

Broadway San Jose new season lineup – ‘The Phantom of the Opera’ and ‘Beauty and the Beast’ to dazzle fans **SEE PAGE 4**



La Villa Deli reopens after death of ‘Chris Combo’ **SEE PAGE 6**



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# Almaden Times

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## City of San Jose facing \$56M projected deficit

*City anticipates drop in sales tax and loss of cardrooms revenues*

By William Bellou  
Publisher

It's going to be a steep financial challenge for San Jose, as recently released documents show the city facing an estimated \$56 million shortfall in the coming year.

The City must now confront ways to balance this year's budget without further severe layoffs for its strained workforce. San Jose currently has the lowest number of full-time employees per capita among major metropolitan areas in California.

Officials had predicted a \$55-\$65 million deficit and late last year due to stagnant revenue, prompting a hiring freeze and a reassessment of service priorities.

"While reductions in services and staff positions are likely needed to address the general fund shortfall, we're committed to minimizing impacts on both community services and our workforce," said Demetria Machado, chief of staff for the city manager, in a recent interview. "That's why the city manager initiated the hiring freeze in December. It not only helps manage spending for the rest of the fiscal year but also leaves vacant positions open for staff whose jobs might be eliminated."

San Jose's base forecasting model projects an overall \$69.2 million shortfall over the next five years, with deficits shrinking over the next three years before turning into a surplus by 2029-2030. Rising salary and benefit expenses alongside

*See DEFICIT, page 3*

## SJUSD Board decision on closing nine San Jose schools delayed

By William Bellou  
Publisher

A committee tasked with recommending which San Jose Unified School District campuses to close is delayed until March 26. A total of nine schools are being considered for closing by the district's Schools of Tomorrow Committee.

"I don't believe there is a perfect answer to the challenges we are trying to solve, but parts of each option available felt out of balance when weighing the costs and benefits," Renata Sanchez, president of the San Jose Teachers Association and Schools of Tomorrow Committee member, recently told San José Spotlight. "At the same time, the urgency for change that many members are expressing remains very real."

The district announced plans to close campuses and consolidate schools due to a 20 per-



Tensions ran high at the Schools of Tomorrow Committee meeting on March 3, 2026. The committee is tasked with recommending a list of schools for the San Jose Unified School District to close due to declining enrollment. Photo by Lorraine Gabbert – San José Spotlight.

cent reduction in enrollment since 2017. At present, several schools have combined multiple grade levels within a single classroom to accommodate the decrease in student population. The Schools of Tomorrow initiative, introduced last fall, describes an "ideal school" as one comprising three classes per grade level.

Eight out of the district's 27 elementary schools currently have fewer than 300 students enrolled, including Anne Darling, Canoas, Empire Gar-

dens, Horace Mann, Lowell, Rachel Carson, Selma Olinder, and Terrell elementary schools.

Dropping enrollment in school districts locally and nationally have resulted in school boards making hard decisions due to budget shortfalls. Local school districts that have made the tough decision to close schools include three in the Franklin-McKinley School District in 2025, three in the Berryessa Union School District and six

*See CLOSING, page 7*

## 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.

Willow Glen resident and Pinewood High School junior Aanya Mukherjee 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



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

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 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

*See TOOLKIT, page 3*

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Times **Local News**



**Chloe Cummings of Almaden named to Siena University President's List for Fall 2025 Semester**

**C**hloe Cummings (pictured) of Almaden Valley has been named to the Siena University President's List for the Fall 2025 Semester.

Chloe is a MAAC All-Academic Team & MAAC Academic and also a member of the Eastern Athletic Communications Association (EAST-COMM)

The President's List requires a 3.9 grade point average or higher.

Founded in 1937, Siena University is a private, Catholic Franciscan, residential, liberal arts college with a student body of about 3,000. Siena offers 43 degree programs, 80+ minors and certificate programs, and professional curricula in teacher preparation/education, pre-medical, pre-law and social work.

**Bella Cook of Almaden named to Dean's List at Biola University**

**B**ella Cook of Almaden Valley has been named to Biola University's Dean's List for academic excellence.

Cook is a pre-nursing student. She is a summer camp volunteer. She is First Aid/CPR/AED certified and was named high school valedictorian.

Biola students are placed on the Dean's list to honor those with a GPA of 3.6 or higher.

"Inclusion in Biola University's Dean's List is reserved for students who demonstrate exceptional performance in their academic studies. This honor signifies hard work, engagement, and investment in scholarship," said Dr. Tamara Anderson, Senior Associate Provost.

Biola celebrated its 118th anniversary since its founding in 1908 on February 25, 2026. The university is only growing, seeing the largest incoming class of both undergraduate and graduate students since 2019.

**Deficit**

*Continued from page 1*

declining revenues are responsible for a large portion of the deficit. The city will lose 22 million in sales tax and \$4.49 million from fees and service charges, leading to an overall revenue decrease of roughly \$1.83 million.

Nearby cities expect multi-million-dollar deficits over the next five years, Walnut Creek plans to keep job vacancies open to address revenue gaps, and San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie recently announced plans to cut hundreds of city jobs to handle his city's deficit.

"A hit of this size wouldn't be hypothetical—it would require real cuts to services," they wrote. "Police layoffs would be necessary. Fire response times would increase due to fewer firefighters. Homelessness programs and support services would face reductions, especially as we urgently try to address unsheltered homelessness."

A newer estimate reduced potential losses to \$25 million, but the California Department of Justice replied last week—unmoved—and stated cardrooms must submit compliance plans within 60 days after the rules take effect. In the short run, the city may offset cardroom tax losses with reserve funds and update future revenue projections.

**Toolkit**

*Continued from page 1*

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.

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## Broadway San Jose new season lineup – ‘The Phantom of the Opera’ and ‘Beauty and the Beast’ to dazzle fans

Broadway San Jose’s season lineup consists of a half dozen shows — including “Beauty and the Beast” (pictured above) and “The Phantom of the Opera” — all of which will take place at the Center for the Performing Arts in San Jose. The company is also offering three add-on productions.

“The 2026-27 season is a celebration of everything our audiences love about Broadway San Jose — welcoming back beloved favorites while introducing some of the most exciting new hits to arrive from Broadway,” says Broadway San Jose general manager Gretchen Feyer. “We can’t wait to share these unforgettable stories, spectacular productions and thrilling performances with our community.”

The season lineup kicks off with a brand-new production of “Beauty and the Beast” Sept. 8-13. It’s Disney’s first North American touring production of the smash hit musical in over a quarter of a century.

Next up is Andrew Lloyd Webber’s legendary “The Phantom of the Opera” Oct. 7-18. This “Phantom” is being billed as a “revitalized new production” from iconic producer Cameron Mackintosh, who has been involved with this Webber play from its very inception in the mid-’80s.

Need some classic rock (done up Broadway style)? Then look no further than a new production of “The Who’s Tommy,” bringing “Pinball Wizard” and other classic rock favorites to town Nov. 17-22.

As the calendar turns to 2027, Broadway San Jose has two big shows based on hit movies.

The company’s first production of the new year is “The Bodyguard,” based on the smash Whitney Houston/Kevin Costner vehicle of the same name from 1992. So, yeah, get ready to belt out “I Will Always Love You” Feb. 2-7, 2027.

Next up is “Mrs. Doubtfire,” based on the Robin Williams hit movie from 1993, which runs Feb.

16-21.

The season lineup closes out with yet another movie-related offering — “The Notebook” — based on the legendary 2004 romantic film starring Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams. “The Notebook” runs May 4-9, 2027.

The 2026-27 Broadway San Jose season also includes three special add-on productions. These are the 30th anniversary tour of “Riverdance” (April 6-7, 2027), the 25th anniversary tour of “Mamma Mia!” (June 8-13, 2027); and a two-week return engagement of “Hamilton” (July 7-18, 2027).

Season subscriptions, ranging in price from \$250 to \$783, are now on sale and can be purchased online at [broadwaysanjose.com](http://broadwaysanjose.com) or by calling 866-395-2929. There is also an interest-free payment plan available, starting at as low as \$30 per month.

Editor’s note: Tickets for individual shows will go on sale at a later date.

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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.

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# La Villa Deli reopens after death of 'Chris Combo'

Customers contribute thousands to Bertucelli family; Celebration of life to be held March 13 at St. Frances Cabrini Church

By William Bellou  
Publisher

La Villa Delicatessen in Willow Glen has reopened somberly as a tribute to Chris Bertucelli, 47, whose sudden death on Feb. 25 shocked the community.

A beautiful white and blue flowered wreath stands outside while many grieving customers from around Silicon Valley place their order at the deli to pay homage and respect to Chris.

The deli has been serving the community since 1988 when Chris' parents, Dave and Patty Bertucelli purchased it as a family business.

Chris had a vibrant presence on the Lincoln Avenue, at local car club shows, at community events — and at San Jose Sharks and San Francisco 49ers games, where La Villa often supplied meals for the NHL and NFL players.

The walls of the cozy deli are lined with NHL and NFL sports memorabilia — autographed hockey sticks from the San Jose Sharks and San Francisco 49ers jerseys, including one from legendary quarterback Joe Montana.



La Villa Deli in San Jose's Willow Glen neighborhood has reopened after the sudden death of co-owner Chris Bertucelli of a heart attack in late February. Bertucelli was 47. Photo courtesy of San Jose Spotlight.

Sold in the thousands was his signature "Chris Combo," or simply Combo, which is his signature secret-ingredient sandwich (two meats, two cheeses, Italian oregano, warmed up on a soft roll.

The full La Villa crew had cooked to supply the hot counter and deli case with ravioli, cannelloni, sausage and peppers, stuffed shells and salads while matriarch Patty Bertucelli filled the dessert case.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to support Chris' wife, Jenelle, and their two young children, Matteo and Liliana.

Organizers said, "Chris was known for his generosity and kindness, and his wife and children are facing a challenging future without him. Many have asked how they can help, and this GoFundMe campaign is a way to provide that support. The funds raised will go directly to his

family to assist with immediate expenses and ongoing needs."

As of March 11, more than \$170,685 had been raised, with sizable contributions coming from the Sharks organization, its players and their families.

"Feel free to bring a written memory of Chris to share with his family at his celebration of life," the Bertucellis said. "These memories will be collected and made into a book so that his children will always remember their amazing father and the impact he had on those around him."

Chris' celebration of life will be held at 4 p.m. Friday, March 13 at St. Frances Cabrini Church, 15333 Woodard Road, San Jose. La Villa will be closed that day.



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Times **Local News**

**Closing**

*Continued from page 1*

in the Alum Rock Union School District in 2024.

The district has 41 schools, including 26 elementary schools, serving about 25,000 students from transitional kindergarten to grade 12. Since 2017-18, enrollment has dropped by over 6,000, with 12 elementary schools now having fewer than 350 students and the largest exceeding 800.

During a recent meeting, tensions got heated as parents expressed concerns regarding the potential closure of their children's schools. Some committee members supported the proposal to revise the existing criteria for school closures by eliminating certain guidelines and establishing new ones. However, the committee maintained several key provisions, such as prioritizing optimal student body composition with respect to English learners, foster youth, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities, as well as ensuring that at least one of Rachel Carson, Reed, or Terrell elementary schools remains operational.

The committee also introduced new criteria, including consolidating only those schools without a bilingual program and enrollment of 300 or fewer students, excluding special day class programs, or schools with a bilingual program comprising fewer than four classes per grade level. The updated guidelines further specify that consolidation should be limited to schools with fewer than two classes per grade level, or bilingual program schools with fewer than four classes per grade level and cap the total number of consolidations at four.

Committee members disagreed on school closings. Some argue small campuses strain resources, while others feared merging them would lead to overcrowding and disrupt communities.

Parents and students have spoken out against closures at committee meetings since the plan was announced last month. They argue it would significantly impede students' academic and social well-being, lead to longer school commutes, and exacerbate the struggle to find childcare. During the public comment segment, parents threatened legal action if the district did not delay a decision to close schools, including threats to pursue a taxpayer injunction to freeze the facilities bond measure funds.

In a recent interview, Ethan Dutra, a fifth grader at Gardner Elementary, said the school closures will affect his friends, his sister, and his community.

"They're ruining friendships, jobs and school histories. They care about the future — schools of tomorrow," Dutra said. "What about the schools of today? What about the families?"

Families and community advocates have said the school closure process risks disproportionately impacting Black and Latino students, focusing largely on downtown campuses while leaving many suburban schools in Almaden Valley untouched.

Under state law, school districts considering closures or consolidations because of "financial distress" must meet certain community involvement guidelines and conduct an equity impact assessment.

**Remembering Colleen Ellen Cortese**

**August 26, 1934 – February 13, 2026**

*Celebrated local historian*

Colleen Ellen Cortese passed away peacefully at her family's Elysian Valley

Ranch in Janesville, California on February 13, 2026. Colleen's loving family was at her bedside.

She is survived by her daughter Teresa



Cortese and three grandchildren, Joe Meyer (Nora), Makaela Shively (Jimmy) and Gino Meyer. Colleen's sunshine was her three great-grandchildren, Vincenzo, Kaelahni and Julian with another child on the way.

Colleen was preceded in death by her beloved husband Vince Cortese, Jr., to whom she was married for nearly 70 years. After living in a modest ranch house in San Jose, Colleen designed a house to meet the family's needs and Vince built it in 1970. Together they hosted seven foreign exchange students in their family

home over the years from many countries including Colombia, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Brazil and Japan.

Colleen and Vince were partners and participants in numerous extended family endeavors in the Santa Clara Valley such as farming apricots, cherries and prunes, ranching, commercial real estate, philanthropy and public service.

Colleen was recognized as a local historian with special interests in San Jose's Evergreen area and the Bay Area's Native American settlements and contributions. Through a series of articles published in the *Evergreen Times* titled "Evergreen Pathways" she chronicled the region's unique story.

*See CORTESE, page 9*

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Times **Local News**

## Cortese

*Continued from page 7*

She co-created the Heritage Collection at Evergreen Valley Community College which included more than 100 photographs documenting local people, industries, schools and daily life from the 1800s through the 1900s. The collection was officially donated in 1991,

She was also known as “Mrs. Pumpkin” to thousands of school children every October when she dressed as a kind Halloween figure to delight and inform thousands of students who would take school field trips to the Cortese Fruit Stand on San Felipe Road in San Jose.

Colleen and Vince were instrumental benefactors in the formation and construction of the Catholic parish St. Francis of Assisi in Evergreen, working closely with the late former Pastor Monsignor John Sandersfeld, and others. Teresa Cortese says her mother’s true passion project was the parish because of her love for Jesus, community, and family.”

Colleen is also preceded in death by her parents Joseph and Gladys Buckley and brother, Joseph Alan Buckley (Bonnie).

She was born on August 26, 1934 in Bakersfield, CA. Her childhood was spent in a large farmhouse in Wasco, CA. While attending Bakersfield College, Colleen was crowned Miss “Magic Maiden” and represented Kern County at the California State Fair in 1953. She became a profes-

sional dancer and performed with the Horace Heidt band.

After moving to San Jose, Colleen worked at the former downtown Hales department store. Later, she joined the leadership team at the former Emporium department store at Eastridge Mall.

In retirement, Colleen’s hobbies were reading, gardening, walking and visiting with friends and family.

A life so beautifully lived leaves a legacy that time cannot diminish. Colleen will be remembered for her grace, her generosity, and the way she made every person feel welcome — whether at her family table, her parish, the fruit stand, or in the pages of local history she so lovingly preserved.

Her faith guided her, her family grounded her, and her community inspired her. She leaves behind not only children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who were the light of her life, but also a community enriched by her kindness, curiosity, and steadfast devotion.

Though she is now reunited with her beloved Vince, the love they built together continues to flourish in the generations that follow. Colleen’s spirit — warm, joyful, and deeply rooted in faith and family — will live on in every story told, every tradition carried forward, and every life she touched.

Services will be held on March 17th, 10:30am at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church located in Evergreen.



## Meals on Wheels

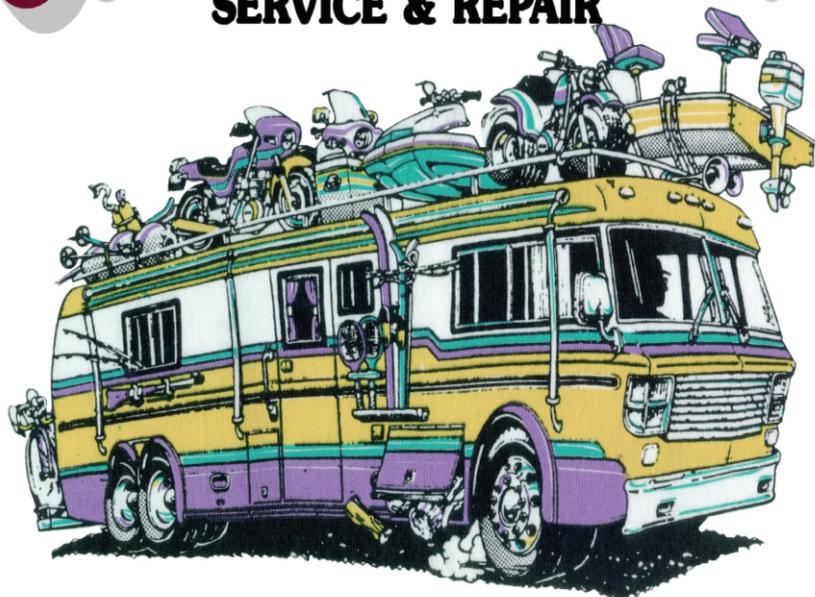
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*The Almaden Senior Association is a diverse group of enthusiastic active adults 50+ who enjoy new learning opportunities, new experiences, and new adventures. Join us today. Meet new people and get involved with classes and programs that will enhance your life and open new doors.*

### Trip to Alcatraz Island

Alcatraz, also known as The Rock, was a maximum-security federal prison from 1934 to 1963. It was a cold foreboding place as a prison. Now it’s a national park that you can visit and learn the history of being a prisoner there.

On Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, we will take you by bus to Pier 33 to take the ferry over to Alcatraz Island. There you will climb to the cellblock to get an audio device with headphones and begin your tour. The tour will take about 60 minutes. Upon returning to the city we will travel to Pier 39 for lunch and shopping. Afterward, we will reboard the bus in front of Pier 39 for the ride home.

Tickets are on sale now in the Almaden Community Center lobby M/W/F from 8 a.m. – 10 a.m. For more information call Rich @ 408-219-8641 or Facebook or ASA Website. Price: \$90. Cash or Check.

Note: All events and trips are for those 50 years and over. Payments are cash or check only (sorry no refunds).

**Almaden Senior Association**  
 at the Almaden Community Center  
 6445 Camden Avenue, San Jose, CA 95120  
<https://almadenseniors.org>  
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OUR MISSION: Evangelizing our community and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. OUR MINISTRY: Training ministers on how to use their love for God to reach those in need of His love. OUR PASSION: Transforming lives within our community with God's love.

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6581 Camden Ave. San Jose, CA 95120. The Rev. Shelley Booth Denney, Rector  
Phone: 408-268-0243  
Web: [www.eca-sj.org](http://www.eca-sj.org)  
At the Episcopal Church in Almaden (ECA), we are joyful followers of Jesus Christ. Through worship, study, fellow-

ship and outreach, we strive to nurture and grow a strong faith community of believers, a family of all ages, where each member feels welcomed, loved, valued and empowered to serve. Children are especially welcomed and cherished as an important part of God's family.



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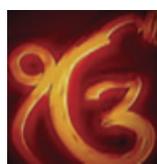


### GRACE CHURCH OF EVERGREEN

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408-274-1200  
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Rab Ik Hai

**SAN JOSE GURDWARA**  
3636 Gurdwara Ave. San Jose, CA 95148

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

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[www.sfoasj.com](http://www.sfoasj.com)  
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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!



### the.point.church

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Cantonese Service: 11:00 AM  
Mandarin Service: 11:00AM  
Youth Extreme Point (7th-12th grade): Every Saturday at 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM



To place a worship listing, email [times@timesmediainc.com](mailto:times@timesmediainc.com)

Times **Local News**

## San José to clear one of the last large encampments within city limits, offering shelter to 100 people

*One-mile stretch of land along the Coyote Creek set to be abated in 50 days*

**By Sean Eastwood**  
*Times staff writer*

The City of San José is clearing Coyote Meadows, near Story and Senter Roads, starting April 15. Approximately 100 unhoused people currently live at the site.

City staff have begun in-person outreach and distributed materials in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, offering interim housing options.

Mayor Matt Mahan highlighted efforts to expand shelter capacity and restore public spaces, and City Manager Jennifer Maguire emphasized balancing compassion with responsibility, noting daily offers of shelter and support during the area's restoration.

The abatement aims to help individuals experiencing homelessness while meeting requirements to reduce debris in Coyote Creek and is expected to last 30-60 days depending on conditions.

The recent opening of Cerone Interim Housing adds placement options for residents leaving the encampment, supporting higher rates of shelter acceptance. The City will provide regular updates as the process continues.

**Timeline and Process**

- **Start Date:** Clearing will begin on April 15, 2026.
- **Outreach Duration:** The city will conduct outreach for at least 50 days prior to the clearing.
- **Notification:** Residents of the encampment have been informed

about the upcoming clearance.

**Support and Services Offered**

- **Interim Housing:** Approximately 100 individuals will be offered interim housing options.
- **Social Services:** City staff will provide social services and support to help residents transition indoors.
- **Multilingual Materials:** Information will be distributed in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to ensure all residents are informed.

**Goals of the Clearance**

- **Public Space Restoration:** The area will be transformed into a "No Encampment Zone" to prevent future encampments.
- **Environmental Compliance:** The city aims to reduce debris and pollutants entering Coyote Creek, complying with stormwater permit requirements.

This initiative reflects San José's commitment to balancing compassion for the homeless with the responsibility of maintaining public health and safety.



## THANK YOU FROM HAPPY HOLLOW FOUNDATION

In appreciation of the generosity of sponsors, donors and friends who supported the 2025 Hooray for Happy Hollow event benefiting Happy Hollow Park & Zoo.



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