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BAY AREA ORIGINS OF A HOLIDAY PHENOMENON

The message and meaning of SantaCon



Carissa Stach of Danville, dressed as Cindy Lou from "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" strikes a pose at Aracely Lounge during the community's first SantaCon event in downtown Danville on Saturday. RAY CHAVEZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Founder says small towns like Danville take event's themes to heart

By Kyle Martin
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DANVILLE — It's possible that no one at Danville's first-ever SantaCon knew that artist John Law invented the event more than 30 years ago in San Francisco because he hated Christmas.

While Santa-clad revelers bar-hopped and drank hot toddies at the Danville festivities on Saturday, the San Ramon Valley firefighters were on hand collecting toys for kids. Proceeds from the event were donated to local schools.

"You've got the whole gamut there with SantaCon," Law told this news organization in an interview. "It's been a very different event from when we started it until now."

Law is the architect of San Francisco's Cacophony Society, a group whose shenanigans have inspired Burning Man, "Fight Club" and more, according to a new documentary on the event. SantaCon started when Law's buddy Rob Schmitt found a postcard depicting a group of



Grinch-themed revelers brave the rain to spread festive cheer at the annual SantaCon celebration in Union Square in San Francisco on Dec. 14, 2024. HAVEN DALEY — AP ARCHIVES

Santas playing pool in 1994. Schmitt suggested they get a bunch of Santas together for fun, and Law jumped at the opportunity.

"Personally, I wanted to

take the holiday back and make it something I would enjoy after the disillusionment that (the myth of) Santa was a bunch of garbage when I was 9 years old," Law said.

"I know it sounds silly ... but that's a core hypocrisy that stays with people for a long part of their lives."

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'THIS IS LIFE OR DEATH'

Health care subsidies set to expire

Deadlocked Senate fails to advance ACA extension for tax assistance

By Carl Hulse
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Thursday deadlocked on competing proposals to avert rising health care premiums, blocking Democratic and Republican alternatives in an outcome that made it all but certain that expanded tax subsidies for health coverage

under the Affordable Care Act will expire at the end of the month.

Republicans squelched a bid by Democrats, who had demanded action on the issue during the 43-day government shutdown, to extend the insurance subsidies for three years.

Democrats turned

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Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Thursday that the Democrats' plan to extend subsidies by three years was a deal breaker for him. SCOTT APPLEWHITE — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEETERING WORKFORCE

Region's job gains offset by state dive

Bay Area sees uptick but California plunges to highest unemployment rate in nation, according to figures

By George Avalos
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While the Bay Area managed to add jobs during September, the state as a whole suffered employment losses that marked the fourth consecutive month of setbacks in California, according to federal labor figures released Thursday.

The release of September employment data was delayed due to a protracted shutdown of numerous federal government operations from October through November. Until now, the most recent jobs report had covered August.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bay Area gained just 500 jobs in September.

As measured by changes in nonfarm payroll jobs and adjusted for seasonal volatility, the South Bay lost 700 jobs, the East Bay gained 700, and the San Francisco-San Mateo metro region added 300.

In the North Bay, Sonoma County added 200 jobs, Marin County gained 100, Napa County was unchanged, and Solano County lost 100.

California lost 4,500 jobs in September. "The Bay Area and California remain in a downward job cycle," said Steve Levy, director of the Palo Alto-based Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy. "The tariffs, deportations and associated uncertainty and fear are huge constraints to growth."

A shaky tech industry and setbacks in the entertainment industry are partly to blame for a weak job market in the state, according to Michael Bernick, an employment attorney with law firm Duane Morris and a former director of the state Employment Development Department.

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MARTINEZ REFINERY BLAZE

Radio system snafu delayed response to chemical fire

The breakdown hindered initial logistical efforts, authorities say

By Katie Lauer
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New details emerged this week about the massive February fire that erupted at the Martinez Refinery Company and released more than 7,000 gallons of hydrocarbon materials into the air, as officials revealed that oil crews had been using incompatible radio systems that prevented immediate contact with local public safety agencies.

While county firefighters arrived on the scene 14 minutes after being notified of a fire at MRC, crews were stalled outside, unable to contact the refinery operators on site — a communication gap that delayed the establishment of a unified command center by nearly two hours.

Internal breakdowns like those add to the chronic terror neighbors and businesses face downwind of the refinery, said Heidi Taylor, who lives along its fence line in downtown Martinez. She said she's seen level-one alerts and "enormous" flaring almost every day for the past month, which was confirmed by

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