

# Mariposa Gazette



"Covering Mariposa County Like The Stars"

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## PRINCIPLE OR POLITICS?

### Supervisors refuse to consider Pride Month declaration

By GREG LITTLE  
Editor

A local group who represents the LGBTQ+ community — and their supporters — has been denied getting a proclamation from the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors.

In the overwhelming majority of routine board proclamations, they are placed on the agenda and generally pass unanimously. Then, the proclamation is read, a photo is taken and that is usually the end of things.

But in the case of Mariposa Pride requesting to be placed on the agenda to have June declared as Pride Month in Mariposa County, things didn't go that route. The entire issue began with a phone call, according to Mariposa County District 5 Supervisor Miles Me-

netrey. He said he received that phone call from Katelyn Strickland, one of the board members of Mariposa Pride.

Strickland told Menetrey she learned from the clerk of the board, Danielle Bondshu, since she was in his district, the proposition would have to go to him.

According to Mariposa County Board of Supervisors Chair Rosemarie Smallcombe, in many cases, a proposed proclamation comes from local organizations, many affiliated with the government. In those routine cases, many times the proclamations are brought directly to the board because they are voted upon each year.

But, she said, in the case of an organization like Mari-

**'I don't participate in gay Pride and I don't want to support it.'**  
—Miles Menetrey

posa Pride, the request would go through the clerk of the board.

Menetrey said he was first made aware of the request by the phone call from Strickland, which he said lasted "30

seconds."

He said she told him they were working on a proclamation and asked if he would put it on the agenda.

Menetrey wouldn't.

"I don't participate in gay Pride and I don't want to support it," said Menetrey in an interview last week of what he told Strickland.

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Submitted photos

Above, this photo shows the burning and clearing that took place on the Mariposa Creek Parkway earlier this year as part of the overall expansion of the project. Below is a bronze turtle which "lives" on the Stockton Creek Preserve and is part of a larger art project targeted for the area.

## Getting creative

### Local groups helping shape the future

**Editor's note: This is the second in an eight-part series about the Mariposa County Arts Council. The stories will appear monthly through the end of the year.**

By GREG LITTLE  
Editor

Creative placemaking.

That's a term used in many circles, but mainly in the art community.

It's also something the Mariposa County Arts Council has been working on for several years.

Now, it seems, that work is beginning to pay off.

"It is often thought of as public art and that can be part of creative placemaking," said Cara Goger, executive director of the Mariposa County Arts Council. "But it's not seeing a blank wall and seeing a mural there. It could be it."

Goger said since 2017, the arts council has been "building capacity for Mariposa. It is not something one group can do on their own."

Goger said it takes many partnerships, and in this instance, that it could be the poster child for creative placemaking and what it means to a community.



"It is completely dependent on partnerships and certain goals," she added.

For Bridget Fithian, executive director of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, the opportunities seem endless. Fithian's group is generally what is known as a "land trust," which means they work with landowners throughout the region to place certain properties into conservancy in perpetuity.

In those cases, the land retains many qualities, like pasture land for cattle, historic structures and it becomes an educational tool for young people to learn about the past — and the future.

But in the case of the Mariposa Creek Parkway, the conservancy took on a different role. They will be able to help secure the land for the extension of the parkway from where it now ends on Stroming Road and 8th Street in Mariposa.

Already, a lot of the heavy underbrush has been removed from the area with the plan to make the walkway extend toward the new apartment development in Mariposa and eventually come

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## At long last

### School board moves ahead with hiring athletic director

By ALLEN LAMAN  
Staff Writer



Danny Ellis

Danny Ellis watched from the sidelines as Lupin Amstutz broke free and scored the goal that sent the Mariposa County High School girls soccer team to the section championship in February.

The next month, he traveled to the Bay Area to watch the Grizzlies boys basketball team compete in a state tournament. He also had a front-row seat to the Grizzlies baseball team's dominant semifinal victory against Argonaut High School in May.

Ellis landed a job as a teacher on special assignment during the spring semester of the 2021-22 school year. That gig made him a familiar face both inside MCHS and on sports fields throughout the winter and spring.

Come August, Ellis will be back on campus.

This time, however, he'll return as the Mariposa County Unified School District's full-time athletic director. He was officially approved to hold the title at the local district's recent school board meeting.

"I want these kids to feel proud of being a Grizzly," said Ellis, who graduated from MCHS in 1974. "We've

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## County fair planning is now well underway

### 'Freedom, family and tradition' is theme

By ALLEN LAMAN  
Staff Writer

Life will fill the Mariposa County Fairgrounds during the first weekend of September when the 83rd annual Mariposa County Fair returns to the Sierra Nevada foothills.

"Freedom, family and tradition" is the theme of this year's fair. Returning favorites, new highlights and a special free admission day will all be part of the upcoming, four-day event. The fair will run from Sept. 2-5.

"The fair is the glue that holds this community together," said Brian Bullis, manager of the local fairgrounds. "It's the homecoming."

Leadership began laying the framework for the yearly gathering in January. Notable additions include a mutton busting — sheep riding — contest, comedy mind reading and hypnosis shows as well as free entry on the fair's final day.

Named in honor of a longtime fair board member, all guests will be allowed into the fairgrounds at no charge

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## Tackling dog issue in county is a 'ruff' row to hoe

By MADISON KIRKPATRICK  
Staff Writer

With the ongoing issue of vicious dogs in Lushmeadows, North Mariposa County and likely many other areas, there is a common question people seem to have.

What can be done?

Greeley Hill resident Michael Day seems to have a good idea.

He knows the hazard which has been created by the vicious dog issue.

In a letter to the editor in the *Gazette*, he outlined some ordinances in the county which provide protection to citizens from vicious and free-running dogs.

Here are a few of said ordinances:

6.08.020 Licensing — This is required. The owner of each dog must purchase a license for their dog. (Ord. 675 Sec. 1, 1986)

6.08.090 Rabies vaccination. (Ord. 675 Sec. 1, 1986)



Submitted photo

Shown is a dog roaming around in Greeley Hill resident Judy Burden's yard. Residents and officials have many ideas about how to handle the ongoing problem.

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# CREATIVE

From Page A1

out near the CAL FIRE headquarters on Highway 49 North.

The other major project the conservancy has developed is the Stockton Creek Preserve. That land was secured by the conservancy and the Mariposa Public Utility District and provides many trails for recreation. Those trails are accessible from the town of Mariposa near the high school.

“These two projects are good examples of how the land trust can secure the land,” said Fithian.

At the parkway, she said with that land secured and now developed, it allows for the art council to “do projects like where native landscapes are really celebrated and can be connected to that and also for tribal use.”

In fact, the groups have been working closely with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to have displays at the parkway, one of which was unveiled last year with more in the works.

Fithian said there is a basket project currently on the parkway for the public to enjoy.

“They are working on the next phase of the project,” said Fithian. “How it can be used for recreation, restoring native plants and having these elements of how the public and community can interact with all of that work through arts medium. The land trust is a partner in trying to create it.”

“The conservancy is playing a huge role in creative placemaking,” said Goger. “This is truly a collaborative effort. It is a community partnership project.”

### The stakeholders

Goger said one of the most critical aspects of creative placemaking is “stakeholder engagement. We have to be responsive to the community at large. It needs to be completely informed by the community’s voice.”

The proof of that is in the pudding, as Goger pointed out there were two years of meetings to hone in on what exactly the group wanted and, maybe most importantly, how to achieve those goals.

“This is the value the community holds,” said Goger.

In fact, she said an extensive survey was completed to gather input of community members as to what they wanted to see in the creek parkway.

Interestingly, she said 60 percent of the respondents “wanted to focus on social and cultural dynamics.”

What that means is varied, and includes how to integrate the land issues with the culture as well as the public health impacts of climate change.

For Goger, whose main focus is on the arts, she said a lot of the information that came out of the final study was “data driven,” not necessarily her cup of tea, but something she said is vital when trying to serve the needs of the community.

“It’s a popular project,” said Mikey Goralnik, the lead person from the Mariposa County Planning Department who has worked on the project since its inception — at least the last few phases. “The reason it is popular is because a lot of people had a hand in it. The parkway is immediately very attractive and makes a lot of sense, but so do a lot of other projects.”

The reason, he said, this one stands out is because of all of the community input.

“It’s not just the county’s project,” said Goralnik. “It’s a public project that has been shaped by the public. The people told us what they wanted. Having come to the table, they provided input and guidance on how they wanted it to function and that’s what we are doing.”

Goger said those partnerships mean a lot of input and she gives a lot of credit to the Sierra Foothill Conservancy “to work in these spaces in partnership with the county and tribe.”

Then, she laughed, “We come along and do the cool stuff. For the arts council and the artists involved, it is really cool.”

### The bigger picture

Fithian said for the conservancy, many of the projects do take in the bigger picture and are “large landscapes,” like a major project they developed in Hornitos that involves thousands of acres and will be conserved basically forever.

But the parkway and the preserve, she said, is “community conservation.”

However, she was quick to note that even the larger scale projects can be considered “creative placemaking.”

She said the Highway 140 corridor through Mariposa County is a good example of that, saying if it is generally preserved, locals and visitors alike (of which there are millions a year), “can drive through the country and experience this place. We want to preserve that ... an experience that is unique to our landscape and our community.”

“Sometimes,” said Goger, “creative placemaking can be a controversial term. ‘Sometimes, it is referred to as creative placekeeping. That goes exactly to what Bridget is saying. They don’t have to be murals or sculptures or things we traditionally think of as public art.’”

She said the possibilities are wide open, and can include literature, virtual reality and “how the art and land” are used in harmony.

“It’s important to be really expansive of what it can be. It is really easy to default to tangible things we think of as public art.”

She went further, saying it can “go to housing, economic development, public safety” and more.

Goger said how they integrate the arts into the overall development can be varied and is not set in stone.

“The end goal is it may not look like an art piece at all, but it is more of the artistic practice or expansive thinking about something to achieve that specific goal,” said Goger.

She said the Highway 140 corridor, for example, “is ripe for maintaining the viewshed for creative placemaking.”

Part of all of this work is getting the community to not just be aware of the effort, but to support it, as well.

The conservancy is a local group that has worked hard over the years to bring various communities together — from ranchers to environmentalists.

“SFC is really a bridge builder between communities that may not associate with each other at all because they may just have different social groups they interact with,” said Fithian. “We have the ability to connect with people at a values level. You can talk to a rancher who may be very conservative and an environmentalist who both agree we want to keep this land.”

She calls them “spaces of commonality. We have to find the threads where we have shared values and goals and then we can all make things happen. Focusing on what brings us together is the key to getting good work done.”



This photo is by Linda Ward, who was part of the F-stop program in 2022. That program encourages local residents to get involved in photography.

Goger said it is “a little different in the art field. Art provides the opportunity to see the world through other people’s shoes. You get to do that at whatever engagement you feel comfortable.”

She also said having creative placemaking in place can help people who might not otherwise be involved in such efforts.

“That trough line is very important because of the public investment,” said Goger. “It is a good space for underrepresented voices. A great space for new stories; exploring the different layers of our community that might not otherwise be seen.”

She believes art “creates a space for civic dialogue. The trick there with art is to make sure everyone feels comfortable.”

An obvious example of that is Music on the Green, the summer concert series the arts council has sponsored for years.

“It is amazing how many people show up every week even if they don’t like the band,” said Goger.

### Behind the scenes

Goger said all of the creative placemaking work that is being done is from the overall planning and strategy effort of Mariposa County. Essentially, she said, it is the “county planning policy. We are partners on it. We are responding to county recommendations.”

That is key, she said, because in the united front of the county, the arts council, the tribe, the conservancy and many more, “that’s what makes it possible for the state and federal governments to fund projects. They want to see local agencies work together. They want to know that everyone is in partnership and alignment with each other.”

That she called “critical,” especially “in a community where the funding has to be from the government.”

She said unlike the larger metropolitan areas where there are large foundations and even extremely wealthy individuals who contribute to such efforts, that’s just not the case here.

Fithian said she believes there are key people within the local government, including Goralnik, who have played an oversized role in getting these projects not just off the ground, but moving forward.

“We have a few visionary employees who have really been able to advance more of this bigger picture thinking,” said Fithian. “I think we should give kudos to local governments who want to be visionary and see what they can do to make it a better place.”

She said the “sky is the limit” if the right people are in place and working toward a unified goal.

Goralnik agreed, saying because of the partnerships, the government can actually accomplish more. He said groups like the tribe and the conservancy and arts council “have the technical expertise; wisdom, skills.”

He pointed to the parkway project.

Some, he said, might just think of it as “a trail. It is more than a trail.”

He called the “disciplines and perspectives” from all of the groups as the key to making it more than a trail.

“If this was just a trail that went through the woods, it wouldn’t be good,” said Goralnik.

He said because of the expertise of many, it will become a place to see restored landscapes and “a way to get people excited about the projects.”

Those visions include a place for people to gather along the parkway, possibly even retail shops and certainly a place where people can walk from one end of Mariposa to the other to access services like the post office or grocery store or any number of local businesses.

He also said there is a “nonhuman” aspect of the project, where wildlife can thrive right alongside the humans.

“Being able to do that is an essential component,” said Goralnik.

### Moving forward

Goger said having the involvement of so many groups is essential because it helps secure the funding.

“It is exciting to be moving into the actual implementation to the recommendation,” said Goger.

Future plans include heavy involvement from the Miwuk tribe, she said, because they can lend a sense of history and importance to the area. She said plans include guided tours by tribal members as well as working closely on the restoration side of things to bring it back as close as possible to where the land was decades, even centuries, ago.

“That is coming down the pike,” she said.

A similar situation is true for the preserve, where the arts council is working with the conservancy and MPUD on a pair of public art projects.

She said the “Stockton Creek hide and seek” project features bronze statues of animals along the trails, including the Western Pond Turtle, which was reborn in a sense in that area. It was there where officials from Yosemite National Park helped those turtles recover and thrive and then be transplanted back into the park where they had lived for centuries.

A pair of local artists — Jackie Baxton and OB Kauffman — are working on that project as well as others. Kauffman is a renowned naturalist, artist and poet, she said.

### More information:

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But don’t think the vision stops at the parkway or along the trails.

Goger said she is working with the school district on mural projects, also part of the creative placemaking effort.

Mariposa Elementary School now has a mural based on butterflies while Mariposa County High School has a metamorphosis mural. She also said Greeley Hill Elementary “did their own” mural projects focusing on the environment.

They are also partnering with the Alliance for Community Transformations to do temporary art installations while working with at-risk youth.

Goralnik announced there are a couple of major projects he is working on that will have major impacts on the area.

One, he said, is called “working lands, working artists.” That concept is to use public art “primarily in the western part of the county.”

It will be temporary art but is intended to highlight agriculture and its important to Mariposa County as well as “possibly enhance agriculture and working landscapes.”

That, he said, should start in the next couple of months.

In addition, he said there is \$1 million of funding coming from Caltrans to do projects in the town of Mariposa. Those funds will focus on the “gateway elements” of Mariposa, which leads people to one of the most famous parks in the world.

The art in this case will be in the form of welcoming signs for visitors “welcoming people to the area and signifying you have reached Mariposa.”

The hope, he said, is to also secure money for a pair of downtown murals “that are related to the gateway elements so they will be consistent to telling a narrative about our community.”

There will also be wayfinding signs as part of the project, including leading people to the parkway.

“Both of these projects are directly implementing recommendations in the creative placemaking strategy,” said Goralnik.

### The story continues ...

Fithian said the conservancy supports all of these efforts and she believes the overall effort is making it a success.

“Oftentimes in local government efforts, there is a planning effort and the plan never gets implemented,” said Fithian. “It is really hard to move to the implementation phase. This is one of the magic elements of this partnership. You have elements you can implement.”

She said the conservancy is heavily involved in the agricultural planning.

“I think it is really exciting the way we think of our work and different aspects we can touch, as well,” she said. “It has been an expansive period of time for all of our organizations.”

“Art is only interesting when it is in service with something else,” said Goger. “Art has this transformative power when it is being offered in service. To that end, I am eternally grateful for all of the other community organizations we work with for their generosity to partner with these projects.”

She did say there is “no road map for this. Creative placemaking looks unique to each community. We have a lot of partners who are really open to this. It serves our community so much better.”

Even the ongoing construction work in the downtown area is part of the future and Goger said all of these elements will be a part of the overall future of Mariposa.

“We have visionaries throughout the community who are working together,” she said. “And then getting it done.”

Goralnik said that “constant change is exactly the reason why it is so essential to asking people what they want. It is necessary to know what to do. Now we know.”

And even though they know, he said they also realize things change and they will be willing to adapt as situations — and concepts — arise.

“It’s cool to reflect on,” said Goralnik, who has watched many of these projects go from the drawing board to being worked on and completed. “It does feel different and it is a reminder those same forces are always at plan and show how we need to see direction.”

Though there is a lot to take in when it comes to creative placemaking, one thing seems to be crystal clear: There are local people in place who are passionate about what it means and how it will shape the future of this region.