

CELEBRATE NEW BEGINNINGS

Wishing you a Happy New Year from the staff of the Times

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Willow Glen Times

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Redco Development has secured a permit to redevelop the property at 940 Willow St. in San Jose into a seven-story residential tower. Photo by Keith Menconi.

Willow Glen seven-story development moves forward

By Keith Menconi
San José Spotlight

Willow Glen residents are expressing bitter disappointment after a proposed seven-story residential building in their neighborhood gained a permit under a state law streamlining housing development.

The decision — made during a recent San Jose Planning Director Hearing — clears the way for San Francisco-based Redco Development to build 126 apartments on a roughly one-acre lot at the southeast corner of Willow Street and Kotenberg Avenue. The building will include more than 1,600 square feet of retail space and will replace an existing liquor store.

The proposed development at 940 Willow St. has faced an organized opposition campaign since Redco first proposed it in 2023. Critics argue the seven-story building is out of character with the surrounding neighborhood, which is largely made up of single-family homes. They also warn that the influx of more than 100 new residents would strain local resources.

"There are no buildings even half the height within a mile of it," Maren Sederquist, president

See DEVELOPMENT, page 9

'A charming little place': Willow Glen dog boutique is closing

By B. Sakura Cannestra
San José Spotlight

Willow Glen's main drag is about to lose its bark, and dog lovers are devastated.

Gussied Up Dog Boutique, at 1310 Lincoln Ave., will be closing once the store's inventory is gone. The store's landlord declined to renew the lease, citing major plumbing repairs.

"Hearing all the stories, how much this store means to people, that's the hardest part of closing," owner Kim Lipsett told San José Spotlight.

Lipsett said a main water pipe runs beneath the store and plumbing issues have been ongoing. The landlord tried to make repairs last year, opening part of the floor and sec-



Kim Lipsett, owner of Gussied Up Dog Boutique, said the shop will be closing once the store's inventory is gone, which includes fixtures, shelves and tables. Photo by B. Sakura Cannestra.

tioning off part of the store for use. Now, the space needs to be vacant for more extensive work.

For 21 years the store has offered a wide variety of specialty pet goodies, with many of its treats, toys and trinkets geared toward dogs and a handful for cats. It's well known

for its selection of baked treats, which come from a variety of the store's favorite dog bakeries.

Customers shuffled in and out the shop lamenting about the approaching closure. Some were accompanied by their canine

See BOUTIQUE, page 9

Check in on your fitness goals during AVAC's New Year Kickoff event

The family-friendly event features complimentary classes and fitness assessments to support fitness goals in 2026

Free body testing, pickleball clinics, kids' fun fitness program, 10-min neck and shoulder massage signups, and free prizes

By William Bellou
Publisher

With fitness among the most common New Year's resolutions, the Almaden Valley Athletic Club (AVAC) is inviting the community to its New Year Kickoff event, a day to check in on their fitness goals, try new activities and build healthy habits for the year ahead.

The community open house will take place on Saturday, January 10, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will feature complimentary InBody testing, a non-invasive body composition analysis; exercise machines learning and technique safe-



ty class designed to build confidence around new exercise equipment; a variety of strength and group fitness classes; pickleball clinics and open play; and NinjaZone fun fitness programming for kids. Participants can also sign up for a 10-minute neck and shoulder massage with an AVAC Massage Therapist and enter to win prizes throughout the event.

"When people set New Year's fitness resolutions, confidence and support make all the difference," said Jeff Doty, General Manager of

AVAC. "We created the New Year Kickoff event to give people a welcoming space where they can try new classes and learn how to build a routine that sticks based on their interests and fitness level."

New Year Kickoff Event Highlights and Schedule:

Assessments & Safety Class

- 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | Complimentary InBody Assessments

See AVAC KICKOFF, page 9

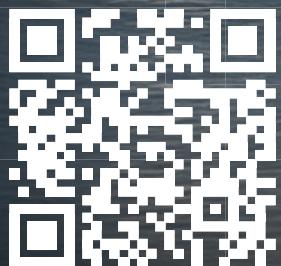
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A new year, a new beginning

By Bryan Golden

The New Year is a time of resolutions. It's a time when people commit to making a change in their life. Losing weight, changing jobs, saving money, making money, a new relationship, getting in shape, going back to school, or giving up smoking, are just some of the goals people set for themselves on January 1st.

Although it's possible for anyone to make a change or a new start, it takes determination, commitment, and persistence. A new goal must be your own. You have to really want it. Without a burning desire, your motivation will fade quickly. It's virtually impossible to make a change due to external pressure.

You may agree with what someone else wants you to do, but it's very difficult to succeed without an internal drive. So to successfully make a change or reach a goal, you have to make sure it's what you really want.

Don't start off on the wrong foot



by making excuses as to why you will probably fail. If you don't truly believe you can do it, you won't. People who do this will say something like, "I'll try to do it, but ..." Or you may hear, "I tried before and it didn't work but I'll give it another go." Before you begin, make sure the only things you are telling yourself are, "I can," "I will," and "I will do whatever it takes."

A new beginning is a three-step process. You have to first know what you want, formulate a plan to achieve it, and then take the necessary action to get it. Setting a spe-

cific goal is essential. The more detailed the better. If you want to lose weight, how much and by when? If you want a new job, what will it be and how much will it pay? If you want to save money, how much and how often?

Next, you need a plan. Just like your goal, your plan must be as detailed as possible. If you are going to lose weight, what will your menu be each week? Are you going to go on a specific diet, cut out certain foods, or just eat less? For finding a new job, what will be your strategy? Do you need a new

resume? Will you look online, in classifieds, use an employment agency, network, cold call, or all of these? If you want to save more money, in what areas will you cut back? Do you know where your money is going? Have you created a budget?

You want your plan to be doable. The smaller the steps are, the more likely you will be to succeed. Any time you feel a step is too big, break it down further. It doesn't matter how small each step is so long as you keep going and never give up.

Losing 20 pounds may feel overwhelming but dropping two pounds a month doesn't seem too bad. If you keep at it for 10 months, you will reach your goal. Saving \$3000 might appear beyond reach, but cutting \$9 a day on family spending is manageable.

Finally, you must take action. The best goals and greatest plans will go nowhere without action. The reason you divided your plan into small sections is so it would be easy to take action, one day at a time. All you have to do is keep going, until you achieve your goal.

Bryan is the author of "Dare to Live Without Limits." Contact Bryan at Bryan@columnist.com or visit www.DareToLiveWithout-Limits.com Copyright 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

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**Raquel Araki named
to the Dean's List at
Palmer College of
Chiropractic**

Raquel Araki of Willow Glen has been named to the 2025 summer trimester Dean's List at Palmer College of Chiropractic's Florida Campus in Port Orange, Florida.

Palmer College of Chiropractic, the first and largest college in the chiropractic profession, has campuses in Davenport, Iowa, and Port Orange, Florida.

Times Local News

New California state laws now in effect

By William Bellou

Publisher

Happy Diwali - Californians will get the day off to celebrate Diwali on November 9, 2026, one of the most important holidays of the year for Indian Americans and South Asian Americans.

Several bills signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom have recently taken effect.

The 2026 roster of new California legislation includes measures addressing artificial intelligence chatbot regulation, a prohibition on declawing cats, and the observance of a new state holiday.

California's New State Holiday

Beginning in 2026, Californians will observe Diwali as an official state holiday. Diwali, one of the most significant annual celebrations for Indian Americans and South Asian Americans, is scheduled according to the lunar calendar, resulting in a variable date each year. In 2026, Diwali falls on November 8, with the holiday observed on Monday, November 9. The Bay Area hosts the largest Diwali celebration in North America.

Food Delivery Services

Assembly Bill 578 introduces consumer protections impacting food delivery platforms such as DoorDash, Uber Eats, and Grubhub. Under this law, companies must provide full refunds via the original payment method for orders that are late, incorrect, or unfulfilled, rather than issuing credit towards future purchases. Additionally, platforms are required to offer customer support through human representatives, not solely automated responses. Itemized breakdowns of pay and fees must be presented, and tips or gratuities can no longer be used to offset driver base pay.

Limits on Immigration Enforcement at Schools

The Safe Haven Schools Act (Assembly Bill 49) enhances protections for students and their families by restricting immigration enforcement activities on K-12 campuses. School officials may only permit access to nonpublic areas by immigration agents when presented with a judicial warrant or court order. The sharing of student or family records with immigration authorities is also limited to instances with appropriate legal authorization.

Parking Fine Relief

Local governments in California now have the authority to reduce, suspend, or waive parking penalties for individuals demonstrating financial hardship, including those experiencing homelessness. Assembly Bill 1299, effective January 1, allows for applications for parking citation payment plans and applies statewide to local parking enforcement.

Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi stated, "California is home to over 750,000 K-12 students with undocumented parents, and fear of immigration enforcement disrupts their ability to learn and thrive. AB49 ensures that schools continue to be safe havens where all students, regardless of their family's immigration status, can pursue their education without the looming



threat of deportation."

Folic Acid Fortification in Corn Flour

A new statute requires most commercially sold corn masa flour and corn tortillas to be fortified with folic acid. Nutritional experts highlight the role of vitamin B in reducing birth defect risks during pregnancy. This change aims to help prevent severe birth defects annually, particularly among Latino households, which were previously exempt from federal fortification requirements. Exemptions apply to certain small producers and fresh masa made on-site.

Regulation of AI Chatbots

Senate Bill 243 mandates clear disclosure to users interacting with AI chatbots designed to simulate personal relationships. Platforms must implement safeguards against self-harm, including protocols for responding to suicidal ideation and providing crisis resources. Lawmakers characterize this bill as a pioneering effort to regulate emerging consumer AI technologies.

Insulin Price Cap

Effective January 1, large health insurers in California must cap copayments for insulin at \$35 for a 30-day supply. This requirement will extend to individual and small-group plans in 2027. Approximately two million Americans rely on insulin for diabetes management. The American Diabetes Association praises the legislation, stating it will offer critical financial relief to those dependent on insulin.

"For far too long, many Americans with diabetes have made the difficult decision to ration this lifesaving medication to pay for other necessities, such as groceries or rent," the organization said in a statement. "This legislation will provide much-needed financial relief for people living with insulin-dependent diabetes."

Requirements for Landlords

Assembly Bill 628 stipulates that, after January 1, tenants signing, amending, or extending leases are entitled to a stove and refrigerator in good working condition, unless otherwise agreed upon at lease signing. Landlords are also required to repair or replace these appliances within 30 days if subject to recall.

Employee Protections for Tips

Senate Bill 648 expands protections for employees receiving tips. Employers are prohibited from deducting credit card processing fees from tips and must disburse credit card tips no later than the next regular payday following the authorization of payment. Violations may be investigated by the state Labor Commissioner's Office, which is empowered to issue citations or initiate civil litigation.

Comprehensive Ban on Single-Use Plastic Bags

Legislation has closed loopholes in California's previous ban on single-use plastic bags. Thicker plastic bags, previously considered reusable, are now prohibited from supermarkets. Customers are encouraged to bring reusable totes on shopping trips.

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Times Community News

Reed Elementary principal apologizes after board trustee sings off-color 1940s song at Christmas program

By Sean Eastwood

Times Media staff writer

At a San Jose elementary school concert, School board trustee and teacher Brian Wheatley (inset) went off-schedule and sang an unapproved, old-timey Christmas parody, "Randolph the Red Gunned Cowboy" which he reportedly sang over the years at a Reed Elementary school concert held Dec. 19.

As soon as the Reed Elementary principal, Jennifer Ponzio heard the word guns, she swiftly cut him off. Subsequently she sent out an apology email stating that Wheatley had requested to sing a song that wasn't on the schedule, which Ponzio quickly deemed inappropriate upon hearing and jumped in.

"During the concert, which included eight classes, our Trustee requested to sing a song that was not part of the planned program," Ponzio says in the email, per NBC Bay Area. "The song, which dates back to the 1940s, included references that were not appropriate for a young audience, including mention of a weapon. After approximately 30 seconds, I intervened and stopped the sing-along."

"Our Trustee has acknowledged this lapse in judgment and has taken full responsibility for the impact of his actions," the email continues.

"As a school community, we also recognize the importance of clear expectations and safeguards for school events," Ponzio's email concludes. "Moving forward, we will be more intentional and diligent in ensuring that all performances and remarks fol-

low approved agendas and reflect our shared values, so that this does not happen again."

Wheatley's apology email

"I wanted to follow up with a direct and sincere apology for my lapse in judgement during the school sing-along," Wheatley's email states. "In an effort to bring levity and humor, I shared verses that were inappropriate, and I'm truly sorry for any disruption or distress this may have caused students, staff or families."



"I take full responsibility for the impact of my actions," he continues. "As a board member for the past seven years, I value the trust our school communities place in us and have deeply appreciated many positive moments we have shared at Reed events."

"Please rest assured it will not happen again" Wheatley concludes. "Moving forward, I will be more deliberate and thoughtful in every school setting to ensure my actions reflect our shared commitment to student safety and well-being."

Wheatley is currently running for re-election for the Trustee Area 4 seat.

Some parents from Reed Elementary discussed the matter on Reddit. The original poster said his five-year-old came home mentioning some old guy singing a parody of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," about a cowboy with a "big red gun."

Redditor, CommunicationMany507, a former student of Wheatley, said he and some of his students sang the song annually, including while caroling at local convalescent homes.

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Times Feature

San Jose uses AI to streamline government

By Vicente Vera

San José Spotlight

San Jose is a beehive of artificial intelligence innovation, with the city continuing its integration of the technology into everyday services to improve the lives of residents.

Now that AI is more accessible than ever, Mayor Matt Mahan along with other city officials are using it to identify problems and strategize solutions. San Jose is already using AI to optimize public transit, translate languages, review documents and find street issues like potholes, graffiti, broken street lights, illegal dumping and more — all before they're noticed by residents. And the city is just getting started.

"We can detect and predict when things need to be happening, and when things need to be resolved before they become a challenge or issue for the public," San Jose Chief Information Officer Khaled Tawfik told San José Spotlight. "This is really important to us since we are in the capital of Silicon Valley."

The city ramped up its AI integration campaign last November when it launched the GovAI Coalition to set standards for responsible use of AI in government. They have since recruited more than 300 cities and 700 government employees focused on the coalition.

"The goal is, instead of us walking alone and reinventing the wheel in every city, we believe we can come together, divide the work and tackle this challenge collectively," Tawfik said. "What we have proven in the last six months is

when government works together, we can achieve a higher quality of work."

While road safety is one of the main areas to see AI integration, San Jose backed away from data collection related to homeless people sleeping in their vehicles after advocates raised privacy concerns.

AI expert and San Jose State University Professor Ahmed Banafa said integrating AI will further San Jose's image as a "smart city."

Examples of using AI to make the city more efficient include traffic management, emergency responses, routine city business reviews and more.

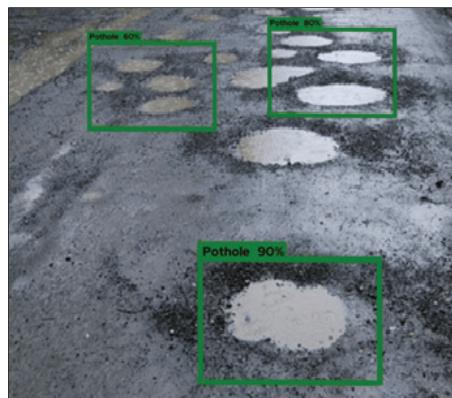
"There can be a chatbot or a ChatGPT device that will answer my questions in a very intelligent way — then take that information and report it," Banafa told San José Spotlight. "They can report if there's a lot of people asking about a topic on the city council agenda, why aren't people asking about a topic, what's the issue and examples like that."

He also said AI can be used to monitor the city's air quality, energy use, waste management and other services.

Many of the artificial intelligence companies in San Jose's own backyard are doing much of the work in developing new AI technology, Silicon Valley Leadership Group Vice President of Technology & Innovation Peter Leroe-Muñoz said, but information sharing between businesses, universities and the city make things move faster.

"So the city is able to draw on all of those resources, all of those innovators and all of those students to better understand and think through how a city can use AI to serve its residents," Leroe-Muñoz told San José Spotlight. "That is a tremendous advantage that most other cities around the country don't have."

AI integration shouldn't concern city workers however, he said, as the technology will be



San Jose is using artificial intelligence to detect potholes across the city. Photo courtesy of City of San Jose.

there to make employees more efficient and better at doing their jobs.

Ladris, based in Nevada City, California, has already partnered with nearly 100 emergency response agencies across eight states, Zlimen said.

The rollout of the technology fits with San Jose's broader embrace of AI tools to boost city governance. San José Spotlight previously reported the city is already using AI-powered software to optimize public transit, translate public meetings, review official documents and catalogue street-level blight and safety problems such as potholes, graffiti, broken street lights and illegal dumping.

Meanwhile, emergency planning is underway for the trio of high-profile sports events set to descend on the South Bay next year — Super Bowl 60, NCAA March Madness and FIFA World Cup. Santa Clara County has been holding drills preparing county hospital workers for active shooters, terrorist attacks and natural disasters like earthquakes.

Officials with the Santa Clara County Office

of Emergency Management told San José Spotlight that county agencies have not been involved in the rollout of the Ladris software in San Jose. However, Riordan said San Jose will share information produced by the technology for the purpose of coordination and public safety.

He also affirmed the software will not make any evacuation calls independent of the humans who operate it.

"We make the decisions, but it's a tool that helps us get the information together to make the right decisions," he said. "You can't just rely on AI by itself."

Zlimen said his company has used recent advances in machine learning technology to make predictive modeling software capable of incorporating new, unexpected streams of data.

He pointed to a novel application developed by San Jose officials during test runs of the software. As emergency planners modeled flood scenarios, they wanted to know where homeless residents living next to the city's creek beds might flee to as the waters rise. The software came up with predictions that could help city agencies more easily locate newly formed homeless encampments and direct resources accordingly, officials said.

It's an outcome that surprised even Zlimen's team, he said. Such flexibility will be essential for emergency planners, he argued, as the emergency risks cities face continue to morph and change over the coming decades.

"There's a huge amount of inputs into those problems, but very few focused metrics coming out," Zlimen said. "So this was able to (create) a process that was useful for the city, but also, potentially, a great example for how other cities may be able to tackle a similar problem."

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SAN JOSE, CA



Customers **Amaya and Ramona Ayon-Zarate** trying an outfit on their two-year-old dog **Xochitl**. Amaya said they'll miss the boutique's "homey" atmosphere. Photo by B. Sakura Cannestra.

Boutique

Continued from page 1
companions, who sniffed out their favorite toys and treats from the pastry case.

Willow Glen resident Amaya Ayon-Zarate held their 2-year-old dog Xochitl while their mother picked out different outfits for the dog. Ayon-Zarate said they've been bringing Xochitl to the store since she was a puppy, and they always appreciated the store's welcoming atmosphere and its central location in the community.

"You can go to PetSmart or Petco or whatnot, and that's fine, but ... it's so niche in this specific store, it's so homey as far as pet stores go," Ayon-Zarate told San José Spotlight.

Lipsett worked in the tech industry before opening the boutique. She was inspired by her chihuahua/minature pinscher Gus to open the store so she could spend more time with him.

Lipsett said the boutique's community of customers kept the store growing and successful amid rising workforce expenses.

Jane Curry has been coming to Gussied Up Dog Boutique since Lipsett opened. A longtime Willow Glen resident, she's seen businesses open and close along Lincoln Avenue for years, and said the boutique was one of the neighborhood's first "fun" stores.

"It's a really different atmosphere from going to some pet store in the mall, which makes it

fun and interesting and a charming little place," Curry told San José Spotlight. "This store fits this neighborhood."

It's unclear what'll happen to Gussied Up Dog Boutique once the store closes.

Lipsett said she plans to take a break and is considering opening an online store, but hasn't made a final decision. She's also gotten offers from other small businesses around Willow Glen to host a pop-up for the boutique.

San Jose District 6 Councilmember Michael Mulcahy, who represents Willow Glen, said the boutique was a great spot for the neighborhood's many furry residents and will be missed.

He said one of the challenges for businesses along Lincoln Avenue is the aging infrastructure. Many of the buildings are decades old and require maintenance upkeep.

"I would hope that this is an opportunity to again express to the community how important they are to the livelihood of these businesses," Mulcahy told San José Spotlight. "A lot of people flock to Valley Fair or Santana Row, it's a one stop shop for everything you need (and) it's pretty well managed, but small businesses are the strength of our city."

B. Sakura Cannestra is a freelance reporter who previously worked at San José Spotlight through the California Local News Fellowship. Contact her at bsakura-cannestra@gmail.com or @Saku-Cannestra on X.

Times Community News



The new housing development would replace a liquor store that presently operates on the site. Photo by Keith Menconi.

Development

Continued from page 1
of the Willow Glen Neighborhood Association, told San José Spotlight. "The density is such that it will affect traffic, parking, storm drains, sewers, the electric grid, internet service providers — the whole infrastructure is going to be stressed by this many people."

Under normal circumstances, the project might have been denied outright due to the site's zoning designation, which doesn't allow for residential development except projects that focus exclusively on below-market rate housing. However, Redco submitted its application under California's "builder's remedy" law, which took effect in January 2023 after San Jose missed the deadline to submit a state-approved housing plan.

As a result, the 940 Willow St. project — along with dozens of others submitted in the 12 months that the city remained out of compliance — can move forward even though they don't meet local zoning rules.

While the builder's remedy does allow local officials to step in when a project poses a public health or safety risk, Ruth Cueto, the hearing officer who oversaw the Dec. 3 planning hearing, said no such exceptions applied to the 940 Willow St. proposal.

"Therefore, I must approve this project, because there aren't any federal or state laws where this project can be denied," she said at the meeting.

Redco Development also used a state density bonus law, which effectively doubled the number of homes allowed on the site.

San Jose's housing plan commits the city to produce more than 62,000 homes by 2031. Of those, 15,000 must be affordable homes set aside for low-income residents.

During the meeting, Redco co-founder Chris

Freise sought to address residents' concerns about the proposed development, which will include 20 below-market rate homes.

"We're not someone who doesn't care about San Jose or its fabric," he said. "We had a lot of conversations around massing, height, parking and impacts on the neighborhood."

Freise, who did not respond to a request for comment, argued at the meeting that the proposed building needs to include seven stories to provide space for on-site parking. Under the proposed design, the building would operate parking garages on its first and second stories with enough capacity to accommodate 127 spaces.

"If you want a shorter building with no parking, it's very much possible," Freise said.

Redco's proposal also includes transit and pedestrian improvements for the surrounding area, including wider sidewalks and a new bus shelter in front of the development site, according to city officials. Nevertheless, residents said they remain alarmed about the potential traffic impacts.

"I have a little boy, and the streets are already busy," resident Jenny Ellis said during the meeting. "With all these extra cars driving around, that intersection is going to be extra dangerous, so I'm concerned about safety."

Not all residents who spoke during the meeting opposed the development. Kate Weber said she welcomed the added foot traffic and vibrancy the influx of new residents might bring.

"We desperately need more housing in the area," Weber said. "It's sad to me that there are members of the immediate community that might not be in favor of this ... I'm not actually sure why a person who lives in single-family dwelling in Willow Glen is allowed to tell other people that they can't live in high density housing close to them, and I'm looking forward to my new neighbors."

Willow Glen Times
Serving Willow Glen, San Jose ■ www.willowglen-times.com

San Jose legendary community leader Frank Fiscali dies at 94
Air Force Cadet Athena Chung of San Jose is selected as the Student of the Year for 2023-24

January 2026 ■ Vol. 20, No. 1

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Willow Glen Times

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AVAC Kickoff

Continued from page 1
• 10:00 a.m. | Machine Learning and Technique Safety Class

AbsoluteFIT Small Group Training

- 10:00 a.m. | AbsoluteFIT
- 11:00 a.m. | AbsoluteFIT

Group Exercise Classes

- 9:30 a.m. | Zumba
- 10:30 a.m. | Core & Lower Body Power

- 11:30 a.m. | Beginner Strength

Pilates

- 9:00 a.m. | Mixed-Level

Reformer

- 10:00 a.m. | Mixed-Level

Reformer

- 11:00 a.m. | Beginner Mat

Pilates

Pickleball

- 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. | Advanced

Open Play

- 12:00-1:00 p.m. | Beginner

Pickleball Clinics

NinjaZone (Ages Walking-11)

- 9:45-10:30 a.m. | Baby Ninja

- 11:30-11:50 a.m. | Lil Ninja

(Ages 3-5)

- 12:00-12:20 p.m. | Ninja Training (Ages 5-11)

- 12:30-1:00 p.m. | Open Gym (Parents & Kids)

Recovery

- 9:00-10:30 a.m. | Complimentary 10-Minute Chair Massages

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Times Local News

Reps. Panetta, Kim reintroduce bipartisan bill to crack down on porch pirates

United States Representatives Jimmy Panetta (CA-19) and Young Kim (CA-40) reintroduced bipartisan legislation to address the nationwide increase in mail theft.

The Maximizing Agency Integration on Letter (MAIL) Theft Act would crack down on thieves who steal delivered packages from homes by requiring cross-agency coordination on the issue of mail theft and raising it as a priority for federal law enforcement.

While the United States Postal Service (USPS) and US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) have increased enforcement and arrests, these crimes are spread out across local communities where police are already stretched thin. According to USPS and USPIS, as of last year, arrests for robbing letter carriers were up 73 percent. Between 2019 and 2022, letter carrier robberies increased sixfold, and high-volume mailbox theft increased 87 percent. Just last month, a housing complex in San Jose was the target of mass mail theft, forcing residents to resort to using P.O. boxes or retrieving mail promptly.

The MAIL Theft Act requires federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security,

and the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), to work with state and local law enforcement to better protect our communities from postal theft and develop a coordinated federal approach to mail theft which is targeting neighborhoods nationwide.

"Too many delivered packages are being stolen from homes," said Rep. Panetta. "The MAIL Theft Act will help investigate and solve these types of crimes by ensuring that federal agencies are backing up our local law enforcement with a coordinated federal response. As more and more people rely on mail order delivery, Congress must play its part to ensure that delivered packages are protected."

"During the holiday season, families should be focused on time together — not stolen checks and missing packages," said Rep. Kim. "Rising mail theft is hurting communities and putting postal workers at risk. The MAIL Theft Act strengthens coordination across all levels of law enforcement so we can stop these crimes, protect workers, and restore peace of mind for families in California. I'm proud to work alongside Rep. Panetta to help introduce this commonsense legislation, just in time for the holidays."

Last March, Rep. Panetta wrote to Postmaster Louis DeJoy and USPIS Chief Inspector Gary Barksdale to request assistance in resolving egregious mail theft taking place in California's 19th Congressional District. Rep. Panetta called on postal leaders to prioritize mail theft deterrence in South San Jose, including the approval

of individual curbside mailboxes, new physical security standards for cluster box units, and clarity on a nationwide strategy to address this epidemic. Rep. Panetta is also a cosponsor of the bipartisan Protect Our Letter Carriers Act which would

appoint an assistant U.S. attorney to prosecute postal crime, amend sentencing guidelines related to the assault of a postal employee, and replace old mail collection boxes with high-security models.



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

By William Bellou

Publisher

United States 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.



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