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Volume 22 Issue 296

WEDNESDAY 11/08/23

smdp.com

Home improvement retailer hopes to build success in Santa Monica



MATTHEW HALL
Daily Press Editor

Santa Monica's profitable and economically important home improvement industry will get a new fixture next year when PIRCH moves into town offering high end home design and furnishings on Santa Monica Blvd.

PIRCH will be opening at 2520 Santa Monica Blvd. in the former Goodwill building early next year and CEO Steve Smith said it's a perfect location for his company as it continues to expand into the Los Angeles market.

"We are thrilled to bring the PIRCH experience to the heart of Santa Monica. Our goal is to provide the best service

possible to discerning consumers and trade partners, knowing that they are shopping for the appliances that they - or their clients - will live with for the next 10 to 20 years. The new showroom will present the top brands in kitchen, bath and outdoor in an immersive, interactive and thoroughly educational environment never before seen on the Westside of Los Angeles," he said.

He said PIRCH customers break down into three categories, home builders, interior designers and homeowners themselves with all three heavily represented in the Santa Monica area.

"We are designed to basically service the luxury homeowner and trade customer with kitchen, bath, outdoor environment and hardware for their home," he said "The thing that makes us unique is that we basically create vignettes and put our products in what I call emotional merchandising. So it's designed to be inspirational displays that allow the luxury

SEE **PIRCH** PAGE 7

Local group makes trek to curb hunger

THOMAS LEFFLER
SMDP Staff Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized insecurity surrounding basic necessities, one of the primary ones being the need for ample, nutritious food. While the pandemic has mostly subsided, that insecurity remains in spades, with one local group continuing to fight for food where it is needed most.

On Sunday, the Westside Food Bank held its 33rd annual 5K Hunger Walk, an awareness and fundraising event for the food assistance organization. Hundreds of locals donned blue shirts with the group's namesake, strolling along the Ocean Front Walk in Santa Monica to spotlight a food crisis that Westside President and CEO Genevieve Riutort says is at a "record high."

"We wanted to find a way to bring

the community together to celebrate the work that we do, and also raise awareness about the need for food assistance ... it's really an equal opportunity event to come together .. and also make a statement when you see several hundred people wearing the same shirt walking down (along the beach)," Riutort said.

This was Riutort's 20th year being

SEE **HUNGER** PAGE 8

Captain found guilty of 'seaman's manslaughter' in boat fire that killed 34 off California coast

STEFANIE DAZIO
Associated Press

A scuba dive boat captain was convicted Monday of criminal negligence in the deaths of 34 people, including two Santa Monicans, killed in a fire aboard the vessel in

2019, the deadliest maritime disaster in recent U.S. history.

Jerry Boylan, 69, was found guilty of one count of misconduct or neglect of ship officer following a 10-day trial in federal court in

SEE **FIRE** PAGE 11

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Santa Monica Daily Press

Flag program turned fast friends into on-field favorites

THOMAS LEFFLER

SMDP Staff Writer

Every student athlete knows the beats to a sports season. From pre-season practices all the way to the postseason, the routine doesn't differentiate much, as players are familiar with the sport and the way the coaching staff wants it played. Weekly practices, games and recovery periods are baked in at normal intervals; creating a typical campaign that breeds the best results.

The Samohi Lady Vikings' flag football season was an exception to this rule, as the inaugural 2023 game slate was anything but typical. Both players and coaches alike were unsure of what the rules to the game were, while some skeptics were unsure if the team should even go ahead within the male-dominated sport. Although none of the measures for a successful season were in place, the Lady Vikings figured it out slowly but surely, gaining momentum that snowballed into an undefeated Ocean League championship campaign. The squad finished 16-3 overall, with an unblemished 8-0 Ocean League record.

"It's honestly such a blessing," said junior safety and wide receiver Bella Medina. "I can't believe that we started off not knowing anything about football, playing on the grass baseball fields, to (being) Ocean League champs. We had a really good season ... really exciting for us, especially because it's our first year as a sport."

When the program was introduced to Samohi students, it represented a chance for girls to showcase their skills in a typically hyper-masculine environment. Junior quarterback Anica Mindes, who helped evolve the Lady Vikings into a stellar offensive unit, was one such player that just wanted an opportunity in an American pastime.

"I've always been interested in football, I've always thrown the ball around with my dad, and (I've always been) wanting to play but there was never an option," Mindes said. "So when I heard about it, I was really intrigued to see if it would actually turn out to be a team."

Turning a group of girls who had little knowledge of one another into a cohesive unit fell on coach Ramsey Lambert, switching gears after previously coaching the Samohi Vikings football squad for three seasons. Lambert preached taking "baby steps" by revisiting the rulebook and expanding what the girls were capable of, building up a repertoire of schematics by the week.

Taking advantage of the basketball and soccer players who joined flag for the fall season, Lambert hammered home various "set plays" similar to out of bounds plays on the basketball court or corner kicks on the soccer field. Practicing plays "to death" until the team had a "mastery" of them, the Lady Vikings adapted strongly enough that the players called the first several plays of the final 2023 contest themselves, scoring on the second play from scrimmage.



Courtesy Photo

STANDARD BEARERS: The Samohi Lady Vikings flag football squad made a splash in its first campaign, going undefeated in Ocean League play.

"It was pretty nice to see that they (had) a total grasp of it, and they're not robots out there," Lambert said. "They actually contextually understand what makes a successful offensive play."

Mindes noted that learning the different plays as quarterback was one of her favorite parts of the season, citing the "mental challenge" of incremental yet crucial offensive progress.

"I was definitely just (trying) to think through each play, and not just play with our emotions, but to really think what's the best option here, what are the best routes, kind of a collaborative effort," Mindes said.

The on-field product grew in direct correlation with the team's off-field dynamic, which was boosted by implementing team-building activities and learning about each other's personal and family lives. Lambert said that the Lady Vikings took off once the players were able to "gel personalities together" and "trust each other."

"I joined the team barely knowing any of the girls and (when the season ended), they're some of my closest friends now," Medina said. "I think something that helped us all bond together was that we were with each other every day. We would go on the bus rides, we would go home together, and we were all learning the same thing ... just being able to have people to confide in also helped us a lot to grow together."

The Lady Vikings' consistent growth made waves throughout the flag football universe, becoming standard-bearers in the sport's first year officially sanctioned by the California Interscholastic Federation. The team was recently featured on Fox 11's "Good Day LA," and Lambert said the support "means everything" for the sport's potential. The coach's goal remains reaching out to other schools, hoping to provide resources to generate new teams and new programs for the 2024 season and beyond.

Local support was even more important for the student-athletes, who felt that they earned equal footing as more established Samohi sports programs.

"Honestly, it was very shocking because I didn't really think people were (going to) support us like they did, but it was honestly such a nice feeling, it made us ... feel special to come out at our games and have people actually watching, supporting us," Medina said.

The dominant inaugural season, cresting with the Ocean League title, has made the girls just as excited for the future as the coaching staff.

"A lot of the girls felt like we had something to prove, just the fact that it was a new team, and there (were) a lot of doubts on whether or not there should have been a team to begin with," Mindes said. "I think us being able to (win) that title just kind of made a statement that ... we deserve to be here, we deserve to have a team."

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GUEST COMMENTARY

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Shifting how California funds its mental health system is critical to getting more people off the streets



REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton

HOMELESS: Alard Gavorkian, who said she had been homeless on the streets for twenty years, tends to her shelter on the sidewalk near an Apartment complex in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S., January 29, 2022.

What if we could reach each person suffering from mental illness or addiction on California's streets and assertively surround them with the resources they need to get well and to get housed? What if we could get them a mental health therapist, a bed in an addiction treatment facility? Someone to help them find an apartment and to pay their rent?

This is not an impossible dream. To reach tens of thousands of people living in tent encampments, we must prioritize and focus the billions generated through our existing Mental Health Services Act, the millionaire's tax I authored in the Assembly and was approved by voters 20 years ago as Proposition 63.

California needs more money for housing and more money for mental health and substance abuse treatment – all targeted for those with the most severe needs.

The effort is well underway with Gov. Gavin Newsom's mental health system overhaul, which requires that more of the \$4 billion raised annually by the MHSA is spent in a much more focused way. Thirty percent for housing, 35% for wraparound services, and the remainder for other services and ensuring children get the help they need before they suffer the worse consequences of untreated mental illness.

In March, voters will have a chance to weigh in on these crucial changes in addition to a second key piece of the governor and legislature's agenda for behavioral health reform. Proposition 1 would modernize the MHSA – renamed

the Behavioral Health Services Act – and raise an additional \$6.2 billion in one-time bond funding to build more housing and treatment beds for those with the most severe needs.

Currently, the funds produced by Proposition 63 flow to counties to care for adults and children with serious mental illness. MHSA's 20-year history and \$31 billion of community-based services has saved many lives.

But the work is so incomplete.

Counties currently spend this money to help many people in need. But there has not been enough focus on identifying and enrolling the unhoused people suffering in plain view on our streets.

The updated Behavioral Health Services Act shifts the dynamic by requiring more funding – an estimated \$1 billion – to be spent on housing those with severe mental illness and substance use disorders. It expands the successful full service partnerships, the wraparound services that is the proven formula to end homelessness for thousands when combined with housing.

The law would also require the prevention and early intervention resources required by the original MHSA to be spent on proven strategies like investing in early psychosis identification so teenagers do not suffer that life-altering first break.

In Sacramento, our city and county governments in December took an important legal step toward a more robust

SEE GUEST COMMENTARY PAGE 11



Surf report WATER TEMP: 64.0

WEDNESDAY | **SURF:** 2-3ft
POOR TO FAIR | Thigh to waist

Size bumps up some with new/modest WNW swell, which will combo with a new/modest SW-SSW swell that fills in further. Consistency should be good. Wind looks nice at this point, just a bit of a deep tide to start with.

THURSDAY | **SURF:** 1-2ft
POOR | Knee to thigh

Lingering NW and SW swells keep surf rideable in the morning and we could see the return of offshore flow. A deep high tide slows the dawn patrol, most spots best as the tide backs out some. Just keep an eye on the wind.



Wednesday: Sunny, with a high near 72. North wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Wednesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 55. North northeast wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near 72. North northwest wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Thursday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 51.

Date	Day	Time (LST/LDT)	Predicted	(ft)High/Low
2023/11/08	Wed	06:31 AM	4.80	H
2023/11/08	Wed	12:34 PM	1.65	L
2023/11/08	Wed	6:15 PM	4.24	H
2023/11/09	Thu	12:20 AM	0.95	L
2023/11/09	Thu	06:48 AM	5.12	H
2023/11/09	Thu	1:06 PM	1.10	L
2023/11/09	Thu	6:57 PM	4.25	H
2023/11/10	Fri	12:43 AM	1.14	L
2023/11/10	Fri	07:06 AM	5.45	H
2023/11/10	Fri	1:38 PM	0.57	L
2023/11/10	Fri	7:37 PM	4.21	H
2023/11/11	Sat	01:06 AM	1.35	L
2023/11/11	Sat	07:26 AM	5.76	H
2023/11/11	Sat	2:11 PM	0.11	L
2023/11/11	Sat	8:16 PM	4.12	H
2023/11/12	Sun	01:29 AM	1.59	L
2023/11/12	Sun	07:49 AM	6.03	H
2023/11/12	Sun	2:45 PM	-0.26	L
2023/11/12	Sun	8:56 PM	3.98	H
2023/11/13	Mon	01:54 AM	1.84	L
2023/11/13	Mon	08:14 AM	6.22	H



Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the winning number information, mistakes can occur. In the event of any discrepancies, California State laws and California Lottery regulations will prevail. Complete game information and prize claiming instructions are available at California Lottery retailers. Visit the California State Lottery web site at <http://www.calottery.com>



Draw Date: 11/6
12 25 40 59 61
Power#: 26
Jackpot: 196 M



Draw Date: 11/6
10 20 21 30 34



Draw Date: 11/3
15 32 38 47 65
Mega#: 12
Jackpot: 196 M



Draw Date: 11/6
EVENING: 7 3 9
Draw Date: 11/6
MIDDAY: 3 6 9



Draw Date: 11/4
5 6 18 26 44
Mega#: 15
Jackpot: 12 M



Draw Date: 11/6
1st: 04 - Big Ben
2nd: 01 - Gold Rush
3rd: 08 - Gorgeous George
Race Time: 1:43.28

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Santa Monica Daily Press

COMMUNITY NEWS

Citywide

Santa Monica Public Library Presents Holiday Card and Bookmark Making Workshop

During the month of December Santa Monica Public Library invites the community to upcycle old holiday cards into festive bookmarks and new greeting cards at the Main Library, Multipurpose Room, 601 Santa Monica Blvd.

Bring your gently used cards to make a new one in a cozy atmosphere amidst the hectic season. The Workshop is open to all on the following days at the Main Library:

- Monday, December 4, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Tuesday, December 5, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Thursday, December 7, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Saturday, December 9, 3 to 5 p.m.

The Library will provide craft materials. Walk-ins welcome, no reservations required.

These programs are free and open to the public. Seating is limited and on a first arrival basis. The Santa Monica Public Library is wheelchair accessible. For disability-related accommodations, email library@san-tamonica.gov at least one week prior to event. Ride your bike or Big Blue Bus. Bicycle parking racks are available at the Library

SUBMITTED BY ANNA SOPHIA HEIDT ALLOWAYED

Malibu

24th Annual Malibu Veterans Day Public Ceremony Honors Veterans and Members of the Military Who Serve and Have Served the Country

The entire community is invited to join in celebrating Veterans and current members of the military who have served our country and our community at the Malibu Veteran’s Day Public Ceremony, Saturday, November 11, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Malibu City Hall’s Civic Theater.

“Veterans Day is a time to honor the brave individuals who have served our country and sacrificed to defend our freedom and our homeland,” said Mayor Steve Uhring. “Please join us at City Hall to express our gratitude and respect for our Veterans and their families.”

The theme of this year’s event is “Legacy of Generations In Service.” The event is sponsored by the Malibu Navy League, Pepperdine University, the City of Malibu, the Malibu Association of Realtors, International Protective Service (IPS) and Malibu Times.

The free public event will feature Veteran speakers, poetry, dancers, musical performances, a Color Guard, and a visit from the Mini Therapy Horses. Students from local schools in Malibu, ROTC and Sea Cadets will participate. Lunch and refreshments will be served after the ceremony.

All current and former members of the military are invited to arrive early at 10:30 a.m. to be greeted and escorted to VIP seating by the Pepperdine Ambassadors Council. The program begins at 11 a.m., and lunch will be served 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.. Malibu City Hall is located at 23825 Stuart Ranch Road, Malibu.

Any person, business, school or other organization may sponsor the event, or have the name of a current or former member of the military listed in the Tribute Section of the event program book. For more information, call Ani Dermenjian at 310-738-0499.

SUBMITTED BY MATT MYERHOFF, MEDIA INFORMATION OFFICER

Citywide

Post Offices to Close in Observance of Veteran’s Day

In observance of the Veteran’s Day holiday, Postal Service facilities will be closed for retail transactions on Saturday, November 11. There will be no residential or business deliveries.

Although there will be no regular mail service, Priority Mail Express is delivered 365 days a year and will be delivered on November 11th. Normal delivery and collection schedules will resume Monday, November 13, 2023.

Please note:

Stamps are available at most grocery, pharmacy, and convenient stores.

For 24/7 access to most postal products and services, go to www.usps.com, where you can look up a ZIP Code, track a package, buy stamps, hold mail, print postage online, submit a change of address, schedule a package pickup and find USPS locations including self-service kiosks.

SUBMITTED BY NATASHI GARVINS

Citywide

SMC Public Policy Institute and SMC Associated Students to Host 2023 Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum Nov. 13-Dec. 3

The Santa Monica College (SMC) Public Policy Institute (PPI) and the SMC Associated Students will present the 2023 Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum Nov. 13-Dec. 3. The theme for this year’s forum is “The Arts & the AI Apocalypse: Humans Strike Back.”

The PPI Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum, which opens with the Ethos Film Awards International Film Festival, will feature community discussions on how artificial intelligence (AI) is affecting the arts, particularly evident in this year’s WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes. Expression through the arts can influence ideas and change perceptions, as well as augment community advocacy that can make change happen. This year’s events also include live, in-theater dance performances for audiences ranging from fifth graders to adults.

All forum events are open to the public, and most events are free. Seating is on a first-arrival basis if reservations are not required. All presentations and performances are subject to change or cancellation without notice.

“This year’s Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum explores the manifestation of artificial intelligence in the arts, and allows us to understand the issues from experts on the forefront of research about AI’s impact, as well as from those on the front line of protecting humans’ creative lives from being usurped by technology,” said PPI co-director and SMC political science professor Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein.

The 2023 Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum events include:

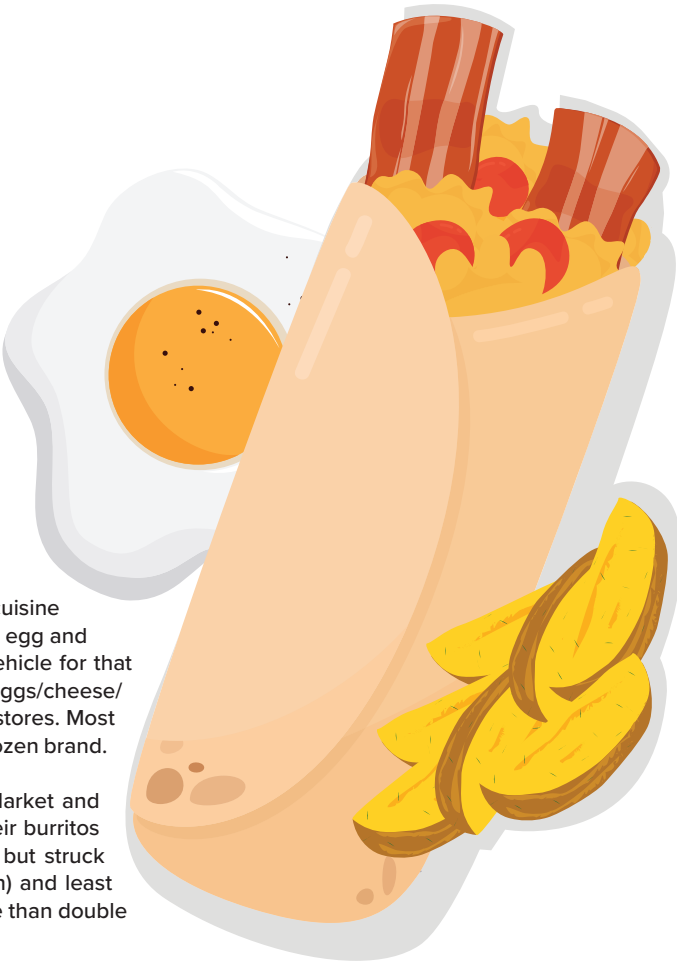
- **FRIDAY, NOV. 10-17:**
Film Festival – “Ethos Film Awards International Film Festival”
The fifth edition of the popular international film festival will screen films and present awards at selected local venues and online with the aim to conceptualize a vision for a better future by highlighting a “purpose-driven” artistic approach to the impact and meaning of story. Schedule, location, and ticket details at filmfreeway.com/ethosfilmawards.
- **MONDAY, NOV. 13, AT 6:30 P.M.:**
Panel Discussion – “Art in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”
PPI will host a conversation with experts from RAND Corporation, an SMC philosophy professor, and an SMC student. Free, Student Services Center Orientation Hall (SSC 183) on the main SMC campus (1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica).
- **WEDNESDAY, NOV. 15, AT 6:30 P.M.:**
Panel Discussion – “How Are Humans Striking Back?”
Kim Masters — KCRW host of “The Business” and “Hollywood Breakdown” — will lead a discussion with Woody Schultz, actor, producer, second unit/assistant director, and member of the SAG-AFTRA negotiating team as representative on AI issues. Free, Student Services Center Orientation Hall (SSC 183) on the main SMC campus (1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica).
- **NOVEMBER 24-DECEMBER 3:**
Tchaikovsky’s “The Nutcracker” Ballet
The Westside School of Ballet, joined by the SMC Nutcracker Symphony and SMC dancers, celebrates the 50th anniversary of presenting the annual holiday extravaganza as a live, in-theater performance — featuring Tchaikovsky’s majestic score, Balanchine’s exuberant choreography, falling snow, and a Christmas tree that grows — in partnership with the Santa Monica College Public Policy Institute’s Arts and Culture Initiative. Performances will be held at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 25 and Dec. 2, and Sunday, Nov. 26 and Dec. 3, in The Broad Stage at the SMC Performing Arts Center (1310 11th Street, Santa Monica). Ticket details at westsideballet.com. Free onsite parking.
The SMC Public Policy Institute provides nonpartisan community programs exploring key economic, social, and political issues. SMC offers an Associate in Arts Degree and Certificate of Achievement in public policy, and students can specialize in one of five public policy areas: arts and cultural affairs, education, environment and sustainability, public health, and urban/socioeconomic issues.
The SMC Public Policy Institute Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum is cosponsored by a wide range of education, government, and community organizations and donors, including Associated Students of Santa Monica College, SMC Associates, Santa Monica College Foundation, Westside School of Ballet, SMC Dance Department, and The Broad Stage.
More information is available at smc.edu/ppi or by calling 310-434-3541.

“This year’s Fall Arts and Cultural Affairs Forum explores the manifestation of artificial intelligence in the arts, and allows us to understand the issues from experts on the forefront of research about AI’s impact, as well as from those on the front line of protecting humans’ creative lives from being usurped by technology”
- Dr. Richard Tahvildaran-Jesswein, PPI co-director and SMC political science professor

IS IT WORTH IT?

The burritos in this week’s test are not examples of Mexican cuisine but are rather the West Coast counterpart to the classic bodega egg and cheese on a roll, adopting the tortilla as the perfect delivery vehicle for that deceptively simple yet wonderfully satisfying combination of eggs/cheese/meat/potato. The burritos in our taste test were all from grocery stores. Most were ready to eat although one only comes cold and the other is a frozen brand.

Two burritos wrapped up the top spots very quickly: Co-Opportunity Market and Whole Foods. Interestingly, both the Co-Op and Whole Foods were the only stores to charge tax on their burritos and they were similar prices when accounting for their per ounce weight. Trader Joe’s scored highly but struck several tasters as not “breakfasty” enough. In the bottom two were both the most expensive (Erewhon) and least expensive (Target) options. The frozen burrito was just too processed to compete and Erewhon was more than double the prices of the winning choices while also being dry.



BREAKFAST BURRITOS



REDS

(PURCHASED FROM TARGET)
The filling of this frozen burrito is processed within an inch of its life. There’s no real way to discern individual ingredients and it just doesn’t compare to any of the others in the field. That said, it doesn’t taste terrible for what it is and hot sauce helped.

Stated Weight 5 oz,
Measured Weight 5.1 oz

\$2.99



CO-OPPORTUNITY

This is a burrito that uses exemplary ingredients and while it was universally praised, it goes beyond the baseline choices made by Whole Foods which is not always to everyone’s taste. It uses a whole wheat tortilla and that’s going to be polarizing for people. Some tasters loved it, some found it overpowering. It also has a more seasoned egg and large chunks of good quality potato which gives it some personality lacking from the others. While it costs more than most, it was the largest of our verified weights and was on par with Whole Foods for value. It didn’t “need” hot sauce but also took the addition of spice well. Overall it was a sneakily strong contender and generally tied with Whole Foods on overall preference.

Stated Weight 10 oz,
Measured Weight 11.4oz

\$9.91

(with tax)



WHOLE FOODS

All tasters would happily buy this burrito on a regular basis, even if it was not always their absolute top choice. For better or worse, this burrito sells itself on simplicity. For some, it had the cleanest execution of a classic breakfast burrito with a balance of fluffy egg, crispy potato (in this case tater tots), cheese and bacon. However, for others, it lacked dimension. It foregoes the personality of a fancy tortilla for the broad appeal of a classic flour wrapper and it’s very competitive on price. It was also the burrito that had the biggest jump in scores with the application of hot sauce.

Stated Weight 8oz,
Measured Weight 9.1oz

\$6.60

(with tax)



TRADER JOE’S

This is an enigma of a burrito. Everyone liked it, but multiple tasters identified it as something other than “breakfast.” It uses what appears to be a 1-1-1 ratio of eggs/sausage/potato and the inclusion of something similar to a sausage gravy, akin to what you might find in a biscuits and gravy plate, really moves it out of comparison with the others. It’s far more processed than the three truly “fresh” options but is only available from a cold case which requires you to take it somewhere to reheat before consumption. Hot sauce was a divisive option here due to its unconventional flavor.

Stated Weight 8 oz,
Measured Weight 9.3oz

\$4.49



EREWHON

When told of Erewhon’s price point, one observer to the taste test exclaimed “what the F— is in that burrito?” It’s a perfectly valid response to the \$16.50 price tag, especially when it was the only burrito to come in under weight. It does have a strong bacon note to it but nothing about it was objectively better than the others in the test and in many categories it was worse. It was dry, overcooked and while its green tortilla was pretty, it was waxy and tough. It genuinely needed hot sauce to overcome its texture. Again, it’s \$16.50, i.e. same prices as Co-Op and Whole Foods combined.

Stated Weight 12oz,
Measured Weight 10.2oz

\$16.50

The lasting toll of California's COVID layoffs

LAUREN HEPLER

Special to the Daily Press

Lose your job, file for unemployment, get a few hundred dollars a week from the state to pay for essentials while you find a new gig. It sounds simple, in theory. But that's far from the reality that many workers experienced when the state's job safety net unraveled during the pandemic.

Five million people — about 1 in 8 Californians — got stuck waiting for delayed payments from the California Employment Development Department. More than 375,000 unemployment debit cards were cut off without warning. As few as 1 in 1,000 workers calling for help got through on jammed state phone lines.

In the years since COVID shutdown orders began, state audits, class-action lawsuits and unemployment experts have blamed the problems on different factors: crushing demand, outdated technology, inconsistent funding and unprecedented fraud, among others. EDD officials say that change is coming with a new five-year, \$1.2 billion effort to overhaul the department's unemployment and disability systems. But the stakes are still high when something goes wrong, as it did for millions of people during the pandemic.

HERE ARE SOME OF THEIR STORIES.

As California locked back down in late 2020, Danny Ramos needed an out.

On paper, the San Diego construction worker had more than \$8,000 in his state unemployment account after losing a soundproofing job that summer. But, Ramos told a state appeals judge, he never received an EDD debit card to access the money.

"I just went into panic," Ramos recalled. "Like, 'How the hell am I going to pay for my apartment?'"

He packed up his place in Carlsbad and found a cheaper rental just across the Mexico border, in Tecate. His then-fiancé took the kids to stay with family in the Midwest — a split Ramos said he thought would be temporary.

But by the spring of 2022, Ramos was still living in Tecate and riding his motorcycle across the border each day to work near San Diego. And then he became one of hundreds of thousands of workers whose unresolved unemployment cases came back to haunt them.

Ramos was flagged for potential fraud after the EDD said he did not send in required identity documents, then was ordered to repay the benefits he never received. He'd never got the notices after he moved and only realized what was happening, Ramos told a judge, when the state garnished more than



Photo by Adriana Heldiz, CalMatters

DANNY RAMOS

\$2,200 from his tax refund.

He filed an appeal, spent \$1,800 on a lawyer, then waited months for a hearing before the judge ruled in his favor this past August. In late October, paper checks finally started to arrive with the long-delayed money.

Other losses can't be repaid. Ramos said his wedding was called off. He's rebuilding his life alone.

"I'm just still trying to catch up to where I was," he said. "And I don't even know if I ever will."

As a longtime seasonal hospitality manager in Big Bear Lake, Donna Cook thought she understood how to file for unemployment with the EDD. But the pandemic brought a whole new level of stress, confusion and up to 4½-hour waits on the phone.

"They become the center of your life," Cook said. "It's always negative, and you're already feeling down on yourself for being unemployed."

The trouble for her started in mid-2021, when she said several payments for her pandemic unemployment claim came late. Then came a letter from the EDD ordering Cook to repay the agency for failing to report \$61 of income. The agency wanted back \$79, including a 30% penalty, despite Cook's argument that she hadn't meant to deceive anyone and received the extra money from an orientation that she did not know was paid.

The timing of the confusion, while she was caring for her terminally ill mother, was terrible. Cook pitched in for utilities but had to rely on her mom to buy groceries.

Like thousands of other workers who are penalized each year for even slight income miscalculations or clerical errors, the worst of it came the next time she had to file for unemployment.

Late this past summer, Cook lost another



Photo by Julie A Hotz for CalMatters

DONNA COOK

hospitality job, filed for benefits and was confused when she didn't get any payments, leaving her in a familiar loop of dialing the EDD and getting a message that all agents were busy. This time, she was struggling to keep paying for the small house she'd just bought with the money she said her mom left when she died.

Finally, Cook got through in October to an agent who delivered the bad news: Under the EDD's strict payment rules, she had to serve a five-week penalty for the previous overpayment, leaving her in limbo once again.

"I don't know how they expect people to wait," Cook said, "when you're already living check to check."

When Maria Sanchez got the letter telling her she owed the state more than \$2,000, she thought she didn't have any choice but to sign up for a payment plan she couldn't afford.

"I would have paid that money to the EDD," Sanchez said in Spanish, recalling "a lot of fear."

Her daughter Maribel, however, had a different idea.

The law student had watched for months as her mom — a longtime San Francisco nanny who emigrated from El Salvador in 1976 — struggled to explain to the EDD, in Spanish, how she'd lost her job and spent months waiting for unemployment payments.

The last straw for Maribel was when court records show that her mom was accused of fraud and ordered to pay back some of the money for making a "false statement" in a language she doesn't speak fluently.

"There was so much fraud going on with the EDD scams," Maribel recalled. "I'm like, 'You're going to come after a 66-year-old lady that doesn't have money to begin with?'"

In mid-2021, the family found a lawyer at advocacy group Legal Aid at Work to challenge the notice ordering her to pay back \$1,750 in benefits, plus a \$525 penalty. The following February, they filed a legal



Photo by Julie A Hotz for CalMatters

MARIA AND MARIBEL SANCHEZ:

complaint in Superior Court arguing that the EDD's fraud allegations were based off of a conversation in English that "contained obvious inaccuracies."

It took multiple rounds of appeals and legal hearings, plus living on high-interest loans in the meantime, but a judge cleared Maria in 2022.

Still, Maribel can't help but wonder, how many others weren't so lucky?

As Hollywood shut down with the rest of the world in early 2020, losing her job as a video editor wasn't Madeline Maye's biggest concern — at least at first.

Right before quarantine, Maye said she had come out as a trans woman. She started hormone therapy two months later. New clothes that she ordered online or got second-hand helped make her feel more like herself. And she was doing it all while estranged from family.

"It's kind of hard to describe how much stress that is," Maye said. "It's basically having to discover an entire new person that you always were, from scratch."

Then she awoke one morning in mid-2020 to find that the unemployment money she was relying on to survive had disappeared. Maye said in a legal filing that she noticed a string of mysterious ATM charges on her state-issued Bank of America EDD debit card, which at one point showed a negative balance of \$5,000.

"It was terrifying," she said. "That was my only source of income, and all of a sudden, it was gone."

Maye was one of thousands of Californians experiencing similar issues with frozen debit cards. With few answers at the time, she started a GoFundMe campaign, raising money from friends and strangers online to pay for rent and other



Photo by Alisha Jucevic for CalMatters

MADELINE MAYE

essentials, while she said the state's Medi-Cal program continued paying for hormone treatments.

After several months of staying in touch with her state representative's office, Maye said she got her money back. In 2021, she joined an ongoing class-action lawsuit against Bank of America.

"It was one of the worst times of my life," Maye said, "and there's zero reason why it should have happened at all."

UNEMPLOYMENT

FROM PAGE 6

In March 2020, Kelly Swanson came down with what he remembers as “a really intense flu.” He went home sick from his credit union IT job of 23 years just as the first pandemic shutdowns hit Solano County.

So began a chain of events that Swanson, now 53, said would lead to draining his retirement savings, being forced to sell his house in Fairfield and leaving California in his new home: an RV that his wife took to calling “a roving coffin” — an example of the domino effect that can happen when workers say the process is too daunting and they give up on fighting for benefit money.

“I was screwed six ways to Sunday,” Swanson said in a recent call from the trailer park where the couple now lives in the old mining town of Wickenburg, Arizona.

At first, Swanson received disability payments when the flu turned out to be a more intense long-term illness that he now assumes was COVID-19. Things got more complicated in the summer of 2020, when he was laid off and filed for unemployment.

The money never came, Swanson said. Instead, he was summoned to a call with the EDD and said he was questioned about fraud.

“It scared me enough that I was like, ‘Nevermind, you can cancel my application,’” Swanson said. “I don’t want to commit fraud.”

An unfruitful job search followed, and Swanson said he started borrowing from his



Photo by Caitlin O'Hara for CalMatters

KELLY SWANSON

401(k). He sold his house in the summer of 2022 and moved most of his belongings into storage. Since he and his wife arrived in Arizona, he estimates that he’s applied for 270 office jobs, but he said he’s working at an ACE hardware store earning \$15 an hour.

“My key takeaway from all of this,” Swanson said, “is just because you saved for retirement and just because you worked for a company and paid your taxes, don’t expect the state to come help you.”

As Nicole Oyler awaits a hearing on her third EDD appeal, anxiety bubbles up each time she opens the mail and sees the agency’s name on an envelope.

“It’s just hanging over you,” she said. “All day you’re thinking about it.”

Oyler wasn’t living in California when the coronavirus hit. She had recently left her Orange County hometown and moved to Washington, D.C., to chase her dream of working in museums. When her first museum job in D.C. disappeared with pandemic shutdown orders, she filed for unemployment with officials in the nation’s capital. At first, everything seemed fine — even better than before, with the added benefits allotted for laid-off workers during COVID.

Then, in early 2022, everything came screeching to a halt. Her \$2,300 tax refund was seized for “government debts.” According to the nation’s byzantine unemployment rules, a lawyer helped her figure out, she should have filed for unemployment in California. And in the meantime, records show that officials in Washington wanted their roughly \$20,000 back.

So began Oyler’s surreal quest to prove her own identity and clear the five-figure debt.

Officials say multi-state unemployment cases are inherently more complicated, but it’s an issue impacting more people amid broader shifts toward remote work and an exodus of hundreds of thousands of California residents moving to other states.

In May 2022, the EDD rejected Oyler’s identity verification documents. Then her online account showed that “some guy” had received unemployment in California using her Social Security Number. In June 2022, she got a letter from the EDD that she couldn’t read because it was in Spanish. Her next tax



Photo by Eric Lee for Cal Matters

NICOLE OYLER

refund was also garnished.

Today, Oyler has a new job. She’s taking a philosophical outlook on the bureaucracies she remains trapped between.

“There are people that believe that we should have a social safety net, and there are people that don’t,” she said. “You end up with this creature that we have now, that’s underfunded and under-staffed. It’s going to fail.”

PIRCH

FROM PAGE 1

homeowner to envision themselves in that environment and see what’s really available to them and create the desire to want to do that.”

Part of that sales philosophy includes working appliance models that allow the company to actually cook in an outdoor kitchen for the potential client and Smith said the service level for his company is part of their reputation.

“You’ll be greeted by one of our concierges and they’ll offer you as a customer a beverage or coffee, latte, whatever they’d like. And then they will partner them up with one of our sales people if they want that or if they just want to wander around and look then we’ll check in with them periodically and see if they want any questions answered. So we tried to really make the shopping experience a experience that’s tied to the level of the product that they’re purchasing,” he said.

The store draws from a select group of brands and has exclusive offerings from several.

Smith said he expects the Santa Monica store to draw from a wide zone in Los Angeles that will bring more revenue into the immediate area. The home improvement market is one of the city’s largest sales tax generators with three existing businesses ranking in the City’s top 20 sales tax generators.

Nationally, home improvement spending has been on a roller-coaster.

According to a recent report by Constructioncoverage.com, after falling by an inflation-adjusted 24% from a high in 2006 to a low in 2011 as a result of the Great Recession, home improvement spending growth got back on track between 2012 and 2019 as

the housing market recovered. However, spending then grew sharply during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic before plateauing in 2022. According to loan-level data from the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the number of single-family home improvement loans originated climbed to nearly 750,000 in 2022, up from approximately 550,000 in 2021.

Smith said the boom in home improvement during lockdown has actually persisted for his customer base.

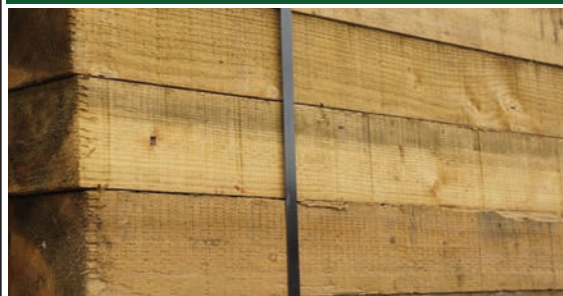
“The luxury homeowner spent less time in their homes than other people did pre-COVID because they traveled more and they ate out and all of those things. So when they were inside their homes, I think they realized what parts of their home they didn’t really like when they had to use them for five days a week,” he said. “They also looked at their home as being their safe place to entertain and all of a sudden they find out they don’t have the facilities inside from their own home to entertain the way they wanted to. So there’s a huge amount of demand created by that and I don’t think that’s going to change.”

The Santa Monica store will be the eighth location for the Southern California luxury home appliance retailer and will open in early 2024. Other PIRCH showroom locations include: Costa Mesa, Glendale, La Jolla, Laguna Design Center, Mission Viejo, Rancho Mirage and Solana Beach. WestEdge attendees get a sneak preview at the PIRCH Culinary Pavilion during the WestEdge Design Fair. For more information about PIRCH, visit www.pirch.com or call 1-858-966-3600.

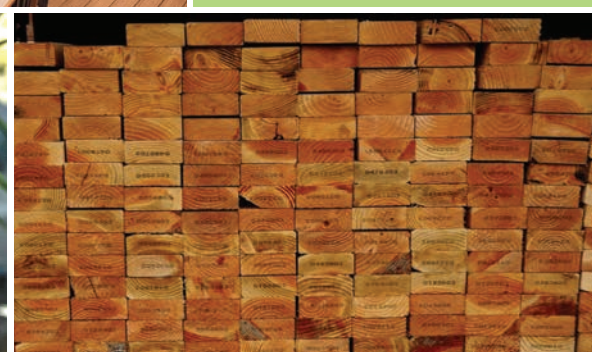
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HUNGER

FROM PAGE 1

involved in the walk, but the first time she was able to walk herself after being an on-site organizer for two decades. The event was able to raise \$115,000 from 400 participants, with the top individual donor being Martha Ross at \$5,000, and the top team donor being the 4th grade class of St. Matthew's Parish School at \$6,618 raised.

Westside provides food for approximately 90 agencies on the west end of Los Angeles County, operating as a warehouse hub that receives food either donated or purchased on the wholesale market, similar to a grocery store. That food is then distributed to the agencies that hand them to individuals through pantries as well as programs like shelters, Boys and Girls Clubs and school programs, including at Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District.

Riutort has had personal experience of food insecurity, stating she knows what it is like "to be on the other side" of the crisis.

"Food assistance really makes a huge difference and relieves people of such a huge burden, and really helps to empower people to face whatever other challenges that they may be dealing with, when you know there's going to be food," she said. "I really bring my heart and soul into this work."

She noted that the "basic bottom line is that everybody needs food," particularly vulnerable populations that are at risk of both food insecurity and diseases exacerbated by a poor diet, such as diabetes and hypertension. Westside emphasizes nutritional needs, distributing fresh produce along with "staple" foods like eggs, rice and beans. She also added that the food crisis is of utmost concern due to the phasing out of pandemic-era assistance

"We feel like if we can provide that food, not only do we keep our communities healthier, but we're also helping to prevent people from losing their housing"

- Genevieve Riutort, President and CEO

programs, and that food insecurity now impacts roughly 3 out of 10 Los Angeles area residents.

"We feel like if we can provide that food, not only do we keep our communities healthier, but we're also helping to prevent people from losing their housing," Riutort said. "By giving them food for free, that can often make the difference between having that extra money to pay the rent, or get the medical care they need, or pay for child care."

The organization will be further involved in Santa Monica events during the holiday season, taking part in the Fairmont Miramar's "Meet Me Under The Fig Tree" event on Dec. 11 and the Santa Monica Pub Crawl on Dec. 16. For more information on the group, visit wsfb.org, as the Hunger Walk donation page will stay up until Nov. 15.

thomas@smdp.com



Photo by Thomas Leffler

HUNGER WALK: Santa Monica residents took to the Ocean Front Walk on Nov. 5 for the Westside Food Bank's 5K Hunger Walk.

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Agnes

By TONY COCHRAN

Dogs of C-Kennel

By MICK & MASON MASTROIANNI & JOHNNY HART

Zack Hill

By JOHN DEERING & JOHN NEWCOMBE

Heathcliff

By PETER GALLAGHER

Strange Brew

By JOHN DEERING

FIND THE WORDS

This is a theme puzzle with the subject stated below. Find the listed words in the grid. (They may run in any direction but always in a straight line. Some letters are used more than once.) Ring each word as you find it and when you have completed the puzzle, there will be 12 letters left over. They spell out the alternative theme of the puzzle.

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Rugby League greats

L	Y	O	N	S	T	O	K	U	C	U	G	I	E	F
W	A	R	D	H	H	C	R	A	O	R	H	L	P	F
S	L	E	E	T	A	G	W	S	D	I	I	F	I	I
I	S	A	L	J	E	I	T	Y	E	A	E	R	I	B
N	T	E	O	C	N	O	L	U	S	N	S	L	R	T
B	O	M	B	G	O	N	O	S	E	T	R	I	E	S
I	N	A	N	B	A	D	O	C	R	U	S	H	E	R
N	E	G	N	M	M	L	H	E	A	S	H	A	B	B
A	A	I	U	A	L	O	C	K	P	E	T	S	E	E
W	C	S	D	K	T	E	S	Y	E	L	U	M	V	A
E	T	A	E	D	I	S	E	K	R	I	O	A	W	R
B	I	R	O	V	A	C	A	N	O	M	S	E	A	S
C	O	G	E	P	O	T	K	I	E	O	S	T	L	B
K	N	R	H	T	I	M	S	A	P	O	R	P	L	I
E	R	U	C	K	E	E	N	P	D	Y	O	B	Y	G

Action	Code	Goal	Miles	Stone
Adam	Crusher	Heat	Moves	Take
Doueih	Dunn	Hot dog	Pain	Teams
Bears	East	Ice	Pass	Tries
Beer	Eels	Jack	Prop	Try
Biff	Elias	Keen	Raper	Urge
Big	Fenech	Kick	Roar	Wally
Bomb	First	Lock	Ruck	Ward
Boots	receiver	Loss	Save	Webcke
Boyd	Fit	Lyons	Sin bin	Wing
Brooks	Game	Manly	Smith	
Cleal	Gate	Mean	Souths	

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S WORDS PUZZLE.
Everyone's hungry



TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Nov. 8)

You love life and life loves you right back. The more specific you are about what you want to accomplish, the more readily you will gain the knowledge, tools and resources to create wondrous results. First, you'll work off established plans, then you'll innovate and be paid well for the improvement. Capricorn and Cancer adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 10, 4, 1, 33 and 16.



HOROSCOPES

ARIES (March 21-April 19). You regularly put your feelings on the line. You've gotten used to such risks. People with less experience will remind you of your younger self. You'll be careful with people. Your kindness will be remembered.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Within the same language is many ways to use it, which tell people where you're from geographically, culturally, emotionally and more. You'll create trust when you speak someone's language back to them.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You don't always think of your interactions as creations, but they are. You put thought into your approach and choose your topics carefully. There's an opportunity for beauty in each scene unfolding on the stage of your life.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You didn't get where you are by being unconcerned with results. So, while your inner critic serves an important purpose, you need very little from them to stay on track. A one-sentence review is enough, then shut it down.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). There are those who will create a false or unnecessary sense of urgency to make their cause seem more important and to get people to respond quickly. Take back the power. Do things on your timetable, not theirs.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). It seems counterintuitive, but less time allotted to work on a project will lead to more creative results. The crunch will focus you on the heart of the matter, and this concentration on what matters will make your work sing.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Organized work habits, effective communication skills, loving mannerisms — these are all things that seem like personality traits but are actually skills that can be learned. Knowledge and practice will take you wherever you want to go.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Your humor is more than a talent; it's a coping mechanism. Wherever it comes from, your ability to call out what's funny in a situation will attract friends and followers who love to laugh with you.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Just like food can only be processed through eating, feelings can only be processed through feeling. Intellectualizing the process won't work. The only way out is through.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You'll be captivated by a dauntingly deep subject or a person who is impossible to fully know. "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science." — Albert Einstein

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). People say thank you for many reasons having nothing to do with gratitude including manners, habits and humility. True gratitude is born of pleasure, comfort and happiness. What are you really grateful for?

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You didn't get to do things the way you wanted to, and there's a lingering sense that you'll never know how it would have turned out. Under different circumstances and with other people, it will work, which you'll know in the future.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

	G	A	G			C	A	S	A		O	S	L	O	
	A	H	A			U	R	G	E	D		A	T	O	P
C	L	O	S	E	F	O	R	C	O	M	F	O	R	T	
N	P	R		M	O	N	E	T		Y	I	P	E		
B	A	S	I	C		Y	E	S		M	S	G			
C	L	E	V	E	R				B	Y	H	A	L	F	
			S	E	A	D	U	T	Y			P	E	A	
I	M	P			T	O	P	I	C			S	I	X	
N	O	R			I	N	C	L	A	S	S				
G	O	O	D	T	O				B	E	T	R	U	E	
		T	A	I		S	A	T		P	L	A	N	A	
	D	E	S	K		A	L	I	B	I		V	C	R	
M	U	C	H	I	N	F	O	R	M	A	T	I	O	N	
A	N	T	E		R	E	N	E	W		U	N	O		
N	E	S	S		A	R	E	S			G	E	L		

Sudoku

Fill in the blank cells using numbers 1 to 9. Each number can appear only once in each row, column, and 3x3 block. Use logic and process of elimination to solve the puzzle.

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S SUDOKU

8	1	7	4	9	3	5	6	2
4	5	3	8	6	2	7	1	9
2	6	9	5	7	1	4	8	3
5	4	2	3	1	7	8	9	6
6	3	1	9	8	4	2	5	7
7	9	8	2	5	6	1	3	4
1	2	4	6	3	8	9	7	5
3	7	5	1	2	9	6	4	8
9	8	6	7	4	5	3	2	1

	2						9	
7			5	9				3
	5		4		3		1	
		5		2		8		
2		4				1		9
		1		3		5		
	3		2		8		6	
9				4	7			8
	4						7	

Newsday Crossword

SOMETHING TO LOSE by Steve Faiella
Edited by Stanley Newman
www.stanxwords.com

ACROSS

- 1 Harvest a crop
5 Knights' titles
9 Ocean reef material
14 Wheel-connecting rod
15 Vicinity
16 Really love
17 Epic tale
18 Totally attentive
19 Sounded like a kitten
20 WHEN WAITING AT A BANK
23 Take the wheel
24 Cowpoke's ending for buck
25 Panther or puma
28 Fridge decoration
31 New Haven campus
32 Secret agent
35 "What's ___ for me?"
36 Bleach brand
38 WHEN DISTRACTED (with 40 Across)

- 40 See 38 Across
41 NASA launch
42 Encounter
43 W. Hemisphere alliance
44 Tennis great Arthur
45 Beagles and bassets
47 See 61 Across
48 Swiss capital
49 Desert rest stops
54 WHEN ENGROSSED IN WORK
57 Old West pursuit group

- 61 With 47 Across, ceramic figurine with leaves
62 In the past
63 Indoor sports venue
64 Gave temporarily
65 Requirement
66 Monarch's domain
67 Jittery
68 Woolly females

DOWN

- 1 Speaks hoarsely
2 Praise highly
3 Seaweed
4 Nobel Prize category
5 New Delhi dress
6 Teheran's country
7 Move to a larger pot

- 8 Literary spoof
9 Star's bit part
10 Praiseful poem
11 Propel a canoe
12 "___ we there yet?"
13 Was ahead
21 White weasel
22 With belt holes, for example
25 Ship's freight
26 Luau greeting
27 Schoolbooks
29 One more
30 Image file format
31 "___ name it"
32 Watchband
33 Nonpoetic writing
34 Luxury boat
37 Ample, as room

- 39 Eisenhower nickname
40 Midmorning hour
42 Chewed noisily
46 Fortune-teller
48 Second-string squad
50 Make amends
51 Muscular strength
52 Game-show host
53 Watermelon throwaways
55 Charles III's title
56 Tasting like Cheerios
57 ___ for the course (about average)
58 Mine resource
59 Mermaid's home
60 NBC weekend skit show

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18					19				
20				21					22					
23							24					25	26	27
				28	29	30				31				
32	33	34		35					36	37				
38			39					40						
41							42					43		
44					45	46								
47				48						49	50	51	52	53
				54				55	56					
57	58	59	60			61					62			
63						64					65			
66						67					68			

FROM PAGE 1

Boylan was the first to abandon ship and jump overboard. Four crew members who

FROM PAGE 3

Passing the accompanying bond next year to build community treatment and housing facilities will move us much closer to fulfilling the promise made by Gov. Ronald Reagan and the Legislature when they closed old hospitals and promised a decent system of community based mental health care. Closing the hospitals

Associated Press writer Christopher Weber contributed.

The homelessness conversation by California Voices features authors involved with the issue to help Californians grasp the solutions and areas of consensus. Darrell Steinberg is the mayor of Sacramento. Darrell Steinberg is the mayor of Sacramento. He is the former president of the state Senate, author of California's Mental Health Services Act and founder of the Steinberg Institute. This article was originally published by CalMatters.

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