

LOCAL NEWS

San Bernardino County settles for \$2.75 million in 3 jail abuse lawsuits



Dozens of inmates have sued over their treatment while incarcerated at the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga. (File photo)

By **JOE NELSON** | Press-Enterprise

July 21, 2017 at 7:50 pm



San Bernardino County has settled for almost \$2.75 million three of five federal lawsuits filed by dozens of current and former inmates at the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga who alleged a pattern of physical abuse by deputies.

The lawsuits followed [confirmation in April 2014](#) of a criminal investigation by the FBI and an internal affairs investigation by the Sheriff's Department that began a month prior. The FBI investigation is ongoing.

On July 11, the county settled for \$2.5 million with 32 plaintiffs represented by Victorville attorneys Jim Terrell, Sharon Brunner and Stanley Hodge and Woodland Hills attorney Dale Galipo.

On June 27, the county settled with plaintiff Eric Smith, one of the first inmates to report the alleged abuse, for \$175,000.

And on June 21, the county settled with plaintiff Armando Marquez for \$70,000.

Among the allegations, inmates claimed they were subject to **Taser gun torture** and brutal pat-down searches their attorneys characterized as sodomy.

The allegations prompted the terminations of seven sheriff's deputies and sweeping reforms and security upgrades at the jail, one of four in the county operated by the Sheriff's Department.

"Back in March of 2014, Sheriff John McMahon went public and made it clear that he was not going to tolerate any misconduct by department personnel when this incident broke out," sheriff's Lt. Sarkis Ohannessian said in a statement. "The department and the FBI fully cooperated to ensure a comprehensive investigation was completed."

Within a month of the investigation, rookie deputies Brock Teyechea, Andrew Cruz and Nicholas Oakley were no longer employed by the department. As the investigation continued into October 2014, deputies Robert Escamilla, Russell Kopasz, Robert Morris and Eric Smale were placed on paid administrative leave. They are no longer with the department, Ohannessian said.

"The clients were glad that the major people involved are no longer in law enforcement," said Terrell, who along with Brunner and Hodge were among the first to file lawsuits after the allegations surfaced.

Terrell said the criminal backgrounds of his clients posed challenges with putting the case in front of a jury. He said the settlement moved forward quickly when his team brought on board Galipo, a veteran trial attorney specializing in police excessive-force cases.

Galipo said in a telephone interview his clients could have possibly received a bigger jury award at trial, but it would have been a gamble.

"Hopefully this is a wake-up call for the detention center that has had a host of inmate abuse problems in the past," Galipo said. "I can tell you, if it continues to go on, it's going to be hard for them to say, 'Gee, we didn't know this was going on.' It's going to be more difficult for them to defend themselves."

Sheriff's officials maintain the abuse by deputies was an isolated incident and not suggestive of an institutional problem. The department attributed the problems to prison realignment, which was implemented in 2011 and shifted many inmates serving longer sentences into county jails instead of state prison. Sheriff's officials said it led to sharp increases in both inmate-on-inmate violence and confrontations between inmates and deputies.

"Today, our deputies in our corrections bureau continue to receive training in the proper procedures for dealing with inmates who have a higher criminal sophistication today than ever before due to the state prison realignment," Ohanessian said.

Since 2014, more than 350 security cameras have been installed at the jail, which Ohanessian said will hold deputies and inmates more accountable for their actions. Additionally, he said the jail has added more medical staff and sergeants to provide better care and supervision.

Brunner, one of the defense attorneys, also said the process for inmates filing grievances at the jail has improved.

She said in a telephone interview she hopes that the substantial number of inmates who sued sends a message to the county and its Sheriff's Department that such abuses cannot, and will not, be tolerated.

"We hold out hope and faith that the FBI will come back and there will be some indictments and charges against these deputies," Brunner said.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said its more than three-year investigation, which prompted the [impaneling of a federal grand jury](#), continues.

Attorneys for Eric Smith and Armando Marquez, the other two inmates whose lawsuits were settled, did not return telephone calls and emails seeking comment.

Meanwhile, other lawsuits are ongoing or pending.

Riverside attorney Robert McKernan is representing four inmates: Daniel Vargas, Anthony Gomez, Mario Villa and Keith Courtney.

McKernan said all four plaintiffs have agreed to a settlement offer by the county, and the paperwork is being forwarded to County Counsel for execution.

The case of inmate Cesar Vasquez, whose lawsuit was filed in August 2014 and was amended July 7, is currently scheduled for trial on July 10, 2018, his attorney, Scott Eadie, said in a telephone interview Friday.

Vasquez, a former food server at the jail, was among a bevy of inmates who alleged deputies engaged in a hazing ritual of Taser gun torture with “chow servers,” who received special privileges at the jail including more food and the ability to move more freely through their cell blocks.

Among Vazquez’s allegations is that fired Deputy Oakley had inmate Lamar Graves use his phone to shoot video of Oakley stunning Vazquez with his Taser in a utility closet, away from view of security cameras.

Eadie said he has subpoenaed the FBI for the video.

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Joe Nelson

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By Motherboard

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SkyPark gets approval from Board of Supervisors

Sunday, Jul 23, 2017

By Douglas W. Motley

SkyPark at Santa's Village received long-awaited approval to operate as an outdoor adventure theme park from the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, July 11. It had been operating under a temporary use permit, which allowed it to open for the 2016 Christmas season on 15 of its 153 acres.

The approval will allow Skypark to continue its operations, as well as open its expanded forest areas for mountain biking, fishing, hiking and camping. Supervisors also approved the project's environmental impact report, which outlines measures for the protection of endangered species, including the Southern Rubber Boa (snake), Spotted owl, Flying Squirrel and Bald Eagle.

One final hurdle remains before the park can be fully operational in accord with the owners' vision for the project, and that is gaining approval from the Department of Fish and Wildlife to obtain an "incidental take permit," for the accidental "taking" (harm or death) of the Southern Rubber Boa caused by accidental disturbance from the use of its habitat. Once this procedure is completed, the trail system can be opened for public use for mountain biking and hiking.

Further mitigation for sensitive species includes the conservation of 30.5 acres of forested land, which will be set aside and limited to recreational and educational use.

According to co-owner Bill Johnson, plans for the park include the creation of a campground across the highway from the main park with 70 recreational vehicle pads and 35 tent camping spots, as well as restroom and shower facilities. Johnson said he expects the campground to be completed by the end of summer.

Prior to the vote of approval by county supervisors, Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford voiced, "I am really excited about the next phase, and thank you for caring enough about the community to cut through with these hoops and deal with the red tape."

During the public hearing portion of the supervisors' meeting, Tim Krantz, a Redlands University professor of environmental studies, praised the park's developer saying, "This is the best possible use of that land."

Johnson said Skypark has hired a marketing firm to approach school districts throughout the Southland and encourage them to bring inner-city students to the wooded park to teach them, among other things, "about ecology and taking out the trash."

Longtime Lake Arrowhead residents Carol and Duane Banner celebrated their wedding anniversary at a pre-grand opening gala held at SkyPark last December. Carol told *The Alpenhorn News* last Thursday, "We're ecstatic, it was a longtime coming. It's too bad it took so long."

The concept of a sustainable adventure park was the vision of local couple Bill and Michelle Johnson. "The property at Santa's Village is an important part of the mountain's history. We recognize that this special place should be treasured and taken care of, from the smallest of creatures, to its towering trees, to its historic log cabins. We believe preservation and sustainability should always be the goal of any development. As local residents who grew up enjoying the recreation and beauty of the mountain, we have always treasured the natural environment. When the Santa's Village property came up for sale, we contemplated a new kind of vision in outdoor recreation. Our vision is SkyPark," explained co-owner Michelle Johnson.

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San Bernardino County's unemployment rate increases to 5.4 percent in June

Posted: Saturday, July 22, 2017 10:12 am

San Bernardino County's unemployment rate surged to 5.4 percent during the month of June, according to data released on July 21 by the California Employment Development Department.

In May, the jobless rate had declined to a 10-year low of 4.4 percent.

California's unemployment rate was unchanged at 4.7 percent in June, the EDD said. However, the state lost 1,400 jobs during the month.

The U.S. unemployment rate increased 0.1 percentage point in June to 4.4 percent.

San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Tentative trial date set for McStay family murder suspect 'Chase' Merritt

By Joe Nelson, The Sun

Friday, July 21, 2017



A tentative trial date was set Friday in San Bernardino County Superior Court for Charles Ray "Chase" Merritt, charged in the bludgeoning deaths of a San Diego County family of four whose remains were found buried near Victorville in 2013.

Jury selection is scheduled for Sept. 18 and trial is tentatively set for Sept. 25.

Merritt, 60, of Homeland was [charged](#) in November 2014 with four counts of first-degree murder for the February 2010 killings of Joseph McStay, 40; his wife, Summer McStay, 43; and their two toddler sons, Gianni, 4, and Joseph Jr., 3.

Sheriff's crime scene investigators [unearthed the family's remains](#) in two shallow graves in November 2013 after a man riding his dirt bike in the Mojave Desert west of the 15 Freeway and north of Stoddard Wells Road north of Victorville discovered some of the remains and reported it to authorities.

Merritt stands accused of fatally beating the family in their Fallbrook home with a 3-pound sledgehammer, then transporting their bodies

100 miles to the San Bernardino County desert.

Trial was delayed because Merritt's attorney, Rajan Maline, has been tied up since Jan. 4 with the [Colonies public corruption trial](#), in which he is representing one of four defendants. Closing arguments are scheduled to begin in that trial Aug. 14.

Maline said in a telephone interview Friday he anticipates that jury selection will begin as scheduled but will take some time. He said he doesn't expect opening statements to begin until late October.

Maline expects the trial to last at least three months and probably longer.

The trial will be heard in Judge Michael A. Smith's courtroom. Smith is the judge presiding over the Colonies trial.

Maline contends the case against Merritt was built solely on circumstantial evidence. Physical evidence presented during Merritt's [preliminary hearing](#) in June 2015 showed that investigators found Merritt's DNA on the steering wheel and gearshift handle of the McStays' Isuzu Trooper that was abandoned at the Mexican border in San Ysidro shortly after the family's disappearance in 2010. Merritt claimed never to have driven the vehicle.

7/24/2017

Tentative trial date set for McStay family murder suspect 'Chase' Merritt

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170721/tentative-trial-date-set-for-mcstay-family-murder-suspect-chase-merritt>

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Authorities: 16-year-old girl arrested for murder of Apple Valley minister

By Staff reports

Posted Jul 23, 2017 at 3:05 PM

Updated Jul 23, 2017 at 9:06 PM

APPLE VALLEY — A teenager was arrested in connection to the murder of 79-year-old Willie Hunter Sunday, authorities said.

At 3:46 p.m Saturday, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department deputies responded to the 12700 block of Kiowa Road in Apple Valley for a call regarding a deceased male found inside an apartment.

Deputies found the body of man, identified as Hunter, and believed he was the victim of homicide, according to authorities.

Sheriff's Homicide investigators responded to the scene and, after a lengthy investigation, determined that Hunter and the suspect knew each other.

"The suspect was at the victim's apartment and an altercation occurred, and the suspect stabbed the victim multiple times," sheriff's officials said in a statement. "The suspect then left the residence, taking the victim's car."

Investigators made contact with the suspect early Sunday morning and, following an interview, arrested her on suspicion of murder and booked her into Juvenile Hall.

Hunter's friend, Frank Kelly, told the Daily Press that "no one should die like this" after discovering that his friend, who he said was a minister at United in Christ Baptist Church of Apple Valley, had been murdered.

"Our pastor was out of town and Reverend Hunter was going to preach for him on Sunday," Kelly told the Daily Press. "His death has really shocked our church. He was a dear brother and he will be missed."

Kelly said Hunter was unmarried and "very devoted to the Lord," his church family and community.

"I spoke to him last week at our back to school splash event for our kids," Kelly said. "Reverend Hunter was a very good-hearted man who loved people and loved life."

Pastor Patrick Foy, who was out of town over the weekend, told the Daily Press his prayers and condolences are with Hunter’s family and his congregation.

“Reverend Hunter always had three things — a smile on his face, an uplifting word for others and a Bible in his hand,” Kelly said. “He truly was a man of God who is now with Jesus.”

Anyone with information regarding this investigation is urged to contact Detective Justin Giles with the Sheriff’s Homicide Detail at 909-387-3589. Callers wishing to remain anonymous may call the We-tip Hotline at 1-800-782-7463 or visit .

Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLa or
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Teenage girl arrested in fatal stabbing of 79-year-old man in Apple Valley



The location where Willie Hunter was killed Saturday in Apple Valley. (Los Angeles Times)



By **Alene Tchekmedyian**

JULY 23, 2017, 8:35 PM

Authorities arrested a 16-year-old girl Sunday on suspicion of fatally stabbing an elderly man in Apple Valley, police said.

On Saturday afternoon, deputies responded to an apartment in the 12700 block of Kiowa Road, where 79-year-old Willie Hunter was found dead with multiple stab wounds, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

Investigators believe the teenager, who was not identified, was at the man's apartment when they began arguing.

The girl allegedly stabbed Hunter several times before taking off with his car, police said.

Police said the pair knew each other, but they did not elaborate on how.

After interviewing the teen, investigators booked her into juvenile hall on suspicion of murder.

Anyone with information about the stabbing is asked to call Det. Justin Giles at (909) 387-3589.

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Twitter: [@AleneTchek](https://twitter.com/AleneTchek)

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5th annual High Desert Mud Run marks return to Adelanto

By **Charity Lindsey**

Staff Writer



Posted Jul 22, 2017 at 8:59 PM

Updated Jul 22, 2017 at 9:08 PM

ADELANTO — Thanks to a wet winter that helped relieve the city's water shortage, the High Desert Mud Run returned to the Adelanto Stadium for its fifth annual event on Saturday.

About 1,000 people signed up for the opportunity to get covered in mud amid running, jumping, crawling and climbing the 5k obstacle course at the stadium, according to event organizers.

While the first two HD Mud Runs were held at the stadium, 2015 and 2016's were at the High Desert Event Center in Victorville. Saturday marked the return of the event to its participants' preferred turf, Event Director Darrel Courtney said.

"People really get a kick out of running through the stadium," Courtney said. The runners weave through the stands, up and down the stairs, before heading to the dirt obstacles around the stadium.

But mudders weren't quite as muddy as years past, the reason being that organizers wanted to be sure they were "good stewards" of Adelanto's land and water.

"Even though we had a wetter winter, we still had to be conscious of the water issues, so when we came back out to the stadium, we made a commitment to the city that we wouldn't go all out and waste more water," Courtney said.

The modest amount of mud may or may not have influenced participation this year, as the attendance last year was at least 500 more.

"Not a much as usual, but we still had a good showing," Courtney said. "It went extremely well, even with triple-digit temperatures."

To beat the heat, some runners elected to start early, the first wave launching at 7 a.m. sharp, a blur of colored t-shirts representing various local teams as they made their way through "vendor row" and into the stadium.

By far the largest group there was Heritage Victor Valley Medical, with 300 people participating and representing one of the event’s key sponsors, Courtney said.

Heritage, in partnership with the City of Adelanto, also sponsored 100 army soldiers from the Fort Irwin National Training Center to participate this year, allowing them to run the course for free. For other participants, the cost of the event ranged from \$20 to \$50.

Courtney said that Adelanto Mayor Rich Kerr was also in attendance on Saturday, and made a challenge to the other military branches to come out and participate next year.

Event organizers aim to eventually increase the event to bi-annual and are looking forward to “another great year” in 2018.

For more information, visit www.highdesertmudrun.com or find High Desert Mud Run on Facebook.

Charity Lindsey may be contacted at clindsey@vvdailypress.com or 760-951-6245. Follow her on Twitter [@DP_Charity](https://twitter.com/DP_Charity).

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Brewery coming to downtown Joshua Tree

By Leah Sanson Hi-Desert Star | Posted: Friday, July 21, 2017 3:46 pm

JOSHUA TREE — “I think every home brewer’s dream is to someday open a brewery,” community member, home brewer and now part owner of Joshua Tree Brewery Dario Guerra said.

For Guerra, that dream is becoming a reality.

Guerra and his business partners are developing a brewery at 6393 Sunset Road in Joshua Tree that they hope to open by January 2018.

Jessica and Andrew Rudd, doctor Rick Eppy, JT Bicycles owner Jima Reed and realtor Bryan Wynwood join Guerra in the ownership and all have a hand in the birth of the brewery.

Guerra explained that he got the “bug” to open a brewery after he saw one of his friends start the Coachella Valley Brewery in 2014. Since then, he has been working on the concept with his partners.

The home brewers who partnered to start Joshua Tree Brewery have already won awards for their beer and participate in contests and fairs regularly.

Most recently, the team placed second in the Orange County Fair for their stout beer in the imperial stout category.

Guerra said the team hopes to design an industrial-type feel for the brewery and will have five to seven taps running on a seven-barrel system.

“We really want this to be a community brewery,” Guerra said.

He hopes to start a guest brewer program so community members who make beer at home can showcase their beers at the business.

The partners also plan on selling growlers and individual cans.

“We really want to stay as local as we can for this project; we are looking at local artists to do the labels and getting bids for local contractors for construction,” Guerra said.

The team plans to house Belgians, IPAs and stouts, but is also looking to see what the area likes and cater to the community’s tastes.

“Our main goal is to get the community to accept us,” Guerra said.



Brewery coming to downtown Joshua Tree

Dario Guerra and his business partners are developing a brewery at 6393 Sunset Road in Joshua Tree that they hope to open by January 2018.

Although the brewery is not open just yet, you can still try the local beer at festivals around the Basin, including Mesa Fest Sept. 23 at the Yucca Mesa Community Center. Joshua Tree Brewing will also be at the Joshua Tree Half Marathon Nov. 4.

For information, follow their Facebook page “Joshua Tree Brewery” or visit the website joshuatreebrewery.com.

Redlands Daily Facts (<http://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com>)

Drones could become part of Redlands Police Department arsenal

By Sandra Emerson, Redlands Daily Facts

Friday, July 21, 2017



REDLANDS >> The Police Department may soon join the ranks of law enforcement agencies that use drones as a crime-fighting tool.

The department has proposed launching an unmanned aerial system that would allow law enforcement to deploy drones for specific incidents.

“This is more proactive,” said Redlands police Lt. Travis Martinez.

“We see where there’s definitely a need that could arise and we’re

trying to equip our officers with all the tools they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.”

[Law enforcement agencies](#) across the country have implemented or proposed to implement drone programs to assist in search and rescue missions, photograph crime scenes or assist during active shooter situations.

Redlands is investigating whether to launch its own program, but first, Martinez said, officials here want public input.

The department will hold a meeting from 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Ayres Hotel, 1015 W. Colton Ave., to solicit feedback from the community.

Police personnel will discuss the use of unmanned aerial vehicles for policing, the city’s policies, Federal Aviation Administration requirements, evidence collection and storage, drone capabilities and more. They also will take questions from the audience.

“There may be some people in the community that have concerns,” Martinez said, “and we would like to address those concerns before we implement such a program.”

The [San Bernardino Police Department](#) has found drones useful in photographing homicide crime scenes, a task previously done by the police helicopter, said San Bernardino police Sgt. John Cardillo.

“Using the helicopter, you’re at the minimum of 500 feet so they’re really high, whereas with these (drones) we can get to whatever height we want,” he said.

When San Bernardino started the program, it planned to use the drone for search and rescue, gathering surveillance in tactical situations and high-risk vehicle stops, Cardillo said.

But due to FAA requirements, the department uses the drone mostly as a crime scene photographer, he said.

“Part of the problem right now is the FAA requires us to get permission or we have to file a (Notice to Airmen) every time we’re going to fly it, which takes a little time,” he said. “We can’t just arbitrarily pull it out and fly on a mission.”

Cardillo said the public has not expressed any problems with the department’s use of drones.

“We’re open about using it,” he said. “It’s not a secret, but then again we’re not using it to go do patrols and fly over people’s yards. If we’re operating it it’s a very special reason and the majority of the time they’re homicide-related, so we already have that area locked down and are flying over that area.”

In Redlands, the department could have found a drone useful during the [standoff outside Office Depot](#) in March 2016, Martinez said, or a couple of weeks ago when police were searching for a robbery suspect.

In that incident, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department [helicopter spotted the suspect in an orange grove](#) before he was taken into custody by Redlands police.

“If he hadn’t come out we would have certainly used the drones,” Martinez said.

With the growing use of drones by law enforcement, it not only presents an opportunity for Redlands to beef up its operations, but also has raised privacy concerns.

Peter Bibring, director of police practices for the American Civil Liberties Union of California and senior staff attorney for the ACLU of Southern California, told the Press-Enterprise in [April 2016](#) limits should be established up front because of the potential of abuse.

“Mission creep is a perennial problem for new surveillance technologies,” Bibring said. “A department may give one reason for acquiring a technology, such as search and rescue missions. But once they have that there is pressure to use it for any circumstance they can to justify that acquisition.”

Martinez said anyone with concerns about the proposed program should show up to Tuesday’s meeting.

“If anybody has any concerns about the proposed use of the drone for law enforcement, they certainly should come to the meeting and hear what we have planned,” Martinez said.

Staff writer David Downey contributed to this report.

URL: <http://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/government-and-politics/20170721/drones-could-become-part-of-redlands-police-department-arsenal>

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San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Feeling stress in San Bernardino? Survey ranks city as 7th-most stressed city in US

By Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Saturday, July 22, 2017



SAN BERNARDINO >> If you're feeling pretty stressed lately, you're not alone — a new study calculates the city as the most stressed in California, and the seventh-most stressed in the United States.

The [ranking from WalletHub](#) is the latest to point out the perils of San Bernardino, where residents are used to online determinations that the city is the [most dangerous](#) or the [worst place to find a job](#).

That kind of thing can be stressful.

The analyses of San Bernardino tend to look at a few interrelated data points — particularly crime rate and poverty — but WalletHub analyst Jill Gonzalez said the study of stress was more comprehensive.

“The methodology was developed in conjunction with academic experts, who took into account four prominent stress sources (work, financial, health, family),” Gonzalez said by email, adding that the information itself came mostly from government sources including the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Although financial stressors might directly and indirectly overlap with others, I do not deem this analysis a proxy for wealthy cities or vice versa.”

The study considers 40 indicators of stress, with different weights given to each, divided into the four categories.

San Bernardino's worst categories include income growth (worst out of 150), share of single parents (4th worst), poverty rate (5th-worst) and unemployment rate (8th). The crime rate per capita was 14th.

San Bernardino's average weekly work hours was 145th — great when you consider work a source of stress, but not so good for people struggling to put food on the table.

“San Bernardino city ranked 145th in Average Weekly Work Hours, at 36.20, which coincides with its ranking as 136th in Underemployment Rate,” Gonzalez wrote when asked if she had any advice for the city specifically. “City leaders should work to create workplace programs that ensure individual residents not only have jobs, but well-paying jobs to support financial and familial wellness.”

Crystal Trejo, 28, said she sees news stories giving plenty of reasons to be stressed, but she and her children have good lives.

“You just don't worry about those things,” Trejo said. “It's a hot day, so we went to the park, and now we're having a good time.”

A scarcity of parkland was one part of the overall score, and is one problem San Bernardino recently addressed, using a state grant to [open Bryce Hanes Park](#) at the corner of 9th and E streets in May.

Marcella Flores, 35, was also watching her children laugh and play in the splash pad at the park Wednesday, apparently without a care in the world.

She herself, though, said she feels pretty stressed.

“Money and the neighborhood make it tough,” Flores said, saying she was particularly concerned about the safety of her home in the area of Highland and Waterman avenues. “Other areas, I can’t afford.” It’s not all bad, though, Flores said.

“We go here one or two times a week,” she said, referring to the park. “It’s one of the really nice parts of San Bernardino. There are a few.”

The 10 most-stressed cities, according to WalletHub:

1. Newark, New Jersey
 2. Detroit, Michigan
 3. Cleveland, Ohio
 5. Miami, Florida
 6. Birmingham, Alabama
 7. San Bernardino, California
 8. Rochester, New York
 9. Augusta, Georgia
 10. Shreveport, Louisiana
-

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170722/feeling-stress-in-san-bernardino-survey-ranks-city-as-7th-most-stressed-city-in-us>

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NEWS

Wildfire near Running Springs at 40 percent containment



Mark Muckenfuss

A firefighting helicopter at the scene of the Dollar fire near Running Springs in the San Bernardino Mountains

By **MARK MUCKENFUSS** | mmuckenfuss@scng.com and **MICHAEL WILLIAMS** | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: July 22, 2017 at 3:47 pm | UPDATED: July 22, 2017 at 7:58 pm

Firefighters gained the upper hand Saturday evening on a wildfire that erupted off Highway 330 near the San Bernardino Mountains town of Running Springs, with the Dollar fire 40 percent contained after burning 85 acres of chaparral-covered terrain.

Christine Hill, a district ranger for the U.S. Forest Service, said there was a concerted aerial attack against the Dollar fire, which was first reported at about 1:30 p.m. in the vicinity of Highway 333 and Old City Creek Road, southwest of Running Springs.

Hill said air tankers and helicopters had been able to surround the fire with retardant. The tankers included the DC-10 “supertanker.” The Forest Service reported that the fire was holding inside the lines of retardant just before sunset.

ADVERTISING

The highway remained open and no evacuations were ordered, although ash fell on the community of Running Springs at the beginning of the fire.

“It’s looking pretty good at the moment,” Hill said earlier in the evening. “They’re working right now on reinforcing that retardant line with the hand work and hose lines.”

She said crews would be keeping a close eye on the fire area because of its proximity to Running Springs.

“We just want to take every precaution,” she said.

About 150 firefighters were on the scene. Cause of the fire was under investigation.

MARK MUCKENFUSS

Mark Muckenfuss

Mark Muckenfuss has been a reporter since 1981. He worked at various publications including the San Bernardino Sun before coming to the Press Enterprise in 1999. He covers higher education, military affairs and, when the ground shakes, earthquakes.

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By Walmart



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San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Firefighters battle wildfire in Highland

Saturday, July 22, 2017



A brush fire in Highland forced the closure of some surface streets in the area as firefighters fought the late-afternoon blaze that charred an estimated 15-20 acres of chaparral.

The Seine fire had no containment before sunset.

No evacuations were ordered in the area where the fire broke out at 3:50 p.m., near Piedmont Drive and Seine Avenue. The fire was burning away from homes, fire officials said.

Cause of the blaze is under investigation.

About 75 firefighting personnel responded to the scene.

— *Michael J. Williams and Mark Muckenfuss*

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170722/firefighters-battle-wildfire-in-highland>

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Wildfire in San Bernardino National Forest near Highway 330

By Mark Muckenfuss, The Press-Enterprise

and Michael J. Williams, The Press-Enterprise

Saturday, July 22, 2017



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Firefighters get handle on High fire near Lucerne Valley

By Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun

Monday, July 24, 2017



LUCERNE VALLEY >> Firefighters held the High fire burning near Lucerne Valley to 100 acres overnight and have increased containment to 45 percent, according to an update from fire officials Monday morning.

The forward rate of spread has been stopped, according to a [Twitter post](#) from Cal Fire. However, structures are still threatened by the blaze, which ignited Sunday afternoon. It wasn't immediately clear if evacuation orders issued Sunday evening were still in effect Monday

morning.

In a tweet, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department described the evacuation area as bordered by High Road on the west, Santa Rosa Road on the south, Buena Vista Road on the east and Sutter Road on the north, all south of Highway 18.

The fire was reported just before 4 p.m. and forced the shutdown of Highway 18 for several hours. As of 7 p.m. it had reopened between Joshua and Willow Wells roads, according to a Caltrans tweet.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170724/firefighters-get-handle-on-high-fire-near-lucerne-valley>

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UPDATE: Lucerne Valley fire forward rate of spread stopped, at 45 percent containment

By Staff Reports

Posted at 8:37 AM

Updated at 8:37 AM

LUCERNE VALLEY — Fire crews managed to hold a fast-moving blaze at 100 acres overnight, stopping its forward rate of spread and increasing containment.

The High Fire, which was first reported just before 4 p.m. Sunday, was at 45 percent containment as of 6 a.m. Monday, according to a tweet from CALFIRE San Bernardino officials.

The fire spread quickly on Sunday, reaching 100 acres before 7 p.m. and forcing authorities to order mandatory evacuations for residents living south of Highway 18 and east of High Road.

A hard closure of Highway 18 between Joshua Road and Willow Wells Avenue was issued at 5:14 p.m., Caltrans District 8 officials announced in a tweet.

CALFIRE officials reported that the evacuation area, which is south of Highway 18, stretched from High Road to the west to Buena Vista Road east, and from Sutter Road to the north to Santa Rosa Road to the south.

CALFIRE San Bernardino and the San Bernardino County Fire Department are in a unified command battling the blaze, with assistance from the San Bernardino National Forest Service, and are utilizing air and ground attacks.

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WSJ. MAGAZINE

In Joshua Tree, Two Giant New Works of Art

Thanks to the vision of artist Rachel Whiteread, two forgotten huts in a private sculpture park have transcended their humble origins to become imposing new masterpieces



LASTING IMPRESSIONS | One of two concrete casts of midcentury cabins made under the direction of artist Rachel Whiteread on art connoisseur Jerry Sohn's land near Joshua Tree National Park. PHOTO: IWAN BAAN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

By *Fred A. Bernstein*

July 24, 2017 10:31 a.m. ET

FROM AN ADJACENT dirt road near California's Joshua Tree National Park, the two concrete buildings seem both ominous and ordinary. Some people might not even notice them. "There are so many peculiar things in the desert," observes their creator, Rachel Whiteread, the London-based conceptual artist. "These would just be two more peculiar things." Other passersby might recognize the structures—casts of the interiors of two small cabins from the 1950s—as part of Whiteread's distinctive body of work, more than 30 years in the making and the subject of a survey that opens at London's Tate Britain on September 12.

These concrete sculptures sit on land owned by Jerry Sohn, a Los Angeles-based publisher of artists' books, who has been building a collection of site-specific art since he bought his first desert parcel in 1993. In recent years, he has installed pieces by Lawrence Weiner and Richard Long as well as the architect Arata Isozaki. The Whiteread works, which the artist herself has seen only in photos, are the newest additions. Casting the interiors of the two shacks took workers employed by Sohn nearly five years, with Whiteread relaying detailed instructions via email and phone. Everything on the buildings' interior surfaces, from light switches to door hinges, was captured in concrete. Projections became indentations and vice versa. The original exteriors were then stripped away, leaving the "ghost" cabins exposed. "They have a double-edged feel," says Whiteread, 54. "There's something sinister about them, which is fine."

Sohn, 61, met Whiteread in 2010, when she had a drawing show at the Hammer Museum, near his L.A. home. He was moved, he says, by the directness and simplicity of her work, and he imagined adding a Whiteread or two to his remote property. Sohn, his wife, Eba, and their 7-year-old twins, Ayea and Mikey, visit the desert most weekends. The family owns a rudimentary home there, but when weather permits, they sleep outside on Isozaki's concrete platforms.

“[The cabins] have a double-edged feel. There’s something sinister about them, which is fine.”

—Rachel Whiteread

Around the time of the 2010 show, Sohn drove Whiteread out to the desert. She was smitten with a landscape of sculptures that preceded them by millions of years—giant piles of rocks and twisty Joshua trees. Not surprisingly, the area has long attracted artists, including Sohn’s neighbor Ed Ruscha. Installations by Doug Aitken and Andrea Zittel are area attractions.



PLAY SPACE | The Sohn twins drawing on Seth Kinmont’s University, another work on the family’s property. PHOTO: IWAN BAAN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

When Sohn showed Whiteread the larger of the two cabins, he recalls, “She said, ‘Would you mind if I destroyed it?’ and I answered, ‘That’s what I was hoping for.’”

The cabins were far from the first buildings the artist has deconstructed. In 1993, Whiteread, a member of the Young British Artists generation, was awarded Britain’s prestigious Turner Prize for House, a concrete cast of a Victorian home in London’s East End. (It was the last property standing in an urban-renewal area, and Whiteread’s cast, which was meant to be temporary, was also torn down, a few months after it was built.) In New York, Whiteread became known in the late ’90s for a resin water tower, commissioned by the Public Art Fund, that appeared on a SoHo roof and later atop the Museum of Modern Art.

Molly Donovan, a curator at Washington, D.C.’s National Gallery of Art, where the Tate Britain show will travel next year, admires Whiteread’s devotion to casting familiar objects, some small enough to fit on a tabletop, others large enough to anchor multi-acre sites. “She’s continued to go deeper and deeper into her own vision,” Donovan says. “There’s something rewarding and frankly remarkable about an artist doing that today.”

Whiteread agreed to supervise the casting of the two structures without remuneration. Even so, Sohn spent a not-small fortune on them. (He declined to say how much, only that the cabins were “unbelievably expensive to produce.”) Builder Jason Scharch and his crew devoted almost five years to the project, including a year searching for the right kind of concrete and another year looking for a company that could spray it with the required precision. Each cabin “looks so simple, but its making belies that,” says Donovan.

Before casting could begin, breakable glass windows had to be refitted with plastic, cracks in the exterior walls had to be filled and projections such as doorknobs and light switches had to be replaced with rubber replicas that could be removed once the concrete hardened around them.

But that was just the little stuff. For each cabin, Scharch had to build a new foundation, incorporating tunnels to allow workers to enter the structure from underground. Inside

he added new steel frameworks so that the finished concrete casts, really just hollow shells, would stand up to the elements (and to the inevitable climbers, who have already included both Sohn children).

The spraying itself, within the sealed cabins, was harrowing. “When you turn on the machines,” Scharch recalls, “you can’t hear anything; you can hardly see anything. It was rather surreal.” Scharch devised a series of hand signals that were conveyed by what he called a “daisy chain” of up to seven workers, leading from outside the cabins, via the underground tunnels, to the interiors, where “nozzlemen” in full protective suits and masks maneuvered 4-inch hoses. Complex ventilation and lighting systems were required, in a part of the desert where there is no easy way to get water, electricity or even a cellphone signal. The spraying was followed by months of painstaking work removing the molds—the original cabins—without cracking the concrete casts. Sohn says he loves the finished pieces, which he sees as “both found objects and careful constructions.”

Whiteread likes the fact that the cabins are hard to get to—she compares them to a similar piece of hers on Governors Island, in New York Harbor, that can be seen only five months a year, when the island is open to the public via ferry. “The slowness of the journey is about the slowness of seeing the piece,” she explains. Someday, she says, she may authorize a book about Sohn’s cabins, with a map directing people to the site. Meanwhile, Sohn shares them with his large circle of friends.

Whiteread and Sohn have agreed that the pieces will neither be sold nor moved. As for working without a fee, Whiteread says that she won’t “make a habit of this; they

were very particular circumstances.” Though Sohn is persuasive, the cabins aren’t gifts to him. As Whiteread puts it, “They are gifts to the place.”



An aerial view of Greg Colson's Composite Fence. PHOTO: IWAN BAAN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE



WIDE ANGLE | A detail of a Whiteread facade PHOTO: IWAN BAAN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

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BUSINESS

Ontario Mills getting 7 new stores this summer



File photo

Ontario Mills is getting seven new tenants.

By **NEIL NISPEROS** |

PUBLISHED: July 23, 2017 at 8:27 pm | UPDATED: July 23, 2017 at 10:06 pm



New food, new stores.

[Ontario Mills](#) announced this week the arrival of seven new tenants. Four stores recently opened and three others will open later this summer.

“I just admire the fact that they keep finding new retailers and in this case new and unique retailers to come into the mall,” said Brad Umansky, president of the Rancho Cucamonga-based commercial real estate firm [Progressive Real Estate Partners](#), “They seem to never run out of new ideas and concepts.”

Umansky said he saw very little vacancy at Ontario Mills during a recent visit. He complimented Simon Property Group, which owns and manages the mall, for continuing to find new users that complement the existing tenants at Ontario Mills.

“They recognize the importance of keeping the interior of the mall vibrant,” Umansky said. “You can’t have vacant space.”

New Ontario Mills stores that have opened in recent weeks include:

- . Francesca’s: casual clothing, handbags, shoes and gifts.
- . BoxLunch: pop culture-inspired gifts, accessories and apparel.
- . Kidpik: girls fashion items at affordable prices.
- . Toys R Us: toys, video games and more.

Opening later this summer:

- . Typo: stationery, art, crafts and more.
- . Stickhouse: handcrafted Italian gelato pops.
- . WeStyle: women’s fashion and accessories.

“In the past we opened a lot more higher-end luxury brands like Tory Burch and these new stores are more affordable brands,” said Marc Smith, Ontario Mills general manager.

Several existing tenants have moved so the shopping center could expand. Store moves include Torrid, Hat Club and Skechers Superstore. Hot Topic is expected to move in August and Vans in September, according to mall officials.

The announcement comes after the [closure in early July of GameWorks](#) restaurant and arcade. Simon Property Group said it expects to make an announcement soon on a new tenant to fill the space near the food court.

“We opened 16 new stores last year and we had another dozen renovations last year, so it’s wonderful,” Smith said. “The retail world continues to change. Concepts change and other concepts take their place. That’s what you’re seeing with the new stores opening now.”

The new stores come after the arrival of the new [“Fashion Alley” wing on the southwest corner of the mall](#). A total of 80,000 square feet of retail space was constructed in an area formerly occupied by a 105,000-square-foot J.C. Penney outlet store.

Tags: [Retail](#), [Top Stories PE](#)



**Neil
Nisperos**

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Park District wins over Crestline Park skeptic



Crestline resident Connie Bracher in attendance at the July 10 meeting of the Rim of the World Recreation and Park District Planning and Facilities Committee (Photo by Gail Fry)

Sunday, Jul 23, 2017

By Gail Fry

At the start of the Rim of the World Recreation and Park District Planning and Facilities Committee meeting, held July 10, it was clear Crestline resident Connie Bracher was a skeptic of plans for a park in Crestline, but by the end of the meeting, Bracher was won over by actions taken by committee.

An item on Rim of the World Recreation and Park District (ROWRPD) Planning and Facilities Committee July 10 agenda, obtained by *The Alpenhorn News*, read "Update Crestline Park Opportunities" and several Crestline residents and stakeholders attended to hear the update.

"I have been hearing scuttlebutt about it and I really wanted to see what you guys had to say about it," Bracher expressed during public comment, explaining, "What I have been hearing is that you have picked the VOE trailer park site, behind VOE school, as the Crestline public park and in my opinion that was the worst site out of all four sites, so I didn't understand why you would be picking that site."

"We haven't picked any site, so let me dispel any rumors to the contrary," Bialecki shared, explaining ROWRPD has been gathering "information about selecting the best site" to meet the "general needs of the people of Crestline" while ensuring the project has "financial viability."

Bialecki explained each of the recommended sites has pluses and minuses and the "total scope of the project is not completely defined at this point."

Neil Nottingham, a former United States Forest Service (USFS) employee, shared his familiarity with the five sites ROWRPD is considering, providing a detailed evaluation of each one, explaining, "I'm all for a park." The five sites include vacant land on Old Mill Road owned by the United States Forest Service (USFS), Pacific Pines Camp owned by USFS leased to the 7th Day Baptist Church, one near Valley of Enchantment Elementary School and the closed Lake Gregory Education Center (LGEC) both owned by the Rim of the World Unified School District (ROWUSD), and the Lake Gregory Ball Field owned by the County of San Bernardino and leased to California Parks.

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- SkyPark gets approval from Board of Supervisors
- Rash of fires briefly threatens mountain communities
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- Boys and Girls Club of the Mountain Communities
- Forest Service sets record straight on Crestline Park

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ROWRPD Recreation & Maintenance Manager Bob Kinzel handed out detailed information on the sites including measurements for several types of baseball fields and diagrams for how they could fit at the various sites.

Kinzel explained it would take 362-feet in width for "normal sized ball fields" 452-feet in width for a "normal 90-foot baseball field and 283-feet in width for a little league field.

Kinzel then presented details on the Old Mill site, explaining the cleared area is 605 feet long "which is plenty big to put two adult fields" while the width is insufficient without clearing trees to obtain 283 feet. He spoke of considerations such as lack of utilities, trenching, permits and cost of putting them in, concerns about soil stability of the old landfill, a 2-3 year application process, needing USFS to approve removing trees and its use as ball fields, not a currently approved land use.

Bialecki viewed the Old Mill site as having few neighbors and USFS decision at the local level as benefits; with negatives being a longer process and addressing the National Environmental Policy Act as "significant."

Kinzel then looked at the Pacific Pines Camp Site where it was determined to be unsuitable for ball fields but more suitable for a mini-national park.

With regard to ROWRPD's use of LGEC, general manager Karen Reams reported its joint use agreement was "with the lawyers" for final review, anticipating board approval at its August meeting. Kinzel explained ROWRPD could use the playgrounds, outdoor basketball courts, parking, athletic fields, the gymnasium, some office space and the kitchen. Reams predicted ROWRPD could have a little league field at LGEC by "next spring."

At that point Bracher commented, "This discussion is so much better than the scuttlebutt I have been hearing around town, so thank you."

ROWRPD Director Lawrence Mainez motioned to direct staff to submit an application for the Old Mill and Pacific Pines Camp sites to USFS and have them ready for approval for its July 24 meeting, separately pursue Lake Gregory ball fields, support staff's efforts to finalize the joint use agreement for LGEC and continue monitoring the VOE school site. Bialecki seconded the motion.

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Town OKs agreement to pay down sewer loan

Posted: Friday, July 21, 2017 3:49 pm

YUCCA VALLEY — An agreement to use sales taxes to pay down a sewer system construction loan got the green light from the Town Council Tuesday.

Council members voted 5-0 to approve the Measure Z agreement with Hi-Desert Water District.

Measure Z is a half-percent sales tax that started in April and will last 10 years. Voters approved the new tax in November on the promise that it would lower the assessments property owners will be charged to pay for construction of Yucca Valley's new sewer system.

Property owners will get a 25-30 percent discount on their assessments for 10 years starting in the second year of the charges, 2019-2020, according to the water district.

Under the agreement, Yucca Valley will hand over the Measure Z tax money to Hi-Desert Water District every financial quarter. The water district will send the money directly to the state water board as part of its payment of a construction loan.

The agreement passed by the Town Council Tuesday includes the following provisions:

- Tax proceeds will be credited to property owners equally among everyone paying assessments.
- The town may use no more than 5 percent of tax proceeds to pay for annual audits, fund management and administrative costs.

The contract will next go to the water district board for approval.



Town OKs agreement to pay down sewer loan

A crew works on the wastewater collection project on Balsa Avenue just north of Twentynine Palms Highway Friday.

Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (<http://www.dailybulletin.com>)

Where a luxury hotel and 380 residential units are coming to Rancho Cucamonga

By Liset Márquez, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Saturday, July 22, 2017

RANCHO CUCAMONGA >> A development that will include a hotel, residential units and restaurants will significantly change the southwest corner of Day Creek Boulevard and Base Line Road.

The project, known as Day Creek Square, will bring 380 residential units on 28.4 acres of vacant property. Built by developer D.R. Horton, it also will include a 71-room luxury hotel and two restaurant buildings totaling 12,000 square feet.

“It really is one of the last parcels within walkable distance of Victoria Gardens that has tremendous potential to create synergy with that regional mall,” said Donald Granger, senior planner for Rancho Cucamonga.

The goal when Horton approached the city in 2015 was to create a project that offers what Granger calls “inter-connectivity and walkable connections.”

Officials did not say when construction would begin or give a timeline for the project’s completion.

Daniel Boyd, vice president of entitlements for Horton, said officials have not determined the homes’ prices, but they could range from \$400,000 to \$600,000. It will depend on the market, he said.

“We believe this project will tap into the higher-level market,” Boyd said, adding he’s already received numerous calls from potential buyers.

The vacant lot had long been zoned for office and commercial use, but in 2015, D.R. Horton applied to change it to mixed use.

City leaders on Wednesday unanimously signed off on the request to change the regulations and allow the project. The Planning Commission had signed off on the project June 14.

City Councilwoman Lynne Kennedy said the project would be an asset for Rancho Cucamonga.

“It’s a highly desirable area, the proximity to shopping – Victoria Gardens – is going to make this a place that is much in demand,” she said. “I think people from outside our community are going to want to visit and see what we’ve done.”

The architecture of the residential units will be Craftsman-inspired and designed in four different villages, Granger said.

-The smallest village, Village A, has several design elements that invoke a Craftsman style. Units will range from 1,200 to 1,400 square feet.

- Village B is touted as having more edgy Craftsman-style architecture such as metal awnings, brick veneer and tower features. Its units will range from 1,500 to 1,800 square feet and will include optional decks.

-The most unique housing product of the project, Granger said, will be Village C, which will feature Adobe and Craftsman-style architecture. These units will have balconies and roof decks. Units will range from 1,800 to 2,200 square feet.

- Village D will feature the single-family Craftsman style, Santa Barbara style.

Two restaurants will flank the southwest corner of Day Creek Boulevard and Base Line Road. A public plaza and a central fountain will be included.

Granger said the project's signature architectural piece will be the upscale, three-story, boutique hotel that will front Base Line Road.

"It's really going to be attracting to millennials, the ones that want culture within their community," Boyd said.

One of the goals was to ensure the project met the needs of the community, Granger told the council. After three meetings, the developer agreed to reduce the number of units from 392 to 380.

The public also requested a park that didn't require them to cross a major road, Granger said. Despite its addition, Natasha Walton, a wildlife biologist and volunteer at the North Etiwanda Preserve, felt the developer could do more to preserve open space.

"You're going to be rezoning this area and a higher density of people, I'm all for utilizing land very carefully and trying to figure how to accommodate our growing population," she said.

Boyd said the project will also include a botanical garden.

City Councilman Bill Alexander acknowledged that he often backs efforts to preserve open space, but said the project "is being done exceptionally well."

URL: <http://www.dailybulletin.com/business/20170722/where-a-luxury-hotel-and-380-residential-units-are-coming-to-rancho-cucamonga>

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http://www.newsmirror.net/news/local/yucaipa-mayor-dick-riddell-is-honored-by-san-bernardino-valley/article_de868818-6d67-11e7-aeb0-673b310047cc.html

EDITOR'S PICK

Yucaipa Mayor Dick Riddell is honored by San Bernardino Valley College

Manny Sandoval Jul 22, 2017 Updated Jul 22, 2017

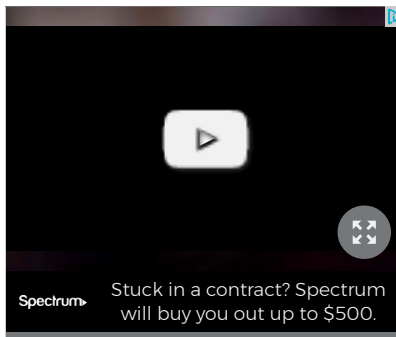


Mayor Dick Riddell holds his retired banner from the college.

Yucaipa Mayor Dick Riddell was recently honored as one of San Bernardino Valley College's 90 Distinguished Alumni.

Along with the honor, Riddell was featured on banners posted around campus, from October 2016 through March 2017.

"I attended San Bernardino Valley College in 1947, which is where I met my wife," said Riddell.



"The 90 alumni honored at the ceremony are former students who have been a shining example to our current students and a model of excellence within the community," said Karen Childers, SBVC Director of Development and Community Relations.

During the gala on Oct. 14, 2016, the alumni were put on a red carpet and had their photos taken, before being honored in front of hundreds of philanthropists, dignitaries, and notable alumni.

"It's an honor to be recognized by the college. I feel that due to my public service with the United States Navy, San Bernardino Association of Government Board of Directors, Omnitrans Board of Directors, serving as a city council member, and Mayor for the city of Yucaipa are all reasons why I'm receiving this amazing honor," said Riddell.

After completing his Associate of Arts degree, Mayor Riddell went on to obtain a Bachelor of Arts and masters degree in management, from University of Redlands.

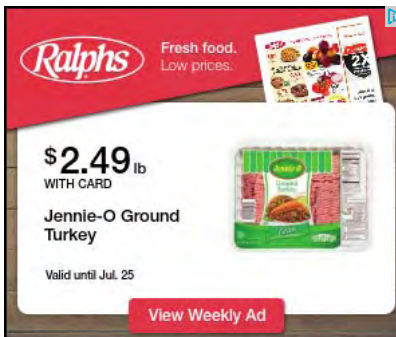
A World War II Veteran, he enlisted in the United States Navy shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. After enlisting, he was quickly sent to boot camp, communications school, and gunnery school.

Riddell was assigned to the Naval Armed Guard, and his unit happened endure to the highest percentage of fatalities in World War II.

"With my experience in communications from the Navy, I later used those skills and landed a job with the Southern California Gas Company as a messenger," said Riddell.

He was eventually promoted to manager for the gas company and in charge of all planning and engineering projects in the Inland Empire.

In addition to his great accomplishments, his sincerity, contributions and service in the community is what makes him loved and admired by many.



As a resident of Yucaipa, Riddell has played a critical role in ensuring that the city of Yucaipa is a viable, fiscally responsible, and well taken care of community.

Some of his work in the city of Yucaipa has been the Oak Glen Road/I-10 interchange. By developing an efficient transportation corridor into the city of Yucaipa, his plan has greatly improved commuter access as Oak Glen Road transitions through the master planned community of Chapman Heights.

Riddell has kept the city profitable and passed a balanced budget with no reduction in services and no new fees or taxes; and has made sure to preserve open space and the rural character of Yucaipa.

He is also behind the success of city hall, Yucaipa Community Park, Community Center; along with building an additional fire station and police station at no cost to city tax payers.

Riddell is the longest serving member of Yucaipa's City Council. Riddell's fiscally conservative approach and longevity in Yucaipa has resulted in a yearly financial reserve increase and new public services have been introduced or extended.

Riddell has earned numerous professional and service awards including Veteran of the Year Award from State of California 65th Assembly District, Inland Empire Outstanding Elected Official from American Society for Public Administration, Yucaipa Citizen of the Year from Yucaipa Valley Chamber of Commerce, and Patriot of the Past Award from State of California 40th Assembly District.

With all of Riddell's awards, contributions, and service to the Yucaipa community and society, it's no wonder that he was honored as one of San Bernardino Valley College's 90 distinguished notable alumni.

Manny Sandoval

LOCAL NEWS

World Logistics Center developer owes Moreno Valley \$180,402 in legal fees

By **IMRAN GHORI** | ighori@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

PUBLISHED: July 22, 2017 at 10:00 am | UPDATED: July 22, 2017 at 6:31 pm

The developer of the planned World Logistics Center remains thousands of dollars behind in reimbursing Moreno Valley for legal bills involving the mega warehouse project, city records show.

Highland Fairview owes the city \$180,402 in legal costs as of late June, the most current information provided by the city shows.

A spokesman for the company said it is repaying the city and blamed the delay on not receiving proper invoices. Meanwhile, a Moreno Valley spokeswoman said the city is satisfied with the payments being made. The mayor and at least one council member say the situation should not be cause for alarm.

Still, some critics say the city is not doing enough to hold accountable the politically influential developer, which has spent thousands of dollars supporting city candidates.

Since the Moreno Valley City Council's approval of the [40.6-million square-foot warehouse complex](#) two years ago, the city has spent \$508,294.22 as of May defending itself against [a dozen lawsuits](#) filed against the project, city records show.

Under a development agreement with the city, Highland Fairview is obligated to pay the city's legal bills. The pact says the developer promises "to fully defend, indemnify and hold the City harmless for all costs of defense."

The company has paid the city \$327,891 — about two-thirds of its costs — as of late June, according to city records.

'Good faith'

In an email, city spokeswoman Kimberly Sutherland said "Highland Fairview has made payments to reimburse the City for legal costs and continues to do so."

She said the remaining amount will be paid back on a regular basis, but did not say when the city expects to be fully caught up.



A spokesman for Iddo Benzeevi, seen in 2015, says legal fees weren't properly vetted by Moreno Valley city officials.

Eric Rose, a spokesman for Highland Fairview and its CEO/President Iddo Benzeevi, said the developer faced delays in receiving legal invoices last year and that they were not properly vetted by the city.

"Highland Fairview has agreed to reimburse the city for their legal fees in good faith reliance that they will scrutinize the legal bills for relevance and accuracy," he said in an email.

Rose blamed the problems on former city council members LaDonna Jempson, George Price and Jesse Molina, "who have ignored their duty to provide oversight on how the city is spending the taxpayer's money and did not scrutinize the bills."

In September, the city sent the company a "demand letter" that stated it was more than \$300,000 in arrears. City records show that its legal expenses have continually outstripped payments from Highland Fairview.

Jempson, who was on the council when the city approved the project and voted against it, said Highland Fairview has not lived up to the agreement, which states that all legal costs would be borne by the developer.

Concerns raised

Jempson, who requested the latest figures from the city and posted them on Facebook, said the understanding was that Highland Fairview would provide money for a trust account to pay legal bills as they came due. Instead, the city ended up fronting the costs, she said.

"We were paying (law firm) Lozano Smith in a timely manner so we were in a way the lending agency," Jempson said. "There were a lot of excuses not to get back on track just because (Benzeevi) wasn't getting his way."

Both she and Price said Benzeevi sought legal information to which only the city as the legal client was entitled and not obligated to share with Highland Fairview.

"I think the public ought to be demanding we should quit providing free legal service until he pays up," Price said, adding "unless the balance is zero, something is wrong."

Councilman Jeffrey Giba said he disagreed with the city's statement that it was being repaid in a timely manner. He said the developer had made "unreasonable requests" to the city but he was limited as to what he could say about closed session discussions.



Moreno Valley Mayor Yxstian Gutierrez says the payments are a "non-issue."

Mayor Yxstian Gutierrez called it a "non-issue."

"They've been making the payments," he said. "I have reason to believe they will make all the payments."

Councilman David Marquez said Highland Fairview shouldn't get any special treatment from city hall.

"The city isn't a bank where we loan out money and don't get paid in time," he said.

Councilwoman Victoria Baca said she's been assured by City Manager Michelle Dawson that the city is being repaid. She called the requests by Highland Fairview reasonable and said the pace of reimbursements has increased since November.

Baca accused Jempson of raising the issue because "she's very bitter and angry because she lost the election."

Jempson, who replaced Baca in a 2014 recall election, lost to Baca at the polls in November.

Jempson said the issue for her was about holding the developer accountable, just as she did as a council member.

"It has to do with a developer who seems to have a lot of notoriety and control in our city based on our elections," she said. "Both myself and a lot of people here have problems with that."

Campaign role relevant?

Jempson and other critics say the company has poured **thousands of dollars into local elections** even as it fell behind in reimbursing the city.

Earlier this year, the company spent \$111,530 supporting Ulises Cabrera, who won a seat on the council in a **June special election**. Since 2014, Highland Fairview — through political action committees — has spent \$221,333 supporting Gutierrez; \$210,206 on behalf of Baca; and \$174,838 supporting Giba.

Giba has increasingly clashed with Gutierrez and Baca and been critical of the developer since last year.

"If that developer can support financially for election those three people he could certainly afford to pay the city's bills," Giba said, referring to his support of Baca, Cabrera and Gutierrez.

Gutierrez said financial support from the developer was "irrelevant."

"Whether you receive campaign contributions or not, you always have to put the city's interests first," he said. "We have a fiduciary responsibility to the city."

MOUNTING LEGAL BILLS

Highland Fairview’s development agreement with the city says the developer promises “to fully defend, indemnify and hold the City harmless for all costs of defense.”

\$508,294

Moreno Valley’s legal costs

\$327,891

Highland Fairview reimbursements

Note: Figures are based on city records provided in June.

Tags: **Top Stories PE**



Imran Ghori

Imran Ghori has been a reporter with The Press-Enterprise since 1999. He covers Moreno Valley and Jurupa Valley.

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By Tonic

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LA Daily News (<http://www.dailynews.com>)

Ex-SoCalGas employee warned regulators of 'potential catastrophic loss of life' at Aliso Canyon

By Brenda Gazzar, Los Angeles Daily News

Sunday, July 23, 2017



State oil and gas regulators approved resuming injections at the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility despite a warning by a former Southern California Gas Co. manager over potential “catastrophic loss of life” in the event of a major earthquake, Los Angeles County court documents reveal.

The state Department of Conservation’s Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and the California Public Utilities Commission announced Wednesday that SoCalGas’ underground storage facility is safe to resume limited gas injections to avoid energy shortages in Los Angeles. The decision followed more than a year of inspection and analysis prompted by the largest atmospheric release of natural gas in U.S. history and a subsequent moratorium.

James Mansdorfer, who was formerly responsible for managing SoCalGas’ storage wells and reservoirs, told DOGGR he was concerned that movement on the Santa Susana fault would “almost surely sever the casing” and tubing of every gas well, “resulting in release of gas at a rate of 100 to 1,000 times the rate of the SS25 leak.”

SS25 was the gas well responsible for the nearly four-month leak that began in October 2015. It released more than 100,000 metric tons of potent methane over nearly four months, sickened thousands of people and pets and displaced more than 8,300 households in the northern San Fernando Valley.

“My belief is that there is potential for catastrophic loss of life, and in light of SoCalGas refusal to openly address this risk, my ethics just will not allow me to stand by without making the public aware of what could happen,” Mansdorfer, who had also warned SoCalGas officials of the seismic risk in an email seven years ago, told DOGGR in a letter included with last week’s amended court filing by the county.

Since 2006, there have been over 100 earthquakes in the Aliso Canyon area, with 16 ranging from 2.0 to 4.7 in magnitude. State regulators have acknowledged a high probability that an earthquake of 6.3 magnitude or greater will occur in the area in the next five decades, according to L.A. County officials.

Los Angeles County is expected to go to court Monday in an attempt to block resumption of injections at the facility until a root-cause analysis of the leak, among other things, is completed.

The California Department of Conservation said in a statement that Senate Bill 380, which details authorization for reinjection at Aliso Canyon, does not require a seismic study of the facility before injections can resume. However, DOGGR agrees that additional research on seismic risk should be performed, the agency said.

Like the National Labs’, which is assisting regulators in overseeing seismic risk studies at Aliso Canyon, DOGGR does “not believe the recommended detailed seismic studies require immediate action, but they should be planned and executed in a deliberate manner,” the state entity said in a statement.

Aliso Canyon also endured the 1994 Northridge earthquake “without significant impacts to public health and safety” and new safety measures have been “significantly improved” since then, state regulators said.

But Los Angeles County officials disagree, saying in amended court documents that DOGGR cannot “kick the can down the road” again and must conduct seismic testing before allowing injections to resume there.

“That is what the law requires,” the county argued in the court documents. “The failure to comply with the law is inexcusable given that an earthquake at Aliso Canyon likely would cause multiple well failures and human and environmental harm much greater than the recent 100,000 metric-ton leak.”

While working as a storage engineering manager in April 2009, Mansdorfer sent an email to the SoCalGas director of storage, Rudy Weibel, warning that casing corrosion, landslide movement or fault movement “are all potential causes of a major subsurface casing leak,” according to the court documents.

He urged SoCalGas management to test and install subsurface safety valves. Instead the utility decided to withhold the seismic risks from regulators and the public in its General Rate Case Assessment, L.A. County said. Mansdorfer’s comments were first reported by KPCC.

However, DOGGR, in a statement posted online, argued that there are risks associated with subsurface safety valves, including “reduction in well reliability” from malfunctioning valves and risk to facility employees and contractors who need to enter the well more frequently for maintenance.

SoCalGas said it does not agree with Mansdorfer’s assessment but said they shared his concerns last year with state regulators. The company stressed that it has made extensive upgrades to its infrastructure, technology and safety practices in the last 18 months.

“We have met, and in many cases, exceeded the rigorous requirements of the state’s safety review,” SoCalGas said.

Meanwhile, Save Porter Ranch and Food & Water Watch, who have repeatedly called for Aliso Canyon to be shut down, are holding a rally at 5:30 p.m. Monday on the southeast corner of Rinaldi Street and Tampa Avenue in Porter Ranch to protest the regulators’ decision to reopen the facility.

“The state regulators who do not have to live and don’t have to deal with the fumes and the health problems that come out of the facility, they are the only ones who say it’s safe,” said Matt Pakucko of Save Porter Ranch.

Gov. Jerry Brown recently asked the chair of the California Energy Commission to plan for the permanent closure of the gas storage facility over the next decade as part of an effort to increase renewable energy and meet its climate change goals.

URL: <http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20170723/ex-socalgas-employee-warned-regulators-of-potential-catastrophic-loss-of-life-at-aliso-canyon>

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Severe, chronic flooding will devastate California coast as sea levels rise, experts say



A cliff collapses in Santa Barbara County earlier this year. (Los Angeles Times)

By **Joshua Emerson Smith**

JULY 24, 2017, 8:05 AM

As glaciers melt amid the heat of a warming planet, scientists predict that coastal communities in the United States could eventually experience flooding from higher tides.

Conservative estimates range from an increase of about one to four feet in sea-level rise by the end of the century. Experts also warn that people should be prepared for unlikely but extreme scenarios of up to eight feet in sea-level rise, which would cause severe and chronic flooding in hundreds of coastal cities.

Grappling with this problem would be expensive for local governments. Anticipating the costly possibility, the city of [Imperial Beach](#) and the counties of Marin and San Mateo last week filed [potentially groundbreaking lawsuits](#) to push large oil and coal companies to foot the bill.

According to scientists, sea-level rise is underway in some seaside neighborhoods and comes on top of the potential for large storms to intensify because of climate change. Cities along the East Coast — such as Miami,

Boston and Charleston, N.C. — face the greatest risk, but flooding is also projected to harm much of San Diego County's coastline in the coming decades.

The major questions currently are: How much flooding will vulnerable cities experience, and how fast?

The answers are difficult to determine because it depends largely on future global efforts to curb greenhouse-gas emissions, and there are widely varying predictions about glacial melt in Greenland and Antarctica. Mountain glaciers contain enough ice to increase seas by 1.5 feet, while Greenland and Antarctica have sheets of frozen water that, if melted, would boost ocean levels by 24 feet and 187 feet, respectively.

Recent scientific expeditions have found that those frozen land masses are losing ice faster than previously thought.

“Those are the places where a lot of research is being done,” said Chris Zervas, a scientist working on sea-level rise for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. “And they’re finding more and more possibilities of areas that weren’t believed to be affected in the next century too much by melting and warming temperatures, but are now showing the presence of warm ocean temperatures, warm air temperatures and increased changing of conditions.”

Seaside cities are starting to prepare for the worst, conducting vulnerability studies and considering a suite of options. Among other measures, they can try to armor their coastlines using seawalls, move critical infrastructure and even retreat farther inland. Elected officials could update zoning rules to discourage future building along the water.

According to a new report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, the number of U.S. communities that would flood more than twice a month could double to 170 by the year 2035 if sea levels increase by four to six feet by the end of this century.

“People need to know how much time they have and be adjusting their portfolio of options accordingly,” said Kristina Dahl at the scientific union, who co-wrote the report. “In communities where they maybe only have 20 years before this type of flooding sets in, they need to be thinking in bold new ways.”

She added: “Many California communities have a longer time frame before they would be chronically inundated. So there can be slower-moving strategies that focus on halting or phasing out policies that encourage development in at-risk areas.”

If the sea rises by six feet by the end of the century, more than 600 communities would experience chronic inundation, including more than 50 urban centers from Oakland to Miami to boroughs of New York City, according to the new study.

Under this scenario, damages could significantly start to really rack up. The real estate service Zillow predicts that if tides rise by six feet, nearly 300 cities in the nation would lose at least half of their housing stock.

It also estimates that in such a situation, about 1.9 million homes could be destroyed, with combined losses of roughly \$882 billion. Florida stands to lose the most with nearly 1 million homes wiped out. California, New York and Massachusetts also stand to suffer major financial harm from the loss of expensive properties.

But is six feet of sea-level rise likely?

In the past century, the sea level rose roughly seven inches on average. Because of tides and weather patterns, the levels are not constant throughout the planet.

Scientists believe the oceans will likely continue to rise at least by that much through 2100, but could increase by as much as eight feet on average globally.

Still, while scientists have upped their predictions for potential sea-level rise in recent years, conservative estimates fall far short of the six-foot mark.

A report in April from professors at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography and UC Santa Cruz found that after midcentury, sea-level rise is increasingly dependent on efforts to curb greenhouse gases.

If the fight against climate change proves extremely successful, there's a nearly 67% chance that sea-level rise could be contained to between one and 2.4 feet through 2100, according to that April analysis. If mitigation efforts fall apart, the report said, the world would most likely see increases of 1.6 to 3.4 feet.

Joshua Emerson Smith writes for the **San Diego Union-Tribune**.

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INVESTIGATIONS

JUNE 24, 2017 9:03 PM

Most managers of SLO County's smallest areas earn six figures. Are they worth the big bucks?

BY MATT FOUNTAIN

mfountain@thetribunenews.com

Many Cambria residents have long complained that Community Services District General Manager Jerry Gruber earns too much money — \$170,456 a year, excluding benefits.

Last year, a proposed a six-year contract would have retroactively increased his salary and guaranteed an additional 5 percent annual increase that would have boosted his pay well above that of any local district manager.

That proposal was scrapped following community outcry, though the board ultimately approved a one-time 6 percent pay bump.

So if he asks for a raise after this year's performance evaluation, the opposition is expected to be fierce, especially given that the district just increased water rates by 4 percent and was charged more than \$53,000 in fines for filing late reports with the state.

"I think people would have the right to be concerned with awarding him a raise this time, especially given the fines from the water board," Cambria CSD board President Amanda Rice said.

At \$237,800 in total compensation (including benefits), Gruber is the second-highest-paid general manager of local districts that provide water, sewage and other specific services in unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo County not governed by a municipality, according to salary information obtained by The Tribune through the California Public Records Act. The Tribune surveyed public districts with populations of at least 1,000 that perform more than one function.

Oceano's General Manager Paavo Ogren tops the list with an annual salary of \$205,922— \$244,400 including benefits and allowances.

By comparison, former San Luis Obispo County Chief Administrative Officer Dan Buckshi earned roughly \$239,000 a year, or \$371,000 with benefits.

Whereas the CSD general managers oversee anywhere from one full-time employee to a staff of about 50, Buckshi oversaw about 3,000 county employees when he left his job this month. And the total county budget of \$724 million that he managed last year far surpasses that of the largest local CSD budget — Cambria — which operates on about \$11 million a year.



Jerry Gruber, general manager of the Cambria Community Services District, is the second-highest paid chief administrator for a local services district. Gruber was paid \$237,843 last year to run a district that serves about 6,200 residents.

Courtesy photo

Current base salaries of local CSD general managers

Here's what local CSD managers are earning this year, excluding benefits. According to a report published last year by The California Special Districts Association, the average salary for a CSD district manager in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016 was \$132,087.



* On June 26, Scott Duffield will take over as the new GM at a salary of \$120,000. Only public districts with populations of at least 1,000 that perform more than one function are included.

Source: Individual CSDs ([Get the data](#))

Why is pay high?

The high pay of CSD managers statewide often draws criticism for being excessive, especially when service rates are on the rise.

Independent special districts are the most common form of government in California, numbering about 2,000 across the state, including about 300 CSDs, according to the California Special Districts Association. The organization advocates for roughly half of those agencies and promotes professional development for their staff.

Most local districts' board members contacted for this story said competitive wages attract highly qualified candidates.

John D'Ornellas, who had been general manager at Heritage Ranch CSD in Paso Robles for nearly 16 years before his retirement this month, earned \$150,712 in salary and \$191,900, including benefits, last year. He said that the district had a difficult time attracting candidates for his replacement even with the healthy pay — just 12 applicants in a nationwide search.

“The board was amazed at the minimal response for a ‘high-paying, good-benefits’ job,” D'Ornellas said, adding that most of the candidates had little industry experience. “Is it the job, the compensation, the community, the cost of housing in SLO County? Or maybe just more jobs out there than candidates?”

Others said their experienced GMs were hired at a high salary in order to complete very specific tasks.





Paavo Ogren, general manager of the Oceano Community Services District, is the county's highest-paid manager CSD manager, earning \$244,429 in total compensation in 2016. **Courtesy photo**

That was the case with Ogren. When he was hired in 2014, the former county Public Works director was tasked with overseeing specific key infrastructure upgrades to water and sewer lines and an emergency generator, among other things.

In order to afford him, the district left vacant an accounting position that paid \$65,000 a year plus benefits.

Comparing CSDs is difficult because they vary in size, location and function.

Port San Luis Harbor District, for example, though considered a “special district” because it doesn’t provide water or sewage services, oversees public safety, maintenance of the harbor and several large improvement projects for a transient population. Ground Squirrel Hollow CSD, on the other hand, solely provides road maintenance to about 600 people in rural Paso Robles.

Part-time contractors

In order to save on administrative costs, some local districts such as Avila Beach and, most recently, Los Osos, outsource their general manager services to part-time contractors. Doing so saves those districts money that would otherwise be spent on full-time employee benefits.

In Avila Beach, the district has contracted GMs since at least 2005, according to Bradley Hagemann, current manager. Though Hagemann only has one full-time employee, he oversees a fluctuating number of operations and maintenance contractors who receive pay and benefits from their private companies.

After going through four full-time GMs in about seven years, the Los Osos CSD last year hired a private firm to manage the district part-time, before settling on Grace Environmental Services, an Arizona-based corporation run by President Charles Grace. The company also manages the San Simeon CSD.

How much local CSDs spend on general manager compensation

Here's a look at the salary and benefit packages earned this year by local CSD general managers. Only districts with populations of at least 1,000 that perform more than one function are included. Click on the column headers to sort by different categories.

CSD	General manager	2017 salary	Projected 2017 total compensation, including benefits ▲	Percent of budget that goes to general manager compensation
Oceano	Paavo Ogren	\$205,922	\$244,400	25.3%
Cambria	Jerry Gruber	\$170,456	\$237,800	2.2%
Heritage Ranch*	John D'Ornellas	\$150,712	\$191,900	8.3%
Nipomo	Mario Iglesias	\$150,000	\$189,200	2.1%
Templeton	Jeff Britz	\$139,050	\$181,900	3.5%
Port San Luis Harbor Control District	Andrea Lueker	\$126,138	\$162,600	3.2%
Avila Beach	Bradely Hagemann	\$136,500	\$136,500	8.0%
San Miguel	Darrell Gentry	\$98,800	\$98,800	5.5%
Los Osos**	Grace Environmental Services, Inc.	\$78,024	\$78,024	2.3%

* On June 26, Scott Duffield will take over as the new GM at a salary of \$120,000.

** The district in its draft budget proposes increasing pay for GES' services to \$96,000/year, effective July 1, if approved.

Source: Individual CSDs ([Get the data](#))

GES was hired in Los Osos in 2016 and is paid a flat fee of about \$6,500 a month, or \$78,000 annually. A draft budget in May proposed a 23 percent increase in the number of contracted hours GES is allotted, which would have increased its annual pay to about \$96,000. But that item was rejected by the board of directors and the district is still in budget talks.

The district, which began hooking up residents' homes to its long-awaited sewer system last year, will increase water rates by 65 percent over the next three years following a board vote last month.

Though it does so in Los Osos, GES would not disclose how much the company receives for running San Simeon CSD, which provides water and wastewater services to about 460 people and several area hotels. While Grace provided The Tribune invoices dating to 2014, those do not break down the roughly \$48,948 it bills the community every month beyond listing \$45,614 for operations and management services and \$3,333 for maintenance. Grace called that information private.

Jon-Erik Storm, board president of Los Osos CSD, said that the district — with its inability to retain a competent full-time general manager — took a chance with the contractor model, which he said has so far been a good deal for the district. He said the district will continue to evaluate whether the use of GES will serve the district’s needs in the long term.

“Having a contractor gives you flexibility. You get more bang for your buck, and you’re on the hook for less traditional and fringe benefits,” Storm said. “Having a record of not having success (with full-time GMs) and not keeping them on — which usually involves a buyout — this seemed like the thing to try, to do the right thing with people’s hard-earned dollars.”

Comparing salaries statewide

The state Controller’s Office does not have guidelines for employee compensation, but most local districts fall roughly in line with what the state’s trade group representing those districts says is common, according to a Tribune review of CSD payroll records dating back 10 years.

The California Special Districts Association in June 2016 published a Special District Administrative Salary and Benefit survey based on voluntary responses from its membership. The survey found that the average salary for a CSD district manager in the fiscal year ended June 30, 2016, was \$132,087.

The group also found that the salaries for district administrators commonly increased between 11 and 20 percent from 2012 and 2016.

Here’s a look at the salaries and projected total compensation for district managers at San Luis Obispo County’s largest CSDs:

In the South County, Nipomo’s Mario Iglesias earns \$150,000 in salary and roughly \$189,200 in total compensation. Port San Luis Harbor District’s Andrea Lueker earns \$126,138 in salary and a total compensation of \$162,600.

In the North County, Heritage Ranch’s new general manager, Scott Duffield, is paid \$120,000 in salary and roughly \$25,000 in benefits, including \$3,480 in car and cell phone allowances. Templeton’s Jeff Brilltz earns \$139,050 in salary and roughly \$181,900 in total compensation.

Of the part-time contract GMs (who earn no benefits), Avila Beach’s Hagemann earns the most — a flat \$136,500. San Miguel CSD’s Darrell Gentry earns \$98,800.

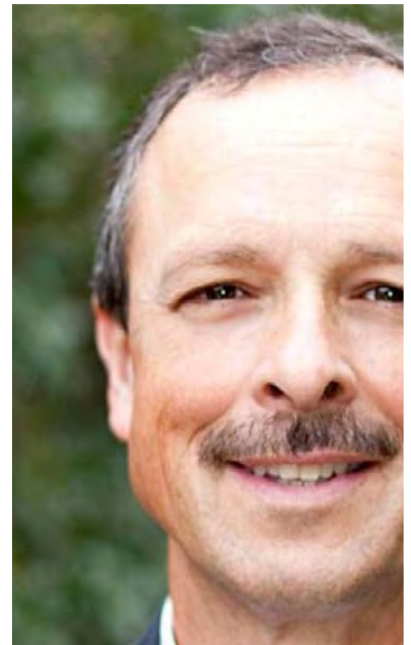
Using the California Special Districts Association survey as a guide, salaries in most of the local districts — Cambria, Nipomo, Templeton, San Miguel and Port San Luis — grew 20 percent or less between 2012 and 2016. Heritage Ranch, however, increased by 27 percent during D’Ornellas’ tenure. Nipomo’s pay increased only 4 percent, the least of any local district.

Executive salary in Oceano — which had a vacant GM position in 2012 — grew 122 percent if comparing 2011 to 2016. If comparing 2013 to 2016, the position’s salary increased just 1.4 percent.

This article has been updated to clarify the number of CSDs and independent special districts in California.



Templeton Community Services General Manager Jeff Brilltz. **Courtesy photo**



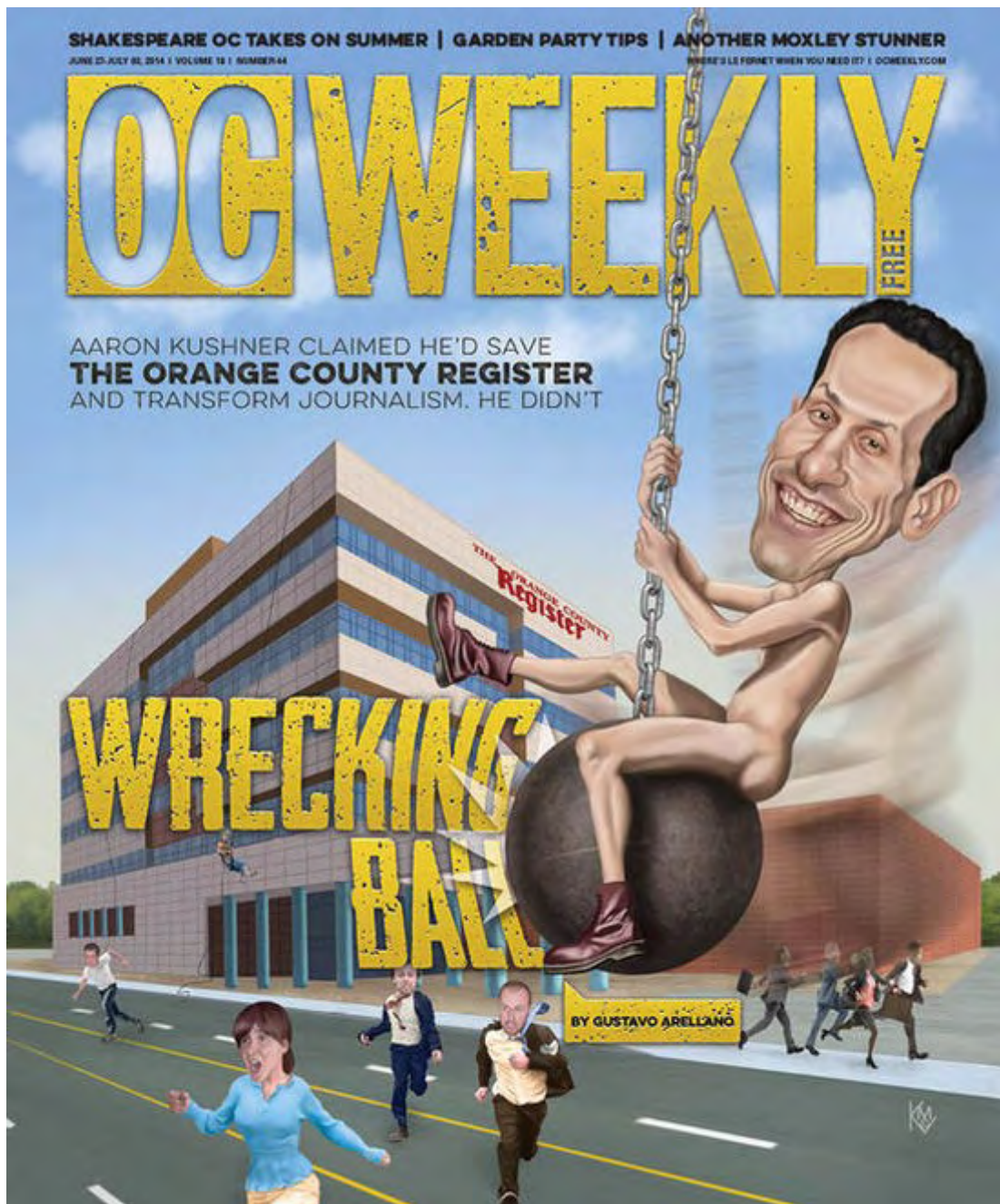
OCWEEKLY



***OC Register* Parent Company to Offer Buyouts So That Layoffs (Hopefully) Don't Come**

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

FRIDAY, JULY 21, 2017 AT 1:22 P.M.



BOOM! goes the Kush!

An email announcing a buyout plan just went out to all employees at the Southern California News Group (SCNG), the parent company of the *Orange County Register*, *Long Beach Press Telegram*, *Riverside Press-Enterprise* and basically every daily paper left in Southern California not owned by the *Los Angeles Times*.

This is slightly better news than what sources had told the *Weekly*: that "massive" layoffs were going to hit the *Register* and its sister papers. Those sources were working off a bombshell memo by CFO Dan Scofield dated July 11 that someone stupidly left on a printer in the *Register* newsroom and that had gotten around the office. The faux pas was confirmed by SCNG executive editor Frank Pine...YIKES!!! However, Pine told the *Weekly* that layoffs are not planned for the moment—buyouts are.

His email is below. If you're tl;dr, fuck off. Okay, I'll sum it up: buyouts to be offered by August, and SCNG hopes enough get taken by the end of September so that no one needs to get laid off.

Now, the full email:

This morning, we held editorial staff meetings throughout SCNG to talk about our current editorial planning and to share some details of initiatives we will be implementing in coming weeks.

It's important to note that we are always seeking new and creative ways to improve our digital newsgathering and to increase our audience. Over the past year, those efforts - your efforts - have resulted in some very impressive achievements and significant gains in digital audience. At the end of June, monthly uniques were up nearly 40 percent from last year, and sessions and page views were up 30 percent. At the same time, our newly formed SCNG social media team is already having an impact, with social sessions up more than 50 percent from last year, and we're reaching the audience we need, with big gains in local users (up more than 35 percent) and younger users (up nearly 40 percent). These are some of the best numbers in all of Digital First Media, and they are a testament to your hard work and dedication. I cannot thank you all enough.

Nevertheless, the efforts currently underway are particularly noteworthy as they will result in significant changes to the way we operate.

As you all know all too well, our entire industry continues to grapple with declining print revenue trends even as we develop new business models for digital. Consequently, we must continually find ways to operate more efficiently as print revenues continue to decline. This challenge is not unique to us. It's one that our entire industry faces.

We're looking closely at what is already working on our sites and with our audience, and we're also looking at what is clearly not working. We're also researching current trends and studying what has and has not worked for other media companies. We are developing our future content plans carefully and thoughtfully, based on data and research.

We expect to roll out a restructured newsroom plan over the next couple of months. The plan will include an even more aggressive emphasis on digital, a commitment to data-based decision making and new ways of approaching breaking news, enterprise and beat reporting.

As we reorganize, we will also be seeking ways to reduce expenses in line with revenues. This is critical to ensuring our business remains viable in the years to come.

In the next few weeks, we will be offering a voluntary separation package. We are hopeful there will be enough volunteers for us to avoid layoffs, and that as part of this process, we are also able to reassign staff and hire for positions critical to fulfilling our digital strategy.

It's too early to say precisely how many people or positions will be affected. The goal will be based on the financial performance of the company as well as our ability to identify other potential savings. We anticipate making a more formal announcement of the voluntary severance package with all of the pertinent details in August. We then expect it will take a few weeks for people to decide whether they want to participate and

for us to determine how we will go forward. We hope to complete the process no later than the end of September.

While these are very difficult decisions to make, they are necessary if we are to remain a stable and profitable business, especially in the face of continued declines in revenue. We are undertaking this effort to better position the company for continued growth.

We will continue to provide updates and more information as plans are further developed.

As always, thank you for your continuing commitment to our organization and to our readers. We greatly appreciate all of you and all that you do.

If you have questions, please ask.



"Orange Feathers" from early last year...

Illustration by Bob Aul

The announcement came just days after a cheery chainwide email by another SCNG exec that concluded with what now seems a cruel tease: that the bosses would "evaluate the possibility of merit salary increases beginning early next calendar year provided that we are on track with financial and other targets, and provided that the local economic conditions, local compensation practices and local performance can support such increases?."

Wonder if that's just an extra umbrella while people rearrange deck chairs on the Titanic?

"While yes, we do face many challenges," that email concluded. "we are also well positioned for future success. Our company is fortunate to have a deeply talented and dedicated team committed to building a strong and sustainable business that will allow us to continue fulfilling our mission and serving our communities for years to come.

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