

# 2006/ Strike at Hartnell, Wal-Mart opens

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The city backed down from that idea, which it had argued would make the most efficient use of the Measure V funds.

For the coming year, citizens will see the libraries expanded to their full, combined operating hours of 117. Mora said he expects all code-enforcement positions to be filled, city after-school programs to expand, and \$1.3 million in street rehabilitation and sidewalk repairs to start in the spring.

## 14. Hartnell healing after strike by instructors

Hartnell College in Salinas, which on Oct. 20 experienced the first teacher strike at a California community college since 1980, continues to rebuild its relationships following a five-day work stoppage that crippled the 9,000-student Salinas campus.

The strike was the culmination of two years of failed contract negotiations between teachers and college administrators. Under the leadership of union president Christine Svendsen, about 150 teachers — consisting mostly of full-time instructors — took to the picket lines.

Eventually, the faculty got many, but not all, of the terms it wanted, and for the first time in the school's recent history demonstrated significant bargaining leverage.

The college's other two unions also benefited from the faculty's move, receiving comparable contract terms. Svendsen has said she plans to unite the faculty, clerical and maintenance worker unions so they can collectively bargain with the administration in the future.

Some have called the strike conflict just one symptom of strained relations between the faculty union and administration.

Union members continue to push for the ousting of 11-year president Edward Valeau, and have begun recall efforts against most of the seven-member board of trustees.

Others on campus, however, see progress stemming from the end of the strike.

"(After the strike) our faculty came to campus and immediately back to the classroom. We didn't skip a beat about those things," said Kathleen Rose, dean of fine arts, language arts and social sciences, one of Hartnell's largest divisions. "There certainly is work to be done on repairing relationships ... but we're moving forward toward the important work of the col-



Veronica Cunningham of Marina was the first person in line Nov. 8 at the grand opening of the new Wal-Mart store in Marina. Cunningham bought two Elmo dolls for holiday gifts.

lege in this community."

## 15. Wal-Mart opens in Marina after controversy

A new Wal-Mart store opened in Marina on Nov. 8 amid heated controversy.

The international discount retailer debuted its 150 Beach Road site after months of public debate about whether the store would hurt independent, locally owned businesses.

Wal-Mart was welcomed by city leaders but opposed by a group of business owners and residents who fought under the banner of Citizens Against Wal-Mart in Marina!

Since the store opened, about 147,000 customers have visited and it has donated more than \$40,000 to community groups, said store manager Mark Blome.

"Everything's been going great. Sales have been good and strong," Blome said. "Most everyone is ecstatic that we're here, because they don't have to travel far to shop."

The store is just one example of the retail growth Marina expects to see accompany



Dennis Donohue



Anna Caballero

thousands of new housing units slated for construction in the next decade.

## 16. Donohue elected new mayor of Salinas

After overcoming some hurdles on the road to becoming Salinas' mayor — including a delay getting sworn in when the Salinas City Council failed to muster a quorum Dec. 5 — Dennis Donohue says he's ready to take on the many challenges the city faces.

Donohue said he plans to start fulfilling his campaign promises during his first 100 days in office. Those promises include promoting the city's economic development, image and public safety. He said he also would like to hire a community director early in 2007 who would be responsible for enacting strategies to make the city safer.

"I think I was hired by the community because they're ready for a change and want to move forward," Donohue said.

Former Mayor Anna Caballero, who served for eight years, now represents Assembly District 28, which covers interior Monterey County from King City to Salinas, San Benito County and parts of Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties.

Some cities within the county preferred to stick with long-term leaders. Greenfield and King City kept John Huerta Jr. and Terry Hughes, respectively, as their mayors. In Marina, Mayor Ila Mettee-McCutcheon, who ran unopposed, will keep her post as the city's leader for another

four years. Soledad Mayor Richard Ortiz, who ran unopposed, won his sixth term in office.

But in Gonzales, by a 4-1 vote of his colleagues on the City Council, George Worthy was selected as mayor, replacing Councilman Matt Gourley, who had been at the helm for the past six years.

Monterey's mayor, Dan Albert — who after 20 years had served as mayor longer than anyone else in the city's 225-year history — retired Nov. 28, backing eventual winner Chuck Della Sala as Monterey's new leader.

## 17. Home prices drop after tremendous growth

Although housing prices took a hit in 2006, the price drop followed more than a year of extraordinary double-digit appreciation, an anomaly in the housing market, said Eugene Ferris, owner/broker of Windermere Coast and Valley Properties in Salinas.

"We ended 2006 on a better note than we started, and for that reason, 2007 seems reasonably positive," Ferris said.

The drop in home prices has returned the market to a normal level, Ferris said. The median price for single-family homes hit a 12-month low of \$655,000 in Monterey County in October, down \$20,000 from the same time last year. The latest figures from the Monterey County Association of Realtors show the median price of a home is \$660,000.

Ferris, however, said the most important factor in determining the health of the local real estate market is the level of inflation, now at record lows.

Inflation could directly affect interest rates this year, he said, making the cost of borrowing money for a home far more expensive even if prices hold steady or continue to fall.

## 18. New company hired to fix Natividad hospital

To save the county's financially ailing hospital, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors teamed up with two local hospitals to find a new company to manage Natividad Medical Center.

The hospital had a \$22 million budget shortfall last fiscal year.

The supervisors this year called Natividad's continued drain on the county's general fund unacceptable because of the money it takes from other county departments' budgets.

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System and Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula agreed in July to pool resources with the county and come up with a permanent solution to fix Natividad's staggering financial losses.

The hospitals pledged \$8 million to pay in part for Natividad's new managers.

On Nov. 6, Huron Consulting Group was awarded a \$3.3 million two-year contract to bring in a new management team and fix the hospital's operating and business inefficiencies.

Supervisor Jerry Smith, who chairs the Natividad Board of Trustees and the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, said he has complete confidence Huron will repair Natividad's problems and leave a financially stable hospital behind.

"I think we did the right thing by hiring (Huron)," Smith said.

Natividad's new CEO Thomas Winston will present his findings about the hospital's operating problems in a report to the trustees come February.

## 19. County general plan saga nears completion

The end of a seven-year saga to write a new general plan for Monterey County

may be drawing near.

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors announced Dec. 19 it might put both the draft general plan and the controversial general plan initiative on the ballot this coming June.

At a cost so far of more than \$6 million, the protracted general plan process could end with a vote and allow the supervisors to settle two lawsuits they face over a citizen-generated general plan initiative.

Supervisors will make their final decision Wednesday on whether to bring the two plans to ballot.

Supervisor Jerry Smith, who chairs the board, wants the new plan approved by that time.

Smith said the supervisors' new plan strives to be inclusive even of the board's most vehement critics.

The primary obstacle facing the county putting both measures on the ballot, he said, is whether the lawsuits now in court can be settled or dropped.

"(The plaintiffs) have to agree to what has been proposed, and then we need ... cooperation," Smith said.

In March, supervisors refused to put the initiative on the June 2006 ballot, saying they couldn't present it to voters because it hadn't been translated into Spanish, thereby violating federal voting laws.

## 20. Homicide rate low; task force seeks funds

The 2006 homicide rates in both unincorporated Monterey County and the city of Salinas are similar to last year's — good news, seeing as the 2005 numbers had dropped significantly from 2004's eight and 20, respectively.

In 2006, the unincorporated county had five homicides, and Salinas saw seven. King City and Soledad each had one homicide case.

Local law enforcement agencies say the Monterey County Gang Task Force, formed in April 2005, has helped prevent killings by reducing gang-related crime. But the task force has nearly exhausted its funding, and its leaders are looking for ways to keep it afloat.

"We are \$1 million short to finish out the (fiscal) year ending in June," Monterey County Sheriff Mike Kanalakakis said.

While the task force seeks federal dollars, Kanalakakis said participating departments, including the Salinas Police Department and his office, are absorbing the operating costs.

In January, he said, he will again go before the Monterey County Board of Supervisors to request additional money.

"The task force has done a fabulous job," Kanalakakis said. "Their presence is being heard and felt."

Salinas police Cmdr. Dino Bardoni, who heads the task force, said it's just one of several factors keeping the homicide rate low, including intervention and suppression programs as well as the community.

"People are reporting crimes, and citizens are getting involved," Bardoni said. "The visible gang violence is down, but the underground activity and organized crime is just as busy as before."

Salinas Californian staff writers DAWN WITHERS, ROBERT SALONGA, CHRISTOPHER ORTIZ, VICTOR CALDERON and SUNITA VIJAYAN contributed to this report.



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