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Councilwoman named to 2020 statewide Latina leadership cohort

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

Sometimes, in order to lead, you first have to follow, and that's just what Irais Lopez-Ortega did when she stepped up to fill a vacancy on the Calistoga City Council in 2012.

But it wasn't another person who showed her the way – it was her own instinct and love for the community she has called home for 20 years that propelled her to a leadership role.

"When I first got onto the City Council, I had not idea what I was getting into," Lopez-Ortega said this week. "I just did it from my heart."

Seven years later, she is still driven by that inner moxie that compels her to continually seek out information and resources that can help her help make life better for the residents of Calistoga.

Her latest endeavor toward that goal is being named one of 26 members of the HOPE Leadership Institute's class of 2020. HOPE, or Hispanas Organized for Political

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PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Calistoga City Councilwoman Irais Lopez-Ortega, who owns and operates two senior assisted living centers in town, continually takes advantage of the many learning opportunities available to local government officials in order, as she said this week, "to be an informed leader and serve Calistoga better."

Mental health unit at St. Helena Hospital to close in summer

By Pat Hampton
Tribune Publisher

On the heels of the sudden closing of its Family Birth Unit earlier this month, Adventist Health officials announced late last week that the mental health and senior behavioral health wards at St. Helena Hospital will close on July 14.

Shuttering the 24-bed mental health facility will affect 105 full-time, part-time and per diem employees, many from the upvalley communities.

"Adventist Health spent considerable time and effort looking at multiple scenarios and it was determined that this was the best course of action," Dr. Steven Herber, president of Adventist Health St. Helena, said in a statement released Jan. 17. Herber, who is a plastic surgeon with an office in Napa, was on vacation out of the country this week when the Tribune called

for additional information.

Seventeen employees lost their jobs when the Family Birth Unit closed on Jan. 11. Herber said in recent years there had been a steady decline in births at St. Helena Hospital. The lower volume levels are far below the requirements needed to sustain the unit, he said last month.

Jeff Eller, president and CEO of Northern California Adventist Health System/West, responded to questions from the Tribune through hospital spokesperson Jill Kinney via email.

"The hospital is not closing. We are simply looking at the efficiency of our operations to ensure our services meet the community's needs," Eller stated. Asked if any other unit or services would be closed, he said none at this time. "That said," he contin-

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Planning Commission OKs apartment rebuild, Crystal Geyser expansion

By Pat Hampton
Tribune Publisher

Crystal Geyser Water Company seemed to be in a bit of hot water with the Planning Commission Wednesday when officials appeared for a use permit and design review hearing to expand its plant at 501 Washington St.

The water company owns two parcels, the 1.8-acre site that is home to the bottling operation since it was built in 1978, and a larger, undeveloped five-acre property next door now primarily used for parking and storage. In 1985, Crystal Geyser received approval to quadruple the size of the then 6,000-square foot facility to nearly 27,000 square feet, its current size today.

The company now wants to add two new buildings on the original parcel. A 5,700-square foot addition facing Washington Street will include space for a new bottle-molding equipment room, and a 3,100-square foot addition at the back-side of the plant would pro-

vide more storage space and a maintenance shop.

As part of the project, most of the existing outdoor tanks and equipment along Washington Street would be relocated to space along Camp Drive (a short roadway just northwest of the facility) and screened by a 10-foot high fence and evergreen landscaping.

The fencing and landscape components drew the most attention from commissioners, especially vice chair Tim Wilkes who said his biggest concern was, "Is it going to be finished?" Wilkes told Rex Ramsey, architect for VR Design, Inc. of San Ramon that "You start things and you don't finish." He pointed out an outdoor shed had been erected at the site with electrical service without a city permit or inspection. It was still unpermitted although assurances had been given by the water company that it would be brought into compliance. Wilkes also wanted assurances that the proposed redwood fencing that

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PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Greek salad

Longtime Calistoga resident Steve Calligeros harvests dandelions from a vacant lot near downtown Calistoga on Wednesday. "I'm Greek. Where I come from, we eat these," he said. "I eat the leaves in a salad, but let me tell you a story. One time, I had a terrible sore throat and I ate one of these stems. Within a few minutes, my throat was perfect."

Citizen group driving petition for enhanced traffic enforcing

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

A small group of Calistoga residents is circulating a petition asking the City Council and its Police Department to step up enforcement of traffic laws.

Residents Erika Pusey and Michael Straka announced their plan during the public comment section of Tuesday night's City Council meeting.

Pusey told council members that a group of about eight residents had been meeting to discuss their concerns about drivers violating traffic laws on Calistoga's residential streets. They drew up a petition, which they planned to begin circulating this week, calling for "strict enforcement" of all traffic laws.

"Our goal is not punishment," Pusey told the Council. "Our goal is deeply rooted in safety and quality of life issues."

After reading the petition lan-

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