

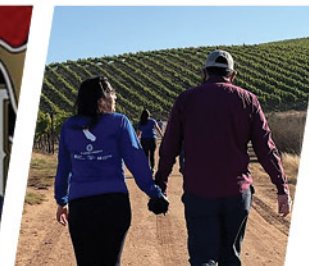


Salinas Valley
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS JOURNAL



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The new transformer at the Del Monte Substation in the City of Monterey.

Boosting Electrical Capacity — PG&E Improvements at Transmission

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Within Monterey County, the investor-owned utility Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) manages all of the high-voltage systems for long-distance power transmission. (It also manages all of the lower-voltage lines for local delivery power distribution.) There are no publicly owned municipal utility districts in Monterey County.

Although the community choice aggregation public power agency Central Coast Community Energy (3CE) is authorized to engage in certain power purchasing and power generation responsibilities (along with King City Community Power, solely serving King City), it's PG&E that builds and maintains physical infrastructure to supply power to Monterey County businesses and residents.

Therefore, PG&E has been responsible for dealing with the increasing number of unexpected and unplanned power outages occurring throughout Monterey County in recent years. These types

PG & E see page 8

The Regenerative California Monterey Attainable Housing Forum Introduces a Strong Partner for Local Housing Strategies

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Four different entities held conferences in Monterey County in the second half of 2025 to discuss ways to increase the regional housing supply that's affordable and available for ordinary residents. Although each conference was organized independently and adopted different approaches to finding potential solutions, all four conferences focused on one specific housing challenge: the so-called "missing middle."

No one is forgetting the working poor, people unable to work, or people who would be legally defined as homeless. Attendees of the four conferences remained concerned about housing supply for low-income households.

However, attendees recognized that many programs and policies have been established at the federal, state, regional, and local levels of government to assist



Invited participants to the Regenerative California Monterey Attainable Housing Forum included your Chamber's Government Affairs Liaison. He participated in a breakout session on workforce housing, was assigned to a focus group on Alignment of Land, Capital, and Demand, and participated in a Permit Streamlining working group.

financially with construction of low-income and very-low income housing. Local governments, non-profit developers, and employers have been building such housing in Monterey County. In addition, programs and services are available, funded, and staffed to help poor people maintain housing, obtain housing, or enter permanent transitional housing. There is measurable progress.

Little Housing is Built for the Middle Class in Monterey County

In the meantime, the lack of new housing construction for the middle class is a statewide problem that is particularly acute in Monterey County. Middle class families have been fleeing California since the early 1990s, at the end of the Cold War. And middle

Regenerative California Monterey see page 5



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Embracing Core Values Serves Our Chamber and Community

By Leonard Batti, SVCC Board Chair

As I look forward to my second and final year as Chair of your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, I also look back at impactful moments from 2025. In December, I was asked to speak at the annual Christians In Commerce Christmas Luncheon about how faith impacts our actions in the workplace, and specifically my work with the Chamber of Commerce.

While workshoping the talk, I realized that, similarly to my Christian beliefs, the world's major religions tend to embrace many of the same values. Values like compassion, humility, honesty, forgiveness, accountability, and more. Whether one has faith, is agnostic, or atheist, these are virtues that, when put into action, serve our community well.

It got me thinking about your

Chamber and how all aspects of the organization strive to conduct themselves, from your CEO and staff to your Chamber and Foundation boards and volunteers. I work for a company that lives by three simple core values, Take Care of the Customer, Take Care of Each Other, Do the Right Thing. Fourteen very easy to remember words, and values that are at the core of your Chamber as well. Taking care of each other means embracing values like:

Stewardship

Stewardship means caring for something that doesn't belong solely



to you. It's about being entrusted, not entitled. Chairing the board of a Chamber of Commerce carries that same spirit. The Chamber doesn't belong to me. It doesn't exist for my personal goals or agenda. I am simply entrusted to guide it for a time, responsibly,

thoughtfully, and with the long-term health of the community in mind.

This responsibility is made easy for me because of the team that runs your Chamber. Colleen, Gabe, Jasmine, and Cesar live stewardship every day.

Stewardship invites a mindset shift from, "What can we gain?" to "What have we been given to take care

of?" From "How do we advance our interests" to "How do we advance the community's interests?" When we remember that we are stewards, we make better decisions. We listen more. We hold our ego in check. We think longer term. And we feel a greater sense of accountability, not only to those in the room, but to those whose voices aren't always heard.

Listening

The importance of listening, listening to understand, is a vital virtue in public service. To be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." That's good advice for any boardroom, any community meeting, or any conversation where people hold strong opinions.

As chair, this value changes the atmosphere of the room. Because

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when people feel truly heard, they are more likely to trust, more likely to collaborate, and far more willing to find common ground. Listening doesn't mean agreeing with everything. It simply means honoring others by giving them your attention and respect.

In a Chamber setting, where business owners, city leaders, nonprofit organizations, and community members all bring different priorities, listening becomes a bridge. It's how complex issues get solved, how relationships deepen, and how polarization is softened.

Civility

If there is one thing our community, and our country, could use more of right now, it's civility, especially in government. Simple kindness in the midst of disagreement. If we embrace compassion, mercy, and grace, not as lofty ideals but as daily practices, we can break down barriers and find common ground.

The Chamber board inevitably encounters situations where people may disagree about policy, strategy, budget priorities, or community issues. When we lead with compassion, even when it's difficult, we create an environment where people feel safe speaking honestly- where tension becomes creativity and disagreements produce solutions rather than divisions.

Seeking Unity Without Demanding Uniformity

Unity does not mean everyone thinks the same. It means we recognize our shared humanity, goals, and responsibilities, even when we disagree.

A Chamber board is a mosaic of perspectives, industries, and cultures. Diversity in the boardroom, and more importantly, *diversity in our community*, is not a problem to solve but a strength to harness. Unity means bringing differing voices into harmony, not forcing them into silence.

In practice, that means your Chamber aims to build consensus

and encourage respectful debate, reward collaboration over competition, and keep the vision of the Chamber at the center of every decision:

Building a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families, and businesses succeed through economic opportunity and growth.

Integrity as a Foundation



The Chamber doesn't belong to me. It doesn't exist for my personal goals or agenda. I am simply entrusted to guide it for a time, responsibly, thoughtfully, and with the long-term health of the community in mind.

Integrity is not only a moral virtue, it's a leadership strategy. It builds trust, and trust is the currency of a healthy Chamber. Integrity means doing what we say we'll do and honoring commitments, even when it's inconvenient. It means choosing transparency over hidden agendas and being consistent, publicly and privately.

Hope as a Leadership Asset

Faith teaches hope, not naïve optimism, but grounded confidence that challenges can be overcome. In community leadership, hope is not optional. It is fuel. Hope inspires creativity. It encourages perseverance and sustains us through slow progress, economic uncertainty, or social tensions. Most importantly, hope protects us from cynicism, the quiet force that can erode communities from within.

A Chamber without hope becomes reactive, but a Chamber with hope becomes visionary. It expects good even when circumstances are difficult and approaches challenges believing that solutions are possible. That posture is contagious, and communities need leaders who refuse to give up.

Loving Our Neighbors Practically, Not Abstractly

In closing, how can I synthesize all these values into simple thought cues that I can readily access in my day-to-day interactions? I'm a simple person, and I like simple things that I can understand and easily remember.

I am blessed to work for a company that lives by just three rules. They're not complicated and they're easy to remember. Three rules that assume employees at Taylor Farms have a high level of intelligence, a conscience that knows right from wrong, and the ability to do the right thing in our dealings with colleagues, customers, business partners, and our community.

My faith highlights just two rules to live by. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And secondly, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The first rule is a given for me. The second is work in progress, but also, I believe, the answer to many of our country's and community's divisions.

For me, loving your neighbor as yourself means treating people with fairness, advocating for the vulnerable, practicing generosity, and showing patience when tensions rise. It means seeing the person before the position they hold or the opinion they express.

When I bring this value into my work with the Chamber, it reminds me that economic decisions affect real families, real workers, and real neighborhoods. Loving my neighbor means ensuring that growth benefits the community, not just the balance sheet.

Whether or not one shares my faith, these values are universal in their impact. They help create a Chamber that is principled, collaborative, resilient, and genuinely committed to the flourishing of the whole community.

I wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year, and I look forward to another successful year working together. 🌱

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Regenerative California Monterey - from page 1

class families from other states that once moved to California for job opportunities and a better life now avoid the state. Housing cost is one reason.

Although some Monterey County residents may argue that the middle class doesn't deserve any special consideration, attendees of these four conferences took a jump to acknowledge that high housing costs deter middle class families from living in Monterey County. Affected households include those supported by jobs in education, public safety, health care, government services, and skilled trades — the traditional types of essential jobs depicted in children's books about what adults do.

And especially since 2020, occupations with insufficient income to pay for local housing have expanded to include doctors, lawyers, and engineers in the early stages of their careers. Local employers struggle to recruit and retain workers for middle class occupations. Residents must often wait a long time to get basic services because of occupational shortages.

Seeking Solutions: A Vision for Monterey County

The Regenerative California Monterey Attainable Housing Forum was held at Asilomar in Pacific Grove on Nov. 6–7. Regenerative California is an initiative funded by Multiplier, a 501(c)(3) organization founded by Kristin Coates in 2023 with significant involvement of Monterey County residents. As Executive Director of Regenerative California, Coates welcomed attendees at the start of the conference. She was present throughout the conference as an inspirational leader with a passion to organize communities for positive societal change.

The organization is working to help transform California's economy



Subsidized Housing

<80% Area Median Income (AMI)

A family of four earning \$82,560/year can afford a home priced around \$420,000



'Missing Middle'

100% Area Median Income (AMI)

A family of four earning \$103,200/year can afford a home priced around \$520,000



Housing Market

>200-300% Area Median Income (AMI)

A family of four needs to earn \$215K–\$320K/year to afford the average market home priced \$830,000–\$1.2 million

The Regenerative California Monterey Attainable Housing Forum focused on increasing housing supply that's affordable for the "Missing Middle."

away from "extractive practices" that it identifies as causing harm and producing waste. Instead, it wants to develop an economy based on practices it identifies as "restoring health, prosperity and resilience for people and planet." When successful, a regenerative economy allows individuals, families, and communities to experience love, joy, abundance, health, connection, stability, safety, access, and justice.

To achieve its vision, Regenerative California has adopted a mission to create individual "regenerative economies" throughout California. Each regional economy will serve as a testing ground and model for other regions and ultimately for the state as a whole. Regenerative California leadership identified Monterey County as its first pilot region. Its research and community outreach showed that the county had opportunities that aligned with the organization's mission.

This exceptionally beautiful and desirable coastal county has long been near the top of the national lists of income and housing disparity. It's home to an impressive number of wealthy households along with a substantial number of households living in poverty. Demographic and economic changes continue to move the county's population toward these two extremes, while the middle class — never very robust

historically — diminishes.

But there is hope. Monterey County also has business, community, and political leaders who recognize these demographic changes as a problem. They want to create a balance in which people who provide essential services can remain an integral part of the community.

Monterey County has a sense of community that seems especially strong compared to other areas of the state, and the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce can attest to that. In fact, speakers from outside the region remarked on this local culture at the recent housing conferences. As a place where relationships are already established and have endured years of tests and trials, Monterey County leaders know how to turn ideas and plans into real accomplishments.

The Regenerative California Strategy for Monterey County

How does Regenerative California plan to transform the Monterey County economy? The group conducted a year-long "listening tour" of the county and ultimately decided to focus on agriculture, tourism, marine resources (the "Blue Economy"), and "healthy, affordable housing."

Regenerative California wants to serve as a forum that brings together representatives of non-profit

organizations, governments, and private for-profit businesses that share a desire for a regenerative economy but currently tend to operate within their own narrow areas of responsibility and expertise. In conjunction with this effort, it has been identifying three types of resources (human, financial, and knowledge) already available in the county for initiating the transition to a regenerative economy.

Under the positive leadership and guidance of Regenerative California, these parties will come together, collaborate on ideas, design and plan housing programs and projects, and learn together to implement "collective action" for "community change" in Monterey County. Regenerative California will monitor and record measurable progress and setbacks and apply these lessons to subsequent efforts for regenerative economies in other areas of the state.

It was mentioned at the conference that the entire leadership of Regenerative California involved with the housing component is made up of women. In addition, women comprise all of the employees of the firm (Aurora Collective) that led the design, facilitated the conference, and is leading the implementation of the next steps identified in November 2025 at the Monterey Attainable Housing Forum.

Why Housing as a Central Focus for Monterey County's Regenerative Economy?

As a result of its workshops, interviews, and research in Monterey County, Regenerative California staff confirmed what most business, community, and political leaders in this area already know: lack of affordable housing supply is the top obstacle to achieving a local regenerative economy. Staff also confirmed there is plenty of housing built and marketed for more affluent people, and plenty of government incentives leading to some success in building more housing for poor people, but virtually nothing built nowadays for the middle class.

Regenerative California staff also concluded through its research that collaboration and progress on housing supply largely exists already in two arenas: public policy and support for subsidized and low-income housing. Governor Brown and then Governor Newsom have signed several bills passed by the California legislature intended to remove unnecessary impediments to new housing. And building models such as Shibusu Systems (used locally by the developer Revision West), provide new local options for housing construction at a more affordable price.

But three other aspects of housing supply need “breakthrough collaborations” to bring affordable middle class housing to Monterey County. These are land availability, investment capital availability, and demand from organized corporate entities.

Tackling the Specific Barriers of Land, Capital, and Unfulfilled Employer Demand

Throughout the 23 hours of time together at the conference, attendees of the Regenerative California Attainable Housing Forum alternated among full session events, breakout sessions, and focus groups. Discussions focused on specific aspects of the land, capital, and demand dilemmas. The conference

also included networking opportunities for attendees at breakfasts, lunches, receptions, and a dinner.

Conference attendees were divided into land, capital, and employer demand groups to discuss problems and propose solutions in these arenas. (A fourth group was later created for the especially challenging task of figuring out how to align these three stakeholder groups.)

Attendees were then provided with two real case studies of proposed housing opportunities in Monterey County and asked to devise strategies to bring these proposals to actual construction and occupation as new housing. Through another exercise, participants were convinced of significant local potential for investing capital in new housing.

At the end of the conference, some conclusions were made concerning concepts that would align land, capital, and demand to move forward.

1. Land Availability

It was encouraging to hear from local people at the conference who owned land parcels and wanted them developed for housing in the framework of a regenerative economy. In the meantime, a focus group has been established to identify owners of all land parcels that fall within potential housing sites identified in the housing elements of the general plans of the twelve Monterey County cities and the County of Monterey.

A working group will identify the most viable sites and then contact the landowners for informed discussions and potential collaboration in housing development. Groups of experts may be convened to devise strategies for getting individual housing projects through the process from concept to occupation.

2. Capital Access

Even if land is available, the challenge remains to obtain enough capital quickly enough at flexible terms to allow construction of

Monterey County Land Collective

Goal: Identify land for housing and connect land stewards in Monterey County

Concept

- Develop a central database for unused property with key characteristics so that land stewards can more easily connect with developers and builders.
- A survey of Monterey County will be done with a specialist network vetting the opportunities.
- Opportunities will be vetted by a developer advisory group.

Initial Focus

Establishing criteria and gathering data

Support Needed

Website and database development/hosting

Capital Fund for Attainable Housing

Goal: Launch a Fund focused on attainable housing development in Monterey County

Concept

- Attract mixed capital:
 - Public, private, and institutional capital via tax deductions
 - Below market rate investor capital
 - Market rate capital
- Aggregate capital using Donor Advised Funds and Matchmaking
- Finance for:
 - Preconstruction, predevelopment, and land acquisition
 - Flexible construction and permanent financing

Initial Focus

Map the top (capital resources) and the bottom (projects, revenue generation, return, vehicles) to identify best structure for a Fund

Support Needed

Connections to aligned funders and projects for interviews

Streamlined Approval

Goal: Develop a roadmap of short-term and long-term proposals to resolve planning, permitting, and utilities barriers.

Concept

- Create a consolidated list of barriers developers and builders face with planning, permitting, and utility approval processes
- Categorize and prioritize issues with a multistakeholder cohort
- Develop a strategic plan for short- and long-term fixes

Initial Focus

Categorize and prioritize top pain points

Support Needed

Engagement from developers, builders, jurisdictions, and utilities

Workgroup tasks for January 2026. Regenerative California is calling these “Implementation Sprints.”

middle-income housing projects. It was encouraging to have people at the conference with access to money who are seeking opportunities in Monterey County for housing investment. Research has already confirmed significant capital available

within Monterey County for housing investments that can generate reasonable earnings. A non-profit group based in Monterey County called Opportunity Land Trust was present and cited as an innovative potential way to fund housing construction.

Money and people are needed to bring this capital into the housing market and build relationships with local banks and other lenders. Obtaining development expertise or engaging a development partner can be prohibitively expensive without upfront flexible capital.

Funding for pre-construction stages (planning and design, scheduling, approvals and permitting) is especially elusive to obtain. No one gets excited about spending money on a long, cumbersome government approval process.

3. Employer Demand

A breakout session discussed how employers and employer partnerships can be leaders and partners in workforce housing development. In Monterey County, more than a dozen workforce housing models are already built or in the construction or approval process. Is there opportunity to coordinate employer interests and provide resources to build even more workforce housing?

Conference attendees also considered and discussed two other projects outside of the structured set of three items:

4. Inspirational Marketing

It was noted that visualization of ideal housing development in a regenerative economy could inspire and encourage collaboration for land, capital, and demand. Such a model could even change perspectives among residents who are skeptical or critical of new housing construction.

5. Permit Streamlining

Although the Monterey Attainable Housing Forum did not have a central focus on changing public policy, attendees repeatedly mentioned permit streamlining as a desperately needed government reform. Regrettably, many people had negative stories to tell about their interactions with certain Monterey County local governments. A working group will identify the causes of delays in permit approvals. Proposed solutions



Regenerative California wants to serve as a forum that brings together representatives of non-profit organizations, governments, and private for-profit businesses that share a desire for a regenerative economy but currently tend to operate within their own narrow areas of responsibility and expertise.

will likely involve adoption of better technology and trying to change the internal cultures of some permit departments.

First Goal: 3,000 New Homes in Five Years

Forum participants agreed on an initial “catalytic” goal of 3,000 new homes for the middle class within five years. The goal is described as “catalytic” because Regenerative California considers the implementation of ideas under its funding and guidance to be a starting point to encourage and inspire others.

It is true that 3,000 new housing units would only comprise 15% of the 20,295 new housing units that the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) and the State of California determined as the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) goal for new housing in Monterey County in 2023-2031. However, 3,000 new housing units for middle class income households would be about 75% of the goal of 4,085 new housing units for households specifically defined as “moderate income.”

And building 3,000 new housing units in the 2023-2031 time period would be a substantial advancement over the previous 2015-2023 time period, which had very few new housing units built for moderate income households. Moving from near-zero to 3,000 new residential units for the middle class would be a tremendous step forward for Monterey County. 🌱

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of power outages have been occurring throughout the state, including within the territories of California’s two other investor-owned utilities, Southern California Edison (So Cal Edison or SCE) and San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E).

Changing Society Brings New Demands for Power Distribution

Although the population of Monterey County (and California as a whole) has remained stable or even declined at times in recent years, electrical demand has increased because of electronic (digital) communications and transmissions, data analysis such as artificial intelligence (AI), electric vehicle charging, building conversions from natural gas to electricity, and cannabis cultivation. These new activities have strained the capacity of the state’s electrical transmission system.

At the same time, PG&E has responded to wildfires by spending much of its construction budget on infrastructure and maintenance meant to reducing fire risks from transmission lines. Now, PG&E has pivoted to spending money on equipment and construction at many of its approximately 760 substations in Northern California. Projects to improve capacity and reliability of the electric transmission and distribution system include transmission upgrades, new substations, substation upgrades, and distribution voltage upgrades.

PG&E describes its substations as “designed not to be noticed, but they are everywhere.” You probably know the locations of a few substations; they are fenced off, but equipment is usually visible to some extent.

Functions of substations include conversion of high-voltage electricity (transmitted from power generation facilities such as power plants and solar farms) to lower-voltage electricity that is then sent to customers as needed. Transformers are the key conversion and transfer component of substation equipment.

These substations have become a weak link in the process of getting

power from the generation facility to your business or home. Many are several decades old and reflect the power demands of another era, before the “Information Age” began with the 1969 creation of what ultimately became the Internet. If substation equipment fails, or the need to balance power distribution exceeds the capabilities of the substation, an outage occurs.

Monterey Peninsula System Upgrades

Perhaps the most prominent recent PG&E substation upgrade in Monterey County—receiving substantial news media coverage—was the spring 2025 completion and launch of a new high-capacity transformer and related upgrades at the Del Monte Substation in the City of Monterey. This substation is clearly visible near the intersection of North Fremont Boulevard and Canyon Del Rey Boulevard.

The new \$3.4 million transformer was manufactured in South Korea by Hyundai and imported by boat to the Port of Long Beach. Trucks brought the transformer as an oversized load to the Monterey Fairgrounds, and then in the middle of the night it was transported by truck to the substation and put into place with a crane. Additional improvements at the substation cost more than \$7 million. A ceremonial flipping of the switch for the substation upgrade occurred on June 12, 2025.

PG&E believes the frequency of Monterey Peninsula power outages will be greatly reduced by this upgrade and another ongoing upgrade at the Monterey Substation on the corner of Figueroa Street and Del Monte Avenue in Downtown Monterey. This smaller substation is getting a new transformer, a new switchgear building, and new power lines. Distribution voltage will change from 4kV (kilovolts) to 21kV for increased capacity. (This kind of power equipment reconfiguration to increase voltage is called a “cutover” — a term that reportedly originates from the physical act of cutting copper wire bundles to disconnect old equipment.)

Current and Planned Electric Distribution Projects in Monterey County

Project Name	Substation(s)	Cost	In-Service Date
21KV Cutover	Soledad	\$956,830	May 31, 2025
Feeder Outlets	Dolan Road (in Moss Landing)	\$79,970	June 1, 2025
21KV Cutover	Fort Ord (in Seaside)	\$1,141,040	June 1, 2025
Circuit Reinforcement	Del Monte and Reservation Road	\$286,150	June 1, 2025
Circuit Reinforcement	Buena Vista (in Salinas)	\$397,640	June 1, 2025
Backtie Reinforcement	Castroville	\$239,680	June 1, 2025
Reconductor - El Camino Real (Highway 101)	Soledad	\$15,140,710	June 2, 2025
Capacity Extension - Overhead	Fort Ord (in Seaside)	\$10,629,800	June 2, 2025
Add Capacitors	King City	\$99,000	June 2, 2025
Reconductor - River Road	Reservation Road and Spence (in Salinas)	\$1,187,040	June 3, 2025
New 21KV Feeders	Pacific Grove	\$2,217,330	January 2, 2026
Substation	Spence (in Salinas)	\$9,800,000	March 2, 2026
Switchgear	Buena Vista and Industrial Acres (in Salinas)	\$6,073,130	March 2, 2026
Transformer Bank and Feeders	Boronda, Castroville, Prunedale, and Salinas	\$2,375,000	March 2, 2026
Backtie Reinforcement	Gonzales	\$307,110	May 31, 2026
Backtie Reinforcement	Buena Vista and Industrial Acres (in Salinas)	\$325,840	May 31, 2026
Backtie Reinforcement	Castroville	\$263,010	May 31, 2026
Fault Location, Isolation, and Service Restoration (FLISR)	Salinas	\$80,000	June 1, 2026
Reconductor - Foletta Road	Gonzales	\$594,320	June 2, 2026
Reduce Customer Count - Hollister	San Benito (in Moss Landing)	\$16,987,000	June 2, 2026
Reconductor - Big Sur	Otter (in Carmel)	\$4,245,860	October 2, 2026
Reconductor - King City	King City	\$4,065,800	May 1, 2027
21KV Cutover	Fort Ord (in Seaside)	\$2,402,050	March 2, 2028
Transformer Bank	Dolan Road (in Moss Landing)	N/A	May 1, 2029
Transformer Bank and Feeders	Gabilan (in Salinas)	\$12,200,000	December 31, 2030

Source: Second Amendment to 2025 Distribution Upgrade Project Report of Pacific Gas and Electric Company (Public Version), submitted to California Public Utilities Commission, November 3, 2025.

The 38 Electrical Substations in Monterey County

	Substation Name	Location	Type
1	Otter	Big Sur	Distribution Bank Only Substation
2	Carmel	Carmel	21 4kV Stepdown
3	Hatton	Carmel	Distribution Bank Only Substation
4	Laureles	Carmel Valley	Distribution Bank Only Substation
5	Castroville	Castroville	Distribution Bank Only Substation
6	Gonzales	Gonzales	Distribution Bank Only Substation
7	Los Ositos	Greenfield	Distribution Bank Only Substation
8	King City	King City	Distribution Bank Only Substation
9	Coburn	King City	Transmission Bank Only Substation
10	Jolon	King City	Distribution Bank Only Substation
11	Monterey	Monterey	Distribution Bank Only Substation
12	Monterey Navy Laboratory	Monterey	Owned by PG&E; the demarcation point with U.S. government ownership is the disconnect switch on the load side of the primary meter
13	Navy School	Monterey	Owned by PG&E; the demarcation point is the primary metering between the power transformer and the low side busbar, which is owned and operated by the U.S. government.
14	Viejo	Monterey	Distribution Bank Only Substation
15	Del Monte	Monterey	Distribution Bank and Transmission Bank Substation
16	Dolan Rd.	Moss Landing	Distribution Bank Only Substation
17	Moss Landing	Moss Landing	Transmission Bank Only Substation
18	Pacific Grove	Pacific Grove	21 4kV Stepdown
19	Forest	Pebble Beach	21 4kV Stepdown
20	Prunedale	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
21	Salinas	Salinas	Distribution Bank and Transmission Bank Substation
22	Spence	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
23	Reservation Rd.	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
24	Boronda	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
25	Buena Vista	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
26	Chualar	Salinas	Substation Not In-Service
27	Edward Pike Co.	Salinas	Customer-Owned Substation
28	Gabilan	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
29	Industrial Acres	Salinas	Distribution Bank Only Substation
30	Lagunitas	Salinas	Customer-Owned Substation
31	Oil Fields	San Ardo	Distribution Bank Only Substation
32	San Ardo	San Ardo	Distribution Bank Only Substation
33	Texaco	San Ardo	Customer-Owned Substation
34	Manzanita	Seaside	21 4kV Stepdown
35	Fort Ord	Seaside	Distribution Bank Only Substation
36	Soledad	Soledad	Distribution Bank and Transmission Bank Substation
37	Camphora	Soledad	Distribution Bank Only Substation
38	Los Coches	Soledad	Distribution Bank Only Substation

Locations of the 38 electrical substations in Monterey County.

Another upgrade on the Monterey Peninsula area is happening at the Fort Ord Substation on the southeast corner of Gigling Road and 6th Street in the City of Seaside, where PG&E is replacing a transmission bank with a new 45MVA (MegaVolt-Amperes) bank and constructing a new 21kV switchgear building.

Finally, the planned Naval Innovation Center at Naval Support Activity Monterey will include construction of a new substation.

North County Upgrades

In North County, PG&E in the last three years has installed a new 30MVA transmission bank and a new 12kV distribution feeder at its Dolan Road Substation in Moss Landing. It has replaced a transmission bank at its Castroville Substation with a new 30MVA transmission bank.

Salinas Valley Upgrades

On the west side of Salinas, PG&E is upgrading its Boronda Substation and replacing its transformer bank with a

“PG&E has been responsible for dealing with the increasing number of unexpected and unplanned power outages occurring throughout Monterey County in recent years.

new 45MVA bank and new 12kV distribution feeders. The company is also reinforcing two circuits for continued electric load growth.

In South Salinas, near the Amazon distribution center, PG&E is rebuilding its Industrial Acres Substation from a 4kV to a 12kV substation with a 45MVA transmission bank and new 12kV distribution feeders. Expected to be completed in 2026, this upgrade is meant to provide additional capacity for South Salinas industrial facilities. Just north of the intersection of Spence Road and Highway 101, PG&E completed an upgrade of its Spence Substation with installation of a new



Map of PG&E substations in Monterey County.

30MVA transmission bank with two new 12kV distribution feeders.

In the Salinas Valley, PG&E plans a large-scale, decade-long “transmission cutover project” to upgrade many of its transmission lines and substations serving the Highway 101 corridor from 60kV to 115kV. This will nearly double the capacity of the local transmission system from Salinas to Gonzales. Upgrades should be complete by 2033. PG&E is also upgrading electrical circuits between

Gonzales and Soledad to accommodate new agricultural facilities and housing development. A new substation is planned to be built by 2030 near Chualar to add additional electric capacity from Salinas to the Soledad area.

Want More Information?

Power, water, and telecommunications (*tele* meaning “at a distance, far from”) are the fundamental building blocks of modern commerce and culture. Human civilizations have always pursued establishment, advancement, and control of these three utilities. If you are interested in attending a formal presentation about the electrical transmission and distribution system in Monterey County (and/or California), please contact Colleen Bailey at colleen@salinaschamber.com.

Thank you to Jazmine Venegas, Central Coast Government Relations for Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), and Marlana Brown, Community Planning Liaison Officer for Naval Support Activity Monterey, for providing supplemental information and clarifications for this article.

Turn Your 2026 Goals Into Reality

At Bay Federal Credit Union, we're committed to helping local businesses thrive.



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The Out-of-Service Chualar Substation



Chualar out-of-service substation.



The Chualar Substation is a visible landmark of California Mission Revival architecture, just north of the Chualar exit on Highway 101. PG&E has a record of purchasing the property on Oct. 3, 1951. Company officials believe the substation structure

was built by Coast Counties Gas and Electric, a regional utility that merged with PG&E in 1954.

However, articles from the Salinas Californian in 1929 and 1930 report that PG&E planned to build a new \$53,600 Chualar Substation (as well as a new

Spence Substation for \$34,500 and other upgrades) because of a significant increase in Salinas Valley power demand. Electrical equipment is no longer in the building, as PG&E replaced it with a larger substation.

Contrary to popular belief, the

building is not listed as a historic resource. PG&E does plan to build a new Chualar Substation. At this time, PG&E has not indicated any plans to demolish the building, which occupies a small amount of land on a parcel that's almost one acre in size. 🌱

BofA Report: Majority of Small and Mid-Sized Business Owners Expect Growth in 2026

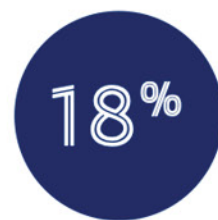
By Esmeralda Owen, PR Partner, Bank of America

Business owners appear bullish on revenues and growth in the new year ahead, according to the latest Bank of America Business Owner Report. Three out of four small and mid-sized business owners expect revenue increases, and nearly 60% are planning to expand their businesses. All this despite recent economic headwinds.

Demand for capital from local companies is on the rise as well.

According to BofA, \$486 million has been extended to Monterey region's small, mid-size, and commercial companies in the first three

Business owners have seen numerous changes to the business landscape. The changes that impacted them the most include:



The rise of AI



Supply chain disruptions



Higher customer expectations



According to BofA, \$486 million has been extended to Monterey region's small, mid-size, and commercial companies in the first three quarters of this year —representing double-digit growth from the same period last year.

quarters of this year —representing double-digit growth from the same period last year.

Part of this growth also includes hiring with just under half — 43% — of companies surveyed say they plan to hire more employees next year, while just 1% plan layoffs. This notable finding has to do with how businesses have been impacted by labor shortages in recent years.

“Businesses came out of the pandemic more resilient and savvy about finances, strategy and planning,” said Sherry Farson, Monterey-based vice president of business banking for Bank of America. “We’ve been consulting with our business clients around planning for anticipated rate reductions, for example, as well as strategies around investing in equipment and commercial real estate growth.”

Top BofA Business Owner Findings

- **Adopting AI** — AI has become essential to business owners, with 77% having integrated it into their operations in the past five years, using it for marketing (50%), content production (38%), customer service (37%), and inventory management (28%).

- **Optimizing supply chains** — 75% of business owners surveyed say they are currently being impacted by supply chain issues.

Over half of business owners expect to maintain staff levels while also expanding their business.



59%

Of business owners plan on expanding their businesses



26%

Are not planning to expand



- **Managing inflation** — Most business owners (88%) say they are currently being impacted by inflation, consistent with last year.

The BofA Business Owner report also includes a five-year outlook, success planning trends, and even ways businesses can leverage marquee events like concerts and sports games.

For example, nearly all business owners surveyed plan to adopt digital tools and AI over the next five years to accelerate digital payments, increase cybersecurity, and help make tasks easier for employees.

They’re also leveraging cultural events such as concerts or rodeos to connect with or gain new customers. More than half aligned their companies to local events by tailoring promotions and social media content or marketing campaigns.

12-Month Outlook

Business owners are entering into the next 12 months with steady yet cautious optimism.



74%

Believe their revenue will increase (down from 78% in 2024)

They believe their economies will improve.

Local 53%

National 48%

Global 45%

That strategy paid off, with nearly 50% of business owners reporting increased sales or social media followings.

These trends are not just found in the Monterey Bay region, but across the greater Bay Area as well, according to BofA business banking executive Shveta Somalwar.

“Despite challenges like inflation and supply chain disruptions that can negatively impact costs, more businesses found ways to maintain steady prices for their customers by implementing operational efficiencies, adopting tech, and finding additional revenue streams.”

“All this bodes well going into the new year,” added Somalwar. 🌱



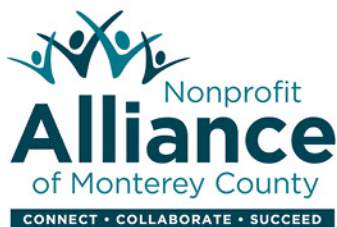
MEMBER NEWS



ARTS COUNCIL
for Monterey County

Arts Council for Monterey County, Santa Cruz County, San Benito County Announce Public Town Hall in January

Together with Santa Barbara-based facilitator Hannah Jacobson Blumenfeld, San Benito County Arts Council, Arts Council Santa Cruz County, and Arts Council for Monterey County are proud to be key regional partners for the California Arts Council's Creative Economies in Action: 2025 Statewide Engagement Tour. This vital initiative will build upon California's first Creative Economy Strategic Plan, driving deep community engagement and storytelling to inform a comprehensive addendum to be submitted to the Governor's Office and State Legislature in the Spring of 2026. The Creative Economies in Action tour is designed to expand upon the initial goals and action areas proposed by the Creative Economy Workgroup. The Tri-County Town Hall will take place on Saturday, January 10, 2026 (10am-1:30pm) at the Watsonville Center for the Arts. It will play a crucial role in gathering critical community insights and identifying innovative practices within the Tri-Counties in the Central Coast region, helping to build a field-informed policy and communications infrastructure that truly reflects the needs of California's creative sector. "I am incredibly excited to engage with creatives across the Central Coast to lift up the local work that is already being done and continue to build connections and community around it," said Blumenfeld. "The Creative Economies in Action tour provides a crucial opportunity to ensure that this plan reflects the specificity of this region and shine a light on both the needs and the bright spots in our six counties. "The arts are a fundamental part of our Central Coast economy. This critical collaboration between the Tri-County Arts Councils and the California Arts Council ensures the state-wide plan accurately champions the unique needs of our local artists and creative entrepreneurs," shared Jacquie Atchison, Executive Director of the Arts Council for Monterey County (Arts4MC). "Uniting our voices is the only way to build policy that makes a truly meaningful impact right here at home."



NAMC Board Welcomed Jason Little, Executive Director of Read to Me Project, as Newest Board Member

Jason Little has been an enthusiastic, engaged supporter of NAMC programming for several years, most recently serving as a presenter at our 2025 Annual Awards Celebration. Little is a passionate nonprofit leader who embraces and models the motto of "vocation over occupation" to further his agency's mission and especially his wider community engagement. We are excited to have Jason joining our Board and welcome him as an energizing force.



2026 Commemorative California Rodeo Salinas Poster Unveiled

The California Rodeo Salinas has unveiled its 2026 commemorative poster, a striking tribute to patriotism and tradition. This year's design features retired Sgt. First Class James "Guido" Davis parachuting the American flag into the arena from 5,000 feet above—a moment that has become a beloved highlight of the Rodeo. The image was crafted using two photographs by Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Photographer Fernando Sam-Sin and stylized by graphic designer Tracy Hopper. Davis, a 20-year U.S. Army veteran and former Green Beret, will celebrate his 11th year participating in the California Rodeo Salinas in 2026. With over 3,000 jumps to his name, his dedication and service continue to inspire fans and participants alike. California Rodeo Salinas President Bob Eggers, himself a veteran, shared his thoughts on the new poster: "There's something deeply moving about seeing the American flag descend into the arena—it reminds us of the values that rodeo and our country share: grit, honor, and freedom. As a veteran, it fills me with pride to see how patriotic this sport truly is." The commemorative posters will be sold for \$20 (plus tax) at the Salinas Sports Complex in the Rodeo's souvenir booth (Saturday 10 a.m.–4 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.–3 p.m.) and at the California Rodeo Office located at 1034 N. Main St., in Salinas, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closed Fridays from 11:45 a.m.–1:15 p.m.). Posters are also available for purchase online at <https://www.carodeo.com/p/about-us/store>.



Bay Federal Credit Union Announces Felisa Garcia as Assistant Vice President, Branch Manager of River Street Branch

Bay Federal Credit Union announced the promotion of Felisa Garcia to Assistant Vice President, Branch Manager of the Credit Union's River Street Branch in Santa Cruz. In this role, Garcia will oversee branch operations, provide leadership and coaching to her team, and ensure an exceptional member experience through personalized financial guidance and community engagement. Garcia began her career with Bay Federal nearly 20 years ago as a Member Services Representative and has since advanced through several positions, including Certified New Account Representative, Financial Services Officer, and Lead Financial Services Consultant. Her extensive experience across multiple branch locations has given her a comprehensive understanding of the Credit Union's operations and member needs. Garcia's commitment to Bay Federal members earned her Bay Federal's Service Excellence Award in 2014, the organization's highest honor. She has also been an active participant in the Community Support Committee, contributing to initiatives such as the Mother's Day Run, the Christmas Project, and fundraising efforts for the Children's Miracle Network. "I'm excited to continue my journey at Bay Federal, learning, growing, and helping our members achieve their financial goals," she said. "Being part of such a supportive team inspires me every day." In her new role, Garcia will continue fostering meaningful connections with members and supporting Bay Federal's mission to make a real difference in the financial lives of its members and the communities it serves.



Bay Federal Credit Union Wins Three Categories in The Lookout List by Lookout Santa Cruz

Bay Federal Credit Union has announced that it has been recognized by Lookout Santa Cruz as a community favorite, winning in three major categories of The Lookout List:

- Favorite Local Financial Institution
- Favorite Mortgage Broker
- Favorite Bank or Credit Union for a Teen's First Account

The Lookout List is a Santa Cruz County community-voted recognition program, where residents nominate and vote for their favorite local businesses, organizations, and professionals. Thousands of locals participated to highlight the people and places that make Santa Cruz County thrive. These awards honor Bay Federal's ongoing commitment to providing exceptional service, competitive financial solutions, and genuine community care. For more than 65 years, Bay Federal has proudly served the Central Coast by empowering members to achieve financial well-being and by giving back through volunteerism, scholarships, and local partnerships. "Being named the best in not just one but three categories by our community is an incredible honor," said Carrie Birkhofer, President and CEO of Bay Federal Credit Union. "We are grateful to our members and the Santa Cruz community for their trust and support. These recognitions reinforce our mission to make a real difference in the lives of those we serve every day."



KSBW's Share Your Holiday Breaks Fundraising Record

KSBW 8, together with The Salvation Army, are celebrating the success of the 39th annual KSBW Share Your Holiday. The broadcast and online fundraiser, held Dec. 12, raised a record-breaking \$240,612 in cash donations. In addition to monetary contributions, the event collected 3,732 toys and 3,672 pounds of food. All donations benefit individuals and families in Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties. The Salvation Army is still accepting online donations on its website at salvationarmy.org.



Building Capacity for a Safer Salinas: Fire Chief Outlines Urgent Needs and New Strategies: An Interview with Salinas Fire Chief Sam Klemek

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC President/CEO

Salinas Fire Chief Sam Klemek recently sat down with me in his new City Hall office to provide an in-depth update on the state of the Salinas Fire Department. As we spoke, he kept a steady eye on the large overhead screen displaying every active call—color-coded by response time. The constant alerts underscored a startling reality even to a novice observer: the call volume in Salinas is extraordinarily high.

This pace is part of what first drew Klemek to the Salinas Fire Department. Two decades ago, firefighter jobs were highly competitive, and he considered himself fortunate to receive interviews simultaneously from Santa Clara and Salinas. When Salinas called first, he accepted—and never looked back. At the time, the city's firefighters were among the lowest paid in California, yet the department offered unparalleled opportunities to gain experience. Its proximity to Highway 101 and active rail lines, exposure to hazardous materials, and large industrial operations requiring ammonia-related hazmat expertise created a complex, high-stakes environment that shaped his career.

Klemek has served the department in nearly every capacity—Firefighter, Paramedic, Battalion Chief, Fire Marshal, and Deputy Chief—before becoming Fire Chief three years ago. Over that time, he has witnessed dramatic changes. When he first applied, a thousand candidates entered a lottery just for



Salinas Fire Chief Sam Klemek

an interview slot.

Today, the applicant pool is far smaller, and employee retention is more challenging. Salinas competes with Bay Area departments that offer higher pay and richer benefits, as well as with smaller cities that offer lower cost of living despite more modest compensation.

Supporting his team through this evolving landscape has become one of his top priorities. After surviving more near-death experiences than he can count, the Chief emphasizes that “firefighters today are paid for what they see, not what they do.” Responding to car accidents, fires, shootings, and traumatic medical emergencies exacts a heavy mental toll. The department typically has three to five employees on extended PTSD leave at any given time. Klemek credits

the local union for its leadership in supporting mental and physical health through peer-support training, counseling programs, and even therapy dogs.

Recruiting paramedics remains one of the toughest challenges, prompting the launch of a new paramedic training program through the South Bay Regional Public Safety Training Consortium with Monterey Peninsula College at Fort Ord. As the first program of its kind in the nation—and funded initially by grants—it provides clinical education, internships, and specialty certifications that can increase firefighter pay by 12.5%.

By reducing the cost and logistics of sending personnel elsewhere, it has strengthened recruitment, retention, and staffing stability. The City Council now budgets annually for at least two firefighters to attend.

The call volume has surged dramatically during Klemek's tenure. When he began, the department handled fewer than 10,000 calls each year. Today, the number approaches 18,000, with the majority tied to emergency medical services—a trend driven in part by the growing unhoused population. Staffing levels, however, have not kept pace. The call volume of

Stations 1 and 2 rivals San Jose, San Francisco and large cities in Southern California. Despite this growth in demand for services, Salinas continues to operate from the same six stations it has operated from for decades, with only one ladder truck added since 2015.

This has increased the response rates considerably, well beyond national standards for both fire and EMS responses. Klemek referred me to the fire department website where a real-time data tracker

exists showing PSAP Time, (time a 911 call is answered to dispatch), the Turn Out Time (time from dispatch to when firefighters are en route), Travel Time (time

spent driving to the emergency location), and Response Time (total time from 911 call to arrival at the scene). In almost all cases, the statistics are in the red. Some factors that can contribute to the delayed response include traffic congestion, and traffic calming measures such as speed bumps and traffic circles. Some of the improvements recently made to the fire stations should help improve response rates, and Klemek is tracking that carefully.

Most concerning is the rise in overlapping calls, which strains

When Fire Chief Sam Klemek began, the Salinas fire department handled fewer than 10,000 calls each year.

Today, the number approaches 18,000, with the majority tied to emergency medical services—a trend driven in part by the growing unhoused population.

the department's ability to respond quickly. Emergencies frequently occur simultaneously, extending response times and jeopardizing outcomes—whether saving a life or preventing a fire from consuming an entire block. OSHA safety standards require adequate staffing at each incident to protect firefighters on scene, meaning the department must sometimes wait for additional personnel to arrive or rely on neighboring agencies for support.

Federal grants have been crucial in sustaining operations, but future needs loom large. Station 7 remains in the long-term plan for the city's future growth area, though its \$30 million price tag leaves funding uncertain.

Klemek is exploring creative solutions to strengthen long-term sustainability. One strategy is reinstating the Commercial Fire Inspection Program, a prevention initiative that was ready to launch just before the pandemic. While new fees and regulations are rarely popular, he emphasizes that the program focuses on education—not punishment—with the goal of reducing fire risk, protecting businesses, preserving jobs, safeguarding property and tax revenue, and ultimately helping lower insurance costs for the entire community. He estimates that the cost to the local economy each year for preventative fire can be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

He is also evaluating a benefit assessment model similar to one used in Clovis, which could offset ambulance service costs, improve bill-collection rates, and relieve pressure on the city's general fund. In addition, upgraded technology may help reduce response times in the future.

Firefighting has never been an easy job, and leading a modern fire department is harder still. Yet Klemek's decades of service in Salinas have proven that he is deeply committed to the city's safety—and fully prepared to meet the challenges ahead. 🌱

2025: A Year When Diversification Worked

By Bill Hastie, Hastie Financial Group

One of the cornerstones of Modern Portfolio Theory is the concept of diversification, the process of allocating assets among several asset classes as not to "put all your eggs in one basket." This seeks to reduce overall portfolio risk or volatility by not making significant positions in any one area of the market. In the long run, diversification can be effective as a prudent strategy for most investors. In the short run, however, diversification can work against you.

Let's take 2023 and 2024, for example. For the most part, one asset class — large cap growth stocks — drove the lion's share of stock market's performance. More accurately, there were only seven stocks that produced the vast majority of the S&P 500's performance.

In this scenario, the average investor who believes in diversification most likely underperformed "the market" because they were invested in other areas of the market such as value stocks, mid and small cap stocks, foreign and emerging markets stocks that did not perform nearly as well. The best performing portfolios were those that took concentrated positions in large cap growth stocks — the exact opposite of diversification.

Now look at 2025. While the large cap growth asset class performed relatively well, large cap value stocks did as well. And foreign stocks actually outperformed the U.S. market for the first time in several years. What's more surprising, foreign emerging market stocks were one of the top



performers of 2025, a stark reversal after many years of dismal performance.

The point here is that by remaining diversified across several different asset classes, the investor likely captured superior performance in many other areas of the market.

So, what is the investor to do when diversification works in some market environments and not so well in others? Investors cannot expect to be able to consistently make rapid changes in their investments in an attempt to

In 2025, while the large cap growth asset class performed relatively well, large cap value stocks did as well. And foreign stocks actually outperformed the U.S. market for the first time in several years.

time the market. One technique that has gained in popularity is starting with a broadly diversified portfolio, setting aside a certain percentage, maybe up to 20% of

the portfolio, to make what are referred to as "technical tilts" towards certain areas of the market. In 2023 and 2024, this would have involved adding to an already existing allocation to large cap growth stocks. This would have led to an overweight in that one asset class, but nowhere near a concentrated position.

The process of under and overweighting asset classes helps an otherwise diversified portfolio slightly focus on, or away from, specific areas of the market. In practice here is how this would have looked in 2025 — underweight small and mid-cap stocks, overweight large cap growth and value stocks, and overweight foreign and emerging market stocks.

Please keep in mind that there is never a guarantee that any particular investment management technique will always be successful. The disciplined investor who never makes portfolio changes based on emotions stands the best chance of long-term success. 🌱

Bill Hastie, MBA, CFP®, CIMA®, AIFA®, is a Financial Advisor and Managing Partner with locally owned Hastie Financial Group and can be contacted at william.hastie@hastiefg.com.



Getty Images

The Children's Shopping Tour: A Salinas Holiday Tradition Continues

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC President/CEO

On Dec. 13, 275 elementary school children experienced the true spirit of the holidays, thanks to the generosity of hundreds of volunteers, donors, and local businesses from across Salinas. Seventy-four years ago, the Children's Shopping Tour was launched by a group of Jaycees determined to ensure that the community's most vulnerable children had warm clothing for the winter season. Nearly three-quarters of a century later, that tradition not only continues—it thrives.

Planning for this year's event began over the summer, when a dedicated committee of volunteers met monthly to prepare for the big day. Their work included raising funds so each child could receive \$125 in gift cards, securing in-kind donations such as snacks, recruiting volunteers, coordinating with schools to identify participating students, conducting community outreach, and managing logistics and store relations. On the day of the event, many were on site well before sunrise—some arriving as early as 5:45 a.m.—to warmly welcome the excited children.

This year's event was made possible through the leadership and hard work of the following individuals:

- **Co-Chairs:** Manny Escarcega & Taylour Matz
- **Fundraising:** Matt Salyer, Francisco Arevalo, & Daisy Regalado
- **In-Kind Donations:** Alejandra Garcia & Celia Garcia
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Jason Hermosillo & Athena Morris
- **Child Recruitment & School Liaisons:** Evette Selva Kirby & Maggie Rodriguez
- **Communications & Media Relations:** Athena Morris
- **Logistics & Store Relations:**



Children participating in the Children's Shopping Tour pose with members of the Salinas Police Department during the event on Dec. 13.

Cynthia Martinez, Celia Garcia, & Keith Chua

The committee raised more than **\$54,500**, with especially generous contributions from the Harden Foundation, Alco Water Service, T-Mobile Foundation, Yellow Brick Road, Cabrera Productions, California Water Service, Comcast, Natividad Foundation, Dean C. Callender & Kristin Lea Callender, the Don & Barbara

Chapin Foundation, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, and Coast & Valley Properties.

'Seventy-four years ago, the Children's Shopping Tour was launched by a group of Jaycees determined to ensure that the community's most vulnerable children had warm clothing for the winter season. Nearly three-quarters of a century later, that tradition not only continues—it thrives.'

could stretch even further. After children were done

shopping, they brought their shopping bags, which were nearly as big as they were, to the kids corral where they enjoyed vegetable packs provided by Taylor Farms and other healthy snacks provided by Costco, Walmart and Chick-fil-A. And to top off what was already a most exciting morning, Santa & Mrs. Claus and Kelpie, the Monterey Bay FC's mascot, all made appearances.

As families exited the mall, children proudly showed off new down jackets, sneakers, and other winter essentials.

This event showcased the very best of Salinas—a community united in support of its children. Local elected officials and public servants attended in full force,



including Mayor Dennis Donohue, Councilmember Jose Luis Barajas, City Manager Rene Mendez and his wife, Assistant to the City Manager Jose Arreola, members of the Salinas Fire Department, Sheriff Tina Nieto and the Monterey County Sheriff's Office, Speaker of the Assembly Robert Rivas' Office Senior Field Representative Gilbert Ramos, and Active

Transport Medical Services. Teachers from Los Padres, Lincoln Elementary, and schools across the city, as well as administrators from Hartnell College and UC Santa Cruz, also participated as chaperones.

The largest turnout came from the Salinas Police Department: with strong support from Chief Carlos Acosta, roughly 15 officers, 2 civilians, and 10 cadets

participated, helping make this one of the safest events in Salinas and demonstrating their commitment to our youth.

At the heart of the effort were three members of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce team—**Gabe Lopez, Jasmine Bhardwaj, and Cesar Chavez**—whose leadership on behalf of the Salinas Valley Chamber Foundation was exceptional.

To everyone involved: thank you. Your commitment not only made this event possible—it showed our young people just how deeply their community cares for them. As one young participant proudly shared, "I was chosen because I've been a really good boy." Beyond new clothes, it is that sense of pride and belonging we hope each child carries with them long after the holidays. 🌿



What's Your Chamber's Government Relations Committee Talking About This Month?

A REVIEW OF 2025

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Members of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce continue to cite the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee and Government Affairs program as top reasons why they join and remain members. As usual, the committee and program was highly active in 2025. Here are some highlights.

1 Your Chamber held its first "Salinas Valley Speaks" event on Aug. 7, at the Braga Barn in Soledad. The event was sold-out and deemed a success. Chamber leaders have decided to hold this annually as a "signature event" and are considering ways to increase event capacity next year to accommodate all people who want to attend. Your Chamber also held a successful third annual Legislative Breakfast on Feb. 28. In three years, your Chamber has gone from no events dedicated to government affairs to two signature events each year. Members seem pleased with these events and the opportunities to learn about how government affects local businesses.

2 Throughout 2025, your Chamber worked to develop and propose compromises in the political fight over rent stabilization (rent control) and tenant protection ordinances enacted by the previous city council in 2023 and 2024. In the summer of 2025, the new city council voted to repeal the ordinances in

their entirety. Then, supporters of the ordinances gathered enough signatures to qualify a referendum, giving Salinas voters an opportunity to choose for themselves in November 2026 whether they want these ordinances completely retained or completely repealed. Your Chamber continues to focus on legislative analysis, data collection, and trying to convene opposing parties to reach agreement and avoid an expensive and divisive election campaign.

3 In the second half of 2025, four local conferences were held for interested parties to collaborate on increasing the supply of housing that's affordable to ordinary people in Monterey County. Your Chamber was a supportive partner for the two conferences held in Salinas and had representatives at all four events. In addition, the Business Journal published the first complete set of tables outlining progress (or lack of progress) of the 12 Monterey County cities and the County of Monterey in pursuing their Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) goals.

4 Your Chamber continually sought openness, transparency, and accountability for various local government programs in Monterey County, including rental registration performance, water flow measurements and water cooperation agreements, expenditures for tax

measures such as Measure G in Salinas, sewer rates, traffic mitigation for the Amazon warehouse, crime statistics, homelessness, and other issues. The demise of the KION news division means the Chamber is more needed than ever to serve as a check and balance for the people against government waste, fraud, abuse, and excess. We the People are the government.

5 Your Chamber closely monitored the consideration and approval of significant rate increases for sewer service and proposed projects to be covered under the city's Salinas Sanitary Sewer Master Plan Update. Improvements and upgrades are needed, but the cost is high and supplemental to high rates already paid to the Monterey One Water (M1W) regional wastewater treatment and recycling agency.

6 As in previous years, your Chamber monitored and reported in the Business Journal on the status of water and wastewater flow in Monterey County, including the implications of current and future water projects on business interests and the public. The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGS) is considering deci-

sions on projects to stop seawater intrusion that could be quite costly. Wastewater from the City of Salinas Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility and Conveyance System continues to be a pivotal element of supply plans for agricultural irrigation water to the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project and drinking water for the Monterey Peninsula. The City of Salinas is a primary water supplier for Northern Monterey County, but many people don't know this.

7 The expiration date for the City of Salinas Measure G sales tax is April 2030, and your Chamber continues to urge the City of Salinas to thoroughly document city expenditures using Measure G revenue and report it to voters. The Chamber seeks to be a leader on the campaign for Measure G renewal. If voters do not approve renewal of this sales tax, the City of Salinas will be in serious trouble.





In three years, your Chamber has gone from no events dedicated to government affairs to two signature events each year. Members seem pleased with these events and the opportunities to learn about how government affects local businesses.

8 Construction continued on the massive Amazon distribution facility in South Salinas. Your Chamber continued to push for mitigation measures on traffic impacts to South Salinas streets and on Highway 101 entrance and exit ramps.

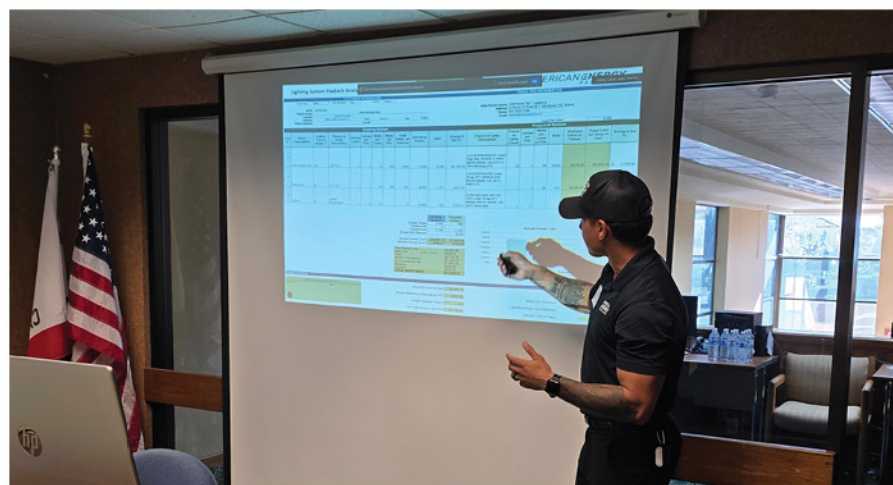
9 The City of Salinas is working on updating its General Plan, zoning code, and the Economic Development Element of its General Plan. Your Chamber has provided input on these documents and will continue to do so.

10 As recommended by the Chamber, the Salinas City Council held a strategic planning session in February to review its goals and priorities for 2025. The Mayor, the full City Council, the City Manager, and the various executive departments of the City of Salinas provided the public and your Chamber with substantive, well-defined outlines of their priorities and plans. All of these priorities and plans were listed in the Business Journal, and the outcomes will be reviewed by Chamber leadership in 2026. 🌱



RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



Lunch and Learn with American Energy Partners

American Energy Partners gave an exciting and educational presentation on their PG&E On-Bill Financing Program—which allows projects to be completed with no upfront costs. Helping Local businesses improve their buildings energy efficiency while lowering operating costs. Attendees were given real world examples of how other small businesses utilized this amazing program and saved money while protecting the environment.

Salinas Tree for Peace Lighting Ceremony

The Salinas Chamber joined the community in celebration for the annual Salinas Tree for Peace Lighting. A huge thank you to Salinas City Center and One Main Street for hosting the annual Salinas Tree for Peace Lighting Ceremony, and to all the Partners— Salinas Fire, Salinas School of Dance, Salinas High Baile Folklorico, Arts Council for Monterey County, Oasis Charter School, National Steinbeck Center, Brewjee Coffee Co, Starbucks Taylor Farms, plus the amazing face painter, balloon artist & magical elf. Santa's arrival, holiday crafts, cocoa, performances, and our community, especially the children and families, made the night truly special.



Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Membership Orientation

Membership Director Gabe Lopez hosted our final orientation for new and prospective members of the year, highlighting Chamber benefits, marketing opportunities, and ways to get involved. Attendees left with resources to maximize their membership and connect with the Salinas Valley business community.

How Decluttering, Donating and Shopping Sustainably Can Help Create a Fresh Start with Purpose

By Goodwill Central Coast Staff

January has a way of reminding people that new beginnings are not only possible but powerful. The turn of the year brings that familiar mix of optimism and introspection, inspiring many to clear out the old, streamline their surroundings, and commit to living more intentionally.

Goodwill Central Coast encourages the community to take this momentum one step further into 2026 by decluttering for a cause, shopping sustainably, and supporting programs that help local residents build brighter futures.

Across Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo counties, GCC has long been known for its mission-driven approach: empowering individuals through employment, job training and career support. Fueling that mission is the simple act of sorting through a closet, rummaging around a garage and making the conscious decision to live with less clutter.

The power of the January reset

For many, January offers a symbolic clean slate. It's the month of fresh planners, fresh goals and, increasingly, fresh spaces. Whether the aim is to feel more organized, breathe easier at home, or simply reduce an emotional burden, decluttering has become a modern ritual of renewal.

Minimalist expert Dana K. White, author of "Decluttering at the Speed of Life," reminds people that progress is the point — not perfection. "Every item you let go of makes your home easier to live in," she says, a sentiment that resonates with anyone who has ever felt overwhelmed by too much



stuff. In a world that moves fast, clearing physical space can feel like reclaiming mental space.

But clearing that space can also open doors for someone else. Those jeans that never fit right, the air fryer used once out of curiosity, the extra holiday ornaments that no longer leave the box — each of these items has potential far beyond a donation bin. At Goodwill Central Coast, they become vehicles for opportunity.

Decluttering for a cause

Goodwill Central Coast turns community generosity into meaningful, measurable impact. When someone donates gently used clothing, home goods, or furniture, those items are sold in local stores, and the revenue goes directly into employment programs

that help individuals gain new skills, find jobs and build financial stability.

For job-seekers across the Central Coast, these programs are life-changing. They offer training, placement services, and support that help people break through barriers and step into the workforce with confidence. Each donation — whether a winter coat or a set of dishes — contributes to this cycle of empowerment.

In January 2026, GCC is tapping into the spirit of renewal with its community-wide TikTok "Donate 10" Challenge. The idea is simple: choose 10 items you no longer need, drop them off at the nearest Goodwill Central Coast location, and share the moment to inspire others. It's an approachable way to start the year lighter while

creating ripple effects that reach far beyond one household.

Five steps to a meaningful declutter

While decluttering may feel daunting, GCC encourages a practical, manageable approach — one designed to build momentum rather than overwhelm:

1 Start small — one space at a time: Instead of tackling the whole house, begin with a single drawer, shelf, or closet. Success in one small area naturally fuels progress in the next.

2 Sort in real time: Make decisions as you go: keep, donate, or trash. If an item hasn't been used or appreciated for a year, it's ready for a new chapter — and donating it turns that chapter into an opportunity for someone else.

3 Keep only what adds value: It's helpful to ask yourself, "Would I buy this again today?" If not, let it go. Owning less often allows you to enjoy more: more space, more clarity, and more peace of mind.

4 Donate with intention: Once items are gathered, drop them off at a Goodwill Central Coast donation center, <https://www.ccgoodwill.org/donate/goodwill-donation-centers/>. Every donation directly supports job creation and career advancement in the community. That old lamp or blender might just help someone take the first steps toward a new career.

5 Celebrate your progress: Decluttering isn't just about what leaves the house — it's about what opens up inside it. Feel the difference ... lighter, calmer and more intentional.



Whether the aim is to feel more organized, breathe easier at home, or simply reduce an emotional burden, decluttering has become a modern ritual of renewal.

Live sustainably, make an impact

A fresh start doesn't mean buying brand-new things. GCC encourages a more mindful approach — shopping secondhand. It's a practice that checks every box — affordable, eco-friendly and socially impactful.

In Goodwill stores, shoppers can find everything from elevated wardrobe essentials to décor that brings personality to a room. Baskets, shelves, and storage items make it easy to stay organized sustainably, while clothing racks are full of pieces that help refresh a style without the environmental cost of fast fashion.

Choosing secondhand keeps reusable goods out of landfills. It reduces waste, minimizes carbon output, and supports a circular economy — one where items stay in use for longer and communities benefit with every purchase. For anyone seeking a greener, more conscious lifestyle in 2026, Goodwill is an ideal place to begin.

A New Year brings new hope

Decluttering may start at home, but its impact stretches across neighborhoods, workplaces and families. When people donate or shop with Goodwill Central Coast, they participate in a powerful cycle, one that supports sustainability, strengthens the local economy and (most importantly) empowers individuals who work hard to build better lives.

To find your nearest donation location, learn more about the mission, or explore GCC stores, visit www.ccgoodwill.org — and make 2026 the year of sustainable living and meaningful change. 🌱

A New Year's Letter

By Pastor T.K. Anderson, Compass Church

As we enter 2026, I find myself reflecting on something John Maxwell often says, "Everything worthwhile is uphill." The progress we make, the communities we build, the businesses we lead, and the families we strengthen all require intentionality. Success does not happen by accident. It happens when people choose to lean forward into the future with hope, courage, and determination.

Here in the Salinas Valley, we are surrounded by people who are willing to climb. Over the past year, I have watched business owners innovate in the face of uncertainty. I have seen educators invest deeply in the rising generation. I have watched nonprofit leaders serve tirelessly. I have seen first responders carry extraordinary burdens with extraordinary grace. And I have seen everyday men and women show resilience, kindness, and strength during a season that stretched all of us.

As we step into 2026, I want to say something I believe wholeheartedly. The best days for our Valley are still ahead.

Why do I believe this? Because great communities are built on more than resources, opportunity, or strategy, although we have all three. Great communities are built on people. People with vision. People with integrity. People who lift others and not only themselves. Our Valley is filled with that kind of leader.

From a leadership perspective, a new year gives us three powerful gifts.



Great communities are built on people. People with vision. People with integrity. People who lift others and not only themselves. Our Valley is filled with that kind of leader.

1 A Fresh Perspective. A new year invites us to step back and ask important questions. What can we do better? What can we do together? What can we do to leave our community stronger than we found it? When leaders ask better questions, communities build better futures.

2 A Renewed Purpose. Purpose is the engine of progress. Without purpose we drift. With purpose we rise. Whether you lead a business, a classroom, a farm, a team, or a home, your sense of purpose matters more than you know. When leaders return to their "why," people around them thrive.

3 A Rebuilt Hope. Hope does not deny reality. It simply refuses to surrender to it. Hope is the confident expectation that tomorrow can be better than today and that we play a meaningful role in that improvement. When hope fills a community, it fuels creativity, compassion, and collaboration.

At Compass Church, we are committed to being part of that hope. Throughout this past year, we watched thousands of families attend community events such as Celebrate America, the Fall Festival, and our Christmas outreaches. We partnered with local agencies and organizations

and saw how powerful it is when a community comes together around shared values such as faith, family, generosity, safety, and unity.

In 2026, we plan to deepen this commitment. We want to serve more families, support more young people, and stand alongside more leaders who work hard to make the Salinas Valley a thriving place to live, work, and raise a family.

As we enter this new year, I want to speak a word of encouragement to every leader reading this. You matter more than you realize. Your leadership matters. Your example matters. Your perseverance matters. The men, women, and families you influence need your wisdom, your stability, and your courage.

So, as we begin 2026 together, let's choose to lead with clarity. Let's choose to live with purpose. Let's choose to serve with generosity. Let's choose to believe that the best days for our Valley and for the people who call it home are still ahead.

Thank you for the privilege of serving alongside you. May this year be filled with growth, peace, and renewed strength for you and your family. 🌱

Warmly,
Pastor T. K. Anderson
Compass Church

It's a New Year and Major 2025/2026 Employment Regulations Have Arrived

By **Michaëlle Stanford**, TPO The HR Experts

2026 has arrived with a host of new California laws accompanied by Items of Interest and 2025 federal reminders that are important for employers to know and act according to their business.



agent) for up to three years. Such records must include the employee's name, training provider's name, date/duration, competencies gained, and any resulting certification/qualification.

New California Laws (effective Jan. 1, 2026, unless noted)

1. "Know Your Rights" – New Notice:

CA SB 294 requires employers to provide a written notice on or before Feb. 1, 2026 and annually thereafter. A template is expected to be available from the Labor Commissioner by Jan. 1, 2026 outlining workers' compensation, immigration protections, the right to concerted activity, and constitutional rights of employee when interacting with law enforcement at the workplace. Also requires employers by March 30, 2026 to provide an opportunity for employees to designate an emergency contact if arrested/detained at work.

2. Job Postings and Fair Pay:

CA SB 642 provides clarification that pay scales in job postings (for employers with 15+ employees) must be a good faith estimate of the salary or hourly wage range the employer reasonably expects to pay for the position upon hire. Also extends the statute of limitations for pay discrimination claims from two to three years and lost wages recovery up to six years.

3. Personnel Files: CA SB513 makes education/training records part of personnel files that can be viewed/copied by current and past employees (or their designated

4. Stay or Pay:

CA AB692 prohibits provisions in employment agreements requiring a worker to repay training and other costs if the employee is not employed a certain duration. Some exceptions include tuition reimbursement and sign-on bonus repayments, when drafted appropriately.

5. CalWARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification):

CA SB617 adds new requirements to the existing 60 days' notice when there is a mass layoff (of employers with 50+ employees during a 30-day period), cessation of operations, or a relocation of operations to 100+ miles away. CalWARN applies to California employers with 75+ employees.

6. EDD's Paid Family Leave (PFL) Insurance: CA SB 590 expands eligibility to caring for a "designated person" for claims starting July 1, 2028. This aligns to the required use of "designated person" for California Paid Sick Leave and California Family Rights Act (CFRA) Leave.

HR Items of Interest

Updated! California Minimum Wage Increases Jan. 1, 2026.

At least 50 cities have higher rates. Health Care and Fast-Food

employees may be on a different schedule, including the minimum salary threshold.

- Employees required to use their own "hand tools" must be paid at least two times the current minimum wage.

- **California Salary Threshold Increases:** In addition to a "duties test", to meet the "salary test" for exemption from overtime, breaks, meals and other wage and hour provisions, employees in Administrative, Executive and Professional exemptions must earn a weekly salary of at least two times the current minimum wage. The minimum weekly salary cannot be prorated for part-time exempt positions.

- o \$16.50 Jan. 1, 2025
\$1,320.00 weekly, \$5,720.00 monthly, \$68,640 annually
- o \$16.90 Jan. 1, 2026
\$1,352.00 weekly, \$5,858.67 monthly, \$70,304 annually

And then annual increases based on the California Consumer Price Index (CCPI).

Updated! California 2026 Annual Increase for Exemption from Overtime –

- **Computer Software** minimum rate increases to \$58.85/hour, \$10,214.44/month, or \$122,573.13/year.
- **Licensed Physician** minimum rate increases to \$107.17 per hour.

Reminder! California Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP) from July 2024 regulation requires annual training. This is in addition to the already required Injury Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP).

Reminder! California Survivors & Victims of Violence Leave

from January 2025 regulation has a new hire and annual notice provided by the CA Civil Rights Department dated July 2025.

Reminder! Federal Employee Personal Tax Deductions Related to Federal Overtime and Tips

— From the July 1, 2025 "The One Big Beautiful Bill Act" there are two provisions that directly impact employers. While payroll taxes do not change, the following changes to recordkeeping provisions apply:

- **Qualified Federal (FLSA) Overtime:** Employers will be required to list federal FLSA overtime (over 40 hours in a workweek) on W-2s starting the 2026 tax year. The IRS will not change the 2025 W-2, though employers are still "encouraged" to provide the data (box 14 or some other method) – see IRS publications. This does NOT include California-specific overtime (over 8 hours in a day and seventh consecutive day of work in the workweek), just federal overtime (over 40 hours in the workweek).
- **Qualified Tips:** Employers were already required to list tips with wages on W-2's but now they will have to separately indicate qualified tips and the qualified occupation. While the IRS will not be changing the 2025 W-2, see IRS publications for directions.

Reminder! Federal Jan. 20, 2025 Executive Order relating to Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Transgender Status — The requirement federal

departments recognize gender as an immutable male-female binary (determined by biological sex at conception), does not change California requirements. Discrimination/harassment based on these protected classifications is not allowed. Harassment training is still required.

Reminder! California Harassment Training — Employers with 5+ employees (count all employees, volunteers, and independent contractors for this count) must provide harassment prevention training:

- **Nonsupervisory Employees** — One hour of training within six months of hire and every two years.
- **Supervisory Employees** — Two

hours of training within six months of hire/promotion and every two years.

- **Seasonal and Temporary Employees** (hired for less than six months) — within 30 calendar days of hire or within 100 hours worked, whichever occurs first.

We work with members and clients to provide HR Best Practice solutions for all sizes of employers in private, nonprofit, and public sectors. Interested in learning more? Contact us at tpo@tpohr.com.

TPO provides Human Resources consulting services only and is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. The consulting services, recommendations, information, and materials are designed to be authoritative about the subject matter covered, without implied warranties.

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

MATT SALYER



Matt Salyer moved to Seaside in 2010 from Modesto to pursue a BA in Global Studies at CSUMB and later completed a dual MBA/MA in Global Business & Policy at the Middlebury

Institute of International Studies. The local wildlife and outdoor opportunities were a major factor in Salyer's decision to stay in Monterey since he enjoys hiking, paddleboarding and the fresh ocean air. Salyer developed a love of business while working on program development at CSUMB, and working as a freelance consultant for start-ups, governments and nonprofits locally and abroad. Salyer's focus on financial strategies for businesses, asset acquisition and wealth management eventually inspired him to become a Financial Advisor so he could better serve his clients and their needs. Salyer works at Salinas Valley Financial Services, a financial advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, where he specializes investment strategies, wealth preservation, and estate planning for small businesses and individuals.



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Health and Well-Being: Where You Live, Work and Play

By Chris Haubert, Salinas Valley Health

Health and well-being are shaped by every aspect of our daily environment—the places where we live, work and play. At Salinas Valley Health, promoting community wellness means providing a broad spectrum of health resources free to the community. As a public district health-care system, we are committed to bringing health education, preventive care and wellness initiatives directly to where people gather. From educational programs to engaging activities and fitness classes, Salinas Valley Health supports healthier living at every level.

Speakers Bureau

Our Speakers Bureau is dedicated to raising health awareness through education and outreach. It connects community organizations, schools and worksites with local medical professionals for complimentary presentations that enhance health and well-being. Topics include preventive care and wellness, substance use disorder, diabetes prevention, mindfulness, nutrition, sleep, and more. Presentations are tailored to meet the unique needs of community organizations, schools and worksites, making health education both accessible and relevant.

Walk With a Doc

Another opportunity to engage with our medical experts is through our Walk With a Doc program. Held monthly from February through November, these wellness events feature a physician or other medical expert who provides a short informative health talk before leading a group walk and answering questions during and after.

Walk With a Doc takes place on select Saturday mornings either at



Vineyard hike and wine tasting in Soledad.

Badger Hills Trailhead at Fort Ord National Monument (across from Toro Café on Highway 68) to Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center in Gonzales or other outdoor community venues. It is the perfect way to start your weekend with fresh air, physical activity and valuable health insights.

Wellness Classes

A variety of free wellness classes—ranging from meditation and mindfulness to the aerobic fun of Zumba—are led by certified instructors. Online, live-instructor classes focus on balance, movement, mobility, and meditation, while yoga is available both virtually and in-person. Weekly in-person Zumba sessions are offered in Gonzales and Salinas, ensuring there's something for everyone.

Monterey County Success

Community well-being is at the core of our mission. In August 2018, Salinas Valley Health, in

partnership with Taylor Farms and Montage Health, launched Blue Zones Project® Monterey County to realize our vision of a healthier, happier and more vibrant community. Thanks to widespread support and the implementation of people-, place- and policy-centered well-being strategies, the county reached a tipping point, with significant, measurable results.

Since the initiative's launch, Monterey County's overall community well-being score improved by 3.7 points. Each point increase correlates with approximately a 2% reduction in emergency department visits and hospitalization, and about a 1% decrease in total healthcare costs—demonstrating a powerful impact.

The City of Salinas earned designation as a Blue Zones Community® in June 2024, followed by Monterey County achieving certified Blue Zones Community status in July of this year—the first county in California to receive this honor.

Next Steps for Sustainability

Salinas Valley Health and Montage Health have since re-aligned former Blue Zones project areas with each health system's service area, reinforcing priorities identified in the Community Health Needs Assessment. This collaboration leverages both organizations' strengths to drive sustainable improvements in health, well-being, access, and equity.

The Salinas Valley Health Live Well Project now serves as the home for the impactful work of Blue Zones Project Monterey County efforts with a continued focused on natural movement, wise eating and community connection.

As Salinas Valley Health looks to the future, the healthcare system remains steadfast in its mission to empower everyone in the community to lead healthier, more connected lives. By building on successful partnerships, expanding accessible programs, and fostering an environment where wellness is part of everyday life, it is committed to helping every resident thrive—making Monterey County a true model for health and well-being, wherever you live, work, or play.

Scan the QR code to learn about our Speakers Bureau or visit our website for details on events and classes: salinasvalleyhealth.com/events-classes/





Support our Chamber Members

Thank you, to our January renewing Members. Please help keep the Salinas Valley strong by doing business with companies that support the Chamber.

Member Name	Member Since	Member Name	Member Since
The Californian (USA Today/Gannett)	1922	Salinas Mattress Company	2004
Struve & Laporte Funeral Home	1927	Foundation for Monterey County Free Libraries	2006
Timmins & Sorensen CPAs	1954	Pizza Factory / Amorim Enterprises Inc	2006
McGilloway, Ray, Brown & Kaufman	1956	Coastal Kids Home Care	2007
JM Electric	1958	EMC Planning Group Inc.	2009
Granite Construction Company Inc	1959	Hartnell College Foundation	2009
Andrews Blueprint	1962	International Paper	*15 Years* 2010
Scarr Moving & Storage, Inc.	1962	Chilton and House Attorneys	2012
Star Market	1963	Edward Jones Investments	2013
Relation Insurance, formerly Pan American	1968	Chevron	2014
Brandon & Tibbs Accountants	*50 Years* 1970	American Takii Inc	*10 Years* 2015
Matsui Nursery	1972	Artistic HangUps	2018
Chicago Title Company	1974	Black Bear Diner - Salinas	2018
Vegetable Growers Supply Company	1974	Monterey County Pops!	2018
Central Coast Builders Association	1976	AgroThrive Inc	2019
Mechanics Bank- Salinas Financial Service Center	1983	Pacific Valley Bank	2021
Wescom Financial - Marina	1984	Compass Church	2022
Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley Inc	1986	Scale Microgrid Solutions	2022
Commercial Service Company - Key & Young INC	1988	Splash Car Wash	2022
Kirkorian Enterprises, LLC, dba Kirkwood Plaza	1988	Blue Adobe Mortgage	2023
Green Rubber - Kennedy Ag, Inc.	1991	Leal's Bakery	2023
Garden of Memories Memorial Park	1992	organicgirl	2023
Round Table Pizza - North Salinas	1993	Platinum Auto Glass LLC	2023
Vilmorin-Mikado USA, Inc.	1993	Salad Shoppe	2023
PearTree+Belli Architects Inc	*30 Years* 1995	Broker Associate, Century 21 Showcase Realtors	2024
L. Nielsen Enterprises, Inc.	1998	Golden State Paint Company LLC	2024
Palma School	1998	Montage Health	2024
Triangle Farms, Inc.	1998	Elevate Spa MD	2025
Tovar Strategies, INC. - DBA TMD	1999	Etheric Networks	2025
TriCord Tradeshow Services	1999	The Blind and Visually Impaired Center of	2025
Backus Property Management Inc	*25 Years* 2000	Monterey County	
Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa	2002	The Valley Restaurant and Catering	2025

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR VISIONARY AND STAKEHOLDER MEMBERS



Voters Offered Two Excellent Candidates for County Superintendent of Schools

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Most Californians are likely unaware of the existence of their county Superintendent of Schools and their county Board of Education. These officials govern educational policy at the county Office of Education, a vertical level of government between the State of California and local school districts.

For example, under state law, the county Superintendent of Schools is responsible for fiscal oversight of each school district in the county. The Superintendent also prepares an annual report of the state of each county school (including charter schools) and the programs of the county office of education. (Annual reports to Monterey County are at the Monterey County Office of Education at www.montereycoe.org.) The county superintendent also manages various kinds of alternative education programs not handled by the school districts.

Your Chamber's Government Relations Committee agreed that either of these candidates would be excellent.

Article IX, Section 3 of the California Constitution authorizes voters of each of the state's 58 counties to elect their county Superintendent of Schools. There is also an alternative option for the elected county Board of Education to appoint the Superintendent of Schools. In Monterey County, the Superintendent of Schools is elected. The next election is in 2026.

The winner will take the place of Dr. Deneen Guss, who is retiring after two terms in office. Both



Monterey County Superintendent of Schools candidates Dan Burns, left, and Ralph Porras.



candidates seeking to replace her are highly qualified, experienced, dedicated to educational excellence, and have an existing strong relationship with the business community.

Your Chamber's Government Relations Committee agreed that either of these candidates would be excellent. The committee decided

not to convene the Candidate Review Committee to interview the candidates and then recommend an endorsement of one or the other. Instead, the committee directed staff to write an article for the Business Journal introducing the candidates and their strengths. In alphabetical order, here are the two candidates:

Dan Burns was Superintendent of the Salinas Union High School District from 2017 to 2024, when he retired. (Dr. Zandra Jo Galván took his place.) He spent more than two decades in the Salinas Union High School District in various roles, including teacher, counselor, principal, associate superintendent of instructional services, and coach.

Burns has been a state leader on advancing workforce housing for teachers and classified personnel at public school districts, overseeing the establishment of the state's first school district workforce housing project and Monterey County's first school district workforce housing project.

His campaign website is www.burns4schools.com.

Ralph Porras was Superintendent of the Pacific Grove Unified School District from 2007 to 2023. He then became Deputy Superintendent of the Monterey County Board of Education, serving under Superintendent Dr. Deneen Guss. He was President of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) in 2017-2018.

Porras has been a state leader on advancing opportunities for immigrant students, including the children of migrant workers. He has advocated for funding for these programs, including the Monterey County Office of Education's Migrant Education Program.

His campaign website is www.porrasforstudents.com.

Both candidates appear regularly at business and community events throughout Monterey County, including Chamber events, so look out for them and ask your toughest questions about educational policy. 🌱



CHAMBER NEW MEMBER PROFILES

The Read to Me Project

Read to Me Project helps children achieve a lifetime of literacy through knowledge, vocabulary, confidence, and comprehension skills. Guided by their vision of children leading with literacy, they partner with schools, families, and communities to build early literacy foundations that last a lifetime. By empowering students to read aloud to younger children, they inspire leadership, connection, and a love of learning that strengthens families and transforms futures. readtomeproject.org, info@readtomeproject.org, (831) 275-1300 ext. 701.



Read to Me
PROJECT

Western States Petroleum Association

Western States Petroleum Association and its member companies are proudly dedicated to guaranteeing that every American has access to reliable energy options through socially, economically and environmentally responsible policies and regulations. Representing the more than 150,000 women and men who have proudly powered the western states since 1907, WSPA works with government leaders, regulators, the media and the public to share information and create an inclusive dialogue around our shared energy future. WSPA believes that, together, we can all innovate towards a sustainable energy future that supports the economy, our sense of social equality, and the health of our environment. wsipa.org, boakley@wsipa.org.



Western States Petroleum Association

Mathnasium of Salinas

Teach children math so they understand it, master it, and love it. Math can change their lives, and they can change the world. Unlike private tutors, Mathnasium's curriculum and methodology have been proven through the success of hundreds of thousands of students. Private tutors are reactive, Mathnasium is proactive; they build each child's needed mathematical skills methodically and comprehensively. Backed by the extensive training and resources of a global organization, their instructors deliver a superior method, typically at a lower cost.

Mathnasium.com, salinas@mathnasium.com



AB Computer

AB Computer is a specialty consulting firm comprised of the best senior-level resources. They have the ability to provide customized and individual service that you can't get from a larger company, while still providing the expertise and performance you expect.

Joshua.Fridey@ABComputer.com, abcomputer.com.



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Acme Awning

Welcome to Acme Awning, your trusted destination for premium, custom-made awnings, tarps, and covers. With over 90 years of experience in the industry, they've built a strong reputation for delivering top-notch craftsmanship and high-quality products tailored to meet your specific needs. Whether you're looking to enhance your business's curb appeal or require functional, durable covers for commercial use, they've got you covered. Since their founding in 1933, they've remained dedicated to providing exceptional value, combining superior materials and expert installation with competitive pricing. They understand that every project is unique, so they work closely with their clients to design the perfect solution, ensuring your satisfaction from start to finish. Whether you need a stylish awning for your storefront, a heavy-duty tarp for industrial use, or a custom cover for specialized equipment, Acme Awning provides the best products and services to keep your business looking great and running smoothly. Trust in their decades of experience and commitment to excellence to meet all your commercial awning, tarp, and cover needs.

aaron@acmeawning.us, acmeawning.us



Bolour/Carl Immigration Group

The Bolou/Carl Immigration Group is a boutique immigration law firm based in California.

They have a proven track record of successfully meeting their clients' immigration-related goals. Originally established in 1996, their firm has served thousands of clients worldwide and facilitated their dream of working in, or immigrating to, the United States. Their strength is rooted in their solid understanding of the extremely complex and ever-changing set of U.S. immigration laws and policies. They owe a great deal of gratitude to their clients, who over the past 25 years, have honored them with their trust to represent them through their immigration processes before USCIS, immigration and federal courts, and consular posts all over the world. They are passionate about what they do and eager to learn your story so as to fully understand what you intend to accomplish with them on your team and by your side. Their team draws strength from their own cultural diversity. Their attorneys and staff are comprised of immigrants, native-born Americans, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Gen Xers, Millennials, LGBTQ, and veterans. Consequently, they relate to their clients' concerns and understand the challenges they may face along the path to meet their immigration-related goals. With this, they also have the ability to tailor a game plan that will maximize the chances to successfully meet your goals all while providing you with the individualized service you deserve.

alex@americanvisas.net, americanvisas.net.



**BOLOUR / CARL
IMMIGRATION
GROUP**

Church Brothers Farms Finalizes Acquisition of Mann Packing, Marking a Major Expansion of its Retail and Value-Added Capabilities

Church Brothers Farms announced on Dec. 16 that it has officially completed its acquisition of key assets and operations of Mann Packing from Fresh Del Monte Produce Inc., solidifying the company's leadership position in value-added vegetables and accelerating its long-term retail growth strategy.

The acquisition immediately expands Church Brothers' annual volume with capacity to grow through the newly integrated Gonzales facility: a 200,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art fresh-cut plant that includes 160,000 square feet of production and cold storage space, 40,000 square feet of offices, and 7.5 acres designated for future expansion.

With the acquisition now complete, Church Brothers becomes one of the only suppliers with the scale and capability to deliver a full retail fresh-vegetable offering — from value-added cut vegetables and packaged salads to specialty items and a broad assortment of field-packed products.

"This is a pivotal moment in our company's growth," said

Brian Church, Chief Executive Officer at Church Brothers Farms. "By bringing Mann Packing into the Church Brothers family, we are significantly expanding our retail capabilities while sharpening our operational focus. We're moving with urgency, discipline, and ambition because

"
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— Brian Church

our goal isn't just to participate in the retail category; it's to be a significant player."

The acquisition allows Church Brothers to support both sides of its business more effectively. All retail processing will move to the Gonzales plant, providing year-

round dedicated retail production while freeing up its San Juan Bautista, Yuma and Northern Mexico facilities for continued foodservice growth.

"This deal creates immediate advantages across our business,"

said Jeff Church, Chief Operating Officer. "Retail customers gain a

simplified, stable, single-location supply chain, while our food-service customers benefit from expanded capacity and focus at our other facilities. It's a meaningful win for our customers, our employees, and our long-term growth strategy."

Founded in Salinas in 1937, Mann Packing is known for category-defining products such as Broccolini®, Stringless Sugar Snap Peas, Broccoli Cole Slaw, and its leadership in cut vegetables and specialty items. Church Brothers will continue to nurture iconic trademarks like Broccolini® while conducting a full evaluation of Mann's branded products as part of the integration process.

"Mann's has been an innovator in our valley for nearly nine decades," said Brian Church. "We're proud to steward that legacy forward—with the same

commitment to quality and creativity, but now with the scale, farming network, and operational capabilities that only Church Brothers can provide."

With full operational integration targeted for April 1, 2026, the combined organization will be focused on executing a strong launch year, expanding retail salad production, and leveraging its vertically integrated farming model to deliver consistent quality and supply across all channels.

For more information about the company and its products, visit ChurchBrothers.com.

About Church Brothers Farms
Church Brothers Farms is a vertically integrated family-owned and operated company that produces a full line of fresh vegetables year-round. Church Brothers has an in-house farming/harvest program and state of the art processing plants in the U.S. and Mexico. The Church family has a legacy of service and innovation in the Salinas Valley that spans multiple generations.



Brian Church



Jeff Church

Traffic Roundabouts: Driving in Circles in Salinas

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

For more than a year, the City of Salinas has been widening a long section of East Boronda Road from two lanes to four. This project includes four new multi-lane modern-style “roundabouts” at the intersections with McKinnon Street, El Dorado Drive, Natividad Road, and Independence Boulevard. A fifth roundabout may be built at the intersection with Hemingway Drive in an arrangement between the city and a private developer.

The City of Salinas also plans to build a roundabout at the Harden Parkway and McKinnon Street intersection. Two roundabouts are planned on Williams Road where it intersects with East Alisal Street and with East Market Street.

Three roundabouts already exist in the City of Salinas, on East Alisal Street where it intersects with Skyway Boulevard, Bardin Road, and Sconberg Parkway.

Advantages of Roundabouts

Why roundabouts instead of traffic lights? A March 17, 2015 staff report to the Salinas City Council justified the city’s first roundabout at the East Alisal Street and Skyway Boulevard intersection: “The traffic study performed at this intersection indicated that a roundabout will perform better than a traditional traffic signal and will deliver additional benefits such as improved intersection efficiency (reduce congestion), reduce fuel consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

The staff report also observed that “the roundabout landscape can serve as centerpiece to the community and enhance the aesthetics of the neighborhood.” And in fact, the 2020 Salinas Public Art Master Plan contended that roundabouts would be “a great opportunity for a



A city staff report observed that ‘the roundabout landscape can serve as centerpiece to the community and enhance the aesthetics of the neighborhood.’

sculptural art installation.”

A May 16, 2017 staff report to the Salinas City Council justifying the five East Boronda Road roundabouts stated that “roundabouts have the following advantages as compared to signalized intersections: fewer traffic fatalities; fewer injury crashes; less severity of collisions; less number of person-hours delayed in traffic; less traffic-related pollutants; short pedestrian crossing distance; less operation and maintenance cost; create a calmer corridor; and has a positive effect on property values.”

Disadvantages of Roundabouts

Roundabouts do have drawbacks. They use more land than a traditional intersection (a characteristic that developers do not like) and cost more to install than a traffic light system.

The Holman Highway roundabout in the City of Monterey defied the studies. Comparing the five years before the October 2017 opening of the roundabout to the five years afterwards, collisions increased from 14 to 58, injury-related collisions increased from two to seven, and the actual collision rate increased from 0.26 per million vehicles to 1.05.

Finally, some people admit they consider roundabouts appropriate for Europe but not for America. They fear the fate of Clark Griswold, who is still circling a roundabout in London repeatedly pointing out Big Ben and Parliament to his hapless family. 🌿



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Ribbon Cutting with Chispa Housing**

Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, 12:00 p.m., 295 Main St., Salinas

Join the Chamber for a ribbon-cutting event with Chispa Housing. More information is coming soon. Save the date. Visit SalinasChamber.com for more information.

- **Celebrate 10 Years with Partnership for Children**

Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026, 4:00 - 7:00 p.m., 427 Pajaro St., Suite 5, Salinas

We’re thrilled to invite you to a very special milestone — the Partnership for Children’s 10th Anniversary Celebration and Joint Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting! This event is more than just the unveiling of their new home at 427 Pajaro St. — it’s a celebration of the compassion, generosity, and shared commitment that helps them stand beside children and families facing life’s greatest challenges. Event highlights include tours of their new space, ribbon cutting with Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula Chambers of Commerce, heartfelt remarks from their Board President & Executive Director, refreshments, reception, and community connection.

- **Member Orientation**

Monday, Jan. 26, 2026, 119, E. Alisal., Salinas

Join us for an informational orientation with the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce’s Membership Director, Gabriel Lopez. We welcome new and prospective members to learn more about member benefits and how the Chamber can help you meet and surpass your marketing goals! Lunch will be provided. If you have any questions, please contact Gabriel Lopez at Gabe@salinaschamber.com or call (831) 751-7725. Join us in-person at the Chamber Office or via Zoom.

- **Lunch & Learn with Read to Me Project**

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026, 12:00– 1:00 p.m., 119, E. Alisal., Salinas

Join us for a Lunch and Learn with Read to Me Project, which helps children achieve a lifetime of literacy through knowledge, vocabulary, confidence, and comprehension skills. Guided by their vision of children leading with literacy, they partner with schools, families, and communities to build early literacy foundations that last a lifetime. By empowering students to read aloud to younger children, they inspire leadership, connection, and a love of learning that strengthens families and transforms futures. Lunch will be provided. Virtual options are available.

- **Fourth Annual SVCC Legislative Affairs Breakfast**

Friday, Feb. 27, 2026, 7:30 - 9:30 a.m., 411 Central Ave., Salinas

Our Fourth Annual Legislative Affairs Breakfast, in partnership with Hartnell College, connects community leaders and business professionals with key elected and appointed public officials from the federal to the local level. Hear about the latest government policies, projects, and programs affecting your business and community. Ticket sales are in high demand, and seats will be limited for this event. Tickets can be purchased at SalinasChamber.com. Partnership opportunities are also available. For inquiries, contact the Chamber office at (831) 751-7725.

RSVP at salinaschamber.com



NON-PROFIT EVENTS

Read for All: County-Wide Winter Break Reading Challenge — Monterey County

Dec. 20 – Jan. 11, any participating Monterey County classroom or home setting

Read for All is a fun, county-wide winter break reading challenge for 4th–6th graders. Students complete family-friendly reading activities using their official Game Token bookmark to earn points for their class. This challenge builds reading fluency, confidence, and joy during the long winter break.

First Fridays — Arts Council for Monterey County

Jan. 2, 5:00 – 9:00 p.m., Salinas City Center, Salinas

Every First Friday, starting at 5 p.m., Salinas City Center comes alive along the 100-300 blocks of Main Street. Enjoy local art, live music, delicious food, and family-friendly fun as shops stay open late and artists and makers showcase their talents. The streets buzz with creativity and entertainment, making it the perfect way to explore and celebrate our vibrant community. Mark your calendar and make First Friday Salinas your new favorite monthly tradition!

Railroad Museum Opening — California Welcome Center

Jan. 3, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., 15 Station Place, Salinas, California Welcome Center

The Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad Historical Society, located next to the Salinas Amtrak station, hosts an interactive HO-scale layout and diorama recreating Monterey County railroads from the mid-1900s. They host an open house for free to the public the first weekend each month. Children are always welcome and encouraged to visit. Scavenger hunting season has started, so come and celebrate 25 years of the MSVRR museum with a new activity that immerses you in the pursuit of model railroading and historical preservation. It's free and fun for all ages. The museum is currently available for personal tours and special gatherings. If you are interested, contact Special-Program@msvrr.org to learn more and schedule a visit. Guest Train Operations on the Diorama are now available during open house weekends.

New Year, New Laws Seminar with Fenton & Keller

Jan. 29, 8:00 – 11:45 a.m., 141 Canyon Del Rey Boulevard, Seaside

Kick off 2026 with Fenton & Keller's highly anticipated "New Year, New Laws" seminar! Join them for this informative and practical seminar designed to provide information and insight for business owners, HR managers, payroll managers, and anyone who handles personnel issues, about new employment laws and workplace-compliance issues in 2026. Speakers: Fenton & Keller attorneys Gladys Rodriguez-Morales and Brad Levang.

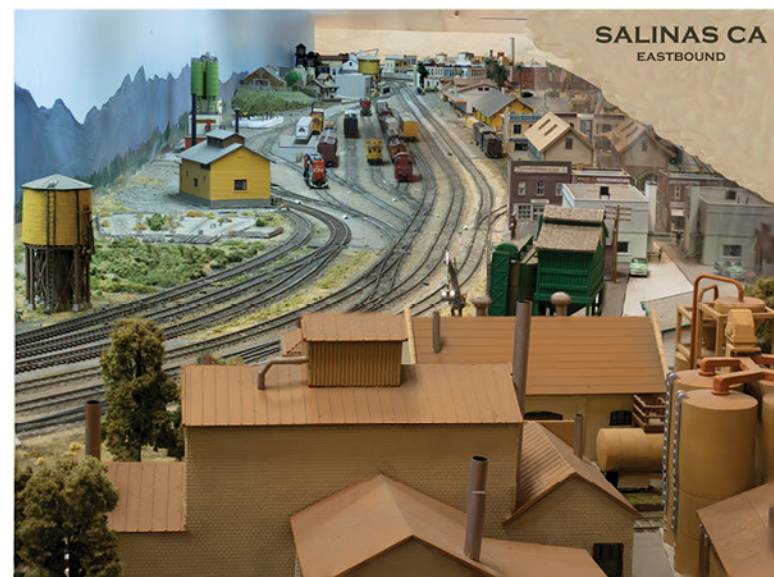
Seminar Topics Include:

- "Stay-or-Pay" Employment Agreements
- New Rules on Artificial Intelligence in Hiring
- Family and Medical Leave Act Update
- Minimum Wage Increase
- New Notice and Record Keeping Requirements
- California's Pay Scale and Equal Pay Act Updates
- Paid Sick Leave Update

Souper Bowl Saturday — Community Human Services

Feb. 7, 11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., 600 E. Franklin St., Monterey

Enjoy world-famous clam chowder from Old Fisherman's Grotto & The Fish Hopper while supporting Shuman HeartHouse and Casa de Noche Buena. Souper Bowl Saturday is Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, at Shuman Heart House, Monterey, brought to you by Gathering For Women and Community Human Services. Takeout meal includes 16-oz. clam chowder, sourdough bread, packaged salad and dessert, \$40 per meal. Pre-order by Friday, Jan. 30. Select pick-up window between 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Drive-through pick-up at Shuman HeartHouse, Feb. 7. Enter at 300 E. Franklin St. and exit on Anthony.



The Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad Historical Society's Railroad Museum will host an open house on Jan. 3.


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FOR UP-TO-DATE LISTINGS**

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For more information:
www.salinasmchamber.com

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Last winter, Salinas Valley Health cared for more than 200 patients who were very sick with the flu or RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). There are safe vaccines that can help protect you or make these illnesses less serious.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider if getting a vaccine is right for you.



For more information,
scan the QR code.