

# OUR REGION

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## Free tax appeals

Appealing your property tax?  
You can pay to have it done,  
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Back-seat Driver  
**TONY BIZJAK**



[tbizjak@sacbee.com](mailto:tbizjak@sacbee.com)

## Grim duty changes lives forever

With every tragedy on the road, there comes a knock on someone's door.

It's the official death notification, and "it will change someone's life forever," Sacramento County Coroner Greg Wyatt says.

For coroner's deputies, the goal is to find the next of kin fast, deliver the news clearly, but gently. And, do it in person, if you can.

Two weeks ago, headed to his night job, 58-year-old Aman Khanna of North Natomas was killed by a drunk, unlicensed teenage driver who had blown through a stoplight, investigators said.

In a Bee story, we noted the family awoke the next morning to find a 2 a.m. phone message from the coroner.

Several readers asked: Did the coroner really break the news in a recorded message?

The short answer: No. The back story, though, reveals a tough nighttime decision.

The on-duty deputy was occupied, so a chaplain who works with the Coroner's Office went to the house where Khanna lived with his wife and three daughters.

It was 2 a.m. The chaplain knocked, coroner's officials said. No answer. The chaplain called on her cell phone but got the recorder. She left a message asking someone to come to the door.

No one stirred, so she left a note on the door. It said "coroner" on it, and read: Please contact investigators on duty immediately regarding an important message regarding a recent death.

Wyatt says the phrase "recent death" was decided upon, with much thought, to avoid confusion about the urgency of the note.

Approaches differ. Gary Tindel of the Marin County Coroner's Office, who teaches California coroners how to make notifications, says he's left notes but had families call the Sheriff's Department rather than use the word "coroner." The calls were then switched to him.

San Mateo County Coroner Robert Foucault says his agency tries to contact kin in person twice in 24 hours before leaving a note.

Khanna did not come home from work that morning. The family found the chaplain's phone message and hit redial.

"Is he OK?" Khanna's oldest daughter asked. At that point, the chaplain had little choice, coroner's spokesman Ed Smith said. "You're obligated to tell them."

Fifteen minutes later, a chaplain was at the door. Family members say it was the message, more than the delivery method, that shocked them.

But why leave a note or phone message at 2 a.m.? Why not just return the next morning?

Smith said the agency has learned that families want word as soon as possible, even if it sometimes means hearing it first on the phone.

Two weeks ago in Sacramento, it led to a grim judgment call.

A fund for the family, in Aman Khanna's name, can be contributed to at any Golden 1 Credit Union office.

Call The Bee's Tony Bizjak, (916) 321-1059.

PLANNING AGENCY | Regulations heavily restrict construction

# Tahoe piers mired in red tape

BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS DISCOURAGES LAKE RESIDENTS

By CHRIS BOWMAN  
[cbowman@sacbee.com](mailto:cbowman@sacbee.com)

CARNELIAN BAY - Shoreline property owners who have been waiting more than 20 years for regulators' permission to build a pier on Lake Tahoe aren't exactly buoyed by a recent decision to lift the boating structures

ban. That's because the new Regional Planning Agency rules adopted last week come weighted with enough restrictions to sink a pier plan before the first piling is driven.

The permit process for piers, all designed to protect

the lake's beauty, can take years longer than that for building a lakefront home, according to consultants for lakefront owners who had property in the few areas where piers have been allowed.

The fees paid to consultants and attorneys who many use to navigate the regulatory

maze can rival the cost of building the pier.

To win a pier permit, lakefront owners have had to re-roof a neighbor's home in earth-tone colors, plant trees to hide the home from sightseers and even change the exterior paneling on the house to better blend with the forest

and sapphire lake.

"When you start to look at what the new TRPA rules really mean, you'll see that almost no one will be able to build a pier," said Jan Brisco, executive director of the Tahoe Lakefront Property Owners Association.

Brisco said she would be surprised if the new annual quota of five piers a year will be

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WEST SACRAMENTO | Big projects in the works

# Extreme makeover: City edition



RANDY PENCH | [rpench@sacbee.com](mailto:rpench@sacbee.com)

The new CaSTRS building is now in West Sacramento and eventually over the Sacramento River last week. The building in the Riley's Landing area could soon be joined by a hotel and office structure in what is now a vacant lot, and eventually, a 150-unit condo tower. Other plans for the city include streetscaping along West Capitol Avenue.

## WEST SACRAMENTO REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

West Sacramento is redeveloping these three major areas:



Map data: ESRI, TeleAtlas, Sacramento Bee

## PLANS INCLUDE NEW CIVIC CENTER, LIBRARY, AND RIVERFRONT PLAZA

By HUDSON SANGREE  
[hsangree@sacbee.com](mailto:hsangree@sacbee.com)

West Sacramento is transforming itself - from its former red-light district along West Capitol Avenue to vacant lots next to the Sacramento River to the post-industrial wasteland near Riley Field.

City officials broke ground last week for a streetscape a half-mile west of West Capitol Avenue east of Jefferson Boulevard.

Lanes on the former stretch of Highway 40 will be reduced from six to four. Sidewalks, now about 5 feet wide, will be widened to 20 feet, with trees lining the thoroughfare.

"The streetscape plan will radically change the look and feel of West Capitol Avenue," said city redevelopment manager Maureen Pascoe.

The goal is to eventually transform the strip of low-rent motels - once notorious for drugs and prostitution - into an all-American main street with storefronts and pedestrians.



After the streetscaping, there will be a gradual process of encouraging more upscale business development along the avenue, she said.

### New library and civic center

Across West Capitol Avenue from the city's modern City Hall, construction is under way on the \$9 million Arthur F. Turner Community Library that will open late next year.

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AIRPORT ART | Three projects proposed

# Big red rabbit could brighten up terminal

By TONY BIZJAK  
[tbizjak@sacbee.com](mailto:tbizjak@sacbee.com)

Public art lovers and critics alike are about to see red at the airport - big time.

Designs for a massive leaping red rabbit will be presented this week for approval as the centerpiece art in Sacramento International Airport's new terminal.

The 56-foot-long rabbit would stretch through the terminal toward a sculpted suitcase with a swirling vortex on its side, seemingly to swallow

the rabbit and pack it away like a child's toy.

"It's whimsical," local arts commission head Rhyena Halpern said. It leads passengers to baggage claim and "harkens to the collective fear: Is my suitcase going to be there?"

The \$800,000 sculpture is one of three major pieces presented for consideration this week by artists chosen in an earlier competition.

Another work is a 30-foot-

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## ART ON THE AGENDA

**What:** Approve the public art designs by Lawrence Argent, Donald Lipski and Christian Moeller for Phase 1 of the airport art plan

**Where:** Sacramento County Board of Supervisors, 700 H St. Suite 1450, Sacramento

**When:** Tuesday, 9:30 a.m. Airport art presentation scheduled for 11:30 a.m.

**More information:** The meeting will be broadcast live on Metrocast 14 and webcast live at [www.saccountry.net](http://www.saccountry.net)

CONSTRUCTION BOND | Gyms, library planned

# San Juan schools build new facilities

By MELISSA NIX  
[mnix@sacbee.com](mailto:mnix@sacbee.com)

San Juan Unified School District broke ground last week on a \$4.3 million gym at Mesa Verde High School, the district's first major construction in 15 years.

Come December, the district will start building another gym at Del Campo High School, and in June, construction will begin on a brand new library at Mesa Verde.

Turns out, the bottom falling out of the housing industry

is good for districts such as San Juan that have passed school construction bonds but not yet used them up.

The gym would have cost about 25 percent more to build just a few years ago, said Don Myers, the district's senior director of facilities and planning. "We're seeing really hungry contractors right now."

Robert Pierce, associate superintendent for facilities and planning in Elk Grove Unified School District, said districts

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