

LIFE in Los Banos

ANNUAL PUBLICATION 2026

BUSINESS AND MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORIES FOR LOS BANOS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
AND LOS BANOS DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



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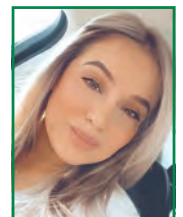
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PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

Los Banos currently has two fire stations with firefighters ready to help protect its citizens.

On the cover: Louie and Barbara Parreira of Los Banos have been married for 77 years. Louie celebrated his 100th birthday on June 13 along with about 50 friends and family members including his seven children. Sitting on his lap is Axel Norden, his great-grandson who also celebrated his 1-year-old birthday on June 13. Their secret to a long life is driving to Mass at St. Joseph's Catholic Church every morning and being home at 5 p.m. to share a glass of wine.

The Life In Los Banos magazine is an annual publication. For those interested in being included in the 2026 to 2027 edition, please call Publisher, Gene Lieb at (209) 704-3831



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Welcome to Los Banos



PHOTO BY GENE LIEBY/glieby@TheWestsideExpress.com

Hundreds of children enjoy gathering plastic eggs filled with candy during the annual city of Los Banos community Easter Egg Hunt at Oliveria Park in Los Banos.

By Christina Rocha

Located on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley in Merced County, Los Banos is a small yet steadily growing city that offers a little bit of everything.

Recognized for its agricultural roots, the city has maintained its rural charm while continuing to expand in residential and commercial development.

Its location between larger metropolitan regions and California's Central Coast also makes it a convenient place for both residents and travelers passing through.

Los Banos shares a balance of traditional and progressive characteristics that have helped shape a close-knit community.

The city has been built on values such as opportunity and accessibility, held by generations of families.

While the city grows, it maintains a distinctly local feel shaped by neighborhood connections, family-owned businesses and active community involvement.

Whether arriving for work, raising a family or simply passing through, many residents and visitors find the city's atmosphere memorable for its hospitable, quaint friendliness.

Families remain central to the character of Los Banos.

Schools, youth programs, local sports and

community events all contribute to an environment where residents stay actively involved throughout the year.

Educational opportunities continue to support a growing population, while extracurricular activities and community programs provide spaces for students and families to stay connected beyond the classroom.

Local organizations, churches, volunteer groups and civic programs also play an important role in strengthening community ties.

Community involvement is evident across the city through charitable efforts, cultural celebrations and seasonal events that bring residents together year-round.

These activities help preserve the close-knit atmosphere that many residents value, even as the city continues to evolve.

Downtown Los Banos remains one of the city's most familiar gathering places.

Local restaurants, small businesses and community spaces continue to contribute to the city's welcoming atmosphere while supporting the local economy.

The downtown area often offers residents and visitors opportunities to experience the city's personality firsthand.

Recreation and outdoor access are also important parts of life in Los Banos. City parks, sports facilities and walking areas provide opportunities for recreation close to home, while nearby destinations offer additional access to outdoor activities.

The city's proximity to San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area continues to attract residents and visitors interested in boating, fishing, hiking, camping and enjoying the surrounding landscape.

Alongside recreation and community life, Los Banos continues to see growth in housing, healthcare services, local businesses and infrastructure improvements.

Continued development reflects the city's efforts to meet the needs of a changing population while preparing for future growth.

New businesses and expanding services continue to create opportunities for residents while contributing to the city's long-term stability and development.

As Los Banos continues to grow, its identity remains tied to a balance of community connection and ongoing development.

The city's ability to balance progress with preservation continues to shape its direction.

Whether encountered for the first time or through long-standing ties, the city offers a connected community shaped by strong local ties and everyday accessibility.

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Discover the rich history of Los Banos at the Milliken Museum

By Javier Powell

How Los Banos got its name is a commonly asked question. In short, a missionary, mountain pools, a couple of businessmen and a creek. But there is more to it than that.

The year is 1808. What would become the modern state of California is known to the Spanish Crown as Alta California. Far-flung from power and before the discovery of gold, Alta California was a backwater region.

A 28-year-old Franciscan monk arrives at the then-under-construction Mission San Juan Bautista. His name is Padre Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta. He was born in the small town of Cubo de Bureba in Burgos, Spain. His journey to California included four years at the College of San Fernando, Mexico City.

Arroyo de la Cuesta was a linguist and avid scholar. Within four years of arriving, he had compiled a compendium on the languages of the Amah Mutsun, Ohlone (Costanoans) and Yokut peoples.

The Yokuts were the Native Americans living in the Central Valley from just south of the Sacramento Delta to the Kern River in the south.

On his trips to Yokut territory, Arroyo de la Cuesta would utilize a far lesser-known route than today's Pacheco Pass—a route he discovered on a whim.

Back then, the only route in the area known to the Spanish was Pacheco Pass, a route that required San Juan Bautista priests like Arroyo de la Cuesta to head northeast and take a long trek to get to the valley.

A young Arroyo de la Cuesta was making a trip into the San Joaquin Valley one



An early photo of the area near Los Banos.

day and hoped to find a shortcut directly over the Diablo Range.

We don't know exactly when, but following the unexplored Los Banos Creek into the foothills, he discovered pools—shallow, clean and perfect to bathe in—cut into the bedrock.

Going further up the creek, he crossed over French's Pass and found himself coming straight west back to Mission San Juan Bautista, shaving days off the journey. Afterward, it became the main route traveled by the mission.

French's Pass sits 9 miles south of Pacheco Pass. The route is steeper and part of an old Native American trail network.

Cresting at 2,435 feet above sea level, once through French's Pass, Arroyo de la Cuesta descended, following North Fork Los Banos Creek when heading east.

Pools cut by the creek would last year-round in the upper watershed beyond the modern Los Banos Creek Reservoir. As some misconceptions state, the pools were not on the valley floor.

They made the perfect overnight rest for Arroyo de la Cuesta and his traveling companions. He would bathe himself in their crystal clear waters to clean up before heading out the next day.

As Arroyo de la Cuesta aged, he was stricken with rheumatism, which made his joints ache and movement hard. Bathing in the pools would have been a necessity for him.

Being head missionary—and for some years, Mission San Juan Bautista’s only missionary—Arroyo de la Cuesta would become a well-known figure in the area and within the mission system. He would leave the mission in 1833. He later died in 1840 at Mission Santa Inés at the age of 60.

The future Mexican ranchers would have learned about the baths through Arroyo de la Cuesta’s stories of bathing there. The ranchers named them “Los Baños del Padre Arroyo” or the Baths of Padre Arroyo.

When petitioning the Mexican governors for land in the area during the 1840s, the ranchers marked the creek on their maps as “El Arroyo de Los Baños del Padre Arroyo.” It appeared as a boundary on the “diseños” (maps) for the Arburua, Santa Rita and San Luis Gonzaga land grants.

The name would last less than a decade. With the American annexation and the 1849 Gold Rush, Americans came from the East and found the name didn’t work as well in English. The parts of the name linking it to Arroyo de la Cuesta were cut off, and the rest was anglicized to “Los Baños Crick” (Creek).

From there, the name flowed down from the mountain pools with the water. The name Los Banos came to be known as the general region around the creek’s meander into the San Joaquin River. The name then attached itself to old Los Banos. Gustave Kreyenhagen started the settlement.

After moving three times, the final location for his general store was just a small distance to the northwest of where Volta Road intersects the Central

California Irrigation District (CCID) Main Canal.

He was moved to the spot in 1870 by Henry Miller after the latter fenced his previous spot on modern-day Turner Island Road.

All three spots were on the route of the Butterfield Overland stagecoaches. The stagecoach line ran through the area on roughly the same alignment as Overland Avenue in modern-day Los Banos.

Kreyenhagen sold resources that the region lacked, like timber and tools. Quickly, the settlement of old Los Banos formed around his store, though it was called Kreyenhagen’s Store or Kreyenhagen’s Corner at the time.

Moses Korn and his business partner, Hirschfeld, bought the store in 1873. Previously, the mail would have had to have been picked up from Gilroy.

But Korn wanted a post office in town and his store, so he successfully petitioned the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) for a new post office. In his petition, he uses the name of the nearby creek, Los Banos. The post office granted the petition on Nov. 10, 1873, and made Korn the first postmaster.

After Korn’s petition, the place officially gained the name Los Banos. In 1880, the first depiction of old Los Banos was a sketch with the label “Los Baños” in the first Merced County history book.

With the coming of the railroad in 1889, residents wanted to move the post office and the town to where the creek itself bisects the railroad tracks. Nearby, the Badger Flat Road and H Street

intersect today. But the landowners, the Wood family, refused.

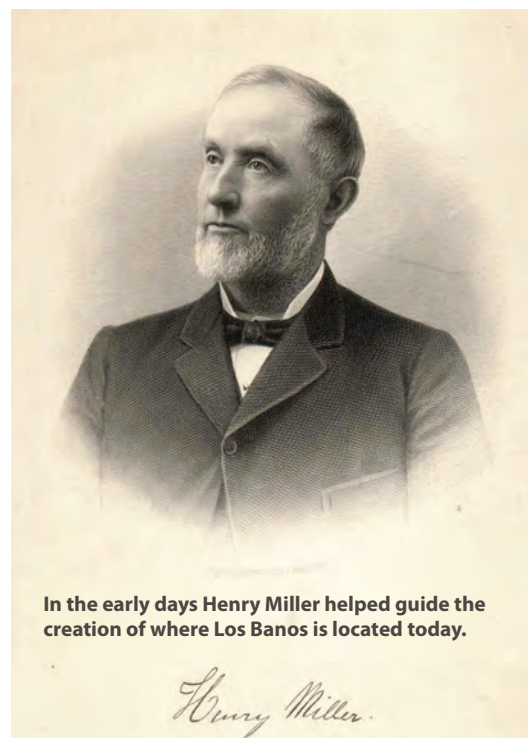
This sparked a race between Henry Miller, who wanted the town to be close to Canal Farm, and some residents in old Los Banos who wanted it to be just north of the old town in what would become Volta.

While residents petitioned the post office to move to Volta, Henry Miller is said to have “quietly” moved the post office to the current site of Los Banos.

Residents claimed that he “stole our post office!” Even so, the Southern Pacific Railroad giant sided with Henry Miller and named the new depot at Henry Miller’s spot, Los Banos. With that, the new Los Banos became Los Banos, marking the end of a roughly 80 to 90-year process.

That is how our valley city earned its name from the mountain pools.

The story behind Los Banos’ unique name.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MILLIKEN MUSEUM

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

By Javier Powell

The government of Los Banos serves its over 48,000 citizens through many commissions, departments and its 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 serve its goal of serving the people.

At the top of the structure is Mayor Michael Amabile, who presides over a city council consisting of District 1's Mitzy Perez, District 2's Refugio Llamas, District 3's Marcus Chavez and District 4's Deborah Lewis.

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

With meetings held on the first and third Wednesdays of every month, they govern the top level of the city. Their meetings are held at the city hall, located at 520 J. St., and start at 6 p.m.

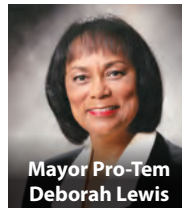
The council delegates duties to the following commissions: the planning commission, the airport advisory commission, the traffic safety commission, the parks and recreation commission, and the tree commission.

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

Underneath the council is City Manager Nirorn Than. He acts as the CEO of the city and has many duties in running its



Mayor Michael Amabile



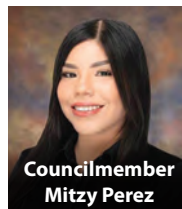
Mayor Pro-Tem Deborah Lewis



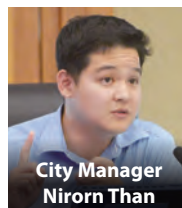
Councilmember Marcus Chavez



Councilmember Refugio Llamas



Councilmember Mitzy Perez



City Manager Nirorn Than

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 Mary Lerner, and City Treasurer Lucy Lawrence.

Non-emergency departments within the city are the finance department, headed by Finance Director Minerva "Minnie" Moreno; the building department; the community and economic development department, run by Director Stacy Elms; the human resources department, run by Director Isabel Carlos; the parks and recreation department, run by Director Joe Heim; and the public works department, led by Director William Via.

Interim Fire Chief Brandon Dorenbush runs

*A city
government
built to serve
residents.*

the fire department. Dorenbush commands two fire stations within the city. Fire Station 1, and the headquarters of the fire department, is at 333 Seventh St. It has an unmissable communications tower and training building. Fire Station 2 is located at 1150 West I St.

The police department, the last of the city government's departments, is run by Police Chief Ray Reyna. Along with a new chief, they have 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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Los Banos prioritizes public safety for residents, wildlife, environment, more

By Shawn Pintor-Day

Public safety is one of—if not the most—important aspects of city life. Los Banos is filled with spaces that are themselves filled with people, wildlife, complex infrastructure and many other objects of unpredictability, both for recreation and public use.

The people and systems behind everything public life has to offer, though, operate with the safety of city residents as their guiding force.

From the most bustling emergency room clinics to the underground water treatment facilities few will ever see, Los Banos is a place built for residential security.

Hospitals and health clinics are the backbone of a healthy and capable society, and Los Banos has recently used newly established financial programs and grants to reinforce its public health buildings.

With many new ways to secure financial support for facelifts and extensions, the valley's healthcare system is currently seeing a rejuvenation of its older facilities as it witnesses the birth of many new, specialized clinics.

Having just celebrated its first year of operation, the new Sutter Health clinic has been strengthening Los Banos residents' access to healthcare since May 2025.

As one of the first clinics in the city to offer dedicated rooms and resources for mental health, the Sutter Health clinic is just one of the latest innovations made possible because of public funding grants that started circulating just a few years ago.

The umbrella of public safety extends to more than the human residents of the valley. While Los Banos hospitals secured funding for more space, programs and procedures, the Los Banos Animal Shelter (LBAS) was doing much of the same.

It unveiled the fruits of its labor last Septem-



A new Los Banos Police Station was built and opened in November of 2023.

ber. Boasting a new office space, surgery rooms and an extended area for kennel storage, the folks at LBAS have never been more prepared to keep the town's population of furry friends safe and healthy.

The local shelter staff is mostly made up of remote veterinarians offering their services to the facility and volunteers. It stands as just one institution upheld mainly by people wanting to do good in their community.

A significant portion of the social infrastructure in Los Banos is either run or made up of community members who reach out and band together to address issues at every level.

From volunteer-led fundraisers to annual holiday help-outs, there are seemingly endless helping hands uplifting the community from every angle.

Economic hardships affect communities as a whole, and if

one family is struggling, there's a good chance that their neighbors could use a bit of help as well.

The American Hero Initiative (AHI) was founded by two Los Banos residents who took the pains of financial struggle to heart and set out to help Los Banos veterans struggling with the costs of everyday life.

Maria and Larry Phillips—the founders of the AHI—have worked with various organizations around the community to provide financial support for struggling veterans of all ages.

They have been slowly spreading their safety net northward and southward, and they hope to become a statewide initiative someday.

Even local institutions, such as the Los Banos fire department, do their best to contribute to the community's health. Just like the Phillips, the Los Banos fire station (and some members

from surrounding fire stations) united to get a boot-full of donations.

In early spring, local firefighters take to the city's freeways and inlets with plastic boots, collecting as many donations as they can for the Burn Institute, a specialized medical center dedicated to helping victims of fire catastrophes.

While the firehouse folks busy themselves with the charity boots each spring, other local institutions open their doors to help with other ongoing social issues.

This year, Mercey Springs Church of the Nazarene has started hosting agents from the Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collective (CVIIC) to help those who need support with immigration services figure out the world of citizenship.

Rev. Raul Granillo, a longtime pastor of Mercey Springs, has helped lead the charge for this bold, new public service, which the church and CVIIC staff alike intend to sustain.

In addition to its rich culture, California is known to have some of the most stunning landscapes in the country, and the wildlife of the Central Valley is as diverse as it is beautiful.

It takes real effort to keep the Golden State shiny and clean, and plenty of people and organizations keep the natural landscape pristine.

Pacheco Pass—aside from being the most prominent mountain pass and state park nearest to the land we call home—has a fascinating history of family business deals, land disputes and, most importantly, land preservation.

Paula Fatjo, an eventual owner of the land her relative, Francisco Pacheco, passed down to her, was granted to California for the express purpose of being a nature preserve.

Thanks to litigation set forth by Fatjo and generations of caretakers who have nurtured the land after her, Los Banos residents have ensured that Fatjo's land has stayed healthy, clean and safe for any traveler hoping to see the majesty of the Central Valley.

The forward-thinkers of the valley have done much more than preserve land for aesthetic and conservation purposes. They have also been actively working toward preserving the community's health while maintaining the environment's.

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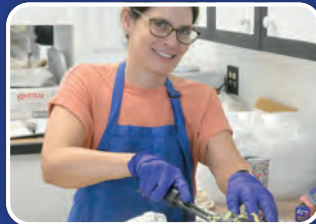
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LB offers citizens charcuterie board of healthcare services

By Christina Rocha

Access to healthcare plays an important role in the quality of life of any community, and Los Banos offers residents a broad range of local medical services.

As the city continues to grow, its healthcare network has expanded to provide care that supports residents at every stage of life.

Healthcare in the community ranges from preventive medicine and routine checkups to specialty treatment and recovery services, creating a system of care that provides residents with easy access to the care they need.

Memorial Hospital in Los Banos serves as a major healthcare resource in the community, providing hospital-based treatment and medical services.

Residents also have access to a variety of family medicine providers and clinics, including Family Health Medical Center, Golden Valley Health Center, Camarena Health, Los Banos Primary Care, Apex Medical Group, Apex Annex Health Center, Access Family Medical Center, Trinity Medical Clinic, Sutter Gould Medical Foundation, and Rural Health Clinic.

Los Banos also offers services that address more immediate and specialized healthcare needs. Premium Urgent Care and Agile Occupational Medicine provide additional options for urgent and occupational healthcare.

Specialty care is also available through providers such as Surgical Affiliates and Foot and Ankle



Everyone claps after the official ribbon was cut February 20, 2026 at the new Memorial Hospital Los Banos Rural Health Clinic East located at 801 West L St.

Podiatric & Orthopedic Care, while Infinite Women's Care offers women's health services.

Diagnostic and support services, including El Portal Imaging Center, Labcorp, and Quest Diagnostics, help connect patients to imaging, laboratory testing and clinical information that assist treatment decisions.

Mental and behavioral health resources are also available throughout Los Banos, including behavioral health support through the Sutter Health Rural Health Clinic East, which opened earlier this year, and addiction rehabilitation services through the Aegis Treatment Centers.

More specialized assistance for children with autism and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is available through CARES Consulting and Genesis Behavior Center.

Residents also have access to

physical rehabilitation and recovery services through Sport & Rehab Physical Therapy and Golden Bear Physical Therapy Rehabilitation & Wellness.

Additional specialized treatment is available at DaVita Los Banos Dialysis for individuals requiring dialysis care, and long-term recovery support is available at Los Banos Nursing Rehab LLC.

Vision care providers in Los Banos include Comprehensive Eyecare, Advanced Eyecare Associates, and Sharma Nazhat Eye Clinic.

Dental and oral health services are available through South Valley Oral and Facial Surgery, Artistry in Smiles, Shine Brite Dental, Suave Dental, iDental Family Dentistry, Mainstreet Dental, Sierra Dental Group, and Western Dental.

Access to healthcare is also strengthened through mobile and outreach programs that bring services directly into the community.



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Church Life In Los Banos

By Rev. Stephen Hammond

SENIOR PASTOR OF BETHEL COMMUNITY CHURCH

From its inception, Los Banos has had a rich history of faith that is an important part of our city's foundation and life. The many churches in Los Banos have played a vital role in the makeup, the character and the community aspect that we value so deeply.

From historic congregations to new church plants, Los Banos has a wide variety of houses of worship to choose from.

The most historic congregation in our city is the United Methodist church, which can trace its roots back 154 years. Then there is the St. Joseph's Catholic Church, which is just over 100 years old. Followed by Calvary Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, and then the Church of Christ, Bethel Community Church, Westside Community Church and El Buen Pastor Church. These are the historic foundations of faith in Los Banos, with many other churches that have followed.

There are now approximately 42 churches in Los Banos, 31 English-speaking churches and 11 Spanish-speaking churches.

There is a wide variety of types of worship so that anyone can find the specific flavor of their personal worship experience. From ecumenical churches to mainstream evangelical churches. From Pentecostal churches to charismatic churches. There is something for everyone.

There are several smaller congregations for a more intimate worship experience, and some larger congregations if someone would prefer a growing church.

For many years, several of the churches of Los Banos have worked and worshipped together to build the faith community in our city. Every Easter, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church hosts an Easter Sunrise service out at the Forebay. Usually several churches participate together for this great community event to honor the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Another great annual event is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. march and service organized by a group of pastors in Los Banos and hosted at Bethel Community Church. In the past there was another annual event called the Harvest of Fun, where 8-10



churches joined together for a community harvest event on Halloween night.

During two different time periods, 5-8 churches have joined together for joint services where we worshipped together, and the pastors rotated preaching.

Several pastors participate in offering the invocation at our local city council meetings. Our local officials have always been very supportive of our faith community and recognize the importance of faith in Los Banos.

The first Thursday of May is the National Day of Prayer. The faith community in Los Banos is blessed to be able to celebrate this day in our City Council Chambers, where several pastors join together to pray for our nation, state and local governments, plus the churches and families of Los Banos, as well as our schools and children. Pastors take turns praying over different topics, and we rotate speaking each year.

It always amazes me that will all of our differences in worship styles, when we come together at events like this, there is a beauty that pleases Almighty God. He tells us this in Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live

together in unity."

During Covid we saw a few churches close down, and some have struggled to recover from that difficult season. Since then we have seen a few churches being planted in our city, and the faith community seems to be growing once again. We are seeing more youth groups starting as well as young adult groups. This summer, there will be a few Vacation Bible School programs available for children during the summer break from school.

Our churches are very compassionate and giving whenever there is a need in Los Banos. Many serve meals to the homeless encampment, and a few have food pantries and do weekly food distributions.

Churches remain an integral part of life in Los Banos as they have from the beginning of our city. We all work very hard to remain relevant and involved in our community.

Our purpose will remain to share the love of God and the salvation that is found in Jesus to all who will believe. I encourage everyone to try out one of the many churches in the city of Los Banos and experience God for yourself.

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Welcome to the Los Banos Unified School District



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB / glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

Los Banos Unified School District Facilities Director Sherry Munday, center right, and the Transitional Kindergarten Center Principal Laura Brady, center left, together cut the ribbon on May 21 officially opening the school.

By Lena Magee

The Los Banos Unified School District (LBUSD) is made up of 16 public schools, including nine elementary schools, two junior high schools and two high schools. In addition to these are an independent study campus, an opportunity school, a continuation high school, several preschools and a transitional kindergarten (TK) center.

The Early Education Center, located at 1851 East B St., houses the TK Center and several preschool classrooms. The center recently updated its existing facility with a brand-new transitional kindergarten classroom and four new preschool classrooms. There are also preschools located at Westside Union, Henry Miller, RM Miano and Mercy Springs Elementary.

Ranging from the historic Volta Elementary, located outside of Los Banos to the northwest, to R.M. Miano at

the heart of the city, parents have their choice of nine elementary schools within the district. Other elementary schools include Charleston, Grasslands, Henry Miller, Lorena Falasco, Los Banos, Mercey Springs and Westside Union Elementary.

Volta Elementary has existed since 1959, surrounded by agricultural land and a short hop from the Volta Wildlife Area. The school recently underwent renovations and modernization efforts and is now home to an entirely new administrative building, updated facilities and a newly paved parking lot.

Grasslands Elementary is one of the newest schools in Los Banos, opened in 2020. In 2025, State Superintendent Tony Thurmond honored Grasslands Elementary as a 2025-26 Distinguished School, which awarded the school's growth in academics, academic excellence and positive school climate.

For students in TK to eighth grade, the district's

Learning Educational Activities Program (LEAP) includes before-school, after-school, summer and intersession programs. Before and after school programs offer nutritional breakfasts and snacks, respectively, homework assistance and tutoring, and a variety of enrichment activities. Summer and intersession programs include educational field trips, arts and crafts and interactive games.

LEAP is not available at every school. Check the school district's website to see which programs are available.

Los Banos has four secondary schools: Los Banos Junior High, Creekside Junior High, Los Banos High, and Pacheco High School. Los Banos High School has been open since 1964, with a campus of 110 classrooms and a comprehensive administrative team. Pacheco High School opened in 2010, and in 2025 was ranked first among high schools in Merced County by U.S. News & World Report.

In addition to these schools, the district also has an op-

portunity school with San Luis High, an independent study campus in Crossroads, and a continuation high school with Los Banos Valley Community School.

Crossroads offers classes for students from seventh to 12th grade, both in person and virtual. The school provides an alternative route for students to complete requirements for junior high and a high school diploma.

San Luis High and Valley Community School provide an environment for students to complete credits necessary for high school graduation and opportunities outside the classroom to explore different colleges and career paths.

For more information about a school within the district, you can visit the LBUSD website at losbanosusd.org, or to contact the district directly, you can call 209-826-3801 or visit their office. The office is located at 1717 S. Eleventh St., and open seven days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed for lunch between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.



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Make a difference today.

Support the Senior Brown Bag Program at www.mmcfb.org.

Look no further than your own backyard for a wildlife experience

By Daniela Macias

You don't have to travel far for an exciting wildlife experience. In Los Banos, you can catch a glimpse of critters in their natural habitat.

The San Luis National Wildlife Refuge has been protecting the nature of Los Banos since 1967. It was established under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act and has over 26,800 acres for visitors to explore.

The refuge comprises six intertwining sections: San Luis, East Bear Creek, West Bear Creek, Freitas, Blue Goose and Kesterson.

The eastern portion of the refuge is split into two sections due to the San Joaquin River flowing through the land.

The refuge is home to an assortment of unique species, such as the San Joaquin kit fox, longhorned fairy shrimp, and the California tiger salamander. Along with these creatures, you can spot different species of birds, mammals, fish, insects and amphibians.

If you're lucky, you may have a tule elk sighting. Tule elk are a subspecies of elk that is native to California. This subspecies of elk was on the brink of extinction in the 1800s due to hunting and displacement by cattle.

"The refuge has played a key role in the recovery of tule elk, a non-migratory elk subspecies found only in California. Prior to the mid-1800s, an estimated 500,000 tule elk lived in California.

"Due to over-hunting and loss of natural habitat, they were nearly driven to extinction by the turn of the 20th century—by some accounts, the population was reduced to as few as 20 to 30 individuals," said Wildlife Refuge Manager Jack Sparks.

The species was thought to be extinct, but they were preserved by multiple conservation groups, including Los Banos' own Henry Miller.

According to the National Park Service, Henry Miller made an effort to save a group of tule elk discovered on his ranch in 1874. The tule elk can be spotted on the tule elk auto tour route.

The route spans 5 miles and is open year-round. During the tour, visitors are guided around an 800-acre enclosure. A wildlife viewing platform allows people to observe this species in their native grassland habitat.

The refuge is home to many species of birds and waterfowl. "The refuge is a major wintering ground and migratory stop-over point for large concentrations of waterfowl, shorebirds and other waterbirds. More than 25 species of shorebirds have



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/gleib@TheWestsideExpress.com

Many types of wildlife can be seen in and around Los Banos.

been documented at the refuge," Sparks said.

You can spot many different species of ducks and geese roaming around, including green-winged teal, mallard, gadwall, northern shoveler, cinnamon teal, northern pintail, greater white-fronted geese, snow geese, Ross's geese, and Aleutian cackling geese.

If you're interested in taking a leisurely stroll throughout the refuge, they offer eight nature trails open to foot traffic only. The trails vary in mileage and difficulty, but most of the trails are leashed dog and child-friendly.

The Kesterson trail is the only trail not marked as child-friendly because it is labeled as moderately difficult and 25.07 miles long.

The refuge offers hunting opportunities for sportspeople throughout the waterfowl hunting season. Reservations are not required,

but booking a reservation in advance can guarantee a spot during the busiest days of the season.

Each hunter will need to obtain a current California hunting license, California duck stamp validation, federal duck stamp, harvest information program validation and a type A pass for hunting at a California state-operated hunting area.

If you plan to hunt pheasant or snipe, you will need upland game bird validation. "Waterfowl generally remain until late March before beginning their journey back north to breeding areas; however, some mallard, gadwall and cinnamon teal remain in the area to nest and raise young.

"Shorebirds, including species of sandpipers and plovers, can be found in the tens of thousands from autumn through spring," Sparks said.

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Longtime volunteer highlights wide range of service opportunities in LB

By Kristina Solomita

From churches and schools to service clubs, youth programs and city events, Los Banos relies heavily on volunteers to keep essential community services running.

Few people understand that better than Sandy Lemas, who has spent more than four decades involved in local volunteer work and community organizations.

Lemas moved to Los Banos in 1983 and immediately became immersed in the city's civic life through her work with Merced County's Worknet program.

"My employment at Worknet involved getting involved with the Los Banos Chamber of Commerce since I was in the employment and training fields. I got acquainted with all of the local businesses and community-based organizations," she said.

That early exposure led her to a lifetime of service. "Before long, I was recruited . . . to join Soroptimist International in 1986 and am still an active member."

Her volunteer work expanded quickly. She served on the chamber board, joined Relay for Life, became involved with Habitat for Humanity, and helped launch the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program locally.

"The staff would see a need and work on finding solutions," she said. "Since so many of our Worknet customers were low-income or on unemployment, staff started doing the VITA program after hours to help them get their taxes done at no cost."

After retiring in 2011, Lemas only increased her involvement. "I continued doing even more volunteer services in the community since I was now a woman of leisure, ha ha," she said.

She continued VITA through the Salvation Army, where the program now assists 350 to 400 residents annually.

Her work there also connected her to additional programs, including homeless services, a Dress for Success clothing closet, a HOPE referral center and youth programs.

According to Lemas, nearly every corner of Los Banos has opportunities for volunteers. "All schools and churches are in need of volunteers. Animal Shelter.

"Parks and Recreation always are in need of volunteers in their sports programs as coaches, etc., and helping out with community events during special holidays," she said.

She also listed the Police Activities League (PAL), VITA, and numerous service clubs, including Soroptimist, Rotary,



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/gleib@TheWestSideExpress.com

Each year many community members volunteer to prepare the rigatoni dinner at the Los Banos D.E.S. Hall as part of a fundraiser for the Central Valley Honor Flight whereby local veterans are flown to Washington D.C.

Kiwanis, Lions, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion. Local government offices also rely on volunteers, including the Merced County Fairgrounds.

Churches, in particular, play a major role in meeting immediate needs. "Local churches provide so many immediate need type services . . . There is unlimited need and limited resources," Lemas said.

Volunteer needs shift throughout the year. "Relay for Life was just held . . . I do Kids Camp, which is fun for the kids, and rely on volunteers to help," she said.

The VITA program runs from January through April, and many organizations host annual events that require significant volunteer support.

Some roles require training or background checks, especially those involving youth. "Most churches require a background check if you are working with

children . . . All schools require background checks, depending on what you are doing as well."

VITA volunteers must complete an IRS-based certification. But Lemas emphasized that there are opportunities for everyone. "Any group I have worked with can find suitable volunteer opportunities for everyone."

Lemas said volunteers are essential to the functioning of many local programs. "Many organizations and clubs would not be able to provide all of the services and opportunities without volunteers. Volunteers save the taxpayers so much money by helping out with services, especially for the youth."

Churches, she added, often help residents bridge the gap before government services can be processed. "So many churches help residents with their immediate needs and help them get through a difficult time," Lemas said.

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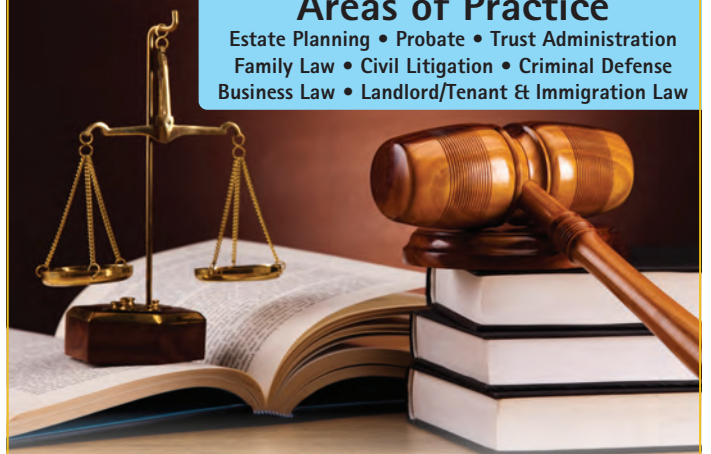
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More than a fair: A celebration of Los Banos

By Daniela Macias

The May Day Spring Fair is woven into Los Banos history, with generations of Merced County residents growing up attending the fair as a family tradition.

The annual event's origins go back more than 135 years and began as a simple community barbecue hosted by Henry Miller, widely known as the "Cattle King of California." Throughout the 135-year evolution of the beloved tradition, it has remained true to its roots.

The barbecue has expanded into a large-scale event with a Queen and Little Princess competition, craft and history exhibits, carnival rides, food vendors and plenty of entertainment. An event that centers around the roots of this agricultural community is the livestock auction. Even if you're not showing or bidding on livestock, the presence of the auction affects the entire community.

The hands-on support and experience 4-H and FFA youth receive through the Little Hands exhibit and The Heritage Foundation prepares them for a future of feeding the Los Banos community.

The Heritage Foundation was founded in 2011 by Pat Gallichio, Fair Director of 20 years. Since its founding, the foundation has raised 2.6 million for youth scholarship awards and raised money to improve the youth livestock portion of the fairgrounds.

The support from local businesses and community members plays a vital role in the auction, with many buyers returning each year to support the next generation of agriculture in the community. "The total for all auctions and bump-ups was over 1.2 million," said Cinnamon Howell, Spring Fair Manager.

The parade is a tradition at the core of the festivities. The highly anticipated event drew crowds of up to 60,000 in the 50s and 60s. Today, the fair continues to draw large crowds and community participation in the parade.

*A tradition
at the core of
festivities*



PHOTO BY GENE LEBER, gileb@TheWestSideExpress.com

The Morning Star Company representative and The Merced County Spring Fair 2026 Grand Marshal, Hans Younce, standing center, successful bids on the original fair painting during the livestock auction.

A Grand Marshal is chosen to lead the parade every year. This is an honor, as each grand marshal has made a significant impact on the Los Banos community. Hans Younce was the latest grand marshal appointed and has been a longtime supporter of the fair.

His biggest role during the fair as a Morning Star Representative is supporting the work of 4-H and FFA youth. In preparation for the fair, kids send him letters, encouraging him to watch them show their animals on auction day.

The most recent fair week came with a special collaboration between Merced County and Valley Children's Madera. The sponsorship from Valley Children's granted free admission to children 12 years and younger, which allowed more participation from families.

Lynce Ashbeck, Valley Children's chief community impact officer, on the partnership stated: "Valley Children's is honored to collaborate with Merced County to expand access to the fair, giving local families more opportunities to come together, celebrate Merced County and enjoy healthy outdoor activities."

More than a century after Henry Miller brought Los Banosans together, the May Day Spring Fair continues to evolve to meet the needs of the current community.

Throughout all the changes, the fairgrounds remain a place that holds many memories of the past. As families and friends gather each year to create new memories, the fair stands as a demonstration of the hard work that was put into building this community.



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From an Ag point of view

By Kirsten Areias

I don't imagine most of you go in depth to delve into agricultural information and statistics. You might not have even noticed that the U.S. has a new Food Pyramid; as long as that food is in the fridge and ends up on your table all is good, right? Maybe not, the food universe is changing.

We have a new Food Pyramid, and a close look at it tells you that agriculture and what it produces are the right stuff.

Even though those boxes in our pantry and processed food and drinks in our fridge don't resemble what the original farm commodity looked like, they have become part of our eating habits. The Secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert Kennedy and USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins would like us to increase our consumption of food that looks like the original... fruit – not fruit roll-ups, meat – not impossible burgers, cow's milk – not the substitutes, etc.

"These Guidelines return us to the basics," Secretary Kennedy said. "American households must prioritize whole, nutrient-dense foods — protein, dairy, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats and whole grains — and dramatically reduce highly processed foods. This is how we Make America Healthy Again."

If you look at the image from the USDA, you will find much of what we should be eating can be found in Merced County... and lots of it!

I would like to thank Merced County Farm Bureau for compiling the Agriculture Statistics used in my article.

The following information is from the Merced County Farm Bureau Report on Agriculture for 2024: Agriculture commodities in our county grossed \$4,223,547,000 in 2024! Here is the rundown of the Agricultural commodities in Merced County that are important to the new Food Pyramid and a few interesting facts:

#1 Commodity: Dairy

Dairy had another big year, with an overall gross value of \$1,250,286,000. What is surprising about this value is that the state experienced a surge in HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza) commonly known as Bird Flu, but it affects more than birds.

It began in the latter part of the year in the herds, greatly affecting milk production, yet Merced County only experienced a 2% decrease in milk. HPAI con-



Employees at Ingomar Packing Company work on the line that washes the tomatoes.

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/gleib@TheWestEdExpress.com

tinued to spread in California dairy herds through the rest of 2025.

California is the #1 Dairy State, and Merced County is the #2 dairy-producing county in the U.S. Cows produce, on average, about nine gallons of milk per day, or about 3,000 gallons per year.

They are great recyclers, eating food waste that would otherwise end up in landfills. This includes almond hulls, cottonseed, bakery waste, orange peels, vegetable waste, etc.

We hear a lot about the methane that cows produce, but fear not, California dairy families are handling that too, with the use of methane digesters to capture that gas and turn it into biogas.

If you look at the Pyramid, you will see prominently positioned at the top, (whole) milk, butter, yogurt and cheese. Dairy plays a big role in health, and Merced County plays a big role in the production of all of those.

Cattle & Calves

This category brought in an impressive \$423,895,000 in 2024. I don't have the stats for 2025, but I'm sure it is significantly higher!

The Pyramid emphasizes real meat, and again features that prominently in both the form of steak and hamburger. Yes, it is expensive, especially right now! So you ask, why is it so expensive? Supply and demand is the answer, and NWS (New World Screwworm) has affected the supply.

NWS has stopped the importation of cattle from Mexico as of May, 2025. We annually import more than a million head of cattle from Mexico, but that has stopped.

New World Screwworms are fly larvae that burrow into a wound. The maggots hatch and eat the flesh and blood of their cattle host with their tiny mouth hooks. The infection from the NWS can kill an adult

cow within 1-2 weeks, so you can see why that border is closed.

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are not on the New Pyramid, but they should be! Merced County's production value of Sweet Potatoes is \$295,881,000, a 12% increase from 2023.

California sweet potatoes contain manganese, which is a mineral that helps support healthy blood sugar levels, which can help stabilize the appetite for hours.

Approximately 22,000 acres of California farmland are planted to sweet potatoes, and around 80% of that acreage is in Merced, Fresno and Stanislaus Counties. The secret is in the soil; it needs to be sandy.

Chickens

The United States consumes 8 billion chickens a year and around 250 eggs per person. Chicken manure is also used as soil fertilizer and contains nutrients such as Calcium, Magnesium, Sulfur, Copper, Zinc, Chlorine, Boron, Iron

and Molybdenum. You can't miss that big chicken on the top of the New Food Pyramid, or the egg!

Tomatoes

Anyone who lives in Los Banos, and Merced County for that matter, knows that we grow A LOT of tomatoes. They are everywhere, in fields, in trucks, in processing plants, on trains going to destinations all over the country and world! We even have an annual Los Banos Tomato Festival to bring the community together to celebrate everything tomato. Their value in 2024 was \$157,505,000.

Eggs

In Merced County, eggs brought in \$113,832,000 in 2024. That's a lot of eggs! Eggs are so healthy they are called "nature's multivitamin" containing B12, B2, Vitamin A, Vitamin B5 and Selenium. They also contain special antioxidants and brain nutrients that many are deficient in, and we can all agree that anything that helps our brain is a good thing!

These are just the highlights. Merced County grows so much more: almonds, corn, cotton, hay, silage, wheat, fruits, etc. California is called the Breadbasket of the World, (though that 'breadbasket' would contain a lot more than bread!) There is no other agricultural place like Merced County, and Los Banos is a big part of that.

I invite you to take a drive down any of our country roads and you will see many of God's wonders growing in that rich Los Banos soil, with a historical water delivery system that is a part of our agricultural history and growth.

Along that drive you will find the work of devoted farm families that have, for generation after generation, dedicated their lives to feeding the world.

Even though the U.S. has only 4% of the earth's population, the other 96% depend heavily on the U.S. to feed and fuel much of the world. U.S. farmers face a plethora of ups and downs, but they 'plow' through them all, the good, the bad and the ugly; the profit and the loss to do what they do, farm and feed all of us.



PHOTO: THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE (IMAGE FROM THE USDA WEBSITE)

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Since 1984, when Richard L. Young founded Young's Air Conditioning, and continuing in 2003 when son's Richard and Charles took over the family business, Young's Air Conditioning earned a reputation as the area's leading provider of energy efficient heating and cooling services. For over a century, the Young family has actively participated in and contributed to numerous community organizations and charities. Their dedication to the community extends to the services they perform, which are carried out with a high standard of work ethics, professional performance, cost effectiveness and exceptional customer service.

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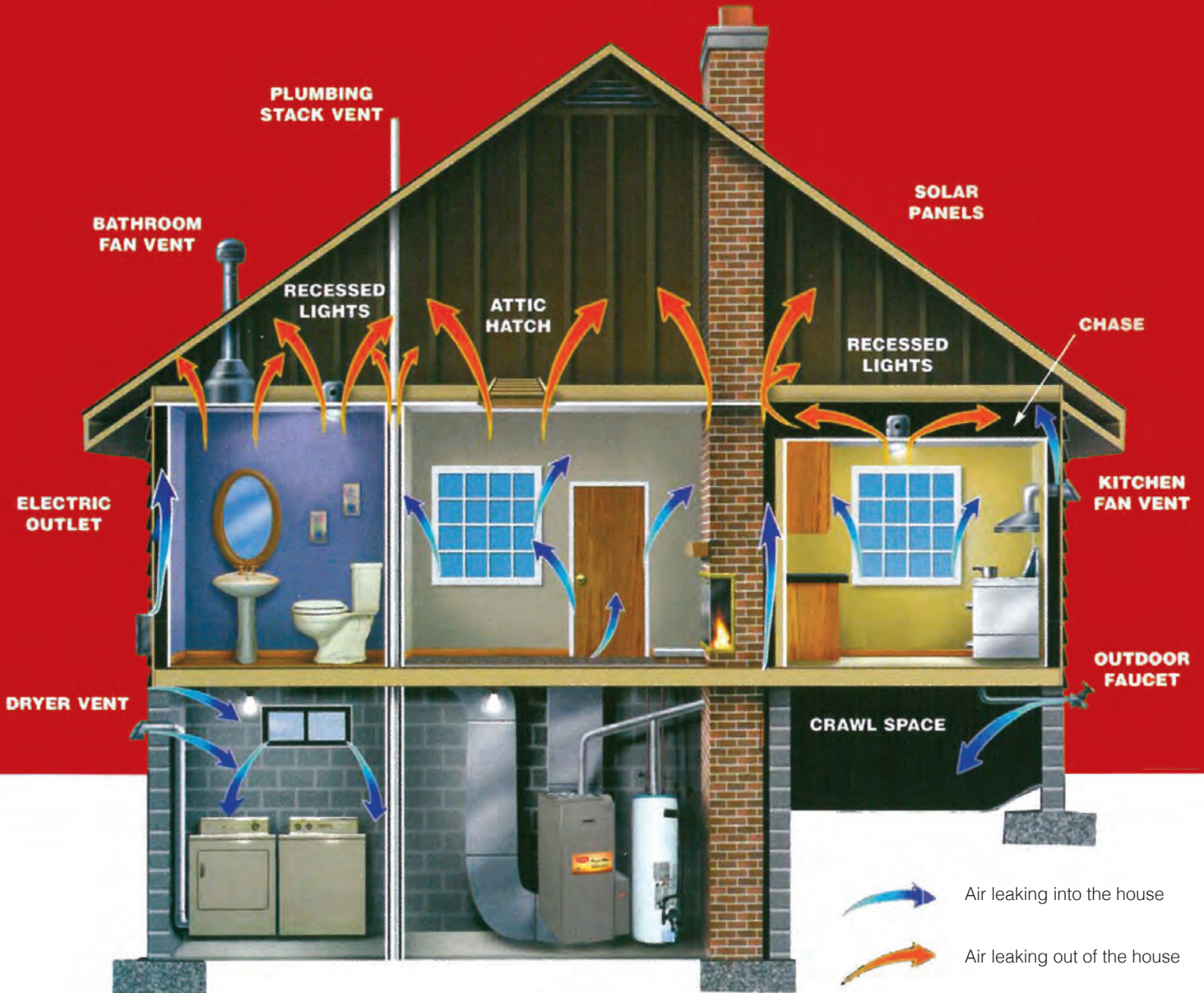
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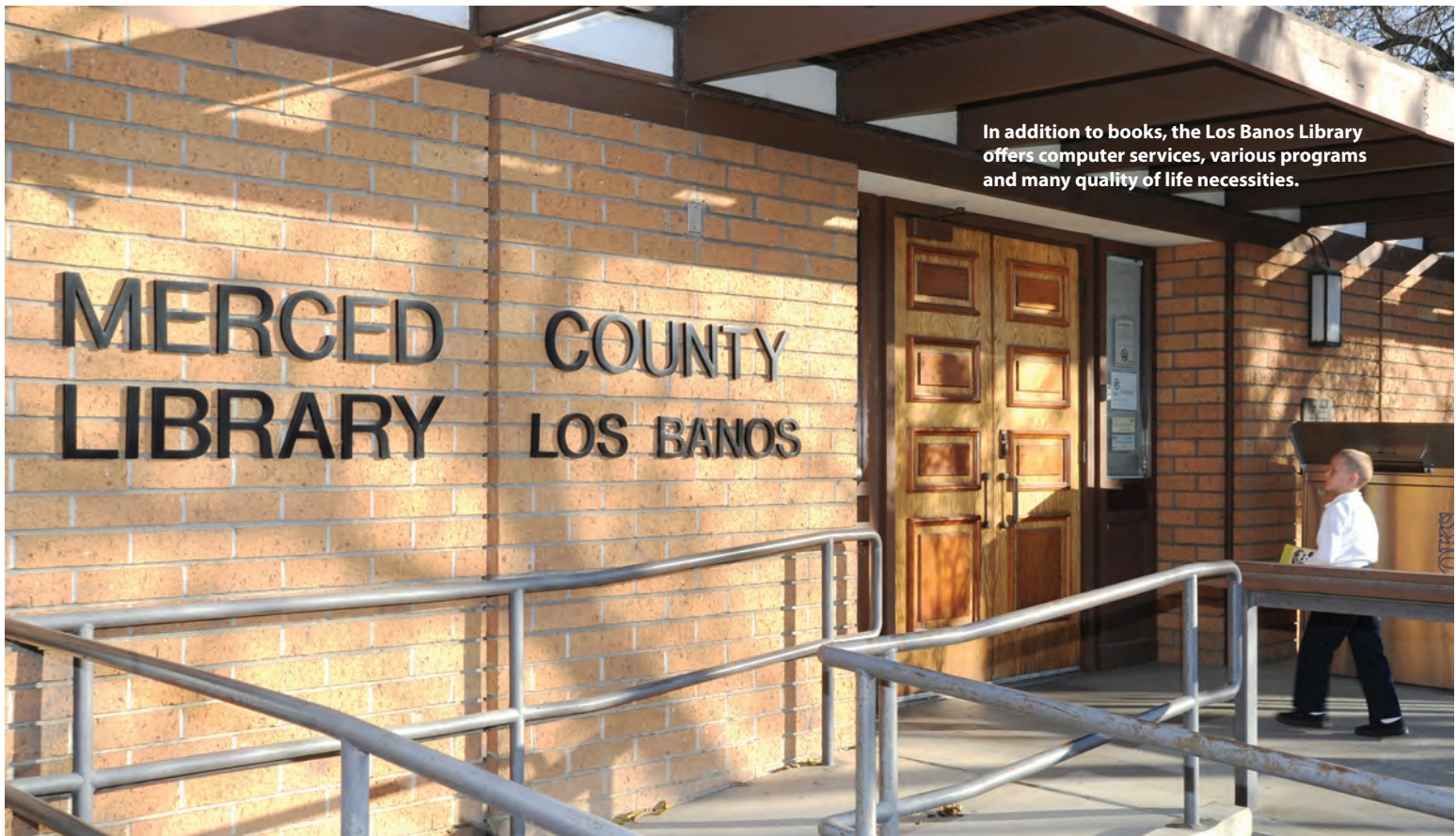
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In addition to books, the Los Banos Library offers computer services, various programs and many quality of life necessities.

PHOTOS BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.coms

Los Banos Library offers a welcoming place to learn, connect and explore

By Amal Marouf

The Los Banos Library is one of the city's most valuable community spaces, offering residents much more than books. From storytimes and student resources to public computers, Wi-Fi, digital materials and family programs, the library helps connect people to information, education and each other.

The library has been part of the Los Banos community for more than a century. It was established in 1910, making it the first

More than books, the library brings the community together.

branch library in Merced County. In its early years, the library operated out of the Miller and Lux building with a collection of only 278 books.

The first dedicated library building was constructed in 1912, and in 1965, the library moved into its current building. More than 100 years later, the library continues to serve residents of all ages and backgrounds.

According to County Librarian Amy Taylor and librarian Jessica Lugo, the library remains an important community resource because it gives residents free access to books, eBooks,

audiobooks, public computers, Wi-Fi, printing and online resources. The library also offers programs and events for children, teens, adults and older adults.

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CASA volunteers are trained community members who speak up for a child's best interests and help ensure their voice is heard in court. While many things in a foster child's life may change, their CASA Advocate remains a steady, supportive presence—and that Advocate is a volunteer.



Cynthia, Advocate
 I do it for the kids!



Helena, Advocate
 I would highly encourage people to become a CASA volunteer.



Tedi, Advocate
 I became the person I needed as a child. You can be that person too.



What is a CASA?



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Taylor and Lugo described it as “a place to learn, access technology and connect with community resources.”

One thing that makes the Los Banos Library special is the community it serves. Los Banos is a diverse city with a large bilingual population, and the library works to make everyone feel welcome.

“It’s a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can learn and connect with each other,” Taylor and Lugo said. Bilingual staff is available to help Spanish-speaking patrons, and the library also offers Spanish Bilingual Storytime every Friday at 10:30 a.m.

The library also receives strong support from the Friends of the Los Banos Library. The group raises funding for library programs and improvements, including puppet and magic shows for families, carpeting, shelving, furniture, and the garden and benches near the entrance. These additions help make the library not only useful but also inviting for residents and visitors.

For families with young children, the library offers several weekly programs.

Sensory play for children ages 0 to 2 is held on Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. Tiny Tales Storytime is offered on Thursdays at 10:30 a.m. and includes picture books, fingerplays and music for children ages 3 to 6 and their caregivers.

These programs give children a fun introduction to reading while also giving parents and caregivers a place to meet others in the community.

Teens also have programs designed for them. Tuesday afternoons are dedicated to Teen Tuesdays, which include different crafts and activities. Adults can enjoy adult coloring every Tuesday at 10:30 a.m., while older adults can participate in crafts, puzzles, workshops and technology assistance. These programs show that the library is not only for one age group. It is a place for everyone.

One of the most popular programs at the Los Banos Library is Summer

Reading. This year’s theme is “Plant a Seed, Read,” and the program runs from June 6 through Aug. 5. Children, teens and adults can participate by tracking their reading and earning prizes. Taylor and Lugo said Summer Reading is popular because “it gives children, teens and adults a fun reason to read throughout the summer.”

The library is also an important resource for students. Students can use books, computers, Wi-Fi, printing services and research materials.

The library offers Homework Help Online, which provides on-demand tutoring and homework support for kindergarten through 12th grade from 1 to 10 p.m. in English and Spanish. Students can also use online databases

that provide access to peer-reviewed journals, magazines, books and newspaper publications.

Another helpful resource is the Driver Education Program, which offers practice tests for the California driver examination. These resources are free with a library card.

Technology access is another important service. The library provides public computers, Wi-Fi and printing. Printing from a public computer or Wi-Fi costs 20 cents per page, and the self-service photocopier costs 15 cents per copy.

Staff members are available to help patrons with basic technology questions, online resources and digital library services.

Some residents may not know that the library offers many services beyond physical books. Patrons can borrow eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines through the Libby app. They can also stream movies and documentaries through Kanopy.

The library also offers California

State Library Parks Passes, which provide free vehicle entry to participating California State Parks. These services make the library helpful for learning, entertainment and family outings.

For people moving to Los Banos, the library can be a helpful first stop. New residents can sign up for a library card, use computers and Wi-Fi, attend programs and learn more about community resources. It is a place where people can ask questions, get help and begin feeling connected

to the city.

The library is also continuing to grow with the community. Recently, it added a new television and a Nintendo Switch, allowing the library

The library helps residents learn, connect, and feel welcome.

to host movie nights and gaming programs. These new activities give families, teens and community members more ways to gather and enjoy the library.

Taylor and Lugo said they wish more residents knew that “the library is for everyone.” They said they often hear from patrons who appreciate being able to borrow books they might not otherwise be able to afford.

New books can be expensive, but the library gives people access to them at no cost. “It’s always rewarding to see someone leave with a book they were excited to read and did not think they would be able to get,” they said.

For anyone new to Los Banos, the message from the library is simple: everyone is welcome. “The library is a place to learn and explore,” Taylor and Lugo said. With books, internet access, educational programs, technology help and friendly staff, the Los Banos Library remains a valuable part of community life. It is a place to learn, explore, connect and feel at home.

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Milliken Museum represents Los Banos' rich history

From the outskirts of new suburbs, individuals might be tempted to believe that Los Banos has a shallow history. Located just at the southeast corner of Pacheco Park is the rebuttal 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 organization.

The museum, with an area of 3,500 square feet, is a single-story, C-shaped building with its opening to the west. The north end of the building has a mural, painted by local artist Anne Whitehurst, that faces Pacheco Boulevard and depicts many scenes from Los Banos' past.

The museum has two entrances within the C-shape—east and north—with an opening to the adjoined Scout Building to the south.

From the second people enter the museum, they'll see artifacts, photos and even fossils lining the walls and in the middle of the rooms.

Visitors are likely to meet Daniel Cervantes, Sally Arambel, Tim McNally, Mike Keys, Javier Powell or even Museum Director Dan Nelson, who will guide them to whatever they're curious about and even give them a tour.

Starting from the north entrance, there are fossils and a wide selection of Yokut artifacts. They were the Native American group that inhabited this part of the valley before the Spaniards came in.

As visitors continue east and then southeast, visitors will be thrust into the first stages of settlers in the land.

In just a few short steps, they're into the storied Henry Miller era. On display, they'll 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 the artifacts



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

The Los Banos' Milliken Museum curator, Dan Nelson, oversees all of the historical information at the museum.

related 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, the May Day Spring Fair being one of them.

Continuing past Miller, people will see how the city—then a town—evolved. They'll also see how the local chamber of commerce, led by James McClelland, created State Route 152 and how Andrew Firebaugh built the first Pacheco Pass road.

The construction of the San Luis Dam boomed the town in the '60s. Photos of its construction and commemoration by former President John F. Kennedy can be found on the walls. A wooden pallet holds empty bottles from the Los Banos Soda Works.

A stand holds the original Los Banos Marching Band uniforms. Uniforms and medals of the Los Banos servicepeople decorate one corner. With the docents' great storytelling, even small artifacts have their share of the limelight.

By the time they reach the end of the current displays, visitors can't

help but feel like there is so much more to discover—and there is.

Down the southeast hallway and past the old typewriters and boat models, they'll find the archive room. This room is the answer to every question visitors may have.

With curator supervision, they'll have access to boxes of information, posters, newspapers, maps and artifacts to search through carefully.

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

For those interested in books, the museum has helped create 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 to 4 p.m. every day except Mondays. To contact the museum, call 209-826-5505 or email: millikenmuseum@att.net.

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Play, explore, connect: New projects bring fresh energy to Los Banos Parks

By Braulio Gonzalez

As the school year ends and summer comes right around the corner, many kids and families will have plenty of vacation time to spend. In the City of Los Banos, a great option for the community is the city's parks and Los Banos' very own Ag Sports Complex.

Around the city's parks, several events will be held for everyone to enjoy. In June, families can enjoy Movies in the Park on Jun. 13 at the Noah Jones Ballpark. On the Fourth of July, the Downtown Association will host a Fourth of July Event at Henry Miller Plaza. On Aug. 4, the Los Banos Police will host their National Night Out event at Henry Miller Plaza.

Aside from all the exciting events happening this summer, the community of Los Banos can look forward to park developments, namely at the Ag Sports Complex.

Throughout the past year, Los Banos' Parks and Recreation have been working on bringing pickleball to the sports complex. It started in February of 2025 when Parks and Recreation hosted a groundbreaking ceremony to jump-start construction.

Parks and Recreation has worked on adding nine pickleball courts to the sports complex. Alongside the pickleball courts, renovations have been made to the ballfields, and a playground replacement is underway. The pickleball courts will soon be ready for play, aiming for a spring or summer opening.

In addition to the improvements coming to the Ag Sports Complex, the Los Banos Parks and Recreation team – in collaboration with the Los Banos Public Works Streets Division and San Joaquin River Exchange Water Authority – has completed work on the Canal Trail Overlay Project.

This project brings a refreshing look to the Canal Trail with fresh pavement laid all throughout the trail. The Parks and Recreation team hopes that with this renovation, everyone can enjoy runs, walks or rides through this trail. Alongside fresh pavement, Parks and Recreation is working to add solar lighting to the Canal Trail.

That is not all the Los Banos community can look forward to this summer. This past May, community members came together for a volunteer day that took place at College Greens



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB, glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

Members of the of the community spent a Saturday morning in May volunteering to paint the basketball courts at College Greens Park in Los Banos

Park. Volunteers focused on painting the basketball court, giving it a bright, new look just in time for summer. This follows after Parks and Recreation staff teamed up with Sutter Health to repaint the basketball court at Verona Park on Apr. 17.

To view more upcoming projects, Parks and Recreation has set up a MapMe page where users can look around

the map of the city and see exactly where past, present and future projects will take place.

Los Banos' Parks and Recreation team has been hard at work to bring recreational opportunities to the community. Whether playing at a park, enjoying the trail or playing sports, many of these recreational projects can be enjoyed by the community this summer.

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Connecting community, supporting business: The Chamber's lasting impact

By Michelle Sandoval
LOS BANOS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce has been serving the community for over 100 years. Founded in 1923, the Chamber has supported local businesses and the community for over a century. It was officially incorporated in California in 1981.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce has since been dedicated to strengthening local businesses while building a stronger, more connected community. With the motto “Working for Business — Believing in Los Banos,” the Chamber proudly supports economic growth, community involvement and local partnerships throughout the city.

Throughout the year, the Chamber organizes and hosts most of the Los Banos’ most recognized free to the community events, including the Spring and Fall Street Fairs, the Tomato Festival, Annual Christmas Parade, community mixers, ribbon cuttings, Father’s Day Car Shows and other family-friendly celebrations that bring thousands of residents and visitors to Los Banos.

These events help showcase local businesses, encourage shopping local and create opportunities for community connection and tourism.

Chamber events help build relationships within the community. Families gather, organizations collaborate and residents become more connected to the place they live.

City Officials, Police and Fire personnel, school staff, large business leaders,



PHOTO BY GENE LIEBY/gleby@TheWestsideExpress.com

local mom-and-pop owners, lifelong residents and newcomers all join Chamber events, creating relationships so that everyone in Los Banos, regardless of position, status or length of residency, treats each other like lifelong friends when seen around town.

Knowing the Chamber brings together so many diverse people gives the Chamber a sense of pride and fuels the desire to continue these efforts.

Community events create traditions, celebrate local culture and encourage volunteerism and civic involvement.

Chamber-hosted events also help attract tourism and outside visitors, which generates additional revenue for local hotels, restaurants, shops and service businesses. A strong event calendar can increase visibility for a city and showcase what makes the community unique.

Most importantly, Chamber events demonstrate that the

community is active, welcoming and invested in its future. They create positive experiences that help businesses grow while making the city a better place to live, work and visit.

In addition to community events, the Chamber works closely with local businesses by providing networking opportunities, business referrals, marketing support, workshops, promotions and advocacy for the local business community. The Chamber also partners with city departments, organizations and community leaders to help support the continued growth and success of Los Banos.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce remains committed to creating a vibrant community where businesses can thrive, families can enjoy local events and residents can take pride in supporting their hometown.

The Los Banos Chamber of Commerce offers a variety of 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 inquir-

ing 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 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.

Most importantly, joining a Chamber of Commerce means becoming part of something bigger than your own business. It is an investment in the success, growth and future of the local community while building lasting relationships and opportunities along the way.

Another way to join a Chamber is to become a Director. Becoming a Director

also provides valuable networking and leadership opportunities.

Directors work closely with business owners, city officials, community organizations and local leaders, building strong professional relationships and increasing their visibility within the community. It allows individuals to be part of important conversations and decisions that affect local business development and community success.

Serving on a Chamber board also demonstrates a commitment to giving back to the community. Directors help support events, business advocacy, educational opportunities and programs that benefit residents, nonprofits and local entrepreneurs.

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 the office at 932 Sixth St. in Los Banos.



Clubs, Activities, and Events

By Shawn Pintor-Day

Thanks to its location at the agricultural heart of California, Los Banos' yearly calendar is full of festivals celebrating the bounty of the Golden State.

From the Tomato Festival to the Spring County Fair, LB residents never miss the chance to celebrate the food and culture that only the Central Valley can produce.

With a community filled with the clubs and organizations that make the multitude of LB's annual events possible, residents and visitors alike will always have activities to look forward to and friends to celebrate with.

The theme and content of the various local celebrations the Valley is known for depend largely on the season: the fine weather of Spring heralds the return of the beloved County fair and community-wide fundraisers like the Relay for Life, and the blooming orchards mean plenty of almonds. The annual Tomato Festival celebrates all things tomato, leaving attendees in awe over the impressive variety of ketchup flavors.

Once the spring breeze gives way to waves of summer heat, the community organizations of Los Banos set to work on the firework stands that announce the arrival of the Fourth of July.

Each Summer, local organizations like the Knights of Columbus, the LB Touchdown club, the Elk Lodge and many more high school clubs and local vets, vendors and volunteers set up their wooden firework stands, ready to keep the summer tradition alive.

When the Autumn chill creeps over the Sierras and Winter freezes the fields over, Los Banos keeps its hearth warm with the community of winter-themed events.

The bi-annual Maker's Market embraces the Holiday season with its themed "Winter Boutique," and unique cultural events like the Mariachi and Dia de los Muertos Festivals keep the Valley tethered to its Hispanic roots.

Community involvement is a key part of the success and number of events in and around the Valley, and the numerous clubs across the city excel at providing fun and educational experiences for Los Banosans of all ages.

The O'Neill Forebay is one of Central California's most important wildlife ranges and offers visitors the



PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

Cancer survivors and friends walk the courtyard at Creekside Junior High School in Los Banos on May 23 and 24 as part of the Relay for Life Los Banos Event.

chance to connect with the wild side of their community with various fishing and zoological events.

The Catch A Special Thrill, or C.A.S.T., foundation has used the Forebay and its dense population of Striped Bass for multiple fishing events that offer special needs children the chance to learn how to cast their line while keeping the environment clean.

With support from regional irrigation officials like the San Luis Water Authority, the nonprofit has held multiple events across California, yet always returns to the environmentally rich O'Neill Forebay.

The C.A.S.T. foundation is far from the only organization that offers young people the chance to get up close and personal with the flora and fauna of the Valley, and is certainly not the oldest: having celebrated 100 years of being in Central California, the Cub Scouts of Los Banos have been teaching generations of young explorers how to interact with and experience the beauty of nature.

Hiking and survivalism aren't

the only things that Scouts devote their time to, and the youngsters of the LB chapter can often be found working with the American Legion or the Rotary Club to both sponsor and volunteer to help with events like the Veteran's Day Parade, fundraisers for the Scouts and their supporters and the annual Christmas Parade.

The last decade has brought a great deal of development to Los Banos and the surrounding areas, and the steady growth in city planning and building construction can be seen in the new or improved public spaces throughout the County.

The Community of Santa Nella to the end and add the following: From the great outdoors to brand new and refurbished facilities, Los Banos has plenty of destinations for learning and fun, and even more organizations that make these spaces special. Whether it's the local Boys and Girls Club, the Animal Rescue Shelter, or a local nonprofit, the people of the Valley will welcome anyone and everyone to the heart of the Golden State.

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Downtown Los Banos: Bringing our community together

By Maribel Garcia
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LOS BANOS DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION/PBID

The Los Banos Downtown Association is proud to serve our community by creating events, programs and improvements that bring people together while supporting local businesses and preserving the unique character of our downtown district.

Throughout the year, our organization works to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors through community events, beautification efforts, business support, marketing initiatives and public-private partnerships.

As a nonprofit organization and the management entity for the Downtown Property and Business Improvement District (PBID), our mission is to promote a vibrant, welcoming, and economically thriving downtown.

One of our most popular programs is the Certified Farmers Market, where residents can purchase fresh produce, enjoy live entertainment and support local vendors while gathering with family and friends.

Our annual Farm to Table Dinner celebrates the agricultural heritage that has shaped Los Banos for generations while recognizing the hardworking farmers and agricultural leaders who contribute to our community's success.

The Los Banos Downtown Association is also proud to oversee the community's annual 4th of July Celebration. What began as a com-



Melon farmer, Joe Del Bosque, left, explains the various varieties of melons during a Farmers Market at the Henry Miller Plaza in Downtown Los Banos.

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/glieb@TheWestSideExpress.com

munity tradition has grown into one of the largest events of the year, bringing families together to celebrate our nation's independence with entertainment, community activities and a spectacular fireworks show.

Through sponsorships, fundraising efforts and community partnerships, this event continues to unite residents while creating lasting memories for families throughout the region.

In addition to events, we continue to invest in downtown beautification

projects, including decorative lighting, banners, landscaping, wayfinding signage, public art initiatives and community enhancements that help create a welcoming environment

for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

One of the most exciting projects currently underway is the Downtown Monument Sign Program. These

*Together,
we build a
downtown
that reflects
community pride.*

attractive business directory signs will help visitors navigate the downtown district while showcasing the many businesses that make our community unique.

The signs are designed to enhance visibility, encourage exploration, and strengthen the identity of the Downtown PBID District. This investment reflects our commitment to supporting local businesses and creating a more visitor-friendly downtown experience.

We also host seasonal events such as the Wine Stroll, Champagne Stroll, Fall Beer Walk, holiday celebrations, the Veterans Banner Program,

Christmas activities and family-friendly community gatherings that encourage residents to shop local and experience all that downtown has to offer.

None of this would be possible without the support of our volunteers, sponsors, board members, local businesses, farmers, community partners and residents. Together, we continue to build a downtown that reflects the pride, history and spirit of Los Banos.

As we look ahead, the Los Banos Downtown Association remains committed to creating opportunities that strengthen our local economy, celebrate

our community and make downtown Los Banos a place where people gather, connect and create lasting memories.

From agriculture and family traditions to community celebrations and downtown improvements, the future

of Los Banos is bright. We invite everyone to join us at upcoming events, support local businesses and experience the energy and excitement that continues to make downtown Los Banos the heart of our community.



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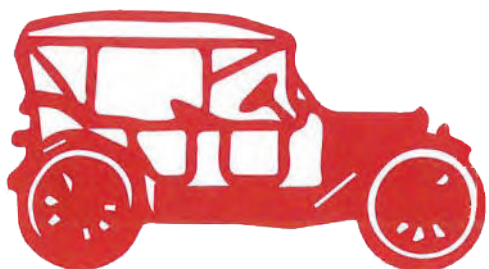
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There's a sport for everyone in Los Banos

By Delton Lowery

A wide array of sports is available in Los Banos, from typical youth sports such as baseball, softball and soccer to swimming and trap shooting. Or, people can get their kids into one of the fastest-growing sports around with the upcoming Police Activities League (PAL) Flag Football season.

It may be a little too late to get on board this year for some sports, such as swimming—the Los Banos Tiger Sharks have already started their season, as tryouts were held in April, but there is still just enough time to get on the gridiron with the Tigers or Wildcats youth football teams.

For the Tigers, registration ends July 27. Those interested can call Jared Rasberry at 209-230-4338 or email lbyouthfootballtigers@gmail.com. Squads in football and cheer go from Mighty Mites, ages 6 to 8, through seniors, ages 13 to 14.

For the Wildcats, registration ends Aug. 1. Please email lbwildcatsfootball@gmail.com to register for Rookies ages 6 to 7 and up through the Varsity team for ages 12 to 14. There will also be a one-day mini-camp mandatory for those on the waitlist on July 14 at Pacheco High School.

Both the Tigers and Wildcats have completed registration for their cheer squads, but there are still plenty of other options for young girls.

Recently sanctioned by the CIF as a sport for high school girls, the PAL is getting in on the action with its Los Banos PAL Flag Football season, with registration typically beginning in August and the season running from August through November.

Boys and girls ages 8 to 13 can register at the PAL office at the Los



Jedidiah Siemiller swims for the Tigers Sharks in Los Banos.

PHOTO BY GENE LIEB/ glieb@TheWestsideExpress.com

Banos Police Department station on 1111 G St.

The Los Banos parks and recreation department offers numerous things to do, from basketball and volleyball to even adult softball at the Ag Sports Complex. Email JoseNorCalSoftball@gmail.com or call Jose at 408-665-2888.

Speaking of the venue on the north end of town at 700 Mercey Springs Road, the parks and recreation department plans to hold its grand opening for nine new pickleball courts in the coming months. The rejuvenated Ag Sports Complex also has two horse-shoe pits, a playground and a dog park available.

The city has already been offering pickleball on most Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. during open gym at the Los Banos Community Center at 645 Seventh St.

Please refer to losbanos.org for an up-to-date recreation calendar, which also includes basketball open gym sessions for ages 16 and up. Or, people

can call 209-827-7034 to find out what other activities are offered, such as Zumba and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) dance.

Turn Up with Sara offers a HIIT dance fitness class for adults for \$30 a month or \$5 to drop in, as well as the Kidz Squad, open to ages 5 and up, for \$25 a month. Information is on Facebook at Turn Up with Sara.

Zumba is offered year-round from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays in the community center fitness room for \$10 a month. There is also a Kalpulli Izkalli dance class open to all ages for \$5 a month on Thursdays from 6 to 7 p.m.

On the horizon is the Youth Fall Outdoor Soccer league for coeds ages 3 to 14, with late registration through July 5. The cost is \$75 for Pee Wee (ages 3 to 4) and \$85 for Youth divisions (ages 5 to 14), with the season on Saturdays from Sept. 12 through Oct. 24.

For 2027, remember to go to losbanos.org/city-government/departments/recreation/ for all city sports.

LOS BANOS DOWNTOWN BUSINESS GUIDE 2026



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The Los Banos Art Scene

By Lena Magee

Located at 1105 5th St., the Ted Falasco Art Center is home to many art events within Los Banos. The center, a converted church, was named after longtime resident and arts supporter Ted Falasco in 2003.

The Los Banos Arts Council, led by President Pauline Young, runs the art center and two additional art studios, the Melvin Soares Art Studio and the Robert Huddleston Art Studio.

The Ted Falasco Art Center serves primarily as a theater venue for adult and children's productions. The theater has hosted the Los Banos Community Theater, Missoula Children's Theater and other independent theatrical productions in the past, running productions of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Shrek the Musical*, *A Christmas Carol*, and more.

The center also hosts Open Mic nights for interested community members.

In addition to theater productions, the center also hosts the annual Pumpkin Patch Quilt Show, a *Día de los Muertos* ofrenda, maker's markets, community and school art showcases, rummage sales, concerts, workshops and a variety of fundraising events. The arts council's Facebook page provides updates on events happening within the center or at either of the art studios.

Many of the events held in the center are by the community, for the community. A number of organizations within Los Banos utilize the space for unique events, like the Los Banos Miliken Museum Society's annual Charles Sawyer Memorial Lecture Series.



An opera production of *Hansel and Gretel* was hosted at the Ted Falasco Arts Center in 2025.

PHOTOS BY GENE LIEB / GIEBO@THEWESTEXPRESS.COM

For those interested in quilting, sewing, or appliqué, the Melvin Soares Art Studio is the place to be. The Los Banos Arts Council Quilt Guild meets every Wednesday at the studio, located at 1143 Fifth St., and all are welcome to join.

The guild offers classes throughout the year for interested members, typically advertised through the Arts Council Facebook page.

If ceramics is more your speed, check out the Robert Huddleston Art Studio at 510 I St.

David Hartley, Los Banos Unified School District art teacher, and his wife Tammy Hartley, teach classes on Thursday nights from 6 to 7:30 p.m., with lab time on Wednesdays 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. for anyone age 12 to 112. Both beginner and advanced classes, with access to materials and tools, are available for purchase. For more information, email madpapermache1of6@gmail.com.

For more information about the center, to check out past and upcoming events, or learn more about the Los Banos Arts Council, you can visit LosBanosArtsCouncil.org or call them at 209-710-7549.



A Mother's Day Mariachi festival with music and dancing was held last year at the Ted Falasco Arts Center.

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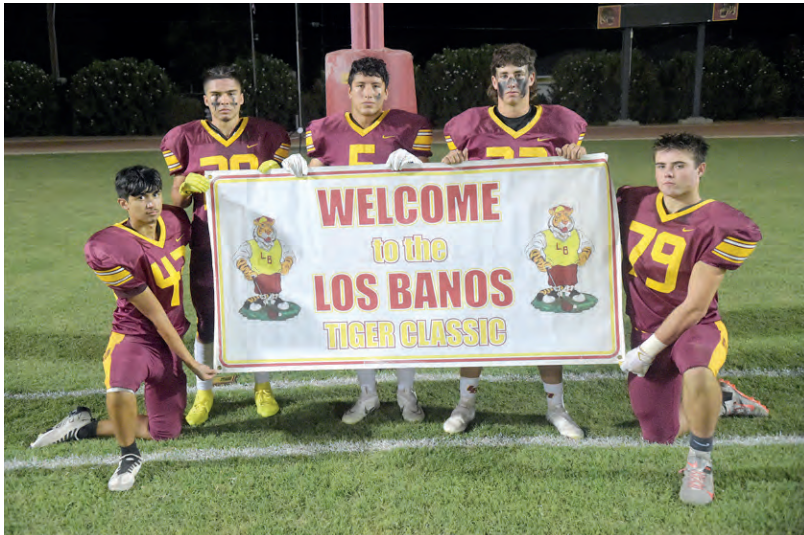
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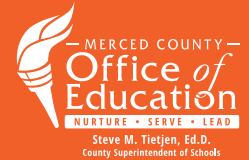
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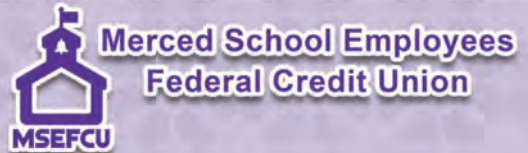
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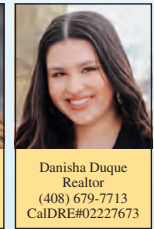
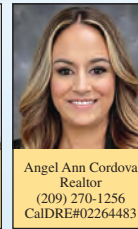
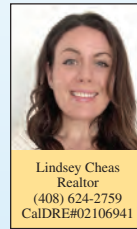
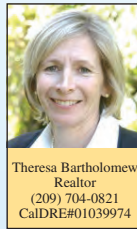
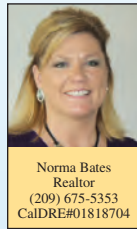
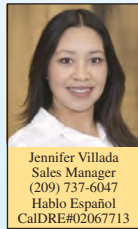
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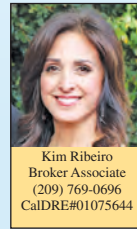
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