

Business Update

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AWARD-WINNING MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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EVENTS

JULY 25 Ambassador Monthly Meeting

Time: 8 a.m.
Location: Visalia First

TRAVEL WITH US

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

MAY 22-31, 2025 Sunny Portugal

JULY 22-30, 2025 Alpine Swiss Villages and Rails

SEPTEMBER 10-18, 2025 Canadian Rockies via Rail

OCTOBER 1-8, 2025 Iceland Explorer

OCTOBER 28-NOVEMBER 5, 2025 Burgundy and Provence France River Cruise



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LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS / ADOBE STOCK

Kaweah Health revises visitor guidelines

Following community and staff feedback Kaweah Health updates its visitor guidelines to enhance patient care and family involvement

Staff Report

The Sun-Gazette



Kaweah Health is set to implement revised visitor guidelines starting June 1, aiming to improve the patient experience and involve their families more effectively in the care process.

The decision to update the guidelines comes after months of consultations with community members, frontline staff and leadership. The changes reflect an ongoing effort to create a more patient-centered care environment, according to hospital officials.

"These changes were informed by extensive feedback from our patients and team members," Kaweah Health

chief nursing officer Keri Noeske, said via announcement. "We strive to support our patients' healing process and facilitate family involvement in their care plans."

Under the new guidelines, general visiting hours at the Medical Center will be from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. This schedule applies to the MedSurg units, intermediate critical care units, intensive care units and mother baby/postpartum areas. Access to the hospital will be streamlined through the Acequia Wing Lobby and the Mineral King Wing Lobby during these hours.

Additionally, the number of visitors in a room will be capped at two in most areas. Exceptions may apply as determined by unit leadership or where existing guidelines permit only one visitor at a time.

Hospital leadership emphasizes that the core principles guiding the visitor policy updates are to respect patient preferences and promote a supportive environment conducive to healing.

"Our focus remains on partnering with our patients to support their health care needs effectively, including managing visitor access as per their wishes," Noeske said.

The full details of the new visiting guidelines are available for review on the Kaweah Health website.

While these are the only changes being made at this time, Kaweah Health encourages all patient care teams to welcome families at the bedside, include them in ongoing care discussions and manage visitor flow as needed to ensure optimal patient care.

Visalia keeps Measure T funds on track

City council recertifies vital tax measure for Visalia's police, fire agencies as departments face ongoing staffing challenges

Derek Fleming
Contributing Reporter
The Sun-Gazette



With the recertification of Measure T, Visalia's police and fire departments are still on track towards receiving essential funding, even as the agencies navigate ongoing

recruitment issues.

Visalia City Council recertified Measure T at its meeting on June 17. The measure, which is a voter-approved one-quarter cent sales tax increase passed in 2004, funds police and fire departments through a small sales tax.

The revenue from Measure T is split 60% to the police and 40% to the fire department. It is a 20-year tax that requires recertification every year. Since its inception, the tax has paid to hire 23 police officers and equipped them, hired 13 firefighters, purchased a new fire truck and a ladder truck, and funded the construction of two fire stations and the training center.

Despite these monumental accomplishments, the 20-year plan called for a specific number of police and fire positions, which have not been filled. In part, the shortages have been caused by slower-than-expected revenues, according to Visalia Mayor Brian Poochigian. He said in an interview with The Sun-Gazette that the initial plan had over-estimated how much revenue would come in and that the tax rate was set too low in the first place.

"Overall, Measure T has been a success," Poochigian said. "It has put more police officers and more firefighters in our city to protect and serve our community. We were one of the first cities around to do something like this and I think we learned from some of the mistakes, and that's why Measure N ended up coming into place later on."

Measure N was enacted in 2011 and adds a half-cent sales tax that provides funding for public safety and a small contribution to roads and parks. Poochigian said that Measure N has been more stable than Measure T over its lifetime. While the tax plans have been successful, they have not been enough to keep up with the growth of Visalia, according to officials with both the police and fire departments.

"Law enforcement nationwide is facing challenges with recruitment and retention," Visalia Police Chief Jason Salazar said in an emailed statement to The Sun-Gazette. "Measure T and Measure N have been critical for the Visalia Police Department in providing the staffing we need and keeping pace with a growing city. We currently have 19 police officer vacancies, including nine candidates in various stages of the hiring process. Most of our vacancies are the result of retirements and new positions that were part of the Measure N plan."

The Measure T plan calls for the hiring of 28 police officers but was amended in 2011 to reduce that number to 23 police officers. Similarly, the number of firefighters the plan calls for was reduced from 18 to 13 as revenues have been below estimates. The city's finance department recommended to the city council that these lower expectations be continued despite a significant spike in sales tax revenue in recent years because the measure will need to contribute toward the new public safety building that is being designed.

Visalia Fire Chief Dan Griswold said that retirements have outpaced hiring over the years, but staffing is in better shape than what the police department is experiencing.

"Recruitment and retention has been challenging," Griswold said. "It's industry-wide across the state, it's always a topic of conversation at conferences. It's a nationwide issue. We have been able to fill our vacancies with enough qualified candidates, but it's not like we have people lining up at the door to become a firefighter like it was

See MEASURE T on page 2

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

"If you can, do it"



Matthew Mingrone
President and CEO
Visalia Chamber

In June, we celebrated the 69th Annual Awards. In retrospect, we should also celebrate our entire business community. We are so very fortunate to live in a community where volunteerism, community outreach, teamwork, local business growth and success, are not only motivating factors but are inspirational to all that that live in Visalia.

Each one of our nominees proves that we really do live in a very special place.

They live by an old adage, "You reap what you sow" or to paraphrase a quote from our 2024 Woman of the Year Winner Sharon Allison-Crook: "If you can—then do it." It seems that most of our members, whether you know it or not, live by that same philosophy.

I've been around the Visalia Chamber for about fourteen years, but after only one week, I saw the specialness and uniqueness this business community really is. All you have to do is watch and listen to customers, employees, charitable causes, schools etc... That's where you witness passion, and love for Visalia. The effort that each finalist put forth in helping make our community great is a joy to see. We do have challenges, but watching this community come together and be a champion for each other is a sight to see.

You may not realize it, but everything you do for your employees, for charitable causes, for this city and your community as a whole never goes unseen. Not everyone gets nominated, not everyone wins an award, but everyone benefits from your passion for your community. I for one, want to say Thank You and Congratulations to everyone for creating a wonderful business climate and an amazing place to live, work and play.

Who knows what tomorrow will bring economically, politically, or socially. One thing I do know is that with the Visalia business leaders we do have, we will continue to be a shining example of community empathy and passion for this city and for all of us!

Your chamber team is excited to celebrate the 70th Annual Awards with you next year, I guarantee it will be a special night for all. Please don't forget to nominate that extraordinary individual or business, so we can show our appreciation for their great work!



Exploring what makes Visalia unique for all

Adriana Valencia Soto
Tulare County Board of Supervisors

On Friday, May 10th, Leadership Visalia focused on how recreational areas improve our quality of life. We kicked off the morning at the Anthony Community Center with distinguished speakers, Nikki Scholl the founder of Train Like a Girl and The Adapted Athlete, Jaylen an Adapted Athlete student, and Jeremy Schultz the founder and CEO of Soccer City 1852 Visalia.

Nikki's journey in the fitness industry inspired her to start Train Like a Girl and The Adapted Athlete. The Adapted Athlete started in 2021 during COVID-19 when programs for individuals with disabilities were closed. The program provided quality training in adaptive fitness by creating an

inclusive and accessible environment for individuals with disabilities. In 2023, Jaylen joined The Adapted Athlete, and found a safe space for him to make friends and develop his social skills. The Adapted Athlete continues to expand the program to include more sports and activities that encourage healthy lifestyle habits, cultivate community, and improve their overall quality of life.

Jeremy's world has revolved around soccer, at all different levels which inspired him to invest in Soccer City 1852 Visalia, an indoor soccer organization for players of all levels and genders. Since its opening in 2022, they have connected people through the love of sport, averaging between 225 to 250 teams a season. 1852 is a communi-

See LEADERSHIP on page 3

Theater plays key role in children's wellbeing

Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company offers tuition-free acting, low-cost tickets for children with community support at annual fundraiser

Parents and educators concerned about students' social emotional wellbeing have access to a free, local program that might help youth overcome many of these problems—children's theater.

Enchanted Playhouse Theatre Company is the only dedicated children's theater in the Central Valley specializing in shows for children of all ages. For more than 30 years, the organization has continued its mission of "bringing books to life" on stage by offering tuition-free programs for children interested in acting and low-cost ticket performances to thousands of students each year. Enchanted Playhouse is a tax-exempt non-profit that produces plays reaching 12,000 school-aged children, many of whom have never been exposed to live theater, from Tulare, Fresno, Kern and Kings Counties. The organization was recently named a finalist for Nonprofit of the Year by the Visalia Chamber of Commerce.

"We want to make performing in theater accessible to all children and families in our area," Enchanted Playhouse president Shanna Meier said. "We do not charge a tuition fee and keep our ticket prices low to give low-income families the opportunity to participate and attend."

Performing and experiencing theater plays an important role in a child's development by allowing them to experience and observe live emotions, expand their imaginations, and exhibit their creativity. In a 2024 article, Scholastic, the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books, says children who are involved in performing arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement compared with their non-performing friends. That's because performing promotes creative thinking skills, helps overcome anxiety, fosters understanding of other points of view, and improves self-esteem and confidence.

"Studies have shown that participating and watching live theater can help literacy, social skills, a greater empathy and increased test scores," Meier said. "Theatre also connects to

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:

- Pacific Employers

Small Business Members:

- California Mentor
- Oak View Apartments
- Storland Self Storage

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Catalyst Bible College

RENEWING

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

Visionary Members:

- SinglePoint Outsourcing, Inc.

Keystone Members:

- Eagle Mountain Casino*
- Visalia Medical Clinic*

Community Investor Members:

- Employer Driven Insurance Services (E.D.I.S.)
- Gateway Financial Planning Group
- Holvik Family Health Center
- Joann Stores Visalia Distribution Center*
- M. Green and Company LLP
- Wyndham Visalia

Community Investor Nonprofit Members:

- CSET-Community Services Employment Training*

Business Builder Members:

- City of Visalia
- National University*
- Tri Counties Bank*
- Wonder Valley Ranch Resort & Conference Center*

Business Connector Members:

- Central Valley Business Forms, Inc.*
- Century 21 Jordan-Link & Company*
- Educational Employees Credit Union
- Franey's Carpet One Floor & Home Design Center

- Infinite Heart Hospice, LLC*
- MindDivers
- Mulligans Indoor Golf Club
- Newrez
- Park Visalia*
- Quail Park at Shannon Ranch*
- Re/Max Success
- ServiceMaster by Benevento*
- Unified Screening & Crushing - California

Small Business Members:

- Ainley Alipaz Webb
- American Ambulance of Visalia*
- ARA Kaweah Dialysis Center
- BJ Perch Construction Inc.*
- Clark Pest Control*
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Hocking, Denton, Palmquist & Company
- Holiday Inn Express & Suites*
- Jim's Formal Wear*
- Kentucky Fried Chicken
- Klink Orange Cove Citrus*
- Lux Dermatology
- Maison Law
- Milan Institute*
- Modern Edge Insurance Brokers, Inc.*
- Nothing Bundt Cakes
- Smokin Barrel Firearms*



- Super 8 Motel
- The Planing Mill
- Token Farms*
- Vintage Visalia

Business Builder Nonprofit Members:

- Tulare Outlets*

Business Connector Nonprofit Members:

- ProYouth*
- Visalia Rescue Mission*

Small Business Nonprofit Members:

- Arts Visalia
- FoodLink for Tulare County, Inc.*
- Proteus, Inc. Employment & Training
- Turning Point of Central California, Inc.
- Visalia Breakfast Lions*
- Visalia County Center Rotary Club

* Indicates membership in the Visalia Chamber 110% Club.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ENCHANTED PLAYHOUSE THEATRE COMPANY

Snow White (Audrey Martin) and the seven dwarfs (Noah Melban, Lilly Montejano, Addison Aslup, Serenity Hache, Desmond Wiesenborn, Eleora Odell and Gracie Oliveria), who were all in the Enchanted Playhouse Company's production of "What Happened After Once Upon a Time" in 2023. Live theater plays an important role in children's well being.

the importance of reading. A play has the ability to jump a story off the page and bring it to life. This can assist with reluctant readers and bookworms alike. Participating in theater can help with self-esteem and public speaking skills."

Keeping Enchanted Playhouse free for actors and inexpensive for local student shows requires community support, not just at its plays but also its major fundraiser. This year's fundraiser will support the theater company's upcoming productions: Twice Upon A Time, Nov. 8-10, 2024 at Valley Strong Ballpark; Tinkerbelle, Feb. 13-16 and 20-23, 2025 at Rotary Theatre; and Charlotte's Web, April

10-13 and 24-27, 2025 at El Diamante Theatre.

Tables of eight seats are available for \$600 and individual tickets are \$85. Payment can also be made by Venmo @EnchantedPlayhouse or online at www.enchantedplayhouse.net. For more information on, call 559-972-7027 or email info@enchantedplayhouse.net.

"Our show costs include rental fees, costumes, props, storage, insurance, royalties, sets etc. Each show can cost up to \$20,000 depending on the show," Meier said. "Enchanted Evening helps us with these costs but also gives us assistance in upgrading the sound equipment and creating a building fund to hopefully someday be able to purchase and build our own theater site."



Spirit Radio partnered with Miss California to host a special showing of Disney's The Princess Diaries in June at the Visalia Fox Theatre. The event featured a meet and greet with Miss California and all delegates for the competition along with Miss California's Teen.

CASA of Tulare County announced Iris Feaver as its new Director of Development.

Assistance League of Visalia had a very successful year! 1,000 Visalia Unified School District students received clothes, 1,300 hygiene kits were distributed throughout Tulare County, 6,000 books were distributed and deserving COS students received support.

Kaweah Health welcomed Paul Stefanacci, MD as Chief Medical & Quality Officer in June.

Valley Strong Credit Union has expanded to Hanford. They celebrated the grand opening of their newest Valley branch in June.

KSEE24 announced veteran journalist Eric Rucker will join the KSEE24 news team as weekend evening anchor.

Nothing Bundt Cakes announced their latest flavor of the summer, Key Lime.

Momentum Broadcasting welcomed Gnarley Charley as their newest family member at KJUG Country.

Visalia Rescue Mission will host their annual Back 2 School Block Party on August 3rd.

Tulare County Library hosted a Dairy Day in June, featuring California Dairies, a book giveaway by Tulare County Office of Education, and ice cream sampling for children ages 1-18 at their Visalia branch library.

Bank of the Sierra awarded \$150K in grants to 20 nonprofits during the first quarter of 2024, including CSET.

Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County was presented with the 2024 NAF Trailblazer Champion award by the Cutler Orosi Joint Unified School District Career Technical Education Department.

Congratulations to Quesadilla Gorilla who celebrated their grand opening of their new Visalia location at The Mix (215 W Main St.).

Fresno Yosemite International Airport announced new daily non-stop flights between Fresno and Atlanta through Delta Air Lines.

International Agri-Center®, World Ag Expo, and the Central Valley Toyota Dealers donated over \$100,000 to Valley Children's Healthcare through the Toyota Tundra Giveaway.

Bank of America awarded over a quarter of million dollars to Fresno and Visalia area nonprofits including CSET, Family Services of Tulare County, The Visalia Emergency Aid Council and Salt & Light.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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Editor Matthew Mingrone
Layout The Sun-Gazette

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MEASURE T

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15 or 20 years ago."

Among the most critical positions the department struggles to fill are dispatch positions which are essential to providing rapid response to emergencies for police and fire crews.

Griswald added that Measure T has been vital to maintaining funding for public safety, particularly in terms of equipment including the two new vehicles Measure T funded.

"Any fire apparatus in the fire station are critical pieces of infrastructure, they are very expensive, but they are used 24/7," Griswald said. "Our people take very good care of them. When you look at a sales tax measure providing those assets to a community, these are truly assets that are important to a community. These sales tax measures have helped us purchase those long-life assets to serve the community."

Griswald added that one of the ways the tax measures have helped public safety is by allowing the department to stay up with current technology that helps provide better safety for the community and protects firefighters as they do their jobs.

Measure T will complete its 20-year plan in the next fiscal year. Staff recommended to the city council to reauthorize Measure T. The city website shows that polling of residents indicates that Visalians are supportive of sales tax increases when those funds go toward public safety enhancement.

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

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ADOBE STOCK

State employment bills on the table for 2025

Summer is quickly approaching and as I've been watching the legislature's process of evaluating new potential laws for 2025, it's getting hot there too!

For tracking purposes, here are the top 5 bills that—if passed—would have the most significant impact on employers in California:

1. Right to Disconnect (AB 2751)

Echoing legislation recently adopted in several European countries (e.g. France, Spain and Italy), this bill would require employers to establish a workplace policy providing employees “the right to disconnect” from employer communications during non-working hours. Under proposed new Labor Code section 1198.2, this would mean that except for communications about “scheduling” or an “emergency,” the employee would have the right to ignore communications from the employer during non-working hours. The employer and employee would be required to establish by written agreement the “non-working hours,” defined as the hours before and after an employee’s assigned hours of work, whether stated in their job description or stated otherwise.

2. Regulation of AI (AB 2930)

This bill is a part of recent trend reflecting increased concern regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and Automated Decision Tools (ADTs) in ways that may discriminate against workers. It is nearly identical to AB 331, which was introduced in 2023 and passed several Assembly committees on party-line votes before stalling in the Appropriations Committee. The bill would create a new chapter in the Business and Professions Code to regulate ADTs and impose requirements on both the users of such tools and the developers of such tools. While employers who use ADTs are covered by this bill, the scope of the proposed new law is not limited to the employment context. California employers thus may also



need to consider possible impacts of this bill on their use of ADTs with respect to consumers and other members of the public in addition to their employees.

3. Changes and Expansion to Prohibition on Discrimination re: Time off for Victims of Crime and Violence (AB 2499)

Presently, the Labor Code prohibits employers from discharging or discriminating against employees for taking time off to serve on a jury, to appear in court if the employee is a victim of a crime, or to obtain certain victim relief; and prohibit discrimination because an employee is a victim of a crime or abuse. Existing law also requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to certain victims and imposes additional requirements on employers with 25 or more employees, prohibiting them from discharging or discriminating against victims who take time off to seek medical attention or obtain services related to crime or abuse. This bill would essentially repeal Labor Code Sections 230 and 230.1 and recast these rules as unlawful employment practices within the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) at new Government Code section 12945.8, which would make violations of these rules a violation of FEHA, and place enforcement in the jurisdiction of the Civil Rights Division (rather than the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement) thus changing the procedures

and remedies available for a violation.

4. Additional Criminal History Protections for Job Applicants (SB 1345)

This bill would amend the FEHA to make it an unlawful employment practice for an employer to take an adverse action against an applicant based upon criminal history information (i.e., prior arrest, charge or conviction information) unless the employer can demonstrate both of the following: (1) the applicant’s criminal history has a direct and adverse relationship with one or more specific duties of the job; and (2) the employer’s “business necessity” requires the adverse action. It would also preclude employers from requiring, as a condition of employment, that an applicant waive their right to privacy in criminal history information or otherwise provide a release to obtain an applicant’s criminal history information under a state or federal law (including for obtaining investigative consumer reports), unless the employer can demonstrate “business necessity.”

5. Eliminate Authorization to Require Employees to Use Vacation Before Paid Family Leave (AB 2123)

Existing law authorizes an employer to require an employee to take up to two weeks of earned but unused vacation before, and as a condition of, the employee’s initial receipt of family temporary disability insurance benefits during any twelve-month period in which the employee is eligible for these benefits. This bill would eliminate the authorization and related provisions of the existing law.

As the legislative session progresses, I'm sure there will be twists and turns on these and other pending bills. We hope that you will join us on June 20th for our Mid-Year Legal Update luncheon for further coverage of these pending new laws and other legal developments that will affect California employers in the coming year.

CITY UPDATE

Logo redesign process

The City of Visalia’s Brand Refresh rolls on, now with another opportunity for community input.



At the City Council meeting on Monday, June 17, the City Council voted to begin the process for a community driven logo redesign and directed City staff to open a submission window and begin the process to a new logo. The new logo will be the companion logo to our Legacy Logo, and both will be used by the City of Visalia.

With the logo submission window now closed, the Brand Refresh Logo Design Committee will be meeting to review community submissions. The Committee will review logos sent in and provide three to five logos that meet the guidelines, along with formal feedback and recommendations to the staff, for further action and preparation for the community feedback period.

Mark your calendars for Monday, July 15, as that is when the Logo Redesign Process public comment period will open. Fresh from Committee review, a selection of logos will be dis-

played online at www.visalia.city/refresh and on the City’s social media channels @cityof-visalia. We’re seeking feedback on the selection of logos, with all comments being accepted through Friday, July 26, 2024.

Once that public comment period closes, all comments will be collected and included in a findings report to be presented to the City Council at the Monday, August 5, 2024 City Council meeting. The City Council will receive the results of the Committee and public feedback via agenda item and staff report and may choose to vote on the new City of Visalia Brand Refresh logo.

As updates are available specific to the Brand Refresh Logo Redesign Process, email blasts will be sent to all those who have shared they would like to stay informed on the process. To be added to our update list, please email communityfeedback@visalia.city.

For the latest updates and news from the City of Visalia, visit www.visalia.city or visit them on social media @Cityof-Visalia.

LEADERSHIP

Continued from page 1

ty where respect, trust, honesty and diversity thrive. These recreational areas are crucial in our community and create inclusive environments that enhance our quality of life in the City of Visalia.

After our roundtable, we all gathered for a pickleball lesson from Jill Dembroff, Visalia Pickleball Veteran. Pickleball is a game that is accessible for players of all ages and skill levels. It has become an extremely popular sport with most of the pickleball courts in town reserved regularly. We had the opportunity to play and learn the rules of the game, and by the end of our session, we became experts at it!

Our day continued with a ride to the Kaweah Oaks Preserve to discuss how preservation benefits the community and enhance our quality of life with speakers Bud Darwin and Sam Weise from Sequoias Riverlands Trust, and Savannah Boiano from Sequoia Parks Conservancy. There are many ways that we can help support the preservation of our trails, land, and national parks. One way is through the Sequoia Parks Conservancy, a nonprofit partner of the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and Lake Kaweah that helps fund and enable projects and programs that protect, preserve and provide access to them. Another way is by participating in or contributing to the work Sequoia Riverlands Trust is doing in our community. They offer many opportunities to work with our school districts, families, and youth. These are open spaces that we can visit to walk

the trails, hike, bird watch and just give us a sense of relief and belonging. We had the opportunity to do a short hike and explore the Kaweah Oaks Preserve. A nice scenery away from the city!

We ended the day at Hilton Garden Inn with our featured speakers, Tracy Polkownikoff of Arts Visalia and Sherrrie Bakke of Visit Visalia. We touched on how art and tourism play a major part in Visalia’s quality of life, by providing employment opportunities, increasing investment, improving standards of living and local services, and increasing recreational activities. If you want to explore what Visalia and surrounding communities have to offer, start at Visit Visalia’s website. Visit Visalia is a collaboration of the Visalia Tourism and Marketing District dedicated to marketing, advertising, and public relations that inspire travel to the City of Visalia.

Art is communication; it allows people from different cultures and times to communicate with each other. But most importantly, it creates a safe space for individuals to express themselves and be creative. Arts Visalia is a nonprofit community art center that offers educational art programs for children and adults. In addition, they have a gallery featuring diverse exhibitions monthly.

Too often we take these recreational areas for granted, such as having the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park right in our very own backyards. We highly encourage you to go out and explore what our beautiful city of Visalia has to offer. There are many recreational spaces for everyone, for all ages, and all genders.

Visalia businesses shine at chamber's award night

Visalia Chamber of Commerce celebrates the city's thriving businesses, community leaders at 69th Annual Awards

The Sun-Gazette

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce has announced the winners of its 69th Annual Awards, where outstanding businesses and organizations were recognized for their contributions to the vitality and growth of Visalia.

The Visalia Chamber announced the winners of the 2024 awards during its annual ceremony on June 6. The awards honor those who have navigated the challenges of running a business and given back to the community, making Visalia a remarkable place to live and work.

The evening allowed attendees to learn more about other businesses and celebrate alongside the finalists and industry leaders while acknowledging their achievements and contributions.

For the year of 2024, the winners of the 69th Annual Awards are:

Small Business of the Year: Visalia Cyclery

Visalia Cyclery demonstrated exceptional service and innovation in the local community, providing high-quality products and fostering a love for cycling among residents.

Medium Business of the Year: Valley Strong Credit Union

Valley Strong Credit Union showed outstanding commitment to financial education and support, offering essential services that enhance the economic well-being of its members and the wider community.

Large Business of the Year: Ace Hardware Distribution Center

Ace Hardware Distribution Center exemplified operational excellence and significant community involvement, contributing to the economic stability and growth of Visalia.

Nonprofit of the Year: Able, Inc.

Able, Inc. made profound impacts through its dedication to empowering individuals with disabilities, providing crucial services, and advocating for inclusivity in our community.

Man of the Year: Armando Apodaca

Armando Apodaca made outstanding contributions to our community, demonstrating exceptional leadership and dedication to improving the lives of Visalia residents.

Woman of the Year: Sharon Allison-Crook

Sharon Allison-Crook showed unwavering commitment to serving our community, making significant strides in various initiatives that benefit Visalia.

The selection of these winners was determined through an extensive application and interview process conducted by a selection committee of previous award recipients. This rigorous process ensures that the most deserving finalists and winners are chosen, reflecting the highest standards of excellence, according to the Chamber.

The Visalia Chamber of Commerce extends congratulations to all the winners and finalists of the 69th Annual Awards. This year's event was a memorable celebration of excellence, achievement and community spirit.

"We are grateful to everyone who attended and supported this remarkable evening," the Visalia Chamber statement via announcement.

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.



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 MAN OF THE YEAR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BECCA AND HER CAMERA PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 WOMAN OF THE YEAR



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 MEDIUM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR



VISALIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR





Thank you

TO OUR PREMIER MEMBERS

CHAMPION:



VISIONARY:



REGIONAL LEADERS:



KEYSTONE:



MEDIA PARTNERS:



HEALTH NOTE

Steady growth, financial health



By Gary K. Herbst
Chief Executive Officer
Kaweah Health

As Kaweah Health enters the 2024-25 fiscal year, we are pleased to look back and share the many positive developments across our organization. The important trend in the last year was the ongoing increase in our revenue and the streamlining of processes, which has cut costs and improved profitability. As a result, we have been experiencing steady growth, which has helped maintain our financial health. The ability of our organization to meet the many challenges of today faced by businesses and families alike, is a testament to the people from our community who are part of the Kaweah Health team and help make it great.



I am very excited to welcome Dr. Paul Stefanacci as our new Chief Medical & Quality Officer (CMO/CQO). As the top physician leader at Kaweah Health, he oversees all medical aspects of our operations, ensuring we uphold the highest standards of quality, safety, and patient care. Dr. Stefanacci's expertise will be instrumental in guiding Kaweah Health toward continued excellence.

One of our biggest achievements this past fiscal year has been the growth and engagement of our workforce. We have increased hiring across the board and our new-hire turnover rate is the lowest in Kaweah Health's history. We are bringing more highly-skilled professionals to our team than ever before. We have also raised wages for employees through-

out our organization by close to \$30 million annually to recognize the invaluable contributions made by our caregivers and support staff.

We have also continued to improve access to health care services in Visalia, with the addition of prompt care at the Kaweah Health Medical Clinic on Plaza Drive. Our newest clinic, located on the northwest side of Visalia, serves the many businesses there with workers' compensation and occupational health services, and now area residents can benefit from prompt care access closer to their home.

We are also excited about the recent acquisition of the infusion center operated by Sequoia Oncology Medical Associates (SOMA), our long-time partner at Sequoia Regional Cancer Center (SRCC) and Tulare County's most advanced cancer treatment facility. SOMA is the group of physicians led by Dr. Robert Havard, who specialize in the use of medication in the treatment of cancer. We look forward to continuing our partnership with this group of doctors and their care team, who have helped so many in our community in their fight against cancer.

On May 21, I had the honor of speaking at the dedication ceremony for the Kaweah Health Reflection Garden and Monument. This gift was made possible by the Kaweah Health Foundation and the many donors it works with. It serves as a place of solace and peace and was created to help us honor the countless lives that have been touched by our caregivers over Kaweah Health's 61-year history. We hope that it serves as a beacon of hope, a source of inspiration, and a testament to the enduring spirit of compassion that defines our organization.

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.