



The newspaper of Silicon Valley

# The Mercury News

BayArea NewsGroup

\$3.00 | MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026 | MERCURYNEWS.COM

111

'PURE, GENUINE JOY'

## BTS FANS TAKE ON STANFORD



BTS fans look at a leaflet while waiting in line to purchase merchandise before Saturday's concert at Stanford Stadium. BTS will perform its third show Tuesday. PHOTOS BY JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

### Stadium welcomes thousands of people as K-pop boy band performs 3 nights at tour's only stop in Northern California

By Molly Gibbs  
MGIBBS@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

Outside Stanford Stadium on Saturday, Ashley Keele and her daughters carried four grocery bags stuffed with handmade necklaces, buttons, stickers and photo cards — two years' worth of preparation for a BTS weekend they had been waiting for since the K-pop group went on hiatus.

Keele, 41, and her daughters, Jocelynn, 16, and Annette, 6, traveled from Sacramento for the show and planned to attend all three Stanford concerts, hoping to hear different surprise songs each night.

Keele said her family has



Thousands gathered at Stanford Stadium for K-pop boy band BTS' first tour since the group went on hiatus so its members could complete military service in South Korea.

been drawn to BTS since 2019, when she discovered the band's song "Mikrokosmos" would immediately calm down her son, who has

autism. The band's welcoming community and lyrics about self-love, she said, are what make BTS so special.

"It's just magical music,"

she said. "Once you know someone likes BTS, it's like you click ... there's nothing more inclusive than a K-pop concert."

They were among thousands of fans who turned Stanford Stadium near Palo Alto into a sea of purple Saturday as BTS opened a three-show run, the group's only Northern California stop on its sold-out "Arirang" comeback tour.

Fans of all ages were decked out in sparkly jerseys, friendship bracelets, merch with band members' faces and outfits from the group's music videos. They milled about under the hot sun, waiting in line in hopes of grabbing

See CONCERT on Page A6

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

## Monitor gives sheriff praise

Watchdog says agency more open to oversight, but also cites further need for scrutiny

By Robert Salonga  
RSALONGA@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

SAN JOSE — A civilian watchdog praised the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office under Robert Jonsen for its post-Laurie Smith shift toward accepting oversight in a new report, but serious safety and transparency issues — including a jail employee accused of smuggling drugs to an inmate in exchange for sex — continue to draw scrutiny.

The 2025 review by the county Office of Correction and Law Enforcement Monitoring, a role filled by the Southern California-based OIR Group, highlights both the progress the Sheriff's Office has made under Jonsen while also pointing out issues that need attention such as pursuit and use-of-force reviews for deputies and gaps in jail oversight. The report is scheduled to be presented Tuesday to the Board of Supervisors.

The oversight firm is not shy about contrasting its findings with "the grudging and limited compliance of our early years under the prior Sheriff," a reference to Smith, who served six terms leading the office before announcing her retirement then resigning in late 2022 amid a civil corruption trial, which led to her formal ouster just a few days before Jonsen was elected to succeed her.

Among the jury's guilty verdicts was a finding that Smith and her administration stonewalled the OIR Group as the firm was working to establish the oversight structure and investigate a high-profile jail-injury case; that incident led to a \$10 million county settlement for a former inmate who suffered traumatic head injuries while in a custody transport van.

See REPORT on Page A6

ALAMEDA COUNTY

## Lawyers dispute sheriff's claim on recordings at jail

Records indicate technician had concerns on conversations in 2019

By Nate Gartrell  
NGARTRELL@BAYAREANEWSGROUP.COM

DUBLIN — Under fire for recording a 2024 confidential legal visit between a lawyer and her client, the Alameda County Sheriff's Office has responded by blaming the attorney, using an argument that one judge has already cast doubt on in court.

The March 2024 audio recording captured a meeting between Deputy Public Defender Sara Star and her client, Crystal Espinoza, in which they discussed the active murder case against her, an apparent violation of fundamental constitutional protections. The recording was turned over to the public defender by the Alameda County district attorney.

But a public statement from the Alameda County Sheriff's Office called the Bay Area News Group's reporting "false" — first denying that the sheriff's office records privileged conversations at all, before asserting that "the recorded interaction in this case occurred solely because" Star and Espinoza "acknowledged and consented to the recording" by continuing the conversation after a disclaimer

See JAIL on Page A6

CALIFORNIA

## Questions, smoke linger for victims of fire

Damage from Palisades brushfire has left families wondering if it's safe to go back

By Emily Baumgaertner Nunn  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

The evening before Pearl's senior year began, Michelle Villemare watched her daughter unravel. The school hadn't released her class schedule yet, Pearl complained. She knew there were logistical complexities to operating a 2,400-student high school in a retrofitted department store, but couldn't they get just this one thing right? And how could it take so long to get back to their real campus?

In the next breath, she started pressing Michelle about the status of their smoke-damaged home in the Pacific Palisades, a mile and a half from the school's grounds.

Why wasn't Pearl allowed to go pick up a dress that was still hanging in her closet there? Wasn't there a way to wash the toxic metals off?

Michelle could see the frustration and grief swirling in her daughter's eyes. It had been seven months since they had gotten word that, after one of the most destructive wildfires in Los Angeles history, their home and Pearl's high school — though badly damaged — still stood. There was talk of the community rising from the ashes. Pearl and her classmates were told that, soon enough, life would return to normal.

But the house repair was moving slowly, and school administrators had pushed back the expected date of return. Now it was August,



Michelle Villemare and her daughter, Pearl Abrahams, sit together at their rental while restoration of their Pacific Palisades home continues. JENNA SCHOENEFELD — NYT

and Pearl was starting the last year of her childhood in an Airbnb more than an hour away, tears streaming down her face.

Oh, God, Michelle thought. Maybe there was more riding on the return to campus than Michelle had realized.

Palisades Charter High

School, or Pali High, had always been an idyllic campus — Hollywood's set for "Carrie," "Teen Wolf" and "Freaky Friday," among other films — with its dolphin mascot and sprawling quad and stippled palm trees

See REBUILD on Page A6

SUBSCRIPTION

Call 408-508-5554 for a subscription. To place a classified ad, call 408-920-5111. Copyright © 2025, Mercury News. 24/7 coverage at mercurynews.com

WEATHER

H: 83-85 L: 53-57 Full report on B8



INDEX

Business . . . . . C7 Local . . . . . B1  
Classified . . . . . A7-8 Lottery . . . . . A2  
Comics/TV . . . . . B6-7 Obituaries . . . . . B5

Volume 175, issue 333

Puzzles . . . . . B2, C5-6  
Sports . . . . . C1  
Weather . . . . . B8



6 40493 00001 1