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COURTSIDE

Wildcats welcome Christian Caldera back onto basketball court.

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COURTESY PHOTO

A group of women calling themselves Pool Pals enjoy a few afternoon hours at the Calistoga Motor Lodge, one of the only spas left in town that offered pool memberships to locals. The program ended January 1, leaving the group without hot mineral water for exercise and health benefits.

Pool Pals left high and dry looking for place to swim in mineral waters

■ Locals mourn loss of pool membership program at popular Calistoga Motor Lodge

By Anne Ward Ernst

For the Tribune

Even before the 2017 grand opening of the Calistoga Motor Lodge, locals were swimming in its pools thanks to a generous offer of an affordable membership by the owners and operators of the motel. But that membership program has been canceled, leaving locals with no year-round place to swim as close by or as affordable.

"It was a screaming deal," said Ramona Asmus, who was among the first Calistoga residents to take advantage of the offer at Calistoga Motor Lodge.

Membership prices at the motel's pools started at \$900 for 12 months for year-round use of the three pools, plus discounts at the restaurant and lodging, Asmus said. The cost crept up over the years, but it was still less expensive than any other option in town

and had adult swim times as well as lap swimming and shallow areas for those doing water aerobics or therapeutic exercises.

No explanation was given to members for why the membership will not be renewed, and Calistoga's community pool doesn't reopen until April. Some members were informed by motel staff, others learned about it from a notice posted at the registration desk.

Yvonne Henry, another of the original members, said the owners were "very upfront about why" they made the cost so reasonable. They needed the money, Henry said, and they wanted to be involved in the community and give "access to mineral spa water" to the locals.

"This was our solace. It was where we went for our therapy," she said.

Jeannie Baswell said that most of the members are "retired and on a fixed income" and use the pool for fitness and health purposes.

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\$31B surplus hints of new round of stimulus checks

■ Newsom pledges \$350 M to stop organized retail thefts

By Emily Hoeven

CalMatters

Compared to the \$76 billion surplus from 2021, California is projecting a \$31 billion surplus in the general fund in 2022, plus \$20 billion in Proposition 98 funding for education.

The windfall is fueled, like last year, with tax revenue and federal funds. In addition, the November cap-and-trade auction generated \$732 million, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office.

In his budget proposal that is due by Jan. 10, Gov. Gavin Newsom has vowed to include more than \$350 million to stop organized retail thefts, plus more money for dyslexia programs after authoring a children's book on his own battles. He's also hinted that he'll include another round of stimulus checks.

Remember the Golden State stimulus checks? Well, more might be landing in your bank account in the near future.

That's because California is — once again — overflowing with money, and will likely have a \$31 billion budget surplus next year, according to a Wednesday report from the independent Legislative Analyst's Office. And because the state is forbidden from spending more tax dollars per Californian than it did in 1978, once adjusted for inflation, it only has a few options for handling most of the cash windfall: slashing taxes; issuing tax rebates; funneling it to schools and community colleges; or earmarking it for certain purposes,

such as infrastructure.

While touring the backlogged Los Angeles and Long Beach ports on Wednesday, Newsom said he plans to "substantially increase our one-time investments in infrastructure" in the budget proposal he'll send to state lawmakers in January. He also suggested that another round — or two — of stimulus checks could be on the way.

Newsom and state lawmakers agreed on a record-breaking \$262.6 billion spending plan for the fiscal year that began July 1, which included \$12 billion in stimulus payments and unprecedented investments in education, homelessness and the environment. On Wednesday, Newsom unveiled the first 18 projects that will receive funding from the \$6 billion broadband package.

Much of the extra revenue came from one-time funding sources, which helps explain why many California schools are still facing yawning budget deficits. However, the Legislative Analyst's Office predicts that California can afford to increase its annual expenses by \$3 billion to \$8 billion through the 2025-26 fiscal year — a prospect that didn't appear to sit well with Republicans.

"There's something wrong when the state is flush with extra cash — \$750 for every man, woman and child — while ordinary people have to choose between putting food on the table and filling their gas tank," said Assembly Republican leader Marie Waldron.

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, there are several main reasons why California is

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Last vestiges of holidays trucked away to new homes

By Pat Hampton

Tribune Publisher

Wednesday morning Mike Swanton and Steve Patel began removing the last vestiges of downtown holiday decorations with a truck and strong friends.

Fifty live, year-old Western Red Cedar trees used to decorate Lincoln Avenue last month during the holidays were picked up and moved to the back of the Calistoga Spa Hot Springs for pick-up by people who needed trees to replace any they had lost in recent

wildfires.

Swanton, who caretakes the trees at Laura Michaels winery until it's time to set them out on the town's main street where they are strung with lights and baubles, said two trees were absconded, leaving 48 needing new homes this year.

He put the word out that the trees would be free to those who needed to replant burned areas. The trees, now at 6-7 feet tall, will grow to 40-60 feet, he said. "They're super healthy," Swanton said. "They're nice trees that need a good, healthy place to go."

During Swanton's care, the trees get regular water and fertilizer so that they are healthy when it's time to decorate downtown. All of that tree TLC though does make the trees a bit root-bound, Swanton said, and that's why he gets a new batch of trees every year from the Urban Tree Farm in Fulton, Sonoma County.

Vintner Tom Eddy at Tom Eddy Winery at the Napa-Sonoma county line is taking five of the Giant Green cedars. Phifer-Pavitt winery on the Silverado Trail lost 23 acres of trees and shrubs to fire, Swanton said, and is picking up 20 trees.