



Yosemite abuzz with visitors

But lack of staff amid shutdown allowing some to bend rules

By Lucy Hodgman
STAFF WRITER

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK — Dan Davis watched as a group of young men leaped from Yosemite’s Swinging Bridge into a shallow stretch of the Merced River.

A middle school science teacher chaperoning a school trip to the national park, Davis knew what they were doing last week was against Yosemite National Park’s rules. Under normal circumstances, he would have alerted a park ranger. But this time, there was no ranger to be found.

Yosemite has been staffed by a skeleton crew since the federal government shut down on Oct. 1, furloughing the majority of

Park continues on A10



ABOVE: An SUV passes a Yosemite National Park sign in El Portal. Drivers haven’t been charged the park entry fee amid the government shutdown.

TOP: Visitors watch a sunset on a rock ledge near Taft Point in the park, which has been staffed by a skeleton crew during the shutdown.

Photos by Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Tri-Valley home sales slow and prices fall

Some properties take over a month to sell as pandemic boom peters out

By Sarah Ravani
STAFF WRITER

For nearly six months, Robert Woods watched his childhood home in Livermore sit on the market — an unexpected scenario in a region where bidding wars during the pandemic routinely brought in 30 offers and it wasn’t unusual to see a property disappear from listings before its weekend open house was over.

When Woods’ three-bedroom house finally sold this year, it went for almost \$200,000 below the original asking price.

The drawn-out sale and the dip in price reflect a bigger shift that’s reshaping swaths of East Bay real estate: Return-to-office mandates are sapping demand from suburbs like those in the Tri-Valley while heating up competition closer to San Francisco and the South Bay, where tech workers once again need to be near offices.

“A lot of companies are mandating all employees to go back to the office so that’s why San Francisco and the South Bay are actually more popular compared to the Tri-Valley recently,” said Aris Wu, a real estate agent based in Dublin.

The geographic shift comes as the market also wrestles with high interest rates, tariffs causing economic uncertainty and political volatility — pressures that have cooled what was one of the region’s hottest housing markets.

Over the past decade, home prices in the Tri-Valley

Homes continues on A8

Klamath River’s salmon at risk of swimming too far

By Kurtis Alexander
STAFF WRITER

With the removal of four dams on the Klamath River, salmon are making tremendous progress on their migration upstream, reaching new, previously inaccessible waters along the California-Oregon border.

In some cases, however, they may be making too much progress.

This month, workers at the Klamath Drainage District observed chinook salmon in their irrigation complex, a grid of canals and ditches that forks off the river near Klamath Falls, Ore., nearly 250 miles from the river’s mouth. The fear is that these far-roaming fish will get caught in the irrigation water as it’s doled out to farms and swept onto dry land amid the alfalfa, potatoes and grains.

“It’s fun to see the fish in the canals,” said Scott White, general manager for the Klamath Drainage District, which first spotted salmon in an irrigation channel known as the Ady Canal on Oct. 15. “The fish look happy there. But I certainly don’t want to see them in the fields.”

The demolition of the Klamath Hydroelectric Project, deemed the largest dam-removal effort in U.S. history, was completed a year ago with the intention of restoring the Klamath River, principally to help dwindling salmon runs flourish in the basin’s upper reaches.

Salmon continues on A8

Theaters struggle with ethical issues of AI

By Lily Janiak
THEATER CRITIC

A young girl’s feet dig into the ocean floor, her silhouette bathed in a sea-foam green cone of light. Nearby, a jellyfish bobs.

The graphic, which Berkeley Repertory Theatre used to market its

January production of “The Thing About Jellyfish,” was no masterpiece. But neither was it just another piece of mediocre promotional art. In an ominous sign for some in the Bay Area arts world, it was made with artificial intelligence.

In a statement, Berke-

ley Rep Managing Director Tom Parrish said that the AI art for “Jellyfish” was an experiment “to complement — not replace — the work of our internal creative design team, and has served as a valuable learning experience.”

It’s one matter for a for-

profit corporation to use artificial intelligence. It might be another if you’re a nonprofit whose raison d’etre is to make art. Yet Bay Area performing arts companies facing budget shortfalls are increasingly turning to AI — not just for back-office cost cut-

AI continues on A9

New Highway 101 stretch called ‘disaster’

Longer HOV hours make gridlock worse despite extra lane, drivers say

By Rachel Swan
STAFF WRITER

Drivers in the North Bay waited 30 years for a new lane to alleviate congestion on Highway 101. But now some wish the project had never finished.

That’s because it came with new carpool hours, meant to align Marin and Sonoma counties with the rest of the Bay Area. Regional transportation officials have tried to standardize the window for high-occupancy vehicles — with at least one passenger in addition to the driver

— to two weekday rush hour periods. The morning period runs from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m., while the evening hours start at 3 p.m. and end at 7 p.m.

Officials at Caltrans imposed this split-schedule after adding diamond lanes to fix a notorious bottleneck between Petaluma and Novato, while also filling a “gap” in the 52-mile carpool lane network on 101, from Windsor to Mill Valley. Notably, the new hours apply to all 52 miles, which means one infrastructure project has vast-

Highway continues on A7



An HOV lane on southbound Highway 101 is fairly empty of vehicles during the morning commute Friday in San Rafael.

Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle