

SERVING THE SALINAS VALLEY AND MONTEREY COUNTY

The Salinas Californian (USPS 478-120) is published Monday-Saturday morning by Salinas Newspapers, Inc., 123 W. Alisal St., Salinas, CA 93901. Phone (831) 424-2221 or (831) 649-6626. TTY: (831) 754-4296. A Gannett Newspaper.

Periodicals postage paid at Salinas, CA, postmaster. Send address changes to The Salinas Californian, 123 W. Alisal St., Salinas, CA 93901.

Local news

8 a.m. to 1 a.m. 754-4260
FAX machine 754-4293
Sports 754-4265
Feature 754-4270
E-mail
newsroom@thecalifornian.com

Circulation

Customer service
Toll Free. 1-877-424-4917
Monday-Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Missed deliveries
Toll Free. 1-877-424-4917
Suggested subscription rates
Home delivery Monday-Saturday \$12.27 for 4 weeks
Slightly higher in outlying areas
Plus tax where applicable.

OBITUARIES/4A

Mendoza, Emma Beat...

Community alliance revs up for June 5

COPA launches campaign to enlist 30,000 voters on local issues

(MCT)

PAJARO — Tony Cardoso didn't think there was much point to voting. After all, what could his one vote do?

Then he learned about an organization of 24 religious, education and nonprofit groups working together to solve economic and social justice issues.

The coalition — Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, or COPA — has launched a campaign for affordable housing, health care access, public safety, economic and educational

opportunity, and immigration reform.

Through the Stand Up and Take Charge signature drive, COPA aims to enlist 30,000 registered voters in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. The nonpartisan group won't endorse anyone, but plans to host forums to hold candidates in upcoming elections accountable.

Cardoso has signed on. But first, 39 years after emigrating from the Azores as a 13-year-old, Cardoso became a citizen so he could vote.

"I'm tired of staying on the sidelines," said Cardoso, a Monterey County teacher. "When we are united — we're talking about 30,000 voters — I think we'll have power."

That's the idea behind the campaign, said Alfred Diaz-Infante, head of the Commu-



nity Housing and Improvement Systems and Planning. CHISPA is a Salinas-based public housing developer. People often feel powerless, he said. But when they come together and start talking, they realize they are facing many of the issues. "We want to bring back people's politicalness to the forefront," he said.

Diaz-Infante, for example, wants governments to look in their own backyards when contracting public works projects. By hiring locally on a recent project, CHISPA created 155 jobs for residents of Salinas and nearby

communities.

Other COPA leaders pointed to achievements of the nearly 10-year-old organization. The group successfully lobbied for creation of the Live Oak Family Resource Center and against a wage cut for home health workers.

Cindy Rubin of Temple Beth El in Aptos said COPA wants to see permit and regulatory reform to make it easier for businesses to set up shop, as well as education opportunities so people can get jobs in marine biology and eco-tourism.

"Business interests are community interests," said Kurt Gollnick of Schied Vineyards.

Monday's campaign launch occurred at the home of Alfredo and Rosa-

rio Melendez. The couple nearly lost their modest house when, despite the fact that Alfredo, a landscaper, and Rosario, a home health care worker, continued to work, their income dropped, and they couldn't afford the more than \$3,000 mortgage payment.

After unsuccessfully trying to modify the loan in 2009, Rosario Melendez turned to COPA. The organization has assisted 50 families facing foreclosure, and with its help, the Melendez family was able to get the bank to agree in January to cut their payment by more than half.

"We're just focusing on what families are facing," said Vivienne Moore of St. Angela's Catholic Church in Pacific Grove. "We know we can create a constituency."

PUBLIC SAFETY DIGEST

Staff reports

CHP: Watsonville man killed in car crash

A 27-year-old Watsonville resident was killed on Monday night in a solo crash on San Miguel Canyon Road, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The driver of a 2006 GMC pick-up traveling northbound on San Miguel Canyon Road north of Strawberry

convicted by a jury last week of voluntary manslaughter.

In November 2007, Hemphill strangled his cellmate to death.

He previously had been convicted and was serving a sentence for attempted murder, kidnapping and mayhem.

Sentencing has been set for April 10; the maximum sentence is 25 years to life.

Soledad police: Drug bust nets 7 suspects

arrested: Juan Zambrano, 32; John Velasquez, 53; Lawrence Velasquez, 35; Derek Velasquez, 24; Claudia Chavez, 38; Edward Diaz, 54; and Scott Thompson, 20.

The suspects were arrested on suspicion of being under the influence of drugs and possession of narcotics or drugs for sale.

Sheriff: Man robbed in Castroville

A man was robbed at

and challenged the victim to a fight, deputies said.

The suspect then pulled up the bottom of his sweatshirt to reveal a black semi-automatic handgun, and another suspect pinned the victim's arms behind his back, deputies said.

The first suspect punched the victim and took money

from his wallet, deputies aid.

A third suspect warned the others he saw a sheriff's deputy approaching, deputies said.

The suspects were last seen running toward a white four-door compact car with black rims and tinted windows, deputies said.

GAS LOG SET SALE