Bret Harte Middle School's 'Staff Stuff pulls out all the stops SEE PAGE 4



Hollow ground

Ground zero: Rain brings little relief to California's depleted groundwater — SEE PAGE 4

Former San Jose councilmember Frank Fiscalini's 100-year ride SEE PAGE 12



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This year's Winter Walk is titled "Wild Wild West '

15th Annual Winter Walk and Senior Resource Fair' slated February 24

By William Bellou Publisher

he City of San Jose District 10 is hosting its 15th Annual Winter Walk and Senior Resource Fair on Friday, February 24 at Westfield Oakridge mall beginning at 8 a.m. The event is free to the public.

This year, Councilmembers Pam Foley (District 9) and Sergio Jimenez (District 2) are again cohosting this event along with new District 10 Councilmember Arjun

The Annual Winter Walk attracts hundreds of 50+-year-old community members to emphasize the importance of staying active and living a healthy lifestyle. The event helps educate the community on the healthy options available to them, including information on the various city, county, non-profit and for-profit services, and activities available to them and also provide a fun event and get together with many of their

"I'm privileged to partner with councilmembers of districts 2 and district 9 on this event," Batra said. "Our team has been working tirelessly on this year's event to make See WALK, page 9

Four Almaden students win American History awards contest

Sponsoring the event is Los Gatos Chapter of National Society Daughters of the American Revolution

our Almaden students are winners in the annual American History awards contest sponsored by the Los Gatos Chapter of National Society Daughters of the American Rev-

Alexis Loo won the 5th grade contest; Udeet Ranade won the 6th grade contest, Mya Peredia won the 7th grade contest, and Sneha Arun won the 8th grade contest. Alexis, Udeet and Mya are from the Challenger School, Almaden Campus. Sneha is from the Challenger School Shawnee Campus.

This year's essay question posed to students: "The Second Continental Congress met from May 10, 1775 – March 1, 1781 and included delegates from all thirteen colonies. The Congress was instrumental in shaping what was to become the United States of America. Imagine that you are a delegate during 1775-1776. Which colony are you from and what will be important for you to accomplish for your colony?"





Udeet Ranade



Mya Peredia



Sneha Arun

The purpose of the NSDAR American History Committee is to promote American history by honoring significant historical people, places,

dates and events. All grade five, six, seven and eight students in a public, private, or parochial school and those who are home schooled are eligible to participate in the essay contest.

The contest is conducted without regard to race, religion, sex or national origin. Pam Walker, American Essay Contest Committee Chairperson of the Los Gatos Chapter NSDAR, coordinated this year's contest.

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is a women's service organization whose members can trace their lineage to an individual who contributed to securing American independence during the Revolutionary War. Today's DAR members annually provide millions of hours of volunteer service to their local communities across the country and world. DAR chapters participate in projects to promote historic preservation, education and patriotism. Over one million members have joined the organization since its founding

If you are interested in learning more about DAR membership, visit losgatosmembers.californiadar.ora.

How to house the homeless dominates local meeting

By Lorraine Gabbert

Senior Staff Writer

ddressing the growing number of unhoused people in San . Jose was the focus of a recent District 10 Leadership Coalition meeting.

District 10 Councilmember Arjun Batra said this concern motivated him to compete for an appointment to the San Jose City Council. Batra, an Almaden resident, has a background working at Intel and IBM and was an Encore Fellow at the San Jose Mayor's Office, where he learned government service. He also served on city commissions and advisory boards, including as Chair of the Measure T Community Over-



District 10 Councilmember Arjun Batra wants to find faster, less expensive ways to permanently house the home-

Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.



Residents shared their concerns at a standing room only District 10 Leadership Coalition meeting. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

sight Committee focused on infrastructure and emergency preparedness.

At the Coalition's Feb. 4 meeting held at the Almaden Community Center, Batra said he cast a symbolic dissenting vote on Jan. 31 against the city council's proposal to build affordable housing due to its cost and timetable. He wants city staff to reduce the cost of affordable housing and speed up building time, which he said could take

"Can we at that price and rate of building address the real problem?" he said.

 $The \, city \, council \, approved \, a \, \16.8 million loan for an 81-unit affordable housing project at 1510-1540 Parkmoor Avenue, spending \$5.2 See MEETING, page 7





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QUESTIONS? Reach out to sjys@sjys.org.

SJYS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (EIN 91-2166427) that has scholar-ships and financial aid offerings available based on a showing of need.



O P E D



The Savory Basin outside of Fresno was built two years ago to refill the aquifer with captured stormwater. The Fresno district spent millions to buy farmland and create basins for percolating water underground to help meet the requirements of state groundwater management regulations. Photo by Larry Valenzuela, CallMatters/CatchLight Local

Ground zero: Rain brings little relief to California's depleted groundwater

By Alastair Bland CalMatters

he powerful storms that clobbered California for weeks in December and January dropped trillions of gallons of water, flooding many communities and farms. But throughout the state, the rains have done little to nourish the underground supplies that are critical sources of California's drinking water.

Thousands of people in the San Joaquin Valley have seen their wells go dry after years of prolonged drought and overpumping of aquifers. And a two-week deluge — or even a wet winter — will not bring them relief.

Even in January, as California's rivers flooded thousands of acres, state officials received reports of more than 30 well outages, adding to more than 5,000 dry residential wells reported statewide in the past decade.

"Just one wet year is nowhere near large enough to refill the amount of groundwater storage that we've lost, say, over the last 10 years or more," said Jeanine Jones, a drought manager with the state Department of Water

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Times Media, Inc. / (408) 494-7000

PUBLISHER / CEO: WILLIAM BELLOU williamh@timesmediainc.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: DIANE BLUM, CLAIRE CHEN, SEAN EASTWOOD, KEVIN LARSEN, EUGENE LUU, SUNAY SANGHANI, FRANK SHORTT, NIRBAN SINGH, JUDY LY, APOORVA PANIDAPU

ART DIRECTOR: JEFF BAHAM

PHOTOGRAPHER: ROCCO SANTORO

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER: SANDY BELLOU

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Resources.

Water from heavy rains can reach shallow groundwater basins in a matter of days, but in places where wells must pump from deep underground aquifers — like those in the San Joaquin Valley — this can take months. And even a season's worth of storms is not usually enough to restore wells left high and dry by years of overdraft.

Restoring California's groundwater is not as simple as waiting for rain and letting it seep into the ground. It requires detailed planning and scientific analysis of project sites, and uses tens of millions of dollars in state funds. Land has to be purchased or growers must be compensated for flooding their fields. And it also means that growers — and to a lesser extent, communities — must reduce the water they pump.

Graham Fogg, a UC Davis professor of hydrogeology, said the recent rainfall could substantially help minimally impacted areas, like much of the Sacramento basin, where groundwater tables are only 25 to 30 feet down. But it's a far different story in the San Joaquin Valley, where the water table is 100 to 300 feet down, even 700 feet in some places.

"That's where most of the dried-up wells have occurred," Fogg said, "and that's where it will take years, maybe decades, of not only managed aquifer recharge, but also reduced pumping from wells, to raise groundwater levels back to more appropriate elevations."

According to state officials and other groundwater experts, most wells in the San Joaquin Valley have virtually no chance of recovering unless groundwater pumping is drastically curbed.

"I've seen about 2,000 wells go dry, and we don't see wells recover on their own," said Tami McVay, director of emergency services for Self-Help Enterprises, a San Joaquin Valley nonprofit that provides funding to residents who need new wells. "They sometimes recover for a couple of days, but then they go dry again."

See GROUNDWATER, page 17

Valley Currents

cur | **rent** (adj.) Present, topical, timely, newsworthy. (n.) Movement in a definite direction, a flow.



Bret Harte Middle School teachers and faculty performed to a standing room only crowd.

Staff Stuff pulls out all the stops

By Lorraine Gabbert

Senior Staff Writer

eachers, administrators and students sang, danced, told jokes and acted their hearts out to uplift an Almaden school community.

With its standing room only crowd at Bret Harte Middle School on Feb. 3, the fundraiser, aptly called *Staff Stuff*, raised \$5,127 for students and families in need. In addition to backpacks, yearbooks and sneakers, funds help defray the cost of rent and utilities.

Teacher Brad Mornhinweg, who directed and performed in the show, said it shows people truly care. Past performances have also funded Bret Harte's sister school, the Doris Dillon School in Cambodia, established by Bret Harte and Leland High School students.

Mornhinweg is proud of the performers and felt electrified by the audience who cheered as participants paraded down the aisle, raising their fists in the air like prize fighters, high-fiving students as they headed to the stage.

"This is the community we have here at Bret Harte," he said. "They respect the teachers and admin. That's who they've come to support, because they know they get a lot of support on the other side."

Started in 2013, *Staff Stuff* reflects the school's philosophy of honesty, respect and responsibility. It also provides laughter and a sense of community.

"We see the benefit to the Bret Harte school culture that *Staff Stuff* promotes," Mornhinweg said. "People in the audience may be dealing with anxiety and depression. Maybe we can give them a reprieve and a belly laugh. Smiles are free and they're welcoming."

It's also two hours without students on their phones, having fun and building relationships, he said, and a chance for students to see their teachers and administrators in a different light.

"It's a great example to the kids just to see us onstage doing crazy skits, dialogues and dancing," he said. "It allows them to see us get along with each other. I tell students not to take themselves so seriously. I'd rather they take chances in life and fail than not to out of fear."

Principal George Vuong said he is amazed and impressed by the staff for participating in this event.

"It shows huge heart and huge character," he said. Teacher Natalie Silva appreciates the chance to connect with other teachers and the outpouring of student support.

"I'm having the time of my life," she said. "We don't always work together, so it's been really fun to hang out with them. Our kids coming out is really rewarding"

Teacher Jennifer Schweitzer said *Staff Stuff* is a bonding experience for students and teachers.

"It's a wonderful thing for kids to see teachers can act goofy and have fun and still be young at heart," she said. "They can relate to it."

In addition to entertaining the crowd, *Staff Stuff* participants shared personal principles.

During a skit, Mornhinweg demonstrated how easy it is to pull someone down from a chair, saying it's easy to tear someone down with words, while urging students to make an effort to be kind.

Teachers and administrators shared advice and their favorite thing about Bret Harte. One teacher said the students crack him up and are the best part of his job. Another said students are more than test scores.

"You are an asset, and you make the world better," she said.

Staff Stuff included dances and skits inspired by TikTok and Saturday Night Live, an electric guitar solo, an administrator showing her flexibility by cartwheeling across the stage and doing a split and a scientist supersizing a Cheerio into a bagel and a Barbie into a living doll. It closed with the staff dancing with students on the stage.

Artist Art Sifflet summed it up best.

"We're here to lift you high...higher than the stars," he said "...We're here to do skits and spit dialogue bars...Some families have fallen economically hard. Tonight's an opportunity to give, play your grace card...Yes, you'll see us shake our hips. Dancing and lip syncs, small clips. Odd sounds bounding off our lips. We're building healthy relationships."



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Times Community News

Meeting

Continued from page 1

million to purchase land at 2388 S. Bascom Ave. and providing a \$9.4 million loan for 64 low-income apartments.

Batra said the current plan to address homelessness doesn't work so a new range of solutions are needed, including Santa Clara County Housing Authority providing families with 4-5 bedroom homes and placing unhoused people in permanent housing faster.

Prior District 3 candidate Irene Smith said according to last year's Santa Clara County annual count, there are 393 unhoused people in District 10. Her plan calls for the city and county to designate land for the unhoused with showers, services and security while permanent housing is located and provide a Section 8 housing choice voucher program.

Resident Denelle Fedor recommended the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds be rezoned for the temporary use of a homeless encampment with social services, showers, portable toilets, healthcare and food distribution

"Currently, when sweeping—removing homeless from a location like a creek bed—occurs, the unhoused have nowhere to go," she said.

Additional city concerns

District 10 Airport Commissioner Dan Connolly said San Jose is in dire need of commissioners, who advise the city council on policies and issues.

The Neighborhoods Commission can't even meet as there's no quorum, and the Airport Commission has four openings, he said. Connolly, who terms out in June, said the city only holds applications for one year, so residents need to reapply.

"We really need some help," he said. "There are all these city commissions that we don't have people to fill." $\frac{1}{2} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2} dx \, dx = \frac{1}{2} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2} \int_{-\infty}^$

Resident Sandra Samuels said nonprofits, which receive city funding, should have to register as lobbyists. She said nonprofits influence city staff as their members serve on city committees and city staff serve on nonprofit boards.

"I'm not saying their work isn't' good," Samuels said. "I'm saying it's not transparent."

Johnny Khamis said he wrote a memo trying to rally support for this issue.

"Unfortunately, nonprofits have quite a bit more power than you can imagine," he said. "Nonprofits get more money than any for profits do. When I left office, they were getting at least \$30 million annually out of our budget and none of it is really questioned."

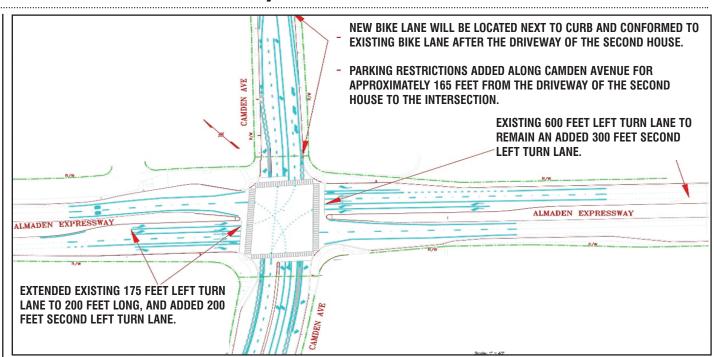
Resident Brenda Dohmen suggested the effectiveness of nonprofits be measured relating to the funding they receive.

District 10 Leadership Coalition Chairman David Heindel said Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian will be invited to speak at a future meeting to answer residents' questions about the time table for installing second left turn lanes at Almaden Expressway and Camden Avenue.

An indoor western-themed Winter Walk and Resource Fair is scheduled for Feb. 24 from 8-10 a.m. at Westfield Oakridge Mall by the Macy's courtyard with food, fun, line dancing and prizes. The Almaden Lions Club will be collecting donations of eyeglasses at the event.

The next meeting of the D10 Leadership Coalition is scheduled for May 6.

Editor's note: To find out more about upcoming meetings of the District 10 Coalition, receive emails, download agendas, learn about grants, events, news and more, go to their website sjd10leadership.org/



Intersection Improvements at Almaden Expressway and Camden Ave.

Photo Courtesy of Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian.



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Times Community News

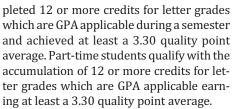
Dom Keiser of Almaden Valley named to University of Rhode Island Dean's List

he University of Rhode Island is pleased to announce that Dom Keiser of San Jose has been named to the Fall 2022 Dean's List.

Students named to the Dean's List represent nearly all of Rhode Island's cities and

towns, all six New England states, New York and New Jersey, and many other states and countries.

To be included on the Dean's List, full-time students must have com-



About the University of Rhode Island

Founded in 1892, the University of Rhode Island is the principal public flagship research and graduate institution in Rhode Island. Competitive and highly regarded, its more than 14,500 undergraduate students and 2,200 graduate students represent 48 states and 76 countries across the globe. With 203 academic programs, URI offers its undergraduate, graduate, and professional students distinctive educational opportunities designed to meet the global challenges.

Caleb Friedrich of Almaden Valley has been named to the honor list for Missouri University of Science and Technology

Missouri University of Science and Technology announced that Caleb Friedrich of Almaden Valley has been named to the honor list for the Fall 2022 semester.

Friedrich is a mechanical engineering firstyear student. He joined a group of missionaries from Holy Spirit Parish in Almaden to help rebuild five homes in St. Augustine, Texas.

To be included on the honor list, students must have carried a minimum of 12 hours and had grade point aver-

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ages of 3.2 or above out of a possible 4.0.

Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) is a STEM-focused research university of over 7,000 students. Part of the four-campus University of Missouri System and located in Rolla, Missouri, Missouri S&T offers 101 degrees in 40 areas of study and is among the nation's top 10 universities for return on investment, according to Business Insider. S&T also is home to the Kummer Institute, made possible by a \$300 million gift from Fred and June Kummer.

Walk

Continued from page 1

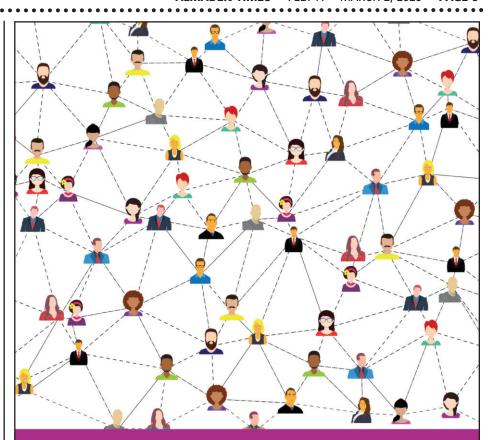
it the best yet to gather in person and remind everyone of the importance of staying active and living a healthy lifestyle. Participating sponsors and vendors will be there to educate and provide information on the various city, county, non-profit, and for-profit services and activities available to them. I want to extend a special thank you to our sponsors who have acknowledged the importance of this event and have supported it financially. I am looking forward to the

walk and joining our residents in attempting a line-dance or two! "

Scheduled festivities

The event festivities begin at 8 a.m. with registration taking place in the Macy's Court inside the Westfield Oakridge Mall. Guests may enjoy a complimentary healthy breakfast, a Country Dance presentation, warmup exercises and maybe learn a dance or two followed by a lively walk around the mall's center. Numerous exciting prize drawings of items donated by the many resource vendors will take place following the walk.

Stage Timing:	
6:30-6:45:	District Staff arrive
6:45-7:20:	Setup-Vendor & Sponsors
6:30-7:20:	Volunteers check-in and assignments
7:20-8:00:	Vendor Check-in - drawing prize collection
8:00-8:30	Breakfast & Registration
8:25	Council member- Announce starting in 5 minutes
8:30	Welcome! Council Member/D10, D2 & D9- All Electeds pass the mic
8:36	Council Member- Introduce Line Dancers
8:37-8:45	Line Dance group- Short Group dance
8:45-8:58	Line Dance group-Leads warm up and exercises
9:00	Council Member/D10- walk start!
9:05-9:25	Walk
9:30	Announce 10 minutes to drawing
9:35	Announce 5 minutes to drawing
9:40-9:59	Drawings - D10 do the calling or share it
9:59-10	Council Member/Mayor-Closing Remarks - Thanks for coming!
10:00	END-Clean up begins
10:30	Clean up ends



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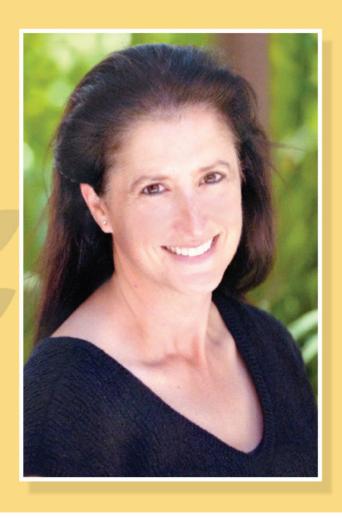
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Times **News**

Inauguration Ceremony: Celebrating a new era

By Matt Mahan
hank you to the over
2000 residents who
joined us to celebrate a
new era in our city focused on
getting back to the basics!

I couldn't have imagined our inauguration without each and every one of you there to mark a renewed focus and increased accountability on our biggest issues: homelessness, blight and crime.

We were also joined by several fantastic performers from across our city — thanks to San José Jazz, Victoria Thúy Vi

McDowell, Buu Kim Tu Dragon and Lion Dance Association, Grupo Folklórico Yolotli Alpha, and San Jose Police Emerald Society for sharing your talents on stage.

After taking the oath of office, I pledged to bring our city back to the basics by focusing on the issues that matter most to residents: cleaning up our streets, ending the era of unmanaged encampments, and keeping our neighborhoods safe.

To start, we must address growing blight in San José. To do this, we kicked off our Inaugur-Action series yesterday in District 7! Inaugur-Action is a 10-week program launching a new era of resident involvement, where San Joséans can become a part of the solution by rolling up their sleeves and beautifying the place we all call home.

Next, we need to end San José's era of unmanaged encampments and treat homelessness as the humanitarian crisis it is. We



From the Mayor
Matt Mahan
Mayor, San Jose

will scale up basic, cost-effective, and safe places for unhoused residents to live and dramatically reduce the barriers to transition into these shelters while working with the state and county to ensure those suffering from mental health challenges get the care they need.

The last basic priority we begin with is safety. Last year, our City Council committed to adding 15 officers per year over the next five years. But that's just not enough – right now, when our residents are in distress, they wait far too long for help to come.

We need to double that rate to at least 30 officers per year to keep our neighbors and our families safe.

These are clear goals with clear metrics of success. And when we tackle these basics, San José will become a place where every resident, newly immigrated or fifth generation, blue-collar or tech founder, son of a mailman or daughter of a Mayor, will find a brighter future and endless opportunity. Thanks once again to those of you who joined our inauguration celebration. Now, let's get to work!

"I pledged to bring our city back to the basics by focusing on the issues that matter most to residents: cleaning up our streets, ending the era of unmanaged encampments, and keeping our neighborhoods safe."

-- Mayor Matt Mahan

San Jose Unified School District offers Transitional Kindergarten program for 4 year-olds

Eligibility: turned 4 by Sept. 2, 2022 and lived within school boundaries

an José Unified School District (SJUSD) is offering the largest Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program in Santa Clara County, serving 704 students.

Nearly 240 of these students are enrolled in San José Unified schools ahead of the state's mandate to offer TK to all four-year-olds in California. The addition of these students resulted in a 51 percent increase in TK enrollment.

California has been moving towards a universal TK program for the past several years, according to school officials. For example, for the 2022-2023 school year, many school districts were required to offer TK to students who turned four by February 2, 2022.

San José Unified has expanded eligibility to students who turned four by September

2, 2022 and lived within the boundaries of schools who serve a large percentage of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

San José Unified schools are eligible for Title I funds when at least 40 percent of their students are identified by the state as socioeconomically disadvantaged. Over half of San José Unified's 27 elementary schools receive Title I funds. The eligibility expansion drew 238 students to TK who would have been ineligible based on the state requirements.

"Our focus on the acceleration of eligibility for our TK programs at Title I schools reflects our longstanding commitment to equity," said San José Unified Superintendent Nancy Albarrán. "By allocating more resources to schools who serve students with the highest needs, we create additional opportunities for students who otherwise may not have been able to attend a pre-kindergarten program."

San José Unified now has over 700 students in its TK classrooms, with 47 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged, compared to 40 percent of total enrollment, and 39 percent English learners. San José Unified provides full-day TK, giving families a predictable schedule aligned to siblings who attend the same school and students the opportunity to get familiar with the school campus and staff.

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San Jose Legends: Frank Fiscalini's 100-year ride Former councilmember and East Side Union High School

District superintendent

By Joseph Geha

San José Spotlight

n a brief entry on the Santa Clara University athletics site, baseball player Frank Fiscalini was said to have played the game with "the mind of a veteran, while keeping the heart of a rookie."

Nearly 80 years later, it seems not much has changed.

Fiscalini, who turned 100 in the fall, still shines with the vigor of youth when recalling the fond memories he's made while wearing the hats of a baseball player, World War II veteran, San Jose vice mayor, superintendent, CEO and great grandfather, among the many others in a life and career that has touched thousands.

Fiscalini has experienced enough joy, pain, success, failure and love for three lifetimes and inspired those around him every step of the way with his genuine and dedicated demeanor, according to his family, friends and former colleagues.

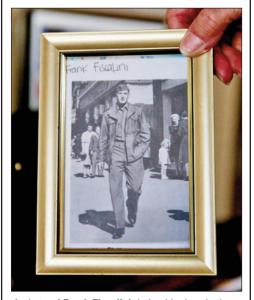
"I don't want to sound crazy, but I felt he was one of the greatest men I ever met," Guy Klitgaard told San José Spotlight.

Klitgaard was hired in 1959 by Fiscalini, then East Side Union High School District superintendent, to teach at Andrew Hill High School. He was later promoted to help Fiscalini open up several schools in the district, and to serve as principal at Silver Creek and Independence high schools. He worked under Fiscalini for more than 20 years.

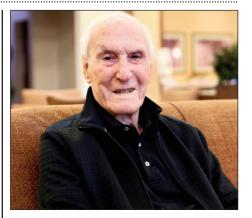
"He was a great guy to work for, he never looked overyour shoulder," Klitgaard said. When challenging moments arose, Klitgaard said Fiscalini told him, "'You do what you think is right and I'll back you.' How's that for a boss?"

Early in his career, Fiscalini taught in the East Side Union High School District—which only had three schools when he was appointed superintendent in 1956. He stayed with the district through 1982, spearheading the founding of 10 new schools.

"Among the many remarkable aspects of Frank's life are the vast diversity of ways that his leadership has impacted our community — invariably for the better — in our schools, the



A photo of **Frank Fiscalini** during his days in the Army in the 1940s. *Photo by Joseph Geha.*



Frank Fiscalini has been an educator, San Jose councilmember, vice mayor and so much more. Among all his accomplishments, he is most proud of his family. *Photo by Joseph Geha*.

arts, health care system, government, neighborhoods, and so many others," said former San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo. "I have yet to find anyone who has crossed paths with the man who doesn't offer some praise for him and his work."

Family brings strength

Born and raised as one of seven children in San Bernardino to immigrant parents from Northern Italy, Fiscalini said he learned Spanish "in the street" as a child, trading language skills when playing with his Latino neighbors.

The language skills would come in handy as he opened some of the first integrated, large high schools in the South Bay as East San Jose's Latino population grew rapidly during his tenure.

"It opened doors for you I think that maybe wouldn't have been easily opened otherwise. People knew I cared," Fiscalini told San José Spotlight. "I spent a lot of time in the community and I think it's necessary. People need to know their superintendent."

Fiscalini moved to Northern California to attend Santa Clara University in 1942, but soon after enlisted in the Army and was sent to Texas for medic training and on to France in the battle against Nazis.

His years in the military interrupted his college education and pursuit of baseball, but he never looked at it as a burden, he said. "Nobody likes to leave home, but I think our generation had a great spirit of service and it was more in that context. 'Dammit, I'm gonna serve my country.' And you were willing to do whatever you needed to do," Fiscalini said. "They could have put me any place."

He returned home for a visit after the war, and was excited to hop into his 1929 Ford Model A, which he had purchased for \$100 from an employee at his brother's gas station in San Bernardino before the war. But it was gone. His dad said Fiscalini's brother Jim had sold it while he was away.

Laughing while recalling the memory of what his dad told him, Fiscalini said, "'He didn't think you were going to come home."

His family recently helped organize a Model A parade for his 100th birthday, and Fiscalini was able to ride in a 1931 model, similar to the one he had in his youth, he said.

Following the war, Fiscalini quickly married Joan, whom he met in junior college in Southern California, and returned to Santa Clara University to earn his degree. The two moved to San Jose, had four kids together and remained married for 64 years until Joan's death in 2010. Fiscalini said she was an easygoing person, who was "totally committed" to family.

"She took good care of me. There is a lot going on in one's life when you're building a career and building a family simultaneously," Fiscalini said. "I don't want to say she was perfect because I don't believe any of us are, but if See FISCALINI, next page



Times Feature

Fiscalini, continued

anyone approached it, she surely did."

The family has since grown, and Fiscalini can count 13 grandkids to his name, and 10 great grandkids, as old as 16 and as young as one. Without hesitation, he said his family is what he is most proud of during his century of life.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without them,"

Lisa Hausle, Fiscalini's daughter, said their growing family has remained tight-knit for decades because of the love and support of her

"You have your ups and downs as a family, but we always come back together and always $support\,each\,other\,through\,good\,times\,and\,bad$ times, because that's what we were shown," Hausle told San José Spotlight. "They were both great examples of human beings and of parents."

Hitting his stride

After fighting a war, graduating from Santa Clara University, earning his master's degree in education from Stanford University, a doctor $ate\,of\,education\,development\,and\,management$ from University of Northern Colorado, and leading a more than 30-year career in education, some might slow down, but Fiscalini was only hitting his stride.

After retiring from the East Side Union High School district, he was hired as CEO of Alexian Brothers hospital system, where he worked for five years. He then took the helm of a massive restoration project of the Cathedral Basilica of



Edith Ramirez and Frank Fiscalini in 2019. Photo courtesy of Edith Ramirez

St. Joseph, a Roman Catholic church in downtown San Jose.

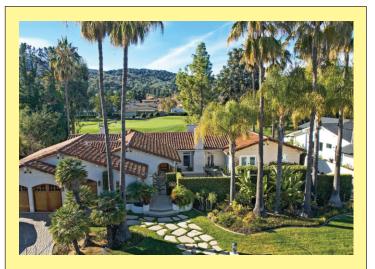
Within a three-year span, he oversaw the structural work and decorative refurbishing of the church's dome, paintings and murals, organ and much more.

Coming off of the success of the restoration, Fiscalini ran for mayor of San Jose in 1990 against Susan Hammer, a city councilmember at the time. The race was one of the closest in city history, with Hammer beating out Fiscalini by less than 1% of the vote, he said.

Fiscalini's team urged him to fight the results, or push for a recount, but he declined, preferring to graciously accept defeat.

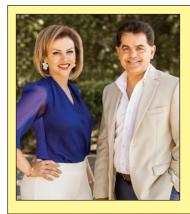
"One thing that sports teaches you is that you're See FISCALINI, page 19

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Gems in

STEM

By Apoorva Panidapu

Times **Feature**

IN MEMORY

LaVerne Vossler

aVerne Vossler, age 91, entered into eternal rest on Dec 20,

She is preceded in death by her daughter Debbie, son Richard and husband Bob. She is survived by her four children Cindy, Linda, Rob and Cathy, 10 grandchildren, 17 great grandchildren and one great great granddaughter.

LaVerne was born in Minnesota. Family and friends will remember LaVerne for her dedication to her family, her ability to reach out to others and her involvement in many ministries at Holy Spirit Church where she was very involved for more than 40 years.

Memorial Mass February 25th Friends are invited to attend a Memorial Mass at Holy Spirit



Church, 1200 Redmond Ave, San Jose on Saturday February 25th at 1:00 pm. For those unable to attend in person, the livestream link is: https://youtube.com/live/THpnYH6PmwA?feature=share

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to the charity of your choice or Sacred Heart Community Service where LaVerne donated much of her time.

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Just keep swimming... in deadly conditions (Part 2)

How Machine Learning can help save coastal dead zones

By Apoorva Panidapu

ast time, we talked about how human activity is increasing eutrophication (aka an excess of nutrients), thereby causing the alarming expansion of dead zones (lowoxygen areas of water). This is killing our aquatic life and worsening climate change. But don't lose hope yet! Here comes the good part: we can do something about it.

How do we stop dead zones?

First, I think we need to do a little Law & Ordering and clear some names. Yes, dead zones are, well, deadly, but the real culprit here is what creates dead zones: overfertilization.

Fertilizers increase crop yields and thereby use less land for agriculture—great! But fertilizer is often overapplied, which is what leads to this nutrient runoff that creates dead zones.

Okay, but it's literally killing aquatic ecosystems, so let's just use less fertilizer,

Unfortunately, our "Would You Rather?" question isn't that simple. It turns out that half of our global population is dependent on synthetic fertilizers for food production. Farmers seem to be facing a trade-off dilemma with little room for error: use too little fertilizer and their crop yields suffer (and people don't get fed), use too much and cause drastic environmental damage.

To solve this problem, we need to channel our inner Goldilocks to find the exact amount of fertilizer required—not too much, not too little, but just right. Efficient fertilizer use means that our population is still fed while minimizing the excess nutrients that poison our aquatic ecosystems.

Robert Jackson, professor of Earth System Science at Stanford University, agrees, "The most important change we can make is to improve the nitrogen use efficiency of our crops by wasting less nitrogen fertilizer and timing its application more closely to when crops need it."

And, huzzah, this approach to optimiz-

ing fertilizer efficiency has worked before!

In 2005-2015, researchers worked with 20.9 million smallholder farmers across China to attempt to increase crop yields while decreasing their environmental impact. There was no magical technology or lifechanging policy implemented, all they did was teach and train farmers in efficient and environmentally-friendly agriculture practices. The result?

While the amount of nitrogen fertilizer used went down by 16%, the average yields of maize, rice, and wheat went UP by 11%. The increased crop output and decrease of fertilizer used were equivalent to an economic return of US\$12.2 billion. That's a lot of zeros.

Turns out the trade-off isn't actually as drastic as we believed—we can increase crop yield and decrease the fertilizers' environmental harm at the same time. Ha, take that "Would You Rather"—I found a win-

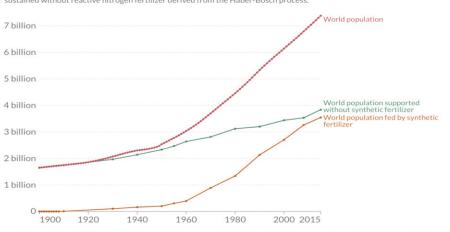
Before we continue, it's important to note that not all countries overapply fertilizer: in fact, some need to use more. For example, many countries across Sub-Saharan Africa barely use fertilizer, and their crop yields suffer as a result. In fact, if they used more fertilizers, they could close large gaps in crop yield, prevent habitat loss, increase food security, and enjoy a host of socioeconomic and environmental benefits. That's why it's so dangerous for organizations to push the notion that "the less fertilizer used, the better," an oversimplification of what's really going on. This kind of message hurts farmers, people, and the environment. Instead, we need to get the fertilizer balance right.

With agricultural activity steadily increasing, it's time to go all in on what's called precision agriculture to find exactly where we need fertilizers the most and to figure out the best way to achieve this ideal fertilization point. Enter: machine learning.

See next page

World population with and without synthetic nitrogen fertilizers

Estimates of the global population reliant on synthetic nitrogenous fertilizers, produced process for food production. Best estimates project that just over half of the global population without reactive nitrogen fertilizer derived from the Haber-Bosch process.



n et al. (2008); Smil (2002); Stewart (2005) ▶ 1900 ○



Times Feature

What Machine Learning Can Do

Data is so important because the more data we collect, the smarter we can make machines—which is exactly what machine learning (ML) does. Machines are "trained" with data sets and use this knowledge to respond to situations they've never seen before, letting them automatically do things like classification, detection, and pattern recognition.

Now, the whole idea of precision agriculture is that you can't manage what you can't measure. But it's not easy to predict the exact amount of fertilizer needed by particular crops, let alone in real-time, so a low-cost and effective monitoring method for nutrients in crops and nearby coastal areas is urgently needed to implement sustainable agricultural practices. This is where remote sensing comes in!

Lately, in remote sensing, which uses satellites and other airborne instruments to collect environmental data, ML has become pretty popular because it can manage these massively complex datasets and provide valuable information without needing significant human intervention. This is in part due to recent advances in earth observation technology that let us obtain images with unprecedented high spatial, spectral, and temporal resolutions—it's like the iPhone 14 Pro Max camera but for Earth!

A machine learning approach with remote sensing can improve predictions about how natural systems behave, improve data analysis automation, and use these insights to better manage our resources. So, AI and ML have taken precision farming to the next level, but, of course, challenges still remain (which we will talk about next time).

Now, let's cha cha real smooth back to the challenge of finding the fertilizer balance. We can accurately measure crop nitrogen through destructive leaf-tissue sampling and wet-laboratory experiments, but this clearly isn't scalable nor cost-friendly to do for millions of acres in the long-term. However, we know that some crop traits are strongly correlated to a collection of spectral wavelengths, so we can leverage remote sensing to measure crop nitrogen! Huzzah!

Next column, we'll discuss how exactly we do this (hint: we're going hyperspectral) and also talk about how we can monitor nutrients in coastal waters using deep learning—you won't want to miss it.

Until next time! If you have any questions or comments, please email me at apoorvapwrites@gmail.com.

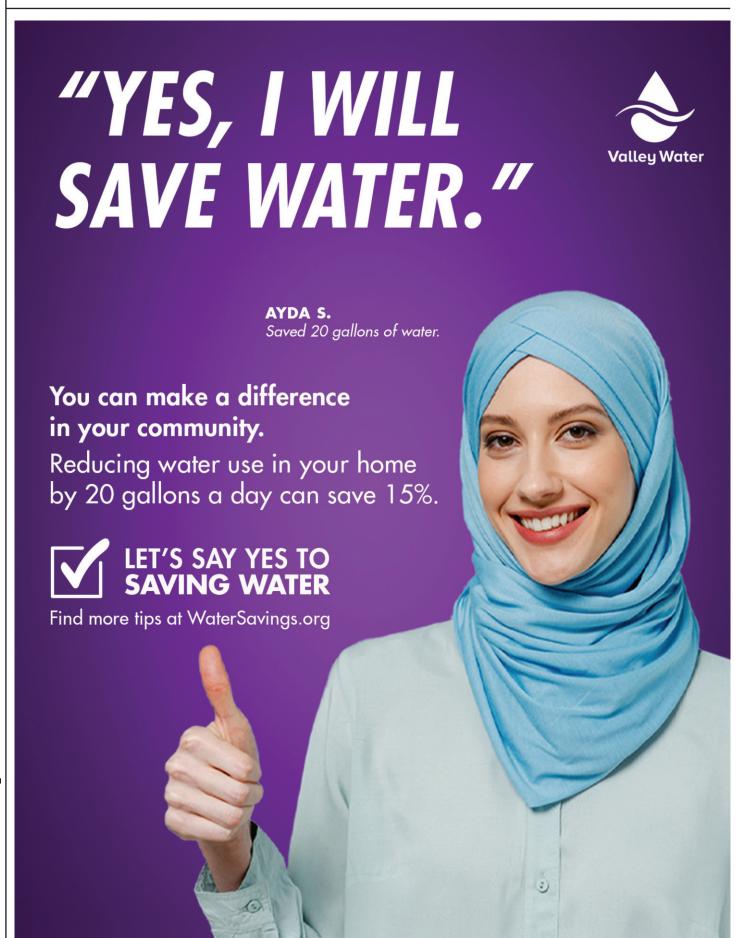
As a recap: this column, Gems in STEM, is a place to learn about various STEM topics that I find exciting, and that I hope will excite you too. It will always be written to be fairly accessible, so you don't have to worry about not having background knowledge. However, it does occasionally get more advanced towards the end.

"Data is so important because the more data we collect, the smarter we can make machines which is exactly what machine learning (ML) does."

-- Apoorva Panidapu



Researchers taught and trained farmers in efficient and environmentally-friendly agriculture practices.



Times **Arts**

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San José Chamber Orchestra presents NEW SOUNDS

Three fabulous new works by American composers

an José Chamber Orchestra (SJCO) presents NEW SOUNDS on Sunday April 2 at 7 p.m. at St Francis Episcopal Church, 1025 Pine Avenue, San José.

The Program features three fabulous new works by American composers:

- Vivian Fung: *Trumpet Concerto* (co-commissioned by SJCO)
- Durwynne Hsieh: *Symphony #1* for Chamber Orchestra

World Premiere, climate change inspired work (commissioned by SJCO)

• Elizabeth Jonasson: Wind through the Poplar Trees. World Premiere, Winner 2021 Allen Strange Memorial Composition Prize

Vivian Fung's Trumpet Concerto is a virtuosic, tour de force work displaying the capabilities of the Eb Flugelhorn and Piccolo Trumpet, and stretches the imagination to what is possible for the instruments. Written for trumpeter Mary Elizabeth Bowden, the concerto originally was inspired by a conversation about Mary's journey in her solo career, in general, and as a woman in a male-dominated field. Ideas of striving, overcoming challenges, frustration, passion, and ultimately joy and celebration are all explored in this piece. Rather than composing the work in movements, the composer has chosen to organize the piece as a continuous work with various episodes, including a toe-tapping march, a lamentful and stormy chant, a more contemplative section for flugelhorn leading to a hip-hop inspired dance. The materials ultimately culminate in a chaotic frenzy that recaps many of the materials and builds to a triumphant ending on the piccolo trumpet.

Durwynne Hsieh's Symphony #1 explores how we humans cause and respond to impending environmental trouble, more from the point of view of an ordinary person rather than that of an expert. In the first movement, Unsustainable, it sounds like we're waking up in the morning and just proceeding through the day doing what we do, a tribute to the idea that we don't have to go out of our way to perform unsustainable acts to have that effect. Pacific Garbage Patch depicts the Pacific Trash Vortex, which is a very large area of the North Pacific Ocean where ocean currents have collected and concentrated a lot of human-created refuse, especially plastic, but also other materials. This movement features the percussion section playing various types of plastic, glass, and metal trash. Otherwise, it's an ugly, tepid ocean scene, with waves, birds that get sick, and a couple of references to Debussy's La Mer. Denial is a series of dances and other distractions, but it is good to remember that no matter what dance of denial you do, the alarming reality of the situation is still there. The final movement, If Only We're Brave Enough to Be It, takes its title from the last line of Amanda Gorman's poem, The Hill We Climb. Read at the inauguration of President Joseph Biden, the



Above and below: Trumpet soloist Mary Elizabeth Bowden courtesy of the artist and San José Chamber Orchestra



poem sees America as imperfect, but with the ability to overcome its deepest problems.

Elizabeth Jonasson's Wind Through the Poplar Trees described from the composer: The presence of trees has always brought me peace and solace, especially in times of distress. Perhaps for this reason, the prominent people in my life often end up associated with a particular tree. My brother became associated with the poplar tree the day he was taken by ambulance to the emergency room and I was told he was going to die. Because of COVID regulations visiting was restricted, and like so many other family members during the pandemic all I could do was wait, hope, and try to reach some state of acceptance. Meanwhile, around my house, the poplar trees swished in the wind, and sometimes in their whispering I could hear my brother's voice.

Ticket price: \$75; Senior: \$65 for age 62 and above; and student: \$15

Tickets and information: sjco.org; (408) 295-4416; Email: sjco@sbcglobal.net

Barbara Day Turner, conductor

Maestra Barbara Day Turner is the founder and music director of the San José Chamber Orchestra. An ardent advocate for new music, she has premiered more than 200 new works with San José Chamber Orchestra alone, as well as leading the first performances of 5 American operas. Named a 2012 Silicon Valley Arts Council "On Stage" Artist Laureate, Maestra Day Turner completed 15 seasons as Music Administrator and Conductor of the Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theatre.

Times Community News

Groundwater

Continued from page 4

Groundwater is liquid gold

Groundwater is among California's most precious natural resources, providing about 40% of the water consumed in most years. It is an inexpensive, local source in a state where many cities rely on imported water and rural towns have no other sources. And its importance is magnified in dry years, when reservoirs fed by rivers are depleted.

The San Joaquin Valley's groundwater reserves have been relentlessly pumped by farmers for decades. Tens of millions of acre-feet have been pumped from the ground, causing the water table to steadily drop and thousands of wells to go dry.

A handful of communities, largely home to lowincome Latino residents, have run out of water, forcing people to use bottled water for everything. The true scope of the problem, in fact, may be underestimated, since many dewatered wells are unreported.

East Porterville, Tooleville, Tombstone Territory, Fairmead, Lanare and Riverdale are just a few of the San Joaquin Valley communities that have been hit hard with dry wells.

"There's so much political pressure to maintain the status quo, and to continue pumping, because it's tied up with economic profits. And the end result is community members who can't rely on their wells for safe water," said Tien Tran, a policy advocate with the group Community Water Center, which advocates for water equity.

Almost a decade ago, California enacted a law that is supposed to protect groundwater reserves from overpumping. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires local groundwater agencies to halt long-term depletion and achieve sustainability, defined by specific criteria. But the deadlines are almost 20 years away, and basins are still being overdrafted.

The San Joaquin Valley's major groundwater basins are designated critically overdrafted by the California Department of Water Resources. A year ago, the agency rejected the region's groundwater sustainability plans on the grounds that they inadequately considered the needs of residential wells, among other impacts.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's water strategy released last August called for increasing groundwater recharge by an average of half a million acre-feet each year. On Jan. 13, state water agencies announced a program to expedite approval of recharge projects.

Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth said the voluminous mountain snowpack dumped in January offers a prime opportunity, and a time-sensitive one, to recharge aquifers.

"We've got a heck of a lot of snow in the Central Sierra," she said. "That snow is going to melt, and we want the local water districts to be positioned to capture some of that excess snowmelt and get it underground."

The quest to store rainwater underground

Compelled in part by state law, and often supported by millions in state funds, some farmers and other land managers have dug large recharge basins to capture stormwater and allow it to sink. Cities design similar projects, and in recent months alone, they've put tens of thousands of acre-feet of water into underground storage.

While not enough on their own to reverse overdraft, these programs could serve as models for scaling up recharge efforts statewide.

In the Tulare Irrigation District, for instance, stormwater during high flows is diverted into 1,300 acres of ponds used to recharge groundwater. In addition, in a new program launched last year, farmers who sink water into their fields during storms can get it back later, during dry periods. General Manager Aaron Fukuda said it

has motivated dozens of landowners to take part this winter. As of Feb. 3, the district was bringing in water at a rate of 1,500 acre-feet daily, mostly to be deposited in the ground.

"The actions our district took last year are paying dividends this year," Fukuda said.

About 40 miles to the north, the Fresno Irrigation District has captured at least 9,000 acre-feet of water since December, according to Kassy Chauhan, executive director of the North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency, which manages the district's groundwater.

Much of this water was diverted into some 900 acres of basins, including 180 acres that were recently constructed. The Fresno district spent millions buying former farmland and forming these basins, which are basically bulldozed depressions ringed by earthen berms made for the express purpose of depositing water underground.

"We were able to capture that water in those basins," Chauhan said. "It was clear progress." Another example of a recharge project is the Pajaro River Valley, on the Central Coast. The local water agency has collaborated with researchers to identify potential recharge hotspots and carve out infiltration basins. One has been in operation for 20 years, and more are coming. The goal, said Brian Lockwood, general manager of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, is to enroll farmers in a rebate program that pays them for flooding their land.

But these types of efforts, even applied broadly, will only have a limited impact. Managed aquifer recharge using local water could potentially recover just 3% to 8% of the San Joaquin Valley's groundwater overdraft, according to 2020 research.

UC Davis Professor of civil and environmental engineering Jay Lund said, while he endorses groundwater recharge projects, there is a better way to lessen the Central Valley's water woes.

"We have to reduce demand," he said.

The problem is that farmers are still pumping water out of the ground faster than it's going back in.

Experts have predicted that the state ground-water law could eventually force as many as 750,000 acres of farmland out of production, permanently easing demands on the state's water supply.

Groundwater agencies tend to "emphasize solutions on the supply side, and relatively little on the demand side ... and the supply numbers do not add up," according to a 2020 PPIC analysis.

In much of the Tulare Irrigation District, the groundwater table sits at a record low elevation of 180 feet underground, and Fukuda said the district's sustainability plan — required by the state's groundwater law and developed by the Mid-Kaweah Groundwater Sustainability Agency — allows for the water table to dip a bit farther before leveling off. The North Kings agency, according to Chauhan, is also allowing some continued decline.

According to data from more than 1,200 San Joaquin Valley monitoring wells, the water table has been dropping for at least two decades, in many places more than 2.5 feet per year on average.

The groundwater plans that the state rejected last year were revised and resubmitted in July, and the state is expected to announce their next round of San Joaquin Valley assessments within two months.

Water equity activists who have studied the revised plans say they're not impressed by the changes made.

"We still found that these plans are not taking adequate steps to protect drinking water users in the basins," said Nataly Escobeda Garcia, policy coordinator for Water Programs with the NGO Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. "We anticipate that numerous domestic wells and public water systems will still be at risk of

dewatering."

The Community Water Center has predicted that almost 500 domestic wells that draw from the Kaweah Subbasin, in the southeast San Joaquin Valley, could go dry under the new plans.

"Domestic wells are disproportionately impacted," Tran said. Tulare County alone has seen 1,810 wells go dry since 2014, according to the state reporting system. All but two were labeled "household."

Replenishing groundwater has limits

With or without human intervention, water sinks into the Earth. Natural, or passive, recharge is the process by which hundreds of millions of acre-feet of water have accumulated in California's shallow basins and deep aquifers. Recent research from NASA found that as much as 4 million acre-feet yearly may seep beneath the Central Valley.

But this doesn't necessarily make a big difference. While the water can generate quick spurts of rebound of the water table, these post-rain gains — at least in the San Joaquin Valley — tend to be erased, plus some, by subsequent dry spells and continued pumping.

The result is a one-step-up-two-steps-down trajectory of groundwater decline.

"Overall water levels have been dropping and until it's reversed, we're going to keep getting dry wells," Fogg said.

Even extremely wet periods have had only temporary benefits in the San Joaquin Valley. After the record wet 2017 winter, the water table jumped — in some places dramatically — but quickly dropped again, continuing the decline. Today more than half of the monitoring wells in Tulare County are at all-time low water levels.

Active recharge programs generated about 6.5 million acre-feet in the San Joaquin Valley alone in 2017, according to a report by the Public Policy Institute of California.

"We have lots of active recharge already," said Ellen Hanak, vice-president and director of the institute's Water Policy Center. "The question is, with (the groundwater law), can we up our game?"

Paul Gosselin, the Department of Water Resources' deputy director of sustainable ground-water management, said 42 recharge projects underway with \$68 million in state support could add 117,000 acre-feet of water storage to the state's aquifers — a big step toward meeting the governor's half-million acre-foot goal. He said the department has \$250 million available to support more recharge work.

Changing climate makes this work all the more urgent. The state's system of capturing and storing water in reservoirs was designed in part around snowpack in the Sierra Nevada. But as the climate warms, mountain snowpack is becoming scarcer. It is melting faster and earlier, and more precipitation is falling as rain in the first place.

California's existing reservoirs don't have the capacity to store so much liquid water at once, but its aquifers do.

"Groundwater recharge will be a good way to compensate for that change," Hanak said. But, she said, "there is a major time constraint — you've got to be able to get that water out there fast, because it's coming down fast."

Randy Fiorini, a Merced County farmer and former chair of the Delta Stewardship Council, thinks the slow pace of aquifer percolation is an obstacle that can only be addressed by building small holding reservoirs to capture stormwater.

"From there, you would meter it into a ground-water basin," he said.

Urban success stories

In urban areas, maintaining groundwater is easier than in farm communities. But it takes active management.

The Orange County Water District provides water for the 2.5 million people who live in the northern half of the county. Despite minimal rain-

fall, it has relatively little reliance on imported supplies and uses a unique groundwater storage system.

A third of its water comes from the Santa Ana River, which originates in the San Bernardino Mountains and flows through San Bernardino and Riverside counties. The Inland Empire discharges voluminous amounts of treated wastewater into the river as it flows into Orange County, where it is deposited into ponds that recharge the aquifer, according to Roy Herndon, the district's chief hydrogeologist.

Another third comes from natural rainfall plus imported Colorado River water. The rest is wastewater that is used to refill the aquifer after undergoing treatment so advanced that it meets or exceeds all drinking water standards, making it "essentially potable," Herndon said. Built 15 years ago, the plant can produce 130 million gallons per day, enough water for about 400,000 households.

All told, the Orange County Water District has 1,100 acres of recharge basins which collectively absorb an average of 250,000 acre-feet of stormwater and runoff annually.

In Sonoma County, the local water agency is using a \$6.9 million state grant to inject surplus water from the Russian River hundreds of feet underground. The project could enter its initial pilot phase next winter and eventually produce 500 acre-feet of water each year. If successful, other similar projects could follow, he said.

In 2018, Los Angeles County voters passed Measure W, which created a new tax on the owners of impermeable surfaces that direct water into storm drains leading to the ocean. Each year since its introduction, the tax has generated about \$280 million in funds for use in supporting stormwater projects.

Since October, the county has captured more than 143,000 acre feet of stormwater in reservoirs and groundwater basins, according to Lisette Guzman, a public information officer with Los Angeles County Public Works. That's enough water, she said, to support more than a million residents for a year.

Lund says the physical limitations of moving and handling surface water mean groundwater recharge projects cannot fix most of the state's well problems.

"No matter how much (recharge) you do, you aren't going to get more than 15% of the ground-water overdraft in the San Joaquin Valley," Lund said. "That's good, and you should do as much as you can economically, but you still have 80, 90% of the problem left."

Gosselin, at the state water agency, is more optimistic, citing the new research, laws, funding and priorities in managing groundwater.

In the novel "East of Eden," John Steinbeck described Californians' tendency to forget about wet times when it's dry and drought when it rained. But Gosselin said growers and water agencies are now planning ahead, rain or shine, to capture and store water in the ground.

"We need resiliency from climate change," he said, "...and I don't think people are going to forget about either right now," he said.

State water restrictions are in effect through December:

- Outdoor watering that lets water run onto sidewalks and other areas (except incidental runoff)
- Washing vehicles without an automatic shutoff nozzle
- Washing hard surfaces like driveways or sidewalks that don't absorb water
- Street cleaning or construction site preparationFilling decorative fountains, lakes, or ponds
- without a recirculation pump
 Outdoor watering within 48 hours after at least
 1/4 inch of rainfall
- Watering decorative grass on public medians

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Times Feature



Aarna Sahu's channel Aarna's News has been operating for the past three years and has quickly gained a following among listeners worldwide on streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and Anchor.

Eliminating the gender gap in STEM fields

By William Bellou

Publisher

arna's News is making waves in the podcast world with its mission to eliminate the gender gap in STEM fields.

Founded by San Jose resident Aarna Sahu, the channel has been operating for the past three years and has quickly gained a following among listeners worldwide.

Sahu started the podcast as a hobby during her sixth-grade summer, but it quickly grew into a passion project that has since had a significant impact. Her goal is to provide young girls with role models in male-dominated industries by interviewing successful women from a range of backgrounds, including YouTubers, VPs of Engineering, and Executive Directors.

Succeeding in STEM with knowledge and recources

According to The Harvard Gazette, a lack of role models and persistent gender stereotypes are some of the external factors contributing to the gender gap in STEM. Sahu saw an opportunity to address this issue and provide girls with the knowledge and resources they need to succeed in these fields.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, as Aarna's News was named one of the 60 best Women in STEM podcasts to follow in 2022 by FeedSpot and ranked on the Russian Federation of Investing. With over 700 downloads and listeners from 45+ countries, the podcast is well-renowned for its informative and inspiring content. You can listen to Aarna's News on any major streaming platform such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and Anchor.

Sahu's passion for encouraging girls in STEM has not waned, and she continues to produce new episodes that promote diversity and inclusivity in these industries. With her podcast, Aarna is making a difference in the lives of countless young girls and inspiring them to pursue their dreams in STEM.

Editor's note: For those of you who have not yet had the pleasure of following Aarna's News on Instagram, you can access her handle @aarnas_news and follow her podcast channel. Sahu states, "This way you can check out our recent offerings and never miss a single episode also, I would be delighted if you could take a few moments to share your thoughts by leaving a rating and review---your feedback is invaluable to us. We can't wait to hear from you!"

SBA Tops \$10M in disaster assistance loans for severe winter storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides

The U.S. Small Business Administration's Disaster Field Operations Center-West has approved more than \$10 million in federal disaster loans for California businesses and residents impacted by severe winter storms, flooding, landslides and mudslides that began late last December.

Businesses of all sizes and private nonprofit organizations may borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory and other business assets. The SBA can also lend additional funds to help business and residents with the cost of making improvements that protect, prevent or minimize the same type

of disaster damage from occurring in the future.
For small businesses and most private non-

For small businesses and most private nonprofit organizations of all sizes, SBA offers Economic Injury Disaster Loans to help meet working capital needs caused by the disaster. Economic injury assistance is available regardless of whether the business suffered any property damage. The deadline to apply for economic injury is Oct. 16, 2023.

Disaster loans up to \$200,000 are available to homeowners to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate. Homeowners and renters are eligible for up to \$40,000 to repair or replace damaged or destroyed personal property.

Applicants may apply online, receive additional disaster assistance information and download applications at https://disasterloanassistance.sba.gov/. Applicants may also call SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or email disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for more information on SBA disaster assistance.

Times Feature

Significant enrollment growth seen at San Jose City and Evergreen Colleges

Evergreen College and San Jose City College has 15.1% increase in enrollment

fter two years of pandemic-driven enrollment declines, San José – Evergreen Community College District (SJECCD) and its colleges show significant enrollment growth compared to last year, based on early 2023 spring term enrollment

As of the first day of spring semester classes, both Evergreen Valley College (EVC) and San José City College (SJCC) reflected year-over-year increases of 15.1 percent in unduplicated student headcount.

"These are preliminary numbers that don't reflect late-start classes or the adds and drops that typically take place at the beginning of each academic term," according to Dr. Raul Rodriguez, SJECCD's interim chancellor. "This clearly shows that not only have we stemmed the tide in terms of the enrollment declines that impacted nearly every higher education institution during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reversed that trend and are regaining much of that lost enrollment quickly."

Regaining enrollment lost during the pandemic has been a point of emphasis for both EVC and SJCC, where faculty and classified staff have been focused on the effort. "We have invested a lot of time and energy into innovative recruitment and retention strategies to ensure that not only are we bringing large numbers of new students onto campus, but we are also retaining and graduating the students that were already here," said Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson, EVC president.

Free tuition program and supplemental monies for textbooks

Among the successful strategies has been a free tuition program, which has provided free tuition and zero fees to any students enrolled in at least six units at either EVC or SJCC. At EVC, students taking 15 or more units can also receive up to \$1,500 for textbooks and course materials. This program is still available and enrollment remains open for spring semester late-start classes

The enrollment increase is apparent in both transfer and career education programs, which is a positive sign for SJCC, according to Dr. Rowena Tomaneng, the college's president. "In addition to our general education and transfer offerings, we have built robust career education programs at SJCC. Due to the hands-on nature of the learning in these programs, some were particularly hard-hit by the pandemic. We're pleased to see strong enrollment growth in these areas," she said.

Last fall, SJCC broke ground on a new Career Education Complex, an approximately 85,000-square-foot facility that will house

"The enrollment
numbers reflect a lot of
hard work by a lot of people," Chancellor
Rodriguez said. "They
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and SJCC."

classrooms, computer labs, offices, student support spaces, and program-specific labs for training skilled workers in fields including health care, software and web development, computer information systems, construction, and more. The Career Education Complex is scheduled for completion in 2024.

While in-person classes and student support services returned to both EVC and SJCC in 2021, about one-third of classes remain online. "We know from surveys that what our students want and need are options," Chancellor Rodriguez said. "We have built our schedule with intention in order to make sure we are meeting the needs of our entire community."

Not only is overall enrollment up across SJECCD, but enrollment has increased among every racial and ethnic group compared to last spring as well, including American Indian students (119 percent), Asian American/Pacific Islander students (5.5 percent), Black/African American students (33.8 percent), Latinx students (16.8 percent), white students (30.6 percent), and multi-racial students (17 percent).

"These enrollment numbers reflect a lot of hard work by a lot of people," Chancellor Rodriguez said. "They also indicate that our community continues to see the value of its local colleges. Students want to learn from the best faculty and leave with a degree that is valued by employers. They know they will have both at EVC and SJCC."

While the semester officially began on January 30, both EVC and SJCC offer late start classes and free tuition this spring. Applications are still being accepted and it is not too late to enroll. Both colleges have also increased dual credit offerings in partnership with local high schools, which allow students to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously and at no cost.

Fiscalini

Continued from page 13

going to win sometimes and you're going to lose sometimes. And when you lose, you can't bury your head in the sand. You get up to play another day," he said.

Two years later, Fiscalini ran for and was elected to the San Jose City Council, serving two terms and working well with his former rival Hammer for several years.

He said it was important to always maintain self-respect when running for and holding political office.

"When you're in the political realm, you represent the people that elect you, not yourself, and there is a big difference," Fiscalini said. "I think today, we are seeing more representatives of self than we probably are of the electorate, and that doesn't bode well for decision making."

The ultimate statesman

His leadership style did not go unnoticed by the community and his colleagues. He was later appointed vice mayor by former Mayor Ron Gonzales.

Edith Ramirez, an assistant city manager in Morgan Hill, started her nearly 30-year public service career as a staffer for Fiscalini during his second council term. She said he is known by many of those who worked with him as the "ultimate statesman" because of the way he carried himself. He was a foundational influence in her decision to continue in public service, she said.

"I'm getting teary-eyed just thinking about it. Watching him on the council, the way he interacted with his colleagues and with staff

and the community really placed this work as something very special, something honorable," she told San José Spotlight. "He was always humble, he was always respectful."

Ramirez said Fiscalini encouraged his staff to look beyond their own responsibilities and to do good wherever they could. The professionalism, grace and compassion he brought to the office had a cascading effect, she said.

"It really allows us as an entire community to elevate, to be more thoughtful, to be more caring and to be more intentional," Ramirez said.

Reflecting on his time in office, Fiscalini said he is proud of the city's work to establish lifelong learning institutions like the Tech Museum and the Children's Discovery Museum. A founding board member of Opera San Jose, he said he hopes the city's current leaders will do more to prioritize funding for arts of all kinds.

"We'll be a lot happier and a lot more fruitful if we can have a strong arts program," he said

At the century mark, having been in San Jose and the South Bay for 80 years, Fiscalini said he's witnessed the Valley of Heart's Delight transition from an agricultural society to Silicon Valley, and he doesn't lament the changes.

With so many institutions of higher learning in the region attracting talent from all over the world, he thinks Silicon Valley is well positioned for whatever the next big venture is.

"I'm confident that whatever the next stage is, we will likely be very successful. It very easily could come in space," Fiscalini said, with a nod to the future. "I hope I'm around to see it."



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Times **News**

State Senator Cortese bill brokering deal for rest breaks for flight attendants clears first committee

egislation by Senator Dave Cortese (D-San Jose) that would resolve major ■industry and labor issues tied to rest breaks and related compensation for flight attendants passed a key legislative committee hearing on January 9.

The conflict had remained gridlocked as airlines considered moving their major operations out of California. SB 41 reflects months of negotiations between commercial airlines and cabin crew labor representatives and has no opposition. The fasttrack bill unanimously passed the Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee on Thursday and heads to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"SB 41 shows that business groups can come together with organized labor to solve thorny problems resulting in keeping goodpaying jobs here in California that might otherwise leave the state," Cortese said. "This negotiation resolves conflicts and provides flight attendants with a benefit that makes them whole and keeps airline workers and passengers safe. I applaud the commercial airlines, cabin crew labor representatives, and my colleagues for promoting compromise for the benefit of commercial aviation, its flight attendants, and the flying public."



Background: Under California law, employees must be "off duty" during meal and rest breaks and able to leave the work premises. This is not possible for flight attendants on an aircraft. SB 41 provides a course correction by exempting California-based cabin crews from the meal and rest break law only if there is a Collective Bargaining Agreement that provides for breaks or appropriate compensation.

The bill accommodates the unique work environment of commercial flight attendants by allowing flight attendants to negotiate meal and rest break benefits while providing their employers the ability to comply with California law. It's the result of an agreement between Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, Transport Workers Union (TWU) and commercial airlines.





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Times **News**

State Senator Cortese introduces legislation to speed statewide housing development

tate Senator Dave Cortese has introduced legislation to streamline the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and tighten housing standards to spur housing development across the state.

"This legislation will allow government agencies and builders to move much more quickly to house the most vulnerable in our communities as we invest billions into housing for the homeless and into affordable housing. SB 406 eliminates duplicative review while keeping environmental protections intact," said Cortese. "Let's do everything in our power to build more housing and speed up an end to homelessness in our state and in our communities."

SB 406 seeks to eliminate duplicative CEQA review without circumventing California's flagship environmental law. When a local agency provides financial assistance for an affordable housing project, both the decision to provide financial assistance and the project itself may require separate, independent CEQA reviews. SB 406 extends to local governments an existing CEQA exemption for state financing of affordable housing projects, provided that the project will still undergo a CEQA review by another public agency.

SB 405 would improve standards for housing plans by local governments. Each region is represented by a Council of Governments (COG) that creates a Regional Housing Needs Assessment every eight years. Unfortunately, the properties included in these plans often are owned by people who have no interest in developing their land. SB 405 would require the local planning agency to notify a property owner that their land is being included in a draft housing plan. If the owner didn't wish to develop 80 percent of potential housing units that the agency identified for development, the site would not be included in the housing plan.

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