

# Business Update

AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Vol. 43, No. 17 | May 2024

## INSIDE

### Tory Burch, Bank of America unveil free online educational resource for women

Bank of America and the Tory Burch Foundation today unveiled a new pillar in their long-term commitment to empower women entrepreneurs. **2**

### Honoring excellence: Visalia's finest finalists revealed

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce proudly announces the finalists for its prestigious 69th Annual Awards, honoring businesses and organizations that contribute to Visalia. The Awards will take place on Thursday, June 6th, at the historic Fox Theater in downtown Visalia. **3**

### Partnering with The Brave Project

The Leadership Visalia cohort class of 2023-2024 has chosen The Brave Project as its focal point, embodying our commitment to fostering collaboration and teamwork within the community. **3**

## EVENTS

### MAY 4

#### Future CEO Day

Time: Multiple times  
Location: Multiple locations  
(visit: visaliachamber.org/ceo)

### MAY 23

#### Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.  
Location: Visalia First

## TRAVEL WITH US

### 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

### MARCH 18-29, 2025

Treasures of Croatia and Slovenia

### MARCH 25-APRIL 2, 2025

Treasures of Ireland

### MARCH 26-APRIL 4, 2025

Holland Tulips and Rhine River Castles River Cruise

### JULY 22-30, 2025

Alpine Swiss Villages and Rails

### OCTOBER 1-8, 2025

Iceland Explorer

### OCTOBER 28-NOVEMBER 5, 2025

Burgundy and Provence France River Cruise



Travel provided by:

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



FILE PHOTO / THE SUN-GAZETTE

California Dairies, Inc. is planning to grow its line of ultra filtered milk in Tipton and expand its butter operation at their plant on Plaza Drive in Visalia.

## Cal Dairies spreads out facility expansion

Dairy leader plans to grow its line ultra-filtered milk in Tipton and expand its butter operation at its Visalia headquarters



**John Lindt**  
Contributor  
The Sun-Gazette



California Dairies, Inc. is planning to expand its plant in Visalia and its line of high-protein and lactose-free milk. The Visalia-based dairy leader has submitted plans to expand its ultra filtered (UF) milk line at its Tipton plant, as well as expand its butter operation at its plant on Plaza Drive in Visalia. The two-phase expansion is valued at \$1 million. E.A. Bonelli Architects & Engineers submitted the plans that will help process fluid milk more efficiently with a new automated process. The architecture firm has worked with Cal Dairies before, designing projects at its plant in Visalia as well as its 10,000-square-foot powder and butter facility in Tipton.

The total expansion would be about

31,000 square feet yet would add only a handful of new employees bringing a total of 365 workers at the plant.

UF milk is the result of an ultra-filtration process whereby the water and a portion of the lactose naturally present in Grade A pasteurized milk is removed, according to Cal Dairies' web site. UF Milk is sold in full tanker loads to customers who manufacture products such as pediatric and adult nutritional beverages and sports drinks.

According to an industry source, ultra-filtered milk contains nearly twice the protein of ordinary milk with only half the sugar. It is also lactose-free. The process makes milk appealing to a wide range of consumers including the health conscious, lactose intolerant and diabetics.

U-Haul plans 4-story storage facility

U-Haul has filed plans for a four-story, 116,000 square foot storage facility on Mineral King Avenue near Cain Street in Visalia. The building to be constructed will be located at 1818 E. Mineral King with construc-

tion valued at \$800,000.

U-Haul has announced a dozen similar projects throughout the United States in the last year. The multi-story self-storage buildings typically include more than 700 indoor rooms with climate-control and high-end security features at affordable price points. The sites provide customers access to a retail showroom with boxes, moving supplies, hitch accessories, bike racks and more. They typically employ between 10 and 20 people at similar sites.

In addition to its moving truck and trailer rentals and supplies, U-Haul is the third largest self-storage operator in North America with 967,000 rentable units and 83.3 million square feet of self-storage space at owned and managed facilities.

DailyDeals pops up at former Toys R Us

Retail discounter and liquidator DailyDeals has opened another location in the Central Valley. The company moved into the former Toys R Us storefront at Whitendale

See CAL DAIRIES on page 2

## Small Business Admin sounds alarm on PPP loan forgiveness

SBA warns borrowers about nearing deadline for PPP loan forgiveness, Fresno SBA office offers helping hand for local loan recipients

**Derek Fleming**  
Contributor  
The Sun-Gazette



In response to the COVID-19 crisis, small business owners were given a lifeline through forgivable loans aimed at supporting payroll costs and maintaining operations. However, the Small Business Administration (SBA) wants to let borrowers know that the application deadline for loan forgiveness is approaching.

According to the SBA Fresno, as of March 13 borrowers of the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) can apply for forgiveness benefits through the SBA web site, although an official deadline date for applications has not been confirmed as of report.

Dawn Golik, district director of the SBA Fresno district office, emphasized the importance of affected businesses applying for forgiveness on their PPP loans, as well as starting repayment of their Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) if they're due or—alternatively—seeking enrollment in the hardship program if they are facing financial difficulties.

"The main thing is that they are not alone to figure out what their options are and there is local help available to help if they need it," Golik said, expressing the office's commitment to assisting businesses in the San Joaquin Valley and the Central

See PPP on page 4

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### Farewell



**Gail Zurek**  
President and CEO  
Visalia Chamber

It is surreal to write my last president's message. This monthly column has allowed me to share my thoughts on business community issues, draw attention to challenges, and celebrate our collective successes.

As I write my final message, I can't help but reflect on my time with the Chamber. This reflection, this goodbye, while good and at the right time, is still tough. Truth be known, I'm stilling on the deadline, having put off writing this.

Serving as your CEO has been a profound honor, far greater than I could have imagined. When I accepted this position, I was excited to represent business interests, improve the overall business community, and, in turn, strengthen Visalia. Little did I know the scope of that representation, its effect on me, or the great adventure awaited.

Beyond our events, which are important and fun, much of my role is developing relationships with business owners, elected officials, and community leaders. That role has led me to meet and engage with some of the most amazing, inspiring, and thoughtful folks. Together, we've tackled issues that affect Visalia and businesses for generations, from helping small businesses plan for their next chapter and developing ways to support emerging business trends to creating a microbrew overlay district or representing small businesses by testifying before the state assembly. I am proud that these changes, wins, and celebrations will still be impactful years from now.

Recently, I came across a picture of my two sons, ten years ago, sitting at my desk, reviewing the proposed creation of new council districts. In my office, looking at the brightly colored maps, I asked my 10- and 5-year-old sons what they saw. Since that picture, they've attended many

city councils, planning commissions, and school board meetings. They've been to ribbon cuttings and have had to be quiet as I took more calls than I admit in the car, on vacation, or on a sports field. But 10 years later, my boys understand the importance of civic engagement, local business support, and a deep appreciation for the people who make this community so incredibly special. I revel in their perspective now and love the education you all have provided them. As a Mom, thank you.

Covid forever changed my relationship with this position, my view of our Chamber, and frankly, with so many of you. When the chips are down and things are difficult, it clarifies your mission. Helping businesses find hope and solutions and serving as their voice became important in ways I cannot fully express. Phone calls during that time were more urgent and despite. They called to ask for advice, a friend, and encouragement. I was deeply honored that they called me during these dark moments. I fought harder and worked longer, and this job became a calling. Fighting for local businesses consumed my time and my heart. Our work during that time solidified for me the Chambers' role in representing the local business.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with over 50 board members. Business leaders in their own right, I have learned so much from their perspective and insight. Together, they ask hard questions and push to strengthen us as an organization. They are excellent representatives of our business community.

As I leave, I know the Chamber is in wonderful hands. The staff serves in their roles because, like me, they are passionate about you, your businesses, and your role in our community. I could not have survived without them, both from the workload but also the support. They are an amazing team fighting for you.

As I sign off, thank you for this amazing adventure, and for all I've learned and been trusted to do. This job, turned calling, has been one of the most profound honors in my life. I am deeply grateful for this chapter and am confident there are many more wonderful chapters in the Chamber's life.



VISALIA

## A new look for the City of Visalia

**Allison M. Mackey**  
Communications Manager  
City of Visalia

2024 marks Visalia's 150th year as an incorporated city with a common council. As we honor this important milestone, coming on the heels of 100 years as a Charter City, we celebrate a new look and promise.

Thanks to the guidance of the Visalia City Council, and the contributions of members across the community, the City has completed a brand refresh and is rolling out Visalia's new logo, new tagline and more.

Informed by over 800 conversations, surveys and interviews completed with Visalians, the process has included updating the City's identity, image, and brand to market the positive aspects of working for and living in the City of Visalia.

The new City of Visalia logo is a nod to its predecessors with elements breaking out of a bold V. The Fox Theatre represents our beautiful downtown and Visalia's arts and entertainment scene, as well as the history of our city. The Sierra Nevadas represent the incredible destination Visalia is

in the valley under the majestic range, while echoing the strength our city holds. The rolling green hills are the farmland that the city is built on and represent the pride we have in living in the Central Valley. It all rests under a bright blue sky and golden sun.

The refreshed brand includes a new tagline, Visalia: A Better Way of Living and a promise to residents, businesses, visitors - all those who are Visalia. It is, "In all we do, we do it with heart. The City of Visalia and our employees are dedicated to providing quality services and creative solutions to make the community a place we are proud to call home. We strive to deliver services in an approachable and friendly way - the Visalia way."

Look for the new logo and corresponding elements as the refresh rolls out across our community. To learn more, visit [www.visalia.city/refresh](http://www.visalia.city/refresh).

For more information on City of Visalia, visit [www.visalia.city](http://www.visalia.city) or visit them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn @CityofVisalia.

## Visalia Chamber announces board slate for 2024

Pursuant to the bylaws of the Chamber, a nominating committee was appointed by the board to solicit candidates for the board. The opportunity to apply was also promoted through the Chamber newsletter earlier this year. The nominating committee has recommended, and the board has accepted, the following to be candidates for the board: Bridget Elmore, Karen Gross, John Anderson, Jordan Mulrooney, Tim Foster. The bylaws require that we notify the members of this slate of candidates, as well as the opportunity for members to nominate other candidates by petition.

In order to nominate an alternative candidate for the board, a petition signed by fifteen members of the Chamber must be received by the Chamber within 10 days of this notification (Friday, May 10, 2024). If no additional nominees are submitted, the proposed slate listed above will be elected to serve on the Board starting July 1, 2024. If one or more names are submitted by petition, then a ballot will be sent to all Chamber members to elect the new directors for this term. If you have questions about this notice, or the process for selecting board members, please contact the Visalia Chamber of Commerce at 559-734-5876.

## CAL DAIRIES

Continued from page 1

Avenue and Mooney Boulevard in Visalia earlier this month. Offering cheap merchandise the company says they have bikes, speakers, car sets, air fryers and much more for just \$12! DailyDeals already had stores in Fresno and Bakersfield.

With a TikTok advertising bent, DailyDeals says it "buys truckloads of overstock merchandise, store returns, discontinued items and much more from top retailers across the country. We buy in bulk, so you can save your money - all at a fixed price! Our stocking days are Fridays and Saturdays."

## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Call 734-5876. Mail to: Visalia Chamber of Commerce 220 S. Mooney Blvd., Ste. B Visalia, CA 93291  
Visit www.visaliachamber.org

# 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:

- MRH Ledgers
- Graphic Packaging International

#### Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- A Solution, Inc.

#### Small Business Members:

- She Mogul Media, LLC
- Unitek Learning-Workforce

### Development

#### RENEWING

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

#### Regional Leader Members:

- Tucoemas Federal Credit Union

#### Keystone Members:

- Valley Strong Credit Union

#### Community Investor Members:

- Xfinity Store by Comcast

#### Business Connector Members:

- Lee's Air, Plumbing, Heating and

### Roofing

- Round Table Pizza\*
- Texas Roadhouse

#### Small Business Members:

- Cal-Valley Insurance Services
- Comfort Suites-Downtown\*
- Gunning & Gunning, C.P.A.\*
- Hampton Inn\*
- International Agri-Center\*
- Nichols Farms\*
- Rapid Care Center of Visalia
- Security Self-Storage\*
- Spraying Devices Inc.
- The Barn\*
- Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG)

## PROUD MEMBER

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

#### Business Builder Nonprofit Members:

- Saint Anthony's Retreat and Conference Center\*

#### Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Central California Blood Center
- Grace Lutheran Church & School

\* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.

## AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

Name: Shane Moss  
Company: Mulligans  
Title: President

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

Most of my journey in making Mulligans a reality had to do with networking, and if you know me, this is not on my list of favorite things to do. What the Chambers has helped me understand is networking is less about selling a vision or dream and more about relationally connecting with likeminded people who are also making their dreams a reality. The chambers has also been a hub for resources through those same relationships.

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

The reality is we cannot do it alone. Harvey MacKay once said, "Even the Lone Ranger didn't do it alone." The Chambers is a place to collab, explore, network, and resource.



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

It's golf, food, drinks, and friends, what's better than that... oh, and I own it so that doesn't hurt.

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

I spend 50% of my time at Component Coffee in meetings or working so I guess that counts. But for food, Sushi Kuu all day!

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Name: Jessica Rodriguez  
Company: Common Heart  
Title: Owner

We are just a small coffee shop on Mooney, dedicated to making Visalia a better place. We love our hometown and we want to give back to our people. One easy way we do that is by giving 10% off discounts to 6 community member groups (first responders, military, healthcare, pastors, teachers + students) to show the people of Visalia that we are FOR them..

How does your company get involved in the local community?

#### Nonprofit Partnerships

- Neighborhood Church + Neighborhood Degree (Neighborhood Church's new non-profit): Partnered with them to give away free drinks for VUSD employees on the first day of school.
- Collected toys from Common Heart employees and customers for Neighborhood's annual Christmas Store for the families at Houston Elementary.
- Salt and Light: Hosted a vendor market where all vendor fees were donated to Salt and Light.
- Visalia Police Department and Food Link: Hosted community "Coffee with a Cop" event and did a can food drive with customers and employees to donate to Food Link



#### Host free community events on our patios

- Hosted 10 community events (an outdoor movie night, 5 craft markets, 3 yoga classes, coffee with a cop, birthday party, galentine's day event); 1 per month in 2024

#### Local sports sponsorships

- Cal Ripken, Redwood Tennessees, 2 local travel baseball teams, etc.

#### Local PTA and nonprofit support

- Denton; Crestwood; Salt and Light; Outshine Ministries, etc.

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

We know most of our customers by name and have built so many friendships outside of the shop!

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

We had an amazing grand opening party that the Chamber helped us celebrate- a formal ribbon cutting and a family movie night on our patio for the community!

Top thing you wish Visalia knew about your business?

Common Heart wants to create space + drinks that bring people together. We want Visalia to be known for how well we love each other and coffee is an easy way to simply be together.

## BANK OF AMERICA

# Tory Burch, BofA unveil free online educational resource for women

Builds on 10-year partnership, \$100M capital deployed to women-owned businesses

Bank of America and the Tory Burch Foundation today unveiled a new pillar in their long-term commitment to empower women entrepreneurs. The Tory Burch Foundation Business Webinars presented by Bank of America is a virtual program featuring education on a range of entrepreneurial topics and a robust content library for on-demand learning. It is poised to be the largest, free online educational resource available for women entrepreneurs—building on a decade-long partnership—including The Tory Burch and Bank of America Capital Program, which provided more than \$100 million in low-cost capital to women entrepreneurs.

Women have created about half of the new small businesses launched since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

"It takes more than a great idea and determination to build a business; it takes resources," said Tory Burch, Executive Chairman and Chief Creative Officer of Tory Burch. "When we equip founders with expert insights, we create a catalyst for economic growth and job creation. With Bank of America's help, the reach of this program will be truly transformative."

Targeting early-stage, women-led businesses in all industries, Business Webinars will provide expert instruction and takeaway learning materials. The sessions will be offered live and on-demand—for free—on the Tory Burch Foundation website and YouTube.

"Through our 10-year partnership with the Tory Burch Foundation and our extensive work with small business clients, we know that women entrepreneurs need greater access—whether that's access to training, mentorship, networks, capital or markets," said Pam Seagle, Global Women's Program Executive at Bank of America. "This is a one-of-a-kind platform that has potential to reach millions of women entrepreneurs who wouldn't have had access to a resource like this before."

Sessions will be hosted on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. ET by Tory Burch Foundation staff and subject matter experts. Registration is open for Spring programming:

- Scaling with Federal Funding
- Make Entrepreneurship Your Own
- Create Your Operations Blueprint Countdown to Launch: Go-to-Market Strategy
- Leading Through Challenging Times
- Kickstart Your Tax Prep

### About Bank of America

Bank of America is one of the world's leading financial institutions, serving individual consumers, small and middle-market businesses and large corporations with a full range of banking, investing, asset management and other financial and risk management products and services. The company provides unmatched convenience in the United States, serving approximately 69 million consumer and small business clients with approximately 3,800 retail financial centers, approximately 15,000 ATMs (automated teller machines) and award-winning digital banking with approximately 57 million verified digital users. Bank of America is a global leader in wealth management, corporate and investment banking and trading across a broad range of asset classes, serving corporations, governments, institutions and individuals around the world. Bank of America offers industry-leading support to approximately 4 million small business households through a suite of innovative, easy-to-use online products and services.

### About the Tory Burch Foundation

The Tory Burch Foundation empowers women entrepreneurs in the United States by providing access to capital, education and community: the Fellows Program has provided \$1,850,000 in grants to help 280 women grow their businesses; the Capital Program, powered by Bank of America distributed \$100 million dollars in low-interest loans to 5,600 women entrepreneurs; the Women of Color Grant Program has deployed \$3,200,000 in grants to 240 small business; and annually the Foundation provides online education to more than 650,000 people.

# Exeter's CACHE shows 'Oil and Water Do Mix'

CACHE invites artists to explore a fusion of mediums by renowned local artists Marty Weekly and Anna Nelson



This spring, the Center for Art, Culture, and History in Exeter is set to captivate art lovers with its latest exhibition, "Oil & Water Do Mix."

This unique showcase features an array of oil and watercolor paintings by CACHE Art Gallery co-founders, Marty Weekly and Anna Nelson. The exhibition promises to offer a visual feast from April 6 through June 30.

Marty Weekly, a fixture in the local art scene, traces his roots back to the areas just west of Exeter. A graduate of Exeter Union High School Class of 1954, Weekly's artistic journey led him to Sacramento State College, where he honed his craft before embarking on a teaching career.

By 1970 Weekly transitioned to painting full-time, a decision that launched over five decades of artistic exploration and acclaim. His oil paintings, celebrated for their depth and authenticity, have graced galleries from Dallas to Los Angeles and Santa Fe, earning him a revered spot in the pages of "Contemporary Western Artists" and Davenport's List of Collectible Artists of the 20th century.

Anna Nelson brings to the exhibit a contrasting yet complementary palette of watercolors known for their bold hues and whimsical subjects. An Indiana native who made California her home at a young age, Nelson's



COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR ART, CULTURE AND HISTORY, EXETER "Desert Magic" oil painting by Marty Weekly.

artistic path was paved during her formative years at Exeter Union High School and later at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia. Her works, primarily featuring enchanting florals and charismatic animals, are born in her upstairs studio—a place where creativity and color converge to create magic.

The exhibition will be inaugurated with an opening reception on Saturday, April 6, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., offering attendees the chance to immerse themselves in the art, meet the artists and perhaps even find a piece that speaks to them, as all displayed artworks will be for sale.

CACHE, known until recently as the Exeter Art Gallery and Museum Association, has undergone a transformation to better embody its mission of showcasing the rich tapestry of California's heartland through art, culture and history. With

a commitment to educational programming and quarterly art exhibitions, CACHE aims to be a beacon for the community, inviting all to experience and appreciate the diverse cultural heritage of the Tulare County area.

"Oil & Water Do Mix" stands as a testament to the synergy between different artistic mediums and the rich cultural narratives they can weave together. This exhibition is not just a display of individual talent but a celebration of the collaborative spirit that defines the local art community. The event is free and open to the public, offering a unique opportunity for visitors to engage with the vibrant art scene of Exeter.

For more information about the exhibition and other upcoming events at CACHE, please visit www.cache-exeter.org.

**Central Valley Community Bank** announced in April the successful completion of the merger with Community West Bank, creating a combined company in an all-stock merger transaction.

**Graphic Packaging International** hosted a Safety Kickoff Event in May focusing on family and safety.

**KSEE24** named Nina Clancy as local recipient of "Remarkable Woman of the Year".

**Visalia Unified School District's** Visalia Technical Early College was selected to represent the California FFA Association as a National Chapter Award Recipient.

**McKellar Ranch Company & Historic Seven Sycamore Ranch** is hosting a 5K Poker Walk/Run event on May 5th benefiting Central Valley Teen Challenge.



Congratulations to **Kaweah Health Foundation**, **Happy Trails Riding Academy**, and **California Service Dog Academy** who were awarded grants from the Central California Women's Conference of Fresno.

**Graze Craze** announced new hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-5pm and new outdoor seating available with indoor seating coming soon.

**Tuscany Villas** hosted an open house in April, featuring new one and two bedroom apartment homes located at 6710 W Doo Ave.

**The Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company** May production features *The Princess and the Pea*.

Congratulations to **Tulare County Federal Credit Union** on their 85th Anniversary!

**Tulare County Library** celebrated National Library Week in April.

**Happy Trails Riding Academy** will host their Ropin' the Stars Gala on May 17th celebrating 40 years of service.

**Soccer City 1852 Visalia** hosted it's Springfest on April 20th.

**Family Services of Tulare County** hosted Denim Day on April 24th in observance April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

**The Center for Art Culture & History Exeter (CACHE)** hosted a Wine & Art Walk in April.

**Visalia Cyclery** will host a Bicycle Swap Meet event on May 11th, featuring used and new bikes, gear, and vendors.

**Family HealthCare Network** welcomed new provider, Olusayo Fadiran, MD, to their medical team at their Porterville Downtown health center.

**Eagle Mountain Casino** announced starting on April 17th the return of its buffet, kicking off with a legendary all-you-can-eat fried chicken extravaganza every Wednesday from 5pm to 9pm.

HEALTH CARE NOTE

## Growth in challenging times



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

Dear Kaweah Health Community,  
As Kaweah Health enters the fourth quarter of our 2024 fiscal year, I am pleased to report that we are continuing our slow-but-steady growth during some of the most challenging times in our history. Our financial condition is steadily improving, which is reflected by Moody's Investors Service's recent upgrading of our credit rating outlook from negative to stable in February.



In February, our board of directors saw the appointment of Dr. Dean Levitan, who replaced board member Garth Gipson as the Zone 3 representative of the Kaweah Delta Health Care District. Dr. Levitan was a Kaweah Health medical staff member for 41 years and has served in numerous leadership positions throughout his career and has served on a number of boards. He brings great experience and commitment to our community, and we are very happy to have him to help guide our organization.

We are happy to welcome orthopedic surgeon Jun Kim, DO, MMS, to our team of surgeons offering specialty services. Dr. Kim specializes in hip and knee replacement surgery and focusses on getting his patients back to an active, pain-free lifestyle. Dr. Kim

will see patients at the newly-remodeled building at 202 W. Willow Avenue, next to the Kaweah Health helipad.

I'm also excited to update you on the progress of students in the Kaweah Health School of Nursing in partnership with Unitek College. Our first cohort of students in the Bachelor of Science Nursing program completed their first year in March, and many of them are only one year away from graduating and joining our team. The program is fully enrolled and will add 150 new registered nurses each year when fully implemented. Additionally, we are very grateful for the fantastic work of our partners at College of the Sequoias, San Joaquin Valley College, and West Hills Community College to expand nursing education in our community. Together, we are tackling the nursing shortage in our region, improving health care for our community, and providing more access to high-demand, high-paying jobs.

And finally, I am truly honored to share that the construction of the Reflection Garden is nearly complete. Situated just outside the Acequia Wing entrance, a custom monument was installed in a small, landscaped area to serve as a tribute to life. The monument is inscribed with a poem in English and Spanish that honors the tireless efforts of our caregivers, who work passionately to safeguard the people of our community. We hope that it serves as a beacon of hope and solace for all who pass through our doors.

As always, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated team of caregivers, whose unwavering commitment to excellence continues to inspire us all. Together, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide exceptional healthcare services to the residents of Tulare County.



## Partnering with The Brave Project

**By Victoria Balderas**  
CSET

The Leadership Visalia cohort class of 2023-2024 has chosen The Brave Project as its focal point, embodying our commitment to fostering collaboration and teamwork within the community. Comprising a diverse group of 12 individuals from various organizations in Tulare County, including Melissa Lopez, Petra Gaytan, Kurt Hardcastle, Tiffany Garcia, Adriana Soto, Maria Rodriguez Ornelas, Joe Iniguez, Daniel Alcaraz, Robert Meier, Dave Byl, Victoria Balderas, and Ty Stelow, we are united in our endeavor to effect positive change. Each member brings unique ideas, passions, and expertise to the table, collectively raising the bar not only for ourselves but also for future cohorts.

For over 12 years, The Brave Project has stood as a symbol of resilience and dedication within our community. Since the inception of our class, this project has captured our collective attention and ignited our passion. Guided by our Class Facilitator, Jena Rodriguez, we've been encouraged to think innovatively and push beyond our comfort zones. The decision to embrace this endeavor was unanimous, fueled by our shared desire to make a meaningful impact.

Jena Rodriguez, our dedicated Class Facilitator, has provided us with the freedom to think creatively and step outside conventional boundaries. With her guidance, we've explored innovative approaches and strategies, allowing us to maximize

our potential and drive positive change within the community. This collaborative spirit has empowered us to overcome challenges and make significant strides towards our shared goal.

As we continue our journey with The Brave Project, we are fueled by a shared commitment to making a difference and leaving a lasting impact. With each member contributing their unique skills and perspectives, we are confident in our ability to achieve our objectives and set a high standard for future cohorts. Together, we are harnessing the power of collaboration and teamwork to create positive change and build a stronger, more resilient community for generations to come.

With the selection of our project being The Brave Project we have had the privilege of working alongside Dustin Cole, the Executive Director, who helps fill our efforts with a profound sense of purpose. His personal connection to the project adds depth and significance, driving our determination to effect positive change and awareness of what we have right here in the City of Visalia. The task of enhancing the project and amplifying its impact felt natural, guided by a shared vision and unwavering dedication.

Over the course of nine months, we have diligently worked towards our shared goal, encouraged by the imminent culmination of our efforts. As graduation approaches, the anticipation mounts, fueling

See BRAVE on page 4

## Honoring excellence: Visalia's finest finalists revealed

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce proudly announces the finalists for its prestigious 69th Annual Awards, honoring businesses and organizations that contribute to Visalia. The Awards will take place on Thursday, June 6th, at the historic Fox Theater in downtown Visalia.

These awards celebrate the unwavering dedication and spirit of entrepreneurship that defines Visalia's business landscape. They recognize those who navigate the challenges of running a business and giving back to our community, making Visalia a remarkable place to live and work. This feel-good night allows attendees to learn something about other businesses and celebrate alongside the finalists and industry leaders while acknowledging their remarkable achievements and contributions to our community.

The finalists represent a di-

verse array of industries and sizes, showcasing the resilience, innovation, and commitment to excellence that characterizes the Visalia business community. From small enterprises to large corporations and nonprofit organizations, each finalist has demonstrated exceptional leadership and a profound impact on our community.

Finalists for the 69th Annual Awards include:

**Small Business Finalists**

- Soccer City 1852 Visalia
- The Sun-Gazette
- Tri Counties Bank
- Visalia Cyclery

**Medium Business Finalists**

- Echelon Security Group Inc.
- Employer Driven Insurance Services (E.D.I.S.)
- RE/MAX Success
- Valley Strong Credit Union

**Large Business Finalists**

- Ace Hardware Distribution Center
- California Dairies, Inc.
- ServiceMaster by Benevento

**Nonprofit Finalists**

- Able Inc.
- Arts Visalia
- Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company
- Visalia Rescue Mission

The winners are determined through an application and interview process conducted by a selection committee of previous award recipients. This rigorous process aims to select the most deserving finalists and winners.

The 2024 Man of the Year is Armondo Apodaca and Woman of the Year, Sharon Allison-Crook. Their unwavering dedication, support for our community, and volunteerism have helped shape our community into the vibrant place it is

today.

Tickets and Sponsorship Opportunities for the 69th Annual Awards Event are now available for purchase at the Visalia Chamber of Commerce's website <https://www.visaliachamber.org/awards>

Join us as we come together to honor excellence, celebrate achievement, and showcase the very best of Visalia's business community at the 69th Annual Awards Event.

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce serves as a catalyst, convener, and champion for local businesses in Tulare County. With nearly 700 business members, it represents over 45,000 employees to local, county, state, and national elected officials. The Chamber actively engages in advocacy, business education, marketing, and networking opportunities to support the growth and success of the business community.

Media inquiries can be directed to Gail Zurek, Visalia Chamber of Commerce, at 559.734.5876 or [info@visaliachamber.org](mailto:info@visaliachamber.org).



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS

# ANNUAL AWARDS

SAVE THE DATE

## JUNE 6, 2024

NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR  
WOMAN OF THE YEAR  
MAN OF THE YEAR

SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE  
BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

VISALIACHAMBER.ORG/AWARDS

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

TRAVEL WITH US

VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Trips presented by Collette Vacations (CST#: 2006766-20) and Chamber Explorations (CST#: 2048841.40)

Visit Our Website For More [visaliachamber.org/travel](http://visaliachamber.org/travel)

# Thank you TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

**CHAMPION:**



**VISIONARY:**



**REGIONAL LEADERS:**



**KEYSTONE:**



**MEDIA PARTNERS:**



**RIBBON CUTTINGS**



Chuck E. Cheese celebrated their grand reopening with a ribbon cutting in March. Visit them at 4345 W. Noble Ave.



Orthopaedic Associates Medical Clinic hosted a ribbon cutting in celebration of their new urgent care. The new clinic can be found at 820 S. Akers St., Ste. 220.



New member, Kamel's Med Spa hosted a ribbon cutting in March. Call (559) 636-8071 to book your next appointment at their 1907 W. Dorothea Ave. location.



In celebration of their grand opening, Les Schwab Tire Center hosted a ribbon cutting. Their new Visalia location can be found at 4643 S. Mooney Blvd.



To kick off the season, Visalia Rawhide hosted a ribbon cutting in March. Catch a game at Valley Strong Ballpark located at 300 N. Giddings St.



Sizzler hosted a grand re-opening event, including a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate their remodel. Find them at 2121 W. Caldwell Ave.

## Tulare County Library brews up new way to enjoy books

**Tulare County Library Foundation's Books & Brews fundraiser at Visalia's 1852 Brewery blends book fair nostalgia with craft beer**



**Karis Caddell**  
Reporter  
The Sun-Gazette

Anyone interested in attending the upcoming "Books & Brews" fundraiser in Visalia can enjoy a nostalgic trip back to school book fairs while savoring locally crafted beer.

"This event is a celebration of nostalgia and community spirit, designed to resonate with individuals who fondly recall the magic of school book fairs," Sonia Mehrmand, president of the Tulare County Library Foundation's board said via news release. "By combining this cherished tradition with Visalia's craft beer scene, we aim to create an unforgettable experience that appeals to our community."

During this event, attendees can look forward to browsing through stacks of books provided by The Book Nook, sampling craft beer, exploring vendor booths that offer literary-themed merchandise and artisanal crafts, and finally, enjoying a special edition community brew crafted exclusively for the event.

"Craft beer has a way of evoking memories and sparking conversations," said Jeremy Schultz, co-founder and CEO at 1852 Brewery, via the release. "We're thrilled to be part of an event that combines the nostalgia of school book fairs with the social experience of enjoying quality brews. It's a



ALEXEY FEDORENKO / ADOBE STOCK

unique opportunity to create lasting memories with friends, old and new."

Representatives from The Book Nook also expressed their excitement about collaborating on an event that celebrates nostalgia while supporting a worthy cause.

"As downtown Visalia's bookstore, we're excited to partner with the Tulare County Library Foundation to bring the nostalgia of school book fairs to Visalia," manager at The Book Nook Dulce Ugalde Arellano said via release. "Books & Brews is more than just an event; it's a celebration of storytelling, community and the enduring power of books."

Tickets for Books & Brews are available

for purchase, with each ticket including two drink tickets and two raffle tickets. Secure your spot for this nostalgic journey by visiting <https://events.humanitix.com/books-and-brews>.

A generous portion of proceeds from the event directly benefits the Tulare County Library Foundation, complementing the funds raised through ticket sales and merchandise purchases. Participation in Books & Brews not only promises a delightful experience but also contributes to the invaluable support of literacy initiatives and community engagement programs within county libraries.

**PPP**

Continued from page 1

Coast who were provided support during the pandemic.

PPP loans were designed to allow small business owners to compensate employees who were locked out of work during the shutdown. The loans could total up to \$100,000 and are fully forgivable, but business owners must apply for forgiveness. The SBA web site provides the application for forgiveness.

According to a press release from the National SBA, the application process takes about 15 minutes online. Business owners can also apply by phone to the local SBA office or in person. The Fresno SBA, which covers 15 counties stretching from the San Joaquin Valley to the Central Coast, provides applications for forgiveness and assistance for business owners in English and Spanish.

As for EIDL loans, these were issued through a federal program to help businesses, including agricultural businesses, cover operating expenses. The loans

must be repaid but featured long-term rates and low interest. Hardship extensions are currently available to assist businesses that continue to struggle with recovery from the pandemic.

No official deadline has been established at this time for when borrowers will go into default, but the National SBA is warning business owners who have not filed for forgiveness or assistance with repayment that they need to contact the SBA and make arrangements as soon as possible.

Golik noted that the SBA is actively reaching out to Payroll Protection Program and COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan borrowers to ensure they understand how to apply for forgiveness on their PPP loans, that they understand how to make payments on their EIDL loans, or that they request enrollment in the hardship plan to lower payments.

"If they (borrowers) are not sure what the situation with their loan is, they can call our office and we can take a look at their loan for them and help get them pointed in the right direction," Golik said.

**BRAVE**

Continued from page 3

our excitement to witness the tangible results of our labor and to galvanize greater community involvement.

Our strategy has been multi-faceted, encompassing various initiatives aimed at bolstering the brave project's visibility and support base. Leveraging social media platforms, we have amplified Dustin's reach and garnered increased awareness within the community. By sharing emotional family stories online, we have fostered a sense of connection and empathy, inviting others to join our cause.

Moreover, our efforts have extended to securing additional funding through donor outreach, ensuring the project's sustainability and growth. Concurrently, we have sought to elevate the narratives of those who have served our country, honoring their sacrifices and contributions to our collective heritage.

The finale of our endeavors will be celebrated during

The Brave Project - Celebration Event on Saturday, May 18th, at Bello Vita from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. This gathering serves as a tribute to the families whose banners beautify the city streets, as well as a testament to our collective commitment to honoring their legacies. Through this event, we aim to foster a sense of community pride and unity, highlighting the enduring significance of the Brave project.

Throughout our journey, the heart of Leadership Visalia has been characterized by our collective growth and mutual support. As we prepare to transition from participants to alumni, the impact of our collective endeavor echoes far beyond the confines of our class. Our legacy is one of resilience, compassion, and collaboration, exemplifying the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. With hearts full of pride and anticipation, we eagerly anticipate the next chapter in the ongoing evolution of The Brave Project.