



Est. 1891

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August 26, 2022

## Los Banos Council splits 3-2 on hiring search firm for new city manager

**Second special meeting gets contentious with council members Jones, Lewis trading barbs. Mayoral candidate Llanez calls it “an absolute waste of time and tax payer dollars”**

By Allen D. Payton

On Thursday afternoon, August 25, 2022, the Los Banos City Council once again met to decide on hiring an executive search firm to help them choose a new city manager. As expected, following the 2-2 split vote during their August 17th special meeting with Mayor Tom Faria absent, the council voted to hire Koff & Associates this time on a 3-2 vote with both Mayor Pro Tem

Ken Lambert and District 3 Councilman Brett Jones voting no.

At the beginning of the very brief meeting, that began at 2:03 p.m. and ended 16 minutes later, Mayor Tom Faria explained his absence during the previous week’s meeting stating he was with his sister as “her husband was on the precipice of life and death. Thanks to the surgeons and technology at Stanford University he’s still with us.” He then thanked “everyone for their prayers and positive thoughts as it seems to be working and let’s hope it continues.”

**Llanez Calls Process Waste of Time, Taxpayer Money**

Before the August 17th meeting, the only candidate to file for mayor in the November election, Paul Llanez said it was a waste of time and money.

On his campaign Facebook page, he

wrote on August 14, “There is a special council meeting this week to select the consulting firm to recruit the next city manager. Now that we know there will be a new mayor in November, this is an absolute waste of time and tax payer dollars. The decision of hiring the city manager should be made by the council who will actually be working with this person and not by an outgoing mayor and a council seat that won’t be decided until the election. If you feel the same way, let your city council know.”

“I look at it from a business and continuity standpoint,” he added when reached for comment. “I think they just ought to take their time to make the best decision for the city and there’s no



Frank Rojas of Koff & Associates makes his pitch during the special Aug. 17 council meeting. Video screenshot

rush.”

“The other issue is can they find a candidate who would want to come to work in this situation,” Llanez asked rhetorically.

**Council Deadlocks, Postpones Decision Until Mayor Present**

During their special afternoon meeting on August 17, the four councilmembers interviewed three executives.

**See Council p.3**

## Varsity Tigers break three-year losing streak against Dos Palos Broncos

**Herrera, Mankel lead Tigers to 21-14 victory in “Westside War” Bring home the Cotton**

By Michael Cosenza, Sports Reporter

Dos Palos Broncos struck first, as Van Worth ran one in to start off the first drive of the night. The Tigers answered back with Herrera’s strike to number 3, Jamison Braniff, for the touchdown. The score remained tied at 7-7, until the third quarter when number 2, Herrera, ran one in to make it 14-7 Tigers, with about four minutes

left in the quarter.

Van Worth then led the Broncos down the field, connecting number 21 for a Broncos touchdown. Behind a Mankel fumble recovery, forced by number 79, Jett Lindeman, the Tiger’s drove all the way down the field and scored with another Herrera touchdown. The Broncos needed to score but fumbled the football, with the recovery made by number 9, Ayden Barcellos, to seal the game.

Overall great game by the Tigers, with 178 yards rushing and three touch-



Fans cheer as the Los Banos High players hold aloft the Cotton Bale trophy following the game Friday night, August 19, 2022. — Photos by Michael Cosenza

downs for Herrera and a two-sack, five-tackle performance by Daylen Mankel.

His key performance surprised the crowd and drew a

**See Tigers p.4**

## The Enterprise hires Los Banos native, LBHS grad to be new editor

By Allen D. Payton

After a literal nationwide search with 25 applicants from as far away as Georgia and New York, it is with great pleasure that owner, Michael Braa and I introduce the new editor of the Enterprise is a native of Los Banos, Tisha Blackwood-Freitas.

Born and raised in Los Banos, Tisha graduated from Los Banos High School then moved to New York for ten years where she graduated with a Bachelors’ degree in Sociology and a Master’s in Education.

Upon the birth of her son Michael,

she began to long for the small rural city she called home. As a teacher, she and Michael would frequently visit Los Banos, and during a visit in the summer of 2007, she reconnected with an old high school sweetheart, Matthew Freitas. Soon they were married and welcomed two more children: Siena and Joseph. And so, their lives began together in Los Banos, built on the core values of Faith • Family • Freedom • Entrepreneurship. She believes success is possible when you have a strong will to serve God and your community and a strong network

**See Editor p.2**

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# Filing period for write-in candidates in November election begins Sept. 12th

By Allen D. Payton

In some races for the November election only one or no candidate has filed to run. But they may still have competition from possible write-in candidates. Official write-in candidates, who can run for any office regardless of how many other candidates are running in the race and want their votes counted, must file paperwork and follow a process that begins Sept. 12.

In Los Banos, Paul Llanez is the only candidate to file and run for mayor, City Clerk Lucy Mallonee is the only candidate to file to run for her position and no one has filed to run for city treasurer. In the school board

races, only the incumbents have filed to run in three of the races, including Area 1 Trustee Gene Lieb, Area 3 Trustee Marlene Smith and Area 5 Trustee Anthony Parreira.

Write-in candidates for city council, school board or special districts are required to file a Form 700 financial disclosure, Form 501 intention to run, and Form 470 unless they plan to spend less than \$2,000. If they spend more candidates also must open a campaign committee with a Form 410 which is filed with the Secretary of State's office.

For city council races, write-in candidates are also required to obtain 20 nomination signatures of registered voters in the district where they are

running. The voters who sign must live at the address where they are currently registered. They must file their nomination papers and other forms with the city clerk's office, except for Form 410.

For school board and special district write-in candidates, no nomination signatures are required but they must file their paperwork with the county elections office in Merced.

According to the Candidate Handbook and Resource Guide on the county elections website, "All non-presidential write-in candidates who desire to have his or her votes counted for a particular office must file a Statement of Write-In Candidacy along with the



Candidate for Los Banos Mayor Paul Llanez. Source: LinkedIn

requisite number of signatures, if any, for such office. Nomination documents for write-in candidacy may be obtained from and delivered to the Merced County Registrar of Voters between the 57th day and 14th day prior to the election."

The Write-In Candidate Filing Period begins September 12 and ends October 25.

**Editor from p.1**

to support your efforts.

A Mompreneur is a great way to summarize Tisha's ambitious life. She adores her family, showing much respect to her husband for supporting all of her goals and dreams. With his support, she has

dedicated her life to serve and advocate for her community. Tisha is trained as a master educator, sociologist and business developer. These skills and experiences propelled her into opening and operating various organizations: including the first charter school of Merced County, a consulting business and a networking organization for women.

She currently operates both Tisha Freitas Administrative Consultant (TFAC) and The Valley Girl Co. TFAC is a consulting business that provides

support to those who want to develop their business strategies, processes and procedures, and succession planning. In partnership with Revolution Financial Management, she helps provide financial planning solutions for businesses, families and individuals. In addition, she teaches and trains others to do the same.

The Valley Girl Co. is a membership network of women collaborating to support, promote, educate and serve our Valleys, welcoming and respecting all opportunities of those seeking to grow strong partnerships throughout the communities we serve. Matt and Tisha, together, also own and operate their family business, MTF Farm Solutions.

Tisha brings to the Enterprise her knowledge, skills, drive, relationships and community involvement in Los Banos to ensure the paper serves you, the residents and our readers, keeping you informed of what affects and interests you, while helping grow the local busi-

nesses and economy. We like her drive demonstrated in just her first two weeks with us in which Tisha has hit the ground running, hiring a sports reporter and helping us locate and secure office space in the old bank building at the corner of 6th and I Streets in downtown. She will soon help open and operate the office to once again, establish a local presence for the paper.



Tisha Blackwood-Freitas and her family celebrate her son Michael's graduation from Los Banos High in June.

"I was excited to see in the paper the opportunity to write for the Enterprise," Tisha

said. "Once I got into conversation with the publisher, I realized I wanted to explore serving in the editor position. That's because I could better serve the community in a way that we're not only bringing local news but highlighting the rich history, our youth, our traditions, our cultures, and our values so people can be more aware, and proud of the greatness of Los Banos and what we have to offer."

"I look forward to working with the community and meeting the needs and interests of our readers and my fellow residents and restoring faith in local media and this historic news source, by providing the facts and information we want and expect," she added. "I appreciate this great opportunity, and the faith and trust the owner and publisher have placed in me."

Please join us in welcoming to the Los Banos Enterprise, Editor Tisha Blackwood-Freitas.

# City of Los Banos receives input from residents on Downtown Master Plan

Two more workshops planned, next one expected end of October

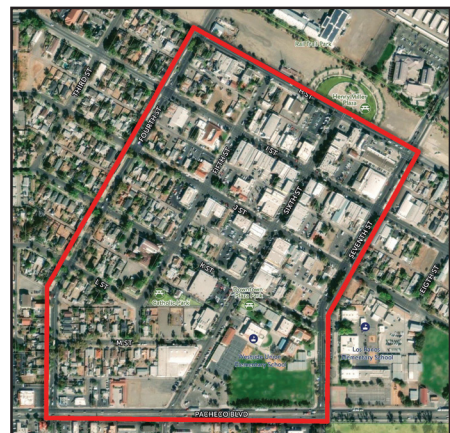
By Justin Collins

On Tuesday August 23, 2022, the City of Los Banos hosted a Downtown Master Plan Community Workshop in the Community Center. The purpose was to allow the public to communicate to the city what their priorities are regarding revitalization of downtown. The 20 to 30 in attendance learned that the city has partnered with two businesses hired to make the plans a reality.

Placeworks is focused on downtown revitalization in general while the Mark



Cutline: Community and Economic Development Director Stacy Souza-Elms speaks during the workshop as Bruce Brubaker of Placeworks looks on. Photo by Justin Collins



Los Banos Downtown Master Plan Project Area.

Thomas engineering firm is focused on transportation. The Downtown Strategic Plan was adopted by the city council in 2020, but everything came to a grinding halt once the COVID-19 pandemic began. The area being referred to as "the downtown", and the area that this plan addresses is located between H, 4th and 7th Streets and Pacheco Blvd. The plan calls for rehabilitation of buildings, providing for new infrastructure and landscaping, as well as an attempt to draw more businesses downtown.

Residents had an opportunity to

voice their opinions about the plan at the meeting. Several referenced a plan from 20 years ago created by the Downtown Planning Advisory Committee referred to as DPAC, which developed a plan to join the Rail Trail and downtown area and was adopted by the city council but wondered why the entire plan were never implemented.

Stacy Souza-Elms, the city's Community and Economic Development Director explained that the plan created 20 years ago was "grandiose and beautiful", but they didn't have the money to execute it, and to

this day the plan is far too ambitious and expensive. So, now the city is turning to a new plan that is expected to be more feasible.

That was when the city had a redevelopment agency, she explained later. But that has since been disbanded by the state.

Following the presentation, residents were given the opportunity to place stickers on categories and improvements to convey to the city what they want prioritized. The two most prevalent comments were that people wanted more dining, including outdoor and shopping in downtown. Plus, they want widening of sidewalks, more lighting and bike lines, as well.

Among those in attendance were Councilmen Brett Jones, Refugio Llamas and Deborah Lewis who listened to the comments from their constituents.

"There will be two more community meetings which are targeted for the end of October," Souza-Elms shared. "Based on the feedback, we're going to return with some concepts for more public input."

Allen D. Payton contributed to this report.

**Council from p.1** utive search firms including Koff & Associates, represented by Frank Rojas who said he's "been doing recruiting since 1981", as well as Oklahoma-based ProRecruiters and Merced-based Sectaris Partners. But the second firm withdrew from the process and the third was just formed last year and has only helped with the hiring of one executive.

"What happened to the last city manager? People are going to ask that question. We don't want rumor to be out there," Rojas stated about the recruitment process in response to a question by Jones. "Let people know this is not going to be a retirement job but a legacy...that you can share with your grandkids."

"A lot of the candidates I've worked with I stay in touch with," he shared.

"I will be leading this recruitment. I want you to trust that I'm the person you'll be working with," Rojas said in response to a question by District 4 Councilwoman Deborah Lewis.

"I interviewed 22 people for city manager of Oceanside. I had eight in my portfolio," he explained. "For the City of Rialto, we had 95 applicants. I might talk to candidates two or three times."

Asked by District 2 Councilman Refugio Llamas what the three most important things he looks for in a candidate, Rojas responded, "Honesty,

integrity and really strong political acumen."

Asked by District 1 Councilman and Mayor Pro Tem Kenneth Lambert to give him one good reason for the council to choose his firm, Rojas responded, "as a resident I want my city council members to do their job and not put things on hold for four months" which also responded to the public speaker's comments from earlier. "I have experience in doing this as far as timing goes...and community outreach."

"What do you feel is your top marketing strategy?" asked Lambert

"We've got to get the word out as far as we can," Rojas responded. "We want everyone in California to know." He has his staff do an online search.

"I focus specifically on government sites...ICMA (International City/County Manager's Association)," he explained. "I also search websites for women and minorities. I do email blasts, LinkedIn."

Asked by Lambert if he had ever missed a projected timeline Rojas responded, "The only thing will be if you miss the scheduled interviews. It's about 12 weeks, sometimes 13, due to a council member on vacation and not available."

City Clerk Lucy Mallonee explained the process for the council to choose their favorite firm by scoring them **See Council p.7**

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# Crosstown Varsity football has begun

## A glimpse into the season for our hometown varsity Panthers and Tigers

By Michael Cosenza Sports Reporter

Crosstown, action-packed seasons are officially back: our very own Pacheco Panthers and Los Banos Tiger Football. This year is looking bright for each squad, returning players improving and newcomers looking to make a big impact.

Returning head coach, Dustin Caropreso is leading the Tiger squad for the 2022-23 season. The captains for this year's Tigers are three seniors and one junior: senior Ayden Barcellos (number 9, pictured right), to his left is senior Jaman Cannon (number 72), to his left is junior quarterback David Herrera (number 2), and senior Jamison Braniff (number 3). It's always nice to note the newcomers, like Kayson Welch, number

8, looking to have a strong senior season. Incoming varsity juniors are Daylen Mankel, who most recently won Defensive Player of the Year against Dos Palos, and Jett Lindeman, who recently transferred from Hilmar and looked great in his Tigers debut playing O-line and defensive end. Tigers do have a tough week ahead playing Hilmar, a team that absolutely knocked their socks off in last year's first round of the playoffs, beating Los Banos a whopping 61-27. Los Banos seems hungry for revenge this Friday Night Lights in Hilmar's own stadium.

For your Panthers, coach Jeremy Siemiller has some key players for us to keep our eye on. One being, running back Abel Bravo. He's a four year, varsity starter and has been a true wrecking ball for this squad, playing both running back and middle linebacker. Their leading senior is lineman Caden Hale, looking to improve on a strong junior



The Pacheco High Varsity Panthers football team practices Thursday afternoon, Aug. 25 ahead of their first game of the season. Photo by Michael Cosenza

year, the Setterberg twins, Louie and Gabriel. The Panthers' schedule is set to start this Friday, August 26 with a game against Central Valley, a team they played really hard last year, but ultimately came out with a 10-6 loss.

It's going to be an interesting year for this squad, with key seniors from last year no longer on the team, but a great group of incoming players to help get it done and hopefully have a successful, winning season.

Let's mark our calendars for the Crosstown Clash and cheer on our hometown squads October 28th at 7pm, Tigers vs. Panthers at Pacheco High School at 200 Ward Road in Los Banos.

## 2022-23 team schedules: Los Banos Tigers

8/26 7:00p @ Hilmar High School

9/2 7:00p Orestimba (Newman) - Location: Los Banos High School

9/16 7:00p Beyer (Modesto) - Location: Los Banos High School

9/23 7:00p Davis (Modesto) - Game Details: Downey [Thomas]

9/30 7:00p @ Mountain House High School

10/7 7:00p Johansen (Modesto) - Location: Los Banos High School

10/14 7:00p Ceres - Location: Los Banos High School

10/21 7:00p @ Lathrop High School

## Pacheco Panthers

8/26 7:00p @ Central Valley (Ceres) - Location: Ceres High School

9/2 7:30p @ Seaside High School

9/9 7:00p @ Tracy High School

9/16 7:00p @ Johansen High School (Modesto)

9/23 7:00p Lathrop - Location: Pacheco High School

9/30 7:00p Davis (Modesto) - Location: Pacheco High School

10/7 7:30p @ Ceres High School

10/14 7:00p @ Mountain House High School

10/21 7:00p Beyer (Modesto) Location: Pacheco High School



The Los Banos High Varsity Tigers team captains before last week's victory over Dos Palos. Photo by Michael Cosenza

## Los Banos college student receives Blue Diamond Growers Foundation 2022-23 Scholarship Award

SACRAMENTO, Calif. –

Blue Diamond Growers Foundation is pleased to announce its 2022-2023 scholarship recipients. This year, scholarship funding is being awarded to 25 college students who are either dependents of Blue Diamond employees or are members of local communities who are pursuing agriculture-related fields of study at colleges and universities in California and throughout the country.

This year's Blue Diamond Growers Foundation scholarship recipients include Erin Vierra of Los Banos, studying Agriculture Education at Oklahoma State

University. She is a Class of 2022 graduate of Los Banos High School where she played on the varsity tennis and basketball teams. Vierra was also a member of the Los Banos FFA (Future Farmers of America) chapter and OLF 4-H club.

"We are proud of this year's scholarship award recipients and wish them the best as they pursue their continuing education," said Dan Cummings, Chairman of the Board of Directors for Blue Diamond Growers. "The Blue Diamond Growers Foundation is committed to helping support this next generation of students who



Erin Vierra in June 2020. Source: stockshowauctions.com

See Scholarship p.5

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**Tigers from p.1** lot of attention. The Tiger defense stepped up strong against Dos Palos quarterback Peyton Van Worth, rallying for two interceptions



David Herrera runs it in to score a first quarter Tigers touchdown.

by George Garcia and Jamison Braniff. Definitely a night to celebrate for our Los Banos Tigers. Head Coach

Dustin Caropreso shared a few postgame words about bringing home the coveted Cotton Bale trophy.

“Defense played really well,” he said. “Our guys came ready to play. It was time to bring it back home. Been too long not having that thing on campus.”

A great win to start the year at 1-0 and definitely a big morale boost for these guys as they kick off the season.

Tiger players of the game were David Herrera and Daylen Mankel.

In the Junior Varsity game, the Broncos pulled out a big victory, 41-19. Quarterback Gavin Estrada had two



The Los Banos High Tigers varsity football team celebrates their victory over Dos Palos. Photos by Michael Cosenza

total touchdowns, and running back Dominic Esquivel added two, himself.

For Los Banos, Luke Reyna made the play of the day and caught a

touchdown ALL OVER the Dos Palos defender, totaling two nice catches for

Reyna. Overall great game to start off this nostalgic night.

## Groundbreaking ceremony held for Loftin Stadium revitalization

### Los Banos Tigers' reverential home

By Michael Cosenza

Thursday, August 25, 2022, was a monumental day for the Los Banos Tiger football community, as the beginning of a new era for Loftin Stadium. A groundbreaking ceremony took place, highlighting the plans for a new facility. Plans include a revamp of the entrance and three buildings: bathrooms, a locker room and snack stand.

Attendees from the community included the Tigers cheer team and band, Los Banos VFW American Lodge, county and city officials, coaches and staff. Eager words were spoken by lead architect, Edgar Sanchez, explaining the process of the project. His enthusiasm to lead this effort was well received. Sanchez's goal for completion is no later than the end

of the 2022-23 school year, ready to kick off next football season with Tiger Pride.

The stadium is located at the end of Washington Avenue next to Los Banos County Park off of E. Pacheco Blvd.

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Officials and coaches prepare to ceremonially break ground including (l-r) Merced County Superintendent Dr. Steve Tietjen, LBUSD Superintendent Mark Marshall, “Legendary” Coach Don Toscano, LBHS Principal Jason Waltman, LB Tigers Football Head Coach Dustin Caropreso, LBHS Athletic Director and teacher Joe Barcellos, Coach Gary Caropreso, LBUSD Board President Anthony Parreira and Trustee Gary Munoz. Photo by Michael Cosenza

**Scholarship from p.4** will undoubtedly contribute to the success of the agricultural industry in the years to come.”

Celebrating its 14th anniversary this year, the Blue Diamond Growers Foundation was established in 2008 for the purpose of providing scholarships to students who have demonstrated excellent academic performance and are pursuing a four-year college degree. Since 2008, the Blue Diamond Foundation has awarded nearly 175 scholarships to help students in local communities achieve their dreams of a college education.

Additional information about the Blue Diamond Growers Foundation scholarship program is available at <https://bluediamondgrowers.com/scholarship-program/>.

#### About Blue Diamond

Blue Diamond Growers, a grower-owned cooperative representing over 3,000 of California's almond growers, is the world's leading almond marketer and processor. Established in 1910, it created the California almond industry and opened world markets for almonds. Blue Diamond is dedicated to delivering the benefits of almonds around the world and does so by providing high-quality almonds, almond ingredients and branded products. Headquartered in Sacramento, the company employs more than 1,800 people throughout its processing plants, receiving stations and gift shops. To learn more about Blue Diamond Growers, visit [www.bluediamond.com](http://www.bluediamond.com).

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# Woman sentenced to maximum prison time in \$300K Los Banos restaurant embezzlement case

**Robin Ruth Recla swindled six local, prominent residents who invested; victims “relieved that it’s over”**

By Allen D. Payton

After entering no contest pleas to embezzlement and filing a false tax return on May 25, 2022, in the case of the Los Banos restaurant scheme, a 46-year-old Brentwood woman, Robin Ruth Ann Recla, aka Robin Berard, appeared in front of Merced County Superior Court Judge David W. Moranda on August 17, 2022, for sentencing in the Los Banos Courthouse. Following requests by both the prosecution and her victims, Recla was sentenced to the maximum available to the District Attorney under current law of two years, eight months in state prison.

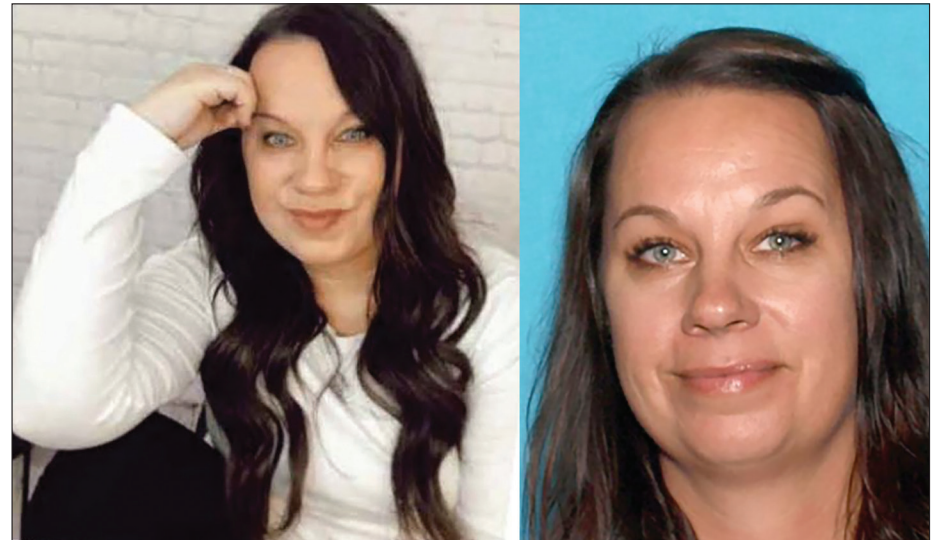
The Merced County DA’s office announced on May 25, 2022, Ms. Recla admitted to swindling approximately \$300,000 from six prominent Los Banos investors. She also failed to claim the profits on her income tax return.

In 2018, the group of investors pooled their funds and formed an L.L.C. with the

intent of creating and opening a restaurant in the Los Banos area. Ms. Recla was selected to manage and direct the project, but investors learned there were problems when they were notified by their bank that the business accounts were overdrawn

A team comprised of an investigator from the state Franchise Tax Board Criminal Investigation Bureau, Los Banos Police Commander Justin Melden, and Merced County D.A. Investigator Moses Nelson worked diligently to trace the financial transactions exposing Ms. Recla’s behavior. The coordinated, year-long investigation uncovered Ms. Recla’s personal use of nearly all of the funds, including \$159,273 in checks written to herself and her withdrawal of \$24,900 in cash from automated teller machines. The investigators determined Ms. Recla also used the investors’ funds for personal travel and the purchase of personal items like furniture.

According to the prosecution brief by Colby, “Ms. Recla has a history of fraud and deceit dating back to 1998 when she was convicted of fraud to obtain aid. She was convicted of felony grand theft in



Robin Ruth Ann Recla. Source: Merced County District Attorney

Pocatello, Idaho District Court in 2010, and in 2011 she was convicted of felony grand theft for stealing \$35,000 from a former employer, Advanced Professionals – an insurance agency in San Jose. She was also accused of embezzling \$70,000 from a restaurant in Los Altos between 2015 and 2017 before taking charge in this scheme to defraud people in Los Banos,” who are prominent and local.

“Ms. Recla is a con artist, plain and simple who should be committed to state prison for her crimes,” Colby continued. “She is presumptively ineligible for probation. But even if probation did apply, probation is not appropriate for her under any reasonable analysis.”

Recla asked for leniency from the court for medical reasons including her mental health and her husband’s physical health and expressed regret and sorrow without showing mercy for the Los Banos’ investors who lost up to \$300,000 collectively and requested the court to reduce her charges of two felony counts to probation.

Judge Moranda agreed with the prosecution noting her crimes “started small and worked their way up.” The judge further stated, “I don’t see the remorse. I don’t see that she is sorry.”

He then sentenced Recla to two years for felony embezzlement and eight months for filing a false tax return to run concurrently in state prison, the maximum under law. Since there was no credit for time served, and showing no mercy for her victims, she was handcuffed and taken away to immediately begin serving her sentence.

Victims “Relieved That It’s Over”, Praise Prosecutor, Police and Judge

Asked how she was feeling, Sandie Silva, one of the victims said, “I’m feeling, I guess, relieved that it’s over. I feel that justice has been done and I feel that our district attorney and detectives, Melden from Los Banos and Moses from the District Attorney’s Office and Travis Colby were amazing.”

Cheryl Silva, Sandie’s sister-in-law, and

her husband Anthony were also victims in the restaurant investment embezzlement scheme.

“I’m elated that the judge listened to our victim’s impact statements,” Cheryl exclaimed. “I believe he responded to us through the sentencing. He listened to how we’re really feeling. This is not Robin Recla’s first felony offense and the judge responded to that saying, this is a pattern with Robin. For me that was very reassuring. In her statements she did apologize, but we did not feel it was sincere. She had many opportunities over the past four years to do what was right but chose not to. It was not vindictive on our part. We were seeking justice.”

Asked how they met Recla, Cheryl responded, “she was very close to Sandie to the point she called her mom. She garnered our trust through that relationship. Sandie met her 30 years ago.”

“I’m in real estate and I had a business with my ex-husband and Robin was actually our ad sales rep for the Los Banos Enterprise,” Sandie said. “I actually also owned a house-cleaning service and cleaned her parents’ house and helped her get the job at the Enterprise.”

“Everything went good, because she was found guilty,” Danny Silva said. “The problem I had was the people in Sacramento. I’m all for giving people a second chance. But it’s not her first offense. I hope I’m wrong. But I’m willing to bet \$20 she’s out in eight months or sooner. The judge knew she’s a habitual liar and con artist. It’s a shame our system doesn’t punish these people more.”

As with most white collar crime cases, the investigation required time intensive forensic accounting and a large collaboration among several agencies. White-collar crime is taken very seriously by the Merced County District Attorney’s Office, as the effects are often far reaching and can financially devastate individuals and businesses.

Andy English contributed to this report. Read more of this article at losbanosenterprise.com.



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**Council from p.3** with a one, two or three with the lowest score as their favorite. But before that could occur, she recognized Councilman Jones who indicated he wished to speak.

"I'm just now hearing their interviews," he said. "I need more time to decide. I'm not ready to vote on it, this evening."

Lambert then said, "Before we go there, I had a suggestion. Unfortunately, Mayor Tom Faria had to have an emergency, today and I'm sure he would want to be a part of this."

He then suggested having a special meeting after the regular council meeting on August 25.

"You can always call a special meeting on 24- or 48-hours-notice," because your next regular meeting isn't until the end of September," said City Attorney William Vaughan.

LLamas asked about the process and wanted to deal with the vote to choose a firm during that day's meeting.

"If we're going to get a deadlock in a two-to-two tie...it would be considered no action," Vaughan explained. "You need to take some action, tonight. A tie vote would be a failed vote with no action."

Lambert then said "I feel it could come down to a deadlock and that's why I want Mayor Faria to be part of this. This way there's no excuses for a tie vote to happen, tonight."

"Two of the council members already indicated it would be a deadlock," Lewis then said. "I think this is a stall tactic, because we came here, tonight knowing we were to select one of these agencies and move forward."

"Because we will sit here, forever trying to get this accomplished," she continued. "We started this in July and here it is almost September, and nothing has happened. I won't have any problem with moving this forward to make sure the mayor is on board. But I'm not in favor of moving this out two or three weeks."

"We are essentially asking the recruiting firm to find a unicorn," Jones stated. "The next city manager is going to have to love being micromanaged by council...to love being bullied by council...and receive false accusations by staff. Finding a recruiting firm to do all that will be tough."

I need more time to decide...and it would be nice of all five council members present," he added.

"Just remember, Councilmember LLamas and Councilmember Lewis, you guys are the cause of why we're here, in the first place," Jones added.

LLamas then made a motion "to proceed as indicated by the calendar...and get direction by council." Lewis seconded it. But the vote failed on a 2-2 tie with Jones and Lambert voting against.

Jones then made a motion to "bring this back at another meeting to make a vote on the recruitment when all five of us are available and have City Manager Wellman to schedule it." Lambert seconded the motion and it passed 4-0.

On Thursday afternoon, August 25, 2022, the Los Banos City Council once again met to decide on hiring an executive search firm to help them choose a new city manager. As expected, following the 2-2 split vote during their August 17th special meeting with Mayor Tom Faria absent, the council voted to hire Koff & Associates this time on a 3-2 vote with both Mayor Pro Tem Ken Lambert and District 3 Councilman Brett Jones voting no. At the beginning

#### August 25th Meeting

The agenda for Aug. 25th was approved on another but rare 3-2 vote with Lambert and Jones also opposing.

Only one comment was read by City Clerk Lucy Mallonee during the Public Forum which was submitted for the last council meeting but had been lost in spam. Kimberlee Flores, who serves as a pastor at Bethel and a Los Banos Parks and Recreation Commissioner wrote to the council members about her concerns how the city is treating its homeless residents.

#### Selection of Search Firm

No member of the public spoke on the item during the meeting held online via Zoom although the remaining firms did not participate.

"There are only two firms in the running, now," Mayor Faria then said. "One of them has a great deal of experience...the other does not have that much experience."

Faria then made an usual motion as chair of the meeting to approve the hiring of Koff & Associates. It was seconded by Councilwoman Deborah Lewis.

"I am not in favor for either one of them. I'm sure they're good at what they do," Jones said, speaking first. "Here is why. In less than three months we'll have a new mayor and possibly a new council member and if we're being ethical about what is in the best interests of our residents it's not an unreasonable request."

"Our interim city manager has 960 hours that will carry us well into January. We'll have plenty enough time after election results to give direction to staff," he continued. "The only reason for a rush to hiring a new city manager is for absolute, reckless control."

"But let's just say council ignores better advice and hires a new city manager before a new mayor and possibly a new city council member are sworn in. We can only assume that by the last meeting of this year that there will be a closed session item on the agenda that's entitle, 'public employee discipline, dismissal release,'" Jones stated. "We will go into closed session with a city manager, and

## Letters: New resident also wants Kaiser in Los Banos

Dear Editor:

I am new to the Los Banos community, and I love it.

Please consider opening a facility in Los Banos with Kaiser since there is nothing comparable for health care benefits not to mention skilled workforce. Those of us that have this Kaiser benefit drive to other cities for care like Merced or Fresno and further. When we could spend our dollars, gas, here.

It would be a great training facility, jobs and a great future potential in Los Banos. Especially with new construction for housing going up.

An additional major medical player would only benefit the people, perhaps relieve some patient care with the only hospital I've seen here.

Please help Kaiser to see the



need and benefit of building in this community, thank you.

Lorraine Girard  
Los Banos

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we'll come out without one. We will not publicly state any specific reason for terminating that city manager. But we'll act serious while telling the public the Brown Act prohibits us from discussing it."

"Just know that every decision you make from here, forward will determine if you're really for the best interest of our city, or if you just love wasting taxpayers' hard-earned money," the District 3 councilman stated. "Councilman LLamas, your comment in the Los Banos Enterprise is correct. Los Banos is at a crossroad and you, along with Councilmember Lewis and Mayor Tom Faria put us, here."

"Any reason you give to justify proceeding moving forward with a new city manager is like pissing down the backs of the taxpayers and trying to convince them it's rain. Now, do the right thing and postpone this selection of a recruiting firm," he concluded.

Mayor Faria then called for the vote, and it passed 3-2 with Jones and Lambert voting no.

Councilwoman Lewis then spoke saying, "Whether we are sitting here as appointed or elected we have a duty to the residents of Los Banos to do our job and do it until the day we don't sit here."

"I think it's reckless on the council

member's part to read a statement and accuse the rest of us of not doing our job and being reckless," she continued. "We will move forward, and the city will work with the council to do what it has to do to find a new city manager. I don't see a reason why if we find one that there should be a meeting in December to dismiss someone unless that's the intention of the council that will be sitting at that time, which may or will probably be a majority different than we have, now."

"But it's typical as it has been since we have been moving forward with this process to have negative, slandering statements thrown at certain council members and I think it's inappropriate and it doesn't serve the community any purpose and it doesn't show good will and good judgement on any council member who does it against any council member

City Attorney Bill Vaughan then pointed out, "There is a resolution pending to select Kaufman & Associates. It allows the interim city manager to enter a professional services contract."

The council then voted, again 3-2 to approve the resolution with Lambert and Jones dissenting.

The meeting was then adjourned on a 5-0 vote.

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