

Memorial commemorates 197 lives lost to homelessness in Santa Clara County this year **SEE PAGE 6**



Compensating leaders
How much are Silicon Valley's top service nonprofit leaders paid?
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Fight over San Jose Vietnamese museum puts future in limbo
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JAN. 10 - JAN. 23, 2025 ■ VOL. 42, NO. 2

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Rep. Panetta announces student winners of the '24 Congressional App Challenge

Anjali Vashist from Evergreen Valley High School wins first place

By William Bellou
Publisher

United States Representative Jimmy Panetta (CA-19) announced the student winners of the 2024 Congressional App Challenge for California's 19th Congressional District.

First place went to **Anjali Vashist** from Evergreen Valley High School (pictured) for the creation of an innovative app, Volunteer-Connect. This award highlights
See APP AWARD, page 10

East San Jose business district gets \$100,000 grant to beautify the area

By Vicente Vera
San José Spotlight

Alum Rock business advocates are getting a \$100,000 grant to not just beautify the neighborhood, but also solidify the East San Jose district's cultural identity.

Councilmember Peter Ortiz said he secured the grant during the city's recent budgeting process to support the efforts of the Alum Rock Santa Clara Street Business Association — an organization where he served as public policy advisor before being elected to the San Jose City Council in 2022. Funds will be used toward beautification, trash removal and public art. More permanent fixes include collaborations with artists on murals and art installations, along with building a gateway structure for the city's first cultural district, "La Avenida" at Mexican Heritage Plaza.

"Alum Rock is more than just a business corridor," Ortiz said Wednesday. "It is a living, breathing reflection of the rich cultures, dreams and entrepreneurial spirit that makes East San



Alum Rock Santa Clara Street Business Association Co-President **Connie Alvarez** celebrated a \$100,000 grant to beautify the East San Jose district on Dec. 18, 2024. *Photo by Vicente Vera.*

Jose so special. This grant empowers the Alum Rock Santa Clara Street Business Association to lead these transformative initiatives and drive our community whole."

Danny Garza, a longtime East San Jose advocate, said the gateway structure proposal has been on his mind for 22 years, and it means more than just a physical landmark.

"It's going to be a symbol of identity and belonging that we are somewhere here in San Jose," he said. "We're not just building structures, we are collaborating and telling people to come join us."

The Mexican Heritage Plaza celebrated its 25th anniversary ahead of Wednesday's grant announcement. While the gateway structure

is a benefit to the community's efforts, representatives with the plaza's School of Arts and Culture said they are still fundraising to fully establish La Avenida. Plans are underway to build at least 100 homes near the plaza, a Gardner Health Services facility, plus commercial space for small businesses and nonprofits.

Jessica Paz-Cedillos, director of the School of Arts and Culture and San José Spotlight columnist, told San José Spotlight last month the school wants to honor the legacy of late Community Development Director Chris Esparza by making sure support for La Avenida doesn't waiver.

"La Avenida was an undertaking that he felt
See BEAUTIFICATION, page 8

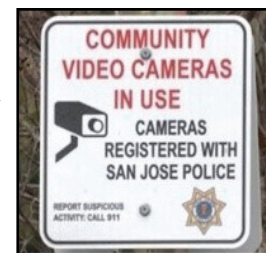
Beall receives commendation

Having previously worked for Jim Beall during his time at the Senate, it was a "surreal experience" for City Councilmember Domingo Candelas to present him with a commendation for his decades of public service. At 28, Beall was the youngest person elected to the San Jose City Council where he championed parks, community centers, and transportation infrastructure. "Jim has mentored and guided students, young professionals, and public servants everywhere," Candelas said.



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Security Camera Registration with the San Jose Police Department is now available. The registration program enables CAM registrants who are using video in an



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Times **Community News**

Fight over San Jose Vietnamese museum puts future in limbo

By **Brandon Pho**
San José Spotlight

Charges of nepotism and suspicious bank withdrawals surround a fight for control of San Jose's Viet Museum in History Park – a crown jewel for Little Saigon.

The 147-year-old farmhouse, which stores hundreds of precious artifacts, photographs and art of Vietnam War refugees, now hangs in limbo over a dispute between the museum's visionary, Loc Vu, and the nonprofit Immigrant Resettlement and Cultural Center that manages it.

The problems started when Vu announced his plan to retire as the nonprofit's executive director, effective Jan. 1, and proposed appointing his son-in-law as his successor. The six other board members overseeing the nonprofit refused to go along with the suggestion, raising concerns about nepotism and calling for an open selection process.

The disagreement opened a rift where Vu accused his board members of meeting secretly and violating the nonprofit's bylaws, while board members claim Vu locked them out of the nonprofit's bank account and paid himself \$45,000 without their approval. The board also accused Vu of changing the museum's locks and installing new security cameras.

"These were transparent, temporary loans from my family to address cash flow issues, documented and approved by colleagues long before succession discussions. Claims of impropriety are false and defamatory," he told San José Spotlight.

He said he didn't intend on his son-in-law succeeding him permanently.

"My son-in-law Minh, a long-time donor and volunteer, worked with two senior colleagues to draft a transition plan. Minh would temporarily assume my role while a talented team was recruited, after which he would step back, and IRCC would select a new executive director," Vu said. "I supported this plan, but disagreements arose, with some wrongly labeling it as nepotism. It's important to note the role is unpaid and focused solely on service."

Vu, in letters to IRCC board members, has challenged the board's legitimacy because it hasn't followed its own bylaws for decades, which call for an 11-member board and annual elections.

While Vu maintains that IRCC is still a legitimate organization, he's questioning the board's authority over the museum and threatening a lawsuit. Vu sent a cease-and-desist letter to the nonprofit board which was later circulated with other community members, saying he spent \$350,000 of his own money on the museum over 30 years "without receiving a single cent from the city."

The museum's architect is now trying to rally other community members to his side – calling for public demonstrations.

"I never expected to be involved in this miserable dispute," Vu wrote in Vietnamese to community members.

The nonprofit is now competing with Vu for community support, and its leaders are forced to defend themselves as authorized decision-makers for the museum.



Loc Vu, a former colonel in the Army of South Vietnam who came to the U.S. with his family in 1976, has spent more than 30 years building the Viet Museum's collection. *Photo by Tran Nguyen.*

IRCC board member and community organizer MyLinh Pham said she respects Vu's contributions to the community.

"While we recognize his intention to pass his leadership to the next generation, it raised important concerns," Pham told San Jose Spotlight. "The board's primary responsibility is to ensure fairness, transparency and accountability in all manners of governance. Choosing a family member without an open process created unease. It didn't align with the nonprofit's best practices."

Tue Phan, a retired San Francisco immigration court judge and IRCC board member, said Vu prevented other board members from reviewing the nonprofit's bank account activities by removing their names from the account. In a public letter that's being circulated in the community, Phan also accused Vu of threatening to dissolve the nonprofit board, which responded by voting to terminate Vu ahead of his retirement.

"No matter how long he or she works or how much credit he or she claims, a CEO cannot view a nonprofit organization as a private inheritance that can be passed on to children and grandchildren," Phan wrote.

The board has eight members but only six are regularly involved at meetings, according to Phan. The nonprofit board hasn't followed its own bylaws for decades, including requirements that the board hold annual elections. Pham said the bylaws were drafted 40 years ago by refugees with limited knowledge of nonprofit governance and that it's operated for decades with fewer members – with no objections from Vu until now.

Pham said the organization is taking steps toward improving its governance structure. She was elected to the board in a formal Aug. 23 meeting alongside Viet Museum Director Hong Cao and Vietnamese American Roundtable Executive Director Phillip Nguyen.

"Over the years, the Immigrant Resettlement & Cultural Center operated on the trust of Mr. Vu, informal practices that worked well for a long time," Pham said. "But the board has to step in to protect this institution that reflects the community's values and aspirations."

At 92 years old, Vu said he remains passionate about the museum, but his physical limitations require a leadership transition.

"As the museum's founder, I am committed to ensuring it is led by capable individuals dedicated to its growth and preservation, not by any seeking control without accountability," he said. "It is a vital community asset that must be protected for future generations."

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With music as enchanting and lavishly colorful as the title character, *The Firebird* is the perfect way to **celebrate the new year.**

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For questions, please contact: **Kristina Ravo**, Coordinator History-Social Science and Civic Engagement at kravo@sccoe.org • (408) 453-4354

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How much are Silicon Valley's top service nonprofit leaders paid?

By B. Sakura Cannestra
San José Spotlight

In Silicon Valley, top executives at the helm of multimillion-dollar nonprofits are paid well — not unusual in a region where competition is steep and the cost of living is one of the highest in the nation.

Experts say compensating nonprofit workers and their executives is vital to maintaining the sector's health, given it makes up 15% of the state's gross domestic product.

San José Spotlight examined the most recent Form 990 public tax filings for the region's biggest direct service nonprofits — organizations that provide hands-on assistance, such as food banks and homeless shelter operators. This list doesn't include nonprofits that don't provide a direct service, such as the Sobrato Foundation or SV@Home.

CalNonprofit CEO Geoff Green said salaries for nonprofit employees are often over-scrutinized, including executives. He said misconceptions about volunteerism make nonprofit worker compensation seem shameful to the gen-

eral public.

"It goes to this notion that we all have in the back of our heads, that when you're doing nonprofit work, you shouldn't be paid for that," Green told San José Spotlight. "That's a really toxic, dangerous notion in my opinion."

Ann Skeet, senior director of leadership ethics at Santa Clara University Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, said the range between Silicon Valley's top 15 nonprofit executives is typical for larger nonprofits.

"You want to make sure that you're paying people fairly and in a way that allows them a decent wage ... but you don't want to overdo it, because you have donors and the public who are saying and have certain expectations around where resources are being directed," Skeet told San José Spotlight.

Skeet said an organization's size and complexity factors into deciding compensation.

The top earner — Second Harvest of Silicon Valley CEO Leslie Bacho — received \$438,225 in fiscal year 2022-23, when the organization's overall budget was approximately \$286 million.

Here are the salaries of Silicon Valley's 15 highest paid service nonprofit executives, based on the most recent tax information.

Silicon Valley's 15 top paid direct service nonprofit leaders

Second Harvest of Silicon Valley CEO Leslie Bacho took the No.1 spot in the direct service nonprofit sector. In fiscal year 2022-23, the food bank had a total budget of around \$286 million.

	Nonprofit Name	Top Officer	Salary	Fiscal year end date	Number of Employees
1	Second Harvest of Silicon Valley	Leslie Bacho/CEO	\$438,225	June 30, 2023	362
2	Destination: Home	Jennifer Loving/President/CEO	\$392,463	December 31, 2022	18
3	The Health Trust	*Michele Lew/CEO	\$351,763	June 30, 2023	114
4	Bill Wilson Center	*Sparky Harlan/CEO	\$349,856	June 30, 2022	303
5	LifeMoves	Aubrey Merriman/CEO	\$309,744	June 30, 2023	528
6	First Community Housing	*Geoffrey Morgan/President/CEO	\$308,570	December 31, 2022	32
7	Abode	*Louis Chicoine/CEO	\$300,007	June 30, 2023	898
8	HomeFirst	*Andrea Urton/CEO	\$272,688	June 30, 2022	505
9	Martha's Kitchen	William Lee/Executive Director	\$253,500	June 30, 2023	44
10	Sacred Heart Community Service	Poncho Jose Guevara/Executive Director	\$225,439	June 30, 2023	175
11	Life Services Alternatives	Dana Hooper/Executive Director	\$196,763	June 30, 2022	246
12	Sunnyvale Community Services	Marie Bernard/Executive Director	\$194,500	June 30, 2022	64
13	West Valley Community Services	*Josh Selo/Executive Director	\$188,724	June 30, 2023	49
14	Community Services Agency of Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills	Tom Myers/Executive Director	\$184,200	June 30, 2023	52
15	Hunger At Home	William Ewell Serner/CEO/Founder	\$182,103	December 31, 2022	28

* These individuals are no longer the head executive as shown on this list.
Table: B. Sakura Cannestra • Source: Internal Revenue Service • Created with Datawrapper

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Memorial commemorates 197 lives lost to homelessness in Santa Clara County this year

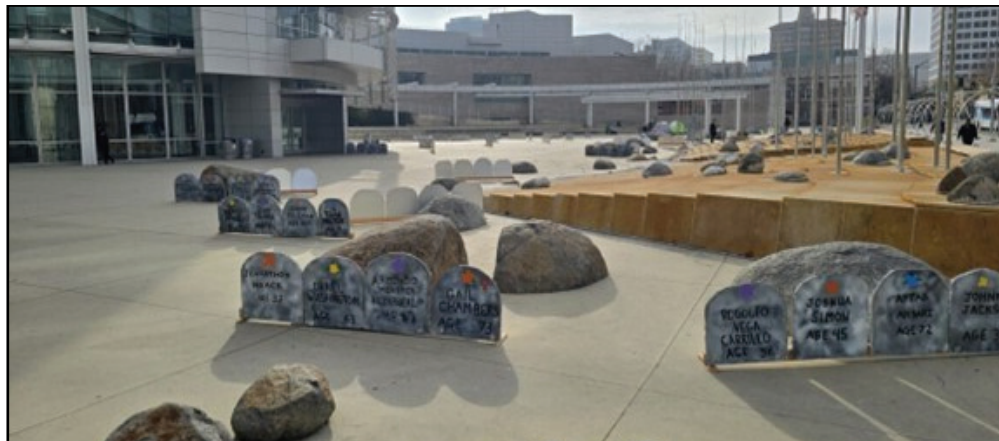
By William Bellou
Publisher

HomeFirst hosted a Homeless Memorial to honor 197 individuals who died while homeless in Santa Clara County in 2024 on December 20th at the Boccardo Reception Center.

The event was a remembrance of those lost, highlighting the urgency of addressing homelessness, inspiring action to tackle the ongoing crisis.

HomeFirst's CEO, Andrea Urton, spoke, as did Mayor Matt Mahan, and following this, Reverend Andy Ligot led a short service. The name of every person who passed away was read during the memorial, giving all who attended a moment to reflect upon each life lost.

Numerous local elected officials and HomeFirst staff read the names of those who died aloud one-by-one. For many of the 197 individuals being remembered, the memorial was the only



Tombstones in front of San Jose City Hall commemorate the 197 homeless persons' lives that were lost. Photo courtesy of Todd Langton.

commendation they received.

This year's deaths show a three percent decrease compared to 2023, reflecting the progress made locally in reducing homelessness.

However, the numbers also reveal the ongoing challenges, as 197 lives were lost, spanning from newborns to centenarians.



Conductor: Carlos Vieu. Photo courtesy of Symphony San Jose.

Symphony San Jose presents *The Firebird Suite* January 25-26 at California Theatre

With music as enchanting and lavishly colorful as the title character, *The Firebird* is the perfect way to celebrate the new year at the California Theatre January 25-26.

This suite comes from the 1910 ballet that launched Stravinsky's international career. Opening the program is Sibelius' most-famous composition, *Finlandia*, evoking the struggles of his native homeland with equal parts ominousness, pride, and festivity. Brahms' *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* is one of the famed Romantic composer's most popular works. Argentinian conductor Carlos Vieu brings Sonia Possetti's spirited *Bullanguera* from his homeland to complete this program.

THE PROGRAM

Jean Sibelius: *Finlandia*
Johannes Brahms: *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*
Sonia Possetti: *Bullanguera*
Igor Stravinsky: *The Firebird Suite*

ARTISTS

Conductor: Carlos Vieu

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Times **Local News**

IN MEMORY
Max A. Wright

1932-2024
Resident of
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Max A. Wright passed away peacefully at his home the morning of November 15, 2024. He was preceded in death by his parents Keith and



he returned home from service he pursued a 45 year career in banking at Bank of America and Bank of the West retiring in 1997 as V/P & Branch Manager at the Cambrian Park Branch. After retirement he went to work for Sportsman's Supply for 20 plus years. Max was a Past President of the San Jose East Rotary Club & Paul Harris fellow.

Max enjoyed golfing, bowling, traveling and watching the SF 49rs. He also enjoyed volunteering as a Sunday greeter for the Grange Community of S.F.O.A.

To my wonderful husband Max: How much do I love you? "All my Life and More". Max was a kind and gentle soul, who will be missed.

Family and Friends attended a Memorial Mass, Dec. 13 at St Francis of Assisi in Evergreen. In lieu of flowers, donations to your favorite charity are appreciated.

Beautification

Continued from page 1

passionate about, and we feel a moral responsibility, not just for him, but for the community, to ensure that we are able to champion some of his first cultural districts," Paz-Cedillos said. Portuguese community leader Davide Vieira said Esparza's vision for the district stretched from King Road to Alum Rock Avenue, and the future 28th Street/Little Portugal BART Station.

"It will be something special when the School of Arts and Culture and our community realizes Chris Esparza's dream in the coming years,"

he said.

Connie Alvarez and Helen Masamori, co-presidents of the Alum Rock Santa Clara Street Business Association, shared in the celebration held in front of the Little Portugal mural. They said their portion of funding will be spent on the group's cleaning and safety initiative because blight plays a huge role in the community's perception, pride and economic growth.

"Another vital part of this initiative is the removal of outdated tree lighting fixtures across 50 trees. Removing them will improve the overall appearance in our streetscape and restore the natural viewings of our green spaces," Masamori said.




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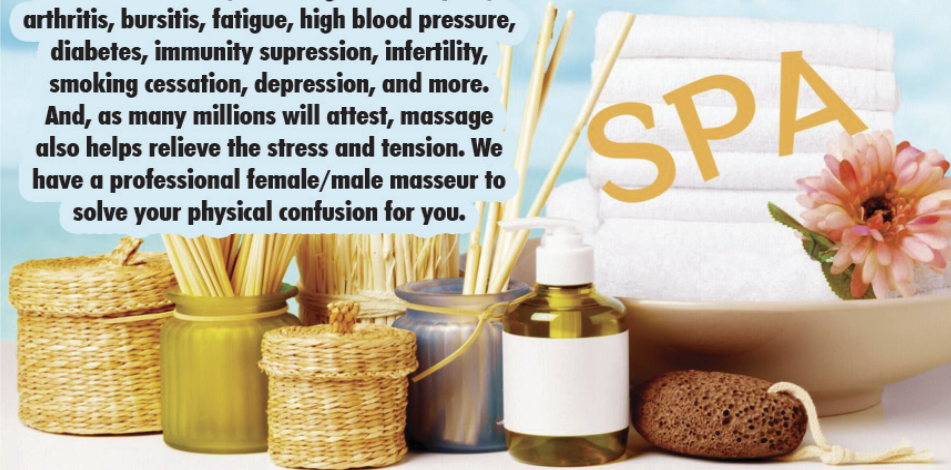
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App Award

Continued from page 1
Vashisht's outstanding achievement in leveraging technology to create a meaningful impact on her community. Ms. Vashisht will also be invited to the #HouseofCode Event in Washington D.C. in the Spring of 2025 alongside other student innovators and have VolunteerConnect exhibited in the U.S. Capitol.
Vashisht's app, VolunteerConnect, utilizes a chatbot interface to connect students with volunteer opportunities based on their personal preferences and location. By sharing their skills, hobbies, and interests, students can find activities that not only fulfill community service requirements for college applications

but also allow them to explore careers and gain valuable experience in fields like healthcare, environmental science, and the arts.

Aarv Kaashyap from BASIS Independent Silicon Valley received second place for creating the app Sustainable Companion, which empowers users to understand their carbon footprint and offers insights into local climate change trends, including temperature shifts and environmental impacts. Saket Pathak from Silver Creek High School received third place for creating the app MindfulMood, which uses journaling and interactive activities to help kids track and manage their emotions.

The Congressional App Challenge promotes student innovation, creativity, and engagement

in computer science through competition and the creation of a new digital application or "app." This year, 48 students from across California's 19th Congressional District participated in the challenge, developing 31 original apps tackling issues ranging from sustainability, education, and social justice. Student participants included middle and high school students.

"Our country appreciates the talent, drive, and ingenuity of our students to discover new technological solutions to real-world problems," said Rep. Panetta. "I am proud to continue to provide an outlet through the annual Congressional App Competition for students to not only test their digital skills but also see how they can make a difference in our community. Congratulations to all the participants in the App Challenge for creating amazing apps that exemplify California's 19th Congressional District's leadership in tech and deep-rooted commitment to service."

Winning apps are eligible to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol building and featured on the House of Representatives website, www. House.gov.

Officially launched by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2015, the Congressional

App Challenge is a nationwide effort that allows students to compete against their peers by creating an application or "app," for desktop/PC, web, tablet, mobile, or other devices. The Congressional App Challenge is open to all middle and high school students in California's 19th Congressional District.

For more information on the Congressional App Challenge and how to get involved in future competitions, visit: <https://www.congressionalappchallenge.us>.

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God is One
ੴ ਸਿਕ ਹੈ
Rab Ik Hai

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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.SanJoseGurdwara.org>

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Sunday 9:00 AM, Sunday 11:00AM, Igbo Mass - Second Sunday of the month 12:30 PM
Mt. Hamilton Grange - 2840 Aborn Road
Sunday 9:30 AM
The Villages Gated Community (Cribari Auditorium) Sunday

8:15 AM
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