

East San Jose school district seeks partner to save former youth center
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Is San Jose safe?
Mayor says San Jose is safest Bay Area city — not everyone agrees
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City of San Jose sets fines for catalytic converter thefts
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Silver Creek Academy hosts district-wide speech contest

By William Bellou
Publisher

Among the winners and finalists at the recently held Silver Creek Academy speech contest are (left to right) Krishang Shukla (1st place), Jennifer Do (finalist), Neoli Sarkar (2nd place), Jaylyn Nguyen (3rd place), Alexandra Vo (finalist), and Vivaan Jindal (finalist).

Silver Creek Academy recently hosted its third district-wide speech contest sponsored by the Evergreen School District.

The event consisted of more than 170 participants from the Evergreen School District Public Speaking and Debate Program.

Students from first through sixth grade presented speeches on the greatest gift that they have ever received, highlighting specific reasons why this gift was valuable to them. Seventh and eighth grade participants presented speeches on what they believe will be the legacy of their generation.

Families and friends of the participants, ESD principals and teachers, Board Members, and special guests including council member Domingo Candelas attended the prestigious event.

First, second, and third place winners were declared across each



grade level division. Silver Creek Academy provided awards, free books, commemorative T-shirts, and goodie bags to all who participated. Students also enjoyed an arts and craft table, snack stations, and photo op tables.

Grade 1 Finalists:

1st Place – Siya K., Tom Matsumoto
2nd Place – Keval G., Cadwallader
3rd Place – Abhinav S., Carolyn Clark

Grade 2 Finalists:

1st Place – Andrea O., Holly Oak
2nd Place – Krishiv S., Tom Matsumoto

Grade 3 Finalists:

1st Place – Viraj J., Norwood Creek
2nd Place – Shanaya P., Millbrook

3rd Place – Avani E., Millbrook

Grade 4 Finalists:

1st Place – Hardaman S., Carolyn Clark
2nd Place – Ammaani S., Evergreen
3rd Place – William V., Millbrook

Grade 5 Finalists:

1st Place – Aayan S., JFS
2nd Place – Ahaan C., Evergreen
3rd Place – Aditi B., Millbrook

Grade 6 Finalists:

1st Place – Krishang S., Cadwallader
2nd Place – Neoli S., Carolyn Clark
3rd Place – Jaylyn N., Carolyn Clark

Grades 7 & 8 Finalists:

1st Place – Sahasra S., Quimby Oak
2nd Place – Supriya B., Chaboya
3rd Place – Sanvi K., Chaboya

See *SPEECH CONTEST*, page 3



SPIRTIED FORUM - Domingo Candelas, Surinder “Suri” Kaur Dhaliwal, Tam Truong and Sukhdev Bainsiwal, candidates for San Jose City Council District 8, speak to residents at a political forum on Feb. 7, 2024. Photo by Annalise Freimarck, San José Spotlight.

District 8 San Jose council candidates debate at Democratic Club forum at Villages Country Club

By William Bellou
Publisher

The four candidates running for the District 8 San Jose City Council seat recently debated issues ranging from homelessness to public safety at a recent Democratic Club forum at the Villages Golf and Country Club.

Incumbent Councilmember Domingo Candelas, Sukhdev Bainsiwal, Surinder “Suri” Kaur Dhaliwal, and Tam Truong spoke to about 50 residents at one of the first campaign stops in the district — which includes Evergreen, Silver Creek and the Lake Cunningham area neighborhoods.

See *DEBATE*, page 3

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LION ON CAMPUS

LeyVa Bulldog Tech Middle School presented a Lunar New Year 2024 celebration on February 15 in the quad area of the school. The festivities included food, exhibitions, calligraphy, fashion show, Kung Fu demonstration, fun dances, band performance, and an exciting Lion Dance.



Evergreen Valley's Raging Waters expected to reopen this summer

San Jose City Councilmembers spearhead negotiations to reopen of Raging Waters in Evergreen Valley. See page 7

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Times **Community News**

Debate

Continued from page 1

The candidates fielded audience questions, preceding the March 5 primary election, which included issues such as public safety, homelessness and how candidates would balance their supporters' needs with the community at large.

Barbara Nilson, a 33-year resident of The Villages, said she'd like to see the next councilmember focus on homelessness, public safety and road maintenance.

"There's so many potholes around, it's getting dangerous to drive around," she told San José Spotlight reporter Annalise Freimarck.

Domingo Candelas

Candelas, a long-time Evergreen resident, said some of the major issues facing the community include public safety, housing and parks. Councilmembers appointed him to the city council in 2023, after voters elected Sylvia Arenas to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

If elected, he said he would like to continue prioritizing housing the homeless, supporting the police force and meeting with residents regularly.

Candelas said even though he is the only candidate to receive endorsements from the San Jose Police Officers' Association and San Jose Firefighters Local 230, he will put the community's needs first.

"I put District 8 residents first, that's my job. I reject the premise of owing anybody just because of an endorsement," he said. "I have my values and people support me for my values."

Sukhdev Bainiwal

Bainiwal, who raised his children in the



Residents of The Villages Golf and Country Club listen to San Jose City Council District 8 candidates at a political forum on Feb. 7, 2024. Photo by Annalise Freimarck, San José Spotlight.

district, is an engineer, former airport commissioner and the long-time director on the board of the Sikh Gurdwara of San Jose. He lost the District 8 appointment to Candelas last year.

If elected, Bainiwal said he wants to focus on crime, parks and homelessness.

"I want to see more neighborhood watches to improve public safety and more interim housing as a solution to homelessness," said Bainiwal. "If we leave our homeless out there in the creeks, No. 1 it's causing blight, No. 2 it's causing security issues," he said. "We need to get our unhoused indoors as soon as possible so they can begin treatment."

Surinder "Suri" Kaur Dhaliwal

Dhaliwal, who moved to the Evergreen neighborhood when she was a teenager, comes from the tech industry. She explained that after leaving an abusive marriage, she is still fighting to gain custody of her son, who she hasn't seen in years.

"My lived experience informs her decision-making when helping vulnerable communities," said Dhaliwal.

Tam Truong

Truong, who is a District 8 native, served as a San Jose Police sergeant for more than 15 years.

An emigrant from Vietnam to the U.S. in 1991, he said his experience with homelessness and pursuing the American dream will add to his expertise on council.

"If elected I want to prioritize police morale and retention, homelessness and job loss," Truong said. "The solution to public safety is a boosted police force. Without police officers you don't have public safety. Without public safety, guess what, people will not put money in San Jose, no economic development," he said. No economic development, no jobs. No jobs, we're sleeping out there on the sidewalk."

Speech contest

Continued from page 1

"We enjoyed seeing all the hard work and effort that students put into their amazing speeches, and we look forward to continuing our public speaking and debate program in partnership with the Evergreen School District," said Shelley Swircek, owner and founder of Silver Creek Academy.

For more information about Silver Creek Academy, call (408) 839-5905 or visit SCAASanJose.com.

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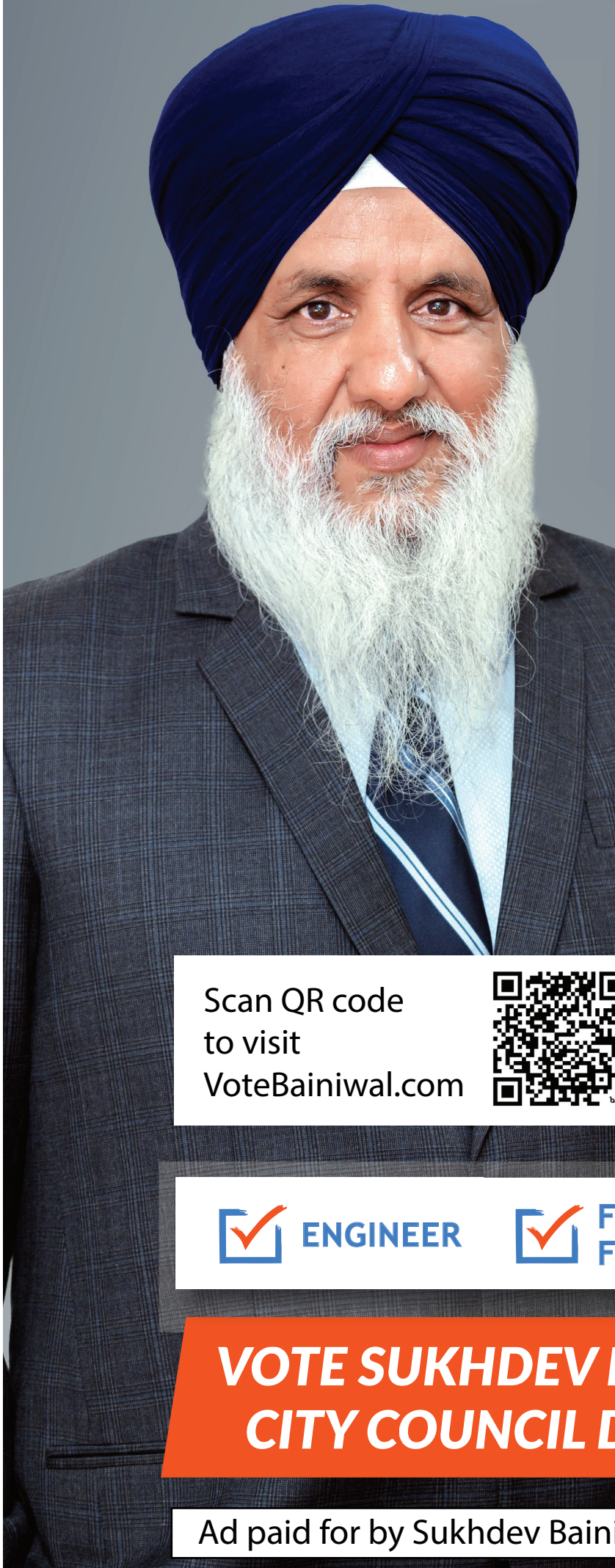
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Times **Local News**



Evergreen Valley's Raging Waters expected to reopen this summer

By William Bellou
Publisher

Water park enthusiasts may soon rejoice and cool off again this summer with the likely return of Raging Waters.

The San Jose City Council will vote on Feb. 27 to approve California Dreamin' Entertainment as the water park's new operator for the 2024 season. If passed, the park, located in Evergreen Valley, will welcome back visitors when warm weather returns in a couple of months.

The City of San Jose considered four companies seriously for the park's lease, and chose California Dreamin' Entertainment, which also operates a similar water park in Sacramento, to run Raging Waters until September 2025. The new operator plans to invest millions into the park for renovations, including food trucks and an outdoor wine garden. The city will take in 6% of its gross revenue which will be used to revitalize Lake Cunningham.

The iconic waterpark shuttered its operations last September when park operator Palace Entertainment terminated its 20-year lease with the city.

Councilmembers Peter Ortiz and Domingo Candelas said the proposal to bring back the water park is a win for San Jose, not only to maintain an important revenue stream for the city, but also to provide needed jobs in the area.

"Keeping the park open gives our young people a work opportunity that a lot of times they don't often have," Candelas said.

Candelas, who represents District 8, grew up going to Raging Waters. He said the wave pool was his favorite part of the park.

The 23-acre theme park houses 14 water slides and a 350,000-gallon wave pool which are in mostly good condition. The water park

San Jose City Councilmembers spearhead negotiations to reopen of Raging Waters in Evergreen Valley. File photo.

secured its first park manager from a response from a classified ad that appeared in the Evergreen Times in early 1985.

Raging Waters was the only theme park in the South Bay besides Great America, which is

scheduled to close by 2035. Cedar Fair Entertainment Company, which owns California's Great America in Santa Clara, sold the property for \$310 million to San Francisco-based Prologis, a national real estate firm.

IN MEMORY

Stuart Reid Gustafson

July 15, 1936 - February 6, 2024

Led Shea Homes' development of Silver Creek Valley Country Club

Stuart Reid Gustafson, 87, passed away after a long battle with Parkinson's disease, surrounded by friends and family on February 6, 2024.

Reid, as he preferred to be called, was born on July 15, 1936 to Earl and Florence Gustafson in San Diego, CA.

The family located in Point Loma where Reid, the third of six children developed his life-long love of sailing and fishing. After graduating from the Army-Navy Academy in Carlsbad, CA, Reid served three years in the US Army, and graduated from UC Davis with a degree in Agri-Business.

Following his graduation, Reid moved to Orange County.

Professionally, he found the build-

ing industry fit both his talents and his interests. Personally, he discovered his lifelong interest in hunting and golf.

Reid moved with his family to San Jose in 1981 where he served as the President of Shea Homes' Northern California Division until his retirement in 2000. During his tenure Reid led development of Shea communities throughout the region. He led the development of the Silver Creek Valley Country Club and community, the most prominent of his many professional achievements.

Those achievements were recognized by his business colleagues.

Reid served as president of the Builders Association and recognized as Builder of the Year by the Home Builders of America. Reid was also deeply committed to the City of San Jose, having served as Chairman of Symphony San Jose, and as a long-standing fixture on the board of the

See GUSTAFSON, page 9



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Times **Local News**

East San Jose school district seeks partner to save former youth center

By **Lorraine Gabbert**
San José Spotlight

A blighted East San Jose youth center has received a brief reprieve from the wrecking ball as community leaders work to save it.

The Alum Rock Union School District board of trustees last week voted unanimously to postpone the demolition of the former Mexican American Community Services Agency (MACSA) building for six months. This is a dramatic reversal from the December meeting where only one trustee, Board Vice President Andres Quintero, voted to save it. This will allow time for the district to search for a community partner in an effort to renovate and repurpose the building.

The board agreed to consider reallocating the \$1 million demolition cost toward the renovation if a funding partner comes forward and requires financial support, Superintendent Hilaria Bauer told San José Spotlight. The building will be razed if a finan-



cial partner can't be found by Aug. 15.

Angel Rios, Jr., San Jose deputy city manager, said the MACSA youth center was an urban sanctuary for young people and if its walls could talk, they would tell countless stories of lives that were changed and transformed.

"I want to offer my support to this board," he said. "We can definitely raise the money. Our children are worth it."

San Jose Councilmember Peter Ortiz, who represents where the former youth center is located, said he's excited to see the demolition postponed and about exploring possible uses for the building.

"The programs and resources at MACSA played a key role in the development of many Latino students served by the district, including myself," Ortiz told San José Spotlight. "Our students still deserve access to such resources, and I hope that a repurposed building will be able to offer that. I look forward to working closely with the Alum Rock School District on a robust community visioning process that will ensure our East San

Jose families are properly served by what comes next."

Former state Assemblymember and San Jose Councilmember Manny Diaz said it's essential the community has an opportunity to be engaged in trying to save the youth center, which provided food, education, child care, health care, sports and gang intervention for the Mayfair community.

"It's not just about the facility," Diaz said. "It's about representing the community. The MACSA youth center at one time provided a lot of services for our youth, and many of our families. I'm hopeful something can be viable."

Nora Campos, former state assemblymember and San Jose councilmember, said the community demands a seat at the table.

"Our voices are loud," Campos said. "You've heard from the families. You've heard from the youth. You've heard from the city. You've heard from electeds. We're willing to roll up our sleeves... and present a proposal that will allow us as a community to move forward and open the MACSA center."

The Mexican American Community Services Agency youth center, once a hub for the Mayfair community, just got a reprieve from being demolished as community leaders try to find a partner to help renovate the facility. *Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.*

Rebeca Armendariz, Gilroy councilmember and movement building director at Working Partnerships USA, said the building was validating to her as a young Chicana.

"It symbolized to me the accomplishments and the struggles of the Chicano movement of my predecessors," she said. "The thought of demolishing this really hurts. Thank you for voting in favor of this pause so we can work together as partners to fundraise and access the needs of this community and hopefully bring it back."

The MACSA youth center was built with state funds. The school district leased the land to the nonprofit for 52 years for \$1 per year, Bauer said, but when the property was turned over to the school district in 2016, it was in a state of disrepair. When the district received bids to renovate the building in 2017, the lowest bid was \$6.9 million, more than the district could afford, she said. As construction escalated, renovation costs skyrocketed between \$25 million and \$30 million, she added.

The district engaged in past partnership discussions with Gardner Health Services, Goodwill of Silicon Valley and San Francisco State University to no avail.

In 2023, the district chose a 23-acre site
See MACSA, next page

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Times Feature

San Jose preps plan to rework and improve one of its most dangerous roads – King Road

By Annalise Freimarck
San José Spotlight

One of San Jose’s most dangerous roads is gearing up for a major upgrade.

King Road, a six-mile street bounded by Berryessa Road to the north and East Capitol Expressway to the south, is slated for improvements. The city’s transportation department is finalizing a plan that targets safety and traffic flow. From 2018 to 2023, eight people, including an infant, were killed on King Road and 21 were seriously injured due to collisions from 2018 to 2022, according to city data.

Rosie Lopez, manager of medical clinic Milagros de México, located at the intersection of Story Road and King Road, said the street needs more safety features to address its danger.

“(Drivers) don’t keep their distance,” she told San José Spotlight. “There’s no safety.”

The plan — funded with more than \$399,000 from a Caltrans grant and more than \$51,700 from the city — will be a collaboration between San Jose and Vision Zero, a program aimed at reducing and ending traffic injuries and fatalities. The draft includes improvements for the entire street, such as a median at some sections of the road, a bus and emergency vehicle-only lane and more crosswalks. The average distance between cross-

walks is roughly 1,000 feet, Project Manager Wilson Tam said, which is about a five-minute walk.

The city began working out the plan in December 2022, and officials have heard from more than 500 community members during public meetings. The plan is expected to be finalized in April before heading to the San Jose City Council for approval.

There’s no set start date — as the city will need to secure environmental clearance and begin the civil engineering process. Those steps will take roughly two to three years if all goes according to plan, and construction will begin shortly after.

Tam said the project will create transformative change, rather than quick fixes, which the city will apply in the interim to increase safety before the project breaks ground.

“It’s not just about building more crosswalks or better signals at the intersections, but more about how we can improve transit reliability,” Tam told San José Spotlight.

Roads intersecting King also have a high number of collisions ending in fatalities or serious injuries, according to city data from 2018 to 2022. Story Road had 11 fatalities and 42 serious injuries, Tully Road had 14 deaths and 39 serious injuries and Capitol Expressway had 12 deaths and 45 serious injuries. Last year, San

Jose scored \$12.9 million to add safety improvements to four corridors.

Cindy Liu, owner of Yami Bowl, a restaurant near King Road’s northern end, said she is concerned how future construction will affect her business. She opened a few months ago and said other construction in the area already directs potential customers away.

“I don’t really want to see that, but if you can do just a one-time finish, it’s OK,” she told San José Spotlight. “It depends how long it’s going to be.”

Councilmember Domingo Candelas represents District 8, which includes parts of King Road. He said the city will take into account the concerns of small business owners and try to keep the effects of construction minimal.

He said while residents wait for the improvements, they need to be mindful of their driving, including their speed.

“It takes all of us to create safer communities,” Candelas told San José Spotlight. “When we’re in a rush to get to a meeting, that may come at a cost and that cost may be very heavy.”

The city is hosting a meeting on Feb. 26 from 5:30-6:30 p.m. at 625 S. Sunset Ave, room 2 in San Jose for residents to voice their opinions on the King Road plan. A full list of upcoming meetings can be found on the project’s website.

MACSA

Continued from previous page adjacent to the MACSA youth center and Renaissance Academy at Mathson to build workforce housing. Bauer said postponing the removal of the youth center won’t affect the housing development.

Esperanza Alejandres, with SOMOS Mayfair’s Jovenes Activos, a youth program nurturing leadership and community involvement, said the needs of students and working families must be prioritized.

“Our community lacks resources,” she said. “We need a

youth center where youth can come and feel safe.”

Trustee Andrea Flores Shelton said she voted in December for MACSA to be demolished because workforce housing to retain teachers is a priority and she was unaware of the community’s will to save it.

“It isn’t the district’s role alone to save the youth center. We need partners,” she said. “Now’s the time for the philanthropic community and all of our partners to answer this call to action. I’m ready for this phoenix to rise from the ashes because I think it’s in all our hearts.”

Gustafson

Continued from page 7

YMCA of Silicon Valley among many others.

Upon his retirement, Reid was able to spend more time doing the activities he loved: hunting in CA, Canada and Alaska, fishing in CA, Mexico and Canada, and golf everywhere! He loved to travel the world with his wife, from Australia to Africa, South America to Europe, Asia to North America. Locally, Reid had a special interest in duck hunting, especially at his Duck club in Los Banos where he could be found on virtually every weekend during the hunting season.

Reid is survived by his wife of 27 years, Sharon Scott Gustafson, and their blended family: daughter Julia Scott

Day, sons Damon Gustafson and family (Lori, Nathan, Myles and Lukas), Fletcher Gustafson and family (Sarah, Henry and Wyatt) Jon Scott and family (Kelly Nolen, Erin, Claire and Colleen), and Jeff Scott and family (Marico Sayoc, Isabella and Quincy).

Reid was loved by many, and respected by all. He easily connected with all types of people, and rarely if ever had a cross word for anyone. He enjoyed a good wine and a great conversation; a good meal and a great friendship.

Many have said “we shall never see his like again!” A celebration of Reid’s extraordinary life will be at a date TBD in late spring. Gifts in his memory are welcome to the Grassland Fund (<https://gwdwater.org/donate/>), or Symphony San Jose.org



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Four very important ways you can prepare for earthquakes in 2024
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SEE PAGE 9

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Mayor says San Jose is safest Bay Area city — not everyone agrees

By **Brandon Pho**
San José Spotlight

The mayor of San Jose recently made a sweeping declaration online about his city's safety record.

Mayor Matt Mahan's office calculated that San Jose boasted the lowest homicides per capita compared to Oakland and San Francisco in 2023. His office used state population data and reporting by NBC Bay Area, which attributed its crime statistics to the San Jose Police Department. The mayor hailed San Jose police for solving 100% of homicide cases between 2021 and 2022.

But not everyone feels this makes San Jose the safest, nor is it a proper barometer for community safety. Community leaders say there are other areas affecting safety where San Jose falls behind, such as traffic fatalities and economic hardship.

Margaret Petros, executive director of the Silicon Valley nonprofit Mothers Against Murder, advocates for families of homicide victims — but said public safety is more complex than that.

"Every other day I read a press release from the San Jose Police Department about traffic fatalities," Petros told San José Spotlight.

"Hit and runs, DUIs — how many of these auto fatalities are victims of crimes?" Petros told San José Spotlight. "What types of services have been provided to their families? I bang my head on brick walls about this."

Jose Valle, who was formerly incarcerated and works with community organizing group Silicon Valley De-Bug, said criminal activity often arises from economic hardship and questions how Mahan's safest city declaration reconciles with his push to expand the city's police force.

"Looks like we're doing good. So should we spend more on the police or should we invest more on trying to solve some of the social ills in our city?" Valle told San José Spotlight.

Despite the City's recent efforts, San Jose, a city with roughly 1 million residents, still has one of the smallest police departments of any major U.S. city. The short-staffed police department had 1,063 sworn officers as of August last year, according to the department, including 24 recruits in field training and 41 recruits in academy training.

Tom Saggau, a spokesperson for the San Jose Police Officers' Association, said low homicide rates don't eliminate the need for more officers.

"Homicides ticking down has absolutely zero to do with whether or not there are enough officers to respond to calls appropriately. That's not a fair assessment on staffing," Saggau told San José Spotlight.

He said a better indication of safety in San Jose — and police department hiring needs — is 911 response time.

Saggau pointed to the department's current performance in responding to priority 2 calls, which deal with injury or property damage, as well as all missing children under the age of 12 and disabled people. The goal for priority 2 calls is to achieve a response time of 11 minutes or under. The department has averaged more than 20 minutes on those calls, according to San Jose's annual report on city services.

He also said some homicides that happen within a home setting, such as a domestic disturbance, can't be prevented by an increased police force.

"You could have a cop on every street corner — that's not going to prevent that crime," Saggau told San José Spotlight.

"Our officers work day and night to protect our neighbors from all threats — whether it be theft, assault, domestic violence, drug possession or child abuse, and we can always do better," Mahan told San José Spotlight.

"Hiring more police officers will give our department more bandwidth to solve crime, keep our residents safe and reduce response times when every second counts."

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The word Sikh (see-kh) means "disciple" or "student." A Sikh is a practitioner of the faith founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak in Punjab of old British India. A Guru who is a "teacher" or "enlightener" completes the relationship of teaching and learning. Sikhism is monotheistic and stresses the equality of all men and women. Sikhs believe in three basic principles; meditating on the name of God (praying), earning a living by honest means and sharing the fruits of one's labor with others. Currently there are close to one million Sikhs living in the USA and Canada and 25 million Sikhs living around the world. Sikhism is the 5th largest religion in the world. At the Gurdwara (House of God) in San Jose we welcome all. We pray daily for peace and prosperity for everybody in the world. Come to visit and enjoy Langer (food) in our kitchen which is open 365 days of the year and serves complementary vegetarian meals. We also encourage you to enter our history room

on site and walk the beautiful grounds. Learn more about us and community events we sponsor by visiting our website; http://www.SanJose-Gurdwara.org

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Mt. Hamilton Grange - 2840 Aborn Road
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8:15 AM
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Eugene Brancoveanu as Rigoletto and Melissa Sondhi as Gilda in Opera San José's production of "Rigoletto," at San José's California Theatre February 17-March 3, 2023. Photo credit: David Allen

Opera San José presents Verdi's timeless tragedy: Rigoletto February 17 – March 3, 2024

By William Bellou
Publisher

Opera San José's 40th anniversary season continues with a thrilling production of Verdi's *Rigoletto* at San José's California Theatre, February 17-March 3.

Boasting some of opera's most memorable music, including the signature aria "La donna è mobile," this gripping work follows the jester Rigoletto, his innocent daughter Gilda, and the corrupt Duke of Mantua whose callous treatment of women launches a storm of vengeance, murder, and tragic self-sacrifice.

The production will feature an exciting roster of talented singers, including OSJ favorite, baritone Eugene Brancoveanu in the title role of Rigoletto*. Soprano Melissa Sondhi, Opera San José's Wadhvani Artist-in-Resident who starred earlier this season as Juliet in OSJ's *Romeo and Juliet*, returns in the role of Gilda, and tenor Edward Graves, recently seen as Gastone in San Francisco Opera's *La traviata*, makes his OSJ debut as the Duke of Mantua*. (* The 2pm, Sunday, Feb. 18 performance will feature baritone Robert Balonek as Rigoletto and tenor WooYoung Yoon as the Duke of Mantua.)

The production is led by visionary director Dan Wallace Miller, acclaimed for his work with Seattle Opera and other national companies, while Jorge Parodi guest conducts for the South Bay opera company – both making their OSJ debuts.

For more information or to purchase tickets (\$55-\$195), the public can visit operasj.org or call 408-437-4450 (open Monday through Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm).



Saratoga Symphony presents free concert: 'The Scent Of Fresh Snow' March 10

By William Bellou
Publisher

Enjoy a free orchestra concert of classical music with beautiful melodies and exciting rhythms presented by the Saratoga Symphony on Sunday, March 10 starting at 3 p.m. at West Valley Presbyterian Church in Cupertino.

Two music program pieces, including a Ballet Waltz,

have snow in their titles, and they support this with their music sounds and moods.

The Sibelius Symphony is an expressive musical piece, representing the Romantic Music Period. This concert features a piano concerto performed with virtuosity by Jason Chiu as soloist. He has received many awards with his active teaching and performance career.

Conductor Dr. Jason Klein talks to the audience about each program piece before it is performed, adding an educational experience to the concert.

DATE & TIME: Sunday, March 10, at 3:00 pm

Editor's note: West Valley Presbyterian Church is located at 6191 Bollinger Road in Cupertino, CA 95014. For more information, visit: www.saratogasympphony.org/concerts Donations appreciated. NO ticket or reservation needed. Open seating in church.

San Jose sets fines for catalytic converter thefts

By Jana Kadah

Reported thefts of catalytic converters are trending down in San Jose, and city officials are strengthening policies to ensure that thefts keep dropping.

The San Jose City Council unanimously approved a policy that makes it a misdemeanor to possess a catalytic converter that is not attached to a vehicle without proper documentation, punishable by up to six months in jail and \$1,000 per violation Feb. 6. Mayor Matt Mahan and Councilmember Arjun Batra were absent.

Proper documentation includes the bill of sale for the converter or photos of the car that housed the converter. Body shops must provide documentation that the owner of the converter relinquished it.

Catalytic converters control vehicle emissions of harmful gasses from going into the environment. Thefts of those converters have surged nationwide in recent years because the precious metals in the converters — including platinum, rhodium and palladium — make them lucrative to steal and sell, garnering between \$250 to \$800 apiece.

San Jose Police Department officials said in 2023 the number of stolen catalytic converters dropped to 836 compared to 1,843 the year before. But the financial burdens on victims remain significant. Depending on insurance coverage, replacing a catalytic converter can range from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

"The cost of replacing a catalytic converter is beyond reasonable for any working-class person," Councilmember Peter Ortiz said. "To that end, the goal of our policy is to send a clear message to thieves: if you steal from the working class, we will come down on you with the full force of the law."

Thieves stole more than 240,000 catalytic converters across the country in 2022 — a 288% increase from 2021, according to the latest data by the National Insurance Crime Bureau. California was overrep-



The San Jose City Council approved a policy making it a misdemeanor to possess a catalytic converter that is not attached to a vehicle without proper documentation. Photo courtesy of San Jose Police Department.

resented, making up 37% of all catalytic converter thefts across the nation.

SJPD Lt. Brent McKim, who heads the financial crimes unit, said San Jose residents have spent approximately \$4 million to replace stolen catalytic converters over the past three years.

"That doesn't even account for the lost wages, when a family is without their vehicle for days or weeks while their car is in the shop," McKim said. "This indiscriminate crime extends across virtually every neighborhood, impacting residents' livelihoods. In the worst cases, victims have been physically harmed or killed attempting to stop the crime."

Prior to this policy, SJPD could only arrest or fine someone if they were caught in the act of stealing a catalytic converter.

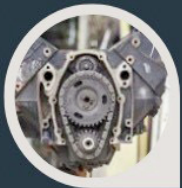
SJPD also created a program that would etch an ID number on residents' catalytic converters for free so if someone tried to sell it it could be identified if found. However, the program failed to take off — rendering it ineffective. In 2022 and 2023, only 435 residents used the etching services, according to police.

In November, officers stopped a stolen vehicle containing 14 stolen catalytic converters — none of which were etched with an ID number, McKim said.

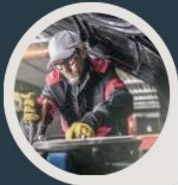
The fine for each undocumented catalytic converter is \$1,000 for the first offense, \$2,000 for second offense and \$4,000 for third and subsequent offenses in a 12-month period.

"Though we hope by this point, the thief would've gotten the message," McKim said.

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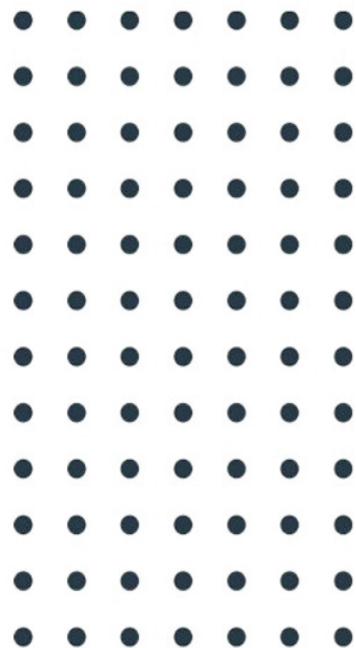
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