



Homes, gardens and interiors ... a colorful special section inside this week!

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Forest Theater renovation under way

Workers began jackhammering up the aisles in the Forest Theater Monday as a first step toward a host of improvements approved by the city council over the course of many meetings. The start of the renovation comes more than a year after the city closed the theater due to health and safety hazards. See story page 6A.



PHOTO/KERRY BELSER

Cal Am stops test well after groundwater dips

By KELLY NIX

CALIFORNIA AMERICAN Water was forced to shut off its test well in Marina after groundwater levels dipped below a level considered acceptable by the California Coastal Commission, the company reported this week.

The drop could indicate that the well, which penetrates the ground west of Highway 1 in the Marina dunes and runs at an 19-degree angle beneath the ocean, has been drawing water from a Salinas Valley aquifer instead of the sea.

Cal Am turned off the test slant well June 5 after four hydrogeologists — known as the Hydrogeologic Working Group — determined that the water level in a monitoring well had dropped more than a foot. As a condition of Cal Am's test-well permit from the coastal commission, the company must stop pumping from the well if the water level goes down 1.5 feet, though Cal Am opted to turn it off before it got that low.

The hydrogeologist group concluded that seasonal agricultural pumping — not Cal Am's test well operation — was to blame for the water-level drop. The test well pumps 2,000 gallons per minute — water which should be at least 95 percent seawater.

Despite concerns that the drop could indicate the slant well isn't functioning properly, a memo from the working

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P.G. Councilwoman will challenge Farr

By KELLY NIX

WITH THE bold statement that the 20th Congressional District needs a "new generation of solutions," 38-year-old Pacific Grove City Councilwoman Casey Lucius said Monday she will run against longtime Congressman Sam Farr in the November 2016 election.



Casey Lucius

Lucius, a Republican, will vie for the U.S. House of Representatives seat that Farr, a 73-year-old Democrat, has held since 1993, when he was elected to replace Leon Panetta.

In an email announcement to the media Monday morning, Lucius portrayed Farr as a career politician who is more loyal to the Democratic Party leadership than to his constituents.

"It's time to step up with new ideas and a new generation of solutions," Lucius said. "The traditional clash of ideologies has resulted in

stalemate and non-representative government. The nation and the Central Coast should be represented by a person who can energetically lead and moderate, not follow partisan dictates."

Lucius told The Pine Cone that water, affordable housing, transportation infrastructure and "rebuilding America's role and legitimacy in the world" are among the challenges she wants to focus on, if elected.

She also said she would differ from Farr in three key ways.

See LUCIUS page 25A

Investigators haven't found cause of gallery fire

Tenants trying to get back on their feet

By MARY SCHLEY

FIRE INVESTIGATORS have yet to figure out what started the fire that shut down an art gallery and badly damaged several upstairs apartments downtown the evening of June 6. Meanwhile, people who lived upstairs are in search of new places to live until they can move back into their damaged apartments, which will probably be at least six months from now.

The fire started around a stairway at the back of the building at about 7:30 p.m. and burned up the exterior, as well as down into a common basement, undermining parts of the

floor. Most of the art was removed from the New Masters Gallery, and no one was injured, but the gallery and apartments suffered smoke, water and fire damage.

"There are a lot of what ifs," Monterey Fire Marshal David Reade said Wednesday, adding that someone must know something, but he hasn't heard it, yet. "No one has said anything out of the ordinary happened."

The blaze began in a place that's difficult to access because it's enclosed by high fences and walls, including the back of the Cypress Inn. Reade said he's found no evidence of habitual smoking, candles, or oily rags that could have spontaneously combusted, or anything else that might

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City reaches \$275k settlement with McInchak's widow

By MARY SCHLEY

KAREN MCINCHAK — widow of former city IT manager Steve McInchak — will be paid \$275,000 to settle her husband's discrimination and unlawful termination lawsuit against the City of Carmel, according to an agreement read

in court before Monterey County Superior Court Judge Thomas Wills Wednesday.

The settlement ends one of the most bizarre and tragic episodes in Carmel history, which began two years ago when McInchak's home was searched by police amid allegations that he illegally accessed and copied confidential files from city computers.

The allegations went nowhere, and in June 2014, McInchak sued the city for discrimination, unlawful termination from his job, and infliction of emotional distress. Four months later, he died of a heart attack.

'Most tragic case'

"Looking back on my 37-year career, this is the most tragic case I've ever handled," attorney Michelle Welsh, who represented the McInchaks in the lawsuit, said Wednesday. "It really is tragic that this man was treated this way, left on leave all those months in a state of constant worry and stress."

The settlement was reached following several hearings in the judge's chambers.

"Everyone is relieved but not entirely satisfied that justice was done," Welsh said. "But at least there's some settlement that recognizes his honor and service. It's hard to say what amount is enough."

Representing Carmel, Aptos attorney Vince Hurley said city taxpayers would be responsible for \$75,000 of the settlement amount, with the balance coming from the city's insurance pool with the California State Association of Counties.

See PANGA page 24A

See WIDOW page 17A

Police arrest nine after finding panga boat full of pot in Big Sur

By CHRIS COUNTS

NINE SUSPECTS were jailed after authorities discovered a panga boat June 12 containing what they say was an estimated \$18 million in marijuana smuggled from Mexico by a drug cartel.

According to the Monterey County Sheriff's Office, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office and the United States Coast Guard had been tracking the boat, which they found sitting on some rocks just offshore from the Mill Creek Day Use Area. Unattended, it contained more than 100 bales of marijuana. The haul weighed about 2,700 pounds.

A short time later, sheriff's deputies arrested four men