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**Grady Wilburn:**  
**The rest of**  
**the story**  
See Page 4

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# The Madera Tribune

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Madera Old Timers Day 2023 King and Queen Nadine and Steve King, center, and Grand Marshal Jim Bryan are recognized during a Madera County Board of Supervisor's meeting.

## Fraud at local charter school: Wrapping it up

By Bill Coate  
THE MADERA TRIBUNE

A full accounting of the alleged fraud by Nicholas Retana, former Executive Director of the ETAA Charter School, in the amount of \$1,062,590.49, is impossible to report in a single issue of the Tribune.

The Tribune has repeated items from remarks given by Cecelia Massetti, Madera County Superintendent of Schools, which were themselves taken from FCMAT, a highly-respected state investigative agency. Interested parties can read the full FCMAT audit for themselves by logging on to <https://www.fcmat.org/fcma-reports>.

The Tribune will conclude this series on school funds' fraud with money spent on trips that had no stated legitimate, educational purpose. It will also expose costly episodes of nepotism.

Between the dates of Jan. 19, 2016, and Nov. 12, 2019, 122 travel trips were paid for with Retana's debit or school credit cards.

In discussing these trips with Retana, which included travel to places such as San Antonio, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Austin, and El Paso, FCMAT found trips that lacked a clear, educational purpose and were paid for by using ETAA funds totaling \$22,708.77.

For instance, Retana claimed the trip to El Paso was to look at buildings that would inspire him and give him inspiration for buildings at the charter location in Madera. To date, that inspiration has not been productive.

While school funds were being spent on questionable trips, thousands of dollars were taken from ETAA coffers to ostensibly

**SEE FRAUD, PAGE 3**

## A DAY FIT FOR KINGS

Steve, Nadine King named Old Timer's Day Parade royalty

By Tyler A. Takeda  
THE MADERA TRIBUNE

For many years, Steve King worked with the Sunrise Rotary to help with the Old Timer's Day Parade. Whether it was heading to the parade route a few days before or just organizing the parade, King has been there.

Now, it's the other way around for King. Instead of watching the parade from the back and watching it go off, King, with his wife, Nadine, will be at the front of the parade as the Old Timer's Day King and Queen.

"I think it's a big honor

to be the King and Queen of the parade," Steve said. "I've been a part of the parade with Sunrise Rotary. The last four years, we helped line the parade out. We will go out Wednesday morning and paint the street with the numbers for people to line-up. I've been in the parade many times and go way back. The day of the parade, the Rotary will have guys down there and line them up. We point them in the right direction. The Interact kids help. We all pitch in and help. It's not just me, but everybody."

"It's an honor ... for him. He's enjoying this immensely, and that's fine," Nadine said.

Old Timer's Day in the Park begins at 8 a.m. with informational and food booths in Courthouse Park. The parade will begin at 10 a.m. and end at Courthouse Park. The booths will be open until about 3 p.m.

The Kings, along with Grand Marshal Jim Bryan, will be honored Friday night at the Old Timer's Day Dinner/Dance at the Madera Elk's Lodge, beginning at 6 p.m. Steve, Nadine and Jim

will officially be crowned at the dinner.

When Steve first found out about the honor, he wasn't sure he was going to be around for the parade. However, the powers that be made sure he would be in town for it.

"Chris Miller called me and asked if we could be the King and Queen of the parade," Steve said. "I told him we couldn't do it because we were going on a trip with the Chamber and we wouldn't be back in time for the dinner and parade. He said they'll

**SEE KINGS, PAGE 2**

## World Champion boxer and Olympian visits Mt. Vista

FOR THE MADERA TRIBUNE

Former Light Welterweight Champion Jose Ramirez visited Mountain Vista Continuation High School to share his inspiring story with students on Tuesday.

Ramirez talked about his humble beginnings as an at-risk student from a farm-working family and how he overcame adversity both in the classroom by attending college and in the sport of boxing. Ramirez's visit aims to inspire students to overcome their own challenges and pursue their dreams.

Ramirez held the WBC title from 2018 to May 2021 and the WBO title from 2019 to May 2021. As an amateur, he was the number one rated WBC lightweight boxer in the United States and represented the U.S. at the 2012 London Olympics.

FOR THE MADERA TRIBUNE  
Alexsa Santos, a student at Mountain Vista, holds an autographed poster of Jose Ramirez she won in a raffle during Ramirez's visit Tuesday.



FOR THE MADERA TRIBUNE

Madera County Treasurer-Tax Collector, Tracy Kennedy announced that more than 61,000 secured property tax bills have been mailed to the names of the property owners shown on the most recent tax roll.

These secured tax bills represent more than \$254 million dollars in property taxes that are due and payable to the Madera County Tax Collector.

"For taxpayers that are behind on their annual billings, the California Mortgage Relief (CALHFA)

you financially by paying your delinquency balance in full," Kennedy said. "You can see if you have any delinquent taxes on the top right corner of your tax bill under the important messages section."

The first installment of the 2023-2024 secured property tax bill is due and payable on November 1, and will become delinquent if not paid by December 11. The second installment is due and payable on Feb. 1, 2024, and will become delinquent if not paid by April 10, 2024.

"We strongly encourage program can assist

**SEE BILLS, PAGE 3**

## 'SPECTACULATHON' OPENS

WENDY ALEXANDER/THE MADERA TRIBUNE  
Evanny Rodriguez, left, and Cheyenne Espinoza are narrators for the Torres Theatre Company's production of "The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon," that opened on Thursday and runs Sept. 30 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., Oct. 1 at 2 p.m., Oct. 5-7 at 7 p.m. at the Torres High School Theatre. For more photos, see Page 5.



## TORRES HIGH HOSTS CARNIVAL



Desmond Middle School cheerleaders perform during a community carnival at Torres High School Wednesday evening. For more photos, see Page 3.



**Weather Forecast**  
Sunny  
High 83 Low 56  
See Weather, Page 2

**INDEX**  
Classifieds..... 10  
Crossword..... 7  
Features..... 12

Sports..... 4  
Opinion..... 6

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## MATILDA TORRES HIGH SCHOOL CARNIVAL

WENDY ALEXANDER/THE MADERA TRIBUNE  
Katelyn Tamperi plays a shooting gallery game with a NERF gun during a carnival at Torres High School



WENDY ALEXANDER/THE MADERA TRIBUNE  
From left, Andres Contreras, Ami Garcia and Carlos Ramirez take a turn at the 360 Photo booth during the community carnival at Torres High School Wednesday evening.



WENDY ALEXANDER/THE MADERA TRIBUNE  
Mia Camacho gets her face painted by Rihanna Aguilar of Class of 2025 during the Torres High community carnival.

### Report

Continued from Page 2

after the closure of the bridge along Avenue 18 1/2 for safety reasons. The residents described a road containing multiple significant potholes, uneven driving surfaces, and a decaying, narrowing road suffering from neglected proper maintenance, and expressed their concern for the safety of the Dairyland School District children who travel the road daily along with others who have come to rely on Avenue 21 for their commute.

Understanding funding shortfalls and the prioritization of maintaining arterial

roads, residents asked the board to consider the children's safety and re-examine the prioritization in hopes of allocating funds to address the avenue, describing the safety of the children as everyone's responsibility.

After acknowledging the voiced concerns, the board took time to recognize the week of September 25-30 as Old Timers week, now in its 92nd year as the city prepares for the traditional annual festivities which include a parade, and recognized the generous support of the Sunrise Rotary Club, and major contributions from Caglia Environmental.

The supervisors also recognized the month of Sep-

tember as national alcohol and drug addiction recovery month, a time in which they examine and understand the effectiveness of addiction treatment, the nature of addiction and the recovery process.

Madera County Director of Behavioral Health Connie Moreno-Paraza introduced Melchizedek Santos, who shared his experience and road to recovery as a testimony of success since his journey began with the Teen Challenge Program in June 2021.

Members of the board applauded Santos and the turnaround, and recognized the hard work and dedication of others in the recovery process as well as the individuals dedicated to that process.

Wrapping up this week's meeting, Madera County Ag Commissioner, Rusty Lantsberger, gave a presentation of the 2022 Madera County crop and livestock report. The statistical report is compiled annually in accordance with section 2272 and 2279 of the California food and agricultural code and contains data on acreage yield and values of commodities in Madera

County. Representing a gross value, the figures do not represent net income or loss to producers.

The report, Lantsberger disclosed the 2022 gross value production of Madera County to be \$1.993 billion, a decrease of \$555 million or 2.69 percent from the previous year.

Lantsberger described little change in the leading crops from last year, almonds, nuts, pistachios, milk, mandarins, tangerines all remaining in place while figs fell out of the top 10 this year.

Field crops experienced a 33.5 percent increase in yield, while nut crops dropped 15.8 percent. Livestock and poultry increased 15.3 percent, their products increased 33.5 percent while vegetable crops increased 99.3 percent over last year. Lantsberger also noted a reduction in harvestable acres in Madera County by about 6,400 acres.

A full copy of the report is available at the department website for at [www.maderacounty.com/government/agricultural-commissioner-weights-and-measures](http://www.maderacounty.com/government/agricultural-commissioner-weights-and-measures) for viewing.

### Fraud

Continued from Page 1

protect school property. As it turned out, Retana's sons appear to have been the beneficiaries of the protection plan.

In 2014, one of Retana's sons was hired as a custodian, and later to night security. In this latter job, he was provided with a vehicle, and later a Ford F-150 Raptor pickup truck. No explanation was given as to why a premium, high-performance off-road vehicle was necessary to secure a single school, sitting on eight acres of land. The vehicles were not kept at the school, and no one except the son drove them.

What was more perplexing, however, was the fact that the son was issued a fuel card, and it was often

used several times on the same day. For instance, on June 7, 2017, the son's fuel card was used to purchase 23.7 gallons of fuel at 8:48 p.m., and an additional 17.8 gallons eight minutes later. Both purchases were made in Fresno.

And so the list continues, impropriety to impropriety, raising eyebrows all over the state. Massetti was required to notify the ETAA governing board, the MUSD governing board, the State Controller, the State Superintendent Of Public Instruction, and the local District Attorney that "sufficient evidence exists that fraud, misappropriation of funds or assets and other illegal use of public funds may have occurred..."

...  
*This may be the end of this series but it surely isn't the end of the story.*

### Bills

Continued from Page 1

age taxpayers to pay by E-Check," read a statement by the Madera County Tax Collector's office. "If paid by this method your payment is posted directly to

our property tax system in real time and you can print a receipt for your records."

Revenue and Taxation Code §2610.5 states that not receiving a property tax bill does not relieve you from your responsibility to pay it on time.

### JEFFREY LEE GARNER

1957 - 2023

Jeffrey Lee Garner passed away on Monday, Sept. 4, 2023, at the age of 66, from traumatic injuries suffered in a Hit-&-Run traffic collision. Born Nov. 2, 1957, to his father and mother, Frank and Barbara (Lucckesi) Garner of Madera, Jeff was a lifelong resident of his hometown. He attended James Madison and St. Joachim Schools, and was a 1977 graduate of Madera High School, where he learned the welding trade and went on to become an accomplished, professional welder.

Jeff was preceded in death by his grandparents, Addie and Alma Lucckesi, and Everett and Beula Mae Garner, and his parents Frank and Barbara. He is survived by his brothers Greg and Jon Garner of Fresno, sister Kellie Garner of San Jose, CA, and his daughter Nikki Garner of Madera. Additionally, Jeffrey is survived by his grandson Gavin Speed of Madera, his uncle Richard Lucckesi of Madera, and numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins. No funeral services are planned at this time.

### Obituaries

#### RAYNALDO A. SOSA AUG. 20, 1936- SEPT. 24, 2023

Ray Passed away peacefully on September 24, he was 87 years old. Born Aug. 20, 1936, in Cheraw, CO, to Clemente and Rachel Sosa. He was the seventh of 10 children.



Ray Married Christine Clarich on Nov. 24, 1975. Together they had three daughters, Laura Galleano, Andrea Sosa and Robin Sosa. Two granddaughters: Megan Galleano and Katelan Galleano. He is predeceased by his daughter Andrea.

Ray came with his family to California in December 1943, to work in the fields. He went to schools in East Los Angeles, graduating from Lincoln High School in 1954. He attended East LA city College to study computers and programming.

In 1960, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He served in communications at Fort Ord, CA, then Fort Lewis, WA, and, finally, in Germany. He served for two years, one month, 29 days, four hours and 15 minutes.

He was employed by Western Electric, Pacific Telephone Co., AT&T for 38 years. He retired from AT&T in 1994.

Ray relocated his family from South Pasadena to Madera in 1979. He took great joy in coaching his daughters in Bobby Sox softball for some 20 years in Madera, touching many lives. He later coached high school softball at San Joaquin Memorial, Hoover High, and Liberty Madera Ranchos, as well as travel softball.

He was a strong supporter of Fresno State Bulldogs Softball. He and his wife have followed the team for many years.

In lieu of flowers, Ray requests donations to Hinds Hospice Home in Fresno @ [www.hindshospice.org](http://www.hindshospice.org).

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**THE NUN II - R-**  
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THU 7:00  
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THU-FRI 4:00-7:00  
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**MEG 2: THE TRENCH - PG13-**  
THU-FRI 4:30-7:00  
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THU-FRI 4:30-7:00  
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**Editorial**  
Newsroom: (559) 674-8134  
Tyler Takeda - Sports Editor  
[tylert@maderatribune.net](mailto:tylert@maderatribune.net)  
Tami Jo Nix - Sr. Staff Writer  
[tamijonix@gmail.com](mailto:tamijonix@gmail.com)  
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**Circulation**  
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**Ad Services**  
Shirley James  
[sjames@maderatribune.net](mailto:sjames@maderatribune.net)

**Office Staff**  
Business Office: (559) 674-2424  
Christy Lopez - Administrative Assistant  
[christyl@maderatribune.net](mailto:christyl@maderatribune.net)

**Legals**  
[legals@maderatribune.net](mailto:legals@maderatribune.net)

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