



BUSINESS JOURNAL



Improvements Completed for a Major Thoroughfare
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Digging Deep Into the Deep Aquifers
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How to Inspire a Local Student to Work for Your Business

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Ask a typical high school student in Monterey County to say what job or career that student wants to pursue, and the most common answer will surely be “I don’t know.”

Not every young person is ready to consider an answer to that fundamental life question, but for students (and parents) thinking about it, the Monterey County Office of Education is ready to help them find answers.

And finding those answers may involve your business. Your response to any student’s statement “I don’t know” may be immediate: “Would you ever consider working for my company, doing fulfilling and meaningful work, and earning pay that would allow you to support a family and even buy a house one day?”

There’s now a way to reach out to local students with that response, and perhaps improve the trajectory of someone’s life, your business, and your community.

A County Educational Agency Helps Students Find Careers

What is the Monterey County Office of Education, and why does it care? This county government agency is overseen by the

Student see page 7

A New Initiative in Salinas to Improve Its Permit Process

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

“We have the same objective — a vibrant, sustainable community.”

This is how City of Salinas Community Development Director Lisa Brinton introduced the city’s permit and planning services at her June 24 presentation to your Chamber’s Board of Directors.

Indeed, the objectives of the city’s Community Development Department are consistent with your Chamber’s official vision of “a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families and businesses succeed via economic growth and opportunity.” The department’s own official vision is “a thriving Salinas with a healthy, safe, and sustainable future for all.”

Brinton attended the board meeting in person to address what she called “valid” concerns from Chamber members about excessively long times for the Permit Center

to process applications from residents and businesses.

She acknowledged that limited staff availability and lack of coordination between departments and divisions have created what she called “roadblocks” in the permitting process.

But change is coming. The Community Development Department has identified many of these obstacles and is now pursuing broad strategies and focused tactics to eliminate them. The department is also emphasizing conscious adoption of organizational values that lead to excellence in customer service.

Keeping a Thoughtful Perspective on Government Permits

There are always going to be complaints about the permit process. Permit conditions can feel like annoying obstacles that waste time and money.

But most Salinas residents would support permit



Many Salinas residents and business owners have positive and successful experiences with the city’s Permit Center. A few have problems, but the Community Development Department has a plan to minimize them.

conditions that are necessary and reasonable to achieve and maintain “a thriving Salinas with a healthy, safe, and sustainable future for all.” Few people would tolerate new projects in their communities that compromise their health and safety or deteriorate their quality of life.

No one appreciates neighbors who install unsightly physical structures on their properties. Most of us want government to respond when there are high-profile tragedies caused by needless failures of physical structures.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City in 1911 caused the deaths of 146 workers who could not escape

Permit see page 5

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Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) has been serving our community since 1941. Our premium airline and general aviation services, continued passenger growth, and transformative capital developments are because of locals and visitors supporting MRY and contributing to our 85 years of success.

MRY is undergoing an unprecedented period of capital development designed to enhance public safety and elevate the passenger experience. The multi-year, FAA-required MRY Metamorphosis Safety Enhancement Program will conclude over the next 18 months. One of the final projects is the replacement passenger terminal, currently under construction, which will serve travelers beginning summer 2027 and for decades to come.

We thank our Central Coast community for:

- Participating in workshops in 2023 to share your vision for your hometown airport. The MRY team and HOK architects took this feedback and incorporated it into designing a welcoming, innovative, and timeless terminal representative of the beautiful Central Coast.
- Continuing to choose MRY for the convenience we offer, and the nonstop and one-stop flights on preferred airlines to your favorite destinations.
- Letting the MRY team and our airline partners know where you wish to fly nonstop. The recent launch of flights to Chicago on United Airlines is one example of community feedback that helped the air carrier recognize demand for this service in the Monterey Region.

The airport team remains committed to providing our customers with a convenient, hassle-free travel experience. As the MRY Metamorphosis continues, we invite you to stay informed by visiting montereyairport.com or following @montereyairport on Facebook, Instagram, and X for travel advisories. Learn more about MRY and the MRY Metamorphosis at montereyairport.com/transform.



Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) thanks our community

for trusting and supporting us with your business and
leisure travel needs over the past 85 years.



We're continuing to build something special at MRY.

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How the World Cup United the World ... and Salinas

By Leonard Batti, SVCC Board Chair

If you paid attention to the World Cup last month, you undoubtedly saw how people from around the globe fell in love with many of the things we often take for granted here in America. It was an event that united the world and, here at home, it also united Salinas.

The Salinas Regional Soccer Complex hosted 12 World Cup watch parties, drawing tens of thousands of spectators from across our community. It was a powerful reminder that sports have the unique ability to bring together people from different backgrounds, cultures, and generations around a common passion, creating a stronger and more connected community.

When fully built out, the Soccer Complex will feature 20 grass soccer fields, eight beach soccer fields, 12 beach volleyball courts, a basketball court, three fully lighted multi-sport courts, and a 60,000-square-foot, two-story wellness center and fieldhouse with a full-size indoor soccer field.

The grounds will also include walking paths, outdoor exercise stations, playgrounds, a BMX pump track, and two skate parks. Today, the complex welcomes an average of 11,500 players and visitors each week. When complete, that number is expected to more than double.

Many Chamber members have already met the capable staff of the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex. Jonathan De Anda is the General Manager and won last year's Young Professional of the Year award at the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Legacy of Leadership event on Oct. 10, 2025. And as Business Development Manager, Mayra Gomez passionately represents the complex as it seeks potential partners within the



With thoughtful capital improvements and continued investment, these facilities can attract visitors from throughout California while, more importantly, providing a safe and welcoming place for local youth and families to participate in sports, music, recreation, and the arts.'

regional business community. The complex has now raised its game once again by hiring John Narigi as President of the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex. Many know John from his years leading the Plaza Hotel in Monterey, where he helped establish it as one of the premier luxury hotels on the Monterey Peninsula. More recently, he served as President and General Manager of WeatherTech Raceway and the Laguna Seca Recreation Area.

John is also a past Chair of the Monterey County Hospitality Association and Rancho Cielo. Locally, he serves on your Chamber Board of Directors and chairs our Economic Development Subcommittee. I have no doubt that his leadership will further elevate

the Soccer Complex's reach and profile throughout California.

I've written before about how the Soccer Complex can become the cornerstone of Salinas' emergence as the premier destination for youth and amateur sports in Central California. Just down the road sits the Salinas Sports Complex, home to the Rodeo Grounds, Rabobank Stadium, the Storm Softball Complex, the City's Aquatic Center, the Boys & Girls Club, Tatum's Garden, Sherwood Hall, and the Community Center.

With thoughtful capital improvements and continued investment, these facilities can attract visitors from throughout California while, more importantly, providing a safe and welcoming place for local youth and families to participate in sports, music, recreation, and the arts.

Together, they also create opportunities to host everything from regional tournaments to concerts and community events, strengthening both our local economy and our quality of life.

For a few weeks this summer, thousands of people gathered at the Soccer Complex, cheering for different countries while standing shoulder to shoulder as neighbors. That is the power of sports. They remind us that, despite our differences, we all want to belong to something bigger than ourselves.

As Salinas continues to invest in places that bring people together, we aren't just building fields, courts, and buildings. We're building community. If we continue to embrace that vision, the Soccer and Sports Complexes will become more than a destination for athletes. It will become a symbol of a city that is united, welcoming, and proud of the place we call home.

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CHAMBER PRIORITIES

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the building. It was a trigger for enactment of basic workplace health and safety laws that we take for granted today.

When an apartment building balcony collapsed in Berkeley in 2015, and when the “Ghost Ship” warehouse burned in Oakland in 2016, people were horrified. In response to these incidents, the state government imposed new laws and regulations to reduce the chances that such incidents will happen again. Those laws and regulations are now part of the permit process.

However, while the concept of government permits may have strong public support, the government also has an obligation to be prompt and efficient in granting those permits.

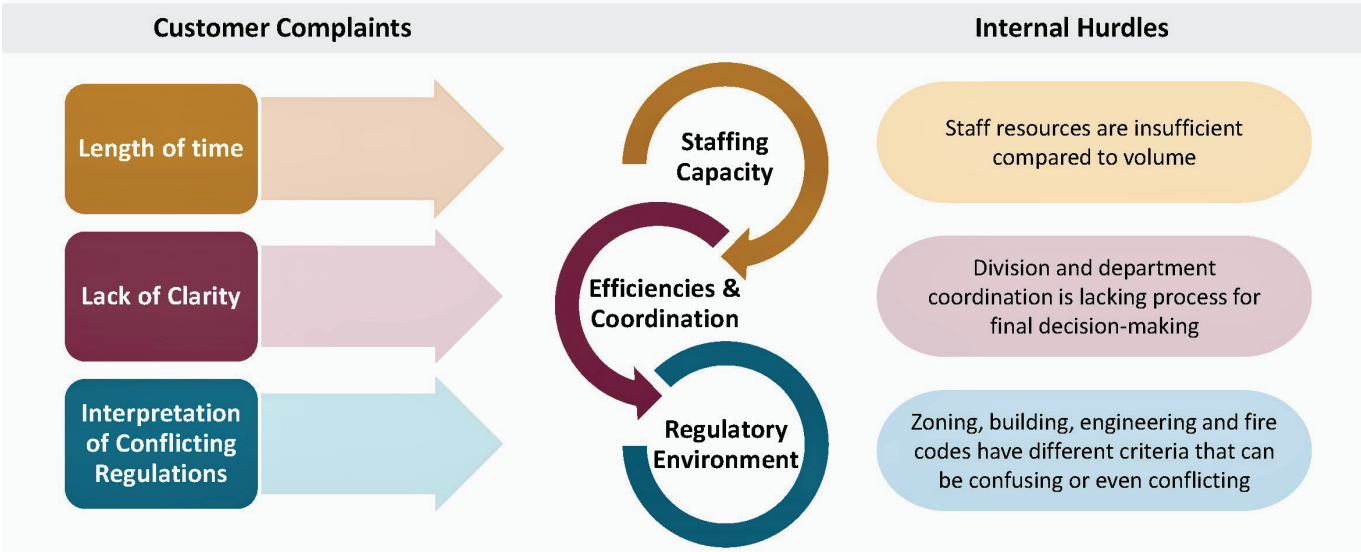
The City of Salinas Community Development Department is now implementing a plan to reduce unnecessary delays and expenses for permit applicants.

Emphasizing Values and Culture in the City’s Permit Process

The City of Salinas Community Development Department has 80 full-time employees (and additional part-time employees and consultants). They are organized into six divisions: (1) Administration, (2) Advanced Planning and Project Implementation, (3) Code Enforcement, (4) Current Planning, (5) Housing & Community Development, and (6) Permit Services.

As a “public-facing” organization that provides services through direct interaction with its customers, the Community Development Department plays a key role in reflecting the values and culture of the City of Salinas. Negative experiences of permit applicants with customer service and interpersonal communication harm the reputation of the city as well as the department. When stories and gossip about negative permit experiences circulate in Salinas and beyond, the

2025 Identified Issues and Resource Needs



The Community Development Department prepared a graphic depiction for the Salinas City Council and Salinas Planning Commission of the challenges facing the department in processing permits.



Salinas Community Development Director Lisa Brinton attended the Chamber board meeting in person to address what she called ‘valid’ concerns from Chamber members about excessively long times for the Permit Center to process applications from residents and businesses.

City of Salinas gains a reputation as a place where starting a business and doing business is difficult.

After Brinton became Community Development Department Director in 2023, the department hired a consultant (MRG — Municipal Resource Group) to identify reasons for delays in the city’s permit process. One response to this consultant’s findings is recognition that customers perceive values and culture as well as mechanics when department employees process permit applications.

There’s a human element to the work as well as a legal and engineering element. To strengthen the interpersonal aspect of Community

Development Department functions, the city’s Human Resources Department is helping the department to expand employee training beyond mere instruction on how to perform a job.

A major, fundamental change to Community Development Department culture was implemented on July 1 through a “Values in Action” plan. The department has identified five values it calls ACT in Service: Accountability, Collaboration, Trust, Innovation and Services Excellence.

Each of the six divisions in the department have now begun to track their activities and rate their performance under these values. For example, the Permit Services Division measures its “accountability” value by determining how often it promptly schedules building permit inspections at the requested time (provided that the permit holder provides notice of at least one business day). The division goal for accountability is to schedule 90% percent of inspections within one business day.

Tracking the process and ensuring accountability for completing the process will be a major component of the strategy to improve

the experience for Permit Center customers.

Tactics Implemented to Improve Permit Processing

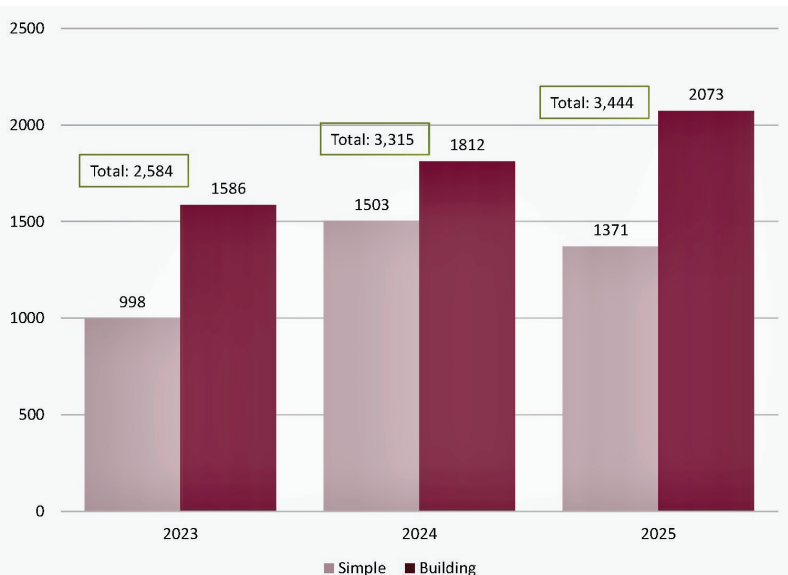
In addition to adopting values-based standards to evaluate its customer service, the Community Development Department is adopting numerous tactics to improve its performance. Listed below are some of the more prominent examples.

Improving Workflow

The department is interviewing firms to perform an independent third-party audit of planning and permitting processes. The audit will focus on eliminating obstacles (“roadblocks”) in the department’s internal workflow.

On the first Friday of each month, the Permit Center is closed to the public so department personnel can obtain training in a rotation of three organizational levels: (1) specific training within each division, (2) cross-division training, and (3) training for the entire department together. This kind of training will continue.

Not everything related to permits is centralized at the Permit Center, and this can cause delays



Total Permit Applications by Year

- Building* permits increased 31% from 2023 and 14% from 2024
- Simple* permits decreased 9% from 2024 to 2025

***Building permits require at least one plan review. Simple permits are fast-tracked (1–3 days)**

The City of Salinas Permit Center continues to be a busy place, reflecting a trend in Salinas of increased interest in building construction.

for applicants of larger projects. The city’s Public Works Department, Fire Department, and Finance Department sometimes have outside roles in the permitting process.

To avoid the “ping-pong” process of applicants walking back and forth between City Hall and the Permit Center, the Community Development Department is creating a “navigation guide” to simplify the process for applicants who need to conduct business at both locations.

Right now, the Community Development Department uses part-time, entry level workers for customer service. This will be changing soon. The Fiscal Year 2026-2027 city budget includes funding for a full-time customer service representative with salary and benefits — someone who holds the position as permanent employment and takes responsibility for the job.

This person will have time to accumulate knowledge through training and experience and will be able to direct applicants to the right procedure and the right person, every time. While the official position title will be Administrative Clerk, the person in this job will unofficially be regarded as the “Greeter” of customers at the Permit Center counter. This person will need to have exceptional social skills.

Software

The Community Development Department is evaluating the effectiveness of its current QLess software for scheduling appointments. It is also considering more options for walk-in visits.

Since the late 2000s, the Community Development Department has used a software program called TRAKiT for members of the public to check the status of their permits, schedule inspections, and download attachments for projects. In 2019, the system was upgraded to TRAKiT9.

This upgraded system is now past its prime, and the city will be issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to evaluate new options for permitting software. A goal would be to allow all users to go to one portal for electronic submissions.

Simplifying the Process for Ordinary Users

Property improvement and repair permits will be standardized. The department is obtaining forms and checklists from other cities and counties to use as models for developing new residential permit guides.

It’s possible that most simple questions that applicants ask about the city’s permit process can

eventually be answered accurately through AI (artificial intelligence). This will allow staff to focus on actually processing permits instead of explaining the basics of applying for a permit.

Resolving Dilemmas of the More Complicated Applications

Wednesdays will continue as the day when the department’s internal Development Review Committee meets with applicants to resolve complex and tricky issues with their permits. Applicants with issues and problems are encouraged to meet with this committee.

For more complex development applications that require substantial hours and specialized work, the department will consider contracts with outside consultants. And for the largest projects, especially those related to the North of Boronda Future Growth Area, the department is examining the potential of adopting organizational structures that other cities and counties are using to grant permits promptly and easily. For example, the City of Marina has a “Strategic Development Center” established as a centralized location for project managers of major development projects.

Ensuring Fairness

Staff has noticed that a few parties habitually request meetings with staff for guidance before they submit a permit application. While advance meetings can be helpful for the applicant and staff, applicants who repeatedly engage in this practice distract staff from helping applicants who already paid their fees.

Also, applicants should be retaining outside consulting services for this level of advice, instead of manipulating the goodwill of the Community Development Department and getting the taxpayers to pay for it.

To address this problem, the department plans to develop criteria that will allow staff to determine when applicants seeking advance guidance are exceeding what is reasonable. There is an appropriate time at which applicants must pay fees for government services.

Your Chamber Role in Improving the City of Salinas Permit Process

In addition to explaining strategies to improve the city’s permit process, Brinton asked your Chamber to be a partner and collaborator in evaluating how changes at the Permit Center are improving the customer experience. This would include a survey for Chamber members to fill out about their expectations and experiences as applicants and customers. 🌱

If you want to share your Permit Center experiences or suggest ways for the Permit Center to improve its performance and eliminate “road-blocks” in the permitting process, please contact Chamber CEO Colleen Bailey at President & CEO, at (831) 751-7725 or at colleen@SalinasChamber.com. Also, please let her know about your POSITIVE experiences with the Permit Center.

Student - from page 1

elected Monterey County Superintendent of Schools (currently, Dr. Deneen Guss) and governed by the elected Monterey County Board of Education. It's the regional support agency for the county's 24 school districts, eight charter schools, and two community college districts. It also operates specialized countywide programs, such as preschool and alternative education.

Recently the Monterey County Office of Education has implemented high-profile initiatives that its Board of Education identifies as priorities. As reported in the June 2026 issue of the Business Journal, the Monterey County Office of Education has begun construction of a Professional Development Conference Center at its main campus on Blanco Road in Salinas. In addition, the agency has launched the Gladeo Monterey County online platform at <https://mcoe.gladeo.org> to help students explore and prepare for potential jobs and careers.

Gladeo is a Santa Monica-based Public Benefit Corporation founded by two sisters wanting to promote career exploration for young people. It specializes in "configurable career navigation platforms, career videos, and research-based, future-ready virtual career development and readiness courses." The Monterey County Office of Education connected with Gladeo through the Bay Area Community College Consortium (28 colleges based in the San Francisco Bay Area and Monterey Bay Area) and arranged for users to have free access to the website.

Besides introducing Gladeo Monterey County directly to students, the Monterey County Office of Education also encourages students' families (especially frustrated and worried parents) to use it to learn about career pathways in Monterey County and beyond. In fact, any person interested in pursuing a new career in Monterey

For Businesses

GLADEO MONTEREY COUNTY

**A Free Career
Navigation Platform for
Monterey County**

Explore Gladeo Monterey County at
mcoe.gladeo.org

What is Gladeo Monterey County

The Gladeo Monterey County Career Navigation Tool is a new innovative online platform designed to help students explore and prepare for career opportunities. This interactive site allows students to dive into career options independently and discover a variety of industries and professions in an engaging and hands-on way.

Who is the Gladeo Monterey County designed for?

Gladeo Monterey County is free for all students, including family members, and anyone interested in exploring career pathways in Monterey County and beyond.

Local businesses can join Gladeo Monterey County for free!

This free opportunity allows organizations to feature themselves and share career opportunities with students exploring potential jobs

Visit:

Montereycoe.org/for-communities/Gladeo-Monterey-County for more information

Business Feature
Request Form



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The QR code provides direct access to the Business Feature Request Form, where businesses can initiate their free business spotlight on the Gladeo Monterey County platform to showcase their brand and share career opportunities with students.



FIND YOUR DREAM CAREER IN MONTEREY COUNTY

Take a free career quiz. Learn about careers. Find programs.

A Project of the Monterey County Office of Education powered by  **GLADEO**

Let Teri Pimentel at the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) Communications Office know when you have registered your business on the Gladeo Monterey County website, so MCOE can include your stories at local career fairs. Note that Gladeo Monterey County business partners can submit employee video stories and career journeys to build brand awareness and inspire the local talent pool. Contact Teri at (831) 755-0301 or at tpimentel@montereycoe.org.

County would find this website to be a useful start. When the Monterey County Office of Education participates in job fairs, it sets up a table where attendees may try out Gladeo Monterey County.

As described below, Monterey County businesses also have opportunities to benefit from the website as potential future employers of these students.

The Gladeo Monterey County Website Experience

The website includes the following information:

Personal Career Exploration — this section allows students to learn about top industries, career paths, and employers in the Monterey County region. It includes facts, practical advice, and guidance on how to pursue these careers.

Career Quiz — introduced with a statement: “This is not about what you know. It’s about knowing yourself.” Students answer questions, and an analysis of the answers allows students to map their personality types and interests to potential career options and industries. Once that information is known, the student can further explore these options at other sections of the Gladeo Monterey County website.

Detailed Job Profiles — this section describes some of the

well-paid professions for which local Monterey County job applicants are in short supply. Current featured jobs include Family Medicine Physician, Emergency Medical Technician, Medical Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Agricultural Products Inspector, Agricultural Technician, Agricultural Engineer, Welder, Accountant and Auditor, and Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic.

Lists of Career Pathway Opportunities — there are sections listing “featured industries,” “featured spotlights,” and “featured companies.”

Educational Options — students can use the program finder to find certificate, degree, and training programs that will help them pursue specific careers.

Scholarship Opportunities - organizations such as the Monterey County Farm Bureau and Arts Council for Monterey County offer educational scholarships to local students, and those scholarships are listed here.

Inspirational Stories and Videos — workers from diverse backgrounds describe the paths they’ve taken to pursue their professional careers.

Career Resources — students can get a personalized newsfeed of events, networking opportunities,

Promote Your Business

Local businesses can join Gladeo Monterey County for free!

This free opportunity allows organizations to feature themselves and share career opportunities with students exploring potential jobs

[Free Business Feature Request Form](#)

MCOE looks forward to showcasing Gladeo Monterey County at upcoming career fairs and events. Schools or community organizations interested in hosting a presentation can reach out to MCOE’s Communications Office at communications@montereycoe.org.

Go to <https://www.montereycoe.org/for-communities/gladeo-career-exploration> for information on how to promote your business on the Gladeo Monterey County website.

internships, and other resources. For example, one posting on the newsfeed includes a link to job opportunities for Industrial Machinery Mechanics, Machinery Maintenance Workers, and Millwrights at Waste Management (WM).

Garbage collection and recycling is more than driving the trucks: keeping the trucks operating requires a skilled and trained workforce that can make \$100,000 with a 40-hour workweek.

Students who have used the Gladeo Monterey County website report being surprised about two things: “their interests go to places they didn’t expect” and “pay can be good without years of expensive education.”

Why Businesses May Be Interested in Gladeo Monterey County

How can Chamber members use the Gladeo Monterey County website to find their future workforce? Local businesses and organizations may join the website at no charge to feature themselves and share career opportunities with students exploring potential jobs.

Featured companies on the Gladeo Monterey County website include Taylor Farms, Driscoll’s, Cruzio Internet, Joby Aviation,



Local businesses and organizations may join the website at no charge to feature themselves and share career opportunities with students exploring potential jobs.

Salinas Valley Health, Montage Health, Natividad (the county health system), the County of Monterey, the Monterey County Sheriff’s Office, the Monterey County Regional Fire District, Cal Fire, Waste Management (WM), the Pebble Beach Company, and Monterey County Works (Parks and Recreation Department).

The “Free Business Feature Request Form” can be found as a button on the Monterey County Office of Education Gladeo Career Exploration website at <https://www.montereycoe.org/for-communities/gladeo-career-exploration>. Businesses seeking more information about promoting their career opportunities on Gladeo Monterey County may contact Monterey County Office of Education Communications Officer Teri Pimentel at (831) 755-0301 or at tpimentel@montereycoe.org. 🌿



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BUSINESS JOURNAL



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MEMBER NEWS

Bay Federal Credit Union Checking Account Receives National Certification by Banking Advocates as Safe, Affordable Account

Bay Federal Credit Union announced that its HarborLight Checking Account was officially certified by the national Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund) as meeting the Bank On National Account Standards (2025 - 2026). The National safe account Standards, co-created by consumer advocates, leading national nonprofit organizations, civic leaders, and other financial institutions, designate both core and strongly recommended features that ensure low-cost, high-functionality, and consumer safety. Key features of the HarborLight Checking Account include a waivable monthly charge of only \$5, no overdraft or insufficient fund fees, the ability to pay bills and make purchases, and federal deposit insurance. The HarborLight Checking Account is available in every one of Bay Federal Credit Union's eight branches across Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey Counties. "At Bay Federal Credit Union, we believe that access to safe, affordable financial services is essential to building financial confidence and stability," said Carrie L. Birkhofer, President and Chief Executive Officer of Bay Federal Credit Union. "The Bank On certification of our HarborLight Checking Account reflects our ongoing commitment to providing practical solutions that support our members' financial well-being."



Bay Federal

CREDIT UNION

Monterey County Fair Announces International Year of the Woman Farmer Recognition Program

In alignment with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and the United Nations' designation of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, the Monterey County Fair & Event Center is proud to announce a new recognition program honoring exceptional women in agriculture throughout Monterey County and the Salinas Valley. Selected honorees will be recognized during a special International Year of the Woman Farmer Reception on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. in the Seaside Room at the Monterey County Fair & Event Center. The private reception will include a hosted bar, catered light bites and desserts, recognition remarks, media opportunities, and community celebration. In addition to the reception, the Fair will feature a dedicated agricultural exhibit throughout the duration of Fair week in the Salinas Room, showcasing the stories and accomplishments of each honoree. The exhibit will include professional profiles, photography, printed storytelling panels, and digital features highlighting the impact women continue to make across the region's agricultural landscape. "Women have long played a vital role in shaping Monterey County agriculture, from the fields and farms to innovation, leadership, and community advocacy," said Kelly Violini-Rodoni, CEO of the Monterey County Fair & Event Center. "This program is an opportunity to recognize those contributions while inspiring the next generation of agricultural leaders."



Church Brothers Farms Introduces Church Brothers Farms Organic, Reimagining Leafy Greens for Today's Wellness-minded Consumer

Church Brothers Farms is introducing Church Brothers Farms Organic, a new retail brand that redefines how organic produce is merchandised at retail. Built around the concept of functional wellness, the brand combines easy-to-understand nutritional benefits, thoughtfully designed packaging and right-sized portions to create a differentiated offering for today's health-conscious consumers. Debuting this summer, the initial Church Brothers Farms Organic lineup includes Organic Baby Spinach, Organic Arugula, Organic Spring Mix, Organic 50/50 Blend and Organic Power Greens. Each variety is packaged in a convenient 3.5-ounce bag and features simple functional wellness icons that highlight naturally occurring nutritional benefits including support for immunity, strong bones, antioxidant intake, eye health, cognitive function, and energy and oxygen transport. "Consumers have never been more interested in wellness, but produce hasn't always made it easy to connect the dots between nutrition and the health benefits fruits and vegetables naturally provide," said Tracy Carranza, Vice President of Retail Sales for Church Brothers Farms. "Our goal was to create an organic line that makes those benefits





immediately recognizable while remaining true to what produce does best: delivering real nutrition through whole foods.” While organic certification remains an important purchase driver, Church Brothers Farms believes today’s consumers are looking for more than an organic seal. Increasingly, shoppers want foods that align with their personal wellness goals and fit naturally into their everyday routines. “We weren’t interested in simply launching another organic salad line,” said Loree Dowse, Vice President of Marketing & Communications for Church Brothers Farms. “We asked ourselves how we could make the produce department more relevant to today’s wellness-minded consumer. That led us to rethink everything from the package format and portion size to the way we communicate nutritional benefits at shelf. Church Brothers Farms Organic is more than a collection of leafy greens. It’s a brand designed to help consumers see produce not just as something they eat, but as an everyday investment in their health.”

CSUMB Welcomes Carlos Vargas as Interim President

California State University Chancellor Mildred Garcia has appointed Carlos Vargas as Cal State University, Monterey Bay’s sixth university leader. He will serve as interim president and will join the Otter RAFT this summer. Vargas has a long career of leading higher education institutions, supporting social mobility and fostering community engagement. Vargas’s appointment is effective Aug. 1, pending the California State University Board of Trustees’ approval of his compensation at its July meeting. Andrew Lawson, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, will serve as Executive in Charge starting July 1, ensuring a smooth transition until Vargas’s arrival. “I am so excited and believe that he is the right person, with the right experience, to fit with the Otter RAFT,” said President Vanya Quiñones, who departs for the presidency of Cal Poly Pomona at the end of June. “He has the values and the experience to keep our momentum going. The university will be in good hands.” Vargas brings more than three decades of experience in higher education, having served as a faculty member, researcher, provost and university president. A first-generation college graduate, he earned his Bachelor of Science in physics from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, followed by two master’s degrees, in aerospace science and physics, and a doctorate degree spanning both fields, all from the University of Michigan. His leadership path includes positions at Kent State University, Central State University and Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, before most recently serving for 10 years as president of Southeast Missouri State University, home of the Redhawks. Now, he’s trading Redhawks for Otters, and by all accounts, he’s ready to dive right in. “I am truly excited to jump into the Otter Plunge and participate in campus traditions,” Vargas said on the day his appointment was announced. “Every institution has its own community, its own momentum and its own story still being written. I am looking forward to contributing to the great work already happening here and moving forward together.” Throughout his career, Vargas has championed student achievement, supported inclusive learning environments and forged partnerships that strengthen the communities universities serve. He also has experience at an HBCU, an institution designated among Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which reflects values closely aligned with CSUMB’s mission. As an experienced president with a strong track record and the right background to keep momentum going, Vargas is expected to provide steady, collaborative leadership as CSUMB continues advancing its strategic priorities for students and the Central Coast. Campus community members will have the opportunity to meet Interim President Vargas in person during the fall semester.



Hartnell Community College District Appoints Cesar Torrico as Vice President of Human Resources

Hartnell College has announced the appointment of Cesar Torrico as its new vice president of human resources. He began his role on July 1, 2026. Torrico brings nearly 30 years of experience in human resources leadership and educational administration, serving diverse school communities throughout California. Torrico currently serves as assistant superintendent of human resources for the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District, where he oversees labor relations, recruitment and retention, employee relations, and organizational development. He began his career as a middle school history teacher in the Alum Rock School District in San Jose before spending more than 15 years as an elementary and K-8 principal. Torrico later transitioned into senior human resources leadership roles across multiple districts, including serving as director of human resources for the Santa Rita Union Elementary School District in Salinas. Throughout his career, Torrico has earned a reputation for fostering collaborative labor-management relationships and advancing equitable, transparent personnel practices. He has served as chief negotiator for multiple collective bargaining agreements and brings extensive experience in supporting positive workplace environments that benefit employees and students alike. Torrico holds a bachelor’s degree in history and a master’s degree in Chicano studies from San José State University.



Improvements Completed for a Major Thoroughfare Between the Salinas Valley and the Monterey Peninsula

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

In November 2016, 67.71 percent of Monterey County voters approved Measure X, a sales tax proposed by the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) to fund regional and local transportation projects. It was the fifth attempt since 1988 to pass a county transportation sales tax.

Now the results are being seen and appreciated. On July 14, 2026, TAMC and the City of Marina hosted a ceremony to celebrate completion of the first major regional highway construction project funded by Measure X: the Imjin Parkway Widening & Roundabout Project. Your Chamber had a representative at the event.

Improvements along the Imjin Parkway corridor, from Imjin Road to Reservation Road (approximately 1.7 miles) include expansion of the roadway to four lanes, constructing four new roundabouts while eliminating four traffic signals, and modifying the existing traffic signal at the intersection of Reservation Road and Imjin Parkway.

It also includes new Class II bike lanes (striped, on-street lanes reserved for bicycles, marked by pavement stencils and signs), a multi-use pathway, crosswalk beacons, storm-water improvements, street lighting, landscaping, and commissioned artwork.

As often noted in the Business Journal, highway construction projects in California take a long time to plan and build. The City of Marina awarded the first engineering services contract for the widening of Imjin Parkway in October 2016, a month before voters approved the Measure X sales tax that would be essential for paying for the project.

Environmental review under the California Environmental Quality



July 14, 2026, was a day to celebrate the completion of the first major regional highway project that's funded by the county's Measure X sales tax.



Metal sculpture artwork in the roundabouts designed and manufactured by Signs by Van includes an egret that has caught a gopher. If you have children in your car, tell them to look for it when you drive by. (Keep your own eyes focused on navigating the roundabout.)

Act (CEQA) was completed as a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in 2018, and no one tried to use legal objections to CEQA review as a strategy to delay or stop the project.

Funding commitments were obtained by 2019. With \$18.25 million available from Measure X revenue and \$2 million available from City of Marina development impact fees, the City of Marina was able to obtain \$20.25 million in state matching grants from revenue generated by the gas tax and vehicle license fee increases imposed in 2017 through California Senate Bill

1 (SB 1).

TAMC declared at the formal kickoff event for the project on July 15, 2023 that its "ability to secure the SB1 funding is due to having a local funding source, Measure X, to leverage for additional state funding for local transportation projects and programs."

Construction formally started on Feb. 13, 2024. The project was completed on-budget and months ahead of schedule, with local Marina-based construction company Monterey Peninsula Engineering acting as the prime general contractor. The last component of

the project was installation of the artwork within the four roundabouts. These metal sculptures were designed and manufactured by Signs by Van, a company based in Monterey County.

The Imjin Parkway Widening & Roundabout Project happened only because of new county and state taxes imposed in the mid-2010s. Is the significant improvement in traffic flow on a main route between Salinas and the Monterey Peninsula worth the amount you've paid in higher taxes?

Road improvements are not free; in fact, this kind of construction is expensive. The final cost of the Imjin Parkway Widening & Roundabout Project is about \$40.5 million -- the most expensive project ever built by the City of Marina.

Other Major Projects Funded by Measure X

The other major regional project in Monterey County completed so far using Measure X sales tax revenue is the Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST) South County Operations & Maintenance Facility. The ceremony to celebrate completion of that project was held on Oct. 11, 2021.

A Chamber representative attended that event.

Measure X has also helped to fund other prominent smaller regional projects in Monterey County, including the Holman Highway 68 Roundabout at the junction of State Route 1, State Route 68, and 17-Mile Drive in Monterey. The ceremony to celebrate completion of that project was held on Oct. 12, 2017. A Chamber representative attended that event.

Ongoing and upcoming major highway projects funded by Measure X include the Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST) SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project now under construction, the Highway 156/Castroville Boulevard Interchange Project, the US 101 South of Salinas Corridor Improvement Project (described in the May and June issues of the Business Journal), and the Scenic

“
On July 14, 2026, TAMC and the City of Marina hosted a ceremony to celebrate completion of the first major regional highway construction project funded by Measure X: the Imjin Parkway Widening & Roundabout Project.”

Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project.
All of these projects were designated in the Transportation Safety & Investment Plan approved in 2016 by the board of directors of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) before Measure X was put on the ballot. Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce formally endorsed and supported Measure X in 2016. 🌱



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Monterey Bay Parent

Monterey Bay Parent is a local media resource connecting families throughout Monterey County with trusted parenting advice, local news, and things to do with kids. Through their website, monthly print issues, and events like the Back to School Expo and Summer Fun and Camp Expo, they help parents navigate everything from local schools and camps to holidays and family activities. They're proud to serve as a go-to community resource for families across the Monterey Bay area.

MontereyBayParent.com, abreznay@montereybayparent.com, (831) 582-1373.



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RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



TheogCompanies Ribbon Cutting

TheogCompanies is made up of leading salad and vegetable brands that support lasting market growth for businesses, growers and shareholders. Each brand strives for fresher foods, smarter packaging, and responsible growth across every part of the business. Thank you to everyone who joined us in celebrating TheogCompanies and the official merger of their Monterey and Salinas teams through a ribbon-cutting ceremony.



Lunch Connect with Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers

Chamber members gathered for a Lunch Connect at Raising Cane's on July 1. The relaxed environment provided an excellent opportunity for attendees to network, introduce their businesses, and build meaningful professional connections. A special thank you to Raising Cane's for hosting this month's networking event and supporting the local business community.



Mills Ranch Apartments Groundbreaking Ceremony

CHISPA was excited to announce that construction has officially begun on Mills Ranch Apartments in King City and celebrated this exciting milestone with a groundbreaking ceremony. Mills Ranch Apartments will provide 40 affordable two- and three-bedroom apartments across five parcels within the Mills Ranch Subdivision. Thirty of the apartments will be reserved for farmworker families, helping address the critical need for affordable housing in South Monterey County.



Marketing 101 Workshop

Chamber members and local business professionals gathered for a Marketing 101 workshop featuring Marc da Motta, founder of Pathfinder Content Marketing. Attendees learned practical strategies to enhance brand storytelling and develop clear, customer-focused marketing strategies to drive business growth.



Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation Cafecito

The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Foundation hosted a special Open House and Cafecito event for Downtown Salinas Farmers Market vendors. Catered by Secret Bakery and Nostalgia Cafe Co., the gathering brought local vendors together to connect with the Chamber team and board members, learn about upcoming marketing opportunities, and share valuable feedback over coffee and pastries.



Behind the Scenes at the California Rodeo Salinas with the Junior Chamber

Members of the Salinas Valley Chamber Foundation's Junior Chamber recently gathered for an exclusive, behind-the-scenes look at the historic California Rodeo Salinas during their July social mixer. The unique event offered young professionals a rare glimpse into the massive logistical operations, community heritage, and volunteer efforts required to produce one of the city's most iconic traditions.

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2

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3

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(PARKING LOT)



4

ARMADILLO

SHERWOOD
HALL



5

HAPPY ALIEN

SALINAS REGIONAL
SOCCER COMPLEX



6

COYOTE

ONE MAIN
STREET



7

CAT

VINEYARD
CHURCH



8

DOG

STAR
MARKET



DOL Issues Guidance on FMLA Leave When Travelling to Medical Appointments

By Bradley J. Levang, Attorney, Fenton & Keller



The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has long allowed

eligible employees to take leave to attend qualifying medical appointments. Earlier this year, the federal Department of Labor's (DOL) Wage and Hour Division issued an Opinion Letter confirming that employees may use FMLA leave for both the medical appointment and the time reasonably necessary to travel to and from that medical appointment.

The DOL Opinion Letter addressed a question about an employee requesting intermittent FMLA leave to attend medical appointments for their own serious health condition. The employee provided their employer with a medical certification which indicated that the medical appointments would occur once per month and last for 45 minutes.

The medical certification lacked any indication about the amount of travel time required to attend the medical appointments, but the employee told their employer that they needed one hour to travel to or from their medical appointments. The DOL concluded that this travel time would also qualify for FMLA leave.

Generally speaking, the FMLA provides eligible employees with up to 12 work weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period for the employee's own serious health condition or to care for a qualifying family member, such as a parent, child, or spouse, with a serious health condition.

A "serious health condition" is an illness, injury, impairment, or

physical or mental condition that involves inpatient care or continuing treatment by a healthcare provider. The FMLA provides job-protected leave for medical appointments, such as those related to the diagnosis, monitoring, addressing, or treating of an employee's or their qualifying family member's serious health condition.

In its Opinion Letter, the DOL reasoned that since FMLA-qualifying medical treatment often cannot occur without travel to the medical provider's location, such travel must therefore be considered "part and parcel" of that medical treatment. Accordingly, the DOL concluded that such travel time would also be designated as FMLA leave.

The DOL Opinion Letter provided an example where the employee's 30 minutes of travel time to a medical appointment, and the time at the medical appointment, during the employee's scheduled workday qualified as FMLA leave.

Not only does this example illustrate the topic of travel time, but it also serves as a reminder to employers that even though the total amount of FMLA leave is stated in workweeks, employers should not forget that FMLA leave can be taken in smaller increments. Employers should have procedures in place for providing and tracking an employee's use of FMLA leave, even leave taken in smaller time increments.

In the initial question presented to

the DOL, the medical certification lacked any mention of travel time. The DOL explained that a medical certification need not explicitly indicate the amount of travel time since the FMLA does not require a health care provider to furnish such information. Employers should not deny FMLA leave requests, or leave for the eligible travel time, just because the travel time is not explicitly indicated on a medical certification.

The DOL also provided helpful guidance for minimizing the potential misuse of FMLA leave for unrelated travel time. The opinion Letter indicated that only the portion of the employee's absence which is attributable to the qualifying medical treatment and the associated travel would be covered FMLA leave.

The DOL stated that FMLA-protected leave for travel time does not include travel to or from, or stops for, activities unrelated to obtaining medical care and treatment. The opinion Letter provided a hypothetical example of a parent ineligible for FMLA leave for the travel time to accompany their child who has a chronic serious health condition but does not need care during a school band trip since that leave is unrelated to the child's serious health condition.

While opinion letters do not carry precedential weight like statutes or regulations, they nevertheless may be a helpful resource for HR professionals and employers. Based on



The Family and Medical Leave Act provides job-protected leave for medical appointments, such as those related to the diagnosis, monitoring, addressing, or treating of an employee's or their qualifying family member's serious health condition.

this recent opinion letter, employers should consider evaluating their FMLA leave policies and procedures regarding travel to and from medical appointments. California employers should also keep in mind that the DOL Opinion Letter only addressed travel to medical appointments with respect to the federal FMLA, and made no mention of the California Family Rights Act ("CFRA").

While the federal FMLA and the CFRA both provide job-protected leave and are similar in many respects, they are also different in others. Employers should consult with their HR department and/or legal counsel should they have questions about providing employees with leave related to travel to qualifying medical appointments.

Bradley Levang is an attorney with the Fenton & Keller law firm. 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.

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Ag Secretary Rollins Invites True Organic Products CEO to Washington: A Proud Moment for the Salinas Valley

By Jim Bogart

It is not every day that a leader from our community is invited to Washington, D.C. to help shape national agricultural policy. So when U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins extended a personal invitation to Monterey's own Jake Evans, Founder and CEO of True Organic Products Inc. — a valued member of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce — it was a moment worth marking, both for what it says about Jake's success and for what it means for the growers of this Valley.

Rollins hosted a USDA Fertilizer Press Conference and industry roundtable to announce the Fertilizer Investment & Expansion for Long-Term Domestic Supply (FIELDS) Program, a new initiative focused on strengthening domestic fertilizer manufacturing and expanding farmer access to critical agricultural inputs.

The gathering brought together a select group of agricultural leaders, cooperatives, and fertilizer manufacturers from across the country, and the Secretary was joined by USDA Deputy Secretary Stephen Vaden, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin.

Among all the invited industry leaders, Jake was the only representative of the organic fertilizer sector. When our federal government sat down to chart the future of domestic fertilizer production, the voice of organic agriculture in that room belonged to one of our own.

Jake used that voice well. He spoke about the dedication of organic farmers who have invested years transitioning their land and building production systems that yield some of the highest-quality



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins hosted a USDA Fertilizer Press Conference and industry roundtable to announce the Fertilizer Investment & Expansion for Long-Term Domestic Supply (FIELDS) Program, a new initiative focused on strengthening domestic fertilizer manufacturing and expanding farmer access to critical agricultural inputs. Photo by Dr. Michael Menes.



A federal commitment to domestic fertilizer production means greater stability, greater affordability, and greater resilience for the operations that earned this Valley its title as the Salad Bowl of the World. And when our growers do well, this entire community does well.

crops in the world. He stood up for the integrity of the USDA Organic Seal, describing it as one of the most cherished symbols of trust in American agriculture, and he made the case for a level playing

field—ensuring that imported products are held to standards equivalent to those our domestic producers meet every day.

That advocacy speaks directly for this Valley. The Salinas Valley is a national leader in organic production, and for more than two decades True Organic has served local growers by transforming agricultural and food-processing byproducts into soil-building fertilizers.

Having spent my career alongside the growers and shippers of this region—as past President of the Grower-Shipper Association and past Chair of the Board of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce—I can attest that the challenges the FIELDS Program addresses are not abstractions here.

I am retired now, and I will

confess that retirement suits me just fine—though news like this is almost enough to make a man want to get back in the game. Almost. Input costs and supply reliability are among the most persistent pressures our growers face, season after season.

A federal commitment to domestic fertilizer production means greater stability, greater affordability, and greater resilience for the operations that earned this Valley its title as the Salad Bowl of the World. And when our growers do well, this entire community does well—the shippers, the suppliers, the workers, and the families who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

So, on behalf of the Salinas Valley grower community, I want to express our sincere gratitude to Secretary Rollins. Thank you for launching the FIELDS Program, for investing in American agriculture and domestic manufacturing, and for ensuring that organic agriculture had a seat at the table by inviting Jake to share his story. Recognition of this kind does not come along often, and it deserves to be acknowledged.

As the event concluded, Jake offered the Secretary a simple, heartfelt message: “You are our hope.” Those words ring true in this Valley. With committed leadership in Washington, and with leaders like Jake Evans representing us there, the future of American agriculture—and of Salinas Valley agriculture—is in good hands. Congratulations, Jake. You have done this community proud. 🌱

Jim Bogart, now retired, is the Past Chair of the Board of the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce and is the Past President of the Grower-Shipper Association.

Leading Through Change: Protecting Health Care Access in the Salinas Valley

By Colleen Bailey, SVCC CEO/President

As our community prepares for significant reductions in federal health care spending and decreased access to insurance coverage under H.R. 1, commonly referred to as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce is committed to ensuring our community understands how these changes will affect our region.

The new law creates additional barriers to care by restricting Medicare eligibility to U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (green card holders), certain immigrants from Cuba and Haiti, and individuals from countries with Compacts of Free Association.

It eliminates eligibility for many other legally present immigrants, including those with Temporary Protected Status, refugees, and asylees. In addition, the law requires childless adults to complete eligibility redeterminations every six months and meet an 80-hour monthly work or school requirement. Together, these changes are projected to cause millions of Americans to lose health coverage.

Fortunately, our region has a long history of proactive leadership in addressing health care challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local leaders helped ensure that essential agricultural workers were vaccinated early, allowing our agricultural industry to continue operating while protecting the health of workers and their families. Our response became a model for the nation.

One organization leading the way today is Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas under the leadership of CEO Dr. Maximiliano Cuevas. This nonprofit organization is dedicated to providing comprehensive, high-quality health care to men, women, and children, with a particular focus on farmworker families and the agricultural community—populations that



Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas ... a nonprofit organization, is dedicated to providing comprehensive, high-quality health care to men, women, and children, with a particular focus on farmworker families and the agricultural community.

are expected to be among those most affected by H.R. 1.

Clinica de Salud is the region’s only Federally Qualified Health Center offering comprehensive medical, dental, behavioral health, and specialty care services. The organization continues to expand its reach and will soon open a new behavioral health clinic on Sanborn Road, bringing its total number of clinics to 15.

Cuevas has also developed innovative solutions to one of the region’s most pressing challenges: language access. While Spanish is the primary language for many of Clinica’s patients, only about 6% of physicians nationwide speak Spanish.

To help close that gap, Clinica has utilized H-1B visas to recruit highly skilled physicians from Mexico through California Assembly Bill 2860, which became law in 2024. The legislation was designed to address California’s shortage of culturally competent health care professionals and improve care for the state’s large Latino population.

Working in partnership with health officials in California and Mexico, Clinica has helped recruit physicians to serve nonprofit community health centers in underserved communities, including San Benito, Tulare, Los Angeles, and Orange counties.

Today, 24 physicians specializing in pediatrics, obstetrics and



Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas CEO Dr. Maximiliano Cuevas.

gynecology, internal medicine, and family medicine are practicing under this program after receiving physician and surgeon licenses from the Medical Board of California. Eligible physicians receive a nonrenewable three-year license to practice exclusively in approved federally qualified health centers.

Currently, 11 of those physicians serve patients at Clinica de Salud. This September, additional psychiatrists are expected to join the organization to help staff the new behavioral health clinic. In addition, 95 physicians will begin arriving in September 2026 and will be working in 18 FQHC clinic systems throughout California. The program has expanded access to care while improving the patient experience.

Unfortunately, this innovative solution currently faces uncertainty. The H-1B visa program has been the subject of proposals that would significantly restrict the entry of foreign professionals. Earlier this year, the federal administration proposed a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B petitions for workers applying from outside the United States. A federal judge later struck down the proposal, ruling that the fee constituted an unconstitutional tax. For now, the program remains intact.

Cuevas is also investing in the long-term pipeline of local health

care professionals. Clinica de Salud maintains strong partnerships with leading California universities through student mentorship, public health advocacy, and programs that connect pre-medical students with opportunities in the Salinas Valley. Cuevas regularly speaks at UC Santa Cruz to encourage Latino and other underrepresented students to pursue careers in medicine while introducing them to the many opportunities available in our community.

UC Santa Cruz, who has partnered with Clinica de Salud for many years, is also helping build a stronger local physician workforce. In partnership with UC Davis, the university has launched the PRIME Central Coast Program, which is specifically designed to train physicians who will practice in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties.

The inaugural class will begin medical training in July 2027. University leaders view this regional pathway as an important first step toward eventually establishing a full medical school at UC Santa Cruz. That would represent a tremendous opportunity for health care providers throughout the Salinas Valley to develop and retain the next generation of physicians close to home.

The Chamber’s next signature event, “Salinas Valley Speaks,” will feature the region’s hospital CEOs as they discuss how their organizations are responding to these rapidly changing challenges in health care. If you have not yet purchased your tickets, I encourage you to visit salinaschamber.com to learn more and register.

Our region is fortunate to be served by health care leaders who do not shy away from difficult challenges. Instead, they respond with innovation, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to improving the health and well-being of the communities they serve. 🌱



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Digging Deep Into the Deep Aquifers

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Monterey County continues to grapple with the future of the “Deep Aquifers” in the lower (northern) part of the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin, where the basin approaches the ocean.

The Deep Aquifers have recently provided reliable irrigation water for farms in areas subject to seawater intrusion. In addition, Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula communities rely on the Deep Aquifers in various ways for drinking water supply.

But current trends in groundwater extraction from the Deep Aquifers may put this water supply at risk of seawater intrusion. When a well begins extracting groundwater contaminated with sodium chloride (salt) from seawater, that well is no longer useful for drinking water or irrigation water unless the water is desalinated. Desalination equipment is expensive to build and operate.

Only in the past few years has Monterey County obtained a comprehensive understanding of the Deep Aquifers, and the news is disappointing. There is apparently a legitimate risk of seawater intrusion. Soon, local government officials will need to make tough decisions about future use of the Deep Aquifers.

How Deep Aquifers Became the Alternative to Traditional Aquifers

In the lower Salinas Valley, groundwater for agricultural irrigation and municipal supply has traditionally come from two separate groundwater aquifers found at different depths.

There’s an aquifer generally found about 180 feet below ground. Below this aquifer is a second aquifer, found generally about 400 feet below ground. Both of these aquifers are confined above and below

by impermeable layers of clay. These two aquifers are not empty caverns with lakes or flowing underground rivers. They consist of permeable layers of aggregate material where water collects and moves. The confined aquifers are replenished (“recharged”) by lateral movement of groundwater that originates from subsurface river and creek flow through alluvial sediments, precipitation (rainfall), and surface water drainage. The Salinas River continuously flows underground, even when the riverbed is dry.

Together, these two aquifers are sometimes called the “Pressure” aquifer, because internal pressure of the groundwater in these confined aquifers is higher than the surface atmospheric pressure. The name of the 180/400 Foot Aquifer Subbasin of the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin derives from these two aquifers. However, these two aquifers are found elsewhere in the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin — notably the Monterey Subbasin near and in the City of Marina and the Seaside Subbasin near and in the City of Seaside.

Unfortunately, salty ocean water is moving underground into some parts of the 180/400 Foot Aquifers as “seawater intrusion” and spoiling the usefulness of wells for agricultural irrigation and drinking water. This is not a new phenomenon — Castroville area farmers first noticed their wells turning salty in the 1930s, and a 1946 state report documented it.

Seawater intrusion has happened because water users are “overdrafting” the aquifers; that is, extracting an amount of water from the aquifers that exceeds the amount of water that recharges them. The State of California has designated the 180/400 Foot Aquifer Subbasin as “critically overdrafted.”

With seawater intrusion



Deep Aquifers Study

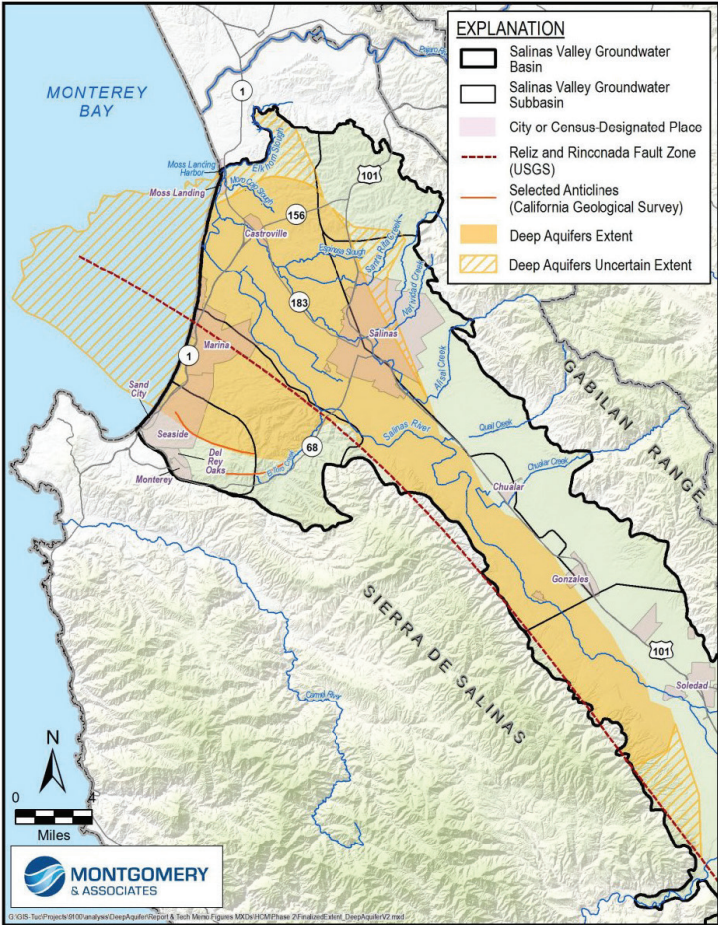


Figure 3-5. Finalized Extent of the Deep Aquifers in the Salinas Valley

The Deep Aquifers Study released in 2024 shows the location of the Deep Aquifers.

contaminating parts of the 180-Foot and 400-Foot aquifers, water producers and users have decided to drill deep wells into relatively unfamiliar aquifers that may not have been disturbed for tens of thousands of years. While these wells are an immediate (albeit expensive) solution to a problem, some people believe water producers and users have delved too greedily and too deeply by penetrating the Deep Aquifers.

The Mysterious Deep Aquifers

Mid-20th century oil prospectors who were in the lower Salinas Valley to drill very deep exploratory wells into the geological Monterey Formation discovered the Deep Aquifers as they drilled down. These aquifers are often described

as generally located about 900 feet below the surface, although at least one Deep Aquifer well has been drilled to a depth of 1,970 feet.

Sometimes the Deep Aquifers are referenced by the names of the two separate geological formations where they are located: the Paso Robles Formation and the deeper Santa Margarita Formation. A 2003 report concluded that what was then commonly called the “Deep Aquifer” is actually two aquifers, which are hydraulically isolated from each other.

In 2002, the U.S. Geological Survey published an analysis of Deep Aquifer water from a well monitoring site near three Marina Coast Water District (MCWD) wells drilled into the Deep Aquifers. Tests

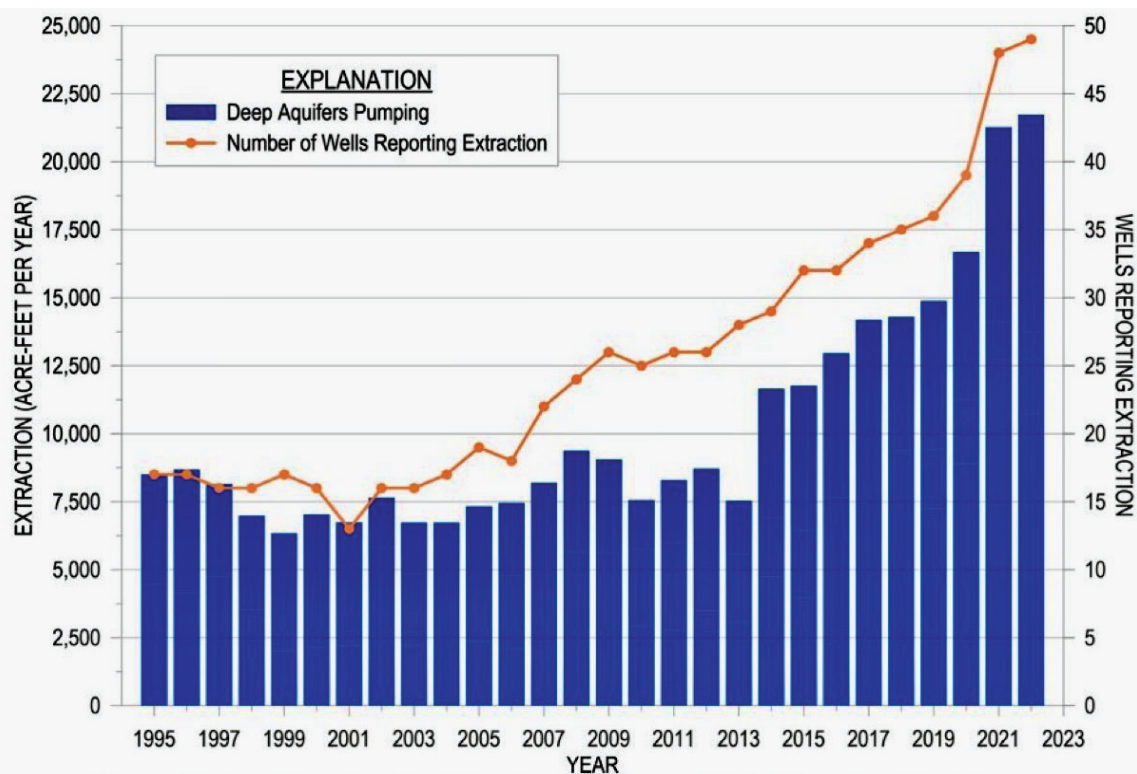


Figure 1-2. Total Deep Aquifers Extraction with Count of Wells Reporting Extraction

The Deep Aquifers Study released in 2024 reveals the extent of pumping in the Deep Aquifers.

indicated that the water was between 22,000 and 31,000 years old, depending on the depth. This suggested that the Deep Aquifer is “paleowater,” ancient groundwater that is not recharged. If true, pumping water from the Deep Aquifers would permanently deplete them.

Reports and studies indicate that water producers and users began drilling into the Deep Aquifers in the mid-1970s. In 1976, the Monterey County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (now known as the Monterey County Water Resources Agency) drilled a test well to determine the potential of the Deep Aquifers as a water source for a proposed irrigation project in Castroville. MCWRA found the Deep Aquifers between 675 and 1250 feet below ground.

Drilling so deep for groundwater is expensive. But as seawater intrusion advanced in the 180-Foot aquifer and subsequently in the 400-Foot aquifer, some water producers and users decided to drill into the Deep Aquifers.

Deep Aquifers Become Another Water Supply Source

In 1982, the Marina Coast Water District (MCWD) drilled into the Deep Aquifers for a new well after it had to discontinue use of wells in the 180/400 Foot Aquifer because of seawater intrusion. It then drilled into the Deep Aquifer in 1985 and in 1989 for two more wells. MCWD still uses two of those wells today to produce drinking water — it ceased using the third well in part because of the hot temperature of the water but has been rehabilitating it for future use.

Several other wells were drilled into the Deep Aquifers in the 1980s and 1990s for agricultural irrigation water, but these wells were reportedly no longer used after 1998, when the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP) began providing farmers in the lower Salinas Valley with irrigation water recycled from municipal wastewater.

Despite the success of CSIP, increased use of Deep Aquifer wells was inevitable as seawater

intrusion continued to advance in the 180/400 Foot Aquifer Subbasin. During drought years of 2012 to 2016, the number of wells and the volume of extracted water from the Deep Aquifers significantly increased.

Drilling of new wells and replacement wells continued after the drought ended. In 2021 and 2022 there was another drought, and CSIP fell short on fulfilling agricultural demand for irrigation water. Deep Aquifer wells allowed farmers to mitigate the effects of drought-instigated water shortages.

An Unwise Practice?

Not surprisingly, people who follow Monterey County water policies worried that increased pumping would drop groundwater water levels in the Deep Aquifers and allow seawater intrusion. In 2017, a report to the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) recommended a comprehensive investigation of the Deep Aquifers.

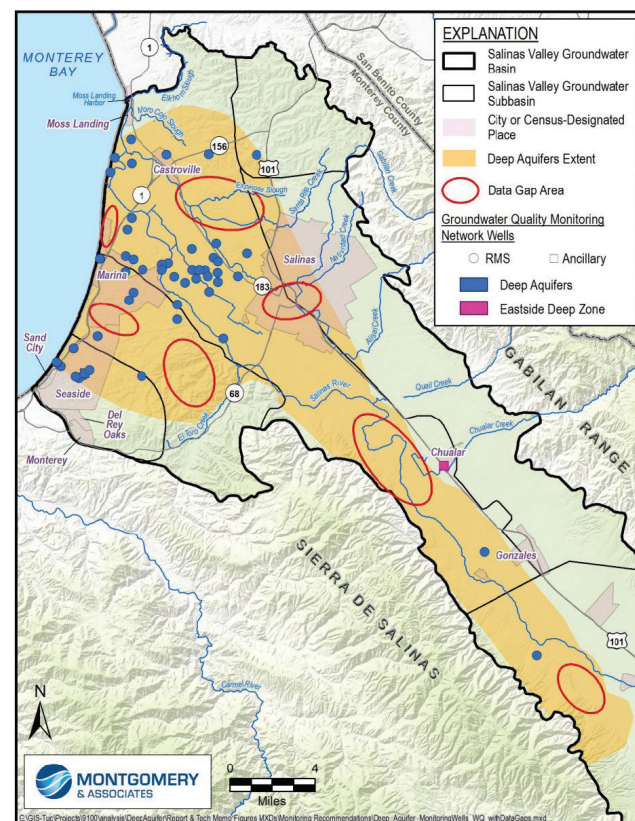


Figure 7-2. Groundwater Quality Monitoring Wells

The Deep Aquifers Study released in 2024 shows the location of monitoring wells for the Deep Aquifers.



Only in the past few years has Monterey County obtained a comprehensive understanding of the Deep Aquifers, and the news is disappointing. There is apparently a legitimate risk of seawater intrusion.’

Of particular interest was confirming whether or not the 180-Foot and 400-Foot aquifers recharge the Deep Aquifers.

In the meantime, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors adopted a 45-day interim ordinance in May 2018 that prohibited the county from accepting or processing any applications for new Deep Aquifer wells in areas impacted by seawater intrusion. Municipal drinking water wells and replacement wells were exempt from the moratorium.

Following that 45-day interim period, the Board of Supervisors enacted a successor ordinance extending the moratorium. It also required all owners of new wells in the Deep Aquifers to measure volume of groundwater extractions, monitor groundwater elevations and quality, and report all data to the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) and the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA). That ordinance expired in May 2020 and was not reinstated.

A 2020 update to the 2017 report to MCWRA maintained the original recommendation to investigate the Deep Aquifers. It reported 44 production wells and nine monitoring wells drilled into the Deep Aquifers, with 42 wells actively pumping water: 27 agricultural wells, 11 municipal wells, three industrial wells, and one domestic well.

In 2022, the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) implemented the 2017 and 2020 recommendations and hired a consulting firm to investigate the Deep Aquifers. This was done in cooperation with the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA), the County of Monterey, the City of Salinas, the Marina Coast Water District (MCWD) Groundwater Sustainability Agency, the Castroville Community Services District (CCSD), California Water Service (Cal Water), Alco Water Service, and agricultural interests.

In 2024, the study was released. It concluded the Deep Aquifers are not recharged from other aquifers, water levels are going down, and seawater intrusion is a risk. It identified 43 wells actively pumping water exclusively from the Deep Aquifers and another nine active wells that were extracting water from both the Deep Aquifers and the 400-Foot aquifer.

These findings spurred new actions. In December 2025, the Monterey County Board of



A multi-agency workshop for owners of wells in the Deep Aquifers was held on May 20, 2026.

Supervisors approved a Deep Aquifer Groundwater Management Plan. A working group then completed a Deep Aquifers Management Recommendations Memorandum in March 2026.

Warning Famers About Their Future Use of Deep Aquifer Wells

On May 20, 2026, a Deep Aquifers Well Owners Workshop was held at the Marina Coast Water District (MCWD) headquarters in the City of Marina to present findings and outline potential responses.

It was jointly hosted by the County of Monterey, the MCWD and its Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Monterey Subbasin, the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA), and the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA). About 60 people attended the workshop in person, with another 50 watching virtually. A representative of your Chamber was in attendance at the meeting.

Workshop panelists explained the 2024 study recommendations and listed recent monitoring activities. They presented recommendations for interim local management actions, which include seawater intrusion response planning, demand

management, and well permitting and destruction.

They also presented long-term solutions, which basically reiterated the list of expensive capital projects already proposed by SVBGSA to stop seawater intrusion and comply with the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

What were the implications of this workshop? There is a possibility that the County of Monterey will eventually impose a moratorium on new Deep Aquifer wells and require agricultural interests to cease using Deep Aquifer wells and destroy them.

These strict limits on wells may or may not apply to municipal water suppliers such as Cal Water and Alco in Salinas, the Marina Coast Water District, and Castroville Community Services District.

Groups such as the League of Women Voters of Monterey County and LandWatch Monterey County have asked the Board of Supervisors to reinstate the 2018-2020 moratorium on new and replacement wells in the Deep Aquifers. Interest groups that are critical of business practices in the agriculture industry may see an opportunity to gain political leverage by supporting a ban on Deep Aquifer wells.

Applications for new wells in the Deep Aquifers will require the County of Monterey Environmental Health Bureau to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that complies with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Opponents of proposed well projects will have an opportunity through the legislative and judicial branches to object to the adequacy of the environmental reviews. They can delay the drilling of wells for years while imposing burdensome legal and environmental analysis costs on the project applicant.

Expect substantial resistance to new wells from local groups represented by environmental law firms that specialize in CEQA objections.

Meanwhile, municipal water suppliers want to protect their Deep Aquifer wells from groundwater depletion and seawater intrusion. They may align with local government jurisdictions to support a moratorium on Deep Aquifer wells drilled or used for agricultural irrigation.

Discontinuing the use of Deep Aquifer wells would be another short-term blow to an agricultural industry in the Salinas Valley that is undergoing internal changes and facing new challenges. Your Chamber will be watching developments concerning Deep Aquifer public policies and practices. 🌱

DEEP AQUIFERS WELL OWNERS WORKSHOP

MCWD MAIN BOARD ROOM
MAY 20, 2026 • 1:30 PM



Salinas Valley Basin
Groundwater Sustainability Agency

RESERVE YOUR TICKETS: The 2026 Legacy of Leadership is Just Around the Corner

The Salinas Valley has always been defined by the strength of its leaders, those visionaries who have been of extraordinary service to our community and work behind the scenes to make our community a vibrant place to live, work, and thrive.

On Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., the local business community will gather to honor these trailblazers at the Salinas Valley Chamber's premier fall event: the Legacy of Leadership Awards.

Hosted at the beautiful, open-air Portobello's on Main courtyard at 150 Main St., Suite 116 in Salinas, this year's signature event is designed as an upscale, lively strolling event. Attendees

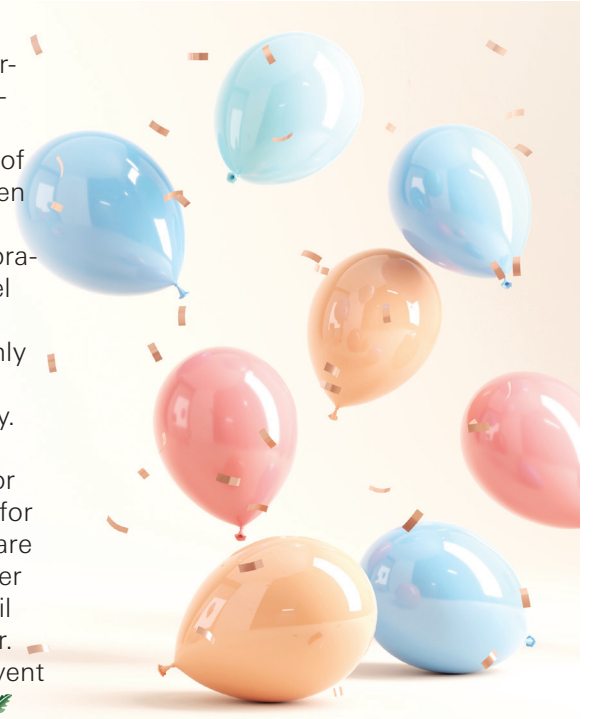
will have the opportunity to connect with fellow business owners, executives, and community leaders while enjoying premium local wines, beautifully curated hors d'oeuvres, and vibrant live networking.

The Chamber is proud to officially pull back the curtain and announce the stellar 2026 Honoree Lineup. This year, the Chamber is proud to recognize: Legacy Award recipient Harry Wardwell, former Executive Director of the California International Airshow Salinas; Public Servant of the Year, Dr. Deneen Guss, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools; Nonprofit of the Year, Arts Council for Monterey County; and Young Professional of the Year, Celia

Garcia of Northridge Mall.

"This event is about the energy in the room when our community comes together to say 'thank you' to the champions of the Salinas Valley," says Colleen Bailey, SVCC President/CEO. "It's the perfect blend of celebration, inspiration, and high-level networking."

Space is limited for this highly anticipated evening, and tickets are expected to sell quickly. Registration is officially open, with tickets available at \$85 for Chamber members and \$100 for non-members. Sponsorships are also available, call the Chamber Office at (831) 751-7725, email Membership@salinaschamber.com, or visit the Chamber's event page online for more details. 🌿



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29th Annual Relay for Life of the Salinas Valley set for Sept. 19 in Salinas

By Athena Tracey, Relay For Life of the Salinas Valley

The 29th Annual Relay for Life of the Salinas Valley will be held once again in the Salinas City Center on Saturday, Sept. 19. The event will be held from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. starting with a heartwarming lap honoring cancer survivors and their caretakers followed by the many teams involved in the Relay.

The evening will have musical entertainment and performers, food vendors, a Kids Zone area and the opportunity to buy a ticket to win a 2026 Honda donated by The Del Grande Dealer Group, Salinas Honda. The evening will end with time for reflection and remembrance during the moving luminaria ceremony lining the track with illuminated candle bags with the names of those lost to or battling the fight against cancer.

We are excited to expand our reach by welcoming participants from communities throughout South County and the Monterey Peninsula. This growth has been supported through the leadership and advocacy of County Supervisor Chris Lopez.

As part of the annual “Paint the Town Purple” campaign, the iconic Salinas sign will be illuminated in purple on Aug. 20, symbolizing support for the event and all cancer types. Throughout downtown, banners of hope will line Main Street, serving as a visible reminder of the community’s commitment to ending cancer. We are renaming this event “Paint the Valley Purple” due to the addition of cities beyond Salinas who will also be painting their towns purple.

Relay for Life is the largest fundraiser in the fight against cancer worldwide providing research funding and a variety of services for patients. In the last 28 years the



PHOTOS BY JUAN AVILA

Salinas Relay has raised over \$17 million and was #1 in the state last year, raising over \$633,000.

If you’re interested in being a part of this year’s Relay for Life as a team, sponsor or volunteer please visit relayforlife.org/salinasca.

We hope to see you in the Salinas City Center on Sept. 19 to be part of this great community event. 🌿

Athena Tracey is the Marketing Chair for Relay For Life of the Salinas Valley and can be reached at athenaatracey@gmail.com.



Relay for Life is the largest fundraiser in the fight against cancer worldwide providing research funding and a variety of services for patients. In the last 28 years, the Salinas Relay has raised more than \$17 million and was #1 in the state last year, raising over \$633,000.



Nontraditional Bond Funds in a Nontraditional Bond Environment

By Ryan Hastie, Hastie Financial Group



Over the past few years, conservative investors have struggled

with holding bonds in their portfolio. Typically viewed as a “safe haven” compared to stocks, bonds have struggled in both bear and bull markets in recent years.

Following an aggressive rate-hiking campaign to combat rapidly accelerating inflation in 2022, the Bloomberg U.S. Aggregate Bond Index lost 13.01%. With interest rates rising, the negative stock-bond correlation, which was consistent from 2000-2020, saw a reversal. Although 2023 - 2025 saw positive performance – 5.53%,



With the positive stock-bond correlation seen in recent years, investors have begun looking outside traditional bond funds that invest in U.S. Treasuries, U.S. government agency mortgage-backed securities and investment grade corporate bonds to mitigate portfolio volatility from stocks.

1.25%, and 7.30%, respectively – bonds have continued to endure pressure from persistent inflation and elevated interest rates.

Additionally, with the positive stock-bond correlation seen in recent years, investors have begun looking outside traditional bond funds that invest in U.S. Treasuries, U.S. government agency mortgage-backed securities and investment grade corporate bonds

to mitigate portfolio volatility from stocks.

The Federal Reserve last cut rates in December 2025, with a 0.25% reduction in the federal funds rate, which currently sits at a target range of 3.50% to 3.75%. Since December 2025, the Fed has left rates unchanged due to persistent and sticky inflation, mostly attributable to the U.S. – Iran war.

Despite the transitory spike in oil prices, the June Consumer Price Index (CPI) saw a marked decrease from the previous few months. The June CPI fell 0.4% for the month, bringing the annual inflation rate down to 3.5%. Wall Street had expected a 0.2% monthly decline and 3.8% annual level. The monthly drop was the largest since April 2020.

Despite the unexpected decline, market analysts currently expect that the Fed keeps rates steady in 2026, with two rate cuts currently expected in 2027.

With rate cuts not likely to happen for some time, conservative investors are looking to other areas of the bond market to boost performance for their fixed income investments and provide additional diversification and possible negative correlation to the stock market.

One area that has gained much attention is nontraditional bonds. The nontraditional bond category contains funds that pursue strategies diverging in one or more ways from traditional bond funds, which typically have portfolio constraints on exposure to credit, sectors, currency, or interest-rate sensitivity.

Nontraditional bond funds go beyond the typical bond universe and may also have exposure to a mix of factors such as absolute return mandates (generating positive returns regardless of market dynamics), and the ability to use a broad range of derivatives for market- and security-level positions.

Another large subset are self-described “unconstrained” funds, which have much more flexibility to invest tactically across a wide swath of individual sectors, including high-yield and foreign debt, doing so with typically very large allocations. Funds in the latter group typically have broad freedom to manage interest-rate sensitivity but attempt to tactically manage those exposures to minimize volatility.

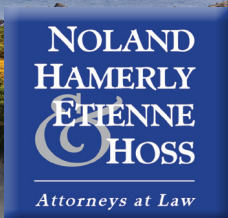
These funds attempt to minimize volatility by maintaining short or ultra-short duration portfolios but explicitly court significant credit and foreign bond market risk to generate high returns. Funds within this category often will use credit default swaps and other fixed income derivatives to a significant level.



Getty Images

With rate cuts potentially being pushed out to next year (or later, depending on the path of inflation), conservative investors would benefit from exploring options outside of the traditional core bond fund strategy. 🌱

Ryan Hastie, CFP®, AIF®, CPFA®, is a Partner and Investment Advisor with locally owned Hastie Financial Group and can be contacted at ryan.hastie@hastiefg.com.



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When a Community Comes Together



Dr. T.K. Anderson, Senior Pastor, Compass Church

There are moments when you look around and realize you are witnessing something bigger than an event. You are watching a community become a community. That is what I felt at this year's Celebrate America event.

Thousands of people gathered to celebrate 250 years of freedom on July 4th. Families filled the grounds, children laughed and played, neighbors shared food, and people from every part of our region stood together beneath the same sky. Since that evening, I have heard nothing but positive comments about the program, the atmosphere, and the spirit of unity that filled the celebration.

One conversation especially stayed with me. After the event, a gentleman approached me and said, "Pastor, I have lived here for years, but tonight was the first time in a long time that I felt like the whole community was one family." That statement meant more to me than he probably realized.

We live in a world that often emphasizes what divides us. We hear about disagreements, differences,

and difficulties almost every day. Yet for one beautiful evening, thousands of people gathered not as strangers, competitors, or political opponents, but as neighbors. We remembered that freedom is a gift, community is a blessing, and gratitude has a wonderful way of bringing people together.

The Bible tells a similar story in Acts 2. The early followers of Jesus came from different backgrounds, yet they shared their lives, meals, resources, and faith with one another.

Acts 2:44 says, "All the believers were together and had everything in common." Their unity did not end when the gathering was over. It inspired them to care for one another in practical ways. They noticed needs, shared what they had, and made sure no one was forgotten.

That same spirit continues through Compass Church's annual Back to School Backpack Drive. This year, we will give away 1,000 backpacks filled with basic school supplies to local children who might otherwise begin the school year without the resources they need.

Pencils, notebooks, paper, and backpacks may seem like small things, but to a child walking into a classroom, they can provide



Senior Pastor of Compass Church Dr. T.K. Anderson addresses the enthusiastic Fourth of July "Celebrate America" event in Salinas.

confidence, dignity, and hope. No child should have to begin the school year feeling unprepared or left behind.

At Compass Church, we believe loving our community requires more than words. It means showing up. It means serving. It means seeing a need and asking, "What can we do to help?" Celebrate America reminded us that we are better when we stand together. The Backpack Drive gives us another opportunity to put that unity into action.

We may not be able to solve every challenge facing our community, but we can help one family, encourage one student, and fill one backpack at a time. That is how strong communities are built. Not



For one beautiful evening, thousands of people gathered not as strangers, competitors, or political opponents, but as neighbors. We remembered that freedom is a gift, community is a blessing, and gratitude has a wonderful way of bringing people together.

simply through large celebrations, but through ordinary people choosing generosity, kindness, and compassion. May this new school year remind us that freedom is worth celebrating, children are worth investing in, and our community is worth serving. 🌿



AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT OSCAR AVALOS

I've spent the past 16 years in commercial banking and finance, helping local businesses access the funding, tools, and partnerships they need to grow. As Vice President and Relationship Manager at West Coast Community Bank, my focus is on connecting clients across Monterey County with tailored financial solutions and community resources that drive long-term success.

Beyond my professional work, I'm deeply involved in public service and volunteer leadership. I currently serve as a Councilman for the City of King City, Vice President of the Salinas Valley Fair, and Chair of the Advisory Council

for the Southern Monterey County Foundation, an affiliate of the Community Foundation for Monterey County.

In 2023, I was honored as King City's Friend of the Community for my commitment to supporting local organizations that make a difference. At the heart of everything I do is the belief that strong businesses create strong communities.

Whether I'm working with business owners, nonprofits, or local leaders, my goal is to be more than a banker. I strive to be a connector, a resource, and a partner in helping our region thrive.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Ticketed Event, RSVP Required for Salinas Valley Speaks Event**

Thursday, Aug. 6, 2026, 3:30 - 5:30 p.m., Braga Ranch, 33750 Moranda Road, Soledad

Join us for an essential conversation on the state of healthcare in our region. Today, the region faces a new healthcare challenge: significant funding reductions that are placing increased financial pressure on hospitals and healthcare systems. In response, this year's Salinas Valley Speaks program brings together local hospital CEOs to discuss how their organizations are adapting through innovation, sustainability, and regional collaboration. The event begins with a casual networking mixer, followed by a moderated panel discussion led by Monterey County District 3 Supervisor Chris Lopez. For tickets and more information, visit SalinasChamber.com.

- **Alebríes & Nahuales: Fantastic Animals from Mexico Exhibition Opening Ceremony**

Friday, Aug. 7, 2026, 5:00– 6:30 p.m., 1 Main St., Salinas

Join us for the official opening ceremony of "Alebríes & Nahuales: Fantastic Animals from Mexico" at One Main Street. The celebration will feature live cultural performances, remarks from project leaders, recognition of key partners, and a formal presentation alongside local elected officials. Curated by Carlo Magno Pedro, the exhibition showcases eight monumental sculptures created by master artisans from Oaxaca, Mexico. This unique cultural experience represents a major collaborative initiative dedicated to bringing world-class art inspired by Mexican heritage to the local community. During the opening program, the City of Salinas and the Salinas Public Arts Commission will share more about the vision behind bringing this international exhibition to Salinas. Attendees will hear from Project Director Romain Greco and JC Gonzalez, Curator of the Miniature Exhibit at One Main Street, who will both share remarks on the inspiration and cultural significance behind this extraordinary collection. In addition to the outdoor One Main Street sculpture, sponsored by the Arts Council for Monterey County, guests will also have the opportunity to experience the captivating indoor miniature exhibition.

- **Lunch and Learn with TPO 'The HR Experts': What Salinas Valley Employers Need to Know About Pay, Total Compensation & Retention**

Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2026, 12:00 - 1:00 p.m., 119 East Alisal St, Salinas

Sponsored by SVCC, Presented by TPO HR.

Employers in the Salinas Valley continue to face challenges, attracting and retaining employees amidst rising wages and total labor cost. What is happening? More importantly, what are successful employers doing differently? Join this fast-paced brown bag discussion exploring current workforce trends affecting small businesses throughout the Salinas Valley. We'll cover:

- Local wage expectations and pressure
- Trends in the shift from wage focus to total compensation emphasis
- Changes in what employee's value beyond pay
- Experimental retentional strategies

You will walk away with practical guidance and ideas to help strengthen hiring and retention efforts right for your business.

- **Paint the Town Purple**

Thursday, Aug. 20, 2026, Time TBA, One Main Street, Salinas

The community is invited to mark the official launch of the upcoming Relay For Life season with the annual Paint the Town Purple celebration. Taking place at One Main Street in Salinas, this special gathering will highlight the collective impact of local cancer-fighting efforts and bring community members together to celebrate survivors and honor local heroes. The evening program is slated to feature special remarks, recognition of Torchbearers, and a variety of community-focused activities. More details regarding the full schedule of events and official timing will be announced at SalinasChamber.com.

- **Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting for Mathnasium of Salinas**

Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2026, Open House from 4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Ribbon-Cutting Event 5:00 - 6:30 p.m., 1534 Constitution Blvd., Salinas

Join us on Aug. 25 as we celebrate a special Grand Opening & Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony for Mathnasium of Salinas. Mathnasium delivers a proven, math-only curriculum, a customized learning plan for each student, and face-to-face instruction in an encouraging environment. As students head back to school, Mathnasium is proud to support our community by creating a space dedicated to learning, growth, and confidence in math. This event marks not only the opening of the center, but also a commitment to helping Salinas students start the 2026-2027 school year strong. Families, students, and community members are all invited to come together for an afternoon of celebration, connection, and fun! Enjoy light refreshments and engaging activities, meet the team, explore the learning environment, and learn how Mathnasium helps students build skills that last a lifetime.

- **40th Anniversary Chamber Mixer with Salad Shoppe**

Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026, 5:00– 7:00 p.m., 1138 S Main St., Salinas

Celebrate 40 years of the Salad Shoppe! Join us for an evening of great food, wine, soft drinks, music, and good company as we celebrate serving fresh, healthy choices to our community since 1986. We look forward to sharing this special milestone with you.

- **Lunch Connect with The Steinbeck House**

Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2026, 12:00– 1:30 p.m., 132 Central Ave., Salinas

Looking to grow your local network in a relaxed, inspiring setting? Join us for our upcoming Chamber Lunch Connect on Wednesday, Sept. 2, from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. We're gathering at the beautiful, historic Steinbeck House (132 Central Ave., Salinas) for an afternoon of great conversation, delicious food, and meaningful connections with fellow Chamber members. Whether you're looking to meet new partners or catch up with familiar faces, this is the perfect mid-week break for your business.

- **Centennial Celebration & Chamber Mixer with California Water Service**

Thursday, Sept. 10, 2026, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m., One Main Street, Salinas

Celebrate a century of service and community! We cordially invite Chamber members, Cal Water customers, and community partners to join us for a special milestone event as we honor California Water Service's 100th Anniversary. Since 1926, California Water Service has been a cornerstone of our region, and they've been a proud partner of our Chamber since 1962. We highly encourage you to register if your business is a California Water Service customer or if your organization has been supported by California Water Service. More information is coming soon at SalinasChamber.com. Save the date.

- **Grand Opening with Read to Me Project**

Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026, 5:00 - 6:00 p.m., 272 S. Main St., Salinas

Read to Me Project (RtMP) is opening their doors in the heart of the community they serve by debuting their office space in Downtown Salinas. RtMP is a nonprofit empowering children, caregivers, and communities to lead through literacy. Through no-cost, equitable, student-led, and family-centered programs, they build confidence, strengthen reading skills, and have supported more than 40,000 students across Monterey County. As they reach over 165 classrooms in the county, RtMP wants to welcome you to their new space with a fun ribbon-cutting event filled with sweet treats and raffle prizes!

RSVP at salinaschamber.com



NON-PROFIT EVENTS

Rancho Cielo Youth Campus 11th Annual Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser

From June 1 to Aug. 28, online

From now until Aug. 21, you can purchase veggie boxes for yourself or donate them to families in need via the Boys & Girls Clubs of Monterey County, Salvation Army Salinas, The Food Bank for Monterey County and Second Harvest Food Bank.

The beloved annual fundraiser makes a significant impact by sustaining vocational training for Rancho Cielo students while also feeding families in need. What's in the boxes amounts to much more than healthy food options. It's a taste of our home—what has been referred to as the "Salad Bowl of the World."

Every Veggie Box may include everything from strawberries and lettuce to artichokes and Brussels sprouts—each a symbol of the region's agricultural backbone. Beginning Aug. 24, teams of volunteers will work in shifts to pack boxes and deliver them throughout Monterey County and beyond. On Aug. 28, the event will conclude with a delicious barbecue lunch, also on sale now (through Aug. 21), prepared on-site by the Rancho Cielo culinary team and volunteers. Enjoy your meal on the beautiful grounds or take it to-go. Go to ranchocieloyc.org/vbb2026 to order veggie boxes and BBQ lunches now!

First Fridays! — Salinas City Center Improvement Association

Aug. 7, 2026, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m., Downtown Salinas in 100 – 300 blocks of Main Street

Join the Association for First Friday Salinas, a monthly tradition designed to transform downtown into a consistent, positive space for community and culture to thrive. Come and enjoy an evening of local art, live entertainment, delicious food, and shops open late. Bring your friends and family to Salinas City Center and discover something new every First Friday of the month — you won't want to miss it!

For the month of August, there will be a special exhibition in Salinas. In front of One Main Street, one of the eight statues from the celebrated Alebrijes & Nahuales will be exhibited during the month.

Monterey Motorsports Festival

Aug. 15, 5:00-11:00 p.m., Monterey County Fair & Event Center, 2004 Fairground Road, Monterey

Monterey Motorsports Festival (MMF) is a premier car culture event taking place as the only Saturday night event during Monterey Car Week that blends automotive excellence with lifestyle, design, and community. MMF

features a curated mix of hypercars, supercars, classic and modern vehicles alongside music, food, wine, and immersive brand experiences. Last year's festival featured a headline performance by Las Vegas DJ Dillon Francis, continuing MMF's tradition of high-energy music entertainment that complements the automotive excitement. Among its most anticipated attractions is Donut Island, where performance vehicles are showcased in motion — bringing automotive performance to life beyond static displays.

Alliance on Aging Car Week Ticket

Aug. 15, 5:00-11:00 p.m., Monterey County Fair & Event Center, 2004 Fairground Road, Monterey

Alliance on Aging will be part of the Monterey Motorsports Festival not just to celebrate incredible automobiles and Car Week culture, but to represent the thousands of older adults AoA serves throughout Monterey County. AoA has been given a limited number of special \$100 tickets, and 100% of every ticket purchased through Alliance On Aging stays local, helping fund critical programs including: senior peer counseling and emotional support services, elder advocacy through the Ombudsman Program, and resources that help older adults age with dignity and connection. Purchase directly through Alliance on Aging by stopping by or emailing npasculli@allianceonaging.org.

Jacob's Heart Golf Tournament

Sept. 11, 2026, Seascape Golf Club, 610 Clubhouse Drive, Aptos

Registration is now open for the Jacob's Heart Golf Tournament. Jacob's Heart is excited to hit the green again with our incredible community. Tee up for a beautiful day on the course while making a difference for families battling pediatric cancer! For more information, check out jacobsheart.org/golf.

Touch-A-Truck Salinas

Sep. 13, 2026, 12:00-4:00 p.m., Salinas Rodeo Grounds, 1034 North Main St., Salinas

Touch-A-Truck is a fall tradition and the signature fundraiser for Coastal Kids Home Care. The event includes vehicles, food trucks, music, and more. Children and adults can climb into a fire engine, explore a bulldozer and climb behind the wheel a big rig. They can learn about CPR, build a toy vehicle, enjoy carnival games all while enjoying tasty treats. The event has grown from a small grassroots effort to an eagerly anticipated community event attracting over 1,000 kids and kids at heart. Proceeds from Touch-A-Truck benefit Coastal Kids Home Care — the area's only provider of in-home medical, social service and therapy visits to children living with illness and injury in our community.

————— BE SURE TO VISIT THE CHAMBER WEBSITE FOR UP-TO-DATE LISTINGS —————



Meet Your Farmer FLORA'S FARM

Flora's Farm is a family-owned farm in Arroyo Seco dedicated to providing the community with naturally grown, non-GMO produce cultivated without herbicides or pesticides. Operated by Flora, David, and their daughter Celestine, the farm also offers fresh cage-free eggs, local honey, homemade jams and breads, seasonal flowers, and handcrafted gifts. Their commitment to sustainable farming and quality has made them a favorite throughout the Salinas Valley. Shoppers can visit Flora's Farm at the Downtown Salinas Farmers Market every Saturday or stop by their farmstand in Reliz Canyon on Sundays. 🌿



Meet Your Vendor 831 SHIRTS & HATS

831 Shirts & Hats | Saladbowl Clothing, established in 2019, is a locally owned Salinas business specializing in custom apparel inspired by the Salad Bowl of the World. We create custom T-shirts, hoodies, hats, for individuals, businesses, schools, and community events. We are proud to be part of the Salinas Farmers Market, helping customers celebrate local pride with quality, custom-made designs. 🌿



Meet our Partner ALBA



ALBA (Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association) has been helping build a stronger agricultural community for more than 20 years by providing education, training, and opportunities for aspiring farmers. Through its Farmer Education and Enterprise Development (FEED) program, ALBA equips participants with the skills, mentorship, and resources needed

to launch and grow successful farming businesses. By promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting local food systems, and creating pathways to economic opportunity, ALBA continues to make a lasting impact throughout the Salinas Valley. Their commitment to empowering future farmers helps strengthen the region's agricultural heritage and supports a more resilient local economy. 🌿

What's In Season?

August brings an abundance of fresh, locally grown produce to the Salinas Valley. Shoppers can enjoy seasonal favorites such as tomatoes, sweet corn, peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, berries, and leafy greens. Many local farms also offer fresh herbs, flowers, honey, and farm-fresh eggs throughout the season. Buying what's in season means enjoying produce at its peak flavor while supporting the hardworking growers who make the Salinas Valley one of the nation's most productive agricultural regions. 🌿



