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California Back To Basics airs pro-Mahan super bowl ad

By William D. Bellou
Publisher

Amidst the high-budget ads shown during Superbowl, an independent committee supporting San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan for governor, ran their first TV ad.

The committee dropped close to a million-and-a-half dollars to introduce Matt Mahan to Californians as their possible next governor.

The ad was straightforward; a back-to-basics message which was seen in many areas of California, but not in San Jose.

The ad opens with a line of tents on a city sidewalk and the statement, "We have problems toxic politics can't fix." It cuts to a crime scene and a grocery checkout line,
See MAHAN, page 3

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High School junior creates a 'Mental Health Toolkit' designed to help Bay Area high school teens

'The Bloom Box' helps students manage stress, build self-confidence, and support their mental well-being

By William Bellou
Publisher

The youth led mental health non-profit Buy Yourself Flowers project (BYF) recently launched the BYF Mental Health Toolkit designed to help Bay Area high school teens.

San Jose resident and Pinewood High School junior Aanya Mukherjee



Aanya Mukherjee, Founder of the Buy Yourself Flowers Project, speaks to a social emotional learning assembly she hosted for her grade on time management.

jee founded BYF after she experienced severe bullying in high school and came to the realization that often teens are excluded from conversations about their own mental health.

"After the bullying subsided, I began working with educators, parents, and community leaders and saw a clear need for resources created by teens, for teens," explained Mukherjee. As a junior, I loved the opportunity to connect and grow with my peers over a topic that's often overlooked, and to create a space where students could walk away with practical tools they could immediately apply."

Mukherjee's efforts were not unnoticed; she was awarded the Pinewood Pathways Grant.

Known as "The Bloom Box," the BYF toolkit contains self-care items to help students manage stress, build confidence, and support their mental well-being. The
See TOOLKIT, page 3

Aztec rain god mural designed to protect San Jose firefighters

By Lorraine Gabbert
San José Spotlight

An East San Jose artist is invoking an Aztec deity to keep a new fire station and its firefighters safe from harm.

Artist Jesse Hernandez has created two metal murals featuring Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god, displayed on the exterior of Fire Station 8, slated to open later this year. The new 5,500 square-foot, two-story fire station at 601 E. Santa Clara St. in San Jose is replacing the old station down the street, which served the city for more than 75 years. The new station has a fueling station and infrastructure to support electric fire engines.

"Tlaloc, the Aztec rain deity, now blesses the fire station, honoring our indigenous relatives, with hopes he will watch over and protect the neighborhood and its people," Hernandez told San José Spotlight. "Tlaloc is often pictured with a jug of flowing water, represented here with a ladder and fire hose mixed into the water flow, honoring the firefighters."

Hernandez said the design of the jug is an hom-



Artist **Jesse Hernandez** created metal murals featuring Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god, for San Jose's new Fire Station 8. He hopes the deity will keep fire at bay and protect the station's firefighters. Photo courtesy of Jesse Hernandez.

age to water baskets of California's native tribes and the station number is an ouroboros in the style of Quetzalcoatl, another Mesoamerican deity. The ouroboros is an ancient symbol of a serpent or dragon eating its tail and represents unity and the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth. The shining metal murals — mirror images of each other — hang against a backdrop of fire engine red, painted the same shade

as the station.

The public art was installed Dec. 31, 2025 and is designed to reflect the East Side neighborhood and its people. Its \$125,000 budget for design, fabrication and installation was funded by Measure T, a disaster preparedness and public safety infrastructure bond passed by voters in November 2018, San Jose Director of
See MURAL, page 5

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Times **Local News**

Toolkit

Continued from page 1

toolkit is packed with journaling tools, affirmation cards, planning sheets, breathing exercises, and calming aromatherapy. The toolkit gives teens easy, practical ways to cope with anxiety, digital bullying, and everyday overwhelm.

Mukherjee uses her creative tenacity to work on creating a weekly blog on her website to discuss teen mental health issues and to promote "The Bloom Box."

Mukherjee has recruited nearly 125 high school members to join her non-profit team. "Our recruiting helps us partner with many local schools to provide youth-driven mental health resources in San Jose, Campbell, and other Bay Area high schools in the past, with more partnerships to be announced."

"I recently lead a Social Emotional Learning Workshop for the Pinewood School's Class of '27. I designed a time-management assembly encouraging students to break down their busy junior-year schedules while finding balance and without compromising sleep or effort toward each commitment," Aanya Mukherjee said.

Aanya Mukherjee will be hosting an assembly at Alta Vista High School in March in which she will deliver a fifteen-minute mental health talk to the school and deliver fifty Bloom Boxes.



Students assemble Bloom Boxes which are mental health toolkits especially prepared for teens. So far, the Buy Yourself Flowers Project has created more than 140 boxes at three workshops.

Mahan

Continued from page 1

then touts San Jose's status as America's safest big city and takes note of the city's 100% homicide clearance rate (every homicide solved), and a reference to a drop in unsheltered homelessness.

The ad included its principal funders: California Back to Basics, Michael Seibel, Marc & Ashley Merrill, founders of the Riot Games and apparel brand Lunya.



Mukherjee hands Bloom Boxes to **Ms. Del Real**, head of the Wellness Center at Westmont High School. Mukherjee plans on partnering with Del Mar and Prospect high schools.

"Our recruiting helps us partner with many local schools to provide youth-driven mental health resources in San Jose, Campbell, and other Bay Area high schools in the past, with more partnerships to be announced."

— Aanya Mukherjee



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San Jose mobile home park manager advised city on rent increase

By Joyce Chu
San José Spotlight

San Jose officials are set to vote on a policy that would increase rent for residents living in mobile home parks. But internal emails show the city favoring input on the proposal from a mobile home park manager.

Emails shared with San José Spotlight show Housing Department employees asking Ryan Jasinsky, property manager of mobile home park company owner Brandenburg, Staedler & Moore, to provide feedback on the draft policy that would increase rent for residents by up to 10% whenever a mobile home is sold. Jasinsky represents the company and other park owners on the Housing and Community Development Commission. The company owns eight mobile home parks in San Jose, including Mill Pond, Mountain Springs and Quail Hollow.

The San Jose City Council is set to vote on the policy Tuesday.

The emails date back to September 2025, before the draft policy was published on the commission's Nov. 13 agenda for commissioners to weigh in. Other commissioners said they didn't get a chance to shape policy as Jasinsky did.



Western Trailer Park in San Jose is among 58 mobile home parks across the city protected by a rent control policy. File photo.

"What I feel is betrayed," Commissioner Daniel Finn, who represents mobile park residents and lives in a mobile home, told San José Spotlight.

Emails dating as early as Sept. 21, 2025 show Housing Director Erik Soliván asking Jasinsky to do a "page turn" on the draft policy to get feedback. In that same email, he asked to set up a meeting with Jasinsky.

Jasinsky sent another email to Soliván and

Eviction Prevention Manager Emily Hislop on Nov. 5 providing input on the policy language of the rental increase.

Jasinsky did not respond to a request for comment.

When San José Spotlight asked Soliván if he met with any other commissioners, he said he offered to schedule a meeting with Finn twice to review the draft with him. Finn canceled both times, Soliván said.

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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!

"This is a deeply layered and beautiful project that represents what the fire station represents for the community: public safety. They're there to protect the community and they too need to be protected."

—Kerry Adams Hapner

Mural

Continued from page 1

Cultural Affairs Kerry Adams Hapner said. Patrick Chung, a deputy chief with the San Jose Fire Department, said the new station represents the department's commitment to serving the community with pride and care.

"We're fortunate to have an accompanying work of art that reflects the same spirit," he told San José Spotlight, "and helps make the station a welcoming and inspiring place for both firefighters and the residents we serve."

Hernandez was on the city's short list of muralists with a proven track record to handle the artwork, Adams Hapner said. She said it's crucial public art reflects the culture of the community — and Hernandez's urban Aztec aesthetic works well for the fire station.

"We're looking for artists that can execute effectively with strong aesthetic skills ... and have something unique to offer," she told San José Spotlight. "This is a deeply layered and beautiful project that represents what the fire station represents for the community: public safety. They're there to protect the community and they too need to be protected."

In addition to creating four public Aztec murals on DuPont Street beneath the Santa Clara Street overpass, Hernandez has designed metal pins, a U.S. Mint medal and counts DC Comics, Marvel, Warner Bros, the Golden State Warriors, former Oakland A's, San Francisco Giants, San Jose Earthquakes and San Jose Sharks among his clients. Much of his work reflects his Mexican American heritage and includes Aztec influences.

He said he's honored to have the city approve his art for the fire station, but seeing it come to life is surreal. He wants his art to bring the community a sense of belonging, connection and cultural identity.

"I try to make art to make people feel, like a beacon of light," he said.

In 2023, the 1Culture art collective selected Hernandez to participate in painting murals at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds. Andrew Espino, founder and curator of 1Culture, said Hernandez is one of his favorite artists. He appreciates Hernandez's ability to bring the community a sense of pride as a self-taught artist.

"He has a way through his creativity of expressing our identity," Espino told San José Spotlight. "He understands the culture. With his artwork, you can immediately identify that it's his, which is really hard to do for a lot of artists. He's found that."



The new 5,500 square-foot, two-story Fire Station 8 is located at 601 E. Santa Clara St. in San Jose. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert.

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San Jose Youth Symphony to hold auditions for the 2026-27 Season

The San Jose Youth Symphony (SJYS) will be holding its annual general auditions for the 2026-2027 Season.

The auditions will be held on Thursday afternoons (April 2nd & April 9th) and Friday afternoons (April 3rd & April 10th) between the hours of 4-9 p.m. Saturday auditions will be held from 2 pm – 7 pm on April 4th and all day on April 11th.

All student musicians are welcome, ages 8 and up, who play orchestral instruments (woodwinds, brass, percussion & strings) or who are interested in performing jazz.

Marching Band musicians are welcome to apply for an audition now, and then join after marching band season ends.

To submit an audition application, visit: www.sjys.org to join one of SJYS's 12 orchestras and instrumental ensembles. The symphony will do its best to accommodate your date preferences you list in the application.

The deadline for submitting applications is March 31, 2026.

If you have questions, send an email to sjys@sjys.org

About the San Jose Youth Symphony

The San Jose Youth Symphony is one of

the oldest and finest youth orchestras on the West Coast of the US. Founded over 70 years ago as part of the former San Jose Symphony*, SJYS has a rich tradition of musical performance and education.

SJYS member musicians, of ages 8 to 20, are selected from more than 650 applicants through our annual spring General Auditions. SJYS comprises 12 distinct performing ensembles: two full orchestras; a chamber orchestra; two flute choirs; concert winds, brass, saxophone, percussion, jazz and two string ensembles. Each group rehearses weekly from September to May or early June and performs a scheduled series of concerts each season. In addition, member musicians participate in a week-long summer camp and receive special coaching and participate in masterclasses from professional and renowned musicians in the Bay Area.

The premier group of SJYS is its Philharmonic Orchestra, led by SJYS Music Director and Conductor, Yair Samet. The orchestra performs its season subscription concerts at the historic and beautiful, California Theatre, in downtown San Jose. The orchestra also travels biannually on its International Concert Tours, and have performed in renowned concert halls in Japan, Italy, Austria, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic, Ireland, Argentina and Uruguay. In 2022, the orchestra traveled to the Baltics: Vilnius, Lithuania; Riga, Latvia; Parnu & Tallinn, Estonia; and Helsinki, Finland. The orchestra toured again most recently during the summer of 2025 to Poland and Czechia!

Were officials, voters misled regarding Santa Clara County's Measure A sales tax hike?

By William Bellou

Publisher

Santa Clara County's Measure A sales tax hike gained critical support from law enforcement and political leaders after revised ballot language suggested funds would aid public safety.

The measure passed with 57 percent approval, but officials now admit the money is not required to be spent on public safety, and plans are underway to allocate all new funds to health care, prompting proposed cuts to prosecution services.

Despite campaign promises and endorsements secured through assurances about raises and filling positions, many backers feel misled.

The situation underscores problems with ambiguous ballot wording and calls for greater accountability and election reform.

"I feel double-crossed," said San Jose Dis-



trict Attorney **Jeff Rosen** (pictured above). "I don't understand it given that I worked very hard to get this measure passed. It's a funny way to say, 'thank you.'"

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Water Threats in Evergreen Valley: A Comprehensive Analysis

By Matt Fraiser
Times Media columnist

Evergreen Valley is grappling with significant water-related challenges that threaten the community's well-being. These issues are becoming increasingly pronounced, especially in light of recent regional assessments that highlight the intricacies of water supply, flood risk, and water quality.



Localized Flooding Risks

One of the most urgent concerns in Evergreen Valley is localized flooding. Many properties are near creeks and streams, making the area particularly susceptible to storm-related flooding. Major storm events can cause rapid, severe surges in water levels, overwhelming existing drainage systems and flooding homes and businesses. While the likelihood of flooding in some areas may be once every century, that chance is still significant, given the potential property damage and disruption it can cause to everyday life.

Residents living in these flood-prone zones must stay alert and prepared for severe weather that could lead to water-related disasters. Local authorities emphasize the critical need for improved infrastructure, such as better drainage systems and dedicated flood-control measures, to reduce the impact of heavy rains. Furthermore, community preparedness initiatives—including evacuation plans and emergency response strategies—are essential to reducing vul-

nerability and enhancing public safety during storm events. Engaging the community in proactive measures is key to addressing these localized risks, and ongoing education can help residents act when potential flooding occurs.

Drought-Induced Water Supply Instability

In addition to flooding, Evergreen Valley faces chronic instability in its water supply, exacerbated by climate change. Prolonged droughts have severely depleted regional water resources, directly affecting both natural waterways and groundwater levels. Rising temperatures and changes in precipitation patterns have created conditions that make traditional water supplies increasingly unreliable.

The implications of this situation are profound, as communities grow more dependent on imported water sources. Unfortunately, these external supplies are vulnerable, especially during prolonged dry spells, raising pressing questions about long-term sustainability and access to clean water. We need water conservation and sustainable management to address these ongoing challenges. The Santa Clara Valley Water District is encouraging residents to conserve water and use it wisely. Implementing rainwater harvesting systems and promoting drought-resistant landscaping will not only help conserve water but also enhance the community's resilience to future drought events.

Risks of Water Contamination

Amid flooding and water supply challenges, the risk of water contamination has become an alarming concern. Urban runoff, combined with increased residential development, places immense pressure on local waterways. Pollutants from urban areas, including chemicals from landscaping, automotive fluids, and other waste products, frequently pollute rivers, streams, and groundwater, threatening overall water quality and public health.

Additionally, issues can arise from On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems (septic systems) found in various neighborhoods. Malfunctioning or inadequately managed septic systems can lead to harmful discharges into the environ-

ment, further undermining local water sources. The discovery of contaminants in drinking water can have grave public health implications, leading to increased treatment costs and potential loss of aquatic ecosystems.

To address water quality issues, it is essential to advocate rigorous monitoring practices and stricter pollution controls. Public education campaigns highlighting the importance of responsible waste management can empower residents to minimize their impact on local waterways. Implementing green infrastructure solutions, such as bioswales and permeable pavements, can effectively reduce urban runoff, improving water quality and enhancing ecosystem resilience.

Summary of Vulnerabilities and Solutions

The Evergreen Valley region exemplifies a complex interplay of significant water threats. The persistent challenges of drought, alongside the immediate risks of flooding during severe weather events, create a unique set of vulnerabilities for the community. However, we remain optimistic that the Santa Clara Valley Water District is actively seeking solutions to address these pressing challenges.

Through innovative flood protection initiatives, effective water management strategies, and increased community awareness, significant efforts are underway to bolster Evergreen Valley's resilience against future crises. Collaboration among governmental agencies, local organizations, and community members is essential for long-term effectiveness.

In conclusion, while the challenges of localized flooding, drought-induced instability in water supply, and contamination pose substantial risks to Evergreen Valley, proactive measures and community engagement offer opportunities to improve outcomes. Prioritizing sustainable water management and infrastructure improvements can help safeguard essential water resources for future generations. By building a culture of preparedness and environmental stewardship, Evergreen Valley can address its immediate challenges and build a foundation for lasting resilience in an uncertain climate future.





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San Jose mayor spars with gubernatorial candidates during televised debate

By Brandon Pho

San José Spotlight

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan faced his first major test as a contender for California governor Tuesday during a televised debate.

The debate, hosted in San Francisco by KTVU, had Mahan standing shoulder to shoulder with six other candidates — conservative TV news pundit Steve Hilton, billionaire Tom Steyer, former Attorney General Xavier Becerra, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, State Superintendent Tony Thurmond and former State Controller Betty Yee. Several candidates traded barbs on topics including California's cost of living, immigration, education, homelessness and contentious climate goals.

Mahan, who announced his candidacy recently, became a primary target for candidates' jabs over his rising political profile, record on addressing homelessness and favor among Silicon Valley's centrist and conservative tech elite. But the attacks teed him up for clever responses that roused audience applause on multiple occasions — boosting his share of the limelight on stage and turning the head of at least one post-debate TV news analyst.

"I have to say — sorry to keep picking on Matt — but he just said in an interview that the thing he most admires about Gavin Newsom is his record on homelessness. You've got to be kidding, Matt," Hilton said during the forum.

By this point, Hilton had already blasted Mahan's positions on housing and being against a statewide billionaire tax.



San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan joined six other candidates for the Feb. 4, 2026 California Gubernatorial debate in San Francisco. Photo credit: Brandon Pho.

"He didn't agree with me about capping taxes on housing. He likes taxes, apparently, unless they're (for) billionaires," Hilton said earlier.

Mahan readily hit back.

"I'll just note that Steve, you came to San Jose just a week ago to see what's working in San Jose because we've been reducing unsheltered homelessness faster than any other city in the state," he said. "I don't know what's changed in the last week — it seems that it's the fact that I jumped into this race — and frankly that's exactly wrong with our politics, is that an idea is good one day until the other side (has them)."

In December, as Mahan mulled over a decision to jump in the race, he invited several candidates to tour San Jose's temporary homeless housing sites in an effort to impress his ideas on the state's next top leader. At the time, Mahan said he was looking for a change agent governor, before ultimately deciding he fit the definition best.

A small group of Mahan supporters gathered for an infor-

mal watch party at Pier 402, a restaurant on Race Street in San Jose.

"All these other (candidates) are not change agents," San Jose resident Terrence Reilly, who helped organize the largely impromptu gathering, told San José Spotlight. "They're not doing what's best for California. If (Mahan) could take over the state and frickin' whip it, yeah, I think it would be good."

Mahan touted his experience teaching public school in East San Jose to argue that California's education problems don't just stem from lack of investment. Mahan taught from 2006 to 2008 at Alum Rock Middle School through Teach for America.

"There's also a lack of accountability," Mahan said. "The truth is we need to have high expectations for our kids. We need to assess their learning, and we need to intervene in ways that work: High dosage tutoring, summer programs, youth jobs to build confidence, ensuring every kid has a pathway to participating in our economy and thriving in our society."

On affordability, Mahan said the "biggest drivers" of California's crushing cost of living are the obstacles developers face to build housing. He touted recent San Jose City Council votes to boost developer incentives and waive fees for downtown office conversions. On energy bills, Mahan called for data centers to pay the full cost of infrastructure upgrades so it "doesn't fall on ratepayers."

Steyer questioned Mahan's commitment to affordability.

"Right now, the big tech CEOs are terrified about the idea of paying their fair share. Right now, they're supporting Matt," Steyer said. "I'm the billionaire who's going to take on the billionaires for working families."

Then came Mahan's final retort of the night.

"I've got about three billion reasons not to trust your answer," Mahan said in an apparent reference to Steyer's net worth.

Forbes listed Steyer at \$2 billion as of Wednesday.



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Originally commissioned for the coronation of King George II, **Handel's** *Zadok the Priest* is anthem is a timeless masterpiece exuding majesty, triumph, and divine grandeur—a celebration of power, tradition, and unshakable glory!

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ASSE International Student Exchange Program

Bring the world to your home this coming fall

By Sean Eastwood

Times Media staff writer

ASSE International Student Exchange Programs (ASSE) is inviting local families to discover the many rewards of hosting a foreign exchange student.

ASSE students come from more than 50 countries worldwide: France, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Ukraine, Japan, Australia, to name a few.

"The students are between the ages of 15 and 18 years, and they are enthusiastic and excited to experience American culture, family life, school, sports, etc., said ASSE spokesperson Francisco Mosca. "They also love to share their own culture and language with their host families, who welcome the students into their home, not as guests, but as family members, giving everyone involved a rich cultural experience. Host families may be single parents, couples and single people."

The exchange students have pocket money for personal expenses and full health, accident and liability insurance. ASSE students are carefully selected based upon academ-

ics and personality, and host families choose their students from a wide variety of backgrounds, countries and personal interests.

ASSE also offers qualified American students the opportunity to learn another lan-



guage and culture by spending a school year, semester or a summer with a host family in another country.

Those interested in hosting an exchange student or becoming an exchange student abroad, should call 1-800-733-2773, visit www.asse.com or send an email to asseusawest@asse.com to request more information or start the application process. Students are eager to learn about their American host family, so begin the process of welcoming your new son or daughter today. The memories and the friendship you create with your exchange student will stay with you forever.

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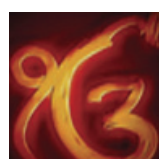


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God is One
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**SAN JOSE
GURDWARA**
3636 Gurdwara Ave.
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The word Sikh (see-kh) means "disciple" or "student." A Sikh is a practitioner of the faith founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak in Punjab of old British India. A Guru who is a "teacher" or "enlightener" completes the relationship of teaching and learning. Sikhism is monotheistic and stresses the equality of all men and women. Sikhs believe in three basic principles; meditating on the name of God (praying), earning a living by honest means and sharing the fruits of one's labor with others. Currently there are close to one million Sikhs living in the USA and Canada and 25 million Sikhs living around the world. Sikhism is the 5th largest religion in the world. At the Gurdwara (House of God) in San Jose we welcome all. We pray daily for peace and prosperity for everybody in the world. Come to visit and enjoy Langer (food) in our kitchen which is open 365 days of the year and serves complementary vegetarian meals. We also encourage you to enter our history room

on site and walk the beautiful grounds. Learn more about us and community events we sponsor by visiting our website; <http://www.SanJose-Gurdwara.org>

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We invite you to join our community of faith located in the Evergreen area of San Jose. We are an inclusive diverse community striving to serve as Disciples of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis, offering prayerful and joyful liturgies, evangelization, fellowship, and service opportunities to the community. We offer spiritual opportunities for all ages, including children's liturgy, dynamic E.C.H.O Jr. High, I.G.N.I.T.E. High School, & North Star Young Adult Ministries, along with small faith communities and opportunities to help the poor and marginalized of San Jose. Our Chapel, Gathering

Hall, Parish Office, Mission Center, Parish Gift Shop, and Memorial Garden are all located at 5111 San Felipe Rd. Please come join us in worship at any of the following times in our Chapel: Weekdays (M-Sa) at 8:30 AM; Saturdays at 4:00 PM (English) and 5:30 PM (Vietnamese); Sundays at 8:00 AM (English), 10:00 AM (English), 12:00 PM (English), 4:00 PM (Vietnamese), and 6:00 PM Youth Mass (English). The Villages Gated Community also features a Mass on Sundays at 8:15 AM at the Cribari Auditorium. For more information, please call or visit us at the Parish Office open M-F 9:00 AM -12:00 PM; 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM. Come join us and

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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