

Silicon Valley school board candidates divided on LGBTQ issues
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Rue Ferrari interim housing 144 more homeless people to be moved off the streets
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Silicon Valley food stamp levels highest since 2014
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Times

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Almaden's Second Story Duo's collaboration and artistic growth shapes band's 2nd album, 'Reflections'

By William Bellou
Publisher

For Second Story Duo, the creation of "Reflections," released late last month, was a labor of love two years in the making, born out of the commitment to collaboration and artistic growth.

For Almaden Valley resident Lynn Case, one half of the duo alongside her partner Doug Bloomquist, the journey began with a simple New Year's goal: to step outside her comfort zone and explore the possibilities of working with other musicians.

'Life, love and memory'

Lynn and Doug have created a rich tapestry of creative partnerships, culminating in an album that captures not only their growth as a band but also their personal reflections on life, love, and memory.

"This album started with the idea of collaboration," Lynn said. "Doug and I joined a Tuesday night class where we share our new songs and get feedback from the instructor; a number one song hit songwriter, Steve Seskin, and fellow songwriters and musicians. It really pushed us to elevate our work."

One of the first collaborations was



Second Story Duo's new album, "Reflections," is stated to be a labor of love for Almaden residents **Lynn Case** and her partner **Doug Bloomquist**. The group's new album is receiving great reviews.

with their friend, Multi-instrumentalist and guitarist Robert Witmeyer, who brought a Heart-inspired flair to "New York/California Girl." Lynn explained that she had this vision of

a lead guitar part in that style, and "Robert just rocked it...it was a challenge to live up to his playing, but it pushed us in the best way."

See NEW ALBUM, page 3

San Jose planning commission gives green light to new Kaiser hospital

By William Bellou
Publisher

San Jose's planning commission has approved Kaiser Permanente to redevelop its medical campus and build a state-of-the-art hospital which will begin construction in 2025.

Kaiser's plans include a 110-foot-tall, 685,000-square-foot hospital, energy center, and five-story parking lot at 250 Hospital Parkway. The new facility, which would be one of the first all-electric hospitals in the state, is 435,000 square feet larger than the current building and increases bed capacity from 247 to 303.

Kaiser is making the decision to redevelop the campus rather than spend money on the existing hospital to meet 2030 seismic standards.

"I think it's an exciting project," said District 8 Commissioner Dilpreet Bhandal. "Kaiser is reinvesting dollars into the current facility and there's a net increase in beds and everybody gets their own room in the new structure."

Senior land use manager Tina Wehrmeister said that Kaiser will keep the current hospital up and running until construction is completed and will eventually demolish the building.



Photo credit: Lorie Biviano

Another production with visionary Director Steve Dini

Les Misérables to be staged in new, creative way by Pioneer High School Drama Department

Performances nightly Wed. - Sat., October 23 - 26

By Jane Johnson
Special to the Times

"A community of caring adults dedicated to providing opportunities to those who otherwise could not participate," local alumna parent, Diane Reed, described The Glue Factory. And she's right. The funding raised by community volunteers goes straight to the support of a local high school program which charges no money for participation.

'Truly a bright star in south San Jose'

"I came and saw The Glue Factory shows and I realized there are kids who are underserved in our area. And they cannot participate in things. For example, I had kids in my other carpools who'd try out for cheer or a sport, and they couldn't participate because of the cost. So, I do know the outreach this (Pioneer High School Drama) program does. It is truly a bright star in south San Jose."

It is through the generosity of time and hard work from its volunteer performers, and the equally profound generosity of audience members providing donations and purchasing tickets, coming to see the shows and supporting the cast, which allows this gem of a community the-

ater to thrive and fulfill its mission. As Diane shared, "It's something I'm passionate about. I tell people it's volunteers, and very, very talented people from all walks of life, all ranges of talent, but together it's just magic. It's for the kids, and for the community."

Seasoned directors, performers and volunteers make this Glue Factory production inspiring

That this community continues to strengthen, deepen and expand owes its roots in large part to Steve Dini. Moving to Texas more than three years ago, Steve continues to return each year. "It's the people! The energy and dedication of The Glue Factory is inspiring. I love these folks and theater - can't resist either," shared Steve.

Providing high caliber performances is a staple of both Pioneer High School's Drama Department and The Glue Factory, and this year is no exception.

"Les Miserables" will be staged in a new and creative way. Owing its vision to Director Steve Dini, "it's a reimagining of 'The World's Greatest Musical,'" shared Steve. "I'd like the audience to see it with new eyes. I hope they will experience the absolute energy and appreciate seeing an 'old' classic in a brand new light."

This new production melds existing
See LES MIZ, page 5

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Times **Community**



“Shady Ladies”—lend their voices to create a fun, empowering anthem with “Out With My Girls.” Rocio Guizard co-wrote the song with Lynn and Doug, created the harmonies, and helped with the vocal recording.

New album

Continued from page 1

Finding the right path

Throughout “Reflections,” collaborations drive the music forward, shaping both the sound and the emotional depth of the project. Pianist Greg Sankovich was another key influence. “Greg’s a genius on the piano,” Lynn explains. “He’s got this way of making me feel free enough to mess up on the way to finding the right path.” Their work with Greg on the title track, “Reflections,” set the tone for the album’s exploratory spirit. “He patiently led us through the process, and by the end, I fell in love with the song all over again.”

‘We let each track evolve in its own way’

The album stands apart from their previous work, particularly their debut album, “What I Wish For Us.” “With ‘Reflections,’ we let the lyrics dictate the direction of each song,” Doug said. “We weren’t bound by genre or style—we let each track evolve in its own way.” The result is an eclectic collection of songs, from the country-tinged “Whiskey” to the French-inspired “The Lake Song,” a love letter to Lynn’s sister-in-law, complete with a lilting accordion performance by Doug himself, honoring his father’s musical legacy.

While the duo has always drawn from personal experiences in their songwriting, “Reflections” is perhaps their most intimate and varied project yet. “Every song touches a part of my life or someone I care about,” Lynn reflects. “Whether it’s the story of a friend’s journey with Alzheimer’s in ‘The Long Goodbye’ or the carefree summers that inspired ‘The Lake Song,’ each track is a love letter to a moment or a person who means something to me.”

Solid backing vocals

The collaborative spirit of “Reflections” extends to the backing vocals, with Rocio Gui-

tard, Mary Zarucchi, Sharon Perl, and Maggie Wing—known as the “Shady Ladies”—lending their voices to create a fun, empowering anthem with “Out With My

“With Reflections, we let the lyrics dictate the direction of each song,” says Doug. “We weren’t bound by genre or style—we let each track evolve in its own way.”

— Doug Bloomquist

Girls.” Rocio co-wrote the song with Lynn and Doug, did the harmonies, and helped with the vocal recording. “He made the entire experience a blast. It was a whole new world of music,” Doug said.

As Lynn and Doug look back on the two-year journey of “Reflections,” they recognize not only the challenges they faced but also the immense growth that came with it. “Every song on this album taught me something new,” Lynn says. “Whether it was learning to trust myself more or figuring out how to sing in a way I never had before, each track required its own lessons.”

At its heart, “Reflections” is a celebration of the moments that shape our lives—both the small, everyday ones and the profound ones we carry with us forever. “I hope listeners can find their own journeys in these songs,” Lynn shares. “For me, each song is a reflection of a piece of my life, and I hope people can use them to reflect on their own experiences, too.”

Hoping for songs to take on a life of their own

For Lynn and Doug, the dream isn’t to necessarily collaborate with the industry’s biggest stars—it’s for those artists to hear their songs and want to make them their own. “I would love for someone better than us to hear one of our songs and feel inspired to do their own version,” she admits. “That’s the ultimate goal—to create something that resonates so much, it takes on a life of its own.”

With an album as varied and personal as “Reflections,” Second Story Duo invites listeners to step into their world, one song at a time, and perhaps catch a glimpse of their own reflections in the music.

For more information: <http://secondstory-duo.rocks>.

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OpEd

Should individual school districts charge one billion dollars in taxes on homes and other things in local neighborhoods to pay for teacher housing and other things?

By Kevin Larsen
Parent and community helper

In my opinion, often, those who vote think they don't have to pay for parcel taxes nor bonds. But they do not fully understand this in my opinion. Here is possibly why.

There are three ways of asking tax money from homeowners

The first is the Parcel Tax (LOCAL BALLOT MEASURE OF A LOCAL PARCEL TAX PAID FOR BY LOCAL AREA LAND OWNERS) which is paid for by the homeowners and others in that area with a passage with a 2/3rds vote of approval.

The second method is the School Bond (LOCAL BALLOT MEASURE OF A LOCAL BOND PAID FOR BY LOCAL AREA LAND OWNERS). It is set up by the school district which is also paid for by the homeowners and land ownership with a lower threshold of a 55% vote.

The third method is the State of California pays or individual cities pay called the LEGISLATIVE STATUTE (STATE WIDE BOND MEASURE WHICH IS PAID FOR BY ALL CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS).

In my opinion, the third method builds confusion to homeowners for when the State of California pays for a bond with GENERAL TAX REVENUE and puts on the ballot, it could let voters

think that bonds are paid by all and not just local areas. For example, on the ballot this November 5, 2024 the State bond PROPOSITION 2 is a proposal for \$10 billion in state general obligation bonds for repair, upgrade and construction of facilities on K-12 public schools including charter schools and community colleges. Other things are also proposed in this bond. The amount borrowed will be (if passed with 55% vote) \$10 billion (approx.. \$500 million per year for over 35 years). Again, the source of the money comes from General tax revenue from the State of California.

The voting literature says that the State usually pays 50% of the cost of new construction projects. "School districts are expected to pay remaining project costs using local funds. The state often shares the cost of new construction and renovation projects with community college districts. Though the share of costs varies among projects, the state commonly pays about half of the cost, with the community college districts paying the rest using local funds."

So, in my opinion, the voters may get confused seeing bonds on the ballot paid for by the State of California and other bonds set up by local school districts (and parcel tax item) where only the local homeowners and land owners pay taxes for their

local area on their local projects and schools. **Let's take a closer look at what PARCEL TAXES AND LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BONDS are.** Information from on-line site *BallotPedia* on parcel tax
A parcel tax is a form of property tax assessed at a rate based on the characteristics of a parcel—or unit of property—rather than a rate based on the assessed value of the property, which is the standard method of levying property taxes. A parcel tax rate can differ based on the type of property. For instance, improved and unimproved properties may have different rates, and residential and commercial properties may also have different rates.

Methods used to divide parcels include:

- by single-family home
- by acre
- by apartment unit
- by square foot

A parcel tax is considered a qualified special tax in California and may be imposed by a local unit of government, such as a city, county, school district, or special district. Special taxes are permitted by the California Constitution, and they require a two-thirds (66.67%) vote for approval.

Parcel tax revenues can be used for any type of spending, including construction costs, employee salaries, school funding, and other projects or spending needs.

Elections to vote on parcel tax measures must take place on established election dates. In even-numbered years, these elections dates are in March, April, and November. In odd-numbered years, the elections are in March, June, and November. However, when an election is held by mail only, the election dates can also be set in May or August (odd-numbered or even-numbered years) and June (even-numbered years).

Notice of a parcel tax election must be given at See *SCHOOL TAXES*, page 12



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Events and Trips:

Trip to Roaring Camp, Felton, CA, Thursday October 24th, 8:00am. Travel by bus to Roaring Camp Railroad in Felton. Take a scenic ride on a steam powered train to the top of the mountain and back. Enjoy a BBQ Chicken lunch before returning to the community center in late afternoon. Tickets on sale in the Almaden Community Center lobby, MWF 8-10am. \$96 cash or check. For information, contact Rich at rsanders1786@yahoo.com or 408-219-8641

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Times Local News

Les Miz

Continued from page 1

formats into one which, as recent alum Sofia Chichizola described, "It's almost like a concert, but there's also a storyline with some acting with it. It reminds me a lot of 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.' It feels he's (Dini) stripping it down because the music is so powerful versus a normal show which may need all the glitz and glamor to spruce it up. This does not." Although there is a limit to the glitz, the impactful sets and props are expertly crafted and supplied by Lorie Biviano. The vocal sounds are blended and enhanced under the tutelage of Marissa Bacon. And the costuming allowing your imagination to "fill in the gaps" owing its styling to Kyla Blili.

Lots of special talent in direction and more

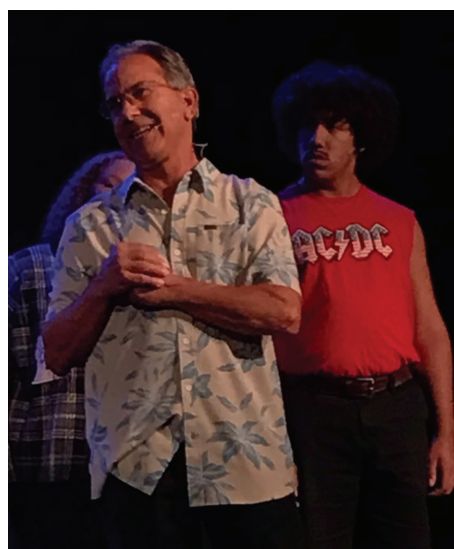
A show of this caliber relies on PHS Drama teacher Ashley Coleman to deftly Assistant Direct, bringing to life the vision from Steve while he was in Texas and create choreography to enhance the parts. "This has been a wonderful experience," said Ashley. "This is the first time The Glue Factory has taken on an operation of this magnitude. We have always allowed our cast to inspire our production choices, and it's been a true privilege to work with performers who have the heart and the talent to pull it off. I am humbled that each chooses to use their gifts and talents here."

When Victor Hugo penned his novel "Les Misérables," he corresponded with his publisher including descriptions such as "Humankind's wounds, those huge sores that litter the world, do not stop at the blue and red lines drawn on maps." How true those words ring over 150 years later. Many stop there with the "wounds" for their understanding of "Les Mis" as it's commonly known. They see the tragedy, the sadness, the anger. But in his 1860s day, French-

man Hugo was not only reflecting on the lives surrounding and leading up to the June Rebellion of 1832, he was also exploring multiple themes woven throughout with a perhaps different outcome than some assume when they first experience the beginning of a "Les Mis" production.

Enter the collaboration which created the 1980 French musical: Claude-Michel Schönberg who created the music, with French lyrics by Alain Boublil and Jean-Marc Natel, from an adapted novel based on Hugo's original work. It was quickly translated for English audiences, premiering in London in 1985, continuing to this day. Ultimately, the story of "Les Mis" ends with redemption and hope. In the musical: "the chain will be broken and all men will have their reward." For all those in modern day who bristle at the word "men" only, instead please entertain the thought it is referring to all people (but obviously the lyric "people" didn't fit into the music - you'll know once you hear it if you didn't just hear the melody play through your head.)

For those who might not understand why "Les Mis" holds a title such as "The World's Greatest Musical", or why friends and family flock to performances of the musical in its various formats over and over, it might be this thematically: that this thing we call life with all of its twists and turns, social injustices and pain, in the end is about relationships and a higher Love. Older alum, Jacob Johnson, provides one rationale for this lofty musical tagline of "World's Greatest Musical": "So many people come from positions of struggle, poverty and a longing for the life they feel they have missed out on, that they identify with 'Les Mis'. And yet, it creates an idea for a hope of a peaceful or happy ending, regardless of how the life they envisioned manifested in their own life. Life, if it doesn't portray as you imagined it, still can be meaningful and enjoyable." "It's a



John Berney and Ezra McCeillis

classic story of redemption, forgiveness and salvation. Universal themes. The redemption aspect especially moves me personally. I tear up every night!" said Steve. And that's just during rehearsals.

'Everyone is a part of everything in this musical'

The music itself is so powerful and moving, the lyrics driving the storytelling across the entire performance, no matter its form. "The music is the main thing in this production and we're going to nail that - Vocal Director Marissa Bacon is seeing to that. There will be enough staging that people unfamiliar with 'Les Mis' will be able to pick up the storyline," community member, John Berney said. Some will remember John most recently as the peddler Ali Hakim from last year's "Oklahoma," his favorite role thus far. "Everyone is a part of everything in this musical. He (Steve) really wants us all to be part of the melody, instead

of separate musical parts," observed Jacob. Diane said this production is about "letting the music and really the talent stand out. Hearing the music which is so beautifully written - I still get the chills and I can get a tear in my eye. It's one of the few sad or depressing-related things I'd see over and over. It gives you all the feels, it really does. There's love and there's wanting and there's everything - it's not just tragic. Keep watching 'Les Mis' until you understand it. It's a fulfillment to me."

'The music is the star of this performance'

Which leads us to today: The music is the star of this performance. With a cast of very talented community members, The Glue Factory has embarked on bringing to life Steve Dini's vision for this production of "Les Mis". "Dini's visions are filled with much more depth in character," said Jacob. "He has this way of creating a masterpiece from child's art."

Of the many benefits of being part of the Glue Factory, being part of a multi-generational cast is one of the best. Younger cast members both still in high school as well as just graduated, and those attending or just graduated from college, all the way through to retirees enjoying the ability to give back fully via their talents, participate together working so very hard to bring a quality production to the community.

Friendships, inside jokes, fun memories and meaningful purpose bind cast members

"It seems almost more (recent) alumni than parents this year - and usually it was the opposite. But I think it's really cool younger people are getting involved. It allows the director more choice in who gets to be a lead," observed Sofia. As Ashley described, "The Glue Factory cast is comprised of a cornucopia of players; a beautiful representation of the Pioneer community. Students, parents, teachers, alumni, and friends of PHS are all represented. The

See LES MIZ, page 7



★ December 14, 2024 ★

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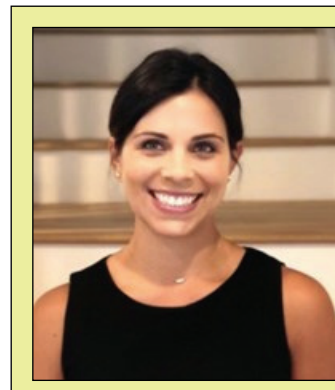
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Times **Local News**

144 more people to be moved off the streets

By **Matt Mahan**

Last week, we broke ground on an expansion of the Rue Ferrari interim housing community, where we are adding enough beds to immediately move another 144 people off our streets the moment it opens. This expansion is part of our overall plan for ending the era of encampments in San Jose.

Getting there isn't going to happen overnight. Permanently closing encampments is difficult and takes longer than any of us would like. But if we continue to execute the plan we will get there.

And our plan is pretty straightforward: fundamentally, it's about creating places where people living on the streets can be, and then requiring that they're used.

More specifically, our plan is to build up our supply of safe, digni-

fied shelter and affordable housing. Our plan is to demand the State and County create treatment facilities for those struggling with substance abuse and severe mental health issues. Our plan is to focus on services that turn lives around — because individuals living on our streets have different needs and face different barriers to achieving self-sufficiency.

Some need to be stabilized in a drug-free facility. Some need job training and counseling to get back on their feet. Some need a bus ticket home to their parents.

And I'm going to be very honest — most need to be in a temporary place to get stabilized before they can move into a permanent or affordable housing unit on their own. Some may not initially accept the offer to move indoors, but as we have more

places for people to go, we will ban camping across the city and use the various outreach, public health, and law enforcement tools at our disposal to require everyone to come inside.

This is why we've created nearly 500 interim housing units in recent years and have 700 more on the way.

The expansion project at Rue Ferrari will double our current capacity at this site, allowing us to serve an additional 144 people at any given time. It also comes with a better and more holistic approach to tackling encampments, including a "local preference" policy, which means that people who are homeless in the surrounding area will be the first people offered shelter at this site.

Then, we will establish a no-encampment zone around the site



From the Mayor
Matt Mahan
Mayor, San Jose

to preserve our progress and make sure that the neighborhood surrounding Rue Ferrari experiences the benefits of bringing people indoors. It's always been my philosophy that neighborhoods that take on solutions to homelessness must experience tangible benefits as a result.

Fortunately, the data actually show that calls for service for crime and blight go down

year-over-year after a site is established because life in a well-managed shelter is more stable and supportive than life on the streets. But we know we can still do better. We can provide more benefits like the ones outlined above to make sure everyone's life is made better by our urgent action to address homelessness. We can save the lives of people living on our streets and by doing so, we can make everyone's neigh-

borhoods safer, cleaner and quieter. This new expansion site will be open within a year. There is no quick fix or silver bullet to end homelessness. But that's okay because we don't need a bandaid solution that hides the problem. We need lasting change.



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Symphony San Jose and Chorale San Jose perform classical music's scariest hits at California

Theater Oct. 26-27

Just in time for Halloween, Symphony San Jose and Symphony San Jose Chorale conjure up some of classical music's scariest hits in performances scheduled Saturday, October 26, 2024 (7:30 p.m.) and Sunday, October 27, 2024 (2:30 p.m.)

This thrilling and bone-chilling concert experience is perfect for the entire family. So, whether you bring your flesh-in-blood, your broom-mate, your boo, or just come on your own, Symphonic Spooktacular is guaranteed to raise your spirits.

Program:

- J.S. Bach: Toccata & Fugue in D minor
- Camille Saint-Saëns: Danse Macabre
- Modest Mussorgsky: Night on Bald Mountain
- John Williams: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
- Franz Schubert: Die Erlkönig
- Bernard Herrmann: Psycho
- Edvard Grieg: In the Hall of the Mountain King

For tickets, visit www.tickets.symphonysanjose.org/Online

Times **Local News**

Les Miz

Continued from page 5

uniqueness of this group creates a beautiful opportunity for mentorship across generations, and also allows us to give a true representation of the citizens of France - both young and old - for this production."

'I love theater, I love performing and I love telling stories'

Current PHS Junior, Ezra McCelleis, has a unique perspective on this collaboration. From the time he was a Freshman, Ezra has participated in The Glue Factory productions. "I feel good vibes - it's such a communal & lively place. I'm feeling really good. I really like working with the other adults. They're really happy to be here, and I get excited vibes from it. Three years in, I get it and how important it is to fundraise for the program all together."

This year brings even more novel experiences: His mom, Jena Sireess-McCelleis, has joined him on stage. "Having my mom in this - it's fun, it's really fun. We talk during rehearsals seeing how she's doing, she asks me how I'm doing - it's really great. It's a unique experience." Ezra himself is pursuing his own directorial path, working to direct and produce an independent film. "I love theater, I love performing. I love telling stories exploring different worlds and different characters."



Diane Reed and Alesya Petty sing "At The End Of The Day."

Audiences should expect a stirring performance, at the very least. "I think the quality of what The Glue Factory is putting out just keeps rising and rising. Maybe because of attrition, some of us hacks are falling by the wayside. And some of the new graduates coming in - it's adding in a big talent increase. I think it's obvious. When I came back to do "Oklahoma" I thought 'Holy cow, these kids can really sing!' I just sing what I hear. I've never had any training in acting or singing. It's all very new to me. To listen to these kids, the ones that are playing the leads especially, they've got some real talent," said John.

On the opposite side of the spectrum from John's Bishop, Jacob plays the antagonist for the first time in his performing career, in the role of Javert. "I'm trying to be a character who creates contrast between the protagonist and me. In the past, I could just be the protagonist, because I didn't need to think of other contrast because I was who I was - I was leading in the front in a sense as a protagonist. But as an antagonist, the role is more to create a reason for the protagonist. I want the audience to feel negative about me, so they feel positive about the protagonist. I hope they hate the character (Javert). I love the story - it's touched me - particularly the story of Jean Valjean finding mercy and forgiveness. And also, the desire for justice Javert brings. The real emotion comes from Jean Valjean's struggle. But I'm finding enjoyment in the demand for justice from Javert. I'm find-

ing that desire for justice entering my personal life even."

Audience is totally captivated

Each one of these multi-generational cast members share a hope for this show. John hopes "It's a successful fundraiser first and foremost. And I think, hopefully, people will walk away with an understanding of the struggles of people and that God is always in the background guiding your ways."

"I think people are going to absolutely love it. I want to sit in the audience and see it performed. I would hope people spread the news on how fantastic this program is, the benefits of this program, and even want to join in, it's a crusade after all!" shared Diane.

Jacob hopes "the audiences come away with a greater love for the magic that PHS Drama and Mr. Dini, Mrs. Coleman, and Mrs. Bacon

create." "I hope the audiences are drawn into this performance and that they're totally in it and captivated. It's a show very easy to get lost in," said Sophia. "And you want to have the audience feel all the feelings."

Ezra hopes "they take away whatever it is that they love about it most for those who are familiar with 'Les Mis', and for those who aren't, I hope they feel moved in some way."

"If you are familiar with 'Les Mis', you should come see our show for a different interpretation. If you are skeptical, give us a chance to turn you around and appreciate what can be beauty in simplicity. Just have a good time," Ezra said. And as Ashley observed, "This is a beautiful story that is written in a way that is accessible and surprising. It elicits an emotional response from audiences in different ways. The musical score may bring you to tears as may the lesson of the transformative power of compassion and redemption."

In the end, it's an amazing way to both treat yourself to a night out and to know you're giving back to a worthy cause, one that has literally saved multiple kids' lives over the years.

Mark your calendars: Performances nightly Wed - Sat, October 23, 24, 25 & 26. Doors open 6:30 pm. Advance ticket sales available at <https://phsdrama.ludus.com/index.php> Students \$7, Seniors \$10 and Adults \$15.

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East San Jose residents facing food insecurity waited in line for a farmer's market style distribution at Mexican Heritage Plaza. *Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.*

Silicon Valley food stamp levels highest since 2014

By **Joyce Chu**
San José Spotlight

It's a tale of two worlds in Santa Clara County — one of affluence and one of survival, as thousands of residents struggle to put food on the table.

Participation in CalFresh is at its highest level in a decade. As of July, the federally funded food assistance program has more than 130,000 individuals receiving food stamps in the county, CalFresh Policy Implementation Specialist Michelle Demetrius said. Only 72,200 county residents received food stamps in 2019, the lowest point in the last 10 years and almost half of what the numbers are today, according to CalFresh data.

"There's quite a food crisis brewing right now," Bill Lee, executive director of Martha's Kitchen, told San José Spotlight.

Martha's Kitchen provides thousands of meals each year at its soup kitchen in Willow Glen, and dozens of its partners throughout the county at transitional housing sites, low-income older adult facilities and more. Last year, the nonprofit served 2.8 million meals, a number that ballooned during the pandemic and never dropped. Prior to COVID-19, the organization was preparing 500,000 meals a year.

"There's tremendous inflationary pressure, and prices aren't falling," Lee said. "That broke people's budgets because people are already on the tattered edge."

Nationally, consumer prices have increased 21% since February 2020. For every \$1,000 Americans spent on goods and services pre-pandemic, it now costs \$1,212 for the same goods and services, according to a Bankrate analysis.

"People who were just having enough money to get their bills paid, all of a sudden didn't have that. So they turn to us and they turn to places like CalFresh," Lee said.

Food insecurity grows

After losing his job in June, a homeless person who goes by the name G re-certified himself for CalFresh benefits. To qualify for CalFresh, individuals can't make more than 200% of the federal poverty level, or \$2,430 a month, and \$5,000 a month for a family of four. Households at the maximum income level get as little as \$23 in benefits a month. G sleeps at a park in Palo Alto. Without any income, he gets the maximum benefit of \$291 a month for an individual. The most a family of four can get is \$973 a month.

G said it isn't enough to cover his needs,

but the bigger challenge comes from not having a kitchen, microwave or place to store his food. Every day, he plans where he'll go to eat: 7-Eleven for a pizza if he's craving something warm, a food bank for fruit, a local church for a fresh meal or a grocery store for pre-cooked foods.

"What makes (CalFresh) insufficient is not having access to a kitchen or a fridge," G told San José Spotlight. "If we could have access to a kitchen or fridge, it would go a long way."

Families may also find the amount they receive from CalFresh to be insufficient, especially after the program scaled back its allotments once the pandemic eased. During the pandemic, people enrolled in CalFresh got an additional \$95 each month, with some households receiving more. Emergency allotments ended last April, and have contributed to the growing number of people coming to food banks, Tracy Weatherby, vice president of strategy and advocacy at Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, said.

Weatherby said the number of people being served has increased to nearly 500,000 people a month — the same as it was during the height of the pandemic. Prior to that, the food bank served 250,000 people every month through food distributions and grocery programs.

"Even as people have been able to go back to work, the cost of living in our area and the income inequality still makes it very hard for people to get by," Weatherby told San José Spotlight. "So our services are helping people be able to pay their rent."

Weatherby thinks the increase in CalFresh participation is a result of the pandemic. She said it brought greater access and awareness of resources available. Second Harvest also helps people sign up for food stamps.

CalFresh data shows the percentage of eligible households who applied for the benefit spiked during the pandemic, from 56% in 2020 to 71% in 2021.

"I think a lot of people didn't realize what an important benefit that could be, and the pandemic brought it to the forefront," Weatherby said. "It brought people who probably originally needed our services. And they have stayed with us because they still need that support."

Demetrius, with the county's Social Services Agency, said that county has expanded its partnerships with nonprofits to help people apply for CalFresh. It has increased

See FOOD STAMPS, page 10

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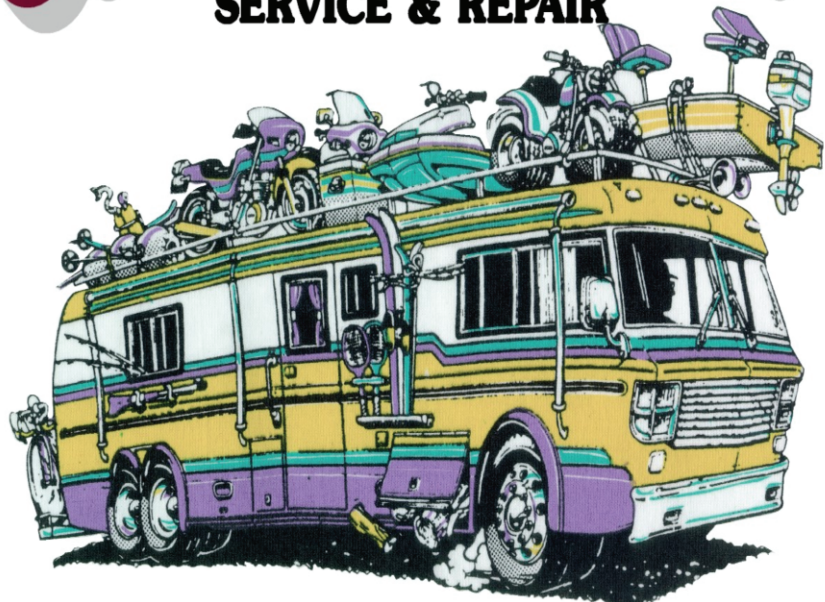
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Volunteers package soup and dinner for those in need at Martha's Kitchen in downtown San Jose. File photo.

Food stamps

Continued from page 8
 outreach at resource fairs and back to school nights, and has hired a CalFresh higher education liaison to help students sign up for food stamps.

County Food Systems Manager Cayce Hill said a major part of the county's strategy to tackle food insecurity is to get more eligible households enrolled in CalFresh.

"CalFresh is pretty widely known to be one of the most efficient and effective anti-hunger programs," Hill told San José Spotlight. "We need to be maximizing it." Last year, Martha's

Kitchen started helping people sign up for food stamps. With donations and funding down, the nonprofit hasn't been able to keep up with demand. This year, the county did not provide the organization with any funding.

Martha's Kitchen has had to slash services within the county. Earlier this month, it had to cut meal programs to nonprofit Amigos de Guadalupe, which houses homeless families in hotels.

"Unfortunately, the pandemic faded away but the demand for food never dropped. It always stayed elevated," Lee said. "People are going un-nourished and it's going to come back and bite the county."



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School bonds and parcel taxes

Continued from page 4

least 90 days in advance of the election date.

See also: Parcel tax elections in California

As of 2017, California was the only state that allows parcel taxes as a method for funding schools.

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, local taxes, including parcel taxes, accounted for 25 percent of public school funding in California in the 2016-2017 school year. The majority of school funding came from the state government, accounting for 60 percent throughout the state. The remaining 15 percent of school funding came from federal, local miscellaneous, and lottery funding.

Per-pupil spending varies by school district based on several factors, including how state and federal grants are allocated. The implementation of a parcel tax can also increase per-pupil spending in a district. Between 2008 and 2017, the majority of all approved school parcel taxes were concentrated around the San Francisco Bay Area. See *Parcel tax elections in California* to learn more.

Information on bonds presented by school districts (same source)

In California, school bond elections are local ballot measures that ask voters to decide on whether the school district that is sponsoring the measure should be allowed to issue bonds and to incur the additional indebtedness that bonds bring with them.

All public school districts in California are allowed to refer bond issues to the local ballot.

California also has a statewide school building program known as the School Facilities Fund, which is supported by statewide bond measures, such as Proposition 51 in 2016. Statewide bond measures require a simple majority to pass.

Local school districts can also issue school construction bonds and levy property taxes to pay for them, as long as the voters in the district approve.

Prior to 2001, districts needed two-thirds supermajority vote approval to pass local general obligation bond measures. More than 40 percent of local school bond ballot questions failed. In November 2000, California voters passed Proposition 39. Proposition 39 reduced the supermajority needed to pass a bond issue ballot question from 66.67 percent to 55 percent. Proposition 39 also imposed restrictions on the allowable amount of the bond and included accountability requirements. Since the passage of Proposition 39, districts have had the choice of whether to seek a two-thirds supermajority approval or to comply with the additional restrictions to qualify for the 55 percent approval requirement.

So, the thing to know is that local parcel taxes require 2/3rds vote to pass and the bonds presented by schools or the State of California require 55 percent to pass

It is very important for voters to know that local school parcel taxes and local school bonds are paid for by the isolated local area of voters (For parcel taxes, any exemption is available, upon application to the District, for any parcel used as an owner-occupied principal residence of persons 65 years of age or older)

Some school districts such as San Jose Unified School District are asking the local people around the schools for well over a billion dollars on their school bond that gets new low cost buildings for teachers to live in and more.

ONE BILLION DOLLAR LOCAL BOND

This new proposed one billion dollar bond

is alarming to me due to the repercussions of this hard tax on local homeowners and others. I am concerned increased local taxes may raise rents and more.

The voters may not realize, in my opinion, that the State of California pays for some bond measures and this one billion dollar bond measure by San Jose Unified is to be taxed only to the local community which surround each school.

First, here is the State of California 10 billion dollar bond (if passes paid for by the State of California).

PROPOSITION 2 -- AUTHORIZES BONDS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACILITIES, LEGISLATIVE STATUTE (EXAMPLE OF A STATE WIDE BOND PROPOSAL WITH LEGISLATIVE STATUTE)

Authorizes \$10 billion in state general obligation bonds for repair, upgrade and construction of facilities at K-12 public schools (including charter schools) and community colleges. To read more see your general election voting pamphlet.

Here is an example of a local school district (starting with the one billion dollars, the San Jose Unified School District ask local taxpayers spend which will take years to pay off. Note: the San Jose Unified School District Measure R includes the proposal of building low price homes or apartments for teachers to use in this one billion dollar local school bond (\$1,150,000,000), which if passed will be paid for by the local residents.

MEASURE R – SAN JOSE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL SAFETY AND IMPROVEMENT BOND OF 2024

“Measure R is a bond measure that would authorize the issuance of \$1.15 billion in bonds for facility improvements. The tax rate for Measure R would be limited to \$60 per each \$100,000 of a property's assessed (not market) value. If approved by voters, funds from Measure R could be used to:

- Replace and update campus safety systems
- Update classroom technology and infrastructure
- Repair old electrical systems
- Upgrade classrooms and labs for science, technology, engineering, math, career technical education, and multipurpose use
- Provide affordable housing to attract and retain teachers and staff members”

School Bond Measure

55% Vote

If measure is adopted then the school district will issue \$1,150,000,000 in bonds at legal interest rates, levying \$60 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation (approximately \$81,000,000 annually) while bonds are outstanding, with independent citizens' oversight, annual audits, and all funds stay local

Concluding thoughts from writer

So, I begin to wonder if local voters know and understand that they will be paying taxes for local parcel taxes and local bonds. It is not free to the taxpayers. I wonder if homeowners are fully aware about the proposed local bond of San Jose Unified School District of over one billion dollars which if passed will result in \$60 dollars per each \$100,000 of a property's assessed (not market) value for local taxes in that area (to learn more go to the school district website)..

To review all proposed bonds and parcel taxes for local school districts go to: <https://vote.santaclaracounty.gov/list-local-measures-0>.

Ballotpedia is a nonprofit and nonpartisan online political encyclopedia that covers federal, state, and local politics, elections, and public policy in the United States. Their website is Ballotpedia.org



HG Nguyen, Milan Balinton, Josue Gonzalez, George Sanchez and Joshua Harrington shared their viewpoints at a Franklin-McKinley School District candidate forum on Oct. 2, 2024. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

Silicon Valley school board candidates are divided on LGBTQ+ issues

By Lorraine Gabbert

San José Spotlight

Candidates running for a Silicon Valley school board shared starkly different viewpoints on LGBTQ+ issues at a forum this week, disagreeing on whether teachers should notify parents about children's preferred pronouns and gender identity.

There are two seats up for grabs in November on the five-member Franklin-McKinley School District board. Trustees Milan Balinton and George Sanchez are both running for reelection and face four challengers.

The candidates with the most votes will win the seats.

Balinton, Sanchez and their challengers — Josue Gonzalez, Joshua Harrington and HG Nguyen — met with voters at a Wednesday candidate forum sponsored by a collaboration of nonprofits, including the Billy DeFrank LGBTQ+ Community Center committee. Candidate Hong Ha Hoang was absent.

“We want people to be mindful about who they're voting for,” Gabrielle Antolovich, board president of the Billy DeFrank LGBTQ+ Community Center, told San José Spotlight. “I want them to know who the candidates really are. Do the candidates represent what they want for their children and their neighborhoods?”

In recent years, Silicon Valley school board races have been stacked with more conservative candidates who look to ban certain books, change curriculum or oppose ethnic studies and critical race theory, which recognizes how racism is embedded in laws, policies and institutions. Some also oppose gender-neutral bathrooms and want schools to contact parents if a student identifies as transgender or changes their name at school, Antolovich added.

Balinton, Nguyen and Sanchez support a new state law that prohibits schools from disclosing a student's gender identity or sexual orientation to anyone without their consent — including their parents. Gonzalez and Harrington don't agree and believe parents should be notified.

“Students have been ostracized, kicked out of their homes and harmed within their own households regarding who they are,” Balinton said.

“Teachers create safe spaces in our schools and children need to trust them. It's about protecting our children and teaching them how to advocate and speak up for themselves,

so when they do decide to share that information ... they will not feel they will be turned away by their own parents.”

Harrington countered that parents deserve to know what's happening with their children.

“We still need to think about parents' rights,” he said. “We are the parents. We need to know what's happening with our kids. It's our right to know and guide our kids.”

Gonzalez agreed, saying a child's safety is primarily a parent's responsibility.

“People need to communicate with parents no matter what, because that's their children,” he said. “We need to have transparency for parental rights and the safety of our students.”

Nguyen said she is grateful for her children sharing private information with her, a teacher or professional.

“When you share with me something you can be assured it's kept confidential,” she said. “Teachers, that is their private information and if they trusted you and they shared with you, you need to keep it confidential.”

Candidates at the forum shared what academic initiatives they'd invest in.

Balinton, executive director of the African American Community Service Agency, said he would invest more in special education and science-related field trips.

Gonzalez, who works in project management, said schools need to stop passing children who aren't at grade level. He said tutoring should be available during school hours.

Harrington, a real estate business owner, said teachers need to be more hands on with students rather than relying on Chromebooks. Nguyen, a political refugee, mother and wife, advocates for English immersion programs and additional resources for students. Sanchez, a lifelong educator and retired principal, wants to invest in teachers and focus their in-service lessons on student achievement.

Citing safety and privacy, all candidates support schools having accessible, single-occupancy, gender-neutral restrooms for students, teachers and staff.

“We know the issues and some of the challenges our LGBTQ+ kids face,” Sanchez said. “We want to make sure we have services for them. We know about the high rate of suicide among LGBTQ+ kids. We make sure our staff is trained and provides resources ... so they feel safe in any schools they attend.”

The school board governs 16 schools across San Jose and includes nearly 6,000 students.

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Roaring Camp Bus Trip Redwood Forest Steam Train Thursday, October 24, 2024



Arrive: 8:15am
Depart: 8:30am
Return to ACC approx. 4pm
\$96.00 per person (Non-refundable cancellation after October 9, 2024).

Travel through trestles, through towering redwood groves and up winding narrow-gauge grade to the summit of Bear Mountain as conductors narrate the history of Roaring Camp, the railroad and the forest.

In the 1880s, narrow gauge steam locomotives were used to haul giant redwood logs out of the mountains. Roaring Camp's steam engines date from 1890 and are among the oldest and most authentically preserved narrow-gauge steam engines providing regularly scheduled passenger service in America.

Lunch will be provided: Chicken Platter includes side salad, western-style ranch beans, corn, roll and butter, unlimited soft drinks, coffee, hot tea, water and marshmallows to roast.

Sign up MWF from 8-10am in the lobby of the Almaden Community Center.
For questions, contact Donna at dsmith95118@sbcglobal.net or 408 266-4938



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