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FILMMAKER TESTIFIES IN D.C. ON FAKE ORPHANAGES

By CHRIS COUNTS

A CARMEL Valley resident who made a documentary about orphanages used to traffic children testified Sept. 18 at the Anti-Trafficking Global Policy Summit at the U.S. Capitol.

The vast majority of children in these institutions are not actually orphans, and many face sexual exploitation,



PHOTO/COURTESY BARAK LAUB

Barak Laub of Carmel Valley (right) meets with Arnold Viersen of the Canadian Parliament and Emilio Puccio of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights in Washington D.C. last month.

forced labor and other perils, says Barak Laub, whose father, entrepreneur Paul Laub, once ran for Carmel mayor.

Laub spoke before members of Congress and elected officials from Canada, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia, Ghana and Mexico.

“I addressed leaders from all over the world,” he said. “I talked with staff from both parties’ representatives on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I met with congressmen and staffers from both sides.”

Laub’s film, “Volunteers Needed,” tells how unsuspecting people send thousands of dollars overseas to groups that claim to operate orphanages but are actually exploiting children.

“It’s a multibillion-dollar industry,” he told The Pine Cone.

80 percent have homes

While he was in Washington D.C., Laub met Chris Smith, a congressman from New Jersey who introduced the Orphanage Trafficking Prevention and Protection Act in the House of Representatives in July.

A former Democrat who is now a Republican, Smith has long advocated for promoting human rights abroad. Laub helped educate him on the topic of orphan trafficking and encouraged him to introduce the bill.

According to the text in Smith’s bill, “orphaned

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License plate cameras should be nixed, group says

■ Worries they’ll be used by ICE

By KELLY NIX

A PROGRESSIVE political group in Pacific Grove is pressing the city to deactivate a dozen license-plate-reading cameras for fear authorities will use them to apprehend illegal immigrants.

On Oct. 17, P.G. Progressives directed its members to copy and paste a form letter to the city urging it to “temporarily disarm” the city’s camera system, which automatically snaps photos of license plates. Pacific Grove installed a dozen cameras after the P.G. City Council in March 2023 OK’d a two-year, \$65,000 contract with Flock Safety for the license-plate readers.

“External reporting shows immigration agencies have

obtained automatic license plate reading camera data via partner-agency queries in other cities, contradicting what communities were told about limits on use,” the left-wing PG Progressives said in a letter to city manager Matt Mogensen and the city council.

Cites ‘loopholes’

It wants Pacific Grove to “explicitly prohibit any access or sharing with ICE and border protection or other immigration agencies — directly or indirectly — without written city authorization,” and to confirm whether immigration authorities have accessed the camera data.

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County land open to Pastor for Rocky Point work

By MARY SCHLEY

THE MONTEREY County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday agreed to give Rocky Point owner Patrice Pastor and his team at Esperanza Carmel access to county land surrounding the Big Sur property for the next five years so they can do extensive restoration work at the iconic restaurant site.

In June 2024, the California Coastal Commission unanimously approved what it called “a visionary plan” to undo extensive illegal work by prior owners, improve public access on the scenic and historic property, and ensure it remains open and accessible. When the plan was developed, it was expected to cost in excess of \$4 million.

Much damage

At that meeting, a coastal planner discussed the history of Rocky Point and the Coastal Act violations committed by Peter and Grace Wang a few years after they purchased it in 2012 for \$4,550,000. Monterey County owns much of the surrounding land, including the driveway from Highway 1 to a parking area near the restaurant.

Regardless, the Wangs installed a locking gate and a sign at the top of the driveway, posted “private property” and “no trespassing” signs, put in security cameras and posted a guard. They only opened the gate when the restaurant was operating and said only patrons could park there, ending the

Water board asks state to lift ban on new meters

By KELLY NIX

COULD THE Monterey Peninsula’s seemingly endless prohibition on water meters for new development come to an end? It’s certainly possible and could even happen within months.

On Monday, the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District board of directors voted to ask the State Water Resources Control Board to lift the 2009 cease-and-desist order it imposed on the Peninsula that bars new water meters and therefore new construction — an order that has existed in other forms since 1995.

If the state water board agrees, it would be a monumental relief for residents, some of whom could finally develop vacant lots they’ve owned for decades. It could also allow for affordable housing, business expansions and more jobs.

“This is a window of opportunity for the community to ease water restrictions in favor of housing and jobs,” water district general manager Dave Stoldt said.

The Pine Cone asked Stoldt when the board might make its decision.

“We have been told spring, possibly early summer,” Stoldt said.

‘You never know’

What are the chances the board will lift the order?

“All the numbers point to ‘confident,’ but you never know,” Stoldt said, adding that his staff has met with state regulators several times this year, and that they’re expecting the submission from the water district’s attorney.

If approved, the district would continue quarterly and annual reporting to the state water board, though some previous requirements could be clarified or deleted. It

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Laird’s bill unlikely to bring affordable homes to Peninsula

STATE SEN. John Laird had a big goal this legislative session — to prove California can protect the environment and still build desperately needed housing. The result is Senate Bill 484, which Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law earlier this month. The legislation will exempt certain infill projects from from the California Coastal

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

Commission’s permit process, an onerous step that’s held up countless building projects.

Sacramento passed so many housing bills over the last couple of years it’s easy to lose track of what’s involved — from exempting projects from the California Environmental Quality Act, to building more apartments near transit

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PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

Rocky Point Restaurant’s prior owners did a lot of illegal building and other damage to the scenic property, which is now owned by Patrice Pastor.