



stanislaus CONNECTIONS

Working for peace, justice and a sustainable future

A MODESTO
PEACE/LIFE
CENTER
PUBLICATION

APRIL, 2021
VOLUME XXIX, NO. 8

Modesto needs a Police Review Commission and Independent Police Auditor: Proposals

The following is a FAQ prepared by a Civilian Review Committee composed of representatives from various community organizations including the Modesto Peace/Life Center. Specific proposal documents have been sent to each member of the Modesto City Council. Please contact your councilmember and urge support for a Civilian Review Board. A Community Forum on Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement for Modesto with recognized experts on this issue was held on February 27. Watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39G3jn10uHU>

WHY?

The community needs to have a voice in the policing of its neighborhoods. Communities all over the nation are looking for reform and new models of police oversight that results in greater transparency, understanding of law enforcement, objectivity, and community engagement. It is a conflict of interest for any organization to be the sole investigators of themselves, particularly when they have a vested interest and/or impact in its outcome.

A civilian review board or commission will serve as a support for law enforcement because the peer pressure within their own ranks can be very difficult to navigate. A civilian review will reduce that pressure because any critique is being objectively reviewed from the outside and not just from within the law enforcement organization. The involvement of an independent body may offer incentive for officers in need of self-correction.

The current investigations of citizen complaints are perceived to be biased, self-serving and are not trusted. In order to build trust, a more transparent process is needed

where citizens feel as though they have a fairer and less intimidating avenue to address police concerns. "It's hard to go to the police department to file a complaint against a police officer."

There is a need for "independent" verification and feedback loops that reassure the public that an impartial, thorough, and fair investigation takes place. Independent audits of local policies, procedures, training and recruitment processes are designed to improve police work not to attack it. Helping residents to better understand law enforcement policies and procedures is a benefit. This is a way to reduce lawsuits and court actions when citizens feel they have another avenue to address their concerns.



The goal is to form a collaborative relationship between community and law enforcement by taking a proactive, preventive measure of establishing an independent checks-and-balance system. Community members who gain a better understanding of police work will serve as a tool in strengthening police/community relationships. A partnership between a qualified Independent Police Auditor (IPA), the Community Police Review Commission (CPRC), and the Modesto Police Department (MPD) in examining citizen complaints, policies, procedures, trends, and practices will strengthen relationships. A better-informed community leads to sup-

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Watch The 27th Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemoration

Premiering virtually on Saturday, February 27, 2021, this year's event celebrated many of the people in our own community doing their work in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Wendy Byrd, President of NAACP-Stanislaus, received the Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Award.

To view the outstanding video created by Wes Page, visit the YouTube link <https://youtu.be/elg9Nguwosg>

A special Thank You to MJC's Michael Sundquist and Ty Helton for their work in broadcasting it, and to Judge Rubén Villalobos for his excellent job as MC.

Important Ways to Slow the Spread of Covid-19

- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others who don't live with you.
- Get a COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to you.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.

I GOT
MY COVID-19
VACCINE!



Add one more layer of protection
to keep you and your family safe.

www.cdc.gov

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Get the latest e-edition of Stanislaus Connections delivered right into your email box!

Can enlarge text to read more easily! Print out if desired!

To sign-up, send your email address to Jim Costello, jcostello@igc.org

If you do not have Adobe Reader, download it free from <http://www.adobe.com/downloads/>

Listen to Local Programming on KCBP 95.5 FM, The Voice of the Valley

Listen on 95.5 FM or streaming on www.kcbpradio.org

KeeHive – LaKiesha McDonald talks with women who have overcome great odds. Mondays & Wednesdays, 7:00am

I-On-Modesto – John Griffin interviews local people who reveal their inspiring stories. Mondays & Fridays, 10 am and Wednesdays at 9 pm.

Arts of the San Joaquin Valley with Linda Scheller – Mondays, 8:00pm; Tuesdays 9:00 am & Wednesdays 8:00 pm. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbp> and on Spotify

Women of the Valley with Linda Scheller and Leah Hassett – 8:00pm Tuesdays & Thursdays & Wednesdays, 9:00am. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbpwotv> and on Spotify.

The Peril and the Promise with Pegasus – Wednesdays, 9:30 pm; Saturdays, 2:30 pm; Listen here also: <https://anchor.fm/kcbp-peril>

Modesto Sound – California Audio Roots Project (CARP) – Wednesdays 11:30am, & Sundays 11:00am & 5:30pm.

Where We Were – Fascinating local history with Felton Daniels. Monday & Thursdays 9am. Friday 8:30pm; Sunday at 11:00am & 4:30 pm.

The Ralph Nader Hour – 4:00pm Saturdays.



Explorations – Science with Dr. Michio Kaku – 9:00am Sundays.

Local Music:

Modesto Area Music Show with Middagh Goodwin – Mondays 5:00pm; Fridays 9:00pm & Saturdays 6:00pm.

Freak Radio with Christian E. Boyett, 6pm Thursdays. Replays Saturdays, 9pm & Tuesdays 11pm.

This is SKA with Middagh Goodwin – Tuesdays, 9 pm; Fridays, 11pm; Sundays, 6 am.

Dead Air – Hear the Grateful Dead with Corey Daniels. Fridays, 6pm; Saturdays, 3 pm

Weekdays (Monday - Friday)

Various musical programs during the noon hour: Oldies, Jazz, Old Piano.

Thom Hartmann – 2:00pm

Sojourner Truth – 4:00pm

Democracy Now! – 7:00pm.

Flashpoint Magazine – 10:00pm.

Children's Programming

Confetti Park – Saturday's 8:00am; & Sunday's 12:30pm.

The Children's Hour – Sundays 3:00pm.

Find a complete programming schedule on our website, www.kcbpradio.org

What programming do you like or would like to hear? Contact us at programming@kcbpradio.org or call (209) 353-3066. Help put "Community" into community radio!

We can't do it without you. Please support us! Donate at <https://kcbpradio.networkforgood.com/>

Sundays at CBS: Golden Bough - America Bound

April 11, 2021 • 3 pm

Season 29 continues with Golden Bough, who will take the audience on a musical journey from the Emerald Isle to the New World—and do so remotely, via the magic of Zoom.

Margie, Paul, & Kathy will perform music from the Celtic Lands along with classic American Folk Songs and favorites from the American Folk Revival of the 50's and 60's.

The beautiful Irish ballad "The Bard of Armagh" (written in the 1600s) came to America and evolved into the cowboy classic "The Streets of Laredo." "Isle of Hope" is a song about Annie Moore; at the age of 15, she became the first immigrant to come to America through Ellis Island in 1892.

Their program also features great American classics, with



Modesto Junior College Science Programs for the Community



MAPS offers free, informative and engaging community science programs.

7:30 pm, participate by logging on to

<https://www.mjc.edu/instruction/sme/maps.php> to sign up for notification of the link. Archived MAPS talks: <https://share.yosemite.edu/view.aspx?i=1E7L>

Friday, April 16: Roger Wiens. Los Alamos National Laboratory. *Exploring Mars with NASA's 1-ton Rovers, Curiosity and Perseverance*. Wiens is the Principal Investigator of the SuperCam team, operating during NASA's missions on Mars. His book, *Red Rover: Inside the Story of Robotic Space Exploration* offers a glimpse into his journey from childhood to adulthood as one who is fascinated by the heavens. NASA's first SUV-size Mars rover, Curiosity, which landed in 2012, discovered an ancient, long-lived freshwater lake on Mars, showing that Mars may have been as habitable as Earth in its early stages. Curiosity also made the first discovery of organic molecules on Mars. With its landing in February, Perseverance is equipped with the most sophisticated instruments yet, to ensure a better understanding of the Red Planet and to collect the best samples for the return cache. This talk will highlight both missions' searches for life on Mars. <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/features/061220/rover/Wiens-Bio.pdf>

SCIENCE COLLOQUIUM:

Wednesdays, 3:15-4:15 p.m., MJC via Zoom. Access the program: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmaymqgHqzxhsAa0RJmYwVg/>. When the live program appears, click on it.

April 7: Derek Madden, MJC Biology Professor, *Science and Art of Yoga: A Monkey-Human Connection*. Dr. Madden will discuss how his research on monkey arthritis led him to study yoga as a Scientist.



PROSPECT THEATER PROJECT

Prospect Theater Project's Radio Cavalcade Presents "The Postman Always Rings Twice"

WHAT: A middle-aged roadside diner owner hires a drifter to work at his restaurant. The drifter quickly begins an affair with the owner's beautiful young wife and the two conspire to kill her husband and seize his assets. When they succeed, a local prosecutor becomes suspicious but is unable to build a solid case. The couple soon realizes that no misdeed ever goes truly unpunished.

Tickets will be \$10 and may be purchased by visiting prospecttheaterproject.org.

WHEN: Streaming Available for 72 hours from April 9-11, 2021

WHERE: Streaming Online

WHO: For over twenty years, Prospect Theater Project has promoted community growth by presenting insightful and innovative works of theater in a uniquely intimate performance space.

Info: For more information regarding "The Postman Always Rings Twice", visit prospecttheaterproject.org or call (209) 549-9341.

Media: Contact: Sarah Aaronson, Prospect Theater Project Board Member sarah@irmevents.com

traveling as a theme. These include such songs as "This Land is Your Land", "Red River Valley", "Sentimental Journey," and "Walk Right In".

These songs are the backbone of American folk music and invoke a simpler time. You'll be singing and humming along to the songs America loves!

Tickets are \$25 for this online event. Links to the Zoom meeting will be emailed to ticket holders prior to the concert. However you decide to purchase—**please make sure we get your email address!**

There are two ways to sign up:

1 Mail checks to: Congregation Beth Shalom, PO Box 85, Modesto, CA 95353. Include "Concert Series" in the memo area. Please make sure they arrive by April 8, so we can get Zoom invitations out in time.

2 Purchase through PayPal: Use the link on our website. For the latest info on the series, check SundaysAtCBS.com

Violence Against Asian Women in the US has a Long History

By KAREN LEONG & KAREN KUO

Asian American women understand that the suspect in the killing of eight people in Atlanta was acting in keeping with a culture filled with racialized and sexualized views of Asian women. Of the people killed, four women were of Korean descent and two of Chinese heritage.

The shooter himself, Robert Long, has said he was motivated to act violently because of his self-proclaimed “sex addiction.” He allegedly told investigators that the businesses he attacked represented “a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate.”

Long sought to eliminate the objects of his sexual temptations, Asian women. In doing so, he drew on the U.S.’s long history of sexualizing Asian American women.

A Long History of Stereotypes

Harmful stereotypes of Asian women in American popular culture date back to at least the 19th century. Back then, American missionaries and military personnel in Asia viewed the women they met there as exotic and submissive.

These stereotypes influenced the first U.S. immigration law based on race, the 1875 Page Act, which prevented Chinese women from entering the United States. The official assumption was that, unless proven otherwise, Chinese women seeking to enter the United States lacked moral character and were prostitutes. In fact, many were wives seeking to reunite with their husbands who had already come to the U.S.

Around the same time, Chinese women in San Francisco also were scapegoated by local public health officials who feared they would spread sexually transmitted diseases to White men, who would then spread it to their wives.

In the mid-20th century, U.S. wars and military bases in China, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, and Vietnam resulted in increased

interracial contact between American soldiers and Asian women. The GIs’ restricted interactions with the larger Asian population meant that they met Asian women that worked on or near the military bases: on-base service workers who cleaned or cooked, or sex workers in the surrounding communities.

Some soldiers married Asian women and brought them home as war brides, while others primarily viewed Asian women as sexual objects. Both approaches perpetuated stereotypes of Asian women as sexually submissive, either as ideal wives or sexually exotic prostitutes.

These stereotypes are evident throughout U.S. popular culture in the form of novels and movies, including The Teahouse of the August Moon and James Michener’s The

Bridges at Toko-Ri, which feature romances between GIs and Asian women. Vietnam War-era films like Full Metal Jacket and Platoon depict graphic sexual violence committed by American GIs against Vietnamese women.

Violence Against Asian American Women

In online digital pornography, Asian women are disproportionately presented as victims of rape, compared to White women or women of other racial backgrounds. Asian American feminist and activist Helen Zia has argued that there is a connection between the portrayals of Asian women in pornography and violence against Asian American women.

Rosalind Chou, a sociologist, describes how in 2000, a group of White men kidnapped five Japanese female exchange students in Spokane, Washington, to fulfill their sexual fantasies of Asian female bondage, a subgenre of pornography.

Sexual attacks targeting Asian American women are more likely to come from non-Asians. Though most attacks on White or Black women come from men of the same ethnic background, Asian American women—and Native American women—are more likely to be sexually assaulted by males of a different ethnicity.

The most recent high-profile example of this dynamic is the 2015 rape of a woman by White Stanford student Brock Turner. Not until 2019 did the woman, Chanel Miller, reveal her name and identity as an Asian American woman. At that point many Asian American women understood another element of what had already been a troubling case of White male sexual aggression: Turner likely felt entitled to use and abuse Miller’s unconscious body not just because she is a woman, but because of her Asian heritage.

Targeted Attacks

In March 2020, Asian American and Pacific Islander community organizations joined with San Francisco State University’s Asian American Studies Program to document incidents of anti-Asian racism occurring across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The group they formed, called StopAAPIHate, has recorded an average of 11 anti-Asian hate incidents in the U.S. each day since its creation, including in-person and online verbal harassment, civil rights violations, and physical assaults.

The group has found that Asian women report hate incidents 2.3 times as often as Asian men. The data doesn’t distinguish between sexual assaults or harassment and other types of physical attacks and harassment, but it nevertheless emphasizes the vulnerability of being Asian and being female.

Oppression of Women of Color

Asian women are not the only targets of racial and sexual violence. Any non-White woman has a greater risk of these perils than White women do.

One day after the White male shooter in Georgia killed six Asian women, an armed White man was detained outside Vice President Kamala Harris’ official residence in Washington, D.C. As a mixed-race South Asian and Black woman, Harris is not exempt from this culture that racializes and sexualizes Asian women and all women of color. None of us is.

Karen Leong is Associate Professor of Women and Gender

Studies, and Asian Pacific American Studies, Arizona State University

Karen Kuo is Associate Professor of Asian Pacific American Studies, Arizona State University.



This article is reprinted from The Conversation.

Confronting Racism, Overcoming COVID-19, & Advancing Health Equity

Time for California to Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis

By ADRIANA RAMOS-YAMAMOTO and MONICA DAVALOS

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the depths and reach of racism on the health of children, families, and individuals, with communities of color in California experiencing higher rates of illness, death, and overall hardship due to the virus. This devastation must be the catalyst for California policymakers to acknowledge that racism has caused lasting and negative impacts on communities of color. While some local policymakers in California have declared racism as a public health crisis, there has not been a declaration at the state level.

This Report provides a high-level overview on how health inequities are a direct consequence of historic and ongoing



racism. The integration of racist policies and practices in various systems — specifically housing, environment, employment, health care, justice system, and education — prevents many communities the opportunity to be healthy and thrive. Only by first declaring racism a public health crisis can we then begin to minimize, neutralize, and dismantle the systems of racism that create inequalities in health for Californians.

In this report, find:

- California & COVID-19: Why Policymakers Must Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis
- Communities of Color Are Hardest Hit by COVID-19 Pandemic
- Health Inequities Are Tied to Structural Racism
- Key Terms Defined
- How Does Everyday Racial Discrimination Harm the Health of People of Color?
- Federal, State, and Local Policies and Practices Rooted in Racism Have Produced an Inequitable California
- Racism Has Produced an Inequitable California
- The full report can be found in the publication PDF here. From the California Budget & Policy Center.



20/21 Peace Essay Contest Winners

Division I (grades 11 & 12)

Award	Name	School	Teacher
First Place	Paola Campos	Central Valley High School	Ryan Avey
Second Place & SW	Natalia Wetenkamp	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Third Place	Bergen Finley	Whitmore Charter School	Kelly Hayes
Hon Men & SW	Joelle Dowdy	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Hon Mention	Kyah Trujillo	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Hon Mention	Julia Hoxie	Whitmore Charter School	Kelly Hayes
Finalist	Isheah Al Sumairi	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Seth Boice	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Finalist	Eric Brooks	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Finalist	Grace Brunetti	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Finalist	Thomas Clavin	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Calvin Hunter	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Aaliyah Johnson	James Enochs High School	Szostak, Danette
Finalist	Jake Martin	Patterson High School	Valerie Jamieson
Finalist & SW	Samantha Mendoza	Patterson High School	Valerie Jamieson
Finalist	Avery Morton	Oakdale Charter School	Jessica Menefee
Finalist	Yesenia Rameriez	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Finalist	Maria Saleh	Modesto High School	Jacquemin, Heather
Finalist	Bailey Veuve	Hughson High Sdchool	Ruelas, Karalee
Finalist	Villasenor Ramirez	Peter Johansen High School	Evans, Nicole

Division II (grades 9 & 10)

Award	Name	School	Teacher
First Place	Lauren Bowman	Home School	Ann Bowman
Second Place	Paige Krueger	Modesto High School	Castellani, Kerry
Third Place	Chloe De la Torre	Pitman High School	Nulph, Denise
Honorable Mention	Makenna Boswell	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Honorable Mention	Nayah Jourdan	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Honorable Mention	Jasmine Valencia	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Asma Al Sumairi	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Jessica Birchall	Oakdale Charter School	Jessica Menefee
Finalist	Ben Bylsma	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Finalist	Daniel Campbell	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Jack Fifita	Modesto High School	Hansen, Summer
Finalist	Hazel Hunter	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Brielle McCalley	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Finalist	Lily Medhurst	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Finalist	Josiah Poirier	Turlock Christian High School	Marjory Peterson
Finalist	Leif Ryun	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells
Finalist	Jonathan Simmons	Oakdale Charter School	Jessica Menefee
Finalist	Sydney Tohara	Oakdale Charter School	Jessica Menefee
Finalist	Carly Whitemyer	Oakdale Charter School	Jeannette Ves'sells

Division III (grades 7 & 8)

Award	Name	School	Teacher
First Place & SW	Landon Arnold	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Second Place & SW	Heidi Bowman	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Third Place	Andrew Swehla	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Honorable Mention	Kevin Banankhah	Independent Study	Susan Janis
Honorable Mention	Abigail Moberly	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Honorable Mention	Jenna O'Neil	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Finalist	Kiana Atwell	Our Lady of Fatima	Star Pedron
Finalist	Alessandro Bonecchi	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist & SW	Pearl Bunch	Hickman Charter Elem	Tracey Kline
Finalist	Milo Cox	Hickman Charter Elem	Tracey Kline
Finalist	Allee DePalma	Gratton Elem	Rexann Casteel
Finalist & SW	Eli Garrett	Our Lady of Fatima	Star Pedron
Finalist	Miles Gerig-Triano	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Trista Holcomb	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Finalist	Tanner Humphrey	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Finalist	Dylan Krause	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Finalist	Morgan Merzon	Oakdale Jr HS	Dee Hawksworth
Finalist	Rafael Padilla	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Aidan Suntra	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Leah Turner	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
School Winner	Madden Nobles	Hickman Middle School	Michelle Blaze
School Winner	Sofiah Ramirez	Yolo MS	Deirdre O'Rourke

Division IV (grades 5 & 6)

Award	Name	School	Teacher
First Place & SW	Jedidiah Chen	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Second Place & SW	Rachel Warter	Agnes Baptist Elem	Amber Eckerfield
Third Place	Jia Li	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Honorable Mention	Marcus Ang	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Honorable Mention & SW	Audrey Brown	John Fremont Elem	Doreen Arnold
Honorable Mention	Madison Vance	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Alesandra Avalon	Connect. Waters Chtr	Alida Higgins
Finalist	Jean Elazar Bengochea	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist & SW	Maddison Borges	Hickman Middle School	Michelle Blaze
Finalist	Noah Doub	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Amelia Duarte	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Averlyn Hajjar	Hart Ransom Acad Chtr	Susan Janis
Finalist	Beckett Kithcart	John Fremont Elem	Levi Hanzel-Sello
Finalist	Kaylani Luy	Agnes Baptist Elem	Toni David
Finalist	Jason Moomau	Agnes Baptist Elem	Toni David
Finalist	Melanie Nguyen	Agnes Baptist Elem	Toni David
Finalist	Deen Pierstorff	John Fremont Elem	Levi Hanzel-Sello
Finalist	Archer Price	John Fremont Elem	Levi Hanzel-Sello
Finalist	Simone Rosemire	John Fremont Elem	Levi Hanzel-Sello
Finalist	Emmalee Vang	Agnes Baptist Elem	Amber Eckerfield
School Winner	Kendall Trombley	WM. Brown Elem	Michelle Bergendahl

*Sch Win or SW = School Winner, recognized for the top essay from a school that has submitted 10 or more essays in the Division Send Any name corrections to david.tucker@stanfordalumni.org

The 34th Annual Peace Essay Contest is a project of the Modesto Peace/Life Center, 720 13th Street, Modesto, 95353 529-5750

Co-sponsored by the Modesto Junior College Department of Literature and Language Arts

Division I Winner –2021 Peace Essay Contest

**Panacea by Paola Campos,
Central Valley High School**

Teacher: Ryan Avey

Most individuals can identify and resolve physical pain relatively quickly. A tooth ache requires a checkup at the dentist. A broken bone requires a visit to the doctor. A stubbed toe simply requires some jumping up and down until the pain dissipates. In all of these scenarios, individuals are not overly troubled with displaying pain because they understand that communicating with others is the only way to receive adequate help and treatment. Does this mean individuals are equally capable of expressing emotional or mental pain? For the most part, individuals are not taught to express, much less manage, poor mental health. Considering that the World Health Organization predicts that one in four individuals will be affected by some sort of “mental or neurological disorder at some point in their lives,” educating others about the impact of mental health becomes incredibly important (Hartl). As such, promoting mental health is a pressing need that affects society as a whole and that organizations, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have been working to avidly promote and increase available treatment options.

Currently, social stigma and confusion surround mental health, disrupting society’s perception and approach thereof. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental health as an individual’s ability to recognize their potential, cope with the challenges of daily life, and “make a contribution to his or her community” (“Mental Health: Strengthening...”).

However, many people have the misconception that only individuals with a mental illness have poor mental health. This increases the stigma surrounding mental health because individuals wrongfully believe emotional instability is a weakness. Nonetheless, WHO emphasizes that an absence of a mental illness does not guarantee mental health because environmental, biological, and psychological factors also have an impact. Thus, every individual is susceptible to poor mental health and understanding its causes is the first step to reducing the social stigma that surrounds poor mental health and reaching a solution. School, work, disease, prejudice, poverty, and countless other situations result in inevitable

environmental factors, such as stress and anxiety, which have a widespread impact on mental health. Nonetheless, most individuals don’t learn to manage these emotions and, conversely, learn to hide them. However, as psychologist Ackerman points out, these coping skills “are destructive and are used to avoid [an individual’s] problems,” not resolve them. This in turn leads to further complications. For instance, poor mental health predominantly arises in the working population which indirectly leads to lower productivity levels and losses in the global economy equal to “\$1 trillion every year” (“Mental Health”). Furthermore, prolonged poor mental health can lead to other physical illnesses as well as an increased risk for suicide, for studies have shown that “90% of people who have died by suicide were suffering from a mental illness at the time” (“Suicide in Teens...”). Thus, promoting good mental health and providing resources for those who suffer from poor mental health is a dire need that is only exacerbated by the stress and isolation caused by the current pandemic.

In promoting good mental health, the National Alliance on Mental Illness is a leading force that raises awareness and furthers research nationwide. From its humble beginnings, an organization that began with two dedicated mothers has expanded to encompass over 600 branches nationwide. Through interactive and online resources, the organization provides a wide range of information sessions, classes and support groups that educate communities holistically (“Support and Education”). What is more, NAMI avidly funds research for new treatments, increasing an individual’s prospects to recover from what often feels like a lifelong battle. With the pandemic, the organization has doubled its efforts to bring individuals the support and help they need. For instance, information and support sessions are now online and helplines are open


any day of the week, any hour of the day. Accordingly, the organization has concentrated its efforts to raise awareness by hosting a virtual wellness month in October, the #FirstRespondersFirst initiative, and “What People with Mental Illness Want You to Know” Awareness week. With all of these programs, NAMI hopes to collectively educate communities nationwide about the “conditions and symptoms that are most misunderstood” (“Awareness Events”). Thus, the organization has not ceased to help individuals nationwide and understands that promoting mental health has never been more important.

All of society does well to remember that “Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone.”

NAMI’s dedication to promoting mental health reduces the stigma that surrounds poor mental health and increases treatment options. NAMI emphasizes that stress and other environmental factors are inevitable and gives individuals the resources they need to manage these situations effectively. Accordingly, instead of shying away from the problem, NAMI starts a difficult but necessary conversation that addresses individuals’ mental health. This, in turn, reduces the number of people that resort to destructive coping skills, like substance and drug abuse, which might temporarily remove the pain but worsen the situation. Furthermore, people’s testimony about their struggles with mental health increases society’s willingness to address and talk about emotional and mental pain, which is necessary as the pandemic inflicts stress “that may have long-term psychological sequelae” (Le et al). Hence, NAMI’s collective efforts are important because they encourage people to address and manage poor mental health.

Ultimately, NAMI highlights that when it comes to mental health panacea, or a solution that will solve a problem in its entirety, is not the goal (“What is Panacea?”). On the contrary, their efforts show that continuous communication is the only way to achieve any form of peace, whether it’s internal peace of mind or world peace. Consequently, NAMI’s work motivates individuals worldwide and me to not only speak out but also listen and show empathy for other people’s pain, whether it be physical or emotional. Overall, all of society does well to remember that “Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are” (“Hafsat Abiola-Costello”).

Note: references will be found in the essay on [Weebly at peaceessaycontest.weebly.com](https://peaceessaycontest.weebly.com)



is published monthly except in August
by the Modesto Peace/Life Center
720 13th St., Modesto, CA 95354.
Open by appointment.
Mailing address: P.O. Box 134,
Modesto, CA 95353
209-529-5750



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“Soft heart, firm soles”

By LENG POWER

Ed. Note: the following “sermon” was given on Civic Saturday held by the Stanislaus Community Foundation on February 27, 2021. Find a recording of the gathering [here](#). To read the poetry, civic texts, and music lyrics that were shared, access [this document](#). See “A Love Letter to Stanislaus County” by Sam Pierstroff at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9igJ0i4jYc

We gather this morning against the weight of so many heavy things happening in our world. As a nation, we have lost over half a million of our family and friends to a virus that we have not fully contained, enduring a pandemic that persists in ravishing our lives. As a community, we are still navigating complex and urgent issues like poverty, systemic inequities, and the ecological burden we are leaving for our children. And personally, we are reeling from months of isolation, mourning multiple forms of loss, managing all the disruptions to normalcy and divisions in our society that continue to resurface to the best of our individual abilities. A collective exhaustion shrouds us every day.

So what is it that compels us to seek connection in this moment. What force brings us to this shared space? Despite everything that tells us to abandon a notion of brighter days and better tomorrows, we show up to each other because we hold onto a courageous and curious hope that within each of us, is the capacity to create a future that features our desire for unconditional care for all people, a belonging that encompasses and honors everyone’s humanity and a resiliency that facilitates the social transformation that reflects who we can be for each other.

We are here because we know we are stronger together than we are alone. As we find ourselves in uncertain times feeling like we are sinking into the division and crisis that surrounds us, we recognize the profound need to align with one another in significantly collaborative ways. But how? The rift is so wide between all the versions of us and them, those who believe and those who doubt, those who belong and those outsiders, those without means and those with excess, those who speak and those who silence. Every issue has become an opportunity for extreme polarization that even the idea of unity has become controversial. It would appear that we have lost each other to the grief of separation. And that would be the greatest tragedy to befall us. But I do not believe we are there yet, and I want us to stay skillfully vigilant against such a fate.

Pema Chodron, a Buddhist Teacher and nun, offers us these words to help us build our collaboration container; *‘If we want there to be peace in the world, we have to be brave enough to soften what is rigid in our hearts, to find the soft spot and stay with it. We have to have that kind of courage and take that kind of responsibility. That’s the true practice of peace.’*

I’d like us to consider this talk an invitation to maintain that softness in our hearts. It is the space where the knowledge of the mind and that of our senses converge allowing us to inhabit our full selves. Softening the heart is not a sentimental act, it is the ability to be open to the range of human experiences, the whole spectrum between joy and sorrow. I think of the way the earth needs to soften before something can be planted, to nurture growth. How a face can appear

softer with a smile. We are not seeking an artificial state of being to distract from the realities we face, we are creating the conditions that will allow us to accept and dignify what is there. While cultivating this practice begins and ends as a personal endeavor, the impact is much wider, extending out into the world as we now possess the courage to act tenderly and patiently with ourselves and each other.

The great luminaries of the civil rights movement often referenced an ethics of love as the guiding principle that would outlast all the driving forces rooted in fear and hate. They knew that to choose love would be to choose community because our lives and our futures are bound together. This past year has made that undeniably clear; we are an interconnected and interdependent species. The most endearing and worthwhile habit of the heart is centering love that is non-negotiable. Martin Luther King believed if we are seeking the highest good, we can only do that through the framework of love. The idea of separation is perhaps the most harmful illusion.

The practice of othering has allowed us to dehumanize and abandon the sacred responsibilities we have as members of a society. And yet we slip into it somewhat seamlessly. How many times in the last week, month, year have we encountered a thought different than ours and felt an instant aversion?

“They’re crazy” we say.

“I wish they would just wake up!” we lament to our friends.

“They are nothing like me” we decide before we leave all the spaces that could’ve broadened this context of a likeness and difference. We unfriend, unfollow, uninvite, disassociate, decline, deny which strengthens the silos that stand in the way of our highest good.

Let me be clear that I am not advocating for people to stay in dynamics and situations that cause physical or mental distress. But I want us to recognize the ways we have dismissed and decided that closing off would be better/safer than staying open. I recall when I said yes to serving on a community council, I thought we would discuss things like gun control and right to life matters, the big things that take up space in our minds. But we ended up discussing crosswalks to ensure the safety of our residents and the joy of getting a new grocery story. These are the rich moments that Dr. King and Pema Chodron call upon us to “choose love” and “soften what is rigid” not as a performative gesture but because we do not have the luxury of division. The cost continues to be great.

The need to be seen and known and accepted as who we are is such an intrinsic desire. That is both what motivates us and repels us in terms of the connections we form, the



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relationships we establish, the opportunities we seek and the communities we build.

Some of you may know the story of my family who were forced to flee from our homeland of Cambodia under the genocidal reign of the Khmer Rouge. My parents endured several years in labor camps sometimes not knowing if the other one was still alive. On occasion, the families were allowed to see one another. During that time, there were also very strict food rations. Hundreds of people died from starvation. My father was informed of an upcoming visit and wanted to store away his rations for his family. He tried to find ways to increase his rations knowing that he would not survive if he himself did not eat. He knew of a fellow

laborer who was once a high ranking official before the country fell. The Khmer Rouge soldiers may be more generous towards him, my father thought. He approached the man with the request. Perhaps offering the man whatever small treasure my dad was able to keep safe from his former life. The man agreed but did not accept the items from my dad. In exchange for the food that would keep our family alive for a while longer, the man with no wife or family of his own anymore, asked that my dad just know him. In the darkest of times, when material wealth was irrelevant, to have

someone in this world know him as a person was the only thing of worth.

The need to be seen and accepted is great. To deny that, is to render someone less visible, a significant type of death on its own.

Citizenship catalyzed by compassion and empathy cannot be a passive engagement. So how do we walk through this world that we are newly awake to? How do we align our softening hearts with the firm soles of our feet poised for meaningful action?

Your presence here today is such an action. What you apply from what you hear today will be such an action. Every time you choose curiosity over conviction, dialogue when there is division, accept and see people who and where they are always ready to welcome them from their unique experience and shared spaces of new understanding, we are taking action.

I will close with this thought; I sit in a room full of beautifully ornate, swords and knives. My partner is a lifelong practitioner of martial arts with decades of training to acquire skills that enable him to use these items in the service of instruction, protection, preservation. In less skilled hands, they can cause great harm.

Each of us have the same potential with our words and witness to each other, without skillful practice we have the potential to wound but with a deep commitment for a new reality, we can create tremendous capacity to bestow the gift of peace to each other, guided by a soft heart and firm soles.

Thank you.

Rivers of Birds Forests of Tule: Awakening to Nature

By DAN ONORATO

With Earth Day 2021 coming soon and spring surprising us daily with its bounty of colorful flowers and exuberant early morning bird song, the time is right to learn more about our Central Valley's nature and culture. Let poet, retired MJC English teacher, and avid naturalist Lillian Vallee be your guide. Her engaging book, *Rivers of Birds Forests of Tule*, illustrated in beautiful detail by MJC biology teacher Dr. Derek Madden, appeared first as a series of monthly columns here in *Stanislaus Connections* from 2003 to 2018. It blends stories and close observations of nature with social history and environmental concerns. Vallee is a gifted poet with the soul and passion of a seer. Her writing is lively and fresh, her appreciation of nature's epiphanies radiant, and the depth of her reflections are at times inspiring. The book is a gem.

Early on Vallee mentions our region's losses: "the Central Valley has barely four to six percent left" of its four million acres of historic wetlands; of its roughly a million acres of riparian gallery forest," maybe "under ten percent are left." But her book is not a lament nor a relentless tirade against development. She's an educator and an advocate influenced by bio-regionalists and fellow poets Gary Snyder and her friend and mentor Lithuanian Nobel Prize-winning poet Czesław Miłosz. As a passionate believer in growing where we're planted, she invites us to open our eyes deeply to the marvels of what's right before us here in the valley where we live, and she calls us to join in the effort to preserve and restore our local habitats. Her summons comes often with a deft touch of humor: "We . . . could use a few voices for the beleaguered Valley Oak in our area," she writes," so that our junior high students (and their parent accomplices) would see the remnant, heritage oaks as worthy of something more celebratory than a ritual toilet-papering."

In other essays she's more direct in promoting corrective action. In "Walking the Asthma Trail," she advocates improving the Valley's air quality, which in its present state is the cause of a disproportionately high incidence of asthma in our region. In "Central Valley Water: Cash Crop or Public Trust?" she calls for a just allocation of water and water rights to prevent exhausting or depleting existing water — all for the profit of huge growers. Among others, she targets the injustice of Beverly Hills billionaire Stewart Resnick's "private control of the Kern Water Bank . . . to keep 120,000 acres of pistachios and almonds productive. Resnick's company, Paramount Farming . . . is the largest grower and processor of nuts in the world. He's also the owner of Fiji bottled water," but "cannot supply his farmworkers with a living wage and potable water." Such, she quotes John Giber, "are the intertwined fates of water and migrant laborers in California agriculture." As in this chapter, throughout *Rivers of Birds* . . . Vallee draws on the research and conclusions of noted experts. In stating that "Water diversions and over 1200 reservoirs homogenize river, riparian, freshwater marsh, and other habitats," she endorses the view of Andrew Cohen, who writes in *Life on the Edge*: "Water development in California

may have had more of an impact on biodiversity than any other single factor."

In a chapter on fish and bird migration she exemplifies the "high drama and expectation" of late fall and the rainy season: "If you stop for just a moment, look and listen, you will notice nature all around you, winged and finned, on the move, flying, swimming upstream, hovering, diving, feed-



ing, fighting the current, making epic journeys, offering itself to you as food and metaphor." She beguiles the reader into awakening to the breathtaking spectacle and wonder of nature. In places her entries are light and playful, as in "Medicine Man." She invites a wild rabbit into her yard and imagines it frolicking in "moonlit capers." In "Blithe and not so Blithe Tomatoes" she grows obsessed with a neighbor's gopher that intrudes into her garden to wreak havoc on her vegetables. Peaked initially, she then chuckles with deeper understanding of their likeness: "Vandal, buffoon, mocker, hedonist, *mon semblable, mon frère*."

Vallee's fluid prose shifts seamlessly from narrative memories to useful anthropological information. For years she took student volunteers from her classes at MJC to Westside refuges to help restore habitat. On one trip to the San Joaquin Wildlife Refuge, students enthusiastically "clipped wild rose hips; collected elderberry, quail bush and box elder seeds; pulled old fence stakes out and removed weeds and trash." But one unsuspecting student discovered a flourishing nettle plant, touched its greenery with her fingers, then lifted her fingers to her nose to breathe in the smell. Vallee lets us imagine the girl's stinging pain as she switches from the dramatic (and humorous) story to how people throughout time and various cultures have used nettles to make fishline, bowstrings, basketry strands, and cloth. Gardeners, perk up, she seems to add, nettles are a good fertilizer, and they speed up decomposition in compost piles.

Vallee's stories and observations often lead to stirring reflections. In one chapter's anecdotes that flow like a calm stream from one quiet eddy to the next, Vallee underscores the importance of healing. She makes peace with another intruding rabbit in her garden. She supports local sustainable

agriculture by joining a CSA project (Community Supported Agriculture). She renews her kinship with Lily, a young woman she's known for years who works a farm that supplies a CSA. Lily's boyfriend and partner on the farm, an Iraq War veteran, teaches other veterans to grow food so they can learn to find purpose in "nurturing what grows and nourishes others." And she concludes with a wistful reflection echoing

Homer's account of Odysseus's homecoming: "There's comfort and hope when children grow up to look after the soil, the food we eat, and one another after life's hard experiences. And there is comfort and hope when there is an Ithaca to which Odysseus can return, after hostilities, to beat his sword into a ploughshare, and to grow limes and pomegranates, cucumbers and corn, carrots and kale. . . ." As she implies throughout the book, the closer we feel toward nature and the natural world, the deeper our growth into wholeness.

Vallee has abiding respect and appreciation for researchers and writers who have helped shape her understanding. One of her favorites is Laura Cunningham, author of *State of Change*. Vallee sums up Cunningham's wisdom: "we gain the ability to see the subtle world when we care enough to look at it in all of its glorious detail . . . ; when we learn from those who have devoted their lives to divining its mysteries; when we are thoughtful in imagining the past and bold in imagining

a more inclusive future; and when we share what we have learned with passion, grace, and humility." In *Rivers of Birds Forests of Tule* Lillian Vallee shares with us what she has learned "with passion, grace, and humility."

If you like lively story telling from a writer who is clearly in love with her subject matter; if you enjoy vivid description of natural life that makes you feel like you're seeing it for the first time; if you're eager to learn more about our region's history and people whose lives and spirit can make us feel proud to live here, Lillian Vallee's book is an excellent read. I'd say it's a treasure.

ACTION: Before the pandemic, people could buy Vallee's book at the MJC Science Museum bookstore on West Campus (surely one of our county's Best Places to Visit). To buy a copy now, contact the author: valleel@yosemite.edu.

The photos with this article highlight the beauty of the La Loma Native Plant Community Garden at the corner of Encina and North Conejo Avenues in Modesto. Vallee's enthusiastic creativity isn't focused only on writing. This splendid peaceful place is in large part the fruition of her daydreaming, planning, and hard work. As she has done for our central valley region through her story telling, she, with others, has "re-sacralized" this space, turning a dusty patch of tumbleweed into a sacred oasis for the soul. "Beauty fortifies us," she said to me in a recent conversation. "Every day something holy happens there." The La Loma Native Plant Garden is in large part her brainchild. But neighbor and friend Rhonda Allen has been indispensable in turning their shared dream into reality. Tireless and determined, "Rhonda is the driving force that makes most things happen at the garden, the locomotive," Vallee says gratefully, "that pulls the train."

Homeless: The Enduring Madness of Sweeps

By ERIC CAINE, The Valley Citizen

Consider the case of a 74-year-old woman who stood, sat, and slept in plain sight on the concrete along a busy street just outside Modesto's city limits for over six weeks, her pants soiled with her own waste, her fingernails and toenails grotesquely untended, and the space around her littered with trash and garbage. Consider also that she is almost certainly developmentally disabled, has an authorized payee, and earlier this year was living in a subsidized motel room.

Then consider the case of Mary Baca. We first wrote about Mary in October of 2015, when she showed up in a Modesto Park after several months living in her car. At the time, Mary showed clear signs of classic schizophrenia.

During her time on the streets — years now — Mary's mental illness has gotten worse. An award-winning vocalist, Mary can be seen singing and playing guitar on a video taped by Richard Anderson in May, 2016. At :28 seconds in, Mary talks about life in Modesto's Graceada Park, and the seven homeless men responsible for home invasions in the Graceada neighborhood. Displaying textbook symptoms of schizophrenia, Mary discusses attempts by the seven underground men to control her mind.

Over the almost six years since she became homeless, Mary has received help from local authorities exactly once, when she spent 15 days at Doctor's Behavioral Health Center, where she was prescribed medication and released back to the streets. Despite the best efforts of homeless friends, Mary stopped taking her medicine within a month of release. She reverted to severe schizophrenia almost immediately.

Last month, Mary was arrested on charges typically associated with homelessness, including, "Failing to leave property." She's currently in jail.

The 74-year-old woman?

After refusing numerous offers of help, she was taken off the street only when Modesto Police Sargent Mike Hammond went beyond the bounds of duty after hearing about her plight from outreach worker Randy Limburg of Telecare. Up until Hammond and his Homeless Engagement and Response (HEART) team intervened, Limburg had been unable to get the woman to accept help. Today's laws being what they are, Limburg was powerless even to help someone so obviously in need.

Though Hammond and his team have many years' experience dealing with homeless people in crisis situations, it took extra measures of compassion, effort, and persuasion to get the woman into a better place, albeit still precariously short-term.

We cite these two cases as examples of inadequate systems of care, not because people lack compassion and the will to help, but because our laws so often prohibit intervention in clear cases of distress and our resources for addressing critical needs are far too limited. We could cite many, many more cases. Many of our readers could add to that number exponentially.

The point is that anyone who truly believes there are sufficient "services — including disability, mental health and drug and alcohol addiction resources" — for the hundreds upon hundreds of local homeless people who truly need them is either out of touch with reality or has never experienced the endless futility of dealing with our systems of care. Just ask Steven Finch.

Finch recently formed "SHARE," the Stanislaus Homeless Advocacy and Resource Enterprise. Finch thought applying a successful model of individual sponsorship and assistance from other volunteer organizations would work with homelessness. He soon found that,



"Agencies and non-profits are so strained and understaffed they are at a breaking point," They refer you back and forth and the referral is sometimes to a phone with no answer and a mailbox that is full. There are many good people in this work, but it seems their hands are tied."

Finch also learned that a great deal of local budget money for homelessness,

"Gets burned up by short-term congregate living solutions. These are not a solution for many people, so they end up back on the streets. I spoke with the Director at Family Promise and she said they could ramp up their program to 4-5 times the size and pace, but at the end of the day, there is NO long-term housing for graduates of the program."

Given these realities, the City of Turlock's recent decision to spend half a million dollars on a 120-day project to reduce the effects of homelessness citywide is indefensible. Most of the money will go towards expanding the number of available beds in congregate living facilities. Assuming the beds fill — an optimistic projection at best — the chances a significant number of people will move from those beds to better situations than they're currently experiencing are infinitesimal.

Theoretically, the beds will be needed to accommodate homeless people who've been forced to move from current locations, especially highly visible camps. Many of those people have been living in cars, campers, motor homes and trailers. Asking them to move into congregate living during a pandemic, especially in a county notorious for its failures to address Covid-19, is like asking the household cat to take up residence in the hot tub. Good luck.

Doubtful? Just ask anyone with a few years' experience

dealing with homelessness.

Sweeps of homeless people generally occur once or twice a year. The City of Modesto has recently engaged in yet another one. It includes a coordinated effort by the Modesto Police Department, Stanislaus County Sheriffs, and Caltrans. The results are visible to the naked eye. Homeless people, formerly camped under bridges, along railroad tracks and highways and in other out-of-the-way places, are now stranded in local parks or sitting on curbsides downtown. They're everywhere.

Despite repeated failures to reduce homelessness, sweeps remain the default strategy for authorities in Stanislaus County. Sometimes they're accomplished with much fanfare, like the current sweep in Turlock.

City and county officials release detailed plans about beds and services, in hopes the public will yet again fail to learn from experience.

But even the most gullible onlookers can't ignore the evidence of their senses, and by every indicator, homeless numbers have risen every year. In fact, even when Turlock adds beds, there won't be enough to accommodate current numbers of homeless people.

And that brings us to the recent decision by the 9th Circuit Court, which holds that homeless people sleeping on public

property can't be required to move or penalized if there are no other places available to lay their heads. Given that shelters throughout Stanislaus County have been at reduced capacity because of Covid-19, there has been no way to argue homeless people have alternatives to sleeping outside.

Nonetheless, authorities have persisted at chasing homeless people, claiming that, "We always have five or six places available." The claim is so thin that even authorities accustomed to bullying people who can't afford attorneys have gotten nervous about the prospect that a *pro bono* law firm might come along and expose their bluffs.

However, if cities and counties do manage to add beds, and if Covid does become manageable, then their argument about having enough beds becomes a little stronger — but only a little. The fact is, the 2020 Point in Time homeless count for Modesto registered over 1592 homeless people in the city alone, not including people outside the city limits. Most experienced observers agree it was a significant undercount of true numbers. Add all available beds together throughout the city, and the total is still far short of even a thousand, let alone more.

So in addition to accomplishing little to nothing in reducing homelessness, today's sweeps leave local authorities legally vulnerable, especially since they have better options.

One such option, much favored by people on the ground, is to permit people living in cars, trailers and motor homes to park in designated areas. They could be approached on site by outreach workers and the costs of care and law enforcement would drop exponentially.





SAL SALERNO – MODESTO'S NEW POET LAUREATE

Congratulations to Sal Salerno for his appointment as the City of Modesto's eighth Poet Laureate! Salvatore retired in 2008 from teaching English and drama at Grace M. Davis High School. His latest poetry book is *Hello, Posterity*. He has also published nonfiction, plays, and short stories. Salvatore is a board member of the Modesto-Stanislaus Poetry Center (MoSt) and president of Stanislaus Audubon Society.

THE RESOLVE OF CLIFFORD CALL

"Someday I'll take up kayaking," said Clifford Call, with a little grin. He pushed from the railing and left As the boaters glided down, away.

"I'll be a master at chess someday," Cliff announced, with a little smirk. He stood there, hands in his pockets, while the players became their play.

"Someday I'll marry one of them," Clifford muttered, with a little shrug. He sat and drank his draft of bitters, gazing as the party pulsed away.

"I'll push someday for that worthy cause," swore Clifford, with a little frown. He girded his loosened mind for a fight, but a tiny obstacle got in his way.

"Someday I'll visit my old friends," thought Clifford, with a little cough. He pulled his blankets up to his chin, and swiftly came the very next day.

CLAYBORNE'S LOT

Clayborne didn't seek out friends;
he shied when others sought him.
They were roiled up in the world,
too much like and for each other—
some too vulgar for his sense,
others like fool's gold, bright yet phony.
Clayborne thought, *If only they
were more like me, only then
how attractive they would be!*

In following time,
lonely were the roads he drove,
and lonely were Clayborne's meals.

Clayborne didn't seek out love,
yet she, despite him, loved him.
She would take Clayborne around
for company, to parties, crowds,
but he soon wearied of them.
Clayborne thought, *If only she
would let me be, would not try
so much to change me, how lovely
she would be!*

In fair time,
lonely were the paths he walked,
and lonely was Clayborne's sleep.

Oh, don't pitch in with Clayborne's lot,
don't crave that poison perfect, but
cleave to the fractured and flawed,
clasp onto the glass seen darkly.

No one knows this more than me,
who has escaped to tell you
once I was a Clayborne too
before I drowned my mirror deep,
before I found that golden key
of getting saved by each of you.

A HUMAN GRAMMAR

*I am rapidly moving on sidewalks and streets
And there is small help when strangers meet—
I'm estranged and ill-fitting as anyone else.*

*He is haltingly walking with pulleys and wheels
And there is little cure for the pain he feels--
He's broken and damaged as anyone else.*

*She is loudly complaining to what she hears,
And there is no way to keep her head clear—
She's battered, disheartened as anyone else.*

*They who primp in the mirrors of their esteem,
Though haughty, are lower than they seem—
They're beaten and conquered as everyone else.*

HARRY D. ATTEMPTS TO MEDITATE

Because the rough world chafes and grates,
Harry D. resolves to meditate.
He sets his jaw to cogitate,
I'll struggle for that blissful state.
He shuts his eyes to close the gates,
But his beehive pate will not abate,
Its neurons buzz at a lightning rate;
They take up again their fierce debate
On choice or luck, on will or fate,
Which one with the other still berates.

Harry D.'s meat server fulminates;
He ponders where he's been, what he ate,
Whom he's offended as of late,
Friends or foes, or once again his mate.
He thickly tries to concentrate
On that single-syllable opiate.
An inward seed then germinates
To grow the truth that blossoms great:
Harry D. was born with an unclean slate—
He never, cannot *ever* meditate!

PEACE AT THE HEART OF THINGS

Go, take your cue from the rays of the sun
that spreads its selfless warmth on sea and land,
on every creature, every woman and man
with equal richness, bringing life to everyone.

Go, take your cue from the air of the trees
that bow with patience from the harshest winds—
with their roots winding deep in the soil,
they give their generous breath to all.

Go, take your cue from the ease of rivers
that nourishes the thirsty realms of earth
as it flows down, gently or full, its liquid
with gestures of a welcome giver.

There is great peace at the heart of things.
Take your lead from the water, light and air;
from nature's grace, above as sure as below,
fashion your heart to a chalice of love.



Modesto needs a Police Review Commission and Independent Police Auditor: Proposals

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ported interactions. Trust is the cornerstone to a healthy and interactive relationship between the community and police. The CPRC would include a qualified auditor and the group will serve as an advisory commission.

What Will The Commission Look Like?

The Commission will consist of one qualified Independent Police Auditor who will work in conjunction with a volunteer commission of seven (7) local residents and two (2) alternatives at least 18 years of age. The CPRC will reflect a diverse representation of the community members from various racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, age, and economic status backgrounds. Background checks will be required of all commissioners. Currently sworn officers, city employees, former sworn MPD officers or former employees or employee associations representing sworn officers will be ineligible to serve. Commissioners will participate in a series of trainings to enhance their understanding of police/community relations.

Role Of The CPRC

- Serve as a liaison between community and law enforcement.
- Give citizens a feeling of neutrality and confidence that their voices will be heard.
- Provide a “safe space” for citizens to turn to when addressing complaints against law enforcement.
- Participate in designing a system to validate that thorough and impartial investigations are taking place.
- Attend a series of trainings on policing.
- Participate in identifying qualified speakers to educate the community about police interactions, citizen responsibility and public safety.
- Give citizens a more active role in policing and public safety
- Participate in outreach and recruitment of a diverse police department.
- Meet monthly or as needed, to monitor progress.
- Demonstrate that law enforcement has nothing to hide

Recommended Minimum Qualifications Of The Independent Police Auditor?

- A Master’s degree in criminal justice, Juris Doctorate preferred.
- 10 years occupational experience in criminal law, labor law or related field
- Must be experienced in investigations, legal research, and analyzing criminal, constitutional, labor, and civil rights law.
- Extensive experience conducting investigations and writing reports.
- Has not been a sworn enforcement officer, (i.e., police officer, reserve officer, probation officer, patrol officer, or DEA agent) within Modesto or Stanislaus County.
- Must be independent and not have any immediate family

members (spouse, parent, sibling, child, or grandparent) who are sworn law enforcement officers with any law enforcement department/agency.

Role Of The Independent Police Auditor

- It is recommended that the Independent Police Auditor be employed as an independent contractor by the City of Modesto for a minimum term of one year.
- Compensation will be commensurate with experience.
- The IPA will need a Clerical Support Staff.
- The IPA will review and analyze police policies and procedures, complaints, and historical data to identify trends and patterns.
- Create a database to track and monitor the types of complaints received and the disposition of each.
- The IPA will have a separate email address to receive complaints.
- Have unfettered access to all relevant documents, records, and data to participate in investigations as needed.
- Will inform the CPRC of the general categories of all complaints (including whistle-blower complaints), and other information not protected by employee rights or confidentiality agreements.
- Will receive notifications of all officer-involved deaths, serious injuries or use of force incidents in a timely manner.
- Review data regarding traffic stops, race, and dispositions.
- Review police training, promotion, recruitment and hiring practices.
- Receive notification of any off-duty officer who is arrested and/or involved in any misdemeanor and/or felony activities.
- Increase the CPRC’s understanding of policing, Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), employment laws, union contracts and other factors that influence behavior and decisions.
- Serve as a liaison between the CPRC and the MPD.
- Make recommendations to the Chief of Police, Modesto City Council and CPRC based on findings.
- Attend or conduct interviews with witnesses as needed.
- Provide public reports at least annually of its findings.
- Provide annual public reports, to the CRPC, MPD, and the Modesto City Council.
- Maintain databases and develop evidence-based findings.
- Recommend strategies to improve police department practices and procedures for crime reduction, if needed.
- Conduct complete independent investigations as needed.

Will The MPD Still Have The Ability To Conduct Its Own Internal Investigations?

Yes. The MPD will be able to conduct its own internal investigations. The findings will be shared with the Independent Police Auditor. If there is a conflict between the IPA assessment and the police department’s assessment, the CPRC may consult with a third qualified party.

What Will Be The Roles Of The Chief Of Police And The Ipa?

The Independent Police Auditor functions in the role as liaison between the CPRC and the MPD. The Chief of Police will have access to the IPA. The Chief of Police will have full authority over his/her police department. The Independent Police Auditor will make recommendations to the Chief of Police based on analysis of evidence of his/her findings and community input. The Chief of Police fully maintains his/her authority to administer discipline in accordance with MPD policy. The IPA will have complete authority to conduct independent investigation as needed.

How Will The Community Police Review Commission Be Selected?

An application process will be established. Local residents will be able to apply for a seat on the CPRC. A screening committee will be developed to screen the applications for eligibility. An interview process like any other city position will take place. A priority will be placed on establishing a diverse commission. If such diversity is not achieved during the first round of interviews, additional individual interviews targeting the missing diversity piece will take place until a diverse balance is achieved. Selected members will participate in background checks, requirement to sign confidentiality agreements and agree to participate in thorough trainings.

Term Of Service

Four (4) years of service or until a successor is appointed; for the purpose of staggered terms varying between one (1) and four (4) years. No member shall serve for more than two consecutive terms, except under special circumstances. Members can be removed from the CPRC for violating terms and agreements.

Compensation

The Independent Police Auditor and a clerical staff person for the Auditor position will be paid positions. Commissioner positions for the CPRC will be on a volunteer basis.

Fiscal Impact (TBD)

Independent Police Auditor’s salary will be commensurate with experience. Clerical staff salary will be commensurate with experience.

Supported By The Following Groups

Modesto/Stanslaus NAACP, ACLU Stanislaus, Latino Community Roundtable, North Valley Labor Federation, Modesto Peace/Life Center, Faith in the Valley, Democratic Women’s Club of Stanislaus, Valley Improvement Projects, Indivisible Stanislaus, Turlock Black Lives Matter Movement, Stanislaus & Tuolumne Central Labor Council, United Domestic Workers of America UDW/AFSCME 3930, Advocates for Justice, DSA Stanislaus, Modesto Church of the Brethren.



ACTION: Get your local organization to sign on to this effort. How? Email Jim Costello at jcostello@igc.org for information.

RIP Edward “White Horse” Mendez

By ERIC CAINE, The Valley Citizen

With a profile that could easily have served as the “heads” side of an American coin honoring its native residents, Edward “White Horse” Mendez was a legendary presence among the small circle of homeless people who lived in and frequented Modesto’s Beard Brook Park. He died Wednesday, March 10. He was sixty-eight years old.

“White Horse taught me how to survive out here,” said one man several decades his junior.

“He took me under his wing and helped me get out,” said another, who had managed to escape homelessness.

Born in San Francisco, White Horse claimed to have played drums for Carlos Santana and a long list of other Bay Area musical luminaries. He’d also had a stint as a street artist.

“I started living on the streets when I was seven,” he said when asked how long he’d been homeless. “Whenever the cops found me and brought me home, my parents always told them to keep me. They said they didn’t want me.”

Like many homeless people, White Horse began using drugs at an early age, hardly into his teens.

“I stayed up for 28 straight days one time,” he said, when describing his days using methamphetamine. “They used to take me to the hospital with needles sticking out of me.”

Sometime in the 1990s, White Horse moved to Sonora, where he became part of a small local homeless population. By then, his drug use consisted almost entirely of alcohol and marijuana.

In 2002, he was convicted of voluntary manslaughter for alleged participation in the gory murder of an alcoholic Sonora man who frequently invited homeless friends to his apartment for extended drinking bouts. White Horse always claimed that he hadn’t been present during the murder; nonetheless, he ended up serving eleven years hard time.

He landed in Modesto because, “They dumped me here when I was released. They gave me \$200 gate money and dumped me near the jail. Where was I supposed to go?”

After failed attempts to make it through programs offered by the Modesto Gospel Mission, White Horse established residence under a large oak on the hillside near the entrance to Beard Brook Park. With no income other than food stamps, he subsisted on a regimen of beer and marijuana, supplemented by meals served by the church and volunteer groups who visited the park regularly. Most of the time, he spent his nights under the stars. In bad weather, he used a blue tarp. He occasionally had use of a donated tent.

Stoic and unperturbed by the tickets he received for unpermitted camping, White Horse had a simple routine for dealing with law enforcement. During periodic sweeps when homeless people were ordered to leave the park, he packed his small bundle of belongings onto a hand truck and wheeled

it to a new location, usually no more than half a mile away. After a short wait, oftentimes only a few days, he’d move back under the oak tree.

During bad winter weather, White Horse would turn himself in and serve time for his long list of tickets and warrants.

Like many people who had spent long years in prison, White Horse was well-read in his favorite genres. His taste ran to the lurid and cartoonish fiction of the past, including a particular fascination with the “Tarzan” and “Doc Savage” series. His dog was named “Greystoke,” after Tarzan’s given



name. He knew in specific detail the history of comics and admired the great cartoonists, including the Marvel stable.

White Horse spent much of his time drawing and produced a large portfolio of “prison art,” an extravagant and fantastic genre he represented with meticulous detail.

When he began receiving SSI income, White Horse gained entry into one of Modesto’s low-income housing programs, but he was never comfortable indoors. When he moved in, he seriously considered setting up a tent inside, just to feel more at home.

“It’s like prison with a key,” he said, not long before being

Madness of Sweeps

Another option is permitted camping. Modesto showed promising success with permitted camping when it approved of MOES (Modesto Outdoor Emergency Shelter), a tent encampment that sheltered homeless people at a cost of approximately \$13 per day.

In addition to permitted campsites, cities throughout the west have recently begun establishing “bridge” communities featuring tiered housing options such as Pallet Shelters in cities like Fresno, Los Angeles, and Sonoma, Conestoga Huts in the northwest, and various kinds of sheds. The advantages of permitted camping and tiered housing options

evicted for smoking in his room.

Always a person who kept to himself, White Horse nonetheless did well when Beard Brook Park filled with residents after local authorities permitted camping there following a court decision that prohibited punishing homeless people for sleeping on public property.

A strict observer of the unwritten codes of homelessness and a believer in “park justice,” White Horse was widely respected for his stoic self-sufficiency. He had a small circle of close friends who enjoyed his stories, unique wit, and advice.



A very small man whose weight never topped 120 pounds, he was seldom bullied and never intimidated. Once when a large man barely out of his teens was menacing people with a heavy chain, White Horse yelled, “Stop that,” and it stopped.

Asked why the man had obeyed, White Horse only said, “He’s lucky I didn’t take his scalp and all his horses.”

Not long after Modesto’s homeless people were moved from Beard Brook Park to the Modesto Outdoor Emergency Shelter (MOES), White Horse was diagnosed with cancer of the liver. From that time onward, he was often found walking slowly down McHenry Avenue, after one of many hospital stays.

When MOES closed, he began a labyrinthine journey from Stanislaus County’s low-barrier shelter to various motel rooms. Sometimes he couldn’t be found. Near the very end, a small circle of friends managed to get him into hospice care, where he spent his last days.

Few noted his passing, but those who did felt fortunate to have known him. He expected nothing and often received less, but he never lost his dignity. He didn’t whine, and he didn’t beg. Like many who have gone before him, he’ll be described as a “vagrant,” or “transient,” or “bum.” He was more than that; he was a human being. He stood against the storm as best he could, and better than many.

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include reduced costs for law enforcement, easier access for social service providers and volunteers, and lowered costs of health care and emergency assistance for homeless people.

As for spending more money on beds in congregate living situations, the record is clear: It doesn’t work. The return on investment is illusory and ephemeral.

Citizens who want to see homeless numbers improve need to penalize repeated failures by public officials to act effectively, and reward efforts that reduce harm. The time-honored way to do so is via the ballot box.



Help keep our readers informed. We urge people participating in an event to write about it and send their story to Connections.

APRIL 2021

CHECK WITH MEETING HOSTS. ONLINE MEETINGS MAY BE PLANNED.

Science Colloquium, Wednesdays, 3:15-4:15 p.m., MJC via Zoom. To access the program, click <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmaymqgHqzxhsAa0RJmYwVg/>. When the live program appears, click on it. **April 7:** Derek Madden, MJC Biology Professor, Science and Art of Yoga: A Monkey-Human Connection. Dr. Madden will discuss how his research on monkey arthritis led him to study yoga as a scientist.

MAPS (Modesto Area Partners in Science): free science programs. Live presentations via Zoom. Link provided before each talk on the MAPS website a few days of the presentation. 7:30 pm, Link to Zoom: <https://modestoscience.wordpress.com/schedule/>. Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF-q-egRrQk>. Friday, **April 16:** Roger Wiens. Los Alamos National Laboratory. Exploring Mars with NASA's 1-ton Rovers, Curiosity and Perseverance. Wiens is the Principal Investigator of the SuperCam team, operating during NASA's missions on Mars. This talk will highlight both missions' searches for life on Mars. <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/features/061220/rover/Wiens-Bio.pdf>

VIRTUAL FILMS are available at the State Theatre! Visit <https://thestate.org/virtual-screensings/>

The Prospect Theatre has continuing offerings: Visit <https://prospecttheaterproject.org/2020-2021-season/>

1 THURS: Peace/Life Center ZOOM Monthly Board Meeting, 6:30 pm. Email Jim Costello for login information, jcostello@igc.org

7 WED: VIGIL: NO VIGIL in April.

11 SUN: Sundays at CBS: Golden Bough: America Bound. 3 pm. Tickets \$25. Links to the Zoom meeting will be emailed to ticket holders prior to the concert. See article, this issue for instructions on how to sign up.

REGULAR MEETINGS

SUNDAYS

Village Dancers are not dancing in person but have a Zoom class, every Sunday 3:00-5:00 PM (PST). Lessons and reviews every week are given in international folk dances and are led by different teachers from around the Valley. People from England to Taiwan, New Hampshire to Oregon, Arizona to Denair join us each week to exercise in their own homes to interesting music. Email Judy at JudyKropp40@gmail.com to receive the Zoom number and password.

Modesto Vineyard Christian Fellowship, 10:00 am at the MODSPOT, 1220 J St. Call or text 209-232-1932, email modestovineyard@gmail.com; All Welcome.

IMCV weekly Insight Meditation and dharma talk, 8:45 am - 10:15 am, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFSC east parking lot). Offered freely, donations welcome. Info: Contact Lori, 209-343-2748 or see <https://imcv.org/> Email: info@imcv.org

Food Addicts Anonymous in Recovery. Sundays 6:30 pm, 2467 Veneman Ave. Modesto. Info: Emily M., 209 480-8247.

MONDAYS

The Compassionate Friends, Modesto/Riverbank Chapter is meeting by Zoom on the 2nd Mondy at 7p.m. Bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult siblings are invited to participate in their support group for families whose children have died at any age, from any cause. Call 209-622-6786 or email for details: tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com; <http://www.tcfmodesto-riverbankarea.org>

Suicide Loss Support Group: Friends for Survival meets every third Monday at 7 pm. Details: Norm Andrews 209-345-0601, nandrews6863@charter.net.

Monday Morning Funstrummers Beginner Ukulele Lessons. Modesto Senior Center. 10:45am to Noon. Free Scenic and Bodem.

Walk with Me, a women's primary infertility support group and Bible study. 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm the first and third Mondays of each month (September only meeting 9/15/14 due to Labor Day). Big Valley Grace Community Church. Interested? Email WalkWithMeGroup@gmail.com or call 209.577.1604.

Silver & Gold Support group for our senior LGBT communities' unique concerns and experiences. A group that will understand and accept you where you are. For LGBT folks over 50 yrs. old. Every Monday at 3 pm to 4 pm at various locations in Modesto. Info: Steven Cullen/Facilitator. Cell/text - (559) 799-0464. Email: stevencullen@sbcglobal.net

TUESDAYS

Teen Tuesdays every week from June-August, 2-5 pm., Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St. Peer Support, Games & movies. Safe space for teens to socialize, work together on projects, and learn about LGBTQ history. Each week will be a little different as we want YOU (youths) to guide the direction this group will go!" Info: Maggie Strong, Political Activist Director/ GSA Liaison, mstrong@mopride.org, 209-284-0999.

Attention Veterans: Join us for Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am - 11 am

NAACP Meeting. King-Kennedy Center, 601 S. Martin Luther King Dr., Modesto, 3rd Tuesday @ 6:30 pm. 209-645-1909; email: naacp.branch1048@gmail.com

Exploring Whiteness & Showing Up for Racial Justice Meetings, Fourth Tuesday, monthly 7:00 p.m., Central Grace Hmong Alliance Church, 918 Sierra Dr., Modesto. Info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/247655549018387/>

Pagan Family Social, third Tuesdays, Golden Corral, 3737 McHenry Ave, Modesto, 6:00 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

Tuesday Evening Funstrummers Ukulele Jam. Songbooks provided. 6pm to 8pm, 1600 Carver Rd., Donation. 209-505-3216, www.Funstrummers.com.

IMCV weekly Insight Meditation and dharma talk, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFSC east parking lot). Offered freely, donations welcome. Info: Contact Lori, 209-343-2748 or see <https://imcv.org/> Email: info@imcv.org

Adult Children Of Alcoholics, Every Tuesday, 7 pm at 1320 L St., (Christ Unity Baptist Church). Info: Jeff, 527-2469.

WEDNESDAYS

Ongoing meditation class based on Qi Gong Principals. Practice a 3 Step Guided Meditation Process I have been doing for over a decade. Fun and Easy. JOIN ME! Donations

MODESTO PEACE LIFE CENTER ACTIVITIES

Modesto Peace/Life Center VIGILS: SUSPENDED, held THE FIRST WEDNESDAY of the month at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five points), 4:00-5:00 pm. Call the Center for info: 529-5750.

MEDIA: Listen to **KCBP 95.5 FM** Community Radio, the "Voice of the Valley" also streaming at <http://www.KCBPradio.org>

PEACE LIFE CENTER BOARD MEETING, FIRST Thursdays, 720 13th St., Modesto, 6:30 pm, 529-5750.

MEDIA COMMITTEE of Peace/Life Center. Meetings TBA.

PEACE/LIFE CENTER MODESTO, 720 13th St. Call 529-5750. We'll get back to you with current info on activities.

accepted but optional. Call 209.495.6608 or email Orlando Arreygue, CMT_RYT_orlando@arreygue.com

Merced LGBT Community Center offers a variety of monthly meetings and written materials. Volunteers, on site Wed-Fri, offer support. Ph: 209-626-5551. Email: merced-board@gaycentralvalley.org - 1744 G St. Suite H, Merced, CA. www.mercedlgbtcenter.org

Merced Full Spectrum meets the second Wednesday of every month, 6 p.m. 1744 G St., Suite H, Merced <http://www.lgbtmerced.org/> Merced Full Spectrum is a division of Gay Central Valley, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. <http://www.gaycentralvalley.org/>

GLBT Questioning Teen Support Group (14-19 years old). 2nd & 4th Wednesdays, College Ave. Congregational Church, 1341 College Ave., Modesto. 7 - 9 pm. Safe, friendly, confidential. This is a secular, non-religious group. Info: call 524-0983.

Transgender Support Group, 2nd & 4th Wed., 7:30 to 9 pm. Info: (209) 338-0855. Email info@stanpride.org, or tgsupport@stanpride.org

Mindful Meditation: Modesto Almond Blossom Sangha, 7 - 9 pm. Info: Anne, 521-6977.

Compassionate Friends Groups, 2nd Wed., 252 Magnolia, Manteca.

THURSDAYS

CA10 Progressive Coalition Monthly Meeting, third Thursdays. Inclusive group of progressive activists to share resources, ideas, and information in order to support all the great organizing work happening in the Valley! Feel free to invite trusted allies. Meet-up and social hour: 5:30 pm-6:30 pm. Meeting: 6:30 pm-8:00 pm. Follow group on Facebook. Info: Tim Robertson, tim@nvlf.org

Laughter Yoga, Every other Thursday at The Bird's Nest, 422 15th St., Modesto. The dates are February & March 7th & 21st, April 4th & 18th, May 2nd & 16th. 5:30pm-6:30pm. \$15.00 per class. To register, call or text Nicole, 209-765-8006 or visit www.nicoleottman.com

Attention Veterans: Join us for Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am - 11 am

IMCV Grupo de Meditación en Español, cada semana 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (edificio trasero al final del estacionamiento este de UUFSC). Ofrecido libremente, las donaciones son bienvenidas. Info: Contacto Vanessa, 209-408-6172.

LGBTQ+ Collaborative Meetings are on the 2nd Thursday of the month, unless noted. Evening meeting, 1pm to 2 pm, Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St., Suite 2, Modesto, CA. Information: John Aguirre at cell/text - (559) 280-3864/ e-mail: jpamodesto@gmail.com

Green Team educational meetings the 3rd Thursday of each month, 10 to 11 am, Kirk Lindsey Center, 1020 10th St. Plaza, Suite 102, Modesto. www.StanislausGreenTeam.com

Third Thursday Art Walk, Postponed until further notice. <http://www.modestoartwalk.com>

The Book Group, First & third Thursdays. College Ave UCC Youth Bldg., Orangeburg & College Ave., 3:30 - 5:00 pm. Info: mzjurkovic@gmail.com

Valley Heartland Zen Group: every Thurs 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2310 Woodland Ave.

Meditation. Newcomers welcome. Info: 535-6750 or <http://emptynestzendo.org>

Pagan Community Meeting, 1st Thursdays, Cafe Amore, 3025 McHenry Ave, Suite S., Modesto, 8 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

FRIDAYS

Overcoming Depression: Small group for men & women. Every Friday, 7:15 p.m. Cornerstone Community Church, 17900 Comconex Rd., Manteca (209) 825-1220.

Game Night and Potluck, third Friday of each month. For 21+ only. Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St., Suite 2, Modesto. 7 pm to 10 pm. Info: John Aguirre, (559) 280-3864; jpamodesto@gmail.com

Friday Morning Funstrummers Band Rehearsal. Donation 9:15am to Noon. College Avenue United Church of Christ, 1341 College Ave., Modesto. 209-505-3216, www.Funstrummers.com.

Latino Emergency Council (LEC) 3rd Fridays, 8:15 am, El Concilio, 1314 H St. Modesto. Info: Dale Butler, 522-8537.

Sierra Club: Yokuts group. Regular meetings, third Friday, College Ave. Congregational Church, 7 pm. Info: 300-4253. Visit <http://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/yokuts> for info on hikes and events.

Mujeres Latinas, last Friday, lunch meetings, Info: Cristina Villego, 549-1831.

Hispanic Leadership Council, 3rd Fridays at noon, 1314 H St., Modesto 95354. Questions? Yamilet Valladolid, yamiletv@hotmail.com

SATURDAY

12-Step/Buddhist Meeting starts with a 30-minute meditation and then open discussion. Held monthly every second Saturday, 4:30 to 6:00 pm, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto at the UUFC in Sarana (small building, rear of the east parking lot). Freely-offered donations welcome. Information: 209 606 7214.

Free Community Drum Circle every third Saturday, 3 pm, Deva Café, 1202 J. St., Modesto. No experience or drums necessary to participate. All levels welcome. <https://drum-love.com/>

Refuge Recovery: A Buddhist Approach to Recovery from Addiction. @Friends Coming of Age., 1203 Tully Rd., Ste. B., Modesto. Saturdays 8-9 am. FREE (donations accepted). Info: RefugeRecoveryModesto@gmail.com

Divine Feminine Gathering. Join us for a time of ritual, song and conversation as women come together to celebrate one another and the Divine among us and within us. 3rd Saturday of the month, 3:30-5:00 p.m. Stockton, CA. Contact Rev. Erin King, 209-815-0763, orkingenne@gmail.com

So Easy ~ So Good: Vegetarian/Vegan/Wannabe Group. Potlucks, guest speakers, field trips, activist activities, movie nights, etc. Third Saturday of every month. Info: Kathy Haynes (209) 250-9961 or email kathyhaynesSESG@gmail.com

DEADLINE to submit articles to CONNECTIONS: Tenth of each month.

Submit peace, justice, environmental event notices to Jim Costello, jcostello@igc.org
Free Calendar listings subject to space and editing.