

SIERRA VIEWS

April 2018



In this issue:
Bishop Mule Days

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April 2018

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To our readers:

East Kern Visions is now Sierra Views. This rebranding offers us a chance to broaden the publication’s scope, expanding from the areas of the mountains and deserts of eastern Kern County to now cover the area up and down the Eastern Sierra and beyond. In this issue, we feature Bishop to the north, Tehachapi to the south, and Kelso to the east.

On the cover:

Mule Days is back in Bishop May 22-27. It’s the only show of its kind anywhere, where thousands of people come to celebrate the mule and take in the events. See story, Page 5



Running of the burros

MICHAEL SMIT
The Daily Independent

Karin Usko said that she often gets people stopping to ask questions when she goes for a run. There's nothing unusual about seeing a runner jogging on the side of the road. But a runner leading a donkey by a rope and trying to coax it to keep pace? That's sure to spark a question or two.

Usko, along with her husband John Auburn, has taken part in Pack Burro races in Colorado, and now are going to try to set up Pack Burro racing in the Indian Wells Valley area. Pack Burro races involve running while leading a donkey by a rope. It's a tradi-



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

John Auburn attempts to coax his donkey, Telma Celemtina, back into moving those hooves as the Pack Burro runners go out for a short practice on Friday morning, Jan. 5.

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tional sort of race that has its roots going back to the early mining settlements of many western states like California and Colorado. In fact, one requirement of the race is for the donkey to carry a 33-pound bag containing a gold pan, a pick, and a shovel.

Usko said that they might not be looking to set up something as competitive as the race in Colorado, but they'd like to get some sort of casual Pack Burro racing group going at the local level. They are scheduled to hold a short race within the fairgrounds for the Bishop Mule Days between May 22 to May 27 this year. Usko said she hopes that'll start generating some local interest.

At the moment, she and Auburn take some of their donkeys out to runs with Over The Hill Track Club whenever they can. The couple are runners of the traditional donkeyless sort as well, but they bring the donkeys along when they can to spark the interest of any who may want to try their niche style of mixed running and animal handling. Usko said that any interested in trying out Pack Burro running at an OTHTC run can set that up by contacting her at karinsit@gmail.com or by contacting her on her Facebook page.

Usko, Auburn, and Eric Kajiwarra met with the Daily Independent early on a January Friday morning. They trotted up and down the short dirt road where Usko lives on the south end of Ridgecrest, each leading a donkey. The donkeys at times trotted along with them, at times walked, and at other times came to a dead stop as if to take in the scenery.

Auborn's hat read, "Wester Pack Burro Ass-ociation." A bumper sticker on



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

Eric Kajiwarra (right) leads his donkey back onto the trailer after a brief respite of munching on some desert bushes during Friday morning's exercise.

Usko's car read, "Prize for last ass over the pass." One of the donkeys was named "Asstrid." Though they genuinely love running and love their animals, the sport is still naturally light-hearted and the humor is not lost on them.

Kajiwarra is an ultra-marathon runner who only recently got into Pack Burro running. He said that while practicing one of his first burro runs, the donkey he was running with suddenly decided that it was absolutely done moving at all. It took Kajiwarra pulling and two people pushing the animal from behind to get it moving again.

"It's a challenge," Kajiwarra said. He said that's what makes Pack Burro running a different experience from his standard running.

Auburn said, "It's definitely not running at your pace. There's times you have to go slow because the burro wants to go slow, then other times you

have to slow them down."

He said that they've had many friends who are champions in the running community come to try Pack Burro racing, only to end up in last place. There have even been races where the first place runner lost their first place spot right at the finish line because their donkey decided it was a good time to stop. When running with a donkey, the fastest runner is the one who can keep his ass moving as well as himself.

Auburn said that the donkeys can get going too fast when running downhill sometimes, so the runner has to jump in front of them or get the animal to turn in order to slow it down.

"It can be a full body workout," Auburn said.

Auburn and Usko have a small ranch in their backyard where they keep donkeys, horses, and a couple mules.

Auburn said that he has worked with

equines for about 30 years, and Usko grew up around the animals. Usko also helps out as a trainer at the Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral, where she helps the wild donkeys and horses become socialized to human contact.

The corral is where Auburn and Usko got their burros, who were wild but captured from a local wild drove at a young age. Auburn said that the corral allows for adoption of their donkeys and horses so long as the adopter has the right sort of space at for the animal. After that, he said they allow the adopter to take the animal for a one year probation period. After that, if things went well, the adopter can keep the animal.

Usko said that donkeys are particularly social animals, despite their stubborn reputation, and therefore make great pets. She said it's even common for horse owners to buy a companion donkey for their horse if they only have one and don't intend to get another. She said that right now she's training a donkey to be a sheep guard. Once the donkey becomes socialized to the sheep, it will actually protect the herd from predators rather than running away like most other herd animals.

"They have personality things from horses, cats, and dogs," Usko said as she pet the baby donkey called Asstrid. The donkey leaned into her like a cat as she petted it.

The group took a moment to stop their walk as the donkeys became momentarily more interested in chomping on some desert bushes. After a brief rest, the three donkeys and Pack Burro runners got back on the trailer and, after a bit of tugging and coaxing, even got up to a casual jog. ❖

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

A scramble during a recent Bishop Mule Days. This year's event is May 22 through 27.

'The greatest mule show on Earth!'

It's not every event that is deemed important enough for its website to contain a ticker featuring days, hours, minutes and seconds counting down to the big event.

But Bishop Mule Days is not any event. Billed as the "Greatest Mule Show on Earth," Mule Days is an annual event that has been taking place on Bishop over Memorial Day weekend for nearly 50 years. And

yes, if you go to the website you can find out how long it is before this year's event begins – down to the second.

It celebrates its 49th year, having been founded in



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A scene from an opening ceremony at a past Mule Days. This year's event is May 22-27, 2018.

1969.

The Bishop Mule Days Celebration takes place for six days each year Tuesday through Sunday the week before Memorial Day on the Tri-County Fairgrounds in Bishop. It will be held May 22 to 27 this year.

"There is no way to actually describe Mule Days. It is part mule show, part test of skills, and part Wild West show," Mule Days writes on its website. "It is an event the likes of which are held nowhere else in the world. Over the six days of the event, there are 14 shows featuring over 700 mules with their trainers, riders and packers. In excess of 30,000 fans converge on the Tri-County Fairgrounds and the Mike Boothe Arena to watch the events and visit the exhibitors. The 14 mule shows consist of: Western, youth, English, cattle working, gaited, coon jumping, racing, musical tires, gymkhana, packing, shoeing, chariot racing, team roping and driving."

The event has a colorful history. Legend has it Mule Days was started by outfitters and packers the region who wanted an event to start off the packing season along with businessmen who wanted to attract vacationers to the Owens Valley.

Apparently the plan worked. The event has proven to be stubbornly popular so it's advisable to get tickets early if you want to go. Every year tens of thousands of people come to Bishop from all over the world to celebrate the mule.

The event this year features 14 shows, beginning with preliminaries on Tuesday continuing through Thursday showcasing English, Dressage, Driving, Reining and Youth competition. Event finals begin Friday featur-

ing the top placing competitors vying for World Championships in all disciplines. The Championships, Comedy classes, Packing contests and World Class Specialty Acts all take place in multiple arenas Friday through Sunday.

Events

The events start 8 a.m. Tuesday at the main arena with amateur hunters, green warm-up hunters, green working hunters, green jumpers, bridled warm-up hunters, bridled working hunters, a bridled jumpers.

At noon in the east arena, donkeys go through their dressage English and Western style — aka the fine style of performing a specific set of prescribed movements meant to impress judges and audience alike.

At 4 p.m., in the east arena II, there's the Donkey Adult Walk Trot (bubble gum chewing not advised for the participating equines). Styles include: English pleasure, English equine and Hunter Hack.

Things go into Wednesday bright and early with hitch pairs and singles super reinmanship shows at 7 a.m. in the main arena, as well as gambler's choice driving for single mules, teams and donkeys. Earlier, in East Arena I, the dressage show goes on for Western Style bridled, green and amateur.

At 1 p.m., hitch class competitions begin with work and reinmanship, youth hitch, donkey pleasure driving in working, turnout and reinmanship, as well as youth pleasure driving workman ship for working and reinmanship.

The shows continue at 1 p.m. in the main arena with 11 shows including: donkey English pleasure, Donkey Hunter Hack, Bridled English Pleasure, Bridled Hunter Hack, Green English Hunter Hack, Amateur English Pleasure and Hunter Hack, and Youth English Equitation, English Pleasure and Hunter Hack.

Wednesday night at 5 p.m. in the Charles Brown Auditorium sees the opening night supper and live entertainment by Dave Stamey with an appearance by Kristyn Harris.

Thursday morning at 7 a.m. in the main arena starts off with western riding followed by the "School Days Show," a series of team and steer roping events and barrel racing. At the

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same time in the East Arena 1, two gambler's choice events take place.

Thursday afternoon at 1 p.m., the main arena comes alive with a number of teamster challenges and driving events for mules, donkeys and steers, as well as team roping. The East Arena 1 will include a number of leadline and jog events.

Showmanship and halter events start at 2 p.m. in East Arena 2. Head back to the Charles Brown Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. for a concert including Tony Suarci "The Highway Man."

Friday, at 7 a.m. in the Main Arena, another set of events occur, including different classes of barrel racing, driving and roping. Reining events happen at the East Arena 1 at the same time.

At 9 a.m. in East Arena 2, halter events shine.

Friday afternoon, things pop at 1 p.m. in the Main Arena with a bevy of events, including log skidding, coon jumping and races, chariot, musical tires, as well as finals including team roping, open barrels, and an individual scramble contest. Head over to the West Track a 1 p.m. for polebending and single stake events, the East Arena 1 at 2 p.m. for some youth events.

Hitch events pop up at 7 p.m. in East Arena 1.

Barbecue time happens at 4 pm.

The Mule Days Parade kicks things off on Saturday at 10 p.m. on Bishop's Main Street.

"The Bishop Mule Days Celebration Parade is one of the longstanding and crowd-favored signature events of Memorial Day Weekend," according to Mule Days. "Spectators covet prime locations up and down Bishop's Main Street hoping to garner a priceless view of the beautiful mules, wagons, drivers and riders."

The Parade starts at 10 a.m. at South and Main Streets and moves north on Main Street. The Parade makes a left turn at Sierra Street and proceeds to the Fairgrounds entrance. The Parade Detour begins promptly at 9:30 a.m. with Main Street being closed to vehicle traffic. All vehicle traffic is rerouted on a multi agency approved detour. Driving during the parade is strongly discouraged to keep traffic flows to a minimum for necessary travel.

After the parade, people can return to the Main Arena for the Grand Entry,



Chariot racing is just one of the many events to be seen at Bishop Mule Days.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

followed by costume classes, the 300 Yard Race, bare hoops races, Big Balls in Mule Town and more. At 1 p.m. in the East Arena 1 and 2, see trail events.

Single and team pack burro races happen at 6:45 p.m. in the Main Arena, along with finals for various events, the rescue and contests. Head to the Charles Brown Auditorium at 8:30 p.m. for a dance and live music by Monte Mills and "The Lucky Horse-

shoe Band."

Things wrap up Sunday with Western Pleasure and Cow Working events at in the Main Arena and ranch riding events in the East Arena I at 7 a.m. Attend Cowboy Church at 10 a.m. at the Charles Brown Auditorium. Races, hitch and polebending contests happen at 1 p.m. in the Main Arena, trail events at 1:30 p.m. in East Arena 1. Things wrap up with races, contests

and Pack Off Finals in the Main Arena.

In addition, there are events that don't feature competitive mules, such as concerts, a catered dinner and BBQ, a dance and what the website bills as "the World's Longest Non-Motorized Parade."

For more information or for various ticket options, call 760-872-4263, email info@MuleDays.org or see the website at <https://muledays.org/>. ❖

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Quality drinks in East Kern

BY MICHAEL SMIT
The Daily Independent

Eastern Kern County is known for its beautiful views and its quiet landscape, but what is one to do after one too many quiet nights? Well, ideas start brewing. Sometimes, literally.

Could Eastern Kern County be home to some of the high quality beer and wine you'll ever behold? You'd better believe it.

Dotted along the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains are a number of vineyards and breweries that don't just produce a great product, but are also full of the uniqueness in character that give our area its charm.

Triassic Vineyards

Jim Arnold explained that vineyards are popping up all across Tehachapi. Arnold and his wife, Sally, own Triassic Vineyard, but he said he doesn't feel threatened by the competition. Instead, he was happy about it. He was downright giddy with excitement.

"We feel the more the better," he said. "The more wine vineyards and wine tasting rooms there are, the more of a destination Tehachapi will become for wine tasting."

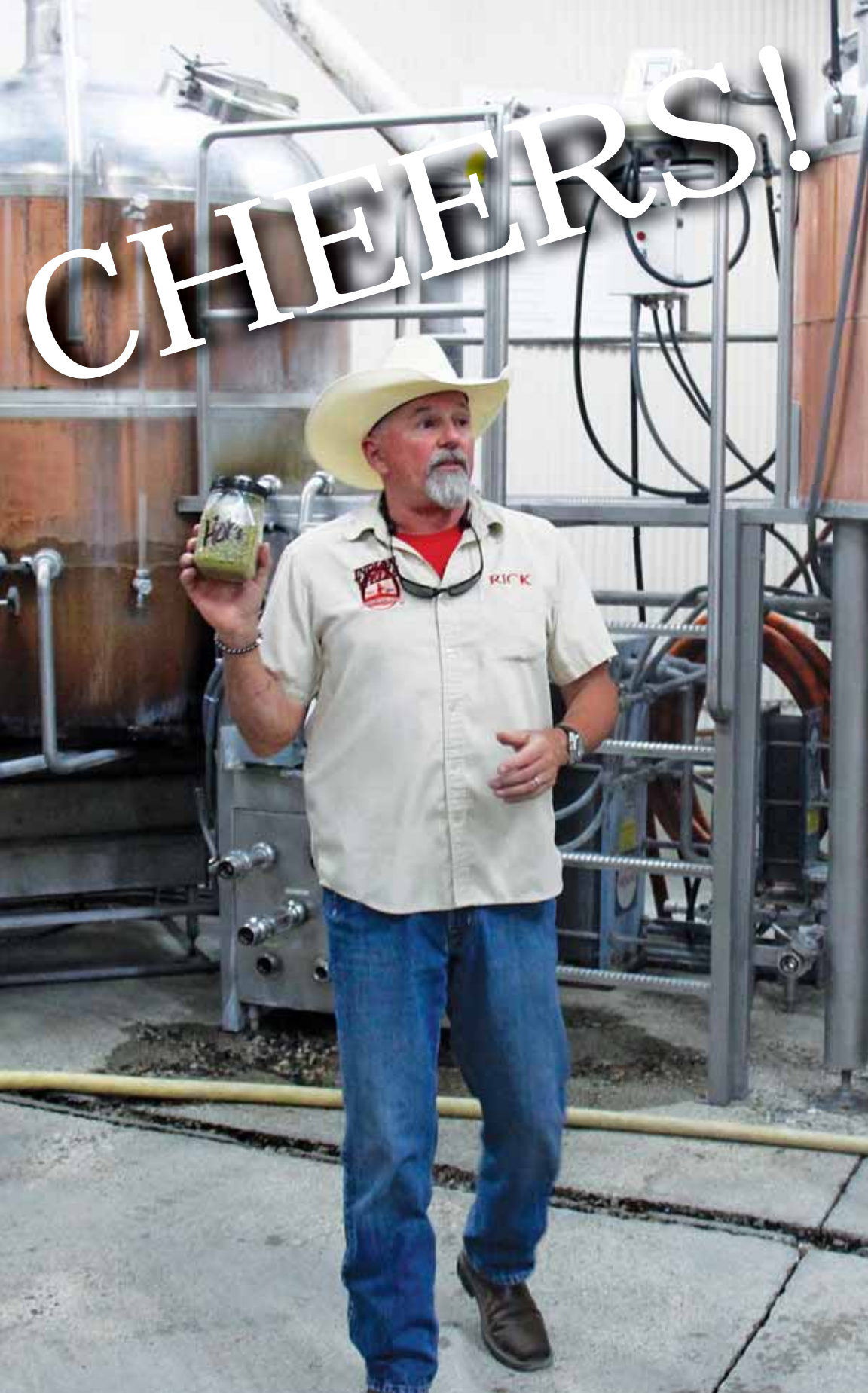
The Arnolds acquired the Triassic Vineyard's founder, Chuck McCollough, in 2013. At that time, there weren't many other vineyards around. In recent years, Tehachapi has quickly grown a name as a major force in the world of wine.

Arnold said that he hopes their next move will be to acquire a certification for Tehachapi to become an official American Viticultural Area, like Napa Valley or Paso Robles. That way they can start officially printing "Tehachapi" on their wine labels in order to grow a name for themselves and increase the notoriety of their distinctive wine.

And their wine is distinctive, according to Arnold. He explained that they're at a higher elevation than almost any other vineyards. In fact, he said that if they earn their AVA, they'll be the high-

MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

Indian Wells Valley Brewing Company co-owner Rick Lovett guides a tour through his brewery.





MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

Triassic Vineyard co-owner Jim Arnold leans against a post on his vineyard which stands on Triassic-aged soil.

est elevation AVA.

Their saving grace is that they get warm air coming up through San Joaquin Valley and Antelope Valley which helps them maintain a long growing season despite the high altitude. With that air keeping temperatures up, their high altitude becomes a boon rather than barricade.

"At 4,000 feet elevation, we get more sunshine days, which ripens the grapes. We have higher ultraviolet rays because we're closer to the sun, and that helps to toughen the skin of the grapes," he said. He explained that tougher skin helps produce a richer wine, which has become distinctive for Tehachapi.

In addition to the unique environmental aspects of growing grapes in Tehachapi, Arnold said Triassic Vineyards itself has yet another distinct feature. The vineyard was built on soil from the triassic period.

McCollough was a geologist who recognized the triassic features of the soil in the area, most likely caused by

the formation of some of the hills just next to the vineyard, according to Arnold. Arnold said McCollough had also heard of other vineyards planted on triassic soil that did exceptionally well due to the unique qualities and features of that soil.

It all blends into a wine experience only available here, and it has resulted in plenty of recognition. The Triassic Vineyards website lists three bronze medals, three silver medals, and two gold medals in San Francisco Chronicle and LA International competitions they entered in 2015 and 2016.

They've built a vineyard to be proud of, and an equally impressive wine tasting room. The main room is inside, but then features a wind-shielded patio outside which can function as a secondary room for separate parties. On one of Tehachapi's many sunny days, parties are welcome to enjoy the vineyard's grassy areas and even cook up a steak on the barbecue.

Arnold said that one of the most satisfying parts of owning the vineyard is



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Souza Family Vineyard co-owner Mike Van Atta tests the quality of one of his grapes. The test showed it was nearly perfect.

providing a space for people to step into and get away from it all.

He said, "In any relationship, there's times when you need to be in the right environment to address some things. And maybe even to dream, to fantasize, to solve problems. I see that here. I see couples bringing their notebooks and planning out what they're going to do for the year. I see them getting away from the kids in an adult environment."

Triassic Vineyards is located at 24627 Cummings Valley Road in Tehachapi, Calif. To learn more, visit their website at TriassicVineyards.com or call 661-822-5341.

Souza Family Vineyard

Tehachapi is quickly becoming the best wine hub that never should have been. According to Souza Family Vineyard's new co-owner Mike Van Atta, it all started with the Souza's planting their vineyard.

"They were the pioneers in the area as far as wine growing," Van Atta told the Daily Independent, talking about Souza Family Vineyard founders Bob and Patty Souza. "Because of their success, it's taken off and other people are enjoying their successes."

Van Atta said that the United States Department of Agriculture had advised the Souzas against planting a vineyard in Tehachapi. USDA believed the elevation was too high. The Souzas went ahead and planted the vineyard anyhow, and in doing so unlocked a hidden gem of land prime and ready for vineyards.

Bob explained that in the beginning, they had no idea what they were doing. In fact, he said they knew so little about what they were doing that when they processed and bottled their first harvest from 2005, referred to as their first crush, they wound up submitting it to the wrong contest.

They wanted to start out in a smaller competition, but instead entered into a world competition in San Francisco. There were about 6,000 entries, 63 judges, and 6 days of competition.

"We entered first crush which is dumbest thing you could do," Bob said. "You don't do that. You don't take a junior high team to the Super Bowl, which is what we did."

Despite the odds, the Souzas came away with a silver medal. The lady

who called told Bob that they were the only ones who entered on a first crush, and the only ones who entered from an area without an AVA. She had to ask where Tehachapi even was.

"You know what?" Bob said, "five years later, we're sitting on six medals and no one asks where Tehachapi is anymore."

The Souzas are retiring and handing off Souza Family Vineyard to Van Atta and his wife, Beth Hamilton. Both Van Atta and Hamilton are retired law enforcement officers.

"We both failed out of retirement," Van Atta said with a smile. "But the nice thing about the work here is that when we meet people, they're happy to see us."

When asked how Bob and Van Atta knew each other, Bob said, "Mike used to be a police officer, and I was one of his customers."

Van Atta looks forward to continuing the proud tradition of wine the Souzas started.

He aims to hold plenty of events at the tasting room, including continuing the popular "Wine Down Fridays," which happens every Friday from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Souza Family Vineyard is located at 26877 Cummings Valley Road in Tehachapi, Calif. Learn more by visiting SouzaFamilyVineyard.com or call 661-822-9233

Local Craft Beer, Tehachapi

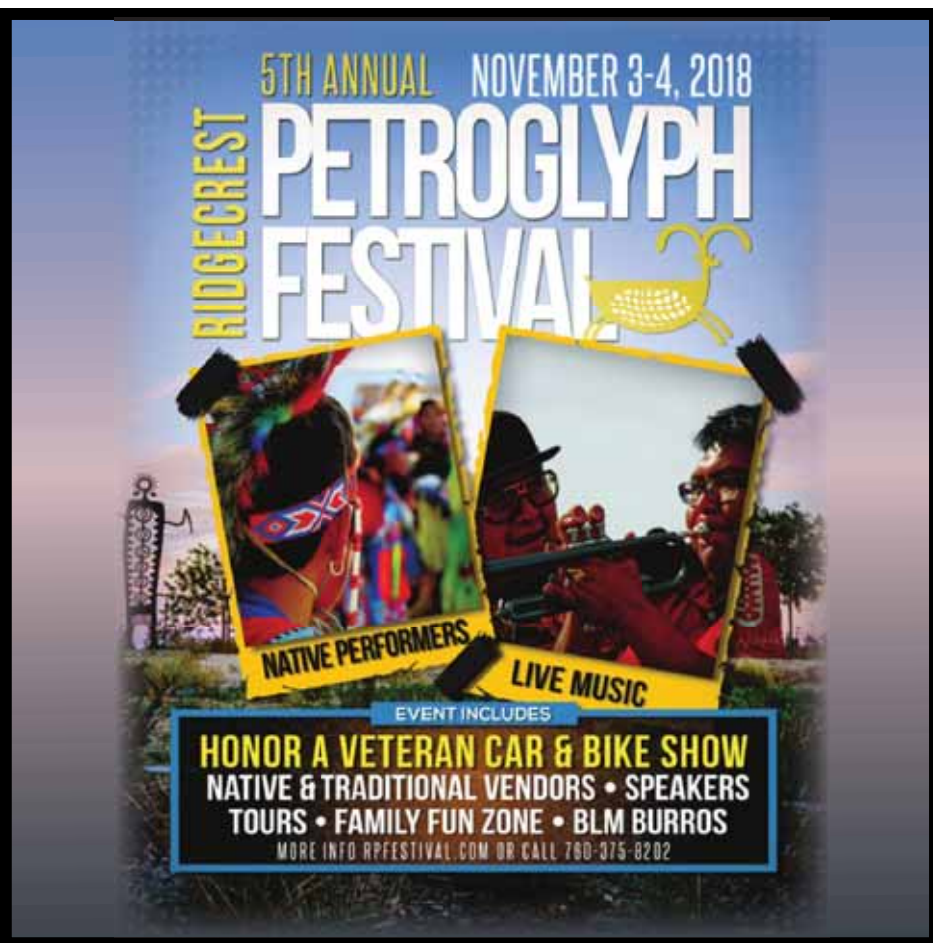
Local Craft Beer, Tehachapi is a hidden gem of a brewery tucked into the back corner of an industrial lot behind the Home Depot in Tehachapi.

Brewmaster Tyson Southworth said that zoning requirements keep many breweries in industrial areas, since they technically do manufacture a product with equipment.

The original owner of the brewery was also friends with one of the nearby repair shops in the lot, adding another reason for the breweries location.

"Not to say if we chose to build a brewery in that town, we wouldn't have chose the same location," Tyson said in an email to the Daily Independent.

The original brewery was named "Honey Wagon Brewing," and existed in that form for about a year before Tyson and owner/assistant brewer



Katie Southworth bought it. Tyson said they bought the place after 10 years of brewing in their own garage and two years of trying to build a brewery from the ground up. Once they bought the location, they replaced the equipment and the recipes with their own and changed the name. That was late in 2015, and things took off since then.

Tyson said that their signature style is high on hops. Their menu board is stuffed full with over 20 beers, so everyone can find something to suit their taste, but hops are their hallmark.

"Our defining style is being hop forward, whether it's a hoppy lager, a West Coast IPA, a New England style IPA, or we even DryHop are sour beers!" he said.

Local Craft Beer, Tehachapi is located in the middle of town and takes the opportunity to join the community in a variety of events, whether it's the obligatory St. Patrick's Day bash or taking part in the Tehachapi-wide Mountain Festival that happens every year.

The brewery has managed to grow its reach well beyond Tehachapi. Tyson said that they distribute their beer out to the range of Sacramento to the north, San Diego to the south, and Las Vegas to the east.

Local Craft Beer, Tehachapi is located at 365 Enterprise Way G. in Tehachapi, Calif. Learn more by checking out their Facebook page at "Local Craft Beer, Tehachapi" or call 661-822-2337.

Indian Wells Valley Brewing Company

During the Indian Wells Valley Brewing Company's annual Oktoberfest celebration on Oct. 7, 2017, co-owner Rick Lovett led a tour through the back rooms of the brewery, filled with multiple metal vats for brewing beer.

While standing among his brewery, Lovett said that he never thought he'd be brewing full-time.

"I was really just brewing for fun," he said. "I started making beer because I couldn't buy the beers I wanted to drink. The choices back then were Bud, Coors, or Miller."

Years later, co-owners Lovett and

Greg Antonaros have developed the Indian Wells Valley Brewing Company into a staple of the community, providing rich and flavorful, as well as characterful, beers for locals to choose instead of yet another Bud Light.

The company's beers carry names like "Blackout Stout," "Amnesia IPA," "Lobotomy Bock," or the aptly named "Whiskey Barrel Amber" which does indeed carry the kick of whiskey.

Asked what his favorite beer is, Lovett said, "Mojave Red was my favorite first beer, so it'll always hold some sentimental value for me. I named it. I won three gold medals with it. But the beer that's in my fridge is Death Valley Pale Ale."

Indian Wells Valley Brewing Company is located at 2565 CA-14 in Inyokern, Calif. Learn more by visiting MojaveRed.com or calling 760-377-4290.

Kern River Brewing Company

Kernville is a beautiful area with a multitude of outdoor activities on any given day of the year, from white water rafting to horseback riding to cross-country skiing. And Kern River Brewing company is right in the middle of it all.

The small town of only a few thousand people can swell to well over 30,000 depending on the weather and local events, and Kern River Brewing Company has made itself a central stop for crowds, both local and visitor.

This place is part restaurant and part brewery, providing a place to be for anyone looking to get a bite to eat or a drink, or better yet, both.

The craft a wide range of beers to quench the thirst of any imbibers, with original beer names such as "Think Tank #15" and "Igor Unchained Russian Imperial Stout."

As a central hub of the community, Kern River Brewing Company also features regular events. A quick scroll through the events page on their website shows a schedule full of upcoming live music performances to enjoy while downing a "Fish'in in the Dark Imperial Coffee Porter."

Kern River Brewing Company is located at 13415 Sierra Way in Kernville, Calif. Learn more by visiting Kern-RiverBrewing.com or calling 760-376-2337. ❖



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Kern River Brewing Company crafts a wide variety of locally made, locally named beer.

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Mojave Rd. remains an untamed, lonely stretch



A huge rock formation dwarfs a visitor's vehicle in Mojave National Preserve, Kelso, California.

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BY STEVE STEPHENS

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Unlike many other old trails through the American West, the hot and lonely Mojave Road remains much as it was when wagon trains rolled through in the 1860s and 1870s.

The dusty, mostly unpaved road bisects the Mojave National Preserve, a 1.6 million-acre expanse of beautiful and potentially dangerous desert in southeastern California. Visitors won't find service stations or convenience stores in the preserve, which is more than twice the size of Rhode Island. So gas up and buy plenty of drinking water before venturing in.

The preserve is bounded on the north by Interstate 15 and on the south by Interstate 40, which lies along the path once taken by historic Route 66. But the Mojave Road remains untamed, a particularly inhospitable branch of the Old Spanish Trail that linked Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Los Angeles in Spanish colonial times.

Exploring the more remote reaches of the preserve and the Mojave Road requires a high-clearance four-wheel-drive vehicle. But a magnificent tour of spectacular desert scenery was doable even in my low-slung rental car, which was up to the task of traversing many miles of unpaved but mostly well-graded road at the preserve's heart.

The best time to visit is October through May, as summer temperatures often exceed 100 degrees. During my December visit, the desert temperatures were even a bit chilly, at least until the sun had risen high.

About 20 miles of paved road took me from I-40 north through sere expanses of creosote bush scrublands. As the elevation rose, I began to spot tall and distinctive Mojave yucca, resembling a ragged hobo with spiky punk hairdos.

The road turned to dirt at Hole-in-the-Wall, one of the preserve's two visitor centers, where a ranger briefed

me on some of the sites reachable by a desert dilettante driving a Kia Rio. One of the best, the Rings Loop Trail, required no more driving at all: The trail is one of four that begins just outside the visitor center.

Just a mile long, the trail makes an irregular circle through the desert past ancient petroglyphs etched into huge boulders, attesting to the long human habitation of this seemingly hostile place.

The season was still too early for desert wildflowers, but I did see a surprisingly colorful variety of flora — cactus, yucca and sagebrush — and views that extended for miles to the Providence Mountains and Piute Range.

After looping through a bit of flat scrubland, the trail proceeded into Banshee Canyon, a wonderfully weird geological feature carved by nature with thousands of Swiss-cheese-style holes, perfectly sized for inquisitive hands. But considering the abundance of wildlife the desert harbors, including the Mojave rattlesnake, I easily put that temptation behind me.

At the end of the box canyon came the outlet — a narrow, vertical crack in the rock leading to the trail above. Reaching the trail meant navigating a stairway of metal rings mounted on spikes firmly (I assume) embedded into the face of the rock.

Somehow I had missed the sign warning hikers about the ring climb, so it was a surprise, and a moderately challenging scramble up, using the spikes as steps and the rings as handholds.

Acting on the ranger's advice, my next stop was 20 miles through the desert to Rock Spring and another loop trail there. The trail begins at Rock House, built by a World War I veteran to help him recover from inhaling poison gas during the war. (He lived 25 more years.) It was later the lonely habitation of artist Carl Faber, who sold his work to determined admirers and the sparse trickle of passing travelers.

Along the trail is the remains of an

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old mining operation and a historic marker denoting the site of Camp Rock Spring, a 19th century Army post that guarded travelers and mail on the Mojave Road.

I found an incongruous and optimistic willow tree near the spring site, but no flowing water, which left my mouth feeling a bit gritty. The hike wasn't long, but I was glad I'd taken water, although the liquid was warm.

From Rock Spring, I drove an especially rutted and potholed length of the Mojave Road, seldom breaking 10 mph. I turned at Kelso-Cima Road, part of the main north-south route through the preserve. I followed the well-paved two-lane road and the adjacent Union Pacific Railroad tracks into the ghost town of Kelso, site of the preserve's other visitor center, located in the magnificent 1925 Kelso Depot.

The Spanish Mission Revival-style train station, beautifully restored and preserved, is an incongruous sight in the desert. The depot once housed railroad-employee dormitories, recreational areas and a restaurant. Now it's a museum and small gift shop. It also gave me a welcome opportunity to refill my water bottle and use the restroom to wash off some desert dust.

As I continued north out of the park, I passed through an otherworldly landscape of cinder cones and lava beds before the pavement crossed the dusty Mojave Road one last time.

The dirt road, looking as if it had been scratched, indifferently, into the landscape by a giant with a stick, continued into the distance until dust and heat lines radiating up from the desert floor blurred it into the horizon. I had plenty of (warm) water, but I still felt parched.

The landscape changed abruptly when I finally hit civilization and the town of Baker.

I knew I would miss the lonely, beautiful desert. But before I merged onto I-15 for my 70 mph, 45-minute zip up to Las Vegas, I stopped in at a convenience store and treated myself to an especially delicious ice-cold soft drink.

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PHOTOS BY STEVE STEPHENS/MORE CONTENT NOW

ABOVE: Several cinder cones of dormant volcanoes can be seen in Mojave National Preserve, Kelso, California.

BELOW: The Rings Loop Trail can only be scaled using rings anchored in the rock thorough Banshee Canyon, Mojave National Preserve, Kelso, California.



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Pitch your tent, hop in your boat and sink your line in the Kern River Valley

Fishing, camping and boating opportunities abound in the Kern River Valley. With Lake Isabella and Kern River swarming with fish and trout season just opening, the area provides a great opportunity for a weekend getaway or day trip for fishing.

East Kern's largest lake, part of the lifeblood of the Kern River Valley, is home to many fishing opportunities. Lake Isabella includes largemouth and smallmouth bass, rainbow trout, kokanee salmon, bluegill, crappie and catfish.

Some of the best places to fish include the east side of Engineering Point between the Army Corps of Engineers' two dams (a good spot with trout), along with Boulder Gulch near Highway 155.

Inclined toward bass fishing? Rocky Point on the lake's eastern side, between the Northern Fork and Stine Point, offer

an opportunity, along with South Fork around French Gulch and Freear Point.

A salmon fan? Hit up the flume or Piney Point.

Remember, if you decide to do some angling on the lake itself, remember to secure a boating permit in addition to your usual fishing permit.

Jim Matthews of Outdoor News Service reports crappie fishing continues on Lake Isabella.

"Crappie Mania continues with good to excellent action for shore, float tube, and boat anglers fishing small jigs or live minnows under a bobber near stick-ups. The action is pretty good around much of the lake, and while most of the fish are small, there are also some bigger fish in the mix," Matthews reported in his April 18 fishing report. "A lot of 25-fish limits posted. The best colors on the jigs have been red and white or

chartreuse, but other colors are also getting fish. There is also still a pretty good trout bite, especially by the auxiliary dam on the usual array of dough baits, inflated nightcrawlers, small jigs, and trout plastics.

"The catfish bite has also broken open with the best bite on clams, shrimp, mackerel, and stink baits, especially in the Camp Nine area. The bass and bluegill bite are also starting to take off, with some especially good bluegill catches this past week.

"For carp anglers, this bite is pretty much wide open with the fish flooding the shallows and showing best on dough baits. Lots of carp to eight pounds. For fishing information: Bob's Bait 661-833-8657 or www.bobsbait-bucket.com, North Fork Marina at 760-376-1812, or Cope's Tackle and Rod Shop at 661-679-6351 or www.tacklean-drod.com."

Trout season opens soon, and the Friends of the Kern River Hatchery is hosting its opening day Trout Opener on Friday, April 28 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To celebrate, the event will host free fishing at the hatchery's stream for kids 15 and under. Fishing tackle will be provided, along with free hot dogs and drinks. The Hatchery is located at 14415 Sierra Way in Kernville.

And last but not most important: remember to hydrate, snack and wear plenty of sun screen or sun protection.

Carpfest

The Southern Sierra Fly Fishers will host the 2018 Carpfest in Lake Isabella on May 19. In addition to raising funds for the Keepers of the Kern and Kern River Conservancy, the event hopes to expand on the rising popularity in fishing for carp.

The event pits teams of two carp fly anglers against Lake Isabella's carp in a catch-and-release bout of fun. The rules are simple:

Have a valid California fishing license and you may fish anywhere on the lake so long as you have your score scare back by 3 p.m.

Fly rules include:

— You may use one fly at one time. Indicators/bobbers, split shot, any length leader/tippet and weighted flies are all acceptable. Barbless hooks are encouraged, but not required. Carp must be mouth hooked and not snagged. Flies may not be scented, however regular floatant is allowed. Tenkara rods are OK to use.

The Carpfest's tournament includes two divisions: floater and wader. Waders may consist of boats, float tubes, kayaks, and if you're balanced enough, stand up paddle boards.

Waders must fish from the shore and may not use boats or floatation devices. Waders aren't required.

According to Carpfest event, scoring is conducted:

— Every fish must be recorded with a digital camera or phone, and each measurement must be with an official Carpfest Ruler (to be provided to each team at sign-in) that clearly shows the entire length of the fish and a closeup of the ruler.

The five largest fish per length per team count: 1 inch = 1 point. Carp should be measured nose to tip of tail. The team with the most points wins.

In each division a tie will be decided by a shootout to a specific target. Three false casts and one lay down closest to the target will win.

Trophies are given to the first and second place winners in each division, and an Epic Prize will be given to the angler with largest carp.

Registration is \$75 per angler for the wade division and \$100 per angler for floaters. Teams need not belong to a fly fishing club.

Register online at ssffclub.org/Carpfest by May 13. Register by April 30 and you get a free Carpfest hat.

Check in starts at 7 a.m. at the Kern River Fly Shop, 11301 Kernville Road, Kernville. Remember, return with your score card by 3 p.m. sharp. Post-fest festivities start at 5 p.m. in the fly shop's back lot, includes a barbecue dinner and a jam session, along with vendors showing off their products. ♦



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