

THE UNION

WEEKENDER



SPOTLIGHT
Ceramics, firing of kiln
returns to Woolman
LIFESTYLES | B1

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ELIAS FUNEZ/EFUNEZ@THEUNION.COM

Supporters of Nevada City's trees stand near and sit in one of the city's heritage trees slated to be cut by PG&E contractors at Broad and Bennett streets Friday afternoon while tree cutters work on a neighboring tree.

Court rules tree cutting can continue

By John Orona
Staff Writer

A court ruling Friday gave PG&E the green light to continue cutting more than 260 trees in downtown Nevada City, but activists say they aren't ready to give up the fight. Nevada County Superior Court Judge Thomas Anderson found the California Public Utilities Commission has sole jurisdiction over the utility company's vegetation management plan,

voiding a previous ruling that stayed the tree cutting until a hearing in which PG&E could establish its actions were authorized. "This Court does not have subject matter jurisdiction to adjudicate Petitioners' claim that PG&E's abatement of hazardous trees is excessive," the ruling granting PG&E's motion to dismiss states. According to the ruling, an evidentiary hearing involving the other defendants — PG&E contractor Mountain Enterprises and

Nevada City — will move forward Nov. 6. The California Public Utilities Commission this week also submitted a brief in support of PG&E's position. The commission's decision to weigh in comes after state Sen. Brian Dahle and District 2 Assemblyman Jim Wood penned a letter to the agency accusing them of shirking their responsibility to mitigate the company's fire danger. "However, in our estimation, the CPUC has often

fallen short in its partnering role in mitigating wildfire risk by remaining silent on state and local actions that are interfering with utility wildfire mitigation efforts and vegetation management programs," the letter states. "The CPUC has exclusive jurisdiction over these utility vegetation management programs, yet time and again avoids exercising its role and authority enforcing the law."

CUTTING, A9

Murder suspect held without bond

The Union staff

Officers on Friday remained on the scene of a South County homicide that left one man dead after he was stabbed, authorities said.

Michael Raymond Stine, 60, of Grass Valley, faces a murder charge in connection with the death of Shelby Comeaux II, 48, said Andrew Trygg, spokesman for the Nevada County Sheriff's Office, in a press release. Stine remained held Friday without bond, jail records state.

According to the release, deputies took Stine into custody after responding after 10 p.m. Thursday to reports of a stabbing in the 14000 block of Garden Bar Road.

"Deputies responded and arrived to find a male in his late forties suffering from what was believed to be penetrating sharp force



Michael Raymond Stine

wounds," the release states. "Two other males on the scene were quickly detained."

Deputies used first aid on Comeaux, who was later pronounced dead at the scene, reports state. Authorities say they took the two detained men to the Sheriff's Office for questioning. Deputies released one of the men afterward. The other, Stine, was arrested on a murder charge, the release states. The state Department of Justice remained on the scene Friday. "The scene is still very active," Trygg said that day. Comeaux's death is the third homicide in unincorporated Nevada County this year, Trygg said.



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CHP officers conduct their investigation into Thursday's head-on vehicle collision on Highway 49 involving Grass Valley police officer John Herrera and Patrick Grady. Grady was driving a stolen vehicle. Herrera was taken to Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, but was not seriously injured.

Officer recovering after head-on collision

By Victoria Penate
Staff Writer

Patrick Grady, 37, remained in custody Friday after authorities say he evaded officers for four hours and ultimately collided head-on with a Grass Valley police vehicle as he tried to flee.

Officer John Herrera — a

Grass Valley police officer since 2003 who serves as the department's downtown and parks officer — sustained "very minor injuries" in the Thursday crash. He was taken to Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital as a precaution, and after being released the same evening

GRADY, A7

COVID compliance complaint? *There's an app for that*

By Victoria Penate
Staff Writer

Nevada County Environmental Health has received several complaints from residents regarding businesses hosting large gatherings, some related to weddings, officials said. When a complaint is made, county staff determine

whether the location of the relevant event falls within an incorporated or unincorporated jurisdiction of the county. If incorporated, the complaint is referred to city or town representatives — police contacts in the case of Grass Valley and Nevada City. "If it is in the unincorporated area of the county,

our staff follow up with the property (or) event owner," County Administrative Analyst Taylor Wolfe said in an email. "Proof is not required, but any information they have is helpful, such as an invitation, social media post, or other documentation regarding the event. This helps our staff have a more direct conversation with

the property owner or event organizer." She said the county has followed up on every complaint received.

"We encourage the public to use the AskNevadaCounty system — at www.mynevadacounty.com/asknevco — to submit complaints," Wolfe

COMPLAINT, A9

WEATHER

H: 66°
L: 49°



See full forecast, Page A11

Mostly Cloudy

OBITUARIES

Carolyn Twing
Mary Booth

Page A7

COVID-19 cases rise by 5

The county's total coronavirus case number reached 562 on Friday, a rise of five from the prior day. Western county had 351 cases, and eastern county had 211. There were 18 active cases on Friday, no change from the day before. There have been 536 people released from isolation, and eight deaths. Cases have continued to climb in the county, though they've slowed recently.

There were 463 on Sept. 8. That rose to 496 on Sept. 15, and 525 on Sept. 22. There were 541 on Sept. 29. One person was hospitalized locally Friday with COVID-19. Of the 20,735 tests performed locally, 2.7% of people have tested positive. Nationwide, there were 7,583,200 total cases, and 212,111 deaths, the CDC states. — The Union staff

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STATE & FROM PAGE ONE

Cal Fire investigators seize utility equipment

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Fire investigators looking into what caused a wildfire that killed four people in far Northern California have taken possession of equipment belonging to Pacific Gas and Electric, the utility reported Friday.

PG&E said in a filing with the Public Utilities Commission that investigators with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection seized some of its electrical equipment near where the Zogg Fire started Sept. 27.

The fire erupted in

Shasta County during high winds and quickly grew, killing four people in the tiny community of Igo. It later spread to neighboring Tehama County. As of Friday it had scorched 88 square miles and destroyed more than 200 buildings, about half of them homes. It was almost fully contained Friday.

The utility said it does not have access to the evidence collected by Cal Fire, which has yet to determine a cause for the fire.

It added that the area where the fire started is served by a PG&E distribution line that reported

trouble the day the blaze ignited.

Customers in the area where the fire started, near Zogg Mine Road and Jenny Bird Lane north of Igo, are served by a 12,000-volt circuit. On the day the Zogg Fire began its automated equipment in the area “reported alarms and other activity between approximately 2:40 p.m. and 3:06 p.m.,” PG&E told regulators. The line was then de-activated.

PG&E, the nation’s largest utility, recently emerged from bankruptcy caused by financial fallout from several devastating

wildfires caused by its utility equipment that destroyed more than 27,000 homes and other buildings in 2017 and 2018 and killed more than 100 people.

PG&E said in a statement that it is cooperating with the investigation.

“We recognize the tragic losses sustained as a result of this year’s fire season and are thankful, as always, for the efforts of the first responders who have worked tirelessly to contain the fires and protect the lives and property of California residents,” the statement said.

CUTTING

From page A1

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Activists for community group Save Nevada County Trees said they will continue their struggle despite the ruling, with some even willing to face arrest.

“Year after year after they’ve been trimmed, now all of a sudden this year they’re all hazardous trees?” said Orchard Street resident Tom Dykstra, who has several trees on his property marked for removal. “I really hope that other neighborhoods hear about this and find ways to not have this happen to them.”

Dykstra said while initially resigned to losing his trees, seeing the community rally in support — offering to defend his property and replant the

trees — has activated and emboldened him.

“That’s really why I’m willing to go to jail,” he said. “I was pretty passive originally, once they said we have the right to do this, I felt like I couldn’t do anything against this big corporation... I was really depressed.”

Last Friday, while the temporary stay was still in effect, the group provided Nevada City and PG&E a list of 16 trees they were contesting, agreeing to let the others go.

“We’re not protesting that removal of every single one of these trees. We’re protesting a very small amount, and PG&E doesn’t have any room for that,” Orchard Street resident Kathy Dotson said.

To contact Staff Writer John Orona, email jorona@theunion.com or call 530-477-4229.

COMPLAINT

From page A1

said.

According to Nevada County building director Craig Griesbach, complaints of this nature are sometimes received informally at the county level, and the resident making the complaint is asked to officially submit through the designated app. He said, at times, this does not end up occurring, and local authorities will then not necessarily receive the complaint.

Nevada City authorities said Friday that they have not received any complaints of businesses hosting large gatherings for “quite some time.”

“So far, education has been an effective tool to assist these businesses better understand the COVID

guidelines and adjust their plans accordingly,” said Wolfe. “Regarding weddings, ceremonies are allowed under the Places of Worship state guidance, but wedding receptions are not allowed.”

OPERATING WITHIN GUIDELINES

According to Griesbach, the county has received some complaints about large gatherings hosted by businesses and found the businesses to be operating within health guidelines.

Griesbach said this has been the case with Harmony Ridge Lodge, which has hosted wedding ceremonies, and what Harmony Ridge owner Yen Kang Liu described Thursday as small gatherings, but not wedding receptions, afterward.

Liu said about half of the weddings originally

scheduled to be held at Harmony Lodge this season have been rescheduled or cancelled, while the other half were held on their originally planned date.

“Our staff have followed up with Harmony Ridge several times since the beginning of the summer,” said Griesbach, adding that the lodge showed contracts and plans each time, which showed events would meet county health guidelines.

On the distinction between a business operating within their industry guidelines and what would be considered a wedding reception, Griesbach said, “It’s a hard one to enforce,” explaining that if hotels are following guidance on hosting gatherings of hotel guests, even if these guests invite others who are not staying the night, they may still be in compliance

when hosting gatherings following wedding ceremonies.

EVOLUTION

Jonathan Rowe, owner of The Stone House, said Friday that he believes there has been some misunderstanding in the community regarding whether Stone House events have been operating within county guidelines, adding that staff have worked closely with the county to ensure the applicable guidelines are met.

Concerning the restaurant and event venue’s adjustments in operations as guidelines have evolved, Stone House events and facilities manager Jacob Van Dutton said, “It’s less that (the county) is OK with what we’re doing, and more that we are 100% following what they’re OK with.”

Gayle Klein, Stone House

vice president of sales and marketing, said they are hosting wedding ceremonies, as permitted by state health guidelines, and then offering dinner services afterward, which have generally consisted of between 20 and 40 guests.

She said these are not considered wedding receptions — which health guidelines currently do not permit — and the dinners have been adjusted to reflect restaurant guidelines. They have been outdoors, tables have been reconfigured to allow more distanced seating, and all dinner service is plated rather than buffet-style for the time being, according to Klein.

Klein said approximately half of the weddings originally scheduled for this fall were rescheduled, while the other half have adjusted their

guest count to meet current restrictions and been held on their originally planned date. She said not many have been cancelled.

Rowe estimated that, according to the 50% indoor seating capacity currently permitted in Nevada County restaurants, over 100 people could be accommodated at The Stone House with the required distancing in place.

“It’s amazing that they’re now allowing 50% (seating capacity) inside,” said Rowe, adding that The Stone House has been close to having to close its doors for good this year due to reduced business, and that he is thankful to be able to retain events to the degree he has.

Victoria Penate is a staff writer for The Union. She can be reached at vpenate@theunion.com.

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