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District, parents battle over child's schooling

■ Should he attend a special school, or get special help in a regular one?

By MARY SCHLEY

A SERIOUSLY disabled 6-year-old Carmel Valley boy is at the center of a legal fight between his parents



PHOTO/KATRINA HODGES

Six-year-old David Hodges is the focus of legal battles between his parents and the Carmel Unified School District over whether to provide services for him in regular classes or place him in a special education program.

and the Carmel Unified School District, which has sued the family over the issue of where he will be best served.

David Hodges' parents want him in a regular class at Tularcitos Elementary School for most of the day, accompanied part of the time by a specialist, while the district wants him to attend the Monterey County Office of Education's special education program in Salinas.

Ashley and Katrina Hodges moved to Carmel Valley from the Santa Cruz area a little more than a year ago and have four kids in the Carmel school district, including David, who, according to legal documents, has numerous medical conditions that render him legally blind and non-verbal.

He depends on a wheelchair for mobility, has little to no control over his arms and legs, and "requires adult assistance in all aspects of his day, including feeding, toileting, positioning, and navigating his classroom and campus."

Those issues, including David's need for frequent rest during school days, didn't keep his former school district in San Lorenzo Valley from developing a plan that had him sharing space with schoolmates for much of each day, and that's what his parents expected Carmel Unified to provide when the family moved to the area in April 2022.

Ask a judge

But district officials concluded, after having the child enrolled at Carmelo preschool for a few weeks, that he would be best served by the Monterey County Office of

See **SCHOOLING** page 19A

Federal law requires a 'free, appropriate public education'

Supes agree on new permit rules for STRs

■ Rentals in C.V., Carmel area will need planning commission approval

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE MONTEREY County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 Tuesday to require the county planning commission to review all short-term rental applications in Carmel Valley, Corral de Tierra and unincorporated parts of Carmel.

The vote comes a month after supervisors were unable to agree on a countywide moratorium on new short-term rental permits until the county completes a set of ordinances to regulate the industry.

According to a county report to the board of supervisors this week, the "transient use" of residential homes "is a significant public policy issue" that "warrants referral of applications for permits" to the planning commission.

Pushed hard

In March, Supervisor Mary Adams pushed hard for a countywide moratorium on short-term rentals, but the vote required the support of at least four supervisors, and Luis Alejo and Chris Lopez signaled their opposition to it, in large part because they didn't want the moratorium hurting

See **RENTALS** page 22A

P.G. housing expert went unpaid for eight months, message shows

By KELLY NIX

THE CONSULTANT who was working on an important housing plan for Pacific Grove before he was suddenly fired in early March said the city was often unresponsive to requests for basic information and failed to pay him for about eight months, according to a message he sent to officials after his termination.

On March 3, city attorney Greg Rubens, at the behest of city manager Ben Harvey, informed David Driskell of Baird + Driskell that the city was terminating its services with the Berkeley-based firm it hired to work on its "housing element," which is supposed to outline the types of new housing needed for the city and where it should be built.

The consultant's firing, which occurred not long before the plan was supposed to be finished, surprised members of the city's planning commission and citizens, several of

See **EXPERT** page 16A

DEM BIGWIGS URGE LOCAL PARTY TO RESTORE ORDER

By KELLY NIX

U.S. REP. Jimmy Panetta and four other elected officials are calling for members of the Monterey County Democratic Central Committee to "work together" after recent infighting has rocked the group.

In an April 11 letter to central committee Chair Karen Araujo and its executive board members, Panetta, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, former Rep. Sam Farr and state senators Anna Caballero and John Laird urged "everyone to work together" to achieve the party's goals.

"The last few weeks have seen heated discussions about the leadership of the Monterey County Democratic Central Committee," the politicians wrote. "We hope that committee members can work together to find a path forward. This letter is not about taking a position in that debate."

The message comes after a March 28 meeting in which former committee chair Vinz Koller outlined numerous

reasons Araujo should be removed from her position, including her alleged lack of fundraising for the group, poor banking and accounting practices, delays in releasing voter guides and candidate endorsements, and arbitrary removals of committee members.

Koller also accused Araujo of causing "division and disharmony" within the group.

'Don't lose sight'

Panetta and the officials referenced many of Koller's concerns and urged the group to address the issues, adding it was their hope that "everyone on the Monterey County Democratic Central Committee will not lose sight of its importance as the local organizing arm for our party's electoral work."

They cited women's rights to abortion, effects of climate change on local farms and neighborhoods, what they

See **DEMS** page 20A

Couple responds to homeless man's plea: 'What I need is a shower.'

By ELAINE HESSER

NICK TORTORELLI says it took three signs to get him and his wife, Sara, on the road to providing mobile showers for homeless people through a newly formed non-profit, Refresh Start.

Nick, a realtor, was in Salinas a few weeks before Christmas 2019, selling a property on Market Street when he inadvertently drove into a neighborhood along the railroad tracks, parts of which are infamously run-down and have become home to hundreds of people living in tents. It was cold, and Tortorelli started thinking about how hard it must be to live outdoors.

Giving out blankets

"I got on Amazon and bought 300 of those emergency blankets — you know, the ones that look like foil," he said. A longtime member of Carmel's Church of the Wayfarer, Tortorelli and the church's then-pastor, Luke Hamm, went

to the tent neighborhood to distribute them.

"One guy came up and said, 'What I really need is a shower,'" Tortorelli remembered. That was his first sign. The second came when he and Hamm took the leftover blankets to Pastor Steve Lundin at First United Methodist Church of Salinas, which provides services to dozens of homeless people each day, including six meals a week.

Tortorelli said that when Hamm asked what other needs the church had, Lundin replied that some of the people who visited for meals could only get access to showers once a month, if that. He wished there was a way to help with that. The conversation moved on to other topics, and Tortorelli went back to work.

Sign No. 3 made it personal, he said, when he and Sara went camping for a week. They hadn't been able to shower during their trip and were excited to get to a campground where they could finally get clean. When they got there,

See **SHOWERS** page 17A



PHOTO/COURTESY REFRESH START

Refresh Start's mobile unit at First United Methodist Church of Salinas, where volunteers coordinate showers for the homeless.

SHOWERS

From page 1A

the bathhouse was out of order. “We felt so defeated and so upset. We got a motel room and took showers — it was the best thing in forever,” he said.

That’s when they decided to find a way to give homeless people more access to hot showers and improved hygiene. The Tortorellis connected with an Alameda-based nonprofit called LavaMae. Its website says it has designed mobile facilities that operate in 89 cities in seven countries and offers consulting, training and support to people who want to provide showers and/or hand-washing stations in their communities.

They located a place that sold mobile showers in Illinois, putting down \$20,000 of their own money to order a three-unit rig in August 2022 and purchase a truck to haul it. It was ready about a month ago. “It was going to cost \$6,000 to deliver it, so I said ‘let’s drive it here,’” offered Tortorelli.

Blizzard, tornado

But this winter’s weather was not ideal for hauling a trailer cross-country. Tortorelli said, “It took us 10 days. We went through a blizzard and just missed a tornado in Iowa. I thought, ‘This is a terrible idea — what did I get myself into? This isn’t going to work. This is so dumb.’” The feeling was temporary, and on reflection, the couple was impressed with the rig’s quality. “It was much nicer than I expected,” he said.

They got home and set up the showers at the Salinas church the next day. A volunteer from First United Methodist took the reins — the couple said they want to work with organizations where volunteers already know the clientele — and, said Tortorelli, “When I saw the first person come out of the shower, it was all worth it.”

The 20-foot trailer comprises three 4-by-6-foot bathrooms with showers, sinks and toilets. The locations where they park provide the water, which is heated on the rig by propane. The trailer also has air conditioning and heat.

Each user gets 15 minutes to wash up, then a volunteer thoroughly cleans and sanitizes the bathroom for the next person. Towels and soap, shampoo, etc. are provided. Two other volunteers, Karyn Heirl and Cathy Garza, take turns doing the laundry. The used water is disposed of at an RV dump site in Salinas.

The Tortorellis moved from Carmel to Toro Park a few years ago, and said they’re grateful that Lopez Liquors

and Fine Wines gives them a secure place to park the bathrooms-on-wheels.

They financed the truck and rig to the tune of about \$125,000 and are seeking donations and grants to pay for them. Sara added, “Our main focus for grants or donations is to be able to have employees that can take the trailer out full time,” since Nick is taking time off from work to drive it around. If you’d like to help, you can visit their website at refreshstart.org.

Sara, a lawyer for the California Department of

See HOMELESS page 28A



PHOTO/COURTESY REFRESH START

(Above) Nick and Sara Tortorelli were inspired to purchase a portable shower trailer with three bathrooms (top) to provide facilities for homeless people who might not otherwise be able to shower. The Tortorellis believe it will improve hygiene, health and self-esteem — and, they hope, create jobs.



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