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> County makeover transforms park
> Zarraga reflects on career of service
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County Notes

> The United Way VITA tax assistance program is underway. [Here is the list of dates and locations.](#) Share with friends and family who may qualify.

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**County Renovation Reopens Pajaro Children’s Park**

A much-needed children’s park in Pajaro has undergone a dramatic transformation and is now back in operation.

The community of Pajaro in northern Monterey County has a large park and athletic field for adults and older children but there are few options for youngsters.

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*Supervisor John Phillips and Project Manager Florence Kabwasa-Green (center) are surrounded by park users as they cut the ceremonial ribbon to reopen this Pajaro children’s park.*
Cayetano Park, located at the intersection of Florence, Cayetano and Jonathon Streets in Pajaro, has been a small ‘tot lot,’ a play area for youngsters, since 1987. It is centrally located, near a school bus stop and is a popular place for young children and families to spend time while waiting for the bus before and after school. Unfortunately, a survey of county park structures found the equipment at the park was unsafe and the park was closed in August 2015.

Supervisor John Phillips, whose district includes Pajaro, saw how important the park was to the small community and stepped in to help.

“Rather than just take the structures out and leave a barren lot, the Supervisor worked with County RMA, which applied for and received Community Development Block Grant funds to pay for a new structure and outreach to the community,” explains Josh Stratton, District 2 Chief of Staff. “Pajaro is a community with a poverty level approximately twice the national average. It’s classified as a Severely Disadvantaged Community which underscores the importance of accessible family recreation.”

Community meetings were held for residents to give their input on new equipment for the park. Stratton says a request from a family with a special needs child was included in the final design.

Project Manager Florence Kabwasa-Green says another valuable collaboration that developed during the project was with the Pajaro/Sunny Mesa Community Services District, which will work with the County on the operations and maintenance of the park.
Margarita Zarraga Honored for a Career of Compassion, Service

The County family said goodbye and happy retirement this week to longtime colleague Margarita Zarraga.

Margarita began a long career of service to the community through the Department of Social Services in 1984.

Her first job was as an Eligibility Worker but her caring, compassion and outstanding work quickly moved her through the ranks into supervisory positions.

It was in that capacity in 1990 that Zarraga developed a Citizenship Advocacy Campaign as part of her participation in Leadership Salinas Valley and actively worked to promote the IMPACTO Coalition to support the health needs of the Latino community.

Supervisor Simón Salinas recalls working with Zarraga during a flood emergency.

“It was during the floods of 1995 that I got to see Margarita demonstrate her ability to serve all of our residents,” says Salinas. “Hundreds of residents from Pajaro were evacuated to the Santa Cruz Fairgrounds in Watsonville. Margarita used her people skills to lessen the impact the families felt after their homes were flooded and the ensuing evacuation. Her calm demeanor and empathy towards our residents will be sorely missed.”

Zarraga was ultimately named Community Affiliations Manager, leading the Community Action Partnership team and where she has played a critical role in developing homeless programs, developing services for domestic violence victims, supporting hunger programs and promoting youth services.

“Margarita’s mark on our organization and community is indelible,” says Social Services Director Elliott Robinson. “Her advocacy for people from all walks of life who call Monterey County home embodies the mission of Social Services. Her compassionate ability to step forward to do what it takes to support people accessing resources...
they need to succeed is so valuable and has made an incredible difference in the lives of thousands.”

Reflecting on her career, Zarraga says Social Services as a career and as an agency has evolved over the years.

“With every change there was a new challenge; for example, the pressure of implementing mandatory changes effectively and in a timely manner,” she says. “The stress for me sometimes translated into sleepless nights. My late brother used to refer to me as ‘my sister the bureaucrat,’ meaning that I worked in a world of rules and red tape.”

Zarraga spent her last day in county service January 31st. She was honored by the Board of Supervisors and co-workers for her achievements.

Her advice to those entering the Social Services field?

“Social Services is a good place to work if you are focused, dedicated and work well with others. Skills and abilities are very important and can be learned. ‘Soft’ skills such as adaptability and flexibility are super important, the difference between pass or fail.”

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CSS Upgrades Staff Recognition

Child Support Services (CSS) has an active staff recognition program which recently got an upgrade.

The program is called WOWEE, which stands for What Outstanding Work, Employee Excellence. It kicked off in 2014, honoring staff work in a variety of categories. Towards the end of last year, CSS managers and supervisors unveiled ‘WOWEE 2.0’ at the department’s employee recognition lunch.

The upgrade includes categories reflecting the various areas of achievement by staff including the Million Dollar Club (Child Support Officers who were the first to collect more than $1 million), Highest One Time Collection, Most Court Filed Agreements and Revolutionary/Bright Ideas.

Those first two categories are intriguing, here are the employees recognized:

The Million Dollar Club: Child Support Officers Kelam Bayard, Miguel Barrera, Martha Becerra, Malia Jaurigue, Mary Lamb, Tony Sanchez and Harllon Wills.
Highest One Time Collection: $100,193.48. Congratulations to staff involved: Attorney Tara Edria, Support Officers Jackie Ruiz, Alex Schumacher and Frank De La Torre.

All employees who earned WOWEE recognition were entered in a drawing for reserved parking spots and gift cards.

CSS is also marking years of service by staff. Those recently receiving pins are pictured and listed below.

20 Years
Anne Chang
Harlon Wills

15 Years
Sonia Garcia
Dean Carothers
Audra Strickland
Jody Holtzworth
Maria Villasenor
Glenda Kelley

10 Years
Lory Urquidez-Eltagonde
Karsten Rother

5 Years
Tara Edria
Alexis Robinson

Receiving service pins are (l-r) Delia Gutierrez, Supervising Child Support Officer, 20 years; Maria Aldape, Child Support Officer, 20 years; Jacquelyn Ruiz, Lead Child Support Officer, 20 years; Maria Ramos, Child Support Officer, 25 years; Dawn Scavo, Lead Child Support Officer, 15 years.