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It's not the name that's historic, it's the decor

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER MORE than 60 years of serving Shell customers, the service station at San Carlos and Fifth is set to become a Chevron, according to applications filed with the



PHOTO/MARY SCHLEY

This hand-carved sign, as well as the Shell-shaped imprints in the column, are part of the historic downtown station that's set to become a Chevron, leaving the decorative details to face an uncertain future.

Carmel planning department. But rebranding won't happen quickly, as nothing does when a property is considered historic.

In March, a company called HASCO Holdings LLC purchased a half-dozen Shell stations on the Monterey Peninsula and in Salinas for a total of more than \$64.4 million, according to the Monterey County Assessor's Office. The downtown Carmel station, which for many years was Lugo's Shell and was later owned by racecar driver Mario Andretti's company, sold for \$9,822,500.

Designed for Shell Oil Co. by the architecture firm of Burde, Shaw & Associates — which also created the plans for the former bank at Seventh and Dolores and the Carmel Police Station on Junipero, among others — the station was built in 1963-1964. Among its more subtle features are Shell emblems imprinted in the pebble and concrete exterior.

'Shell' to 'Chevron' could face hurdles at city hall

The city's historic context statement, which guides planners in gauging the significance of the town's buildings, describes the station as "a remarkable example of a utilitarian building whose design blended well with the existing architectural fabric of Carmel."

'Never in Carmel'

"An industrial take on the Bay Region style so popular in Carmel from the 1940s through the 1960s, the station is softened by skylights in the roof over the service area and wood trellises over the gas pumps and corner signage," the

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SECOND SEA LION SW OF THE OLD CYPRESS

By MARY SCHLEY

FOR SEVERAL days this month, dead seals accumulated on Carmel Beach, repulsing visitors and regulars, and distressing dog walkers who had to keep their canines away from them.

"Carmel Beach is our crown jewel," one resident said, noting that the dead animals hadn't been disposed of after a week and were left to rot. "It's hard to believe this is allowed to happen with all of the dogs that visit the beach, not to mention their owners."

A permit

In the past, city workers had simply buried dead animals found on the beach, but they'd recently been told they needed a permit from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association in order to dispose of the creatures, according to environmental programs manager Mary Bilse. That news amounted to a no-touch order until it could be confirmed.

It was later learned that public works crews can indeed bury deceased animals on the beach — but not until 48

hours after they are discovered.

"If you receive a report of a dead sea lion or seal on Carmel Beach, please notify the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories at (831) 771-4422 or mlmlstranding@gmail.com and provide the species or description of the animal, photos, GPS location, date and time the animal was last seen, approximate size of the animal, condition of the animal and name and contact information," Bilse told The Pine Cone.

After doing all that, beachgoers should call the public works department at (831) 620-2070, and the carcass will be buried after 48 hours. The delay gives the marine lab's scientists and researchers time to respond if they need to.

"The city public works department buried six seal

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Homeowners see drop in taxes after court ruling

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY PENINSULA property owners will notice a change to their property tax bills after a local water agency was forced by the courts to cancel a long-standing charge.

Accompanying property tax bills recently mailed by the Monterey County Tax Collector is an insert informing property owners that the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District is no longer collecting a "water supply charge." Revenue from the tax had generated about \$3.4 million annually for the district.

"Water Supply Charge Removed," the glossy insert says. "This property tax bill has been corrected to reflect the following change: The Monterey Peninsula Water Management District rescinded the collection of its annually approved Water Supply Charge for Fiscal Year 2024-25. These charges have been removed from the county's property tax roll for this fiscal year."

The insert goes on to tell property owners that they can

It took years, but the water charge is finally gone

find more information about the water supply charge on its website at mpwmd.net.

The director for the Monterey Peninsula Taxpayers Association — the group that sued the water district over the charge and prevailed — called the insert "another waste of taxpayers' money" and "misleading" because it did not say why the charge was being removed.

"The reason the fee was removed from the bill was that it was illegal, and the courts had already ruled against the water district when" water board directors "voted earlier this year to add the fee to the bill," Heuer, who said he paid \$96.36 for the water supply charge on his property tax bill last year, told The Pine Cone.

Heuer called the rescission of the tax "a good first step," but said that Peninsula homeowners are "waiting for their deserved

refunds of illegally collected fees."

Water district general manager Dave Stoldt said that it was the county tax collector's idea to notify water

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Salinas Valley to get agriculture robotics center

By LISA LAPIN

A SWATH of prime Salinas Valley farmland near the intersection of Highway 68 and River Road will soon be abuzz — not with pollinators, but with the drones and robots of dozens of high-tech agricultural start-up companies.

The new nonprofit venture, which will bring together growers, educational institutions and funders, is being



Artistic renderings show a robot deployed in the Salinas Valley (top) and what the interior of the valley's new robotics development center — combining workshops with experimental farm fields — may look like.

hailed by its organizers as the first in the nation to combine a "robotics development center with a farm" and promises to make the Salinas Valley a leader in agricultural innovation, especially in growing and harvesting leafy greens and berries.

Plans for Reservoir Farms were announced Wednesday at an autonomous agriculture conference in Yolo County, where the focus is on farming advancements to keep the United States competitive against foreign growers.

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PHOTO/MARK HEDBERG

When you come across a dead sea creature on the beach, you're supposed to notify the authorities, including exact location and other details, and then the city, which can bury it after 48 hours.