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Why so many outages?
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Almaden Times

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A crowd is flanked by Christmas trees during Christmas in the Park in San Jose. File photo.

Unpermitted vendors put San Jose's 'Christmas in the Park' at risk

By Annalise Freimarck
San José Spotlight

Christmas in the Park is at risk of losing some of its magic this year due to unpermitted vendors crowding the streets and sidewalks—but the groups that host the downtown San Jose celebration aren't ready to give up just yet.

Event organizers said unpermitted food vendors pack the streets every year at the annual winter holiday festivities, creating accessibility issues for families and preventing permitted vendors from selling their goods to park-goers.

Debbie Degutis, managing director of Christmas in the Park, said the problem has only gotten worse each year and has reached 40-plus unpermitted vendors. She said the city has refused to crack down on these vendors, citing issues with optics in years past.

"This has been a problem for a long time," she told San José Spotlight. "But it's gone unchecked in the city of San Jose."

Degutis submitted a letter to the
See CHRISTMAS, page 20

Why do Valley Water and PG&E keep raising their rates?

By Lorraine Gabbert
Senior Staff Writer

The rising cost of utilities was the focus of the June 12 Almaden Valley Community Association meeting.

"Why are we paying so much for basic necessities like water and electricity?" said AVCA Vice President Gary Hector.

Referring to a recent study by Next 10 and the Energy Institute at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, Hector said, California residents pay 80% more than the median U.S. household for energy provided by PG&E. The report suggests raising revenue from sales or income taxes rather than rates and imposing income-based fixed charges to help residents.

"Electricity prices in California are high and rising. This poses a heavy burden for many of the state's most economically vulnerable



AVCA Vice President Gary Hector said residents are paying too much for utilities.

households," the report said. "Changes to how the state and its residents pay for electricity will be needed to ensure equitable outcomes as California pursues a carbon-neutral path."

In addition to power costs, Hector said local water rates are among the highest in the state. He said both utilities plan to significantly increase prices in the coming years.

"Valley Water's board in May approved a 14.5% increase in wholesale water prices," he said, "and told the city to expect a 15% increase in wholesale water prices for fiscal year 2024-2025."

Water prices spiked during the drought, said Michael Potter, community outreach program supervisor for Valley Water. Emergency purchases made by Valley Water during this time are showing up in people's bills, he said. In addition,

See RATES, page 21

New summer Junior Lifeguard program open to the public at the Almaden Cabana Club

By William Bellou
Publisher

The new Almaden Cabana Club Junior Lifeguard Program starts this month for children 11-14 years old at the time of the session date.

"Our new Junior Lifeguard Program emphasizes teamwork, leadership, responsibility and aquatic safety while introducing young people to professional opportunities," said Skip Harsany, Almaden Cabana Club

Jr. Guard Program Coordinator/Lead Instructor. "We've designed the program to provide quality water safety education while improving participants' physical conditioning, their respect for themselves, their neighbors and their peers."

The Cabana Club Junior Lifeguard Program, supervised by certified and experienced lifeguards, allows participants to learn and practice the skills necessary to become a suc-



cessful lifeguard.

Participants will also learn about the most common poolside injuries and other medical emergencies and how to properly treat them as well as when to know the appropriate time to call for professional emergency medical response.

Although the Junior Lifeguard Program does not certify participants as lifeguards, it does provide an in-depth understanding of many aspects of what it means to be a lifeguard.

The lifesaving program provides a foundation of knowledge, attitude, and skills that will prepare participants for lifeguard training in the future if they choose. Participants are trained in both dry land and in-water exercises daily.

All sessions will consist of conditioning and lifeguard instruction. Conditioning will include swimming, running, calisthenics and team-building games, in addition to other physical activities.

Cost

The cost is \$300 per child (11-14 years of age by the first session date) with the session being a full week, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Each child will require

See CABANA CLUB, page 20

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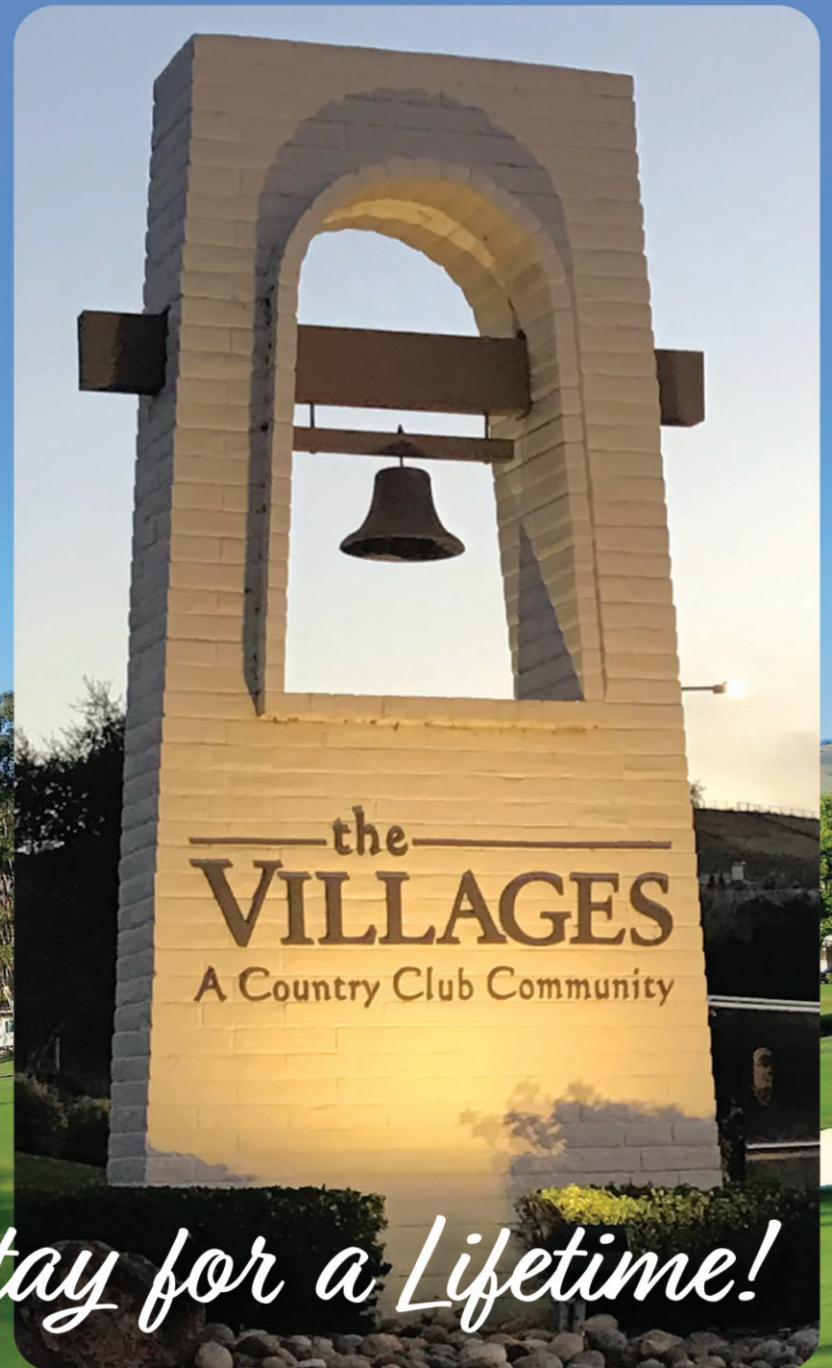
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NEWS DESK

Mercury News digital archives now available for free to all San José Public Library cardholders

Digital archives expansion comes on anniversary of San José Mercury News launch thanks to Margaret Ma

On the 172nd anniversary of the San José Mercury News, the San José Public Library (SJPL) and the San José Public Library Foundation (SJPLF) announced that all of the more than 650,000 San José Public Library members will now have access to a digital archive of the San José Mercury News from 1900 to 1985 for free.

Library members can access the vast archives from any internet-connected device by visiting sjpl.org/MercuryNewsArchive and entering their SJPL library card barcode and PIN number. Until now, students, researchers, and members of the public had to complete their research using microfilm and microfiche by traveling to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library's California Room where nearly 60,000 historical documents are stored.

The digital archives expansion was made possible thanks to a donation from Margaret Ma, a lifelong San José resident who volunteered in SJPL's California Room. "I made this gift in honor of my mother, Susan Renzel Carter, who grew up visiting the library. The gift is to honor her love of the library."

"It is my way of leaving the library a lasting gift that makes researchers' jobs a little easier," said Margaret Ma. The decision to donate to the San José Public Library Foundation to purchase the digital archives came about when she began researching her family's past and struggled to use the microfilm reader to complete her

research. She realized others would benefit from accessing the digital archives as she had.

Kaiya Catalano named to the University of Mississippi's Spring 2023 Dean's Honor Roll

Kaiya Catalano of Almaden Valley was named to the University of Mississippi's Spring 2023 Honor Roll lists.

Catalano, majoring in Criminal Justice, was named to the Dean's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.50-3.74.

In order to be eligible for honor roll designation, a student must have completed at least 12 graded hours for the semester and may not be on academic probation during the semester.

The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state's flagship university. Included in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business. Its 16 academic divisions include a major medical school, nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law and pharmacy, and an Honors College acclaimed for a blend of academic rigor, experiential learning and opportunities for community action.

Kenneth Carvers of Almaden Valley named to MSOE Honors List for Winter Quarter '22

Kenneth Carvers of Almaden Valley has been named to the Milwaukee School of Engineering's Honors List for the 2022 Winter Quarter.

Carvers is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering.

Carvers is a member of the MSOE Club Hockey Team.

Undergraduate students who have earned a GPA of 3.20 or higher (out of 4.0) for this quarter are on the Honors List.

Milwaukee School of Engineering (www.msOE.edu) is the university of choice for those seeking an inclusive community of experiential learners driven to solve the complex challenges of today and tomorrow. The independent, non-profit university has about 2,700 students and was founded in 1903. MSOE offers bachelor's and master's degrees in engineering, business and nursing.



Valley Currents

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



Residents waited through the entire AVCA meeting to have their power outages addressed.

Almaden Valley residents are fed up with power outages

By Lorraine Gabbert
Senior Staff Writer

Unanswered questions regarding ongoing power outages sparked residents' outrage at a recent Almaden Valley Community Association meeting.

"Tonight PG&E will explain electrification (elimination of natural gas in our homes) and what they are doing about the power outages in our neighborhoods," AVCA said on Facebook regarding its June 12 meeting.

But as the presentations ended without power outages being addressed, frustration mounted for a group of residents, some who had lost power six times over two weeks.

"The only reason we came here tonight," a resident said, "was to ask why we have so many power outages."

During the question and answer portion of the meeting, residents demanded answers from Ben Brown, principal strategic analyst at Pacific Gas and Electric Company, but he came up empty.

"They come to fix it and it happens again and again," a resident said, earnestly addressing Brown. "How does PG&E plan to solve this problem for us?"

At this point, AVCA Vice President Gary Hector shut him down.

"This can't be a debate," Hector said. "It's over."

"It's not over," the resident exclaimed. "We need a solution."

His cry was taken up by others. A resident said the loss of power causes food to go bad and interrupts his work and meetings, sending him scrambling to other locations.

"It's ridiculous," another resident said. "You're sitting there telling us it's not an issue and it is an issue. They need to fix it. I expect dates. I expect information. I expect a plan."

Residents demanded PG&E send someone who could provide answers to a follow up meeting. Some felt having a PG&E representative in their midst was

the best way to deliver that message.

"He can talk to somebody and tell them we've got a serious problem going on," said a resident.

AVCA President Michele Dexter said the evening's meeting was about electrification and not the power outages.

"We totally understand," she said. "Outages are a big deal. It happens everywhere."

The residents strongly disagreed and converged toward the microphone and Brown to push their case. Taking the microphone, Hector told them Brown was not the person to answer their questions about local outages.

"I informed him there might be some people here who were upset and he should be prepared to answer questions," Hector said, "but it's not his policy area."

A resident asked for someone who could.

"Let's get someone here who can answer reliability questions," said a resident, "with data, relative to our situation."

Dexter ended the meeting, offering to follow up with residents through email. Hector apologized that the speaker couldn't address this issue.

"We had a very spirited meeting," AVCA said on Facebook following it. "Ben Brown laid out PG&E's strategy on decarbonization really nicely. But he was not the right person to answer questions about local outages. We will reach out to PG&E to see about setting up a special meeting."

Hector said AVCA was surprised by the residents' passion.

"We probably didn't handle things as well as we should," he said, "but we did our best."

Hector said following the community meeting, Brown connected him with Matthew Schneiderman, regional senior manager for PG&E. Schneiderman researched the outage history for the area and spoke with area crew supervisors who were working on the problem, Hector said. Schneiderman said outages occurred in other areas due to wild turkeys.

In an email to Hector, Schneiderman said he understands residents' frustrations. In addition to making the necessary repairs, the crews also reframed two poles, which provides additional separation between the wires and is a common mitigation technique regarding issues with birds, he said, adding if outages continue, they will find other options. Schneiderman said he is open to meeting with the community.

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Cricket Wireless teams up with Boys and Girls Clubs of SV for Leadership Training program's graduating seniors

By William Bellou
Publisher

Cricket Wireless recently celebrated the graduation of high school seniors who were involved in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Silicon Valley (BGCSV) program.

Students had been participants of the Leadership in Training program (LIT) or had been recognized as a Youth of the Year, both programs being dedicated to leadership development and uplifting those in the local community.

As part of the collaboration between Cricket Wireless and BGCSV in supporting college bound students, each graduate was given \$500, a moto G stylus 5G phone, plus three months of Cricket Wireless service and phone accessories.



Winchester Mystery House celebrates its 100-year anniversary

By Kevin Larsen
Times staff writer

One hundred years ago on June 30, 1923, the Winchester Mystery House officially opened its doors to the public.

While San Jose has gone through some major changes over the last century, the mansion has remained the same; with its sprawling 24,000 sq. ft. and 160 interconnecting rooms..

What makes the house unique is Sarah Winchester's design with 2,000 doors that exit into thin air, stairways that lead to dead-end ceilings and other oddities that are discussed by visitors from all over the world. The real question: Is the home haunted?

"I think this story resonates and there has been curiosity even in Sarah Winchester's time about why did she build this the way that she did and all of the mysteries, legends and lore," Winchester Mystery House exec. director Walter Magnuson said. "There are very few places that can serve as a time capsule of living history, that you can actually

get immersed in and visit to this day."

To learn more about the Winchester Mystery House, visit: <https://winchestermysteryhouse.com>

California gas tax increased by 8 percent

California drivers are now paying 8 percent more for gasoline that kicked in over the July 4th weekend.

The tax provides additional revenue for planning, constructing and maintaining California's roadways and public mass transit systems.

"As if living in California wasn't expensive enough, residents are now paying eight percent more in the state's gas tax thanks to Gavin Newsom and California Democrats," said Jessica Millan Patterson, California Republican Party Chairwoman "Despite Legislative and House Republicans' efforts to stop the increase, Democrats refused. Their insatiable thirst for even more of California taxpayers' hard-earned money completely disregards the struggles of those who are forced to choose between filling up their gas tanks or buying groceries."

California's \$4.80-\$4.83 average for a gallon of gas is still well above the national average of \$3.53-\$3.56.



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Times **Community News**

DoorDash Kitchens allows new restaurants a way to test their food in the community without opening a physical location. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

DoorDash ghost kitchen turns San Jose into testing ground

By Lorraine Gabbert
San José Spotlight

An opportunity to try new restaurant menus beyond a brick and mortar location is a hot concept in Silicon Valley.

DoorDash plans to operate a ghost kitchen at The Plant Shopping Center off Curtner Avenue in San Jose. This pickup- and delivery-only service model lets fledgling and out-of-area restaurants test new markets while avoiding the time and expense of opening their own storefronts. Previous restaurant partners have been located in San Francisco and Southern California. DoorDash Kitchens also creates jobs for cooking staff and supervisors who oversee delivery and pickup orders.

“Our mission is to empower local economies,” a DoorDash spokesperson told San José Spotlight. “DoorDash Kitchens... provides a cost-effective way for select restaurants to grow their business under one roof, connects consumers with enhanced selection in their area and provides additional earning opportunities for Dashers (food delivery workers).”

DoorDash covers the infrastructure build out and permitting, and co-designs the space with each business. It collaborates with each restaurant to refine their menus to meet local food preferences and helps the merchants with marketing. To maintain quality, chefs representing each restaurant work in the ghost kitchen.

Sammuel Washington, president of the Silicon Valley Black Chamber of Commerce, said if managed and organized well, a ghost kitchen can be a great success and launch a variety of new restaurants.

“It’s great for diversity,” he told San José Spotlight, “as many different cultures can come together and cook a variety of dishes while working out of the same space. Another perk for a ghost kitchen is a small start-up can get their business started for a minimal cost while avoiding the downside of the costly overhead it takes to run a restau-

rant.”

Dennis King, executive director of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Silicon Valley, said this model could help businesses hurt by the pandemic stay afloat, but he has some reservations.

“If this is a step to help our local struggling businesses find ways to efficiently expand their services, then this is definitely worth celebrating,” King told San José Spotlight. “If this is a sidestep of restaurants so that DoorDash can continue to be a delivery service, this can be viewed as additional competition.”

In 2021, ghost kitchen concepts opened in the South Bay. Seen as an economic boost for downtown San Jose during the pandemic, City Storage Systems, a real estate company owned by former Uber CEO Travis Kalanick, created space for CloudKitchens, housing restaurants mainly focused on food for delivery and pickup. Local Kitchens opened a digital food hall north of downtown. This model promotes direct customer pickup and relies mostly on online ordering.

The DoorDash Kitchens concept is a limited time pop up. Its first Bay Area location opened in Redwood City in October 2019. The second ran from July-November 2021 at Oakridge Mall in San Jose. The latter featured six restaurants, including Aria Korean Street Food, Canter’s Deli and Curry Up Now.

Eddie Truong, cofounder of the Silicon Valley Restaurant Association, is in favor of bringing another restaurant incubator into the economy. Truong said it can be expensive to open a restaurant, and a ghost kitchen could aid minority-owned restaurants that can’t afford a brick-and-mortar business right away.

“What DoorDash is doing is a good thing,” he told San José Spotlight. “The more options that we can introduce into the market, the better for the whole ecosystem of restaurants in general, especially if someone has an entrepreneurial idea. Then they can decide to go all in for their business.”

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Times **Feature**

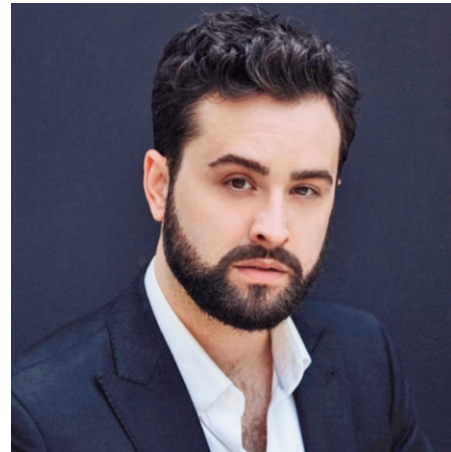
Opera San José kicks off 2023-24 season with Gounod's 'Romeo and Juliet' September 9–24

Opera San José launches its 40th Anniversary season with an all-new production of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by OSJ General Director Shawna Lucey, her first production for the company she now helms.

Following on the heels of Lucey's critically acclaimed legacy production of *La Traviata* for San Francisco Opera, this production will also bear Lucey's inimitable stamp.

For this work, OSJ will bring Shakespeare's play about feuding factions and illicit love to the stage in a vibrant new production. Audiences can expect swash-buckling sword fighting, lively dancing, and an exhilarating cast. Lucey describes her vision for this production as "a piece for our time, with a focus on how deep divisions can make love illegal."

Several artists will make role debuts, including rising star tenor Joshua Sanders as Romeo and two dazzling sopranos taking on the role of Juliet: Melissa Sondhi and Jasmine Habersham. Armed with a sword and commanding tenor voice, Alex Boyer returns to the California Theatre in the role of Tybalt, and former Adler Fellow and renowned bass Kenneth Kellogg joins the production as the Duke. Bass Vartan Gabrielian makes his OSJ debut as Frère



Tenor **Joshua Sanders** makes his role debut as Romeo in Opera San José's all-new production of Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet," Sept. 9 – 24, 2023 at the California Theatre.

Laurent and baritone Efraín Solís returns to the company as Mercutio, with additional casting to be announced. Opera San José Director of Music Joseph Marcheso will conduct.

Tickets

Subscriptions (\$150–\$585) and single tickets are on sale now. For more information, the public can visit operasj.org or call (408) 437-4450 (open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.).

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Times **Community News**

VTA signs deal for 100% affordable housing development of 195 units

Future development sites of VTA could create approximately 2,600 affordable units throughout Santa Clara County

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is creating the first of four housing developments with 100% “affordable” units. This effort helps address the housing needs of our community’s most vulnerable residents.

On June 23, 2023, VTA entered into a formal lease option agreement with the Affirmed Housing Group (AHG) to build 195 affordable units on a currently vacant lot next to the Berryessa Transit Center. The agreement allows AHG to lease the land from VTA on a long-term basis for the housing.

The agreement was announced at a public event at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, June 23, 2023, at the Berryessa Transit Center.

“This development is important not only for the critically needed affordable housing, but having it so close to multiple forms of public transportation will enable easy access to jobs, schools and other important destinations,” said Carolyn Gonot, VTA General Manager/CEO.

In 2020, VTA entered into a cost-sharing agreement with the Santa Clara County Office of Supportive Housing, leveraging Measure A tax funding and VTA land to build four 100% affordable housing developments.

“This development will not only boost much-needed housing inventory, but it also promotes seamless, sustainable living and supports the health and wellness of the entire community,” said Affirmed Housing’s President for Northern California Rob Wilkins. The Berryessa development is expected to break ground in 2025, with apartments ready for move-in by 2027.

The VTA Board increased its Affordable Housing Policy goals to ensure that 40% of its residential Transit Oriented Development portfolio will be developed as afford-

able units (up from 35% previously.) In addition, the affordable set-aside in each market-rate project was increased from 20% to 25%. Transit Oriented Development refers to housing, retail or commercial development in close proximity to public transit.

“This project is an example of how impactful agency collaboration is,” said Santa Clara County Supervisor and VTA Board Vice Chair Cindy Chavez. “Through this great partnership, we were able to create a solution that provides essential housing that seamlessly connects to affordable public transportation.”

All VTA’s affordable units must serve households earning 60% of Santa Clara County’s Area Median Income (AMI) or below, and half of VTA’s affordable units must serve households earning 50% of AMI or below.

“This project is a perfect example of how the right partnerships can maximize our resources and boost our efforts to make Santa Clara County a more livable place for everyone,” said Consuelo Hernandez, Director of the County of Santa Clara’s Office of Supportive Housing. “Every new affordable housing development means more opportunities to improve the quality of life for the people and families who live and work here.”

VTA has 29 property sites throughout Santa Clara County eligible for development. Recent projections indicate that VTA’s current projects and future development sites will create approximately 2,600 affordable units throughout Santa Clara County. The projects have the potential to generate millions of dollars in leasing revenue for VTA to use on transit services.

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is an independent special district that is responsible for bus, light rail and para-transit operations, transportation planning, and serves as the county’s congestion management agency.



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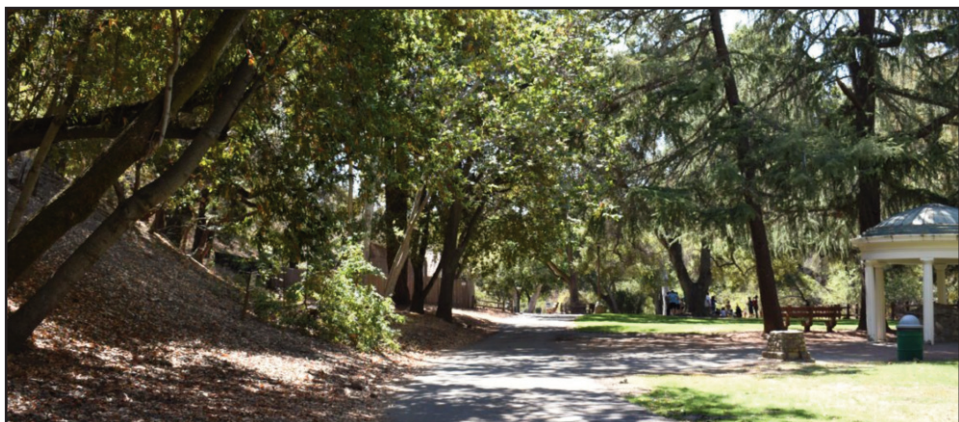
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Mature trees lend shade to Alum Rock Park's trails. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

How do San Jose parks fare against other U.S. cities?

By Lorraine Gabbert
San José Spotlight

A recent ranking of U.S. city parks places San Jose in the top half, and locals are torn on touting the city's open spaces as needing a higher ranking—or more improvement.

A new study by Trust for Public Land, a park and land conservation nonprofit, has San Jose's park system in 32nd place, trailing behind Fremont in 21st and way behind San Francisco, which came in 7th. Washington D.C. took the No. 1 spot.

The report reviewed parks across the nation's most populous cities, analyzing factors such as resident proximity to parks, amenities and park sizes. Community leaders said the city should be doing better and ranking higher, and the city's parks are still crucial spaces that need continuous investment.

"(Parks) build community," Jean Dresden, a member of San Jose Parks Advocates, told San José Spotlight. "There's some place for exercise, there's some place to grow food. It causes community cohesion."

Stormy weather shut down dozens of city parks earlier this year due to fallen trees, mudslides, flooded waterways and other dangerous conditions. Damages totaled about \$31 million, with Alum Rock Park requiring \$19 million in repairs. Meanwhile, San Jose is working citywide to develop more parks in an effort to address blight or revitalize existing parks through community events.

The study found that 80% of San Jose residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park, compared to San Francisco at 100% and Fremont at 73%. While the city's residents have more access to parks compared to nearby regions, data reveals low-income San Jose residents still have 16% less park space compared to those in high-income neighborhoods.

Daniel Lazo, spokesperson for the city parks department, said San Jose is always working to ensure park access for residents, while also balancing funding constraints to support different amenities. The city's park maintenance backlog, or the amount of park repairs needed, totals about \$464.3 million, he added.

"We are currently developing an equity metrics mapping tool to identify the most vulnerable neighborhoods," Lazo told San José Spotlight. "From there, we will develop an equity plan to help guide our decisions

about how to best deploy resources to the places and programs that have not experienced the same level of investment as others."

Orlana Mejia, president of the Lone Bluff Senter Neighborhood Association, said while she's generally satisfied with San Jose's parks, they still need improvement. Her association adopted the Lone Bluff Park through the city's Adopt-A-Park program, which allows residents to volunteer and maintain areas by picking up trash, removing graffiti and more.

The study found San Jose parks lacking in terms of amenities. They don't have the same levels of public bathrooms, basketball hoops and dog parks compared to San Francisco and Fremont. Lone Bluff Park has basketball hoops and picnic tables, but the playground could use an upgrade and there are no public restrooms, Mejia added.

"I want the playground repainted. It's just dingy and old looking, and I think that would be great for our neighborhood," Mejia told San José Spotlight. "It's a really basic park that provides a lot of joy to the kids whenever they're there."

Mejia said the COVID-19 pandemic put park maintenance on the back burner, and repairs still take a while even as the city's parks department hires more workers. Fixing the playground's rubber flooring took months of calls, she added. The response time may be the result of hundreds of vacancies in various city departments, an issue also at the county level.

Dresden said she's concerned about long-term investment in parks, especially as maintenance needs continue to increase throughout the city. She said park dollars generally come from development fees, but new construction has been lacking. That also means city parks are getting smaller since space is so limited, or used for more profitable projects, she added.

"As we move toward less construction because of an economic downturn, and also toward more rentals, we don't have construction and conveyance tax and park development fees," she said. "Those are the dollars that the city depends on to replace a broken playground, to replace the roof of a community center, to fix the bathrooms when they break down, to resurface the basketball or tennis court."

Lazo said smaller parks can still be high-quality parks. But the city is also looking to address inequalities in funding, given that some areas of the city see more development and fees than others, he added.

"We acknowledge room for improvement within our park system, as we have new parks online and strive to open more," he said.

Times **Op Ed****Santa Clara County voter guide should facilitate, not hinder elections**By **Ted Stroll**

The county voter information guide aims to help registered voters pick candidates. For some races, it facilitates this. For others, however, it's an impediment.

The problem is the steep cost to appear in the guide for certain candidates, including candidates for Congress, the state Legislature and a plethora of local offices.

Only the independently wealthy or those generously funded by outside interests can afford it. The most hotly contested elections can attract this kind of funding, but for others it's essentially left to candidates to pay, and it's too costly.

In 2022 I ran for a state office, California Assembly District 25, which comprises central and eastern San Jose. For the primary, the county charged me \$4,684. I paid up. For the general election, it quoted \$7,010. I declined. It would have eaten up too much of my budget.

The only way to communicate with voters was through laborious door-to-door canvassing. I visited thousands of households, but it was a fraction of the registered voters who receive the guide.

San Diego County charges half what Santa Clara County does. For a race like mine, the average cost was just under \$3,500 for the 2022 general election.

Moreover, San Diego County's candidate statement charges are a maximum, but Santa Clara County's are a minimum. The county warned us candidates that we could be billed further, in an unknown amount. A document the county produced in response to a Public Records Act request I made shows the final assessment could have been \$8,290.

At the same time, it imposes these costs, Santa Clara County seems to know the situation is untenable. Accordingly, it covers the entire cost for county candidates. To run for supervisor costs \$18,910 for a candidate statement, but the county pays the whole fee. Candidates pay nothing.

Similarly, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority subsidizes all but \$500 for candidates for its board of directors. It, too, recognizes the unaffordability of the county's voter guide statements.

Moreover, it's been arranged that candidates for judgeships pay 1% of the incumbent judge's salary, or about \$2,250 to \$2,750. The judiciary has persuaded the authorities that the fees would otherwise be too high for judicial candidates. A judicial candidate's entire fee is about half of a single item for my Assembly District 25, namely \$5,114 for printing costs.

We should be encouraging qualified candidates to run for federal, state and local offices, even if not backed by a lot of money. The high fee schedule discourages these things. The voter guide should further democracy, not be an impediment to it.

I addressed the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors about this issue on May 16. Although I hope the county will find a solution, I am mindful of the ancient curse, "May you get what you wish for."

In future elections, a lower cost to candidates may mean that I have several opponents rather than the one I had in 2022. But I'll take my chances rather than pay what

could approach \$20,000 to appear in the 2024 primary and general election voter guides.

Ted Stroll is a retired judicial staff attorney and president of the Sustainable Trails Coalition, a nationwide mountain biking advocacy organization. He's been a San Jose resident since 2007.

Generative artificial intelligence plagues Bay Area educationBy **Sucbeer Maddury**

In November of 2022, OpenAI released their notorious ChatGPT, a natural language model initially based on the Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 (GPT 3) architecture.

Based on generative technology, the service is typically used as a chatbot for informational purposes. Like an instant, ChatGPT became the new trend as a source for cheating, with students in middle, high, and undergraduate school almost homogeneously using OpenAI's program to find homework answers, write full essays, and even generate free response answers on tests.

Surveys already show that 17% of Stanford students have admitted to using ChatGPT on assignments and exams. As a student at Leland High School, I can personally attest to the popularity of ChatGPT and similar algorithms for use in academic dishonesty.

Obviously, academic integrity is important for students learning—even at the levels of knowledge and critical thinking, forcing a student to manually research topics or even extrapolate from lessons is substantially more effective at building an educated generation than being complicit in the lie that students learn from copying from other sources. Even constrained generative AI will always be exploited by some younger kids. When school is all about grades, students will take any shortcuts necessary.

While the development of AI has certainly had its uncontestable benefits in sectors such as healthcare, finance, agriculture, and control systems, AI algorithms continue to get more invasive upon information and creative integrity. These harms are generally concentrated in generative AI algorithms, and unfortunately, school-wide restrictions are, in reality, at best pseudo-effective and completely unenforceable. Real solutions must be addressed either one of two ways.

First, an educational reform could be implemented to make generative AI less useful. This might make tests all in person and on paper, with new versions of the exam created for each class. Assignments that the student completes on their own should then be changed to require more specific evidence and deeper thought into the question, rather than surface level explanations of elementary school-level questions. Ideally, the incentive to use AI to cheat should be removed, but this is unlikely at this point.

Second, some legislative act could be proposed to constrain the use of generative AI to only specific cases. Similarly to how morphine is available only to doctors for prescription, a potential solution might be to limit AI's use to instances of institutional research, military technology, healthcare, etc. A combination of the above two approaches may be our best option for protecting the education of our next generation.

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Times Feature

TECH JARGON OF THE WEEK

Phishing Scam

By Shubhi Asthana



Have you ever stumbled into a conversation where everyone is speaking around this “techie” word – and even after you’ve broken in, it is difficult to understand the unfamiliar jargon and acronyms? Well, there’s no need to sweat it. Let me teach you the meaning of some commonly used tech words:

Phishing Scam

In 2020, when the World Health Organization classified the coronavirus infection as a global emergency, online scammers got to work and

started exploiting the uncertainty and fear surrounding this disease.

A sample phishing email detected by security agencies, showed attackers disseminating malicious links and PDFs that claim to contain information on how to protect yourself from the spread of the disease. “Go through the attached document on safety measures regarding the spreading of corona virus,” reads the message, which purports to come from a virologist. “This little measure can save you.”

Email scammers often try to elicit a sense of fear and urgency in victims. It’s not surprising that they would attempt to incorporate the coronavirus into that playbook so quickly. But the move illustrates how phishing attempts so consistently hew to certain time-tested topics and themes.

The hackers use phishing as a scam on the internet to get hold of your valuable information. You may come across pop up messages or suspicious emails from these fraudsters. In most of the cases this scam takes place through emails. These mails may ask you to update information about your personal accounts. Asking for confirmation of the confidential information, these spam mails will guide you to visit websites, which appear to belong to legitimate and authorized organizations briefly. But these websites are fake sites, which are operated by fraudsters to take over sensitive information from you.

Phishers know all too well that during uncertain times—whether it’s international conflict or coronavirus—people become desperate for information and reassurance. Protecting yourself from falling into these traps can be difficult,

but there are some helpful steps you can take. As you’ve probably heard countless times, take a moment to think before downloading attachments or clicking links in any email or message, especially from someone you don’t personally know. If you must interact, try to confirm that the email address is valid and spelled correctly, or use another method of communication to confirm that everything is above board. Most importantly, trust your gut. If something elicits strong emotions or a sense of urgency—or just feels off—pause to reconsider.

Do you enjoy reading this column? Send in your comments or feedback to the author at shub.saxen@gmail.com. Shubhi Asthana works as a Research Senior Software Engineer at the IBM Almaden Research Center, San Jose.

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Largest annual antique auto show in the West to be presented at History Park San Jose Sept. 9

Go back in time at the 23rd annual Antique Autos in History Park San Jose on Saturday, September 9 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The 23rd annual Antique Autos in History Park presented by the Santa Clara Valley Model T Ford Club and History San José will take place on Saturday, September 9 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

This event fills History Park (Kelley Park, 693 Phelan Ave, San José, CA) with 200 period-correct pre-1946 vehicles, fire equipment, bicycles, and motorcycles of all makes.

Also located on the grounds this year will be the Early Day Gas Engine and Tractor Association. There will be antique crafts demonstrated, antique collectibles, and toy trains. Also, take a trolley ride and see blacksmith demonstrations. Food will be available from food trucks and other possible outlets. Several activities will be provided for children attending the event.

Music venue

Rhythmairs Dixieland Band will provide music. Songs will be sung by The Fabulous JewelTones along with dancing by the San Francisco Bay Area Vintage Dancers.

Requirements for entering an antique vehicle

For those interested in entering their antique vehicle, there is no registration required. They can just bring their antique vehicle to the gate at History Park. All vehicles permitted on the grounds of History



Park must be manufactured between the late 1800s and 1945 and are period-correct. No vehicle will be allowed on the grounds of History Park during the show that is newer than 1945.

The featured vehicles this year are 1916 to 1930 Orphan Autos.

An example of an orphaned U.S. vehicle, is a 1920 Liberty Model 10-C, the nomenclature proclaiming that it's the longer and more powerful version of the two six-cylinder model lines that Liberty produced in 1920, pretty much the precise midpoint of its existence. This 10-C model is based on a 117-inch wheelbase and develops 56hp.

Plan your day around the following:

- 11:15: Dance Performance
- 12:00: The Fabulous JewelTones
- 12:30: Music by Rhythmairs Dixieland Band
- 12:30: Video: Merrily we Roll Along, narrated by Groucho Marx
- 2:00: Model T Put Together
- 2:30: Barbershop Quartet
- 3:00: Silly Ricky's Juggling & Fun
- 3:30: Drawing for Door Prizes

Tickets prices at the door are: Adults: \$10, Seniors: \$8, Children (6 to 12) & History San Jose members: \$5. Participants & Children under 6 are free. (Adjacent City Parking: \$10.)

Editor's note: There is NO alcohol, NO pets (except service dogs), and NO BBQs allowed inside the park. These are History Park rules and must be followed by everyone in attendance.

Live concerts at the 'Festa' Saturday, August 5

From an international singing sensation to a Bay Area country music star, there's entertainment for everyone at the 2023 Italian Family "Festa" San Jose, and it's all free!

World Folk & Roots singer Michela Musolino will be performing on Saturday August 5th, from 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. The Sicilian-American singer has been internationally lauded for her unique ability to reimagine Sicilian folk and roots music. Her songs make your heart sing and your feet dance!

On Sunday August 6th, we'll get a little bit country with Silicon Valley's own, Mike Annuzzi.

He takes the stage from 1:30pm-3:30pm. You've heard his hits on country radio, including "Just Getting Started" and "New Boots On."

The Anthony "Nino" Lane Band brings its classic Italian sound to the "Festa" Sunday August 6th from 4pm-6pm. Anthony has been performing since he was 10 years old. His credits over the past few decades are long and impressive.

Also joining a weekend of excellent entertainment, Bay Area Sinatra - John DeMers, Gold Money Band, Blue House, Livewire, The Fratello Marionettes and Nadejda (Nadia) Posk-atcheeva.

And new this year, a Roman Encampment and Legionaries Parades... happening both Saturday and Sunday. The Roman experience

is educational and interactive... kids and adults will be enchanted with the authentic, cultural addition to the "Festa."

Please visit www.italianfamilyfestasj.org for the full entertainment schedule.

Editor's note: The Italian Family "Festa" is presented by the Italian American Heritage Foundation (IAHF). All proceeds support the preservation of Italian culture and the Italian American Heritage Foundation Scholarship Program.



Michela Musolino (Photo by Nino Di Maio)
At right: Anthony "Nino" Lane Band



Roman Encampment and Legionaries Parades realistic interactive experience.



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Times **Community News**

San Jose Realtors say housing advocates 'terrorized' their office

By **Jana Kadah**
San José Spotlight

Tensions between local housing advocates and realtors have boiled into threats and ugly confrontations.

A coalition of homeless and housing advocates protested at the office of the Santa Clara County Association of Realtors on June 7, six days before the San Jose City Council approved the annual budget. They yelled chants like, "Realtors you can't hide, we can see your greedy side" and "Everyone deserves homes" because of the association's support to move city dollars away from affordable housing. But now those chants could result in criminal charges—if the realtors have it their way.

Association employees described the protest as an "invasion" that "terrorized" workers. Nearly 30 protesters from various housing nonprofits entered their building after first gathering in the parking lot with megaphones and handmade signs. Association officials said they are pursuing all legal avenues to ensure protesters never enter their building again.

"We were fine with them protesting out in our parking lot, which is still trespassing, but once it escalated to them coming into our offices that was crossing the line," Jordan Nunes, association spokesperson, told San José Spotlight. "Some of our employees are really shaken up by it."

Nunes said one employee went to the doctor to check her hearing after the protest, and

another employee Jody Souza said at a recent council meeting that she sought counseling because she was so distraught.

But the homeless and housing advocates who protested at the association's office said they were nonviolent—that this was a standard protest—but maybe the first time realtors had one on their doorstep.

Sandy Perry, one of the protesters and president of the Affordable Housing Network of Santa Clara County, said the protesters entered the building to make sure their message was heard.

"We will confess to being loud and being critical, but we were peaceful," Perry told San José Spotlight. "Also Souza told council she locked herself in her office, but failed to mention that after she came out, she got into our faces and yelled at us."

Perry said the drama is because the realtors are setting the stage to reduce dollars for affordable housing next year and the legal threats are just to scare off protesters from coming to their office again.

"I'm not surprised that the realtors are blowing this up because they lost the vote," Perry said. "They have been demonizing nonprofits for months and this is another way to do it so they can stop affordable housing development."

Tensions between the two groups have been rising for years, but reached a breaking point during budget discussions. Councilmembers voted to spend the majority of tax dollars from



Protestors march around the Santa Clara County Association of Realtors office in San Jose on June 7, 2023. Screenshot via video courtesy of Sandy Perry.

Measure E to build affordable housing—a deviation from Mayor Matt Mahan's plan to funnel the money toward interim housing.

The realtors, who didn't support Measure E in 2020, backed Mahan's plan to invest in short-term, quick-build solutions. The protesters, who were from nonprofits including LUNA and the South Bay Community Land Trust, were opposed and wanted the dollars for affordable housing, which they believe to be the root solution to solving homelessness.

Nunes said protesters were asked to go outside several times, but refused until police arrived. However, the San Jose Police Department said there was only one protester left when they got to the offices.

"There were no arrests, or noted damage/vandalism," a police spokesperson told San José Spotlight.

Neil Collins, CEO of the Santa Clara County Association of Realtors and a columnist for San José Spotlight, said the damage was emotional. His employees were "taunted and terrorized,"

which is why he emailed city officials about the protest. His employees are continuing to publicize the protest by speaking out at meetings and through emails.

"I need to protect my employees. This just can't be something that we can ever allow have to happen again," Collins told San José Spotlight. "There's limits to political discourse, and there's venues for it. This was a political theater that caused real harm to my team."

Homeless advocate Shaunn Cartwright was one of the last people at the protest and said to imply protesters terrorized the association is "laughable."

"This was by a group made up largely of people who were over 50 years old with walkers, canes, various other disabilities and others who were previously or currently homeless," Cartwright told San José Spotlight. "For the realtors to say they have compassion for the unhoused and then use the word terrorize to describe them is not compassion, it is judgment."

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Times Feature



Willow Glen High School students **Melissa Anicua** (right) and **Arianna Dominguez** (left) said it's sometimes hard to tell what's true on social media. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

'Real or not': San Jose students support social media bill

By Lorraine Gabbert
San Jose Spotlight

Teens in San Jose said the line between truth and lies is becoming harder to define on social media and distinguishing the difference would be welcome. One state legislator wants to make that happen.

Assemblymember Marc Berman authored a bill that will require schools to incorporate media literacy into K-12 classes in every subject. AB 873, which passed unanimously in the Assembly, is currently in the Senate Education Committee.

Willow Glen High School student Melissa Anicua said some of her friends suffered from cyberbullying while playing online video games, and others had their social media accounts hacked and received fake texts. She said classes on media literacy could help differentiate what is real and what is fake.

"You can't really tell if (the information is) real or not," she told San José Spotlight. "I feel like it's just helpful to know so you don't get confused on things and think bad stuff about people."

Lisa Whitfield, chair of the psychology department at Santa Clara University, said it's beneficial to have students engage in developmentally appropriate lessons about how to evaluate claims that come from the media. But she cautions against making them feel every source is untrustworthy and urges input from scientists and educators.

Berman said as the spread of misinformation has become increasingly pervasive, it's essential young people view information through a critical lens. They need to know how to do their own research to confirm or deny the media they're exposed to, he said. He hopes by integrating media literacy into all subjects, it'll help students put misinformation into context and lessens its personal effect.

"Young people are getting the majority

of their news from social media and the internet," he told San José Spotlight. "They are getting bombarded with misinformation, conspiracy theories and lies on a daily basis."

Arianna Dominguez, a student at Willow Glen High School, said social media makes people feel they have to look or be a certain way to like themselves.

"It causes mental problems, especially for young people," she said. "If they know that those things aren't real, then it would probably help them release a lot of stress."

Katy Bruchmann, associate professor of psychology at Santa Clara University, said although a bill like this would help, social media misinformation can stick. She said cyberbullying research suggests it's associated with mental health, body image issues and even physical health issues in adolescents.

"Learning that something is fake after reading it and processing it doesn't really help," she told San José Spotlight. "People will still believe what they read. But one thing that does seem to help a little bit is inoculating people against misinformation ahead of time. It sounds like this bill would incorporate these techniques in the classroom, which would be great, if successful."

This isn't the first time the state Legislature has addressed social media. In 2018 state lawmakers passed SB 830 to create social media literacy guidelines. It requires the California Department of Education to provide school districts with an online list of resources, instructional materials and development programs for teachers.

More than 90% of young adults use social media, and the majority were confused by fabricated news, according to data in SB 830. It also cited a Stanford University study which said 82% of middle school students struggle to distinguish advertisements from news stories.

Berman said his bill takes media literacy to the next step and ensures it's used in the classroom. He feels there is no time to waste.

"I'm terribly concerned about the amount of misinformation, conspiracy theories and outright lies that are flying across social media and flying across the internet," he said, "and the real-life impact that its having on our communities and our society. We need to make sure the next generation knows how to identify and dismiss misinformation. We can't wait any longer."

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Times **Community News**

Christmas

Continued from page 1

San Jose City Council earlier this week in an effort to get the city to enforce permit laws. In the letter, Degutis wrote the downtown festivities have lost Winter Wonderland's vendor, Butler Amusements, and may lose significant revenue usually generated by the amusement park rides.

The Christmas in the Park nonprofit met with Councilmember Omar Torres, who represents the downtown area, last week to voice concerns.

Torres did not respond to a request for comment.

Butler Amusements has said it will not return this year if the vendor overcrowding doesn't improve. Winter Wonderland, adjacent to the Christmas in the Park festivities on Paseo de San Antonio, has provided amusement park rides and games for 23 years.

Annie Hermes, owner of Messenger Events, the company that hosts Winter Wonderland, said if Butler Amusements doesn't return, there is a high likelihood there will be no Winter Wonderland this year. She said if Butler Amusements drops out, Christmas in the Park will lose an estimated \$55,000 in revenue.

"Right now, I couldn't sell it to another company," Hermes told San José Spotlight. "I could not convince them to come given what we're experiencing with the unpermitted vendors."



A crowd is flanked by Christmas trees during Christmas in the Park in San Jose. File photo.

Hermes said in past years, there have been daily confrontations between permitted and unpermitted vendors, resulting in a physical altercation one year.

Degutis also said if unpermitted vendors

continue to go unchecked, the event could lose some of its longtime vendors.

"This is the hot chocolate vendor. This is a churro guy," she said. "You know, they're part of our Christmas in the Park family. We

want them there."

Unpermitted vendors affect the ice-skating rink run by the San Jose Downtown Association, blocking entry to the rink.

"People feel bothered by them because there's so many of them, and they're in such close proximity to the location," Alex Stettinski, executive director of SJDA (San Jose Downtown Association), told San José Spotlight. "People don't feel necessarily safe or comfortable."

Stettinski said the association hasn't secured a producer of the rink yet, but is still negotiating. He said it's on the right track to getting an ice rink, but if it falls through, the association will provide another winter activity.

Both Degutis and Hermes said they're optimistic about this year's festivities and believe the city council can come up with a solution.

Hermes said keeping the downtown tradition alive is crucial to help families create memories during the holiday season. She remembers going downtown to participate in the merriment as a child, and she takes her children every year.

"It's part of growing up and living in San Jose," she said.

For Degutis, the event is important because of its accessibility. Christmas in the Park is free to enter.

"The Google billionaire and the Google janitor have the same fun, have the same joy," she said. "It's pretty much the only thing in San Jose that gives us that equal space for community."

Cabana Club

Continued from page 1

a separate registration submission. After the session is selected, the tryout date must also be selected. Tryouts are required in order to be committed for the selected session.

Session one will be held July 24, 2023 – July 28, 2023, M-F 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Session two will be held July 31, 2023 – August 4, 2023, M-F 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ACC Lifeguard office: (408) 997-7296; Program Coordinator/Supervisor: (408) 410-1593. To register, and for more information about the Program, visit <https://almadencabana.com/JLP>.



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Times **Community News**

Rates

Continued from page 1

as residents conserved water, it limited the amount of water sold and revenue coming into Valley Water.

About 30% of local water comes from groundwater and reservoirs, while half is imported from the delta and Hetch Hetchy. Recycled water makes up 5% and conservation accounts for 15%, he said. While Anderson Dam undergoes seismic retrofitting, additional water will have to be imported, he added.

Potter said residents can help conserve water, especially the amount used for their lawns and gardens, which is about half a home's usage.

"Use less water," he said, "especially since we're bringing it hundreds and hundreds of miles from the Sierra Nevadas."

Valley Water will come to people's homes to check for leaks, he said, as they are responsible for 12% of indoor water usage.

"You're bringing water hundreds of miles to San Jose just to have it go down the drain," he said. "We want to try to use all of the water as best we can."

Roxanne Grillo, associate civil engineer and project manager for the Almaden Lake improvement project, said reconfiguring it is on hold due to increased costs. The environmental stewardship project aimed to separate Alamos Creek from Almaden Lake to improve water quality in the lake, create a passage for fish and reduce methylmercury in the lake, she said.

"The Almaden Lake improvement project costs unfortunately far exceed the funds that Valley Water has set aside, mostly due to the need for over half a million cubic yards of dirt," Grillo said.

Valley Water's infrastructure construction projects experienced significant cost increases last year, she said. This project would currently cost approximately \$90 million but Valley Water only has \$50 million set aside, she said. Funding for the project came from Valley Water's 2020 Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Bond Measure. These funds will instead be used for restoration of Ogier Pond, she said.

Ben Brown, principal strategic analyst at Pacific Gas and Electric Company, discussed consumer mandates to switch from natural gas to electricity.

California has a statewide goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045 by lowering greenhouse gas emissions, he said. PG&E's carbon reduction strategy goal is to reach a net zero energy system by 2040.

"We know the broad constituency of our customers as well as shareholders and the general public are interested in seeing this type of commitment," Brown said.

He said the key is reducing natural gas emissions and supporting the electrification of vehicles and buildings. In 2027, only zero nitrogen oxide water heaters can be sold or installed in the Bay Area.



Michael Potter, community outreach program supervisor for Valley Water, said emergency purchases made for water during the drought are showing up in people's bills.

In 2029, this will apply to furnaces as well. PG&E is offering incentives and rebates to close the cost gap, Brown said.

Electrifying homes, in place of natural gas, means expensive underground pipelines can be retired rather than replaced every 60 years, he said, decreasing utility bills and achieving carbon reduction. A significant amount of natural gas appliances will have to be retired to meet PG&E and state decarbonization goals, he added.

"The Almaden Lake improvement project costs unfortunately far exceed the funds that Valley Water has set aside, mostly due to the need for over half a million cubic yards of dirt," Grillo said.

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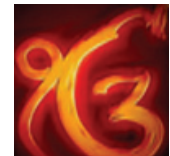
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