Two people — including a San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputy — were found dead Sunday in the wreckage of a small plane that crashed Saturday in the San Bernardino Mountains.

Rebecca Joan Raymond, 28, had been with the sheriff’s department since September and was assigned to the Barstow station, officials said. The name of the other victim, an adult male, has not been released, but the San Bernardino County sheriff’s employee union said he was Raymond’s fiance.

“We are heartbroken to hear of Rebecca’s death,” the Sheriff’s Employees’ Benefit Association wrote in a Facebook post. “She committed her career to the service of others and she will be missed. Our hearts go out to her loved ones.”

“Feels like yesterday that Sheriff John McMahon swore Rebecca in,” the Sheriff’s Department tweeted. “It’s a tragic and sad day for all of us. May God watch over her parents.”

The search began about 10:30 p.m. Saturday after the two didn’t show up to the Apple Valley Airport — their intended destination — when they were supposed to, sheriff’s officials said in a news release. “An aerial search began immediately,” the release said.

A Federal Aviation Administration spokesman said the victims were in a Cessna 172, a four-seat, single-engine airplane. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Big Bear City Airport General Manager Dustin Leno said no one saw the plane crash, but some people at the airport saw it flying low after it took off about 2:30 p.m. and became concerned. He said people were searching for any emergency signal, but those can only be picked up within line of sight of the transmitter.

About 9:30 a.m. Sunday, a San Bernardino County sheriff’s helicopter located the wreckage. A flight crew member was lowered down and found the victims’ bodies.

Leno said the plane went down off Saw Mill Road about a half-mile south of the airport, in an area not accessible by vehicle.

The FAA and San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department were at the scene Sunday; the National Transportation Safety Board, also was helping investigate the crash.

Cessna describes the 172 Skyhawk as “the ultimate training aircraft and the most popular single-engine aircraft ever built.”
Bob Hartunian, 78, of Fawnskin is a pilot who has been using the Big Bear airport for 20 years. He said one witness who saw the plane take off reported that its nose appeared to be too high — something that can lead to a stall.

There are special conditions pilots need to account for when flying in and out of the high-elevation airport, Hartunian said. It’s at 6,752 feet above sea level.

“We’ve had a lot of people go in the lake” when they fail to account for those conditions, he said.

Because the air is less dense due to the higher altitude, Hartunian said, a plane doesn’t get as much lift as it does at sea level. Pilots, he said, also have to make the plane’s fuel mix leaner. Sea-level fuel mixtures can diminish engine performance.

“You flood the engine,” Hartunian said.

Overloading the plane with too many people or too much cargo can make both situations worse, he added. “It’s really important for people to be aware of air density, to lean your engine and not overload your plane.”
UPDATE: July 30, 4:30 p.m. — San Bernardino County Sheriff's Deputies are mourning one of their own following a fatal plane crash south of Big Bear City. Rebecca Joan Raymond, 28, has been identified as one of two victims of the crash. She was a deputy assigned to the Barstow station.

An adult male also died in the crash. His name has not been released pending notification of family.
According to a press release issued by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, around 10:30 p.m. July 29 deputies at The Apple Valley Police Department were asked to respond to the Apple Valley Airport. They were asked to search for a vehicle belonging to Raymond.

Raymond and the male were flying into Apple Valley and were overdue, according to authorities. The victim's vehicle was found at the airport. The Sheriff's Department Aviation Division was alerted and began a search between Big Bear and Apple Valley airports.

On July 30 the crew of Sheriff's Department helicopter 40King located a single engine aircraft down in the Sawmill Canyon area near Bear Mountain Resort. A flight crew member was hoisted to the wreckage and found the male and Raymond both deceased.

Raymond has been with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department since September 2016. It's unknown who was piloting the aircraft.

The FAA and NTSB are assisting the Sheriff's Aviation Division in investigating the cause of the crash.

UPDATE: July 30, 11:21 a.m. — The general manager of the Big Bear City Airport District, Dustin Leno, has confirmed that a single engine aircraft did crash in Sawmill Canyon. It's unknown exactly when the crash took place.

Leno said the single engine aircraft took off from Big Bear City Airport yesterday, July 29, around 2:30 p.m. At some time between then and around 9:30 a.m. July 30, authorities received a signal from an emergency locator transmitter alerting them to the crash, Leno said. It's unknown if the plane crashed shortly after takeoff July 29, or may have been returning to the airport July 30.

Leno would not confirm if the crash was fatal to those on board. He did not identify the type of plane or how many people were on board.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, the FAA and NTSB are investigating the cause of the airplane crash.

This is an update to an earlier post. See the original below and as more information becomes available, this story will be updated.

Emergency personnel are responding to a plan that apparently crashed in the Sawmill Canyon area of Big Bear City.

The crash site is reported to be about a mile south of Big Bear Airport. There are unconfirmed reports that there are two fatalities on board. It's unknown if the airplane had left Big Bear Airport or was approaching the local airport.

As more information becomes available, this story will be updated.
BIG BEAR LAKE — A San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputy was identified Sunday as one of two people killed when a small plane crashed into a Southern California mountain.

The bodies of Rebecca Joan Raymond, 28, and an unidentified man were found Sunday morning after searchers found a downed plane in a remote part of Big Bear Mountain, about 95 miles northeast of Los Angeles, the sheriff’s department said in a statement.

A helicopter crew had been looking for the pair after authorities received a call Saturday that they didn’t reach their destination at Apple Valley Airport.

The two were aboard a Cessna 172 Skyhawk that had taken off from Big Bear City Airport and crashed under unknown circumstances, FAA spokesman Allen Kenitzer said.

Raymond had been with the department for almost a year and was assigned to the sheriff’s station in Barstow.

“It’s a tragic and sad day for all of us,” the department said. “May God watch over her parents.”

The man’s name has not been released pending notification of next of kin. A friend told KABC-TV he was Raymond’s boyfriend.
Debbie Payne told the station the couple had rented a plane for the weekend to go to Big Bear to celebrate their anniversary, and he had proposed to her.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

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Posted Jul 28 at 10:00 AM
Immigrant rights advocates protest San Bernardino County sheriff’s cooperation with ICE

By Alejandra Molina, The Press-Enterprise

Friday, July 28, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> Immigrant rights organizers marched to the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department headquarters Friday urging the agency to build trust with residents instead of cooperating more with immigration officers.

“Our public safety is at stake with the collaboration of local law enforcement and immigration agencies,” said Javier Hernandez, executive director of the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice.

The protest was scheduled from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at 655 E. 3rd St., in San Bernardino. By 5:12 p.m., the marchers had arrived and blocked off part of 3rd Street.

Organizers are criticizing Sheriff John McMahon’s opposition to Senate Bill 54, the California Values Act, also referred to as a ‘sanctuary state’ bill, that would prohibit the use of state and local public resources to aid federal U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, agents in deportation actions.

McMahon has used the Dec. 2 terror attack in San Bernardino to justify his stance against the California Values Act. In an interview posted on YouTube, McMahon said the Sheriff’s Department reached out to ICE to determine how Tashfeen Malik, the woman who carried out the mass shooting with her husband, was allowed in the country.

“That was critical to our ability to investigate that case,” he said.

“Preventing local law enforcement specifically in the state of California from working with ICE could put the safety of our public in serious jeopardy,” he added.

Immigrant rights advocates are also wary of McMahon’s meeting with Attorney General Jeff Sessions earlier this year. McMahon has been public about this meeting, which he said took place a day before Sessions’ confirmation. He said it was a gathering involving other California sheriffs where he expressed frustration over how police agencies are no longer allowed to hold people 48 hours after their release from jail to allow ICE to pick them up.

McMahon said immigrants wanted by ICE are “dangerous criminals.”

Immigrants and their allies say the Sheriff’s Department appears to have no concern for the public safety of the thousands of undocumented immigrants and others in San Bernardino County who could be wrongly detained as President Donald Trump ramps up deportation efforts.

Guadalupe Plascencia, 59, of San Bernardino, for example, said she was detained by immigration authorities for deportation despite being an American citizen. She was expected to be at the protest.
She said she was arrested in March on a bench warrant for failing to testify in a 2007 case in Ontario. She was then arrested by immigration agents when leaving jail the next day.

San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Cpl. Ruben Perez said ICE sent the agency an immigration detainer requesting that the Sheriff’s Department detain Plascencia up to 48 hours past her release. The Sheriff’s Department, however, does not honor immigration detainers unless they are signed by federal judges, or there is a valid arrest warrant, Perez said.

Perez said the agency did let immigration officials know they were releasing her.

Plascencia was released after her daughter showed her passport. She filed a notice of claim with the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

ICE said the agency would not knowingly detain a U.S. citizen.
President Trump on Friday called for police and immigration officials to be “rough” with suspected gang members in order to rid the country of “animals” he said are terrorizing communities.

“No one’s gonna be too good to what we’re doing,” Trump said to the applause of police recruits at Suffolk County Community College in Brentwood, a heavily Latino suburb of New York. “Like when you guys put somebody in the car and you’re protecting their head, you know the way you put their hand so they don’t hit their head and they’ve just killed somebody ... you can take that hand away.”

He implied that he was satisfied with rough handling of suspects by the police. “When you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon — you just see them thrown in, rough,” he said.
Scoffing at calls for what he describes as political correctness, Trump also renewed his pledges to build a wall along the Mexican border. He accused the Obama administration of admitting criminals into the United States.

“The previous administration enacted an open-door policy to illegal immigrants from Central America,” he said. “As a result MS-13 surged into the country and scoured, just absolutely destroyed, so much in front of it.”

He referred to Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, a primarily Salvadoran gang that started in Los Angeles in the 1980s and has spread into other communities. The gang is blamed for 17 killings on New York’s Long Island since the beginning of last year.

“Few communities have suffered worse at the hand of these MS-13 thugs than the people of Long Island,” Trump told the recruits. “They have transformed peaceful parks and beautiful quiet neighborhoods into bloodstained killing fields. They are animals.”

In often graphic detail, Trump spoke of the gangs’ cruelty to victims: “They like to knife them and cut them and watch them die slowly.”

The president’s comments come on the heels of a speech he gave earlier in the week in Youngstown, Ohio, in which he also appeared to be endorsing extrajudicial violence by law enforcement.

Although the American public may be inured by now to Trump’s unconventional approach, his speech on Long Island drew strong reactions.

“It’s clear that the way he views things is simple: If you’re a person of color, then police can beat you, slam you to the ground, not have any respect for your rights as a human,” said Jeff Robinson, a deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union.

“It’s outrageous. ... If you’re a person of color in this country, there’s every reason to fear for your life, when you hear these comments from a president,” Robinson added.

In Los Angeles, one of the civilian commissioners who oversees the police department was quick to note that Trump’s remarks stood in stark contrast to the philosophy and rules guiding the LAPD.

“What the president recommended would be out of policy in the Los Angeles Police Department,” Steve Soboroff said. “It’s not what policing is about today,”

Soboroff stressed that he believed police officers in Los Angeles would act appropriately while making arrests regardless of what the president said.

“I have faith that any one of our officers would not take their hand off someone and bang their head into a car because that’s what the president of the United States recommended,” Soboroff said.

Earlier Thursday, hundreds of demonstrators protested outside the community college located in Brentwood, a suburb of 60,000 people, two-thirds of them Latino. The protesters complained that Trump’s anti-immigrant
rhetoric and tactics have terrorized the community nearly as much as the gangs.

“Trump is preparing for a massive deportation, and he is justifying this by using our Hispanic community in Brentwood as an excuse to help us against MS-13,” said Javier Guzman, a 50-year-old activist who was among the protesters.

Some older, more settled Latino immigrants, however, were heartened by Trump’s campaign against the gangs.

“Everybody is afraid of the gangs, the murders and the killings. Trump will make us feel safer. He is only going after the illegal immigrants and criminals,” said Reynaldo Caiaffa, 65, a businessman who was drinking coffee at a Colombian bakery in Brentwood earlier this week.

Brentwood has been terrorized by a string of killings of teens and young adults. Two girls, ages 15 and 16, were killed with machetes last September near an elementary school. Four young men were lured into a park and killed in adjoining Central Islip in April.

The MS-13 gang has recruited from the ranks of young immigrant teenagers from Central America, many of whom were sent to live with relatives in the U.S. because it had become too dangerous for them in their home countries.

These unaccompanied minors make up most of the people arrested for gang violence, as well as the majority of the victims. Few victims have been non-Latino.

Elizabeth Alvarado, 49, a Brentwood woman whose 15-year-old daughter, Nisa Mickens, was killed with a machete last year, said that many of the unaccompanied minors allowed into the United States joined gangs because of lack of supervision.

“If they are following the law and on the path to becoming U.S. citizens, it is OK, but many of the children were not monitored,” said Alvarado.

The ACLU said said that nine teenagers had been detained on Long Island for wearing T-shirts or caps mistaken for gang colors — in particular the logo of the Chicago Bulls, which uses horns that resemble MS-13 symbols.

“These practices are forcing children to fear both the gang and the government,” said New York Civil Liberties Union Suffolk County director Irma Solis in a statement. “We’ve heard from children who are afraid to go to school or go outside their homes because they’re scared they will be picked up by ICE and separated from their loved ones — and all because someone may have misunderstood a T-shirt.”

Other lawyers said that some teens had been detained for minor offenses, such as some boys accused of trespassing when they played basketball on school property after hours.
In the previous six weeks, 1,400 immigrants in the country illegally had been detained by ICE, according to Trump.

Demick reported from Brentwood and Lee from Los Angeles. Staff Writer Kate Mather in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

ALSO

Michael Bloomberg talks gun control, empowering cities and Trump: 'I was a manager; he was not'

Trump's border wall prototypes in San Diego delayed until the winter

President Trump said 'our guys are rougher' than the violent gang MS-13. What did he mean?

Trump touts 'big progress' in fight against MS-13

UPDATES:

4:20 p.m.: This article was updated with comments from Steve Soboroff in Los Angeles.

2:55 p.m.: This article was updated with comments from Jeff Robinson, Javier Guzman and Reynaldo Caiaffa.

This article was originally published at 9 a.m.
In Old Town Victorville, inmate releases threaten turnaround effort

By Shea Johnson
Staff Writer

There are two options for inmates released from the county jail in Adelanto: Arrange for transportation or be dropped off at a transit center, near the Oro Grande Wash, at the bottom of an already beleaguered historic neighborhood.

VICTORVILLE — There are two options for inmates released from the county jail in Adelanto: Arrange for transportation or be dropped off at a transit center, near the Oro Grande Wash, at the bottom of an already beleaguered historic neighborhood.

Transported by a white van marked with the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department emblem on its side, male and female inmates are let off, sometimes several at a time, and from there they’re free people.

On occasion, they’ll have family or friends pick them up from the center, northeast of D Street between Fourth and Sixth streets in Victorville, as was witnessed early Friday morning. The transportation hub boasts buses and a Burlington Northern Santa Fe train, making it a central transit access point particularly conducive to inmate releasees who live outside the city or even the High Desert.
But inmate releasees sometimes will also spill into the neighborhood and travel by foot to mid-town, wandering into businesses, a rescue mission walk-in center or even the public library along the way seeking a cooperative soul. One resident reported seeing a handful beeline to the liquor store across the street from the drop-off point.

For stakeholders in Old Town, the recent public revelation that jail inmates — wherever they may be from — are being released into arguably the city's most vulnerable pocket has elevated angst at a time when violent crime has risen over 20 percent in the High Desert and as the neighborhood desperately seeks to reinvent itself as a safer and appealing destination.

Valentin Godina, 51, has lived just a block from the neighborhood's recognized boundary since 1990 — “but what happens in Old Town comes up my way” — and described watching for the first time inmates unloaded from a van about a month or two ago.

“Well, it's a safe place for them, but it's an unsafe place for us,” he said, adding that he has often felt ignored by police and the city as a resident in that part of Victorville.

The situation has already spurred two top city officials to meet with Sheriff John McMahon and 1st District Supervisor Robert Lovingood, which was described as a productive meeting by those involved.

In interviews this week with Lovingood, City Manager Doug Robertson and Mayor Gloria Garcia, it was learned that officials were kicking around working with a nonprofit or private contractor to transport releasees from the High Desert Detention Center to their place of origin or adding stops in Adelanto, Apple Valley and Hesperia.

Unpleasant conversations likely await, and Lovingood said officials plan to follow up the July 14 huddle with another meeting soon.

“Transportation, as to where and when, is going to be decided,” he said. “We're going to look at some opportunities, really, how the folks are released and how they're dispersed and whether it continues in Victorville or whether they're able to go back to where they're from.”
Ultimately, city officials, residents and businesses in Victorville agreed that the sole burden on the city must be lifted; if not, Old Town’s nascent resurgence effort, beginning seriously in late 2015, will be doomed.

“It has to be mitigated if it’s going to be successful,” Robertson said. “The thought of increasing business activity and improving Old Town with this influx is just not tenable. It just can’t happen.”

The neighborhood’s ills can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, officials have said, a period a decade or two removed from when Interstate 15 development shifted traffic from the city’s downtown. Efforts to formally plan improvements and pump redevelopment money into Old Town were derailed when the RDA program was discontinued by the state in 2011.

But for more than 18 months, community organization Revive Our Old Town (R.O.O.T.) has worked closely with the neighborhood and city officials to strategize on a sustainable and incremental rebuild. The city has since undertaken revision efforts on a specific plan for the neighborhood that had been shelved for years.

“From what I’ve heard with my ear on the ground, it is an issue of concern to the community,” said Stephanie Pazarin, a R.O.O.T. organizer with Institute for Public Strategies. “It’s an issue they feel affects their safety and they’d like to see it addressed.”

Officials have pointed to criminal justice reforms as a key element of the issue, meaning shorter incarcerations than before while the severity of crimes committed by inmates housed in county jails can be higher-level than in the past.

According to several people who spoke with the Daily Press, the issue of safety triggered by releasee drop-offs is relevant whether real or perceived, because either threatens to reinforce Old Town’s already troubled reputation.

“This is my community and that’s where my family lives as well,” said Old Town resident Rosy Olvera, “and I don’t want to have people walking in my neighborhood looking for opportunities to do something bad.”

But Olvera, 30, added that while drop-offs added complexity to turnaround plans, she believed that the city and sheriff’s shouldn’t alone seek a reversal.
“To be honest with you, I don't know what the solution is,” she said. “But I know we should work together to come up with a solution.”

Julie Hendricks, a prep cook at Renee Allen’s Soul Food & BBQ, the only restaurant located inside the transportation center, offered a unique perspective, saying she viewed recently released inmates to have been mostly “decent gentlemen” in her experiences.

They’ll buy lunch or a quick drink, she added, and she described them as usually in gray sweatpants, white T-shirts and sometimes carrying an envelope with money.

“I’m not saying they’re great guys because a lot of them have a lot of problems, and some of them will open up about it,” she said. “What I like is they’re very respectful for the most part and I know they’re just getting out and they feel they've gotta be on their best behavior and that’s a good thing.”

The Victorville City Library is a farther post-release stop for those who seek to contact out-of-town family or even job search, said library aide Mickey Grosso.

“It has impacted us some, but it hasn’t impacted us in a negative way,” Grosso said. “I know that there's quite a bit that have come to print out their bus tickets to take them where they need to go.”

But a destination isn’t always known.

“Most of the inmates, they don't have nowhere to go,” said Sammy Phon, co-owner of Ravin’s Donuts & Ice Cream off Hook Road and Seventh Street.

Phon and his wife Ravin, the shop’s namesake, said the releasees will share both their post-release status and where they're from, which can be as far as Rialto or Fontana.

And Ravin belongs to a contingent that had only before heard rumors of such drop-offs until she witnessed it herself.
“I just saw a white van drop them off and give them their bags,” she said, “and I thought, ‘oh, God, it’s true!’”

It’s the new faces, they both said, that can sometimes also giveaway releasees, and the shop and neighboring stores, which confirmed the sentiment, fear that the sub-population will add to the troubles long-made by homeless encampments across the street and nearby.

The Phons said they’ve been threatened, customers have been scared by unruly vagrants and that open drug use is common.

“That's why we’re thinking of closing earlier (each day),” she said.

While the city doesn’t possess the data to back it up, Robertson said city officials assumed that the homelessness influx here is “at least somewhat attributable” to inmate drop-offs.

Garcia, the city's mayor, will play a significant part in shepherding Victorville through this latest dilemma. She said she found “reassuring” an indication by Sheriff McMahon in talks earlier this month that there was funding to alter the current transportation method.

A bookkeeping services professional, she acknowledged having issues herself with persons outside her Park Avenue business known to be recently released at the transportation center, prompting her to call police.

“It was like the plague,” she said of releasees in Old Town, speaking broadly about her recent experience noticing them. “All of a sudden they were all over the place.”

Neither Garcia or anyone the Daily Press spoke to for this story, including the Sheriff’s Department, could identify when the program began, which Garcia admitted left her “puzzled.”

Bill Edwards, director of the Victor Valley Rescue Mission, said the organization’s Seventh Street walk-in center offers and acts as a liaison to services for releasees and suggested the drop-off program wasn’t new.
“They've always done that,” he said. “People just haven’t been aware of it.”

The High Desert Detention Center released approximately 15,000 inmates in 2016, according to Robertson, recalling conversations with McMahon, but Sheriff’s spokeswoman Jodi Miller said the department didn’t immediately have a statistical breakdown to detail how many of those were taken to the transportation center.

She confirmed there were additional meetings scheduled “in the very near future to continue to strategize an effective solution.”

Robertson also revealed that he learned the federal and private prisons were sending inmates to the D Street depot, but on a much lesser scale. The city plans to install camera systems in the area to keep an eye on other grumblings.

“I’d just like a camera there to verify that there’s nothing else happening because we occasionally hear about a white van with no markings dropping off prisoners,” he said. “Well, the Sheriff’s Department van always has markings on it so we don’t know who this mysterious white van is.”

— Staff Writer Paola Baker contributed to this report.

*Shea Johnson can be reached at 760-955-5368 or SJohnson@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter at @DP_Shea.*

**READ NEXT**
By Beatriz Valenzuela, San Bernardino Sun

Friday, July 28, 2017

GRAND TERRACE >> The man who barricaded himself inside a Grand Terrace home and traded gunfire with deputies Thursday before he was shot and killed has been identified as 26-year-old Michael Fitzgerald, officials said.

Fitzgerald was fatally wounded after deputies were called to the 12800 block of Mirado Avenue near Pico Street just after 4:30 p.m. on reports of gunfire from inside a home, according to a San Bernardino County Sheriff’s statement.

The county’s SWAT team responded. The law enforcement response included sharpshooters on rooftops.

Officials evacuated nearby homes and urged the public to stay away.

Fitzgerald was shooting from inside the house and the garage area, sometimes toward deputies, authorities said.

Nearby homes were peppered with bullets from the Grand Terrace man’s weapon, officials said.

“Fitzgerald was going in and out of the home and deputies could see that he was armed,” according to a sheriff’s statement.

During the nearly two-hour standoff, deputies attempted to negotiate with Fitzgerald, without success, sheriff’s officials said Friday.

At one point, authorities said Fitzgerald opened the garage and was struck by non-lethal rounds, but they seemed to have little to no effect on him. A short time later, Fitzgerald fired at deputies, who returned fire, striking the 26-year-old.

Paramedics took the wounded man to a hospital, where he later died, sheriff’s officials said.

The incident is under investigation and sheriff’s officials ask anyone with information regarding this investigation to call Homicide Detail Detective Julius McChristian at 909-387-3589. Callers wishing to remain anonymous may call the WeTip Hotline at 800-78-CRIME (27463) or by visiting www.wetip.com.

Our View: Sheriff’s Safe Return Program may be a lifesaver

By Daily Press Editorial Board

Posted Jul 28, 2017 at 9:21 AM
Updated at 8:15 AM

While fighting crime and catching and locking up criminals remains Job 1 for the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department, the agency recently launched a program that will help locate missing persons with disabilities more quickly and has the potential to reduce the time required for deputies to do so.

The Safe Return Program features an online database where families can register loved ones who have a habit of wandering away or who may be at risk to do so in the future. Typically, persons with Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, severe autism, Down Syndrome or even severe deafness or mental illness are most at risk for wandering away from home without telling anyone.

Sometimes these persons are elderly and sometimes they are taking medication that must be administered promptly on a schedule. In either situation, time is of the essence in finding the missing, particularly when we’re experiencing a heat wave like we are now or in the winter when temperatures drop below freezing overnight.

“The Safe Return Program is an invaluable tool designed to protect some of our most vulnerable citizens,” Sheriff John McMahon said. “Deputies will have access to vital information that will reunite critical missing people with their families.”

The registry is easy to access. Family members and caretakers can visit the Sheriff’s Department’s website’s Safe Return page at www.sbcounty.gov/sheriff/safereturn/ You must create a user name and password, but the site even features a tutorial to help walk you through the process. It explains everything from resetting your password to uploading a photograph of the person you are registering.
Families can include everything from a loved one’s physical description and disability to behavioral triggers, best approach methods and places they’re likely to wander in the profile, McMahon said. And having the photograph on file will help deputies in the field save valuable time when looking for a critical missing person.

Conversely, the registry will be available for deputies to help them identify persons who may have wandered away without their family or caretaker knowing. Deputies can search the database for pictures of anyone they find who is unable to communicate with them. The hope is this will solve the mystery of the person’s identity quickly and enable the deputies to return them home safely.

The goal of this great new program is to reunite disabled persons who have wandered away with their families before they are injured, taken advantage of or die. The Sheriff’s Department deserves recognition for creating this valuable program and we encourage families and caretakers to immediately register loved ones who may be at risk of wandering off.

Crime will always be the main focus of the Sheriff’s Department, but it’s easy to forget that deputies also want to keep people safe. The safety of some of society’s most fragile persons counts just as much as the safety of the rest of us.

Kudos to Sheriff McMahon and his team for developing this important public safety tool.

**READ NEXT**
A consulting firm is now getting more than $40 million from cash-strapped Riverside County

The exterior of the County Administrative Center in downtown Riverside.

By JEFF HORSEMAN | jhorseman@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: July 28, 2017 at 3:20 pm | UPDATED: July 30, 2017 at 12:53 pm
The price of innovation for Riverside County government is now more than $40 million.

The county Board of Supervisors this week approved a two-year contract extension worth up to $20.3 million with consulting firm KPMG to continue an almost two-year effort that started with a look at public safety spending and has grown into an overhaul of how the county, with its $5.5 billion budget, does business.

The $20.3 million is on top of roughly $21 million KPMG has gotten to date for its work, which features consultants working extensively with county staff and analyzing reams of data with the goal of making county government more efficient and conditioned to make decisions based on hard numbers.

Efficiency and cost-cutting are paramount for supervisors determined to put county spending on a sustainable path that doesn't dry up reserves. The Great Recession of 2007-08 took a giant bite out of county finances. While revenues are bouncing back, it's not enough to keep pace with a mounting list of new, ongoing and non-optional expenses.

These include a $40 million annual increase in the cost of providing health care to jail inmates required by a lawsuit settlement; the projected $50 million-a-year cost of running the expanded Indio jail when it opens next year and higher costs associated with in-home care to indigent adults. Adding to the red ink are labor raises guaranteed to unionized employees in 2012 in exchange for pension savings.

For years, non-public safety departments have seen their budgets whittled down as supervisors sought to avoid cutting the Sheriff’s Department, Fire Department and other public safety agencies. But now, officials say there’s nothing left to trim from non-public safety categories. Public safety spending consumes three-fourths of the county’s discretionary funding.

To that end, KPMG has focused on how the sheriff, district attorney and other public safety departments can do their jobs with the same amount of money or less. An international firm specializing in audit, tax and advisory services, KPMG has come up with scores of suggestions on how the county can serve the public more efficiently.

In a July 22 op-ed in The Press-Enterprise, supervisors John Tavaglione and Chuck Washington wrote that KPMG’s work is already bearing fruit. The firm found $50 million could be saved by replacing an old human resources computer system and $40 million a year could be saved by changing how the county buys goods and services, the supervisors wrote.
KPMG offers expertise and perspective that county employees, who are focused on daily operations, lack when it comes to foundational, long-lasting change, Tavaglione and Washington wrote.

“If the county can save just 1 percent of general-fund spending, it more than pays the costs of KPMG's services,” they wrote.

“Some suggest the county spend reserves to shore up deficits or increase salaries. Using one-time money from reserves for ongoing costs would be folly. Financial problems would only worsen the next year, with reserves dwindling further.”
Supervisor Kevin Jeffries opposed the KPMG extension.

“When you combine 20,000 employees, a ($5.5) billion budget and operate under a government monopoly you are going to have inefficiencies and bureaucratic red tape that you need to clean up,” Jeffries said.
“Seeking external evaluations can be a valuable tool to make the needed changes. But when the bill due for those external evaluators actually starts costing you the loss of services to the public, you have to question who’s being served — the taxpayers or the consulting firm?

“It is very clear to me,” Jeffries added. “That the additional $20 million we are going to pay KPMG is going to come from taxpayer funds that could otherwise be used to pay for essential public services. This is happening at a time when we need every dollar we can find.”

While praising KPMG’s work to find savings, Jeffries noted that the board and county department heads are responsible for making “it all happen, not keeping an extremely expensive consulting firm on the payroll and using them as a crutch.”

KPMG is working with the district attorney and public defender to see if staffing changes could yield savings. But it’s a thornier situation when it comes to the Sheriff’s Department, which is run by Stan Sniff, an elected sheriff who can’t be fired.

KPMG has said the sheriff can cut costs by changing deputies’ schedules to meet peak demands and using a telephone response system and non-sworn personnel to handle minor, non-emergency calls.

Sniff, while saying he’s open to the firm’s suggestions, has been skeptical about whether KPMG’s ideas can save money. He contends that his department has been cut to the bone and last month asked for $50 million in additional funding; otherwise, Sniff said he’d have to look at closing patrol stations.

Sniff and Tavaglione publicly clashed this week, with Tavaglione accusing the sheriff of dragging his feet on working with KPMG. Supervisors gave Sniff another $17.9 million beyond what was in the budget.
15 Freeway toll lanes work to start next year, after $152 million loan

Anne Mayer, executive director of the commission, stands on top of Metrolink Parking Garage as commuters travel on the 15 Freeway and recently built connector lanes from 91 Freeway in Corona in this March file photo. In the background is I-15 where a new toll lane project is planned.

By IMRAN GHORI | ighori@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise
July 30, 2017 at 7:00 am
Plans to build toll lanes on the 15 Freeway from south of Corona to Jurupa Valley have received a major boost with the approval of a $152 million federal loan.

The money from the United States Department of Transportation approved this month was the final piece of financing and clears the way for the Riverside County Transportation Commission to start construction of the 15-mile project early next year.

The $471 million project will add two toll lanes in each direction to the freeway, which now has three lanes each way from Cajalco Road north to the 60 Freeway. The new lanes are expected to open in 2020.

The commission's application for the low-interest loan through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act was a competitive, months-long, process, said John Standiford, the agency's deputy executive director.

While officials were confident of their chances “it's never a sure thing until you have the signature on the dotted line,” he said.

Under federal law, the program can only finance a third of a project's cost, Standiford said. The rest will be financed through bonds and borrowing from the county's Measure A sales tax.

Future toll proceeds will repay the loans and pay for maintenance and operation of the toll lanes.

The agency was able to finance the recently completed $1.4 billion toll lanes on the 91 Freeway through Corona with a $421 million loan from the same program, Standiford said.

The 15 lanes are considered a natural follow-up to the 91 project because the connecting freeways are the most heavily-used in Riverside County.

Transportation officials say the project will ease congestion by offering drivers willing to pay a toll faster lanes while also removing traffic from general lanes.

The commission awarded contracts earlier this year to Skanska-Ames, a joint venture between two firms, to handle construction and to Kapsch TrafficCom Transportation to run the toll services.

Pre-construction work such as soils testing and surveying is already happening, Standiford said. Depending on weather, construction could start at the beginning of 2018.
Work will be done along with two interchange improvement projects on the freeway at Limonite Avenue and Cajalco that are set to begin construction next year also, Standiford said.

“There will be a lot of activity,” he said.
Authorities are looking for two people believed to have gone missing inside Joshua Tree National Park sometime around July 27, officials say.

The two people, an Asian woman and an unknown race man in their 20s, were supposed to have checked out of accommodations on July 28. They didn't and their belongings were left inside their room, according to a news release from the park.

The couple's vehicle was found near Maize Loop in the northwest corner of the park, the release says.

A ping from the man's cellphone from July 27 puts the couple somewhere inside the park, according to officials.

Joshua Tree National Park Search and Rescue, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department and California Highway Patrol are all looking for the couple. Officials are asking anyone who believes they may have seen the couple to call 909-383-5652.
Search for hikers moves into rockier terrain as dogs find area of interest

By Stacy Moore, Hi-Desert Star | Posted: Sunday, July 30, 2017 6:32 pm

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK — Searchers faced a double punch of heat and humidity as they moved into rocky terrain Sunday to look for missing hikers Rachel Nguyen, 20, and Joseph Orbeso, 21.

The couple, who come from Westminster, went hiking in the national park Thursday and have not been seen since.

Search teams finished clearing the more commonly used trails Sunday and moved on to the rocky elevations. “We’ve started working on the really treacherous drainages so we can clear those,” Dan Messaros, a park ranger who is co-incident commander for the search, said Sunday afternoon.

The terrain is unsafe and the temperatures are so high that it’s slow going for the search teams.

Two searchers were pulled off the hunt as they showed symptoms of heat sickness Sunday. San Bernardino County’s rescue helicopter was called in to fly them out. “They were in spots where we couldn’t get them out any other way,” Messaros said.

Sunday started with a briefing and the deployment of K9 teams, who might have picked up a scent. “There’s an area the dogs have some interest in, in a very rocky area in the northeast corner of the park,” Messaros said.

The region is difficult for humans to get to, but the K9 teams will be picking up the search in that area Monday in hopes that the dogs have found Nguyen and Orbeso’s scents.

The searchers are also coping with changing park terrain thanks to the monsoonal rains in the past month. The storm that hit some parts of Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms Saturday night did not fall in the search area, but Messaros said they hope some water might get to Nguyen and Orbeso. “We’re hearing from the teams that there is water up in the rocks, so what we’re hoping is they’re able to find some water and shade,” he said.

Although the rain and the K9 teams have brought a glimpse of hope, another possible avenue to find the couple has turned into a dead end. Orbeso and another friend had visited the Joshua Tree area a couple of weeks ago, and Messaros had been trying to contact that friend to learn if Orbeso had mentioned any trails he planned to hike with Nguyen. Messaros said he was finally able to talk to the friend, who is now in...
Japan, but it turned out the two men had just driven on Twentynine Palms Highway, looking at restaurants and shops.

Sunday’s search included park rangers, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department personnel and Joshua Tree Search and Rescue volunteers. The Sheriff’s Department helicopter and crew was searching from the air, but they were pulled off the hunt to respond to a deadly plane crash on Big Bear Mountain, Messaros said.

The search will pick up again Monday morning.

**Airbnb owner reported couple missing**

Rangers believe Nguyen and Orbeso drove into Joshua Tree National Park for a hike at some point Thursday. The two were staying at a local Airbnb and were supposed to check out at 11 a.m. Friday. When they did not, the host looked for them in their rental. “It did not appear that anyone had been there overnight,” Messaros said.

The Airbnb host reported Nguyen and Orbeso missing to the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department, and a search was launched.

The couple’s burgundy Lexus was found Friday afternoon about 1½ miles inside the park from the Joshua Tree entrance. It had been parked on a dirt lot in the Maze Loop area.

The volunteer Joshua Tree Search and Rescue Team was called in at 4 p.m. Friday and trackers found prints near couple’s car, the team reported.

Team members believed they found the couple’s tracks heading north into a canyon, but they did not find any further sign of Nguyen or Orbeso.

“Several search teams were deployed with no results,” JOSAR reported on its Facebook page.

A ping of Orbeso’s cellphone was recorded at 4 p.m. Thursday from inside the park. Messarsos said the ping came from the general area where the couple’s car was parked, so it was of limited use to the search.

It is not known if they took water or supplies with them on their hike.

Some family members of the missing couple have come to the area and the incident command has assigned a liaison to them, he added.

If anyone has seen or had contact with the couple, they should call (760) 831-7633.
Dark Sky designation puts Joshua Tree National Park in a new light

The Milky Way arched overhead as photographer Wally Pacholka trudged across an expanse of boulders and sand here, searching for the right spot to plant the tripod of his camera.

“This is how clear night skies are supposed to look,” he said, scanning the wide, wide sky filled with bats and pulsating stars.

The rangy photographer, whose images of the night sky over southwestern vistas have been published worldwide, was in his element: scouting for cosmic views on a stark Mojave Desert landscape illuminated by frothy networks of stars and galaxies.

He was among a group of stargazers who had gathered around a picnic table Wednesday in the park’s Hidden Valley Campground to celebrate a significant announcement that day:

Joshua Tree, which harbors some of the darkest night skies in the United States, had been certified as the 10th International Dark Sky Park in the U.S. National Park system. Others include Death Valley, Big Bend and Grand Canyon national parks.

It also joins 83 locations worldwide that have won the coveted designation, including Warrumbungle National Park in Australia, Yeongyang Firefly Eco Park in South Korea and Zselic National Landscape Protection Area in Hungary.

No other Dark Sky spot on Earth, however, is a mere 140 miles from a metropolis where stars were washed out long ago by mega-wattage flooding the night sky from airports, malls, billboards, theme parks, car dealerships and urban sprawl.

“The Milky Way is only a two-hour drive away by car,” Luke Sabala, the park’s physical scientist, likes to say.

The Dark Sky designation is part of a growing movement across the nation and around the world that wants skies illuminated by stars. It began in 1988 with the formation of the International Dark Sky Assn., based in Tucson.

The nonprofit, which has about 3,500 members, advocates limiting light pollution with measures such as no-glare street lights and low-energy bulbs, and lighting ordinances that apply to residences, businesses, public buildings and parks.
Joshua Tree has long been known as an ideal natural observatory to view the heavens.

“A 2010 survey showed that 28% of the park’s nearly 2 million annual visitors come ... just for the night sky — and we think that number is going to grow because of this designation,” Sabala said. “So there’s a huge economic benefit for the region.”

Winning the distinction represents nearly a decade of hard work by activists including Pacholka; Sabala; Tom O’Key, a retired technical consultant in personal injury litigation cases; and park ranger Caryn Davidson.

That’s because their application for Dark Sky status “involved the most complex set of circumstances we’ve ever had to consider anywhere in the world,” said John Barentine, program manager for the Dark Sky association.

“For example, the western edge of this 790,000-acre park is so polluted by the night light of Coachella Valley cities including Palm Springs and the Los Angeles metropolitan area that it is almost ineligible,” Barentine said. “But its eastern edge has levels of darkness found nowhere else in the state.”

The park also is framed by State Routes 62 and 247, the sprawling Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, the city of Twentynine Palms and the booming town of Yucca Valley.

On the plus side is the park’s proximity to tens of millions of people in Southern California who, Barentine said, “could experience some of the most spectacular after-dark shows nature has to offer.”

The association, which designates at one of three levels — gold, silver and bronze, depending on the sky quality of the site — “decided to compromise: We gave it a silver,” Barentine said.

“I’ve been a promoter of Joshua Tree for 30 years,” Pacholka says, then falls silent, training the lens of his camera on a scene framed by one of the park’s peculiar namesake trees on the left, massive boulders on the right — and a dazzle of stars between them.

Then he started shooting with a 24-millimeter lens and a 20-second exposure.

“Anyone with a digital camera can get nice images of the Milky Way these days,” he said. “But great shots depend on landscape, composition and darkness.”

Louis.Sahagun@latimes.com
JOSHUA BASIN PRECAUTIONARY WATER BOIL ORDER LIFTED SUNDAY

By Z107.7 News, on July 31st, 2017

After more than two days of being told to boil their water or to use bottled water, customers of Joshua Basin Water District were assured Sunday afternoon that it was safe to use tap water without boiling it prior to drinking or cooking with it. The water district issued the boil order Friday morning following a break in a water main line Thursday night. The boil water order was issued to protect the public’s health from waterborne infectious agents that could be present in drinking water.
Supervisor Janice Rutherford will be staging “Breakfast With Your Supervisor” on Friday August 18, at Thousand Pines Camp (Photo by Michael P. Neufeld)
Crestline, CA – Breakfast with Supervisor Janice Rutherford on Frida August 18 will feature the Crestline/Lake Gregory Chamber of Commerce President Louis Boehle. The 8 a.m. session will be held at Thousand Pines Camp in Crestline.

The cost of the breakfast is $15 per person and you may pay at the door by cash, credit card or check made payable to : Thousand Pines Camp.

THE MEETING

Thousand Pines Camp is located at 359 Thousand Pines Road Crestline, CA

The informal breakfast meeting will involve short presentations by Second District Supervisor Rutherford and Chamber President Louis Boehle.

Rutherford and Boehle will also circulate around the room to meet and greet those in attendance.

MAKE RESERVATIONS

Please RSVP by sending and E-mail to : SBD2rsvp@gmail.com.
SAN BERNARDINO >> At an age when many of their peers were weighing whether to spend their money on pizza versus tacos, a group of San Bernardino teenagers had to decide how to distribute more than $10,000 in grants to local nonprofit groups.

“They’re the philanthropists of the future,” said Denisha Shackelford, youth grant advisor for the Community Foundation.

The Youth Grantmakers program began in Riverside County in 2009, based on a similar program in Michigan.

“When I started the program, I didn’t even know what philanthropy was,” said Margaret Kumler, 16, a senior at Aquinas High School.

The San Bernardino teens met nine times over the course of the school year in monthly three-hour sessions. They surveyed students at their schools about local issues and attempted to match the issues to local nonprofit groups addressing those issues, donating up to $2,500 to each.

The San Bernardino group included students from Cajon and Aquinas high schools, who brought very different concerns to the group.

“A lot of our surveys were about college stress, but when they came back from the public schools, they surprised me,” Kumler said. “They were about depression, teen pregnancy.”

“Teen pregnancy, abuse,” Aquinas senior Cameron Cabellos, 17, agreed. “It was eye-opening.”

The students ended up giving out $10,600 to five San Bernardino-area groups, including $2,500 each for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Inland Empire, Highlander Boxing Club and Youth Action Project, along with $2,000 for YouthHope Foundation and $1,000 for Children’s Fund.

Jonathan Rodgers, who graduated from Cajon High School in June, was particularly struck by the request for help from the Highlander Boxing Club.

“They’re putting their money where their mouth is, helping kids avoid gangs,” he said.
Years of community engagement with the Grantmakers program has rubbed off on the students.

“It’s really expanded my mind,” Rodgers said. “I want to run for president in the future, and this was one of the things that helped me solidify that dream.”

His first step on the road to the White House: Majoring in Political Science at UCLA beginning this fall.

And even if the Grantmakers don’t end up in the Oval Office, the Community Foundation’s plan of creating the next generation of philanthropists may come true.

“The power of giving back has made me want to give back more,” Rodgers said. “They embody the idea of service above self. It’s all about giving to someone and not worrying about what you get back.”
Could additional parking come to the Redlands Family YMCA?

Nonprofit bought 3 homes with intent of demolishing properties to get 40-50 spaces

By Kristina Hernandez, Redlands Daily Facts

Saturday, July 29, 2017

REDLANDS >> The YMCA of the East Valley is in the process of addressing the No. 1 member complaint at its Redlands facility — parking.

The nonprofit organization recently purchased three homes on Myrtle Street with the intent of demolishing the properties to create 40-50 additional parking spaces.

“We get extremely crowded during peak times and it causes parking issues along the streets and along the back end of neighborhoods,” said Darwin Barnett, chief executive officer at the YMCA of the East Valley. “This is causing some issues with our neighbors and members who have to walk several blocks to get to the Y after parking. We have been, for some time, trying to find a solution.”

Barnett said the Y purchased all three homes about six months ago following negotiations with their former owners.

“And we’ve probably started looking at those structures several decades ago, but the opportunity wasn’t there,” he said. “And this time they fell into place.”

Two of the three homes — 253 Myrtle St. and 257 Myrtle St. — have already made it on the agendas of the city’s Historic Preservation Commission and Environmental Review Committee, according to city records.

Barnett said plans for the third property have been submitted to the city and is coming up for a hearing.

The Y is looking to demolish the properties as quickly as possible to reduce the chances of vandalism and vagrancy. Yet, the group plans to be respectful of their history by offering elements of each site to interested parties.

“We want to be sure to respect (each house) as much as we can,” Barnett said.

The Redlands YMCA has gone through several changes since the 1920s, most recently a four phrase construction project to modernize the building. The facility unveiled its upgrades, which includes renovations to The Woody Center, multipurpose room and enclosed racquetball courts, in January 2016.

Barnett is looking forward to seeing the Y’s new project become reality.

“If we could take 40 cars off the street during the night, that will really help our neighbors,” he said. “If we can control the traffic as much as we can, that’s going to benefit everybody.”
APPLE VALLEY — Frank Robinson wasn't wearing a tie on July 18.

Ten days before his retirement as the town’s “chief executive officer” — a term he applies to his job when likening municipalities to “multi-million-dollar corporations” — Robinson was, no doubt, dressed better than the Daily Press reporter interviewing him.

Still, he was casual and relaxed. Less professional than the suits he reserves for Council meetings and public events imply, a sign that the obligatory letting-it-all-hang-out jokes he's delivered recently might have taken root since he announced his departure in March.

Perhaps that's because Robinson describes himself as a “looking forward kind of guy.” A man who — after nine years as Apple Valley's town manager — will return to his home state of Texas where his wife, Lisa, has been providing care for her ailing mother.

“My immediate issue is helping get my mother-in-law settled into a memory-care facility closer to us,” Robinson said. “Handling her estate and dealing with a lot of those personal family issues, and getting those settled out.”

The family situation meant Robinson's July 28 retirement came a year ahead of his initial plan, a move that has sent the Town Council in search of a successor who will be just the fourth since Apple Valley's 1988 incorporation, according to Mayor Scott Nassif.
“The town has had a tradition of longevity in our town managers,” Nassif said during the Council’s Tuesday meeting. “We’ve been incorporated for almost 30 years, and Frank is only our third town manager in here. That’s not common, necessarily, amongst many cities.”

Longevity aside, it was the abrupt firing of Bruce Williams in September 2007 that opened the door for Robinson, and he arrived during a time when civic leadership in the High Desert was on the verge of spiralling out of control.

Between 2007 and 2009, multiple public officials, including former Hesperia City Councilman Tad Honeycutt and former San Bernardino County Assessor Bill Postmus, were arrested and charged with felonies stemming from investigations into corruption at the local and county levels.

Amid the political turmoil, Robinson started his new position as the country plunged into a financial crisis, the effects of which — slow economic recovery chief among them — are still mentioned each year in town budget documents.

In response, Robinson helped spearhead Opportunity High Desert (OHD), a collaboration between the region’s five largest municipalities meant to spur economic development in the Victor Valley. Robinson said the idea for OHD was borrowed from a similar project undertaken in Montgomery County, Texas, but added that the credit should be spread out among the region’s city managers.

“Mike Podegracz in Hesperia, myself here, Doug Robertson in Victorville, Jim Hart in Adelanto and Curt Mitchell in Barstow. We all started talking about how to pull our resources together after the demise of redevelopment agencies,” Robinson said.

“When those went away we lost that special tax. That was really devastating to cities all over the state of California. And we had to figure out, in our minds, how (to) continue to promote this High Desert.”

With former City of Hesperia Economic Development Manager Steve Lantsberger in the leadership role, OHD took to the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) conference in Las Vegas — now an annual gathering for the group — as a “united front” to “pitch and sell” the High Desert.
“We all came together and everyone wasn’t really quite sure until we had our first showing in Vegas,” Robinson said. “It was huge. A huge success. And the next year, we were in the groove now.

“This Opportunity High Desert has roots now. What I hope will happen is they will not only keep that going but really look for opportunities to further expand the exposure of the High Desert, not just to commercial retail, but also industry. Manufacturing, warehousing, there are other places to go take that show on the road.”

Robinson listed the Yucca Loma Bridge — a major selling point at this year’s ICSC — a new conference center and a “high level of professional development for the staff” as key accomplishments of his tenure.

Robinson departs, however, long before any conclusion to the town’s acquisition attempt of Liberty Utilities’ water system, an ongoing and contentious saga that has yet to pick up any kind of steam in court.

And while he didn’t mention that effort during his final remarks at Tuesday’s meeting, he did remind the Council that “exciting and challenging times” await them.

“I think you made a very good appointment for interim Town Manager (in Lori Lamson) that will keep the momentum going forward,” Robinson said.

“I commend you on ... your desire to turn over every stone in your due diligence to find a new chief executive officer for this multi-million-dollar corporation. It’s a big task. And I am certain that you will. You have a reputation, you have a legacy in this town of having long-term CEOs, long-term leaders, and I really encourage you to stay focused and try to give it your best to try achieve that again for the next go round.”

Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVdailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.
The newly selected teen advisers for a United Nations Foundation campaign called Girl Up come from three countries and 14 U.S. states — including one 16-year-old girl from Adelanto.

University Preparatory student Leslie Arroyo is one of 21 teen girls selected out of more than 400 that applied to the position through Girl Up, a “borderless movement” with nearly half a million supporters around the world that share the common goal of supporting girls.

“When I was looking online for organizations that align with my beliefs, I found Girl Up and I thought, ‘I need to be a part of something this amazing,’” Arroyo said.

Arroyo made it through the competitive process to become one of the advisers, who “help lead advocacy, provide feedback on campaign materials and energize others in support of United Nations programs serving adolescent girls in developing countries,” according to the Girl Up website.

The UP junior stood out as an involved student, being part of the Interact, Key and Spanish clubs, serving as vice president of the Running Club last year, serving on the school’s yearbook staff and taking AP and honors classes.
Arroyo noted that she and Girl Up share the common goal of simply “giving to girls.”

“We tend — here, living in the U.S. — to forget about how much privilege we have,” Arroyo said. “We wake up every day and get to go to school, when there are 130 million girls who aren’t in school. I think that is unacceptable. That’s what I’m truly passionate about changing.”

Arroyo has already taken one major step toward change by initiating the first High Desert Girl Up club at UP.

“I felt like my community definitely needed it and also, the nearest ones were more than an hour away,” Arroyo said. “I’m hoping to talk to friends at other schools to expand throughout the High Desert.”

The Girl Up club participates in discussions about global issues and fundraisers to contribute to the United Nations Foundation. For Arroyo, a significant aspect of the club is welcoming boys to participate too.

“If we want to achieve a world in which girls are values we need boys to value them as well,” Arroyo said. “We have had some boys join who are not scared to be part of a club with ‘Girl’ (in the name). That’s really, really important and I want to push that even more.”

Last week, Arroyo traveled to Washington D.C. for the first of two in-person meetings the new Girl Up advisers have together during the course of the academic year program, along with the campaign’s annual Leadership Summit.

“I was a little scared thinking, ‘Who am I?’ A 16-year-old from Adelanto. Like, do people even know where Adelanto is?” Arroyo laughed. “Three hundred and fifty girls came from more than 11 countries ... It’s not just about working together; it’s becoming friends. So at times I worried if I was going to be accepted, but they really take you in and we became so close throughout the week.”

Now the girls talk every day, texting and Snapchattting each other and sharing ideas, Arroyo said.
On their last day in D.C., the girls lobbied with their regional representative at Capitol Hill. Arroyo met with Rep. Paul Cook (R-Apple Valley) and asked him to support HR2408, the Protecting Girls’ Access to Education Act.

“He actually met with us ... It felt so great knowing that when you use your voice, they actually listen,” Arroyo said. “He did co-sponsor the bill so we are extremely thankful for that.”

In the Victor Valley, Arroyo said “one of the biggest problems we have is there are not enough opportunities for youth.”

“I didn’t have anybody to tell me to go apply for this,” she said. “We need to push girls to get more involved. I’m hoping with Girl Up, I can reach out to more organizations and provide more opportunities to make sure our youth are trying to strive for better goals.”

Throughout the next year, Arroyo will continue to advocate on behalf of United Nations programs and enhance her leadership skills in local community outreach.

“It’s not just about giving back to girls in underprivileged countries,” Arroyo said. “It’s about the girls here, and the boys too.”

Charity Lindsey may be contacted at clindsey@vvdailypress.com or 760-951-6245. Follow her on Twitter @DP_Charity.

READ NEXT
Here’s how much San Bernardino’s next city manager will make

By Ryan Hagen, The Sun

Friday, July 28, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> A contract making Assistant City Manager Andrea Miller the city manager for the next five years is on the agenda for Wednesday’s City Council meeting, two days before her boss’ scheduled retirement.

The City Council voted during closed session July 17 to offer her the position, according to the agenda, posted Thursday evening.

Miller was the city’s assistant city manager in 2012, when then-City Manager Charles McNeely abruptly resigned, leaving her as interim city manager to discover that the city would have to file for bankruptcy, then leading the city through the first six months of that bankruptcy.

She left in 2013 without removing “interim” from her title, instead taking a position as executive director of the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments.

She held that position for just over two years, then was city manager of Covina for just over one year. In 2016, San Bernardino City Manager Mark Scott re-hired her to be his assistant city manager.

“I am comforted that one of my biggest achievements was hiring back Andrea Miller as my Assistant City Manager,” Scott wrote in an open letter after announcing that he would retire effective Aug. 4. “Talk about character — she was Acting City Manager at the front end of the bankruptcy in what I am told was a toxic political environment. She eventually left, but asked to come back to lead the recovery. She is brilliant and has tremendous support at City Hall. The new management staff we are hiring deserve to know now that I will not be their future boss, but I am confident that Andrea’s reputation will encourage them.”

Scott had served in San Bernardino’s top unelected position since February 2016, but said he had to leave because of the strain of commuting daily from Rancho Mirage, where his wife lives and works.

If approved as drafted, Miller’s salary will be $253,080 per year, along with a guarantee that her salary will increase to match any employee whose salary matches that. And she would be eligible for yearly performance incentives of up to 5 percent of her salary.

If she is fired, the contract entitles her to a severance equal to one year’s pay.

That’s slightly higher than the $248,076 per year Scott received. Scott’s initial contract was for one year, and at the time of his retirement was working month-to-month with no severance agreement.

City Hall was closed Friday and Miller was not available for comment.

The City Council meeting is scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. Wednesday at 201 North E St.
A major step has been taken toward establishing passenger rail service in Redlands.

The San Bernardino County Transportation Authority’s Board of Directors has approved a $31.4 million-contract with Stadler U.S. in Utah to build three diesel multiple units to deliver the Arrow passenger rail service, also known as the Redlands Passenger Rail Project.

“We’re excited about this type of vehicle,” said Justin Fornelli, chief of transit and rail programs with SBCTA. “I think it’s the right size and appropriate for this type of service.”

The contract, approved July 12, includes vehicle construction, tools, spare parts, training for the operation and maintenance of the vehicles, Fornelli said.

The vehicles will be made in Utah, with the first one expected to arrive at the end of 2019, Fornelli said.

Operations are anticipated to start in late 2020 or early 2021, he said.

Once operating, the Arrow service will run 9 miles from the San Bernardino Transit Center to the University of Redlands. Stations are also planned for Tippecanoe Avenue, New York Street near Esri and downtown Redlands.

The vehicles will run every 30 minutes during peak morning and evening hours and every hour during off-peak hours.

A Metrolink train will make one daily round trip on the rail line, but will only stop in downtown Redlands.

Fornelli said the diesel multiple units are essentially a hybrid between a light rail and heavier locomotive.

They’re smaller, lighter and cheaper to operate than a larger locomotive and run cleaner, he said.

The cost to procure the vehicles was a little higher than expected though, Fornelli said, pushing the total project cost up by nearly $5 million.

The total project cost, which includes Measure I half-cent sales tax revenue, state, federal and private funds, is now estimated around $290 million, he said.

Councilman Jon Harrison announced the SBCTA board’s decision during the July 18 council meeting.

“That was probably the biggest step that’s been taken to date on that project, so it was a bit of a milestone,” Harrison said.
In other project news, the design is 90 percent complete, Fornelli said, and utility relocation along the rail line is expected to start in the fall.
Redlands’ water rate increases have done what was needed, utility says

Leaks declining as old pipeline is replaced, says utility director

By Sandra Emerson, Redlands Daily Facts

Saturday, July 29, 2017

REDLANDS >> One year after increasing water rates, the revenues have been what were expected, city officials say.

Rates went up 10.6 percent in July 2016, generating an additional 9.1 percent increase in revenue, helping the city cover its costs to deliver water and replace aging infrastructure.

“The reality is everything that we anticipated occurring is occurring,” said Chris Diggs, director of the Municipal Utilities and Engineering Department.

In May 2016, the City Council approved three years of rate increases. The second increase of about 10 percent went into effect this month. The third increase will be implemented in July 2018.

The additional revenue generated from the rate increases are meant to address a loss of revenue due to water conservation, needed pipeline replacements and inflation.

In 2015, the city saw a 20.1 percent reduction in water use compared with 2013. And in 2016, use went down by 23.2 percent, Diggs said.

Since the state lifted its agency-specific water conservation targets, Redlanders have continued to save water.

In fact, Diggs said, customers used 6 percent less water in 2016 than they did in 1986.

“That’s with all of the development we’ve had in the last 30 years, all of the homes that have been built, the businesses that have come to town,” Diggs said. “I think it’s impressive to note that our customers have been very diligent on conserving water as they are using 6 percent less water than they did 30 years ago.”

Diggs said operations have been cut as lean as possible and the city is still trying to get its arms around the amount of pipeline that needs to be replaced.

Prior to implementing the increase, the city had identified 25 miles of pipe that is on average more than 81 years old. The city estimated it would cost $22 million to replace the pipe.

Over the next year, the city plans to invest a little more than $7 million to construct about 8.5 miles of pipeline, Diggs said.

“With confidence I can say that we would not be putting in 8 miles of pipe if it had not been for the rate increases,” Diggs said.

Pipeline leaks have declined by a couple hundred per year from what the city was experiencing five to seven years ago, Diggs said, which is attributed to the amount of work and investment the city has put into replacing...
old pipe.

“Our pipeline maintenance costs increased significantly and now we’re starting to see those cost decrease because we’ve seen the frequency of leaks decline,” he said.

In 2016, many residents opposed the increases, but not enough to defeat the increase.

Although the council heard from more than three dozen water users opposing the rate increases, state law requires more than half of the city’s customers to submit written protests in order to stop the increases.

Carl Baker, city spokesman, said the city is keeping the promises it made to residents to improve city infrastructure and is using the money as intended.

“I want to remind the public that what we promised and showed them, we’re delivering,” he said. “I think as we do that we earn the trust of the residents.”

WATER RATE INCREASES

July 2016: 10.6 percent

July 2017: About 10 percent

July 2018: Another increase expected
Hesperia amends Crime Free Housing program

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Posted Jul 28, 2017 at 3:33 PM
Updated at 8:35 AM

HESPERIA — The City Council approved an ordinance that amended the registration and regulation of housing rental businesses in the city as it pertains to the Crime Free Rental Housing Program, essentially making the program voluntary. The move came in response to a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ordinance revision removes the mandatory prospective tenant screenings, mandatory use of a crime free lease addendum and mandatory evictions of tenants who violate criminal laws and the crime free lease addendum.

Mayor Paul Russ and Mayor Pro Tem Russ Blewett were vocal about the amended ordinance.

“It was just easier for us to capitulate after the feds changed the law on us,” Russ told the Daily Press. “The government believes criminals are a protected class and law-abiding citizens are now the bad guys.”

Blewett said the “Obama administration,” through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “changed about 20 years of policy” and now makes criminals a “protected class and more of a danger to our community.”

The Crime Free Program ordinance, which was adopted in 2015 and went into effect last year, included mandatory registrations of rental properties in Hesperia. The program was originally designed to address the disproportionate calls for service and crime emanating from rental properties.
The Sheriff’s Department reported that that nearly 90 percent of Hesperia’s homicides three years ago were committed in rental properties and that one-third of the 66,000 calls for service originated at rental properties that same year.

The newly amended ordinance provides the following:

1. Voluntary screening of prospective and current tenants.

2. Voluntary participation in notification systems that alert property owners of arrests that occur on their properties.

3. Voluntary monthly reports on law enforcement activities occurring at a particular property.

4. An appeals process for those affected by any reports and notices generated from voluntary screening and any notices relating to arrests.

While the program was principally well-received by owners of rental properties, the city received substantial negative feedback from property owners, the public and various interest groups.

The ACLU contended that the rental housing ordinance and the city’s group initial home ordinance were discriminatory and unconstitutional.

The ACLU’s current client is the Victor Valley Family Resource Center, which rented three properties in Hesperia for those on probation. It filed suit against Hesperia last year.

The nonprofit VVFRC is led by founder and CEO Sharon Green, who challenged Hesperia’s attempts to “unlawfully restrict” housing and support services for “individuals with criminal records,” according to an ACLU report.

The VVFRC attempted to resolve this matter on several occasions with the city and the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department “without going to the extent (of filing a lawsuit),” Green told the Daily Press. “Unfortunately, they left us no alternative but to have a lawsuit filed.”

Both parties would not comment on the litigation.
Regarding the transitional home operated by VVFRC and shut down by the city nearly two years ago, Blewett said, “How would you like it if you had a houseful of jailbirds living next to you?”

He went on to say, “These people can violate the law, move into any neighborhood and avoid every single law thereafter. I guess they just expect us to move aside and let them do what they want.”

Regarding the amended ordinance, Green told the Daily Press she’d like the city’s ordinance “totally removed from the books because it holds people in bondage.”

“We’ve had many success stories and our people are a testament to how lives can be transformed,” Green said. “I think if people look hard enough, they are liable to find something in anybody’s background.”

One of Green’s former homes, located in the 7800 block of Chase Avenue, was vacated in March 2015 after code enforcement took action on the house operated by VVFRC.

According to city staff, there were building and safety issues with the home that Green closed in order to comply with the city rather than obtaining a conditional use permit.

During that time, Green told the Daily Press that she moved her eight clients out of the home for their “safety and stability” after neighbors “intimidated them and kept knocking on our door” at all hours of the day.

Green shared several client success stories, including one client in his 40s who’d been on drugs since he was 9 and had just completed drug rehabilitation and was getting his life back in order.

*Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com or on Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz.*

**READ NEXT**
Rental costs spike as housing market remains weak

By Rene Ray De La Cruz
Staff Writer

Posted Jul 29, 2017 at 3:16 PM
Updated Jul 29, 2017 at 3:19 PM

VICTORVILLE — With a shortage of homes and an increase in rental costs, those looking for an affordable place to live in the High Desert are finding it a challenge.

San Bernardino County is projected to see a shortage of 65,000 homes over the next two years, meaning the amount of single-family homes, apartments, condominiums and low-income housing will fall short of what will be needed, according to the Building Industry Association.

Coupled with the housing shortage, the Inland Empire saw the country’s second-highest annual average rent increase at 6.2 percent for last month, with the average tenant in San Bernardino and Riverside counties paying $1,542 a month. The increase was bested only by Sacramento, which had a 9.4 percent increase, according to a monthly report Axiometrics, a real estate and economic forecast company.

Despite June’s average monthly rental rates increasing, the prices in the High Desert and county are still low compared to Los Angeles ($2,280) and Orange County ($2,084).

Bob Basen, vice president Coldwell Banker Commercial Victorville, told the Daily Press the numbers from the BIA and Axiometrics are accurate and reflect much of what the High Desert is experiencing.
“Developers across the High Desert are selling houses faster than they can build them, but there’s not that many homes or apartments being built,” Basen said. “With very little homes available, not much tract construction and not enough apartments — prices are going up.”

Basen said local renters are paying anywhere from $1 a square foot for older apartments to $1.25 or higher for “nicer units” built over the last 15 years. He also added that rental costs have increased at a “crazy rate” over the last few year and are the highest he’s seen in over 10 years.

“I’m not surprised the Villas 55-plus senior apartment complex in Hesperia has filled up before they even opened,” Basen said. “I’m very interested to see how the West Main Villas luxury apartments will go over considering they’re going opposite to the trend of building smaller units with lots of amenities.”

Considered luxury-style apartment living, the West Main Villas will offer single-story units with 1,074 square feet of living space and second-story units with 1,330 square feet. Some amenities include walking trails, a fitness center, kid’s play area and outdoor piazza. The housing community is scheduled to open later this year.

The Villas 55-plus apartment complex includes 96 units on 10 acres on Avenal Street, just east of Mariposa Road. The project, which is scheduled to be completed in August, includes a dog park, computer center, lap pool, clubhouse, fitness center and Jacuzzi.

Basen, along with several other industry leaders, told the Daily Press many developers continue to shy away from building apartments due to high construction costs.

“Apartment builders need to justify construction by making sure rental costs will pay for the project,” Basen said. “But when you start paying $1,200 to $1,500 a month to rent an apartment, you quickly realize you could pay for a house, but that’s another issue altogether.”

Many industry leaders said a few housing tracts, currently in the works in the High Desert, are making a dent in the lack of homes department.
In Victorville, the number of new housing permits issued in 2016 (116) saw a 41-percent increase over the previous year and there have already been 60 issued this year.

The Town of Apple Valley is expected to see a decade-high 156 housing starts this year and the City of Hesperia revealed an expected 73-percent increase in multi-family building permits (166) to be issued for the new fiscal year.

Adelanto officials recently cut the ribbon on the 65-home Stone Briar community located off Highway 395 and Cactus Avenue, a development that has already sold 32 homes despite the builder only having three model homes on site.

“Construction is making a small rebound, but we still have a job and economy issue,” Basen said. “How are these people going to pay for their homes and the price increase that comes with it?”

Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com or on Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz.

READ NEXT

Thieves attempt to steal iPhones from moving...  From coast to coast, towns anticipate...  Famed for ugly-but-cozy boots, Ugg aims for a...  Florida man robs bank, gets naked and throws...
How a San Bernardino Internship program is preparing special education students for real-world jobs

By Beau Yarbrough, The Sun

Friday, July 28, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> San Bernardino City Unified offered special education students on-the-job training this summer close to home -- in the school district.

“We have a transition services program for kids in special ed,” said Chris LeRoy, San Bernardino City Unified School District Program Specialist, who leads the program.

Over the past three years, 232 students have gotten jobs from the district’s Transition Partnership Program, including at the Amazon Fulfillment Center and San Manuel Indian Bingo & Casino. But this year, school board member Mike Gallo suggested using the district’s existing internship program to give special education students additional training in real-world work environments, side by side with potential future employers and coworkers.

“The good news is we’re kind of a gigantic employer,” LeRoy said.

The pilot program put six students with cognitive and intellectual disabilities in jobs at Jones, Henry and Roberts Elementary Schools and at a district administrative office in July.

Photos: SBCUSD trains special education students for job market in summer internship program

The students used “the skills they’ve attained at an entry level, giving them more experience in the field,” LeRoy said. “These folks have the skills, and they could move into some of these positions.”

The internships included food service, custodial and clerical work and helped prove both to students and their coworkers that the students were up to the task.

“Every time they have work experience, they’re more confident. They do a better job. It’s a self-esteem issue. But at the schools, the staff at the schools, the principals at the schools, they saw these students with moderate-to-severe disabilities have these skills and can do these jobs,” LeRoy said. “We’re kind of selling the story to ourselves. They’re skilled. They’re on time. They do a good job. They ask good questions.”

The program already is paying off for Indian Springs High School student Asante Thompson-Lake, who will work in the school’s cafeteria beginning in August.

“I’m learning how to be a good employee, like getting to work on time,” Asante, 19, is quoted as saying in a school district press release. “You have to have a job to have a future.”

Showing these students there’s a place for them in the workforce is part of what the summer internship program is all about.
“There’s jobs waiting for them,” LeRoy said. “That sounds small, but it’s kind of a kid-by-kid story.”

After this year’s successful pilot program, the internship program will be back, bigger and better, in the future.

“We have a real good game plan on how to expand it, not just as a summer program, but during the year,” LeRoy said. “We’ve had students who’ve gotten jobs in the district, but it’s not as clear a pathway as it could be.”
Inland Empire United Way board chair balances work, family, and philanthropy

By Gregory Bradbard, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Saturday, July 29, 2017

Tracy Simmons was recently elected the incoming chairwoman for Inland Empire United Way’s Board of Directors. As a mom and the Inland Empire Regional Vice President for Enterprise Rent-a-Car, managing the second largest region in the country, including 64 branches, one could ask how she manages it all.

Tracy gives much of the credit for her commitment to philanthropy and the ability to balance multiple priorities to the organizational culture at Enterprise. Like many Enterprise employees, Tracy joined the company as a management trainee straight out of college. She attended Carson Newman University in Jefferson City, Tennessee, on a softball scholarship, starting as a biology major and finishing a business-economics major. Although she initially thought she would become a banker, her now husband of 18 years was the one who convinced her to take the job at Enterprise.

They married young, during college, and she now says that Jonathan was right.

“The Enterprise culture aligned closely with my personality and values,” said Tracy. Over the coming years, Tracy quickly climbed the ladder while they built their family. She began in a local branch in Tennessee and became a regional manager before taking an associate vice president position in the corporate office in St. Louis.

During that time, Tracy and her family moved four times, and she says they were always open to a new adventure to support her career.

In 2013, Tracy was named the regional vice president for the Inland Empire, a move that brought her to Rancho Cucamonga.

Tracy is now the mom of an 11-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. Her husband has stepped into an important role as stay-at-home dad, which allows her to invest fully in being a professional.

She’s proud of being a working mother who can be a role model to young girls. Tracy says it’s not easy to balance a career and family, but it can be done. To make time for her family, Tracy and her husband calendar kids’ activities, including school and sports events, and she says that the weekends are all about family time.

Tracy also spoke about her leadership in the workplace and likened it to a coach on the softball field. “I remind my team that every day matters and that we drive to be No. 1 in the galaxy.” Apparently, it has worked. Tracy and her team have received numerous awards for their performance.

Throughout her journey, philanthropy has been a running theme.

“Enterprise introduced me to community involvement,” said Tracy. “They strongly encourage giving to charity and I’ve learned that it feels good to make a difference.”
Over the years, Tracy has served in a volunteer capacity with the Boys and Girls Club, the Urban League, the Ronald McDonald House, and the United Way. She now talks about the importance of businesses engaging their employees in community causes.

“Young recruits are now asking what our company does for the community and if they will be encouraged to volunteer on company time. It’s no longer optional. Businesses need to give back to attract and retain the best talent,” she said.

As Inland Empire United Way’s new Board Chairperson, Tracy is excited to help the organization impact even more lives right in her backyard. “The need is so great,” said Tracy. “I never knew how many kids in our community need assistance. I look forward to building toward United Way’s next chapter in the Inland Empire.”

To learn more or to join Tracy in her pursuit to help more children and families, visit www.IEUW.org.

Gregory Bradbard is president and CEO of the Inland Empire United Way

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These 3 Colton brothers are all now Hometown Heroes

By Michel Nolan, The Sun
Saturday, July 29, 2017

Sacrifices made by one Colton family were recognized Wednesday as the three brothers of the Suchil family were honored with Hometown Heroes banners.

All three military veterans served in the U.S. Army as did their father, decades ago.

Banners with photos of Van, Mark and Dale were hung a few blocks from the banner of their father, Albert Suchil, who served in World War II as a medic in the “Pacific Theater” of the war.

Albert, who died in 1963, left behind a legacy playing baseball with community and commercial ball clubs, as well as a tradition of community service.

His banner, which was hung in April 2016, is at the intersection of Laurel Street and Rancho Avenue.

These banners are important to the brothers, according to Dale, 64, who retired from the U.S. Postal Service as postmaster of Adelanto.

“After we put dad up there, we realized all of us have served in the military and wouldn’t it be good if we were all up there together — in South Colton, where we grew up,” Dale said. “We can see my dad’s banner from my mom’s house.”

Colton Mayor Richard Delarosa was part of the festivities.

“Our community is very fortunate to have veterans who were born and raised here in Colton. The banners are a good way to acknowledge those who served but we also need to keep an eye on veterans’ needs,” the mayor said. “We are proud to have the three brothers here and are thankful the city has recognized them — it’s important to the veterans.”

In all, 250 banners hang from Colton’s lamp posts.

City Councilman Luis Gonzalez, also known as “Dr. G,” read a poem he wrote for the brothers, adding that “these gentlemen made a conscious decision to serve and I honor and respect them.”

Between 80 and 100 people attended the ceremony, most of them family members, some from out-of-state.

Combined, the family has compiled many years of military service.

“I don’t think any of us know how many years this family has served,” said Hector Delgadillo, an uncle with 31 years in the Army Reserves.

Dale figures among uncles, dads, brothers and cousins, there’s more than a century of service.
The families have a history in Colton. The brothers’ grandparents, Yrineo and Luz Suchil, came to Colton in 1912 from Aguascalientes Mexico. They had 14 children. Five of the sons served in the military.

“Our dad got the nickname ‘Dynamite’ because he was an outstanding baseball player,” Dale said. “In 1936, he played for the Commercial Club team, which played at Cubs Park — also known as El Corralon (the Corral) in South Colton. In the 1940s and ‘50s, he played for the Colton Mercurys, Colton Lumber and the San Bernardino Centrals.

The Mercurys were inducted into the 2016 Colton Hall of Fame.”

Covering all his bases, Albert made a variety of Mexican candy in his garage and sold it during the games in Veterans Park.

He also played ball while in the military, playing for The Medics ball club, which went on to become the 1943 Champs So Cal AAF.

Their mother’s family, Emilio and Carmen Delgadillo, came to Colton in 1923 from Teocaltiche Mexico. They had six children. Emilio was a musician, known as “Don.” He taught students at Garfield Elementary School in South Colton, and was also director of the Wilson Jr. High Band, with an all-girl orchestra and brass bands that played at fiestas and clubs throughout the Inland Empire, Dale recalled.

His grandfather was the organist at three local Catholic churches — San Salvador and Immaculate Conception in Colton and Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Bernardino.

One of Dale’s happiest memories was going to church and listening to their grandfather on the organ, then going to the ballpark and seeing their dad play ball.

“Those were fun times,” he said.

The family-style ceremony for all the brothers was the vision of Dale.

He initiated the project for the other two brothers, who live out-of-state, said Dale’s wife, Kathy.

“Mark lives in Arkansas and Van lives in Arizona, so it was nice to have the family all together,” she said.

The banner day ended with a birthday party for the brothers’ step-dad, Mike Monraz, and their 93-year-old mother, Esperanza, who they call “Hope.”

Michel Nolan appears in The Sun on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Reach her at mnolan@scng.com or on Twitter @MichelNolan.

URL: http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20170729/these-3-colton-brothers-are-all-now-hometown-heroes

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Mountain Communities – Seven historical lookout towers can be found in the San Bernardino National Forest, offering majestic views, solitude, quiet, heroic vigilance — sending volunteers to the top to help protect us all and become the eyes of the forest.

FOREST SERVICE LOOKOUTS

The U.S. forest Service has been sending lookouts to the top of these 7 historical towers for over 100 years. These lookouts are volunteers — trained to spot wildland fires during the fire season and welcome guests to lookouts–Strawberry Peak, Keller Peak, Butler Peak, Morton Peak, Black Mountain, Red Mountain and Tahquitz Peak– from May through November.
Strawberry Peak Lookout

**Strawberry Peak** – Located off Hwy 18 in the San Bernardino Mountains near the communities of Twin Peaks and Rimforest (elev. 6,135 ft.). It gets its name from a strawberry farm owned by Bart Smithson from the 1870’s-80’s. The 30 foot tower you see today was built in 1934 and is the second tower to be built there.

**Keller Peak** – Though not the first lookout built in the San Bernardino National Forest, is the oldest remaining original tower. It is located three miles east of Running Springs, at an elevation of 7,882 feet. The lookout road and peak are named for Alley Carlin Keller, born in San Bernardino in 1868, who at one time was an employee of the Forest Service. You can view two memorial plaques at Keller Peak lookout. The first designates the 1926 built tower as a historic landmark. The second marks the spot where a B-26 bomber crashed in December 30, 1941. Some of the wreckage is still visible.

**Butler Peak** – Butler Peak, at an elevation of 8,535 ft, is located in the San Bernardino Mountains — between the town of Green Valley Lake and Fawnskin. Butler Peak was named after George E. Butler, a local politician and Bear Valley property owner. In 1970, lookout staff spotted the devastating Bear Fire that destroyed 49 homes and burned 53,000 acres from a point just south of Big Bear Dam to the San Bernardino Valley.

Morton Peak Lookout
Morton Peak – This lookout is located off Hwy 38, overlooking the cities of Yucaipa and Mentone (elevation 4,624 ft.) with spectacular views of Mill Creek leading up to Forest Falls as well as surrounding views of Mt. Palomar, Keller Meadows, Keller Cliffs and the San Bernardino Valley. Originally built in 1934, the lookout was destroyed by the Morton Fire of 1959.

Black Mountain – Is located in the San Jacinto Mountains at and elevation of 7,772 ft. Built in 1926 Black Mountain was the third lookout built in the San Bernardino Forest. In 1935, the original lookout was disassembled and rebuilt on Barton Peak. The lookout that sits on Black Mountain today was completed in 1962.

Red Mountain – Red Mountain, elevation 4,573 feet, is located in the southern part of the San Bernardino National forest southeast of Hemet. Red Mountain, named for the distinctive red granite on its peak, overlooks parts of the town of Anza, the Cahuilla Indian Reservation, Reed Valley, Bautista Canyon and has a great view of the new Diamond Valley Reservoir. This is the youngest lookout, originally constructed in 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and reopened in 1999.

Tahquitz Peak – Tahquitz Peak was a working fire lookout until the end of the 1993 fire season, and then was reopened October 1998 and staffed by volunteers. At its elevation of 8,828 feet, it is the highest lookout in the San Bernardino National Forest. It is also the forest's longest continuously operated station, serving some 77 years, and is the only lookout located inside a Wilderness area. Tahquitz was actually built entirely by hand, as all power tools are prohibited in the San Jacinto Wilderness.

JOINING THE HOST PROGRAM

The host program “helps preserve the lookouts, increase public awareness, and creates a desire among visitors to conserve and help care for the public lands.” The Southern California Mountains Foundation manages the Fire Lookout Host Program. For information on becoming a host visit SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA MOUNTAINS FOUNDATION on line.
Triple-digit heat, humid conditions and possible thunderstorms to plague Southern California this week

By Veronica Rocha

JULY 31, 2017, 7:25 AM

Scorching heat, muggy conditions and the possibility of thunderstorms will return to Southern California, making this week uncomfortable and sticky.

With triple-digit temperatures on the forecast for much of the interior valleys, mountains and deserts, the National Weather Service issued an excessive heat warning Monday. Temperatures could reach 109 degrees in the Antelope Valley and 106 degrees in the valleys.

“High temperatures will [be] quite high today with some heat risk issues today and Tuesday,” meteorologist Curt Kaplan said in a weather statement. “Overall, expect humid and hot conditions to continue through much of the week. There will be little relief from the heat overnight away from the coast through much of the week.”
An upper level high pressure system and weak northerly winds could be blamed for the intense heat, the weather service said.

If the heat wasn’t enough to activate sweat glands, forecasters says, a monsoonal flow pattern will bring humid conditions and a slight chance of thunderstorms by Tuesday.

Thunderstorms could rock the San Gabriel and Santa Barbara County mountains, and bring flash flooding to the areas.

In some areas, the increasing cloud cover will be deceiving because the “increased humidity will still lead to significant discomfort.”

The muggy conditions “will likely cause increased risk of heat-related illness,” the weather service said.

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ALSO

Man arrested in fatal stabbing of business owner in Victorville indoor swap meet

California's bullet train is likely to face more environmental hurdles after a high court ruling

Teen arrested in drunk driving crash that left expectant father dead, police say
Local News

Which of these 6 spots should Riverside choose for new $15 million Eastside library?

Children and parents watch as Rudy Gonzales performs a simple experiment as a part of Rudy’s Radical Science program at the Jesus S. Duran Eastside Library in Riverside on July 18.

By Alicia Robinson | arobinson@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

Published: July 29, 2017 at 8:00 am | Updated: July 29, 2017 at 8:37 am
A crowd of moms and a few dads waited outside Riverside's Eastside library branch on a recent morning, carrying babies and toddlers, holding them by the hand or pushing them in strollers.

When the library opened, everyone streamed in and darted to the children's area to grab a seat for story time.

Music and sing-alongs kept the kids amused, but they also highlighted a big problem with one of the city's smallest library branches: with no separate room for children, everyone in the building could hear the rattling of tambourines, beating of drums and warbling of small voices.

There are no community rooms for meetings or a summer lunch program. No teen area. No quiet study rooms at the Spc. Jesus S. Duran Eastside Library, though they're needed, said Tonya Kennon, director of Riverside's eight-branch library system.

The Eastside branch is a leased storefront in a Chicago Avenue strip mall that also includes a dollar store, hair salon and discount fashion mart. Inside, it's basically a big box.

“This kind of open space just doesn't lend itself to all of those things which are part of library services,” Kennon said Tuesday, July 25.

The city hopes to build a new branch for an estimated $15 million, but the first step is to decide where. Officials are asking the public for feedback at two public meetings in August and September about six possible sites that are vacant, for sale and big enough for a 15,000-square-foot library, which would be more than 40 percent larger than the existing one.

Four sites are along University avenue, and two are in the Sycamore Canyon area.

The first Eastside branch opened in 1998 on the other side of Chicago Avenue and offered only computer work stations. Demand was high, so in 2003 it moved to the current space and added books, movies, children's programs and other typical library fare, Branch Manager Gloria Brison said.

Some people don't want it to move, including 69-year-old Armando Salcido, who lives five blocks away and walks there once or twice a week.
“I like it right here,” he said. “You’ve got your stores around it if you’ve got to shop or something.”

Resident Clare Schrum, 75, thinks moving the library could hurt a community that hasn’t always gotten its share of resources. She told the library board at a recent meeting that money should be spent to improve the Eastside branch rather than move it.

“More thought needs to be put into what we’re offering in the (books and materials), maybe, more than the building,” Schrum said by phone.

Other patrons said they’d like a new facility with features such as family restrooms, more programs and a comfortable learning environment designed for children.

“I feel like it’s really important for the kids to know not just how important books are, but how to interact with each other,” said Marisol Ortiz, who came from Perris on Tuesday with her husband and 3- and 1-year-old daughters.

Her girls enjoy the story time, she said.

“I wish it was all five days a week.”

Brison said that, if there were more space, the library could offer more programs and services, like more computer stations and a free dental clinic that’s about to come back for the second year.

Library staff members now host toy and book giveaways in the back parking lot.

“The more we have available, the more they’ll come,” she said.

IF YOU GO

Riverside will hold two public meetings on six potential sites for a new Eastside library. It likely won’t be built for several years, but officials hope to choose a location so they can begin design.
Which of these 6 spots should Riverside choose for new $15 million Eastside library? – Press Enterprise

**Friday, Aug. 11:** 5:30 p.m., Ameal Moore Nature Center, 400 Central Ave., Riverside

**Thursday, Sept. 7:** 5:30 p.m., Cesar Chavez Community Center, 2060 University Ave., Riverside

**Information:** 951-826-5213 or tkennon@riversideca.gov.

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**Tags:** Echo Code, Top Stories PE

**ALICIA_ROBINSON**

Alicia Robinson has been at The Press-Enterprise since 2007 and has covered Riverside and local government for most of that time, but she has also written about Norco, Corona, homeless issues, Alzheimer’s disease, streetcars, butterflies, horses and chickens. She grew up in the Midwest but earned Southern California native status during many hours spent in traffic. Two big questions Alicia tries to answer with stories about government are: how is it supposed to work, and how is it working?

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LOCAL NEWS

Want a green or gold library card? Riverside jazzes up its cards

Riverside is offering new library cards in four colors.

By ALICIA ROBINSON | arobinson@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

PUBLISHED: July 29, 2017 at 8:00 am | UPDATED: July 29, 2017 at 8:34 am
Redesigned library cards are now available to Riverside library patrons — whether you’re a new customer or one of its 240,715 card holders.

The new cards come in four colors and aim to reflect the broader services and modern materials the library now offers, Riverside Library Director Tonya Kennon said.

Beyond books, movies and music, Riverside’s eight-branch library system now boasts **3D printers**, a recording studio, **science and engineering kits**, and sewing and embroidery machines. Later this year, it will add a toy lending library with interactive toys for children up to 12.

The library also is testing a Redbox-style system to store and deliver DVDs at the Main Library. Soon, self-checkout will be installed at the Orange Terrace library. Several branches offer coding classes and resources for veterans.

As officials plan two new facilities — the Main Library and the Eastside branch will be replaced in coming years — Kennon is pondering innovations such as kiosks and tablet computers that get librarians out from behind the desk. She’s also looking at treadmill stations where people can walk while they use a computer or read.

Today, the library is more than a place to check out a movie or do homework, Kennon said.
“It’s really the community living room,” she said. “It’s the gathering place.”

Check it out

Riverside is offering redesigned library cards.

**What:** The cards come in green, navy, gold and a reddish shade.

**Where:** They’re available at all eight branches.

**Why:** Having a library account allows patrons to use 3D printers, sewing and embroidery machines, a recording studio and other technology and toys, as well as to check out books and movies.

**How to get one:** Go to any neighborhood library, call 951-826-5201 or visit [www.riversideca.gov/library/](http://www.riversideca.gov/library/).

Tags: Top Stories PE

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Follow Alicia Robinson @arobinson_pe
OPINION

Prop. 47 a tough lesson in weakness of initiatives

In this Feb. 21, 2013 file photo, an inmate at the Madera County Jail is taken to one of the inmate housing units in Madera, Calif.

By MIKE GATTO | July 29, 2017 at 12:05 am
Whereas the traditional legislative process is a dialogue, a ballot initiative is more of a monologue. California's easiest-in-the-nation rules make it possible to pass an initiative without substantive discussion or broad consensus, as long as the proponent has the money to qualify one.

Largely absent from the initiative process is the chance for opponents, experts, the public and the media to express their thoughts to the drafters and seek amendments. Once an initiative qualifies for the ballot, there are no opportunities to change it, even if someone identifies a serious shortcoming. In theory, the electorate can vote "no" — if we notice an error. But once an initiative passes — if errors have gone unnoticed — the Legislature is generally powerless to fix them. Since deficiencies often manifest years later, this has produced misshapen policies for California.

2014's Proposition 47, which mandated that prosecutors could no longer charge certain crimes as felons, provides the clearest example of this style of poor policymaking. There are at least four problematic ramifications of Prop. 47, some which were foreseeable before passage, and some which were not. Shame on those who promoted it, despite those uncertainties. And shame on policymakers for not fixing the deficiencies, now that they are so clear.

First, because our overburdened criminal-justice system rarely requires those convicted of misdemeanors to serve any time, Prop. 47 hasn't really reduced the punishments for these crimes, as much as it has eliminated them. Word of this has spread, and criminals act accordingly. Stores report shoplifters meticulously calculating the value of goods to pilfer, so as to come just under the threshold to qualify for Prop. 47 leniency. And in the rare instances when a shoplifter is arrested, they are often right back at the same store the next day.

Second, Prop. 47 has profoundly affected our state's DNA database, used to solve the most serious crimes, like rape and murder. Criminals have asked the courts to destroy their DNA samples, which are already in the state's system, under the theory Prop. 47's re-classification of their crimes means that the original sampling, which was perfectly legal when performed, should be retrospectively deemed improper. Moreover, by significantly reducing the list of crimes that require DNA sampling, Prop. 47 has also helped many violent criminals evade responsibility for other criminal acts.

Third, Prop. 47 has destroyed our state's drug-rehabilitation infrastructure, because it has destroyed judges' ability to threaten consequences to coax a repeat drug offender into rehab. Previously, the specter of a felony conviction made many choose to accept court-appointed help. Now, with no such threat, convicts with serious drug problems fail to receive the help they need. Thus, Prop. 47 has hurt the very people it was designed to help.
Finally, Prop. 47 made the theft of most handguns — even if the handgun is later used in a murder — a misdemeanor. My father was murdered in 2013, and like many urban murders, his was committed with a handgun. The Los Angeles Police Department believes my father’s killer was a petty criminal and thief, the type of person who often uses cheaply acquired, previously stolen handguns. The thought that someone could have stolen a gun, and sold it to my father’s killer, but under Prop. 47, would likely never spend a day in jail was quite troubling to me. Thankfully this loophole has been closed, but many others remain.

All of these deficiencies involve the complex interplay of Prop. 47 with other laws and realities. It’s almost beside the point to remind that some of us noticed these problems before it passed. The jingoism of a statewide ballot-proposition campaign doesn’t always produce thoughtful reflection or debate. For the moment, this is our reality: the public did not notice the deficiencies and neither did the proponents — or they did, but chose to proceed anyway.

The question before us is, now that these (and other) issues are manifest, what will California do? Hopefully, we fix Prop. 47, and remember to hesitate a little before the next initiative proponent tries to sell us a false panacea.

Mike Gatto is a former four-term member of the California State Assembly. He represented the 43rd District. You can follow him on Twitter @mikegatto

Tags: Guest Commentary
Judge denies sanctions against attorney in Victorville auto dealership lawsuit

By Joe Nelson, The Sun
Friday, July 28, 2017

SAN BERNARDINO >> A Superior Court judge on Friday denied a request by lawyers for a Victorville auto dealership accused of bank fraud and racial discrimination to sanction a Riverside attorney $36,000 for essentially trying his case in the press.

Judge Donna G. Garza said defense attorney Christian Scali did not meet the burden of proof in establishing that Pelayes and his client, former Rancho Motor Company finance manager Christopher White, were extorting the embattled auto dealership by giving it an ultimatum: pay a $1.5 million settlement to White or they would “splash atrocities across the press.”

Scali was referring to a settlement demand letter by White’s previous attorney, Jim Terrell, requesting $1.5 million, which Scali said Pelayes knew about and responded to in court filings.

Shortly after White resigned from the 46-year-old, family owned Rancho Motor Company, the dealership sued him for breach of contract for allegedly stealing customer credit applications. White countersued in February, and subsequently said he kept the credit applications as evidence to prove the company engages in systemic bank fraud by using falsified customer employment and income information on the documents to secure auto loans.

White also alleges in his lawsuit that Rancho Motor Company’s top management - President and owner John Wilkins, General Manager Jason Wilkins, and co-owner Cathy Wilkins-Wilson, fostered a workplace culture rife with racism and sexual harassment, among other things.

A secret recording of a sales manager’s meeting last year emerged and was introduced as evidence in the case. It caught company owner John Wilkins, son Jason Wilkins and other employees laughing and cracking racist jokes. At least three former employees, including White, identified John Wilkins as the one heard in the recording using a racial epithet to describe one customer and saying “we need to buy sheets and some gasoline.”

Scali argued the recording was done illegally, without the consent of the employees, and amounted to criminal conduct. In a court document, he said that had employees known the meeting was being recorded they would not have participated in the conversation, noting the declarations of sales managers Travis Palmer and Dustin Keaton.

Scali also accused former Rancho Motor Company team leader and retired San Bernardino County sheriff’s sergeant Danny Braun, through a “process of elimination,” of being the one who produced the recording.

“He’s the only one who hasn’t denied it,” said Scali. “So that means that Braun, who is also under this court’s jurisdiction under a deposition subpoena, is the one who committed the illegal act.”
He said Pelayes failed to ask Braun at his May deposition if he recorded the sales managers meeting or if he knew who did?

On that basis, Scali argued the court should suppress the recording as evidence.

Pelayes said, “The issue of expectation of privacy is to be decided by a jury.” He said the evidence was “wholly insufficient” to make a criminal determination, and that a number of exceptions apply when it comes to making such clandestine recordings.

Garza ultimately denied Scali’s request.

“I know there’s lots of accusations of who you believe it is and how it’s getting there. I have no evidence of it, just theories,” Garza said.

Following Friday’s proceedings, Pelayes said, “I don’t remember ever denying I killed Kennedy, but it doesn’t make me a suspect by process of elimination, and that is the logic that he (Scali) was trying to use today in court.”

Rancho Motor Company John Musella did not respond Friday to a request for comment.

In other matters, Pelayes told Garza he did not want Scali to continue accusing him of illegal conduct.

“I don’t want to be accused of any further crimes unless he’s got specific evidence,” Pelayes said. “This is outrageous. How long is he going to get away with this?”

Garza said there are state bar proceedings to take those issues up.

“This court is interested in making sure both parties have an opportunity to come into this courtroom, present their positions based on this court’s ruling on what it feels is appropriate and fair based on the law as to what’s presented,” Garza said.

Garza scheduled the next pretrial hearing for Nov. 15.
Dozens of convictions tossed out of Southern California courts because of prosecutors’ bad behavior, Harvard study says

By Tony Saavedra, Orange County Register

Saturday, July 29, 2017

The gavels had fallen, the cases appeared closed:

Marsha Kay Esswein was found guilty of stabbing to death her 82-year-old husband in Riverside County.

Christopher James Lloyd was convicted in Orange County of knifing a man in a hotel room.

Roshawn Anthony Charles was found guilty in Los Angeles County of aggravated assault by a gang member.

Jonis Centeno was convicted in San Bernardino County of committing lewd acts on a 7-year-old child.

Except, it turned out, they weren’t closed at all. From 2010 through 2015 all of these convictions, and dozens more, were tossed out on appeal because of prosecutorial misconduct, that is, cheating by prosecutors to win in court.

Though it’s common for court cases to end with defendants or their lawyers claiming bad behavior by prosecutors, actual legal findings of prosecutorial misconduct — decisions reached by a judge and entered into the record — are rare. It is rarer still for justices — usually in the state Supreme Court or appellate court — to reverse convictions because of misconduct.

But a new study by Harvard Law School’s Fair Punishment Project shows Southern California ranks high in reversals in which misconduct by a prosecutor played a factor. And the embattled Orange County District Attorney’s Office has the state’s worst record based on population.

It’s not just Orange County prosecutors who run afoul of the law. The study found that Los Angeles County has the state’s second worst record and Riverside County ranks fifth, while San Bernardino and San Diego counties are tied for ninth.

Legal scholars say the study shows serious flaws in Southern California’s justice system.

“Reversals are an indication of a bigger problem. The case was so egregious that a court determines years later that it wasn’t a fair trial,” said Daniel Medwed, a professor at Northeastern University School of Law. “A high rate of reversals from a single office may be a sign of a problematic, overly-aggressive prosecutorial culture in that organization.”

Prosecutorial misconduct can include withholding evidence from defense attorneys, misleading juries, participating in the presentation of false evidence by police and removing potential jurors on the basis of race.
Experts say it is difficult to prove misconduct and harder still to show the misconduct was not a “harmless error” that didn’t affect the outcome of the case. Though prosecutors make mistakes, and some prosecutors break or bend the rules, the process of reaching a misconduct finding involves a combination of research and dumb luck, according to legal experts.

“Most of the time, if there is a … violation, nobody finds out about it,” said Laura Fernandez, a research scholar and Senior Liman Fellow in residence at Yale Law School.

“You’re only ever seeing the tip of the iceberg.”

And sometimes it takes decades for the misconduct to surface.

Take the case of Los Angeles gang member Barry Glenn Williams. It took more than 30 years for a federal judge in 2016 to overturn Williams’ murder conviction and death sentence because the Los Angeles County prosecutor withheld the true name and address of a witness from the defense and failed to correct false testimony. Williams’ case was not included in the Harvard study.

The prosecutor in the Williams case, Carmen Trutanich, went on to serve as Los Angeles City Attorney from 2009 to 2013. Trutanich, 65, now faces discipline by the State Bar of California for allegedly cheating to win a conviction against Williams, accused in the fatal shooting of a bicyclist in the mid 1980s.

In Orange County, the overturned convictions add more heat to an office already under fire.

Orange County District Attorney Tony Rackauckas’ office is under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice and the California Attorney General’s Office for allegations that prosecutors and police developed a network of jailhouse informants to illegally garner confessions from inmates. It is a civil rights violation to use informants against defendants who have attorneys and have been formally charged.

Orange County prosecutors also are accused of withholding favorable evidence from defense attorneys, especially evidence pertaining to informants.

Orange County’s “snitch scandal” has rocked the local justice system, prompting one judge to ban Rackauckas and his office from prosecuting the worst mass murderer in county history. Scott Dekraai, who pleaded guilty to murdering eight people in a Seal Beach shooting rampage, is now being prosecuted in the penalty phase by the state attorney general’s office. Superior Court Judge Thomas Goethals is poised to take the death penalty off the table for Dekraai because of concerns that informants were improperly used and informant-related documents were shredded.

At least six murder and attempted murder cases in Orange County have resulted in overturned convictions, lowered sentences and dropped charges because of problems with informants and the withholding of evidence. None of those cases involved official findings of intentional misconduct by prosecutors.

The Orange County Grand jury has declared the scandal “a witch hunt” and a “myth,” while appellate justices and Goethals say the improper use of informants in the county is real and systemic.

The scandal helped spur Harvard to study the rate of prosecutorial misconduct in Orange County and, to give that data some context, the rest of California. Harvard’s Fair Punishment Project also looked at DA offices in New Orleans, St. Louis and Memphis.

The study found Orange County had 24 misconduct findings from 2010 to 2015, and seven reversals in which misconduct was a factor. That amounts to over one reversal a year. By comparison, the Orange County District Attorney’s Office completed 693 criminal trials in 2016.

While that ratio may be low, the stakes are high, according to Bennett L. Gershman, a professor at Pace Law School in New York and one of the nation’s leading experts on prosecutorial misconduct.
“To me, any reversal is a big deal,” said Gershman, a former prosecutor and author of two books on misconduct and judicial ethics. “I don’t think prosecutors make mistakes. I think they know what they are doing.

“If an appellate court reverses a case (because of) prosecutorial misconduct — any time — that’s a serious matter,” he added. “Finding misconduct is a laborious and a difficult pursuit.”

Michelle Van Der Linden, spokesperson for Rackauckas, said the Harvard study is flawed.

“Based on the fact the authors of this report are criminal defense attorneys, who are typically anti-law enforcement, they didn’t contact our office for any information, but simply relied on news articles versus actually doing their own research, makes their findings non-credible,” Van Der Linden said. When told the researchers based the study on appellate court rulings, Van Der Linden said she stood by her statement.

Gershman said the reversals, coupled with the informant scandal, might offer insight into the inner workings of the Orange County District Attorney’s Office. “The jailhouse scandal may be indicative of the ethos, the culture of prosecutors in (that) county.”

Professor Medwed, who wrote the book “Prosecution Complex: America’s Race to Convict and Its Impact on the Innocent” — and who serves as a legal adviser for the Fair Punishment Project — said Orange County’s seven reversals in six years is problematic.

“Even if seven cases in the abstract does not seem large, in the context of reversals for prosecutorial misconduct, it’s quite significant,” he said. “It is very alarming.”

Misconduct also can be a key factor in a guilty verdict.

In the case of Christopher James Lloyd, the man convicted in the knife attack, an Orange County prosecutor told the jury that a verdict of “not guilty” would mean Lloyd didn’t do it, playing on a common misconception. In truth, according to the appellate opinion, a “not guilty” verdict could also mean that the prosecutor did not prove his case beyond a reasonable doubt.

“Had the prosecutor not misstated the law, there is a reasonable probability the jury would have returned a more favorable verdict for defendant,” the ruling said.

Around Southern California, the Fair Punishment Project found 78 misconduct findings in Los Angeles County during the six-year-study period, with 22 reversals in which misconduct was a factor. There were 32 findings of misconduct in Riverside County and four reversals; 11 findings in San Diego County with three reversals, and nine findings in San Bernardino County with two reversals. Statewide, the study found 269 findings of misconduct with 54 reversals in which misconduct was a factor.

In Riverside County, justices ordered a new murder trial for Marsha Kay Esswein because the prosecutor, Christopher R. Ross, told jurors in his opening statement that the killing was premeditated — but didn’t provide evidence to back that statement during trial.

Ross, who left the district attorney’s office, was referred to the state bar for potential discipline.

In the case of alleged gang member Roshawn Anthony Charles, the Los Angeles County prosecutor improperly introduced evidence that an accomplice pleaded no-contest to similar charges. Appellate justices later determined the tactic tainted the jury. Charles later pleaded no contest before he could be retried.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office declined to comment.

In the case of Jonis Centeno, who was accused of child molestation, a San Bernardino County prosecutor presented improper evidence intended to sway the jury.
“Given the closeness of the case and the lack of any corrective action, there is a reasonable probability that the prosecutor’s argument caused one or more jurors to convict defendant based on a lesser standard than proof beyond a reasonable doubt,” said the state Supreme Court in the Centeno ruling.

By the time justices reversed his conviction, Centeno had already served his sentence.

Legal experts say prosecutors are rarely punished for legal misconduct. In fact, most appellate rulings don’t even name the offending prosecutor. A California law enacted last year could send prosecutors to jail for intentionally withholding or falsifying evidence. However, scholars says, it is hard to prove the misconduct was done willfully.

The State Bar of California also has initiated an ethics rule that disciplines prosecutors who do not hand over evidence that they know is beneficial to the defense. An Orange County prosecutor, Sandra Lee Nassar, is facing discipline by the bar for allegedly failing to disclose evidence in a 2013 child abuse case in order to obtain a strategic advantage.

“Right now, there’s an argument that prosecutors are being aggressive. And, in the back of their minds, the chance of reversal is really low (they’re thinking) ‘let’s take that chance,’” Medwed said. “Many (prosecutors) have convinced themselves they aren’t doing the wrong thing. ‘The guy’s guilty. I don’t think it violates (disclosure laws). I’m going to go for it.’”

“Sometimes it’s for the broader good, like protecting the public, putting a bad guy behind bars,” Medwed added.

A 2011 Yale Law journal said because penalties are so rare, and the stakes so high, prosecutors are routinely tempted to cheat. The journal wrote: “Knowing that ‘minor’ misconduct is unlikely to jeopardize a conviction on appeal, prosecutors may be more likely to bend the rules in the pursuit of victory.”

In addition to looking at Rackauckas, the Harvard study also looked at other troubled chief prosecutors in New Orleans, Memphis and St. Louis.

“What we found is noteworthy. These four prosecutors, and the people who work with them, have repeatedly violated their constitutional and ethical duties, shattering the lives of the defendants and their families,” said the report.

In New Orleans, elected District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro came under fire for issuing fake subpoenas to trick reluctant witnesses to testify. According to the Fair Punishment Project, Cannizzaro’s prosecutors also repeatedly hid evidence showing that his office had made deals with informant witnesses, and failed to turn over crucial materials to defense lawyers in a timely manner.

Cannizzaro’s office had the second worst ranking in Louisiana for reversals per capita in which prosecutorial misconduct played a role.

The report also said city of St. Louis Circuit Attorney Jennifer Joyce defended a prosecutor in her office who had at least 25 misconduct allegations. Joyce’s office was ranked fourth per capita in Missouri for reversals in which prosecutorial misconduct was a factor.

In Memphis, Shelby County District Attorney General Amy Weirich was privately reprimanded after the Tennessee Supreme Court concluded she withheld key evidence from the defense in a murder trial, according to news accounts and the Harvard report. Weirich’s office was ranked sixth per capita in Tennessee for reversals in which prosecutorial misconduct played a role.
Gary Shelton tossed clothes, a wooden bed frame, a director’s chair and cardboard boxes stuffed with papers from his community-activist campaigns.

Other clothes the 68-year-old Long Beach man washed, dried and bagged.

Then he waited. And waited. And waited.

An exterminator sprayed his ninth-floor Plymouth West apartment three times for bedbugs — December, January and February.

“If there is any evidence of bedbugs, they treat again,” he said.

Finally, in March, Shelton was given “the all-clear.”

“It’s like living out of an overnight case for three months,” he said of the lengthy process.

Comeback bug

Experts say the reddish-brown bedbug, which is about the size and shape of an apple seed, has made an extraordinary comeback after a roller coaster of a century.

In the early decades of the 1900s, the bug was widespread across the U.S. But the advent of DDT during World War II changed that, killing off huge numbers in the 1940s and ‘50s.

“We thought it was gone forever,” said Dini Miller, professor of entomology at Virginia Tech. “When you think about it now, that was kind of stupid.”

After lying low for decades, the dreaded insect that was mentioned in medieval European literature has been enjoying a renaissance of sorts since 2000.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, they’re in apartments, houses, shelters, college dormitories, cruise ships, buses and trains. They typically live within an 8-foot crawl of where people sleep.

If you thought your car was a refuge from the blood-sucking pests, guess again. Miller said bedbugs are fond of automobiles — for good reason.

“The food comes and sits down on a regular basis,” she said. “And everybody gets something to eat.”
But you don’t know when your blood is being slurped through the bedbug’s version of a straw — an elongated beak — for a meal. The Centers for Disease Control say the bug injects an anesthetic and anticoagulant that renders its bite painless.

Itchy bite marks can appear in a few days. They are similar to marks from a mosquito or flea bite — a slightly swollen and red area, the Centers for Disease Control said.

“They do not transmit any diseases,” said Dong-Hwan Choe, an urban entomologist and assistant professor of entomology at UC Riverside.

The bugs feed mostly at nighttime, “which creeps people out,” Choe said.

And don’t think you can fool them if you work a graveyard shift and sleep during the day.

“Sleeping with the lights on is also not likely to deter hungry bed bugs,” University of Kentucky entomologist Michael Potter wrote in a 2015 article, “Your Guide to Bed Bugs.”

A feeding takes three to 10 minutes, according to Potter. Then the bug crawls back into its hiding place to digest the meal. Its flat body enables it to hide in tiny crevices in mattresses, box springs and bed frames.

Unlike other insects, bed bugs can’t fly. But they can crawl more than 100 feet in a night.

The nation’s big bad bedbug blow-up can be traced to a number of factors, experts say: DDT is long gone; the EPA banned it in 1972.

Even so, the bugs were building up resistance to DDT, Miller said. And they are building up a defense against insecticides being used today.

Some have developed thick, protective skins. Others produce enzymes that break down toxic ingredients and render insecticides harmless.

“We like to call those the hard drinking bugs,” she said.

Still other bedbugs have mutated.

“They meet, fall in love and make other genetically immune babies,” Miller said.

**Inland Empire bedbugs in decline**

Bedbug outbreaks reported to the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health have actually gone down in recent years, according to spokeswoman Lana Cao.

In 2015, the department received 188 calls regarding bedbugs. In 2016, that had dropped to 163. And as of July 17, the department had heard only 71 complaints.

Cao suspects educational programs offered by the department’s mosquito and vector control program are part of why reported outbreaks are declining in San Bernardino County.

“The education is super helpful,” she said. “They let you know what they look like and what to look for.”

Still, that’s of little comfort to those covered in itchy bites delivered by surprise bedroom guests.

“Once you get an infestation, it’s pretty bad because they spread like wildfire,” Cao said. “They don’t really transmit any diseases. God forbid if it does.”
Riverside County’s Department of Environmental Health does not track calls related to bedbugs, but provides educational information and directs callers to pest control companies instead. But calls for service in Riverside County have been going up for Green Dog Pest Service, according to owner Deanna Sparks Kjorlien.

“It’s gone up, for our inspection business, 50 percent over the past year,” Kjorlien said. “We’re getting twice as many calls for Riverside County.”

Her company, which was founded in Hemet, but moved to Solano Beach earlier this year, uses bug-sniffing dogs to detect bedbugs.

She attributes the rise to changes in bedbugs and changes in Inland Empire residents:

“The bugs are building up a resistance (to insecticide), and there’s a lot more travel,” Kjorlien said. “Any time you have travelers and anyone who has their luggage with other luggage, going from hotel to hotel, the nature of bed bugs is that they’re hitchhikers.”

And even when Inland Empire residents are staying home, more are living closer to other people.

“We’re not all single-family residences in the Inland Empire any more,” Kjorlien said. “There’s lots of apartments and shared-wall houses.”

And that’s especially true at senior living communities, such as the Plymouth West community in Long Beach.

“They go from apartment to apartment to see their friends. Or they go to the shared dining hall,” Kjorlien said of residents. “If one person gets infested, it’s spread. If you don’t get all the apartments treated, everyone gets them.”

L.A. region a hot spot

As for the region overall, Los Angeles is the nation’s sixth-worst metro area for bedbugs, according to Atlanta-based Orkin. In the pest control firm’s 2017 ranking, L.A. followed Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York and Columbus, Ohio.

For the Orkin survey, the L.A. area was defined as Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties.

Miller noted Terminix puts out an annual ranking, too. In its most recent report, Detroit was No. 1 on the list. L.A. was No. 4.

“You have to take all of this with a grain of salt,” Miller said. “But, it’s one of the few indicators that we have.”

There’s no denying that Shelton’s home is in one of the hardest-hit properties.

Davis said 84 of Plymouth West’s 196 units have been treated in the past 12 months.

Some units have been treated multiple times.

“A friend was over and noticed a live bug in the middle of the bed spread,” Shelton said.

He was stunned. “I wasn’t getting bites that I was aware of,” he said. But he promptly called the apartment manager.

After seeing one, he started seeing a lot more bugs.

“Once you see them, you’ll see them in your mind,” Shelton said. “You’ll see them everywhere.”
Staff writer Beau Yarbrough contributed to this story.

BEDBUG (NOT SO FUN) FACTS

• Size: 1mm to 7mm, roughly the size of Lincoln’s head on a penny
• Color: Reddish brown, similar in coloration to apple seed
• Food: Human blood
• Home: Within 8 feet of sleeping quarters. Known to live in apartments, houses, hotels, shelters, cruise ships, buses, trains and dormitories
• Travel: Can’t fly or jump, but can crawl fast — up to 100 feet per day
• Bite: Similar to mosquito, flea bites; does not carry disease
• Evidence of presence: Bedbugs in folds of mattresses and sheets, rusty-colored blood spots; a sweet, musty odor
• Treatment: insecticide, heat; significant preparation required of home occupants in advance; professional treatment recommended
• No-nos: Do not spray bed sheets, blankets or clothes; do not apply bleach or alcohol. Applications of rubbing alcohol have sparked fires.

Sources: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; “Your Guide to Bed Bugs,” by Michael Potter; news reports


© 2017 Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (http://www.dailybulletin.com)
Another year went by without the City of Bakersfield having to cut services due to ballooning pension costs but the way things are trending, those years may be coming to an end.

The city’s pension costs have been steadily rising every year since 2011-12 — when they were $28.1 million — due to several things including the Great Recession, a push to get closer to being fully funded and the California Public Employees Retirement System not receiving the rate of return on investments it expected.

This fiscal year the city expects to spend $42.1 million on pensions, a rise of $2.4 million from last year. Next year’s bill is projected to increase by another $6.5 million.

So what’s that mean for Bakersfield residents? A city that could struggle to keep up with its considerable growth, officials say.

“Can we add more staff? These are costs,” Assistant City Manager Steve Teglia said. “We’ve been holding the line on staffing levels.”

Teglia said the city facing stagnant revenues and rising pension costs is a factor in them holding the line on staffing levels.

Those staff collect your trash, treat your water and mow city park grass.

The city was able to add three more police officers and one solid waste employee for this fiscal year. But those employees will not be paid for with general fund money.

The city and state have taken steps to reduce their pension costs in the future. Recently hired city employees do not have retiree health-care benefits, must pay more of the pension cost burden and have to work longer to receive their benefits.

But even with those reforms, the city’s contributions to CalPERS are rising.

**Why are CalPERS costs rising?**
It doesn't help that people are living longer, but CalPERS has not met its target rate of return on investments for the last two years.

So now the state pension system has set a new lower rate of return to meet, and employers, aka cities, counties and the state, must fill the gap.

“We are very much in a position where we have to be responsive to decisions that CalPERS makes,” Teglia said.

In this case, it’s balancing increasing CalPERS obligations with fairly flat revenue coming from sales and property taxes.

City Manager Alan Tandy said in his FY 2017-18 budget message that these “unanticipated cost increases create significant challenges” in addressing other needs within the city.

As Bakersfield Finance Director Nelson Smith said, the city would direct any new revenue it receives to pay CalPERS costs, and then deal with adding staff.

The City of Bakersfield lost about 160 employees from FY 2008-09 to 2009-10. The number of employees is now higher than its lowest point of 1,441 in FY 2010-11 at 1,525 employees.

But the city’s population has grown by nearly 28,000 people from 2010 to 2016, according to U.S. Census data. And Tandy said the city is adding more than 50 new homes a month with 1,472 homes that have been built since the last solid waste employee was added.

**Historically**

Before 2002, CalPERS was “super-funded” and the City of Bakersfield did not pay anything for its employees’ pensions. Projections during that time led the city to retroactively sweeten pension benefits for all employees.

But then the dot.com bust hit and the city had to start paying again. Between 2006-7 and 2010-11, costs stayed relatively flat, between $23.6 million and $25 million. They’ve been going up ever since.

Around 2010, before the state-instituted “PEPRA,” the city negotiated and asked voters to lower pension benefits for city employees. This eliminated health care benefits, required them to pay more and work for more years to receive their benefits.

In addition to holding the line on hiring, the city has put aside $500,000 in this fiscal year’s budget for anticipated increases in CalPERS costs, and Smith said city finance and city manager staff have made clear to the City Council their concerns of costs increasing faster than the revenue stream.

“It’s never a good idea to have ongoing expenditures without ongoing revenues to sustain them,” Teglia said.
City Council members have talked about similar efforts to understand what the city will be dealing with several years later. For example, Ward 4 Councilman Bob Smith asked city staff after passing the budget to prepare a projection of where the city will be in five years.

Smith said the biggest problem facing the city for the last couple of years has been the economy, with a downturn in the oil and agriculture industries.

The northwest Bakersfield councilman said with CalPERS and health care costs predicted to rise, it would be good to have an idea of where the city is going.

“If you have a contracting economy,” Smith said and named those rising costs, “and stuff’s going up, how are we going to deal with it?”

Meanwhile, he doesn’t think pension costs have determined budget decisions so far.

The newest councilman, Bruce Freeman, said it’s a good start to begin a conversation about CalPERS.

“I think any reasonable person who reads (the budget) is going to go, ‘Oh, we’re going to have a problem,’” Freeman said.

Freeman, the former president of the land-planning company Castle & Cooke’s mainland division, made a point of talking about the city’s pension costs during his campaign for the Ward 5 City Council seat that opened up after Jeff Tkac’s death earlier this year. Freeman took office June 28.

“I don’t think people should panic today,” Freeman said. “They should work to fix these problems.”

He did not want to offer a solution when he might not yet have all the information, but Freeman said “we’re going to have to wrap our brains together to create solutions.”

Bakersfield is not alone. Rising employer pension costs are something every city and county that contracts with CalPERS is dealing with. Even the state of California, which contracts with CalPERS, is talking about the increase in its unfunded liability.

Finance Director Smith said that while the current CalPERS cost projections seem to just keep rising — from about $42 million in fiscal year 2017-18 to $68.5 million in FY 2022-23 — at some point those costs should level out.

Tandy announced Friday some “good news” from CalPERS as the system beat rate of return projections by hitting 11.2 percent.

“This information is positive news,” he wrote, “but due to CalPERS calculation methodologies and timing issues, the benefits to the City of these positive investment returns will not be reflected in the City’s CalPERS rates until Fiscal Year 2019-20.”