



California's oldest weekly newspaper of continuous publication

Mariposa *Weekly* Gazette.

Established 1854 — Celebrating 171 Years

Official County Newspaper

Mariposa, California • Thursday, January 2, 2025 • Issue No. 1 • \$1.00

Back on the bench

Starchman Bryant takes oath of office with family by her side

By GREG LITTLE
Editor

It was Christmas Eve. The courtroom was packed.

No, it wasn't Miracle on 34th Street.

But it was in a historic courthouse in Mariposa; an appropriate place during the holidays for the county's first female Superior Court judge to take her oath of office.

Anita Starchman Bryant, who was appointed to the Mariposa County Superior Court in September 2022 by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, took her second oath of office last week.

But this time, it was her first after being elected by the people of Mariposa County.

See BENCH on page A8



Photo by Greg Little

Anita Starchman smiles after taking the oath of office from Judge Michael Fagalde on Christmas Eve. Shown in the background are her husband, Tim, and children Annie and Davis. In the background are relatives, friends and others who tuned into the ceremony via Zoom.

Preserving the future

Several partners coming together to preserve a historic piece of land

By GREG LITTLE
Editor

As you walk through the Stookey Preserve near Triangle Road, it is quite a statement that you can walk there at all.

Well, at least on 10 acres of land that has undergone an incredible transformation.

"This is a major restoration project," said Nancy Fluharty, development director for the Sierra Foothill Conservancy.

The preserve is a 226-acre tract of land that was acquired by the conservancy in 2021. It was a major acquisition for the group and in the past couple of years, they have been working to improve the property, all the while continuing their vision of open spaces, pathways for various species and even education for the youth.

This particular restoration project is focused on plants, though the side effects impact all

types of wildlife and even the human experience.

In order to get such a massive project off the ground, or in the ground in this case, it takes funding.

The conservancy secured a grant of just under \$400,000 from the Wildlife Conservation Board and Point Blue Conservation Science to make sure the project could become a reality.

The major focus last year at the property was eliminating invasive species. And this wasn't just your typical elimination of pulling plants out the ground.

The invasive Himalayan Blackberries don't just grow thickly, they grow so dense that even small animals can't get through.

The property was covered with that particular species, as well as the Briar Rose.

"It is a long process," said Jessica Thompson,

See FUTURE on page A9



Photo by Greg Little

Nancy Fluharty, left, and Jessica Thompson of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, are shown at the Stookey Preserve in Mariposa County.

Hospital audit is nearly complete

By MADISON KIRKPATRICK
Staff Writer

Though the 2024 audit for John C. Fremont Healthcare District is not quite complete, the district's auditing firm presented the main results during the December meeting of the hospital board.

Pat Ryan, interim CEO, said during the meeting that the audit shows a "lot of grave indicators going in the wrong direc-

See HOSPITAL on page A10

Land donated for new cemetery location

By MADISON KIRKPATRICK
Staff Writer

Mariposa County has received a land donation of 1.27 acres that will be merged with the existing 2.78-acre cemetery in Catheys Valley.

Mariposa County Public Works and Transportation director Shannon Hansen spoke at the Dec. 17 meeting of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors about the donation from the Simon family.

The Mariposa Cemetery "has about met its max" and staff had been looking for additional land for quite some time.

The last expansion was an addition to the Mariposa Cemetery in 1976.

County supervisors Danette Toso and Wayne Forsythe

were instrumental in communicating with the Simon family, who eventually donated the acres.

Though the cemetery is in Catheys Valley, the cemetery will be open to all residents of the county, Hansen said.

The Catheys Valley Cemetery Ad-Hoc Committee supported and the Mariposa Town Cemetery Committee recommended acceptance of the donation.

Toso was appreciative of the generous donation. "It is much-needed" and it is nice that it can be used for the entire county.

By a 4-0 vote, the supervisors accepted the donation, authorized County Administrative Officer Joe Lynch to sign the necessary applications and documents to process a lot line adjustment and authorized the supervisors chair to sign the acceptance upon completion of the lot line adjustment.

State agency satisfied about cleanup work within Yosemite

By GREG LITTLE
Editor

When you are dealing with environmental issues, putting things in perspective is crucial.

That is certainly the case with some old sites that dot Yosemite National Park — and the ongoing efforts to make sure those are safe for the public.

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) recently released information regarding some sites in the park and officials in the department say both the park

service and Yosemite officials have been cooperative over the years in working on the issues.

The most recent public notice released by DTSC specifically refers to Camp 6, Baseline Dump and Taft-Toe Dump units. It's likely many people don't even know where these places are located or how all of this became part of an ongoing cleanup effort.

The Mariposa Gazette reached out to the department to get some clarification on what it all means. Alysya Pakkidis, information officer for the department, responded to the inquiry and tapped into experts in the field to get answers.

The information from DTSC stated that in 2001, the National Park Service agreed to oversight by the DTSC for "investigation and corrective action" of 13 Solid Waste Management Units within the boundaries of the park.

Presently, three of those units have ongoing corrective action, according to Pakkidis, as well as land use restrictions for Taft-Toe and Baseline.

The decision reached at this point by DTSC is that "no further action" is needed for each of three units.

See CLEANUP on page A8

FUTURE

From page A1

operations director of the conservancy. She was talking about both getting the grant funding as well as the effort it took to remove the invasive species — and the effort it will continue to take to keep them thinned out.

Thompson said those species, and the blackberry plants specifically, “create a cover” and the native plants “can’t compete,” causing all sorts of havoc in the plant and animal world.

As part of this undertaking, the conservancy also brought in officials from the Southern Sierra Miwuk Tribe. That group, too, is preserving part of the land and they have a lot of historical knowledge and expertise when it comes to plant life and the outdoors in general.

All of the work, said Thompson, not only preserves the plant life but also “helps” many other species, including those that are aquatic, mammals, birds and more.

Fluharty said one of the “cool things” about how the actual work started involved, of all things, goats.

Happy Goat Farm brought in around 100 goats, who lived on the preserve for some three months. Fluharty said it was “amazing” how the goats would devour the blackberry plants, thorns and all.

“The goats did the first major pass,” she said. “This is the first time we’ve seen a project use the goats. I was really impressed by adding in that element.”

Crews then brought in around 6,000 feet of irrigation lines, which are temporary but needed for the first few years as the plants take root and grow.

She said there are 23 species of plants involved in the project. The second phase of the project is ongoing and involves getting those plants in the ground. But it’s not as simple as digging a small hole and walking away. Each one has to have a special cage around it to keep the deer from making them a meal.

It will take two years for the plants to fully develop before they can be cage free, so to speak. That’s a good chunk of the three-year project but one Fluharty said is vital for success.

Fluharty said they “targeted” the riparian areas of the land, but they also wanted to make sure “people could see it.”

There is a historic house on the land and a lot of the plantings can be seen from the house.

It also allows tribal access, something they said is critical in the project.

Other work included removing distressed trees and cleaning areas for both people and animals.

Fluharty said not only does it help the plants and wildlife, but the clearing also makes a fuel break, something that is “critical” in this region. In fact, Thompson said the preserve will be part of a major CAL FIRE grant project that is targeted for a wide swath of this region. That \$7 million grant is focused on fuels treatment, including thinning of trees, and will be taking place over the next couple of years.

There is also black oak restoration that will take place as well as the riparian corridors.

Western Pond Turtles also inhabit the area and the work will help that species survive, as well.

“We love the turtles,” said Fluharty.

Taking a tour with the two, you also find out some interesting nature facts.

Thompson said the pond turtles depend on temperature to determine the sex of the newborn turtles. Depending on hot or cold equals more males or females.

The turtles have adapted to the point that they know where to breed in order to keep the species balanced.

The plantings, a majority of which are in place, include pollinators like milkweed, California roses and coyote mint.

They also include “culturally significant” species like redbud, elderberry, deer grass and sourberry.

Interestingly, the project came on “the heels” of the Mariposa Creek Parkway work, said Thompson, and they “used that knowledge” in working on the Stookey Preserve.

Both projects are being done in conjunction with the tribe, something Fluharty said is a critical component and a partnership they believe is vastly important.

The parkway project has been a major undertaking and the tribe has played a central role, from assisting in the removal of the invasive species to the selection of native plants in that area. The same is true for the project now ongoing at the Stookey Preserve.

Both also are critical to those corridors, said Thompson.

Most people likely think of corridors for animals like deer, mountain lions and more. But Thompson said there are “polli-



This is an example of the extensive planting effort at the Stookey Preserve.

Photos by Greg Little



The pond on the preserve is an integral part of how plants and wildlife survive. In the background is the historic home on the preserve.

nator corridors,” as well, which are crucial.

Some have much smaller rangers, she said, but they all need to have that space.

“They need resources along that journey,” said Thompson. And in all of that, there is another important component, especially at the Stookey Preserve.

For six weeks during the summer, school children are brought to the preserve to learn about a wide variety of issues, from plants and animals to environmentally sound practices, said Fluharty.

That is one aspect of the program that Fluharty thinks is vitally important because it introduces young people to the many aspects of the natural environment.

Annual campaign

The Sierra Foothill Conservancy is now in the midst of its annual fundraising campaign. Fluharty said they are seeking to raise \$160,000 for their ongoing conservation efforts.

To contribute, the easiest way is to visit sierrafoothill.org and Fluharty said there is a lot of information available.

The conservancy also conducts guided tours on many of its properties throughout the year.

Topics and subject are quite varied, from yoga to birding. An expert docent leads all tours.

“There are all kinds of activities,” said Fluharty. Visit the website for more information.



This old water storage tank even adds a little history to the preserve, which is one of the most historic pieces of land in the county.

Allana Bush, Nurse Practitioner Has Returned!

We are excited to announce that Allana Bush has returned to our Fremont Family Physicians Clinic!

Allana is now available for telemedicine appointments every Tuesday through Thursday and is currently accepting new patients.

Don't wait - call today for more information or to schedule!

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