

KGO-TV/ABC7
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
QUARTERLY LISTING OF COMMUNITY ISSUES AND
RELATED PROGRAMMING
SECOND QUARTER - April 1 - June 30, 2023
REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING

During the second quarter of 2023, KGO-TV/ABC7 aired the following regularly scheduled local newscasts identified on air as “ABC7 News” with a total cumulative average of approximately 140 hours per month:

Monday – Friday 5:00-7:00AM

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 Julian Glover, 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 politics, and community leaders.

Monday – Friday 4:00-5:00PM

ABC7 News at 4pm- Anchored by Larry Beil, Kristen Sze, Weather Spencer Christian and Meteorologists Sandhya Patel, 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, Meteorologist Sandhya Patel and Weather forecaster 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, Weather Spencer Christian, 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 & Sunday 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.

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

ABC7 News at 5pm & 6pm- Anchored by Dion Lim, Weather Spencer Christian, 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/ABC7 / 7.2 HD

KGO-TV/ABC7'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 KGO-TV/ABC7 consumer affairs unit that provided consumer information / product recalls during local 4:00PM and other ABC7 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 approximately 4000 e-mails during the 2nd quarter of 2023.

Community Outreach Events

2nd Quarter 2023

Allies in Action: Ian Bain

In celebration of Earth Month, KGO honored nonprofit Green Foothills and its board president Ian Bain. Since 1962, Green Foothills has served as a guardian for open spaces, farmlands and natural resources of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Bain shares more about the organization's ongoing advocacy and current campaigns to help Build a Better Bay Area. In partnership with Disney, KGO awarded Green Foothills with a \$2000 grant to continue its good work.

Allies in Action: Wisa Uemura

KGO spotlighted Wisa Uemura and San Jose Taiko for Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The powerful sound of the taiko drum has been echoing through the streets of the Bay Area for 50 years, connecting communities and serving as a symbol of strength, resilience and cultural identity. Birthed in the heart of San Jose Japantown, the nonprofit performing arts company is dedicated to the development of the taiko art form, as well as educational programs.

Allies in Action: Brooke Westling

For Pride Month, KGO honored the work of Brooke Westling and The LGBT Asylum Project, which provides accessible legal representation to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers. The life-saving work helps community members overcome past or potential persecution, and the trauma of unjust treatment and the fight to obtain asylum. Co-founder Westling is dedicated to helping clients gain more than acceptance and love in the Bay Area – she helps them find family.

Allies in Action: Proud in Drag

KGO's Reggie Aqui moderated a half-hour panel discussion during Pride Month featuring three of the Bay Area's popular and most honored drag queens: Sister Roma, D'Arcy Drollinger and Nicki J. Topics covered include recent attacks on drag performers, accolades, diversity, evolution and future of drag culture.

Rock the CASA: April 15

KGO's Dan Ashley produced, hosted and MC'd his annual Rock the CASA benefit concert, an evening of music for children in need. This year's headliner, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts raised important funds to support Court Appointed Special Advocates, Friends of Camp Concord, Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys & Girls Club.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: April 19

KGO's Kumasi Aaron volunteered on the Host Committee of SFMOMA's annual Art Bash, the museum's most spectacular part of the year celebrating art and artists. The event supports SFMOMA's much-loved education and family programs and community engagement events that benefit 150,000 people each year, like the popular First Thursdays, which offers free admission for all Bay Area residents.

Girls, Inc. of Alameda County: April 20

KGO's Jobina Fortson and Kumasi Aaron MC'd the Girls, Inc. of Alameda County's Strong, Smart & Bold Luncheon at Scottish Rite Center in Oakland. The event celebrated the accomplishments of the girls and of the organization's 65 years of history building toward equity and breaking down barriers so that youth in the community can safely imagine what they want for their futures.

SF Chronicle Live at Manny's: April 20

KGO's Drew Tuma was the featured panelist at SF Chronicle's "Understanding California's Wild Weather" discussion. Drew joined the Chronicle's new Weather Science Team for a fun-filled night of extreme weather and climate change conversation.

Junior Achievement of Northern California: April 21

KGO's Jobina Fortson MC'd Junior Achievement of Northern California's "Business Hall of Fame" luncheon to honor JA NorCal's Business Partners, Students, Volunteers of the Year and Educators of the Year for their impact on JA's mission to empower students toward greater economic success.

Friends of Children with Special Needs: April 22

KGO's Amanda del Castillo volunteered on the judging panel for the 9th Annual Special Needs Talent Showcase, the yearly celebration of music, performance and showmanship by children and adults with special needs. Friends of Children with Special Needs provides programs, services and family support for individuals with special needs.

Camp Okizu: April 14

KGO's Reggie Aquí and Stephanie Sierra MC'd the annual Art Inspiring Hope Gala, helping create a safe haven for children with cancer since 1982. Money raised helps send hundreds of kids to camp this year.

Armenian Genocide Commemoration: April 23

KGO's Karina Nova MC'd the 108th Armenian Genocide Commemoration at San Francisco's Mount Davidson Cross. The event commemorates the 1.5 million Armenians massacred in 1915 by the Ottoman Turks.

Academy of Art University: April 26

KGO's Mimi Kwan hosted broadcast journalism students from Academy of Art University for a tour of the newsroom and control room and a viewing of a live broadcast in studio.

Southeast Asian Development Center: April 28

KGO's Dion Lim MC'd Southeast Asian Development Center's 46th Anniversary Gala: A Celebration of Hope, Resilience and Transformation. SEADC works hard to transform and uplift thousands of youth and families with jobs, academic support, language services and cultural and social guidance. Clients include Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese families who work low-paying jobs, speak little English and still suffer from PTSD, 45 years after the end of the Vietnam War.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bay Area: April 28

KGO's Kumasi Aaron and Dan Ashley MC'd the Big Futures Gala, Celebrating the Power and Promise of Youth. The event featured the "Bigs and Littles of the Year" and the stories they shared about how mentoring relationships changed their lives. More than \$540,000 was raised to help kids realize their potential, one relationship at a time.

Alzheimer's Association of Northern California and Northern Nevada: April 29

KGO's Amanda del Castillo MC'd the Alzheimer's Association's A Bright Night Gala, raising money to fund research and local care and support services. More than 650,000 Californians are living with Alzheimer's disease, and more than 1.6 million family and friends are providing care.

San Francisco Community Health Center: April 29

KGO's Reggie Aqui MC'd the Show of Hope, a gala and benefit concert for San Francisco Community Health Center, honoring Health Justice Champion Nancy Pelosi and Community Impact Award Honoree Cecilia Chung. Closing out the evening was headline performer Martha Wash. SF Community Health Center's wide array of medical, mental health, education and community services are designed to empower people in safe, respectful and supportive spaces.

Girls Leadership: May 3

KGO's Lyanne Melendez MC'd "Power of Voice" celebration which supports the nonprofit, Girls Leadership. The event cheered on the impact of the evening's honorees and made sure every girl knows her power.

Committee of 100: May 5

KGO's Dion Lim MC'd the annual meeting of Committee of 100 whose purpose is to provide leadership and act as a constructive force in the dual mission of: promoting the full participation of all Chinese Americans in American society and acting as a public policy resource for the Chinese-American community; and advancing constructive dialogue and relationships between the peoples and leaders of the United States and Greater China.

National Coalition of 100 Black Women: March 24

KGO's Dion Lim joined KGO alum David Louie to MC the event, themed "Seeking Common Grounds in Turbulent Times." Committee of 100 is a non-partisan leadership organization of prominent Chinese Americans in business, government, academia, and the arts.

Kids & Art Foundation : May 6

KGO's Kristen Sze MC'd the peninsula fundraiser for Kids & Art Foundation. The nonprofit uses the power of arts and creativity to mitigate stress, anxiety and trauma induced from the diagnosis and treatment of pediatric cancer and other critical medical conditions.

Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Center: May 12

KGO's Dion Lim MC'd the Tel Hi Neighborhood Center's "Taste of Tel Hi," with an evening celebrating the Mayors of San Francisco. Funds raised support educational programs that provide kids the academic support they need to succeed and help them get their education back on track.

Lucasfilm Trivia Night: May 17

KGO's Kurt Stoneburner, Jocelyn Fiset, Dave Fortin and Zach Fuentes competed in the Lucasfilm Trivia Night fundraiser to benefit three local charities: SF-Marin Food Bank, Students Rising Above and Raphael House. Other KGO employees volunteered to help the evening's friendly competition run smoothly.

Farmworker Affairs Committee: Farmworker Public Summit May 20

KGO's Gloria Rodriguez MC'd the event, with leading discussion topics about issues like clean water, humane farm worker housing and healthcare.

San Francisco Chamber of Commerce: May 23

KGO's Karina Nova MC'd the Chamber's City Beat breakfast, with the goal to bring together Bay Area's top business and civic leaders to apply fresh thinking to today's greatest economic, political, environmental and humanitarian challenges.

Wilkinson Elementary School : May 26

KGO's Gloria Rodriguez spoke to young students on Wilkinson Career Day about her daily work schedule and some of the opportunities that are open to students.

Equal Rights Advocates: June 9

KGO's Karina Nova MC'd the Equal Rights Advocates' Gala Luncheon, the annual celebration in the gender justice and civil rights movements, bringing together hundreds of advocates, business leaders, philanthropists and partners from across the country.

San Francisco Pride Parade: June 25

KGO was the exclusive, proud broadcast sponsor of the SF Pride Parade, which attracted an estimated 1M attendees. The parade was broadcast live, streamed and available to view online following the live broadcast. Reggie Aqui and Drew Tuma were joined by community hosts at the ABC7 set along the parade route. Jobina Fortson was the roving reporter. Zach Fuentes covered the festivities at Civic Center.

San Francisco Pride: June 27

KGO's Ken Miguel joined a panel for SF Pride's first human rights summit, discussing the importance of corporate sponsorships and why they matter for SF Pride.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

2nd Quarter 2023

- **AIDS Walk San Francisco**
- **Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month**
- **Charlotte Maxwell Clinic**
- **Juneteenth events**
- **Make A Wish**
- **Professional Business Women of California**
- **Rock the CASA concert**
- **San Francisco Decorator Showcase**
- **Starlight Foundation: Letters**



KGO-TV/ABC7 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/ABC7 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/ABC7 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

ECONOMY & CHANGING WORKPLACE

RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Monday, April 10, 2023

Paperwork roadblocks delay woman's DMV vehicle registration renewal for six years

FAIRFIELD, Calif. (KGO) -- For six years, a greater Bay Area woman unsuccessfully tried to register her car. She ran into one roadblock after another. The long ordeal meant she went all that time without legally being able to drive her vehicle. So for the most part, it just sat there. Ludean Mines of Fairfield shows 7 On Your Side the 2007 Prius that she cannot legally drive because it has expired registration tags. "If I drive the car, I run the risk of being stopped and having the car impounded. Which did happen once," Mines said.

To understand this story, you need to go back to 2013. That's when Mines moved from California to a suburb of Portland, Oregon. Two years later, she returned to California to live in Fairfield, and that's where the confusion began. She immediately applied and received her new California plates and registration. Then she says the DMV sent her a letter saying not so fast -- and basically rescinded her registration. "An internal audit had found some incorrect information," Mines said. That basically meant she had to start all over with the DMVs both in California and Oregon. She says the DMV advised her to register her car first in Oregon to get a title there. "Of course Oregon won't do that because I don't live there. So I can't get a title from either California or Oregon," Mines said.

Mines says she's spoken to both DMVs in person and by phone many times with reams of documentation, but without success. "If you don't fit into their neat little box of, 'Go here. Fix that. Fill out this form,' they don't know how to be helpful," she said. With six years of frustration boiling over, she contacted 7 On Your Side. The DMV told us it couldn't let Mines register the car because it belonged to someone else. That someone else turned out to be Mines's daughter, who was apparently gifted the car from her mom many years ago. The daughter took it, but decided she didn't need it and let her mom have the car back. Both apparently forgot to take care of the paperwork. So 7 On Your Side contacted the Oregon DMV. It sent Mines's daughter the title for the car and suggested she needed to sign that title over to her mom to complete the transfer. Mines now has a new California license plate and up-to-date registration tags. The car now legally belongs to her and after six years, she's raring to go. "As soon as I get packed and organized I'm going to take a road trip and drive this thing to Yellowstone National Park and go camping and have some fun," Mines said. Mines is also planning trips back to Oregon and up to Canada.

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Federal consumer bureau cracks down on 'junk fees,' encourages consumers to be on the lookout

Junk fees have been getting the attention of lawmakers, elected officials and even President Biden during his recent State of the Union address. "We'll ban surprise 'resort fees' that hotels tack on to your bill," President Biden said. "These fees can cost you up to \$90 a night at hotels that aren't even resorts." The President jump-started the process of identifying and doing away with junk fees. President Biden went on, "Americans are tired of being played for suckers." Congress is crafting new laws. The California legislature is too. Consumer activists are pulling out all the stops. "The bottom line is, consumers deserve to know what they are paying for, how much and upfront. It is that simple," said Sander Kushen of the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG). While the spotlight has been turned on lawmakers now crafting laws, there is an actual crackdown now underway in the financial services industry. "Americans are charged tens of millions -- excuse me, billions of dollars in fees each year by their financial service providers through things like late fees and overdraft," said Brian Shearer of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

The CFPB has oversight of financial institutions and says banks rake in \$12 billion a year on credit card late fees -- and that's just the beginning. "These include not-sufficient fund fees, bounce check fees, payment processing fees. You name it, and American consumers are fed up by this fee creep every year," Shearer said. Many of the examples of fee creep you have seen yourself. Late fees going up, that sort of thing -- but there are also hidden and sneaky ways businesses find to reach into your pocket. Here's one that some homeowners faced. "Another was fees for unnecessary property inspections," said Shearer. "There were companies that were paying a fee to inspect a property even though the inspector couldn't find the right address, and the company knew that they couldn't, and they just kept sending inspectors out to inspect nothing, and then charging a fee."

Sometimes these junk fees are only a few bucks so we brush them off, but the CFPB's Shearer says we shouldn't. "We're talking about big money. I think sometimes it's easy to look at junk fees and think that it's sort of playing small ball. But this is real money for real people that that affects people's pocketbooks," he said. If you have been hit with an unfair fee, the Consumer Financial Protection bureau wants to hear about it... and so does 7 On Your Side.

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

More customers say 'tap-to-pay' charged their credit card through bags, pockets

Many viewers have responded to a 7 On Your Side report about a woman whose credit card was charged without her knowing it. Turns out the "tap-to-pay" terminal at Safeway had reached inside her purse and charged her credit card by

mistake. It hit home for several viewers who said the same thing happened to them, in other places. "Tap-to-pay" card readers sent radio waves into a purse or pocket, and charged viewer's credit cards by mistake. These tap-to-pay systems are everywhere now, and millions of us are walking around with radio frequency chips in our pockets ready to be read. Several viewers told 7 On Your Side tap-enabled systems captured their credit card information at a variety of places -- a restaurant, a store, even a doctor's office. So is this going to happen more? "What else can be grabbed out of my wallet, you know?" said Edgar Mathews of San Francisco.

Mathews was trying to use his debit card to pay for groceries at Safeway -- but that never happened. "I hadn't tapped it, I hadn't inserted it, I hadn't swiped it... and then all of a sudden, out comes a receipt. And I said, 'How did this get paid for?'" said Mathews. The cashier couldn't explain it. "She stood there just literally sort of blank and I said somebody paid for this on a credit card somewhere... and I really thought the guy in front of me, that he had been charged," said Mathews. Mathews checked his bank accounts. Turns out, the "tap-to-pay" card reader at Safeway had ignored the debit card in his hand. Instead, it reached into Mathews's back pocket, through his wallet and charged his Bank of America credit card tucked inside!

"So that's a pretty big reach. I mean, around me or through me to my wallet. Why didn't it grab the card that was near it? How did it decide what to grab? I have no idea, they're not any better cards," said Mathews. "I was shocked. I was like, well it can't be, I haven't taken them out of my purse yet," said Mill Valley resident Sonya Cesari. Cesari says it happened at a doctor's office. "I went to pay and they said, 'OK, you're already paid.' I said, 'I haven't inserted my card! I haven't even taken it out of my wallet,'" said Cesari. Turns out the card reader there had sent radio waves into her purse and charged her credit card -- without her knowing it. And that wasn't all.

"Three days later at a boutique in Yountville," said Cesari. She got an even bigger surprise at a little shop. "The woman said, 'Oh my, it's just read three cards,'" said Cesari. The store's "tap-to-pay" system charged not only one, but three credit cards tucked in a wallet inside her purse. "I haven't taken them out of my purse yet. What are you talking about?" said Cesari. "I'd say I was two feet away at that point, for sure." All charges were reversed, but it was troubling. "It could be inadvertently happening everywhere multiple times a day," said Cesari. "It makes you very uncomfortable and frightened and insecure and unsafe." "Somebody is literally in your pocket which is very alarming," said Paul Cesari, Sonya Cesari's husband. "I was swiping through, looking for the tip at the end," said Ace Batacan of Portland, Ore. -- a former Bay Area resident who recently relocated. Batacan was about to pay for lunch at a restaurant.

"That's when I saw, 'Thank you for... thank you come again,'" said Batacan. A portable pay terminal charged his card before he could swipe or tap.

"It's kind of scary in a way that that can happen. That's better than Superman with X-ray vision," said Batacan. Batacan saw 7 On Your Side's story about Destiny M, whose card was charged at Safeway without her knowing it. "I go, oh, wait a minute... something like this happened to me too," said Batacan. "It was pretty interesting to have Mr. Finney's report right after that," said Paul Cesari. "Y'all did a little story on it. I said, 'Oh, my God, that happened to me,'" said Edgar Mathews. "The industry party line here is this is not supposed to be happening," said Ted Rossman of Bankrate.com. Rossman says, theoretically, this can't happen. "You know, you're not supposed to have a card charged by mistake, you're supposed to have to hold it very close to the reader," said Rossman.

Millions of credit cards now have the newer RFID technology that lets you pay by 'tapping.' A store's payment terminal will pick up the radio frequency in the card if it's tapped or at very short range -- four inches away at most. Technology exists to read radio frequencies at long range -- but supposedly not on credit cards. But it's no comfort for these folks. "I... left my wallet locked up in my car," said Mathews. "I am standing back, and I'm holding my purse down," said Sonya Cesari. So it seems some readers are reaching farther than intended. Still, many people say it can be hard to get the tap to read at all. Some folks are now buying metallic wallets that block RFID waves. If this has happened to you, contact 7 On Your Side at ABC7.com, then go to 7 On Your Side.

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Missing EDD money? Here's why you should transfer funds to your own bank account

The scams surrounding the Employment Development Department's unemployment benefits just don't seem to stop. This is Connie Lloyd and her husband Nicholas. He had received payments from EDD and since not all of the money was needed, he used his EDD account like a bank account and just left the money sitting there. Connie Lloyd explained their thinking. "It's just another bank, it should be fine. We never touched it. You could see, like on some of the transaction histories. The most we've spent on is like \$50," she said. But after a while, Nicholas spotted a problem. "I checked the 'my card' balance and it showed \$52, and there should have been over like five grand in there," he said.

Nicholas contacted the bank and received a letter that said in part: "We found that the transaction was made by someone you authorized." They would get no money back. While still dealing with Bank of America, the Lloyds reached out to 7 On Your Side. "Within three days they had called us and told us that yes, they were going to re-issue the balance," she said. When asked if they received the funds, she replied, "Yes, yes, thank God. Yeah, thank God, lifesaver." 7 On Your Side reached out to the bank and were told anyone may ask for a second review: "Consistent with our longstanding policy, if someone disagrees with our decision from our initial review they can ask for reconsideration and submit any additional

information available." The big lesson here is to move your money out of the EDD accounts and into a bank account as soon possible.

Saturday, May 6, 2023

Want to lower your credit card interest rate? All you have to do is ask, survey finds

We tend to get ticked off when hit with high credit card fees and charges, but don't do anything about them. Bad move, says Lending Tree's Matt Schulz. "People have more power over their credit card issuer than they realize, and oftentimes all they have to do is pick up the phone and ask for a break." Schulz says if your interest rate is too high, ask for a reduction. "Our recent survey found that about 3 out of 4 people who asked for a lower interest rate on their credit card in the past year got one; problem is too few people ever ask," he says.

Check out the statistics just found by Lending Tree:

- 76% asking for an interest rate reduction got one.
- 86% who asked for a higher credit limit got one, too.
- 93% who requested an annual fee waiver or reduction got a positive response.
- And 81% who asked for a late fee waiver got one.

So what's the holdup? Consumers don't know about this, or dread talking with their credit card company. 7 On Your Side asked how to go about getting a better deal. Schulz says start by looking at what other companies are offering. "So you can say, 'Hey, I've had this card for a long time, but my interest rate is 25%, and I've just seen this offer that I'm qualified for at 19%,'" Schulz says, "Can you match it?"

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

More than 1.4M Californians can still claim inflation relief funds. Here's how

You wouldn't think it would be hard to give away billions of dollars for free... but the state government ran into more than its share of obstacles when it sent out inflation relief payments to millions of Californians last fall. Now that the program is over, it turns out millions of dollars never were claimed. Many still have money coming. The saga of the Middle Class Tax Refund is still going on. The state sent out payments up to \$350 per person beginning last fall. Millions got their payments on a debit card from a New York bank -- but many thought it was junk mail; others didn't trust the bank, and then hackers began draining money off the cards. Now 7 On Your Side has learned thousands of Californians never got their money.

Many Californians were skeptical when they received a debit card in the mail -- a California Middle Class Tax Refund issued by a bank... in New York? "I honestly thought it was a scam," said Doris Beers of San Francisco. "I almost threw it out."

"What do I do with this card?" Al Ginsburg, also from San Francisco, asked. "It wants me to give six digits of my Social Security number. That's not safe." It was a gift from the state to ease inflation... but not without snags. An ATM swallowed one man's card before he could cash it. "It just sucked it up. It was gone," said Don Brendel of San Francisco. Worse, many found that scammers had drained the cards before they could use them. "You have zero balance," quoted San Rafael resident Tom Koerber. "Well, I said, I guess we've been hacked." "It wiped out my complete account, wiped it out," Elizabeth Weber of San Francisco said. "Apparently these fraudsters are able to drain these accounts without having the cards in their possession," Assemblymember Jim Patterson (R - Fresno) said.

Many found they could not reach the debit card company, Money Network, to solve their problems. "Complete waste of time. No matter which button you push, it says 'due to the volume of calls we cannot answer, goodbye,'" Elizabeth Weber said. And now that the program has ended, another hitch. Nearly one and a half million Californians just got a letter from the state, saying they never cashed in their inflation relief debit cards. "I was surprised because I never got the card," said Jennie Chien of San Francisco. "It said, you haven't activated your card yet. So I'm like, okay, I didn't get the card."

Shelley Graham of Alamo was baffled when she saw the notice. "So when we got the letter saying we hadn't activated that, I thought, okay, well, never got it." Data from the Franchise Tax Board show it mailed out 9.6 million debit cards, but 15% were never activated. That means roughly \$750 million dollars is left unclaimed by those who are entitled to it. The cards expire in 2026. After that the money goes back to the state. "So I called the number, went through the prompts," Graham said. But there's a problem: the letter says to call Money Network and claim your refund. But the old problem persists: folks can't get through. "Only to get a message saying, 'due to high call volume, we can't talk to you now.' And click," Graham said. "It says, your call is important to us. But due to the volume of the calls we're receiving, then, you know, we can't answer your call," Chien said. "I waited on hold for about 35, 40 minutes. I give up. You know, I just said forget it."

"If you are calling about a letter you have just received stating you have not activated your debit card, press one," the recording said with Chien on the line. Chien thought she was getting results. But the recording said: "This line is for relay operators only. If you are not a relay operator, hang up and call 1-800-240-0223." But that was the number she'd just called... the prompts led her in circles. "So I contacted 7 On Your Side," Graham said. "And I thought, somebody's got to have a way to do this. This is ridiculous." 7 On Your Side contacted the Franchise Tax Board, which is distributing the refunds. And Money Network changed the phone prompts, so Graham and Chien finally got through -- and received their debit cards. A little late, but still welcome. "It's nice to know that we have somebody like 7 On Your Side who's pulling for the people," Graham said. Money Network has now received more than 22 million phone calls since

last October to resolve all the problems with lost cards, stolen cards, fraud, and more. If you got a letter saying you never activated your card, and you don't have your card, here's how to claim your money: contact Money Network at 1-800-240-0223. Be sure to follow prompts for "lost card" (not customer service). If you do have a card, call the same number, follow prompts to activate it. We helped several viewers get through to claim their refund.

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

The 'look who died' scam is spreading on Facebook. Here's what to know

If you get a message on Facebook that says, "look who died" -- don't click that link or it'll be your own account that perishes. Online security experts are warning of a phishing scam making the rounds on Facebook that aims to steal your Facebook login credentials or install malware on your device. Its premise is simple, but undoubtedly intriguing: a friend sends you a private message that says, "look who died" along with a link to what looks like a news article. But when the victim clicks on it, it asks them to enter their username and password in what appears to be a Facebook login page. This is the trap.

As soon as the victim enters their information, it's sent straight to the scammer. The scammer takes over the victim's account, locking them out, and uses the account to send the same message to its friends list. Scammers love Facebook accounts because of all the personal data they can grab, from email addresses, phone numbers, birth dates, private messages, and of course its list of friends -- more potential victims. The stolen data can be used to break into non-Facebook accounts, or sold on the dark web.

As a general precaution, users should not click on any link that looks unusual or suspicious, even if it comes from someone they know. If you realize you've fallen for such a phishing scam, cybersecurity service DataProt suggests that you change your password immediately to avoid being locked out of the account, and that you check your security settings to log out of any devices or locations you don't recognize. Once that is done, report the message to Facebook. Then, make sure that no unfamiliar email addresses have been added to your account, and for good measure, change your email password too. (Users should never re-use their passwords across different accounts, but if you're a password recycler, now's the time to change them!) Finally, turn on two-factor authentication for your account, and scan your computer or phone with anti-virus software for good measure.

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Student loan payments are set to restart in the fall. Here's what you need to know

President Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness plan hit another road bump on Wednesday as House Republicans passed a resolution to nullify loan

forgiveness and reverse the most recent extension of the pause on payments. This action joins multiple lawsuits heard by the Supreme Court in February; the court is expected to rule in late June or early July. President Biden's plan will forgive up to \$20,000 in federal student loan debt. Right now, borrowers are allowed to skip payments, the interest rate has been set to zero, and collections are paused on defaulted loans. But that could soon change. Experts are saying that borrowers should prepare to start making payments again in early fall. The ninth and most recent payment pause extension, issued in November, says that the pause will continue until the Department of Education is either allowed to move forward with forgiveness, or the litigation is resolved.

If the Supreme Court rules on the program before June 30, those with remaining balances will have to start repaying loans 60 days later. If the court has not made their decision by June 30, the payment pause will end 60 days from June 30 - the end of August. Borrowers are advised to start preparing now for payments to resume. Leslie Tayne is a financial attorney with the Tayne Law Group. She recommends borrowers first get an understanding of their overall finances. "If you don't know what comes in and goes out of your household on a regular basis, it's going to be very challenging to figure out what it is that you can afford," she says. Borrowers can contact their student loan servicers to learn their repayment plan options. There are income-driven repayment plans, which sets your payment based on income and family size. There is also the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program for those working in public service fields.

"Each one of these programs has different requirements. And you must be aware of what those requirements are. Because if you don't meet the requirements and follow the guidelines for those requirements, you could be pulled out of that program," Tayne says. Even if borrowers have up to \$20,000 forgiven, if they have a remaining balance, they will have to start payments again. For those borrowers, now's the time to reduce the amount they owe. "So while there are programs in place right now, there's no requirement under this act for anybody to repay their federal student loan, you can repay your federal student loans and reduce the balances. Therefore, when the interest does kick back in, you'll have interest on a lower principal balance," Tayne says. Borrowers should log into their loan accounts to make sure that all their contact information is correct, in order for their servicer to get in touch when payments begin again. And a reminder - these forgiveness programs apply to federal student loans, not private loans.

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Allstate also halting home insurance policies in California due to wildfire risk

ABC7 reported how State Farm Insurance stopped selling new homeowner policies in California on Saturday -- now a second major carrier, Allstate Insurance, confirmed today it ended new home policies in the state last year. On

top of that, sources tell 7 On Your Side a third carrier, Farmers Insurance, is limiting policies for new customers. The exodus comes as wildfire season looms ahead. It's hard not to worry. But all three companies say they are still serving existing customers, and there are more than 100 other insurance companies still issuing new homeowner policies. However, after relentless wildfires of the past several years, homeowners in those hot spots will have an even tougher time getting coverage.

The threat of wildfires has grown every year, ripping through forests, scarring hillsides and destroying whole communities. And amid the devastation, thousands of homeowners in disaster zones lost their coverage over the years. Then last week, State Farm Insurance, California's largest carrier, stopped issuing all new homeowner policies in the state -- at least temporarily. The company cited a growing threat of natural disasters, as well as rising construction costs and inflation. And Allstate Insurance, the fourth largest carrier in California, just confirmed it stopped issuing new homeowner policies last year. Allstate also blamed wildfires and higher costs, saying, "The cost to insure new home customers in California is far higher than the price they would pay for policies."

Now, sources tell 7 On Your Side, Farmers Insurance is limiting new homeowner insurance in California. But the company said, "Our primary focus is to continue serving the needs of our customers... we remain actively engaged with the California Department of Insurance and others interested in improving the availability of property insurance in the state." Consumer advocate Amy Bach of United Policyholders says more than 100 carriers still offer new homeowner policies -- though they are growing more wary about risks in California. "State Farm's announcement is definitely not helpful news, but we have to keep it in perspective. I'm encouraging consumers to, to stay calm," said Bach. "Ever since the fires, I talk to insurance executives, they're all worried about wildfires in the west... They don't take blind risks anymore because they can buy data and they can see the pine needles in your gutter."

Harvey Rosenfield of Consumer Watchdog was skeptical about State Farm's motives for ending new home policies. "Insurance companies can't just decide to stop selling insurance to new customers," he said. "They're trying to pressure the insurance commissioner to approve a \$721 million additional increase in people's homeowners' insurance premiums that State Farm requested a few weeks ago," Rosenfield said. State Farm says: "We take seriously our responsibility to manage risk..." and, "It's necessary to take these actions now to improve the company's financial strength." The company indicated it will be monitoring California's efforts to mitigate fire losses with an eye toward returning to the market.

"It's already been hard for people to shop for insurance in these wildland-urban interface areas," said Bach. Bach expects thousands more homeowners in fire-prone areas will have to resort to buying insurance through the state's FAIR

program -- it's very expensive and provides only bare-bones coverage. Already just under 300,000 Californians have resorted to buying the state's FAIR insurance. If you have trouble buying a new homeowner policy, let 7 On Your Side know about it. There are resources to help you navigate the options -- and find those still offering new policies.

Thursday, June 1

Amazon Fresh auto-adds tip for delivery people, customers cry foul

Tipping is part of our lives, but now the rules are changing. Oakland's Hugh MacDonald speaks for a lot of us: "I've been tipping all my life, and I'm for it. But not when they force it." MacDonald contacted 7 On Your Side because of the tips he was unknowingly giving to Amazon Fresh delivery people. "When I order grocery items from them, they automatically put a tip in and they force us, the client -- the customer, to either cancel a tip, or it just goes without us being aware of it to a certain degree," he said. "I think that's wrong." Here's how Amazon Fresh ordering works. You go online, select the items you want delivered. Then just like on Amazon, a list of items and charges mount up... but on Amazon Fresh there is place at the bottom of that list to include a tip.

While adding items to your shopping list the tip line remains empty, but once you get ready to purchase, a tip is automatically added. Here, it was \$5. That is what MacDonald didn't notice and doesn't like. "Amazon is automatically adding the tip without us, as a customer, saying, 'I want to tip,'" he said. When MacDonald complained directly to Amazon, his tip money was refunded via a gift card. All the rules make it sound complicated, but he can actually use the online credit very easily. Amazon told 7 On Your Side: "We've worked directly with the customer to explain our checkout process options, which gives customers the opportunity to add, edit, or remove driver tips similar to other food and grocery delivery services." That is a much more liberal policy than many food delivery services, but MacDonald just doesn't like the way it feels. So you can change the tip amount or delete it altogether before checkout... and if the delivery does not go well, you have 24 hours to reduce or do away with the tip.

Education

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

SF students deal with cooler temps outside, a broken boiler inside as part of aging infrastructure

The San Francisco School District has its share of old buildings with occasional problems. On Monday, at least one high school experienced a broken boiler which made for an uncomfortable learning environment. ABC7 news senior education reporter Lyanne Melendez looks at the \$1.7 billion infrastructure problem. We know it's been an unseasonably cold spring. Students at John

O'Connell High School in San Francisco dressed in layers to deal with the colder temperatures outside and a broken boiler inside. "The bigger classrooms were really cold. The heaters weren't working well, some of the windows couldn't close well," explained Andres Flores, a student at O'Connell. "I had to wear multiple sweaters and like even it was impossible to concentrate in class because everyone was shivering, some students even brought their blankets," said Dulce Samayoa a senior at the school.

Ironically, students call the school "Home of the Boilermakers." "We definitely want to make sure that students and staff are comfortable in classrooms and office spaces in schools. We know if someone is cold, it makes it much more difficult to learn and to teach," expressed SFUSD spokesperson, Laura Dudnick. Typically, the maintenance department responds as quickly as possible, but because they are short-staffed, it could take days. But this is part of a bigger issue involving an aging infrastructure. According to the district there are a number of boilers that have outlived their lifespan.

A year ago, the Facilities Department went from school to school to do a thorough evaluation and found that there's a lot of work ahead of them. "1.7 Billion dollars was the amount that was found in the assessment and so there are various upgrades that school buildings need. We know schools have playground, heating, electrical, they have plumbing," added Dudnick. This ten-year facilities master plan will be presented to the board on April 25. Once adopted, the school district will ask voters to approve a bond measure to fund these projects.

Saturday, April 8, 2023 7:55PM

From Oakland to Hawaii: Middle school students on a life-changing adventure

A group of middle-school students from Oakland are on an adventure in Hawaii giving them a whole new perspective on what's possible. Twelve middle-schooler's Oakland Unified School District were chosen to take part in "Travel Academy" a partnership between Alaska Airlines and STATE Bags, a company supporting children and families through every purchase of their bags. "I was shocked because I never knew I'd be able to go somewhere farther than I'd never been before in my life because I've never been out of state," said 8th grade student, Marcus Wheeler. He and the others experiencing a lot of firsts over the past week; learning the history and culture of Hawaii and the importance of sustainability and ocean conservation.

"It's very beautiful," said Marcus. "We've been going to a lot of places with trees and all that and the Hawaiian people like to pray there and do crops." "Kids from these communities are often met with so many barriers and challenges that it's hard for them to think to themselves, 'I can still do it. I can still beat the odds stacked against me'," said Scot Tatelman, Co-Founder STATE Bags, noting the week's itinerary is purposefully packed with risk taking outings, like ziplining.

"This was actually my second time ziplining, but this one was higher and farther, so the last one I was a little scared, and we took some photos and my face was like "pop" so, yeah I was scared," said Marcus. "Snorkeling was a big thing for a couple of kids that don't swim in the open ocean. There was some panic in the air for a few of them," said Tatelman, who spent time with some of the students on kickboards, including Marcus. "I kind of got emotional because he was so proud of himself. He was shocked that he was doing this - and then I got him to put the mask on and look down and look at the reef and look at the fish and he couldn't believe where he was."

"I was kind of scared that I was going to drown when I went inside the water. I thought I'm going to drown right now," said seventh grade student, Anaya Sarfraz, who also overcame her fear. I saw all the fishes that I have never seen and we saw a school of fishes. They were all in a circle and it looked really beautiful." And beyond the fish she worked through some other fears, making new friends. "The first day I was really quiet and I really didn't know who to talk to and get along with people but now I get along with everyone and it's really fun," said Anaya, who is eager to take the lessons learned and friends she made in Hawaii back home to Oakland. "I'm going to be having more friends in the school and tell other people that you should try to become friends with others you don't know," she said.

Monday, April 17, 2023

No plans to build new SF art school, despite voters approving it in 2016; here's what happened

The San Francisco School Board will consider adding a bond measure on the November ballot for capitol improvements worth \$1.7 billion. The plan does not include any monies for the construction of the new Ruth Asawa School of the Arts, which had been promised to voters in 2016. The Ruth Asawa School of the Arts is located in an isolated area of San Francisco. Many have argued that it should be in the heart of the arts community, in close proximity to opera, the ballet, the Davies Symphony Hall, and the San Francisco Jazz Center. "If you can walk across the street and watch a dress rehearsal or have a master class, you're going to come away with experiences that you will never, never forget, expressed Andi Fong, an arts advocate who in 2016 like thousands of San Franciscans voted to fund a new location for the Ruth Asawa School and an arts center to serve all public school students at 135 Van Ness Avenue.

It was a \$744 million bond of which \$100 million would go toward the construction of the school and the center. Except that the money got diverted to other projects. "I won't say that I feel cheated, but I will say I feel disheartened. I think they deserve better," added Fong. With the money for the Ruth Asawa School, the district was supposed to find matching fund from private donors, but failed to do so, despite having the support of huge artists like Michael Tilson Thomas, the Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony. Few voters today

realize that what they voted on in 2016 never got built. When the money got diverted, the Director of the California Education Partners was quoted as saying,

"We have schools that have immediate needs that absolutely have to be addressed. This in no way closes the door on future bond programs raising money for the School of the Arts." Except that, again, most voters fail to now that the school board will soon be presented with a \$1.7 billion Facilities Master Plan to improve structural conditions at their existing schools without any of the money going to build the new Ruth Asawa School and arts center as promised in 2016. "That is a tremendous oversight. How can you say this is a Master Plan for SFUSD facilities and leave out one project which the district has been committed for decades?," asked former school board member, Jill Wynns.

Here's what the superintendent told ABC7 news during an interview shortly after taking office less than a year ago. "Not only do I want to support that school, we want to make sure that we are providing art in all of our schools for our kids because it's a path to success and a path to develop critical thinking that we have in our high school rifles. It's definitely a priority to support our art programs," promised Superintendent Dr. Matt Wayne.

Tuesday, April 25, 2023 8:41PM

Oakland teachers union votes to authorize strike

OAKLAND, Calif. (KGO) -- Oakland Unified School District teachers voted in favor of a strike, the union representing them announced Tuesday afternoon. Out of the members who participated, 88% voted "yes" to authorize a strike. This does not mean teachers are going on strike right away, but it does give the union authority to call one. The Oakland Unified School District says if there is a strike, it expects the earliest it could take place is next Monday, May 1. The district has gone to a state board to try to stop the strike -- it contends testing for AP courses will be taking place at the time. May 25 is the last day of school for the district.

Teachers in the Oakland Unified School District are set to vote on whether to authorize a strike after their union says it has been in negotiations with the district for about six months. After about six months of contract negotiations, there's still no deal. Within the six months of contract negotiations, the school board has approved a package of budget reductions for next school year - which are essentially designed to make room for teacher pay raises. But representatives of the Union say increases in state funding should be enough to fairly compensate teachers.

Monday's vote comes almost a month after an unauthorized March 24th "Wildcat Strike," which brought out OUSD teachers to three different sites. That walkout had not been authorized by the Oakland Education Association, but Monday's vote will establish whether a union-backed strike will happen. In the March 24th

strike, educators from at least 14 Oakland Unified middle and high schools took part. Interim president of the OEA board Ismael Armendariz delivered a message, posted to the union's Facebook page, addressing OUSD on Friday.

"They cancel session and have given unserious proposals," Armendariz said. "Unfortunately this behavior is continuing and we can't trust ousd to come with serious proposals to setting a contract." He's urging OUSD teachers to vote yes, to allow him to authorize a strike. Armendariz went on to explain OEA members deserve a livable wage and students deserve the services they need to be successful. He claimed OUSD has not come to the table to bargain special education and alleged the district has brought no proposals around teachers' safety, further emphasizing claims of bad-faith bargaining by the district.

Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Oakland teachers to strike if no deal reached with school district by Thursday

The Oakland teachers union announced on Monday they will go on a strike if no deal is reached with the school district by Thursday, May 4. "We've done everything we can to avert this strike. The district has truly failed our students and the time for us to act is now," said Ismael Armendariz, of the Oakland Education Association. Teachers have been working without a contract since October. May 1 commemorates the struggles of the labor movement. On Monday, both the teachers union and the Oakland School District continued negotiating to avoid a strike with only 25 days before the end of the school year. The signs are stacked at union headquarters and a strike kit has been given to representatives at each school.

Oakland Unified parents and former parents are weighing in. "They're going to school if they do strike, my kids are going to school. We crossed last time, we'll cross this time," insisted Reginald Mosley who has three kids in Oakland public schools. Both Anthony Landry and his children attended Oakland public schools. He says he understands teachers here when they say they are underpaid. "I wanna work, I want to deal with the kids and I do want to help them out - how can I do this if I can't pay my bills at the same time. I'm not getting enough for me to do what I need to do," added Landry. Oakland teachers are among the lowest paid in Alameda County with salaries ranging from 52,000 to 99,000

The union is asking for a 23% pay raise across the board. But the district has offered a 22% increase for the most tenured teachers and staff, calling it "structured salary increases." That would put them at the higher end of the pay scale in the region. But it also means that new instructors, counselors and early childhood education teachers, among others, would receive a lower pay raise. A proposal that some OUSD parents find unacceptable. "We stand with our teachers, we support our teachers, and it hurts us to see this happen to our teachers," said one parent. It's not fair, it's not equitable, it's not just that these

students continue to miss critical classroom instruction time," said parent, Annie Gottbehuet. Gottbehuet is one of those parents. She says while she's supported teacher strikes in the past, she thinks the current proposals put forward by the district are fair. "The learning loss will continue into next year if we do not have a fair contract if such a high percentage of teachers keep leaving our district," said union representative, Olivia Udovic.

Mosley says he wants his kids in school because they are still struggling with the learning loss brought on by the pandemic. "If you have a salary dispute, dispute that on the side but do your contract," he added. A year ago during this time, teachers had a one-day walk out to protest the closure and merger of some schools. While they threatened to strike, they did not. The last time, teachers went on strike over pay raises was 2019. The walk out lasted seven days. Gottbehuet tells ABC7 News that after the strikes of 2019 and the COVID closures of the last several years, Oakland kids can't afford to lose any more valuable classroom time. "Coming down to the last four weeks of school, again, there are so many kids that are so many kids that are going to be impacted one way or another on this," she said.

Monday, May 15, 2023

Oakland teachers' union reaches deal with OUSD in contract negotiations; students to return

Oakland Education Association says a tentative agreement has been reached with Oakland Unified School District concerning the teachers' strike, which has now been called off. "Our collective power forced OUSD to commit to living wages for educators, more resources in our schools, enforceable working conditions and common good issues for our students & their families," OEA said in a tweet early Monday morning. Union members spent hours reviewing the final draft of the contract and made the announcement around 3 a.m. OEA is declaring victory with regard to their Common Good goals, saying the tentative agreement includes assistance for unhoused students, shared governance and resources for black thriving community schools.

"Today we reached an agreement to raise our our compensation by 15% including a historic collapse of our salary structure," OEA President Ismael Armendariz said. "We added teacher librarians, more counselors and more mental health services to our schools and to our students." The tentative agreement still has to be voted on by OEA members. With the common good proposal already agreed upon in over the weekend, the district says their historic compensation package for union employees over the next three years will cost around \$70 million. District leaders say it comes with a 10% raise for all union employees retroactive to Nov. 1 of last year and a one-time \$5,000 bonus, but it also comes with investments for students, like more teacher librarians, counselors, nurses and visual and performing arts teachers.

"Mental health isn't an add-on, it's an absolute necessity, given what we're seeing students bringing into the classroom and it's way too much for educators on their own to handle," Kyla Johnson-Trammell, Superintendent of the Oakland Unified School District said. But Johnson-Trammell says, to pay for it all, the board may have to have some tough conversations further down the road about things such as revisiting the school consolidation plan. "We all know at the end of the day, the math needs to make sense right," she said. "So those are going to have to be some hard conversations in terms of what options that the board is going to have to make some tough decisions about." OUSD Board Member Sam Davis says he hopes the changes to the salary schedule will help with teacher retention.

"That was making teachers leave Oakland, because they wanted to go to another district where they could get to that top salary faster so we shortened that and added extra amounts to the salary schedule so that way we could incentivize teachers to stay in Oakland, which is where we want them to be," Davis said. RELATED: How similar is the Oakland teachers strike to others in Chicago and Los Angeles? Although schools were open on Monday, it was an optional planning day for teachers, and students will be welcomed back for their first full day of instruction since the strike starting on Tuesday. But some parents like Reginald Mosley, who crossed the picket line to drop his kids off at school all seven days of the strike says, the strike could have been avoided on the heels of the pandemic. "It's very frustrating, one day is too many," Mosley said. And now, with just eight days left in the school year, he's worried about even more learning loss. "They have lost their momentum, and they lost their drive, that's very important, so you have kids going in a certain direction and then all of the sudden just stopped for seven days?" he said. "They don't have the drive to keep going or pick up and keep going."

Monday, May 15, 2023

ABC7 Salutes 6 outstanding San Francisco high school seniors graduating in 2023

The 2023 Superintendent's 21st Century Awards Scholarship Program grants six graduating seniors in San Francisco who have excelled academically and have been leaders at their school and in their communities. Each winner received a \$6,000 scholarship. They were honored at an event sponsored by SFUSD on May 3. Here's a look at their work:

Imani Clifton - Washington High School. Imani wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) and took the initiative to fundraise so that other Black students at her school could tour several HBCUs. She was able to raise \$18,000. She will now attend Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina to study Health Care management to make sure that people in her community have access to the care they need.

Gilberto Silva Cortes - Mission High School. While he was born in the U.S., his family moved back to Mexico when he was only 5 years. His dream to return to San Francisco and go to college in America became a reality when he turned 17. He came back alone, living with an aunt and an uncle. He found a sense of family and community at Mission High School. He worked hard, being the first student to arrive at school at 7 am. He was recently accepted into Stanford.

Colten Hitchcock - Ruth Asawa School of the Arts. Creative writing, songwriting, digital illustration, podcasting and acting are just a few of the things that Colten Hitchcock is involved in at school. He cares about others, co-leading the Niche Film Club at RASOTA and directing freshman in theater performances. Colten has been accepted to Emerson College in Boston.

Banyar Htut - SF International High School. Described by his instructional coach as "incredibly diligent and self-driven," Banyar came to the U.S. with his family from Myanmar without knowing any English. He was the only Burmese speaker in his school. He persisted and thrived and decided to help others like him. As a senior, he is now a leader of the school's Peace Club, which brings cultures together to talk about their differences and learn how to reach common understandings. Banyar will major in computer science at Uc Santa Cruz and is proud to call himself a "Banana Slug."

Amy Li - Galileo Academy of Science and Technology. Studying healthcare and giving back to her community have always been important to Amy Li. She took the initiative to address the rising dangers of screen addiction in teens by filming a PSA video for a local hospital. Amy wants to be a traveling nurse and learn about the different cultures around the world.

Joshua Mayorga - Lincoln High School. Described by his art teacher as "the most remarkable student I have worked with in my teaching career," Joshua Mayorga is an artist and a voice for those with autism. He is passionate about challenging the world around him to think and see things differently.

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

Oakland students 'reclaim' sidewalk outside their school through chalk art

Art, beauty, poetry, community - it all flowed onto the streets of Oakland outside the Fox Theater Tuesday as students took over the sidewalks to fight back against loss of safety outside their own school. You could call it art activism - hundreds of students from Oakland School for the Arts armed themselves with chalk to express their feelings of being trapped inside their urban school in downtown Oakland. "Recently, the conditions have shifted as we've all seen. I now have a security guard accompany every PE class. What they witness on the streets daily is not something I want young people to see and be exposed to. If people know it's a school zone, crime is less likely to happen in the immediate area," Mike Oz, the executive director of Oakland School for Arts said. Student

artist Sonia Suarez said, "I feel more safe instead of getting hassled. You don't have to look over your shoulder today? Yeah, yeah, yeah." Instead of chalking up their safety, these students used chalk to create a new uplifting energy. "Messages of joy, messages of hope, messages of safety needs of our students," Oz said. "And just show Oakland what it looks like when we're all out here and bringing life to the streets."

The artist who spearheaded this effort was gratified. "Reclaiming the streets - that's exactly what it is. And identifying there's a school here," Michele Pred said. Student body president William Truong said, "If this space is now ours, then that safety could be significantly increased for the students." Part of the plan is to fundraise and create a safe zone on this one-acre parcel across the street from OSA to build basketball courts, a soccer field and a performance amphitheater for the students to use by day and for the community to use by night. The goal is to create a bubble of security and positivity around this school in the heart of downtown Oakland. The drawings are a start. "I kinda just drew this flower because I thought it was pretty. It could represent new blossoming in OSA. Yeah," Suarez said.

Monday, June 5

2 CA bills aim to make teaching social media literacy mandatory for K-12 students

Two California assembly bills would make teaching media literacy in the classroom mandatory. Assemblyman Marc Berman from Menlo Park wants to make teaching media literacy mandatory in California schools. Texas, New Jersey, and Delaware already do. The idea is for students to know what stories are fake on social media. A 2020 survey conducted by Common Sense Media found many can't tell the difference. There are complaints that schools have been dealing with the effects of fake news, cyberbullying and hate speech through social media. Last March, the San Mateo Office of Education filed a lawsuit in federal court against media platforms like YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok, to try to force them to address and reverse the harm done to students. Another assembly bill, sponsored by Jesse Gabriel would also survey schools on how they teach media literacy, if at all. His bill always seeks input from teachers, tech experts and researchers. Berman's bill which is AB 873 passed in the assembly, now it's before the Senate Education Committee. The goal is to teach social media literacy in schools beginning in 2025.

Thursday, June 8

This 14-year-old Bay Area teen is about to graduate from college, work for SpaceX

Bay Area native Kairan Quazi is an exceptional 14-year-old - next week he will become the youngest graduate in the history of Santa Clara University.

On June 17, Quazi will be graduating with a degree in computer science and engineering from SCU. He can't drive or see an R-rated movie, but Quazi landed his first job as a software engineer for SpaceX which he'll be starting next month. Quazi was born in Pleasanton. His parents say he was speaking in full sentences at two years old. "During third grade, it became very obvious to my teachers, my parents, and my pediatrician that mainstream education wasn't the right path for my accelerated learning ability," Quazi said. Not only was his IQ seen as profoundly gifted, so was his emotional intelligence. Quazi started at Las Positas Community College when he was nine years old and transferred to SCU when he was 11.

If you ask him - he'll say he's had a fairly normal college experience. "There wasn't anything to compare it to say oh this is different. But I really enjoyed it - I made a lot of close friends. I think after a few days the novelty of me being there wore off," Quazi said. At one point at Las Positas, Quazi was a stem tutor and became one of the most requested tutors on the staff. Higher education was fulfilling to the young mastermind. "I went from being a third grade mutineer to really feeling validated intellectually," Quazi said. By the time he transferred to SCU, he had already started working with Intel Labs as the only undergraduate intern on his team.

Quazi is grateful leaders gave him opportunities to see beyond his age. "I think there is a conventional mindset that I'm missing out on childhood, but I don't think that's true. I think again that mindset would have me graduating middle school now and I don't think it makes sense for someone that's able to take rigorous graduate electives work in a prestigious co-op - I am joining SpaceX as a software engineer. I don't think it makes sense I would be trapped or that anyone whose abilities are beyond that to be trapped," Quazi said. On Tuesday, Santa Clara City Council congratulated Quazi for his past achievements and his future ones. "In addition to you and your family who have given you all the space to grow like that, I would also like to compliment institutions like SpaceX and Intel that took basically exceptional out-of-the-box steps to make sure this thing happened," City Councilmember Raj Chahal said.

Quazi currently lives in an apartment with his mom in Santa Clara. They will be moving to Washington state in July as he joins SpaceX's Starlink team. ABC7 asked Quazi who has been his biggest supporter. "My journey wouldn't have been possible if not for influential people and positions of power - again looking beyond my age but I would say my mom. She's been my rock through this entire journey and I know it's been very difficult on her as well. Again, now she's uprooting her life to move me to Washington. I'm eternally grateful for her," Quazi said. On Saturday, June 17, 1,598 undergraduates will be receiving their degrees from SCU. This is SCU's 172 graduation ceremony.

Friday, June 16

Bay Area-developed AI chatbot tutor 'Khanmigo' aims to transform student learning

To make up for learning loss after the pandemic, educators across the country are looking for new ways to develop students and help them grow. South Bay educational programs Khan Academy and Khan Labs have developed a new AI chatbot tutor to accelerate learning in a whole new way. Khan Academy Founder Sal Khan helped develop "Khanmigo" to be an extension of a teacher, offering personalized and immediate educational help for any student. The AI chatbot has knowledge on a variety of subjects, like history, math and science in many languages and on different grade levels. After a student chooses a topic, Khanmigo will then quiz students on the given subject matter or answer any questions about that topic. They can even have conversations with characters like Ben Franklin or Winnie the Pooh to learn in different ways.

The goal is to guide the student towards learning, never giving up an answer or doing work for them. Khan believes that artificial intelligence can be the next evolution of learning. "We've always been thinking about how do we make education more personalized?" Khan said. "How do we arm teachers with more information to make their lives easier as well? How do we make students more engaged in their learning? And I think artificial intelligence and Khanmigo has just accelerated that. Some of what I just described that we're already doing at places like Khan Lab School, I would've thought were science-fiction a year ago, and I wouldn't have thought it would've happened in my lifetime. And that's literally happening in real classrooms already and, it's going to be happening for tens, if not, hundreds of thousands of students this coming school year."

Health

Thursday, April 27, 2023

Santa Clara County to assess health of Latino residents in new comprehensive study

South Bay organizations that help bridge health barriers Latinos face, are excited about a new health study the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved. By 2050, the Latino community will be the largest ethnic group in Santa Clara County. The pandemic only amplified health inequities. Now, the county is moving forward with a new health study of the Latino and Hispanic communities. CEO of Gardner Family Health Network, Reymundo Espinoza says he's hopeful to create a unified strategy. "Hope it doesn't just stop at the assessment part because that's always been the challenge right," Espinoza said.

In 2021, Gardner Health Services partnered with the county to bring the first walk-up vaccination site in Santa Clara County. They currently serve more than

46,000 patients within their network of health clinics - 70% are Latinos. "I mean 90% of our patients are at a 150% of poverty - that's a family of four making \$45,000 a year. So when you're in that situation, you have to make choices between healthcare, transportation and housing," Espinoza said. Espinoza said requests for diabetes care and mental health services have skyrocketed. "Pre-COVID, we were running around 85% and then when the pandemic hit, it went up to 100," Espinoza said. He said their job is to eliminate the financial barriers and try to make them less challenging.

The nonprofit organization Latinas Contra Cancer was receiving clients before the pandemic who lost their housing or their employment because of a cancer diagnosis. Darcie Green, the executive director, said the pandemic only added an extra layer to the problem. She's excited for this health assessment. "As a county, it's not okay for us to expect that someone would become unhoused or unable to feed themselves because of a cancer diagnosis. Maybe an outcome of this needs assessment for our community can be looking into taking a deeper dive into what are people challenged with and what are they facing when just trying to prioritize their health," Green said. She said it takes courageous policy making to make change. "I believe the way we do this is together," Green said.

The Public Health Department says this new health study will be gathering data in different phases. Angelica Diaz is the Health Communities Branch Director for the Santa Clara County Public Health Department. "I think we have the greatest impact towards achieving health equity when we ask the right questions ask of the right people. And part of the process will be to identify and address different health conditions or health outcomes. Part of that will be prioritizing the solutions or specific actions we can take as a county to improve the health outcomes. That may be increasing resources and investment where it's most needed," Diaz said. The report will be due by spring of next year with suggestions on policy changes.

Friday, April 28, 2023

San Mateo senior care facility fined, at risk of losing license after poisoning deaths

Two Bay Area care homes in which three elderly residents died last summer from poisoning recently had investigations carried out by the state's Department of Social Services (DSS), but so far only one facility is in danger of losing its license as a result. Residents at Atria Park in San Mateo and Atria Walnut Creek died last summer after they ingested caustic cleaning solutions. Three people at the San Mateo facility on Aug. 27, 2022, drank dishwasher liquid, which was in a beverage pitcher left on a kitchen counter, according to an investigative report by DSS dated April 14. Two of them died and one was injured. DSS in March filed a legal action to revoke the facility's license and the case is pending.

Jason Montiel, a spokesperson for DSS, said that the pending revocation may be appealed and may result in a revocation, probation, or it may be dismissed by a

judge. The facility may remain open during this process, which remains ongoing, he said. A spokesperson for Atria Senior Living said Thursday that they disagree with the DSS decision about the San Mateo facility and have filed a notice of contest to appeal it. "During this process, Atria Park of San Mateo will remain open, and our employees continue to be focused on providing a safe and welcoming environment for all our residents," the spokesperson said. DSS said that the dishwasher soap had normally come to the San Mateo facility in 1-gallon containers, but that "weeks prior" to the poisonings, management had been ordering 5-gallon containers. Employees would pour the liquid into a beverage pitcher to then pour into the dishwashing machine, which holds 1 gallon.

The state found that an employee left the full beverage pitcher on the kitchen counter next to the sink, noting that no staff member had labeled it as cleaner. A staff member subsequently picked up the pitcher and poured its contents into three glasses, thinking it was juice. The glasses were served to three residents, referred to as "R1, R2, and R3" in the official report. "Upon being served, R1's lips began to swell and was black and red in color," reads the report. "R2 yelled after drinking out of the juice cup and then sat down." Once staff determined it was soap and not juice, they called 911. Resident "1" died due to severe chemical burns after ingesting highly alkaline fluid. R2 was admitted to the hospital with "acute respiratory distress requiring intubation" and later died. R3 survived, but had burns to their lips, mouth and tongue. "This incident has been a tragedy," said Atria Senior Living. "It is in no way indicative of the quality care our staff provide each and every day. We remain deeply saddened by the deaths of our residents, and our hearts are with their families and loved ones."

The San Mateo County District Attorney's Office charged Atria Park employee Alisia Rivera Mendoza, 35, in April with two counts of involuntary manslaughter and three counts of elder abuse. She is due to be arraigned on May 12. Meanwhile, at Atria Walnut Creek, a resident drank cleaning solution on Aug. 23, 2022, and later died. Constantine Albert Canoun, 94, lived in the memory care unit of the facility and was rushed to the hospital after ingesting an all-purpose cleaning solution. He died on Aug. 31 after suffering injuries to his stomach, esophagus and part of his throat, authorities said. Canoun had dementia, and DSS noted that, as such, a staff member should have been in his presence at all times. Somehow, Canoun had died of injuries consistent with drinking a caustic liquid cleaning agent, the report said. Cleaning supplies were stored in the facility's kitchen on the shelf underneath the kitchen counter, the state said. A DSS investigation into his death dated April 18 on the department's website found that Canoun had wandered into the facility's dining room before midnight and was found sitting in a chair with a staff member's lunch in front of him, steak strips and Flamin' Hot Cheetos. The kitchen door had been left unlocked. According to the report, "R1," or Canoun, vomited and coughed up food, telling the staff member that he had been poisoned.

"Based on observation, interviews, and records review by the Department, it was determined that R1 was not adequately supervised, resulting in R1 being injured and expiring due to ingestion of a caustic cleaning agent," reads the report. The Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office filed charges in January against an employee at the Walnut Creek facility. Lateshia Sherise Starling, 54, of San Pablo, is facing one count of felony elder abuse resulting in the death of Canoun. However, DSS has not yet made a move to pull the license from the Walnut Creek facility, as the department has done in San Mateo. The family of a woman who died in the San Mateo facility, 93-year-old Trudy Maxwell, filed suit last September outlining allegations of "stunning and inexcusable neglect and abuse" over a period of time that culminated in her death on Aug. 29. Lawyers for Maxwell's family said in their claim that Canoun's hospitalization for drinking cleaning solution should have raised a "red flag" at Atria's other facilities before it happened again in San Mateo. Atria said last September that the "incidents at our San Mateo and Walnut Creek communities are isolated and unrelated." On Thursday, Atria said, "As always, we are focused on the safety, health, and well-being of all our residents."

Friday, May 5, 2023

More than 500,000 COVID test kits recalled because of bacteria contamination, FDA says

COVID-19 tests are supposed to let you know if you may be sick. But some could actually make you sick. A manufacturer is recalling more than half a million test kits that were distributed to CVS and Amazon because they may be contaminated with strains of bacteria that can cause illness, according to the FDA. The contaminated kits may also produce false test results. The federal agency has not received any reports of anyone actually developing illness from the kits. Still, the FDA is warning consumers to stop using and throw out any test kits that are subject to the recall. The liquid solution should not be poured down the drain. The kits are labeled SD Biosensor, Inc. Pilot COVID-19 At-Home Tests and are distributed by Roche Diagnostics. Lot numbers of the test kits and more information can be found from the FDA recall notice [here](#).

About 500,000 kits were distributed to CVS and about 16,000 to Amazon. The kits were not among those distributed for free by the federal government. The liquid in the test kits may be contaminated with certain strains of bacteria. During the normal testing procedure, consumers are not supposed to ingest or come into contact with the liquid in the test vial. But accidental exposure is possible, the agency notes. "Infection from bacteria such as Enterococcus, Enterobacter, Klebsiella and Serratia species may cause illness in people with weakened immune systems or those with direct exposure to the contaminated liquid solution through standard handling, accidental spills, or misuse of the product," the FDA says.

Friday, May 5, 2023

Are your veggies safe? Contra Costa Co. begins testing soil for harmful metals after exposure

A toxicologist hired by Contra Costa County began collecting soil samples Thursday to be tested for contaminants related to last year's accidental release of "spent catalyst" from the Martinez Refining Company. TRC, a Concord-based environmental consulting firm, is collecting samples from 14 locations in the central and western parts of the county to see if they contain elevated levels of certain harmful metals, including aluminum, barium, chromium, nickel, vanadium and zinc. The samples are coming from areas in and around Martinez, including the Alhambra Valley and Franklin Canyon areas, as well as El Sobrante, Hercules and, in Solano County, Benicia -- all of which were exposed to a 20- to 24-ton plume of spent catalyst dust during the Thanksgiving holiday.

"The samples will be collected and sent to a lab where they will be analyzed for metals that could have been associated with the release of spent catalyst and have potential to pose health effects," Nicole Heath, director of Hazardous Materials Programs for Contra Costa Health Services, said during a media briefing Thursday. Despite the fact that the noxious plume was released almost six months ago, a TRC official said that shouldn't hamper the collection and analysis process, which captures the top six inches of soil for testing. "We do believe that we're still characterizing and capturing conditions that occurred during that November deposition event," said Laura Trozzolo, who leads TRC's Risk Assessment Practice. If the tests reveal potentially toxic levels of contaminants in the soil, TRC could go back and collect samples from additional locations, Trozzolo said. The testing is part of the county's independent investigation into the spent catalyst release, which is being led by the Martinez Refining Company Oversight Committee.

At the end of the investigation, the committee will decide what steps the refinery should take to make sure nothing similar happens again. County officials have criticized the company for failing to inform them of the release, which led to a delay in understanding its size and severity. Health officials said they learned about the release two days after it happened through social media accounts, after which the county formed the MRC Oversight Committee and referred the case to the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office, which is conducting its own investigation. Deputy Health Director Matt Kaufmann said the county will seek reimbursement for the entire process. "The County Health Department will be invoicing the refinery for all costs associated with not only the community risk assessment, but also the incident investigation that's going to take place under the oversight committee," Kaufmann said. Also, the county's Hazardous Materials Department has been doing a safety inspection at the refinery since February, which should be wrapping up this week.

In the meantime, people are still being advised to not eat fruit and vegetables grown in soil that was potentially contaminated by the release until the test results come back, which could take about a month. This was only the third time a dust cloud of spent catalyst was released from the refinery, with the other two times happening in the early 2000s, when it was owned by Shell, Heath said. MRC has set up a claims line for individuals who think they have been impacted by the release: (800) 542-7113.

Tuesday, May 9

Women should start screening for breast cancer at age 40 instead of 50, new draft guidance says

The US Preventive Services Task Force is proposing that all women at average risk of breast cancer start screening at age 40 to reduce their risk of dying from the disease, according to a new draft recommendation statement. It's an update to the 2016 recommendation, in which the task force recommended that biennial mammograms, which are x-rays of the breasts, start at age 50 and that the decision for women to screen in their 40s "should be an individual one." Some groups, such as the American Cancer Society, already have been recommending for women to start mammograms in their 40s. "Our new task force recommendation is recommending that women start screening with mammography for breast cancer at age 40 and screen every other year until age 74," said USPSTF Vice Chair Dr. Wanda Nicholson, a senior associate dean and professor at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health.

The USPSTF, a group of independent medical experts whose recommendations help guide doctors' decisions and influence insurance plans, released the proposed update to its breast cancer screening guidance Tuesday. The recommendation is not final but will be available on the task force website for public comment through June 5, along with a draft evidence review and draft modeling report. The draft recommendation is for all people assigned female at birth, including cisgender women, trans men and nonbinary people, who are at average risk for breast cancer. Nicholson said that women with dense breasts and those with a family history of cancer generally fall into this category but not women who have a personal history of breast cancer or a family history of genetic mutations, like mutations on the BRCA gene, as they are considered to be at high risk.

The updates would not apply to those at an increased risk of breast cancer, who may already have been encouraged to screen at 40 or earlier. They should continue to follow the screening practices that their doctors have recommended. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women in the United States, and rates of death are highest among Black women. 'Screening alone is not enough' The update to the recommendation "will save more lives among all women," Nicholson said. "And this is particularly important for Black women, who

are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer." The draft recommendation comes a few weeks after a study in the journal JAMA Network Open found that the rate of breast cancer deaths among women in their 40s was 27 per 100,000 person-years for Black women, compared with 15 deaths per 100,000 in White women and 11 deaths per 100,000 in American Indian, Alaska Native, Hispanic and Asian or Pacific Islander women. The researchers suggested that Black women start screening at younger ages, around 42 instead of 50.

The USPSTF members are calling for more research into these racial inequities in breast cancer, Nicholson said, and for all women who get abnormal mammogram results to receive equitable follow-up evaluations, additional testing, biopsies and treatment when needed. "Screening alone is not enough. Once someone screens with an abnormal mammogram, the subsequent steps in care must occur -- timely follow-up, biopsies that are indicated -- and Black women must have access to equitable treatment," she said. "We're calling for more research to look across the health systems as to why these inequities occur," she said, adding that the draft recommendation also calls for more research into whether women with dense breasts should get additional screening and among "women who are 75 years of age and older, whether and how to screen that population."

To review and update breast cancer screening guidance, the task force members analyzed data from thousands of study abstracts and hundreds of research papers on screening programs, cancer cases and deaths in the United States. They found that screening with mammograms every other year provided a moderate benefit to women ages 40 to 74, as the benefits, such as detecting cancer early, outweigh potential harms, such as the risk of a false positive that could lead to unnecessary tests and emotional stress. The evidence is "insufficient" to determine the risks and benefits for screening in women 75 and older, the group determined. The task force also noticed that the rate of breast cancer diagnoses has been rising each year among women at younger ages. Population-based data "showed that the rate of breast cancer diagnoses was increasing at 2% annually since 2015. So more women than ever before are being diagnosed in their 40s," Nicholson said. An estimated 12.9% of women born in the United States today will develop breast cancer at some time during their lives, according to the National Cancer Institute.

"Within our recommendation, we're calling for more research to have a better understanding of the causes and mechanisms that may be contributing to breast cancer development in all women, and in particular among Black women," she said. "We know that Black women continue to have more aggressive tumors." A paper published in October in the journal Nature suggests that the incidence of various cancers diagnosed in adults 50 and younger has been rising in many parts of the world since the 1990s. "The rising incidence of early-onset cancers is probably partially attributable to increasing uptake of screening and early

detection before the age of 50 years, to variable degrees across certain cancer types, especially breast, prostate and thyroid cancers," the researchers wrote. "However, increasing incidence of early-onset cancers in several organs, such as colorectal and pancreatic cancers, which might not be fully explained by screening is also apparent," the researchers wrote. "This trend could reflect increased risk factor exposures in early life and/or young adulthood."

To screen biennially or annually? The draft recommendation appears to be catching up with what other organizations have been recommending for some time. It aligns more closely -- but not entirely -- with American Cancer Society recommendations that women ages 40 to 44 have the option to screen with a mammogram every year, women 45 to 55 get mammograms every year, and women 55 and older can switch to a schedule of mammograms every other year. "There are some similarities and some differences. So, now, the new task force recommendations has changed from screening at age 50 to age 40. And our recommendations currently are that women should begin to have the opportunity to begin annual screening if they choose beginning at age 40. The big difference there is, we recommend annual screening at that age, while the task force recommends biennial screening," said Dr. William Dahut, chief scientific officer of the American Cancer Society, who was not involved in the USPSTF draft recommendation.

"But the big thing is, I think, a lot of women were being screened probably starting in their 40s, and so this is consistent, I think, with how most women and practitioners have been looking at screening," he said. Both the USPSTF and the American Cancer Society recommendations are for women at average risk. Dahut said that women should talk to their doctors about whether they might have a higher risk for breast cancer and what screening practices would be best for them, including factors like a family history of ovarian or breast cancer or dense breasts, which have less fatty tissue and more connective tissue and have been associated with a higher risk of breast cancer. "The change in guidelines by the USPSTF to endorse screening mammograms for average risk women 40 and over is warranted, incorporates more modern and 'real world' data into the science informing the guidelines and will hopefully prompt payers to provide better coverage for women seeking breast cancer screening," Dr. Laura Dominici, a breast cancer surgeon at Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer Center, said in an emailed statement. She was not involved in the USPSTF draft recommendation.

Thursday, May 11, 2023

A skin patch to treat peanut allergies? Study in toddlers shows promise

An experimental skin patch is showing promise to treat toddlers who are highly allergic to peanuts - training their bodies to handle an accidental bite. Peanut allergy is one of the most common and dangerous food allergies. Parents of allergic tots are constantly on guard against exposures that can turn birthday

parties and play dates into emergency room visits. There is no cure. The only treatment is for children 4 and older who can consume a special peanut powder to protect against a severe reaction. The patch, named Viaskin, aims to deliver that kind of treatment through the skin instead. In a major test with youngsters ages 1 to 3, it helped those who couldn't tolerate even a small fraction of a peanut to eventually safely eat a few, researchers reported Wednesday. If additional testing pans out, "this would fill a huge unmet need," said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt, an allergist at Children's Hospital Colorado who helped lead the study.

About 2% of U.S. children are allergic to peanuts, some so severely that even a tiny amount can cause a life-threatening reaction. Their immune system overreacts to peanut-containing foods, triggering an inflammatory cascade that causes hives, wheezing or worse. Some youngsters outgrow the allergy but most must avoid peanuts for life and carry rescue medicine to stave off a severe reaction if they accidentally ingest some. In 2020, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first treatment to induce tolerance to peanuts -- an "oral immunotherapy" named Palforzia that children ages 4 to 17 consume daily to keep up the protection. Aimmune Therapeutics' Palforzia also is being tested in toddlers. France's DBV Technologies is pursuing skin-based immunotherapy as an alternative way to desensitize the body to allergens. The Viaskin patch is coated with a small amount of peanut protein that is absorbed into the skin. A daily patch is worn between the shoulder blades, where toddlers can't pull it off. In the new study, 362 toddlers with peanut allergy first were tested to see how high a dose of peanut protein they could tolerate. Then they were randomly assigned to use the Viaskin patch or a lookalike dummy patch every day. After a year of treatment, they were tested again and about two-thirds of the toddlers who used the real patch could safely ingest more peanuts, the equivalent of three to four, researchers concluded.

That compares to about a third of youngsters given the dummy patches. Greenhawt said they likely include children who are outgrowing the allergy. As for safety, four Viaskin recipients experienced an allergic reaction called anaphylaxis that was deemed related to the patch. Three were treated with epinephrine to calm the reaction, and one dropped out of the study. Some youngsters also accidentally ate peanut-containing foods during the study, and researchers said allergic reactions were less frequent among the Viaskin users than those wearing the dummy patches. The most common side effect was skin irritation at the patch site. The findings were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The results "are very good news for toddlers and their families as the next step toward a future with more treatments for food allergies," Dr. Alkis Togias of the National Institutes of Health, which wasn't involved with the study, wrote in an accompanying editorial. Togias cautioned that it's too early to compare oral and skin treatments, but pointed to data suggesting each might have different pros and cons - raising the possibility that oral therapy might be stronger but also cause more side effects. DBV Technologies has struggled for

several years to bring the peanut patch to market. Last month the company announced the FDA wants some additional safety data for toddlers, and a separate study already is tracking longer treatment. A study of 4- to 7-year-olds also is underway.

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

CA Assembly approves bill to ban key ingredients in Skittles, other foods and candy

The California state Assembly has approved a bill that would ban certain ingredients found in popular candies such as Skittles and Nerds, as well as other processed foods. Assembly Bill 418, proposed by Rep. Jesse Gabriel from Woodland Hills, now moves on to the state Senate for consideration. While the European Union has already banned the five chemicals listed in the bill, California would become the first U.S. state to take that step. The bill would ban processed foods with the chemicals red dye no. 3, titanium dioxide, potassium bromate, brominated vegetable oil and propyl paraben. "Today's strong vote is a major step forward in our effort to protect children and families in California from dangerous and toxic chemicals in our food supply," Gabriel said. "It's unacceptable that the U.S. is so far behind the rest of the world when it comes to banning these dangerous additives."

Studies have linked those chemicals health dangers that include an increased risk of cancer, behavioral issues in children, harm to the reproductive system and damage to the immune system. The chemicals are often put in processed foods to make them last longer, taste better and look more enticing. Gabriel says many food and drink manufacturers have already stopped using those chemicals, including Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Gatorade. If passed, the bill would force manufacturers to modify the ingredients in their products sold in California.

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

SF nonprofit says HIV/AIDS services will be cut at end of month without funding

It could be the end of the road for one San Francisco nonprofit that provides HIV/AIDS services. AGUILAS says after government funding stops at the end of this month, they'll no longer be able to provide help for those in need. "We gave notice to the staff saying that unless things change, that June 30 will be the last date," said Eduardo Morales. AGUILAS has served San Francisco since the 1990s, providing HIV/AIDS services for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. "We're the only agency in San Francisco that does all of our services in Spanish, English and Portuguese. So essentially what it means is the Portuguese speakers will be knocked out of services for HIV prevention throughout the entire city," said Morales. Morales is AGUILAS' executive director.

He says while they'll still be able to provide other services, their organization, and the people they serve, will take a hit. Morales worries that many patients will simply fall out of system and not get the critical care they need. "About 40% of the people we do serve are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and the others are at high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS," Morales said. AGUILAS isn't alone either. On Monday afternoon, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation hosted a rally outside of city hall.

There they called on elected leaders to fund a variety of HIV-related programs. "This is a life or death issue. We can't wait any longer for funding and resources to protect our most vulnerable members of our community," said Ande Stone of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. The San Francisco Department of Public Health says this year, they are maintaining their grant funding for HIV programs. Morales, though, argues that with the cost of treating someone who contracts HIV/AIDS running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, that often it's better to treat problems before they arise. "If you start accumulating that, well then you say penny wise, dollar foolish," Morales said.

Tuesday, June 13

After son's suicide, Bay Area man turned grief into action by connecting teens with vital resources

After his son died by suicide, Elliot Kallen made it his mission to connect young people and their families to critical mental health resources. He launched A Brighter Day, a charity that teed up for its 7th Annual Charity Golf Tournament at Crow Canyon Country Club on Monday morning. Money raised will go toward providing resources for teen mental health and teen suicide prevention. It's an effort close to Kallen's heart after his son Jake, a sophomore at the University of Montana, died by suicide. "In his note to us, he wrote, 'Mom and Dad, I've been thinking about this for a long time. I never would've told you how I felt. I never would've asked for your help... and I never would've taken your help,'" Kallen recalled. "So we knew, on the plane ride home, with his body under the plane on Southwest Air, we had to make a difference. We had to do something." Kallen is the founder and president of A Brighter Day Charity, turning his hurt into help and his pain into promise. "When we started the charity seven years ago, we helped in the first four years, about 2,000 people with our resources," he described. Mostly teens, according to Kallen. Now, he said the charity is helping 5,000 to 10,000 families a month.

No doubt, demand has only grown. The U.S. Surgeon General recently called for more research to be done to determine the extent of mental health impacts on young people who use social media. Kallen said such platforms leave teens susceptible to social pressure and opinions from peers. "It's horrible what's going on - much of it is caused by social media," he said. "By the TikToks and the Facebooks and the phones of the world. As much as you would like to be able to get a book report done in five minutes from your telephone, there's far more

negative than there is positive on this." However, he's hoping events like the charity's signature golf tournament will drive awareness and action. It's an effort he understands carries great weight, especially with how many people are impacted.

"It's your second cousin, it's your grandfather, it's your father, it's your brother," Kallen described. "Hopefully not your child. But everybody has some type of depression or suicide experience now with their family. That didn't exist, certainly when I grew up." He continued, "If it did exist, nobody knew about it. But now we know about it and at least we're talking about it."

Thursday, June 15

Patients with HIV in US saw rise of rare, deadly bacterial illness last year: CDC

Patients with HIV in the United States saw an increase in rare, deadly meningococcal infections last year, new preliminary data shows. Nearly 10% of all meningococcal disease cases in 2022 were among people with HIV, according to a report published Thursday afternoon by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is much higher than the previous five years, from 2017 to 2021, during which patients with HIV made up between 1.5% and 4.3% of annual meningococcal disease cases in the U.S., the report said.

Meningococcal disease is a rare illness caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. The bacteria are spread by coming into contact with an infected person's saliva or spit, such as through coughing or kissing. Sometimes the bacteria also spread through prolonged general contact with an infected person. The illness can often turn severe and lead to meningitis, which is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord.

Symptoms included headache, fever, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting and -- if the disease gets into the bloodstream -- a dark purple rash. Between 10% and 15% of all people who fall ill end up dying of the disease even with antibiotic treatment, the CDC said. Recently, an outbreak of the meningococcal disease in Florida primarily infected men who identify as gay, bisexual or men who have sex with men and resulted in at least 24 confirmed cases and seven deaths, according to the CDC. The federal health agency recommends that people at risk for meningococcal disease -- including patients with HIV -- receive a two-dose series of the MenACWY vaccine, which protects against four types of the bacteria that lead to severe illness. However, vaccination rates among patients with HIV are low. The report cited a recent study of data from January 2016 to March 2018 that found only 16.3% of those with HIV received one or more doses of the vaccine within two years of being diagnosed.

Of the cases among patients with HIV in 2022, 75% were not vaccinated with the MenACWY vaccine, 20% had unknown vaccination history and the remaining 5% had received a vaccine but the number of doses was unknown. The CDC

stressed the importance of primary care doctors and health care providers making sure any patients with HIV in their care are up to date on the meningococcal vaccine. "MenACWY vaccine coverage among persons with HIV is low; given the recent increase in meningococcal disease cases in this population, health care providers should ensure that all persons with HIV are up to date with MenACWY vaccination," the authors wrote. "Health care providers should also maintain a high index of suspicion for meningococcal disease among persons with HIV who have symptoms of meningococcal disease."

Climate & Environment

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Pilot project aims to divert excess water runoff potentially caused by massive Sierra snowpack

For most of California's history, a record snowpack in the Sierra has been like money in the bank -- filling reservoirs and keeping rivers healthy and flowing year-round. But in this era of climate change, there's a real concern that some of that precious water could slip through our fingers. "If we get a very warm rain, or a series of warm rains -- if we get an extended period of warm weather, that's going to trigger the snowmelt and the flooding potential for the river," said Central Valley rancher Don Cameron. Cameron runs the Terra Nova Ranch near Fresno. He's building a pilot project that could help reshape the way California manages and stores its Sierra runoff. It involves diverting excess water from the nearby Kings River through a network of canals to deliberately swamp his own fields. "And so when the water comes, we will, as it is right now, we're filling up the canals. And we're pumping the water onto the fields, the open fields, and we're allowing the water to percolate down to the aquifer to start rebuilding the aquifer," he said.

The technique is called groundwater recharge, and it's quickly expanding in different forms across the state. Recently Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority protected a large flood plain in Coyote Valley from development, in part, to help replenish the aquifer. While surrounding agencies like Valley Water operate sophisticated recharge systems that return treated wastewater into the ground. But with the prospect of a faster snow melt, there's a growing focus on using groundwater recharge as a kind of second reservoir system to capture and store as much runoff as possible. Karla Nemeth directs the California Department of Water Resources and says it's part of a complicated puzzle, to adapt the State's massive water system to climate change. "How we build conveyance to make sure we can move water, where it needs to go, is going to be critical to meeting this extreme weather, this kind of weather whiplash, so we can capture it and store it, when we know the dry periods are going to return. And then groundwater is also crucial," says Nemeth.

Last year ABC7 News profiled a futuristic survey program supported by the state. Researchers use spaceship like antennae to ping the ground with electromagnetic pulses. The goal, to uncover hidden pathways, that could carry seasonal runoff deep into the aquifer. "So the work that we've been doing to essentially like take an MRI of the Earth, we basically measure down about 1000 feet, and we measure the resistance and we can profile the soil types," Nemeth said. "So when that snowmelt comes, we'll have mapping in place." Recent studies have also suggested that flooding areas with the right kind of porous soil can capture water without harming crops. Back at the Terra Nova Ranch, Cameron believes the technique could also be critical for restoring over-pumped aquifers. Especially in areas of the Central Valley that are so dry, the ground is literally sinking. "We've been the example throughout the state on how to do it, and how you can flood some of the growing crops without damaging them and get this water stored in areas that have been over pumped, over-drafted over the years," he adds.

Governor Newsom has now issued an executive order that could help fast track the process. Potentially expanding California's water system in a new and resilient way. Tapping into an invisible network of natural underground reservoirs, to store water in a climate driven age, split between drought and downpours. And the potential is vast. Some experts estimate that our groundwater basins can store at least three times as much water than our above ground reservoirs combined.

Wednesday, April 12, 2023

These are challenges the Bay Area faces in eliminating 'forever chemicals' in water, experts say

Scientist Rebecca Sutton, Ph.D. and her colleagues at the San Francisco Estuary Institute have spent more than a decade tracking chemicals known as PFAS, which have been linked to a variety of environmental problems. "So they can harm a lot of different organ systems in the body. They can harm the kidneys, the liver, our blood, our reproductive and immune function. So, there's a lot of different things that can go wrong in the human body when we're exposed to PFAS," Sutton said. PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," are now in the crosshairs since the Environmental Protection Agency proposed tight new standards to protect the nation's drinking water. But Sutton says the situation here in Bay Area is different than some other parts of the country, where the pollution is still driven by heavy manufacturing.

Teams from the Estuary Institutes have used techniques like sampling storm runoff into San Francisco Bay to learn more. The goal is to identify which chemicals are present in our environment and where they're coming from. "And we look at PFAS in the water in the sediment, and in all kinds of Bay wildlife. And we're concerned there to see the levels and the build-up in the bay,"

she says. And here in the Bay Area common sources typically range from personal products and cleaning agents, to clothing, carpeting and more. And once they're washed into the Bay, the chemicals can potentially enter the marine food chain, according to Andria Ventura with the environmental group Clean Water Action.

"And the more predatory, the bigger or the older the species, the more of these contaminants they can collect up that food chain, because they're eating the next guy down and the next guy down and the next guy down and collecting everybody's contamination. And we've seen this with things like mercury. We expect this with PFAS chemicals," Ventura said. Researchers say they're also working to better understand how PFAS pollutants may be entering drains and wastewater systems and at what volumes. But they believe the most efficient way to control the chemicals is with manufacturers.

"We have a lot of great studies on wastewater and stormwater as pathways for PFAS and other contaminants. But wastewater and stormwater agencies aren't responsible for the presence of these contaminants, and they can't just treat them away. So we really need to address products and manufacturing, Sutton believes. It is a campaign that may accelerate as the EPA develops new tighter standards to safeguard America's drinking water and eventually, the broader environment.

Thursday, April 20, 2023

Bay Area Dutch Slough tidal restoration project creates powerful carbon sink, combats climate change

When we first visited Dutch Slough in eastern Contra Costa County last year, the recently restored tidal marsh was already flourishing. But hiding among the reeds was a critical question. How effective would the marsh be at sequestering carbon? A key benefit of restoring wetlands in the age of climate change. "For doing the inhaling and exhaling, and we're trying to inhale more carbon dioxide and then exhaling oxygen that we need," explains University of California biometeorology professor Dennis Baldocchi, Ph.D. Prof. Baldocchi's team placed sensitive instruments in the slough to measure greenhouse gases and other data in multiple ways. He says the results after more than a year of monitoring show that the tidal marsh is acting as a powerful carbon sink, drawing CO₂ into the ground where it should remain sequestered, instead of contributing to climate change.

"I'd say we're probably in the one percentile, upper one percentile of the ecosystems in the world that have the largest amounts of carbon dioxide taken up over a year," says Baldocchi. And to compare that benefit, Karen Thorne, Ph.D., and her team from the United States Geological Survey helped take additional measurements. Discovering that while the surrounding farmland is still emitting greenhouse gasses, the new tidal marsh is sequestering CO₂ at an

even faster rate. "Our early results are telling us that the Dutch Slough restoration is really pulling in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere 10 times faster than the pasture lands," says Thorne. While Dutch Slough is clearly a success story, it didn't happen overnight. And the work that went into it, could hold lessons for other restoration projects up and down the state. First, the California Department of Water Resources' plans included excavating the channels and leveling the soil. After that, teams pre-planted some 25,000 Tule plugs along with thousands of trees and shrubs. And finally, after the plants were established, crews broke the surrounding levee, creating the marsh.

"And then the benefits once you have the plants are going to be really big, and they're going to come really quickly," says Letitia Grenier, Ph.D., of the San Francisco Estuary Institute.

Grenier has created detailed guides for tidal marsh restoration. She says a key question has been whether the added restoration work is worth the time and effort, compared to less expensive strategies that allow the tidal marshes to form over time. "So once those plants start growing, if you've got the right elevation, you should have a lot of functionality within a year. And then over the years as that wetland matures, and maybe you get more different plant species and a little more diversity coming in, you should get better and better returns, more and more carbon sequestered," explains Grenier. And with pressures now ranging from climate change to flooding, to sea level rise, the value of tidal marshes could be critical to California moving forward.

Monday, May 1, 2023

Researchers find Great Pacific garbage patch teeming with life

Scientists say a new study is now revealing that one of the largest patches of pollution on the planet is also teeming with life. And they're trying to learn what it means for the ocean, and possibly the West Coast. Marine Ecologist Chela Zabin, Ph.D., has always considered the humble Frogfish a remarkable sea creature. But not for the reason that has her examining a specimen now lying on her table at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Tiburon, California. Instead of its normal habitat, this one was plucked from a man-made environmental disaster zone. A massive stretch in the Pacific Ocean known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

"And the thing that's really interesting about the garbage patch, is it's essentially recreated a coastline, a floating coastline that has that three-dimensional structure that a lot of these coastal species depend on," Dr. Zabin said. "And it's sort of become a substitute environment for them." A substitute environment made up of an estimated 80,000 tons of plastic, fishing nets and trash floating in the Pacific. Mary Crowley directs Ocean Voyages Institute, which organizes the clean-up missions, which have now expanded into an unexpected program of scientific research, and collecting specimens. "We've discovered a tremendous amount on the expeditions we've done in terms of the composition of things that

are out in the gyre," Crowley said. "I mean, it's amazing, the diversity of items. And then, you know, if you look closer, you can see things that are growing out there"

Growing, and in some cases thriving. Back at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, Dr. Zabin is helping to identify specimens from what are believed to be at least 46 different species. Everything from tiny crustaceans to larger fish. And floating along with them are several critical questions. If those mounds of plastic can support life, could they also spread quickly into the marine food chain? Or perhaps carry invasive species from one continent to another. "So we have a lot of interesting ecological questions about that," Dr. Zabin said. "And then there's also some really significant potential environmental impacts, the plastics issue, obviously. But the idea that if these coastal species that are only found on one side of the Pacific Ocean, and are able to live out their lives and reproduce and perhaps grow in number, almost floating Garbage Patch, they may get close enough to the other side of the Pacific to our coast, that they can then move into the reef areas into the kelp forests and other places along our coast."

She says many of those key questions are still left to be answered. Researchers say some of the species found in the patch are native to the coast of Japan. And they believe they may have been pulled far into the ocean during the massive Tohoku Tsunami in 2011, in a kind of a marine Big Bang theory. In the meantime, Crowley says her organization is hoping to add a new vessel in the near future, joining a fleet that now has a dual mission: to help understand the ecological effects of a massive floating garbage patch while at the same time working to clean it up. The study was published in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution* by author Linsey Haram, Ph.D., then with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Tiburon, biologist Jim Carlton, Ph.D., of Williams College/Mystic Seaport Museum, Nikolai Maximenko, Ph.D., of the University of Hawaii, and Gregory Ruiz, Ph.D., of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center.

Thursday, May 11, 2023

Mercury spill in Martinez spreads concern among residents as cleanup efforts continue

Concern among residents is growing in Martinez as hazmat crews continue to clean up a mercury spill. The mercury was first discovered near a garbage can outside of the town's Amtrak station Monday. Then on Tuesday, health officials said they found traces of mercury on several roads surrounding the train station after a truck picked up the leaking trash can. And on Wednesday, more traces were found along another road leading up to Rankin Park. "Maybe I need to get rid of the shoes, have them tested? What do I do?" said Abel Vanegas. Contra Costa Public Health has stressed that the mercury levels found outside are an extremely low risk to people's health. They also say that while small levels of mercury were found on the road, the sidewalks in the area are safe to walk on.

Their main worry was those who might have stepped in the initial puddle near the Amtrak station Monday and then tracked it into their homes. Once inside, high levels of mercury can create more serious risks. "I do have concern about Martinez and our health, and what is being done to protect us from horrible contamination," said resident Stephanie Telfer.

Telfer runs a local kids camp in town and says several people she works with have worries. "I actually had some parents call me and were concerned that our road would be closed to camp," she said. "And they were also really concerned about contamination." The streets of downtown Martinez were quiet Wednesday night as some residents told ABC7 News they're avoiding the area until the mercury is cleaned up. Karissa Gerhke says since she moved to town a couple of years ago, her family has experienced two health hazards. First the Martinez refinery's unexpected release of ash into the air last Thanksgiving, and now the mercury. "Now I'm worried that we can't walk our child through near the Amtrak to go to the park," Gerhke said. As of Wednesday night, police are still investigating where the mercury came from.

Friday, May 12, 2023

Scientists hope warning system along NorCal coast will protect whales from ship strikes

If whales could shout out their own warnings to passing ships, it might sound a bit like what's currently being captured by an alert system being deployed to protect them. Now, that sophisticated system is a key part of a voluntary vessel speed reduction request, designed to prevent deadly collisions along a newly expanded stretch of our coastline. "It used to be just in Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries, but now it (also) includes...all of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and that's almost 1,000 square miles had been added to the to the speed reduction zone," said Michael Carver, operations coordinator with NOAA and the Greater Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. He says the effort to protect passing whales from ship strikes involves a combination of both looking and listening. Last year, ABC7 showed you a new system of acoustic buoys developed by the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory, and deployed with the help of the Marine Mammal Center and other Bay Area partners. It uses artificial intelligence and underwater eavesdropping to alert ships and researchers to the presence of whales.

"So we have real-time acoustic listening devices on those," Carver said. "And what those are doing is sort of what I like to say giving us like a Twitter, real-time feed of information of what's going on out there."

But he points to the human eyes, also trained on what's going on out there. The research vessel Bell M. Shimada recently glided through the Golden Gate, carrying a team of NOAA researchers. The ongoing marine surveys will help establish the populations migrating off our shore, as well as the ecosystem

supporting them. "So they're going to collect a ton of data and spend months analyzing," Carver said. "For example, they deploy nets and tow for krill. And so they'll go through and grad students will count each and every single sample and figure out what's in there." Still, accurately predicting the path of migrating whales is a complicated task. Callie Leiphardt is a project scientist at the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory at U.C. Santa Barbara. Their team also has the acoustic alert system deployed around the marine sanctuary at the Channel Islands, more than 300 miles south of the Golden Gate.

"We all have the same common goal to help protect and keep track of these whales and so information, to share it through the government channels, the whale watching companies are really good about posting what they've been seeing and kind of keeping track of it because they're out looking for these whales every single day, too," Leiphardt said. "So I think there's a really good open communication network along whale researchers and naturalist in California." They point out the voluntary speed reduction is only effective when ships comply. Carver says the program has made significant progress since its launch. "In 2015, we saw cooperation around 20 to 25%. And now we're in the low 60s," Carver said. "And for those vessels that we've engaged with, our Blue Whales Blue Skies Program, we're approaching nearly 80% cooperation. So we've really seen a large uptick." The program is building enough momentum that there is currently a bill working its way through the state assembly to expand the vessel speed reduction program in the national marine sanctuaries to the broader coast of California.

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Electric ferries on the San Francisco Bay? Here's the P-12 shuttle

At first glance, it blended in with the hundreds of other boats docked in Sausalito. But the moment we hit the water, we realized part of what makes the electric boat we rode around on Tuesday so different. It was quiet, fast and emission-free. "It basically is a boat that flies above the waves," Veronica Cargay, a project manager for Candela Marine Tech, told ABC7 News. "Our boat basically uses 80% less energy than a traditional speedboat would, and the mission really is to help accelerate the transition to fossil fuel free waterways." Candela is an electric boat company based in Stockholm, Sweden with an office in Sausalito. Although ABC7 News took a test drive on one of their electric boats, it was not actually what we had come to talk about.

What we did want to talk about? The company's efforts to build a fully electric ferry. "For us, the shuttle is an answer to that transition from the traditional big diesel passenger ferry to something that's electric" Cargay explained. The company's ferry is called the P-12 shuttle. Renderings show a futuristic-looking, 40 foot catamaran that they say will be able to hold up to 30 people. Cargay said the speed is a big part of the allure. It currently takes 30 minutes to go from Sausalito to San Francisco with Golden Gate Ferry. Cargay said with an electric

ferry it would take roughly half that time. "It allows the potential for more routes," she said. "If you have a smaller boat, it can get to more areas and it can really allow for the waterways to become a bigger way to commute to and from anywhere in the Bay."

The push towards electric ferries is already underway. The Water Emergency Transportation Authority -- the agency that provides San Francisco Bay ferry service -- was recently awarded a nearly \$14 million grant from the state to help electrify Bay Area ferry terminals. Cargay said the city of Stockholm has plans to do a beta-test with their ferry later this year. After that, they hope to be in the Bay Area. "There's a lot of opportunities here to transition over to something that's electric and over to something that can get you where you're going quicker, can you get you where you're going in a smoother and more silent way," she said. "And so, for us, it made a lot of sense to be based here and to be based in communities that take water and sustainability seriously in a lot of ways."

Friday, May 19, 2023

Academy of Sciences digitizing more than 1 million plant specimens

At the California Academy of Sciences, preserving samples of the world's plants and flowers is a painstaking business. But just like stuffing family photo albums, if you do it long enough, you're going to fill up a lot of shelf space. Just ask botany curator Sarah Jacobs, Ph.D. "You have to come in here and literally rifle through," Jacobs says as she opens one door in a seemingly never ending walkway of sliding file cabinets. Dr. Jacobs oversees more than two million specimens, filling hundreds of shelves and file folders and spanning centuries. Some collected by the likes of former curator Alice Eastwood, who's credited with saving them after the 1906 earthquake. "She started in the late 1800s, here at the academy, and worked all the way up to her 90s. So we're the sixth largest herbarium in North America and the largest herbarium west of the Rockies," Jacobs says.

And to make sure the botanical data survives for centuries to come, the academy is now launching an accelerated program to digitize the collection. First, they turned to a Dutch company, which brought in a high-speed, conveyor-belt driven camera system. With 10 times the speed of older hand-fed systems, it's imaging thousands of specimens a day. "A year from now. We're hoping to have about a million specimens imaged. And in about two years or so we're hoping to have those fully transcribed and geo referenced," she adds. But look closely at some of specimens and you'll see the kind of elegant handwriting that AI and digital systems can have trouble deciphering. Enter Rebecca Johnson, Ph.D., co-director of Community Science. She says the Academy is turning to the public for help. Later this summer, citizen scientists will be able to log onto an open database, and help transcribe the information into a digital format. "We will be taking the label data along with the beautiful picture of the press plant. And we'll be asking people to help us fill in things like the locality, like what does it say?"

Where does it say this was found? Can you read this better than the computer? And can you type it in? And then by, you know, I hopefully millions of people helping us with that task will be able to complete the digitization of those specimens." Johnson explains.

It's a high tech army that would likely have made devoted collectors like Alice Eastwood proud. And the academy team believes that making the historical data available in a digital format, could help researchers better understand the biodiversity in California and the West. And perhaps provide vital clues in the age of climate change. "I think we have an opportunity to begin to try to understand how things might change in the future. With a changing climate and in a changing environment. Having an idea of how plants might react, how speciation may or may not proceed in the face of those changes, can all give us some insight into sort of what to expect," Sarah Jacobs believes. A botanical roadmap, more than a century in the making. We'll be following the progress and will update you with a link as soon the labeling project is ready to go.

Monday, June 12, 2023

San Francisco Bay Area's only marine research center could lose funding, close

In the North Bay, a vital marine research facility is in danger of closing for good. The Estuary and Ocean Science Center operated by San Francisco State University, is the only one of its kind on the bay. With funding for the program in jeopardy, students and staff are getting creative about how to save it. It's a place where water from the bay is piped in on-demand for research and tanks of eel grass are studied to help buffer sea-level rise. "We take it out and plant it in the bay, we did about three acres of restoration last week," said Estuary and Ocean Science Center interim executive director, Katharyn Boyer. Welcome to a mile-long stretch of Marin bayfront, known as the Estuary and Ocean Science Center in Tiburon, a 53-acre campus run by San Francisco State University. For the past 45 years, it's where researchers and students have studied the changing waters of the bay and Pacific. "We study everything, most anything you can think of that affect estuary and ocean health - we're interested in water quality and the reintroduction of sea otters," said Boyer.

Jivan Khakee is a graduate student, studying reefs and invasive species and oysters. "It's important because we care about oysters, they're threatening San Francisco Bay," said Khakee. But the center and its 15-resident faculty are at risk of losing its operating funding from the university. The historic site, once a Navy facility from the 1940s, could close its doors for good. "We are really on a timeline, where we need to develop a school and operational plan, that means basically self-support sustainability," Boyer added. Boyer says she needs to come up with \$2 million per year to run the operation and keep the lights on, and that means getting creative about fundraising and repurposing historic buildings on site.

Part of the fundraising effort could be used to renovate Navy barracks into affordable housing for grad students, teachers and first responders who can't afford to live in Marin "I'm confident in her ability to find funding sources," said Khakee. Many are optimistic money can be raised. The alternative would mean lost research and some students not pursuing careers in ocean science. "Not having the facility would mean lack of training, lack of support for state and Federal agencies," said Boyer. Boyer and her colleagues are working on a financial proposal which they plan to show university officials this month. A final decision is expected this summer.

Monday, June 19

Pres. Biden to announce over \$600 million for climate projects during Bay Area visit

President Joe Biden will announce new funding to tackle the U.S. climate crisis during his visit to California. The president will be in the Bay Area for a series of campaign fundraisers on Monday. But he'll also mix in official business with a stop focusing on climate change in Palo Alto. The White House says President Biden will be highlighting both the urgency of taking bold climate action and strengthening America's resilience. "The President will tour a coastal wetland and announce more than \$600 million for climate adaption projects through his Investing in America agenda to better protect our nation's power grid from extreme weather events and prepare coastal and Great Lakes communities for climate change impacts like sea level rise, tidal flooding, and storm surge," according to a White House official.

The White House says funding is coming from both the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. "Through the President's historic Investing in America agenda, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will later this week launch a first-ever \$575 million Climate Resilience Regional Challenge to help coastal and Great Lakes communities, including Tribal communities in those regions, become more resilient to extreme weather and other impacts of the climate crisis... The Challenge is part of the \$2.6 billion in resilience funding for NOAA included in the Inflation Reduction Act, and is part of the President's Justice40 Initiative." In January, President Biden visited Capitola and surrounding towns in Santa Cruz County when it was hit hard by the winter storms. The president returns to the Bay Area to raise money for his 2024 reelection presidential campaign. On Saturday, he spoke at a Philadelphia rally supporting union workers officially kicking off his bid for reelection.

Economy & Changing Workplace

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

San Francisco officials introduce plan to convert vacant downtown offices into housing

With more workers and companies choosing to work from home, the future of Downtown San Francisco is still up in the air. But, San Francisco's mayor and other leaders are considering a proposal to reinvigorate the downtown area. San Francisco's Downtown is an economic hub for the Bay Area. Leaders say empty office spaces hurt the city. Mayor London Breed just introduced new legislation Tuesday to the Board of Supervisors. It could pave the way to convert downtown office buildings into housing. "Yes we need more housing. I'm not sure how to make it work," said Judith Hearst in San Francisco.

Many people agree, the City of San Francisco needs more affordable housing. Mayor London Breed and Supervisor Aaron Peskin believe one answer could be converting empty office buildings in downtown into housing. "I think it's a great idea. The buildings are empty anyway with tech moving out and a lot of vacant spaces. People need housing. You might as well utilize the space," said Laleth Gonzalez, an East Bay resident. On Tuesday, the mayor submitted legislation to the Board of Supervisors designed to change an old planning code to make it easier and less expensive to convert vacant commercial spaces into residential spaces. Supervisor Peskin worked with the mayor for the past month on this legislation. "I'm excited! San Francisco's Downtown may have challenges. There are also opportunities for remaining (vibrant) and this is one of them," said Supervisor Board President Aaron Peskin. "When you think of conversion, it'll be Class C buildings that will be looked at," said Robbie Silver, executive director of Downtown SF Partnership. "They're typically much older, smaller foot plates than like your Salesforce Tower."

And while there's still a lot of work to be done to decide which building would be converted and how much it could cost, the end game could be promising says Downtown SF Partnership. "You think amount of utility work alone that needs to go into converting this building. But with the right incentives from the city, the right incentives from the state, we could look at mini lower Manhattan level," said Silver. "It's an excellent idea," said Sarith Dillard-Selico. "Being a mom myself, I think it's a great idea because you occupy a building with families and they'll be happy they have someplace to stay. I don't think any family wants to be homeless," said Dillard-Selico. Economic experts say the office vacancy in San Francisco is about 30%. According to SPUR, a policy research group, the city's empty office space could hold nearly 11,000 new homes. But, the city would need to lower fees and affordable housing requirements.

Thursday, April 27, 2023

Layoff tracker: Mass layoffs by tech companies big and small hit the Bay Area

From Amazon to Twitter to Meta, and now Lyft, Zoom, Ebay, Paypal and Splunk, thousands of U.S. workers have lost their jobs in brutal mass layoffs in 2022 and now in 2023. On April 27th, 2023, Lyft employees received notification on their employment status after a note from new CEO David Risher a week earlier announced yet another round of cuts, this time an estimated 26% of current workforce or 1,072. This brings the combined estimated workers cut to 1806 or an estimated 34% of its original workforce from 2022. While our layoff tracker below watches tech mass redundancies in the Bay Area, due to the magnitude of the cuts, it is worth noting retail tech giant Amazon has announced on Monday March 20, 2023 it was laying off an additional 9,000 employees, on top of the cuts to 18,000 positions that the company disclosed in January, bringing it to a total of 27,000. This comes hot on the heels of a statement by Mark Zuckerberg a week before that Meta will lay off 10,000 more workers and incur restructuring costs ranging from \$3 billion to \$5 billion. On March 29 2023, Electronic Arts announced a restructuring plan through an SEC filing that will see around 800 or 6% of its staff let go.

On February 7 2023, Zoom announced it was laying off 1,300 or 15% of its staff. On the same day, Ebay announced it was shaving off 4% of its workforce or 500 workers, to create "additional space to invest and create new roles in high-potential areas," according to Ebay CEO Jamie Iannone in an SEC filing. On January 31st 2023, Paypal announced a round of layoffs, cutting 2,000 from its global workforce. Google (parent company Alphabet), together with a long list of tech companies executing mass redundancies, announced on January 20th that it will lay off 12,000 or 6% of its global workforce. Salesforce first announced layoffs of 1,090 workers in November and kicked off 2023 with another layoffs announcement in January of approximately 7,900 staff or 10% of its global workforce. San Francisco-based DoorDash announced on Nov. 30 that it is shaving 1,250 jobs or 6% of its workforce in an effort to rein in operating cost in a challenging post-pandemic, macro environment. Including the most recent announcement by Salesforce, a growing list of companies have made second and third rounds of cuts. These include Stripe, which cut around 1,000 in November after laying off around 50 people (from TaxJar, a Stripe acquisition) earlier this year, and Lyft, which slashed 683 from its team after laying off 60 people in July. In May, Netflix cut 150 staff members from its workforce and laid off 450 more in June.

Tuesday, May 2, 2023

Nordstrom to close both Downtown San Francisco stores, company confirms

Nordstrom is planning to close both of its Downtown San Francisco stores, choosing not to renew its lease inside of Westfield Mall, the store confirmed Tuesday. It will also close the nearby Downtown Nordstrom Rack. The Nordstrom Rack on Market Street's last day of business will be July 1, and the Nordstrom inside Westfield Mall is slated to close at the end of August. The

company's chief stores officer wrote in an email to staff that "the dynamics of the downtown San Francisco market have changed dramatically over the past several years, impacting customer foot traffic to our stores and our ability to operate successfully." The Westfield Mall said in a statement that the closure "underscores the deteriorating situation in downtown San Francisco."

"The planned closure of Nordstrom underscores the deteriorating situation in downtown San Francisco," said a mall spokesperson. "A growing number of retailers and businesses are leaving the area due to the unsafe conditions for customers, retailers, and employees, coupled with the fact that these significant issues are preventing an economic recovery of the area."

We've heard about the stores leaving Downtown San Francisco. But what you may not have heard about - the businesses moving in, expanding, or adding residential or office space. On Thursday, San Francisco city officials asked the Planning Commission to make zoning changes so new mixed-use businesses could open in Union Square. Union Square is the place to be if you like to shop. "I do like the Nike store, I do like to window shop at Neiman Marcus," said shopper Krysta Gahagen. "I just passed Banana Republic and I bought something," said Idrissa Driop. "I bought a pen and a shirt." With retail stores across the country closing and others rethinking their brick-and-mortar locations, ABC7 News decided to take a closer look at what's happening in Union Square. We noticed three big patterns. New stores are moving in, some stores are cutting retail space, and some stores are expanding. In the Downtown San Francisco shopping core, a new IKEA store is going up at 945 Market Street. Coco Republic, an Australian furniture store, moved into the Crate and Barrel location at 55 Stockton in Union Square last year. In Union Square, Banana Republic is decreasing its footprint. It's moving from the location on Grant Avenue into a smaller place on Geary.

"They're downsizing their storefront, but offering something they think the consumer really wants," said Marisa Rodriguez, CEO of Union Square Alliance. The businesses that are expanding include luxury stores. "I think that was an in response to a huge demand during the pandemic. That demand has not stopped," said Rodriguez. Chanel is moving from Geary Street into a bigger site - the William Sonoma location on Post Street. Yves Saint Laurent also opened new store. Union Square Alliance said there's also a big demand for discount stores. "Store like Ross - they are looking for a larger footprint," said Rodriguez. Ross, on Market Street, is moving down the street into a bigger space. It's taking over the space occupied by Nordstrom Rack and Sak's Off Fifth. "I do shop at Ross sometimes," said Travis Pastori of San Francisco. "It makes a lot of sense. Because everything is so expensive." There's also new event space going up at 100 Stockton Street and new luxury housing is going up at 233 Geary Street right above the Louis Vuitton store. Despite the news of big stores like Nordstrom leaving, there are a lot of good changes happening in San Francisco. "Union Square is vibrant," said Rodriguez. "It's an exciting time, so come on down and support your local businesses."

Friday, May 12, 2023

Despite downtown SF's current rough patch, prominent business leaders are investing in it

Office vacancies in downtown San Francisco hit their highest level ever in the first quarter of this year. But despite all this, some local CEOs say they're doubling down on San Francisco and still believe the Bay Area is the place to be. For Bay Area native Chris Larsen, San Francisco current troubles are nothing new. "We've seen this many times before. You know San Francisco is a story of boom, bust and, kind of, reinvention." For much of the last decade, the city was in a fantastic boom. New, gleaming skyscrapers, exponential economic growth and a tech sector that seemed like it would never crash. But the good times did come to an end - thanks largely to the pandemic and the advent of work from home.

Now, many of those same skyscrapers sit empty downtown, nearly a third of all office space is vacant, and business after business is seemingly fleeing the city. "This is one of those transformations you haven't seen in 50 plus years," said Chris Larsen. Chris Larsen is a CEO and investor. He tells ABC7 News despite this difficult period, he thinks the city's future is bright. That's why his tech company, Ripple, is bucking the trend. They recently signed a lease for a new, 130,000 square foot headquarters downtown. "I think it's the most creative and accepting place on the planet, which is why you see so much innovation coming out of here. That's not a coincidence," Larsen said. Larsen says the city certainly has its share of challenges to deal with, most notably public safety concerns and homelessness. But he rejects the notion that San Francisco is dying, saying the economic foundations of the past are still sound.

Data from the Bay Area Council backs that up. Consider these stats. Of the 10 most valuable companies in the country, six of them are based in the region. Between 2020 and 2022, of the companies worth more than \$10 billion that went public, two-thirds were from the Bay Area. And for companies worth more than \$1 billion? The Bay Area also topped that list. "For really world changing ideas to take root and thrive, you need a population and environment that is supportive of people who think differently," said Randy Howder. Ripple isn't alone. Randy Howder is the co-managing director of Gensler - the world's largest architecture firm. They too are investing millions and moving to a new space in the historic Mills Building on Montgomery Street. "Art Gensler himself came from New York in the 60s and was able to create this company that really changed the face of our industry. And I think that was only possible by being here," Howder said.

As the city goes through this latest transformation, Gensler is working with elected leaders. A growing trend of local companies stepping up to do more to help San Francisco. Howder tells me one thing Gensler is focusing on, is helping the city rethink downtown and the potential of converting empty office space to

homes. "Thinking differently about development, about who belongs in the neighborhood and how we can kind of transform it to be something that's more of a destination," Howder said. So what comes next for the city by the bay? The truth is, nobody knows for certain. But one thing both Larsen and Howder are sure of, that despite the rough patch now, there's nowhere they'd rather be than San Francisco. "There's a whole cottage industry of people who love to predict San Francisco's demise and they've been proven wrong every time," Howder said.

Monday, May 15, 2023 10:03P

Displaced fossil fuel workers struggling as CA shifts to clean energy, study shows

As California moves to renewable energy, a new study from the UC Berkeley Labor Center shows the difficult impact it's having on fossil fuel workers. The report focuses on the Marathon refinery in Martinez that closed during the pandemic. It found that transitioning fossil fuel workers to clean energy jobs has proven easier said than done. "This was an opportunity, not one we would want but an opportunity to give us sight lines on the coming transition to clean energy," UC Irvine Urban Planning and Public Policy professor Virginia Parks -- who is the lead author of the study -- told ABC7 news of their research. "Learning what are fossil fuels workers are really going to face in the labor market once they no longer have jobs in industries where they've been employed?" For more than 100 years, the Marathon refinery operated as a petroleum plant. But in 2020, it abruptly closed and 345 of the refinery's permanent workers were laid off. "It was what I described as a gut punch," Tracy Scott, the president of United Steelworkers Local 5, told ABC7 News. "I think people were stunned that the job that they were hired into, that they were told would be a career that they would retire from, was going away. And so it took them a minute to gain their composure and to start to do the things that were necessary for looking for work."

Parks research surveyed those workers. She says a year after they were laid off, 26% of respondents remained unemployed. And of those who had found new jobs, many said it came at a cost, including much lower wages. "They took a 24% wage cut. They also found themselves in more hazardous jobs, more stressful jobs, jobs that did not have the same high standard and working conditions they had left at the refinery," Parks said. "And they struggled. They struggled to make ends meet." Parks said a third of workers that they surveyed took early withdrawals from their retirement. "They had to sell cars, they had to pull their kids from extracurricular activities," she said. "So they landed on their feet, many of them, but at a cost." The Marathon refinery closure signifies the broader shift to renewable energy in California. Scott said as the state moves away from fossil fuels, refinery workers are being left behind. The Marathon Refinery is now in the process of reopening as a renewable diesel plant. Scott said some of the former employees have been rehired, but that it's just a fraction of those that lost their jobs in 2020. And, he said, for many of the workers three years later is too late.

"The impact in the interim was all of the economic distress that was caused by their layoff," Scott said. "You know, they had three years of not being able to participate in their 401k. They had three years not participating in a pension program... and so their future and stability in retirement has been impacted by that."

Scott is hoping lawmakers take the UC Berkeley Labor Center report seriously, and that change is made to better support fossil fuel workers. "You're talking about thousands and thousands of jobs, good union jobs, that are going to go away," Scott said. "And the economic development to support the transition to good paying jobs needs to be put into place in order to support that." One proposal is to give refinery workers certification that allows prospective employers to better understand their skill set. "Employers do not understand the skill set that refinery workers have, and the workers I interviewed ran into this time and time again," Parks said. "They don't have a certification that spells out what they do and are capable of doing, yet they are highly skilled. But new employers just didn't have a sense of what they could do, so that lack of certification is what you might call a real friction in this transition, and we need policy to grease the wheels and eliminate that friction." Scott is also hopeful that a proposal from Governor Gavin Newsom to allot \$40 million in the 2022-2023 state budget to support displaced oil and gas workers will help the Marathon refinery employees. But he said they're still waiting to learn if those workers will be eligible. "We're hopeful," he said. We asked why the support hasn't come sooner. "I think the cart is firmly before the horse," Scott said. "I think you know a decision was made and now we're looking back to say what can we do to help support them? We're cobbling together solutions that should have been part of the plan in the beginning."

Wednesday, May 24

These are the businesses thriving in SF's Union Square

We've heard a lot about struggling Union Square, with lots of empty storefronts and even more stores leaving. But, there is some good news. Union Square is seeing more luxury stores expand. And, new data shows that tourists are still visiting the area. At Samuel Scheuer Fine Linens which has been in Union Square for more than 30 years, customers are still stopping in for the extra attention and experience of shopping in person. "With sheets, it's such a personal thing. You really have to come in and feel what you like," said Taylor Enstall, Design Ambassador for Samuel Scheuer. "They come in to actually feel what they like, which is very important. Whether they cotton, or a linen or Italian beechwood." Some say Union Square has a way to go to recover from the pandemic. "It's a little empty. Not nearly as many people walking around," said shopper Julie Crocker. Foot traffic was down 27 percent in the district in February compared with the same month in 2019. Vacancy rates hit 19 percent in the first quarter of this year. According to the Wall Street Journal, tourists are the ones visiting the high-end stores compared to locals.

"The city needs the sales tax revenue. If the tourists are coming and wanting to shop, that can only be a positive," said shopper Graham from San Francisco. "I don't know what it's going to take to get the locals back down here. But I'm glad the tourists are coming. So that's a good sign," said Crocker. Marisa Rodriguez is CEO of Union Square Alliance. "We are starting to see foot traffic levels really peak up. We are not pre-pandemic all the way, but we are getting close," said Rodriguez. "I think people who are coming out of the pandemic are really looking for what they call 'revenge travel and experiences.' Luxury seems to be at the forefront of that. We are seeing stores actually expanding their footprint here in Union Square." A few weeks ago, Rodriguez told ABC7 News that luxury stores are actually expanding in the area. "One of the first was Bottega Veneta. Shortly after that, we saw Brunello Cucinelli also expand their footprint. We saw YSL move from their current location to a more flagship-style location," said Rodriguez. "Chanel purchased the building with a desiring goal to have three levels of luxury retail right at the heart of Union Square." "What I heard is Nordstrom is closing or moving. So I'm surprised to hear some of the more expensive stores are opening. That's a good sign," said Crocker. Rodney Fong, President and CEO of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce offered this statement Wednesday afternoon: "As tourism rebounds after the pandemic, the streets of Union Square are brimming with newfound energy and excitement. Luxury stores are seizing the opportunity by opening new branches and expanding their presence making it the most lively and bustling it has been in years."

Meanwhile, Mayor London Breed said she's pushing for zoning and tax code changes to make it easier for businesses to open up. "We are changing our zoning across our downtown and Union Square to help fill empty spaces with more diverse uses," said Mayor Breed at the SF Chamber Breakfast on Tuesday. "We can't keep pretending that they're going to go back. We have to be relentless to everything we do in San Francisco...we have to diversify." "There is a zoning package that is going through the process. That's going to make it so you don't have to have three levels of retail. You can have retail on the first level and any use on top. It could be an office; it could be a school, a dental office, whatever you want. (That's) helping to make the process easier. There's lots of residential conversion as part of that package," explained Rodriguez. Rodriguez said the proposal is still being reviewed. "It won't be until later this summer that we get the full seal of the entire Board of Supervisors," said Rodriguez. "We definitely need some creative thinking along those lines," said shopper Graham. Flower stand owner Daniel Regalado opened his business, Flowers World CA, about a year ago. His business faces a number of buildings adorned with for lease signs. "Just on this block there are 13 empty stores," said Regalado. He believes change is desperately needed like the proposed changes in zoning codes and tax codes. "I think this is a great idea. Get people into stores," said Regalado. "We know people want to experience music, they want to experience

luxury, and they want to experience dining and art," said Rodriguez. "We're moving in the right direction. Certainly, it takes time."

Thursday, May 25

Could billions in cash save downtown SF? A look at plans for the future of Salesforce Transit Center

It was supposed to be the transit epicenter of the San Francisco Bay Area, with the \$2.4 billion Salesforce Transit Center built to corral thousands of commuters and serve as the urban center of a new neighborhood South of Market. Today, the Grand Central Station of the West is a very quiet place. A near ghost town waiting for city life to return. As buildings go, the Transbay Transit Center is huge. It is longer than the Transamerica Pyramid is high. When it opened in 2018, there were high hopes that that it would serve as the new economic roadway for commuters from all around California. But add the COVID-19 pandemic and a change in worker habits and you have to ask -- will the Transbay Transit Center ever live up to expectations?

Maybe. For years, it was the vision of the new San Francisco. This was the place, the hub, the Grand Central Station of the West. At least, that's what the thought was. It was to be a place where a hundred thousand people a day would be walking over murals as they went in and out of the city from here all the way to Los Angeles. "That's right," said Adam Van De Water, executive director of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, the agency that oversees the transit center. He added, "I mean, this is generational infrastructure. We are replacing a transit terminal that was built in 1939, and here we are in 2023. So we built this for the next several generations of use. We've connected it to eight transit providers. We're a block from BART and the Market Street corridor as a ninth and we're working to connect Caltrain and high speed rail through the downtown rail extension." There is a lot of ambition there. A lot of good points. But at the same time, we've had the COVID pandemic. We've had remote work. We've had retail shutdowns in the core of the cities. And those mass transit systems you were talking about aren't doing nearly the number of passengers that they were doing a couple of years ago. And the projections of them doing more are pretty slim. "Yeah, no question," Van De Water said. "Our transit operators are not experiencing the same ridership and without the same ridership are not getting the same fare box recovery."

So what happens when you take the masses out of mass transit? Will it even survive? "Well, there's a real challenge for our operators in the coming years as we struggle to kind of get to a new normal," Van De Water said. "San Francisco, as you know, more than most, is an area that has been about invention, reinvention, and innovation. And it's continually changing. We are going through one of those change periods now, and it's very difficult on our commercial property owners and really our transit providers." The transit providers have gone to the governor and said we need a billion dollars a year in order to not go over

the financial cliff. So far, he's saying no. So it could get even tighter and fewer people on mass transit. "Well, one of the things is that we've always known and regardless of the topic area is change is difficult," Van De Water said. "And we'll go through some difficult periods like you described. But we need to keep investing in the future because we know that in order for people to take transit, it needs to be clean, it needs to be regular, it needs to go where they want to go." But in the massive second story bus bay, where the commuter buses are supposed to be rolling in regularly, it doesn't look like the hub of a lot of transit. "Well, here we are today in the middle of the day on Monday," Van De Water said. "So this tends to be an a.m. and a p.m. peak use right here. And we've seen through work from home that the hybrid work model today is consolidating around the middle of the week: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday."

The result is that the buses are only carrying about 40% of the pre-COVID passengers load. The Transbay Transit Center was built with the hopes of linking San Francisco to Los Angeles with a new high speed rail system. Below the Grand Hall and Bus Decks is a two-level train station has been built to house high-speed trains and link an electrified Caltrain from 4th and King streets to downtown. If the system was fully funded, trains could be stopping in San Francisco in 2033. "This was part of the long term vision of the Transbay Program," Van De Water said. "We're walking on the mezzanine ticketing level, and just below us are six rail three platforms and six rail lines for Caltrain and high speed rail. That'll bring about 100,000 passengers here when it's complete." And how much is that going to cost? "The downtown rail extension, or what we call the portal, will connect this center to the existing Caltrain alignment," Van De Water said. "Seventy-seven miles to south of San Jose that will go fully electric next year. And we need to bring the last mile and a half, two miles of construction, to get those trains into the basement here."

And how much is that expected to cost? "That project is about \$6.9 billion," Van De Water said. "And we are about three quarters of the way funded now and working towards a full funding grant agreement to start that construction. And a little over two year time." Back above ground, there are some signs the transit center may make it. "Our operating revenues come from a couple of sources. And we're happy to say that this center is almost 90% leased," he said. "Just in the last quarter, we've opened three restaurants. And at the end of last year, we opened the taproom in the park that's become quite an evening destination. So our sales tax revenues have actually outpaced those of the rest of the city because of that activation." The activation does rely on commuters, but it's not solely reliant on them. We also have 15,000 residents down here and we have international visitors discovering our architecture in our park That massive park on the top of the center gives you a window on what this neighborhood has, or could, become. Tree-lined pathways amid a concrete style jungle, surrounded by empty offices where workers only come a few days a week, and residences for those who choose to live here.

The terminal is also the center of this entire new neighborhood. That we are surrounded with that came up with this transit center that includes the Salesforce Tower here, which is one of the new icons of the city and the other office buildings which now are at a pretty high vacancy rate. People just aren't coming into them like they used to. "Where we're seeing that vacancy is moving from our older buildings downtown into our new ERs, the newer ones. Do you happen to be down here because this is the newest part of downtown? So some of these have a lot of activity, more so as I mentioned on the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, part of the week with the hybrid work schedule," Van De Water said. "It's interesting you point that out because we opened in 2018. Here we are five years later in 2023 and we've yet to have a normal 12 month period of operations. So we've had robust ridership and then we closed for the fisher of Fremont Street reopened had that robust ridership again and then we went into a global pandemic," Van De Water said.

With the pandemic's end, there is some hope San Francisco will emerge to that "new normal" we keep hearing so much about. "I think we're in for a period of change and that period of change is not going to be solely office financial districts and solely residential bedroom communities, but a hybrid in both directions. And so the Trans Bay District, more than most of downtown has been that vision for decades. We have 15,000 residents here today, and those are the ones who are frequenting our park and our retail and keeping it alive. Even with transit service lower than projected right now. So do I see this fulfilled? I do. I think they will be a mix. We'll have a more diversity in our tax base. It won't be just one or two industry and we'll have more residential and more have more retail. I think the long term projection and the long term vision is still there that people want activated walkable, beautiful, robust communities, whether they be downtown or elsewhere, and I think this is one of those visions," Van De Water said. Two years. That's what transit experts and city leaders are saying it will likely take to flush out the current downturn in the Financial District. Workers they say will come back. The key to that recovery will be to diversify the mix of jobs.

Wednesday, May 31

San Francisco launches multimillion-dollar campaign to boost tourism

A massive, multimillion-dollar campaign aiming to attract tourists to the city of San Francisco was launched Tuesday. The new "Always San Francisco" campaign highlights the city's most iconic sights and sounds, with a minute-long commercial already airing in New York, Boston, Washington D.C., Houston, and Chicago. All of this as the city's economy struggles to rebound after the pandemic and public perception is less than favorable. San Francisco's first-ever television commercial showcases the city by the bay in a brighter light. The San Francisco Travel Association campaign comes equipped with a TV ad, online material and more "The ad was actually pretty good," Chicago resident and tourist Agnes Yu-Suaso watched it and said she's excited for a future return trip. "There was a lot of things they talk a little bit about, so you have an idea of how

things- like, oh, okay, maybe I should come here and check it out too," she told ABC7 News.

The new commercial features the Golden Gate Bridge, the Painted Ladies, Lombard Street and more. Also on full display is the diversity of various neighborhoods. Prospective visitors can browse and learn more about what didn't make the minute-long ad, at their leisure, online. And for those who live here, SF Travel Association's executive VP and chief marketing officer Lynn Bruni-Perkins said, "I hope it evokes some civic pride. I mean, we have a lot to be proud of. This is the city who has been through a lot in the last few years and we always, you know, the Phoenix Rising is on our flag." San Francisco's tourism industry has been struggling to bounce back since the pandemic. That issue, compounded by the known negative public perception surrounding crime, homelessness and drug use in the city has made that a tough task. "The idea of trying to put together an ad campaign that's featuring the great stuff, without addressing the reality of the city... my guess is it's not gonna work right now," San Jose State Associate Professor of Public Relations Dr. Matt Cabot said, as the rhetoric has to match the reality. "It would be better if they actually address their issues and then do a campaign like this to say, 'Listen, we fixed these issues. Now it's time to come back,'" he said. Still, the \$6 million campaign looks to sell the experience of what is being called the "most fascinating 49 square miles on the planet." Bruni-Perkins explained, "San Francisco still is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It has a lot to offer visitors. And we really wanted to challenge that negative narrative with this campaign."

Tuesday, June 6

J.P. Morgan Healthcare Conference coming back to SF in 2024 but wants hotel costs addressed

Organizers of J.P. Morgan's healthcare conference say they will be back in San Francisco in 2024, but they've pointed out one concern. In a recent letter to Mayor London Breed obtained by ABC7 News Insider Phil Matier, those with J.P. Morgan said they had a successful conference in January and announced their return next year. "I say thank you J.P. Morgan Chase for making the decision, having the confidence in the city that we can pull it off, that's based off their recent experience," said Jim Wunderman of the Bay Area Council. A simple 'thank you' from the business community in San Francisco. It's estimated that more than \$86 million was brought into San Francisco because of the conference. But while organizers say the city was clean and they felt safe, they wrote, "One major concern we continue to hear from our clients is the price gouging and lack of flexibility exhibited by San Francisco's hotels during the conference period."

"So we're coming out of this doldrums of the pandemic saying, 'okay welcome everybody back but you better be willing to pay,' but that puts us in competition with places like Las Vegas and that's the downside of it all," said Matier.

While competition from other cities is strong, Wunderman believes prices will soften as more conventions come to town. That said, he believes officials must work with hotels on this. "Ultimately it's up to the hotels probably to decide what they want to do, but in their own interest long-term, if they want to see this particular convention here I think that they're going to need to moderate their prices a little bit," said Wunderman. San Francisco's recent national image, fair or not, has been one of shoplifting and unhoused individuals on the streets. This letter though is proof of the positive experiences being had here. Matier says the conversation is now focusing on the cost of doing business in a city like San Francisco. "San Francisco has always been a fun place to have a convention and it's always been an expensive place to have a convention, the question is given remote work, giving the changing economy, can it continue to be both?" said Matier.

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Westfield to give up SF location amid declining sales, Nordstrom closure, company says

Westfield is giving up its downtown San Francisco shopping mall and will surrender to its lender, the company said on Monday. "We have made the difficult decision to begin the process to transfer management of the shopping center to our lender to allow them to appoint a receiver to operate the property going forward. San Francisco Centre's debt is non-recourse and this action has no impact on the rest of URW's debt," Westfield wrote in a statement on Monday. The company said it has seen a significant decrease in sales in the San Francisco location from \$455 million in 2019 to \$298 million in December 2022. In that same period, Westfield Valley Fair in San Jose has seen a 66% increase in sales, the company said. "The center's occupancy level has decreased dramatically to approximately 55% including already announced closures of tenants such as Nordstrom, Banana Republic and others. Our US Flagship portfolio occupancy averages around 93%," the company wrote in the press release.

This also comes as Banana Republic closed its Union Square store and its anchor store, Nordstrom, is set to close. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, the company stopped making payments on a \$558 million loan. Earlier this month, Westfield and its partner, Brookfield Properties, started transferring control of the mall at 865 Market St., the newspaper reported. San Francisco Mayor London Breed released the following statement after Westfield's announcement: This has been something that has been coming for some time. We've had numerous conversations with Westfield about the future of this site, and it's been clear that they did not have a long-term commitment to San Francisco as they look to withdraw entirely from the United States market. With new management, we will have an opportunity to pursue a new vision for this space that focuses on what the future of Downtown San Francisco can be.

Whether that's attracting new types of business or educational institutions, or creating a totally different experience, we need to be open to what's possible. Retail is changing, and we will adapt to diversify and better use spaces in our Downtown area. This is at the heart of what we are trying to create in San Francisco as we move forward. For now, the stores at the mall remain open under the new management. The public safety resources we've dedicated to the area, including ambassadors and police officers, remain in place. The stores are still a part of our Downtown experience and we will continue to support this area to make it clean, safe, and inviting for everyone.

Tuesday, June 13

San Francisco ranks last among 63 cities in downtown recovery, data shows

An ABC7 News Data Team analysis of 63 cities' downtown recoveries found San Francisco ranked last. For 25 years, "Union Square 4K" has been a fixture downtown with Francisco Gonzalez working here for 10. Since the pandemic, he says business hasn't been the same. "Slowly we've seen some increase on the tourists but not really," said Gonzalez. "It's tough," he continued. Especially when compared to how other cities are doing. ABC7 News Data Analysts looked at cities nationwide and found San Francisco ranked last out of 63 cities' downtown recoveries. "Metrics don't lie," said Gonzalez. Rachel Michelin is president and CEO of the California Retailers Association. "Unfortunately, I'm not surprised," said Michelin. "It's sad, you know San Francisco used to be the premiere place to go." During the week of April 10 this year, the downtown area of San Francisco was at about 29% of its activity during the same period in 2019, while other Bay Area cities were more vibrant. The downtown area of San Jose was at about 75% of its activity and the downtown area of Oakland was at about 48% of its activity, during the same period in 2019. Vacancies may account for some of the differences. Office vacancy in the broader San Francisco Metro Area nearly tripled, from a 6.3% vacancy rate in Q1 2019 to a 17.2% vacancy rate in Q1 2023.

"Maybe there's not incentives for companies to come back," said Gonzalez. "My opinion - I'll say it has something to do with the administration you know," he continued. Last week, Mayor London Breed announced a series of upcoming events in Chinatown to attract residents and visitors to shop and dine in the neighborhood this summer. "That is why we're here, to shine a light on Chinatown in a way to remind people what makes San Francisco so special," said Mayor Breed. Michelin says she believes safety is a key factor in San Francisco's downtown recovery.

"I was just in San Diego last month and people are out running in the streets, you feel safe as you walk around," said Michelin. "And I think that that is not felt when you go to San Francisco," she continued. In his interview, Gonzalez also mentioned the SoCal city. "Last year, I went to San Diego. Looked pretty clean at

least," said Gonzalez. They're not wrong, our data analysts found San Diego made the top 10 list for downtown recoveries as of April 10, ranking seventh on the list. Two other California cities, Bakersfield and Fresno made it to the top 5. "We need to think differently about how we approach these issues because what we've been doing in the past isn't working," said Michelin. An ever growing challenge for city leaders as San Francisco looks to flourish again.

Race & Social Justice

Monday, April 3, 2023

Tesla ordered to pay more than \$3 million to former worker in racism suit

A jury ordered Tesla to pay over \$3 million Monday in a racial discrimination case brought by a former employee of its assembly plant in Fremont, California. The case was brought by Owen Diaz, who worked as an elevator operator at the plant. He reported he regularly heard racial slurs, including the N-word, on the Fremont factory floor, and saw racist graffiti in bathrooms and a racially insensitive cartoon. A San Francisco federal jury said the electric car company will have to pay Diaz a total of \$3,175,000. In October 2021, a jury awarded him \$137 million in damages in the case, but a federal judge threw out that award as excessive. US District Judge William Orrick offered Diaz \$15 million in damages in the case instead, but Diaz rejected the offer, choosing instead to have a new trial. It is that second trial in which the jury awarded Diaz the new amount.

The trial is separate from another case brought by the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, which said the agency had received "hundreds" of complaints from workers alleging racism and harassment at the Fremont factory. Tesla has denied the charges that the situation was as bad as alleged in the two suits, but it has admitted there were problems which needed to be addressed at the plant. In a blog post the company posted after the original 2021 verdict for \$137 million, Valerie Capers Workman, then Tesla's Vice President, People, wrote, "We do recognize that in 2015 and 2016 we were not perfect. We're still not perfect. But we have come a long way from 5 years ago. We continue to grow and improve in how we address employee concerns." Capers Workman, who is Black, has since left Tesla.

Thursday, April 6, 2023

Chabad of SF hosts annual Passover Seder with security concerns in mind

It was the first night of an eight-day Passover celebration for the Chabad of San Francisco. On Wednesday, they hosted their annual Passover Seder for the local Jewish community. "It's going to be a lot of good energy. Good singing, dancing," said Rabbi Shmulik Friedman. Passover is a holiday that celebrates the biblical story of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. It's a time for and friends to

come together. But despite the festivities going on, organizers say they also had to worry about some more serious things too, including security.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, hate crimes against Jewish people have been rising rapidly in recent years, including in California. In 2021, the ADL says they reached an all-time high. "We're being safe. We're taking all the necessary measures, but at the same time there's no direct threat. We're not scared in any specific way, but we're being cautious and being careful," said Rabbi Friedman. All the more reason, people in attendance Wednesday night say it's important, to practice their religion proudly. "I think it's important for all people, regardless of your race or ethnic background, to recognize and appreciate the work of our ancestors," said attendee Norman Krug. The holiday dinner was open to everyone. And many people we talked to told us that no matter what your faith, Passover can offer a lesson for us all. "It represents the release of slavery to freedom from the Jewish people but it's a universal holiday because it represents freedom for all mankind," Krug said.

Sunday, April 9, 2023

'We're angry': Hundreds rally for transgender and drag queen rights in SF

A day of action and activism in San Francisco Saturday. Hundreds of trans and drag activists including their supporters took to the streets to fight for their rights and protest recent anti-LGBTQ Legislation across the country. A march with a message echoing through the streets of San Francisco. Activists and allies say enough is enough. "Trans rights are human rights," the crowd chanted. Organizers say Saturday's protest march called "Drag Up! Fight Back!" is in direct response to a wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation nationwide, targeting the trans and drag communities. "They're saying drag queens and trans people are grooming children. None of that is true," said Sister Roma from Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The ACLU is tracking more than 400 legislative actions targeting the LGBTQ community. Activists say they're feeling under attack.

"It's not ok for our youth or community to be victimized, and to be ostracized from their own community because of who they are. It's not ok," said activist Alex U. Inn. "People are not attacking us because we're different. People are attacking us because we're joyful and present in the world, in a way that scares them," said activist Lily Hamilton. The march made its way from Civic Center to Union Square, where the message got even louder. "Make some noise if you think trans rights are human rights," said Sister Roma. Supervisor Matt Dorsey says the community has his support.

"I'll never forget the early lesson of the LGBTQ activism we all stood together. I have the opportunity to stand with the community, and I'm going to," Dorsey said. Many feel this is a moment to get organized and speak out, to help themselves and others. "So yes, we're angry, we're mad and hurt, we're afraid. But that fear

is not going to stop us from being joyful, it's going to motivate us to protect ourselves," Hamilton added.

Sunday, April 16, 2023

EXCLUSIVE: Allegation of racism toward Samoans rocks Alameda County DA's Office

An allegation is coming to light, of a racist comment within Alameda County District Attorney's Office. The allegation, documented in an email obtained by ABC7 News anchor Dion Lim, claims the comment was made about those of Samoan descent. ABC7 News was first made aware of the allegations at Monday's "Justice for Jasper" rally in Oakland. A member of the DA's office said one of Pam Price's chief assistant district attorneys, the number two person in charge, made comments about a Samoan victim saying that "Samoans fight. They like to get drunk and high and they fight in a minute." Families of murdered loved ones, such as Virginia Nishita, wife of Kevin Nishita who was killed while protecting a TV news crew, and Barbara Nguyen whose brother, David, was killed in a freeway shooting last year, spoke about the need for proper punishment and fears of possible changes to enhancement charges from District Attorney Pamela Price. But what came as a bit of a surprise: Alameda County prosecutor Butch Ford, who said he was put on paid administrative leave by Price, taking to the podium.

He explained a bit about his background. "I'm half Pacific Islander and I was raised by a strong Pacific Islander woman who taught me what it meant to take responsibility for your actions," Ford said. "I am also half African American, influenced by the first African American female judge in Alameda history, Judge Judith Ford." Ford shared an anecdote of a seemingly racist incident a young female DA said she experienced last month, within the Price administration. Lim obtained a copy of the email complaint that female DA made from an Alameda County Prosecutors Association Union member and former supervisor. In it, she says Chief Assistant District Attorney Otis Bruce criticized the victim of her case, who is AAPI. The complaint was sent to her direct supervisor and the Teamsters Union. Ford commented on this at Monday's rally. "It was his way of attacking the victim of a violent crime and justify what most surely be a very low sentence, our young AAPI sister was so shocked she went to her office and broke down," Ford said. Lim reached out to Bruce along with the DA's office asking for comment on Tuesday, and followed up, but have yet to get a response.

Ford told Lim on Monday, the purpose of the rally and sharing what happened to the young female DA was not about race. "It's about doing what's right and protecting victims," Ford said. When Lim asked Matt Finnegan, the representative and staff attorney for the Teamsters 856 Union, about any response from the Otis or Price in regards to this matter, he said no. The allegation comes after emails Lim reported on last week, which DA Price sent to some members of the Asian American Community, calling them misinformed

about a case. The Asian Pacific Islander Prosecutors Association denounced those emails, calling them "offensive."

Monday, April 17, 2023

San Francisco AAPI community rallies, calling out banks supporting gun manufacturers

Members of San Francisco's AAPI community calling out banks backing gun manufacturers. The AAPI Victory Alliance launching its campaign in the heart of Chinatown putting pressure, specifically on San Francisco-based Wells Fargo to cut all ties with the industry. "As Asian Americans, we have the power to stop a lot of this. We have a choice in where we invest our dollars and where we deposit our paychecks," said Varun Nikore, Executive Director with AAPI Victory Alliance. Mass shootings in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay involving the AAPI community propelling the campaign and the youth-led March For Our Lives is getting behind them. "We're supporting efforts around their campaign to essentially call out Wells Fargo for funding the gun industry and really emphasize that they stand in solidarity with the AAPI community yet they're funding the same weapons that impact folks in that community," said Zeenat Yahya, Director of Policy, March For Our Lives.

In a statement, Wells Fargo says in part: "We listen carefully to all voices and all points of view in the ongoing firearms debate and take each of them seriously. Our communities, schools, places of business and neighborhoods must be kept safe from gun violence." In 2018 Bloomberg News reported Wells Fargo as the gun industry's top financier -- the bank's CEO saying in 2020 that its relationship with the NRA was declining, but activists like 16-year Anya Patri say it's not enough. "I think that holding our corporate sponsors accountable is so important to call them out in rallies like this and why everyone needs to get involved," said Anya Patri with March For Our Lives.

Thursday, April 27, 2023

Dozens pack into an Antioch church to discuss race and policing amid racist text scandal

Dozens of people packed into an Antioch church Wednesday night to discuss race and policing. The discussion at the Antioch Church Family location titled 'Race Matters,' happened just weeks after news surfaced about racist text messages allegedly sent among a number of Antioch Police officers. Earlier in April, there was a heated back and forth between Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe and a community member as those text messages were being discussed at a city council meeting. "Standing up to racism is not an easy task and that is all that is," said Mayor Thorpe. "It wasn't an outburst, it wasn't a trigger, it was standing up to racism. I don't know how clear I can make that. That is as clear as I can make it."

Wednesday's race conversation included Rev. Wanda Johnson, who is Oscar Grant's mom, and University of San Francisco Professor James Taylor. "I'm suggesting to you that policing continues to evolve but it won't change for us and it needs to, and we got to break it's back, and we have to attack it like we did slavery," said Dr. Taylor. As questions are still out there about what will happen to the Antioch police officers implicated in the scandal, Johnson made a call for defunding the department. "The only way to change our system, the only way to make a difference, is allocating those funds to other programs some of those funds to our reparations," said Johnson.

Mayor Thorpe said that many in the community are still hurting from those text messages. "When I think about these text messages it's all in there. We don't mean anything," said Thorpe. "I'm the value of a steak dinner, I'm the value of a steak dinner in those text messages. My behavior is not the problem. The fact that that man didn't understand that people were grieving in this community because of racism and not just black people, but white people who were there apologizing for attacking myself and Councilwoman Wilson for the reforms that we've been trying to achieve." The Mayor says the city has already launched a crisis response team that responds to certain 911 calls instead of police. Antioch is the first city in Contra Costa County to do so. Thorpe says the official launch date of that team is in May but soft launch has already happened.

Sunday, May 7, 2023

California reparations panel OKs state apology, payments

"The California Reparations Task voted Saturday in Oakland to approve recommendations for a final proposal to be delivered to state lawmakers this summer. The nine-member committee, which first convened nearly two years ago, gave final approval at a meeting in Oakland to a hefty list of proposals that now go to state lawmakers to consider for reparations legislation. The panel's first vote approved a detailed account of historical discrimination against Black Californians in areas such as voting, housing, education, disproportionate policing and incarceration and others. Other recommendations on the table ranged from the creation of a new agency to provide services to descendants of enslaved people to calculations on what the state owes them in compensation. Panelists say the time is now. "I think there comes a point in time that we got to be practitioners and we got to be social engineers and make sure we deliver something to this black population or else we will never do it," said Dr. Amos C. Brown, Vice Chair of Reparations Task Force. According to the report, an African American resident over the age of 70 could receive payments up to \$1.2 million. The final report will contain 95 recommendations for determining what reparations will look like in the future. State legislators must pass all or some of the recommendations to pass the proposal into law come July.

U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, who is cosponsoring a bill in Congress to study restitution proposals for African Americans, at the meeting called on states

and the federal government to pass reparations legislation. "Reparations are not only morally justifiable, but they have the potential to address longstanding racial disparities and inequalities," Lee said. "An apology and an admission of wrongdoing just by itself is not going to be satisfactory," said Chris Lodgson, an organizer with the Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, a reparations advocacy group. An apology crafted by lawmakers must "include a censure of the gravest barbarities" carried out on behalf of the state, according to the draft recommendation approved by the task force. Those would include a condemnation of former Gov. Peter Hardeman Burnett, the state's first elected governor and a white supremacist who encouraged laws to exclude Black people from California.

After California entered the union in 1850 as a "free" state, it did not enact any laws to guarantee freedom for all, the draft recommendation notes. On the contrary, the state Supreme Court enforced the federal Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed for the capture and return of runaway enslaved people, until for over a decade until emancipation. "By participating in these horrors, California further perpetuated the harms African Americans faced, imbuing racial prejudice throughout society through segregation, public and private discrimination, and unequal disbursement of state and federal funding," the document says. The task force approved a public apology acknowledging the state's responsibility for past wrongs and promising the state will not repeat them. It would be issued in the presence of people whose ancestors were enslaved. California has previously apologized for placing Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II and for violence against and mistreatment of Native Americans.

The panel also approved a section of the draft report saying reparations should include "cash or its equivalent" for eligible residents. More than 100 residents and advocates gathered at Mills College of Northeastern University in Oakland, a city that is the birthplace of the Black Panther Party. They shared frustrations over the country's "broken promise" to offer up to 40 acres and a mule to newly freed enslaved people. Many said it is past time for governments to repair the harms that have kept African Americans from living without fear of being wrongfully prosecuted, retaining property and building wealth. Elaine Brown, former Black Panther Party chairwoman, urged people to express their frustrations through demonstrations. Saturday's task force meeting marked a crucial moment in the long fight for local, state and federal governments to atone for discriminatory policies against African Americans. The proposals are far from implementation, however. "There's no way in the world that many of these recommendations are going to get through because of the inflationary impact," said Roy L. Brooks, a professor and reparations scholar at the University of San Diego School of Law. Some estimates from economists have projected that the state could owe upwards of \$800 billion, or more than 2.5 times its annual budget, in reparations to Black people. The figure in the latest draft report released by the task force is far lower. The group has not responded to email and phone requests for comment on the reduction. Secretary of State Shirley Weber,

a former Democratic assembly member, authored legislation in 2020 creating the task force with a focus on the state's historical culpability for harms against African Americans, and not as a substitute for any additional reparations that may come from the federal government. The task force voted previously to limit reparations to descendants of enslaved or free Black people who were in the country by the end of the 19th century.

The group's work has garnered nationwide attention, as efforts to research and secure reparations for African Americans elsewhere have had mixed results. The Chicago suburb of Evanston, for example, has offered housing vouchers to Black residents but few have benefited from the program so far. In New York, a bill to acknowledge the inhumanity of slavery in the state and create a commission to study reparations proposals has passed the Assembly but not received a vote in the Senate. And on the federal level, a decades-old proposal to create a commission studying reparations for African Americans has stalled in Congress. Oakland city Councilmember Kevin Jenkins called the California task force's work "a powerful example" of what can happen when people work together. "I am confident that through our collective efforts, we can make a significant drive in advancing reparations in our great state of California and ultimately the country," Jenkins said.

Thursday, May 11, 2023 9:56PM

'Move us forward': Antioch police chief responds to CA DOJ's investigation into department

A year into an ongoing FBI investigation of the Antioch Police Department, the California Department of Justice is now launching an investigation of its own. "We have seen data that shows spikes in excessive force in the Antioch Police Department, more than other local police departments nearby and in the region," said California State Attorney General Rob Bonta at a press conference on Wednesday. Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe says the city received an official letter on Thursday from Bonta regarding the investigation. Antioch Police Chief Steven Ford says his department is getting ready. "I was actually somewhat relieved, to be honest with you, because I know the value that they bring. And I know they will give us some structure and some framework to work within to move us forward," explains Chief Ford.

Bonta says this investigation into the Antioch PD comes after multiple complaints of "habitual" and "consistent" violations of civil rights. Then came the texting scandal, which the Contra Costa County Public Defenders Office believes may involve up to 40% of the police force. "Those texts are hard to read. They are racist, homophobic, misogynist, and they aren't just comments related to unofficial duties. They are directly related to official duties, including the use of force," says Bonta. Chief Ford says the investigation will likely include a deep dive into internal systems and structures, the department's use of force policy, level of supervision in certain situations and accountability. Ford says he had a

conversation with California Department of Justice on Wednesday. In the coming weeks, he and his command staff will map out the process for the investigation. He has also sent out an email to the rank and file so they understand what to expect.

"They are the change agents of what's forth coming. They are going to be the practitioners of the new framework that we have forthcoming," says Ford. Mayor Thorpe says the investigation is critically important given the magnitude of the situation. He believes in the long-run, the city will be better off. "It can't just be a certain segment of the white community that feels that they can have a relationship with the police department," says Thorpe. "Everybody has the right to feel comfortable with their police department, particularly since everybody pays their fair share of taxes here to pay for the police department." "This fight for civil rights and the fight for injustice for African Americans, especially at the hands of police, has been over decades," says Kimberly Payton, first VP of the East County branch of the NAACP, which includes Antioch. She says they welcome the investigation, adding that change takes time. And that each investigation like this one can be another step towards that goal. "Not only to unite the community, but to build trust again. And to prevent this from happening if possible," says Payton.

Thursday, May 11, 2023

Chinese Railroad Workers History Center opens in SF Chinatown to recognize stories of laborers

During the 1860s, thousands of Chinese laborers helped connect parts of the U.S. through the transcontinental railroad -- many of them were never formally recognized for that tremendous achievement. Wednesday, as part of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, a brand new museum dedicated to Chinese railroad workers in San Francisco's Chinatown just opened. It's a monumental day for the Chinese community. The Chinese Railroad Workers History Center on Kearny Street in SF is now open. "The center's purpose is not to forget the Chinese railroad workers contribution to this country," said Florence Fang, Founder of the Chinese Railroad Workers History Center. "The center's goal is to give a voice to the voiceless."

"Their contributions cannot be overstated and yet their contributions have been largely overlooked throughout American history," said Jim Wunderman, the event emcee and Bay Area Council President. "This museum is a really important step toward rectifying that through exhibits, artifacts and replicas of the trains."

The opening of the new museum and community center coincides with an important day: the 154th anniversary of the Golden Spike -- the completion of the first transcontinental railroad. "The anniversary of the Golden Spike brings together all the different cultures from the east and the west. It's not just there in the U.S.. It's also the east and the west with China and here in the United States as well," said Benjamin Yee, Planning Commissioner for City of Fremont.

Yee is the great-grandson of a railroad worker.

"My great-grandfather lived to be 114. So he was alive long enough for me to hear his stories," Yee said. "These workers faced immense challenges and incredible levels of discrimination. They received 30 to 50 percent lower wages than white workers for the same job," said Wunderman. "They were given the most difficult and dangerous work including tunneling and the ease of explosives." Connie Young Yu's great-grandfather also helped build the railroad when he arrived in 1866. "My great grandfather, I-Wong Sang, was one of the Chinese railroad workers that helped build the Central Pacific. He came to San Francisco, worked on the railroad, risking life and limb," said Yu. Yu explained how difficult life was for Chinese workers.

"The Chinese workers were never honored. They were never allowed to be citizens of the United States. They were excluded," said Yu. "They were denied rights of citizenship. It took years of struggle. The Chinese Exclusion Act lasted for 61 years. It was not repealed until 1943." Many say the story of the Chinese railroad worker needs to be recognized and remembered. "This history was obliterated. It has taken decades to bring this history back together, that Chinese were part of building America." Yu applauds the new historical center in Chinatown.

"It's tremendous that the monument and museum is here on Kearny Street," said Yu. "This is where the Chinese first came. Where they got their foothold in America. Chinese workers came before California was a state." For many, this new Chinese Railroad Workers History Center represents resiliency. And, they say it bridges the past to the future. "Especially in this moment where many of us are challenged with Asian hate, we need to be able to stand together and say in solidarity and say we are not the foreigner, not the perpetual foreigner, not the model minority. That we are American history," said Lily Mei, Mayor of the City of Fremont.

Sunday, May 21

Judge issues landmark ruling against Contra Costa County D.A.'s office over racial bias

As protesters rallied for police accountability in the Antioch Police Department's texting scandal on the steps on the Contra Costa County Superior Court on Friday, earlier that morning a Superior Court judge issued a landmark ruling against the Contra Costa District Attorney's office. The judge found proof of racial bias and racism in the charging decisions by the D.A.'s office. "Our clients were not only subjected to racist policing, but when they were brought into the criminal justice system in Contra Costa County, the ruling was that they were subjected to racist charging decisions," explains attorney Carmela Caramagno, representing Terryon Pugh, one of the four men involved in the case. Caramagno says Black people were up to 44% more likely to be charged with special enhancements

compared to others. "And that's significant. When you charge somebody with a special circumstance, you are asking the court to impose a mandatory of life without any possibility of parole. Ever," says Caramango. The ruling does not affect the attempted murder and conspiracy charges the defendants face.

Two of the men are named in the Antioch police texting scandal. But this case is not about the texts, nor policing. Just the D.A.'s filing practices. "And we showed that the difference, the disparity in those charging decisions was 92% based on race, rather than any other factor. And the D.A. failed to present evidence of race neutral basis for those decisions," she says. In a statement to ABC7 news, Contra Costa County District Attorney Diana Becton writes: "The District Attorney's Office recognizes that today's ruling is one of significance for offsetting systemic racial disparities within the criminal justice system. The court's ruling provides direction and my office will review similarly charged cases to promote fair and equitable prosecution." "This is a landmark ruling, again, that it is the first ruling of its kind statewide. And it's actually the second ruling under the Racial Justice Act involving the Contra Costa County District Attorney's office," says Ellen McDonnell, Chief Public Defender for Contra Costa County. California's Racial Justice Act was passed in 2020. It allows legal challenges to charges, convictions and sentencing that may be influenced by systemic bias. "And that's it really critical that we continue litigation and that we continue looking at each phase of the criminal legal system to ensure that we can uncover whether in racism in policing, racism in charging decisions, or racism in any other part of our criminal legal system," she says.

Friday, May 26

Bay Area student 'hijacks' classroom projectors to show racist video, images. Here's what happened

A middle school student reportedly 'hijacked' technology in several classrooms to show racist footage, the Brentwood Union School District confirmed to the I-Team. It happened earlier this week at Edna Hill Middle School. Parents say it wasn't the first time. "I would've never thought, 'let me hack the teacher's computer,'" said one parent whose daughter attends the school. "It is things you hear about in the movies, you don't actually think it's going to happen in real life." According to the district, the student was able to hack into the projectors in the classrooms of three different teachers to display racist images. Parents told the I-Team, some of the students were learning about Jim Crow laws when the incident happened - adding the racist images were followed by an inappropriate video of animals. The district says teachers acted immediately and were able to stop the projections from continuing. The school's superintendent Dr. Dana Eaton added the principal immediately contacted the IT department to investigate the incident and prevent it from happening again.

But parents told the I-Team students have reported this happening a handful of other times in recent months, including one recent case where a student

allegedly streamed porn in class. "It's mind blowing," said Eliane Bazouzi, a parent whose sister works at the school. "There's still racism going on, kids are calling each other the N word. Nobody has the right to use that word." The district told the I-Team the investigation into the incident is continuing, but it's expected to conclude soon. In a statement, Dr. Eaton wrote: "Our district is a place where everyone belongs and we want all to feel welcome. We will not tolerate any type of racist or hateful behavior and the consequences will be severe for any student involved." So, how could have this happened? Parents told the I-Team students are able to stream content on their cellphones using Chromecast - which allows anyone to cast content from their phone, laptop, computer, etc. "You just have to be on the same Wi-Fi," said Ahmed Banafa, a tech expert and engineering professor at San Jose State University.

Stephanie: "What could've the school done to prevent this?" Ahmed Banafa: "Have some restrictions on who will join the Wi-Fi by defining the devices. For example, if someone wants to join and start casting they have to have a certain pin number and that pin number is only given to certain people. Also you can cancel the universal plug in n play making it impossible for anyone to join the network unless they have permission." Stephanie: "Sounds like it's a pretty easy fix?" Ahmed Banafa: "Yes, it's not difficult. It's just fixing the features of casting." What is difficult for these parents - comprehending why this even happened? "Bullying happens frequently for no apparent reason," said Bazouzi. "The inappropriate language constantly... kids have no respect for other kids."

Monday, June 12

Research underway to determine if racial bias plays role in BART fare evasion response

BART is set to undergo a major study to find out if their policing tactics are racially motivated. The specific focus will be the department's response to fare evasion. The goal is to uncover any disparity and ultimately give the transit authority recommendations to improve its practices. The study will take place over the next 18 months. BART claims that it struggles with fare evasion. Some officials estimates that BART loses upwards of \$25 million each year due to fare evaders. And many passengers say they see it all the time. "I disapprove. The system can't run if it's not paid for," says Sherry Olsen, a BART regular who lives in Berkeley. A man was caught jumping the gate at the Rockridge BART station on Monday. He exchanged words with the BART attendant and then left. But what if there is racial bias by BART police when dealing with fare evasion? "I think that's an issue everywhere. Sadly," says Olsen.

The Center for Policing Equity (CPE) previously found that Black BART passengers were stopped eight times more often than white passengers, and 15 times more likely to experience use of force by police. Building on that data, CPE is now looking into issues around fare evasion. "We know that there is enough of a problem to warrant further and deeper investigation," says Hans Menos, Vice

President of the Triage Response Team at CPE. Over the next 18 months, CPE will be conducting focus groups and interviewing passengers to get a more qualitative understanding of what passengers face. BART police was the first transit law enforcement agency in the country to undergo such a review by CPE. It resulted in updates to the BART's use of force policy. A review of fare enforcement policies is now underway.

"What we are talking about here is oppression and mistreatment of black and brown people nationwide. And BART is just one example of how we want to uncover that. And to understand how we can improve that," explains Menos. In a statement to ABC7 News, BART Interim-Chief Kevin Franklin writes that BART is, "committed to continuing with this work as part of the department's commitment to equitable policing." Karen Brent doesn't have a car, so she uses BART a lot. She says fare evasion is a problem. But the bigger issue for her is personal safety on the BART trains. She points out that she mostly sees young people jumping the gates. And that solutions, like reducing fares, may also help tackle issues around racial justice. "I feel that there are so many social issues with some of these young people who evade the fare. And they tend to be lower income and people of color. It's very complicated," she says.

Monday, June 12

Young activists lead SF protest against anti-trans laws

Amid Pride Month celebrations, there was action in San Francisco Sunday. Glide Memorial Church held a special service inclusive of the LGBTQ-plus community. A standing ovation at Glide Memorial Church for one of San Francisco's better-known drag queens, Sister Anya Streets with a story time moment and message of inclusion. "Enter our church for all. We should be as welcoming as possible. That's right. Not just here, when we step out," Streets of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence said. This comes as the ACLU is tracking nearly 500 bills, introduced this year alone, taking aim at LGBTQ+ rights, many directed at drag queens and the transgender community. Elsewhere in the city, young voices were saying enough is enough. Sixteen-year-old transgender activist Hope led the march down Market Street to San Francisco City Hall. "It really scares me for the future, because I know that there has been times in history where it just starts out with state bills, and then it goes to a national level," Hope said.

"What's going on in this country right now is actually kind of terrifying," Sol, another activist, said. Nineteen states now have laws on the books banning gender-affirming care for trans youth, and restricting access to adults. "I don't want to have to worry about getting, like, health care and that because that's like such a basic need," Sol said. "It sucks and it's scary and kind of hopeless," activist Eddie said. "But as long as I can, like, get out and do these things, I feel a little bit better about it. Like, I can at least do something."

"We can't be silenced," activist Abby said. "We are not going to just let them take away our rights even if they're in another place, even if they're not right here. We're going to fight for them." "I think in some ways we have real privilege and opportunity here in San Francisco to be openly loud and proud and show the rest of the country what's possible. People look to San Francisco for hope," transgender activist and Chair of the San Francisco Democratic Party Honey Mahogany said. Mahogany says it's imperative to protect transgender kids putting themselves out.

"We're seeing attacks happen, terrorist groups like the Proud Boys and other groups show up at drag queen story hours or youth events and harass our young people and I feel very protective of young people," Mahogany said. Young people say they're determined to make change. "As soon as we are old enough to get into state governments and national governments, we're going to be the policymakers and we are going to be able to make the change that people really let us down for," Hope said.