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UPDATED DAILY

DECEMBER 8, 2023

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

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10th Anniversary BEST OF CENTRAL VALLEY BUSINESS
THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

First Time Category Winners

De Young Properties
Central California Food Bank
Paul Halajian Architects
Lars Andersen & Associates, Inc.
Noble Credit Union
Max's Bistro & Bar
Kaiser Permanente
JIT Outsource
Hire Up Staffing
Facility Designs
Powertalk 96.7
Old Republic Title
Fresno Greek Fest
GB3
Mad Duck Craft Brewing
Kings River Winery
Behr Laser and Skin Care Center
Harris Construction

This Week Online 24
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Opinion 29

The readers have their say

40 top local businesses unveiled

Gabriel Dillard – MANAGING EDITOR

Pardini's was the place to be Tuesday evening to party with the winners of the Best of Central Valley Business Readers Choice Awards.

Nearly 300 people attended the event to network and celebrate the best of the best in 40 categories — an expansion from last year's 35 categories. New voting categories for 2024 include Best Fitness Center, Brewery, Vintner, Medical Spa & Wellness Center and Construction Firm.

For our 10th annual Best of event, we opened attendance to the general public for the first time, beyond the winners and finalists. The Business Journal was excited and honored to host such a fine group.

As far as voting goes, the online public came through in a big way for our decade anniversary. We tallied 434,621 individual votes this year from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31, 107% more than last year.

Be sure to flip through this entire issue to learn who the finalists are and read about the winners.

We always welcome feedback on the contest or suggestions for new categories. Please contact Marketing Manager Abner Garcia at abner@thebusinessjournal.com.

BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR

DE YOUNG PROPERTIES

1ST FINALIST: COMMUNITY MEDICAL CENTER
2ND FINALIST: GAR BENNETT LLC

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

De Young Properties has been recognized as the Best Company to Work For, a first for the Fresno-based homebuilder that was the 1st finalist in the category for 2022.

The De Young family began building in 1974 to help families achieve the American Dream of homeownership. Today, the business is in its third generation and has built over 8,000 homes.



Photo by Melissa Sweeney Photography | Ryan De Young, president of De Young Properties, accepts his Best of Central Valley Business award from Cathy Chatoian with event sponsor Central Valley Community Bank on Tuesday at Pardini's.

Hitting that kind of milestone requires a strong team.

"This [award] speaks to our commitment to a workplace where innovation, teamwork, and integrity thrive. We're not just a company; we're a family, united by a shared vision of excellence. This recognition is a nod to our dedication to creating a positive, supportive environment where every team member feels trusted, valued and empowered," said Ryan De Young, president of De young Properties.

De Young Properties has been part of some exciting projects over the years, including not one but two appearances on the hit television show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" in 2009 and 2019.

At De Young Properties, De Young said, they're not just about building homes; they're about crafting dream homes and fostering a closely connected community.

BEST ELECTED OFFICIAL

FRESNO MAYOR JERRY DYER

1ST FINALIST: REP. JIM COSTA
2ND FINALIST: FRESNO CITY COUNCILMEMBER GARRY BREDEFELD

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

For the second year in a row, Business Journal readers have picked Mayor Jerry as the Best Elected Official for 2023.

Working towards the administration's vision of "One Fresno," the mayor's office has had a busy year.

Dyer worked closely with state and federal partners to secure major support for the city, including a $250 million state grant to improve Downtown Fresno's infrastructure and another $43.7 million from the state to support housing development.

Through Project Off-Ramp, more than 3,000 people have been housed in motels purchased by the city. Affordable housing development is up 1,644% compared to the prior five-year period.

In the last two months, the city officially opened the Veterans Boulevard Interchange, a project nearly 40 years in the making. It also launched the FresnoHop free trolley service and broke ground on one of the largest combined on-site solar energy projects in California.



Photo by Estela Anahi Jaramillo | Jerry Dyer, center, poses with Fresno luminaries including Parker the mascot as part of the FresnoHop trolley launch last month.

The mayor continues to boost the Beautify Fresno program, with more than 16,000 volunteers teaming with sanitation crews to pick up more than 2 million pounds of trash to date.

Dyer said Fresno is a "city on the move," with great things ahead in '24.

"We are committed to supporting our existing business community while also enticing new businesses and industries to come to Fresno. More than anything, this nomination means we are on the right path. Big things are ahead for our great city," Dyer said.

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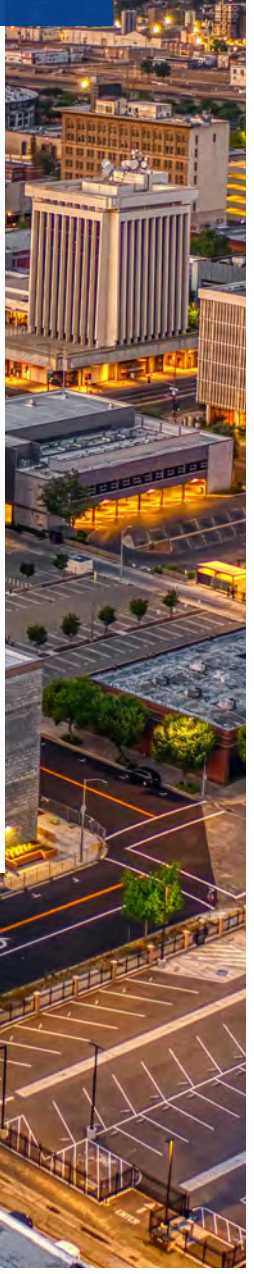
It is an honor to be considered one of the Best Law Firms in the Central Valley 2023.

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We are open to suggestions

The Business Journal is starting a new regular feature where we spotlight a locally produced podcast. Do you know a podcast we should include? Send an email to **editor@thebusinessjournal.com.** Preference is given to podcasts with a business focus.



BEST BUSINESS SUPPORTING LOCAL CHARITIES
BEST HOME BUILDER

GRANVILLE HOMES

1ST FINALIST: DE YOUNG PROPERTIES
2ND FINALIST: GAR BENNETT LLC
1ST FINALIST: LENNAR HOMES
2ND FINALIST: IMAGE CUSTOM HOMES

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

With a 10-year sweep, voters have selected Granville Homes as the Best Home Builder and Best Business Supporting Local Charities.

Since its founding in 1977, Granville has built more than 7,500 homes in the Central Valley. The passion of Granville Homes is to serve the community by improving the well-being of people in the Central Valley through building forever homes and giving back to charity

"Much of my team has roots here in the Central Valley and we're passionate about serving and giving back to our local communities. We operate with superior construction standards with the goal to produce a quality home with timeless architecture. Folks will buy a Granville because our homes and neighborhoods age like fine wine. The more mature they get, the more attractive and valuable they become," says CEO Darius Assemi on the company website.

In 2019 alone, Granville was able to assist more than 60 nonprofit and community organizations dedicated to improving the lives of families in the Central Valley, including Hinds Hospice, Poverello House and Marjaree Mason Center.

The Granville Foundation has partnered with an extensive portfolio of charities. The Granville Home of Hope event is the company's biggest fundraiser, raising $8.4 million for local partners since 2006 to provide food, shelter, health care and education.

Each year as a grand prize, Granville Homes donates a brand new home awarded to one lucky winner. Time and materials used in constructing the Granville Home of Hope are donated to the project – every penny of ticket sales goes straight to a nonprofit.



Granville Facebook photo | Granville Homes partnered with Fresno City Councilmember Mike Karbassi this year for the 3rd annual District 2 Operation Gobble, distributing more than 400 turkeys with all the trimmings to families.

BEST NONPROFIT

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA FOOD BANK

1ST FINALIST: FRESNO MISSION | 2ND FINALIST: MARJAREE MASON CENTER

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

For the first time in five years, a new organization takes center stage as Central California Food Bank brings home its first honors as the Best Nonprofit.

Central California Food Bank is the Valley's largest hunger-relief organization, partnering with more than 200 local organizations to feed more than 300,000 people each month.

"It really shows that the community recognizes the incredible impact that we make," said Central California Food Bank co-CEO Kym Dildine.

This year, the food bank opened the First Fruits Market, a free, market-style food bank for those suffering food insecurity. The market is open inside the Fresno Mission's City Center facility, which should come fully online within the next year.

"We're stretching the team to be innovative and [introduce] new, more specific programming so we can ensure we have equitable access and neighbors have access to the food that they want and that's culturally appropriate for them," she said.

The Central Valley Food Bank operates thanks to a number of volunteer workers and employees whose goal is to reduce the number of food-insecure Valley residents with initiative's such as CalFresh Outreach, senior hunger programs, school food programs and others.

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com



File photo | The Central California Food Bank team accepts a $150,000 grant from the Morgan Stanley Foundation in this July 2023 photo.

BEST COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE COMPANY

FORTUNE ASSOCIATES

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

For the second year in a row, Fortune Associates has been named the Best Commercial Real Estate Company in the Central Valley.

With the recognition, it's confirmation that the company is doing a good job, said Brandon Lamonica, specialist at Fortune Associates. This is a tribute to their existing clients and the relationships the company has built over time.

"It's a privilege to be able to represent a lot of individuals and companies here locally. And we take great pride in that. We'll continue to do that as we move forward," said Lamonica.

This year the commercial real estate company announced that a group of associates has teamed up to purchase Fortune Associates, with industry veteran Larry Fortune deciding to retire.

The Fortune Associates team made a big move in 2019, taking a high profile office space near Herndon Avenue and Fresno Street, where up to 90,000 cars travel each day.

Estela Anahi Jaramillo | Writer can be reached at: 490-3448 or e-mail anahi@thebusinessjournal.com

1ST FINALIST: NEWMARK GRUBB PEARSON COMMERCIAL
2ND FINALIST: RC COMMERCIAL



Fortune Associates Facebook photo | Fortune Associates moved into its high-visibility, second-floor office at 470 Herndon Ave. in 2019.

BEST RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE COMPANY



Guarantee Real Estate Facebook photo | Members of the Guarantee Real Estate team helped serve local families as part of the One Table Fresno event last month.

1ST FINALIST: KELLER WILLIAMS
2ND FINALIST: LONDON PROPERTIES

GUARANTEE REAL ESTATE

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

Guarantee Real Estate has been voted as the Best Residential Real Estate Company, the third time the business has topped the category since 2014.

In 1984 Guarantee Savings recognized a need for a high-quality real estate brokerage firm in the Fresno community, establishing Guarantee Real Estate by purchasing an existing mid-sized real estate company with 30 associates.

Since opening, Guarantee Real Estate says it has represented more homebuyers and sellers than any other real estate firm in the Central Valley.

Having adopted Guarantee Savings' philosophy of providing quality customer service, Guarantee Real Estate has prospered and grown to nearly 400 associates with 13 offices in Fresno, Clovis, Prather, Shaver Lake, Reedley, Selma and Visalia. Guarantee Real Estate President Scott Leonard has provided leadership to the firm since 1985.

With on-going education, state-of-the-art technology, advanced marketing and seasoned management support, Guarantee allows its associates to provide the best real estate services available, focusing on the same values it has held for over 100 years.

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BEST REAL ESTATE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANY

MANCO ABBOTT

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

Manco Abbott has been honored for the eighth time by Business Journal readers as the Best Real Estate Property Management Company in the Central Valley.

Manco Abbott celebrated its 50-year anniversary this past year. The company has continued its focus on service, integrity and community.

Founded in 1972, the headquarters is located in Fresno and serves customers throughout the Central Valley and Central Coast. The company manages apartments, office buildings, shopping centers and industrial buildings.

The property management company's objectives are to provide the maximum net return over the life of a client's property, preserve and safeguard property and enhance the value of real estate through skillful property management and planned upgrades. Dedicated to customer service, Manco Abbott strives to foster relationships with clients and provide the best care possible.

Estela Anahi Jaramillo | Writer can be reached at: 490-3448 or e-mail anahi@thebusinessjournal.com

1ST FINALIST: LIBERTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
2ND FINALIST: GRANVILLE HOMES



Manco Abbott Facebook photo | Manco Abbott celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022, and has been honored for the eighth time as best property management firm.

BEST ARCHITECTURAL FIRM

PAUL HALAJIAN ARCHITECTS

1ST FINALIST: MARLETTE ASSOCIATES | 2ND FINALIST: DARDEN ARCHITECTS

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Winning for the first time in this category is Paul Halajian Architects in Clovis, with readers voting the firm as the Central Valley's best architectural firm.

Founded by Paul Halajian in 2010, the firm's work can be seen all over the Central Valley, including the Mercedes-Benz of Fresno building, the Fresno State aquatics complex and a number of educational facilities and living communities.

This was a year of growth for the firm, Halajian said.

The team has expanded to 22 and makes it a point to seek out projects with capacity to improve the lives of Central Valley residents.

The firm is working on several affordable housing projects including La Joya Commons in Firebaugh and Crossroads Village and The Dakota, both in Fresno.

They're also busy with Landmark Square, a 47,000 square foot centralized hub for the Clovis Senior Center and home to the new Clovis Transit Center.

Another project that will go into construction soon is a new campus for State Center Community College District in Oakhurst. They also just began work with the Marjaree Mason Center of Fresno on a new facility.

The architectural firm was recently commissioned to design the new Porterville public library.

The team is currently operating out of a temporary office and will be moving into new offices in the spring of 2024.

Halajian said they are growing but maintaining a studio culture that sets them apart.

"Bringing in the brightest, most talented practitioners to be part of our team is critical to our success and to be nominated for this award is affirming. We are humbled that so many individuals recognize PHA as a top Architecture Firm in the Central Valley," Halajian said.



Photo contributed by PHA | The team at Paul Halajian Architects seeks work that has the capacity to improve lives.

BEST ENGINEERING FIRM

LARS ANDERSEN & ASSOCIATES

1ST FINALIST: PRECISION CIVIL ENGINEERING
2ND FINALIST: GIANETTA ENGINEERING

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Business Journal readers voted Lars Andersen & Associates as the Central Valley's Best Engineering Firm.

With over 75 years of business in the Central Valley, the Fresno-based firm has a history as rich as the area it's in.

Started by two Danish brothers who emigrated to the United States, Andy and Lars Andersen first worked for several Fresno land surveying firms.

After the death of Andy, Lars took over the business, giving the company his name and expanding it from a land surveying firm into a civil engineering and design firm.

The firm provides functional and creative project development and management for large-scale commercial projects and parking structures, single-family and residential communities, government facilities, school districts, industrial sites, and more.

Scott Mommer, grandson of the firm's founder, was trained under the eye of his grandfather to become the firm's president.

Mommer expanded the firm to its greatest size in the mid 2000s and began to cater to Fortune 500 companies all over the western United States.

While Mommer still leads the team, the current day-to-day operations are run by Daniel Zoldak, the firm's vice president and chief operating officer.



Lars Andersen & Associates image | The firm traces its roots to two Danish brothers, Andy and Lars Andersen, who came to this country and started land surveying.

BEST BUSINESS BANK

CENTRAL VALLEY COMMUNITY BANK

1ST FINALIST: CHASE BANK
2ND FINALIST: FFB BANK (FORMERLY FRESNO FIRST BANK)

Ramon Castanos –CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Voters once again chose Central Valley Community Bank as Best Business Bank — for the tenth year in a row.

The honor reflects hard work and trust with the local business community, said James Kim, president and CEO of Central Valley Community Bank and Bancorp.

They understand the needs of Valley business.

"If there's a business need, we are there to help and provide advocacy with a giving spirit and exceptional service in the good and challenging times," said Kim. "All businesses are important to the region's economy, as they provide quality jobs and give back to the community to ensure it remains strong and vibrant for the future."

The company was founded in 1980 in Clovis by local business leaders who wanted to focus on the needs of the community. The bank has since expanded from Clovis to Fresno, Tulare and the greater Sacramento area.

In October, bank officials announced the signing of an all-stock merger agreement valued just shy of $100 million with Community West Bank in Santa Barbara.

With the expected closure of the deal in Q2 2024, the bank will be rebranded to Community West Bank.

But Kim said the core values of teamwork, caring, inclusivity, excellence, accountability and integrity will remain.

"Annually, we provide support from financial education to food and housing security, from healthcare to regional revitalization. We are proud of our long-time partnerships with nonprofit, civic and trade organizations that help meet the specific needs of our community," said Kim.

They are grateful Business Journal readers once again recognized them as one of the best in the Central Valley.



File photo | James Kim, president and CEO of Central Valley Community Bank, said his team places a strong emphasis on serving the community.

"We recognize the value that each of the Best of Business finalists provide our region and we are grateful to be part of such an esteemed group," said Kim.

BEST EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

PRIDESTAFF

1ST FINALIST: HIRE UP STAFFING SERVICES
2ND FINALIST: SELECT STAFFING

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

For the eighth year in a row, PrideStaff has been voted as the Central Valley's Best Employment Service.

The staffing agency was founded in Fresno in 1978 and is still headquartered in the city.

PrideStaff began franchising in the mid-1990s and has nearly 90 locations across the U.S.

PrideStaff issues about 30,000 W-2 forms annually—about 5,000 them locally.

They work with more than 200 different companies in the counties of Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare.

Sean Akin, vice president of branch operations at PrideStaff, said the current labor market is being influenced by various factors including economic conditions and societal challenges.

Remote work is trending more, demand for skills is evolving due to automation and there are ongoing workforce challenges.

Akin said the Fresno market is growing fast, with wages going up and a higher demand for skilled labor. That situation will remain for the foreseeable future.

He said PrideStaff is honored to be nominated as the best staffing agency for the eighth year in a row.

"This recognition is a testament to our commitment to excellence and the trust our clients and candidates place in us. We are grateful for the ongoing support and look forward to continuing to provide exceptional service in the years to come," Akin said.



PrideStaff photo | Sean Akin, a Hanford native is a strategic partner for PrideStaff in Fresno.

BEST PROPERTY/CASUALTY INSURANCE COMPANY



DiBuduo and DeFendis Facebook photo | From left, Matt and Mike DeFendis run the firm started by their father Leonard T. DeFendis and his partner Anthony J. DiBuduo in 1960.

DIBUDUO AND DEFENDIS INSURANCE BROKERS

1ST FINALIST: CAL VALLEY INSURANCE SERVICES
2ND FINALIST: DER MANOUEL INSURANCE GROUP

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

DiBuduo and DeFendis Insurance Brokers, LLC, has once again been named best property/ casualty insurance firm for the 10th year, reflecting the company's reputation among readers and community members.

"This [award] is a testament to our team's hard work in an ever-changing market and economy, where the root values of what our company was founded on remain unwavering – family, integrity, trust, community involvement, to name a few. This has been a team effort for sure, and we are very blessed," said Matt DeFendis, principal of DiBuduo and DeFendis Insurance Brokers.

Mike DeFendis, also a principal at the firm, is Matt's brother.

Founded in 1960 by Anthony J. DiBuduo and Leonard T. DeFendis, the firm operates 11 offices throughout the Central Valley and California. It has offices in Clovis, Fresno, Bakersfield, Dinuba, Hollister, Lodi, Modesto, Oxnard, San Luis Obispo, Santa Monica and Taft.

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BEST CREDIT UNION

NOBLE CREDIT UNION

1ST FINALIST: EECU
2ND FINALIST: NAVY FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Ramon Castanos –CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For the very first time, Noble Credit Union has been named Best Credit Union by readers of The Business Journal.

The credit union was established in 1941 by a group of Fresno County employees who wanted an alternative to traditional banks. The organization rebranded from its Fresno County Federal Credit Union name in 2017 and is now Noble Credit Union.

"We knew that selecting this particular name would communicate the continued promise to the members and communities we serve that at Noble, you're treated with dignity, honor, respect, and compassion," said Angelino "Gino" Cayanan, the new president and CEO hired this year. "This is the promise we live up to every day and that members appreciate and quite frankly, deserve."

Noble Credit Union has 114,000 members in eight locations in Fresno, Clovis, Selma, and Madera, served by a team of 220 employees.

"And I would be remiss if I didn't mention the numerous businesses and organizations we work with by supporting their initiatives through monetary donations, sponsorships, and our employee volunteer program, which results in hundreds of volunteer hours each year," said Cayanan.

"Thank you to the readers, the voters, and the Business Journal for providing this opportunity for the community to feel safe and confident about who they do business with and for your contributions to helping the business community thrive," Cayanan concluded.



Noble Credit Union photo | Angelino "Gino" Cayanan is the new president and CEO of Noble Credit Union.

BEST AUTO DEALERSHIP

FRESNO LEXUS

1ST FINALIST: FUTURE FORD OF CLOVIS
2ND FINALIST: FRESNO ACURA

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

For the second year in a row, and fifth time since the Best of Central Valley Business Awards began, the Best Auto Dealership award goes to Fresno Lexus.

After a 2022 that saw the dealership recognized as the Valley's top auto dealership for the first time since 2016, Fresno Lexus repeated its performance in 2023.

Fresno Lexus continues to serve the local luxury auto market under the direction of General Manager Mike Gibson, who also serves as the president of the Central California New Car Dealer Association.

Focusing on customer service first, Fresno Lexus provides a variety of car buying options from simple walk-in appointments to online shopping and expertise. Even prior to the pandemic, Gibson said the company's focus has been on customer relations, with options online to view inventory, contact dealers and even reserve specific units.

Fresno Lexus is located at 777 W. Palmdon Dr. in Fresno, near the corners of Palm and Herndon avenues. The dealership operates seven days a week and its parts and service departments serve customers from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekly and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.



Fresno Lexus Facebook photo | Fresno Lexus has been named Best Auto Dealership for the second year in a row, and the fifth time since the program started 10 years ago.

BEST ACCOUNTING FIRM

MOSS ADAMS LLP

1ST FINALIST: MOORE GRIDER & CO.
2ND FINALIST: NUNES & NUNES CPA INC.

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

For the second consecutive year, Moss Adams LLP has been named the Best Accounting Firm in The Business Journal's Best of Central Valley Business Awards.

Founded in Seattle in 1913, Moss Adams has been in the Valley since 2016. The firm has more than 3,800 practicing accountants throughout its Western U.S. branches.

"We're always proud and excited to be recognized for our team here at Moss Adams and all of the hard work that they do to take care of our clients and also give back to our community," said Chris Morse, lead partner at Moss Adams, Fresno.

In 2018, Moss Adams merged with Fresno firm Baker Peterson & Franklin, cementing its foundation as a local accounting firm. Prior to partnering with Moss Adams, Baker Peterson & Franklin had been named the Valley's Best Accounting Firm by readers for five consecutive years.

"The folks here in Fresno, many are born and raised here…it's just a good quality of people that we get to work with as our clients," Morse said.

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com



Moss Adams photo | Chris Morse is the partner in charge of Moss Adams, Fresno.

BEST LAW FIRM

MCCORMICK BARSTOW LLP

1ST FINALIST: PASCUZZI, PASCUZZI & STOKER
2ND FINALIST: HATMAKER LAW GROUP

Ramon Castanos –CONTRIBUTING WRITER

McCormick Barstow LLP has once again been named Best Law Firm for the tenth year in a row, and they feel very proud, said Mike Ball, managing partner.

To Ball, the reason they have been nominated for all sorts of awards is because they have built strong relationships in the Central Valley over the decades. Their various business and organizational partnerships are spread throughout the Valley.

"I'm not talking just writing checks, but I'm talking about being active on the board in the community at the functions, and we take pride in giving service," said Ball. "And whether we get an award or not, we're proud of it."

Ball said service is essential. They strive to be available 24/7 hours for their clients, with associates only a phone call or email away.

McCormick has existed since 1951, with the firm going by different names over the years. But their ideals have remained intact. The team is happy to see their hard work recognized.

"It's great feedback to tell us that maybe our mission is working," said Ball.



McCormick Barstow photo | Since 1951, McCormick Barstow has grown to one of the most successful law firms in the Central Valley.

BEST MARKETING AGENCY

JP MARKETING

1ST FINALIST: JSA | 2ND FINALIST: FIVE CREATIVE GROUP

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

With a winning streak going for 10 years now, JP Marketing continues its clean sweep for the Best Marketing Agency in the Central Valley.

"We've been so blessed to have been recognized each year. I think this year, we need to turn the tables and really thank the Webster family for all the work that they do to shine the light on local businesses," said Jane Olvera Majors, president and founder of JP marketing, talking about The Business Journal's publishers.

As she reflected on this past year, she said the team was able to look back at their work and who they have served as they approach 29 years of service. The agency underwent a brand journey, which tracks the interactions between a company and its potential customers, from the moment they become aware of the business to their satisfaction with the product or service.

The effort provided a thorough review of who they are, what they stand for and who they serve well.

The branding included a lot of work done internally at the agency and that isn't visible externally yet, Olvera said.

Estela Anahi Jaramillo | Writer can be reached at: 490-3448 or e-mail anahi@thebusinessjournal.com



Photo by Melissa Sweeney Photography | Jane Olvera Majors and her JP Marketing team accept their award Tuesday night.

BEST BAR TO ENTERTAIN CLIENTS

MAX'S BISTRO & BAR

1ST FINALIST: PISMO'S COASTAL GRILL
2ND FINALIST: MAD DUCK CRAFT BREWING CO.

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

The Best Bar to Entertain Clients award goes to another first-time winner this year, with Max's Bistro and Bar taking the top spot.

Max's Bistro and Bar has been wowing diners for 25 years as a casual, upscale bar and restaurant, featuring a rotating seasonal menu, appetizers and a drink menu that pairs well with its relaxed atmosphere.

"We're very excited to be recognized for just about anything in this town," said owner J.J. Wettstead. "We're just thrilled to still be in business after all of the things that have happened over the last three years."

Following the pandemic and since returning to regular operation, Max's has had several years of booming business, according to Wettstead. He emphasized a "celebratory feeling" as customers continue to return to in-person dining and interactions.

For customers, the restaurant provides a quiet atmosphere, great for hammering down the details of a big transaction or spending a night on the town.

"In the late afternoon it stays quiet enough; it's small and quaint enough to not be inundated with noise while you're trying to have a discussion," he said. "It's always worked out really well."

This year marks the third year in a row a different business has won an award in this category – one of The Business Journal's most competitive voting categories.

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com



Max's Facebook photo | J.J. Wettstead, owner of Max's Bistro & Bar, said it was a "celebratory feeling" when customers returned to in-person dining.

BEST HOSPITAL

KAISER PERMANENTE FRESNO MEDICAL CENTER

1ST FINALIST: CLOVIS COMMUNITY MEDICAL CENTER
2ND FINALIST: SAINT AGNES MEDICAL CENTER

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

This year's award for Best Hospital goes to Kaiser Permanente – a first for the health maintenance organization that plays a key role in the local health care scene.

Serving as one of the Valley's leading health care networks, Kaiser Permanente is one of the largest private sector employers in the Valley, employing nearly 3,000 Valley residents. Kaiser Permanente serves the Valley from its seven facilities in Fresno, Clovis, Selma and Oakhurst. Its Fresno medical center offers 169 inpatient beds.

Kaiser Permanente is consistently ranked among the top hospitals for quality of care and accessibility with services for maternity, emergency, outpatient, radiology, laboratory, pharmacy and health education. Kaiser Permanente Fresno also acts as a certified Primary Stroke Center, offering consistently better outcomes for stroke patients.

"This nomination is a reflection of Kaiser Permanente Fresno's commitment to providing high-quality, exceptional care to the communities we serve," said Debbie Hemker, interim senior vice president and area manager at Kaiser Permanente Fresno. "Our highly skilled and dedicated care teams work every day to provide our patients and members with the clinical and specialty care they need to improve their overall health and well-being."

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com



Kaiser photo | Kaiser Permanente serves the Valley from seven facilities, including the Fresno Medical Center.

BEST TECHNOLOGY COMPANY

JIT OUTSOURCE

1ST FINALIST: KOTMAN TECHNOLOGY INC.
2ND FINALIST: CIO SOLUTIONS

Ramos Castanos- CONTRIBUTION WRITER

Voters chose JIT Outsource as the best technology company in the Best of Central Valley Readers Choice Awards.

JIT was formed to help customers with all of their technology needs, including IT support, web development and hosting and Internet phone systems. They strive to ensure a worry-free tech environment for businesses.

JIT Outsource was founded by J. Colin Petersen, who originally launched "The Geeks" computer service in 1995.

In 2014 JIT Outsource was born. The firm grew in 2015 with the acquisition of AR Technologies, formerly known as ARTCO.

"I.T. is not for the weak. I'm privileged to have this incredible team of rock stars, geniuses, and mover/shakers working for me and for the benefit of my clients," Petersen said on the website.

BEST SHOPPING CENTER

RIVER PARK

1ST FINALIST: FIG GARDEN VILLAGE
2ND FINALIST: MARKETPLACE AT EL PASEO

Ben Hensley - STAFF WRITER

Domination of the Fresno retail scene once again goes to River Park, solidifying itself as the area's Best Shopping Center among voters for a tenth-consecutive year.

"It's such an honor to be nominated," said Tracy Kashian, public relations manager at River Park. "We work really hard to keep everything fresh and new. We try to keep bringing tenants that Fresno wants and likes and we're never going to stop."

This year, River Park improved some of its aesthetic design elements, including the addition of oversized planter pots and the addition of Tesla charging stations between the Ashley's Homestore and Mattress Land.

The Nike store, slated to open in February, is taking center stage for the center, which has very limited space, according to Kashian. This year, several tenants, including Pum Bum Boutique, relocated within the shopping center. J Crew will fill the space previously occupied by Sur La Table.

"We're almost completely filled," Kashian said. "I think inside the shops area we actually have one space that's vacant, which is pretty amazing."

River Park also continues to host weekly events featuring everything from music to farmers markets, community events and the annual Santa's Workshop during the holiday season.



River Park Facebook photo | River Park is bursting with events in December for the holidays.

BEST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

FRESNO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

1ST FINALIST: CLOVIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
2ND FINALIST: HANFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Ramos Castanos- CONTRIBUTION WRITER

The Fresno Chamber of Commerce has been won its Best of category for the tenth time.

The Fresno Chamber of Commerce has had a strong relationship with Central Valley businesses since 1885.

The Fresno Chamber of Commerce had a strong 2023. Membership has increased, according to CEO Scott Miller. Last month, they hosted their second-annual MADE Central California food expo, helping establish the region as a foodie business haven.

"The idea is to kind of make our local economy a little bit more resilient by bringing people together who are in complementary businesses," said Miller. "It was successful, and we had a great turnout."

Miller said bringing local businesses together is essential to build strong relationships and forge trust. One of the many ways the Fresno Chamber helps its members succeed is through networking events, education classes and political advocacy.

"We'll do seminars to improve your business and notify business owners of important issues coming down the road," said Miller.

The Fresno Chamber's political advocacy helps inform local businesses and support candidates supportive of business.

They are very happy to be awarded again in our annual program.

"We really appreciate the work that The Business Journal does out there in the community," said Miller.



Fresno Chamber Facebook photo | The Smittcamp family greets guests at the MADE Central California event last month.

BEST WOMAN OWNED BUSINESS

HIRE UP STAFFING & HEALTHCARE SERVICES

1ST FINALIST: LA TAPATIA TORTILLERIA
2ND FINALIST: JP MARKETING

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

This is the first year that Hire Up Staffing & Healthcare Services has won the Best Woman Owned Business award.

The staffing franchise is headquartered in Fresno and was founded by Rebecca Kirkman in 2010.

Kirkman started the staffing company with two investors and after the five-year mark, she bought the company from them and began expanding.

Today they secure jobs for about 2,000 people each year and employ approximately 70 employees between their 10 offices in California and Texas.

After coming off an amazing 2022, 2023 has represented more of a challenge. Kirkman attributes this year's drop to a lack of hiring activity.

Some employers are also choosing to eliminate roles that have become vacant.

Most of the job gains are happening on the government side, Kirkman said, as governments tend to spend more during recessions and spend less when the economy is good, which is when companies hire more.

Kirkman remains hopeful for better conditions in 2024.

In Fresno, the economy is holding pretty strong, she said, and companies will still need staffing services.

Kirkman said she is proud to be considered a woman business leader and is inspired by other successful woman entrepreneurs.

"I feel honored and almost wonder 'why me?'" Kirkman said. "I get compliments from people that see how our employees talk about how well they're treated. I'm very transparent, so you always know what to expect. I hope that's what led to the nomination."



Photo contributed by Hire Up | Rebecca Kirkman, founder of Hire Up Staffing, is proud to be considered a woman business leader.

BEST OFFICE EQUIPMENT COMPANY

CALIFORNIA BUSINESS MACHINES

1ST FINALIST: CALTRONICS BUSINESS SYSTEMS
2ND FINALIST: CAL BENNETTS OFFICE FURNISHING PLANNING AND DESIGN

Ramon Castanos

Fresno-based California Business Machines has for the ninth time taken top readers-choice honors for Best Office Equipment Company

For 70 years, California Business Machines has adapted new technological changes to help the needs of local companies. According to Teri McNally Brymer, president of California Business Machines, they do so while maintaining consistent quality service to meet customer needs.

The family business used to sell typewriters and adding machines, today providing the modern office with products such as multifunctional printers and more — serviced by a locally based company.

"It's important for us to succeed, to be part of the community, and to take care of those people," said Brymer. "A bigger company may have its own benefits, but they are more numbers-driven, not customer-centric, as we are."

California Business Machines prides itself on customer service, and Brymer believes that this is why many local businesses trust them for their equipment needs.

"Our mission is not only to choose the right products to represent, but our business is very much a service business," said Brymer. "You have to start by having good people in your company, training them, treating them right and sharing the mission of caring for your customers."

They are very honored to be recognized again for their customer service.

"We're very appreciative, and it does motivate us to keep up the good work," said Brymer.



Photo via California Business Machines | California Business Machines prides itself on providing quality customer service.

BEST COMMERCIAL PRINTING COMPANY

FASTSIGNS

1ST FINALIST: DUMONT PRINTING
2ND FINALIST: FRESNO REPROGRAPHICS

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Though they're not consecutive wins, Fastsigns of Fresno has been voted the Best Commercial Printing Company for the third time, its first award since 2021.

Kim and Robert Craigo own the local Fastsigns franchise that has been operating in the area for nearly 30 years. The Craigos purchased the business located at 2745 W. Shaw Ave, STE. 120 in 2010.

The Craigos also own the location in Clovis at 1541 Railroad Ave.

Fastsigns has about 15 employees between both stores.

Robert said that business was good in 2023, especially at the Fresno location, but business at the Clovis location did run flat as they had really big jobs in 2022. That's how the industry cycles, he said.

The bulk of their business is repeat customers, but new businesses and residents brings new activity depending on how the economy goes, he said.

Fastsigns of Fresno has a history of racking up awards. In 2019 it received the Pinnacle Club Award, given to Fastsigns centers ranked 26 to 12 in sales volume from Oct. 1, 2017 to Sept. 20, 2018.

"I know the [Best Of] awards come from customer votes, and it's fantastic to hear that some of the customers feel that way about us. We do our best and customer service is No. 1," Robert said.



Fast Signs photo | The Fresno Fastsigns franchise owned by Kim and Robert Craigo has won many awards over the years.

BEST CATERING COMPANY

PARDINI'S

1ST FINALIST: LOVE & GARLIC
2ND FINALIST: KARSH'S CATERING

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

Pardini's Catering joins elite company as one of eight local businesses to have held a "Best of" title since the inaugural event.

This year, Pardini's rolled out major renovations, introducing a complete redesign of the event venue. The company introduced The Red Room – a craft cocktail bar – as a permanent fixture open to the public four days a week.

"Being named a finalist for the Best of Central Valley Business Awards - Best Catering Company is a tremendous honor and a testament to the hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence that our team embodies," said Pardini's co-owner Jeff Pardini.

"Having our efforts to provide exceptional catering services be recognized by our local business community is very much appreciated."

Opened in 1958, Pardini's evolved into a catering business in 1981, catering large events. The company, run by Jim Pardini and his sons, work with several local venues and wineries, and also host two meeting and event spaces – the Tuscan Room and Banquet Room – onsite at Pardini's in Fresno.

"Winning this award repeatedly speaks volumes about the enduring relationships we have built with our community and the consistent trust they place in our services," Pardini said.



Pardini's Facebook photo | Pardini's Catering is one of eight local businesses to win their Best of category since the event started 10 years ago.

BEST SECURITY COMPANY

MATSON ALARM COMPANY

1ST FINALIST: HAVEN'S SECURITY, INC.
2ND FINALIST: HOFFMAN SECURITY

Ramos Castanos– CONTRIBUTION WRITER

The voters have once again lifted Matson Alarm as the Best Security Company for the eighth time in the Best of Central Valley Business Readers Choice Awards.

The Matson team makes it a top priority for the people of Central Valley to feel safe and secure by providing committed customer service in the face of any and all security issues, according to Katie Williamson, the marketing director of Matson Alarm Company. In addition, they tailor their security systems to what the individual or business needs to help for what suits them the best.

"Backed by extensive experience, we excel in managing projects of any size, from single-family homes to complex fire systems and access control projects," said Williamson. "Our track record attests to our proficiency and reliability across diverse project scales."

The company was founded in 1974 by Larry and Mike Matson to help protect families and businesses from burglary or violent crimes in the Central Valley. They both have since retired and the company is under the ownership by Pye-Barker Fire & Safety since last year.

Williamson appreciated the votes once again because it shows that people trust them for security.

"Our commitment to hard work and doing the right thing forms the foundation of integrity and reliability in our operations," said Williamson. "Both businesses have histories of being local, family-run businesses, and we prioritize serving our customers and communities with pride."



Matson Alarm Facebook photo | Matson Alarm Company offers a full suite of security measures for single-family homes to complex fire systems and access control projects.

BEST GOLF COURSE TO TAKE A CLIENT

FORT WASHINGTON COUNTRY CLUB

1ST FINALIST: COPPER RIVER COUNTRY CLUB
2ND FINALIST: KINGS RIVER GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

The first players to take on the course played through the original nine holes in 1923. Today, what was once the first fairways and sand greens is now an 18-hole course.

The voters have selected Fort Washington Country Club as the Best Golf Course to Take a Client for the second year in row. Located in North Fresno, it's in close proximity to Woodward Park and the restaurants and businesses along Friant Road.

According to the website, the name came from a nearby fort for early pioneers and settlers. Fort Washington Country Club was voted best golf course in 2015, when the category first appeared in Best of Central Valley Business Awards.

The Club has hosted some major golfers and other luminaries in its time, including Tom Watson, Phil Mickelson, Mark O'Meara, Fred Couples, LPGA Hall of Famers Patty Berg, Mickey Wright and Babe Zaharias as well as Michael Jordan Bob Hope and the original Tarzan, Johnny Weismuller.



Fort Washington photo | The course at Fort Washington Country Club marked 100 years this year, with plenty of golf legends and luminaries playing over the years.

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FACILITY DESIGNS

1ST FINALIST: ERIN MELKONIAN DESIGNS
2ND FINALIST: EDINHART REALTY & DESIGN CORP.

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Facility Designs in Fresno is a first-time winner for this year's Best of Central Valley Business Awards.

The interior design firm has seen a busy 2023, with this year being one of the best years of business it's had, said Chief Operating Officer Carrie De Young.

Facility Designs was founded by principal Suzanne Byrnes, who started the firm with Founding Partner Kay Garabedian.

The design firm grew steadily until the economic meltdown of 2007, and in 2010-2011, when the economy had picked up, it began to grow once again, and has been "in growth mode ever since."

Clients of Facility Designs include Ok Produce, JD Foods, Clovis Community Hospital, Agrian, and Fresno Dental Professionals.

In 2019, after a yearlong renovation, Facility Designs unveiled its new office space and 7,500 square foot show room.

"We are extremely humbled and blessed to be nominated! We are thankful for our 30 years of support from the community and are committed to continuing to deliver exceptional service and design for the next 30 years," De Young said.

De Young said the Facility Designs team is kicking off strong in 2024, with several large projects in the works.



Facility Designs Facebook photo | Facility Designs has seen a busy 2023, with projects in the works that will make 2024 an exciting time.

BEST LOCAL MORNING DRIVE RADIO SHOW

POWER TALK 96.7

1ST FINALIST: MEGA 97.9
2ND FINALIST: SOFT ROCK 98.9

Ramos Castanos– CONTRIBUTION WRITER

Power Talk 96.7 for the first time has won the top honor in the Best Local Morning Drive Radio Show category.

People tune in to Power Talk 96.7 for its local coverage of politics, sports and business, said Steve Darnell, iHeart Media area president for the Pacific region.

"Each of our radio stations reflects what's going on in our community," he said. "They want to know what's going on, and they can turn to Power Talk to find out."

Power Talk 96.7 wasn't originally a talk show Radio but an alternative rock station. Darnell mentions that iHeart Media wanted to start a talk show at the beginning of the New Year of 2013.

Originally an alternative rock format, Power Talk 96.7 came out in 2013 with a target on the political talk radio that continues to dominate the airwaves.

"We launched Power Talk with our lineup of Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and a local show, which currently has Trevor Carey from three to six in the afternoon," said Darnell. "And then various programming at night. We also are the broadcast homes for Fresno State Athletics. We carry Fresno State football, basketball, baseball."

They are proud to broadcast the Bulldogs with two exclusive hosts, Carey and John Gerardi. Even national shows like Glenn Beck or Sean Hannity focus on local issues, Darnell said.

When Power Talk 96.7 heard they had been nominated for the Best of Central California Readers Choice Awards, they felt honored by voters who voted for them.

"We don't go out seeking awards," said Darnell. "We work hard to do the best to produce the best content we can for our community."



Power Talk 96.7 Facebook photo | Host Trevor Carey, right, speaks with (from left) Michael Maher and Jody Jones at Crawdaddy's restaurant in Visalia.

BEST LOCAL LUNCH SPOT TO EAT DURING THE WEEK

DOG HOUSE GRILL

1ST FINALIST: HEIRLOOM
2ND FINALIST: MAX'S BISTRO & BAR

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

Dog House Grill has made its return to the Best Of list, being named the Valley's Best Local Lunch Spot to eat During the Week.

Dog House Grill is known as one of the top spots to grab a bite to eat by many students and faculty at Fresno State and this year, the voters echoed those sentiments.

It's also a favorite before and after spot for Save Mart Center events.

Featuring numerous televisions with sports on each one, a full bar and lively atmosphere, Dog House Grill opened in 2004 under the management of David Billingsley after their first two restaurants – Main Street Grill in Cambria and Firestone Grill in San Luis Obispo – proved a success.

Since then, Dog House Grill has brought the community an energetic atmosphere whether catching up with friends or catching up on the game.

Orders can be placed in person and can also be made online at doghousegrill.com.



Dog House Grill Facebook page | Dog House Grill took Fresno by storm since its opening in 2004 with its famous tri-tip sandwiches.

BEST FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS

HARRIS RANCH RESORT — THE HARRIS FAMILY

1ST FINALIST: ORLOFF JEWELERS—ORLOFF FAMILY
2ND FINALIST: SELMA AUTO MALL—NELSON FAMILY

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

For the second year in a row, Business Journal readers voted Harris Ranch Resort the Best Family Owned Business in the Central Valley.

Owned and operated by John Harris and the Harris Family, Harris Ranch Resort was also recognized on a national level this month.

Restaurant Business, a national restaurant news publication, ranked Harris Ranch the 29th highest earning independent restaurant in the nation — and third highest in California.

In 2022 alone, Harris Ranch Resort reported revenue of $22.9 million in food and beverage sales, serving 669,818 meals with an average bill of $43.

Harris Ranch Resort is preparing to open an R.V. park in 2024.

Along with the restaurant, the grounds also include Harris Ranch Express BBQ, which has been performing so well over the years that it will be expanding into Bakersfield as Harris BBQ, slated to open in March.

A second Harris BBQ is slated to open by the end of 2024.

Director of Marketing Suzanne Devereaux said: "We have leadership that is very innovative and wants to grow business."

She said everyone on the team feels lucky to be part of the Harris Family legacy, with many employees being there for decades.



Harris Ranch Resort Facebook photo | At Harris Ranch Resort, it's the personal touches that make the dining experiences feel like family.

BEST TITLE COMPANY

OLD REPUBLIC TITLE CO.

1ST FINALIST: FIRST AMERICAN TITLE CO.
2ND FINALIST: CHICAGO TITLE COMPANY

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Business Journal readers voted Old Republic Title as the Central Valley's Best Title Company for 2023 — a first time win for the company.

Headquartered in Tampa, Florida, Old Republic Title has been in business for over 100 years, providing services to protect people's property rights and secure safe and efficient real estate transactions.

They provide title and escrow products and services for individuals, businesses, and government.

Old Title Republic has three offices in Fresno, one in Clovis and one in Kingsburg. Brent Evans is the executive vice president and Central Valley regional manager.



Old Republic Facebook photo | Old Republic Title in Fresno helps promote pet adoptions by featuring pets on its social media pages. This good girl is Clover.

BEST LOCAL ANNUAL EVENT TO ATTEND

FRESNO GREEK FEST

1ST FINALIST: BIG FRESNO FAIR
2ND FINALIST: JUNE JAM (VALLEY CRIME STOPPERS)

Estela Anahi Jaramillo – STAFF WRITER

The annual Fresno Greek Fest has attracted visitors from all over the country. This year, Fresno Greek Fest has been awarded the Best Local Annual Event to Attend – their first Best of the Central Valley Business award.

According to their website, Greek immigrants arrived in Fresno in the early 20th century who later formed their own Greek community. They established a church that was officially incorporated in 1923, and St. George's Church was built on Fresno Street in 1924. Over the years, the community has continued to grow, celebrating its heritage with the annual Greek Fest – a foodie's paradise.

"We're ecstatic that all the hard work and countless hours that goes into putting on the Greek Festival is appreciated by the thousands of people that join us every year for a celebration of Greek culture and heritage," said Peter Vallis, Greek Fest chairman.

This year's event held in mid-September had a great turnout, said Vallis. The weather was ideal throughout the weekend and there was just the right amount of food and drinks for everyone, making it a relaxing weekend with thousands of people from around the metropolitan area.



Fresno Greek Fest Facebook photo | Fresno Greek Fest draws thousands each year to enjoy the food and culture of Greece.

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Adventist, four local hospitals terminate Blue Shield contract



File photo | Adventist Health Hanford medical center is one of four local hospitals no longer accepting Blue Shield as an in-network provider.

California-based health care provider Adventist Health announced last week that it has terminated its working contract with Blue Shield of California following 11 months of negotiations in which neither party was able to reach an agreement.

As of Dec. 1, patients with health insurance under Blue Shield of California are unable to use their coverage at California Adventist Health facilities, including hospitals in Hanford, Reedley, Selma and Tulare.

Additional Adventist Health location across the state will see their Blue Shield contracts expire through spring 2024.

The termination impacts Blue Shield PPO/EPO/HMO, Medicare Advantage PPO/HMO, and Medi-Cal Managed Care HMO patients.

A news release from Adventist on Dec. 1 announced the contract termination and provided users with frequently asked questions and responses for those concerned about how the status will affect them. They also provided reasoning for the termination of the contract.

"After 11 months of negotiations, Adventist health was unable to reach a fair agreement to continue as an in-network participating provider with Blue Shield of California," the press release said.

Blue Shield of California issued its own news release Tuesday confirming the expired contract, also citing the 11 months of stalemated negotiations.

"Throughout 2023, we have been negotiating in good faith with Adventist Health leadership to establish a new contract that was sufficient to cover the cost of providing access to quality health care and that would enable us to offer competitively priced coverage to our members.," wrote Patty Gonzalez, VP, Network Management and Provider Partnerships.

"Unfortunately, Adventist Health's requests did not make that possible."

Earlier this year, Blue Shield and Community Regional Medical Centers faced a similar situation, with six months of negotiation starting last January.

As of June 30, Blue Shield insurance was once again accepted at Community Regional Medical Centers.

A message left with Blue Shield's media line has not been answered as of the publishing of this story.

Fresno high-speed rail boosted with $3B grant

Rep. Jim Costa (D-Fresno) helped secure a $3.1 billion federal grant announced Tuesday that will help the California High-Speed Rail Authority advance rail projects in communities including Hanford, Fresno, Madera, Selma and more.

The money comes through the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

In April, Costa along with Sen. Alex Padilla, the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein, and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi led 28 California lawmakers in calling on the Department of Transportation to issue these grants to the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

The $3.1 billion in funding for the California High-Speed Rail Authority will support activities including final design and right-of-way acquisition for the Merced extension from Madera to Merced; Bakersfield extension from Poplar Avenue in Shafter to Bakersfield; design and construction of the Fresno station; design and procurement of trainsets and design and construction of trainset facilities.

Earlier this year, Costa announced over $200 million in grants for the California High-Speed Rail Authority through the Department of Transportation's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Grant Program.

"For decades, I've worked to make California's high-speed rail system a reality. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law I helped pass; we now have significant investment to make major progress. I worked to secure this $3 billion federal grant to ensure continued economic growth and investments in California's San Joaquin Valley. I want to thank President Biden, Governor Newsom, and our partners. We still have much more work to be done." said Rep. Costa.

Another $3 billion in federal funding was also announced for a private operator's plans for high-speed rail service between Los Angeles and Las Vegas by 2028.

$1B Fresno bank sees leadership transition

Fresno's Premier Valley Bank announced a leadership transition on Tuesday, with current President and CEO Lo B. Nestman taking a promotion with parent company Heartland Financial USA.

Nestman has accepted a position as the head of retail, marketing, wealth management and private banking for Heartland Financial, branded as HTLF Bank the Denver-based institution that acquired Premier Valley Bank for $95.1 million in 2015.

Nestman joined Premier Valley Bank in April 2019.

"Lo has delivered significant growth and provided leadership on numerous successful initiatives across the organization…," said Bruce K. Lee, president and CEO of Heartland Financial, which has assets of $20.1 billion. "We're thankful for his years of dedication and leadership and congratulate him on this exciting new step in his career."

David Triplitt, Premier Valley Bank's head of commercial, has been named the bank's new president and CEO. He's successfully led the commercial banking team at Premier Valley Bank for more than two years and brings over 30 years of banking experience and relationships in the Central Valley to the role.

"David is a great asset to the bank, our customers and the community," said Nestman. "We are excited about the local knowledge, passion and dedication he brings to the role. Under David's leadership, Premier Valley Bank will continue to deliver Strength, Insight and Growth to our customers across California."

Founded in 2001, Premier Valley Bank has assets of more than $1 billion.

Madera tiny homes project breaks ground

The Madera Rescue Mission broke ground Monday for its new triage center, aiming to provide service to those living in or transitioning from homelessness.

The triage center will include six pre-made tiny homes on the Madera Rescue Mission's 7,600 square-foot lot. Each 576 square-foot unit will include two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and seating area.

The units will be available to eligible families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

"The triage center is a vision come true for the Rescue Mission," said Jesse Chavez, executive director at Madera Rescue Mission. "We are extremely grateful for the support of Madera County and partners. Our mission is to serve the least, the last, and the lost with radical hospitality and MRM will be that one stop shop for those transitioning out of homelessness."

Since the closure of Madera Community Hospital, the county has seen a dramatic drop in available health care resources, with nearby Valley Children's Hospital even admitting adult patients in extreme circumstances.

The addition of the triage center will also help to ease some of the potential burden on overcrowding in addition to serving an underserved and vulnerable population.

The triage center will also partner with the Community Action Partnership of Madera County and other county departments to administer rapid rehousing, street outreach and other activities with the goal of transitioning individuals into permanent, affordable housing.

"Our County has a great team of leaders who are dedicated in addressing homelessness," said Chairman David Rogers. "The quality of life of all residents is important to all of us and we will continue to work towards the prevention of homelessness in our communities. Everyone deserves to live, work and play healthy in Madera County."

The project will cost approximately $1.22 million, which was awarded from Community Development Block Grant and the American Rescue Plan Act.

Officials hope the center will be completed by summer 2024.

Fresno dispensary expected to open this month

Signage is going up for another recreational cannabis dispensary in the City of Fresno — and one pot mogul is promising to interview potential workers himself.

Renovation is underway for the Cookies cannabis dispensary at 5048 Blackstone Ave. near Shaw Avenue. The store could open before the end of the year, according to a social media post by the local CEO.

Cookies is a cannabis culture brand and franchise founded by Bay Area rapper Gilbert Milam Jr., known by the stage name of Berner.

According to the Cookies' website, the franchise has 55 stores in four countries.

A post from Berner's Instagram account last week invited people to apply to work at the Fresno Cookies location. He said he would be interviewing candidates himself.

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The Business Journal (USPS 145-100) is published Monday's Wednesday's and Fridays for $109 (52 weeks : 154 issues + The Book of Lists) or Friday only for $79 (51 weeks : 51 issues + The Book of Lists). Multi-year discounts, group / organization bulk discounts, electronic editions and student subscription rates are available by contacting the circulation department.

The Business Journal, Inc. 1315 Van Ness Avenue Suite 200, Fresno, Ca 93721. The Business Journal Newspaper, PO BOX 126, Fresno, CA 93707-0126.

PERIODICAL POSTAGE IS PAID IN FRESNO, CA
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Business Journal
PO BOX 126 Fresno, CA 93707-0126
Telephone: 559.490.3400 - FAX: 559.490.3521
Adjudicated newspaper of general circulation by decree No. 14315 of Superior Court of Fresno County, March 4, 1911.

McCarthy resignation sets off mad scramble for local candidates

By Joe Kieta with CalMatters

Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's announcement Wednesday that he will vacate his seat and not seek reelection sets off a tidal wave of speculation on who will represent a wide swath of California's agricultural heartland.

The timing of the announcement also puts McCarthy in a spot to be a political kingmaker if he makes an early endorsement. It's a role he's played before and relishes. In announcing his resignation in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, McCarthy reiterated that he will "continue to recruit our country's best and brightest to run for elected office."

One thing is virtually certain: McCarthy's replacement will be a Republican. And one of the names on a possible list of GOP stalwarts is a big one — former Rep. Devin Nunes.

The sprawling Godzilla-shaped district is a GOP stronghold as ruby-red as any in California. Its voters supported former President Donald Trump and the recall of Gov. Gavin Newsom by wide margins.

We also know the process for how McCarthy will be replaced, at least initially. Since he isn't leaving his seat until after the candidate filing deadline, it's up to Newsom to decide whether to call a special election in early 2024 to fill the remaining months of McCarthy's current term, according to the Secretary of State's office. A spokesperson for the governor's office said a special election would need to be called within 14 days of a vacancy, but did not answer questions about whether Newsom plans to do so.

"We will have more to share once we have specifics from McCarthy about his planned departure," said Erin Mellon, the spokesperson.

In the March primary and November general election, voters in the district will choose their next representative to serve starting in January 2025.

The counties covered by McCarthy's 20th Congressional District have recent familiarity with this process when Nunes departed at the end of 2021. Connie Conway was elected in June 2022 to fill out the remaining six months of Nunes' term and served as a caretaker uninterested in re-election.

Here are some of the potential candidates who could mount a campaign to replace McCarthy, and their pluses and minuses:

Devin Nunes

Longtime GOP member of Congress who left his seat in late 2020 to take over as chief executive of Truth Social, Trump's social media venture

Why it could happen: Nunes has a mile-long list of political bonafides: national name recognition, an $11 million campaign war chest, and a bridge to the powerful MAGA wing of the Republican Party. He previously represented many of the Fresno-area voters who now make up a sizable chunk of McCarthy's district. He hasn't disappeared from the local political scene and frequently is a guest on local conservative talk radio. Election to a GOP stronghold district could be a more secure job than Truth Social's shaky prospects.

Why it won't: Nunes, who over nearly two decades in Congress had risen up the House ranks to lead the influential intelligence committee, would start over as a backbencher. Many speculate the chamber's current thin GOP majority will be wiped out after the 2024 election, making for a miserable life as a Republican first-termer. He's also branched out into various unrelated interests after joining Truth Social. He recently started his own winery with such vintages as Patriot Cabernet Sauvignon.

Vince Fong

Republican Assemblymember who represents Bakersfield

Why it could happen: At 44, Fong could serve for decades and move into leadership. The Princeton graduate has long been a favorite of McCarthy and served as his district director prior to his election to the Assembly 2016. He was a former staffer for Republican Rep. Bill Thomas. He's been a leader in the failed Republican efforts to suspend California's gas tax. A lifetime NRA member, he's pushed back against the Democratic majority on gun control.

Why it won't happen: Fong is unknown in the wealthy Fresno suburbs that are an important part of McCarthy's district. He has no local government experience.

Shannon Grove

Republican state senator who currently represents a district that overlaps much of McCarthy's congressional seat



Photo by J. Scott Applewhite, AP Photo | Rep. Kevin McCarthy, a Republican from Bakersfield, talks to reporters at the Capitol on Oct. 3, 2023. McCarthy says he's resigning from his congressional seat in California two months after his historic ouster as House speaker.

Why it could happen: Grove has built a well-known and popular political brand in Bakersfield, which makes up the bulk of her Senate district. She's a strong supporter of Trump but has charted a relatively more pragmatic political profile. She won a high-profile victory over Democrats in the Legislature to reclassify human trafficking of a minor as a felony, a bill that Newsom signed. Redistricting brought her north to the wealthy and more conservative areas of Fresno and Clovis.

Why it won't happen: Grove still is a relative unknown to a chunk of McCarthy's district. She'd have to fundraise at a level she hasn't achieved in the past. Her MAGA ties could turn off more middle-of-the-road voters in the Fresno suburbs.

David Valadao

Republican who currently represents the 22nd Congressional District

Why it could happen: The Republican from Hanford long has been held up as a political miracle — a Republican who gets elected in Democratic-majority districts. It's a streak he kept alive for multiple terms until the 2018 blue wave, only to regain his seat in 2020. He's now staring down a rematch with Salas in a year with Trump on the ballot. Hopscotching one district over could make political life much easier. It wouldn't be the first time a member of Congress moves districts for greener political pastures. Democrat Josh Harder declined to run for re-election in his Modesto-centered district in 2022, opting instead to run in a safer Democratic district centered in Stockton.

Why it won't happen: Valadao would be viewed as a political carpetbagger. Moving over to McCarthy's district would leave his current one wide-open for Salas and the Democrats. His vote to impeach Trump in early 2021 turns off the powerful MAGA bloc.

Nathan Magsig

Fresno County supervisor

Why it could happen: Magsig, also a former Clovis mayor and councilmember, mounted a primary challenge in 2022 to incumbent Rep. Tom McClintock in the newly-drawn 5th Congressional District. He has a history of taking on conservative causes and made waves when he led a majority of Fresno supervisors to sue the state over the renaming of the unincorporated community Squaw Valley to eliminate the Native American slur.

Why it won't happen: Magsig's 2022 McClintock challenge went poorly and angered many Republicans. He has no name recognition in Bakersfield. He opted out of a logical next step to replace termed-out Assemblymember Jim Patterson, a Fresno Republican, and seems content to stay closer to home. There are no term limits for Fresno County supervisors.

Connie Conway

Former state Assemblymember and member of Congress

Why it could happen: Conway won a special election in 2022 to fill out the remainder of Nunes' term. Her long history in the state Legislature gives her all-important name recognition.

Why it won't happen: The former Assembly minority leader showed no interest in making Congress a permanent home.

CalMatters Capitol reporter Alexei Koseff contributed to this story.



Photo by Larry Valenzuela, CalMatters/CatchLight Local | Outlines of the Madera Community Hospital sign being covered by a tarp at the Emergency Room entrance of the hospital on Jan. 2, 2023.

California threw a $50 mllion lifeline to a bankrupt hospital. It's scrambling to reopen.

Ana B. Ibarra with CalMatters

California's special emergency fund for financially distressed hospitals probably would not have passed the Legislature this year had it not been for the failure of a rural hospital off Highway 99 in the San Joaquin Valley.

The bankruptcy and closure of Madera Community Hospital spurred lawmakers to allocate $300 million in loans for it and other troubled medical facilities. The state began doling out the money this fall, earmarking up to $57 million for Madera alone.

But Madera's share of the money is on hold and in question because the hospital has not yet found a buyer or partner to reopen it almost a year after its closure. Madera Community's state loan is contingent on it securing a purchase or partnership deal.

And, while some hospitals have started to get their checks, others that applied for money and did not qualify for it are raising questions about the process. They're calling for more transparency with respect to how the state selected hospitals for the funding.

The Madera hospital seemed to get a lifeline from Adventist Health, a West Coast system that had been in talks to take over the defunct hospital. Adventist backed out earlier this month, dealing a setback to Madera County's hopes of reviving the facility.

It marked the second failed effort to find a buyer for the hospital. Trinity Health pulled out of a deal to purchase the struggling hospital in December of 2022.

"Unfortunately, Adventist Health was unable to find a fiscally viable solution for the costly process of reopening and operating a closed facility," Adventist Health officials said in an emailed statement.

Adventist Health had estimated that restarting services at Madera Community would cost at least $85 million during the first two years of reopening.

Following Madera's closure in January, a number of community hospitals claimed that they, too, were in financial trouble. Two filed for bankruptcy and several cut service lines, including labor and delivery units. The state responded by creating the Distressed Hospital Loan program; 30 hospitals applied and 17 were selected to receive loans.

Four hospitals have received their checks, with the rest expected to go out in the upcoming weeks. Madera stands to receive the largest loan. The state recently increased the amount the hospital could qualify for by $5 million, bringing the total to $57 million.

Potential deals for Madera hospital

Madera Community Hospital could still reopen and receive its loan if another buyer or partner comes through.

Two other suitors, American Advanced Management, Inc. and Praise Healthcare, LLC, have expressed interest in taking over. For now, Madera's hospital still has dibs on the $52 million.

"The funding is currently reserved for Madera Community Hospital," said Andrew DiLuccia, a spokesperson for the Department of Health Care Access and Information, which selected which hospitals would get loans.

Riley Walter, an attorney representing Madera Community Hospital in bankruptcy court, said the hospital's board is awaiting paperwork from both suitors before it can move forward. He said he expects that to happen sometime this month.

If no suitors follow through on a deal and Madera Community loses out on its loan, the state loans could be returned to the emergency fund for other hospitals to use, said Joe DeAnda, a spokesperson for the State Treasurer's Office.

Hospitals want more transparency

To qualify for loans, hospitals had to show both financial need and a path to viability. Hospitals with low levels of cash on hand had priority, according to the Department of Health Care Access and Information. Eligible facilities had to be public, community hospitals and not owned by large health systems.

Some hospitals that did not receive loans said they wanted to see more transparency from the state's program. At least one hospital administrator said he was unsatisfied with the response he received in the rejection email.

Steve Stark, CEO of Orchard Hospital in Butte County, said his hospital's situation is similar to that of some of the hospitals that were granted loans.

"When we submitted our application, we were down to less than three days of cash on hand," Stark said. "We had received an audit letter from our auditors in our last fiscal year that indicated that we wouldn't be around in 12 months. And so by all measures that we could accumulate, we felt like we were distressed, we still are."

Stark said one of the disqualifiers mentioned by the state was that his hospital is under a management agreement in which the Modesto-based company American Advanced Management is overseeing the hospital's operations. (This is the same company that has expressed interest in taking over Madera Community Hospital.)

Other hospitals that were granted loans are also under management agreements, such as Dameron Hospital in Stockton, which has a partnership with Adventist Health.

In an emailed response DiLuccia from the state health care information department, said "provisions within the management agreement made a difference in applicant's eligibility."

California sends checks

Chinese Hospital in San Francisco is one of the first four hospitals to receive its loan — close to $10.4 million. The 88-bed hospital has reported a net loss every single year since 2016, according to its financial records.

Michael Chung, the hospital's president, said the hospital's main challenge as a safety net provider is low-reimbursements from Medi-Cal and Medicare that haven't kept up with the growing cost of care. The hospital leans heavily on state and federal grants, as well as funds from private foundations.

"That has worked for 100-plus years, but it's not able to sustain the hospital any longer," Chung said.

As part of its turnaround plan, Chinese Hospital is seeking to renegotiate reimbursement rates with both private and public insurers, Chung said. Those negotiations can be a hit or miss, he said.

Low reimbursement was also a key challenge noted by Watsonville Community Hospital in Santa Cruz County, which qualified for a state loan of $8.3 million. The hospital only last year emerged from bankruptcy and is now operating under a nonprofit health care district.

Nancy Gere, spokesperson for Watsonville Community, said the hospital is renegotiating contracts with health insurance plans, which hadn't been done in more than 10 years. The hospital is also considering the possibility of a general obligation bond to upgrade the facility and improve the hospital's financial standing.

"Despite all these efforts, our expenses currently still exceed revenues, so the $8.3 million loan from the state of California is incredibly helpful," Gere said. "The loan funds are being used to help stabilize our operations."

Ana B. Ibarra covers health policy and the COVID-19 pandemic. She joined CalMatters in 2020 after four years at Kaiser Health News. She started her reporting career at McClatchy's Merced Sun-Star. Her work has also appeared in The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, USA Today and other state and national news outlets. This story was originally published at CalMatters.org.

BEST LOCAL FITNESS CENTER

GB3 - GEORGE BROWN SPORTS CLUB

1ST FINALIST: FORT WASHINGTON FITNESS
2ND FINALIST: FIG GARDEN SWIM & RACQUET CLUB

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

George Brown Sports club, or GB3, was voted as the Central Valley's Best Local Fitness Center, a new category added this year.

Gb3 has four locations in Fresno and one in Clovis.

George Brown, founder of GB3, has been building and selling fitness clubs since the 1970s.

By the late 1980s, Brown was operating what would become the first GB3, and the business has grown since.

In 1999, Bally Total Fitness acquired seven George Brown fitness centers, including one operating in the San Francisco Bay area. Bally Total Fitness sold them to Blast Fitness.

In 2020, like all other gyms in the state, GB3 was forced to temporarily close due to Covid-19 regulations, and later opened with revamped health and safety measures.

Frank Lopez | Writer can be reached at: 490-3465 or e-mail frank@thebusinessjournal.com



Photo by GB3 Facebook photo | George Brown Sports Club has its roots in the 1970s in Fresno with founder George Brown, who got his start building and selling fitness clubs.

BEST LOCAL BREWERY

MAD DUCK CRAFT BREWING CO.

1ST FINALIST: SEQUOIA BREWING CO.
2ND FINALIST: FULL CIRCLE BREWING CO.

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

Mad Duck Craft Brewing Co. was named the winner of this year's Best Local Brewery category, a new category in this year's Best of Central Valley Business Awards competion.

With a focus on cuisine and craft beer, the brewery has made a name for itself since opening its first location 14 years ago in the Clovis Commons shopping center.

Mad Duck will not only open a fourth location early next year at the Copper River Marketplace, but also hopes to have an airport restaurant operational in the coming years.

Managing member and CEO Alex Costa said that the unique approach Mad Duck takes to not only its brews, but also its food, is what puts them on the map.

"One of the things that I think makes the Duck so special is that it is a food-focused brewery," Costa said. "We put an enormous amount of time, effort and resources into really making great food; it isn't just beer-battered everything."



Photo by Mad Duck Facebook photo | Mad Duck is food-forward with its operations, enticing customers with more than just well crafted brews.

Costa said that being named Best Local Brewery is recognition of the hard work the Mad Duck team has put in over the years.

"It takes a village," he said. "It's an incredibly special thing and I'm just eternally grateful to even just be in the consideration.

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com

BEST LOCAL VINTNER

KINGS RIVER WINERY

1ST FINALIST: LOMAC WINERY
2ND FINALIST: MORAVIA WINES

Ben Hensley – STAFF WRITER

Kings River Winery was voted the first winner of this year's new category, Best Local Vintner, which focuses on highlighing the best vino the Central Valley has to offer.

Since 1954, Kings River Winery has been a mainstay in the Central Valley wine industry, producing everything from grapes to apricots on their 40-acre property.

In 2012, owner Bob Bagdasarian decided to commit his focus to winemaking, planting 12 varieties of wine grapes and building a state-of-the-art, boutique winery and event destination.

"We are a small, local winery and everything that we do here is for our customers, so it means a lot to us to know that people in our community are loving what we're doing. They're loving the wines that we're producing and the events we host for them to attend," said Ashley Borges, director of operations and events at Kings River Winery.

The winery recently released several new offerings, including two top-selling 2021 labels. This year's wines will debut early next year.

Kings River Winery also hosts special tasting events, providing guests the opportunity to "ease into" the culture.

"For 2024, we're excited to release our new wines that we've been working on bottling over the last few weeks," she said. "Those will come out in the spring."



Photo by Kings River Winery Facebook photo | Kings River Winery winemaker Bob Bagdasrian poses with his Best of Central Valley Business Award for Best Vintner on Tuesday

Ben Hensley | Writer can be reached at: 490-3461 or e-mail ben@thebusinessjournal.com

BEST LOCAL MEDICAL SPA & WELLNESS CENTER

BEHR LASER & SKIN CARE CENTER

1ST FINALIST: MYSTIQUE MEDICAL SPA
2ND FINALIST: ESTEEM MED SPA

Ramon Castanos – CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Behr Laser & Skin Care Center is the winner for the new category of Best Local Medical Spa & Wellness Center.

It was founded in 2003 by Dr. Kathleen Behr, a pioneering dermatologic surgeon who helped introduce procedures including Mohs skin cancer surgery and Botox Cosmetic treatment to the Fresno.

She graduated from UCLA with a medical degree and residency in dermatology in the 1990s. She moved her family to Fresno in 2001.

Behr Laser & Skin Care Center's menue of treatments is vast, supported by four board-certified physicians and a team of injectors, laser nurses, aestheticians, body contouring specialists and support staff.

"We are a one stop shop for all aesthetic needs," said Operations Manager Nicole Rosen. "If you have a cosmetic concern, then we have a treatment to address it."

Rosen said Behr's nomination for this inaugural Best of category reflects the hard work and dedicatioiin to proving patients the best care possible.

"Our mission is to empower them with confidence and allow them to love their lives to the fullest," Rosen said. "It is really powerful watching someone experience freedom from an insecurity that has held them back from their entire life. We feel very grateful to have the privilege of being able to provide this to our patients."



Photo by 439skin.com | Dr. Kathleen Behr founded her dermatology practice in Fresno in 2003.



BEST LOCAL CONSTRUCTION FIRM

HARRIS CONSTRUCTION

1ST FINALIST: QUIRING GENERAL
2ND FINALIST: RJ MILLER CONSTRUCTION

Frank Lopez – STAFF WRITER

Harris Construction took top honors in the newest category, Best Local Construction Firm, winning the support of voters.

Founded nearly 110 years ago, Harris Construction specializes in educational and civic projects, in additon to food processing, health care and other privately-owned industries.

Harris Construction has corporate offices in San Luis Obispo and Fresno.

Some of their projects include Fresno High School, the Fresno State Jordan Agricultural Research Center, Madera County Justice Center, and the African Adventure exhibit at Fresno Chaffee Zoo.

In 2022, Harris Construction was awarded a number of educational projects. As the year progressed, the team saw it would be spending much of 2023 preparing those new projects for contruction, including estimating, scheduling, planning and materials procurement.

Now that the preconstruction work is done, the company is looking forward to a very busy and robust 2024.

"We appreciate all of the votes and we will continue to strive to be the best contractor in Central California for all of our great clients, including countless amazing school districts, universities, community colleges, counties, cities and more," according to a statement.

Frank Lopez | Writer can be reached at: 490-3465 or e-mail frank@thebusinessjournal.com



Photo by Harris Construction Facebook photo | Harris Construction, with corporate offices in San Luis Obispo and Fresno, has built several high profile projects in the Central Valley and across the state.in 2003.



A lesson from Elon Musk



GUEST VIEW
Paul H.Betancourt

I just read the Walter Isaacson biography of Elon Musk last month. Boy, everyone is going after Elon these days aren't they? The Right doesn't like electric cars. The Left is mad at him for buying Twitter and trying to allow free speech.

Frankly, I was impressed. I didn't realize that SpaceX has been going at it for 20 years already. Elon is a hands-on guy. He would make a great farmer, but he's smarter than that. The stories of him sleeping on the factory floor at Tesla and working the line at SpaceX are legendary. You will have to read it yourself to find out what happened to Elon's McClaren F1. (Again, he would have made a great farmer.)

Elon is a visionary. He created Space X with the vision of making us a two-planet species. For Elon, the vision is to get us off fossil fuels. (Unlike some folks who want to take away our cars, Elon knows we value our freedom.)

My favorite part is Elon has a pretty low tolerance for bureaucratic foolishness. (You can see why I like this.) When someone at SpaceX tells him they have to jump through a particular hoop because the Department of Defense says so, he asks, "Who at DOD?" Right on.

There is a lot of red tape out there that has just accumulated. Musk cuts to the heart of the matter—who imposed the regulation and why. Go straight to the source and work things out. I like that. I wish I had known that 40 years ago.

I did have one experience where I almost did that. Back in the day when we could actually burn brush once in a while, we would call in to the recording at the air district. Some of you may remember those days. One time I called in, it was a burn day, and I was allowed to burn.

The next day, while my guys were already burning I get a call saying I was in violation and if we did not stop I would be fined and have my permit pulled. The problem was I was out of town, and this was the pre-cell phone days. There was no way to contact the men working for me. I told the air district staff I would be in at 8 a.m. Monday morning and I wanted to meet them face to face. The mistake was theirs, but they wanted to punish me. Ridiculous. (For the record- I didn't get everything I wanted. I kept my permit and did not get fined. They did make me attend a remedial class. That was interesting, but a story for another day.)

I get it, Elon is not everyone's cup of tea and that is fine. But I respect his entrepreneurial approach to things. That is how innovation gets done and I wish him well. We need more of that in today's world.

Merry Christmas to All.

Blessings in the New Year.

Farmer, writer and educator, Paul Betancourt is a lecturer at Fresno State who has written books on Swiss political history and environmental policy.

WEB POLL

Is Adventist backing out of a deal the last nail in the coffin for Madera Community Hospital?

With recent news that Adventist Health has backed out of its agreement to operate Madera Community Hospital, it marks two organizations that have bailed on the shuttered hospital. Even though other suitors are waiting in the wings, the majority (55%) of respondents to this week's web poll believe this was the last nail in the coffin. Thirty percent are still hopeful the facility could reopen and 15% are unsure. Seventy-three votes were cast.

YES.....55%

NO.....30%

NOT SURE.....15%

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Each week, The Business Journal takes an in-depth look at an industry or an issue facing the Valley with its Focus section. We welcome input from the business community. If you would like to be considered as a source for an upcoming focus, please call the editorial department at 559.490.3400 or e-mail: editor@thebusinessjournal.com

12/15	Small Business
12/22	Retail
12/29	Year in Review
1/5	Banking & Finances

Upcoming LISTS

Each week, The Business Journal ranks the Valley's hottest growth industries from tourism to health care to mortgage lenders. To be considered for one of our lists, please contact Alex Light at 559.490.3493 or e-mail: alex@thebusinessjournal.com



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12/22	Residential Real Estate Brokers
12/29	Most Expensive Homes Sales
1/5	Financial Institutions

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The tradition began when a young John Bonadelle, Sr. built his first Fresno neighborhood near Manchester Center for first-time home buyers. Together, John Sr. and his wife, Pauline, began a family legacy of offering quality, affordable, homes for Valley residents.

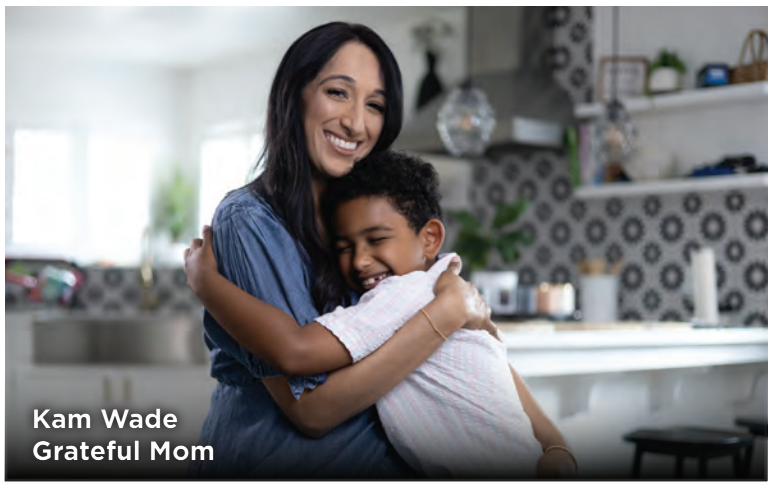
Today, the family tradition is continued by their son, John, his wife, Lisa, and their two oldest children, John Anthony and Bianca.

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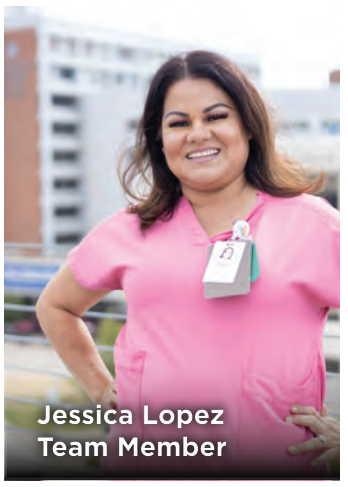






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Our home.
Our Community.













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