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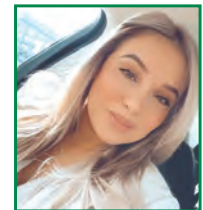
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On the cover: Los Banos Interim City Manager Gary Brizzee, left, and Los Banos Community and Economic Development Director Stacy Souza Elms celebrate during the ribbon cutting and dedication on April 25, 2025 of the new city arch located near Sixth Street and Pacheco Boulevard in downtown Los Banos.

The Life In Los Banos magazine is an annual publication. For those interested in being included in the 2026 edition, please call Publisher, Gene Lieb at (209) 704-3831



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

The roller coaster at the May Day Fair is always a crowd favorite.



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A stronger Los Banos

Building safety, growth and community for the future



Los Banos Police Chief Ray Reyna, right, congratulates Julian Pacheco after he was sworn-in as Los Banos' newest police officer June 11, 2025, with his wife, Yara, by his side.

By Michael S. Amabile

Mayor of Los Banos
Welcome to Los Banos! These are exciting times for our city.

As Mayor of Los Banos, I have always believed that our city's greatest strength is its people. That's why, as we move forward, every goal and decision is guided by our commitment to public safety, fiscal responsibility, quality of life, and transparency.



Today, I'm proud to share the progress we're making and the exciting plans underway to secure a brighter future for everyone who calls Los

Banos home. Your city council is moving ahead with purpose, openness, and determination.

Public Safety First. Our top priority will always be the safety of our residents. I'm proud to say we just added seven new police officers to our team, ensuring a greater presence in our neighborhoods and faster response times when you need us most.

We're also planning a new fire station on the west side of town. This facility will feature an Emergency Operations Center, Regional training Center and additional firefighters. This will strengthen emergency response across our growing community. These investments mean better, faster medical and emergency care for everyone in Los Banos.

Fiscal Responsibility for a Healthy Future. Responsible stewardship of your tax dollars matters. This year, our city's budget is balanced with a 10% surplus in the General Fund, and we are on track to build reserves to a healthy 30%. This financial discipline keeps Los Banos strong in uncertain times and has earned us an AAA credit rating that benefits future generations.

Investing in Parks, Recreation, and Community Life. Los Banos is a wonderful place to raise a family, and we're making it even better. We are planning new parks, new pickleball courts, and a splash pad for our youngest residents. Design work is underway for a regional sports complex at Colorado Ball Park—a future hub for youth, families, and community events.

Supporting Local Business and Smart Growth. We are making it easier for local contractors to compete for city projects by updating our bidding process and encouraging local participation. Public Works is preparing for a major citywide street repaving project, bringing overdue improvements you'll notice every time you drive.

We are also designing the Pioneer Corridor to improve traffic flow and safety, and remodeling the city annex to create a "one-stop shop" for permits and plan review making Los Banos more efficient and business-friendly.

Affordable Housing and Economic Opportunity. We are working with developers to bring more affordable housing options to Los Banos, including apartments and condos. We are also focused on attracting good-paying jobs, so more of our residents can live and work right here in our community.

Building Trust, Transparency, and Community. Engagement Government works best when it listens and responds. We are committed to transparency, accountability, and building trust. I believe our citizens should be part of every major decision. Your voice truly matters in shaping Los Banos' future.

A Better Future—Together There is a real sense of possibility in Los Banos. Working together, there is nothing we can't achieve. Whether it's building safer streets, creating new places for recreation, or welcoming new jobs and businesses, our future is bright when we move forward as one community. Let's continue to work together, involve every resident, and move Los Banos forward toward a safer, more prosperous, and united city for generations to come.



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Discover the rich history of Los Banos at the Milliken Museum



Inside the Milliken Museum, one will be amazed by the vast amount of Los Banos history. Gene Lieb/The Express

By Javier Powell

From the outskirts of newly built suburbs, you may be tempted to believe that Los Banos has a shallow history; however, located just at the southeast corner of Pacheco Park, the Milliken Museum serves as the refutation to that idea.

Ralph M. Milliken, the historian after whom the structure is named, chronicled the history of Los Banos as it happened. Even after his death on Oct. 27, 1971, the Milliken Museum of Los Banos has carried on his tradition.

The Milliken Museum is an entirely community-funded 501(c) non-profit.

The museum's 3,500 sq/ft building is a single-story 'C' shape with its open-

ing to the west. The north end of their building has a mural facing Pacheco Boulevard painted by local artist Anne Whitehurst, depicting many scenes from Los Banos' past. The museum has two entrances within the 'C', east and north, with an opening to the adjoined Scout building to the south.

From the second you enter the museum, you're hit by the sight of artifacts, photos and even fossils lining the walls and in the middle of the rooms. You're likely to meet Sally Arambel, Tim McNally, Mike Keys or even Museum Director Dan Nelson who will guide you to whatever you're curious about and even give you a tour.

Starting from the north entrance,

you can see fossils and a wide selection of Yokut artifacts, the native group that inhabited this part of the valley before the Spaniards came in.

As you continue east and then southeast, you'll be thrust into the first stages of settlers in the land. In just a few short steps, you're into the very storied Henry Miller era. On display, you can see many artifacts, some related to Miller, his buggy, his cattle, a map of all his land and even the book he sat on to be taller when sitting.

The "Cattle King" as his nickname suggests, ruled a vast domain of cattle to feed the cities on the coast, with the headquarters of his Valley operation right here in Los Banos.

Undoubtedly, as evidenced by all



the artifacts that relate to him, Miller played a pivotal role in the creation of Los Banos as a proper city. From him stem some of our oldest traditions, such as the May Day Fair.

Continuing past Miller, you'll see how the city, then a town, evolved. How the local Chamber of Commerce, led by James McClelland, created state route 152. How Andrew Firebaugh built the first Pacheco Pass Road.

The construction of San Luis Dam boomed the town in the 60s. Photos of its construction and commemoration by John F. Kennedy can be found on the walls.

A wood pallet holds empty bottles from the "Los Banos Soda Works." A stand holds the original Los Banos Marching Band uniforms. Uniforms and medals of Los Banos servicemen decorate one corner. With the great storytelling of the docents, even small artifacts are given their share in the limelight.

By the time you reach the end of the current displays, you can't help but feel like there is so much more to discover, and there is. Down the southeast hallway, past the old typewriters and boat models, you'll find the archive room. This room is the

answer to every question you may have. Here with curator supervision, you have access to boxes of information, posters, newspapers, maps and artifacts to carefully search through.

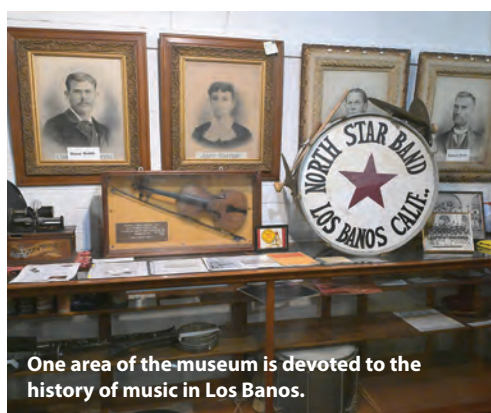
Here is the gem of the museum, Milliken's vast writings and photo collections. They have been digitized for viewing on their computer too. With just a keystroke you can read the oral interviews of the first pioneers.

If books are more your style, the Museum has aided in the creation of multiple books about local history. They can be bought from the north entrance counter and cover Henry Miller, the

Pacheco Pass, and even the vibrant bird-hunting tradition of Los Banos.

The museum is open from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. every day except Mondays, and you may often find yourself running through those hours from start

More than a museum — it's memory preserved.



One area of the museum is devoted to the history of music in Los Banos.

to finish. You can schedule days with Director Nelson to have more hours to satisfy your curiosity.

As you may notice on your visit, the museum makes the most of its small space. It's a cozy layout that is filled to near capacity.

There is an effort underway to build a larger museum to better showcase the colorful story that made Los Banos. The plan is to build a new museum at the corner of H and 7th Street. Already the museum society has an architectural design for the future two-story building. The Museum will inhabit one floor of the building, which at 10,000 square feet will triple the current museum.

As described by Los Banos Community and Economic Development Director Stacy Elms, the Milliken Museum is a "hidden gem." Many who've found the museum echo the same sentiment.

The Milliken Museum Society that administrates the museum is a non-profit organization and

relies entirely on volunteers, membership support and donations. To contact the museum call, 209-826-5505 or email at millikenmuseum@att.net



Bottles from the Los Banos Soda Works are on display.

Get to know the city government, its officials, commissions, committees, departments



By Javier Powell

The Los Banos government serves its over 48,000 citizens through many commissions, departments and a city council.

The city's current form has evolved from 1907, 117 years ago, when it was incorporated to build a sewer system. It has become a multifaceted machine to attain its goal of serving the people as best it can.

At the top of the structure is Mayor Michael Amabile, who presides over a city council consisting of District 2's Evan Sanders, District 3's Marcus Chavez and District 4's Deborah Lewis.

Following a resignation, the District 1 spot is vacant and will be filled in a special election on Aug. 26.

These elected officials are voted in for each of their respective districts. District 1 covers the north side of the city.

District 2 covers the east side, and District 3 covers the central and south sides. District 4 represents the west side of the city. Everyone elects the mayor.

With meetings held on the first and third Wednesdays of

Members of the Los Banos City Council include, from left, Evan Sanders, Mayor Michael Amabile, Deborah Lewis and Marcus Chavez. Photo by Don Hughes

every month, the council governs the top level of the city. Its meetings are held at the city hall, located at 520 J St., and start at 6 p.m.

The council delegates its power to the following commissions: the planning commission, the airport advisory commission, the traffic safety commission, the parks and recreation commission and the tree commission.

Additionally, the committees oversee the funding from Measure P and Measure H. These commissions and committees manage their respective namesakes so the council can focus on other issues.

Below the council is Interim City Manager Gary Brizzee. Brizzee, a former police chief, acts as the city's "CEO" and has many duties in running day-to-day operations and managing the city's departments.

He is also the head of the administration department, which includes City Clerk Lucy Mallonee, City Attorney William A. Vaughn and City Treasurer Lucy Lawrence.

Non-emergency departments within the city are the finance department, headed by Minnie Moreno, the building department, and the community and economic development department, run by Stacy Elms.

The non-emergency departments also include the human resources department, run by Lucy Mallonee, the parks and recreation department, headed by Director Joe Heim, who is also the interim public works director

with the resignation of Charles Bergson.

Fire Chief Paul Tualla runs the fire department. Tualla commands two fire stations within the city.

Los Banos Fire Department Station 1—and the headquarters of the fire department—is at 333 Seventh St. with an unmissable communications tower and training building. Los Banos Fire Department Station 2 is located at 1150 West I St.

The last department of the city government is the police department. The new police chief, Ray Reyna, runs it.

In addition to acquiring a new chief, the police department recently built a state-of-the-art building at 1111 G St. Reyna oversees a force of 48 officers, some of whom make up code enforcement, which enforces the municipal code adopted by the city council.

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LB Chamber of Commerce does a lot for local community

Michelle Sandoval
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LOS BANOS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

People often ask, “What does a chamber of commerce do?” and “What’s in it for me?” Well, I’m glad you asked.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce is a business network. We are comprised of local businesses whose goal is to further the interests and well-being of businesses. The chamber advocates for the business community.

Most communities have a chamber of commerce. The goal of any chamber, including our own, is to help further the interests of small businesses in our area.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce offers a variety of different services. For our members, we offer an assortment of workforce help, such as labor law updates, networking and resources for businesses needing help in areas like human resources, payroll, bookkeeping and advertising.

We also offer various options for business networking and promotional advertising. We refer our business members to anyone inquiring about a business they are interested in.

Additionally, our events contribute to our members by allowing them to help promote their business by sponsoring an event or setting up a vendor booth to meet the community one-on-one. Every service the chamber offers is for the community’s betterment.

Business owners who join the chamber pay a nominal membership fee. Primarily, this is the chamber’s source of revenue to maintain operations and maintenance.

Anyone who desires to join the chamber as a member must pay the necessary



Parents with their children take part in the annual Halloween Trunk or Treat event in downtown Los Banos. Gene Lieb/The Express



Students from Dance Explosion dance studio perform a routine from the movie Polar Express for the Christmas Parade judges at Sixth and J streets in downtown Los Banos.



The Spring Street Faire in April is enjoyed by many who come and roam up and down Sixth Street and visit with all of the vendors.

fees. We have various membership packages, including employee count, nonprofit status and non-business residential associate.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce offers members an in-person network of talent and resources in your area. It gives business members the power of a united voice for the small business community. Most of all, it brings you opportunities to learn, grow and connect as a business owner and community member.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce is responsible for improving the local business environment and strengthening communities through advocacy, networking and campaigning.

In doing so, we create an easy line of communication for business owners to connect with governing bodies.

Currently, the Los Banos Chamber of Commerce hosts at least six main events throughout the year, and we are constantly gathering committees to add more events to our lineup.

These events are jam-packed with arts and crafts vendors, music, food and live entertainment for the whole family.

These events provide quality-of-life entertainment to the residents of Los Banos and make Los Banos a pleasant town to visit. When the chamber hosts an event in town, typically downtown on Sixth Street, we have vendors and people from the communities near and far come to visit.

These events give visibility, advertisement and name recognition and promote our chamber members' business.

Our local economy also benefits from our quality-of-life events when residents stay in town and shop at local stores. When residents shop local, 68% of that currency stays in our community and with that, we all win.

This year will also be eventful. Starting with the Downtown Spring Street Faire in April 2025 will include Mother's Day in the Park in May, the Los Banos Tomato Festival and Trunk or Treat Halloween Movie Night in October, the

Downtown Fall Street Faire in September, and the annual Christmas Parade in December to cap off the year.

Applications for these events are on our website, losbanos.com, or at the chamber office.

Anyone interested in more information about becoming a chamber member, volunteering or sponsoring an event may contact the chamber office by emailing LBCOFC@comcast.net, calling the office at 209-826-2495 or coming downtown to our office at 932 Sixth St. in Los Banos.

Finally, keep this in mind: the Los Banos Chamber of Commerce is your three-C chamber—it's a catalyst for business growth and expansion, a connector of people, ideas and resources, and a champion of a strong community!

The chamber executive director is Michelle Sandoval, under the direction of the board of directors.

According to the chamber's mission statement, "We encourage, promote and support business and industrial growth and retention, provide a program of action that meets the needs and challenges of the community, and promote the quality of life that Los Banos offers."

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about that
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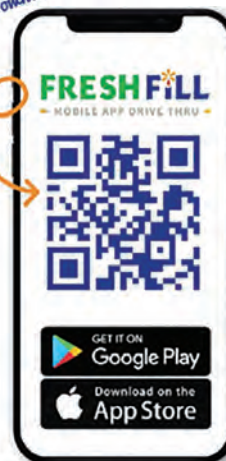
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Downtown Association working to create a vibrant downtown

By Maribel Garcia

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LOS BANOS DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

The Los Banos Downtown Association has been serving downtown Los Banos, California since 2019 when it was established as an association for business owners to gather and collaborate, focusing their efforts on creating a vibrant place to shop, dine, work and play, where the downtown is showcased as a destination that brings people together and lends economic opportunity for businesses, enabling them to establish new customer connections.

In addition to serving as a resource to local businesses, we host several community events throughout the year that have become central to the culture of our community.

Downtown Los Banos offers the historic business environment of yesterday, while catering to modern needs. The tree-lined streets, outdoor music, wall murals of old Los Banos, inviting storefronts, and historic façades harmoniously lend to the unique downtown Los Banos experience while community members and visitors stroll through the downtown, visiting the offerings found here – some of which that have been serving this community for generations.

Recently the Los Banos Downtown Association had a successful renewal of the Property and Business Improvement District (PBID) for another 10 years. This long-term renewal represents a major step forward for the revitalization and growth of downtown Los Banos. With this funding secured, downtown stakeholders can look forward to continued enhancements to the heart of our city—creating a more vibrant, clean, and safe environment for all.

The PBID, which is supported by local property and business owners, plays a vital role in funding key services such as street maintenance, public safety enhancements, beautification projects, and business development initiatives. These improvements not only elevate the appearance and functionality of our historic downtown district but also stimulate economic activity, drawing in both residents and visitors alike.

While the PBID lays the foundation for infrastructure and maintenance, it is the spirit of community



In October the Los Banos Downtown Association will present an outdoor Mariachi Festival.

support that fuels the energy and culture of downtown Los Banos. Through creative fundraising efforts and volunteer-driven programs, the Los Banos Downtown Association brings life to the city through a series of events designed to celebrate local heritage, support small businesses, and foster community pride.

Here's a look at what's in store for 2025:

Farmers Market

Every Friday evening from May through October, the downtown district comes alive with the sights and sounds of the Farmers Market. Visitors can enjoy farm-fresh produce, handmade goods, and delicious eats from local vendors—plus live entertainment that captures the spirit of Los Banos' vibrant culture.

4th of July Celebration & Fireworks Show

Nothing says summer like our annual Independence Day celebration! This event features live music, carnival rides, food vendors, and a breathtaking fireworks show that lights up the night sky—

bringing together families from across the region.

Farm to Table Dinner – September

This elegant outdoor event highlights Los Banos' rich agricultural roots and honors one exceptional individual as Farmer of the Year. Guests gather for an unforgettable evening featuring locally sourced cuisine, fine wine, and heartfelt storytelling—all set against the charming backdrop of downtown.

Mariachi Festival – October

Back by popular demand, the Mariachi Festival celebrates music, tradition, and community. Live mariachi bands, folklórico dancers, delicious food, and family-friendly fun take center stage at this culturally rich celebration.

Christmas Celebration – December

Downtown transforms into a winter wonderland during the holiday season. With beautifully decorated storefronts, sparkling lights, and festive activities, our Christmas Celebration brings joy to families with free photos with Santa, holiday treats, and themed performances.

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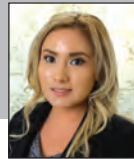
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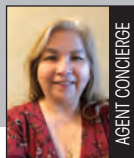
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For a farming family especially, 'The Things We Hold Onto' are important

By Kirsten Arieias

WRITER OF KIDS, COWS AND CROPS

Growing up in an agricultural community, living in a closely knit farming family and after experiencing profound losses, I value more than ever "the things we hold onto."

When you lose your first parent, my father in my case, it is such a difficult loss, but you still have one parent.

And then you lose that second parent; that is a game changer. All of a sudden, the stuff matters: that noisy windchime, that salad bowl, pictures, and even an ice cream scoop. You no longer have the people that owned them, you just have the "stuff," small things that take on a new value because of the memory they bring back.

I think that is how the "old timers" feel about our community. We keep losing those people that were important to us and a part of our community. And then come the changes to our community itself, too many to mention, but the "stuff" holds a special place in our hearts, and the only tie we have to our past.

The "stuff" of our rich Los Banos history, including so much of our agricultural history, is in a place called the Milliken Museum, located in Pacheco Park.

I found it interesting to discover that Ralph Milliken, for which our Los Banos Milliken Museum was named, was a farmer. That should surprise no one, as back then so many of our residents were farmers.

Milliken was also a mail carrier and, fortunately for the town of Los Banos, a museum collector and curator. He collected the Things We Hold Onto for a community which was no small task.

The history of life in Los Banos would not exist had it not been for Milliken who started the museum, or for people like Dan Nelson and the Milliken Museum Society, who keep it alive and running today.

The Things We Hold Onto can be found in that museum...a rich history of farming, including the



A family treasured
wind chime that is
worth holding onto.

famous rancher, Henry Miller. It's also place where memories of football and families can be relived.

In this museum, lives our history, carefully preserved, and the memories carefully document the people that shaped the community we live in today. The Things We Hold Onto as a community are treasured, displayed and forever available because of a place called

the Milliken Museum.

The museum is open to the public from 1-4 p.m. daily, Tuesday through Sunday in Pacheco Park. If you would like to explore the museum online you can go to: <http://www.ourlosbanos.com/millikenmuseum.html>. The museum is also a 501(c3) non-profit organization, if you are looking to donate.

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Los Banos Unified School District has accomplished much in the past eight years



Dr. Mark Marshall stands next to Dr. Dan Sutton as he cuts the ribbon May 10, 2024 during a ceremony celebrating the construction of the new science wing at Pacheco High School.

BY DR. MARK MARSHALL
SUPERINTENDENT, LBUSD

(Editor's note: This is an unusual article for Life in Los Banos, but it's timely. As Life in Los Banos goes to press, the Los Banos Unified School District bids farewell to its superintendent, who has written this perspective on the district.)

My contribution to this issue of Life in Los Banos is bittersweet. It coincides with my departure from this great city and the Los Banos Unified School District (LBUSD).

While I had originally contemplated retiring next school year, after thoughtful consideration and reflection, I have accepted a position with another school district that will

allow me to continue growing as an educational leader while applying the valuable lessons learned during my time in LBUSD and the City of Los Banos.

While I look forward to this new chapter, I am filled with gratitude for the extraordinary experiences we've shared. Serving as your superintendent has been one of the greatest honors of my professional career.

Over the past eight years, we have navigated challenges, celebrated achievements, and consistently prioritized the educational needs of our students. I am immensely proud of what we have accomplished as a community.

Together, we have achieved remarkable progress that fills me with pride. We have elevated our district's academic

performance metrics across all grade levels and successfully implemented innovative curriculum and instructional strategies that have enriched our students' educational experiences.

We facilitated the second California Distinguished School in district history, a two-time US News and World Report-Best Elementary Schools recipient, and an inaugural Dual Language Immersion Academy.

Our partnerships with local businesses and community organizations have flourished, creating valuable opportunities for our students and strengthening the fabric of our community. Perhaps most gratifying has been witnessing the tremendous growth in parent and community engagement in our schools, creating a true educational partnership that benefits every student.

I am confident that with the implementation of the \$21-million Community Schools grant that we received last year, our partnerships with the community and families will be taken to further heights.

I am particularly proud of how we've transformed our facilities into more vibrant and conducive learning environments where students can thrive.

Since the passage of Measure X, a local bond measure designed to improve LBUSD's school facilities, Grasslands

Elementary has been constructed; a science wing has been added at Pacheco High School; Loftin Stadium is undergoing complete renovation; classrooms have been added at Volta Elementary and San Luis High School; an Early Education Complex is presently being constructed; and Los Banos High School and Volta Elementary are undergoing modifications.

These accomplishments were only possible because of the dedication and hard work of our exceptional teachers, staff, administrators, board members, students, parents and community partners. Your commitment to educational excellence has been inspiring, and I will carry the lessons I've learned from you throughout my career.

The Board of Education will soon communicate the plan for leadership transition. I leave with complete confidence that Los Banos Unified School District is poised for even greater achievements in the years ahead.

The true strength of this remarkable district has always been its people, the passionate educators, dedicated staff, engaged parents, supportive community members and, of course, our inspiring students. This powerful community will continue to thrive and reach new heights of educational excellence. Thank you, Los Banos!



Dr. Mark Marshall

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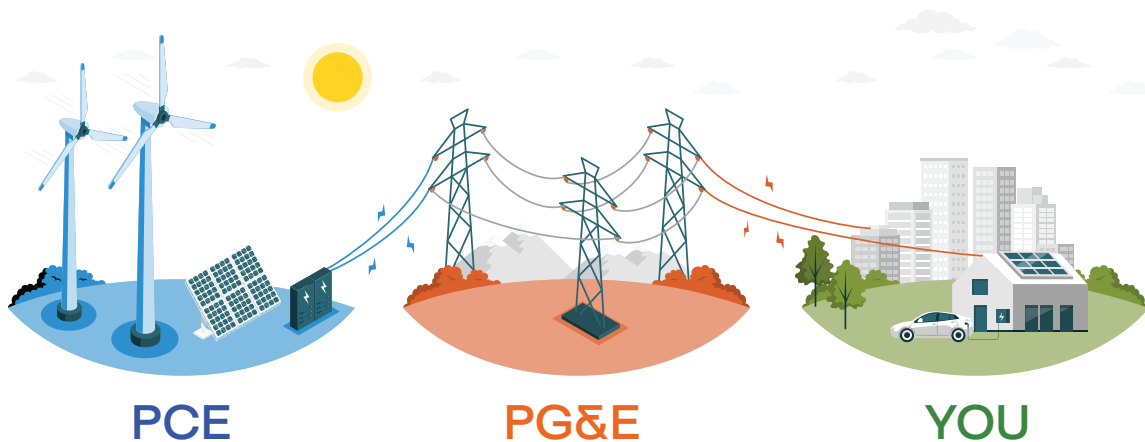
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Reinvestment in Parks and Recreation highlights city's growth

By Joe Heim

LOS BANOS PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR

Los Banos is at the heart of California, and its roots are in its family-oriented community and large outdoor spaces.

To support its growing community, the City of Los Banos Parks and Recreation Department provides over 260 acres of public landscape, including over 40 parks and over 13,000 public trees.

38 playgrounds, 16 basketball courts, 14 shaded picnic areas, six horseshoe pits, a skate park, three volleyball courts, two bocce ball courts and a dog park highlight the city's offerings.

In the past year, reinvestment in the parks system has been at the center of the city's growth. The Parks and Recreation Department's premier facility, the Los Banos Community Center, has completed vast improvements including solar panel carport construction, interior and exterior LED light conversion, digital sign replacement, exterior building painting, perimeter fence construction and the addition of Wi-Fi and cameras to the facility.

The city has also undertaken the largest investment in its ballfields since their construction, including complete field rehabilitation of six fields at Officer Noah Jones Ballpark and AG Sports Complex.

AG Sports Complex will also host one of the city's most popular offerings following the construction of the city's first nine pickleball courts set to open in summer 2025.

Replacement of playgrounds throughout the city has also been a priority and includes ten brand new playgrounds, including its first two inclusive playgrounds and its first two hillside slides. In appreciation of a \$445,000 grant from First 5 of Merced County, the city was able to install 10 shade structures over playgrounds across the city.

Sunrise Ranch is the city's latest park and is expected to host a Grand Opening ceremony in summer 2025. The park includes a shaded picnic area, a basketball court, exercise equipment, a hillside slide and cornhole.

Volunteer days are at the heart of the community, where the Parks and Recreation Department hosts regular opportunities to paint basketball courts and plant trees.

The most popular activities are the city's wide array of annual events, including the Egg Hunt held each April at Oliveira Park, Movie Nights in the Park during the summer, Arbor Day



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/gleb@TheWestsidepress.com

Children scramble around Oliveria Park in Los Banos gathering eggs during the city's annual Easter Egg hunt.

each March and a spooky night at the park in October's Halloween Fest.

In September, local senior citizens are invited to the annual Salute to Seniors event. Salute to Seniors has become the premier senior event in the area, and each year it chooses a new theme. This year's theme is "Under the Sea," where our appreciation for our seniors takes a deep dive!

Near the end of the year, residents and visitors are invited to a special Breakfast with Santa event at the Community Center, where attendees enjoy a pancake breakfast, crafts and fun games including home-made mini golf.

Sports leagues are also offered throughout the year. The city's Jr. Warriors Youth Basketball League has been rapidly growing, while Summer Youth Volleyball has become one of the city's staple programs.

The Community Center offers a beautiful Grand Room space for weddings and Quinceañeras. Two other recreation facilities, College Greens and the historic Miller and Lux Building, offer additional meeting and event space.

Los Banos is famous for its natural wildlife, surrounding wetlands and its agricultural base. As the city has grown as a family-based community, residents can enjoy big-city offerings while still living in intimate neighborhoods and enjoying hundreds of acres of public landscape.

The Los Banos Parks and Recreation Department is proud to be at the heart of offerings for residents and visitors of all ages. To visit Los Banos Parks and Recreation, visit us online at LosBanos.org, on the Los Banos Parks and Recreation Facebook page or in person at the Community Center located at 645 7th Street.

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The Friends of the Los Banos Library loves sharing what's happening at the Library!

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Thursdays 10:30am - TinyTales Story Time & Craft

Fridays 10:30am - Spanish Bilingual StoryTime & Craft

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Los Banos Hearts for the Arts



PHOTOS BY GENE LEB / gilebo@TheWestsideExpress.com

Los Banos Rotarian Dick Gerbi serves soup during the Los Banos Rotary Club's Empty Bowls event held each year at the Ted Falasco Arts Center.

By Sandy Lemas and Ashlee Williams
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

The Los Banos Arts Council (LBAC) continues to be the heart and focal point for the cultural activities in the Los Banos community. Their mission is to support, encourage and promote the arts, cultural and educational activities in Los Banos and to benefit charitable and non-profit activities, including service club activities and fundraisers in the community.

A major goal is to bring affordable Arts and Culture to the Los Banos community. The group is very community-minded, devoted and dedicated to bringing the arts alive for the community residents to enjoy.

Throughout the years, the Arts Council has worked tirelessly on supporting and organizing music concerts and other entertainment acts, art and photography shows, exhibitions, theater, youth programs and other activities that showcase the many talents and creative minds in the Los Banos area.

The arts council emphasizes the importance and desire to work as a bridge for art and culture through Los Banos Unified School District (LBUSD), Merced College, the City of Los Banos and other companies and nonprofit organizations.

*A historic space,
now filled with
vibrant, creative
energy."*

The Los Banos Arts Center was formerly home to St. Joseph's Catholic Church. The historic church was built in 1922, and the building was overseen by Father J.Lo Daumus. After the new Catholic church was finished on Center Street next to the established parochial school, the old church was slated to be torn down and sold.

In 1994, a group of visionary and generous Los Banos residents came to the rescue and were able to purchase and save the building for the benefit of the community.

The LBAC primarily promotes or supports events out of the Ted Falasco Arts Center at 1105 Fifth Street in Los Banos. The name was changed from the Los Banos Arts Center to honor the group's primary benefactor, local philanthropist and successful business owner Ted Falasco, following his passing.

There are 3 other buildings connected to the Arts Council. The annex is located at 1125 Fifth Street, with the Mel Soares Arts Studios next door at 1143 Fifth Street.

The studios are at the house where the nuns resided and are fondly remembered by some as the "nunnery." It has now turned into a "funnery," where residents can attend "funshops" for stained glass, quilting, crocheting, painting, papermaking, Eco printing, marbling, bookbinding and so much more.

The fourth location is the Robert Huddleston Crafts Studio, located at 510 I Street, for ceramics and pottery. Classes can be added based on local talents and skills of creators and artists that become available to share with others. Classes are held year-round, and the arts council is always looking for artists willing to partner with them for additional classes.

LBAC hosted a block party-style Earth Day in April in collaboration with Sutter Health. The Earth Day event was a family-friendly celebration to learn more about the environment and the importance of sustainability and health through creativity.

In May, LBAC partnered with Joe G. Gutierrez State Farm Insurance Agency to host a Mother's Day Mariachi concert, which was a great success.

In November, LBAC combined forces with Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services for a Día de Los Muertos event, funded by a Sutter Health grant. This

was a free event that included music, dance, cultural demonstrations, community ofrenda (altar) and artmaking experiences.

As part of this partnership, a mural was sponsored on the side of the Annex Building. It depicts music, dance and fiber arts -- representing significant parts of the community. This year, LBAC hosted winter and spring makers markets, highlighting the work of local makers and artists.

Local veterans stand with the first responder quilts as they present the colors prior to last year's September ceremony.



LBAC hosted Opera Modesto for Westside children to attend. Per their website, "This unique initiative shines a spotlight on operas inspired by stories and books commonly featured in school curricula, as well as written works that may not be currently present in schools. By bringing stories to life on stage, Opera Modesto creates an approachable form of art that encourages students to engage with familiar narratives in a dynamic and immersive way."

The Missoula Children's Theater is back on June 23 with the Red Riding Hood production adapted by Michael McGill. Students from kindergarten to 12th grade are encouraged to audition.

There will be 50-60 students to be cast. Rehearsals will be June 23-27, with performances on June 28th. The Arts Council also schedules concerts and other shows throughout the year. For more information go to losbanosarts.org or call Steve at 209-704-2025.

The Arts Council is interested in resurrecting the Open Mic Night. If anyone would like to spearhead this, let the arts council know. They would love to work with you and get this fun night going again for the community.

The Quilt Guild is another Arts Council group that is focused on building a community around quilting

with expert quilters. Guests are always welcome.

Community service clubs hold fundraisers at the Ted Falasco Art Center throughout the year. Later this year, the twelve annual "Empty Bowls" fund-

and inspiring each other in supportive ways. The Guild meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Mel Soares Arts Studios. Beginning quilters can get help with their projects and can connect

raiser will be held to raise much-needed funds to benefit local programs that feed the hungry in the community.

This event is sponsored by Los Banos

Rotary, Arts Council and the school district. Contact Gene Lieb at 209-704-3831 if additional information is needed.

Over the years, many other charitable and service organizations have raised much-needed funds to help out the community with events at the Ted Falasco Art Center.

LBAC is funded by memberships, donations, sponsorships and grants that support the initiatives and programs.

You can become a member at any time throughout the year. Thanks to the generosity of donors, LBAC has been able to offer a variety of programs that enrich the lives of community residents.

These activities include community theater, ceramics and other art classes, musical and dance performances, quilting shows, community art shows, public art installations and more.

For more information about becoming a member or volunteer of the Arts Council, or with questions regarding council activities, upcoming programs and events, check out the webpage, Facebook, or Instagram sites.

Memberships are \$50 for an individual, \$30 for full-time students and for seniors 60+ and \$100 for a family of up to four immediate members. Being a member or volunteer is fun, energizing and inspirational.

As a bonus to all of this fun, adventures, and opportunities, the arts council is a non-profit, so all donations are tax-deductible. The Ted Falasco Arts Center is also available to rent for community events for special occasions. Tables and chairs are included in the rental fee.

There is always something exciting happening at the Ted Falasco Arts Center. The Los Banos Arts Council continues to be a gift of love and labor for the community and for future generations to enjoy and cherish. For more information on events, rentals and membership, go to www.losbanosarts.org.

Where local talent meets opportunity, expression, and joyful connection.



Children perform Gulliver's Travels last year as part of the Missoula Children's Theatre.



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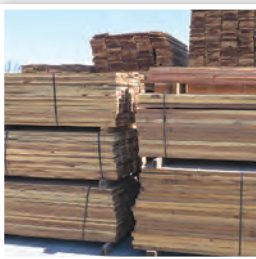


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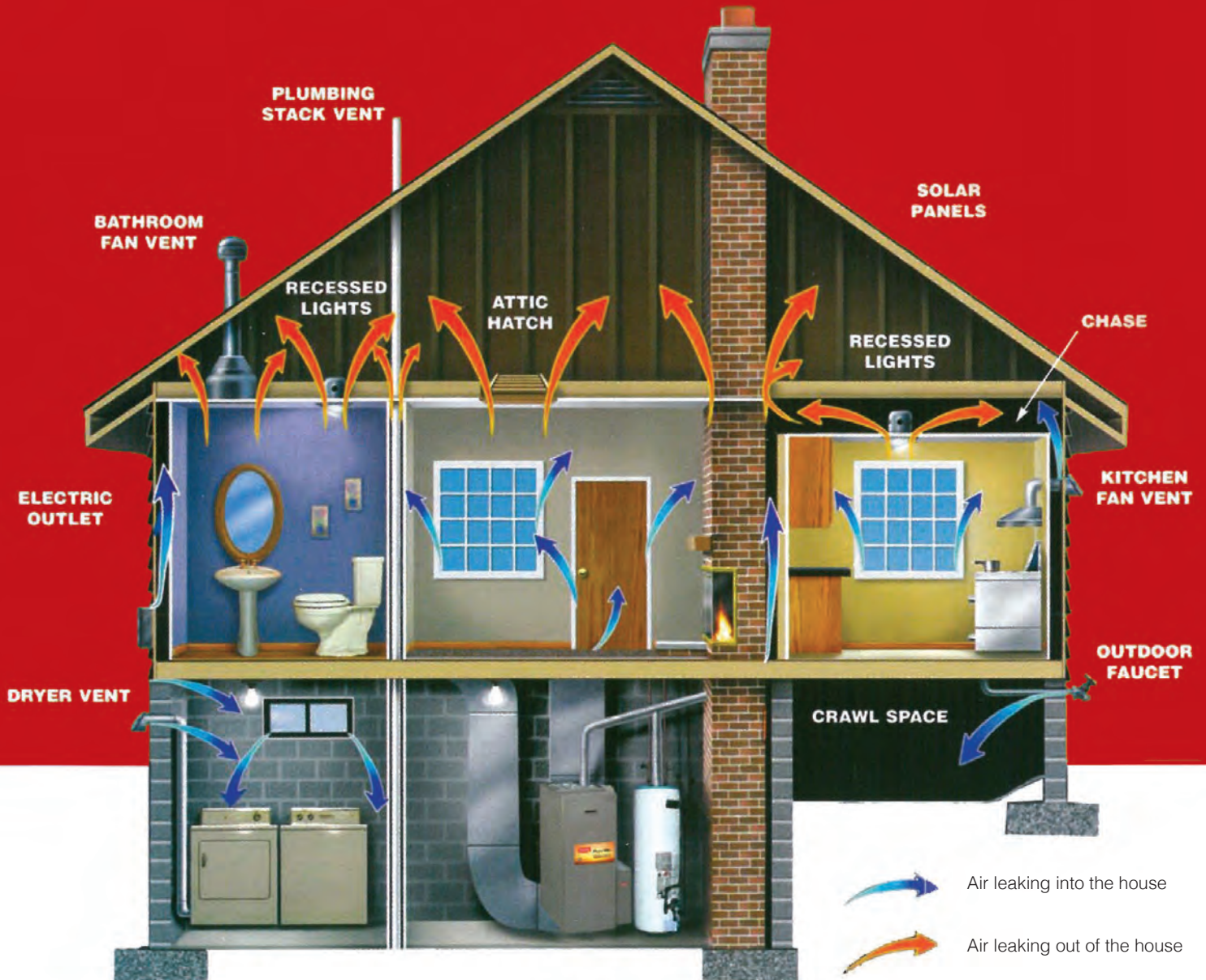
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Get out of the house *for a while*

By A. Rentner

When you've had enough of staring at one sort of digital device or another, get in the car and take a short drive to any of several wonderful outdoor locations near here.

The wildlife refuges of the local San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex (Merced NWR, San Luis NWR, and San Joaquin River NWR) have many features that allow visitors to explore, spend time in nature and observe wildlife of the San Joaquin Valley.

Auto tour routes are automobile trails that visitors drive in their vehicles through the various habitat types protected by the wildlife refuges. Habitats are homes that provide everything wildlife needs to survive—food, water, shelter and space.

The Merced NWR has one 5-mile auto tour route that provides visitors with an opportunity to view scores of waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors, songbirds, mammals, insects and more that inhabit wetland and upland grassland habitats.

The San Luis NWR has three such auto tour routes. The Waterfowl Auto Tour Route winds about 8.5 miles through the seasonal wetland and upland grassland areas

of the San Luis unit of the wildlife refuge.

Another 2.25-mile Waterfowl Auto Tour Route meanders through the wetlands of the West Bear Creek unit of the wildlife refuge.

The San Luis unit also has the 5-mile Tule Elk Auto Tour Route that follows the perimeter of the

tule elk enclosure, a 789-acre habitat that is home to the refuge's herd of native and endemic tule elk.

Nature trails are another way visitors can explore the wildlife refuges, and there are many to choose from.

The Merced NWR has the Meadowlark, Bittern Marsh, Cottonwood, and Kestrel nature trails. All but the Kestrel Trail are about 1 mile in length and roam through wetlands, uplands and riparian areas of the refuge (the Kestrel Trail is about half a mile long).



The San Luis NWR has four nature trails on the San Luis unit. The Sousa Marsh Trail is 1 mile plus in length, depending on which loops one takes and how many of them one walks.

It leads visitors through a bit of riparian woodland to an elevated observation deck that looks out across North Sousa Marsh—one of the largest seasonal wetlands on the refuge.

The Sousa Marsh Trail is one of the favorite trail destinations at any time of year. During the fall, winter and early spring, when Sousa Marsh is flooded, visitors can see a variety of ducks and geese, as well as tundra swans.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36 ►►

The Sousa Marsh Trail is one of the favorite trail destinations at any time of year.

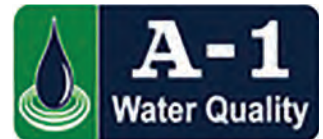
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The lesser sandhill cranes are often seen in Sousa Marsh or flying over. This year, during the past few weeks, visitors have also been seeing a bald eagle—and sometimes a pair of eagles—in the vicinity of Sousa Marsh.

As many as 3,000 white geese (snow and Ross's geese) were seen recently, as well as wood ducks. A rare visitor also made an appearance recently: a Eurasian wigeon.

The Winton Marsh Trail is about half a mile long and makes a loop around the historic Winton Marsh wetland. The Wetland Trail is about eight-tenths of a mile and makes a loop around a seasonal wetland right across from the visitor center.

These three trails are open for walking all year long. A fourth trail on the San Luis unit, which is only open seasonally, is the Chester Marsh Trail, an approximately 1-mile loop around the Chester Marsh.

The trail also includes an approximately one-quarter-mile spur that leads walkers to the San Joaquin River and the historic site of a bridge that once led travelers across the river to the now-

extinct town of Chester.

The Chester Marsh Trail is open only from Feb. 15 to Sept. 15 each season. The West Bear Creek unit of the San Luis NWR also has two trails: the approximately 2-mile Woody Pond Trail and the Raccoon Marsh Trail (about 1 mile). Both trails are loops.

The Wood Pond trail encloses the heavily wooded Woody Pond, a wetland so named because it is a favorite of wood ducks. A portion of the trail also parallels the San Joaquin River for a short distance. The Raccoon Marsh Trail loops around the Raccoon Marsh.

The San Luis NWR also includes the Kesterson unit, which is unique in that it is open for visitors to explore on foot only. Kesterson is also open seasonally, from Feb. 15 through Sept. 15 each year.

Visitors wishing to explore Kesterson enter on foot at the trailhead on the south side of state Route 140 between the San Joaquin River bridge and Gun Club Road and, once inside, are free to roam to their heart's content.

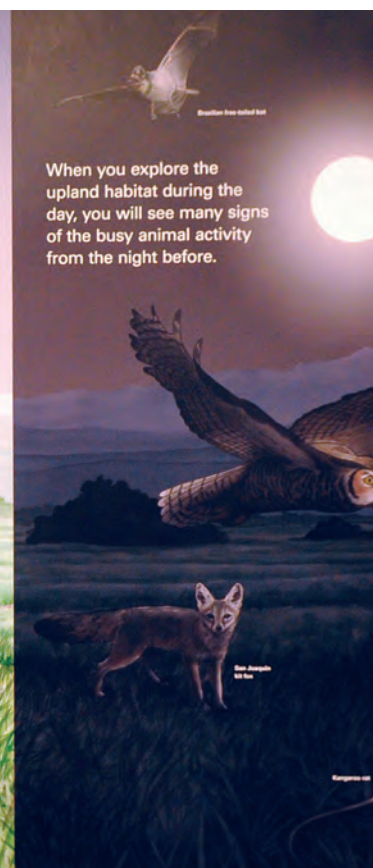
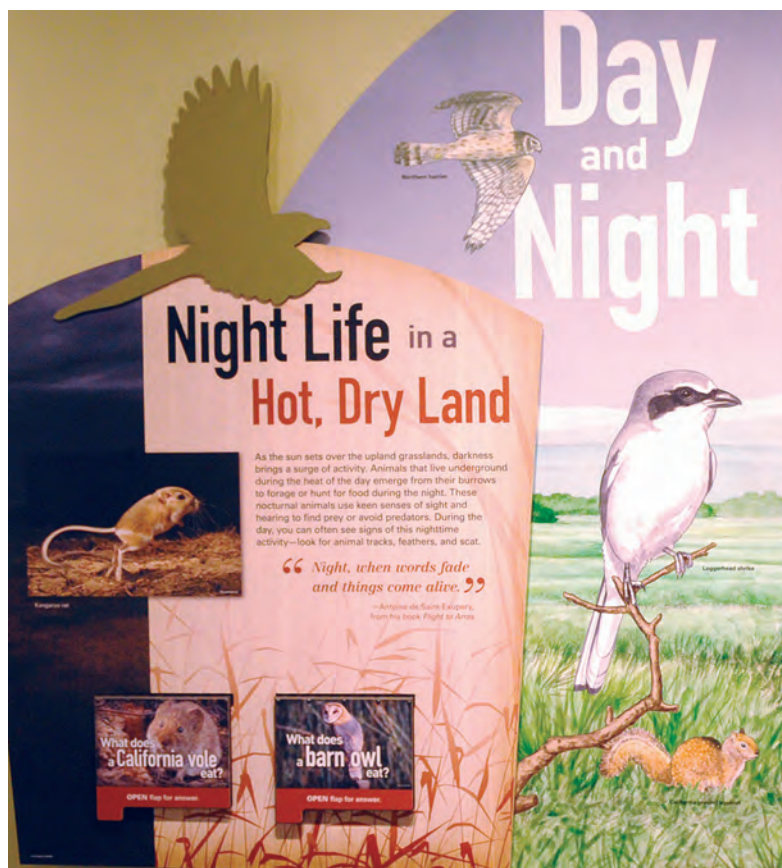
They can utilize the internal refuge roads as a trail, or they can strike out off-trail to explore wetlands, uplands and riparian woodlands. Some years, there are remarkable wildflower blooms at Kesterson.

Speaking of wildflowers, the Great Valley Grassland State Park has some of the few native vernal pools left in California. The flowers that bloom in those pools are a spectacular sight when conditions in the winter have been just right.

It's a 3-mile walk to get to the pools from the trailhead off state Route 165 just south of the San Joaquin River.

A little farther afield from the local Los Banos area, but still a great place to explore, observe wildlife and connect with nature, is the San Joaquin River NWR. The refuge has a 4-mile nature trail known as the Pelican Nature Trail.

The trail is open all year and is laid



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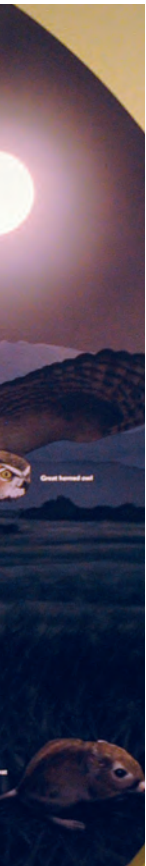
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out in a series of three loops connected like the lengths of a chain. Visitors can tailor the length of their walk by how many loops they choose to include.

At the trailhead is a free-roam area of native-planted uplands that includes a restroom facility, informative interpretive panels and several covered picnic tables.

Closer to home, check out the Los Banos Wildlife Area off Henry Miller Road east of Route 165. The 6,200-acre area supports more than 200 bird species and other animals like beaver, deer and muskrats.

Closed to the public during waterfowl hunting season from Sept. 15 to mid-February, the wildlife area welcomes visitors in possession of a California Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands

Take a trail, leave your screen behind—nature calls!

Pass at other times.

West of Los Banos is the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area. While upgrades are being made to the dam at the reservoir, campgrounds and visitor access on the south side of state Route 152 are limited.

However, to the north of the highway is the O'Neil Forebay, which provides space for camping, boating, fishing and wildlife

viewing year-round.

Further up the hill on the south side of the highway is the Romero Visitor Center. Operated by the California Department of Water Resources, the center offers all sorts of information about the San Luis Reservoir and water in California, generally.

There are outstanding views of the reservoir and the back side of the dam from the center. The top of Pacheco Pass on the south side of the highway provides access to the reservoir's Dinosaur Point boat ramp and the entrance to Pacheco State Park.

The park has miles and miles of walking trails, some easy strolls, others more challenging and varied in elevation. In the spring, the area is known for its expansive wildflower blooms.





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Los Banos public library provides services and resources to all



Brandon Gray with Wild Child Adventures entertains children at the Los Banos Library.

The Los Banos Branch of the Merced County Library is the third largest branch in the Merced County Library system. It is located at 1312 Seventh St., just south of Pacheco Boulevard in Pacheco Park.

The Los Banos Branch, at its present location since 1965, offers many different programs year-round, especially for children and young people. This includes the popular Summer Reading Program, where participants can earn prizes for reading.

Spring brings the annual Cover-to-Cover reading program where children can earn free hamburgers from In-N-Out after reading five books.

The Los Banos library offers two weekly Storytimes, including Tiny Tales (ages 2-6), Bilingual Storytime (ages 3-6). Also offered are Sensory Playgroup and Family Lego Time.

Monthly crafts and coloring days are available with themes that fit the holidays of seasons.

Throughout the year the library has other programs with performances and shows.

The Los Banos library also offers public computers and free WIFI for everyone to use and unlimited access to online databases, as well as apps for e-books and e-audiobooks. All free with a Merced County Library card.

The local library also offers literacy tutoring and it helps connect veterans to services they might need.

Library cards are free. Children 17 and under are registered through a

parent or guardian.

A valid photo ID is required along with verification of address.

The hours of operation are Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The library is closed on Sunday and Monday.

The library's phone number is 209.826.5254.



Gina Waldron from Anderson Homes, fifth from right, presents a check to members of the Friends of the Los Banos Library on Dec. 11, 2024.



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Higher education continues to thrive at the Merced College Los Banos Campus

By James Leonard

The Merced College Los Banos Campus, a key part of the Merced Community College District, has been providing quality education and job training since 1971.

More than 50 years later, the campus continues to expand its offerings, serving nearly 4,200 students each semester with diverse programs, including general education and career technical education (CTE) programs like welding and our new EMT program.

Additionally, the campus supports adult learners through noncredit programs, such as GED preparation, English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship classes.

The Los Banos Campus is entering an exciting period of growth and transformation thanks to the overwhelming support of the community in passing Measure P in November 2024.

The \$46 million bond measure, which passed with nearly 74 percent of the vote, will fund critical campus improvements without raising local tax rates.

These funds will support the expansion and modernization of educational facilities, ensuring students have access to state-of-the-art resources for hands-on learning and career training.

With the expansion of the agriculture program led by Professor Elias Armenta, the completion of the modular classroom and greenhouse will provide students with hands-on learning experiences in sustainable farming and agribusiness.

The campus quad will undergo significant improvements, enhancing outdoor spaces to create a more engaging and

student-friendly environment.

The new career technical education (CTE) building, a highly anticipated facility funded by Measure P, will support a variety of hands-on programs designed to prepare students for careers in high-demand fields.

The past year saw a 21.82 percent increase in student enrollment as based on full-time equivalent students (FTES), with more students opting for face-to-face learning.

Dual enrollment programs continue to grow, offering high school students early access to college courses. The Los Banos campus also strengthened its partnerships with local high schools and community organizations, participating in events like career fairs and multicultural nights.

We have also welcomed the community to our campus by hosting ag workshops for our Kings View community members and providing tours to high school students.

Merced College remains committed to making higher education accessible and beneficial to the Westside Merced County community. The college's transfer partnerships with CSU Stanislaus, UC Merced, and Fresno State provide students with clear pathways to four-year degrees.

Representatives from these institutions regularly visit the Los Banos campus, offering direct support to students exploring transfer opportunities.

With these upcoming developments, the future looks brighter than ever for students at the Los Banos campus. Thanks to the continued investment in education and community support, Merced College is poised to provide

even greater opportunities for learning, career preparation and personal growth.

Local students with their sights set on a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or even a Ph.D. don't have to travel far. Merced College provides associate degrees that promise an easy transfer to local four-year universities like CSU Stanislaus, UC Merced and Fresno State.

Students also transfer to more distant colleges, such as San Jose State University, which ranked as the No. 1 transfer college for students from the Los Banos campus.

Located in Turlock, CSU Stanislaus is a comprehensive university and part of the California State University system. It has ranked among the best colleges in the nation for 17 consecutive years, according to The Princeton Review, gaining high marks for academic excellence and social mobility.

Another great option for Los Banos students is UC Merced, the newest campus in the world-renowned University of California system. UC Merced offers a top-quality education and student support, with cutting-edge research and technology.

Fresno State, one of the flagship campuses of the CSU system, is another popular choice for local students. With over 150 programs to choose from, students can find the perfect fit for their future career goals. The university is known for its strong academics, vibrant campus life and close-knit community.

From the local community college to outstanding four-year options and more, there's truly never been a better time to be a college student in Los Banos.



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A Strong Voice for District 5

How did Los Banos get its name?

By Javier Powell
MILLIKEN MUSEUM SOCIETY

“How did Los Banos get its name?” is a common question we hear at the Milliken Museum. The answer goes back more than 200 years and starts with a little-known route, a Franciscan monk, and natural pools in the hills.

In 1808, California was still part of Spanish Alta California. That year, 28-year-old Padre Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta arrived at the under-construction Mission San Juan Bautista. A scholar and linguist from Burgos, Spain, he soon began studying the languages of local Native tribes, including the Yokuts, who lived across the San Joaquin Valley.

While exploring the valley, Arroyo de la Cuesta hoped to find a shortcut over the Diablo Range, rather than the long-established Pacheco Pass. He followed Los Banos Creek into the hills and discovered a series of pools carved into the bedrock. From there, he crossed French's Pass, 9 miles south of Pacheco Pass, and returned west to the mission. This new route saved days of travel and became a preferred path for missionaries.

The pools he found were not on the valley floor, but higher in the watershed, above what is now the Los Banos Creek Reservoir. These crystal-clear pools made ideal rest stops and, later in life, would offer relief to Arroyo de la Cuesta, who suffered from rheumatism.

Over time, ranchers in the region learned about the pools from Arroyo de la Cuesta's stories. They referred to them as “Los Baños del Padre Arroyo”—the baths of Father Arroyo. When applying for Mexican land grants



Mural Depicting Padre Arroyo De La Cuesta and the baths (Los Banos) hung in the Milliken Museum.

in the 1840s, they marked the creek as “El Arroyo de Los Baños del Padre Arroyo” on their diseños (maps). That name, though shortened over time, stuck to the creek.

By the time of the Gold Rush and American annexation, Americans simplified and Anglicized the name to Los Banos Creek, and it came to define the general region.

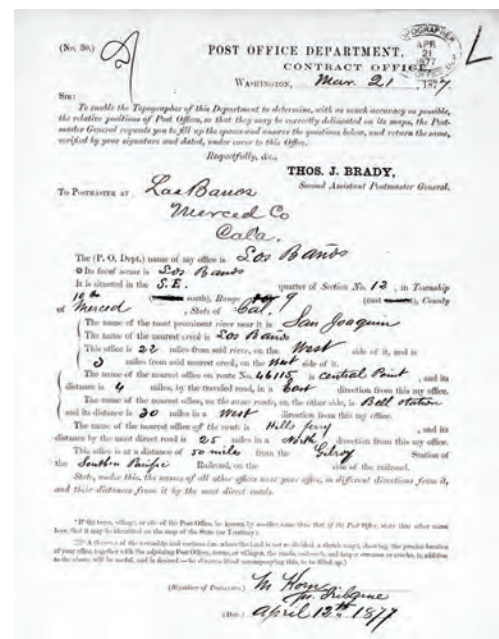
The town itself traces its roots to Gustave Kreyenhagen, who opened a general store near the creek. After being moved by Henry Miller in 1870, the store became a key stop on the Butterfield Overland Stagecoach route.

In 1873, Moses Korn purchased the store and petitioned the U.S. Postal Service for a post office—naming it after the creek. On November 10, 1873, the name Los Banos became official.

Later, when the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived in 1889, residents wanted to relocate the town closer to the tracks. After a dispute with landowners near

Volta, Henry Miller quietly moved the post office to a new location near the railroad, now the site of modern Los Banos.

Some accused him of “stealing our post office,” but the railroad accepted the change—and so the town of Los Banos was born, named after the mountain pools where Padre Arroaayo once bathed.



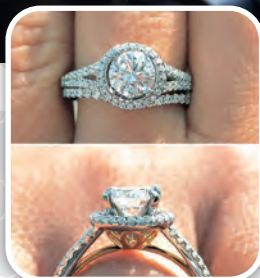
Moses Korn's original petition to create a post office named Los Banos. From the National Archives.



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Mental health matters in Los Banos Resources, trends and community support

By Christina Martinez, LCSW

Los Banos has an estimated population of 48,553 as of 2023 and has seen increasing attention to mental health needs, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As mental health challenges become more prevalent, it is important for residents to become aware of resources to support their well-being.

Nationally, mental health concerns have risen, with the CDC reporting that in 2021, over one in five students seriously considered attempting suicide, and one in ten attempted suicide.

In Los Banos, the predominantly Hispanic community (73.2 percent Hispanic or Latino) faces unique challenges, including language barriers and cultural stigmas surrounding mental health. Additionally, 27.6 percent of residents are foreign-born, which can impact access to culturally competent care.

For residents seeking support, numerous resources are available locally to address mental health needs. By leveraging these services and fostering open conversations, Los Banos continues to prioritize the mental well-being of its community.

Los Banos offers several mental health services to cater to its diverse population.

Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, an outpatient clinic, is located at 40 West G Street, Suite C. This clinic provides services for adults and children, including therapy, case management, substance use disorder services and medication support. Services are free for Medi-

Cal recipients and offered on a sliding scale for others.

Camarena Health Center is situated at 2520 Pacheco Boulevard. This center offers integrated care, including behavioral health services alongside medical, dental, and optometry services.

Golden Valley Health Centers, at 821 Texas Avenue, this facility provides comprehensive health services, including mental health support, to the community.

Aspiranet, located at 415 F Street, offers behavioral health services, focusing on family and community support.

Aegis Treatment Centers, found at 745 West J Street, Suite A, provides medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorders, with counseling services available in nearby Merced.

For immediate mental health crises, residents can access the Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), open 24/7 at 300 East 15th Street, Suite A, Merced, the CSU provides emergency psychiatric assessments and interventions.

The Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) is also available for immediate mental health crises. This team collaborates with local law enforcement to respond to psychiatric emergencies throughout Merced County, including Los Banos. Services can be accessed by calling the Crisis Warm Line at 209-381-6819

California's recent mental health reform proposals, pending voter approval, aim to invest \$6.38 billion in expanding treatment facilities and services statewide. If passed, these measures could significantly enhance mental health infrastructure in communities like Los Banos.





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Los Banos churches gather at annual ‘SonRise Service’

By Pastor Mike Neu

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, LOS BANOS

The SonRise Easter Service has been a Los Banos tradition since the mid-1960s. Started under the direction of Rev. Paul Hartrick of St. John's Lutheran Church, the service expanded from a single church celebration to include many churches from Los Banos and the surrounding area. In 2025, the service was attended by 70 people.

The inaugural service was held in Pacheco Park but was moved to the then newly created shores of O'Neill Forebay, across Highway 152 from the dam at San Luis Reservoir. The celebration is held annually to the left of the Forebay boat ramp, adjacent to a day-use picnic area. Scattered trees and the forebay form the backdrop as the sun rises over the distant Sierras and reflects off the water through the trees.

The SonRise Service, as St. John's calls it, often includes ministers from other Los Banos-area churches. Over the years, clerical participants have come from Mount Moriah First Baptist of South Dos Palos, First Baptist of Los Banos, Calvary Baptist, United Methodist, St. Alban's Anglican, Cornerstone and others.

An offering is collected as part of the service, 100 percent of which is donated to a local charity. In 2025, \$300 was provided to the Rotary Club of Los Banos for their Feed The Need program. This program provides food to children for the



The rising sun at the O'Neill Forebay creates a silhouette of the cross.



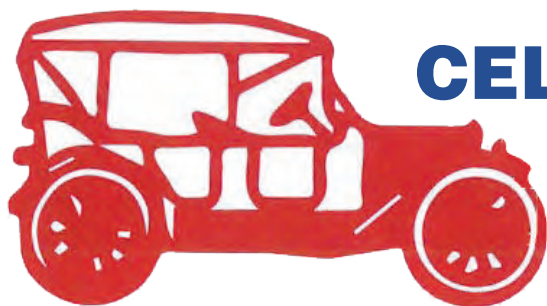
**St. John's Lutheran Church
Pastor Michael Neu and
Maureen Wollington lead the
congregation with a hymn.**

weekend each week through three participating Los Banos elementary schools.

The entire community is invited to attend the service, regardless of your church home or lack thereof. St. John's provides some folding chairs, but many arrive with their own chairs, not to mention blankets. Early spring mornings can be chilly and a challenge for the musicians to stay in tune!

The San Luis SRA management has been generous in past years accommodating this event. They have provided free parking passes that are good for the duration of the service only.

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LB veterans group includes VFW, American Legion members

Patricia McCoy
LOS BANOS VETERAN

The American Legion Post 166 was established in Los Banos in 1920, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 2487 was established in 1932.

In most parts of the country, the American Legion and the VFW operate separately and rarely come together for activities. However, in Los Banos, the two organizations have united to serve veterans and the local community.

The Veterans Memorial Hall, located at 615 E St., Los Banos, was dedicated in 1968 to the two posts for their use. At 7 a.m., Members meet on the second Tuesday of each month for breakfast, with the post's meeting following. They meet for dinner once a quarter.

The commanders created a veterans commemorative plaque wall located on the outside of the building.

Community members can purchase a plaque to be placed on the wall in honor of their military loved one. It's a beautiful sight to see, and all are encouraged to visit and read the names on the wall.

Aside from posting colors for local events, the members of both posts also provide honor services at the San Joaquin National Cemetery and sponsor many community programs and activities, highlighted by the Flag Service Program and the annual veterans parade.

The Flag Service Program is a fundraiser for the VFW where individuals sign up to have veterans place an American flag outside their homes on eight specific holidays a year. It's a wonderful display of patriotism that people

see when driving through Los Banos.

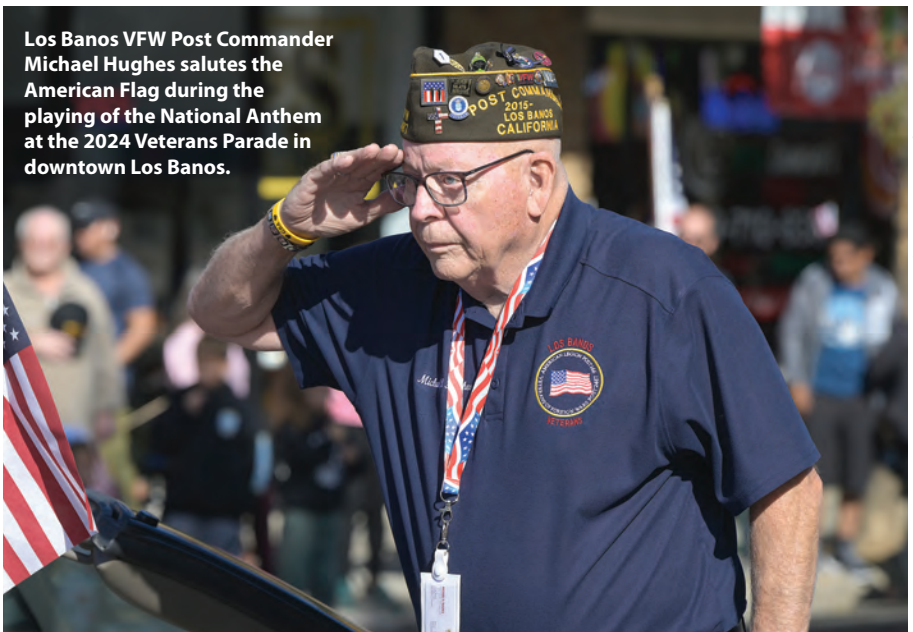
The Los Banos Veterans Parade is always held on the first Saturday of November to avoid competing with events in surrounding areas on Veterans Day. Veterans for Veterans sponsors the parade.

One exciting feature is the Most Patriotic School Contest. Each year, the parade has a theme, and most schools participate in creating a float based on that theme.

Independent judges are selected and score the entries. There are three winners from the elementary, junior high and high school categories.

The winning schools receive a framed flag with the school's name and the year. The school displays the trophy until the veterans parade the following year. These schools do an amazing job of honoring the veterans.

The Los Banos Veterans Memorial Hall houses the only ATLAS Care Center in California.



Los Banos VFW Post Commander Michael Hughes salutes the American Flag during the playing of the National Anthem at the 2024 Veterans Parade in downtown Los Banos.

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB / glieb@TheWestsidepress.com

This innovative program provides telehealth services to reduce the need for long travel times to Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities. It is a real honor that our small town was selected to provide this service.

Another service provided is the presence of the Veteran Service Office (VSO), which visits the hall four times a month. It visits on the first, third and fourth Thursday and the second Wednesday of each month to assist veterans with understanding their benefits and filing claims.

Also located outside the veterans hall is a tattered flag receptacle where people can place an old, ripped flag, and the veterans will execute the proper retirement ceremony for those flags.

The American Legion Post 166 and the VFW Post 2487 are very active in the community. To learn more about membership and the various activities, visit their website at losbanosveterans.org.



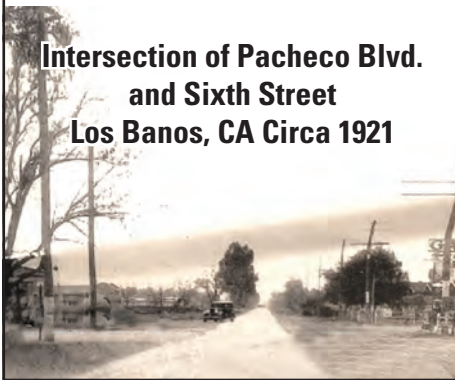
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The May Day Fair: The Valley's yearly harvest of community



Los Banos' Phoenix Books owner Joanne Hoefer is an excellent Colonel Sanders as she walks with her "chicken" horse in the Merced County Spring Fair on Sat., May 3, 2025.

By Shawn Pintor-Day
THE WESTSIDE EXPRESS

Los Banos is a community created, maintained and sustained by agriculture, and the May Day Fair is the community's way of giving back to the Valley that supplies it all.

The earliest May Day Festivities were a celebration of the completion of the foundational infrastructure of Los Banos. Thanks to the work of Cattleman Henry Miller, a farmer from Germany, our hometown grew from a few acres of grassy hills and streams into a bustling hub of agricultural industry.

After noticing the temperate climate and fertile soil of the Central Valley, Miller acquired the San Joaquin Valley Canal and Irrigation Company and got to work on his farming empire.

Using LB as a hub for his business practices, the small community quickly

developed a personality of its own: the fertility and crop variety that the Valley had to offer defined its culture just as much as it defined its business, and the lush fields and abundance of crops such as tomatoes helped establish a legacy that still persists today.

By the late 1800s, Los Banos as we know it was taking shape, and early Los Banosans decided to celebrate the completion of the town railroad with an all-out, county-wide fair that would showcase the (literal) fruits of the farming community's labor.

The first May Day Parade was held, farmers manned stalls brimming with the latest harvest, and the community came together to revel in the warm weather and bucketloads of produce. The May Day celebration was so beloved by the community that the Los Banos Chamber of Commerce took up the task of maintaining the annual festivities, and the

May Day Fair -- as it came to be known -- became a tradition long after Miller's death (and the construction of any more railroads).

As the years went by and the town continued to grow, the annual fair only got bigger. With each club, school or church that popped up in LB, a new team of people was dedicated to helping May Day evolve, each helping hand leaving its own fingerprint on the history of the Fair.

By the 1940s, the American Legion and the LB Chamber of Commerce led the charge in expanding the annual spring celebration, and thousands of people were converging on our small rural community to either take part or see the May Day Fair for themselves.

Well over a century after its first Spring Parade, the county fair is going strong with no signs of slowing down. Residents from all over the San Joaquin flock to Los Banos each year to be a part of the

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com



4H member, Taite Strohmenger wearing her green jacket, keeps her eyes on the competition and the judge at the same time.

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

festivities, and each year's new theme only adds to the rich tapestry that makes up the event's history.

The annual May Day fair is a celebration of what life in the Valley is and can be. With a community spirit that has not faded since the 1800s, the spring fair has grown to be as big as Los Banos itself.

Rather than the modest collection of local dancers and farming families that kicked off the May Day Parade of years past, today's parade has countless businesses, clubs, school organizations

and more carrying the torch that Miller and his efforts lit centuries ago.

The spring festival's food, entertainment and culture reflect the Valley and what it has to offer, made all the more special by the fact that it's produced completely here on our home soil.

The Los Banos Spring Fair happens every year and has never lost its spirit of homegrown hospitality. No matter what year it is, the May Day Parade always promises to provide an authentic slice of the Valley.

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**Lunes a Jueves 8:00 AM
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A conversation with Los Banos Ghosts



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

The late Milliken Museum creator Charles Sawyer was a constant fixture at the museum for anyone seeking history information.

By Diana Ingram
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Listen in on the weaning hours of the evening as our Los Banos winds come over the pass. If you listen carefully, you can hear them. They, the voices of Los Banos past, telling of the days they walked the precious grounds we walk upon.

Our Los Banos is unique in its blend of past and present, making it a rich and diverse place to live. You can hear the sounds of the footsteps of the Yokut people who first called our community home. A proud people, they cared for it lovingly until the others came, making way for a different kind of future.

Then came other brave people, who traveled the treacherous pass and saw something good in this land. Later, immigrants from Italy and Portugal came, bringing their work ethic, love of the

*I slept in
Dracula's Castle
in Transylvania,
I wrote a book
about it, and
I was used as
an expert on
the subject on
endless shows.*

land and rich cultures that are all still present today

Los Banos is a tapestry of cultures. Henry Miller came and saw a way to make his fortune, and fortunes he

made. You can see his statue at the end of Main Street.

"Do not forget to tell them that I was the largest and richest landowner in the state." Ok, Henry Miller, I will tell them.

Listen, do you hear the sounds of laughter? Do you hear music and the sound of dancing?

That is coming from our fairgrounds and the large gazebo where Henry Miller held picnics and dances for his employees. Now, we hold the May Day Fair there. I can see Miller smiling.

Oh, the buildings have changed since those early days. Although some remain to speak of our history. A big fire burned down much of our old Los Banos, including our opera house. But walking the streets, I still can sense their presence. I can also hear the footsteps of those who helped build this city that we

now walk in.

Yes, I hear June Erreca and Charles Sawyer now. They were the keepers of our history, nurturing it in our treasured Milliken Museum. What was that? Ok, June, take over.

"Los Banos has always treasured its past, but new folks moved in, and Charles and I felt it our duty to let them know the stories of our people. Strong people, hard-working people and loyal to the land they felt honored to walk upon. Charles and I spent endless hours in this museum, and that's a tribute to our past.

"Of course, I made a bit of history myself here. I was the first owner of a flower shop. My Los Banos Flowers, which I made a great success, continues to operate under my son Emil."

Oh, of course, now Charles Sawyer wants to add something, "I just wanted to put in a good word for our downtown. I used to give walking history tours, which were very informative. Too bad you missed me. There is still a lot to see there, although I sure do miss our drug store and its counter. We also hang out in the back at the Black Bear Diner. A few of us have our pictures up on its walls. Be sure and take a peek."

Henry and Helen Mello just dropped by to remind us: "You should not forget that dairy farms are also a

big part of Los Banos' past, present and future. We formed a brotherhood and made a successful dairy. Now we are going to drink a glass of Los Banos milk."

"I have a huge landmark in Los Banos that no one else can touch," inserts Buck Fawcett. "I have a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home. Who'd have thought you would find that here? I didn't."

"We get to hear him boast about that for eternity," interrupts Vincent Hillyer, "You know, I got the best story of all of you. I slept in Dracula's Castle in Transylvania, I wrote a book about it, and I was used as an expert on the subject on endless shows. Plus, I was married to the sister of the SHAH of Iran. And to an Italian actress, I even acted in a few movies there. But I came back to Los Banos. It called to me."

Now the voices are all getting excited, Benny Silva's voice stands out, "Well, I used to manage the old movie house on I Street. The stories I could tell about couples on the balcony. I should have written a book."

There is so much history here, so many interesting families. It is worth a quick trip to our cemetery on Center for a taste of our past. Stick around. Settle in.

"You are going to love it here," Joe Cox adds, "I mean, we have to love it. We are all sticking around."



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SEE PAGE B1

WE THE WESTSIDE EXPRESS
Serving the communities of Dos Palos, Firebaugh, Los Banos and Santa Nella
VOLUME 4 ■ No. 21
WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2025

New Jerry O'Banion Library dedicated
BY DAVID BORRERO
The Westside Express
It was a day of celebration as the community of Dos Palos marked the completion of three major projects—all right next to each other.
During the morning of Wednesday, May 14, before well over 100 people, ribbon cuttings were held to celebrate the new Lorraine Street Bridge, the brand-new Jerry O'Banion Library and the much-needed renovation of Del Norte Hall.
"Absolutely gorgeous," is the way Merced County's head librarian Amy Taylor described the state-of-the-art library, named after the late O'Banion, who served Dos Palos and the Westside of the county for 28 years as a county supervisor.
"It is so wonderful how it turned out," said Taylor, one of many government officials who came out for the occasion.
The 3,500 square foot library has 15,000 book titles to choose from.
Brand new computers have been installed, and Taylor said there are children's computers available with "learning games" and no internet.
Taylor added that like the old downtown library, the new facility will be open 20 hours a week on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.
"I have put in a request to increase the hours," she explained. "It has not been approved yet. Our goal is to have the new library open five days a week."
Taylor also said that O'Banion, throughout his tenure, was a strong supporter of the library.
SEE LIBRARY, PAGE A5

LB Scouts turn
Left to right: Kasey Silveira, Katolyn Oliveira (Queen) and Sidney Silveira.
The Dos Palos D.E.S. Association will celebrate its annual "Festa do Divino Espírito Santo" on May 24 and May 25.
The D.E.S. Association's Secretary-Treasurer Bob Bertas outlined the schedule of events for the weekend's festivities.
The festivities will begin at 11:30 a.m. Saturday, with the traditional Roda de Lete, a parade featuring historical mercedense artists, followed by a procession to the D.E.S. Hall, where a Mass and the coronation of this year's queen, Father Antonio Silveira will preside over the Mass and sermon.
Following the service, the procession will return to the D.E.S. Hall for a traditional lunch of sopas, served free of charge.
BY SHAWN PINTOR-DA
The Westside Express
Few clubs have been as important to modern child development as Scouting America, formerly known as the Boy Scouts of America. For as long as kids have loved running "hardfoot" through nature, Scout programs all across the country have helped them grow into healthy and capable adults.
Though the Scout program has lived to see the 100th anniversary of Los Banos' young explorers, as 2025 denotes the Cub Scout's 100th year as a part of the country.
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Serving the Communities of Dos Palos, Firebaugh, Los Banos and Santa Nella

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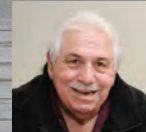


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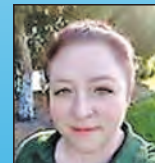
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