

## COMMUNITY

## Grassroots effort focuses on safety

By Jessica A. York  
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**LIVE OAK** » There are things in Santa Cruz that are “less than ideal,” city native and downtown business owner Marvin Christie told an audience of more than 70 people by way of an opening Thursday night.

Christie, along with friend and professional peer Kaelin Wagnermarsh, of Live Oak, said their personal frustrations around visible public safety, mental health, drug addiction and homelessness issues led them to organize a panel discussion in the Santa

Cruz Sheriff’s Office Live Oak community room. Together, the two have dubbed their newborn effort simply “Safety in Santa Cruz” — with Thursday’s event the opening volley, the “beginning of a bigger movement,” Christie said.

“We were upset and we were angry about some of the things we were seeing. And then, after having conversations with many of these people, we realized that this is a really dynamic and complex issue,” Wagnermarsh told the mostly live audience, plus a handful streaming online. “Our goal here today is to kind of unpack

a little bit more of that. Find out where the gaps are and let’s make this better.”

With a limited scheduled timeline and nine panelists, the duo were able to “just scratch the surface” in asking five questions of their guests before moderating audience queries, they said. Panel attendees included Santa Cruz Mayor Fred Keeley, Santa Cruz County Supervisors Manu Koenig and Justin Cummings, Santa Cruz Police Chief Bernie Escalante and Sheriff’s Office Lt. Nick Baldrige, County Health Services Manager Danny Contreras,



Santa Cruz Deputy City Manager Lisa Murphy stands to address an audience of some 70 people Thursday in the Sheriff’s Office Live Oak community room as part of the Safety in Santa Cruz public forum.

JESSICA A. YORK — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

## MOUNT MADONNA SCHOOL

## Students share their experiences from India



PHOTOS BY SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Cecily Kelly speaks about her experiences in India on Friday as she and her Mount Madonna School twelfth grade classmates tell an assembly at the school about their experiences during a recent learning journey to that country.



Mount Madonna School senior Mariah Cohen makes a connection in February with a youngster at Sri Ram Ashram in Shyumpar Village, India during her classes visit to the home for abandoned children.



Mount Madonna School seniors Sandy Astone and Sky Weir visit Gurudwara Shri Bangla Sahib, a large Sikh temple in New Delhi, in February while on a learning journey to India with their classmates.

By Eric Sleeper  
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**WATSONVILLE** » Seniors from Mount Madonna School in Watsonville shared their most colorful experiences and big takeaways from their March trip to India, which spanned from Delhi, India’s capital, to the foothills of the Himalayas and back,

during the school’s Sambandh Return Presentation Friday morning on the school’s campus.

The journey to and through India is part of the school’s Values in World Thought Program and was made by eight Mount Madonna students, six chaperones, which included Sentinel photographer Shmuel Thaler, and was led for the first time by

Mount Madonna’s Upper School Director Shannon Kelly.

This year’s student trip to India, which is part of a long tradition for the school, was also the first excursion that Mount Madonna School students have taken to the country since 2019.

“So much of what we do at Mount Madonna is about experi-

ential learning, and it was great to be able to get back out experiencing these things together,” said Kelly, who’s traveled to India with students on six occasions. “Every trip I take is a completely different experience even if we visit the same places, and it’s also nice to see it each time through fresh eyes.”

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## CESAR CHAVEZ COMMUNITY AWARDS

## Watsonville residents, organizations honored

By Nick Sestanovich  
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**WATSONVILLE** » As the last three weeks have demonstrated, Watsonville is a community that takes care of its own.

This was evident even before the Pajaro Valley saw severe flooding this winter, and as it has done for the last 21 years, the city took time Thursday to honor some residents and organizations who have made a difference in their community as part of the Cesar Chavez Community Awards.

Hosted by Friends of Watsonville Parks and Community Services and held virtually over Zoom, the ceremony presented awards in six categories to individuals, organizations and businesses who engage and empower local youth and the community at large and were nominated by the public.

Daryl Wise, president of Friends of Watsonville, said the awards were expanded this year to acknowledge those who assisted during the recent floods. Many during the ceremony invoked the awards’ iconic labor activist namesake, and not only was the ceremony held one day shy of Cesar Chavez Day, but it also happened to fall on the 155th anniversary of Watsonville’s incorporation as a city.

“Back then, there were 2,000 residents,” said Wise. “Today, we’re over 50,000 strong.”

Mayor Eduardo Montesino introduced the event’s keynote speaker, Ray Cancino, CEO of the nonprofit Community Bridges. Montesino talked about how Cancino helped out throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and during the recent floods.

“I was there the first day at the shelter, and he was there helping getting toiletries,” said Montesino. “(He) left his family, went to get his things that people needed, but this just talks about his heart and where his commitment to the community is.”

Cancino reflected on Chavez’s selflessness and dedication with the quote “We can not seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community.”

“That, for me, sums up what tonight is all about: celebrating community, one of Cesar Chavez’s core values,” he said. “This highlights the importance of sharing the joyous and respectful expression of cultural diversity through the reinforcement of the values and equity and responsibility to and for one another.”

Cancino said it was just as possible today to support “the next Cesar Chavez.”

“The awardees today are recognized for supporting that next generation and for doing action in our community, for all they have done to make our community stronger,” he said.

Alma Leonor-Sanchez, a 2021 graduate of Pajaro Valley High School and current Cabrillo College student, received the Young Person award for her work with Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Climate Corps Leadership Institute, MILPA, Watsonville Community Forest and helping to develop the Farm 2 Cafeteria program at Pajaro Valley High.

AWARDS » PAGE 4

## UTILITY

## State pursues receivership for Big Basin Water

Public meeting for proposed rate increase happening Monday

By PK Hattis  
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**BIG BASIN** » After years of unreliable service, code violations and failures to respond to regional authorities in a timely manner, the California Water Resources Control Board Division

of Drinking Water says it has engaged the Office of Enforcement to begin the process of pursuing a receivership for Big Basin Water Co.

According to a letter sent by the control board to the company’s private owners Jim and Shirley Moore in late February, the company has been falling short of its duty to consistently provide safe, potable water to its customers in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

“BBWC (Big Basin Water Company) is not currently satisfying

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Big Basin Water Co. rate increase public meeting hosted by the California Public Utilities Commission.

**When:** 6 p.m. Monday.

**Where:** In person at the Boulder Creek Fire Department 13230 Central Ave. Boulder Creek.

that obligation as it does not have the technical, managerial, and financial capacity to operate a public water system, and it

is unresponsive to the rules and orders of the Division,” wrote Office of Enforcement attorney Laura Mooney in the letter.

Mooney concluded the seven-page report by stating: “In our view, a receiver should be appointed to assume possession and operate BBWC’s drinking water system for the purpose of bringing BBWC back into compliance and ensure the public has reliable access to safe drinking water.”

WATER » PAGE 4

## Coast Lines

SANTA CRUZ

### City announces San Lorenzo Park reopening

The City of Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department announced the reopening of San Lorenzo Park on Saturday. The reopening will include the upper park including the restrooms, playground, duck pond, and lawn bowling green and improvements will continue in the coming weeks.

The upper park will be open to the public daily from dawn until dusk.

The San Lorenzo Park benches remain closed for cleanup and restoration work. For information about the park and upcoming events, including Earth Day on April 22, visit [cityofsantacruz.com](http://cityofsantacruz.com).

BEN LOMOND

### Highway 9 Holiday Slide to reopen Friday

The Holiday Slide off of Highway 9 near Ben Lomond is set to reopen to one-way traffic at 10 a.m. Friday following inspection assessments after recent rains, according to a release from Caltrans.

A temporary signal system has been put in place to direct traffic as repair work continues, but travelers can expect delays on this route as a second temporary signal system was already put in place just south of this location at Highway 9.

The section of roadway between lower Glen Arbor Road and Holiday Lane has been closed since early January, after heavy winter storms triggered a massive mudslide that covered the roadway along with multiple downed trees.

Since that slide occurred, crews have been working to remove debris, stabilize the slope, manage drainage and rebuild a damaged retaining wall. The effort was set back several times as additional atmospheric river storms and heavy rainfall hit the Central Coast in the weeks that followed the original incident.

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

### Services and livestreams

- Aptos United Methodist Church shares worship on Zoom at 10 a.m. Sundays. Information: [Aptosumc.org](http://Aptosumc.org) and click on the Zoom link.

- Boulder Creek Church posts Sunday worship on Zoom, at 10 a.m. Sundays. For information, visit [BCUMC.com](http://BCUMC.com).

- Calvary Episcopal Church, at 532 Center St., Santa Cruz, offers one Sunday Choral Eucharist service that is in person and livestreamed at 10:30 a.m. Livestream link: [www.calvarysantacruz.org](http://www.calvarysantacruz.org). We also offer in-person Sunday services at 8 a.m. (Rite I) and 9 a.m. (Liturgy of the Word). COVID Protocol: due to current tripelemic conditions we strongly recommend wearing masks while inside the church. N95, KN95, KF94, and FFFP2 masks have proven to be most effective in helping prevent the spread of viruses.

- Chadeish Yameinu Jewish Renewal of Santa Cruz offers livestreaming Erev Shabbat and Shabbat services. Details: [cysantacruz.com](http://cysantacruz.com).

- Christ Lutheran Church, 10707 Soquel Drive in Aptos, hosts worship service at 10 a.m. All are welcome. Call 831-688-5727 or visit [AptosChurch.org](http://AptosChurch.org).

- Christian Life Center hosts in person and livestream services 1030 a.m. Sundays. Details: [clicantacruz.org](http://clicantacruz.org).

- Congregational Church of Soquel hosts worship services 10 a.m. Sundays @church and @home on Zoom or [ccsoquel.org](http://ccsoquel.org) or on YouTube.

- Corralitos Community Church offers its ChurchAtHome and Kids Clubhouse children's videos online each week. Visit: [corralitos.church](http://corralitos.church). For details, email [hello@corralitos.church](mailto:hello@corralitos.church).

- Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist in Aptos, 10:30 a.m. Sundays, [www.st-john-aptos.org](http://www.st-john-aptos.org).

- Gateway Bible Church of Scotts Valley, 9 a.m. Sundays worship service and Children's Worship Experience, [GatewayBible.org](http://GatewayBible.org).

- High Street Community Church is now open for in-person worship, inside & outdoors, (honoring distancing and tiers) and continue to stream weekly services on its Facebook Page and YouTube Channel. Visit us at [Hscchurch.org](http://Hscchurch.org) and join us online at 9:30 a.m. Sundays at: [facebook.com/850highstreet/live](https://facebook.com/850highstreet/live) or [youtube.com/channel/UCO5x-Mo6jP0396JXTn2SV-A/](https://youtube.com/channel/UCO5x-Mo6jP0396JXTn2SV-A/) live.

- La Selva Beach Community Church Services via Zoom. Contact for invite: [lsbcc.org](http://lsbcc.org) or call 831-688-4033.

- Ocean Gate Zen Center is offering live streaming meditation and dharma talks. Visit: [oceangatezen.org](http://oceangatezen.org).

- Peace United Church of Christ, 900 High St. Santa Cruz, in-person services on at 10:30 a.m. Sundays. Services livestreamed at [peaceunited.org](http://peaceunited.org).

- ReGeneration Church, 1500 Green Hills Road, Scotts Valley. Services are at 10 a.m. Sundays in person, online and also outside. For information, visit [therenerationchurch.com](http://therenerationchurch.com).

- Catholic Community of San Agustín in Scotts Valley, Livestream Mass at 8 a.m. on Sundays, [sanagustin.church](http://sanagustin.church).

- Santa Cruz Zen Center offers morning and evening meditation Monday to Friday online and in person. Dharma talks at 6:35 p.m. Wednesdays in person and online. For information or Zoom link, visit [sczc.org](http://sczc.org). For questions, call 831-457-0206.

- Shrine of St. Joseph in Santa Cruz will livestream Masses daily at 11 a.m. [shrinestjoseph.com](http://shrinestjoseph.com).

- St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ben Lomond is having in-person services at 10 a.m. Sunday. All are welcome.

- St. Stephen's Lutheran Church is in-person/indoor worship at 10 a.m. Sundays. Safety precautions will be taken, and masks are required. Recorded worship will still be available at [ststephenslutheran.org](http://ststephenslutheran.org).

- St. Philip the Apostle Episcopal Church in Scotts Valley shares an 8 a.m. in person Holy Eucharist on Sunday mornings, and a hybrid Zoom and in person 10 a.m. service, followed by a hybrid coffee hour with Zoom members and in person members on the patio. A midweek service is held on the patio at 11:30 a.m. Wednesday. For details, visit [stphilip-sv.net](http://stphilip-sv.net).

- Trinity Presbyterian Church offers both an in-person and zoom worship service, Sundays at 10:30 a.m. 420 Melrose Ave., Santa Cruz. For the Zoom link, visit [trinitypressc.org](http://trinitypressc.org).

- Twin Lakes Church in Aptos has in-person and livestream services: 6 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Sunday For details, visit [tlc.org](http://tlc.org).

- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship offers in-person and online services at 10 a.m. Sunday. To check information about upcoming services, visit [uufsc.org](http://uufsc.org).

- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship offers both in-person services and on Zoom at 10 a.m. Sunday. For information, visit [uufsc.org](http://uufsc.org).

- United Methodist Church of Santa Cruz hybrid (Zoom and in person) worship service at 10:45 a.m. Sundays. For information, visit [umcsantacruz.org](http://umcsantacruz.org).

- Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz will livestream services from its website, [vintagechurch.org](http://vintagechurch.org), at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Sundays.

- Watsonville Buddhist Temple has in-person services at 10 a.m. on Sundays and some live-streamed/pre-recorded Dharma talks. For information, visit [www.wbtemple.org](http://www.wbtemple.org).

## India

FROM PAGE 3

The seniors from Mount Madonna School choose a theme for their journey, and this year the crew of eight seniors (Zoey Ocampo-Sobkoviak, Mariah Cohen, Cecily Kelly, Sam Kaplan, Bella Cambell, Jacob Sirk-Traugh, Sandy Astone and Sky Weir) chose the theme of sambandh, a Sanskrit word meaning "connections," which they hoped to make on their 1,000-mile, two-week long odyssey.

Their adventure began as soon as they landed in Delhi and walked out of the airport to discover that it was smoggy, not foggy, and more than 80 degrees and humid — much different than the wet, winter weather they left in Santa Cruz County. From there, the culture shock continued as they made their way through the congested streets of the country's populous capital.

"Getting off the plane was one of the most overwhelming things I've ever experienced," said Cecily Kelly. "There's cars everywhere. People are honking. There's cows in the road and stray dogs. We get on the bus and look out the window and people are just staring at us. They have their cameras out and they're taking selfies with us."

"When you get out of the main area of the city with the airport, everyone is kind of mishmashed together with houses built on top of houses," said Astone. "There isn't a single square foot of land that isn't being used with intention. Everything is so in demand and it really helps me put things



SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Zoey Ocampo-Sobkoviak, center, and her Mount Madonna School classmates interact with students from Purkal Youth Development Society in Dehradun, India, on February 23.

in perspective. Let me tell you, traffic here could be a lot worse."

The students were struck not only by the poor people of the city, but also by the ways that people help the poor as they do at the city's restaurants such as one they visited in Old Delhi where a patron can pay 30 rupees, which is about 40 cents, to provide a meal for someone who can't afford it themselves or at the community kitchens housed in temples.

"It's kind of like a soup kitchen except it's unlike any soup kitchen I've seen in the United States," said Kaplan. "It's not restricted in the hours that it operates or the people it serves. You don't have to prove that you need the food or present anything. You just sit down and they serve you a meal. The particular one we visited in Delhi serves 35,000 a day."

Despite the stark differences in environment and culture, the students began connecting with young people their own age almost immediately, especially by playing games to-

gether and dancing as they did at a wedding they attended at the Sri Ram Ashram in the city of Haridwar.

"I was just amazed by the colors and sounds and smells, and how welcoming the people were at the ceremonies," said Ocampo-Sobkoviak. "They were like, 'Hey come dance with us. We're going to teach you a dance that we're all going to perform together in front of everyone.' I am glad that I did it because it was a lot of fun and really helped me put myself out there more and fully immerse myself in the experience. I felt welcomed and a part of it."

"There's a game that's like dodgeball but it's not dodgeball. They tried to explain it to us and we all just had blank faces. We had no idea what was going on, and then we just started," said Cambell. "We played another game that was like cat and mouse, where we chased each other, and then we played volleyball, where we showed our true colors. It was a lot of fun

and brought us closer together."

The crew made a stop at the River Ganges where the generally shy Mariah Cohen made fast friends with the locals who she has kept in touch with still.

"We walked down to the river and we're standing on the shore, not really sure what to do," said Cohen. "One of the girls, named Veena, just grabbed my arm and said, 'You're coming in with me.' Within a few seconds, we were dunking under the water and having a splash war. It was one of my favorite parts because that's when I felt like we were actually connecting."

While visiting a small village with old-school architecture and very little contact with the outside world, Jacob Sirk-Traugh realized that not everyone in the world is glued to a screen.

"It started with a tractor ride on this bumpy road and pulled off onto this winding dirt road to the middle of nowhere," said Sirk-Traugh. "They have one solar panel that connects to a battery that powers a fan. Their way of life is culturally rich and very beautiful but it's a shocking difference and challenges the idea that I had of the modern world."

If there's one piece of advice that Sky Weir has for the next class to visit India, and for the world at large, it's to take advantage of every moment and make connections during every step of the journey.

"On the trip, be super open minded and try to talk to as many people as possible," said Weir. "People know things and have insights that they want to share with you, so ask questions, talk to people and just take it all in."

## Awards

FROM PAGE 3

"Currently, students take the lead in chopping and preparing the produce harvested by Alma at Esperanza Community Farms," said presenter Alfonso Lobato.

Leonor-Sanchez said she was grateful for the award and to have opportunities to explore environmental justice and social justice.

"We have a really nice opportunity to involve youth in different ways," she said. "I'm really grateful to be a participant in that and ele-

vate other youth, and that's been a very special experience for me. I look forward to seeing a lot more of Watsonville's youth showing up in these spaces, taking up space and using their voice for things that matter to them."

The school award was given to New School Community Day School, a credit recovery high school for Pajaro Valley Unified School District students co-founded in 1996 by Don Eggleston, who continues to assist staff and students at the school even after his retirement.

In his acceptance speech, Eggleston said the school

was more than a credit recovery school but a school where kids can overcome negative circumstances and turn them into positive ones.

"We want you to flip the switch and turn your stress, anger, depression, whatever into making your dreams come true," he said. "It's not just credit recovery. It's 'How can we help you to be successful?'"

The other honorees were:

- Adult role model: Robby Olson, Watsonville High School boys basketball coach, for giving students volunteer opportunities.

## Water

FROM PAGE 3

### Options on the table

A receiver is someone appointed by a judge to temporarily manage a company and its operations, though ownership does not change. State Water Resources Control Board spokesperson Blair Robertson told the Sentinel this week that the Division of Drinking Water is currently working on the steps it needs to complete before filing a lawsuit that will begin the receivership process.

"The judge will consider arguments for and against the appointment of a receiver," wrote Robertson in an email. "If the judge agrees that a receiver is needed, one will be appointed on terms decided by the judge." According to Robertson, the whole process could take "many months."

The receivership is also being pursued only for the water side of Big Basin's operations and not for its small wastewater treatment station, which is regulated by the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

State authorities say they have discussed their plans with Big Basin Water, but the company's Chief Operator Damian Moore remains skeptical of how useful an appointed receiver could be.

"We would need someone that would be in a hard hat and boots to justify paying them with the staff we have," said Moore. "That's what we need is people on the ground not someone in an office sending emails taking more money than any of us make."

The state's letter docu-

ments efforts to bring the water company into compliance dating back to 2018, when the cost of corrective actions was almost \$2.9 million.

That was before the CZU Lightning Complex Fire, which devastated portions of the Big Basin system, leaving it with only one well source for the 547 customers that it now serves.

The Sentinel documented Boulder Creek residents who have endured multiple water outages and boil water orders in the fire's aftermath, along with reports of black filters and taps that have spewed brown water.

At this point, Moore said the family is actively trying to sell the company, which he called the "best case scenario."

Alternatively, Big Basin Water has also explored a consolidation with a neighboring public utility company, a move that has been strongly encouraged by local and state leaders. But those negotiations have ended for now.

Rick Rogers, district manager for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District, told the Sentinel that the public utility has explored consolidation with Big Basin Water on several occasions, including in recent months. But the district estimated that it would cost about \$40 million to complete Big Basin's system repairs to bring it back into compliance; a figure it considers untenable without outside funding.

"There were no assurances that if the district did consolidate that we would get funding," said Rogers. "That would have to put the upgrades and repairs on our existing rate payers and that was just basically unacceptable to

our district."

In the meantime, Rogers said a receivership may help move the process forward in terms of finding a long-term solution, including potential consolidation. But he stressed that a secure funding mechanism through state grants or other sources will be necessary.

"Hopefully that funding will be made available, it has to be. Otherwise that system will fail; that system is failing and it needs a large cash infusion," said Rogers.

While Santa Cruz County officials have no jurisdiction over the privately owned utility, 5th District Supervisor Bruce McPherson, who represents the Big Basin area, has been working for years with local and state stakeholders to try to facilitate a viable solution.

"I support the state's efforts to pursue receivership and I hope the process eventually leads to a local public ownership of the system ideally through a consolidation with the San Lorenzo Valley Water District," said McPherson, who emphasized the the district has already engaged in several mutual aid efforts to support Big Basin customers in the wake of the fires and recent winter storm damage.

"But whatever the future

holds for Big Basin (water) customers, there's going to be a higher cost involved because to repair the system and operate it properly is going to require more revenue," said McPherson.

### Rate increase meeting

Big Basin has set in motion a possible water rate increase for its customers for the first time since 2014 as a means for raising funds to invest in the company's infrastructure, according to Moore.

"If the rates go up then obviously we'll be able to create revenue for infrastructure, whether it be to make loan payments or to outright purchase tanks or pay third party contractors to do some projects," said Moore.

The proposal would cumulatively increase rates by \$271,613 or 55.5%, according to the California Public Utilities Commission, which has the authority to approve, partially approve or deny the request.

To explain the rate increase process and receive public input, the commission will be hosting a public meeting Monday night at the Boulder Creek Fire Department. Customers are encouraged to attend the event to ask questions about the process or other issues related to Big Basin Water.

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