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Tamara Kalin
Calistoga

CALISTOGA

Currents

Independent local journalism for Calistoga and the upper Napa Valley

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INDEPENDENT. LOCAL. NEWS.

Calistoga Fills Mayor and Council Seats Without an Election

The 3-0 vote cancels the Nov. 3 city races, saves an estimated \$35,000 to \$60,000 and closes the last path onto the ballot.

BY TIM CARL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The Calistoga City Council voted 3-0 Wednesday, Aug. 19, to appoint three people to seats that would have been on the Nov. 3 ballot, canceling the council and mayoral races and saving the city an estimated \$35,000 to \$60,000.

The vote also ended something that never came up in the room. Under the city clerk's certification, once the council makes the appointments, the clerk cannot accept a statement of write-in candidacy for any of the three seats. Holding the election would have left that option open. The cancellation closed the last path onto the ballot for anyone who had not already filed.

The meeting ran roughly six minutes.

The Vote

Councilmembers Kevin Eisenberg and Scott Cooper were recused, announced at roll call before anything else happened. Both were among the three people being appointed.

That left three members voting: Mayor Donald Williams, Vice Mayor Lisa Gift and Councilmember Irais Lopez-Ortega. Gift moved to adopt the resolution and Lopez-Ortega seconded. All three voted aye.

Williams said in an interview earlier that morning that he expected the recusals and that the remaining three members would be enough to act.

Eisenberg, a former Calistoga teacher and principal, will become mayor. Cooper, a Realtor and former Planning Commission chair, will keep his seat. Lana Richardson takes the third. The terms begin in January.

What the Council Could Have Done Instead

Williams laid out the options from the dais. The council could appoint the nominees and cancel the election. It could appoint any eligible voter if no one had been nominated, which was not the case. Or it could hold the election as scheduled, uncontested.

No member moved to hold the election. The option was stated and not taken up.

There was no public comment on the item. Williams opened the comment period and closed it in a single breath.

The council had until Thursday, Aug. 20 — the 75th day before the election — to act. After that the election would have proceeded.

Calistoga voters will still receive a Nov. 3 ballot. The statewide general election proceeds; only the three city offices come off it.

How Three Seats Drew Three Candidates

The council called the general municipal election May 12. Notice was published July 2. The nomination period opened July 13 and was set to close Aug. 7. Williams did not file for reelection, which extended the filing window for non-incumbents, according to the staff report. It closed Aug. 12. Nobody came forward during the extension.

The city posted a Notice of No More Candidates on Aug. 13, and City Clerk Yudiana Galvan certified that there were no more candidates than seats to be filled.

Two residents took out papers and did not complete them, according to Richardson. One, she said, was a young Latina woman who found the volume of city material more than she



From left, Councilmember Irais Lopez-Ortega, Mayor Donald Williams and Vice Mayor Lisa Gift at a special City Council meeting Wednesday, Aug. 19, at the Tucker Building. Councilmembers Kevin Eisenberg and Scott Cooper were recused — Calistoga Currents Photo

had expected. Richardson said she sent her links to the city website and hopes she will run next time.

Williams said he had personally asked a number of residents to consider running. The answers were consistent, he said: full-time jobs, young children, aging parents and in some cases an unwillingness to take on the criticism that comes with the seat.

He said he emailed both residents who took out papers and did not file, inviting them to meet.

“Participation is crucial,” Williams said.

He said he had read that roughly two of every three races nationwide go uncontested, including school board, council and legislative seats.

What the Appointees Said

Gift, moving the resolution, called it the fiscally responsible action and said she was grateful Richardson had stepped forward. She said the role is not an easy one.

“I wish more members of the community who are vocal to us and wish things would change would step up,” she said.

Lopez-Ortega said there was no reason to hold an election when no one else had come forward and said she was glad Richardson was willing to serve.

Richardson, speaking after the meeting, said her priority is the Calistoga fairgrounds.

“I want to see the master plan that has been approved by the council previously to be followed, implemented and followed,” she said.

Richardson has lived in Calistoga for close to 30 years and ran a bed-and-breakfast and cooking school here for 20. She has served on the city's housing advisory committee since 2021 and said that since retiring she has watched every council and planning commission meeting.

Where the Money Goes

The election funds — the city's share of the county-run November election — were allocated to the city clerk's department in the adopted budget, Williams said. Unspent, the money carries over and is reallocated next year unless the council moves it sooner.

The meeting was held at the Tucker Building, 2025 Grant St., at the Calistoga fairgrounds. It was in-person only with no stream.

Richardson volunteered with Calistoga Currents until her appointment.

Tim Carl is a Calistoga-based photojournalist.

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By the Numbers

3-0

Council vote filling the mayor's seat and two council seats with no election, closing the last path onto the ballot.

Page 1

\$566.55

Average nightly room rate last fiscal year. Lodging tax reached \$12.9 million, the most the city has collected.

Page 4

53.5%

Share of rooms filled over the same year, the lowest outside the pandemic in 13 years.

Page 4

9 of 11

Best of Class awards at Calistoga's first professional judging that went to something other than cabernet.

Page 5

428

People counted as homeless in Napa County in January, up 14%. Nearly half said it was their first time.

Page 6

5

Children enrolled for the fall at Hearts and Hands Preschool, which closed for want of a building it could legally occupy.

Page 9

\$40,000

What the county paid in 1938 for the first 30 acres of the fairgrounds, using state money. The city paid \$2 million in 2024.

Pages 12-13



EDITOR'S NOTE

There Are Not Enough Referees

BY TIM CARL

There are not enough referees.

That was one of the more surprising things I learned recently while talking with a vice principal at Calistoga Junior/Senior High School, a former coach, about the beginning of another school year.

We talked about academics, of course, but also about sports. Calistoga plays eight-man football, and its teams travel around the region competing against other small schools. Athletics offer students something a classroom cannot always provide: the experience of depending on other people, competing within rules, losing without collapsing and winning without humiliating somebody else.

We call much of that sportsmanship.

But there is a practical problem. There are not enough officials to work all the games.

Schools sometimes have to move games to different days or bring officials in from outside the area, adding expense and logistical complications.

I asked why.

The answer was remarkably simple.

People are tired of getting yelled at.

That conversation has stayed with me, particularly because of something happening a few miles away at Calistoga City Hall.

Calistoga will not hold an election for its open City Council seats this November because there were no contested races. Lana Richardson and Councilmember Scott Cooper will take council seats and Kevin Eisenberg will become mayor, succeeding Donald Williams. The new terms begin in January.

Canceling the election saves the city roughly \$35,000 to \$60,000.

Saving that money is useful. Having too few people willing to run for public office is something else.

There is an obvious danger in comparing elected officials with referees. Councilmembers are not supposed to be protected from criticism. Neither are mayors, city managers, school boards, newspaper editors or anyone else exercising public authority.

Democracy requires disagreement. It requires scrutiny. Sometimes it requires anger.

But criticism and contempt are different things.

Attend enough public meetings and another side of local government becomes visible. Meetings stretch for hours. Staff members explain sewer rates, housing requirements, budgets, contracts and planning rules. Councilmembers listen to reports, ask questions and cast votes that inevitably disappoint somebody.

By the end of some meetings, only one or two members of the public remain in the audience.

The council is still there.

The people doing this work are not volunteers, but neither are they making anything resembling a private-sector salary for the hours and public exposure involved. Whatever one thinks of a particular vote, they have agreed to put their names beside decisions made on behalf of the community.

And the arithmetic has gotten harder. When housing costs outrun wages, the hours a council seat demands — weeknight meetings, weekend events, hundreds of pages of staff reports — are hours a young family with a mortgage simply cannot spare, which narrows the field to people with flexible schedules, grown children or enough money that the time is not a sacrifice.

Increasingly, public life seems to carry an assumption that yelling at the people making those decisions is itself a form of participation.

Mayor Donald Williams raised the idea in a recent interview and followed up with a citation: Eitan Hersh's "Politics Is for Power," which describes "political hobbyism" — politics consumed as a pastime rather than practiced as the work of governing.

The consequences may be more significant than an unpleasant Tuesday night at City Hall.

What happens when qualified people look at public service and decide they would rather not subject themselves or their families to it?

What happens when a school cannot find somebody willing to referee Friday night's football game?

Eventually, the game changes.

None of this means people should stop challenging their government. Quite the opposite. Calistoga would benefit from more people attending council meetings, reading staff reports, asking difficult questions, serving on commissions and running for office.

A contested election is healthy. Four candidates for three seats would have given voters choices. Six would have given them more. Democracy is stronger when people step forward.

But getting more people onto the field may require thinking about how we treat the people already standing there.

That lesson is particularly appropriate at the beginning of a school year.

We ask young athletes to learn that disagreement with a call does not entitle them to abuse the official. We teach them to compete hard, follow the rules, shake hands afterward and return the next day prepared to play again.

We call that good sportsmanship.

Outside the gym and beyond the football field, we have another word for much the same thing. Citizenship.

The word has not gone anywhere. We have simply narrowed it to mean holding strong opinions, when it has always meant more: doing a share of the work, and extending some good faith to the people doing the rest of it.



Masthead

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Calistoga Currents publishes letters from readers on the issues facing the town. Letters carry the writer's real name and may be edited for length and clarity. Send yours to editor@calistogacurrents.com.

KEEP THE COMMUNITY POOL OPEN THROUGH THE WINTER

Water fitness exercise provides a low-impact, full body workout which improves muscle strength and heart health and boosts mood. For some people like myself it has helped me heal from a low-back injury with some minor nerve damage. My spine doctor and physical therapist recommended aqua aerobics to help my body heal.

There are folks who attend this exercise at the public pool to help gain better mobility and feel stronger. The talents of the teachers and the social enjoyments of this activity lift the spirits of all involved. Unfortunately, our Calistoga Community Pool will be closing for the season at the end of September and many people who

use this pool for aqua aerobics classes or lap swimming are very disappointed.

The Community Pool needs to be open all year round so residents can continue to feel healthy, especially in winter. Issues of heating the pool and the need for lifeguards should be addressed. Access to the pools of our town's resorts is not possible anymore unless you want to pay a high price for day-use only.

Finally, I wish to thank all of the amazing aerobics teachers: Abby, Allison, Dianne, Fides and Kailee. They are talented and everyone appreciates their fun and positive energy. Also, thanks to the friendly staff and caring lifeguards. We will miss you.

Allie LaCentra, Calistoga

WHAT READERS SAID

A TOWN THAT CANCELED ITS ELECTION, AND TWO READERS WHO DISAGREED ABOUT WHY

Readers responded to our Aug. 19 report that the City Council appointed a mayor and two councilmembers and canceled the November election. Two wrote publicly under their own names, and they disagreed.

Mark Skinner wrote that three positions drew three candidates and not one contested race. "I'm all for saving taxpayer money, but saving money because voters have no choices isn't exactly a victory for democracy," he wrote. He said this was not a criticism of Kevin Eisenberg, Scott Cooper or Lana Richardson, who "stepped forward and deserve credit for doing so," but that nobody challenged them. "Calistoga deserves participation, debate and choices."

Frederick Lancaster, who describes himself as a part-time Calistoga resident from 2004 to 2018, read it differently. He wrote that nobody stepped forward because of what the current council has done, and pointed to the city's ownership of the fairgrounds as evidence. "Citizens must approve of the current direction of the town," he wrote. He also raised something the appointments did not touch: that the town's hot springs remain available only to guests of its resorts.

Both were invited to submit letters.

We are reporting two questions for a coming issue: what the city did between May 12 and Aug. 12 to notify residents that three seats were open, and why Calistoga held a mayoral election in 2024 with a single candidate but appointed in 2026 under the same statute.



HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Send a letter at calistogacurrents.com/letters, or email editor@calistogacurrents.com. Letters should respond to local issues, run 300 words or fewer and carry the writer's real name and city.

PICKETT FIRE LAWSUIT

Lawsuit Over Pickett Fire Moves to Federal Court as Woodbridge Claims Foreign Citizenship

BY KERANA TODOROV



The Pickett Fire burns in the hills east of downtown Calistoga, August 2025 — Tim Carl Photo

NAPA, Calif. — Five companies controlled by vintner Jayson Woodbridge have moved a lawsuit over the Pickett Fire into federal court, asserting in their filing that they are citizens of Poland and that Woodbridge is a citizen of Malta and Canada with no right of residence in the United States.

The suit was filed Aug. 5 in Napa County Superior Court by three Howell Mountain vineyard and winery owners — Laelius Winegrowing LLC, 1260 Summit Lake LLC (Impensata) and Tourelle LLC (Outpost Wines). They allege the Pickett Fire started because of the negligence of a worker at Woodbridge’s Hundred Acre property on Pickett Road, and that smoke taint left their 2025 crop unusable and unsalable.

The complaint brings four claims — negligence, trespass, public nuisance and private nuisance. The trespass and nuisance claims are brought by Laelius and Outpost only. It seeks compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at trial, along with prejudgment interest and attorneys’ fees, and names 50 unidentified defendants.

A Napa Case With Foreign Citizens

The five corporate defendants — One True Vine LLC; 2339 Pickett Road LLC; Hundred Acre Wine Estate LLC; Hundred Acre Wine Group Holdings LLC; and Hundred Acre Wine Group Vineyards LLC — removed the case to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California on Aug. 12 and filed an amended notice of removal Aug. 18.

The complaint describes each of the five as a California limited liability company. The removal notice describes them as citizens of Poland. Both can be accurate: for purposes of federal diversity jurisdiction, a limited liability company takes the citizenship of its members rather than the state where it was formed or does business.

According to an ownership chart filed with the notice, each of the five companies is owned by another limited liability company, with By the Light of the Moon LLC as the ultimate parent. The sole member of By the Light of the Moon is Gleventille Investments sp. z o.o., a Polish corporation with its principal place of business in Warsaw.

The filing states that Woodbridge is a citizen of both Canada and Malta, maintains his permanent residence in Malta, resides principally there and has no right of residence in the United States. The amended notice filed Aug. 18 added the Canadian citizenship claim and the legal standard governing foreign-citizen diversity to the original Aug. 12 filing.

Removal to federal court requires complete diversity between the parties and an amount in controversy above \$75,000. The companies said the plaintiffs’ pre-litigation demands exceeded that threshold, while noting they do not rely on those demands to establish liability.

Woodbridge Not Yet Served

The notice states that Woodbridge had not been served with the complaint or summons, and that none of the defendants had appeared in the state case.



Onlookers watch a helicopter crew gather water behind the Napa Valley welcome sign just south of downtown Calistoga during the Pickett Fire in August 2025 — Tim Carl Photo

Counsel for the five companies returned a signed acknowledgment of receipt Aug. 12, effecting service on them. All defendants consented to the removal.

The companies are represented by Robert A. Julian, Robb Adkins and Lauren T. Attard of Baker & Hostetler in San Francisco, with Dustin Dow of the firm’s Cleveland office seeking admission for the case. The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Haywood S. Gilliam Jr.

On Aug. 18, the five companies moved to dismiss the complaint. A proposed order filed with the motion asks the court to dismiss the case with prejudice and without leave to amend, and to enter judgment in the companies’ favor. A hearing is set for Oct. 8 at 2 p.m.

An Insurer’s Subsidiary Among the Plaintiffs

The removal notice also identifies the ownership of the plaintiffs. It states that the sole member of Tourelle LLC, which does business as Outpost Wines, is AXA Millésimes US Inc., a Delaware corporation with a principal address on Summit Lake Drive in Angwin. AXA Millésimes is the wine arm of the French insurance group AXA.

The companies further contend that 1260 Summit Lake LLC is a citizen of New York rather than California, citing a Buffalo address and a member listed in state records, and that Laelius Winegrowing’s sole member is a trust benefiting founder Louis Ciminelli, also of Buffalo.

What the Complaint Alleges

The complaint alleges on information and belief that the defendants “have acknowledged that one or more workers at the Hundred Acre Property was tempering an outdoor masonry oven, which process generated hot ashes, which ashes were discarded on the Hundred Acre Property, and that the Pickett Fire broke out ‘relatively soon’ after those ashes were discarded on the Hundred Acre Property.”

It further alleges that Woodbridge acknowledged the fire began on property the defendants own, operate, control or use, and that the companies were negligent in hiring and failing to train the employee in the proper handling of hot ashes and prevention of wildfires.

Laelius Winegrowing was founded by Ciminelli, a retired contractor from Buffalo, N.Y. Impensata is his family’s wine brand. Laelius operates two vineyards in Napa County, including the roughly 15-acre Ciminelli Vineyard in Angwin, on Howell Mountain. Two wineries rejected the smoke-tainted cabernet sauvignon from that vineyard, according to the complaint.

Outpost Wines operates three vineyards on Howell Mountain — Outpost Estate Vineyard, True Vineyard and Henry Vineyard — along with a winery. Grapes from those vineyards also sustained smoke-taint damage, leaving Outpost without a source for its Howell Mountain wines, the complaint said.

Napa County Agricultural Commissioner Tracy Cleveland estimated in August 2025 that the Pickett Fire caused at least \$65 million in agricultural losses, a figure she described as preliminary.

Cause Still Under Review

The fire burned 6,820 acres over 17 days in mostly steep terrain before it was fully contained Sept. 7, according to Cal Fire’s incident page, which lists the cause as debris burning. It is unclear whether anyone has been cited or fined.

The complaint said Cal Fire denied a public records request for information on the fire’s origin, citing an active ongoing prosecution case, and directed the requester to the Napa County District Attorney’s office. Napa County separately denied a records request, calling the material exempt investigatory records tied to an open criminal investigation. The county did not disclose the nature of the charges under investigation or who, if anyone, is the subject.

A representative for the district attorney’s office confirmed that a case has been submitted for review. The office did not identify the subject of that case.

“We hope to make a decision on whether or not to file charges soon,” said Carlos Villatoro, spokesman for the Napa County District Attorney’s office.

The plaintiffs are represented by Lawrence Brocchini of Carle Mackie Power & Ross, with Daniel Reidy of Reidy Law Group serving as of counsel. Reidy said his clients seek accountability.

“Notwithstanding evidence that the [Pickett] fire originated on Jayson Woodbridge’s property as a result of inexcusable conduct on a triple-digit temperature day in late August that resulted in the loss of their 2025 harvests, our clients made concerted good-faith efforts to mitigate and resolve their claims without litigation,” Reidy said. “Despite promises to do the same, these efforts were not reciprocated by Mr. Woodbridge, prompting this lawsuit. Our clients intend to fully prosecute this action to ensure that those responsible are held accountable.”

Hundred Acre intends to defend itself in court. “Hundred Acre denies the claims in this lawsuit. We will vigorously defend our position in court,” Hundred Acre spokesman Sam Singer said. “Only these three plaintiffs chose litigation. Numerous other wineries affected by the Pickett Fire are working cooperatively and in collaboration with us to resolve their claims fairly and responsibly. The complaint contains allegations that are unproven — including claims concerning the cause of the fire and responsibility for the plaintiffs’ alleged losses.”

A History of Litigation

Woodbridge has litigated against Napa County in separate cases over the years.

In 2022, Woodbridge and Hundred Acre sued the county in Napa County Superior Court, challenging a requirement that he replant vegetation destroyed on his Pickett Road property in the 2020 Glass Fire. According to the complaint in the current case, 80 acres of Woodbridge’s 113-acre Calistoga property burned in that fire. Hundred Acre sought to develop an experimental dry-farmed vineyard on the land. That case remains pending.

In 2023, Woodbridge sued the county in federal court over its well permitting policy. That case was dismissed as premature, with leave to amend.

FLORIST LISTING

No License, No Shop: City Finds No Record of Online Calistoga Florist

A business listed at a Foothill Boulevard address turns out to be a medical office suite

BY CALISTOGA CURRENTS STAFF

CALISTOGA, Calif. — A business that appears in online searches as a Calistoga florist has no business license with the city, and the address it advertises belongs to a medical office.

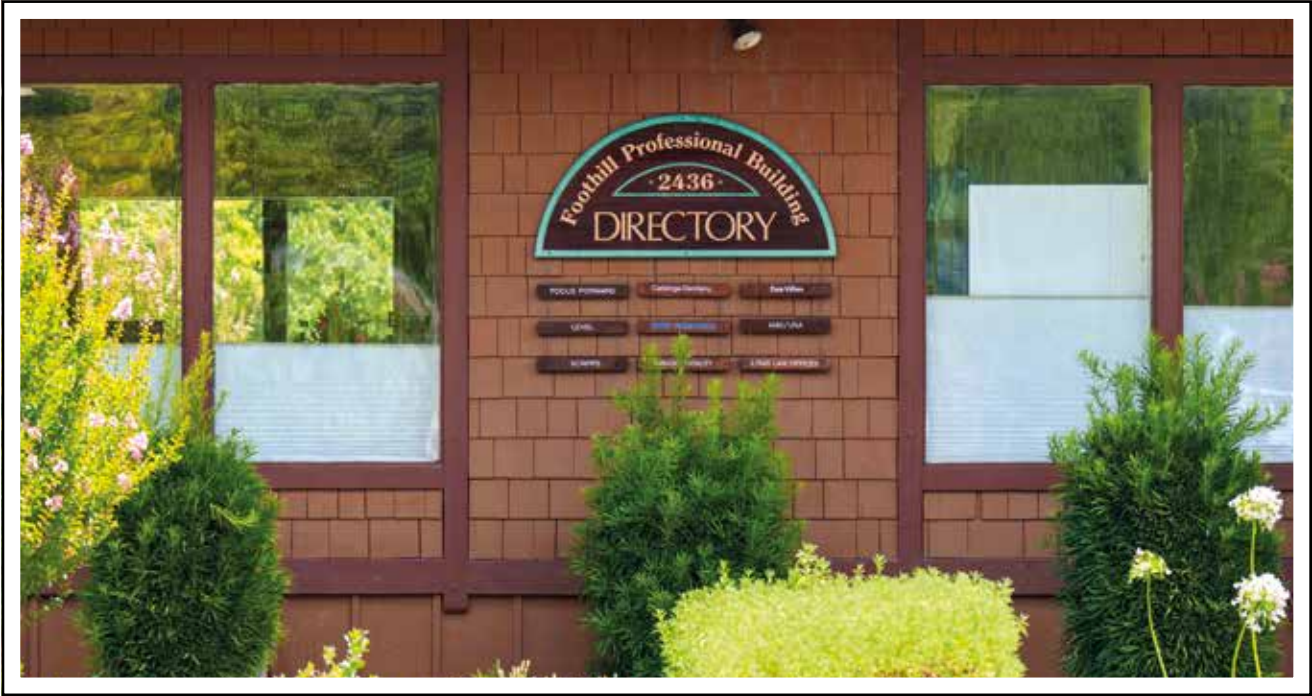
Calistoga Balloons and Flowers lists 2436 Foothill Blvd., Suite D, along with a local phone number and daily hours. The address is the Foothill Professional Building. Its exterior directory names nine tenants and an interior board assigns suites by letter. Suite D is Kaiser Permanente. No florist appears on either.

Deputy City Manager Rachel Stepp said the finance department searched city records and found nothing under that name. The only license issued for Suite D in the past five years belongs to Permanente Medical Group.

“The city does not have a business license under that name,” Stepp said.

A call to the listed number Aug. 21 opened with a recording describing roses arriving three times a week from South America. A person who came on the line said the business operates from Novato, said the Calistoga location closes for the summer and is used only for events, then repeated that the operation is in Novato when asked about the Foothill Boulevard address. The call ended abruptly. A second call two hours later went unanswered. Two Novato flower shops said the listing is not theirs.

Stepp said staff who administer business licenses reviewed the question and concluded that an out-of-town seller taking Calistoga orders would need a city license under municipal code sections 5.04.020 and 5.04.220. A local business fulfilling or delivering such an order would need one as well.



The tenant directory at the Foothill Professional Building, 2436 Foothill Blvd., where an online listing places a florist that city records show has no Calistoga business license. Suite D is Kaiser Permanente — Calistoga Currents Photo

Code enforcement in Calistoga is complaint-driven. Stepp noted that a city letter would go to the advertised address — the Kaiser suite. Asked whether the city would investigate, Stepp said the matter would generally fall outside the city’s enforcement role unless there is a separate local code violation or another issue within its jurisdiction.

Erica Ramey, owner of EV Floral Design, and manager Barbie Trattler reported the listing at

city hall and at the police department. They were referred to the Federal Trade Commission.

California law makes misrepresenting a floral business’s location an infraction. The penalty is capped at \$250, and the statute exempts the directory sites that carry such listings.

No one has identified themselves on behalf of Calistoga Balloons and Flowers. A certified letter requesting comment was mailed Aug. 24 to the address the listing advertises.

WINERY LICENSES

Calistoga’s Winery Count Depends on What You Count

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The state lists 188 active winery licenses at Calistoga addresses. They are held by 160 businesses, at 106 places.

A Type-02 winegrower license is what California requires to make and sell wine. It does not require a winery. The permit also covers warehouses, offices and off-site tasting rooms, and one license can carry several brands.

A review of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control’s license database on Aug. 9 found 88 addresses where a single business holds the only license. At the other 18 addresses, two or more separate businesses each hold their own permit. Seven of those addresses account for 67 licenses between them. Two neighboring properties on Silverado Trail carry 16 apiece, and a Tubbs Lane address carries 13.

Multiple businesses at one address usually means custom crush — a brand making wine at another company’s winery under its own permit. The arrangement is legal, common and decades old in the Napa Valley.

Calistoga’s total has held. The city had 186 licenses in October 2023. Napa County’s countywide count has fallen since mid-2025.



Most Calistoga winery addresses carry a single license, but seven addresses host five or more separate businesses — Calistoga Currents Chart

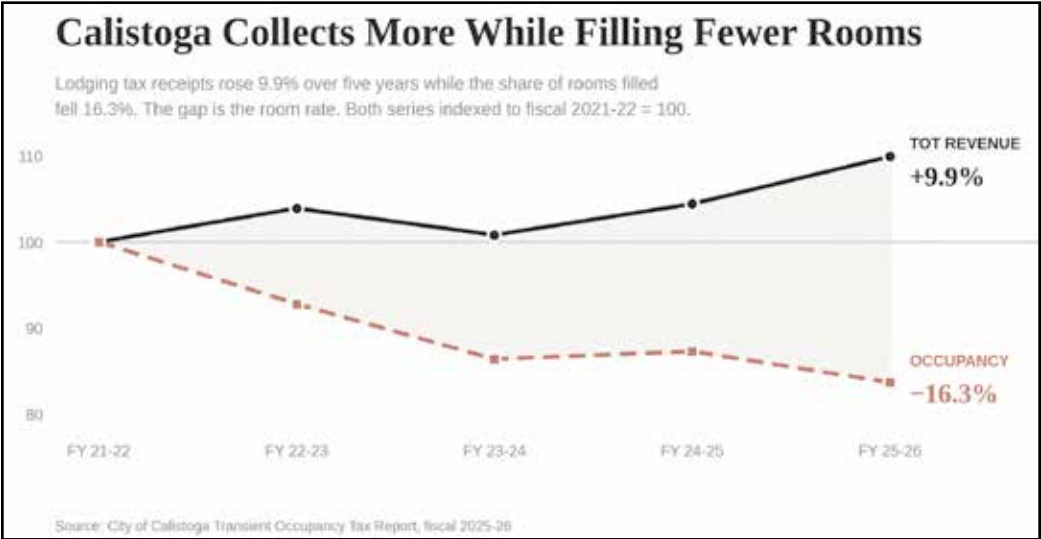
LODGING TAX

Calistoga Collects More While Filling Fewer Rooms

The city took in \$12,958,844 in transient occupancy tax in fiscal 2025-26, the most in its history and about \$988,000 above the adopted estimate. Occupancy over the same year averaged 53.5%, the lowest outside the pandemic in the 13 years the city has published the figure, down from 63.9% in fiscal 2021-22.

Both facts follow from the same arithmetic. Lodging tax is a percentage of what guests pay, so revenue rises when the average room rate rises even as fewer rooms fill. The average nightly rate reached \$566.55 across the year.

That leaves the city’s largest revenue source resting on price rather than volume. A 10% drop in room rates, with occupancy unchanged, would cut lodging tax collections by about \$1.3 million. Recovering that through volume alone would require selling 11% more room-nights than the town sold last year.



Calistoga’s lodging tax receipts rose 9.9% between fiscal 2021-22 and fiscal 2025-26 while the share of hotel rooms filled fell 16.3%. Both series indexed to fiscal 2021-22 — Calistoga Currents Chart

WINE FESTIVAL

Calistoga Wine Festival Makes the Case for the Vines It Kept

BY TIM CARL



Nick Skinner holds the Best of Class medal for Joseph Cellars’ zinfandel at the Calistoga Wine Festival on Aug. 15 at the Brannan Center — Clark James Mishler Photo

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The highest-scoring wine at Calistoga’s first professional evaluation was a zinfandel.

About 130 people filled the Brannan Center, 1407 Third St., on Aug. 15 for the inaugural Calistoga Wine Festival, where 14 wineries poured, 10 restaurants served and the results of a July judging were announced. Twenty-six wineries had submitted 56 wines. All 56 took a medal, and the 11 Best of Class awards went almost entirely to varieties that have largely disappeared from the rest of Napa Valley.

Cabernet sauvignon accounted for 21 of the 56 entries and took two of the 11 top awards. The others went to a zinfandel, a charbono, a petite sirah, a merlot, a touriga nacional, a grenache blanc, a sauvignon blanc, a Bordeaux blend and a proprietary field blend.

“No one else in this whole entire area in Napa Valley will be able to do that,” said Christopher Sawyer, the sommelier who designed the evaluation and led the awards seminar.

He credited the growers who kept the old blocks in the ground rather than replanting to cabernet.

“These vines, they can outlive generations of people,” Sawyer said.

Sawyer put the appellation at roughly 90% red varieties, with cabernet near 56% of plantings and zinfandel around 20%, and said 46 of California’s 75 acres of charbono sit within it. Published figures run somewhat lower, at about 65 to 70 acres statewide with roughly 40 in Calistoga, but the concentration is not in dispute. Most of the charbono left in the United States grows within a few miles of downtown Calistoga.

What the Awards Showed

Wines were poured blind at Sterling Vineyards on July 15, and judges were told only the appellation and the category. They scored on a 100-point scale, then each table’s head judge reconciled the scores. Gold and double gold wines were tasted a second time by both panels, and where the panels agreed, a wine was named Best of Class.

Whitney Fisher, wine grower at Fisher Vineyards, entered the RCF Vineyard Red Bordeaux Blend, which took Best of Class at 96 points, and the Coach Insignia Cabernet Sauvignon, also 96 and a double gold. She found the breadth on the tables more interesting than the results.

“The most surprising has been just the breadth of wines,” Fisher said. “Some varieties from the past showing up again.”

Fisher, whose family has farmed here since 1973, framed that as strategy rather than nostalgia. The winery planted chenin blanc and sauvignon blanc within a fruit orchard and made its first vintages of both in 2025, dry farmed, in what she described as an agroforestry planting.

The Varieties That Survived

The results sheet reads like an inventory of what Calistoga did not pull out. Castello di Amorosa’s gold-medal zinfandel came from a block Sawyer said carries 100-year-old vines. Tedeschi Family Winery submitted a valdiguié, once grown widely in California as Napa gamay and now nearly gone. Vermeil, GRO Wines and Girard all entered wines from the Frediani Vineyard, among the appellation’s oldest holdings.



From left, Joel Aiken, winemaker emeritus at Beaulieu Vineyard; Len Tolstunov, founder of the Calistoga Wine Society; sommelier and wine judge Christopher Sawyer; Hugh Davies, president of Schramsberg and Davies Estate; and Castello di Amorosa proprietor Dario Sattui at the Judgment of Calistoga award ceremony Aug. 15 at the Brannan Center — Clark James Mishler Photo

The Room

The festival sold 131 tickets, above the 100 organizers had advertised. Eighteen volunteers and a six-member planning committee worked it, and organizers put total attendance above 150 counting winery and restaurant staff. A portion of proceeds went to UpValley Family Centers, a nonprofit serving northern Napa County.

Michelle DiPasquale, the volunteer day-of coordinator and an events manager for the University of California system, said the local framing was the point.

“There’s so many events in Napa for the whole valley, which is great,” DiPasquale said. “But this was Calistoga restaurants, Calistoga wine.”

Gustavo Rios, executive chef at Solage, brought dishes from Solbar and Picobar and described the appellation the way the vintners did.

“We have a lot of wines that are underdogs, that are not because they’re very small,” Rios said. “People sometimes haven’t heard of them, but I think we have great juice and great potential.”

The Anniversary It Didn’t Need

Organizers called the evaluation the Judgment of Calistoga, timed to the 50th anniversary of the 1976 Paris tasting. The borrowed name did less work than the wines did, and Len Tolstunov, who founded the Calistoga Wine Society four years ago and spent eight months assembling the festival, set the comparison aside when pressed on it.

“It’s a quality assessment of Calistoga wines,” he said. “You can say it’s evaluation or assessment of local wineries by the quality, with getting gradations, getting awards, different awards, but it’s not definitely an Olympic competition.”

The Paris tasting was the other thing. Nine French judges ranked 20 wines against one another, and the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay finished first among the whites. Something won because other things lost.

The Calistoga evaluation was built to avoid a winner take all situation, and deliberately. Tolstunov said the ranked format was itself a barrier to getting wineries to participate. He told the judges that roughly 60 to 65 wineries are associated with the appellation, meaning fewer than half took part in the first year.

The appellation’s own founding document makes the case more precisely than the marketing does. Geologist Jonathan Swinchatt, whose report accompanied the 2003 petition filed by Bo Barrett of Chateau Montelena, found the area underlain by volcanic bedrock with alluvial fans of cobbly and gravelly loam extending onto the valley floor — a uniformity he contrasted with the more varied ground beneath St. Helena, Rutherford and Oakville. At the valley’s northwestern end, he recorded nighttime minimums near 50 degrees against daytime peaks near 100. The appellation covers 12,713 acres with roughly 625 planted, a figure Tolstunov confirmed this month after earlier Calistoga Wine Society materials described about 2,500 planted acres.

Gillian Ballance, a Master Sommelier and national education manager for Treasury Wine Estates, recalled that Calistoga had appeared on the Master Sommelier theory exam as the answer to a question about diurnal temperature range, and said that single answer is close to the whole of what many candidates know about it.

“It’s an indication that there’s not enough awareness about this AVA,” she said.

What It Is

“It’s called Calistoga Wine Festival, but it’s not just about wines,” Tolstunov said.

The name will keep causing trouble as long as it stays. A reader who sees Judgment of Calistoga is invited to think of a tasting where a result overturned an expectation, and this event was built so that no result could — by design, and for a reason its founder stated plainly.

What it did instead is harder to put on a poster and more useful to the appellation. It got nine working professionals to spend a day on Calistoga wine, several of whom said afterward they had not been paying it enough attention. It put more than 150 people in a room with charbono, old-vine zinfandel, valdiguié, marsanne and touriga nacional from a place the trade files under cabernet. And it produced an argument the appellation has not made well before: that the interesting thing about Calistoga is not that it can make another Napa cabernet, but that it kept the vines everyone else pulled out.

Most of the charbono left in the country grows here. No borrowed anniversary is doing more work than that.

Best of Class Winners				
CALISTOGA AVA PROFESSIONAL WINE COMPETITION • JUDGED JULY 15, 2026				
	BEST OF CLASS	DOUBLE GOLD	GOLD	SILVER
	11	9	21	15
				90 double-goldists rose to being wine judges
Nine of the 11 top awards went to varieties other than cabernet sauvignon.				Best of Class is a separate award. The 11 winners were selected from the gold and double gold tiers and listed in place of their original medal.
UPGRADED FROM DOUBLE GOLD		DOUBLE GOLD CONTINUED		2 WINES
90-99 points, below the upgrade				
Joseph Cellars	97	Vermeil Wines		96
• 2022 Tofanelli Vineyard Zinfandel		• 2023 Roundtable Block, Frediani Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon		
Beaulieu Vineyard	96	Hayfork Wine Co.		95
• 2022 “Marsanne” Reserve Calistoga Touriga Nacional		• 2024 Knieflick Ranch Grenache Blanc		
Elusa	96	UPGRADED FROM GOLD		2 WINES
• 2023 Sauvignon Blanc		90-99 points, below the upgrade		
Fisher Vineyards	96	Chase Cellars		94
• 2023 RCF Vineyard Red Bordeaux Blend		• 2023 Barbara Vineyard Petite Sirah		
Girard	96	Hayfork Wine Co.		94
• 2019 Calistoga Cabernet Sauvignon		• 2023 Skypack Vineyard Chardonnay		
Markham Vineyards	96	Girard		92
• 2021 District Series Merlot		• 2022 Mixed Black Proprietary Blend		
• 2021 Old World Cabernet Sauvignon		• 2021 Mixed Black Proprietary Blend		
• 2021 Old World Cabernet Sauvignon		• 2021 Mixed Black Proprietary Blend		

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Back-to-School Celebration Draws Families to Berry Field

Forty-seven organizations, a free meal and a mechanical bull, against a season in which some families are staying home.

BY TIM CARL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Children took turns on a mechanical bull on Berry Field at Calistoga Elementary School on Friday evening while volunteers worked a grill, a band set up nearby and families moved among rows of tables offering everything from mental health counseling to Medi-Cal enrollment.

The annual back-to-school celebration, organized by UpValley Family Centers with the Calistoga Joint Unified School District, is free and open to anyone.

“It’s important so that our community members know what resources are available for them,” said Marcela Rodriguez, education program manager for UpValley Family Centers. “A lot of these providers are staffed within either our school-based offices or in our client-facing offices for the family center, and we help reduce the barrier to access to services.”

Forty-seven partner organizations set up tables this year, ranging from early learning services to insurance and health providers, services for older adults, Napa County offices and first responders. About 40 volunteers worked alongside roughly 30 staff members and district employees, she said, and 779 people attended over the



Families dance as Generación 05, a norteño group formed by Calistoga High School alumni, closes the annual back-to-school celebration at Berry Field on Friday — Calistoga Currents Photo

course of the evening. Students ran the popcorn and snow cone stations. Napa singer Jazmin Oro performed, followed by Generación 05, a norteño group formed by Calistoga High School alumni during the pandemic.

One Stop for Many Providers

Karina Arias, a bilingual therapist with Mentis, the Napa nonprofit that provides affordable mental health

care countywide, said bringing services onto campus removes a step for families.

“That way, we’re kind of creating a one-stop shop,” Arias said. “You’re here at the school, and the families can also be supported through the services that are provided in the community, and we’re all working together as a system.”

Arias said the largest unmet need she sees is care delivered in Spanish.

Fear Is Keeping Some Families Home

Indira Lopez-Jones has worked for UpValley Family Centers for 21 years and is serving as acting executive director while Jenny Ocón takes a sabbatical. She said turnout at the celebration has grown steadily. Participation in some other programs has moved the other way.

“There is a lot of fear in the community about all the talk at the national level,” Lopez-Jones said. “Now it doesn’t matter if you are an undocumented person versus a documented one — everybody feels the threats the same way.”

She said some families have stopped seeking food assistance and other help rather than put their names on a government record.

“It’s very difficult for some families to survive,” she said.

Lopez-Jones, who also holds a seat on the Calistoga Joint Unified School District Board of Trustees, said the organization does not ask clients about immigration status and cannot quantify how many families have pulled back.

A Partnership the District Leans On

Audra Pittman, superintendent of Calistoga Joint Unified School District, said the evening reflects a working relationship that runs through the school year into mental health services, student support and food assistance.

“We as a school district couldn’t do this work without our partnership,” Pittman said. “It truly is a true partnership that you don’t see in many places.”

She said assembling agencies, law enforcement and school staff in one place carries its own message at a moment of tension over immigration enforcement.

“They are safe here, that we are going to welcome them in, that we are going to support them every which way we can,” Pittman said. “All of us are here to really work together to support whoever lives here and whoever has needs here, regardless of what their immigration status is.”

Economic Pressure Behind the Demand

Doug Boesch, president of the UpValley Family Centers board and co-founder of Boesch Vineyards in St. Helena, said the organization serves more than 3,000 unduplicated clients a year, a figure he put at more than a quarter of the combined population of St. Helena and Calistoga.

“These are our neighbors and our friends and the people who make our businesses work,” Boesch said.

Napa County’s point-in-time count on Jan. 28 identified 428 people experiencing homelessness, a 14% increase over the previous year. Of those, 190 — about 44% — reported it was their first time, up from 33% a year earlier. Asked about the increase, Boesch pointed to overlapping political and economic pressures and named the wine industry, the county’s largest employer, as the likeliest driver.

“It’s been tough on the wine industry lately,” he said. “So my guess is that’s probably the number one influencer, at least in very recent times.”

Boesch said UpValley Family Centers does not operate a shelter but provides emergency housing help, food, short-term financial assistance and job training.

Laurel Rios, the school board clerk, who came with her two daughters, said the night does something the school calendar cannot.

“I think the start of the school year is always an exciting time, and everyone’s on the same page,” Rios said. “And it’s just important to remember that feeling and carry it throughout the year.”

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Families visit one of the 47 organizations that set up tables at the celebration, which ranged from early learning services to Napa County offices and first responders — Clark James Mishler Photo

MENTIS MOMENT

Healthy Habits for a Strong Start to the School Year

BY NIKKI CLANCY AND KARINA ARIAS



— Calistoga Currents Illustration

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The back-to-school season can bring opportunities, challenges and many different emotions for both children and parents. According to the American Psychological Association, returning to school often brings increased stress and anxiety as children adjust to new routines, teachers, classmates and academic expectations. From unfamiliar classrooms and changing schedules to social pressures and the transition from the freedom of summer to a more structured routine, these changes can feel overwhelming.

As parents and caregivers, it is important to encourage your children to share their feelings, maintain healthy routines such as getting enough sleep, and make time to connect with family, friends or other trusted adults. But it is also important to remember that adjusting takes time. Your child may not walk into the first day of school feeling completely confident or calm — and that is OK. With patience, understanding and a few simple wellness practices, families can create a supportive foundation for a healthier start to the school year.

Create a Healthy Foundation

One of the most effective ways to support your child’s mental health during a transition is to create consistency at home.

Prioritize sleep. A regular bedtime and wakeup schedule can help children and teens adjust to the demands of the school day. Begin shifting sleep schedules gradually before school starts rather than waiting until the night before.

Build movement into the day. Exercise and physical activity can be a powerful way to reduce stress and improve mood. Encourage your child to play outside, walk the dog, ride a bike, participate in a sport or simply move their body in a way they enjoy.

Calistoga has trails at every level. Mount St. Helena is the one most families here know, and the climb out of Robert Louis Stevenson State Park is a full morning. Table Rock is shorter with the same views. The Oat Hill Mine Trail begins at the north end of Lincoln Avenue, so a family can walk to the trailhead, and it can be as long or as short as the day allows. The Palisades reward an early start.

Make time for connection. Even a few minutes of uninterrupted time together can help children feel grounded. Share a meal, take a walk or simply sit together without distractions.

Practice calming techniques. Simple breathing exercises can help children and teens regulate big emotions. Try taking a slow breath in through the nose for four counts, holding for two counts and slowly exhaling for four counts. Repeat several times. Younger children might enjoy pretending to “smell the flower” as they breathe in and “blow out the candle” as they breathe out.

Encourage healthy outlets. Journaling, drawing, listening to music, reading, mindfulness or spending time in nature can give children a healthy way to process emotions. The goal is not to eliminate stress but to help children learn ways to manage it.



Pausing counts as direction.

— Calistoga Currents Illustration

Give Yourself Grace, Too

Back-to-school transitions can be stressful for parents and caregivers, too. New schedules, homework, carpools, activities and family responsibilities can make the start of the school year feel overwhelming. A 2024 Harris Poll conducted for Understood.org found that 89% of parents of school-aged children experience back-to-school stress. Give yourself the same patience and grace you offer your child during this transition.

Remember that your child may need time to adjust to a new routine. There may be difficult mornings, forgotten assignments, emotional afternoons or days when everything feels overwhelming. Approach these moments with patience and curiosity rather than frustration.

When emotions run high, pause before reacting. Take a breath. Remind yourself that your child is learning — not only academic subjects but also how to navigate change, manage emotions, solve problems and become more independent.

You do not have to have all the answers. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can offer is simply your presence and reassurance: “I’m here. We’ll figure this out together.”

A Gentle Reminder for the Year Ahead

The transition back to school takes time. While some children adjust quickly, others may need extra support. What matters most is creating an environment where children feel comfortable talking about their experiences and know they are not alone.

As the school year begins, check in on more than homework and grades — ask how your child is feeling. Celebrate small successes, make time for rest and be patient through the difficult days. Remind your child that their worth is not defined by grades, sports or achievements.

A new school year is a fresh start. With compassion, connection and support, families can begin the season with confidence, resilience and hope.

Nikki Clancy is the development manager at Mentis. Karina Arias is a licensed marriage and family therapist at Mentis, where she supports tweens and teens through the organization’s youth programs.

Mental Health Care Services

If you or someone you love is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. In Napa County, the Mental Health Crisis Hotline is (707) 253-4711 and the Mobile Response Team is (707) 299-2111, both 24 hours a day.

If you or someone you love needs mental health or wellness support, visit the Mentis Community and Youth Resource Database at mentisnapa.org/youth. Mentis is one of Napa’s oldest nonprofits and provides bilingual, affordable mental health services to people of every age and income level.

If you are a veteran or someone who supports a veteran in crisis, call the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1, or text 838255 for 24/7, confidential support — no VA enrollment required.



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NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

Nineteen Tables, One Park:

Calistoga Marks 10 Years of National Night Out

Police, Rotary and 17 other groups filled Pioneer Park for a steady, unhurried evening.

BY TIM CARL



From left, Officer Nick Dobusch, Officer Samantha Arlen, Police Technician Andrew Wieggers, Community Service Officer Anika Fair, Police Chief Matthew McCaffrey, Officer Tanya Hilliard, Sgt. Michael Miceli, Officer Roberto Ballines and Officer Deybis Menjivar at the Calistoga Police Department table at National Night Out in Pioneer Park — Calistoga Currents Photo

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Pinewood Derby cars rolled down a track at one end of Pioneer Park on Aug. 4 while, at the other, children pressed patches onto blank ball caps at a table staffed by Calistoga police officers. A ring toss game ran between them.

The hat bar drew the longest lines of the night. The occasion was National Night Out, the annual community-building event held the first Tuesday of August in communities across the country. Calistoga police hosted 19 organizations this year, according to Officer Samantha Arlen, the department’s school resource officer for the Calistoga Joint Unified School District. Participants across the park described Aug. 4 as the 10th year of the event here.

The park never filled. Families and individuals arrived in a steady stream across the evening rather than in a crowd, and some appeared to have wandered in without knowing the event was scheduled. Arlen estimated about 250 residents attended, along with roughly 25 people staffing partner tables.

Nineteen organizations tabled, according to Arlen. Several came with services residents can use: UpValley Family Centers offered parenting classes and free naloxone, Aliados Health and CommuniCare+OLE brought certified counselors for Medi-Cal, Covered California and CalFresh enrollment, Soroptimist International of Calistoga had scholarship information, and Wine Country Animal Lovers brought animals for adoption. The Rotary Club served chili dogs, the Upper Valley Cub Scout Pack ran the Pinewood Derby, and police, fire, the Napa County Sheriff’s Office and the California Highway Patrol all had tables.



The Case for Showing Up

Police Chief Matthew McCaffrey, who has led the department for about 18 months and grew up in Healdsburg, described the event as a mutual benefit and used it to explain his approach to visibility. “Part of what we’re trying to do is break down barriers, and honestly, I don’t think we have barriers here in Calistoga,” McCaffrey said. “But I’ve worked in different jurisdictions where people have limited exposure to the local law enforcement agency. So anytime we can have that experience on a casual basis like this, that’s awesome.” He offered school resource officers as an example. Asked why the department does not put them in softer uniforms, he said the uniform itself is the point. “Because I want them to get exposed to the police uniform,” McCaffrey said. “That’s somebody they can talk to. That’s somebody that’s approachable to them.” Arlen, who started with the department as a reserve officer before being hired full time, made a similar argument from the other direction. “You are able to build trusting relationships with them,” Arlen said. “So if they have a problem or something comes up that they need your help, you know them, and they know you.”

Familiar Faces and First-Timers

Sue Arlen drove up with several of her daughters and grandchildren to watch her daughter Samantha work the event. “She really wanted her niece and nephews to be able to see her in uniform,” Sue Arlen said. “They haven’t seen her in uniform before.” Emma Good, Samantha Arlen’s sister, said she had spent little time in Calistoga before that night. “I know that this community means everything to her, and she takes a lot of pride in protecting and serving the people of Calistoga,” Good said. “Driving through, it’s absolutely beautiful, and I can see why she loves it so much.” Juan Solorio came with his wife, Fatima Solorio, and their two children. The family moved to Calistoga about four years ago and attended for the first time this year. “I know that they do this every year, we haven’t ever had the opportunity to come, so this is our first year coming,” Solorio said. “There’s a lot of help for the community, all of the things that we can get help with here in town.” Asked what the department could do better, Arlen said the answer was more of the same. “Always reaching out, always seeing who we can build connections with,” Arlen said. “Be wherever we can in events like National Night Out to show it’s not just a badge. There’s a person behind that badge.”



Cubmaster Derek Dwyer runs a Pinewood Derby demonstration for the Upper Valley Cub Scout Pack at National Night Out in Pioneer Park — Calistoga Currents Photo

The Calistoga Community Emergency Response Team, which has tabled in past years, could not attend because its lead was ill.

CHILD CARE

Hearts and Hands Preschool Closes After Search for a New Home Fails

BY TIM CARL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Hearts and Hands Preschool closed July 31, not because it ran out of money but because it ran out of places to go.

The nonprofit had told families in January that it expected to close. Donations and new enrollment reversed that. By late spring the board believed it could operate through the fall.

“The preschool itself is now sustainable,” board President MaryAnn Salinger told the City Council on June 3. “Unfortunately, our current facility is not available beyond Sept. 30.”

What the board could not find was a building. Three pressures converged over the same few months: enrollment falling for reasons that reach well beyond Calistoga, a parish that needed its hall back and a cost of care that kept rising.

“We felt confident we could find something that worked,” Salinger said in an interview. “It turned out not to be the case.”

A Shrinking Pool of 4-Year-Olds

Hearts and Hands was licensed for 30 children and for years enrolled about 27, Salinger said. It charged \$950 a month for years, raising tuition roughly two years ago to \$1,100 and adding 2-year-olds at \$1,500 a month. Private programs in the area charge \$1,500 to \$2,000.

Then the state changed where 4-year-olds go to school. Assembly Bill 130, signed in July 2021, expanded transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds by 2025-26. The program is free and runs through public school districts.

Four-year-olds had been the preschool’s oldest and largest group. Hearts and Hands responded by enrolling 2-year-olds, who cost more to care for because of stricter staffing ratios. The share of full-paying families fell at the same time.

“It was just the perfect storm,” Salinger said. “Our numbers went down, our funding went down.”

The pattern is not local. Erika Lubensky, executive director of Community Resources for Children in Napa, said the expansion left private providers serving only younger children who are more expensive to care for. As of June, private businesses accounted for 79% of Napa County’s 3,264 licensed child-care slots, with the remainder at publicly funded sites such as those run by the Napa County Office of Education and Head Start, according to the agency’s database.

“The underlying issue is that the child-care and early education system is systematically flawed,” Lubensky said in an email. “It is a highly regulated system where parents pay too much and child-care providers are often paid poverty wages.”

A Request for Rent Forgiveness and Two Conditions

The board determined in December 2025 that the preschool was no longer financially sustainable and notified families in January. The response was substantial: parents, donors and volunteers raised money and recruited students, and some families had tuition covered in full.

The closure date moved twice as money came in — from Feb. 28 to April 30, then to June 30, the end of the fiscal year.

On Feb. 21, Salinger emailed St. Luke’s asking the church to forgive rent for the remaining months so the preschool could reach that June 30 goal, according to a written statement from the church quoting the request. The parish hall rented for \$1,500 a month.

The Mission Committee, the seven-member body that governs St. Luke’s, met the next day and granted the request, forgiving \$4,500 for April, May and June. It attached two conditions, citing uncertainty about continued funding: that Hearts and Hands would end the preschool at St. Luke’s on June 30, and that its furniture and goods would be removed in a timely manner.

The date had come from the board’s own request. The condition made it binding.

The church says it never declined to renew. “The MC never voted not to extend the lease,” senior warden Dave Stoneberg said. “Instead we voted twice to extend it, first to June 30 and then to Sept. 30. We did not decline a renewal request.”

Stoneberg is a retired journalist who formerly wrote for Napa Valley Features, a separate publication also founded by Tim Carl.

In late spring the board asked to stay through December. Salinger met with Stoneberg and the Rev. William McIlmoyl before it went to the committee. The two sides settled on September.

On May 31 the Mission Committee approved an extension to Sept. 30, conditioned on \$9,000 in back and forward rent paid in advance, covering April through September. It was paid. The payment covered the three forgiven months as well as the three added ones, leaving the preschool with no net rent relief.

By the time September was set, Salinger said, the board already knew its most viable option was slipping away.

The Clock Ran Out

“One by one, each of our search options fell through for different reasons,” Salinger said.

The nonprofit reported total net assets of about \$69,000 at the close of its 2024 fiscal year, according to its most recent Form 990 filing with the Internal Revenue Service. The funding path had its own clock: the board planned to apply to the Gasser Foundation, a Napa trust that funds education programs, but the application cycle opens once a year in August.

The board chose to close July 31 rather than reopen in mid-August for a few weeks. Teachers customarily take two weeks off before a new group arrives, and reopening would have meant asking families to move twice.

Vice Mayor Lisa Giftraised the closure at the council’s Aug. 4 meeting, the first time it was mentioned at the council table after the announcement. It was not on the agenda.

“As we all know, a preschool is much more than a building,” she said. “It is where children really begin.”

She thanked the school’s board and staff, credited city staff with exploring alternatives, and called the closure a loss for the whole community.

A Different Future for the Hall

St. Luke’s plans several months of work on the parish hall, beginning with bathroom renovations to meet accessibility standards, according to the church’s written statement. The hall is expected to serve as a fellowship space and a venue for community gatherings.

“It has been a difficult transition for both Hearts and Hands and St. Luke’s,” Stoneberg and McIlmoyl said in the joint statement. “We have been pleased to host the preschool.”

What Is Left

Community Resources for Children case managers are working with the five affected families to find placements, Lubensky said.

Calistoga retains licensed child care at Sattui Preschool, run by the Napa County Office of Education, and at two home-based providers, with a combined licensed capacity of 70 children, she said. Licensed capacity is not the same as available openings. Sattui is publicly funded and offers extended hours. The home-based providers can accept children from low-income families through the state-funded assistance program.

Salinger said she has spoken with Darrell Whitacre, director of early learning services at the county office of education, about giving displaced children priority for placement, and that he could not make promises. Whitacre did not respond to a request for comment on current openings.

Staff members have been referred to programs that are hiring. Hearts and Hands employed three full-time and two part-time workers. The school district



Hearts and Hands Preschool students walk to the Calistoga library in a file photo — Clark James Mishler Photo

is arranging its own after-school care for transitional kindergartners and may hire one person.

Salinger spent 32 years in education — as a teacher, a high school dean and principal of Snow Elementary School in Napa — before retiring in 2016.

She said the loss lands hardest on the industries that employ most of the town.

“It leaves a real deficit for the community,” she said. “If you look at the service industry and the wine industry, it’s going to be hard to get people to work when they don’t have daycare for their kids.”

The board had planned to approach wineries about subsidizing tuition for employees with young children. That plan needed a building.

“If we don’t have a place to go, we can’t do any of that,” she said.

Reporting for this story drew on an interview with MaryAnn Salinger, a written timeline provided by the Hearts and Hands board, a written statement from St. Luke’s senior warden Dave Stoneberg and the Rev. William McIlmoyl, correspondence between the church and the preschool board provided by Salinger, written responses from Erika Lubensky of Community Resources for Children, city staff reports and council proceedings on June 3, July 14 and Aug. 4, and the preschool’s most recent Form 990 filing.

Every Site, and Why Each One Closed

SITE	WHAT HAPPENED
St. Luke’s parish hall The preschool’s home. The Mission Committee extended the lease to Sept. 30 on condition of \$9,000 in rent paid in advance, and the church plans several months of renovation work on the hall.	
Grant Street house, city-owned Poor condition.	
Oak Street house at the fairgrounds City staff estimated \$300,000 to \$400,000 in code compliance upgrades and site improvements, plus \$35,000 for water utility improvements, and about six months of work following permit approval. The board’s own architect and contractor estimated six to nine months to obtain the permit alone. The council voted July 14 to continue the item rather than decide it.	
Land beside Sattui Preschool, Napa County Office of Education A third portable classroom is planned. The funding is not in place and the expansion will not happen this year.	
Cedar Street house Rented to someone else.	
House near Archway Sat in a residential zone the preschool’s state license did not permit. Rezoning would have taken months.	
Donated portable classroom No city land to put it on.	
Another Calistoga church with an existing preschool setup Its board voted against hosting the program.	

Accounts are MaryAnn Salinger’s except the Oak Street figures, which come from a city staff report.

TOMATO COMPETITION

A Cool Summer, a Blind Tasting and a New Calistoga Tomato Champion

BY CALISTOGA CURRENTS STAFF



Judges work down the line of entries at the Calistoga Garden Club's third annual tomato tasting on Aug. 19 — Calistoga Currents Photo

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Members set tomatoes out along the kitchen counter inside the Tucker Building on Wednesday afternoon, each paper plate identified in marker with the variety and nothing else. The judges knew what they were tasting. They did not know whose it was.

“These are all homegrown and all by our members, and we do a totally blind tasting,” said Tina Nelle, the Calistoga Garden Club’s president, who has entered all three years of the contest.

Four judges scored the entries: Darlene Leffler, Bobbi Enderlin, Amy Sather and Zia Wesley. The club recruits a different panel each year.

A Cool Summer Shows Up in the Bowls

Members traced a thin year to a swing between heat and cold.

“It was very hot, and then it was cool,” Nelle said. “So, it really affected the growing season.”

Lenor Fowler, the club’s vice president, said cool mornings had pushed the crop back by weeks.

“Not all of our tomatoes are ready like they were last year in August,” Fowler said. “September will be the big boom.”

Fowler won with Sun Sugar, an orange cherry hybrid, and placed third with Juliet, a grape-type hybrid named an All-America Selections winner in 1999. She said she bought both as starts rather than growing them from seed.

“It’s in the cherry family, and it’s very sweet,” she said. “And this is perfect weather for that.”

She credited an irrigation system installed at her home for the difference between this year’s fruit and last year’s, when the plants were watered by hand.



Club president Tina Nelle, left, who placed second with Cherokee Purple, and vice president Lenor Fowler, whose Sun Sugar took first place and whose Juliet took third, hold their entries after the judging — Calistoga Currents Photo

“My secret is my husband, Chris Ladd,” Fowler said. “He’s the one that makes it.”

Nelle placed second with Cherokee Purple. She won the first contest with San Marzano and the second with Copper River, a variety bred in Calistoga by Lynn Brown, who started an organic growing



A sliced heirloom entry sits on a paper plate during the blind judging — Calistoga Currents Photo

business here in 1979 that became Forni-Brown-Welsh Gardens after Peter Forni and Barney Welsh joined as partners. It grew for Napa Valley restaurants that named it on their menus, until it closed in 2018.

Brown said he named the tomato for the bright copper streak that runs through the flesh of a good one, inside skin the olive green of oxidized copper. He grew it out for several years from seed a Sacramento grower had given him, and only after he began selling it nationally did customers point out how close it was to Ananas Noir, a bicolor heirloom developed in Belgium.

“I’ve placed for three years in a row,” Nelle said. “Let’s just leave it at that.”

Sharing the Secret

Asked what accounted for the run, Nelle first declined, then noted she had already walked the club through her method at a meeting before planting season.

Her system: buy strong starts or grow from seed, open the planting hole and add ash from a home wood fire along with calcium and a tomato fertilizer mix, plant and water. Refertilize around the Fourth of July. Keep the plants trimmed and the lower leaves off the soil.

Both women said consistent drip irrigation beats hand watering — five to 10 minutes in the morning, or the same total split between morning and evening — and that thick skins are a sign of too much water.

Both also said they buy starts from Forni Farm and Nursery at 4000 Barnes Road in Santa Rosa. The nursery is run by Miranda Forni, daughter of Forni-Brown-Welsh partner Peter Forni, who opened it in 2020 after the Calistoga gardens closed. It still grows the Copper River from saved seed.

“We’re helping each other be better gardeners, and tomatoes are very easy to grow in our area, 9b, but we still struggle,” Fowler said.

Asked why the club stages the contest at all, Nelle gave a short answer.

“Because we’re the Garden Club,” she said. “We want to share.”

THE CALISTOGA GARDEN CLUB

A Club Since 1938

The Calistoga Garden Club has operated since 1938 — the same year Napa County took title to the land that became the fairgrounds.

The club’s work shows up around town in plantings in front of the fire station and at Pioneer Park, where a plaque marks their work, members said. The club raised money at the citywide garage sale to buy plants and is working with the city to replant at the fairgrounds.

Frances Tedeschi said her mother belonged to the club decades earlier, decorating tables with flowers for club teas and entering flowers at the fair. She placed her mother’s involvement in the

1960s and 1970s and recalled a line from her father. “Fair time’s fun time,” she said.

Tedeschi said she hopes contests and displays like her mother’s return as the city rebuilds the grounds it now owns. Her mother died in 2001.

Darlene Leffler, a past president who took the office during the pandemic and served as a judge this year, said she began attending in 1978.

“I started here in like ’78 going to the garden club,” Leffler said. “I loved it, especially all those older ladies.”

Membership fell to six during the pandemic, by Fowler’s count, and stands at 32 today. No garden is

required to join. Members range from property owners to residents of mobile homes.

Past programs have covered terrarium-building, tool-sharpening and pest management with master gardeners. Field trips went to the Luther Burbank Home and Gardens in Santa Rosa this year and to a lavender farm on Petaluma Hill Road last year. Next month’s program is on bees. The club is considering a dahlia contest next year.

The Calistoga Garden Club meets the third Wednesday of each month at 2 p.m. in the Tucker Building at the fairgrounds.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES

Catholic Charities Plans Northern California’s Only Runaway-Youth Shelter

At a Calistoga Inn meeting, Catholic Charities of Northwest California laid out its local shelters and a six-bed emergency house for youths 14 to 17.

BY JULIE MULLER MITCHELL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Catholic Charities, a nonprofit headquartered in Santa Rosa, held an informational meeting at the Calistoga Inn to let the community better understand what the organization does and its plans for the future, including opening the only shelter for runaway youth in northern California. It will serve kids under the age of 18 who are in dangerous situations, potentially at home, or who have run away and have nowhere to go. According to Catholic Charities, children ages 14 to 17 are the most likely to be overlooked in the shelter system.

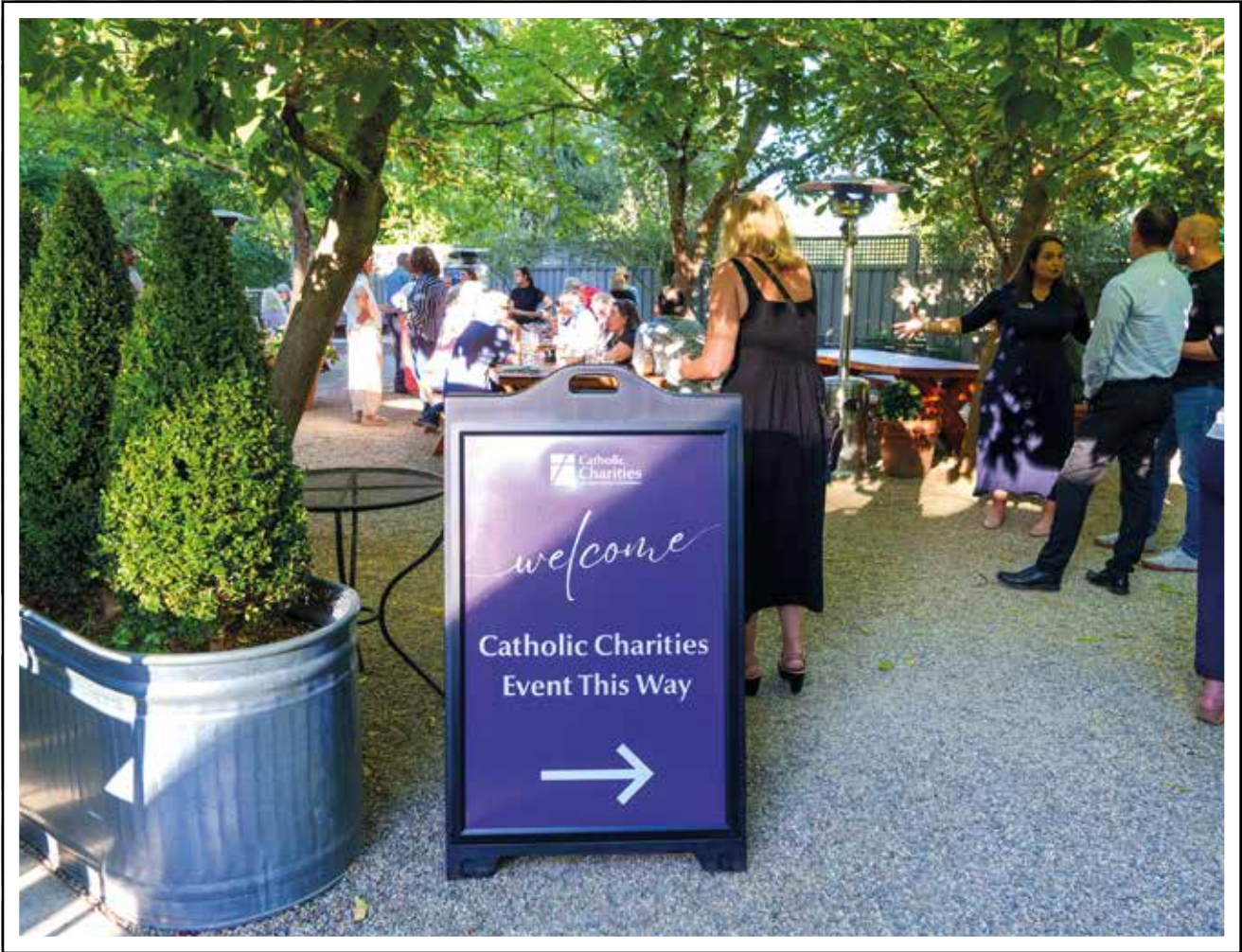
Homelessness is often discussed as a problem of cities such as San Francisco and Oakland. But it exists in Napa Valley and Sonoma as well, especially for families, teens and even younger children.

Jennielynn Holmes, CEO of Catholic Charities of Northwest California, spoke about the nonprofit’s outreach program and its mission of serving vulnerable members of the community with integrity and compassion. The Rev. Stephen Canny, a retired pastor at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Calistoga from 1967 to 1975 and a retired priest of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, was on hand at the event. Canny has been a longtime supporter of Catholic Charities’ programs for the unhoused and unprotected.

“Catholic Charities serves multiple communities including Sonoma, Napa and Lake counties and also Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties,” Holmes said. “We are part of a national organization, so every community has its own Catholic Charities, but we’re completely separate from one another, and we’re all providing what each community needs.”

What Catholic Charities Runs Now

Catholic Charities currently has three local shelters, including Rainbow House emergency family shelter, which is the only shelter for families in Napa County. Nightingale Recuperative Care



The back garden at the Calistoga Inn, where Catholic Charities held its informational meeting — Calistoga Currents Photo

Shelter offers support to individuals who are in the hospital and have no place to go and recuperate. It also has several permanent supportive housing units through its Jefferson PSH and Imola House in Napa, placing people in housing and working with them at home to make sure they stay housed.

Holmes said Rainbow House Shelter is one of the best data-driven shelters in the nation.

“While the national average of people leaving shelter into housing is about 25% to 40%, 91% of the people who live in Rainbow House move into housing,” she said. “That is a phenomenal track record.”

A Shelter for Runaway Youth

Catholic Charities is planning to open a new six-bed, 24/7 emergency youth shelter for the 14-to-17 age group. The Trione Youth Shelter will open in Santa Rosa because, Holmes said, there are “dozens and dozens of kids homeless on the streets.”

“We had young people showing up to our shelters, literally 15-year-olds, 16-year-olds, homeless with nowhere to go,” she said. “Because these are minors, you have to be specially licensed to care for them, so we weren’t able to take them at our shelters.”

The Trione Youth Shelter, the only shelter for runaway youth in northern California, will occupy an existing building that Catholic Charities was gifted and already owns.

The facility will be in Sonoma County but will serve Sonoma and Napa and all the way up to Oregon, because there is no other shelter for these kids between the Golden Gate Bridge and the Oregon border. Youths will have a safe place to stay while staff work to reunite them with family or move them somewhere safe, keeping siblings together where they can and working with the foster care system where they cannot.

“Right now it will be six beds at one time,” Holmes said, “but we hope to temporarily house 70 kids annually. You have a short amount of time to work with these kids and find a longer-term option for them. If we identify a longer-term option, we can give them some extensions.”

Those interested in learning more about Catholic Charities, or who would like to donate, can reach the organization at ccnwc.org.



Mayor Donald Williams, left, and Jennielynn Holmes, CEO of Catholic Charities of Northwest California, who spoke during the gathering — Calistoga Currents Photo

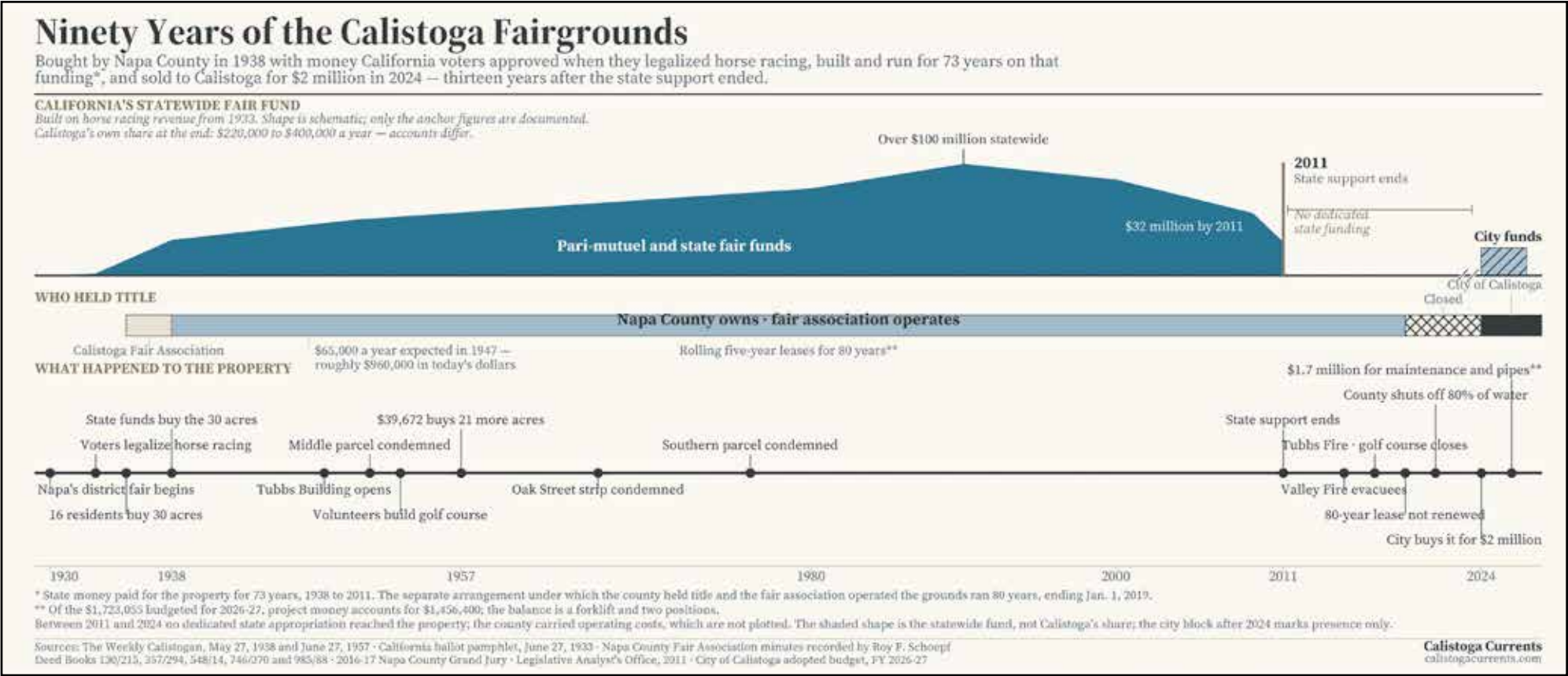
Julie Muller Mitchell is a Calistoga-based freelance writer

FAIRGROUNDS

Ninety Years of the Calistoga Fairgrounds: How a Gambling Tax Built a Public Property

State money paid for the buildings, the golf course and most of the land. The town has spent three years relearning why that matters.

BY TIM CARL



Ninety Years of the Calistoga Fairgrounds. State money bought the property in 1938 and paid for nearly everything on it until the Legislature ended fair funding in 2011. The county sold it to Calistoga for \$2 million in 2024. An interactive version at calistogacurrents.com/records/fairgrounds-timeline shows the source behind every entry and is updated as documents arrive — Calistoga Currents

CALISTOGA, Calif. — On the evening of Oct. 15, 1935, five men met in the council chambers at Calistoga City Hall, created the Calistoga Fair Association and voted to buy 30 acres on the west edge of town for \$3,000.

They called it Silverado Park. Sixteen residents had put up the money — among them Chapin Tubbs, Andrew Rocca, Frank Piner and the Siemsen brothers. Later funds bought the Lura McArthur home and property, bringing the total to \$4,300.

What those men understood, and what the town has spent the past three years relearning, is that they were not really buying land. They were qualifying for something.

Two years earlier, on June 27, 1933, California voters had approved a constitutional amendment legalizing horse racing and pari-mutuel wagering. On the ballot as Proposition 3, it passed with 63% of the vote and sent a portion of the proceeds to the state fair and to county fairs and expositions. It was the first legal gambling in California, approved the same year the state repealed Prohibition, and it created a fund that would pay for fairgrounds construction for the next 78 years.

To reach that money, a fair needed to be an official county fair. A private park could not qualify.

The Association Goes After the Money



The front page of the Weekly Calistogan, May 27, 1938, reporting that Napa County had received state funds to buy the 30 acres at Silverado Park and that the Calistoga Fair Association was negotiating a lease back — Courtesy of Dana Cole

At a board meeting following the first Silverado Trail Festival, Chapin Tubbs reported that state aid looked promising but that the association's rules would have to change.

They changed. On May 27, 1938, the Weekly Calistogan reported that Silverado Park had become the property of Napa County, the county having received state funds to purchase the 30 acres. The association was negotiating a lease back. The county paid \$40,000 for the 30 acres. The deed is recorded at Book 130, Page 215.

The association had sold the land not as a business transaction but so it would be eligible for state money as an official county fair site. From that point the county held title and the association ran the property, an arrangement that lasted 80 years. The association itself lasted 83, from 1935 to 2018.

The state money arrived. By 1940 the association had \$15,175.88 from Sacramento and was out of debt for the first time. In January 1947 the board was told the fair would begin receiving \$65,000 a year — roughly \$960,000 in today's dollars.

What the Money Built

Almost everything still standing.

In October 1944, with the fair suspended for the war, the board asked the state Division of Fairs and Expositions to build a large auditorium as a postwar project. The Exhibit Building was completed in 1948, the first structure of any size on the grounds. In 1954 the board named it the Tubbs Exhibit Building.

The golf course was secretary-manager Roy F. Schoepf's idea, floated in December 1952 and built with in-house labor and grounds-improvement money. The directors agreed, most of them admitting they knew nothing about golf. The first green was seeded April 19, 1953, using 2,450 yards of dirt the county had excavated building Fisher Street. Green fees began in January 1955, collected in a box on the first tee.

The county kept buying. It took a triangular piece in the middle by condemnation in 1951, a strip fronting Oak Street from John and Valentina Logvy in 1966 and the southernmost parcel from John Logvy in 1976. That is how a property assembled with public money reached 70.6 acres.

The Town's Backup



The 70.6 acres the city bought for \$2 million in 2024, seen during a pop-up carnival on June 28, 2025. The county fair that ran here for eight decades ended in 2018 — Tim Carl Photo

“One only has to look ahead a few years to know that Calistoga is bound to be THE recreational area.”

— ROY F. SCHOEPF

1966, Napa County Fair Association History

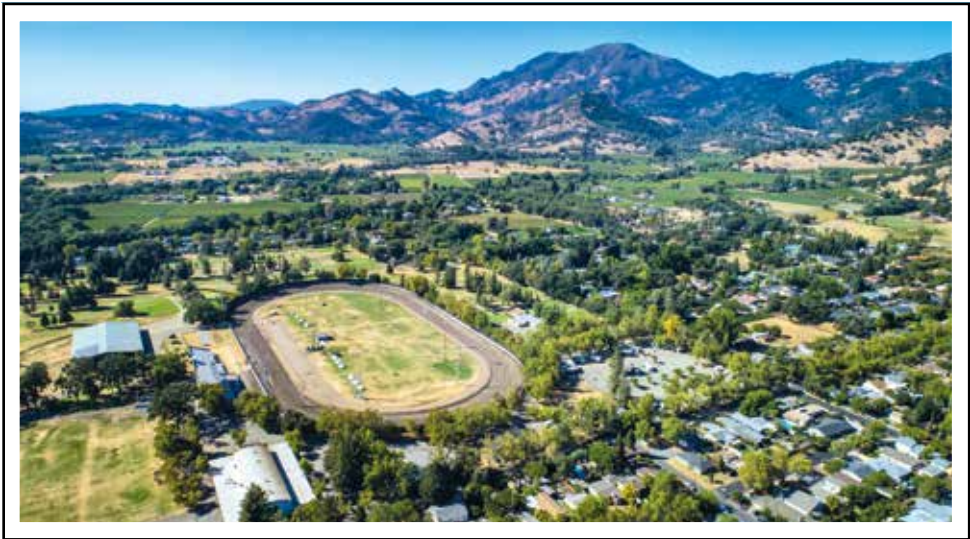
The FM3 survey the city commissioned last year found 86% of residents calling the fairgrounds’ emergency role extremely or very important, above every other use. The pattern runs back through the association’s minutes for 70 years — classes in the Tubbs Building when the high school gym burned in 1963, the Red Cross and Calistoga Hospital patients sheltering there during a 1964 fire, evacuees and animals from the 2015 Valley Fire, and Cal Fire, the Army Corps of Engineers and PG&E staged there for the better part of two years after October 2017.

When the Money Stopped

The fund that built all of it did not survive. In 2009 the state redirected racing licensing fees to the general fund. In 2011, facing an \$11.2 billion shortfall, Gov. Jerry Brown eliminated \$32 million in General Fund support for California fairs on the recommendation of the Legislative Analyst’s Office.

Calistoga’s annual appropriation ended with it. From 2011 the fair paid for itself out of six operations: the RV park, the speedway, the fair, the events center, the golf course and disaster staging. It lasted seven more years. The golf course closed Oct. 8, 2017, after the windstorm that drove the Tubbs Fire. On Jan. 1, 2019, the county took over as operator after the association said it could no longer run the property in a fiscally balanced manner. In 2020 what remained closed as the pandemic began.

Three Deals and a Sale



The 70.6-acre Calistoga fairgrounds, assembled with state money between 1938 and 1976 and sold to the city for \$2 million in 2024. The speedway oval sits at center, with the dormant Mount St. Helena Golf Course at left — Tim Carl Photo

The first attempt nearly worked. In November 2018 the county countered that the city buy a 34.3-acre portion for \$7,717,500 all cash. Both bodies signed in August 2019. Then the pandemic, and in May 2020 the two sides agreed the transaction should not move forward.

The second was a \$15.885 million agreement for the whole property, reached in October 2022 and contingent on voter approval. Measure E asked for \$27.5 million in March 2023 and drew about 32% support against a two-thirds requirement.

By May 2023 the county was ready to sell outright. Eight people spoke when Public Works Director Steven Lederer asked the board for direction. One was Dana Cole, who joined the fair association board in 2015 and served until it dissolved. He had spent months in the archives with the 1933 ballot pamphlet and the 1938 and 1957 newspaper accounts, and his argument was that the county had never paid for the land — the state had, with money approved by California voters for public benefit.

The third attempt was \$2 million in cash. Cole had recommended the city offer no more than what the county originally paid using mostly state funds, roughly \$100,000, and was not party to the negotiations that arrived at the higher figure. Supervisors approved the sale Jan. 23, 2024, and the council approved it Feb. 6 on a 4-0 vote, Councilmember Lisa Gift recused because she lives near the site. Escrow closed July 22, 2024.

Ninety Years On

The city budgeted \$1,723,055 for the fairgrounds in the fiscal year that began July 1 — \$506,400 to repair water leaks, \$500,000 for sewer connections at the RV park and Butler Building, \$450,000 for infrastructure at the northeast corner and the balance for a forklift and two new positions. Capital spending the previous year totaled \$143,035.

The county had shut off roughly 80% of the water system in 2021 after bills exceeding \$100,000 a year and leaks it could not locate. A single meter still serves every building on 70.6 acres. Most of this year’s work will be underground.

The Fairgrounds Advisory Committee, created in 2025 and made permanent in January, has not yet hired the master plan consultant its adopted work plan called for in the first quarter of the year.

Schoepf closed his history in 1966 imagining a dining room overlooking the ninth green, a coffee shop for golfers, tennis courts where the poultry building was falling down and space left for a swimming pool.



THE FAIRGROUNDS:

A Working Record — an interactive timeline with the source behind every entry, updated as documents arrive.

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NATALY

Nataly’s Window Art

BY VANESSA HERRERA ORTEGA



Nataly Lopez Romero paints the front window at Fitness First on Lincoln Avenue — Vanessa Herrera Ortega Photo

CALISTOGA, Calif. — As the seasons change, so does the window at Fitness First with the help of acrylic paint, acrylic markers and Nataly Lopez Romero, who livens up these windows with her artwork. Lopez Romero is a 21-year-old Calistogan and a full-time employee at Fitness First, where she works the front desk taking calls, assisting with memberships and navigating the app.

“I have been drawing ever since I was little and even took art classes throughout high school,” she said. “I’ve always been extremely passionate, but eventually, after graduating from high school, I plateaued and stopped drawing altogether.”

She began drawing again, however, at her previous job at Hydro Grill, where the giant chalkboards listed old, unavailable drinks. She updated the board and added doodles. When she moved to Fitness First, her sister encouraged her to draw on the windows with the pens she used to maintain the chalkboard there.

“I do it because I really love it,” she said. “It’s a reset from the usual things I do at work.”

She said inspiration comes in many different ways.

“Members give me suggestions on what I should draw,” she said. “They even remind me of holidays I may have missed, and I’ll usually take my pick that way.”

The time a piece of window art takes to finish depends on the amount of detail and planning.

“Smaller, less detailed pieces usually take a shift, which is four hours, minus planning and sketching. The larger ones usually take two shifts which is about eight hours,” Lopez Romero said.

So far, she said her favorite creations are the ones she did for Easter and the Fourth of July.

Lopez Romero is self-taught, and when she began creating window art, she used chalk markers. After doing research, she moved on to using acrylic paint and acrylic markers.

“I love that it makes people smile,” she said. “It also makes me smile when I finish a piece. It makes me feel extremely accomplished that I was able to do something like that.”

One problem with doing window art is waiting for the paint to dry in between layers. According to Lopez Romero, adding paint will make the previous paint lift, but she has learned that to avoid this you can add two coats of white as a base layer.

She shared that the Calistoga community has influenced her a lot, and she is excited for harvest season and is looking forward to doing an homage for all the hard workers who help make wine.

Lopez Romero would love to do this full time. Looking ahead, her goal is to get out of her comfort zone and start doing windows for other businesses. She just hopes her window art makes people smile.

Vanessa Herrera Ortega is studying journalism at Santa Rosa Junior College. She is a graduate of Palisades High School in Calistoga.



A chalkboard Lopez Romero lettered for August at Fitness First — Vanessa Herrera Ortega Photo



Lopez Romero’s window art at Fitness First — Vanessa Herrera Ortega Photo

NATALY

El Arte en las Ventanas de Nataly

POR VANESSA HERRERA ORTEGA



López Romero atiende la recepción en Fitness First, donde trabaja tiempo completo — Vanessa Herrera Ortega Photo

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Conforme cambian las estaciones, también cambia la ventana de Fitness First, con ayuda de pintura acrílica, marcadores acrílicos y Nataly López Romero, quien da vida a esos vidrios con su arte. López Romero tiene 21 años, es de Calistoga y trabaja tiempo completo en Fitness First, donde atiende la recepción, contesta llamadas, ayuda con las membresías y maneja la aplicación.

“He dibujado desde que era chica, e incluso tomé clases de arte durante toda la preparatoria”, dijo. “Siempre me ha apasionado muchísimo, pero con el tiempo, después de graduarme de la preparatoria, me estancué y dejé de dibujar por completo”.

Volvió a dibujar en su trabajo anterior en Hydro Grill, donde los pizarrones enormes anunciaban bebidas que ya no había. Actualizó el pizarrón y le agregó garabatos. Cuando se cambió a Fitness First, su hermana la animó a dibujar en las ventanas con los plumones que usaba para mantener el pizarrón.

“Lo hago porque de verdad me encanta”, dijo. “Es un descanso de lo que hago normalmente en el trabajo”.



El letrero de Fitness First en Lincoln Avenue — Vanessa Herrera Ortega Photo

Dijo que la inspiración le llega de muchas maneras.

“Los miembros me dan sugerencias de qué dibujar”, dijo. “Hasta me recuerdan días festivos que se me pudieron haber pasado, y normalmente de ahí escojo”.

El tiempo que toma terminar una pieza depende de la cantidad de detalle y de planeación.

“Las piezas más pequeñas y con menos detalle normalmente toman un turno, que son cuatro horas, sin contar la planeación y el boceto. Las más grandes toman como dos turnos, que son unas ocho horas”, dijo López Romero.

Hasta ahora, dijo, sus creaciones favoritas son las que hizo para la Pascua y el Cuatro de Julio.

López Romero es autodidacta, y cuando empezó a hacer arte en ventanas usaba marcadores de gis. Después de investigar, pasó a usar pintura acrílica y marcadores acrílicos.

“Me encanta que hace sonreír a la gente”, dijo. “También me hace sonreír a mí cuando termino una pieza. Me hace sentir muy realizada de haber podido hacer algo así”.

Un problema del arte en ventanas es esperar a que la pintura seque entre capa y capa. Según López Romero, agregar pintura levanta la capa anterior, pero ha aprendido que para evitarlo se pueden poner dos manos de blanco como base.

Contó que la comunidad de Calistoga la ha influido mucho, y que tiene ganas de que llegue la vendimia; piensa hacer un homenaje a todos los trabajadores que hacen posible el vino.

A López Romero le encantaría dedicarse a esto tiempo completo. Su meta es salir de su zona de confort y empezar a pintar ventanas de otros negocios. Solo espera que su arte en las ventanas haga sonreír a la gente.

Vanessa Herrera Ortega estudia periodismo en Santa Rosa Junior College. Es egresada de Palisades High School en Calistoga.



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NEW LISTING – Prime Napa Valley knolltop estate site. This property has commanding views of the Valley from Mt. St. Helena south towards Stags Leap. Several building sites to choose from. Present owners improved the road, cleared an additional 3+ acres, finished a survey and completed all of the pre-development studies for a new residence. 60 GPM well and electricity are at the site. **\$2,250,000**



CALISTOGA HIGH SCHOOL

Calistoga Boys Soccer Opens Season With 3-2 Win Over Eureka in New Stadium

BY JACOB TUCKER

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The first game ever played in Calistoga High School's new stadium went to the home side. In the season opener Aug. 21, the Wildcats jumped on Eureka early, built a three-goal halftime lead and held on for a 3-2 victory over the larger school in front of an energized home crowd. The stadium's ribbon was cut in April.

For Wildcats coach Cristian Escobedo, the result was encouraging not only because of the win, but because of the composure his team displayed against a bigger program.

"We had a good first game," Escobedo said. "The kids showed a nice composure, considering it was a larger school."

Calistoga established control early and carried a 3-0 advantage into halftime. The strong opening 45 minutes provided an immediate confidence boost for a program Escobedo estimated at roughly 30 players, potentially his largest as coach. The school's official roster lists 20. An influx of freshmen gives the coaching staff competition for playing time either way.

The second half presented a different challenge. Eureka found its footing and scored twice, cutting deeply into Calistoga's lead. Escobedo credited conditioning as the area that made the final portion of the game more difficult.

"In the second half, I think the conditioning got to us a little bit and they were able to get two goals in on us," Escobedo said.

The night carried significance beyond the result, creating an atmosphere Escobedo likened to a postseason match.

"There was great energy from the crowd," he said. "It definitely felt like a playoff game in terms of the environment."

Several players helped set the tone, including senior midfielder Leo Ramos and senior center back Aecos Chavez, both captaining this year. Chavez turned in a standout performance while also finding the back of the net. Escobedo said Chavez and the team's other seniors provided important leadership on a roster featuring a sizable number of younger players.



Calistoga players huddle at Logvy Field in a 2021 file photo — Clark James Mishler Photo

With a new stadium, a deep roster, strong senior leadership and a 1-0 record to begin the campaign, the Wildcats have plenty of reasons to believe their first night at home could be the beginning of a successful season.

The squad hosted Oakland Military Institute on Aug. 26.

Young Calistoga Squad Shows Fight Despite Season-Opening Loss to Eureka

BY JACOB TUCKER

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The Calistoga High School girls soccer team opened its season Aug. 21 against a formidable Eureka High School squad, suffering a 7-0 home defeat. The result was not what head coach Esme Rivera expected from her team's season opener, but the performance offered an early glimpse of a young squad she believes has the potential to grow significantly.

"I lost six seniors last year, but I also gained a lot of new athletes," Rivera said. "Summer training has been going amazing. I have a great group of girls this year, and am hoping for a good year with this new squad."

The opening loss provided an immediate test for a team still learning how to play together. Rather than allowing the scoreline to define the afternoon, the Wildcat players continued to compete and maintained their composure through the final whistle. For Rivera, that resilience was among the most encouraging aspects of the opener.

"At the end of the day, I was really proud of the girls for not giving up and keeping their heads up the entire time regardless of the outcome," she said. "As I told my girls, every game is a lesson. Whether we win or lose, we can always learn something from it."

Two players stood out to the coach in the opener: freshman defender Cynthia Gutierrez and freshman Monserrat Zepeda. Gutierrez was entrusted with a demanding role as the team's sweeper and center back, putting her in charge of helping organize the defense despite being one of the youngest players on the field.

"Cynthia, who played my sweeper center back, takes a lot of confidence to take control of the whole defense," Rivera said. "Without a doubt, she stepped up and played her role, despite being younger than the other girls. Her experience has been a huge help this year."

Zepeda provided a different kind of stability in the middle of the field. Playing defensive center midfield, her experience was particularly valuable for a team adjusting to a new group of players and a new season.

The 7-0 result was a difficult beginning, but the Wildcats now have an opportunity to use the lessons from it as they prepare for Middletown.

"Even though it was a tough loss, I know my girls have that fight in them to keep going," Rivera said.

Calistoga has a gap to practice before its next match Sept. 2 at home against the Middletown High Mustangs, kicking off at 4 p.m.

Jacob Tucker writes about sports for Calistoga Currents.

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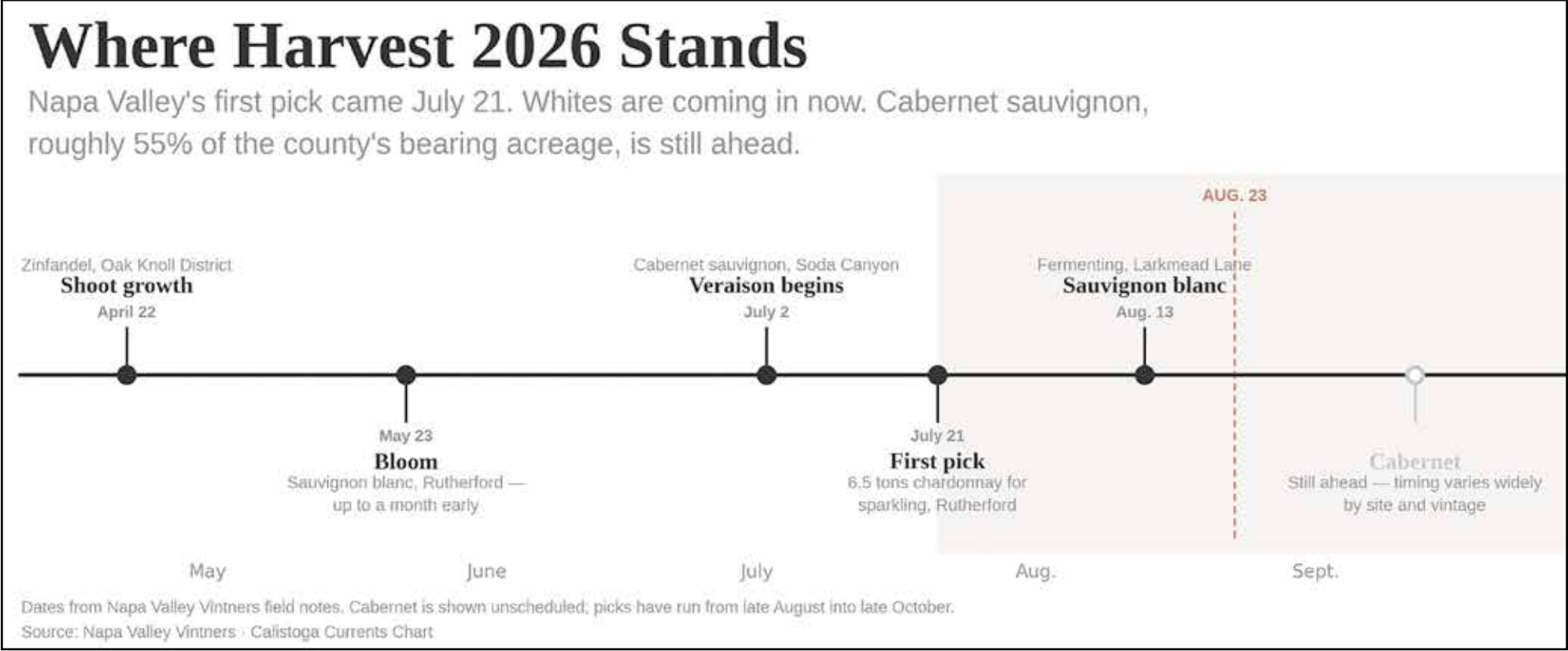
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HARVEST

A Light Crop as Growers Ready for Cabernet Harvest

BY TIM CARL



NAPA VALLEY, Calif. — Napa Valley’s 2026 harvest began July 21, when Round Pond Estate brought in 6.5 tons of chardonnay destined for sparkling wine from its Rutherford vineyard, according to the Napa Valley Vintners.

The timing is unremarkable. What growers are describing is the size of the crop.

Garrett Buckland, a founding partner of Premiere Viticultural Services and a past president of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers, said in July that this year’s crop is the lightest he can recall in Napa and the broader North Coast.

The reports since have been consistent. Steve Matthiasson of Matthiasson Wines described a very light crop, small clusters and surprisingly small berries on healthy vines. Chris Hyde of Hyde Vineyards told the Vintners that a cooler

stretch produced smaller berries and smaller clusters in his Carneros pinot noir. Violet Grgich of Grgich Hills Estate reported less chardonnay because of shatter, a failure of fruit set that leaves sparse clusters.

One vintner, speaking on background, said cabernet sauvignon has been hit hard. Which variety fared worst will not be known until the fruit is in.

The season ran unevenly rather than early or late. Matthiasson said bloom dragged across roughly six weeks, leaving unusual swings from block to block.

Picking has moved into white varieties. Larkmead Vineyards was fermenting sauvignon blanc picked the week before, winemaker Avery Heelan said Aug. 21.

Cabernet sauvignon is roughly 55% of the county’s bearing acreage and is still ahead. Picks have run from late August into late October.



AROUND TOWN · BIG NIGHT AT LOVINA

A ‘Big Night’ in Calistoga: Italian Food, Wine and a Movie Under the Stars

BY LINDA S. YORK

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Restaurant owner Jen Bennett hosted a community-focused Italian dinner and movie night last month, priced to welcome local residents. All 40 tickets sold out within a day.

At 6 p.m. on Sunday, July 12, the patio at Lovina had been transformed into an outdoor Italian trattoria with long communal tables draped in crisp white linen and red-and-white checked runners. A side table filled steadily with bottles of Barolo, Chianti and Barbaresco — each one carried in by a guest, per the evening’s one house rule. Neighbors who had lived blocks apart for years met for the first time over antipasti and risotto. Two hours later the diners rose and strolled together down the street to the Mount View Hotel’s Moonshine outdoor theater to watch “Big Night” beneath the summer sky.

Calistoga has a collection of luxury dining experiences that cater to affluent visitors and resort guests but not to the approximately 5,028 people who call Calistoga home. It’s common to hear longtime locals say they’ve never eaten at Auro or have only been to Solbar once or twice because with tax and gratuity, a couple can easily spend \$800 to \$1,200 on one meal. Many opt instead for Lovina, Evangeline or Bricco Osteria, where a meal for two can still climb to \$250 or more with wine and dessert.

“My goal was to create a more affordable dining experience for locals,” Bennett said. “I wanted it to be a celebration of food, community creativity and the magic that happens when people share a meal — all for less than \$100.”

That was the genesis of a small experiment: an evening pairing an Italian feast with an Italian-American trivia contest and a screening of “Big Night,” the 1996 film written by and starring Stanley Tucci. Bennett posted about it once on a community Facebook page and listed it on OpenTable; there was no other promotion. Tickets were \$95 for a Community Cellar ticket, which asked guests to bring a bottle of Italian wine to share, or \$125 for anyone who preferred to drink what others brought. All 40 sold out in 24 hours.

“I always struggled with the fact that we have to charge so much for special dinners, to pay for food and wine costs, extra staffing, live music and decor,” Bennett said. “This wasn’t a money-maker, but it covered the costs, and I enjoyed doing it.”

She cut costs in ways she felt would not take away from the experience: chicken thighs and shrimp instead of steak and scallops, no live music, and one server per table handling a fixed menu with no substitutions.

“Jen really knows how to bring people together,” said Nina Henkel, who worked the room. “This feels more like a big family party than a night of going to a restaurant.”

The centerpiece was the timpano — the towering, drum-shaped pasta dish from the film’s climactic meal, packed with meatballs, sausage, eggs, cheese and sauce inside a golden crust. Chef Raul Loyola had never made one. He worked through hours of video and prepared a practice version for Bennett to taste ahead of the event.

The film wasn’t part of the original plan. Bennett had been thinking of pairing the dinner with “Moonstruck” until Anna Gottreich, who produces the movie series at Moonshine, steered her elsewhere.

“Food is the star of the film, and food is rarely just food,” Gottreich said. “It becomes the language the characters speak when ordinary words fail them — an expression of love, pride, tradition and belonging.”

The film follows two Italian immigrant brothers running a restaurant in 1950s New Jersey: one a gifted chef devoted to the food of his homeland, the other determined to keep the doors open by giving customers the spaghetti-and-meatballs they expect. The tension builds to the timpano and resolves in a nearly wordless final scene.

Bennett’s evening echoed that ending more than the brothers’ struggle. Nobody on the patio was fighting to keep the doors open. But a similar idea was at work: an evening measured less by what was served than by what it prompted — neighbors who left as friends over a shared bottle, trivia answers shouted down the communal tables, the walk to Moonshine together.

Bennett said she has been fielding requests ever since about when the next one will happen. She is already sketching ideas, and is open to suggestions within the limits of her kitchen: no deep fryer, and no expecting her staff to master an unfamiliar cuisine overnight.

It was dinner and a movie — and, for one night, a version of Calistoga built around the people who live there rather than the ones passing through. Whether the appetite for it extends beyond the 40 people who got tickets is something only a future event will show.

“I want my neighbors in Calistoga to benefit from the pleasure and sense of accomplishment I get from my work,” Bennett said.

Linda S. York is a Calistoga-based writer.

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CALISTOGA LIBRARY

Rebeca DeLuna Joins Calistoga Library as Community Librarian

BY JULIE MULLER MITCHELL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — Rebeca DeLuna, the Calistoga Library’s new community librarian, has loved books and libraries since she was a child. She grew up in Fresno and moved to Calistoga last June to replace Jackie Flores, currently the library’s international services supervisor.

“I have always visited libraries,” DeLuna said. “As a child, I would check out so many books that I would go up to the desk and worry that the librarian would make me return some.”

She said her love of books combined with her desire to help people had much to do with her decision to enter library science. A friend who attended San Jose State University encouraged her toward the field. DeLuna earned a bachelor’s degree in social work at Fresno State University and a master’s degree in library science at Louisiana State University. She interned at the California University of Science and Medicine in Colton, where she studied both Eastern and Western medicine and developed guides on health and wellness, mental health and self-care strategies for medical students.

Before coming to Calistoga, she worked for the Epilepsy Foundation, an organization that aids people with neurological conditions. She participated in fundraising for the foundation to help provide resources and medical care to patients.

“I had the opportunity to work with neurologists and nurses, and I supported patients who had neurological conditions like brain injuries,” she said. “I helped them get access to medical care, medicine, additional resources and employment. I supported patients emotionally, so often I was their only source of support.”

“As a child, I would check out so many books that I would go up to the desk and worry that the librarian would make me return some.”

— REBECA DELUNA

As far as her plans for the Calistoga Library, DeLuna feels that libraries have evolved as more than just a place for books and literacy.

“I’d like to expand our services to be a resource hub,” she said. “I want to do a food drive and donate the contributions to the Calistoga Cares Food Bank and possibly do a coat drive or partner with Toys for Tots during the holidays. I understand that the majority of the community here is Hispanic. Since I am Hispanic, I can really reach out to that segment of the community and let them know we are here for them and to empower them to read and to ask for help when they need it. I will be doing more outreach, like going out to the schools and connecting with different organizations to let them know about our services, our programs and build a network of support.” Several of those programs, including the seed pantry and the ESL conversation hour, are listed in the Weekender on Page 21.

DeLuna said her favorite genre is self-help, although as a teenager she loved science fiction. One of her passions is ballet, and she hopes to resume dancing soon.

DeLuna can be reached at rebeca.deluna@countyofnapa.org.

Julie Muller Mitchell is a Calistoga-based freelance writer.

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MIDDLE CHILD

TEXT FROM SON, 27

you should try cold plunging.

TEXT FROM MOM

We smoked in the car with the windows up and we were fine. ♥

BOTH OF THESE PEOPLE THINK I AM DOING IT WRONG.

GEN X: NOT THE EXPERIMENT

TO-DO: PAY BILLS • CALL MOM • SURVIVE

MIDDLE CHILD

TEXT FROM MILLENNIAL BOSS

Hey! Just checking in. Wanted to see if you got my message. 👍

TEXT FROM GEN Z INTERN

hey just saw this!! sry i was in a meeting lol 🤪

Meeting or doom scrolling?

VOICEMAIL FROM BOOMER DAD

Hi mijo! It's your father. I tried calling you because texting is for teenagers. Call me when you have a moment.

I'm fluent in three generations. Nobody pays me extra.

GEN X: NOT IMPRESSED

TO-DO: WORK • SURVIVE • REPEAT

GROAN ZONE

Why did the student bring a ladder to school? To get to high school.

Why was the math book stressed? Too many problems.

I ate my homework. The teacher said it was a piece of cake.

My computer was late to class. It had a hard drive.

I brought a ruler to school. It measured up.

Why did the pencil go to school? To get sharper.

Got a groaner? Send it to editor@calistogacurrents.com — we'll print your name with it.

How much does it cost if you swallow it?

Somewhere in here I was supposed to become established.

STABILITY?

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FOOD



Melon *With Prosciutto, Basil and Lime*

FROM A KITCHEN SOMEWHERE IN NAPA VALLEY

Serves 4

- 1 ripe Crane melon, or a cantaloupe or Charentais, chilled
 - 6 to 8 thin slices prosciutto
 - 1 small handful fresh basil
- 1 lime
 - Extra-virgin olive oil
 - Flaky sea salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper

Cut the melon into wedges and arrange on a platter. Drape the prosciutto around the wedges. Tear basil leaves over the top, then add a squeeze of lime and a light drizzle of olive oil. Finish with a little flaky salt and black pepper. Melon with cured ham is the foundation — jambon de Bayonne in a French bistro, prosciutto in an Italian one. Lime and basil give it a bright California finish without making it fussy.

Serves four, unless someone has been leaving zucchini on your porch.

WINE CHRONICLES

Northern Exposure

BY DAN BERGER



CALISTOGA, Calif. — Seventy-one years ago, the state of California proposed to put a north-south highway from the city of Napa due north. The plan was to make it easier for travelers (including commercial trucks) to get to the next largest city after San Francisco.

That’s Portland, Oregon, a distance of well over 600 miles.

That proposal was debated and languished until the mid-1960s. After Jack Davies and his wife, Jamie, bought the old Schramsberg Vineyards just south of Calistoga in 1965, the highway proposal was still alive and threatened to devastate the nascent vineyard developments that were quickly replacing plums, walnuts and pears as Napa Valley’s primary crops.

That threat angered Jack Davies so much that he spearheaded the campaign to fight the state plan. He was proactive in defending Calistoga from the powerful trucking industry, and he successfully safeguarded the northern reaches of Napa Valley. The highway plan was soon permanently shelved.

No one knew at the time that Calistoga would end up suffering from its distant location 50 years later. Today, wine tourism that has been so beneficial to the financial health of wineries south of St. Helena has not developed as quickly or as lucratively in the Calistoga area because of the very fact that there is no highway.

Calistoga has benefited, of course, by continuing to be a vital producer of superb cabernet sauvignon fruit to wineries throughout the valley without the negative impact of massive traffic. But anyone who has ever driven from the city

of Napa north intending to visit a tasting room in or near Calistoga certainly has encountered the famous St. Helena bottleneck (pun intended). Highway 29 was never intended to be a through corridor.

One traffic solution that most locals know about is relatively simple. They just use the Silverado Trail to bypass St. Helena, then cross the valley to 29 until they reach their destination. Not only does it save time as well as petrol, but it’s really easy to see how much simpler it is when you use your GPS system to see the benefit.

I estimate that you can save between 10 and 15 minutes just by driving over to the Silverado Trail and then crossing the valley at Lodi Lane. For the uninitiated, the time lost going north will be multiplied by the same time going south later in the day, putting Calistoga just that much closer in terms of tourism time to spend at a winery.

Although vineyard owners clearly have Jack Davies and others to thank for keeping behemoth trucks from barreling through Wine Country as they head north to Oregon, one thing that no one has yet solved is the existing traffic on Highway 29. But maybe AI can help.

If artificial intelligence is embedded into GPS systems, it would be a simple matter for a traveler who is seeking to go from Yountville to Calistoga to be redirected to the trail, thereby saving time and aggravation. My present GPS system did not do this on a recent Tuesday afternoon, and as I approached St. Helena, I realized I should’ve known better. I have lived here for 40 years.

I sat in stop-and-go traffic for 15 minutes.

Solving the traffic mess will benefit all of the businesses in Calistoga, not just wineries, and allowing through visitors to bypass St. Helena may also remove some of the pressure on St. Helena street parking that has become difficult, as well.

Dan Berger has been writing about wine since 1975.

WINE OF THE WEEK

2021 Shypoke Charbono ‘Le Corbeau’

2021 Shypoke Charbono ‘Le Corbeau’ (\$45, 15 barrels made) — Sourced from a Calistoga vineyard planted in 1904 by the Alsatian great-grandparents of winemaker Peter Heitz (not the St. Helena Heitz family) — five generations here, nine before that in France. This rare Charbono, or Le Corbeau as they call it, is made by Peter and Meg Heitz using old-school methods that echo all of them. Aromatics of cigar box, clove and dried fennel give way to blackberry and cherry fruit, underlined by a subtle streak of vanilla. The palate is focused and textural, with moderate acidity and restrained alcohol lending balance. Pair with mushroom risotto, herbed rack of lamb or Gorgonzola-glazed brisket. Hayfork Wine Co.’s 2023 Shypoke Vineyard Charbono, from the same vineyard, took Best of Class at the judging covered on Page 5 — Tim Carl.





Luscious Cabernet Franc from local Frediani Vineyard and decadent Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon

—  —

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Lars Björkman and Molly Hill

— GROWINES.COM —

PAUL’S PICKS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27 – THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Paul Franson, the man behind NapaLife, picks the two weeks’ best things to do – now in Calistoga Currents twice a month.

BY PAUL FRANSON

FRIDAY, AUG. 28

Movies at the Moonshine: “Mitty” — Mount View Hotel and Spa, 1457 Lincoln Ave., just after sunset. Popcorn and refreshments for sale. \$5.

Down valley, the 2026 Broadway and Vine series continues with Andrew Rannells and Nikki M. James at Inglenook, 1991 St. Helena Highway, Rutherford, 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUG. 29

Calistoga Farmers Market — Sharpsteen Plaza, 1311 Washington St., 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Our year-round Saturday market between the Sharpsteen Museum and the Community Center, with California-grown produce, flowers, honey, prepared foods and, often, live music. **Free to wander.**

The first of Calistoga Art Center’s three Art+Wine+Home tours of 2026 will be from 5 to 7 p.m. at the art-filled home of Terry Goldin and Peter Kay. \$125.

The Lab at Lincoln Avenue Brewery has a Lagunitas Tap Takeover and Backyard BBQ Bash with music by the Happy Axedents. 5 p.m. 1473 Lincoln Ave.

Alvon Johnson at the Calistoga Inn, 1250 Lincoln Ave., 6 to 9 p.m.

The 34th annual Hands Across the Valley food benefit is at 5 p.m. at Charles Krug Winery, 2800 Main St., St. Helena. \$500.

Le Jazz Hot brings Gypsy jazz to the White Barn. 7 p.m. \$35. 2727 Sulphur Springs Ave., St. Helena.

Down valley, comedian Hannibal Buress comes to the Uptown at 8 p.m. 1350 Third St., Napa.

SUNDAY, AUG. 30

The Tritones at Hydro Bar, 1403 Lincoln Ave., 6 to 9 p.m., to close the weekend downtown.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 4 THROUGH MONDAY, SEPT. 7

Shop local in downtown Calistoga this Labor Day weekend with up to 70% off at participating businesses.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 4

The 2026 Calistoga Speedway Hall of Fame Dinner, presented by the West Coast Stock Car Hall of Fame, opens the 15th annual Louie Vermeil Classic at the Calistoga Fairgrounds. 5 p.m. \$65.



— Clark James Mishler Photos

The Weekender
AUGUST 27 – SEPTEMBER 10, 2026

BY CALISTOGA CURRENTS STAFF

Labor Day weekend belongs to the Speedway, with the Sharpsteen Museum’s biggest fundraiser, the first Art Center home tour and a library seed pantry around it.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

Fairgrounds Advisory Committee — 6 p.m., Tubbs Building, 1435 N. Oak St. Last Thursday of each month. **Free.**

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

38th Instant Wine Cellar Raffle and Auction — 4–7 p.m., Boys and Girls Club, 1401 N. Oak St. The Sharpsteen Museum’s biggest fundraiser. Grand prize is five mixed cases of Napa Valley wine. **\$10 members, \$25 non-members.** 21 and over.

Art + Wine + Home Tours — Calistoga Art Center. \$125 for one, \$300 for all three. Aug. 29, Terry Goldin and Peter Kay; Oct. 10, Gretchen and Charley de Limur; Nov. 7, Ca’toga Villa and Garden. 707-942-2278.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

ESL Conversation Hour — Hora de Conversación en Inglés — 6–7 p.m., Calistoga Library, 1108 Myrtle St. **Free.**

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

Coloring Hour — 4:30–5:30 p.m., Calistoga Library. Teens and adults. **Free.**

FRIDAY TO MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4–7

Downtown Labor Day Weekend Sale — Up to 70% off at participating downtown businesses. Dates and discounts vary by business.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 5–6

15th Louie Vermeil Classic — Calistoga Speedway, 1435 N. Oak St. Sprint cars return to the half-mile dirt track. The USAC/CRA Non-Wing Series is joined by the debut of the Shark Tales with Andy 360 Calistoga Classic; both run full programs each night. Gates 4 p.m. Grandstand and box \$53.25, bleachers \$43, pit passes \$50, parking \$10 cash. **Each night is a separate ticket.**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

Seed Pantry Opens — 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Calistoga Library. Take seeds home and plant them, while supplies last. **Free.**

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Book Buzz — 4–5 p.m., Calistoga Library. A conversation about the last good book you read. **Free.**

RUNNING THROUGH THE WINDOW

Cameo Cinema — 1340 Main St., St. Helena. The valley’s last single-screen independent theater, run as a nonprofit. Admission \$10. “The Rivals of Amziah King” Aug. 27–30 · “The Magic Faraway Tree” Aug. 28–30 · “SIX The Musical Live!” Sept. 1–3 · “The Last Picture Shows” Sept. 1–3 · “Tony” Sept. 4–6 and Sept. 8–10.

Live Music at Romeo Vineyards & Cellars — Weekends through Oct. 31, 1224 Lincoln Ave.

Sharpsteen Museum: Calistoga’s Places of Worship — Through Sept. 30, 1311 Washington St. **Free; \$3 suggested.**

THE SKY

A deep partial lunar eclipse, Thursday, Aug. 27. The moon rises near sunset already in Earth’s shadow. Greatest eclipse at 9:13 p.m., about 96% of the disk inside the umbra, clear of it by 10:52. Last quarter Sept. 4, new moon Sept. 10.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Calistoga Harvest Table — Sunday, Sept. 13, downtown. A thousand feet of tables, more than a dozen restaurants, 40-plus wineries.

Evangeline NOLA Seafood Boil — Sunday, Sept. 13, reception 6 p.m., dinner 7:15 p.m., 1226 Washington St. \$85. evangelinenapa.com/seafoodboil.

Calistoga City Council — Tuesday, Sept. 15, 6 p.m., Community Center, 1307 Washington St. Streamed on Napa Valley TV Channel 28, YouTube and Zoom.

California Coastal Cleanup Day — Saturday, Sept. 19, 9 a.m. to noon, sites between Calistoga and American Canyon. Volunteers pulled more than 1,000 pounds of trash from the Napa River last year, according to the Napa County Resource Conservation District. Sites at naparcd.org.

Have an event we missed? Send it to editor@calistogacurrents.com.

CITY HALL

Council Sends \$10,000 to the Food Bank Over a Case for Public Art

BY TIM CARL

CALISTOGA, Calif. — The City Council voted 4-0 Tuesday to send \$10,000 in remaining community support money to the food bank, after Mayor Donald Williams made an extended case for spending it on public art instead.

Vice Mayor Lisa Gift was absent.

Deputy City Manager Rachel Stepp said the council had directed \$20,000 to community groups during budget talks, with \$10,000 meant for the food bank and the rest unsettled. Williams proposed a mural on the blank wall of the police station across from City Hall.

Councilmember Kevin Eisenberg said the money’s origin decided it. It had gone to the Boys and Girls Club and was reallocated during a budget discussion about what he called an acute food emergency.

“I think this particular pot of money has to go to our most needy and endangered population,” Eisenberg said. He said he would look for public art funding at the mid-year budget adjustment.

Councilmember Irais Lopez-Ortega first argued the money should go through the community enrichment grant process, then agreed with Eisenberg after learning the application period had closed with four applicants. Councilmember Scott Cooper concurred. A separate \$30,000 is already allocated for those grants.

Marsha Beecham of the Calistoga Art Center said its COVID-19 tile project — 260 fired tiles painted by community

members — is close to completing city permitting for installation at the east end of Pioneer Park.

The council also voted unanimously to accept a transfer of county property tax revenue for structural fire protection, worth about \$500,000 a year beginning Sept. 1. City Manager Mitch Celaya said the money would free up general funds.

Flock cameras

Lopez-Ortega and Eisenberg both asked for a presentation from Police Chief Matthew McCaffrey on the city’s automated license plate readers, citing repeated public comment and national coverage.

Water sale

The council approved selling about 450 acre-feet of State Water Project carryover water for roughly \$170,000 to the water enterprise fund. Staff said the allocation could be reset without payment if the San Luis Reservoir spills.

Fairgrounds

Williams said he and Eisenberg asked the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday morning to extend the city’s lease limit at the fairgrounds from 25 years to 50. The board went into closed session and had not announced an outcome.

The council proclaimed September Suicide Prevention Month and Sept. 15 through Oct. 15 Hispanic Heritage Month.



Police Log

AUG. 5—18, 2026

The following are initial reports from the Calistoga Police Department. They are not charges or findings.

Wednesday, August 5

10:02 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Mitzi Dr. The vehicle was tagged for 72 hrs.

10:31 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Washington St. The vehicle was tagged for 72 hrs.

6:05 p.m. — Caller reported 2 dogs left inside a pickup truck on Lincoln Ave. The vehicle left prior to officers’ arrival.

Thursday, August 6

11:16 a.m. — Theft of a bicycle reported on Washington St. The bicycle was located and a report was taken.

5:53 p.m. — Illegally parked vehicle reported on Lincoln Ave.

Friday, August 7

10:01 a.m. — Officers responded to a gas leak on Foothill Blvd.

10:33 a.m. — Barking dog reported on Lake St.

4:16 p.m. — Restraining order violation reported on Washington St. A report was taken.

10:41 p.m. — Officers responded to a female drunk in public on Lincoln Ave. The female was assisted.

11:06 p.m. — Commercial alarm reported on Foothill Blvd. False alarm.

Saturday, August 8

9:02 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Pine St. The vehicle was cited.

9:12 a.m. — Fraud reported on Washington St. A report was taken.

10:16 a.m. — The use of a gas-powered leaf blower was reported on Chablis South. The subject was advised of the municipal code.

11:17 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Third St. The vehicle was cited.

11:43 a.m. — The use of a gas-powered leaf blower was reported on Pine St. Officers conducted an area check, but no one was seen using a leaf blower.

5:14 p.m. — Theft of a wallet was reported on Washington St. A report was taken.

10:12 p.m. — Loud music complaint reported on Second St. The resident was contacted and the music was turned down.

11:00 p.m. — Barking dog reported on Fair Way.

Sunday, August 9

9:20 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Washington St. The vehicle was towed.

11:11 a.m. — Officers assisted CHP with a vehicle blocking Hwy 29.

Monday, August 10

4:01 a.m. — Officers responded to a water leak on Cedar St.

Tuesday, August 11

7:13 a.m. — A suspicious subject was reported inside a vehicle on Lincoln Ave. One female was contacted and advised to leave the property.

10:24 a.m. — A neighbor dispute reported on Third St.

11:40 a.m. — Caller reported stalking and harassment on Third St.

1:10 p.m. — Caller reported a male urinated on Lincoln Ave. The male subject was located and contacted.

Wednesday, August 12

2:22 p.m. — Officers responded to a family disturbance on Lake St.

4:31 p.m. — Vandalism reported on Foothill Blvd.

7:55 p.m. — Caller reported a suspicious male riding a bike and playing loud music on Washington St. Officers conducted an area check but were unable to locate the subject.

7:59 p.m. — Suspicious male reported on Centennial Cir. Officers conducted an area check but were unable to locate the male.

10:14 p.m. — Caller reported two subjects walking with flashlights and looking inside garbage cans on Foothill Blvd.

10:22 p.m. — Caller reported an unknown male was sleeping behind his apartment complex on Washington St.

10:31 p.m. — Loud music complaint reported on Janis Way. The resident was advised of the municipal code.

Thursday, August 13

4:32 p.m. — Restraining order violation reported on Washington St. A report was taken.

7:52 p.m. — Loud music complaint reported on High St. The resident was contacted and advised of municipal code.

0:00 p.m. — Officers responded to a municipal code violation on Brannan St. A parking violation was left on the vehicle.

11:19 p.m. — Loud music complaint reported on Janis Way. The resident was contacted and advised of the municipal code.

Friday, August 14

10:25 a.m. — Parking complaint reported on Foothill Blvd. The registered owner was contacted and advised of the municipal code.

11:41 a.m. — Officers assisted with a civil issue on Foothill Blvd.

7:16 p.m. — Caller reported loud construction noise heard on Foothill Blvd. Quiet upon officers’ arrival.

Saturday, August 15

9:39 a.m. — Illegally parked vehicle reported on Spring St. The registered owner was contacted and the vehicle was moved.

10:06 a.m. — Usage of a gas powered-leaf blower reported on Lincoln Ave. A male was contacted and advised of the municipal code.

11:26 a.m. — Caller reported hearing a male scream on Washington St. Officers conducted an area check. No signs of distress seen or heard.

11:55 a.m. — Abandoned vehicle was reported on Washington St.

12:21 p.m. — Illegally parked vehicle was reported on Washington St. The vehicle was tagged for 72 hrs.

8:06 p.m. — Caller reported a male under the influence of a controlled substance on Brannan St. Officers contacted the male who was OK and not under the influence.

10:17 p.m. — Officers responded to a traffic accident on Myrtledale Rd. A male driver was arrested for drinking and driving.

11:33 p.m. — Officers responded to a domestic disturbance on Lake St. A male subject was arrested and transported to the Napa County Jail.

Sunday, August 16

1:36 a.m. — Caller reported multiple subjects fighting on Lincoln Ave. A report was taken.

5:40 a.m. — Caller reported a male passed out in the middle of the road on High St. Officers responded and arrested the male for public intoxication.

12:50 p.m. — Caller reported goats in the middle of the road on Foothill Blvd.

1:50 p.m. — Abandoned vehicle reported on Washington St. The vehicle was towed.

2:22 p.m. — Theft reported on Silverado Trail. A report was taken.

7:47 p.m. — Caller reported 2 males sleeping on Washington St. Both subjects were contacted and assisted by family members.

8:40 p.m. — Caller reported a male yelling at an intoxicated female laying on the ground. Officers contacted both subjects.

Monday, August 17

12:02 a.m. — Caller reported hearing footsteps outside of her bedroom window on Oak Hill Ct. Officers checked the property and everything checked OK.

Tuesday, August 18

7:58 a.m. — Fraud reported on Lincoln Ave.

10:25 a.m. — Officers responded to a possible domestic disturbance on Washington St. A female was contacted.

5:32 p.m. — Illegally parked vehicle reported on Lincoln Ave. The vehicle was tagged for 72 hours.

5:56 p.m. — Residential alarm reported on Lake St. The property checked OK.



FILMGUIDE

NOW PLAYING **AUG. 27–SEPT. 10**

THE RIVALS OF AMZIAH KING
Thu. Aug. 27, 5:00 & 7:45 | Fri. Aug. 28, 2:00 & 7:45 |
Sat. Aug. 29, 7:45 | Sun. Aug. 30, 5:00

THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE
Fri.–Sat. Aug. 28–29, 2:00 · 5:00 · 7:45 | Sun. Aug. 30, 2:00 & 5:00

SIX THE MUSICAL LIVE!
Tue. Sept. 1, 5:00 | Wed. Sept. 2, 2:00 & 7:45 | Thu. Sept. 3, 5:00

THE LAST PICTURE SHOWS
Tue. Sept. 1, 7:45 | Wed. Sept. 2, 5:00 | Thu. Sept. 3, 7:45

TONY
Fri.–Sat. Sept. 4–5, 2:00 · 5:00 · 7:45 | Sun. Sept. 6, 2:00 & 5:00 |
Tue. Sept. 8, 5:00 & 7:45 | Wed. Sept. 9, 2:00 · 5:00 · 7:45 |
Thu. Sept. 10, 5:00 & 7:45



GENERAL ADMISSION \$10
Includes military, seniors and students
Closed Mondays
OPEN CAPTIONS Wed. 5:00 · Sun. 2:00

SHOWTIMES & TICKETS

Cameo Cinema
1340 Main Street, St. Helena · 707.963.9779
cameocinema.com
All movies and showtimes subject to change.

Currents Challenge

Back to School · August 27, 2026

SUDOKU — EASY

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

Fill every row, column and box with 1–9.

SUDOKU — HARD

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

Fill every row, column and box with 1–9.

WORD HUNT

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

Scan for the answer key: calistogacurrents.com/answers/2026-08-27



WORDS TO FIND

(Across, down or diagonal — forwards or backwards)

- ATTENDANCE
 - BACKPACK
 - CAFETERIA
 - CHALK
 - DESK
 - ERASER
 - HOMEWORK
 - LIBRARY
- LOCKER
 - LUNCH
 - NOTEBOOK
 - PENCIL
 - PLAYGROUND
 - RECESS
 - STUDENT
 - TEACHER

WORD LADDER

Change one letter per rung:

Bell to Book.

BELL

— — — —

— — — —

— — — —

BOOK

At Picayune Cellars and Mercantile, French-born winemaker Claire Weinkauff crafts vibrant, balanced, and approachable wines.

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Calistoga

downtown

Labor Day Weekend Sale



*Friday, September 4th -
Monday, September 7th*

- Accompli • Blackbird • Calistoga Bike Shop
- Collings & Légère Gallery • Copperfield's Books
- Field Trip • Irais of the Valley • Mad Mod Shop
- Papa Lou's Wine & Spirits • Picayune Cellars & Mercantile
- Read Head Books • Robindira Unsworth
- Second Story • Stix & Stones and More!

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