Happy Hollow hosts Santa Clara County families for 'Friendsgiving' SEE PAGE 3



Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority receives state funding to bolster wildfire prevention work SEE PAGE 4



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San José Unified identifies ideal elementary characteristics, moves to implementation

Board to vote on next step in collaborative schools of tomorrow initiative

By William Bellou
Publisher

he San José Unified School District has completed the first step of the district's Schools of Tomorrow initiative.

The Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee, composed of parents/guardians, teachers, staff, and union representatives, has completed its work and delivered its final recommendation to the Board of Education regarding the characteristics of the ideal elementary school.

The Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee recommends that elementary schools, using negotiated student-to-staff ratios, have 3 classes per grade level, Special Day Classes placed in clusters of 3-4, and 4 classes per grade level at schools that offer both a standard structured English immersion program and a bilingual program. These characteristics are foundational, the Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee writes, because of their "impact on social and academic opportunities for students, teacher planning and collaboration, the likelihood of combination classes, and the availability of additional support offerings for students and staff"

The San José Unified Board of Education recently reviewed the Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee's recommendation and established a Schools of See ELEMENTARY, page 9

Local volunteers help birds — and native habitats — thrive

By Michele Dexter Special to the Times

Have you ever thought about placing a bird-house in your yard?

Thanks to a dedicated network of local volunteers, thousands of birds in the Santa Clara Valley have found safe places to nest—and many residents have discovered the joy of watching them.

For 24 years, longtime Almaden Valley volunteer Lee Pauser has been installing and monitoring nest boxes for 18 species of cavity-nesting birds, from Western Bluebirds to American Kestrels and Barn Owls. His careful customization and meticulous record-keeping have helped launch more than 23,000 birds into the world—many from species once





Left: Lee Pauser servicing a barn owl box in 2023. Right: Barn owl with owlets. Photos by Amanda Newlove

depleted by development.

Across 24 nesting seasons, Pauser has documented 7,500 broods containing 36,000 eggs. Of those, 31,000 hatched, and 23,000 nestlings successfully fledged. At his busiest, Pauser monitored 530 nest boxes across city and county parks, golf courses, a community garden, and

even IBM's local campuses.

All this data is reported to Cornell University's NestWatch program and the California Bluebird Recovery Program, where it supports academic research on bird populations.

Pauser hasn't done this alone. Over the years, See BIRDS, page 8



Crystal's Daughter **Tatiana** as a party girl in the Original San Jose Nutcracker production in 2023. *Photo Credit - Diane Rose*

Alumna and Castillero Middle School Principal Crystal Campbell returns to The Original San José Nutcracker

Returning to The Original San José
Nutcracker stage after more than
30 years fills Crystal Campbell with
both trepidation and immense gratitude.

A principal at Castillero Middle School and lifelong supporter of the arts, Crystal's connection to San Jose Dance Theatre (SJDT) runs deep. Performing in the Nutcracker as a child shaped her passion for dance, her work ethic, and her sense of self. Now, decades later, she experiences the magic anew—from the wings, watching the Christmas tree rise and the cookies scurry under Mother Cupcake's skirt—with the same awe she felt as a young dancer.

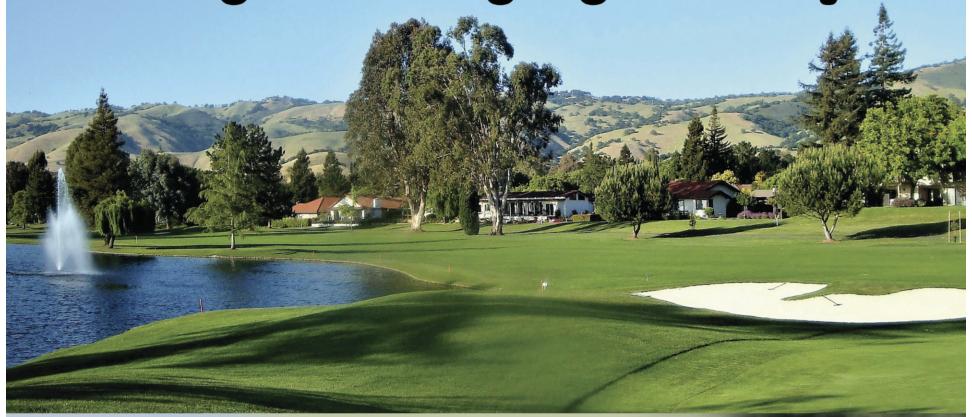
She remembers those early days vividly: the downtown San Jose studio in its big brick building, the excitement of Saturday rehearsals, and the rush of stepping onto a massive stage for the first time. "It's indescribable," she recalls.

Among her many cherished memories, being cast as a Little Lost Cookie stands out—her first taste of the spotlight. Later, as a Party Girl and one of Clara's friends, she found herself swept up in the enchantment of the holiday story, rehearsing alongside dancers like Jennifer Watson and Holland McBride, memories that still bring her joy.

Today, Crystal experiences The Nutcracker from a new perspective—as a parent. The production has become a treasured family tradition spanning generations. Her younger brother Roberto once performed as a Party Boy; her daughters Logan and Tatiana have each taken on multiple roles, from Soldiers to Cookies and Party Girls. Most recently, her niece Ximena has joined the cast as a Soldier and Cherub. "The Nutcracker has been part of our family's rhythm for See NUTCRACKER, page 9

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Times Community

Happy Hollow hosts Santa Clara County families for 'Friendsgiving'

By Lorraine Gabbert

San José Spotlight

anta Clara County families and advocates in the court system had a recent opportunity to enjoy time together over a Thanksgiving meal at a local park and zoo.

Families in the Dependency Wellness Court and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs shared in a "Friendsgiving" Nov. 15 at Happy Hollow Park & Zoo in San Jose. The event — hosted by Happy Hollow Foundation through a Healthy Living grant from Kaiser Permanente — aimed to give positive experiences to people participating in the dependency wellness court and their families.

The Friendsgiving feast provided struggling children and families a supportive environment ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Happy Hollow Foundation Executive Director Rhonda Nourse said such uplifting childhood experiences are critical to recovering from trauma. Nearly 200 people attended the event this year, double the amount from 2024. Nourse said she was humbled by attendees sharing what they were thankful for, from clothing and food to sobriety and a roof over their heads.

"It showed that the foundation has a very meaningful role in these people's lives — just providing this one simple meal ... and a positive experience around a holiday," Nourse told San José Spotlight. "These families have a choice between putting food on the table or a day spent at Happy Hollow. (Through the foundation), kids have an opportunity to create more memories, have access to nature and a day of play in the park and zoo with each other."

In addition to Friendsgiving, the foundation offers free Senior Safari and Title I events targeting historically underserved



Santa Clara County families and advocates in the court system had the opportunity to enjoy time together at Happy Hollow on Nov. 15, 2025. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

communities. Within a 5-mile radius of Happy Hollow are more than 50 Title I schools, Nourse said, but most of the children have never been to the park and zoo.

Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Erica Yew pre-

sides over the dependency drug treatment court. She said being in a setting where children can run free and parents can play with them is special.

"This is a human story of survival, strength and the love of the community," Yew told San José Spotlight. "That is the recipe for healing."

In addition to the families and children invited to the event, a support network of people who went through the wellness program and mentor parents such as Krystal Joye attended. Joye, 43, grew up in the foster care system and said she struggled with addiction for 35 years.

"Anything that could happen to a girl happened to me before I was four years old,"

she told San José Spotlight. "I've been institutionalized. I grew up in juvenile hall."

She said going through the court wellness program changed her life. She's applying to San Jose City College to take classes in alcohol and drug studies and social work to help others.

Yew said there's a correlation between childhood trauma and depression, incarceration, mental health issues and addiction.

"We can intervene in a court setting and help families heal," she said. "We had one mom who had ... her rights terminated to the children. She came into family wellness court and was healed. She got her kids back. Then she started to have relationships with her relatives who had adopted some of her kids. Then she could have a relationship with those kids and the family. That healing really does counteract the pain, the damage and the trauma."

Melissa Elias, another mentor parent who attended the Friendsgiving event, uses her lived experience to uplift others and encourage them to seek help.

Elias said she had five of her children taken away due to her substance abuse, and it took her nine months to get sober. "I was broken, I was lost. I just couldn't get clean," she told

San José Spotlight. "I didn't want to face the pain. I didn't want to do the work, and I didn't know how. I was pregnant with my sixth baby, and when I had delivered him, I had two and a half days sober. I knew they were going to call my social worker and take this baby."

Elias stayed in the hospital for about two weeks due to pre-eclampsia and got clean. After being released, she checked into rehab and said she "fought like hell" to get her kids back.

"I was scared out of my mind, but I did it because I wanted my babies," she said. "Now I have a daughter in college. My daddy just passed away from cancer, but I got to take care of him. That's the beauty of recovery. We learn from it and we become stronger."

Excerpts for a younger audience



Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge **Erica Yew** (left) said being in a setting where children can run free and parents can play with them is special. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert



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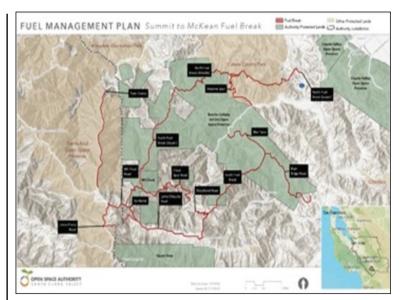
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority receives state funding to bolster wildfire prevention work

alifornia State Coastal Conservancy grant enables
Authority to purchase new equipment, implement proven methods to reduce potential fire hazards

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) has received a \$240,000 grant from the California State Coastal Conservancy for a fuel break implementation project in western Santa Clara County. The grant, approved today by the Coastal Conservancy's board, enables the Authority to purchase specialized equipment that will allow Authority staff to reduce and remove flammable vegetation along the ridgeline roads in western Santa Clara County, Fuel breaks like this have been scientifically shown to reduce the spread of wildfire and helped contain the Loma Fire above Morgan Hill in 2016.

"Proactive fuels management is a critical part of caring for open space to protect the communities we serve in Santa Clara County," said Andrea Mackenzie, general manager of the Authority. "We are grateful that the Coastal Conservancy acknowledges the importance of building wildfire resiliency for our lands and communities via this generous grant. We are now ready to increase our wildfire management work, in accordance with the County-wide Wildfire Protection Plan, starting in January."

The Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies the western part of the county as the location of most flammable vegetation, or fuels. Removing or reducing these fuels and building fire breaks helps limit the spread of wildfire into residential and urbanized areas. In western Santa Clara County, nearly 58 miles of fuel breaks—areas where flammable vegetation or combustible materials have been removed, making it harder for wildfires to spread—run along ridge roads. They rise as high as the Loma Prieta and Mount Umunhum summits, descending into dense, fast-growing, low-lying chaparral and scrub before grading into oak woodland at lower



elevations. The fuel breaks need proactive maintenance to remain effective.

"Healthy natural lands are vital in preventing and reducing catastrophic wildfires and the Authority has a proven track record of implementing projects like this in Santa Clara County," said Amy Hutzel, executive officer for the California State Coastal Conservancy. "As the threat of cata-

strophic wildfires increases, we are proud to support the acceleration of the Authority's wildfire resilience work to protect communities, critical roadways and open space in some of our region's most vulnerable landscapes."

The source of funding comes from a block grant to the Coastal Conservancy from the California Department of Conservation under *Continued, next page*

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Healthy natural lands are vital in preventing and reducing catastrophic wildfires.

its Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). The goal of the RFFCP is to increase regional capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects that improve forest health and fire resiliency.

Next Steps

The Authority's newly funded project focuses on a four-mile section of the fuel break in need of heavy-equipment work (see map). Originally established in 1985 by CALFIRE, the miles-long western Santa Clara County fuel break protects the watershed at the Chesbro, Uvas and Lexington Reservoirs, while also protecting multiple residential neighborhoods.

The fuel break implementation project is scheduled to start in January 2026, and this equipment will enable the Authority to continue ongoing wildfire prevention work. This work will complement the Authority's ongoing conservation grazing efforts, further reducing flammable vegetation and enhancing landscape resilience.

San Jose Dance Theatre announces community guest artists for 60th anniversary 'Chimney Sweep' cameo roles in The Original San José Nutcracker

n celebration of the 60th Anniversary of The Original San José Nutcracker, San Jose Dance Theatre is delighted to introduce a special new tradition: Guest Community Chimney Sweeps, featuring notable local leaders and beloved public figures in cameo appearances throughout Nutcracker weekend.

Traditionally, chimney sweeps have long been considered symbols of good fortune — folklore says that shaking a chimney sweep's hand brings luck for the year ahead. In this milestone production, each guest will bring their own magic, personality, and San José spirit to this whimsical role, honoring both the past and future of this beloved holiday production.

"This is such a joyful way to honor our community while celebrating 60 years of Nutcracker magic in San José," says Elizabeth Sweeney, Executive Director of San Jose Dance Theatre. "Each guest sweep embodies the collaborative, community-centered heart of SIDT."

San Jose Dance Theatre is proud to welcome the following guest chimney sweeps:

Guest Chimney Sweep Appearances

- December 13, 2:00 PM: Viscount Michael North San Jose Restaurateur
- December 13, 7:30 PM: Elizabeth Sweeney SJDT Alumna & Executive Director
- December 14, 2:00 PM: Ron Murietta Arts Industry Support Director, San Jose Office of Economic Development & Cultural Affairs
- December 20, 2:00 PM: Shan Berries Radio Host at Mix 106.5, Founder of Shades By Shan Cosmetics & The MamaBerries Foundation
- December 20, 7:30 PM: Holly Barr Realtor & Founder of Willow Glen Charm
- December 21, 2:00 PM: Matt Mahan Mayor of San José

Each guest artist will appear live on stage in their scheduled performance, contributing to the joy, humor, and theatrical sparkle of this long-standing holiday tradition.

This special addition is part of San Jose Dance Theatre's ongoing



The Original San José Nutcracker, San Jose Dance Theatre is introducing a special new tradition: Guest Community Chimney Sweeps, featuring notable local leaders and beloved public figures in cameo appearances at Nutcracker weekend performances. Among those appearing this year are (left to right) **Elizabeth Sweeney**, Executive Director of San Jose Dance Theatre; **Nicole Haskins**, Artistic Director of San Jose Dance Theatre, San Jose Mayor **Matt Mahan**, and **John Torrey**, Board President of San Jose Dance Theatre.

celebration of its Diamond Jubilee year, honoring the generations of dancers, families, and local supporters who have made The Original San José Nutcracker a cherished cultural landmark for six decades.

About San Jose Dance Theatre

Founded in 1964, San Jose Dance Theatre is a premier nonprofit arts organization dedicated to excellence in dance training, performance, and community enrichment. For 60 years, SJDT has brought the magic of The Nutcracker to Silicon Valley and provided world-class ballet education to young dancers across the region.



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Santa Clara County education board looks to reform amid probe

By Brandon Pho

San José Spotlight

anta Clara County Office of Education leaders say a series of probes they ordered into their former superintendent found contract favor-itism and improper use of funds – though the full reports have not been made public.

The Board of Education took a first swing on policy changes stemming from those findings, which focus on former superintendent Mary Ann Dewan, recently at their regular board meeting.

The board's majority voted to fire Dewan without cause in October 2024. When the decision sparked backlash from residents and state lawmakers, the board accused Dewan of impropriety and misspending – hiring independent investigators to examine Dewan's leadership. Last December, Office of Education officials said they handed over information to local law enforcement.

County prosecutors don't see a case.

"We carefully reviewed the evidence and concluded that there was insufficient evidence to charge a crime," Sean Webby, a spokesperson for District Attorney Jeff Rosen's office, told San José Spotlight.

It's unclear when the Office of Education plans to release the independent investigators' full report. At Wednesday's meeting, a lawyer for the school district said there is no central report— and that redactions have to be made before



Santa Clara County Board of Education President **Maimona Afzal Berta** (left) and fellow trustee **Don Rocha** on Wednesday. Photo by Vicente Vera.

their release.

For now, the findings are summarized in a numbered list that was attached to Wednesday's board meeting agenda. They accuse Dewan of using public funds for non-office purposes and awarding contracts in a way that suggested favoritism. They also say her office sought to censure certain board members and redirected grant money beyond the grant's original purpose. An earlier federal investigation found more than \$135,370 earmarked for the preschool education program Head Start was misallocated to pay for non-Head Start staff and credit card purchases.

"The Board's 'findings' are meritless, malicious and baseless attacks, unsupported by any evidence," Dewan told San José Spotlight. "I have no knowledge of any wrongdoing and fulfilled all of my duties with integrity and within the statutory framework of my role."

 $\label{lem:power_power} Dewan\ said\ the\ county\ superintendent, whether appointed or elected, is a constitutional$

officer with broad and independent authority to enter into agreements and contracts.

"This pattern of public attacks, mischaracterizations, and personal targeting is harmful to the institution and discourages talented educators from serving our students," Dewan said. "I remain committed to the values that have guided me throughout my career and my belief that every child deserves access to opportunity, excellence, and support."

Kathleen King, a former Board of Education trustee who opposed Dewan's firing, said she's puzzled by the format of the investigation findings.

"I can't figure out what the findings are trying to say. I have been in county positions for many years and I have never seen findings like this that don't include a report that explains the findings. It makes me wonder about the credibility of these claims from the organization that did the evaluation," King told San José Spotlight.

Joseph Di Salvo, a Board of Education trustee from 2008 to 2024 and one of the four who voted to fire Dewan last year, is calling on the Office of Education to release the full report.

"I think it's essential they give all the information the public deserves to see, as soon as they possibly can," he told San José Spotlight.

Yet he said the summarized findings align with his own experience with the former superintendent.

"She did not respond to board members requests for information about budget and staffing," Di Salvo told San José Spotlight. "Her lack of transparency and being forthcoming about inquiries that individual board members made about things related to the budget were very concerning to me and very different from all the superintendents I worked with as a prin-

cipal, teacher and school board member."

Trustee Don Rocha went further during remarks at Wednesday night's meeting.

"In my 30-plus years of public service, I have never seen a public agency that was as focused on serving interests other than the public and its constituency as this agency was," Rocha said. "Take that as you like — I'm entitled to my opinion as is everyone else who is here today. But the evidence speaks for itself, unless you choose to look the other way."

The current board is now trying to turn the page. A committee of three board members — one of whom voted to fire Dewan while the other two either opposed or did not vote in favor of it—is behind the recommended reform measures up for approval tonight.

The proposed policy changes include setting new governance standards for the superintendent role, now filled by Superintendent David Toston, as well as the disclosure of confidential information. Another measure would clarify that board members can obtain outside legal representation – a point of contention during the legal battles that followed Dewan's ouster.

"These recommendations respond directly to the issues identified in the independent investigations," Board of Education President Maimona Afzal Berta, who supported Dewan's firing, told San José Spotlight.

Berta, who was on the policy reform committee, said the proposed measures draw from best practices from other public agencies.

"I look forward to the Board's consideration and adoption of these reforms so we can move forward with clear, student-centered, and publicly responsible oversight of administrative practices," Berta said.



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San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan invites community to historic plaque unveiling at City Hall on December 4

San Jose to Celebrate 60th Anniversary of the Grateful Dead

By Sean Eastwood

Times staff writer

Mayor Matt Mahan and San Jose Rocks announced a momentous celebration marking the 60th anniversary of the Grateful Dead's first performance under that iconic name.

The city will unveil a commemorative bronze plaque at San Jose City Hall on Dec. 4 above the footprint of a house which once stood on South Fifth Street. In that building, Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, and Bill Kreutzmann made history on December 4, 1965, by playing their very first notes as the Grateful Dead.

"San Jose has an incredible musical heritage that deserves to be celebrated," said Mayor Matt Mahan. "The Grateful Dead didn't just start here—they launched a cultural revolution that spread throughout the Bay Area and the world. This plaque will serve as a permanent reminder to current and future generations that San Jose is where this legendary band first performed under the Grateful Dead name. I'm thrilled to invite our entire community to this free celebration on December 4th"

December 4th Event Schedule

All events are free and open to the public at San Jose City Hall, 200 E. Santa Clara Street: 4:00 PM – Event area opens at City Hall's South Plaza

4:30 PM – San Jose State Musical Jam Band Students Perform Greeting Songs

4:45 PM -• Muwekma Ohlone Tribal Land Acknowledgment

- Welcome from city leaders and San Jose Rocks Founder Dan Orloff
- The Story Behind the Story with Mark Purdy, San Jose Rocks historian and journalist
- Ira Meltzer shares his firsthand account

 $of organizing \,the \,December\,4,1965\,Acid\,Test$

- Special remarks from Trixie Garcia, daughter of Jerry Garcia
- Unveiling of the commemorative bronze plaque featuring the iconic Steal Your Face logo

5:15 PM – Drum procession leads to Sonic Runway

5:25 PM – Sonic Runway illuminates with light and sound

5:26 PM – Psychedelic light show projected onto City Hall rotunda and West Wing featuring historic Grateful Dead and Acid Test imagery

5:30–7:30 PM – Reception featuring rare Grateful Dead & Acid Test exhibit at Janet Gray Hayes Rotunda

Federal funds on the way to help upgrade VTA low-emission bus fleet

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) will receive \$20 million in federal funding for hybrid diesel-electric low-emission buses as it builds its fleet to help counter harmful environmental impacts.

VTA is one of 24 agencies across California to receive funding made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed in 2023.

"Replacing outdated buses with low-emission hybrids isn't optional—it's essential," said Carolyn Gonot, General Manager/CEO of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. "Government funding is critical to reducing harmful emissions, safeguarding public health, and ensuring our transit systems remain resilient for the future."

The federal Low-No Program helps transit agencies buy or lease U.S.-made low- or zero-emission buses and make critical facility, station, and charging upgrades to facilitate this transition. Transit agencies throughout California are tasked with converting to zero-emission/low emission fleets by the year 2040.

The funding is part of a nationwide federal investment of \$2 billion that will go to 165 transit projects in 45 states and Washington, D.C.

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San José Public Library reveals top checkouts of 2025

J Library members' reading trends feature a children's favorite as overall leader for a second year in a row.

As another year comes to a close, San José Public Library (SJPL) is excited to share the most checked out titles by its library members in 2025.

From humorous graphic novels to transforming historical fiction, this year's top picks celebrate the diverse interests of our community and highlight the library's pivotal role in fostering a love for reading and learning.

The following titles are the top checked-out books of 2025 at SJPL:

Taking the crown as

the most checked-out title in the "Adult" age group, Kristin Hannah's *The Women*, sweeps readers into a compelling coming of age story.

The prequel to *The Hunger Games, The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* by Suzanne Collins, remains the top pick for "Teen"

readers for two consecutive years.

Once again, a Dav Pilkey title shines on top in the "Children" age group, *Dog Man: The Scarlet Shedder*, was the most checkedout title for that age group.

Dog Man: The Scarlet Shredder by Dav Pilkey also claims the number one spot as SJPL's top checked out book across all age groups, genre, and formats, exemplifying the unquestionable popularity of the Dog

Man series. For a second year, author Dav Pilkey is one of only two authors listed in SJPL's top ten Children's booklist.

View the complete list of the San José Public Library's top ten borrowed books in the adult, teen, and children's age group at: sjpl.org/BestOf2025.

There, you can also view the top five checked out books in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese, regardless of age, genre and format.

SJPL serves over 760,000 li-brary card-

holders and recorded an impressive 8.1 million items checked out over the past year. To borrow items from SJPL, all you need is a library card, which is free, easy, and rewarding to have.

For more information, visit: sjpl.org/membership



KRISTIN

HANNAH

Birds

Continued from page 1

he has built a community of volunteers who now help maintain and monitor his many "trails" of boxes. Among them are Amanda Newlove, Steve Cassidy, and Jennifer Koga, who received recogni $tion\,along side\,him\,at\,the\,Almaden$ Valley Community Association's recent Thankful Together Cele-

bration.

Local craftspeople Bruce Watson and Chuck Wade build many of the boxes used on Pauser's trails and also supply nest boxes for groups such as the Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance, local scouts, and school classrooms. Residents can learn nest-box care and building through SCVBA programs.

The ripple effects of Pauser's work can be seen throughout the

community. In 2006, nest boxes he installed in Guadalupe River Park produced the first Western Bluebird nest in downtown San José in 50 years. Some residents have even reported bluebirds nesting in backyard boxes he provid-

Times Local News

Pauser has also assisted with Barn Owl rehabilitation, helping foster or release 107 rescued owlets in partnership with the



May 2025: freshly hatching Western Bluebirds. Photo by Amanda Newlove

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Happy Hollow Foundation is dedicated to preserving and enhancing Happy Hollow Park & Zoo so that it remains a community asset that is highly valued and accessible to all. Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley.

Volunteerism extends beyond birds. Steve Cassidy, a Santa Clara County Parks Land Steward, has spent five years restoring native habitat in Santa Teresa County Park. He has planted more than 800 native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, many grown from seed in his own backyard, and maintains an impressive 85% survival rate. Cassidy combines planting with invasive-species removal and even hand-waters young plants during the summer. He also monitors nest boxes in the park and recently took on 67 more from Pauser's trails.

Amanda Newlove, an avid birder and accomplished nature photographer, began monitoring 26 boxes in Santa Teresa Park in 2023 and now helps recruit and support new volunteers. Thanks to her efforts, Jennifer Koga monitors Pauser's 36 boxes in Guadalupe Oak Grove and Jeffery Fontana Parks, as well as Barn Owl boxes in Martial Cottle Park.

Together, these volunteers form a growing network committed to

supporting native birds and restoring local ecosystems. Their work shows how much can be accomplished when community members give their time—and their hearts—to nature.

Interested in helping local wildlife?

You can learn more about nestbox building, habitat restoration, and volunteer opportunities through local organizations such as the Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance.

A simple birdhouse in your yard might be the start of something much bigger.

About AVCA

The Almaden Valley Community Association (AVCA) is a nonpartisan, volunteer-led organization dedicated to helping residents understand and engage with the neighborhood issues that impact everyday life. Through open, educational forums and respectful dialogue, we connect residents with local leaders, subject-matter experts, and diverse viewpoints.

To learn more about AVCA, visit https://www.avcasj.org





Helpful Tips:

- Know how to download your camera
- When mounting cameras, please be aware of places where people may have a reasonable expectation of privacy (examples: their backyard or interior of their home)
- · Focus and mount your video on key points of entry or concern
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- Consider lighting around your cameras.

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OSC has opened a new program for women based upon equine interaction and equine-assisted-learning, designed to develop self-awareness and self-acceptance, confidence and resilience, and safe boundaries.

G.R.I.T. is for adult women led by OSC founder Landa Keirstead. The small group meets in 2 hour sessions, once per week for six-weeks

> Contact One Step Closer for more information and to enroll one.step.closer@sbcglobal.net 408-778-3567

Nutcracker

Continued from page 1 decades," she says. "It's such a gift to share the stage and the magic with my own children."

When her daughter Tatiana was cast as Clara this season, the moment was one of shared disbelief and emotion. "We were at the kitchen table with Tatiana's grandparents when we opened the SJDT email. We must have all seen the word Clara at the same time. I lost my breath and shed tears alongside my parents, who supported me through my own Nutcracker years." Watching her daughter take on such an iconic role brings a sense of wonder and pride. "It's hard to focus on my own role as a Party Scene Parent when Tatiana is dancing," she admits with a laugh. "Ballet is such a personal journey, and most of the time parents don't see that growth up close. It's a rare gift."

Crystal hopes Tatiana will savor every moment—from rehearsals to fittings to each magical performance. "She often says The Nutcracker is the highlight of her year. I hope she continues to feel that joy and gratitude."

As SJDT celebrates its 60th anniversary, Crystal is reminded of her own milestone performance—dancing in the 25th anniversary production. "I can't believe the remarkable legacy this show has built. To see my



The production features live music performed by the Cambrian Symphony under the direction of conductor **Scott Krijnen**.

daughter carry on the tradition in the 60th anniversary feels like a dream come true."

She's also seen how current production has evolved while maintaining its timeless charm. "I love that so much of the original choreography and tradition remain, but now there are even more opportunities for students to explore new roles and grow as dancers. The emphasis on consistent training and technical standards has made a real

difference in their preparation."

Crystal understands deeply the transformative impact of creative expression. "Performing in The Nutcracker inspired my own pursuit of excellence and dedication in all areas of life," she reflects. "I hope audiences feel the holiday magic and appreciate how the arts shape and enrich our children's lives." She especially values that the production features live music performed by the Cambrian Symphony under the direction of conductor Scott Krijnen, whom she knows from her work at Castillero. "It elevates the experience for dancers and audiences alike."

When asked about her favorite parts of The Nutcracker, Crystal smiles. She's always moved by the swelling music during the growing Christmas tree scene and the emotional depth of the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier pas de deux. Knowing that Tchaikovsky composed that section while mourning his sister gives it a poignancy that resonates deeply with her.

Some of her fondest memories are from backstage—Secret Santa exchanges, elaborate scavenger hunts, and moments of laughter with friends like Jennifer Watson and Melissa Orth. "Those little traditions are what made it all feel like family," she recalls.

Could she describe The Nutcracker in three words? "Magical. Timeless. Family."

Elementary

Continued from page 1

Tomorrow Implementation Committee. The committee will be tasked with executing what San José Unified communicated in September: using the identified characteristics as a benchmark when examining San José Unified's current school portfolio and determining next steps.

If approved, the formation of the Schools of Tomorrow Implementation Committee will mark a critical moment in the Schools of Tomorrow initiative, which is designed to better serve students and staff by proactively managing declining enrollment. Details on how to apply to join the committee or participate will be shared shortly after the Board's decision.

"The collaborative effort of the Schools of Tomorrow Advisory Committee has given us a clear, student-centered vision for the future of elementary education in San José Unified," said Superintendent Nancy Albarrán. "As we move into the implementation phase, our commitment remains to execute this initiative transparently, inclusively, and with respect for our students, staff, and community. Together, uniting as one community, we can and will elevate opportunities for all."



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guides Muslims to

practice Islam. . "Hufazik Allah Waeayilatak"" the English meaning is " May Allah (swt) protect you and your family" Please visit our website to learn more.



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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 Puniab 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

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share your presence with us so that together we may grow and share our gifts to help build God's Kingdom!



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HAVE SOME NEWS

TO SHARE?

Times Community News

Revolutionizing Irrigation: How drones are transforming agriculture in San Jose

By Matthew Frazier

n the heart of agricultural innovation, particularly in areas like San Jose, CA, drones have become pivotal in irrigation management.

As farmers and farming professionals strive to maximize crop yields while efficiently managing resources, drones equipped with cutting-edge technology have emerged as game changers.

The ideal drones for this task are not just flying devices; they are sophisticated tools packed with features that can revolutionize how irrigation is approached.

In irrigation management, one of the standout capabilities of mod-

ern drones is their use of multispectral and thermal cameras. Multispectral cameras capture a spectrum of light beyond the visible range, which helps identify plant health and stress levels. By analyzing this data, farmers can pinpoint areas that require attention, ensuring that every drop of water is used efficiently.

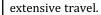
Thermal cameras are equally impressive, capable of measuring temperature variations across the field. This technology creates moisture maps that highlight which areas need water, ultimately leading to a more efficient irrigation strategy that conserves resources and maximizes yield. Integrating these sensor types is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the farm's health.

In addition to sensor technology, drones equipped with LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) offer a revolutionary approach to field mapping. By understanding the slope and elevation of the land, farmers can opti-

mize their irrigation systems to ensure that water is distributed evenly and efficiently, preventing runoff and wastage.

But not all drones are created equal, especially when it comes to size and capability.

For larger areas with varied terrain, a hybrid drone that combines the efficiency of fixed-wing designs with the agility of vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) is often the best choice. These drones can cover expansive fields quickly while still operating in confined spaces. On the other hand, multi-rotor drones are excellent for smaller plots, providing detailed analyses for specific areas without the need for



When assessing the best drones for irrigation management, a few models stand out for their superb performance and userfriendly features. The DJI Agras T40 and T50 are among the top contenders, explicitly designed for agricultural use. With impressive flight times of 20 to 60 minutes, these drones are built for maximum efficiency, enabling them to cover large areas without frequent recharging. Their advanced radar systems enhance terrainfollowing and collision avoidance, enabling precise navigation in complex environments.

The Parrot Bluegrass Fields drone is another remarkable option that features a multispectral camera capable of capturing extensive data in a single flight. This model is particularly appealing to those seeking to maximize the area covered per charge, making it a reliable partner in the quest for sustainable farming.



Water Wise
Matthew Frazier,
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