

Tank rules bring end to familiar gas station

■ City’s share dwindles to one

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER MORE than 75 years of selling gas in Carmel, Andy Hill’s family business at Junipero and Fourth will pivot to focus entirely on his towing company, he said Thursday, as crews used a large crane to remove old fuel tanks in time to meet an end-of-the-year deadline mandated by state law. The closure leaves the Shell-turned-Chevron at San Carlos and Fifth as the only gas station within the city limits.

“Our family has been selling gasoline in Carmel since 1943,” Hill said Thursday. “I will miss the gas station and the fantastic customers. My focus now is 100 percent on towing.

“I can tell you Carmel Towing is as strong as ever,” he continued. “I’ve increased to nine trucks with seven amazing drivers and Karen Christie, who has been with me for 26 fantastic years.” (Christie handles dispatching.)

Hill said the independent garage next door will continue operating, too.

“The project is going much faster than I anticipated, and the mechanics should be back on property as soon as the cement dries,” he said.

Big bill

Hill said his decision to shutter the gas business was driven by the cost of replacing the tanks. While George Giem owns the property and applied for the demolition permit to remove

them, the business belongs to Hill, so he’s footing the bill.

“Because I own everything privately, it would cost \$1.5 million to redo the tanks and meet the standards of the EPA,” he said. Demolishing the underground storage, cleaning up the site, filling in the holes and pouring new cement will cost around \$180,000, Hill estimated.

The tank removal is being driven by a Senate bill that

See STATION page 18A



PHOTO/MARY SCHLEY

Many a local has filled up at Andy Hill’s station, but the cost of installing new tanks is bringing an end to his family’s decades-old fuel business.

Trial date set in fatal stabbing near high school

By MARY SCHLEY

A JURY trial has been ordered for Donel Geisen, who will turn 80 Oct. 1, in the stabbing death of his wife nearly two months ago, according to Monterey County Superior Court documents.

Geisen, who reportedly told a 911 operator that he’d just killed his wife of 58 years — and who had apparently tried to commit suicide by stabbing himself — has been held in Monterey County Jail on more than \$1 million bail since he was released from a hospital a couple of days after the fatal attack.

Telephone call

According to the Monterey County Sheriff’s Office, Geisen called 911 at 4:20 a.m. July 24 and said he believed he had stabbed his wife to death. Deputies and medics arrived at the couple’s home on Raymond Way in a neighborhood east of Highway 1 near Carmel to find the victim, 78-year-old Barbara Lynn Geisen, and her husband in their bedroom.

She died at the scene from multiple stab wounds, while her confessed attacker was transported to the hospital for treatment of “life-threatening injuries.”

Shortly after he was charged with second-degree premeditated murder with an enhancement for using a knife, Geisen was subjected to a mental-health evaluation when his public defender suggested he might not be competent to stand trial, but Monterey County Superior Court Judge Pamela Butler later deemed him mentally fit.

During a preliminary hearing Aug. 27, deputy district attorney Rebecca Garcia presented evidence backing the charges against Geisen, including testimony from investigating officer Rodrigo Lopez and deputies Matthew Bradford and Josue Ramirez, according to court records.

See TRIAL page 18A

‘Year of affordability’ falls short in Sacramento

IN DECEMBER, politicians in Sacramento promised 2025 would be the “year of affordability” in the Golden State, but nine months later, it’s questionable when or if their efforts will actually lower the cost of living. Still, that hasn’t stopped the governor and leaders in the state Legislature from declaring victory.

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

“We went big. We produced results. We delivered historic progress,” said Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas on Sunday, calling 2025 the most productive year in a generation for the Legislature.

Making the state a more affordable place to live was a lofty goal. California earned its nickname during the Gold Rush — but the moniker still fits, as it remains the most expensive in the nation to live, with median home prices

See PRICES page 17A

Amazon building colossal Salinas Valley warehouse

By KELLY NIX

THE AMAZON distribution center being built in Salinas won’t be open for business anytime soon, but work on the massive facility — which is adjacent to agricultural row crops — is taking shape.

The online retail giant in late 2024 broke ground on the five-story, 3 million-square-foot building on Harris Road and Abbott Street which is described as an “advanced robotics fulfillment center.”

While not long ago only the skeletal framing and support structures of the building were evident, crews have installed most of the façade facing Abbott Street. Along with work trucks, cranes and other heavy machinery staged around the perimeter of the building, dozens of construction employees were working on the structure this week, as they have for months.

Same-day deliveries?

The warehouse will bring jobs, sales and property tax revenues, and allow for other improvements, the City of Salinas has said.

“It will be an advanced robotics fulfillment center that is projected to bring hundreds of jobs or more to our community,” Salinas said. “In addition to job creation and offsite improvements, other economic benefits to Salinas include sales and property tax revenues.”

Will the innovative new fulfillment center mean even faster deliveries for Monterey County Amazon customers, who currently get their

Commission: New water should go to housing, commercial, public projects

By MARY SCHLEY

THE 14 acre-feet of new water destined for Carmel-by-the-Sea when an expansion of a wastewater-recycling project comes online at the end of the year should be earmarked for housing of all types, commercial uses and municipal projects, the planning commission unanimously decided last week. A city staffer had recommended leaving the bulk of it in “unallocated reserves.”

The new water will bring the city’s total supply to 16.661 acre-feet, or 5.4 million gallons, per year, according to principal planner Marnie Waffle.

The city’s “water management program” requires that at least 10 percent be reserved for projects that will create affordable housing “and that water is reserved for anticipated projects serving coastal recreation, access and essential public services,” she told the commission Sept. 10, adding that those requirements implement policies in the general plan and local coastal program.

Waffle also estimated that if the additional 349 residential units of various types, as envisioned in the city’s housing element, become a reality, they’ll require 32 acre-feet of water.

Resolution needed

In May, the city council discussed the incoming bounty and decided 3 acre-feet should be moved into the category for low- and very-low-income housing, but did nothing with the rest, leaving 12.29 acre-feet in the unallocated category.

But planning commissioners had other ideas. Chair Michael LePage said sticking most of the water in unallocated reserves “really bothers me,” and commissioner Stephanie Locke, who has worked for the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District for 37 years, presented a different strategy.

See WATER page 16A



PHOTO/KELLY NIX

Robots will be used to sort and stack products inside the mammoth Amazon warehouse going up near Spreckels, the company said.