

AI CEO sues McLaren over huge fine

By KELLY NIX

AN EXECUTIVE at a prominent artificial intelligence company is suing a British supercar manufacturer for hosting a weeklong event at her French-style chateau in Carmel Valley during Car Week without getting permits — which led county officials to slap her with a massive



PHOTO/MCLARENLIFE.COM

A swank event for supercar enthusiasts at a Carmel Valley home in August prompted a huge fine from the county, which said it needed a permit. The homeowners are blaming the car company that rented their property.

\$763,000 fine.

Fidji Simo, CEO of applications at OpenAI, agreed to allow McLaren Automotive to host a lavish “promotional event” in August at a \$6 million home on Scarlett Road she owns with her husband, Remy Miralles.

But on the second day of the Aug. 11-18 soiree — when it was in full swing — a county official showed up at the 9-acre property to hand deliver a citation for an astonishing \$505,359 for failing to “obtain permits” for the gathering. Simo contends that McLaren failed to inform her of the huge fine, which the county said she was on the hook for.

“McLaren intentionally concealed the fact it had received the Aug. 12 citation from Monterey County,” according to a lawsuit Simo and her husband filed in Monterey County Superior Court Monday.

‘Deceptive’

While Monterey County allows short-term rentals in its unincorporated areas, including Carmel Valley, homeowners must obtain permits from its housing and community development division. While the suit doesn’t say whether that was the reason for the citation, the county assesses those who fail to obtain STR permits a fine that’s 125 percent of the rental fee.

Monterey County also requires homeowners to obtain permits for special events.

The lawsuit accuses McLaren of not disclosing

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Council seeks to curb automotive rowdiness

By MARY SCHLEY

IS CAR Week a boon or a bust for Carmel? The city council on Monday added another item to its lengthy to-do list when councilmembers expressed what Mayor Dale Byrne described as “a fair amount of support for fundamentally rethinking what Car Week is.”

That direction followed Police Chief Todd Trayer’s after-action report on the August events, when he recapped the four larger shows held downtown and a couple of smaller ones, and shared statistics for traffic stops, citations, arrests, tows, parking tickets — and overtime, which cost \$36,000.

He also described the results of the city’s annual post-automotive-week survey, in which 422 people participated. This year’s questionnaire offered not just “Loved it,” (94 people), “Did not like it at all,” (149) and “It was OK,” (28), but a “conflicted” option, which got the highest number, at 151. Nearly half the respondents said they live in Carmel.

Mayor says he doesn’t go outside at night because ‘it’s scary.’

Calls for help

In addition to the shenanigans that regularly occur after the scheduled events end — such as drivers racing up and down some streets late into the night and social-media followers flocking to town to ogle high-end supercars — Trayer observed that Tuesday’s Concours for a Cause event took far longer to break down than organizers had promised, which drew complaints from business owners.

“It didn’t end up being done until almost 10:30 p.m.,” he said. “I heard immediately from the business community — they wanted to know why this was happening.”

Trayer said that even though the problem wasn’t the city’s fault, it could do a better job ensuring that it “doesn’t happen again.”

He also said the practice of letting people rent parking spaces so they can have exotic cars in front of their shops created problems, because when gawkers crowded the sidewalks and streets, the business owners asked the police to help disperse them.

“That was a drain on resources,” Trayer said, adding that businesses should be made “responsible for traffic control and security as needed.”

He further suggested implementing different traffic flow

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WATER ALLOCATIONS LIMITED FOR ACCESSORY UNITS

By MARY SCHLEY

THE CARMEL City Council at a special meeting Monday voted to allocate all 14 acre-feet of water coming from the expansion of the regional wastewater recycling plant — but people who want to use it for new granny units that add too much square footage would be out of luck.

State law compels local governments to approve accessory dwelling units and junior accessory dwelling units if they meet some basic standards, and dozens of property owners have jumped at the chance to build them, often bringing the total square footage on their lots well in excess of what the local zoning code allows. Councilman Jeff

Baron suggested at the Nov. 3 meeting that the city curb that by denying additional water for any such project that would increase the total floor area on a property beyond what the municipal code allows, such as the 1,800-square-foot maximum on a standard 4,000-square-foot lot.

“This community has been around for 100 years, and one of the principles of this community is small homes, and this is a thing that we buy into when we buy homes here,” Baron said.

He suggested those who want more living space, which could include couples with children and people who want their elderly parents to live with them, look elsewhere.

“Maybe this isn’t the right place for you,” he said.

Plans scuttled

That rule throws a spanner in the works for David Amooi, who wants to convert a detached two-car garage behind his home on Guadalupe Street into an ADU so his elderly mother can move in — and so Amooi’s daughter

See **WATER** page 29A

Landslide Prop 50 win leaves GOP on the outs

DIRECT DEMOCRACY was in full force this week as California voters passed Proposition 50, taking their opportunity to stick it to President Donald Trump.

The win was resounding for the Yes on 50 campaign, with 64 percent of voters in favor.

The measure’s passage temporarily suspends California’s current congressional maps, which were drawn by an independent citizens commission, and replaces them with

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

a map drawn by Democratic insiders.

Gov. Gavin Newsom spearheaded the gerrymandering effort as a must-pass initiative to counter mid-decade redistricting in Republican-controlled states.

“We stood tall and we stood firm in response to Donald Trump’s recklessness. Tonight, after poking the bear, this bear roared, with unprecedented turnout in a special election with an extraordinary result,” said Newsom on election night.

Had his gerrymandering campaign gone the other way, Newsom would have been humiliated, but his victory propels him one step closer toward his campaign for

See **PROP 50** page 20A

Rocky Creek seawall beefed up to protect highway

By CHRIS COUNTS

A DRAMATIC photo sent out this week by Caltrans shows a massive wave crashing up against a seawall located below the site of the project to repair Highway 1 at Rocky Creek in Big Sur — where a large chunk of pavement slipped out in March 2024, along with about 30 feet of an old rock wall.

While the \$25 million project to build a viaduct to support the highway has been well documented — it was completed in late June and travel in both lanes was restored — the transformation of the seawall below the project site hasn’t received nearly as much attention.

Stacked like pancakes

Caltrans also shared a second photo of the embankment taken in May that shows how extensively the site has been developed in the past six months, with what appear to be four concrete slabs stacked on top of one another like pancakes. Heavy equipment and workers in both photos show the scale of the operation. The site is accessed by scaffolding that snakes several hundred feet up the cliff to the highway.

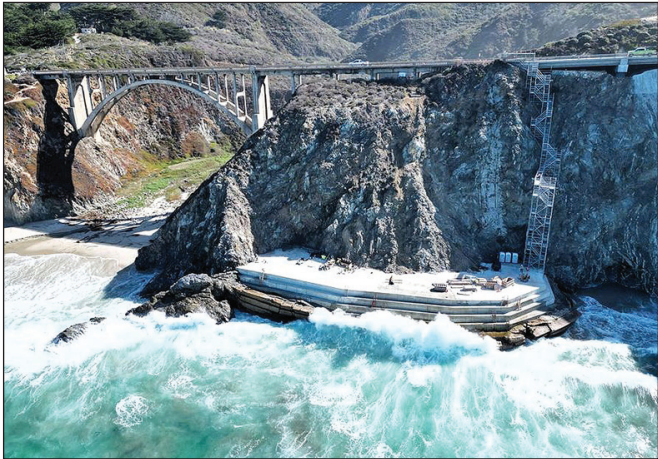
An old seawall existed at the site. But according to Jim Shivers of Caltrans, it was expanded and improved to help absorb the constant pounding of the coastline by waves.

Shivers compared the expanded barrier to a “concrete wedding cake with multiple layers.”

“The reconstruction of the seawall was absolutely necessary,” he told The Pine Cone. “The wave action is pretty heavy. It will help protect the integrity of the slope above.”

A Caltrans report, meanwhile, noted that “repairs to the

See **SEAWALL** page 24A



PHOTO/CALTRANS

An enormous layered structure under construction just south of Rocky Creek will help protect Highway 1 in Big Sur, according to Caltrans.