

2006/ Transportation tax fails

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The wrestling team is ranked 15th in the CCS and has six wrestlers in the top 10 in their respective weights.

The football team will become eligible for post-season competition in 2008.

3. Two Salinas Valley agriculture leaders die

2006 saw the loss of two major leaders in the Salinas-area agricultural industry.

Robert "Bobby" Tanimura, a founder of Spreckels-based Tanimura & Antle, died Feb. 18, and Don Nucci, co-chairman of Mann Packing Co., died Sept. 4.

Tanimura & Antle, one of the country's largest lettuce producers, was formed through a partnership with the Antle family in 1982, but the two families had worked closely together for many decades.

Nucci helped build one of the most successful agriculture companies in the nation and one of the world's largest shippers of broccoli.

Both men and their companies took part in political causes and donated generously to community organizations.

On Oct. 5, Lorri Koster, Nucci's daughter, was chosen to succeed her father in his post as co-chairman of Mann Packing.

4. Beautician injects woman with cooking oil

A Salinas beautician will serve prison time for performing a botched cosmetic procedure that left one woman dead.

Martha Mata Vasquez was arrested March 13 after injecting Mazola corn oil into the buttocks of customers seeking beauty-enhancement treatments. The injections caused the death of Olivia Aguirre-Castillo, 46, of Castroville, and seriously injured several others, including a transgender person who fell into a coma after receiving the injections.

According to testimony from her preliminary hearing, Vasquez had told customers the substance was a "French polymer" and that she was licensed to perform the procedure.

Deputy District Attorney Steve Somers said the case differed from other homicides because it didn't start as a murder case.

Vasquez initially faced charges of involuntary manslaughter in March, but the District Attorney's Office charged her with second-degree murder in May after learning about more injured patients.

"As we were investigating, we found bigger problems," Somers said. "Halfway through, we learned she almost killed someone previously, and then it became a murder case. This is very unique for us. We usually start with a murder case."

In October, Vasquez agreed to a deal and pleaded no contest to involuntary manslaughter and other charges, in exchange for 15 years in prison. She is scheduled for formal sentencing in January.

Had she gone to trial on the murder charge and been convicted, she would have faced a sentence of 15 years to life.

"We weren't aware of how much was going on in these illegal practices in Salinas," Somers said. "These backdoor procedures are more common than we thought."

5. Thousands rally in immigration marches

More than 17,000 people marched in east Salinas and Seaside on May 1, joining a "National Day of Action" in support of fair immigration reform.

The pro-immigration marches and rallies left schools and some agricultural operations thin on students and workers for the day. Some businesses never opened at all.

Community leaders followed the rallies with voter registration drives, using the



Les Cooper, of Coeur D'Olives, hands change Nov. 18 back to a customer at the Oldtown Salinas Marketplace on the 100 block of Main Street in Salinas.



Marches converge May 1 at the corner of Alisal Street and Sanborn Road in Salinas as part of the 'National Day of Action.'

slogan "Today we march, tomorrow we vote."

President Bush authorized additional fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border as he called for comprehensive immigration reform. The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have yet to reach a compromise on the issue.

The rallies and marches serve as an example of the rise in Latino grass-roots organizing, said Cesar Lara, executive director of The Citizenship Project in Salinas, which helps immigrants apply for citizenship and offers English classes and employment help.

"That day showed people across the nation that there are hard-working, undocumented Latinos across the country ... and that the community was able to get together and ask for change," Lara said.

He noted that marches took place not just in states with high Latino populations such as California and Texas but also Michigan, New Jersey and Maine.

"People were saying these marches were larger than the Latino civil rights marches in the 1960s," Lara said. "These marches left a good legacy that needs to be followed."

6. Oldtown Salinas Marketplace kicks off

Through the diligence of a father-and-son team, the Oldtown Salinas Marketplace this year became both a reality and a success.

The Saturday farmers market in the Main Street parking lot across from Maya Cinemas opened June 3 for a six-month test run. Now, through the perseverance of Joe Aliotti and his son, Joe Aliotti Jr., it's become a year-round fixture.

Aliotti Sr., 59, said that since October, the number of visitors to the market has increased by 75 percent. About 70 vendors with wares ranging from organic vegetables to arts and crafts set up booths each week, he said.

But the Aliottis plan to increase the number to 80 by next summer as well as organize special events that involve the community.

"People love us," Aliotti Sr. said. "It's the best thing that's hit Salinas — even more than the new mayor!"

7. Transportation sales tax fails but will return

Measure A, a half-cent sales tax that would have funded road improvements in Monterey County over the next 14 years, failed to pass in the June 6 election.

The measure, which would have raised about \$1 billion, received 57 percent of the vote, but needed 67 percent to pass.

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County said the defeat would delay major road improvement projects for decades, although TAMC's board of directors said it will put another sales tax measure before voters in 2008.

Debbie Hale, executive director of TAMC, said public meetings will begin this coming spring to educate the public about another sales tax proposal.

8. Educators prepare for smoother exit exam

During the first half of the year, the state saw a tangle of legal battles surrounding the California High School Exit Exam, as critics argued it unfairly hurt students from poorly resourced schools. But the major sticking point was the fact that 2006 was the first year the exam became a graduation requirement for high school students throughout the state.

When the public frenzy over the test subsided at the beginning of the summer, educators turned their full attention to preparing students to pass it the first time, as sophomores, so it wouldn't jeopardize their diploma hopes later.

By the end of the year, 90

percent of the 2006 senior class had passed the test, but the disparities critics feared had been fleshed out as well: English-learners universally struggled with the two-part test in language arts and math.

The state Department of Education responded by funneling tens of millions of dollars toward preparation efforts, which include hiring additional counselors and teaching materials. Adrienne Meckel, director of curriculum and instruction for the Monterey County Office of Education, called the influx of resources a sign that the once-tenuous exam is here to stay.

"Everyone's impressed with the need to make sure there are base skills that kids can take with them, whether it's higher education or work opportunities," Meckel said.

9. New president hired, settles in at CSUMB

Dianne Harrison, the second president in the history of California State University, Monterey Bay, has overseen lots of change in her first few months at the helm of the 4,000-student Marina campus.

The CSU Board of Trustees voted to hire Harrison on

March 15. Buildings school-wide have been razed, and groundbreaking on the university's new library — envisioned as the campus's flagship building — took place this fall. Finally, for the poor souls trying to find the campus in the middle of the winding, twisting former Army base that is Fort Ord, the university has revamped its signage.

Since taking the helm June 19, Harrison has spent much of her time meeting with her new faculty and surrounding community. She said she and her husband have also

immersed themselves in theater and other aspects of campus life.

One of the next moves for the campus will be the addition of two new majors: biology and psychology. Harrison said she hopes they will make the school, already renowned for its service-learning component, attractive to other types of students.

10. Anchundo accused of embezzlement

Tony Anchundo, Monterey County's longtime registrar of voters, was caught after years of embezzling money from the county.

Anchundo, who'd worked in the elections office since 1989, abruptly resigned from his post as elections chief April 21. The District Attorney's Office had begun a criminal probe two weeks earlier triggered when the county's accounting office became suspicious about unusual purchases on his county-issued credit card.

On Dec. 20, Anchundo pleaded no contest to 43 felony counts alleging he used taxpayers' money to pay for plush hotel stays, expensive dinners and personal air travel to the tune of more than \$70,000.

Anchundo, who has paid nearly \$51,000 in restitution so far, is expected to be sentenced in March to three years of felony probation and, possibly, up to a year in county jail.

11. Marina High aims at expanding offerings

Monterey County's newest secondary school had a relatively smooth start to its inaugural year, which began Aug. 7.

Marina High School, which now hosts freshmen and sophomores and will expand to juniors, then seniors in the coming two years, fielded 150 students, mostly freshmen, for 2006-07. A brand-new science wing has just been completed, and support from the community, which had clamored for its own high school for decades, is at an all-time high, said Principal Don Livermore.

Livermore said the small student body gives the school a teaching flexibility others don't enjoy and that staff will continue working toward making Marina High an International Baccalaureate school.

12. Local ag industry rattled by E. coli outbreak

The Salinas Valley has been linked to 10 outbreaks of deadly E. coli bacteria in the past 11 years, but the summer 2006 outbreak traced to Central Coast fresh spinach was especially damaging.

Ultimately, the outbreak sickened 200 people and killed three. The source of the contamination has not yet been determined by the FDA. In response, produce trade



PROVIDED PHOTO

Crossing guard Jim Maloney died after he was struck by a car in front of Mission Park School in Salinas.

associations such as the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, are working on more stringent food safety guidelines.

"We are certainly increasing, improving, extending the Good Agricultural Practices to make them better, and our aim is to change voluntary practices into mandatory best practices," said Jim Bogart, president of the Salinas-based Grower-Shipper Association.

On Sept. 14, word of the scare became public as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an unprecedented consumer warning not to eat any fresh or bagged spinach. The crisis made headlines across the globe, and the spinach harvest temporarily came to a halt.

One estimate places the financial losses to the local industry at about \$200 million.

A month after the outbreak first made headlines, The Nunes Co. in Salinas issued a voluntary recall of its lettuce after preliminary tests showed E. coli-contaminated irrigation water.

Although both the water and lettuce ultimately tested negative for E. coli O157:H7 — the strain that made people sick from contaminated spinach — the Mexican government instituted a ban on California-grown lettuce. The ban has since been lifted.

Bogart said the challenge in all such outbreaks is to determine the source and identify how the food became contaminated.

"Based on the limited amount of information we have (and) the little science that's been conducted that is based on that limited information, ultimately our best effort is to minimize the areas of risk we think might be the problem," he said.

13. Measure V funds online and on track

The half-cent sales tax Salinas voters passed in November 2005 is so far delivering on its aims to revive vital city services, particularly by increasing hours at the city's libraries and re-opening recreation centers.

Measure V, expected to add \$10 million to city coffers each year until it expires in about 10 years, generated \$4.1 million between July 1 and Nov. 30, City Manager Dave Mora said. About \$1.25 million has been spent by the city, with most of it going toward expanding library hours, re-opening recreation centers and putting crossing guards back on school patrol.

The spending of the tax funds comes after a smattering of debates throughout the year about city priorities and some residents' concerns that the money might not all go toward city services.

Some expressed frustration about the length of time it took for the city's three libraries to boost operating hours from a combined 33 hours to 69, which took place Oct. 24. Tax dollars, however, did not start rolling in until the beginning of the fiscal year in July.

Controversy also erupted over a short-lived proposal to combine the library director and recreation director posts into one position.