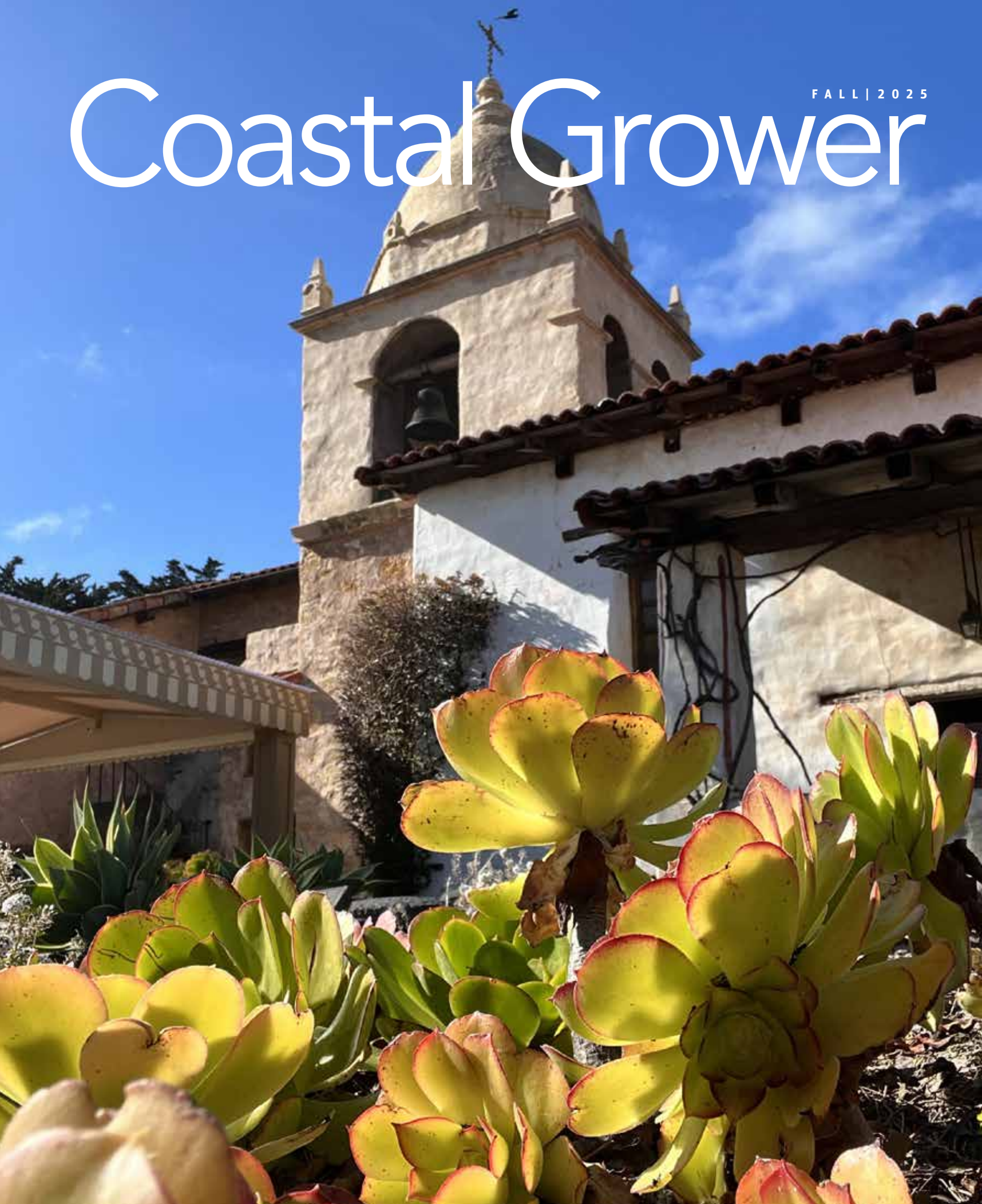


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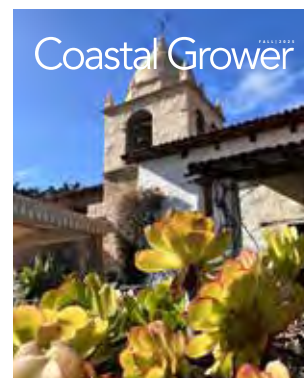
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Showtime!

By the time you are reading this another one will be in the record books. Every October the fresh produce and floral industries gather for what I have always called “our Superbowl.” A grand trade show exhibition with colorful booths and employees dressed in matching shirts showing off their new products and displaying their finest goods for buyers to see and sample.

Historically there were two big shows: The United Fresh Produce Association and the Produce Marketing Association’s Fresh Summit. Luckily for produce marketers (and their budgets) these two organizations collectively formed a new one in 2022: The International Fresh Produce Association. Since then, the “Superbowl” has a new name and a united purpose: The Global Produce and Floral Show.

These events were always my favorite times of the year. Not only was I in charge of our exhibit strategy, the multiple-day shows were also one big reunion. You would see colleagues, customers and associates you usually only talked with over the phone and later, email, I assume. The workshops and networking receptions provide an opportunity to recharge your batteries, and the host cities provide many opportunities to dine at world-class restaurants.

Not that these shows don’t have their downsides...your feet hurt, trust me, they hurt. No matter the shoes, no matter the flooring in your booth, they are long days with lots of walking and standing about. Your feet hurt.

They are expensive. It is expensive to design and build an exhibit but even more expensive to have it installed and dismantled at the convention center. Many of them are unionized and they won’t miss an opportunity to rent you a \$16 trash can or a \$72 plant to add some “greenery” to the space. They will then charge you to empty said trash can and bring your product out of refrigerated storage and put it back at the end of the day.

Finding buyers on a crowded show floor of 20,000 people can be like finding needles in a haystack. When you do spot one, they are often in a rush and can’t spend a lot of time with you. Then there is what we call the “looky loos.” The attendees who are not interested in buying your products (or not qualified to do so) but are there intentionally to gain intel on your products and how they might copy them. I know this might sound dramatic...but it’s true. It is often attendees from other countries that sneak pictures, waste your time asking irrelevant questions and just make your exhibit space so crowded the actual buyers can’t see what you are showcasing.

I recall one year, a member of our team had an after-hour meeting on the show floor. He went back to your booth to grab his briefcase and caught a competitor red-handed, putting some of our products in their bag. He politely asked them to put the items back on the shelf and they scurried away. At the next company meeting we jokingly gave him a T-shirt with the word SECURITY on it.

One of my career highlights was when I initiated the Grower Shipper Association “Salad Bowl of the World” pavilion. A handful of members gathered and designed a shared space where we collaborated on expenses and gave buyers a destination where they could see all their leafy greens, strawberries and row crops in one spot. We shrunk our space and only brought new products, not the entire portfolio. Our go-to-market strategy was to see customers at least once a quarter, so these larger shows were more of a meet and greet for us—new products were always introduced at the buyer’s office.

Upon retirement people often asked me what I missed, and I’d have to say these shows. The people, the products, the beautiful cities and amazing meals I got to enjoy. I miss seeing my friends and continuing learning opportunities. The sore feet? Not so much.



Contributors



MAC McDONALD

Mac McDonald was a reporter, columnist and editor of the GO! weekly entertainment and dining section for the Monterey County Herald for 22 years. He was also Managing Editor of the Carmel Pine Cone for seven years. He is currently a freelance writer and editor writing about virtually every subject under the sun, from music, art, food and sports to marketing and public relations.



DIANE GSELL

Diane Gsell is a Monterey-based food stylist and lifestyle writer. Dartmouth College taught her how to write, and her mother and the culinarily-gifted Golden State taught her how to cook.



RYAN HASTIE

Ryan Hastie is a partner of Hastie Financial Group, a registered investment advisory firm in Salinas. As an investment advisor, he is involved in developing the firm's investment strategy for their private wealth management clients and designing and maintaining retirement plans for their 401(k) clients. He holds the Certified Plan Fiduciary Advisor (CFPA®) designation.

A Salinas native, Ryan resides in Salinas with his wife and their two daughters. He enjoys the beautiful adventures the Monterey Peninsula has to offer, including golf and hiking.



DOUG LARSON

With a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Education from Colorado State University and over forty years of experience in the Industry of Agriculture, Doug Larson maintains both a California Pest Control Advisor and Qualified Applicators License.

Through his years as a 4th generation Colorado Farmer and Rancher, Agricultural Educator, Manager, Director, Vice President, Partner, President & CEO, Mr. Larson has developed a unique set of skills and experiences focusing on the use of precision irrigation systems to better manage critical water resources in today's regenerative production agriculture climate.



ESMERALDA OWEN

Esmeralda Owen is a broadcast journalist turned marketing consultant. A graduate of USC and NDSU, she worked as a reporter and news anchor for Spanish media for ten years. She has worked for the National Steinbeck Center, Hartnell College, and YOSAL. She is an adjunct professor of communication studies at Gavilan College. In 2020, she launched her consulting business to create marketing strategies, media relations, fundraising opportunities, video production, etc. for nonprofits in Monterey County. She is a mentor and philanthropist and volunteers for the Salinas Airshow board, Sunset Center board, Girls Inc, and others.



GWEN MCGILL

Gwen McGill is the founder of GEM Collective, a marketing, events, and public relations collective founded in 2013, focused on wine, food, events, and hospitality. In 2017 she became Executive Director of the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans, a non-profit trade association dedicated to raising awareness and promoting the growers and vintners of Monterey County's Santa Lucia Highlands appellation.



JARROD CHRISTENSEN

Jarrod Christensen has served as the Administrator at Carmel Hills Care Center since 2016. He began his career at Carmel Hills in 2008 as a CNA, later becoming director of admissions before earning his administrator's license. Jarrod oversees non-clinical operations and advocates for skilled nursing locally and statewide as the regional chair of the California Association of Health Facilities. He especially enjoys giving tours to families and sharing what makes Carmel Hills unique. In his free time Jarrod enjoys RV adventures with his wife and two young children.



MINDY CARPENTER

Mindy Carpenter is a Partner and Vice President of Finance at Axis Ag. Before joining Axis, Mindy made her mark at FarmWise, starting in 2020 during the company's early expansion into the Salinas Valley. A proud third-generation member of a Salinas Valley farming family, Mindy's roots in agriculture run deep. Recognized by Women in Ag and AgKnowledge, Mindy is a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion within the industry. She actively mentors and empowers the next generation of women leaders to pursue careers in a field that has traditionally lacked female



NATHAN NUNEZ

Nathan Nuñez serves as Director of Development at First Tee – Monterey County. In this position, he leads fundraising strategy, donor engagement, and community partnerships. Nuñez has held senior growth and revenue roles for multiple startups that have scaled to valuations exceeding \$1 billion. He is dedicated to serving the local community through volunteer work with Partners for Peace and the Suicide Prevention Service of the Central Coast. He also serves as Board Chair of Big Sur Charter School, where he champions educational opportunities and inclusive environments for youth.



ALLA ZELTSE

Alla Zeltser is a dynamic leader in nonprofit strategy and fundraising, with over 25 years of experience helping organizations achieve transformational results. Her projects have directly helped mission-driven partners raise over \$50m, while her methodology, campaigns, materials, and donor strategies have helped drive upwards of \$100m through long-term client-led cultivation and campaigns. As founder of Disruptive Development Inc., Alla equips organizations to stand out, connect with donors, and present their case in a way that inspires meaningful, lasting investment in impact.



SCOTT DELUCCHI

Scott, a San Francisco Bay Area native, joined the SPCA Monterey County as President & CEO in 2016, following 17 years with a Bay Area animal welfare organization and an earlier career as a high school teacher and administrator. He earned a B.A. in Communication from Stanford University, where he also played (sparingly!) on two national champion baseball teams. Scott and his wife Jay (a former chef who loves living in the Salad Bowl) keep busy with two active teens and two dogs -- one active, one couch potato.



MIKE HALE

Salinas native Mike Hale is a freelance writer who spent a long career in local journalism, working in various stints as both an editor and writer with the Salinas Californian, Santa Cruz Sentinel and the Monterey Herald. In 2014 he helped jumpstart KRML radio (94.7 FM) in Carmel, creating community-based programming for the "Locals Station for the Monterey Bay." He is now semi-retired, enjoying traveling abroad and discovering new adventures along the way.

Coastal Grower values the contributions of all our writers. Contributors wishing to be recognized are listed here. In some cases contributors prefer to remain unrecognized with a bio and photo, or prefer complete anonymity. In those instances articles are published with no recognition or attribution.

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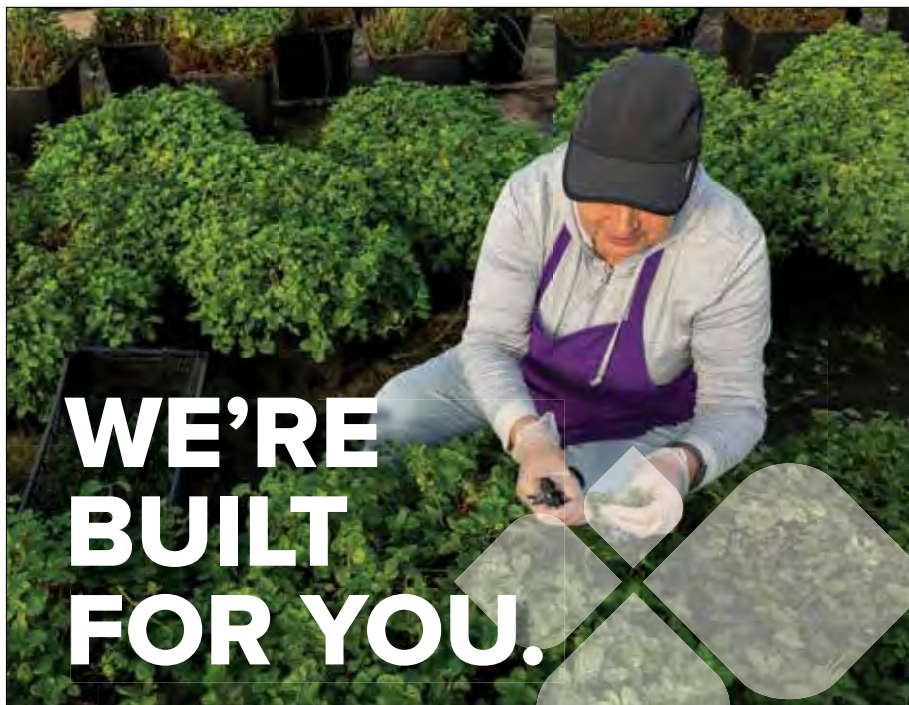
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PATRICK TREGENZA

Patrick Tregenza is a multi-award-winning commercial photographer based in California. With a career spanning more than three decades, he has worked extensively with regional farms, wineries, chefs, and publications, defining the visual identity of local agriculture and cuisine. His work has been featured in national advertising campaigns, culinary books, and exhibitions. Tregenza's photography is marked by a painterly sensibility and a deep reverence for his subjects—especially when the subject is something as universal and intimate as food.



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“The Patch” Kicks Off 5th Season

By Jeff Mendelsohn



Around this time of year every year in the Salinas Valley, many local farmers parcel off their land in homage to the season's most popular commodity, the pumpkin. Over the years, local pumpkin patches such as Swank Farms and Borchard Farms have beefed up their offerings to include such attractions as corn mazes, tractor pulls, train rides, and more.

Several years ago, on the heels of the Covid pandemic, a new pumpkin patch appeared off of Highway 68 and River Road. On September 26th of this year, “The Patch” opened its doors to customers for its fifth season.

“Coming out of Covid-19, we just wanted to create something that would promote community involvement,” Devine says. In the spring of 2021, Devine struck a lease agreement with Triangle Farms on a prime location at the intersection of Highway 68 and River Road and began operations as Triple F Farms. Devine, who is a father of

two, says that the name referenced both of his children (Francis and Fynlee), but also his goal for the new business.

“Friends, family and fun,” Devine says. “That’s really what we’re all about here. We want this to be a place where friends and family gather, have fun, and celebrate the fall season.”

“It’s really cool to see how far we’ve come in five years.”

What started out as little more than “a bunch of pumpkins and a few bales of hay” has blossomed into five acres of fun and has included everything from bounce houses to corn mazes. This year they added a tractor-pulled train ride for kids, along with plenty of games and grass to play on. “I want it to be more than just a place to buy pumpkins,” Devine says. “I want this to be a place where the community gathers. A safe place for par-

ents to bring their kids and have some fun – and maybe buy a few pumpkins.”

Devine, who owns a transportation company called Fresh From D’Vine, receives roughly four truck-loads of pumpkins per week from a plot in Greenfield.

Once delivered, the pumpkins – ranging vastly in size, shape, and color – are sorted and carefully placed throughout The Patch, allowing wagon-toting pumpkin seekers to shop. And with the addition of a plethora of food and drink vendors, you won’t have to shop for pumpkins on an empty stomach.

“That’s really enhanced the overall experience for our customers,” Devine notes. “It’s a great place to spend some time.” Improvements at The Patch have been well received thus far, as traffic on River Road tends to pick up during business hours.





“Weekends have been fantastic,” Devine observes.

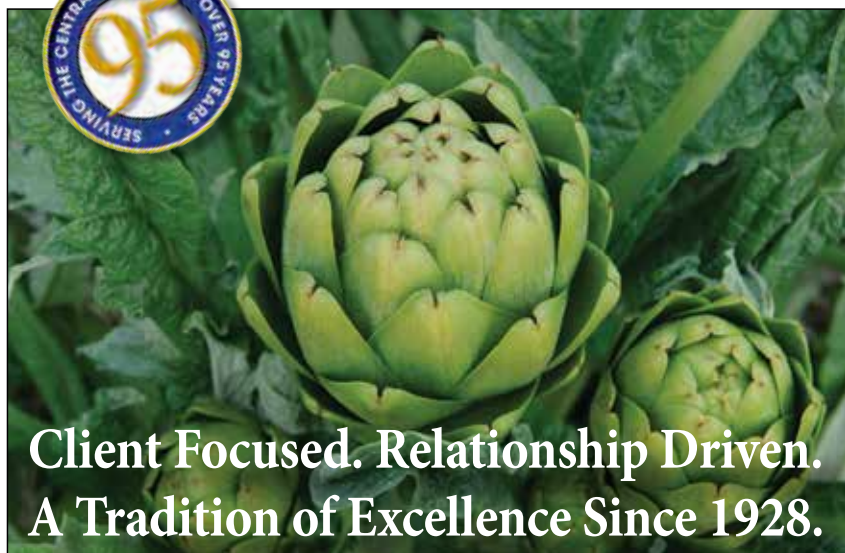
So far this season, The Patch has hosted school field trips, birthday parties, and even a wedding proposal or two. But it’s the photo ops that have become really popular over the years, says Devine.

“The sunflower orchards were always a popular place for photos,” says Devine. “Along with the chair, of course.”

“The chair” is a 16-foot-high Adirondack chair that oversees The Patch. Built by local carpenter John Laughton, the giant chair can be seen from the highway, and is another popular feature at The Patch.

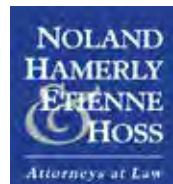
With several weeks left before Halloween at the time of this article, Devine is hopeful that more and more local families will come out to The Patch. There is no shortage of activities for the kids, and plenty of places for parents to relax.

“It’s really cool to see how far we’ve come in five years,” Devine says. “I’m hopeful that we can continue to build our presence in the community and continue to do this every year.” **CS**



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The Front Lines of Compassion

Investigating Animal Cruelty

By Scott Delucchi



A dog set on fire.

A starved horse unable to stand.

A red-shouldered hawk shot for “fun.”

Nothing can fully prepare new SPCA investigators for what they'll experience and nothing can help staff veterans forget the worst cases, like Pinky. The Akita mix had been beaten with a two by four so badly that she suffered a broken pelvis. Once she was safe in our care, an exam showed multiple, older breaks from what we believed to be previous abuse.

Another call led to a sickening discovery inside someone's home: 46 cats stacked in crates on top of garbage, cat poop and filthy litter piled so high that our responding investigators' heads were touching the ceiling as they waded through the putrid room. Pinky's owner was found guilty of animal abuse. Her adopters, a lovely couple, returned to the SPCA two years later with their family member clearly living her best life. If that wasn't rewarding enough, Pinky couldn't contain her excitement upon seeing the investigator who rescued her. Picture

Dino the Dinosaur greeting Fred Flintstone!

Of the 46 cats being hoarded, 41 were adopted to new loving homes, while five were beyond any group's ability save and were euthanized due to significant, untreatable injuries. Sadly, humans in this same home were also living with compromised health, which necessitated coordinating our work with Adult Protective Services.

These are extreme cases. Fortunately, we don't encounter many instances where people maliciously harm animals, or where the numbers of incoming animals can quickly fill our shelter. Still, there's no slow season for calls, and reports of abuse or neglect come from all zip codes in our vast county.

People surrender pets with suspicious injuries though we can't prove they were purposefully harmed. Almost daily, we're informed of a dog relegated to a backyard life without walks, playtime with other dogs, or any form of love or affection or a horse kept in a small enclosure with no pasture access. Neglect on full display across our county. It's heartbreaking but not always illegal.

State law requires that owners provide their animals food, clean water, some form of shelter from the elements and veterinary care when their pet is sick or injured. It's illegal to leave injuries untreated, but not illegal to leave a dog in a yard 24-7.

The public acts as our eyes and ears for the animals. The number of cruelty and abuse calls – 700 to 900 annually – requires that we employ a small team of full-time investigators. Police and sheriff officers can respond to animal cruelty calls, but often refer to the SPCA, recognizing our expertise and availability. Many calls result in “no merit” outcomes, meaning we visited the property, observed the animals and saw nothing actionable. For example, this can occur when a reporting party couldn't see that a dog in a yard actually had access to water and shelter.

Still, when we encounter owners who aren't providing what we would consider a good quality of care, we offer gentle yet firm recommendations and let owners know that surrendering their animal to the SPCA is an



option; many take it, and these are wins!

Depending on the circumstances, we might request immediate veterinary care or, in extreme cases, seize animals for their own safety. Animals are considered property in a legal sense, so we must have grounds to take this action. We submit case materials – photos, vet reports, interviews – to our District Attorney’s Office which then decides which they will pursue. We’ve not had a single animal seizure deemed illegal and cases are vigorously pursued by a DA team that cares as much about animal cruelty as we do.

Our investigations work, like all the SPCA’s work, is funded by donations.

SPCA’s investigators complete an 80-hour Animal Law Enforcement Academy, which covers search and seizure laws, interview and interrogation techniques, civil and criminal liability, and mental health. During a 40-hour Equine Investigations Academy, they become proficient in property inspections, body conditioning scoring, equine behavior, nutrition, foot and leg care, vital signs and first aid. As much as we need to take care of the animals, we must care for our people; compassionate fatigue training is part of that.

Handling emotional work that can overwhelm, we count wins one at a time. An owner building a better dog house. A veterinarian confirming a pet received care after our welfare check, or an abuser receiving jail time. Adopters of formerly abused or neglected pets send us photos from the beach, hiking trail, couch or car. We see emotional scars fade, fanned away by the rush of air from an open car window, and smoothed over from an owner’s soft words or gentle neck scruffs.

Cases can often shake us, leaving an indelible imprint, like Hugo.

The horse arrived in our care with a body condition score of .5. On a 1-10 scale, 1 is emaciated and 9 severely overweight. Our vet was shocked that he was still standing. Our Barn staff placed Hugo in a refeeding protocol and he steadily improved. The DA’s office filed the case, the owner pled guilty to animal cruelty and received jail time. Following more than 300 days in care, Hugo was adopted by a wonderful family and now spends his days as the star of their riding pro-



Hugo before and after SPCA care.

gram for kids...and being loved.

The SPCA’s Barn Manager has an easy, playful banter with our Lead Investigator. “As soon as we work to place a horse into a new home, he brings us two more!”

Cruelty never stops and neither do our people on the front lines. We see the worst in people – no doubt – but the kindness, compassion and second chances we experi-

ence fuel and reinvigorate. They remind us every day why this work matters and why we will never stop fighting for animals. ☺

Update: Blue Zones Project Monterey County

By Tiffany DiTullio



A little over seven years ago, Salinas Valley Health, Taylor Farms and Montage Health made a commitment to improving well-being in Monterey County through the implementation of Blue Zones Project. The idea seemed a bit lofty, and yet, so practical. Making slight changes in the places where people live, work, play, learn and recreate with the goal of small nudges toward healthier behaviors is almost common sense. Almost.

Having been a part of this project since inception, one of my greatest takeaways is this – change is hard, but it is not impossible. If you meet people where they are, keep it simple and you acknowledge you cannot do it alone, that is where the magic happens. I consistently say, this is a “we project” because this type of transformation does not happen because a few people think it is a great idea. Transformation happens when people, organizations, community groups, schools and municipalities come together to align and elevate the all of the work being done to improve well-being, and we push that boulder up the hill, together.

On August 5th of this year, Blue Zones Project Monterey County achieved certified Blue Zones Community® designation. Certification recognizes Monterey County’s

well-being transformation through the successful implementation of Blue Zones Project, a first-of-its-kind population health initiative that brings evidence-based best practices in built environment, policy, and social connection to participating communities. Monterey County is the first countywide project in California to earn this distinction.

What does this mean for Monterey County? It means we collectively pushed the boulder up the hill, it is sitting at the top, and now, we need to push it over to keep going! Our efforts as a community have shown amazing results. Monterey County’s overall community well-being score improved 3.7 points since 2019, which is slightly over a 6% increase. We saw a 13% increase in residents feeling they are thriving in life, and a 10% increase in residents reporting an increase in physical activity. These are just a few examples of the outcomes our collective work has shown.

How did this happen? It happened because the community was ready and highly engaged. Throughout the project we have engaged over 41,000 residents in Blue Zones activities and over 4,000 vol-

“Monterey County is the first countywide project in California to earn this distinction.”

unteers donated more than 12,500 hours in support of the community. Sixty-nine worksites achieved Blue Zones Project approval, optimized the work environment for employee well-being. Sixty-four schools achieved Blue Zones Project approval as a result of their commitment to student and family well-being through education, school

gardens and Walking School bus activities. Sixty-two restaurants modified their menu to highly defined healthier options, making the healthy choice the easy choice while dining out. Fourteen grocery stores achieved approval by adding healthy check-out lanes, highlighting California grown produce and featuring healthy foods. Eight of those

“Monterey County is the first countywide project. Our efforts as a community have shown tremendous results.”

approved grocery stores supported the implementation of Double Up Food Bucks, doubling the purchasing power of California grown produce, increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Throughout Monterey County, 196 policy initiatives were implemented in the areas of built environment, tobacco and food access. These initiatives are designed to support more walkable and bikeable communities, reduce the sale and use of tobacco and increase access for all residents to fresh fruits and vegetables.

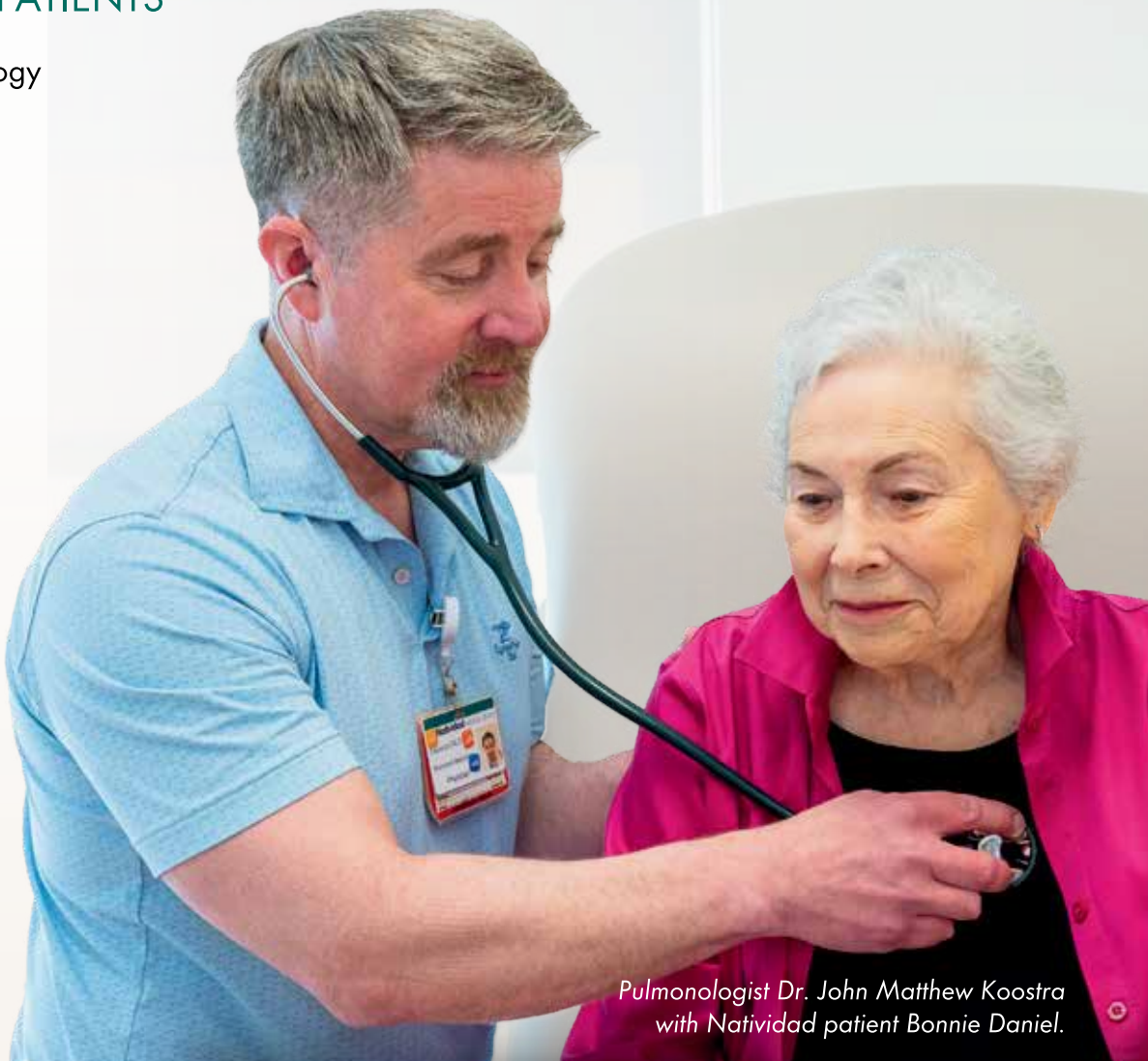
When we work together to find aligned goals and priorities, and then we collaborate on the solution, anything is possible. After years of dedication, Blue Zones Project Monterey County has surpassed our expectations for transformative and sustainable change. As we move into our sustainability phase we encourage the community to stay engaged, to keep supporting well-being initiatives where you live, work and play, and to make the healthy choice the easy choice! To access free resources visit (QR code) or reach out to livewell@salinasvalleyhealth.com ☎

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Expert Advice for Choosing a Skilled Nursing Facility

By Jarrod Christensen



After a hospital stay due to surgery or illness, your physician or hospital discharge planner may recommend skilled nursing care. After the referral, what is your next move? Who decides which facility to choose? The hospital? The doctor? The answer is: You. You have the right to choose the skilled nursing facility (SNF) that's best for you. The facility should meet your medical needs, you should know your costs and insurance coverage, and it should be conveniently located near your support group—family & friends.

I am proud to serve as the Administrator of Carmel Hills Care Center, an independently owned, 99-bed facility located next to the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP), at the edge of the Del Monte Forest. Among my roles, I give tours to prospective residents and their families regularly. Additionally, I serve as the regional chair of the California Association of Health Facilities (CAHF). CAHF promotes policies that support access to quality long-term care services at the state level.

While Carmel Hills is often a top choice

for advanced rehabilitation or long-term care, there are several types of facilities and levels of care available. Deciding which facility is best depends on the importance you place on medical care, therapy involvement, physical surroundings, family involvement, independence and cost, among others. Understanding what to look for can make the process less daunting and far more effective.

How was I greeted when I arrived?

If SNF care is recommended, I always encourage prospective clients to tour as many facilities as possible. And first impressions matter. Assessing whether you were greeted and how quickly is important because it is the first measure of the warmth and professionalism of the SNF team. You should expect to be welcomed immediately and asked to sign in. This can be an indicator of attention to detail.

Will rehabilitation and nursing services meet my medical needs?

After determining availability, checking

costs and insurance coverage, a priority is to ensure they offer the rehabilitation therapies and nursing services you require. Providing the SNF employee with a diagnosis and current condition of the prospective resident helps to start the dialogue to determine medical and therapeutic needs—physical, occupational, or speech therapy. On the tour, ask to speak with the director of rehabilitation. Consider what services are needed now and might be necessary in the future. Note that all licensed SNFs are required to monitor and assist residents manage the activities of daily living (ADLs)—bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, and ambulation.

Do staff engage residents in meaningful activities?

On your tour, observe the residents themselves, notice whether they are socializing, engaged, and moving freely about. Alternatively, are they sitting alone, sleepy, and disengaged? What you observe while walking throughout the facility may reveal the facility's philosophy of patient care. The activity department at a SNF should be a staple in residents' daily life. While physicians, physical therapists, and nurses monitor medical needs, activity teams should be well acquainted with each resident's mental capacity, memory, likes and dislikes, abilities, and functional status. Visit the activity room



and view the activities calendar, if available.

Don't all Skilled Nursing Facilities have a distinct smell?

Like your home, a SNF should not have foul odors or smell of cleaning products. Truth is, the facility is home to our residents, however long they are with us. If the residents are kept clean and dry and routine housekeeping is provided, the facility will smell of fresh organic scents or perhaps cooking aromas as you enter and walk around. You should feel empowered to ask about how staff assist with toileting and personal care of residents.

Are the amenities what I'm seeking?

Chef-prepared dining, personal care salons, religious services, outdoor space, and fitness classes can add to quality of life at a SNF. At mealtime, do residents eat alone in their room or can they eat communally with friends and family? You might ask to see menus and ask where the food is sourced. Look for fresh, chef-prepared meals tailored to a resident's dietary needs. Beyond dining, what other amenities do you consider necessary for your happiness day to day?

Am I inspired by the indoor and outdoor spaces?

The physical environment of a SNF can affect recovery along with the medical services offered. Warm, comfortable common areas and home-like decor give residents greater peace of mind and promote socializing, an important factor in long-term health. Green outdoor spaces have therapeutic benefits—lowering stress, boosting mood, even improving cognitive function, as well as provide areas for physical and occupational therapy and exercise. For those families seeking a SNF to offer comfort care and coordinate with hospice for a loved one, quiet and reflective places to gather with family might be a top consideration.

Will I feel at home here?

No medical facility will feel exactly like home, but a warm, friendly staff that treats residents like family will help you or your loved one embrace, even enjoy, a new daily routine. Our team strives to make Carmel Hills feel more like a home than a hospital, with a personalized approach to healthcare

SNF Visit Checklist:

- Was I greeted quickly and warmly when I arrived?
- What is the staff-to-resident ratio?
- What levels of medical, nursing, or rehabilitation services are available?
- Do staff engage residents in meaningful activities?
- Is it a clean, fresh-smelling facility?
- What amenities do they offer (e.g., dining, salon, classes)?
- Am I comfortable and inspired by the indoor/outdoor spaces?
- Will I feel at home here?
- Are friends and family welcome?

that stems from our deep roots in Monterey.

In 1967, Dr. Robert J. Bowersox and nine local physicians saw the need for a state-of-the-art skilled nursing facility to accompany the recently built CHOMP. They acquired a ground lease bordering the hospital and built what would eventually become Carmel Hills Care Center. At first, operations of the facility were contracted to large healthcare corporations—like most SNFs in the Monterey area today—but in 2004, sons Kim and Robert Jr. transitioned Carmel Hills to family ownership, knowing they could offer better care than a corporate entity.

Carmel Hills remains family owned and operated, delivering state-of-the art post-acute rehabilitation therapy, expert skilled nursing, and loving long-term care. While

our medical care is top tier, we strive to make every moment matter. Staff members encourage all residents, along with their families and guests, to truly become part of the Carmel Hills family, whether that means joining in a fun-filled barbecue, working together with a dedicated therapist, having fun at our internet cafe, or just laughing together on a garden bench.

Every SNF is different—the choice is yours

Many people don't anticipate needing a SNF. Families frequently face these decisions in urgent moments, unsure of what to look for. While I love talking about the unique qualities of Carmel Hills, I explain to all prospective residents and their families that every SNF has its own strengths and health-care philosophy. Carmel Hills may focus on advanced rehabilitation therapy and community. Other facilities may emphasize behavioral care. By choosing a facility that aligns with your goals, you are more likely to achieve better health outcomes. ☞

The mission of Carmel Hills Care Center is to enhance the well-being and quality of life of each resident by fostering strength, confidence, and independence. We provide the highest standard of compassionate care, delivered with professionalism, warmth, and a commitment to dignity and respect in an energetic and engaging atmosphere.



Planning for Your Investments

By Ryan Hastie



As we approach the final quarter of the year, many investors take this time to review the performance of their investments, overall investment strategy, and previously defined goals. In reviewing their overall investment strategy, investors can ensure that they are on track to meet their goals while also refining or changing goals due to any changes in their financial situation. Although there are numerous actions that can be taken, few of the more popular strategies are outlined below.

The end of the year is a good time to revisit your overall investment strategy and asset allocation – not only for your overall strategy, but for each individual account. This will help ensure that your asset allocation among various asset classes (i.e., equities, fixed income, cash/cash equivalents, alternatives, etc.) is in line with your risk tolerance and short- and long-term financial goals. Due to market volatility and performance, some allocations may have deviated from their intended allocation percentage,

thus increasing or decreasing the risk level for a given portfolio – which may not be aligned with the original risk tolerance. By performing a portfolio rebalance, all investments within the portfolio are brought back to their intended allocation percentages and risk level.

In addition to reviewing the portfolio's allocation, investors can benefit from planning for any potential tax liability, specifically capital gains in taxable accounts (i.e., individual accounts, trust accounts, brokerage accounts). One important item to keep in mind is that certain accounts, such as traditional and Roth IRAs, are not subject to capital gains taxation each year. For taxable accounts, a strategy known as tax-loss harvesting can help mitigate taxes on capital gains. Tax-loss harvesting is when investors sell investments with a capital loss and those losses are used to offset capital gains. If, after netting capital losses and gains, a net loss still exists, you can deduct up to \$3,000 against your ordinary income. Any remain-

ing, unused losses can be carried forward indefinitely for future use.

As the end of the year nears, it is important to ensure that all Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), if applicable, have been fulfilled. The Secure 2.0 legislation provided some changes to RMD ages. For traditional IRA holders, the current RMD age is 73 (for those born between 1951 and 1959). The RMD age for those born in 1960 or later has been changed to 75. Under current regulations, the first RMD may be delayed until April 1 of the year following the year in which you turn 73. For example, if you turn 73 in 2025, the first RMD must be taken no later than April 1, 2026. Thereafter, each RMD must be taken by December 31st of each year. In the previous example, if the 2025 RMD is taken in 2026, the account holder must also take the 2026 RMD during that year as well. It is important to speak with your investment professional or CPA to determine the best RMD strategy for you and your situation. Additionally, IRA beneficiaries may be subject

to RMDs – depending on the age and date of death of the original account holder. If subject to RMDs, IRA beneficiaries must fulfill their RMD by December 31st of each year. If you are unsure, always consult with your financial professional to determine if you are subject to RMDs and what the amount will be each year.

One final consideration to keep in mind as we near year's end is charitable giving. During the holiday season, many feel inclined to give back through charitable donations. Charitable giving offers a way to support your charity or cause of choice, while enjoying personal tax benefits. When determining your gifting plans, you will need to decide if you want to give cash or appreciated assets. Donating appreciated stock, private business interests, real estate, and other non-cash assets held more than one year has two tax benefits. First, you generally eliminate the capital gains tax that you would otherwise incur if you sold the assets and donated the sale proceeds, increasing the amount available for charities by up to 20%. Second, if you itemize deductions when filing your 2025 tax returns, you may be able to claim a charitable deduction for the fair market value of the contributed assets. Another charitable giving strategy involves the use of a donor-advised fund (DAF). A DAF provider is a public charity, and by contributing to a DAF account, you can potentially reduce your tax burdens, contribute assets for potential tax-free investment growth, and use contributions to recommend grants to other public charities immediately or over time. Lastly, if you are age 70½ or older in 2025 and have a traditional IRA, each individual can give up to \$108,000 directly to an operating charity through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD). There is no tax deduction for a QCD. However, a QCD will not count as taxable income and can also be used to satisfy your IRA's 2025 required minimum distribution (RMD). Unfortunately, this strategy is not available within a DAF.

As these are only a handful of examples for year-end planning, it is always best to consult with your financial professional to learn more about the strategies and options available to you and how they will impact your portfolio and potential tax liability. ☺



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Farmer's Daughter

By Mindy Carpenter



Well, this is a surprise and quite an honor! I have been reading Coastal Grower, specifically admiring the showcase homes, since I was young. Having grown up in a local agriculture family, this magazine was our coffee table staple! Never in a million years would I have thought I'd be asked to write for the magazine. I have always loved to write, and my experiences raising two boys has been my humorous writing focus. Humor makes everything survivable.

Being raised in an ag family had so many perks, though being the only daughter introduced limitations to my participation in the family business. My brothers worked their summers on the ranch moving pipe, driving tractors, and getting dirty. In stark contrast, my summers consisted of making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for my dad and I, looking at the horrifying CHP magazine pictures, sitting at my dad's desk, refusing to

clean the toilets and wandering through the shop. The main rule was to never go home dirty. The problem? Dirt is in my genetics! My dad, Ed Gulate, was a grower in Salinas and was the kindest, gentlest man I've ever met. He was born on the very ranch he worked, and every night, would cut fresh broccoli and/or lettuce for Mom to use for dinner. So much broccoli. I ate so much of it that I began to leave it on my plate for my dad to finish. If the broccoli was still on my plate when Mom was done cleaning the kitchen, I had to go to bed. Hence, Dad was the broccoli finisher. He was my hero, though not just for his broccoli eating abilities. Dad knew so many people in the valley, so many that visits to restaurants always took twice as long and trips to the bowling alley made me feel like I was walking in with a celebrity. He lived and breathed Salinas and would go toe to toe with anyone who had stories of the Monterey Peninsula. In his

eyes, Salinas was heaven on earth.

Fast forward to my adult life, and finance became my career. My husband and I raised our family on the southernmost street in Salinas where fields of lettuce, broccoli and strawberries, as well as the Toro mountain range provided the most beautiful portraits out of our picture window. The boys had their very own airshows when cropdusters would make their early morning appearances. These very fields also provided breathtaking backdrops for the Blue Angels and Snowbirds during California Airshow season. While the dirt was definitely in my front yard, a fence and trespassing signs kept me out of the fields. How could I get in the dirt when my career keeps me in an office? Enter my husband and his fantasy football friend. His friend had just started a job with a new "AgTech" company in town. I'd never heard of this new terminology and was intrigued. Robots in a field? That was absurd, but so fascinating! This friend needed help with hiring a team, establishing compliance requirements and setting up the new shop, so I met with him to see how I could help. Our initial meeting went very well and I left feeling confident, knowing this was perfect for me. Still not in dirt, but much closer than I was in my living room.

FarmWise was revolutionary not just for the ag industry, but for me personally.





After two and a half years with the amazing team we had built, I became Head of Field Operations, leading a fleet of bright orange robots known as “Titan”. I was also handed the keys to a white pickup. I set out several mornings a week wearing the standard issue work boots, tshirt, flannel and vest. My travels took me as far south as San Ardo and just a touch north to the ranch where my love for dirt began, the Gularte family ranch bordering Espinosa Road and Highway 101. Most of the fields our FarmWise Titans were weeding were organic and filled with ladybugs and the dreaded grasshoppers. The fields were tucked away in valleys and at the base of mountains, providing views I never knew existed. This was pure heaven. One trek to the fields off of Espinosa Road ended with a drive through the Gularte ranch, ending at the main house and the shop where I learned my craft of sandwich making. It was at this moment that my life came full circle. I stopped on the dirt road leading to 101 and faced Queen of Heaven where my dad rests. I knew he was proud.

I was able to live this dream for a year and a half, at which time the Titan era ended and they were turned into scrap metal. This era may have ended, but the experiences it provided, the knowledge I gained and the people I met became who I am today. The new me. FarmWise eventually saw its last day and soon became part of Taylor Farms in April, 2025. I was a bit lost, confused and not sure where the coming days and weeks would take me as FarmWise, the people, had become family.

Being a woman in agriculture is not as simple as it sounds. Sure, we are in offices

and we are in board meetings, but when you’re in a field driving a big white, dirty pickup, we are rare. This new world is definitely male dominant. It was a difficult and painful lesson to learn that not everyone was my friend and not everyone was supportive. In some meetings, my voice was heard but dismissed. I was often made to feel that I didn’t belong where I was and in the position I had achieved. There were days in that white pickup that I doubted myself, something I later learned was called “imposter syndrome”. Life in this dirt-filled dream was everything I had hoped for, but also came with questions like “What the heck am I doing?” and “Why am I showing up every day?” What kept me going was the support of my family, the amazing operations team I had helped to build, and the desire to follow in my dad’s footsteps. My career in agriculture could simply not be scrapped with the Titan. I was not done yet, I just didn’t know the way. I needed to travel a long and once dirt road to realize my next adventure.

During a therapeutic drive to see my youngest son at Cal Poly on the last Saturday morning in March, I sorted my thoughts, and started to craft a plan, all while singing at the top of my lungs. I now refer to this very drive as my “come to Jesus” drive. I do my best thinking with music on loud, and my drive that morning was nothing short of a sold out concert at Levi Stadium. With swirling thoughts and ringing ears, I told myself what I needed to hear: I am worthy, I am strong, I am compassionate, and I am really good at my job. I flushed all of the negativity down the Salinas River that I crisscrossed on my drive towards San Luis Obispo.

Agriculture has always been in my blood, and the new world of Agtech became my passion. The desire to continue this passion reminded me of a business a friend of mine started. The same friend and fantasy football guy who brought me to FarmWise created a business working with Western Growers, collecting images of crops for their crop library. This was just the beginning for his company and he was about to do some amazing things. As I drove closer to Cal Poly, I wondered how I could contribute. I

had visions of myself back in the field and learning more about the daily operations of a ranch, and about new robotics companies. Once again, coming home with dirty boots. I wanted into this new business and I knew I could make a difference. The first week of May, I became a partner and VP of Finance of Axis Ag, Inc. Look us up, we’re pretty amazing!

Axis Ag is thriving in the Salinas Valley, Pacific Northwest and the desert southwest. We specialize in all things agriculture, with a focus on equipment and software design, business consulting, and promoting new tech in the US market. We just completed the season in the Salinas Valley, working with Ecorobotix from Switzerland and Niquo Robotics from India. We were able to bring the Niquo RoboThinner from prototype to market in just nine months. Having recently made the transition to Yuma for the winter, we are ready to introduce even more technology. What makes us different? Axis Ag owners have AgTech backgrounds, we know what works and what doesn’t, and we listen to growers. We invest our time and expertise in our clients and set them up for success.

Becoming an owner of this company has been life changing. Not only am I able to voice my opinion, but I am asked for my opinion. I am still the only woman, but I am a strong one. I am honored to work in the Valley alongside the very growers my dad shook hands with. Agriculture is generational. If I meet a younger grower, chances are my dad knew their father or grandfather. When I introduce myself, I have learned to mention that I am a Gularte and that I was born and raised right here in Salinas. Why does that make a difference? Because “AgTech” has the stigma of Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley, I am not! A few months ago while observing a group of growers at a demo, I chimed in on a conversation they were having about a dinner fundraiser in town. I asked a few questions, and was met with a cold look and a stinging “Are you from this area?” Once I mentioned who I was and where I am from, the walls came down. The discussion changed from a guarded one to one of the good ole’ boys club I had always heard of. “You are local?!” I sure am, and I am

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so proud to live here. Turns out, the foreman of one of the growers lives in the house my dad was born in. We always say Salinas is a small town. This was absolute proof that it is indeed! One where integrity, handshakes and history mean something.

In future issues of Coastal Grower, this small town girl will focus on all things AgTech in the Valley, including what new tech is headed our way and how and why it works, and local events, as well as events throughout the western United States. I will also touch on what it means to be a woman in this industry. I have grown a lot in the last five years, and while not all of it has been pleasant, I feel that I forged through for a reason. I have a purpose, and I want to share my experiences with as many women as I can. There are unlimited opportunities for us in this industry, and we need to know that we belong out there. Sure, I had to learn the proper way to wave when passing someone in a field (this really is a thing!), how to quickly throw it into four-wheel drive, followed by how to patiently sit while stuck in the mud for half an hour waiting for someone to tow me out, but I also learned how to believe in myself.

Do I still have days where I feel the imposter syndrome creep in? Absolutely. Some days it can knock me down, but other days, I stand in front of a mirror, raise my arms, take in a deep breath and make myself larger than life. This is my super woman pose and it helps me realize that I really can do hard things. I can put myself in difficult situations and thrive. I can feel confident in the field and know that my voice matters. I no longer allow myself to be discounted. I am meeting with growers whose family names I've heard since I was a little girl, traveling up and down the Salinas Valley, flying to Yuma where the heat really shows me who is boss, and keeping my head up as a strong woman who has fought to be here.

Women make a difference in agriculture. We have voices and we belong in white pickups in the fields. I truly am my fathers' daughter, I love dirt and I absolutely love agriculture. ☺



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Forest for the Trees

By Douglas Larson



Undoubtedly, we've all heard the statement, "can't see the forest for the trees". The proverb is an illustration of focusing too heavily on one part of an issue causing a person to miss the overall matter at hand. Whether it's a matter of not seeing past an individual tree or two, corn plants, grape vines, or even almond trees, we have all fallen subject to this dilemma of not looking past that which is right in front of us... the proverbial big picture.

As ag professionals, we find ourselves facing countless obstacles in an endless sea of responsibilities and coinciding decisions. The diversity of our industry is not for the faint of heart and certainly the experience that comes to us as we tackle these various determinations builds a broad spectrum of management skills. Producers find it necessary to become proficient, if not experts, in everything from financing, plant and animal science, human resources, marketing, negotiations, mechanics, and all things in between.

I think about our children and grandchild-

dren growing up on these farms and the countless multi-tasking and problem-solving skills that they learn. From assisting a cow giving birth to properly watering a plant. There is an old saying that states "a farmer can fix anything with a pair of pliers and bailing wire". Today, not every farmer carries a pair of pliers on their belt and bailing wire is pretty much a thing of the past, as large and small hay bales are now almost exclusively bound by polypropylene twine or netting.

Still, these young aggies learn the importance of caring for land, water and life, the value of a hard day's work and the power of living up to one's word. In an industry, where we look each other in the eye and shake hands, knowing that each party will undoubtedly do everything possible to carry out their side of the bargain. Where we pull up our boots, enter the field and work hand in hand with others to carry out the day's mission.

At an early age, we learned to drive tractors and trucks, saddle horses, stack hay, set irrigation pipe and perform countless other

farm duties. No matter where life takes us and what occupation we find ourselves in, these life-long lessons serve us, our employers, our partners and our employees well.

I have tremendous respect for aggies and the way in which they tackle the endless challenges that their way of life entails. They toil year in and year out, never knowing if their sweat will produce a single dollar of profit. In fact, in this fall of 2025, most farmers would admit that the last three years have been the toughest farm economy in a generation. Even the best producers across the country have been forced to eat away at their equity to sustain their operations due to high interest rates, the rising cost of labor and various other inputs. It is amazing what responsibilities these individuals carry with them throughout





their daily lives.

I recall being at a conference a few years ago when a group of people that I had been visiting with suggested that, together, we walk over to an evening event hosted by a large grower. As we were preparing to depart, one of the people in the group mentioned that he needed a coat for the outdoor event, as the evening was certain to cool off. I offered to run up to my room to grab an extra jacket for the man to wear for the evening. His distasteful reply was “okay, but I don’t want to look like a farmer”. As a former 4th generation farmer myself, the comment didn’t sit well with me.

Here was a man who made his living in our industry, yet his disdain for our clientele told me that he thought himself to be above the level of a farmer, which each of our companies served and depended upon. In fact, I found the comment offensive, as I well understood what it took to be a producer in our current ag environment and have to say that I was and still am proud to be associated with and referred to as an ag professional.

Anytime that I am mistaken for a farmer, I see it as a badge of honor. I am more than happy to be referred to in such a manner. Perhaps, it would behoove each of us to take a little broader look at the entirety of a farmers’ world. Instead of focusing on weathered hands, worn boots or a regular old coat, that broader view of the forest might just shed some light on the trees within. Let’s continue to hold our aggies in high regard, as they risk it all to feed us all!!! ☺

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Celebrating the Arts & Embracing Opportunity

Jesús Ruvalcaba is Distinguished Alumnus and Shark Tank bait

By Esmeralda Owen

Hartnell College is proud to honor Jesús Ruvalcaba as this year's Distinguished Alumnus in the Arts. "I feel honored to be recognized with this honor, especially as an alumnus of Hartnell College," he said. "This recognition is very meaningful to me because it shows that you really can make a career in the arts, not only as a passion, but also as a successful business."

He received the award in September from Vice President of Advancement at Hartnell College, Dr. Jackie Cruz, and Superintendent/President of Hartnell College, Michael Gutierrez.

"We are so proud of the talent that comes through our campus," said Dr. Cruz. "Jesus is a true example of how the arts can invoke vision and creativity."

Growing up in Castroville, Ruvalcaba saw his parents work hard in the fields. No one in his family had a college education, and for him and his three sisters, it was a foreign concept. But he was curious and artistically endowed from an early age. All he could think about was drawing day in and day out, and thus, schoolwork was often forgotten. But it was his art that would later lead him to get national attention.

It was his counselor who recommended that he attend Hartnell College. His journey towards expression through the arts began in graphic design, cartoon animation, and drawing. "One of the classes I took was Introduction to Computers – it was something new and exciting for me," he said. "I was amazed at what you could do with Photoshop and other applications."

For him, as for many others, Professor Jerri Namiro at Hartnell was of great inspiration and motivation. "I give a lot of credit to her for caring so much for me," he said. "She really wanted us to succeed." Namiro encouraged Jesús to complete his AA in



Multimedia and to transfer to CSU Monterey Bay for his B.S. in Communication Design. With this found courage, desire to continue on, and the dream to one day teach at the university level, and he earned a master's degree in Art Direction from the Academy

Above: Jesús Ruvalcaba shows off a couple "Paper Tacos". Top right: Jesús Ruvalcaba receiving his Distinguished Alumnus in the Arts award from Hartnell College's Dr. Jackie Cruz and President Michael Gutierrez. Top bottom: Jesús Ruvalcaba on the set of hit series "Shark Tank"

of Art University in San Francisco.

During a visit to the Mexican Heritage Plaza in San Jose with his wife, he came across a vendor selling posters with popular Mexican sayings. “Jokingly, I said ‘those would make great greeting cards!’” That was the start of an idea that turned out to be Paper Tacos – greeting cards with sayings like ‘Sapo verde tu you,’ a playful way to say ‘Happy birthday to you.’ He then knew that fun and funny, culturally relevant Spanglish greeting cards could be a hit.

He worked in Silicon Valley and locally with big companies like Discount School Supply, eBay, and Hewlett Packard, eventually rising to Art Director. But working full-time and managing a new business was difficult. In 2023, Jesús and his wife, Rocio, decided to give Paper Tacos their full attention.

That decision paid off. The popular show Shark Tank invited Jesús to pitch his product to gain support from one of the investors (sharks). It was Mark Cuban who signed up to help Paper Tacos get to the next level.

“I hope my journey can serve as a testament to the possibilities with the arts, and maybe inspire other students as well,” Jesús said.

Paper Tacos is based in Oldtown Salinas.



Jesús runs the business alongside his family and collaborates with Latin American illustrators to grow the product line—all while staying true to his creative roots and cultural identity.

You can find Paper Tacos at Gifts on the

Go, Vallarta Super Markets, and online at <https://papertacos.com>, as well as at other supermarkets in California. Jesús is working with new designers to expand into other markets and cultures, and to go national. ☞



Bullish on the Economy:

Local Company Expands Hiring from Military and Community Colleges, Raises Minimum Wage Pay

By Esmeralda Owen



Above: Vice President of Consumer Banking and Investments Cintia Sanchez-Rivera greets a client as a colleague looks on.

Longtime local company Bank of America, which has served the Monterey Bay region for over 100 years, made a series of pay and hiring announcements that, taken together, demonstrate confidence and optimism in the economy and the local workforce.

First, the company raised its minimum hourly wage to \$25 per hour, which brings minimum salary to more than \$50,000 annually – a 67% increase in starting pay since 2018 and outpacing minimum California pay.

On the jobs front, the company announced plans to hire 10,000 individuals with military backgrounds as well as another 8,000 from community and junior colleges nationwide over the next five years.

Having made a similarly ambitious military hiring commitment ten years ago that result-

ed in its hiring over 20,000 veterans since 2015, Bank of America has a keen understanding of the importance that military experience brings to finance careers, having banked the U.S. Military for over 100 years and having branches on the Ford Ord and Presidio of Monterey bases in the past.

With more than 170 employees across the region and 12 financial centers where many of the starting and entry-level pay roles are housed, the bank anticipates the increased pay, coupled with the hiring goals, will have a positive impact locally.

“These moves reflect our commitment to building a strong skills-based workforce and offer economic opportunities for advance-

ment and success here at home,” said Jennifer Dacquisto, president, Bank of America Monterey Bay.

“From past efforts, we know that people with military backgrounds, for example, demonstrate incredible skills, discipline, commitment, and the ability to adapt quickly to changing environments – these are transferable skill sets for successful banking and finance roles,” noted Dacquisto.

In a region with several leading community and junior colleges, as well as a significant military and veteran population, this is welcome news that makes local education leaders smile.

“We applaud Bank of America’s commitment to hiring veterans and community college graduates, because investments like these not only create opportunities for individuals and their families, but also strengthen the workforce and the economic vitality of our region,” said Michael Gutierrez, Superintendent/President, Hartnell Community College District. “At Hartnell College, we are deeply committed to supporting our veteran students and their families as they transition from service to civilian life – thus, community colleges play a critical role in providing the skills, education, and guidance that make economic and social mobility possible.”

Army veteran Carolina Gamino of Salinas applauds the latest news and appreciates the focus on veterans like her. She is a graduate of Hartnell College and CSU Monterey Bay in Business Administration.

“Most times when we leave military life, we are faced with the uncertainty of what comes next,” Gamino said. “It is refreshing to know that there are opportunities for us and ongoing support to get back to civilian life and thrive.”



While the bank noted its investments into employee skills development, it also recognizes that community and junior colleges provide a valuable pipeline of talent with the skills needed to meet current and future entry-level needs.

That's why BofA will double its annual hires from community colleges from 800 to 1,600 over the next five years – 8,000 in total – recognizing the vital role these local institutions play in providing opportunities for their communities and preparing skilled talent for the workforce.

When the \$25 starting hourly is coupled with great benefits, skills development opportunities, and career advancement, Dacquisto says it makes BofA a great place to start and build a career.

In a high-cost region like Monterey, starting pay for entry-level jobs can vary. According to ZipRecruiter, the average hourly pay for an entry-level role in Salinas is \$16.54, in Santa Cruz, it's \$17.28, and in Hollister, the starting average hourly pay is just above \$20.00.

"We have many colleagues who started in entry-level and minimum wage roles who went on to become senior leaders who oversee entire teams of bankers or manage millions of dollars. So, this is a launchpad for a great career," said Dacquisto.

A great example of this career trajectory from entry level to more senior roles is Cintia Sanchez-Rivera, who grew up in Gilroy and joined Bank of America, starting in the local branch. She soon rose through the ranks to

become vice president of Consumer Banking and Investments.

The Gavilan College and UC Santa Cruz graduate now oversees a team of 18 financial solutions advisors who help manage \$120 million in assets for clients.

"Coming from a single-parent household,

being able to advance my career and help my family seemed unattainable when I was growing up, but Bank of America continues to give me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and career," said Rivera-Sanchez from her Salinas office.

"I initially expected my job would remain within the four branch walls but given how much the company values employees with varied experiences and promotes from within, I navigated into the investment side of the finance world and now find myself leading a team of advisors across the entire Monterey Bay region. I even recently bought my first home," Rivera-Sanchez noted proudly.

All of these efforts have brought notable recognition for Bank of America, which has been recognized by LinkedIn's Top Companies in the U.S., Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For list for seven consecutive years, and People Magazine's 100 Companies That Care. **ce**



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Wine Industry Faces Both Reckoning and Opportunity

With demand in decline, tough choices today could pave the way for a stronger future

By Gwen McGill



The California Wine Industry is facing challenging times. And no region is being spared.

Per capita wine consumption in the US has declined since 2022 after reaching its peak during the pandemic, and the effects are hitting local growers and wineries hard. According to the County of Monterey Agricultural Commissioner's 2024 Crop & Livestock Report, the overall value of wine grapes in Monterey County dropped by 22 percent, from \$194 million in 2023 to \$152 million in 2024. Sauvignon Blanc yields were down by 32 percent year-over-year, Chardonnay production was down by 17 percent, and Pinot Noir tonnage declined by 15 percent, indicating thousands of tons of unsold grapes. Winegrapes dropped from the county's 5th most valuable crop to 8th in 2024.

Listings for grapes and wine for sale were plentiful on wine industry classifieds this year. In July, WineBusiness.com reported that its grapes and bulk wine classifieds listings continue to hit new highs, with total offers posted through June this year up 2% compared to 2024 (when they reached their all-time high) and nearly 60% more than in 2023. (graphic)

Multiple Forces Behind Decline

Wine's challenges are coming from many directions, making it harder for growers and vintners to combat the headwinds. Shifting demographics are partly to blame. Younger consumers are not adopting wine at the same rate as previous generations, and the aging boomer population is drinking less wine, resulting in a decline in overall consumption. Additionally, an oversupply of

grapes from the 2022 and 2023 harvests contributed to inventory just when consumption started trending down.

Competition from other sectors, including craft beer, ready-to-drink cocktails and seltzers like High Noon, as well as cannabis, is taking market share from wine. Health concerns and the rise of medications like GLP1s that aid weight loss are also curbing individual consumption of alcohol.

Anti-alcohol campaign movements, overall dwindling consumer confidence, and the high cost per bottle of wine, particularly with restaurant markups that range from 200 to 400 percent, are often cited. Tariffs on goods ranging from vineyard equipment and tractors to glass, barrels, and corks are also a looming concern as they ultimately increase costs for growers, wineries, and, in turn, wine consumers.

On a positive note, a September report in The New York Times stated that the upcoming, newly updated US Dietary Guidelines are expected to support the moderate use of alcohol, including wine, rather than declaring that no amount of alcohol use is considered safe, a statement the previous administration seemed poised to hand down.

"The last time our industry faced a downturn that included a decrease in consumption AND an oversupply of wine grapes was in the mid-1980s," Steve McIntyre, President and Founder of Monterey Pacific, a vineyard management company based in Soledad, said. "The reasons are nearly identical to today's circumstances."

Growers Struggle as Prices Decline, Grapes Go Unsold

Experts like Jeff Bitter, president of Allied

Grape Growers, acknowledge that this harvest will be particularly challenging, but it presents an opportunity for the industry to regain balance.

This harvest season, growers in Monterey County and across California experienced dramatically reduced demand for the second consecutive year. “Grapes selling from Monterey on the spot market have been at prices that barely cover picking and hauling—nowhere near covering costs or sustainability, it’s just cleaning off the vines,” Bitter said in September, as the grape harvest hit its peak. “If we crush almost 1 million tons less than what we can sell, that effectively could wipe out the inventory level we have, but unfortunately, it’s at the expense of the grower community,” he said, referring to the 2025 California grape crush.

The Path to Recovery

To restore balance to the California wine industry, vineyard acreage needs to be reduced. Bitter estimates that the Central Coast accounts for 30,000 of the 50,000 acres that need to be removed across the state. For Monterey County, that translates to a reduc-

tion of around 5,000 acres of grapes just in terms of supply. Restoring sustainable wine grape prices may take longer.

“It will be a couple of years before we see sustainable pricing,” said Bitter. “For now, we are seeing a lot of acres come out and a lot of heartache for growers.”

Innovation and Marketing to Reach New Consumers

The California Wine Institute, among others, has conducted surveys and provided valuable analysis of younger consumers’ habits regarding alcohol and wine, offering industry guidance on how to expand occasions and audiences for wine.

Local vintner and grower organizations, like the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans and Arroyo Seco Winegrowers, are working to keep the local wine community strong. They rely on membership dues, industry sponsors, grants, and event income to fund marketing initiatives.

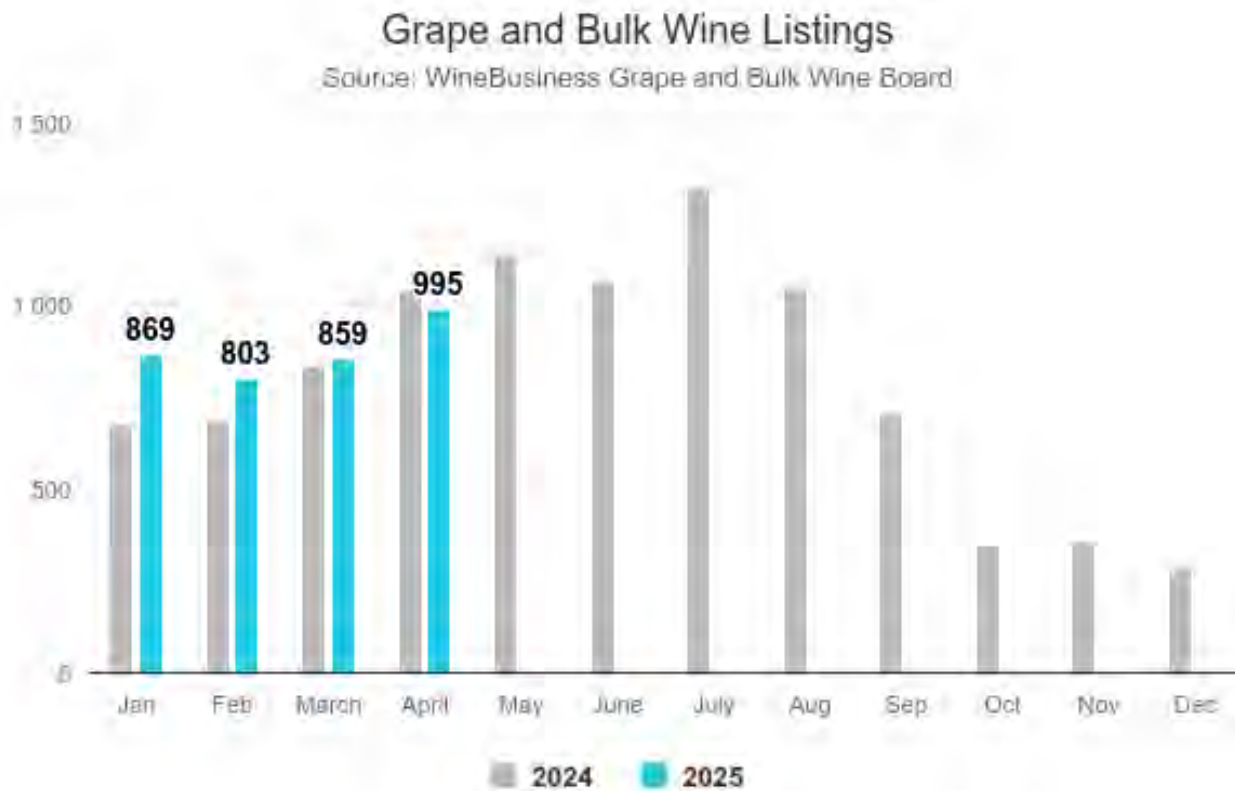
The Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans was recently awarded nearly \$500,000 from the California Department of Food and Agriculture 2025 Specialty Crop Block Grant

program to promote. The funds will support campaigns promoting the region’s growers and wines to the national wine trade, and target millions of 25-50-year-old wine enthusiasts within the San Jose and San Francisco markets, encouraging visits to the region’s tasting rooms.

Collaborations with See Monterey and the Monterey County Hospitality Association can also help promote the region’s tasting rooms and increase the presence of Monterey County wines on local wine lists.

How Consumers Can Help

There is no one silver bullet, easy answer, or approach. The industry will need to weather the downturn, focusing on quality, localism, and the experiential benefits that wine offers. Meanwhile, Monterey County residents can support their local wine growers by visiting tasting rooms, attending wine events, ordering local wines at restaurants, and continuing to enjoy the 8,000-year-old beverage that has been a part of Monterey’s agricultural history since the 1770s. *cg*



Salinas Restaurant Business Expands to Marina

By Jeff Mendelsohn



There are few families in Monterey County that have fed more people than the Bozzo/Filice family. Hailing from the Calabria region of Italy, these families have shared their collective passions for family, faith, and original recipes with countless area residents for decades.

What started in 1975 with one standalone Italian restaurant right off Highway 68 in Salinas eventually grew into four different family-owned brick-and-mortar eateries stretching along the Salinas Valley, ranging from Angelina's, located in the Toro Park neighborhood (est. 2007) to Luigi's in Gonzales (est. 2014). Couple those with the widely popular Pastabilities (2016) and Bagel Corner (1996) concepts in the middle of Salinas, and you're all but guaranteed to have tasted some of their age-old family recipes at some point or another.

However, on the off chance you haven't, the family business has spawned yet another creative concept targeting one of the most rapidly growing communities in the area, Marina.

"We've been looking at Marina for a while

now," says Mike Filice. "It's undeniable that there is a demand for our products in this community.

Faced with the decision to go full brick & mortar or a ghost kitchen concept, the family decided that a hybrid approach would be best.

"This location will offer indoor seating but will be highly focused as a mobile-thru concept," says Filice.

The mobile-thru concept will include a dedicated drive thru lane for digital orders. The restaurant will be working with all the well-known food delivery platforms including GrubHug, DoorDash, and Uber Eats.

"It's undeniable that there is a demand for our products in this community."

"We're trying to keep up with the trends in the industry and make it simple for our customers to get what they want," says Filice. Expected to open in late October or early November – the menu represents some of the

most popular dishes from the existing restaurants. There will be breakfast burritos from Bagel Corner alongside blackened chicken alfredo, calamari strips, customizable home-made pastas, as well as soups and salads. Already highly successful in Salinas, the family is targeting the growing number of families, businesses, and college students in Marina.

"My wife and I both played soccer at CSUMB," says Operations Manager Aaron Besaw of he and his wife Mikaela's ties to the university. "Our new location is only a few minutes away from the campus and the sports complex, so we're definitely going to be working on collaborations with the university to capture as much of that potential business as possible." ☞



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A Fresh Look At a Local Treasure

Carmel's famed Cypress Inn undergoes 'light-touch' renovation

By Mike Hale



Renowned for its artistic legacy, Bohemian spirit and timeless beauty, the storybook village of Carmel-by-the-Sea cherishes a host of treasures — yet few with the glamour and charm of The Cypress Inn.

A refuge where Old Hollywood magic meets Spanish-Moroccan style — and where every guest (whether two-legged or four) feels perfectly at home — the stately inn brought into global prominence by the late screen legend Doris Day has stood unchanged at its core for decades.

But as it approached its centennial following decades under the glare of the spotlight, the famed boutique hotel born on Lincoln Street in 1929 needed a refreshing. The inn is currently undergoing a “light-touch renovation” under the guidance of renowned Carmel-based designer and hospitality innovator Charles Gruwell. The approach is not about reimagining but about refreshing — “not a complete change,

just upgrading the feel of it,” according to Joseph Violi, the inn’s newly appointed general manager. “(Gruwell) is the perfect person to take this on.”

Spearheading the project is the inn’s owner Dennis LeVett, a local entrepreneur and Day’s former business partner who has decades of experience in local hospitality. Violi refers to his own role as “a steward of a legacy,” and thinks of his current opportunity as the pinnacle of his hospitality career.

“The inn has such a storied history and our job is to bring it forward with a sophisticated approach,” said Violi, a graduate of Cornell’s prestigious School of Hotel Administration, and with more than 35 years in luxury hospitality (including a long-ago stint at nearby Carmel Valley Ranch).

Work is unfolding in phases, rather than one grand reveal. “Everything is being done in steps,” said Violi, who noted that the inn would not close at any point. “The living room is totally being redone, and it will have a big impact because every local knows

it. That’s where we host live music on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights — it’s a beloved space.”

Guestroom renovations are just beginning, with palettes and furnishings still being chosen by Gruwell. The team is committed to keeping the Spanish-Moroccan theme, ensuring that the inn’s heritage remains intact even as the details are refreshed for modern sensibilities.

The heart of the hotel remains the restaurant/bar Terry’s Lounge, named for Day’s late son, musician and producer Terry Melcher. Terry’s has long been the place to meet friends, enjoy a cocktail, and soak in the inn’s relaxed glamour.

The Gruwell-led refresh has leaned into the Moroccan spirit, adding a tent-like feel to the front area (known affectionately as “the dog bar,”). Local artist Lisa Haas has adorned the space with trompe-l’œil (French for “deceives the eye,”) a style of painting that uses realistic imagery to create a three-dimensional illusion. Outside, guests





now find new patio furniture, umbrellas, and heat lamps — simple touches that have already been warmly embraced by locals.

A timeless gathering place

The famed boutique hotel rose to prominence through the talent of master builder Michael J. Murphy, who just after the turn of the 20th century crafted more than 350 buildings in Carmel, making him one of the single most influential shapers of the village's look and character.

From the ornate entrance and wrought iron embellishments to the famed Queen Tower suites with their sweeping views, the Cypress Inn always boasted a welcoming sophistication. It is part of the Carmel Boutique Inns collection, but its singular history — blending Old Hollywood, Carmel's bohemian charm, and a pioneering pet-friendly philosophy — makes it stand apart.

"We have to be sensitive to the history

and legacy of the property," Violi said. "We're updating what has traditionally been a legendary inn in Carmel-by-the-Sea and bringing it more into the 21st century — but with a light touch."

The inn's design pedigree is nearly as famous as its pet policy. In 2013, Carmel designer Julie Gardner unveiled a renovation that fused Old Hollywood with Spanish-Moroccan overtones. The look featured rich tones of paprika, ginger, and clove alongside handcrafted tile, wrought iron, and alabaster lighting. Gardner called the style "Glam-Meets-Morocco," and it became the Cypress Inn's signature aesthetic — a visual reminder of both its architectural roots and its Hollywood lineage.

A legacy born in the Golden Age

The Cypress Inn began life in 1929 as the Hotel La Ribera, a white-painted brick landmark with black-and-gold trim that local press immediately hailed as "one of the show places of the Monterey Peninsula." Designed in a Spanish Revival style, its arches, wrought iron details, and Mediterranean influence set the tone for what would later evolve into its celebrated Spanish-Moroccan décor.

Ownership changed hands in the 1960s, when Earl E. McInnis and his son Frank restored and modernized the property, renaming it Cypress West. But its most

famous chapter began in the mid-1980s, when Day (a Hollywood icon but also a Carmel Valley resident) and LeVett purchased the hotel. By then, Day had stepped away from her film career and devoted herself to animal welfare, founding the Doris Day Animal Foundation.

One non-negotiable request for the hotel was simple but groundbreaking: it had to be pet-friendly. At a time when hotels rarely welcomed pets, the Cypress Inn became Carmel's first boutique hotel to invite four-legged companions as warmly as their owners. That pioneering stance, coupled with Day's star power, soon earned it recognition from Sunset Magazine as "probably the most famous dog-friendly hotel in the country."

Carmel itself was the perfect backdrop. Dogs run free on Carmel Beach, stroll the town's shop-lined streets, and find water bowls waiting for them at storefronts. At the Cypress Inn, they find doggie treats at check-in, outdoor dining spaces where they can curl up by their owner's side, and even post-beach rinse-off stations in the courtyard.

In the end, what has become the most famous dog-friendly hotel in the country, is equally known for its style, grace and hospitality.

"It's been part of Carmel's fabric for decades," said Violi. "It's important that we treat her with the respect she deserves." **CG**



Carmel Woman's Club Celebrates Its Centennial

From City Beautification Projects to Philanthropy and Building Strong Community Relationships

By Mac McDonald



Back in the early 1900s, years before it was founded, the various women's civic groups that would eventually become the Carmel Woman's Club, were tasked with naming the city's streets, cleaning up the town and even building a water trough for horses.

Fast forward 100 years and the club no longer performs those particular functions, instead, the nonprofit club has become a force in local philanthropy as well as a haven for socializing, friendship and fostering community.

Just in the past year, the now 500-member club has raised enough funds to bestow grants on 16 local nonprofit organizations as well as award scholarships to 13 women to continue their college careers.

A century ago, on Dec. 6, 1925, a gathering of 54 civic-minded women met at the Pine Inn in Carmel and signed their names to a charter document that would create what would become the Carmel Woman's Club (more on that name later). Their goals were: "... mutual help, intellectual advancement,

social enjoyment, and united effort for the welfare of the community." Those general goals still remain today, with a heightened emphasis on the "welfare of the community."

Not only that, that initial group of 54 has multiplied tenfold, and since that initial

meeting there have been more than 3,000 meetings, all open to the public; more than 10,000 members over the years, the purchase and construction of a permanent clubhouse that still stands and has been rented by local nonprofits more than 1,000 times and the creation of a number of popular monthly and annual events that raise funds for scholarships and local nonprofits.

Not too bad for a group that initially were involved in such things as gardening and landscaping, pitching in to help two war efforts, raising funds for municipal tennis courts and a sundial, and generally keeping Carmel clean and beautiful.

"What happened in 1920, was women had won the right to vote, so that was the catalyst to start the club," says current club president Tina DeMaria, a member since 2005. "That really inspired these women to get involved in civic responsibilities, and empowered and motivated them. When the club started, the mission emphasized city beautification,





becoming more informed on current world events, culture and the arts, along with socializing and playing bridge. Today, the mission is the same, with 13 educational and entertaining programs each year, opportunities to socialize and philanthropy to benefit our community.”

And while the current club has been able to raise a tremendous amount for local nonprofits and scholarships, DeMaria believes it’s something else that fuels the involvement of its members.

“Now, I think the driving force behind the Woman’s Club is friendship, community and the social aspect,” she says. “Our membership has doubled since the pandemic. We went from 250 to more than 500 members. What I hear from members is that they want to meet people and want to get involved in the community. I think the pandemic starved them of social interaction.”

With 2025 being the centennial year for the club, the members decided to go big and set a huge fundraising goal.

“Our goal for the centennial is to raise \$100,000 for our scholarship fund, and we are on track to meet that goal,” DeMaria said in late-August.

The first order of business was the Centennial Celebration, “A Journey Through the Decades,” held Sept. 20 at the clubhouse on San Carlos Street across from the Sunset Center. The Alison Sharino Band played music from the 10 decades of the club’s existence, a block of Ninth Street was closed off for food, wine, beer and other vendors, a car

“With 2025 being the centennial year for the club, the members decided to go big and set a huge fundraising goal.”

show was held at the Sunset Center parking lot and a VIP reception was held the night before.

DeMaria says the centennial celebration was more about celebration and less about fundraising, which is spread out throughout the year, with two-a-month meetings with speakers, followed by tea; a craft fair in November; a fashion show luncheon and a fall luncheon; and in past years, a Sweet Seconds rummage sale and the Lobster Fest (which raised a whopping \$45,000 last year). This year will also feature a luncheon on

Dec. 8 to celebrate the club’s anniversary as close to the actual founding date as possible.

In 2024, the club donated funds to the following 16 nonprofits: Meals on Wheels, Breast Cancer Assistance Group, Blind and Visually Impaired, Carl Cherry Center for the Arts, Carmel Foundation, Chamber Music Monterey Bay, Community Human Services, Gathering for Women, Gen Giammanco Foundation, Legal Services for Seniors, Kernes Adaptive Aquatics, Monterey Sober Living for Women, Pacific Repertory Theatre, Salvation Army, Second Bloom, and VNA & Hospice

In addition, in 2025, they supported 13 women with scholarships totaling \$18,075 in their quests to return to college and continue their education. Since 2010, the club has awarded 93 scholarships totaling almost \$110,000.

“Philanthropy has grown to become a larger part of our mission since we started the scholarship fund in 2010,” says DeMaria, with the huge success of Sweet Seconds the impetus to start the fund. “Our scholarship fund is directed to women who are returning to college, not high school seniors. These are older students who want to improve their



However the name is spelled, DeMaria feels strongly connected to the club's mission and goals started 100 years ago.

"I've been involved with the club for more than 20 years and it makes me so proud to be part of it, to be a good steward and continue our mission," she says. ☞

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lives, improve the lives of their families and give back to the community. Our club members have enthusiastically supported our scholarship recipients and are very proud of their achievements. You should see what schools they are attending."

As for the name of the club, which has caused undue confusion and questions, DeMaria says using the singular form, woman, was the vernacular of the day when

the club was formed in the 1920s, as in "I'm a woman and we have a club. Not a man's club, but a woman's club." But times have changed, and in the spirit of inclusiveness, the club has welcomed men to its membership, among them current mayor Dale Byrne and former Carmel mayors Ken White and Dave Potter, internationally renowned author Jeffrey Deaver and education consultant and race car driver Terry McHenry.



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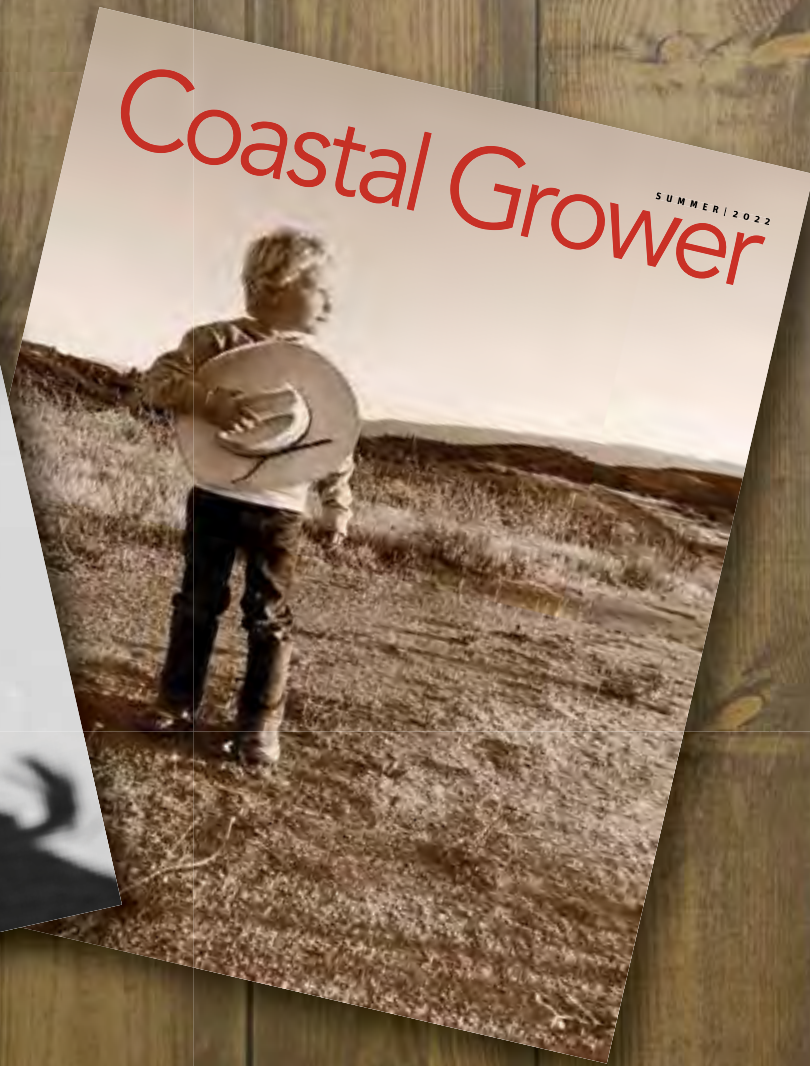
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Dogs and cars. Or is it cars and dogs? One can imagine that throughout the Stratton's decades-long romance the ratio of these two additions to their household has trended in both directions. At the moment, cars are in the lead, but my money's on dogs in the long run. After all, through her unfaltering volunteer efforts, Sylvana has been instrumental in the adoptions of over a thousand in-need Labrador retrievers. And as much as she loves her red Ferrari, she would undoubtedly choose four legs over four wheels any day of the week.

When Jerry and Sylvana were dreaming up the design for their forever home, no doubt both of these passions were considered. The end result is a beautiful house with plenty of room for cars, dogs, and all of the couple's worldly treasures. Nestled in the scenic rolling hills that define Monterey's Highway 68 corridor, the house hits the sweet spot in between secluded and close to the magical resources that Monterey has to offer.



After a lifetime of travel with some living abroad, these two proud “military brats” were excited to build a home where they could showcase the art and antiques they’d curated for decades. Aside from a few pieces with automobile and dog themes, the artwork is eclectic in nature, the ultimate testament to the “I buy what I like” approach to collecting. Because they’re so discerning, the couple is fortunate that if something catches their eyes, chances are it’s something truly special.







Jerry's love of wine is reinforced through his acquisition of many antique decanters, one of which was crafted in the 18th century. Sylvana favors salt sellers and other hosting accessories like distinctive napkin rings and place card holders. All of these items are showcased in the most distinctive part of the house: Jerry's beloved wine room. The irony that a house that's all about the views makes the best use of a windowless corner that we've ever seen. In cozy contrast to the uplifting light that streams into the core of the home, this stately room transports wine enthusiasts into a wonderland of nostalgia best shared by candlelight. A foggy evening would be perfect for a visit to this end of the house, perhaps followed by an intimate dinner for two in front of the living room's fireplace where a small table sits nearby waiting for that scenario.

And should they ever be called upon to serve fish to a hundred or so guests, the couple is ready with their prized collection of distinctive fish cutlery sets. In Germany, where Jerry and Sylvana spent many happy years, such service sets are cherished family heirlooms in nearly every household. How lovely that they brought that tradition stateside.







With so many fascinating points of interest throughout the home, it was a savvy choice to go with a unifying force of Saltillo tiles for flooring, making the flow of the layout as grand as their endless views of Monterey Bay. On a clear day, one can see as far as Santa Cruz's Pigeon Point Lighthouse. They truly capitalized on the potential of their prime Halcyon Heights lot within the Hidden Hills development.

Both accomplished sailors, the couple naturally gravitated toward land with a breathtaking view of the sea. That kind of view never gets old, but even if it did, they could simply turn their gaze east to avail oneself of an expansive display of the Salinas Valley. When one's visuals go from "pastures of heaven" to "marine sanctuary" on a daily basis, it's clear that the corner of the universe you call home was well chosen. And dogs, cars, antiques and art are the icing on a very sweet cake. ☞





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Salinas Welcomes “The Reservoir”

By Jeff Mendelsohn



If you've driven along Highway 68 near Hitchcock Road, you may have noticed a new sign at the corner. No, I'm not talking about the “Burritos & Gas” signage adorning the Casillas Brothers service station slash taqueria (insert joke here). What I'm referring to is the plot of land directly across the street moving crate that reads “Coming soon...Reservoir Farms”.

Danny Bernstein is a former Silicon Valley executive who has established an innovative new ecosystem for ag technology. His new company, The Reservoir, is a venture capital firm and network of nonprofit incubators designed to tackle some of the most urgent challenges facing California agriculture. The company's flagship initiative, Reservoir Farms, is the world's first on-farm robotics incubator, bringing high-tech startups out of the lab and directly into the field to develop and test new ag tech solutions.

In partnership with Tanimura & Antle, Reservoir Farms has secured a long-term lease for 40 acres of farmland on the corner of

Hitchcock Road and Highway 68. This highly desirable farmland has been cultivated for a variety of commodities including strawberries, lettuce, and leafy greens, making it an ideal site for Reservoir Farms to test pilot robotics and automation technologies.

“Partnering with Tanimura & Antle to secure this exceptional farmland ensure Reservoir Farms can serve as the launchpad for the next generation of ag tech,” said Bernstein. “Thanks to the partnership with the Tanimura & Antle family, ag tech innovation can be directly connected to farmland.” Bernstein's vision for The Reservoir stems from a critical observation: traditional ag tech incubators, often resembling sterile office spaces, are ill-equipped to serve the needs of the specialty crop industry. Robotics and automation solutions for crops like strawberries and leafy greens require real-world testing environments to adapt to uneven terrain, diverse growing conditions, and the delicate nature of produce. The Reservoir addresses this disconnect by securing the lease with

T&A, thus providing startups with direct access to a farm environment and the guidance of experienced growers.

On August 27th, a collection of both agriculture and city leaders gathered at the future site of Reservoir Farms for a ground-breaking and ribbon cutting ceremony. The event was attended by more than two hundred industry leaders, growers, partners, investors, educators and city leaders.

The launch marks the first step in creating Bernstein's vision of creating an “Olympic Village of Ag Tech”, where growers and tech leaders collaborate to address the challenges facing the industry.

“This ‘Olympic Village’ concept of ag tech in Salinas really is the of its kind,” said Salinas Mayor Dennis Donahue. “And that's a heck of an accomplishment,” said Donohue to the assembled crowd.

Prior to the ribbon cutting, The Reservoir announced its strategic partnership with John Deere, a leader in equipment for ag technology. This partnership creates an opportunity to connect innovation with real-world application. Representatives from John Deere were on hand at the ceremony to support Bernstein and his “Reservoirians”.

Bernstein then went on to discuss several industry partnerships including Nutrien Ag Solutions, a global provider of critical materials and inputs for farms who will serve as the





primary provider of those materials to the Salinas location. Bernstein also recognized Netafim, the world's leading drip irrigation technology company, Driscoll's, Taylor Farms, Western Growers, Naturipe, and the Monterey County Farm Bureau.

"This is the first start-up incubator in California that we believe is built from the ground up with authentic and deep community partnerships," said Bernstein.

The Reservoir's role in the Salinas Valley

The Reservoir's impact on the Salinas Valley's agricultural business is set to be multifaceted and profound.

Accelerating innovation: By providing startups with on-farm testing grounds and direct grower feedback, The Reservoir dramatically accelerates the development and commercialization of new technologies. This process is already underway with its first cohort of six startups, which are working on technologies ranging from AI-powered farm equipment to computer vision tools and automation. This initiative aims to address the industry's generational challenges, including labor shortages and the need for greater efficiency.

Creating economic opportunities: The Reservoir is also designed to be a long-term economic contributor to the region. Bernstein's plans include expanding the program to other agricultural areas. The project has already secured a \$9.2 million California Jobs First investment, the state's largest-ever ag tech award, to create jobs and training opportunities for underserved populations. This approach aims to build a skilled workforce and embed innovation as a driver of economic vitality.

Fostering strategic partnerships: The initiative is built on a foundation of robust public-private partnerships. The partnership with John Deere is particularly significant, as it grants startups access to the company's equipment, technology, and expertise, bridging the gap between early-stage ideas and scalable commercialization. Academic partners, such as UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, Hartnell College, and Merced College, are also involved, helping to provide research and workforce training.

A bridge between tech and the field

Bernstein's background in technology has given him a deep understanding of what it takes to scale innovative solutions. However, his experience has also taught him that tech developed in a vacuum often fails to meet real-world needs. He was humbled by the complexity of agriculture, especially the skilled manual labor involved in harvesting specialty crops like strawberries. This experience reinforced his belief that technology must be developed in close collaboration with the people who will actually use it.

Ultimately, The Reservoir aims to create an authentic bridge between Silicon Valley's technological prowess and the agricultural roots of the Salinas Valley. The company is not just building new products; it is cultivating a new culture of innovation where tech and agriculture grow together, ensuring the resilience and prosperity of California's farming communities for generations to come. **CG**

Planting the Seeds of Tomorrow

How First Tee's Changing the Odds for Local Youth

By Nathan Nunez



Twenty years ago, Monterey County was facing a crisis. Youth violence, chronic absenteeism, and limited opportunities were cutting lives short and narrowing futures. The community needed a safe place where kids could grow, learn, and discover their potential. Out of that urgency, First Tee – Monterey County (FTMC) was born in 2004.

From the beginning, our mission has been simple but bold: keep kids alive and use golf as a vehicle to create good human beings. Golf is not the end goal but the tool to drive meaningful change. Every swing, putt, and lesson reinforces respect, perseverance, honesty, and confidence. Practiced daily, those values become the foundation for healthier, safer, and more hopeful lives.

From Crisis to Commitment

In the mid-2000s, Salinas earned the grim nickname “the youth homicide capital of California.” Community leaders asked a hard question: What would it take to give kids a real chance to succeed academically,

personally, and in their communities? The answer came in 2007 with Going Gangbusters, a partnership between FTMC and the Alisal Union School District. Instead of waiting for kids to arrive at the golf course, First Tee went directly into classrooms in some of the county's most underserved neighborhoods.

Students spent 90 minutes each week learning not only how to grip a club, but how to handle challenges, make positive choices, and believe in themselves. Teachers saw immediate results: fewer behavior issues, more cooperation, and a stronger sense of responsibility. Principals noticed a cultural shift, with children more engaged, motivated, and proud of their growth. The results were undeniable. Academic scores rose. Attendance improved. Most importantly, community safety began to change. In East Salinas, youth homicides dropped nearly 50 percent over two decades, and overall youth violent crime fell by about 44 percent. While many community efforts contributed, local leaders recognize FTMC as a vital partner in this transformation.

“This is the best program the Alisal School District has implemented. I have seen great changes in our students. They look forward to First Tee days not just for golf, but for life skills,” says teacher Patricia Andrews.

Programs That Save Lives and Shape Futures

Today, FTMC serves more than 12,000 youth annually across Monterey County, from Salinas and Pajaro to Soledad, Greenfield, and King City. Since its founding, the chapter has reached more than 180,000 kids, many from families where 80 to 90 percent live below the poverty line.

Accessibility is central. Programs are free or low-cost, transportation is provided, and equipment is loaned. No child is turned away for financial reasons. Coaches meet students where they are: on school campuses, in after-school centers, or at FTMC's Salinas and King City campuses, which include a learning center with STEAM labs, tutoring spaces, and a teen hub.

Each lesson blends golf skills with life skills. A putting drill becomes a lesson in patience. Scorekeeping turns into an exercise in honesty. Team play reinforces cooperation. Over time, children internalize these values and carry them into classrooms, homes, and careers.





The results speak volumes:

- Chronic absenteeism among FTMC students has dropped to 7.7 percent, compared to nearly 30 percent in nearby districts.
- 40 percent of participants meet or exceed English standards, versus 28 percent countywide.
- In math, First Tee kids outperform peers two-to-one.
- Surveys show more than 85 percent of participants report greater resilience, confidence, and leadership skills.

Stories of Transformation

The numbers are powerful, but the lives behind them matter most.

Nicole Iniakov came to First Tee as a shy 10-year-old. Through mentorship and perseverance, she grew into a confident leader. In 2024, she won the PURE Insurance Championship at Pebble Beach and is now headed to Harvard University. She credits First Tee with instilling the discipline and character that fueled her journey.

Derrick Ow, once bullied for a disability, found belonging at First Tee. With encouragement from coaches, he developed self-confidence and went on to graduate as a program leader. Today, he works for the Northern California Golf Association, paying it forward by making golf more inclusive. Every child's story underscores the same truth. FTMC is not about creating professional golfers. It is about creating good human beings who succeed in school, avoid gangs, contribute to their communities, and believe in their own potential.

A Safer, Stronger Monterey County

First Tee's work ripples outward. By keeping kids engaged, safe, and hopeful, the entire community benefits. Salinas Police leadership has estimated FTMC's presence has saved the community nearly 300 million dollars in crime-related costs. Parents report children showing more empathy, confidence, and communication skills. Teachers describe classrooms where students are more focused and respectful.

This is why FTMC is not just a youth program. It is a public safety and economic advancement partner. It proves that when a community invests in kids, everyone wins.

Looking Ahead: Scaling Impact

As FTMC marks its 21st year, the vision is bold: triple the number of youth served to 25,000 annually by 2026. This means expanding deeper into South County's agricultural towns and building stronger roots on the Monterey Peninsula.

The chapter is also innovating:

- Growing its Teen Center with STEM labs, a music studio, and mentoring programs.
- Training and certifying more coaches to deliver high-quality life skills instruction.
- Leveraging technology, including a new mobile app for goal-setting and healthy habits.

Most importantly, FTMC will stay focused on its founding promise: keeping kids alive, out

of gangs, and on a path to becoming leaders and role models.

How the Community Can Help

This mission is only possible through collective effort. Community members, businesses, and individuals can support in several ways:

- Volunteer as a mentor, tutor, or coach. Last year, volunteers contributed more than 8,500 hours to help kids thrive.
- Donate or sponsor a program, school site, or fundraising event like the annual "Boots, Bottles & BBQ." Contributions fund scholarships, transportation, coaching, and healthy snacks.
- Partner by offering field trips, internships, or career talks for youth.
- Spread the word, because every new student who walks through the door represents a life with greater possibility.

Changing the Odds

First Tee – Monterey County was founded to change the odds stacked against our kids. Two decades later, the message is stronger than ever: golf is the hook, but life is the lesson.

By teaching values, building confidence, and creating safe spaces, FTMC is keeping kids alive, steering them away from gangs, and shaping the good human beings our communities need.

As we look ahead, we invite you to join us in this work. Because when kids win at life, we all win. 



Club at Crazy Horse Ranch Celebrates Centennial

By Jeff Mendelsohn



In the early 1920s, in the quiet rolling hills of the Salinas Valley, a vision took root for a place where golfers, families, and community members could gather, enjoy the land and fresh air, and engage in some friendly golf competition. So, in 1923, Salinas Golf & Country Club was founded along San Juan Grade Road in north Salinas.

Over the decades, the club established itself as a community institution. Originally laid out as a 9-hole "sand course", the tree-lined course became well-known locally; valued not only for golf, but for the tradition, camaraderie, and that threaded through its annual calendar. In the early 1960s the club added a second nine holes, making it a full 18-hole championship course.

Some of the club's early traditions became almost legendary in the mid-20th century, during the ear when the Bing Crosby Pro-Aam at Pebble Beach (now known as the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am") drew big names to the Monterey Peninsula. Salinas Golf & Country began holding a "Little Crosby" tournament

In 1985, local businessman Don Chapin and his wife Barbara joined the club for the

handsome price of \$25,000.

"The club was in its heyday at the time," says Chapin. "We had been on a waiting list for a period of time, and I remember thinking 'holy crap that's a lot of money.'" Despite the hefty price tag, the Chapins joined the club in 1985 to become one of the 325 members who regularly enjoyed the popular and thriving local club.

"We have great memories of those early years," says Chapin. "My wife and both played a little golf and as our family grew, we all loved to come out to the club."

In the late 1980s the clubs Board of Directors' invested significantly in renovations of both the clubhouse and the golf course, which left the club with a significant amount of debt.

"That was kind of the beginning of the end," says Chapin. "They took on a tremendous about of debt for the club improvements."

Fast forward about forty years to 2014, the club was still playing catchup on the balance sheet, and although the Chapins were still members, the club's overall membership had quietly decreased to just over one hundred. From a high of 325 when

the Chapins joined, to 108 in 2014. The Club was struggling, badly, yet many of the members didn't know it.

"I was one of those perfect members clubs like who pay their dues and rarely show up," says Chapin. "I wasn't on the board, and I really didn't pay much attention to the membership numbers shrinking," he says. "I just came out to the club to enjoy it."

But in early 2014 Chapin received a letter from Salinas Golf & Country inviting members to attend a special meeting regarding "hard decisions that are needed to be made".

The meeting was well-attended. "I had never seen so many members all in the





same room,” says Chapin. “Just about every member was there.”

The Board of Directors informed the invited members that the shrinking membership and lingering debt had put the club in extremely dicey situation. As Chapin tells it, the club had three choices.

“They told us essentially that they were either going to ask for a cash call (ask members to foot the bill), borrow more money, or close the club,” says Chapin. As the meeting bore on, it became clear that none of these options were very popular among the members, and the Board presented one final option that involved selling the course a firm full of east coast lawyers who specialized in buying struggling country clubs and turning them around. This idea seemed more popular to many of the members, but Chapin wasn’t so sure.

“I remember just sitting in the back with Rocky Franish and a few other guys and we’re looking at each thinking this doesn’t sound right,” says Chapin.

Their concern was that the move was a land play for the east coast group. They’d commit to leaving the club open for a period of only two years, and after that they could sell land and close the club.

Chapin and gang in the back weren’t having it. After the meeting they stayed for

cocktails and discussed the possibility of submitting a competing offer. With Chapin leading the charge, the group of local investors brought their offer to the Board of Directors who then asked members to take it to a vote. It wasn’t close.

“The members voted overwhelmingly for our proposal,” says Chapin. “And the rest is history.”

So, starting in 2014, Chapin and his group

formed an LLC, took the club out of debt, and set out with a promise to keep the club open for as long as possible with a goal of bringing it back to its height.

But first, the club’s weakened condition required years of costly maintenance, an expense that Chapin and his group realized was a needed one.

“The course was in tough shape. The building was in tough shape. There was no air conditioner. The heater barely worked. There was no refrigeration. The kitchen needed work,” says Chapin. “Every time we turned around, there was something.”

Despite all that, the group was slowly able to bring the club back to life. With a renovated clubhouse favoring their new-western, country theme and name, the Club at Crazy Horse Ranch started to find its identity. Throughout the rest of the decade, there were continued improvements to both the club and the course which continued to drive new membership. The upstart Crazy Horse Ranch had itself some energy.

Now flash-forward to September 12th of this year, where the CHR celebrated its 100-year anniversary with a party at the century-old Salinas landmark. Along with great food, fun and drinks, the Club displayed decades of newspaper clippings,





tournament brochures, fliers and scorecards from the last century leaving no doubt of the historical importance of its treasured real estate.

Today, Crazy Horse Ranch has about 265 golf members. The golf course, although not as long off the tee as some of the more recently designed courses, is known to have some of the most consistently good greens in the entire area code.

“I’d put our greens up against anybody in the area,” says Chapin.

He goes on to credit the head greenskeeper Rafael “Rafa” Barajas and his entire staff who deserve credit for doing a tremendous job on the golf course.

Chapin also credits club pro Dominic Hernandez and his staff in the pro shop for keeping the tee sheets active and the merchandise racks full of updated Good things are happening in the clubhouse as well.

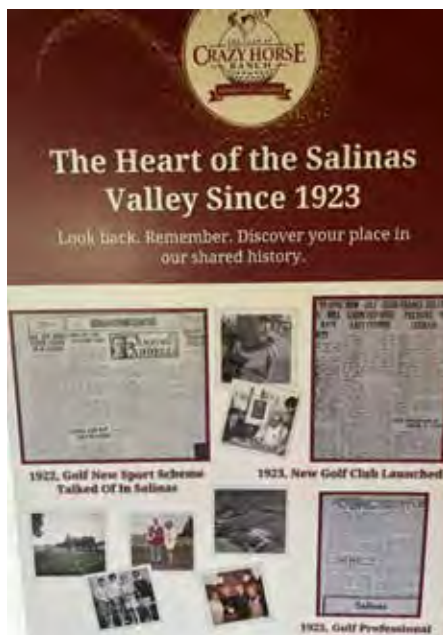
Members often rave about the food and the service at CHR. Led by General Manager Darla Smith, the foodservice category is thriving under the direction of Food & Beverage Manager Marcela Cervantes and

head chef Alfonso Ahumada, Jr.

With a newfound energy and a one-hundred-year resume, the Club at Crazy Horse Ranch is undoubtedly a core part of golf culture here in Monterey County. But what Chapin and his team is most proud about is that the culture and membership reflect the spirit of the people in this community.

“Good, hard-working western folks,” says Chapin. “Our goal is to provide an affordable and enjoyable asset to the community. We think we’re doing a pretty good job of it.” If you’re interested in learning more about a membership at the Club at Crazy Horse Ranch, visit www.clubatcrazyhorse.com or contact Darla Smith at darla@clubchr.com.

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Grand Opening of Ensen Community Park

Brings Long-Awaited Green Space to Salinas Families



On Sunday, August 17, 2025 the public was invited to the grand opening celebration of Ensen Community Park's neighborhood park at Carr Lake in Salinas. The event, hosted by Big Sur Land Trust, the Center for Community Advocacy and the City of Salinas, included a formal ceremony and ribbon-cutting.

The six-acre neighborhood park is the first phase of a visionary plan to transform 73 acres at Carr Lake—a seasonally dry lakebed in the heart of Salinas—into a vibrant public green space. With its playground, sports courts, skate park, picnic tables, dog play areas, and walking paths, the neighborhood park will serve as a recreational haven for thousands of nearby families.

The Mayor of Salinas, Dennis Donohue, stated, "Ensen Community Park is a beautiful example of what happens when community, vision, and partnership come together. On behalf of the City of Salinas, I want to thank Big Sur Land Trust for helping bring this dream to life. This park belongs to the people of Salinas now, and I can't wait to see families enjoying it for generations to come."

A Community Dream, Years in the Making

A public park at Carr Lake is a long-held dream. For decades, residents in Salinas—particularly in East Salinas where parks are scarce—have envisioned Carr Lake as a place for families to gather, play, and connect with nature. Although Carr Lake spans over 480 acres in the center of the city, it remained largely undeveloped and used mainly for agriculture.

In 2017, Big Sur Land Trust took a bold step by purchasing a 73-acre portion of Carr Lake, thanks to generous support from public and private

partners including Monterey Peninsula Foundation, California Natural Resources Agency, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the California State Coastal Conservancy. This marked the beginning of a project grounded in equity, access, and community-led design.

Over 7,000 Salinas residents played a role in shaping the new park—signing petitions, participating in design meetings and site tours, creating and caring for a native plant demonstration garden, and voting on the park's name.

Construction of the neighborhood park, including the elements requested by the community, was made possible thanks to funding from the California Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Grant Program (funded through Proposition 68), the City of Salinas, Manitou Fund, Resources Legacy Fund, Barnet Segal Charitable Trust, and Harden Foundation.





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“This project is going to be transformative for the city, but has also been transformative for Big Sur Land Trust in learning how to work shoulder to shoulder with the community to deliver a long-held multi-generational dream for Salinas residents,” said Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis, President and CEO of Big Sur Land Trust.

1.) Aerial view of Eansen Community Park during the grand opening celebration (Credit: Matthew Scott)

2.) Mayor Dennis Donohue speaking during the formal ceremony of the grand opening celebration (Credit: Bradley Dunbaugh)

3.) Left to Right: Supervisor Wendy Root Askew, Dr. Jennifer Norris (Wildlife Conservation Board), Armando Quintero (California Department of Parks and Recreation), Gloria Sanchez (California Natural Resources Agency), Colleen Bailey (Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce), Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis (Big Sur Land Trust), Chairwoman Louise Ramirez (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation), Senator John Laird, Rachel Saunders (Big Sur Land Trust), Salinas Councilmember Gloria De La Rosa, Joel Hernandez Laguna (Center for Community Advocacy)

Credit: Bradley Dunbaugh

4.) Left to Right: Colleen Bailey (Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce), Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis (Big Sur Land Trust), Chairwoman Louise Ramirez (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation), Senator John Laird, Rachel Saunders (Big Sur Land Trust), Joel Hernandez Laguna (Center for Community Advocacy)

Credit: Bradley Dunbaugh

5.) Chairwoman Louise Ramirez (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation) with a sign including her portrait and quote, and its painter Enid Baxter Ryce (Credit: Matthew Scott)

6.) Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis opens the formal ceremony at the amphitheater (Credit: Alisa Selivanova)

Designed with and for the Community

The name “Ensen Community Park” was ultimately chosen because most of the 966 respondents to the final community survey felt it was important to honor the history of the Indigenous peoples and their relationship with this land. “Ensen” is an Indigenous word, which means blackberry. The name was suggested by Louise J. Miranda Ramirez, Tribal Chairwoman of the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation (OCEN), because blackberries were an important food source for Indigenous peoples in the area.

The park is the result of a deeply collaborative process. Big Sur Land Trust worked closely with local partners, including the Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), CSUMB’s Habitat Stewardship Project, Building Healthy Communities, CHISPA, and the Monterey County Department of Public Health, among others, to reach residents from historically underserved neighborhoods. Thirteen local organizations contributed to the planning and outreach process.

Joel Hernandez Laguna, Executive Director of the Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), recently described the prolonged partnership. “For over eight years, CCA’s leaders, families, and staff have worked alongside Big Sur Land Trust in community engagement efforts that will bring access to open space and outdoor activities within walking distance to farmworker and low-income families.”

From sports courts to picnic areas to trails, the design reflects input from the people who will use it most. Residents provided feedback on amenities, layout, and accessibility—ensuring that the park feels truly rooted in the Salinas community. When complete, the combined Ensen Community Park will include a 67-acre habitat restoration area, which is already under construction.

“The restoration area will reconnect residents with the natural world right in their backyard,” said Rachel Saunders, Vice President of Conservation at Big Sur Land Trust. “It’s a space that’s designed to grow healthier communities from the soil up.”



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14th Annual Boots, Bottles & BBQ

Raises Over \$1.1 Million for Monterey County Youth

By Alla Zeltser



On September 13, 2025, nearly 400 guests gathered in the Salinas Valley for the 14th annual Boots, Bottles & BBQ, benefitting First Tee - Monterey County. This year's event raised more than \$1.1 million to support youth development programs, bringing the event's total impact to over \$9 million since its inception.

Guests enjoyed a vibrant evening of food, wine, and community. The menu featured Wagyu hotdogs with caviar and crème fraîche, Tomahawk steaks beautifully prepared by Kleinfeld Barbecue, and fresh seafood including crab, prawns, and oysters, paired with some of the finest wines from across California.

The live auction, led by David Gill and Steve John, delivered another unforgettable experience. Their energy and charisma kept the audience engaged as paddles flew high and proud for unique items and experiences. A standout moment was the sale of a Screaming Eagle lot for over \$60,000—a hallmark of the event and a symbol of the extraordinary generosity on display. Longtime supporters Mike and Bobbi Winer have consistently donated Screaming Eagle and Second Flight, helping to raise nearly \$100,000 annually through the auction. Steve John has been key to the auction's success not only for his wildly entertaining style on stage, but also for the creativity and effort he brings to securing many of the event's most exciting lots.

David Gill has served as event chair for all 14 years, playing a central role in shaping and growing the event into what it is today. The event has been produced each year by Alla Zeltser of Disruptive Development, who helped imagine the original concept and has

guided its growth and impact ever since. Their long-standing leadership and collaboration have been critical to the event's continued success.

Musical guest Karen Waldrup flew in from Nashville to perform and brought down the house. Known for her heartfelt lyrics, powerful voice, and dynamic stage presence, Waldrup delivered a crowd-pleasing set that blended country, rock, and soul, adding an extra layer of energy and excitement to the night.

Boots, Bottles & BBQ is made possible by a deeply loyal community. Sponsors return year after year, as do auction donors and the incredibly generous auction winners whose support brings these fundraising totals to life. This year, special recognition was given to Wendy Sawyer for her exceptional generosity and long-standing commitment to First Tee - Monterey County.



1.) Board Chair Dan Lynch shares his vision. 2.) (l to r) Alla Zeltser, David Gill, Karen Waldrup. 3.) Nick Nelson and friends enjoying the entertainment. 4.) Kate Hitchcock, Amy Pemberton, & Whitney Bream enjoying the strolling dinner. 5.) First Tee participants share the impact the program has on their lives. 6.) Phil Meiggs supporting First Tee Youth.



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The impact of this event reaches far beyond a single evening. Every dollar raised helps support programming at our First Tee campuses in Salinas and King City, where young people build character, confidence, and life skills through mentorship, athletics, and educational support. Thanks to this outpouring of support, thousands of youth across Monterey County will continue to have the opportunities they deserve and the encouragement they need to thrive. With our community's generosity, First Tee - Monterey County is Building Game Changers.



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A Beautiful Afternoon in Support of Harmony At Home

On Sunday, September 21, Karen and Jim Fanoe graciously opened their beautiful home to host a heartfelt gathering benefiting Harmony At Home, an organization dedicated to ending cycles of violence and abuse. Friends, neighbors, and supporters came together to celebrate the incredible work Harmony At Home has been doing for the past 20 years and to raise critical funds to support its life-changing programs.

Harmony At Home strives to end the cycles of violence and abuse by empowering children, young adults, and their families with the skills and confidence to lead healthy, productive lives. For two decades, the organization has provided vital services including counseling, bullying prevention, support for young families, and guidance for divorcing and separating parents—programs that reach some of the most underserved communities in the region.

The Fanoes' generosity created a warm and welcoming atmosphere where guests could learn more about this important mission. Their stunning home provided the perfect backdrop for meaningful conversations, new connections, and a shared commitment to creating safer, healthier communities. As Karen noted during the event, "Opening our home to support Harmony At Home is a privilege. We believe in their mission and the real difference they make in the lives of children and families. It's inspiring to see our friends and neighbors come together for such an important cause."

Guests enjoyed an afternoon filled with delicious food, lively conversations, and a true sense of purpose. Special thanks go to Diane Rogers and Debbie Meeks, whose thoughtful decorations and meticulous set-up transformed the space into an elegant celebration of community. The exceptional and mouth-watering menu provided by Valley Catering added to the festive atmosphere, delighting everyone in attendance.

During the program, Harmony At Home's Chief Executive Officer, Julianne Leavy expressed her gratitude for the incredible support shown that day. "This gathering reflects the heart of our mission," Julianne shared. "Every person here is helping us empower children and families to break cycles of violence and build brighter futures. With supporters like the Fanoes and all of you, we can continue to expand our reach and provide critical services to those who need them most."

The September 21st gathering was more than just a beautiful event—it was a testament to what a community can accomplish when it comes together with compassion and purpose. Thanks to the Fanoes' generosity and the commitment of every guest, Harmony At Home is one step closer to ensuring that all children and families have the opportunity to lead safe, healthy, and hopeful lives.

1.) (l to r) Lettie Bennet, Doug Henry, Susan Prest, Jim and Karen Fanoe, Michael Bailey, Frank and Tammy Padilla. 2.) (l to r) Patty Gough, Nicole Ramsayer, Karen Fanoe, Meadow Forrest. 3.) (l to r) Debbie Meeks and Diane Rogers. 4.) (l to r) Yolanda Frudden, Karen Fanoe, Drake Frudden, Anna Lisk, Mary and Jack Harbins, George and Mai Ingham.

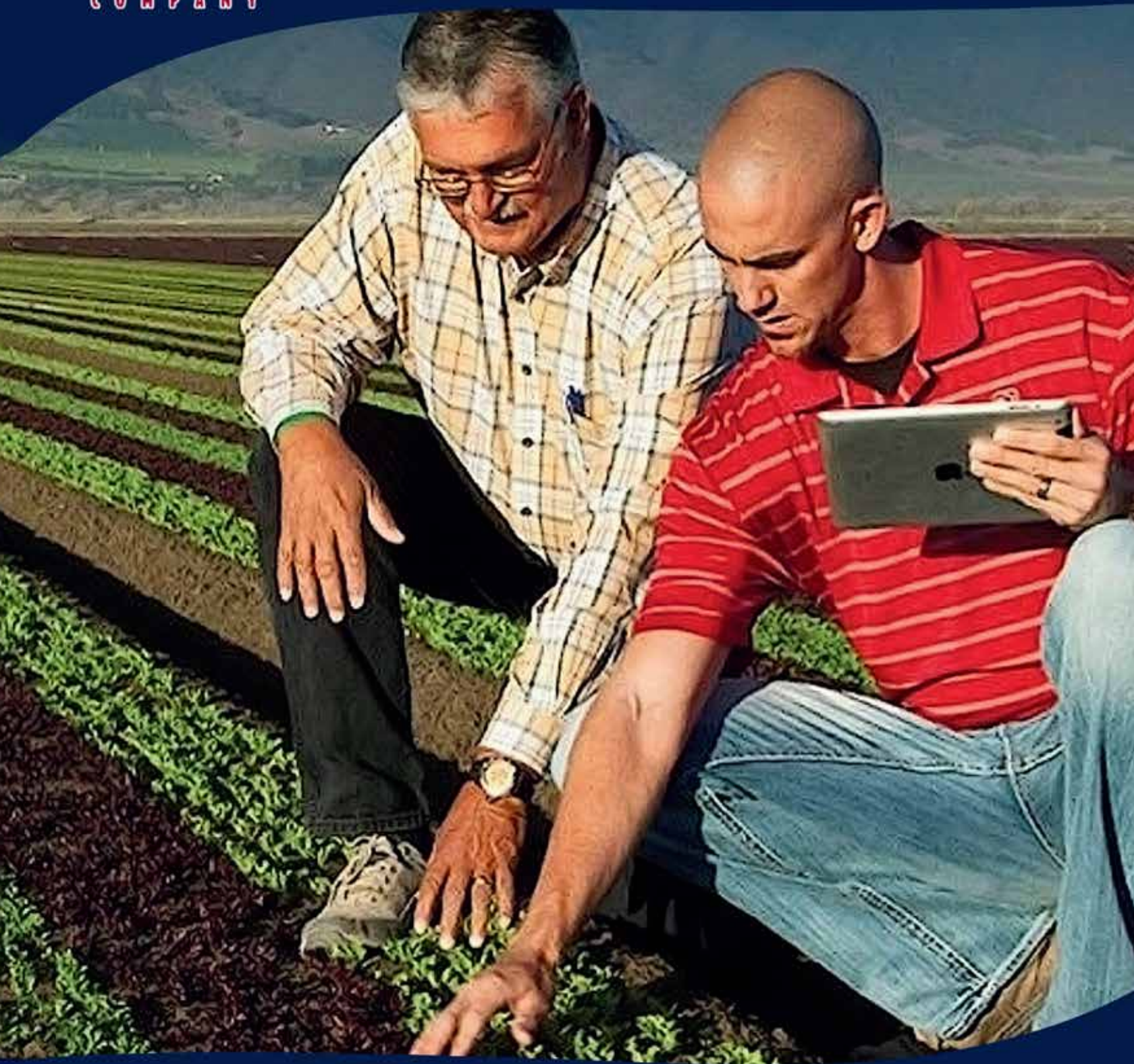




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Grand Opening of Ensen Community Park

A Day of Resilience and Community

On Saturday, September 20, 2025, over 300 members of the central coast gathered at the Veterans Administration in Marina for the 6th Annual Recovery Run. A beautiful day of sunshine created the perfect backdrop for a day filled with health, hope, and celebration.

Now in its sixth year, the Recovery Run once again proved to be more than just a race, it was a movement. The event, founded by Dr Casey Grover and Dr Reb Close, brought people together to encourage healthy lifestyles, break the stigma surrounding substance use disorder, celebrate the successes of individuals in long-term recovery, and educate about services provided by Sun Street Centers and other local recovery providers, like The Bridge, Door to Hope, Community Human Services, Valley Health Associates and CCODP, who take up the torch each year to host this event.

The day began at 7:30 a.m. with registration, warm-up activities, and exhibitor booths. At 9:00 a.m., runners and walkers took to the certified 5K and 2-mile courses, winding through the CSU Monterey Bay campus. Participants enjoyed crisp air, clear skies, and a renewed sense of energy as they crossed the finish line. Mario Murillo of Monterey and Bonnie Post of Pacific Grove were the top male and female finishes with times of 20:57 and 24:18 respectively.

Following the races, attendees gathered for breakfast, explored community resource booths, and shared stories of encouragement. The highlight of the morning was the Honoree and Awards Ceremony, where Danny Dedmon was recognized as the 2025 Recovery Honoree. His story of strength and perseverance inspired the crowd, reminding everyone of the power of resilience and the importance of community volunteering.

Adding to the celebration, Marina Mayor Bruce Delgado addressed the crowd, offering words of encouragement and praising the community for coming together for such an important cause. His remarks highlighted the City of Marina's commitment to health and healing. Awards were presented to top finishers, and runners eagerly awaited the drawing of raffle prizes, which included fitness gear and local gift certificates. The prizes added excitement to the morning and showcased the generosity of community sponsors. Families, children, competitive runners, and casual walkers all joined in the fun, making it a true community-wide event.

The 2025 Recovery Run was made possible through the hard work of volunteers lead by our Race Director, Ben Balester, and the generosity of sponsors like Montage Health, Dataflow Business Systems, Alvarez Technology Group, Edward Jones/John Musni, Natividad Medical Foundation, and Boutonnet Farms.

As the morning closed, one truth stood out: every step taken at the 2025 Recovery Run was a step toward healing, hope, and a healthier future and reflected the compassion and solidarity of the Monterey County community.



1.) Top three finishers on the podium (from left to right: Adam Roach (3rd place), Mario Murillo (1st place), and Anthony Vazquez (2nd place). 2.) Esteban Calderon, Sun Street Centers Board President and Vice President & District Manager of Comerica Bank, crosses the finish line. 3.) Sun Street Centers CEO, Anna Foglia, poses with event sponsors Luis & Ronni Alvarez, from Alvarez Technology Group, Inc. 4.) Runners ready for the start of the 2025 Recovery Run.

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Community Foundation for Monterey County's Women's Fund Luncheon

“When a woman thrives, a family thrives, when family thrives, community thrives.” That is the key premise behind the Women's Fund of the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC). More than 550 people came together at the 18th Annual Women's Fund Luncheon on May 16, 2025 to share the positive energy and impact of investing in local women and girls. The Women's Fund has granted more than \$2.7 million for women's economic security, leadership and education, including \$500,000 in scholarships for local girls to attend college of their choice.

Emcee Erin Clark, News Anchor KSBW 8, opened the program with Cari Herthel, Vice Chair of the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County offering a meaningful land acknowledgement. Christine Dawson, former Senior VP of Philanthropic Services, and artist René Romero Schuler, shared an inspiring conversation around the theme “Strength, Resiliency and Hope.” Rene overcame major personal struggles to emerge as a successful artist and author who exhibits her work nationally and abroad.

Stephanie Martinez Flores shared how the Girls' Health in Girls' Hands program and Women's Fund scholarship shaped her growth and leadership journey. She is a biochemistry major at MPC and hopes to become an anesthesiologist and advocate for better access to high-quality healthcare in underserved communities. “When young women are empowered to lead, they don't just strengthen themselves, they uplift their entire communities,” she said.

Esmeralda Owen, Women's Fund Leadership Council Chair, noted the powerful impact scholarships and mentorship had on her life and invited attendees to partner with the CFMC to expand grant funding for greater reach. Thanks to our generous sponsors and donors, the luncheon raised over \$100,000 to support programs and scholarships for local women and girls.

About the Community Foundation for Monterey County
The mission of the Community Foundation for Monterey County is “to inspire philanthropy and be a catalyst for strengthening communities throughout Monterey County.” Thanks to generous individuals, families and businesses who partner with the CFMC to create charitable funds, the CFMC granted more than \$44 million in 2024 to nonprofits working towards healthy, safe, vibrant communities.

Find more information and view event photos: cfmco.org/WomensFund.

1.) (l to r) Erin Clark, Stephanie Martinez Flores, René Romero Schuler, Esmeralda Owen and Christine Dawson. 2.) Scholarship speaker Stephanie Martinez Flores. 3.) (l to r) Karen Curtis, Margaret Noble, Nicki Pasculli. 4.) (l to r) Karina Rusk, Dan Baldwin, Jeri Gattis. 5.) (l to r) Lisa Locke, Felicia Perez Kausin, Natalie Perez Medina. 6.) (l to r) Shelly Kaprielian, Paige Colijn Keck, Sarah Laflan, Lucia Boggiatto, Liz Mustoe, Dorothy Mahan, Meryl Rasmussen, Lea Johnson.





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The Last Pallet

By Jeff Mendelsohn

First off I'd like to apologize to all of you readers. This issue is reaching you well behind schedule. And while I'd like to say it isn't my fault, in this case I have to own it. My travel schedule for the past few months has been extremely busy. Whether it be work trips (I work full-time in the foodservice industry), or pleasure (by pleasure I mostly mean kids sp, and I look forward to writing more about the real Puff Daddy as we move forward.

Finally, thank you to our advertisers, old and new, and to you readers for getting all the way to the end. I'll get the next issue out on time, unless life gets in the way.

Cheers!

-JM



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