

December 29, 2023

DOMESTIC DISPUTE
ENDS PEACEFULLY

Calistoga PD gets assist from
St. Helena and sheriff

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Rain and snow mark biggest stories of 2023

By Tom Chorneau
Editor

After a near-record rainstorm, a freak snow shower and a delayed grape growing season, weather might qualify as the top story for 2023 in Calistoga.

During the first week of January, storms dumped nearly 10 inches of rain in the upper valley, which was the start of what would become the 10th wettest winter in state history, according to the Western Regional Climate Center.

While there was just a modest amount of flooding locally, the January storms caused some mudslides and road closures as well as toppling a 275-year-old canopy oak at St. Helena's V. Sattui Winery.

Next came the extraordinary snowstorm that blanketed the town during the last week of February. In some spots, the cold stuff measured 9 inches. Although most of it melted away in a few hours, the peaks of the Palisades and Mayacamas Mountains remained snowcapped for days.

Weather also played a big part in one of

the biggest business stories of the year – the late harvest. A chilly and overcast spring left growers worried about when the vines would blossom.

"We had a cold winter, and it's turned into a cool spring," said Michael Swanton of Laura Michael Wines in Calistoga in a Tribune report published June 16. "And we're about to start what looks like a cool summer. It's June, and I'm out here in the vineyard in a hoodie. That's sort of weird."

The summer did eventually arrive, and grapes did ripen. While many growers

were harvesting well into November, the long growing season may have contributed to what Napa Valley Vintners and the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association called the great vintage of 2023.

"I have no doubt that 2023 will go down as one of the most phenomenal vintages ever in Napa Valley," said Karen MacNeil, author of The Wine Bible, in a story published Dec. 8.

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City sells off surplus properties

By Tom Chorneau
Editor

A 1997 Ford pickup that runs poorly and has a few mechanical issues. Three digital Olympus cameras. A 52-inch Hitachi TV. These are among the list of used equipment that the city of Calistoga has deemed surplus and will be sold in the coming weeks at auction.

Like government bodies everywhere, the city's staff is expected to make do with existing work tools until the products either wear out or become obsolete.

Each year, items that are considered to have lost their utility but might still retain some value are gathered up and marked for resale.

Derek Rayner, director of the city's Public Works Department, said there is no minimum estimate for how much this year's haul might bring. Last year, a similar batch of items generated a check for about \$9,000, money that



PHOTO BY TOM CHORNEAU

Workers load a truck trailer with surplus city property to be sold at auction in the coming weeks.

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PHOTO BY KACEY JOHNSON

Members of "Adelante," a lobby group representing the Latino community of Calistoga, which championed a \$420,000 improvement plan at Logvy Park.

Latino group wins upgrades at Logvy

By Mariela Gomez
Highway 29 Media

When a \$420,000 improvement project at Logvy Park is finished next fall, the new features – an expanded picnic area, a playground, bocce courts and a pedestrian walkway – will stand as permanent reminders of who conceived the plan and how they got it done.

They call themselves "Adelante," which is Spanish for forward. Starting seven years ago as a loose coalition of parents concerned about Calistoga's future, they have emerged today as a leading example of the Latino community's growing influence in local civic affairs.

"We live in a country where most of us are immigrants – Anglos, Latinos, you name it," said Gloria Parada, a member of Adelante since 2016. "It takes a while for

us to implement ourselves into the American system, but being involved in the community allows you to be part of something bigger."

The Latino community of Calistoga comprises approximately 40 percent of the town's population of about 5,000. Their children, however, represent 86 percent of the students attending local public schools.

Finding new recreational avenues for their kids as well as all other children was a natural area of interest.

Julie Garcia, the leader of Adelante and a local business owner, said the catalyst for their campaign was recognition that there were few facilities in town that might keep teens or younger kids occupied.

"Our kids have nothing to do," she said. "They are either inside watching TV or at the computer. We want them outside."

She said they started to meet informally at the UpValley Family Center, whose

staff encouraged the dialogue. The center brought in an architect and later a facilitator to help guide progress on the group's work.

At one point the plans included a skateboard park and an indoor soccer field. The group still hopes both will one day become reality.

The former mayor, Chris Canning, was a supporter and brought their project to the council, which approved the plan in November 2019.

The project was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic but earlier this year, the council included the appropriation as part of the 2023-24 budget. City engineers are finalizing bid documents for construction of the new recreational features – the playground and picnic area, bocce courts and a

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A rare snow storm blanketed the upper Napa Valley in late February.



Voters overwhelmingly defeated Measure E, a \$27.5 million bond measure to buy the Napa County Fairgrounds.



Calistoga High's boys soccer team won the league championship for the first time in November.

LOGVY PARK

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pedestrian walkway. They hope to have crews working by early spring. The completion date is mid-October. So far, Adelante has not turned their attention to more political matters such as next year's council races or the hiring of more Latino town executives, but the success of the park project has clearly sparked interest among some members for bigger goals. "It gave us a feeling of visibility and empowerment to partake in our city government and to have a say in how our city is shaped," said Guillermo Robles, one of the original members of the organization and the father of three. "When we started the group and realized we had the power to influence, we grew and sought more members," he said. "We wanted to inspire other Latinos." Logvy, located at Washington and North Oak streets, was a point of emphasis for Adelante because

of its proximity to a number of apartment buildings where Latino families live, as well as the low-income farmworker housing complex next door to the park. While the park offers an expansive grass field and a baseball diamond, it doesn't fulfill the needs of families. "The problem is that the park is not adequate in the sense that if I had my older child playing a game on the field, I could not expect my youngest child to watch the entire game," said Parada. "The proposed additional amenities would transform it into a family experience, with someone cooking in the picnic area, my son enjoying the slides and another participating in a competitive sport on the field. Parks have the power to bring our families closer together." Robles said he is proud of what Adelante has accomplished. "When we unite it is when they hear us," he added. "The investment in Logvy Park assured us that our voices are heard and that we are needed in city decision-making processes."



Members of Adelante political action group. From left: Julie Garcia, Silvia Dennis, Guillermo Robles, Omaira Baptista, Rosa Rodriguez and Gloria Parada.

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Another significant news story was the announcement in February that a newly formed public-benefit company, Highway 29 Media, had reached an agreement with the owners of the Calistoga Tribune to take operational control of the newspaper, a milestone in the company's effort to save the paper and the Yountville Sun. Growth became a front-page topic in April with a report from the Tribune that as many as 260 housing units were in line to be built in Calistoga over the next two years. City officials said that some of the projects would likely be scaled down or perhaps rejected altogether. Even so, the expected growth spurt would be the largest in the last decade. The biggest political story of the year had to be Measure E and the disposition of the Napa County Fairgrounds. The Calistoga City Council agreed in 2022 to buy the 70-acre

property for \$16 million. The council then asked voters to approve a \$27.5 million bond measure, Measure E, to pay for the acquisition and related improvement. In a special election on March 7, the voters overwhelmingly rejected the bond. The city and the Napa County Board of Supervisors remain in negotiations over the fairgrounds property. Politics were central to another noteworthy story the Tribune published on April 7 about the tormented weeks that Napa County District Attorney Allison Haley and her staff endured after Donald Trump Jr. falsely tweeted that she had dropped drunken driving charges against Paul Pelosi, husband of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Her office was inundated by thousands of threatening and abusive emails and phone calls that didn't let up until Pelosi was charged and convicted of driving under the influence and causing

an injury. In 2023, prominent citizens passed away: business leader and local activist Rosie Dunsford of the Calistoga Inn died on New Year's Day; 12 months later, Miljenko "Mike" Grgich, passed away. Grgich made the Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that bested the French wines at the 1976 Judgment of Paris. There was a Michelin Star awarded in July to Auro, Four Seasons Resort's newest restaurant. In November, the Calistoga High School boys' varsity soccer team won its first-ever championship. And last fall, educator Patty Arends became the first female head football coach at Calistoga High. The team ended the season 5-5, but there were enough high notes that she's promised to come back next year.



Educator Patty Arends becomes the first female football coach at Calistoga High.



Chef Rogelio Garcia led Four Season's Auro restaurant to a Michelin Star in July.



In 2023, the town lost two prominent citizens: Rosie Dunsford, proprietor of the Calistoga Inn; and world-renown winemaker, Miljenko "Mike" Grgich.

