



BUSINESS JOURNAL



Best-selling author Tessa Bailey unveils new novel

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City of Salinas awards \$300,000 in prevention and wellness grants

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Getty Images

Hundreds of New Laws Went Into Effect This New Year. How Will They Affect You?

By Chamber Staff

It's only the second month of the new year, so most California residents can be excused for not being aware of all the new laws that went into effect on Jan. 1, 2024. And we're not talking about a few new laws, but literally hundreds, plus some that will become law later in the year.

For example, some California cities will find speed cameras on city streets to flag drivers going 11 mph or above the speed limit. One

LAWS - see page 8

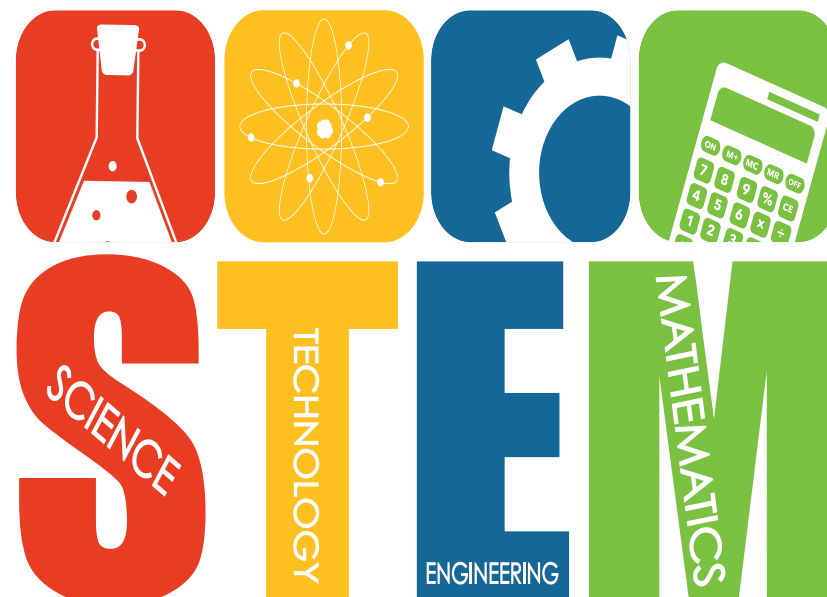
Monterey County STEM Talent Expo Connects Students, Community With STEM Industry Leaders

By Chamber Staff

It's said that we are on the verge of the fourth industrial revolution, or industry 4.0, in which we will face a range of new technologies that combine the physical, digital and biological worlds. These new technologies will impact all disciplines, economies and industries.

STEM education, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, is one way to take on the challenges of this fourth industrial revolution. It gives students a skill set that governs the way we think and behave. STEM education links these four disciplines into a cohesive system, preparing professionals who can transform society with innovation and sustainable solutions, helping us to solve the challenges the world faces today.

With that in mind, the Hartnell College Foundation President's STEM Task Force will convene the Monterey County STEM Talent Expo from 1 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 20, 2024, at the Hartnell College STEM



Getty Images

Center Lobby, 411 Central Ave., in Salinas.

This exciting and informative, free, one-day event will connect STEM industry leaders to talented students, former students, and community members who are looking for opportunities to further their education and career opportunities in the fields of

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Participants meet with Fortune 500 companies, local companies, and government agencies looking to recruit new talent for internships and positions, and education partners hoping to enhance your career opportunities in STEM.

EXPO - see page 8



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Differing Perspectives and the Freedom to Express Ourselves

by Jennifer L. Williams, SVCC Board Chair

It's understood that personal background and experiences play a significant role in how people serve as leaders. So, some of you may be curious about me and how my personal background and experiences will be reflected in how I serve this year as Chair of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

I was born into a family that valued education, and going to college was a given. I was the valedictorian of my high school senior class — I couldn't let myself be the salutatorian, because I had to do better than my twin brother! That academic background helped me get scholarships that paid for my bachelor's degree at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. Toward the end of my college career, I decided to move to California to attend Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. I then moved to the Central Coast by way of Seattle where I finished a Master of Arts in Theology.

One month after moving to California and starting grad school, I had symptoms that I knew in my heart were caused by multiple sclerosis. After an emergency MRI, I officially received a diagnosis of relapsing-remitting MS in 1998. There were long periods of time where — even with health insurance — I couldn't afford the co-payments for the specialty injectables used to treat this chronic disease.

Soon after finishing graduate school, I was hired as the Director of Development focusing on grant writing for Natividad Medical Foundation. I wanted a career that would be flexible enough to allow me to work even if I lost the ability to walk. More importantly, I wanted to fulfill my purpose to love and care for everyone, including the poor, sick and lonely. After 16 years, I was promoted to President & CEO, and, while medical challenges persist, they also remind me how important it is that everyone in Monterey County has access to health care.

I know that government regulations often bring challenges to businesses. The lingering impacts of the pandemic remain, including inflation and workforce shortages. Our region is desperately in need of solutions for water and housing. While we may have conflicting ideas about how to respond, I am grateful that the Chamber values differing perspectives and



gives all of us the freedom to express ourselves. Your Salinas Chamber board members work hard to represent your concerns. Sometimes I vote along with my Chamber colleagues on a matter, and sometimes I am a dissenting voice. Our discussions sometimes challenge my perspective and are always informative and respectful.

Your Salinas Chamber has business policies that cover topics from health-care and diversity and inclusion to housing, water, transportation, and infrastructure. These form the foundation for developing positions in support of or in opposition to proposals that arise. We've been told by the Chamber's members that advocacy is one of the greatest values of your membership, so please plan to join us at the 2024 legislative breakfast, now called "Vision of Valley Vibrancy Breakfast," on Friday, Feb. 23, for important, lively

discussions for which we have the great freedom to agree or disagree!

I look forward to getting to know you better and achieving important things together in 2024! 🌱

“While we may have conflicting ideas about how to respond, I am grateful that the Chamber values differing perspectives and gives all of us the freedom to express ourselves.”

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FEBRUARY

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SCAN ME!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Builders
Tuesday, February 13th, 2024
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Community Room
Salinas Police Department

Insightful Presentations: Explore valuable resources for business owners, including grants, utility programs, and cutting-edge digital marketing resources.

Expert Guidance: Engage with knowledgeable presenters from key organizations, including the City of Salinas, PG&E, and the dynamic team behind our Building Business Back program.

Networking Opportunities: Connect with like-minded entrepreneurs, share experiences, and establish valuable connections within the local business community. Note: Lunch is on us!

Register using the link or by scanning the QR code: tinyurl.com/BizBuildersMC

Chamber Breakfast Advances a Vision of Valley Vibrancy

by Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

For a second year, the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce is holding a breakfast for you to meet your local public officials and hear their views on business and commerce. The second annual "Vision of Valley Vibrancy Breakfast" will be held from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 23 at the Hartnell Community College's main campus in Salinas.

WHY A BREAKFAST FOR A SECOND YEAR (AND FOR EVERY YEAR HEREFTER)?

This breakfast is now poised to become an annual Chamber "signature" event. After many years of not having an event dedicated to government affairs, your Chamber Board of Directors decided at its 2022 strategic planning meeting to hold a Governmental Relations breakfast in 2023. It would be a test to see if Chamber members and prospective members would appreciate such an event.

Chamber staff initially assumed the breakfast would have limited appeal and tentatively planned for 80 attendees. To try to stir up interest, the Chamber held a "Local Government 101 Lunch and Learn" on Feb. 2, 2023, featuring the Chamber's Government Affairs Liaison. Unexpectedly, that "Lunch and Learn" was sold out, and late registrants had to participate via Zoom.

Chamber event planners realized that attendance at the first "Governmental Relations Breakfast" would be greater than anticipated. As it turned out, the Chamber and its event planners and caterers ended up stretching to serve 223 attendees at the breakfast on Feb. 24. People mingled and networked for an hour afterwards. The Chamber received many positive comments from members, prospects, and local government officials.

A NEW NAME FOR THE BREAKFAST IN 2024

This year, to make sure all attendees are quickly served and comfortable, the Chamber has capped the breakfast attendance at 225. We expect registration to fill quickly.

In its second year, this event is now dubbed the "Vision of Valley Vibrancy Breakfast" instead of the "Governmental Relations Breakfast." Your Chamber is adopting a new name to reflect a more ambitious view of the event, as the "AFL-NFL World Championship Game" was officially renamed the "Super Bowl" after the first two games were held in 1967 and 1968.



SAVE THE DATE

February 23
Hartnell College
7:30 - 9:30 AM

Tickets Available @
SalinasChamber.Com



WHY HOLD A "VISION OF VALLEY VIBRANCY" BREAKFAST?

What's the Chamber's motivation for giving businesses and nonprofits an opportunity to meet and hear from local elected officials? Our reasons are anchored in the Chamber's official vision: "a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families and businesses succeed via economic growth and opportunity."

At the Vision of Valley Vibrancy Breakfast, you'll get to hear views of state, regional, and city officials about the roles and responsibilities for business and commerce in the future of the Salinas Valley. You'll get a chance to talk to people who are responsible for decisions about government policy where you live and work. You'll be informed — and perhaps even challenged.

We want elected and appointed public officials to understand that a positive and encouraging environment for commerce brings prosperity and vibrancy to the Salinas Valley. Economic growth and job creation brings opportunities for residents to improve and enjoy their lives in this beautiful region.

STAYING ALOOF FROM POLITICS IS FOOLHARDY — SOMEONE ELSE FILLS THE VACUUM

Your Chamber works to maintain a positive message. But we acknowledge there will always be people who blame business and commerce for problems.

Some critics of business in our community claim new jobs attract new residents who compromise their quality of life. Other critics regard the profit motive as essentially detrimental to the community and stir up public resentment and anger against businesses. Even nonprofits don't escape scrutiny, as some critics regard nonprofit organizations as another expression of individual self-interest.

This breakfast is an opportunity to rebut the claims of those critics.

A FINAL ALERT TO REGISTER NOW

With breakfast attendance limited to 225 people, you'll be wise to register yourself and your colleagues promptly.

Go to www.Salinaschamber.com to purchase tickets. If you have any questions or comments about this event, please contact Chamber President & CEO Karin Moss at karin@salinaschamber.com or by phone at (831) 751-7725. 🌱



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**For all that is Monterey County.
For all that is you.**



EXPO - from page 1

Participants will:

- Meet and participate in mock interviews with several hiring managers in one day
- Learn about different companies and their available positions
- Discover educational pathways to higher-paying careers and certifications
- Gain experience interacting with potential employers
- Get immediate feedback
- Get connected to hands-on internship experiences
- Have an opportunity to make an impression with a recruiter

The event Includes:

- Pre-event keynote address with Q&A from 1 to 2 p.m.
- STEM Expo from 2 to 5 p.m.
- STEM education and employment opportunities — more than 30 employers and education partners will host booths and be ready to meet, greet, and inform.

Expo Co-Chairs are Andrea Bailey, Public Affairs Representative, Corporate Affairs, for Chevron; and Luis Alvarez, President & CEO of Alvarez Technology Group, Inc.

Businesses are also encouraged to register for a table to showcase their

companies and initiatives. The Expo offers complimentary tabling partnerships to organizations interested in showcasing their initiatives. This is a great opportunity for businesses to engage with the Expo audience at no cost and an excellent opportunity to highlight an organization's commitment to:

- Filling internships and jobs from a

pool of diverse candidates

- Networking with STEM talent to understand more about the jobs and careers that excite them
- Organizational brand exposure to the next generation of local STEM talent
- Preparing STEM talent for careers that are needed in your industry and organization 🌱

While the event is free, participants must register to attend the event at:



For more information on the event:



For detailed maps of the location:



LAWS - from page 1

blowers, lawnmowers, weed trimmers, chain saws and other tools, which were targeted for contributing to the state's notoriously emissions-filled air. Another one is directed at property owners who have built or are considering building accessory dwelling units, (ADUs), which can now be sold like condos in California. It aims to give more people opportunity to own their own homes in a state with a severe shortage of housing.

Los Angeles Times Sacramento bureau chief Laurel Rosenhall highlighted a number of the more significant new laws that could affect residents "at home, at work, at school and on the road" in an article titled, "How will California's new laws affect you?" that ran on the first day of the new year.

Here's are highlights of some of the ones that could directly impact you from Rosenhall's article:

AT HOME

Assembly Bill 1033 allows Californians to buy and sell accessory dwelling units, also known as granny units, as condominiums. That means property owners can construct an

ADU on their land and sell it separately, following the same rules that apply to condos.

Assembly Bill 1346, passed in 2021, requires phasing out the sale of small gas-powered engines — including those in leaf blowers, lawn mowers, weed trimmers and chain saws — beginning in 2024. These engines create as much smog-causing pollution in California as light-duty passenger cars, according to state air regulators.

Assembly Bill 12 limits the amount landlords can charge for security deposits to no more than one month's rent, starting July 1. Previously, landlords could charge two months of rent for a security deposit, but that made it hard for many people in high-rent cities to find affordable housing.

AT WORK

The minimum wage in California went up by 50 cents to \$16 an hour on Jan. 1. (Several cities already have a higher minimum wage than the state, and many of them also went up on Jan. 1.) Fast-food workers statewide will see their wages rise to \$20 an hour beginning on April 1 under Assembly Bill 1228. Workers at large hospitals and healthcare facilities will get a minimum wage boost to \$23 an

hour on June 1 under Senate Bill 525.

Employees will get at least five sick days under Senate Bill 616, an increase from the earlier minimum of three paid sick days. Labor unions lobbied heavily for the increase, which large employers opposed citing the increased cost. Some cities already require more paid sick time, where employers must provide at least six paid days of sick leave.

Companies with at least five employees will have to allow workers to take at least five days off to grieve a "reproductive loss" under Senate Bill 848. That includes a miscarriage, stillbirth, failed adoption, failed surrogacy or unsuccessful assisted reproduction, such as an in vitro fertilization or intrauterine insemination.

ON THE ROAD

The cities of Los Angeles, San Jose, Oakland, Glendale, Long Beach and San Francisco will be allowed to install speed cameras near schools, streets with a lot of car crashes and areas known for street racing. Under Assembly Bill 645, drivers can be fined \$50 for speeding 11 to 15 mph over the limit, with charges rising to \$500 for going more than 100 mph.

Police officers will have to tell drivers why they've been pulled over before

questioning them on any subject under Assembly Bill 2773. The law is meant to reduce the police practice of making "pretextual stops," in which officers use a minor infraction as the basis to pull someone over and investigate other potential crimes.

"Many of them are unlikely to make much difference in your life," writes Rosenhall. "California now has an official state bat (the pallid bat) thanks to one new law, and an official state mushroom (the golden chanterelle) thanks to another."

Plus, for those who lament the eroding of a once-common skill, Assembly Bill 446 requires that handwriting instruction in elementary schools include cursive, a skill that has fallen out of practice among a generation growing up typing on cellphones and laptops. Educators who supported passage of the law contended that writing by hand helps children learn to read, spell and build their vocabularies in ways that typing does not.

Now that's one law we didn't think we'd need in 2024, but which undoubtedly many people welcome. 🌱

For the full article, go to:



Best-selling author Tessa Bailey unveils new novel at Salinas Public Library

You're invited to meet the No. 1 New York Times best-selling author Tessa Bailey on Thursday, Feb. 8, 5 p.m. at the Salinas Public Library.

Bailey will be talking about the launch of her new sports romance duology with a rom-com about a bad boy professional athlete who falls for his biggest fan in her new book "Fangirl Down".

About the author: No. 1 New York Times best-selling author Tessa Bailey can solve all problems except for her own, so she focuses those efforts on stubborn, fictional blue-collar men and loyal, lovable heroines. She lives on Long Island, avoiding the sun and social interactions, then wonders why no one has called. Dubbed the "Michelangelo of dirty talk" by Entertainment Weekly, Tessa writes with spice, spirit, swoon, and a guaranteed happily ever after.

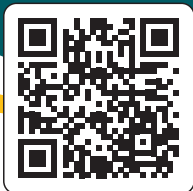
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Santa Cruz County Bank Ranks #1 for Number of U.S. Small Business Administration Loans in Silicon Valley

Santa Cruz County Bank, with assets of \$1.77 billion, is a top-rated community bank headquartered in Santa Cruz County. Today, the Bank announced its #1 ranking as top lender for number of SBA loans and its #3 ranking based upon total dollar volume of SBA loans in the Silicon Valley. The data was released by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and published by the Silicon Valley Business Journal for the 2023 fiscal year, which includes the 12 months from Oct. 1, 2022, to Sept. 30, 2023. Santa Cruz County Bank made 23 loans totaling \$22.58 million in volume in Silicon Valley as defined by the Silicon Valley Business Journal, which includes Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey counties. Santa Cruz County Bank's SVP, Director of SBA Lending, Susan Chandler, commented, "Our lending volume confirms our commitment to supporting small businesses to promote economic development and job growth. We receive repeat business from satisfied customers and as the result of many years building the positive reputation of our SBA team in the marketplace, we see continuous referrals from brokers, developers and our partners in government guaranteed programs."



Noland, Hamerly, Etienne & Hoss welcomes Attorney Charles Mullaney

Based in NHEH's Salinas office, Charles Mullaney's practice focuses on labor and employment law and general civil litigation. He earned his J.D. from the University of California, Davis School of Law. Also at UC Davis, Charlie earned an M.B.A. from the Graduate School of Management. His degree in Philosophy is from Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. While studying for both advanced degrees, he accomplished several significant legal internships. Charlie is from Santa Barbara and now lives in Monterey.



Noland, Hamerly, Etienne & Hoss Promotes Attorney Sharilyn Payne to Shareholder

Sharilyn Payne, who joined the firm in 2022, has more than 20 years of experience counseling clients in the complexities of California employment law with the goal of avoiding lawsuits and administrative claims. She also defends employers in court and before administrative agencies. She has served on the Boards of Directors of many local nonprofit organizations and is a frequent presenter and author on a variety of employment law topics, including articles for the SV Business Journal.



Fenton & Keller welcomes Maria A. Aiello as an associate attorney

Maria's practice focuses on all aspects of business and transactional law. Maria is a 2023 graduate of Santa Clara School of Law. While in law school she focused her academic endeavors in the area of corporate law, having earned a High Technology Law Certificate with a Corporate Specialization with Honors from Santa Clara's High Technology Law Institute. Maria was the President of the Sports and Entertainment Law Society and remains a member of the NextGen Committee of the Sports Lawyers Association. She also volunteers her time as a mentor for the Legal Education Access Pipeline, which is a nonprofit that supports students from underrepresented groups realize their goal of attending law school. Maria has a diverse legal background, having interned at the Monterey District Attorney's Office, clerked for the Honorable Socrates Manoukian of the Superior Court of Santa Clara, and held several internship positions in in-house roles. Maria is a Monterey native and is pleased to be back in her hometown serving the local community.



Salinas Valley Health recognized by the state for exceptional efforts in pediatric health care

The state of California is recognizing Salinas Valley Health's rural health clinic in Gonzales for exceptional efforts in keeping pediatric patients healthy with outstanding immunization rates. The California Public Health Department issued a Certificate of Achievement to Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center for successfully vaccinating more than 76% of infant and toddler patients against preventable and dangerous illness. "We are a part of this community," says Christine Ponzio, MD, Medical Director at Taylor Farms Family Health & Wellness Center. "The high vaccination rates we achieve for our young and vulnerable patient population reflect the trust and connection we have with parents in this community. We are culturally sensitive to their needs and educate them with facts that help protect their children. They know we care." A congratulatory letter from CDPH and the Academy of Pediatrics, California applauds the staff for a tremendous effort, indicating vaccination rates above 70% in the category monitored is an exceptional achievement for any immunization program and demonstrates a high level of service to the community.



Cal Water announces 10th Annual Classroom Conservation Program

Cal Water, in partnership with DoGoodery, has launched its 10th annual youth water conservation education program. This year, the program returns under a new name, "Tap Into Learning," with multiple opportunities for students, classrooms, and school-based clubs in Cal Water service areas to engage in activities around caring for water. Details of program components include:

- **Aqua Adventures**, which offers free water- and nature-based field trips for upper elementary classrooms, grades 4-6, in Cal Water service areas. Teachers simply enter their classroom online for a chance at one of three annual field trips.
- **A Splash of Creativity** (formerly known as the Individual Challenge), an art competition in which students submit original artwork focused on caring for water. This competition is open to individual students in grades K-12 living in a Cal Water service area, and offers multiple tiers of awards.
- **Water Smart Grants**, offering \$100 grants to teachers proposing classroom water projects. Applications are open year-round to teachers in grades 4 through 6 working in a Cal Water service area.
- **H2Oath**, which enables individual students to commit to pledges and learn more about water conservation. This offering is currently only available for individual students; however, H2Oath will soon also open to classrooms, with additional opportunities for participating classes.



Salinas Police Department Awarded Grant for Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program from the Office of Traffic Safety

Salinas Police Department announced today that it has received a \$115,148 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety to support its Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program. This grant will allow the SPD to promote safe practices for pedestrians and bicyclists and provide education about the importance of sharing the road. Police Chief Roberto Filice said, "These grant funds allow us to teach safe behaviors to elementary school children in our community by providing walking courses and bicycle trainings, as well as distributing free helmets and safety equipment." Grant funds will support a variety of activities focused on bicycle and pedestrian safety:

- Bicycle training courses that educate youth on safe riding behaviors.
- Helmet fitting inspections and distribution of helmets to those in need.
- Community and school education presentations.
- Community bike rides that encourage and teach riders safe riding skills.
- Walking field trips with older residents and pedestrian safety for people who are experiencing homelessness.
- Pop-up events that promote the importance of visibility on roads with safety equipment such as reflective armbands/leg-bands and bicycle headlights/taillights.

Celebrate Random Acts of Kindness through Goodwill's mission to create jobs

By Goodwill Central Coast

We all know what holiday February brings, and while Valentine's Day celebrates love, it's often fraught with stress and expectations.

Consider another day equally wrapped in love — and observed just three days later. Random Acts of Kindness Day is a dedicated observance on Feb. 17 that promotes and celebrates unconditional acts of kindness. It's designed to foster an enhanced awareness surrounding the positive impact that simple acts can have upon society as a whole, and on individuals, in particular.

Goodwill Central Coast supports this idea through its Mission Services, but believes the underlying message should extend beyond just a single day. A great way to support this idea is to tap into GCC's "engine" to foster community growth through the power of employment. Purchases at any of GCC's 16 retail stores across three counties, or donations at one of its 29 donation centers, help fuel this change. Whether those donations are unwanted clothing, household items, the gift of money or the gift of time through volunteerism, every bit of kindness matters.

This is all believed to be rooted in a 1995 book titled "Random Acts of Kindness," which inspired a cultural movement in America. In this context, it has grown in popularity over the years, championed by institutions and organizations seeking to foster a culture of reaching out to others and creating a stronger sense of community spirit.

That spirit is generated in many ways, but GCC places its focus on removing obstacles to employment — the center of its mission. Barriers such as homelessness, military service, single parenting, incarceration, addiction, and job displacement can define a person's identity, even when they have so much more to offer. GCC works hard every day to strip away those barriers to reveal a whole person worthy of dignity.

Goodwill offers free employment services, putting all its resources behind an individual's search to find a meaningful, rewarding job that complements their abilities. Its assistance extends beyond Career Centers into subsidized job placement, financial counseling, tax preparation and much more.

Through a partnership with a broad network of organizations, GCC also makes a difference through its Opportunity Platform that helps individuals work toward economic self-sufficiency.

The program helps those living at 125 percent or below the federal poverty line to reach financial independence by working one-on-one (in-person or online) with an expert. It helps clients navigate through vulnerable situations, chart a path toward stability, and reach individual goals.

In a typical year, GCC receives more than 630,000 donations, totaling more than 25 million pounds of clothing and household items. From those generous donations, GCC diverts more than 17 million pounds from landfills, helping

preserve and protect the Central Coast landscape. And the money raised helps fund programs that supported more than 17,000 community members with employment services and achieving goals toward self-sufficiency.

With multiple, convenient drop-off sites, GCC makes it easy for anyone to have an impact on their local economy and the environment. It's a win-win proposition — for the people and the planet.

But what happens in households across the Central Coast is truly remarkable. Employment is a life changer. It brings empowerment, self-sufficiency, independence and pride. That simply cannot be measured.

So if you find yourself wanting to make an impact on Random Acts of Kindness Day, buy a coffee for a stranger, compliment someone, help a neighbor in need. All of those spread kindness in diverse ways, and their cumulative impact is significant.

What's equally easy is thumbing through your closet, attic or cluttered garage in search of community gold — those unwanted or unused objects that hold so much power. GCC accepts everything from clothing and accessories to small household appliances and furniture, electronics, books, fine china, art and other collectibles in good or new condition.

Donate your stuff, and you'll help create jobs for scores of your friends and neighbors. Just like that, you're a job creator. And that's a kindness that cannot be underestimated. 🌱



AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT RICARDO RUELAS

INTEGRATED MEDIA SPECIALIST



Local to Monterey County, Ricardo was born and raised in Salinas. Coming from immigrant parents, Ricardo is passionate about helping the Latino community and constantly strives to be a positive and strong reflection of his parents. Ricardo is a proud alumnus from California State University Monterey Bay, having received his bachelor's in Marketing in 2018 and a Master of Business Administration in 2022. He has experience in marketing, accounts receivables, and remains committed to helping Salinas grow. Currently, Ricardo is an Integrated Media Specialist where he helps businesses grow by utilizing digital & broadcast advertising. During his free time, Ricardo enjoys traveling, exercising, and trying out different restaurants.



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WORKPLACE DRUG TESTING: Looking back on 2023 and preparing for 2024

Spenser Smith, Lab Manager, ARCpoint Labs

The year 2023 brought significant shifts, including legislative changes, increased substance abuse in the workplace, and a heightened focus on detecting impairment rather than past THC use. Let's delve into the key trends and see what lessons can be taken from 2023 and explore how employers can lay the groundwork for a successful 2024.

TRENDS FROM 2023

The past few years have been challenging for employers, judging from drug testing statistics. 2023 was, unfortunately, no different. Key trends include increased drug test positivity rates in the workplace, dramatically increased positivity rates in post-accident testing, increased costs to employers from drug abuse among employees, and responses from employees in anonymous surveys indicating that substance abuse in the workplace is on the rise.

According to the recent Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index, "The overall positivity rate in the combined U.S. workforce, based on more than nine million urine drug tests, was 4.6% ... an increase of 31.4% from the all-time low of 3.5% just 11 years ago" While THC positives account for a large share of these results, positives are up across all drug categories, particular among for-cause tests.

Post-accident testing showed a dramatic rise in positive drug test results. In 2018, 8.4% of all tests submitted after a workplace accident came back positive for one or more illicit drugs. By 2023, that number has ballooned by 22.6%, meaning that 10.3%, or more than 1 in 10 of all accidents in the workplace, could be potentially linked to drug abuse. A post-accident test was 58.7% more likely to be positive for marijuana, and 230% more likely to be positive for cocaine compared to a pre-employment test for the same individual.

Considering the compounded costs to a business from lost productivity, liability, insurance increases, injuries, and claims resulting from even a single workplace accident, this increase in drug-related accidents presents a real challenge to employers. Hidden costs from lost productivity, absenteeism, turnover, and healthcare expenses reached an estimated \$81 billion in costs directly to employers in 2023, according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

Employees' responses in anonymous surveys indicated a growing acknowledgment of substance abuse

within the workplace.

Finally, 2023 saw a number of dramatic changes to drug testing laws and regulations, in California and beyond. First, there was the passage of Assembly Bill 2188 (AB 2188) in September. This law, which took effect on the first of the year, bars employers in California from testing for THC (the hallucinogenic ingredient in cannabis) in urine testing, except for certain Federally mandated programs and the construction industry. Secondly, the Department of Transportation finalized their new rule for oral fluid testing in DOT covered workplaces, including commercial drivers, pilots, rail workers, employers under the jurisdiction of the US Coast Guard, and more. These headline changes to how businesses conduct drug testing will play out throughout 2024, posing new challenges but also offering new options for employers to balance the demands of workplace safety with employee dignity and rights.

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2024

As we enter 2024, employers must proactively adapt to the evolving landscape. Updating policies to be compliant with AB 2188 is also an opportunity to check in with a part of the employee manual that may not have been updated in several years. Drug testing, like many aspects of risk management for employers in California, is constantly evolving. This includes a shift in focus towards detecting

impairment rather than THC use which might have occurred off the job in an employee's personal time. Proper training of supervisors to identify possible signs of impairment, document such incidents correctly, and order the correct tests when properly justified by state law and company policy is key. So is clearly communicating such policy updates with employees.

Managers play a crucial role in implementing drug testing policies effectively. Training should focus on understanding the differences between active THC and metabolites, understanding the difference between historical use and current impairment, ensuring that supervisors have been trained to recognize signs and symptoms through a reputable training certification program, and recognizing when and what types of drug tests should be employed to deal with workplace scenarios.

Clear communication is pivotal in ensuring employees understand the nuances of AB 2188 and how

it impacts company policies. Firstly, employers are legally obligated to inform employees of any changes to drug and alcohol testing policies, obtaining their sign-off on these amendments. But more than that, introducing the new policies clearly to employees, with a chance for them to ask questions and receive clarification, is a valuable opportunity to combat some of the misinformation surrounding THC and drug testing and pre-empt potential future misunderstandings.

The nuances of AB 2188 have been boiled down in social media posts and news headlines, such as this one from ABC7 news in LA: "California employers will soon be banned for screening workers for marijuana." The effect of this oversimplified misinformation may be to convince some workers that testing for THC is now outlawed in all situations. They may not be aware that smoking or being impaired by THC while on the job is still inappropriate, and that reasonable suspicion and post-accident testing for active delta-9 THC is still permitted in the workplace. Additionally, employees in the construction industry, commercial truck drivers, and some categories of state or federal covered employees may still be subject to routine THC testing by urine and other methods. We work with truck drivers and transportation companies every week to get employees back to work after having falsely believed that their off-duty THC use was no longer prohibited by the DOT due to California law. Nobody wants to lose good employees due to a simple misunderstanding, and a little communication can go a long way.

Much reporting on AB 2188 has focused on how employer drug testing has been narrowed in permitted scope. In my view, however, this law offers California employers a chance to refocus the goals of drug and alcohol-free workplace policies towards detecting impairment due to active use, rather than attempting to police employee behavior that occurs outside the workplace. Over the long term this has the potential to improve employee satisfaction and the retention of good employees, while also sharpening employers' ability to ensure a safe workplace with their drug and alcohol testing policies. 🌱





UPCOMING EVENTS

- **New and Prospective Member Orientation**

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

119 East Alisal St., Salinas

Join us for an informational orientation with Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Membership Director Gabriel Lopez. We welcome new and prospective members to get a broad overview of the different member benefits with the Chamber and how to take full advantage of your membership. 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 Salinas Chamber Office or via Zoom.

- **“Vision of Valley Vibrancy” - 2nd Annual SVCC Legislative Breakfast**

Friday, Feb. 23, 7:30 – 9:30 a.m.

Hartnell College, 411 Central Ave., Salinas

Join us for our second annual legislative breakfast, “Vision of Valley Vibrancy Breakfast,” which will be held on Feb. 23 at Hartnell College commencing at 7:30 a.m. through 9:30 a.m. The purpose of this event is to connect leaders and business professionals with key elected and appointed officials and to foster relations between our business community and government leaders. We will discuss updates, new projects, and issues of importance to the prosperity and vitality of the Salinas Valley. Sponsorships and ticket sales are in high demand, and seats will be limited for this event. Tickets can be purchased at \$50 for Chamber members and \$60 for non-members. Purchase your tickets today at SalinasChamber.com. For inquiries, contact the Chamber office at (831) 751-7725.

- **Lunch and Learn with ARCPPoint Labs**

Tuesday, March 12, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

119 East Alisal St., Salinas

Join us for an insightful Lunch and Learn session with Spenser Smith from ARCpoint Labs of Salinas and Monterey. Dive into the crucial aspects of reshaping your company's Drug & Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy for 2024. Key highlights include policy crafting, legal compliance, addressing common oversights, effective implementation, and employee education.

Equip your company with the knowledge to foster a safe, legally compliant, and productive work environment. Don't miss this opportunity to stay ahead in workplace safety management! The event will take place in-person at the Chamber office and via Zoom. RSVP at SalinasChamber.com today!

- **15th Anniversary Celebration & Ribbon Cutting with Loaves, Fishes, and Computers**

Thursday, March 14, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

830 Park Row, Salinas

Join Loaves, Fishes & Computers (LFC) in celebrating their 15th anniversary at their new location! Since 2009, LFC has worked with the Central Coast to bridge the digital divide by providing low-cost and free computers, technical assistance and repair, and digital literacy classes to low-income families, individuals, seniors, and veterans. Come to learn more about LFC and our services, enjoy refreshments, and tour our new facility. If you have any questions, contact our SVCC Marketing and Member Services Manager, Jasmine Bhardwaj, via email at Jasmine@salinaschamber.com or by calling (831) 751-7725.

- **STEM Talent Expo 2024**

Wednesday, March 20, 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Hartnell College, 411 Central Ave. Salinas

This exciting, free, one-day event will connect STEM industry leaders to talented students, former students, and community members who are looking for opportunities to further their education and career opportunities in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The event includes a pre-event panel discussion, STEM Expo, and STEM education and employment opportunities. More than 30 employers and education partners will host booths to meet, greet, inform and more. For more information, visit mcstemtalentexpo.com.

RSVP at salinaschamber.com





CHAMBER NEW MEMBER PROFILES

H Jackson Events

Hollie Jo Jackson is the Chef and Owner of H Jackson Events, a boutique catering firm that offers elite and customizable private dinners and events. HJE is based in Monterey, but also travels throughout the state and across the country. Chef Hollie is originally from the Pacific Northwest and is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu in Portland, Oregon. She did much of her training at a luxury hotel outside of San Diego, as well as at a fine dining restaurant in Seattle, before settling in Monterey in 2014. Chef Hollie was part of the opening team at 1833 Restaurant (now called Stokes Adobe), and she worked as part of the core team planning, organizing, and implementing both Pebble Beach Food & Wine and Los Angeles Food & Wine. She then spent seven years honing her skills with large local catering companies as both an event planner and as an executive chef until she decided to launch her own, self-titled H Jackson Events in 2021. HJE specializes in curating the perfect combination of food, atmosphere, and service for any event.

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RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



Grand Opening of Fastest Labs of Salinas

Fastest Labs of Salinas celebrated its opening in Salinas through a ribbon cutting ceremony. SVCC Board Members, Tiffany Fournier and Brenda Granillo, presented a Chamber plaque to the owner, Kumar Vijayendra in recognition of the grand opening.



Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting Ceremony with T-Mobile

T-Mobile hosted the official grand opening of its first T-Mobile store for south Monterey County. This passionate team looks forward to serving the community and expanding T-Mobile's products and services.



Meals and Wheels Open House & Chamber Mixer

Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley commemorated a significant milestone – the one-year anniversary at their new location on Abbott Street – to celebrate 52 years of service to seniors in Monterey County and an exclusive Mural Unveiling.



Lunch and Learn with Salinas Valley Health

Community Benefit Director, Lynette Fitzgerald, and Orlando Rodriguez, MD, presented on the invaluable services offered by the Salinas Valley Health Mobile Clinic, providing free medical care throughout Monterey County.

New Required Notice and California Paid Sick Leave Expansion

By Gladys Rodriguez-Morales, Fenton & Keller



Senate Bill (SB) 616 amends the Healthy Workplace, Healthy Family Act of 2014, increasing the amount of paid sick leave most employers are required to provide to employees from three days (24 hours) to five days (40 hours) per year, effective Jan. 1, 2024. Employers should be aware of the following requirements concerning the new paid sick leave expansion:

1. ENTITLEMENT TO PAID SICK LEAVE

Employees are entitled to paid sick leave if they work at least 30 days for the same employer within one year. Employees are entitled to five days or 40 hours of paid sick leave per year, whichever is greater. For example, if an employee works a legally compliant alternative workweek schedule of 10-hour shifts, the employee is entitled to 50 hours (5 days x 10 hours) of paid sick leave a year. Employees working in any city or county that provides more paid sick leave than California requires must be provided with the higher amount.

2. TWO METHODS FOR PROVIDING PAID SICK LEAVE

Employers can provide paid sick leave one of two ways: (1) the lump sum method providing employees five days (40 hours) of paid sick leave available for the employees' immediate use; or (2) the accrual method, whereby employees earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked. Employers may choose to implement the lump sum method for some employees (for example, full-time employees) and adopt the accrual method for another group of employees (for example, part-time or seasonal employees.)

Employees receiving a lump sum of paid sick leave can be limited to using five days (40 hours) of paid sick leave per year, and employers are not required to allow employees to carry unused sick leave over to the following year. Unused sick leave may be forfeited at the end of the year, and a new lump sum of sick leave will be provided on the first day of the following year.

Under the accrual method, unused paid sick leave will carry over to the next year and employers can cap the accrued paid sick leave to ten days (80 hours) and limit the use of sick leave to five days (40 hours) per year.

3. ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED FOR 2024

In addition to increasing the total hours of sick leave provided, employers who currently use a date other than Jan. 1 to reset the paid sick leave year will have to make adjustments now to comply with the new sick leave requirements. If an employer uses the lump sum method and provided an employee with three days (24 hours) of paid leave on a date other than Jan. 1, the employer has the choice to provide the two additional paid sick leave days on Jan. 1, 2024 or move the measurement of the yearly period to Jan. 1, 2024 and provide five days (40 hours) on Jan. 1, 2024. For example, if an employee started work on May 1, 2021, and the employer used that anniversary date to provide the lump sum of three days (24 hours) on May 1, 2023, the employer may either provide two days (16 hours) on Jan. 1, 2024, and keep the May 1 date to provide the lump sum each year or the employer can "reset" the date to provide the lump sum on Jan. 1, 2024 and provide the employee five days (40 hours) on Jan. 1, 2024 and each Jan. 1 thereafter.

Employers who currently use the accrual method and impose a cap on the use of paid sick leave each year must change the sick leave usage cap to 40 hours (five days) on Jan. 1, 2024.

For example, if an employer uses the 12-month sick leave year of May 1 to April 30 and implements a cap, and an employee used 24 hours (three days) of paid sick leave before Jan. 1, 2024, the employer must allow the employee to use an additional two days (16 hours) before April 30 if the employee has accrued that additional leave.

4. USE OF PAID SICK LEAVE

Employees may use paid sick leave starting on their 90th day of employment for the care, treatment or diagnosis of the employee, the employee's child, parent, spouse, registered domestic partner, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, or a designated person (an individual related by blood or whose association with the employee is equivalent of a family relationship), or if the employee is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

5. NOTICE AND POSTING REQUIREMENTS

Employers must provide each employee with written notice of their sick leave rights and post a new poster at each worksite. An updated English version of the "Notice to Employee" is available through the Department of Industrial Relations ("DLSE") at https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/lc_2810.5_notice.pdf (English). The DLSE has yet to make available an updated Spanish version for use. The required "Paid Sick Leave" poster can be downloaded at [https://www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE/Publications/Paid_Sick_Days_Poster_Template_\(11_2014\).pdf](https://www.dir.ca.gov/DLSE/Publications/Paid_Sick_Days_Poster_Template_(11_2014).pdf)

6. WAGE STATEMENT AND RECORD KEEPING REQUIREMENTS

Employers must track the number of paid sick leave hours an employee has available for use and provide this information on the employee's wage statement or a separate document provided to the employee with their paycheck. Employers must also maintain records for at least three years showing the number of hours of paid sick leave that each employee has accrued and used.

For more information visit the DLSE California Paid Sick Leave Frequently Asked Questions at https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/paid_sick_leave.htm

Gladys Rodriguez-Morales is a lawyer with the Fenton & Keller law firm in Monterey. This article is intended to address topics of general interest and should not be construed as legal advice. For more information, please visit www.fentonkeller.com.



Marlys Maher's Salinas legacy honored at John Steinbeck Library

By **Sophia Rome**, Community Relations Manager

Marlys Maher's legacy as an advocate and volunteer for the Salinas community was memorialized recently at the John Steinbeck Library (JSL). The plaque that was unveiled in her honor in front of the Teen Lounge at JSL will be a reminder for generations to come of the impact she had on Salinas libraries and her efforts to enhance children's literacy.

Maher's estate recently made a generous contribution to the City of more than \$300,000 in her honor, to be dedicated to improvements at JSL.

"We are incredibly grateful for this unbelievable donation, her incredible work that she put into our community, and the legacy she has left behind," said Salinas Mayor Kimbley Craig.

JSL had a special place in her heart, and she was instrumental in the creation of the Digital Art Lab and Homework Center, as well as the issuance of library cards to all students in Salinas schools. Maher's daughter, Karen Cameron, shared that when traveling, her mother made visiting local libraries a destination.

"For my mom libraries were always



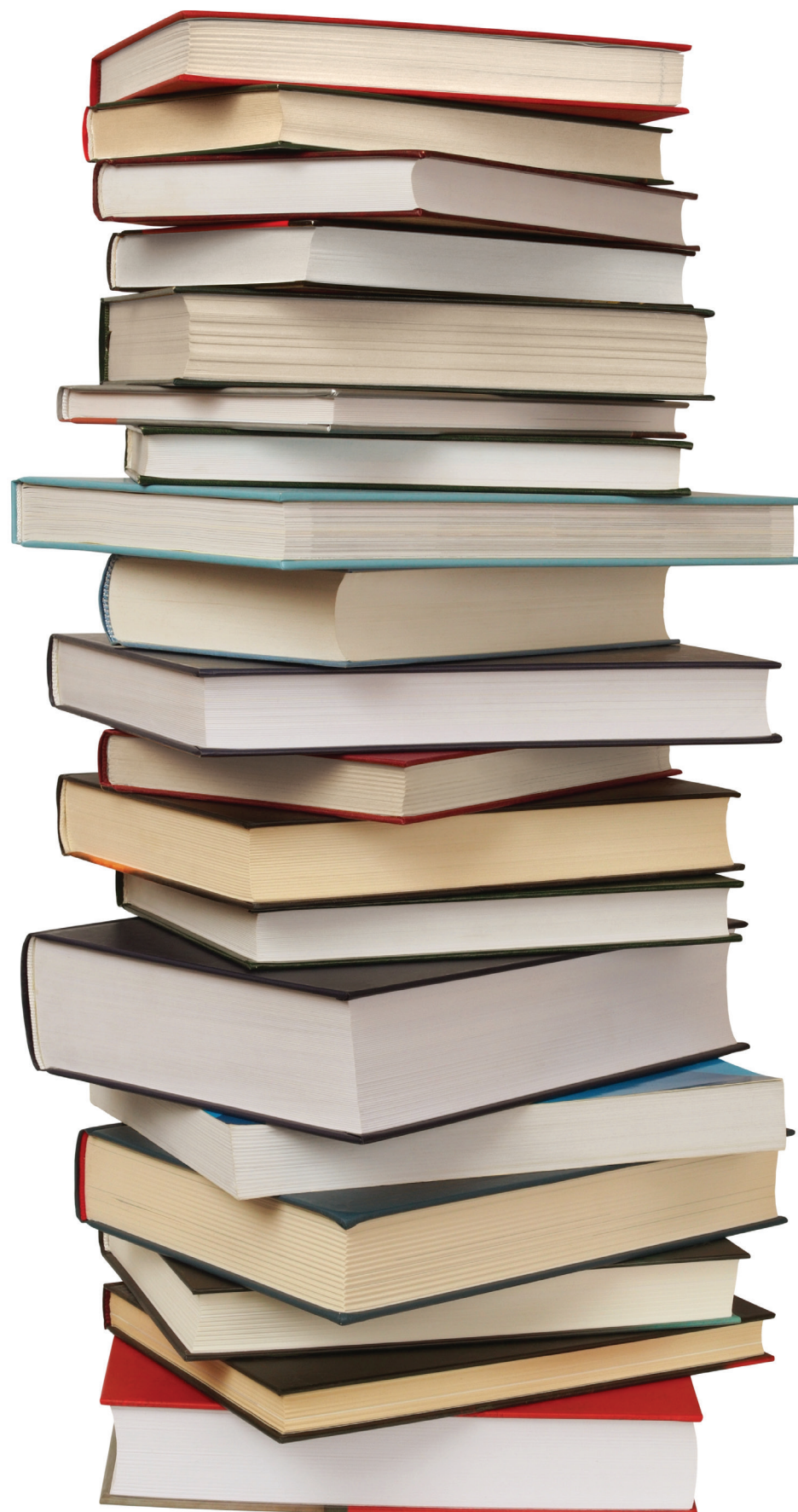
a magic place," said Cameron. "It's clear that she poured her passion into her profession and into her volunteerism."

She has left a mark on our community's history that includes advocacy and outreach for the passage of Measure V to keep Salinas libraries

open, and subsequently Measure E which will allow Salinas libraries to be funded in perpetuity. However, Maher's service to the community went beyond the library walls. She volunteered countless hours serving on many City and community committees and boards, including the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee and Sustainable Salinas, and she was active with the League of Women Voters.

"If you think of the range of initiatives she was involved with in this community, it was extraordinary," said former Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue. "We saved the libraries, in large part, because of Marlys' leadership in bringing us together."

Marlys Maher was a champion for the Salinas Public Library and our community, and she will always be remembered for her unwavering and selfless service to Salinas. 🌱



GETTY IMAGES



Salinas CA GETTY IMAGES



A green row of fresh crops grow on an agricultural farm field in the Salinas Valley, California. PAUL GIAMOU/GETTY IMAGES

Are you new to Salinas? Here's what to know!

The birthplace of novelist John Steinbeck and the primary city in one of the world's most famous farming regions, Salinas draws devoted readers of such Steinbeck classics as "The Grapes of Wrath" and "East of Eden," as well as visitors looking to explore an authentic corner of California.

Located less than an hour south of San Jose and the Bay Area, Salinas offers a great way to start your Monterey County adventure, including a stop at the California Welcome Center in downtown Salinas, where you can find useful information on local things to do while also exploring a historic railroad depot.

THINGS TO DO IN SALINAS

The impressive and modern National Steinbeck Center is a must, not only for devotees of the Nobel Prize-winning writer, but for anyone looking to learn more about Salinas itself. The center's main exhibit tells Steinbeck's story and is organized geographically to highlight locations around Monterey County that played

a role in his life and work. A few blocks from the center in the Queen Anne-style Victorian where Steinbeck grew up, which now is home to The Steinbeck House, a restaurant where Steinbeck family pictures and memorabilia are on display.

Salinas is certainly a city that reveres its history in other ways as well. The California Rodeo Salinas began as a Wild West show in 1911 and today is one of the top 20 events of its kind in the country (and the largest rodeo in the state). The rodeo also honors the area's rich Mexican-American culture with mariachi music and performances by charros (Mexican horsemen) in their elaborately detailed outfits. Salinas is also a great destination for anyone who loves Mexican food, thanks to such local favorites as El Charrito (in business since 1981) and Villa Azteca, which blends traditional and contemporary approaches.

In his writings, Steinbeck told the story of the Salinas Valley, the fertile region often described as "the Salad Bowl of the World." The Farm, an

education center and operating agricultural facility, offers guided tours that take you inside Salinas Valley farming. You can sample the bounty of the land by picking up fresh produce at its store or treat yourself to delectable deep-dish pies baked with fruit produced on The Farm.

At The Farm and throughout the Salinas Valley, you're bound to notice giant plywood cutout figures rising from the fields. Somewhere between sculpture and mural, these photo-realistic billboard-sized works of art, as tall as 20 feet, were created by Monterey County artist John Cerney. They depict scenes of daily life in the Salinas Valley, such as people harvesting iceberg lettuce and working on irrigation projects.

SALINAS VALLEY WINERIES AND VINEYARDS

While the Salinas Valley will forever be associated with lettuce, it has also become a destination for wine lovers. From Salinas, follow the River Road Wine Trail south toward Soledad as you travel above the valley floor along the

Santa Lucia Highlands bench. Outside of town, stop at intimate Odonata Winery to taste its small-batch varietals crafted in the French style by owner and winemaker Dennis Hoey; a few miles down River Road and you'll find Rustiqué, a family-owned and -operated winery with a tasting room in a century-old barn. Continuing south on 101, take in valley views and savor single-vineyard Syrahs and Pinot Noir while picnicking on the terrace at Wrath. And just a short detour from the wine trail, step into the valley's past at the beautifully restored Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad.

There are more attractions near Salinas on the drive to Monterey, just 30 minutes away along the coast. Toro County Park's 20 miles of trails draw mountain bikers, hikers, and equestrians eager to explore its 4,756 acres of rolling grasslands, canyons, and forests. And for some faster-paced excitement, WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca is one of the country's most storied road racing tracks. 🌿

Source: VisitCalifornia.com

Highway 68 Improvements Between Salinas and Monterey May Happen by 2030

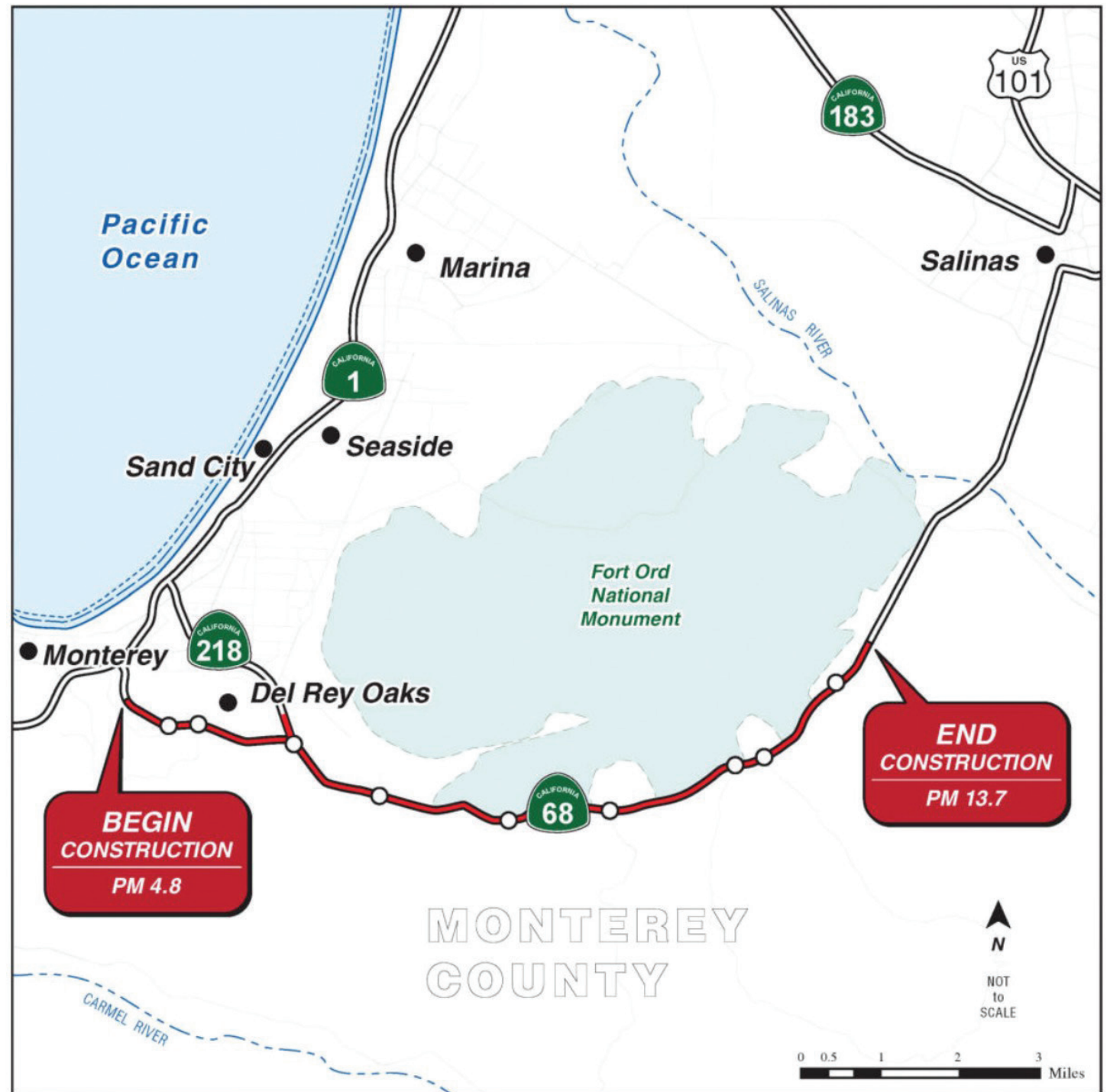
By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Regional highway improvements take a long time in California. Multiple governments must coordinate a lengthy process: confirming need and proposing solutions; planning, surveying, design, and engineering; obtaining land easements or outright land acquisition; preparing and undergoing environmental review and obtaining permits; arranging for public utility relocations; awarding bids for contracts; and proceeding with several stages of construction.

Land transactions can be long and costly, especially if the government has to obtain land through the eminent domain process. Lawsuits and the threat of lawsuits alleging inadequate environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) can delay projects for years. For various reasons, the wait time for electric utility relocations has delayed many recent infrastructure projects in Northern California.

And, of course, the government needs to figure out how and where to get money to pay for the project.

This lengthy process explains why Monterey County residents will have to wait until the end of the 2020s for possible road improvements to Highway 68 between Salinas and Monterey. The proposed "Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project" is meant to reduce travel times and smooth traffic flow during commute periods (thereby also reducing greenhouse gas emissions), lower the accident rate, and reduce roadkill numbers on this road.



“Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project” is meant to reduce travel times and smooth traffic flow during commute periods (thereby also reducing greenhouse gas emissions), lower the accident rate, and reduce roadkill numbers on this road.

The regional Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) are working together on this project. Prospects to actually proceed with a Highway 68 improvement project dramatically increased after Monterey County voters approved the Measure X sales tax in November 2016 to fund regional transportation projects. (Cost of Highway 68 improvements is currently estimated at \$150 million to \$215 million.)

Caltrans and TAMC conducted a feasibility study for Highway 68 improvements in 2017. The first public meeting concerning environmental review of this project was held on Oct. 3, 2019. By 2023, the project had been narrowed down to two alternatives to do something (and an alternative of not doing anything).

One alternative is replacing traffic signals at intersections with roundabouts. The other alternative is “signal enhancement” with intermittent road widening. A public comment period for draft environmental review of these two alternatives concluded on Jan. 8, 2024.

Other ideas for Highway 68 — such as building a bypass or widening the highway to four lanes — have been rejected because of costs, difficulties with land acquisition, and environmental impact. The era of building new highways or adding lanes to highways to increase traffic capacity is long over in California.

Roundabouts are the alternative that has caught more public attention. As many as nine roundabouts would be constructed at intersections where there are now traffic lights. Supporters of the roundabout option cite the success of

the Holman Highway roundabout at the intersection of Highway 1 and the Pacific Grove section of Highway 68 as an argument for why roundabouts would work on the Highway 68 stretch between Salinas and Monterey.

Meanwhile, some people worry that nine roundabouts in a series on one nine-mile section of highway would intimidate tourists and discourage them from visiting the Monterey Peninsula. Members of the public have also expressed concerns that trailer trucks (such as those transporting cars for events) would have difficulty navigating roundabouts.

Another concern is that the hassle of years of construction to improve Highway 68 would offset the long-term benefits of better traffic flow after 2030. TAMC officials report that the roundabouts (and any new lanes related

to them) would be built in phases as funding allows: the west end (near Monterey) first, then the east end (near Salinas), and then the middle. But some traffic disruption is inevitable.

The public will now wait for a Final Environmental Impact Report and a decision by Caltrans and TAMC about how to proceed with Highway 68 improvements. For more information about the project, go to this website: <https://www.tamcmonterey.org/scenic-state-route-68-salinas-to-monterey>.

Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Government Relations Committee has been tracking this project. If you have thoughts about where the Chamber should stand on this proposed project, please contact Chamber President & CEO Karin Moss at karin@salinaschamber.com or by phone at (831) 751-7725. 🌱

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Alliance on Aging Names John McPherson as New Executive Director

Longtime Monterey County resident John McPherson has been named the new Executive Director of Alliance on Aging, taking over for longtime Executive Director Teresa Sullivan, who is retiring.

McPherson has been Executive Director at education and advocacy nonprofit organizations, and held executive roles in both the produce and financial services industry. He has served on the Monterey County Board of Education since 2012, and has been a leading advocate in the fight against human trafficking in Monterey County.

In addition, McPherson is President of the California County School Boards Association, and was previously the President of the

Oversight Board for the San Jose City Redevelopment Successor Agency. McPherson demonstrates his passion for young people through coaching youth sports and volunteering with 4H. A graduate of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, McPherson resides with his wife Christina and two children in Las Palmas.

"We are excited to have someone of John's experience and expertise in both education and advocacy nonprofit organizations and look forward to working with him on many important issues and programs at Alliance on Aging," said Nicki Pasquili, Alliance on Aging Marketing Director. "Teresa can retire with peace of mind knowing her legacy and established



programs and initiatives with AOA are in good hands." Alliance on Aging provides

services and resources that address the challenges and opportunities for older adults in Monterey County. Alliance on Aging was established in 1970 by a group of concerned local citizens who wanted to help seniors remain safely in their own homes for as long as possible. This volunteer-driven organization which began as a single program with a handful of volunteers is now a multi-purpose senior service agency with over 200 volunteers. The largest non-profit provider of senior services in Monterey County, the Alliance on Aging serves over 7,000 individuals every year. Information on Alliance on Aging can be found online at: <http://allianceonaging.org/> or by calling (831) 758-4011.



Salinas Valley
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The Pros and Cons of Increasing the Minimum Wage

By Bill Hastie, Hastie Financial Group

One recent issue that has been the source of much debate is that of increasing the minimum wage. The minimum wage is the lowest hourly wage an employer may legally pay an employee for their work. This has generated two very strong points of view – either increasing the minimum wage is a net benefit or a detriment to society – and we will explore both.

Investopedia published an article earlier this year written by J.B. Maverick that presented both sides of this issue very well. As stated in the article, “The primary purpose of minimum wage is to provide workers with a level of income that allows them to meet their essential needs. It acts as a safeguard against extremely low wages and helps reduce poverty and income inequality within a society. By setting a minimum wage, governments aim to promote decent working conditions and provide a degree of economic security for workers.”

Proponents of increasing the minimum wage believe doing so will increase consumer demand for goods and services in the economy, thereby benefiting the overall economy. They go on to say that a higher minimum wage will bring families out of poverty by paying them something closer to a true living wage. It is also cited that the recent high levels of inflation have most adversely affected those at or near the minimum wage. This is very true, as inflation has increased 17.6% in just the last three years while wage increases have not nearly maintained that rate of increase. This has resulted in a significant loss of purchasing power for even the most basic necessities.

The Investopedia article presented a “Fast Fact” that speaks well to the recent challenges efforts to increase the minimum wage has



faced. “Lawmakers have tried to raise the federal minimum wage on many occasions. The U.S. House of Representatives passed an amended version of the Raise the Wage Act of 2019 in July of that year to gradually increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025. But the bill died in the Senate. President Joe Biden tried to increase the rate for federal contract workers to \$15 per hour, but that motion was blocked by a U.S. district judge in September 2023.”

Opponents of increasing the minimum wage site what they say is basic business economics, that requiring a higher hourly wage will result in the loss of jobs. For the vast majority of businesses, labor is a major and relatively fixed cost of doing business. If those costs increase, a business can only bring the overall cost of labor back down by laying off employees and/or passing on higher costs to its customers. This belief was addressed in a 2022 study by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) that studied how higher wages would result in the loss of jobs. In this study, the CBO estimated that 1.6 million jobs would be lost by 2027, and 1.9 million jobs would be lost by 2032.

This will no doubt remain a hotly contested issue with minimum wage employees needing to provide for their families and businesses struggling to remain in business. 🌱

Bill Hastie, MBA is a financial advisor at locally-owned Hastie Financial Group and can be reached at william.hastie@hastiefg.com.

Strengthening Your Marriage: The Marriage Connect Conference at Compass Church

By Pastor Todd Anderson



Love is a journey, not a destination. In our fast-paced world, where the hustle and bustle of daily life can sometimes overshadow our personal relationships, it's crucial to pause and refocus on what truly matters. This is why Compass Church on South Main Street is thrilled to announce the Marriage Connect Conference, a two-day event on Feb. 16 and 17, dedicated to celebrating and strengthening the sacred bond of marriage.

As a pastor and husband, my wife Dee and I are on this journey of love and commitment, and we've witnessed the transformative power of God's love in marriages. The conference aims to provide couples with the tools, wisdom, and inspiration to nurture their relationship, keeping the flame of love alive in the midst of life's challenges.

This year's theme, “Build Your Marriage,” reflects our commitment to helping couples not just stay together, but also grow together in love and understanding. We believe that a strong marriage is the cornerstone of a healthy family and, by extension, a robust community. The conference will feature sessions led by Brad and Heidi Mitchell, who are marriage experts who will share insights and practical advice on communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, and spiritual growth.

Interactive workshops and breakout sessions will provide an opportunity for couples to engage in meaningful conversations and activities, fostering a deeper connection. Whether you are newlyweds or have celebrated several anniversaries, the conference offers something for every stage of your marital journey.

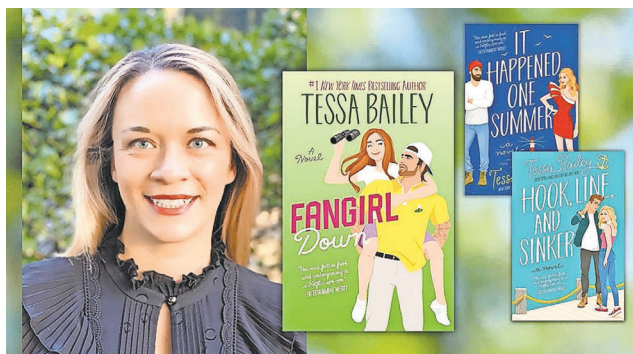
In addition to the sessions, the conference is a great opportunity to meet other couples, share experiences, and build friendships that can offer support and encouragement long after the event has concluded.

Registration for the Marriage Connect Conference is now open, and I encourage couples to sign up early as spaces are limited. For registration and detailed information about the event, please visit our website at Compasschurchmc.org. The cost of the conference includes all sessions, materials, meals, and a special gift for each couple.

At Compass Church, we are committed to supporting marriages because we believe that through them, we can reflect God's love and grace to the world. Join us for this incredible two-day journey where we explore the depths of marital love and discover how, with God at the center, our relationships can thrive and impact the world around us.

My prayer for you is that God would strengthen your marriage and grow your connection as a couple. We look forward to welcoming you to what promises to be an enriching and unforgettable experience. See you there! 🌱

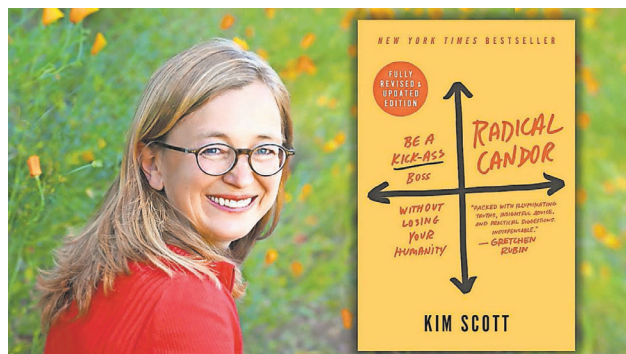
Salinas Public Library events



"Spice, Spirit, and Swoon—A Guaranteed Happily Ever After with Rom-Com Author Tessa Bailey"

No. 1 New York Times best-selling author of *"It Happened One Summer"* and *"Hook, Line, and Sinker."*

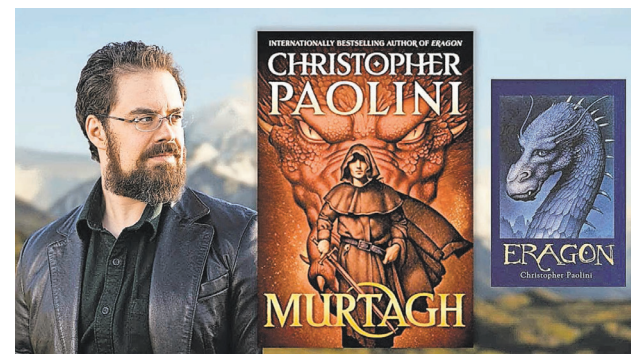
Thursday, Feb. 8, at 5:00 p.m.



"Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity: An Author Talk with Kim Scott"

New York Times best-selling author of *"Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity"* and *"Radical Respect: How to Work Together Better."*

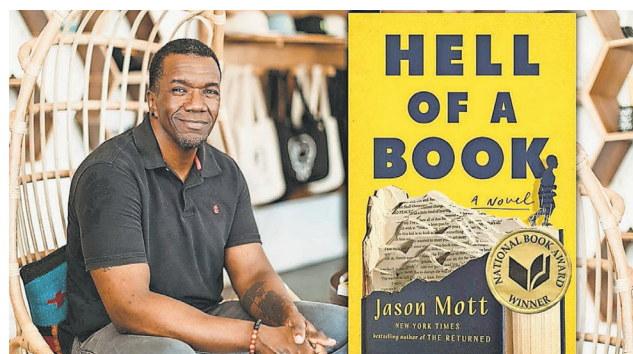
Wednesday, Feb. 28, at 11:00 a.m.



"Twenty Years of Dragon-Riding in YA Fantasy with International Bestselling Author Christopher Paolini"

International best-selling author of *"Eragon," "Eldest," "Brisingr,"* and *"Inheritance."*

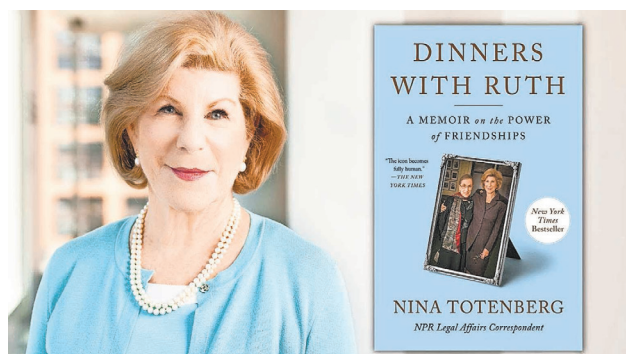
Thursday, March 14, at 1:00 p.m.



"Exploring Identity, Love, and Being Black in America in Fiction Writing: A Conversation with Award-Winning Author Jason Mott"

New York Times best-selling author and National Book Award Winner.

Tuesday, Feb. 20, at 1:00 p.m.



"The Power of Friendships with NPR Legal Affairs Correspondent Nina Totenberg"

NPR Legal Affairs Correspondent and New York Times best-selling author.

Wednesday, March 6, at 1:00 p.m.



"On Retelling Greek Classics: An Exploration of the Modern Epics with Madeline Miller"

New York Times best-selling author of *"The Song of Achilles"* and *"Circe."*

Thursday, March 21, at 4:00 p.m.

The views expressed by presenters are their own and their appearance in a program does not imply an endorsement of them or any entity they represent. Reference to any specific product or entity does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by the Salinas Public Library.

For more information, contact the Salinas Public Library at (831) 758-7311 or visit salinaspubliclibrary.org



Getty Images

City of Salinas awards \$300,000 in prevention and wellness grants to local agencies

By Ursulla Scardina, Communication Specialist

The City of Salinas has chosen six local agency applicants to be recipients of a Prevention and Wellness grant. During the FY23-24 budget process, the City Council allocated \$300,000 to support community-based organizations focusing on public safety.

The selected applicants address a range of critical concerns, including homelessness, youth and adult prevention, and wellness services.

An impartial team of raters, comprising both City of Salinas staff and experienced community agency leaders, evaluated the proposals. Awards were granted in accordance with the rankings until the allocated funds were fully expended.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR’S GRANTEES:

César Chávez Fútbol Academy: Youth mentoring and fútbol coaching to 70 teens guiding them to high



school graduation and college acceptance.

California Youth Outreach: Provide effective pre-release and aftercare for youth released from

secure confinement for 40 gang impacted youth. Reducing recidivism and crime rates by reducing gang involvement and activity.

Harmony at Home: Provide comprehensive school-wide bullying prevention programming for every school in the Salinas Union High School District and two (2) middle schools in Santa Rita Union School District.

YWCA Monterey County: Provide therapeutic services to victims and survivors of domestic violence and other violent crimes.

Community Homeless Solutions: Provide alcohol and drug counseling services to homeless adults suffering from substance use disorders.

Youth Orchestra Salinas (YOSAL): New youth mariachi band program attire, supplies and facility costs. 🌿



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Classes start January 22, 2024 | hartnell.edu



75th Celebration Anniversary

We Thank Our Community

Central Coast Federal Credit Union has had the distinct opportunity and honor to serve the Monterey County for 75 years! We started with five US veterans pooling their monies together to charter a Credit Union serving the Military community during the late 1940's and flourishing into servicing the Fort Ord base and its soldiers starting in the 1960s. We finally transitioned to members of the public in 1993 after the Fort Ord base closure. That change enabled us to help Monterey County residents achieve their financial goals with an institution they could trust with deep ties to their community. Our motto is, "Community Minded. Just Like You!" and that is instilled in what we do every single day. On January 24, 2024, we began a three-day celebration providing food and mementos to our members for allowing us to continue to serve them as their financial institution of choice! We would not be here today without your support and confidence in your Credit Union. We are so proud of what we have accomplished and the members that we have helped realize their dreams, however big or small. From our CCFCU Staff and Board of Directors, we say THANK YOU for celebrating the 75th Anniversary of Central Coast Federal Credit Union - 75 years of giving you more!



**CENTRAL COAST
Federal Credit Union**
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opportunities to our team,
our clients,
and our communities.



We'll get you there.

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NONPROFIT EVENTS

SCCIA - 1st Fridays Art Walk

Feb. 2, 5:00 p.m., Salinas City Center, Salinas

Every first Friday of the month, numerous downtown establishments extend their operating hours, featuring live music, showcasing local art, hosting book signings, conducting wine tastings, poetry readings, and presenting special promotions. We invite you to join us in celebrating these vibrant cultural and other offerings. Come out and celebrate!

Alzheimer's Association - Salinas Dementia Family Caregiver Support Group

Feb. 7, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m., 1130 San Vicente Ave., Salinas

Support groups create a safe, confidential, supportive environment or community and a chance for participants to develop informal mutual support and social relationships. They also educate and inform participants about dementia and help participants develop methods and skills to solve problems. Join us for our in-person meeting. You can also call the 24/7 helpline at (800) 272-3900.

Active Seniors, Inc - Monthly Luncheon

Feb. 8, 11:45 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., 100 Harvest St., Salinas

\$12 for members and nonmembers. The lunch is prepared by our professional chef, Michael Gaines, and his crew of volunteers. There is always a program following lunch. Lunch is served at noon but come early and have a social time with friends. Please call (831) 424-5066, email asi@activeseniors.org, or come in to make a reservation. Our website, activeseniors.org, will have a link to the newsletter where the menu and program are listed.

Salinas Valley Speech Pathology – 'Power Over Parkinson's'

Feb. 19, 5:00 p.m., 450 E. Romie Ln., Salinas SVH Conference Room

"Power over Parkinson's" is a new resource in Salinas for those with Parkinson's and their families. Each month we will have a speaker who will provide information, including the latest research about Parkinson's. The speaker at the January meeting will be Dr. John Morgan, MD. He is a neurologist who specializes in movement and has Parkinson's himself. Dr. Morgan is a professor at the Medical College of Medicine in Augusta, Georgia, and is the director of the college's Parkinson Foundation Center of Excellence. Join us and empower yourself over Parkinson's!

Arts Council for Monterey County - Monterey Symphony – Palo Corona Concert Series

Feb. 17-18, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m., corner of Sun Street & Ninth Avenue (Sunset Center), Carmel-by-the-Sea

Concert three, "Palo Corona," meaning Crown Tree, is a concert about transformation, transcendence, salvation, and overcoming personal setbacks. Weber's "Der Freischütz" is a story about the redeeming power of love. Jennifer Higdon's "Blue Cathedral" represents one's travels over a lifetime and toward the afterlife. Beethoven's "Symphony No. 7" embodies bacchic, dance qualities, to the extent that Richard Wagner called it "The Apotheosis of Dance." All of these pieces reveal the deep and sometimes mystical connections between the natural and supernatural worlds. This concert also features a world premiere of a "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" by Monterey Symphony Composer-in-Residence John Wineglass, with trailblazing pianist Lara Downes.

Alliance on Aging's - Trashion Show in King City: Transforming Waste into Innovation

Feb. 22, 5:30 p.m., Salinas Valley Fairgrounds, Orradre Building, King City

Alliance on Aging is thrilled to announce the much-anticipated Trashion Show in King City, a pioneering event to redefine waste through innovation and creativity. Scheduled for Feb. 22, 2024, this remarkable exhibition brings together artists, environmentalists, and community members to showcase innovative ways of repurposing and transforming discarded materials. Attendees will witness a dynamic fashion show with ideas born from reimagining waste, all to inspire sustainable practices. The Trashion Show promises a platform for engagement, education, and inspiration, fostering a community-driven approach to waste management and sustainability. For more information or to participate in the Trashion Show, please contact Nicki Pasculli at Npasculli@allianceonaging.org.

Rancho Cielo's - 14th Annual Culinary Round Up

Feb. 25, 4:00 - 7:30 p.m., 2 Portola Plaza, Monterey

Our 14th Annual Culinary Round Up will be held on Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024, with more time to taste, sip, and mingle at the Portola Hotel & Spa. This event is an exclusive evening of delicious culinary delights and fabulous wine. It also provides a unique opportunity to meet our Drummond Culinary Academy students and see them in action. The evening has a western flair with a strolling dinner atmosphere. Visit Ranchocieloyc.org/events for sponsorship opportunities and purchasing tickets.

Partners For Peace - Pathways to Success in Soledad

March 2, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., 441 Main St., Soledad

Partners For Peace presents "Pathways to Success" on Saturday, March 2, 2024, at Main Street Middle School in Soledad from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. This will be a day filled with workshops for families who will explore several resources, and enjoy food, swag bags, and fun. Guest speakers will be Soledad Mayor Anna Velasquez and Chief of Police Damon Wasson. Parents, youth, and caregivers are encouraged to attend and participate in hands-on workshops, including career pathways. Resource booths will highlight services available in the Soledad community. This is a free event and everyone is welcome. To register, call (831) 754-3888 or go to www.partners4peace.org.

Big Sur Land Trust – 'Let's Go Outdoors!' San Jose Creek Hike

March 22, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., 4860 Carmel Valley Rd., Carmel – Palo Corona State Park

Every step of this hike was made possible through our partnership with the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District, California State Parks, and Point Lobos Foundation as collaborative members of the Lobos Corona Parkland project — along with generous donors and funders. Shuttles will transport hikers from Palo Corona Regional Park (Rancho Cañada) to the Ishxenta State Park San Jose Creek trailhead, which is only accessible through guided hikes. From there, we will meander up the gentle incline along San Jose Creek, looking for early wildflowers along the way. After crossing over San Jose Creek's three magnificent redwood bridges, we will arrive at the meadow that will be our turnaround point. This hike is a beautiful reminder that collaboration can bring beautiful change and that our actions are stronger when taken together. We are grateful to our partners and to our donors for each step forward that we take together.

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