

Rancho Cielo gets \$1M for new kitchen

By ELAINE HESSER

RANCHO CIELO, the vocational high school founded by retired Monterey County Superior Court Judge John Phillips 20 years ago to keep youth who'd run afoul of the law out of prison, is planning a sweet addition to its Drummond Culinary Academy — with some help from taxpayers.

U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren is a Democrat representing the 18th District, which comprises parts of Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties and all of San Benito County, as well as inland Monterey County, including Salinas and the Salinas Valley. Within the more than \$50 million in funding for community projects Lofgren secured in the appropriations bill signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 9 was \$1 million for the Drummond Academy, located

in northern Salinas. Rancho Cielo plans to use the money to add a pastry kitchen to its cooking school.

Chris Devers, CEO of Rancho Cielo, said that the pastry kitchen is being planned in response to input from the school's advisory board, with local employers saying they need more employees trained in pastry-making skills, which means academy graduates will have more job opportunities.

Longtime supporter

The preliminary design for the new facility was created by Peter Kasavan and includes 1,200 square feet of space with state-of-the-art equipment.

In addition to talking with local employers, the school consulted with Tom Vaccaro, one of the top pastry chefs in the country, whom Devers said he met through

Bert Cutino (chef and co-owner of Monterey's Sardine Factory restaurant), a longtime supporter of Rancho Cielo.

Devers anticipates that the student body will grow from its current enrollment of 42 students to more than 70 over a two-year period, once the kitchen is finished and an additional instructor is hired. He said he'd like to see the project completed by the end of 2025, but thinks May 2026 might be more realistic.

Said Lofgren, "I love seeing smart workforce training opportunities that help members of our community, specifically those in underserved populations, secure

good-paying jobs in stable and growing industries."

She continued, "Rancho Cielo's programs set students and families on paths to success, and when I learned federal funding could support plans to expand their culinary offerings, I was eager and excited to back the project."

Devers said the pastry kitchen is part of a two-phase project that includes a new barbecue pavilion for outdoor catering. As he hires contractors, he said they will be asked to include students in Rancho Cielo's schools of construction and welding in building both facilities.

Hiker disappears Monday near Tassajara

By CHRIS COUNTS

POLICE HAVE launched a massive search for a woman who left Tassajara Zen Mountain Center Monday morning to go for a hike and hasn't been heard from since.

The Monterey County Sheriff's Office received a report late March 18 that Caroline Meister never returned from her day hike.

Police described Meister as a 30-year-old white female who is about 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighs about 150 pounds. A media report said she has lived and worked at Tassajara for more than a year.

"She has long brown wavy hair that is likely pulled up," police reported. "She was last seen wearing teal-colored boots and carrying a blue bag."

According to the sheriff's office, Meister left Tassajara Monday around 10 a.m.

"She stated she was going to hike a trail that loops back around to the Zen Center," the report indicated.

"There was also mention of hiking the Wind Cave Trail. She was only carrying snacks for the day and was not dressed or equipped for an overnight stay," according to the sheriff's office.

The wind caves are a landmark near

Tassajara. The area is steep and rugged, with dense brush and no cell reception

Meister's father described her as "an avid hiker" who is "very familiar" with the area. As many as 12 county and state agencies are reportedly involved in the effort to find her.

Asking for help

"The Monterey County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team, the drone team and a California Highway Patrol Helicopter have been working collaboratively throughout the day to attempt to locate Caroline," the sheriff's office said. "Additional resources are being requested to assist in continued search efforts."

Police are asking locals or others who were — or are — hiking in the area to share any information that might aid in the search.

"The sheriff's office is asking persons who may have been hiking in the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center Area on Monday who may have seen Caroline to please contact our office at (831) 755-5111 with information that could help us in locating her," the report added. "Additionally, we are asking any hikers who are planning on being in the area to please be on the lookout for her."



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