

It's chance to judge the judges

June provides rare opportunity to vote in contested bench races

BY JASON KOTOWSKI
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Cicadas emerge more often than a sitting judge is challenged in Kern County, but voters this year will have the opportunity to decide whether to re-elect a sitting judge or move on to someone new. The three-way race for seat 34 in

Election 2016

Mojave is one of two local contested races for judge this year, and marks the first time in 22 years a sitting judge has been challenged. In 1996, attorney Robert Barton unsuccessfully ran against Judge H.A. "Skip" Staley. The other local race is for seat 20 in Bakersfield to replace retiring

Judge Michael Lewis. The 20 other county judgeships up for re-election are uncontested. That includes seat 33, where prosecutor Ken Green is running unopposed to replace retiring Judge Gary Witt. Judges most often are appointed by the governor, and are rarely challenged when they come up for re-election following their six-year terms. This year, then, offers voters a chance at something relatively rare. And the races are countywide, so every registered voter can make their voice heard. The races are as follows:

Seat 34
• Cory Woodward, 57, of Tehachapi. Graduate of McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific. Kern County District Attorney's office prosecutor, 1987-2003; court commissioner, Kern County Superior Court, 2003-2006; Superior Court judge 2007-present.
Disciplinary actions: Censured



Woodward

by the California Commission on Judicial Performance in 2014 after he admitted to carrying on a lengthy affair with his court clerk, misleading his bosses about the relationship and resisting the court administrator's efforts to reassign the woman. Woodward faces two challengers, a prosecutor and a defense attorney, as he seeks re-election to the seat he's held since 2007. Woodward says on his campaign website that he's been active in the community in addition to the work
Please see JUDGES / A9

Class teaches kids uke can do music

BY HAROLD PIERCE
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When Jim Schaffer pitched the idea, his principal was wary. How about a year-long class where kids can build their own ukuleles, then learn about the culture of Hawaiian music, and, of course, how to play their instruments? "It was a hesitant 'yes,'" Schaffer said. "But we put on an end-of-the-year concert, and after that first concert he was sold."

Since that first concert last year, the class has gained something of a cult following at Earl Warren Jr. High School. About 100 students enrolled in four sections of the class this year, crafting their instruments in the fall, then honing their musical talents in the spring.

While building a ukulele isn't your garden-variety elective offering at most junior high schools, it's not unusual for Schaffer to settle on unconventional courses.

His classroom looks like something out of a hobby store. There are model rockets and airplanes suspended from the ceiling, drill presses and heavy machinery in the back workshop, remnants of solar-powered car parts and ukuleles in progress strewn throughout the room.

Outside of the four ukulele classes, which now dominate Schaffer's schedule, he teaches Exploring Technology, a course where kids build rubber band airplanes, rockets, CO2-powered micro cars, solar-powered hot dog cookers and take on a litany of other projects. They also learn about the science that makes all those projects possible.

"In other classes, we make rockets and rubber band air-



CASEY CHRISTIE / THE CALIFORNIAN

After they tune up their instruments, instructor Jim Schaffer leads the class in a song.

planes. That stuff breaks," Schaffer said. "These ukuleles will last forever."

The ukulele class was born out of Schaffer's own interests as a guitar player. He was struck one day by a song played with a ukulele and asked his wife if he could buy one, but was disappointed with the quality of his Ibanez ukulele.

"I could build something better than that," he said.

So he built one from a kit. Then he decided that it could sound better, and tried his hand at one from scratch. He constructed a machine at home to heat the wood, relaxing it enough to curve. He talked to luthiers.

He scouted for wood producing the warm sound he sought in a tenor ukulele. And then he began making them for friends and family.

If he could do it, why not his students?

They aren't building anything from scratch, however. They start with kits, and must attach the neck, bridge and fretboard to a prefab body, then string their ukuleles after sanding and finishing them.

The class draws students — mostly boys — who aren't necessarily in band, but still want to
Please see UKULELES / A11



Ethan Guerrero strums his ukulele while singing a song in his class at Earl Warren Junior High.



MIKE KITADA / CALMATTERS

Adriana Jimenez, center, explains the Covered California enrollment process to potential clients Maria Valle, left, and Elvia Salgado.

State seeks health care for undocumented in federal plan

BY PAULINE BARTOLONE
CALMATTERS
As the presidential election generates a heated national debate about immigration, California is ploughing ahead with policies to integrate undocumented immigrants, most recently, by expanding health care access.

"It's one of the most dramatic turn-arounds in California political history," said Daniel Zingale, senior vice president of the California Endowment, a nonprofit health foundation, about undocumented kids being covered for a full range of health services through Medi-Cal starting Monday.

Currently, Medi-Cal covers emergency medical services for undocumented children and adults.

Now, California health care advocates and immigrant rights groups want to allow undocumented immigrants the option of buying a health plan, without government subsidies, through the state-run marketplace, Covered California.

The proposal needs federal approval, an involved bureaucratic process that could be thwarted under a new presidency. So California advocates are acting swiftly to get their application to President Obama before he leaves office, and to do so must win support from at least a few California Republican lawmakers.

"It is consistent with (President Obama's) values of immigrant integration," said state
Please see HEALTH / A9

Denying settlement in sexual assault is wrong-headed

Lois Henry
OMG, just pay the woman. There's so much wrong with Kern County lawyers trying to hold up a \$1 million settlement to a sexual assault victim over a press release that I'm practically speechless.

Word is county attorneys are so adamant about not paying they're bringing the issue before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

What is going on inside their heads? This woman was sexually assaulted by a sheriff's deputy.



Think about that. A person with a gun and a badge used the power entrusted in him by the public to get his jollies by degrading another human being. That's horrifying.

Instead of trying to wriggle out of paying the victim on a technicality, county attorneys should review the Sheriff's Office hiring practices and see if they need tightening. Sheesh.

The deputy, Gabriel Lopez, pled no contest (basically a guilty plea) to that assault and one other in 2015 and was sentenced to two years in prison.

While one victim sued the county, the

other was paid off through what I consider to be a questionable process whereby a sheriff's employee offered her \$5,000 to release the county from liability.

This is apparently commonplace, which the paper will examine more thoroughly later.

Meanwhile, the other victim, who declined \$10,000 in hush money from the Sheriff's Office, sued. That lawsuit resulted in the \$1 million settlement.

As part of the settlement, though, county attorneys demanded the victim's attorneys at firm Chain Cohn Stiles not hold a press



Lopez

conference.

Perhaps the county hadn't gotten over the dueling press conferences from the previous week that followed announcement of a \$3.4 million settlement in the wrongful death lawsuit regarding David Sal Silva. Chain Cohn Stiles was the firm on that case as well.

Silva died in May 2013 after he was awakened by a sheriff's deputy from where he'd passed out on a sidewalk across from Kern Medical.

Silva became combative after the rough awakening.

So much so that seven sheriff's deputies, a sheriff's K-9 and two CHP officers joined the effort to subdue him, eventually getting him restrained on the ground where he died.


LOIS HENRY ONLINE

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His death was ruled accidental, the result of hypertensive heart disease.

During a press conference about the settlement, Chain Cohn Stiles lawyers repeated that they believed Silva died of asphyxiation caused by law enforcement's actions and that the Sheriff's Office had done a shoddy investigation.


Sheriff Donny Youngblood held his own press conference in which he accused Chain Cohn Stiles of trying to drum up business based
Please see HENRY / A11



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Unfinished ukuleles will soon be worked on by Earl Warren Junior High School students in Jim Schaffer's class.



Students in Jim Schaffer's class at Earl Warren Junior High School practice on their ukuleles.

UKULELES

CONTINUED FROM A7

play. Students like Arianna Valenzuela, who used to play french horn until she gave it up because, she said, sitting in the horn section near the percussion sets gave her headaches.

"I couldn't keep up with it," Valenzuela said, strumming her ukulele in class on a recent morning. "This is more calming."

It also gives those kids who don't know how to play an instrument the opportunity to find out if they can, Schaffer said.

"To join band you have to know how to play already. This gives those kids who don't (know how to play) a really good outlet," Schaffer said.

He clicks on a video of a student from his class last year who had never picked up an instrument. Before the end of the year, he was tearing across the fretboard, playing complicated pieces of music and making it look effortless.

"You never know," Schaffer said.

The same goes for students like Ethan Guerrero, who played trombone for a little while, but was excited to pick up ukulele this year. He pulls a group of five of his friends into the workshop in the back of the classroom, secluding themselves from a cacophony of sound outside, and they begin a rendition of "Sabor A Mi."

Guerrero leads his group in the rhythm sections of the Spanish love ballad, but doesn't hesitate asking for



Earl Warren Junior High School student Dylan Meadors waits for class to start while resting on his homemade ukulele.

help where he stumbles.

"I don't know how you guys play the intro, it's so hard," he tells his classmates, referring to the finger plucking, hammer-ons and pull-offs not easily executed by beginning players.

The class even attracts those who aren't students.

Terry Garner, a retired teacher from the district, turned up last year and built a ukulele of his own.

"I sent it to my mother-in-law," Garner said. "This is something these kids will never forget."

HENRY

CONTINUED FROM A7

on lies and reiterated that three separate investigations by his office, the Kern County District Attorney's office and the FBI did not back up their claims.

It was tense.

So back to the latest settlement against the Sheriff's Office.

Chain Cohn Stiles agreed to no press conference but asked if a press release would be OK.

According to attorney Neil K. Gehlawat, the county was fine with that.

The release went out, the press reacted, next thing you know, Assistant County Counsel Mark Nations is saying the settlement may be a no-go.

As in, the county may pay the victim nothing.

His stance hinges on this clause: "This settlement will not be publicly disclosed by any party unless required by

LISTEN UP!

Lois Henry appears on "First Look with Scott Cox" every Wednesday on KERN 1180 AM and 96.1 FM from 9 to 10 a.m. The show is also broadcast live on www.bakersfield.com. You can get your 2 cents in by calling 842-KERN.

statute."

Yes, the county, as a government agency, is required by statute to reveal legal settlements — if asked.

And no, Chain Cohn Stiles is not required by statute to disclose a settlement.

Kern County may think it's a neat trick to withhold the victim's money based on such a technicality.

I do not.

First, it tells me the county wanted to keep this settlement under wraps, only revealing it if someone in the know knew to ask.

Second, it would victimize the victim all over again,

forcing her to go back to court to enforce the settlement.

Both are appallingly shady and petty actions that the Board of Supervisors should reject out of hand.

Remember what this is all about: An employee representing the county in the most powerful way possible assaulted this woman and at least one other, that we know of.

One of the goals of big money settlements is they inflict enough monetary pain on a government agency that it has a great incentive to make sure the same thing never happens again.

I'm gonna go out on a limb and suggest that should be the focus. Not punishing the victim.

Opinions expressed in this column are those of Lois Henry. Her column runs Wednesdays and Sundays. Comment at <http://www.bakersfield.com>, call her at 395-7373 or email lhenry@bakersfield.com.



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