez Collins said their in-person services also typically include volunteers who can read forms out loud to people to help them fill out the intake form and understand what it is asking.

CSET can also help with California state tax returns concurrently with federal returns; however, CSET is not able to help with out-of-state tax returns, incomes of more than \$60,000 annually and other, more unique situations. A full list is available on the intake form.

Access services

There are a total of six sites where residents can access either in-person or drop-off services. Four of the sites have services offered every other Saturday, on Feb. 24, March 9,

March 23 and April 6.

In Visalia, the Employment Connection office, located at 4025 W. Noble Ave., Suite B, is open for in-person and drop-off services Tuesdays through Fridays.

Also in Visalia, the CSET main office, located at 312 NW 3rd Ave., is open for in-person services every other Saturday.

In Tulare, the Family Resource Center, located at 302 E. Tulare Ave., is open for drop-off services on Tuesdays and Thursdays and for in-person services every other Saturday.

In Porterville, the Employment Connection office, located at 1063 W. Henderson Ave., is open for drop-off services Tuesdays through Fridays and in-person services every other Saturday.

In Cutler, the CSET Cutler-Orosi Senior Center, located at 12691 Ave. 408, is open for drop-off services Tuesdays through Thursdays and in-person services every other Saturday.

In Earlimart, the Family Resource Center, located at 176 N. Front St., is open for drop-off services on Wednesdays and Fridays.

How to volunteer

CSET is always looking for volunteers for the VITA program, and volunteers can get involved at any point, Gomez Collins said. Individuals with any experience level are welcome to volunteer, whether they are tax professionals or not.

To get involved, those interested should email CSET or register online, and a CSET employee will provide them with the training modules they need to go through to learn how to prepare tax returns and get a certificate.

Gomez Collins said that about half of the training is about ethics related to tax preparation and the other part is about understanding the terms and language of a tax return. Once a prospective volunteer receives the certificate, CSET will vet them and then set them up to volunteer.

Volunteering can be a good way for anyone, especially young people, to take advantage of the training provided and build up the knowledge base of how to prepare tax returns in the community, Gomez Collins said, because "everyone has to do a tax return forever."

"It's such a wonderful way to learn about your community but also give back and make new friends," Gomez Collins said. "It's a great place to meet people."

Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



RIBBON CUTTING



Apricot Lane Boutique hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their grand opening weekend located at 117 E. Main St.

LEADERSHIP

Continued from page 3

into groups representing, the community, peace officers, legal counsel, and the administrative officials. Each team put together their talking points and it became clear that these varied perspectives are easier to comment on with the advantage of hindsight.

This led to the simulation, where several Leadership Visalia team members were able to work through a simulation and see how they would react in an escalating dramatization. Our minimum training combined with the small amount of information provided on the situation, led to both interesting and humorous results. The Leadership Team left realizing we would require significant additional training before considering a career as a peace officer. Training provided to our officers is essential in preparing them for the skills they require to protect our community daily. As a community we are fortunate to have such a highly skilled and dedicated public safety team.

Tulare County Superior Court – Bureau of Investigations

The last round table of the day was in the Tulare County Court House. We were greeted by Fortune, the Courthouse Facility Canine, at the Tulare County District Attorney's Office. Fortune is a Golden Retriever, and a working canine who assists during stressful stages of legal proceedings such as child forensic interviews and trials. While he can respond to over 90 cues, on this day the cue he was responding to most was our candy wrappers as he made us all feel at ease.

While fortune is clearly an undisputed favorite, we were also supported by two other speakers Erica Gonzalez, Assistant District Attorney, where she has prosecuted various types of crimes, including Crimes Against Children, Domestic Violence, Elder Abuses, Sexual Assault and Juvenile Crimes. In addition, we had Jennifer Lightfoot, Director of Victim Services, where she oversees 17 Victim Advocates, as well as Fortune.

We learned about the process of prosecution and the crimes as well as the need for more attorneys to work for the District Attorney and serve Justice. As many fields in law and justice there is an ever-greater need and fewer individuals willing to rise to the challenge to serve as officers of the court. So, if you are looking for a career, this one is in high demand.

The diverse backgrounds and experiences of these key speakers added depth and authenticity to the Public Safety & Justice Day Session. Their dedication to community well-being, coupled with their personal and professional accomplishments, showcased the intricate tapestry of individuals working tirelessly to ensure public safety and uphold justice within Visalia and Tulare County. As the day unfolded, participants gained not only knowledge but a profound appreciation for the faces behind the badges, reinforcing the collaborative effort required for a safe and just community.

HEALTH CARE NOTE

Focused on growth



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

I'm happy to report that Kaweah Health is moving into 2024 focused on continuing our recent growth and bringing more life-saving care to Tulare County. As we enter the third quarter of the fiscal year, Kaweah Health's financial condition continues to improve, as we are outperforming our budget, generating a modest profit, and increasing our number of days cash on hand (an important benchmark measure of an organization's liquidity and balance sheet strength)

In an update to California's Senate Bill 525, which will impact all hospitals across California, Governor Newsom has publicly stated he is seeking major reforms to the law, largely due to its \$4 billion impact on California's finances at a time in which it faces a record \$38 billion budget deficit. The first pay increases were scheduled for June 2024, but Newsom wants to delay them until the State's fiscal outlook is healthier. It is unclear what the scope of change will be, but we remain strongly opposed to SB 525 and are deeply concerned about its long- and short-term financial impacts, which will be felt beyond just the healthcare industry.

With the recent conclusion of the World Ag Expo, people often ask me why Kaweah Health is a sponsor of the expo, considering we aren't an agricultural business. I respond that Kaweah Health doesn't exist just to treat people when they are sick or injured—we exist to promote health in our community, and that takes many different forms. Each year, Kaweah Health sponsors the volunteer meetings for the 1,200 to 1,500 people who donate their time to make the expo a world-class event. Sponsoring the volunteers for the expo is a way we can support an event that contributes to a healthier community. As the largest agricultural expo in the world, the local impact is vast, generating revenue and jobs, bringing international attention to our community, and providing a sense of pride in hosting the world's largest ag show. The volunteers play a large role in the success of the World Ag Expo, and Kaweah Health is proud to help in supporting the show and the local people who make it such an amazing event.

In health care news, Kaweah Health is excited about increasing access to life-saving heart surgery through our affiliation with Stanford Health Care. Last fall, we welcomed Dr. Michael K. McLean, cardiothoracic surgeon and Stanford Medicine faculty member. Dr. McLean settled in quickly and began performing open-heart surgeries within his first few days in Visalia. With the high need for advanced heart surgery in our community, it is important that we continue to bring more access to the community, and we look forward to bringing two more Stanford Medicine heart surgeons to Visalia soon.

We are also excited to bring four new physicians to the area, three of whom have local roots in Tulare County. It's always nice when people who have grown up here come back to practice medicine. It's a testament to the desire of those doctors to serve their community, and we are honored to have them on our team. We have recently welcomed Tulare County natives Dr. Daniela Rangel Orozco (family medicine), Dr. Carlos Rangel (Ob/Gyn), and Dr. Rafael Martinez (family medicine), as well as Dr. Esther Flores (pediatrics), who are now practicing in Visalia and at Kaweah Health rural clinics.

Please remember that our local residents play an important role in supporting quality health care in Visalia and Tulare County. By using the exceptional primary and specialty care, clinics, labs, and testing facilities available locally, they contribute to maintaining high standards of health care. Kaweah Health remains proud to care for the people of our community.

FUTURE CEO

Continued from page 3

dards, the program equips young entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure the well-being of their customers and uphold industry regulations.

- Marketing & Customer Service: Understanding the power of effective marketing and exceptional customer service, participants learn to communicate their brand message, attract clientele, and cultivate lasting relationships with their target audience.

- Money Management: From budgeting and cash flow management to financial reporting, students develop essential money management skills essential for steering their business towards success.

With a modest tuition fee of \$25 per student, the Future CEO Program offers accessible and affordable access to high-quality entrepreneurial education, making it inclusive and welcoming to aspiring young minds from all backgrounds.

Beyond the acquisition of practical business knowledge, the program fosters invaluable skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork, nurturing the next generation of leaders poised to make a positive impact in their communities and beyond.

As the spring session of the Visalia Chamber's Future CEO

Program commences, the stage is set for young visionaries to embark on a transformative journey of discovery and empowerment. With the support of dedicated mentors, engaging curriculum, and a nurturing learning environment, participants are primed to unleash their entrepreneurial potential and pave the way for a future defined by innovation, resilience, and boundless possibility.

To enroll your future entrepreneur and join us in shaping the business leaders of tomorrow, visit visaliachamber.org/ceo today. Don't miss this opportunity to be part of an award-winning program that empowers young minds and cultivates a culture of innovation and excellence in our community. Together, let's inspire the next generation of leaders to dream big, take risks, and make a difference in the world of business and beyond.

preneur and join us in shaping the business leaders of tomorrow, visit visaliachamber.org/ceo today. Don't miss this opportunity to be part of an award-winning program that empowers young minds and cultivates a culture of innovation and excellence in our community. Together, let's inspire the next generation of leaders to dream big, take risks, and make a difference in the world of business and beyond.

REGISTER TODAY!

FUTURE CEO



ServiceMaster by Benevento

5-week digital business education course that teaches children the basics of starting their own company.

SESSION CATEGORIES:

- Business Fundamentals
- Marketing & Customer Service
- Cost Models
- Money Management
- Safety/Food Prep

