

SANTA MARIA TIMES

Mott responds to recruiting allegations

St. Joseph coach followed by past mistakes. **SPORTS, B1**



'Being that bridge'

Goodwill celebrates grand opening of Lompoc Youth Center. **CENTRAL COAST, A3**



LOW CLOUDS, THEN SUN **66 • 40** FORECAST, B8 | **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020** | santamariatimes.com

Admin: chant not racially motivated

Righetti students called 'Where's your passport?' at St. Joseph players

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St. Joseph High School administrators on Wednesday dismissed the notion that a chant from a group of Righetti High School students at the end of Tuesday night's rivalry basketball game was intended to be racially charged.

The Righetti High student section chanted "Where's your passport?" as time ran out in

Tuesday's game on the St. Joseph High campus, which St. Joseph won 74-57.

St. Joseph, a private school located across the street from Righetti, a public school, has a player from France on its roster and three players from Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory which doesn't require a passport. Under coach Tom Mott, the Knights have consistently fielded teams with players from all over the world.

St. Joseph has beaten Righetti the last six times the teams have met on the court.

On Wednesday, Mott said he understood the chant could be interpreted as racist, but felt that

was not the intent of the group of students who chanted it.

"I honestly think they were unaware they said a racist thing," Mott said. "They did not intend for it to be racist."

St. Joseph Principal Erinn Dougherty was captured on video walking toward the Righetti students and briefly shouting at them as they were chanting. Dougherty then had a brief but heated interaction with Ted Lyon, an assistant principal at Righetti High.

"Just because I will not allow certain xenophobic statements to be made at my campus and I don't

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JOE BAILEY, STAFF

In a screen grab from a video taken Tuesday night, St. Joseph High School Principal Erinn Dougherty approaches the Righetti High School student section as the students chanted "Where's your passport?" at St. Joseph basketball players.



LEN WOOD, STAFF

Officer Matthew Boland walks up to receive the Lifesaving Award during the Santa Maria Police Department's annual awards ceremony Wednesday at the Elks Lodge.

Police, employees honored at luncheon

Team, life savers were among those recognized

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Dozens of Santa Maria Police officers and city employees were honored at an awards luncheon Wednesday, including a team that played a vital role in implementing a new, multimillion-dollar public safety dispatch system that went live in November 2019.

The annual event, which was organized by the nonprofit Santa Maria Police Council, was held at the Elks Lodge to honor the

Santa Maria Police Department employees for their accomplishments in 2019.

Approximately 100 people in attendance who were treated to a tri-tip lunch included Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office employees, members of the Santa Maria City Council and several SMPD officers.

The event recognizes the extraordinary work of the department's men and women during a time of intense scrutiny placed on police officers, said Santa Maria Police Chief Phil Hansen.

He cited the rise of social media and the proliferation of camera phones, which he said have tended to capture only the poor performance of a few officers.

"The positives seldom make news," Hansen said. "That's why doing this is so important."

The Distinguished Team Award was given to a group of Santa Maria police officers and information technology employees who worked together during the last three years to build and implement a state-of-the-art computer-aided dispatch and records management system, which is meant to provide improved response times and enhance coordination between police and fire units.

Officer Matthew Boland received the Lifesaving Award, which is given for a heroic life-saving attempt in the line of duty, whether the attempt was

successful or not.

On June 7, 2019, Boland was dispatched to the home of a distraught elderly woman who called police to report that her husband had threatened suicide.

Hansen said Boland was the sole officer who responded to the call while other officers were engaged in a foot pursuit of a robbery suspect at the same time.

Boland located the man hanging by a rope inside the home's garage and lifted the man from the rope, thus saving his life, Hansen said.

Two officers, Stephen "Max" Shaffer and Alfredo Rodriguez, each were awarded certificates

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Pope avoids divisive issue

NICOLE WINFIELD
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis refused Wednesday to approve the ordination of married men or women as deacons to address a shortage of priests in the Amazon, sidestepping a fraught issue that has divided the Catholic Church and emboldened his conservative critics.

In an eagerly awaited document, Francis didn't refer to recommendations by Amazonian bishops to consider married priests or women deacons. Rather, the pope urged bishops to pray for more priestly vocations and to send missionaries to a region where faithful Catholics in remote areas can go months or even years without Mass.

The pope's dodge disappointed liberals, who had hoped he would at least put both questions to further study. It outraged progressive Catholic women's groups. And it relieved conservatives who had used the debate over priestly celibacy to heighten their opposition to the pope, and saw his ducking of the issue as a victory.

Francis' document, "Beloved Amazon," is instead a love letter to the Amazonian rain forest and its indigenous peoples from the first Latin American pope. He

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County to seek \$4 million from state for homeless housing

Access to housing could help homeless live longer

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Santa Barbara County will apply for approximately \$4 million in state funds to provide housing and services to the homeless, including a program that could lead to permanent housing for some.

The Board of Supervisors authorized staff to apply for the money from California Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention program Tuesday as part of the administrative agenda,



LEN WOOD, STAFF

Dana Gamble, assistant deputy director of the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, talks about deaths of homeless people in 2018 during the Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday in Santa Maria.

shortly before hearing a report on 41 homeless county residents who died in 2018.

Homeless Housing, Assistance

and Prevention provides a \$650 million block grant to be

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Former PG&E attorney to head EPA West Coast office

Stoker was told in phone call to resign

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Environmental Protection Agency has named a former attorney for the nation's largest utility to head its West Coast office, replacing the regional director ousted from the post last week.

John Busterud, who worked for Pacific Gas and Electric for three decades, will manage more than 600 staff employees and oversee environmental protection efforts across EPA's Region 9, which includes 50 million people living in California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands and

tribal lands, KQED reported Tuesday.

Mike Stoker, the EPA's regional director since 2018, said he got a call last week from senior agency officials in Washington, D.C., telling him to resign.

The change in leadership comes amid conflict between California and the federal government over environmental policy.

Among the disagreements are the Trump administration's policies aimed at expanding domestic oil and gas production, and its rollback of environmental regulations. California, a state with robust environmental

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SANTA MARIA TIMES

Chant video sparks heated reaction

Righetti students say racist remarks, trash talk common

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A Santa Maria Times video of students at Righetti High School chanting "where's your passport" at rival St. Joseph during a Tuesday night basketball game has sparked heated reactions on social media about what is seen as racism towards St. Joseph players from France and Puerto Rico.

However, students at Righetti are saying that's only half of the story.

Righetti students who were at the game said inflammatory chanting that night was started by students in the St. Joseph section, who allegedly were chanting racist remarks at Righetti earlier in the game.

Two Righetti students who asked to remain anonymous, one of them due to concerns of retaliation, said members of the St. Joseph student section yelled comments at Righetti about how they would be pumping their gas someday, and chanting "where's

your green card."

While both student bodies have a large Hispanic population, Righetti is known in the region for having more Hispanic students and fewer white students than St. Joseph, with Hispanic students making up 63% of the student body.

According to 2017-2018 enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Hispanic students make up 38% of the St. Joseph student population, while white students make up 34%.

In Facebook comments on the video, multiple individuals asserted that St. Joseph students had shouted the comments at Righetti before the video was captured, as well as at past games.

Righetti students said in response they threw their own digs, shouting "where's your passport" to target out-of-area players on St. Joseph's team.

"The SJ students were chanting at our student section that we would be filling them up with gas in the future, so we shot back with our chant, it's simple trash talk," one of the anonymous students said in a written message to the Santa Maria Times. "They were

also throwing their own racist remarks at us before our chant. They were yelling 'where's your green card' at Righetti."

A media statement from Kenny Klein, public information officer for the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District, said the incident is being addressed by both officials at Righetti as well as the school district. St. Joseph does not fall into the district because it's a private school.

While many people were upset, there were also students, parents and alumni from both schools who shared on social media that such rivalry is nothing new between the two schools, and that in this case, this specific chant by Righetti was highlighted misleadingly.

While some individuals on social media alleged the St. Joseph section never talked about green cards on Tuesday night, floods of responses suggested that trash talking each other has been a key part of the rivalry between the schools for some time rather than an isolated event.

One Facebook commenter, who identified himself as a St. Joseph parent, said the anger around the "where's your passport" chant

was an overreaction compared to other chants that have happened in the past.

"During the football games when St. Joe's is beating Righetti and St. Joe's chants 'Jesus doesn't love you.' I think that's more offensive than a recruiting thing," Rick Milanese said.

The private school's enrollment of student athletes has long been a point of tension between the two rivals, with members of the Righetti High School community alleging the unfairness of playing against out-of-area students.

A Feb. 7 tweet by the Righetti sports Twitter about a championship win by women's basketball spoke to the tension regarding St. Joseph's recruiting practices, reading "That's 4 Championships in the last 5 years... and they don't have to recruit overseas !!!"

St. Joseph athletic director and basketball coach Tom Mott faced allegations of recruiting athletes outside CIF guidelines during his time as coach and athletic director at Mission Prep in San Luis Obispo in 2006.

Laura Place covers city government for the Santa Maria Times.

Chant

From A1

want racially-charged rhetoric here doesn't mean that I don't love and respect the students of this whole community," Dougherty said Wednesday. "Not just the St. Joe students but the whole community. I think they were good kids who didn't realize what they were saying."

Administrators from Righetti High would not comment on the incident. Instead, Santa Maria Joint Union High School District spokesman Kenny Klein released a brief statement citing "unacceptable comments" from both student sections.

"We are aware of the unacceptable comments exchanged from both sides of the basketball court during the heated rivalry between St. Joseph and Righetti High School Tuesday night," the statement read. "The incident is being addressed by SMJUHSD and RHS

school officials. We have no further comment at this time."

Mott did say he wished young athletes didn't have to endure the type of taunting that can be heard inside a high school basketball gym.

"It's just sad that kids who are 15-, 16- or 17-years-old are called out for what they look like or where they're from," Mott said.

Dougherty said she wished she had kept her cool a bit more at the time of the incident.

"I've made mistakes and I probably made a mistake charging over there," Dougherty said. "I don't want this to be damaging to somebody's career. We can all do better. Let's reflect on it, pray on it, and each school needs to focus on what we can do to be the best school for our kids."

"I am a person who wears her heart on her sleeve," she added. "I'm an easy crier. I love hard, I cry hard, I love my kids a lot... All I can say is that I wished that I hadn't scolded another administrator's

students. Obviously that had upset him, but I was in the mode of taking care of kids."

Dougherty, though, said she did not believe the event was an isolated incident, saying some of the St. Joseph student athletes had heard similar chants when the two teams played last month at Righetti High. Dougherty said that it bothered a few of the players.

"A student had come up to me, one of the players, and he had been upset after the last game," Dougherty said. "Another student came to me (Tuesday) morning and said he was nervous about it. It had been on my mind, but I had begun to feel smug because things had gone so swimmingly (at Tuesday's game)."

Mott said he doesn't think the incident will impact the rivalry between the two schools moving forward. He said administrators are planning on meeting early next week to discuss the episode and any changes that could be made to prevent something similar hap-

pening in the future.

"We hope to continue to play Righetti," he said. "I have a lot of friends who teach over there and that coach over there. A lot of our students' parents teach or work over there. We get along really well with (Righetti athletic director and coach) Kevin Barbarick. We absolutely love working with Kevin."

After watching the video, Mott felt Barbarick did try to stop the students from chanting as he was coaching the final seconds of the game.

"I talked to Kevin this morning and, after watching the video, I saw as soon as they started the chant that Kevin turned around and told them to be quiet and that's exactly what you want your administrator to do," Mott said.

The game was the regular season finale. St. Joseph will prepare for the CIF Central Section Division 1 playoffs, which begin next week. Righetti's season is over as the Warriors will not play in the CIF-CS Division 2 playoffs.