

MILL VALLEY
TO HELP
REPAIR
SIDEWALKS

LOCAL NEWS | PAGE A3



49ERS CLEAR
KITTLE FOR
PRACTICE IN
PRESEASON

SPORTS | PAGE C1



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Marin Independent Journal

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COAST GUARD

‘NO ONE EVER WARNS YOU’
Service lags in brain care for its surf-battered rescuers



U.S. Coast Guard personnel train off Cape Disappointment in Washington state on Jan. 9, 2023. Crew members can be exposed to dangerous jolts as boats punch through waves. RUTH FREMSON — THE NEW YORK TIMES

MARIN COUNTY

Outlook
dims for
worker
housing

\$12.5M funding gap
for Oak Hill project

By Richard Halstead
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Marin County officials are reassessing the feasibility of a workforce housing project planned on state land near San Quentin prison because of escalating cost projections.

The project is being developed by the Marin County Public Financing Authority — an agency formed by the county government and the Marin County Office of Education — in partnership with Education Housing Partners. The plan calls for 135 below-market rental apartments reserved for local education employees and county workers.

The proposed development is one of two at the site known as Oak Hill, which the state donated. The other project, which is being developed by Eden Housing, involves 115 apartments that would be priced as affordable to low-income households and extremely low-income households.

“We do not have good news to share around the cost of our project,” Matthew Hymel, director of the Marin County Public Financing Authority, told members of its board on Aug. 13. “We are now projecting a \$12.5 million

See HOUSING on Page A4

War, weather
threaten
breadbaskets

By Somini Sengupta
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Instant noodles. Hot chapatis. Sliced bread. Wheat is at the heart of the modern diet, and this year, it is facing an accumulation of modern dangers. The breadbaskets of the world are getting pummeled by drone strikes and devilish weather, nudging prices higher amid already soaring food costs in the wake of the Iran war.

Heat and drought have diminished harvests in some of the biggest wheat-producing countries, including the United States, which is expected to have its worst wheat harvest in a half-century, spiking prices. Poor countries that agreed to buy American wheat under the threat of Trump tariffs could be stuck paying abnormally high prices.

The Black Sea, a crucial passage for the global wheat trade, is an active theater of the Russia-Ukraine war, while the Houthi militia’s attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have already forced grain shipments to take a longer, more expensive route around South Africa.

Beyond that, a supercharged El Nino further threatens water levels in the Panama Canal,

See FOOD on Page A2

By Dave Philipps
THE NEW YORK TIMES

CULLOWHEE, N.C. — Brett Bonner saved hundreds of lives during 21 years on rescue boats in the Coast Guard. When he died, his teenage daughter Kayleigh wondered why he couldn’t save his own.

He was a big, gregarious man who seemed able to handle anything. But as Kayleigh grew up, she watched him slowly fall apart. First came headaches, and sleeplessness. His memory frayed and his moods turned raw.

When he retired from the Coast Guard at age 40 in 2022, things grew worse. He would rant and scream. One afternoon he dropped her grandfather with one punch. In the months after, he started setting things on fire.

On a winter evening in 2025, with a pile of Coast Guard files burning on the living room floor, he walked out the front door and shot himself dead.

Kayleigh, her mother, her younger sister and her two little brothers all saw it happen.



Brett Bonner steers a U.S. Coast Guard vessel near the Golden Gate Bridge in 2012. He died of suicide last year after years of mental deterioration. FRANKIE FROST — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL

He left no note. He offered no explanation. His unraveling left his family so perplexed about how to sum up his life that they buried him without a headstone.

Kayleigh, who is now 18, was devastated. But after the funeral, she started to wonder.

Her father was a surfman — an elite rescuer whose job was to drive lifeboats through crashing waves as high as 25 feet. Maybe all those years crashing into waves had left

her father with an unseen brain injury, like a linebacker who had too many tackles. And maybe he wasn’t the only one.

She looked for answers from the Coast Guard but found nothing. The service has never studied the hazard that waves may pose to the brain and knows little about the force of the hits or the consequences of years of exposure.

With no official sources to

rely on, Kayleigh turned to the only source that might offer some clues: other surfmen.

She sent questionnaires to scores of them, using a survey of Navy crews as a template, and asked 36 questions about their service and their health. In all, 77 active and retired surfmen responded. Their answers were so stunning that they changed her whole perspective on her father.

They showed few surfmen had been diagnosed with head injuries by the Coast Guard, but a vast majority were struggling with the same issues as her father: headaches, memory lapses, cognitive problems, anxiety attacks, mood swings and a list of other ailments that can be symptomatic of brain injuries.

Some said the problems were growing worse with time.

“My brain has started to fail me. I feel it, I see it,” one responder in his early 50s wrote. “It is difficult to do things that used to be natural to me.”

“It has been a struggle for me to keep my life together,”

See GUARD on Page A4

Coalition campaigns to keep California nuclear plant open

By Hayley Smith
LOS ANGELES TIMES

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — Diablo Canyon doesn’t look like a nuclear power plant that’s getting ready to retire.

Beneath its twin concrete domes here on the edge of the Central Coast, neutrons slam into uranium atoms billions of times each second, workers respond to blinking lights

in a seafoam-green control room, and thunderous turbines generate steady electricity for nearly 4 million Californians.

At the building’s entrance, a massive banner celebrates the plant’s recently renewed federal operating license, proclaiming “You Made This Possible” above a photograph of smiling staffers.

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. A decade ago, the plant’s operator, Pacific

Gas & Electric, agreed to methodically shut down Diablo’s reactors in 2025, replacing its 2.2 gigawatts of power with a portfolio of wind farms, solar arrays, battery storage and just plain using less electricity.

But as that deadline neared, state officials, including Gov. Gavin Newsom, waved a white flag. They weren’t ready to shut down

See NUCLEAR on Page A2

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INDEX

Lottery..... A2
Obituaries..... A8
Opinion..... A9

Volume 165, Issue 155

Horoscope..... B4
Comics..... B5
Classifieds..... C5



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