

KGO-TV/ABC7
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
QUARTERLY LISTING OF COMMUNITY ISSUES AND
RELATED PROGRAMMING
FOURTH QUARTER January 1-March 31, 2022
REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING

During the first quarter of 2022, KGO-TV aired the following regularly scheduled local newscasts identified on air as “ABC 7 News” with a total cumulative average of approximately 140 hours per month:

Monday - Friday 5:00AM-7:00AM

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Reggie Agui, Kumasi Aaron, Meteorologist Drew Tuma, Traffic anchor Jobina Fortson.

This morning news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, traffic, health, financial and consumer news.

Monday – Friday* 11:00AM-12:00PM

ABC7 News Midday Live- Anchored by Reggie Aquí, Kristen Sze, Meteorologist Drew Tuma.

This late morning news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health and consumer news. Anchors conduct live or taped interviews with local newsmakers and discuss hot topics in the news of the day.

Monday – Friday** 3:00-3:30PM

ABC7 News Getting Answers- Anchored by Kristen Sze.

This news program is a live interactive interview program in which viewers can submit questions to live newsmaker guests. Topics include Covid health, local politicians and community leaders.

Monday - Friday 4:00-5:00PM

ABC7 News at 4pm- Anchored by Larry Beil, Kristen Sze, Meteorologist Mike Nicco, Seven on Your Side Consumer Reporter Michael Finney

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health, technology and consumer news. Anchors conduct live interviews with local newsmakers on topics of daily interest.

Monday - Friday 5:00-5:30PM

ABC7 News at 5pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health, technology and consumer news

Monday - Friday 6:00-7:00PM

ABC7 News at 6pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Weather Spencer Christian, Sports Larry Beil. Seven on Your Side Consumer Reporter Michael Finney.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather, health, climate change, consumer news and sports.

Monday - Friday 11:00-11:35PM

ABC7 News at 11pm- Anchored by Dan Ashley, Ama Daetz, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel, Sports Larry Beil.

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

Saturday & Sunday 11:00PM-12:00AM

ABC7 News at 11pm- Anchored by Dion Lim, Meteorologist Drew Tuma, Sports Chris Alvarez

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

Saturday & Sunday 5:00-6:00AM / 6:00-7:00AM

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Liz Kreutz, Meteorologist Lisa Argen

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

Saturday 9:00AM-10:00AM

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Liz Kreutz, Meteorologist Lisa Argen

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

Sunday 9:00-10:00AM

ABC7 News Mornings- Anchored by Liz Kreutz, Meteorologist Lisa Argen

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

Sunday 5:00-5:30PM & 6:00-6:30PM

ABC7 News at 5pm & 6pm- Anchored by Dion Lim, Meteorologist Drew Tuma, Sports Chris Alvarez

This news program provides viewers with late-breaking local, national and international news, weather and sports.

***Titled- "Midday Live"**

****Titled- "Getting Answers"**

THE LOCALISH NETWORK- KGO-TV / 7.2 HD

KGO-TV'S D2 sub-channel aired the "Localish Network" which broadcasts numerous half-hour programs covering a variety of topics featuring locally sourced yet nationally relevant stories such as Glam Lab, Bit Sized, Secretly Awesome, and Worth the Wait to name a few. The network also airs MORE IN COMMON a program featuring inspiring stories of Americans who come together despite their differences and ALL GOOD a program highlighting the people making positive differences in their communities.

SEVEN ON YOUR SIDE

Michael Finney headed ABC7 consumer affairs unit that provided consumer information / product recalls during local 4:00PM and newscasts, and provided investigations / resolutions during 6:00pm newscasts. Seven on Your Side consumer counselors answered letters, email and hotline telephone calls from viewers seeking help with a wide variety of consumer problems. The unit received over 4000 e-mails during the first quarter of 2022.

Community Outreach Events-1st Quarter 2022:

Allies in Action: Malcolm Yeung, early February

As part of our Lunar New Year celebration, KGO honored neighborhood advocate Malcolm Yeung, Exec Director of Chinatown Community Development Center. Malcolm works to preserve Chinatown's cultural identity while tackling food and housing inequities for its vulnerable residents.

Allies in Action: Azikiwee Anderson, late February

In celebration of Black History Month, KGO honored Azikiwee Anderson, who founded Rize Up Bakery. Azikiwee reinvents sourdough bread with unique ingredients while feeding Bay Area communities in need.

Allies in Action: Marian Sousa & Marian Wynn, March 31

For Women's History Month, KGO spotlights two east bay women who continue to volunteer with the Rosie the Riveter Visitor Center and World War II Home Front National Historic Park. Marian Sousa and Marian Wynn were both "Rosies" in the Kaiser shipyard in Richmond, CA. Marian S. learned how to read and draw blueprints at U.C. Berkeley and was hired as a Draftsman. Marian W. was hired as a Pipe Welder and was able to use her skills to find work after the war.

Lunar New Year Parade Prep: January 23

KGO's Dion Lim had the honor of "waking up" one of two featured lions that will be performing in the San Francisco Chinese New Year Parade, which will be roaring back to life February 19 after the cancelation of last year's parade. The tradition of dotting the eyes symbolizes the awakening of auspicious creatures like lions and dragons, whose performances during festivities chase away evil spirits and bring in good luck.

Warriors Mentorship Panel: January 25

KGO's Kumasi Aaron moderated the Mentorship panel with the Golden State Warriors at the Chase Center. Local high school seniors got some great hands-on sports business advice from a panel of mentors representing business, the popular 2K video game franchise, and the Warriors front office.

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society: February 10

KGO's Zach Fuentes kicked off Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) 2022 Student of the Year campaign for the Central Valley chapter. The virtual kickoff event showcased the philanthropic leadership development program with high school participants learn professional skills like entrepreneurship, marketing and project management, while raising funds for LLS in honor of children who are blood cancer survivors.

California Antiquarian Book Fair: February 11-13

KGO sponsored the 54th annual California International Antiquarian Book Fair in Oakland. The 3-day Fair is recognized as one of the most prestigious antiquarian book fairs in the world, featuring collections and rare treasures from around the globe, including manuscripts, modern first editions, children's books, maps and autographs. This year's special exhibit on wine and viticulture was presented, courtesy of University of California, Davis.

National Association of Television Arts & Sciences: February 20

KGO's Luz Peña and Dan Ashley participated on the Diversity panel discussion for NATAS, titled "Let's Really Talk About It." The candid discussion is viewable to the public and featured individual experiences and personal challenges that broadcast professionals, representing a wide range of cultural communities, have faced.

Greater Richmond Interfaith Program: March 8

KGO's Ama Daetz moderated a conversation with Tianna Hicks about how the former GRIP client and now board member moved her family from the depths of homelessness into a legacy of giving back. Tiana and her five children once stayed at GRIP's shelter. One of them is Najee Harris, who became first round draft pick for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Franchise Fund: March 10

KGO's Jobina Fortson MC'd the graduation of the Franchise Fund's first cohort at the Warriors' Chase Center. The Fund helps minority small business owners become certified as "Corporate Ready" by the nonprofit Western Regional Minority Supplier Development Council (WRMSDC) when interacting with large buyers and corporations.

Dress for Success "Sweet 16 Anniversary Gala": March 18

KGO sponsored the Dress for Success Sweet 16 Anniversary Gala. KGO's Dion Lim was MC and an honoree at the black tie optional event, one of the first large events to return in-person in San Francisco. The global nonprofit is about more than providing workplace clothing; DFS empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support and development tools to thrive in work and in life, elements that are especially important now coming out of the pandemic.

Family Connections Centers: March 24

As part of our Magic of Storytelling initiative, KGO's Gloria Rodriguez read classic Disney stories to preschoolers at the Portola location of Family Connections Centers. KGO and Disney is donating 2000 books to share with the FCC. The nonprofit serves community members who are 98% people of color, 90% households qualify as low, very or extremely low-income and 70% report being English language learners.

San Francisco Community School: March 25

Spencer Christian shared his love of reading and of books with second and third graders at San Francisco Community School, a small K-8 public school that supports project-based learning. The students' Spring project is about studying local San Francisco history and landmarks, so Spencer read "Larry Gets Lost in San Francisco" by John Skewes to the group. He talked about publishing two children's books and shared with them his journey growing up in Virginia during Jim Crow and his career path.

Take Action: Ukraine Support Resources

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, KGO created a vetted list of local, national and global resources that are helping support people and families affected by the crisis overseas. The resource page continues to be updated as news in the region evolves.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Lunar New Year: January-February** KGO celebrated Lunar New Year with a series of eight personal greetings from ABC7 anchors and reporters. The messages shared the excitement of the upcoming holiday, along with family traditions, wishes for good health, prosperity and wealth!
- **Black History Month: February** KGO celebrated Black History Month with eight personal messages from ABC7 anchors and reporters. The spots share messages of allyship and honor and acknowledge the historical achievements of people and movements.
- **Alzheimer's Foundation**
- **Choose Kindness**
- **First Book/Magic of Storytelling**
- **Partnership to End Addiction**
- **Stand Up to Cancer**
- **Starlight Children's Foundation**
- **World Wild Life: Earth Hour**



KGO-TV also airs syndicated programming on its main D1 channel that includes Children’s Core Programming as described in the Children’s 398 Report which is filed separately in the Public Inspection File.

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In addition to the local news and public affairs programs described in this report, KGO-TV carries all of the ABC Television news & public affairs programs listed and described in the report filed as “Network Programming.”

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KGO-TV applies feedback from the community in determining the key local issues, problems, and needs. Some of the station’s most significant treatments of these issues are described on the following pages:

CONSUMER PROTECTION

EDUCATION

HEALTH

CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT, WILDFIRES

ECONOMY AND CHANGING WORKPLACE

RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

East Bay Dasher loses earnings, gets kicked off DoorDash after hackers take over his account

The popular DoorDash delivery service is warning drivers -- known as Dashers -- they may be targets of a new phishing scam. Imposters posing as DoorDash support staff claim to be helping drivers with their accounts. Really they're stealing their money. It happened to an East Bay Dasher -- who not only lost his money, but got kicked off the DoorDash platform. This viewer says it all began when his regular job at the port of Oakland slowed down and he needed extra cash. So he signed up to be a DoorDash driver -- even bought a new car. But it wasn't long before scammers struck: he lost his pay and his DoorDash job. "There would be days that pretty much nothing would come off of those boats," said Timothy Johnson of Hayward. Johnson drives a truck here at the Port of Oakland, but with fewer ships unloading these days, he wasn't getting enough work.

"It's been really rough. it's been really rough," Johnson said. And so Johnson signed up to be a DoorDash driver... even bought a hybrid car with heated seats. "It would keep the food actually really really warm," Johnson explained. And after work at the port, he'd switch to delivering food. "I usually would get off around 3:30, 4 o'clock in the morning and I will go straight into DoorDashing. You know, I'm tired, I'm a little exhausted from work... I'm out there pretty late, grinding trying to make ends meet... You know, keep food on the table," he said. It was going well -- until one day his DoorDash app shut him out. A message said, "Dasher must be active to schedule dashes." He contacted DoorDash. "Oh we're gonna look into it, thank you for the information. We're working on it," Johnson said he was told. But the next day, he got the same rejection. And when he checked his earnings, he found his money was gone. Someone had diverted his pay to a bank he'd never heard of. "It sends you into a real world of worry, you know, how much is compromised... How far did this hacker get into my account?" he said.

DoorDash promised to investigate, sending forms to prove his identity. And he still had to appeal the decision to deactivate his account. Weeks later, still no response. And the car he'd purchased just for DoorDashing stood idle in a parking lot -- a big investment that wasn't paying off. "It definitely depressed me in a lot of ways... you know, I work really hard at DoorDashing... I went through extreme lengths, you know, like buying a car just to be successful. It causes a lot of stress for someone that dashes till three in the morning," Johnson said.

He contacted 7 On Your Side. "I've always been a big fan of Channel 7," Johnson said. We told DoorDash about Johnson's plight. turns out he had apparently fallen for a phishing scam. imposters posing as DoorDash support had switched his banking information, and that raised suspicion. A spokesperson said: "Mr. Johnson's DoorDash account was deactivated because of a fraudulent bank account associated with his account. We were able to identify and resolve the issue." DoorDash returned his money, and now, Tim Johnson is back to delivering food. "It was a relief, yeah, it was a relief. You're my hero. Thank you Channel 7," Johnson said. DoorDash says it is warning drivers about this scam through emails and push notifications. If someone calls saying they're DoorDash support, hang up and contact the company directly through the app.

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Facebook pulls out big guns to fight Bay Area father's small claim suit on faulty VR headset

Social media giant Facebook, now called Meta Platforms, has faced some big scandals: critics saying it has harmed teenagers, allowed foreign interference, misused our data and given voice to violent radicals. All in a drive for profits. And so, one small voice of discontent -- a fed-up father in the East Bay -- seemed lost in the noise. Until now. The dad is taking the big tech company to small claims court in a dispute that began with a faulty virtual reality headset. Surprisingly, Facebook didn't just pay him off. It rolled out big guns to fight that small claim. It began a year ago when the dad bought his son a virtual reality, 3D headset from Oculus VR -- a company owned by Meta/Facebook. He says it stopped working, and Oculus wouldn't correct it, just kept ignoring him. Now he's saying the big companies need to start paying attention to their billions of customers. Bobby Redman got an Oculus VR headset for Christmas -- a year ago. He says it hasn't worked right since June. "All I can really see is 'left controller not connected,'" he said.

Bobby's father Mark Redman kept emailing Oculus support, asking for a replacement under his one-year warranty. "It completely stopped, it wouldn't boot up and it took months to get hold of them," Redman said. Oculus replied it would need to first "validate his warranty." Then it said it needed to "authenticate his account." Finally, Oculus said it didn't have any replacements. "They told us they were out of stock... and they kept saying that they were still out of stock. After three months went by, I said, 'I want my money back,'" Redman said. He says Oculus refused to refund his money or extend the warranty even though the unit hadn't worked for months. "They denied me, they said, 'No we're not gonna do that, we'll give you some extra credits..." Redman recalled. Redman filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau. "Then they just stopped responding at all. The Better Business Bureau sent two letters and they didn't respond," Redman said.

Turns out hundreds of Oculus customers had filed similar complaints, earning Oculus an “F” rating with the BBB. And in spite of its global dominance, Meta / Facebook itself also has an “F” rating -- for ignoring thousands of complaints from customers. Like Mark -- a devoted Facebook fan with a nagging gripe. “I’ve become kind of a slave to Facebook. I’m on it every single day... they know that we’re trapped, we’re addicted to their products, there’s no other place to go,” he said. “They don’t really even care. So it’s, they’re just, they’re too big of a company. And they, you know, they need to be held accountable,” Redman continued. So Redman filed a small claims lawsuit against Oculus and Meta/Facebook. He asked for his money back, plus \$500 for all his troubles. “This is an inch thick, all the documents that I went through,” he said, showing his papers. Ironically he could not reach the companies to serve the court papers. “They said they haven’t been here in three years,” Redman said he was told.

The address registered with the Secretary of State for serving court papers to Oculus is no longer valid. The small claims court served the companies instead. And finally Redman got their attention. “Sure, I was happy to receive the letter...” he said. Meta/Facebook hired prominent San Francisco law firm Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe to keep the case out of court. The law firm sent him a letter saying Oculus was sending him new controllers, and would extend the warranty after all, plus throw in a \$50 gift card. “I was a little shocked they would have an attorney of that caliber offer a \$50 gift card after all we’ve been through...” Redman said. And would he drop the lawsuit “It was a slap in the face... they’re completely not taking accountability for what they’ve done wrong,” said Redman. 7 On Your Side has reached out to Meta/Facebook over the past four weeks. A spokesperson said the company would decline comment. The attorneys also did not respond to our inquiries. “This is not about the money. It’s the principle of the fact. It’s just ridiculous how these big companies treat the consumer,” Redman said.

7 On Your Side has just learned Meta has now offered Redman a full refund for the Oculus system after all, plus about \$300 to cover his court costs -- a little better than a \$50 gift card. Redman says he still wants a pledge the companies will register a correct address, and honor warranties. A judge granted the companies more time to try to settle; a trial is scheduled for April.

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Doctor warns EDD about scammers filing phony claim in his name; EDD sends a check anyway

We’ve been reporting about massive fraud at the Employment Development Department during the pandemic. The EDD admits it paid criminals billions of dollars for phony unemployment claims. It’s happened again, this time with fraudulent disability claims. The EDD just locked 345,000 suspicious accounts. However, 7 On Your Side has learned, some doctors detected this fraud months

ago, and tried to report it. but got nowhere. One doctor tried for weeks to tell EDD someone used his identity to file a phony claim in his name. The EDD's response? It sent him a check anyway.

Robert Pousman is an anesthesiologist in Santa Rosa, so he was puzzled when the EDD began sending him notices about his account. "Back in October, I started getting notices from the EDD about changes made to my account. And I thought, well I didn't make any account," he said." I got on their website, I didn't make an account. So I can't check my account," Pousman continued. The notices said the doctor just updated his mailing address... and his treatment facility. He realized someone used his name to file a phony disability claim. Surely the EDD would want to know about this right away." You have to be on hold for four or five hours at a time," Pousman said. But when he tried calling the number on those notices, no one picked up. He filed a fraud report online. No one responded. He left a message on the fraud hotline. Never heard back. So, he made copies of the notices and sent them to the EDD, covered with warnings. "Saying, 'This is all fraudulent. I never opened these accounts, they're fraudulent,'" he said. "I told them, 'Cancel this claim, just close it immediately before any checks are sent out.'" But it was too late. Instead of canceling the claim, the EDD sent the scammer a check for \$2,700!

"I'm speechless," he said. It was for two weeks of disability pay on that phony claim. And it said he'd be getting \$1,350 dollars each week. "I wrote void all over the check," Pousman explained. Luckily, Robert got that check instead of the scammers. But what about the next one? The notice showed someone had changed the mailing address for that account." A coworker sat on hold for four hours; someone picked up, she was shocked," Pousman said. With help from his coworker, the doctor finally got EDD to pick up the phone. "I told them everything that's going on, that I'm getting checks... I have submitted an online complaint of fraud. I have left voicemails, and she said, 'Oh, okay, well then just mail the check back to the address that's on the check.' And I said, 'No, I'm not real comfortable doing that,'" Pousman said, Pousman's wife Laurie recalls all the unemployment fraud last year - now this. "For him to have to go through this much to try to tell them there's fraud, I mean that's crazy," she said. "Not only are they not being proactive in trying to find fraud, they don't have a system in place, it seems, to report fraud," Laurie continued.

Pousman contacted 7 On Your Side. We told EDD this doctor was trying to report a scam. The EDD investigated and tells us it has shut down that phony claim and contacted Robert to tell him so. However, Pousman says he has yet to speak with anyone from the EDD. Then last week, the EDD announced it has shut down 345,000 disability claims, believing most are fraudulent. The decision came three months after Pousman tried to report the fraud. The EDD did not estimate how much was paid to these scammers since then. "I'm so glad you guys may be pursuing this... all of us pay our taxes; this is really frustrating," Laurie told 7 On Your Side. "With all the things we could be spending money on, this is a

complete waste,” said Robert Pousman. We've learned the fraud began when criminals stole identities of hundreds of doctors and used their credentials to authorize phony claims. Also, 27,000 newly-registered physicians must prove they are legitimate before they can authorize disability benefits -- and many truly sick or disabled patients are caught in the crackdown, their benefits locked too.

Sunday, January 23, 2022

Here's how you can use regular bills to boost your credit scores

You get a loan and pay it back. How much, how quickly and how responsibly determines your credit score, but without a score it is tough to get that first loan. “A lot of people are shut out of the credit system,” says Ted Rossman of Bankrate.com, “There are 53 million people, according to FICO, that do not even have a credit score. A lot of those people can be scored if we give them credit for rent, streaming cell phones and so on.” Most of us have subscriptions that we pay monthly, just like we would a small loan, but those cell phone bills and streaming service payments aren't tracked by traditional credit reporting services. But that is changing. Companies are now willing to track your subscription payments, rent and cell phone bills.

There are new credit reporting companies like Perch and longtime players launching new initiatives, like UltraFICO and Experian Boost. If you sign up and request it, these companies will keep track of those monthly payments. “I actually really like this concept because the design is to give you credit -- quite literally -- for things you have already been doing,” Rossman says, “it is low risk because if it doesn't help you, you can just shut it off.” The catch? You have to take the time to sign up, and although these services can help you land a cell phone contract or credit card, mortgage lenders are heavily regulated and federal rules do not allow for these alternative credit scoring systems. “They could, though, indirectly help you because you could get direct benefits for other things, a credit card, a car loan, and then if you use those responsibly it will indirectly influence the score the mortgage lenders are looking at,” says Rossman. Experian Boost says the boost can happen instantly and the average consumer getting a boost can see a 13-point increase on their FICO credit score.

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

EDD stops payments to struggling California mom during massive disability freeze

As we've reported, the EDD has shut down 345,000 disability claims trying to stop yet another wave of fraud. Officials say the move has blocked thousands of payments to scammers, but they admit legitimate claims also were swept into the crackdown. Payments stopped to some truly sick and disabled patients. Folks on disability tell 7 On Your Side that EDD cut off their payments without warning, or

explanation. They only know about the fraud from our news reports. Now, as they're dealing with illness or disability, they're also fighting the EDD to get their money. Christina Wieland suffers from tangled nerves in her spine. And now, weeks after a surgery to ease the pain, she's also sick with COVID-19. "From this I have memory loss, I have pain... I can't pick up my daughter," Wieland told 7 On Your Side. Wieland stays quarantined in her room, so she won't infect her 5-year-old daughter Gracie, or her husband Ian. "We can't hug or touch, and so everything is a ton of pressure, a ton of stress," Ian said.

As if all that weren't enough, while she's sick in bed, Wieland is fighting with the EDD. "I'm in so much pain right now, I can't... All's I know is EDD is holding onto my damn money," said Wieland. Hers was one of 345,000 disability claims the EDD locked without notice, or explanation. Her payments just stopped... right before Christmas. "Massive anxiety, massive upsetness. It's just on top of everything she's dealing with," Ian said. "We have a mortgage, we have a child, we have bills, it's just enormous pressure." Wieland waited on hold for hours with the EDD. No one explained the crackdown on fraud. "The representative said, 'Your check has been put into a review,' and I said, 'What are you talking about?' she said 'I don't know exactly what this is,'" Wieland explained. Bills piled up. Ian's income wasn't enough. "Especially at Christmas and going into a new year," Ian said. When disability stopped paying payments, "I wasn't able to make my December house payment," as Wieland put it. "I had to borrow money from my father, she's had to borrow money from her mother," Ian said. "All I need to do is continue to get payment so that I can continue to pay my bills so that my house doesn't get taken away," Wieland said. "I'm sure fraud goes on. But you shouldn't stop people who have legitimate conditions and are going through legitimate life issues and genuinely need the money," her husband said.

Gracie turned five in the middle of it all. "We were able to have a birthday party for her," Wieland said. Gracie made a sign to cheer her mom. It says "Everything is going to be OK..." "I keep it up every day and I look at it," said Wieland. Wieland contacted 7 On Your Side. We asked the EDD why her claim was flagged. The EDD said it was working to restore legitimate claims while stopping thousands of payments to scammers. But no word how long it would take. That didn't help those caught in the crossfire, like Wieland and her family. "It hurt me. I cried, I've cried for days and days and then when I got COVID I was so wiped out I couldn't call anymore," Wieland said. "This is just a huge damper on everything we dealt with," said Ian.

One Santa Rosa doctor tried to warn the EDD that someone had filed a phony claim using his information. Instead they sent him a check for \$2,700. After we told the EDD about Wieland, it did respond. "It was 7:30 in the morning, answered my phone," said Wieland. Out of the blue, an agent told her he was releasing her money. "I am so appreciative, you have no idea... Thank you 7 On Your Side, thank you so much... If your benefits were cut off, and you need that money, let 7 On Your Side know about it.

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

California man deposits \$33K check in BofA account, never sees it again as branch closes

You may have noticed it lately -- many banks closing branches, as more customers bank online, and fewer in person. But for one East Bay man, it caused a mild panic. Bank of America shut down his branch just hours after he made a huge deposit. His money disappeared, so he came to 7 On Your Side's Michael Finney to find it. It's hard to believe it could happen at a major bank. This viewer deposited \$33,000 through a teller at Bank of America in Oakland. Hours later the branch shut down. His deposit never posted. And everybody kept saying, "Sorry, there's nothing we can do." It was like a bad dream... except, it was real. "I'm starting to think I may not see the money ever," said Brian Leonard of Oakland. "You're telling me that Bank of America lost \$33,000 of my money, and you're telling me right here to my face, there's nothing you can do?' 'That's right, sir." Leonard deposited \$33,000 into his account at Bank of America. Then it disappeared. "Nobody said, 'We'll find out where the money is, we'll make good on it, we'll take care of it..." Leonard said.

It all began in Leonard's kitchen. "My wife and I are in the midst of a big kitchen remodel," he explained. Leonard had to pay the contractor, and needed to transfer \$33,000 from his account at Wells Fargo to his account at Bank of America. He brought a cashier's check straight to the teller at BofA so it would clear right away. "I deposited the cashier's check... she said it would post that afternoon or next morning at the latest," Leonard said. However, when he checked his account the next day, the money was not there. He called BofA -- and it was not good news. "The woman said that there was no record of the transaction. So as far as she was concerned, no transaction happened," he said. Leonard drove back to the bank, and got another surprise: BofA had shut down that branch, just hours after he'd made his big deposit. "When I realized the branch was closed, and the teller that took my \$33,000 cashier's check is nowhere to be found, my heart sank into my stomach... I felt like I just saw the boat leaving the dock and my money's on the boat," he said.

Leonard went to another branch, only to find the doors locked there too. "It was closed permanently, so that's when I started getting very nervous; wait a second, the branches are closing, the people I've had contact with... gone," he said. He went to a third branch. It was open -- but the manager didn't help. "He said, there's no record of the transaction. So there was nothing he could do," Leonard said. Leonard showed him the cashier's check and deposit receipt -- proof of the missing money. "I said, 'You're the manager, can you escalate the issue.' He says, 'No, there's nothing I can do." Leonard says everyone at BofA kept telling him that. "Well, it was kind of, kind of kafkaesque," he said. But there was something Leonard could do. He contacted the bank's CEO, the federal government, and 7 On Your Side. "And you know, that ball started moving quickly," said Leonard. BofA tells us the problem arose because the cashier's

check was made out to Bank of America, not Leonard, and it “delayed the process.” BofA didn't say why no one helped Leonard track down his money... until now. “Within the course of a couple of hours, Bank of America contacted me, they said they're gonna give me \$33,000. 7 On Your Side, man, you guys were on it,” Leonard said. This story is a great reminder: keep your receipts!

BofA did not comment on whether the shutdown of that branch may have caused a problem with the deposit, but says it's a temporary closure. This is one of hundreds of bank branches to close nationwide over the past year. 7 On Your Side starting to hear more problems related to these shutdowns -- if you've experienced this, let us know.

Wednesday, February 2, 2022

Congress urged not to make unemployed workers pay back pandemic overpayment

Unemployment departments in all 50 states -- including California's Employment Development Department -- are asking Congress not to make workers pay back benefits they received by mistake during the pandemic. Millions of workers may have been overpaid through no fault of their own, as rules kept changing for pandemic unemployment benefits. Here in California, about a million workers currently are required to prove they deserved unemployment benefits the past two years -- or pay it back. Most are independent contractors and part-timers who normally would not receive benefits.

Now the National Association of Workforce Agencies wants Congress to let folks keep the overpayments if they were not obtained by fraud. The EDD says mistakes were made as rules kept changing -- the EDD certainly had a hard time keeping up with changes. But workforce officials say the money helped honest workers struggling in the pandemic, and it would be a hardship to force them to pay back money they've already spent. They emphasize they're still going after the billions of dollars collected by fraudsters during the pandemic. We'll see how Congress responds.

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Right to Repair bill could save families \$330 per year

With inflation at its highest rate in 40 years, consumers are looking for ways to save money. One way may be to make old electronics new again. Nico Gist of Sacramento did what many people do every day: he cracked the screen on his smartphone. The manufacturer quoted the cost of repair at a couple hundred dollars. “Completely unfair. I thought it was pretty ridiculous that it would cost that much to make a fairly simple repair,” said Gist. Sander Kushen of the consumer group CALPIRG says manufacturers limit the availability of parts and even

service manuals to outside vendors, forcing the prices of repairs up. Adding to the difficulty in getting repairs done, some manufactures will void your warranty if you use a third party repair shop.

“The research shows that opting for repair over replacement could save California families \$4.3 billion per year,” said Kushen. That's an average of \$330 per family. “It's about having the option. If you own it, you should be able to fix it,” Kushen said. CALPIRG supports SB 983, or “Right to Repair” legislation introduced Monday by State Senator Susan Eggman (D - Stockton), which would open up access to consumers and third party vendors to parts. Gist thinks that's a great idea. “It would basically give me the freedom to repair the products as I see fit,” he said. The bill would cover not only electronics, but appliances such as washers and dryers. Supporters also say the bill would eliminate e-waste.

Kushen says Americans throw out 416,000 cell phones each year. “Essentially, kind of goes back to the whole problem of creating this culture of waste where we have this product that we can only use for a certain amount of years,” he said. Take a look at more stories and videos by Michael Finney and 7 On Your Side.

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Got scammed? You can no longer deduct it on your taxes

Most losses from theft, fire, storms and accidents are no longer deductible on federal tax returns due to changes in the Trump administration's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. As tax season ramps up, many taxpayers are finding out some losses they suffered last year are no longer tax deductible. Personal losses from events like a house fire or robbery generally cannot be deducted. 7 On Your Side has been reporting about the widespread Zelle scam - bank imposters tricking victims into sending them money through Zelle. The scammers were bad enough. Now victims are finding out the IRS won't give them a break either. “And I went, 'Wow I have been scammed,’” said Donald James of San Jose. Another victim, Page Pollack of San Francisco, had a similar experience. “And \$3,500 was gone right then and there.” “The money is gone. It's gone. It like, disappeared,” said Concord resident Cynthia Marin.

All were victims of the same scam - bank imposters claiming to help them stop a fraud tricked them into sending money through Zelle - but it went straight to the crooks. “I went to go look and I had six dollars left,” Marin said. “\$7,000 over a matter of several transactions,” James explained. Like other victims, James felt the sting of losing thousands of dollars to the scam. He figured at least the federal government would soften the blow with a nice tax break. “My hope was that I could treat this scam, this loss of money, as a deduction. So I investigated. I called my accountant. He said that was no longer available as of 2017,” he said.

IRS enrolled agent Norman Golden, former president of the California Society of Enrolled Agents, says scam victims can no longer deduct the loss on their federal tax returns: "Unfortunately, this law changed in 2017 and it's no longer deductible." Other personal casualties are no longer deductible either - such as losses from a home burglary, a house fire, a windstorm, or auto accident. Previously, taxpayers could deduct losses that were not recovered through their insurance, or other reimbursements. "Unfortunately, this is one of those situations where a lot of taxpayers are gonna get hurt... When the deduction was allowed, we had less scams than we have today," Golden said.

The tax break was eliminated as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act signed by then-President Trump in 2017. It does contain one exception - allowing deductions on your federal returns if the loss was a result of a federally declared disaster, like the California wildfires. Those damages are still deductible. Also, you can still deduct theft and casualty losses on your California state tax returns. Generally, unreimbursed loss from scams, fraud, fire, storms, and accidents can still be deducted from your state tax liability. But for millions who were scammed out of billions of dollars in the past year, the non-existent federal tax break is another sting. Ames had this to say about the situation: "I hope the scammers are paying their taxes." Most provisions of the new tax bill are scheduled to expire in 2025 - but for now, this deduction is no longer available. Check out the IRS web pages that explain what you can, and cannot deduct here.

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Here's what's different about getting your child tax credit in 2022

For any parents who want the Child Tax Credit this year, 7 On Your Side has some important information for you. Last year, many parents received monthly credits of up to \$300 per child from the Biden administration's American Rescue Plan. They didn't even have to do anything -- as long as they had filed taxes the previous year. This year, they have to do something differently. Claudia Quinonez is raising two boys ages 10 and 13. Last year she received \$3,000 over six months to support both of her sons. "It helped with small items, that being able to get other things done, especially things like orthodontics. Things like that," she said. Anyone who received the child tax credit last year should have received a letter from the IRS. It that outlines exactly how much money you received from the benefit. "Most people should have received 50% of their entire Child Tax Credit in 2021. So what you can expect is to get that same amount as part of that tax refund," said Laura Ross of the accounting firm Eisner Advisory Group. To get it, parents need to do the following. They need to take the total amount of your credit last year that's outlined in Letter 6419... You need to then input that total onto Form 8812.

Parents will get a matching credit either as an increased tax refund, or, if they owe the IRS money, the amount owed will be reduced. Parents shouldn't let the

tax forms scare them away from claiming the rest of their credit. Quinonez works with the Children's Council of San Francisco and has been active in getting the information out about the Child Tax Credit. "It's really straightforward because all you need is really... is take your letter from the IRS," said Quinonez. If parents didn't get the letter, they can log onto the IRS portal to get it. If they input incorrect information, Ross warns their tax refund could be delayed significantly. "The return that you file has to match his letter. Otherwise your return will be set aside to be processed at a much later time," said Ross.

She says the IRS has yet to get through 25 million returns from 2020. If parents file their taxes incorrectly, their tax refund could be delayed by months and months. The Treasury Department based any credit you received on your 2020 return. For anyone who welcomed a new child into the family last year, they may not have gotten the credit you deserved. If they didn't file a return in 2020, they may not have gotten their credit. "So a new child wouldn't have generated a credit for you. And there wasn't a mechanism to get it started if you weren't getting it in 2020. So if you file your 2021 return, it will be credited to you with your tax refund," said Ross. Some from blended families who have since divorced may have overpaid the Child Tax Credit last year because they now have fewer children. Some may have attempted to opt out of the child tax credit because they didn't qualify, but received it anyway.

Those families will have to repay it in the form of a lower refund or higher payment. There are exceptions, but not many. "If they were lower income, they may get to keep it. But as they are moving up the income scale, there are payback requirements so, yes, even if they didn't want it, the IRS sent it, they would have to give it back as they hit those income levels," Ross warned.

Still confused? You can consult with United Way's Free Tax help program or the Children's Council of San Francisco. "We want to make sure that families know that Children's Council is here to help families with their child care needs and informational resources such as this topic," Quinonez said.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Officials warn to be on lookout for gas thieves targeting cars, gas stations amid high prices

As gas prices continue to climb, thieves are turning to steal gas through a variety of ways that include targeting gas stations or individual vehicles. "Always concerned about any type of automotive crimes that could be happening to consumers," said Doug Shupe with the Auto Club of Southern California. "People pay a lot of money for their vehicles to keep them maintained." "They're paying a lot of money for gasoline so we don't want drivers to have to experience not only the loss of a full tank of gas, which comes at a high dollar amount these days, but also have to deal with cost of replacing that fuel tank," added Shupe. That's the case with a growing trend in criminals drilling into the gas tank of a car, officials

say. Replacing your gas tank could cost \$1,000 or more. Police around the country are warning drivers to be on the lookout for gas thieves.

"We are hearing about more and more reports of gas thefts happening not only in southern California, but also across the country," Shupe said. "The old fashioned way that thieves would steal gasoline from a vehicle would be to siphon it out of the gas tank, but newer vehicles these days have a rollover valve in the gas tank, which prevents the gasoline from going out of the gas tank."

The Auto Club of Southern California says there's a few ways to keep your vehicle safe. "If you do have a vehicle in a driveway, park it in a garage if you have one. If you're parking in public, look for fenced in areas. Maybe something with a surveillance camera so people can't get into that secured parking area," said Shupe.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022 10:10PM

How to save at the pump

People are trying to reduce their gasoline consumption as oil markets remain uncertain. There are ways of savings money that you may not have thought of. When Larry Purcell paid for his gas today, he received an automatic discount just for using his cashback credit card. "I used my credit card and the price went down," who lives in Redwood City and was filling up at the Chevron station at 19th Avenue in San Francisco It wasn't a huge amount, 6 cents per gallon, but any kind of discount is welcomed because prices are still very high. "It's killing me," he added.

Some credit cards have a "Buy Now Pay Later" option, but 7 On Your Side's Michael Finney says be careful with the high interest rates and late fees "The most important thing you can do is don't buy more gas than you can afford to use, that's the bottom line because even though gas prices are going up, the price of Muni is not, the price of BART isn't, so if you hurting for money use public transportation to get you over those humps," explained Finney. We've been here before, certain circumstances drive up the price of gasoline. There are some things you can do to save on gas.

"Probably just plan things better, just go one way and do everything that I need to do and go back instead of back and forth," suggested Anna Eng who was filling up her car with diesel. "I'm a nerd so I keep my tires inflated properly," said J.C. Chance "Drive less," expressed Purcell.

The American Automobile Association, Triple-A makes another good suggestion. Don't leave heavy stuff in your car. "Believe it or not an extra 100 pounds of weight added to your vehicle reduces your full economy by one percent," said Also Vazquez, spokesperson for Triple-A.

Thursday, March 17, 2022

California lawmakers to propose \$400 gas rebate

As gas prices continue to soar, several California assembly members are expected to announce a \$400 gas rebate proposal Thursday for every taxpayer in the state. Lawmakers say the money should help offset the gas tax Californians are paying at the pump. The \$9 billion-proposal would come from the state's budget surplus. Officials behind the proposal say if it's passed, every California filer would receive the rebate, including those who don't own or drive a car, because of the increase in living expenses. Officials said that would also ensure taxpayers who use "public transit, active transportation options, and zero-emission vehicles" could receive the rebate.

A press release from the office of Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris claims a rebate is better option than suspending the gas tax, saying that would impact funding for transportation projects and "offers no guarantee that oil companies would pass on the savings to consumers." "This rebate will more than cover the current 51.1 cent per gallon gas tax for one full year of weekly fill ups for a car with a 15 gallon gas tank," the release said. The average price for a gallon of regular gas in California is listed at \$5.77 as of Wednesday, according to AAA. Lawmakers who are expected to announce the proposal include Assembly members Cottie Petrie-Norris, Cecilia Aguiar Curry, Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Jesse Gabriel, Adam Gray, Jacqui Irwin, Evan Low, Chad Mayes, Blanca Rubio, Sharon Quirk-Silva and Carlos Villapudua.

Saturday, March 19, 2022 4:00PM

Equifax, Experian and TransUnion to wipe out most medical debt on credit report

Three of the country's largest credit reporting agencies are removing nearly 70% of medical debt from consumer credit reports, the companies announced in a joint statement Friday. Equifax, Experian and TransUnion will eliminate billions of dollars from the accounts of consumers who faced unexpected medical bills that they were unable to pay. The three firms said they made the move after months of research, CNN reported. "Medical collections debt often arises from unforeseen medical circumstances. These changes are another step we're taking together to help people across the United States focus on their financial and personal well-being," the companies said in a joint statement.

The announcement follows research from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau showing that Americans had racked up \$88 billion in medical debt on consumer credit records as of June 2021. It's the most common debt collection credit account on credit records, the CFPB said. Medical debt can be volatile and unpredictable, and can negatively affect many financially secure consumers. Black, Hispanic, young and low-income consumers are most likely to be

impacted by medical debt, the bureau said. Medical debt concerns have heightened since the Covid-19 pandemic hospitalized millions of people, and CFPB Director Rohit Chopra has been publicly critical of medical debt collections by credit reporting agencies. On March 1, Chopra said the CFPB will be "closely scrutinizing" the Big Three credit reporting agencies. "We expect them to take seriously their role as major actors in the credit reporting system -- a system whose integrity and accuracy can determine the financial futures of hundreds of millions of people," Chopra said.

Starting July 1, paid medical collection debt will no longer be included on consumer credit reports. Millions of Americans had credit scores previously lowered because debts paid after being sent to collections could appear on credit reports for up to seven years. More changes are expected. It will now take one year before unpaid medical collection debt appears on a consumer's report, instead of six months, the previous standard. The three companies also said that starting in the first half of 2023, medical collection debt less than \$500 will no longer be included on credit reports.

Education

Monday, January 3, 2022

Area school districts ramp up COVID test sites before classes resume

Parents around the Bay Area pushed to get their kids tested as omicron cases continue to surge. While not mandatory, school districts recommended testing and some were quickly overwhelmed by the number of families who showed up. In Oakland, four schools were testing sites on Monday. They were up and running by 8 a.m. this morning. Yesterday, many parents refused to wait after seeing the long lines for testing offered at Fremont High School. Dasha Phan, an Oakland student tested negative last Friday and then again yesterday. Still, she was asked to get tested again today by a concerned teacher. "At school I didn't feel so well. I just coughed one time and then my voice was like changing," explained Dasha. "My advice is if you have any symptoms please do the test right away and stay home if your don't feel well," said her mother, Dep Phan.

"It seems that attendance was lower and across the district today," observed Sarah Goudy, an Oakland teacher. But it's too soon to know how many have tested positive for COVID after the break. Still, Goudy believes districts should have been better prepared. "Weather gets bad and more people gather inside and travel for the holidays and there is a potential for a new variant, this can get really bad," added Goudy.

On Sunday, San Francisco Unified administered more than 1,000 tests. With omicron being so infectious, for many school districts testing has become more important than ever. "I think it shows that our message is reaching communities and that's a good thing. We want people to know how to access testing and have that information available if that is what they chose to do," explained SFUSD spokesperson, Laura Dudnick. Monday, the rapid Color testing was available at San Francisco district headquarters but by noon they had run out, leaving many confused. San Francisco Unified then began sending messages to families to let them know where to find other testing locations throughout the city. Meanwhile, the San Francisco Department of Health reassured the district that in person learning is safe. Schools, they say are low-risk settings for transmission when all the safety measures are followed.

Friday, January 7, 2022

Teacher's viral dance

When it comes to TikTok dances, you don't often see the teachers outshine the kids - but one California educator did just that. One Friday afternoon, Austin

LeMay, the Campus Culture Director at Tenaya Middle School in Fresno, joined a group of dancing teens out on the campus courtyard, as they grooved to the 'You're a Jerk' song trending at the time on social media. It wasn't unusual for him. LeMay busts out his impressive dance moves every Friday with the kids. But this time, it caught the attention of TikTok. Fellow teacher Jenny McCauley, who posted the video of LeMay dancing online late that Saturday night, describes its meteoric rise.

“By Sunday morning, I woke up and it was over a million views at that time. And it was not even 9 o'clock in the morning. I found out that Snoop Dogg shared it on his Instagram story on Sunday afternoon. At that point I knew that this was going to go bigger than I could even imagine,” she recalls. The Friday dance parties are just one of many steps the school has taken to try and make school more fun for the students, and help them reconnect with one another and the faculty after the prolonged social isolation of the pandemic. As for LeMay, he's certainly not taking his newfound fame for granted. “All the comments were like - 'He's been waiting 12 years for that'. I've been waiting 30 years for this, man!”, he says.

But ultimately, he says, it's all about inspiring students and making them love school, and that's what he cares about. “This is my job and this is my career, but more than anything, it's my passion. The kids are our passion,” he says.

Saturday, January 8, 2022

A decade behind

There is growing concern that more schools could return to remote learning as omicron cases rise. More than 700 teachers and aids called in sick in San Francisco last week. In Oakland, 12 schools closed Friday due to staffing shortages. On Monday, Contra Costa County is planning to close 54 schools to deep clean classrooms. “The biggest issue here is whether staff are going to be well enough to be at school. This is an ongoing issue, our educators and our students are sick right now,” said Cassondra Curiel, president of the United Educators of San Francisco. San Francisco's teacher's Union president is asking for an increase in protection to keep schools open.

“High quality masks, N95s, KN95, or 94s for all students and staff. Weekly testing and pick up at every single school site accessible. An extension to COVID sick leave for 10 days for any employee that has to quarantine,” said Curiel.

Stanford's infectious disease doctor Hector Bonilla says vaccines and testing will keep schools safe. “If you are vaccinated and you get this infection you are going to have very mild symptoms. We are going to live with that,” said Dr. Bonilla. As several Bay Area school districts are considering remote learning we asked California's state assembly vice chair of the education committee what the state can do to increase protection in schools like more testing. “The governor can do that right away.

Saturday, January 8, 2022

Milpitas Unified will remain open for in-person learning

Milpitas Unified will remain open for in-person learning Jan. 10-14 despite a district-wide quarantine proposal, school officials announced in a newsletter sent to families Saturday. Officials say they are not able to offer a “district-wide quarantine” after consulting with the Santa Clara County Office of Education. Community quarantines may be declared by County Public Health. Come Monday, January 10, most Milpitas Unified School District students will be back to distance learning. It's a move district leaders say has to do with staffing shortages, high COVID-19 case rates and low test availability. Students are expected to be back behind screens temporarily. “If we can get people to stay home, that's what's needed now,” MUSD principal Nichol Klein said at the district's Board of Education meeting on Thursday.

On Friday, a letter from the Office of the Superintendent went out to the Milpitas Unified community saying, “ALL MUSD SCHOOLS WILL BE PLACED ON A 10-DAY, DISTRICT-WIDE QUARANTINE.” The letter went on to read, “During this time (January 8-17), we expect our families to not travel, not attend large gatherings, and practice Safety First risk mitigation measures in and around your homes so we can safely return to In-Person Learning on TUESDAY, JANUARY 18.” The hope is these measures will fit a 10-day timeline for students to have enough time to quarantine and get healthy at home, before returning to in-person classes. Students will distance learn the week of the 10th.

“As an emergency procedure, I'm in support for it,” MUSD parent, Tingna Xu said. “But if it's for long-term, we will need to figure out other options.”

But late Friday night, the Santa Clara Office of Education and Office of Public Health sent ABC7 a video statement - advocating for keeping kids in schools. “We've learned that in-person education is what they need and remote learning doesn't support their mental health, emotional health, and academic well-being nearly the way that in-person learning does. We are centering our efforts on ensuring that our kids remain in school for in-person learning,” said Dr. Sara Cody, Santa Clara County public health officer. According to the district's letter, 167 substitute teacher positions went unfilled. The letter explained this required the district “to cover classes with other teachers, principals, district office staff, as well as grouping classes together with one teacher.” Additionally, 107 support staff positions went unfilled this week. However, the hope for Xu is that this remains temporary, as the changes mean two young kids and two parents will all be working from home. “I really wish that we had we can have a win-win solution, but I know it's difficult,” Xu shared.

Not speaking specifically to the action at Milpitas Unified, Stanford Children's Health Associate Chief Medical Officer Dr. Grace Lee told ABC7 News, “Every time another wave comes through, the first reaction we have probably should not

be shut down.” Instead, Dr. Lee said focus should be maintaining and minimizing the disruption to both communities and kids.

“I do think that kids have borne the brunt of the pandemic, in that we have asked them to do more than I think we asked ourselves to do as adults,” she continued. “And so my hope is that we can continue to support kids in a safe learning environment.” For Milpitas Unified, until at least the 18th of January, that environment will be at home. Dr. Lee told ABC7 News, “I very much agree that from the health perspective, mental health perspective, social emotional perspective, being back in school, it has been a huge benefit to our kids who have been out for so long.” According to the district's letter, “For families without adequate Wifi or child supervision during the school day, their child can come to the physical campus, where they will be able to log on and participate in the Virtual Learning with the rest of their class.”

Monday, January 10, 2022

Palo Alto Unified staff positions stretched thin during pandemic

In the South Bay, an S.O.S. from Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) schools to parents. The district is looking for volunteers to fill spots left empty by staffing shortages and COVID-19 absences. The push, called 1 Palo Alto, will put parent volunteers on campuses across the district beginning Wednesday. PAUSD is asking parents to step up and fill support staff positions including assistance with the COVID Testing Clinic, food services, light custodial work, office assistance, and classroom support. “A lot of the work we do to open a school district and keep it open is not glamorous work,” PAUSD Superintendent Don Austin told ABC7 News. “And our parents, our parents came through.”

After Superintendent Austin posted a video request on Sunday night, close to 600 parents responded by Monday afternoon. Parent Shailo Rao was among those eager volunteers. With two daughters at the district, he explained anything to keep them in-person is paramount. “I mean, we talk about essential services and somewhere along the way schools got lost,” Rao shared. “But schools are essential. Our kids' education is essential.” However, the push comes at a time when COVID-19 cases are surging, and after the district decided to stop sending out close contact letters to those facing potential exposure. Superintendent Austin cited logistical reasons, and pointed to the district's 380-plus cases just last week. “Everyone should be operating as if they've come in contact with someone with the omicron variant,” he said. “And in fact, I think getting a notice home every single day, that you may have come in contact, loses all value anyway.”

“And could even distract from what we're really trying to accomplish, with focusing on the high leverage areas,” Austin continued. Parents told ABC7 News

they're not concerned about having more people on-campus and around students, since volunteers are required to be vaccinated. Supt. Austin assures volunteers will not be alone with students. Nallely Gomez, PAUSD parent and Palo Alto Council of PTAs Executive Board member, feels work will offer another level of understanding. "I think like, we are able to see for firsthand what is going on the school," Gomez said. "How is the environment there?" Beyond that, Gomez said the experience will offer kids a much needed showing of support during the on-going pandemic. "I think, like for the kids especially, it's really important to see their parents being part of that," she shared. "They really appreciate that." Rao added, "I think it'll be fun for our kids to see us doing all the above. Bumping into us on the playground, cleaning up. Hopefully not in the principal's office." "It's gonna be fun. We're gonna learn a lot," he told ABC7 News. "For us, it's like a going back to school night. It's like throwing back the clock. We get to be in school again."

Thursday, January 13, 2022

Restaurant owner donates 10,000 KN95 masks to Oakland Unified Schools

An Oakland restaurant owner is donating KN95 masks to every high school student in the Oakland Unified School District. Euge Lee purchased 10,000 masks that will be distributed to Oakland high schools this week. "The important part was getting these into your hands ASAP to help out during a particularly tough time. You folks have the future in your hands," Lee said to district leaders.

The district also has 200,000 KN95 masks on order for all OUSD students. Lee is opening a restaurant this Saturday on Fruitvale Avenue called Noodle Belly, which is part of his site called Korner Kitchen. "OUSD thanks Euge Lee and his family for supporting the young people of Oakland!" district leaders said in a Facebook post.

Friday, January 14, 2022

Hayward Unified to return to in-person classes

The Hayward Unified community can expect a so-called "soft entry" as the district ends its week of distance learning due to COVID-19. District leaders were warned against going virtual; it's an option that could've cost them millions, daily. When students get back on the 18th, new safety measures will include shortened school days to allow students and staff to access afternoon COVID-19 testing offered by the district. Superintendent Dr. Matt Wayne explained, "We're doing grab-and-go meals just to minimize the lunch interactions, we've moved staff meetings virtually. We're testing athletics, limiting spectators. Limiting students-not having student performances, postponing study trips."

The district's Board of Education met Friday evening to decide whether it would extend remote learning and continue risking a potential daily funding loss of \$2.5-million each day campuses stayed closed. "Before we reached this omicron stage of the pandemic, they were already dealing with some difficult fiscal decisions," Michelle Smith McDonald with the Alameda County Office of Education told ABC7 News, ahead of Friday's meeting. "That certainly doesn't make this easier if it comes to pass." Smith McDonald said nearly all other districts in the county have continued to offer in-person instruction. "The state has given schools two pathways," she added. "In-person instruction, or the parental choice of independent study."

Independent study is meant for parents who remain reluctant to send their kids back to school for in-person learning. The option requires parents to sign a contract with the district, allowing the student to complete school work and meet district-adopted curriculum with little supervision. This is different from remote learning, where school campuses were shut down and teachers taught a class online. Remote learning is no longer an option for districts in California. Friday's meeting brought mixed reaction about Tuesday's return. A woman who identified herself as a teacher in the district told the board, "What you're talking about is not enough, it's not." "Help us out with the kids," a father with children in the district told the board. "And online is not good for our kids." The board voted three to two, in favor of returning in-person. Ahead of the official vote, Trustee Ken Rawdon told his colleagues, "It's not perfect, but right now we are also trying to do everything we can to cooperate with the state and our county."

Thursday, January 27, 2022

Preliminary list of Oakland school closures released without consent of OUSD

Oakland Unified has a preliminary list of schools it wants to close, they say, to help cut costs and deal with a budget shortfall. Except that, the list was not meant to be published. It was distributed internally until someone disclosed it. Now, the district is facing parents and teachers of those schools that are outraged. Mike Hutchinson wants everyone to know he's the one who released the list of schools that may end up closing. The Oakland school board member first posted it on social media. "I didn't leak anything, this wasn't privileged or confidential information, what I did was my job by reporting out to my constituents and the community information that I received about their schools being under threat for closure," expressed Hutchinson.

Oakland's superintendent then sent out a note stating that "To be clear, the information shared was from a draft-it is NOT the final set of recommendations." The Oakland schools for possible closures at the end of this school year are: Prescott, Brookfield, Carl Munck, Parker, Grass Valley, La Escuelita, Westlake,

Bunche, Street Academy, Ruidsdale, Community Day, Hilcrest (6-8), Merging Highland/RISE. For next year: Horace Mann, Fruitvale, Manzanita Community, Korematsu, Merging ICS/TCN, Merging Acorn/Encompass

Wednesday staff at La Escuelita began distributing fliers to parents interested in having a meeting on this possible closure. Lucretia Henderson, a grandmother has had a deep connection with the school. "They're losing not only their education, but they're also losing their support system, they're losing their friends, they're losing their teachers, this is all a disservice," she said. The school district has said it needs to slash \$50 million from next year's budget. But Hutchinson insists there is no budget deficit. "What we are doing is going through a series of adjustments to free up more money to raise compensation for our staff going forward but we are not in a budget crisis. We have money in our reserves," revealed Hutchinson.

Then there's the issue of declining enrollment in Oakland which affects the district's budget. For example, before the schools there shut down because of the pandemic, the number of students enrolled as of March 13, 2020, was 35,904. At the beginning of this school year, the recorded number on August 23, 2021, was 34,970 --934 fewer students. That's less money coming in from the state per student. Sarah Goudy teaches at Ruidsdale Newcomer High School which is also on the preliminary closure list. She says there should be community input. "The final closure vote is going to happen on February 8 and schools aren't even going to be notified if they are for sure on that list until January 28. So it's two weeks. The whole thing is absolutely outrageous," added Goudy.

Another argument being made is that Oakland has the highest ratio of schools to students among California's largest districts. The district says that keeping all their school open meant they have to spend more money to maintain them. But Hutchinson argued that 20 years ago Oakland embraced public charter schools, more than any other district in California. Giving parents a choice, also meant that traditional public schools have lost students.

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

UC Berkeley may cap enrollment for 2022/23 over housing lawsuit

UC Berkeley tops the list of the world's best public universities- so it's a coveted place to enroll. But next month Cal may be sending out 5,000 fewer acceptance letters than expected due a court ruling in a lawsuit filed by a community group that says there's just not enough housing to go around. A court ordered enrollment freeze means UC Berkeley may be mailing out 5,000 fewer acceptance letters than anticipated next month for the 2022/23 school year. Cal Spokesperson Dan Mogulof said "We're now faced with the possibility we have to enroll 3,000 fewer students than we planned to. That's 3,000 students who have worked so hard to get into Berkeley. "

A group called Save Berkeley's Neighborhoods is behind a lawsuit to cap enrollment. President Phil Bokovoy said "The University since 2005 has added 14,000 students and only 1,600 beds and we have a tremendous housing crisis in Berkeley. " Last year an Alameda County Superior Court ruling mandated Cal freeze enrollment at 2020 levels and Cal's appeal to a higher court was turned down last week. Bokovoy said "The judge said yes adding 11,000 students has significant environmental impact and the university needs to study those and they need to propose mitigation measures." Mogulof said "One of the great ironies is this is the community group that sued us is claiming we're not building enough housing and yet sued us around a project meant to build more housing. Go figure."

The community group says they want to link increased enrollment directly to increased housing. Students on campus had their own take with one saying "Housing is absurd at Berkeley. It's expensive. It's hard to get." But there's a lot at stake for prospective students who could pay the price with thousands possibly not gaining admission this spring as they hoped. Mogulof said "we have filed an appeal with the supreme court and we are active in Sacramento to see if there's something the legislature can do. " Save Berkeley's Neighborhoods will file their response with the California Supreme Court on Thursday and then it's up to the court to decide if they'll grant UC Berkeley's emergency request to not cap enrollment.

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

'Little Free Antiracist Libraries' help dismantle division through education

Antiracist libraries are springing up throughout the Bay Area to inspire education and dismantle racism. The Walnut Creek-based nonprofit, Rise Up Against Racism builds "Little Free Antiracist Libraries" from the ground up, filling each structure with books for children and adults that center on historically marginalized perspectives. "The idea behind these libraries is to provide our communities with antiracist books for children and adults and really make this reading accessible," said Rise Up Against Racism co-founder Jenny Roy. "We believe in the power of books to spark conversation." From the outer artwork to the books within, the libraries aim to uplift diverse voices. The libraries are functional pieces of community art painted by a diverse cadre of commissioned artists. Each artist seeks to tell unique stories through the design elements. "I love lining them up with African fabrics on the interior, as well as using images that are symbolic of what love means in the community," said artist Netsanet Tesfay.

Each library prominently displays "This Little Library is Antiracist." Rise Up Against Racism is intentional with these words, hoping to inform, enlighten, and drive action against racism. Inside, the collection of books offered is carefully

chosen, curated, and purchased from Marcus Books in Oakland, the oldest Black-owned bookstore in the United States. The selections provide sources of vital historical context and important lessons. "Every part of our Little Free Antiracist Libraries offers opportunities for reflection and learning and hopefully a powerful impetus for action," explained Rise Up Against Racism co-founder Meg Honey. The libraries are currently installed throughout the Bay Area in Walnut Creek, Martinez, and Burlingame with more locations to come. "Education is a good first step in building awareness of our collective responsibility to dismantle racism," said Rise Up Against Racism co-founder Sarah Foster. To learn more and support, visit [here](#) and follow @riseupagainstracism on Instagram. Find a new book and borrow at one of these locations.

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

SFUSD votes to cut more than 200 positions due to budget shortfall

The San Francisco Unified School Board has voted to eliminate up to 264 positions in the district. A number of people originally called into the virtual meeting saying that they didn't believe the two recalled school board members should vote to begin with. A third school board member, who was recalled, has already stepped down. "Collins and Lopez should remove themselves from the vote," said one person during public comment. "Miss Collins and Miss Lopez you were voted out," said another person. "With all due respect, I know you have a hard job but I do not think you should be voting," said someone else. Both recalled board members, Alison Collins and Gabriela Lopez, did end up voting. The 264 positions cut could include up to 151 instructors. It does not include up to 47 paraeducators. The board voted against eliminating those positions. This is because the district has lost 3,500 students since the pandemic started. Pension and health care costs for employees have also increased. Students voiced their thoughts about some of the proposed cuts. Here's what they had to say.

"These classes are what make school interesting and fun and you're taking that away from us you should care about what we students value," said one student. "These newer teachers who are on the chopping block are mostly the ones who care about the students who want to see us grow as students and people," said another student. "Please think twice about your decision, please don't lay off these amazing teachers. You'll be losing some great teachers. One is Mr. Cho and I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for him," said a separate student caller. Just because the positions were eliminated, it doesn't necessarily mean that all of them will end up being cut. Some educators could retire, others could leave the district and that would save some of those positions.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Cal State college system drops SAT/ACT admission requirement

In a move that squarely places California's public universities at the forefront of the national trend to drop standardized tests, the Cal State university system will eliminate SAT and ACT exams from admission requirements, officials decided Wednesday. The California State University's Board of Trustees unanimously approved the change, aligning the country's largest four-year university system with the "test free" admissions process already adopted by the University of California college system. The California State University system has 477,000 students at its 23 colleges around the state, while the University of California's 10 colleges enroll over 280,000 students. The University of California Board of Regents voted last year to eliminate the standardized test admissions requirement at its undergraduate schools, which include the prestigious campuses of UC Berkeley and UCLA.

Acting Cal State system Chancellor Steve Relyea praised the decision, saying it will help "level the playing field and provide greater access to a high quality college degree for students from all backgrounds." Critics have long argued that standardized tests put minority and low-income college applicants at a disadvantage and pose a barrier to their admission. They have noted that wealthier students or their parents have the money to pay for expensive standardized test preparation courses that help boost their scores. "In essence, we are eliminating our reliance on a high-stress, high-stakes test that has shown negligible benefit," Relyea said in a statement. California's public universities, like many across the country, suspended the exams during the pandemic and did not require them during the admissions process for college entry during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.

Amid the pandemic, more than 1,800 colleges and universities, or nearly 80% of U.S. four-year campuses, adopted either test-optional or score-free policies for fall 2022 applicants, said Bob Schaeffer, executive director of FairTest, a Boston-based anti-testing group. The decision by the Cal State and the University of California college systems to make that ban permanent will "set a standard for public higher education around the nation," Schaeffer said. "It is not an accident that so many other public systems, literally from Washington state to Maine, now have similar policies. The whole country is watching California, and largely following the state's lead," he said. Students can still choose to submit SAT or ACT scores that will not be considered for admissions purposes but could help in their placement for English and math courses, said Cal State system spokeswoman Toni Molle.

The system had suspended the standardized test requirement during the pandemic, instead basing admission on what it called a "multi factor admissions score" that allowed campuses to consider high school grade point averages, extra curricular activities and leadership roles as well as whether applicants were

first-generation college student or came from schools with a high percentages of low-income students. A system wide advisory council made up of faculty, students and administrators and student leaders was put in charge of studying whether to drop the tests and recommended the change to the Cal State college system's board. Board Trustee Diego Arambula said it was important to drop the requirement because "reducing the stress and inequity that currently exists today are huge." Trustee Yammilette Rodriguez said dropping standardized tests will help students avoid what she went through at a rural high school that she has said "lacked college support." She had a 4.0 grade point average but missed SAT deadlines and didn't take the test - and as a result had to attend a community college before she could transfer to California State University, Fresno. "I am a proud product of the CSU and I would have been a product even sooner if I could have gotten in as a freshman," Rodriguez said. "I know that my story is the same for many across California. It's going to change the lives of many."

Health

Thursday, January 6, 2022

Mom and son write children's book while son hospitalized with rare autoimmune disease

A writer's inspiration can take many forms. For Joy Van, it happened while her son was hospitalized with a rare autoimmune disease. "I was sitting in the hospital with him one night feeling hopeless and just feeling like, 'Why is my son having to experience this?' That's when what he told me just kept coming to me," said Van. She was referring to what her son Aroon Ivy told her a few days before being hospitalized. He was with his family when he suddenly began attacking them. "I went beast mode," explained Aroon, who was 5 years old at the time. His mom took him into the bathroom and put him in a warm bath to calm him down. That's when he told her, "There was a ninja inside me that I couldn't control."

Van had noticed strange things happening with her son in March of 2018. Aroon had started to walk in a strange way. "He couldn't hold his posture. He couldn't hold his legs correctly. It was really wobbly," said Van. That's when Van took her son to the emergency room. Then his health got worse. "Six days after we arrived in the hospital, he became nonverbal. He was put on a feeding tube and he lost his ability to walk. He just became a vegetable in the hospital," said Van. Aroon was diagnosed with anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis. It's an auto-immune disease that affects 1.5 million people a year. It's caused when the body's own antibodies attack the part of the brain that controls movement, memory and learning.

Doctors still don't know what causes it. Early symptoms include fever and headaches which are followed by psychosis, delusions and violent behaviors. Aroon became violent during his hospital stay. The medical staff had to enclose him in a Posey bed and strap him down to restrain him. That's when Van and her husband, Aaron Ivy, remembered what Aroon said a few days before he got really sick. "He's very big with the karate. He likes Ninjago a lot. So that's how he explained it to me. 'I have a ninja inside me and he's mad,'" said Ivy. Van got inspired. She asked the hospital staff for craft supplies and began writing and sketching a children's book about a boy ninja. She worked on the book for a year while sitting next to her son's hospital bed.

"I would ask him what color we should do for the tree. Should we do a yellow or should we do a green? Should we put flowers on it?" said Van. It was a way for her to communicate with Aroon. Even though he could not talk, Van looked at his eyes for a response. "He could still move his eyes. Even if it was a little blink or a little look to the left or right, I knew that he was trying to actually talk to me still," explained Van. Each section of the book represents a stage in Aroon's illness.

When the ninja in the book can't hit a target, it symbolizes Aroon's struggles with movement. When the ninja hurts himself training with nun chucks, it represents the violent outbursts when Aroon would hurt himself.

The hope also explains the symptoms and profession of anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis. Van hopes it will help other families understand more about the disease and what to expect is someone is affected. For Aroon's father, it was also a way of coping with the disease, which is more common among young people and children. "It allowed our family to just express how we really truly felt emotionally," said Ivy. About a year after he was first hospitalized, Aroon started to improve. He's now healthy and playful. His mom credits working on the book with helping her son's brain recovery and avoid the memory problems that can develop. The book "The Ninja Inside Me" is available on Amazon.

Saturday, January 8, 2022

Does having a high COVID-19 antibody level mean you don't need a booster?

U.S. regulators issued new guidance this week shortening the time that people who received Moderna or Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine have to wait for a booster, and it's different than the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Food and Drug Administration's decision Friday means Moderna recipients are eligible for a booster after at least five months have passed since their last shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agreed.

That's in line with new recommendations for recipients of the Pfizer vaccine. Initial Pfizer vaccinations are open to anyone 5 or older. But only Pfizer recipients 12 and older are eligible for boosters, and earlier this week, U.S. health authorities said they can get one five months after their last shot. A booster after receiving the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine already is urged two months later. However, those changing recommendations can be confusing and some people have resorted to trying to figure out things on their own. Omicron continues to break previous daily highs for case rates in California due to its transmissibility. Los Angeles-area resident Tina Connell spoke with Eyewitness News this week and said it's time for her to get her booster, but before she does, she said she wants to check her antibody levels. "I'm here to get an antibody test to see where my levels are," she said. "I feel like if my antibodies are high enough then I don't need to get the booster." This is a tool many people are hoping will give them reassurance. An antibody test determines if your immune system is still making antibodies against coronavirus.

USC Verdugo Hills Pharmacist Elizabeth Khatchaturian said 95% of the people she's tested have waning antibodies at six months, but not everyone. "There has been that 5%," she said. So can people with higher antibody levels wait to get their booster shot? "That's something we still don't know," said Kaiser

Permanente Infectious Disease Specialist Dr. David Bronstein. “Even after all this time, there's no way of saying this specific antibody level is going to protect you against infection at this specific rate. We just don't know that because there's so much more than antibodies that we think about.”

T cells, which play an essential part of the immune system, also protect against infection. Bronstein said we can't measure T cells, but we can measure real world evidence that gives scientists a strong indication of when vaccine effectiveness starts to wane. “When you do start seeing more and more breakthrough infections, even if they're just mild infections, that tells you that your level of immunity is going down,” he said. Bronstein said when less virus is circulating, antibody testing may have a place. But he said at this point in the pandemic, get the booster shot when it's indicated for you. “Unless you're living in a cave somewhere, you will be exposed, and if you don't have that immune response ready to fight it off, bad things can happen,” he said. The antibody test, which cost Connell \$25, showed her antibody levels are low, so she said she'll be getting her booster shot soon.

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Sonoma County urges residents to stay home amid COVID surge

Sonoma County's health officer is urging residents to voluntarily limit going out as much as possible over the next 30 days to stop the spread of the omicron surge. Residents are being asked to only leave their house for necessary trips like health care, school, work, and grocery shopping. The county also issued a new health order that limits indoor events to a maximum of 50 people and outdoor events to no more than 100. For those at high risk for COVID, the maximum number of people is 12, unless it's a family gathering. The new rules take effect tomorrow and will last for a month.

According to county data, half of Sonoma County's cases emerge from large events. Mase hopes this order will reduce the chances of people catching COVID-19 at events. “While we may all be done with COVID, COVID is not done with us. due to the omicron variant, our case rates have never been higher and our hospitalizations are beginning to climb,” said Sonoma County Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase. The county's positive testing rate reached an all-time high of 16.5 percent this week, and case rates rose from 24.4 per 100,000 residents per day to more than 121 per 100,000 residents per day in the past two weeks. Sonoma County's health officer says all indications are the case surge will likely get worse in the coming weeks. Sonoma County is the first and only county in the Bay Area to take these steps to fight the omicron variant.

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Digital eye strain: Why you may have it and what you can do about it.

Did you know screen time can cause issues such as headaches, fatigue, blurry vision, dry eyes and more? It's called digital eye strain. "Your eye muscles are working harder to focus on images much closer" said Dr. Jennifer Tsai, optometrist and founder of Line of Sight. The real problem is that digital eye strain will likely affect the majority of people in time. "In 10 years, half of the world's population will be nearsighted."

As if we needed another worldwide worry. Personally, I noticed my vision getting blurry when looking at my screens toward the end of the day. I would notice rings of lights around images when editing. My friend Lataya, also an editor and producer, noticed the same issues. I thought I could combat the issue by myself with blue light blocker glasses, but it turns out I needed a little more help than that. So Lataya and I went to Line of Sight to get a full consultation. Dr. Tsai brings a lifestyle approach to eye care. She gets an idea of your day-to-day life and comes up with a treatment plan that will work best for you. Line of Sight also gives off more of a spa feel than that of a doctor's office, which really puts you at ease. Best of all? Dr. Tsai has cutting-edge technology and treatment options, so there's something for everyone.

Thursday, February 10, 2022

New CDC report reveals US life expectancy by state

A new federal report published Thursday has revealed the life expectancy of Americans in every state. Researchers from the National Center for Health Statistics -- a branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- looked at deaths rates in 2019, the last year for which complete data is available, for each state and the District of Columbia. For the U.S. overall, life expectancy was 78.8 years in 2019, an increase of 0.1 years from 2018. States with the highest life expectancy were mostly in the Northeast and West states while states with the lowest life expectancy were Southern states. "The fact that there can be such large differences in life expectancy within one country, that's what I find most interesting," Dr. Elizabeth Arias, director of U.S. Life Tables at NCHS and first author of the study, told ABC News.

Hawaiians had the highest life expectancy at birth in 2019, living to nearly 81 years old. The Aloha State also led the U.S. in highest life expectancy for women at 83.9 years. Rounding out the top five were California, New York, Minnesota and Massachusetts, respectively. California had the highest life expectancy for males in 2019 at 78.4 years. Meanwhile, residents of Mississippi had the lowest life expectancy, at 74.4 years old, and the lowest for males at 71.2 years. The bottom five states were all in the South and included West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee. West Virginia had the lowest life expectancy for

women at 77.3 years. However, the report found life expectancy was higher for women in every single state and in Washington, D.C. In the United States, the difference in life expectancy between the sexes was 5.1 years. Utah had the lowest difference at 4.5 years and Mississippi had the highest at 6.4 years.

Arias said the gap used to be higher -- about 7.8 years in 1978 -- but has been declining. "The wide gap was believed to be highly associated with smoking," she said. "So, males took up smoking a lot earlier than females did and with a much higher prevalence. But then, over the decades, females began to smoke close to levels that men smoked. And, as men have been quitting, women have followed but not at the same pace." The report also found that between 2018 and 2019, life expectancy declined in 14 states, ranging from 0.1 years to 0.5 years. Five states had no change and 31 states and Washington, D.C., saw increases between 0.1 years and 0.5 years. The report also examined life expectancy after age 65, when adults are considered senior citizens. Once again, Hawaii and Mississippi had the highest and lowest life expectancy projections at 21.2 additional years and 17.5 additional years, respectively.

The report did not discuss why some states have lower life expectancy than others, but Arias offered some theories. "Well, we do know that mortality from the leading causes of death like heart disease, cancer, stroke, accidents, tends to be higher in the states in the South and the Southeast than in New England, for instance, and the Western states," she said. "Smoking prevalence is also higher in the Southern states. I believe there are also higher rates of poverty throughout (the South)." Additionally, the report did not include any data from 2020 onward, meaning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are not reflected in the new numbers. However, preliminary data has shown the global health emergency caused life expectancy in America to drop dramatically.

Friday, March 4, 2022

California could OK abortions by nurse practitioners

A bill announced Thursday in the California Legislature would let some nurse practitioners perform abortions without the supervision of a doctor - part of a plan to prepare for a potential influx of patients from other states if the U.S. Supreme Court allows states to ban or severely restrict the procedure. State Senate leader Toni Atkins, a Democrat from San Diego, said the goal is to increase the number of health care workers in California who can perform abortions ahead of a potential Supreme Court ruling this summer. "As states like Texas and others start to restrict further abortion, it just makes sense that women are going to find other places to go. California will be one of those states," she said. Nurse practitioners are not doctors, but they have advanced degrees and can provide a number of treatments. In 2013, California passed a law allowing nurse practitioners, certified nurse midwives and physician assistants to perform abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy - but only if they completed

special training and were under the supervision of a doctor.

Atkins' bill would change the law by letting nurse practitioners with the required training perform first trimester abortions without a doctor's supervision. California has about 30,000 nurse practitioners. But it's unclear how many more of them would be allowed to perform abortions if this bill becomes law. The U.S. Supreme Court now has a conservative majority after former President Donald Trump made three appointments during his term. Many conservative-led states have responded by passing new abortion restrictions, hoping the court will uphold them. Texas has a law that bans nearly all abortions in the state, but it is only enforceable by civil lawsuits. Abortion rights groups have sued to block that law, but the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed the law to remain in effect while the case is pending. Last year, the court heard arguments over whether to uphold a Mississippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. The court likely won't make a decision on that case until June. But during a hearing on the case, a majority of justices indicated they were likely to uphold the law and could even overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the court's 1973 ruling that banned states from outlawing abortion. If the court overturns or significantly weakens the *Roe* ruling, multiple states would likely act quickly to ban or severely limit access to abortion.

But California, led by Democrats who support abortion rights, would do the opposite by passing laws to increase access to abortion. That could include helping women who live in states where abortion is banned or severely limited travel to California for care. A proposal filed last month would potentially use taxpayer money to help women from other states get to California by paying for things like travel, lodging, child care and food. Atkins said the government couldn't pay for everyone, saying the bill would create a fund that would also accept private donations. "You will see a bill that tries to set up a framework for where we can do that and take private dollars," Atkins said. Jonathan Keller, president and CEO of the California Family Council, called Atkins' bill "a tragic example of the legislators putting abortion numbers above abortion safety and putting ideology above patients."

"We are essentially treating abortion like no other health care service," he said. "We're not flying people from poor states to California to get heart transplants." A 2013 study led by the University of California-San Francisco concluded first trimester abortions are "just as safe when performed by trained nurse practitioners, physician assistance and certified nurse midwives as when conducted by physicians." "When we're within our areas of training, we are absolutely qualified to provide the care that we do," said Patti Gurney, president of the California Association for Nurse Practitioners.

Saturday, March 12, 2022

How daylight saving time could cause your health to fall back

The beginning of daylight saving time marks the arrival of spring every year. For some, the time difference can cause feelings of fatigue or more serious health symptoms. First proposed over 200 years ago as an economical suggestion to maximize daylight hours and conserve candles, we continue to "spring forward" with one 23-hour day to transition our clocks. According to the American Heart Association, in addition to fatigue, the transition can also affect your heart and brain. Hospital admissions for an irregular heartbeat pattern known as atrial fibrillation, as well as heart attacks and strokes, increase in the first few days of daylight saving time.

"Daylight saving time feels kind of like jetlag from traveling across time zones," said Dr. Angela Holliday-Bell, a pediatrician and certified clinical sleep specialist. "Your body needs time to readjust to a new light/dark cycle, so it can be hard on the body and hard on sleep," Holliday-Bell said. This cycle, also known as the circadian rhythm, is a fine-tuned system that our bodies use to regulate time, she said. For most people, that cycle is about 24 hours and 15 minutes. "It dictates all the processes that occur in your body -- including sleep, wake and digestion," said Holliday-Bell. Even the immune system is controlled by your circadian rhythm, meaning "when you lose an hour, you're losing some immune function as well," she explains. Sleep deprivation can also slow the executive function of the brain, which explains the increase in car accidents seen with the time transition of daylight savings. Mood can suffer too. Experts agree that there are several strategies to prepare your body all year round and for the days leading up to daylight savings time.

Start to wind down earlier in the evening. Even for a few days, adjusting your sleep-wake cycle can help you feel more well-rested. Try moving your bedtime up in fifteen minute increments in the days before the clock sets back, until you've reached the one hour you'll lose on Sunday.

Maximize natural light. "Light is the strongest influence on circadian rhythms," says Dr. Holliday Bell. "Getting natural light as soon as you can when you first wake up helps to reinforce your circadian rhythm."

Limit caffeine. The extra coffee might feel necessary to get through the fatigue, but too much caffeine is not heart healthy. It also lasts in the body for a long time, which can affect the ability to fall asleep or sleep restfully in the evening. Gradual lifestyle improvements all year long and a concerted effort in the days leading up to the transition can help to soften the disruption to your circadian rhythm, so you can save daylight without losing anything else.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Study: Allergy season will start much earlier and will be far more intense

Future allergy seasons will start more than a month earlier and be far more intense because of the climate crisis, new research shows. The study, published Tuesday in the journal *Nature Communications*, found by the end of the century, pollen season could begin as much as 40 days earlier than it has in recent decades in the US because of global warming. Researchers also found annual pollen counts could climb by up to 250%. "Pollen is something that is on people's radar because it influences their daily lives if you are allergic," Allison Steiner, author of the study and professor at the University of Michigan, told CNN. "A huge component of the population is affected by these allergies, and people are really interested in understanding how [their allergies] might change so they can manage their symptoms better."

While there have been studies in the past pointing out how allergy season is getting longer and pollen concentrations are getting higher, Steiner -- who has two children suffering from allergies -- said their research is unique because it breaks down the individual types of pollens and tree sources by region, specifically analyzing a variety of plant sources including oak, cedar or ragweed. The timing of tree pollen is released -- especially in regions where there are a number of deciduous trees -- varies. For instance, in Michigan -- where Steiner lives -- birch trees typically pollinate first, then oak or pine, followed by other species over the course of a few months. In the future, though, the study found different tree pollen varieties that once varied in timing will eventually overlap with each other, leading to overall higher concentrations that threaten public health.

"Some people are allergic to certain pollen; some are not; and some have more allergenic proteins that can drive more allergies. If you're an allergy sufferer, you may or may not know what you're allergic to, depending on what kind of testing you've done," Steiner said. "The [projected] higher concentrations of pollen is in addition to what you might be allergic to individually." Lewis Ziska, a plant physiologist and associate professor at Columbia University, suffers from allergies himself and carries a rescue inhaler at all times. He said the study extends the work that's already been done and makes clear the climate crisis will, at some point, exacerbate allergies, asthma and other public health problems. "It's a very solid piece of science," Ziska, who is not involved with the report, says. "Looking at forecasting, particularly for both the high and low projections, it's a very good indication of the kind of impact that climate change can directly have with respect to people's health. "I was impressed by the granularity of the study that it was looking at more on a very specific regional basis and also looking in regard to specific plant species," he added.

Wind-driven pollen, which plays an important role in plant fertilization, is closely tied to temperature and precipitation changes. So as spring seasons get warmer

earlier due to climate change, plants could pollinate much earlier and for a longer period of time than they currently do. Climate change also impacts the number of winter chill hours and spring frost-free days, which then affects the timing and duration of pollen season. As temperatures get warmer in the South and drought plagues the Southwest, pollen from plants like ragweed or poaceae -- a plant that typically grows on grassland or salt-marshes -- is projected to be higher across those regions than in the North. A longer and earlier start to pollen season could trigger a public health emergency, researchers say. More than 24 million people in the US experience pollen-induced respiratory allergies or hay fever, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While more research is needed in determining larger socioeconomic implications, Steiner said this could result in a large economic loss due to missed work, school days, medical expenses, and early deaths. A recent UN climate report emphasized greenhouse gas could be removed from the atmosphere by planting more trees and plants in green spaces, which could lead to an increase in pollen in those areas. But not all plants produce pollen. Steiner said as long as planners are careful of what trees to plant, people shouldn't worry about more trees intensifying pollen concentration. As the window to adapt to the climate crisis rapidly closes, Steiner said the projections could still be avoidable if the world reduces greenhouse gas emissions at a large scale, while simultaneously getting carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere to a manageable point. "What happens between 2050 and 2100 really depends on human choices," she said. "We're really hoping that's going to change. A lot [of us] in the climate community want to see those cuts, this concentration start to level off and hopefully start to have temperatures plateau, but a lot of work has to happen to make that change."

Thursday, March 17, 2022

Airborne gummies recall issued after reports of caps popping off bottles, hitting people

Millions of bottles of Airborne gummies are being recalled due to an issue with their containers. The Consumer Product Safety Commission posted the recall notice on its website Wednesday. It says the company behind Airborne, Reckitt, has received 70 reports of the cap or seal popping off of bottles. Eighteen reported minor injuries. One reported an eye injury requiring medical attention.

Because of this, Reckitt, or RB Health, is pulling more than 3 million Airborne gummies bottles off of the shelves. The recall affects select 63- and 75-count bottles in blueberry pomegranate, orange and assorted fruit flavors. The gummies were sold at several retailers including Target, Walgreens, CVS, Kroger, Sam's Club, BJ's Wholesale Club, Costco, Walmart and online at Amazon and SchiffVitamins.com from May 2020 through February 2022 for between \$18 and \$33.

Thursday, March 17, 2022 11:56PM

Moderna seeks FDA authorization for 4th dose of COVID shot

Drugmaker Moderna asked the Food and Drug Administration on Thursday to authorize a fourth shot of its COVID-19 vaccine as a booster dose for all adults. The request is broader than rival pharmaceutical company Pfizer's request earlier this week for the regulator to approve a booster shot for all seniors. In a press release, the company said its request for approval for all adults was made "to provide flexibility" to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and medical providers to determine the "appropriate use" of a second booster dose of the mRNA vaccine, "including for those at higher risk of COVID-19 due to age or comorbidities."

U.S. officials have been laying the groundwork to deliver additional booster doses to shore up the vaccines' protection against serious disease and death from COVID-19. The White House has been sounding the alarm that it needs Congress to "urgently" approve more funding for the federal government to secure more doses of the COVID-19 vaccines, either for additional booster shots or variant-specific immunizations. U.S. health officials currently recommend a primary series of two doses of the Moderna vaccine and a booster dose months later. Moderna said its request for an additional dose was based on "recently published data generated in the United States and Israel following the emergence of Omicron." On Tuesday, Pfizer and its partner BioNTech asked U.S. regulators to authorize an additional booster dose of their COVID-19 vaccine for seniors, saying data from Israel suggests older adults would benefit.

Friday, March 18, 2022 6:45AM

COVID cases will rise in coming weeks due to new BA.2 variant

Experts fear that COVID-19 cases in the United States will rise in the next few weeks as the new BA.2 variant continues to spread. Data from the CDC shows BA.2, which is a subvariant of omicron, has been tripling in prevalence every two weeks. As of the week ending March 11, BA.2 makes up 23.1% of all COVID cases in the U.S. compared to 7.1% of all cases the week ending Feb. 26, according to the CDC. Although the original omicron variant still makes up the majority of America's COVID infections, its prevalence has dropped over the same period, from 74.5% to 66.1%. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said given the growing prevalence of BA.2, he expects cases will increase within the next month. "I would expect that we might see an uptick in cases here in the United States because, only a week or so ago, the CDC came out with their modification of the metrics for what would be recommended for masking indoors, and much of the country right now is in that zone, where masking indoors is not required," Fauci told ABC affiliate KGTV Wednesday. Fauci added that he believes BA.2 will become the dominant variant in the country, surpassing the original omicron variant.

Several European countries -- such as Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom -- have reported a spike in COVID-19 over the last couple of weeks. In the U.K., 93,943 cases were recorded Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University, more than double the 45,303 recorded two weeks earlier. "Europe has been an important sign of what we can expect in the U.S.," said Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor. "Rising infections, an increase in variant prevalence and a slow booster rollout is likely a sign of a surge. Whether it will be another wave or small bump, we don't know yet." Last month, U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced any remaining COVID-19 measures in England would be dropped so the country could move into a new phase of the pandemic, which he described as "living with COVID." Several European countries followed suit, as did the U.S., which eased masking guidance for 70% of the country, including for schools.

Fauci said he is encouraged that BA.2 does not appear to cause more severe disease, but warned if the U.S. experiences another COVID wave, Americans must be willing to readopt mitigation measures -- and other experts agree. "What we're seeing now is the importance of being able to off-ramp interventions as cases up and how they need to be readopted as they come back," Brownstein said. "This might mean masking in certain settings and spending less time in indoor settings and environments we know the virus can spread quickly." Dr. Ali Mokdad, an epidemiologist with the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle, said he hopes that the U.S. government also has a plan to distribute COVID-19 antivirals in case of a surge. "These medications are life-savers and if someone is diagnosed early on and they take these antiviral medications, they're not going to end up in the hospital and die from it," he told ABC News. "So it will really reduce the burden of COVID-19."

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Moderna COVID vaccine performs as well in children as it does in adults,

Moderna announced interim results of its Covid-19 vaccine for children younger than 6 on Wednesday. The company said two 25-microgram doses of its Covid-19 vaccine for children ages 6 months through 5 years old provided a similar immune response to two 100-microgram doses for adults ages 18 to 25, indicating that the benefit conferred to young adults is also conferred to young children. The two doses of vaccine are given to children 28 days apart. The data showed "a robust neutralizing antibody response" and "a favorable safety profile," according to a company news release issued Wednesday. Based on the data, Moderna said it will ask the US Food and Drug Administration to authorize the use of the vaccine in this younger age group in the coming weeks. "Given the need for a vaccine against COVID-19 in infants and young children we are working with the U.S. FDA and regulators globally to submit these data as soon

as possible," Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said. "We believe these latest results ... are good news for parents of children under 6 years of age."

The vaccine was not all that effective at preventing Covid-19 infections caused by the Omicron variant, which predominated in the US during the study. For children ages 6 months through 1 year old, the efficacy was 43.7%. For children ages 2 through 5, the efficacy was 37.5%. Moderna said the lower efficacy was still statistically significant and consistent with how vaccinated adults have fared with the Omicron variant. Moderna said it is preparing to evaluate the potential of a booster shot for all children 6 months and older, which would target the original strain of the virus as well as the Omicron variant. The data is based on a group of 6,900 children ages 6 months through 5 years old. The majority of adverse reactions were mild or moderate, and were more frequent after the second shot. Moderna said no deaths and no cases of myocarditis or pericarditis were reported.

Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle and pericarditis is inflammation of the heart lining. Moderna also announced that it has initiated a submission to the FDA for emergency use authorization of the company's Covid-19 vaccine for children ages 6 through 11 years old. Children that age would get two shots of a larger 50-microgram version of the vaccine. Moderna also said it provided the FDA with additional follow-up data on its vaccine for children ages 12 to 17. Children that age would get two shots of a larger 100-microgram version of the vaccine. Last month, the FDA postponed a meeting of its vaccine advisers to consider Pfizer/BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine for children younger than 5, and requested additional data on third doses. The companies have said they expect that data to be ready by early April.

Climate & Environment

Monday, January 3, 2022

Sunnyvale residents turning food scraps into eco-friendly products

A big change coming Saturday for many in California. Food scraps must be separated for composting to help reduce waste going to landfills. However, the city of Sunnyvale has already taken this one step further -- turning leftover food and scraps into eco-friendly products. Residents have already been rewarded by seeing lower trash bills. 900 tons. That's how much waste comes into Sunnyvale's recycling center on a daily basis. However, 18% of it gets diverted from going to a landfill facility because of a food scraps program started in 2015. Thanks to residents placing leftovers, trimmings from fruit and vegetables and other food waste in a separate container, all of it will be transformed into eco-friendly products. As you can imagine, bits and pieces of food scraps do not look appetizing, but after processing, they will eventually become biofuel and animal feed.

Starting New Year's Day, all California residents and businesses must separate food scraps for composting. However, Sunnyvale wanted to do more by working with a contractor. "They pick up the mash at the Smart Station, and at their facility, they dehydrate it, they pasteurize it, and they're able to make it into a USDA approved animal feed, also into fertilizer, and they're also able to make the fats into biofuel," said David Krueger, Sunnyvale's solid waste programs manager. It takes more effort for residents to separate their food scraps, as they do with recyclables. However, the city's 31,000 residential customers received a reward. They saw their waste bills drop an average of 10 percent in 2019 -- savings resulting from reducing trash sent to landfills.

"We accept all kinds of food, including animal bones and meat, which you can't put in your yard waste if you're composting. But you can't put in other things that might be considered compostable like napkins and paper bags," said Jacqueline Guzman, Sunnyvale deputy city manager. An additional payoff is giving residents an opportunity to do something to help the environment. "It reduces the amount of methane that comes out of landfills that can contribute to climate change," said Krueger. "I think people feel good about helping the environment and helping the community."

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

California drought killing winter-run Chinook salmon species

"Salmon is the second most consumed seafood in the U.S., and California is a major salmon contributor. But a new report shows the drought facing the state is killing a salmon species in the Sacramento River. A recent report from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife shows that only 2.6 percent of the winter-run Chinook salmon juvenile population survived the brutally hot and dry summer. "Well it's a hit to everybody. When you get to a drought like this, water is in really, really short supply," said UC Davis Fisheries Scientist Peter Moyle. Moyle says that this could be just the beginning if nobody works on a solution. The winter-run Chinook salmon may be the first to take a hit but not the last. "The other runs of salmon are going to follow suit. If we use the battle for the winter run, we're likely to run the battle for the other runs. So we've got to make the system work," Moyle said.

Last April, the state sucked the salmons out of the reservoirs and trucked them all the way to the ocean, instead of releasing them into rivers, in an effort to save them. With less snow melt feeding the rivers, the water was just too warm for young salmon. "We're using all this water that's being produced by mountain ranges. We're trying to capture it and store it in the reservoirs, and we're taking it from the fish. So if we want some of those fish around, we've got to give some of that water back," explained Moyle. The winter-run Chinook salmon has been on the endangered list since 1994. Hatcheries that raise fish in artificial conditions are helping to keep the other two main Chinook salmon runs in the area alive.

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Recent storms washed microplastics into San Francisco Bay, studies show

Walk along Damon Slough in Oakland and you're likely to see trash heading towards San Francisco Bay. David Lewis of the environmental group Save the Bay, says much of it comes from the nearby 880 freeway and local storm drains. "Every time it rains, anything that's on the streets goes into the storm drains and straight out into the bay unfiltered. And we see this on all of the freeways and all of our urban road," Lewis explains. And experts say the pollution you can actually see is only part of the threat. Floating along side, often invisible to the naked eye, are microplastics. They're tiny particles, that can come from clothing, cigarette butts, and even the rubber from car tires. "And the way it wears off is when the tire hits the road. It wears off these little tiny bits of tires. They're so small, they're practically microscopic," says environmental researcher Kelly Moran, Ph.D. of the San Francisco Estuary Institute.

But their effects can be devastating to fish like Salmon and other marine life. In recent studies, Dr. Moran and her colleagues set out to document the likely sources of microplastics and also confirmed that storm water is a main culprit.

“Our study for the first time revealed that microplastics were mostly coming from outdoor rain, and washing across outdoor surfaces,” Moran explains. In other words, the kind of downpours that have swept through the Bay Area this winter, creating run-off that literally pulls microplastics along with it. But now, with a better understanding of where microplastics come from and how they're transported, researchers are hoping we'll be able to come up with innovative solutions. Everything from introducing new technologies to changing old behaviors.

Remember the rubber particles? Several companies, including one called the Tyre Collective, are engineering on-board devices designed to capture the worn rubber before it's left on the road, and potentially recycle it. And researchers say limiting the tiny clothing fibers pushed out from dryer vents is another opportunity. “It falls down and it gets washed off. And it doesn't go to a sewage treatment plant. It goes to the Bay and into creeks,” says Moran. She says families can make an impact by simply air-drying clothes. Save the Bay's David Lewis also points to new efforts by cities and the state to cut down on plastic use. An initiative on the state ballot this November, would go a step further, creating new regulations on single use plastic.

“So the more we can eliminate single use plastics and packaging and other materials, the less there is to get into the environment and into landfills,” says Lewis. Limiting the pollution and microplastics that can be washed into creeks, streams, and ultimately San Francisco Bay.

Thursday, January 13, 2022

Spaceship-sized detection system could help determine future of CA water supply

If it looks like something that could transport you into the future, in a sense it is. A spaceship-sized hoop suspended from a helicopter is actually part of an advanced water detection system. The information it's gathering, could help determine the future of California's water supply - and where we store it. “I've seen similar studies that say, 'Hey, let's not even think of building more above ground reservoirs. Let's use all the empty space below,’” says Rosemary Knight, Ph.D., a professor of Geophysics and senior fellow at the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University. For several years, Knight has been conducting aerial surveys using an electromagnetic sensing system. She says the technology is able to penetrate the ground, yielding vital data on the geology of natural groundwater basins. 3D maps pinpoint attractive sites, made up of materials marked in red, like sand and gravel, that allow water to sink in. “Where if I put the water on the ground surface, hey, here's a connected pathway that will get me down to the water table, get this water down where it's going to be useful,” Knight explains.

A long abandoned marshland is back up and running as part of a larger effort to restore a habitat that's becoming increasingly rare in the Bay Area. Felicia Marcus, a visiting fellow at the Woods Institute, sees the potential for an historic opportunity. "Our groundwater basins are a gift. They're bigger than any above ground reservoir capacity," says Marcus. While they're not visible like our above ground reservoirs, some studies estimate the state's groundwater basins can hold many times as much water when they're replenished. And with climate change, and extended droughts threatening to disrupt California's normal snowpack and river melt cycle, some believe they could be critical for capturing and keeping the water we do get. In fact, identifying and potentially maximizing the capacity of California's groundwater system is part of an aggressive statewide effort. Recent flights over the North Bay this past November are just the latest example.

Katherine Dlubac, Ph.D., directs the aerial survey program for the California Department of Water Resources. She says the data can help accelerate projects designed to recharge groundwater basins. Using technologies like direct underground pumping or creating saturation ponds. "And so we can choose locations on the surface, where we know the top is connected to the aquifer. And we can sight our recharge pond there so that we can know and be sure that we're getting the groundwater into the aquifer where we want it to be," explains Dlubac. While recharge efforts have been going on for years, experts say there's new momentum building since the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in 2014. The focus is on emerging strategies, like diverting floodwaters to farms or orchards, where the underground conditions are right for saturation -- Or, connecting dams and reservoirs to underground systems, to capture water from a heavy runoff that might otherwise need to be released.

As the drought worsens, some communities are taking a closer look at seawater desalination as a reliable source of drinking water. "Because we are seeing that that runoff curve is getting more extreme to where a lot of water shows up all at one time, as opposed to when it snows. And then the snow nicely releases that water steadily through the spring and summer. We are seeing more and more flashy discharge. And so a lot of these new concepts that people are working on at the local state and federal level, are really trying to put that water to most use, to best use," adds Steven Springhorn, technical manager for the Department of Water Resources' sustainable groundwater program. It's a melding of innovation and technology, and perhaps a second act, for a State built on major water projects launched more than a century ago, now facing the urgent challenges of climate change. Multiple counties and water agencies are teaming up with the State on this project. The recent survey flights covered areas stretching from Ukiah, through Lake County and the Napa-Sonoma area.

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

San Francisco fishermen struggle to stay afloat amid delayed crab season

ABC7 is excited to continue our partnership with the brand new San Francisco Standard. Part of Building A Better Bay Area is highlighting anyone who's working toward the same mission we have here at ABC7. The SF Standard's deep and insightful reporting on the city does just that. Strolling through Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, you cannot miss the giant sign with a red crab welcoming tourists. And, the smell of freshly steamed crabs. It's hard to think of a more iconic industry that's so San Francisco than San Francisco's crabbing industry.

But a series of problems is causing some longtime fishermen to consider leaving their jobs. From the Pier 45 warehouse fire of 2020 to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to the changing climate, one of the city's biggest industry is struggling to survive. Tuesday on ABC7's Getting Answers, SF Standard reporter Kevin Truong joined Kristen Sze to talk about what's delaying San Francisco's crab season and the future of the business. Typically, crab season begins in November but this season, it began in December. Truong says it all started with the changing climate that's affecting wildlife, leading to a lawsuit. "The crabbing industry entangled a record number of whales now that led to a lawsuit from the Centers of Biological Diversity, global environmental groups," Truong said, adding that 29 states eventually settling back on a delayed date to protect the whales of which migratory patterns have shifted with the presence of substances and chemicals in the ocean.

The delayed season means more financial trouble and less motivation for the fishermen to go out to sea with an uncertainty of catching any crab. "It's really difficult to get people to work on your boat if you don't know when you're actually going out," Truong said. The delayed season also poses risks for the fishermen as dangerous weather conditions could potentially do more harm than making a few bucks.

Friday, January 28, 2022

New Stanford study links gas stoves to methane release into atmosphere

For millions of restaurants and homeowners across the country, natural gas stoves are the preferred way to cook. But, a new Stanford study is turning up the heat on a growing debate over the environmental tradeoffs. Specifically, the amount of the greenhouse gas methane the stoves release into the atmosphere. "We were able to really quantify each of the different phases of operation," said Eric Lebel Ph.D., lead author on the study. Lebel, says the Stanford team, including senior author Prof. Rob Jackson, measured the methane release in a more complete way, using sample stoves of different brands and ages in homes around California.

By deploying a large sample chamber, they were able to calculate methane levels both while the stoves were being used and when they were turned off. “Even while you're turning it on and off, you know, like when you turn the knob and you hear the clicking sound, and sometimes you can smell a little gas. Well, sure enough, there is gas being emitted during those phases. And you're able to really put a number on how much that is every time we did it,” Lebel explains.

Accounting for leaks, the Stanford team's estimates that a significant fraction of the natural gas used by stoves are released as unburned methane. Equal they say, to the climate impact of the annual carbon dioxide released by half-a-million gasoline powered cars. “So the momentum is really huge, especially in the Bay Area,” says Laura Feinstein, sustainability and resilience policy director for the environmental nonprofit SPUR.

Feinstein says some 50 cities and counties around California are now working to phase out gas appliances in new construction. But stoves in particular are tricky. “And so I would say that the real low hanging fruit is definitely getting people to change to zero emission furnaces and hot water heaters first, and the stoves and the ovens, that's harder,” Feinstein believes. She says limiting gas hook-ups on new construction will help. But advocates believe phasing in a new generation of electric appliances, with subsidies and incentives for businesses and homeowners of different income levels is also critical. And perhaps essential to limiting the amount of greenhouse gasses reaching our atmosphere.

Sunday, February 6, 2022

San Francisco launches anticipated mobile recycling service, but not everyone is happy

San Francisco's new container recycling program is now up and running. The city used to have hundreds of places to return your bottles and cans: stores that sold the items and recycling centers. A new law scrapped all of that and put into motion a mobile program with roaming trucks to be set up around town and take in your empties. The new “BottleBank” program launched in early January and so far only two trucks have been deployed and they aren't roaming. They are stationary at two locations. Charles Sheehan is with the San Francisco Department of the Environment and he tells 7 On Your Side, “So we're starting small, but we are planning on scaling up the program gradually and so as the word gets out, as we do outreach, we will add new locations and the goal is to be in every district within the city.” “Doesn't look like it's doing too good to me,” says Jamie Court from Consumer Watchdog. “I mean they're in like two locations for like a few hours every morning, on the weekdays not the weekends, so most people aren't going to be using this facility, and it doesn't replace every retailer in San Francisco who was required to take back cans and bottles.” Although the BottleBank idea was sold as convenient, not all San Franciscans see it that way.

“For someone like me who doesn't have a car,” says San Franciscan Adrienne Gembala, “I would be reliant on either a bicycle or taking the bus to get to these locations, there are only two in the city that I have seen when I've checked the app a few times.” The app she is talking about starts off with a bit of confusion: when viewed in the app store, it says “Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative.” Turns out the app was developed in Oregon, but works here in San Francisco. Once the app is downloaded, it is time to gather up your bottles. With this new program you must use specific blue BottleBank bags to return bottles and cans. The website shows where bags can be found. When 7 On Your Side's Michael Finney went around town spot-checking stores, none could be found on the shelves and when asked for them, employees sometimes had no idea what Finney was talking about. Other times Finney was handed a kind of starter kit with two bags and instructions. “If you go to the store right now they're just carrying the two-pack bags, and if you go to customer service, they should be able to give them to you and for a limited time they're giving them to participants for free,” says Sheehan. “Going further into the program the stores will start carrying and selling eight-pack bags, and they certainly will plan to start carrying those eight-pack bags, probably the next month or two, maybe even a little bit sooner.” “I think they're plastic. I don't understand why a recycling program would use a plastic bag, it seems like the opposite of what you would want to do,” Court says.

At the BottleBank site Michael Finney visited, those running the place could not have been more helpful or friendly. They checked the app, then checked in the bags of bottles and cans Finney brought for recycling. They explained the containers will be tallied later and the deposit will be sent to the app where it can be transferred to a financial accounts. The BottleBank says it can take as long as three days before the payment is received. 7 On Your Side took in our bottles and cans on Tuesday around noon. Friday at 1 p.m., it still had not been paid. A couple final points: With this program, you don't squash the cans. There is a Saturday availability at Stonestown, and there are also two stationary recycle centers still operating in the city. When the bags are sold, they will cost a couple of bucks, which means it will take about fifty containers before breaking even.

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Some San Jose residents could run out of water by summer

In California, you pay big bucks for blue skies and sunshine filled days like we had today in San Jose. But this morning, ABC7 News Meteorologist Drew Tuma explained why it's not necessarily always a good thing. “This is our 49th day in a row without a drop of rain in San Jose,” Tuma said. “So, that is the record longest stretch in our winter season that we have not seen a drop of rain in parts of the South Bay. So you can see how dry it has been this winter season.” Monday's study says the megadrought is now the worst-case scenario officials and

scientists worried about in the 1900s. “In general, January and February are supposed to be our wettest months of the year,” Santa Clara Valley Water District Chairperson Gary Kremen said. “January and February to date have been the driest months on record.” The last time we saw rainfall in San Jose was back in late December.

Meteorologists say an atmospheric ridge has prevented storms from making their way to California and they don't anticipate it breaking anytime soon. “Well, to the extent that you trust the forecast models, they have us dry for the next two weeks,” San Jose State University Professor of Meteorology Alison Bridger said. Across Santa Clara Valley, reservoirs are already at 25.9% of total capacity and experts say conservation is crucial as we remain dry. But if all else fails, there may be another solution. “If people pray for rain, I'm not going to go criticize them at all,” Kremen said. “In fact, feel free to pray for rain. I do my own prayers for rain.” If we don't see rain soon, experts say it could lead to some serious implications. “I feel like we're in trouble,” Bridger said.

“It's possible, some people with wells for example will run out of water in the Summer,” Kremen said. “We're trying to prevent that by doing emergency water purchases, but most important by conservation. Definitely next year, if this continues, there can be widespread shortages.” Enjoy the green hillsides while they last, they may not last long.

Sunday, January 23, 2022

'Risk is real now': Climate expert says California may see more unusual winter wildfires

The Colorado Fire burning between Carmel and Big Sur is giving a climate expert and CAL FIRE insight into what's to come. “It's extremely unusual. We had an unusual combination of a long stretch of dry weather in January combined with an off-shore wind event that was pretty substantial,” said Michael Wara, Director of the Climate and Policy program at Stanford University. Now, should we expect wildfires like this one in January? “I think it's more likely. We are going to see more of them. In the old days this would've been an incredible unusual event. Maybe a once in a 50-year event, but these days is going to be more common and we are going to see it once every couple years,” said Wara and added, “Californians need to be aware of the weather in a different way than they used to be. The risk is real now.”

Instead of categorizing the summer months as the beginning of fire season, CAL FIRE is now preparing for a fire year. “We are towards the end of January. 10-15 years ago we use to call it the California fire season where we might get fires say in July that would last through maybe September or October. So, it was just a few months. Now our fires are extending all the way through December and then into January. So it's not really accurate to call it a fire season. CAL FIRE is trying

to get away from calling it a fire season because that doesn't make sense anymore. It's really now more of a fire year," said Cecile Juliette, CAL FIRE public information officer. As CAL FIRE units gear up for the rest of the year they are also noticing the California coastal regions are no longer off limits for wildfires. The humidity these areas normally have can't be expected anymore.

"There should be that heavy marine coastal fog influence that usually brings the humidity levels up overnight. That didn't happen last night. The humidity levels did not recover and it stayed very dry," said Juliette. Michael Wara believes fire prevention strategies will be key moving forward. "We need to allow some fires to burn when it's safe to do so. When the weather conditions are not extreme. So essentially pick the time and place to battle. As oppose to letting nature choose," said Wara.

Wednesday, February 9, 2022

Berkeley Lab's climate-flexible smart roofs could help save energy year-round

As climate change continues to raise temperatures, planners have been paying special attention to city environments known as urban heat islands. Figuring out ways to shade sidewalks, increase tree canopy and cool buildings themselves. "We've been exploring what happens when you apply these heat island counter measures such as reflective roofs or shade trees to buildings," says researcher Ronnen Levinson, PhD, of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Levinson, who is with Berkeley Lab's Heat Island Group, says while there have been significant advances in roof cooling technologies, there's a trade off.

"While you'll save energy in summer, if you need heating in winter, the cool roof won't get as warm as a traditional roof in the winter, and so your building might require more heating," Levinson explains. Now, Levinson and his colleagues believe they've made a break-through that could provide a more effective way to control the temperature of buildings we live and work in. It's a material coating that looks something like Scotch Tape. Junqiao Wu, Ph.D., of Berkeley Lab, says it's able to help cool buildings in the summer, and help them retain heat in the winter.

"This is because our technology is unique in the sense that it adapts automatically to the environmental temperature. If you don't do that, then your roof will be a cool roof all year round, or a warm roof all year round," says professor Wu. The shoreline near Highway 101 in Menlo Park is being turned into an example of what 21st century levees could look like.

The technology is known as TARC, for Temperature Adaptive Radiative Coating. It takes advantage of compound called Vanadium Dioxide which changes behaviors at different temperatures. In rooftop experiments, the team found the

coating released more heat from the building when the weather was warm, and retained more when it was cooler. “We are the first group to use this phase transition property to make it as a roof coating material,” says professor Wu. They say the difference could cut building energy use by roughly 10% in many parts of the country with other benefits as well, including reducing the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted from heating and air conditioning use.

“So those all those contributes to the climate change to our carbon dioxide emission, which we want to cut, cut down those type of energy consumption. Now, if you can save 10% of that amount of energy, in my opinion, that is already a significant contribution to save our planet,” argues prof. Wu. While much of the concept work was done in the lab, professor Wu says he and the team also tested the coating using the roof of his own home in the East Bay. Berkeley Lab now hopes the technology can be developed into a commercial smart roof coating, perhaps having a significant impact both cooling urban heat islands and combatting climate change.

Thursday, February 10, 2022

South Bay's levee greening project could be model for fight against climate change

Flying along Ravenswood Pond with Droneview7, it might be hard to spot the design evolution taking place on the ground. But the shoreline, near Highway 101 in Menlo Park, is being turned into an example of what 21st century levees could look like around the Bay Area and the country. “What we're looking at here is a native plant called common yarrow,” says Jessie Olson, habitat restoration director at Save the Bay. The environmental group is using native plants to green nearly 10 acres of what's known as a horizontal levee. It's a gently sloping stretch of land connecting Bedwell Bayfront Park to surrounding salt ponds. “I think a lot of people moving into the future are thinking of more nature based solutions for these levees,” says Olson.

An environmental group says sediment could help strengthen Bay Area wetlands with rising sea levels. To accomplish that vision, the Save the Bay team has been growing plants in a makeshift nursery a short distance away. Scores of volunteers have joined forces to plant the area by hand, after an agricultural team placed the original materials using heavy equipment. “So right now, it doesn't look like much because we're only in our first year. But from a trained eye, you can already see those native plants coming up,” Olson points out.

The project also echoes a movement across the country. With the growing threat from climate change and sea level rise, many environmental groups say we need alternatives to simply building higher levees and taller sea walls. Natalie Snider is with the Environmental Defense Fund, late last year the group joined nearly a hundred other organizations in drafting a letter to the Army Corp of Engineers. It

called on the Corp to re-focus its planning toward nature based solutions. “And so it doesn’t have to be these strong sea walls, which, you know, actually harm the environment, and are not sustainable in the long term with climate change,” says Snider.

Here in the Bay Area, Save the Bay believes the Ravenswood project can act as a pilot for future planning. Perhaps, becoming a model for major shoreline projects. “We are learning a lot here. Hopefully we’ll see success, and that will be something we can share,” says Olson. Save the Bay is also planning to expand the project soon to include another stretch of horizontal levee in the same area. Eventually greening more than 25 acres in all.

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

US could see a century's worth of sea rise in just 30 years

"America's coastline will see sea levels rise in the next 30 years by as much as they did in the entire 20th century, with major Eastern cities regularly hit with costly floods even on sunny days, a government report warns. By 2050, seas lapping against the U.S. shore will be 10 to 12 inches higher, with parts of Louisiana and Texas projected to see waters a foot and a half higher, according to an 111-page report issued Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and six other federal agencies. “Make no mistake: Sea level rise is upon us,” said Nicole LeBoeuf, director of NOAA's National Ocean Service. The projected increase is especially alarming given that in the 20th century, seas along the Atlantic coast rose at the fastest clip in 2,000 years.

LeBoeuf warned that the cost would be high, pointing out that much of the American economy and 40% of the population are along the coast. However, the worst of the long-term sea level rise from melting ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland probably won't kick in until after 2100, said ocean service oceanographer William Sweet, the report's lead author. Warmer water expands, and the melting ice sheets and glaciers add more water to the world's oceans. The report “is the equivalent of NOAA sending a red flag up” about accelerating the rise in sea levels, said University of Wisconsin-Madison geoscientist Andrea Dutton, a specialist in sea level rise who wasn't part of the federal report. The coastal flooding the U.S. is seeing now “will get taken to a whole new level in just a couple of decades.”

“We can see this freight train coming from more than a mile away,” Dutton said in an email. “The question is whether we continue to let houses slide into the ocean.” Sea level rises more in some places than others because of sinking land, currents, and water from ice melt. The U.S. will get slightly more sea level rise than the global average. And the greatest rise in the U.S. will be on the Gulf and East Coasts, while the West Coast and Hawaii will be hit less than average, Sweet said. For example, between now and 2060, expect almost 25 inches of

sea level rise in Galveston, Texas, and just under 2 feet in St. Petersburg, Florida, while only 9 inches in Seattle and 14 inches in Los Angeles, the report said.

While higher seas cause much more damage when storms such as hurricanes hit the coast, they are becoming a problem even on sunny days. Cities such as Miami Beach, Florida; Annapolis, Maryland; and Norfolk, Virginia, already get a few minor “nuisance” floods a year during high tides, but those will be replaced by several “moderate” floods a year by mid-century, ones that cause property damage, the researchers said. “It’s going to be areas that haven’t been flooding that are starting to flood,” Sweet said in an interview. “Many of our major metropolitan areas on the East Coast are going to be increasingly at risk.” The report said that the western Gulf of Mexico coast should get hit the most with the highest sea level rise 16 to 18 inches by 2050. And that means more than 10 moderate property-damaging sunny-day floods and one “major” high tide flood event a year.

The eastern Gulf of Mexico should expect a rise of 14 to 16 inches of sea level by 2050 and three moderate sunny-day floods a year. By mid-century, the Southeast coast should get a foot to 14 inches of sea level rise and four sunny-day moderate floods a year, while the Northeast coast should get 10 inches to a foot of sea level rise and six moderate sunny-day floods a year. Both the Hawaiian Islands and Southwestern coast should expect 6 to 8 inches of sea level rise by mid-century, with the Northwest coast seeing only 4 to 6 inches. The Pacific coastline will get more than 10 minor nuisance sunny-day floods a year but only about one moderate one a year, with Hawaii getting even less than that. And that’s just until 2050. By the end of the century, the report is projecting an average of about 2 feet of sea level rise in the United States - more in the East, less in the West. [Sea Level Rise Viewer: View projected sea level rise at any coastal location up to 6 feet of inundation from flooding, hurricane storm surge, high tides.](#)

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Stanford researchers identify 'double-hazard' wildfire zones in the West

Watching a wildfire race through dry brush, it may seem that the impact of drought and climate change is obvious. But understanding the global forces that increase fire danger is actually more complicated. Stanford researchers Krishna Rao and professor Alexandra Konings, PhD, study the relationship between plants, moisture and fire. They've discovered that some areas in the West are more vulnerable than others. Regions they describe as double hazard zones. “And so these double-hazard zones are regions where the faster drying out of the atmosphere, and the relatively sensitive ecosystem sort of drying out rates act as a double whammy in terms of increasing risk,” says professor Konings.

Kongings and her team used satellite data to help measure plant-water sensitivity over time. The complex formula includes factors like soil and plant types, root depth, and the effect of surrounding air temperatures on how much moisture the plants retain. "And we found that that property of ecosystems is closely related to how much burn areas increase under dry conditions. So we know that there is an increased potential risk in regions where these ecosystems dry out relatively quickly," she explains.

They say the newly identified double hazard zones are concentrated in eastern Oregon, Nevada's Great Basin, central Arizona, and the southern Sierra Nevada. The team has modeled the data into interactive maps that track dryness patterns over time. Krishna Rao says the results add critical context to understanding long term fire dangers. "Until this work, we've really not known what the vegetation dryness, how the vegetation dryness changes across the western United States, through seasons and through years,"

Sunday, March 20, 2022 4:15PM

Speier pushes \$24 million in funding through for EPA's SF Bay restoration projects

When it comes to spending for climate change and the environment, San Francisco Bay's ship may finally be coming in. Congresswoman Jackie Speier recently pushed through \$24 million in funding for the EPA's Bay restoration projects in the new federal budget. That's roughly triple the normal amount, and long overdue according to David Lewis, of the nonprofit Save the Bay. "Yeah, federal funding for San Francisco Bay has been a fraction of what Chesapeake and Puget Sound and other bays receive. This is a huge boost for accelerating wetland restoration and cleaning up water quality in the bay," Lewis points out. While the increased EPA funding will be a welcome boost for shoreline restoration, other advocates say an historic surge in spending for Bay Area environmental projects could be just around the corner, fueled by money from Gov. Gavin Newsom's climate resilience package coupled with funds from the \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure plan. "And that can make a trend historically transformative," says Warner Chabot of the San Francisco Estuary Institute. "Launching that could make the Bay Area frankly a national model of how an urban region of 8 million people at the edge of the sea tackles climate adaptation."

Chabot says priority projects include tidal marsh restoration to combat level rise, drought and water conservation systems, and managing surrounding forests for wildfire risk. But while the goals are clear, Chabot believes the dozens of major Bay Area cities, counties and agencies involved need a new coordinated approach to effectively tap into the funding stream. Possibly negotiating together to craft a broad regional proposal. "So we need to start now, to get the concept of we're not going to fight each other. We're not going to have a food fight. But

we're actually going to recognize that climate change is a regional issue," he believes

If the planning is effective, they believe the Bay Area could begin a transformation that's critical to surviving the effects of climate change. "It's encouraging to see the congressional delegation getting more resources for San Francisco Bay. And frankly, we need an order of magnitude higher investment over the next decade, to keep the bay clean and healthy, in the face of climate change," Lewis said.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022 8:18PM

Expert says California fire season could start early as May

Plenty of residents went out to enjoy the beautiful record-breaking weather across the Bay Area Tuesday, but climate scientists were not necessarily enjoying the warm temps. One wildfire expert believes hot days like today could lead to an increased risk of fire danger. March 2022 in the Bay Area feels more like a taste of summer with temperatures in the 70s and 80s and record highs falling across the region. It made for a perfect day to go enjoy the sunshine. "The human body likes warm and sunny skies," San Jose resident Chris Mulcaster said. "This is one of the days that we've had this week that's been nice. It's great, the rain is not as desirable as the sunshine that's for sure." Well, don't tell that to anyone following the drought and climate closely. While, it's true, it feels good to soak in some Vitamin D, SJSU Wildfire Interdisciplinary Research Center's Professor Craig Clements says these record temperatures are actually not good for our environment. "Any of these heatwaves that we have so early in spring helps dry out the fuel. So, it could actually cause our fire danger to increase earlier than we typically would see in the late-spring, early-summer," Clements said. We have been enjoying beautiful green hillsides in the area, but more days like today could turn that green to brown.

In fact, Clements says plants are drying out, or "curing," about a month sooner than they did last year. Grass fires normally start in June, but he says the natural fuel may be ready to catch fire as early as May. "Most of the big fires actually do start in grass," Clements said. "Grass fuels burn very hot, very easily, and then they can carry up into the shrubs and to the forest. So, we could actually potentially see more fires because of our early curing of the grasses." So what's the magic cure to this curing? Well, rain of course. It has been a historically dry winter, but Clements said some late spring rain would go a long way. Otherwise, it may be another rough summer for wildfires. "The outlook is looking pretty grim in terms of what we should expect for next season," Clements said. "Given the fact that we're in this severe drought, our grass is already curing this early in the season, fuel moisture are below normal across Northern California, we could actually probably say we're going to have a pretty busy June in terms of fires." So, days like these are nice, but here's to hoping for some rain.

Economy And Changing Workplace

January 3, 2022

Robots filling in staffing shortages at some Bay Area hotels with no tips expected

Hotels, like restaurants, have been hard pressed to provide attentive service due to staffing shortages during the pandemic. In Silicon Valley, robots are filling the gap to the surprise and delight of guests. This is how the Radisson Sunnyvale is dealing with staffing shortages - A guest would like a soft drink delivered to the room. In the past, someone from the front desk or sometimes even the general manager might step up. Now, this robot, designed by Savioke in Campbell, will handle the task. "They're in this kind of crunch mode where the higher paid staff are filling in for things that frankly robots can do," said Savioke CEO Steve Cousins. The robot needs to be trained only once to navigate the lobby and hallways. It even has been adapted to call for an elevator. Once inside, it can press the destination floor. Hotel corridors can be tricky to navigate, even for humans, with housekeeping carts and other guests.

So what happens when this robot comes, and someone is in the way? The robot is programmed to avoid obstacles, human or otherwise, so it will try to go around. If, as sometimes happens, a person is uncertain which direction to move and does a zig-zag, the robot reacts in a similar fashion, seeming to do a dance, even spinning around in search of a safer maneuver. It's that playful characteristic that makes the robot almost human.

It can really be good at getting around people. A video taken in the lobby of a busy Las Vegas hotel during a major convention shows how well it avoided contact when surrounded by a crowd. Once the robot gets to the room requesting something, it calls the guest to announce its arrival. This recording is played: "Our robot is waiting outside your door to pick it up." The message is followed by sound effects mimicking what you'd expect to hear from robots like Wall-E or R2D2 The robot opens its compartment door, and there's the soft drink the guest requested. There's also a bonus: "You don't have to tip it. You know, there's no obligation, there's no handout. And you don't even have to get dressed for it," said Savioke's CEO. The robot has reduced room service delivery time from 30 down to five minutes in many cases. It also reduces COVID anxiety. "There are guests that like the fact that they can have items delivered and not have that

contact with a human being,” said Radisson Sunnyvale general manager Alex Martinez. “It’s more of an enhanced experience than it is replacing someone.” The robot’s on call 24/7. It doesn’t have days off or take vacations.

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

Car traffic to return to downtown SJ street

A stretch of Post Street in Downtown San Jose is reopening to car traffic later this week. During the pandemic, the City of San Jose allowed businesses to expand temporarily onto Post Street for outdoor dining services. ABC7 News reported on the city’s Al Fresco initiative extending to December 31, 2021. The program granted businesses temporary access to use outdoor space for services. While changes along Post Street were expected by business owners, patrons say they were caught off-guard and are disappointed to see the outdoor dining area go. Barrels were being moved on Tuesday evening, marking the end of the good ship El Dorado 55.

For 55 South bar and lounge in Downtown San Jose, the 50-foot-long structure was built in the middle of Post Street and saw a 20-foot expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic. “To be honest, 2020 was a shipwreck of a year,” 55 South Managing Partner Eric Nielsen told ABC7 News. “So I was joking around with my partners, I thought it was really appropriate if we could get the street shutdown, that we would literally build a shipwreck in the street. And then it did, so we did!” Nielsen said the “ship” fit about 14 tables, each spaced out the necessary 6-foot apart. The temporary street closure allowed 55 South and other businesses to serve patrons safely outdoors. “It’s something that we were given from the city. So, we can’t be upset when it gets taken away.” This stretch of Post St. in Downtown #SanJose is being cleared for the return of car traffic. #TONIGHT @CityofSanJose, biz owners and patrons weigh in.

Nielsen explained car traffic is expected to take over Friday, so in order to beat any bad weather, he and his crew spent much of the day Monday, taking down the ship. By Tuesday, the stretch of Post Street, between Lightston Alley and First St. was nearly empty. It is soon-to-be cleared completely for the return of car traffic. Councilman Raul Peralez explained the city didn’t have “buy in” from all business owners on the block to keep the street closed. “We did not want to do something that was going to continue to hinder business,” Councilman Peralez told ABC7 News. “Especially as we’re emerging out of the pandemic and hoping to get back to some sense of normalcy.” He continued, “One of the things we can be certain of is uncertainty in this pandemic. That’s just been the case—we’ll be going on two years this March. At the same time though, what we have learned is how to adapt and how to be able to live within the confines of this pandemic.” For Froylan Rodriguez, owner of Dream Jewelers, he explained the pandemic has been a nightmare.

Parklets have popped up by the thousands in San Francisco -- A temporary solution to pandemic dining, that is now up for permanent discussion.

"Because of this street closure, I had enough customers call in and say, 'We can't go because the street is closed. We don't know where to park,'" he said. "And it's terrible." Since 1996, Rodriguez said he's depended on both foot and car traffic along Post Street. "I know for the restaurants it was kind of good for them to do that, but for us it was kind of bad," he continued." Still, some patrons and business owners said because of where we are in this pandemic, timing is making this decision tough. "I do understand that some of the businesses have good reasons for wanting cars back, and I definitely want to respect that," San Jose resident Ryan Globus said. "But with omicron surging, you know, it's really a big punch for the bars and the restaurants on this street." Nielsen commended the city for allowing many small business to continue outdoors, and for providing the tool of Post Street. However, he did acknowledge how the reopening will impact 55 South. "We had more seats available when we had the street, than we have indoors," he explained. "So, it's going to cut our capacity by more than 50%." Nielsen added, "It's something that we were given from the city. So, we can't be upset when it gets taken away."

Councilman Peralez shared, "This has been in motion for quite some time. We couldn't have predicted what was happening right now with this latest surge." Nielsen called the move bittersweet. "The sweet part of it is- hopefully that means that we're returning to normal." For Globus, who frequents the stretch of Post Street in what's also known as San Jose's Qmunity District, said that regardless of the pandemic, the area provided a really welcoming, safe, exciting and fun place to hang out. "I think the biggest piece was all the people that would be out here during the day or in the evenings. It really sort of creates an x-factor, something extra special about the space," Globus continued. "Compared to when it's a lot quieter." He told ABC7 News, he felt the decision to reopen the street to traffic was made with only business owners in mind. "Of course, they should be talking to the businesses- they're very important stakeholders, but they're not the only stakeholders," Globus added. "There is the community, there's the public, this is a public street. And there should be a more open public process to get input on what we want this street to be."

Speaking specifically about the growing Qmunity District, Globus pointed out, "There's very few LGBTQ spaces in the South Bay and in San Jose. So, I think it's really important that we listen to that community when we make decisions like this, and we try to keep alive those spaces." Councilman Peralez said there is hope for the potential of a hybrid street closure in the future. Although there are no actionable items as of now. Until then, it's about keeping small businesses afloat. "If we're decent neighbors, the only thing we can do is try to be equitable," Nielsen told ABC7 News. "To try to make sure that they survive, right? Rising tide raises all boats. So, hopefully we're one of those boats." Blage Zelalich, Downtown Manager of the city's Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs released the following statement to ABC7 News: "The City of San Jose

has been working with our local business community to help them survive the impact of the COVID pandemic, which is obviously not over yet. One of the City's efforts was to help businesses operate outdoors, which we started when indoor operations were closed by public health orders. We temporarily changed sidewalk, parking space and private space ordinances to allow restaurant, bar and other business operations outdoors, and the street closures on Post Street, San Pedro Street and Coronado Avenue were part of that effort. Stakeholder discussions with the businesses on Post Street led to an agreement that Post Street would remain closed until the beginning of the year and we will continue to work with the merchants there to provide opportunities for outdoor operation, if not full-time street closure, so that we can ideally meet the needs of all the businesses on the street.”

Thursday, January 6, 2022

San Francisco startup Bolt permanently switches to 4-day work week

San Francisco tech start-up, Bolt, is making a change meant to ease the workload for staffers. Bolt is now permanently switching to a four-day work week. The company started with the idea back in October, when it began testing the new schedule. Within a month they saw a surge in productivity. Ninety-five percent of the workforce wanted to keep working four days a week. Bolt's CEO, Ryan Breslow, calls the traditional 5-day work week, “work theater.”

Thursday, January 6, 2022

Bay Area outlook as record 4.5 million in US quit jobs in November

New numbers released Tuesday show a record number of Americans who quit or changed jobs in November with labor shortages giving job-seekers the upper hand. “What the data is showing is that people are leaving jobs more quickly than they have been in the past, that was a trend, we saw pre-COVID,” said Justin Rietz, Assistant Professor of Economics at San Jose State University. “When COVID hit, people were holding on to their jobs.” But now, the latest data from the U.S. Department of Labor shows that a record 4.5 million American workers quit their jobs in November.

Rietz says the reasons people are leaving their jobs may vary. “They're saying, “Hey, I can take that risk, there are other jobs available. Part of it could be inflation...hey, I'm not making enough money at my current job. I want to find a better job where I make more money.” Rietz is part of a team that developed a tool called the Silicon Valley COVID-19 Dashboard. Instead of only getting data on the state and national level that's released monthly, the tool releases economic data daily that specifically targets Silicon Valley. “It looks at such things as a number of businesses open, the foot traffic those businesses are seeing, and to a certain extent, what employment looks like, in the local area,” Rietz said.

When the pandemic first hit, he says that the unemployment rate in Silicon Valley was at 12%. Now the unemployment rate is just above 3%. “The general trend has strongly been a growth in the job market in Silicon Valley, low unemployment, we're seeing business pick up,” Rietz said, “Everything suggests that we have a fairly robust labor market in California and Silicon Valley, especially.” The federal data released Tuesday by the U.S. Department of Labor is based on information gathered in November, before the omicron surge. Though he says it's hard to speculate what the upcoming data will show, Rietz thinks the impacts of the surge won't be seen until much later. “My gut would be we won't see a lot of differences in the December data,” He said, “But January might be more telling.”

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Bay Area small businesses struggle with high price of upholding high quality as inflation rises

Inflation in the United States rose 7% this past year - the highest since 1982. In the Bay Area, the impact is felt more immediate. The consumer price index jumped at an annual rate of 4.2% in December, compared to the same month last year, according to the U.S. Bureau for Labor Statistics. Small businesses say they are constantly trying to find the right balance. Russell Lund helps run his wife Tiffany's bakery in Martinez. He says the price of baked ingredients increased, and they have to adjust. “We are committed to making quality cakes,” Lund said. “She doesn't want to get cheap products. She wants to get quality products, but that does influence the price. It also influences our labor costs as well,” he explained.

Lund says they normally receive strong reviews about their cakes. However, recently they said they got their lowest online review -- because of the cost. He says they always have to walk a fine line to help grow their business and make their prices good for customers. A big hurdle is competing with bigger businesses. “The bigger businesses, they get a lot more discounts because they order a lot more stuff,” he said. “We can't order that much stuff, so we are paying a little bit more for the quality products.” It's a similar issue for Quin McCormick, the owner of Leather and Moss Mercantile. She says she is always trying to determine the prices for her products. “There is definitely a lot of math, and a lot of planning and strategizing and comparing to previous months,” she said. “You definitely have to be aware of what your purchase price is and what your mark up is, and what people are comfortable buying at, especially in your area.”

Friday, January 14, 2022

Downtown SF faces 20% drop in foot traffic since omicron, as major companies delay return to office

It's been eerily silent in San Francisco's financial district over the past month, ever since the highly-contagious omicron variant hit the Bay Area. "Omicron certainly made us take a step back here," said Rodney Fong, the President of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. Fong says there's been a 20 percent drop in foot traffic downtown since the first case of omicron was detected in the city in early December. "We've seen that dip in the downtown corridor, and that's largely from offices and tourism taking a temporary time out," he said. The temporary time out, is now reflected on the roads.

Data from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission shows there's been roughly a 12 to 13 percent drop in Bay Bridge traffic moving into the city over the past month. "We're seeing a drop, but January typically is a slower month in general," said John Goodwin, an MTC spokesperson. "It's still clearly a dip...likely due to omicron." Walking through San Francisco's South of Market and Financial District feels like a ghost town, as 90-percent of the city's workforce is working from home and people are leaving the city. Goodwin says the current traffic volume on the Bay Bridge is comparable to this time last year during the peak of our delta surge. Michelle Londono, who works at an IT consulting company in San Francisco, expects that to be the norm. "In January, we actually asked everybody to work remote from home," said Londono. "I think most companies will be considering that in some form moving forward."

According to data compiled from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 15 percent of companies will stay remote permanently, another 15 percent won't return, and more than 50 percent are adopting a hybrid model. "I know many of those companies have made those plans to come back to the office and are now pulling back," said Fong. "We're trying to stay hopeful." Major tech companies like Facebook have pushed back their return to the office until late March. Airbnb announced their return is delayed even further until September. Meanwhile, stock trading app Robinhood is giving most employees the option to go fully remote permanently. PayPal was originally scheduled to return to the office in January but informed employees this week remote work status will be an option until further notice.

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

Meat prices are still rising but you could be paying less for that steak soon

The rising cost of groceries, and notably the price of meat has led to many Americans tightening their belts when shopping for food. Lindsey Fredericks has noticed the cost of meat go up on her trips to the supermarket and has been choosing what she buys more carefully. "Especially with the pandemic going on, I have not been getting as much money from my employment and I really have to

ration what I am buying so I am really turning towards things that are not so expensive.”

Kelly Gallagher, head butcher at Mill Valley Market has seen customers change their buying habits at the counter. “What some people have done, especially with prices on some items going up, they'll try to find a less expensive cut and try to work with that or they won't buy quite as much.” “When the skirt steaks went up so dramatically, the people used to come up and buy two (to) three pounds of skirts at a time, I would tell them that it was going to be over \$100 and they would go 'oh my gosh' and only get half the amount or change to maybe a flank steak or another cut.”

The price of beef and veal in November 2021 was 20.9% higher than in the same month a year ago. Pork was up 16.8% and poultry 8.4% higher in the same period last year. However, there is good news ahead with the latest labor data forecast on consumer prices for food showing price rises slowing down. Even though the price for beef and veal for December 2021 was still 18.6% higher than it was in December 2020, they are forecast to only rise 3% to 4% in 2022. “We think food inflation will peak somewhere in the spring or summer as you begin to see some of the issues food companies faced in the early part of 2021 lapse with a lower run rate in the back half of the year,” says Peter Galbo, a food and beverage analyst with Bank of America. Inflation for all food, a metric that looks at eating out as well as the cost of making food at home, grew 6.3% in December 2021 compared to December 2020.

Steven Maxey, Vice Chairman Elect of California Beef Council says the biggest challenge the beef industry experienced that has contributed to the rising price of beef the last few years has been a severe labor shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that especially affected packing houses from producing at capacity. Pent-up demand for dining out coupled with more people buying meat for family meals has resulted in pushing prices further up. “Through this whole time, we've experienced pretty steady demand, even as high as prices have been, consumer demand has been strong. And so I think the combination of the supply due to some of the labor restraints, and strong demand has kind of put us in the position that we're in,” Maxey said.

An industry leader for chicken and poultry in California saw similar problems. “There are a lot of issues involved in the raising of prices for chicken and for other meats,” Bill Mattos, President of the California Poultry Federation says. “It was kind of a perfect storm this past year with the Covid crisis and then we had the gas price issue that skyrocketed and all of our products need to be shipped all over to grocery stores and everywhere. That was over a 50% rise.” “60% of the cost of producing a chicken is in feed, our feed comes out of the Midwest by rail and feed prices have gone up because there has been somewhat of a shortage and also China's buying a lot of the same corn that we need to feed chickens,” Mattos says. The U.S. Labor Department's consumer price index

which tracks inflation saw prices for all items climbed 7% in December from the same month in 2020, the fastest pace in nearly four decades

Friday, February 11, 2022

Bay Area transit officials exploring plan to charge all drivers to use certain highways

Bay Area transit officials are exploring a plan to charge drivers to use certain Bay Area freeways in an effort to reduce congestion and drive down greenhouse emissions. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission discussed the plan during a meeting on Thursday. "It's how can we move more people in fewer cars," explained MTC spokesperson John Goodwin. Despite more people adopting telecommuting during the pandemic, the agency projects that the population and congestion in the Bay Area will continue to increase in the coming years. "This is a way for instance, to keep the region moving with 2 million additional people, 1 million additional jobs that are expected to be here by 2050," said Goodwin. "And at the same time to meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction requirements in state law."

The agency said the planning study would take at least two years and that any tolls would not be implemented for at least a decade. But the plan is still drawing a strong response from drivers. "I think that's a bad idea, I don't think we should charge because everyone uses their cars," said Bay Area driver Kelly Tang. Members of the MTC also expressed concern about the equity of the plan.

"I have a lot of senior friends that cannot afford paying pricing," said Pat Eklund, MTC member and Novato City Council Member.

MTC spokesperson John Goodwin says looking into equity issues is exactly what the two year study is about. "If you maybe answer that question with exemptions from tolls or discounts on tolls... then does the does the model work at all?" said Goodwin.

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

3 Bay Area cities make top 10 list for most expensive 1 & 2 bedroom rentals

Three Bay Area cities make the top 10 list for most expensive 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, according to data analyzed by ABC7 News. That's in spite of rents not having fully rebounded from the pandemic. Melissa Kargiannakis is a Bay Area tech professional, but despite her success says she can't afford to live alone in San Francisco. "The elusive dream. A one-bedroom in San Francisco," said Kargiannakis. The ABC7 News Data Team analyzed data from the website Zumper, capturing median prices for 1 and 2 bedroom apartment listings.

If you're on the ABC7 News app, click here to watch live On the list of most expensive one bedroom rentals, San Francisco is second at \$2,850 a month -- only New York surpassed that cost. San Jose is fourth at \$2,390 a month and Oakland is eighth at \$2,100 a month. "I wish. That'd be great," said Kargiannakis. She says her search has yielded even higher rents, "It's shocking how high rates are right now." Brad Hirn is the Lead Organizer at the Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco. He says corporate landlords drive the market up. "Whether it's rent increases or fees or loopholes in existing rent regulations, then it pushes the overall rents up," said Hirn. "We just don't have enough affordable housing and we need more," said Shanti Singh, Tenants Together Communications & Legislative Director.

Tenants Together is a coalition of 50 renters rights organizations across California. Singh says we should think of renter protections as homelessness prevention. "Once somebody becomes homeless it is very hard to get them back into a home again," said Singh. Rents in the Bay Area are likely to continue climbing, according to Zumper's Senior Market Analyst Jeff Andrews. "Rent is still down in San Francisco by 16% and it's still the second most expensive market in the country," said Andrews. When looking at two bedrooms, the rent costs in San Francisco surpass New York with a median rent of \$3,930 a month. San Jose is listed as \$2,870 a month and Oakland is listed as \$2,770 a month. Andrews says most cities' rents rebounded in January of 2021. "The West coast was a little sluggish to creep back up," said Andrews. Especially the Bay Area, which he says will change as tech companies go back to in-office work. "So no yeah, it's not looking good," said Kargiannakis. And not looking like Kargiannakis will be able to move out on her own, for now.

Thursday, February 17, 2022

Most remote workers don't want to go back to the office

Employers, take note: If your staff has been working from home most or all of the time during the past two years, chances are a majority may want to continue doing so after the threat of COVID-19 fades. Among Americans with jobs that can be done remotely, 59% say they still are working from home much or all of the time, according to a new survey released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center. That's less than the 71% who reported working remotely in October 2020, but is well above the 23% who did frequently before the pandemic. And among those who have a workplace outside of their homes, the majority (61%) said they are choosing to work from home, while the remainder said they're remote because their workplace is closed or unavailable to them. Pew researchers said they found that 60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home say they'd like to work from home all or most of the time when the pandemic is over if given the choice. This is up from 54% in 2020.

Why people currently are choosing to work at home rather than in the office is a

key question, and there can be more than one reason. Forty-two percent cited fear of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace -- that's down from 57% in 2020. But the biggest reason cited by respondents (76%) is that working from home is their preference. For some, geography plays a role: 17% (up from 9% in 2020) cite the fact that they have relocated as a main reason for not going to the office. And for working parents with kids under 18, Pew found a third (32%) cited lack of child care, while 15% said there are restrictions on their access to their workplace.

Among people who rarely if ever worked from home before the pandemic and are choosing to do so now, 64% said working from home has improved their work-life balance. In terms of productivity, 44% say remote work has made it easier for them to get work done and meet deadlines. One common downside, however, is feeling less connected to colleagues, which 60% cited. The survey, conducted from January 24 to January 30, captures the views from a random, nationally representative sampling of 5,889 US adults who are working part-time or full-time and who have only one primary job.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Large conventions 'on the books' in SJ, boost to economy and real recovery anticipated

Downtown San Jose's iconic Fairmont Hotel is being renovated and rebranded as Signia by Hilton. The San Jose location will be the world's second Signia hotel, but the first on the West Coast. General Manager Jimmy Sarfraz said workers will start taking reservations on April 25. Of course, in order to fill rooms, people must find a reason to travel. "San Jose has never been a top tourist destination, but we're a hardworking business convention town," Scott Knies, CEO of the San Jose Downtown Association (SJDA) told ABC7 News. Pre-pandemic, the San Jose McEnery Convention Center provided space for annual tech conferences, tradeshow and more. Knies said the return of large events means businesses will get a real chance at recovery. "Right now, a number of businesses are closed down like on Mondays and Tuesdays, because it just isn't strong enough yet," he added.

Without naming companies, Team San Jose- which manages the Convention Center and a number of other arts and entertainment venues across the city- said large conventions are "on the books." A search of a public events calendar and event websites show SiliCon, FanimeCon, the Crunchyroll Expo fan festival and more are already scheduled for later this year. The hope is that these events will bring back caterers, clients, community members and boost the local economy. "It's not just the hotels that benefit, it's not just the conventions that benefit," Sarfraz said. "It's the restaurants, it's the barber, it's the small shops." He added, "The rising tide lifts all boats, they say. And that's generally true."

Sarfraz with Signia by Hilton also serves as Team San Jose board chair. He explained, even with today's relaxed pandemic rules, people ultimately have to be ready. "There's a distinction between going out for dinner and meeting together with 10,000 people," he said. "And so, I think it'll have various phases of coming back." Team San Jose said smaller events have already returned, with hope business and convention travel are only ramping up. Knies with the SJDA said, "When 2020 started, the beginning of the year we said, 'Yeah! This is the beginning of the Roaring 20s.' Looks like we're delaying the Roaring 20s into a little later into 2022." "The effect of it isn't immediately visible. It just takes time," Sarfraz told ABC7 News. "Because the conventions- some of them- remember, they used to be booked like multiple years out." "So, we need to start that process now," he said.

Thursday, March 24, 2022

As workers return to Silicon Valley tech campuses, so does demand for corporate catering

With office workers coming back to big tech campuses in Silicon Valley, the demand for corporate catering has returned as well. Local business owners say the interest is just the boost they need after COVID-19 impacted the last two years and their livelihoods. "We're getting a head start, we serve at 11 a.m.," Art Campos said in a video he recorded just before Wednesday morning's catering event. Campos is the owner of The Art of BBQ. He said before COVID, he could book 12 events in a day and serve an upwards of 5,000 people. However, Wednesday's large corporate catering event for 560-plus people was a welcome site. "It's like, not practicing for a while- not doing the job- and then now having to jump in with both feet," Campos described. He said the job put 250-pounds of tri-tip, 12 trays of mac and cheese, seven 40-pound boxes of chicken, and 100 slabs of ribs on the menu for a major tech company and Devcon Construction.

Campos said the loosening of restrictions and the return to the office have re-energized business. "We're booking through October already," he said. "A lot of weddings. Corporate stuff is coming with short notice because April's coming." Campos described, "As soon as the mask (mandate) was lifted, my phone probably rang 15 times that day." Before the pandemic, he owned a brick-and-mortar location. He said the restaurant was closed for remodeling, and reopened two weeks before COVID-19 changed everything. Campos shut down his BBQ spot a year and a half ago. However, catering business is picking back up. He mentioned interest multiplies after corporate catering events. "The tech giants that I do office stuff for, I also do their baby showers and their weddings," Campos added. It's demand Sushi Confidential owner Randy Musterer considers a nod to normalcy. He said pre-pandemic catering orders, made to feed up to 300 people, are now down to trays for 10 to 30. However, he's already booking events through August. "It's overwhelming, but at the same time, I'd rather be

overwhelmed with a lot of business coming in," Musterer said. "Especially catering."

He said many smaller companies tend to rely on the larger companies to make decisions, then follow suit. "When is Apple, when is Meta going to bring back employees," he gave as an example. "And a lot of the smaller companies tend to follow." Musterer added, "So having some of these big companies now saying, 'We're actively in the office. We want corporate catering. We're having you come in to get our employees back and to be excited to have sushi for lunch.'" He said because of the interest, he's ready to hire a catering manager. In the last few weeks, Musterer has hosted the San Francisco 49ers cheerleaders. He's even hosted sushi-making classes for a number of tech workers. "When you get the email, you're not sure- is this for virtual or in-house sushi team building? And they say, 'No, we want to come in.'" Musterer also mentioned many businesses that focused only on corporate catering didn't survive the pandemic. However, he's in a unique position where catering is another "economic arm," considering the brick-and-mortar business. Now, there is a pool of potentially new customers looking to him for corporate catering options. However, both Musterer and Campos describe it's corporate catering events with a side of caution. "We need to be optimistic, we don't know what's going to happen in six months or a year," Musterer told ABC7 News. "You're starting to hear stories about potential shutdowns or a new virus coming around." Campos shared, "In the pandemic, I sat at that computer, waiting for an email to come through. And now I have to filter through which ones I'm going to go through first." "I don't have high expectations, but I'm hopeful," he added.

Race, Culture & Social Justice

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

EXCLUSIVE: PG&E employee files discrimination lawsuit; alleges hostile work environment, retaliation

A PG&E employee is suing the utility company for what he said amounts to discrimination. The employee said he faced discrimination and was retaliated against including being denied promotions. "I've been there too long and I'm still standing. I will continue to stand and I'll continue speaking up," said San Francisco resident Emanuel Lankford. Lankford has been employed with PG&E for more than 15 years and currently works as a substation supervisor. In a lawsuit filed in district court in December 2021, Lankford said he has faced discrimination and was subjected to a hostile work environment at PG&E, partly because he is Black.

"It's been one thing after another: being overlooked for promotions, being retaliated against for speaking up and even speaking up about being retaliated against only to have those claims go unsubstantiated," said Lankford in an exclusive interview with ABC7 News. CA's first-in-the-nation Reparations Task Force met for the fourth time to discuss several important topics including the racial wealth gap. In the lawsuit, asking for \$15 million in compensation and punitive damages, Lankford alleges he was denied bonuses and overlooked for promotions - all things he said were awarded to white counterparts instead.

"I interviewed for the manager position and did not receive the position, it was not awarded to me. It instead went to a white female who has no substation experience," he said.

PG&E said in a statement to ABC7 News on Dec. 28: "PG&E holds a strong commitment to providing a discrimination-free workplace and takes all claims of discrimination seriously. The company has not been served, but is aware of the lawsuit, and we do not comment on pending litigation." The Austin family sunk \$400,000 into renovating their home, but were stunned when they barely gained any value during the appraisal process. When they had a white woman pose as the homeowner, that all changed. Lankford's lawsuit is the second discrimination suit filed against the utility in as many months.

A former Black PG&E employee in Sacramento filed a lawsuit alleging she was fired after making a discrimination claim against the utility. San Francisco-based Attorney Tony Bothwell represents both plaintiffs. "Both cases involve retaliation. Both cases involve people who've made complaints about discrimination. Both cases involve plaintiffs who happen to be African American...both cases involve misconduct on the part of PG&E the management," said Bothwell. Lankford has

filed complaints with the EEOC and the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing and believes this lawsuit was his final option. “I, ultimately, just want some change, some meaningful, sustainable change,” Lankford said.

Monday, January 17, 2022

Bay Area Native Americans oppose replica mission bell installation, say it represents dark history

The indigenous community in the Bay Area is fighting the installation of a replica mission bell approved more than a year ago. It's set to be installed in the City of Gilroy. Despite the opposition, the city council has not decided to bring it back for further discussion. Mission bells have been a site seen on Highway 101 or El Camino Real for more than a hundred years now. Long before they lined the highway, Valentin Lopez, chair of the Amah Mutsun tribal band, says bells like them were used by missions to order oppressed Native American people around. “If you didn't follow that bell, they would punish you and oftentimes that punishing was with a whip,” Lopez said of the history, “That's what the bells represent, nothing but brutal control and domination of indigenous people.”

The dark history of the bells have been brought to the headlines in recent years. In 2019, a bell was removed from the grounds at UC Santa Cruz. This month, the City of Gilroy plans to install a new replica bell on Gilroy's busy Monterey Street. So far a pole is up, the bell itself still set to be installed. The history of indigenous peoples in the Bay Area is complicated and not always pretty. But the dark past is serving as inspiration for a brighter future for that community. It was introduced and approved by the City Council in September 2020 as gift to the city to celebrate its 150th anniversary. Last week though, dozens spoke in person at the council meeting and emailed, asking that the bell not be put up. “This is a great example of a gift that doesn't mean the same to everybody” said Gilroy City Councilmember Zach Hilton. Hilton, who was not on the council when the bell was approved, was one of three councilmembers who voted in favor of a motion to put the bell back on the agenda last week. If they weren't outvoted by the mayor and other councilmembers, the issue could have been revisited.

“This has nothing to do with cancel culture, I believe that some of my council colleagues are falling under that trap,” Hilton said, “This is a chance to do something right, before we do something wrong.” Lopez responded to the vote: “They're trying to erase indigenous history, because they don't want to listen to it, and they don't want to talk.” Hilton says he will continue working to get the item back on the agenda for discussion. As for the Amah Mutsun Tribal band, Lopez says their fight against this mission bell and all of the others in the state, won't end until all of the bells are gone. “We think in terms of generations,” he said.

Monday, January 17, 2022

Car caravans held in East Bay, virtual events to honor Martin Luther King Jr's legacy

Monday is Martin Luther King Junior Day, and the Bay Area is finding ways to honor Doctor King's legacy, despite the latest COVID surge. Oakland's Anti-Police Terror Project hosted a car caravan at 12:30 p.m. The theme was "One Struggle, One Fight, One People." "We're riding for all the lives lost, whether it was someone in the community or someone who works for a law enforcement agency that pulled the trigger," said Cat Brooks, Executive Director Anti Police-Terror Project. "It's a call to do what King said and declare a war on poverty, not the people," Brooks continued.

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we took a dive into our archives to explore some of the visits the civil rights activist paid to the Bay Area. She says with Oakland in the middle of a violent crime pandemic along with the coronavirus pandemic and an economic pandemic, it was especially important to come together in the safest way possible. Volunteers planned to hand out food, gift cards and much needed PPE supplies. Another car caravan also took place along San Pablo Ave in El Cerrito. "Martin Luther King Junior, to me, was a leader that was taken too soon, but also a leader that showed us how to fight in different ways," Ma'lia Gibson, who was volunteering at the El Cerrito celebration, told ABC7 News, "How to fight for what we want, how to stand up for what we want."

Gibson said her grandparents were some of the original organizers of the MLK Jr. Day event, which began 33 years ago as a peaceful protest when the city of El Cerrito declined to recognize the federal holiday. Organizers say it is now the longest, continuously running Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in Northern California.

This year, the event adapted into a car caravan because of the pandemic. "Our theme this year is that we're keeping the dream alive, embracing our new normals," organizer Patricia Durham explained. "We're embracing our new normal through family, through faith and through community. We're not stopping, so get ready." The group drove in a caravan down San Pablo Avenue, ending at the San Pablo Plaza Bart station, where there was a program with speeches and live music. "This is our 33rd year! This is a car parade, we're not getting out of our cars, but we're still celebrating and I love it," Patricia Durham said. Dozens of community members joined the festivities, including the El Cerrito police chief, members of the local NAACP and board members with the Japanese American Citizens League, which has been participating in event since it began in 1989.

"We felt that Black Lives Matter. We felt that we had to support our fellow Americans," said 86-year-old Flora Ninomiya, who was forced to live in a

Japanese internment camp as a child during World War II. “And so we are here to support all groups that are marginalized.” She said she reveres Martin Luther King Jr. because “he fought for freedom, he fought for equality.” “It’s important to keep Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s dream alive, to talk about faith and family and community, and how we can bring each other together especially during hard times,” said El Cerrito Police Chief Paul Keith. “The story can never die,” said Durham. In the Bay Area, the holiday will wrap up with a series of virtual celebrations that have been happening over the long holiday weekend. San Francisco’s celebrations are going virtual, too, with all indoor events for Monday moving online. The city’s annual MLK march and parade has been canceled.

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

'Deep structural issues': New report calls for appraisal industry reform, blasts lack of diversity

A new report released Wednesday by the National Fair Housing Alliance is calling for sweeping reforms in the appraisal industry and highlights a lack of diversity in the field, among other challenges. When you are looking to purchase a home or refinance your home mortgage the lending institution you’re working with hires an appraiser to assure the home value is not less than the loan amount. Now, the profession of roughly 105,000 people is under scrutiny in this new report. “We didn’t expect to uncover some of the issues that we uncovered,” said Lisa Rice, CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance, a national civil rights organization focused on combating discrimination and securing equal access to housing. The Appraisal Standards and Appraiser Criteria report released Wednesday is believed to be the most comprehensive review of bias in the appraisal industry to date, spanning 80 pages.

“There have been lots of anecdotes of appraisal bias,” said Rice. “What our study shows is that these issues are not one-offs, that there are some really deep structural issues and barriers that no one family could overcome.” The Barnes family knew something was off after an appraisal on their West Oakland home came in at \$750,000 flat. The family had a hunch because they’ve seen ABC7’s on-going coverage of racially biased appraisals across the Bay Area. For the last year, ABC7 News Race and Culture reporter Julian Glover has extensively covered allegations of appraisal discrimination involving Black and Latino Bay Area families. The families believe their homes were undervalued by as much as \$500,000 because of the color of their skin. The report names two of those cases and highlights issues around oversight and governance of the appraisal industry, gaps in fair housing training, barriers to entry in the appraisal field, and a shocking lack of diversity in the field. An ABC Data Team analysis of U.S. Census data confirmed those racial inequities in the appraisal industry showing that nationally an estimated 86% of appraisers are white, while only 61% of the U.S. population is white. The numbers also show Hispanic/Latino, Black, and Asian appraisers are under-represented nationwide.

Those same racial inequities are present in the Bay Area. In San Francisco and the East Bay, white people make up 40% of the population, but an estimated 72% of appraisers. The under representation gap is largest for the Hispanic/Latino community with 22% of the population, but only an estimated 7% of appraisers. Asian American people are 26% of the population, but only estimated to account for 14% of appraisers. For Black people it's 7% of the population but an estimated 4% of appraisers. In the South Bay the percentage of Asian appraisers reflects the Asian population, but white appraisers are still over-represented. There's a double digit gap for Hispanic/Latino appraisers and it's estimated only 1% of South Bay appraisers are Black.

After seeing the story of a Marin City couple lowballed in what they believe was a racially biased appraisal. The Curtis family knew something wasn't right when they also received a low appraisal because both the husband and wife work in real estate. "That's borne out in the statistics that you see, not just from a race and ethnicity standpoint, but also from a gender standpoint. The majority of appraisers are male and white," said Jim Park, executive director of the Appraisal Subcommittee. The ASC is the federal appraisal industry regulatory body that commissioned this independent report. "When I first started appraising lots of appraisers would ask who in your family is an appraiser. Very quickly I learned that this is a tradition that's often passed down typically from father to son," said Jillian White, head of collateral at Better Mortgage - a technology forward home mortgage company.

As a Black woman, White is a rarity in the appraisal industry. She shared her experience of having to change her name to "Jay" on her resume just to land a job interview to be an appraiser trainee-a requirement to be licensed in the field. "When I showed up for a job interview, things changed. All of his enthusiasm was gone and instead of conducting an interview, he just kept telling me 'You're overqualified,' and 'I don't know why you want to become an appraiser.' The interview was very short because he never even invited me to sit," she said. NFHA's report out today suggests re-examining barriers to becoming an appraiser that keep women and people of color from entering the industry like the college degree requirement, education hours and experience hours to obtain a license that take anywhere from dozens - to hundreds of hours working under a supervisory appraiser. "That presents a very unique barrier for people of color, first of all, who don't already know an appraiser who would take them under their wings," said Rice.

The Appraisal Institute, the largest association of real estate appraisers in the country, provided the following statement: "The report acknowledges that enhanced standards and greater diversity within the profession are critical elements in addressing equity and rooting out bias in appraisal - we agree. That's why since 2018, the Appraisal Institute has worked to recruit and expand opportunities for appraisers of color and women through the Appraiser Diversity

Initiative, raised ethical standards for our membership, convened researchers and experts, worked closely with congressional leaders, and advanced legislation to require education on antidiscrimination and fair housing. There is more to do, and these efforts remain core to our work as an organization.”

-Jody Bishop, MAI, SRA, AI-GRS, Appraisal Institute President According to the Appraisal Institute, it is working on an initiative to diversify the industry by teaming up with Government-Sponsored Enterprises that handle mortgages like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and the National Urban League. Since 2018 the AI says it has awarded 113 scholarships. Fifteen recipients have completed the program and another 84 recipients are still training.

While this represents progress, it is only a dent in the industry of 105,000 U.S. appraisers that has been under scrutiny as families of color file federal lawsuits and HUD complaints in response to alleged lowball appraisals. However, major changes to how the industry operates could come in a matter of weeks. The Property Appraisal and Valuation Equity (PAVE) interagency task force created by President Biden and led by Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge and Domestic Policy Advisor Susan Rice is expected to release a major report soon identifying root causes and solutions to the misevaluation and undervaluation of properties owned by families of color.

A HUD spokesperson sent ABC7 News the following statement: “Secretary Fudge and Ambassador Rice and recognize that each of us has a role to play to ensure all Americans have opportunities to build generational wealth through how their homes are valued. This is especially important in communities of color, and why the President launched a first-of-its-kind Task Force aimed squarely at delivering a set of concrete actions that the Federal government will take to redress appraisal bias. HUD and its partners are proud to continue to engage appraisers, lenders, philanthropy, civil rights groups, and victims of appraisal bias through the Task Force. We applaud partners like NFHA for taking up the mantle to reveal and address bias and inequities, and look forward to reviewing the contents of NFHA's study as HUD finalizes its report to the President.”

“We have to have a full throttle response from Congress, from regulators, from the industry, from civil rights groups, in order to address these issues,” said Rice. Other charges from the report include calling on the Appraisal Standards Board to revise the code of ethics for appraisers known as the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice to clearly state that discrimination in appraisals is prohibited.

NHFA is also calling for reform to the Reconsideration of Value Process where homeowners and lenders flag a potentially erroneous appraisal value and have it reconsidered. The civil rights group suggests the Appraisal Foundation, government entities, GSEs, and lenders should develop standards and guidance for appraisers to make the process more fair, transparent, and increase accountability. If you believe you have been the victim of housing discrimination, file a complaint by visiting the National Fair Housing Alliance website.

Friday, February 4, 2022

Alameda gym faces backlash over seemingly racist post about Asian massage parlors

Community members in Alameda are speaking out after they say a local gym owner is attacking Asian Americans with hurtful and dangerous language some call racist. Erica Peck lives in Alameda and was one of more than a hundred commentators on a Facebook group page, discussing the way the owner of Island Personal Training described his company's massage services. "Who is he marketing this toward? Just...UGH it makes me so mad!" Peck is referring to the gym's website which advertises their massage therapists "speak English...kind of rare for the field round these parts" and continues to say, they're not like "shady Asian massage parlors."

Another Facebook user who requested we only use her first name of "Jojo," says she was horrified when she saw the language. "I was like, 'oh my god, this guy. I don't know what decade he's living in or country he's living in, and this is not okay.'" Island Personal Training has locations in Redding and Alameda. ABC7 news anchor Dion Lim went to the Alameda location to speak to the owner, Jason Wilson. He appeared amenable to a conversation and said he would step outside in-between personal training appointments. Lim stepped outside and Wilson poked his head outside to say "maybe later," and shut and locked the door. Cynthia Choi is one of the founders of STOPAAPIHate and an executive director with Chinese for Affirmative Action. She says stereotypes that Asians are subpar stokes fears and directly cause the attacks we see so often today.

"It's very triggering given what happened with the Atlanta area shooting. We're coming up on that anniversary where Asian women and Asian businesses were targeted," said Choi. "This kind of racist rhetoric and commentary adds to the persistent stereotypes that are not only offensive but really put our communities in danger." After ABC7's visit to their Alameda location, the business' website appeared to be down. However, Island Personal Training's Redding location Facebook still shows posts from last May saying other massage parlors are "dirty" and "smell like Chinese food." Jojo says she hopes speaking out will create an educational experience for all. "I really hope he can learn, open up and grow and become a part of the wonderful community that's here in Alameda. I'm not trying to bash anyone's business, but I want to make sure the businesses in Alameda are inclusive and not causing struggles," said Jojo. Lim visited Island Personal Training again on Friday afternoon and made several calls. She did not hear back.

Friday, February 4, 2022

From creator of refrigerator to MLK, Bay Area Black history museum celebrates achievements

As we celebrate Black History Month, volunteers are busy setting up a unique pop-up museum on the Peninsula with an unusual history. What started as a school project has grown into a collection so large that all of it can't be displayed at one time. A Belmont grandmother has been at this for 25 years. You can say this is Carolyn Hoskins' passion. 25 years ago, her grandson Domini asked her who else is worth studying besides Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during Black History Month. "I never thought about that myself and so from that question, the answer is everything that you see here today," Mrs. Hoskins said. It started as a school project to assemble an exhibit. The collection numbers are in the thousands now, which she has on display in donated space in downtown Redwood City this month. The 20,000 square foot former retail store opens Saturday, free to the public and to school groups. Volunteers are helping to set up the displays.

Most of us are familiar with the formidable contributions of Black athletes and Black entertainers, but what many visitors to the collection are amazed by are the contributions of Black inventors. It's that section that draws the most attention as visitors learn potato chips, the refrigerator, and a variety of devices were all invented by Black people. "It's just amazing that these accomplishments were made by a race of people that it was illegal for them to be able to learn to read and write," she said. Other sections pay tribute to politicians, authors, and women leaders. There are positive images and a few negative ones that reflect stereotypes of the past. One area highlights Mrs. Hoskins' late husband, 49er Bob Hoskins.

Cari Pang Chen is a friend and volunteer. "The more time we take to really connect with each other on a personal basis, but also to understand everything that got us to where we are and where we came from, I think that will help us understand each other and support each other better," she said. The Domini Hoskins Black History Museum and Learning Center opens Saturday, Feb. 5, at 890 Jefferson Avenue in Redwood City. It will be open daily, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. but closed Mondays. A donation of \$5 per person is requested.

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

The story behind the legendary Black Panther Party's revolutionary newspaper art

Emory Douglas' bright, smile draws you in, and so does his art. Douglas is the former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party. "As a youngster, at my age, how could I build a Ministry of Culture?" said the 78-year-old. Led by Douglas, the group of artists, Gayle "Assali" Dickson, Malik Edwards, Tarika

Lewis, and a few others, created and printed the Panther's newspaper and the caption-filled art that went inside, and on the front and back pages. Together, they solidified a cultural movement. "The fact that we were so young," said Dickson, a retired teacher, at her home in Richmond, California who worked for the Panthers in her late teens and early 20s. "And so dedicated." Malik Edwards, now a teacher in Oakland, had just returned from Vietnam where he fought in the war as a Marine. "The art that I was doing in the Marine Corps was to help kill people. And I felt like the art that I was doing in the Black Panther Party was trying to save people, was trying to educate people, and help them understand the conditions that were around them, and understand that they could overcome that."

Billy X. Jennings, the group's unofficial archivist has kept a room full of Black Panther memorabilia, and a closet full of hundreds of carefully stored Black Panther Party newspapers on the second floor of his home in Sacramento. "When the party first started, the newspaper was everything. And, the paper would always sell better with Emory's art on the back. A person could really understand without really reading the article," he explained. The party and the art were based on a ten-point program written by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale: a list of basic human rights, needs, and goals including, proper housing, education, stopping the murder of Blacks, trial by a jury of peers, and disavowing the incarceration of Black people.

Malik Edwards explains why the art and accompanying captions were so pivotal. "Because remember, back in the 60s, in the early 70s, literacy was a problem in a lot of communities," said Edwards. "While it still is today, we had to make sure we made our point with every drawing we did." The Panthers often pushed back on extreme repression and abuse by police of Blacks and other people of color. It's a common theme in the art they produced. Douglas tells the story of an image Huey Newton brought him one day after being out on patrol observing police harassment of young people in the community. "He brought me an image of a pig on four hooves and said we want to put this image in the paper each week. And we want to put the badge number of the police who are intimidating or violating people's rights in the community."

The image may still seem provocative today. Douglas laughs. "It may have been provocative. But, it wasn't a distorted interpretation. It was a provocative interpretation." It was a reaction to the brutality and racism of the era, experienced by a younger Black generation. "You have to understand this youth movement, never had this country had a movement such as Black Panther Party," said Douglas. Edwards believes it should stay that way, that an exact copy should not exist today. "(Civil rights groups) are not gonna do what we did, nor should they. They should come up with what they think is a better idea."

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

San Francisco lawmaker proposes bill to mandate consistent hate crime policies throughout state

San Francisco Assembly member Phil Ting held a press conference Friday morning in San Francisco's Chinatown to announce a new bill he is proposing to address the rise in hate crimes. Ting says he was surprised to find out that California does not require law enforcement agencies to have a uniform hate crimes policy. He wants to see consistent enforcement of hate crime laws and reporting of hate crimes when officers are filing their report. "A 2018 audit found that law enforcement agencies oftentimes inadequately identified or reported or responded to hate crimes and that the finding concluded that the state's hate crimes are underreported by 14%. It's not the fault of law enforcement agencies because there really was not proper training or proper protocol and that is what our bill is addressing. Our bill is working with the state agency in charge of training law enforcement and making sure they know how to respond and to report this very important data. And we believe that by working together with our community groups that this will be one of many things we can do to stop AAPI hate," Ting said.

He says if officers properly classify hate crimes, then hate crime laws that are on the books can be applied.

"Let's say in a case where a senior got violently accosted. Obviously there is the violence but we have laws on the books that do enhancements for hate crimes. So if you don't identify the case as a hate crime, it just gets treated as a regular incident. If you treat it as a hate crime, we identify it as a problem. So you collect that data. We have certain crimes that are treated differently if they are due to hate and that's why it is so important to have that enhancement," Ting explained. He says he was motivated by the rise in hate crimes against Asians during the pandemic, but that this would apply to hate crimes against all races, religions, gender, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics. Hearings on the bill will likely start in March.

Friday, February 18, 2022

Day of Remembrance: It's been 80 years since Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps

It's been 80 years since President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that incarcerated 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II.

Decades later, the Japanese American community is vowing to never forget the atrocity and who helped them win reparations. Feb. 19, 1942, is a day that will forever live on in infamy - a notch in America's ugly past of hatred, bigotry, and xenophobia. "It is a story that, unfortunately, not everybody still knows about," said David Inoue, Japanese American Citizens League executive director. On that day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. It called

for the incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry. The vast majority were American citizens.

The order was in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the catalyst for the United States entering World War II. In the months that followed, racist hysteria reached a fever pitch stemming from fear of another possible Japanese surprise attack. "It's a really dark chapter in American history of systemic racism that incarcerated my father, my mother, and all of my aunts and uncles," said Jon Osaki, a documentary filmmaker. His newest release, "Reparations," will be screened at the 2022 Films of Remembrance the weekend of February 26 and 27. The 11th annual Films of Remembrance will be held virtually.

For Osaki, Day of Remembrance is personal. He shared photos with ABC7 News of his father while incarcerated at the Tule Lake Relocation Center just outside the California-Oregon border. His father was sent with thousands of other Japanese Americans in 1942. In many cases, they were ripped from their homes with few belongings and forced to live in inhumane conditions. The Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno, on San Francisco's Peninsula, was used as a detention facility. American citizens of Japanese ancestry were forced to sleep in horse stables. 80 years later Japanese Americans are vowing to never forget. "It's also a means of healing and remembrance for members of the community who experienced the injustice of mass incarceration during World War II," said Inoue.

After years of lobbying under a veil of multi-racial solidarity, the U.S. Government apologized to Japanese Americans in 1988 with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act signed by President Reagan. And with that apology came reparations for \$20,000 to surviving Japanese Americans. "Our families did receive reparations for the World War II incarceration of our entire community," said Osaki. "Many of us feel a certain amount of responsibility to speak out for other injustices that have yet to be atoned for." Today, the San Francisco-based filmmaker uses his voice to call for multi-racial solidarity once again - this time for African Americans to receive reparations for the country's original sin of slavery and decades of Jim Crow. "Japanese American communities all across the country are having these events and many of them are talking about the topic of Black reparations. They're using this as an opportunity to create awareness," said Osaki.

San Francisco attorney Don Tamaki is familiar with this work. He serves on the first-in-the-nation California Reparations Task Force created by AB 3121 and signed into law by Governor Newsom. Tamaki is the only non-Black member of the nine-person task force directed to study historical harms and recommend potential reparations for African Americans in California. "We as Japanese Americans know something about prejudice," said Tamaki. "As we mark Feb. 19 to remember our community we're reminded that each time America has owned up to its wrongs, repaired them, and become more inclusive, it has become stronger as a nation." As the California Reparations Task Force prepares to

release the first of two reports on its findings of historical harms faced by the African American community, the movement gains support from a familiar ally. “I believe we can make the greatest progress in addressing systemic racism in this country together,” said Osaki. The Japanese American Citizens League is hosting events across the country in observance of Day of Remembrance.

Friday, February 18, 2022

San Francisco Chinatown business owners prepare for in-person Lunar New Year Parade

We are quickly approaching one of San Francisco's biggest celebrations -- the Lunar New Year Parade in Chinatown -- and all of the events that come with it. The last two celebrations were virtual due to the coronavirus pandemic, but it's back to normal come Saturday. Thursday night, Mayor London Breed held a special Lunar New Year Celebration at San Francisco City Hall. Lions could be seen dancing on the floor of the Rotunda and in the air at San Francisco City Hall in preparation for this weekend's Lunar New Year celebrations in Chinatown. “We are so excited because the last two years, because of COVID, all the events were virtual, so we're so excited,” said Claudine Cheng, who is president of the APA Heritage Foundation. Saturday's Lunar New Year celebrations, which include the traditional parade at 5:15 p.m., will be in-person.

Steven Lee owns Lion's Den, one of the only nightclubs to open in recent years in Chinatown. He's hoping for a big weekend as the Year of the Tiger is celebrated. “All across the board, we're probably 50% down compared to what we were pre-pandemic. We're not giving up, we lasted this long during the pandemic, there's a good number of stores that survived it,” said Lee. There are certainly safety concerns in light of some of the anti-Asian hate crimes seen in the city, but the San Francisco sheriff and mayor say this will be a safe event. “We're going to be out in full force. We'll have meter maids, we'll have police officers, we'll have ambassadors,” said San Francisco Mayor London Breed. While Breed spoke inside City Hall and above the traditional lions, the outside of City Hall was lit up in red and gold for the Lunar New Year. “The Lunar New Year parade in San Francisco is always one for the history books so come on out. The floats are being made, the people are getting ready, I got a new outfit, I'm super excited,” said Breed. “This is an opportunity because City Hall has been closed and the city has suffered so much through the pandemic for the past two years, so today is a celebration,” said Vanita Louie, who is San Francisco's Recreation and Park Commissioner. “Just go and enjoy. It's New Year time!” says Cheng.

Monday, February 21, 2022

SF's Sir Francis Drake Hotel changes controversial name to The Beacon Grand

The iconic Sir Francis Drake Hotel opened in 1928 and now 94 years later it's changing from the inside out. Starting with its controversial name. "His name doesn't have to be honored. Put him in a museum talk about him within the full context of what he did," said Noah Griffin, Civil activist and Tiburon Council Member. This hotel is not the first to get rid of Sir Francis Drake's name. In 2021, the town of Fairfax changed the name of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard after community tension. A year earlier, in 2020 a 30 foot-tall Sir Francis Drake statue in Marin County was removed after a community petition. Noah Griffin is a Bay Area civil activist who's been behind the name change of several places.

San Francisco Mayor Breed asked officials to work with the community so that art, including statues, reflect the values of the city after statues of Francis Scott Key, Junipero Serra and Ulysses Grant were torn down in Golden Gate Park. "They think of him as the father of enslavement in the British empire. It was in the 1560s with the help of Elizabeth I. That he and John Hawkins enslaved the first folks out of western Guinea and also Sierra Leone for quite a profit and began the British Empire slave trade," said Griffin. Now, the hotel will be named the Beacon Grand. "It's the 21st century, you got to change with the times," said Tom Sweeney, Former Chief Doorman at the Sir Frances Drake Hotel in San Francisco when referring to the remodel and changes happening at the hotel before its grand reopening.

Tom Sweeney is the legendary doorman of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel. He retired in 2020 and says his uniform will also go. "They are going to retire my uniform," said Sweeney. "I have them lined up at home like an old soldier." The name change is also part of the rebranding. "We're excited to share the extraordinary story of the Beacon Grand - the name change and the many new and refined experiences from street to star - as soon as the details are finalized. I promise it will be worth the wait," said Sebastien Pfeiffer, General Manager of the Beacon Grand. The hotel has been closed since March of 2020. The Northview Hotel Group that purchased the iconic hotel says they'll reopen this spring.

The superintendent of the Tamalpais Union High School District said a group of staff members came forward to the district in June with a desire to change the name of the high school. "We think that this is going to bring a much-needed acceleration of the economy to the area. It's really a sign of visitors and tourists coming back to San Francisco," said Marisa Rodriguez, Executive Director of the Union Square Alliance. The hotel was not asked to change its name, but Noah Griffin believes it will only benefit them. "I think it was very smart for them to change the name. They bring new attention to the hotel," said Griffin.

Monday, February 21, 2022

Jewish community calls for positivity, not silence after anti-Semitic flyers left in Palo Alto

Over the weekend in Palo Alto, police say dozens of flyers with anti-Jewish messaging were distributed throughout the community. The flyers blamed the COVID-19 pandemic on Jewish officials and highlighting the anti-President Joe Biden slogan "let's go Brandon." "Jews were blamed for all kinds of things by every movement that you can think of throughout the generations," Chabad Palo Alto Rabbi Yosef Levin said. "It's an irrational hatred that is part of the world that we live in." The Palo Alto Police Department tells us the flyers were found around town in plastic bags weighted down with rice. They add there is no indication the recipients of the flyers were targeted in any way and the bottom of the paper all said, "These flyers were distributed randomly without malicious intent."

This comes about a month after similar flyers were distributed in San Francisco. "I feel it very personally," Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen said. Rosen is a member of the Jewish community and believes hate drove the flyers. But no matter how hurtful the words were, police are investigating this as a hate incident and not a hate crime. "A crime is when those words cross over into some kind of physical assault or property damage," Rosen said. The American Jewish Committee says the events across the country are emotional, but silence won't solve anything because it's how some of the biggest events in the past became even worse.

"It's scary that this is one of the things that is one of the things that we're dealing with now in the social media age," AJC San Francisco Associate Director Eran Hazary said. "Our silence only allows for hate speech, hate incidents and any sort of hate to grow. So, we can't be quiet." So, the members of the Jewish community we spoke with encourage others to speak out. They hope this can be a learning lesson. "Maybe teach them a little bit about Judaism or Jewish history and try to educate them about this," Rosen said. "Honestly, if we find the person or people who did it, I'd invite them to my house for seder." "The way to respond to this is really for good people to add goodness and kindness," Rabbi Levin said. "Do an act of kindness. If every person in Palo Alto today would be nice to someone, show an act of kindness, do something good in the world. That will counterbalance the negative."

Wednesday, March 23, 2022 9:48PM

US plan aims to end racial, ethnic discrimination in home appraisals

Vice President Kamala Harris has announced a plan that's intended to end racial and ethnic discrimination in the appraisal of home values. The plan is part of a broader federal effort to address a wealth gap that systemic inequality has perpetuated. On the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre, President Biden

announced the creation of a federal interagency task force to address systemic devaluations of homes and predominately Black and brown neighborhoods. The PAVE (Property Appraisal and Valuation Equity) task force headed by HUD secretary Marcia Fudge and White House domestic policy advisor Ambassador Susan Rice set out on a six-month mission to determine root causes of appraisal discrimination and develop solutions. Vice President Kamala Harris announced the PAVE action plan at the White House Wednesday. She offered remarks on the plan as the White House hosted affected families to share their stories of appraisal discrimination. "We've heard the stories of people who have tried everything to avoid an unfair appraisal, stories like that of Tenisha and her family," Vice President Harris said in her opening remarks.

The Austin family from Marin City were among the families invited to the White House. Many will recall the Austin family's story of their home being undervalued by nearly \$500,000. The Black family's home value went up when they took down family photos and artwork, before having a white friend stand in for them in a subsequent appraisal. "I'm telling my family's story because I know appraisal bias is holding African Americans back from growing and supporting their families in a way that we want to and deserve to," said Tenisha Tate-Austin as she welcomed VP Harris to the stage. The plan also calls for the task force to issue guidance and implement new policies to improve the reconsideration of value processes if the initial valuation of a home by an appraiser is lower than expected. HUD will require FHA lenders to track usage and outcomes of ROVs. The task force will also work to change the standard appraisal form so there is less of a chance to include overt or indirect references to race, ethnicity or other protected classes and strengthen language on the form to ensure appraiser is certifying their opinion is not based on discrimination.

An analysis by mortgage buyer Freddie Mac shows appraisers are more likely to undervalue homes in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. This form of discrimination widens the racial wealth gap. The task force will direct supervisory and enforcement agencies to better coordinate to identify appraisal discrimination. As noted in reports by the National Fair Housing Alliance, the appraisal workforce is overwhelmingly white and male. The PAVE action plan called for the government to work to diversify the appraiser workforce which, according to the Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statics, is 97.7% white and 70% male. One solution is to work with HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, and Minority-Serving Institutions to develop the next generation of appraisers. In a one-on-one interview with Housing Secretary Marcia Fudge, she told ABC7 News Race and Social Justice Reporter Julian Glover that her home in a predominately Black neighborhood is valued less than an equivalent home two doors down in a predominately white neighborhood. "Your home is valued for \$25,000, less than two doors down from you correct? How does that happen to the HUD secretary?" asked Glover. "Because I live in a Black neighborhood. So my neighborhood is one that is automatically considered to be not as good as a neighborhood that starts two doors from me. There is a bias and inherent bias that the appraisals

have had for generations, this just didn't start," said Fudge. Secretary Fudge admits there is work still to be done.

As the Austins continue to fight with lawsuits against the appraiser and appraisal management company involved in their lowball appraisal, they're proud of the change created by their story - and the stories of so many others we've covered here on ABC7 News. "It's unfortunate that we're here, we are happy that we are here with this change moving forward," said Tate-Austin. "I'm super proud of you and all the work that you put into this story because without you it wouldn't have blown up the way that it did," said Paul Austin. The task force of 13 federal agencies and offices will continue working over the next year to turn some of the proposals included into today's report into action. Congresswoman Maxine Waters of California has already announced forthcoming legislation to address appraisal bias.