

Coastal Grower

SUMMER | 2026

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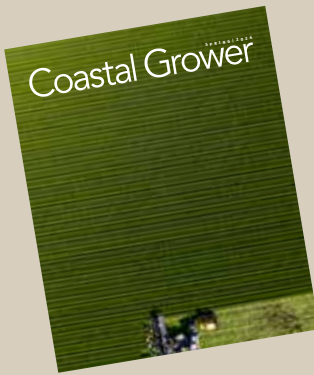


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NPD

One of my favorite meetings of the week was on Thursdays at 10 a.m. A cross-functional team from research and development, quality assurance, procurement, sales, and marketing would gather for our New Product Development (NPD) meeting.

Not that NPD is for the faint of heart. At the retail level consumer packaged goods have an extremely low success rate with 70-80 percent of new products failing. There is intense pressure for shelf space so sales must come quickly or you're out (a minimum of one case per store, per week, for our category). With slim margins, new products in the produce department must be noticed on the shelf—there is no luxury for elaborate marketing campaigns steering consumers to search for the new item. Throw in a short shelf-life and your window for success is tight.

New product cycles for the foodservice industry take longer as menus are created far in advance and distributor product catalogs updated infrequently. Timing is tricky but you often have a longer window to prove your product's worth if its menu applications are broad enough.

Everyone is competing for what is called your "share of stomach." So where do new products come from?

For supermarkets it often starts with a "space to sales" analysis. Every time a product's bar code is scanned at checkout it goes into vast databases where manufacturers can purchase (at no small price) the data and slice and dice away. You want to use the data to show retailers your category is growing (hopefully) and worthy of new items. You can also use the data to show your competitor's products are not selling at the same velocity and not worthy of their space on the shelf. You can also play defense if you identify one of your product's sales are slipping and replace it with one of your new items before a competitor does it for you.

You can also take a global view with new product databases that show you what is trending in EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Asia). Europe and Asia host their own produce trade shows you can visit and see what is trending. While not always transferable to a North American market (different palates, shelf-life requirements, shopping patterns) they can show you for example, the popularity of hummus, which was more common in other cultures before it started trending here.

You can produce products under the retailer's brand (often called private label or "own" brands). While it might break your heart to take your name off the label and put another name on it, with the right volume requirements you can maintain margins and lock in a longer-term contract. This helps with production planning and packaging procurement.

You can leverage a trend. Retailers looking to offer exclusively organic produce are a growth opportunity if you produce a once conventional item organically.

You can time a trend. Consumers looking for gluten-free and low carb substitutes for pasta and grains were making their own veggie noodles at home—thus the birth of cauliflower rice and veggie noodle options.

You can identify consumer driven meal occasions. Think of air fryer and roasting vegetable products developed for these cooking methods.

You can take a product developed for the foodservice industry directly to consumers at the store shelf. My biggest claim to fame here is Broccolini® which was first introduced to high-end, white tablecloth restaurateurs and eventually trickled down to a store near you.

You can partner with seed companies who are constantly developing new varieties. We always positioned ourselves as the go-to company for trying new varieties and having a proven history of being able to bring them to market successfully. Some companies choose to do their own seed breeding—trying to gain a competitive advantage with superior taste profiles.

Like I said, new product development is not easy. Managing the lifecycle of a product is constant. And like I said sometimes you may have to "kill one of your own." Consumer preferences change rapidly and if you aren't watching a sale decline—your competitors are. Best to get ahead of it.

The most important aspect of NPD is not to take it personally. Having a customer decline a new product can be like them telling you your baby is ugly—but with the right research that share of stomach could be yours.



Contributors



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.



BIRDIE CHURCH

Birdie Church is a student journalist in the honors communications program at the University of Miami. As a writer for her school's publications— The Miami Hurricane and Distraction Magazine— she has grown a love for all things journalism. With family ties in Salinas going back generations, Birdie brings a personal connection to the agriculture and community, allowing her to connect deeply to our local stories.



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 wealth management clients and designing and maintaining retirement plans for their 401(k) clients. He holds the Certified Financial Planner™ (CFP®) certification and the Accredited Investment Fiduciary (AIF®) and Certified Plan Fiduciary Advisor (CPFA®) designations.

A Salinas native, Ryan resides in Salinas with his wife, Megan, and their two daughters. He enjoys playing golf, weightlifting, fishing, and hiking.



MAC MCDONALD

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



DIANE GSELL

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



HILLARY FISH

Hillary Fish is Natividad's director of marketing and community relations. A typical day for her at the hospital can include writing a press release, posting a health story to social media, designing a project, then managing and photographing an event. A Salinas High School grad, Hillary started her marketing career in ag at Earthbound Farm and later at Matsui Nursery. She lives in Prunedale with her husband, daughters and an assortment of animals.



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.



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.



PATRICK TREGENZA

Oh Salinas. It's given us Steinbeck, salad, Rodeo pronounced right, and, well, Patrick Tregenza. Having found out early on that jazz drumming may not be the most secure way to make a living he shifted his focus to commercial photography. His bread-and-butter jobs are sometimes literally bread and butter (or meat and potatoes) but are most often foods we were told to eat as kids. Salinas is still the lettuce center of the universe as it has been since Cal and Aron fought for their father's good graces and Patrick still does his best to entice us all to eat healthier.



TODD FISHER

Chef Todd Fisher is the creative force behind The Meatery in Seaside, CA. Named Best Butcher Shop in California 2025. He has a long and deep connection to the Salinas Valley Ag world and has been voted Monterey's Favorite Chef for years. Chef Todd champions premium sourcing, bold flavors, and chef-driven butchery rooted in craft and community.



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.



ALLA ZELTSE

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



ELENA MUELLER

Elena Mueller is the Director of Advancement and Communications at Chartwell School, where she leads communications, fundraising, and community engagement. With over 30 years of experience, she began her career in the technology industry before moving to the independent school world. Elena brings expertise in storytelling, brand development, and audience engagement, and is passionate about building connections and advancing initiatives that support neurodiverse learners.



JORGE RUBIO

I'm Jorge Rubio, an Outreach Specialist at Sun Street Centers with 15+ years in prevention work. I focus on educating teens and families about underage drinking and substance use while building meaningful community connections. I also bring a strong background in marketing and design, creating materials like landing pages, social media graphics, newsletters, reports, and presentations that align with our mission.



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 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 Communication Officer.

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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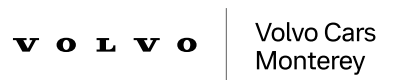
SAFE FAMILY MEMORIES



OFF-ROAD WITH SCENIC ESCAPE



THE HEART OF AUTOMOTIVE IN SEASIDE.



Growing the Future of AgTech in the Salinas Valley

By Mindy Carpenter



CSUMB Mechatronics Open House.

Rooted deeply within the Salinas Valley are generations of families who have ties to agriculture. Whether they worked in the fields, tirelessly tending to our “green gold” with their bare hands, managed crops as growers, or drove tractors hauling pipes, cultivators, or pesticides, the human connection to agriculture is a living and breathing community. They are the backbone of fresh vegetables for the country and beyond. But what happens to them when most manual jobs are eventually replaced with AgTech?

AgTech is evolving at such a rapid pace with new ideas for handling manual tasks coming to market each year. The Reservoir in Salinas unveiled its incubator and introduced the valley to twelve different start-ups, each with a different idea. Their common goal is to address the elephant in every room, labor.

Labor in California is more expensive than any other state in the country, yet 40% of the fresh vegetables for the nation are grown here. With the high cost of health insurance, worker’s compensation, payroll taxes and housing, growers and labor companies are struggling. Adding to these costs is the shrinking farm labor workforce. Farmers are realizing the value of AgTech, and watching their return on investment grow.

There is no denying that AgTech is replacing human workers. We have robots replacing costly hand crews for weeding, thinning and harvesting, drones replacing pesticide spraying, and tractors driving without drivers. It is clear that AgTech is here to stay, so where will those workers go? This question has become increasingly urgent in recent years. The Salinas and Yuma areas are moving quickly

to address the issue. The most logical place to start is education. Introducing this type of technology to students as early as elementary school is key. The industry will need equipment operators, technicians, mechanics and more to survive.

Monterey County Ag Education sponsors and hosts third graders at three events in Monterey County each year. The children arrive by bus, are assigned a tour guide and spend approximately 3 hours learning about nutrition, plant growth, water, pest control and vegetable identification. They are also introduced to farm animals, herding dogs, wool production, and AgTech. Companies from the area have equipment and representatives on site explaining what their machines do. Machines on display include tractors, forklifts, robotic weeders and transplanters. For many students, this is their first time learning about robots and equipment, and they are full of questions. This event is often short on volunteers, and is truly a fun and heartwarming way to give back to the community. Volunteers are provided breakfast as well as an incredible BBQ lunch. Visit the Monterey County Ag Education website for future Farm Day dates: <https://www.montereycountyageducation.org/farm-day>

Local high schools have recognized the need for skills for this new generation of agriculture. Through Regional Occupational Program (ROP) or Career Technical Education (CTE) programs as well as their FFA classes, students are introduced to engineering, fabrication, mechanics, irrigation and landscape design, seed science, and computer science. Students are in a “learn by doing” environment and learn not only on campus, but also by shadowing professionals in their place of employment. All of these skills are necessary for AgTech to flourish.

In February of this year, King City High School hosted an Ag Career Day on campus.

I, along with my friend, Chris Lauritzen of Niqo Robotics, set up our booth alongside the Niqo RoboWeeder implement. This bright yellow machine was the attention getter of everyone who walked through. While most students asked general questions, some wanted to know how it works, how it was built, and what it does. The booth to our right was a local fabrication company who used the Niqo implement to show examples of certain welds that students are learning and how they hold the frame together. Another booth introduced students to the career path of pesticide spraying with drones. So many options, and so many curious students!

In 2024, Hartnell College officially opened its Agriculture Mechatronics program. I had the opportunity to tour their facility on the Alisal Campus and was beyond impressed. They have created a hands-on fully immersed program offering classes from Industrial Safety to Advanced Agriculture Process Automation. In the lab, students work with prototypes of

machines that add the dressing and condiment bags to bagged salads, they have access to 3D printers, Farm-ng (Bonsai) robots, and even have a retired Titan from FarmWise. Students are learning how to work in this world of robots, right here in Salinas.

The Associate Degree in Agricultural Mechatronics will prepare students to work as a skilled mechatronics technician in agriculture. Students learn how to install, repair, calibrate, and troubleshoot mechatronics, or electro-mechanical systems, including automation and robotics equipment focusing on indoor value-added food processing. Students will have the opportunity to earn third-party industry certifications from OSHA, NCCER, and NC3 (Festo, Snap-On, Starrett, Greenlee, Rigid, Trane, Lincoln, 3M, and more). Additionally, students may have transfer opportunities to pursue an undergraduate degree in Ag Systems Management. (Source: Hartnell College catalog)

In 2020, California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) introduced its Agricultural Plant and Soil Sciences program. The Agricultural Plant and Soil Sciences B.S. (AGPS) program features small classes, broadly trained and diverse faculty, and internship and research opportunities that provide hands-on experience in the food and agriculture industry. The skills gained throughout the AGPS program help prepare students for careers as agronomists, crop production consultants, pest control advisors, research associates, advancement to graduate-level programs and much more. (Source: CSUMB Department Directory)

In addition, CSUMB introduced its Department of Mechatronics and Engineering in 2024. This program is one of only three such programs offered in the California State University system. The interdisciplinary program fuses mechanical engineering, electronics, and computer science. Students develop skills in embedded systems, robotics, automation, and control theory—while also mastering core principles in mechanical and electrical systems, computer programming, and systems design. Through a hands-on curriculum that includes technical training, internships, and a year-long capstone project, students gain experience designing and implementing solu-

tions to real-world challenges. Whether they're building autonomous robots, programming sensor networks, or prototyping a product for industry partners, the program prepares students to step confidently into engineering careers or graduate study. (Source: CSUMB Department Directory)

My company, Axis Ag, recently participated in the CSUMB Ag Career and Intern Fair on campus. Students searching for internships and employment were thoroughly prepared to meet with agriculture related companies throughout the Salinas Valley. I was genuinely humbled to meet such eager and thoughtful young adults who are wanting to use their education and experience to stay right here. What is equally as important as providing the pathway to the skills needed for a career in AgTech, is keeping those skills locally. A large percentage of the students I met live locally and are looking for local internships and jobs. Music to my ears! This new idea of AgTech can only survive with exceptionally trained and skilled humans. Having these individuals be local is not only great for our community, but a cost savings to local employers. Employers can hire locally and not be required to provide expensive housing or reimburse living expenses.

One commonality with the students from all ages is their dedication to their families. Our young adults can now receive training and education for a successful career in AgTech right here in their own communities. Their career pathways will lead them to operate robots and drones, repair robotic packing and harvesting equipment, use their soil science knowledge to work for growers and pest control entities spraying fields with robots and drones, and use their mechanical and engineering knowledge to build future robots. While the future of AgTech is bright in this valley, the same can be said for our youth. They can have it all without leaving home. A future where innovation and community grow side by side, right here in our valley, feels pretty close to perfect. ☺



Farming robot at the Airshow with the Hartnell Mechatronics team.

Maximizing Retirement Plan Liability Protection

By Ryan Hastie



Over the years, the 401(k) plan has become the retirement plan of choice for many companies for an array of reasons – tax advantages, participant control, portability, employee retention, and attraction, among others. Once an employer (i.e., plan sponsor/trustee) adopts a 401(k) plan, however, they accept a myriad of responsibilities (and liabilities) they might not have anticipated. It's commonplace for employers, especially smaller companies, to delegate many of the day-to-day responsibilities of administering the plan and managing the plan's investments to third parties in the retirement plan space.

Management of Plans

Regarding plan investments, the Department of Labor (DOL) gives plan trustees the fiduciary responsibility of developing and implementing a prudent process to select, monitor and replace (as needed) investment options available to plan participants. The legislation that governs all employer-sponsored retirement plans, The Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), affords trustees the ability to offload investment-related risk in one of two ways. First, the trustee can hire an ERISA 3(21) Investment Advisor. These retirement plan advisors help plan trustees evaluate, select, and monitor an investment menu suited to the unique needs of the plan's participants. This service is intended for plan trustees that wish to retain discretion over the investment menu. Here, the plan trustee shares investment-related liability with the 3(21) Investment Advisor. The second option allows the plan trustee to completely relieve themselves of investment-related liability for the plan by hiring an ERISA 3(38) Investment Manager. In this arrangement, the Investment Manager serves as chief investment officer (CIO) to select, monitor, and replace funds without any direction or input from the trustee. Within this arrangement, the plan trustee delegates all investment oversight to the Investment Manager.

Limiting Liability

Plan trustees can go a step further in reducing their retirement plan-related liability by hiring an ERISA 3(16) Fiduciary Administrator. The Wagner Law Group, a nationally recognized ERISA law firm, defines a 3(16) fiduciary as “an administrator with ERISA reporting and disclosure duties.” Full 3(16) fiduciary services often include accepting the fiduciary responsibility for performing the vast major-

ity of plan administration: maintaining plan documents in accordance with IRS/DOL regulations, tracking employee eligibility, ensuring communications meet DOL requirements, performing nondiscrimination testing, sending required participant notices, and preparing and signing the Form 5500 – required documentation designed to satisfy the annual reporting requirements under Title I and Title IV of ERISA and the Internal Revenue Code.

When a plan trustee retains the services of an ERISA 3(21)/3(38) and/or 3(16), they are most often left with only three primary responsibilities: deposit employee deferrals on a timely basis, provide an annual employee census and monitor the plan's various service providers.

What plans make the best candidates to retain a 3(16) fiduciary administrator? It's not so much based on plan size as it is based on plan needs. It's true that larger 401(k) plans, those with 100+ participants, are often good candidates simply based on the volume of employee needs and activity. Most often, the plan trustee is attempting to accomplish one of two objectives: either to maintain a “hands off” approach to their 401(k) plan as much as possible, to limit their fiduciary liability related to their plan, or both.

Many plan trustees have found both maximum “hands off” of plan duties and fiduciary protection by retaining the services of both an ERISA 3(38) Investment Manager and a 3(16) Fiduciary Administrator.

If you would like more information about reducing trustee liability within your company's retirement plan, please speak with a financial professional that serves as a 3(21) or 3(38), as they will be able to directly address any questions or concerns you may have and provide the best recommendation for your company's retirement plan. ☞



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Abalone Creek Ranch

A Regenerative Family Farm in the Pastures of Heaven

By Lorri A. Koster

Photos Courtesy of Sarah DeSantis



Spending time together, working toward a common goal, valuing and understanding the process of food production and self-sufficiency....these values are what led David and Tarin Haymore on a journey towards purchasing a property in Monterey County. Initially inspired by their love for the outdoors it also was driven by a desire to create a family retreat where grandkids could climb oak trees, play by the creekside and gain an appreciation for where food comes from and animal husbandry.

A Netflix documentary on regenerating land into a farm piqued the family's interest and in 2020 they began their journey of restoring somewhat barren land into productive pastures where livestock can thrive, roam and where "food forests" will soon abound.

My best friend told me about this family ranch operation and together we journeyed up Monterey County's Corral de Tierra canyon to what locals call "the top of the loop." Next thing I knew we were in the back seat

of David's all-terrain vehicle being given a tour of the stunning property, learning about improvements to infrastructure, its transformation, and the family's plans for its future.

Let's Start with the Broilers

Abalone Creek Ranch is gaining recognition for the quality of their Cornish Cross pasture-raised chickens. Mainly a direct-to-consumer model, customers can subscribe (my best friend is one of them) to get allotments of the pasture-raised Abalone Creek Ranch chickens, a true testament to sustainable farming done right. They can also be found on the menus of select dining establishments where the ranch origin is often called out by name on the menu, given the high quality, delicious taste, and growing reputation. A few high-end grocers and butcher shops also sell Abalone Creek Chickens.

Purchased from Metzger Farms, a Gonzales, California source renowned for

exceptional genetics and vitality, the chicks are fed a starter crumble that is non-GMO and free of corn and soy. The chickens are also antibiotic free. They spend their first two weeks in a nurturing temperature-controlled brooder before moving to covered, Pasture Tek hoops out in lush pastures where they are rotated about to exercise and enrich the soil. This mobility encourages natural foraging, an example of regenerative farming principles.

After four weeks, the chickens are processed at a USDA facility. The broilers are then packaged as whole young birds with an average finished weight of three to three and a half pounds, vacuum packed and immediately frozen to negative 10 degrees to preserve freshness, and ensure wholesomeness.

The Navajo Churros

A specialty breed known for producing beautiful wool and highly favored meat, Navajo Churro sheep also call the ranch home. Recommended to David by a farmer in Ukiah, California, Navajo Churros originated from the Spanish Churra sheep. Their wool consists of a protective topcoat and soft undercoat. Some rams develop four horns; a trait shared with few other breeds





in the world. Highly resistant to disease, the ewes often bear twins and have good mothering instincts. The breed is also known for hardiness which is ideal for the Corral de Tierra hillsides.

Here's The Beef

A herd of cattle also makes Abalone Creek Ranch home. A smaller breed with their meat seeming to be a growing preference over Angus, Dexter bulls average 1,200 pounds while heifers average 800-850 pounds. Relatively easy to care for, Dexter cows have short legs compared to other breeds and are known to be hardy, efficient grazers. Dexters have a high fertility rate, and the bulls are known for their even temperament.





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The Cornish Cross aren't the only chickens on the ranch. Originally hosting the Gold Sex Link breed, David recently switched to Barred Rock chickens. Barred Rock chickens are a popular American breed known for their friendly nature and excellent egg-laying abilities. David said right now most of the eggs are going to family and friends, but the plan is to sell them with the same direct to consumer model as the broilers.


Security Guards

Of all the animals I learned about at Abalone Creek Ranch, I think my favorite were the llamas Lucky and Kuzco. As adorable as they look—don't be fooled. These llamas serve as guardians overlooking the herds and keeping predators away. They have a natural instinct to protect and socialize with other animals and are becoming popular for farmers who need a low-maintenance (and cute) guardian for their herds and flocks.

David comments, "I have an appreciation for the mild temperatures at the ranch and particularly enjoy the sunsets and the vibrant greenery of the hillsides following the rains. We hold deep respect and gratitude for the land we reside on and the animals on our ranch. We do everything we can to ensure their well-being while they are under our care."

What started with a single chicken coop is now a thriving regenerative farming operation with more infrastructure improvements in development. David concludes, "We believe by working together with nature, we can create a healthier and more sustainable future for ourselves and future generations."

Indeed, at Abalone Creek Ranch, the future shines as bright as the sunsets.

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The Gold Standard of Nursing Excellence

By Chris Haubert



March 25, 2026 announcement of Magnet with Distinction designation.

Achieving the highest standards of nursing excellence is a promise to patients: they will receive the safest, most advanced, and most compassionate care. Magnet Recognition® from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) has long symbolized that promise. Now, an even more elite honor sets a new benchmark.

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center has earned Magnet® *with Distinction* from the ANCC— placing it among the nation’s highest-performing hospitals. This reinforces its role as a trusted institution and leading healthcare provider in our region.

The accomplishment reflects the expertise, leadership, and unwavering focus of the nursing team and the dedication of the entire staff. It strengthens both the nursing workforce and care standards.

Understanding Magnet with Distinction
The ANCC’s Magnet Recognition Program®

is widely regarded as the gold standard for nursing excellence. It evaluates medical centers on their ability to:

- Deliver superior patient care
- Foster innovation
- Support strong nursing leadership

Magnet designation recognizes organizations where nurses are empowered to deliver high-quality care through collaboration, continuous improvement and exceptional standards.

Introduced in 2023, Magnet *with Distinction* represents the top tier, awarded to organizations that exceed Magnet standards across multiple dimensions. While approximately 10 percent of U.S. hospitals have Magnet designation, as of March 2026, only about 1 percent have earned Magnet *with Distinction*—making it a rare honor.

The Journey to National Recognition

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center first earned Magnet in 2021 after a five-year doc-

umentation and application process, becoming the region’s first and only Magnet-designated medical center.

Since then, it has focused on excellence in nursing practice, patient outcomes, and workforce engagement.

The Magnet Recognition *with Distinction* process was extensive. In 2025, the medical center submitted over 2,000 pages of detailed documentation demonstrating superior performance in nursing leadership, patient outcomes, innovation, and professional practice. Magnet appraisers made a multi-day site visit in mid-January 2026 that included evaluation and engagement with more than 400 staff members.

Exceptional Standards in Nursing Practice At the core of this honor is a commitment to evidence-based care. Nurses are empowered to lead, innovate, and implement best practices. One example is the ICU’s alcohol withdrawal program, where nurses identified the latest research and redesigned care protocols. “Essentially, we redid our whole alcohol withdrawal and created a new one that was supported by evidence,” said ICU nurse Laurel Black, MSN, RN, CCRN, who also serves as the Co-Chair of the Collaborative Care Council, which is the professional governance coordinating council at Salinas Valley Health Medical Center.

Nurse autonomy defines Magnet culture. Nurses develop and implement programs, directly improving care. Interdisciplinary collaboration among nurses, physicians, and staff enhances safety and quality.

What This Means for Patients

Research consistently shows that Magnet-recognized organizations achieve higher patient satisfaction, lower mortality rates, and improved quality outcomes.

For patients, this designation builds trust and signals that outstanding treatment is

the standard. Chief Nursing Officer Carla Spencer, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, emphasized: “This is all voluntary,” Spencer said. “As an organization, we chose to go down this path because what we knew was that the benefit it yields is safer patient care, and that’s what the community deserves.”

Empowering Nurses and Staff

Magnet *with Distinction* fosters professional growth, leadership and autonomy, which is reflected in retention rates. The medical center’s registered nurse turnover rate is 9.13 percent, significantly lower than the national average of 16.4 percent.

Nurses consistently cite the supportive culture as a key reason they stay. “This medical center does something that I’ve never seen any other do, and that is being able to keep nurses and treat nurses well,” said ICU nurse Laurie Freed-Edelman, BSN, RN, CCRM-CSC, Chair of the Quality Council. “We call it the unicorn hospital.”

Kristen Green-Meadows, BSN, RN, CCNR-CSC, ICU Nurse and Chair of the Clinical Inquiry Council, echoed this sentiment: “They give us the tools to take the best care of patients,” Green-Meadows said. “A lot of our traveling nurses stay because of these wonderful opportunities.”

A Win for the Community

As a leading healthcare provider in our region, Salinas Valley Health Medical Center ensures access to high-quality care for all. Among the small number of medical centers in California to earn Magnet *with Distinction*, it sets a benchmark and reinforces the value of investing in nursing.

“Achieving Magnet Recognition *with Distinction* is a powerful affirmation of who we are as an organization,” said Allen Radner, MD, President/CEO of Salinas Valley Health. “It speaks to the unwavering dedication of our entire staff, serving in both clinical and non-clinical roles. Our collective strength is the teamwork and intent focus we share to provide the highest level of care to the communities we serve.”

Raising the Bar for the Future of Healthcare

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center stands

out for nurse-driven innovation, autonomy, exemplary patient outcomes, patient satisfaction, and workforce stability. Nurses lead initiatives and shape care practices, contributing directly to better results and continuous improvement.

Magnet *with Distinction* is both a milestone and a springboard supporting ongoing advancement in evidence-based care, collaboration and quality. Salinas Valley Health Medical Center goes beyond leading the way

in nursing to help set the standard for the future of healthcare.

“Earning Magnet *with Distinction* is an extraordinary honor, and it reflects what I have long known about our nursing team: they are exceptional professionals whose integrity, compassion, and unwavering commitment to excellence define who they are,” says Kirsten Wisner, PhD, RNC-OB, CNS, C-EFM, NE-BC, Magnet Program Director.

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From Science to Success

Chartwell's Mission to Reach Every Learner

By Elena Mueller | Photos Courtesy of Topher Mueller



One in five people has a learning difference. That's not a fringe issue—it shows up in nearly every classroom, family, and workplace.

Across Monterey County and beyond, many students are capable of far more than traditional instruction allows them to show. The difference often comes down to how they are taught to read.

“Too often, students are held back not by a lack of ability, but by the way reading is taught. Our goal with Chartwell Teaching Institute is to give teachers the tools to unlock every student's potential, so learning differences become strengths, not obstacles,” says Jodi Amaditz, Interim Head of Chartwell School and Director of the Chartwell Teaching Institute (CTI).

The Gap That Holds Students Back

Through CTI, public school teachers are receiving training in structured literacy—a research-based approach that teaches reading in a clear, systematic, and explicit way.

While it has been shown to significantly improve outcomes, especially for students with dyslexia, it is still not a standard part of most teacher preparation programs.

“I was struck by how much I didn't know about reading, even though I've spent my entire career teaching kids to read,” one educator shared following a training.

That gap matters more than most people realize. Students who are not proficient readers by third grade are significantly more likely to leave high school without a diploma. When reading instruction doesn't work early, students can fall behind year after year.

Structured Literacy: What Changes When Instruction Works

Structured literacy offers a practical, research-backed approach grounded in decades of cognitive science. It builds essential skills step by step—phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

And importantly, it works for all stu-

dents—not only those with identified learning differences—giving every learner a stronger foundation to build on.

In California, this approach is gaining momentum through Assembly Bill 1454 (AB 1454), signed in 2025. The law strengthens teacher training and aligns reading instruction with evidence-based science-of-reading practices, moving schools more broadly toward structured literacy.

From Campus to Community

Chartwell Teaching Institute is an extension of Chartwell School, an independent school in Seaside, California serving students with dyslexia and learning differences in Grades 1–12 on a 60-acre campus. Chartwell has long been guided by a mission to unlock the potential of every student by supporting the whole child—academically, socially, and emotionally. CTI carries that mission into public schools and broader education systems.

Today, CTI partners with schools and organizations across 20 counties, reaching 219 schools, supporting more than 1,700 teachers, and impacting over 42,000 students.

“Chartwell students are always at the heart of what we do. Every success here inspires us to support teachers and students beyond our campus,” says Amaditz. “Seeing this work make a difference across Monterey County and California reinforces our belief that literacy is a human right—and that every student deserves access to it.”

Scaling Success in Public Schools

Monterey Peninsula Unified School District's recent gains in literacy rates show how quickly focused support can make a difference. As an early partner in this work, CTI helped lay the foundation by training all TK–3 teachers in structured literacy—ensuring students build strong skills from the very



beginning. Alongside the district’s focus on foundational literacy, investment in teacher training, and implementation of structured practices, these efforts have led to measurable improvements in reading outcomes and stronger classroom instruction. In the most recent state assessments, MPUSD reported the percentage of students meeting or exceeding English Language Arts standards increased from 38.89 percent to 41.57 percent, with fewer students falling into the lowest performance band—an early indicator of meaningful progress.

Reflecting on this shift, Superintendent PK Diffenbaugh shared: “Chartwell has helped us by expanding our knowledge and improving our practice, and by showing us that there is a systematic approach to teaching literacy—and once we know that, we as educators have a responsibility to give our students the very best.”

Opening Doors for Students

CTI also partners with Rancho Cielo in Salinas, which serves high-need youth by combining education with life and career training. Many students enter Rancho Cielo reading several years below grade level, often because they didn’t get the support they needed early on. Over the past two years, CTI trainers have worked directly with students while coaching teachers in real time, building lasting instructional capacity. Even in short intervention blocks, students have shown meaningful gains in reading, demonstrating how quickly progress can happen with the right support.

“CTI’s work with our students has led to remarkable progress in reading skills,” says Chris Devers, CEO of Rancho Cielo. “By

teaching students directly and training our teachers alongside them, our faculty are now empowered to sustain this instruction. This work complements what we’re already doing to build confidence, life skills, and career readiness—ensuring our students are prepared for meaningful pathways into the workforce.”

“...literacy is a human right—and that every student deserves access to it.”

Catching Challenges Early

Recent California legislation is bringing renewed attention to early identification of reading challenges. With updated screening requirements for all students in grades K-2 and AB 1454, schools are better positioned to identify students who need support.

But screening alone is not enough. Teachers need the training to interpret results and respond with effective instruction.

Through partnerships like the University of California San Francisco Dyslexia Center’s Multitudes Project—a statewide effort to improve early literacy screening—CTI helps schools understand screening results and apply them in the classroom, so students get the support they need right away.

Changing Trajectories, Unlocking Potential

As more schools adopt these practices, and the results are becoming clear: stronger literacy, greater confidence, and more students fully engaged in learning.

Many students with dyslexia have strengths in problem-solving, creativity, and visual thinking that are often overlooked in traditional classrooms. When instruction aligns with students’ strengths, those abilities can come forward in meaningful ways.

“When we equip teachers to support how students actually learn, we do more than improve reading,” Amaditz reflects. “We affirm a simple truth: learning differently is not a disadvantage—it’s a strength.”

Access CTI Training for Your School:

Chartwell Teaching Institute is committed to making structured literacy training accessible to all educators. Through its Structured Literacy Access Fund, more than \$100,000 is available to support professional development for teachers and administrators.

To learn more, contact Chantel Touryan-Schaefer at ctouryanschaefer@chartwell.org. ☎



In Buying and Selling Businesses, Buyers Pay for the Future, Sellers Get Paid for the Past

By Mac McDonald



There's an adage in buying and selling a small business: "Perception drives traffic — but performance drives valuation."

But what exactly does that mean for most of the public not cognizant of the language of business brokers (the other side of the real estate agent coin)?

To put it simply, perception is what makes customers choose you, which can range from brand recognition and reviews to social media presence and word of mouth. Performance is based on the systems that are the nuts and bolts behind the business, the data, and procedures, such as financial management, documented operating procedures, vendor agreements, inventory controls and hiring and training procedures.

Systems create predictability and predictability creates value. And business value is not based on revenue and profit alone. Buyers, lenders, and investors look

at factors such as sustainability, risk, and future growth potential.

With that in mind, here's another axiom on buying and selling a business: "Small businesses are bought on future potential and sold on past performance."

"If somebody is going to consider buying or selling a business, there are a lot of complexities in it that go beyond, let's say, buying or selling a house," said Michael Tilson, president of Carmel Business Sales, a well-established business brokerage that just celebrated its 45th anniversary. "If you are going to be involved in such a thing, then it really is important to plan what you want to do and sign up people with knowledge to help. Whether it's us or anybody else, you want to not get caught by the unknowns. You want somebody who's seen those unknowns."

There were a couple of dozen businesses for sale recently on the Carmel Business Sales' website. They ranged from restaurants and

boutique hotels to jewelry shops, auto repair shops, wine-tasting room, a pet supply shop, clothing boutique, even a cannabis trucking firm and a tortilla-manufacturing business. "Whether it's an organic farm, dog daycare business, restaurant or an automobile repair facility, there are some commonalities to things, but it also puts a high premium on being able to learn and understand," said Tilson about the wide variety of businesses his brokerage deals with. "I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on dog daycare, but I must learn enough to be able to connect people and understand the questions they should be asking. That's one of the things that's interesting about being in this business — it's such a diverse thing."

There are an estimated 35,000 small businesses in Monterey County (those with fewer than 500 employees), which make up about 99.95 percent of all businesses here. Most are very small, with an owner and fewer than 20 employees. And in the first quarter of 2025, more than 2,300 small businesses were reported sold in California. But there is little hard data about how many were bought and sold locally because there just isn't a centralized and comprehensive public source with detailed small business sale statistics. Most available data is gleaned from statewide, listing-based, or general business counts rather than confirmed transaction records.

There are only a few business brokers in Monterey County, maybe a few dozen if you count online-only, small independent brokers or brokers based in other areas, but include Monterey County in its area of reach.

Carmel Business Sales is part of Monterey Bay Business Brokers, which also includes Santa Cruz Business Brokers, Coastal Boutique Hotels and Peninsula Consulting Group, and is the oldest and largest business brokerage and consulting group in Monterey

and Santa Cruz counties.

“An interesting thing about business brokerage is most of the time the broker actually works with both parties, and it does require a great deal of care, because you have obligations to both parties, and there’s information that you might know about one that you’re not allowed to give to the other,” said Tilson, who acquired Carmel Business Sales in 2014. “The buyer and the seller have different interests. On the other hand, they have a shared interest in that they’re both looking to consummate a successful transaction.”

Buying and selling a business is a collaborative endeavor, said Tilson, one that not only involves finance, data, spreadsheets, copious paperwork, and so forth, but perhaps most importantly, people. Many businesses are family affairs, passed down from family members to family members, which involve family traditions and legacies, emotions, relationships not only with others in the family, but employees and staff, customers and clients, partners, and investors.

“Transferring a living, breathing, going concern is a mutual project. And if somebody spent their life building a business, they want their money, of course, but they also want to know that their business is going to continue in good hands,” said Tilson. “Are employees going to be cared for and so on. Somebody who’s taking it over wants to know that the owner is a forthright person, and do I feel good about them, and are they going to assist with the takeover process. The nature of the thing is such that the broker works to bridge the gap and help each side understand the other side’s position. And both parties’ interests are served if there’s a good value transaction that meets both of their needs.”

To assist both buyers and sellers, Carmel Business Sales publishes a monthly informational analysis of that month’s market and key trends driving the market. The March 2026 Market Insights, for example, focuses on strengthening business value, improving operational resilience, and understanding the trends shaping the regional economy.

As mentioned previously, business value is not based on revenue alone, but key players look at sustainability, risk, and future growth potential. According to Carmel Business Sales, key drivers include:

- Consistent, documented cash flow

- Systems that allow the business to operate beyond the owner
- Favorably structured lease terms and location stability
- A diversified customer base
- Clean financial reporting and tax compliance
- Strong reputation and online visibility

“Even if you are not planning a transition, strengthening these areas improves stability, profitability, and long-term business health,” according to the analysis.

And, going back to the original adage, “Perception drives traffic — but performance drives valuation,” having strong systems in place can create consistency, efficiency, and scalability.

“Business owners who anticipate change rather than react to it are better positioned for long-term success.”

According to Carmel Business Sales, businesses that rely entirely on the owner’s daily involvement face greater operational risk, but documented processes can:

- Improve efficiency and workflow
- Reduce training time and turnover impact
- Strengthen customer experience
- Support expansion and growth
- Reduce owner stress and operational risk

“Clear operational structure positions a business to perform consistently in both stable and changing market conditions,” according to the analysis.

With unpredictable tariffs, shifting economic conditions, inflationary uncertainty and other factors, buying and selling a business in 2026 is challenging, to say the least. But local businesses are adapting the best they can to changing consumer expectations and economic conditions.

Key trends on the Central Coast that are tracking include:

- Increased demand for experiential retail and dining
- Expansion of hybrid and online service models

- Growing emphasis on sustainability and local sourcing
- Strong consumer support for locally owned businesses
- Greater reliance on digital visibility and online reviews

The Central Coast continues to offer diverse opportunities for both entrepreneurs and investors, including:

- Restaurants and food concepts
- Retail and specialty shops
- Service-based businesses
- Boutique hotels and Bed & Breakfasts
- Commercial property investments

Despite the challenges and complexities of buying and selling a business, completing a successful transaction can be rewarding for all concerned, including the broker.

“That is the most gratifying thing about being in business brokerage, because it’s a really difficult, challenging profession,” said Tilson. “Our experience, skills, and effort are allowing businesses to continue and prosper through these transitions.” **CG**



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Building Tomorrow's Workforce

Inside the 2026 Monterey County STEM Expo

By Mike Hale | Photos Courtesy of Richard Green Photography



On a bright Wednesday afternoon this past Spring, the halls of the STEM Building at Hartnell College buzzed with energy. Students in business attire shook hands with hiring managers, educators discussed training pathways, and recruiters fielded questions from curious young minds eager to understand their place in the future workforce.

The 2026 Monterey County STEM Expo was more than a career fair. It was a gathering of industry, education and community leaders focused on one goal: preparing the next generation for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The free, one-day event connected students, alumni, and community members with more than 30 employers and educational partners offering opportunities in high-demand STEM fields. Through mock interviews, networking sessions, and hands-on conversations with professionals, attendees gained a firsthand look at the careers shaping the region's economic future.

But more importantly, the Expo reflected

a larger movement underway in Monterey County — one aimed at building a skilled workforce capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly evolving technological economy.

A Growing Event with a Growing Purpose

Now in its fourth year, the STEM Expo has become a cornerstone event for the region's workforce development efforts. Organized by a coalition of educators, industry leaders, and community partners, the gathering aims to close the gap between classroom learning and real-world opportunity. For co-chair Luis Alvarez, the event represents years of collaboration between educators and employers who recognize the importance of aligning academic programs with industry needs.

"The event was great, the fourth-year building on all the previous years," Alvarez said. "The students who attended were engaged and interested in learning more about STEM careers and the jobs that are available locally."

That engagement was evident throughout the afternoon. After the keynote session,

representatives from companies such as agriculture leader Duda Farm Fresh Foods and advanced aviation manufacturer Joby Aviation were quickly surrounded by students eager to discuss internships and career opportunities.

The keynote address was delivered by Josh Metz, executive director of the Monterey Bay Drone, Automation and Robotics Technology initiative — better known as Monterey Bay DART. His work focuses on preparing the region for emerging industries such as drone technology, robotics, and advanced manufacturing.

"Beyond academic preparation, the event helps students build professional networks and confidence..."

Under Metz's leadership, partnerships between local employers and training programs have already led to new workforce pipelines, including apprenticeship programs that have placed more than 100 local hires in advanced manufacturing roles.

Connecting Education and Industry

For co-chair Omar Perez-Sandoval, the most powerful aspect of the STEM Expo is the



direct interaction it creates between students and employers. “Seeing students, educators and industry leaders all gathered in one place, engaging in meaningful conversations about careers, innovation and the future of STEM, was truly inspiring,” Perez-Sandoval said.

Throughout the event, students rotated between employer booths, practiced interviewing with hiring managers, and explored educational pathways that could lead to high-paying technical careers. These interactions help demystify the workforce for students who may not yet see themselves in STEM fields.

“Events like this are critical because they intentionally bring together two groups that don’t always have direct access to each other,” Perez-Sandoval said. “Students who are eager to learn and grow, and industry professionals who are looking for emerging talent.” The result is a mutually beneficial exchange: Students gain insight into career opportunities, while employers gain early access to a diverse and motivated talent pipeline.

Preparing For a Tech-Driven Economy

Monterey County’s economy has long been defined by agriculture, tourism, and marine science. But in recent years, new sectors — including advanced manufacturing, robotics, and data-driven agriculture — have begun reshaping the region’s workforce needs. According to Ana Gabriela Ibarra-Castro, director of K-12 STEM Programs for the Hartnell College Foundation, the STEM Expo helps ensure local talent can keep pace with these changes. “The STEM Talent Expo at Hartnell creates a direct bridge between our local talent and regional workforce opportunities,” she said. “Employers are seeking strong technical, problem-solving, and innovative skills.”

Beyond academic preparation, the event helps students build professional networks and confidence — two factors often just as important as technical knowledge when entering the workforce.

Just as crucial is the Expo’s role in expanding participation in STEM fields among underrepresented groups, particularly women and students of color.

“The Expo makes STEM visible, relevant, and attainable,” Ibarra-Castro said. “This



exposure is critical if we want a future workforce that is both strong and representative of our talent pool.”

Historically, women — particularly women of color — have faced barriers entering fields like engineering and computer science due to cultural expectations, limited access to education, and a lack of visible role models. While progress has been made, increasing representation remains a key priority for educators and employers alike.

One Topic Dominated Discussions Throughout the Expo: Artificial Intelligence

Panelists emphasized that AI is not likely to replace the workforce but rather reshape the skills workers need to succeed. “Universally, the panel agreed that AI wouldn’t be taking away jobs,” Alvarez said. “But people who refuse to gain AI skills might find themselves being replaced by people who do.” For Alvarez, who serves on Hartnell College’s President’s STEM Task Force and leads a Salinas-based technology company, ensuring students are prepared for these changes is critical. “As a CEO I selfishly want to make sure students are ready for the workforce when they graduate,” he said. “With the skills and experience necessary to hit the ground running when we hire them.”

A Student Story That Captures the Mission

Among the hundreds of students exploring career opportunities at the Expo was someone who embodies the transformative power of STEM education. Alondra García Bejarano, a 21-year-old engineering student at Hartnell, represents a new generation of innovators. Born and raised in Salinas, Bejarano is the daughter of Mexican immigrants who came to California from Michoacán seeking better opportunities for their children. Her father works as a landscaper, and her mother packs lettuce at an agricultural company — jobs that require long hours and sacrifices to support their family. Money was scarce, and higher education once seemed out of reach.

“My parents built a life from nothing in order to give my siblings and me the opportunities they never had,” Bejarano said.

Growing up, Spanish was her first language, and learning English in school presented early challenges. But through determination and support programs in high school, she developed strong study habits and a passion for mathematics. Today, she is pursuing degrees in math and physics at Hartnell with plans to transfer to California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo to study mechanical engineering. Her path hasn’t been easy. To support herself, Bejarano works

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multiple jobs while maintaining a demanding academic schedule. Some days begin before 6 a.m. and stretch past midnight as she balances work, classes, and homework. Yet along the way, internships and mentorship programs have opened doors she once never imagined.

Through Hartnell’s STEM programs and initiatives, Bejarano secured internships with the Naval Postgraduate School and the U.S. Department of Agriculture — experiences that strengthened her commitment to engineering. “As a daughter of immigrant parents, I am proud to say I have worked in such prestigious fields,” she said. She also hopes to inspire other young women to pursue STEM careers. “As an underrepresented Latina pursuing mechanical engineering, I see how few women there are,” she said. “But I want girls to know they belong in these spaces.”

Looking Ahead

By late afternoon, the STEM Expo floor was still humming with conversations — students exchanging contact information with recruiters, educators discussing internship pipelines, and employers discovering promising new talent. For Monterey County, the event reflects a larger strategy: investing in local talent to build a resilient, innovative economy. When education, industry, and community organizations align, Perez-Sandoval said, the results extend far beyond a single event. “It’s about helping build a long-term framework where students are not only prepared for the workforce,” he said, “but inspired to lead and innovate within it.”

And if the enthusiasm in the STEM Building was any indication, the next generation of innovators is already on its way. ☞



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By Scott Delucchi



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Only to find out Daisy was an 8-week-old black Labrador Retriever at the Atlanta Humane Society.

Every SPCA and humane society copied this brilliant piece of marketing. We all had our "single black females" and "single

white males" and we suspected what studies confirmed: just 18 percent of people looking to acquire a companion animal would visit a shelter. Getting creative meant saving lives!

Today's picture is rosier for shelter pets. Recent data from the American Pet Products Association (APPA) indicates that adoption from shelters and rescues is a primary method for acquiring pets. Approximately 40 percent of dogs and 43 percent of cats are acquired from animal shelters or rescue groups. This still means that other sources combined – friends and family, strays and breeders – outweigh shelter adoptions.

Reasons for this shift include more welcoming shelters and fewer hoops to jump through. People used to say that it was harder to adopt a dog than it was to adopt a child! It also didn't help that shelters looked more like gulags than welcoming centers. Shelter staff, in an effort to protect animals, created hurdles, which have largely been removed.

A Local Perspective

At SPCA Monterey County, we make it easy for pets to go into good homes. If someone has cared for cats before, the process to adopt another – barring unusual circumstances – shouldn't take two hours; 20 minutes is more like it. As an independent nonprofit with no ties to (or funding from) the ASPCA or other national groups, we make our own rules. That said, if someone is looking to adopt a Husky puppy and they know nothing about the breed and have never cared for a puppy, that becomes a teaching moment. It could mean that they choose another pet or put off the decision and this is okay.

Visitors to the SPCA on Highway 68 find warm colors, playful murals, soft music, clean enclosures and bilingual staff. They see volunteers interacting with animals; on the

right day, they may see a volunteer practicing reiki with our cats or horses! The visits are inspiring, not depressing.

I bumped into a woman in her 80s looking at cats; she had a smile and twinkle in her eye telling me she was open to banter. I said, "If this cat doesn't work out with your husband, get a new husband; our adoption success rate is above 90 percent which is much better than our state's marriage rate." Without hesitation, she clapped back "I already did – he's number three!," pointing to another octogenarian caning down the hall. They left with a senior cat.



The Doggie Day Out program allows people to take dogs off campus just for just the day,

A Doggie Date

For years, SPCA visitors asked about risk free test drives. After years of sticking with a hardline position, we softened and initiated a program called Doggie Day Out. Folks can take dogs out for the day even if they have no intention of adopting. Five hundred visits later, we called it a success. The day out gives dogs a break from our shelter environment which can be stressful. It's also fun for people. Pawjama Parties came next; same idea as Doggie Day Out, but for an overnighner. A "foster to adopt" option rounded out our new offerings which all brought more adoptions.

Not Just Cats and Dogs

Unlike most shelters around the country, SPCA Monterey County has much more than dogs and cats available for adoption. Rabbits, guinea pigs and domestic rats. Turtles, iguanas, snakes and exotic birds. Horses, goats, and chickens.

We receive these animals for the same reasons we get dogs and cats; some are stray and others surrendered by owners. A man surrendered a macaw because he got remarried and his bird kept saying the ex-wife's name! Some people are moving, others mention allergies, divorces, no time and kids no longer interested. These can be heartbreaking, especially when someone surrenders a bonded pair of dogs or cats they've had for 10-plus years.

A Little TLC

With an open admission philosophy, we regularly accept animals that are broken physically or behaviorally and require months in our TLC Program which mends broken bones and heals broken spirits.

On the other end, we help families adopt their first pet that will shape their kids' lives. We find perfect matches for seniors craving companionships. Many of our visitors have recently lost a loved pet, making empathy a job requirement.

Our best days include finding homes for our oldest pets or the ones who've been with us the longest, or when we have promotions and clear the entire shelter. It's also fun when

a certain local celebrity adopts, which he's done many times. I never have the guts to say "Go ahead, make our day" in my best gravelly voice.

Messages and photos from happy adopters arrive almost daily; they mean everything for our staff, especially when we can see our former residents living their best lives.

Want ads may be a thing of the past, but finding love, companionship and connectivity at the SPCA is timeless. ☺



Jim adopted "Jack" from the SPCA and both are enjoying their retired years together.

The Power of Connection

Why Relationships and Education Are Agriculture's Most Undervalued Inputs

By Lisa Branco



Today, my role in agriculture is largely office-based, focused on strategy, alignment, and coordination across breeders, growers, and markets. While my early career was rooted in the field, this broader vantage point provides a clearer perspective on what truly drives success in our industry. Time and time again, one factor stands out as both critical and often undervalued: connection.

In an industry defined by inputs such as seed, water, labor, and crop protection, we spend significant time optimizing what we can measure. Yet some of the most important drivers of long-term success do not appear on a spreadsheet. Relationships, trust, and the ability to bridge stakeholders across the supply chain are what ultimately move agriculture forward.

The Role of the Connector

Agriculture has become increasingly complex.

New varieties are constantly being developed, market demands shift rapidly, and growers are asked to make high-stakes decisions with more variables than ever before. In that environment, information alone is insufficient.

What matters is context and trust.

Working across breeders, growers, shippers, and end markets, I have come to see the value of serving as a connector. It goes beyond introductions; it requires translating needs across different parts of the industry, aligning objectives, and ensuring the right products reach the right hands for the right reasons.

A strong relationship can accelerate the adoption of a new variety. It can give a grower the confidence to trial something new. In an industry where margins are tight and risk is real, that confidence is critical.

Relationships as Risk Management

Growers today operate in an environment

defined by uncertainty, including labor challenges, water constraints, evolving regulations, and shifting consumer preferences. Every decision carries weight, particularly when it comes to variety selection. Data is essential, but it does not tell the whole story.

Relationships help close that gap. They provide insight beyond trial results, including real-world experience, regional nuance, and candid feedback. When growers trust the people they work with, they are better positioned to make informed decisions that affect not just a single season, but the long-term viability of their operations.

In many ways, relationships are among the most effective and underutilized forms of risk management in agriculture.

“Not every student will work in agriculture. But every student will become a consumer, a voter, or a decision-maker.”

Expanding the Definition of Connection

While our industry has made meaningful progress in building relationships within agriculture, there is a critical gap: connecting with the next generation.

Ask a room of students where their food comes from, and many will point no further than the grocery store. That disconnect is not just a perception issue; it is a business challenge.

Agriculture faces a growing need for skilled, engaged professionals across every segment of the value chain. From production to research, sales to logistics, the future workforce will determine how effectively we respond to the challenges ahead.

If we are not actively building that pipeline, we are leaving the future of our industry to chance.

Why Ag Education Matters

Programs like Monterey County Ag Education's "Farm Day" are often viewed as community outreach, and rightly so. They are also strategic investments in agriculture's future.

When students have the opportunity to see, touch, and experience agriculture firsthand, it shifts their perspective. It sparks curiosity, builds appreciation, and in some cases, opens the door to a future career.

Not every student will work in agriculture. But every student will become a consumer, a voter, or a decision-maker. Creating a more informed and engaged public benefits the entire industry.

For those who do pursue careers in agriculture, early exposure can be the difference between seeing it as a viable path or never considering it at all.

A Shared Responsibility


Building these connections, both within the industry and beyond it, is not the responsibility of any single company or organization. It requires collective participation.

That can take many forms, including opening an operation to a school group, mentoring a student, supporting local programs, or simply taking the time to share your story. Individually, these actions may seem small, but collectively, they have a meaningful and lasting impact.

Just as strong relationships drive better business outcomes, they also help ensure the long-term sustainability of our industry.

Looking Ahead

Agriculture has always been about growth, including crops, businesses, and communities. As we look to the future, it is worth asking what we are cultivating beyond the field. The connections we build today, between people, across sectors, and with the next generation, will shape the direction of our industry for years to come.

Because in the end, the most important thing we grow may not be what is planted in the ground, but the relationships that enable its success. 



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| HOME SHOWCASE

Simple Beauty Jeff Webster & Kimberly Clemenson

By Diane Gsell / Photography by Patrick Tregenza





When “doers” retire they don’t stop doing. The venue might change, the particular nature of the tasks might differ, but the same driving passion to proactively shape their surroundings and strategically direct their efforts continues on. That deep-rooted belief that they can still make a relevant difference can produce a vibrant second act of profound proportions.

If ever there was a home worthy of Jeff Webster and Kimberly Clemenson’s vision, it’s the property they chose for their next chapter. Moving on from careers in biotech, the couple was seeking land that had the potential to accommodate a micro farm while also providing a well-appointed house for themselves that could comfortably host family and friends. The vibrant dose of history that this particular parcel came with was merely the sweetest of icings on the cake.

Tucked deep within the Robles del Rio neighborhood of Carmel Valley, the home has always figured prominently in the world of visionary lifestyle and home design. When, in keeping with the nation’s mindset of the 1930’s, iconic builder Hugh Comstock of Carmel Fairytale Cottage fame took on the challenge of shifting to more economical materials, he looked to Monterey’s historic adobe buildings for inspiration. Developing his own formula to stabilize the clay in order to promote waterproofing properties, Comstock produced a series of “Bitudobe” homes, such as this 1939 gem.

Built as a summer home anchoring a 61.2 acre ranch for Kansas

City’s grocery and bakery magnate, Fred Wolferman, the parcel would pass through the hands of other notables such as beloved “Dennis the Menace” cartoonist Hank Ketcham, his wife Alice, and son Dennis, as well as members of the Salinas Valley agriculture industry’s Spiegl family.

While the larger parcel was subdivided in the 1970s and a handful of then modern-day structures were built, the core of the ranch with both the Comstock main residence the guest house and poolhouse and pool constructed by the Spiegl’s in the early 1950’s remained. Decades of wear and tear had taken its toll, but the good bones of the original main and guest house were intact as were original details like doors, windows, and hand-forged hardware.

As the couple began what they like to refer to as a four-year “restoration/renovation/transformation” project, they found that, as simple as it sounds, oftentimes all that is called for is a deep cleaning to bring forth original beauty. And so, the two took a scrape-not-scrap approach to so many elements. Decades of grease, smoke and dust were washed away to reveal original wood ceilings, many painted to mimic the blue sky above. Multi-paned steel windows were taken down to their perfectly intact cores and reglazed to their former glory. Whenever possible and practical, elements like doors, redwood siding, and original Carmel stone were set aside for eventual re-use.

Some show-stopping original elements like the copper/redwood







hood over the stove are hard to miss, but explore a little more and you're likely to find stealth gems like an original ironing board tucked into a built-in cupboard in the housekeeping room. A keen eye will also discover enchanting acorn hinges, vintage Lumi lighting fixtures, original exterior lighting and rain gutters and a charming-beyond-belief original doorbell. This over-the-top eye for detail in the original concept and construction which remains to this day secured the property's spot on the Monterey County Register of Historic Places.

Just because vintage design choices were respected doesn't mean that modern-day functionality was sacrificed. The salvaged-redwood-framed mirror above the living room's fireplace magically morphs into a television upon request. And the gap between the ceiling and roof on the morning-sun side of the house (a temperature regulating Comstock feature) is utilized as a conduit for the tech "brains of the house."

Leaf through any of the featured articles written about the home in classic magazines like *Sunset* and you're likely to see the very same (now 80-years-old) concord grape vine in its infancy elegantly defining the outdoor dining courtyard. Equally impressive is the fact that the massive outdoor redwood table and matching benches with the ability to comfortably seat over a dozen diners is indeed the very same table that has anchored that area from its first meal in 1939.

Landscape architect Michael Bliss had his work cut out for him as he implemented a transformative vision that blended old and new in perfect proportions. The concord grape mentioned above produced 500 pounds of grapes last season- apart from Jeff, it's likely the hardest working organism on the property. Massive native coastal and valley oaks and a specimen Japanese maple were preserved, while other overgrown, non-native and closely packed shrubs were removed. Meadow grasses were added to complement new







stonework in peaceful harmony. The substantial backyard now hosts a fruit orchard, 708 pinot vines, various bush berries and raised garden beds made from old fence posts that peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins and dahlias call home.

Just across the main patio, the guest house stays true to the original plan right down to the pale jade bathroom where the only visible update is a modern-day shower head (preservationists fear not, the original wasn't discarded, merely stored away). Should guests prefer a more contemporary approach, the substantially renovated pool house provides just that, but in a style that blends current details with the vibe of the home's legacy.

The renovated pool house surrounds the original (and also renovated) pool, and includes additional guest quarters, a home gym, a lounge area and a state-of-the-art farm kitchen. To ensure the more contemporary leaning architecture didn't clash with the rest of the property, the owners utilized redwood salvaged from the original siding on the ceilings to provide a warm feel, and for cabinetry, achieving a balance of modern comfort and functionality while respecting aesthetics of days gone by.

With the help of a local mill, massive walnut stumps were transformed into a custom tabletop to anchor the farm kitchen (the artisans refer to this as the 7-saw-blade project). Behind the scenes is an industrial-grade prep area where the land's harvest is lovingly processed into jams, jellies and preserves that serve as the

core products in the couple's ultimate side hustle: Comstock Farm & Kitchen gourmet gift boxes. Utilizing Kimberly's well-honed design skills as well as Jeff's hands-on approach to finding ways to employ all produce grown on the property, the couple produces beautifully curated collections of their own products combined with the absolute best examples of what the area's vibrant food scene has to offer. The quality alone of these products (small-batch local honey, coffee, chocolate, olive oil and their own jams and jellies) sets the offerings apart from standard gift box fare. But the aesthetic presentation, right down to a box that's so attractive it screams for repurposing rather than recycling, truly distinguishes their product line from the competition.

As if that wasn't enough, what on the surface might appear to be a well-executed small business is actually a deeper form of labor of love. Every year all profits from Comstock Farm and Kitchen are donated to support Rancho Cielo Youth Campus and the hands-on learning that goes on there. In a time when so many are seeking authentic emotional bonds, Jeff and Kimberly have forged a deep connection to both their land and its associated generations past in a way that links to one of the most vibrant community institutions in the area. It's the perfect example of doers who continue doing in a way that genuinely inspires the next generation...of doers.

To learn more visit and shop at: www.comstockfarmandkitchen.com ☞





From Vineyard to Bottle

The Craft of Samuel Louis Smith Wines

By Birdie Church



Samuel Louis Smith Wine is not built on legacy; it is built on passion.

While spending a semester abroad in Bordeaux to learn French, Smith accidentally fell in love with wine. But with the decline of the wine industry, he knew he had to take a reinvented approach to wine—natural wine.

Natural wine and everything that comes with it has been a major source of inspiration for both Smith's range and consumer base. By emphasizing gentle handling, each wine is able to be the clearest rendition of its vineyard and vintage, which is central to the brand's intention of clean production with the least number of additives.

Purpose Driven

Samuel Louis Smith (SLS) is a micro-négociant winemaker tucked along the Central Coast of California with a portfolio that focuses on Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Gamay Noir, and cool climate Syrah, and the newly introduced sparkling wine. Smith's label sets itself apart from mass-produced labels through quality and intention. SLS Wines hand-selects grapes from small, independent growers, resulting in an annual production of approximately 1,300 cases, which focus on precision and quality over volume. With small-scale production, every part of the craft is purpose driven. "In each bottle of wine, there has got to be over 1,000 decisions to be made," said Smith, highlighting the meticulous nature of his blends.

Higher acidities and lower alcohol percentages while maintaining the same degree of maturity and development are possible in SLS's wines because most of the hand-selected vineyards are located in cooler climates and higher altitudes. By layering red fruit, coastal salinity, and herbal complexity over fresh acidity and fine, chalky tannins, the result is wines that emphasize energy,

restraint, and site-driven character. With the low intervention style, each wine and vintage has its own individual taste that is a direct reflection of the vineyard of origin.

These coastal, high-elevation vineyards remain in the marine layer, allowing the cooling effect of the fog and the interesting mountain soil structure to combine, resulting in a well-structured wine that isn't all about the fruit but rather lends itself to being more savory.

With wines that are reminiscent of the grower of their origin, it is only fitting that their labels do the same. The 2024 vintages are single-vineyard bottles, meaning that all the grapes in any given bottle were grown at one vineyard. With a little creative licensing, each label's art is hand-painted by Smith himself to reflect the vineyard of origin.

Origin: Where It All Started

With the craving to surf and a desire for wine knowledge, Smith chose to take a semester abroad in Bordeaux, France. While he didn't take any classes in viticulture there, he fell into the locals' entrancement with wine. Between his host family's passion for a good



pairing and his time spent exploring wineries abroad, he fell in love.

Captivated by the industry, Smith felt he had no option but to pursue the art. Starting with a job in a Santa Barbara tasting room, he built his palate and knowledge. By 2010, he went hands-on with a harvesting internship.

In viticulture, two months of harvest make up 75 percent of the wine produced in any given year, leaving Smith working 14–16 hours a day. Working these long hours allowed Smith to learn about the craft, and as a perk, he found himself trying numerous variants of wines during his lunch and dinner breaks. At this point, Smith's whole life became consumed by wine. Smith says he “fell in love with the intersectionality of sciences within the field.” On one side, viticulture—the study of how vines grow, shaped by climate, soil, and the natural conditions of each vintage. On the other hand, there's enology, the science of winemaking, where decisions in fermentation and aging

influence the final product. Both sciences are unintentionally mixed into the matrix of the art to produce a very compelling wine.

Smith has perpetuated his small-scale success to his ability to extrapolate certain wines' presence, understanding why a wine looks, smells, and drinks the way it does, and being able to take certain aspects and change them. His brand has been built on low intervention, which allows for vintage variation that makes wine dynamic and alluring from an accumulation of tastes that are reflective of not only the origin of the bottle but also Smith's intricate decision-making from vintage to vintage.

Explore more at <https://samuellouiswines.com>

Leading Without the Spotlight

How Team Sports Shaped Catherine Kobrinsky Evans' Approach to Leadership

By Alla Zeltser



Catherine Kobrinsky Evans has spent her life leading in business and in the Salinas Valley community, helping shape organizations, supporting economic development, and contributing to projects that have lasting impact. She has served as president, board member, and advisor across a wide range of efforts, from downtown revitalization to youth and women's sports. Her work is visible in the strength of the organizations she has supported and the outcomes they have achieved, even if her name is not always front and center.

That's not by accident.

Catherine describes herself as an introvert, someone who does not seek out the spotlight and who has never viewed leadership as something tied to visibility or volume. Her approach has always been grounded in listening, creating space for others to speak, and in stepping forward when needed. That

perspective, which has guided her work across business and community leadership, can be traced back to an unexpected experience during her college years.

Her Rugby Era

While attending the University of California, Berkeley, Catherine became a founding member of the first women's rugby team in 1979. She did not come from a background in organized sports, and her introduction to the game was largely a matter of circumstance. Someone noticed her height and decided she might be exactly what the team needed. As she tells it, she was essentially recruited for being tall and in the right place at the right time. What began as an unfamiliar and uncertain experience quickly became formative.

Rugby, by its nature, requires a level of trust and interdependence that leaves little room for individualism. Success is determined not by a single standout player,

but by the cohesion of the group, by the ability of each person to anticipate, support, and respond to the needs of others in real time. For Catherine, the experience revealed something fundamental about how teams function and how leadership emerges within them.

She often reflects on the way that team sports create space for individuals with different strengths to contribute meaningfully. Some players are vocal and directive, others are strategic and observant, and still others lead through consistency and reliability. Each role carries value, and the success of the team depends on the integration of all of them. It was within that structure that Catherine found her footing, not as the loudest voice, but as someone who paid attention, who showed up, and who could be counted on when it mattered.

That understanding has carried through every phase of her professional life and community leadership.

Giving Back Philosophy

Over the years in commercial real estate development and community roles, Catherine has consistently found herself working within teams that share a common purpose. Whether collaborating with fellow business owners, serving on boards, or participating in civic initiatives aimed at improving the Salinas Valley, she approaches each effort with the same mindset she developed on the rugby field. She views these groups not as collections of individuals, but as teams with shared values and objectives, where progress depends on mutual trust, thoughtful collaboration, and a willingness to step forward when needed.

She has helped shape initiatives designed to support and elevate women across the region, creating opportunities for connection, growth, and leadership. The work is

grounded in the belief that leadership takes many forms and that providing space for those different expressions strengthens the entire community.

That belief is also central to her long-standing commitment to the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex, where she has served on the board for the past decade. The project represents more than the development of fields and facilities. It is, in Catherine's view, an investment in the kind of environment that allows young people, particularly girls and young women, to experience the same sense of belonging and growth that she found through sports.

Team sports offer something distinct in the development of leadership. They provide a setting where individuals learn to navigate challenges together, where success is shared, and where the contributions of each person, regardless of personality or background, are necessary for the group to move forward. For young women who may not naturally gravitate toward highly visible roles, that environment can be especially meaningful. It allows them to discover that leadership is not confined to a single style, and that there is strength in listening, in observing, and in supporting others.

Teams and Dreams

Catherine speaks often about the idea of being needed, of finding purpose in showing

up for a team and contributing in ways that may not draw attention but that are essential to the outcome. She describes leadership as something that happens not only in formal roles or public moments, but in the day-to-day decisions to engage, support, and take responsibility when it counts.

This perspective has shaped her contributions across the many organizations she has been part of. It has informed her work in economic development, her involvement in civic boards, and her ongoing commitment to projects that strengthen the Salinas Valley. It also underscores her focus on ensuring that the next generation has access to the same opportunities that influenced her path.

“Team sports offer something distinct in the development of leadership.”

In many ways, Catherine's story reflects a broader shift in how leadership is understood. It moves away from the idea that leadership is defined by visibility or prominence and instead highlights the importance of consistency, awareness, and collaboration. It recognizes that some of the most effective leaders are those who create space for others, who notice what is needed, and who act with intention rather than volume.

Giving Back

That philosophy continues to guide her work today. Just recently, Catherine and her husband, Lee Evans, have stepped forward with a \$250,000 leadership gift to The Match at the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex. Their commitment reflects the same belief that has defined her leadership journey, that when people come together around a shared purpose, they can create opportunities that extend far beyond themselves.

This investment will help transform the community and expand access to team sports for tens of thousands of youths, ensuring that the next generation has the chance to build confidence, connection, and leadership through sport.

Through her work, Catherine continues to demonstrate that leadership can be both quiet and impactful, rooted in a deep understanding of people and a commitment to shared goals. Her experience on a rugby field more than four decades ago continues to inform that approach, serving as a reminder that teams, at their best, allow individuals to contribute in ways that align with who they are while advancing something larger than themselves.

For the Salinas Valley, and for the many organizations and individuals she has influenced, that approach has proven to be both enduring and impactful. ☪



Catherine (front row, third from right) rocking the pigtails with her rugby team.

A Boy's Trip to Pinehurst

By Tom Koster



Ranked number five out of 20 top golf destinations in the world by www.beautifulgolfcourses.com, Pinehurst Resort is in Pinehurst, North Carolina, about a one-hour drive from the Charlotte Airport. Pinehurst has hosted prestigious golf tournaments including four U.S. Open Championships, one U.S. Women's Open, three U.S. Amateur Championships, one PGA Championship and the Ryder Cup. A visit and an opportunity to play is on every avid golfer's bucket list.

Pinehurst consists of ten 18-hole golf courses, each named simply by a number, an 18-hole putting course, and a 9-hole short course called The Cradle. In addition to the golf courses, Pinehurst has three hotels, as well as villas, condominiums, restaurants, and other leisure facilities. Engine Room 87, a tap room located in an old locomotive car, being one of the most popular and unique. History

Pinehurst was founded by Boston soda

fountain magnate James Walker Tufts. He purchased 5,500 acres for approximately \$1.25 per acre in 1895 and opened the Holly Inn New Year's Eve of that year. The first golf course was laid out in 1897-98, and the first championship held at Pinehurst was the United North and South Amateur Championship of 1901. Pinehurst's best-known course, "Pinehurst No. 2," was completed in 1907 designed by the renowned Donald Ross, who became associated with Pinehurst for half a century.

The first PGA Tour Major staged at Pinehurst was the PGA Championship in 1936. In 1951 the resort hosted the Ryder Cup and in 1991 and 1992, it was the venue for the Tour Championship in 1999., Pinehurst staged its second major, the U.S. Open, won by Payne Stewart at the No. 2 course. There is currently a statue behind the 18th hole at Pinehurst No. 2 showing Stewart's famous victory pose after making a putt on the 18th hole to defeat Phil Mickelson. Today it is not

uncommon for golf players to mimic the victory pose after finishing their round.

In similar fashion in 2024 Bryson DeChambeau won at Pinehurst No. 2, capturing his second major title by one stroke over Rory McIlroy. The victory was clinched with a clutch up-and-down bunker shot on the 18th hole. Today players often try to mimic the historic shot when approaching the 18th green.



The Putter Boy

One of golf's most storied and favorite symbols is Pinehurst's logo featuring a young boy holding a putter. In 1912, sculptress Lucy Richards used the lad as the model for her bronze statuette in sundial form. The shaft of the club created the shadow that would be used on the sundial to tell time, and to get the proper angle, the length of the club had to be extra long.

The statue was known as "The Sundial Boy" until the 1970s, when "The Putter Boy" name caught on. For many years, the statue sat on a concrete base between the two large putting greens beside the clubhouse. It was moved in 1978 to the PGA/World Golf Hall of Fame but returned to Pinehurst around 1990 and now is displayed prominently once again outside the clubhouse.



Payne Stewart

The iconic Payne Stewart statue at Pinehurst was a labor of love. Stewart won the 1999 U.S. Open at Pinehurst No. 2 by sinking a dramatic 15-foot par putt on the 72nd hole, finishing at 1-under-par to defeat Phil Mickelson. This iconic win is remembered for its emotional finish and now immortalized by a statue enshrined in bronze by sculptor Zenos Frudakis. Dedicated two years after Stewart's death, it was a fitting tribute to one of the game's most beloved players and has since become the most famous statue in golf.



Golf Digest Magazine ranks Pinehurst 32 on its list of the top 100 golf courses in the United States and number six in public course rankings (2024).

Our Trip to Pinehurst

With a local connection from my buddy Hank Ashworth, we packed our bags and our clubs and headed East. We played four courses in five days. Three of our rounds were on Donald Ross designed courses. Ross is recognized as one of the greatest golf course architects in history, having designed over 400 of them. His designs are known for natural and challenging layouts and featuring “turtleback” greens.

Saturday—The Arrival

Two of us flew in Saturday. We arrived hungry and, without my wife being available to help me organize things in advance, we tried to get into The Deuce Restaurant to no avail. The Deuce is in the building behind the 18th green on Pinehurst No. 2. If you make a 2 anywhere on Pinehurst No. 2, present your signed card to the hostess, and you are rewarded with a cool gold token.

The Deuce was packed, so we decided to visit the pro shop. It was massive—easily rivaling a Nordstrom.

We took our time and looked at all the historical memorabilia in the lobby. Still hungry, we stopped into the local market



and bought some sandwiches and beers. We enjoyed our meal while watching multi-generational golf enthusiasts practice putting on a course about 400 square yards in size. Being a Saturday night, grandparents were there with grandkids practicing their putting in their finest Southern golf attire. It was like being in a giant amusement park for golfers of all ages. You could feel the Southern hospitality. There must have been 2,000 people on the property. College golf kids, golf tourists, and members alike.

Most of what we were looking for was within walking distance. Our condominium was right off Pinehurst No. 3. We could walk right to the par 3 course, The Cradle, and the putting green.

We went out to a back horseshoe shaped patio about three tiers high overlooking the 18th green at Pinehurst No. 2. Spectators were enjoying libations and watching people wrap up their round. It was like an amphitheater around the 18th green. Everyone cheered as players were looking for their own Payne Stewart or Bryson DeChambeau moment.

Sunday—Pinehurst Number 2

We were playing off season, so Ross's gem had tricky greens. The ball never stood still. There were lots of undulations and spectacular design. The bunker layout was tricky. We got lucky playing on this day because it was Sunday, so the pins were placed exactly where they were for the 2024 U.S. Open. I achieved my goal...I have a gold token from The Deuce!

Monday—Pine Needles

Cold, blustery, and windy conditions... toss in a couple of lightning delays...Pine Needles gave us all we could handle. Carved out of the Carolina pines. It was a fair test that required all types of different shots. Certainly, worthy of national championships (most recently, the 2024 U S Women's Open).

Tuesday—Southern Pines

Wind, rain and lightning left town...but a super cold front moved in for our foray at this Donald Ross gem. Sunshine provided warmth, and a winding, undulating course built through a little valley in the pines provided an entertaining test. This is a "must play" if you get off the property at Pinehurst.



Built in 1906, this is a true Donald Ross treasure.

Last Day—Pinehurst Number 10

Pinehurst’s first new course in three decades, Tom Doak’s design has made the legacy of Pinehurst proud. Built in 2024 and named the best new course that year it is considered another “must play.” Located in Aberdeen, North Carolina on a former sand mine site, it features dramatic, rugged terrain and a modern, minimalist design. It has massive elevation. We were able to walk both Pinehurst courses giving us plenty of time to soak it all in. This course has massive ponds with huge fish in them with bald eagles nesting in the Carolina pines waiting to swoop in for dinner. We did need to look out for the water moccasins.

The Cradle was our final round at Pinehurst. Our friend Matt Bass made a hole in one on hole number two. The ball spun off the back hill, and we watched it go in. We all went wild. They keep a running tally of how many holes in ones are made at The Cradle. Matt’s was number 2,826. They took a picture of him while they updated the number with us and patrons cheering congratulations.

You know you love the sport of golf when you see your kids off to school in the morning in California, play a round of golf, go to work bartending until you close the restaurant. You hop on a red eye flight to Chicago then fly Chicago to Charlotte. You land, drive directly to Pine Needles golf course for a practice round, you eat dinner and call it a night. That’s 36 holes of golf in a 36-hour period coast to coast. I guess that hole in one at The Cradle was well-earned Matt Bass!

Being a huge Donald Ross fan...this trip certainly didn’t disappoint. His imagination, while maintaining the true nature of the landscape, was breathtaking. If I could describe the experience in a phrase... I guess it would be... “Norman Rockwell meets the greatest game ever invented.” *CG*

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FRESH SEAFOOD

How Nico Hernandez Found Himself in the Kitchen

by Adam Joseph



From left: Judges Philippe Striffeler, Jay Marshall and Jerome Viel pose with Nico Hernandez, the first-place winner of the *Jeunes Chefs Rôtisseurs Nationaux* competition at Rancho Cielo (second from right).

When Rancho Cielo alumnus Nico Hernandez was announced as the first-place winner of the *Jeunes Chefs Rôtisseurs Nationaux* competition—a significant opportunity for young chefs to showcase their abilities—he broke down in tears.

“I just saw how much I had grown, and everyone was proud of me for what I did,” Hernandez says during his break at the Peninsula Café at Monterey Peninsula College’s Student Center. “It was something so different from when I worked at Taylor Farms and Tesla. You don’t get a pat on the back for doing something good. After being at Rancho with all of the teachers, Chef EJ [Jimenez] and Chef Efren [Diaz], who gave me the confidence to put the food out that I do and the confidence to know it’s going to be good, it makes me feel even better when I see someone take their first bite, and I can see their enjoyment.”

The statement feels simple until you consider what it suggests: that pride must be learned. It develops over time, shaped by repetition, encouragement, and the ability to see your own progress.

Path to Victory

To secure that first win, Hernandez had to work within a strict framework: three hours, three courses and 30 minutes to study a mystery basket and plan. *Mise en place* had to be written out in advance. A secret ingredient—assigned and unchangeable—had to be incorporated into the main dish. At least half the basket contents needed to be used, whether it made sense at first glance or not.

The competition, organized by the *Chaîne des Rôtisseurs*, blends tradition with pressure. With participation spanning 75 countries, it demands precision, discipline and an understanding of fine dining that goes

beyond the plate. It’s less about winning than about demonstrating control, knowing the rules well enough to work within them.

Hernandez’s assigned ingredient was bacon. He folded it into a sunchoke purée and a bacon-and-pecan praline sauce for a seared sablefish entrée, paired with spinach and mushroom chips. The first course—a sea scallop aguachile—was sharp and immediate. Dessert pushed further: a beignet with Earl Grey crème anglaise, chocolate ganache and macerated berries, a dish he had never made before.

That decision reflects a willingness to take risks, to attempt something unfamiliar with the understanding that failure, if it comes, is part of the process.

The Criteria

Judging extended beyond taste. Sanitation, organization and even spelling on the menu were evaluated. Judges watched not only what competitors made but also how they worked. Hernandez performed strongly across all categories—something that would not have been true a year earlier.

Last year, only four months into his time at Rancho Cielo, the 24-year-old competed and fell short. His dishes—stuffed bell pepper, steak with asparagus, chocolate mousse—now feel elementary, the work of someone still learning.

“Everything I did was basic,” Hernandez admits. “From the rest of the time I was in culinary school to my graduation, then to the next competition, my growth was huge.

Rancho’s Drummond Culinary Center General Manager Wanda Straw describes it simply: “Nico cooks from the heart. I respect him so much because he trusts his instincts, and he’s always observant. He’s been so focused for the last year.”

His only mistake this time—leaving his knife bag on the table instead of storing it beneath—was minor. The kind of detail

that stands out only because everything else went right. He treats it as part of the process; something learned in time for what came next. Seattle.

Cooking in Seattle

The Northwestern Division Finals at the Seattle Culinary Academy brought a new set of challenges. A new kitchen. New competitors. Hernandez had only flown once before and had never been to Seattle.

“I learned that I would be competing against three students from their own school in Seattle, who had worked in that kitchen before,” Hernandez explains. “I had no clue where anything was, so I visited the kitchen

“Nico cooks from the heart...”

the day before and took pictures and went back to my hotel room and watched videos to see where all the pots, plates and pans were. The kitchen was huge—like three Pebble Beach kitchens all in one. But it was amazing

to see another type of kitchen and another group of kids who wanted to be there, learning and going into something they’re passionate about.”

Even in an unfamiliar space, he relied on preparation. Studying the kitchen in advance, trying to reduce uncertainty before the competition began.

“I felt like the outcast because it was their home field,” the Salinas native says. “They knew this kitchen and where everything was and had everything you can think of, like a blast chiller, which I used to make a granita.”

Still, he moved forward the only way he could: by cooking. His menu reflected both control and creativity, from citrus-iced crudo to seared hanger steak with kabocha purée and bacon-praline glaze, finishing with a dark chocolate and ginger ganache tart.

“My mentors EJ and Efen always tell me, ‘You’ll never know if your food’s good unless someone critiques it,’” Hernandez explains. “So, I just stuck with making comfort flavors for myself.”

He placed third. In context—a new city, an unfamiliar kitchen, experienced competitors—it reads less as a loss and



Over 600 feet above Seattle, Nico Hernandez observes the city from atop the iconic Space Needle.

more as progress. Since then, his direction has become clearer. He’s going to continue working at the café at Monterey Peninsula College alongside Chef Efen Diaz and expand his role beyond the line.

“It gives me more flexibility to work around everything,” Hernandez explains. “I’m not just on the line. I’m creating specials. I’m placing vendor orders. I’m putting away the orders when they get here. I’m learning how to cost out orders and everything else from being in the kitchen. Also, it gives me opportunities to be a mentor for everyone else in the kitchen.”

Mentor in the Making

That final piece, mentorship, marks another shift. The point where learning turns outward. He plans to return to Seattle next year. This time, not as an outsider. He believes he can win. Straw believes it, too. “There’s a clarity he didn’t have before,” she says. “Something just clicked. It’s like watching a sensei in the kitchen.”

And maybe that is what this is really about. Not the competition, not even the food, but the moment when something internal becomes visible—when the work and the person doing it finally align.

Rancho Cielo’s 11th annual Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser happens August 24-28. For more information and veggie box & BBQ lunch sales, visit: ranchocieloyc.org/VBB2026. ☪



Rancho Cielo Drummond Culinary Academy alum Nico Hernandez competing in the Northwestern Division Finals at the Seattle Culinary Academy.

A Community Rises to Meet the Moment

Taylor Farms, The Match, and the Future of the Salinas Valley

By Alla Zeltser



There are certain places in a community that do far more than serve their stated purpose. They become part of the rhythm of everyday life, part of family routines, part of childhood itself. The Salinas Regional Soccer Complex has become one of those places for the Salinas Valley. On any given week, it is filled with young players finding their footing, parents and grandparents lining the fields, coaches investing in the next generation, and families gathering in a space that feels safe, welcoming, active, and deeply connected to the community it serves. Today, 11,500 people use the Complex each week, a remarkable reflection of both the demand for this kind of space and the trust the community has placed in it.

A Place with Purpose

That kind of trust is built over time, and it is built through consistency. The Salinas

Regional Soccer Complex has established itself as a healthy, family-focused hub where sports, recreation, and community life come together in a way that feels both organic and essential. Its mission is rooted in cultivating community well-being through soccer, providing a safe and healthy place for fitness, life skills, and athletic development while also serving as an economic engine for local businesses and municipalities. Parents describe it as a home field for their children and a place where families can gather around something positive and joyful. Coaches speak about the life lessons learned there, the teamwork, resilience, responsibility, and human connection that extend far beyond any single game.

The Match

At a moment when that demand is more critical than ever, Taylor Farms has stepped forward with a \$1.5 million leadership

challenge gift to launch The Match, a \$3 million community campaign to build eight new soccer fields and complete key infrastructure at the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex. This is Taylor Farms' third major investment in the Complex since 2019, reflecting Taylor's profound leadership and meaningful commitment to the Salinas Valley. This leadership gift creates a clear and immediate opportunity for the community to come together, with every dollar contributed by our community going twice as far to expand impact in real time. This investment moves the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex closer to meeting the needs of the community, creating more room for children to play, more room for families to gather, more room for health, belonging, pride, and opportunity to take root.

The Complex is already serving thousands of people each week, and with the addition of these eight new fields and amenities, weekly use is projected to exceed 22,000. That kind of growth tells the story of a community that is ready for more space, more access, and more opportunities to participate in a setting that reflects the dignity and promise of the Salinas Valley. It also tells the story of families who have already embraced the Complex as part of their lives and who are eager to see it expand so that more children, more teams, and more neighborhoods can share in what it offers.

Location is Key

What the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex offers is especially meaningful in a region where access to safe, outdoor recreational space carries enormous value. The expansion represents a direct investment in physical health, mental well-being, community cohesion, and long-term success for local youth and families. The Complex stands as an answer to a very real need for more green space, more opportunities for exercise



something fundamental about the Salinas Valley itself: a powerful belief in family, in hard work, in showing up for one another, and in creating opportunities that allow children to grow into their fullest potential. The expansion is about fields, but it is also about what happens on those fields and around them. It is about kids learning confidence and discipline. It is about friendships and belonging. It is about girls

“Today, 11,500 people use the Complex each week...”

and recreation, and more places where families can spend quality time together in an environment that is active, welcoming, and affordable. In a community where health challenges are significant and safe outdoor access is not evenly distributed; the importance of this kind of space becomes even more profound.

This is one of the reasons the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex has become such a source of community pride. It reflects

and boys seeing that they have a place here, that their aspirations matter here, and that this community is willing to invest in their future in a visible, tangible way.

The Female Factor

That opportunity is especially important for women and girls. The Salinas Regional Soccer Complex has made a meaningful

commitment to ensuring that women and girls have access to sports, mentorship, and high-quality fields, and the impact of that access can be seen in the confidence, health, and long-term well-being it helps build. The Legacy Grass Fields are free to girls’ and women’s leagues thanks to the generosity of donors who have intentionally earmarked their contributions to ensure that access. Expansion strengthens that work by increasing capacity, visibility, and access, allowing more young athletes to participate and more families to experience the value of sport as a pathway to growth and connection.

A Tourism Economy

The benefits also extend far beyond the boundaries of the Complex. The Match is a critical component of the broader effort to complete the next stages of construction, including not only the eight new soccer fields but also supporting infrastructure such as stadium seating, restrooms, field lighting, and fencing. These improvements will help position the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex

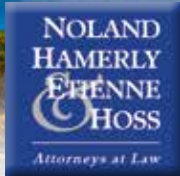


Project Features

- 2 Lighted Synthetic Turf Fields
- Stadium Seating (3,000 seat capacity)
- 7 Additional Natural Grass Soccer Fields
- Indoor Soccer, Offices, Classrooms, Concessions, Restrooms, Wellness Center
- Celebration Plaza
- Sport Court
- Picnic Area
- Play Facilities
- 400+ Additional Parking
- Pedestrian Circulation/ Walking Path
- Trash Enclosure
- Restroom
- Sand Court

Project Phases

- 1** Renovate Existing Grass Fields
- 2** A. New Synthetic Turf Fields & Parking Lot
B. Stadium Seating & Lighting
C. BMX Pump Track & Skate Park
- 3** A. Soil Mitigation
B. Natural Grass Field & Sand Courts
C. Gabilan Creek Rehab
- 4** A. The Community Wellness Resiliency Center
B. Celebration Plaza & Sports Courts



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to host larger tournaments and events, drawing visitors and economic activity into the Salinas Valley. Youth sports tourism continues to grow, and a facility of this caliber creates real momentum for local businesses, expanded employment opportunities, and new economic activity that stays rooted in the community. Upon completion, the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex will stand as the largest facility of its kind between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Still, the heart of this story remains local. It lives in the families who already spend their evenings and weekends at the fields. It lives in the players who experience the Complex as a second home. It lives in the parents who see the value of a safe, well-maintained, family-centered place where their children can be active and joyful. It lives in the broader promise that when a community invests in spaces that bring people together around health, recreation, and shared purpose, the return reaches across generations. Taylor Farms' \$1.5 million challenge gift comes at a time that is pivotal for the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex, a gift that will truly be a catalyst for the largest transformation of the Complex since the opening of two lighted, regulation-size turf fields in late 2024.

This moment belongs to the Salinas Valley. It belongs to the families who are already here every week, and to those who are waiting for space to open. It belongs to the kids who will step onto these fields for the first time, and to the generations who will follow them. This is one of those transformational moments in the Salinas Valley. The expansion of the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex is within reach, and with it comes the opportunity to shape something enduring, something visible, and something that reflects the very best of who this community is and what it is capable of creating together. ☞

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Meeting Youth Where They Are

The Impact of the Road to Success

By Jorge Rubio



iPad distribution for students who completed Road to Success program in Greenfield.

“There are some days where I feel like everything is against me but push and pull.” For Fredy Garcia-Martinez, that feeling defined much of his teenage years. At 16, school was no longer a place where he felt supported. He began missing classes after experiencing harassment and judgment, especially because of the friends he associated with. Those missed days added up, eventually landing him on Truancy Probation. The consequences stretched beyond Fredy himself; his parents faced potential legal trouble, a reality that deeply weighed on him.

Around the same time, Yaneli Maldonado was stepping into her role as a Case Manager with Sun Street Centers’ Road to Success Program in South Monterey County. Having grown up in the area and attended college, she was becoming more aware of the gaps in support that many families experience. “I just wanted to be somebody who can be a support to them, help them, and advocate to give them a voice too.”

Road to Success is a referral-based intervention and diversion program serving youth ages 12–17 who are referred by schools, probation, or law enforcement. For many families, like Fredy’s, entering the program can feel unfamiliar and intimidating. When Fredy and his parents were first offered the opportunity, they were hesitant. But they decided to move forward, unsure of what to expect.

That decision would place Fredy in front of a consistent supportive adult, something Yaneli believes is often missing for youth who are struggling.

“It’s easy to overlook these youth who struggle as the ‘problem child’, but that’s not the case. They are just facing different adversities that others don’t really take the time to see.”

As with many students who enter the program, Fredy didn’t immediately open up. Trust doesn’t come easily when you’ve spent years feeling misunderstood. Case Managers

meet weekly with students and their parents, guiding them through proven curriculum like Why Try for teens, while parents participate in Life Skills Training. Weekly check-ins create space for something just as important – listening to the students.

“That’s my approach,” said Yaneli, “if they do receive me that way, I understand I am a new adult in their life that’s stepping in so of course they are going to be guarded or unsure about trusting me, so patience is key.”

Fredy slowly began to feel comfortable talking about personal matters, something he found difficult to do with others. Having a trusted adult to talk to was especially important during moments when he felt alone and needed to express how he was feeling. Over time, he became more thoughtful in how he communicated, especially with his parents.

One of the parts of the program that left the biggest impression on Fredy was community involvement. Youth in Road to Success are encouraged to complete community service and pro-social hours, helping them apply the skills they are learning while realizing they can play a meaningful role in their community. Through



Fredy Garcia Martinez

that process, Fredy began to see himself as someone who could give back.

At home, his parents were changing too. The Road to Success program believes that youth succeed best when families are supporting alongside them. As Fredy's parents participated in the program, conversations became more open and encouraging.

"Me dicen echale ganas miijo, tu puedes. Ya se que ahorita no se mira tan bien, pero puedes seguirle echando ganas." They tell me, "Go for it, son, you can do it. I know it doesn't look so good right now, but you can keep going."

"Even though sometimes it feels like too much, I have my parents there to support me."

For Yaneli, moments like this are why consistency matters. Showing up week after week helps students understand they are not alone and not defined by what's written on paper.

Working closely with youth has also shaped her understanding of resilience and recovery, especially as she balances her role as an intern in Sun Street Centers outpatient services while pursuing her master's degree at Cal State University, Monterey Bay.

Now working with adults in outpatient care, Yaneli often hears stories of people who lacked support growing up, stories of being mislabeled or unseen. That perspective reinforces why early intervention matters. "I think it has taught me a lot about recovery and making sure that we, at least on our end, do our best to be there to support these youth and letting them know 'we do care and we do see that you are capable of achieving what you set your mind to.'"

After completing Road to Success, Fredy attended Grizzly Youth Academy, graduating a year early at just 17 years old. Soon after, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted his educational plans. He worked in the fields, helping support his family, but he knew he wanted something more.

He went on to enroll in the Center for Employment Training, pursuing his goal of becoming a Medical Assistant. Today, he works at Doctor's on Duty, proud of how far he's come and determined to keep going.

His mother, Inocencia Martinez, shares that pride.

"It's super rewarding when you see that there is a change in their behavior, in their mindset. They are more motivated, start to build confidence, and see that they are capable of achieving their goals because there is a team of people believing in them like our program does."

Fredy's story and Yaneli's work reflect what Road to Success is designed to be, a partnership built on patience, trust, and

belief. A program where youth and families are met where they are, and invited to keep moving forward, even on the days that push and pull. ☺

To Learn More: Sun Street Centers, Road to Success Program 641 Broadway Street, King City, CA www.SunStreetCenters.org



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A Tale of Todos Santos...and Two Puppies

By Lorri Koster



I have been visiting the Los Cabos region of Baja California Sur in Mexico for 40 years. While I have seen and driven by freeway signs pointing directions to the town of Todos Santos (on the Pacific Ocean side of the state), I'm a bit embarrassed to say I had yet to venture over to explore the quaint Mexican town—until this past Spring. It did not disappoint.

Visiting Todos Santos (“All Saints”) is like taking a step back in time. Tourism has yet to “Americanize” the small coastal town. It sits nestled in the foothills of Mexico’s Sierra de la Laguna Mountains, on the vast

Pacific Coast side of the Baja Peninsula. It is about an hour’s drive North of Cabo San Lucas. While my girlfriends and I didn’t brave the drive over ourselves (thank you, Jovani!) it was a comfortable distance and more convenient than I thought with just a little bit of congestion making our way through Cabo San Lucas. Todos Santos is located at the Tropic of Cancer in the municipality of La Paz. The town is known for its historical significance, surfing, a regionally pleasurable climate, and the arts. We explored and enjoyed it all (well, except the surfing).

History

The region that now includes Todos Santos was originally inhabited by the Guaycura people (Waicura, Waikuri, Guaycuri), a nomadic hunter-gatherer group whose range extended to modern day Loreto. In the early days of Spanish settlement, a mission was established in what is now Todos Santos, Misión Santa Rosa de las Palmas, founded by Father Jaime Bravo in 1723. In 1724, it was renamed Nuestra Señora del Pilar de La Paz. Located across the street to the southwest from the small-town plaza, this mission contains the statue of the Virgin of Pilar, which is the focus of Todos Santos’s main festival held every November. We found the Mission to be the heart and soul of the town. We joined many visitors stopping in to say a brief prayer and reflect.

During the 19th century, following the secularization of the missions, Todos Santos thrived as the Baja sugarcane capital, supporting eight sugar mills at the end of the 19th century. Only one existed by the time the town’s freshwater spring dried up in 1950, and that last mill closed in 1965. As we got closer to the town, we entered a more



agrarian region with farmlands and crop cultivation.

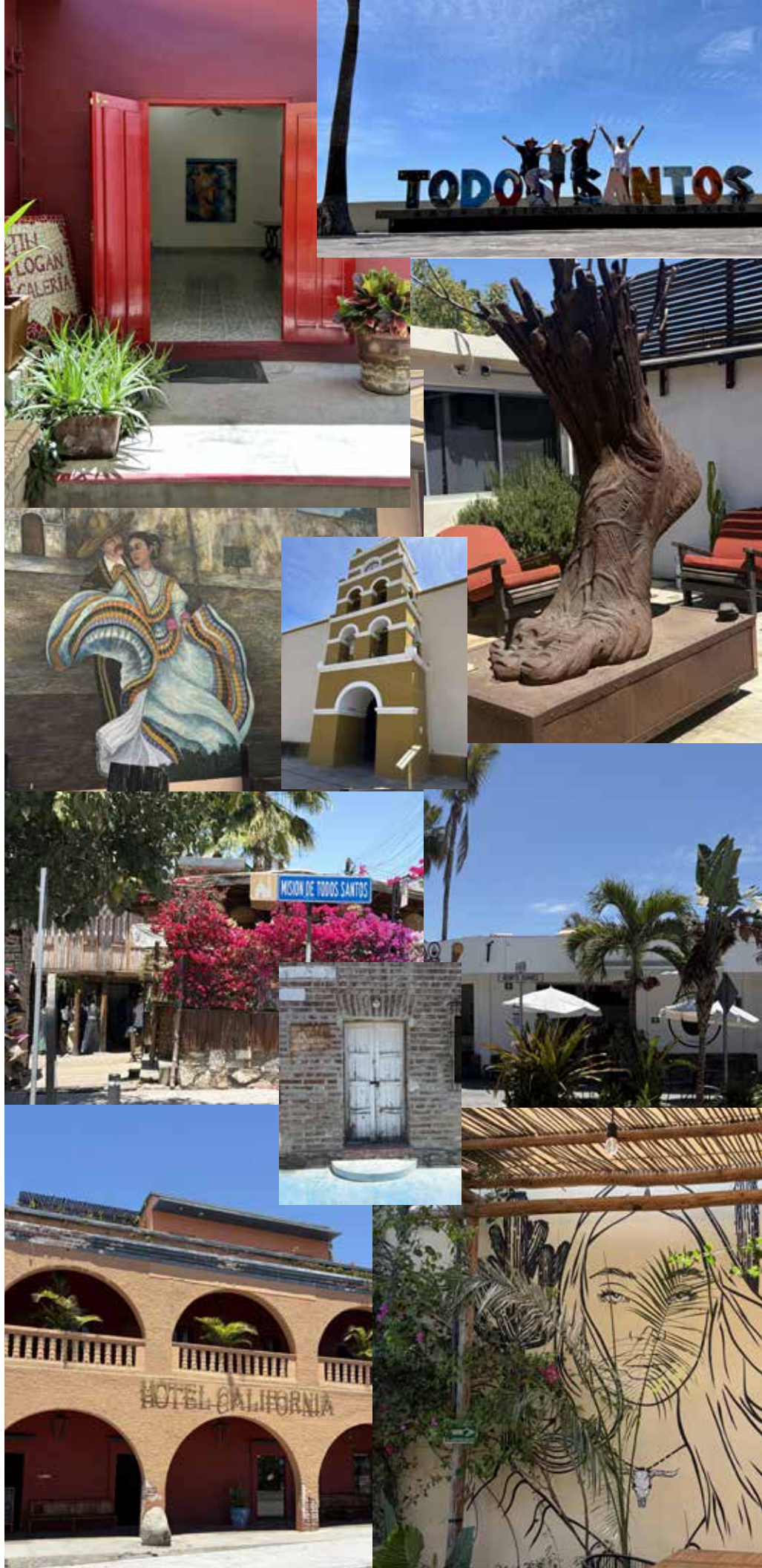
Todos Santos faced a bleak future until the spring came back to life in 1981 and the Mexican Government paved Highway 19 in the mid-1980s. The highway brought tourists and the rich farmlands have been revived. The town now prospers from farming vegetables, chilies, avocados, papayas, and mangoes, as well as from fishing and ranching.

Today's Todos Santos

Of course, no visit to Todos Santos would be complete without a visit to the famed Hotel California. The Hotel California is a favorite stop because of the name association with the song made famous by the Eagles. Spoiler alert: the song does not specifically reference this particular hotel, nor any other existing hotel, but we did our part to keep the myth alive!

Our day in Todos Santos reminded me of what Los Cabos looked like 40 years ago. There wasn't a Domino's Pizza in sight! The infrastructure is more dated, but the streets were clean, the art galleries aplenty with sophisticated boutiques discovered amongst the outdoor shopping markets.

We found the people to be warm and welcoming and our lunch delicious. Many galleries and boutiques are owned and managed by Americans that have fled the hustle and bustle of the States for a quieter more relaxed lifestyle. My highlight was meeting puppy "Chai" who had a proud and friendly owner who tolerated our fawning over him and picture taking. At our lunch spot we were greeted by the owner's puppy we called "Soxie" with his four spotted paws. He was the unofficial greeter sporting his red bow tie and charming all the guests. It took me 40 years to get there but I'm so glad I did. Muchas Gracias, Todos Santos. ☺



Preserving the Story of Motion

How Tony Singer Safeguards a Visual History That Still Shapes the Central Coast



In an era defined by speed—of information, of technology, of daily life—it is increasingly rare to encounter something designed to last.

Images today are fleeting. They are created, shared, and forgotten in seconds, replaced by an endless stream of new content. Yet in a quiet studio in Carmel Valley, one collector has devoted his life to preserving a different kind of visual language—one that was never meant to disappear.

Everett Anton “Tony” Singer, founder of Vintage Auto Posters, has spent more than four decades collecting, preserving, and stewarding original automobile posters dating from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century. These works are not simply decorative objects. They are artifacts of a transformative period—when the automobile reshaped landscapes, economies, and the way people understood movement itself.

For regions like the Central Coast, where agriculture, transportation, and land use are

deeply interconnected, that story remains highly relevant.

Before Screens, There Were Posters

Long before digital media and mass broadcasting, posters were one of the most powerful tools for communication and persuasion.

Commissioned by automobile manufacturers, race organizers, and tourism agencies, these works were designed to capture attention and inspire imagination. They combined bold typography, striking illustration, and emerging modernist design principles to convey not just products or events, but entire ways of thinking.

The automobile was not simply introduced as a machine—it was presented as a symbol of progress, independence, and possibility. “These posters show what people believed the future could be,” Singer has said. “They made the idea of movement aspirational.”

For agricultural regions, this shift was profound. The rise of motorized transport

altered how goods moved from field to market, how labor traveled across regions, and how rural communities connected to broader economic systems.

In many ways, these posters document the early visual narrative of modernization—one that continues to shape rural and agricultural life today.

A Record of Cultural and Economic Transformation

Singer’s collection spans a critical period in global and American history, from the earliest days of organized motor racing to the height of mid-century automotive culture.

Among the works he preserves are posters tied to landmark events such as early Grand Prix races in Europe and endurance competitions like Le Mans. These events were not only sporting spectacles; they were testing grounds for engineering innovation and symbols of national pride.

The artistry of these posters reflects that significance. Artists such as Michel Beligond, Erich Strenger, and Mich (Michel Liebeaux) brought together precision, drama, and visual storytelling to capture the spirit of speed and competition.

“As more aspects of life move online, there is a growing appreciation for objects that carry tangible history.”

But beyond their aesthetic value, these works serve as historical documents. They reveal how societies envisioned progress—how technology, industry, and movement were presented to the public as forces that would define the future.

For readers of Coastal Grower, this connection is more than abstract. The



Grand Prix Dieppe 1907 poster World famous poster, by Mich, for the Automobile Club de France and this very early race event. Has tax stamp. Superb colors. The race, 10 laps of 48 miles each, was won by Felice Nazzaro in a Fiat. 28.6" x 41", guaranteed original and professionally archival linen mounted.

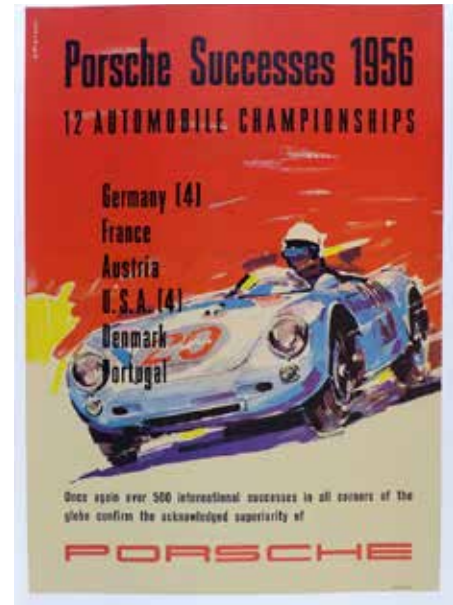
same period that saw the rise of automotive culture also marked significant changes in agricultural production, distribution, and labor mobility. The ability to transport goods more efficiently reshaped farming operations and expanded market reach, while also introducing new dependencies on infrastructure and fuel.

Preservation as Stewardship

Unlike many forms of modern media, these posters were not created to endure indefinitely. Printed on fragile paper and exposed to the elements, they were often discarded once their immediate purpose had passed.

Preserving them requires both technical expertise and a deep understanding of their historical value.

Each piece in Singer's collection is authenticated and professionally linen-mounted using museum-grade archival techniques. This process stabilizes the paper, prevents further deterioration, and ensures that the work can be handled and displayed without compromising its integrity.



Porsche Successes 1956. The great and rare Strenger watercolor-gauche poster; by far the most difficult to find. Page 44/45 of Lewandowski, with English language. 23" x 32.75", guaranteed original and professionally archival linen mounted.



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This kind of preservation mirrors broader conversations happening across agriculture and land management today. Just as farmers work to maintain soil health, conserve water, and protect long-term productivity, cultural preservation involves safeguarding resources that cannot be replaced once lost.

In both cases, stewardship is about recognizing value beyond the immediate moment.

A Central Coast Perspective on Permanence

The Central Coast has long-balanced tradition and innovation. It is a region where generational knowledge in agriculture meets evolving technologies in sustainability, logistics, and production.

Singer's work reflects a similar tension—between the permanence of physical artifacts and the impermanence of modern digital culture.

As more aspects of life move online, there is a growing appreciation for objects that carry tangible history. Original posters, with their texture, scale, and visual impact, offer a sense of continuity that digital images cannot replicate.

This is particularly relevant in design and architecture, where historical elements are increasingly integrated into contemporary spaces. Whether in hospitality settings, agricultural estates, or commercial environments, these works provide a visual anchor—connecting present-day spaces to a broader narrative of innovation and change.

The Enduring Narrative of Movement

At its core, Singer's collection tells a story about movement—not only of vehicles, but of ideas.

The automobile changed how people experienced distance, time, and opportunity. It enabled new forms of commerce, reshaped rural economies, and altered the physical and cultural landscape.

The posters that accompanied this transformation captured that moment of belief—the sense that technology could redefine what was possible.

Today, as industries including agriculture face new transitions driven by sustainability, climate considerations, and technological

advancement, similar questions arise. How do we balance progress with preservation? How do we honor the past while adapting to the future?

Historical artifacts like those preserved by Singer offer a lens through which to consider these questions. They remind us that every era defines progress in its own way—and that the narratives we create around innovation can shape how it is understood for generations.

Looking Ahead

While the mediums of communication have changed, the need to document and interpret moments of transformation remain constant.

Singer's work underscores the importance of preserving not only objects, but the stories they carry. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how industries, communities, and landscapes evolve over time.

On the Central Coast, where agriculture continues to adapt to new realities, these lessons are particularly resonant. The story of motion—of how people, goods, and ideas move through the world—is still being written. And through careful preservation of the past, it becomes possible to better understand the path forward. ☞

Beyond Access

Cultivating Inclusive Learning Environments at Hartnell College



In the Central Coast region, conversations about workforce readiness, agricultural innovation, and community sustainability often take center stage. Increasingly, another important issue is emerging alongside them: ensuring that every student—regardless of how they learn—has the opportunity to succeed in higher education and beyond.

At Hartnell College, this effort is taking shape through a growing commitment to supporting neurodivergent students, including those on the autism spectrum or with other intellectual and developmental differences. As Hartnell serves a diverse student population closely connected to the region’s agricultural and business communities, this work extends beyond education and into the future strength of the Central Coast workforce.

For many students, the transition to college can be challenging. Neurodivergent students often face additional hurdles as structured high school schedules shift to more independent learning environments that require time management, navigating complex systems, and self-advocacy.

Recognizing both the need and the opportunity, Hartnell College was recently



the inaugural “Beyond Access” workshop. The event marked the beginning of what is expected to become an ongoing regional collaboration focused on sharing strategies and best practices.

A key concept highlighted during the workshop was Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an approach that encourages educators to build flexibility into courses from the outset rather than making accommodations later.

including attention to detail, deep focus, innovative problem-solving, and persistence. In industries such as agriculture technology, logistics, research, and data analysis, these skills are increasingly valuable.

By creating inclusive learning environments, institutions like Hartnell are helping students succeed while also strengthening the region’s workforce.

“Ultimately, the goal is to foster an



selected as one of only eight community colleges in California to participate in specialized neurodiversity training through the UCLA Tarjan Center. Supported by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, the initiative focuses on improving institutional support for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In February 2026, Hartnell’s Department of Supportive Programs and Services (DSPS) expanded the training into a regional convening, inviting faculty, counselors, and student support professionals from across Monterey County to participate in

Examples include providing clear instructions, breaking assignments into manageable steps, offering multiple ways for students to demonstrate understanding, and creating opportunities for ongoing feedback.

While these strategies benefit neurodivergent students, they also strengthen the learning experience for all students. The concept mirrors practices already familiar within the agricultural community, where growers adapt to varying conditions to produce successful outcomes.

Neurodivergent students also bring valuable strengths to the classroom and workforce,

environment where students feel understood, supported, and empowered,” said Kevin O’Haire, Director of Student Affairs within DSPS at Hartnell. “This work extends beyond the classroom—it’s about building systems that help students transition successfully into careers and community life.”

As the Beyond Access initiative continues to grow, Hartnell’s efforts reflect a broader shift in higher education—moving beyond simply opening doors and toward ensuring every student has the support and opportunity to thrive.

It All Begins With The Season!

By Todd Fisher



Everyone assumes that because my Beautiful Bride and I own The Meatery, where we sell prime beef, lamb, poultry, fish, and game, that that's where every menu starts. The truth is every menu, dish, recipe starts in the field and what season we are in.

Before I think about cuts, or cooking methods, or even what's going in the case this week, I'm paying attention to what's coming out of the Salinas Valley and the surrounding counties. Because no matter how good the protein is—and it simply has to be good—it doesn't exist in a vacuum.

Now all of you "Liver King" following, Carnivore crusaders may be okay with meat, meat, and more meat, but the majority of us prefer to balance our plate with vegetables, greens, potatoes, legumes. Life is about balance, you hear it said all the time, we can't all be wrong, can we?!

In a restaurant or even in your home kitchen, the plate only works if everything on it makes sense together. It is the curating of ingredients and the tuning of technique that bring the symphony together to satisfy our palates.

And this time of year, Lady Summer tells you exactly what that should look and sound like.

From Field to Plate and My Process

June, July, August—are not interchangeable.

They shift, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically around these parts. We've fallen into a rhythm of treating seasonality like a mere suggestion. But it's non-negotiable. It's the definitive line between a plate that is technically accurate and one that truly sings with intent and flavor.

In June, everything is still leaning green. The lettuces are pristine, arugula has that perfect radishy bite, strawberries are bright but not overly sweet. It's a time for lighter hands. When that's what's showing up, I'm not reaching for the heavier, hearty cuts that need long cooking processes. I'm thinking about letting the clean, clear flavors of the season be the acid and pepper to my grilled steak, chicken, or lamb. I want those greens to do their job and help carry the dish.

By July, things begin to open up. Stone fruit comes into its own, tomatoes start to mean something again. This is when you can step back and let ingredients speak. Grill a steak, smoke some pork ribs, sure—but don't overthink it. The stone fruits become your sweetness, the cruciferous vegetables become your slaw and allow for all those rich animal fats to get scrubbed from your palate between each bite, so it is decadent again and again.

Then August hits, and everything intensifies. Tomatoes step into that identity crisis phase, where they are sweet enough to remind us they are a fruit but have that underlying savory salinity, almost refusing to be framed in one category. Melons are lush and sweet, almost dripping with decadence and late-season fruit has real weight to it. That's when richer cuts start to make more sense. Pork shoulder, Beef ribs, brisket, fattier lamb shoulders, things that can stand up to what's happening on the produce aisle. Don't sleep on a fruit forward, savory baseline, Watermelon & Tomato Salad with Smoked Lamb Shoulder...some mint and basil to set off the dish. That is late summer whispering sweet nothings to you...

At The Meatery, we'll always focus on the best quality proteins you can get your hands on. That's the foundation of our business. We will

walk you through the process, make sure you have the technique and know how to make a great steak. But the truth is, the best meals we see don't start with the meat.

They start with the season and so should you!

As a closing thought,

We spend a lot of time in this industry trying to explain produce—how it's grown, why it matters, what makes it different.

But maybe the better approach is simpler.

Eat it at the right time.

Handle it with a little care.

Let it speak for itself.

Because summer in Monterey County isn't about complicated food.

It's about timing.

And if you get the timing right, the food does the work for you.

Slow-Roasted Pork Shoulder with Grilled Stone Fruit

Ingredients

- 4–5 lb Pachamama Pork shoulder
- Salt, pepper
- Garlic, fennel seed, chili flakes - Optional
- Olive oil

Method

- Season aggressively, rest overnight if possible
- Roast low (300°F) for 4–5 hours until tender
- Finish hot or shred rustic

Grilled Stone Fruit Component

- Peaches / plums halved
- Olive oil
- Salt
- Optional: honey + vinegar glaze

Grill hard + fast

- Char cut side first
- Finish with light glaze (acid + sweetness)

Serve

- Pork on platter
- Grilled fruit alongside or chopped into a relish
- Add arugula or herb salad for lift ☞

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Grower Shipper Foundation's Ag Woman of the Year

Photos Courtesy of Ivan Garcia



City of Gonzales' Economic Development Committee.

Liz is a volunteer at Rancho Cielo, Monterey County Ag Education's Farm Day, Monterey County Fair Heritage, St. Theodore Catholic Church, Salinas Valley Recycles, Girls Inc., Lions Club, Salinas Valley Fair and the California Rodeo Salinas.

Beyond her professional achievements, Liz is a mentor, role model, and tireless advocate for the agricultural community and for young people in the area. She was instrumental in developing the Youth Council at the Gonzales City Council.

One special aspect of this event is when, unbeknownst to them, the award recipient's family sneaks in and surprises the winner with their presence. This year was especially poignant when Liz realized her 96-year-old mother made the day!

Liz was celebrated by past award recipients, community leaders, and agriculture industry professionals all in support of Ag Against Hunger.

An annual tradition recognizing women leaders in agriculture celebrated its 30th anniversary this past Spring at McIntyre Vineyards in the Salinas Valley's Santa Lucia Mountains. Attendees were encouraged to wear their pearls in recognition of the 30th year milestone.

This year's worthy recipient is Liz Silva, Gonzales City Council Mayor Pro Tem. Born in Salinas and raised in Gonzales, she attended local schools and has remained active in the community.

Liz's agriculture career started at Chiquita where she spent 17 years as an executive assistant. Following that she was an executive coordinator at Fresh Express for six years. Most recently she was a planting schedule coordinator for Ippolito Group.

An active volunteer and community leader, Liz serves on the Gonzales City Council, she is a member of California Women for Agriculture and serves as an alternate on the Association of California Cities Allied with Public Safety. She also serves on the





Monterey County Sheriff Advisory Council Shootout

Photos Courtesy of Stafford Bain



This past May a unique event was held at the Swiss Rifle Club in Gonzales, California to benefit the Monterey County Sheriff's Advisory Council. Funds were raised to support the Council's mission of supporting the men and women who serve and protect our communities.

The Council is a non-profit organization made up of dedicated community members who partner with the Monterey County Sheriff's Office to provide critical resources not covered by the County budget. Through generous donations from individuals and businesses alike the money helps fund:

- Emergency equipment and technology to enhance public safety
- Community outreach programs that build trust and connection
- Training and wellness programs for deputies and staff
- Support for the families of fallen or injured officers

The competition had 10 shooters rotate through five different shooting stations featuring a variety of long-distance challenges measuring marksmanship ability and ability to manage stress of competition amongst peers.

This year's first place winner was John Bibb taking home \$2,500 followed by second place winner Daniel Esterly who took home \$1,000. Over \$120,000 was raised with some 190 people in attendance to support sheriffs in Monterey County.

Every dollar raised goes directly toward making Monterey County a safer and stronger place for all of us. Whether it's supplying lifesaving equipment, supporting K-9 units, or assisting with youth programs, contributions help bridge the gap between what is needed and what is available.

For more information visit: www.sheriffadvisorycouncil.org.





Animal Friends Rescue Project

Dine for a Cause Unites Community, Coastal Hospitality and Compassion for Furry Friends

By Mike Hale



On a late-winter Sunday in Carmel, diners gathered at Hatch Southwest Kitchen for more than margaritas and Southwestern comfort food. They came to share a meal with purpose — and in doing so, helped support hundreds of animals still waiting for their second chance.

The annual Dine for a Cause fundraiser returned this past Spring to the Barnyard Shopping Village, transforming an ordinary day of dining into a celebration of support for Animal Friends Rescue Project (AFRP). Throughout the day, 10 percent of restaurant sales were donated to the Pacific Grove-based nonprofit, helping fund lifesaving care for rescued dogs and cats across California.

Started eight years ago by Annee Martin (founder, owner, and president of Sanctuary Vacation Rentals in Carmel) the free event began as a way for Martin to give back to the organization that rescued the dog that she now dotes over. She named her Gracee Blossom Joy because “she spreads love and joy wherever she goes,” Martin said. “AFRP chose my husband and myself to be her human parents and we are so grateful.”

Gracee has also become the ‘Ambassador for Goodwill’ for Martin’s business and even has her own social media platform. At the fundraiser, the pooch quickly became one of the day’s most popular attendees as guests stopped to greet her, snap photos, and hear the story of a once-stray dog whose journey from hardship to happiness reflects AFRP’s mission.

More Than a Fundraiser

Guests who visited Hatch throughout the day met AFRP volunteers and program animals, many encountering the organization for the first time. Those introductions often lead to foster applications, adoptions and donations in the weeks that follow, expanding the event’s impact well beyond a single afternoon.

“We love any event that brings our community together, and this long-standing event is one that many people look forward to each year,” said Laurie Machado, executive director of AFRP. “Any time you can combine great food, great company, and a good cause is always a reason to celebrate.”

While the annual event raises modest but meaningful funds through restaurant proceeds — averaging about \$375 in past years — its true value extends far beyond the dollars collected.

“Grassroots marketing events like this are very key to our organization,” Machado said. “Much of our 28-year success has been because of our ties to the community and the opportunity to meet people in person — especially when we can bring our program animals out, too.”

A Rescue Model Built on Homes, Not Kennels

Animal Friends Rescue Project is a fully foster-based organization, meaning every animal in its program lives in a volunteer home rather than a shelter environment. AFRP provides medical care, supplies and





adoption support while foster families offer stability and compassion during recovery and transition.

Funds raised during Dine for a Cause flow directly into the nonprofit's "where it's needed most" fund — a vital resource covering everything from food and bedding to vaccines, dental care, and complex surgeries.

Over the past seven years alone, AFRP has welcomed

more than 3,600 dogs and cats into its program. Some arrive needing only routine care before adoption, while others require extensive medical intervention. The organization has treated parvovirus in dogs, feline infectious peritonitis in cats, repaired broken bones and performed intricate corrective surgeries — refusing to turn away animals simply because their care may be costly or complicated.

Each success story depends on partnerships with local businesses willing to invest in the cause.

Hospitality With Heart

As the official sponsor of the fundraiser, Sanctuary Vacation Rentals honors a commitment to hospitality that extends well beyond welcoming visitors to the Monterey Peninsula.

“Over the past seven years alone, AFRP has welcomed more than 3,600 dogs and cats into its program.”

Founded in 2008 by Martin, the company represents more than 200 homes across the region. Central to the company's philosophy is a belief that strong communities are built through compassion, connection and giving back.

“What drives me is my love for people and wanting to give them the best experience they can have while they're here,” Martin said. “We've all been strangers at some point — I just want people to feel welcome.” Of course, Sanctuary offers numerous pet-friendly vacation homes and actively supports many other animal welfare organizations, inspired in part by the story of Gracee Blossom Joy. Adopted after being found wandering the streets of Salinas in poor condition, Gracee's transformation into a joyful companion continues to influence the company's charitable efforts.

Machado noted that Martin's ongoing support years after adopting her “heart dog” speaks to the lasting bond created through rescue. “It is evidence of the power of the love that a rescue dog brings to a family,” she said.



A New Restaurant Joins the Mission

This year also marked a new partnership with Hatch Southwest Kitchen, one of Carmel's newest dining destinations. Restaurant owner Kristen Ridout said participating in the fundraiser felt like a natural fit for both her business and her family.

“As an animal lover, I've always wanted to give back in a meaningful way, and this fundraiser really resonated with us,” Ridout said. “My family has three dogs, a cat, and a parrot. We love animals and truly view them as our family members.”

Ridout added that Hatch's pet-friendly patio helped create a welcoming atmosphere for guests and their companions throughout the event.

“Our restaurant is brand new and has a beautiful pet-friendly patio, along with some food for the pups that come to dine with us,” she said. “We invited everyone to join us for drinks — margaritas, anyone? — and Southwestern food, including tacos, burritos, nachos and burgers.”

The Ripple Effect of Community

For AFRP, Dine for a Cause represents something larger than a single fundraiser. It is a reminder that community engagement — conversations shared over meals, introductions to rescue animals, and local businesses stepping forward — sustains the organization's work year-round.

“The impact goes far beyond the day itself,” Machado said. “Every connection we make helps animals not just today, but in the future.” For more information visit: www.animalfriendsrescue.org.

Natividad's Residency Leader Earns Top National Honor

The teaching hospital's family medicine director is recognized as the best in the country—and the farmworkers who feed the nation stand to benefit

By Hillary Fish

When the American Academy of Family Physicians and the Association (AAFP) of Family Medicine Residency Directors (AFMRD) went looking for the nation's best residency program director, they found her at Natividad Medical Center in the heart of the Salinas Valley.

Melissa Nothnagle, MD, MSc, director of the Family Medicine Residency Program and chief of Family Medicine at Natividad, has been named the recipient of the Nikitas J. Zervanos Outstanding Program Director Award, the highest national honor in family medicine residency education, presented only when an outstanding candidate with more than 10 years of experience exists. Dr. Nothnagle received the award this past Spring at AAFP's Residency Leadership Summit in Dallas, Texas.

A nationally recognized leader in family medicine education, Dr. Nothnagle has directed residency programs for more than 14 years. The AFMRD designated her a Gold Level Program Director in 2021, and in 2022, the American Medical Women's Association selected her as an Inspire Award winner for her academic and clinical work in reproductive justice.

"Natividad is the only teaching hospital in Monterey County."

Before joining Natividad in 2017, she directed the Brown University Family Medicine Residency. Since arriving in Salinas, she has built a residency cohort that is diverse, service-minded, and deeply connected to the communities they serve. Most residents speak Spanish, and many come from agricultural communities like the Salinas Valley.

"One of the greatest privileges of my career is helping train the next generation of family physicians at Natividad," Dr. Nothnagle said. "Our residents are learning not only excellent clinical care, but also how to serve their communities with compassion and purpose."

Natividad is the only teaching hospital in Monterey County, and its Family Medicine Residency program is affiliated with the University of California San Francisco. One of more than 800 family medicine residency programs nationwide, Natividad's program is in its 51st year and trains 30 physicians over three years. Those doctors work in the clinics and delivery rooms that serve the farm workers, packers, and families who sustain the Salinas Valley's fields and harvest — and



(l to r): Dr. Walter Mills, Maria Fisk, Claudia Tovar, Dr. Melissa Nothnagle, Tami Robertson, Dr. Minerva Perez-Lopez, Dr. Christina Zaro.

about half go on to practice on the Central Coast. The program is an important part of Natividad's mission of improving the health of the people of Monterey County.

At Natividad, Dr. Nothnagle supervises residents, maintains her own patient panel, practices obstetrics, and serves as an attending physician on the inpatient service.

Her colleagues describe a physician who leads by example. "Melissa is admired for her clinical acumen, her bedside teaching, her gift of mentorship and her administrative prowess," said Dr. Marc Tunzi, senior associate program director at Natividad. "The residents adore her, the faculty revere her, and the institutional leadership leans on her."

That sentiment is echoed by those she has trained. Dr. Victor Carrasco, a former chief resident and Natividad hospitalist, said: "Dr. Nothnagle has dedicated her career to serving and empowering marginalized communities. She elevates the caliber of her residents, colleagues, and the future of full-spectrum Family Medicine."

The Salinas Valley grows food for the nation — lettuce, strawberries, broccoli, and more, harvested by families who deserve world-class care. It deserves physicians who are equally committed to the people who make that possible. In Dr. Melissa Nothnagle, it has one — and thanks to the program she leads, it has many more.

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Pick It Up — Pay It Forward

One Local Restaurant Group's Commitment to Community Investment Pays Huge Dividends

By Mike Hale



While dining at Montrieo, Tarpys or Rio Grill, the clink of glasses and the hum of conversation feel like a celebration of the Monterey Peninsula itself. But tucked inside every takeout bag leaving the kitchen is something less visible — and far more enduring. It's a community connection with a local heartbeat.

Through the three restaurants (each a celebrated culinary destination for 30 years or more), Coastal Roots Hospitality (CRH) donates 10 percent of every to-go order to a rotating local nonprofit partner through a program called Pick It Up — Pay It Forward. Born as a crisis response during the darkest days of COVID, it has grown into one of the region's most consistent and quietly powerful philanthropic engines — raising more than \$400,000 for Monterey County nonprofits since its inception.

A Program Born of Uncertainty

In 2020, as dining rooms shuttered and uncertainty gripped the hospitality industry, Ken Donkersloot and his wife Mona Calis had just purchased the Peninsula's iconic trio of restaurants. The future was anything but guaranteed, so rather than retreat, they leaned in.

The couple conceived Pick It Up — Pay It Forward as an emergency lifeline — a way to support essential services when nonprofits were stretched thin and traditional fundraising events had vanished overnight. Every takeout order became a micro-investment in their community.

Six years later, the program remains embedded in daily operations

— not as a seasonal campaign or symbolic gesture, but as a permanent pillar of the business model. “For us, this program represents more than a donation — it's a partnership,” said CRH CEO Ken Donkersloot, whose company motto — Faith, Family, Friends, and Food — guides the organization's philosophy. “We wanted to build something lasting that connects our guests, our team and the organizations doing the hardest work in our community. Six years in, we're proud that Pick It Up — Pay It Forward is still growing and still making a difference.”

A Predictable Lifeline

Unlike traditional check presentations or one-off galas, Pick It Up — Pay It Forward operates on a rotating two-month schedule. The structure offers something rare in the nonprofit world: predictability. Each nonprofit partner knows exactly when its giving period will occur — and can plan accordingly.

The 2026 partners include:

- January/February: The Bridge Restoration Ministry
- March/April: CASA of Monterey County
- May/June: Monterey County Film Commission
- July/August: Community Partnership for Youth
- September/October: Monterey County Youth Museum (MY Museum)
- November/December: Seneca Kinship Center

Over the years, the program has supported a wide swath of Monterey





County nonprofits, including the Monterey County Food Bank, Monterey Rape Crisis Center, Loaves, Fishes & Computers, Set Free Monterey Bay, and the Monterey Firefighters Community Foundation — among many others.

Causes Close to the Heart

While Pick It Up — Pay It Forward provides structured, rotating support, Coastal Roots Hospitality’s philanthropic footprint extends even further. One cause especially meaningful to the owners is Task Force Antal, a volunteer-led initiative supporting military personnel in bringing endangered Afghan families — who had assisted U.S. troops — safely out of Taliban-controlled regions following the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

CRH launched a fundraising drive and matched donations dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000. The effort raised more than \$50,000, with the company contributing half of the total funds. It was a hands-on, values-

driven response — one rooted not in publicity, but in conviction.

Closer to home, Interim, Inc. remains a frequent Pick It Up — Pay It Forward beneficiary. Each year, Coastal Roots Hospitality prepares and presents more than 800 meals at Christmas and Thanksgiving to support mentally and physically challenged adults served by the organization.

“We run this program as a volunteer opportunity for our staff to present an opportunity to give back,” Donkersloot said. For the team, it’s more than a career — it’s community.

Philanthropy From The Inside Out

Coastal Roots Hospitality’s commitment to giving begins internally. The company offers health insurance to part-time employees working 20 hours or more, free telemedicine for all staff, and language and educational assistance to help team members grow professionally. The belief is simple: care for employees first, and exceptional guest experiences will follow.

Even four-legged community members are included. Through Monterey Gives and a Patio Pet Menu program, a portion of designated pet-friendly menu items benefits Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, Max’s Helping Paws Foundation and Animal Friends Rescue Project.

Everyday Acts, Lasting Impact

What makes Pick It Up — Pay It Forward remarkable is its simplicity. No ticket required. No gala attire. No separate donation portal. Just a meal. A family picking up takeout. A couple ordering in. A busy professional grabbing a bite between commitments. Each transaction becomes a thread in a larger fabric of giving — woven seamlessly into daily life.

In a region known for its natural beauty and tight-knit spirit, Coastal Roots Hospitality has created a model that feels distinctly Monterey County: collaborative, consistent and community-first.



Gil Basketball Academy Celebrates 17 Years of Mentorship, Leadership and Community Impact

Photos Courtesy of Richard Green Photography

Community pride and purpose filled the room as Gil Basketball Academy (GBA) celebrated its 17th Anniversary Court Heroes Gala — an evening dedicated to recognizing leadership, awarding scholarships, and supporting youth development across the Salinas Valley.

The annual Dinner & Dance brought together families, alumni, civic leaders, educators, and supporters who share a belief that mentorship and structured opportunity can transform young lives. Since its founding in 2009, Gil Basketball Academy has grown into a year-round program serving more than 350 youth annually through basketball training, leadership development, college tours, competitive travel teams, and international cultural exchange experiences.

A highlight of the evening was the recognition of Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas as the 2026 GBA Court Hero, honoring his leadership, service, and commitment to youth in the Salinas Valley. His presence underscored the importance of investing in programs that strengthen communities and create pathways to success.

The program also celebrated Heart of GBA Award recipient Fredo Fontanez, whose consistent mentorship and dedication have helped shape the Academy's culture for nearly two decades.

Two outstanding student-athletes were recognized with the Coach Solis Memorial Scholarship. Diego Hernandez, a varsity athlete and aspiring first-generation college student, plans to pursue a degree in business marketing. Syree Barrios, an Alisal High School senior and student leader, will study international relations with the goal of building a career in communications and public affairs.

Funds raised during the Gala directly support Gil Basketball Academy programs that provide mentorship, academic exposure, travel opportunities, and leadership development.

The evening concluded with live entertainment, dancing, and renewed commitment from community supporters — a powerful reminder that Gil Basketball Academy is not simply about basketball, but about building confident young leaders prepared for college, careers, and life.





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UnitedAg continues its commitment to the agricultural community with the opening of its new Health & Wellness Clinic in Salinas expanding access to high-quality, culturally responsive care for farmworkers and their families.

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Healing Through Art

Student Voices Transform Salinas Valley Health

By Chris Haubert

At Salinas Valley Health, healing is taking on a new dimension—one shaped by color, culture, and the creative voices of local students. Through a new initiative led by President and CEO, Allen Radner, MD, student artwork now lines the medical center's corridors, transforming clinical spaces into a more welcoming and reflective environment for patients, families, and staff.

The project brings together original works from students at California State University, Monterey Bay, Hartnell College, and Rancho Cielo, offering young artists a meaningful platform to share their stories. In doing so, the medical center has created not just an art display, but a space where the cultural richness and diversity of the Salinas Valley are seen and celebrated.

“Fundamentally, we had little art. We had a medical center full of empty corridors, which was nice and clean, but it wasn’t engaging,” said Dr. Radner. “I saw an opportunity to make our medical center more inviting and interesting. I wanted to do something that was high quality and local. When you look at the walls now, it’s really astounding.”

The initiative was designed with intention—to enhance not only the patient experience, but also to uplift staff and families. As Dr. Radner explained, “Art has the ability to be reflective, inspiring, and joyful. We believed bringing it into our environment would add real value for



people during some of the most difficult moments in their lives.”

The collection includes roughly two dozen works, each offering a distinct voice. From deeply personal reflections on heritage to broader explorations of identity and community, the pieces form a visual narrative rooted in the region’s lived experiences.

For the student artists, the opportunity to display their work in a healthcare setting adds a meaningful dimension to their creative journeys. “I was raised in an immigrant family and am proud of my heritage,” said student artist Dayanara Silva. “The tapestry of my life is part of how I present my art. I am so grateful for the chance to share my work in a place where it can connect with people in a healing environment.”

The program was celebrated during a recent artist reception, where students and their families gathered alongside community members to honor the installation. Guided tours invited attendees to experience the artwork throughout the medical center, highlighting pieces located in the Emergency Department hallway, the Radiology Department, the Heart Center entrance, and the main lobby.

Organizers describe the initiative as a pilot program that has already exceeded expectations. With many walls still open, there is strong enthusiasm to expand the collection and continue showcasing new student voices in the future.

What began as a vision has quickly become something more—a living gallery of community expression. Today, the halls of Salinas Valley Health reflect the voices, histories, and creativity of the region, offering a powerful reminder that healing is not only physical, but emotional and cultural as well.





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Comics for Kids

This past April, the Inn at Spanish Bay came alive as more than 300 local leaders, partners, community members, and friends gathered for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County's (BGCMC) 33rd Annual Comics for Kids event.

Led by auction host Dina Ruiz and headlined by actor, comedian, and former Club kid Joel McHale, the event was elegant and memorable yet deeply rooted in connection and purpose. Guests were surrounded by the natural beauty of the Pacific coastline, and enjoyed performances by the young Club members whose journeys they have consistently supported

Cheering and laughter filled the room as the food and wine flowed, while every ticket purchased, bid made, and auction item won raised critical funds for BGCMC programs. These vital programs provide safe spaces, caring mentors, healthy, nutritious meals, education and workforce development, financial literacy, and opportunities for young people to discover their full potential.

What makes Comics for Kids special is not just the food, wine, or even the stunning setting. More than an evening of entertainment, it is a celebration of what becomes possible when a community invests in its young people, and a reminder that strong communities are built when the next generation is set up to thrive.

BGCMC extends heartfelt thanks to everyone who made Comics for Kids possible. Your partnership and generosity helps create brighter futures for youth across Monterey County, deepen connections and strengthen roots in the communities we all call home.

That's why, in honor of the families we serve and the commitment we've made to meeting our county's evolving needs, BGCMC is offering summer programs FREE of charge for the first time ever. The



future may be uncertain and costs may be rising, but safe, affordable, enriching summer programs for kids in our community are now guaranteed.

Visit www.bgcmc.org to learn more about how you can join us in giving every child the educational opportunities and summer experiences they deserve.

1): (l to r) Mike & Kim Costa, Cathy & Tony Alameda
2): (l to r) Teri Silva, Scott & Heather Ferreira
3): (l to r) Ron Roth, Isabel Firme, Vivien & Butch Lindley, Laura & Ted Mills
4): Tim Stejskal bidding during the Live Auction
5): Host Joel McHale, Actor and Comedian

American Cancer Society's Monterey Fashion Show

Photos Courtesy of Richard Green

This past Spring the annual and ever-popular American Cancer Society's fashion show was held at the Inn at Spanish Bay. Celebrating its 32nd year, the event presented an opportunity for attendees to raise funds and for models, courageous cancer survivors, to celebrate strength and resilience through fashion. Over 344 attendees and 22 amazing models helped make this event unforgettable—along with an amazing volunteer committee.

In loving memory of Shirley Lavorato, whose dedication to the community left a lasting impact, Butch Lindley received this year's Shirley Lavorato Award for leading with his heart, uniting the community and striving for a cure.

With attendees encouraged to dress in timeless old Hollywood attire, the event raised more than \$450,000 to help fund lifesaving cancer research, expand patient support services, and strengthen advocacy efforts. Together, survivors were celebrated, lost ones honored and a move was made to "fashioning" a world without cancer.



CALIFORNIA RODEO JULY 16-19 SALINAS 2026

*It's not just a good time,
it's a good cause.*



Photography by Phil Doyle

BY THE NUMBERS

The California Rodeo is the largest rodeo in the state and #15 in the US out of over 600 professional rodeos.

Our mission is to preserve and promote the traditions of the West. But that's not all. We have a big impact on the local economy.

THE IMPACT



\$21.8 Million

Annual economic impact



\$854,000

Annual donations to local community groups and non-profits



\$234,000

Scholarships awarded since program inception

THE EVENT



>92,000

Big Week attendance



> 460

Events held at the Salinas Sports Complex annually



1,400

Volunteers



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EMERALD CROWN



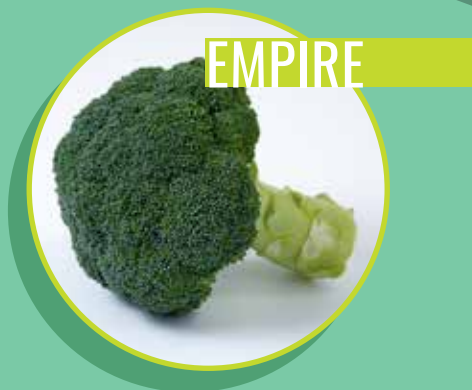
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DYNASTY



- HARVEST UNIFORMITY
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- CROWN CUT/SHORT TRIM
- OVERWINTER AND FALL HARVEST SLOTS IN COASTAL CALIFORNIA
- BLIND PLANT TOLERANT

MILLENNIUM

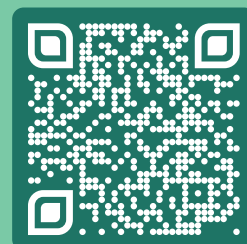


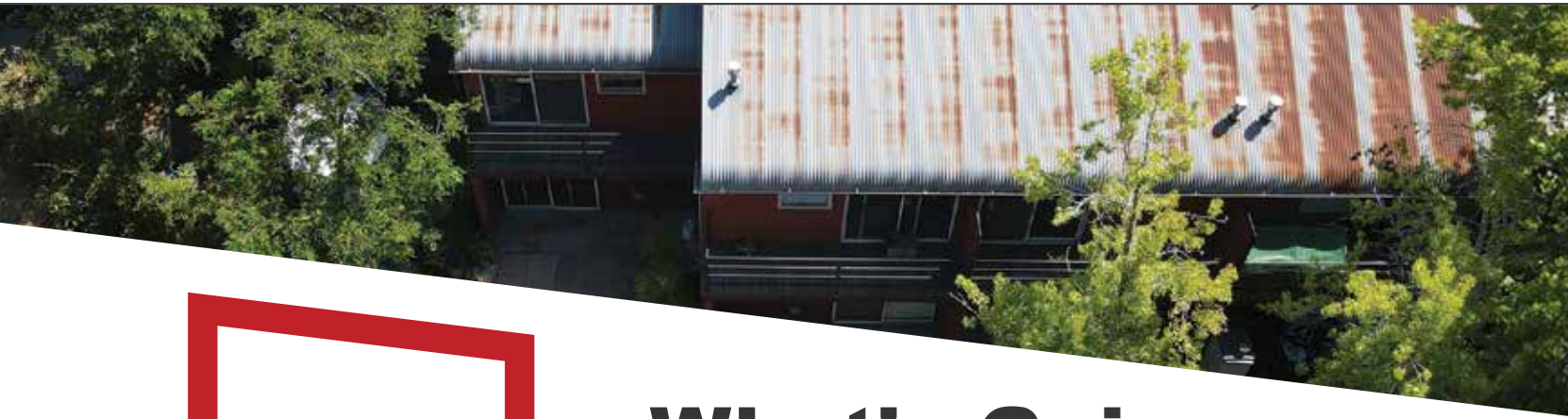
- EXCELLENT FOR CROWN CUT AND SHORT TRIM
- HIGH DOMED, FINE BEADED
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