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Doctors: Fentanyl bigger threat than Covid

■ After dozens of deaths in county, officials highlight threat to youth

By KELLY NIX

THE ARTIFICIAL opioid fentanyl poses a far greater danger to Monterey County kids than Covid-19, according to local physicians, who said Tuesday



PHOTO/KELLY NIX

Flags in front of Colton Hall in Monterey Tuesday honored people affected by addiction: white for people in recovery, red for family and friends of addicts, and black for those who have died.

morning that fatal overdoses from that drug and other opioids have increased significantly in the county.

In front of Colton Hall in Monterey, doctors, police officers, elected officials and a woman whose son died from a fentanyl overdose spoke about the dangers of opioids, which killed about 108,000 Americans last year, up from 71,000 in 2020. Roughly 1,500 red, white and black flags were planted on the Colton Hall lawn to honor victims of drug addiction. The event was held a day before International Overdose Awareness Day.

"Each of the black flags represents the story of a life cut short by substances," Dr. Reb Close with Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula said at the event.

Many victims

Close is also a member of Monterey County Prescribe Safe Initiative, a group of more than 35 business and agencies which has addressed the local opioid addiction problem since 2014.

In Monterey County alone, deaths from fentanyl increased dramatically from 2018 to 2021, with most of the victims younger than 30, according to Montage Health, which organized the event.

For instance, there were 23 fentanyl deaths in Monterey County in 2020,

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It's not just stadium lights anymore

■ New EIR outlines major project at Carmel High

By MARY SCHLEY

IN RESPONSE to neighbors who complained that installing lights on the athletic field at Carmel High School would make parking on their streets worse, the Carmel Unified School District is now proposing two new parking lots on campus and several other changes, according to an environmental impact report released last week.

In addition to the four proposed poles and lights the first draft evaluated a year ago, the project now calls for 111 new parking spaces, a new on-campus road and walkway, and a new storage building with a spectator platform.

Meeting Tuesday

CUSD officials released the nearly 400-page updated EIR Aug. 24, and comments are due by 5 p.m. Oct. 10. They can also be made during a special meeting scheduled for Sept. 6 at 5:30 p.m. in the Carmel Middle School gym.

The previous environmental impact report, researched and developed by EMC Planning Group Inc., only looked at potential impacts of having four 70-to-80-foot-tall posts mounted with LEDs on the athletic field. With the lights,

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County proposes 6 percent STR solution

By CHRIS COUNTS

TRYING TO find a compromise that works for those who like the vacation rental industry and those who don't, Monterey County officials are proposing to allow short-term rentals in most unincorporated parts of the county, but to limit them to 6 percent of single-family dwellings in each area.

In two of the county's most popular tourist destinations, Big Sur and Carmel Highlands, vacation rentals would be banned. Earlier this week, the county mistakenly reported that some short-term units would be allowed in Big Sur.

In Carmel Valley, where there are currently 129 STRs, the 6 percent cap would mean a total of 302 vacation rentals, making it possible for another 173 to be created.

Too many?

The supervisor who represents Carmel Valley, Mary Adams told The Pine Cone that she's opposed to allowing so many short term rentals there. She called the number "unmanageable," and noted that "many of these would be situated in residential neighborhoods."

In unincorporated neighborhoods surrounding

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Car Week sees auction records, pricey hotel rooms

By MARY SCHLEY

HOTEL REVENUES during Car Week beat projections, coming in at an estimated \$48 million, or 10 percent higher than last year, according to the Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau. Occupancy was slightly down, the group added — which means room rates were significantly higher.

Auctions broke sales records left and right, and numerous events raised a combined \$3 million for local charities, with the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance providing the lion's share at nearly \$2.7 million.

"While county overnight visitation was just 4 percent under 2019 records, revenue far exceeded projected figures," reported Sandy Huerta, media representative for the MCCVB.

Slow start

In Carmel, traffic was a little slower, according to Amy Herzog, executive director of the city's tourism promotion group, Visit Carmel. The loss of the Concours on the Avenue, traditionally held on Tuesday of Car Week but canceled after founder Doug Freedman died last October, was probably the reason visitors were more sparse in town earlier in the week.

"As compared to years past, there was more availability at the hotels in the village Monday and Tuesday," she said

this week. "It does seem as though not having a Tuesday event in town did slightly impact occupancy. However, starting on Wednesday through the weekend, the hotels were close to completely sold out."

But, she said, guests and residents told her the Prancing Ponies event on Thursday "was well run and very well attended."

"There was a nice flow of visitors in general, as many use Carmel-by-the-Sea as a home base for car events around the Peninsula," Herzog added.

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First mention —

There are children who never grow up but influence generations

By ELAINE HESSER

IF BEVERLY Cleary's world-famous characters, Beezus and Ramona Quimby, were real, they'd be pushing 80. As it is, 9-year-old Beatrice, or Beezus, and her pesky 5-year-old sister, Ramona, will forever be children, beloved by generations of young readers.

The award-winning writer and longtime Carmel-area resident, who died in 2021, first came to The Pine Cone's attention on April 15, 1965, when she was one of 13 authors slated to attend a May 1 luncheon at the Monterey Fairgrounds, aptly celebrating National Library Week.

Young critic

Cleary grew up in Portland, Ore., and earned bachelor's degrees in English and library science from UC Berkeley and



Beverly Cleary in 1993.

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See CLEARY page 18A

CHERRY CENTER PLAY TARGETED WITH CANCEL CAMPAIGN

By CHRIS COUNTS

AT A time when cancel culture is raging, 32,000 people have signed a petition demanding that the Cherry Center for the Arts cancel a play, "The Testament of Mary," because it is offensive to Christians.

A petition at americanneedsfatima.org says Mary, the mother of Jesus, was "the most pure and faithful disciple of her son," and calls the play about her "filthy," "outrageous" and "shocking beyond belief." The petition also says the play contains "intolerable blasphemies."

Thousands of signatures

Launched Aug. 16, the petition is addressed to Robert Reese, the executive director of the Cherry Center. In two weeks, more than 32,000 had signed it.

In response, Reese told The Pine Cone there are no

plans to cancel the play, and he said it's possible its run will be extended.

Depicting the mother of Jesus at the end of her life, "The Testament of Mary" is a 90-minute, one-woman play starring actress Jane Press. The play is directed by Maryann Schaupp Rousseau.

Press said the play has been well received by audience members of many faiths.

"At each performance, there have been in attendance, Christians, Jews, atheists, Catholics — devout, practicing and lapsed — and agnostics," she told The Pine Cone. "Every one of them has expressed nothing but interest and deeply felt appreciation."

While Press suggested it's likely none of those signing the petition has seen the play, she nevertheless understands

FENTANYL

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compared to two in 2018, according to the California Department of Public Health.

“While Covid-19 is a significant threat to our community’s health, when it comes to our youth, opioids, including fentanyl, are a far greater threat,” Close said.

Monterey Assistant Chief of Police Mike Bruno said around five years ago, fentanyl “became more prominent” in the Peninsula, with officers finding fentanyl added to counterfeit prescription pills, heroin and other illicit drugs.

“The use of fentanyl in these drugs led to more overdoses,” Bruno said.

That led Monterey and other local police departments to give patrol officers Narcan, a drug that reverses the effects of opioid overdoses. The drug has been widely successful and has saved many lives.

“Since 2020, Monterey officers have administered Narcan 44 times,” including two times last weekend for people who overdosed on fentanyl, Bruno said.

In July, Monterey police confiscated rainbow-themed fentanyl, likely made that way to appeal to young people. Most of the fentanyl that arrives to the United States comes from Mexican drug cartels, according to the Drug Enforcement Agency, that funnel it through the porous southern border.

Pacific Grove Unified School District superintendent Ralph Porras, who also attended the Tuesday event, said the district has a goal of providing every one of its 308 staff members with a lanyard containing Narcan.

Many losses

Also at the event was Carmel Valley resident Michele Henderson, who told the devastating tale of her son, Thomas Henderson, 20, who came back home to live with her after a February 2020 skiing accident. A doctor prescribed her son a prescription painkiller, and he became

addicted to the opioid. After the prescription could no longer be filled, he turned to illegal street-sold opioid pills containing fentanyl.

“Tom was instantly addicted to the fentanyl that” a drug dealer “was selling to him,” Henderson said.

Henderson got him into rehab in April 2020, which helped until the insurance ran out less than a month later. Hours after she got him home, though, the same drug dealer snuck inside and gave Tom the fentanyl-laced pill that would be his final dose.

“At 6:50 a.m. I walked into his room” and “he was passed out,” Henderson said. “He looked dead; he was blue.”

Her son was rushed to Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, but he was in critical condition.

“They kept him on life support for a few days so they could figure out who they were going to give his organs to,” Henderson said. He died four days later, and Henderson said his heart, lungs, liver and both kidneys went to five people.

While her son was still in the hospital, Henderson called a Drug Enforcement Agency hotline. The next day, agents — who knew the drug dealer who sold the pills to her son — retrieved the remaining fentanyl pills and launched an investigation.

The result was the arrest of Xavier Jimenez Robledo, a then-19-year-old from Seaside, who was charged with providing fentanyl to Henderson and a Pacific Grove minor who overdosed on a pill Robledo sold him in April 2020 but survived after paramedics administered Narcan. In May 2021, Robledo was sentenced to eight years in federal prison.

Oddly, when Henderson picked up her son from the drug rehab center, officials didn’t give her Narcan.

“I wished I would have had it,” she said.

In March, Pacific Grove resident Ashley Callau’s son, Angelo Klotz, 15, a high school student, died from an accidental fentanyl overdose.

Two months before that, Klotz’s friend from Monterey also succumbed to the drug.

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