

The Sunday Californian

JUNE 6, 2021 • BAKERSFIELD.COM

102 Kern County high school students to graduate with associate degree from BC

BY EMMA GALLEGOS
egallegos@bakersfield.com

Of the thousands of students who receive their high school diplomas in Kern County this spring, 102 of them will also be earning an associate degree from Bakersfield College. As impressive as that number is, it's expected to grow in the coming years.

The Early College program, which allows high school students to take college courses at BC or their own high school without paying a cent for tuition or books, now spans 36 different high schools in some form, according to Kylie Campbell, director of the program.

This year 8,000 high school

students participated in the program at schools ranging from the comprehensive schools and continuation schools in the Kern High School District to private schools like Garces Memorial or charter schools like Valley Oaks Charter School.

But this year's 102 high school graduates represents the fruits of

the first partnerships in the Early College program that were forged in rural Kern County. All of this year's graduates hail from outside Bakersfield: Wonderful College Prep Academy in Delano, Wasco High School, Delano High School and Arvin High School.

BC piloted its program in these communities where there are

steep barriers to attending college. Students are typically the first in their family to attend college, mostly field workers who can feel like the idea of college is remote. And sometimes in the rural corners of the county, it has been too remote and far away.

Please see **DEGREE | A3**

VIEWPOINT



PHOTOS BY ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Brian and Kier Butterworth share the story of their daughter Heather, who recently died from a fentanyl overdose. Portraits of their three daughters as well as a family photograph adorn their northwest Bakersfield home.

She came so close, and then fentanyl



Brian and Kier Butterworth assembled photographs and mementos in their home belonging to their daughter Heather, who recently died from a fentanyl overdose.

The road out of addiction was treacherous enough without this. The mountain was high enough, the dangers along the trail more than sufficient. Then this.

Chemistry, greed and deceit conspired to give the world street fentanyl. Not the pharmaceutical gift that eases suffering in hospitals and on battlefields, but its cousin, a less meticulously formulated version with the ability to capture and kill like few before it.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 100 times more powerful than morphine and 50 times more powerful than heroin, and today it is literally everywhere in the illicit drug market, often posing as heroin or commercial painkillers that carry an air of legitimacy, like oxycodone or Percocet. Lately, because it's so cheap to produce, the profit margins are so huge and the high is so satisfying, it's even turning up outside its chemical family, in cocaine, crystal meth and counterfeit Xanax.

Fentanyl is the trap that ensnared



ROBERT PRICE
FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Please see **PRICE | A3**

Shortage of new cars a challenge for dealers, customers

BY STEVEN MAYER
smayer@bakersfield.com

Some car lots in Bakersfield are looking downright desolate as a global shortage of new vehicles affects local dealerships and customers alike.

A worldwide squeeze on microprocessors — new cars use hundreds of them — is slowing down the delivery and availability of 2021 models in Kern County and across the country. And that's causing a spike in the sales of used cars and causing upward pressure on prices across the board.

"Right now we have a total of 50 new Chevrolets and Cadillacs on the ground," said Ted Nicholas, president and dealer operator at Three-Way Chevrolet Cadillac at the Bakersfield Auto Mall.

Fifty may sound like a lot, but Nicholas said there have been times when the dealership could boast 800 new vehicles on the lot.

"I believe we're bottoming out right now," Nicholas said of the reduced inventory. "Next month will be a little better and it should continue to improve."

Please see **CARS | A3**

GUN RIGHTS

Calif.'s longtime ban on assault weapons overturned by judge

STATE | A4

COLLEGE BOUND

Clayton is North's 1st four-year football commit since 2005

SPORTS | C1

DINING OUT

Red Pepper delivers excellent experience, is as popular as ever

EYE STREET | E1

State looks to build on Kern's success employing homeless in cleanup work

BY JOHN COX
jcox@bakersfield.com

A Kern County initiative that has cleaned up local highways while helping people on the street get back on their feet is increasingly serving as a model for the rest of the state.

After Caltrans adopted its own version of an 8-year-old partnership between the Kern Council of Governments and the Bakersfield Homeless Center, Gov. Gavin Newsom in May proposed spending \$1.5 billion on similar efforts.

The program has removed countless tons of roadside trash

and debris while providing employment opportunities for hundreds of people who had been homeless, in many cases leading them to permanent housing and stable employment.

"It costs a little more money but the benefits to the people at the homeless center are huge," said Kern COG executive director Ahron Hakimi, who helped spearhead the program in 2013. He said the program was the first of its kind in the state.

The governor's proposal for a one-time, three-year effort to beautify the state's transportation

network can be traced to the city of Bakersfield's 2009 program putting about a dozen people from the homeless center to work at the city's green waste facility.

Kern COG, a regional transportation planning organization, saw promise in what was quickly welcomed as a successful innovation. It arranged a separate contract putting people from the homeless center to work removing trash along local highways.

When funding became an issue, former state Sen. Jean Fuller of

Please see **CLEANUP | A4**



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Jacob De Oca and Angel Chavez with the Bakersfield Homeless Center's jobs program pick up trash along Highway 99 and California Avenue on Friday morning.



PRICE: \$2

CONTACT US

Subscriber services:
661-392-5777, 800-953-5353
or customer@bakersfield.com

To report a news tip:
661-395-7384, 800-540-0646
or local@bakersfield.com

OUTSIDE TODAY

YOUR COMPLETE FORECAST | C6



INSIDE YOUR CALIFORNIAN

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Advice..... | E3 | Nation & World..... | B1 | Television..... | E4 |
| Books..... | E5 | Obituaries..... | B4 | Today in History..... | A2 |
| Classifieds..... | D3 | Opinion..... | C4 | Travel..... | E6 |
| Eye Street..... | E1 | Puzzles..... | D3, E3 | | |
| Horoscopes..... | E3 | Sports..... | C1 | | |
| Lottery numbers..... | A2 | Sunday Forum..... | C5 | | |

LOCAL

DEGREE

Continued from **PAGE A1**

This year is an especially important graduation ceremony for Arvin High School. In 2018, its first cohort of freshmen began taking college courses and now those students are graduating. Six seniors will graduate with an associate degree in communications, and an additional 13 others received over a 3.5 GPA and enough classes to earn them a communication certificate of achievement. This is also the first cohort to graduate in the Kern High School District.

Arvin High School Principal Ed Watts can't say enough wonderful things about the Early College program or the students who have taken advantage of it.

"It really launches kids ahead," he said. "And it's free. Out here that's vitally important because kids don't have resources."

He said when students are provided resources, they're appreciative and they take advantage of it.

"They just soar," he said.

One of the Arvin High students graduating with her associate degree this year is Eduarda Angeles. She will be heading to UC Berkeley in fall but she's not alone in her cohort in heading to a competitive college.

The first group of Early College students became a tight-knit group through taking courses together, Angeles said. They're all proud of each other for their achievements in high school and where they're headed in fall: UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, UC Santa Cruz and one student received a full ride scholarship to Swarthmore.

"Arvin High has a lot of smart, hard-working students," she said. "It doesn't get broadcast enough."

Five years ago, Watts said that then-BC president Sonya Christian along with leaders at Kern High School District met to launch what would become the Early College Pathway for high school students in Arvin.

Under the model, there would be 60 slots each spring for fresh-

men to begin their journey to getting their associate in arts in communication studies, which would also fulfill their general education requirement for the UC or CSU system. They would take these classes after school and during the summer.

But since the launch of the Early College pathway at Arvin in 2018, the school has also been adding dual enrollment classes — college classes that students can take during the school day. That means 360 students this year are graduating with college credit.

When Bakersfield College first launched its Early College program, it was in part because of the county's poor track record in college preparatory course completions, transfers to UC or CSU campuses and college degree attainment.

"Once a kid has a college plan in their pocket, they're much more apt to keep going," said Watts.

Angeles said that the Early College experience pushed her to think about higher education in a way she might not have.

"It was an eye opener in chasing after more advanced education," Angeles said.

She's thinking about attending the business school at UC Berkeley once she finishes her undergraduate degree. With all the credit she has, she could theoretically do it in the same amount of time as her peers getting their bachelor's. She likes the idea of getting involved in the world of business and STEM — and Berkeley isn't far from Silicon Valley, she notes.

"There are a lot of things I can see myself doing," she said.

This year six students are graduating with their associate degrees at Arvin High, but Watts expects that number to grow.

In fall 2023, BC plans to open its satellite campus across the street from the high school. Watts said the school plans to make it possible for students to walk across the street to take a specialized college course by aligning their schedules.

But the increasing number of high school students taking

college courses is happening all across Kern County, Campbell said.

Alejandro Hernandez graduated from Delano High School in three years with his associate degree thanks to dual enrollment courses he took at his high school and classes that he took at BC's satellite campus in Delano. Hernandez wanted to waste no time in completing the coursework he needed to move on to the next phase of his life: heading to UC Berkeley so that he can enter a STEM field.

"I want to encourage what I did for more people," he said. "It saved me three years of my life."

What Hernandez did took a lot of planning and initiative, but Campbell said that the program is trying to knock down barriers to make it easier for students like Hernandez who want to create their own pathway. As time goes on, she sees students taking on heavier loads like him, saving years of college and debt.

"Students are graduating with more and more units," she said.



PHOTOS BY ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Brian and Kier Butterworth share the story of their daughter Heather, who recently died from a fentanyl overdose. Portraits of their three daughters as well as a family photograph adorn their northwest Bakersfield home.

PRICE

Continued from **PAGE A1**

Heather Lyn Butterworth just as she had nearly tunneled out of a decade-deep hole. Maybe she had fooled herself and everyone else into thinking she really was close to escape. Maybe she truly was, but she had turned back for one more high, just for old time's sake. Maybe it was both, because with profound drug addiction it so often is.

In any case, on May 21, 2021, Heather Lyn Butterworth, a 30-year-old graduate of Bakersfield's Centennial High School, died of a fentanyl overdose. Her body was discovered locked inside the bathroom of her apartment at The Third Tradition Sober Living, a campus of roughly 50 modest single story-units where she had lived for the previous 70 days. In that time she had progressed just well enough to inspire glimmers of hope — in her family, in her boyfriend Dan, in her caretakers — and had quite possibly saved another addict's life along the way. But that's opiate addiction, which teases and taunts before it delivers a verdict.

At least heroin and most other drugs offer some predictability. Some. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl, though, is Russian roulette: the substance is so potent, a mixture of the active ingredient and its cutting agents need only be off by a few micrograms for a desirable high to instead end in death.

And an uneven, miscalculated batch, possibly in combination with a lower tolerance level created by several days of sobriety, could well have been what killed Heather.

The Butterworth family doesn't look like the type that would produce a fentanyl user — whatever that means. The Butterworths — parents Brian and Kier and their three adult daughters — are intelligent, solidly middle class, athletic, attractive people. Totems of faith and patriotism decorate their walls. Near the front door is a grouping of photos that un-

derscores those values: Brian, impossibly young and earnest, smiles in his Navy seaman's blue; a few inches to his right, daughter Brenna, now, 25, is similarly upright and proud in her crisp Air Force airman's uniform. They're 25 years apart, but here, framed side-by-side on the home's entryway wall, they're both 20.

Family photos and mementos are throughout the house, all the way down the hall toward the bedrooms. Military certificates and souvenirs, flags and flag motifs, dad pictured on water skis, the kids at various stages of life. In the living room, a large photograph of the five of them — Heather, Emmie, Brenna, Brian and Kier — leaning against a wooden railing, all wearing blue jeans, holding hands; a few feet away from that framed photo, in a dark-stained hutch, are bottles of Mrs. Butterworth's syrup, a silly, fun nod to the family name.

No family is perfect, but the Butterworths might have deserved consideration. And yet here they were.

"Before all this, in my young life, I had this Hollywood, typical stereotyped vision of what a drug addict was," Brian Butterworth told me Friday, the day before his daughter's memorial service. "Right? Wandering the streets. They're dirty, nasty, ugly, mean, messed up in the head."

One of his first lessons on the fallacy of that stereotype was a group counseling program he attended years ago with Kier and Heather.

"We would see this young lady and this older lady at all these meetings and I remember thinking, 'Wow this grandmother is the only one left who cares enough to see that this kid has some hope of recovery.' No, it turns out I had it completely backward. It was the grandmother who was the addict and the grandchild who was the only one willing to give her any time."

"So, yeah: Anyone can become a drug addict. I was totally ignorant, thinking that you could always pick a drug addict out of a crowd."



Marc Smith, executive director of The Third Tradition Sober Living, speaks about Heather Butterworth, a former resident in the facility who died from a fentanyl overdose.

FENTANYL: THE COUNTERFEIT KILLER

Watch Robert Price's special five-part series on KGET 17 starting Monday on the increasing use of fentanyl in illicit drugs in Kern County and across the U.S.: How it's manufactured, why it's so much more deadly than previous generations of opioids, and what we can do about it.

Watch: 17 News, June 7-11, 5 p.m.

Read, starting Monday: KGET.com/fentanyl

And if anyone can be a drug addict, any family, even ones with spotless kitchens, playful border collies and new grandbabies, can raise them.

Heather's trouble started just after high school: a drinking problem and then, at 20, a DUI. She smoked pot too, but then about five years ago, things took a darker turn — heroin. Brian and Kier put up with it for as long as they thought they could before kicking her out. There were all the typical fights and temper tantrums, dishonesty and exasperation, interspersed with periods of calm and hope. Heather went into rehab 13 times, by her parents' count.

One place that provided some hope and solace was Third Tradition, a sober living facility tucked into a quiet, almost hidden cul-de-sac near Real Road and Belle Terrace. Executive Director Marc Smith — a former addict himself, as so many are — saw great promise in Heather.

"She had an infectious smile," Smith said. "I've been doing this for 14 years and I can tell you her will to change, and to be something, was there. She always wanted to be more."

Now, in recent weeks, he had

been especially encouraged. She wasn't just taking responsibility for herself, she had emerged as something of a role model, a leader, to the other 25 or so women staying at the facility. When an addict telephoned Third Tradition, saying she was in bad shape and stranded in Tehachapi, Heather had jumped in a car, drove 45 miles east, fetched her off the street and brought her back to Third Tradition. Heather, the young woman later told Kier, had saved her life.

"Her process was always: doing well, relapse, doing well, relapse," Kier Butterworth said. "This latest recovery was our longest with her — a year and a half. She was doing really well. There's no real reason for this to have happened, so it just shows how crazy addiction can be. She's doing well, she has a car, she has a dog, she has a job, she finally has all the things you would hope she should be working toward. And then this."

It's impossible to know how Heather might have fared if she hadn't locked herself in her bathroom that day, placed a counterfeit Percocet on a small square of aluminum foil, heated it with a lighter and, with a cutoff straw on her lips, allowed the vapor to seep

into her mouth — chasing the dragon they call it, for the snake-trail of burned tar the flame leaves behind.

"There's evidence they can see where (users) start to do the drug, and they don't even get to finish," Brian said. "It's only half burned and then it just hits, and boom, it's over."

"She didn't finish a quarter of it," Kier said.

It's impossible to know if it were simply some momentary weakness, a temptation she would be able to push away next time, or if Heather would always be trapped in this cycle of addiction and recovery, addiction and recovery. This much is certain: With fentanyl, an immensely profitable, dauntingly addictive, relentlessly unforgiving active ingredient in a new generation of illicit opioids, the chances were not as good as they once might have been.

As a firefighter friend of Brian's recently told him about the surge of fentanyl overdose calls they've been getting of late: "I wish they'd just go back to heroin."

All the more reason for the Butterworths to join the chorus of families shattered by the Sinaloa cartel's most destructive export yet: If ever there was a time for people to turn away from that first temptation, that first offer of a cheap, easy high, this is that time. Fentanyl is here and its tragic toll is growing, not slowing.

Robert Price is a journalist for KGET-TV. His column appears here Sundays. Reach him at Robert-Price@KGET.com or via Twitter: @stubblebuzz. The opinions expressed are his own.

CARS

Continued from **PAGE A1**

But the cause of the chip shortage, he said, does not have a quick fix.

"The chips — only 12 percent are manufactured in the U.S.," he said. Most of the other 88 percent are made in the Far East, including China and Japan.

"This chip crisis," he said, "will continue into 2022."

At Jim Burke Ford Lincoln, the only car inside the showroom Thursday was a 2020 Cobra GT 500. Beautiful, but not quite new. A few 2021 models were displayed outside, but the pickings looked slim.

"You're probably wondering why we have an empty lot," said Jim Burke President Joe Hay.

"It's a really unusual time in the business."

Like so much that has hap-

pened over the past year and a half, the root of the problem began with the coronavirus.

Early on in the pandemic, auto purchases fell sharply, car rental companies cancelled their fleet orders, Nicholas said, prompting automakers to cancel their orders for chips. But then demand came back big — when the semiconductors were out of the pipeline.

"We had a good year last year," Three-Way's Nicholas said. "But in the first five months of this year, we're up 30 percent over last year."

John Pitre, chief operating officer at Motor City Buick GMC, said he can recall other times when demand temporarily exceeded supply, but he doesn't remember it being quite this profound.

Motor city has about 100 new vehicles "on the ground," Pitre said. More than 1,000 are coming, "some built, some waiting to be built."

On its website, about 500 new autos are available, including the 100 on the lot.

"We all are facing the same issue," Pitre said of Motor City and its competitors. "The market is bigger than the supply."

For local car-buyers, these powerful market forces can make buying and selling a challenge or a boon.

Local teacher Rachel Lenix said her daughter began shopping for a car late last year. Because the color she wanted wasn't available on the lot, she placed a deposit on a vehicle that was yet to be built.

"She was told the car would be delivered in February," Lenix said. "In February, she was told March, in March she was told May or even possibly June. She is now in June and still waiting."

"The worst part is she traded in her lease with the assumption the car would be ready in Febru-

ary. So now she's without a car."

Indeed, some car companies have had to pause operations, contributing to a spike in prices for some new cars, and a jump in demand (and costs) for used cars.

Bakersfield resident Chris Cruz-Boone said she and her husband went to Arizona to get the model they wanted.

"It was that or wait two months for one to be delivered."

"We ended up buying used from a dealership," she said in a text message. "But we actually flew to Phoenix and drove the car home just to get one."

Their SUV had been stolen earlier this year, and they needed a replacement fast.

"The best deal we could find within 100 miles (of Bakersfield)," Cruz-Boone said, "was \$5,000 over MSRP (Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price) and a two-month wait for the car."

On the flip-side, consumers are

getting great trade-in value for their used vehicles.

Has this been tough on the sales teams?

Nicholas said there will be no layoffs. And Pitre said Motor City is actually expanding its sales crew.

Fewer customers are coming in to "kick the tires" and shop on the lot, Pitre said. But Internet shopping doesn't mean salespeople are being bypassed. On the contrary, it usually takes more time to manage an Internet sale than a traditional transaction, he said.

Despite the healthy demand, is the shortage costing dealers sales?

"The demand is there," Nicholas said, but the cars are not. "Last month, I could have sold 100 more units."

Reporter Steven Mayer can be reached at 661-395-7353. Follow him on Facebook and on Twitter: @semayerTBC.

National Blood Pressure Month
Tip of the Day!
Know your numbers
 Normal blood pressure is when systolic pressure (the top number in a blood pressure reading that measures heartbeats while pumping blood) is below 120 mm/Hg and diastolic pressure (the lower number that reflects the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats) is below 80 mm/Hg. Know your numbers and what they mean so you can prevent heart attacks and strokes.
 Brought to you by BAKERSFIELD HEART HOSPITAL

B3K looks to promote tech innovations at military bases

BY JOHN COX
 jcox@bakersfield.com
 New attention is being focused on what some see as Kern's under-tapped potential for turning eastern Kern military research into commercial enterprises generating good, local civilian jobs.
 A recent market assessment

by the county's B3K economic development collaboration suggested more can and should be done to promote "technology transfer" of government-sponsored innovations at China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station and Edwards Air Force Base.
 The question now is how to capitalize more efficiently on the

diverse research that takes place at the two bases but which, for different reasons, often doesn't translate to winning advantage for local business startups.
 B3K leaders are "in the middle of investigating that" and hope to formulate an agreed-upon set of strategies for enhancing the county's tech-transfer capabili-

ties, said David Janiec, a B3K executive committee member and executive director of the China Lake Alliance nonprofit group.
 One idea he brought up was assigning more military manpower to the task, which could end up helping the bases by raising private money for additional research. Doing so could

turn up opportunities for commercializing existing, unclassified capabilities.
 "You often don't recognize what's in your backyard," he said.
 Some see the task ahead as requiring an attitude shift away from a strict military mission

Please see **B3K | A3**

Truck driver shortage worries local ag producers as harvest nears



PHOTOS BY ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Trucks maneuver in and around The Wonderful Co.'s Delano halos plant. A continuing shortage of truckers has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and it's had an adverse effect on local agriculture. Some local ag producers worry there won't be enough hauling capacity to bring this summer's harvest to market.

BY JOHN COX
 jcox@bakersfield.com
 A worsening shortage of truck drivers is raising concerns among local farmers that, unless a solution emerges soon, there might not be enough hauling capacity to bring this year's harvest to market.
 The California Trucking Association says initial indications suggest the shortfall could be as high as 30 percent because of a confluence of factors including an aging workforce and some drivers possibly choosing to collect unemployment benefits rather than return to work during the pandemic.
 Although the driver shortage has affected many industries for years now, farmers already wrestling with congestion at Southern California ports say the situation threatens to drive up food prices as produce sits in the field for too long.
 "For us it's a food issue,"



A forklift operator loads a truck with halos bound for Massachusetts at The Wonderful Co.'s Delano halos plant.

said John Larrea, director of government affairs for the California League of Food Producers, which represents growers in Kern and elsewhere. "Nobody wants wilted lettuce."

WEIGHT RULES
 A primary hope now is that the Biden administration can be persuaded

to temporarily relax truck-weight regulations as the previous administration did. That 120-day emergency measure, before expiring in July, permitted tractor-trucks to exceed their 80,000-pound weight limit by 10 percent, essentially reducing the need for additional drivers.
 But that presents new

problems, including safety worries, and it does nothing to address the long-term challenge of finding more people to drive trucks.
 "We aren't refilling the ranks of the truckers anymore," said Kevin Andrew, senior vice president of Bakersfield-based farming company Illume. "With new driving-time restrictions and less desire to be gone from home so much, it's less attractive."
 People in the local trucking industry point to a variety of hurdles holding them back. Many say they have driver positions that have gone unfilled for months, and that relatively generous jobless benefits have not helped.

STAYING HOME
 Jay Mann, owner of Mann Transport Inc. in Bakersfield, said 90 percent of his

Please see **TRUCK DRIVERS | A3**

GIVE BIG KERN Nonprofit fundraiser looks for big year

BY SAM MORGEN
 smorgen@bakersfield.com
 After an unprecedented year, Tuesday's Give Big Kern aims to provide a huge boost to nonprofits that have struggled through the coronavirus pandemic.
 An important resource to local charity organizations, Give Big Kern has steadily grown over the past six years. The day of giving hosted by the Kern Community Foundation nearly raised \$750,000 in 2020. Given a 400 percent increase in donations since 2017, organizers hope 2021 will finally be the year when the event tops \$1 million.
 "Giving Day is supposed to grow, is supposed to pick up momentum as more of the community finds out about it, and more of the community becomes engaged with the nonprofits," said Louis Medina, the foundation's director of community impact. "That's our big hope, that we can finally break that \$1 million ceiling."
 Billed as "one day to celebrate the giving spirit of Kern County," Give Big Kern provides a platform for more than a hundred local nonprofits to fund programs and activities that help thousands across the community.
 While, officially, Give Big Kern takes place Tuesday, donations are now being accepted at givebigkern.org. On the site, potential donors can search out their favorite nonprofit and make an online

Please see **GIVE BIG | A2**



KENTUCKY DERBY
Medina Spirit wins race; Rock Your World 17th
SPORTS | C1

DINING OUT
Toasted a great option for local brunch bunch
EYE STREET | E1

VIEWPOINT Shawn Jordan, your fifth-grade teacher from Siebert Elementary is calling

Every one in a while, but not nearly often enough, Roger Berry will hear an unfamiliar voice coming from a line at the store or at a table in a restaurant. A voice not remotely like the high-pitched intonations he was accustomed to hearing every nonsummer weekday for 40 years. An adult voice.
 Recently, one such voice reached his ears. "Mr. Berry," the stranger called out. "You were my favorite teacher in school."
 And Roger Berry beamed and thanked the unfamiliar but sincere man, reassured once again that he'd chosen the right course in life



ROBERT PRICE
 FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

and the right specialty within his field: Fifth grade, the last year of innocent, earnest inquisitiveness before hormones come along and rattle the sweet trajectory of childhood.
 But, truth be told, the kids at the four schools where he taught starting in the mid-1960s kind of run together, and the passage of time since his retirement — Berry is 77 — has only made it worse. But a few stand out. High achievers. Talented athletes. Unique personalities.
 And Shawn Jordan.
 That would have been from Berry's fifth-grade class at central Bakersfield's Siebert



Roger Berry, Taft High School class of 1960, has a nice, quiet life now — a little golf here and there, an old, friendly Labrador, a lot of memories. He'd like to hear about his fifth-grade student Shawn Jordan.

ROBERT PRICE / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Please see **PRICE | A2**



CONTACT US
Subscriber services:
 661-392-5777, 800-953-5353
 or customer@bakersfield.com
To report a news tip:
 661-395-7384, 800-540-0646
 or local@bakersfield.com

OUTSIDE TODAY
 YOUR COMPLETE FORECAST | **C6**
HIGH 81 **LOW 60**
 AIR QUALITY **50** | Moderate

INSIDE YOUR CALIFORNIAN
 Advice **E3** Lottery numbers **A3** Sunday Forum **C5**
 Books **E5** Nation & World **B1** Television **E4**
 Classifieds **D3** Obituaries **B1** Today in History **A3**
 Eye Street **E1** Opinion **C4** Travel **E6**
 Horoscopes **E3** Puzzles **D3, E3**
 How They Voted **A5** Sports **C1**

PRICE: \$2

PRICE

Continued from PAGE A1

Elementary in 2004-05, toward the end of his teaching career. Admittedly, Berry's memory of that particular 11-year-old is aided by a 16-year-old newspaper clipping that he laminated just before his retirement and tucked into a drawer in his living room.

Berry pulls it out once every blue moon. Reading it still makes his eyes water. He can still recite the first sentence, unprompted, almost verbatim.

"Three people saw what happened near the corner of Baker and Chico streets five Saturday nights ago. Two of them aren't talking."

It was March 19, 2005. Shawn, a skinny, carefree kid, was walking home with his older cousin after a birthday party. As they approached Baker Street, the cousin, a few steps behind Shawn, knelt to tie his shoe. Just then a man in a Chevy Suburban came zooming around the corner at the same moment Shawn stepped into the street.

The cousin, 15, looked up just in time to see Shawn, frozen in a moment of surprise and indecision, smacked by the vehicle. The driver stopped and looked down at Shawn lying there in the street for a good 10 or 15 seconds. Then he punched it, flying away from the accident scene down Baker Street, northbound.

The accident sent Shawn first to intensive care at Memorial Hospital with a serious head injury, then to Valley Children's Hospital, north of Fresno. Shawn's classmates at Seibert School were suddenly,



ROBERT PRICE / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Roger Berry, Taft High School class of 1960, has a nice, quiet life now — a little golf here and there, an old, friendly Labrador, a lot of memories. He'd like to hear about his fifth-grade student Shawn Jordan.

painfully, learning about vulnerability, grief, hope and harsh reality. Their friend, the kid with the desk over by the window who used to make them laugh, was gone from their lives.

"I'd go up to see him a couple of times a month in Fresno," Berry said. "Gas was cheap then. He was on a ventilator and had braces on his legs." Berry would bring back updates to the class, trying to be upbeat without setting unrealistic expectations. Then one Friday, Berry had to deliver this report: "Shawn won't be back this year," he said. "You'd all better know that."

I paid the class a visit one day soon afterward.

Shawn's classmates didn't have much to say about their friend — just that he was funny and a good basketball player. His best friend, a sweet, skinny kid who sat in the second row, couldn't bring himself to say anything at all. Asked about Shawn, he covered his face in his arms. That said plenty.

Berry followed Shawn's case for several months. Then a new school year began, new challenges emerged, and he lost track.

The driver was never apprehended and the statute of limitations for injury hit-and-run prosecution has

expired.

For what it's worth, though, the driver was 20 to 30 years old with a white shirt, close-cropped hair — shaved on the sides and short on top — and a clean-shaven face. He might have been Hispanic. The vehicle was an early '90s Suburban or similar vehicle, white or silver, with a tinted rear window. All of that information is according to Shawn's cousin, who I declined to name at the time. BPD's investigative file contains no additional information outside of a possible name: "Derrick."

With prosecution and possible restitution apparently out the window,



THE CALIFORNIAN

Shawn Jordan was in Roger Berry's fifth-grade class at central Bakersfield's Siebert Elementary in 2004-05.

the only thing left to learn now, as far as Berry is concerned, is Shawn's status. He survived the crash, we know that. But where he lives now, how he handled the long regimen of physical therapy he almost certainly faced, and what became of him — he'd be about 27 — is a mystery. Efforts to locate him or his mother, Hilda Johnson, have been unsuccessful.

Roger Berry, Taft High School class of 1960, has a nice, quiet life now — a little golf here and there, an old, friendly Labrador, a lot of memories. He and wife Pamela, their two sons now in their late 40s, have a comfortable home in Laurel Glen. Their fulfilled

lives check off most of the important boxes.

But just one more time, sometime before he plays that last round of golf, Berry would like to hear a certain, distinctive voice coming from a line at the store or a table in a restaurant.

It won't be the familiar high tenor of preadolescence but rather something deeper, more self-assured. This one — this one — Berry might recognize.

Robert Price is a journalist for KGET-TV. His column appears here Sundays. Reach him at RobertPrice@KGET.com or via Twitter: @stubblebuzz. The opinions expressed are his own.

GIVE BIG

Continued from PAGE A1

contribution.

For many local nonprofits, the fundraiser has become an important part of their annual budgets.

"We're a very small nonprofit, so the funds that we raise, it helps support our program throughout the year," said Catherine Waldon, executive director of Independence Through Grace, a faith-based nonprofit that provides

enrichment activities for adults with special needs.

The nonprofit has already raised \$56,986 and hopes for even more. Through Give Big Kern, which supplies about a third of the group's budget, Independence

Through Grace provides music, cooking and even ballroom dance for the individuals in its program.

"We had never fundraised before Give Big Kern," Waldon added. "It's a great resource for our program."

COVID-19 prevented many nonprofits from holding in-person fundraisers throughout 2020, making an online platform for donations even more important.

For Bakersfield ARC, which trains individuals with special needs to place them in permanent work, 2020 was also difficult because changes to state laws forced the program to change. The organization, which is partially funded through the state, is hoping to use Give Big Kern to expand its offer-



CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO

In this file photo, staff from the Girl Scouts of Central California South were out in force during Give Big Kern 2018 to draw people for their fundraiser.

ings to its clients.

"We are looking at how can we evolve as an organization to make our clients fully integrated into

the community through work and recreation and the state limits our ability to do that," Erika Dixon, BARC director of development, said of the money the organization receives from the state, which is limited to certain purposes. "So we need to raise big dollars to create more community-based opportunities for our clients."

BARC hopes to provide a three-acre garden for its clients so they can grow and sell their own food at a farm stand. And that's just the beginning.

"The team is sitting down and saying, 'the sky is the limit, what do we do?'" Dixon said. "The fundraising dollars are incredibly important right now because, what we feel is that we have a whole new world laid out to us, and we just need to figure out how to go get it and pay for it."

Volunteer opportunities are also available through Give Big Kern, for those interested. Many nonprofits saw a decrease in volunteers due to COVID concerns.

But with the big day coming up, perhaps that can be turned around, and maybe it will be the biggest year ever.

"We know that Kern County is a very giving community. We know that the people of Kern County like to give to their favorite causes. We know that a lot of people want to volunteer," Medina said. "To us, that would signal this collective trend in giving that the community as a whole can come together and support charity collectively."

You can reach Sam Morgen at 661-395-7415. You may also follow him on Twitter @smorgenTBC.



We are pleased to announce that Ajay Desai, MD, is the new owner of Rio Bravo Cancer Center, and has joined the medical staff as a Radiation Oncologist. With a distinguished career serving the Bakersfield Community for over 20 years, he looks forward to advancing this state-of-the-art facility while providing personalized care and offering hope and healing to those in need of comprehensive oncology services.

Welcome
Dr. Ajay Desai



Accepting most insurances.

661.491.5060 | 4500 Morning Drive | Suite 105
www.RioBravoCancerCenter.com

POP UP In
Celebration of
Mother's Day!
SATURDAY • MAY 8th
10am-5pm

Relax, Shop, Enjoy!
Weekend Hours:
Friday - Sunday, 10am - 5pm

The Lavender Garden®
I SMELL SWEET

- GIFT SHOP
- THE COURTYARD
- ANIMAL PARK
- DOG PARK
- RV PARKING
- FREE TO PUBLIC

VISIT THIS WEEKEND!
Midway from Bakersfield to the Coast!

14014 CA-46, Lost Hills, CA 93249
www.thelavendergarden.com