



Demonstrators gathered Jan. 10 near the corner of First Street and South Livermore Avenue to join a Livermore Indivisible pop-up protest against recent national events. Among matters on the radar of those gathered was the U.S. capture of Venezuela's president, Nicolas Maduro, and his wife; potential further aggression toward Venezuela; and the shooting and killing of U.S. citizen Renee Nicole Good by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent in Minneapolis. (Photo — Leah Silveira)

Former Dublin Mayor Hernandez Running for Congressional Seat

Targeting Vacancy in House Created by Swalwell's Quest for Governor

By David Jen

TRI-VALLEY — Former Dublin Mayor Melissa Hernandez, a Democrat, announced her candidacy for U.S. Congress last week, joining the race for the House of Representatives seat that Congressman Eric Swalwell will vacate at the end of his term this year.

Swalwell, who is leaving Congress to run for governor of California, represents District 14, which covers the Tri-Valley and extends west to San Francisco Bay.

Hernandez, a Dublin resident for more than 30 years, hopes to leverage her experience representing wide portions of the county to bring relatable issues to the federal

level.

"Congress is hardly working, and they're a little bit out of touch, because they're serving billionaires and special interests at our people's expenses," Hernandez told The Independent. "It seems like no one in power really cares right now."

Referring to the recent difficulties of passing the federal budget, she said, "I feel like (legislators) don't want to reach across the aisle. Reaching across the aisle sometimes is what you have to do. Just like in my negotiations with the developers (in Dublin), you want to make sure that you are getting what you can for your city. We made developers pay their way

when they come into our city, and if they build, they will provide services. They will be able to help us provide services that our residents have been used to."

Her priorities include health-care access and affordable housing at all income levels.

In addition to two terms as Dublin mayor, Hernandez draws from her work as Chair of the Valley Link Board of Directors, a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) director and the director of health-care services for Alameda County Supervisor David Haubert. She is the first Latina to have served as mayor of Dublin and on the BART Board of Directors.

She views healthy working

(See HERNANDEZ, page 6)

Dublin Teachers Vote No Confidence In District Superintendent Chris Funk

Student Needs, Communication and Budget Management Cited as Concerns

By Sanestina Hunter

DUBLIN — More than 90% of teachers represented by the Dublin Teachers Association (DTA) cast votes of "no confidence" in Dublin Unified School District Superintendent Chris Funk, citing alleged negligence toward student needs, miscommunications with staff and the community, and concerns over alleged budget mismanagement.

Funk, who has been in his present job since July 2021, announced last month that he plans to retire at the conclusion of the school year in June.

The vote comes as DTA, which

represents more than 700 educators, has reached an impasse with the district in contract negotiations and has entered mediation with the California Public Employment Relations Board.

The union alleged in a Jan. 7 statement that district spending priorities have shifted away from classrooms, saying spending on contractors and consultants has more than doubled to \$13 million.

The union also accused district leadership of circulating inaccurate information related to a \$3.6 million budget error. The district is facing a potential \$8.4 million reduction target for the 2026-27 school year, according to district

budget documents.

The \$3.6 million budget error was related to overstated vacancy savings. According to the district's 2025-26 First Interim Report, DUSD assumed \$3.6 million in savings from vacant positions that ultimately did not materialize, and internal checks failed to catch the error before the budget was adopted.

In a statement to The Independent, Brad Dobrzenski, president of DTA, said the union does not see a path forward in negotiations under Funk's leadership.

"DTA members have consistently implored Superintendent Funk to invest in students," Do-

(See NO CONFIDENCE, page 7)



Bay Area performer Deborah Del Mastro, spanning multiple genres, has been entertaining audiences since she was 18 years old. Her charisma and stage presence have been continually recognized both at home and abroad. (Photo courtesy of Deborah Del Mastro)

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Local Singer Spreads Magic through Song

The Talent of Deborah Del Mastro Has Brought Star Power to Tri-Valley Over Years

By Christina Cavallaro

TRI-VALLEY — Deborah Del Mastro is a true Tri-Valley treasure — just three minutes into one of her performances feels like discovering gold.

The singer, voice coach, actress and trumpeter has filled everything from large theaters, both internationally and abroad, to television screens to area wineries, small venues, private parties and churches with a palpable stage presence for which she takes little personal credit.

"I tell this to my students; it's like the music doesn't come from you. It comes through you," Del Mastro said. "It's one thing to be up there (on stage) and know that you're good, but when you're up there trying to prove something or prove how good you are, it's like, you may be the most talented person in the world, but it will not move people."

And she knows of what she speaks. Hard-working is an understatement when it comes to Del Mastro and the experience she has amassed.

"I've done many different kinds of music, performing and theater, and my career was actually in musical comedy," Del Mastro said.

She originated the role of Sister Robert Anne, the streetwise, tough-talking nun from Brooklyn in the wildly popular musical "Nunsense." It first premiered Off-Broadway in 1985 and became a global phenomenon, eventually becoming the second-longest-running Off-Broadway show (after "The Fantasticks") in history, running for 3,672 shows.

(See SINGER, page 7)

PET OF THE WEEK



BONNIE HARPER

Bonnie Harper, the current mayor of Kitty City, reigns with a warm heart and a gentle kind of magic. She's known for her social nature — always eager to greet friends, soak up affection, and charm everyone she meets. Bonnie Harper is ready to bring a little everyday enchantment to her new home. Call (925) 426-8656, or email info@valleyhumane.org to get started with the adoption process. (Photo courtesy of Valley Humane)

Hagemann Ranch Curator Named Livermore Historian

By Vivien Wenneker

LIVERMORE — The Livermore City Council on Jan. 12 appointed Jeff Kaskey as the city's historian.

Alan Frank had filled the role from 2024 until passing away in 2025. Kaskey will complete Frank's term through Feb. 1 and then serve a regular term through Feb. 1, 2028.

Kaskey currently serves as the curator at historic Hagemann Ranch and is the collections manager for the Livermore Heritage Guild. He has decades of experience in civic and community involvement, having served on Livermore's Historic Preservation Commission for eight years and the board of Livermore Valley Performing Arts Center for nine years. He was also a member and vice president of the Livermore Cultural Arts Council.

Additionally, Kaskey

was the first vice president of the Livermore Heritage Guild, and later president for 10 years.

As the City's historian, Kaskey will be responsible for providing historical presentations, developing educational programs, and supporting the Historic Preservation Commission and Heritage Guild.

"My particular interest and passion have been in bringing the stories of local history to our children and students," Kaskey said. "The Livermore Heritage Guild brings the HistoryMobile to all of the third-graders, which we've been doing now for decades, and every third-grader gets to learn about what makes their community special — what history their community brings."

Kaskey said he looks forward to expanding the HistoryMobile program, stressing the value and lasting impressions that

its presentations leave on third-graders throughout the community.

His other priority is relocating Livermore's last one-room schoolhouse, the Midway Schoolhouse Museum, from the Altamont Hills to Hagemann Park, next to the historic, 150-year-old Hagemann Ranch.

The aim is to create an immersive destination for elementary-school field trips and a public museum. Also, since the ranch and school are almost the same age, joint events held there would be historically consistent.

The project has been roughly 20 years in the making and still has a long way to go, according to Kaskey, but he expressed optimism about the fundraising that the Heritage Guild has received so far. Recently, the Guild submitted a formal project request to the city's Planning

department and is currently awaiting its approval. That would enable the school's relocation process to move forward.



Jeff Kaskey

"For some, this information helps them appreciate their town and may prompt them to take a more active role in supporting the town's character and quality of life," Kaskey continued. "For others, simply gaining more information about the history of their town as a piece of continuous learning is valuable on its own. ... Providing accessible links to our past can have many benefits and the city historian is one of the ways to reinforce those links."

Deputy City Manager Named

The city also announced that Stephanie Egidio has been appointed as deputy city manager.

Egidio has been an integral part of the city manager's office since 2018, according to a social-media post. She has steadily advanced through key roles and most recently served as assistant to the city manager.

"This is going to be a big year for our historian, because this is the 150th anniversary of our incorporation," Mayor John Marchand said. "We were incorporated on April 1st, 1876, so this is a big deal, and we'll be celebrating that, along with the 125th anniversary of the lightbulb."

What is recognized as the world's longest-running lightbulb, currently located at a fire station at 4550 East Avenue, has been burning with only a few brief interruptions since 1901.

While Kaskey acknowledged that there is a lot of work before him and he has big shoes to fill, he is honored to have the role moving along the city's history for the next generation.

"I think there is value in telling Livermore residents the stories of our people, places and events that created (and are creating) the foundation of our community," Kaskey stated in his application for the historian position.

trative and city clerk teams. Egidio formerly worked as the environmental outreach manager for GreenWaste of Palo Alto, according to her LinkedIn page.

Her immediate priorities include publishing the Fiscal Year 2024–25 annual report, deploying digital kiosks, leading the city's website revamp, implementing a public-facing tool to share Strategic Plan progress and preparing incoming council members for service.

Egidio will also oversee major city events, such as Community Service Day and the Fourth of July Celebration — an event she helped grow to more than 10,000 attendees in 2025.

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Tri-Valley residents gathered Jan. 8 at Delucchi Park in Pleasanton for a solemn candlelight vigil honoring Renee Nicole Good, the 37-year-old woman shot and killed by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent in Minneapolis a day earlier. The vigil was one of many held across the United States. Community members, advocates and local organizers came together to mourn the loss of Good, call for accountability and stand in solidarity with those affected. (Photo — Leah Silveira)

Tri-Valley Cultural Jews to Host Reproductive Rights Discussion

LIVERMORE — Tri-Valley Cultural Jews (TVCJ), a secular Jewish organization, will host a conversation on reproductive rights at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 22.

TVCJ said the Repro Rights Gathering is not a lecture or debate, but a time

for individuals to listen and be heard in a relaxed, welcoming environment.

Challah, a Jewish bread usually reserved for ceremonial occasions, will be served.

The cost is \$15 for non-members.

To register, and receive directions to the event location in Livermore, email culturaljews@gmail.com or call 925-399-8029.

TVCJ is open to anyone who identifies as Jewish through family, culture, or history.

Comedian Copeland Set to Bring Trump Monologues to Las Positas

LIVERMORE — Standup comedian and San Francisco talk show host Brian Copeland will present "The Great American Sh*tshow: Monologues on Life in the Age of Trump," at the Mertes Center for the Performing Arts at Las Positas College at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 8.

Copeland made his theatrical debut in 2004 with a one-man play, "Not a Genuine Black Man," exploring race and identity growing up in San Leandro. It became the longest-running solo show in San Francisco

theatrical history and was adapted into a best-selling book.

Three more solo shows followed, including "The Waiting Period" in 2012, "The Jewelry Box" in 2013 and "The Scion" in 2014.

Copeland has also written two crime novels, "Outraged," published in 2024, and "Shadows of Justice," published last year.

Copeland first performed his "The Great American Sh*tshow" monologues in 2020.

The updated version, fol-

lowing the reelection of President Donald Trump in 2024, includes two new monologues addressing the current political climate.

Tickets are \$35 online at tinyurl.com/ytd7c5hb and \$45 at the door.

Forty percent of the proceeds will go to support non-profit groups with the goal of promoting progressive candidates and issues and opposing the Trump agenda, including Livermore Indivisible, Eden Area Indivisible and Indivisible Try-Valley, based in Pleasanton.

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EDITORIAL

Our Leaders Must Stand up to Protect The People, Rather Than the Powerful

Enough.

We've reached a tipping point. Last week, a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent murdered a Minneapolis woman in cold blood, without provocation. The entire incident was captured on video, from multiple angles. This makes the lies being told about the victim, Renee Nicole Good, by President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, ICE acting director Tom Homan, Border Patrol chief Greg Bovino and other government officials that much more transparent, brazen and unconscionable.

In addition to smearing a poet, wife and mother as a domestic terrorist, the federal government is now working to prevent any unbiased investigation: the FBI has shut local police out of the case, which is contrary to standard practice with shootings involving law enforcement. The Daily Mail has reported the shooter, Jonathan Ross, may have gone into hiding. His home was swept by a federal response team, which carted away many belongings.

This is not just about Minnesota. This is about all of us. ICE has been active in Bay Area communities. At least one Livermore family has been devastated by ICE's deportation campaign. Many of our Tri-Valley neighbors live in fear. It's not a question of whether ICE will target our neighbors, but when.

Minnesotans have rallied after Good's killing, and demonstrations have been held in many U.S. cities, including Pleasanton on Jan. 8.

A functional Congress would impeach and remove not just Trump, but Vance, Noem, Homan and Bongino, and perform a clean sweep of the entire system. A functional Congress would grind the federal government to a halt and abolish ICE entirely. ICE has become a rogue gang operating as Trump's personal secret police. A clean sweep is now the only way to preserve the republic.

We do not have a functional Congress, however. What we have are 50 different state governments, more than 3,200 county governments or their equivalents, and nearly 20,000 city, town or village governments, all finding their own way in a society in which the federal government has all but declared war on the people of the United States.

Federal agents have conducted unconstitutional kidnappings of citizens and noncitizens alike, denied detainees access to counsel, deported people to third-world countries such as El Salvador notorious for torturing prisoners, invaded schools, churches and homes without warrants, and conducted blatantly racist police operations against people doing nothing but walking or driving down a street. ICE agents have opened fire at least 16 times since they began their crackdown against immigrants, injuring seven and killing four, including Good, according to the Trace. The Guardian has counted at least 32 people who died in ICE custody in 2025.

At the federal level, the majority Republican Party has marched in lockstep behind Trump and refused

to hold him to account. The minority Democrats still have tools—Senators could stop approving Trump's nominees through unanimous consent, for example, or could filibuster federal legislation, such as must-pass budget laws coming up. U.S. Representatives can continue to force discharge petitions on bills House Speaker Mike Johnson would rather kill. But the Democratic leadership has shown itself to be feckless and still chasing after a mythical "centrist" vote while the nation burns.

That is all the more reason why we need our state and local leaders to stand up. California, Alameda County and our cities in the Tri-Valley are not without resources or power. In fact, our leaders are sworn to represent the people, and every city or county in California has at least one agency charged with enforcing the law, while the state of California has more than two dozen. Law-enforcement officers are sworn to defend the constitutions of both the United States and California against "all enemies, foreign and domestic."

Right now, the federal government is acting as a domestic enemy of the people. Our leaders need to make expressly clear whose side they are on, and take action. ICE's militarized behavior in Minneapolis is not an outlier. On the same day Renee Good was killed, ICE agents also invaded a Minneapolis high school, tear-gassing teachers and students. ICE agents were seen on video going door-to-door in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area the next day, kicking in doors without show-

ing warrants. And they already have waged their campaign of terror against people in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Washington and other cities.

And it's pretty clear that the Trump administration is trying to provoke a violent response, to justify an even more violent crackdown. So far, people have not taken the bait.

But we're going to need to stand together in the coming days: citizens, elected officials and even local police, too, against an onslaught of violence being brought by the Trump administration. We cannot protect our communities while cooperating with the regime—it's one or the other. Our leaders and police must serve and protect the people, not the powerful.

When ICE agents come calling—and they will—we must not comply. ICE is breaking the law, and our own law-enforcement agencies must act accordingly. We must stand by our neighbors, and our leaders must make it abundantly clear that ICE is not welcome in the Tri-Valley, or anywhere.

There are many to blame, but just as was the case on Jan. 6, 2021, when thousands of people attacked Congress in Washington to prevent Joe Biden from being sworn in as president, there is a singular cause of the violence today. None of this would happen without Donald Trump.

It's long past time for Trump to be held accountable for his actions. Barring that, we must be ready to fight back, because he will not be satisfied with attacking just one city. In the end, he will come after everyone. It's time to pick a side.

MAILBOX

Mailbox Guidelines:

Opinions voiced in letters published in Mailbox are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of The Independent. Anonymous letters will not be published. All letters are required to have the name(s) of the person(s) submitting them, city of residence and phone number, for verification purposes. Letters may not contain advertising. Abusive letters and letters containing ad hominem attacks may be rejected or edited. Letters are subject to verification and may be edited for clarity at the discretion of the editor. We reserve the right to decide whether or not the letter will be published. Headings for all letters may be edited at the discretion of the editor to properly reflect their content. A headline will be added to letters received without one. Frequent letter writers may have publication of their letters delayed or not run at all. Letters should be limited to 400 words or less and should be sent by email to letters@independentnews.com or submitted using the form below. The letters to the editor deadline is Monday at 8 a.m. If you wish to submit a letter pertaining to a special event or meeting taking place on a Monday before any given Thursday print edition—and you would like your letter to run that week—please contact the editor (editor@independentnews.com) as soon as possible on Monday to discuss the content and publication options. Otherwise, all letters submitted after 8 a.m. on Monday must hold until the following week.

Ukraine Help

Richard Andrews, Livermore

Dear friends of the Ukraine. As you should know from my recent posting: I am a big supporter of the Ukraine and its wonderful people. And I again thank those who have contributed so much to their aid.

I am passing on the website that you can go to, to find out what is going on, as well as contribute financially, as they also need funds. Eugene, the person

I have been working with for the past year+, runs this website that is an IRS authorized charity. It is also a CHRISTIAN based charity that runs an orphanage for the children whose parents have been killed, but helps ALL in the Ukraine who need assistance. All donations help and I thank you again.

Hearts4Ukraine.org

Disagreeing About Somalians

John Lahommedieu, Dublin

Jon Elfin writes that Somalians are humans; that is true. But let's examine Mr. Elfin's mistakes: Somalian fraud is rampant across the country by way more than 90 bad actors, according to Mr. Elfin, a number I have no idea where he came up with but is not correct. The Senate investigation in Washington DC yesterday had Minnesotan officials verifying the corruption and the officials who knew of this, and that the vast majority of the illegal Somalians who came here during the Biden era of disaster are on welfare and food assistance (Over 80 percent of the Somalians who receive assistance have done so for years now.) The corruption of fake daycare centers receiving taxpayer dollars is not only in Minneapolis; it's in LA, New Orleans, Detroit, Michigan and states not mentioned by Mr. Elfin. Rather it be Somalians or anyone who comes to this country and commits fraud in the billions that take away from American citizens must be called out. Mr. Elfin makes his point by saying sure there is fraud, but they are good people. Why are we picking on them? That's insanity and true democrat liberalism that nearly took this country to third world status. Mr. Elfin does not like my words, but my message he does not address, and that is the heart of my issue with him and anyone who defends such criminality. I suppose Mr. Elfin would gladly pay more in taxes to help the Somalian community then to address the fraud and crimes committed by many of them in excess of 80 percent in Minnesota alone. Mr. Elfin in all accounts supports Congressman Swalwell who supports sanctuary

city status, which was the culprit in the beginning of all this illegal immigration and criminal protection status. To Mr. Elfin and other democrat liberals, I say this: President Trump has had enough of this nonsense, and frankly so have his supporters, and I urge and support the removal of every criminal illegal to include every last Somali. Wake up, Mr. Elfin. Your argument and points of view fail, and in Trump's America, there is no more acceptance of ripping off the American citizen by illegal criminals and your so-called sweet, wonderful Somalians who came here and took and took and offered nothing. Minneapolis is crap now because of them, and that, sir, is a hard fact!

Will They Learn from This Experience?

Elizabeth M. Judge, Livermore

Eight years ago, local wineries wanted a downtown hotel so they could be included in wine spectator magazines. This would put them on wine country maps so tourists would come to taste and stay.

But they bet on the wrong horse! They put their money on the "too small to be profitable" hotel squeezed up against the Bankhead where wine country buses would have trouble maneuvering and valet parking would be blocks away.

Now the very wineries who insisted on the small hotel are whining about the lack of hotel accommodations when they could have championed a larger downtown hotel years ago which had a better chance to be profitable.

Many citizens will remember that fateful council meeting when David Kent surprised them by throwing

them figuratively under the Wente bus with a totally new downtown plan that thwarted a year's worth of citizen input. Several groups had gotten together with wineries to pull this off and the rancor continues to this day.

Let's hope those involved have learned something from this experience.

Abuse of California Funding

David Marco, Livermore

Va Licia Adams Kellum, CEO of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), has come under fire for funneling money to her husband's NGO, billing taxpayers for lavish personal events, and approving six figure payouts to silence whistleblowers, all while California's homeless crisis continues to climb costing taxpayers tens of billions of dollars.

Kellum, praised by Mayor Bass, makes about \$430,000 a year including salary and benefits, among the highest-paid officials in the homelessness sector.

California's homeless population is more than 180,000, the highest in the nation, and state audits have revealed that \$24 billion in homeless spending can't be tracked.

Whistleblower complaints and public records show that Kellum approved or oversaw at least one major contract worth \$2.1 million to a nonprofit where her husband is a senior leader.

Reports show multiple instances popping up of Kellum directing taxpayer money to family-linked entities.

In addition, accusations from former LAHSA staff detail how Kellum charged the public for open bars and other extravagances at

agency-hosted events.

These included professional gatherings, where taxpayer dollars covered alcohol and entertainment that had little to do with serving the homeless.

In a city where basic shelter costs \$20,000 per person each year, many point to her lavish spending as an abuse.

She's also facing misconduct charges after LAHSA authorized \$800,000 in settlements to two former executives, Kristina Dixon, the ex-chief financial officer, and Emily Vaughn Henry, a top IT official, who claimed they were wrongfully terminated for exposing wrongdoing.

Of this amount, \$200,000 came directly from city and county general funds (taxpayer dollars), with the rest covered by insurance.

The payouts, approved in March without commissioners reviewing the full complaint details, equate to the annual shelter costs for up to 40 homeless people.

Legal experts have slammed LAHSA for initially withholding and heavily redacting the whistleblower letters, violating public records laws and shielding executives from scrutiny.

Kellum, who stepped down from her role in August after less than three years, was praised by Mayor Bass and LAHSA Commission President Linda Gruel even as her actions came to light.

Bass had personally pushed for her hiring, including a consulting gig at \$10,000 per week early in her administration.

Federal Judge David O. Carter recently criticized LAHSA for shielding elected officials from

(See MAILBOX, page 5)

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Guitarists Rob Nordvik, left, and Doug Roberts of the Foam Riders band perform at the Stampede bar in Livermore on New Year's Eve. (Photo — Jacob Clouser)

MAILBOX

(Continued from page 4)

accountability over billions in homelessness spending.

Source: Christina Aguayo News

Teaching the Likes of Emerson United States' Fascism

Greg Scott, Livermore

On Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2026, six-year-old Emerson's life was changed forever. On that day, Emerson's mother, Renee Nicole Good, after dropping Emerson off at school, was murdered in cold blood by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agent Jonathan Ross.

Murdered. Some, like President Trump, his minions, and some followers will say otherwise. Private videos made public displays to the contrary. One video, when analyzed frame by frame, clearly shows Ross's feet to the side of Good's car when he drew his gun and fired the first shot through the lower right corner of the windshield as he leaned over the front quarter panel of the

Honda SUV. When the car slowly rolled forward to the driver's right and away from Ross, the agent fired two more shots from the side of the car into Good's face and head at near point-blank range.

During this time Ross was recording video from his phone, which he unwisely released to the public. The recording shows him changing hands with his phone so that his right hand could have access to his gun. He then crossed in front of the vehicle against Department of Homeland Security protocol. Ross held onto the phone when he shot Good. After mortally shooting Good, Ross is recorded calling Good a "F*#king bitch." We thereby have evidence of Ross's mental state. The Honda then sped off from the weight of Good's foot and then crashed into a parked car and utility pole down the way. In no way was Ross run-over or injured. The other ICE agents then pre-

vented a medical doctor from checking on Good. The paramedics didn't arrive for another 15 minutes. A view through the passenger door showed the deployed airbag covered in blood and Emerson's stuffed animals spilling out of the glovebox.

This is fascism, a form of

autocratic rule where governance is by a very few who think they can rule the masses better than anyone else by fear and threat of violence, and that those masses deserve no say in governance.

It is gruesome, however, if Good's mother and wife have the courage, Renee should have a public funeral with an open casket. Let the world see what Jonathan Ross did to Emerson's son and his two half-siblings' mother, just like Emmett Till's mother had the courage to do to show how Southern racist bigots tortured and mutilated her 14-year-old son.

Bear witness!

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Bear witness!

Deep Data Dives for Geeks and Non-Geeks Alike

Patricia Munro, Livermore

Tired of doomsscrolling? Want to try an online resource that is fun, informational, useful, and a fantastic way to procrastinate? The City of Livermore has you covered with an amazing new resource—a GIS (Geographic Information System) Open Data Hub, with interactive web maps, downloadable data, and digital tools.

Here's the link to all the data: gisopendata.livermoreca.gov.

That page lists six categories: Boundaries, Environment, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Planning, and Public Interest. Here's how to play:

First, click on one of those categories — say Public Interest — to bring up a list of everything from Affordable Housing sites to Police Command Stations to Lot Lines.

Then, click on one of the listed items — say Affordable Housing — to bring up a map with the location

of every affordable housing site located.

Finally, click on one of the sites to open a pop-up window with the name, address, property manager, number of units, target population, website, and contact email.

It took less time to get the information than it did to write down the above steps. Amazing!

Here's one more example, then try it yourself!

Click on the Planning Category to bring up a list of six items. Click on one of these — say Capital Improvement and Development Projects — to bring up a map with many icons, each representing projects that are planned for the

(See MAILBOX, page 6)



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<http://www.christiansciencechurchlivermore.com>
email: lecture@christiansciencechurchlivermore.com



Before becoming a Christian Science practitioner, Janet Hegarty had a career producing original music for theatre and film. Through finding success, she felt a sense of fear for her health and uncertainty about the future. The concepts about God found in Christian Science moved her to a feeling of fulfillment and security. Today she helps others find this kind of healing, too. She speaks with audiences worldwide as a member of the Christian Science Board of Lectureship.



Be Part of Livermore's Vision for Safer Streets

Livermore Vision Zero Action Plan (VZAP)

Community Meeting (Virtual)

The City is developing a Vision Zero Action Plan (VZAP) which will be a comprehensive strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries. Recognizing that traffic deaths and severe injuries are preventable, the VZAP aims to prioritize safety, creating a more sustainable and livable city for all.

Your input is Important to us!

Community outreach was held on December 15th to introduce the Vision Zero Action Plan and share how the City is working to improve traffic safety. The project team discussed the Plan's goals, processes, and next steps, presented early findings from the collision analysis, and invited community feedback on locations identified as part of the High Injury Network. The public outreach platform was also shared so residents can continue providing input throughout the project. The video and presentation are available on the project website, accessible via the QR code above or the link below — www.LivermoreCA.gov/VisionZero



Visit the Project Website here!

Share your Traffic Concerns by January 19, 2026

Mark intersections and street segments, and provide your safety concerns through QR code on the right or visit <https://app.maptionnaire.com/q/226syd2ore37>



Upcoming Community Meeting!

Join us for the next Outreach Meeting in January. Details are provided below!

Wednesday, January 28 at 6 p.m.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83097332929?pwd=sLnS3iaTtDJLdcXqcT47mNpScylaZn.1>

Meeting ID: 830 9733 2929

Passcode: 587861

Note: Please visit the project website for updates on upcoming community meetings.



Scan here to join the meeting!

- Provide feedback and input on High Injury Network (HIN)
- Collision Profiles, Priority Areas & Countermeasures

We look forward to hearing from you! Please let us know your availability by scanning the QR code on the right and completing the brief form. Or visit <https://forms.gle/WYzkdNfeKBGc4pqN9>

Please RSVP by January 19, 2026 for Community Meeting!



Focuses on PREVENTABLE FATAL AND SEVERE CRASHES rather than eliminating all crashes



Updates collision data and areas of CONCERN



Aims to ESTABLISH SAFE SYSTEMS



Integrates HUMAN ERROR into the approach



TJKM

Reunión comunitaria (Virtual)

La Ciudad está desarrollando un Plan de nombre Vision Zero Action Plan una estrategia integral para reducir y, con el tiempo, eliminar las muertes y lesiones graves por accidentes de tránsito.

Reconociendo que las muertes y lesiones graves por accidentes de tránsito son prevenibles, el VZAP busca priorizar la seguridad, creando una ciudad más sostenible y habitable para todos.



Visite el sitio web del proyecto aquí!

¡Su opinión es importante para nosotros!

El 15 de diciembre se realizó una actividad de divulgación comunitaria para presentar el Plan Vision Zero Action Plan y compartir cómo la Ciudad está trabajando para mejorar la seguridad vial. El equipo del proyecto analizó los objetivos, procesos y próximos pasos del Plan, presentó los primeros resultados del análisis de colisiones e invitó a la comunidad a compartir sus comentarios sobre las ubicaciones identificadas como parte de la Red de Alto Riesgo de Lesiones. También se compartió la plataforma de divulgación pública para que los residentes puedan seguir aportando sus opiniones durante todo el proyecto. El video y la presentación están disponibles en el sitio web del proyecto, accesibles con el código QR (arriba) o el link (abajo). www.LivermoreCA.gov/VisionZero

Comparta sus inquietudes sobre el tráfico antes del 19 de enero

¡Marque intersecciones y segmentos de calles, y comunique sus inquietudes de seguridad a través del código QR a la derecha o el link de abajo!

<https://app.maptionnaire.com/q/226syd2ore37>



¡Próxima reunión comunitaria!

¡Únase a nosotros para la próxima reunión de extensión en enero.

¡Los detalles se proporcionan a continuación!

Miércoles 28 de enero a las 6 p.m.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83097332929?pwd=sLnS3iaTtDJLdcXqcT47mNpScylaZn.1>

ID de la reunión: 830 9733 2929

Código de acceso: 587861

Nota: Visite el sitio web del proyecto para obtener actualizaciones sobre las próximas reuniones comunitarias



Scan here to join the meeting!

- Proporcionar comentarios aportes sobre la Red de Alta Lesión conocido como High Injury Network (HIN)
- Perfiles de colisión, áreas prioritarias y contramedidas

¡Esperamos tener noticias tuyas! Informanos de tu disponibilidad escaneando el código QR a la derecha o el link de abajo y completando el breve formulario <https://forms.gle/WYzkdNfeKBGc4pqN9>

¡Por favor confirmar su asistencia antes del 19 de enero para la reunión comunitaria!



Para Más Información: www.LivermoreCA.gov/VisionZero





A lady walking a dog Jan. 10 on Fallon Road in Dublin made for a picturesque scene. (Photo — Jacob Clouser)

MAILBOX

(Continued from page 5)

future, in the design process, under construction, or recently completed. Click on an icon — say the new parking garage — and get status (complete), category (Downtown Revitalization), and a description: "The Livermore Village Parking Garage, a four level, 452-space parking garage located off L-Street between Railroad Avenue and First Street, will help meet downtown's parking goal by maintaining existing parking and providing enough parking for new development."

There's much, much more to discover, but my procrastinating time is up! Have fun browsing and learning.

Are We Safer?

Kyoko Takayama, Livermore

Are we safer with the current Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)? The shooting and killing of Renee Good by ICE officer on Jan. 7 in Minneapolis led vigils and protests in every corner of the country. Reports and articles are coming in on how they treat our neighbors in the community. They are arresting and shooting U.S. citizens because they look like immigrants, or because they are observing and recording their conducts, as our rights allow.

We appreciate the service of our local law enforcement officers keeping us safe. They identify themselves as such, with clearly marked cars and name tags. They are the keepers of laws. Can we say the same with the ICE officers? Apparently not. If you agree, please contact our elected officials and ask them to stop ICE violence and their lawless conduct. Renee was not the first, nor the last, unless ICE and the Department of Homeland Security are held accountable. Should we remove criminal immigrants from the country? Yes, but for the most part, overstaying without documentation is a civil offense, not a criminal offense. Remember how and why you and your family came to the U.S. Treat others as you would like for others to treat you. Is that too much to ask?

Nutrition Guidelines Are Off the Rails

Lex Manwill, Livermore

Ever since the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs 1977 Dietary Goals for Americans recommended reduced meat consumption, the meat and dairy lobbies have been battling nutritionists and other health professionals for the dietary soul of the American people. In the just issued Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the meat and dairy lobbies won, with the misguided support of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Since the 1977 report,

scores of other scientific studies, involving thousands, have clearly established a strong association between consumption of meat and dairy products and elevated incidences of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain types of cancer. No credible study has claimed the contrary.

Moreover, if Kennedy is concerned about processed foods, his touting of meat and dairy products is misplaced, as meat and dairy products are plant foods that have been highly processed by the digestive tracts of pigs and cows.

Welcome to Trump World: The Unholy Trinity of Money, Power, and AI

Rosario Milelli, Pleasanton

In Trump World, loyalty is purchased, regulation is abolished, and the public pays the bill.

Donald Trump's new political economy rests on a simple bargain: billionaire tech oligarchs fund and flatten him, and in return he gives them everything they want — deregulation, public subsidies, and freedom from accountability. The winners are a tiny circle of men who now dominate both America's wealth and its information systems.

Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Ellison, Jensen Huang, and Sam Altman together control well over \$1.5 trillion in personal and corporate wealth. AI has minted dozens of new billionaires on top of that. Never in U.S. history had so much economic and informational power been concentrated in so few hands.

Trump's contribution to this arrangement has been explicit. His executive order barring states from regulating artificial intelligence strips governors and legislatures of the power to control how AI is deployed in their own communities — even when it affects jobs, privacy, elections, or public utilities. The message to Silicon Valley is clear: you are untouchable.

In return, these same oligarchs increasingly control the platforms that decide what Americans see. News outlets, social media, and even legacy programs like 60 Minutes now operate under quiet pressure not to offend or be critical of Trump.

That is not a free press — it is a privatized gatekeeper system.

This political bargain now collides with something very real: the electric grid.

AI and data centers run on enormous amounts of power and water. A single large AI facility can consume 100 megawatts, enough to power 80,000 homes, and up to five million gallons of water per day for cooling. According to the Department of Energy, U.S. data-center electricity use could more than double

by 2028.

The infrastructure to support that growth will cost hundreds of billions of dollars. In Northern Virginia alone, grid upgrades driven by data centers are estimated at \$4.6 to \$10 billion — and those costs (double digit rate increases) are being passed on to ordinary ratepayers.

Meanwhile, the same companies spend aggressively on lobbying in statehouses and in Washington, seeking tax breaks and subsidies that further offload costs onto average families.

That is Trump World: privatized wealth, socialized costs, and a government captured by the very industries it is supposed to regulate.

This Can't Be Happening

Ward Kanowsky, Pleasanton

No, no, no, no — this can't be happening, this shouldn't be happening, and yet here we are.

Our elected president, following a run of over 30 strikes on boats in South American waters that were allegedly carrying drugs and have killed at least 115 people, has moved forward on his this-was-my-plan-for-regime-change-all-along

with a large scale attack on Venezuela resulting in the removal of President Nicolas Maduro and his wife. To

paraphrase historian Heather Cox Richardson, "this is a very, very, very, big deal," and it's only the beginning.

Since the strike on Saturday,

Trump has identified Columbia, Cuba, Mexico, Greenland, and Iran as potential targets for takeover by the United States. You read that right; five more countries are

on his hit list.

So what comes next?

More world leaders being abducted? Boots on the ground in the identified countries?

Nuclear war? All of these

are in the realm of possibility with this whack job.

If ever there was a time to move

forward with impeachment,

for the third time no less, this

is that time. Trump is ignor-

ing Congress, and Congress

must send the message that

it stands for the Constitution

and the rule of law.

Thank You

Cathy Rainey, Livermore

Thank you for the editorial in last week's paper, "What We Can Work for in the New Year." It focused on the important actions that all citizens can take to preserve our democracy and fight the radical MAGA movement. It's critical. If we all say NO to the tyrannical regime currently in power, we stand an excellent chance of slowing and even stopping the harm that is raining down on America.

It's true that most members of Congress are not doing the job that they were elected to do. They are not working for the majority of people, working to make our

lives better. They spinelessly yield to the tyrant at the top.

That means that we, the people, must work harder to raise our voices against the radical MAGA movement. Last week's editorial reminded everyone to get involved in our communities by "putting our bodies on the line" for injured groups, attending demonstrations, and making donations to the organizations that support people at risk. We must work to stop FCI Dublin from being turned into an ICE deportation prison.

We have to support national groups that fight to protect the environment and reduce climate change. Contacting California's elected officials is critical to encourage them to resist, to remain strong, and to remind them they work for us.

Most importantly, we all need to stay informed and educated by reading and listening to trusted information

sources. When the midterms come, vote. And vote as if our democracy depends on it, because it does.

Remembering the Good Old Days

Ann Gray, Livermore

This is response to a letter in the Jan. 1 edition with the heading "Remembering the Good Old Days". I found myself reading a statement from Keith Jackson in this letter. I don't even know this person, but he is so articulate and insightful on this topic. Summing his words up to me are that Trump is a liar and we all know it, but some people are still in denial. I don't care if other presidents lied in the past. What matters is now. People, wake up and realize what is really going on and read Keith's letter. We have been looking like fools too long. Yes, I do feel sorry for the people that think it is okay to shame other people, including other presidents, with negative words, and to display it on plaques. Really, for those people that believe this is all right, and then to put your name over Kennedy's name; this is stupid and Trump acts like a child. How foolish. Can't you see what is going on? Are you blind to what he has done? Are you challenged? Remember, we have the power to get rid of him; we just have to be more vocal and fight with words and actions. The President is disgraceful, and so are his followers. The day after the election, someone wrote on the sidewalk "He is Not My President". Powerful words. Great job, Keith.

This Country Deserves Better

Keith Jackson, Dublin

What about the innocent bystanders? During Trump's recent operation to liberate Venezuela's oil, 100 people on the ground were killed. These were not drug cartel

childcare facilities together.

"We want to be able to bring in different mechanisms to help these parents with childcare," Hernandez

"I've been doing the work," Hernandez said. "I've not only been doing it at the city level, but I'm also doing it as BART board president, a special district, and then through my county job at District 1. I'm definitely ready for what the future has to hold, but also again, I'm always there ready to work."

The District 14 race includes San Leandro entrepreneur Matt Ortega (D), Union City resident Wendy Huang (R) and Concord attorney Abra Qadir (D). Candidates have until March 6 to file to run. The top two candidates from the June 2 primary election, regardless of party, will face off in the general election on Nov. 3.

HERNANDEZ

(Continued from front page)

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finding the resources to realize projects. She pointed to Grace Pointe in Dublin, an affordable housing rental community for those with intellectual and development disabilities, as a prime example of where federal funding could go. Hernandez also highlighted the La Familia rehabilitation center in unincorporated Livermore and the need for PFAS remediation in Pleasanton as other possible recipients.

She has championed making California more welcoming to younger families, such as through Dublin's first-time home buyer program, and she encourages new, creative solutions to continue assistance, suggesting development projects that build housing and

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finding the resources to realize projects. She pointed to Grace Pointe in Dublin, an affordable housing

Leakey to Explore Origins of Humanity at the Bankhead

LIVERMORE — The first Rae Dorough Speakers Series of the new year at the Bankhead Theater will feature paleoanthropologist Louise Leakey, daughter of famed anthropologists Meave and Richard Leakey,

who has continued their exploration into the origins of the human race.

Leakey will discuss “Diggings for Humanity’s Origins” at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 29.

She will be followed by

New Zealand adventurer Peter Hillary, son of famed mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to scale Mount Everest with his sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, in 1953, on Thursday, March 5.

Born and raised in East Africa, at age 5 Leakey became the youngest person ever documented to find a humanoid fossil, uncovering a 17-million-year-old tooth in the fossil-rich Turkana Basin that stretches

from Kenya into southern Ethiopia. By age 12, she was driving the family’s Land Rover to assist the research team.

After her father lost both legs in a small plane crash in 1993, Leakey returned from studying in the United Kingdom to join her mother in running the field camp. The mother-daughter team later discovered a 3.5-million-year-old skull believed to be a branch of early humans.

Leakey is a research associate with the National Museums of Kenya and founder of Leakey Journeys and Expeditions. She is also an Explorer at Large and lecturer with the National Geographic Society and research professor of anthropology at Stony Brook University in New York.

She has a doctorate in paleontology from University College London.

Tickets for “Diggings for Humanity” start at \$25.

The younger Hillary has summited Mount Everest twice, once with his father, and completed the Seven Summits challenge, reaching to the top of the

highest mountains on all seven continents. He also forged a new route across Antarctica, reaching the South Pole on skis.

He now chairs the Himalayan Trust, founded by mother and father to provide healthcare, environmental and educational services to the people in the Himalayan region of Nepal.

Hillary’s presentation is titled, “Seventy Years of Everest.”

Tickets for the 7:30 p.m. presentation start at \$25.

Tickets for both Rae Dorough Speaker Series presentations are available online at livermorearts.org, by calling 925-373-6800, or at the Bankhead Theater box office, 2400 First St.



\$500 Off!

925-577-6864

bobspropainting.com Lic# 999325



The annual Noon Year’s Eve celebration Dec. 31 at the Robert Livermore Community Center provided youngsters and others in attendance the opportunity to ring in 2026 at a more reasonable hour. The event featured games, crafts, dancing, light refreshments and the grand finale — a balloon drop at noon! (Photo — Leah Silveira)

NO CONFIDENCE

(Continued from front page)

brzinski said. “If students were at the forefront of Superintendent Funk’s thinking, we would be happy to move forward. However, historically we have had to enter impasse proceedings to get our students’ needs met.”

Teachers called on the school board to take action to hold Funk accountable, saying responsibility for the superintendent rests with the board as his employer.

“The services to our most vulnerable students all come down to class size and caseload,” Dobrzenski said. “When class sizes and caseloads are manageable, every student has access to the support and individual attention they need. The status quo is not meeting those needs.”

DTA’s criticism also extends to Funk’s prior tenure at the East Side Union High School District in San Jose, where the union said similar concerns about staff relations and budget management existed. The union claims those same issues contributed to his departure from East Side.

The Dublin Teachers

Association said it has proposed an alternative budget framework, referred to as the DTA Justice Plan, which it says would reprioritize existing district funds to support smaller class sizes, as well as improve staffing and additional student services.

The plan includes a proposed 3.5% cost-of-living adjustment, expanded health benefits and reduced class sizes, which the union estimates would cost several million dollars.

The California School Employees Association (CSEA) Chapter 439 in Dublin, which represents classified staff in the district, voiced support for the teachers’ vote.

“A vote of no confidence is not about personalities. It is about leadership and trust,” said Karen Chamberlain, president of CSEA Chapter 439. “When employees consistently raise concerns about safety, workload, transparency and respect, and those concerns go unaddressed, confidence erodes.”

Funk told The Independent that the vote was disappointing given that the

district and the teachers’ union have entered formal mediation, but emphasized that negotiations are ongoing.

“Our focus remains on reaching a fair and sustainable agreement that supports our teachers, while also protecting the long-term stability of our schools and the students we serve,” Funk said.

He also rejected claims by the DTA that the district has reduced investment in students, saying Dublin Unified has already implemented approximately \$10 million in budget reductions over the past two years and is identifying an additional \$8 million in reductions for the 2026–27 school year.

Funk said that those challenges reflect broader fiscal pressures facing school districts statewide, including rising employee salary and benefit costs, insurance, utilities and materials, as well as the \$3.6 million budgeting error identified by district staff.

He added that enrollment declines are projected over the next six years, which

he said directly affects state funding under California’s attendance-based funding model.

Addressing union claims about consultant spending, Funk said that consultant services are limited and used only when legally required or when specialized expertise is needed, adding that they do not replace educators or reduce instructional funding.

Funk said the district has engaged in collective bargaining in good faith and entered mediation as part of the standard process when negotiations become difficult.

He described allegations that the district has provided misleading or inaccurate information as troubling, saying communications are based on verified financial data and board-approved documents.

As mediation moves forward, Funk said he remains hopeful both parties can refocus on shared goals.

“Doing what is best for students while honoring the work of our educators in a responsible, transparent and sustainable way remains our priority,” he said.

SINGER

(Continued from front page)

“I think I’ve done over 10,000 hours on stage (under the Actors Equity Union), plus filmed and done a lot of live performance,” Del Mastro said.

And according to the chanteuse, the key to moving people is not by singing at them.

“What you need to do is get out of the way and breathe deeply and just kind of channel it, you know? Just channel the muse. Let it come through you,” she said.

Del Mastro also cautions singers who focus solely on the lyrics and overlook the power of the melody to add to storytelling.

“You sing the story of the song on the melody. You don’t just sing the words,” she said. “It’s the whole flow of everything. And you’re actually singing the melody, which also reaches out to people on those gorgeous vowels where your voice comes out. So, once you know that, then you just word paint and play from there.”

Del Mastro has been singing and acting professionally since she was 18. The performing really started much earlier, though, when her mother, a self-taught pianist, used to take the little singer from church to church across the country to offer their musical services.

Del Mastro used to joke

that she grew up singing in church like Aretha Franklin did in the south in the 1960s.

“I think about it now and oh, God, those poor people. You know, ‘Here’s little Debbie, 6 years old, singing “His Eye is on the Sparrow” again,’” Del Mastro said, laughing.

Even before her role in “Nunsense,” which she said, “really made my career,” her talent was recognized by the best of the best.

When she was in her early 20s and had just begun dipping her toe into the classical music genre, she won a prestigious singing competition and was selected by the Bel Canto Foundation of Chicago to go to Italy and study Italian Opera.

“I think the thing about me, and maybe why I work so much, is I do a variety of things and I’m a musician (trumpet) and can read music,” she said. “I remember when I was younger, I used to say I was far too happy to sing the blues — even though we’ve all been through enough to be able to sing the blues over and over again. But I changed my mind about that because, again, it doesn’t come from you. It comes through you. It’s very vulnerable and it’s very powerful at the same time.”

Del Mastro has since learned a bit more about the blues and surviving them.

In March, she will be two years breast cancer-free.

“I had a badass team of women doctors that saved my life,” Del Mastro said. “It’s really great. But I’m still just dealing with loss of identity. It’s so strange. ... when you lose your hair. I was that little chickie out there, shaking it and singing my buns off all my life. And now I’m older and I’ve been through cancer that changed everything and so I’ve been thinking, ‘How can I age gracefully?’”

Del Mastro sings with many local bands, including Hipster Cocktail Party, with her husband, Paul, and fronts a couple of rock groups. Known for her powerful rock-and-roll singing, she has her sights set on writing and performing more cabaret style shows in 2026.

“Tom Petty said the only real magic in the world is music. And I really believe that,” Del Mastro said. “If I can go to some little wine bar that holds 60 people... and I can get up and sing and change those people’s days, change how they’re feeling — right here, right now — No matter what just happened in their lives, no matter what’s happening in the world, you know? It’s the magic of being able to share the joy of music. And it makes me want to keep going.”

For more information, visit deborahdelmastro.com

This article is part of a series of periodically appearing stories called “People Portraits.” Do you know of someone in the Tri-Valley whose story you think the community might like to hear? If so, please email christina@independentnews.com

FOR DAILY ONLINE LOCAL NEWS VISIT

independentnews.com

PLEASE HELP BRING MIGUEL HOME



Miguel Lopez left in the photo, next to his son, Julian Lopez, and his wife, Rosa Lopez.

Livermore Wente Winery worker, married father of three and grandfather

Miguel Lopez

remains in Mexico after having been illegally deported in early June.

To donate to a GoFundMe account supporting the Lopez family, visit

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/bring-miguel-back-to-his-loved-ones>

Dublin Father Puts Kids First in New Gym Business

By Christina Cavallaro

DUBLIN — USA Ninja Challenge opened its doors Nov. 11, and the new business owner of the obstacle-based fitness experience for children, Aman Takhar, hit the ground running.

"It's been incredible," Takhar said. "I mean, we're not even at the two-month mark, and it's been humbling. I've heard again and again from parents that they've been looking for something like this for years."

Before the Dublin opening of the year-round, youth-focused fitness program made famous by the popular television show, American Ninja Warrior, parents had to travel to other cities to get similar experiences for their kids.

"But they weren't getting the level they needed, so they weren't happy about that," Takhar said.

USA Ninja Challenge Dublin's classes have been so well received, in fact, that Takhar has started opening the studio on Mondays to accommodate those on a waiting list.

Takhar can relate all too well to the experiences of other young Dublin parents looking for the best outlets for raising healthy, happy kids. He is the father of two boys, Ranveer, 6, and Yash, 4. They were the inspiration for Takhar and his wife to take the leap into business ownership. Takhar's background is in IT technology, and his wife is an accountant.

"We were paying the bills," Takhar said. But he had a three-hour commute to Redwood City every day, and his kids were growing up before his eyes. "We needed more time with them — something so we could be present in their lives, as well."

When looking at potential opportunities, starting a business from scratch felt too challenging.

"We wanted something with a structure already in place," Takhar said.

By leaning into the needs of his own family, he and his wife found a perfect fit in the New Hampshire-based USA Ninja Challenge kid franchise.

"I went through the discovery and I'm like, 'This is really good, because

workout for kids, including aspects of cross-training, CrossFit, track and field and the ninja sport itself. "So, there's a lot of jumping over boxes, a lot of swinging around, climbing around, and balancing," Takhar said. "Kids are coming

we're hitting the mark."

Takhar works hard to keep the kids, and parents, wanting to come back.

A key to that success, he said, is "they need to be able to progress. We need to grow and build that confidence in them that they

really love while working on more difficult skills in the same routine.

"They keep trying that hard one and before you know it, they are already able to do much better on that hard obstacle where before they might never have even tried," Takhar said.

The courses, Takhar said, are not one-size-fits-all in terms of curriculum. The progression program allows coaches to home in on one child's need to work on grip strength or another to practice balancing, all in the same activity.

"So, we are able to cater it to the individual. And even though it's a community feeling in there, a group activity, each kid is working on their own individual limits and abilities, versus competing with other kids in the same class. And I think that's the beauty of this."

USA Ninja Challenge offers fitness progression programs for kids and also hosts camps and private parties.

Takhar's younger son, Yash, will soon be having his birthday party at the family business. "We really tried to do a business the kids could connect to," Takhar said. "We didn't want our kids to grow up and say, 'Dad is always busy with his business, and we don't even know what it is.'

"But now they can come there after the classes when I'm still wrapping up my things. And they can be in the gym trying out the obstacles or practicing their skills or whatever they want. And three hours in, they still don't want to go home."

For more information, visit ninja-dublin.com.



USA Ninja Challenge owner Aman Takhar welcomes the community to his newly opened obstacle-based fitness experience for children in Dublin. The facility, at 6761 Sierra Court, Suite E, is the city's first outpost of the East Coast-based nationwide franchise that combines fun and fitness by teaching children agility, balance and problem-solving through a series of structured obstacle courses. (Photo — Leah Silveira)

my older one really loves jumping around," Takhar said.

But the obstacle-based fitness program the enterprise touts is so much more than that, according to Takhar.

"Our focus is not just fun," he said. "We are here and our coaches are here to train. We constantly give the kids cues on how to do those obstacles in a safe way."

The program consists of seven different categories that provide a full-body

out with their faces red, sweating, and a big smile. And parents say the kids are tired and proud of what they have done. And they keep asking when their next class is. I'm like, 'That's exactly why we're here. I think

can do hard things.'

That means constantly changing weekly lesson plans.

"They're not doing the same thing every week," he said. "So, there's always that extra challenge."

sometimes very good at something and then struggle in other things," Takhar said.

The lesson plans fold in multiple skills in every course, so a child may be so focused on an aspect they

AARP Offers Free Tax Aide in Livermore, Dublin

TRI-VALLEY — The AARP Foundation will be offering free tax-preparation services at the Livermore Civic Center Library and the Dublin Senior Center starting in February.

The Tax-Aide services will be available at the Dublin Senior Center, 7600 Amador Valley Blvd., on Wednesdays, through Feb. 8. Tax assistance will be offered at the Civic Center Library, 1188 S. Livermore Ave., on Thursdays, through April 9.

The AARP Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide offers free assistance, focusing on those 50 and

older with low to moderate incomes. Those requesting assistance do not need to be seniors or AARP members.

Tax returns are prepared by IRS-certified volunteers and filed electronically. Taxpayers also receive a paper copy for their records.

The Tax-Aide service is available by appointment only.

To schedule an appointment at the Dublin Senior Center, call 925-556-4511. To schedule an appointment for the Civic Center Library, call 925-373-5505 or email lib@livermoreca.gov.

Additional tax information and Livermore Public Library resources are available at tinyurl.com/ny55dx.

Thursday, Jan. 15

LUNAR NEW YEAR CALLIGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Welcome the Year of the Horse with a special calligraphy workshop led by Jojo Liu. This class introduces the fundamentals of Chinese calligraphy, including brush techniques, stroke order, and the writing of auspicious New Year phrases. For ages 15 and up. No registration; however, space is limited to the first 25 participants. On Jan. 15 from 6-7 p.m. at the Dublin Library, 200 Civic Plaza.

Saturday, Jan. 17

LIVERMORE LIONS CLUB CRAB FEED FUNDRAISER

Doors open 5p.m. at Bothwell Arts Center, 2466 8th St. Dinner includes all you can eat crab with pasta, salad, bread, dessert, water. Live music by Element 116, raffles, 50/50, and silent auction. No host bar. No outside beverages. Tickets \$75 per person or \$420 table for six. Call Ann at 805-405-8742 for tickets.

Saturday, Jan. 17

SMART RETIREMENT MEETING

In this course, you'll learn how to set your ideal retirement age and calculate exactly what's required to fund your dream lifestyle. Learn strategies and tools for early retirement with speaker Amber Ma. At the Dublin Library, 200 Civic Plaza, Jan. 17 from 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 18

HOUSE CONCERT: SIXPENNY

The Livermore Jazz Society will host a house concert featuring Sixpenny, traditional Celtic music played on acoustic instruments. Sixpenny gives propulsive energy to the rhythmic beat of jigs, the dance music of reels, and rousing songs and ballads. On Jan. 18 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. Details at www.livermorejazzsociety.org/events or email info@livermorejazzsociety.org. If seats are available, you will receive a written invitation with the concert address. Seating is limited, so advance notice is highly recommended. Livestream available. Suggested donation: \$20 per person.

Thursday, Jan 22 and 29

SQUARE DANCING LESSONS

Cactus Corners, a local nonprofit, is offering free introductory square-dancing classes on Jan. 22 and 29 to new dancers. Lessons will continue through the rest of the year. Anyone age 8 and up is invited. At Sunrise Mobile Home Park, 856 Sundial Circle, Livermore, in the Community Room. For more information and to be placed on the class notification list, email Margaret at mmiller1435@gmail.com or call 925-518-7624.

Saturday, Jan. 24

DRESS A GIRL AROUND THE WORLD

Make simple dresses for girls in third world countries! The next monthly Sew-Fest is on Jan. 24, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1020 Mocho St., Livermore. Bring your sewing machine or serger, iron, ironing board, scissors, along with your helping hands. Come for an hour or all day! (Please bring a bag lunch if you plan to stay all day.) Cheerful cotton fabric donations are always welcome. Contact Suzanne Beck, 925-352-8447, or suzbeck@yahoo.com for questions or kits that you can sew from home.

Saturday, Jan. 24

PIANIST DANIEL GLOVER PERFORMS "VIVA L'ITALIA"

International concert pianist Daniel Glover will perform the music of Italy in "Viva l'Italia," a benefit for the Valley Concert Chorale. Mr. Glover's programs are always entertaining and educational as he shares the history and analysis of each piece he performs. On Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church, 2020 Fifth St., Livermore. Tickets are \$30 and may be purchased at www.valleyconcertchorale.org or 925-866-4003.

Sunday, Jan. 25

HISTORIC RANCH OPEN HOUSE

Visit historic Hagemann Ranch at your own pace on Jan. 25 from 1-5 p.m. Wander this 5-acre, historic site, see the original buildings and the gardens, and visit the animals. Docents will be on hand to answer questions and offer tours. Located at 455 Olivina Ave. in Livermore.

Monday, Jan. 26

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. FELLOWSHIP BREAKFAST & AWARDS

Three Valleys Community Foundation (3VCF) is hosting the 25th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Breakfast & Awards in the Tri-Valley, celebrating community service with the theme "The Fierce Urgency of Now," focusing on courageous, compassionate action and philanthropic service and honoring local leaders who embody Dr. King's spirit. Tickets are on sale and sponsorship packages are available at 3vcf.org/mlk-fellowship-awards. At the Palm Event Center in the Vineyards, Pleasanton, on Jan. 26 from 8:00 - 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, Jan. 31

CRAB FEED FUNDRAISER

The Dublin/San Ramon Women's Club is holding an all-you-can-eat crab feed fundraiser — to benefit local nonprofits that support foster youth, children and families. On Jan. 31, from 5:30 to 9:00 pm. at St. Raymond's Catholic Church, Moran Hall, 11555 Shannon Ave., Dublin. Featuring a silent auction, dessert auction, prizes and games. Menu: dungeness crab, pasta, salad, bread, dessert, wine, beer, soda sales. Pricing: \$80 per adult, \$40 youth 6-12, kids 5 and under free. Register online at www.gfwcdsr.org or by mail at DSRWC 20 Lawton Ct. San Ramon 94583. For questions, call 925-381-1040.

Sunday, Feb. 8

2026 LIONS SPEECH CONTEST FOR COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP

The Livermore Lions Club is holding its annual Student Speaker Contest on Feb. 8 at the Civic Center Library in Livermore. The contest provides scholarships for high school students after graduation. Each of up to six students presents a 5- to 10-minute speech on the topic, "Youth Mental Health: Overcoming Barriers to Well-Being." The contest is open to high school students in and around Livermore. For more information and to enter the contest, call Ann at 805-405-8742.

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

FOOD RELIEF SERVICES

Local residents can access vital food-assistance services to help meet basic needs. Food relief services can be found at: Children's Emergency Food Bank; 7421 Amarillo Rd., Dublin; appointments M-F, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; 925-828-5363; St. Raymond Catholic Church, 11555 Shannon Ave., Dublin; third Sat. of the month, 8 to 11 a.m.; Open Heart Kitchen; M-F, 1 to 5 p.m.; 450 N. Livermore Ave., Livermore; Tri-Valley Haven Food Pantry, 150 N. "L" Street, Livermore; 925-449-1664 — M-Th, 1 to 5 p.m.; Fri/Sat 12 to 4 p.m.; Alameda County Community Food Bank; 510-635-3663; M-F, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ONGOING EVENTS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

In AA, we don't tell anyone to do anything. We talk about our own drinking, the trouble we got into, and how we stopped. To find a local meeting in person or online, visit valleyservicecenteraa.org or call the 24-hour hotline at 925-829-0666.

SATURDAY PLEASANTON FARMERS MARKET

Open Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Main Street and West Angela Street. Seniors 60 and over are welcome for specialized shopping from 9 to 10 a.m.

SUNDAY LIVERMORE DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET

Open year-round on Sundays 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in downtown Livermore, on Second St. between J St. and L St.

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Email non-profit events to calendar@independentnews.com for newspaper calendar and visit our website www.independentnews.com to promote all events online.

SWALWELL

(Continued from front page)

one speech, "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

As rioters stormed the building and called for the execution of then-Vice President Mike Pence, Trump posted on social media that Pence lacked "courage" for not overturning the election results. Trump refused for hours to call off the attack.

Swalwell gaveled Congress back to order on Jan. 6 and helped assist in the evacuation of the House of Representatives Chamber. Because of his actions that day, his gubernatorial campaign recently earned the personal endorsements of former Capitol Police Officers Harry Dunn, Aquilino Gonell and Michael Fanone, and Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges, according to an announcement from Swalwell's campaign office. All four served on the front lines on Jan. 6.

The congressman has acted as one of Trump's most vocal critics.

"We found him guilty then, and he's guilty now,"

Swalwell said in the video. "Guilty for going after our immigrant families, guilty for prosecuting people who speak out against him, and guilty for raising inflation with his stupid tariff taxes."

Two New Reports

Following Trump's re-election in 2024, Trump pardoned en masse more than 1,500 Jan. 6 insurrectionists.

On Jan. 5 this year, Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee, a standing committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, marked the insurrection's fifth anniversary with two new reports that followed up on the event's participants, including 33 pardoned insurrectionists that have since been convicted of, charged with or arrested for additional crimes.

"President Trump and his faithful protectors on the Roberts Supreme Court have constructed an America where political crime pays — at least sometimes," Ranking Committee Member Rep. Jamie Raskin wrote in one report. "This

creates a bundle of moral and political hazards. Instead of being met with bipartisan opposition, swift legal consequences and widespread social repudiation, these insurrectionists and coup-plotters are pardoned, forgiven, lionized, promoted, compensated and embraced by the political system. As a result, these sweeping assaults on our constitutional order were normalized and validated, and may become standard operating procedure for predatory political groups."

Current California Governor Gavin Newsom will term out at the end of this year after serving eight years in office. The state will hold its primary election on June 2 and its general election on Nov. 3. Voters must register by May 18 to vote in the primary and by Oct. 19 for the general election.

"The next governor has two jobs: One, protect Californians from the worst president in our history," Swalwell said. "And two, fight for an affordable, new California."

Students Entertain Seniors At Pleasanton Community

PLEASANTON — Student volunteers from the Rise and Shine Youth Leadership (RISE) group entertained more than 100 residents at the Kottinger Gardens senior housing community last month with a variety of piano duets, violin solos, instrumental ensembles and a martial arts performance. Seniors also joined in singing Christmas carols and a graceful Tai Chi fan dance.

RISE is a student-run nonprofit organization founded in the Bay Area

during the COVID pandemic to develop leadership skills while giving back to the community. The group is currently led by students at Dublin High School, Amador Valley High School and the Quarry Lane School.

The program at Kottinger Gardens also included interactive games with the seniors and a gift for every resident in attendance.

Last year, RISE also volunteered at the Alameda County Fair, helped Kids Against Hunger send more

than 20,000 meals to Haiti and Ukraine, participated in food drives for Bay Area food banks, collected clothing and household goods for Savers Thrift Store in Dublin and sponsored the group's annual Shoebox Event, packing 150 shoeboxes with toys and school supplies for children in need as part of Operation Christmas Child, sponsored by Samaritan's Purse.

For more information about RISE, go to rsyouth-leadership.org.

Marriage, Family Therapist to Offer Free Advice for Couples

LIVERMORE — Family therapist Lisa Gray will discuss the most common mistakes couples make when dealing with conflict in a relationship at the Civic Center Library at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 1.

Gray, a licensed marriage

and family therapist with a practice in Livermore, will also discuss how a chronic illness can change a relationship and how she works with couples to address the issue.

She will be signing copies of her books, "Thriving in a Relationship When You

Have Chronic Illness" and "Healthy Conflict, Happy Couple," which Towne Center Books will have available for purchase at the event.

The event is free for adults and registration is not required.

OBITUARIES

Eleanor Lilly Lucas**July 22, 1927 — Dec. 13, 2025**

Eleanor Lilly Lucas, 98, of Livermore, California, passed away peacefully on Dec. 13, 2025, at Bethelcare Home in Lafayette, California.

Born on July 22, 1927, in Chicago, Illinois, to Albert and Frieda (Lehmann) Scholz, Eleanor lived a long and meaningful life marked by curiosity, creativity, and devotion to family and community.

She attended Elmhurst College in Illinois and married the love of her life, Henry Lucas, in January 1948. They shared 49 years of marriage and raised two children, Robert and Kathleen, building a warm and loving home.

After moving to Fullerton, California, in 1953, Eleanor devoted herself to family life while enjoying gardening, raising parakeets, and serving

as a Cub Scout and Girl Scout leader. In December 1965, the family relocated to Livermore, where Eleanor would live for more than five decades.

In Livermore, Eleanor began volunteering at the VA Hospital laboratory. Her dedication and attention to detail led to a 24-year career as a laboratory technician, where she earned respect for her meticulous work and strong work ethic.

Eleanor had a deep love for animals, plants, and the outdoors. She was an avid gardener and orchid enthusiast and shared her husband's passion for sailing, racing together throughout San Francisco Bay and spending many weekends at the marina. She also expressed her creativity through oil painting, knitting, sweaters and blankets, spinning wool,

and crafting latch-hook rugs.

After becoming a widow, Eleanor continued to find joy in reading, playing bingo and pinochle with friends, and cherishing her beloved pets, who were truly family to her.

Eleanor is survived by her daughter, Kathleen (Katie) Sodermark of Kula, Hawaii; her grandchildren, Brooke, Ashley, and Paul; and her great-grandchildren, Krystal, Rachel, Sierra, Kai, and Angus. She was preceded in death by her husband, Henry Lucas, and her son, Robert Lucas.

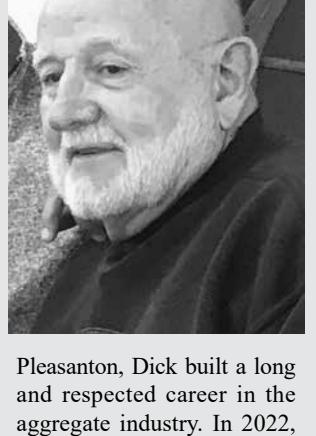
A memorial service will be held at Holy Cross Lutheran Church, 1020 Mocho Street, Livermore, at 10:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Valley Humane Society.

Celebration of Life**Dick Wallis Sanders****May 22, 1937 — Dec. 13, 2025**

Dick Wallis Sanders, a devoted husband, father, and skilled craftsman, passed away peacefully at his home in Manteca on Saturday, Dec. 13, 2025, at the age of 88, surrounded by his loving family.

Dick was born on May 22, 1937, in Bloomingdale, Illinois. His journey west took him through Minnesota, eventually leading him to the mountains of California, where he lived in McCloud and White Pines. During these years, Dick worked as a logger in the woods and later as a logging truck driver. It was during his time behind the wheel of a logging truck that he met the love of his life, Linda. Driven by his devotion to her, Dick moved to the Bay Area in 1958 to be close to his future wife.

After settling in the Bay Area, living first in Dublin and then for many years in



Pleasanton, Dick built a long and respected career in the aggregate industry. In 2022, he and Linda relocated to Manteca.

A talented handyman with a passion for home improvement, Dick was known for his craftsmanship, particularly the beautiful decks he built

Dick's presence was especially felt during the Christmas season; his signature Ramos Fizz and mini cranberry loaves were beloved family traditions that everyone looked forward to each year. Above all, Dick was a man who deeply loved and provided for his family.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Linda Sanders; their three children, Rick, Teresa, and Kevin; and his sister, Susan Keith. He was the proud grandfather of Ryan Agamau and Megan Sousa, to whom he was affectionately known as "Papa," and a doting great-grandfather to five great-grandchildren.

Service Information: A Celebration of Life will be held on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, located at 2020 5th St., Livermore, CA 94550.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE**Henry Ashford Stephens****June 26, 1951 — Dec. 23, 2025**

Join us as we celebrate the life of Henry "Hank" Stephens on Jan. 17, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at First Pres-

byterian Church in Livermore, California. Hank was husband to Karen for 52 years, father to Brad

and Adam, and grandfather to Levi, Avery, Nolan, Charlotte, Brady, and Caden.

Maria Liduina Silva (Sousa)**Dec. 6, 1937 — Jan. 2, 2026**

Maria Liduina Silva (née Sousa), age 88, passed away peacefully at her home in Livermore, California, on Jan. 2, 2026, after a courageous three-year battle with dementia.

Born on Dec. 6, 1937, in Rebeira Seca, São Jorge, Azores, to Manuel and Carmina Sousa, Maria carried with her the rich traditions and enduring spirit of her Portuguese heritage throughout her life.

Maria was a devoted member of the Catholic Church and found joy in participating in annual Holy Ghost festivities organized by Portuguese societies. Her generous heart and selfless nature were evident in all she did—always thinking of others before herself and offering help wherever it was needed.

She shared many years of marriage with her husband, Estulano Silva, who preceded her in death. Maria was also

predeceased by her daughter Rosa Cantz.

She is lovingly remembered by her daughter Orlando Silva, son-in-law Bernard Cantz, her grandchildren, Matthew Cantz, Alyssa Cantz, and Angela Walker, and her dog, Charlie, who had been her companion for the last three years. Her love for them was boundless; they brought immense joy to her life.

Maria was an avid cook whose meals brought comfort

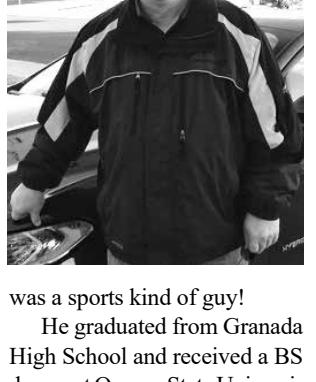
and warmth to those around her. She found relaxation and delight in watching Spanish telenovelas and cheering on her favorite sports teams—the Golden State Warriors and the San Francisco Giants. Sewing was another of her treasured pastimes.

Maria Liduina Silva will be remembered for her unwavering devotion to family, faith, culture, and community. May her memory bring comfort to those who knew and loved her.

A memorial service will be held on Feb. 6, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at Callaghan Mortuary, 3833 East Ave., in Livermore. The burial will follow, at 12:30 p.m. at Roselawn Cemetery, 1240 N Livermore Ave., Livermore, California.

Callaghan Mortuary is honored to be serving the Silva family. An online guestbook is available for condolences at www.callaghanmortuary.com.

Join us as we celebrate the life of James, a devoted car enthusiast, inventor, product designer, volunteer and devoted

Jerry Francis Hanlon**Aug. 7, 1968 — Dec. 28, 2025**

was a sports kind of guy!

He graduated from Granada High School and received a BS degree at Oregon State University majoring in communications and media. Professionally, Jerry

was a TV graphics technician, sports coordinator or stats coordinator on Sports TV. "He was one of the people in the truck that aired the game!" Jerry will be remembered for his professional work ethics to make a high-quality Sports TV show. He was a freelancer who worked for the Warriors, Kings, Giants, and college sports, which required extensive travel. He is survived by his mom Pat, dad Jerry, brother Don and Dina, plus many relatives in New Jersey.

May he rest in peace and enjoy a cold beer in Heaven. We will miss him dearly!

CELEBRATION OF LIFE**James Christian Johnstone****Sept. 28, 1949 — Sept. 1, 2025**

Join us as we celebrate the life of James, a devoted car enthusiast, inventor, product designer, volunteer and devoted

family man. He brought joy and laughter to all.

We will gather on Sunday, Jan. 18, 2026, noon-4:00 p.m. at Liver-

more-Pleasanton Elks Lodge, #2117, 940 Larkspur Dr., Livermore. Please bring your stories and memories to share.

With love and sadness, we share the passing of our beautiful mother and grandmother, Diane Shigeyo Shimada, who died peacefully in Livermore on Dec. 18, 2025, at the age of 85, surrounded by family.

Born in Oakland on Aug. 1, 1940, Diane graduated from Berkeley High School and Laney College. She spent 32 years at Sandia National Laboratories, first as a drafting designer and later serving as a facilities manager.

As a child, Diane was incarcerated with her family at the Topaz War Relocation Center in Utah during World War II — making her later work for the U.S. government, with the highest levels of security clearance, all the more extraordinary.

Diane was light-hearted,

funny, and thoughtful, deeply devoted to her family, and immensely proud of her five grandchildren. She found joy in puzzles, crocheting, and tending her garden.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Mae and Harry Hoshi, and sister, Ruth Narasaki. She is survived by her brother Donald (Mitzi) Hoshi; her children René (Eric) Siegel, Lori (Peter) Rocero, and Derek Shimada, all of Livermore; and her five grandchildren Adam, Arielle, Jared, Shelby, and Mitchell.

In keeping with her wishes, no public service will be held. If you feel moved to honor her, please consider donating to a charity meaningful to you. Diane taught us to think of others and to help where we can.

Amador Valley Girls Soccer Team Targets Strong Finish

By Mitch Stephens

PLEASANTON — The notion that more is better doesn't apply to the Amador Valley High School girls soccer team.

Amador Valley's third-year head coach, Grant Matsumoto, is a great believer in economy, efficiency, and mental and physical health.

That's why the Dons competed in only one non-league game before opening East Bay Athletic League play Jan. 8 with a 2-0 win at Livermore. Addie Stout and Niela Harris scored goals, and goalie Morgan O'Brien, a first-year Don and transfer from Foothill, recorded the shutout.

Matsumoto implemented the same strategy — one game in December before starting league play in January — the past two seasons during 12-3-1 and 14-5 overall campaigns. The Dons won a total of five North Coast Section playoff games, advanced to the CIF Northern California regional tournament twice, and last season, reached their first NCS title game since 2002.

There is definitely a method to the unconventional December light scheduling that Matsumoto and assistants Jonathan Decker and Luis Siu im-

plement and will continue to apply as long as the 2010 Dougherty Valley-San Ramon graduate is in charge.

Load Management

Virtually every member of the 17-person roster plays year-round soccer, with half competing for the Pleasanton Rage soccer club, where Matsumoto, Decker and Siu all coach. Matsumoto, who played college soccer at Sonoma State and professionally for the Sonoma County Sol, San Ramon FC and Diablos Professional Futsal, works full time on the Rage technical staff.

The new age of high school soccer is that rather than pile on games, which can lead to injuries or threaten mental well-being, we subscribe to getting the players to peak and reach their highest potential at just the right time," Matsumoto said. "Playing year-round is a grueling process, so our philosophy is to keep them 100% healthy, and the hottest team will win at the end."

It sure worked last season, when the Dons captured the EBAL playoffs with a 1-0, double-overtime victory over Carondelet-Concord on a goal from then-sophomore Mira Garuda. The talented midfielder missed her freshman

The elder Montoya was

season with a torn ACL, which is just the type of injury Matsumoto is trying to minimize by playing fewer nonleague games. The Dons host San Ramon Valley at 6:30 tonight, Jan. 15, before traveling to Carondelet on Tuesday, Jan. 20.

"(Garuda) is a super-good player and one of the many girls who make this team go," Matsumoto said.

Stingy Defense

The biggest reason for Matsumoto's optimism for this season is the team's defense. The Dons (1-0-1, 1-0) have not allowed a goal, after having given up just 23 over 35 matches the past two seasons.

That defense is led by junior Julia Wanis, who Matsumoto said "is one of the best defenders, if not the best defender, in the region. She's very athletic, extremely good in the air and super aggressive and competitive."

The center fullback is flanked by seniors Kailee Walker and Hailey Morec, along with sophomore Addison Montoya, the sister of last season's star senior, Maylen Montoya, who was named to the Big Ten all-freshman team at the University of Washington this fall.

The elder Montoya was



Amador Valley's Claire Morgan, left, vies for the ball during last season's March 1 North Coast Section girls soccer championship game against Monte Vista-Danville. (File photo — Doug Jorgensen)

one of six seniors lost to graduation. The team's returning players have been joined by four players called up from last season's junior varsity, along with transfer O'Brien and the team's lone freshman, Leena Khan.

"Our challenge, like everyone else in the league, is scoring more goals," Matsumoto said. "Finding offense will be key."

History Lessons

Befitting her name, Stout is an extremely talented sophomore who should help in that area.

"She'll be one of the

more dynamic players in the league," Matsumoto said. "And she's just getting better and better."

Junior Claire Morgan controls everything in the midfield and is one of the league's top players.

All that talent points to another possible EBAL playoff title and also a possible NCS crown, which would be the sixth in school history, but first since 2002.

Last season, that NCS title seemed secure in the final against Monte Vista-Danville, only to see the Mustangs prevail 1-0 in two overtimes despite being outshot 18-6.

Amador Valley, just as Matsumoto and staff planned, had peaked at the end of the season, with eight straight wins. But the Dons just couldn't finish with a goal against Monte Vista. After the game, Matsumoto called soccer "sometimes cruel," where the better group on a given day doesn't always win.

"Hopefully the loss and all the experiences from last year will make us stronger for this season," Matsumoto said. "We were so proud of that team, and those players coming back have big expectations and know the standard it takes to go far."



Members of Amador Valley's girls soccer team react after a heartbreaking 1-0, double-overtime loss to Monte Vista in last season's NCS championship game. (File photo — Doug Jorgensen)

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Cowboys Not Monkeying Around

By Mitch Stephens

TRI-VALLEY — As the final seconds ticked away on Jan. 9, members of the raucous, home student body, flailing fists and roaring their approval, inched toward the court.

On the Livermore High School boys basketball bench, junior Zachary Acaba and senior Ryan Natsch began to bounce as longtime head coach Mike Tripp continued to pace.

When the final horn sounded, senior point guard C.T. Harper and sophomore sensation Amare Chandler, already on the court, didn't retreat, but instead met the storming students head on, suddenly disappearing into the masses.



Fans and players wildly celebrate Livermore's 74-63 triumph over visiting Amador Valley on Jan. 9, a victory that snapped a 121-game Cowboys' losing streak in EBAL play that dated back nearly 12 years. (Photo courtesy of Mike Tripp)

Out of nowhere, Harper emerged, flinging a basketball straight into the air.

With a thoroughly impressive 74-63 East Bay Athletic League win over Amador Valley, players skipped, coaches embraced and everyone waved goodbye — to their opponent, to 12 years of defeats, to one of the longest league losing streaks in the country, a staggering 121 games.

The most recent Cowboys' EBAL victory had come on Feb. 14, 2014, which was followed by two more defeats, then 0-14 seasons in 2015 and 2016, 0-13 campaigns from 2017 to 2020, three EBAL defeats in the pandemic-shortened 2021 season and consecutive 0-9 EBAL seasons from 2022 to 2025.

"I can officially say now that the monkey is off our back," said Tripp, in the middle of the second season of his second stint with the Cowboys and his 40th season overall. "I'm so proud of these guys. They were so locked in tonight. We played connected and on all cylinders. We shared the ball. We defended. I'm just so happy for the guys and our school."

Against one of the EBAL favorites, the No. 9 team in the Bay Area according to the San Francisco Chronicle, the Cowboys improved to 14-3 overall while getting 27 points from the 6-foot-6 Chandler. Dylan

Wherry, a 6-7 senior post, had 19 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots. Harper added 12 points and junior guard Zach Lininger shut down star Amador Valley guard Jaylen Smith, who finished with seven points, 14 below his season average.

Tripp might have been most thrilled with literally getting rid of a stuffed monkey he bought last season, when he thought his team would end the streak.

In his first year back in 2024-25, he led the talented Cowboys to their first winning season (15-14) and first North Coast Section playoff victory in more than 30 years. Despite that, they were still 0-9 in arguably the Bay Area's toughest league, and Tripp had to hold on to the monkey.

While addressing the team after Friday's game, he gladly disposed of the toy into a nearby receptacle, setting off a wild celebration in the locker room.

"I can't tell you how great it was to throw that monkey in the garbage," Tripp said. "The guys went crazy."

Breaking the streak is one thing, but the Cowboys now have their eyes on going worst to first. They played at San Ramon Valley-Danville on Tuesday, Jan. 13, and host Dougherty Valley-San Ramon on Friday, Jan. 16. Tip-off is set for 7:30 p.m.

Granada to Rebound

Winning in the EBAL is not easy. Ever. The same night Livermore broke its long losing streak, crosstown rival Granada lost a tough 51-44 EBAL opener at Monte Vista-Danville despite 22 points and 10 rebounds from Brandon Hahn, and leading 39-32 entering the fourth quarter.

The Matadors seemed to run out of steam with just five points in the fourth quarter, compared to 19 for the Mustangs, who got a game-high 23 points from Max Nishikawa.

Monte Vista (11-6) was one of only three EBAL teams not ranked in the Chronicle's Top 20 heading into league play. De La Salle-Concord led the way at No. 5, followed by Amador Valley (No. 9), Dublin (No. 10), Granada (No. 11), California-San Ramon (No. 12), Dougherty Valley (No. 14) and Livermore (No. 19). It marked the first time the Cowboys have made the Bay Area rankings.

In other EBAL games scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 16, Granada (12-4 as of Jan. 10) will host California (10-7), Amador Valley (10-7) entertains San Ramon Valley (7-10), Foothill (10-5) hosts Monte Vista and De La Salle (15-2) plays at Dublin (13-5).

EBAL Girls Basketball

Amador Valley (7-7) plays at San Ramon Valley (13-2) on Thursday, Jan. 15, while Friday games include Granada (6-10) at California (9-6), Livermore (9-8) at Dougherty Valley (12-2), and Foothill (6-8) at Monte Vista (9-6).

Have high school varsity sports news or note? A good human-interest story? Email Mitch Stephens at mitch@scorebooklive.com

Student-Run Online Tutoring Program Continues to Flourish

By Vivien Wenneker

PLEASANTON — Edutine, a free online tutoring platform founded by sisters Aarushi and Parul Gupta in 2020, will soon be celebrating six years, and some major milestones.

What started as a small initiative to support friends with academic help, primarily in Pleasanton, where the Gupta sisters attended school, has grown into a global nonprofit. Chapters are spread across the Tri-Valley, Tri-City, San Joaquin County, Contra Costa County, New York and India.

The platform was established during early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many students were grappling with the adjustment of transitioning to remote learning.

Parul, who was then a sophomore at Foothill High School, saw firsthand how the pandemic was taking a negative toll on the students around her, and even her younger sister, Aarushi, who was 10 at the time.

Recognizing that younger students were more likely to suffer in the long run and feel that their educational endeavors were stunted, Parul got the idea of creating an online learning platform that would allow high-school volunteers to give lessons to younger students. The reasoning was that since high-

school students already have the necessary years of learning, and knowledge fresh under their belts, they would be the most ideal tutors.

"Edutine," as Parul called it, originally had the mission of helping students within the local community through providing



Aarya Godse

free, virtual tutoring, but as the platform's message and presence spread, it quickly expanded beyond the Tri-Valley.

According to Aarushi, now a Foothill student, the company has drawn more than 1,000 volunteers who have contributed to more than 10,000 hours toward mentoring/guiding students and also completing administrative work to connect students with tutors.

Additionally, despite its global reach, Edutine strives to connect students with local tutors, or ones living in nearby cities so that a student in Pleasanton, for instance, may be paired with a tutor in Pleasanton.

Its volunteers not only find

fulfillment in watching their students grow and helping them achieve their academic goals, but also in gaining practical, real-world skills.

"The best part of volunteering for Edutine is being able to expand our organization worldwide so that we can help



Veda Mungara

provide resources to students in underserved communities across the globe," said Veda Mungara, one of Edutine's 2025 volunteers of the year. "As VP of Marketing and on the Board, I've been able to play a vital role in social media and advertising, to expand our partnerships and the amount of students we help, and that has been the most rewarding part."

Mungara's current work for the company fits into her larger goals and passion concerning youth advocacy and education. She hopes to pursue a degree in Public Policy and one day start her own business that helps provide education to women who face domestic gender violence.

Another 2025 volunteer of the year, Aarya Godse, shared that she was originally drawn to Edutine about two years ago due to its strong focus on making education more accessible and supportive for students.

"The idea of combining academic help with mentorship really resonated with me, and I wanted to be part of a community that genuinely empowers students," Godse said. "One of the best parts has been seeing the direct impact on students, whether that's helping someone gain confidence in a subject or feel supported during a stressful academic period. A memorable moment for me was transitioning from being a tutor to taking on leadership roles like the board VP of student support, where I could support not just students but also other volunteers."

Godse added that the experience of working as a tutor, before going on to become a student support director and later vice president of student relations, has taught her so much about developing leadership, empathy and a broader perspective on student impact.

"I absolutely see myself continuing to volunteer with Edutine in the future and growing alongside the organization," Godse said. "It's given me the opportunity to not only help

students academically, but also to connect with them, guide them and inspire confidence."

Edutine currently offers more than 30 subjects, from Algebra to AP Sciences, and according to its website, 95% of students report improved understanding and performance.

The company continues to find ways of building connections and strengthening its ties within the Tri-Valley and beyond. In 2025, it collaborated with local organizations to host events such as a Robotics Workshop in collaboration with System Overload Robotics. It has also held several business workshops in collaboration



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Startup Company Led by Students Develops Hydroponics System for Small-Scale Farms

By Sanestina Hunter

DUBLIN — A new startup is working to address one of agriculture's growing challenges: helping small-scale farmers increase production while using less land and water.

Terran, a startup company co-founded by Dublin High School senior Nithin Aruswamy, Ethan Chen of Mountain View, Rohan Philip of Oak Park and Agastya Sidher of Singapore, is developing an automated hydroponics system designed to reduce water use and land demands for small-scale farming.

The company took shape after the four students met while attending summer programs at the UC Berkeley MET Innovation Academy and the UC Berkeley Business Academy for Youth. They connected over a shared interest in building affordable agricultural technology.

The team began working on the project in September 2024 and officially launched the startup in January 2025.

In a statement to The Independent, Aruswamy said his interest in agriculture developed through frequent visits to his grandparents in India, where he observed farming carried out with limited access to modern tools.

"Nearly everything was manual labor, from plowing to harvest," Aruswamy said.

He said that from a young age he traveled to more than 50 countries, many of which he described as underdeveloped, particularly in agricultural infrastructure. A cross-country road trip with his family also left a lasting impression after

he observed large-scale farming in Iowa that relied heavily on agricultural technology and efficiency.

Those experiences led Aruswamy to pursue an earlier agritech project with a group of other students, while his interest in technology was shaped by growing up in the Bay Area and participating in competitive robotics programs, including VEX and VEX AI.

VEX and VEX AI are competitive robotics programs in which students design, build and program robots, including fully autonomous systems, to complete engineering challenges.

That earlier work culminated in the development of an autonomous farming robot known as the Sustainable Harvesting and Integrated Efficient Land Defense (SHIELD) system.

designed to automate and support the cultivation of cruciferous crops throughout the growing cycle, from planting to harvest.

According to Aruswamy, the SHIELD project resulted in a United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) provisional patent application and a research paper examining smart crop robotics and water-efficient cruciferous crops.

Terran's system centers on hydroponics, a method of growing plants without soil by delivering nutrients directly through water. Aruswamy said the design is intended to increase production for small-scale farms while reducing water use and land requirements.

Through testing, we found that designing a hydroponics system is currently the most efficient way to help farmers

grow more food using less land and water," he said.

Terran's approach includes two primary innovations. The first is a three-tier vertical setup designed to increase output without requiring additional farmland. The second uses sensors and simple robotics to apply biofertilizers — natural fertilizers — in a targeted manner, using data such as pH levels and water temperature to monitor growing conditions and determine where applications are needed.

Aruswamy said the team also visited UC Berkeley's Center for Smart Infrastructure and received feedback on the concept from Professor Kenichi Soga, which helped shape the product's development.

Although Terran's hydroponics system has not been implemented on working farms, Aruswamy said the startup has tested its business concept by pitching to micro-investors and California small-scale farms and by competing in business competitions.

According to Aruswamy, Terran placed second in the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) World Series of Innovation, ranked among the Top 100 teams in the Blue Ocean Competition, and was named a finalist in both the GENIUS Olympiad and the Paradigm Challenge.

Looking ahead, Aruswamy said the next phase for Terran will focus on testing and integrating the system into real farming environments and gathering feedback directly from farmers.

He said the long-term goal is for Terran to expand internationally, particularly in

regions facing water scarcity, soil degradation or labor-intensive farming conditions, while keeping the technology affordable and accessible for small-scale farms.

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