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John Merchant dies upon return from family vacation

■ Family members keeping details of longtime Calistoga businessman's death private

By Pat Hampton
Tribune Publisher

Resort owner and developer John Merchant, 75, passed away unexpectedly Tuesday after returning from a six-week vacation in Australia, family members confirmed on Wednesday.

Merchant's son, Danny, who worked alongside his father as a project manager at Indian Springs

Resort, said the family had traveled to Australia for the holidays and that his parents had extended their stay after other family members had come home.

Danny Merchant said the family would not be releasing the details surrounding his father's death other than to say he had died from natural causes.

John and Pat Merchant moved to Calistoga in 1988 after they purchased Pacheteau's Baths, the site of Sam Brannan's original resort. They rebuilt it into a luxury retreat and renamed it Indian Springs Resort. About the same time, the Calistoga

Gliderport was also acquired by the Merchants after it had been operated by the Jim Indrebo family for more than a decade. John Merchant closed the gliderport in 1999 because it was financially challenging and regulations on small airports were tightening.

It was the beginning of a contentious time for John Merchant and city leaders who saw a newcomer holding a fair amount of downtown real estate begin pushing for change.

In 2005 after a fire destroyed part

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John Merchant, a local businessman whose family owns Indian Springs Resort and the historic Calistoga Railroad Depot, passed away Monday upon returning from an extended family vacation to Australia. His son told the Tribune on Wednesday that John died of natural causes but declined to give other details of his death.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MERCHANT FAMILY



PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Making room for new growth

Fisher Street resident and master gardener Rachelle Benney prunes – or pollards – the bare branches of one of the large trees in her yard on the last Saturday of December 2019. “We need to take our trees down to the stub once a year,” Benney said. “It’s a lot of work but very satisfying.”

City takes Grant St. property owners off hook for cost of path

■ Residents given options for repairing road, making it safer; asked to weigh in

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

Longtime plans to reconstruct a half-mile section of Grant Street inched forward this week when city officials presented concerned residents with four options for moving ahead with the \$1.3 million project.

The addition of a five-foot wide asphalt pedestrian pathway on the west side of Grant appeared to be made more palatable to property owners when mayor Chris Canning informed them that the city would cover the cost of that installation.

That decision came on the heels of a community meeting last May that riled property owners along the route who, as a condition of their city-approved parcel maps, would be responsible for costs associated with constructing the pedestrian pathway. They argued that some of the so-called deferral agreements were decades old, unclear and unfair. Many contacted lawyers, and the project stalled as the city considered its next move.

On Wednesday, Canning told the 35 to 40 people

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Public hearings next week on liquor license, Crystal Geyser

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

The Calistoga City Council agenda on Tuesday includes a public hearing over allowing an on and off-sale wine and beer license at the Brannan Cottage Inn.

The following night on Wednesday, the Planning Commission will consider use permit and design review applications for the expansion and other improvements at Crystal Geyser Water Company, 501 Washington St.

Planning commissioners will hold a second public hearing on Wednesday to consider recommending to the City

Council that amendments be made to the Infrastructure Element of the General Plan.

Brannan Cottage Inn owners are seeking a “Determination of Public Convenience or Necessity” in order to be able to sell wine and beer to customers of Sam’s General Store, recently opened at the inn offering coffee and natural soda drinks as well as pastries and other snacks.

Public convenience or necessity is a tool for local governments and communities to limit the issuance of new

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Calistoga student Sabrina Wells named Boys & Girls Clubs’ Youth of the Year

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

Calistoga High School junior Sabrina Wells was named the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Helena and Calistoga Youth of the Year last week at a dinner designed to recognize students for their active participation and leadership abilities as club members.

Wells was one of four nominees up for the award. Calistoga senior Fernando Rios, along with St. Helena High School’s Naomi Fernandez, a junior, and Erik

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