

## Staffing an emerging concern for local hospitals in battle against coronavirus

BY STACEY SHEPARD  
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As local hospitals become more impacted by coronavirus patients, a new concern has come to light. The question is no longer will there be enough beds to care for all the sick as COVID-19 cases escalate, but will there be enough hospital staff to tend to those beds? For a 12-hour period this past

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

weekend, ambulance traffic had to be diverted away from Dignity Health's Mercy Hospital Downtown and Mercy Hospital Southwest. The two facilities reached a point where they couldn't take any more patients due to staffing, said Kern County Public Health Services Director Matt Constantine. Constantine said the county is going to start this week tracking

hospital staffing as another way to monitor capacity in Kern's 10 acute care hospitals.

"What we're talking about is another threat to our health care system that we need to address," Constantine said.

"Hospitals are good at managing some localized peak demand, where there's a surge or during flu season or there's a horrific traffic accident where many people are involved," Constantine

said. But coronavirus presents a problem with sustained, region-wide growth. Constantine said it's critical to know if what the two Bakersfield hospitals experienced this past weekend was an errant incident or a possible warning of what's to come.

"We might need to have different triggers that would implement different actions earlier if staffing truly is a limiting factor in Kern County," Constantine said, refer-

ring to the surge plans drawn up by hospitals to increase their bed capacity by up to 40 percent.

Dignity Health didn't respond to several requests Wednesday for comment but Hall Ambulance spokesman Mark Corum confirmed that ambulance traffic was diverted over the weekend.

As of Tuesday night, neither hospital had beds available, said

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## Anonymous act of kindness



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Three generations of family ownership pose Wednesday below the newly repaired sign at Casa Munoz in Bakersfield. Joe Munoz Jr., Joe and Teresa Munoz and Alyssa Hernandez are grateful to the individual responsible for fixing their sign. Someone broke it less than two weeks ago, and an anonymous good Samaritan replaced it without their knowledge.

### Good Samaritan replaces broken sign at Casa Munoz, brightens day for entire city

BY STEVEN MAYER  
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Sometimes, in the midst of difficulty and disappointment, the right story comes along at just the right time.

This is that story. It began less than two weeks ago when Joe Munoz Jr. discovered someone had broken a hole through the sign at his family's Casa Munoz Mexican Restaurant on Union Avenue.

As if surviving during a COVID-19 lockdown wasn't tough enough for local restaurants, Munoz thought, now this.

But like any good businessman, he called a sign company to get the sign repaired.

Then on Tuesday, something completely unexpected happened.

"When I got to work this morning," Munoz told a reporter Tuesday night, "the sign was finished. I texted the sign company, telling them, 'Great job!'"

"They texted back: 'What are you talking about?'"

"The sign," Munoz replied. "It looks great."

The company texted back that they hadn't finished the sign.

Munoz was awestruck. Somehow, some good Samaritan had recreated the sign to perfection, matching the font and the colors — and then installed the repair without the knowledge of the Munoz family.

"It blew me away," Munoz said. Not only had the community

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COURTESY OF THE MUNOZ FAMILY

## Several prisons in Kern hit with virus outbreak

BY QUINN WILSON  
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A handful of Kern County prisons haven't been spared as COVID-19 has spread like wildfire through some California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation institutions.

As of Wednesday, the California Correctional Institute in Tehachapi had reported 134 total cases, 32 new ones coming in the last 14 days, according to CDCR COVID-19 tracking. Of the prison's 3,711 total inmates, 185 have been tested in the past 14 days.

The prison hadn't encountered any positive cases until June 16, according to CDCR.

"Prior to reporting its first positive test among the incarcerated population, CCI was conducting surveillance testing of the inmate population in an effort to immediately identify any potential COVID-19 exposure," wrote Lt. Nadia Erwin, public information officer for the CCI, in a July 2 email.

"As soon as a positive COVID-19 case was reported among the incarcerated population, CCI quickly moved to test all incarcerated persons at the institution."

Additionally, CCI has had a total of 83 staff members test positive, with nine returning to work. Since March 18, CCI has conducted

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### THE DISH

**New outdoor dining options continue to grow in Kern County**

**EYE STREET | C1**

### UNCERTAIN FALL

**BC athletes return for workouts as CCCAA call on season looms**

**SPORTS | B3**

## Swell of support for Hard Rock casino project heard at virtual public hearing

BY SAM MORGEN  
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A new casino development slated for south of Bakersfield received a flood of support during a public hearing the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs held Wednesday evening.

During the meeting, a parade of Kern County's government and business leaders expressed full-throated endorsements for the \$600 million casino and hotel development. Several Kern County residents also voiced their

desire for the casino, along with at least one person from outside the region.

"Today is important because it is a step toward reestablishing a tribal homeland for the Tejon Indian Tribe," Tejon Tribe Chairman Octavio Escobedo said at the beginning of the meeting. He mentioned the tribe's long efforts to not only gain federal recognition, but also to establish a homeland, noting the tribe hasn't had a home for generations.

The hearing comes after the

Bureau of Indian Affairs released a draft environmental impact statement studying the impacts the 306-acre project would have on all aspects of life in the area around the casino. After reading the final version of the report, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior will make a determination on whether the casino can move forward.

If successful, the Tejon Indian Tribe will use the land as its new homeland. The 1,045-member

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

A rendering of the casino proposed by the Tejon Indian Tribe and its development partner, Hard Rock International.



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**LOCAL**

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

# Sheriff's Office seeks witnesses in fatal east Bakersfield shooting

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

The Kern County Sheriff's Office, investigating a Tuesday afternoon fatal shooting in the 700 block of Bernard Street in east Bakersfield, is seeking witnesses from the incident.

At 3:24 p.m., KCSO received a report of a peace disturbance, then shots fired. Deputies arrived and located Andrew Anaya, 44, inside a house. He was a victim of multiple gunshot wounds and died at the scene, KCSO said in a news release.

Detectives learned numerous witnesses didn't wait for law enforcement to arrive, KCSO said. Detectives would like to identify and speak to anyone who witnessed the incident.

If you have any information, please call KCSO at 861-3110 or Secret Witness line at 322-4040.

## The Bakersfield Police Department discovered a woman involved in an apparent fatal assault Wednesday in the 1300 block of Chester Place.

Officers were conducting a welfare check just after 6:30 a.m. when they discovered the victim. Her identity will be released at a later time by the Kern County Coroner's office.

Homicide detectives have assumed the investigation and no arrests have been made, BPD said.

Anyone with information is asked to call Detective T. Hernandez at 326-3501 or BPD at 327-7111.

## A 16-year-old girl who was previously reported missing was located Wednesday morning, according to the Bakersfield Police Department.

Brisa Torres was located Wednesday at about 7:08 a.m. She was last seen Monday at approximately 11:15 a.m. in the 9000 block of Mendocino Drive near Calloway Drive and Brimhall Road. Torres wasn't the victim of any criminal offense and the investigation has revealed she was a voluntary runaway, BPD said in a news release.

## The Kern County Sheriff's Office is asking for public assistance identifying and locating two suspects wanted for grand theft Sunday in the 7800 block Fruitvale Avenue.

The suspects removed several catalytic converters from cars at the business, KCSO said in a news release.

Anyone with information on the identify or whereabouts of the suspects is asked to call KCSO at 861-3110 or Secret Witness line at 322-4040.

## The Bakersfield Police Department is requesting community assistance identifying the suspect in a March 27 theft at the Brundage Liquors located at 401 Brundage Lane.

The suspect is described as Black man, in his early 20s, about 6-feet tall with a slim build. He was wearing a red hooded sweatshirt, blue jeans and white Nike Air Max 97s at the time of the incident.

Anyone with information is encouraged to call Detective T. Tsang at 326-3519 or BPD at 327-7111.

## The Kern County Sheriff's Office arrested a man Saturday in McFarland on suspicion of various weapons and narcotics charges following a traffic charge in the area of Elmo Highway and Davis Avenue.

Robert Ortiz, 34, was arrested and booked into the Central Receiving Facility, KCSO said in a news release.

At about 10 a.m. deputies conducted a traffic stop for vehicle code violations and it was discovered Ortiz' driver license was suspended. He was searched and a small amount of suspected methamphetamine was in Ortiz's possession, KCSO said.

A search of the vehicle revealed Ortiz was in possession of a Glock 9mm handgun, with a fully loaded magazine.

A records check of Ortiz revealed he was prohibited from possessing firearms, KCSO said.



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN / FILE

Dignity Health Mercy Hospital Southwest.

## HOSPITALS

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Mary Lynn Briggs, a staff nurse in the ICU at both Mercy hospitals and the chief nurse representative for the California Nurses Association at both hospitals.

Briggs said patients were being held in the emergency room while rooms were sought for them at other Bakersfield hospitals.

During the day Monday, the hospitals dipped below state-mandated nursing ratios in some units, Briggs said. Some nurses in the medical/surgical unit had six patients instead of the mandated five and some telemetry nurses had five patients instead of the mandated four. In the ICU, the ratio of one nurse to two patients was maintained but Briggs said some patients were so critically ill they needed their own dedicated nurse. She said the hospitals have a combined 28 ICU beds and 17 are for COVID-19 patients; 16 were filled Tuesday, the last day Briggs worked.

"I've been a nurse since 1992, I have never seen staffing as short as it is right now," she said, adding that last week she worked five shifts with no breaks or meals.

She estimates about 15 to 20 staffers between the two hospitals have contracted the virus from patients.

"They're trying to get travelers to come in and they have gotten some, just not enough," she said. Briggs said the hospital could offer better financial incentives to employees to work extra shifts

and for traveling nurses but so far hasn't. Despite that many workers are working additional shifts, she said.

"Trying to increase staffing right now can be tricky," said Jan Emerson-Shea, vice president for external affairs for the California Hospitals Association. Earlier in the pandemic, travel nurses and other healthcare workers were easier to come by. Now, as the virus has spread and places like Texas and Arizona see their own hot spots developing, those healthcare workers are in higher demand.

"Everybody thinks capacity is, 'do I have enough beds or ventilators,'" Emerson-Shea said. "You can find nooks and crannies in hospitals to put more beds. The issue often is staffing. Staffing is key."

Emerson-Shea said hospitals sometimes run into staffing issues during a bad flu season. Some hospital workers may get sick and then there can be an influx of elderly patients, requiring hospitals to look elsewhere for extra staffing help.

"But the difference with a regular flu season is not every state is having it at the same time," Emerson-Shea said. "Because of the nature of this pandemic, it's affected every state in the country."

Sharlet Briggs, CEO for Adventist Health Bakersfield, with no relation to Mary Lynn Briggs, said she hasn't encountered problems yet getting additional healthcare workers when her hospital has needed it.

"As we increase our volume of ICU patients we are going to

need more ICU nurses," Sharlet Briggs said.

She said some employees at Adventist Health Bakersfield had contracted the virus but she's unaware how many.

Kern Medical CEO Russell Judd said as of Monday there had been no known transmissions of the virus from patients to staffers.

Tim McGlew, CEO of the Kern Valley Healthcare District, said while there are no COVID-19 patients currently in his hospital the situation in Bakersfield is impacting his facility, stalling transfers from their emergency department to better-equipped hospitals in Bakersfield. That happens from time to time, he said.

The Kern River Valley has remained largely unscathed by the virus but recently there have been several cases in the community.

He noted that Isabella Lake has been packed with visitors on recent weekends, which is a concern "because they're coming from Los Angeles and other places that have been having high experiences of COVID. Now we've got eight or nine cases in the community. We'll see what happens over the next couple weeks."

Mary Lynn Briggs, the ICU nurse at Mercy hospitals, said that among staff there's a sense that the surge of patients that has been talked about for so long is underway.

"That's one of the scariest things about all this," she said. "There is no end in sight."

John Cox contributed to this report.



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN / FILE

The California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi.

## PRISONS

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verbal and temperature screening of all those entering state prisons, according to Terri Hardy from CDCR's press office.

Additionally, CDCR has provided multiple reusable cloth barrier masks and hand sanitizer to staff and those incarcerated, and have mandated their use while moving throughout the institution, Hardy said. CDCR has strictly limited incarcerated movement to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 between housing facilities at the institutions.

"Many things are standardized (throughout the CDCR system)," Hardy said.

Wasco State Prison has had the second-highest number of cases locally, with 21 active, 11 of which were recorded in the last 14 days. Twelve inmates have recovered, according to CDCR.

CCI and Wasco State Prison have released six inmates actively positive with COVID-19. Hardy explained CDCR doesn't have any authority to hold an offender past their scheduled release date.

However, there may be some additional measures coming to help COVID-19 positive inmates safely transition out of incarceration.

"We are partnering with state and local agencies to identify housing accommodations to people released from state prison, and who have a need to safely quarantine or isolate due to COVID-19 exposure or positive status, but do not have housing in place to do so," Hardy said.

On Wednesday, there were 59 total COVID-19 cases recorded in the 93561 ZIP code — where CCI is located in Tehachapi — which

is 75 less than CDCR's reported number.

Kern County Public Health and Services Department spokesperson Michelle Corson said Monday that cases in prisons are included in the daily virus tracker on the department's website. She acknowledged, however, the possibility of a delay.

"There could be a delay of those cases showing up on our Dashboard when comparing to the CCI website," Corson said.

Corson said inmate cases should be accounted for in the ZIP code the prison is located, while staff cases are accounted for in their home communities.

"State and testing case information is uploaded to the Patient Tracker as soon as it's recorded into the (California Correctional Health Care Services) electronic health record system so it's an immediate update," Hardy said.

"We are working closely with our local partners to ensure we're providing information as quickly as possible."

North Kern State Prison in Delano currently has seven active cases, one over the last 14 days, according to CDCR. Both California City Correctional Facility and Kern Valley State Prison don't have any current active cases as of Wednesday, with the latter having one recovered inmate.

More than a third of the 3,593 inmates at San Quentin State Prison near San Francisco have tested positive since officials transferred 121 inmates from the heavily impacted California Institution for Men in Chino on May 30 without properly testing them for infections, according to the Associated Press.

Tehachapi News reporter Darla A. Baker.

## KINDNESS

Continued from PAGE A1

reached out to the Munoz family with sympathy and love after news of the broken sign hit the streets, someone had gone beyond the call.

Casa Munoz posted the good news on its Facebook page Tuesday. And the crowd went wild.

"It looks like we have a new sign up! And to our surprise, we have NO IDEA who made this and put it up!" the restaurant posted.

"We truly are blessed to have some of the best customers in town! So, to whoever did this for us, THANK YOU!!"

The post continued: "There are no words for the gratitude we feel to whoever did this! We hope one day to find out who you are so we can repay you somehow!"

One customer called it a blessing.

People used words like awesome, and wonderful and "paying it forward."

"Just when you're about to lose hope for humanity ..." someone said.

On Wednesday, the Munoz family was back to work under the shining new sign at the restaurant that's served customers for 30 years.

Three generations gathered below the sign for a photo.



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Members of the Munoz family were shocked and grateful when they discovered an unknown individual repaired their sign, which had been broken less than two weeks ago by a vandal.

Joe Munoz Sr., 85, who has a lifetime of restaurant experience behind him, with 30 years at the historic Sinaloa, a decade at El Sombrero and 30 more years at Casa Munoz, said he was moved by the way repeat customers responded to the senseless vandalism of the sign.

"When you have people coming in and leaving 10 or 20 dollars at the register," he said, "it tells me a lot about my customers."

And that seemed to be one of the lessons Bakersfield residents were taking away from this astonishing episode. That despite

the divisiveness, despite the ire, many locals still root for the underdog, they're still willing to share their neighbor's hardships and help ease their neighbor's pain.

"I'm glad this happened at a time like this," Joe Munoz said. "A little silver lining. Something like this can really brighten your day."

"Someone has gifted us a great Christmas present early," Munoz said. "This kind of thing lets you know there are really good people out there."

"It reinforces our faith in this community."

## CASINO

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tribe has no designated reservation.

In the environmental report, the bureau found the hotel and casino wouldn't significantly impact the surrounding area as long as mitigation measures were taken. The most extensive option under consideration allows the tribe to develop a sprawling casino resort that includes an organic farming area, 102 acres reserved for residential housing, a community park, as well as fire and sheriff's stations.

Hard Rock reports the casino will generate a \$59 million annual payroll, supporting over 2,000 permanent jobs in addition to 1,000 construction jobs, and 2,000 indirect jobs.

A timeline of when the casino could open hasn't been established.

In the past, Kern County leaders have been fully supportive of the casino development, citing the enticing financial implications and jobs prospects. On Wednesday, it was no different.

"This is really a game changer. We've all heard about the \$600 million impact of the project, but that does not count the future, new money coming into our economy," said Kern Economic Development Corp. President and CEO Richard Chapman. "This is going to create much needed economic parity."

Other officials said the casino would allow the county to begin being less dependent on oil and agriculture industries, which are subject to a boom and bust cycle. Longtime Kern County resi-

dent Dick Taylor said he never thought the area would see anything like a casino.

"If somebody would have told me 20 years ago that a Hard Rock casino was going to be built near here, I would have told them that they had rocks in their head," he said. "But it is exciting to see that this is going to be a reality."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs will address all substantive comments in the final environmental impact statement. Public comments can be submitted to the bureau until July 27. Emailed comments can be sent to chad.broussard@bia.gov. Verbal comments can be submitted to 916-755-0181.

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