



The State Parks Diablo Range Division hosted a public tour of the Alameda-Tesla property on April 17, 2024. State Senator McNearney urges that the area be designated a natural reserve. (Photo — David Jen)

## Supreme Court Decides Against Hearing Eden Housing Case

MEH Still Energized, Reviews Further Legal Options

By David Jen

LIVERMORE — The California Supreme Court declined this month to hear a case on the Eden Housing affordable housing project downtown.

The Nov. 17 petition to the court by community supporters alleged that, because of a voter referendum, the Livermore City Council violated the elections code when it approved an agreement with Eden in June 2024. The Jan. 14 Supreme Court decision lets stand the October decision of a lower court, the Court of Appeal, ruling that the city acted within legal bounds.

The Supreme Court, which re-

views lower-court decisions to maintain legal uniformity, usually grants hearings for 1%-3% of the petitions it reviews.

After nearly four years of lawsuits, the City of Livermore and Eden now look forward to developing the 130-unit affordable-housing project downtown. "We are deeply grateful to the City of Livermore and our many partners for their steadfast leadership and support throughout this effort," Eden Housing President and CEO Linda Mandolini said in a statement. "We are eager to finally move this important project forward.

Had it not been for these meritless lawsuits, 130 families would have already been living in high-quality,

affordable homes for the past two years. We are encouraged by the court's decision and the numerous published opinions confirming our right to build this housing and remain committed to bringing this much-needed housing to the community."

The city declined to comment following the decision.

The community group Move Eden Housing (MEH), which organized the referendum and brought the lawsuit, has stated that it will continue its legal efforts to relocate the project.

"Despite the outcome here, Move Eden Housing and its supporters have not lost their resolve or given

(See COURT, page 6)

## Pleasanton City Council Accepts Audited 2024-25 Financials

Closes Fiscal Year With a \$1.3M Surplus

By David Jen

PLEASANTON — Financial austerity measures have allowed the city to close its 2024-25 fiscal year with a \$1.3 million surplus in its general fund, but significant headwinds remain for city finances. The city's total net position increased by \$11.5 million last fiscal year, driven mainly by increased revenues, such as a 2.7% increase in property-tax revenues and a 5.3% increase in sales-tax revenues, according to recently audited city financial statements.

At its Jan. 20 meeting, the city council unanimously accepted the financial statements, along with the city's annual compre-

hensive financial report and the audit reports for fiscal year 2024-25.

Independent accounting firm Pun Group LLC performed the audit. The firm granted the statements the highest level of audit approval, meaning the statements were presented fairly and in accordance with industry principles.

Mayor Jack Balch, who has championed public financial transparency throughout his city council tenure, joined other council members last week in praising city staff's work on the financial statements, which received an award from the Government Finance Officers

Association.

"An audited financial statement, I think for Pleasanton right now, goes to improving transparency, public trust, accountability — all the goals that we advance for our community," Balch said. "From my view, I think our community is more in tune with our budget than almost any time that I can remember in recent memory, and that's a good thing."

City Manager Gerry Beaudin said a number of reasons, such as reduced expenses and some additional revenue, contributed to the general fund surplus.

"We aim to finish ahead," Beaudin said. "We did that last year because we pumped the

(See FINANCIAL, page 6)



Cristi Bowman, left, and Lisa Gaines laugh during a meeting of The Circle: Cultural Connections & Community group at the Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices offices in downtown Livermore on Jan. 15. The women-focused group meets monthly for wellness events and activities centered on self-love, charitable giving and mutual support. (Photo — Leah Silveira)

## Monthly Gathering Brings Women Together

Livermore Realtor Utilizes Office Space to Host Community-Connection Circle

By Christina Cavallaro

LIVERMORE — Nafisa Lillie, a Realtor at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices in downtown Livermore, has discovered a unique opportunity to bring women together in numerous ways.

Lillie is the founder of The Circle: Cultural Connections & Community, a women-focused group that meets monthly after hours at the real estate office where she works by day.

The idea came about when

Lillie, who is from Afghanistan, was preparing for a visit there and wanted to bring aid of some kind. Her sister suggested she reach out to her circle of friends to see if anyone wanted to donate.

"I told her my dream was to take some money and go help because I have this amazing life here," Lillie said. One of seven siblings, Lillie came to the United States as a refugee just after the Soviet invasion of her country in 1979. Lillie's father brought the family to safety and with that instilled in his children the

importance of service and paying it forward.

"My father taught us, 'You came to this country to live and survive. You have to give back.'" That message has been a driving force in her life.

She is largely focused on helping women and children in her charitable works. "That's where my heart is," Lillie said. And she never forgets the reality of life for women in places like Afghanistan. "Women can't go to school, they can't go to work. For me to have

(See WOMEN, page 7)

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## PET OF THE WEEK



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# New Study Highlights Danger of Multi-Ignition Wildfires

By David Jen

LIVERMORE — When wildfires merge, the resulting fire behaves differently from one that started from a single ignition, causing a disproportionate amount of damage even when compared to a single-ignition fire of the same size.

A new study published in the journal *Science Advances* by researchers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), University of California (UC), Irvine and other institutions sheds light on this extreme fire behavior, helping to improve wildfire prediction, risk

assessment and management.

"The disproportionate effects of multi-ignition fires result from more than just the bigger size of the fires," said Qi Tang, one of the paper's authors and deputy group leader of LLNL's Climate Modeling Group. "Other fire properties may also contribute to the disproportionate effects of multi-ignition fires, (such as) intensity and dynamics."

Multi-ignition fires account for 31% of the burned area within California, but make up only 7% of the total number of fires. Five of the 10 largest fires in California

studied began at multiple points, with the 2020 August Complex fire, the largest California fire on record, originating from 10 fire starts before burning over 1 million acres across Mendocino, Humboldt, Trinity, Tehama, Glenn, Lake and Colusa counties.

"Our data indicates that the disproportionate impacts of multi-ignition fires come, in part, from these complexes having a larger actively spreading fire front," said UC Irvine Earth system science professor James Randerson, one of the paper's authors. "So, the perimeter area will be higher for multiple-ignition fires. The

presence of multiple fronts makes it more difficult for firefighters to respond effectively, and when the fronts merge, they can generate intense fires that create pyrocumulonimbus clouds and erratic surface winds."

Pyrocumulonimbus events, or fire-triggered thunderstorms, are more likely to emerge from multi-ignition fires, with the study attributing 67% of such events in Russia and Canada in 2023 to multi-ignition fires. Lightning strikes from these storms can hinder airborne fire suppression and even start new fires miles away from the parent fire.

The researchers examined satellite data ranging from 2012 to 2023 for the causes and impacts of fires in boreal forest ecosystems. They also considered feedback mechanisms from the atmosphere and humans that may have amplified the fires.

The study found that lightning strikes, especially those occurring over a layer of dry air, are the primary cause of clustered ignitions. What's more, when multiple fires ignite simultaneously, they can quickly overwhelm regional firefighting resources, forcing fire managers to prioritize some fires over

others. Lightning-caused fires, as opposed to human-started ones, also tend to occur in remote areas, adding logistical challenges.

The team hopes that simulations based on their data can help suppress future multi-ignition events.

"We can help the community of firefighters know where the pyrocumulonimbus is more likely to occur, and that can lead to a prediction of where the fire triggers and the larger event would be," Tang said. "We might be able to do something to avoid multi-ignition events. That is one of our objectives."

## LVJUSD Faces \$14.8M Deficit, Rules Out Any School Closures

By Vivien Wenneker

LIVERMORE — With the Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District (LVJUSD) facing an imminent deadline to cut budget costs, the board held a special meeting Jan. 20 to discuss next steps.

Unlike previous years when the district managed cuts of roughly \$6 million,

the district must cut \$14.8 million for the 2026-27 school year.

"The number we have to get to is going to be deep," said Superintendent Torie Gibson. "We will not be able to keep it away from kids, unfortunately. That's how deep we have to go."

The Jan. 20 meeting was intended to establish a process for budget reductions

and provide direction to Gibson.

A number of options were proposed to address the question concerning process, and where community input should fall within that. Board member Deena Kaplanis called for the creation of a webpage to update parents and the community.

"The more opportunities and access people have to

engage with us, the better," Kaplanis said. "For the sake of transparency, I would like to see a process that allows for that."

The board also discussed scheduling more meetings before Feb. 10, when it must approve a formal budget reduction plan for the 2026-27 school year. No dates have been decided.

Board member Craig Bueno said more meetings would allow the board to stagger community input and control the timeline while consulting with stakeholders and the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) committee.

Bueno stressed the importance of following a succinct approach driven by expert opinion when considering how best to address the budgetary concerns, and then weighing that against community feedback.

"Putting things out before we understand them completely, as we've seen with school closures, can cause a reaction that leads to us now fighting the reaction, rather than looking for the solution," Bueno said.

The board unanimously agreed to remove school closures from the list of budget reduction options. In removing them, Gibson made it clear for the record that everything on the list was asked for by stakeholders.

ers, union leadership, and even some board members.

"School closure was put on there, and I'm just going to put it all out there at this point — school closure was put on there because at least one, if not two board members asked me to put it on there," Gibson said. "So, those of you who did probably should own that."

Gibson also asked the board for direction on the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, following passionate community feedback.

The program costs approximately \$60,000 according to Gibson. Although the cut would only apply to Granada High School, she and other members of the Board, specifically President Steven Drouin, highlighted intangible benefits that impact other schools.

While IB was not offi-

cially removed from the list, the board was hesitant to cut the program and asked the superintendent to gather more information and prepare a multi-tiered reduction schedule with input from all the departments.

Gibson said she could have it ready by the end of the week.

The board also asked the superintendent to freeze all hiring of non-essential district positions until the plan is settled.

"I think that the process matters," board member Emily Prusso said. "It's important that we're doing this not just for the outcomes, but also for the trust with our staff, our families and the community."

For more information and budget updates, visit the district's webpage at [bit.ly/45w9OJL](http://bit.ly/45w9OJL).



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Tri-Valley residents gathered in protest on the Santa Rita 580 overpass in Pleasanton on Friday, Jan. 23. The group convened as part of a nationwide Ice Out for Good National Day of Solidarity with Minnesota. The coordinated rally was intended to call attention to the pattern of unchecked violence, impunity and abuse being carried out by federal immigration enforcement (ICE) agencies against communities across the nation. (Photo — Jacob Clouser)

While IB was not offi-

## Pleasanton Schools to Open 2026–2027 Enrollment Feb. 2 for all New Students

By Sanestina Hunter

PLEASANTON — Pleasanton Unified School District (PUSD) will open new student enrollment Feb. 2 for the 2026–27 school year.

The district will accept applications from families enrolling in PUSD for the first time and students returning after a lapse in enrollment.

To help families prepare, the district will host a transitional kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten information night Wednesday, Jan. 28, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Fairlands Elementary School, 4151 W. Las Positas Blvd. The event will also be live-streamed.

The session will cover enrollment procedures and what families can expect in

TK and kindergarten.

Staff will also share information on the Spanish dual-language immersion program, Kids Club before- and after-school childcare, and health requirements, including immunizations needed before students start school.

PUSD assigns students to schools based on home addresses. If a campus reaches capacity, students may be placed at another school site while remaining on a waitlist for their residence school.

The district encourages families to complete enrollment early. Schools may hold lotteries for TK and kindergarten when enrollment exceeds available space.

Enrollments submitted after Feb. 28 will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis.

To qualify for TK, children must turn 4 years old on or before Sept. 1, 2026. For kindergarten, children must turn 5 years old by the same date.

Parents of current PUSD TK students do not need to complete a new enrollment for kindergarten.

PUSD also reminded families that it does not provide school bus transportation. "Families are responsible for getting students to and from school, though public transit is available through the Tri-Valley Rapid Wheels bus system," the district said.

The enrollment rollout comes as PUSD continues campus improvements funded through its \$395 million Measure I bond, approved by voters in 2022.

The bond program includes projects tied to transitional kindergarten facilities and other upgrades across district campuses.

Current projects under construction include improvements to the Foothill High School swimming pool deck and transitional kindergarten projects at Donlon and Fairlands elementary schools, according to the district's Measure I project list.

The first day of school for the 2026–27 school year has not yet been announced.

The new year brings important changes that could impact the real estate market.

Expanded tax deductions—including a temporary increase in the SALT deduction from \$10,000 to \$40,000, permanent mortgage interest deductions, deduction PMI/MIP, non-taxable overtime, potential auto loan interest deductions on US made vehicles, and improved child tax credits—may increase purchasing power and improve loan qualifications.

These could create new opportunities for buyers and sellers alike, but as always professional tax guidance is recommended. Call us today and let's turn your homeownership dreams into reality.

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# MLK Honorees Reflect Leadership, Service in Tri-Valley

By David Scholz

REGIONAL — Martin Luther King Jr. extolled “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere; service bridges the gap.”

Those honored Monday, Jan. 26 at the 25th annual (MLK) Fellowship Breakfast named for the civil rights leader — hosted this year by the Three Valleys Community Foundation (3VCF) — are doing their part to forge a sturdy path forward with work in the community. The event was

and spearheaded initiatives addressing food insecurity, access to laptops for underserved students and wildfire relief efforts.

Describing it as “incredibly emotional” upon learning she had been selected from among 49 nominees, Badar said, “In that moment, I thought about the families helped, the causes supported, and the people who stood beside me along the way. It reminded me that compassion, when paired with action, has real power and that even one person can

included Zayan Kajani of Dublin, Cole Gable of Livermore and Aashvi Geddam of Pleasanton.

The event also continued the tradition of recognizing individuals from the Tri-Valley and nearby communities with Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy awards.

Faith Alpher, of Livermore, a radio talk show host and professional storyteller who has sponsored workshops to help youth find their voices, expressed surprise gratitude upon learning she was a Legacy honoree.



Young Philanthropist Award winner Rabia Badar, left, and Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy Award recipient Faith Alpher were among those honored at the 25th annual MLK Fellowship Breakfast hosted by the Three Valleys Community Foundation on Monday, Jan. 26. Badar, an 18-year-old Dublin resident, was recognized for her work addressing food insecurity, while Alpher, of Livermore, delivered the keynote address emphasizing Dr. King's enduring message of justice and action. (Photo courtesy of 3VCF)

hosted by the Three Valleys Community Foundation (3VCF).

The event, the first for 3VCF, which helps connect donors with regional nonprofit organizations, featured the first-ever Young Philanthropist Award given to Rabia Badar.

The 18-year-old Dublin resident is a senior at Averroes High School in Fremont, the first faith-based Islamic high school in the Bay Area. As a freshman, Badar founded the Junior Civitan Club at Averroes

create meaningful change.”

Going forward, Badar views the honor as a beginning, giving her reassurance that the work she is doing matters and that choosing service and leadership is worth it, even when it is challenging.

“This honor has inspired me, and it motivates me to continue pushing myself to do more, reach more people, and take on initiatives that create lasting impact,” she said. Other Tri-Valley residents among those nominated for the award

“Dr. King consistently reminded young people that their voices matter—and they still do,” Alpher said.

Michael Karami, co-founder of the Dublin Diversity and Inclusion Alliance, strives to embody Baha’i Faith, which emphasizes loving all the world, humanity and working for universal peace.

“Let deeds, not words, be your adornment,” Karami said of his philosophy.

Sunol resident Jim O’Laughlin sees his rural community as having

## Dublin Approves a 45-Day Moratorium on Firearms

DUBLIN — The Dublin City Council voted 4-0 Tuesday, Jan. 20, to impose a 45-day citywide moratorium on new, expanded or relocated firearms retailers and shooting ranges.

The moratorium does not affect firearms retailers currently operating in the city.

The action follows a recent inquiry about a potential firearms dealership with an indoor shooting range, according to a staff report.

The inquiry raised concerns because the business would be located on a vacant retail parcel adjacent to a school under construction in downtown Dublin.

Amy Million, Dublin community development director, said the ordinance gives the city time to study the land use and regulatory framework governing firearms retailers and shooting ranges.

She said staff will return to the council during the

45-day period with policy recommendations.

Under Dublin’s zoning code, firearms retailers and shooting ranges are generally allowed in the city’s commercial districts.

Indoor shooting ranges may be approved through a zoning clearance or minor use permit, while outdoor ranges require a conditional use permit, according to the staff report.

During public comment at the special meeting, Dublin resident Liz Schmidt supported the temporary moratorium, citing concerns about a firearms business operating near a school.

Schmidt also cited Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, saying more than 48,000 people died from firearm-related injuries in the U.S. in 2022.

Another resident criticized the ordinance as unnecessary and said it appeared to target community member Mike Grant, who

has been outspoken on immigration enforcement and gun retail issues.

The resident also questioned whether the issue met the threshold for an urgency ordinance.

In response, Vice Mayor Jean Josey said the urgency ordinance was prompted by the inquiry and is intended to give the city time to review its firearms retail and shooting range regulations.

Josey said the moratorium is a citywide policy action and is not directed at any specific individual or business.

The council adopted the urgency ordinance to avoid an immediate threat to public health, safety and welfare while the city reviews potential zoning changes.

The council also found the ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act because it will not have a significant effect on the environment.

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much to be proud of, and he is committed to boosting community involvement in projects that enrich its quality of life.

The Legacy Award to retired educators Gary and Nancy Harrington, now residents of Point Ruston near Tacoma, WA, recognizes their long-term financial support in Pleasanton. This includes transforming the city’s public art program through private donations and the creation of the Harrington Art Partnership Piece for You (HAPPY) initiative.

**Other honorees included:**

- Alamo residents Gina Halow and Mindy Longo, who founded the Diablo Valley chapter of Impact100, an organization mobilizing more than 200 families through giving circles.

- David Behring, president of the Wheelchair Foundation and the Blackhawk Museum in Danville. He has also advanced civic pride through initiatives, such as the Veterans Memorial Building of San Ramon Valley and the All Wars Memorial in Danville.

- Gary Alpert, chairman of the San Ramon Economic Development Advisory Committee, and San Ramon Education Foundation board member.

“Together, these honorees reflect the spirit of Dr. King’s call to justice, unity, and collective action,” said 3VCF President Kelly Bowers.

The annual event culminated with keynote remarks by Alpher, who returned to the stage at the last minute to fill in for the scheduled speaker.

Using WALK acronym — “Walk with courage, Arrive as you are, Love, and Keep going” — to fire up the crowd, she reminded them that Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. always showed up

and walked.

She noted walking does not have to be physical; it can be emotional or include writing a check. She said the act must be done with love and passion to advance justice, “whatever that looks like.”

“You don’t have to be all put together or polished, but you have to start where you are because that will make all the difference,” Alpher said. “Even when it is uncomfortable, keep going. Even when progress feels slow, keep going.”

“The dream didn’t end

in 1968, the dream continues today in 2026,” Alpher continued. “Martin Luther King didn’t just talk about justice; he walked it, and now it’s our turn.”

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She said staff will return to the council during the

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## EDITORIAL

# Cleaning Up Our Nuclear Mess Can't Repeat Our Past Mistakes

Ever since the United States conducted its first atomic test on July 16, 1945, we've been dealing with the effects of the nuclear program, both in global security and in domestic affairs.

The one thing we haven't dealt with is nuclear waste. In 1957, the National Academy of Sciences proposed spent fuel rods and other high-level waste, such as byproducts of the nation's nuclear weapons programs, should be buried in a permanent underground

facility. But Congress didn't pass a law to that effect until 1982, and it wasn't toward the end of that decade that President Ronald Reagan recommended Yucca Mountain in Nevada to be the long-term storage site of the nation's high-level radioactive waste.

The decision was controversial. Nevadans didn't want it in their backyard, especially since Nevada had no nuclear plants. The land is also sacred to the Western Shoshone people. In addition, the geologic surveys conducted raised questions about the site's seismic stability or groundwater contamination. In 2010, Congress pulled funding for construction, and there has been no forward movement ever since.

Allison Macfarlane has a plan to break the logjam. The former chair of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, whose business has brought her to Livermore more than once, leads a bipartisan committee that proposes the work of site research, selection and construction should be handled by an independent corporation, "NuCorp," created by Congress.

If a private corporation can bypass the gridlock in Washington, D.C., and get this done, so much the better.

But just taking it out of the hands of government bureaucrats won't solve the more basic problems the waste storage program has experienced. There will need to be significant changes in how it's planned, structured and implemented.

We've been kicking the nuclear waste can down the road for decades, while other countries such as Sweden and Finland have already designed, sited, and opened their own underground facilities. We're overdue for addressing the problem directly.

Here's the catch: NuCorp, or whatever entity is ultimately tasked with the problem, needs to avoid the mistakes the federal government has

made. And the biggest mistake is how the U.S. Department of Energy steamrolled public opinion throughout the process of selecting Yucca Mountain as its preferred storage site.

Notwithstanding the technical difficulties of storing high-level radioactive waste for at least 10,000 years, getting people behind the project is going to take an immense amount of political and diplomatic skill. No one wants a nuclear waste storage site in their neighborhood, or even within a hundred miles of it.

Done right, storing high-level nuclear waste can be safe, with less impact on public health than non-nuclear industries that currently pollute our communities. Sweden and Finland are showing the world how it's done.

The problem will not just go away. Radioactive waste is a very long-term problem — we must plan for a time when the United States and even the English language will have become unrecognizable or disappeared from the world entirely. Meanwhile, Washington is notorious for its inability to think past the next election.

America's history with atmospheric atomic testing puts the onus on the

government to ensure that the people have fully informed consent as to what happens near their communities. "Downwinders" in Nevada and Arizona and their descendants, not to mention Native Americans, know full well that the government needs to earn the public's trust.

But the storage project needs to happen, and it needs to have public buy-in. The country has 100,000 tons of high-level waste stored at 76 temporary sites that are inadequate for the longer term. And Washington doesn't have a lot of credibility when it comes to protecting the public from nuclear contamination. The downwinders of the atomic tests since the 1950s and their descendants still remember the government's failure to address the danger they experienced.

Those are high bars to clear, but they're not impossible. We continue to need storage for high-level radioactive waste that ensures its long-term security and safety. If Macfarlane's plan for an independent corporation can clear those hurdles, then it would be irresponsible not to pursue it.

## MAILBOX

### Mailbox Guidelines:

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### Wild & Scenic Film Festival on Tour in the Tri-Valley

Terry Chang, Pleasanton

In an uncertain world, leaning on hope and community for courage and strength can really help us navigate it. For the Tri-Valley Air Quality Climate Alliance (TVAQCA), our vision is a healthy and thriving Tri-Valley community that embraces sustainable practices for clean air and climate resilience. To help us move toward this goal, our small and dedicated team, partnering with Tri-Valley Conservancy, is organizing and co-hosting a film festival at the Bankhead Theater on Friday, Feb. 27, 2026, from 5 to 9:30 pm. This will be the second time the Wild & Scenic Film Festival on Tour comes to the Tri-Valley. We hope to repeat the success of the first event (back in 2020 before Covid) when the

sold-out crowd and enthusiasm of participants confirmed what we all have in common: a deep love for nature and its beauty. We invite you to be inspired once again. With films carefully chosen to spark healing and actions for our fragile world, plus delicious local treats, beer, and wine, and an Eco-Fair highlighting the amazing work of local leaders, the event aims to bring our community closer together. Tickets are available now at the Bankhead Theater Box Office or at livermorearts.org/events/wild-scenic-film-festival. Read more about the curated films on our website at tvaqca.org. As Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher and mathematician, wisely said, "In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart." We hope this event will give you something beautiful for your heart to carry.

### America's Real Energy Bottleneck Isn't Fossil Fuels — It's Electricity

William Goure, Livermore

Current efforts to significantly increase U.S. production of fossil fuels will not lower energy costs for Americans. The United States already produces more than enough oil, natural gas, and coal to meet domestic demand. We remain a net exporter of crude oil and refined products and are the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas. Coal production also exceeds domestic needs, and demand continues to fall as utilities retire coal plants in favor of lower-cost natural gas generation.

The real constraint in America's fossil-fuel system is not production, but refining. U.S. refining capacity has been declining due to aging infrastructure, and many existing refineries are configured for heavy crude that must be imported. Meanwhile, the U.S. is one of the world's largest producers of light sweet crude, which many domestic refineries cannot efficiently process.

Building new refineries or reconfiguring existing ones to handle U.S.-produced light crude is extraordinarily expensive and takes many years. With long-term global demand for fossil fuels in irreversible decline, investors have little incentive to fund new refining capacity with decades-long payback periods. As a result, it remains far cheaper and faster for the U.S. to import refined petroleum products than to build new domestic refining infrastructure. Increasing production of crude oil, natural gas, or coal will not change this bottleneck and will not reduce near-term energy costs or strengthen long-term energy security.

America's most urgent energy need is rapid expansion of electricity generation to support AI-driven productivity gains, which

are likely to be the most important near-term driver of economic growth. Because the U.S. lacks a sufficiently large and skilled workforce to quickly scale manufacturing, increased factory output will not power economic growth in the near future. Instead, meeting rising AI-driven electricity demand requires accelerating deployment of renewable energy, the only scalable option available over the next five to ten years.

If renewable expansion slows, data centers, AI-enabled industries, and the broader economy will face energy bottlenecks and rising costs. To secure America's economic future, we need a major shift in both near- and long-term energy policy — one that prioritizes electricity generation and renewable deployment over symbolic increases in fossil fuel production.

### Property Tax

Owen Brovont, Livermore

In the November 2020 general election, the people of California, through Proposition 19, chose to alter the details of California's property tax. Many of the changes to property taxation since the passage of Proposition 13 in November of 1978, reflected the on-going political war to limit how the state legislature could alter the property tax rate at will. The Legislature fought all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which ruled that the 2/3 vote requirement imposed by Proposition 13 to change the property tax rate was constitutional.

Despite the ruling of the highest court, the California legislature, in efforts to evade the limits Proposition 13 imposed on the state's taxing ability, have made many attempts to moderate the impact of Proposition 13 protections of property owners, by changing the name of any new taxes related to property ownership — for in-

stance by calling it a parcel tax (specifically supporting K-12 education), special assessments (to fund public services), or fees of one kind or another instead of what they were in reality — all are taxes based on property.

The impact of Proposition 19 is another step in mitigating the impact of Proposition 13's limiting the income related to property taxes that the California state government realizes. It accomplishes its limitation through redefining the conditions under which the rate of property tax can be changed. The most conspicuous is related to passing property ownership to family members, and by being able to carry the owner's current tax rate through an exchange of "primary residence" to property of essentially the same value as the property from which the property owner relocated — this is called Property Tax Portability.

The original residence tax rate can then be raised to a rate related to the current value of the property if sold on the open market. For a thorough discussion of the ins-and-outs of the impact of Proposition 19, refer to the following web site.

Reference: [legalclarity.org/what-is-prop-19-in-california-and-how-does-it-work/](http://legalclarity.org/what-is-prop-19-in-california-and-how-does-it-work/)

Owen Brovont — 59-year Livermore resident

### MAGA Postcard

Ramona Krausnick, Dublin

Two days ago on Jan. 20, in the USPS mail I received a postcard postmarked from Las Vegas. I thought it odd because I don't know anyone there. The front had my name and address printed on it with no return address and the back was ugly.

The back was a picture of Trump with his MAGA hat on and next to him in the picture was an ugly alligator also with a MAGA hat

on and the card said in capital letters "ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ GRAND OPENING." Nothing else.

I know my letters to the East Bay Times and the Livermore Independent get published. My letters support immigrant rights and support Democracy.

They are anti-MAGA and anti-Fascism by their very nature. As many friends and acquaintances know, I participate in as many peaceful rallies/protests as I can in order to fight for what right and good for those who can't fight for themselves, and I'm not afraid to do that.

I think whoever sent me this postcard is truly mentally sick. A few years ago, someone who has my email address sent me nasty responses to an anti-Trump letter I wrote to The Livermore Independent.

I'm wondering if I'm the only one who received this postcard or if the Trump Administration has a postcard campaign to all who oppose him, i.e., all Democrats who are now by default on his imaginary "enemies" list.

### Intended Consequences and Lost Opportunities

Patricia Munro, Livermore

On Jan. 14, 2026, the California Supreme Court, for the final time, rejected Move Eden Housing's attempts to prevent Eden Housing's proposal for an affordable 130-unit affordable housing development. That means Eden Housing can finally break ground, and in 2028, a mere ten years after the Livermore City Council approved the Downtown Plan, 130 families will be able to move in. The full saga is here: [edenhousing.org/properties/downtown-livermore-apartments](http://edenhousing.org/properties/downtown-livermore-apartments).

That the housing will, finally, be built is good. But unfortunately, it comes at a great cost.

The land on which the

(See MAILBOX, page 5)

THE *Independent*

INLAND VALLEY PUBLISHING CO.

PUBLISHER: Joan Kinney Seppala

EDITOR: Christina Cavallo

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: David T. Lowell (*In Memoriam*)

EDITOR: Janet Armantrout (*In Memoriam*)

THE INDEPENDENT (USPS 300) is published every Thursday by Inland Valley Publishing Company, 2250 First St., Livermore, CA 94550; (925)243-8000. Mailed at Periodical Postage Prices at the Livermore Post Office and additional entry office: Pleasanton, CA 94566-9998. THE INDEPENDENT is mailed upon request. For more information or to sign up visit [www.independentnews.com](http://www.independentnews.com). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Independent, 2250 First St., Livermore, CA 94550.

Advertising and subscription rates may be obtained by calling (925)243-8000

during regular business hours or by emailing [info@independentnews.com](mailto:info@independentnews.com).

Editorial information may be submitted by emailing [editor@independentnews.com](mailto:editor@independentnews.com)

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Life's a balancing act for this Dublin cyclist on the Iron Horse Trail. (Photo — Jacob Clouser)

## MAILBOX

(Continued from page 4)

development will be built was purchased around 2008 with state redevelopment funds specifically for affordable housing. In other words, it will have taken twenty years to fulfill the promise made by the city, all of us, to create affordable housing.

It is appalling that there are those so privileged and so wealthy that they would use their money to prevent this development from happening for decades. That is the obvious cost in time.

But by delaying the development with meritless suits, the plaintiffs have doubled, maybe tripled, the cost of the development. That money could have been used to build other developments. That is part of the cost in money.

In addition, there is the money spent on the meritless lawsuits, with the effect of dividing, rather than building, community. That is a cost in community efforts.

And most invisible to the public eye is the cost of the legal battles, battles for which both City Attorney's Office and Community Development Department prepared—taking time that could have been spent in other ways that would benefit the city. Yet one more cost—time and money, that in effect, was stolen from all of us.

### 25 Can Save Our Disgrace

Richard Andrews, Livermore

I feel sorry for my fellow citizens who are MAGA. It always hurts when you follow somebody on their promises and find out that they are nothing but lies. Your leader is one of those types. His behavior is a disgrace, and he drags your loyalty to him through the mud like his private toy. You can salvage respect by repudiating him. We all make mistakes, and admitting them is what we do. You don't need my forgiveness, just respect. I extend it to you if you want it.

Now the "Disgraceful One" can be removed. And today (Weds) he has proven without a doubt, it

has to be done. On a world stage, he showed dementia, ignorance and foolishness beyond reason. He disgraced our country and lied repeatedly that he has that right.

While his cabinet is filled with blind followers, I pray that they will wake up and invoke the 25th Amendment to save America and the world from this horror.

Donald J. Trump must go. America and the world need this to happen before total collapse and war.

### A Great Job Opportunity from ICE

Keith Jackson, Dublin

Are you one of those people who is a little too aggressive and you sometimes get into physical altercations? Do you fear that you may go too far

"There's nothing remarkable about playing a musical instrument. All one has to do is hit the right keys at the right time and the instrument plays itself."

I believe that our president feels similarly about bringing peace and tranquility to our country and to the world:

"All that has to be done is follow his orders, rid our country of undesirables, annex any country that he desires, and — very important — do not question or protest his decisions. World peace will be assured!"

### Welcome to Trump World: Even the Bravest Republicans Cower Before Trump

Rosario Milelli, Pleasanton

Consider the following Trump quote: "I've always said, will they be there if we ever needed them?" (referring to NATO) "And that's really the ultimate test. And I'm not sure of that. We've never needed them. We have never really asked anything of them. You know, they'll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan or this or that. And they did. They stayed a little back, a little off the front lines."

British Prime Minister Starmer responded: "I will never forget their courage, their bravery, and the sacrifice that they made for their country. There are many also who were injured, some with life-changing injuries. And so, I consider President Trump's remarks to be insulting and frankly appalling."

Fact: The U.S. saw about 2,461 deaths. The NATO allies suffered a total of 1,160 deaths during the conflict, a third of the total deaths.

Jake Tapper (CNN) interviewed Republican Congressman and Navy Seal Ryan Zinke of Montana. After Tapper's introduction of Trump's remarks and Prime Minister Starmer's response, Zinke's commented, "I had NATO brethren with me, and I absolutely salute our partners, the Special Forces, NATO, because they did sacrifice. But to

### A Simple Recipe for World Peace

Patrick Weidhaas, Dublin

The following quote is attributed to the composer Johann Sebastian Bach:

the President's point, too, is let's look at Canada, for instance. Canada doesn't have a warship (a lie). And remember when Ukraine first began. Germany surged forward everything they had available. I think it was 10 Humvees and a couple of Patriot missile batteries that weren't full." (gross mischaracterization)

Tapper came back with,

"I think it's the specific question about whether troops from these other countries pulled their weight, heeded the call." Zinke's response, "President Trump is President Trump. And the mold was broke. If the point is that is NATO doing their share, is NATO viable without the United States? No. We supply the logistics, the overwhelming force."

During the rest of the interview, Zinke could not, would not, state the obvious that Trump's statements were not only wrong, but deeply offensive, just pivoting to Republican talking points.

Zinke's military service commands respect. His silence does not. Moral courage requires correcting falsehoods, especially when they demean allies who bled and died alongside us. On that test, Zinke, and today's Republican Party, continue to fail, choosing partisan loyalty over truth, honor and basic decency. Republicans know Trump's statements are false and offensive, yet none will say so publicly.

So please take note: the USA is now becoming an

### Massive Cover Up

Ward Kanowsky, Pleasanton

I have a big favor to ask of you. Please pay attention to Greenland and please pay attention to Minneapolis. The fact that I just wrote such a sentence, mentioning Greenland and Minneapolis, two places that, as far as I know, have nothing in common except being cold, speaks volumes to the upside-down world we live in today.

Why Greenland? Trump has stated that, "One way or another, we are going to have Greenland."

Specifically, he wants to buy it with funds from who knows where, but likely it would be U.S. taxpayers, or invade it. Based on recent comments (incoherent rants) is probably a more accurate description), he may be backing off on this, but this is a guy who has targeted Greenland not because he's thought of the collateral damage it could cause, but because it looks so big on a map.

And we all know about Minneapolis by now: Renée Good murdered by ICE; Kristi Noem and the administration defending the murder with cruel and nonsensical rhetoric; 3,000 more ICE agents deployed to Minnesota and a 5-year-old detained and put in a detention center in Texas. Similar surges of ICE agents are being seen in Maine and Alaska with more states to follow, undoubtedly.

So please take note: the

imperialist bully and the out-of-control mayhem reeked by ICE is expanding. Let your voice of resistance be heard now; we still have three more years of Trump and his goons.

And don't forget: less than 1% of the Epstein files have been released. Trump wants Greenland and ICE to provide a distraction from this ongoing scandal. So in addition to being a wanna-be-king and a tyrant, he is also a pedophile engaged in a massive cover up.

### What Now

Samuel Warner, Pleasanton

Today the U.S. withdrew from the World Health Organization. Every day, almost every hour, something new and horrifying and new seems to take place. The WHO globally works together to help with outbreaks and to eliminate disease, i.e. cholera, COVID, and measles (which is making a huge comeback in the U.S. thanks to this administration!) Why on earth would we withdraw from this? I'm sure there will be

(See MAILBOX, page 6)



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The Livermore Police Department (LPD) has named Sgt. Kyle Yost to supervise the School Resource Officers Unit. A Pleasanton native, Yost was a Livermore Police cadet in 2009. He joined the department as an officer in 2012, after two years with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department. With the LPD, he has served as a patrol officer, Criminal Investigations Bureau detective, East County Tactical Team member, field training officer, reality-based training instructor and facilitator for Community Police Academy Class #40. He was promoted to sergeant two years ago. (Photo courtesy of LPD)

## MAILBOX

(Continued from page 5)

some preposterous reasoning, and FOX will spread that disinformation far and wide, but what is the real ulterior motive? No more funding for PBS. Science grants withdrawn. January 6 insurrectionists and drug dealers pardoned. The Education Department, health care, National Park Service, the VA, and much more sliced. Why?

Whose idea is it to destroy this country, and to break alliances with our allies? I doubt that Trump voters thought we would separate ourselves from Europe and North America and instead try to form bonds with Russia, North Korea, Qatar and other dictatorships. I doubt they believed we would aggressively try to take over other countries like Greenland.

Do you really believe that Minneapolis or Portland are such violent cities they require thousands of armed, masked thugs to bully citizens and law-abiding immigrants? This administration is defending these guys when they are violent, and then twisting the story even when you've seen the truth with your own eyes.

ICE agents are breaking the law, and those in charge are immediately going out of their way to defend them. Why? And FOX can't be trusted to

give facts; omitting videos of major events (50,000 on the street in Minneapolis, and protests in ICE detention facilities, and around the world! Are you getting any of this information — or is it being censored by your favorite channel?)

A peace prize! All he does is put down anyone who doesn't bow to him, work to make dictators happy, take away services that help anybody but the wealthy, and seemingly want his own country to fail.

And now we have lost all our allies. Good job, boss. The bully has no friends, only other bullies. I used to be proud to be American.

So now do we hide while armed personnel come into our own streets, gassing protesters, not showing their faces? Isn't this what our 2nd Amendment was to protect us from? Is the next step civil war? Is this what they want? Why?

### Is Border Control Necessary?

**Kyoko Takayama, Livermore**

Is border control necessary? Yes. Countries have borders and each country has their own laws. Every administration had border control and deported people. Immigration officers have done their jobs, and many were deported. They did their jobs with-

out hiding behind masks and unmarked cars, caging kids, separating families, picking people by color of skin, or shooting and killing bystanders. Are these actions necessary? Are they keeping us safe? Why can't current ICE do their job without doing all this? Why are they treating people as if they have no rights? People, not just U.S. citizens, have rights and should be treated with dignity and due process.

The system is not perfect, with back logs and refugees coming from all over the world; it needs more resources and the processes could be updated. Currently, Republicans have power to make the changes with both Congress and president in the white house. So why aren't they doing their jobs? Why aren't Democrats doing everything they can to stop these lawless conducts of the administration and its officers? If you agree, stand with Minnesota and immigrants. Speak up and tell our elected officials to do their jobs.

### The World's Worst Diplomat

**Frank Cannella, Livermore**

Following the escapades of Donald Trump in Davos really makes my head spin. First, he threatens military action if NATO

doesn't support his takeover of Greenland. Then, shortly thereafter, he says he would never do such a thing, thereby leaving our NATO allies scratching their heads. But that wasn't enough. He found it necessary to denigrate NATO's military aid to us in Iraq and Afghanistan, even though the United States has been the only NATO country that ever received military support in the 80 years of its existence. It is estimated our NATO allies lost over 1,000 people while aiding the U.S. Finally, our NATO allies stopped massaging our

President's ego and actually called out his callous misrepresentation of their efforts. Trump backed off and gave a halfhearted mea culpa, but it was too late. Our NATO agreement may continue, but it will never be the same. Meanwhile, Putin is doing summits of joy, because Trump did more damage to the alliance in a few days than all the previous Russian leaders had done in 80 years.

Have you noticed the deafening silence from the Republican Congress regarding this fiasco? Neither have I.

P.S. The story in Minnesota is even worse, but that is for another letter.

## The Harrington Gallery Blooms with Floral Art Show

**PLEASANTON** — The Harrington Gallery at the Firehouse Arts Center, 4444 Railroad Ave., is hosting the third annual "Flora in Focus" exhibition through Thursday, March 7, featuring a collection of floral-inspired artwork by 13 local artists.

While unified by botanical themes, the exhibition includes nearly 100 works of art reflecting a spectrum of media, styles and techniques.

Organizers said what dis-

tinguishes "Flora in Focus" this year is a "thoughtful dialogue between realism and abstraction, two- and three-dimensional forms, and Western and East Asian artistic traditions."

The floral motif serves "not merely as subject matter but as a framework for exploration, allowing artists to investigate movement, light, emotion, materiality, and narrative."

There will be a public

reception for the artists from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 31, featuring traditional Japanese floral arrangements by Cindy Ting, who teaches ikebana at the Firehouse Arts Center, and her students.

Artists include Usha Shukla, Jenna Hobbs, Rekha Joshi, Monique Makepeace, Peggy Kervin, Lynda Briggs, Wei-Ting Chuang, Tuan Karsevar, Helene Roylance, Ranjini Venkatachari, Tejal Shah, Charlotte Severin and

Meghana Mitragotri.

Several of the artists will also give demonstrations on Saturdays during the run of the exhibit, starting with Wei-Ting Chuang, who specializes in East Asian brush painting, at 11 a.m. on Jan. 31.

The demonstrations are free and open to the public.

For more information, including a schedule of demonstrations, go to firehousearts.org.

## FINANCIAL

(Continued from front page)

brakes on spending pretty hard. You'll recall that we were headed into a tougher budget situation, and we froze positions, held them vacant on purpose, which ended up yielding significant savings for us in (the) part of this year that's under review currently."

City Finance Director Susan Hsieh tempered any celebration, pointing to ongoing financial challenges for Pleasanton.

"Even though we may end the year with a positive result, it doesn't mean we have resources to fund all our needs," Hsieh said. "Even with the \$1.3 million in net surplus in the general fund, we have to retain that \$1.3 million in the general

fund in order to meet the 20% reserve target."

Comparing the city to a business in the private sector, Hsieh said the city still lacks the resources to cover all of its needs.

Pension and retiree medical liabilities, one of the city's largest expenses in the coming years, still totaled \$240.6 million as of June 30, 2025.

The net position of the city's water fund, dragged down by the cost of water and personnel expenses, decreased by \$3.2 million last year despite a second year of significant water-rate hikes that took effect at the beginning of 2025.

Pleasanton's sewer fund position decreased

by \$600,000, with a rise in expenses attributed to increased sewer-treatment fees paid to Dublin San Ramon Services District.

"All of it suggests that we need to be focused on continuing our economic growth," Balch said, citing continuing discussions on the city's economic development plan, expansion at Stoneridge Mall, revitalization of the city's downtown, and how the city might leverage its partnerships with other organizations.

Last June, the city council unanimously adopted a budget that met a projected \$10 million annual deficit by cutting some \$7 million per year worth of city services and almost \$5 million

in transfers from the city's pension-trust and retiree-benefits funds over two years. The budget laid off two full-time city employees, closed the library on Sundays and cut back on some park maintenance in addition to other program and service cuts.

Last week's approval began a series of public meetings this year focused on city finances. The city council will hear a midyear budget update in February, followed by proposed pension strategies in March and a midterm budget update in May. Meanwhile, city staff plans to work on a citywide organizational assessment during the first half of the year.

## TESLA

(Continued from front page)

increased protection of natural and cultural resources and limits on additional development."

He asked for a third concept plan that will allow Tesla "to be fully considered" as a reserve.

McNerney represents the 5th Senate District, which includes the Tri-Valley and all of San Joaquin County.

The Alameda-Tesla property, also known as Tesla Park, spans an area of grassy hills in the Diablo Range near the eastern border of Alameda County. It draws its name from the historic Tesla mine within its borders, which served as California's largest coal producer at the beginning of the 20th century. The mine was named after engineer and inventor Nikola Tesla.

State Parks began work deciding how to use the property after 2021 legislation ruled out a previous plan to use it as an expansion of the neighboring Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area.

The department has so far proposed two concept plans, both of which allow for the possible classifications of a state park, state natural reserve and state cultural reserve, according to State Parks Deputy Director of Strategic Planning and Recreation Services Alexandra Stehl.

"The concepts that we put out that included the reserve classifications will be evaluated through our environmental review process," Stehl told The Independent.

Although all three of the classifications seek to preserve the area's natural, scenic and cultural values, the two reserve types prioritize the preservation of natural or cultural resources over public recreation.

With the exception of overnight uses, which a natural reserve would prohibit, "different activities can happen on all those classifications," Stehl continued. "It's just what level of activities would be appropriate."

The Friends of Tesla Park alliance, which has pushed

for classifying Tesla as a natural and cultural reserve, includes many Tri-Valley groups, such as Friends of Livermore, Save Mount Diablo, Tri-Valley Air Quality Climate Alliance and Tri-Valley Conservancy. Friends of Tesla Park has also drawn support from the Northern Valley Yokut Ohlone tribe, whose ancestral lands include the Alameda-Tesla property.

Friends of Livermore member Dick Schneider raised concerns following last September's workshops that State Parks had tried to steer public opinion away from the reserve classifications. He told The Independent last week that his group was grateful that McNerney called for the natural reserve.

"The concept plans provided by State Parks last September would allow high-intensity recreational activities and development into the heart of Tesla, impacting its highly sensitive landscape," said Schneider. "Tesla is habitat for many fully protected species at risk of extinction, as well as containing significant Native American cultural resources. Dozens of public interest groups and Native American tribal interests have advocated that Tesla be designated as a state reserve. Senator McNerney has now added his voice to many others requesting that State Parks fully consider a natural reserve alternative. We are very thankful for Senator McNerney's leadership."

Stehl said State Parks is still receiving public feedback on the concept plans and remains open to adjustments based on that feedback. After several more months of this phase, the department will "move into the environmental review process, which really is going to be where we're comparing what we're proposing to what potential impacts might be on the ground. And that's going to involve natural, cultural, as well as recreation impacts."

The environmental review portion will likely span through 2027.

## COURT

(Continued from front page)

up," the group said in a statement. "Too much is at stake for the future of downtown Livermore. We are investigating what other options may be available under the law to support the will of the voters. Our job is not done."

The Eden project plans to build two four-story buildings up to a block long between Railroad Avenue, Veterans Way, L Street and a planned K Street fire lane in downtown Livermore. A grass park 52' wide would be developed between the buildings, with an expansion of the park in its eastern quarter.

The project would price all 130 of its units for households earning between 20% and 60% of Alameda County's area median income.

The legal dispute centered on a development agreement for the project that was approved by the city council in May 2022. The agreement included a \$7.8 million 55-year loan at 3% interest from the city for Eden to buy the property, a \$4.3 limitation of the city's liability for any cleanup on the site, and a \$5.5 million payment from the city to Eden to build a linear park, known as Veterans Park.

Following the city's approval, MEH submitted a referendum petition to the city to overturn the decision, asking to put to a public vote whether or not to move the project to a location across Railroad Avenue to make room for a larger park at the original Eden site. City officials originally declined to process the referendum, but the city council ultimately voted to rescind the agreement after the First District Court of Appeals compelled the city to process the referendum in March 2024, ruling that the park payment rendered the agreement subject to referendum.

In June 2024, MEH again took issue when the city council immediately approved

another, similar agreement, this time without the city's \$5.5 million payment to Eden to construct its portion of the park, a payment that would enable a referendum. The Superior Court sided with MEH that November, compelling the city to once again rescind the agreement.

The Court of Appeal reversed the Superior Court decision and sided with the city in October 2025 and now, the Supreme Court declined to hear the case. This MEH case has been concluded. MEH argued in the Court of Appeal that the reapproval of the agreement was unlawful because the housing and park components of the project could not be separated. According to MEH, "The Court of Appeal refrained from addressing this point, even noting in a footnote that in effect they were not making a decision on whether the apartments and Veterans Park could be separated. In other words, the Court of Appeal never ruled on this relevant issue. Since Veterans Park requires a referendum, and the apartments do not, the city hopes to avoid a vote of the people on the location of the Eden Housing development by removing Veterans Park."

MEH member Dick Ryon said, "Unfortunately, rather than put our referendum to a vote, the city chose to continue readopting the same agreement we challenged and undermining public confidence. We had no choice but to take this second fight all the way to the California Supreme Court. While we believe we presented a strong petition to the Supreme Court that warranted review, unfortunately the Court elected not to take the case."

"Our group remains steadfast, and we are looking into further legal options to ensure the city's leadership listens to the voters in deciding the future of downtown Livermore."

# Dublin Debuts Phase 1 of Iron Horse Nature Park, Open Space

DUBLIN—Pedestrians and cyclists have a new route to explore in Dublin after officials opened Phase 1 of the Iron Horse Nature Park and Open Space on Saturday, Jan. 24.

The new linear park includes a 1,700-foot paved multi-use trail connecting Amador Valley Boulevard to Stagecoach Park.

Iron Horse Nature Park is the city's 28th park and represents a significant addition to Dublin's parks and open space system, expanding recreational opportunities and improving regional trail connectivity, said Felicia Escovar, Dublin's economic development manager and interim public information officer.

Phase 1 cost approximately \$6 million, with the overall project totaling \$12.2 million, funded in part through public facilities (impact) fees and grants, Escovar said.

The park features shaded seating areas and bike-friendly

amenities, including racks and a repair station.

The site also includes interpretive signage highlighting the area's railroad history, oak trees, wetlands and native ecology, Escovar said.

Mayor Sherry Hu spoke at the event, along with Assemblymember Rebecca

Saturday's dedication ceremony included a ribbon cutting, giveaways and refreshments with community members.

Mayor Sherry Hu spoke at the event, along with Assemblymember Rebecca

Bauer-Kahan, Escovar said.

Bauer-Kahan, who represents the 16th Assembly District, helped secure a \$2.3 million grant from the state Department of Parks and Recreation.

Additional speakers in-

cluded Mark Dedon, past president of the Valley Spokesmen Bicycle Club.

Dublin City Historian Steve Minnear shared the site's railroad history at one of the park's outdoor classroom areas.

The Iron Horse project supports Dublin's Parks Master Plan, which aims to expand neighborhood open space and enhance quality of life for residents as the city grows.

City staff originally scheduled Phase 1 for completion in fall 2025, but adjusted the timeline to accommodate seasonal environmental protections, Escovar said.

The city said the park stretches from the border of San Ramon to the confluence of Alamo Creek and South San Ramon Creek, south of Amador Valley Boulevard.

Construction included grading and installation of a 12-foot-wide asphalt concrete path with aggregate base shoulders, storm drainage pipes, retaining walls,

fencing and native landscaping, according to the city.

Crews also built an arch culvert bridge as part of the trail improvements.

In addition to the trail improvements north of Amador Valley Boulevard, the city completed related stormwater infrastructure work south of the roadway.

That portion includes a new bioretention basin, storm drainage upgrades, seating, interpretive signage, fencing and improvements to sidewalks, curb ramps and trail crossing areas, according to the city.

Landscape maintenance is scheduled to continue into spring 2026.

The opening follows the debut of Forest Park in December 2025, a two-acre neighborhood park in the Jordan Ranch development.

In August, the city also opened Wallis Ranch Community Park, which includes dedicated pickleball courts, a dog park, walking paths and community gathering spaces.



A multi-generational family enjoys a festive stroll along the new paved pedestrian walkway at the Jan. 24 Phase 1 opening of Dublin's Iron Horse Nature Park (Photo — Jacob Clouser)

## WOMEN

(Continued from front page)

this opportunity here; to be here in a free country and the life I have... I have to give back," she said.

Lillie and her husband of 34 years raised their four daughters in Livermore. When they became empty nesters Lillie entered real estate, eventually landing a few

"I have this space here and nobody uses it," Lillie said. She took her idea to her office manager. "I said, 'I'd like to do something with the space.' And she said, 'Nafisa, do whatever you want, as long as you're involved.'" Lillie has used the building for her monthly meetings for

same group of women each month either.

"My friends ask, 'How do you come up with these ideas and have these women in your life?' I say 'God moves in mysterious ways. They just come into my life.' I met a lady yesterday on the trail. She's here."

is in my garage and everything came true.' Isn't that amazing?"

The group gathers for wellness events and activities centered on self-love, charitable giving and mutual support. Lillie has hosted events ranging from local author readings, holiday makers markets to visits from functional medicine experts, meditation and sound bath sessions, and clothing exchanges. These have led to sizable donations for local charities like Livermore's Tri-Valley Haven.

"I feel like now, after COVID, we're all looking for a group to connect with; to come together and be safe and open our hearts and just be there to support each other," Lillie said.

Before the crafting began, Michelle Borrero, co-founder of WellSoul Women's Day Retreats, guided the room filled with women of all ages through a breathing meditation. The audible sound of repeated inhalations and exhalations gave the lulling feeling of an ocean tide.

Lisa Gaines, a local color analyst who attended with her mother, said "I was just thinking, the sound...it was so beautiful. I was like, that's what the whole world needs. Just to take a breath."

Borrero spoke about the

"This brings me so much joy," Lillie said. "I love our community."

To learn more contact Nalillie@comcast.net



The Circle: Cultural Connections & Community, which meets monthly at the Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices offices in downtown Livermore gathered Jan. 15. The group, focusing on women's wellbeing, came together to create manifestation boards for the year ahead. (Photo — Leah Silveira)

years ago at the Berkshire Hathaway offices, which occupy a sizable space on the corner of Second and South L streets.

Since many real estate agents spend much of their time with clients away from the office, Lillie noticed it was often empty.

nearly two years.

The cost of event space can be prohibitive for many groups, but Lillie has access for the cost of her regular office monthly dues. And for the women who come to enjoy her events, it's free.

"All my events are open," Lillie said. It's not always the

The group met Jan. 15 to welcome the new year through the creation of manifestation boards.

"This is my 3rd time doing manifestation boards," Lillie said. "And one of the ladies who's here, she texted me today. She said, 'My board (from last year)

is in my garage and everything came true.' Isn't that amazing?"

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Borrero spoke about the

## DISPOSAL

(Continued from front page)

"They will be best at aligning efficiencies and doing a safe and cost-effective job."

The corporation would draw on the experiences of other countries that are well ahead of the U.S. in their waste disposal programs, she added.

"We looked at what has worked elsewhere, including Finland and Sweden, which are both constructing deep repositories for their nuclear waste, having already settled on a site for the facility."

NuCorp would take the place of the Department of Energy (DOE), which has U.S. responsibility under the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act to develop a permanent geologic disposal site, such as the one recommended for Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

The DOE has failed to do so, however, being "severely constrained by ever-changing leadership and uncertain funding," as cited in the proposal.

It is clear that the funding needs to be fixed, which is one of the topics addressed by the group. The 1982 legislation established a Nuclear Waste Fund that now totals more than \$50 billion, but that money is being used by Congress to offset the national debt rather than to create a waste disposal site, the plan says.

Group members draw on years of experience in nuclear waste disposal, according to the proposal. The group is bipartisan and consists of representatives of the nuclear industry, former government

officials, members of public interest groups and others.

It recommends new legislation with assured funding, but it is a sign of the program's technical and administrative challenges that NuCorp would only be required to develop a plan to move ahead "within a few years of its establishment."

### Domestic Responsibility

If Finland, Sweden and other countries are developing waste disposal sites, could the U.S. send its waste overseas to them? Not a chance, Macfarlane says. First, the U.S. has far too much waste to deal with that way. Beyond that, "We have to clean up our own mess!"

For Macfarlane, radioactive waste disposal is a deeply familiar topic. An MIT-trained geologist, she published a book on the Yucca Mountain disposal concept in 2006.

From 2010 to 2012, she served on President Barack Obama's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, examining and making recommendations on the disposal of high-level radioactive waste.

Her connections to Livermore are several. She once visited as a member of a National Academy of Sciences committee studying ways to dispose of spent nuclear waste fuel.

In the 1990s, she took a particular interest in a Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) approach

to immobilizing the waste in a ceramic matrix.

### Talks at the Bankhead

In 2010, while a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission, she spoke at Livermore's Bankhead Theater, recommending nuclear energy as part of the U.S. energy supply, but with two warnings.

One was that the nuclear industry had to pay closer attention to safe, long-term nuclear waste disposal. The other was to make sure fuel cycles were safe against the diversion of nuclear materials for weapons use. (In concept, plutonium and other ingredients of nuclear weapons can be extracted from spent fuel, although the process is technically difficult.)

In 2016, she spoke again at the Bankhead, this time about the Japanese Fukushima nuclear disaster.

On a personal note, Macfarlane was married in Livermore to anthropologist Hugh Gusterson, who has carried out and published research about cultural characteristics of weapons lab employees and their critics.

Today, she is director of the School of Public Policy at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

As for the future of the Way Forward proposal, she is optimistic. She said that congressional representatives with whom group members have met to date have been encouraging, and there has

been no actual opposition.

She sees the attitude of the nuclear industry as key. Important professional organizations like the American Nuclear Society and the Nuclear Energy Institute have reacted positively to the proposal to date.

"If the nuclear industry goes to folks in Congress and says, 'Actually, this is a good plan... We want this going forward,' then it has a much higher likelihood of success."

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# Beth Emek Encourages Learning In Diverse Environment

By Jessica Zimmer

PLEASANTON — Beth Emek Preschool, the licensed preschool associated with Congregation Beth Emek in Pleasanton, recently launched a full-time program that runs 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., five days a week. The preschool welcomes students between ages 2 to 5 for early childhood education, focusing on literacy and Judeo-Christian values. The program runs year-round with time off for national and Jewish holidays. Parents who sign up before the end of January will receive a discount on tuition. The preschool also offers a gift card reward through a parent referral program.

Parents from around the Tri-Valley come to Beth Emek because they value its play-based developmental program and activities related to science, reading and Jewish culture.

"Beth Emek puts an emphasis on socialization, building routines and play in a warm environment. I've seen all four of my children enjoy their time here. Beth Emek lets children explore," said Anna Kalman, a Dublin resident.

Kalman said one of her children has autism. Beth Emek Preschool allowed the child to attend with a one-on-one behavioral aide.

"That was just great for

them, to be in a general education preschool classroom and have a positive experience," Kalman said.

Heather Bell deLeyos, a Livermore resident, currently has one son at the preschool. She likes the international feel of the program.

"There are students

from many different backgrounds, from all over the world. They speak a variety of languages. It was important to me that my son get that exposure," deLeyos said.

Another benefit according to deLeyos, is that parents have formed a community. They often gather and

talk during pickup times or after school. Parents and students also get together frequently.

"When I was looking for a preschool, the parents of current students are who sold it to me. They had good reviews and were very warm and kind," deLeyos said.



Congregation Beth Emek preschool director Kathi Estill reads to student Jojo deLeyos. (Photo courtesy of Heather Bell deLeyos)

Beth Emek Preschool serves 30 children per day, with the student population split between "the youngers," students ages 2 through 3, and "the olders," students ages 3 through 5. The preschool began in 1992. Several members of the six-person staff have worked together for decades. Every educator is certificated with a background in early childhood education.

"The staff know each other and get along very well. We take up two classrooms, which are connected by a common hall for bathrooms. There is a playground outside," said Kathi Estill, director of Beth Emek Preschool.

The daily routine includes teacher read-alouds, usually at least five books a day; circle time, with stories, music, dance and discussions; hands-on activities like art and science; free play, with opportunities for dramatics, building and games; outside activities, like climbing and water play; and snack and lunchtime, with adults and peers around the table.

Sometimes the students go on field trips or have guest speakers visit.

"I remember one of the olders talking to his parents at pickup about another student, sharing what he taught a younger student to do. He was so proud. That made me proud to direct this preschool," said Estill.

Melinda "Mel" McDonald, a teacher at the preschool and one of its former directors said her favorite activities include teaching students to "light" wooden candles for Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath), sharing challah (braided egg bread) and grape juice, and singing Jewish and secular songs with students as the rabbi accompanies on guitar.

"We have so many Jewish things here in the classroom, like stuffed dreidels, Jewish books from the PJ Lending Library for children or teachers to read, toy bagels and toy menorahs. I am not Jewish. Yet learning all the stories that the Jewish faith tells has expanded my understanding of Judaism. Working at Beth Emek Preschool has taught me so much," said McDonald.

Estill said one of her favorite things about the program is that older children are encouraged to help younger children. They may assist with everything from learning to read to taking off a jacket.

"I remember one of the olders talking to his parents at pickup about another student, sharing what he taught a younger student to do. He was so proud. That made me proud to direct this preschool," said Estill.

For more information, visit [bethemekpreschool.com](http://bethemekpreschool.com).

## Tri-Valley's National Alliance on Mental Health Brings Awareness in its Youth Suicide Prevention Workshop

By Kathryn Stroud

TRI-VALLEY — The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Tri-Valley will co-host with NAMI Alameda County, the Alan Hu Foundation and the Genesis Community Development Corporation a suicide prevention workshop for parents of adolescents and children Saturday, Feb. 28, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with both in-person and Zoom options available. This educational event is free and designed to equip parents with essential knowledge and tools to support youth at risk for suicide.

"The motivation is to save lives," said Marsha McInnis, president and founder of NAMI Tri-Valley. "This event is for everyone. We want to destigmatize the conversation around suicide so it's not fearful or frightening."

Suicide remains one of the most pressing public health concerns affecting families across the United States. According to the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention, suicide was the second leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 24 in 2023. The CDC also reported that one-fifth, or 20% of high schoolers disclosed seriously having considered suicide in the past year.

McInnis emphasized that the workshop is designed

to empower families with actionable steps to protect and support their children. "The reason we do this for families is to enable them to have actions they can take that can make a difference," McInnis said. (And) if the worst should happen, families don't feel complicit by virtue of ignorance or inaction."

The workshop aims to foster hope, build confidence and reduce stigma around mental health by providing evidence-based information in a compassionate and supportive environment. Parents will learn how to recognize warning signs, initiate meaningful conversations, and respond effectively when concerns arise.

The workshop will feature speakers Gang J. Xie, PhD; Lynn Gardner-Lockett, MBA, MS Counseling; and Brian Laurence, LMFT; each bringing professional expertise and real-world experience in mental health and community support.

For those unable to attend, NAMI Tri-Valley offers additional ways to get connected, including group sessions, workshops, and one-on-one support services. Recordings of past workshops are also available through the organization's YouTube channel.

"We are here," McInnis said. "We are a presence that everyone can come to. Learn

all you can. Knowledge is power. We are here to teach, and knowledge will help you make better choices that benefit your family."

For in-person attendees, space is limited and refreshments will be provided. Registration is required and can be completed online

through the NAMI Tri-Valley website. Participants will receive either the Zoom link or the in-person location details after registering.

For additional information or to register, visit [namitri-valley.org](http://namitri-valley.org) or contact NAMI Tri-Valley directly at 925-344-4480.

## TRI-VALLEY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Thursday, Jan. 29

#### SQUARE DANCING LESSONS

Cactus Corners, a local nonprofit, is offering free introductory square-dancing classes on Jan. 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](mailto:mmiller1435@gmail.com) or call 925-518-7624.

### 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](http://www.gfwcdsr.org) or by mail at DSRWC 20 Lawton Ct. San Ramon 94583. For questions, call 925-381-1040.

### Saturday, Feb. 7

#### FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONY

Livermore Pleasanton ELKS Lodge No. 2117 is conducting a public Flag Retirement Ceremony on Feb. 7 at 10:00 a.m. at 940 Larkspur Drive. Join in a dignified and solemn event for the respectful disposal of worn-out American flags. This year, the Elks are partnering with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Boy Scout Troop 939. You are encouraged to bring your U.S. flag that is need of retirement and it will be included in the ceremony. Call the lodge at 925-455-8829 for any questions.

### Saturday, Feb. 7

#### BINGO FUNDRAISER

The Italian Catholic Federation will hold a joint fundraiser with the St. Michael Golden Friends on Feb. 7 at St. Michael's Hall, 326 Maple St., in Livermore. There will be Mardi Gras-themed BINGO and a light lunch. Doors open at 10 a.m., BINGO starts at 10:30. Adults: \$20 per card plus lunch / children \$10 per card plus lunch / additional BINGO cards: \$10 each. RSVP by noon on Feb. 3 to [suzibg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:suzibg@sbcglobal.net) (Golden Friends) or [dcshauer@comcast.net](mailto:dcshauer@comcast.net) (ICF). Partial proceeds benefit ICF local Catholic charities.

### 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.

### Monday, Feb. 9

#### LIVERMORE-AMADOR GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Come hear Scott Norrick introduce on-line resources that are most useful in tracing British ancestors. Both free and subscription sites will be discussed. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland will be covered. On Feb. 12 at 7:00 p.m. In-person at Congregation Beth Emek, 3400 Nevada Court, Pleasanton, or via ZOOM. To register, see [www.lags.org](http://www.lags.org), click on Speakers & Topics on upper left. This speaker will be presenting virtually. No charge, visitors welcome.

### Thursday, Feb. 12

#### LIVERMORE AMADOR VALLEY GARDEN CLUB MEETING

On Feb. 12 from 6 to 8 p.m., Karla from Beeline Blooms will be presenting about dahlias. Tubers will be for sale. At Crosswinds Church, 1660 Freisman Rd., Livermore at the red Farm Theater Building.

### Friday, Feb. 13

#### MARIA MULDAUR & HER JAZZABELLE QUINTET; MUSIC FOR LOVERS

Maria Muldaur & her Jazzabelle Quintet will be performing their special "Music for Lovers" show on Feb. 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Firehouse Arts Center, 4444 Railroad Ave., in Pleasanton. See [firehousearts.org](http://firehousearts.org) for details. Tickets: \$38-43. Be inspired to fall in love all over again!

Iligator Records artists Tommy Castro & The Painkillers and Ronnie Baker Brooks will perform live at the Almost Famous Wine Company in Livermore on Friday, February 27 and Saturday, February 28, 2026, respectively.

### Friday, Feb. 27

#### TOMMY CASTRO & THE PAINKILLERS

Tommy Castro is the guitar slinging, soul-singing leader of the tight and raucous Tommy Castro & The Painkillers. Performing live at Almost Famous Wine Company, 2271 S. Vasco Rd., Livermore. Showtime is 7:30 p.m., tickets are \$39.19-71.21. See [www.almostfamous.wine](http://www.almostfamous.wine) for complete performance information.

### Saturday, Feb. 28

#### RONNIE BAKER BROOKS

Firmly rooted in the blues, Ronnie Baker Brooks incorporates his own brand of rock, funk and soul to the mix. Performing live at Almost Famous Wine Company, 2271 S. Vasco Rd., Livermore. Showtime is 7:30 p.m., tickets are \$44.52-65.87. See [www.almostfamous.wine](http://www.almostfamous.wine) for complete performance information.

### Saturday, March 14

#### 14th ANNUAL LIVERMORE HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION CRAB FEED

Come to a fun night of live and silent auctions, DJ, games and dancing! March 14 from 6-10 p.m.; doors open at 5:30. At Robert Livermore Community Center, 4444 East Avenue, Livermore. \$80 per person. Ticket includes crab, pasta, salad, bread and dessert. For more info, contact [lhslumniassoc@gmail.com](mailto:lhslumniassoc@gmail.com) or Duane at 925-724-4251.

#### 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](http://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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# Civic Center Library to Celebrate Black History Month

LIVERMORE — The Livermore Public Library is planning several events for its celebration of Black History Month in February, including a monthlong Art of the African Diaspora exhibit at the Civic Center Library, 1188 S. Livermore Ave., in partnership with the Richmond Art Center.

The library system will

also create trivia bulletin boards at all three Livermore branch libraries — Civic Center, Rincon and Springtown — where patrons can test their knowledge of African American history.

Other events include a Take & Make craft project inspired by "Something, Someday," a picture book by Amanda Gorman

and Christian Robinson, at the Springtown library, 998 Bluebell Dr., on Tuesday, Feb. 3; a discussion by Akilah Cadet, author of "White Supremacy is All Around: Notes from a Black Disabled Woman in a White World," at 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7, at the Civic Center Library, and a family-friendly game night at Longevity

Wines, 2271 S. Vasco Rd., starting at 5 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 12.

There will also be a Tri-Valley for Black Lives Trivia Night at the Civic Center Library at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 19; an interactive presentation by South African percussionist Baba Shibambo, who will introduce the audience to tra-

ditional African instruments and dance, at the Rincon library, 725 Rincon Ave., at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 20; and a performance by the Ashley Jemison Quartet at the Civic Center Library at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 22.

Black History Month events will wrap up on Saturday, Feb. 28, with Grammy-nominated storyteller

Diane Ferlatte, accompanied on banjo and guitar by Erik Pearson, at 10:15 a.m., and a reception for artists featured in the Art of the African Diaspora exhibit at 11 a.m., both at the Civic Center Library.

All events are free and open to the public. For more information, go to [library.livermoreca.gov](http://library.livermoreca.gov).

## Livermore Valley Wineries Earn Best of Class Status

LIVERMORE — Eight Livermore Valley wineries were awarded Best of Class in the 2026 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, the largest wine competition in North America.

Livermore Valley wineries earned a total of 239 medals in this month's judging, including 30 Double Gold, 86 Gold, 95 Silver and 20 Bronze medals, in addition to the eight Best of Class.

More than 1,100 wineries from the U.S., Canada and Mexico entered more than 5,500 wines in the competition, according to The San Francisco Chronicle. Only about 150 wines received Best of Class medals.

Earning a record 239 awards, including eight Best in Class, is an extraordinary honor for the Livermore Valley wine region and a powerful testament to the talent, passion and collaborative spirit of our

winemaking community," said Brandi Lombardi, executive director for the Livermore Valley Wine Community, a marketing organization for local wine-makers and growers.

Earning Best of Class honors were:

- 3 Steves Winery — Townsend Ranch 2022 Cienega Valley Sangiovese.

- Almost Famous Wine Company — 2023 Livermore Valley Cabernet Franc.

- Almost Famous Wine Company — 2024 Livermore Valley Sauvignon Blanc.

- Concannon Vineyard — 2024 Livermore Valley Chardonnay.

- Garre Vineyard and Winery — 2024 Livermore Valley Rose.

- Las Positas Vineyards — 2023 Livermore Valley Tempranillo.

- Mitchell Katz Winery — 2022 Livermore Valley Chardonnay.

- Retzlaff Vineyards — 2024 Livermore Valley Sauvignon Blanc.

Also receiving medals were Arroyo Cellars, Bent Creek Wines, Cellar 13 Winery, Charles R Vineyards, Cuda Ridge Wines, Dante Robere Vineyards, Darce Kent Estate Vineyards, Del Valle Winery, Favalora Vineyards, Fenestra Winery, JMC Cellars, McGrail Vineyards and Winery, Murrieta's Well Estate Vineyard, NFINITY Cellars, Ocasio Winery, Omega Road Winery, Page Mill Winery, Winery, Rosa Fierro Cellars, Sakura Winery, The Steven Kent Winery, Wente Vineyards, Wente Vineyards The Nth Degree, Wood Family Vineyards, and Wood Family Vineyards Culmination.

There will be a public tasting of the award winners at the Gateway Pavilion at the Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture in San Francisco on Saturday, March 7.

## TVH Offers Crisis Intervention, Advocacy Training

TRI-VALLEY — Tri-Valley Haven (TVH) is seeking volunteers to support victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Livermore-based nonprofit, which provides services throughout the region, said volunteers will receive 10-weeks of state-approved online training in crisis intervention, survivor advocacy and trauma-informed support.

The Zoom-based training program will be from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, starting Jan. 20 and running through March 24.

Applicants must be at least 18 years old, complete a pre-training interview and pay a training fee.

TVH said volunteers from other advocacy programs seeking state certification are welcome.

For more information, go to [trivalleyhaven.org](http://trivalleyhaven.org) or call 925-667-2711.

## Cultural Arts Council Accepting Entries for YEA! 2026 Awards

PLEASANTON — The Pleasanton Cultural Arts Council (PCAC) is now accepting entries for its annual Youth Excellence in Arts (YEA!) awards and the Don Lewis "Say Yes to Music" grant program sponsored by the Pleasanton Rotary Club.

Both programs are open to high school students living in Pleasanton.

The PCAC art competition includes three categories: Visual Arts, Music and Literary Arts.

Those who enter the Literary

arts category must submit an original typed story of less than 2,000 words or three poems, each 50 or fewer lines, along with their registration forms.

Those who enter the Music category must submit a 5-minute audio or video recording of a solo performance and sheet music for the piece performed. In the Visual Arts category, students must submit photographs of two original pieces of art.

The top three entries in each category will receive awards of \$300, \$200 and \$100, respectively.

The application deadline for both the PCAC awards and the Rotary Club's "Say Yes to Music" grant is Sunday, March 1.

Award and grant recipients will be expected to attend the YEA! Awards Reception at Valley Community Church in Pleasanton on Sunday, March 22.

To apply, or for more information, go to [PleasantonArts.org](http://PleasantonArts.org).

## OBITUARIES

### Alice Fern Lane

Sept. 6, 1942 — Jan. 19, 2026



Fern was born in San Francisco to Margaret and Henry Anderson. The family moved to Portland, Oregon for a time, then settled in Walnut Creek where Fern graduated from Las Lomas High School in 1960. Shortly after, she met and married Les Lane; they raised their two children in Livermore.

They were devoted parents and always believed having Steve and Laurie was the best thing they ever did. Les died in 2017, just three weeks shy of their fifty-sixth wedding anniversary.

After the kids started school, Fern went to college, earning a BA in Human Development, and a Master's in Public Administration. She had satisfying careers teaching and as an administrator for the City

Hazel Short of Oregon, and many loved cousins, nieces, and nephews. Her dear friends Joni Pattillo and Susan Schiller survive with memories of decades of laughter, adventure, and companionship. In some circles, Joni, Susan and Fern were referred to as "the usual suspects!"

She is predeceased by her husband, Les; sisters Jean Mitchell and Irma Proell, and brother Arvid Anderson.

Services will be held Jan. 30 at 12 p.m. at Callaghan Mortuary, 3833 East Ave., Livermore, CA 94550.

Callaghan Mortuary is honored to be serving the Lane family. An online guestbook is available for condolences at [www.callaghanmortuary.com](http://www.callaghanmortuary.com).

### Paula Bligh Greeley

Oct. 12, 1952 — Dec. 26, 2025



With heavy hearts and gratitude for her life, we announce the passing of our beloved mother, sister and nana. She was born in Palo Alto, California, and resided in Livermore, California. Her faith was the foundation of her life. She

found comfort in prayer and strength in knowing she was guided by God's purpose. She will be remembered for her gentle spirit, kind heart and love for others. You will be missed.

### Susan Mary Gallegos Hamblett

Feb. 17, 1935 — Jan. 10, 2026

Susan Mary Gallegos Hamblett passed peacefully in her home on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026. She made her home in Livermore in 1977, where she raised her family and enjoyed making many happy memories with her children and grandchildren.

Susie, as she was lovingly known, moved to Oakland, California when she was a child.

She was proudly born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in her beloved village Agua Fria. Although she spent most of her life in California, her Spanish roots ran deep 'back home'. Her parents, Antonio and Guadalupita Gallegos, made a warm and loving home

with her ten siblings Stella (Frank), Effie, Grace (Jesus), Jackie (Wayne), Virginia (Roy), Rose (Ed), Tony (Marcella), Solomon (Becky), Marylou (Bob) and Dolores (Peter). They were

her best friends, and she was the 'Last of the Mohicans'.

Susie was a dedicated and hardworking woman. She was a candy packer for Jelly Belly in Emeryville and retired from Ghirardelli in San Leandro.

Married to Cyril 'Art' Hamblett for 54 years, she selflessly took care of him when he became disabled due to ALS. They made a blended family.

Tina (late husband Ron), Bobby (Jessie), Lisa (late husband Paul), Tommy (Susan), Lloyd (Suzy), Denise (late husband Mark/partner Gil), Maxine (Jack), Doreen (Kevin) and Mark (Vicky).

Art and Susie enjoyed countless hours with their beloved family that grew to over 100 members.

In 2017, Susie was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and she was cared for by her children and her amazing care-

givers.

Susie enjoyed music, dancing, cooking, eating lots of ice cream, and watching shows and movies, some of her favorites being Johnny Cash, Mariachis and Shirley Temple.

She is greatly missed, and her family will carry on her larger-than-life legacy. If you knew Susie, you loved her and experienced her authentic hospitality and sense of humor.

We appreciate the love and support throughout her journey. Susie always valued her faith in God and lived with a gracious heart.

Services will be held Feb. 17, her 91st birthday, at Holy Sepulchre, Hayward, CA.

Repast to follow.

Charitable donations to the Alzheimer's Association are welcome.

### Paul Dominic Rosa

Sept. 13, 1961 — Nov. 25, 2025



Paul D. Rosa passed away unexpectedly due to heart complications at his home in San Ramon, California, on Nov. 25, 2025.

Growing up, Paul took an interest in technology and music. He graduated from Castro Valley High School and received undergraduate education from Cal State Hayward. Paul was a talented video producer and founded his own business, PDR Film and Video, in 1983. He produced and directed countless television commercials, corporate instructional videos, short films, interviews, and treasured videos of family birthdays, holidays, and vacations. He loved to make people laugh and was an actor in stage productions throughout the Bay Area for many years.

as well as a teacher passing his knowledge and expertise on to the next generation. Through all of his endeavors, he was known for his unique energy, passionate opinions, generosity and creativity.

Paul is survived by his two daughters, Natalie Davis (John) and Emily Owens (Mike), two grandchildren, Holly and Kirk Owens, his mother, Lydia Rosa, four siblings, and many nieces, nephews, and great nieces and nephews.

Paul will be remembered as a talented artist, supportive father and grandfather, and a generous friend to many.

Services will be held for Paul on Saturday, Jan. 31 at 11 a.m. in the Main Sanctuary of Eden United Church of Christ, 21455 Birch St., Hayward, CA.

### CELEBRATION OF LIFE

#### Lee Arthur Zachariades

June 4, 1948 — Jan. 12, 2026



Lee Arthur Zachariades, lovingly known as "Zack," passed peacefully at his home on Jan. 13, 2026, with his loyal dog, Bailee, by his side.

Zack is survived by his daughters, Allie and Katie; their partner and husband, Brandon and Collin; and his cherished granddaughters, Charlotte Grace and Harlan, who brought him immense pride and joy.

Born in Castro Valley, California, on June 4, 1949, to dedicated educators Katherine "Zacky" Zachariades and George Zachariades, both immigrants from Greece, Zack was raised in the Greek Orthodox faith and served as an altar boy. He lost his father at age 12, a formative event that shaped his character and resilience. Though an only child, he shared a lifelong bond with his cousins Bill, Deb, Liz, and Art, spending treasured summers together in Massachusetts and Maine.

A natural leader, Zack was class president at Canyon High School and went on to earn a degree in history from UC Berkeley. He played football for the Cal Bears during his college years and remained an enthusiastic fan throughout his life. Being the son of two

educators, he was drawn to teaching and went on to earn his teaching credential. He landed his first job as a 5th grade teacher at Alisal Elementary and continued to dedicate 45 years to the Pleasanton School District as a teacher and coach. He was known for his wild sense of humor and unique classroom spirit. He believed deeply in young people and worked tirelessly to create environments where students felt seen, supported and valued.

In retirement, Zack found joy in golf, fishing, gardening, time with friends, and long walks with Bailee. He was steadfast, loyal, passionate, and unapologetically real. Zack will be deeply missed.

A Celebration of Life will be held on Feb. 1, 2026, at the Pleasanton Senior Center at 11:00 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, kindly consider a donation to Operation Dignity or Glide Foundation, where Zack often volunteered. Donations to Operation Dignity can be made at [operationdignity.org/how-you-can-help/donate](http://operationdignity.org/how-you-can-help/donate). Donations to Glide Foundation can be made at [glide.org/donate](http://glide.org/donate). You may dedicate this donation to Lee Zachariades and send a notification to Katie Zachariades at [kzach711@gmail.com](mailto:kzach711@gmail.com), 12354 Rainbow Drive, Truckee, CA 96161.

# Coach 'Gio' Lifts Granada Girls to Early Heights

By Mitch Stephens

His passion started as a youth near Portland, Oregon, expanded to college around Seattle, Washington, and blossomed into an exploration in the United Kingdom.

Clearly, soccer isn't just a game to Giovanni Monroe.

"Soccer is life," said Granada's second-year head girls coach.

The 30-year-old — known by most around Livermore as "Coach Gio" — has not only injected life into a stagnant program, considered something of an afterthought in the rugged East Bay Athletic League, but he has also inspired winning.

After leading the Matadors to a 7-5-7 record in 2024-25 and a North Coast Section playoff berth — the program's first winning season and postseason appearance since 2015 — Granada entered this week 10-2-2 while standing toe-to-toe with many of the Bay Area's top teams.

They beat defending NCS Division 1 and 10-time champion Monte Vista-Danville 2-1 on Jan. 8 for only the third time since 2007, and on Jan. 22 they tied 2024 and nine-time NCS champion San Ramon Valley, 1-1.

Through 14 matches, Granada has outscored opponents 56 goals to just seven. It has already qualified for NCS and perhaps most important, there is an excitement and pride around the program that hasn't been matched since the early 1980s, when the Matadors, led by the late, great Julie Macias, were the section standard.

They won five of the first seven NCS titles, starting in 1982.

The pride continues this week Thursday (Jan. 29), at Carondelet-Concord

(9-13), Friday (Jan. 30) at El Cerrito in a nonleague match and back to EBAL play Tuesday (Feb. 3), at home versus Foothill. The regular season ends Feb. 5 at home against Livermore. "Seems like every

as the girls director of coaching for the Issaquah Gunners Soccer Club. In 2022, the same role opened for the Livermore Fusion Soccer Club and he and his young family — the couple has a son, Dante, 5

program. When the Granada job opened in 2024, he jumped at it.

Most players on last season's Granada team played in the Fusion program — today 18 of the 21 varsity players are — "so they

Those 2025 seniors were replaced by vastly improved JV players along with freshmen Layla Twiss — the team's leading goal scorer with eight — and Katy Hernandez. Last season's freshmen, June Hop-

"As frustrating as a tie was, seeing the girls' refusal-to-lose mentality revealed a lot," Monroe said. "It showed our competitive spirit."

They've shown it ever since, "never letting off the gas pedal during any obstacle they've faced," Monroe said.

They showed it especially in a 1-0 home win over Castro Valley on a Twiss goal and scoreless goalkeeping by junior Megan Silva and senior Marin Lnenicka. "She's always asking how she can get better," Monroe said of Twiss. "She's relentless in her pursuit to get better and to score goals."

Granada's drive showed most in the win over Monte Vista, getting an early tally from Jazmine Angel and then what is considered the "goal of the year," by senior Celeste Gaquin-Robles in the final two minutes to break a 1-1 tie.

She bent in a corner kick that would have made David Beckham proud.

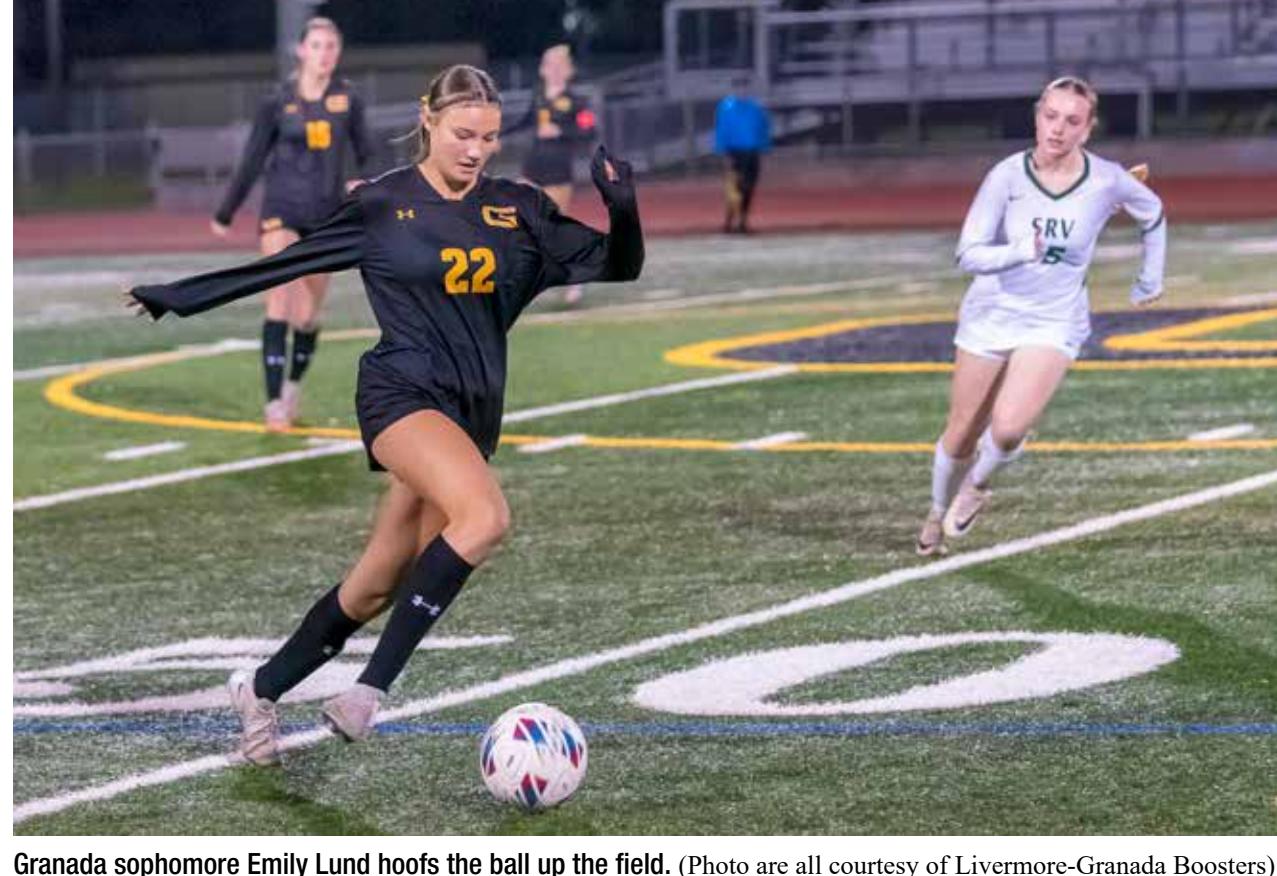
"That moment and celebration was huge," Monroe said. "It capped a very intense game."

The defense came up huge in the win as it has all season.

The backline of Harper Hopcus — older sister of June — Denton, Kalley Gandolfo and Emily Lund

has helped preserve nine shutouts. "The two keepers and backline have been incredibly consistent and work so hard together," Monroe said. "They're all great leaders."

Angel, second on the team in goals with six, is another outstanding leader. Not only for the team, but the community, Monroe said. "She's pure Livermore," he said. "She epitomizes the character of the city. She always leads the pack in fitness, drills, and games. She rises to every challenge."



Granada sophomore Emily Lund hoofs the ball up the field. (Photo are all courtesy of Livermore-Granada Boosters)

match we win I'll hear from someone saying 'this is the first time in five or 10 years' we've done this or that," Monroe said. "It's really clear that this is a community that cares. And that incentivizes me to do the best job I can and I think it incentivizes the girls to give their all."

Monroe preaches community and believes the game galvanizes it. He learned and felt it from his prep and college playing days in the Northwest and then studied and coached it in Wales, where he met his wife, Martina.

The couple eventually settled near Seattle where he immediately landed

and 3-month-old Elsa — jumped at the opportunity to start and contribute in a new community.

"I have coached in four different countries and have made friendships and relationships with people all over the world with the game," he wrote on his coaching profile for the Fusion SC. "There is nothing I love more than to use the game to encourage and develop players and create amazing communities around the game."

Monroe said he connected deeply with the Livermore community and players, and there was not a better way to deepen that than through a high school

knew what the standards are and what the (Granada) program is aspiring to be," he said. "We gelled really well, our style of play improved gradually and the players and coaches worked super hard."

Last year's team peaked early, going unbeaten in its first 11 matches (6-0-5), but finished 1-5-2, losing in the first round of NCS to Urban-San Francisco, 3-0. It was a big jump from the previous six seasons of 21-47-12.

But with 11 seniors graduating off the 2024-25 squad, younger talent would have to progress this season. And they have. "Majorly," Monroe said.

and Delaney Miskella, made even larger strides.

Heading into this season during tryouts, Monroe couldn't have been more optimistic. "We had a high number of high-level kids," he said. "They all dove into training. They had the look of a team that any coach would want to coach."

In the season opener, however, when the Matadors fell behind Piedmont 2-0 in the first 20 minutes, Monroe wondered if his instincts had deceived him. Instead, Twiss scored on an assist from Kaitlyn Denton and Hopcus netted a penalty kick in the second half to finish in a 2-2 tie.



## MitchMash



### Friday Night Hoops: Hard to Beat in Tri-Valley

By Mitch Stephens

If looking for some good Friday night entertainment, an East Bay Athletic League boys basketball game might indeed be in order.

When it comes to packed gyms, school spirit, quality play and best of all, unpredictability, there might not be a better league in the Bay Area. All but one of the 10 teams have been ranked in the Top 20 Bay Area teams by the San Francisco Chronicle.

Here are the game options for Friday (Jan. 30): Foothill at California-San Ramon, Dougherty Valley-San Ramon at Amador Valley, San Ramon Valley-Danville at Dublin, Granada at De La Salle-Concord and Livermore at Monte Vista-Danville.

All tipoffs are scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

Thumbnail on each of the Tri-Valley squads (all records after games on Jan. 24):

**Livermore (16-6 overall record, 2-3 in EBAL):** After a span of 12 years and 121 games before winning an East Bay

Athletic League game — 74-63 over visiting Amador Valley on Jan. 9 — the Cowboys needed just 11 more days and three games to win another league game,

61-44 over Foothill. Unfortunately for the Cowboys, that came after tough losses to San Ramon Valley (64-62) and Dougherty Valley (72-49). Despite a

31-point explosion from sophomore Amare Chandler, the Cowboys then dropped a 69-59 game at California on Jan. 23.

Nothing gets easier for the Cowboys, who after facing Monte Vista (14-8, 3-2) close the season at Dublin (Feb. 3) and at Granada (Feb. 6).

**Granada (15-6, 2-3):** Three days after stunning Dougherty Valley in San Ramon, 74-69, behind 20 points and 20 rebounds by possible league MVP Bryan Hahn on Jan. 20, the Matadors were upset at home by San Ramon Valley, 70-64 in

overtime. Hahn, a 6-foot-7 junior, had 25 points in the loss while teammate Damien Mills added 16, but it wasn't enough. After Friday's De La Salle game, the Matadors host Foothill (Feb. 3) before the big home date with Livermore.

**Amador Valley (14-8, 3-2):** After the humbling loss at Livermore to start the EBAL season, the Dons won three straight impressive games over Granada (50-44), San Ramon Valley (53-50) and Liberty-Brentwood (46-45). After a somewhat

decisive loss at De La Salle (62-46) last week, the Dons responded in a big way with a 45-40 win over Dublin behind 14 points by Elijah Stanley and 10 from Cade Kruger. The Dons still haven't been able to use 6-foot-7 transfer Cam Anderson, who was thought to only miss games through December, but might be lost for the season. Amador Valley, which also features

perhaps the best all-round player, 6-foot-4 Jaylen Smith, might be the hardest team in the league to predict. After Friday's game with Dougherty Valley, the Dons close with games at California (Feb. 3) and at Foothill (Feb. 6).

**Dublin (15-7, 2-3):** Featured in this space last week, the Gaels offered a mixed bag with a great win at Monte Vista (49-38), but then lost at home to Amador Valley, despite a combined 25 points from Aiden Li and Izaiyah Romero. Following Friday's home game with San Ramon Valley, the Gaels host Livermore (Feb. 3) and then closes the season Feb. 6 at Dougherty Valley.

**Foothill (12-9, 0-5):** The Falcons started the season 9-2, but have since gone 3-7, losing all five EBAL games by double-digit margins. After the Friday game at California, Foothill plays at Granada (Feb. 3) and then hosts Amador Valley (Feb. 6).

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

## LVO Will Perform 'The Barber of Seville' at Elementary Schools

TRI-VALLEY — The Livermore Valley Opera (LVO) is now performing a 45-minute version of the comic opera "The Barber of Seville" at elementary schools in Livermore, Dublin, Pleasanton and Sunol.

The cast for the free performances includes four professional opera singers and a piano accompanist.

Ten students at each school are also provided costumes and get to rehearse non-singing parts with the opera 30 minutes before each performance.

The annual elementary school program reaches about 10,000 students every year, according to Pamala Riggs, the LVO's volunteer

director of education and community engagement.

In addition to presenting abbreviated versions of well-known operas, the LVO provides classrooms with study materials two weeks before the performance, including YouTube links to an animated synopsis, major arias and available student roles. Teachers receive a study guide that includes classroom activities, operatic themes and questions designed to encourage critical thinking skills.

Twice a year, the LVO education program also offers a 45-minute "master class" for middle and high school chorus students and invites all students in the

Tri-Valley area to attend a full dress rehearsal for an upcoming performance.

This spring, the LVO is performing "Così fan tutte" and students are invited to a rehearsal at the Bankhead Theater in Livermore on Thursday, Feb. 26.

The rehearsal begins at 7:30 p.m. and registration is required.

Performances of "Così fan tutte," a comedy composed by Mozart, are scheduled for 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 28, and 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 1, Saturday, March 7, and Sunday, March 8.

For more information, go to LivermoreValleyOpera.com.

## LPC Showcases Music Program

LIVERMORE — The Music Department at Las Positas College (LPC) will host an Applied Music Showcase at the Mertes Center for the Performing Arts, 3000 Campus Hill Dr., on Friday, Feb. 5.

The evening will begin with a reception at 5 p.m., followed by vocal and instrumental performances featuring students in LPC's Applied Music

program at 7 p.m.

"This showcase highlights the dedication and artistic growth of our Applied Music students," said music professor Dan Marschak. "It's an opportunity for the community to experience the depth of talent being developed at LPC while directly supporting student learning."

Tickets are \$30 and include refreshments and a glass of wine from the LPC

Campus Hill Winery.

Proceeds will help support Music Department expenses, including student travel to festivals and competitions, hosting guest artists and clinicians, and instrument repair and maintenance.

To purchase tickets, or for more information about the LPC music program, go to [laspositascollege.edu/music](http://laspositascollege.edu/music).

## Boosters to Host Race to the Flagpole

LIVERMORE — The Livermore-Granada Boosters will host their 17th annual Race to the Flagpole fundraiser on Saturday, Jan. 31.

The event includes a 10K, 5K and 1-mile fun run, all starting at Independence Park.

The longer events will extend into Sycamore Grove Park.

The races are open to all ages, and all runners will receive a T-shirt, med-

al and post-race refreshments.

The top male and female finishers will be recognized in every event.

The elementary, middle and high school with the most participants will also be recognized, as will the schools with the fastest times.

To register for the Race to the Flagpole, go to [livermoregranadaboosters.org](http://livermoregranadaboosters.org).

Runners can also regis-

ter at Independence Park on race day. Registration opens at 7:30 a.m., with the first event, starting at 8:45 a.m.

The nonprofit boosters organization, which supports athletics at Livermore and Granada high schools, annually awards scholarships to graduating seniors who exemplify both athletic excellence and strong academic achievement.



# Blind Boys of Alabama to Light Up the Bankhead Theater

By Christina Cavallaro

LIVERMORE- Livermore Valley Arts (LVA) is celebrating Black History Month with a series of Friday performances at the Bankhead Theater that champion Black artists' talents and stories. The legendary Blind Boys of Alabama will take the stage in a joint appearance with co-headliner Ruthie Foster on Friday, Feb. 6.

Foster was named either Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year or Traditional Blues Female Artist of the Year by the Blues Foundation nine times between 2010 and 2023.

Her latest album, "Mileage," received the Grammy award last year for Best Contemporary Blues Album.

Ricky McKinnie, the current leader of the Blind Boys, said in a phone interview with The Independent from his home in Atlanta, Georgia, "We've known Ruthie for a long time. She's a great singer; we're going to have a wonderful time."

The 73-year-old McKinnie leads the six-time Grammy Award-winning gospel group that has been around since 1939 and is recognized worldwide as legends of gospel music. Many of the legacy members McKinnie has known since childhood, including founder Clarence Fountain, whom he met when he was 4 years old.

"He had a lot of insight," McKinnie said.

The original members of the Blind Boys got their

start singing as part of the school chorus at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Deaf and Blind in Talladega, Alabama.

The enduring group first found mainstream success in 1983 after appearing in the musical "The Gospel at Colonus." The Blind Boys

realization: "People need people and working together works," McKinnie said. The singers have performed with an extensive range of artists from rock and pop to country and blues, including such icons as Prince, Bonnie Raitt, Willie Nelson, and Ben Harper.

civil rights movement... (songs like) "It's Alright" that let people know that 'everything's gonna be alright' and "Precious Lord" — all those songs gave people the will to keep on keeping on. It's something from the heart that reaches the heart."

sight, but I never lost my vision," he said.

"And I'll tell you what, God has really been good; He's opened up doors for me. I have been going and doing and doing and going all these years. I've had the opportunity to do a lot of great things."

be feeling bad...(but) you come to the Blind Boys show, and I'll tell you what, we're gonna make you feel good. We're gonna have a good time.

"Ruthie's gonna get you started and we're gonna finish you off," he said, laughing.



The Blind Boys of Alabama will be performing at the Bankhead Theater with co-headliner, Ruthie Foster, on Fri. Feb. 6. It will be an evening of soul-stirring music by the Grammy legends. (Photo courtesy of LVA)

received its latest Grammy Award, for Best Roots Gospel Album, for "Echoes of the South" in 2024.

McKinnie officially joined the Blind Boys in 1989 and credits the group's breakout success across other musical genres to one

Some original members of the Blind Boys sang alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as a voice of the civil rights movement.

"Music can calm anybody," McKinnie said. "And by being able to sing a song that impacted the

McKinnie lost his sight at age 23 from complications with glaucoma. A favorite aunt of his told him early on, "She said, 'You're not blind, you just can't see.' And that became my mantra."

He took that to heart and made it his own. "I lost my

As for what audiences can expect at the upcoming Bankhead Theater show:

"We're gonna sing some a cappella songs. We're gonna sing some good ole gospel. And we're just gonna have a good time," McKinnie said. "People might

Tickets to the 8 p.m. performance of the Blind Boys of Alabama with Ruthie Foster start at \$65 and are available online at livermorearts.org, by calling 925-373-6800, or at the Bankhead Theater box office, 2400 First St.

## Foothill Senior Helps Rebuild Robotics Program, Wins International Titles, Inspires Leadership

PLEASANTON — Foothill High School senior Neil Sarkar has loved building things since he was a kid — from radio-controlled airplanes to robotics — and that curiosity has helped power Foothill's rise in competitive robotics in recent years.

Along with his peers, Sarkar led Foothill's robotics team to three international championships: the Space City Signature Event, Nor-Cal Signature Event and the VEX U.S. Open Red Division. The team also secured the Bay Area Championship and seven regional tourna-

bling laptops at home," he continued. "That love for creating drew me into robotics, where I could apply it to build something tangible."

In 2024, Sarkar said Foothill became California's highest-performing school, winning more tournaments than any other school in the state.

"Building even a single successful robot is impossible as a single person; it easily takes over 1,000 hours of work," the senior said. "I love working with my team because we get so many different perspectives on the same problem just from

Johnson said Sarkar helped set up new machines in the engineering shop, learned how to maintain them and created resources for other students.

"He built, learned and maintains the machines, and also created a user manual and instructional videos for other students to reference," Johnson said.

The senior said he took on that work because he remembered how long it took him to feel confident using the tools in the workshop.

As a freshman, he said he was unsure how to use

psychology, and the student said continuous, passive measurement could offer a path toward earlier detection of health issues. His research was recently published in IEEE Access.

"I was especially driven by how simple engineering solutions could broaden access to medical care," he said.

Johnson said Sarkar is leaving a lasting impact on the program.

"Neil embodies everything we like to see in students," Johnson said. "Neil, whether he knows it or not, is establishing a legacy that will hopefully continue to grow and prosper beyond his time at Foothill."

He will be leaving the robotics team and the engineering shop significantly better off than when he arrived."

Looking ahead, Sarkar said he has applied to colleges and hopes to major in electrical engineering, with plans to continue research in accessible medical instrumentation.

"I love how I'm able to apply my passion for engineering to directly help people," he said.

"My main goal has always been making sure they



Foothill High School senior, Neil Sarkar, is changing the trajectory of the school's robotics team. Sarkar has led the group in countless Bay Area and international tournament wins. (Photo courtesy of PUSD)

ment wins.

VEX Robotics is an educational program that gives students hands-on experience designing, building and programming robots through yearly themed challenges.

Foothill competes in the annual VEX Robotics Competition, which introduces a new game each year. Matches are played in a two-on-two format on a 12-by-12-foot enclosed field, Sarkar said. Robots are designed to score points while disrupting opponents' strategies.

"For the six years before, we hadn't won a single award or even competed outside the Tri-Valley," Sarkar told The Independent. He said he rebuilt the program "from a box of 12-year-old scraps," regularly clocking more than 80 hours a week to build and prepare.

"I've always loved building things — from making RC airplanes to disassem-

bling laptops at home," he continued. "That love for creating drew me into robotics, where I could apply it to build something tangible."

Sarkar's leadership extends beyond competition. As president of Foothill's robotics club, Sarkar said he founded three new teams and raised \$16,000 to support their launch.

He also organized Foothill's first robotics tournament, which he said was the only tournament in California that offered free entrance to all participating teams.

Sarkar also serves as president of Foothill's Engineering Club, which coordinates tours with local engineering companies and supports four other STEM-focused clubs, he said.

Foothill High School engineering teacher Gary Johnson said Sarkar stands out for his initiative and the way he supports other students.

"Neil takes initiative in engineering; he sees new opportunities and goes for it," Johnson said.

the school's large CNC machines — short for computer numerical control — and didn't begin using them until later in high school.

"I wanted to help other students feel confident accessing the tools in our workshop sooner than I did," he said.

Beyond the engineering shop, Sarkar also pursued research that blends psychology and technology.

Conversations with Foothill High psychology teacher Mary Rozelle inspired him to reach out to a UC Berkeley professor and explore research connecting human behavior with engineering.

His work focused on developing a small electronic device capable of unobtrusively measuring cognitive reaction times during natural conversation.

Reaction time is a well-established indicator of neurological health in cognitive

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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>