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CACHE CREEK  CASINO RESORT



Valerie Chieng hands Kris Gallimore a bouquet of lilies at her flower stand at the intersection of Montgomery and Post streets in S.F. on Thursday. Gallimore is a regular of the outdoor stand, one of the few left in the city.

Quiet push to bring flower stands back

Measure would ease permitting for Market Street vendors



Chieng backs proposed city legislation that could help bring in more stands. "More flower stands will bring more people in," she says.

PETER HARTLAUB
TOTAL SF

Valerie Chieng assembles a bouquet at her street-side flower stand, an oasis of color on eerily lifeless Market Street, and points toward the ghosts of her competition. Over 26 years, Chieng has watched her fellow flower vendors shutter their doors and close.

"There was one over there, two over there, one in Crocker Galleria," she says. "Just on Market and Montgomery, (near) this corner, there were nine flower shops."

San Francisco had 120 flower sellers after the turn of the 19th

Hartlaub continues on A7

Pacific signals fast shift to El Niño

Pattern points to more active storms for state next winter

By Greg Porter
SENIOR NEWSROOM METEOROLOGIST

After years locked in a La Niña pattern, the Pacific is flipping. Major global climate models are now signaling a rapid transition toward El Niño later this year, with some projections suggesting the potential for strengthening by late summer.

The turnaround appears compressed in a way that has surprised even seasoned experts, with one forecaster calling this the biggest midwinter collapse of La Niña in two decades.

The shift is being driven in large part by two unusually strong westerly wind bursts that developed along the equator since January. These bursts temporarily weakened the trade winds that sustain La Niña, allowing warm water pooled in the western Pacific to surge eastward.

Government agencies are picking up on the trend, but remain somewhat cautious. It is still

Weather continues on A6

Area creators' mutant cats game a viral hit

By Roland Li
STAFF WRITER

"Mewgenics," the biggest video game hit of early 2026, wasn't created by a behemoth studio like Nintendo or Electronic Arts.

It was crafted by two Santa Cruz-area residents, Edmund McMillen and Tyler Glaiel, who worked for six years on the cartoonish, sometimes grotesque strategy game about breeding mutant cats.

The game was released on video game store Steam on Tuesday and sold 500,000 copies in 36 hours, generating \$13.5 million in revenue. The game also has the highest review score of 2026 so far and is being floated as a "Game of the Year" award contender.

It was the biggest launch of McMillen's 25-

Game continues on A7

Frog turns cleanup of golf club pond into big mess

By Sarah Ravani
STAFF WRITER

The pond at a Blackhawk golf course wasn't always a mess. Eight years ago, water cascaded out of a waterfall into the pond, a pristine feature of the posh Tri-Valley neighborhood where homes routinely sell for several million dollars.

Today, the pond water sits stagnant and murky green. Algae blankets the surface. Mosquitoes swarm above it. And residents like Laurie Cindric, who drives past it multiple times a

Blackhawk continues on A6

Dog trainer fights state over use of rattlesnakes for work



Jake Molieri handles an albino rattlesnake he owns on Jan. 21 in Fair Oaks (Sacramento County). Molieri runs a business that teaches dogs to avoid rattlesnakes.

By Kurtis Alexander
STAFF WRITER

Working inches from venomous fangs, Jake Molieri knows that placing a muzzle on a rattlesnake leaves little room for error. If it's too tight, the animal can't breathe; too loose and the deadly viper could open its mouth and strike.

The 27-year-old Sacramento resident and Cal Poly biology graduate proceeds cautiously yet confidently with the task. He clutches the sometimes hissing rattler just briefly, his grip firm and precise when, "with love" as he describes it, he straps the jaw with protective tape.

Snakes continues on A9