



The Sun-Gazette

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VISALIA

Friends and family hold vigil for three gunned down boys

According to Visalia police reports, Jose Hernandez-Pena, 19, Isaiah Rule, 18 and Blake Medeiros, 19, were shot and killed at Golden West High School. Officers responded to a shots fired call at approximately 11:15 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5, but the boys were already deceased when they arrived. 5

BUSINESS

The Darling Hotel opens next month

There hasn't been a lot of good news for the local hotel industry. Since the Governor issued his stay-at-home order two months ago, Tulare County tourism is projecting it has lost 2,500 jobs, \$270 million and \$8.7 million in local tax revenue. 3

EDUCATION

Great futures at students' fingertips

The Boys and Girls Clubs of the Sequoias, which oversees all 14 club sites in Tulare County, will hold its annual "Great Futures" event on May 20 to celebrate the achievements of club members and staff, as well as to show their appreciation for their local supporters. 7

OPINION

Gardening: Why I love annual bluegrass and other weeds

In these uncertain times of social distancing and stay-at-home directives, I have been spending lots of time in my garden. After pruning every possible shrub and planting more vegetables than two people can ever eat, I have started on the weeds. 2

Golf courses reopen in Tulare County

JERMAINE JOHNSON/JERM_10 Valley Oaks and the Visalia Country Club along with other Tulare County golf courses resumed play last week after making modifications to improve player safety from the coronavirus.



■ Courses reopen with slight changes to avoid public points of contact and limit possible transmissions of the novel coronavirus

By Paul Myers @PaulM_SGN

VISALIA — When Tulare County started taking measures to halt the novel coronavirus in March, the most vocally opposed citizens weren't parents or employees, it was golfers.

In March the county mandated that golf courses, among a bevy of other nonessential recreational enterprises, needed to be shut down.

At the board of supervisors' March 24 meeting, chairman Pete Vander Poel mentioned he had personally received a lot of calls from individuals asking why golf courses were closing in Tulare County but remained open in places like San Luis Obispo County. Exeter, River Island

in Springville, and Ridge Creek in Dinuba and Valley Oak in Visalia had all been closed.

"Why are we not allowing golfing as an important recreational option to get out is what they are asking," Vander Poel said. "There is an inconsistent landscape and I just want to provide some clarity."

Public health officer Dr. Karen Haught said at the time that the only way the county could survive an outbreak without calamity was to continue to minimize gatherings outside of household units.

"I think everyone agrees that golf courses are not part of essential services," Haught said.

But as of last week, golf courses were allowed to reopen with some slight modifications. And it could not have come soon enough. The Visalia Country Club opened on Wednesday, May 6

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COUNTY BEGINS ECONOMIC RECOVERY

■ Tulare County takes first step toward taking the local business community off life support from medically induced coma

By Reggie Ellis @Reggie_SGN

TULARE COUNTY — Many businesses throughout California reopened their doors last Friday, but Staci Welch was ahead of the game. The owner of Exeter Coffee Company decided to reopen her shop last Monday, May 4 and her goal was to restore hope to her local community.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, Welch shut down her business six weeks ago. At the time, there was much uncertainty regarding COVID-19. Although she deems herself as a major germaphobe, the decision to close the shop was still a tough one to make.

"I didn't want to be the reason for someone to leave their home," Welch said.

Keeping the shop closed grew more difficult as time went on. She would ride her bike around town and people would constantly ask when she is going to reopen.

"I was missing the community that we built here [at the coffee shop]... the everyday people that came in often and became more than customers," Welch said.

Thankfully, the coffee shop owner was able to utilize resources from the federal government that were meant to aid small business owners during the pandemic. She received a grant and was able to take advantage of the Paycheck Pro-

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JERMAINE JOHNSON/JERM_10

Exeter Coffee Company owner, Stacy Welch, reopened her coffee shop last Monday, May 4, after closing for several weeks due to the novel coronavirus. Several other businesses in Exeter and throughout the county have resumed some level of business now that California is entering phase 2 of the state's reopening plan.

Wearing a face mask is most effective when used with social distancing and hand and surface hygiene

- Individuals are asked to ensure effective use of face coverings by washing their hands after putting on and taking of the face covering.
- Essential businesses and their employees are asked to utilize face coverings when providing services to the public.
- Essential businesses are asked to post signage informing the public of the requirement to use face coverings.
- Masks or face coverings can be homemade, store-bought, a bandanna, or cloth.
- Key exception: children ages two or younger should not wear a face mask.

FoodLink continues to address widespread food needs

■ The food bank is also dealing with a shortage of certain supplies like dried and canned goods

By Kaitlin Washburn @Kwashy12

TULARE COUNTY — Accessing food amid the novel coronavirus pandemic remains a chal-

lenge for many Tulare County residents as cases of the disease continue to increase and many people are still out of work.

Nicole Celaya, the executive director of FoodLink, said getting certain supplies has continued to be a problem for a food bank, especially dried and canned goods, while produce has been easier to come by.

"Whether it's through the network of food banks or our personal vendors, those foods are about a month out at least," Celaya said.

The organization has seen a significant increase in how much food has been given out since the start of the pandemic. In 2019, the food bank gave out 4 million pounds of food. Just in the last month, Food-

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Supes OK hiring freeze

■ County will freeze all current vacant positions, possibly through next year, in an effort to offset revenue losses during the pandemic

By Reggie Ellis @Reggie_SGN

TULARE COUNTY — As retail businesses reopened last week, local governments have just begun to realize the scope of damage shutting down the economy will do to next year's tax revenue and their budgets.

In an effort to avoid more severe cuts, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to institute a hiring freeze throughout the county government. Jason Britt, the county's chief administrative officer, said the decision could potentially save the county more than \$64 million over the next 13 months, about \$18.6 million of that would be realized as savings to the general fund, the main account for the county's unrestricted money that funds public safety and health.

"The county has budget reserves but it is unlikely they will be sufficient to do business as usual until the economy recovers," Britt said. "One of the tools to weather this downturn is a hiring freeze."

The freeze would require all current and future vacant positions to go unfilled, possibly through the next fiscal year ending in the summer of 2021. Britt estimated there are 600 positions that were currently vacant in county government. Under the freeze, any employment offers made by the county before 5 p.m. last Friday, May 8 will be honored. Public safety positions, such as Sheriff deputies, firefighters and probation officers, are exempt from the freeze. The board did

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