

YEAR IN REVIEW 2006

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Tracking the top stories

Staff reports

A food-borne illness makes international headlines and deals a body blow to the Salinas Valley's leading industry.

Dissatisfaction over wages and benefits prompts Hartnell College teachers to walk off the job in Salinas, marking California's first community college strike in a quarter century.

A well-regarded public official's career derails amid allegations of white-collar crime.

These are just a few of the top 20 local news stories as identified by The Salinas Californian staff, collected here for our annual look back at the year and its highlights.

The choices are far from scientific and certainly subjective, but provide a snapshot collage of what defined our region in 2006. The following summaries appear in roughly chronological order and not ranked by importance:

1. Crossing guard hit by car, fatally injured

The accidental death of an elementary school crossing guard in January prompted the city of Salinas and parents to explore ways to better protect children as they walk to and from school.

On Jan. 12, volunteer crossing guard Jim Maloney was struck by a car in front of Mission Park School on West Acacia Street. Maloney, 76, died of his injuries three weeks later.

The driver in the case, Tarek Amin, 55, said he was blinded by the sun and did not see Maloney until striking him with his Jaguar.

"That event was a tragedy, but what it did was (it) brought the safety of children to the forefront," said Sgt. Robert Eggers of the Salinas Police Department.

The criminal case of Amin stretched nearly the entire year. Ultimately, he was charged with misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter, to which he pleaded no contest and was sentenced Nov. 29 to 90 days of home confinement.

After much public outcry stemming from Maloney's death, city and school leaders brought back the paid crossing guard program, abandoned in 2004 because of city



Striking Hartnell College faculty members walk the picket lines Oct. 20 on Alisal Street in Salinas.



Martha Mata Vasquez enters a Salinas courtroom June 29. In October, Vasquez pleaded no contest to involuntary manslaughter and other charges. She will be formally sentenced in January.

budget cuts. The loss of the official program had led people such as Maloney to volunteer as crossing guards.

Also, the Salinas Police Department, with the help of the California Highway Patrol, has since increased



A new company, Huron Consulting Group, will manage Natividad Medical Center in Salinas.

traffic enforcement at schools when children are crossing.

"Safety and safety awareness has increased 100 percent," Eggers said.

2. Salinas High School hit with heavy sanctions

Salinas High School's athletic program was slapped with a crushing set of sanctions.

On Jan. 20, The Central Coast Section, the governing body for sports spanning South San Francisco to King

City, gave Salinas High a one-year postseason ban for all sports, a two-year postseason ban for the football team, and a one-year probationary period for the athletic program. The decision stemmed from a long list of infractions by Salinas High, including playing ineligible athletes, unsportsmanlike conduct and an unauthorized television commercial involving members of the football team.

Teams and individuals who'd done well couldn't par-

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Former Registrar of Voter Tony Anchundo pleaded no contest Dec. 20 to 43 felony charges.

icipate in postseason tournaments, although nearly every team would have been eligible. The district appealed the decision, but CCS officials stood their ground.

That left many student-athletes with only the option of winning in-season tournaments and league titles.

Salinas High athletic director Paul MacDonald said the student-athletes did their best under the circumstances.

"Our kids rose up," MacDonald said. "The kids and coaches re-established themselves. They wanted to do the best they could."

Many of the teams and individuals did well, with the girls volleyball, cross country and tennis teams all winning Tri-County Athletic League championships.

Except for the football team, which faces a two-year suspension, all the teams have cleared the one-year suspension for postseason play. Prospects for just that are within sight for most of the school's winter sports. The girls basketball team needs just one more non-league win to qualify for the CCS tournament, while the boys basketball team needs two. The boys soccer team, by virtue of its 4-1-3 nonleague record, has earned the minimum requirement to enter the postseason.

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Top stories

The war in Iraq is the top story of 2006 as chosen by editors and news directors. **Page 6**



News, newsmakers

A quick look back through 2006 and some newsworthy and noteworthy deaths. **Page 9**



In Washington

The November elections changed the nation's political landscape. **Page 7**

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