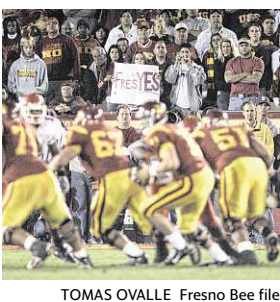




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TOMAS OVALLE Fresno Bee file



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MERCED SUN-STAR

Mom faces 5 years in plot to send teen to Christian school

BY ROBERT RODRIGUEZ
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A mother who used to live in Clovis and arranged to have her 16-year-old taken against his will to a Christian boarding school in Missouri could spend the next five years in a federal prison.

Shana Gaviola, who now lives in Florida, was found guilty this week of an interstate violation of a protection order. Her co-defendant Julio Sandoval, 43, was acquitted. He was also facing a five-year sentence.

Gaviola is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour on April 27. She faces a maximum statutory penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

After the verdict, federal prosecutors urged the judge to place Gaviola in custody until her sentencing. He disagreed.

Said her attorney, George T. Pallas of Miami: "We're grateful the judge recognized that Shana poses no flight risk. ... She'll now remain home with her children while we prepare compelling mitigation to present to the court in April."

Sandoval's attorney, federal public defender Griffin Estes, was thankful the jury understood his client's role in the incident.

"Their verdict is a just outcome of Julio's case, confirming what we've known all along: Julio thought he was doing the right thing with the information the co-defendant gave him," Estes said.

In October, Pallas filed a motion for dismissal arguing that one of the prosecutors, Michael Tierney, was guilty of prosecutorial misconduct for speaking to Gaviola without an attorney during a happenstance encounter in May 2023.

Although the motion was

SEE SCHOOL, 3A

UC Merced faces big decisions on \$38M donation from Scott

BY AYSHA PETTIGREW
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UC Merced leaders say they were surprised by the \$38 million donation from MacKenzie Scott, the biggest gift in the university's history. The donation was announced Monday.

One official said it feels like "a Christmas gift" to UC Merced.

"They don't take applica-

tions," said Tonantzin Oseguera, UC Merced's vice chancellor for student affairs and engagement.

University spokesperson Alyssa Johansen wrote in a news release that funds will be used to "accelerate programs that deepen its commitment to access and opportunity," including student success initiatives, faculty research programs and critical capital projects.

Oseguera added that while

the university community is focused on finals and fall commencement this month, she and other members of campus leadership will "take some time to think about ... (how) we are going to be very strategic about where we spend those funds."

SOCIAL MOBILITY IS IMPORTANT TO UC MERCED

Oseguera emphasized that while university leaders haven't yet selected specific programs

to receive funds, the administration intends to focus on programs that help make UC Merced an "engine of social mobility, research innovation."

In September, U.S. News & World Report named UC Merced one of the top colleges in the nation for social mobility.

According to Oseguera, the university is able to accelerate students into high-paying ca-

SEE SCOTT, 3A



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The former Forever 21 is seen at the east end of Fashion Fair Mall, Tuesday in Fresno.

Fresno mall unveils major changes

BY BETHANY CLOUGH
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Fresno's busiest mall is making some big changes.

Fashion Fair on Shaw Avenue has already started a renovation that will change its look with new seating, flooring and more.

But when it comes to the mall, Fresnoans always have some of the same questions:

What's going to happen to the empty Forever 21 store (the former Gottschalks)? Is Jollibee restaurant ever going to build a restaurant at the mall? And when is Seoul Meat Korean Barbecue going to open?

We have answers.

First, expect to see lots of work happening on the 55-year-old mall. The brown ceiling has already been repainted white. Remodeled restrooms are coming along with lots of changes to the main entrance.

"There will be areas of our shopping center that will look drastically different," said general manager Joey Elliot.

WILL GOTTSCHALKS BE TORN DOWN?

Ever since the three-story Forever 21 store on the east end closed earlier this year, shoppers have been speculating about what will replace it.

Writing on the side of the



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The main north entrance to Fashion Fair Mall is seen Tuesday in Fresno.

building teases something new: "Get ready for a gamechanger ... Seriously, we can't wait to tell you what's coming next."

But you'll have to wait because the deal isn't finalized yet, Elliot said. No lease has been signed, but the mall is deep in negotiations with a potential tenant, he said.

"Everybody wants to know and it is killing me to not say it, but I can't," he said. "There is a very spectacular tenant that is working with us on that building, but it does involve razing that building."

For years, that location was a Gottschalks department store,

and a Weinstock's before that. If the building is torn down, the mall and the new business would build something new in its place.

A deal is very close to being finalized, Elliot said.

WHAT ABOUT JOLLIBEE?

Jollibee, the hugely popular Filipino fast food restaurant, caused a stir when it filed permits with the City of Fresno to build a location in front of the mall in 2021. It made even more plans on paper a few years later.

But nothing was ever built on the spot.

This week, Elliot confirmed

plans for Jollibee are dead. The restaurant pulled out of the deal, he said. Jollibee did not return a message seeking comment about why.

But Fresno hasn't seen the last of the global chain fast-food restaurant. It announced this week it is planning a major expansion in the Central Valley and "zeroing in on Fresno as one of its most promising growth markets."

It is looking for locations to open, though it has not shared if any have been identified yet.

SEOUL MEAT CO KOREAN BARBECUE

Another highly watched part of the mall is the Seoul Meat Co Korean Barbecue restaurant that's coming soon.

It's a Korean barbecue spot where customers cook their own meat at the table. Seoul Meat has locations in Kirkland, Wash., and Riverton, Utah.

It's taking over a spot in the outdoor portion of the mall near the main entrance. It was originally supposed to open last year.

That didn't happen, but the restaurant is getting close. Seoul Meat could not be reached for comment. But Elliot said the restaurant is working through final inspections, and owners are hoping to be open by the end of the year.

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