

Section

B

Sunday
December 21, 2003

LOCAL

Coming
Monday

Last year, the county Christmas tree stirred up controversy with its Hispanic theme — now the county has a new tree.

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Robert Price
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Brothers give to honor their mom's legacy

The Mendiburu brothers move at different speeds. Brian, the younger one, is in constant motion. His jaw is perhaps his most remarkable feature, not so much for its contours as its agility and endurance. He can talk.

John is a relative stoic. His pattern of speech is to Cliffs Notes what Brian's is to Tolstoy. He is Brian, abbreviated.

But they move with synchronicity when it comes to one mutual interest. They run the Mendiburu Magic Foundation, a small, home-grown nonprofit dedicated to — among other things — easing the burden of catastrophic illness, and cancer in particular.

The way Brian tells it, he almost had no choice but to establish the foundation.

He was just 22 when, in June 2000, his mother, Nancy, died from ovarian cancer.

"Instead of carrying that pain around, I decided to do something positive," he said. "Something she would have been proud of. Something that honors her legacy."

He asked his brother if he'd help. "He told me, 'Just let me know what I need to do,'" Brian said.

Brian, the founder and president, made his brother the foundation's secretary.

You've seen obituaries that conclude with: "In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to..." The Mendiburu brothers made a similar gesture and then multiplied it by 365.

This month marks the foundation's third anniversary — three years trying to help people meet some of the extraordinary needs that arise in family medical emergencies.

They can't pay for entire surgeries or long-term medical expenses. They focus on the little things, the secondary costs that can eat away at savings accounts and inflate credit card balances: Gas money to and from clinics in Los Angeles or San Diego. Hotel bills. Medication co-pays. Insurance shortfalls. Supplies that HMOs don't cover. Wheelchairs, crutches.

Many of the primary donors are friends and relatives of the Mendiburus, a Basque sheep-ranching family that has been prominent here since Juan Mendiburu immigrated with his brother to the southern San Joaquin Valley from Azpilcueta, Spain, in the early 1950s.

The foundation (www.mendiburumagic.org) also has a scholarship component, an outgrowth of mother Nancy's lifelong emphasis on kids and education. The Mendiburus award cash to

Please turn to PRICE / B5

County making dumpers pay a price

Fines to go up amid outrage from officials, residents over problem

By LAURA A. MALDONADO
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Ron Pierce is tired of cleaning up other people's trash.

He's hauled off couches, water heaters, mattresses, garbage bags and stacks and stacks of tires from his 20 acres just off Comanche Drive and Breckenridge Road.

He spends every weekend with his fiancée Carol Onsum picking up trash along their rural road and has even confronted dumpers in the act. Pierce grew up riding motorcycles in the area and says seeing it trashed is disheartening and irritating.

"I ask them if they know they're dumping in my front yard. If we don't clean it up right away, hundreds of others will pile it on," Pierce said.

Pierce and Onsum are just starting to build a new home amid the sloping foothills. They'll clean up an area only to find a new illegal dump nearby within days. They've brought in a small bulldozer to pile up trash — crumbled concrete, shot-up swamp coolers, car seats. The county has brought in large trash bins to haul off the waste free of charge.

The Bena landfill is just a few miles away on Neumarkel Road.

"All of these things are accepted for free at the landfills," said Mary Beth Garrison, executive director of Community Clean Sweep. "People know this is against the law, or else they wouldn't come so far off the road to (dump their trash)."

Kern County supervisors are sick of the problem and are putting some teeth in the illegal dumping program.

They have agreed to increase fees for violators and have said they want to hire enforcement officers. The fees go into effect in January.

First-time violators will now pay \$250 instead of \$100. Repeat offenders will pay more, too. The charges for second and third offenses jump to \$500 and \$1,000.

"People who are breaking the law need to know we're serious," board Chairman Pete Parra said.

The problem lies in catching dumpers in the act. That can be a challenge in a county of 8,171 square miles.

Supervisors say it would literally take surveillance to keep rural areas clean. But even in the best of budget

Please turn to DUMP / B5



FELIX ADAMO / THE CALIFORNIAN

Ron Pierce and his fiancée Carol Onsum walk among the illegally dumped trash near their property at Breckenridge Road and Comanche Drive.



LYDIA GONZALES / SPECIAL TO THE CALIFORNIAN

Nick Salinas debones a turkey while Rosa Gomez and Angela Ochoa prepare to break a wishbone at the Bakersfield Homeless Center.

Spirit of service

Troubled students volunteer time through program to help homeless

By DAVID HUNN

Californian staff writer

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An unlikely set of volunteers pulled turkey meat at the Bakersfield Homeless Center Friday afternoon.

Eight students expelled from Bakersfield schools stripped 48 turkey carcasses in preparation for the center's 600-person Christmas feast, to be held today.

They were part of a new Bakersfield program that aims to get school troublemakers doing community work.

A \$94,000 grant has paid for the Kern County Superintendent of Schools' program, called the Community Youth Connection. The connection takes teens currently enrolled in alternative schools, and gets them involved in community service for six weeks.

There's never been a program so focused on community service, said Jeff Coomber, who runs the program.

So far, 20 students have participated — painting over graffiti, helping distribute toys, preparing food baskets and Christmas meals.

Right now, in its first year, the community service is voluntary. Most of the students asked to be a part of the program, at least partially so they could get

out of school, they said, laughing.

But Coomber hopes the program will eventually be more stringent. He hopes to get 260 students involved, and make their involvement mandatory. Without the 20 to 30 hours of community service, he hopes they won't be able to get back into a mainstream school.

Coomber's not alone. The program spans four counties — San Luis Obispo, Ventura, Santa Barbara and Kern — and a \$450,000 grant pays for all four programs.

Kern County has plenty of expelled students to keep Coomber busy for a while. Among Kern High, Bakersfield City and Lamont school districts, about 600 students are expelled each year, Coomber said. And he serves Richland and Greenfield Union school districts as well.

Coomber said the program will expand in January, bringing students to The Boys & Girls Club to tutor youngsters. He also plans on picking up trash for the Great American Cleanup and planting trees for the Tree Foundation.

And while the aim is to keep kids off the streets and to help out the community, it's also to help the students feel better about themselves.

"My hope is they take away something," Coomber said while picking

Please turn to SERVICE / B5



Cecelia Bautista and Jose Ortega prepare cup, napkin and fork setups on Friday for a Christmas feast scheduled for today at the Bakersfield Homeless Center.

Review panel to examine CPS cases

Members to study incident of child locked in closet

By CHRISTINA VANCE

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A new team wields the power to study normally confidential Child Protective Services cases.

One of their first assignments is a whopper.

The Kern Citizen Review Panel will scrutinize a high-profile case involving a boy who was shut inside a closet smeared with human waste.

The panel was formed months ago at the request of the Department of Human Services and CPS, Assistant Director Kris Grasty said.

The new program was a state idea, and Kern County volunteered.

"We were one of only three counties that jumped at the chance to do it," she said.

Panel member Steve Sanders, who's also the executive director of the Kern County Network for Children, said his organization was tasked with putting the group together.

The result? A "brain trust" of people with backgrounds in child welfare, foster care, health, the law, education and medicine.

Child abuse is a definite problem in Kern County, Sanders said. Substantiated child abuse numbers are double the state rates. Poverty and unemployment are high.

Please turn to CPS / B5

Eight teachers earn prestigious teaching award

By DAVID HUNN

Californian staff writer

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Eight Kern County teachers received National Board Certification this year, almost double the number who earned the prestigious teaching award last year, according to data recently released by the California Department of Education.

The national certification allows teachers to prove their excellence in the classroom as well as their commitment to improvement, educators say.

The rewards are high. National Board Certified teachers can teach in any state in the country without having to take extra college classes or be certified by the individual state, said Sierra Middle School teacher Mindy Koerner, who just received her certification this year.

But, according to all, the application process is expensive — \$2,300 — and time-consuming, sometimes taking as many as 200 hours of work.

Teachers must compile a classroom portfolio, demonstrate their teaching ability in a video and take a "stringent"

Please turn to CERTIFICATIONS / B5

Get involved

Upcoming

Tehachapi Planning Commission, 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Council Chambers, 115 S. Robinson St., Tehachapi.

E-mail alerts

To get news, weather and traffic alerts via email, visit <http://newsletters.bakersfield.com/>

bakersfield.com



FELIX ADAMO / THE CALIFORNIAN

Illegally dumped trash near Breckenridge Road and Comanche Drive includes an old chair.

DUMP: New county positions on hold as budget controversy is being resolved

Continued from B1

years, there would never be enough funding to watch every pocket of the county.

"There's no way we could put an officer at all the sites" said Rod Parker, the principal building inspector with the county.

Parker has a staff of six that enforce housing, zoning and building codes.

He was hoping to add five more to deal with dumping problems, but supervisors only approved two earlier this year. The new staffers would focus on illegal dumping and eventually his entire staff would cross-train.

But even those two positions are now on hold until the state car tax controversy is resolved.

"We needed \$500,000 per year just to deal with the run-of-the-mill complaints," said David Price, director of the county's Resource Management Agency.

"We got \$200,000. Some would say we've got a \$6 million problem on the ground (of Kern County)," Price said.

In the meantime, landowners like Pierce are being told to put up fencing, form neighborhood watches and report dumpers to the Sheriff's Department by taking down license plate numbers, county staff say.

Supervisors are sick of wasting county dollars repeatedly cleaning the same areas.

"We have to find out who these dumpers are. It's unfair to the vast majority of county residents who want to keep their neighborhoods clean," Supervisor Barbara Patrick said.

Waste programs

To learn more about county waste reduction programs, call 862-8979.

The newest service to residents in the unincorporated areas of Bakersfield is curbside large-item collection. Local haulers will collect up to two large items at your curb per month for free. To schedule a pickup, call 322-6863 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Bakersfield residents can take bulky items to the Bena or Shafter-Wasco landfills. For hours, call (800) 552-5376, option 6.

Pierce's property is only one problem spot in the county. Another illegal dump site along Poso Creek between McFarland and Wasco would cost \$30,000 to clean up, said Aurora Rush, the community educator with the county's Waste Management Department.

"In terms of the environmental impact, (Poso Creek) would blow your mind," Rush said.

The increased fines and potential hiring of enforcement officers aren't the first steps the county has taken to crack down on illegal dumping. In recent years the county has started requiring trash collection in some urban areas.

So far residents in unincorporated Bakersfield, portions of unincorporated Taft, Lost Hills, Lamont and Weedpatch have all had curbside service forced upon them.

PRICE: 'If it's a good cause, I can't help myself,' group's founder says of his work

Continued from B1

about five graduating seniors from the Kern High School District each June.

The application has an essay component.

"We ask them to write about compassion," Brian said. "What it means to give back to a community. I think it helps for them to know that's part of what they're being acknowledged for."

The money for that program comes from the Hoopin' With Hope junior-high boys' basketball tournament. Brian, who is the head basketball coach at south Bakersfield's Golden Valley High School, has the connections to make that happen.

But community leaders have stepped up, too.

One is Larry Reider, the county superintendent of school, who came on board after meeting Brian.

Mendiburu, then an officer (and now a consultant) with the Boys & Girls Club of Bakersfield, had led people on a tour of some of the local schools that were working closely with the youth organization. Reider quickly realized he was dealing with a young man worth keeping tabs on.

"We talked about careers and I told him I thought he would make a great educator," Reider said.

When he heard about the foundation, he was doubly impressed.

"What he's doing is really positive," Reider said. "He's willing to give back. That's rare. You have to encourage that."

But the school tour was a bit of an ordeal.

"He's like the Energizer Bunny," Reider said. "That was a tour and a half. Trying to keep up with him was something. He's like a sprinter; he really can talk."

Guiltily as charged, Brian admits. "I know I'm hyper," said Brian, still just 26. "I don't know if my friends and family really like it. I hear about it all the time."

But when the phones are ringing, hyper can be a good thing.

"And it's usually an everyday thing," said John Mendiburu, the 30-year-old principal of west Bakersfield's Almondale School. "We can get from 12 calls a week to 50 calls a week."

Well, they asked for it. "I've been told I have a lot on my plate," Brian said. "But I'm just getting a taste of everything. If it's a good cause, I can't help myself."

Mom would be proud.

"I hold onto that day when I can see her again and tell her what has transpired since that day, when I was 22 and I lost her," Brian said. "Anything I can possibly do on this Earth to make sure I see her again one day, I'll do."

CPS: Official hopes group will help find ways in which agency can work better

Continued from B1

The county welfare system can use improvement, Sanders said. That's one reason the department called for the panel, and he praised the system for its openness.

"The department's behind it, but we're potentially coming up with things that we need to improve," he said.

Panel members have spent most of their time learning about the system. They've split into different teams to focus on areas like investigations, child placement, child fatalities and other issues.

In the future, the panel will talk to people who have contact with the system such as foster parents, those who have had their children taken away and social workers, Sanders said.

The panel will also review selected CPS investigations like the Eliana Espinoza case, an incident that prompted an internal audit of CPS and raised the ire of state Sen. Dean Florez. Questions arose over CPS' response

time in the case and the mother's 10-year referral history.

Espinoza pleaded no contest Wednesday to willful cruelty to a child after being accused of locking her youngest son in a feces-streaked closet for up to three days at a time. Sentencing was set for Jan. 14.

Grasty said the panel is a boon to CPS because it lets the agency get a once-over for cases like Espinoza's.

"We really needed another group that would, independent of our department, look at how we do business," she said. "It was a way to involve the community."

Sanders said his agency will likely review many cases and release periodic recommendations.

The panel will do good, but Sanders stressed that child abuse can't be solved by improving just one system.

"This is really a bigger issue than one agency," Sanders said. "Every time we blame one agency, we're taking the blame away from the one person who deserves it: the abuser."

CERTIFICATIONS: Rigorous process 'really made me look at myself,' Sierra teacher says

Continued from B1

subject-matter competency test. Six out of 10 who try, fail.

Last year, 12 Bakersfield City School District teachers started the process. Four submitted portfolios, said Bakersfield teacher Sammie Novak. And only three received the certification.

"It really attests to how difficult the process is," said Carol Sherrill, city school district supervisor of curriculum and standards.

But the accreditation is beginning to pick up momentum. As of last year there were fewer than a dozen teachers across Kern County who had passed National Boards, Novak said. Five teachers were certified in 2002 and just three in 2001, state department data showed.

But when results were released this month, eight teachers passed.

Similarly, teachers across the state seem to be getting more interested in the certification. In 2001, 515 teachers were certified. In 2002, 652. And in 2003, 687 teachers across California were certified.

"The word's spreading," Koerner said. Koerner said she mostly did it to prove that she was a good teacher. She had not been credentialed by the state when she started the application, and she wanted to prove she was good regardless.

But she said she discovered that the process itself made her a better teacher.

"It really made me look at myself," Koerner said, who has since gotten her state credential as well.

Part of the application involves videotaping herself while teaching.

Koerner filmed her class discussing a short story — "There Will Come Soft Rains," by Ray Bradbury — about a future after a nuclear holocaust, and a house that made breakfast and did chores itself. Unlike everything around it, the house survived the blast, and was functioning

Kern teachers get certifications

Eight Kern County teachers earned National Board Certifications in 2003:

- Marlys Brimmer, Kern High, adolescence and young adulthood/mathematics
- Noelle Combs, Kern High, adolescence and young adulthood/social studies-history
- Karen Corson, Bakersfield City, early and middle childhood/English as a new language
- Mary Kennedy, Panama Buena Vista Union Elementary, early adolescence/mathematics
- Melinda Jean Koerner, Bakersfield City, early adolescence/English language arts
- Jose Maldonado, Delano Joint Union High, adolescence and young adulthood/mathematics
- Jan Rita Phelan Herbert, Bakersfield City Elementary, early childhood/generalist
- Sarah Schlusell, Kern High, adolescence and young adulthood/science

much as normal.

Now, Koerner considers herself to be pretty good with students. She listens when they talk and gets along with them well. But at one point in the discussion, when a group of students said the house was being psychotic, she blew them off. "Naw, guys, be serious," she remembers telling them.

But then she watched the videotape and reread the story. And she realized that they were being serious, in a very eighth-grade way.

She wrote about it in her National Board application, and then went and apologized to the students.

More importantly, she says, she learned something about her teaching.



LYDIA GONZALES / SPECIAL TO THE CALIFORNIAN

Rigoberto Romero, Jose Ortega, Cecelia Bautista, Rosa Gomez, Ronny Hurtado, Nick Salinas and Desire Foster begin deboning the first of 48 turkeys Friday at the Bakersfield Homeless Center.

SERVICE: One student says he wants to continue volunteering when he returns to mainstream school

Continued from B1

turkey bones with the students. "A little change of attitude."

The junior high students around him had fun Friday — flicking turkey oil at each other, blowing up plastic gloves and vying for carcass-plucking duty.

"You lucky the oil didn't sling off," 13-year-old Nick Salinas said to a girl next to him. "I've been flinging it at you all day."

Twelve-year-old Angela Ochoa shoved a turkey bone in his face.

At the other end of the metal counter, 13-year-old Rigoberto Romero grabbed one of the 15 trays of turkey in front of the students.

Rigoberto, called Rigo by his classmates, was

expelled from Sierra Middle School last year. He doesn't want to talk about why, but he says he's changed.

"I thought of school as fun and games," he said of his time at Sierra.

Since then, his teachers at Sandstone East Community School have told him how much he's improved.

"I've been doing good," he said. "My grades have been going up."

Two days ago, he said, he passed his Constitution test — 95 percent. An A plus.

Rigo will head back to a mainstream junior high in January.

But he's asked Coomber if he can keep volunteering.

BIRTHS

- KERN MEDICAL CENTER**
- AMIREZ: to Jesus Dominguez and Irene Ramirez, a daughter, Elizabeth, 7 lbs. 12 oz., 19 in., Nov. 7.
- AMIREZ: to Alfredo Ramirez and Eulalia Medina, a son, Jose Alfredo, 6 lbs. 3 oz., 18½ in., Nov. 23.
- AMOS: to Sam Ramos and Suzanne Esqueda, a son, Ryan Andrew, 3 lbs. 6 oz., Nov. 25.
- AYAS: to Charles Sr. and Christina, a daughter, Aaliyah Illene, 6 lbs. 13 oz., 20 in., Nov. 22.
- REYES: to Jasper and Melinda, a son, Damien Paul, 6 lbs. 4 oz., 18½ in., Nov. 8.
- REYES: to Alfredo Reyes and Yadira Valdovinos, a son, Kevin, 7 lbs. 10 oz., 19½ in., Oct. 28.
- RICO: to Pablo and Maria, a daughter, Linda Ruby, 1 lb. 7 oz., 11 in., Nov. 29.
- RIVERA: to Jiussahna, a son, Fernando, 8 lbs. 1 oz., 20 in., Nov. 30.
- ROBLES: to Jorge and Irma, a daughter, Melissa, 8 lbs. 9 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 19.
- ROCHA: to Moises and Lucila, a daughter, Vanessa, 9 lbs. 4 oz., 20 in., Nov. 2.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Juan Rodriguez and Yesenia Delapaz, a son, Antonio Eduardo, 7 lbs. 4 oz., 18½ in., Oct. 29.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Felipe Rodriguez and Delcia Chavez, a son, Bryan Alexander, 8 lbs. 19½ in., Nov. 13.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Sandra Nava, a daughter, Concepcion, 6 lbs. 7 oz., Oct. 31.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Rosalio and Carmen, a son, Cristian, 9 lbs. 7 oz., 22 in., Nov. 17.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Arcadio and Rafaela, a daughter, Daisy, 10 lbs. 2 oz., 21 in., Nov. 19.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Hector Rodriguez and Vanessa Simmons, a daughter, Jackeline, 7 lbs. 1 oz., 20 in., Oct. 27.
- RODRIGUEZ: to Leopoldo Rodriguez and Veronica Castro, a son, Leopoldo, 6 lbs. 10 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 15.
- ROJAS: to Mario Rojas and Maira De La Rosa, a son, Luis Mario, 8 lbs. 4 oz., Nov. 24.

- ROMERO: to Jose and Brenda, a daughter, Jade Irene, 8 lbs. 5 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 4.
- ROMERO: to Jennifer, a son, Juan Gerardo, 9 lbs. 1 oz., 20½ in., Nov. 14.
- ROSALLES: to Miguel Rosales and Amanda Lopez, a son, Elijah Angel, 7 lbs. 7 oz., 19 in., Nov. 25.
- RUBALCADO: to Manuel and Lilly, a daughter, Julianna Marie, 9 lbs. 10 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 24.
- RUSH: to Kevin Rush and Samantha Hurst, a daughter, Karmanita Carmelle, 5 lbs. 7 oz., Oct. 31.
- RUSH: to Thomas and Jammie, a daughter, Kim Antonia, 7 lbs. 1 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 7.
- SAAVEDRA: to Liborio Saavedra and Josefina Rodriguez, a daughter, Giselle Jasmine, 10 lbs. 1 oz., Nov. 4.
- SALAS: to Monica, a son, Elijah Jacob, 7 lbs. 8 oz., Nov. 24.
- SANCHEZ: to Juan and Aida, a son, Juan Jr., 7 lbs. 6 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 8.
- SANCHEZ: to Eduarolo and Vanessa, a daughter, Mariana, 3 lbs. 13 oz., 17 in., Nov. 13.
- SANCHEZ: to Josue Sanchez and Marisa Lopez, a daughter, Sayorie Nicole, 7 lbs. 2 oz., 18 in., Nov. 8.
- SANCHEZ: to Juan and Graciela, a daughter, Yanelly Cristal, 6 lbs. 14 oz., Nov. 20.
- SANDOVAL: to David Sandoval and Margarita Contreras, a daughter, Abby Deilah, 6 lbs. 1 oz., 18 in., Nov. 17.
- SIFUENTES: to Armando and Yolanda, a daughter, Jennifer Monique, 4 lbs. 10 oz., 18½ in., a daughter, Yvett Marie, 4 lbs. 9 oz., 18 in., Nov. 11.
- SILVA: to Noe Silva and Liliana Magana, a son, Nelson Noe, 7 lbs. 10 oz., 19 in., Oct. 30.
- SIMPSON: to Roosevelt Simpson Jr. and Erica Heisser, a daughter, Jasmen Arianna, 6 lbs. 10 oz., 19 in., Nov. 25.
- SKAGGS: to Miranda, a daughter, Ava Celeste, 8 lbs. 11 oz., 21 in., Nov. 28.
- SOTO: to John and Louisa, a daughter, Angelica Emily, 7 lbs. 14 oz., 19½ in., Nov. 11.
- SOTO: to Ezequiel Soto and Lori Webb, a son, Patrick Ezequiel, 7 lbs. 4 oz., 18½ in., Nov. 14.



"Sound Off" is a feedback forum designed to give readers a way to voice criticisms, compliments or questions about news coverage. Questions are answered by Executive Editor Mike Jenner. "Sound Off" appears Thursdays and Sundays. To offer your input by phone, please call 395-7649 and leave your comments in a voice-mail message or send an e-mail to soundoff@bakersfield.com. Please include your phone number so we can call you if we need to get more information.



Jenner

Reader: Several months ago, *The Californian* carried several articles reporting the death of a female infant in a Kern County foster home. Her twin sister was hospitalized. At least one article was the headline article in the Local section and the name of the foster parent (Sabrina Stafford) was given. Her arrest and subsequent release were also reported in these articles. A lot of details were provided which certainly gave the reader the idea that Mrs. Stafford was negligent in her duties as a foster mother.

However, the final autopsy results were given only scant attention in a very small article published earlier this week with the headline "Death not suspicious." The foster parent's name was not mentioned in this article.

I am wondering why Mrs. Stafford's alleged failings were given so much attention and why the fact that the infant's death is finally confirmed as not being suspicious was published in a small article printed in the bottom left corner of the Local section.

No criminal charges have been filed against this foster mother. It has now been determined that the infant's death was not due to her negligence. I think the facts that proclaim her innocence deserve to be more prominently displayed in *The Californian*.

— Jeff Mendoza

Jenner: You're right.

The story about the autopsy was put together on deadline, but it should have named the foster mom who was implicated in earlier stories.

It's important that we clear accused people when the system deems they're no longer a suspect. And we should give such stories prominence similar to the original stories.

We'll publish a full follow-up story on this in the near future.

Reader: I want to thank you so much for **David Hunn's** article on Debbie Mixon in Wednesday's paper.

I was one of her CSUB instructors and her supervisor during her student teaching days. We can usually see immediately in our new student teachers whether we have a potential success or not. They come to us with the same training but not the same love of the craft nor the deep desire to help children.

I immediately saw in Debbie a love of teaching and the energy to want to help children be the best they can be. She has that special insight to see beyond what ever might be in the way of learning.

This article was a Christmas gift I shall treasure because she was one of my "children" who has reached for the stars and is still looking beyond. There are many more teachers in the field like Debbie. We must continue to let them know how they are appreciated so they will not become discouraged and leave the profession.

Hooray for *The Californian* for putting a success on the front page!

— Mrs. Nellis M. Johnson
(Retired — I ran out of energy and fell from the sky!)

Jenner: Thanks so much for your kind note. We love sharing success stories, especially about our schools, and we're happy to celebrate them on the front page.

Reader: I have not become a fan of journalist **Danielle Belton**. My preference — many others may find her entertaining and enlightening. I am also not sure when a journalist should be one or the other or both.

My eye was drawn to Wednesday's article regarding Misa Misomo and I wanted to read about her and her handbags. Ms. Belton began the article with a reference to her "orgasmic glee" at the discovery of these handbags.

I really do question use of the "orgasmic glee." I have gone to the online Oxford English Dictionary and could, if pressed, defend "orgasmic" as a "fit of excitement." However, I believe most of your readers will consider the term in its sexual meaning.

Community standards may not be what they were years ago and I am not so naive as to assume that unmarried folks are not personally familiar with such glee, but, in my opinion, Ms. Belton's excitement could have been expressed in more appropriate terms for an article about handbags.

— Charles Cunningham

Jenner: I asked Danielle about her choice of that word. Here's her response:

"I realize that 'orgasm' is a word that describes a certain biological function. But 'orgasmic' is often used in food stories to describe people's feelings towards chocolate. Heck, an entire ad campaign was built around how Herbal Essences' shampoo is an 'organic' experience, playing on the word.

"I personally don't have a problem with the word. But I guess I can see how someone else would."

Reader: In Thursday's "Sound Off," **David Hunn** explained why he used the term "preaching" to describe some parents' objections to the book "The Blue Eye."

It's said that his observation is that one would expect to hear about "morality, ethics and decency" in church but not in a school board meeting. Is it only "church people" who aspire to some level of morality, ethics and decency? If so, then that explains a lot about our schools and our society.

In trying to explain the first article, David is getting further into the weeds. He should just fall on his sword and move on.

— Paul Tate

Jenner: I agree that does say a lot about our society. I appreciate David's honesty.

And he did "fall on his sword," by the way. For that matter, so did I. Both of us agreed that "preaching" is a loaded word that should not have been used in this story.

Let's all move on.