

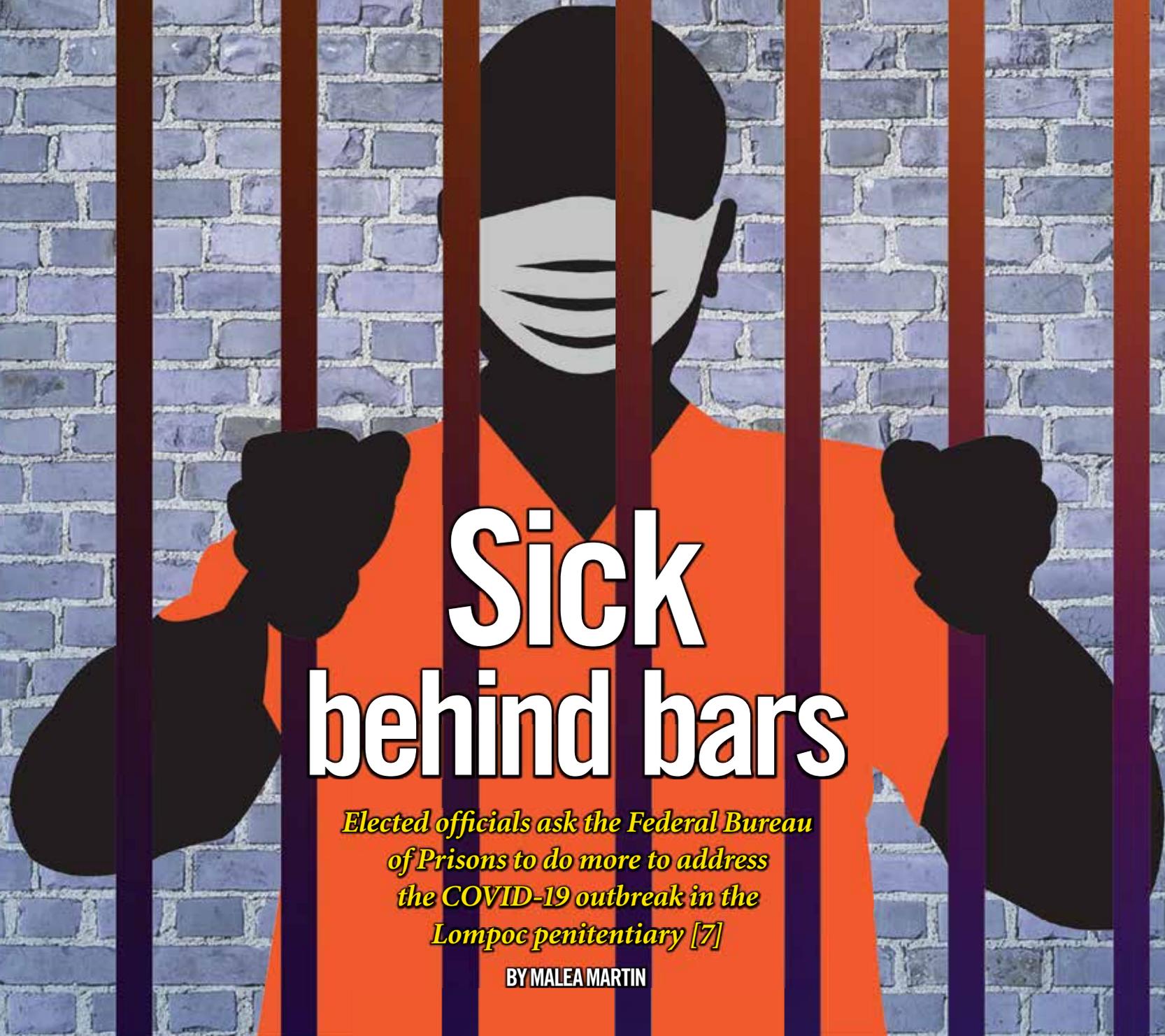
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AT THE MOVIES



Pandemic is prescient [15]

SUN



Sick behind bars

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of Prisons to do more to address
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BY MALEA MARTIN

NEWS County continues looking for more library funding [8]

ARTS Nipomo author invites locals into her fictional world [12]

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The COVID-19 outbreak at the U.S. Penitentiary in Lompoc is the third worst of any Federal Bureau of Prisons facility in the nation. Prison leadership is starting to work toward remedies, such as constructing a field hospital to house the inmates who need care, but it could take several more weeks. State elected officials are pushing the bureau to do more quicker, and hoping that other local detention facilities, such as the California Men's Colony can learn from the Lompoc pen's mistakes. Staff Writer Malea Martin has the story for you [7].

This week, you can also read about how the county could fill a more than \$600,000 library funding deficit [8], a monthly subscription to a fictional newspaper that will take you to another world [12], Orcutt's rock game [14], and the best way to support and imbibe local beer [16].



CAUGHT: Santa Barbara County officials want to turn the tide on the COVID-19 outbreak at the Lompoc penitentiary.

Camillia Lanham
editor

Cover design by Alex Zuniga

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Political Watch

• **Gov. Gavin Newsom** announced in an April 15 press conference that California will become the first state to offer direct disaster assistance to undocumented people who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten percent of the state's workforce is undocumented, Newsom said, and undocumented workers make up a disproportional number of those working in essential industries like health care, agriculture and food, manufacturing and logistics, and construction. Last year, the governor stated, undocumented Californians paid more than \$2.5 billion in local and state taxes. Undocumented workers do not qualify for unemployment insurance, nor do they receive money from the federal stimulus package. "We feel a deep sense of gratitude for people that are in fear of deportation but are still addressing the essential needs of tens of millions of Californians," Newsom said in the press conference. The funding for the assistance will come from \$75 million of taxpayer dollars as well as \$50 million from philanthropic fundraising efforts. Individuals can qualify for up to \$500 of assistance, and households up to \$1,000. Newsom said that the aid will provide relief "for those individuals that are, quite literally, putting themselves on the line in helping support this economy and those most in need at this moment."

• **U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal** (D-Santa Barbara) and all members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus sent a letter on April 15 "calling on congressional leadership to include protection and financial assistance for farmworkers in future legislation to slow the spread of coronavirus," an April 16 press release stated. "Farmworkers are essential front-line workers, and our nation's food supply is dependent on their well-being." The letter was addressed to **House Speaker Nancy Pelosi**, **Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell**, **House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy**, and **Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer**. "During this crisis, our front-line farmworkers are laboring every day to put food on America's dinner table and maintain the world food supply," the letter stated. "As this virus threatens the resiliency of our food supply chains, it has never been more important to ensure the well-being of our agricultural producers and workforce."

• On April 14, **Gov. Gavin Newsom** unveiled the parameters that California will have to meet before he would consider lifting the state's stay-at-home order. "Any consideration of modifying the stay-at-home order must be done using a gradual, science-based, and data-driven framework," the press release announcing the indicators stated. The six indicators include: "The ability to monitor and protect our communities through testing, contact tracing, isolating, and supporting those who are positive or exposed; the ability to prevent infection in people who are at risk for more severe COVID-19; the ability of the hospital and health systems to handle surges; the ability to develop therapeutics to meet the demand; the ability for businesses, schools, and child care facilities to support physical distancing; the ability to determine when to reinstate certain measures, such as the stay-at-home orders, if necessary," the press release states.

• **Assemblymembers Jordan Cunningham** (R-San Luis Obispo) and **Monique Limón** (D-Santa Barbara) co-signed a letter on April 14 requesting that **Gov. Gavin Newsom** allocate \$10 million to help domestic violence centers during the pandemic. "While crime rates have dropped during the statewide safer-at-home order, there has been an increase in domestic violence calls, and shelters have struggled to keep up with demand for services," Cunningham wrote in a Facebook announcement of the letter. ○

Increase in 211 calls signals that community members want help, program manager says

Even outside of times of disaster, Santa Barbara County's health and human services information line—accessible by dialing 211—is always there to help by connecting callers with resources like housing, food, health care, transportation, and more. But during times of increased and unprecedented need, these services become a vital community resource. In the last two weeks of March alone, 211 saw a 300 percent increase in calls.

The Community Action Commission—the organization that runs 211 in Santa Barbara County—had to find a way to bring in additional call specialists to meet increased need while also adhering to social distancing protocols.

"We did have to set up a way where not only did we bring in additional call specialists, but we also had to work remotely," said 211 Program Manager Elisa Pardo. "Our community sees this service seamlessly: They don't know of the transition. They continue to access this centralized line, 24/7, and access information with a live human on the other end providing that information to them at all times."

Pardo said that for the call center's staff, working extended hours is something they've come to expect in times of crisis, especially after the county went through the Thomas Fire and Montecito mudslide, when 211 received 7,000 calls in one week. And this time, the difficulties aren't limited to one area of the county.

"Everybody, in one way or another, is being impacted," Pardo said. "As we go through these days, there's some days harder than others. The demand is high, and we're trying to do our best to answer every single call and connect individuals to our existing resources."

But the situation has also brought out something positive: The feedback from the community, Pardo said, keeps her and her staff going. There's one voicemail in particular left by an older gentleman that Pardo often goes back to.

"About an hour ago one of your wonderful people, a lady, left a food delivery after knocking at my door. I caught a glimpse of her walking away, and I hollered out, 'Thank you!' I'm pretty sure she heard me," the man says, his voice distorted a bit by a poor phone connection.

"It's wonderful what you're doing," he continues. "It doesn't happen unless people really put their best. ... The work and all the organization it takes to do something like this. ... The silver lining to the tragedy is going to be the renewed sense of community ... because of people like you."

Pardo said, "It's that little recording that keeps me going. That says there is someone out there who is appreciating what is happening and that we've made a difference."

While the help line is seeing high utilization and appreciation right now, Pardo said that in the past, she wondered if enough community members knew about 211 as a resource. The call line is available in 98 percent of the county. It can connect resources to callers in more than 150 languages. In the county specifically, the language line makes Mixteco translation and access possible; 211 can even be reached by texting one's area code to 898211.

"Not a lot of people knew of 211, and I feel that in this situation, we are able to demonstrate that this is an existing, valuable resource that has been in our community," Pardo said. "We have additional people calling us that normally would not call into 211."

As the anonymous caller said, perhaps the silver lining to COVID-19 is that community resources like 211 will emerge stronger than ever once the pandemic has passed.



HERE TO HELP: 211 is available in 98 percent of the county to connect people to resources such as housing, health care, food, and more.

"We will be here after the event as well, so this is definitely a valuable tool in our community that we are able to adapt to our community needs at all times," Pardo said.

—Malea Martin

County outlines economic reopening plan development

A week after Gov. Gavin Newsom identified six indicators determining when to change the existing stay-at-home order, Santa Barbara County officials have released the first steps of their own reopening plan.

During the Board of Supervisors meeting on April 21, Assistant County Executive Officer Nancy Anderson said that over the next four to six weeks, county staff plans to work with REACH—which is the new iteration of the economic development group formerly known as the Hourglass Project—on developing a plan for reopening the county's economy.

In addition to working with REACH, county staff will receive input from representatives of local governments, school districts, businesses, and medical professionals. County staff and the stakeholders involved will work together to create a plan that'll be presented to county Public Health Director Van Do-Reynoso.

"We will be developing a strategic phased reopening plan that complies with national and state guidance," Anderson said. "It will outline the steps that can be taken safely as we deal with the epidemic transmission brought under control, and we will include tools and approaches to target infection containment under less restrictive orders."

During the press conference where he announced the six indicators the state developed, Newsom said the most important piece of the framework is the ability to expand testing and trace and track individual cases of COVID-19. Other indicators include the ability to protect the most vulnerable from the virus; for hospitals to handle a surge in cases; and for businesses and schools to function while supporting physical distancing; as well as the development of therapeutics.

Fourth District Supervisor Peter Adam said the county should interpret this framework liberally or outright defy it to open the county sooner than later. He added that he believed continuing the existing closures would create long-lasting economic hardships that residents would endure for years.

"I think it's void vagueness, among other things," Adam said. "We have a responsibility to future generations to reopen this thing. And yes, some people are going to get sick and that's unfortunate but people are going to get sick in any case, and we can't stop that and we're just inducing a

depression, and I find that just appalling."

Among concerns from supervisors that the county's reopening plan will take more than a month to develop, County Executive Officer Mona Miyasato clarified that the county will allow businesses to reopen as soon as the governor OKs the move.

"We're having the REACH plan ready, but if the governor said tomorrow you can open up because we believe all the cases have dismantled, we would certainly do that and work through it," Miyasato said. "Again we want to get the economy going as soon as it's safe."

—Zac Ezzone

Unemployment rates in the county increase, Workforce Development Board goes virtual

Unemployment rates in Santa Barbara County—at first glance—don't appear too out of the ordinary. At 5.6 percent unemployed, the county had the exact same rate in March as the state of California as a whole, according to the county's Workforce Development Board Executive Director Raymond McDonald.

But when compared to last year's numbers, a different picture emerges: Santa Barbara County's unemployment rate was just 4.7 percent in March 2019. And before the COVID-19 pandemic, the county consistently had lower unemployment

NEWS continued page 6

Weekend Weather

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NEWS from page 4

rates than the state overall.

McDonald explained that because the pandemic is a statewide hit to the economy, rather than a more regional or localized situation, it means that it's being felt more universally than usual.

"It shows that everybody across the state is suffering from the stay-at-home order and the layoffs that are ensuing," he told the *Sun*. "Normally Santa Barbara County has such a strong hospitality sector that goes year-round. That's generally the reason why we're running a little bit lower on unemployment than the state as a whole."

McDonald explained that Santa Barbara's economy is typically very consistent, as it relies on a year-round tourism industry. Santa Maria's economy, he said, is not as consistent year round, and as such has become accustomed to weathering these fluctuations in the past.

"The biggest shock to the system is the city of Santa Barbara and the South County area, only because they're not used to being impacted like this, whereas the rest of the county has gone through ups and downs," McDonald said.

But having experienced economic ups and downs in the past doesn't make it easy. Because this crisis is of unprecedented proportions, it's difficult to compare to the past, a reality that McDonald emphasized.

Santa Maria is still taking a heavy hit with a March unemployment rate of 10.8 percent, more than 5 percent higher than the county as a whole. Furthermore, McDonald predicted that numbers will be higher in next month's report in a special coronavirus email update from the Workforce Development Board on April 17.

"I can't use anything in the past as a barometer," McDonald told the *Sun*. "We're in new territory."

Another unexpected facet of the economy that McDonald has noticed is that more restaurant workers are out of their jobs than hotel workers. This might be due to the fact that some hotel management positions can function even with closures, whereas restaurant service positions—particularly waiters—are largely dependent on having customers in seats.

McDonald also said that looking at data for entire sectors can be deceiving. For example, while grocery stores mostly continue to thrive, the "retail" sector that these stores fall under is overall taking a hit.

"The other retailers like Macy's and all the other big shopping centers are closing down, at least temporarily," he said. "So that's overshadowing what's happening at the grocery stores."

While social distancing presents challenges for the Workforce Development Board as it tries to assist struggling businesses and laid off employees, the board's Business Services Strategist Alma Janabab said that the board is working to get virtual resources off the ground.

"On a regular occasion, when a business is laying off or downsizing, I would be the person that they would contact, or I would get information like the WARN notice," she said of the pre-pandemic process.

WARN—which stands for Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification—requires that employers give a 60-day notice to employees before either closing or enacting a mass layoff, usually of more than 50 employees. While the WARN notice requirement was temporarily suspended as a result of COVID-19, Janabab said that local businesses have continued to be diligent about notifying employees and the Workforce Development Board when they are experiencing difficulties.

For the board, continuing to receive this notification is vital to begin building a plan for recovery once the crisis has passed.

"This way, we know the businesses that are being affected, and then as we work toward economic recovery we'll be able to have that contact information so we can reach out back to

these businesses and hopefully help them get back on their feet," Janabab said.

In the meantime, the board is putting together a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act webinar, which basically teaches affected employers and employees about what resources they have at their disposal. Case managers are also available for virtual appointments.

"We're starting to think about that: How do we prepare our businesses, our community, to recover after all this?" Janabab said. "We don't want to wait until it's time to do it: We want to actually start preparing now."

—Malea Martin

Solvang extends marketing contract through next fiscal year

As a city with an economy built around tourism, Solvang has been hit especially hard during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

During a City Council meeting on April 13, City Manager Xenia Bradford said the city will lose about \$2 million in revenue related to this virus during the current fiscal year, which runs through June. She also said that if the city's businesses remain closed through July and August, the city's estimated revenue for the next fiscal year would be about \$1.5 million less than officials had originally expected for this year.

The city is already beginning to feel the effects of these revenue losses, and announced it laid off eight employees on March 27.

Whenever the health orders that have led to these business closures are lifted, the city is relying on IDK Events—a firm hired to handle tourism marketing and event planning—to help jump-start the local economy. During the April 13 meeting, the council changed the scope of IDK Events' existing contract and extended the agreement through the next fiscal year.

Under these contract changes, \$100,000 the city has already paid the company will go toward future efforts, such as annual events when large gatherings are allowed, IDK Events Managing Partner Scott Shuemake said during the meeting.

As for next year's contract, the city will pay IDK Events 12 percent of whatever it collects in transient occupancy tax revenue, which Mayor Ryan Toussaint said is a reasonable rate.

"Their proposal to council is exceptionally reasonable because ... it gives us something that we can easily plan out, and on the downside if there is no TOT, then sorry Scott," Toussaint said. "But on the upside, if there is, then they get something."

Since the statewide stay-at-home order went into effect, the company has shifted to assisting the city with its response to the crisis. Shuemake said during the meeting. This includes launching a website with resources related to the virus for businesses and residents and taking over all of the city's social media challenges, among other moves.

After these initial efforts, Shuemake said the company is beginning to plan for how to attract tourists to Solvang after the crisis is over. He added that he believes the city is well positioned for a rebound as recent tourism surveys have found people are eager to travel when it's safe to do so and they're more willing to visit places that don't require air travel.

"Rather than planning big aspirational,



CONTRACT EXTENSION: Solvang City Council recently extended its contract with a firm hired to handle its tourism marketing.

international trips, [travelers have] down-shifted to be more drivable," Shuemake said. "So we think that positions Solvang and the Santa Ynez Valley well to capitalize on this initial recovery push."

The council unanimously approved the changes to its existing contract with IDK Events, as well as extending the contract through next year. Although Councilmember Robert Clarke recognized the city may receive some criticism for extending a marketing contract given the tourism industry has completely halted.

"I know that the council will probably take some heat because they think that all that IDK does is promote tourism when we don't need that right now," Clarke said. "But I think they've done a really good job, and the city has done a good job directing them which way to transition their resources to what we need right now."

—Zac Ezzone

Local organizations work to get COVID-19 updates to non-English speaking residents

March 17 was the first time the San Luis Obispo County Public Health Department conducted a press briefing via Facebook Live regarding the coronavirus. It was entirely in English.

Latino Outreach Council of San Luis Obispo County CEO Jaqueline del Valle Frederick said the nonprofit is concerned that there isn't enough direct communication in Spanish or Mixteco—spoken by indigenous people in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla—in both the city of Santa Maria and in SLO County. The Latino Outreach Council is launching public service announcements to air on Spanish Television and radio in both SLO and Santa Barbara counties. Del Valle Frederick said the announcements will remind people to shelter in place and stay at home, and inform them about "the precautions they need to take with regard to using masks and gloves when they go out."

SLO County spokesperson Michelle Shoresman told the *Sun* the county is concerned about its entire population getting the

information they need to be safe.

"It is a constant challenge to keep everyone in the community informed," Shoresman said.

All of the county's COVID-19 press briefings now have transcripts in Spanish at readyslo.org under the "emergency SLO" tab and they can be viewed on Facebook by changing page settings to Spanish. SLO County has also translated some documents for health care workers into Tagalog, Shoresman said, as there is a "reasonable-size population of Filipinos in the local health care workforce." The county is also beginning to work on some communication in Mixteco.

Santa Barbara County Public Information Officer Jackie Ruiz said her county is also concerned that its non-English speakers aren't receiving critical public health messages.

In Santa Barbara County, roughly 38 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home, according to recent census data. Those languages include Spanish, Mixteco, and Zapotec.

Ruiz said Santa Barbara County has been doing voiceover translation in Spanish along with American Sign Language at every press conference since the conferences began on March 12.

"We have multiple Spanish translators at the Joint Information Center every day of the week to help with the ongoing press-release and social-media translation. We are also part of a rapid response team that has helped us translate materials into many indigenous languages via video or sound files," Ruiz said.

All coronavirus-related information is also accessible to Santa Barbara County residents in multiple languages by dialing 211.

In Santa Maria, City Councilmember Gloria Soto said the council was slow to take local action for its residents in regard to the pandemic.

Soto said she got on calls with the county's local public health officials, Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, and U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) to discuss how to make the Latino community understand the importance of social distancing and staying at home.

"I felt the need to push back a little bit, because it's not just about telling people to stay home. It's about understanding the unique and different communities within our county and city," she said.

One of the city's first steps is creating a long-term relationship with Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), a nonprofit that unites indigenous leaders and allies to strengthen the Mixteco and indigenous immigrant community.

Donna Olivera, communication coordinator for MICOP, said her position was created specifically to gather recent public health information and work with MICOP translators to create informational video and audio messages in Mixteco.

"It's really difficult and I have to do the research myself and find the most important information to get out there," Olivera said.

She said the process of getting the information out is slow as she awaits responses to questions that she's sent to public health officials, not to mention that there are only five Mixteco translators who work for MICOP.

Mixteco isn't a written language, so Santa Barbara County has created coronavirus-related videos in Mixteco. The Santa Maria Joint Union High School District is also sending out information in Mixteco via video format to keep parents and guardians of students informed of district updates.

The public health crisis, Soto said, is really shining a light on the disparities that exist.

"It's the working-class and minimum-wage earners that are most at risk. We're still slow enough in putting in place policies or recommendations that will help to protect them while they're still on the front line," Soto said. "It's the utmost importance that we use this crisis as an opportunity to build bridges with communities that have always been hard for us to reach." ○

—Karen Garcia

PHOTO COURTESY OF FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

Catching COVID

Lompoc penitentiary's COVID-19 outbreak grows, but an understaffed facility threatens the ability to keep up with prisoners' needs

BY MALEA MARTIN

Incarcerated people are among those with the least agency in the United States. Some argue that this is a key part of serving justice. The punishment—confinement and everything else that comes with it—fits the crime. Others say prisoners should have more rights, advocating for felon enfranchisement or labor compensation.

“Inmates have a Ph.D. in what Californians are learning: Namely, how to sit at the edge of your bed and do nothing,” Charles Carbone, a prison reform lawyer, told the *Sun*. “Quarantine” is not a new word for the inmate population.”

But amid this pandemic, Carbone said, it's worse.

“It is a public health crisis on steroids because of the easy communicability of the disease inside a prison setting, the existing lack of hygiene in the prison system that will also allow the disease to run, and then the constant and close interaction that that entire inmate population by necessity has to have with staff,” he said.

Some Central Coast prisons are already experiencing the worst of it: For the first weeks of April, the Lompoc penitentiary had the highest infection rate among all Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities in the nation. As of April 20, it had 54 infected prisoners—only two prisons had more positive cases—and the first inmate death from the virus was reported on April 18. The California Men's Colony, a state facility operated under the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), trails a few weeks behind the penitentiary's curve at one COVID-19 case so far.

“They need to learn from what's happening at Lompoc,” U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) told the *Sun*. “Perhaps they can learn of the impact and the problems we're having and see how that might impact the Men's Colony.”

The Lompoc prison's leadership is now starting to work toward the construction of a field hospital to house the inmates who need medical attention. Initially, Carbajal said, the

Bureau of Prisons told him that it would take four to six weeks to get the field hospital up and running.

“I have been told by other stakeholders and public health officials at the county that four to six weeks is too late,” Carbajal said. “This needs to happen right away.”

In response to the bureau's original estimation, Carbajal decided to pen a letter alongside California Democratic Sens. Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein demanding that the prison leadership build the field hospital as expeditiously as possible, and also that they fill medical and prison staffing levels, which as of the April 14 letter, were at 68 percent and 80 percent, respectively.

“I am encouraged that I have heard through different sources that the Bureau of Prisons is looking at expediting that effort,” Carbajal said. “I'll believe it when I see it.”

A few days later on April 21, the same Congress members sent a second letter to the Bureau of Prisons “to continue stressing the need for the BOP to move with urgency in establishing this facility with the necessary staff and equipment—including ventilators,” they wrote. The second letter also addressed reports of an inmate from the facility being released with COVID-19 symptoms and not receiving treatment prior to his release, as well as insufficient personal protective equipment for staff.

Meanwhile, the Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health confirmed the county jail's first case in an April 17 press conference. Over the last few weeks, the jail has made efforts to expand early releases for its inmates, bringing the jail's population down to the lowest it's been since the 1970s. But for the federal prison system, release is not a simple process.

“Currently, there is no parole in the federal system,” Scott Taylor, a bureau spokesperson, told the *Sun* in an email. “Only a few inmates remain who are parole eligible. For the federal system, we are using home confinement as a means of transferring inmates to the community.”

Taylor said that the bureau “has begun immediately reviewing all inmates who



CATCHING UP: As Lompoc's federal prison outbreak hits 54 inmates testing positive for COVID-19 on April 20, the prison's leadership is scrambling to build a field hospital to accommodate those who are sick.

have COVID-19 risk factors,” and of those individuals, determining “which inmates are suitable for home confinement.”

Unlike the federal prison system, the state-run CDCR has thousands of inmates working toward parole. But their release is contingent on gaining enough “rehabilitative achievement credits” in programs that are largely stalled in response to COVID-19.

“All of the rehabilitative programs, all of the vocational programs, all of the educational programs, all programs that get inmates together, ... in CDCR all of those programs are offline right now,” prison reform lawyer Carbone said. “You have 40,000 lifers in the state of California whose paroled release is largely dependent upon them participating in rehabilitative programming.”

Dana Simas, the CDCR's press secretary, wrote in an email to the *Sun* that “the Office of Correctional Education is working with institution principals, library staff, and teachers to provide in-cell assignments where possible in order for students to continue their studies, legal library access, and educational credit-earning opportunities.”

However, Simas confirmed that because state law requires that rehabilitative achievement credits be earned in the presence of an instructor, and because instructors are currently not allowed inside the prison, inmates will not be able to earn rehabilitative achievement credits while visitation remains suspended—a reality Carbone expressed concern about.

The CDCR is making efforts to compensate for COVID-19 related visitation suspensions by giving the adult incarcerated population three days of free phone calls each week

through the end of April, with no limit on the number of calls.

Similarly, the Bureau of Prisons “increased monthly telephone minutes for all inmates from 300 to 500, in recognition of how important it is for families to stay in touch during this time,” Taylor wrote. “Telephone calls are free to inmates for the duration of this emergency.”

Carbone said that prisons will ultimately have to find a balance between the advantages and disadvantages that congregated living situations have on the spread of the virus.

“It's a competition between the ability to segregate and the ability to control movement on the plus side of the prison system, against the proximity and ease of communicability on the negative side,” he said.

As Rep. Carbajal pointed out, the Lompoc prison is critically understaffed, and an understaffed facility cannot begin to address the level of retooling within the prison system that COVID-19 requires. That's why Carbajal said he is asking leadership within the bureau to increase staffing and other gaps at the Lompoc penitentiary, as well as urging the Men's Colony to learn from Lompoc's mistakes.

“Some institutions certainly have been caught flat-footed. Everybody's trying to do their best to adjust and adapt to this fluid circumstance,” Carbajal said. “But it certainly has identified weaknesses and lack of systems and plans that need to be enhanced and modified for the future.” ○

Reach Staff Writer Malea Martin at mmartin@santamariasun.com.



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New Times Sun

Looking for answers

Library committee nears the end of its work addressing funding, inequities

BY ZAC EZZONE

For years, the amount and source of library funding has been among the most contentious topics discussed during Santa Barbara County's annual budget process.

About a year and a half ago, the county Board of Supervisors tried to solve this continuous problem by enlisting a group of stakeholders to review and address two issues in the county's library system: inequities that exist between locations and recurrent budget deficits.

The group is nearing the end of its work and recently presented the board with how it proposes to address the first issue of inequities. The committee's full report is slated to appear before the board prior to its meeting on the upcoming year's budget in June. But with the county facing millions of dollars in expenses and revenue losses as a result of COVID-19, the committee's proposals may be set aside for the time being.

"Counties are bearing the full brunt of dealing with the impacts of this crisis," said 3rd District Supervisor Joan Hartmann, who is on the ad hoc committee. "We're losing revenue, and we have huge costs."

The county operates an unusual library system. There are four main library locations, with one each in Santa Maria, Lompoc, Goleta, and Santa Barbara. Each of these libraries relies primarily on city revenue for funding, along with some from the county. These libraries also receive funding from the county to operate nearby locations in unincorporated areas or smaller cities. For example, the Santa Maria Library operates the branches in Cuyama, Guadalupe, Los Alamos, and Orcutt.

The county allocates this funding based at a rate of \$7.80 per capita, but it's never enough. According to preliminary budget information presented during the board's April 13 meeting, after this per capita funding, the nine county branches would have a combined deficit of \$658,664. Over the last few years, supervisors have filled this recurrent deficit with one-time funding expenses from the county's cannabis tax revenue.

The committee hasn't yet released its report on how to sustainably fund the system so that deficits and one-time expenses are no longer

the norm. But Santa Maria City Librarian Mary Housel said the idea of a new tax has been kicked around as a possible solution.

Housel, who sits on the ad hoc committee and oversees the county branches near Santa Maria, said she doesn't believe the county will ever have enough money to fund libraries fairly without a new revenue stream.

"That's been looked at many times," Housel said. "That seems like it will be the only way to achieve the funding we need to make the libraries more equitable."

Another idea the committee discussed is the creation of a joint powers authority, which is created when multiple public entities combine to make decisions for all jurisdictions involved. She said this could be something that's created as an expansion of the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments.

"The long-term idea is a joint powers authority where the eight cities in the county work with the county on funding and governing the libraries, so it's really a collaborative governance," Hartmann said.

Although the committee hasn't released its official recommendations regarding

'I feel like we do a really good job with what we have, which isn't very much.'

—Mary Housel, Santa Maria city librarian

this funding issue, Ryder Bailey, the chief financial officer for the county's Community Services Department, presented the board with the committee's recommendations on countywide equity during a preliminary budget workshop meeting on April 13.

According to this presentation, the committee grouped the county's libraries into three different groups titled: Small 1, Small 2, and Medium. The first group includes the smallest branches in Cuyama, Los Alamos, and Vandenberg Village; the second group includes branches in Buellton, Guadalupe, Montecito, and Solvang; and the third group includes branches in Carpinteria, Santa Barbara Eastside, and Orcutt.

The committee created benchmarks—such as number of employees or hours open—that



ANNUAL ISSUES: A committee has worked for the last year and a half to identify ways to increase library funding and address inequities among the locations throughout the county.

each library should reach, depending on its group. According to Bailey's presentation, most libraries in the county don't meet these benchmarks, and libraries in North County meet fewer of these standards than those farther south.

"Ours were [below the standards] in almost every case," Housel said. "I feel like we do a really good job with what we have, which

every year when we need to look for funds," Villegas said.

According to Bailey's presentation during the April 13 preliminary budget workshop meeting, funding all the proposed improvements that would allow all libraries to meet the benchmarks the committee identified would require nearly \$650,000, which is on top of the nearly \$660,000 needed to cover the projected deficits.

Supervisors directed staff to include funding to cover the library deficits in the proposed budget that the board will look at in June. However, given the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 crisis, the supervisors didn't move forward with the funding for the benchmarks.

Hartmann said that while it's disappointing to set the committee's recommendations aside, supervisors felt it would be irresponsible to allocate any additional funding while the county still works out its financial situation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. But she said the committee has accomplished a lot of work that can't be completely discarded.

"We've done a lot of work that is extremely helpful in getting everybody to an understanding of what libraries are and ... we have a clear sense of what the libraries need to do," Hartmann said. "We can't lose that, too much was invested." ○

Reach Staff Writer Zac Ezzone at zezzone@santamariasun.com.

isn't very much."

Two significant expenses that Housel has to cover in the branches she oversees are the costs of rent for the locations in Orcutt and Guadalupe, which limit how much funding can be used on staffing, books, or technology.

Amelia Villegas, the president of the Friends of the Guadalupe Library and city employee who sits on the county's Library Advisory Committee, said the city has contributed additional money toward rent in recent years, but it's often limited financially on what it can fund. To address this issue, Villegas wrote a letter to the Board of Supervisors requesting it to consider increasing the per capita funding for libraries from \$7.80 to \$11.70.

"It just becomes a very frustrating issue

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HOME DELIVERY: The Foodbank of Santa Barbara County ramped up its services during the COVID-19 pandemic, including now delivering food to seniors with the help of the California National Guard.

Feeding those in need

County Foodbank ramps up services during COVID-19 crisis

BY ZAC EZZONE

As businesses remain closed under the statewide stay-at-home order and the number of people unemployed in California continues to increase, many residents are facing food insecurity for the first time.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County has ramped up its services to provide fresh food to the thousands who may be turning to the organization for help for the first time, Foodbank marketing communications manager Judith Smith-Meyer said.

“There are a lot of people facing food insecurity for the first time who are not accustomed to receiving food from the Foodbank,” Smith-Meyer said. “Our message is there’s enough for everybody who needs it.”

As of April 16, the Foodbank has set up more than 50 emergency food distribution sites throughout the county where people can stop by to grab a bag full of canned goods, pasta, fresh produce, and other items. More than 20 of these sites are drive-through locations where people can pick up these bags without coming into contact with volunteers passing out the food.

“You give your name, how many people are in your household, and also whether this is your first time getting food this month,” Smith-Meyer said. “That’s all the information. Your need is based on your sense of your need.”

Between March 15 and April 9, nearly 70,000 people visited one of these sites to pick up food. The Foodbank also received assistance from the California National Guard to start delivering bags of food to seniors, who are at a higher risk of developing a serious illness if they contract COVID-19.

To feed more people than normal, the Foodbank needs more food than normal. Between March 9 and April 14, the Foodbank distributed nearly 1.7 million pounds of food, Smith-Meyer said. During the entire year of 2019, the organization delivered 9.8 million pounds of food, which is about 816,000 pounds a month.

At the beginning of this crisis, securing additional food wasn’t an issue, Smith-Meyer said. Producers have an excess amount of fresh

produce that normally is sold to restaurants—which have closed or switched to carry-out or delivery—and grocery stores that may not be selling as much in certain products.

Much of this food has been diverted to food banks throughout the state, including in Santa Barbara County. Smith-Meyer said food donations increased by about 30 percent at the beginning of the pandemic, and although food donations continue to arrive, the Foodbank is also purchasing more food than normal.

She said the organization has spent about \$250,000 on food since the beginning of this crisis, which is about three times as much as it normally spends in that amount of time. All of this funding comes from donations and grants, and the Foodbank is trying to increase the amount it receives from both of those revenue streams.

This increase in funding is necessary to address the long-term effects of the ongoing crisis, Smith-Meyer said.

“We’re doing great right now, but even if stay-at-home orders get lifted, it’s going to be gradual and slow,” Smith-Meyer said. “When people experience economic hardship, it doesn’t just end when you get back to work. It takes time to get into the deepest impact, and it takes time to get out of that.”

Highlights

- The city of Lompoc is requesting community input on how to spend state grant funding to improve Beattie Park. The city has released graphic renderings and videos showing two options for the new playground and fitness equipment. Residents can weigh in on these options through a survey at cityoflompoc.com.

- Through a donation from the Mark and Dorothy Smith Foundation, Marian Regional Medical Center is acquiring more than 10 iPads that will allow patients to communicate with family members as hospital visitation remains limited during the COVID-19 crisis. The iPads will also allow hospital staff to connect with and evaluate hospice patients who are not in the medical center. ○

Staff Writer Zac Ezzone wrote this week’s Spotlight. Send tips to spotlight@santamariasun.com.

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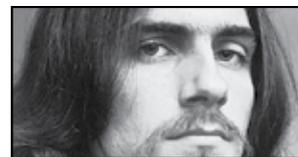
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Unacceptable factors

Unreliable information has led to sizable problems in COVID-19 risk analysis

BY RON FINK

Beginning in late February, government officials and the press began to predict a massive outbreak of a contagious disease known as COVID-19 in the United States. Using math models, they were convinced that anywhere between 100,000 to 200,000 deaths would occur.

The governor of California even went so far as to say 25.5 million Californians might contract the disease. As of mid-April, there were a total of 26,182 positive cases in California.

This set in motion a series of decisions that closed almost all commercial enterprises and denied millions of people their constitutional rights of freedom of movement and assembly.

From *The Wall Street Journal* on April 9: "The good news on lower expected virus mortality arrived at Wednesday's White House coronavirus task force briefing. Here's an excerpt from the official transcript:

"Question: Last week, your top experts were saying that we should expect 100,000 to 240,000 deaths in this country. You've been talking about how it looks like maybe things are plateauing. Are these numbers now being revised downward? I know you don't want people to stop social distancing and that sort of thing, but what can you tell us about the numbers? Are they being revised down?"

President Donald Trump deferred to Dr. Deborah Birx who said: "I know many of you are watching the Act Now model and the IHME model from ... and they have consistently decreased the number, the mortality from over almost 90,000 or 86,000, down to 81,000 and now down to 61,000. That is modeled on what America is doing. That's what's happening."

So, how could our political leaders have gotten it so wrong? I can't excuse the media reporting;

they relied on and dramatized the information they were fed instead of seeking out facts.

Managing risk is a tricky business. First you must establish what could cause loss of life, serious injury, or a significant monetary loss. Then you must determine what measures are necessary to reduce or totally mitigate the risk. Then you must make recommendations based on several options including a "no action" option.

I say that this is "tricky business" because how you establish the severity of action or inaction is based on reliable information. The goal is always minimize, monitor, and control the probability or impact.

So, how does this relate to early predictions of 100,000 to 240,000 COVID-19 deaths in this country?

Reliable computer models are based on the information that forms the basis of the predicted outcome. In the case of the COVID-19 data, it appears that researchers were relying on unverifiable information being fed to them from China. This produced an enormous and unacceptable risk factor.

As more models were being produced by different research organizations, their results differed dramatically.

The decision makers at all levels of government were faced with a serious dilemma: How do we plan for a catastrophe of the magnitude being predicted by the scientific/medical community? Their response was a series of actions that resulted an unheard-of loss of civil liberties in modern memory.

Then, as actual data from reliable and verifiable sources in the United States, Canada, and northern Europe began to be plugged into the models, the predicted risk was significantly reduced.

In matters like this, hindsight is 20/20. The

policy in place to manage the assumed risk was to "flatten the curve," however some were suggesting "net zero"—meaning no new cases or deaths—was the safe way to go.

Here are some facts from the Centers for Disease Control: In 2019 there were 2.8 fatalities nationwide; that means that means that an average of 7,903 people passed away each day from a variety of causes. For example, an average of 1,773 passed away each day from heart disease; 1,641 from cancer; and 465 from accidents.

Recently the director of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department was suggesting that the current restrictions may need to remain in place for several more months.

A couple of days later, Dr. Henning Ansorg, county public health officer, said during a daily press briefing, "We continue to see an increase in confirmed cases across the county of Santa Barbara, however, the increase is following a linear pathway and has not evolved into an exponential pattern [characterized by or being an extremely rapid increase as in size or extent], which we initially were worried about."

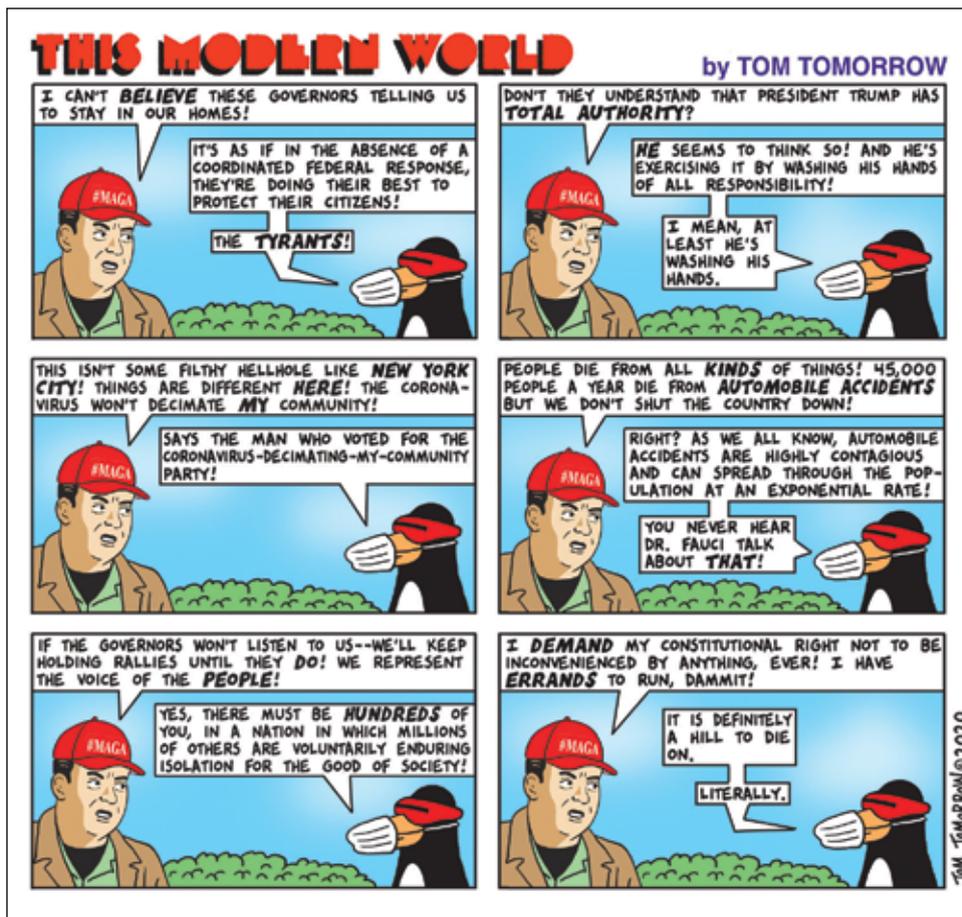
That sounds like exactly what health officials were initially hoping for—a "flattening of the curve" and should signal a return to normal. But will it?

Gov. Gavin Newsom recently laid out his administration's benchmarks for reopening the state; they appear designed to achieve zero risk. Considering the testing needed to achieve development of "therapeutics to meet the demand" and the "ability to prevent infection in people who are at risk," these goals appear to be unachievable in the foreseeable future.

In the meantime, we are left with the aftermath produced by early predictive models based on unverified information. Politicians, who were responsible for creating the policies that resulted in this chaos, are faced with even more difficult challenges associated with admitting they made decisions based on a faulty risk analysis.

Will they be willing to give up these new powers? Based on Gov. Newsom's plan to reopen the state, it doesn't look like it. ○

Ron Fink writes to the Sun from Lompoc. Send your thoughts, comments, and opinionated letters to letters@santamariasun.com.



LETTERS

Elephant, donkey cartoon missed the mark

A cartoon can be ironic or satirical. But when it preaches at us, and lies at the same time, it fails miserably. Take the Mayfield cartoon of April 2.

Referring to the recent congressional bailout bill that gave tens of millions of dollars to the middle class, working class, and the poor, and well over a trillion to large banks and corporations, Mr. Mayfield drew a picture of an elephant wearing a blindfold offering a mask to a donkey. The donkey holds a pork barrel that overflows with cash, and he's saying, "Hey! Never let a crisis go to waste."

Truth is that elephant had its eyes wide open and fought to give all the pork to its corporate puppeteers, and pennies to the small guys. The donkey, also controlled by corporations, was ready to throw in the towel. Only Bernie Sanders fought in the Senate for the 99 percent. He forced the elephant majority to offer a little more of the pie to Americans in greater need.

So, Mayfield did nothing to elucidate what had happened in Congress, and seriously muddied the waters with his jaundiced slant on politics. Don't we see enough of that in the news already?

Gale McNeeley
Santa Maria

Tough it out

If you get sick, you get sick guys. That's the way the cookie crumbles, according to 4th District Supervisor Peter Adam, who is raring to get that Santa Barbara County economy up an moving again.

You hear that, **Public Health Director Van Do-Reynoso**? Adam is ready for Do-Reynoso to get her crap together on a plan, man, for getting over this whole coronavirus stay-at-home BS. You won't even tell the press who's sick unless they ask you—for instance, the county got its first case at the **Main Jail**, but Do-Reynoso didn't just volunteer that information during the April 17 press briefing. The *Sun* had to ask!

Also, does anyone really know how many cases are at the **United States Penitentiary in Lompoc**? The county and **Federal Bureau of Prisons** numbers don't always line up. The *Sun's* reporters are scratching their heads trying to stay on top of where these cases are and how many people are in this hospital attached to respirators or in that prison coughing in an isolation cell—meanwhile the county's cases are heading toward 500 at a quick clip and we are apparently putting all of our economic eggs into the **REACH** basket.

What is REACH, you ask? Good question. The organization formerly known as the **Hourglass Project** pushes regional collaboration between the public and private sectors to create innovative plans to spur "vibrant" future economic growth, or some such nonsense. The Hourglass Project was around for more than a year and gave a bunch of presentations encouraging people to "think big," took some money from Central Coast cities and counties, went to Sacramento to do some stuff, is on the "**Vandenberg Air Force Base** will save us" bandwagon, and we've literally got nothing but a bunch of words to show for it.

Now, REACH is going to guide us out of a pandemic-induced recession?

Uhh. Guys. I think you better rethink that particular "plan." Unless all you're looking for is the trend-setting corporate-inspired lingo of the day.

We need a solid foundation of economic knowledge to build on that actually leads to good policy decisions and actual action *before* the end of the crisis. We certainly don't have time for jargon and navel-gazing.

After all, we don't want to be like **Solvang**, which just promised 12 percent of all future transient occupancy tax to an events and marketing company. It has the potential to be a revenue stream of up to \$540,000 or more a year for **IDK Events**.

That's a lot of money. I think I'm in the wrong business.

If transient occupancy tax makes up at least 50 percent of the city's general fund revenue stream (which it does in a non-pandemic recession), that means the city is promising 6 percent of its revenue to a marketing company. Don't worry though, everyone, **Mayor Ryan Touissant** says if the city brings in \$0 in transient taxes, then IDK gets nothing.

Well that makes it better. The city did just have to lay off eight employees because of COVID-19. They couldn't exactly give IDK the whole kit and caboodle. ☹️

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Arts Briefs

Wildling Museum seeks photography of regional wildlife

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLIOT LOWNDES



Registration to enter the 11th biannual Wildling Nature Photography Competition, hosted by the Wildling Museum of Art and Nature in Solvang, is now open. The theme of this competition's latest recurrence is Critters of the Tri-County Region, as applicants are encouraged to submit photos of all forms of wildlife—land and sea mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects—so long as they are found within the counties of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, or Ventura.

"We are fortunate to have a wealth of local wildlife and we're excited to highlight native species in the newest iteration of our photography competition," Stacey Otte-Demangate, executive director of the museum, said in a press release. "We want to encourage our museum followers to find solace in nature during these uncertain times, and often there's no better place to start than your own backyard."

The competition is open to photographers of all ages and is divided into two categories: adult (ages 18 and over) and youth (ages 17 and under). Photographers in the adult category will compete for prizes of \$250 (first place), \$100 (second place), and \$50 (third place). Winners of the youth category will receive \$100 (first place), \$50 (second place), and a family membership to the museum (third place).

Applicants may only submit five or fewer photos. The entry fee is \$10 per photograph (Wildling membership holders may use one complimentary entry). The Wildling Museum's board of directors and staff members are not eligible for entry. The deadline for submissions is July 6. Semi-finalists will be notified on July 26.

Although concrete scheduling will be contingent upon California's COVID-19 reopening guidelines, the Wildling Museum hopes to display competition finalists on-site starting Sept. 12 (finalists and winners will be showcased online in September regardless). For entry forms or more info, visit wildlingmuseum.org or call the museum directly at (805) 688-1082.

Santa Maria Public Library offers virtual readings of children's books

SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM THE CITY OF SANTA MARIA'S YOUTUBE PAGE



During the city of Santa Maria Public Library's indefinite cancellation of its Storytime program and other ongoing activities, the library staff members are producing an online series of short videos for children and families to enjoy from the comfort of their own homes. The program is designed to help kids boost their literacy skills through recorded readings of children's books and other stories. The videos are available to stream for free on YouTube (youtube.com/cityofsantamariacalifornia).

The library also plans to upload additional videos in the future designed for other age groups, including programs on arts and crafting activities for teens and young adults. For more details on the library's new virtual programming, contact Library Youth Services directly at (805) 925-0994 or email libraryyouth@cityofsantamaria.org.

Arts Briefs is compiled by Arts Editor Caleb Wiseblood. Send information to cwiseblood@santamariasun.com.

License to quill

Nipomo novelist Kathryn Blanche offers new content, writing resources, and more through Patreon and YouTube

BY CALEB WISEBLOOD

Writing fantasy fiction was already a diversion of sorts for Central Coast-based author Kathryn Blanche—who began developing her Laila of Midgard series during a rough patch in college—long before the COVID-19 crisis.

"I find that writing is an escape, so diving into the various worlds in my novels is my primary way of keeping my mind off these troubling times," Blanche told the *Sun*.

Due to pay cuts at her day job, Blanche recently filed for unemployment benefits—joining more than 20 million other Americans during the course of the last five weeks. But the pandemic hasn't stopped her from writing, she said. On the contrary, the statewide shelter-at-home orders have only helped boost her creativity.

"I have been actually extremely productive in the last few weeks," the Nipomo native said. "I've got so many projects that I'm preparing, so it's nice to have extra time."

With three novels in the Midgard series already under her belt (*Caught by Demons*, *Summoned by Demons*, and *Infiltrated by Demons*) and a fourth on the way (*Hunted by Demons*), slated to be released before the end of the year), Blanche is a prolific world builder. The series takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where humans coexist with supernatural entities—elves, vampires, ghosts, you name it. The novels' protagonist, Laila Eyvindr, works for a special agency designed to keep the peace between the realms and investigate supernatural crimes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHRYN BLANCHE



FANTASY FRANCHISE: With three novels in the Laila of Midgard series under her belt (*Caught by Demons*, *Summoned by Demons*, and *Infiltrated by Demons*) and a fourth on the way (*Hunted by Demons*, slated to be released before the end of the year), Kathryn Blanche is a prolific world builder.



LOCAL AUTHOR: It might be a while before novelist Kathryn Blanche is able to host another book signing, but the pandemic hasn't stopped her from writing, she told the *Sun*. "I find that writing is an escape, so diving into the various worlds in my novels is my primary way of keeping my mind off these troubling times," Blanche said.

Aside from the books themselves, Blanche has further explored the dystopian landscape of her fantasy series through *The Supernatural Times*—a fictional newspaper set in the world of her novels (think Harry Potter's *The Daily Prophet*). Written from the point of view of journalists within the Midgard universe, Blanche posts articles from the paper monthly (every second weekend) on her Patreon page. Subscribers can look forward to headlines like "An enchantment gone wrong: Three teens rendered invisible," or "How to handle your haunting."

"I was inspired to write the *Supernatural Times* articles as a way to explore various topics that I don't have time to mention in the books," Blanche said. "A lot of them look at world-building details like 'inter-realm' portal travel, or magical medicine, but others report on incidents in the book series."

For \$1 a month, subscribers of Blanche's Patreon have access to the articles as well as behind-the-scenes content on her writing process. Audiobooks (recorded readings of Blanche's novels) are also available to patrons who pledge \$5 a month.

Those who pledge \$10 a month receive the previous benefits as well as a thank-you letter and a personalized holiday card written by one of the novels' characters. Tiers of \$25 and \$50 include even more goodies.

"The higher you pledge, the more perks you gain access to," Blanche said. "[Patreon] is a great way for fans to help support me as an author, so I can spend more time focusing on writing and less time on a day job."

But fans of the Midgard series can also

take advantage of Blanche's free content on her YouTube channel, where she posts video blogs, book previews, and advice for aspiring authors. While Blanche is currently completing her fourth novel in the franchise, she can't help but notice the harsh reality of the coronavirus pandemic—and its eerie effects on society—

creeping its way into her fictional world.

"I just finished the first draft of a novel where the climax centers around a catastrophic event. As I was writing, I found myself reflecting on how people have been reacting to COVID-19 and using that to inform my characters' decisions, especially the various ways people act

in a panic," Blanche said. "Even though the characters in this story face a completely different threat, I found it very cathartic to write those scenes. It helped me process through my own emotions and frustrations." ○

Arts Editor Caleb Wiseblood always loves hearing from local authors. Contact him at cwiseblood@santamariasun.com.

SCREENSHOT FROM KATHRYN BLANCHE'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL



WRITE MAKES RIGHT: Kathryn Blanche offers writing advice to aspiring authors in one of her latest YouTube uploads. Viewers can also find other video blogs, including book previews and reviews, on her channel.



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PHOTOS BY CALEB WISEBLOOD

ARTS

Let's rock this joint

Grab your paint brush and partake in a townwide scavenger hunt with #OrcuttRocks

BY CALEB WISEBLOOD

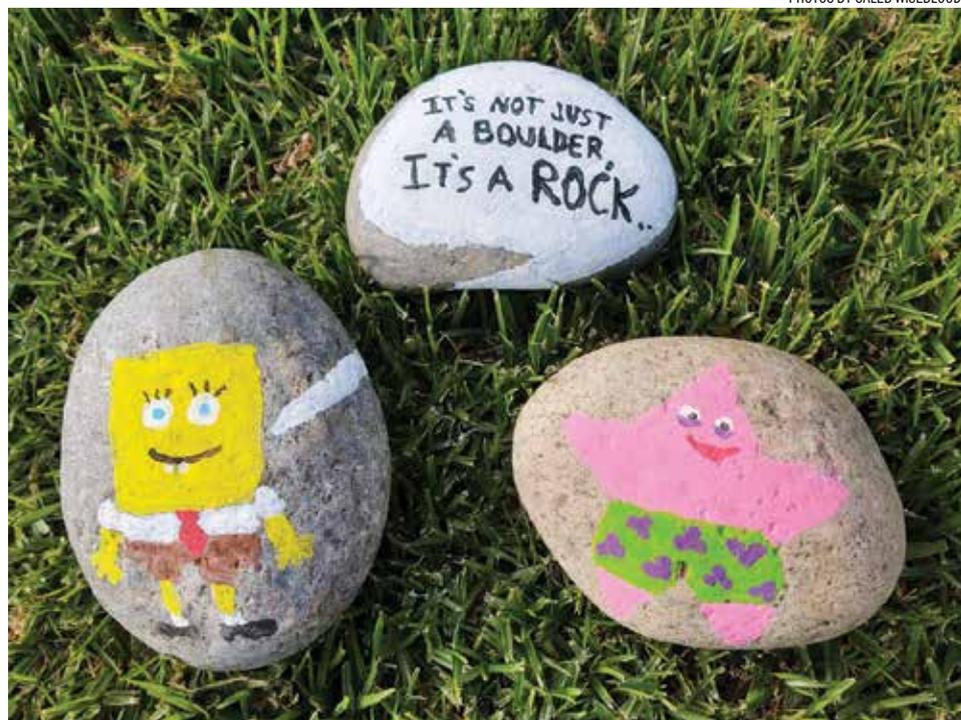
It might as well be stepping outside Apollo 11 onto the moon's surface, but in reality, I'm just gearing up to exit my Chevy Aveo in the Walmart parking lot.

Mask, check; gloves, check; sanity, indeterminable—there's just no time. I've already wasted enough as is, sitting in this car for minutes, taking my right glove off and putting it back on again in between texting memes to a group chat. But I'm on a mission and there's a \$2.97 18-color paint set inside the store with my name on it. On my way out, I feel like the only person in line without groceries. No food, all paint—the embodiment of a *starving artist*.

I don't remember exactly how I found out about Orcutt Rocks, but I'm guessing the Facebook group must have randomly popped up on my newsfeed a while ago. I must have been talking about either paint or rocks (probably the latter) that day, the government heard me, and voila! I'm glad they were listening though because it's a fun group that's been well worth the recommendation.

The premise is simple: Group members paint or decorate a rock and hide it somewhere in town, whether it be on a hiking trail, at a park, or on a random street corner. On the back of the rock, members are encouraged to write "Post to Orcutt Rocks" or "#OrcuttRocks," so whoever finds it can post about it on social media if they like and spread the word. There are a few rules, or guidelines, however: no hiding rocks in the grass (as they cause damage to lawn mowers if unspotted), no hiding rocks in cemeteries, keep rocks at least 6 feet apart, etc. One of those is not true (two truths and a lie).

Today's expedition marks the first time I'm joining in on the rock painting and hiding action, but I've been spectating the local scavenger hunt from afar through Facebook posts from the group's participants (first time caller, longtime fan). I've really enjoyed the diversity of artwork



CECI N'EST PAS UNE BOULDER: I let my Spongebob Squarepants and Patrick Star rocks dry on the front lawn before venturing out to hide them. The Orcutt Rocks group actually advises against hiding rocks in grass (as they can cause damage to lawn mowers if unspotted and run over).

included. The pop-culture-oriented rocks especially tickle my fancy. One of the latest rocks posted on the group, for example, is of Michelangelo (the Ninja Turtle, not the artist), which was found at the corner of North Avenue and North Broadway Street.

One of the subjects I decide to tackle is literally a Rock, or the one true Rock, I should say—Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. I attempt to re-create Johnson's infamous 1990s turtleneck and fanny pack pic with *interesting* results. I debate with myself about repainting over the eyes and mouth I botched; he's starting to look more like a demented *Sesame Street* character than a successful wrestler turned actor. But I decide to leave it as is; in fact, I kind of want to keep him now.

If you happen to spot either my Spongebob Squarepants or Patrick Star rock somewhere in Orcutt, I hope it brightens your day. I also painted and hid a couple of cheeky tributes to Andy Warhol and René Magritte, both of which I also botched but not nearly as creepily as my poor Dwayne Johnson's facial features. Happy hunting! ☺

Send subject suggestions to Arts Editor Caleb Wiseblood for his next batch of painted rocks at cwiseblood@santamariasun.com.

No paint, no gain

To find out more about Orcutt Rocks or join in on the fun, visit the group's Facebook page.



ALL'S FAIR IN LOVE AND WARHOL: Enjoy my silly tribute to Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962). Notice I spelled out "Caleb's" instead of "Campbell's" as I wasn't confident in fitting "Campbell's" within the space of the can.



KEEP SANE WITH DWAYNE: One of the subjects I decide to tackle is literally a Rock, or the one true Rock, I should say—Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. I attempt to re-create Johnson's infamous 1990s turtleneck and fanny pack pic with *interesting* results.



THUS SMOKE ZARATHUSTRA: Surrealist painter René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1929) get's a rockin' makeover.

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Prescience

This timely and informative docuseries introduces viewers to the men and women on the front line of the war against global pandemics. (six 50-min. episodes)

Glen: This docuseries, which was filmed before the COVID-19 outbreak, predicted the pandemic we're currently experiencing. Its timing feels uncanny. Set up like a global thriller, the episodes cut between various scientists and health care workers in locations around the world as they attempt to trace the origins of viruses, invent a universal influenza vaccine, and treat those who contract coronaviruses. If someone told me a month ago that I'd develop a deep interest in epidemiological sciences in the coming days, I would have said, "Epidemiolwhat?" The series brings to life this largely unknown work by people looking for virus sources in a crowded Vietnamese market; or pointing out how woefully understaffed and unprepared rural hospitals are, like one in Oklahoma. Some of these folks are real characters, like Jacob Glanville, who's trying to develop the universal flu vaccine. He sports a leather jacket and rides an electric skateboard around San Francisco. There's also Susan Flis, a retired nurse who's dedicated herself to offering free flu vaccines at the Mexican border in Arizona. It's fascinating stuff, and its characters all seemed to know what our own government didn't—that a new pandemic would come, and we're not ready for it.

Anna: It's certainly clear that these people knew the next pandemic wasn't an "if" but a "when,"

and watching them predict what has now turned our world upside down is fascinating. It takes the shine off of being a doctor, especially when you see the long hours and seemingly thankless work they put into both combatting and researching these scary viruses. World Health Organization Ebola specialist Michel Yao in South Africa only sees his family through video chats—missing birthdays, graduations, and everything else to fight the good fight. Yet misinformation and fear spread just as fast as the disease he's fighting, and when locals start to believe that the outside health workers in fact brought Ebola, they attack one command center and try to set fire to another. It's heart-breaking to see what fear can lead to. This series lets us follow the same people through many different avenues and facets of what it takes to combat something so global. It's fascinating to say the least.

Glen: We also meet Oregon mother of five Caylan Wagar, an anti-vaccine activist and fierce opponent of Oregon's vaccination laws, which forbid her from sending her kids to public schools without vaccination records. Despite a measles outbreak, Wagar will not budge on her stance that forced vaccines are wrong and harmful. She reminds me of the pockets of people today who refuse to wear masks in public, demand businesses be open, and protest against government health directives. Yes, I "get" that you think your freedoms are being infringed upon, but don't other children deserve to be "free" of preventable disease? Don't elderly or immune-compromised people deserve to avoid COVID-19 outbreaks? We also see outbreak preparation drills in NYC and



UNPREPARED: Netflix's new docuseries, *Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak*, predicted the COVID-19 outbreak and drives home how woefully unprepared we are to cope with it.

PANDEMIC: HOW TO PREVENT AN OUTBREAK

What's it rated? **TV-14**
Where's it showing? **Netflix**

learn of the importance of personal protective equipment—if you can't protect yourself, you can't help anyone else. What this docuseries really drives home is how apathetic we've become to disease, and how as we continue to encroach into wild places and disrupt ecosystems, we can expect to see more of this animal-to-human transmission of deadly diseases. Maybe we'll be ready for the next one. Maybe not.

Anna: Wagar is such a frustrating piece of this story. There's no doubt she loves her children, but it was definitely one of the most infuriating sections of the series for me. We watch small-town Oklahoma doctor Holly Gorake work

through a 72-hour shift as the only doctor at her hospital and the other side of her life—evangelical Christian worship with her husband. It goes a long way in showing both sides of the coin; she's nothing if not devoted to both her work and her faith. From researchers designing and developing drugs and vaccines, to doctors inoculating livestock, to health care providers on the front lines, this is a sweeping look at what it takes to fight these viruses. It's a very sobering series, but one that puts the people doing the actual work at the forefront. Check this one out. ○

New Times Senior Staff Writer Glen Starkey and freelancer Anna Starkey write Sun Screen. Comment at gstarkey@newtimeslo.com.

Film Reviews

PHOTO COURTESY OF FILM LAB



MEAN OLD MAN: Peter Huffman's ongoing screaming match with his roommate becomes fodder for serendipitous recordings that become cult favorites, in the documentary *Shut Up Little Man! An Audio Misadventure*, available on Amazon Prime.

SHUT UP LITTLE MAN! AN AUDIO MISADVENTURE

What's it rated? **Unrated**
When? **2011**
Where's it showing? **Amazon Prime**

It's 1987 and two friends from Wisconsin—Eddie Lee Sausage and Mitch Deprey—decide to head to San Francisco and try their hand at big-city life in the lower Haight. They end up renting an inexpensive apartment with paper-thin walls, and they quickly discover their neighbors—bigoted loudmouth Raymond Huffman and gay and proud Peter Haskett—have an ongoing and endless screaming match with one another. Eddie and Mitch begin to record the conflict, and soon their audiotapes get distributed and reach underground cult status.

This dark and sad documentary explores how over the ensuing years the recordings take on a life of their own and inspire plays, comics, and even a failed movie deal. Various artists and fans are interviewed, and greed rears its ugly head. Viewers basically get an inside look at a toxic relationship, which becomes mean-spirited entertainment. It's weirdly fascinating and certainly a guilty pleasure to witness this exploration of humanity's corruption. (90 min.)

—Glen Starkey

THE WILD AND WONDERFUL WHITES OF WEST VIRGINIA

What's it rated? **TV-MA**
When? **2009**
Where's it showing? **Amazon Prime**

Maybe you've seen the cult classic documentary *Dancing Outlaw* (1991), about Jesco White, a mountain tap dancer. It followed his amazing dancing skills, the grinding poverty he suffered, his alcoholism, and drug addiction. This documentary explores the rest of the White clan, a pack of thieves, gas-huffers, drug dealers, and worse. The documentary has now been rereleased for its 10th anniversary, and as an accompaniment to *Shut Up Little Man!*, it offers another look at humanity's underbelly.

The Whites are really something else. Drug use is a way of life, and the various members talk candidly about their drugs of choice, the crimes they commit, and their multigenerational life of misdeeds. Yes, it's easy to look at this family and feel sorry for them or see them as degenerates and losers, but you'd be hard-pressed to find people living lives more free of convention, expectation, and the law. It's a wacky world they've created, one I wouldn't want to live in, but it's also sort of amazing. Watch at your



PHOTO COURTESY OF DICKHOUSE PRODUCTIONS

RULES ARE FOR SUCKERS: Currently screening on Amazon Prime, the documentary *The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia* examines the lawless White family, a pack of drug-abusing criminals who are also known for their mountain dancing members.

own peril! (86 min.) ○

—Glen

Sun film reviews are compiled by New Times Senior Staff Writer Glen Starkey. Contact him at gstarkey@newtimeslo.com.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF NAUGHTY OAK BREWING COMPANY



BOTTLES AND CANS: Although beer sales at Naughty Oak are about half of what they were before the pandemic started, the beer crew that's left is doing a lot more packaging than normal to keep up with the demand for to-go orders.

TO-GO: You can still pick up beers to take home at Naughty Oak Brewing Company in Orcutt.

Sip up while settled in

Naughty Oak Brewing Company settles into a new normal with beer sales to-go and a little boga on the side

BY CAMILLIA LANHAM

With beer sales at less than half of what they were before the pandemic started, Naughty Oak Brewing Company is in survival mode to make it through to the other side of the stay-at-home orders.

"We're seeing most of our support from the membership club. And we're just trying to be there with to-go stuff, and we're bottling and canning like crazy to stay on top of it," said Emily Kitts, who owns the brewery with her husband. "Since everything is now basically sold in a to-go package, it's just us trying to package everything."

The whole business model has shifted toward to-go, since the state and county stay-at-home orders went into place in mid-March to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Similar to other breweries, Naughty Oak is beefing up its to-go offerings and doing some delivery—delivery is available to the brewery's club members.

Kitts said that business varies from week to week, and the only major issue they've run into is with crowler cans, which are hard to come by on the supply side of things. She said some members send her an email when they want to re-up their supply, while others are ordering via social media or over the phone. But mostly, people are coming into the brewery and placing a quick order.

"Most of the people are stopping by when they're out running errands or finishing up a

walk or something," Kitts said.

For now, it's doable, Kitts said. As long as nothing else major changes. For a while there, everything was changing daily on the public health side of things, she said. They were just trying to keep up with what officials were asking people to do, but, she said, "I think we're settled now."

"If regulations don't get changed, we can sustain this for as long as we need to," Kitts said. "But who knows what will get changed in the future."

Naughty Oak decided to furlough almost all of its employees. Because so many of their employees rely on a tip-based income, Kitts said, even if the brewery could have kept them on and they filed for reduced wages, it wouldn't have come close to what they were making before the pandemic. Plus, many of the employees didn't want to risk getting exposed to COVID-19 and then expose their families to the virus.

"It seemed like it was in their best interest to file for unemployment," Kitts said.

However, the brewery was told it received approval for a Payroll Protection Act loan. Kitts said they haven't received the paperwork to sign yet. Once—and if—that money kicks in, she said she would love to be able to start bringing some people back to work.

"So we'll see, hopefully," Kitts said. "We fully intend to get everybody back, hopefully in June. In May would be amazing, if we could get them back in May."

In the meantime, Kitts' husband is still busy brewing, and Naughty Oak is even releasing some new beers during the pandemic. They recently started selling a new Belgian ale, a new double IPA is on deck, and a new sour is going into the tanks soon.

"We're partly trying to work with what we have, and we're partly trying to make—my

husband always likes to make something new," she said.

Rather than ordering anything specialty, Naughty Oak is just using what's already in store, she said, the grain and hops that are already sitting at the brewery. When they ran out of double IPA a few weeks ago, she said they were initially hesitant to brew a new one.

IPAs are tricky, Kitts said, because you want to drink it while the hops are still fresh and beer takes two to three weeks to ferment. They wanted to see how sales went, so they waited a little while before starting one because they didn't want the beer just sitting in the tanks.

Although everything is a little wacky because of the quarantine, the brewery still has some fun in store for its loyal customers—including boga (that's beer yoga for all you newbies out there). Courtney Iverson, who's been teaching boga at the brewery once a month for about 2 1/2 years, is continuing to lead Naughty Oak boga. It's just online.

The way Iverson explains it: "Beer yoga is basically doing yoga and drinking beer at the same time while incorporating your drink into the poses. Either with your hands or your mouth," she said.

Iverson said that she wanted to continue supporting the business and help people feel more connected. She's taught two virtual classes using Zoom and said the responses have been great. It's a little more challenging than teaching a class in person, she said, because it's more difficult to correct everyone's form.

But it's fun for her.

"I thoroughly enjoy doing it as a way to stay in touch with my regulars and meet new people while trying to encourage support for Naughty Oak," Iverson said. "It's like being in everyone's living room and kids and pets always end up getting involved." ○

Editor Camillia Lanham is already striking a pose with a beer in her hand. It's called "down the hatch." Send food and drink tips to clanham@santamariasun.com.



BEER ROVER: Black rover, black rover, bring Naughty Oak beer right on over. Brewery owner Emily Kitts' brother rigged up a rover and has been using it to make some "fun deliveries" to a couple of their furloughed employees, Kitts said.

SLO THE VIRUS

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