



Doug Hamilton, left, and wife Gail watch the Pickett Fire burn in the distance in Pope Valley on Friday.

Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Will Napa growers get burned again?

Pickett Fire threatens to ruin grapes with smoke taint

By Esther Mobley
SENIOR WINE CRITIC

As the Pickett Fire in Napa County continues to burn, winemakers are confronting the vexing question that always attends Wine Country wildfires: Will there be smoke taint on the grapes?

Although it's too soon to know for sure, some vintners in the Howell Mountain and Pope Valley areas are resigned to the likelihood that some or all of their crop will be unharvestable.

"We lost our crop in 2020, and I think we're going to lose it again," Xavier Cervantes, owner of Cervantes Family Vineyards in Pope Valley, said on Monday.

Others in those areas, however, say they're confident that their fruit is fine.

For now, the smoke taint concern seems to be isolated to this section of Napa Valley's northeastern hillsides, where the Pickett Fire has burned more than 6,800 acres and was 17% contained as of Tuesday afternoon. The rest of the valley has, for the most part, seen blue skies and clear air — and



Jessica Christian/The Chronicle

Farm workers move quickly in the early morning hours to harvest grapes at a vineyard owned by Beckstoffer Vineyards last October in Napa.

wineries will continue with their grape harvest as planned.

Cervantes was grateful, he said, that the efforts of Cal Fire and other fire-fighting crews had prevented the loss of structures at his winery, in part by performing back burns at properties to consume flammable debris. But the byproduct of those back burns is extra smoke.

Cervantes has begun sampling his grapes and will send them to a laboratory to test for smoke-taint compounds. But he's not holding out much hope: He already set up his crop insurance claim, which could reimburse him for some of the value of the loss.

Napa Valley's harvest is barely under way, a late start after a moderate, rel-

atively cool summer. Some producers have begun picking grapes for sparkling or white wines, but most hope to hang their red grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon on the vine for at least a few more weeks.

Smoke taint has wreaked havoc on the California wine industry in recent years. It occurs when wildfire smoke lingers, **Napa continues on A8**

Opt-out for ethnic studies falters

Despite curriculum uproar, only 43 SFUSD freshmen request delay

By Jill Tucker
STAFF WRITER

A campaign to spur San Francisco students to opt out of taking ethnic studies in the ninth grade this year seems to have fizzled, with just 43 of the 3,785 current freshmen requesting a transfer out of the class, the Chronicle has learned.

The small number of students taking the opt-out might seem surprising given how controversial ethnic studies has been in the district and across California. Parents, students and educators — in public meetings and on social media — have sparred over what should or shouldn't be taught in the course and whether students have to take the class.

Across the state debate has largely centered around whether to teach students to appreciate other cultures than their own or, in what some argue is a more activist approach, to teach about white supremacy, racism and other historic injustices and give students the tools to address them.

That controversy isn't dying down in San Francisco anytime soon. The next round of public debate was scheduled for Tuesday evening, when the school board was set to vote again on buying a new ethnic studies curriculum after making a procedural error during the first vote.

In San Francisco, the divisive, yearlong course is a graduation requirement, starting with last year's ninth-graders. That means freshmen who opt out

Ethnic continues on A8

Ex-Mid-Market HQ of tech firm to be auctioned

By Roland Li
STAFF WRITER

The former headquarters of tech firm Zendesk has lost nearly 80% of its property value, making it the latest victim of the Mid-Market pandemic exodus, according to a new report.

The six-story property at 1019 Market St. was valued at \$14.7 million in a new appraisal, down from \$71.4 million, according to a report Monday by research firm Morningstar.

Owner 1019 Market St. LP couldn't immediately be reached for comment. It bought the property for \$48 million in 2014.

The value "might actually be a surprisingly high figure for a property that's reported just a 3% occupancy since 2022," Morningstar stated.

Chicago Title Co. filed a notice of mortgage default by owner 1019 Market St. LP in April and plans to auction off the property in a foreclosure sale, according to an August notice.

Zendesk left the building in 2022 and is now headquartered at 181 Fremont St. The company received the controversial "Twitter tax break" to move to Mid-Market, as part of a city effort to revitalize the troubled neighborhood. The tax

Auction continues on A8

Settlement gives nonprofit second chance

By Maggie Angst
STAFF WRITER

San Francisco is betting an embattled homeless shelter operator accused of fraud and labor violations can clean up its act as the city copes with the fallout from a wave of nonprofit scandals.

A year ago, San Francisco officials said they found enough evidence to suspend the Providence Foundation of San Francisco. But now, a \$1 million settlement is expected to resolve the case and keep the nonprofit on the city's rolls for future contracts.

Providence has admitted to wrongdoing, re-

moved its executive director and two other employees who participated in the alleged misconduct, and reorganized its board of directors, according to the city attorney's office.

Dexter Hall, who took over last year as the nonprofit's interim executive director, said the organization has worked tirelessly over the past year to regain trust and "turn a moment of reckoning into a moment of renewal."

"The Providence Foundation today stands stronger, clearer and more committed than ever," Hall said. "We didn't just pay a penalty, but we paid attention to every-

Shelter continues on A8



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Providence Foundation of San Francisco has operated the Oasis Inn as a homeless shelter. Providence will remain eligible for city contracts.