

The Carmel Pine Cone

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Post office deemed unsafe after car crashes into it

By MARY SCHLEY

A 74-YEAR-OLD Pebble Beach woman escaped injury when she crashed her Tesla into the front of the Carmel post office during the lunch hour Wednesday, narrowly missing a pedestrian before smashing into a brick planter with enough force to break the windows and damage the



PHOTO/JERMEL LAURIE

A Tesla Model S driven by a Pebble Beach woman turned an entrance to the Carmel Post Office into twisted metal, broken glass and rubble Wednesday

structural integrity of the building.

According to Carmel Police Sgt. Michael Bruno, the woman, Rebecca Rousso, was parked in the handicap stall in the off-street post office parking lot directly across from the front doors on Fifth Avenue when she said the Model S “took off, sped forward about 40 feet out of control, missed a pedestrian in the crosswalk by approximately 1 foot and crashed into the front of the post office,” causing severe damage to the building and the car.

Rousso was not injured, nor did she appear to be impaired, and the pedestrian she nearly hit was shaken but also unharmed, according to Bruno.

Last week, too

The crash occurred a week after an elderly man ran his car into a wall at the Normandy Inn on Ocean Avenue when his foot slipped off the brake and hit the accelerator, totaling the Toyota Avalon he’d been driving and causing minor injuries to his wife, who was in the passenger seat.

But in this case, Bruno said the woman did not say she’d mistaken the gas pedal for the brake. “She was older and had some mobility issues and couldn’t really explain

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Rebuilding slow after major wildfires

Just three applications for permits since 2016 Big Sur wildfire

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE DEVASTATING impact of wildfires on Monterey County’s rural communities was made clear Wednesday when the county planning commission weighed in on a report detailing the damage to homes since 2015 — and the efforts to rebuild them.

The report comes in response to a request made by planning commissioner Martha Diehl, who was trying to identify where “rebuilding hurdles may exist.” Diehl lives in the Palo Colorado area, where 57 homes were lost during the Soberanes Fire in 2016.

The report focuses on what the county has done to make rebuilding easier — and what it can do to improve upon those efforts. Over the past nine years, four major wildfires — the Soberanes Fire and the River, Carmel and Dolan fires in 2020 — destroyed 134 homes and burned down an additional 56 structures throughout the county. Of those 134 homes, 53 of them either have been rebuilt or are in the process of being rebuilt, the report indicates.

Hurdles exist

According to county records, 94 construction permits have been processed relating to the River, Carmel and Dolan fires. The River Fire burned 48,000 acres of between Salinas and the Carmel River, the Carmel Fire scorched 6,900 acres in upper Carmel Valley, and the Dolan Fire burned 148,000 acres in Big Sur.

“Of the 77 homes destroyed in these fires, 50 homes have been or are being rebuilt,” records show. “The remaining 44 permits were for repairs or replacement of structures other than the main dwelling.”

Unfortunately, such information isn’t available for

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Court limits reach of housing mandate law

By KELLY NIX

A SOUTHERN California judge has ruled that a 2022 state housing law that requires California municipalities to ministerially approve applications to split single-family residential lots and allow up to four housing units on each doesn’t apply to charter cities. The ruling could eventually have implications for several such cities in Monterey County, including Monterey and Pacific Grove.

SB9, which went into effect Jan. 1, 2022, dramatically lowered the bar builders face to subdivide property and exempts many housing projects from the rigid California Environmental Quality Act. The law was intended to alleviate the severe shortage of housing in the state.

But on Monday, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Curtis A. Kin ruled in favor of five Southern California charter cities that filed suit against the state and Attorney General Rob Bonta alleging that SB9 is unconstitutional and invalid against charter cities.

Charter cities

“After extensive briefing and two hearings” in a Los Angeles courtroom, “the court ruled in favor of the five charter cities,” according to Aleshire & Wynder, the law

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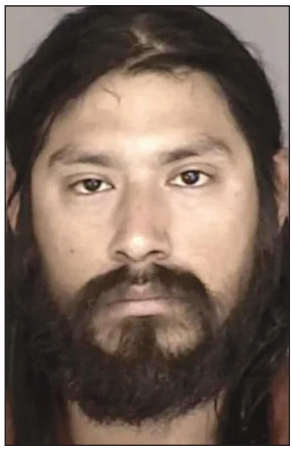
Man guilty of killing animals at high school

By KELLY NIX

A SOUTH County man who illegally entered a high school in the early morning hours and stabbed numerous farm animals belonging to students has been found guilty of the attack, which killed two lambs.

Jose Jesse Marquez, 31, was found guilty in a Salinas courtroom April 17 of four counts of felony animal abuse with a deadly weapon, and resisting a police officer, and burglary, also felonies.

Prosecutors say that Marquez rode his bicycle to Gonzales High School just before 2:30 a.m. on Feb. 18, 2023, and entered the school to steal a tool. He went to the school’s barn area and held down numerous animals that Gonzales High students had raised since birth and stabbed them.



Jose Marquez

CALTRANS REPORTED Wednesday that repairs to Highway 1 at Rocky Creek in Big Sur are moving forward at a steady pace, and May 27 remains the target date for reopening the road to tourist traffic.

But a spokesperson said the state roads agency is hesitant to move the date up, due to the likelihood of high winds, which could delay repairs, and the wear and tear the work is taking on heavy equipment.

“We’re holding to a May 27 estimate for the reopening,” Caltrans spokesperson Kevin Drabinski said. “Part of that reason is that we have experienced delays due to

Sunday’s Big Sur Marathon will have an out-and-back route. See page 9A.

wind and likely will continue to experience delays due to wind.”

Drabinski observed that those working over the side of the road in a basket must adhere to stringent safety standards — they had to stop last Saturday and Sunday due to high winds.

Photos tell story

“We have a 25 mph wind limit,” he explained. “When you’re drilling off of a crane-held basket over the side of the roadway, it’s challenging.”

Equipment failures could also slow progress, Drabinski warned. “We have experienced, and will continue to experience, some breakdowns in equipment,” he conceded.

Drabinski described what has been done so far in an

Winds could delay May 27 highway reopening

By CHRIS COUNTS

effort to stabilize the site, where a large chunk of pavement in the southbound lane collapsed March 30.

“To date we’ve been able to install a series of vertical

See **HIGHWAY** page 10A



PHOTO/CALTRANS

Workers install vertical dowels this week to help support the pavement along the Highway 1 near Rocky Creek Bridge in Big Sur.