



# BUSINESS JOURNAL



Spirit of the Community Award  
page 15

Chamber's Citizen of the Year  
page 18

## Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue Announces His Priorities at Chamber Legislative Breakfast

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

The last of the five speakers at the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Third Annual Legislative Breakfast on Feb. 28, 2025, was City of Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue. It was widely rumored that Donohue would outline his priorities for 2025 and beyond at this well-attended event, and the audience was not disappointed.

Donohue described the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce as a key member of "an unbeatable team for the future of our region." Your Chamber encourages you to read the bullet points below listing his priorities, which he classified under four categories, and consider how the business community can help the mayor to achieve them.

### 1. GROWTH FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- Don't expect any more federal funding, and the money from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 has been spent or committed
- Amazon fulfillment center will provide significant tax revenue

DONOHUE see page 7



Rep. Zoe Lofgren

## Third Annual Legislative Breakfast Continues to Advance Chamber Mission

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Your Chamber's mission is "to build a strong local economy by promoting sound government and an informed membership and community." Three years ago, your Chamber added a new benefit for members to fulfill that mission: an annual breakfast focused on

government affairs relevant to the Salinas Valley.

This "Vision of Valley Vibrancy" event has proven to be popular with members and local elected officials. This year, attendees again heard speakers representing various branches and levels of government.

U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren

presented her perspective on what's happening in Congress. California State Sen. John Laird gave an update on what's happening at the state legislature. He also described some of his initiatives within his district to solve regional issues

MISSION see page 6





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For all that is you.**





# Ensuring Salinas' Future by Investing in the Development of our Young Professionals

By Leonard Batti, SVCC Board Chair



When young professionals are given the tools to succeed, they are more likely to give back by mentoring others, creating jobs, and participating in initiatives that benefit the community as a whole.

professionals often face challenges in navigating the complexities of their careers. Whether it's gaining technical expertise, understanding the nuances of corporate culture, or refining leadership skills, young professionals benefit from the mentorship and training programs that the Chamber can offer.

Through educational seminars, skill-building workshops, social networking, and leadership development initiatives, the Chamber can equip young professionals with the tools they need to succeed. Investing in these areas ensures that future generations are not only

prepared for today's demands but also for the evolving job market.

## Networking and Career Advancement Opportunities

One of the most valuable benefits the Chamber of Commerce offers young professionals is the opportunity to network not only with peers, but with business and community leaders. Early career development often relies on building relationships, finding mentors, and establishing connections that can open doors for growth. Through Chamber-hosted events, mixers, and conferences, young professionals can engage with seasoned business leaders, fellow emerging talent, and potential employers. These networking opportunities help young professionals expand their horizons, gain industry insight, and advance in their careers faster than they might in isolation. The relationships fostered through Chamber networking often will last a lifetime, further ensuring that talent stays local.

## Encouraging Innovation and Fresh Perspectives

Young professionals often bring new ideas, fresh perspectives, and innovative solutions to the table. However, these contributions can be easily overlooked without the proper support and encouragement. By investing in the development of young talent, the Chamber can help bridge the generational gap between established industry leaders and emerging professionals. This

Continued on page 5

In today's rapidly evolving economy, fostering an engaged and well-rounded workforce is more important than ever. One key way to ensure Salinas' long-term economic prosperity is by investing in the development of our young professionals.

Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce plans to play a pivotal role in this process. As the Valley's leading business organization, we have the ability to create programs, opportunities, and networks that can significantly enhance the career development of young professionals. By prioritizing the growth of the next generation of leaders, your Chamber can contribute to the economic health of our communities and shape the future of our city's business and civic leadership.

## Building a Skilled Workforce

Your Chamber has the unique opportunity to support the development of our future leaders. Young



## 2025 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- **Chair** - Leonard Batti  
Taylor Farms
- **Chair-Elect** - Aaron Johnson  
A Johnson Law Group
- **Past Chair** - Jennifer Williams  
Natividad Foundation
- **Vice Chair, GRC** - Amy Salmina  
Coast & Valley Properties
- **Vice Chair, Membership** - Mark Kennedy  
Green Rubber Kennedy Ag
- **Vice Chair, Events** - Amy Gibson  
Wescom Credit Union
- **Vice Chair, Finance** - Tom Moran  
Goodwill Central Coast

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Michael Arensdorf** - Scholl & Arensdorf LLP
- **Brent Fogg** - Granite Construction
- **Regina Gage** - Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley, Inc.
- **Scott Gillett** - Pacific Valley Bank
- **Brenda Granillo** - California Water Service
- **Fred Hooker** - Retired Agri-Business Manager
- **Clement Miller** - Salinas Valley Health
- **Oscar Mora** - Blue Adobe Mortgage
- **John Narigi** - A&D Narigi Consulting LLC.
- **Colby Pereira** - Braga Fresh Family Farms
- **Veronica Plascencia** - KION
- **Tony Sanchez** - Spiffy Clean Services
- **Hugh Walker** - Stonebridge Homes

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- **Peter Kasavan** - SPARC
- **Matt Huerta** - Monterey Bay Economic Partnership
- **Kevin Dayton** - SCCIA

## LEGAL COUNSEL

- **Matt Ottone**

## PROFESSIONAL STAFF

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CEO
- **Gabriel Lopez**  
Membership Development Director
- **Jasmine Bhardwaj**  
Marketing & Member Services Manager
- **Cesar Chavez**  
Digital Marketing Specialist

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## CHAMBER PRIORITIES

CREATING A STRONG LOCAL ECONOMY • PROMOTING THE COMMUNITY • PROVIDING NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES • POLITICAL ACTION • REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF BUSINESS WITH GOVERNMENT



Continued from page 4

interaction fosters creativity and encourages collaboration across age groups. Furthermore, young professionals who are nurtured and given the resources to grow will be more likely to make positive contributions in their companies, introducing new products, services, or business models that can drive economic growth.

### Fostering a Stronger Community

By investing in young professionals, your Chamber of Commerce will contribute to building a stronger, more engaged community. Young professionals who feel supported and have access to resources for personal and professional growth are more likely to remain in the area, contribute to local initiatives, and become active community leaders. This sense of belonging and commitment to the local area is vital for the long-term sustainability of our region's economy and culture. Moreover, when young professionals are given the tools to succeed, they are more likely to give back by mentoring others, creating jobs, and participating in initiatives that benefit the community as a whole.

Finally, your Chamber's investment in young professionals' development is a critical strategy for ensuring the continued growth and prosperity of the local economy. By nurturing future leaders, fostering innovation, building a skilled workforce, and strengthening the community, the Chamber plays an essential role in preparing the next generation for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce intends to play a key role in ensuring that the next generation of leaders is prepared to meet these challenges and opportunities head-on. 🌱



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting with Patria on Main**

*Wednesday, April 2, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.*  
*228 Main St., Salinas*

A new culinary chapter begins in the heart of Oldtown Salinas as Patria on Main officially announces its arrival on the scene with a grand opening celebration on April 2 from 4-5:30 p.m. This event welcomes food lovers, community leaders and local businesses to experience the reimagined bistro-style destination, culminating with a Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce ribbon-cutting event. Patria on Main (228 Main St.) is a stylish yet approachable bistro offering a seasonally inspired menu, full bar with craft cocktails, and a varied wine selection. Under the vision of new owners Ernie Amorim and Jose Aranda, the restaurant formerly known as Patria embraces a modern take on comfort food, blending bold flavors with local ingredients. "Patria on Main is more than just a restaurant — it's a place to gather, celebrate and indulge in incredible food and drinks with great company," said Amorim. "We've put our hearts into every dish and cocktail, and we can't wait to welcome the community to experience it." Come celebrate the occasion with them.

- **104th Annual Awards Luncheon Presented by Chevron**

*Thursday, April 10, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.*  
*Sherwood Hall, 940 North Main St., Salinas*

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce is delighted to host its highly anticipated 104th Annual Awards Luncheon — an extraordinary celebration of achievement, business excellence, networking, and community spirit. This event attracts over 400 prominent business leaders and community members in the Salinas Valley region. Opportunities for participation include individual or group tickets, as well as sponsorship options. Prepaid reservations are required to secure your spot — visit [SalinasChamber.com](http://SalinasChamber.com) to make your reservation today.

- **Celebrate Lab Week 2025 with ARCpoint Labs of Monterey Bay**

*Tuesday, April 22, 5:00– 7:00 p.m.*  
*24560 Silver Cloud Court #103, Monterey*

Join us for an exclusive evening of connection, celebration, and discovery in honor of Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (Lab Week) with a joint event with the Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula Chambers of Commerce, hosted by ARCpoint Labs of Monterey Bay. Enjoy a selection of fine beverages and gourmet bites as you mingle with fellow attendees, get an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at their state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, and learn about the critical role that medical laboratory professionals play in healthcare. Connect with the local business community and discover more about the services ARCpoint Labs provides.

- **'The Vital Role of Hydration' by Lior Taich, MD, Urology and Urology Oncology, Salinas Valley Health**

*Thursday, April 24, 12:00– 1:00 p.m.*  
*119 East Alisal St., Salinas*

Join this insightful presentation on "The Vital Role of Hydration for Urinary Tract Infection Prevention for Women and Prostate Health for Men." Learn how proper hydration supports urinary tract and prostate health. Space is limited, please register or tune in via Zoom. The event offers an excellent opportunity for Chamber members to learn from a leading expert in the field. Lunch will be provided.

- **Grand Opening & Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony with Goldberg & Ibarra**

*Monday, May 12, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.*  
*306 Capital St., Suite 102, Salinas*

Celebrate the grand opening of The Law Offices of Goldberg & Ibarra. With over 25 years of dedicated service to the Central Valley, their experienced legal team, led by attorney David Ibarra, continues to set the gold standard in the legal field. Specializing in workers' compensation, personal injury, and social security cases, they are committed to securing the compensation and benefits their clients deserve. Join them in honoring this milestone as they uphold their legacy of excellence, integrity, and unwavering advocacy for our community.

**RSVP at [salinaschamber.com](http://salinaschamber.com)**





Superintendent/President Michael Gutierrez of Hartnell College



State Sen. John Laird

## MISSION - from page 1

and challenges. Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine Pacioni outlined important programs and projects based in the D.A.'s office that the public often overlooks. And Dennis Donohue presented his priorities for 2025 and beyond as the new Mayor of Salinas.

As many attendees noted afterwards, networking opportunities before and after the event are one of the most appreciated benefits of the annual legislative breakfast. Chamber board leadership and staff were able to talk to many members about their interests and concerns about federal, state, regional, and local government. These person-to-person conversations will allow the Chamber to better serve you.

If you're interested in government affairs and politics, your Chamber invites you to participate in the Chamber's Government Relations Committee meeting each month. Contact Colleen Bailey, President/CEO of the Chamber, at (831) 751-7725 or at [colleen@SalinasChamber.com](mailto:colleen@SalinasChamber.com) for more information. 🌱



Monterey County DA Jeannine Pacioni





## DONOHUE - from page 1

- There's potential for additional development in the Salinas Ag-Industrial Center Specific Plan area
- Use soccer complex as regional tournament center to attract visitors and promote tourism—it could bring 20,000 visitors per week
- Encourage hotel development to collect Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue
- Housing needs will be met by the City's Future Growth Area (West Area Specific Plan, Central Area Specific Plan, East Area Specific Plan)
- Revitalize Alisal and Chinatown neighborhoods by implementing the approved City plans
- Big Sur Land Trust just transferred Carr Lake to the city for a public park

### 2. PUBLIC SAFETY

- Staffing issues — there are many vacancies
- New and renovated fire station and other facility upgrades needed
- Police technology — seeking a "real time crime center"

### 3. INFRASTRUCTURE

- Industrial wastewater is highest priority: negotiate use contracts with other parties
- No one knows what's underground (utilities)
- 15-year backlog on sidewalks
- Deterioration and need to expand city's three wastewater systems: municipal sewage, stormwater, industrial wastewater

### 4. CUSTOMER SERVICE

- If people aren't satisfied with customer service, they'll send a message to the city by refusing



Salinas Mayor Dennis Donahue

to vote to renew the Measure G sales tax

- The Permit Center is the "Business" section of the city's customer service
- Finance Department Revenue

Division also needs to be outstanding

- We have a new assistant city manager to help improve customer service 🌱



VISIONARIES OF THE YEAR™



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## JOIN THE FIGHT!

### LULU SAVINO CAMPAIGN FOR A CURE

#### WHY WE FIGHT:

We're proud to stand with **Lulu Savino**, a 2025 Visionary of the Year candidate, in the fight against **leukemia and lymphoma**. As part of **Team Lulu**, we are raising funds and awareness to support the **Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's** mission to cure blood cancers and improve the quality of life for patients and their families.

This campaign is personal—for every life touched, every battle fought, and every loved one we remember. Together, we can create lasting change.



**HELP US REACH OUR GOAL OF \$50,000 FROM MARCH 21ST-MAY 31ST**

EVERY DOLLAR MATTERS. EVERY VOICE COUNTS. THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING TEAM LULU AND THE LLS MISSION!

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

### APRIL 2025

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

**Y**our Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Government Relations Committee had 24 members at its meeting on Wednesday, March 12 as it continues to pursue your Chamber's official vision of "a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families and businesses succeed via economic growth and opportunity." Here's what they discussed:

**1** The Mayor, the full City Council, the City Manager, and the various executive departments of the City of Salinas have now provided the public and your Chamber with a substantive, well-defined outline of their priorities for 2025 and beyond. This issue of the Business Journal includes articles listing these priorities.

**2** With City of Salinas leadership priorities now known, the Chamber can examine its own priorities for 2025 and beyond and determine how and where they align. It's reasonable to assume the City of Salinas will welcome collaboration with the Chamber on common priorities.

**3** Rental property owners in the City of Salinas have received a letter from the city informing them about rental registration, rent stabilization/rent control, and other new laws related to landlord-tenant relations. The City of Salinas continues to collect data and information from organizations and rental property owners about the rental market.

**4** Until the city compiles and analyzes rental market data, the Salinas City Council is unlikely to consider repeal or amendments of language in the four new rental registration and rent stabilization/rent control ordinances enacted in 2023

and 2024. In the meantime, organizations and individual rental property owners concerned about these implications of these new ordinances will continue to meet and share data and anecdotes. Chamber representatives will participate in these meetings. The Chamber fears that if the ordinances result in fewer rental properties on the market and more restrictive rental policies, they could hurt the very renters that the ordinances were written to help.

**5** Committee members discussed how the City of Salinas rental registration program may compromise tenant privacy, a special concern right now for tenants who are undocumented. The Salinas City Council has adopted policies and resolutions that limit the city's release of information to federal authorities related to individuals' immigration status.

**6** Amazon representatives have responded to requests from organizations — including your Chamber — for structured discussion on how to mitigate potential negative impacts of the massive fulfillment center now under construction in the Salinas Ag-Industrial Center Specific Plan area in South Salinas. Remaining as the top concern for businesses is potential impact of Amazon trucks on local streets (such as Abbott Street and Airport Boulevard) and ramp entry and exit of those trucks on the dangerous stretch of Highway 101 identified as the South of Salinas Safety Corridor.

**7** A City of Salinas priority for 2025 is negotiation of a long-term agreement with the Monterey One Water (M1W)

regional wastewater agency for use of wastewater from the City's Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility and Conveyance System. The City of Salinas has released its Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility 2024 Annual Report and reports 227,942 million gallons of industrial wastewater pumped from Pond 3 at the Treatment Facility to the M1W Regional Treatment Plant (RTP) under a short-term agreement for 2024.

**8** The City of Salinas is at various stages of planning for improvements and expansion of its Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility and Conveyance System. At its next meeting on April 9, 2025, the Committee will examine this system in more detail to understand its importance to regional economic development and water supply.

**9** The Committee voted unanimously to recommend to the Chamber's Board of Directors that your Chamber become the leader of a regional coalition to devise and implement strategies to win voter approval for renewing the Measure G sales tax approved by City of Salinas voters in November 2014. The tax expires in 2030. Committee members share concerns repeatedly expressed by the Mayor of Salinas that City residents will reject the sales tax renewal as a way to make a statement objecting to perceived lack of city transparency and openness.

**10** Sewer rates will be significantly increasing in the City of Salinas. At their March 11 meeting, the Salinas City Council was officially informed in a public setting about the city's default on



sewer revenue bonds and the subsequent credit rating downgrade for its outstanding sanitary sewer system revenue debt. The downgrade means the city's annual debt service for future sales (issues) of sewer revenue bonds may be \$250,000 higher per year for every \$20 million borrowed for a project (a total of \$7.5 million in increased interest payments on bonds over 30 years).

**11** The Committee asked staff to invite the City of Salinas Finance Director to attend the next meeting to discuss three issues: the city's default on sewer revenue bonds, the future reliance of the city budget on revenue generated by the Amazon fulfillment center, and the city's plan to ensure accountability for Measure G sales tax expenditures.

**12** The committee declared the Third Annual Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Legislative Breakfast on Feb. 28, 2025, to be a success. The Chamber's Government Affairs Liaison said that the breakfast, for a second year in a row, met the standards of a legislative breakfast held by major business organizations in Washington, D.C. 🌱



# From Tragedy to Triumph This Easter

By Pastor T.K. Anderson, Compass Church

**E**aster is just around the corner, and I can't help but be reminded of one of the greatest truths in all of history: God specializes in turning tragedy into triumph! Just when it seemed like all hope was lost, when the tomb was sealed, and the story of Jesus appeared to be over, God was at work. Three days later, the stone was rolled away, and death was defeated. The resurrection of Jesus wasn't just a historical event; it was a divine declaration that no setback is ever final when God is involved.

Let's be honest. Life has a way of throwing challenges our way. Businesses face tough seasons, families navigate hardships, and our community deals with its own share of struggles. But Easter reminds us that no obstacle, no failure, and no heartbreak is beyond the power of God to redeem.

As Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him." If God can turn the cross, a symbol of suffering, into the ultimate victory, then He can surely bring hope and renewal to our lives today.

Winston Churchill once said, "Success is not final, failure is not



fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Easter is proof of that truth. No matter what setbacks we face, we serve a God who writes comeback stories. That's not just good news for church-

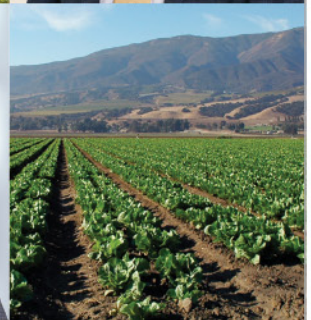
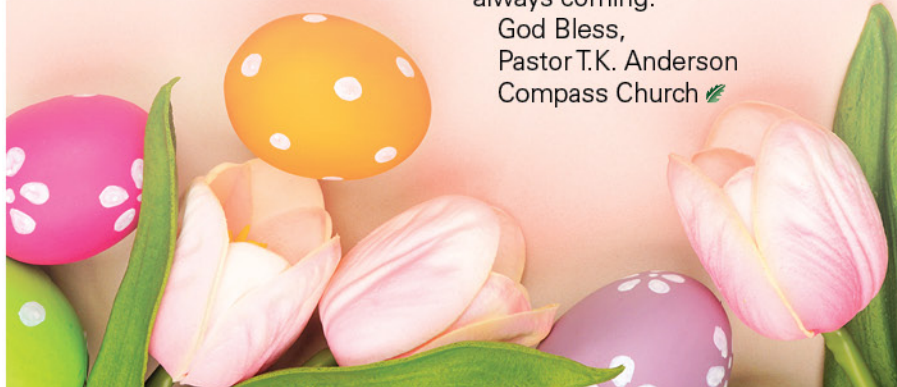
es; that's good news for our businesses, our city, and our families.

Our community is stronger than we realize. We have hardworking business owners who invest in this valley, families who pour love into the next generation, and neighbors who step up when times get tough. Yes, there are challenges, but there is also great hope. Easter reminds us to keep believing, keep striving, and keep trusting that the best is yet to come.

So, as we celebrate Easter this year, let's not just look back at what God did 2,000 years ago, let's embrace what He's still doing today. The tomb is empty, which means our lives can be full of hope. No matter what you're facing, have faith that God is still in the business of working the impossible.

From my heart to yours, may you and your loved ones have a blessed and joy-filled Easter. And remember, no matter how dark Friday may seem, Sunday is always coming.

God Bless,  
Pastor T.K. Anderson  
Compass Church



## New bank name. Same trusted bankers.

We're celebrating a new name – West Coast Community Bank – after merging Santa Cruz County Bank and 1st Capital Bank. Your trusted bankers are energized for the future and more committed than ever to our West Coast communities. Put your money where your life is, as we continue to grow together.

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## HARTNELL COLLEGE

### Hartnell College Launches Climate and Environmental Resilience Ambassadors (CERA) Program with NOAA Grant Support

Hartnell College has introduced the Climate and Environmental Resilience Ambassadors (CERA) Program, an innovative initiative designed to empower students as leaders in climate adaptation and environmental resilience. Funded through a \$2 million subaward from California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the program will equip students with essential skills and hands-on experience to address pressing climate challenges. Hartnell's work is part of a larger \$71.1 million project titled Climate Resilient Monterey Bay, sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) through the Climate Resilience Regional Challenge, and focused on bolstering climate adaptation efforts in the region. Under the leadership of Dr. Jason Hough, Professor at Hartnell College, the CERA Program will engage 175 students over the next five years in experiential learning, leadership development, and climate policy advocacy. While enrolled in public speaking and argumentation courses, students will participate in guest speaker sessions, field trips, and real-world climate adaptation projects, integrating key sustainability concepts into their academic and career paths.



### Pan American Insurance Services Renews Chamber Membership Under New Name: Relation Insurance Services

We are excited to announce that Pan American Insurance Services, a member of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce for more than 50 years, is renewing its membership under its new name: Relation Insurance Services. This change marks an exciting new chapter for the company as it continues to grow and evolve to better serve its clients and community. While the name is changing to that of the parent company, the commitment to providing exceptional insurance services and expert support remains steadfast. Pan American looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Salinas Chamber of Commerce and contributing to the growth and success of the local business community.



### Paper Tacos to Appear on ABC's Hit Show 'Shark Tank'

Paper Tacos, a culturally vibrant greeting card company celebrating Latino heritage, is set to make its national television debut on ABC TV's "Shark Tank" on Friday, April 4, 2025, at 8 p.m. Founded by Jesus Ruvalcaba, Paper Tacos is revolutionizing the greeting card industry by offering bold, humorous, and culturally authentic designs that reflect the richness of Mexican and Latino traditions. The company's mission is to bring representation to the greeting card aisle with high-quality, creative, and meaningful designs. "I created Paper Tacos because I saw a gap in the market — greeting cards were targeting the Latino community by language alone, but we are more than that. We have our food, culture, humor, and traditions that deserve to be represented," said Ruvalcaba. "Being on 'Shark Tank' is a dream come true, and I'm excited to share my story and vision with millions of viewers." During the episode, Ruvalcaba will take the iconic stage to pitch his business to the panel of esteemed Sharks, seeking an investment to scale Paper Tacos and expand its retail footprint. To celebrate this milestone, Paper Tacos invites fans, supporters, and small business advocates to tune in to ABC on April 4, engage with the brand on social media (@papertacos), and visit [www.papertacos.com](http://www.papertacos.com) to explore its unique collection.





## Pacific Valley Bank Expands Commercial Banking Team with Six Key Appointees

Pacific Valley Bank today announced the addition of six experienced banking professionals to strengthen its commercial lending and branch operations teams in Monterey County. Glenna Datta joins as Executive Vice President and Regional Executive to lead the commercial lending relationship management team. Datta brings extensive local market experience, having previously served as Chief Banking Officer at 1st Capital Bank and Market President at Santa Cruz County Bank. The expanded commercial lending team includes Senior Relationship Managers Robert Mina and Jessica Perez, along with Relationship Manager Jefferson Suruiz. Additionally, Kelly Harless joins as Vice President and Branch Manager of the King City branch, accompanied by Vikki Rodriguez as Assistant Vice President and Branch Operations Manager. Harless and Rodriguez bring a combined 27 years of banking experience in the King City market. "We are thrilled to have Glenna, Robert, Jessica, Jefferson, Kelly and Vikki join the PVB team. They are excellent bankers with a track record of success and are well connected in our community," said Sandi Eason, President and Chief Operating Officer of Pacific Valley Bank. "PVB is committed to a strategy of organic growth and this investment in people will pay dividends in future revenue growth," said Anker Fano, CEO of Pacific Valley Bank. "This is a continuation of our efforts over the past year to build our loan and deposit production capacity as we strive to reach the billion-dollar asset size threshold."



## Bay Federal Credit Union Hires Mark Ely as Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer

Bay Federal Credit Union has announced the hiring of Mark Ely as its new Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer (SVP & CMO). Ely will drive the Credit Union's growth, enhance brand recognition, and expand community impact through data-driven marketing while fostering team development and aligning initiatives with organizational values. "We are thrilled to welcome Mark as our new Senior Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer, a leader whose expertise and vision align perfectly with our commitment to innovation, growth, and service," said Cameron Haste, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Bay Federal Credit Union. "Mark's strategic approach to data-driven marketing and deep understanding of community engagement will play a vital role in expanding our reach and enhancing our ability to serve our members." Ely brings nearly 20 years of credit union and financial services marketing leadership to his new role. In his most recent position as Vice President, Digital Engagement & Research at Members 1st Federal Credit Union, he spearheaded innovative digital marketing and growth initiatives that significantly enhanced member engagement and streamlined marketing operations. With proven expertise in strategic planning, digital transformation, and cross-functional leadership, Ely is well-equipped to elevate Bay Federal's brand and expand its community impact. "I am honored to join Bay Federal Credit Union, an organization deeply rooted in community, collaboration, and member service. Bay Federal has a long-standing reputation for innovation and excellence, and I am excited to lead marketing initiatives that further our mission of empowering members and fostering financial success," said Ely. "By leveraging data-driven insights, creative storytelling, and digital engagement, we will continue to expand our impact and deliver exceptional value to our members." Ely holds a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Marketing from Lebanon Valley College. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife and two kids and finds happiness in simple moments, like summer evenings enjoyed in the backyard.





## Support our Chamber Members

Thank you, to our March 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
California Water Service	1962	Express Employment of Monterey County	2019
Valley Trophies & Detectors	1967	Bank of America Financial Center	2021
Monterey One Water	*40 Years*	Christensen & Giannini, LLC	2021
Cushman & Wakefield	1987	ITNMontereyCounty (Independent Transportation Network)	2021
Seneca Family of Agencies	1997	Balance Physical Therapy & Human Performance Centers	2021
IPG International Produce Group LLC	2002	Central Coast Cooling, LLC	2021
Monterey Credit Union - Salinas	2002	Growers Custom Equipment	2021
Salinas Public Library, Steinbeck	*20 Years*	FarmWise	2021
Maureen Wruck Planning Consultants	2006	SAGE, Sustainable Ag & Energy	2021
Monterey County Bank	2008	Monterey Bay FC	2021
Alta Vista Mortuary	*15 Years*	Core6.Marketing	2022
First 5 Monterey County	2011	Adobe	2022
Maya Cinemas	2014	Alisal Long Term Care Pharmacy	2023
Arts Council for Monterey County	2014	Kafens	2023
Monterey County Housing Authority Development Corporation	2014	Smith Medical Pedicures	2024
Disaster Kleenup Specialists	*10 Years*	Monterey County BAR Association	2024
East Bay Tire Co. (Salinas Service Center)	2016	BLANCO CONSTRUCTION SERVICES INC	2024
InterContinental - The Clement Monterey	2016	Gowans & Co.	2024
Kevin C. McWilliams	2018	Hijos Del Sol Arts Productions	2024
Central Coast Community Energy (CCCE)	2018		

### A Special Thanks to Our Visionary and Stakeholder Members





# CHAMBER STAFFER JASMINE BHARDWAJ GRADUATES WITH MASTER'S DEGREE



The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce congratulates Jasmine Bhardwaj, MBA, our Marketing & Member Services Manager, for graduating with a master's in business administration degree from the University of Phoenix in March. We are so proud of her significant accomplishment.



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# RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



## Salinas Valley Chamber Third Annual Legislative Affairs Breakfast

The 3rd Annual Legislative Breakfast, presented by Vistra and Taylor Farms and hosted by Hartnell College, brought together community leaders and elected officials. Keynote speakers shared updates on government policies, fostering insightful discussions and networking among attendees.



## Elevate Spa MD Grand Opening: A Night of Celebration

Elevate Spa MD celebrated its grand opening of its second location, marking the expansion of Griselda Castillo's premier med spa. Guests enjoyed a lively evening with a DJ, live music from Mariachi Tapatio, delicious hors d'oeuvres, and drinks. Heartfelt speeches from friends and family highlighted the journey behind the spa's success, while attendees explored the new space, met the expert team, and took advantage of exclusive special deals.



## New and Prospective Member Orientation

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce hosted an orientation led by Membership Director Gabriel Lopez. Attendees learned about membership benefits and strategies to leverage Chamber resources for business growth. The event, held in-person and via Zoom, included a complimentary lunch and networking opportunities.

## Panda Express Grand Opening in Soledad

Panda Express celebrated its grand opening with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Salinas Valley and Soledad Chambers of Commerce. The special event brought together local leaders, community members, and Panda Express team members. Guests enjoyed delicious food, special promotions, music, and giveaways. This grand opening marks an exciting milestone for the City of Soledad, and Panda Express looks forward to serving the community with their signature menu offerings.





# Spirit of the Community Award

## Community-Minded Victor Kong and Star Market Embody the Spirit of the Community Award

By Mac McDonald, Salinas Valley Business Journal

Talking to the Star Market partner Victor Kong about being the winner of the 2025 Chamber's Spirit of the Community award is like talking to an old friend in a grocery store aisle.

With his easy-going manner, wealth of local knowledge and can-do attitude, one could chat for hours with the longtime grocer, who is celebrating his 45th year at the helm of the local favorite market at South Main and Boronda.

"I was quite honored, of course, but I asked, 'What exactly is the Spirit of the Community award?' he says laughing, when told about being the award-winner this year. When told it was an award for an individual, company or organization "that has made significant contributions to the Salinas Valley community and has demonstrated leadership" in the community, he was justifiably pleased. It's an award for someone who represents the collaborative, friendly and giving spirit of the community, which fits Kong, his partners and helpful staff to a "T."

While Star Market can't compete with the big-chain supermarkets or big-box stores, those corporate giants can't compete with the neighborhood market's renowned customer service and deep community connections. Kong and his staff's mantra is "We're not competing — a can of beans is a can of beans; what's valuable is our service."

And the market has been offering that topnotch service for 65 years in the same location. In fact, the market was the flagship business at the new shopping center and the namesake for what became the Star Shopping Center.

The Star Market story started just before World War II, when five Chinese teenagers from the same small village were sponsored to come to our shores to learn all about the grocery business. While they were learning the ropes of the business, war broke out and the boys were drafted into the U.S. Army and became American citizens.

The teens finished their service in 1947, and set about to open their own grocery store. But first they had to return to the "old country" to find wives. On their return they owned and operated



a small market in Watsonville in 1947 and dubbed it Star Market after the previous business there, Star Cash Groceries. One of the five burgeoning business owners was Victor's father Harry.

After a decade, they moved to a much-larger location in the small community of Freedom just outside Watsonville. That's where Victor first greeted the world, attending grade school in Freedom, graduating from Watsonville High School and attending a local junior college before, like his dad before him, he was drafted into the Army in 1969 and spent 15 months in Vietnam.

After getting out of the military, Victor attended San Jose State University and received a degree in business. But he still wasn't sure he would use that degree to get into the grocery business, even though by this time the Star Market had re-established itself in Salinas at its current location.

Of course, Victor worked at the market doing the usual tasks that were asked of all sons and daughters of the five families — bagging, stocking shelves, sweeping and mopping and being a courtesy clerk.

"We all had to work, that's how you learned," he says. "It was a job, but it gave me a little

spending money too."

It wasn't until the late-1970s that his father and his business partners were ready to hang up their aprons for a well-deserved retirement. His father Harry put it to them bluntly: you can either take over the family business or we'll sell it to another family. So, in 1980, with four others (including two sets of brothers, including Victor's sibling Art), they took over the market and established their own legacy of community service.

The ownership group now includes three, in addition to Victor, there's Robert Harp and Chris Reyes, both of whom have been with the market for 18 years. And the market continues its legacy of service — their attitude is, if you want it, we can get it for you. They make it a point to get to know their customers by name and what they like and want and greet them personally.

Victor recalls a story relayed to him by one of his former partners, who said he witnessed three generations of a family at the check stand, with the fourth, their great-grandson, bagging groceries for his family!

Continued on next page



Star Market is also known for supporting local nonprofits, charity and school groups, offering them space in front of their store and parking lot, supplies for the fundraisers and even space on their shelves in some cases. Ever the diplomat, Victor didn't want to name any of the organizations because he didn't want to inadvertently leave anybody out. "It's just a part of working with the community," he says of the store's all-are-welcome policy.

When asked about the keys to Star Market's success, he says it's simple.

"Number one, it's a people business, you've gotta like the business. So if you like what you're doing and you get compensated, it's worth it," he says.

The market is also well-known for offering space on their shelves for local purveyors, from coffee to bread and nuts (don't get him started on Jeffrey's spiced pecans!), often giving them their first location to offer their wares.

Just a few examples of local companies the market has supported: Acme Coffee, Angelina's Bakery, Beckmann's Bread, Beefy Boys Beef Jerky, Carmel Valley Roasting Company, Carolyn's Cookie Company, Casa Sanchez, Jeffrey's Best Nuts & Granola, Monterey Farms, Gizdich Ranch Pies, Golden Sheaf Bread, Happy Dog Food, Harris Ranch Beef, Lula's Chocolates, Mansmith's Spices, Marianne's Ice Cream, Matsui Nursery, Orange Guard Pest Control Products, Acosta Honey, Carmel Honey Company, That Garlic Stuff, Wise Goat Organics, Otto's Bread Company, and Tourist Hat Coffee.

Now in his 70s, when Victor is asked if he's contemplating retirement, he was typically upbeat:

"They say when it's not fun anymore, call it quits," he says. "But I'm still having a good time!" 🌿

# Annual Awards Luncheon Award Winners



## Outstanding Small Business of the Year – Signs By Van

Signs by Van is a premier sign company based in Prunedale, known for its high-quality, handcrafted signs. Founded by Phil Vanderkraats and ran by Jeremy Vanderkraats, the company has built a reputation for creativity, precision, and attention to detail. Signs by Van specializes in dimensional signs, vehicle wraps, and custom commercial signage, combining modern techniques with artistic craftsmanship. The team works closely with clients to design unique, eye-catching signs that reflect their brand identity. Serving businesses across California and the United States, Signs by Van has become a trusted name in the industry, known for transforming ideas into award winning standout signage that leaves a lasting impression for the businesses they serve. Signs by Van is committed to supporting the local economy by sourcing over 85% of their materials from local vendors. This dedication strengthens our community and ensures exceptional quality in every sign they produce.



## NORTHRIDGE MALL

## Outstanding Large Business of the Year – Northridge Mall

Northridge Mall is a super-regional shopping center serving three counties on the California Central Coast. Located in Salinas, the mall provides shopping, dining, and entertainment options for families and friends while offering a diverse range of merchandise that satisfies a loyal consumer base. Over the decades, Northridge Mall has undergone significant transformation — growing from a humble collection of shops in the early 1970s to the impressive retail destination it is today. The center has expanded dramatically, introducing new retail categories such as entertainment, electronics, and personal services. With ongoing renovations, new store openings, and modernization efforts, Northridge Mall continues to invest in the local retail landscape, making Salinas a more attractive destination for businesses and consumers. Beyond its economic impact, Northridge Mall plays a key role in the community by attracting shoppers from throughout Monterey County, supporting a wide range of businesses, and providing employment opportunities. The mall frequently hosts community events, job fairs, and holiday celebrations that bring people together and create a sense of local pride. In addition to housing national retailers, Northridge Mall provides opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses through pop-up shops, seasonal kiosks, and flexible leasing options. The mall has also built a strong reputation for its philanthropic efforts, partnering with nonprofit organizations, schools, and local initiatives. It has supported charitable causes such as the Salvation Army, the Salinas Valley Chamber Foundation's Children's Shopping Tour, Youth Orchestra Salinas (YOSAL), and more — demonstrating a deep commitment to giving back. A prime example of this community engagement came in April 2024, when Northridge Mall partnered with the Salinas Public Library, Artists Ink, and the Friends of the Salinas Public Library to establish a pop-up "Read Across Salinas" Little Library.



## Businesswoman of the Year – Julie Packard, Monterey Bay Aquarium

Julie Packard is executive director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which she helped found in the late 1970s. She is an international leader in the field of ocean conservation, and a leading voice for science-based policy reform in support of a healthy ocean. Under her leadership, the Aquarium has pioneered innovative exhibits and education initiatives. It has evolved into one of the nation's leading ocean conservation organizations through its globally respected Seafood Watch program, its activities on behalf of ocean policy reform, and field research that is illuminating the conservation challenges facing sea otters, white sharks, and tunas in the wild. The aquarium envisions a world in which both people and nature thrive, and equity and social justice are essential underpinnings to achieving its mission: to inspire conservation of the ocean. "I grew up exploring California's amazing natural places, and I'm just one of many who have drawn inspiration from this very special piece of ocean. It's been my privilege and great fun to lead our team here at the Aquarium, where in the past 38 years we've introduced nearly 70 million people to the incredible ocean life just off our coast and in the vast ocean beyond." A marine biologist, Julie earned both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in biology from the University of California, Santa Cruz, with a focus on marine algae.





### **Spirit of the Community – Victor Kong, Star Market**

For over 45 years, Victor Kong has been the face of Star Market, a long-time Chamber member. Victor is widely respected in the greater Salinas Valley community and has been a strong advocate for growing businesses throughout the area. He has personally crafted the Star Market wine department into a wine lover's dream. Over 90% of local Monterey County wines are featured at Star Market. Every year, Star Market has been a steadfast supporter of local brands, well-known throughout our community. A few examples of local companies supported by Victor Kong of Star Market include: Acme Coffee, Angelina's Bakery, Beckmann's Bread, Beefy Boys Beef Jerky, Carmel Valley Roasting Company, Carolyn's Cookie Company, Casa Sanchez, Jeffrey's Best Nuts & Granola, Monterey Farms, Gizdich Ranch Pies, Golden Sheaf Bread, Happy Dog Food, Harris Ranch Beef, Lula's Chocolates, Mansmith's Spices, Marianne's Ice Cream, Matsui Nursery, Orange Guard Pest Control Products, Acosta Honey, Carmel Honey Company, That Garlic Stuff, Wise Goat Organics, Otto's Bread Company, and Tourist Hat Coffee.



### **Citizen of the Year – Joshua Hostetter, City of Salinas & Salinas Firefighters Association**

A firefighter, engineer, and leader, Josh has dedicated his life to serving the Salinas community, always putting others first and demonstrating what it truly means to be a selfless public servant. Since joining the Salinas Fire Department in 2002, Josh has been a steady, reliable figure, particularly at Station 4 on the east side of Salinas. As a bilingual firefighter, Josh has connected with and assisted countless families, ensuring that language is never a barrier to receiving critical care and support. His ability to communicate with diverse groups of people in their times of need has been invaluable in building trust and ensuring the safety of everyone he serves.

Beyond his technical expertise, Josh has always been the first to step up when it comes to putting others before himself. Whether responding to a fire, a medical emergency, or a disaster, Josh's focus has always been on those in need — always keeping the well-being of others at the forefront. As president of the Salinas Firefighters Union, he has been a tireless advocate for both his fellow firefighters and the community, always working to ensure that those who risk their lives are given the support and resources they deserve to protect us all. Josh's role on the Critical Incident Stress Management Team speaks to his deep empathy and understanding of the emotional toll that his line of work can have on both first responders and the public.

But Josh's contributions go beyond his professional life — he is also a dedicated father of four daughters, teaching them the same values of service, compassion, and responsibility that have guided his own life.



### **Agricultural Leadership – Bardin Bengard, Bengard Ranch**

The Bengard family started out as true pioneers in the Salinas Valley. In 1855, James

Bardin traveled across the Great Plains to California by covered wagon, searching not for gold but for rich farming and grazing land. Wes Eade also came to California in the 1880's to farm and raise cattle.

This heritage led to Tom and Terry Bengard, the grandchildren of James Bardin and Wes Eade, establishing Tom Bengard Ranch in the 1960s. To start, Tom farmed sugar beets, small white beans, potatoes and Spring lettuce on the original home ranch. Having a strong work ethic, he did most of the labor himself which included driving tractors, planting, irrigating and shop repairs. As Tom accrued more acres, he transitioned into row crops. While he was busy in the field, Terry managed the book-keeping and together they successfully grew the Ranch.

The next step involved packing and shipping produce using their own label, which they began in the early 1970's. Tom packed iceberg lettuce in Bengard, Bardin, Bengi, and On Top cartons. These labels, along with Kleen Harvest, are still used today. With the help of essential employees like Lino Finatti, John Harrington, and the next generation of Bengards, the company grew exponentially.

Throughout the years, Tom acquired additional land and formed many key partnerships while venturing into several different commodities and growing regions. He retired in 2000, passing ownership to Bardin Bengard, Tom Bengard and Tracy Pezzini. Today Bengard Ranch is one of the largest grower-shippers in the Western United States, farming in California and Arizona with extensive operations in Mexico and Florida. Bengard Ranch has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the local community and nonprofits from the American Heart Association, California Rodeo Salinas, Rancho Cielo, and more.



### **Ambassador of the Year – Laurie Martin**

A resident of Salinas, Laurie Martin has made her home with Brad, her husband, and their son, Mitchell, for the past 26 years. Laurie began working in the magazine business

in 2014 with her husband and together they publish Greet HWY 68 Loop magazine. Laurie also published Monterey County Real Producers, a real estate magazine, for six years before closing it this year to focus her work on Greet and start a nonprofit organization. Laurie has been a proud member of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce for 10 years, serving as an ambassador for the past three years where she enjoys the camaraderie of working with other local businesses and promoting Salinas Valley businesses. Active in the community, Laurie enjoys serving as a board member on local nonprofit, Impower. She is an active member of Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd where she served as Junior Warden for the vestry. She was President of Monterey Bay Panhellenic and is an alumna of Chi Omega National Women's Fraternity. She also served five years on the board of Salinas High Music Association. Laurie's energies are now turned to spearheading a nonprofit with the mission of creating an assisted living-styled community for adults on the autism spectrum to live independently here in Monterey County and to provide jobs for its residents. Laurie grew up in the Central Valley town of Visalia. She attended college at UC Santa Barbara and did graduate work at San Diego State University, studying political science. She worked on a national level political campaign before heading to work on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. and later, for the State Legislature in New Jersey.



# A Passion for Creativity and Hard Work Has Made Signs by Van One of Top Sign Companies in Country

By Mac McDonald, Salinas Valley Business Journal

**W**hen Jeremy Vanderkraats, owner of Signs by Van in Prunedale, was informed by phone that his company had won the Chamber's Outstanding Small Business of the Year, he says he almost broke down in tears.

"I literally was about to cry, my body went tingly and I couldn't believe that this was happening to us, it was a pretty memorable moment," says the energetic, fast-talking businessman, adding that he went out into the shop, informed the employees and there were high fives and fist bumps all around. "We've put so much effort into this business and our employees are all dedicated and hard-working. We're as passionate as any company can be."

Jeremy didn't even start out in the sign-making business his father Phil started in 1981 in a single-car garage. A talented pitcher for Hartnell College's baseball team, he parlayed that into a business degree at St. Mary's College in Moraga, before getting into residential real estate and mortgage and banking.

When the real estate market took a nosedive in 2008, his father called and told him the business needed help to stay afloat, so he dropped everything, moved back to Prunedale and used his



business acumen and marketing skills to right the ship. Now he's the owner, while his father is the founder, creative designer and builder. They have 14 employees, including signmaker Dick Shulte, who has been with the company for 39 years and who Jeremy calls "the most talented signmaker in the U.S.," and Dong Sun Kim, who has been with Signs by Van for 30 years, and is his dad's best friend and part of the family.

In addition to jumping into the business with both feet, Jeremy became a paid-call firefighter for the North Monterey County Fire Department for 10 years, leaving when the sign business really took off and needed his full-time attention.

While the name of the business is Signs by Van, Jeremy stresses that the company does more than signs. In fact, currently his dad is building faux concrete rocks for a project and "Mr. Kim" is working on a huge mural for the Cinemark Theater in Marina. They also do vehicle wraps, sign restoration and building tables

out of a 246-foot, 1,700-year-old sequoia tree they traded a Native American tribe in Portersville for \$400,000 in business (which is a whole other story in itself).

"We build crazy things," he says, "Our motto is 'If you can dream it, we can build it.' Our key to success is to build a team around creative, hard-working foundation and passionate people who want to work for you and create an environment where they can get their creativity out."

Signs by Van shows no signs of slowing down, in fact, they have big projects for Great American, Knotts Berry Farm and Six Flags, among others, as well as "simple" signs for individuals and local small businesses and organizations.

"A sign is the best representation of marketing you can get. It's in front of your business day and night, 365 days a year and can make or break a business. We help you stand out and make you successful," he says. "We care a lot. The key for us is to put your head down and run as fast as you can, but keep your eyes up." 🌱



## Veteran Salinas Firefighter Josh Hostetter Named Chamber's Citizen of the Year

By Mac McDonald, Salinas Valley Business Journal

**W**hen veteran Salinas firefighter Josh Hostetter was told that he was the Chamber's 2025 Citizen of the Year, he thought there must be some kind of mistake.

"I was pretty shocked, it was something I was not expecting, that's for sure," says the soft-spoken firefighter, who has been fighting fires (and more) for Salinas the past 23 years. "I'm humbled and honored, but I don't know what I did to deserve it."

Well, let's let his nomination letter explain:

"Josh Hostetter has made an undeniable impact on the Salinas community. His years of dedicated service, unwavering commitment to others, and leadership have left a lasting legacy. In every call he answers, every life he touches, and every act of kindness he shows, Josh embodies what it means to be a true citizen of the year. We are truly fortunate to have him as a part of our community."

Josh had an inkling he'd become a firefighter ever since he was in high school at Bear River High School in Grass Valley. He joined the school's Regional



Occupation Program (ROP) and, as part of the program, started visiting the community's firehouse, where he witnessed firsthand what being a firefighter would be like.

"That's what caught my interest, that's what I wanted to do," he says. "Plus, I'm a third-generation fireman. My uncle and grandpa were both firemen."

When his family relocated to the Monterey Peninsula after Josh graduated, he joined CalFire and worked for three seasons before joining the Salinas Fire Department in 2002. He's been with Station #4 on Williams Road for the past several years.

Not only that, but he's been the president of the Salinas Firefighters Association for the past decade and plays a significant role on the Critical Incident Stress Management Team, which focuses on mental and emotional health of fellow firefighters dealing with the stress and trauma of the profession. Josh is still active with the department, but he's dealing with a career-ending injury to his eyes, losing vision in one and sustaining damage to the other.

In his off days he and his wife Angel have coached youth softball and she is on the Marina soccer board. They have four daughters, Samantha, 14; Bailey 16; Kylie 18; and Abigail 20.

Josh will receive his award at the Chamber's 104th Annual Awards Luncheon from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, April 10, at Sherwood Hall in Salinas. The luncheon draws more than 400 guests, and in addition to Citizen of the Year, includes awards for Small Business of the Year, Large Business of the Year, Businesswoman of the Year, Agricultural Leadership Award, Spirit of the Community, and Ambassador of the Year. For tickets and information, go to [salinaschamber.com](http://salinaschamber.com).

# Philanthropy Made Easy, and Beneficial

By Bill Hastie, Hastie Financial Group

**W**e all know that the Salinas Valley is a wonderful place to work, live and raise a family — amazing weather, mountains, valleys and the beautiful Monterey Bay. Cultural diversity adds to the success of our communities. But Monterey County is also known for its dedication to philanthropy. Investopedia defines philanthropy as follows: "Philanthropy involves charitable giving to worthy causes on a large scale, but it is much more than just a charitable donation. Philanthropy is an effort an individual or organization undertakes based on an altruistic desire to improve human welfare, and wealthy individuals sometimes establish private foundations to facilitate their philanthropic efforts."

One of the most common challenges facing the potential donor is knowing the various ways one can donate to a worthy cause. Let's examine one popular technique for making



philanthropic donations to a non-profit organization and the potential tax benefits of doing so.

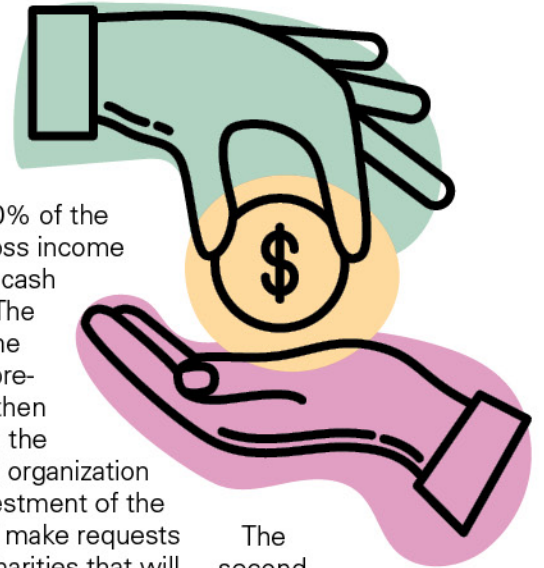
The Donor Advised Fund (DAF) is a charitable investment account that has gained in popularity in recent years. It provides for a way to make charitable contributions to a sponsoring organization which is operated as a 501(c)(3) and then retain advisory privileges as to the investment and final distribution of the account assets. Although first created in the 1930s, the DAF was not formally recognized in the IRS tax code until the passing of the Pension Protection Act in 2006.

Once the donor selects the sponsoring organization, cash, securities or other personal property can be deposited to the account that is created. The donation to the DAF generates an immediate tax

deduction for the full market value of the assets donated up to 30% of the donor's gross income (60% for a cash donation). The donor, or the donor's representative, then works with the sponsoring organization for the investment of the assets and make requests as to the charities that will receive donations from the DAF account.

There are two strategies that potential donors may want to consider. First, donating highly appreciated assets to the DAF can provide for generous tax deductions of the fair market value of the assets donated, up to the limits noted. The advantage here is rather than selling the highly appreciated asset, paying the long-term capital gain and then donating the sales proceeds, the donor can effectively cut the tax man out of the transaction. So, the donor can support worthy causes of their choice and reduce their tax burden at the same time.

The second technique is donating the required minimum distribution (RMD) from an IRA account. Those with significant retirement income often do not need or want to take their RMD because it just creates additional taxable income. For 2025, the IRS allows a maximum qualified charitable distribution from an IRA of \$108,000. So, rather than receiving a taxable distribution of up to \$108,000, the donor can receive a tax deduction for up to that amount. As always, potential donors should consult their tax or financial professional before taking any action.



*Bill Hastie, MBA, is a Financial Advisor with locally owned Hastie Financial Group and can be contacted at [william.hastie@hastiefg.com](mailto:william.hastie@hastiefg.com).*





# NON-PROFIT EVENTS

## **American Cancer Society Celebration of Life Fashion Show – American Cancer Society**

*April 11, 10:30 – 2:30 p.m., 1 Portola Plaza, Monterey – Monterey Conference Center*

The American Cancer Society's Celebration of Life Monterey Fashion Show is a prestigious annual event celebrating cancer survivorship and raising essential funds to support groundbreaking research and patient services. Courageous cancer survivors are featured as models, showcasing their strength and resilience while donning the latest fashions from local businesses. Join them for this inspirational afternoon and accelerate the American Cancer Society's vision to end cancer as we know it for everyone.

## **Ecology Action's – Salinas EV Ride and Drive**

*April 19, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., 11 Station Place, Salinas – Salinas Amtrack*

Ecology Action is hosting its Sixth EV Ride, Drive, & Display show to celebrate Earth Day in Salinas on Saturday, April 19 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. With both English and Spanish-speaking EV experts available to help, attendees will be able to test drive the latest electric vehicles, talk to EV owners displaying their vehicles, and engage with family-friendly organizations. Don't miss this free family fun event with the opportunity to explore sustainable modes of transportation. Event Activities: Test drive more than 12 different EVs. Walk-ins welcome. Pre-Registration is encouraged and will open on April 17. Experts and resources on hand to learn about EV financial incentives, including federal, state, local rebates, and PG&E's Pre-Owned Rebate! Get all your EV questions answered in one-stop. Learn how to sign up for free 1-to-1 EV Purchase Guidance. Enjoy food from local vendors. Details coming soon. Complete surveys with event volunteers and be entered to win prizes like gift cards to local eateries, portable chargers, swag bags, and more! Connect with local organizations doing vital work in Salinas and Monterey County.

## **Pigs, Pinot, and More – Salinas Downtown Rotary**

*April 24, 5:00 – 10:00 p.m., 241 Main St., Salinas – Fox Theater*

15th Annual Salinas Downtown Rotary Pigs, Pinot, & More. Meet at the downtown Rotary Arch. Enjoy the best of Monterey County food and wine. Taste, Sip, Enjoy from 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. Live music and dancing from 8:00 -10:00 p.m. Follow the event on Facebook and Instagram for more info on featured chefs and winemakers. Dress is festive party attire.

## **Impower Monterey County – Spring Luncheon**

*May 8, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., 350 Calle Principal, Monterey – Monterey Marriott*

Lisa Watson will be discussing her recently published memoir at the beautiful Ferrante Room in downtown Monterey. In "What We Wished For," an adoption story, Watson dives into her personal journey of adoption, a story of trauma, empathy, hope and forgiveness. A memoir which reveals needs and enduring memories from deeply personal experiences. "This is a narrative I felt compelled to write as a way to heal and connect who might find solace in my words."

## **United Way Monterey County – 2025 Live United Awards**

*April 30, info to come*

Join the United Way for the 2025 Live United Awards. United Way Monterey County is now accepting nominations for individuals and groups who have made a significant impact on our community. From supporting education and youth to aiding those in need and improving the overall quality of life, the Live United Awards recognize the invaluable contributions of volunteers across various categories, including Education & Youth Services, Human Services, Youth Volunteerism, Community Service, Group Volunteers, and Lifetime of Service. Help celebrate the inspiring individuals who make Monterey County a better place.

## **El Pajaro CDC and Regional Women's Business Center – Día Del Empresario**

*April 27, 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., 1 Main St., Salinas, CSUMB Salinas City Center*

El Pájaro CDC and the Regional Women's Business Center will present Día del Empresario, an event for aspiring and established entrepreneurs. The event will cover essential topics such as marketing strategies and access to financing. More than 100 entrepreneurs are expected to attend, and all presentations will be delivered in Spanish by bilingual and bicultural experts. Entrepreneurs from Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties and beyond are welcome to join this event. The event will open with a keynote speaker followed by offer workshops, an entrepreneur panel, networking opportunities, and resource tables. Dia del Empresario Latino offers two tracks with workshop topics on: Marketing Strategies Access to Financing. Tickets are available at [www.elpajarocdc.org](http://www.elpajarocdc.org) or by calling El Pájaro CDC office at (831) 722-1224. Ticket cost is \$30 per person and includes a delicious breakfast. Ticket costs will increase to \$40 on the day of the event. This conference will be presented entirely in Spanish by bilingual and bicultural experts. English translation is available upon request in advance.

## **Blue Zones Project Monterey County – Hike & Wine at the Vineyards**

*April 13, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., 37500 Foothill Road, Soledad, Smith*

### **Family Wines**

Join Blue Zones Project Monterey County through the picturesque vineyard trails of Valley Farm Management and CRU Winery, where you'll breathe in the fresh air and soak in the natural beauty that surrounds Soledad. This hike is not just about exercise; it's about fostering connections, embracing nature, and cultivating a sense of well-being. After the hike, you'll have the opportunity to taste wines at CRU Winery with 2-for-1 tastings and 10% off bottle purchases for hike participants. Participants are also more than welcome to bring their own snacks to enjoy a little picnic afterwards. Spaces are limited, so reserve your spot today and be part of this enriching journey towards a healthier, happier you. Comfortable clothes and walking shoes are recommended. Please don't forget your water. Hike is easy to moderate, with some inclines, on 2 to 4-mile routes; 45 minutes to 1-hour walks. While this is a Blue Zones-inspired event, note this hike is led by Valley Farm Management and CRU Winery.





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# Jose Luis Barajas: A Fresh Voice for Local Business and Community Growth

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC CEO

**J**ose Luis Barajas is bringing renewed energy and insight to the Salinas City Council. His youth, combined with a strong grasp of complex issues, creates a dynamic approach to governance. Council Member Barajas ran on a platform with five key priorities: 1) putting public safety first; 2) attracting more business to Salinas; 3) standing up for undocumented residents; 4) supporting youth and seniors; and 5) creating more affordable housing. In a recent conversation, he shared the steps he has taken in his short three months to advance these goals.

### **Public Safety: Strengthening Community Trust**

Council Member Barajas has actively engaged with law enforcement, participating in ride-alongs to better understand the challenges officers face. "It is immediately clear that there are too few police to cover the demands of a city the size of Salinas," he noted. His plan includes recruiting more officers from the local community and using technology to enhance public safety. "One plan is to work with neighborhood groups to install cameras to get more visibility in areas where there are high crime rates to build a sense of security for residents."

### **Attracting Business to Salinas:**

#### **A Strategic Approach**

Barajas believes the city must focus on growing its business community rather than competing for existing resources. "We need to be more deliberate about economic development," he stated. He advocates for a hotel incentive program and reassessing where economic development is housed within the city. "The city needs to analyze under what department economic development should be housed and needs to leverage the resources from the county where available."

### **Standing Up for Undocumented Residents:**

### **Ensuring Representation**

Salinas is home to a significant immigrant population, with 38% of residents being foreign-born. "Even though they pay taxes, they aren't able to participate in the democratic process and have a voice in those that represent them and their interests," Barajas emphasized. He is working to strengthen regulations that reinforce Salinas' identity as a "Welcoming City" and ensure all residents feel included in local governance.

### **Supporting Youth and Seniors: A Personal Commitment**

Barajas has a deep personal connection to youth and senior issues, as both a big brother and a caregiver for his grandparents. Recently, he participated in Career Day at El Sausal Middle School, where students expressed interest in learning about business, taxes, and homeownership. "Young people experience and interact in a very different way, and we have to embrace new modes of communication to reach this generation," he explained. At the same time, he stresses the importance of ensuring that seniors are not left behind. "We need to create incentives for the development of more senior housing and senior services and ensure transportation access to essential services."

### **Affordable Housing: A Top Priority**

"This is the city's number one issue. We should be asking, 'What kind of future do we want?' We need to embrace growth and guide it," Barajas asserted. His strategy includes working with developers, streamlining the regulatory process, and restructuring permitting policies to encourage high-density housing. The city needs to focus on bringing new units online and tracking its progress and challenges. While development may bring changes to the city's rural feel, Barajas sees it as an opportunity. "We want to create a place for the next generation to want to come back to."



Jose Luis Barajas is passionate about making space for underrepresented communities in local leadership and inspiring a new generation of leaders. "I get to build on the progress made by the many immigrant, Latino, and queer city leaders that have come before me," he said. His lived experience as an undocumented, 26-year-old, gay, immigrant, renter, and Latino informs his leadership and commitment to change. With a clear vision and dedication to action, Barajas is proving that Salinas' future is bright under his leadership. 🌱



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# Earth Month Calls on All of Us to Live More Sustainably and Reduce Waste

By Goodwill Central Coast Staff

The month of April marks the beginning of spring, a season that symbolizes renewal, growth and transformation. It prompts introspection and reflection on the past and future — the perfect time to celebrate Earth Month.

April has become a time to reflect on how we can protect the planet and our ecosystems, live more sustainably and reduce waste. Earth Month began with the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, when 20 million Americans took to the streets to protest environmental destruction.

Such a movement reminds us that we share one planet — and its health directly impacts our survival, well-being and future. From clean air and water to food security and stable weather, every aspect of life depends on a thriving environment.

Earth Month (and Earth Day) calls us to recognize our collective responsibility and take action to preserve the planet's resources and ecosystems for all life on Earth.

## The circular economy and why it matters

At the heart of Earth Month is the concept of the circular economy — a system that reduces waste and keeps resources in use for as long as possible. Instead of the traditional "take-make-dispose" model, a circular economy emphasizes reuse, repair and recycling. This is where the nonprofit Goodwill Central Coast plays a key role.

GCC puts the circular economy into action every day by:

- **Extending the life of goods:** Donated items are resold, keeping them out of landfills.
- **Promoting reuse and repurposing:** Clothing, furniture, and household goods get a second life with new owners.
- **Recycling unsellable items:** We divert textiles, electronics, and other materials from the waste stream whenever possible.

## Environmental impact of donations

Each year, millions of tons of clothing and

household items end up in landfills, where they take decades — or in some cases centuries — to break down. By donating to Goodwill Central Coast, you're directly reducing waste and lowering your carbon footprint in the following ways:

- **Less waste:** Every item donated is one less item in the landfill.
- **Reduced carbon emissions:** Reusing goods reduces the need for new manufacturing, which cuts down on pollution.
- **Conservation of resources:** Extending the



life of products means fewer raw materials need to be extracted.

## Participate in the Circular Economy with Goodwill!

- **Donate with Purpose:** Before discarding an item, consider if it can be reused, repaired, or creatively repurposed. Donate these gently

used items to Goodwill, giving them new life while supporting local job training programs.

- **Shop Sustainably:** Choose secondhand first! Shopping at Goodwill reduces waste, saves resources, and directly supports a thriving community.
- **Repurpose and Innovate:** Get inspired to create something new from something old. Transform a T-shirt into a reusable tote, refinish thrifted furniture, or reimagine everyday items to reduce your environmental footprint.
- **Share the Impact:** Inspire others! Spread the word about donating, shopping secondhand, and sustainable living. Every action makes a difference.

## Together, we build stronger communities and a healthier planet

### Supporting sustainability

Goodwill Central Coast's mission extends far beyond retail. Every time you donate or shop at a Goodwill store, you are contributing to a more sustainable future. Goodwill gives second life to clothing, furniture, electronics and household goods, diverting more than 12,000 tons of materials from landfills each year.

Here's how Goodwill Central Coast makes an impact:

- **Reuse and repurpose:** Donated goods are resold or repurposed, reducing the need for new manufacturing and cutting down on environmental pollution.
- **Recycling programs:** Unsellable items are recycled or responsibly disposed of, preventing them from becoming waste.
- **Job training and employment:** Sales from Goodwill stores fund job training, financial literacy, and career services, helping individuals in the community achieve economic independence.

## The impact of shopping secondhand

Fast fashion and mass production contribute to environmental degradation, but shopping secondhand helps reduce a giant carbon footprint. When you purchase a thrifted item, you save water,



reduce emissions and prevent waste. Goodwill's mission creates a sustainable loop — your donations support both the planet and the local community.

**Be part of the solution for Earth Month**

- **Donate thoughtfully:** Clean out your home and donate gently used items to Goodwill Central Coast.
- **Shop sustainably:** Stop by one of GCC's 16 store-sacross Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Luis Obispo counties, or explore Goodwill's stores and online platforms such as shopgoodwill.com.
- **Volunteer:** Support Goodwill's mission by giving your time or participating in local events.

**A healthier planet starts with small changes**

Earth Month reminds us that even small actions can have a big impact. When you donate or shop at Goodwill Central Coast, you're supporting the circular economy, reducing waste and creating job opportunities in your community. This spring, celebrate Earth Month by choosing sustainable habits — and support Goodwill Central Coast's quest to help make a difference.

By donating to Goodwill Central Coast, you're not only reducing waste but also helping fund job training programs that change lives.

Find a donation center near you and be part of the solution. Together, we can make sustainability a way of life! Learn more about Goodwill Central Coast's mission at [ccgoodwill.org](http://ccgoodwill.org).

**AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT**

**MARGARITA "MAGGIE" RODRIGUEZ**  
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE, ENTRAVISION



Born and raised in Watsonville and a resident of Salinas for the past 20 years, Margarita "Maggie" Rodriguez has dedicated the last 10 years of her career to sales. As an account executive with Entravision, her passion is supporting local businesses to enhance their growth and success in our vibrant community. When she's not working, Maggie enjoys hiking, exercising, exploring new restaurants, and attending concerts. She looks forward to collaborating with fellow members of the Chamber of Commerce to foster a thriving local economy.



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# National Volunteer Month Celebrates the Enormous Contributions Volunteers Make to our Country

**D**id you know that volunteering can make a person happier and reduces depression? Volunteering also contributes more than \$130 billion, with a “b,” to the U.S. economy, based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, volunteers contribute 4.1 billion hours of service every year.

No wonder a whole month is dedicated to volunteering, although given the massive contributions of volunteers, the whole year could be dedicated to them.

National Volunteer Month was officially established by President George H.W. Bush when he launched the 1000 Points of Light campaign in 1991 and established April as National Volunteer Month. But the history of the month actually goes back much further.

National Volunteer Month is an extension of National Volunteer Week, which was first held in 1943 in Canada. The week was dedicated to honoring the unwavering contributions of women during World War II who would collect supplies and help wounded soldiers. It was in the early 20th century that organized volunteering reached its peak. Numerous groups opened up to escalate humanitarian services, many of which are still active today, such as the Red Cross.

National Volunteer Month is an extension of National Volunteer Week, which was created in 1974 by Presidential Proclamation under President Richard Nixon. The month-long recognition was introduced to further highlight the impact of volunteers and encourage community service across the U.S.

Since then every U.S. president has issued proclamations



Each year, millions of Americans contribute billions of hours in volunteer work, providing services that would otherwise require paid labor.

recognizing April as both National Volunteer Week (April 20-26) and National Volunteer Month, celebrating the contributions of millions of volunteers nationwide.

## How to Observe National Volunteer Month

Even though you can get involved by making material or financial donation, direct participation will make a difference in someone's life, as well as yours. Through your dedication towards a healthy civil society, you can get involved in many ways:

- **Volunteer at an organization.** Nonprofits receive an overwhelming number of requests in April, so if you can't get a spot in, don't push the idea away. Sign up for volunteering for some other month this year – but make sure you do volunteer!
- **Throw an appreciation volunteers' party.** They truly

deserve the honor. Plan a party for all the volunteers you know at a wacky place, like a coffee shop, and bring in some surprises. Make sure your recognized volunteers don't even get up to get their drinks. Find volunteers to volunteer!

- **Celebrate it on social media.** Whether you are volunteering this month or remembering some great volunteers of the past (and present), share pictures and tell your story using the hashtag #NationalVolunteersMonth.
- **Help senior citizens at shelter homes or hospitals.** Volunteers can help by cleaning, serving food, and playing games.
- **Organize a fundraiser.** Volunteers assist in activities that help raise money for local charities and nonprofit

**VOLUNTEER** see page 30

## 5 Fascinating Facts About Volunteering

### 1. Volunteering makes people happy

96% of the volunteers believe that volunteering makes them happier persons and they answer questions more positively if they've recently volunteered.

### 2. It contributes \$130 billion to U.S. economy

Talk about banking on volunteers. Americans who volunteer contribute 4.1 billion hours of service. Using the estimated value of volunteer time, this translates to over \$130 billion in economic impact.

### 3. It leads to better job opportunities

Volunteering takes you to places and tells you about vocations you've never heard of before. Not to mention the excellent impression it makes on your CVs!

### 4. It reduces depression

With feelings of happiness, empathy, and brighter job prospects, it's no doubt studies reveal that volunteering significantly lowers levels of depression.

### 5. Millions of nonprofits

There are 1.8 million non-profit organizations in the United States alone, so the opportunity to volunteer is close to never-ending.





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organizations, like making phone calls, staffing fundraising events, and putting together mailers.

- **Visit children's hospitals.** Help bring smiles to children in hospitals by bringing craft projects, playing music, and giving handmade cards.
- **Offer your special service.** If you have a special talent or skill that may benefit a charity or organization, offer your services or ask how you can be of help.
- **Thank a volunteer.** A little appreciation goes a long way in a volunteer's life.

### Why We Love National Volunteer Month

#### It fills critical gaps in service

Without volunteers, we wouldn't be able to host events or held programs as easily as we do today. Since most of these events are extremely important for communities and businesses, volunteers fill a critical gap in service.

#### Americans volunteer billions of hours annually

Each year, millions of Americans contribute billions of hours in volunteer work, providing services that would otherwise require paid labor. With such a massive amount of time donated for the greater cause, all non-volunteers owe this month to celebrate 30-days of appreciation to volunteering efforts.

#### It inspires us to volunteer

Thousands of aspiring volunteers have emerged for decades during April. Driven by the admiration they receive during National Volunteer Month every year, they are excited to become part of the month, too! 🌱

# Robotic Surgery: Merging Technology with Personalized Care at Salinas Valley Health

**A**n operating room team at Salinas Valley Health recently performed its inaugural procedure using the latest robotic surgery system available. In a time when medical technology is rapidly advancing, integrating sophisticated robotic surgery systems has emerged as a transformative force in the healthcare sector. Facilities that adopt this innovation witness a triple benefit: expanded surgical capabilities, improved patient outcomes, and optimized operational efficiency.

The Da Vinci® 5 (dV5) robot is at the forefront of this technological evolution. It features high-definition 3D visualization that delivers a clear and magnified perspective of the surgical area. The dV5 enables surgeons to experience resistance and tension during procedures — capabilities that were previously unavailable in older robotic models — and its multiple arms allow for intricate instrument manipulation that exceeds the limitations of the human hand. Furthermore, ergonomic enhancements significantly lessen surgeon fatigue during extensive operations.

### Advantages of Value-Based Care

"Robotic-assisted surgery brings a host of advantages to patients, fusing greater precision and surgical efficiency with markedly less trauma," explains Dr. Tarun Bajaj, who performed the first surgery with the dV5 in December 2024.

Salinas Valley Health was the first healthcare system in Monterey County to adopt the dV5. As a publicly funded healthcare system that serves the community, this strategic investment not only broadens the medical center's surgical capabilities but also attracts top-tier professionals eager to utilize cutting-edge tools.

"Integrating these advanced



Salinas Valley Health was the first healthcare system in Monterey County to adopt the dV5 robotic surgery system.

systems positions Salinas Valley Health as a leader in medical innovation, helping to draw and keep exceptional surgical talent motivated to work in a forward-thinking healthcare setting," says Bajaj.

### A Commitment to Investment

While the initial financial outlay for such technology is considerable, the long-term benefits often surpass the costs. Improved surgical outcomes can lead to shorter medical center stays, aligning with value-based care efforts that prioritize enhancing quality while managing expenditures.

The versatility of the da Vinci system allows it to support a wide array of surgical specialties, including urology, gynecology, gynecologic oncology, urogynecology, and general surgery, among others. Although robotic surgery has been in practice for over two decades, the dV5 represents the next leap forward, seamlessly integrating technology with medical expertise to offer exceptional care.

### Distinctive Features of the dV5

How does this cutting-edge

technology function? The surgeon begins by programming the robot, positioning the arms, and then moves to the console, where they can deftly control the robotic arms to focus on the target area. Bajaj, a decade-long practitioner at Salinas Valley Health, has experience with previous robotic systems and notes that the dV5 model offers several marked improvements.

A major advancement is the haptic feedback feature, a term derived from the Greek word for "touch." This technology allows surgeons to "feel" the tissue they are manipulating through tactile sensations relayed from the surgical console — similar to realistic feedback in video games. This advancement bridges the gap between the robotic instruments and the surgeon's hands, delivering a far more intuitive sense of touch. "Additionally," Bajaj explains, "I am able to adjust control settings from the console during surgery, eliminating the need for interruptions to make changes."

### A Bright Future Built on Core Values

Looking ahead, Bajaj anticipates that future robotic surgery systems will incorporate patient imaging directly into the surgical workflow. "For instance, when a CT scan identifies a tumor's location, it could be displayed in a different color on the screen, helping the surgeon pinpoint it with precise accuracy."

Since opening its doors in 1953, Salinas Valley Health has led the way in providing quality healthcare close to home. Access to advanced technology such as the dV5 further enhances its vibrant medical environment, merging today's transformative innovation with the compassionate care that generations of local families have trusted. 🌱





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