A couple hundred off-duty police officers who attended a Las Vegas music festival earlier this month embraced their law enforcement roles when a shooter opened fire on concertgoers, some getting injured in the process – only to go back home to California to find their workers’ compensation claims denied.

That’s because California’s labor code indicates that public agencies must pay benefits to off-duty officers hurt while they are involved in the “protection or preservation of life or property, or the preservation of the peace anywhere in this state,” but makes no mention of out-of-state incidents.

Orange County on Monday rejected four workers’ compensation claims from sheriff’s deputies, laying the groundwork for a battle in court that could set a precedent for outcomes on the matter affecting several counties in Southern California, the Orange County Register reported.

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"If the county believed the law was on the side of these applicants, these claims would not be rejected,"

Orange County counsel Leon Page told the Register that the claims would not have been rejected if the county believed the state’s code sided with applicants, but that “the law is clear” in not allowing for such compensation.

“There’s no wiggle room, there’s no discretion,” Page said. “There’s no ill will here.”

Los Angeles County is also considering compensation claims from the Las Vegas massacre, from two deputies who were injured. A manager in the county’s risk management branch, Steve Nyblom, called the issue “vague” and “subject to interpretation.”

“Issues relating to legislative intent should be clarified by the legislature,” Nyblom told the Register.

But some workers’ compensation lawyers interpret the “preservation of life” phrase as leaving no restriction on the officer’s location.

“It makes sense to us that the legislature meant protection of life would not have any limitation, because if police are out of state trying to save lives, do we want to limit it as a public policy?” John Ferrone, a partner at the law firm Adams Ferrone & Ferrone representing several Southern California police unions, told the Register.

In a statement to Business Insurance, the Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs said the issue is not as clear as counties and cities may argue, and expected it to go to litigation.

“Where the law is vague, the legislature has instructed the courts to liberally construe workers’ compensation statutes in favor of injured workers,” the association stated.

If the officers’ compensation claims are approved, California taxpayers may have to front their medical bills. The officers could then be eligible for paid time off and early retirement on disability.

REQUEST REPRINT OR SUBMIT CORRECTION
Dr. Richard Pitts, the medical director at Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton for the last four years, has announced his last day at the San Bernardino County-operated public hospital will be Nov. 28.

Hospital Director William Gilbert will name Pitts’ successor or interim successor prior to Pitts’ departure, county spokesman David Wert said in an email Tuesday.

Pitts said in a telephone interview he is taking a job closer to home in Orange County with more scheduling flexibility so he can spend more time caring for two in-laws suffering from dementia.

“I love my job as medical director, but it’s very inflexible,” said Pitts, adding that he typically works 11-hour workdays — usually from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. five days a week. He said his weekends are spent caring for his in-laws.

Pitts said his new employer recruited him for the job, and at first Pitts was reluctant. But when the new employer offered the flexible scheduling he needed, Pitts said he accepted the offer.

He said he could not disclose who his new employer is because he signed a confidentiality agreement, but the employer is expected to soon be making an announcement.

Pitts said he will miss mostly the talented people he has worked with at ARMC.
“You always miss the people. It’s always about the people,” Pitts said. “There’s so much good that happens here – the lives that are saved, the people that are cared for. It’s great place to feel proud.”

Pitts succeeded Dr. Dev Gnana Dev, who had been the hospital’s top doctor for 12 years, in September 2013. Prior to taking the position at ARMC, he had served as Orange County Service Area assistant medical director at Kaiser Permanente in Anaheim.

County Supervisor Josie Gonzales, who sits on the ARMC Joint Conference Committee, which reports to the Board of Supervisors on most all issues of concern surrounding the hospital involving administration, physicians and patients, said in a telephone interview that Pitts “has been a steady, professional influence on the hospital.”

“He has been a steady, professional influence on the hospital. He has been phenomenal,” Gonzales said.

Tags: hospitals, Top Stories IVDB, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun

Looking to Change Jobs? Here Are the Top 10 Companies For Workplace Satisfaction
By Monster
MONSTER
Which companies did employees rank highest?

NELSON JOE
Joe Nelson is an award-winning investigative reporter who has worked for The Sun since November 1999. He started as a crime reporter and went on to cover a variety of beats including courts and the cities of Colton, Highland and Grand Terrace. He has covered San Bernardino County since 2009. Nelson is a graduate of California State University Fullerton. In 2014, he completed a fellowship at Loyola Law School’s Journalist Law School program.

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Confronted with perpetually rising pension costs, Riverside County supervisors voted on Oct. 17 to hold a workshop to discuss potential solutions to the problem.

“Somebody’s got to step up and do something about it,” said Supervisor Marion Ashley after a presentation and hearing about the county’s pension obligations. He’s right. Sitting back and waiting out pension cost increases will only condemn the public to higher taxes and fewer services.

According to the county Pension Advisory Review Committee’s annual report, Riverside County will see sharp increases in pension contributions in just the next few years. Whereas county contributions to the plan for non-safety workers in 2016-17 were just over $187 million, contributions will hit $386.6 million by 2023-24. From 2016-17 through 2023-24, contributions to safety-employee plans will more than double, from just under $93 million to over $197 million.

Supervisor Ashley raised the idea of a defined contribution retirement plan for new hires, and whether such a plan could help contain cost increases moving forward.

Such an idea, among others, will hopefully be discussed at the workshop. We encourage the board to remain open to considering all possibilities, given the unsustainable trajectory of pension costs and the burdens they impose on virtually everyone.
Meanwhile, San Bernardino County, which has its own pension system independent of CalPERS, is forecasting more optimistic projections than Riverside County. Expecting pension costs to reach their peak in about five years, the county is expecting to overcome pension problems soon.

However, this is partly based on more optimistic investment return assumptions than CalPERS. On April 18, the governing board of the San Bernardino County Employees’ Retirement Association rejected the 7-percent annual investment return assumption recommended by its own consultant and opted for 7.25 percent. CalPERS, CalSTRS and at least a few independent pension systems now use 7 percent to protect taxpayers from having to pick up the tab if the assumptions don’t pan out.

Above all other considerations, we urge conservative, responsible approaches to pensions.

Tags: editorials
The Inland Empire took longer to recover from the Great Recession than other parts of Southern California, but a new report suggests workers in Riverside and San Bernardino counties have been starting to take home bigger paychecks.

Average annual wages in the area were up 6.5 percent in the first quarter of 2017 compared with the same period last year, according to this year's Inland Empire Economic Forecast.

UC Riverside economist Robert Kleinhenz, one of the authors of the report, said the year’s strong start is encouraging, considering that average pay in the Inland Empire has only been going up about 2 percent a year over the past five years.

One reason for the recent uptick in wages, said Kleinhenz, is the area's low unemployment rate. It fell to 5.5 percent in July.

"We're projecting that we're going to do better this year simply because the labor market is so much tighter now than it was, say, a year ago - or even a half year ago," he said.

Not all Inland Empire workers saw big pay bumps in the first quarter. Workers in sectors like health care and manufacturing saw their average wages grow by more than 11 percent, but warehouse and transportation workers only saw an average raise of about 1 percent.

California's average statewide wages grew a bit faster in the first quarter than the Inland Empire's, at 7.7 percent. But nationwide annual wage gains, at 5.7 percent, trailed behind the Inland Empire's growth.

Like much of the rest of the state, the Inland Empire is also dealing with a housing shortage. Workers may be taking home more pay, but they're also facing higher home prices, which are forecast to go up 5 to 6 percent in the next two years.

"It has become increasingly evident that we're just not building enough housing," said Kleinhenz.

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High Desert Regional Job Fair comes to fairgrounds

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Victorville — Hundreds of job seekers are expected to attend the High Desert Regional Job Fair Wednesday at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds.

Hosted by the San Bernardino County Workforce Development Board, dozens of local and regional employers will interview job candidates for a variety of positions.

Last year, approximately 900 people met with nearly 70 employers, including CEMEX, Jersey Mike’s Subs, Contracted Drivers Services and Frito-Lay.

Mountain High was a big player at the job fair, as the ski resort near Wrightwood was seeking 1,000 seasonal positions for its upcoming snow season, and several trucking firms sought short- and long-haul drivers were also at the fair.

The job fair is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesday at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, Building 2, at 14800 Seventh St. in Victorville. Job candidates are encouraged to dress for an interview and bring resumes.

Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com, Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz and Instagram @reneraydelacruz
The cost of visiting Joshua Tree National Park is about to go up—a lot. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke announced Tuesday that entrance fees to Joshua Tree and 16 other National Parks will increase dramatically during the parks’ peak seasons. For the national park in our back yard, the increase will be nearly two to four times the present fee between January and May, the park’s busiest time of year. The fee, which is currently $25 for a one-week pass for vehicles, will increase to $70. Likewise, the $12 fees for motorcycles and individuals on foot or bicycles will increase to $50 and $30, respectively. Annual passes to Joshua Tree National Park will also go up to $75; passes are $40 now.

In a press release Zinke said the increase will “generate badly needed revenue for improvements to the aging infrastructure of national parks.” Joshua Tree National Park Superintendent David Smith said he expects between 2.8 million and 3 million visitors to the park this year; up from a record-high 2.5 million visitors last year. Smith said during off-peak months, the entrance fee will go back down to its lower levels. Smith urged residents to share their thoughts on the fee increase during a public comment period, which is open through November 23. The address to send written comments is in this story at z1077fm.com

Written comments can be sent to National Park Service, Recreation Fee Program, 1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop: 2346 Washington, DC 20240. [https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/10-24-2017-fee-changes-proposal.htm](https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/10-24-2017-fee-changes-proposal.htm)

**Parks affected by the fee increase:**
Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Denali, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Grand Teton, Olympic, Sequoia & Kings Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Zion

**National Parks with peak season starting on May 1, 2018; in Acadia, Mount Rainier, Rocky Mountain, and Shenandoah National Parks with peak season starting on June 1, 2018; and in Joshua Tree National Park as soon as practicable in 2018.**

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Chino Hills, Diamond Bar file lawsuits in attempt to halt sale of 2,450-acre ranch to City of Industry

Tres Hermanos Ranch covers 2,445 acres of undeveloped land in Chino Hills and Diamond Bar, recently purchased by City of Industry. (photo by Watchara Phomicinda, Southern California News Group)

By STEVE SCAUZILLO | sscauzillo@scng.com | San Gabriel Valley Tribune
PUBLISHED: October 24, 2017 at 5:51 pm | UPDATED: October 25, 2017 at 7:22 am
Chino Hills and Diamond Bar have filed separate but similar lawsuits against the City of Industry, hoping to halt that city’s bid to build a massive solar farm inside their boundaries, arguing the move is a covert, money-making scheme that benefits the buyer but robs them of millions in tax dollars.

Although a county oversight board has signed off on the City of Industry’s $41.7 million purchase of 2,450 acres known as Tres Hermanos ranch — far less than the state Department of Finance’s accepted appraised value of between $82 million-$122 million — the board was kept in the dark about the solar arrays the industrial city wants to install, covering at least 900 acres and expected to produce $4 million in annual revenues for the industrial city, the lawsuits allege.

“Industry had deceived the Oversight Board and the public by constantly making false statements that the property would be used for open space and recreational purposes, while it was spending million of dollars to cause the development of a major solar facility, and as a result of this deception the affected taxing agencies have been harmed,” Chino Hills City Attorney Mark Hensley wrote in Friday’s filing.

The entire swath of land lies within the two cities: 700 acres in eastern Diamond Bar surrounding Grand Avenue and 1,750 acres in Chino Hills, bordering San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Orange counties. Still used for cattle grazing, the land was owned by Industry’s redevelopment agency since November 1978, now known as the Successor Agency. A 2011 law ended redevelopment, setting in motion the sale of all agency assets, with this property the largest put up for sale in the state.

State law requires local oversight boards to maximize the value to best serve the state and cities, schools and special districts which are to share in the proceeds. Chino Hills and Diamond Bar’s lawsuits primarily contest the approval of the sale, though city officials also contend the project would violate environmental and city planning laws.

The two cities, which filed virtually identical lawsuits, say a sudden and drastic price reduction — approved by the Oversight Board on a 4-3 vote in August after the City of Industry attached a covenant allowing for public use, open space or preservation — amounts to a gift to City of Industry of nearly $60 million and a loss of millions in sales proceeds to the affected cities.

The lawsuit quotes Industry City Manager Paul Philips, who said publicly in August the savings would be put into the solar project, which Chino Hills argues would benefit Industry to the detriment of the other taxing entities.

The City of Industry has spent $14 million on a team of consultants working on planning the solar farm, including about $4 million to several law firms.
“The successor agency, the city and the City Council will vigorously defend themselves against the lawsuits,” Jamie Casso, Industry city attorney, said, confirming the city was served.

Included in the Chino Hills lawsuit are opposition letters from two other taxing agencies which have not testified during recent public meetings involving Tres Hermanos: the Chino Valley Fire District and San Bernardino County.

Jeff Ballinger, general counsel for the Chino Valley Fire District, called the covenant a ruse, agreeing with Chino Hills and Diamond Bar that the law already requires any municipality that buys land to use it for public uses. Ballinger said the vaguely worded deed restriction approved by the Oversight Board would allow Industry to proceed with its proposed solar project.

Likewise, Dean Smith, interim chief executive officer of San Bernardino County, objected to the sale in a letter to the Department of Finance, the state agency reviewing the sale with the power to approve or disapprove the transaction. According to the Chino Hills lawsuit, Smith asked the state to void the sale because the Oversight Board did not follow state law requiring the maximum value from a sale.

In addition, the lawsuits say the city has failed to abide by its own plan for selling off redevelopment assets, did not provide a development plan with a schedule or anticipated job creation for the solar farm use, and may have brought on more obligations by adding a restrictive covenant.

The two cities are suing the City of Industry, its Successor Agency and the Oversight Board. Chino Hills’ lawsuit alleges the Oversight Board violated its fiduciary responsibilities under state law when it approved the sale at an “unreasonable price.” The suit says the Board should have marketed the property to the highest bidder.

GH America, a land developer, had offered $108 million for the land, but the offer was not accepted.

The cities argue the Oversight Board, a group of county and local officials representing the taxing agencies, could not legally change the price from $100 million to $41.7 million during its Aug. 24 vote as the discount had not been previously approved by the successor agency, or Industry, and the public was never notified that a lower price was an option.

The two agencies, both run by the Industry City Council, later ratified approval of the lower price.

Staff writer Jason Henry contributed to this article.
Alex Gonzalez, director of administrative services for City of Industry, opens the gate from Toner Canyon to Tres Hermanos Ranch, a 2,450-acre preserve owned by City of Industry, in Diamond Bar and Chino Hills on Nov. 7, 2016. The sale of the land is being challenged. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, SCNG)
The Twentynine Palms City Council took the first step last night in changing the way the city’s council members are elected. Managing editor Tami Roleff has more...

The City of Twentynine Palms received a letter last month in which an attorney threatened an expensive lawsuit against the city, claiming that despite the fact that 20 percent of its population is Hispanic, only one councilmember in 22 years has been Latino. Council members grumbled that that wasn’t true; Steven Bilderain, who was elected to the council in 2016—is Hispanic. During public comment, resident Carol Giannini said that switching to districts was a great idea.

"I’m absolutely all in favor of district-based election because for my experience, in the Hanson Tract when we had someone living in the Hanson Tract sitting on the city council, we got better attention and we got taken care of better out there."

And then the council voted unanimously, with Macarthur Wright absent, to pay a demographer $18,500 to map the city’s residents, the first step in changing over to a district-based election system.

The city council also voted unanimously to authorize an agreement with an engineering firm for a feasibility study of a joint wastewater reclamation facility with the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center.
City to sponsor San Bernardino Arts Fest 2018 at San Manuel Stadium

San Manuel Stadium in San Bernardino will be the site for the San Bernardino Arts Fest 2018. (Photo by Rachel Luna/The Sun, SCNG)

By BRIAN WHITEHEAD | bwhitehead@scng.com | San Bernardino Sun

PUBLISHED: October 24, 2017 at 10:31 am | UPDATED: October 24, 2017 at 11:13 am

Artists near and far, young and old, will converge at San Manuel Stadium in March for the third annual San Bernardino Arts Fest.
The City Council last week voted to sponsor the growing festival, which community members, fine arts commissioners and elected officials believe bring vitality to the area.

“There is ample evidence that the arts help stimulate community redevelopment,” Councilman Henry Nickel said from the dais. “I've seen it in other parts of the country, how the arts can reinvigorate a community through very artful arts districts.

“Distressed communities can come back in a major way, in an innovative and enlightening and desirable way.”

The city will pay $25,000 for such expenses as stage rentals, welcome banners and event flags, newspaper and radio advertisements and after-event clean-up.

The first two festivals were held downtown and featured music and theater performances, poetry readings, dance sessions and art displays.

Cal State San Bernardino, San Bernardino Valley College, San Bernardino City Unified School District and the Arts Connection have thrown their support behind the event.

“The arts are important,” said Danielle Wallis, executive director of the Arts Connection. “They're something to be valued, something to be celebrated. This community needs the positive arts. It needs that respite from all the other stuff going on.”
Next year’s Arts Fest will be on March 24 at San Manuel Stadium. The city will staff the festival with employees and volunteers, but may need to pay up to $5,600 for stadium personnel, officials said.

While some council members questioned relocating the event, Mark Persico, community development director, said the change of venue will provide better security for prized artwork. The event could return to downtown, he added, but “for the next couple of years, the stadium is the logical location.”

The expected crowd of 7,000 can enjoy performance art, pop-up art booths and several food trucks.

All are invited.

“It’s great to see that art and music are becoming part of San Bernardino again,” said Bryan Wing, director of the city’s Teen Music Workshop and a faculty member at Richardson Prep middle school. The festival “not only highlights our great kids, but it highlights what we can accomplish as a community.”

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Tags: Arts, Top Stories PE, Top Stories Sun

Brian Whitehead

Brian Whitehead covers San Bernardino for The Sun. Bred in Grand Terrace, he graduated from Riverside Notre Dame High and Cal State Fullerton. For seven years, he covered high school and college sports for The Orange County Register. Before landing at The Sun, he was the city beat reporter for Buena Park, Fullerton and La Palma.
Amazon launches career pathway in logistics at Cajon

Posted: Tuesday, October 24, 2017 9:49 am

In celebration of its 5-year anniversary in California, Amazon donated $100,000 to San Bernardino community organizations, $50,000 of which went to Cajon High School for the creation of a new logistics career pathway. The checks were presented to their recipients during a special celebration at Cajon High School Monday morning, Oct. 23.

"This community is where we started [in California], and it holds a very special place in our heart," said Sumegha Mahankali, general manager of Amazon's San Bernardino fulfillment center, its first in California. "Our associates here are some of our most caring and hardest working people."

According to Mahankali, when Amazon was looking to make donations to celebrate the anniversary it turned to those associates for suggestions.

From those suggestions Amazon donated $5,000 to the Inland Empire Children's Book Project, $7,500 to Boys & Girls Club of San Bernardino, $7,500 to San Bernardino Parks and Recreation, and $10,000 to San Bernardino City Library Foundation.

The biggest donation and the biggest news was for Cajon High School's newest career pathway, the Amazon Logistics Pathway Program.

The program will include academic and technology based courses in the classrooms and practical experience using the logistics technology in Amazon fulfillment centers, Mahankali shared when presenting the $50,000 check to Cajon Principal Teenya Bishop and San Bernardino City Unified School District Superintendent Dale Marsden.

According to Bishop, the school will be planning for the new program this year as well as recruiting interested students to participate in the first year of implementation in the 2018-19 school year.

"This is a significant financial and relational investment in our community," Marsden said of the program. "This partnership will be preparing [students] for good paying jobs available here in San Bernardino."
Shannon Kendall, emergency services coordinator for the Loma Linda and Colton fire departments, shares his experience in the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria during the Redlands Disaster Council meeting Monday, Oct. 23, 2017 at City Hall. (Sandra Emerson/staff)

By SANDRA EMERSON | semerson@scng.com | Redlands Daily Facts October 24, 2017 at 2:23 pm
What Hurricane Irma didn’t destroy in the U.S. Virgin Islands last month, Hurricane Maria did, according to Shannon Kendall, emergency services coordinator for the Loma Linda and Colton fire departments, who spent 22 days in the islands assisting during the aftermath of the hurricanes.

“Everywhere you looked there was devastation,” said Kendall, who recounted his deployment to members of the Redlands Disaster Council Monday at City Hall.

Kendall, a member of the American Red Cross San Bernardino County Board of Directors, deployed with the American Red Cross last month to Saint Thomas following Hurricane Irma, which ravaged the islands. While there, Hurricane Maria hit.

This image made from video shows damage from Hurricane Irma in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2017. (AP Photo/Ian Brown)

“Whatever was left, the infrastructure, if anything was left (Maria) took it out,” Kendall said. “Anything that had been done up to that point to try to restore power and get the roads cleared, it put everything back to zero.”

Resources were limited and communication was difficult. The majority of structures, including the hospital, were destroyed and power lines were downed all over the island.

“A boiled water advisory was in effect the entire time I was there,” he said. “It’s still in effect three weeks after getting back and they still don’t have complete power.”

A boiled water advisory is put in place as a safety precaution advising residents to boil water before use because it may be contaminated by bacteria.
In addition to the destruction caused by the storms, there were challenges while working in the Emergency Operations Center, Kendall said, from communication and coordination difficulties to inter-agency issues.

“There was a lot more politics than I thought there would be,” he said. “I thought that agencies would just work together and do the right thing and get people taken care of.”

The council, which meets quarterly, was also briefed on the Earthquake Brace + Bolt program for homeowners.

“When we talk about the hurricanes, it will be real similar to that here with an earthquake,” said Tim Sparks, managing director of Earthquake Bracing Inc. in San Bernardino. “Past earthquakes in Northridge, Landers and Loma Prieta and others. ... There were thousands of homes destroyed. Many of them were raised foundation homes.”

Through the state funded program, Redlands homeowners are eligible for up to $3,000 to seismically retrofit their raised foundation homes.

The council develops and recommends emergency and mutual aid plans and agreements for consideration and possible adoption by the Redlands City Council.

Tags:  Top Stories RDF,  Top Stories Sun

Sandra Emerson  
Sandra Emerson covers the cities of Redlands, Highland and Yucaipa for the Southern California News Group.

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LOCAL NEWS

Ex-Beaumont councilman Mark Orozco apologizes after getting probation in bribery, perjury case

Former Beaumont City Councilman Mark Orozco, seen in May, was sentenced to probation Tuesday, Oct. 24, after earlier pleading guilty to taking a bribe and to perjury. File photo by Stan Lim, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG

By CRAIG SHULTZ | cshultz@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: October 24, 2017 at 9:45 am | UPDATED: October 24, 2017 at 8:13 pm
Former Beaumont City Councilman Mark Orozco apologized to citizens and supporters after his Tuesday, Oct. 24, sentencing for felonies he committed while in office.

Orozco received three years of formal probation and six months of home confinement after pleading guilty to bribery and perjury charges last month. He also was ordered to pay a $10,000 fine.

“My family, my supporters and I are personally devastated at the outcome of this case,” Orozco wrote in a statement he handed to reporters after the morning hearing. “It was not the way I was hoping to go out. There is still an enormous amount of work left to do. That is why I would like to personally apologize for my mistakes.”

He thanked those who have backed him through the ordeal.

“I love my community and I hope you will all judge me on the many accomplishments that we, together, fought over the years, and not only on this incident,” Orozco said in the statement.

Orozco, 40, who has been free on bail, could have faced four years in prison on each count if he had not reached a plea deal with the District Attorney’s office.

He did not speak in court other than to answer “Yes, your honor” to some questions asked by Judge Samuel Diaz Jr.

“In these trying months, having considered all aspects of the matter, my attorneys, my family and I felt that accepting this plea was in the best interest of the city of Beaumont and its citizens,” his statement said.

It announced his resignation, effective immediately, from the council.

Orozco’s resignation was a condition of his plea deal. With the conviction, the former Beaumont Unified School District trustee and unsuccessful 2012 Democratic candidate for state Assembly and 2014 candidate for the Riverside County Board of Supervisors may never again hold public office.

His former colleagues last week appointed real estate broker Rey Santos to serve the remaining 12 months of Orozco’s term.

Deputy District Attorney Amy Barajas, who prosecuted the case with Emily Hanks, said the sentence was in line with current practices.

“This way we were able to hold him accountable and make sure he’s punished for his wrongdoings,” Barajas said.
Ex-Beaumont councilman Mark Orozco apologizes after getting probation in bribery, perjury case – San Bernardino Sun

Orozco pleaded guilty Sept. 28 to soliciting a bribe from Pardee Homes and to a new case of perjury filed that day for falsifying a campaign form.

On that form, prosecutors say he made it appear that fellow council member Nancy Carroll received a donation that she did not. That set her up for punishment for violating state campaign reporting laws.

The move retaliated against Carroll for not voting for Orozco as mayor, prosecutors said.

Orozco was indicted in May by a grand jury on bribery and perjury charges. The other charges he faced, which were related to lying on campaign forms when he ran for county supervisor, were dropped.

The accusations against Orozco were not related to the corruption case against seven former city officials accused of misspending city money.

Two of the accused, former planning director Deepak Moorjani and former Police Chief Francis Dennis “Frank” Coe, pleaded guilty last week to their part in the corruption probe.

Beaumont Mayor Lloyd White said the sentences can bring some closure to the city, which has faced numerous hurdles in recent years.

“Bringing resolution to the criminal proceedings against those who have harmed our city will help us to rebuild our community’s trust in its leaders,” White said. “We recognize this will take years but the Council is committed to rebuilding that trust and rebuilding the city of Beaumont.”

Tags: Echo Code, Top Stories PE, Top Stories RDF, Top Stories Sun
Payrolls in the region spanning Orange and Los Angeles counties and the Inland Empire will grow at a pace of 1.6 percent this year, 1.7 percent next year, and 1.9 percent in 2019, Cal State Fullerton is predicting, Oct. 25, predicts. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)
Payrolls in the region spanning Orange and Los Angeles counties and the Inland Empire will grow at a pace of 1.6 percent this year, 1.7 percent next year, and 1.9 percent in 2019, the university’s annual forecast, released Wednesday, Oct. 25, predicts.

That compares with an expansion of 2.6 percent in payroll jobs in 2016.

“While the national employment has been robust,” the report notes, “job growth in Orange County and California appears to have slowed down over the last several months. Southern California and Orange County, in particular, are in a local downturn as employment growth has stagnated.”

Economists Anil Puri and Mira Farka, authors of the report, write that “there does not seem to be an obvious trigger for the current drop in employment. The unemployment rate is still low by historical standards, and the economy appears to be near full employment.

“The growth rate of employment under such circumstances can be expected to slow down, but, short of an error in data reporting, a full rationale for such a slowdown is not apparent at this time.”

On the upside, they add that despite the lethargic job creation, “local business leaders continue to be enthusiastic about local economic conditions and housing prices are still rising.”

Across the region, the Inland Empire will continue to show the most vigorous payroll expansion, albeit slower than last year, the economists predict.

In 2016, jobs grew in the combined counties of Riverside and San Bernardino at a 3.5 percent rate. That will slow this year to 3.1 percent, next year to 2.9 percent and rise slightly to 3 percent in 2019.

In Los Angeles County, job growth was 2.5 percent last year and will drop to 1.3 percent this year, rising slightly to 1.6 percent next year and 1.9 percent in 2019.

Although unemployment in Orange County, 3.6 percent in September, is the lowest in the region, the county lags its neighbors in job creation.

The forecast predicts a precipitous drop in payroll expansion to 0.8 percent this year from 2.3 percent last year. Job growth will then slowly accelerate to one percent annual growth next year and in 2019.
Some of the contrast between the counties has to do with **home building**, which **has been opposed by anti-growth activists in cities such as Huntington Beach.**

“Construction activity has slowed in Orange County, but is continuing at a healthier pace in other parts of Southern California,” the report notes.

In Southern California, construction permits will grow by 15 percent in 2017, then stabilize at that level for the next two years, the economists calculate. Most of the growth is expected to occur in the Inland Empire and Los Angeles counties.

Construction permits for Orange County, which topped 12,000 last year, are expected to drop to just 9,100 this year. In the following two years, they should grow at about 8,000 annually, the historical average.

But the report notes, “While the reduction of permits in Orange County may seem quite dramatic, things are not as dire especially when bearing in mind that permit growth had risen by a staggering 34.4 percent between 2014 and 2016,” as Orange County building recovered from the recession slump.

As customary with Cal State Fullerton forecasts, the report delves into greater detail on Orange County than on Southern California generally.

Beyond construction, Orange County has also seen declines in manufacturing, retail, professional and technical services, healthcare and social assistance and local government.
“The declines in healthcare, professional services and retail are more noticeable because they have been some of the main drivers of employment growth in Orange County over the last several years,” the economists note.

Other worrisome signs for Orange County: The formation of new small businesses has ebbed and the county’s average employment by industry has been shrinking.

“Firms in most industry sectors are reducing their employee rolls,” the economists write. “While this trend began before the Great Recession and accelerated during the crisis, it appears to still be ongoing.”

The average number of workers in Orange County businesses fell from 17 workers in 2003 to 15.6 workers in 2015. Similar trends, however, are occurring at the national level, the report adds.

Only three industries, which are also the main growth industries in Orange County, are bucking the trend. From 2003 to 2015, employment rose in the arts and entertainment, health care and social assistance, along with hotels and restaurants — all of which grew their share of overall employment.

Orange County accounts for 8.3 percent of California’s employment, but it has accounted for 12.5 percent of reported mass layoffs this year — those which must by law be reported to state officials, the forecast notes.

The 6,000 laid off workers included 905 at Live Nation in Irvine, 332 at American Apparel in Garden Grove, 280 at Kellogg in La Palma, 213 at Nature’s Bounty in Garden Grove, 195 at Nordstrom in Santa Ana, 175 at Royalty Carpet Mills in Irvine, 148 at Wet Seal in Irvine and 147 at Ricoh Electronics in Tustin.

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NEWS

Until poverty eliminated, schools won’t graduate 100 percent of students, expert says

Graduation rates have increased steadily in California in recent years, now reaching an average of 83.2 percent for the class of 2016. (File photo)

By EDSOURCE |
October 24, 2017 at 4:35 pm

By Theresa Harrington, EdSource
California has made higher graduation rates one of its key measures for assessing school performance as part of its new accountability system. Graduation rates have increased steadily in California in recent years, now reaching an average of 83.2 percent for the class of 2016.

But just how high can or should graduation rates go?

Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Michelle King has set a goal of graduating 100 percent of district students.

But one of the state’s leading experts on how to increase graduation rates says that is not likely to happen without far-reaching changes in the society as a whole.

Russell Rumberger, a professor emeritus at UC Santa Barbara who directs the California Dropout Research Project, said poverty is too big an obstacle for some students to overcome. Although the graduation rate has increased, more than 50,000 students drop out of high school each year, he said.

“A lot of kids and their families live in very dire circumstances, with food insecurity and health issues that affect their ability to learn,” he said. “Even if schools are working their butts off, most people would agree, you’re never going to solve any major problem like graduation rates without attempts to help kids and families improve.”

“If we guaranteed every kid could not live in poverty, I bet we could do it,” Rumberger added. “Until we solve poverty, we'll never solve high school graduation rates.”

Similar sentiments were expressed at the recent EdSource Symposium, where Rumberger was one of several experts on a panel that discussed whether California is adequately serving its most vulnerable children, including students at risk of dropping out of high school.

Rumberger said Latino and other student groups who have historically lagged behind have made “remarkable” graduation gains, but he cautioned that “a high school diploma is really a blunt instrument and it doesn’t really tell us too much about what a student has learned.”
Graduation rates have increased steadily in California in recent years, now reaching an average of 83.2 percent for the class of 2016. (File photo by Scott Varley, Daily Breeze)

He is currently raising research funding to begin digging deeper into what students are learning and hopes to complete this new phase of his research in the next couple of years.

“We have a set of academic requirements for graduation,” he said during the EdSource panel discussion. “But what we are really interested in is: ‘What kind of preparation have those students received?’”

A person’s high school experience, he said, is pivotal to his or her future and “defines their trajectory in life.” Those who fail “have a very bleak future,” whereas those who thrive go onto college and “do incredibly well.”

One of the concerns he wants to explore further is the rising use of “credit recovery” or online courses that students are taking in some districts, including Los Angeles Unified, to make up for more traditional semester-long courses that students may have failed.

“The rigor of that (credit recovery courses) is questionable,” he said, adding that districts still have a lot of discretion in what they require of students before giving them diplomas.

And beyond just ensuring that students graduate from high school, Rumberger said it is important to adequately prepare students for college and careers beyond high school.
While many colleges and universities still rely in part on the results of tests such as the SAT or ACT to make admissions decisions, Rumberger said the best predictor of college success is high school grades. Passing students with a “D,” he said, is likely not sufficient to prepare them for college.

Rumberger praised districts such as Oakland Unified, which is working to help those students who come to high school performing below grade level to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to graduate in five or six years instead of four. These students should also be counted in districts’ graduation rates, he said, adding that the state currently calculates its graduation rates based on those who graduate within four years.

“‘The schools and students should be applauded,’” he said, after Oakland Unified Superintendent Kyla Johnson-Trammell described during the EdSource symposium her district’s efforts to boost graduation rates. “‘Good for them. They persevered. We should acknowledge districts like Oakland that are sticking with these kids and getting them to graduate.’

He also praised Fresno Unified for its efforts to not only improve graduation rates, but improve instruction and student learning, especially for its Latino students. In the past seven years, Fresno’s graduation rate has grown from 69.2 percent to 85.4 percent, surpassing the state average of 83.2 percent. Meanwhile, its graduation rate for Latino students grew from 64.7 percent to 85.6 percent, exceeding the state average of 80 percent for all Latino students.

“‘Fresno implemented some real improvements in teacher training and curriculum and I think it’s paid off,’” Rumberger said, crediting the work of the district’s graduation task force established several years ago.

Another indicator of college readiness is course enrollment, especially in college prep classes such as Advanced Placement and dual enrollment college-level courses, Rumberger said, adding that he wants to delve into the data for courses taken by students statewide.
Dual enrollment allows students to take college-level classes while in high school — often on a college campus — with credits counting toward high school graduation as well as toward college credit requirements.

“Students don’t have to take any of those classes to graduate,” he said. “But if they want to be prepared for college, dual enrollment (classes) help because not only do they get credit, but exposure to the college environment.”

The big question he is seeking to answer regarding a student’s diploma is whether students are meeting the minimum requirements for high school graduation or whether they are truly prepared for success in college.

Even earning a “C,” in a course, he said, may not be good enough to adequately prepare students for college.

“There’s research that suggests a 2.5 GPA (in high school) is the dividing line between being prepared and not being prepared,” he said.

Rumberger wants to research how many students are earning B’s and A’s versus C’s and D’s in high school courses to get a better picture of graduates, looking at both individual course grades and overall grades to see whether they exceed a 2.5 GPA.

His passion stems from what he has learned from his studies.

“The most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in our country and many countries are those who are the least educated.”

—Russell Rumberger | Professor emeritus at UC Santa Barbara

“The most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in our country and many countries are those who are the least educated,” he said.

After completing his doctoral dissertation at Stanford University on highly educated college graduates whose education exceeds the needs of their jobs and are underemployed, he said he found that topic was “just not to me as motivating as (studying) the group that never gets out of high school.”
“College-educated kids, kids who graduate from high school and college, are privileged,” he said. “But it’s the kids who don’t graduate high school who are the most disadvantaged.”

They die nine years sooner on average than high school graduates, earn half a million dollars less over their lifetimes, are five or six times more likely to be incarcerated, and tend to rank low in most indicators of well-being, including poverty, he said.

“It’s amazing,” Rumberger said. “The people at the bottom are the ones who are high school dropouts. So, it motivated me to say, ‘That’s the group I want to study.’”

Now, as an emeritus professor, that’s just what he is continuing to do.

After 28 years as a UC Santa Barbara faculty member, Rumberger has stepped down from his position as a full-time professor, but he’s not ready to stop his research.

“There’s still more work to do and I want to do it, but I have to get the (research) funding,” he said. “Every life matters.”

This story originally appeared on EdSource.org. EdSource is an independent journalism organization that works to engage Californians on key education challenges with the goal of enhancing learning success.
Southern California's house hunters must move 23 percent faster this year to find a residence to buy.
ReportsOnHousing found Southern California had 29,635 existing homes listed for sale on broker networks Oct. 19. That's down 5,906 or 17 percent vs. a year ago. Meanwhile, the four-county region had 13,645 new escrows in the previous 30 days — up 1,124 or 9 percent in a year.

By comparing inventory with the pace of new purchases, ReportsOnHousing shows the estimated “market time” a homeowner’s property went from listing to escrow was down by 20 days in a year to 65 days, or a 23 percent faster pace.

“The storyline for 2017 is that there simply have not been enough homes on the market, fueling the already hot demand,” said ReportsOnHousing’s Steve Thomas. “Continued low rates have also stoked the fires of demand here in SoCal. Home values have been on the rise and will continue to march upward as long as the inventory shortage continues, which it will in 2018.”

The speed of selling was faster in all four Southern California counties vs. 2016.

Riverside County quickened the most. Its 7,847 listings, down 20 percent in a year, when compared with 3,610 escrows, up 38 percent, equaled a market time of 65 days. That’s down 47 days in a year.

San Bernardino County’s acceleration ranked second. Its 4,965 listings, down 14 percent, came as 2,124 escrows opened, up 6 percent. Market time fell 16 days in a year to 70 days.

Los Angeles County’s 11,608 listings, down 15 percent, came as 5,518 escrows opened, up 2 percent. Market time fell 12 days in a year to 63 days.

Orange County was the lone county with falling new escrows. Its 5,215 listings, down 18 percent, compared to 2,393 escrows, down 4 percent. Market time fell 11 days in a year to 65 days.

Home prices rose in September throughout Southern California, pushing the regionwide median to its bubble-era high of $505,000 for the first time in a decade, CoreLogic reported this week. Los Angeles County’s median hit an all-time high of $575,000 for a third straight month. The median price in Riverside County was $360,000; San Bernardino was $325,000.

A late-summer surge in home buying pushed Orange County housing prices to record highs. The median price of a home — or the price at the midpoint of all transactions — hit $710,000 last month, up 10.9 percent year over year, housing tracker CoreLogic reported Tuesday.

Staff writer Jeff Collins contributed to this report.
What Happens to Survivors of Mass Shootings Like Las Vegas?

They may face a lifetime of psychological and physical issues – and could struggle to find help as Republicans work to gut Obamacare.

Las Vegas memorial honors the victims of the mass shooting there on October 1st. Mikayla Whitmore/Las Vegas Sun/AP

By s.e. smith
October 16, 2017

When a gunman who had coolly calculated his strategy for maximum damage opened fire on a crowded concert in Las Vegas earlier this month, he killed 58 people, making it the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. Numerous media outlets have painstakingly assembled the stories of those who died and humanized them in death. But somewhat less discussed are the 489 other individuals he injured.

We know from examining the aftermaths of other mass shootings that these hundreds of injured have a long and difficult journey ahead of them, and one that’s likely to be forgotten as headlines about the Las Vegas massacre inevitably fade. While they may drop from the news cycle, survivors and witnesses often live with a lifetime of...
psychological and physical issues – and could struggle to find help as Trump and his fellow Republicans work to gut Obamacare.

Mary Reed was shot three times during the shooting at a January 2011 event in Tucson for then Rep. Gabby Giffords. Reed tells Rolling Stone people have expressed to her, "I don't want to speak with her – she was only injured. I want to speak with someone who was really affected."

Reed, who attended the event with her husband and two young children, was shot while shielding her daughter from gunfire. She now lives with a bullet lodged in a nerve bundle near her spine, causing intractable chronic pain. For her, every new mass shooting reminds her of how society focuses on killers and fatalities, but tends to forget those who live through such tragedies with injuries or disabilities.

Living through these events isn't easy. Jeremy Cannon, a trauma physician at Penn Medicine who served three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, says the kinds of injuries inflicted by semiautomatic weapons like those used in Las Vegas are distinctive, and especially challenging to treat.

High-velocity weapons carry a lot of kinetic energy, which can cause huge amounts of blood loss, Cannon says. And that's not the only problem. "When they strike tissue, it just creates a tremendous amount of destruction," he says. The full extent of such injuries isn't always apparent, complicating treatment. For instance, tissue death that may not be apparent on initial evaluation can cause serious, even fatal, complications. Survivors may deal with a lifetime of acquired physical disability thanks to bullets that cannot safely be removed, spinal cord injuries or limb loss.

Cannon's experience in military contexts gives him a personal relationship with the kinds of injuries seen in Las Vegas, and he notes many of the improvements that help physicians treat injured patients come from military practice. But, he adds, "in some ways the mental anguish can be as much, if not more, devastating than the physical wounds."
That emotional trauma is a significant fear for mental health providers as well as survivors who have been there and know what Vegas survivors are facing. "I am profoundly concerned about how people are going to be able to heal from this," says Reed, noting she found it particularly hard to find mental health support for her children after the Tucson shooting; she has a vivid memory of watching her son "pick brains and blood out of his sister's long blond hair." The shooting also profoundly changed her sense of personal safety and control. But friends and neighbors didn't know how to interact with the family. Reed remembers people suggesting to her, "Oh, you were only injured."

Mary Reed, right, at a 2013 event outside Sen. Jeff Flake's office in Tucson calling for universal background checks for firearm purchases. Will Seberger/ZUMAPRESS.com/ZUMA

Steven Berkowitz, director of the Penn Center for Youth and Family Trauma Response and Recovery, stresses that in the aftermath of a shooting, the psychiatric fallout for survivors, especially young people, can be severe. Violent incidents like these, he says, "tend to have worse long-term outcomes than other types of traumatic experiences," with emotional responses punctuated by anger, feelings of helplessness and an erosion of survivors' sense of safety.

While many people may think of post-traumatic stress disorder in the aftermath of shootings, Berkowitz says other mental health conditions can come into play as well. Some people develop severe anxiety or
depression, for example, and those with long-term physical impairments may struggle with daily reminders of their experience, like lost limbs or paralysis. The understanding that emotional stress interacts with physical health is also informing trauma care, Berkowitz says, with health care providers recognizing that inadequate mental health services can cause physical, not just emotional, symptoms.

Both Berkowitz and Cannon express concerns about one element of the Las Vegas fallout that's somewhat unusual among recent U.S. mass shootings: Most of the survivors were from somewhere else. After receiving treatment and stabilization at well-resourced hospitals in the area, they're returning home to areas that may not have adequate trauma care programs or follow-up plans in place.

A woman sits on a curb in the aftermath of the Las vegas shooting. John Locher/AP

Cannon says that in the military, providers deal with this problem with weekly teleconferences during which physicians across the military health care system can compare notes on patients and track them through recovery. "You have to have a commitment that you're going to get them back to full functional status, not just survive," he says.

Reed says the victims' advocacy program through her local Pima County Sheriff's Office made a tremendous difference in her recovery, helping her regain her sense of control and move forward with her life.
It had such a profound impact on her that she later trained to join the advocacy team and spent several years supporting victims of other violent crimes. "It was part of my healing," she says. For victims of the Las Vegas shooting, that kind of long-term follow-through may be more challenging to provide.

Concerns about the immediate and long-term psychiatric and physical needs of shooting survivors aren't the only things weighing on the minds of people like Reed and Berkowitz: The elephant in the room as the United States responds to mass shootings is the tremendous financial cost for those facing both immediate and lifetime medical expenses. In a sense, surviving a mass shooting is the ultimate preexisting condition – and that makes it vulnerable to Republicans' efforts to gut Obamacare. Without protections for preexisting conditions, and coverage through the ten essential benefits at the core of the law, the survivors of mass shootings could face tremendous medical debt.

"We know that we have created a false dichotomy in terms of thinking about health," says Berkowitz, referring to the medical community's history of treating mental and physical health care as separate, often unrelated issues, and of insurance companies not covering mental health needs as well as they do physical ones. The Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, along with several Obamacare provisions, have forced insurers to treat mental and physical health equally – but the stigma associated with mental health care remains.

From 2006 to 2014, the United States spent $735 million on immediate medical care for shooting survivors. A third of that, according to an article in the American Journal of Public Health, was covered by Medicaid – which many Republicans are trying to defund. A quarter of patients were "private pay": uninsured. Long-term costs for people with serious, complex injuries can climb into the millions, according to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.
"What we are experiencing is a unique American nightmare," says Colin Goddard, who survived the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting. Recently – a decade after the attack – he needed surgery to remove migrating bullet fragments that were slowly poisoning him.

Goddard, who now works as a gun violence advocate, says his post-shooting experience was unusual: Unlike the vast majority of victims of gun violence in the United States, he didn't shoulder the cost for his immediate or ongoing care. His recent surgery was covered through a fund developed to support Virginia Tech survivors, with money coming from donations and a settlement paid out by the university. (He estimates the costs for surgery, physical therapy and related care at around $100,000.) But such funds, when they exist, don't always reach victims of mass shootings, and they are rarely established for other victims of gun violence. The reality is that support is limited for most of the roughly 222 people who survive shootings each day in the U.S.

The public health implications of compromising care for victims of the gun violence epidemic in the United States are considerable. For
survivors like Reed, those obstacles are combined with a desire to be seen and heard. Rarely hearing about victims doesn't just deemphasize their significant health care and social challenges in the wake of a shooting – it can also be isolating for newly injured people who have entered a world they never thought they'd see. In the wake of events like the Las Vegas shooting, survivors of prior shootings often reach out to offer a helping hand and issue a warning: The road ahead can be long, dark and lonely. "It's a club no one wants to join," Reed says. "And you don't even know [it] exists until you've become a member."