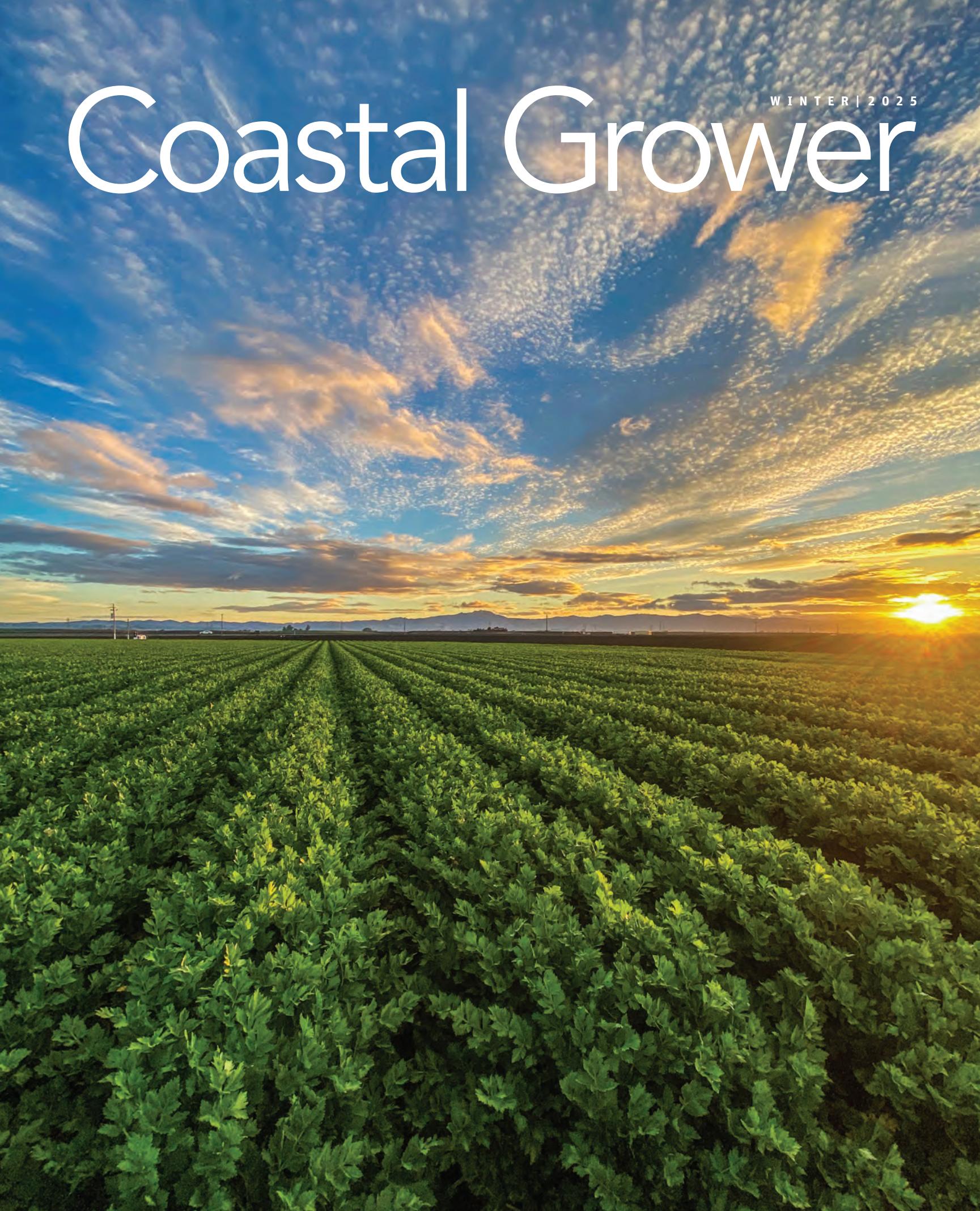


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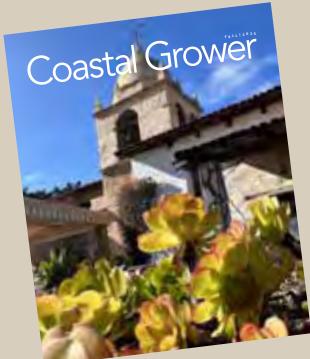


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# Little Ditty About Patrick & Diane

**B**y the time you are reading this another one will be in a One of the longest, most uncomfortable day of my professional career was in San Francisco at a big, fancy photo studio to take what we in the marketing world call “plate shots.”

You see them in cookbooks, on websites, television commercials and social media...glamorous or casual place settings featuring mouth-watering, perfect plates of food. Let's be honest...that double whopper you see in the Burger King commercial with the perfectly crisp lettuce and cheese melt is rarely what you see when you leave the drive-thru with your order. That burger was staged and designed by a food stylist.

Yes, there are professionals who style food for a living. It's a special talent (a lot of tricks in the trade) and the good ones are often in high demand.

Well, that day in San Francisco our advertising agency had hired the photographer and the food stylist. We were launching our signature new vegetable, Broccolini® and I was charged with the task of getting those glamour shots of our new hero vegetable.

Suffice to say, there were what we would call “creative differences” between the photographer and the food stylist. The color of the plates, where to position the cutlery, do we include a glass of wine or water? Lighting bright or subtle...the debates went on and on and so did the photo shoot.

In hindsight I, as the client, should have put my foot down and told the two of them to focus on the task at hand...but I was in the younger years of my career and intimidated to be in the big city at such an elaborate studio.

I learned my lesson the hard way and while we did get some gorgeous photos when scheduling future photo shoots, I always hired the photographer first and I always asked if they had worked with a certain food stylist before we hired one.

Which brings me to Patrick and Diane...two collaborators I also consider friends. Patrick Tregenza has been doing photography for this magazine for 35 years and was the primary photographer for my family's produce company for decades. Diane Gsell, who writes for this magazine, is not only a great journalist but an exceptional food stylist. Patrick and Diane are married and doing photo shoots with them, unlike that day in San Francisco, were an absolute pleasure.

Efficient, creative, collaborative, Patrick and Diane get in a groove during photo shoots and create some amazing images. There was always a great playlist pumping in the background and prop research done beforehand so the right plates, glasses, placemats, napkins were always ready.

It's the same with the home showcase photo shoots for this magazine. Patrick and Diane make a wonderful team. He catches the images and Diane documents the story behind them. Whether it is a gorgeous salad in a ceramic bowl or a family story of holidays and heirlooms, the two of them are creative, collaborative and a pleasure.

It's nice to know we have such notable talent here at home. No need to go to the big city and listen to people argue all day. the record books. Every October the fresh produce and floral industries gather for what I have always called “our S



# Contributors



## ADAM JOSEPH

Adam Joseph is committed to providing thought-provoking editorial content, a craft honed over 15 years as a professional editor and writer. A multiple first-place California Journalism Award recipient, his work has appeared in the Monterey County Weekly, Relix, Gayot, 65 Degrees, Metro Silicon Valley, and the Salinas Californian. After serving as managing editor and interim editor at Good Times Santa Cruz, he joined Rancho Cielo, where for over two years he has used his expertise in media communications to bring community stories to life as Communications Officer.



## 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 (CPFA®) 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.



## 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 representation. She lives with her husband Chris in Salinas.



## ALAN SHIPNUCK

Alan Shipnuck was a starting forward on Salinas High's 1991 Monterey Bay League championship basketball team. He wrote his first cover story for Sports Illustrated as a 21 year-old intern and is the author of 9 books, including best-sellers *Phil*; *Liv & Let Die*, *The Swinger*, and *Bud, Sweat, & Tees*. Alan lives in Carmel and is head coach of Carmel High varsity girls basketball team.



## LISA BRANCO

Lisa Branco currently serves as General Manager of Radicle Seed Company and Headstart Nursery. With over 25 years of experience in agriculture, Lisa is a dedicated advocate for mentoring the next generation of industry leaders. She serves on the boards of Monterey County Ag Education, the California Seed Association, and the UC Davis Seed Biotechnology Center. Lisa is also involved with the American Seed Trade Association as well as Hartnell's STEM Task Force. She resides in Salinas with her husband, Corey, and their children, Andrew and Lauren.



### **BILL HASTIE**

Bill is the managing partner of Hastie Financial Group, a registered investment advisory firm. He earned a B.S in Economics from Cal Poly, an M.B.A. in Financial Planning from Golden Gate University, holds CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ (CFP®) certification, and Certified Investment Management Analyst® (CIMA®) and Accredited Investment Fiduciary Analyst® (AIFA®) designations.



### **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 representation. She lives with her husband Chris in Salinas.



### **ADRIENNE LAURENT**

Adrienne Laurent has dedicated her career to strategic communication in both healthcare and journalism. Most recently, she served as Chief Strategic Communications Officer at Salinas Valley Health which also included overseeing the Mobile Health Clinic, Volunteer Services, and Health Promotion. Prior to joining Salinas Valley Health, Adrienne spent 23 years in journalism, working as a television news anchor, reporter, and news director. Adrienne is deeply committed to her community, having served on various boards including Big Sur Land Trust, Hartnell College Foundation, Central Coast YMCA and the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce.



### **TIFFANY DITULLIO**

Tiffany DiTullio serves as the VP of Partner & Community Relations at Salinas Valley Health. She oversaw the implementation of the Blue Zones Project Monterey County and has been a dedicated advocate for community well-being for more than 15 years.

Tiffany earned a BS in Business Administration from Cal State, Chico. She is an active community volunteer and has held leadership roles with several organizations including the Rotary Club of Salinas, Relay for Life, IMPOWER, and many others.

Tiffany lives in Salinas with her husband, Reno, and has two grown children. She enjoys hiking, running, reading, and spending quality time with her family.



### **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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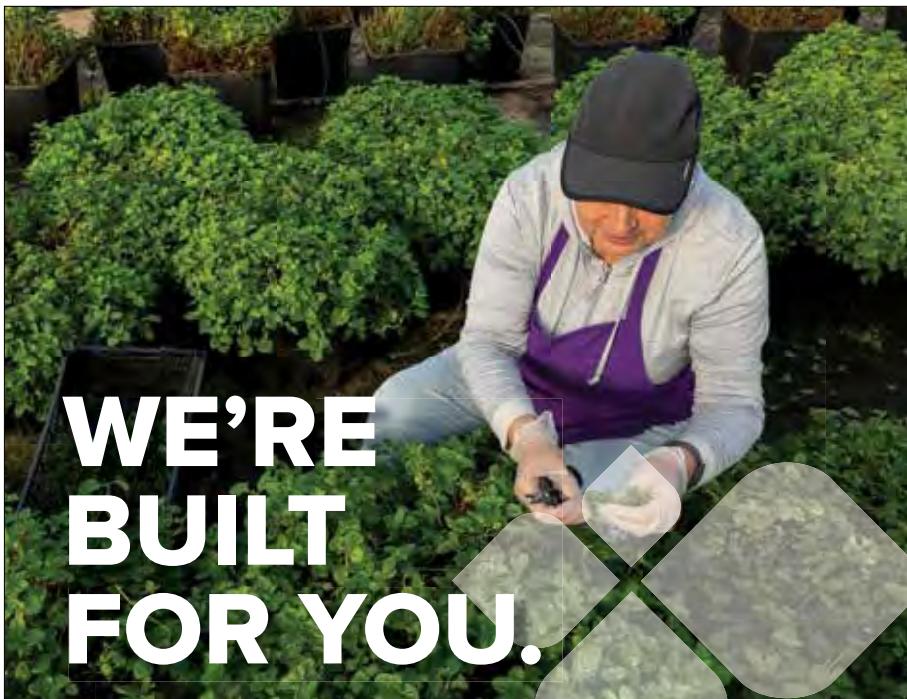
### ESMERALDA OWEN

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.



### CHRIS HAUBERT

Chris Haubert is the Creative Content Writer at Salinas Valley Health. With experience in journalism, non-profit administration, and as a volunteer, she enjoys sharing people's stories, particularly as they related to connection and community. As part of her prior work as Executive Producer at KSBW TV, Chris produced a yearlong series on Central Coast history, *Time & Again 2000*. She later served as Chief of Staff and Programs at The Panetta Institute for Public Policy at CSU Monterey Bay.



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# Community Spirit Powers First-Ever Harvest Cup Tournament

*Hartnell College Wins Top Honors as Local Businesses Compete for a Cause*

By Adrienne Laurent



The Salinas Regional Soccer Complex came alive Sunday with energy, competition, and community pride as local businesses and organizations took to the fields for the inaugural Harvest Cup — a corporate soccer tournament created to celebrate teamwork and support the ongoing operations and growth of the Complex. Link to photos attached.

## Friendly Rivalries, Fun, and a Shared Purpose

After a day filled with laughter, camaraderie, and high-energy play, Hartnell College claimed the title of Harvest Cup Champion 2025.

Additional honors included:

- Ag Cup Champion: RAMCO Enterprises, LP
- Best Kick: Jonathan Cervantes, Monterey Pacific
- Best Team Jerseys: Driscoll's
- Best Fan Zone: Salinas Valley Health (SVH)
- Executive Kick-Off: Granite Construction Inc.
- Executive Kick-Off by Proxy: Taylor Farms

The Complex buzzed with excitement all day long — from the Executive Shoot-Out, where business and community leaders took their best shots on goal, to the colorful fan zones that brought the sidelines to life. Salinas Valley Health's spirited crowd waved pom-poms and brandished cardboard cutouts of their players, proving that fan enthusiasm can be just as powerful as what happens on the field.

Between matches, participants and fans enjoyed music, food trucks serving fan favorites, and delicious team lunches provided to all the hard-working players.

The championship game was announced and streamed live on social media, featuring the renowned Fidel M. Soto at the microphone, along with Jose Romo. Their play-by-play commentary kept the crowd buzzing with excitement through the final whistle.

Supporting a Community-Built Complex Proceeds from the Harvest Cup will directly support the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex, helping maintain and improve facilities, enhance youth and adult programs, and advance plans for future expansion — including new grass fields and sand courts for soccer and volleyball. These additions will not only promote community health and wellness, but also

strengthen the regional economy by attracting tournaments and visitors whose spending benefits our region. As a nonprofit, community-built facility, the Complex depends on donor and sponsor funding to sustain and grow opportunities for local athletes and families.

"This tournament showed what our community can do when we come together," said Jonathan De Anda, General Manager of the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex. "Every player, fan, volunteer, and sponsor helped make this a day to remember — and every dollar raised helps ensure that the Complex continues to serve our community for years to come."





“The Harvest Cup was a wonderful example of how the Complex connects people,” said Catherine Kobrinsky Evans, Vice President of the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex Board. “It was inspiring to see teams from across the Salinas Valley — from agriculture, education, construction, and healthcare — all playing side by side in support of a shared community space. Their participation reflects a deep commitment to making this region stronger and healthier.”

Board President Kurt Gollnick added, “The Complex has always been about creating opportunities for everyone — from young players just learning the game to adults who find joy and friendship on these fields, and to people who come here to enjoy walking paths and safe green spaces. Events like the Harvest Cup demonstrate that this space truly belongs to the community. We’re grateful to all who played, volunteered, and sponsored to make it possible.”



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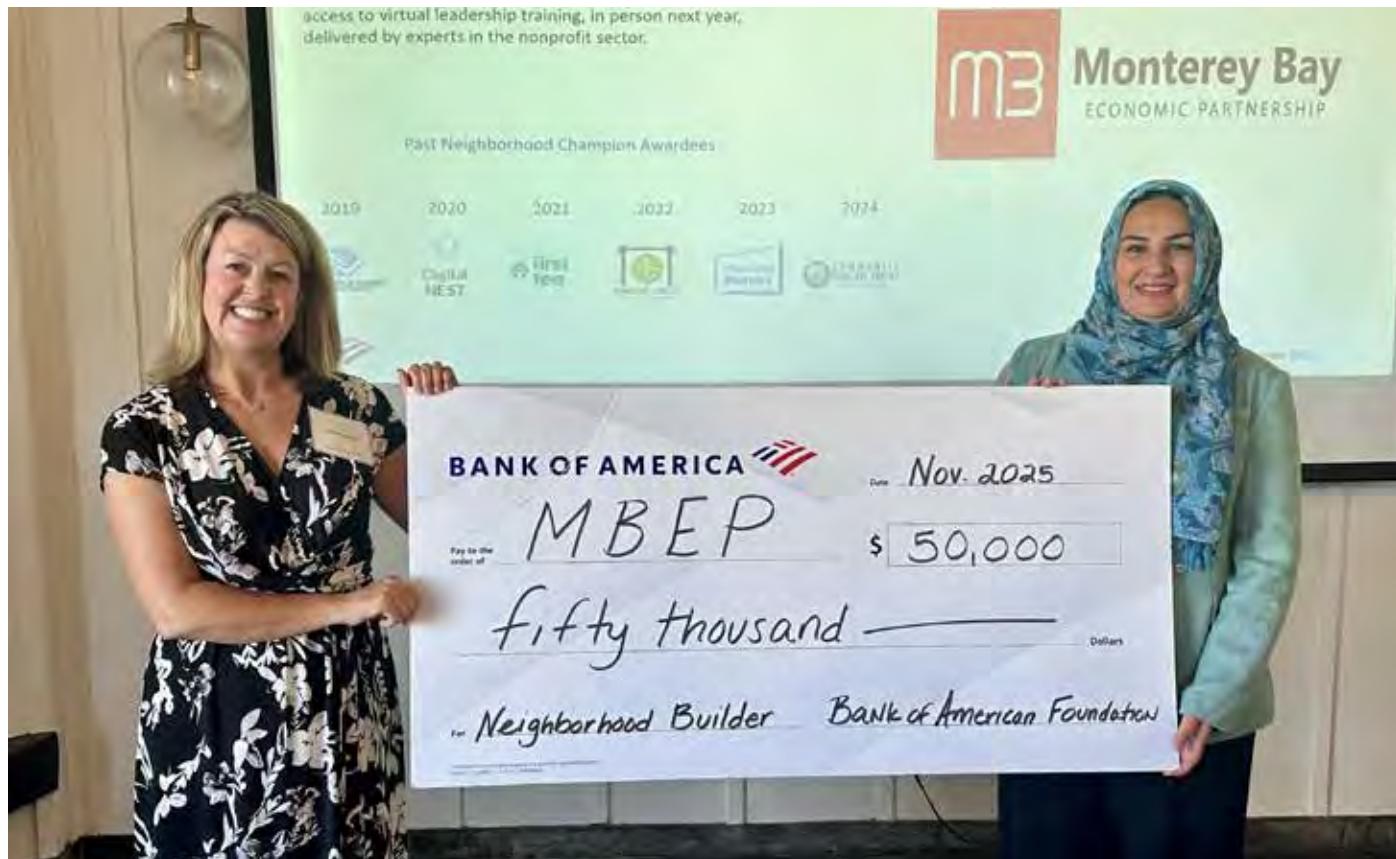
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The Salinas Regional Soccer Complex extends heartfelt thanks to all players, sponsors, and volunteers who made the inaugural Harvest Cup such a success — and looks forward to welcoming even more teams, fans, and community supporters next year. **cc**

# Monterey Bay Economic Partnership

*MBEP Earns Prestigious National Recognition From Bank of America*

By Esmeralda Owen



The Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) was named Bank of America's 2025 Neighborhood Builder® for its work to improve the economic health and quality of life in the tri-county region of Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz.

MBEP serves as a regional catalyst, convening leaders from government, business, education, and community sectors to address the most pressing challenges facing the region, from housing and digital access to economic development and workforce training.

"Monterey Bay Economic Partnership continues to make significant strides in creating a more vibrant and resilient

economy and advancing workforce opportunities," said Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) President & CEO Tahra Goraya. "Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders funding is an investment that supports expansion of MBEP's role as a catalyst for positive change in our region."

Bank of America's signature Neighborhood Builders program continues to be one of the nation's largest philanthropic investments in nonprofit leadership development, while providing unique multiyear flexible grant funding to high-impact nonprofits in communities nationwide. As a Neighborhood Builder, MBEP is awarded a \$50,000 grant over two years, leadership training for the chief executive officer and

an emerging leader, and the opportunity to connect with nonprofits in a peer network.

MBEP is dedicated to improving the economic health and quality of life across Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties. As a nonprofit founded in 2015, it serves as a regional catalyst—convening leaders from government, business, education, and community sectors to address the most pressing challenges facing our region. MBEP focuses on what matters most: housing affordability, broadband access, inclusive economic development, and workforce opportunity.

"Nonprofits such as MBEP excel at building cross-sector coalitions and place-based strategies that address complex regional

challenges,” said Jennifer Dacquisto, president, Bank of America Monterey Bay. “By providing flexible funding and leadership training, the Neighborhood Builders program can help MBEP scale its impact in the region.”

The nonprofit will use the Neighborhood Builders grant to help scale high-impact initiatives like the Pajaro Alliance and the Monterey Bay Housing Trust.

Bank of America has served the Monterey region for over 100 years and is one of the world’s leading financial institutions, serving individual consumers, small and middle-market businesses, and large corporations with a full range of banking, investing, asset management, and other financial and risk management products and services.

Its commitment to the people and economy of Monterey Bay area includes grants and matching gifts of more than \$3 million since 2020. Employee volunteers give their time to

support people and communities. Locally, employees have volunteered over 20,000 hours in Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties.

Since 2019, Bank of America has selected seven local nonprofits across Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties for

### ***“Bank of America has served the Monterey region for over 100 years”***

its Neighborhood Builder program, as part of the bank’s longstanding efforts to build thriving communities through economic opportunity. These include Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County, Digital NEST, First Tee Monterey County, Rancho Cielo, Housing Matters Santa Cruz, and Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley.

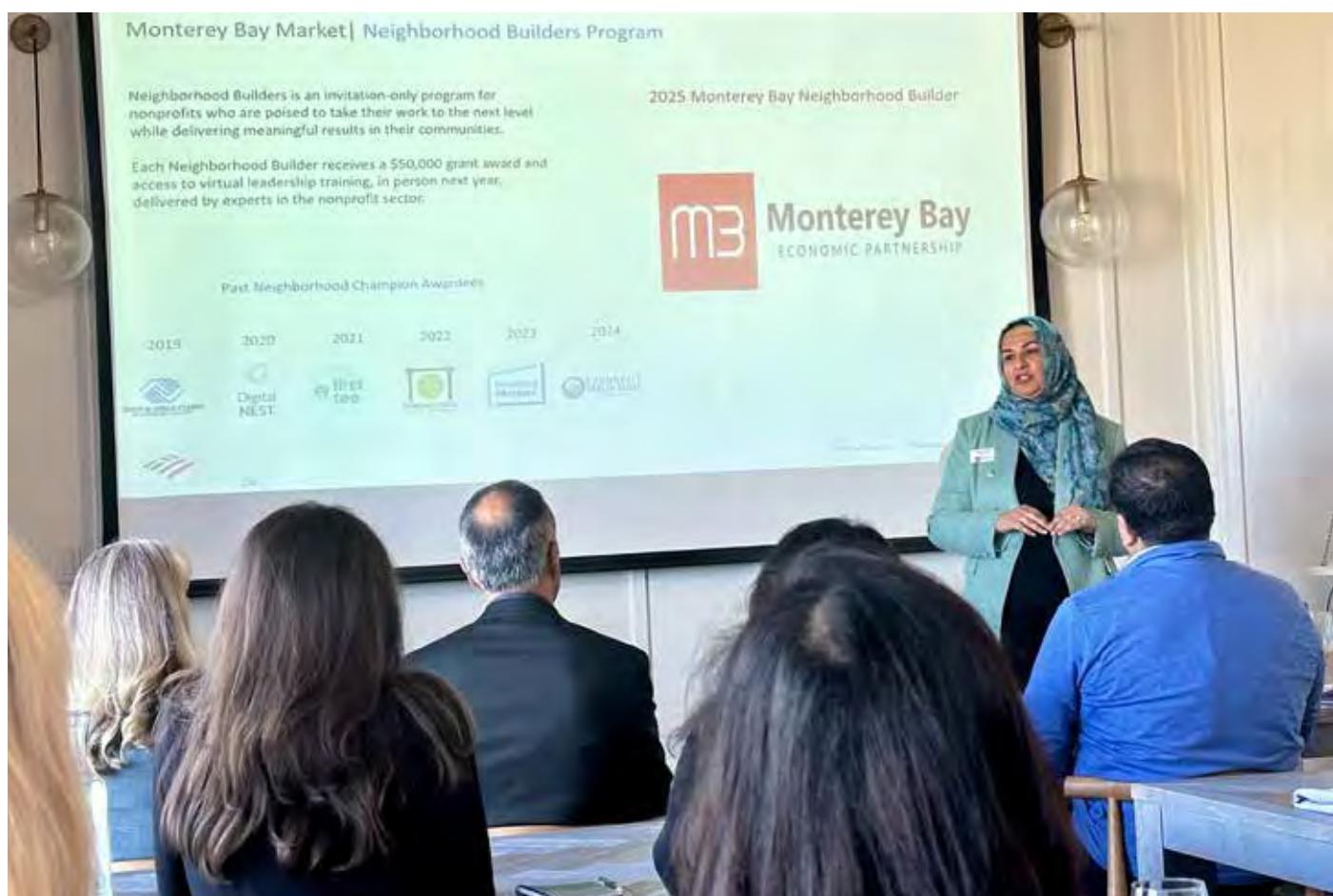
“MBEP was created a decade ago to

strengthen our regional economy,” said Goraya. “We’re honored to be selected for the Neighborhood Builders Award and to have the support of Bank of America in furthering our mission to promote economic mobility across the Monterey Bay region.”

Through cross-sector collaboration and data-informed strategies, MBEP is building a more resilient region with its deep commitment to regional leadership and a growing network of partners, MBEP is driving lasting change for the communities it serves —today and into the future. To learn more about MBEP, visit <https://mbep.biz>.

*Left: Jennifer Dacquisto, President, Bank of America Monterey Bay, presents MBEP President & CEO Tahra Goraya with a check for \$50,000.*

*Below: Monterey Bay Economic Partnership President & CEO Tahra Goraya*



# Urban Cowboy

By Scott Delucchi



Scott's dad and grandfather at their San Francisco home, 1938.

In the decade I've lived here, I've noticed a common story among friends who grew up in the Salinas Valley: they go away to college, graduate, then return home to slide into the family business. Countless growers, contractors, attorneys, auto shop owners – second and third generations carrying on familiar legacies.

That was never my path. There was no family business waiting for me back in my sleepy suburb minutes south of San Francisco. My mom was a homemaker, and my dad joined the fire department because it beat bartending. If I'd followed in his footsteps, I'd be eyeing retirement now – and making perfect Manhattans.

As much as I loved the firehouse culture and my dad's nutty band of brothers, I chased another dream. When it became clear I wasn't destined to play third base for the San Francisco Giants, I set my sights on sportscasting. A few months into a TV

internship, that plan crashed too. After five years teaching American Literature and creative writing at my former high school, I stumbled across a job posting for a Communications & Outreach Director at the local cinder-block-and-chain-link animal shelter I'd known since childhood. Something about it called to me.

Looking back, it's no surprise that animals found their way into my story. They'd been there from the start.

***"Looking back, it's no surprise that animals found their way into my story. They'd been there from the start."***

Growing up, baseball was the obvious bond between me and my dad. We played catch constantly and went to more Giants games at Candlestick Park than I can count. He coached my first little league teams, then stepped back as I got older – never the obnoxious "Little League Dad," just quietly proud. When it became clear I wouldn't be playing professionally, I think it hit him harder than it did me. For years after that, until he died much too young at 60, we were two retired ballplayers trying to find new common ground.

We had it all along in animals. The first family dog, Clancy the Dalmatian, was Dad's idea – the obvious choice for a firefighter. While my older brother was ready for this addition to the family, I wasn't and my parents responsibly rehomed her. Soon after, my drawing of a poodle won the San Francisco Chronicle's junior art contest and a whopping \$2 prize (which later bought a dozen packs of baseball cards). Dad taped the clipping to his firehouse locker, even though poodles weren't exactly the mascot for his crew of Marlboro men and James Rockford

types who all had sideburns, side hustles and nicknames: Moon, Ski, Mac, Wild Bill. Dad's quiet pride meant more than any trophy.

A year later, Dad let me pick a puppy from a firefighter friend's accidental litter. Ginger, a yellow lab mix, became our family's dog and this boy's best friend. When Dad suffered a massive heart attack while I was still a boy, his firefighter brothers filled the ICU with roughneck support: "Keep a stiff upper lip, be strong for your mom." I really tried. Years later, when Ginger died during my senior year of high school, Dad surprised me by reaching for words he usually didn't share: "Ginger is now in heaven with your sister."

This was deep. We didn't talk much about my sister and, instead, coped with silence. Dad came from a generation of men who



Scott and his father with his fellow firefighters' ill-conceived rehabilitation project following a hunting trip.



*A power surge at Serra High School led to college offers and a Stanford scholarship.*

didn't share feelings, the ones who grew up idolizing John Wayne. Why use words when a look, nod or back slap will suffice. But in that moment, over the death of a four-legged companion, he let me see a little more.

My dad was a ballplayer, too, but at heart, he was a cowboy. He grew up in San Francisco where he and his dad would ride their horse and pony from their home to a local riding club at the Cow Palace, a venue where kids of my generation saw everything from the Harlem Globetrotters to Kiss. His parents and the extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins called him "Tex," a nickname that stuck through adulthood. Looking back, Dad may have been miscast in the city and suburbs. He would have loved this Valley, with its wide-open spaces, slower pace and cowboy culture.

Dad introduced me to many things: rummy, San Francisco history, Lone Ranger reruns, Sinatra on vinyl, colorful language, a love of baseball. People also thought he gave me curly hair, but his was a perm. Hey, it was the 70s when perms were ok, even in the firehouse among guys with Al Bundy's fashion sense. 

I may not have inherited a business like many of my friends here, but I did inherit something lasting: a love for animals, a sense of loyalty, and the gift of connection they bring. My dad never lived to see me working in animal welfare and leading a team of close to 100 employees and 400 volunteers, but I know he would have smiled at the path I stumbled into, even if he asked "what the hell is a non-profit," in his inimitable way.

So if you're a young parent, here's something my dad gave me that mattered more than any ballgame, driving lesson or awkward birds and bees chat: the chance to grow up with pets. That first family dog, that scruffy cat, even the poodle sketch taped to a firehouse locker — those are the things that stay with you. They shape not just childhood, but the kind of adult you become. 

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# A Decade of Care: Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center Celebrates

*10 Years of Transforming Health in South Monterey County*

By Chris Haubert



**O**n a sunlit Saturday morning in Gonzales, hundreds of community members gathered at Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center to celebrate a milestone that has reshaped healthcare in South Monterey County. The special event—marking the Center's tenth anniversary—was more than a commemoration of a decade of service. It was a vibrant Community Health Day, featuring a range of supportive services, connection, care, and a reaffirmed commitment to health equity and wellness for all.

## A Vision Realized: Ten Years of Growth and Service

Since its doors first opened in November 2015, Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center has become a beacon of accessible, compassionate care. What began as a 6,400-square-foot facility with

three providers has grown into a dynamic 20,000-square-foot hub staffed by eleven full-time bilingual primary care providers and five rotating specialty physicians in cardiology, orthopedic surgery, gastroenterology, and general surgery. Over the past decade, the Center has welcomed nearly 207,000 patient visits—averaging about 20,000 patient encounters each year—a testament to the trust and need it fulfills within the community.

“It’s hard to believe it’s been ten years,” reflected Gonzales Mayor Jose Rios during the celebration. “This facility has transformed healthcare access in our community. It’s a point of pride for our city and we are grateful to all of the partners who make it a success.”

The Center’s growth is not just measured not just in size or patient numbers, but in lives changed and a community strength-

ened. Allen Radner, MD, President/CEO of Salinas Valley Health, highlighted the original mission: “We had a vision of delivering quality health services to underserved populations that were most in need. Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center reflects our commitment to serve everyone, regardless of insurance. It has become a crown jewel in our healthcare system.”

## Celebrating Community and Preventive Care

The anniversary’s Community Health Day was filled with energy and celebration. Families visited health and wellness resource tables, joined educational demonstrations, including Zumba classes and cooking demos.



Many left with a free soccer ball and a smile. More than 200 attendees received free flu vaccinations administered by the Salinas Valley Health Mobile Clinic.

"This Center is such an important part of how we stay healthy," shared Evangelina Maldonado, a longtime Gonzales resident and patient. "The staff here really are amazing. I bring my whole family to get our free flu shots every year. I'm grateful they do this for the community."

Center Manager and proud Gonzales native Micaela Vargas, expressed deep appreciation for the trust and partnership the Center has built over the years. "For 10 years, we've had the privilege of healing, supporting, and growing alongside our patients. This milestone is not just ours, it's shared with every life we've touched. Here's to many more years of making a difference."

### **A Hub for Well-Being and Community Connection**

Beyond its clinical services, Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center has become a true community hub. Preventive care and wellness are central to its mission. The Center provides bilingual education classes on healthy living, free Zumba and yoga sessions, and fresh food distributions in partnership with Live Well (formerly Blue Zones Project Monterey County) and Savor the Local. A conveniently located bus stop in front of the Center ensures easy access for residents from Greenfield, Soledad, King City, and beyond.

#### **Mandy Jackson, MD**

Medical Director and pediatrician Mandy Jackson, MD, emphasized the Center's commitment to addressing social determinants of health. "Access to quality healthcare is a matter of human equality, and our entire staff is dedicated to leveling the playing field," she explained. Community Health Workers are available five days a week, helping patients with arrangements for housing, food, transportation, education, and other basic needs—a holistic approach that goes far beyond treating illness.

Many staff members call South County home, further strengthening the bonds between caregivers and the community. The legacy of Christine Ponzio, MD, the Center's



first medical director with a 40-year medical career in Gonzales, was also celebrated. Her dedication to compassionate and accessible care set a high standard that continues to guide the Center's work today.

reduces the need for emergency department visits by focusing on preventative care and wellness. That makes all the difference in the lives of real people."

### **Partnerships and Philanthropy: Foundations for Success**

The Center's achievements are rooted in a strong network of generous supporters and partners. Taylor Farms, whose initial investment was instrumental, remains a steadfast collaborator. Additional vital support has come from the Central California Alliance for Health, Susan Merrill, the Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Mike and Mary Orradre, the Salinas Valley Health Service League, the Sally Hughes Church Foundation, and others.

Jerrett Stoffel, Senior Vice President of Operations at Taylor Farms, captured the impact of these partnerships: "This Center

### **Looking Forward: A Commitment Renewed**

Since 1953, Salinas Valley Health has advanced access to quality healthcare, and the sense of community pride and purpose at this special event was unmistakable. The first decade of the Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center has shown what is possible when vision, compassion, and partnership come together. As the Center enters its second decade, its commitment to healing, supporting, and empowering the community remains stronger than ever—a true model for the future of healthcare in the Salinas Valley and beyond. **ss**

# Reaching Your Resolutions

By Tiffany DiTullio



We are entering the time of the year where words such as resolution, intention, commitment, plan, and aspiration take a center stage in our vocabulary. Transitional times naturally prompt us to reflect on our lives, our habits and the changes we hope to make.

For some, this season means drafting resolutions or engaging in a meaningful ritual of reflection. For others, it might involve setting specific goals or participating in something more ceremonial. When our kids were little, we had a tradition of gathering on New Year's Eve to write down three or four things we wanted to focus on in the coming year. We'd jot them on craft paper, place them in the same decorative frame every year, and hang it near the kitchen—because everyone ends up there. Talk about built-in accountability.

Statistically, over 40% of US adults set resolutions, yet just almost 90% don't follow

through on their stated goals. In fact, most people have thrown in the towel by mid-January, affectionately known as "Quitter's Day." My dad used to say, "How you start is how you finish," so let's make sure we start on the right foot.

## ***"A long list of goals or behavior changes can make follow-through much harder."***

Maybe this is a tradition you've embraced for years, or maybe this is the year you've decided to begin. Before you start your journey, I would like to offer a few tips to help set you up for success. First, don't overcommit. A long list of goals or behavior changes can make follow-through much harder. Instead, focus on three to five realistic, meaningful goals. Consider different areas of your life—personal, professional, health, relationships/social,

and financial—and identify one thing in each category you'd like to prioritize.

Next, identify what you want to do—and then ask yourself why this goal matters to you. Understanding both the what and the why will naturally lead you to defining the how, which is a key ingredient for success. How will be plan to establish the path needed to be successful?

For example, a common New Year's goal is fitness-related: "I will work out three times per week." The why might be to improve your health or maintain a healthy weight. But the how is often where people get stuck. Ask yourself: How will I make this happen? Then clearly outline what it will take to support that three-times-per-week routine.

As you outline how you'll achieve your goals, you may realize there are supports you will need in place. Maybe you'll need childcare, an accountability partner, or even a new gym. Whatever the barrier is to your how, think it through now—and take steps to address it before day one. These are often the obstacles that derail us, so planning for them early can make all the difference.

Last but not least, decide how you will measure success—and be realistic. Setting reasonable expectations allows you to recognize and celebrate your progress rather than feeling discouraged. You may start strong and then hit a bump in the road. When that happens, pause, revisit your goal, reassess your how, and simply begin again.

If you are looking for resources, or a little motivation, Salinas Valley Health has you covered. From healthy cooking demonstrations and delicious recipes to guided hikes, walk with a Doc events, and health education programs, our free community offerings are here to help you get started on your wellness journey. For more information visit [www.salinasvalleyhealth.com/pathways](http://www.salinasvalleyhealth.com/pathways). **ss**

## Examples

### Personal Development

- Read one book a month
- Start journaling
- Practice daily gratitude
- Volunteer
- Build a positive morning routine
- Take a break from social media

### Professional Development

- Find or become a mentor
- Take a public speaking course
- Update your resume and LinkedIn profile
- Take an online course you are interested in
- Improve a professional skill
- Take a class or read a book on effective communication

### Health & Fitness

- Drink more water
- Practice a regular workout routine
- Join a community fitness class
- Practice meatless Monday
- Attend a healthy cooking demonstration
- Walk at least 20 minutes a day

### Relationship & Social

- Practice self-care regularly
- Create a schedule for family time – Sunday dinners
- Schedule a recurring dinner or lunch routine with friends
- Reconnect with someone you haven't spoken to in a while
- Join a club or group with a shared interest
- Plan a date night with your partner
- Become more comfortable saying no, guilt free

### Financial

- Develop a monthly budget and adhere to it
- Put a plan in place to pay off debt
- Define a specific amount you will save each month
- Understand the benefits your credit card offers, and use them!
- Create a savings fund just for vacations and experiences



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# IRS Announces 2026 Contribution Limits

By Bill Hastie & Ryan Hastie



The IRS recently announced its long-awaited 2026 contribution limits – delayed due to the government shutdown – for retirement plans and individual retirement accounts (IRAs).

For 2026, the annual contribution limit for employees participating in their employer's retirement plan (i.e., 401(k) and 403(b) plans) has been increased to \$24,500, up from \$23,500 in 2025. The catch-up contribution limit (which generally applies to employees aged 50 and over) has been increased to \$8,000, up from \$7,500 for 2025, for a total of \$32,500. Under a change made in SECURE 2.0, a higher catch-up contribution limit – known as a “super” catch-up – applies to employees aged 60, 61, 62 and 63. For 2026, this “super” catch-up contribution limit remains \$11,250, making the total limit \$35,750 for those in the 60-63 age band. The limit on annual contributions to an IRA has been increased to \$7,500, up from \$7,000 in 2025. The IRA catchup contribution limit for individuals aged 50 and over has been increased to \$1,100, up from \$1,000 for 2025, for a total of \$8,600.

Taxpayers can deduct contributions made to a traditional IRA if certain conditions are met. If, during the year, either the taxpayer or the taxpayer's spouse was covered by a retirement plan at work, the deduction may be reduced, or phased out, until it is eliminated, depending on filing status and income. If neither the taxpayer nor their spouse is covered by an employer's retirement plan, the phase-outs of the deduction do not apply. The phaseout ranges for 2026 are as follows:

For single taxpayers covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is increased to between \$81,000 and \$91,000, up from between \$79,000 and \$89,000 for 2025.

For married couples filing jointly, if the spouse making the IRA contribution is covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is increased to between \$129,000 and \$149,000, up from between \$126,000 and \$146,000 for 2025. For an IRA contributor who is not covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is increased to between \$242,000 and

\$252,000, up from between \$236,000 and \$246,000 for 2025.

For a married individual filing a separate return, who is covered by a workplace retirement plan, the phase-out range is not subject to an annual cost-of-living adjustment and remains between \$0 and \$10,000.

The IRS places limits on the ability to contribute to a Roth IRA based on household income. The income phase-out range for taxpayers making contributions to a Roth IRA is increased to between \$153,000 and \$168,000 for single filers and heads of household, up from between \$150,000 and \$165,000 for 2025. For married couples filing jointly, the income phase-out range is increased to between \$242,000 and \$252,000, up from between \$236,000 and \$246,000 for 2025. The phase-out range for married individuals filing a separate return who make contributions to a Roth IRA is not subject to an annual cost-of-living adjustment and remains between \$0 and \$10,000.

With so many changes in the contribution limits and income phase-out levels, it is always advised to check with your tax or financial professional to make certain you are contributing the correct amount to your IRA, 403(b) or 401(k) plan.

The beginning of a new year is a great time to check the asset allocation of your retirement account and confirm the degree of investment risk you are willing to accept. One advantage to making asset allocation changes in a retirement plan is that the trades will not generate any currently taxable capital gains. After three good years in the U.S. stock market, a 60% stock and 40% bond allocation, for example, will tend to drift to a higher stock allocation relative to the bond allocation. This will most likely increase the risk inherent in the portfolio, so rebalancing the portfolio back to its intended allocation will help maintain the acceptable amount of investment risk. **ee**



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# AgTech 101

## What Is It and Why It Matters

By Mindy Carpenter



**A**gTech - short for agricultural technology, refers to innovations that improve farming efficiency, sustainability, and productivity. With labor shortages, rising input costs, and increasing sustainability requirements, AgTech is quickly becoming one of the most important shifts in modern agriculture.

The world of AgTech is changing every day. A glance through the fields of the Salinas Valley reveals implements that look very different from those of the past. A quick search on Google and LinkedIn can present technology for planting, weeding, irrigation, harvesting and packing, among other things. We were introduced to the world of commercial robotic weeding around 2019, but it actually started in research labs as early as 1996. During the period between research and commercialization, the idea of agricultural technology stayed exactly the same: using cameras and artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence, also known as AI, is a fascinating and complex technology. As many are aware, it has quickly become part of our everyday lives, whether we like it or not. AI is meant to make things easier, though it has

raised concerns in many industries. AI used in AgTech is the former, thankfully.

For the purpose of this introduction to AgTech AI, I will focus on what I know best, which is weeding robots and their use of AI. Robotics companies such as FarmWise, Carbon Robotics and Niqo Robotics use AI to identify a plant versus a weed. The cameras

***"We were introduced to the world of commercial robotic weeding around 2019, but it actually started in research labs as early as 1996."***

onboard capture images of everything they see. These images are then passed to a team of individuals referred to as a "machine learning team" or "annotators", who annotate and classify each image. This process requires outlining every plant and weed, and labeling accordingly. For example, in a single image, one may see a very young lettuce plant as well as purslane, a common weed (also an edible succulent) found in many fields throughout the Salinas Valley. The team then identifies the

lettuce, thus creating a "model", training the computer to recognize the plant in this stage as well as all other growth stages as images are continually gathered. This model now not only identifies the lettuce, it identifies the weed. The cameras onboard the robots are taking thousands of images during its passes through the field. As new weeds are identified, they are added to the catalog of weed models, and as the robots enter fields of different commodities, new models are created. These weed and crop models are fluid - constantly updated, expanded and improved.

The AgTech boom was large and quick on the technology side, but it was and still is relatively slow to catch on with growers. Agricultural weeding practices and the tools used - such as cultivators and other implements, have not seen much change in decades, and the adaptation of technology is not something that would have happened instantaneously. This slower pace of adoption isn't surprising considering how rooted farming practices are in tradition. Growers are old school, speaking from experience with my own grower dad. He passed before I joined FarmWise, but I recall explaining the concept to him. I thought he'd find it fascinating, but instead he told me he was more than happy with his simple laser leveler and needed nothing more. We lost my dad in 2019, right before the AgTech boom, so he never had the chance to see the robots in action when they made their way to the fields.

Robots began entering the fields in the Salinas Valley in early 2020 and boy, were they a sight to see. FarmWise had large orange robots that attracted a lot of attention when weeding. Our operators would tell us of folks who drove out just to see what it was and what it was doing. There was plenty of interest, though mostly driven by curiosity. Hand crews were a guaranteed weed killer, and most growers felt very comfortable with their labor contractors.

In 2021, there was a slight shift of interest, and growers began to jump onboard to purchase this new smart technology. Some growers soon found that their purchases required costly monthly subscription fees, annual maintenance fees, costly repairs, and some machines were down more than they were working. This hardship caused a swift hesitation in purchasing additional AgTech. Growers were deciding to wait for the second and third generations of these machines before thinking of making a purchase, while others had lost interest completely.

Many generations of tech later, and the interest is growing once again. New companies with new robots doing many things all at one time are in the AgTech space and are doing very well. Instead of purchasing multiple smart machines, growers now have the option of purchasing one unit with attachments designed for their specific growing needs. The sales prices of the new technology have started to decrease, all while hand labor costs are on the rise. Growers can now see that the return on investment is substantial, making the decision to purchase technology a seemingly easier one.

Fast forward almost six years since AgTech was introduced in the Valley, and it is still evolving. So much so that there are now multi-day events showcasing new technology all over the world. The largest of these events is Agritechnica, a global trade fair showcasing agriculture technology, held in Hanover, Germany. Agritechnica hosted 2,849 vendors from 52 countries and drew more than 476,000 visitors in November, 2025. It remains on my bucket list!

Agriculture exists in every country on every continent but is vastly different in each location. Block and bed sizes vary, and soil contents are different and require different technology and practices. I attended the Great Lakes Expo in Grand Rapids, Michigan two years ago. FarmWise had a small booth with a video on loop, demonstrating what our new implement for sale, Vulcan, could do in a romaine field in southern Monterey County. Growers in Michigan are tech-aware, but instead of asking about our machine, most stopped by to learn about the crop and planting practices shown in our video. They had

never seen an 80 inch bed of six line romaine before! We learned a lot from the growers, and also learned that the soil in some areas of Michigan is highly flammable, so they must use extreme caution when using any type of technology. This type of soil contains a high percentage of organic carbon, making it highly combustible.

In October, FIRA was held in Woodland, California. FIRA may sound familiar as it was once held in Salinas at the Sports Complex a few years ago. This is a French-based event that showcases technology for fields as well as orchards and vineyards. Now that AgTech has been in existence for some time, technology represented at the event are brands we are familiar with but introducing updated models. Niqo Robotics was introduced last year and hosted a demo showing their newest features, as did local company, Stout. What

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***"The AgTech boom was large and quick on the technology side, but it was and still is relatively slow to catch on with growers."***

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was most exciting at FIRA this year, was the introduction of two new companies with their weeding implements. The first notable demonstration was Aigen Robotics out of Redmond, Washington. Their robot is a solar powered weeder and cultivator. It is small and lightweight and can be fitted with many different sized blades, while operated by an onsite operator using a tablet. Aigen harnesses the power of AI to identify crops, and cultivates around each plant, removing weeds at the same time. During the other demos, Aigen removed their cultivating blades, attached beverage-holder bars and walked their robot through the crowd offering drinks - an ingenious way to show its versatility.

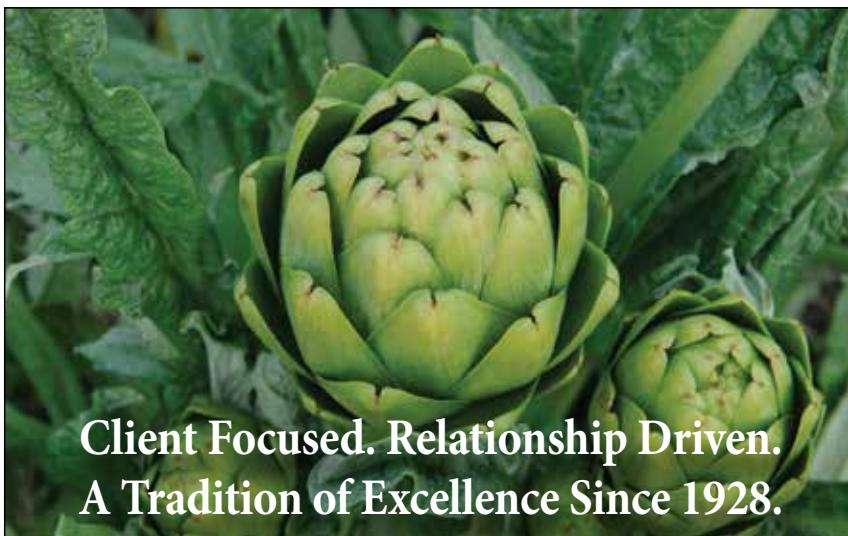
The second demonstration of note was by a new to the market company, Tensorfield out of Union City, California. Tensorfield uses AI to identify crops and weeds, then spot sprays heated oil to kill the weeds - eliminating them without chemicals and without disturbing the crust of the soil. They are still in the prototype

stage, and have future plans of contracting with local restaurants to use their discarded oil for the elimination of weeds. What a great concept.

In mid-November, the Desert Difference FarmTech Connect was held in Yuma, Arizona. This event was hosted by the Yuma Center for Excellence for Desert Agriculture (YCEDA), in partnership with the University of Arizona. This event featured major AgTech companies, startups, and a half day of topical panels. One informative panel was a group of three local farmers who described what technology they use, why they use it, and suggestions for what could make the technology better. This is what the AgTech companies really need to pay attention to. In the boom of AgTech, growers were presented with implements and technology that the engineers created based on what they, the engineers, thought would be beneficial to agriculture. What they quickly found, and some were resentful of, was that while the technology idea was helpful, the technology delivery via an implement, was not ideal. As a result, projected sales fell short of expectations, affecting the survival of some AgTech companies.

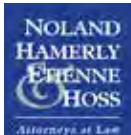
Of the smaller companies that demonstrated at Desert Difference, there were three focused solely on water which is a big problem in the Yuma and Imperial regions. While these were not implements or robots, they use AI in other ways, creating smart technology. Vorterra from Leavenworth, Washington, is a captivating company who has created a way to use water more efficiently by altering its molecular structure. This is done by passing water through a combination of flow tubes, spheres, and an aqueous crystalline solution, essentially stretching the water. Technically speaking, this is called fragmenting water molecule clusters into significantly smaller units. This has resulted in a 33% reduction in water usage among their growers.

The industry was also introduced to Skysense from Richland, Washington. Skysense uses drones for bird mitigation in fields and orchards, and was very successful at chasing the birds away from their demo zone on the University of Arizona Campus Farm. FAA-certified pilots remotely fly the drones, which use AI to map fields before flight and



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There is so much to see and learn at these AgTech events, and I can't wait for two upcoming events in February, 2026. Along with new technology, they feature informative panels, demonstrations and great networking opportunities. First is the World Ag Expo held in Tulare February 10th through 12th. If you have not been, you really should go! It is a multi-day event and if you're a first time attendee, you may need two days to take it all in. You will find AgTech and smart technology used in dairy, vineyards, orchards, row crops and of course, specialty crops as seen in our valley. The technology seems never ending and I am always impressed by how much it changes from year to year. If you do attend this event, you'll want to get in line early for the famous steak sandwich served by Sundale School. It really is that good!

The second event in February is the Southwest Ag Summit in Yuma, Arizona. While this event is smaller than the World Ag Expo, it is still a multi-day event beginning February 17th running through the 19th. Demonstrations and discussions focus on farming in Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico and Northern Mexico, in partnership with regional universities and grower organizations. AgTech companies will be on site with static displays and in-field demonstrations. Looking back at past Southwest Ag Summit events, my most memorable demo was a band-steam machine created by Professor Mark Siemens from the University of Arizona. This technology injects the soil with steam, heating the soil to 140°, killing soil pathogens and weed seeds. It is essentially disinfecting the soil with steam. Many remarkable agricultural tools are still in prototype form - hopefully coming to fields near you soon!

As AgTech continues to evolve, one thing hasn't changed: farmers' deep connection to their land and the need for tools that truly work for them. When innovation and practicality meet, the results can be transformative. The next few years will be exciting to watch - not just for the robots and AI, but for the growers whose lives and operations they're designed to support.



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# Glory For Rory

## *A Look Back at McIlroy's Big Win at Pebble Beach*

By Alan Shipnuck



**H**ow did Rory McIlroy finally win the Masters to complete the career Grand Slam and fulfill his destiny? It all started at Pebble Beach. Actually, it started a few months before that.

In his decade-long quest to achieve the Slam, McIlroy had tried everything to peak for the Masters: play the week before, rest the week before; arrive in Augusta early, arrive in Augusta late; play the course weeks ahead of time, skip the extra preparation. The one thing he had never done is to treat November and December as if the Masters was imminent. "Rory's plan for Augusta started in the off-season," says Bob Rotella, his sports psychologist. "He won four times in 2024; he was playing at such a high level, the plan for the off-season was to treat it like it wasn't the off-season. He stayed very active, playing and practicing and working on targeted things."

McIlroy dedicated himself to becoming more effective with his short irons and

wedges. Both Tiger Woods and Butch Harmon had harped on McIlroy to address this longstanding weakness in the preceding two years, but now, finally, he was ready to hear it. "That's just how I am: I have to make things my own idea," he says, knowingly. This resistance to outside counsel can be found in other vastly talented feel players—makes sense, since safeguarding their gift is part of what makes them who they are. Phil Mickelson didn't win his first major championship until he was 33, having finally accepted what everyone else already knew: he needed to abandon his crashing draw off the tee and embrace a more gentle fade. Dustin Johnson did not become dominant until his early 30s, when he began spending the bulk of his practice time dialing in precise distances on his wedges, as various folks had long beseeched him to do. So, as 2024 turned into 2025, McIlroy grinded on different shot shapes and trajectories

with his shortest clubs, allowing him to lower the height and spin rate of his shots and giving himself a more varied arsenal, including a baby cut that would serve him well off the hook lies at Augusta National.

Throughout the long off-season, Golf Channel analyst Brandel Chamblee could see McIlroy's swing going back to the future. "At the end of 2024, he was posting swing videos online and the technical improvement was obvious," says Chamblee. "At the top [of his swing], he looked more like the Rory of old. Once he got his swing in a better place, he could let go of every mechanical thought. That gave him the clarity to come out and play with more grit, more mettle, more determination."

All of this was on display at McIlroy's 2025 PGA Tour debut at the Crosby Clambake. He arrived at Pebble Beach looking rested and refreshed, a much

***"(Rory) arrived at Pebble Beach looking rested and refreshed..."***

different energy from his pinched, puckered visage throughout the preceding season's marital drama, when McIlroy had filed for divorce from his wife Erica and then they reconciled a month later. McIlroy is a golf romantic; he stirred his soul the day before the Clambake began by playing Cypress Point for the first time. (He shot 67.) McIlroy began the tournament proper on the back nine at Spyglass Hill. The 15th hole is a short, steeply downhill par-3 that demands precise distance control. All McIlroy did was fly his ball straight into the hole for a slam dunk ace, keying his bogeyless round of 66. Nothing like some positive feedback to validate all the hard work.

An ensuing 70 left McIlroy in 11th

place, five strokes behind Sepp Straka. Some vintage Crosby weather blew in on Saturday, and McIlroy rose to the challenge with a dazzling display of shotmaking into Pebble's tiny greens. He set up birdies with a three-quarter wedge on 15 and then an off-speed 9-iron at 16, to say nothing of a 346-yard drive on 18. His 65 was his second bogey-free round in the span of three days, and it shot McIlroy into the lead. "This is as complete as I've seen Rory look, tee through the green, around the green, on the green," enthused CBS's Trevor Immelman.

On Sunday, having fought his way to a two-stroke lead through 13 holes, McIlroy launched from the 14th tee one of the more memorable drives in the recent history of Pebble Beach, a 339-yard moon shot that touched 190 miles per hour of ball speed and 168 feet at its apex. He followed with a towering 7-iron from 201 yards that left him 27 feet for eagle, a putt he brushed in like a practice round gimme. Game over.

Sixteen years earlier, McIlroy had defeated Justin Rose in Dubai for his first

professional victory. They were paired again on Sunday at Pebble Beach, and Rose was impressed that McIlroy continued to evolve at 35. "He did all the right things," said Rose, who tied for third. "He had control of his wedges. He was controlling all of his distances quite nicely. It was a very professional round of golf." Rose's smirk betrayed that McIlroy has, in the past, been prone to schoolboy errors. Rory didn't exactly disagree. "I finally feel my game can travel to any sort of golf course in any conditions in any setup, really," he said after his first victory in California. "I feel like I'm now a very well-rounded golfer and can adapt to whatever I need to adapt to." When I asked him to clarify when he had finally arrived, he turned philosophical. "Maybe not finally," McIlroy said. "I don't know if any of us should define ourselves as complete because that means there's nowhere left to go, no improvement left, and that's certainly not the case."

It's admirable that McIlroy was still looking ahead, given all that he had already accomplished: his 27th Tour victory moved him within one of Paul (Little Poison)

Runyan and Leo Diegel for 20th on the all-time list. Within striking distance were legends Lee Trevino (29 wins), Horton Smith (30), and Jimmy Demaret (31). Getting to 31 victories would make McIlroy among the 15 most prolific winners in the history of the PGA Tour, to say nothing of his victories on the Euro Tour (10 and counting circa Pebble Beach, not including the major championships and WGCs, which are already included in his PGA Tour total). Yet McIlroy noted that the Pebble win was so special because it came on one of golf's "cathedrals." Only Augusta National and the Old Course can match Pebble's grandeur. "And I had a big fat zero on all of those going in here," McIlroy said. "So to knock one off [at] Pebble is very cool."

Rotella loved hearing McIlroy talk that way. "I thought that was brilliant on his part," he says. "He embraced the bigness of the moment. What a great word—cathedral." McIlroy didn't mention it, but Augusta National has long carried an overwrought nickname: The Cathedral in the Pines. cc



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# Teacher Turned Real Estate Broker Shares Monterey Bay With The World

*Jan Leasure of Monterey Rentals Makes Giving Back Part of Her 40-Year Legacy*

By Mike Hale



**W**hen Jan Leasure first laid eyes on the crescent-shaped Monterey Bay shoreline, she had to remind herself to exhale.

“It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen,” said Leasure, a West Virginia native who arrived in Monterey in the 1970s with her late husband, who was stationed at Fort Ord. “I remember coming across Highway 156 and getting on Highway 1, and I just held my breath, so overcome. I’m still emotional about it.”

The couple quickly decided to settle in the area permanently, and became teachers. At first, Leasure taught home economics, eventually teaching reading and language

arts to learning disabled students, leveraging her Masters degree in special education.

“Uncle Sam brought us here, and we were lucky enough to be along for the ride,” she

***“That first foray into vacation rentals grew into opportunities to flip houses and build financial security beyond teachers’ salaries.”***

says, looking back on those early days. “Oh, my goodness, we knew we were never going anywhere else.”

She also knew that she wanted to share her special place with others — extended family, friends and even visitors from far-flung places.

So, she took the first step in creating her own home rental business.

“It started with renting out our house while we were traveling in the summer,” Leasure said. “Then other teachers asked if I could rent out their places as well. I thought, ‘I could do that.’”

That first foray into vacation rentals grew into opportunities to flip houses and build financial security beyond teachers’ salaries. From there, Leasure slowly built the well-respected, family run business Monterey

Bay Vacation Rentals, established in 1986. By Leasure's estimates — the company has secured half a million reservations in the 40 years since she founded it.

Today, Leasure is owner and managing broker for an umbrella company called Monterey Rentals, which includes Monterey Bay Property Management, specializing in the management of a large portfolio of single-family homes, condos, and apartment buildings all over the Monterey Peninsula.

Leasure is dedicated to providing creative property management, with the mission "to make being a landlord rewarding, to make being a tenant a pleasure, and to have fun doing both!"

#### **Always community focused**

Along with all this success has always been Leasure's strong desire to give back to the community that has given so much to her.

"All I ever wanted to do from age 13 was to be a teacher," she said. "I think, like most teachers, I always had a mindset to give back, and help build something for future generations."

Currently, the Equal Opportunity Committee chairperson for the Monterey County Association of Realtors, Leasure instructs new real estate licensees in the areas of fair housing. She regularly provides seminars and workshops on property management and other business topics, and she works as an expert witness in landlord-tenant cases.

"The whole point of being in this business is that I realized very quickly that I could share this amazing area with people and that they could visit the coast," she said. "The long-term rental element came about as I was realizing that there were lots of people who wanted to live here but needed more affordable housing."

For decades she has helped facilitate turning vacant properties or those not being fully utilized for long-term residences into opportunities for others to call Monterey County home.

#### **Launching Homes with Heart**

To mark the 40th anniversary, Monterey

Rentals has launched an initiative in 2026 that it calls Homes with Heart. Each quarter, a portion of every guest stay and rental booking will be donated to organizations making a lasting difference in Monterey County.

From January to March, the recipient is Veterans Transition Center of Monterey County, a nonprofit that provides veterans and their families with housing, case management, and comprehensive support services as they transition from crisis to stability.

As a former military wife, Leasure has always kept VTC close to her heart, and supporting the nonprofit is part of her commitment to fair housing in a region known for its high cost of living. For years she has donated gently used linens and furniture from vacation rental properties to the VTC, helping ensure that those who serve their country have the resources to thrive

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#### ***"Leasure instructs new real estate licensees in the areas of fair housing."***

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through housing assistance, job training and mental health support.

Future Homes with Heart beneficiaries include: Habitat for Humanity Monterey Bay (building strength, stability, and self-reliance through affordable housing); I-HELP Monterey Bay (providing shelter, meals, and life skills programs for homeless men and women); and Alliance on Aging Monterey County (providing services and resources that help seniors live independently, with dignity and respect.)

#### **All in the family**

Another reason behind Leasure's success is her management style that leads to retention in her employee base. She hired her first employee, Michelle Larkin, in 1990 and "she's still with me today," Leasure said. "Michelle came to me as a high school work-study student. Now she is a property manager."

Larkin's daughter, who was 18 months

old when her mother started at Monterey Rentals, is now the office manager. "She grew up around the business, working for us after she got out of high school," Leasure said.

Her current bookkeeper Kerri Collins also arrived as a work student in 1994 at age 16, and later her husband Matt left Pebble Beach Co., to sign on as a property manager.

"My oldest grandson works for us, as does his wife," said Leasure. "We're all one big family here."

When asked about her success, Leasure really can't put it into words.

"They say you don't know what you don't know, and that was certainly true for me," she said. "I am a graduate from the 'University of Flying by the Seat of My Pants.' At the beginning I didn't know anything."

She earned her broker's license, "but all that means is that you had taken some courses in real estate and had passed the state exam," she said. "Back then I was very anxious to get practical knowledge so I joined trade organizations, and learned from other property managers, and reinvented myself."

It ended up changing her life and her family's life — and drew so many people to a place that literally takes your breath away.

"It's such an amazing place," she said. "And I feel so lucky to have been part of it, and to be able to help share it with the world." **cs**

| HOME SHOWCASE

# Home For The Holidays

By Diane Gsell

Photography by Patrick Tregenza & Barbara Plaskett





When Barbara and Gordon Plaskett blended their families, they chose a modest ranch-style house near downtown King City as their home. What began as a cozy 1,800 square-foot dwelling for their family of seven eventually blossomed to the stately 4,100 square-foot residence that it is today. Along its way to its present form through two rounds of additions, the house never lost its heart or its warmth. And that is why the end result is the kind of home that is as comfortable and inviting as it is elegant.

Over the years, both Barbara and Gordon enjoyed traveling the world on a quest to fill their mounting square footage with antiques that spoke to them. While Gordon's early service in the military inspired an interest in collecting civil war memorabilia, his greatest influence in all things related to history, literature and artifacts was undeniably his grandmother, Mabel Sans Plaskett. Author of The Coast Trail series, she was an incredible resource who shared books and insight that would greatly impact his lifelong interests.

Gordon's career in aviation, from crop duster to antique aircraft restorer and flight instructor, is reflected in items displayed throughout the home. When you've restored multiple P-51 Mustangs (including one that the couple flew all the way across the country in a total of eight hours) as well as several Stearman PT-13s and other warbirds, it makes sense that your choice in home décor might include a WW1 propeller, various maps and photographs of some of your favorite aircraft. A keen eye might even spot an image of a young Barbara lending a decorative hand by painting nose art onto one of their many restoration projects.

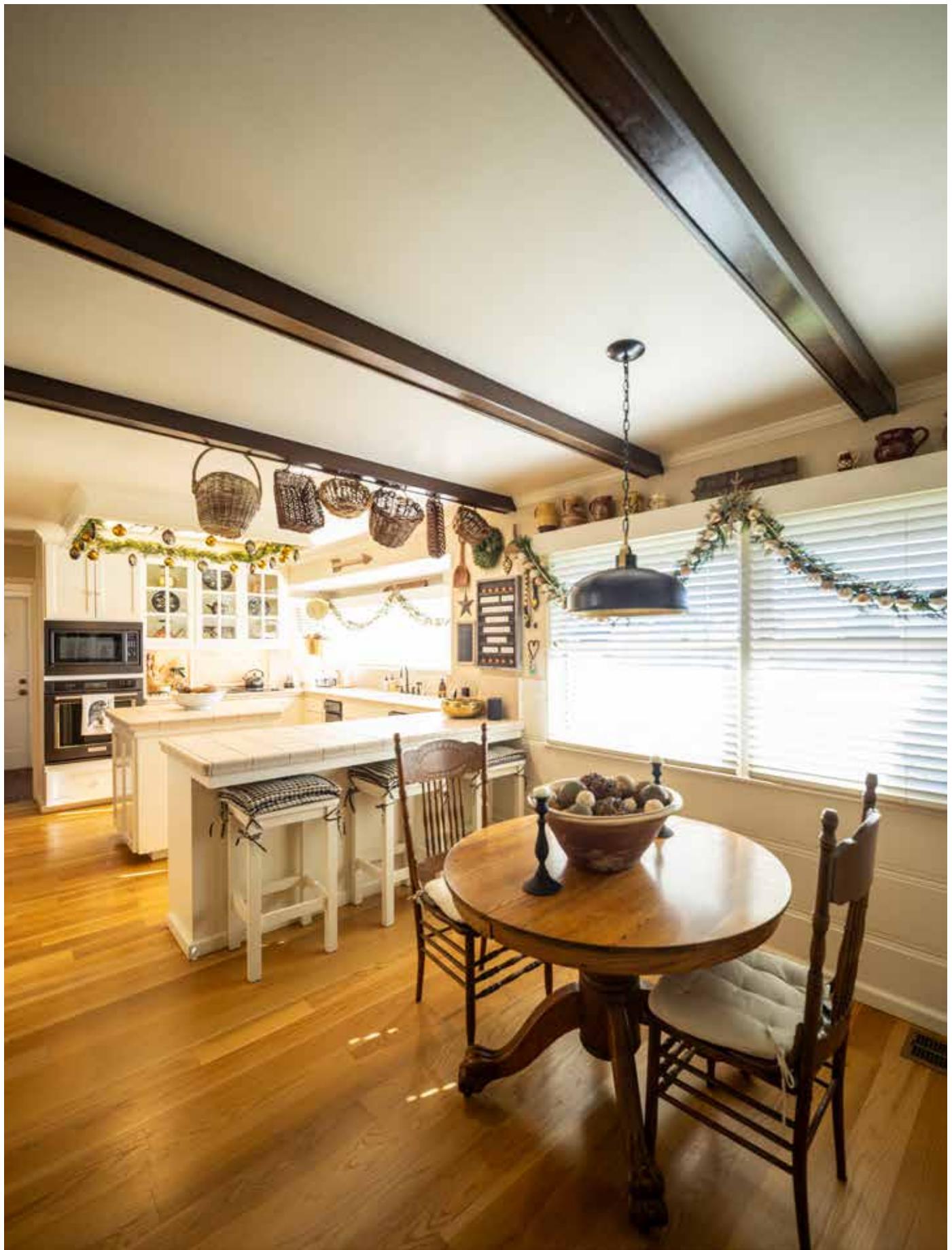
As much as Barbara enjoyed contributing to the couple's aviation endeavors, her passion when it came to antiquing was firmly planted on the ground. As her collection of crocks, homesteader tools, baskets, jugs, and warming devices grew, Barbara realized that the common thread amongst these prized possessions was the fact that they were tools that women tended to use in the home. Having grown up on a dairy farm in northern California's Delta region, Barbara was fascinated by how her salt-of-



***"Along its way to grandeur through two rounds of additions, the house never lost its heart or its warmth."***











***“...when it comes to decorating for the holidays, an endeavor so involved that it always starts in early November, Barbara minimizes the cliché red and green tones in favor of silver, gold, and cream hues.”***

the-earth grandmother would routinely cook up a substantial lunchtime meal for family and crew on her humble wood stove. When your style muse is a boot strappy matriarch your décor will have a formidable depth of character that hints at a tribute to capable women everywhere.

Because many of these tools were made from natural elements such as stoneware, wood, brass and copper, the consistently neutral color palette allows for a maximalist aesthetic that's not overwhelming. Even when it comes to decorating for the holidays, an endeavor so involved that it always starts in November, Barbara minimizes the cliché red and green tones in favor of silver, gold, and cream hues. She reserves the big hit of red for the dining room where it provides a festive and warm splash of color, perfect for a room that boasts one of the home's three fireplaces.

Another fireplace anchors the family room, defining a cozy seating area reserved for reading or other quiet pursuits. While the main part of the family room has a home theatre set up, this separate space tends to be everyone's favorite nook. The dual layout works well to define space while keeping in step with the open atmosphere.

It's rare for a home that's had two substantial rounds of additions to flow as well as the Plaskett's. The garden room, a feature inspired by the couple's friends in England, runs alongside the family room addition creating the perfect transition to the birch-studded backyard accented by an elegant brick patio. The family room's beamed ceilings, beautifully appointed with vaulted cathedral trusses, and the garden room's many skylights, French doors and floor-to-ceiling windows create an airiness that boosts the overall flow of the home.

It's no surprise that a couple so adept at masterminding the restoration of objects on such a grand scale would expand their home in a way that works so well. When Barbara majored in design at UC Davis (back in the day when it was part of the home economics department within the school of agriculture), little did she know that her Bachelor of Science degree would on some level help fine-tune an aesthetic based on function. Pair that mind with Gordon's visionary prowess and you've got the dream team in creating décor that has a purposeful soul to it. **se**



***"The garden room, a feature inspired by the couple's friends in England, runs alongside the family room..."***



# Opening The Gate To Agriculture

*Monterey County Ag Education Inspires Thousands of Students Each Year*

By *isa Branco, President, Monterey County Ag Education*



Monterey County Ag Commissioner Juan Hidalgo with Lisa Branco, President of Monterey County Ag Education

Each school year, Monterey County Ag Education has the privilege of welcoming thousands of local third graders into the world of agriculture, giving many of them their very first hands-on experience with the crops, technology, and people that feed our communities. This November, we kicked off our 2025–2026 Farm Day season in Salinas, and what a start it was.

On November 6th, nearly 3,000 students, teachers, and chaperones filled the Salinas Farm Day event with excitement, curiosity, and wide-eyed wonder. For many children, stepping into a Farm Day experience is stepping into an entirely new world, a place where tractors tower above them, where they can see animals, explore farm

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***“For many children, stepping into a Farm Day experience is stepping into an entirely new world...”***

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equipment, learn about the seeds and crops we grow locally, and meet the men and women who make agriculture possible in Monterey County. Their questions, enthusiasm, and joy are constant reminders of why our program exists and why it matters.

This work is truly a community effort. Monterey County Ag Education is fortunate to have an involved and passionate Board of Directors, as well as the tireless work of our event coordinators, Candi DePauw and Tiffany Batistich, who orchestrate these large-scale events with remarkable skill and heart. But beyond our board and staff, our greatest strength is our agricultural community.

Every Farm Day is made possible because local ag businesses and individuals donate equipment, time, expertise, and resources, allowing us to offer a completely free and unforgettable educational experience to every third-grade class in Monterey County. We even reimburse schools for transportation costs, helping make sure all students have the chance to experience Farm Day.

And the season is just getting started. We're already looking forward to our next two Farm Days:

• **South County – January 22, 2026**

• **Monterey – March 5, 2026**

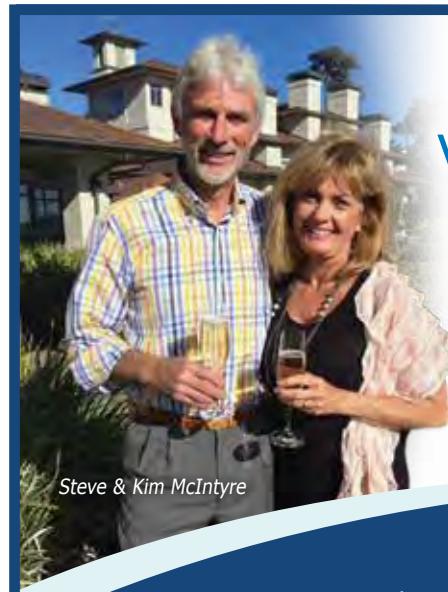
As these dates approach, we're calling on our community once again, because volunteers are the heartbeat of Farm Day. If you've ever wondered whether you're "qualified," let me reassure you: if you can

**“...we’re calling on our community once again, because volunteers are the heartbeat of Farm Day.”**

hold a clipboard and say, "Follow me!" you're qualified. Truly. What matters most is enthusiasm and a willingness to help guide students through a day of discovery.

If you – or someone you know – would like to get involved, we would love to welcome you into our volunteer family. You can learn more about our program, sign up to volunteer, or contribute to our mission at: [www.montereycountyageducation.org](http://www.montereycountyageducation.org)

Together, we are educating the next generation, strengthening connections between youth and agriculture, and celebrating the incredible ag community that makes Monterey County one of the most productive regions in the world. Thank you for helping us continue this important work. **cc**



Steve & Kim McIntyre

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# A Living Legacy

## *How the Monterey State Historic Park Association Keeps California's First Capital Vibrant*

By Mindy Carpenter



**T**ake a stroll along Monterey's famed Path of History and the culture and characters of yesterday come alive — thanks in large part to the ongoing efforts of the Monterey State Historic Park Association.

For nearly 50 years, this small but mighty nonprofit has acted as the heart and hands of Monterey's heritage, preserving many of the city's iconic adobes, enlivening its stories, and ensuring that generations of visitors and locals feel the past as something present, vibrant and deeply relevant.

Founded in 1975 by a handful of passionate state park employees, the association originally set out to restore four adobe buildings. Today, the Monterey State Historic Park has grown to encompass a dozen historic structures scattered across downtown — and MSHPA's mission has expanded right along with it. As the official philanthropic partner of the park, the association raises funds, fields volunteers

and supports interpretation, education and special events that make Monterey's layered history accessible to all.

"Educational programs and building restoration have always been at the core of what we do," said Mimi Sheridan, MSHPA's vice president. "Our activities help visitors and local residents alike interpret their history, combining knowledge — plain facts — with greater cultural understanding."

Sheridan is one of many who arrived in Monterey drawn by its beauty, but stayed captured by its past. A historian and preservation specialist by training, she spent years researching and developing public tours in Washington State before returning to California — "a beautiful location on the ocean with an extraordinarily rich history."

Her enthusiasm for that history is contagious, and her fingerprints can be found throughout MSHPA's work: guiding

volunteers, staffing the Custom House Museum Store, conducting research, and helping shape the interpretive experiences that connect modern visitors to centuries of human stories.

### **Bringing history to life for the community**

For families, students and curious travelers, MSHPA might best be known for its lively, hands-on approach to education. The association sponsors the State Park's school field trips, supports the Los Exploradores summer history camp, and helps orchestrate programs where children craft adobe bricks, make beeswax candles or learn to dance 19th century quadrilles. These aren't passive lessons but immersive experiences designed to spark imagination.

"Heritage and culture are passed on, person to person, from the family and the community," Sheridan said. "It's exciting to see young people so interested in learning — when they are here, they don't see history as boring."

Parents play a powerful role, too. Many, she notes, return to Monterey because of childhood memories of their own school trips. "People make lasting memories here — memories that may help shape their view of the world."

The park's everyday offerings — guided docent tours, interpretive exhibits and special educational programming — serve as entry points into Monterey's past. But MSHPA also plays a crucial role in protecting the physical sites that make these stories possible. With fluctuating state financial support, the association's fundraising efforts have supported restoration work on structures ranging from the Larkin House to the Sherman Quarters. A recent success story is the



reopening of California's First Theatre, shuttered for more than a decade due to structural concerns, and brought back to life through grants and community support spearheaded by MSHPA.

"This shows the power of community support," Sheridan said. "The historic buildings are vital to the character of downtown Monterey. Maintaining them is a constant challenge."

#### **Volunteers and museum stores**

While MSHPA's infrastructure projects and educational programs often earn the spotlight, Sheridan is quick to emphasize that the organization's real heartbeat lies in its volunteers — and in the museum stores they help run. These stores, especially the beloved Custom House Store at the edge of the plaza, do more than offer souvenirs; they extend the museum experience, showcasing locally made crafts, carefully curated books, and items that reflect California's cultural heritage.

"Volunteers serve as ambassadors, representing Monterey, the park and the state to visitors — including many from around the world," Sheridan said.

Those volunteers greet guests, share stories, guide tours and help visitors understand Monterey's role as the epicenter of early California. Some specialize in school programs or research; others maintain a vast wardrobe of historically

accurate clothing for events; still others support the board or lend their talents to writing, dancing or public outreach.

"Volunteers can choose from a variety of activities," Sheridan said. "Everyone is welcome."

The stores also generate essential revenue for the association, helping underwrite restoration efforts and educational programs. For locals, they've become destination shops — places to find unusual gifts, regional literature, and handcrafted pieces not available anywhere else.

#### **Monterey's magical moment**

If MSHPA has a signature event, it is surely Christmas in the Adobes, the romantically lit celebration that transforms downtown Monterey into a magical time capsule each December. For more than 40 years, thousands have flocked here to wander through more than two dozen historic buildings, each decorated in period style. The air fills with music — from carolers to violinists to flamenco dancers — and every adobe offers a slightly different window into the past.

"It's special because it's unique," Sheridan said. "Monterey citizens purposely set out more than 70 years ago to preserve this physical component of the city's heritage. Many towns have historic adobes, but only Monterey has preserved so many."

#### **Looking ahead: A call for community**

As Monterey continues to evolve, the association is clear-eyed about its priorities: expanding community involvement, increasing membership, and scaling its support for both educational programs and building restoration. Sheridan emphasizes that an engaged public is essential.

"Our goal is a simple one — to get more of the community involved in preserving the heritage of Monterey and California," she said.

There are countless ways to help: becoming a member, volunteering, donating, sponsoring events, or simply attending programs and bringing friends.

Sheridan's personal inspiration remains what first drew her to the Peninsula — the joy of discovery, the layers of history, and the belief that understanding the past enriches the present.

"I learn more about this area every week," she said. "I especially like passing this information on, helping people better understand our history and its importance in present-day life."

In the end, MSHPA serves as a bridge between centuries, keeping Monterey's stories alive — not behind glass cases but out in the open air, along the sunlit plazas and walkways. Through dedicated volunteers, vibrant educational programs, and a community that recognizes the value of its heritage, the past remains not only visible, but vivid.

For more information about the nonprofit or how to volunteer, visit [www.mshpa.org](http://www.mshpa.org). **cc**



# A New Era For a Historic Landmark

*The Golden Bough Playhouse Under Pacific Repertory Theatre*

By Jeff Mendelsohn

The story of the Golden Bough Playhouse is one of resilience, community spirit, and a phoenix-like ability to rise from the ashes—twice. Its acquisition by the Pacific Repertory Theatre (PacRep) in 1994 marked a pivotal moment, transforming a beloved but aging movie house into the beating heart of a vibrant, year-round professional theatre community in Carmel-by-the-Sea. This transition, far more than a simple change of ownership, has ensured the preservation of a vital cultural landmark and ushered in an era of modernization, artistic growth, and environmental stewardship.

#### **From Ashes to Art House: A Storied Past**

The original Theatre of the Golden Bough, opened in 1924 by the visionary Edward G. Kuster, was an architectural marvel hailed as the “greatest little playhouse in America”. Its history was dramatic, mirroring the plays staged within its walls. After the first building on Ocean Avenue burned down in 1935, Kuster rebuilt on Monte Verde Street. In an almost unbelievable twist of fate, this second location also succumbed to fire in 1949 after a revival of the very same play, *By Candlelight*!

Undeterred, Kuster built the current facility in 1952, a three-story complex featuring the main Founders Theatre and the intimate, downstairs Circle Theatre. After Kuster’s death, the main theatre was leased to a movie chain, while the Circle Theatre eventually closed in 1972 and was used for storage. By the early 1990s, with movie audiences dwindling, the property was slated for demolition to make way for residential lots.



Exterior of Carmel's Golden Bough Playhouse as seen from Monte Verde Street.

## The PacRep Acquisition: A Community Triumph

In 1993, the non-profit GroveMont Theatre, founded by Stephen Moorer, launched a public campaign to “Save the Golden Bough”. The community responded with an outpouring of support, raising \$600,000 to purchase the facility and prevent its destruction. The organization officially renamed itself the Pacific Repertory Theatre in 1994 upon acquiring the property and announced its ambitious plans to establish Monterey County’s only year-round professional theatre company.

The doors reopened in September 1994, with PacRep presenting its first full season in March 1995. This was the beginning of a transformation that saw the theatre regain its former glory. PacRep, under Moorer’s artistic and executive direction, quickly established itself as the premier theatre company of the Central Coast, producing a wide range of classics and new works. The venue also served as a vital hub for other local arts groups, including the Monterey Opera Association and the Monterey County Symphony.

“We’re very proud of what we’ve built here,” says Moorer, who is the driving force behind the Theatre.

## A Vision of Modernization and Sustainability

The merger of PacRep and Carmel Bough Playhouse marked the beginning of significant, multi-phase renovations designed to bring the historic venue into the 21st century.

- Phase One (completed 2011): This phase focused on artistic enhancements and infrastructure, including the installation of a computerized revolving stage system and state-of-the-art projection systems.
- Environmental Stewardship: In 2016, PacRep demonstrated a commitment to sustainability by installing a solar power system that effectively eliminated the playhouse’s carbon footprint, a significant achievement for a historic building.

“We are extremely proud to work with wonderful local customers like PacRep,” says Brian Constable, EVP and Chief Credit Officer for Monterey County Bank. “Being in a position to help local businesses is exactly what we set out to do as a community-centric bank.” This local banking partnership demonstrates MCB’s commitment to supporting community arts, helping PacRep navigate capital campaigns and operational needs, and keeping the magic

- Phase Two (completed 2024): The most recent and extensive renovation was an \$10.8 million project that began in earnest in 2021. This phase, largely funded by a lead gift from a philanthropist was “for the audience”. The entire interior was stripped and rebuilt, featuring a new lobby with a bar, new restrooms, and a redesigned auditorium with enhanced stadium seating and improved sightlines, all while maintaining the historic facade. The theater officially reopened in the fall of 2024 with a modernized, world-class performance space. The 300-seat proscenium style auditorium serves as the centerpiece of the complex, and hosts everything from full-scale musicals to contemporary productions and film screenings.

***“Aside from the heavy dependence upon philanthropic gifts, PacRep also partners with local financial entities.”***

Aside from the heavy dependence upon philanthropic gifts, PacRep also partners with local financial entities.

Monterey County Bank (MCB) significantly bolstered Pacific Repertory Theatre (PacRep) by providing crucial, timely financial solutions, like working capital and SBA loans, during the Golden Bough Playhouse’s major renovation, ensuring continuity for the beloved arts institution.

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This local banking partnership demonstrates MCB’s commitment to supporting community arts, helping PacRep navigate capital campaigns and operational needs, and keeping the magic

of live theater alive for Carmel and the wider Monterey Peninsula.

## The Legacy Continues

The union between the Golden Bough Playhouse and Pacific Repertory Theatre has been a resounding success story, ensuring that live professional theatre continues to thrive in Carmel. By acquiring and rejuvenating this historic venue, PacRep saved a cultural institution from commercial development and cemented its place as a cornerstone of the Central Coast’s performing arts scene.

Today, the Golden Bough Playhouse, alongside the intimate Circle Theatre and the picturesque outdoor Forest Theater (also managed by PacRep), offers diverse programming, from family-friendly musicals to challenging dramas. The result is a premier, fully accessible, and environmentally conscious facility that honors its dramatic past while looking firmly toward the future, providing a stage where the magic of theatre can endure for generations to come.

For information on current shows and future seasons, visit the Pacific Repertory Theatre website. [cc](#)



Construction workers prepare a set in the Golden Bough’s 300 seat Founder’s Theatre

# Rancho Cielo Alumnus Brings Vision to Life

By Adam Joseph



A mural depicting Green Thumb Farms alongside a hoop house in San Juan

**W**hen old redwood trees surround Rudy Jimenez, he slips into a meditative state.

"They create a reserve around them to sustain themselves and help other trees," says the 2007 Silver Star graduate. "So, for me, life is all about creating a strong foundation for other people to thrive."

Jimenez didn't grow up dreaming of being a farmer. His late father, a lifelong field worker, encouraged him to get an education instead. He didn't want his son to spend his life under the same sun, bent over rows of crops, earning a low wage. Rudy took that advice and pursued business.

At 22, he owned around 20 vending machines throughout California's Central Coast. "I wanted to be an entrepreneur," he says. "Build my own business that can make me income."

For a while, it worked. The machines made money. But one day, a customer pointed at a soda machine and told him how his daily soft

drink habit had led to diabetes and surgery. That moment stayed with him. Jimenez realized he didn't want to profit from what was harming people.

"I was done with the vending machine business after that," he says. "I saw the direct consequences of processed food."

## A Return to the Land

What started as a decision to walk away from vending machines turned into something much bigger. In 2015, Jimenez founded Green Thumb Farms in San Juan Bautista. He started with just a quarter of an acre, focusing on growing clean, diverse and sustainable produce. Over time, he has expanded the farm to 24 acres.

Jimenez's connection to nature runs deep and spans several years. "I grew up on [Pisoni Farms in Gonzales] until I was 12," he says. "I had access to the land. I never knew cement until I moved to [East Salinas]."

Jimenez's road to Green Thumb Farms

wasn't a straight line. "For me, the more you fail, the better you get," he says. "Because now you know how to catch yourself in similar situations. My journey unfolded through failure, through learning."

That same discipline carried him through years of uncertainty. Jimenez's East Salinas neighborhood was immersed in gang activity. "There was constant violence," he recalls. "As a kid who grew up on a ranch, going into that environment had me asking a lot of questions."

At the same time, Jimenez felt like he was slipping through the cracks in school. There wasn't anyone there who would offer him guidance, so he just stopped attending, which led him to Rancho Cielo, where he found a place to belong and a real chance for success. "Rancho Cielo helped me hold onto my education and look forward to the future," he says.

Nearly 20 years later, former Monterey County Probation Officer Dave Campos clearly remembers working with Jimenez when he was a student.

"He was very quiet," Campos says. "But I could tell he was smart. He always seemed to be observing everything that was going on." In addition to ensuring Jimenez received his high school diploma, Rancho Cielo helped him secure his first job, where he worked with children at the Salvation Army. He then spent seven years employed by a retirement facility in Carmel Valley. "That job was more about taking care of people's health," Jimenez says. "[It was about] helping people step out of their normal programs and transform their realities."

Ultimately, he was drawn to the work his father did for so many decades. After Jimenez completed the Farmer Education Program through the Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) at Hartnell College, everything fell into place. "Growing

my own food is like printing my own money,” he says. “If I can grow my own food, I can create better practices within myself.”

### **Building a Sustainable Future**

Jimenez views his life and high school education as part of a larger ecosystem, much like the ancient redwood trees he admires. “I see Rancho Cielo as a dream come true for kids,” he says. “It’s a space for people to grow; a cloud in heaven, and a great opportunity to create good career pathways. We need more kids transforming the economy.”

When he met his partner, Maria Gonzalez, that vision expanded. “I initially wanted to start supporting a local farmer, most importantly a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) farmer,” Gonzalez says. “Rudy’s mission aligned with mine. I had a vegan business, and it was important to him to support vegan food.”

After visiting the farm, she realized she could help Jimenez. “They had extra



*Rudy Jimenez and Maria Gonzalez with their son, Rudolfo.*

pumpkins and squash, so we started collaborating on vegan pies and bringing them to markets,” she says. In 2024, Gonzalez opened Cultiva, an entirely plant-based restaurant less than three miles from Green Thumb Farms, where most of its ingredients are grown.

Jimenez and Gonzalez extend their passion for healthy living by selling at five farmers’ markets in San Francisco, including two at the iconic Ferry Building. They also sell at markets that serve low-income communities. “It inspires me to see myself as a parent,” Jimenez says, “and be able to guide other parents in giving their kids the best food for brain and health development. We go to grocery stores and think everything grows all year round, but real food has seasons. Sometimes kids don’t like vegetables because they’ve never tasted them ripe.”

### **Food, Family and Spirit**

Jimenez and Gonzalez’s work extends beyond growing and selling produce. They collaborate with nonprofit organizations, such as the Urban Arts Collective in Salinas and Urban Tilth in Richmond, to create healthier and more sustainable food systems. “A lot of the work we do is spiritual and mental,” Jimenez says. “Building a healthy environment can create space for personal growth. It’s all about creating a safe space for

other people to grow.”

His earliest memories of the farm still guide him. “When I was five, my conscience expanded beyond my understanding of myself,” Jimenez says. “When I moved to the city, I felt small. I know we have more than five senses, but some of them only activate in nature. You start to understand your environment differently.”

Now, with a three-year-old son, Rudolfo, Rudy and Maria’s purpose has taken on more profound meaning. “We’ve raised him plant-based since day one,” Gonzalez says. “He loves coconuts, veggie sandwiches, salads and garbanzos. He’s taught us that it’s all about how we present our food and ourselves.” From vending machines to vegetables, Jimenez’s story is about restoring the land, health and community. Like the old trees, his roots run deep, and his mission is simple: Grow strong enough to help others grow, too. “Education is everything,” he says after visiting Rancho Cielo for the first time in several years. “It was a safe space where I was able to grow. It gave me focus.” **ss**



*Rudy Jimenez at his San Juan Bautista-based Green Thumb Farms with his 3-year old son, Rudolfo.*

# Community Foundation for Monterey County's Celebration of Philanthropy

By Amanda Holder



(l to r) Elsa Mendoza Jimenez, Kayla Crocker, Tonya Antle, Cecilia Romero

The board of the Community Foundation for Monterey County (CFMC) was proud to present the Distinguished Trustee Award to Tonya Antle at the annual Celebration of Philanthropy on October 1, 2025 at The Club at Pasadera. President/CEO Dan Baldwin spoke about Foundation accomplishments and scholarship recipient Kayla Crocker shared her journey from participant to leader of the Girls' Health in Girls' Hands (GHGH) program (initially created by the Women's Fund).

Tonya was recognized for the passion and commitment she brings to everything she does, particularly for building powerful philanthropic resources for causes close to her heart. She is a long-time member of the CFMC's Women's Fund Advisory Council, served on the CFMC board from 2011-2016, became a generous donor advised fund holder, along with her late husband, Rick, and is a Legacy Society Member.

Tonya's philanthropic journey with the Community Foundation began in 2010, when she attended her first Women's Fund event. When she heard a panel of high school girls from Greenfield sharing their goals,

she immediately asked, "How can I help?" She made a remarkable impact, bringing her energy, talent and heart to build the event from a small breakfast to a packed luncheon of nearly 600 supporters. As chair of the Women's Fund Endowment Campaign Tonya helped grow the endowment to more than \$2.1 million. The Women's Fund has granted more than \$2.7 million, including over \$500,000 in scholarships.

Tonya's impact extends far beyond the CFMC with volunteer commitments as generous as her giving. She serves on the boards of The Panetta Institute for Public Policy, Carmel Woman's Club and the Morse Foundation at Monterey Peninsula Country Club and is a mentor and guest lecturer at Cal Poly school of Ag and the CSUMB school of Business.

Her leadership has been recognized both locally and nationally with the Women in Produce Achievement Award, Ag Woman of the Year Award, Ag Against Hunger Award, Brighter Bites Philanthropy Award and the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2023 Girls Inc. created the Tonya Antle

Visionary Award in her honor.

As Distinguished Trustee recipient, Tonya designated a \$10,000 CFMC grant to the nonprofits of her choice. She presented checks for \$5,000 each to Ron Johnson, President & CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County and Patty Fernandez-Torres, Executive Director of Girls, Inc. CFMC Board Chair Elsa Mendoza Jimenez noted, "Tonya has a gift of casting a bold vision and inspiring others to join her to create greater good. Our community is better off for the joy she brings to her philanthropy and giving spirit."

## 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 Foundation grants more than \$40 million annually to nonprofits working towards healthy, safe, vibrant communities. To simplify your giving or learn more, visit: [cfmco.org](http://cfmco.org).



FMC Board Chair Elsa Mendoza Jimenez (center) with outgoing board members Joe Pezzini (l) and Francine

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# 25th Annual Bill Barker Memorial Golf Tournament

Each year, Monterey County Farm Bureau hosts a golf tournament honoring our long-time Executive Director Bill Barker. This year's tournament was held on October 23rd under a picture-perfect blue sky along the Monterey Bay at the Bayonet & Black Horse Courses.

Since both courses are located side-by-side, Farm Bureau is able to fill both courses with 264 golfers each year. The shotgun start was at 11:00am with a coffee service sponsored by Central Coast Young Farmers and Ranchers during the check-in time. Also prior to tee-off was a putting contest sponsored by Monterey County Agricultural Education, benefiting their three Farm Day events held each year.

Golfers enjoyed three food stations along the course, along with adult beverages throughout the day. Contest holes included longest drive, closest to the pin, a skill shot, and a hole-in-one for a new vehicle sponsored by our business partners at Salinas Valley Ford and MY Chevrolet.

After the round was completed, golfers enjoyed a reception in the Beer Garden at the Club House, sponsored by Tanimura & Antle. Players watched as their team scores were posted by the course staff and related their expertise in golf swings to their fellow players.

Monterey County Farm Bureau is proud to honor Bill Barker by naming our golf tournament after him each year. Over a career of 43 years, Bill served as the Executive Director of Monterey County Farm Bureau; throughout those decades many changes took place in Monterey County agriculture, from crops produced to water infrastructure to office locations. Bill was instrumental in many public policy decisions that shaped our local farming and ranching for future generations. Bill was awarded the California Farm Bureau Distinguished Service Award in 1999.

Proceeds from the Bill Barker Memorial Golf Tournament go towards educational efforts by Monterey County Farm Bureau, including scholarships for college students majoring in agricultural curriculums, funding for the three Farm Day events held by Monterey County Agricultural Education, as well as educational offerings to our members each year.

The 25th Annual Bill Barker Memorial Golf Tournament was another big success due to the support of many companies in agriculture, banking, and hospitality!





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# Rancho Cielo Marks 25 Years of Changing Lives in Monterey County



After an hour of steady drizzle, the late-afternoon sun broke through the clouds, casting a golden glow over the Sally Hughes Church Amphitheater. Music filled the air, and the spirit of transformation was palpable as Rancho Cielo celebrated its 25th Anniversary on Saturday, October 25, 2025. The milestone celebrated the legacy of empowering young people across Monterey County.

Founded in 2000 by former Monterey County Superior Court Judge John Phillips, Rancho Cielo was born from a simple but profound realization. "If only we could reach these kids earlier," Phillips recalled. "They might have gone to college or started their careers. After years of sending young people to prison, I decided to try something different."

What began as a few classrooms on the 100-acre site of the former Natividad Boys Ranch has grown into a vibrant educational and vocational campus. Over the past 25 years, more than 2,250 students have found their footing there, graduating with a high school diploma, practical career skills and a plan for their future, whether that path leads to higher education or the workforce.

Rancho Cielo's success is rooted in deep community partnerships. From growers and restaurateurs to tradespeople and civic leaders, local support has shaped a model that blends education, counseling, mentorship and job training. "This celebration is about more than our anniversary; it's about the community that made Rancho Cielo possible," said Chris Devers, Rancho Cielo's CEO. "We are honoring the belief that every young person has potential, and that belief has changed countless lives."

During the event, founders John and Patti Phillips were recognized alongside longtime champions Ted Balestreri, Susie Brusa, Bert Cutino, Bill Hayward and others whose dedication helped bring the vision to life. "Twenty-five years ago, [Rancho Cielo] was nothing," said





supporter Joanne Taylor, who helped fund the Ted Taylor Vocational Center. "Look at [Rancho Cielo] now. It's helped thousands of lives, and it keeps growing."

That growth is embodied in alumni like Rudy Jimenez, owner of Green Thumb Farms in San Juan Bautista. "Rancho Cielo was a place where I could focus on my education instead of giving up on it," Jimenez said. "[They] never gave up on me. I was held accountable. Today, I live with that same discipline in my life." His heartfelt words drew a standing ovation.

The celebration culminated in a lively performance by blues legend Chris Cain and Santana vocalist Tony Lindsay, whose soulful rendition of Ray Charles' "America the Beautiful" had everyone dancing beneath the open sky. Guests dined on exquisite dishes from local chefs and Rancho Cielo's own Drummond Culinary Academy students, accompanied by regional wines and craft brews.

As Rancho Cielo looks ahead to its next 25 years, its mission remains dedicated: to equip at-promise youth with the training and trust they need to build better futures. On this late afternoon autumn day, as the sun dipped behind the hills, one truth shone brightly: Rancho Cielo isn't just celebrating its history, it's continuing to shape it.

Rancho Cielo's upcoming Culinary Round Up fundraiser will be held at the Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay on February 22, 2026, with proceeds benefiting their life-changing programs. Details at [ranchocieloyc.org](http://ranchocieloyc.org).

# Pacific Ag Rentals Continues to Give Back Annual “King of the Valley”

**W**hen the smoke cleared over the grills at this year's King of the Valley BBQ Cookoff, one thing was obvious: Pacific Ag Rentals knows how to rally a community for a cause. The annual event raised more than \$30,000 for the American Cancer Society, bringing together ag companies, friends, and co-workers for a day of competition, camaraderie, and purpose. But for Pacific Ag Rentals, the event isn't just about good food and trophies. It's about giving back, a commitment that runs as deep as their roots in agriculture itself.

Long before the cookoff became a local tradition, Pacific Ag Rentals was quietly investing in its people and its communities. The company has never viewed charitable giving as a marketing opportunity or a line item; it's simply part of who they are. Whether times are good or challenging, they've held firm to one belief: when you take care of people, everything else follows.

The past year has tested the ag industry in countless ways, from tightening margins and strict regulations to unpredictable weather, but through it all, Pacific Ag Rentals has remained steadfast in their commitment to giving. “For Pacific Ag Rentals, service to others isn't a campaign or a quarterly goal. It's a reflection of the values that built this business in the first place: hard work, integrity, and care for others,” says President Bartley Walker. “Even as ag companies continue to face difficulty, we believe there is always room for compassion. Because at the end of the day, success isn't just measured in acres or equipment; it's measured in how much you give back.”

For Pacific Ag Rentals, their giving doesn't only extend outward - it starts with those closest to home. On the first Thursday of every month, the company hosts an employee food bank, a gesture that reflects their belief that generosity starts close to home. Employees are encouraged to take what they need or share it with someone they know who could use a helping hand. It's not about handouts; it's about looking out for one another.

That same sense of care extends into the community, where Pacific Ag Rentals supports local sponsorships throughout the Salinas Valley and beyond, from youth sports and school programs to agricultural education and local fundraisers. They understand that the strength of a region depends on the people who live and work in it, and they take pride in playing a small part in keeping that strength alive.

Beyond day-to-day giving, Pacific Ag Rentals often looks for creative ways to make an impact. Their Salvation Army of Monterey giveaway is one example, an initiative where the company raffled off a mini dirt bike, with all proceeds going to the Salvation Army to support families in need during the holiday season. It's a reminder that sometimes generosity comes with a little fun attached and that giving can bring joy on both sides of the equation.



# THANK YOU!



Natividad Medical Foundation and Natividad's patients thank the family farmers, companies, and individual members of The Agricultural Leadership Council (TALC) for their philanthropic support. Together they are changing and saving the lives of agricultural workers and their families with 2025 collective donations of **\$475,000**. Since 2010, TALC has donated **\$5,594,200** to fund essential services at Natividad. TALC has purchased **776** pieces of specialized and life-saving medical equipment to provide the best care for patients—from critically ill babies to victims of trauma—in need of highly advanced surgical procedures.

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# Entre Nous Society Hosts “An Organic Affair”

Entre Nous Society Inc. is a local, nonprofit organization focused on providing financial support to other nonprofits in Monterey County. Through our fundraising activities, we provide support and assistance to help further the mission of our chosen nonprofit.

This year the group of 37 members held a fundraiser, “An Organic Affair” on Thursday, October 16th from 11AM - 2PM at Earthbound Farm Stand in Carmel Valley, which included a Culinary Demonstration by Chef Hollie Jackson (Owner of H Jackson Events). The Affair also treated their guests to sip local wines in the Herb Garden and a seasonally inspired picnic basket lunch while enjoying the warm sunshine on a crisp Fall day.

Through many generous local sponsors and the fundraising event the ladies of Entre Nous Society were able to generously make a donation of \$55,000.00 to the chosen charity, Breast Cancer Assistance Group of Monterey County.

Upholding our Mission Statement of being a group that shall be social, charitable and cultural. We succeeded in a fun event that promoted relations of mutual helpfulness to aid those who are in need and to enhance the cultural environment of our community.

Since 1934, Entre Nous has contributed over \$1,000,000 to over 90 nonprofits in Monterey County.



1.) Pictured are the present members of Entre Nous Society

2.) Guests enjoying their lunch

3.) Chef Hollie Jackson

4.) Pictured (l to r) Debbie Meeks Vice President and Project Co-Chairs Betsy Leach & Marigrace Gamble

5.) Entre Nous member Dr. Lena Malik with the picnic basket lunches.

6.) Entre Nous President Karen Mitchell addresses the guests.



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# Key For a Cure Fall Event Recap

## 5th Annual St. Jude Golf Tournament – Event Highlights

**O**n Monday, October 6, the Key For a Cure Foundation hosted its 5th Annual St. Jude Golf Tournament at the Corral de Tierra Country Club. The event sold out three months in advance, welcoming 124 golfers and supported by more than 45 sponsors and donors. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, the tournament raised over \$90,000 before expenses—our most successful year to date.

A highlight of the day was the presentation of the Jannel Sweigert Warrior Award, honoring individuals who embody extraordinary courage and resilience. This year's recipients were Angel Franco, accepting on behalf of her late husband, Jake Franco, who bravely battled brain cancer until his passing this summer, and Amber Albertoni, who continues her fight against breast cancer with remarkable strength and grace.

Each year, Key For a Cure also recognizes a local hero with the Above and Beyond Award, celebrating extraordinary community leadership and service. The 2024 honoree was Joe Stretch, a longtime supporter of Key For a Cure and numerous local charities. Joe's journey exemplifies perseverance, purpose, and the lasting impact of giving back.

Congratulations to our 1st Place Tournament Champions, the C2 Financial Team—James Pemberton, Raphael Grijalva, Adam Huntress, and David Grijalva—who claimed the coveted title after competing in every tournament since its inception.

This event would not be possible without the support of our generous sponsors. Our deepest thanks to T&T Enterprises, Hon. Jonathan and Holly Price, Terry Sammut and Mike Catanesi, Joe Stretch – State Farm, Costa Family Foundation, Balesteri Construction, and WESCOM Financial, along with all those who donated, volunteered, and participated. This tournament is a true reflection of community, compassion, and shared purpose.

### Chasing Dreams, Finding Cures – 10th Anniversary

#### Barrel Race Highlights

The 10th Annual Chasing Dreams, Finding Cures Barrel Race took place November 1–2 at the Salinas Valley Fairgrounds in King City, California. More than 200 riders competed over two days, helping raise over \$37,000 in support of childhood cancer research and assistance programs.

In addition to the competition, attendees contributed more than \$700 worth of toys, which were hand-delivered to children receiving services at Jacob's Heart in Watsonville.

This year's Missy Spurr Award, presented to an individual who demonstrates unwavering spirit, compassion, and resilience, was awarded to Nicole Buck. A devoted mother of two, loving wife, and dedicated daughter and sister, Nicole recently completed treatment for thyroid cancer and is thriving. A loyal participant and generous donor, Nicole embodies the heart of the Key For a Cure mission.



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# The Region with a Heart for Giving

*Bank of America Presents Study of Philanthropy*

**M**onterey Bay is one of the most philanthropic in the region. Its donors care about impact and thriving communities through personalized support.

November is National Philanthropy Month and in the spirit of giving, Jennifer Dacquisto, president, Bank of America Monterey Bay hosted their annual community partner luncheon and roundtable at Salt Wood in Marina, CA.

The special gathering included leaders in non-profits, education, government, and community. It featured the Philanthropic Solutions Team led by Misti Sangani, managing director, senior philanthropy strategist for Bank of America who presented highlights from the 2025 Bank of America Study of Philanthropy.

“We have a thriving philanthropic community,” said Sangani. “This is a time for non-profits to take some key takeaways from the Study to use in their public relations, marketing, and development strategies.”

The Study is the largest and most comprehensive survey to date of the charitable practices and attitudes of wealthy Americans. It outlines notable themes such as how donors prioritize causes close to home, focusing on their local communities, which communities get the highest share of dollars, intentions behind giving, how volunteers give more, strategies for giving, and more.

“Donors are really thinking about the long-term sustainability of the non-profits they support,” said Dacquisto. “If organization is struggling, they will provide more support.”

Affluent donors have a variety of philanthropic identities. The study highlights five unique donor profiles: steadfast supporters, devout donors, entrepreneurs, changemakers, and philanthropic experts.



1.) Misti Sangani presents the Study of Philanthropy.

2.) Guest Helen de Young from Habitat for Humanity with Jennifer Dacquisto.

3.) Jennifer Dacquisto welcomes community leaders to learn more about the Study of Philanthropy.



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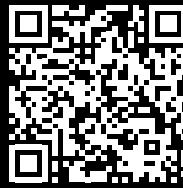
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# We've got SPACE!



The Salinas Sports Complex has two beautiful banquet halls with capacities ranging from 160 persons to 600 persons. It's the perfect location for your next celebration!

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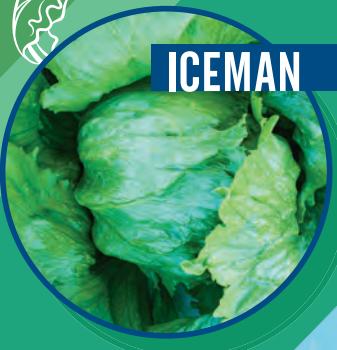
The Salinas Sports Complex is managed by the California Rodeo Association.



# LEADING THE COAST IN LEAFY GREENS



ICEMAN



- LETTUCE: ICEBERG
- HR: BL-US 7, 8, HR: SS/RS, IR: FOL 1
- LARGE SIZE
- DARK COLOR
- HIGH DISEASE PACKAGE

PORTOLA



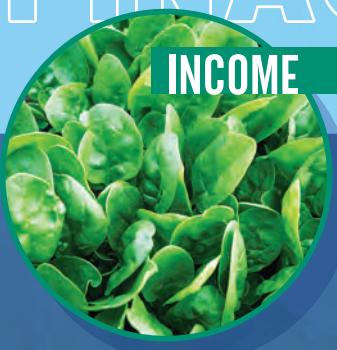
- LETTUCE: ICEBERG
- EXCELLENT FIELD HOLDING ABILITY
- SIZE/WEIGHT IS VERSATILE FOR CARTON AND BULK PROGRAMS
- SHOWN STRONG FIELD TOLERANCE TO BIG VEIN

CIELO VERDE



- LETTUCE: GREEN LEAF
- HR: TBSV
- THE INDUSTRY STANDARD FOR GREEN LEAF WHOLE HEAD PRODUCTION!
- LARGE, THICK, VIGOROUS HEADS WITH GOOD COLOR
- SUITABLE FOR YEAR-ROUND PRODUCTION

## SPINACH



INCOME

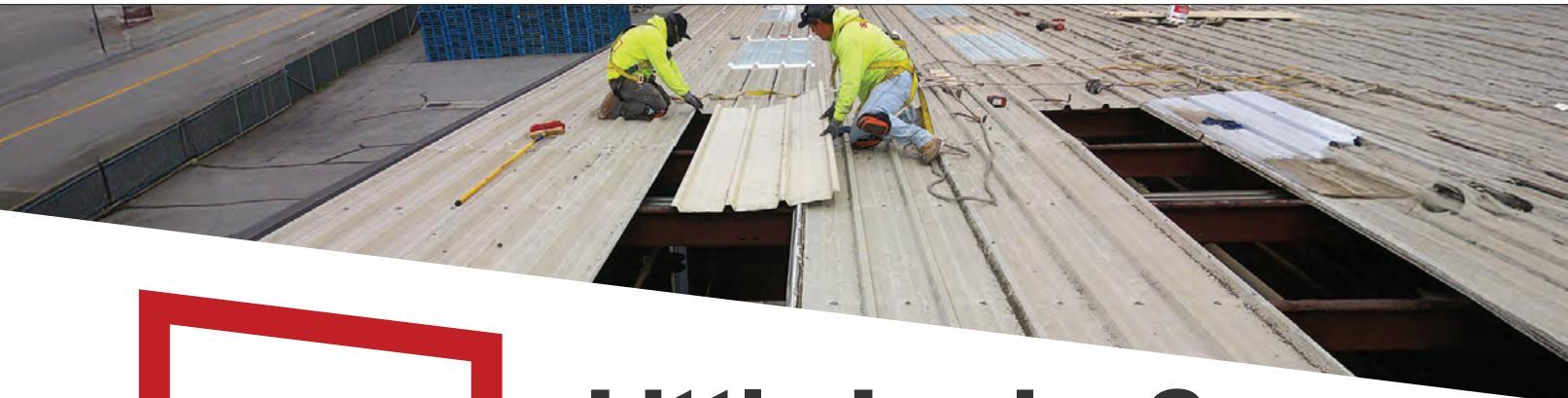
- SPINACH: BABY LEAF
- HR: PE: 1-20
- MODERATE TO FAST GROWING
- PERFORMS WELL IN COOLER GROWING SLOTS
- VERY UNIFORM SHAPE AND SIZE



AFFLUENCE

- SPINACH: BABY LEAF
- HR: PE: 1-20
- DARK GREEN, UNIFORM, ROUND LEAVES
- MODERATE TO FAST GROWING
- UPRIGHT PLANT HABIT





## Little Leaks Can Cause Big Problems

Is your building ready for winter? Do you have leaky skylights, rusted gutters, or loose roof panels that might become an issue during wet, windy weather? Don't wait for leaks to give SSB a call!

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