

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

COMMUNITY NEWS

by Melissa Diaz Hernandez

Heritage Day picnic at Valley-Wide

Celebrate the rich history of the San Jacinto Valley at the 82nd annual Heritage Picnic on Monday, May 29 at Valley-Wide Recreation & Park District in San Jacinto. This annual picnic began around a wooden picnic table in 1935 when the city of Hemet dedicated its newest park, Weston Park. Awards will be presented. Bring your own picnic, or purchase a sandwich for \$5. Local organizations will have table displays featuring historical events in our valley. 901 W. Esplanade Ave., San Jacinto. Event will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Memorial Day Run/Walk & Wellness EXPO

Runners and walkers of all experience levels are invited to come out and enjoy the Memorial Day festivities at the 5th annual Memorial Day 5K, 10K & Kids 1K Run. Kidz Fun Zone with free supervised activity area and a Health and Wellness Expo. Visit www.Active.com for information. Registration fees vary between \$30 and \$50. 6 a.m. – 12 p.m., Diamond Valley Lake Park, 1801 Angler Ave., Hemet.

West Coast Thunder Annual motorcycle parade from Riverside Harley-Davidson to Soboba Casino Arena in honor of Memorial Day. Registration and staging at 6 a.m. at Riverside Harley-Davidson. Memorial service 8 a.m. Parade departs Riverside at 9:11 a.m. to Soboba Arena. Concert featuring Eli Young Band begins at 1 p.m. Info and registration at www.westcoastthunder.com. \$45 per person.

Valley-Wide hosts movies in the park Each site at Valley-Wide Recreation presents a fun-filled evening for the whole family once a month. Bring your own chair/blanket and enjoy a family film under the stars. Refreshments available. Movie begins at dusk. Call each site location for date and movie information.

Opening ceremonies for the Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance

The ceremony will begin at noon on May 26 and is open to the public from May 26 to May 29 at VFW Post 2266 located at 1891 S. Santa Fe Ave., San Jacinto. For more information, please call (951) 925-3523.

IMPACT Homelessness:

A community forum This free forum will be held on May 27 at 10 a.m. at Hemet Christian Assembly located at 602 E. St. John Place. Panelists will include Brenda Scott, executive director NAMI Mt San Jacinto; Stephanie Hopkins, formerly homeless; Linda Rogers, director of Valley Re-Start Shelter, Inc; Steve Norman, pastor of Hemet Chris-

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Making 35 years' worth of memories in days

A broken family reassembles as mother has just weeks to live

BY KYLE SELBY
REPORTER

About three weeks ago, Marilyn Votaw, 61, was told that she had one week to live. Two weeks later, she was still alive and her family – once broken – reunited for one final meal at Maze Stone Bar and Grill at the Country Club at Soboba Springs.

Last year, Marilyn was diagnosed with stage four stomach cancer, and later with ovarian cancer. Spending her life in and out of prison, today she is finally spending her final



Photo by Katherine Tran

Christee Peoples-Votaw, James Votaw, Lee Votaw, and their mother, Marilyn Votaw are finally reunited as a family after more than 25 years.

moments with her children and grandchildren.

"Last week was the first time in 26 years that we've been together," said

Marilyn's youngest son, James Votaw, 32.

Because of Marilyn's

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San Jacinto student sings for her scholarship

MARY ANN MORRIS
EDITOR

She sings prettier than a songbird, which is why San Jacinto High School student Saria Castillo was the proud recipient of a \$1,000 vocal music scholarship from Harmoners Chorale. She received her award at the Chorale's Spring concert May 20, where she enthralled the audience by singing "I Dreamed a Dream" from "Les Miserables."

Also appearing at the



Photo by Harmoners

Saria Castillo, a student at San Jacinto High School, was awarded a \$1,000 vocal music scholarship from Harmoners Chorale on May 20. She was surrounded by family, including her mother and grandmother.

concert was a surprise guest, Ludwig von Beethoven himself (or a rea-

sonable facsimile there-
▶ SEE STUDENT ON D-4

Turning home equity into liquidity

MATT MCPHERSON
COLUMNIST

Equity in property continues to rise every month and is expected to peak toward the end of summer now that interest rates are slowly creeping upward. The urge to sell is greater than it's been in the last decade, now that owners can convert their equity into liquidity.

Many property owners, such as growing families looking to upsize, are tapping into significant profits from home sales and leveraging into larger, more expensive houses. Home Equity Lines of Credit (HELOC) are extremely popular with millennials, leading the pack ahead of Generation X and baby boomers.

More than 33 percent of millennials are considering applying for a HELOC in the next 18 months with intentions of consolidating credit card and college debt, along with making some home improvements.

In 2016, more than 39 million homeowners had the power to tap into available equity, which is driving younger generations to refinance, but the same rise in prices seems to be discouraging millennial first-time buyers. Home builders understand this and are beginning to cater to this market segment.

Investors bought up

millions of homes during the recession and opted to rent out rather than sell, resulting in an extremely low inventory of starter homes on the market. In March, the national median price of a new home was \$315,000 – much higher than the median price of existing homes at \$236,000. Builders looked at the move-up buyer as a significant factor when building and pricing their homes. With the demographic shifting, builders now are focused on new millennial buyers to help foster the growth.

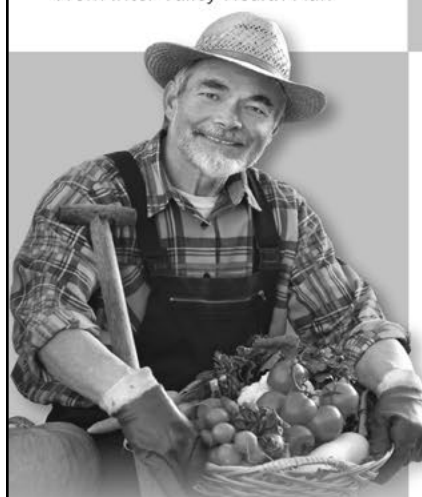
Construction is still 18 percent lower than its 25-year average, attributable to renters not moving out to buy homes in large numbers. FICO scores and credit risk are still major factors for borrowers in securing loans. Student loans and lower incomes continue to stymie the expected surge of new home buyers, while significant savings may allow for large down payments.

In April, the median home price in Hemet was \$223,156, which is up from \$209,437 over 12 months. This is a rise of seven percent in value and still a very healthy recovery.

San Jacinto home prices averaged out at \$238,897 in April and

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brushes with the law, her three children spent their childhoods bouncing from foster home to foster home. Two of them currently live in Hemet, and the other lives in Orange County.

Marilyn met her husband in Illinois in 1981, and their first child, Christee, was born the following year. They moved to California, and a year later they had their second child, Lee, with whom Marilyn now lives.

Drug addiction and crime separates the family

Not long after the birth of her youngest son, James, Marilyn became heavily addicted to heroin and fell into a life of crime and drugs. Gone and in prison, Marilyn left her three children in the care of their father in Long Beach, who each can recall living in a station wagon at one point. More surprisingly, Christee and Lee were kidnapped when they were seven (Lee) and eight (Christee) years old.



I'm glad we got to spend this time with her, and toward the end, she's with the right people she needs to be around."

- James Votaw

"We were walking home from school," explained Lee Votaw, 34. Their father owed a debt to a rival biker gang, who took the two of them for ransom. Lee described the scene as if it were yesterday; a van would follow them home from school every day - and Christee and Lee knew it.

"One day, a guy jumped out. I looked back and I saw [Christee] was grabbed, so I just walked back and said 'OK, take me too.'" They were kept for six days - unharmed, just not allowed to leave - until they eventually snuck out of their captors' house early one morning. "Just a typical day for us," laughed James. Eventually, Child Protective Services seized the children from their father, and they were

placed into foster care. Their father was actively working to regain custody of his children in court, until he was murdered in 1993. He was allegedly injected with battery acid, which caused cardiac arrest. Marilyn was allowed to leave prison to attend funeral service, in handcuffs.

"After that, we all got separated into different homes," explained Christee Votaw-Peoples, 35.

Lee cycled through nearly 14 different foster homes in Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside counties, and Christee more than that. They lived together in a foster home on only two separate occasions, but still tried to keep in touch with each other for as long as they could. It didn't last, and they re-established contact after they turned 18.

"We've always been close, because that's all we had," said Christee. "We took care of each other...it's the same with Mom, too. We've always been in contact with her, but there'll be gaps, like years we don't talk to her, because we couldn't find her."

Homeless on the streets of Long Beach

In and out of prison, Marilyn wound up homeless on the streets of Long Beach. "They [social workers] told me 'you can't see them today,' or 'they're not here,' there was always an excuse," stated Marilyn. "There were a lot of lies." She continued to live the only life she ever knew - crime and hard drugs.

Christee eventually went off to nursing school, while Lee enlisted in the U.S. Army. James entered the U.S. Marine Corps. Lee came back six years later with vision and hearing impairment, and severe post-traumatic stress disorder, which Christee was also diagnosed with in 2015.

In time, Marilyn was found in the streets, passed out and near death; she was taken to Long Beach Memorial Hospital and put on life support. That's when she received her diagnosis. Weeks later, Marilyn's "boyfriend" finally informed her children that she was in the hospital. They all started visiting Marilyn daily.

"When I came to, I'm looking up, and my son's giving me a kiss," Marilyn described the time her children first came to visit her in the hospital; her eyes welled up with tears. "I got to see all of my family there. It's the best thing I've ever felt in my life."

The only photos Marilyn had with her three children were from when they visited her in prison. This past Mother's Day was the first time they were able to all take a photo together as a family again.

"I'm so glad, now that I'm with them," wept Marilyn.

Hospice grants dying wish

On Saturday, May 20, Southern California Hospice Foundation (SCHF) granted Marilyn her dying wish, and brought her, her three children and nine grandchildren to have lunch at Maze Stone Bar and Grill at the Country Club at Soboba Springs in San Jacinto. The foundation also provided a brand new wig and clothing for Marilyn.

This is the first time we've ever seen her sober, clean, and happy - in our entire lives," explained Christee. "And now we're trying to make 30 years' worth of memories in weeks."

"It's not about the past; it's about the future," Lee told his mother.

"I'm glad we got to spend this time with her, and toward the end, she's with the right people she needs to be around," reflected James. "We all love her, and we're still family with that bond that's never going to be broken."

"We never stopped loving her," added Christee. "She's always been Mom."

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up from \$230,688 from the previous year. A four percent increase in value in San Jacinto suggests the climb in home values may be approaching a plateau toward the fall and winter months.

More than twice as many

properties in Hemet does affect the average and leaves a huge potential for increased values over the coming months. The large proportion of houses in the valley which are categorized as Hemet-owned, might have contributed to lessening the overall median home price in the valley. Stay tuned for future arti-

cles as the local real estate market persists through the summer months with new construction headed our way.

Matt McPherson is a licensed real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Associated Brokers, BRE # 01362837. Reach him at 951-315-7914 or McPhtown@aol.com.



Home values in Hemet and San Jacinto both continue to rise steadily.

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of), who delighted the audience as he strolled among them during the rendition of a fun song entitled "Beethoven's Wig" (In case you didn't know it, it's very big).



Saria Castillo, a student at San Jacinto High School, was awarded a \$1,000 vocal music scholarship from Harmoners Chorale on May 20. She was surrounded by family, including her mother and grandmother."

"A Musical Potpourri" was the theme of the Harmoners' concert, which the group described as a musical walk through life,

and included well-known songs such as "Moon River," "The Impossible Dream," and "Step in Time" from "Mary Poppins." Lively numbers, such as "Create a Rhythm," "Spiritual Jubilee" and "Rhythm of Life" kept the audience engaged. Also featured was a tribute to the men and women serving in our armed forces. Such songs as "Already Home" and "Keep the Home

Fires Burning," during which a slide show was presented showing photos of local men and women who are presently serving our country in the armed forces, was a tear-jerking performance.

The Harmoners Chorale has been performing before audiences in the Hemet area since 1977, and has given away more than \$45,000 to help finance the education of more than 60 local graduating seniors who choose to pursue a career in vocal music. If you would like to add your voice to this excellent group, visit their Facebook page or send an email to harmonerschorale@gmail.com.

Your Weekly Forecast
Hemet - San Jacinto

Thursday May 25	Day: Some clouds in the morning. High 77F. Night: Clear skies with a few passing clouds. Low near 50F.
Friday May 26	Day: Some clouds in the morning. High 71F. Night: A few clouds. Low 49F. Winds W at 10 to 15 mph.
Saturday May 27	Day: Abundant sunshine. High 81F. Winds WSW at 10 to 15 mph. Night: Clear skies. Low 53F. Winds NW at 5 to 10 mph.
Sunday May 28	Day: Mainly sunny. High around 90F. Winds W at 10 to 15 mph. Night: Clear. Low 57F. Winds WNW at 5 to 10 mph.
Monday May 29	Day: Generally sunny. High 92F. Winds W at 10 to 15 mph. Night: Mostly clear. Low 58F. Winds W at 5 to 10 mph.
Tuesday May 30	Day: Sunshine along with some cloudy intervals. High 89F. Night: Mostly clear skies. Low 57F. Winds SW at 5 to 10 mph.
Wednesday May 31	Day: A few passing clouds, otherwise generally sunny. High near 85F. Night: Partly cloudy. Low 57F. Winds WSW at 5 to 10 mph.

	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED
Los Angeles	69F/59F	68F/57F	70F/56F	76F/59F	77F/61F	74F/60F	72F/60F
Idyllwild	65F/41F	59F/43F	73F/49F	80F/54F	83F/57F	82F/51F	78F/48F
Big Bear	62F/35F	60F/37F	67F/41F	73F/45F	76F/47F	74F/45F	69F/41F
Palm Springs	95F/63F	88F/63F	96F/70F	102F/74F	107F/77F	103F/74F	100F/71F
San Diego	67F/61F	67F/60F	68F/59F	69F/60F	68F/61F	68F/60F	68F/61F

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tian Assembly and founder of Hemet GateKeepers; Chief Dave Brown, Hemet Police Department; Stacie Olson, president/founder of Project Hope II; Audra Lee, CASA executive director; Lynne Brockmeier, administrative services manager for Housing, Riverside University Health Systems. The forum will be moderated by Councilwoman Karlee Meyer.

Center Against Sexual Assault (C.A.S.A.) Open House

Join CASA for its first annual open house and silent auction on June 2 from 1-4 p.m. at 1600 E. Florida Ave. #206, Hemet. Refreshments and door prizes will be provided. Please contact Diana Barnes-Fox, director of counseling, at (951) 652-8300 for more information.

Bow-Wow Meow Luau

The Ramona Humane Society fundraiser to help shelter animals will be held Saturday, June 3 starting at 6 p.m. at the Hemet Library, 2nd floor, located 300 East Latham Ave., Hemet. Tickets are \$50 each online. For more information, please call (951) 654-8002.

Free golf classes for kids

Grandfathers For Golf sponsors free golf lessons for children ages 7 to 18. Classes begin June 13 and all course fees and classes are free. Beginner's classes will be held at Echo Hills Golf Course in Hemet and Golden Era Golf Course in San Jacinto. The first classes will be held on Tuesday, June 13 at Golden Era Golf Course, and Wednesday, June 14 at Echo Hills. Classes are from 7:30 - 9 a.m. at both locations. Pee Wee classes (ages 5 to 6) will start at 8 a.m. Every child, in addition to nine classes, will receive a uniform shirt and hat and a set of golf clubs for them to keep. Donations are gratefully accepted. Sign-ups are available online at www.grandfathersforgolf.org or by calling (909) 754-4148. For more information, please contact Tony Viola at (909) 754-4148.

Wild Desert at DVAC

Photographer David McChesney's new exhibit, "Wild Desert," presents striking images of desert life. A meet-the-artist reception will be held on Sunday, June 11 at 4 p.m. The exhibition runs from Friday, June 1 to Saturday July 29. Hours of the exhibition are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays at Diamond Valley Arts Gallery, 123 N Harvard St. Call (951) 652-3800 for more information.

Hispanic Network Meeting

The Hemet/San Jacinto Chamber of Commerce hosts the Hispanic Network Meeting the third Wednesday of every month. For more information contact Yolanda Saenz at (951) 658-3211 or at (562) 400-4621. Meetings are held at various locations and are conducted in English.