

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## MISSING HIKER FOUND DEAD AT BASE OF WATERFALL

By CHRIS COUNTS

AFTER AN extensive search that lasted four days, police reported Friday morning that they found Caroline Meister deceased at the base of a waterfall not far from the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center.

Meister, 30, had lived and worked at Tassajara for



PHOTOS/FACEBOOK, MONTEREY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

After hiker Caroline Meister (with a friend at upper left) went missing March 18, a rescue team was dispatched to conduct a search (left). Friday morning they found her lifeless body at the base of a remote waterfall (above). Monterey County Sheriff Tina Nieto said the hiker's death appears to have been accidental.

two years. She went for a hike March 18, leaving around 10 a.m. with only a few snacks. When she didn't return that evening, the Monterey County Sheriff's Office was contacted. A massive search began Tuesday morning and eventually included more than 100 volunteers from 13 different agencies.

"It was a vast area we had to cover," explained sheriff's deputy Carlos Pena, who was part of the search team. "In this case, the residents at the Zen center were extremely helpful."

### Accidental fall

Acting on information that came from Meister's co-workers, the search focused on what's called the Horse Pasture Trail. A path off that trail leads to the waterfall, and about 10:45 Friday Meister's body was found below it. "Search and rescue personnel rappelled down the steep drop off and located Caroline Meister's body at the base of the waterfall," the sheriff reported.

Monterey County Sheriff Tina Nieto said Meister's death appears to have been an accident, but nothing is certain until an autopsy has been performed.

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## Charges for couple accused of 'unsafe' housing

By KELLY NIX

WHILE COMMUNITIES all over Monterey County grapple with state housing mandates designed to alleviate a critical shortage, county prosecutors this week announced criminal charges against two people accused of operating a massive illegal housing operation in the Prunedale area which lodged nearly 300 people.

Nicolas and Anna Ruvalcaba face three felony counts of tax evasion, one misdemeanor for failing to secure workers compensation insurance, and seven other misdemeanors related to "unpermitted, substandard, and unsafe housing at the property." The illegal housing was discovered by Monterey County authorities in April 2023.

"Approximately 68 unpermitted, substandard, and unsafe dwelling units were erected at the property, which housed approximately 270 tenants," according to prosecutors, who said the housing operation began four years ago.

A separate civil complaint against the couple contends that the illegal housing operation included 22 units built without permits in converted greenhouses and 46 units built illegally in "hillside structures."

### Not arrested

While charges have been filed, the Ruvalcabas have not yet been arrested. However, an arrest warrant has been issued "and the defendants have been given an opportunity to surrender," according to the DA's office. The illegal housing was on a property on the 1100 block of San Miguel Canyon Road of Royal Oaks.

The criminal complaint filed by Monterey County Chief Deputy District Attorney Emily D. Hickok charges the Ruvalcabas with filing false income tax returns in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

"They did willfully and unlawfully fail to report all

income with the intent to unlawfully evade paying a tax," the complaint says.

As for the buildings that were built without permits, prosecutors contend that the couple illegally "allowed tenants to occupy unpermitted dwelling units in greenhouses" and in the hillside structures.

The complaints do not indicate how much rent the Ruvalcabas charged their tenants.

The Ruvalcabas "did unlawfully create, maintain and/or permit the continued existence of any dangerous structure or premises, unsafe condition, unsafe equipment, unsafe structure, any structure that is unfit for human

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## What do Carmel's police officers do all day?

■ Plus, a look back at The Pine Cone's beloved Police Log

By MARY SCHLEY

CARMEL COULD be about to spend more than \$20 million on a new police station, but the police department is much less busy than it has been for decades, according to records it discloses to the public.

The weekly log provided to media and the public by Carmel P.D. indicates there was practically nothing for officers to do during one week in early March, with no crimes or requests for assistance on March 4 or 5, nothing but a report of a found remote control for a dog-bark collar at Scenic and Eighth on March 6, and on March 7, the only thing officers did, according to the log, was sign off on a fix-it ticket that had been issued to a driver by the California Highway Patrol.

March 8 also contained nothing, but March 9 appeared to be busy: A hit-and-run on a parked car was reported near Dolores and Eighth, and the animal control officer made a follow-up visit at Torres and Ninth regarding a barking dog. Wrapping up the week's worth of policework, March 10 saw another hit-and-run, this one somewhere on Lincoln Street.

### 'Why have a police department?'

This week, Police Chief Paul Tomasi said the sparse amount of information doesn't indicate that officers are less busy or that residents and visitors are calling the station any less frequently than in the past.

But he acknowledged how they share information and how much is shared has changed — and said it should change again.

"If there are literally no calls happening, why do we even have a police department?" Tomasi asked rhetorically, saying that he plans to ask officers and dispatchers to show the public what they do — especially considering the department commands a nearly \$5.8 million annual budget and is campaigning for a new or extensively

See **POLICE** page 18A

## Famed primatologist takes in Peninsula animal life



PHOTOS/(LEFT) © FRANS LANTING, WWW.LANTING.COM, (RIGHT) DAVID LAWS

Jane Goodall may have spent much of her life in Tanzania, but last week she was in town for an appearance at Sunset Center. The event, sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Network, whose president, Charles Knowles, is a Carmel resident, was a fundraiser for Goodall's Roots & Shoots program, which advocates for global youth environmental action. On Saturday, just a few days before her 90th birthday, she was honored with a "90-dog salute" on Carmel Beach (Goodall is in front of photo at left). Later, she visited Pt. Lobos (right), where she borrowed a beachgoer's binoculars to check out the local sea otters and sea lions.