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# Sun

AT THE MOVIES

*Planet of the Humans:*  
a dose of reality [24]

## Emergency giving

*Giving Tuesday adds a second day of generosity for nonprofits struggling to meet the community's needs [10]*

BY CAMILLIA LANHAM

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The Mezas fight against COVID-19 [5]

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A music video inspired by quarantine [20]

**EATS**

Pico's new chef gets cooking on Zoom [26]

# THE GRAND JURY WANTS YOU!



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This week's online poll 4/30-5/7

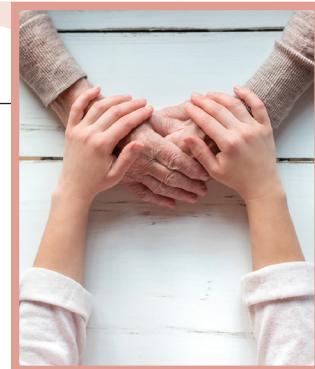
Do you think Central Coast mountain lions should be protected under the California Endangered Species Act?  
 Yes. Their numbers are dwindling.  
 They should be protected statewide.  
 No. It'll just lead to more regulations for developers and ranchers.  
 There was one in an Orcutt neighborhood recently. There's plenty of them left!

Enter your choice online at:  
[SantaMariaSun.com](http://SantaMariaSun.com)

**Sun**

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APRIL 30 - MAY 7, 2020 VOL. 21 NO. 9



**AIDING THE VULNERABLE:** Community Partners in Caring works to get food and prescriptions to the seniors who need it, now more than ever.

The annual Giving Tuesday campaign is all about volunteering time, donating money, and lending a helping hand. In this unprecedented time, nonprofits are finding it harder to keep up with the ever-increasing needs of the community, so Giving Tuesday added another day of generosity to the calendar and is hosting Giving Tuesday Now on May 5. Organizations as diverse as Community Partners in Caring and the SLO Botanical Garden are participating, and looking for a little bit of extra help to do their jobs. Learn about how you can help [10].

This week, you can also read about one North County couple's battle with coronavirus [5], a fight with the county over cannabis farm approvals [6], Angie and the Nightmares' new quarantine-inspired music video [20], earrings made from home [22], and how Pico's new chef is adapting to coronavirus [26].

Camillia Lanham  
editor

Cover design by Alex Zuniga

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## Stay Healthy & Fit

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# News

## BRIEFS

PHOTO COURTESY OF LOMPOC PRISON RALLY ORGANIZERS

### Political Watch

• U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) was among the majority of representatives who voted in favor of the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act on April 23. The bill, which had already passed through the Senate, allocates hundreds of billions of dollars to relief funds for small businesses, hospitals, and health centers, according to Carbajal's office. "This bipartisan bill will bring necessary relief to small businesses, hospitals, and front-line workers in our communities," Carbajal said in a news release. "I'm proud that congressional Democrats fought to include small business disaster funding, robust testing, and more protection and equipment for front-line workers in this bill." The bill adds \$310 billion to the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program, through which small business owners can obtain forgivable loans to pay their employees during the COVID-19 crisis. In late March, Congress passed a bill that allocated \$349 billion to the program, which was depleted in a matter of weeks.

• On April 22, the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) announced that it is launching an update to the county's long-range transportation plan and sustainable communities strategy called Connected 2050. According to SBCAG, this plan will help guide future decisions regarding transportation and how it relates to housing, jobs, and land use to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Members of the public can provide their input on the plan by texting the word "CONNECT" to (833) 956-0921 or by registering for updates at connect2050.org. SBCAG will also hold public meetings where residents can weigh in on the plan in the future. "The recommendations of Connected 2050 will influence Santa Barbara County's long-term growth and development for the next 30 years," SBCAG Executive Director Marjie Kirn said in a statement. "We will be asking residents and businesses about safe and affordable housing, how essential goods like medicine and food are transported, and how far we travel to reach our jobs or schools." The SBCAG board of directors is slated to adopt this plan in August 2021.

• On April 23, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued an executive order that extends the deadline for when school districts have to file an annual plan that's used for long-term planning and is tied to budget projections. The same order requires school districts to publish a written report explaining to communities how the district is responding to the COVID-19 crisis. District officials are required to detail the steps they've taken to continue educating students and providing school meals during the pandemic. District officials will also be required to explain how they've tried to meet the needs of low-income students as well as those learning English and in the foster care system.

• Santa Barbara County's Public Works Director Scott McGolpin was nominated as the president of the National Association of County Engineers at its annual business meeting on April 22. McGolpin has served in his role as director since 2007 and has been with the department since 1988. The association is a nonprofit of more than 3,000 county road officials and similar professionals in the U.S. and Canada. "It is an honor and privilege to serve the nation's county road professionals this year," McGolpin said in a news release from the association. "With infrastructure sure to play a key role in our nation's economic recovery, I look forward to engaging with policymakers and stakeholders to ensure county road infrastructure receives the attention needed to provide our nation with a safe, reliable transportation network." ☀

### Rally demands change in Lompoc prison's response to COVID-19

Concerned family members of inmates incarcerated in the Lompoc federal penitentiary organized a car rally on April 25 in hopes that the prison would answer to their demands, including moving nonviolent offenders to home confinement, restoring phone and internet access to inmates, providing personal protective equipment for all staff and inmates, and access to COVID-19 testing.

"It was very peaceful. We had a few cars, but I think that it will grow next week," rally organizer Alexandria told the Sun. "Over time, hopefully, they will return the use of the telephones, the internet, and the commissary, which is what we're asking for. Hopefully they will depopulate the prison by releasing the nonviolent offenders to home confinement."

Alexandria—who said her son is in the low-security facility on a nonviolent drug charge and has an upcoming release date later this year—is concerned for the safety of inmates at Lompoc amid one of the worst federal prison outbreaks of COVID-19 in the country. She asked that only her first name be used out of concerns of retaliation for her son.

"If you have over 200 people in one dormitory that are an arm's distance away, there's no way you can do social distancing unless you depopulate," she said. "We're not even asking for him to be home free, we're saying home confinement is fine."

Alexandria said she believes the Lompoc prison management is not releasing as many inmates to home confinement as they could be, per orders by United States Attorney General William Barr to prioritize home confinement as a response to the pandemic.

"I was hoping that the prison would consider the memo that was sent by Attorney General William Barr on March 26," she said. "In that memo to the [Bureau of Prisons], he said that prisoners should be released if they have good conduct in the prison, and if they are nonviolent offenders. Of course they prioritized older people and sick, but they didn't say it had to be."

In the letter that Alexandria is referring to, Barr sets out six different criteria that federal prisons should consider when assessing which inmates might be chosen for transfer to home confinement. The top of the list is "the age and vulnerability of the inmate to COVID-19."

Other factors Barr asks the bureau to consider include "the security level of the facility currently holding the inmate, with priority given to inmates residing in low- and minimum-security facilities," as well as "the inmate's conduct in prison" and "the inmate's crime of conviction, and assessment of danger posed by the inmate to the community."

While Alexandria's son doesn't meet the "age and vulnerability" standard, she feels that his good conduct and the security level of his facility makes him a strong candidate for home confinement, based on the other categories set out by Barr. Lompoc's prisons consist of U.S. Penitentiary Lompoc, a medium-security facility, and FCI Lompoc, a low-security federal correctional institution.

"And he's not even being considered for release," she said.

Scott Taylor, a Bureau of Prisons (BOP) public affairs official, told the Sun in an April 28 email that, since Barr's March 26 letter, they've released 1,576 inmates to home confinement across all BOP facilities. The bureau didn't answer the Sun's request for the specific number of inmates released from Lompoc's facility, stating, "Given the fluid



**DEMANDING ANSWERS:** Concerned family members of Lompoc prison inmates peacefully gathered for a car rally on Saturday to ask the Bureau of Prisons to consider more inmates for home confinement release to stop the spread of COVID-19.

nature of the pandemic situation, we are just providing the total number of inmates transferred to home confinement across the Bureau of Prisons."

Taylor also stated that, in response to the Attorney General's directives, "the BOP began immediately reviewing all inmates who have COVID-19 risk factors, as described by the CDC, to determine which inmates are suitable for home confinement." The email response didn't mention consideration of any of the other criteria for home confinement that Barr included in his letter.

Taylor wrote that the bureau has the discretion to choose "which home confinement cases are appropriate for review in order to fight the spread of the pandemic." So while the bureau must work under Barr's guidelines, Taylor said that the Department of Justice confirmed that ultimate discretion lies with the bureau.

U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara) has penned multiple letters of concern over the Lompoc prison outbreak to BOP officials, asking that prison leadership quickly build a mobile hospital to house sick prisoners, obtain more ventilators, and increase personal protective equipment for staff.

Alexandria commended these actions, but also expressed that, in her opinion, more can be done.

"The depopulation of the inmates I think is key. The ones that are not violent and have a release date that's soon, that have been doing well: Let them go to home confinement," she said. "Depopulate it so that you can then work with the population you have left."

In regard to moving prisoners to home confinement, Carbajal wrote in an April 24 email statement to the Sun that "We should be assessing every measure to safely stop the spread in the Lompoc facility and in our community at large." The congressman also reiterated the need for a health facility and ventilators at the prison site.

"We are hearing stories of inmates being sent home without proper care and of workers sleeping in their vehicles to protect their families from the virus," he wrote. "Everyone deserves better and the bureau must act swiftly."

—Malea Martin

### State studies listing Central Coast mountain lions as threatened, endangered

Over the next year, officials with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will review the status of mountain lion populations on the Central Coast and farther south to decide whether the animals should be protected under the California Endangered Species Act.

This move started in June 2019 when the Center for Biological Diversity and the Mountain Lion Foundation submitted a petition to the CDFW to list six populations of mountain lions as threatened or endangered. In the petition, the groups outlined numerous threats to these populations, while highlighting development as the key factor.

"While the Southern California and Central Coast mountain lions face a multitude of

**NEWS** continued page 4

### Weekend Weather

#### KSBY NEWS

Microclimate Weather Forecast  
**Dave Hovde**  
KSBY Chief Meteorologist



#### Thursday



**COASTAL** ▶ High 79 Low 53  
**INLAND** ▶ High 87 Low 56

#### Friday



**COASTAL** ▶ High 75 Low 49  
**INLAND** ▶ High 82 Low 51

#### Saturday



**COASTAL** ▶ High 72 Low 50  
**INLAND** ▶ High 70 Low 48

#### Sunday



**COASTAL** ▶ High 72 Low 50  
**INLAND** ▶ High 70 Low 48

**High pressure relaxes a bit into the weekend resulting in a little cool-down but temps still run slightly above average.**

**NEWS** from page 3

threats, the greatest challenges stem from habitat loss and fragmentation and the consequent impact on their genetic health," the petition states.

According to the petition, the Central Coast population, which stretches between Monterey and Santa Barbara counties has a healthier population than other areas. The petition states there are between 113 and 226 mountain lions in this population, while some groups farther south are in the single or double digits. However, in the petition, the organizations argue that high rates of development and habitat loss could lead to similar issues for mountain lions along the Central Coast, where population numbers are already lower than other parts of the state.

Los Padres ForestWatch Conservation Director Bryant Baker told the *Sun* that looking further ahead could help populations in years to come. His organization supports providing additional protection for these populations.

"Just because areas are rural now doesn't mean they will be in the future," Baker said. "That's one of the really important aspects of doing something like this is it's really forward thinking."

The CDFW reviewed this petition and presented its findings to the California Fish and Game Commission during its April 16 meeting. The commission agreed that further analysis on these mountain lion populations is warranted and unanimously decided CDFW should review the issue in depth.

In an email, Jordan Traverso, deputy director for the CDFW Office of Communications, Education, and Outreach told the *Sun* that after this year-long review process, the CDFW will present its findings to the commission, which will then decide whether to add the mountain lions to the state's list of threatened or endangered species.

"Endangered status means the population is worse off than threatened," Traverso said. "Threatened is a step toward endangered status."

Either status would require development plans to take mountain lions into account, which the California Building Industry Association has pushed back on. Another aspect that's received opposition is how this potential new listing would change a rancher's ability to obtain a depredation permit.

A statewide proposition voters approved in 1990 banned the hunting of mountain lions. Under this proposition, mountain lions can only be killed if the state issues a depredation permit for a mountain lion that's killed livestock or pets. The lions can also be killed to preserve public safety or to protect bighorn sheep.

During the public comment period of the commission meeting, Sunshine Saldivar, a representative for the California Farm Bureau Federation, said mountain lions are a significant threat to cattle and that losing livestock is extremely costly for ranches that already operate on thin margins.

"Ultimately the [California Endangered Species Act] listing would jeopardize ranchers' ability to protect their livestock and it would threaten the viability of ranches," Saldivar said.

In an email, Traverso told the *Sun* that it's yet to be determined how a potential threatened or endangered listing would affect ranchers' ability to obtain these depredation permits. According to CDFW data, since 2001, state officials have issued 54 of these permits in Santa Barbara County and 159 in San Luis Obispo County, although not all of these permits led to lions being killed.

In a statement to the *Sun*, SLO County Farm

Bureau Executive Director Brent Burchett said that he hopes the state provides some clarity on how any new listing could affect this depredation permit process.

"No one wants to see these animals killed, and we know the important role mountain lions play in our Central Coast ecosystem," Burchett said. "But for a family cattle ranch, even the loss of a few head of cattle from predation has a serious financial impact."

—Zac Ezzone

## Lompoc weighs Fourth of July event amid COVID-19 pandemic

Although it's still months away, Lompoc officials are debating whether to cancel the city's Fourth of July event this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Without a clear end date for local and statewide stay-at-home orders, city officials are concerned it may not be possible to hold an event that people can attend in person. Even if the order is lifted, Councilmember Gilda Cordova said she's wary of the city hosting an event that people are afraid to attend.

"We may not get ticket sales even if we had it ... because people would be too afraid to come out or because they may have been laid off and not be able to pay for tickets," Cordova said during the April 21 City Council meeting.

During the meeting, city Recreation Manager Mario Guerrero presented the council with three possible locations where the city could host the event. The options include Ryon Park near the middle of town, River Park on the east side, and a private agricultural property to the west of the city. Normally the city holds the event at Huyck Stadium, but recent renovations remove it from the list of options.

If the stay-at-home order is still in place at the time, the city couldn't host an in-person event, Guerrero said. However, the residents who live near those locations would probably be able to see the show from home and other residents could drive close to the event and watch from inside their vehicles.

Councilmember Victor Vega wasn't a fan of those options.

"I would hate to just have a drive-by fireworks show because I don't know who we're appeasing," Vega said.

The event's location isn't the only issue the city needs to address to have the show. Funding is also an issue.

According to a staff report, the city's Fourth of July events usually cost about \$30,000 to run. About half of this funding comes from a percentage of "safe and sane" fireworks sold at booths within the city from the previous year, while the rest comes from a combination of ticket sales and sponsorships. But if the event isn't in-person there's no revenue from ticket sales, and with many businesses closed due to the virus, Vega said it's unlikely donors will contribute funding to the event.

But Councilmember Jim Mosby disagrees. He said he's heard from residents who want to see the event move forward and that they'd be willing to help contribute to make it happen.

"Remember what Fourth of July is and one of the reasons why we have the 'bombs bursting in air,'" Mosby said. "I think this is an important time for us to continue to say, 'We are alive.'"

Ultimately the council decided that if the city doesn't have the necessary funding by June 1, then the event would be postponed to next year. Additionally, the council directed city staff to speak with the city and county fire departments about where would be the safest location to hold the event and return as soon as possible with their input.

—Zac Ezzone

## Santa Maria could follow county's lead on potential reopening plans

At an April 27 virtual press conference, county officials discussed the importance of continued physical distance as well as potential plans for reopening in the future. According to Santa Maria City Councilmember Gloria Soto, the city plans to follow the county's lead on any reopening plans.

Second District Supervisor Gregg Hart said that, if the public wants to maintain access to public outdoors spaces like beaches, trails, and parks, people need to continue to respect physical distancing guidelines—particularly as temperatures start to rise and more people flock to outdoor activities.

"The overflow parking lot at Arroyo Burro was also closed, and there was a big sign advising beachgoers to avoid overcrowding, because too many people could force the closure of beaches," Hart said of the previous weekend, during which temperatures broke 80 degrees.

Public Health Officer Dr. Henning Ansorg reiterated the continued importance of physical distancing, stating, "Our COVID-19 related hospitalization and ICU admission rate has remained stable over the weekend, which again, is directly attributed to our efforts as a county with maintaining physical distancing."

However, Ansorg also said that the county is beginning to work with local medical experts and business leaders to come up with a plan on how to eventually transition out of the stay-at-home order locally, which can only happen after the governor lifts statewide orders.

"The decision on when this will be possible has to be made thoughtfully, safely, and rationally, founded in scientific data," Ansorg said. "Locally, we want to make sure that we have a plan in place and are ready once the qualifying criteria for reopening have been met."

City Councilmember Soto told the *Sun* that the city of Santa Maria's reopening would likely be accompanied by some degree of continued social distancing.

"We've been having conversations about what a reopening phase for us here in Santa Maria would look like," she said. "I am almost certain that there will still be some sort of social-distancing measure that will still be in place."

Soto emphasized that Santa Maria small businesses will need attention and support.

"We're trying to figure out, one, how we can support businesses in practicing those recommendations to protect the well-being of their customers, but also of their employees. And two, how we can support them in being successful once that order is lifted," she said. "The biggest thing is making sure that public health is at the forefront of everything that we do."

Soto said that Santa Maria should focus less on an exact reopening date, and more on how "to support our residents and our small business owners when those orders are lifted."

Soto said she continues to hear from constituents who are experiencing economic hardship from COVID-19 closures and economic changes.

"I had a constituent reach out to me who works in an auto dealership, for instance," she said. "They saw a large reduction in hours, but also the pay, because they weren't selling at all."

But it's vital to balance these economic concerns with ensuring that the virus continues to be contained, Soto said.

"My biggest fear is if we're not cautious about how we reopen. If we open up too soon, my concern is of a second wave hitting, a wave that could be worse than what we've experienced now," she said. "It's crucial for us as a governing

body to really listen to what public health experts say when it comes to what is considered an essential service and what's not, and also their social-distancing recommendations."

Other than Lompoc, which is home to the federal prison outbreak, the city of Santa Maria has the highest number of confirmed positive cases in the county at 104 cases as of April 27 and one death.

—Malea Martin

## Grand jury report highlights overcrowding in multiple county detention centers

During a review of 20 local detention facilities, the Santa Barbara County grand jury found that many of the issues associated with these sites could be solved with additional funding.

"The majority of the findings and recommendations stem from the lack of funding, funding that is essential to add staff where needed, funding to upgrade older and dangerous buildings, and funding to add new mission-critical technical systems for safer management," a report the jury released on April 27 states.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the jury inspected county jails—including the Northern Branch Jail, which is under construction—and substations, probation facilities, court holding facilities, city jails and holding facilities, and the Santa Barbara Sobering Center.

According to the report, one of the more noteworthy findings was the overcrowding in the county's Main Jail. On the date the jury conducted its inspection in February 2020, there were 890 inmates in the jail, which is supposed to maintain a daily population of 819. Additionally, during the inspection, there were 13 fewer custody deputies on duty than there should have been.

"The jail is understaffed, which results in higher safety risks to custodial deputies, costs associated with mandatory overtime, and heightened custody staff stress levels," the report states.

The Northern Branch Jail, which is being built to the west of Santa Maria, is supposed to alleviate the overcrowding in the Main Jail, however, construction has taken much longer than expected. According to the report, the jail was originally scheduled to open in September 2018, but is now slated for May 2020. Due to this delay, as well as other issues, the jail is also estimated to cost between \$119 million and \$121 million, which is about 7 to 9 percent higher than originally projected.

The jury also found that the holding facilities at the county courthouses in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara both struggle with overcrowding. In Santa Maria, this problem stems from a lack of coordination between court administration scheduling and the Sheriff's Office.

"Frequently, many inmates are transported to the court holding facility and never reach the courtroom," the report states.

In Santa Barbara, the holding facility, which can officially hold 56 detainees, often has to accommodate as many as 80 prisoners at a time. The facility can house one person in each of its eight overflow cages that the jury refers to as "extremely small" and "inhumane." The holding facility in Lompoc also has three of these cages staff use to separate inmates or for overflow purposes.

A representative from the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office said the department has received the report and is working on its response. All agencies identified in the report have between 60 and 90 days to submit their responses to the grand jury. ○

—Zac Ezzone

# Road to recovery

Santa Maria local Louis Meza shares what it's like to recover from COVID-19 while watching a loved one fight to live

BY MALEA MARTIN

**O**n March 14, Santa Maria resident Louis Meza went from feeling healthy to violently ill overnight.

"I woke up about 2 in the morning, and I couldn't stop shivering," he told the *Sun* a month later.

For Louis and Melissa Meza, that night was the start of a battle with COVID-19 that the couple is still fighting. While Louis has fully recovered, Melissa also caught the virus. She was improving but still hospitalized as of April 24.

Using Facebook to post updates about Melissa's condition, Louis has reached people across the nation. His story even made national news in a video interview with NBC on April 23.

But national attention aside, Louis is about as "locally grown" as it gets. He was born and raised in Casmalia, about 5 miles southwest of Santa Maria. Today he works as a chef in Casmalia at The Hitching Post, a barbecue restaurant and the heartbeat of the tiny town.

"When he was 5 years old, he came looking for my dad to see if there was some work he could do," the restaurant's general manager, Terri Stricklin, told the *Sun*. "He just has that kind of work ethic still to this day."

Four of The Hitching Post's employees ended up testing positive for COVID-19, Stricklin said.

"It made it real for all of us," Stricklin said. "It wasn't somebody you read about in the paper: It was somebody that we know and were close to."

When Louis started feeling ill, his mind went immediately to COVID-19—sudden fever is one of the hallmark symptoms of the disease.

Currently, anyone who shows up with COVID-19 symptoms at Marian Regional Medical Center is tested, said Dr. Kevin Ferguson, medical director of the Clinical Laboratory and Pathology Department at Dignity Health Laboratories of Central Coast Division North.

But when Louis got sick on March 14, this wasn't yet the case.

Because of limited numbers of tests early on, "When people had influenza we weren't testing for COVID, unless for some reason they didn't recover," Ferguson said.

Louis contacted his doctor, got his nose swabbed in the parking lot, and tested positive for influenza-A. He went home feeling relieved.

"My wife was bringing me food, and we were thinking it's just influenza-A," he said. "So she was around me the whole time."

But Louis' fever, body aches, headaches, and cough wouldn't subside. Over the next few days, he made two trips to the emergency room at Marian Regional Medical Center. After revealing that he was diagnosed with influenza-A, he was sent home each time. Then, Louis began coughing so hard that he could barely get out of bed.

"I felt like I couldn't breathe," he recalled. "I was coughing up blood."

On March 23, Melissa drove her husband to the hospital one more time.

"I just told them, 'I cannot go back home. I am so sick,'" Louis remembers. "The first thing I heard from the doctor was, 'This guy has the virus.'"

Because of his condition, Louis was tested, isolated, and treated like a COVID-19 patient. Four days later, what he and his doctors already

suspected was confirmed: Louis didn't just have influenza-A, he also had COVID-19.

"We have seen co-infection, but it's very uncommon," Ferguson said.

While Louis was recovering in the hospital, Melissa began experiencing symptoms at home. Like Louis, it took Melissa three trips to the hospital to be admitted. At first, Louis said, she wasn't sick enough to get a hospital room. But by her third trip, "She was in trouble," Louis said. "She just couldn't breathe."

Melissa was admitted the same day that Louis left, March 28, so the couple has been apart since Louis was first admitted more than a month and a half ago. Just before Louis was discharged, he remembers his nurse coming back into his room.

"He says, 'Your wife did get admitted into the hospital, but we had to intubate her right away,'" Louis recalled. "I just lost it. I started crying."

Louis, 47, has a pre-existing condition—rheumatoid arthritis. He said his doctors believe that the arthritis medication he was already taking, a steroid, might have made it easier for him to fight the virus.

But Melissa, 43, didn't have any health problems before contracting the disease, Louis said. The virus just happened to hit her harder.

As the days passed, Melissa wasn't improving, so her doctors started searching for a plasma donor match. Convalescent plasma treatments, in which a recovered person's antibodies are given to a sick patient, "have been tried in other illnesses for which we don't have vaccines," Ferguson said.

But this early on in the pandemic, health officials say it's difficult to know whether plasma treatments are responsible for patient recovery. Since hospitalized patients are often receiving a slew of treatments, Ferguson said that any improvements in patients who receive plasma are, for now, "anecdotal." But for someone as sick as Melissa, doctors were determined to try everything.

After finding a match from a recovered man in Ventura County, Melissa was the first COVID-19 patient at Marian to receive the plasma treatment, Louis said. It helped, but she was still struggling.

The next option was to get Melissa on an extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machine. These blood-cleaning machines have helped coronavirus patients across the globe when nothing else is working. Although Marian

"is evaluating the necessary steps to enhancing clinical



**STILL FIGHTING:** While Santa Maria resident Louis Meza recovered from COVID-19 more than a month ago, Melissa Meza is improving but still hospitalized.

services by adding an ECMO program," Chief Nursing Officer Candice Monge told the *Sun* in an email that "there are no ECMO programs on the Central Coast."

Despite no local ECMO machines, Louis had a premonition: "I kept telling everybody, there's going to be a miracle Easter Sunday." Sure enough, that weekend, an ECMO machine opened up at Providence Saint John's Hospital in Santa Monica. On Easter Sunday, Louis was informed that Melissa could be transported within two hours, with his permission.

"The high risk about this is she might not



**LIFE BEFORE COVID:** Before COVID-19 forced him to temporarily stop working, Louis Meza worked as a chef at The Hitching Post, a local restaurant in Casmalia.

survive the ride," Louis recalls the doctor saying. "I had made the decision with my family, and I told everybody, 'We have to send her.'"

Melissa made it. Within two days, Louis received a text from the doctors down in Santa Monica: "She's breathing on her own."

"I just started crying," Louis said. "I was so excited."

While the ECMO machine helped tremendously, Melissa's battle was far from over. After days of improvements, Melissa experienced a setback and had to get back on the ECMO machine.

"She's not running fevers, her heart rate's good. All kidney functions, liver functions are really good," Louis said on April 22. "But she's still having a hard time breathing."

On April 24, Louis said Melissa was back off ECMO, breathing on her own with oxygen assistance and a long road to recovery ahead of her. Louis left the hospital more than a month ago, but he continues to be cautious because his COVID-19 tests keep turning up positive. As of April 22, Louis had taken five of the highly uncomfortable nasal tests. He's waiting for a negative result so he can donate his plasma.

"We typically take donations after their PCR becomes negative," Ferguson said. PCR stands for polymerase chain reaction, the type of test used to identify COVID-19 patients.

"If I come up negative, I'm donating right away," Louis said. "I wish more people would do it. I think the problem is people are ashamed that they had it."

Louis encouraged his fellow COVID-19 survivors to overcome the stigma around the disease and donate.

"His activism on the part of their illness has been impressive," Stricklin said of her co-worker. "It's made it real for so many people, not just his friends and family and co-workers, but to our whole community."

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

# Battle in the valley

*Some in the wine industry continue to oppose cannabis in the Santa Ynez Valley*

BY ZAC EZZONE

The same week the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors approved the largest cannabis project to come before the board so far, a coalition of residents pushing back on the new industry sued the county over its March approval of a different farm.

During its April 21 meeting, supervisors approved plans for a 50-acre cannabis farm in the Santa Rita Hills on a tight 3-2 vote, with 3rd District Supervisor Joan Hartmann and 4th District Supervisor Peter Adam voting against the project. Adam acknowledged this rare circumstance where he, a staunch conservative, was on the same side as some environmentalists who opposed the project.

"I'm sitting with the strangest bedfellows ... so, maybe hell has frozen over, I'm not sure," Adam said.

This is the second farm in the Santa Ynez Valley supervisors have approved in recent months. On March 17, supervisors—absent Adam, who didn't attend the meeting—unanimously approved plans for Busy Bee's Organics, which became the first project in the valley the board approved.

The Santa Barbara Coalition for Responsible Cannabis sued the county and the board over this decision on April 23. According to the petition, the group claims the county violated the California Environmental Quality Act by approving the project based on an insufficient programmatic environmental impact review (PEIR). The county completed this review in 2017 prior to passing the cannabis ordinance in February 2018.

In the lawsuit, the group claims that in the time since the board approved the ordinance, new environmental issues involving the cannabis industry have appeared that weren't examined in the review.

"Because the board was presented with substantial evidence supporting a fair argument that changed circumstances and new information arising after the PEIR's certification may result in new and substantially more severe environmental impacts, the board's finding was in error, and subsequent environmental review is required," the lawsuit states.

Since the county began accepting applications for cannabis projects, the Santa Ynez Valley has emerged as one of the areas with the most proposals. Opponents of the cannabis industry claim that this sort of clustering isn't examined

in the PEIR, although county staff has said otherwise on numerous occasions.

In a statement to the *Sun*, attorney Susan Petrovich, who represents Busy Bee's Organics, said the team behind the project is disappointed to see this lawsuit filed against the farm, which 1st District Supervisor Das Williams referred to as an example for others to follow during the board's March 17 meeting.

"More than 10 local and state agencies have reviewed and approved the project and found it to meet or exceed their rigorous requirements," Petrovich said in the statement. "This is an end run around the long since expired statute of limitations to challenge the county's cannabis laws."

The coalition behind this lawsuit has filed numerous appeals over other cannabis farms in the valley, including the Santa Barbara West Coast Farms project the Board of Supervisors approved during its April 21 meeting.

The project description includes plans to grow 46 acres of cannabis, along with a 4-acre nursery, and the construction of two 3,000-square-foot buildings where the plants will be processed. The project site is located off Highway 246 about 1 mile west of Buellton.

It's across the street from Blair Pence's property, Pence Vineyards. According to Secretary of State filing documents, Pence is the CEO of the coalition. He and two other board members filed paperwork with the state to register the organization on May 6, 2019, which is the same day that Pence appealed the county Planning and Development

Department's decision to approve a land use permit for the Santa Barbara West Coast Farms project.

Pence and some other vintners and cannabis opponents in the valley say they're concerned that organic compounds released from the plants—called terpenes—could taint the taste of the wine. A cannabis farm applicant financed a study last year that suggests this isn't likely, but the county is looking into funding its own study to examine the issue.

Because of the strict testing cannabis undergoes to ensure it's pesticide-free, vintners have also complained that they could be held



**HARVESTING:** Busy Bee's Organics grows 22 acres of cannabis on its farm near Buellton, which is at the center of a lawsuit filed against the county.

liable if the pesticide they spray on their grapes drifts over to a nearby cannabis farm and ruins the plants. But cannabis farmers point out that it's illegal for pesticides to drift to any neighboring farms, not just when it's cannabis.

Some vintners have also raised concerns about the odor from cannabis farms affecting guests' experiences tasting wine at their wineries, including Al Wager, who is the vice president of vineyards for Foley Family Wines.

"Our wineries' reputations have been built on our wines and tasting room experience—with the proliferation of cannabis odors near tasting rooms along Highway 246, we expect visitors will not be able to taste our wines and will not choose Santa Barbara County for wine tasting," Wagner said in a written public comment to the board for its April 21 meeting.

of an industry that has been working for decades to create a cache with the Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez Valley, and Santa Rita Hills area," Hartmann said.

In response to a request from Hartmann, county planner Kathryn Lehr told the board that the county has received applications that total up to about 625 acres of cannabis cultivation in the AVA, which covers more than 33,000 acres.

Attorney Larry Conlan, who represented West Coast Farms at the meeting, said this concern over clustering isn't a valid reason to deny the project a permit, as it's only the second project in the Santa Ynez Valley to appear before the board. Also, he said, the county looked at this clustering issue in a programmatic environmental impact review that the coalition is contesting in its lawsuit.

Fifth District Supervisor Steve Lavagnino, who is one of the strongest cannabis proponents on the board, said the wine industry doesn't have a monopoly on land use decisions

in the valley. He said that people opposed to the cannabis industry continue to point to proposed locations as incompatible, which leaves farmers without many options where they wouldn't receive criticism.

"It's just this continual attempt to block wherever these folks want to go," Lavagnino said. "I guess we go back out into the Los Padres National Forest again and do it illegally, because that's where you're going to force these guys to go."

—Susan Petrovich, attorney for Busy Bee's Organics

## 'This is an end run around the long since expired statute of limitations to challenge the county's cannabis laws.'

—Susan Petrovich, attorney for Busy Bee's Organics

While supervisors approved the Busy Bee's Organics project unanimously, the debate over West Coast Farms was far more contentious. Its location within the Santa Rita Hills American Viticultural Area (AVA) was a major concern for Hartmann and Adam. An AVA is a designated grape-growing region with unique features that distinguish it from surrounding areas.

Hartmann—whose district includes the valley—said she is concerned about a high number of cannabis projects proposed in and near the AVA hurting the local wine industry.

"It's a misappropriation of the Santa Rita Hills brand, and I think it's damaging to the reputation

Reach Staff Writer Zac Ezzone at [zezzone@santamariasun.com](mailto:zezzone@santamariasun.com).



Kathleen Gerber, 2019



David Lawrence, 2019



Dylan Kyle, 2019



Barry Goyette, 2019



Michael Castaneda, 2019

# Winning Images

## Our 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Photography Contest & Exhibition has been postponed

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NewTimes Sun

# Page turner

*With the new Book Club over the Phone, Santa Maria Library patrons can read through quarantine*

BY MALEA MARTIN

For those of us lucky enough to have a little extra time on our hands during quarantine season, now's the perfect chance to pick up a new hobby. Sticking to that hobby, though—especially without the motivation that comes with having others around—can be challenging.

But the Santa Maria public library has just the solution to isolation woes: the Book Club over the Phone, a new take on Valley Reads, which is an in-person book club the library has hosted for years.

"It is attended by faithful participants, and we gather every fourth Tuesday of the month," Library Technician Jose Gaytan told the Sun. "However, since the closures, we couldn't meet for obvious reasons. My supervisor was watching a webinar, and one of them discussed virtual book clubs, and we thought that was a good idea. That's where it was born."

The first session of Book Club over the Phone will be held on May 5. Gaytan encouraged interested community members to email him their name and phone number at jgaytan@cityofsantamaria.org. Then, on May 5, Gaytan will set up a teleconference with all the phone numbers and lead a group book discussion.

Rather than picking one book for all club

members to read and discuss, Gaytan said that the first meeting will center on a single genre: mystery novels. This way, participants will have more freedom to choose their book and, in turn, gain inspiration for their reading list from other book club callers.

The open-ended approach provides an opportunity for people to get in the habit of reading, even for those who aren't avid readers. Gaytan emphasized that no one should feel intimidated by the book club, and offered some advice on how new readers can find books that suit them.

"The way I started reading was I thought about, 'OK, what movies do I like to watch?' A lot of them were science fiction, so then I fell in love with science fiction books," he said. "My advice is to think of a type of movie that you like and then see if there's a written genre based on or around that. You know how the old adage goes: 'The book was better than the movie.' I can attest that the book is definitely better than the movie."

Book Club over the Phone isn't the only option for reading while the library remains closed: Through the California State Library's Zip Books program, Santa Maria Public Library also offers a doorstep delivery service.

"With patrons who are looking for a certain title that we might not have here, we can go ahead and order it through amazon.com," Gaytan explained. "It has to be \$50 or less if it's a physical book or \$75 or less if it's an audio book, and then it goes directly to their home. Then they have 30 days to return the book."

Patrons can call (805) 925-0994 to see if the book they want to read fits the Zip Books guidelines, or they can fill out a book request form on the city's website. The library also has a wide collection of e-books and e-audiobooks



**READ ON:** The Santa Maria Public Library is offering a variety of ways for patrons to continue reading through the COVID-19 crisis, including a virtual book club and a large e-book selection.

that library cardholders can access even while the library remains closed. Even those who don't have a library card can join the fun: sign up for an e-library card online.

## Highlights

- Women's Economic Ventures (WEV), a Santa Barbara-based nonprofit, launched a Quick Response Loan program on March 18. Within a month, WEV received 118 loan applications amounting to more than \$1 million in funding requests. As of April 20, the nonprofit had approved 45 loans adding up to \$362,500, 36 of which went to local small businesses. The loans are up to \$10,000 each with a fixed interest rate that can be repaid over 36 months. Find more information about the loan program and other business resources at [wevonline.org](http://wevonline.org).

Santa Maria's Code Enforcement Division announced on April 22 that Pierce Chiropractic & Sports Injury Center was awarded the Code Officers Distinguished Excellence (CODE) Award. Operated through the city attorney's office, the award intends to "recognize businesses that are making a positive contribution to the community," according to the city. Located at 1415 East Main St. in Santa Maria, Pierce Chiropractic & Sports Injury Center was nominated "for its current efforts in implementing safe practices to stop the spread of COVID-19 while continuing to offer chiropractic services to the members of the community in the safest manner possible," according to the release. ☈

Staff Writer Malea Martin wrote this week's Spotlight. Send tips to [spotlight@santamariasun.com](mailto:spotlight@santamariasun.com).



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# Opinion

## COMMENTARY

### Online Poll

**How do you feel about the framework the governor announced the state will use when determining whether to change the stay-at-home order?**

- 50% It's great. It needs to happen slowly.
- 36% It's too vague to know for certain.
- 7% It needs to happen now. I'm ready to protest!
- 7% It's irrelevant. I don't trust anything he says.

14 Votes

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# Unmasking the media

*Take a peek behind what national broadcast reporters convey while covering themselves and the pandemic*

BY JOHN SUMMER

**O**h, I just love it when a "national" broadcast news reporter submerges himself or herself in the hoary depths of a debacle. This is where they gain their stripes. This is raw reporting at its finest.

Over the ages, news reporters have strived to hurl themselves into the teeth of a storm, or war, or a Justin Bieber concert. The finest moments come with a trench coat while clutching a telephone pole as the category 5 hurricane scours the surrounding terrain like a "freight train" leaving a "war zone" with "trees snapping like matchsticks." And there, in the middle of it all ... is the intrepid reporter, body waving horizontally, lips flapping in the 157 mph wind.

And throughout it all, they are appropriately dressed.

Mujahideen turbans in Afghanistan. Burkas in Iraq. And trench coats everywhere.

So it is with the virus I call "Phil." This is "war" in the absence of war, and national broadcast news reporters are embracing it with the full measure of zeal and appropriate dress. In this case, with *the face mask*.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not dissing face masks. Worn in the appropriate setting along with at least a 6-foot zone of demarcation and a Taser, face masks can help to prevent the spread of Phil. But that's not the case with the national TV reporters I'm watching at this moment on the evening news as the anchor appears with a Zoom meeting/*Brady Bunch* display next to him where every reporter is wearing a mask.

The face mask has been hijacked as a virtue-signaling device like a bumper sticker on a

Subaru. Reporters are visibly demonstrating their "high moral standards," when in most cases where they report from the mask is about as useful as a goose-down parka in a summer grassfire. Come to think of it, the mask would be a good thing in a grassfire.

But that's not where these important broadcast people are. They're in the middle of a Kmart parking lot in Secaucus. Or on an empty beach in Lavallette or Neptune. Or in desolate midtown Manhattan. You could fire an Exocet missile down Broadway these days and never hit anyone except perhaps the Naked Cowboy. But they're there. Fearless reporters all, wearing *the mask*.

(Insider's note: Most of these dufuses don't even write their own copy. They have producers who march to the orders of the East Coast Blue

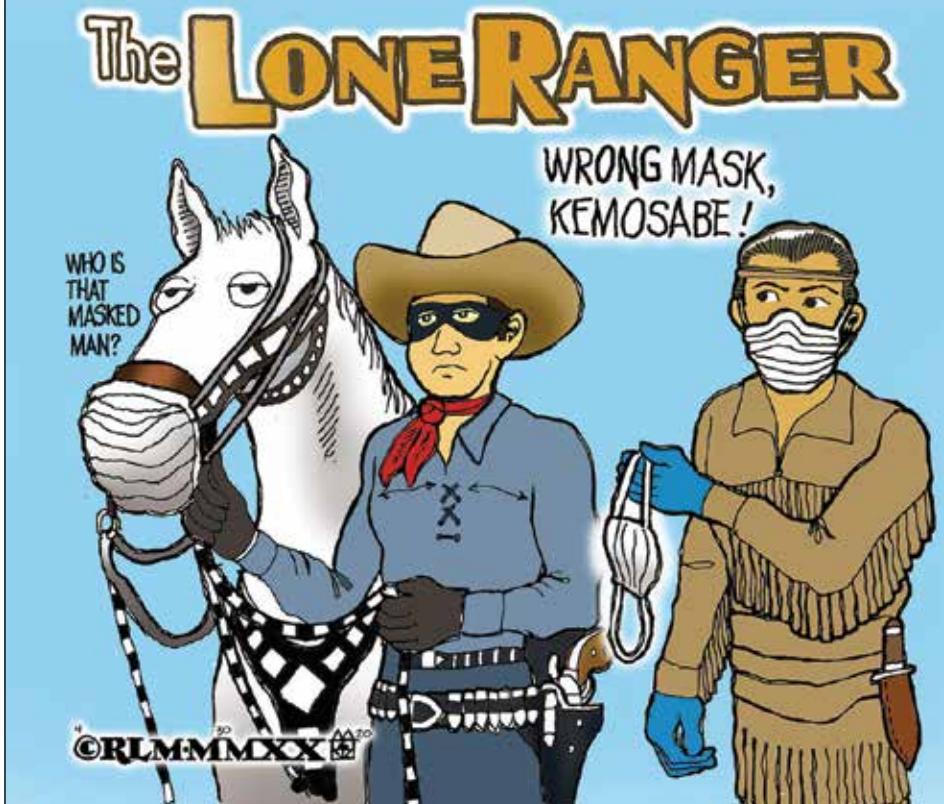
**This is 'war' in the absence of war, and national broadcast news reporters are embracing it with the full measure of zeal and appropriate dress.**

Blood Elite Network Managers, who have an agenda. Oh yes they do.)

And come to think of it part deux: They're *all* on the East Coast, and that's the problem. Most national media reside in the New York/Washington, D.C., corridor, and that's the lens through which they view the rest of the country. They think they are us. Since they've got it bad, they just assume the rest of us should suffer along with them.

Well, I feel bad for them, but I don't suffer with them. I've got my own stuff to deal with. It's like denying the whole fourth grade class peanut butter sandwiches because one student

## MAYFIELD



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has an allergy. I get it. But what about the rest of us out here in the hinterlands? You know, "If we can prevent just *one* death" ... from despair, fear, anxiety, joblessness, homelessness, alcoholism, domestic abuse, heart attack, stroke, drug addiction, suicide. Post *those* statistics in bold print alongside the anchor, instead of virus stats, as if they're doing body counts during the Vietnam War. Aren't those economic lost lives equal in value to lives lost to the virus?

The reality is, we had it first. This is pretty clear now. I can't tell you how many people have said that they had a nasty unexplained illness here on the Central Coast long before we even heard of this virus thing called by many names. That includes my own family and friends. And there's a good explanation. California has/had a robust air bridge between us and China, where the virus began.

And since it comes from China, on the other side of the Pacific, we would naturally be the first to be infected, as recent studies out of Stanford and USC are confirming. Then it travels all the way to the East Coast. And to the East Coast from the other side of the Atlantic as well. So we've had it. Now they've got it. Such is life.

Well, here's the deal. Don't listen to these broadcast numbskulls. They spew negativity and divisiveness. Take charge of your own life. You know what is best for you. Wear a mask if you wish. But no mask can protect us from fear and despair and putting our lives on hold while the illuminati lecture us from afar. Respect your neighbor. Exercise common sense and cleanliness and responsibility. If you are among the "vulnerable," stay home. But for God's sake, let's get back to business.

The more we learn, the less we have to fear. And we've learned a lot. But not from the myopic mask-wearing posers on the "national" TV news. And I guarantee you the mask comes off once the camera is off. □

*John Summer spent many years imbedded in the world of broadcast journalism and managed to survive unscathed. At least he thinks so. He writes from San Luis Obispo. Send your thoughts, comments, and opinionated letters to letters@santamariasun.com.*

## LETTERS

### Fear is not a new normal

Some of us in the coming weeks will experience something not unlike Neil Armstrong's "one small step for man ..." moment. We will decide to test the unknown. Not all of us will be that apprehensive because we suspect that this new virus entered California last December. I know I had the flu between Christmas and New Year's, and as I ask around, many other people reported the same flu affecting the whole family—children and adults. This will be an important issue to investigate in the aftermath of this unprecedented

LETTERS continued page 9

## LETTERS from page 8

event, because some are saying this lockdown and panic will be the "new normal." I really despise that resignation. What was the "new normal" after the 1918 Spanish flu or the avian flu or the swine flu?

This new virus was treated differently because we knew nothing about it at all. To err on the side of caution is prudent. We have the technology to handle the unknown more swiftly than any previous generation. To resign to a "new normal" means we should shut down the economy every flu season.

Influenza is an annual event for which we wisely get a flu shot and do not cough and sneeze on other people, and it's best not to visit people in frail health.

God help us if we decide to cower in fear of the unknown. It hasn't been our nature for as long as recorded history, even as the naysayers said the world is flat. May I include a big fat zero appreciation to those who stirred up panic for political reasons.

Jan Lipski  
Vandenberg Village

## Mother Earth's health is at risk, too

April is the month we celebrate Earth Day. With the COVID-19 health crisis, we realize how critical a healthy and safe environment is for all communities. Many Americans have pulled together to secure safety for themselves and others. This is such a positive example of how our country can make sacrifices to benefit all citizens. Just as the world is suffering from

this terrible virus, the Earth is also suffering from toxins in the air and water. As a society, we must take climate change seriously. Mother Earth has provided us with a perfect ecosystem, but right now her health is at great risk, too. This November, let your representatives know: climate matters. Mother Earth matters. If her health fails, we all suffer. Help Mother Earth cleanse the air and water. This November vote for the environment. Vote for Mother Earth.

Maggie Kraft  
San Luis Obispo

## What about the small businesses?

I am writing to you today with a heavy heart. My family owns a small business, 34 years in our community. Not a franchise, not a chain. We are a small business. More than 90 percent of our store is dedicated to local purveyors, wineries, farmers, and entrepreneurs. Each day we support our community. We support other businesses. We donate, we volunteer, we pride ourselves in community and in making a positive imprint each day.

I heard recently about the \$20 million that was granted to Ruth's Chris Steak House. That's wonderful, but what is left?

When we applied for our loan, we did it with no expectation of amount. Frankly, a tiny fraction of what they have received would have been appreciated.

Right now, we feel overlooked, frustrated, and forgotten.

We remain hopeful because that is what we do as small business owners and community

members. We support each other in all times, good and bad.

So from here, this is how we will continue to be active. We will stay afloat with our hope of better days ahead. We will continue to be part of our community and support one another even if it is with just a smile. We are small business, and you can bet one thing is for certain: We will not give up.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.  
Brittany Carollo  
San Luis Obispo

## We need to ban fracking now

The oil and gas industry fear the continued drop in the prices of their products worsened by the pandemic. They want to ensure our dependency on fossil fuels by taking advantage of this life-threatening virus. While Gov. Gavin Newsom is heroically combating COVID-19, the federal government has been rolling back environmental protections and lifting restrictions to allow for more drilling. They are gambling with our lives, for their profits.

In California, 24 permits for new fracking wells in Kern County were approved on April 3, 2020. Our Department of Conservation may approve 282 more fracking permits any day.

More than 22,300 Californians are confirmed infected with COVID-19, and 687 have tragically died. Yet, more than 12,000 Californians die annually from oil and gas production and burning. Any form of fossil fuel drilling makes air pollution worse. Air particulates cause cancer and asthma, and put immune systems at risk, but we can't see them. We can't see COVID-19, either.

Toxic air pollution from oil and gas drilling

makes COVID-19 even deadlier. The authors of an April 5 Harvard study found that the slightest increase in air pollution would cause an "increase in the COVID-19 death toll and hospitalizations, further burdening our health care system"—and putting people who live next to oil and gas wells at higher risk.

Now more than ever, we need to protect the health and safety of all Californians. We shouldn't needlessly be putting more people at risk.

Local elected officials are the first line of defense to fight fracking. I'm proud to serve on the steering committee of Elected Officials to Protect California. More than 300 of us have already signed a letter asking the governor to take action banning fracking. I believe Gov. Newsom does want to protect the health and well-being of all Californians. I understand that he's focused on combating COVID-19. He may only be tangentially aware that new fracking permits are being issued. We are in an emergency, and COVID-19 is his priority.

But climate change is an emergency, too. The World Health Organization has stated that if temperatures continue to rise, there will be an increase in pandemics like COVID-19. They are a national security threat.

We need to let the governor know the serious threat that fracking represents, as it adds to temperatures rising and the possibility of more pandemics.

Together we are stronger. Unite your voice with ours. Please contact Gov. Newsom's office and be heard. Together we can convince him not to issue any new permits. But it's time the state put our lives first, not the interests of the oil and gas industry. We need to ban all fracking now.

Heidi Harmon  
San Luis Obispo

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**Use up leftovers and food scraps.** Make a DIY veggie stock or bake croutons from stale bread.

Test your skills! Find these key food-waste prevention words!

FOOD-SCRAPS	VEGGIES
STORAGE	CANNED-FOOD
VEGGIE-STOCK	FREEZE
MEAL-PREP	COMPOST
DONATE	BULK
LEFT-OVERS	FRUIT
NON-PERISHABLE	
EXPIRATION-DATE	

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# A hand up

The annual Giving Tuesday campaign adds a second day this year as the COVID-19 pandemic tests local nonprofits and the clients they serve

BY CAMILLIA LANHAM

**C**ommunity Partners in Caring lost 90 percent of its volunteers at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the nonprofit's volunteers are older than 65, so when the stay-at-home orders went into place, those volunteers had to stay home.

But the people who Community Partners serves in Santa Barbara County still need the services the organization provides. Homebound seniors still need help getting groceries and prescriptions, yard work, and just to know that someone is looking out for them. So Community Partners put out the call and was able to replenish about half of its volunteer force, according to Marketing Director/Outreach Coordinator Kaley Wise.

"We were able to gather about 40-something new volunteers," Wise said. "We had to get pretty much all new volunteers, and it was pretty amazing to see the community come together and be so willing to help us out during this time."

The organization with offices in Santa Maria and Lompoc is one of several North County nonprofits that are participating in Giving Tuesday Now on May 5. Since 2012, Giving Tuesday has taken place after Thanksgiving as a day encouraging people to do good, according to Caryn Stein, the head of communications for Giving Tuesday. Adding a second day to the calendar this year is an "emergency response to the unprecedented need caused by COVID-19," she said in response to emailed questions.

"It's designed to be a day when we all come together and give back in all ways, no matter who or where we are," Stein said.

"#GivingTuesdayNow is about giving of all types—some may choose to give a financial contribution to their favorite cause or a fundraising drive, others will opt to reach out to neighbors, start an advocacy campaign, donate goods or extra supplies,

share gratitude to front-line workers and those keeping us safe. If you can show generosity and share kindness, you have something to give!"

On the last Giving Tuesday—Dec. 3, 2019—\$2 billion in donations were generated in the United States, Stein said, and millions of volunteers offered their time, voices, money, and goods. She said some organizations use the day to focus on fundraising, while others organize community events, advocacy campaigns, or just use it as a day to say thanks.

Community Partners in Caring is definitely looking for volunteers, Wise said, adding that the pandemic has changed the way the organization helps the seniors it serves. In the last five years, the nonprofit has helped 819 seniors with their needs. Most of their clients are older folks who are aging at home but might not necessarily have family close by to help them out.

"We're kind of breaking that barrier and helping them really reintegrate within society," Wise said. "We really just do anything so that they know there's someone out there looking out for them."

Although the goal in the past was to get seniors out of their homes and into the world, obviously Community Partners doesn't want its clients to leave their homes right now because they are members of a vulnerable population. So operations have changed to maintain social distancing, but Wise said they can still organize rides for medically necessary appointments and pick up and drop off groceries and prescriptions.

"Our main goal right now is getting them food and making sure they're stocked up... We do reassurance calls," Wise said. "We're just making sure they're OK, and I think it's really nice

that they know even in this time that there's still somebody looking after them."

The crisis has really shed a light on this serious thing that was already an issue, Wise said. Community Partners calls the population

they serve "orphaned seniors," or "people who are aging in place without anyone."

While an organization like Community Partners in Caring is looking for volunteers on this Giving Tuesday, other organizations, such as the SLO Botanical Garden, are looking to generate funding.

Giving Tuesday Now happens to coincide with the SLO Botanical Garden's biannual plant sale. Development Director Heather Billing said plant sales in the spring and fall are one of the Botanical Garden's main sources of revenue.

For the first time in 30 years, she said, they are going to do the spring plant sale online. Organized by a Cal Poly student as her senior project, the virtual plant sale runs from May 6 through 17 and features a variety of Mediterranean plants, from succulents to drought-tolerant species and area natives.

"Our mission is to connect people with nature, and plants are just one of the ways. Even if you live in an apartment, you can have houseplants," Billing said. "They just bring life."

In addition to getting ready for the plant sale, Billing said the Botanical Garden is using this time to work on its plans for 150 acres of leased land from the county. They are weed-whacking for a future trail network in El Chorro Regional Park as well as continuing to work on the seven different gardens featuring plants from each of the seven different Mediterranean climates.

For the Botanical Garden, Giving Tuesday is a way to generate a little bit of extra revenue that can be put toward the plans and permits they need to complete the project, Billing said.

"We're in a week-to-week situation out here,"



**HELPING HAND:** Community Partners in Caring is one of several organizations in North County participating in Giving Tuesday on May 5. The organization focuses on helping seniors age in place with dignity and is looking for volunteers to help deliver groceries, prescriptions, and more.

Billing said, adding that when the time comes to open to the public, they want to be ready. "If anything, pandemics are a good time to plan."

Reach Editor Camillia Lanham at clanham@santamariasun.com.

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MAY 5, 2020

# A Global Generosity Movement ... Locally on the Central Coast

**#GivingTuesdayNow** is a global day of giving and unity that will take place on May 5, 2020 as an emergency response to the unprecedented need caused by COVID-19.

This new day is organized by **GivingTuesday**, and is being held in addition to the annually scheduled **GivingTuesday** event that will still take place on December 1, 2020. In partnership with **GivingTuesday**'s global network of leaders, partners, communities and generous individuals, this event is set to spark an increase in grassroots generosity, citizen engagement, business and philanthropy activation, and support for communities and nonprofits around the world.

People can show their generosity in a variety of ways to participate in **#GivingTuesdayNow**—whether it's helping a neighbor, advocating for an issue, sharing a skill, or giving to causes, every act of generosity counts. The movement is currently

focused on opportunities to give back to communities and causes in safe ways that allow for social connection and kindness even while practicing physical distancing.

**#GivingTuesdayNow** is an opportunity for people around the world to stand together in unity—to use their individual power of generosity to remain connected and heal.

So, in the spirit of **Giving Tuesday** please take the time to see who needs your support and help if you can.

[now.givingtuesday.org](http://now.givingtuesday.org)

*New Times* Sun

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Your donation will directly support the local Santa Maria Royal Family KIDS chapter in providing the critically needed programming including Summer Camp and Mentoring Club. With the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, foster children need our programming more than ever.

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Now more than ever, in this  
*time of distance*



Domestic violence survivors

## *need your assistance*

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To learn about our most pressing needs, please email **Jenni-Elise Ramirez** at [JenniEliseR@DVSolutions.org](mailto:JenniEliseR@DVSolutions.org).

To make a monetary donation and support survivors, please visit [dvsolutions.org](http://dvsolutions.org).

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- Housing First assistance funds

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#### Website:

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**We are here for you!**

## *Housing First*

The **Domestic Violence Housing First** program offers deposit and rental assistance, case management, career development, and financial literacy training, which prepares families to re-enter the housing market successfully.

To learn more, please contact **Dora Campos**:  
805.963.4458 x1112 • [DoraD@DVsolutions.org](mailto:DoraD@DVsolutions.org)



Domestic Violence Solutions for Santa Barbara County  
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For more information, including COVID-19 FAQs and Resources, visit: [www.lafsbc.org](http://www.lafsbc.org)

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Support Hancock students facing acute financial hardships by contributing to the Student Emergency Fund at

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#GivingTuesdayNow

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, CASA volunteers have continued to provide advocacy for children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. Volunteers have adapted to conducting "Virtual Visits" and have remained engaged and invested in the safety of our community's most vulnerable children.

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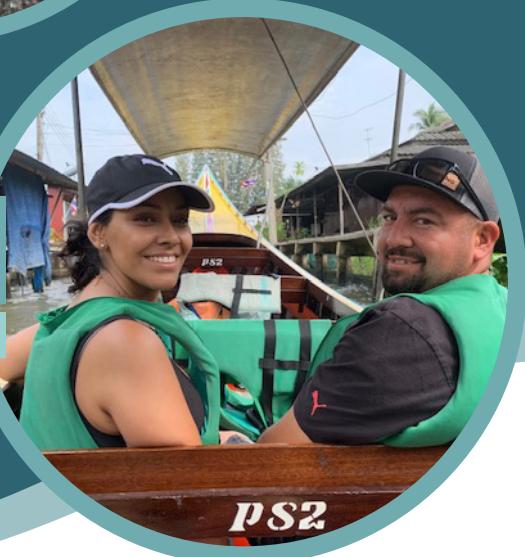
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**If you haven't already, please consider making a gift to Peoples' Self-Help Housing's Resident Assistance Fund, which provides direct financial support for medical, food, and utility emergencies, as the effects of the coronavirus change daily life for our most vulnerable.**



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[giving@pshhc.org](mailto:giving@pshhc.org)

(805) 548-2357



# MISSION

The mission of the North County Rape Crisis and Child Protection Center is to reduce the incidence of and vulnerability to sexual assault, child abuse, and human trafficking by providing education and prevention skills to community children and adults; and to alleviate the trauma experienced by survivors of these crimes by providing direct services.

KNOW MORE  
DO MORE  
**NO MORE!**



North County  
**Rape Crisis and  
Child Protection Center**

Prevention Education Services | Intervention & Counseling

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[www.sbccountyrapecrisis.org](http://www.sbccountyrapecrisis.org)

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# OUR STORY IS YOUR STORY



**The Center was established in 1974 when a group of Lompoc women realized there was a critical need for support and resources for survivors of sexual assault.**

Nothing existed at that time in the area, so they got together and did something about it: **The Rape Crisis Center** was born. Thirteen years later, the branch office in Santa Maria was established.

The Center provides 24-hour hotline support, crisis intervention services and prevention outreach in Lompoc, Santa Maria/Guadalupe, Santa Ynez Valley, Cuyama/New Cuyama and neighboring areas through our prevention and intervention efforts.

**North County Rape Crisis and Child Protection Center has a total of 13 full- and part-time staff positions.**

Our staff includes a Client Advocate position within the Lompoc Police Department. All services are offered bilingual in English/Spanish; the Center currently has a fluent Mixteco/Spanish/English speaker on staff as well.

**School-based ChildSAFE Program provides personal safety, sexual harassment, and healthy relationship workshops.**

ChildSAFE has been provided to North County youth since 1984; these workshops are delivered to children from pre-school to high-school level.

With this specialized instruction, younger children learn about different types of touch in the "**Good Touch, Bad Touch**" presentation, how to prevent unwanted touch, and how to identify and get assistance from "helping people" in the community, and who these people may be.

Older students get an extended lesson on abuse which also concentrates on how to recognize and prevent potentially dangerous situations. The presentations are age appropriate and specific, based on different stages of socialization experienced by each age group and the different issues that they may face.



## An exciting and effective program also presented by Center staff is called "Word on the Street."

This training is given specifically to youth aged 14–19, and focuses on the perils of human trafficking and what one needs to be aware of as far as the tricks and traps that exploiters use to groom vulnerable youth into a life of being trafficked.

**Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC)** are, sadly, a common occurrence on the Central Coast, and The Center is working hand-in-hand with many organizations to not only assist the survivors of these crimes, but to raise awareness and prevent children from being victimized in this manner; on average 8 children are trafficked in Santa Barbara county each day. The Center's goal through its prevention programs is to reduce their vulnerability by providing healthy dialogue that helps them explore the dangers and learn practical ways to avoid the tactics of exploiters.

## Center staff provides intervention and direct services 24 hours a day.

Our services are available to survivors of sexual violence, child abuse and human trafficking as well as support for their significant others and others in crisis. Services include crisis intervention and support through our **24-hour Hotline**, immediate advocacy, case management, counseling, follow-up contact, information/referral services, and support groups.

One of the most critical aspects of the Center's intervention program is our membership with the county's **SART (Sexual Assault Response Team)**. The Center's role on the team is to provide accompaniment and support services for the survivor once they disclose to law enforcement.

## Our intervention services are available not only for an immediate crisis; we serve all survivors – whether they were victimized an hour ago or 60 years ago.

We assist people of **all ages** – and **men and boys**, too, as we understand that they are victimized at an alarming rate; just as women are. Significant others are welcome to contact us for direction in helping their family member or friend on their journey of healing. All services and programs are available **free of charge** to all, though donations are of course accepted, and are tax deductible.

## The Center exclusively provides "Building Resiliency Through Art," (BRTA) classes which have been a huge success.

The graduates of these classes (children, their parents and other community adults) have shown marked improvements in their journey of healing and their ability to work through issues that may arise because of their victimization. Some children have experienced trauma that is crippling, which has had a negative impact on their ability to learn. **BRTA** helps them focus and teaches them skills that helps them better cope with their anger, sadness, and anxiety so that they can concentrate in class and at home.

# KNOW MORE DO MORE NO MORE!

If you would like to **KNOW MORE**, and **DO MORE**, so that there is **NO MORE!** violence, we encourage you to contact us.

#### Let us know how you want to **KNOW MORE** by:

- Becoming more involved with the Center
- Becoming a volunteer with the Center
- Attend educational programs in the community or call us to schedule one for your place of work or group you belong to
- Attend a self-defense/personal safety program

#### Perhaps you want to **DO MORE** by:

- Partnering with the Center in ending violence
- Assisting the Center with fundraising/events

#### Or perhaps you would like more information on how you can help us financially by:

- Having my gift matched by my employer
- How to make a gift of appreciated securities
- How to include the Center in my will

## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are critical to the work we do in our community, from assisting with intervention services by providing direct services to survivors of sexual violence, to helping us provide life-changing educational programs in our community. Training is provided for everyone who gets involved. It's extensive and lasts for ten weeks.

If you'd like more information on how you can be involved, call Jackie at 805-736-8535 or 805-922-2994 for info or email [jackie@ncrccpc.org](mailto:jackie@ncrccpc.org).

Our service area is expansive from the Goleta Tunnel north to the Santa Maria River bridge and all of the outlying areas in the unincorporated areas of Northern Santa Barbara County.

#### Main administrative office:

511 East Ocean  
Lompoc  
(805) 736-8535

#### Satellite office:

301 South Miller, Suite 206  
Santa Maria  
(805) 922-2994

**24-Hour Support Line (805) 736-7273**  
[www.sbcountryrapecrisis.org](http://www.sbcountryrapecrisis.org)

## FUTURE

The lasting effects of Covid-19 are at this point unknown, and the ripple effect will likely last for years. We at the Center are concerned about future funding for our programs and services and need your support.

**Won't you reach out on the upcoming #Giving Tuesday, May 5th, and pledge assistance for our community's most vulnerable?**

#### FUND A NEED

- **\$1,000** funds **40 hours of assistance** for teens identified as Commercially Sexually Exploited Children and adult survivors of human trafficking
- **\$750** funds **3 months of 24-hour hotline accessibility** for survivors of sexual assault, child abuse and human trafficking
- **\$500** funds **4 ChildSAFE three-day workshops** for one school. The Center provides these workshops in all north county secondary schools.
- **\$250** funds **art supplies for four Survivor support group sessions**
- **\$100** provides **workbooks to 15 youth** in the Center's Word on the Street human trafficking prevention program.
- **\$50** funds **four survivors with clothes** to wear home after a SART/Rape Kit exam. We average over four SART's a month.
- **\$25** provides **office supplies** that are used for outreach programming.



## CALL OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE TODAY!

Lompoc  
**(805) 736-8535**

Santa Maria  
**(805) 922-2994**

[www.sbcountryrapecrisis.org](http://www.sbcountryrapecrisis.org)



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**Rape Crisis and  
Child Protection Center**

Prevention Education Services | Intervention & Counseling



Facebook: @ncrccpc • Instagram: @ncrccpc • Twitter: @ncrccpc\_org

YouTube Channel:

Search "North County Rape Crisis Staying Centered"

# What's going on?

It's hard to tell what the actual situation is at the Lompoc federal prison, other than it's not good.

After promising inmates increased phone minutes to stave off concerns about the loss of other rights, "officials" (we have no idea if they're local, national, or somethings else) decided to cut off inmate phone access altogether due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in the federal prison. Families are pissed!

So pissed they held a rally outside of the prisons—there are two facilities on the compound—on April 25 demanding change.

And I don't blame them at all.

Now, the only way for them to figure out how their incarcerated family members are doing is to wait for snail mail or just trust that the Bureau of Prisons is taking care of things the way they ought to.

And if you check out the Bureau of Prisons' website, you'll get a slightly different view of what's going on at the Lompoc facilities than if you look at the numbers compiled by the county. Which is insane! Why can't everyone just track the same damn things? It would be so much easier for everyone, but maybe it's too much to ask government agencies to stay in touch with one another.

Then the public wouldn't be playing a guessing game about this pandemic!

As of April 27, Santa Barbara County listed 104 positive confirmed inmate cases at Lompoc's facilities. According to the Bureau of Prisons' April 28 numbers, 92 inmates had confirmed cases. Uh, so is it 104 or 92 or some other randomly generated number without explanation?

The week prior, a Bureau of Prisons' spokesperson told the *Sun* that the agency was only listing "unresolved" cases. But we have no idea what a "resolved case" means. Does it mean the inmate fully recovered from COVID-19? Does it mean they were released into home confinement? Does it mean they are no longer with us? They're in the ICU attached to a ventilator?

God, I hate bureaucracy. It sucks!

Why all the secrecy? It's not that hard to just be honest. Be factual. Be precise. Be upfront.

Don't be opaque, imprecise, and general.

Then there's the whole home confinement release issue. The bureau won't tell us whether anyone from Lompoc's prisons has been released into home confinement, only that agency-wide, a little more than 1,500 inmates have been released and sent home to confine.

Thanks for the specificity.

But, of course, it's not just incarcerated criminals we should be concerned about. It's the people who work at the U.S. Penitentiary Lompoc and Federal Correctional Institution Lompoc. Between the two facilities, 25 staff members have confirmed positive for the virus. But, of course, that number is coming from the Bureau of Prisons, so who knows what the actual number of staff members who have contracted the virus is.

All we really know is that, according to U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-Santa Barbara), some of the staff members have started sleeping in their cars because they don't want to get their family members sick. What the hell, Bureau of Prisons?

Take care of your employees. It's literally the least you could do. ☺

*The canary is sick and tired of being sick and tired. Send comments to [canary@santamariasun.com](mailto:canary@santamariasun.com).*



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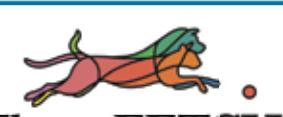
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# Arts

## Arts Briefs

### Buellton Arts and Culture Committee accepts requests for project funding

FILE PHOTO COURTESY OF SUBSESSIONS



The Buellton Arts and Culture Committee, formed by the Buellton City Council, is currently accepting project proposals for funding. Examples of potential projects to propose include public art installations (permanent or temporary) as well as large community events (for the future once re-openings commence). Applicants must reside in the Santa Ynez Valley and are encouraged to propose any projects related to arts and culture.

To propose a project, applicants can fill out funding request forms available at [cityofbuellton.com](http://cityofbuellton.com). Applicants are required to provide contact info for the proposed project's key organizers and possible sponsors (individuals or organizations). Along with a detailed description of the project, applicants are also advised to include info (website links or portfolio samples) on any artists, musicians, or performers involved.

If the project or event is proposed to be held on public property (street, sidewalks, parks, etc.), a completed event permit application is also required. A temporary use permit is required for events that include sales on private property.

For more details on the Buellton Arts and Culture Committee, including info on how to join the group, contact Buellton Recreation Supervisor Kyle Abello at (805) 688-1086 or [kylea@cityofbuellton.com](mailto:kylea@cityofbuellton.com). The committee was enacted in 2019 to explore potential arts and culture concepts and propose them to the Buellton City Council for approval and funding.

### Disney animator to judge SLOMA's inaugural statewide film festival

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE ROBINSON

The San Luis Obispo Museum of Art (SLOMA) announced that professional animator Michelle Robinson will be the juror of its inaugural statewide Digital Shorts Film Festival, a one-night event scheduled to take place on Sept. 26, from 6 to 9 p.m. The competition is open to filmmakers residing in California, and the deadline to submit films to SLOMA is June 14.

Robinson has worked for Walt Disney Animation Studios for more than two decades, and her film credits include *Chicken Little*, *Bolt*, *Tangled*, *Wreck-It Ralph*, *Frozen*, and *Zootopia*. She has also served as a mentor in Disney's Artist Development Program. Robinson is also an accomplished studio artist, and her works have been showcased in multiple exhibits across the country. She received her MFA in visual art from the New Hampshire Institute of Art. For more info on the artist and animator, visit [michellerobinson.org](http://michellerobinson.org).

The Digital Shorts Film Festival is hosted in conjunction with SLOMA's upcoming digital art exhibition, A Digital Art Salon, which is currently slated to run Sept. 4 through Nov. 1. Competition finalists will be notified by July 13. Digital films of any genre are eligible, but submissions must be 10 minutes long or less. Each applicant can submit up to two films for an entry fee of \$20. To find out more about the festival or its submission process, visit [sloma.org](http://sloma.org). ○

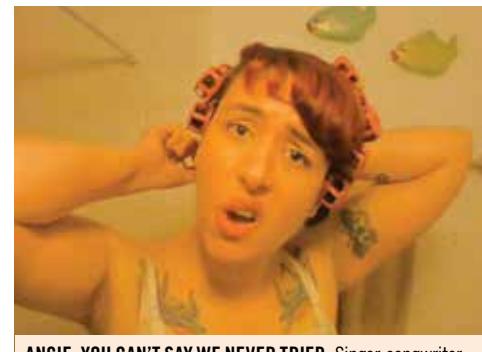
*Arts Briefs* is compiled by Arts Editor Caleb Wiseblood. Send information to [cwiseblood@santamariasun.com](mailto:cwiseblood@santamariasun.com).

## ART SCENE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KASANDRA DE LA ROSA



**SIX FEET APART:** Lompoc blues, folk, and roots band Angie and the Nightmares features lead vocalist and bassist Angelina LaPointe (center), guitarist Aaron France (left), and drummer Sean Campbell (right).



**ANGIE, YOU CAN'T SAY WE NEVER TRIED:** Singer-songwriter Angelina LaPointe (pictured) proposed a quarantine-inspired, Zoom-style music video for the band's new song, "Talking," in which she and her bandmates would film themselves in their own homes and compile the footage later.

call for work, ended the day with a livestream concert, and texted the guys. 'Hey, what if ... ?' the singer-songwriter said.

LaPointe proceeded to propose a Zoom-style music video in which she and her bandmates—guitarist Aaron France and drummer Sean Campbell—would film themselves performing from their own homes and other locations and compile the footage later. As the band switched gears for the video, not being in each other's company during production created a tangible disconnect, fittingly resembling the song's theme of miscommunication.

"We were amused by how unabashedly meta the concept was but also how it really reflected how disconnected we felt," LaPointe said.

What connects "Talking" and the rest of Angie and the Nightmares' songs on the group's upcoming album, however, are themes related to adulthood, LaPointe said. While also the lead vocalist and bassist, LaPointe is the band's principal songwriter and approaches each composition from a storyteller's point of view, inspired by Willie Nelson, Patsy Cline, and other old-school country musicians.

"As is always the case for me, the songs are really centered on story," LaPointe said. "The whole album is basically about learning how to be an adult—about the expectations and misconceptions we have about sex, relationships, marriage, and adulthood in general."

The title track of the album, "Girl Talk," for example, illustrates the somewhat abstract, but pretty relatable, complexities of trying to make new friends as an adult, LaPointe explained.

"I'm a pretty well-adjusted woman in my 30s and asking someone I'd like to be friends with out for coffee is just as terrifying as it would have been talking to my crush in high school," LaPointe said. "And I've talked about it with others—I'm not the only one who feels that way." ○

*Send music recommendations to Arts Editor Caleb Wiseblood at [cwiseblood@santamariasun.com](mailto:cwiseblood@santamariasun.com).*

## Behind closed doors

*Angie and the Nightmares' new single gets a quarantine-inspired, Zoom-style music video*

BY CALEB WISEBLOOD

**H**oney we've been talking, staying up all night/I've been trying to reach your body through the phone/Honey close the door/This time I want more/And talking is the last thing we'll do."

The lyrics of Lompoc trio Angie and the Nightmares' latest single, "Talking," tell the story of two long-distance lovers rekindling a weary relationship through phone and video calls. Written prior to shelter-in-place guidelines, composer and bandleader Angelina LaPointe, aka Angie Nightmare, couldn't have predicted the new song's timely, broader implications—whether it applies to partners living 10 hours away from each other, or 10 minutes.

"It's about the sexual excitement of being separated by space and also the way that communication can be colored by emotion and desires," LaPointe told the *Sun*. "COVID-19 has caused all of us to have to deal with separation in communication. Whether it's learning online, working from home, or just calling friends instead of getting face-to-face interactions."

### Zoom lens

The music video for "Talking," the new single from Angie and the Nightmares' upcoming album, *Girl Talk*, premieres on the band's website ([angieandthenightmares.com](http://angieandthenightmares.com)) on Friday, May 1. Viewers will also be able to stream the video on YouTube (username: MsAngieNightmare).

"Talking" is the first song to be released from the band's upcoming blues, folk, and roots album, *Girl Talk*, which is slated for an August release. But fans can look forward to hearing the new single much sooner, as well as the song's music video, which premieres on Friday, May 1. The video has been an ongoing project for months, LaPointe said, enduring several hiccups along the way, including a substantial concept change just days before the original shoot date.

"We had planned an outdoor video shoot in the Santa Ynez Valley in early April. I bribed the band, a drone operator, a photographer, and a couple of assistants with the promise of beer and snacks to drag all their gear up to the top of a hill," LaPointe said. "It was to be a gathering of cool, talented people that I just don't

get enough time to hang out with. But as the day approached, voluntary self-isolation started, and it felt irresponsible to get together."

But the quarantine lifestyle we were still adapting to back at the end of March also inspired LaPointe to pitch her team a new approach for the video, she explained.

"The day we canceled the shoot, I had a Zoom



**TO THE BEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUM:** Drummer Sean Campbell is one of the three "talking heads" caught on camera in Angie and the Nightmares' new music video for their single, "Talking."



**GUITAR HERO:** Guitarist Aaron France (pictured) performs Zoom-style in a casual, homey setting. France also provides backing vocals for Angie and the Nightmares.

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## ARTS



**ON A ROLL:** Stormy Wadham's various earring designs include pairs that resemble *Dungeons and Dragons* dice. Other gaming-themed earrings include regular six-sided dice earrings and video game controller earrings.



**WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS:** It's hard not to spend too much time glancing through Wadham's earring selection; there are just too many designs to choose from—shapes, plants, animals, and food, including these lemon earrings.

# All ears

*Handcrafted jewelry is just a few clicks away through one Lompoc local's Etsy shop, Little Earring Studio*

BY CALEB WISEBLOOD

**M**y ears aren't pierced but some of Stormy Wadham's earring motifs are making me wish otherwise, specifically the pairs that resemble *Dungeons and Dragons* dice—D4, D6, D8, D10, D12, D20, the gang's all here.

Whether you're a chaotic neutral bard like me (in-character) or just an average joe on the prowl for some local, giftable jewelry (out-of-character), Wadham's Etsy shop is worth checking out. This Central Coast local started selling her homespun creations online in January, under her shop's title, Little Earring Studio.

"I had one of those 'I could do that' moments, and I did just that," said Wadham, who stumbled upon a few DIY earring tutorial videos online, which led her down a rabbit hole—one she continues to spiral downward through.

"I'd recommend checking out YouTube videos on making earrings for anyone who's interested in making them," she said. "I've learned various techniques for different types of earrings from [YouTube] mainly."

From traditional beaded hoops to more specific, niche designs, Wadham's earrings have made their way from her home in Lompoc to customers across the country, with orders coming in from 14 different states so far.

What attracted Wadham to earrings over necklaces, bracelets, and other jewelry was her philosophy of first impressions, she explained.

"When you look at a person, you tend to look at their face and eyes," Wadham told the Sun. "I'm more drawn to earrings, since that's

something you're more likely going to notice first upon meeting someone."

Wadham's most popular product (which was sold out for weeks before becoming available again on April 25) is her rainbow flower dangle earrings, full of cheer and color—a welcomed interruption to these dark, muddled times. Luckily for Wadham, she was already purchasing the lion's share of her crafting materials online before the COVID-19 mitigation closures.

"Most of the charms and dice I order from online. I was ordering them online before the pandemic," Wadham said. "However, the head pins, earring findings, and some other supplies I was purchasing in person at Michael's—now I'm having to order those online as well."

Wadham usually uses pliers, wire cutters, a hand drill, and other tools during production, working with gemstones, sea shells, beads, and other source materials. It's hard not to spend too much time glancing through Wadham's earring selection; there are just too many designs to choose from—shapes, plants, animals, and more.

As you can already guess from my *Dungeons and Dragons* outburst earlier, I'm most drawn to the nostalgic, gamer culture fare. Wadham's offerings include regular six-sided-dice earrings as well—for all you Muggle rollers out there—or video game controller earrings, if tabletop just isn't your style.

Wadham announces new designs usually more than once a week, both on her Etsy site as well as on her Instagram. And while the pandemic hasn't slowed down her production process, there is one ironic objective she's excited to possibly accomplish once quarantine ends—getting her own ears pierced finally.

"Actually I don't have my ears pierced, so I'm just making them for others—for the time being," the 21-year-old said. "Once this quarantine is over, I'm very tempted to just go out and get them done." ☀

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



**GNOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS:** These gnome earrings are much smaller than average gnomes (which are usually 3 to 4 feet tall), as you can see from the ruler comparison.



**OVER THE RAINBOW:** Lompoc resident Stormy Wadham's most popular product (which was sold out for weeks before becoming available again on April 25) is her rainbow flower dangle earrings.

# An Important Message for Anyone Who Has Lost Their Health Insurance

In addition to the thousands of people losing their jobs due to COVID-19, many are also losing their health insurance.

There is no-cost health coverage you may be eligible for: **Medi-Cal**. CenCal Health administers the Medi-Cal program in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties.

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Currently, 1 in 4 residents of Santa Barbara County and 1 in 5 residents in San Luis Obispo County receive their health and vision benefits through CenCal Health, the health plan that provides medical and vision coverage for Medi-Cal beneficiaries in these counties.

CenCal Health contracts with over 1,500 local physicians, 104 pharmacies, and all hospitals in both counties. It is likely that you would be able to keep your current physician under CenCal Health.

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- **Online** through [www.coveredca.com](http://www.coveredca.com)

The county departments of Social Services make all eligibility and enrollment decisions.

For more information on how to apply for Medi-Cal, including phone numbers for local Department of Social Services offices, visit our website at [www.cencalhealth.org/howtoapply](http://www.cencalhealth.org/howtoapply)

Sincerely,



Bob Freeman  
CEO, CenCal Health



# Bitter pill

**W**riter-director Jeff Gibbs helms this new documentary endorsed by leftist polemicist Michael Moore, who wrote that it's "a documentary that dares to say what no one else will this Earth Day—that we are losing the battle to stop climate change on planet Earth because we are following leaders who have taken us down the wrong road—selling out the green movement to wealthy interests and corporate America. This film is the wake-up call to the reality we are afraid to face: that in the midst of a human-caused extinction event, the environmental movement's answer is to push for techno-fixes and Band-Aids. It's too little, too late." (141 min.)

**Glen:** In case you're not depressed and cynical enough these days, this new documentary should push you right over the cliff. My main takeaway is that we suck. Human beings are pushing the planet and its resources to the brink of collapse, and too many of us believe we're going to innovate our way out of our overconsuming ways. What we learn in Gibbs' documentary is that the Green Energy Movement has been co-opted by corporations, monetized, and offered up like a false idol for us to worship. According to Gibbs' research, alternative energy sources such as solar panels, wind turbines, and biomass—all touted as green and renewable—are inextricably tied to fossil fuels and in fact require such fuel to be in any way feasible. His research also shows that in

the final financial calculations, it would be more efficient just to burn the fossil fuels instead of going through this empty exercise of pretending to make a difference though "fake" green energy. Yes, it's unfathomably depressing to contemplate.

**Anna:** Not a feel-good film, that's for sure. Gibbs paints a sad, hopeless picture and doesn't sugarcoat the fact that we are doing far too little and are far too late to stop the trajectory we're on. Between the incredible amount of mining and fuel burning it takes to create the panels and turbines, the miles of stripped earth they take up, and the fact that there just isn't enough energy created to replace fossil fuels with any of the biomass methods, there just doesn't seem to be a solution here. In fact, the solution seems to lie in reducing both our human consumption and the human presence on the Earth. Green is big business though, and if the rich keep getting richer selling their own brand of snake oil to hopeful consumers, they are happy to do so. It's very important to be aware of Gibbs' message, but boy is it a bummer. Make sure you're in the right headspace before you sit down to watch this one.

**Glen:** Yep, that's definitely Gibbs' message—if we don't limit our population and consumption, we'll continue our trajectory toward disaster. It's not a U.S. problem or an Asian problem or a European, African, or Russian problem. It's a global problem. When's the last time humanity came together on a global scale to work together for the common good? Oh yeah ... never! Worse still, leaders worldwide are tied to wealth, and between greed and the

## PLANET OF THE HUMANS

What's it rated? **Not rated**  
Where's it showing? **YouTube**

corrupting influence of power, how can we expect our leaders to do the right thing? Gibbs says the first step is awareness, and I guess he's right. But the second step is action, and when much of the population is either in survival mode or simply doesn't believe in global climate change or the idea that our resources are finite, or frankly doesn't care about future generations, I fear we are truly doomed as a species. I wish Gibbs

had offered a solution; his film is simply a frank look at our bleak future. How long do we have? I don't know, but as resources become scarce, I expect to see humanity devolve.

**Anna:** Gibbs has a fairly monotone, glum way of narration that feels both pragmatic and dire. There's no light at the end of this tunnel, and it's both infuriating and disheartening that the human race can't get it together enough to stop choosing greed and destruction so we can have exactly what we want when we want. It's an important watch, but a rough one—I was in tears by the end. ☺

New Times Senior Staff Writer Glen Starkey and freelancer Anna Starkey write Sun Screen. Glen compiles streaming listings. Comment at [gstarkey@newtimesslo.com](mailto:gstarkey@newtimesslo.com).

## Film & TV Reviews

### BOSCH

What's it rated? **TV-MA**  
When? **2014-Present**  
Where's it showing? **Amazon Prime**

I'm late to the *Bosch* party, a TV show based on an ongoing series of novels by Michael Connelly. It's got six seasons under its belt with a seventh ready to start, and so far I've only made it through the first. Gotta say though, I'm hooked! The titular character is Hieronymus "Harry" Bosch (Titus Welliver), an LAPD homicide detective whose tenacity makes him highly effective but whose personal code of ethics and penchant for insubordination keeps him at odds with his superiors.

In the first season, Bosch is in hot water for shooting a suspect in what may or may not have been a "good" shooting. Put on restricted duty, he trades shifts without his superiors' permission and ends up with a case of a murdered boy. What follows is his attempt to find the killer in the decades-old case. Meanwhile, a suspected serial killer, Raynard Waits

(Jason Gedrick), claims to have murdered Bosch's young victim. Is he telling the truth or is it a sick need for attention? Don't worry, Bosch will get to the bottom of it, let the chips fall where they may.

This is a gritty police procedural with an engaging lead character and enough side plots and twists to keep things interesting. (60 51-min. episodes.)

—Glen Starkey

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMAZON STUDIOS



**RELENTLESS:** LAPD homicide detective Harry Bosch will do whatever it takes to find the truth, even if that means ignoring procedures and his superiors' orders, in the gripping TV series *Bosch*.

## LIGHT OF MY LIFE

What's it rated? **R**  
When? **2019**  
Where's it showing? **Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, Vudu**

Writer-director-star Casey Affleck (*I'm Still Here*) helms this survival story about a father and child trying to make their way after a pandemic has wiped out half the Earth's human population 10 years earlier. The loose framework of civilization that remains is fraying, and humankind's character is being tested.

Affleck is dad to Rag (Anna Pniowsky), and through flashback we see Rag's mother (Elisabeth Moss) fall ill and pass, leaving Rag and her dad to fend for themselves. They camp in the forest and are wary any time they run into another person, who may or may not be willing to harm them for their possessions.

Occasionally they make their way into town for supplies, where government stores ration goods to keep survivors alive. Rag and her dad decide to make a long journey to her dad's grandparents' farm, located in a remote—and hopefully safe—area. They find the house occupied by a quartet of squatters, who allow them to stay for the night, but is it safe? That's the question that looms over every move they make. Rag's dad works to teach self-sufficiency, knowing the hardships ahead at what seems like the end of humanity.

Like director John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009)—based on

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLACK BEAR PICTURES



**PATERNAL LOVE:** Rag (Anna Pniowsky, left) and her dad (writer-director Casey Affleck) try to survive in a dangerous world where half the population died a decade earlier, in *Light of My Life*.

Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel of the same name—*Light of My Life* is bleak cinema that highlights the unbreakable love of a parent for his child. Slow, depressing, but good—it shows the power of low-budget filmmaking. (119 min.) ☺

—Glen

Sun film reviews are compiled by New Times Senior Staff Writer Glen Starkey. Contact him at [gstarkey@newtimesslo.com](mailto:gstarkey@newtimesslo.com).

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# Buy Restaurant Bonds and Support Small Businesses in No. SB County!

*Purchasing gift cards from our local businesses can help stimulate the economy now.*

With orders that restaurants can only serve takeout or delivery, our county's restaurant industry has been among the hardest hit by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. People are being encouraged to stay home and away from crowds and public dining rooms, some restaurants and cafes have already been forced to dial back hours in response to the decrease in business, while others have shut down entirely. With restaurants facing an uncertain immediate future, one way local diners can support their favorite restaurants is by purchasing gift cards – or what we are calling “Restaurant Bonds” – similar to “war bonds” during WWI and II. Whether given as a gift or kept for future meals, gift cards can act as a microloan to restaurants to provide much-needed immediate cash. Many restaurants sell gift cards online, allowing customers to offer their support without having to leave home.

There has never been a more important time to support our neighborhood's culinary scene. Restaurants are emptying out and small business owners are seeing up to an 80% drop-off in customers. Restaurants already work off razor-thin profit margins, but the COVID-19 pandemic is a test like no other. For now, the best thing our friends and neighbors in the community can do to help is to order takeout or buy gift cards to ensure at least some income during this difficult time.

If this trend continues, many of our beloved businesses will suffer greatly but we have the opportunity to help.

Buy gift cards (Restaurant Bonds). Restaurants collect gift card revenue as soon as the card is purchased, then mark it as redeemed once the user applies it to a bill. If you are in a position to buy a gift card and sit on it for a while, you will be helping your local favorite get through a tough time.

Opt for carryout or delivery. Many restaurants are opting for curbside pickup or have pick-up areas where you can dash in, get your food and leave. It's a better deal for restaurants if you collect carry out yourself, rather than use a delivery app. That helps the restaurant – and you – avoid delivery charges. But if you don't feel like driving over, delivery is your back-up choice. Be sure to tip your delivery person.

Please show your support. Let's do this together.



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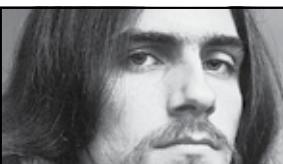
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Paso Robles Golf Club



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SATURDAY, MAY 16  
Online with Make & Muddle



Classical Giants  
SUNDAY, MAY 17  
Mission  
San Miguel



SLO Blues Baseball: Opening Day  
Vs. Santa Maria Packers  
FRIDAY, MAY 22  
Sinsheimer Stadium



Viva La Cerveza  
SATURDAY, MAY 23  
Madonna Inn  
Meadows



Virtual Cocktail Making Class:  
Tiki Talk  
SATURDAY, MAY 23  
Online with Make & Muddle



The Full Monty – Musical  
SATURDAY, MAY 23  
Santa Maria  
Civic Theatre



The Tipsy Gypsies  
SUNDAY, MAY 31  
Cambria Concerts Unplugged  
Old Santa Rosa Chapel



Patriot Cruise of San Luis Bay  
SUNDAY, MAY 31  
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TEACHER, TEACHER: Pico's new chef John Wayne Formica teaches Zoom watchers how to make pasta from scratch on April 16.

## Teaching the basics

Pico's new chef starts live cooking class he hopes to continue teaching after the pandemic

BY CAMILLIA LANHAM

A film strip of wine-drinking soon-to-be risotto-makers moved about in their kitchens above Chef John Wayne Formica's head.

"Risotto is all about technique," he tells the camera recording the Zoom cooking class as he runs through some of the ingredients on the afternoon's to-do list. Mushrooms, stock, wine, onion, and more.

It's the second virtual class Pico's new chef has taught since the pandemic started. Formica said 65 people registered for the risotto class, and between 30 to 40 home chefs were streaming from and into their kitchens on April 23.

"We're definitely generating that buzz, and it's great having patrons of the restaurant who follow us joining," Formica told the Sun.

"We felt that we could support our community. [It] keeps us relevant and going at the restaurant, keeps us top of mind: 'Hey, we're still here, we're still doing things.'"

Formica and his wife, Liz Formica, moved to Northern Santa Barbara County from Los Angeles in February. After a hiatus at the beginning of 2020, Pico in Los Alamos reopened with Formica's new menu on March 5. Three

weeks later, the pandemic happened.

Now, the couple is doing what they can to keep things moving at the restaurant in the General Store, Liz in the front of the house and behind the cooking class camera with Formica in the back of the house and in front of the camera.

The Italian-Lebanese chef is from Chicago and grew up eating Mediterranean-style food. He's a classically trained French chef who studied at The Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago (a Le Cordon Bleu affiliate) and learned to make classic Italian fare on the Amalfi Coast.

Formica said he's been doing Asian cuisine for the past 12 years and was most recently the executive chef at Tao in Los Angeles.

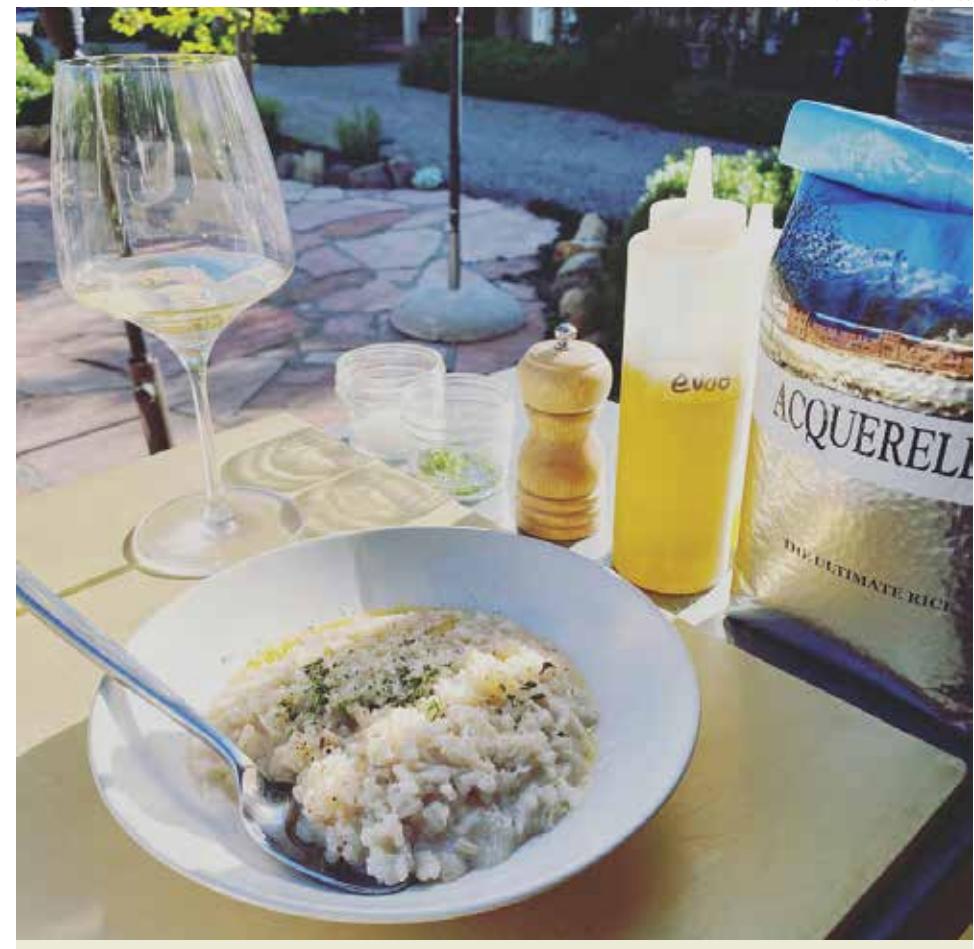
"My background is very diverse. Global cuisine is my wheelhouse," he said. "I always wanted to diversify my portfolio so I would be more valuable as I moved up in the ranks."

The menu at Pico reflects those global influences and showcases them with local ingredients, either from the backyard farm at the restaurant or local meat producers and seafood purveyors.

Crispy Vietnamese-inspired Brussels sprouts salad, braised veal osso buco, and matcha panna cotta are on the short to-go menu these days,

### Support Pico

To learn more about upcoming cooking classes or to check out the to-go menu, visit losalamosgeneralstore.com.



DIY RISOTTO: More than 30 people tuned in to learn the basics about how to make risotto with mushrooms on April 23.

alongside a pasta kit, burgers, and bourbon-braised beef. If anything, he said, he's influenced by the Middle East (Lebanon), Mediterranean (Italy), and Asia, but is inspired by seasonality.

"I bring a lot of my heritage, how I grew up eating, and just kind of refined it. And then as I traveled all over the world," he said, "I've brought a lot of those experiences and brought them into the menu."

A peek at what restaurant patrons can look forward to in a post-pandemic world includes a look back at that menu inspired by Formica's past and present. Grilled octopus with diavolo sauce, basil, and grana padano. Crispy cauliflower served with smoked pea butter, cumin paprika, and chickpea. Channel Islands spiny lobster with squid ink risotto and local uni.

Formica also touted a locally caught whitefish, grilled and served with a parsnip puree.

The Formicas spent two years in Los Angeles, and it just wasn't for them, Formica said. After traveling to Santa Barbara for pleasure, they were hooked on the Central Coast, and eventually Clark Staub—who knew Formica through the restaurant industry—from Full of Life Flatbread invited them up to Los Alamos for a wedding. Staub mentioned that Pico was searching for a chef, and Formica drove up for a "great nine-hour conversation with the owners," Will Henry and Kali Kopley. Formica put in his notice to Tao that day.

"We just wanted something different," Formica said about him and Liz. "We barely saw each other, and we wanted to kind of downshift from that and start a family and kind of get a little more laid back."

But the coronavirus has been a big challenge, he said.

At the moment, Pico is featuring a shorter menu that people can order from online and pick up at the restaurant. Formica's offering a three-course menu for \$32 that comes with a baby kale salad, braised veal osso buco with polenta, and



TO-GO FOOD: The baby kale salad comes with red onion, pistachio, shiitake mushrooms, creamy balsamic vin, and a five-minute egg.



MEET YOUR CHEF: Chef John Wayne Formica is Pico's new chef—and, yes, he was named after the actor.

EATS continued page 28

# STAY HOME

if you can and avoid any non-essential travel.  
Avoid social gatherings of more than 10 people.

# PRACTICE SOCIAL-DISTANCING

by keeping at least 6 feet away from others if you must go out in public.  
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*New Times*

**Sun**

## EATS

EATS from page 26

the matcha panna cotta. He said the three-course menu will change regularly. House-made pasta kits with two portions of pappardelle pasta and a half pint of Formica's family's red sauce are \$15. Burgers and fries are also on the menu, including a surf-and-turf burger that comes with blue crab, a yuzu and calamansi vin, and uni cream.

In addition, Formica said Liz has revamped the restaurant's cocktail list and is offering cocktails to-go. Of course, you can also grab a bottle of wine or various items from the General Store. Lumen—Henry and Kopley's—wine label, is also available for purchase. Formica said he's also thinking about offering up house-made chocolate bars and some other items that people can grab from the store or add on to their meals.

"We're just trying to see what works, what doesn't work," Formica said.

The cooking classes were always part of the plan at Pico. And Formica enjoys teaching them, as teaching has been a part of his career. In the kitchens he grew up and moved through during his life, he's been the teacher, a mentor for less experienced cooks, he said.

Plus, he's new to the area and is still trying to introduce himself to residents. The Zoom classes are a great way to do that. And so far, he said, the feedback has been great.

Guests, he said, will post their dishes on social media with a video snippet or their kitchen setup, which is really cool.

"There's a lot of positive feedback, so it's really great to see people learning new things," he said. "It just reinforces what we're doing."

For the first virtual cooking class, he taught watchers to make pasta from scratch: a pappardelle. Then came the risotto. Really,

PHOTO COURTESY OF PICO



**PASTA KIT:** You can grab pappardelle pasta and a red sauce from Pico to-go for a fresh pasta dinner at home.

Formica said, it's about teaching technique, giving students a foundation from which to work and potential variations that they can add to the dish. Next up on April 30 is kung pao, focusing on the sauce and veggies.

"I teach you a base, and then you kind of make it your own, at home with your own flavor profiles or whatever you'd like," he said. "Just teaching people the basics of cooking so they have what they need to survive."

*Editor Camillia Lanham could go for a surf-and-turf burger right about now. Send uni cream to [clanham@santamariasun.com](mailto:clanham@santamariasun.com).*

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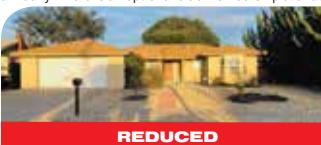
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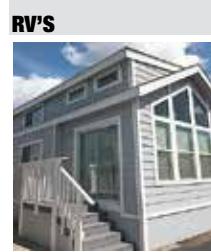
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