

How San Jose plans to tackle its worst problems
PAGE 4



On the list
The Federal Government is tracking the unvaccinated
PAGE 7

Acclaimed British Pianist Benjamin Grosvenor performs March 25: **PAGE 7**



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Willow Glen Times

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San Pedro Square in downtown San Jose is pictured in this file photo.

Downtown Tabard Theater faces its final curtain call

A truly magnificent gift to all

A San Jose art institution in downtown is closing its curtains later this year.

The Tabard Theatre is closing indefinitely on April 2, according to Jonathan Rhys Williams, executive artistic director of the Tabard Theatre Company.

"After three years of battling increasing costs, decreasing ticket sales and the ongoing effects of a global pandemic, we are simply no longer able to make ends meet and therefore will be unable to complete the current season," Williams wrote in a letter to the community today.

The COVID-19 pandemic decimated the local arts scene in downtown San Jose. In 2021, Team San Jose, which manages the city's arts and cultural centers and tourism, reported zero dollars in revenue. While some have been able to recover, the small Tabard Theatre in San Pedro Square couldn't keep up.

There are still two shows residents can catch before the theater closes. "The Super Secret Society" runs until Sunday. Following that, "Once," an eight-time Tony award-winning musical, will run from March 10 to April 2 as the 22-year old theater's swan song.

Customers who purchased
See TABARD, page 4

South Bay artists collaborate in new photography exhibition at Wheelhouse Gallery in Willow Glen

Sunnyvale portrait photographer Suszi Lurie McFadden and Palo Alto abstract photographer Brandon Stauffer invite you to experience their new gallery show, HumanEssence, at Wheelhouse Gallery in Willow Glen, located at 1173 Lincoln Ave.

HumanEssence runs from March 15 to May 15, 2023, with an Artists' Reception on Saturday, April 1 at 5 p.m. This show explores how two fundamentally different artists can come together to tell a single story.

The portrait photographer captures the essence of human expression and emotion.

The abstract photographer uses shape, form, and color to offer an alternative yet complementary perspective.

Together, McFadden & Stauffer present a series of photographic pairings that illustrate how representational and abstract images can convey the same emotional resonance. By displaying their images side by side, they tell a story that is greater than the sum of its parts and compel the viewer to look past the superficial veneer of each subject.

The concept for the show was proposed by



Fall 2020 Abstract #14 by Palo Alto abstract photographer Brandon Stauffer.

McFadden, an award-winning, internationally published portrait photographer based in Sunnyvale:

"My first thought was that the concept was really unique – but I wasn't sure how it would work. However, as soon as Brandon and I began brainstorming, I knew we were creating something special. I absolutely love seeing my portraits paired with Brandon's abstracts. His art helps me see deeper into my own portraits, and

the combinations speak to me in a way that even I didn't expect."

Brandon, whose abstracts appear in galleries throughout and beyond

California, adds: "When Suszi approached me with the concept of grouping abstracts and portraits, I thought it was a brilliant idea. Until this project, many of my abstracts were the result of chance-based processes. I would use experimental techniques to generate thousands of images, then cull them to find a few hidden gems. HumanEssence posed a new challenge for me, as I had to create abstracts with a specific purpose: to complement Suszi's portraits. Working together, we have created a unique body of work where each

image alone is strong, but the combinations are where the magic really happens."

HumanEssence presents each portrait/abstract combination as a puzzle with infinite solutions. Viewers are invited to discover for themselves the solutions that speak to them with the most clarity and force.

For more information, please contact Suszi McFadden at (415) 203-6400 or suz@suzmc-faddenphoto.com.

Willow Glen residents Wymer and Adams co-chair Mayor Mahan's inaugural afterparty

Two Willow Glen Residents, Steve Wymer, President and CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs of Silicon Valley, and Nicholas Adams, President and CEO of NINICO Communications, were the co-chairs of Matt Mahan's inaugural afterparty after being sworn in as mayor of San Jose.

San Jose's most notable influencers in business and the community celebrated newly elected San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan's inauguration following his standing-room-only swearing in at the Center for the Performing Arts.

The after-party, designed

and produced by Julee Winterbourne at the private Silicon Valley Capital Club, was also a fundraiser for local nonprofit Downtown Streets Team.

At right, Mayor **Matt Mahan** is pictured with Willow Glen residents **Steve Wymer** (right), President and CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs of Silicon Valley, and **Nicholas Adams**, President and CEO of NINICO Communications, who were co-chairs of Matt Mahan's inaugural afterparty after being sworn in as mayor of San Jose. *Photo by Bernie Grijalva Photography*



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NOTEBOOK

Christina Lefler of Almaden earns Dean's List recognition from George Fox University

Christina Lefler of San Jose earned dean's list recognition at George Fox University for the fall 2022 semester. Lefler is a senior biology major. Traditional undergraduate stu-

dents must earn a 3.5 grade point average or above on 12 or more hours of graded work to earn a spot on the dean's list. George Fox University is a Christian college classified by U.S. News & World Report as a "Best National University." More than 4,000 students attend classes on the university's campus in Newberg, Oregon, and at teaching centers in Portland and Redmond, Oregon. George Fox offers more than 60 undergraduate academic programs, degree-completion programs for working adults, seven seminary degrees, and 13 masters and doctoral degrees.

Tabard

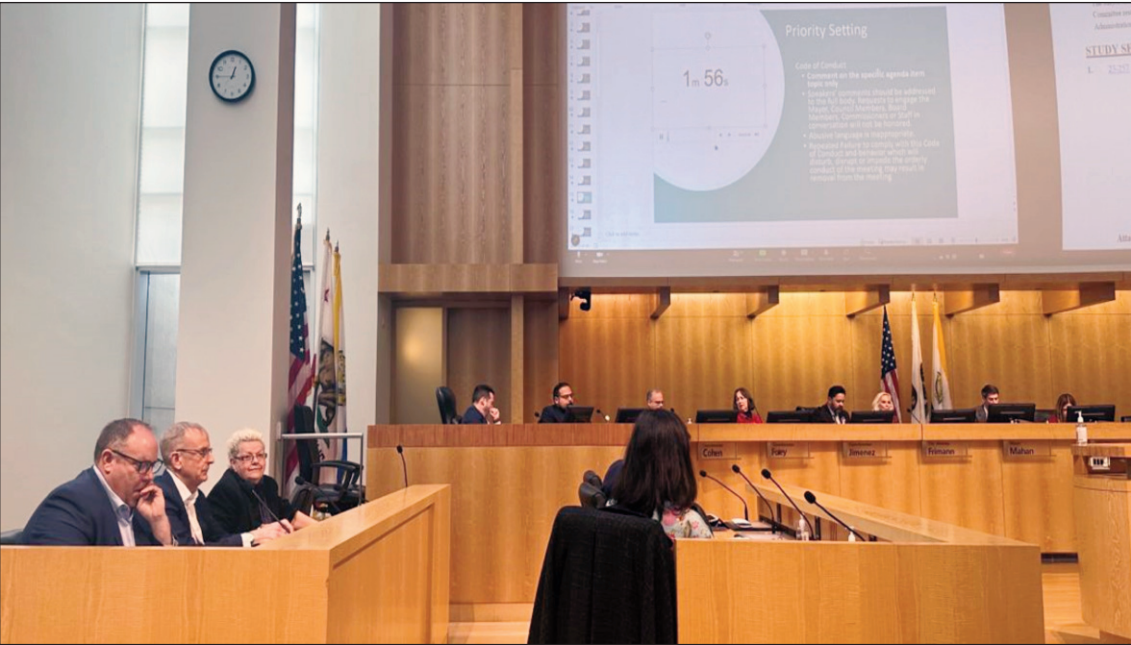
Continued from page 1 tickets to the two other productions planned for the year, "Othello" and "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," will be contacted by the box office about options, Williams said. "The Tabard Theatre Company has meant so much to many of you as artists, technicians, volunteers, staff, and of course as subscribers, donors and patrons," Williams said. "We thank everyone who has supported us over the past two decades, and particularly through this very challenging last three years."

Tabard mission statement The Tabard Theatre Company provided live entertainment experiences that enlightened, appropriate and affordable for audiences of all ages, championing unique works in an inclusive environment, with educational programs and altruistic outreach to the underserved. **Tabard storied history** The Tabard Theatre Company is a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation that was founded in 2001 by Cathy Spielberger Cassetta to be a "different" kind of theatre company from the more than 450 theatre companies in the Bay Area. For its first seven

seasons, Tabard nomadically performed in a variety of venues, not having a consistent venue of its own. In 2008, Tabard contracted with the San Jose Redevelopment Agency to become the managing and resident theatre company of then-named Theatre on San Pedro Square, the current location. Its charter provided for production of theatrical plays and musicals as well as to be a destination for guest performing arts groups. This venue was formally renamed "Tabard Theatre" in 2018. It blossomed into a multifaceted theatre arts organization hosting concerts and comedy shows, and a wide variety of corporate, private and public guest events. Tabard Theatre also continued to be the official Swing Stage of the San Jose Jazz SummerFest. All told, various programs provided the community with over 150 performances per year. The venue was also home to summer theatre camps for children ages 6 to 16. In its mission to bring outreach to the underserved, Tabard's Youth Performing Arts Programs brought theatre education to a number of schools in the San Jose area.

Valley Currents

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



The San Jose City Council chambers during a priority setting meeting for Mayor Matt Mahan's transition committees on Jan. 14. Photo by Jana Kadah.

How San Jose plans to tackle its worst problems

Mayor Mahan formed five committees to help tackle homelessness, crime, blight, permitting for development and downtown vibrancy

By Jana Kadah
San José Spotlight

The San Jose mayor's transition committees have finally made their private discussions public.

Mayor Matt Mahan created five closed-door committees to meet and advise him on the city's most pressing problems ahead of this year's budget process—a move highly criticized because it lacked transparency and potentially flouted the law. The now-dissolved committees were tasked to create measurable goals to track San Jose's progress on solving the city's top issues. At Tuesday's San Jose City Council meeting, the decisions were made public. Mahan formed the five committees to help him tackle homelessness, crime, blight, permitting for development and downtown vibrancy. While most of the recommendations are iterations of the city's already identified solutions, there are some unique initiatives. Here are the top takeaways from each committee.

Homelessness Councilmembers Pam Foley, David Cohen and David Pandori, former councilmember and deputy district attorney, chaired the homelessness committee. The 25-member group was made up of nonprofit leaders and developers, including Huascar Castro, an associate housing and transportation policy director at Working Partnerships USA, Valley Water CEO Rick Callender and Sand Hill Property Company co-founder Peter Pau, but excluded most advocates and individuals with lived experience—a major point of criticism from residents during public comment. The major goal is to build more housing, particularly interim housing. The No. 1 priority is to complete former Mayor Sam Liccardo's 2021 goal to build 1,000 homes by the end of his term, of which only 317 were completed. Once the rest are finished, the committee suggests the council find more public land to build an additional 1,000 homes.

The committee also recommends reducing barriers for homeless residents to access services by creating sanctioned camps. The committee's recommendations are not groundbreaking. In addition to hiring more officers, the committee outlined it would like to rely on mental health experts to respond to crisis calls and build out more self-enforcing streets and new designs to reduce traffic fatalities that have increased in the last five years. The most interesting recommendation is to explore redirecting non-emergency 911 calls away from badged officers to community service officers who perform lower level duties like issuing parking citations and towing abandoned vehicles. This aligns with what the San Jose Police Officers' Association and police reform activists want. **Blight** Councilmember Peter Ortiz chaired this 23-member committee with community co-chairs Deb Kramer, executive director of nonprofit Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful, and Helen Brock, founder of Beautify Almaden. In addition to adding more public trash cans and planting more trees and flowers, the clean neighborhoods committee wants to educate residents on what services exist and how residents can report dumping and graffiti, and properly dispose of their own blight. The committee focused heavily on expanding the city's 311 mobile application, San Jose's customer service tool to respond to complaints about potholes, abandoned cars, graffiti and blight. The committee wants the city to expand language access, increase marketing and create a mechanism for residents to provide feedback on services they believe are incomplete. The committee also suggests the "gamification" of the 311 app where council districts compete with each other through the app to increase users and reporting by making it more fun. **Downtown vibrancy** The 20-member downtown vibrancy committee includes leaders from the San Jose Downtown Association, the Jay Paul Company, Sharks Sports and Entertainment and SAP Center, Adobe Inc. and San Jose State University. It was chaired by downtown Councilmember Omar Torres and developer Gary Dillabough of Urban Community. See PROBLEMS, page 6

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Times **Feature**

Racing hearts: The difference between life and death

By County Supervisor Joe Simitian

Racing Hearts is a life saver. In just 10 years, they've placed more than 1,000 automated external defibrillators (AEDs) within Santa Clara County, and they've made Santa Clara County the first county in California to have defibrillators in virtually all public schools. It's an outstanding example of the good that nonprofits and government can do when we work hand in hand.

And what a journey it's been. Two decades ago, Stephanie Martinson was out climbing Yosemite's Half Dome when she suffered an aborted sudden cardiac arrest. She was just 23 years old.

Stephanie was not the first young adult, and she won't be the last, to experience sudden cardiac arrest. We hear too many stories of otherwise healthy people collapsing suddenly. Maybe it's a student at sports practice, or a friend at work, or a neighbor at a farmers' market. It can happen to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

Sudden cardiac arrest is not the same as a heart attack, but it's just as dangerous. Instead of a blockage, it's an electrical disturbance that stops the heart beating correctly.

After her ordeal, Stephanie was inspired to do something. In 2012, she founded Racing Hearts with a clear mission: to increase the survival rate of people suffering a sudden cardiac arrest. How would she and her volunteer team get that done? By placing AEDs in easy to access locations throughout the community, and by teaching people how to use them.

An AED is a small but powerful device. It uses electrical pulses to reset the heart, like turning a frozen computer off and on again. "Public access" AED models, like the ones placed through our partnership with Racing Hearts, are easy to use and capable of defibrillating a cardiac patient before the ambulance arrives.

There are more than 350,000 cases of sudden cardiac arrest each year in the U.S. — 7,000 of them children under age 18 — and nearly 90% are fatal. The survival rate for those experiencing this kind of cardiac event is 5-8% when traditional cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is used but increases to 80% with the use of AEDs. Clearly, having AEDs widely available makes a huge difference — between life and death.

In 2014, I proposed that Racing Hearts partner with our Board of Supervisors, the City of

Mountain View, El Camino Health, and local school districts to place 49 AEDs in public locations throughout Mountain View, including schools and recreation/community centers.

Following the success of the Mountain View pilot, in 2015 the Board of Supervisors allocated \$500,000 in matching funds to get even more AEDs out into the community, including in County park ranger and sheriff patrol cars. Soon after, Racing Hearts, the County, and El Camino Health collaborated with our local state legislators to update California legislation to make it easier to own and maintain AEDs.

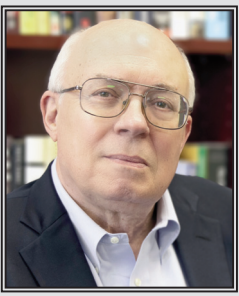
By 2018, Santa Clara County was the first county in California to have AEDs in virtually all public schools, spread among elementary, middle, and high schools. When we started our partnership with Racing Hearts, fewer than 10% of local public schools had access to the equipment.

Racing Hearts has now placed more than 1,000 AEDs in Santa Clara County. In the San Jose area, that includes City of San Jose Parks and Recreation sites including community centers, and San Jose police vehicles.

It's a triumph, to put it simply. After completing their mission to raise awareness and blanket our community with life-saving AEDs, Racing Hearts' journey has recently come to a natural close. I'm honored to have worked with Racing Hearts from day one, and I hope the Racing Hearts story continues to inspire partnerships between non-profits, local organizations, and government.

Thank you, Racing Hearts. You're a life saver.

Joe Simitian was elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in 2012 and re-elected in 2016 and 2020. He represents the Fifth District, which now includes Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Saratoga, Stanford, and portions of San Jose, including Almaden Valley. Joe's public service over the years includes stints as a member of the California State Senate, the California State Assembly, Mayor of Palo Alto, President of the Palo Alto School Board, as well as an earlier term on the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. He served as an election observer/supervisor in El Salvador and Bosnia and participated in refugee relief and resettlement efforts in Albania and Kosovo.



County Report

Joe Simitian
County Supervisor

Problems

Continued from page 4

The big ticket idea from this committee is to permanently create and fund a team of downtown-focused workers that coordinate between nonprofits, government agencies, the private sector and other local stakeholders. The team would consist of five members who will focus on economic development, cleanliness and safety, create more community engagement in public spaces and create a brand and marketing for downtown San Jose.

The committee wants the city to hire a team of five people by the end of Sept. 30 to serve in these roles.

Planning and permitting

The 28-member planning and permitting

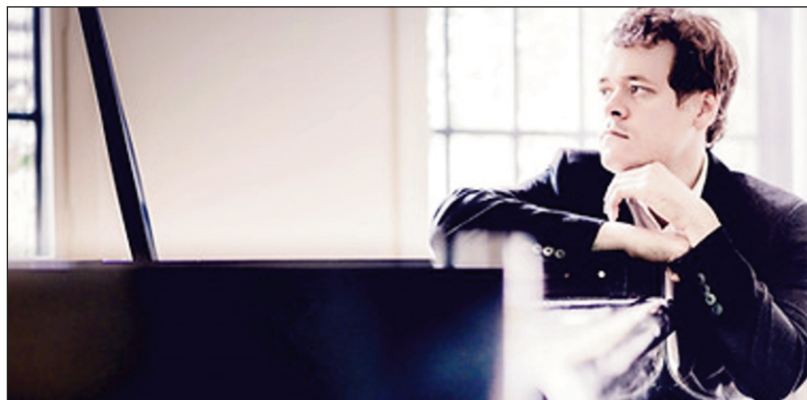
committee is predominantly composed of developers, including representatives from Boston Properties, Urban Catalyst, Webcor Builders and the Building Trades Council. Bayview Development Group Chief Investment Officer Ted McMahon served as co-chair along with Councilmembers Dev Davis and Sergio Jimenez.

The group focused on the lengthy building permit process. The committee suggests creating a project manager to assist with five different types of projects: large commercial, large residential, small residential, tenant improvements and affordable residential. Committee members see this as a way to improve communication and expedite the permitting process.

The committee also suggests refining the city's web portal to better keep applicants informed of their project status.

Times **Feature**

Classical pianist **Benjamin Grosvenor** to perform for Steinway Society – The Bay Area on Saturday, March 25 in Santa Clara.



Acclaimed British Pianist Benjamin Grosvenor performs for Steinway Society, March 25: Live and LiveStreamed

Winner of Gramophone award for best instrumental album of the year

Classical pianist Benjamin Grosvenor returns to perform for Steinway Society – The Bay Area on Saturday, March 25 at the Louis B. Mayer Theatre, at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara.

Patrons will also be able to livestream the concert and view it for up to 48 hours afterward. Program notes and a recorded pre-concert lecture by classical music expert Dr. Gary Lemco are available at www.steinwaysociety.com

“Piano’s Golden Generation” concert, beginning at 7:30 p.m., will feature:

Bach-Busoni, Chaconne in D Minor (From Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004)

Schumann, Fantasie in C Major, Op. 17

1. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen (To be performed with fantasy and passion throughout)

2. Mässig. Durchaus energisch (Moderate. Energetic throughout)

3. Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten (Slow and sustained. Gentle throughout)

Ravel, Le tombeau de Couperin

1. Prélude, Vif

2. Fugue, Allegro moderato

3. Forlane, Allegretto

4. Rigaudon, Assez vif

5. Menuet, Allegro Moderato

6. Toccata, Vif

Prokofiev, Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op.

83

1. Allegro inquieto

2. Andante caloroso

3. Precipitato

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Benjamin Grosvenor

Now among the world’s most admired pianists, Benjamin Grosvenor became the youngest-ever winner of the BBC Young Musician Competition at age 11. At 19, he was the youngest British musician ever signed by Decca Classics; his first album won the Gramophone award for best instrumental album of the year. He has also won the Classic Brits Critics’ Award, UK Critics’ Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, and a Diapason d’Or Jeune Talent Award. Grosvenor has been featured in two BBC television documentaries, BBC Breakfast and The Andrew Marr Show, as well as in CNN’s Human to Hero series. Since 2011 he has appeared eight times at BBC Proms.

In January 2019, Gramophone named Grosvenor one of five “Piano’s Golden Generation” artists who are leading the way among today’s classical pianists.

Sought after and praised for his distinctive sound, his artistry described as “poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clear-minded, intelligent but not without humor, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch” -The Independent

Photo courtesy of the artist and Steinway Society

OpEd

The Federal Government is tracking the unvaccinated

By Dr. Joseph Mercola

The U.S. government has secretly been tracking those who didn’t get the COVID jab, or are only partially jabbed, through a previously unknown surveillance program designed by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The program was implemented April 1, 2022, and adopted by most medical clinics and hospitals across the U.S. until January 2023.

Under this program, doctors at clinics and hospitals have been instructed to ask patients about their vaccination status,

which is then added to their electronic medical records as a diagnostic code, known as ICD-10 code, so that they can be tracked inside and outside of the medical system.

These new ICD-10 codes are part of the government’s plan to implement medical tyranny using vaccine passports and digital IDs.

They’re also tracking noncompliance with all other recommended vaccines using new ICD-10 codes, and have implemented codes to describe WHY you didn’t get a recommended vaccine. They’ve also added a billable ICD code for “vaccine safety counseling.”



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*The Young Artist Competition is kindly sponsored by the San Jose Symphony Foundation. "San Jose Symphony" is a registered trademark of the San Jose Symphony Foundation and its use in all its variations is by license.

The Philharmonic Orchestra performs Khachaturian, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev March 18

Ticket purchases now available online

The San Jose Youth Symphony's Philharmonic Orchestra, under the artistic leadership of Music Director and Conductor Yair Samet, presents its Spring Concert to be held on Saturday, March 18 at 2 p.m. at the California Theatre, 345 S. 1st Street, San Jose.

The orchestra will open with Khachaturian's Masquerade Suite, with its beautiful, haunting, and suspenseful theme, and end with Prokofiev's enduringly popular Romeo and Juliet Suites. This concert will also feature two winners from the 2022 Young Artists' Competition, proudly sponsored by the San Jose Symphony* Foundation. Outstanding young soloists, Ekaterina Kabenina, violinist, will perform Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto; and Kerry Xu, pianist, will perform Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2.

Ekaterina (Kate) Kabenina is a junior at Campolindo High School. She has been playing the violin since she was 6 years old. This is her fifth season with the San Jose Youth Symphony, having been with the Concert Orchestra and then the Chamber Orchestra during her first two years before joining the Philharmonic Orchestra two

seasons ago.

Kerry Xu is a junior at Mission San Jose High School in Fremont. He started playing the piano when he was 4 years old. He first joined the San Jose Youth Symphony 5 years ago and is currently in his 3rd season as a violinist with the Philharmonic Orchestra.

The San Jose Youth Symphony (SJYS) is one of the oldest and finest youth orchestras on the West Coast of the U.S. Founded over seven decades ago as part of the former San Jose Symphony, SJYS has a rich tradition of musical performance and educa-



Kerry Xu

tion.

The musicians of SJYS, all school-age youth, are chosen from more than 650 applicants through our annual auditions. The SJYS comprises 12 distinct performing ensembles: two full orchestras, a Chamber orchestra, two flute choirs, two string ensembles, as well as winds, harp, saxophone, percussion, and jazz ensembles.

Note: "San Jose Symphony" is a registered trademark of the San Jose Symphony Foundation and its use in all its variations is by license.

Ekaterina (Kate)

Kabenina is a junior at Campolindo High School. She has been playing the violin since she was 6 years old. This is her fifth season with the San Jose Youth Symphony.



Above: Ekaterina (Kate) Kabenina.

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Valley Water approaching milestone on project to reduce flood risk along Coyote Creek

By Director Barbara Keegan
Valley Water Board

We started the new year with a series of atmospheric rivers that caused flooding in parts of Santa Clara County. These storms reminded us of the impactful February 2017 flood event along Coyote Creek in San José and the work being done to reduce that area's risk of flooding.

I'm pleased to share that Valley Water will reach a milestone in the coming months in our Coyote Creek flood reduction efforts. This June, our agency will begin construction on the first of two flood protection projects, the Coyote Creek Flood Management Measures Project, located along a nine-mile stretch of Coyote Creek.

In preparation for construction of the Coyote Creek Flood Management Measures Project, this winter, our work crews began removing trees and vegetation along the creek.

When construction begins, Valley Water will install floodwalls along three reaches, or sections, of Coyote Creek between Old Oakland Road and Highway 280, including:

- Reach 5: San Jose Municipal Golf Course to Mabury Road
- Reach 6: Mabury Road to Highway 101
- Reach 7: Santa Clara Street to the south end of William Street Park

As we approach the start of construction, Valley Water is coordinating with the City of San José to address unhoused encampments located in areas where the work will be done. This is a safety issue, as construction crews will be working with heavy equipment.

Regarding our second project, Valley Water continues designing the Coyote Creek Flood Protection Project, part of the voter-approved Safe, Clean Water and Natu-

ral Flood Protection Program. For this project, Valley Water will install floodwalls, passive barriers and berms along five reaches of Coyote Creek between Montague Expressway and Tully Road. We anticipate beginning construction on this project in 2025.

Once completed, the Coyote Creek Flood Management Measures Project and the Coyote Creek Flood Protection Project will help protect homes, schools, businesses and highways in historically flood-prone areas. The measures we are implementing will protect against creek flows like the February 2017 flood, which was a 20-year event.

Both Coyote Creek projects are connected to our work at Anderson Dam in Morgan Hill. The original Coyote Creek Flood Protection Project was split into two projects to accommodate building a new outlet tunnel at Anderson Dam. Valley Water is accelerating the design and construction of the Coyote Creek Flood Management Measures Project so that the creek can handle the potential release of higher flows from the larger outlet tunnel at Anderson Dam.

Since the beginning of these projects, Valley Water has worked hard to ensure community members have a voice in the proposed solutions. Our agency has held approximately 25 public meetings to hear from neighbors and gather their input – and we are using that feedback to help shape the projects.

The two Coyote Creek projects are a high priority for the Valley Water Board of Directors and represent our commitment to supporting our communities' public health and safety. We are committed to moving these critical flood protection projects forward and getting them built as quickly as possible.

For further information, contact your elected district representative at BKeegan@valleywater.org. To learn more about these projects, visit valleywater.org.

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Times **Community**

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

*How Machine Learning
can help save coastal
dead zones*

By **Apoorva Panidapu**

Last time, we talked about how human activity is increasing eutrophication (aka an excess of nutrients), thereby causing the alarming expansion of dead zones (low-oxygen 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.

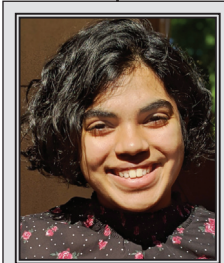
Fertilizers increase crop yields and thereby use less land for agriculture—great! But fertilizer is often overapplied, which is what leads to this nutrient runoff that creates dead zones.

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

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.

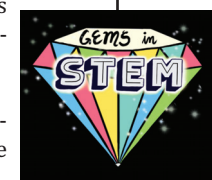
To solve this problem, we need to channel our inner Goldilocks to find the exact amount of fertilizer required—not too much, not too little, but just right. Efficient fertilizer use means that our population is still fed while minimizing the excess nutrients that poison our aquatic ecosystems.

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."



Gems in STEM

By **Apoorva Panidapu**



And, huzzah, this approach to optimizing 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 life-changing 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-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.

What Machine Learning Can Do

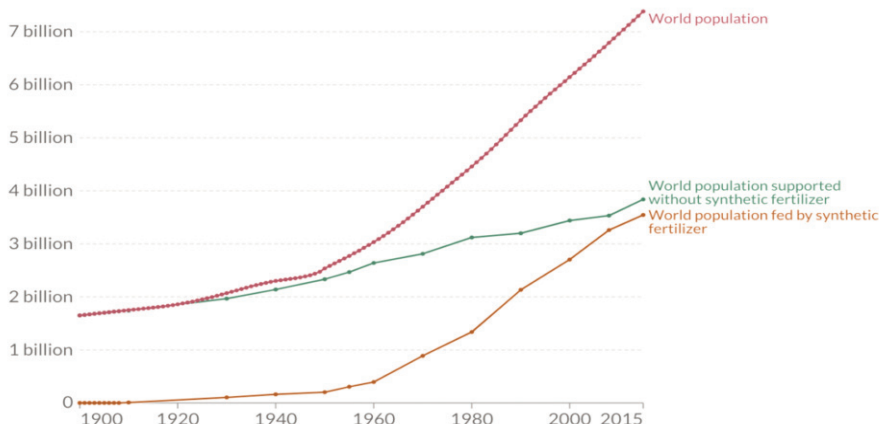
Data is so important because the more data we collect, the smarter we can make machines—which is exactly what machine learning (ML) does. Machines are "trained" with data sets and use this knowledge to respond to situations they've never seen before, letting them automatically do things

See GEMS, page 14

World population with and without synthetic nitrogen fertilizers

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

Our World in Data



Source: Erisman et al. (2008); Smil (2002); Stewart (2005) OurWorldInData.org/how-many-people-does-synthetic-fertilizer-feed/ • CC BY

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Times Feature

Gems

Continued from page 13

Gems 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 apoorvap-writes@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.

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