

Willits Weekly

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Open house collects input on East Commercial plan

Margi Gomez Guhde
Features Writer
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A Design Review Open House was held on October 18 at the Willits Community Center to gather public input for the East Commercial Street Corridor plan. This project is on track to be funded by Caltrans' Clean California Local Grant Program for Willits' "Beautify Willits" project.

Read the rest of **Plan**

Over on Page 10

Airplane crash kills 2 in Covelo

By Sgt. J. D'Orazio,
for MCSO

On Friday, October 20 at 6 pm, Mendocino County Sheriff's Office deputies were dispatched to a reported airplane crash at a rural location in the 21000 block of Airport Road in Covelo.

A short time later, deputies were informed the airplane was on fire and the fire was spreading into nearby vegetation.

Personnel from CAL FIRE, U.S. Forestry Service, California Highway Patrol, and Round Valley Tribal Police Department responded to the crash scene as well.

Once the fire was contained, deputies began

Read the rest of **Crash**

Over on Page 11

Building permit amnesty starts November 1

Submitted by Mendocino County Planning and Building Services

On September 12, 2023, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors provided direction to Planning and Building Services to establish a one-year amnesty program that waives all violation / penalty fees related to building permits submitted after work has already commenced or been completed, which are not associated with a confirmed code enforcement case.

The amnesty program applies to all residential and commercial building permits, subject to the following limitations:

- The permits are not associated with a confirmed code enforcement case.

Read the rest of **Amnesty**

Over on Page 11



Brooktrails Fire Department's Fire Chief Jon Noyer, center, smiles with firefighters Lindsey Schively, left, and Jordan Kirkpatrick, right. They are all excited to see the community for the Trunk or Treat Halloween night event.

Happy Halloween

Emergency services and law enforcement agencies provide free Halloween candy circuit for local community

The Brooktrails Fire Department, the Little Lake Fire Department, the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office, the County of Mendocino, the California Highway Patrol, and the California Department of Fish and Game are excited to offer a fun event for kids this Halloween.

From 5 to 8 pm on Tuesday, October 31, the participating agencies will all offer candy during drive-through or "stop and visit" events at the three different locations.

The fire departments will be hosting their candy give-a-ways at their respective locations; Brooktrails Fire is located at 24860 Birch Street and Little Lake Fire is located at 74 East Commercial Street. The other agencies will be disbursing candies from the Sheriff's Office substation located at 470 East Valley Street.

Brooktrails Fire Chief Jon Noyer noted his excitement for



this year's upcoming event.

"There's really no easy way to trick or treat in Brooktrails, so we're happy to be offering our station as a stop for an option," said Noyer. "We're happy to be on the circuit for the Trunk or Treat event again this year, and wish everyone a safe and happy Halloween!"

– Maureen Jennison



Photo by Maureen Jennison



Where is Willits?

The only freeway sign that includes the word 'Willits' to direct traffic into town at the south off-ramp is still missing

Where's our sign? The exit sign indicating Willits' existence which was located just south of the south off-ramp was collided into by a single vehicle on August 18, and has yet to be replaced, leaving motorists with no great indication that the town of Willits lies just to the west.

As shown on the Google maps screen grab, above, at top, the sign helped motorists clearly know this was the exit to take to come into our hometown.

Presently, the only sign on Highway 101 noting Willits' existence before the south off-ramp at all, is one located by the Redwood Valley overcrossing, south of the Ridgewood Grade, indicating Willits is 14 miles ahead. That's it, and that's not great. The "Exit 568" sign is still standing, but it is located part way down the already-dividing off-ramp, likely not allowing motorists time to take the ramp, even if they somehow knew that "568" = "Willits."

Third District Supervisor John Haschak has reached out

to Caltrans to see what the status is in getting the vital sign replaced.

"Thank you for bringing this to my attention," said Haschak. "I have contacted Caltrans. The sign needs to be replaced for many reasons. Caltrans has been helpful with signage, and I expect drivers to soon be directed into Willits with a new sign."

Late-breaking update: Supervisor Haschak reports that the Caltrans District 1 office told him they had a request in for a quote from a sign manufacturer to replace the damaged "Willits" sign, but that replacing the sign "is taking more time than would be ideal." So the plan now is to ask "our District 3 office to make the sign for us, in order to expedite replacement," with an approximate replacement date expected by next week.

– Maureen Jennison

North Street resident warns council of drug activity

Jennifer Poole
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A City of Willits resident spoke out during the "Public Communications" part of the Willits City Council's October 11 meeting about the situation on his block, the 300 block of North Street.

As reported in a Willits Police Department press release in Willits Weekly's October 5 edition, "WPD investigating unattended death on North Street," after receiving a walk-in tip,

Read the rest of **Activity**

Over on Page 11

Willits Police Department September Report

By Interim WPD Chief James Conner

The Willits Police Department's report for the month of September was included in the Willits City Council's agenda packet for their October 25 meeting.

The list of "Monthly Achievements & Activities" reported statistics from September 2023, compared to September 2022. WPD received 49 911 calls in September 2023, compared to 44 911 calls in 2022. Calls for service last month were listed as 395 calls, compared to 659 calls in September 2022.

The number of cases in September 2023 was 42, down from 90 in

Read the rest of **Report**

Over on Page 11

Prescribed burn planned for Shamrock Ranch

Submitted by CAL FIRE MEU

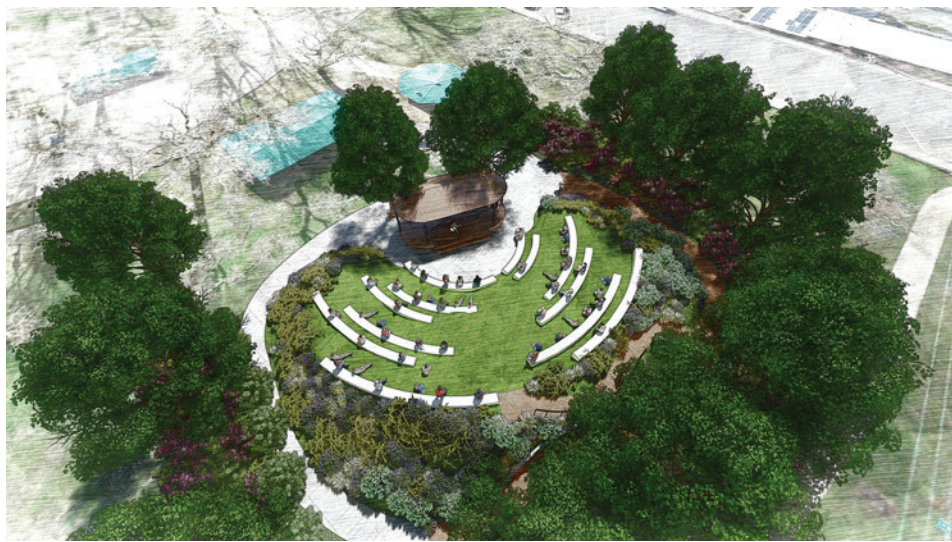
The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Mendocino Unit will be conducting a vegetation management prescribed burn on Laytonville's Shamrock Ranch this weekend.

This prescribed burn will treat approximately 600-acres of grasslands, chaparral, and understory vegetation within oak woodlands and mixed conifer habitats, creating a mosaic of variously burned vegetation and islands of unburned habitat.

The Shamrock Ranch is located in the northern portion of Mendocino County, east of Highway

Read the rest of **Shamrock**

Over on Page 11



Above, left: The East Commercial Street Corridor Plan proposes an amphitheater for Recreation Grove. Above, right: One proposed project is a 2,500 square foot pavilion for Bud Snider Park, designed to host the weekly Willits Farmers Market and other events.

Below: This graphic shows the proposed expansion of the sports fields on East Commercial Street. At bottom: This graphic shows a potential new entry design for the Mendocino County Museum.

Graphics courtesy of Terrain Landscape Architecture



OBITUARY |

Rosann Cash

Rosann Cash, 80, of Willits passed away at home October 13, 2023. She was known as "Rosie" to her friends, and "Grandma Rosie" to more kids than anyone could count.



The rest of Plan | From page 1

The highly competitive grant – Willits was one of 42 applicants to receive a grant award out of 230 applications - will provide \$2.77 million in funding for streetscape, signage, litter abatement, improvements to parks, safety upgrades, and more.

The Design Review Open House presented an overview of proposed changes to East Commercial Street, including beautification elements, increased accessibility to downtown, improvements to public spaces such as Bud Snider Park, Recreation Grove, the Willits Library, Mendocino County Museum and the Roots of Motive Power areas, as well as the soccer and baseball fields.

Large easels with detailed drawings of the various areas along East Commercial Street indicated both the current conditions and the enhancement and development proposals, attracting lively conversation and discussion.

Stickers and post-its were available to collect public input, and display boards quickly filled with a range of community comments, which included support for more shaded areas, more trees and benches, access to water fountains, safer sidewalks, better street lighting, and improved parking.

Senior City Planner Taylor Perry is part of the team who worked on the Beauty Willits Grant, which will fund the East Commercial Street Corridor project, and was on-hand at the Open House. "The Beauty Willits Project is "set to transform Willits," Perry said, with construction expected to begin by the summer of 2025.

Willits Mayor Greta Kanne also attended the Open House at the Willits Community Center, and expressed her gratitude to the community members who came to the public sessions to share their ideas and concerns.

"The more public participation the city gets during the planning process, the better the ultimate design will be," Kanne said. "And the most exciting thing about this plan is that because of the Clean California grant, we can expect to see some of this become reality as early as next year. It's a great time to get involved."

The City of Willits plans to continue its outreach to Willits residents and its gathering of public input on the East Commercial project. The design boards will remain on display at City Hall for the next two weeks to allow Willits residents to familiarize themselves with proposed changes and submit comments, and there is likely to be another Open House session before the plan is completed.

To see the entire 58-page East Commercial Design Review, developed and compiled by City of Willits staff and Terrain Landscape Architecture, go to: https://cityofwillits.org/DocumentCenter/View/1337/East-Commercial-Street-Community-Outreach-and-Program-Development

home mom. The days she was at home, when Devereaux would come home, he would give her kiss and take her in his arms for a waltz around the kitchen.

As a family, the Cashes would often go fishing. Devereaux enjoyed showing the kids all the tips and tricks for a successful cast, and Rosie would sit on the front seat of the family motorhome, feet up on the dash, crocheting. Rosann also loved exploring caves as an amateur spelunker. She would wake up of a morning and rouse the kids saying: "Get dressed. I've got my go briches on." She enjoyed every adventure they took together.

Devereaux predeceased Rosie in 1985. She was never quite the same.

Rosann is survived by her children, Nathan and his wife, Rachel, Brennan, Dena, and Jana; and grandchildren Avery, Devina, Lenore, Jae, and Hayden.

Services will be held Saturday, October 28, 2023, at 1:30 pm at The Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, 740 Highway 20, in Willits.

The rest of Amnesty | From page 1

The permits are not already under review with the department. The program does not apply to zoning violations.

Amnesty building permits for residential construction will be subject to meeting the building-code standards for the year in which we can verify the construction occurred. If no construction date can be verified, they will be subject to current building-code standards.

Amnesty building permits must meet all standards for the zoning district in which they are located.

This program is limited to one year starting November 1, 2023 and ending November 1, 2024. All amnesty building permit applications must be submitted on or before November 1, 2024 in order to be eligible for this program.

All members of the public are invited to self-report any unpermitted structures and legalize improvements during this amnesty program.

If you have specific questions regarding the process, please contact the Mendocino County Department of Planning and Building Services at 707-234-6650 or email pbs@mendocinocounty.gov.

The rest of Report | From page 1

2022. WPD made 25 arrests in September 2023, compared to 45 in September 2022. Citations for September 2023 were listed as 14, compared to 45 in September last year.

Staffing items

Our newest dispatcher, Anthony Castillo, successfully completed the required 120-hour POST Dispatch Academy. During the three-weeks of academy training, Dispatcher Castillo returned to Willits on the weekends and worked dispatch shifts to ensure the rest of the dispatch team could get days off.

The department has an ongoing recruitment to fill vacancies for Dispatcher and Community Service Officer, as well as Police Officer and Police Sergeant.

Department staffing stands at about 50-percent of authorized strength; temporary augmentation to ensure we are providing around-the-clock coverage is still being provided via a mutual aid agreement with the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office.

Staff visited the Santa Rosa Public Safety Training Center to recruit unaffiliated students at the Dispatch Academy and met with unaffiliated Police Academy recruits as well.

Disqualified several applicants during the background investigation process, as they were not an appropriate fit for our agency.

Field Training continues for our senior officer-in-training; while non-field training continues for our most recently hired officer.

Councilmember Gerry Gonzalez suggested reaching out to the city's Code Enforcement Office. "I have done that," the North Street resident said. "I've sent pictures and emails before," thanking Gonzalez for his suggestion.

Mayor Greta Kanne thanked the speaker for bringing the situation to the council's attention. "I know most of us are already aware of it. You know I live on your block I'm very aware of it um and oh hopefully we can find some resolution for our community."

This project burn will be conducted under strictly controlled weather and fuel conditions. Smoke and aircraft may be visible in the area.

Editor's Note: CAL FIRE MEU briefly announced then cancelled a plan to conduct burning of approximately 20 to 25 piles of vegetative matter, at CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit Headquarters on Highway 101 south of Willits. The pile burns were scheduled to begin October 25 and continue periodically through November 4.

CAL FIRE's Patricia Austin confirmed the cancellation, and said she had no information about when that burn might be scheduled again.

The rest of Letters | From page 2

Gateway to the Stage seeks proposals

The Gateway to the Stage 2023 summer production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was an enormous success! The Willits Community Theatre would like to extend sincere gratitude to the community, parents, theater staff, volunteers, and Willits High School for championing this annual program. Your continued support helps provide our youth with an opportunity to explore theater and to shine on our community stage.

The Gateway to the Stage Steering Committee aspires to expand and further develop our youth programs in the future. Your assistance is appreciated in helping us find the perfect candidate for our next program.

Our committee is seeking proposals for the Summer 2024 kids' camp production. This popular series usually has a cast of approximately 30 children. The camp and show rehearsal period is six weeks long,

The rest of Activity | From page 1

WP found a deceased 60-year-old man on the front porch, and a 41-year-old male unconscious and unresponsive on the floor of a bathroom.

In this week's report to the Willits City Council WPD Interim Chief James Conner confirmed the 41-year-old male's condition was the result of "an overdose," although no other details have yet been released.

The North Street resident first gave his name and address. "I'd like to comment on some public safety and public health issues where I live," he started off. "I'm sure many of you are aware of the recent drug overdoses and deaths that have happened at the house next door to me.

"It's not new," he continued. "The four years that we've lived there I've counted four people who have died. There's a van in the backyard someone was living in it; she died in the motor home in the driveway. A man died on the front porch last week. Two months ago my partner ... was attacked with an axe in our front yard by someone who frequents that house.

"I want to thank the Willits Police Department they swiftly apprehended this suspect. I want to thank the Mendocino County District Attorney's Office, which I believe did a commendable and fair job.

"Like you, I love Willits," he said, "and I share your desire and vision for it to be a better place and I thank you for that, but it's an issue we deal with constantly. Traffic 24 hours a day – by foot, by car, kids come by on their skateboards – and there's drug activity going on.

"We deal with rats constantly. There's no garbage service next door; there's piles of garbage and we're at our wits' end. I've had neighbors tell me they now keep an armed shotgun at their door. Two ladies who told me they don't open their door or windows at night – they're afraid to do that in our neighborhood. This is a problem that has not gotten better, and it concerns me greatly, and I appreciate your time."

Councilmember Gerry Gonzalez suggested reaching out to the city's Code Enforcement Office. "I have done that," the North Street resident said. "I've sent pictures and emails before," thanking Gonzalez for his suggestion. Willits Municipal Code requires garbage pickup for every residential address within city limits, and prohibits "accumulation" of trash.

Anyone with information that may assist investigators are urged to contact the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office

and the show runs for seven shows over a two-week period. Camp sessions are three hours a day for four days a week. A generous stipend has been secured for the director position.

This year the steering committee is interested in a musical show but will also entertain proposals for a non-musical show. If anyone is interested in being a director or would like to learn more about being a camp manager, please contact Karen Mattson at willitstage@gmail.com for more information.

We look forward to working with our community again this year to put on a dynamic show. Once again we thank everyone for contributing your time, talent and generosity to this program.

Karen Mattson, for Gateway to the Stage, Willits

Co-Housing Community meeting

To the Editor: Save the date for all who are interested in learning about and/or helping to establish a senior-friendly, multi-generational cohousing community in or near Willits. We will meet on Thursday, November 16 at 5:30 pm at the Willits Library. A light, plant-based dinner will be available.

Cohousing is all about community and living where everyone involved wants to be a good neighbor. It is a place where elders can age gracefully, and young families can feel supported. If there is more interest in the "senior-friendly" aspect, the community can be geared to elders.

As described at the very informative website www.cohousing.org: "Cohousing is an intentional, collaborative neighborhood that

#BanksNeverAskThat anti-phishing campaign

Submitted by Savings Bank of Mendocino County

Savings Bank of Mendocino County and banks across the nation are educating consumers about the persistent threat of phishing scams during National Cybersecurity Awareness Month. The FTC estimates that consumers lost \$8.8 billion to phishing and other fraud in 2022, an increase of more than 44% compared to 2021.

During October, Savings Bank is sharing information provided by the American Bankers Association #BanksNeverAskThat campaign on social media to combat phishing. The campaign provides tips to empower consumers to identify bogus bank communications. It's not just phone calls from suspicious numbers, or numbers that appear to be from a bank. It's also emails, and text messages masked to look like they're from your bank asking for sensitive information like passwords and Social Security numbers.

If you're contacted by phone, email or text and are asked for confidential information such as your account number, username, password, or PIN, this is definitely a red flag. End the call, delete the text, and trash the email.

The rest of Crash | From page 1

searching the debris field. Deputies located the bodies of two deceased individuals who remain unidentified at this time due to the conditions of their bodies.

Deputies initiated a Coroner's Investigation specific to aircraft accident protocols and contacted the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

The circumstances/ cause of the crash is currently being investigated by NTSB investigators who were making arrangements to respond to the crash scene upon being notified of the incident by the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office.

The Sheriff's Office Coroner's Division will continue the Coroner's Investigation in conjunction with the NTSB investigation.

Anyone with information that may assist investigators are urged to contact the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office

combines private homes with shared indoor and outdoor spaces designed to support an active and interdependent community life. Cohousing is not a financial or legal model, but rather a descriptive term that emphasizes the active participation of residents in everything from design to governance."

I envision this as a place where those of us who have homesteaded in the hills surrounding Willits can live with more ease and comfort and still feel connected to the land and feel supported by community. To see more about our vision, please visit www.greenleafcohousing.org.

It is important to RSVP so we know how much food to have on hand. Email: greenleafcohousing@gmail.com or text or call Janae at 707-354-2035. Thank you,

Janae Stephens, Willits

Food Bank Appreciation Dinner

To the Editor: The Willits Food Bank held an appreciation event on Sunday, October 22 at the Willits Senior Center to thank all who help keep the food bank open and running well. Forty people attended. A lovely meal was provided by the kitchen chef.

Awards and many compliments were bestowed on the food bank staff and volunteers. Board members were also thanked for their support and hard work.

The appreciation dinner tradition was started by former director Jim Marill in 1996 when he began his 20-year career leading the food bank. We skipped several years during and following the pandemic crisis, but are now back on track, celebrating our outstanding helpers. Thanks to all who made it possible.

Ruthanne Volz, executive director, Willits Food Bank

Advertisement for Willits Unified School District accepting applications for Director of Maintenance, Operations & Transportation. Annual salary: \$94,234-\$114,815. Contact Trina Seaton, HR Director (707) 459-5314.

Advertisement for B.A.S. Roofing Inc. offering roofing applications available to fit any roofing need. Office: (707) 462-4514, Mobile: (707) 367-3786. Website: www.basroofing.com.

Advertisement for John Ford Ranch, RANCH RAISED NATURAL BEEF. No hormones, fastured in Willits, California. Phone: 707.459.5193.

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Advertisement for Best Willits Power & Hardware. Lawn & Garden Equipment, Generators, Sales, Parts & Service, Pick-up & Delivery. Phone: 707 459-6420.



This witch floats menacingly above the displays.



At far left: Krystle Coffman, with her friend and helper Tom Watson, created the ghoulish displays. At left: This year's goal of \$100,000 is close to being attained. Above: The yard is rife with scary creatures of the night, at least parts of them.

Photos by Mathew Caine

Lil 206

Giant skeleton haunts from beyond the grave, imploring residents to donate to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

There is a giant on East Valley Street, a 12-foot-tall skeleton named Lil 206 (after the number of bones in the human body) that is chained to a giant bloody hand and surrounded by scary creatures of the night. Krystle Coffman is displaying this huge creature in order to bring awareness to a campaign to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Mathew Caine
Features Writer
willitsweekly@gmail.com

"This is our third year participating in the St. Jude's fundraiser," explained Coffman. "We just broke the goal which was a \$100,000. The last I checked, to date, with the previous two years, they've raised \$394,000. With this year's, we are really close to half a million dollars. You don't know how much each individual has brought in because the QR code is the same for all. The funds go directly to St. Jude's."

The first year, prior to Coffman's participation, the Skeletons for St. Jude was the project of one man, Jeff Robertson, who raised \$8,000 on his own. Since then, in the ensuing three years, the fundraiser has taken off nationwide, raising \$151,396 the second year and \$214,265 the third year. This year, the campaign has netted \$134,164 so far and is on track to possibly break last year's record.

Anyone can participate by decorating their house or

business and putting up a sign with a QR code which takes one directly to the Skeletons for St. Jude site where people can donate. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, named after Saint Jude Thaddeus, the patron saint of lost causes, never takes money from the parents of sick children and provides excellent care and support for families, and shares its scientific discoveries with other facilities.

Coffman, although currently nine months pregnant and due in a week, put up all her decorations, with the assistance of her friend and co-worker, Joe Watson. Her Halloween night is an extravaganza of scares and candy, and sometimes even fire dancers. On East Valley Street, one block east of the post office, all are invited to stop by, meet Lil 206 and scan the QR code to contribute, or just to enjoy a fun Halloween, grab some candy, and see the smiles.

"You don't have to put up 12-foot skeletons, just decorations," said Coffman. "There are even businesses putting up signs. Anyone who decorates for Halloween can participate and put up a sign. It's fun to be part of the group and watch as we raise the funds. I've even talked my mom into putting up a sign."

To contribute directly, go to www.facebook.com/skeletonsforstjude or <https://skeletonsforhope.org>.

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Above: Brookside Elementary School Students of the Month are honored at the October Willits Unified School District board meeting.

Brookside Students of the Month

Submitted by Brookside Principal Kathleen Crossman

At our most recent Willits Unified School District school board meeting, on Thursday, October 12, Superintendent Mark Beebe, along with our school board and each student's teacher, presented Brookside Students of the Month and their families with certificates.

The students were selected by their teachers for being safe, respectful, responsible and kind. They each have outstanding attendance and are achieving at grade-level or above.

The students who earned this designation are: Transitional Kindergarten: Shania Gimple, Priscilla Lara, and Kado Delgado; Kindergarten: Jaxon Williams and Aubree Adam; 1st Grade: Cali-June Alesi, Guillermo and Bautista Herrera; 2nd Grade: Debanhi Agular Ochoa and Amara Gallups.

Two staff members were also recognized by their peers. Special Education Teacher Devon Jones and Secretary Erica Buzzard were recognized for outstanding performance and collegiality.

Bring in any Two Cans of Progresso Soup
or POP TOP LID Canned food on Wednesdays
and receive \$5 to \$30 in Free Play!



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