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EvergreenTimes



True Holiday Spirit

By Bryan Golden

Among other things, the holidays are a time of giving and receiving gifts. The question most often asked of people is, "what did you get?" Much less frequently asked is, "what did you give?" Invariably, the inquiries concern material gifts. Purchasing a gift can certainly be thoughtful and a wonderful gesture, especially when it's backed up by your actions.

However, the most valuable presents are those that aren't sold in stores. When you give your love, your time, help someone in need, aid another in solving a problem or overcoming an obstacle, you

See GIFTS, page 5



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Rep. Panetta Announces Student Winners of the 2025 Congressional App Challenge

By William Bellou

Publisher

United States Representative Jimmy Panetta announced the student winners of the 2025 Congressional App Challenge for California's 19th Congressional District.

Sixty students from across California's 19th Congressional District participated in the challenge, developing 44 original apps tackling issues ranging from sustainability, education, and social justice. Student participants included middle and high school students from 18 different schools.

First place went to Saumit Pathak from Silver Creek High School for the creation of an innovative app, LeftoSense. This award highlights Saumit's outstanding achievement in leveraging technology to create meaningful impact on their community. Saumit will also be invited to the #HouseofCode Event in Washington D.C. in the Spring of 2026 alongside other student innovators and have LeftoSense exhibited in the U.S. Capitol.

Saumit's app, LeftoSense, is a web application that utilizes AI to determine if the food is still safe for consumption or is beginning to spoil and then directs the user to the nearest donation point through Google Maps. By addressing concerns about food safety and making it easy to donate food, LeftoSense will help communities reduce food waste, stay healthy, and give people the ability to make better food choices.

Swarasai Mulagari from Evergreen Valley High School received second place for creating the app ShineUp, which serves as a starting point for people looking for clearer, healthier skin.

Bryan Hu and Jun Jiang from Valley Christian High School received third place for creating the app Billion, which uses AI to analyze complex government websites and documents to summarize them, helping people stay informed about government actions and political developments.

The Congressional App Challenge promotes student innovation, creativity, and engage-



ment in computer science through competition and the creation of a new digital application or "app."

"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 to see how they can make a difference in our community. Congratulations to all the partic-



ipants 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.

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

Big Ideas Contest open to Evergreen Valley High School students

By Sean Eastwood

Times staff writer

Evergreen High School (EVHS) PTSA wants to know what's your big idea?

PTSA is holding a Big Ideas Contest open to all current students of EVHS. If you were given \$10,000 that you had to spend on EVHS, what would you buy? Got an idea? PTSA wants to hear it!

Submit an essay on your best idea on how to spend \$10,000 on EVHS and if PTSA chooses your Big Idea, you and three friends will receive lunch on EVHS PTSA!

For more information on the contest rules, please visit: <https://forms.gle/6gNh6c6u5HEB5LKNA>

All entries are due by Friday, January 9, 2025. We can't wait to hear your Big Ideas!

BIG IDEAS CONTEST

EVHS PTSA is challenging students to come up with ideas on how to spend \$10,000 on EVHS!

If you had to spend \$10,000 on EVHS, what would you buy?

Entries due by Fri., Jan 9

CONTEST RULES

- Open to all students in grades 9-12.
- Essays must be original and written by the student.
- Judging criteria include originality, clarity, practicality, number of students it would benefit, and ease of implementation.
- Essays must not exceed 300 words.

WINNERS

All entries that are chosen will receive lunch on EVHS for you and three friends! Winners will be announced in January.

How to Register?

Visit: forms.gle/VPHCKvduwUvTJ9h57

Contact Information

For more information, please email evhsptsa@gmail.com

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San Jose residents to get rebates on energy bill in January

By Keith Menconi
San José Spotlight

Customers with San Jose Clean Energy, the city's primary energy provider, are set to get a break on their energy bill come January. With the company's reserves flush with cash, it has announced a plan to distribute \$25 million in rebates to about 330,000 of its customers.

"Energy costs were lower than expected in 2025, which allowed (San Jose Clean Energy) to build reserves beyond what is required for financial stability," company representatives wrote in a news release. "Because (San Jose Clean Energy) is community-owned, those dollars don't go to shareholders — they go back to customers."

The pot of rebate money will be split 50/50 between the city-backed energy seller's commercial and residential customers.

For residential customers, who make up the vast majority of the company's customer base, that comes to a one-time flat bill credit of \$40. The rebate will appear on their January PG&E bill as a separate line item labeled "SJCE Community Energy Credit."

Eligibility for the rebate extends to nearly all residential customers in good standing with the company as of Oct. 27, the release said. The one exception is the roughly 11,700 customers who have produced more energy than they



San Jose's solar project in Kern County. Photo courtesy of San Jose Clean Energy.

have consumed over the past 12 months, typically because they use solar panels. These customers will be excluded because they have already received surplus energy payments.

Meanwhile, commercial customers will receive rebates ranging from \$130 to \$3,760 depending on the quantity of energy they consume.

The city launched San Jose Clean Energy in 2019 as a means of providing residents with electric power from low-emission sources, including wind, solar, geothermal and hydro-electric. Today, the company sells energy to nearly all San Jose residents, though PG&E still transmits and distributes the power and also handles billing.

San Jose Clean Energy officials said the upcoming rebate is intended in part to offset the expected increase of a state-mandated fee paid by PG&E customers, which could begin Jan. 1.

"Issuing the credit now ensures that customers see a benefit on their January 2026 bills — typically a high-bill period — prior to the implementation of new (San Jose Clean Energy) rates in March 2026," San Jose Clean Energy Director Lori Mitchell wrote in a memo sent to the City Council.

A spokesperson for PG&E said its rates have declined over the past two years and are expected to drop again at the start of the new year.

City officials say San Jose Clean Energy has benefited from a mild summer this year, which helped reduce energy consumption and lower costs. With money pouring in, the company's rate stabilization reserve — which will fund the rebate payments — more than doubled over the last fiscal year, reaching \$106 million, according to the memo.

Councilmembers, who oversee San Jose Clean Energy, signed off on the rebate plan during their Tuesday meeting. During deliberations, Mayor Matt Mahan cheered the rebate and the modest financial windfall it will bring to residents.

"In a time when California's No. 1 concern is cost of living ... I am glad that we are showing that when we achieve savings, we can return those to folks and do our best to keep rates low," Mahan said at the meeting.

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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. Scan the QR code to learn more!

Times **Local News**

Eventful year noted: D8 youth sports expanded

By Domingo Candelas

As we wrap up another eventful year in District 8, I want to take a moment to thank everyone who contributed to Mary's 15th Annual Warm for Winter Coat Drive.

Due to the generosity of our community, hundreds of families and individuals in need will receive the warmth and security they deserve. I also want to extend my appreciation to everyone who came to Santa at the Square. Evergreen Village Square came alive with a jolly visit from Santa and activities from our community partners; what a wonderful way to end the year!

Many of you likely heard about the Black Friday shooting at Valley Fair Mall, a stark reminder of why upstream investments in youth programming and public safety are so essential. That's why, during this year's budget, I championed funding to expand youth sports in District 8 (shoutout to Mayor Matt for his support). With those dollars, and in partnership with the San Jose Earthquakes and several community organizations, we launched Saturday Night Lights (SNL). SNL is an after-school futsal program that gives

kids a safe, positive place to be on Friday and Saturday nights, when too many of our youth have limited options.

The results speak for themselves:

- 100% of 8th-grade participants were promoted to high school, including students previously at risk
- 30% increase in school attendance among participants
- Zero disciplinary incidents
- Stronger peer relationships and collaboration among all participants

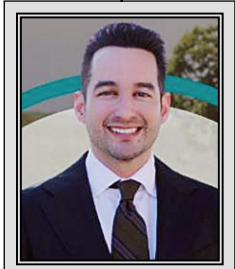
Investing in our youth, rather than criminalization, builds the foundation for long-term community safety and long-term success and should be a priority. Having experienced firsthand how transformative sports can be, I will continue to strongly advocate for the expansion of this program across San José and am committed to scaling SNL citywide in the upcoming budget. I also want to extend thanks to Supervisor Arenas, who secured \$40,000 in the County budget for Phase Two

of SNL, which we are working to launch in 2026.

City Hall will be closed through January 4th for the holidays. My office will be monitoring emails sent to district8@sanjoseca.gov. Please note that responses may be slightly delayed.

On behalf of the District 8 team, I wish you a joyous holiday season and a Happy New Year. We look forward to an exciting 2026!

It is my pleasure and privilege to serve as your City Councilmember.



Council Report
Domingo Candelas,
District 8 Councilmember

Gifts

Continued from page 1
give something priceless.

The true spirit of the holidays is giving. When you give, you receive. You can get anything in life you want by helping others get what they want. But only if you give without expecting anything in return. The impact of giving isn't limited to just the holiday season; it's something that has value all year.

The power of giving is often underestimated. When you give unconditionally, you don't just impact the recipient; you start a chain reaction. By brightening the life of one person you also affect all those who they then touch.

No gesture of giving or kindness is too small. Holding the door open at a store, helping someone carry groceries to their car, letting another car in front of you, saying please and thank you, and saying hello to a stranger you pass on the sidewalk, are some of the many things you can do daily.

For family and friends, your time is one of the most precious gifts you can offer. Are you there for others when they need you? Do you offer a hand without being asked? Do you help out when asked?

Too often, people get caught up in their own desires, thus losing sight of the needs of others. A person who tries to get through life by looking out for himself or herself first is invariably frustrated. Often this person views life as a competition to determine who can accumulate more.

On the other hand, those who are con-

cerned for the wellbeing of others are happier, more content, and more satisfied. By giving without expecting, they in turn receive the things they need.

Giving is a simple concept that works every time it is applied. There will be people who don't appreciate what you do, but it doesn't matter. You are giving without anticipating anything in return. Besides, there will be many more who are thankful for your efforts.

If you don't treat others well, buying a gift won't compensate for your behavior. The recipient might like what you give them, but it won't make up for your actions. You can't bribe someone to forgive the way you treat them with a present.

The best gift you can receive is the joy of making someone else happy. Being unselfish is a wonderful way to live. When you give with no ulterior motives, your actions are seen as genuine. Should you expect something in return, your behavior is always suspect. We all know people who do nice things only when they want something in return.

Make giving a daily routine. Don't start and end with the holiday season. Every day is a good day to do something nice. When people feel good due to your actions, you can't help but feel happy yourself. And that is priceless. The most significant action you can take is having a positive impact on the lives of others.

Bryan is the author of "Dare to Live Without Limits." Contact Bryan at Bryan@colum-nist.com or visit www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com Copyright 2024 Bryan Golden



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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
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Panetta, LaHood reintroduce bipartisan legislation to simplify retirement savings options for seniors

By William Bellou
Publisher

US Representatives Jimmy Panetta (CA-19) and Darin LaHood (IL-16) reintroduced the Retirement Simplification and Clarity Act.

The bipartisan legislation can provide more flexibility and clearer guidance to Americans navigating retirement savings decisions. The bill would empower individuals with options and digestible information for securing their financial futures.

“Navigating the various methods of saving for retirement can get very complicated, very fast,” said Rep. Panetta. “This bipartisan bill helps Americans plan for retirement by making the process simpler and giving them more flexibility. By helping Americans make informed decisions about their savings, we can strengthen their financial security for retirement and the years ahead.”

Specifically, the Retirement Simplification and Clarity Act would implement key recommendations from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to streamline the complicated 402(f) notice process. A 402(f) notice is the document provided to

individuals who leave an employer and request a distribution from their 401(k) plans. The notice outlines distribution options and their tax implications.

Under the bill, the IRS would be directed to redesign this notice in clear, straightforward language. The revised version would provide plain explanations of all distribution options, including rolling over savings into a new plan or leaving them in the current one, so that individuals can make well-informed decisions about their retirement funds. Additionally, the legislation would broaden in-service rollover options by allowing individuals aged 50 and older to transfer funds from their employer-sponsored 401(k) accounts into an annuity account.

Most relaxed cities in America listed

Some cities help residents slow down with green space, low congestion, and supportive community amenities, which is so important, especially during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season.

To help you find a little more calm this season, LawnStarter ranked America’s Most Relaxed Cities.

The website compared the 500 biggest U.S. cities across seven categories, including mental health, sleep, commute times, finances, and access to outdoor and wellness amenities, among 42 metrics.

Why is LawnStarter ranking the Most



Relaxed Cities? Our front yards welcome us home from stressful commutes and our backyards often are an oasis of calm amid everyday life.

How does San Jose stack up in some key categories for large cities (1st = Most Relaxed)

- Mental Well-Being Rank - 3rd
- Physical Well-Being Rank - 1st
- Environmental Stressors Rank - 3rd
- Financial Well-Being Rank - 6th

How does San Jose compare with other large California cities (1st= Most Relaxed)?

- San Francisco - 2nd
- Irvine - 4th
- San Diego - 5th
- Oakland - 14th
- Chula Vista - 22nd
- Los Angeles - 28th
- Sacramento - 40th

Ranking: America’s most relaxed cities:

- 1 San Jose CA
- 2 San Francisco CA
- 3 Seattle WA
- 4 Irvine CA
- 5 San Diego CA
- 6 Plano TX
- 7 Honolulu HI
- 8 Lincoln NE
- 9 Madison WI
- 10 Minneapolis MN
- 11 Raleigh NC
- 12 Chicago IL
- 13 Jersey City NJ
- 14 Oakland CA
- 15 New York NY
- 16 Washington DC
- 17 Austin TX
- 18 Portland
- 19 Gilbert AZ
- 20 Omaha NE






Helpful Tips:

- Know how to download your camera footage
- 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
- Exterior Mounting Location Options: Front door, rear door, side gate, driveway/front parking lot, second floor wide view and street view.
- Keep batteries charged in your cameras.
- Consider lighting around your cameras.

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<https://www.sjpd.org/community/crime-prevention/security-camera-registration>

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Times **Local News**

The best Christmas present

By Kevin Larsen
Special to the Times

As the holiday season approaches, I often find myself reflecting on its true meaning. With age comes perspective, and the spirit of Christmas prompts deeper contemplation each year.

One evening, a vivid dream brought me to the North Pole. Welcomed warmly, I joined the elves in their workshop and enjoyed a cup of hot chocolate topped with melting marshmallows. The camaraderie of the elves and the presence of Rudolph were reminders of the kindness found at the Pole.

Soon after, Santa Claus arrived, greeted respectfully by everyone. He approached me directly and posed a thought-provoking question: "What is the best Christmas present one can ever receive?" I suggested it might be something monetary, but he replied, "No, it's free and not everyone realizes what it is." Before I could inquire further, Santa departed, and his question lingered with me for years.

This season, upon reflection, I believe I have discovered the answer. My fondest gift

from Christmas was the time spent with family: my mother preparing a wonderful meal, my father gifting me a football and joining me for a game outside, and the warmth of family embraces. The uplifting music contributed to this atmosphere, underscoring that the intangible gifts of time, love, and care are truly invaluable.

Modern distractions, such as electronics, often detract from these simple pleasures. For many years, I struggled to express affection and appreciation to my loved ones. However, this year, I made a conscious effort to share smiles and care more openly, which I now understand to be the essence of Santa's message.

The lyrics for "Silent Night" (Stille Nacht) were written by Austrian priest Joseph Mohr in 1816:

*Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin, mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Silent Night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!*



PRESENTS

Hopelessly Romantic

Jan 24 & 25, 2026
at the California Theatre

We put our heart and soul into this concert. Sweeping melodies, intense emotions, and symphonic brilliance abound in this program of Romantic greats.

Schubert's overture, originally composed for *Rosamunde*, *Princess of Cyprus*, has since become a concert hall favorite, captivating audiences with its elegance and charm.

Geneva Lewis, recognized for her expressive artistry and technical mastery, brings **Sibelius'** spellbinding beauty to life. From its haunting opening to its fiery finale, it's a breathtaking journey through soul-stirring melodies.

The program concludes with **Schumann's** final symphony, where every note pulses with life, every phrase tells a story, and the music resonates with the full depth of human emotion. With its soaring melodies, rich orchestral colors, and bold harmonic progressions, this symphony stands as one of Schumann's most innovative and deeply personal works.

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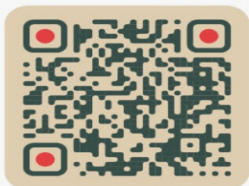
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Symphony San Jose presents Hopelessly Romantic Jan. 24, 25

Symphony San Jose presents sweeping melodies, intense emotions, and symphonic brilliance in this program of Romantic greats at the California Theatre January 24th at 7:30 p.m. and January 25th at 2:30 p.m.

Franz Schubert's Overture to *Rosamunde* was originally composed for the play *Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus* and has since become a concert hall favorite, captivating audiences with its elegance and charm.

Geneva Lewis, recognized for expressive artistry and technical mastery of the violin, brings the spellbinding beauty of Jean Sibelius' Violin Concerto to life. From its haunting opening to its fiery finale, it is a breathtaking journey through soul-stirring melodies.

The program concludes with Robert Schumann's Symphony No. 4 as every note pulsates with life, every phrase tells a story, and the music resonates with the full depth of human emotion. Its soaring melodies, rich orchestral colors, and bold harmonic progressions, make Schumann's final symphony one of his most innovative and deeply personal works.

AN ADDED ATTRACTION: Music Notes occur one hour prior to the concert in the main auditorium and includes an informative discussion, fun facts, insights, and interviews with featured guests. It is free of charge to concert ticket holders and designed to deepen the audience's appreciation of the

music to be featured during the performance.

THE PROGRAM:

Franz Schubert: Overture to *Rosamunde*
Jean Sibelius: Violin Concerto
Robert Schumann: Symphony No. 4

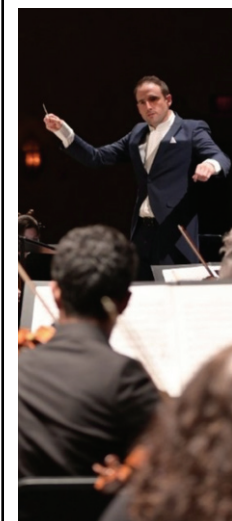
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Left: Conductor: **Francois Lopez-Ferrer**.
Right: Violinist **Geneva Lewis**

Times **Local News**

Flores named the next president of San Jose City College

Following a nationwide search, **Dr. Marilyn Flores** (inset photo) has been named the next president of San José City College (SJCC).

A first-generation college graduate and second-language learner herself, Dr. Flores has held a variety of leadership positions in her more-than 25 years of service within the California Community Colleges system, including most recently as superintendent/president of Rio Hondo College in Whittier, Calif.

"Dr. Flores is a distinguished educational leader with a proven track record of advancing institutions and improving student success," said Dr. Beatriz Chaidez, San José – Evergreen Community College District (SJECCD) chancellor.

"After reviewing dozens of applications from a deep and diverse pool of highly qualified candidates, conducting two rounds of interviews, and virtual candidate forums, I'm confident that we have identified the right leader for SJCC," Chaidez said.

Prior to her role at Rio Hondo, Dr. Flores served as interim president of Santa Ana College and vice president of academic affairs at Santiago Canyon College. Her prior experience also includes having served as both chief instructional officer



and accreditation liaison officer. Her experience also includes instruction and deanships at Santiago Canyon College and Las Positas College as well as earlier leadership roles at Riverside City College.

"I am deeply honored to step into this role, and I extend my sincere thank you to the chancellor and board of trustees at SJECCD for providing me with this wonderful opportunity to lead San José City College," Dr. Flores said. "I am honored to join an excellent team and to work alongside the students, faculty, and staff to support SJCC's innovative work and ensure access, equity, and success for the diverse community we serve. Together, I look forward to building on the College's strong foundation and advancing our shared mission with purpose and commitment."

Dr. Flores is scheduled to assume her new role as SJCC president on January 12, 2026.

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Times News



Best States for College Students

More than 19.4 million people are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, according to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics, with that number expected to increase. Over 40% of these students leave home to pursue higher education, facing challenges like balancing schoolwork, making friends, and adjusting to independent living.

To highlight the best states for college students and those that have more work to do, SmileHub compared each of the 50 states based on 28 key metrics. The data set ranges from graduation rate to the cost of higher education to the earning potential for college graduates.

You can find the complete results below. In addition, SmileHub boasts a selection of over 35,500 charities focused on education. If you want to support education but don't know where to donate, you can check out our picks for the Best Charities for Education in 2026.

Best States for College Students

Overall Rank*	Total Score	
10	North Dakota	55.13
11	Virginia	54.46
12	Wisconsin	54.33
13	Minnesota	53.66
14	Washington	52.75
15	Maryland	52.50
16	New Jersey	52.13
17	North Carolina	51.73
18	Iowa	51.51
19	Ohio	51.49
20	Nebraska	51.20
21	Florida	51.00
22	Nevada	49.50
23	Michigan	49.42
24	Indiana	49.38
25	Wyoming	49.09
26	Vermont	48.84
27	Georgia	48.60
28	Missouri	48.41
29	South Dakota	48.11
30	Oklahoma	47.89
31	Delaware	47.78
32	Colorado	47.62
33	Idaho	46.80
34	New Mexico	46.80
35	Arizona	46.39
36	Oregon	46.17
37	Alabama	46.08
38	New Hampshire	45.98
39	Kentucky	45.49
40	Maine	45.39
41	Kansas	44.45
42	Louisiana	43.96
43	Tennessee	43.82
44	Hawaii	42.67
45	South Carolina	42.28
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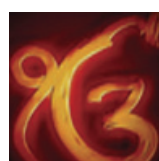


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