



The new headworks facility, foreground, replaces two older operations at the site. Behind it is “Whorl Whirl: Our Circular Nature” by artist Norie Sato, peeking from the exterior wall at the Southeast Treatment Plant.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

S.F. sewage plant’s upgrade cuts odor

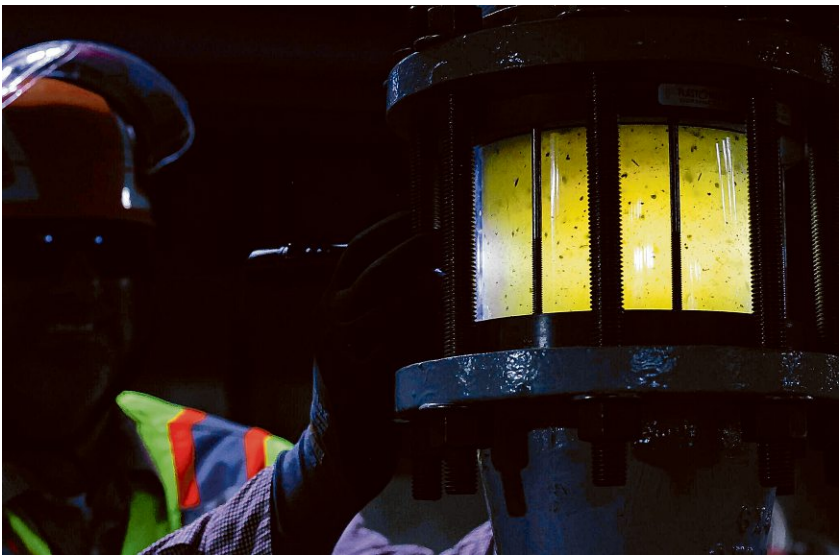
\$7M overhaul includes microbes to provide neighborhood relief

By Lucy Hodgman
STAFF WRITER

When a toilet flushes in San Francisco, its contents join a churning current of wastewater that travels through more than 1,000 miles of sewer pipes beneath the city streets. Most of that water is going to the same place: a 40-acre facility in the Bayview.

Eighty percent of San Francisco’s wastewater is processed at the Southeast Treatment Plant, which treats about 45 million gallons a day: enough to fill 68 Olympic swimming pools. It has been more than a decade since the city’s Public Utilities Commission decided that the facility was due for an upgrade. Some of

Sewage continues on A9



George Engel, enterprise capital lead at the San Francisco Public Utility Commission, shines a light into a pipe as water, which has passed through screens, continues through the treatment process.

Tourists paying big for Waymo tours in S.F.

By Rachel Swan
STAFF WRITER

Dara Mihaly has led tours of major U.S. cities using just about every imaginable mode of transportation: a black SUV, a vintage fishing boat, a cable car, her own two feet, a Segway scooter.

So when Waymo

launched its commercial robotaxis in San Francisco last year, the veteran guide was eager to incorporate them into her business. From February to August, Mihaly booked 10 Waymo tours in which clients would ride the autonomous vehicles to such prominent landmarks as Alamo Square, Twin Peaks and the Gold-

en Gate Bridge.

At \$149 for a three-hour, three-ride “experience,” these jaunts became so popular that Mihaly began offering them in Los Angeles, Waymo’s other flagship market in California. She had four Waymo tours on the calendar as of Aug. 18, the day the self-driving car juggernaut sent a cease

and desist letter. Mihaly had, it turned out, violated the company’s terms and conditions for brand display.

Although Mihaly and her business partner quickly scrubbed the self-driving car option from the website and promotional materials for their company, igniTours, they

Waymo continues on A10

Schools turn to peer-to-peer counseling

Two South Bay campuses hope for all students to have someone to lean on

By Melody Xu
STAFF WRITER

Nearly a third of the juniors in the Mountain View-Los Altos Union High School District felt “so sad or hopeless” last year that it hindered their normal activities. Fourteen percent said they had seriously considered suicide.

At the same time, campus resources weren’t scarce. Mountain View High has six on-campus therapists and a slate of referral options in place for roughly 2,000 students.

The district sees 1 in 4 students pass through school-facilitated wellness programs.

Still, last school year, the school’s wellness team decided to add peer-to-peer counseling, where students can get one-on-one counseling from fellow students — and Los Altos High is following suit this year.

School leaders have been grappling with post-pandemic concerns over isolation, social media, as well as the South Bay’s historical battles with suicide.

Schools continues on A9



Santiago Mejia/S.F. Chronicle

Junior Anoushka Dugar is a peer counselor at Mountain View High School, which decided to add peer-to-peer counseling last school year.

Pay splits Oakland district, teachers

Union wants raises and more; officials say money’s not there

By Jill Tucker
STAFF WRITER

The Oakland school district’s officials and its teachers union have been at the same bargaining table in recent weeks, but the two sides don’t seem to be operating in the same reality — one flush with cash, the other overdrawn by \$4 million a month and on the brink of bankruptcy.

The union has asked for a 9% raise retroactive to July 1, with an additional 5% raise next year, with additional increases for counselors, social workers and specialized teachers, with reductions to class sizes and case loads as well as more teacher prep time, which means hiring hundreds more teachers and other staff.

Based on current staffing levels and average salaries for the nearly 3,000 members in the union, the raises would likely increase district costs by about \$50 million per year and significantly more for the additional requests, which also include three days of leave for teachers who are attacked or verbally threatened.

All told, the cost could exceed \$100 million per year going forward, equal to about 10% of the district’s current budget.

District officials said they haven’t had a chance to tally the exact cost of the union’s demands, but

Oakland continues on A7

Dem group works to shift focus to economic strife

One clear message Democrats have heard since their electoral debacle in November is that voters want candidates who are fighters. But leaders at Emily’s List, the 40-year-old fundraising powerhouse that has helped elect

JOE GAROFOLI
IT’S ALL POLITICAL

nearly 2,000 abortion-rights-supporting women to office, said there’s another big factor voters want in their candidates: people who know what it is like to struggle economically.

That is one of many new findings Emily’s List President Jessica Mackler found through extensive research the organization commissioned to understand how Democrats can take back power as they struggle to regain voters’ trust and shape a coherent message in time for the 2026 midterm elections, which could be the party’s last chance to check President Donald Trump’s power.

Trump may have owned a golden toilet and grown up as the child of a wealthy New York developer, but he was able to communicate better than Democrats that he understood the economic pain many Americans were feeling. His advantage on that front, however, may be short-lived, as a Fox News survey released this

Garofoli continues on A10