

Editorial

Continued from A6

“The short answer is no. In the aggregate, despite the deluge of legislation, annual building permits have remained stubborn-

ly stagnant at just over 100,000 homes annually for the last few years — well below the 180,000 a year state officials say we need to keep up with demand,” wrote David Garcia is the policy director of UC Berkeley’s Turner Center

for Housing Innovation in a May opinion piece in the LA Times.

However he notes that, like the Housing Elements in 1969, slowly but surely, California’s new laws are making an impact. Loosened regulations

sparked a significant uptick in the construction of “granny flats” (aka accessory dwelling units), for example.

Change is never easy, and rarely quick.

Here, too, we may be slow to see the impacts of

new housing regulations. But our soaring costs are a problem we ignored for too long, and like the state, we must take decisive action to right the ship so our kids might have a chance to afford the good life here in Petaluma.

Letters

Continued from A6

April thru October, we can count on this earsplitting speedway night from 4 to 10 p.m. with “decibels above the norm” to the point when dining outdoors we must yell across the table to be heard. On any given Saturday during this six-month, intrusive event, don’t expect to carry on a conversation anywhere in the adjacent shopping area — it’s impossible to do so because of the horrific screaming engines.

The City Council is deaf to the pleading requests from citizens. Residents have been patient, but abused. It is very clear that Petaluma has catered to the outsiders. Why not build a raceway in your backyard?! A speedway belongs on the outskirts of a town, not the middle of a town. Petaluma City Council, it is time to refocus and relocate this circuit. If not, there should be no contract!

Julianne Feere
Petaluma

Send letters to publisher Emily Charrier at emily.charrier@arguscourier.com.

Burns

Continued from A6

situation has been the takeover of media organizations by hedge funds like Alden Global Capital which has an alarming track record of buying distressed newspapers, selling off their real estate and equipment assets and gutting their newsrooms to generate enormous profits for shareholders. In the East Bay, home to 2.5 million people, Alden has acquired, folded or consolidated multiple daily newspapers. What’s left is a single regional daily newspaper, the East Bay Times, which purports to cover the news in an area the size of Delaware with a tiny fraction of the news staff formerly covering the 40 large and small cities in the region.

Here in the North Bay, the latest newspaper casualty is the 160-year-old Napa Valley Register, which regularly published a print newspaper seven days a week. But beginning this week, subscribers will only receive the print newspaper three days a week.

Petaluma and Sonoma County are not immune to the severe economic headwinds buffeting the American news industry. Despite the multiple successes of Sonoma Media Investments, the parent company of the Argus-Courier, the company was forced to lay off 12 employees earlier this year.

Yet the local investors who own this media company deeply value the importance of journalism to maintain a well-informed and engaged citizenry. To



CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Letterpress printing blocks spell out “Calistoga Tribune” in the weekly newspaper’s office in Calistoga on Monday, May 16, 2022.

preserve journalism, the company has continually adopted many innovative practices to grow revenues and gain cost efficiencies.

Still, enormous challenges threaten all California news organizations. For example, a state law will soon require newspaper carriers to be treated as employees rather than independent contractors, adding significant costs to newspaper companies’ overhead.

Realizing the law would significantly increase operational costs and possibly trigger the elimination of some newspapers altogether, the legislature agreed to temporarily exempt newspapers from complying until 2025.

But to avoid further worsening the alarming local news crisis, state lawmakers should make the exemption permanent.

The California State legislature has, in fact, shown some limited interest in preserving local news. Last year, for example, the state authorized a \$25 million expenditure to create the California

Local News Fellowship program administered by the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. The multi-year initiative will help local news reporting by placing up to 40 fellows in newsrooms throughout the state for two-year, full-time reporting positions beginning this September, for which fellows receive a \$50,000 annual stipend.

The State Assembly also recently passed a bill aimed at forcing social media companies like Meta and Google to pay news publishers a “journalism usage fee” for news content posted alongside the platforms’ digital ads.

But the bill’s future is murky because tech companies have brazenly threatened to block user access to all news content on platforms like Facebook and Instagram if such a law were to pass.

Far more useful public policies, like extending tax credits to consumers who subscribe to or donate to local news media, should instead be seriously considered by state legislators. So should tax credits

for small businesses that advertise in local news publications and for the news organizations themselves that hire and retain local journalists.

Such innovative public policies would help prevent local news from disappearing altogether.

Nonprofit media organizations, philanthropists and community foundations — like those collaborating in Napa County to save the longstanding community newspapers in Calistoga and Yountville — can also make a big difference.

A local nonprofit media corporation there is producing independent, public interest journalism that is funded, in part, by the Napa Valley Community Foundation, which created a media and democracy fund to support news coverage of education, housing, climate, agriculture, health, local government, the economy and community affairs.

The model was documented by the California Press Foundation which recently produced a guidebook showing how any regional community foundation can help support local journalism with similar funding programs available to both for-profit and nonprofit local news publishers.

So, what can you do? Tell your state assemblyman and senator to

support public policies that help local news media companies survive and thrive.

Donate to a philanthropic organization working to support local journalism initiatives.

Because high school journalism programs are being cut everywhere, consider supporting Casa Grande High School’s online magazine, the Casa Revista, or the Trojan Live morning broadcast program at Petaluma High School which reports daily on campus and community affairs.

Subscribe to your local newspaper and encourage others to do the same. The ongoing collapse of local news represents a severe threat to our communities and our democracy. Doing nothing is not an option.

(John Burns is a former publisher of the Petaluma Argus-Courier and president of the California Press Foundation’s board of directors. He can be reached at john.burns@arguscourier.com).

SHARE YOUR OPINION

- Email letters to the editor of no more than 350 words to editor@arguscourier.com. Longer pieces — up to 650 words — may be considered for publication as a guest commentary.
- All letters must include the author’s name, address and phone number. Addresses and phone numbers will not be printed. Names will not be withheld.
- Letters may also be sent to the Argus-Courier, P.O. Box 750308, Petaluma, 94975.

North Bay Association of REALTORS® Charity Awards \$59,000 in Scholarships



In recognition of their remarkable determination and resilience, the North Bay Association of REALTORS® Charity is proud to announce the winners of this year’s high school scholarships. For their leadership, academic achievements, and commitment to community, these outstanding students were selected following a meticulous review by our chapters, and Board of Directors. A total of 48 scholarships, across 18 high schools, throughout 15 jurisdictions have been awarded. Representing more than 3700 REALTORS® and industry professionals, NorBAR promotes positive community impact, and advocates for a sustainable housing economy in Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, and Lake Counties.

NorBAR Charity Regional Scholarships (partial list)

- Marisol Alvarez Diaz, Sonoma Valley High
- Briana Birk, Cardinal Newman
- Jaret Bosarge, St. Vincent De Paul
- John Bugbee, Casa Grande
- Isabela Cole, Fort Bragg High
- Carlo Delanni, Napa High
- Catelin Dundas-Gordon, Casa Grande
- Josephine Erickson, Fort Bragg High
- Quincy Frommelt, Napa High
- Emily Harris, Technology High
- Giovanni Lopez, Windsor High
- Brittany Manzo Diaz, Geyserville New Tech Academy
- Esperanza Marquez, Windsor High
- Aiden McFadden, Fort Bragg High
- Rosalina Meuniot, Ukiah High
- Anuska Parajuli, Santa Rosa High
- Lily Roberts, St. Vincent De Paul
- Emma Smith, Windsor High
- Casey Sullivan, Petaluma High
- Ella Turjanis, Napa High
- Samuel Vanden Heuvel, Healdsburg High

NorBAR Chapter Scholarships

- Napa Chapter, Shane Scholarships, 5 students
- Sonoma Valley Chapter Scholarships, 11 students
- Petaluma Chapter Scholarships, 6 students

The Sonoma County Junior College District does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, ethnic group identification, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information or sexual orientation in any of its policies, procedures or practices. See How the District Accommodates employees or applicants with disabilities on the basis of their age. For nondiscrimination policy issues, access and human resources programs and activities, including but not limited to admission, financial aid, educational services and others, visit www.santarosa.edu or contact your representative.