

# Calistoga Tribune

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JV TEAMS KEEP BALL IN PLAY

COVID takes out varsity hoops teams but maybe this week

PAGE 8



## City Council names new city manager

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

The Calistoga City Council on Tuesday hired a new city manager, unanimously approving an employment contract that will pay Laura Snideman \$229,800 a year, plus benefits.

Snideman, 52, most recently served as city manager in Richmond for two years. Prior to that she served as city manager in Half Moon Bay from 2010-2014, and as assistant city manager for the city of Fairfield from 2014-2020.

Snideman, who spent part of her youth growing up in St. Helena, was introduced by city attorney Michelle Kenyon during the council's virtual meeting Tuesday night. Snideman, who returned to living in Napa County eight



Laura Snideman

years ago, recalled visiting the Calistoga gliderport, and attending the Napa County Fair and Fourth of July parades when she was young.

"I'm thrilled [to be in Calistoga] for both personal and professional reasons," Snideman told the council. "There are a ton of great things to build on here."

Kenyon said the council

See CITY page 3

## PG&E to convert Calistoga microgrid to 'clean' power

By Pat Hampton

Tribune Publisher

PG&E is soliciting proposals from a third party to build a clean microgrid in Calistoga to provide electricity to its customers during future Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) events.

Plans call for the microgrid to be fully operational by Sept. 1, 2023.

Proposals from outside vendors were due yesterday, and the city will look at them closely for one essential element: No more diesel-fueled generators.

"We're nipping that in the bud right now," mayor Chris Canning told the Tribune. "We've told PG&E from the beginning, no more diesel."

The city already has a pre-installed interconnection hub (PIH) that provides back-up power during PSPS events. It only provides back-up power to the core part of the city, including the downtown area.

PG&E installed the PIH, adjacent to the Little League

Field, at a cost of \$4 million. The above-ground facilities consist of three pad mounted transformers and their switch boxes. Large, portable diesel generators are brought in and connected to in-ground infrastructure when a PSPS is scheduled.

This is the hub that PG&E wants converted to a system that uses a cleaner energy source such as wind, solar, natural gas or geothermal.

Angwin, Calistoga, Placerville and Grass Valley are all part of PG&E's effort to build a network of "resilience zones" and temporary microgrids in portions of its service territory that are especially vulnerable to fire-related outages.

Installation of the PIH is PG&E's solution to keeping the lights on in most of Calistoga if the company must de-energize transmission lines that cross high-risk fire zones to carry electricity to the city.

See PG&E page 3



PHOTOS BY KIM BELTRAN

### Hazard Mitigation

Calistoga Fire and Public Works crews on Wednesday began burning a pile of forest debris near the city's corp yard on the Washington Street bike path. Fire Chief Steve Campbell said the debris, cleared by city crews, came from a four-acre parcel above the Pioneer Cemetery on Foothill Boulevard. A similar burn will take place likely next week, said Campbell, of debris cleared around the city's Kimball Dam and Lake Ghisolfo reservoir. Campbell said this should serve as a reminder to Calistoga residents who live on wooded property that they have a responsibility to clear potential fire hazards as well. Questions? Call the fire department at 942-2822.



## Omicron surge worsens teacher shortage, closing some schools and hampering learning in others

### Calistoga school district reports having adequate staffing levels but a big increase in student absences

By Joe Hong

CalMatters.org

Tribune Editor Kim Beltran contributed to this report.

Last week at Simi Valley Unified School District, northwest of Los Angeles, there were only enough substitutes to cover about half the teachers who stayed at home after testing positive for COVID-19.

"It's untenable," Superintendent Jason Peplinski said last week. "It is so bad."

The good news is that public health experts across California expect the omicron surge to be over by March. But the consequences of the highly transmissible variant and the acute school staffing crisis it has caused could long outlast the spike in case numbers. The teacher shortages and unprecedented absenteeism are disrupting learning, extending the long-term academic fallout of COVID-19.

"But what's a teacher to do when she has half of her class gone?" Peplinski said. "Do you just keep teaching long division and hope the class will catch up?"

COVID-19 infection rates among students and staff are at all-time highs at many school districts. At Simi Valley Unified, positivity rates among students went from below 1% to 6.5% in the past month. Just in the past two weeks at school districts across California, the numbers of positive COVID-19 cases have tripled over what they were before omicron.

That's true at Calistoga Joint Unified School District, according to director of educational services and human resources Michael DeFrancesco, who reported this week that the district has had 120 positive COVID-19 cases since students returned to class from winter break on Jan. 10.

"In addition to the students who are positive for COVID-19, their siblings who live in the home are also required to quarantine," DeFrancesco said. "The result has been an increase in the absence rate from the average of 5% to approximately 19% per month."

Monica Gandhi, a professor of medicine at UC San Francisco, said public health experts expect that the number of omicron cases will taper off in a month. "We're all praying everything gets better by the end of February," she said. "That's the hope."

Until then, schools will need to endure previously unimaginable staff and student absences.

Teacher shortages plagued California even before 2020. The pandemic amplified the shortage, and omicron brought it to a breaking point.

In 2021, K-12 schools accounted for about 18% of workplace outbreaks in California. Schools outpaced health care

See SHORTAGE page 7