



Inside: What's happening right outside your home? See our guide for fun things without wandering too far afield.

QUAKE SAFETY

Hospitals race to upgrade

Bay Area healthcare campuses are rushing to hit 2030 deadline on seismic standards

By **Grant Stringer**
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Health systems across the Bay Area are racing to rebuild, retrofit or replace aging hospitals before a 2030 state deadline that requires medical centers not just to survive a major earthquake, but to keep treating patients after one.

In 2030, California state health regulators will enforce stricter rules for structural integrity and resilience at hospitals. The rules were passed in the 1990s. With less than four years until the deadline, hospital executives are in construction mode with new hospitals in plan-

ning phases or already in construction, and retrofits are underway across medical campuses.

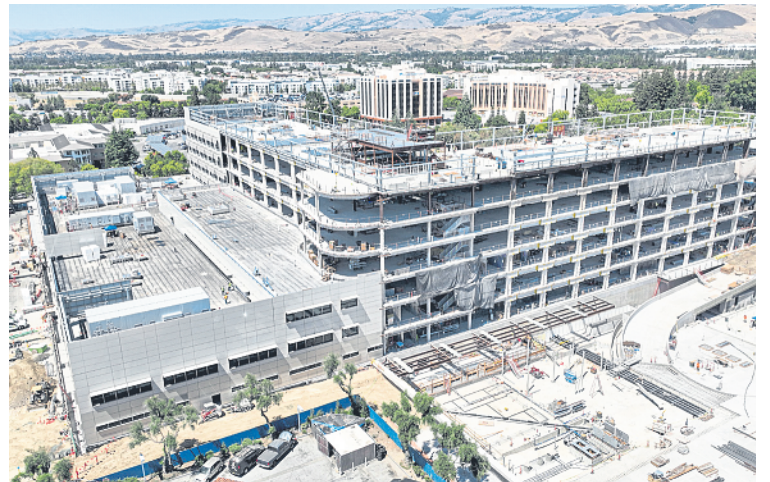
"Every major healthcare provider in Northern California is doing something as it relates to seismic upgrade," said Nick Palumbo, a healthcare project executive for the construction company Swinerton.

In San Jose, Kaiser Permanente is building a new medical center to replace a facility that could not meet the new standards. Stanford Medicine is retrofitting hospital buildings on its Peninsula campus and as part of a \$200 million expansion of its Tri-Valley campus in Pleasanton. Sutter Health has also proposed building Emeryville's tallest tower,

a \$1 billion, 17-story hospital, to replace Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Berkeley, where executives said seismic upgrades weren't feasible.

Hospitals are largely responsible for financing seismic construction upgrades, and the California Hospital Association has balked at the cost. Statewide, hospitals have spent \$60 billion to retrofit buildings or build new health centers to come into compliance, said spokesperson David Simon, and another \$75 billion of investment is needed.

"The risk for access to care is grave," Simon wrote in an email. "Hospitals will be forced to make difficult choices about reducing service, resulting in decreased access to care for patients and loss



Construction crews work on a new 303-bed, state-of-the-art hospital at the San Jose Medical Center at Kaiser Permanente San Jose. The new building will meet the exacting seismic safety standards that are set to take effect in 2030. It wasn't feasible to retrofit Kaiser's original facility at the site. **SHAE HAMMOND — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

See **HOSPITALS** on Page A8

SEX TRAFFICKING

TWO HOTELS, TWO STORIES

Oakland sought to combat prostitution by shutting down a pair of troubled businesses. Even with legal victories, only one was transformed.

By **Jakob Rodgers** and **Shomik Mukherjee**
 STAFF WRITERS

Fifteen years ago, Oakland's leaders launched an ambitious plan to combat prostitution and trafficking along "The Blade" — the infamous open-air sex market just east of Lake Merritt.

They sought to close two hotels infamous for playing host to a rotating cast of traffickers and people selling sex — including minors being sold for sex work. Rapes were commonplace in both, as were the discoveries of women who had been abducted from elsewhere in the Bay Area and the state by assailants seeking a place to stash them.

One property, after being shut down, became a home for modest commercial storefronts. Despite some residual safety concerns, it no longer appears to be a hotbed of human trafficking.

The other hotel, which reopened after a brief closure, now serves as a cautionary tale.

There, on the corner of East 12th Street and 1st Avenue, remains a hotel where women and teenagers are coerced or forced by pimps to demand money from undercover cops for sexual favors. One child — this time just 15 years old — arrived there in 2024 after being sold for three months on a notorious website at the rate of \$120 per sex act. In another room, police found a pimp suspected of more than a dozen crimes, including the nearby shooting of a man in the neck during a rolling gun battle.

Legal observers and human-trafficking experts say the divergent paths taken by the two properties reveal a central weakness in Oakland's whack-a-mole approach against sexual exploitation along The Blade: City leaders won a rare legal victory against both of them, but never built the sustained follow-through needed to keep one of the corridor's most troubled hotels from slipping back into the same pattern.

The inn — owned by Rajes-

See **HOTELS** on Page A8

THE TARGETED HOTELS

More than a decade ago, the city's efforts garnered media attention as an inventive strategy in battling crime in an area infamous for prostitution.



Oakland police investigate a fatal shooting in the parking lot of the America's Best Value Inn on East 12th Street in 2024. The city's efforts have failed to stem the police calls. **JANE TYSKA — STAFF ARCHIVES**



An interior view of the International Plaza, a former motel converted into commercial spaces at the corner of International Boulevard and 17th Avenue in Oakland. **RAY CHAVEZ — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

EARTHQUAKE

Disaster tests ties between U.S. and Venezuela

Search and rescue, additional aid sent

By **Edward Wong** and **Michael Crowley**
 THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — In early January, Secretary of State Marco Rubio huddled with President Donald Trump and U.S. generals to oversee a nighttime assault on Venezuela that resulted in the ouster of the country's autocratic leader, Nicolás Maduro.

On Thursday, Rubio found himself explaining how the United States would help Venezuela after a devastating double earthquake left many citizens trapped under rubble.

The United States, he said, would provide a "whole-of-government response."

"We're already deploying search and rescue teams from Fairfax County, Virginia, and Los Angeles," he told reporters. "There'll be some others we'll add. That's their most immediate need right now, is search and rescue efforts."

"The airport there is badly damaged, so we'll have to rely on the Department of War to deploy assets there," he added, using the Trump administration's preferred name for the Defense Department. "And then we're also helping them with some overhead imagery."

Rubio's remarks were intended to support Trump's message on social media that the United States was "ready, willing and able to help." They also signaled that the administration wanted the world to know that its interests in Venezuela could go beyond oil, despite the president's aggressive assertions that his country deserved to take the Caribbean nation's most valuable resource.

See **VENEZUELA** on Page A7

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INDEX

Classified B14, E5
 Local B1
 Lottery A2
 Obituaries B9
 Puzzles B12
 Today's Economy E1
 Opinion A10
 Sports C1
 Weather B16

Volume 176, Issue 9



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