



# COUNTY CURRENTS

Santa Cruz County

[www.santacruzcounty.us](http://www.santacruzcounty.us)

Winter 2022

A publication of the County Administrative Office Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrator



## NEW SOUTH COUNTY SERVICE CENTER ON WAY



*In October, the County of Santa Cruz closed escrow on 500 Westridge Drive in Watsonville. Once renovated, the 121,000-square-foot building will allow the consolidation of new and existing services into one location to better support the health, safety and well-being of South County residents. Completion of the full project is expected to take up to three years, while medical and behavioral health services are expected to remain at their current location at the Freedom Boulevard campus.*

The renovated **La Selva Beach Library** is open! Improvements to the interior and exterior have brought a light, airy and inviting feel to the library, one of numerous projects funded by voters through **Measure S**.

*Photo by David Wakely*



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## VACCINES, BOOSTERS URGED FOR RESIDENTS

With a recent omicron-driven surge in cases, Santa Cruz County Public Health Officials encourage all those who are eligible (age 12+) to get a COVID-19 booster shot now.

Under California Department of Public Health Guidance, individuals may receive either the same or different COVID-19, using a “mix and match” strategy.

“Protection from the initial vaccine series may decrease over time, and a booster shot is highly effective in preventing serious hospitalization and death,” said Dr. Gail Newel, Santa Cruz County Health Officer. “It is imperative that those living in a long-term care facility or who are 65 or older receive a booster, and we encourage everyone eligible to seek one as we head into the winter months.”

People who received their initial series with any of the three COVID vaccines (Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Moderna) may now be eligible for a booster.

It’s important to be vaccinated as quickly as possible if you haven’t done so already and to get the booster when eligible. Booster shot appointments can be scheduled through <https://myturn.ca.gov/> and are widely available at many doctor offices and pharmacies. Those needing assistance in scheduling an appointment can call the Community Bridges Helpline at 831-219-8607 or 831-440-3556 (English, Spanish, Mixteco and Triqui).

For local information on COVID-19, go to [www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirus](http://www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirus) or call (831) 454-4242 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Visit <https://www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirusvaccine> (English) or <https://www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirusvacuna> (Español) for more.



## RENOVATIONS COMPLETED AT APTOS PARK

In close collaboration with the community, Santa Cruz County Parks has completed renovations at Hidden Beach County Park Playground.

Made possible by many generous community donations — most of them made in memory of Jett Ramsey, a local boy who passed away in April 2020 following a long battle with cancer — the project added a new play structure and improved accessibility.

“The project is an example of how the Aptos community comes together to support one another. I’m grateful that these donations have made it possible to honor Jett’s memory” Supervisor Zach Friend said.

Hidden Beach park is located at 600 Cliff Drive. For a complete list of County parks and amenities, visit [www.scparks.com](http://www.scparks.com).

### *In memoriam...*



*This wonderful bench near Twin Lakes State Beach honors Allison Endert, a Board of Supervisors analyst who played a key role in beachfront renovations and tragically lost her life in 2020. The bench was created by artist Kathleen Crocetti.*



## REPORT FIRST TO EXAMINE REGIONAL POLICING POLICIES

The Santa Cruz County Criminal Justice Council has released what is likely the first-ever open and transparent regional review of policing practices in the United States, finding substantial alignment on critical policing issues such as use of force, technology, and other issues that guide officer decision-making and build community trust.

The independent review was conducted by Applied Survey Research and examined policies in five local law enforcement agencies – the Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Office, Santa Cruz Police Department, Watsonville Police Department, Scotts Valley Police Department and Capitola Police Department. The effort was led by CJC Chair and Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend and Santa Cruz City Councilmember Justin Cummings.

All agencies release body camera footage to the public and undergo implicit bias training. Currently, no department uses predictive policing or facial recognition technologies. All agencies currently require officers deploy de-escalation techniques prior to use of force, ban controversial restraints such as choke-holds, and no agency uses no-knock warrants.

Overall, all agencies were found to have updated policies regarding use of force, technological deployment and release of information to the public. Furthermore, all either use or favor the use of behavioral health professionals to address individuals in a behavioral health crisis. The report also found substantial alignment among local law enforcement agencies on critical issues. The CJC includes local elected officials along with public safety, schools, Superior Court, nonprofit and behavioral health leaders.

For more, go to <https://santacruzsjc.org>.



## Measure G funds public safety, homeless response and more

In 2018, Santa Cruz County voters approved Measure G, a half-cent sales tax measure to improve emergency response and preparedness, street repairs, homeless services and more.

Those funds are now being put to work, including the Sheriff’s Office’s Focused Intervention Teams (FIT), which works with repeat, low-level offenders in the downtown areas of Santa Cruz and Watsonville who consume a disproportionate level of public services. After a pause for the pandemic, the FIT squad is back on the streets.

The funding also helped the County form the first-ever division focused solely on the issue of homelessness. The County’s Housing for Health Division works to secure needed funding for programs to address homeless programs and services, and during the COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role on

supporting more than 1,000 highly vulnerable houseless community members who placed in shelters to protect them from the virus. The Housing for Health Division is now focused on finding permanent housing for shelter residents and other community members who are without homes.

Measure G also funds the Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience, which was formed in the wake of the CZU Fire and is focused not just on emergency response, but helping prepare the county for the long-term effect of climate change and how we can adapt to these long-term changes.

Additionally, Measure G funds are paying for other essential county services, including parks maintenance workers to help make sure County parks are ready for you and your family the next time you head to your local park.

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County



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## Affordable housing, health care project taking shape

In November 2019, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a mixed-use development near 17th Avenue and Capitola Road that will include community-serving medical and dental clinics, a public plaza, and 57 units of affordable rental homes.

That vision is now taking shape. Built on land formerly owned by the County's redevelopment agency, the 3.7-acre development is a model for public-private partnerships that benefit the community. The 57 affordable rental apartments will be developed, owned and operated by MidPen Housing, while an 11,000-square-foot community dental clinic will be operated by Dientes Community Dental, and an 18,000-square-foot medical clinic will be operated by Santa Cruz Community Health Centers.

Not only did the County contribute land and a substantial public investment to both subsidize the project and address needed environmental remediation, but it secured \$2.2 million in California No Place Like Home funding. As a result, 15 of the 57 affordable units will be used as permanent supportive housing for indi-



vidual who need assistance and are either exiting homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Other contributors include Central California Alliance for Health, Dominican

Hospital, Sutter Health, Kaiser Permanente, Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, Monterey Peninsula Foundation and the State of California. The first phase of the development is expected to be completed later this year.



Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller, who was killed in the line of duty June 6, 2020, will be honored with a memorial at Willowbrook County Park, where he enjoyed time with his family and dog. The project will include the installation of a beautiful memorial seating area, park entry enhancements, updates to the play area and sport courts, and a new flagpole. To donate, go to <https://www.countyparkfriends.org/willowbrook>.

## BOARD RATIFIES EMERGENCY DECLARATION

In January, the County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday ratified an emergency declaration due to \$3.1 million in damage to county roads and infrastructure from the December 13, 2021 Atmospheric River Winter Storm.

Voting unanimously during a special Board meeting, the Board declared a local emergency due to widespread flooding, numerous landslides, a fire-related debris flow along Foreman Creek, road washouts and road collapses, including the loss of part of Lodge Road in Boulder Creek.

The vote allows the County to request disaster assistance funding under the California Disaster Assistance Act to help with public infrastructure repairs that are beyond the County's ability to fund.

# MORALES TO LEAD COUNTY HEALTH AGENCY

A Watsonville native is coming home.

In January, Mónica Morales began work as the new Director of Health Services for Santa Cruz County, replacing Mimi Hall.

Raised in Watsonville, Morales brings a wealth of experience in health and public health policy administration, budgeting and working with community partners, including in her current role as Deputy Director of the Center for Healthy Communities for the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), where she oversaw programs that addressed environmental and occupational health, injury and violence, chronic disease prevention, suicide prevention, and substance use and addiction.

Morales previously served as the Deputy Director of CDPH's Fusion Center for Strategic Development and served in several roles with the Nevada State Division of Public and Behavioral Health, including statewide Chronic Disease Director and Deputy Bureau Chief for Child, Family and Community Wellness.

"As we engaged in a national search for our next HSA Director, it became clear that the best candidate was raised in Watsonville and knows our community well," County Administrative Officer Carlos Palacios said. "I'm pleased to welcome Mónica and her family back home, and look forward working with her to protect the health and well-being of our residents."

"There is much to be done to ensure we are moving forward equitable public health policies in our county. I look forward to working with the community and dedicated staff in the Health Services Agency to assure that all members of our community are healthy, safe and resilient," Morales said.

Morales is a planning member of the California Children's

Behavioral Health Initiative, is a representative on the UC Merced Farmworker Research project and the California Health and Human Services Alzheimer's Advisory Committee. She also serves as a board member of the National Association of Chronic Disease directors, serving as president during 2019-20.

She has a BA in Sociology from UCSC and MPA in Public Policy and Administration from Columbia University, New York.. A graduate of Watsonville High School, she enjoys outdoor activities with her family; seven year old daughter Isa, four year son Nico, her spouse Adriana, and her dog, Choco.



## *Homelessness Memorial remembers those who perished on the streets*

On December 21st, in conjunction with the National Homeless Persons Memorial Day, the County's Homeless Persons' Health Project (HPPH) and several partners held the 23rd annual Homeless Memorial, which honors people who passed away while living unsheltered during the past year.

Presented along with HPPH by Housing Matters, Wings, and the Salvation Army, the 2021 event was a virtual one, with contributions from the friends and loved ones of those who have passed.

Unfortunately, 94 persons experiencing homelessness died on the streets of Santa Cruz County last year —

nearly two per week.

Despite record numbers of homeless persons staying in County-run shelters due to the COVID-19 pandemic — more than 1,000 at one point — the figure represented a significant 22 percent increase over the previous year.

It was also the highest number in the past 23 years. People experiencing homelessness have much shorter life expectancies and are more likely to suffer violence, trauma and other health issues.

For more on local efforts to reduce homelessness, visit [www.homelessactionpartnership.com](http://www.homelessactionpartnership.com).



## Meet Your Supervisor

### [Manu Koenig](#)

District 1 includes Live Oak, Summit Road Soquel and parts of Capitola and Santa Cruz.



### [Zach Friend](#)

District 2 includes Aptos, Corralitos, part of Capitola and the South County coast.



### [Ryan Coonerty](#)

District 3 includes much of Santa Cruz and the North Coast.



### [Greg Caput](#)

District 4 includes most of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley.



### [Bruce McPherson](#)

District 5 includes the San Lorenzo Valley, Scotts Valley and parts of Santa Cruz.



*Click on each supervisor to learn more about them and their responsibilities, including how to reach them during constituent office hours.*

## Quick Guide

Citizens rely on county government for many needed services. Use this handy guide to find who to call, or come find us on the web at: [www.santacruzcounty.us](http://www.santacruzcounty.us).

**Main Number**  
(831) 454-2000

**Board of Supervisors**  
(831) 454-2200

Agricultural Commissioner  
(831) 763-8080

Animal Services  
(831) 454-7303

Assessor's Office  
(831) 454-2002

Benefits  
(888) 421-8080

County Clerk/Elections  
(831) 454-2060

Economic Development  
(831) 454-2728

Environmental Health  
(831) 454-2022

Health Services Agency  
(831) 454-4800

Parks and Recreation  
(831) 454-7900

Planning Department  
(831) 454-2580

Public Works  
(831) 454-2160

Recycling Information  
(831) 454-2333

Sheriff/Coroner  
(831) 471-1121  
(call 911 if emergency)

Superior Court  
(831) 763-8060

Tax Collections  
(831) 454-2510

# 'Yermo' Aranda selected as 2021 Artist of the Year

Each year, the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission presents the Artist of the Year award to local artists for outstanding achievement in the discipline of performing, visual, or literary arts who have also made a substantial contribution to the cultural enrichment of Santa Cruz County.

Multi-media artist Guillermo "Yermo" Aranda was named 2021 Artist of the Year. Born and raised in the San Diego area, Aranda comes from a family of artists, craftsman, and musicians. He is a co-founder of "Toltecas en Aztlan" (1968), a collection of multi-media Chicano Artists. He is also co-founder and First Director of "El Centro Cultural de La Raza" (1971-75), a cultural art center focusing on Latino and Indigenous Art forms.

As the Centro's first Administrative Director, Aranda initiated the first Chicano Park Murals in San Diego in April of 1973. Chicano Park is now recognized as a National Historical Landmark. Within a year after arriving in Watsonville in 1983, Aranda began to practice and teach Aztec dance and co-founded the Whitehawk Dancers, a cultural arts organization providing Visual and Performing Arts Workshops for youth.

In 1985, the first "Xilonen" ceremony on the West Coast was held. This gathering of Aztec dancers continues to this day, the second weekend of July. In 1995, ten Whitehawk dancers went to Shingu, Japan as part of the Sister Cities program, where they danced at the World Exposition in



Wakayama. Aranda's contributions to the White Hawk Dancers has always been on a volunteer basis, and its focus has always been the youth of our communities.

Aranda helps youth develop their artistic skills, utilizing murals as the means to involve youth in the arts. He has over 80 murals in the Santa Cruz and Monterey County areas, all youth projects. Currently he teaches art and the process of mural painting locally and throughout the State of California, working with elementary students in Northern California and inmates in a California state penitentiary.

Aranda has been commissioned and sponsored by a host of agencies and organizations, including the California Arts Council, Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, Santa Cruz County Arts Commission, Santa Cruz County Office of Education, Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, Mexican American Community Services Agency of San Jose, and the City of San Diego.