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Congressman Salud Carbajal represents the 24th Congressional District of California.

Carbajal Urges Review of Vandenberg Super-Heavy Launch Plans

U.S. Representative Salud Carbajal (D-CA-24) has urged the Department of the Air Force and U.S. Space Force to carefully evaluate the community, environmental, and operational impacts of a proposed super-heavy rocket launch pad at Vandenberg Space Force Base.

In a letter to Air Force Secretary Troy Meink and Space Force Chief General Chance Saltzman, Carbajal acknowledged Vandenberg's importance to national security and the Central Coast economy. However, he stressed that increased launch activity has already created significant noise and environmental pressures.

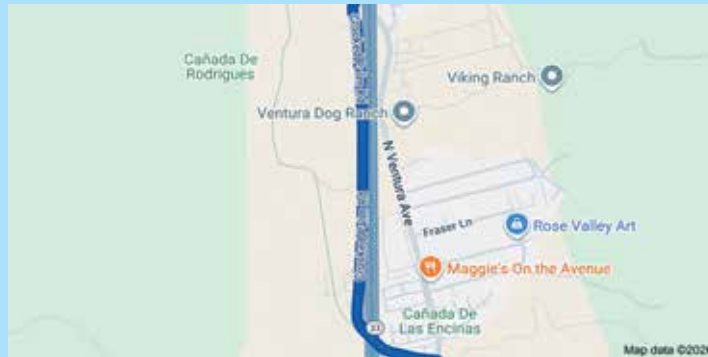
"Vehicles launched from Vandenberg travel south along the coast, and sonic booms affect communities far downrange," Carbajal wrote. "A super-heavy vehicle would likely increase both the severity and geographic reach of those impacts."

He also highlighted concerns about the base's unique ecosystem, which supports hundreds of plant and animal species, including 17 federally listed as **Continued on page 15**

From Industry to Open Space: Crooked Palm Permanently Protected

After more than a century in private ownership and industrial use, 101 acres at Crooked Palm are now permanently protected for public benefit, marking a milestone for community access, regional climate resilience, and habitat restoration in Ventura County.

Located in an area where residents experience some of the highest pollution levels in California, Crooked Palm's conservation delivers long-overdue access to clean, healthy outdoor space. The protection of this land also secures more than 45 acres of important habitat, strengthens the Ventura River watershed, and advances California's 30x30 conservation goals.



Crooked Palm, a 101-acre site along the lower Ventura River, is now permanently protected after more than a century of industrial use.

"Crooked Palm's transformation from an abandoned industrial site to protected land is a victory for Ventura and all Californians. Restoring this land protects habitat, strengthens regional climate resilience, and opens healthy access to the outdoors in a community where it's needed most," said Guillermo Rodriguez, Vice President of the Pacific Region and California State Director

Continued on page 2

VUSD Reviews Possible School Closures

The Ventura Unified School District (VUSD) Board of Education has directed staff to begin a clear, evidence-based process to evaluate whether any school sites should be considered for closure as early as the 2027-2028 school year. As part of this effort, the District is forming a School Closures Advisory Committee to study enrollment trends, review criteria, analyze data, and provide a recommendation to the Board of Education.

This process is in its early stages. The School Closures Advisory Committee is expected to begin meeting in March 2026, meet monthly, and bring a recommendation to the Board by October 2026. Even if the Board were to approve any closures, no school would close before the 2027-2028 school year.

For several years, VUSD closely monitored enrollment trends, watching to see if post-COVID declines might stabilize. However, enrollment continues to decline by approximately 300 students per year. Regional data also shows sustained decreases in birth rates, fewer families moving into the area due to the high cost of living, and an aging population. Together, these trends require the District to carefully assess how many school sites are needed to best serve current and future students.

Many VUSD schools are operating below their intended capacity. Maintaining under-utilized campuses requires resources that could otherwise be invested directly in classrooms, student programs, and learning opportunities. The District has a responsibility to review our internal processes and procedures to ensure public funds entrusted **Continued on page 2**



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VUSD is forming a School Closures Advisory Committee to study enrollment trends, school capacity, and financial data.

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PUBLISHER-EDITOR

Mark Brown
editor@venturabreeze.com

ADVERTISING

Rosa C.
Rosa@venturabreeze.com
805.827.2306

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Alfred J. Lewis

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Shirley Lorraine · Richard Lieberman
Sheli Ellsworth · Carol Leish
Pam Baumgardner · Elizabeth Rodeno
Mira Reverente · Amy Brown
Richard Senate · Patricia Schallert
Ross Williams · Mary Olson
Leslie Sokol · Joseph Seemayer
Tracy Marcynszyn

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Richard Lieberman · Michael Gordon
Patricia Schallert · Joseph Seemayer

PUBLISHER EMERITUS

Sheldon Brown

DISTRIBUTION

Mary Thompson · Alfred J. Lewis
John Murchison · Patricia Schallert
Debbie Lopez

EXHIBITION COORDINATOR

Jaime and Ana Baker

PRINTING

CA Web Print, Inc.

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CONTACT US:

EVENTS & HAPPENINGS
events@venturabreeze.com
OPINIONS
opinions@venturabreeze.com
ARTICLES AND PHOTOS
editor@venturabreeze.com
THE PET PAGE
scampclub@venturabreeze.com
ADVERTISING
advertising@venturabreeze.com
805.653.0791

Ventura Breeze

PO Box 832, Ventura, CA 93002
Phone 805.653.0791



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“I am so clever that sometimes I don’t understand a single word of what I am saying.”
– Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* – 1888

City News

Ventura Housing Connections Series

City Launches Housing Workshop Series
The City of Ventura is launching Ventura Housing Connections, a free workshop series that helps tenants, property owners, and property managers build informed, successful rental relationships. The workshops will deliver clear, practical guidance on rental rights and responsibilities, housing standards, communication strategies, and local housing resources. Designed for both new and experienced renters and property owners, the series supports conflict prevention, stronger communication, and housing stability throughout Ventura.

“These workshops give people straightforward, reliable information they can use right away,” said Maruja Clensay, Assistant Community Development Director. “By bringing tenants and property owners together in the same space, we’re helping reduce misunderstandings, improve communication, provide educational opportunities, and support stable housing across Ventura.”

Upcoming Workshops:

- Fair Housing Essentials - Thursday, January 29

- Legal Landscape for Landlords - Thursday, February 5
- Basics of Renting - Thursday, February 26

The City presents the series in partnership with the Ventura County Coastal Association of Realtors and the Housing Rights Center, bringing property owners and tenants together to support informed and balanced housing conversations.

All workshops are free, open to the public, and hosted from 6:00 – 8:00 pm in the Community Meeting Room at City Hall, located at 501 Poli Street. Spanish interpretation will be provided upon request; registration is required.

These workshops are designed for: Anyone that lives in the City of Ventura; Tenants; Property owners (small and large); Realtors; Anyone interested in understanding Ventura’s rental housing landscape. Participants are encouraged to register in advance and submit questions ahead of time to help guide each session. For registration and more information, visit www.cityofventura.ca.gov/VHCS.

VUSD Reviews Possible School Closures Continued from page 1

to the Ventura Unified School District are being used efficiently and thoughtfully, while remaining focused on student success.

The School Closures Advisory Committee will include teachers, staff, families, students, and community members from across the City. The committee will review a wide range of information, including district enrollment and school capacity data, facility utilization, financial impacts, housing and population trends, and demographic projections prepared by a professional demographer. All materials reviewed by the committee will be made publicly available on the District website.

“We understand that this process may bring a range of emotions for our students, staff, families, and community,” said Marianne Quiroz, Public Information Officer for Ventura Unified School District. “We are committed to creating meaningful opportunities for community feedback as the process unfolds, sharing all of the information reviewed by the committee, and approaching this work with transparency, care, and compassion.”

The committee does not make final decisions. Its role is to review data and provide a recommendation. Any decision regarding school closures would ultimately be made by the Ventura Unified School District Board of Education at a public meeting.

Committee meetings will be held in accordance with the Brown Act, allowing the public to attend and provide comment. There will also be meaningful opportunities for staff, students, families, and community members to share feedback throughout the process.

VUSD is currently building the

processes and protocols that will guide this work. Meeting dates, agendas, and updates will be posted on the District website and shared through the District’s Facebook and Instagram pages. Community members are encouraged to follow these platforms to stay informed as the process moves forward. Community members are encouraged to:

Visit the District website and social media platforms for updates:

- Website: www.venturausd.org/about/committees/school-closure-committee
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/Venturausd/
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/schoolventura/
- Read the monthly VUSD Connections Newsletter (families and staff)
- Attend School Closures Committee meetings
- Share questions or feedback by emailing VUSDschoolscommittee@venturausd.org

The Ventura Unified School District appreciates the community’s partnership and engagement as this thoughtful, data-driven, and community-centered process begins.

Crooked Palm Permanently Protected Continued from page 1

for Trust for Public Land. “For the first time in more than a century, this land will increase connection to the Ventura River and provide the public with the physical and mental health benefits that come with close-to-home access to nature.”

For the first time in over 100 years, the former agricultural fertilizer and oil refinery property can no longer be used for industrial or commercial purposes. The site creates a new connection point to the Ventura River/Ojai Valley Trail, a 16-mile regional corridor

that links communities to nature, recreation, and non-vehicular transportation options. This new access will reduce reliance on cars, expand opportunities for outdoor activity, and improve close-to-home access to nature’s proven health benefits.

The protection of Crooked Palm is the result of a partnership led by Trust for Public Land, Ventura Land Trust, and the California Natural Resources Agency. The property has been part of regional planning discussions since 2008, and its permanent conservation marks the beginning of a new chapter for the landscape and the community.

“The Ventura region falls within one of a few dozen biodiversity hotspots identified across the globe, making every acre conserved an important one,” said Melissa Baffa, Executive Director of Ventura Land Trust. “This property, along the Ventura River, just a short distance from an urban setting, and with a long history of industrial use, is an especially exciting acquisition for Ventura Land Trust. We are thrilled to have this opportunity to take a bruised and blighted property and restore it to beautiful natural habitat that our human and wildlife neighbors will enjoy for generations. We are very thankful for the support of our conservation partners in this important project.”

“After generations of industrial use and pollution, Crooked Palm now offers safe, welcoming outdoor access in a community long denied it,” said California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot. “Through strong collaboration, we secured important habitat, strengthened the Ventura River watershed, and took another meaningful step toward California’s 30x30 conservation goals. This project reflects what partnership delivers when public health, nature, and community come first.”

Following decades of industrial use, the property has undergone extensive environmental cleanup and infrastructure removal. Given this much improved state of the property, Ventura Land Trust now has an opportunity to envision this portion of the lower Ventura River with the community. While the protection of the property immediately provides for improved flood protection and habitat restoration, there are also future opportunities to activate the land in a way that reflects local open space and recreational priorities, and the unique ecology of the site.

Habitat restoration at Crooked Palm will support threatened and endangered species, improve floodwater management, and help reduce wildfire risk. In a region facing significant pollution burdens and climate stress, conserving this land brings meaningful and lasting health and environmental benefits.

The project was made possible thanks to the generous support of public and private partners, including Proposition 68 and the California Natural Resources Agency’s Urban Flood Protection Program. California voters passed the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) on June 5, 2018, which authorized a competitive grant program for the purpose of multi-benefit projects in urbanized areas to address flooding.

About Trust for Public Land

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 4 million acres of public land, created more than 5,500 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised \$112 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected nearly 10 million people to the outdoors. To learn more, visit www.tpl.org.



Senior Living



Sheldon Brown enjoys a trial ride on Cycling Without Age Ventura, a unique, free program offering senior residents an outdoor cycling experience.

Wind, Wheels and Connection: Cycling Without Age Rolls Into Ventura

By Nella Nelson

Basking in the fresh coastal air and rediscovering the joy of bike riding reminiscent of childhood, many older Ventura residents are embarking on a new kind of journey. Cycling Without Age Ventura has arrived in the community, offering residents renewed vitality and connection through a unique, free program. The local chapter is part of a worldwide movement dedicated to enhancing quality of life through shared cycling experiences.

The Trishaw e-bike – a combination rickshaw-style electric bike with the driver positioned at the back – was first introduced in Copenhagen, Denmark, by Ole Kassow in 2012. The concept made its way to the United States through Bentonville, Arkansas, via the Gnargo Bike Company. Newer models are lighter and more efficient, capable of carrying up to 300 pounds while navigating hills and inclines with ease. The trishaws are equipped with seat belts, and wheelchairs

can be accommodated. Volunteer “pilots” receive regular training to safely operate the bikes.

Locally, co-founders Michael Mariani and Dan Ayers launched Cycling Without Age Ventura in September 2025. Both were inspired after watching a documentary at the Ventura Land Trust’s Wild and Scenic Movie Festival.

Rides typically last between 45 minutes and an hour, winding through parks, beaches, bike paths and areas near care facilities. “We love meeting new people and riding a bike outdoors,” Mariani said. “Passengers enjoy going anywhere with beautiful scenery and people to visit with.” He recalled one passenger, Eloise, who announced at age 88 that it was her first-ever bike ride.

Eight trishaws are currently in use in Santa Barbara, with more being added in Ventura and Ojai. Ventura’s bikes are

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Senior Living

Wind, Wheels and Connection Continued from page 7

being named after the Channel Islands, including Santa Cruz and Anacapa. While the program primarily serves older adults, it is also available to individuals with mobility challenges who would benefit from time outdoors. Rides are offered at local care facilities and mobile home parks, and residents may also coordinate participation through their health care providers. Weekly scheduled rides are currently available at The Lexington in Ventura and The Gables in Ojai, with additional locations planned.

The organization's motto reflects its mission: Cycling Without Age is a worldwide movement that aims to provide joy and vitality to older adults through the magic of the bicycle. Through the simple

act of sharing a bike ride, it fosters a sense of community and gathers invaluable stories, unlocked only by wind and wheels.

Retired Breeze publisher Sheldon Brown recently took a ride and shared his experience. "This was a most enjoyable and fun ride," Brown said. "Michael, the captain, and Kay, who directed traffic on her bike, were wonderful. They kept up great conversation and took me to places I didn't know existed, stopping along the way to talk with people. As soon as they brought me home, I went to the Cycling Without Age site and donated to this wonderful program. You should sign up for a great time."

Cycling Without Age Ventura is funded through donations. Tax-deductible contributions can be made at cwa-ventura.org/ support.



Photo by Sheldon Brown.

Riders enjoy a leisurely trishaw ride through Ventura, taking in coastal views, fresh air, and the simple pleasure of being outdoors

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This year, CAREGIVERS will coordinate rose deliveries on Friday, Feb. 13. Volunteers may visit the CAREGIVERS offices to pick up roses anytime between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Roses will be provided along with a printed list of delivery addresses and information for each senior. To maximize convenience, each volunteer will be assigned three to four deliveries, based on proximity to their home.

Volunteers are encouraged to post photos of their deliveries on social media in real time. CAREGIVERS will also share photos and stories submitted by volunteers that highlight their rose delivery experiences.

If you are available to volunteer, please RSVP by Monday, Feb. 2, by calling 805-658-8530 or emailing Barbara at connect@vccaregivers.org.

