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Former River School principal sues CUSD

■ Claims ‘scandal-plagued district’ harassed and illegally fired him

By MARY SCHLEY

A SHORT-LIVED Carmel River School principal who was hired following longtime school head Jay Marden’s retirement two years ago sued the Carmel Unified School District in Monterey County Superior Court April 17, alleging civil rights violations, discrimination and a host of other wrongs. Alberto Ramirez is seeking more than \$1 million in damages.

The complaint, which was filed on his behalf by San Francisco attorney Michael Welch and refers to the “Carmel Unified Scandal District,” paints a picture of Ramirez as a model administrator who found himself on the wrong side of superintendent Sharon Ofek and was subsequently harassed, retaliated against and fired.

According to Ramirez, in July 2023 he embraced his job as principal with enthusiasm after he “was presented with the challenge and opportunity for which he had worked and prepared his entire professional life.” At the time, the lawsuit claims, the district had been “enmeshed in a series of scandals, the most disturbing of which involved reported abuse and neglect of students that shook the entire community.”

The complaint also states as truth that the district “had

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SALINAS COUNCIL VOTES TO REPEAL RENT CONTROL

■ Increased supply said to be best way to protect tenants

By MARY SCHLEY

LESS THAN four months after the City of Salinas’ rent-control ordinances took effect, the city council — which saw a major overhaul as a new mayor and four new councilmembers were elected last November — voted 5-2 to repeal the measure. The council also moved to get rid of the rental inventory adopted in April 2023.

At the council’s April 22 meeting, planning director Lisa Brinton offered an update on the rent-stabilization program, which was implemented via three ordinances that were all unanimously approved by the previous council last September.

Many rules

The Salinas rent control law limited rent increases to 2.75 percent or 75 percent of the Consumer Price Index, whichever is lower, over a 12-month period. Apartments that are deed-restricted affordable housing, government-provided units, rentals in institutional and medical

Tiny bird gets first-class treatment



PHOTO/SPCA MONTEREY COUNTY

This 2-day-old snowy plover, no bigger than a thumb, came from one of two eggs rescued in early April after their nest was washed away with the tide at Marina State Beach. The eggs were taken to SPCA Monterey County’s Wildlife Center. After 25 days in an incubator, the first plover hatched, followed by the second two days later. After about a month of SPCA care, the birds will be released back to the wild.

facilities, those in historic buildings, and units built after Jan. 31, 1995, were exempt.

Repairs, evictions

Landlords weren’t allowed to charge for utilities unless they were separately metered and could only pass through capital-improvement costs after the work is done, based on actual expenses amortized over the life of the improvement. Tenants could also file for hardships to avoid construction-related increases.

If a landlord failed to keep a unit in compliance with health and safety codes or didn’t make repairs ordered by the city or the courts, any rent increase was invalid, and landlords were required to pay a per-unit fee to cover the costs of the city’s rental registry but couldn’t pass those fees on to tenants.

A tenant evicted without fault had to be paid the equivalent of three months’ rent, plus any deposit owed. Owner move-in could only be used for one unit on any property if there are no other vacancies in the same complex and the person doesn’t own a vacant rental anywhere else in the City of Salinas.

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Seaside sixth graders pilot underwater robots

By LILY PATTERSON

LAST WEEKEND, two underwater robots designed by students from Del Rey Woods Elementary School carried out successful missions under a cloudless sky and with a faint breeze — favorable conditions to see what was going on at the bottom of the Watsonville High pool.

Wet Turtle Logistics — the joint enterprise of sixth-graders Alex, Corine, Isaac and Monica — guided a remotely operated vehicle through a series of complex tasks, using only an electrical control box equipped with switches the students engineered to motor their robot forward and back, up and down, and to extend its “claw” to grab various objects. Wet Turtle scored 70 out of 100 possible points for a strong finish at the Marine Advanced Technology Education Remotely Operated Vehicle Competition, an elementary through college-level regional event drawing tech-savvy students from across Monterey

County. Following similar competitions all over the globe, MATE ROV, as it’s known, will have its 2025 World Championship at Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Alpena, Mich., June 19-21.

High-pressure competition

Next in the pool was Kraken Logistics, a formidable two-man team of Ivan and Adriel, also sixth graders, whose robot altered the blueprint in a couple significant ways. Kraken had done what every tech startup would be wise to: let the other guys make the first mistake, then create the solution. Armed with fresh knowledge of electrical circuitry, the team installed a small breaker along the cable connecting the underwater robot to its electrical box, to prevent a possible electrical surge from doing any damage. Early flotation tests inspired Ivan and Adriel to add small

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Kaiser buys \$8.7M property in Marina

By KELLY NIX

JUST MONTHS after Kaiser Permanente opened medical offices in Salinas, the nonprofit healthcare company signaled its intention to move even more aggressively into Monterey County by purchasing an \$8.7 million property in Marina.

According to a deed at the Monterey County Recorder’s Office, on April 22, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan acquired property at 2405 Sea Shell Avenue in Marina for \$8,712,000. The acquisition follows Kaiser’s January opening on Davis Road in Salinas.

The Kaiser facility will be on property that is part of The Dunes, the Marina development off Highway 1 and Imjin Road, where Target, Best Buy, hundreds of new homes and two hotels are located. It’s also near a Montage wellness facility and a VA medical clinic.

The seller is Marina Community Partners, an entity controlled by Shea Homes, developer of the Dunes.

Asked about the development, a Kaiser spokesperson offered a statement from the company but did not furnish details. “Kaiser Permanente exists to provide high-quality, affordable health care and to improve the health of our members and the communities we serve. We continue to explore all possible options to serve individuals and employers in Monterey County who over the years have expressed their desire to have Kaiser Permanente’s high-quality care available to them,” the company said.

‘Important to quality of life’

Marina city manager Layne Long told The Pine Cone this week that the city is looking forward to the development.

“We are very excited about a high-quality healthcare company like Kaiser locating in our Dunes development and becoming part of our Marina community,” Long said. “Access to quality healthcare is such an important part of our community’s quality of life and we look forward to working and partnering with Kaiser as they continue to grow and expand in our region.”

The Kaiser facility will be on a parcel at 2nd Avenue and Divarty Street, across from the Cal State Monterey Bay sports complex.

Last week, the board of directors for the California Office of Health Care Affordability imposed spending restrictions on seven hospitals, including Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula and Salinas Valley

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PHOTO/STAN WYMAN

“Accept no apologies, contact Wet Turtle Technologies,” goes the slogan of a team of sixth-grade engineers from Del Rey Woods Elementary, who present their robot to a panel of scientists.