



Salinas Valley
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS JOURNAL



Want to Be a Partner in Improving Child Care in Monterey County?
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Salinas Valley Excellence: A Look Back at the 105th Annual Awards Luncheon
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How Do Residents Feel About Living in Salinas?

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

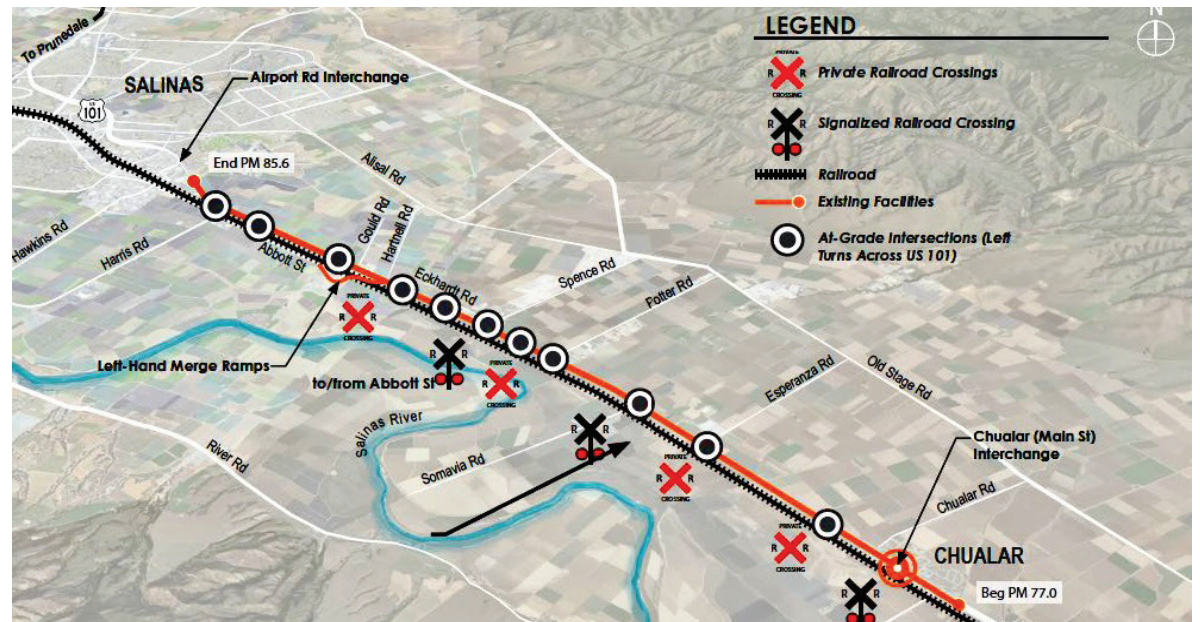
Polls and surveys can be a useful tool to find out what communities are thinking and how their views are changing over time. The City of Salinas uses them.

In 2024, the City of Salinas hired a public opinion research company to conduct a survey of voters from May 28, 2024 to June 3, 2024. This was meant to determine voter attitudes about city services and predict their support for renewing the city's Measure G sales tax, which expires in 2030. Results were presented to the Salinas City Council at its June 25, 2024 meeting.

More recently, the City of Salinas hired a different public opinion research company for another poll about resident attitudes about city services and Measure G renewal. This poll was conducted from Feb. 2, 2026 to Feb. 9, 2026. Results were presented to the Salinas City Council at its March 26, 2026 meeting.

Because the 2024 and 2026 polls asked different questions in different ways, it's somewhat difficult to use them to make conclusions about voter trends over time. However, it's fairly obvious to see what Salinas residents generally like and generally don't like about their city in the post-COVID era.

RESIDENTS see page 8



Map of South of Salinas Access Management Project.

Implementing Long-Awaited Highway Safety Enhancements on U.S. 101 South of Salinas

Part 1: Closing Median Crossings Through the 'South of Salinas Access Management Project'

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Drivers know U.S. 101 (commonly called Highway 101) immediately south of Salinas as an unsafe stretch of road. Not surprisingly, it has a collision history that exceeds statewide averages. It has

SAFETY see page 5





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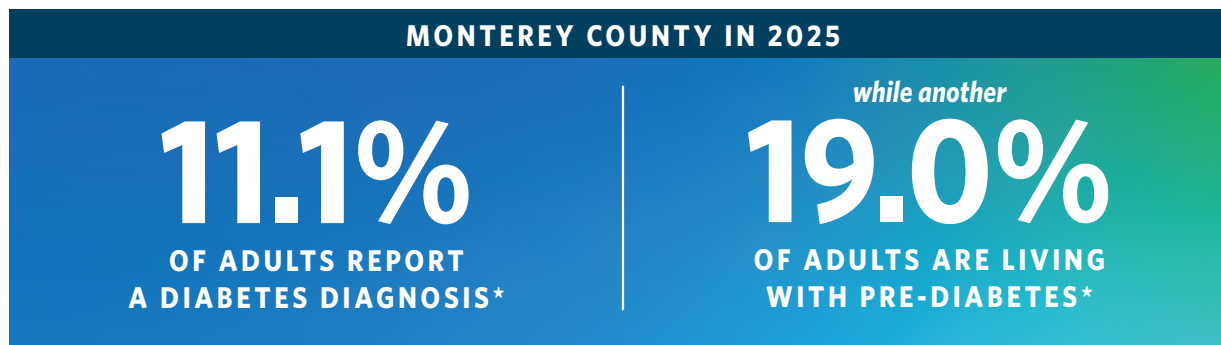
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Together, we're improving the health of our community—one patient at a time.



Gina Capodanno, MD, pediatric endocrinologist with patient



Scan for more information about our diabetes services.

*Sources: 2025 PRC Community Health Survey, PRC, Inc. [Item 106] Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia. United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): 2023 California data. 2023 PRC National Health Survey, PRaC, Inc. Notes: Asked of all respondents. Excludes gestational diabetes (occurring only during pregnancy).

Unintended Consequences

By Leonard Batti, SVCC Board Chair



I was recently invited to a small meet-and-greet at the Grower-Shipper office to meet Sara Hernandez, who is running for the District 26 State Senate seat in Los Angeles. If you're wondering what a politician from Los Angeles was doing in Salinas, it's because Sara was born and raised here.

Her parents were lawyers who met while working for California Rural Legal Assistance and practiced law in Salinas for decades. After graduating from Salinas High School, Sara went on to attend Duke University.

After earning her degree, she joined Teach For America and taught at a middle school in South Los Angeles. As a teacher, she launched HYPE Los Angeles, a nonprofit that helped low-income middle school students obtain scholarships to attend elite private schools. She later earned her law degree and worked as a land use attorney. Sara reached out to the Grower-Shipper Association to learn about the issues impacting California agriculture, particularly in the Salinas Valley.

While discussing housing and the need for more affordable options, the subject of California's extensive regulatory environment came up, and how regulations have severely impacted the cost of construction. Sara impressed me with her understanding of how well-intentioned legislation can sometimes exacerbate the very issues it aims

to solve. She emphasized the need for greater oversight of existing laws, especially those that, despite good intentions, have produced unintended consequences.

That conversation got me thinking more broadly about state and local policymaking, and how laws, however well intended, can sometimes make the problems they seek to address even worse.

Take, for example, Proposition 12, the 2018 Farm Animal Confinement Initiative. The law prohibits the sale of veal, pork, and eggs from animals confined in spaces below certain minimum square-foot requirements. On the surface, the law makes sense, who wouldn't want more humane conditions for animals that help sustain human life?

Yet since its passage, it has remained controversial. Some in the industry have associated increases in highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) cases since 2022 with changes tied to Prop 12, while studies from the USDA and UC Davis suggest the law's impact on HPAI is minimal.

Regardless of where one stands on that debate, there is little dispute that consumers are paying

significantly more for eggs and pork today than before the law was enacted. Unfortunately, these higher prices disproportionately affect underserved communities.

Turning to our local political environment, there is considerable discussion among candidates, and prospective candidates, for mayor and city council about how tax dollars should be spent. Some prioritize economic development, while others emphasize basic needs like street and sidewalk repair.

While I agree that our infrastructure requires significant attention, including what lies beneath the streets and sidewalks, I don't believe we can afford to ignore the importance of forward planning and economic development.

One only needs to look west to our neighboring city of Marina to see how investment in development can attract hotels, restaurants,

and anchor businesses. Despite having a population roughly one-seventh the size of Salinas, Marina continues to grow and diversify. Why should residents of the largest city

in Monterey County have to drive to Marina or Monterey to shop at stores like Trader Joe's, REI, or the Apple Store? Why should any of the 17,000 weekly visitors to the Salinas Soccer Complex need to

“
While I agree that our infrastructure requires significant attention, including what lies beneath the streets and sidewalks, I don't believe we can afford to ignore the importance of forward planning and economic development.”

CONSEQUENCES see page 5

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CONSEQUENCES - from page 4

stay in hotels in Morgan Hill, Gilroy, or Marina because Salinas can't fulfill the demand?

The point is that economic development and infrastructure investment are not mutually exclusive, they can and should be pursued together. While it may serve a political purpose to criticize projects like the Alisal Arch or the Heritage Center, both sources of community pride and potential drivers of tourism and commerce, the unintended consequence of abandoning such efforts could be a stagnant economy and a loss of community identity.

Another proposal that has been discussed is generating additional revenue by further taxing the agriculture industry. While this may seem like a logical solution, it overlooks the substantial contributions that agricultural businesses already make to our community.

Ask any nonprofit organization, and they will tell you that the local agriculture sector is a major source of support. Education, healthcare, the arts, youth sports, and community events from the Rodeo to the 4th of July celebration to the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life, rely heavily on this support.

Do we really want to risk diminishing that spirit of giving for what may appear to be an easy revenue solution? The best-case scenario may be similar to what we've seen with eggs and pork, higher prices passed on to consumers. The unintended consequence, however, could be a reduction in the philanthropic contributions that so many in our community depend on.

Something to think about when you step into the voting booth this November. 🌱

SAFETY - from page 1

the characteristics of a "high-stress corridor" — unsafe conditions, congestion, and outdated infrastructure. In addition, seven collisions have occurred in the past 10 years between vehicles and trains on the adjacent rail corridor.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) have been planning for significant safety enhancements and better freight rail reliability along the eight miles of U.S. 101 between the Airport Boulevard interchange in Salinas and the Chualar interchange in unincorporated Monterey County.

You may have noticed smaller safety enhancement projects already occurring on this corridor. One is an auxiliary lane, recently completed, that extends the existing northbound acceleration lane at Spence Road all the way to the Eckhardt Road exit. Another small upcoming project will be Caltrans installation of a "Changeable Message Sign" (CMS) to provide drivers with real-time traffic updates, including incident management, travel times, and construction alerts.

On a more comprehensive level, two major construction projects are also separately planned on this section of U.S. 101: a short-term project to close the median (officially designated as the South of Salinas Access Management Project) and a long-term project to build new interchanges (officially designated as the U.S. 101 South of Salinas Corridor Improvement Project).

This May 2026 issue of the Business Journal explains the reasoning for these projects and describes the short-term project that will soon close the median crossings. The June 2026 issue will explain the long-term, much more expensive project to build new interchanges.



Location of the U.S. 101 South of Salinas corridor.

An Unsafe Stretch of Road

Instead of being a "freeway" with entrance and exit ramps and overpasses and underpasses, the U.S. 101 South of Salinas corridor is an "expressway," defined in California law as "an arterial highway for through traffic which may have partial control of access, but which may or may not be divided or have grade separations at intersections." It was built in the mid-1950s at a time when lower traffic volumes in the Salinas Valley could accommodate agricultural vehicle access at grade (that is, at the same level or elevation) as the U.S. 101 travel lanes.

Eleven median crossings are found on the U.S. 101 South of Salinas corridor: seven for local roads and four for private ranch roads/driveways. Trucks and other vehicles—most related to local agricultural activities—make left or U-turns against the two lanes of highway traffic coming from the other direction at highway speed.

Frontage roads (auxiliary service roads adjacent and parallel to the highway) are generally not available as alternate routes to and from local ranch properties.

At-grade median crossings are not the only traffic complication on the U.S. 101 South of Salinas corridor. At the north end, the interchange for Abbott Street uses a traffic flow configuration that is non-standard for modern highway conditions. The ramp to Abbott Street from U.S. 101 northbound uses the fast travel left lane (out of two lanes) for exiting, while the ramp from Abbott Street to U.S. 101 southbound uses the fast travel left lane (out of two lanes) for merging onto the highway. (Abbott Street does not have an entrance to U.S. 101 going north or an exit from U.S. 101 going south.)

This configuration is a legacy from when Abbott Street (also known as South Abbott Street) was a segment of U.S. 101, before the modern four-lane expressway

between Salinas and Chualar was built in the mid-1950s.

Preparing for the South of Salinas 101 Access Management Project

Very soon, Caltrans will be eliminating these at grade median crossings, and drivers will no longer be able to make left turns and U-turns. (Right turns will still be permitted from U.S. 101 to the side roads and from the side roads onto U.S. 101.) For emergency vehicles, Caltrans is establishing two median crossings with selected locations based on input from California Highway Patrol (CHP) and the Monterey County Regional Fire District.

Vehicle drivers who need to get to locations on the left side of U.S. 101 will soon have to turn around at Abbott Street or Airport Boulevard to the north and the Chualar exit to the south. Stop controls (primarily STOP signs) will be used in Chualar to reduce backups.

In fact, the County of Monterey Public Works Department has already made some changes to help improve current and future traffic flow, in coordination with the office of County Supervisor Chris Lopez. On May 29, 2024, the County of Monterey announced that drivers coming off US 101 onto Main Street or coming from Chualar River Road going towards the Main and Grant Street intersection have the right of way and no longer need to stop. Meanwhile, drivers on Grant Street now have a STOP sign. This was meant to reduce traffic backups on the off ramps from U.S. 101.

In Chualar, Main Street is the primary street and crosses over U.S. 101 perpendicularly with an overpass, while Grant Street is the closest parallel street to U.S. 101 and is used as the access street to exit U.S. 101 going northbound and enter U.S. 101 going northbound. In fact, Grant Street was part of U.S. 101 until the four-lane expressway was built through Chualar in



the mid-1950s.

In addition to adopting stop control changes in Chualar, Caltrans is also coordinating with County of Monterey Public Works to install STOP signs at intersections where Hartnell Road, Spence Road, Potter Road, and Chualar Road meet with the two local roads parallel to U.S. 101 on the east side (Old Stage Road and Alisal Road). It is expected that some vehicles will use these two roads (located in unincorporated Monterey County) as a direct route to processing and cooling facilities in Salinas, rather than making a longer trip on U.S. 101 that involves turning around at an exit.

Caltrans estimates that more than 30 percent of local highway trips could divert to Old Stage Road after the median crossings are closed on U.S. 101. This is a road where pavement is deteriorating and drivers tend to exceed a prudent speed. There are safety hazards that will

require special attention from all drivers, including shared use by agricultural vehicles such as tractors. In apparent public recognition of unsafe conditions often experienced on Old Stage Road between Salinas and Chualar, urban legends claim that drivers have seen ghosts there.

On the west side of Highway 101, there is no parallel road that vehicles can use as an alternative route to travel to Salinas processing and cooling facilities. Vehicles will need to go to Chualar and turn around there to get to Salinas.

What's the Timing for the Short-Term Safety Improvements?

Caltrans anticipates finishing final design plans by the end of April 2026. In July 2026, Caltrans will invite construction companies to bid on a contract, with award of the contract anticipated in October 2026 and work starting in January 2027.

Caltrans will expect its contractor to block all 11 median crossings within one week in early 2027 using single K-rail white Jersey barriers, which are the heavy pre-cast, white-painted concrete, steel-reinforced safety walls often seen at highway construction sites. Closing off all the median crossings at the same time increases the project cost, but it will prevent drivers from working their way north or south on Highway 101 to find a remaining open median crossing and make a U-turn.

Then, the contractor will install double-faced steel beam guardrails (often referred to as double W-beam or Thrie-beam barriers) to permanently close all median crossings. The contractor will also dig up all pavement at the median crossings. As the contractor finishes removing all traces of the median crossing at each location, it will remove the temporary K-rails.

While night work is more expensive, for this project Caltrans will ask the contractor to perform work at night when lanes need to be closed. To further enhance safety and reduce congestion, Caltrans will pay the local California Highway Patrol (CHP) office in Salinas to implement a "Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program (COZEEP)." This program often includes CHP vehicles parked with lights flashing within the construction zone, along with moving patrols that enforce speed violations and manage vehicle queuing.

Ideally, the bulk of traffic changes will be implemented by the end of February 2027, before spring agricultural production ramps up. Then, the region will get to see what kind of effects this change will have on highway safety.

Improving Public Awareness and Encouraging Public Input

Caltrans seeks to get the South of Salinas Access Management Project done in the shortest

possible time, at the most reasonable cost, and with minimal inconvenience for drivers and agricultural businesses that operate along the corridor. To this end, the Caltrans regional Public Engagement Team is now engaging and collaborating with interested parties, including the Monterey County Farm Bureau and your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Caltrans seeks the public's advice about how to best manage traffic during construction and then after the project is done. Caltrans will also work with various groups to distribute flyers to farmworkers and other agricultural employees explaining the change and how to respond to the new road conditions.

Reportedly most landowners and agricultural businesses along the U.S. 101 South of Salinas corridor already support the median closure despite the resulting inconvenience. In fact, some businesses along the route

already prohibit employees and contractors from making left turns across the median. While agricultural companies need to maximize food safety by minimizing the travel time from fields to cooling processing facilities ("cut to cool times"), they recognize the unsafe conditions on this stretch of U.S. 101 and adopt to them.

Soon everyone will need to adopt to the change in traffic patterns. This kind of change can be frustrating and difficult. If you have questions or comments about the South of Salinas Access Management Project, please contact Chamber President & CEO Colleen Bailey at (831) 751-7725 or at colleen@SalinasChamber.com.

Or, go to the Caltrans South of Salinas Access Management Project website: <https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-5/district-5-current-projects/05-1s590>

Next month's Business Journal will publish Part 2: Building the New Interchanges Through the US 101 South of Salinas Corridor Improvement Project.



**Crash Data for U.S. 101 South of Salinas
Postmile (PM) 78.83 to 82.57
Jan. 1, 2015, through Dec. 31, 2024**

Average Number of Injury Crashes Per Year:

13

Average Number of Fatal Crashes Per Year:

1

Average Number of Crashes with Property Damage Per Year:

0

Locations with most frequent crashes:

**Spence Road intersection
Hartnell Road intersection**



CHAMBER MEMBER PROFILES

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Steel Bonnet Brewing Company is a small, family-owned and operated brewery located in Scotts Valley. They produce small batches of high-quality craft beer in a range of styles; from traditional cask conditioned British ales to intensely hopped American IPAs. In their tap room, they aim to provide a cozy and educational environment where you can meet with friends, sample and learn about their beers, listen to great music, and pick up a growler or two to take home and enjoy later. steelbon.net, donald@steelbon.net, (831) 837-5845.



How Is Life in Salinas?

What's Good and Bad in Salinas, According to Voters

First, while one-third of city voters say “things in Salinas are generally headed in the right direction” and describe the “overall quality of life in Salinas” as “good,” the other two-thirds of Salinas voters don’t share that positive sentiment. This is dismaying, considering that Salinas has a strong sense of community and is located in a place with truly exceptional natural beauty, weather, food, and air quality. Life here should be excellent for everyone.

There are many possible reasons why a solid majority of voters describe their quality of life in Salinas as fair or poor. The polls don’t dig deeply into why people feel this way. It could be related to the area’s high cost of living (especially housing) that puts stress on ordinary households. It could be related to a lack of local jobs with opportunities for lifelong careers that can support families.

Your Chamber believes that misguided, burdensome and expensive public policies on the federal, state, and local level may be contributing to these problems. It continues to support public policies that expand economic opportunities and thereby advance your Chamber’s official vision of “a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families and businesses succeed via economic growth and opportunity.”

There is positive news. Residents are generally satisfied with police and fire services and parks. It’s not surprising that a majority of residents are satisfied with police services.

Salinas Police Department data shows that the rate of serious

What people are generally displeased about today in Salinas seems to be related to their personal experience in their community as they engage in routine business — deteriorated conditions of their local streets and sidewalks and the prominent public presence of the unhoused.

Question	2005	2009	2024	
Would you say that things in Salinas are generally headed in the right direction or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track?	11% Right Track 67% Wrong Track 22% Don't Know	30% Right Track 40% Wrong Track 30% Don't Know	34% Right Track 47% Wrong Track 20% Don't Know	
Question				2026
How would you rate the overall quality of life in Salinas?				34.8% Good 46.3% Fair 18.5% Poor 0.5% Unsure

Does the City of Salinas Need More Tax Revenue?

Question	2024	2026
In your personal opinion, do you think the City of Salinas has a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funds to provide the level of services that residents need and want?	Great Need 61% Some Need 22% A Little Need 5% No Real Need 8% Don't Know 4%	
Do you think the City has a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funds to maintain the level of City services and facilities?		Need 66.5% No Need 21.3% Unsure 12.3%

crimes has dropped dramatically since the mid-2010s. Since 2022, your Business Journal has published a chart each year showing the number of reported crimes since 2015—a peak year for criminal activity in the City of Salinas. The steep drop in the number of crimes is often attributed to implementation of new police community outreach strategies, adoption of new technology such as gunfire detection equipment, and incarceration of gang leaders.

What people are generally displeased about today in Salinas seems to be related to their personal experience in their community as

they engage in routine business. Residents are clearly frustrated about the deteriorated conditions of their local streets and sidewalks. They are also frustrated about the prominent public presence of the unhoused.

These two complaints are heard in medium-sized cities throughout California. Public infrastructure maintenance is expensive and has often been neglected when budgets are tight. And people who don’t have a home and choose to live on the streets are exercising civil liberties that courts have upheld as constitutional rights.

How to Improve Voter Attitudes about the City of Salinas

Are there any solutions? Taxes are one proposed answer. In fact, a solid majority of Salinas voters seem to believe the City of Salinas must collect additional tax revenue to improve its services.

This finding seems to bode well for voter approval of a measure on the November 2026 ballot to renew the existing Measure G sales tax. Of course, a rule of thumb in politics is that everyone wants the government to do more to make life better, but they want someone else to pay for it.

Based on the latest City of Salinas poll and other recent polls done in Monterey County, it seems that local voter willingness to support tax increases has dropped over the past couple of years. One possible reason for this: inflation and high gas prices have forced households to tighten their budgets.

The upcoming campaign to ask voters to renew the Measure G sales tax will need to address voter worries about their own household budgets. It will need to explain clearly to voters how the city has spent Measure G tax revenue—and how it will spend future tax revenue—to improve quality of life in the City of Salinas. Streets and sidewalks will need to be emphasized as well as police and fire services.

Your Chamber has closely monitored Measure G sales tax expenditures and will continue to inform the business community about the purpose of Measure G and its importance to basic city services. Expect to see more comprehensive reports in the Business Journal this summer about Measure G. 🌱



RIBBON CUTTINGS & CHAMBER EVENTS

by Chamber Staff



Lunch and Learn with Hastie Financial Group: Prudent Investing 101

Knowledge is power when it comes to your financial future. We had an insightful Lunch and Learn featuring Bill Hastie and Ryan Hastie of Hastie Financial Group, who broke down “Prudent Investing 101.” Some key takeaways from the presentation included being aware of your investments, the different investment vehicles, asset classes, diversification, asset correlation, bond duration, and other principles.



Central Coast Connections BNI — Salinas Valley Chamber Speed Networking Event

Fast-paced connections and fresh opportunities! The Salinas Valley Chamber teamed up with Central Coast Connections BNI for a dynamic Speed Networking session at Portobello’s on Main. It was an evening filled with the opportunity to practice elevator pitches and build new professional relationships.



Lunch and Learn with Bright Beginnings

Sonja Koehler of Bright Beginnings gave a presentation on the current state of child care. She informed members on the Bright Beginnings Initiative, child care by the numbers, and ways to support the expansion of child care in our region. For details about the Bright Beginnings presentation, see the article “Want to Be a Partner in Improving Child Care in Monterey County?” on page 15.

AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT DAN FIGUEROA



My name is Dan Figueroa, and I am a lifelong resident of Salinas. I am a recent graduate of CSU Monterey Bay’s class of 2022 and started my career in insurance while I was attending college selling personal line products such as home and auto insurance. Recently I have transitioned from a Property Adjuster to Employee Benefits at Leavitt Central Coast in Salinas. After seeing Leavitt’s involvement with the local community, I was motivated to give back to the community where I was born and raised. I look forward to my involvement in the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce.



MEMBER NEWS

California Rodeo Salinas Announces 2026 Mutton Busting Dates and Entry Details

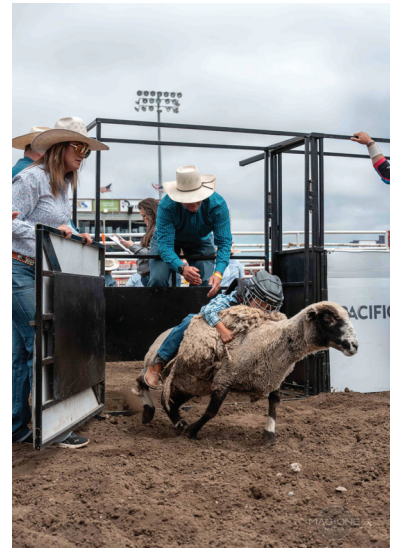
The California Rodeo Salinas is proud to continue its tradition of introducing the next generation to the Western way of life with the return of its fan-favorite event, Mutton Busting. Presented by Pacific Valley Bank, Mutton Busting gives young riders the opportunity to experience the excitement of the arena as they try their hand at sheep riding in front of thousands of fans. The event will take place during the following performances at the Salinas Sports Complex:

- July 15, 2026 – Big Week Bull Riding Xtreme Bulls
- July 16–19, 2026 – California Rodeo Salinas

Children ages 4 to 7 who weigh 60 pounds or less on the day of their ride are eligible to participate. Each rider will compete in a single performance, with a buckle awarded to the child with the longest ride each day. “Mutton Busting is always a highlight of the Rodeo,” said Track Director Braden Hoover. “It’s incredible to watch these young kids show their grit and excitement in the arena—it’s often their very first rodeo experience, and one they’ll never forget.”

How to Enter:

- Riders must be ages 4–7 and weigh 60 pounds or less on the day of their ride
- \$50 entry fee per rider (payable only if selected; due June 12)
- One entry per child; incomplete entries will not be considered
- Entries opened April 15 and will close May 29, 2026
- Riders will be notified by Friday, June 5, 2026



Natividad’s Dr. Melissa Nothnagle Named Outstanding Program Director of the Year

Melissa Nothnagle, MD, MSc, director of the Family Medicine Residency Program and chief of Family Medicine at Natividad, has been honored with the Nikitas J. Zervanos Outstanding Program Director Award from the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors and the American Academy of Family Physicians. The Zervanos Award is the highest national honor for a family medicine residency program director, recognizing sustained leadership in the specialty, mentorship of residents and medical students, contributions to the community and service to family medicine organizations. Nothnagle received the award during a ceremony at AAFP’s Residency Leadership Summit in Dallas, Texas, in March. “One of the greatest privileges of my career is helping train the next generation of family physicians at Natividad,” Nothnagle said. “Our residents are learning not only excellent clinical care, but also how to serve their communities with compassion and purpose.” A nationally recognized leader in family medicine education, Nothnagle has directed residency programs for more than 14 years. Before joining Natividad eight years ago, she served as program director at the Brown University Family Medicine Residency from 2011 to 2017. The AFMRD designated her a Gold Level Program Director in 2021, and in 2022, the American Medical Women’s Association selected her as an Inspire Award winner for her academic and clinical work in reproductive justice. At Natividad, Nothnagle balances a demanding portfolio of responsibilities. She supervises residents and maintains her own patient panel in the residency clinic, actively practices obstetrics and is an attending physician on the Family Medicine Inpatient Service. She is also known nationally for her scholarship and clinical leadership in reproductive justice. “Melissa is admired for her clinical acumen, her bedside teaching, her natural gift of mentorship and her administrative prowess,” said Marc Tunzi, MD, MA, senior associate program director of Natividad’s Family Medicine Residency and the institution’s designated institutional official. “The residents adore her, the family medicine faculty revere her, the specialty faculty respect her, and the institutional leadership leans on her.” Colleagues credit Nothnagle with a deep commitment to building a residency faculty and future family medicine workforce that reflects the diverse demographics of Monterey County. Former Natividad Family Medicine program chief resident and current Natividad hospitalist Dr. Victor Carrasco said, “Dr. Nothnagle has dedicated her career to passionately serving and empowering marginalized communities. Naturally, through authentic and personal relationships, she elevates the caliber of her residents, colleagues and the future of full-spectrum Family Medicine. Dr. Nothnagle has forever impacted my life, and I am incredibly grateful for her support and leadership.” Natividad is the only teaching hospital in Monterey County and is affiliated with University of California San Francisco. A single-residency institution, Natividad offers full-spectrum training to prepare graduates to meet the needs of underserved communities. Graduates go on to practice in many different medical settings including outpatient family medicine, pregnancy and delivery care, inpatient medicine, rural and global medicine. About half of all graduates remain on the Central Coast. Natividad Chief Medical Officer Dr. Craig Walls said that the Natividad family recognizes how fortunate they are to have Nothnagle leading their residency and Family Medicine service. “It’s a great honor to have the recognition of a prestigious, national organization such as the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Nothnagle is clearly a tremendous teacher, leader and mentor,” Walls said. “But underneath all that is the caring and brilliant physician any family would want at their bedside in their time of need.” The Zervanos Award is named for the late Nikitas J. Zervanos, MD, a pioneering figure in family medicine education. To be eligible, nominees must have actively directed a family medicine residency program for at least 10 years and demonstrate significant leadership at the national level. The award is presented only when an outstanding candidate exists. According to AAFP, there are more than 800 accredited family medicine residency programs in the United States.





Bay Federal Credit Union Named Diamond Awards Recipient Amid Record-Breaking Competition

Bay Federal Credit Union was among 181 credit unions nationwide named as winners of the prestigious Diamond Awards, America's Credit Unions Marketing, PR & Development Council's annual competition recognizing excellence in credit union marketing. Bay Federal received recognition in the Video category for Brand Storytelling and Purpose for its "The Talk" and "Bedtime Story" commercials. America's Credit Unions Marketing, PR & Development Council announced the winners of this year's Diamond Awards, recognizing the most effective and innovative marketing campaigns across the credit union industry. This year's competition drew a record 1,481 submissions, with 181 organizations from 42 states elected as winners. In total, 330 awards were distributed, reflecting the exceptional quality of work produced by credit unions nationwide. "We're honored to receive this recognition, especially for work that reflects the heart of who we are," said Carrie Birkhofer, Bay Federal Credit Union President and CEO. "These campaigns were rooted in real conversations and everyday moments with our members and speak to our team's commitment to showing up for our community in ways that are authentic, relatable, and truly member-focused." "We are proud to recognize Bay Federal and this year's Diamond Award winners for their entries that deliver both creativity and results," said Lorrell Bellotti, Diamond Awards co-chair and Chief Marketing Officer at Western Vista FCU in Cheyenne, Wyoming. "These entries demonstrate an understanding of the people we serve and strategic execution that delivers measurable impact."



BofA Invites Monterey Bay Area Youth to Get Outside and 'Golf with Us' in 2026

Bank of America is once again making golf accessible for young players in the Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito County region with the return of its "Golf with Us!" program. Building on a successful first year, the BofA program with local nonprofit Youth on Course offers free, one-year memberships to local golf courses and \$5 rounds of golf to kids ages 6-18. Last year, hundreds of kids from the tri-county region joined the Golf With Us! program and played more than 1,000 rounds. Last month, kids from Boys & Girls Clubs and First Tee joined retired 49er and avid golfer, Jeff Garcia, to learn golf and life lessons. Key Points: Kids ages 6-18 are encouraged to enroll in a free, one-year membership to Youth on Course, courtesy of Bank of America. Enrollment for new members is open until June 15, 2026, at BofA.com/GolfwithUs. Golf with Us! includes access to select golf courses for \$5 or less per round. The full list is available at YouthOnCourse.org. Bank of America launched Golf with Us! in partnership with Youth on Course to expand affordable access to golf nationwide. Last year, Golf with Us! helped nearly 100,000 young people nationwide – including many first-time golfers – experience the transformative power of the sport. "Sports can do so much for kids, from instilling leadership and life skills to healthier habits. It's why our 'Golf with Us' program has been so successful in its first year," said BofA Monterey Bay Area President Jennifer Dacquisto. "By making this very popular sport more affordable and accessible, we can help the next generation of young athletes achieve success on and off the course." "Our partnership with Bank of America has been a game-changer for Youth on Course, accelerating our mission and scaling our impact in communities across the country," said Adam Heieck, Chief Executive Officer, Youth on Course. "As Youth on Course proudly celebrates its 20th anniversary, Bank of America's support has not only inspired tens of thousands of new young golfers but also expanded our network by adding over 100 municipal course locations and counting, ensuring that kids have safe, affordable places to play in their communities."



2026 Alfred Diaz-Infante Award Nominations Open

The Siembra Latinos Fund of the Community Foundation for Monterey County invites nominations for the 2026 Alfred Diaz-Infante Award. The award was established in 2023, in partnership with Diaz-Infante's family, to honor the late community leader and nonprofit executive who created partnerships to create opportunities for all. "Siembra" means "to sow," and Diaz-Infante sowed seeds of goodwill and progress along his path, leaving this community better than he found it. This annual award honors his work and legacy by recognizing individuals who work collaboratively to make positive change for the Latino community. "We are honored to present this award to someone who follows in my brother Alfred's footsteps as a champion for the Latino community in Monterey County," said Louie Diaz-Infante, Siembra Latinos Fund Advisory Council Chair. Nominations are due Friday, June 5, 2026, by 5 p.m. and information is available at [cfmco.org/Alfred Diaz Infante Award](http://cfmco.org/Alfred-Diaz-Infante-Award). Award criteria include exhibiting values that reflect Diaz-Infante's character, including humility, generosity, thoughtfulness, kindness, inclusivity, strength as well as his tireless efforts to create an equitable community. The individual must also be involved in one or more of these areas: equitable opportunities, civic engagement, collaboration, housing, education, environmental justice, farmworker community, environmental justice and mentoring and/or volunteering. The 2026 Alfred Diaz-Infante Award will be presented at the annual Siembra Latinos Fund Celebration on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026, from 5-7 p.m. at 1 Main St. in Salinas. Tickets and sponsorship information will be available soon on cfmco.org/Siembra. Past Alfred Diaz-Infante Award Recipients include:

2025: María Elena Manzo, Founder and Executive Director of Mujeres en Acción

2024: Dr. Juan P. Magaña, Founder, Minorities in Medicine and Hospitalist, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP)

2023 (Inaugural Award): Ernesto Vela, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of Student Services for the Monterey County Office of Education



Siembra Latinos Fund
OF THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR MONTEREY COUNTY



MEMBER NEWS

Monterey Bay FC Women Officially Launch Founders Circle Sponsorship Program Ahead of Inaugural USL W League Season

Monterey Bay Football Club (Monterey Bay FC) and Monterey Bay Sirens are proud to announce the official launch of the Monterey Bay Sirens Founders Circle, a new sponsorship initiative designed to unite regional businesses, community leaders, and mission-aligned partners in support of the club's historic inaugural season in the USL W League, the nation's premier pre-professional women's soccer platform. The launch of the Sirens marks a major milestone for women's sports in the Monterey Bay region. With the USL W League experiencing exponential national growth and expanding its footprint across Northern California, the Sirens will compete against top clubs throughout the region, bringing high-level women's soccer to communities from the Central Coast and around the 831. The Founder's Circle is an invitation for local and regional partners who believe in empowerment, opportunity, and the long-term growth of women's sports to help shape the foundation of this team from day one. It offers a limited number of partners the chance to be recognized as founding supporters of Monterey Bay FC Women. These partners will play a key role in advancing the club's mission to create meaningful development pathways for aspiring female athletes, expand youth engagement, and deliver community-centered programming throughout the region. Together, it will build a platform that will elevate young women, strengthen community, and expand access to the sport across Northern California with opportunities for brand visibility, community activation, youth development support, and direct engagement with the club's inaugural roster of athletes. Sponsorship levels are designed to be accessible for businesses of all sizes, from regional leaders to locally owned establishments. The Monterey Bay Sirens will kick off their inaugural USL W League season on May 9, with home matches hosted at Cardinale Stadium in Seaside. The club will compete across the NorCal Division, bringing high-energy match days and community events to fans throughout the region.



From the Fields to the Finish Line: Racing Together to Create Hope

In the Salinas Valley, we understand what it means to work hard, care for family, and push forward—no matter the odds. It's a community built on resilience, agriculture, and the belief that opportunity should be within reach for everyone.

That's why Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey is proud to invite you to our inaugural Run for the Roses Kentucky Derby benefit on May 2 in Monterey.

While the Derby is known for its tradition and excitement, this event is rooted in something deeper. Because while horses run for the roses, we race to create hope.

Each year, Catholic Charities serves more than 65,000 individuals across the Central Coast. Many are working families—often holding multiple jobs—doing everything they can to provide for their children. Nearly 75% are women with children, striving for stability while facing impossible choices between housing, food,

A Kentucky Derby Themed Event Benefiting Catholic Charities Diocese of Monterey

RUN *for the* ROSES

Saturday, May 2nd at 1:30 PM

InterContinental Clement Hotel Monterey, CA.



and basic needs.

Through nutrition and food assistance, financial stability programs, and immigration legal services we walk alongside our neighbors as they build a stronger future.

Run for the Roses is more than an event—it's an opportunity for our business community to lead with impact.

Together, we provide help and create hope. Join us and share

this event with your colleagues and network to help build a stronger tomorrow.

The event will be held at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, May 2, at InterContinental The Clement Monterey, 750 Cannery Row, in Monterey. Scan the QR code on this page for tickets. For more information, contact Elena Prakash, Director of Development, at Eprakash@catholiccharitiesdom.org or by calling (831) 393-3110. 🌿





Support our Chamber Members

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

Member Name	Member Since	Member Name	Member Since
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	1981	Salinas Self Storage	2019
Goodwill Central Coast	1983	Powers Associates, LLC	2020
Edwards Truck Center, Inc.	1985	Bandit Systems	2022
CHISPA Inc	1987	Community Human Services	2022
Harden Ranch Plaza	1991	Matt Huerta Consulting LLC	2022
Green's Camera World	1995	Soledad Community Health Care District	2022
TAMC (Transportation Agency for Mo Co)	1996	Stonies Taphouse and Bistro	2022
	<i>*30 Years*</i>	Ameriprise Financial Services	2023
Community Foundation for Monterey County	2007	DeVeera Technology	2023
Lopez Tax Service	2007	Varnel Consulting & Training Services	2023
Alzheimer's Association of Monterey County	2008	Cain Law PC, DBA Chris Cain Law	2024
Beverly Meamber	2008	Navigator Public Schools	2024
Scudder Solar Energy Systems	2010	Salinas Valley Food and Wine Festival	2024
A Tool Shed Equipment Rentals Inc	2015	A Johnson Law Group, PC	2025
Alliant Insurance Services	2015	Acme Plumbing	2025
Veterans Transition Center of California	2015	Gold Line Transportation LLC	2025
Wells Fargo Northern and Central California Region	2015	Monterey Motorsports Festival	2025
Salinas City Center Improvement Association (SCCIA)	2016	Smile Aesthetics Monterey Bay LLC	2025
	<i>*10 Years*</i>	Town and Country Realty	2025
Spherion	<i>*10 Years*</i>	Tuff Shed	2025
Silver Point Protection Inc.	2018	Vista Harden Ranch Assisted Living and Memory Care	2025
Jim Bogart	2019	Voler Strategic Advisors	2025

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR VISIONARY AND STAKEHOLDER MEMBERS





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

MAY 2026

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce Government Relations Committee had 22 members at its meeting on Wednesday, April 8, as it continues to pursue your Chamber's official vision of "a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families and businesses succeed via economic growth and opportunity." Here's what they discussed:

1 Committee members reviewed the status of Measure G, a City of Salinas sales tax that will expire in 2030 unless voters renew it before then. The Government Affairs Liaison was asked to prepare a list of projects funded by Measure G, similar to the list he produced for publication in the September 2023 issue of the Business Journal.

2 Committee members discussed the effects of the upcoming South of Salinas Access Management Project, a Caltrans (California Department of Transportation) project that will close the 11 median crossings on the U.S. 101 South of Salinas Corridor between Airport Boulevard in Salinas and the Chualar exit. The Chamber will be part of a coalition coordinated by Caltrans to inform the public about the permanent change in traffic patterns and seek public input on effective traffic management. The committee also discussed opportunities for public art with this project, including concrete stamps and welcome

monuments at city limits.

3 There will be a City of Salinas Infrastructure Summit on Friday, June 5, at One Main Street in Salinas. The Chamber will be involved. It will be open to the public.

4 As requested at the committee's March 9 meeting, the Government Affairs Liaison prepared an analysis of misuse of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as Short-Term Rentals (STRs), thus undermining the strategy of providing incentives to build ADUs as a way to increase housing supply. He noted that other cities have observed this practice going on and cited Los Angeles as a prominent example. However, there are claims that users of ADUs as STRs are typically people who work in an area for a limited time period, such as traveling nurses, and not vacationers. He indicated that a solution would be city enforcement, which would require funding. The committee took no action.

5 As requested at the committee's March 9 meeting, the Government Affairs Liaison prepared an analysis of long-term residential vacancies and listed ways that other California local governments are trying to address it. The committee expanded this into a discussion of both residential and commercial vacancies and the tools available to the City of Salinas to make owners accountable

for blighted vacant properties. The city's "Blight Accountability Ordinance" enacted in 2018 was key in ending the long-blighted status of the Bruhn Building (300 Main St.), the Greyhound Bus Station (19 West Gabilan St.), and the large house on the corner of West Alisal Street and Lorimer Street (304 Lorimer St.) near Hartnell College. Some committee members questioned whether vacant houses in residential neighborhoods were a Chamber concern, and arguments were made from various perspectives. It was noted that a legal challenge to the San Francisco "Empty Homes Tax" is moving through the courts. The committee took no action.

6 As requested at the committee's March 9 meeting, the Government Affairs Liaison prepared an analysis of inclusionary housing (requiring housing developers to set aside a percentage of new units for households with incomes under a certain threshold). He reported on studies showing that in some cases under some conditions, inclusionary housing seems to increase costs for market rate housing and can discourage housing construction altogether. He also cited commentaries that defended inclusionary housing based on the premise that no private developer would ever voluntarily build housing in high-priced areas such as Salinas for people who couldn't afford housing at market rates. A committee member noted that inclusionary



housing has been the primary reason why the City of Salinas has made some progress in pursuing Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) goals for lower incomes.

Committee members discussed "affordability-by-design," zoning restrictions, developer impact fees, and obstacles in the permit process. Committee members acknowledged there are many reasons why housing isn't getting built in the City of Salinas and elsewhere in Monterey County. The Chamber is diligently working on many housing policies already and cannot add any more to the list at this time. The committee took no action.

7 Committee members expressed support for continuing to hold discussion and debate at committee meetings about potential positions on difficult local public policy issues, with the Government Affairs Liaison presenting background and various perspectives in an objective, neutral way as a basis for reasoned discussion. This is an effective way for Chamber members to learn about issues. It also serves as an example of how the Chamber exercises its leadership role in the community. 🌱

Want to Be a Partner in Improving Child Care in Monterey County? Here's a List of Eight Specific Ways

By Kevin Dayton, Government Affairs Liaison

Members of your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce continue to report employee struggles to find and keep affordable child care. Even when employees find a program that's reasonably affordable, it's often not located near their home or workplace.

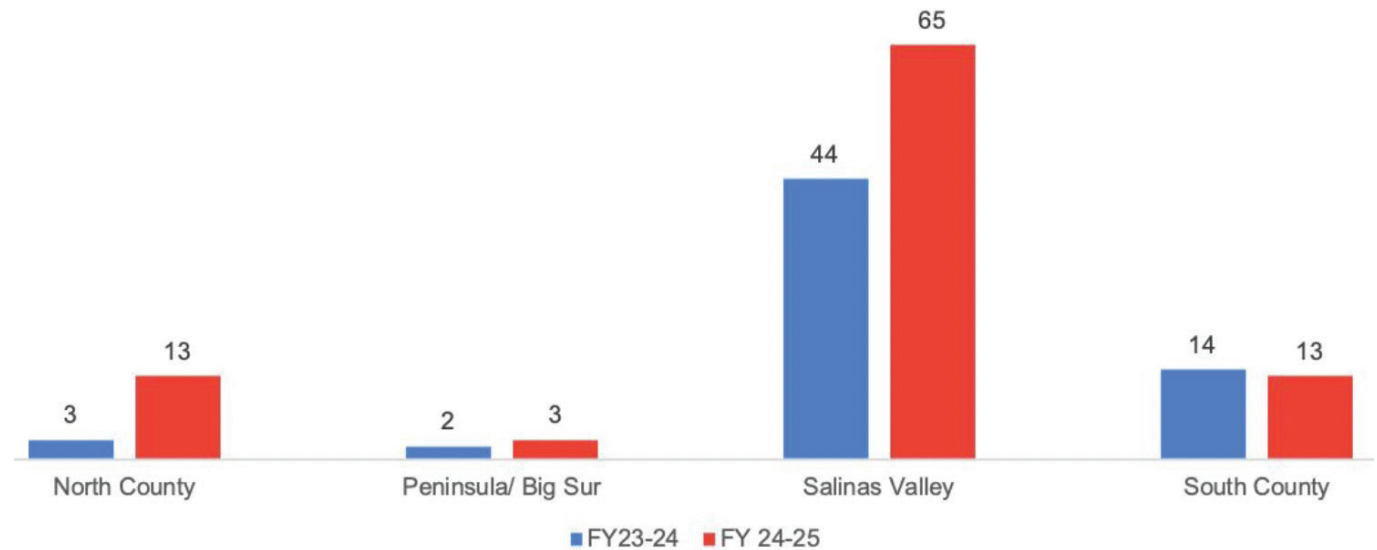
Chamber members also continue to report cases in which families leave Monterey County or choose not to move here because the high cost of living is compounded with the high cost and limited availability of child care. Retaining and recruiting employees is a continual challenge for businesses, organizations, and government agencies, and the insufficiency of local child care options can be a liability.

For these reasons alone, your Chamber has a responsibility for involvement in promoting and advancing the county's child-care system. Your Chamber also recognizes that the children of today will be the entrepreneurs and workforce of the next generation. We want young people who grow up in Monterey County to be capable of obtaining quality jobs in Monterey County, as well as having the opportunity to get such jobs. Quality child care is an early stage of that preparation.

Also, workforce shortages, the exodus of young families, and school enrollment decline are trends that do not align with the Chamber's official vision of "a thriving, welcoming Salinas Valley where people, families, and businesses succeed via economic opportunity and growth."

Some Improvement for Child Care in the Past Few Years

There is some good news. The



There has been a significant recent increase in the number of newly licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) in Salinas and North Monterey County.

January 2025 Business Journal article "Efforts Continue to Increase Child Care Affordability and Accessibility in Monterey County" describes the establishment of new programs and projects to increase the supply of child care providers and workers in Monterey County. These providers are both "center-based" child care (run by for-profit commercial entities, non-profit organizations, employers, school districts, government agencies, religious institutions, and military installations) and "home-based" child care businesses.

The total number of child care programs in Monterey County declined for many years but have recently bounced back up to about 500 programs. Home-based child care dropped to a low of 291 programs in 2021 (following the COVID-19 public health orders that shut them down) but have since increased to 461 programs in 2025.

Two likely reasons for the

rebound in Monterey County: (1) an influx of outside government funding, and (2) the expansion of parties interested in pro-active efforts to increase the number of child care programs.

Following the COVID shutdowns, new state and local funding became available for local governments and private organizations to help increase the number of child-care programs in Monterey County. Also, an unsuccessful campaign in 2022 to pass an annual \$49 parcel tax for 10 years to fund child care (Measure Q) brought together a diverse and capable new team of Monterey County residents interested in being leaders and activists on child care policies.

This team includes representatives of business groups such as your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, which began more explicitly regarding child care as a systematic community problem rather than a responsibility that

individual families resolve on their own through the free market. For many reasons, the market for child care is distorted in Monterey County, and supply cannot meet demand without a significant decline in the number of children living here.

What's Next for Child Care?

The Measure Q election was 3½ years ago, and public momentum generated by that campaign is fading. In addition, more government funding for the Monterey County child care system is unlikely. In fact, some center-based child care programs may soon need to adjust to government budget cuts.

Some child care advocates observe that 62.8% of Sonoma County voters approved a sales tax in November 2024 to fund that county's child care system. They are impressed by this solid expression of public support and ask if Monterey County voters would be

more willing to support a tax with a second opportunity.

Setting aside the differences between Sonoma County and Monterey County, economic and political circumstances in 2026 do not create a favorable climate in Monterey County for a proposed tax increase to support child care. Governments are struggling to balance their budgets. Many now plan to ask voters to approve new or higher taxes on many things for many purposes. Your Chamber is tracking several proposed tax increases in Monterey County for the November 2026 ballot.

At the same time, people have tightened their household budgets in response to years of inflation and recently, soaring gas prices. Polls recently conducted in Monterey County show significant weakening over the past two years in voter support for tax increases. Convincing voters to approve a child care tax measure in Monterey County would be a tough campaign in 2026.

The Place to Introduce New Child Care Strategies: Your Chamber of Commerce

Instead, child care programs in Monterey County may grow and prosper with assistance through partnerships with private entities and individuals. A set of new strategies was introduced to the public for the first time by Sonja Koehler, Director of the Bright Beginnings Initiative, at a Lunch and Learn event on March 26 that was sponsored by your Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce. Not surprisingly, most attendees of the Lunch and Learn were already familiar with deficiencies in the Monterey County child care system and eager to see them fixed.

Bright Beginnings seems to be the ideal entity for promoting new strategies. It was founded in 2012 to fill a gap in coordination and facilitation of the diverse and scattered parties interested in child care

and child development in Monterey County. Bright Beginnings is now implementing its strategies with the help of more than 80 partners, including your Chamber.

Home-Based Child Care Businesses Need Partners

It was noted at the Lunch and Learn that the center-based child care programs in Monterey County are still in high demand, although some have had difficulty finding property and buildings to host new or expanded programs. Potential federal and state budget cuts could end up undermining some of these programs, especially those that significantly rely on state and federal funds.

Because center-based child-care programs have more costly and more complex start-up and expansion needs, Bright Beginnings is trying to bring community attention and assistance to the smaller but essential home-based segment of the child care market.

There are plenty of Monterey County residents interested in starting such businesses, and plenty of parents interested in using them. But the type of person who runs a home-based child-care business is very different than the type of person who runs a center-based child-care business.

On the positive side, people who want to start a home-based child-care business usually have

a passion for working with infants and young children and believe small, home-like settings are best for young children and meeting the individual needs of parents. They want to expand their interest and ability into a career that allows them to make some money for themselves. They seek independence and have an entrepreneurial spirit.

However, people who want to start a home-based child-care business also tend to face some obstacles. They typically lack formal training and experience in budgeting and accounting, regulatory compliance, procurement, and employee management. Some aspiring home-based child-care business owners may have limited proficiency in English. Some may be getting a checking account for the first time and have no experience with the banking system. They may lack capital for start-up costs. A few may even lack internet service in their own home. Bright Beginnings, with its partners, is promoting and building a community-based approach to address these obstacles.

Potential Partnerships with Businesses, Non-Profits, and Individuals

How can Chamber members help aspiring home-based child-care business owners get started on their dream? Bright Beginnings offers at least eight partnership options, listed below.

1. Donate matching grants (\$1,000 to \$50,000) to support formal training for aspiring home-based child-care business owners.

In Monterey County, individuals interested in establishing their own home-based child-care businesses can enroll in a 12-week training program offered through the local federally funded Monarch Small Business Development Center (SBDC), affiliated with the U.S. Small Business Administration

COMIENZOS BRILLANTES
INICIATIVA PARA PROMOVER EL DESARROLLO INFANTIL

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS
EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Salinas Valley
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

LUNCH AND LEARN

March 26
12 PM - 1 PM
119 E. Alisal St
Salinas, CA 93901

The State of Child Care: Learn the basics about our child care system and progress in expanding child care businesses in Monterey County. Be part of the solution to closing the gap in affordable, quality child care that meet the needs of parents and employers. Brought to you by the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Initiative.

Register at SalinasChamber.com

(part of the U.S. Department of Commerce) and administered by the Monterey County Business Council (MCBC).

In partnership with a community group called Las Mamás de Salinas Abogan, Monarch SBDC offers no-cost training, mentoring, and grant assistance for launching home-based child-care businesses. It contracts out this training to Nurture, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides training specifically for new entrepreneurs in the child-care industry. Donations from partners could go to these entities, or go through the Bright Beginnings Initiative as a coordinating entity, or even go directly to the child-care provider when appropriate.

2. Donate mini-grants (\$1,000-\$5,000) to help aspiring home-based child-care business owners to fulfill government requirements and establish a professional business environment necessary to begin operations.

As many Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce members know from experience, starting a small business is not free, nor is it simple. What seems like routine start-up expenses for some people may seem like insurmountable obstacles for people with limited savings and no experience.

There are forms and fees to file with federal, state, and local governments. The business owner will need a decent computer with software and internet access and a multi-functional printer. Presumably the business owner will want a desk and chair and cabinet storage to dedicate for work associated with the business. There are many things to consider, and they all cost money before the first child is ever enrolled.

3. Sponsor an aspiring home-based child care business owner with a grant of \$5,000 or more.

People who have recently established a home-based child-care business in Monterey County have learned that getting a license can sometimes take three to six months and cost \$25,000 or more. Time and cost often depend on how easily the business owner can perform work on the home property to fulfill regulatory health and safety guidelines of the California Child Care Licensing Program, overseen by the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).



Bright Beginnings seems to be the ideal entity for promoting new strategies. It was founded in 2012 to fill a gap in coordination and facilitation of the diverse and scattered parties interested in child care and child development in Monterey County.

The potential owner will likely have to buy new infant and child furniture, toys, outdoor play equipment, and solid waste containers that must fulfill safety and quality standards. In addition, home-based child-care facilities need to be ready for small children, with gates, fences, and other equipment and fixtures to ensure safety. Some potential home-based child-care business owners have been stymied in their dream because inspectors required new sinks, water heaters, carpeting or flooring, or even a new roof in the existing home.

4. Invest larger amounts and adopt a larger child care business or program.

For businesses or other entities that want to establish and support a formal child-care program but do not want to start one within their own organization, there are



Sonja Koehler of the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative invited Chamber members to participate actively in the effort to increase the supply of affordable, quality child care that meet the needs of parents and employers in Monterey County.

opportunities to sponsor center-based programs or home-based child care businesses and obtain guaranteed spaces for employees. Note that while the typically sponsorship cost per child is likely to be \$20,000 per year, there may be opportunities to negotiate special arrangements or reduce costs by providing in-kind contributions such as furniture or play equipment. One particularly valuable in-kind contribution would be indoor space with an adjacent outdoor play area.

5. Be a real estate ally: provide discounted building space

for a center-based child-care program.

Not surprisingly, obtaining property is a challenge facing potential owners and administrators of any center-based child-care facility in Monterey County. What property is suitable for child care at a suitable price?

Perhaps you own or manage a retail or commercial property that includes unused space and also has an outdoor area that could become a play area for small children. Or perhaps you oversee a government agency with empty surplus buildings, or you oversee a government

agency planning to build a new large facility. If so, consider leasing space to a center-based child-care program at a significant discount, even as low as \$1 per year.

6. Be a banking ally: help aspiring home-based child-care business owners to open bank accounts and obtain micro-loans.

Some people who have recently established home-based child-care businesses in Monterey County have contacted banks that didn't seem to consider them as desirable customers. And it may be true that offering banking services to home-based child-care business owners may not be lucrative and may have higher risk than other customers. But the need is there.

It can be difficult and confusing for some people to establish and use a bank account for business transactions. In addition, home-based child-care business owners who need a "micro-loan" for home improvements discover that some banks will not lend such small amounts. Perhaps there are local banks that can help.

7. Be a government ally: recognize how your own agency can help home-based child-care business owners.

If you are involved with a local or regional government micro-loan or grant assistance program, you may be wondering why aspiring home-based business owners haven't come to you to apply for funding. Or, if you handle zoning, permits, or licenses, you may wonder why your municipality is not seeing any interest from aspiring home-based business owners.

In Monterey County, it can be difficult for the public to know all the options because so many public and non-profit programs offer services to businesses and individuals. However, Bright Beginnings can serve as a central coordinator and facilitator to connect interested

parties to the entities that can help them.

8. Be a public relations ally: use your newsletters, electronic bulletins, and publications to promote the child-care partnership options.

This news may start with a Chamber Lunch and Learn and an article in the Chamber's Business Journal, but it needs to expand far beyond attendees at an educational lunch event and beyond Business Journal readership.

Perhaps someone in your neighborhood association or service club is interested in child care but never knew how to help. Now, there is a list of specific options and a contact person: Sonja Koehler, Director of Bright Beginnings, at (831) 444-8549 or at Sonja@BrightBeginningsMC.org.

What Rewards Would You Get from These Partnerships?

Ideally, donors will be able to have a personal relationship with the home-based child-care business owners that they support. They will see firsthand how their partners start and grow their businesses. Running a small business can be a lonely and discouraging proposition. Being an ally, mentor, and friend could be a decisive factor in keeping a new business afloat.

Imagine your relatively small grant or other personal assistance leading to a living room and backyard full of happy toddlers, who are overseen by trained child-care workers and exposed to wholesome toys and positive social interaction. You will be helping a small group of local children to have a better first five years of life and learning. They might even become part of your future workforce.

On a broader level, you'll help local parents to find jobs or keep their jobs to support their families. And you'll blunt the relentless flight of families out of Monterey County (and out of California). You may

even encourage Monterey County residents to become parents who otherwise may have decided that parenthood was financially infeasible for them.

You—Not the Government—Are the Solution to Monterey County Child-Care Challenges

Government cannot be the sole solution at this time. To start, grow, and thrive, child-care programs in Monterey County will need opportunities for assistance through partnerships with private entities and individuals.

Eight specific options are listed above, with potential outcomes for child care that could be far more personally fulfilling for you than simply paying a tax to a government agency. Perhaps you can help through one of the eight options listed above. Or, propose your own idea!

Again, contact Sonja Koehler, Director of Bright Beginnings, at (831) 444-8549 or at Sonja@BrightBeginningsMC.org for more information about these potential partnerships. 🌱

Want to Be a Partner in Improving Child Care in Monterey County?

Here are Eight Specific Ways:

- 1 Donate matching grants (\$1,000 to \$50,000) to support formal training for aspiring home-based child-care business owners.
- 2 Donate mini-grants (\$1,000-\$5,000) to help aspiring home-based child-care business owners to fulfill government requirements and establish a professional business environment necessary to begin operations.
- 3 Sponsor an aspiring home-based child-care business owner with a grant of \$5,000 or more.
- 4 Invest larger amounts and adopt a larger child-care business or program.
- 5 Be a real estate ally: provide discounted building space for a center-based child-care program.
- 6 Be a banking ally: help aspiring home-based child-care business owners to open bank accounts and obtain micro-loans.
- 7 Be a government ally: recognize how your own agency can help home-based child-care business owners.
- 8 Be a public relations ally: use your newsletters, electronic bulletins, and publications to promote the child-care partnership options.

Case Study: Expanding Retirement Savings with 1099 Income

By **Bill Hastie**, Hastie Financial Group

We will be periodically changing the format of our monthly article to include case studies that address specific situations and how applying proactive planning techniques may improve the situation. That said, please always seek professional assistance to address your specific circumstances and objectives.

Most employees of any company earn what is referred to as W2 income – income that is reported on a Form W2. These employees often have a retirement plan, such as a 401(k) plan, offered by their employer. Their maximum salary deferral in 2026 is \$24,500 if they are under age 50. If they are age 50 – 59 or age 64 or over, they can make a catch-up contribution of an additional \$8,000, and if age 60 – 63, that catch-up contribution is an additional \$11,250.

What if the employee wants to contribute more toward their retirement savings? If they are participating in the employee-sponsored retirement plan, there are specific income limits that may preclude them from making deductible IRA or Roth IRA contributions.

If the employee happens to



have self-employment income in addition to their employment income (W2), they may have the opportunity to save a considerable amount of assets in addition to their 401(k) plan at work. Because the self-employment income is reported on

a Form 1099 and be reflected on Schedule C of their tax return, this has, in effect, created a separate entity – most likely a sole proprietorship.

Let's assume a physician works at their local hospital as a W2 employee. This physician is most likely a participant in the retirement plan offered by the hospital, such as a 403(b) plan. But this physician also has 1099 income from services performed away from the hospital and wants to

make substantial contributions to a plan for retirement. After speaking with their financial advisor, the physician discovers that the sole proprietorship created by the 1099 income can establish a certain type of defined

benefit plan, referred to as a Cash Balance Plan.

The design parameters of a Cash Balance Plan are beyond the scope of this article, and it is

“
If the employee happens to have self-employment income in addition to their employment income (W2), they may have the opportunity to save a considerable amount of assets in addition to their 401(k) plan at work.

1099 INCOME see page 20

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Getty images

1099 INCOME - from page 19

important to note that the annual administration of the Plan can be somewhat expensive since an actuarial calculation is required each year. But once established, the maximum allowable Cash Balance contribution for a 50-year-old in 2026 is \$204,000 and increases to \$349,000 at age 65.

All contributions made to a Cash Balance Plan are considered deductible employer contributions, which allows the physician to fully contribute to the hospital's 403(b) retirement plan as employee contributions.

From a retirement planning standpoint, this physician has been able to take 1099 income that likely would otherwise just be spent and create an additional tax-deferred pool of assets to generate retirement income. Given the significant contribution limits, it is not uncommon for a Cash Balance Plan established in this manner to accumulate \$1 million or more, which is in addition to the accumulation in their 403(b) plan. A little planning with 1099 income can make a significant impact on the quality of life in retirement. 🌱

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

When People Come Together Around Hope, Something Deeply Meaningful Happens

By Pastor T.K. Anderson, Compass Church

As we move into May, I keep coming back to one simple thought, we live in a truly remarkable community. Just a few weeks ago, nearly 6,000 people gathered at Compass Church across our Good Friday and Easter services, joining together to celebrate the hope of Jesus Christ.

And, of course, that was only part of the story, because thousands more gathered at churches across our area that same weekend. It was a powerful reminder that faith is still alive and well in our region, and that when people come together around hope, something deeply meaningful happens.

At Compass, the entire Easter weekend felt special. The music was heartfelt and uplifting. Personal stories of life change reminded us that God is still at work in real people with real struggles. The sense of community engagement was off the charts. Families sat together. Friends invited friends. Neighbors welcomed neighbors. In a world that often feels divided and distracted, those gatherings felt like a glimpse of what can still be true when people slow down long enough to focus on what matters most.

That is one reason a recent story about Scottie Scheffler stood out to me. Before the 2025 Open Championship, Scheffler, already the top-ranked golfer in the world, said that winning is not what fills "the deepest places of your heart." He also made his priorities unmistakably



clear, saying that his faith and family come first and golf comes third.

It was a striking reminder that even at the very top of one's profession, success is a terrible savior. Achievement can be rewarding, but it was never designed to carry

the full weight of the human soul.

That perspective fits May so well, especially as we celebrate Mother's Day. Few gifts in life are as profound as the gift of a mother. Whether we are honoring moms, grandmothers, stepmothers, adoptive mothers, or women who have become spiritual



One of the best ways to honor mothers is to live out the values they worked so hard to build into us. Integrity. Compassion. Perseverance. Faith. Those are the qualities that shape strong homes, strong businesses, and strong communities.

mothers through their love and wisdom, this is a time to pause and say thank you.

The Bible gives us this timeless instruction, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). That kind of honor means more than buying a card or planning a nice meal. It means giving genuine gratitude, showing consistent respect, and recognizing the sacrifice, strength,

and quiet faithfulness that so many mothers bring into the lives of others.

One of the best ways to honor mothers is to live out the values they worked so hard to build into us. Integrity. Compassion. Perseverance. Faith. Those are the qualities that shape strong homes, strong businesses, and strong communities. When we honor the people who helped form our character, we strengthen the moral foundation of the next generation as well.

May is also the season of high school and college graduations, and that brings another reason for hope. Every diploma represents diligence, sacrifice, growth, and resilience. Behind every graduate is a story of early mornings, late nights, setbacks, encouragement, and determination. These students and young adults remind us that the future is bright. They are stepping into tomorrow's classrooms, companies, churches, communities, and leadership roles.

As a community, we have good reason to be encouraged. We have families investing in their children. We have mothers shaping lives. We have graduates stepping into the future. And we have churches across this area continuing to point people back to God, who alone gives lasting hope and direction.

That is why May feels so meaningful. It reminds us that when faith remains central, families grow stronger, communities grow healthier, and the future grows brighter. I am deeply grateful to serve in a place like this, and I believe our best days are still ahead.

God Bless. 🌱

From Donation to Opportunity: How Goodwill Central Coast Turns Community Generosity into Careers

By Goodwill Central Coast Staff

On any given day across the Central Coast, the routine is familiar. Someone clears space in a closet, packs up a box of books, or sets aside a jacket that no longer fits. The items are loaded into a car and dropped off at a donation center — one small act of generosity among thousands happening throughout the region.

For most donors, it's a simple way to declutter and give items a second life. But inside the network of stores and donation centers run by Goodwill Central Coast, those everyday contributions begin a journey that can ultimately change someone's life.

Across Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties, donated goods are transformed into something far greater than thrift store merchandise. They become job training, career guidance, and employment opportunities for people working to overcome significant barriers to entering the workforce.

At its core, Goodwill's model is remarkably straightforward: community generosity fuels programs designed to help individuals build stable and productive futures. Yet the scale of that impact — and the ripple effects it creates — reveal a powerful example of how small actions can strengthen an entire region.

The journey of a donation

When someone drops off clothing, household items or furniture at a Goodwill donation center, the process that follows is carefully coordinated. Items are sorted, evaluated, priced, and then placed on the shelves of local thrift stores.

From there, the story continues.

Shoppers browsing for vintage clothing, furniture, books, or household goods purchase those items, often drawn by affordability or the thrill of discovering something unique. But the transaction carries deeper significance: The revenue generated from those sales directly supports Goodwill's employment programs.

The system creates what Goodwill leaders often describe as a cycle of opportunity. One person's donated items become another person's purchase — and together they help fund job training and career services that support individuals striving for a fresh start.

The numbers illustrate just how large that cycle has become.

In 2025, Goodwill Central Coast received more than 707,000 donations totaling over 28 million pounds of clothing and household goods. Through resale and recycling efforts, the organization diverts more than 17 million pounds from landfills, helping reduce waste while preserving the region's natural landscape.

What begins as a bag of clothing can ultimately support someone preparing for a job interview, learning workplace skills, or taking the first steps toward financial independence.

Shopping with purpose

For many people, shopping at a

Goodwill store is simply a fun and affordable way to find something unexpected. Vintage denim, classic vinyl records, rare books, and distinctive furniture pieces often appear on store shelves. For sustainability-minded shoppers, thrifting also offers an environmentally conscious alternative to fast fashion and disposable consumer culture.

But each purchase also supports a larger mission.

The proceeds from store sales help fund programs designed to assist people facing challenges in finding employment. Participants

may be overcoming homelessness, living with disabilities, recovering from addiction, or returning to the workforce after extended gaps in employment.

Through job readiness training, career

counseling, and employment support services, individuals gain the tools needed to pursue meaningful work and rebuild their lives.

For shoppers, the experience becomes more than a transaction. It becomes a way to participate directly in strengthening their own community.

Turning barriers into opportunities

Across the Central Coast, many people face obstacles that can make employment difficult to secure. For individuals experiencing homelessness, consistent work

may seem out of reach without stable housing or transportation. For those living with disabilities, finding employers willing to provide accommodations can be challenging. Others may be rebuilding their lives after addiction recovery or returning to the workforce after years away.

Goodwill's workforce development programs aim to address these barriers by providing practical guidance and training tailored to each participant's needs.

Through job readiness programs, individuals learn essential workplace skills — from preparing resumes and practicing interview techniques to developing time management and communication abilities. Career counselors help participants explore job pathways while building confidence in their abilities.

What's more, the benefits extend far beyond the individual.

Strengthening the local economy

When someone secures employment after completing a workforce program, the positive impact spreads throughout the region.

Stable jobs allow individuals to support their families, invest in housing and education, and participate more fully in the local economy. Businesses gain reliable employees, and communities benefit from increased economic activity.

In this way, the cycle created by donations and thrift shopping becomes an investment in regional resilience.

Community participation plays a critical role in sustaining that cycle. Every bag of donated goods, every thrift store purchase, and every financial contribution helps ensure that Goodwill's employment



The system creates what Goodwill leaders often describe as a cycle of opportunity. One person's donated items become another person's purchase — and together they help fund job training and career services that support individuals striving for a fresh start.

services remain available to those who need them most.

Sustainability meets social impact

Beyond workforce development, Goodwill's operations also address another pressing challenge — environmental sustainability.

The Central Coast's natural beauty — from coastal landscapes to agricultural valleys — is a defining feature of the region. Yet like many communities across the country, it faces increasing pressure from waste and landfill overflow.

Thrift shopping and reuse provide a practical solution.

By extending the life of clothing, furniture, electronics, and household goods, Goodwill helps reduce the volume of items entering landfills. Millions of pounds of materials are diverted each year, lowering environmental impact while promoting a culture of reuse.

For environmentally conscious consumers, thrifting offers a meaningful way to align everyday shopping choices with broader sustainability goals.

The result is a rare intersection of environmental and social benefits — reducing waste while supporting workforce development programs.

A true community effort

What makes the Goodwill model especially powerful is its reliance on collective participation. The organization's mission is not carried out by a single group or institution. Instead, it depends on thousands of community members who contribute in small but meaningful ways.

Some donate clothing or furniture. Others shop regularly at thrift stores. Schools, businesses, and civic groups organize donation drives. Supporters make financial contributions to expand services.

Each action may seem modest on its own. But together, they

create a powerful network of support that helps individuals overcome barriers and pursue meaningful employment.

In that sense, Goodwill Central Coast is not just an organization. It is a reflection of the community it serves.

Neighbors helping neighbors. Donations becoming opportunities. Everyday generosity creating pathways to brighter futures. And with every item dropped off at a donation center or discovered on a thrift store shelf, that cycle begins again — quietly transforming simple acts of kindness into lasting impact. 🌱

City of Salinas Industrial Wastewater Flow Data 2013-2025

	Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility Flow Totals (Millions of Gallons - MG)	Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility Flow Totals (Converted to Acre-Feet - AF)	Effluent Flow Diverted to Regional Treatment Plant from Pond 3 Pump Station (Millions of Gallons - MG)	Effluent Flow Diverted to Regional Treatment Plant from Pond 3 Pump Station (Converted to Acre-Feet - AF)	Influent Flow Diverted to Regional Treatment Plant from Shunt Valve (Millions of Gallons - MG)	Influent Flow Diverted to Regional Treatment Plant from Shunt Valve (Converted to Acre-Feet - AF)	Stormwater Influent Flow Diversion Phases 1A and 1B (Millions of Gallons - MG)	Stormwater Influent Flow Diversion Phases 1A and 1B (Converted to Acre-Feet - AF)	Monthly Average of Daily Flow to Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility (Million Gallons MG)
2013	?	?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.88
2014	?	?	N/A	N/A	1,000	3,068.90	N/A	N/A	2.32
2015	?	?	N/A	N/A	?	?	N/A	N/A	2.95
2016	?	?	N/A	N/A	592.88	1,819.49	N/A	N/A	2.69
2017	729	2,237.23	N/A	N/A	167.1	512.81	N/A	N/A	2.90
2018	1009.66	3,098.55	N/A	N/A	0	0	N/A	N/A	2.76
2019	716.99	2,200.37	N/A	N/A	262.5	805.59	N/A	N/A	1.97
2020	959.29	2,943.97	N/A	N/A	6.76	20.75	N/A	N/A	2.62
2021	897.1	2,753.11	3.54	10.86	106.78	327.70	0.544	1.67	2.45
2022	753.1	2,311.19	198.74	609.91	68.3	209.61	1.581	4.85	2.06
2023	736.08	2,258.96	73.1	224.34	139.97	429.55	4.83	14.82	2.00
2024	914.02	2,805.04	227.94	699.53	2.2	6.75	0	0	2.50
2025	906.69	2,782.54	239.24	734.19	0.118	0.36	0	0	2.48
Total/Average	7,621.93	23,390.94	742.56	2,278.83	2,346.61	7,201.50	6.96	21.34	2.51

Sources: City of Salinas Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility Annual Reports 2013-2025. Acre-Feet is determined by multiplying the reported amount of million gallons by 3.0689.

2013-2016 - Some basic flow data provided in City of Salinas Industrial Wastewater Treatment Facility Annual Reports for later years was not included in these years.

2014 - Diversion of industrial wastewater to Monterey One Water Regional Treatment Plant began in April.

2014 - The reported influent flow diverted to the Monterey One Water (M1W) Regional Treatment Plant (one billion gallons) is approximate.

2018 - Monterey One Water (M1W) did not have a permit to accept industrial wastewater.

2021 - Pond 3 diversion and stormwater diversion infrastructure is completed and operational.

2024 and 2025 - Stormwater diversion is suspended because sediment deposits during 2023 flooding reduced water capacity of treatment facility ponds. From November 2024 to January 2025, the City of Salinas removed 10,011 dry tons of sediment from the ponds: 4644 tons from Pond 1, 2061 tons from Pond 2, and 3306 tons from Pond 3.

Joining the Top 1%: Salinas Valley Health Medical Center Earns Magnet® *with Distinction*

By Chris N. Haubert, Salinas Valley Health

Achieving the highest standards of nursing excellence is a commitment to patients — ensuring they receive the safest and most compassionate quality care. For years, Magnet Recognition® from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) has represented that commitment. Today, an even more prestigious honor raises the bar further.

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center has earned Magnet® *with Distinction* from the ANCC — placing it among the nation's top hospitals. This accomplishment reflects the expertise, leadership and focus of the nursing team, as well as the dedication of all the staff. It strengthens both the nursing workforce and care standards.

What Sets this Achievement Apart

The ANCC's Magnet Recognition Program® is regarded as the gold standard for nursing excellence. It evaluates medical centers on their ability to deliver superior patient care, foster innovation and support strong nursing leadership.

Magnet designation recognizes organizations where nurses are empowered to deliver the safest, highest-quality care. Choosing a Magnet institution means choosing a culture of collaboration, continuous improvement and exceptional standards.

Introduced in 2023, Magnet *with Distinction* is the top tier. It is awarded to organizations that exceed Magnet standards across multiple dimensions. While about 10% of U.S. hospitals have Magnet designation, as of March 2026, only about 1% have earned Magnet



March 25, 2026 announcement of Magnet *with Distinction* designation for Salinas Valley Health Medical Center.

with Distinction — making it a rare honor.

Pathway to National Recognition

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center's achievement was years in the making. It first earned Magnet in 2021 after a rigorous process, becoming the region's first and only Magnet-designated medical center.

Since then, it has focused on sustained excellence in nursing practice, patient outcomes, and engagement. In 2025, the medical center submitted over 2,000 pages of documentation demonstrating superior performance. This was followed by a multi-day site visit, during which appraisers evaluated the organization and engaged with

more than 400 staff.

At the core of this honor is a commitment to high-quality, evidence-based care. Nurses are empowered to lead and implement best practices. One example is the ICU's alcohol withdrawal program, where nurses redesigned care protocols based on the latest research.

Nurse autonomy defines Magnet culture. They develop and implement programs that directly improve care. Interdisciplinary collaboration enhances safety and quality.

Impact on Patients, Nurses and the Community

The benefits of Magnet recognition — especially Magnet *with*

Distinction — are evident in patient outcomes. Research shows Magnet-recognized organizations achieve higher patient satisfaction, lower mortality, and improved quality outcomes.

For patients, this designation signals that outstanding treatment is the expectation. As Chief Nursing Officer Carla Spencer, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, explains, "As an organization, we chose this path because it yields safer patient care, and that's what the community deserves."

For nurses and staff, Magnet *with Distinction* fosters professional growth and satisfaction. Salinas

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A PROFILE IN LEADERSHIP

From Salinas Valley Roots to Global Leadership: Colby Pereira Remains Committed to Community and Agriculture

By Colleen Bailey, CEO/President SVCC

Leadership in agriculture often begins long before a title is earned. It begins in the fields, in family traditions, and in the quiet lessons passed from one generation to the next.

For Colby Pereira, that journey started in California's fertile Salinas Valley, where a childhood shaped by family farming and community involvement planted the seeds for a career that now helps guide a global food brand.

Today, Pereira serves as chief operating officer of TheogCompanies, overseeing a complex network formed through the merger of major agricultural brands. Yet despite the scale of her responsibilities, she still traces her leadership philosophy back to a tractor seat beside her grandfather and the small farming operation her family began decades ago.

"I was actually born and raised in the Salinas Valley," Pereira said. "Both sides of my family have roots here. My mom's side was in the Soledad area and my dad's side in Gonzales. Agriculture was always around us."

Her family's farming story began in the 1950s when her grandparents leased a small parcel of land near Soledad's Mission area and started what would become the family business. Over the years it expanded steadily, but the values that defined it remained simple: hard work, family, and a deep connection to the surrounding community.

"As a child, I spent a lot of time



with my grandparents on the farm," Pereira said. "I remember riding on my grandfather's knee on the tractor. Agriculture was just in my blood."

Life revolved around the farm, but it also revolved around the community that supported it. Pereira grew up immersed in youth sports, school activities and community programs in Soledad. Her parents coached teams and volunteered, modeling the importance of giving back.

"From an early age I saw how much the community gave to our childhood," she said. "That created this link in my mind between family, business and community. It's a trifecta that has always been important to me."

Her education followed a similar path through the region she calls home: Mission School in Soledad, Notre Dame High School in Salinas, and eventually California Polytechnic State University, where she continued building the

knowledge that would support her work in agriculture.

But the most formative lessons often came outside the classroom.

"My first jobs with the family business were actually cleaning the office," she said with a laugh. "My grandfather would run his fingertips across the top of the door frames to show us where we missed."

Those early responsibilities evolved over time. Throughout high school she helped with administrative work and spent time learning

operations in the fields. During college summers she returned to the farm, and after graduating she joined the family business full-time, spending more than a decade learning every aspect of it.

"I'm so thankful for that time," Pereira said. "It gave me a real understanding of the entire operation."

In June 2020, Pereira made a major professional shift, joining Braga Fresh as vice president of operations. The transition happened at an extraordinary moment: the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She had known company leader Rod Braga for most of her life, and the similarities between their family farming operations made the move feel natural. But the timing meant stepping into leadership during one of the most disruptive periods the agricultural industry had seen in decades.

"Traditional farming didn't stop," Pereira said. "We kept growing food and producing. But the way we got that done looked very different."

Protecting team members meant rethinking equipment design, shift schedules and daily operations. At the same time, the marketplace itself shifted dramatically as restaurants and schools closed and consumers began stocking up on groceries they could prepare at home.

"It was a really interesting time in the industry," she said. "But it was also an incredible learning experience. You saw people across agriculture and across the community coming together to figure out how we keep moving forward safely."

Her role soon expanded to include oversight of the company's processing operations — an area she initially knew little about. Rather than seeing that as a limitation, Pereira embraced it as an opportunity to learn.

"I definitely didn't come in

pretending to know everything," she said. "But Rod had faith that I could figure it out."

That approach became a defining element of her leadership style. Pereira believes strong leaders are not those who claim expertise in every detail, but those who surround themselves with knowledgeable teams and remain eager to learn.

"I know just enough about a lot of things," she said. "But I know a lot about the people who are experts in those areas, and I rely on them."



From an early age I saw how much the community gave to our childhood. That created this link in my mind between family, business and community. It's a trifecta that has always been important to me.

In August of last year, Pereira stepped into her current role as chief operating officer of TheogCompanies, overseeing operations following the merger of Dole Fresh Vegetables/Bud Antle, organicgirl and Braga Fresh. The transition elevated her responsibilities from regional operations to helping manage a national — and global — brand. This is a meteoric rise in only five years.

Her current work focuses largely on integration — aligning three organizations into a unified system while maintaining stability for employees and customers. That means bringing together different corporate cultures, operational systems, holiday calendars, customer networks and logistical frameworks across the country.

"It's about making three companies feel seamless," Pereira said.

The process involves everything from coordinating IT systems

and legal structures to optimizing supply chains across the United States. It also requires clear communication during a period of significant change.

"Even though headquarters is here in the West, we have team members across the country," she said. "It's important for me to maintain connection with the entire team, no matter the location, so everyone feels supported and part of the network." [CP1]

That communication extends beyond team members to customers as well. Pereira spends a significant amount of time traveling, meeting directly with partners to explain the merger process, outline expectations and ensure the company continues delivering high-quality products and service.

For Pereira, quality extends far beyond what ends up in a box or bag of produce.

"We talk about quality in everything we do," she said. "Quality in how we communicate, quality in how we interact with our team members, quality in how we support our communities."

Despite the scale of the company she now helps lead, the values guiding her decisions remain rooted in the same Salinas Valley traditions that shaped her childhood.

From cleaning office door frames under her grandfather's watchful eye to overseeing nationwide operations, Pereira's path illustrates how leadership often grows from humble beginnings. Her career reflects the enduring influence of family, the resilience of the agricultural community and the power of staying connected to the people and places that shape us.

In an industry that feeds millions, Pereira continues to draw strength from the lessons she learned long ago — that success is never just about the harvest. It is about the people who plant the seeds, the communities that sustain the work and the leaders willing to keep learning along the way. 🌱

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Valley Health supports career development and autonomy, which is reflected in its low nurse turnover rate of 9.13%, compared to the national average of 16.4%.

Nurses cite the supportive culture as a key reason they stay.

"This medical center does something that I've never seen any other do, and that is being able to keep nurses and treat nurses well," said ICU nurse Laurie Freed-Edelman, BSN, RN, CCRM-CSC.

Salinas Valley Health Medical Center plays a vital role in the regional healthcare ecosystem, ensuring access to high-quality care. As one of the few facilities in California to earn Magnet *with Distinction*, it sets a benchmark for care and reinforces the value of investing in nursing.

While about 10% of U.S. hospitals have Magnet designation, as of March 2026, only about 1% have earned Magnet *with Distinction* — making it a rare honor.

Advancing the Future of Healthcare

The medical center stands out for nurse-driven innovation, autonomy, and high performance. Magnet *with Distinction* is both a milestone and a springboard. The public district healthcare system remains focused on advancing evidence-based care, collaboration, and optimal outcomes while sustaining the high standards that earned this recognition.

Blending innovation, teamwork, and commitment to quality, Salinas Valley Health Medical Center leads the way in nursing excellence — setting the standard for the future of healthcare. 🌱



Salinas Valley Excellence: A Look Back at the 105th Annual Awards Luncheon

By Chamber Staff

On Thursday, April 9th, the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce hosted its 105th Annual Awards Luncheon, presented by Taylor Farms. It was a landmark day of celebration and excellence, bringing together nearly 500 attendees to honor the pillars of our business community.

The festivities began with a vibrant Networking Power Hour, sponsored by Bay Federal Credit Union, which many described as “poppin’.” The room was abuzz with excitement as Chamber members and community leaders reconnected over coffee, all while being warmly greeted by the enthusiastic students of the Rancho San Juan FFA.

Following the networking hour, guests enjoyed a spectacular buffet-style lunch provided by Valley Restaurant and Catering. The menu, featuring barbecued tri-tip, chicken, farfalle pasta salad, grilled vegetables, green salad, fruit, beans, and bread, received rave reviews from those in attendance. The formal program opened with a stirring performance of the National Anthem by Barbra Ann Wagner, a talented student from CSUMB, who left the crowd in awe.

CEO Colleen Bailey and Board Chair Leonard Batti kicked off the program by expressing gratitude to retiring board members Jennifer Williams-Carpenter, Amy Gibson, and Tom Moran. They also officially introduced the incoming board members for 2026, Juan C. Gonzalez, Liz Hall, and Chris Steinbruner.

During her reflections on 2025, Bailey highlighted key milestones including a surge in visionary and stakeholder members, overall membership growth, and the



The room was abuzz with excitement as members and community leaders connected at the Networking Power Hour.



Amanda Gamban and Carolyn McGlenn-Newton of Bay Federal Credit Union.



Sponsors, Tymeesa Rutledge of Montage Health, Athena Morris of TMD Creative, Jennifer Williams of Natividad Medical Foundation, and Monica Tovar, Citizen of the Year Honoree with husband William Tovar.

launch of new programs such as the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Career Pathways, and various economic development initiatives. Batti followed by reporting on the Chamber’s mission and updated strategic pillars, which place a heavy emphasis on enhancing member benefits.

A major highlight of the

afternoon was the recognition of the Chamber’s milestone anniversary members. We were proud to honor California Rodeo Salinas for an incredible 50 years of partnership. Our 25-year members include Monterey Credit Union, Backus Properties, Republic Services, and The Costa Family McDonald’s Restaurants. We also celebrated

a large group of 10-year members, including Monterey Zoo & Vision Quest, California Strawberry Commission, C&N Tractors, Stifel, Nicolaus & Company, Inc., Disaster Cleanup Specialists, Active Seniors, Inc., A Tool Shed Equipment Rentals, Monterey County Film Commission, Johnson Electronics, Salinas Valley Ford, Veterans

Transition Center of California, Holaday Seed Company, Housing Resource Center of Monterey County, American Takii, Inc., Alliant Insurance Services, and La Plaza Bakery & Café.

The program then moved to the heart of the event: the presentation of the 105th Annual Awards. Manny Escarcega of West Coast Community Bank was named Ambassador of the Year, sharing a heartfelt message about his support system, his fiancé Evelyn, and his commitment to the small business community, coming from a family who runs a small business in Watsonville. The Agricultural Leadership award was presented to Brian Church of Church Brothers Farms, who spoke about the grit required to navigate the pandemic and his unwavering commitment to the local community. Monica Tovar of TMD Creative was honored as Citizen of the Year, noting the “full-circle moment” of following in the footsteps of her mentor, Alfred Diaz-Infante, as she now focuses her expertise on uplifting women and youth.

The Food Bank for Monterey County received the Spirit of the Community award, with Executive Director Melissa Kendrick discussing the vital local partnerships and volunteers necessary to fight the regional hunger crisis. Chris Morello of the Monterey Regional Airport was recognized as Businesswoman of the Year, marking her achievement as the first female Executive Director of the airport since its establishment in 1941 and highlighting her team’s hard work during a period of significant growth.

The award for Outstanding Small Business of the Year went to Salad Shoppe, whose team expressed deep gratitude to their clients and the staff who drive their daily success. K&D Landscaping was honored as the Outstanding Large Business of the Year, with their team speaking passionately about their commitment to innovation, their



Nathalia Carrillo, President of the SUHSD Board of Trustees, with Rancho San Juan FFA students.



Outstanding Small Business of the Year Honoree, Salad Shoppe, at the luncheon.



From left to right, Chamber CEO Colleen Bailey, Spirit of the Community Honoree Food Bank for Monterey County Melissa Kendrick, and SVCC Board Chair Leonard Batti.



California Rodeo Salinas celebrated 50 years of membership with the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce.



Sponsor, Alex Garcia, Johnny Jarquin, and Johnathan Gracida of Mag One Media.



Ambassador of the Year Honoree, Manny Escarcega with fiancé Evelyn, and West Coast Community Bank Team.



Agricultural Leadership Honoree, Brian Church and guests of Church Brothers Farms.

people-first approach to business, and their ongoing leadership in regional water conservation efforts.

Our deepest thanks go to all the attendees, honorees, sponsors, and partners for making this celebration a resounding success. We would like to extend a special thank you to

our Vice Chair of Events, Veronica Plascencia, for her exceptional leadership. We also recognize the hard work of the Rancho San Juan FFA and our Ambassadors: Laurie Martin, Margaret Noroian, Francisco Arevalo, Keith Chua, Laura Kershner, Jason Avalos, Brad

Martin, and Jan Burnett as well as the Chamber team — Colleen Bailey, Gabe Lopez, Jasmine Bhardwaj, Cesar Chavez, Kevin Dayton, and Mac McDonald. To stay up to date on Chamber happenings, visit SalinasChamber.com or call (831) 751-7725. 🌿

Gut Health Intricately Involved in Healthy Functioning of Body, Can be Key to Improving Overall Health

ARCpoint Labs Offering Expanded Menu of Gut-Health Testing for Gut Health Awareness Month

By Spenser Smith, ARCpoint Labs Laboratory Manager

“Let food be thy medicine.” Attributed to Hippocrates (sometimes called the “father” of modern Western medicine and the origin of the Hippocratic Oath), the phrase has endured because it points to something fundamental. 2,400 years later, cutting-edge research into gut health, our gut microbiome, food intolerances, and more is underlining and deepening our understanding of that age-old wisdom.

With June being Gut Health Awareness Month, ARCpoint Labs is offering an expanded menu of gut-health testing.

We all know that diet is important, but how does our gut health influence our immune system? Our aging process? Even our brain? In popular understanding, gut health can be sometimes reduced to digestion: what you eat, how well you absorb nutrients, and whether you experience discomfort after meals.

Upset tummy after eating a meal full of spicy peppers? Obviously, gut-related. Distress or brain fog due to a lactose or gluten intolerance? Of course. Serotonin imbalances? Mood swings? Chronic inflammation? Frequent illnesses? Skin rashes? Accelerated aging symptoms? Traditionally, medical investigations of symptoms like these would look elsewhere.

Modern research is dramatically expanding that view. Today, scientists increasingly recognize the gut as intricately involved in the healthy functioning of other systems in the body. It does so through many intricate pathways.

As individuals, understanding these connections can be the key to

improving our wellness and health with decisions as simple as what we eat and what supplements might be helpful or unhelpful.

First, the microbiome. Did you know that you are not just an individual organism, you are actually a thriving ecosystem? The human gut is home to trillions of microorganisms — collectively known as the microbiome. In fact, there are more microbiome cells in your body than there are human cells!

Today, scientists increasingly recognize the gut as intricately involved in the healthy functioning of other systems in the body. It does so through many intricate pathways. As individuals, understanding these connections can be the key to improving our wellness and health.

These bacteria, fungi, and other microbes play a critical role in maintaining balance across multiple body systems. They help regulate immune responses, synthesize certain vitamins, and even communicate with the brain through what researchers call the “gut-brain axis.”

Emerging evidence suggests that disruptions in the microbiome — often referred to as dysbiosis — may be linked to conditions ranging from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) to anxiety, depression, autoimmune diseases, and metabolic disorders.

Microbiome testing provides a snapshot of the bacterial composition in your gut. It can highlight imbalances, low diversity, the presence of potentially harmful organisms, or the absence of beneficial ones. This type of testing is particularly useful for individuals dealing with chronic digestive issues, unexplained inflammation, or recurrent infections.

Gut permeability refers to how

easily substances pass through the intestinal lining. Increased permeability, also called “leaky gut,” has been associated — though still actively researched — with inflammation, immune system activation, and concomitant increased cancer risk and effects on the aging process.

Testing in this area aims to provide a clearer picture of intestinal barrier function. Innovative biomarker panels like the **Gut Zoomer**, genetic predisposition and antibody testing like the

CICA test, and detailed antibody profile testing can help aid in determining the health of your gut permeability.

Chronic inflammation is a common thread in many health conditions, including those related to gut health. The gut plays a central role in regulating overall background inflammation because it houses a large portion of the immune system, and imbalances in its microbiome or barrier function can trigger chronic, low-grade immune activation throughout the body. Chronic inflammation linked to gut dysfunction may contribute to conditions associated with aging and metabolic health.

Testing markers of inflammation, such as an **Inflammation Panel**, can provide insight into whether your body is experiencing ongoing immune activation, even in the absence of obvious symptoms. Ongoing inflammation marker testing can monitor the success of interventions over time, measuring

how successful your personal health plan is in improving your biomarkers, and giving you the feedback and information to make targeted health decisions.

The food you eat affects you in numerous ways, from the quality of the micronutrients contained within to its effects on your metabolic health like your cholesterol, blood sugar, and insulin levels. Sometimes, though, a specific food can set off a negative reaction in your body through an overreaction by your immune system.

Food allergies involve an immediate immune response and can be serious or even life-threatening. Food sensitivities, on the other hand, tend to produce delayed symptoms such as bloating, headaches, fatigue, or skin issues.

Food sensitivity and food allergy testing can determine the difference between acute allergic reactions to foods in your diet, and long-term food sensitivities that may be worsening inflammation and causing difficult to diagnose symptoms. Food-sensitivity panels at ARCpoint Labs and other certified facilities can often test for hundreds of food markers at once, potentially forming a valuable aid in constructing a healthy diet.

Why Testing Matters

Many people try to promote gut health through diet changes, supplements, or probiotics. While these can be helpful, they’re often applied broadly without understanding the underlying issue. Two people with similar symptoms—bloating, fatigue, or irregular digestion—may have entirely different root causes.

This is where targeted testing becomes valuable. Instead of guessing, testing allows you to identify specific imbalances or sensitivities and tailor your approach accordingly.

Of course, a lot of diet advice is universal. Regardless of your test results, almost everyone will be well served by choosing a diet that is high in fiber (which promotes the growth of healthy microbiome organisms), low in ultra-processed foods (which leads to overgrowth of less healthy microbiome organisms), and plentiful plant-based and naturally fermented foods. Following this advice will be good for your microbiome, good for your gut, and good for the rest of you too!

Still, knowledge matters, and knowing more about your gut health means making precision decisions. Rather than cycling through diets, supplements, and trends, individuals can use testing to better understand their unique biology. From there, changes to nutrition, lifestyle, and medical care can be more targeted and, often, more effective.

If you want to explore these connections further, look for reviews and meta-analyses rather than single studies. Institutions like the Mayo Clinic and Cleveland Clinic also provide balanced, evidence-based overviews for the public. Reputable sources such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Harvard Health Publishing, and peer-reviewed journals like *Nature Microbiology* or *Gut* regularly publish accessible summaries of ongoing research.

While not every claim you see online is fully validated, the overall direction of research is clear: the gut is not isolated. It is central. At ARCpoint Labs, we make it possible for individuals to take a more proactive and informed role in their gut health. Take advantage of our wide range of gut health tests in one place, with streamlined processes and fast turnaround times to get your results fast, easy, and with the service you can expect from your neighborhood laboratory experts. 🌿



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Ribbon Cutting with Hampton Inn & Suites by Hilton Salinas**

Thursday, May 7, 5:00– 6:30 p.m.
523 Work St., Salinas

Join us as we celebrate a ribbon cutting with Hampton Inn & Suites by Hilton Salinas. This special event will introduce the hotel's new leadership team and provide an opportunity for the community and Chamber members to connect. Guests will enjoy light refreshments and drinks while networking with local business professionals. Attendees will also have the opportunity to take guided tours of the hotel and learn more about the amenities and services the Hampton Inn offers to visitors and the Salinas community.

- **Grand Opening Celebration with Diamond Financial Group**

Saturday, May 9, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
1611 Bunker Hill Way, Salinas

Join us as we celebrate the official Grand Opening of Diamond Financial Group, Inc. This special occasion is more than a ribbon cutting—it is a celebration of community, connection, and something truly meaningful. This will be a midday celebration featuring live entertainment, delicious refreshments, exclusive giveaways, and the opportunity to connect with the Diamond Financial Group team of dedicated financial professionals. Whether you are looking to build, protect, or elevate your financial future, this event is designed with you in mind—offering a chance to discover the personalized approach that defines Diamond Financial Group.

- **Ribbon Cutting with Pacific Valley Bank for new Branch Location**

Wednesday, May 13, 4:30– 6:00 p.m.
1097 South Main St., Salinas

Please join us for Pacific Valley Bank's ribbon-cutting celebration at their new location: 1097 South Main St., Salinas on Wednesday, May 13, from 4:30-6:00 p.m. Savor light bites, drinks, and networking with Monterey County Businesses and the last team of truly local bankers.

- **Lunch Connect with The Valley Restaurant and Catering**

Wednesday, June 3, 2026, 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.
9 E. San Luis St., Salinas

Join us on Wednesday, June 3, 2026, from 12:00–1:30 p.m. at The Valley Restaurant & Catering for our Chamber Lunch Connect series — a great opportunity to meet fellow Chamber members, network in a relaxed setting, and enjoy a delicious meal. Don't miss this fun way to connect with your business community and support member restaurants!

- **California Rodeo Salinas & Monterey Regional Airport Chamber Mixer**

Tuesday, June 16, 2026, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
200 Fred Kane Drive, Suite 200 Monterey

Join us for the Annual California Rodeo Salinas and Monterey Regional Airport Chamber Mixer with the Salinas Valley and Monterey Peninsula Chambers of Commerce as we gear up for the California Rodeo Salinas in July. Dust off your boots, throw on your cowboy hats, and join us for a fun evening in celebration of one of Salinas' most loved events. Tickets cost \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members.

- **Business After Hours: K&D Landscaping — 40th Anniversary Ribbon Cutting**

Thursday, July 30, 2026, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.
62 C Hangar Way, Watsonville

Join the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, and the Santa Cruz Area Chamber for Business After Hours on July 30 from 5:00–7:00 p.m. at K&D Landscaping in Watsonville. Network with fellow business professionals, enjoy a relaxed evening of conversation, and experience a unique behind-the-scenes look at a local business. The evening will also include a special 40th anniversary ribbon-cutting celebrating K&D Landscape's milestone year. Help us commemorate this exciting achievement while building connections with the Chamber's vibrant business community.

RSVP at salinaschamber.com

California Rodeo Salinas Generates More Than \$21 Million in Economic Impact for Monterey County

The California Rodeo Salinas has been a community treasure for more than 100 years, and now there's hard data to back up how valuable the famed annual event actually is. A newly released economic analysis shows that the rodeo and the Salinas Sports Complex that it runs, generated \$21.8 million in total economic output in 2025, up from \$18 million in 2014.

The report, "California Rodeo Salinas — Economic, Fiscal, and Social Impact Analysis," which was conducted by Beacon Economics, a Los Angeles-based independent research and consulting firm, found that the combined rodeo and sports complex supported 93 local jobs, generated \$6.6 million in labor income, produced more than \$2.4 million in tax revenue for essential public services, and \$17 million in direct spending, \$14.6 million from the rodeo itself and \$2.4 million from year-round events at the sports complex.



Pint-sized rodeo competitors show off their belt buckle awards at the California Rodeo Salinas. Photo by Alex Garcia, Mag One Media.

"The California Rodeo Salinas has always been about bringing the community together, but it's also clear that what we do has a meaningful impact on the local economy," said Barbara Causley, Salinas

Sports Complex General Manager. "From tourism and hospitality to local vendors and nonprofits, this event touches so many parts of our community."

The 52-page in-depth analysis (which is available to read in full at <https://www.carodeo.com/p/about-us/community/economic-impact>) also reports that nearly 90,000 attendees participated in 2025 events, with out-of-the-area visitors accounting for more than 70% of total attendee spending.

These out-of-the-area visitors, who stayed at local lodging, dined at local restaurants and shopped at local stores, spent an average of \$161 per person per day (\$63 on lodging, \$41 on food and beverage, and \$30 on retail), significantly benefiting local businesses. This total includes direct spending as well as the ripple

effect of their dollars recirculating through the local economy.

Not only that, but local attendees also contributed to the regional economy, spending an average of \$15 per person per day outside the venue, mainly on dining and transportation.

The analysis draws on financial records from August 2024 through July 2025, including operational and capital expenditures, as well as results from an attendee survey conducted during the 2025 event season. It's the first in-depth, comprehensive economic analysis of the rodeo's impact since a study conducted by students at CSU Monterey Bay in 2014, thus the 12-year gap in economic data.

Beyond their economic and fiscal contributions, the California Rodeo Association, which operates the Rodeo and the sports complex, plays a vital role in the social and cultural life of Salinas and Monterey County.

As a not-for-profit organization, the association reinvests in local schools, youth programs, and nonprofit organizations, helping preserve Salinas' Western heritage and fostering a strong sense of community pride.

The report focuses on the association's ongoing contributions in four key areas: community giving, scholarships and youth development, volunteerism and community engagement, and cultural identity and heritage:

- Community Giving – \$850,000 distributed to 40-plus nonprofits, schools, and service

California Rodeo Salinas: Economic, Fiscal & Social Impact Study

Economic and Fiscal Impacts at a Glance (Monterey County, 2025):



Additional Statewide Impact: Together, CRS and SSC activities generated about \$3.3 million in economic output and \$454,000 in tax revenue across the rest of California, excluding Monterey County.

A new report highlights the California Rodeo Salinas' role as a major economic driver and community supporter in Monterey County.

continued on next page



NON-PROFIT EVENTS

First Fridays! – Salinas City Center Improvement Association

May 1, 5:00 – 9:00 p.m., Salinas City Center, Oldtown Salinas

Every first Friday of the month, the heart of Downtown Salinas comes alive with creativity, culture, and community. Local galleries, restaurants, coffee shops, and businesses open their doors to showcase the incredible talent of artists, musicians, and makers from across the region. Stroll through Main Street and beyond to discover vibrant art exhibits, live performances, and interactive experiences. Whether you're here to support local artists, enjoy live music, or simply connect with friends and neighbors, First Friday is your chance to see downtown in a whole new light. Come hungry, come curious, and come ready to celebrate the best of Salinas' art, culture, and community.

Salinas Day – City of Salinas

May 2, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., 1 Station Place, Salinas, Heritage Park

Celebrate Salinas at the 2nd Annual Salinas Day! The day will be filled with activities, music, history, community resources, and more.

2026 Salinas Valley Fair – Salinas Valley Fair

May 14-17, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., 625 Division St., King City, Salinas Valley Fairgrounds

The 2026 Salinas Valley Fair in King City features four days of agricultural education, local entertainment, livestock shows, and family fun, including a carnival, concerts, and rodeo events. Highlights include 4-H/FFA livestock shows, a Grand Tasting, nightly entertainment at the Longbranch Saloon, and special themed days like Armed Forces Day.

continued from previous page

groups.

- Scholarships and Youth Development – More than \$200,000 awarded since the 1980s to support local students pursuing higher education and vocational training.
- Volunteerism and Community Engagement – In addition to more than 1,400 volunteers and committee members, 350 student volunteers contribute over 5,500 hours of community service each year.
- Cultural Identity and Heritage – 13,000 spectators and 1,100

horses in Big Week parades, with more than 550 community events hosted annually at the SSC.

“The Rodeo’s impact goes far beyond dollars,” Causley said. “It’s about community pride, tradition, and giving back.”

The Salinas Sports Complex extends this impact year-round by hosting more than 550 events annually, continuing to drive tourism and economic activity beyond Big Week.

For more information, visit www.CARodeo.com or contact the Rodeo Office at (831) 775-3100. 🌱

Monster Truck Throwdown – California Rodeo Salinas

June 14, 2:00 p.m., 1034 N. Main St, Salinas Sports Complex

The Monster Truck Throwdown will roar into the Salinas Sports Complex on Sunday, June 14, delivering high-flying stunts, car-crushing power, and nonstop excitement to the Central Coast. Fans can expect an all-new, larger, and more challenging track designed to push drivers and machines to the limit, along with the notorious Farmer 500 race, with some new twists this year. Tickets are on sale now. The event is presented by Gold Star GMC.

TICKET PRICING:

Box seats (ages 2+) – \$45; All Grandstands: Adults & ADA (ages 13+) – \$32; Kids (ages 2-12, except box seats) – \$15 Monster Meet Up – \$10 (Must be purchased separately and must accompany an event ticket.) Gates will open at 10:30 a.m., with the show kicking off at 2 p.m. Fans can get up close to the massive trucks and meet the drivers during the Monster Meet Up from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (separate ticket required; must accompany an event ticket). Don't miss this thrilling day of monster truck action at the Salinas Sports Complex on June 14. Get your tickets early at www.carodeo.com before they're gone.

3rd Annual Sweetheart Soiree – California Rodeo Salinas

July 9, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., Salinas Sport Complex, Salinas

After back-to-back sold-out events in 2024 and 2025, the California Rodeo Salinas is thrilled to welcome back the Sweetheart Soiree Cowgirl Luncheon for its 3rd annual celebration on Thursday, July 9, 2026. This fan-favorite event will be held in the Exhibition Mall at the Salinas Sports Complex from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., bringing together cowgirls from across the region for an afternoon of connection, celebration, and western flair. The Sweetheart Soiree is more than a luncheon—it's a spirited celebration of the confidence, camaraderie, and unmistakable style of cowgirls. Guests can look forward to mimosas, music, and a vibrant, high-energy atmosphere that captures the heart of rodeo week. The event is presented by Kaiser Permanente. With the past two years seeing quick sellouts, demand is expected to be high once again. This year, 300 seats will be available at \$100 per person. A limited number of donor opportunities and reserved tables will be offered to returning 2024 and 2025 table purchasers, who will receive early access via email. Tickets are on sale now at carodeo.com. Beyond the fun, the Sweetheart Soiree continues to make a meaningful impact. A portion of event proceeds, including those from the always-popular silent auction, will benefit the California Rodeo Scholarship Program. By attending, guests are not only part of a memorable afternoon but also helping support local students in their pursuit of higher education.

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