

Second round of Oscar buzz for CHS alum

By DENNIS TAYLOR

FOR THE second time in three years, Carmel Valley resident Conall Jones is waiting to learn whether a film he helped create will be named as a contender for an Academy Award.

The 43-year-old Carmel High graduate (Class of 2001) was one of the producers of “All The Empty Rooms,” a 33-minute documentary streaming on Netflix.

Jones, director Joshua Seftel and eight others on the production team will learn on Tuesday whether their film is one of 15 out of more than 100 candidates for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ “short list.”

“All The Empty Rooms” follows CBS News correspondent Steve Hartman and photographer Lou Bopp into the untouched bedrooms of four of the 70 children who have died in school shootings since 2019 — a small fraction of the 200-plus killed in school shootings since the 1999 Columbine High School massacre.

Undisturbed memories

All of the bedrooms remain exactly as the four children left them on the days they were shot.

A clothes hamper still holds the unwashed laundry of Dominic Blackwell, who was 14 when he died in a shooting at Saugus High School in Santa Clarita on Nov. 14, 2019.

“I don’t think we wanted to lose the smell in his room, because it is distinctly him,” his mother explained to Hartman.

Dominic’s bed is lined with SpongeBob SquarePants pillows, and a huge SpongeBob poster hangs above the headboard.

A close-up photograph of the teen, smiling in a football helmet, stares back from a bedroom shelf that also holds a childhood basketball trophy, a Dodgers cap and other

CSUMB professor killed in cycling crash

By MARY SCHLEY

A LONGTIME Cal State University Monterey Bay professor whose lifework focused on social justice education and community-building died in Pebble Beach Friday morning while riding his bicycle near 17 Mile Drive.

Shortly after 9:15 a.m. Dec. 5, Monterey resident Seth Pollack, 66, was cycling westbound on Crespi Lane as a 62-year-old Pebble Beach resident was turning left onto the street from southbound 17 Mile Drive in her Toyota SUV, according to California Highway Patrol officer Jaskaran Bhaurla.

“For reasons still under investigation, the rider of the bicycle crossed into the eastbound lane and crashed into the Toyota SUV,” Bhaurla said.



Seth Pollack

Driver hurt?

According to CHP dispatch traffic, the woman stopped her SUV on the hill and went back to the scene of the crash on foot. Emergency responders soon arrived, radioed for a medical helicopter to land on the nearby golf course to take Pollack to a trauma center, and began administering CPR. But their efforts were unsuccessful, and Pollack died at the scene.

Bhaurla said the driver of the Toyota “was transported to a local hospital for suspected possible injuries,” but

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PHOTO/COURTESY CONALL JONES

Conall Jones (with laptop) is a producer on a school-shooting documentary that is being considered for an Academy Award. Jones was asked by CBS News’ Steve Hartman (right) to work on the film.

treasures.

A placard hangs on the wall above the desk of Jackie Cazares, who died May 24, 2022, at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. It reads, “We loved you even before you were born.”

Such intimate belongings are heart-wrenching to the

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C.V. HOMEOWNERS TO FIGHT HUGE COUNTY FINE

By KELLY NIX

THE OWNERS of a property in Carmel Valley who were hit with a \$760,000 fine for allegedly violating Monterey County’s vacation rental ordinance during Car Week last summer are set to make their case against the penalty next week.

On Aug. 12, the county issued the citation that included the massive fine to Scarlett Road homeowners Remy Miralles and Fidji Simo for not obtaining a short-term-rental permit for supercar company McLaren’s use of their property, which spanned eight days and included events on three of them. The administrative fine amounted to \$761,975.

Dec. 16 hearing

Miralles and Simo, who is the CEO of applications for OpenAI, the company that owns ChatGPT, appealed the citation. They’re set to make their case before the county zoning administrator during a Dec. 16 hearing in Salinas.

“The property owners have appealed the notice of violation issued by the county,” a spokesman told The Pine

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Mayor: ‘We’re incentivizing gangs to arm juveniles’

SAN JOSE Mayor Matt Mahan, a Democrat, says the pendulum has swung too far left when it comes to criminal justice in California — specifically the state’s sentencing laws that apply to minors.

“I think we need to bring that pendulum back to the

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

middle,” Mahan told a Los Angeles TV station this month.

The mayor’s remarks came in response to a gang shooting on Black Friday involving a 17-year-old suspect. According to police, the teen fired six shots in the crowded Valley Fair Mall in San Jose, injuring three people, including his intended target, a 28-year-old man, as well as an 18-year-old woman and a 16-year-old girl who

Former Stevenson head files \$20M suit

■ Claims he was fired illegally

By KELLY NIX

THE FORMER head of Stevenson School — who was put on leave in 2022 before being fired several months later — contends in a new lawsuit that a few disgruntled senior employees made up bogus claims about him, which led the school’s board of trustees to let him go so they wouldn’t have to give him about \$2 million in severance pay.

In August 2022, Stevenson’s trustees placed Kevin Hicks, who started the job in 2015, on leave before firing him four months later. The circumstances surrounding his termination had largely been kept secret from parents and the public until he filed a lawsuit in federal court against the school and its board last week.

‘Manufactured claims’

The Dec. 1 complaint contends that a small group of Stevenson employees who were upset with some of Hicks’ management decisions manufactured false claims “to serve their own nefarious purposes.” That prompted the school to hire an investigator.

“Though Dr. Hicks had been initially told that this investigation was about sexual harassment, discrimination and unethical behavior stemming from employee concerns, upon disclosure of this investigative agenda, it seemed that it was about something else altogether,” according to his lawsuit, filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California.

The members of the board of trustees, who are also named as defendants, eventually terminated Hicks “for cause,” meaning they maintained he violated his

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PHOTO/FACEBOOK

Former Stevenson head Kevin Hicks, wife Cornelia and daughter Zuleika in 2015 when Hicks was hired to run the private school. Now he’s suing it.

were bystanders.

The shooting could have been a lot worse, considering the three victims survived and it was the busiest shopping day of the year. But the violent crime, allegedly committed by a teenager, has renewed the debate in California over whether its justice system is too lenient when it comes to minors.

“The pattern we see is disturbing. By shielding juveniles from real consequences, we seem to be incentivizing gangs to actively recruit and arm young people in our community,” said Mahan.

Lax sentencing laws

In California, juvenile sentencing laws are lax. Offenders are often sentenced to a few years in detention, with the requirement that many be released by their 21st birthdays. Even those committing the most heinous crimes, like

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