

ANIMALS

Humanely addressing the local cat problem



SHANNON CHAFFIN — SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Sweet Boy is a feral cat that has been trapped, neutered and returned. Shannon Chaffin, founder of Best Life, looks after it.

By McKenzie Prillaman
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This particular scruffy cat has a peculiar characteristic — the tip of its ear is missing, forming a flattened edge.

No, it hasn't been harmed in a fight or a run-in with a sharp surface. The cat's clipped ear is an ear tip, the universal sign the animal has been trapped, neutered and returned, a humane way to reduce the number of cats out on the streets.

The volunteers of the non-profits Community Cat Allies and Best Life TNR & Rescue, Inc. are hard at work carrying out this procedure on as many unowned, free-roaming cats in Monterey County as possible.

"Our mission really is to save cats — it's that simple," said Meg Davidson, founder of Community Cat Allies. "And we believe our place in the cat-saving universe is to trap, neuter/spay, vaccinate and return, or TNR."

Thousands of feral cats, which are unsocialized and afraid of humans, can be found wandering around Monterey County, according to Shannon Chaffin, founder of Best Life. The biggest cat crowds, Davidson added, live in the northern region, including Prunedale, Castroville, Salinas and Marina. She said the county's mild weather means kitten birthing season lasts longer than in other parts of the U.S. and that the county lacks sufficient access to enough low-cost spay/neuter services to handle the sheer number of cats.

Between July 2020 and

June 2021, the SPCA Monterey County took in 1,699 cats and kittens. The majority were adopted, but others were transferred to different agencies or euthanized due to health problems or aggression. Feral cats taken into shelters, however, rarely make it out alive, according to Davidson.

"Animals suffer when there are too many pets and not enough homes," said Beth Brookhouser, vice president of marketing and communications of the SPCA Monterey County.

But TNR groups like Community Cat Allies and Best Life are helping to shrink that intake amount by reducing the number of cats that could end up in shelters.

"We just fix as many cats as we can so they will stop having litter after litter," Chaffin said.

Since its establishment in August 2016, Community Cat Allies has trapped, neutered and returned 740 cats; 203 in 2021. The group currently consists of seven volunteers, most of whom also have full-time jobs. Best Life, also a small team of seven volunteers, both employed and retired, has trapped, neutered and returned 349 cats since its founding in January 2020, 168 of which were completed last year.

A cat is lured into a humane trap by a trail of food set by a volunteer or trained community member. When the cat is fully inside the cage, the animal either trips a mechanism that closes the door, or the person who set the trap triggers it.



LUCY AHRENS — SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Meg Davidson, founder of Community Cat Allies, after trapping her first street cat.

The cage is immediately covered with a blanket to calm the cat down.

The next day, the cat goes to a vet clinic for spay or neuter surgery, vaccinations, micro-chipping and an ear tip. After an overnight recovery, the cat is returned to the area where it was found.

The SPCA is one of the few veterinary clinics in Monterey County that offers spay/neuter services for feral cats, and the organization frequently works with Community Cat Allies and Best Life. Their veterinarians have performed these procedures on thousands of cats

CAT » PAGE 2

RENT RELIEF

Program running short on money

Demand outstrips \$5.2 billion aid fund

By Louis Hansen
Bay Area News Group

California's \$5.2 billion pandemic rental relief fund is running out of money even as the pandemic deepens economic turmoil and tenant protections expire in March.

Housing advocates have seen a steady demand in recent months for assistance to protect people from displacement or eviction. The state requested an additional \$1.9 billion from the federal emergency rental assistance program to cover landlord and tenant debts, but last week received just \$62 million in additional funds.

Aid requests from tenants and landlords have now hit \$6.9 billion, according to state data. Officials say some of those requests will be ineligible or are duplicate applications that will be denied. The state is still accepting applications.

"It's premature in this moment to know if we are over-subscribed," said Geoffrey Ross, deputy director of the state department of housing and community development, "because we don't know how much more funding we will receive."

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LA COUNTY

Train derails near site of recent wave of cargo thefts

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES » Crews made railroad repairs in Los Angeles Monday after a train derailed near the location where thieves have been raiding cargo containers, leaving the tracks littered with emptied boxes of packaged good sent by retailers.

It wasn't immediately clear if the derailment that happened Saturday was caused by the debris left behind by thieves in the Lincoln Heights area near downtown Los Angeles. Union Pacific said the cause of the derailment was under investigation.

The derailment caused 17 train cars to go off the tracks, Union Pacific said in a statement. No injuries were reported.

Cargo containers aboard trains have been targeted by thieves for months, authorities said. The stolen packages are from retailers including Amazon, REI and others, the CBSLA television newscast reported last Thursday.

Union Pacific said in a statement to CBSLA that the railroad was concerned about increased cargo thefts in California.

"We have increased the number of Union Pacific special agents on patrol, and we have utilized and explored additional technologies to help us combat this criminal activity. We also will continue to work with our local law enforcement partners and elected leaders," the railroad company said.

Amazon said it was direct-

THEFTS » PAGE 2



Tom Amitay
District Manager, NRG Clean Power

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Tom Amitay: A Powerful Opportunity

By JAMES FLORENCE, Diamond Certified Resource Reporter

Tom Amitay was pursuing a career in finance, but when he saw the opportunity presented by the burgeoning solar industry, he decided to get in on the action. "From a financial standpoint, I was struck by the growth potential of the solar industry," he affirms. "However, I was also attracted to the fact that it was clean energy, which made it not only lucrative but something that would actually benefit the planet. It wasn't long before I left my finance job and started doing sales for a solar company." Today, as district manager of NRG Clean Power, Tom says his favorite part of his job is passing on the benefits of solar to his customers...Continued at www.dccert.org/tomamitay

Tom's Expert Tip

Solar Panel Placement

To maximize sun absorption, solar panels are usually installed on the hottest area of a roof, which offers the added benefit of shading that area from direct sunlight. In this way, solar panels not only convert sunlight into energy for the home, they also naturally lower the home's indoor temperature on hot days.

Read more tips and find local companies rated Highest in Quality and Helpful Expertise® at www.diamondcertified.org

ECONOMY

Stock Market: World shares mixed after China reports slowing growth

By Elaine Kurtenbach
The Associated Press

BANGKOK » World shares were mixed on Monday after China reported that its economy expanded at an 8.1% annual pace in 2021, though growth slowed to half that level in the last quarter.

Paris, Frankfurt, Tokyo and Shanghai advanced while Hong Kong and Seoul declined.

The weakness in China's economy toward the end of 2021 is prompting suggestions Beijing should intervene to prop up growth with interest rate cuts or by injecting money into the economy through public works spending.

Shortly before the growth data were released, the Chinese central bank announced a rate cut on medium-lending to commercial banks to the lowest level since 2020.

"Economic momentum remains weak amid repeated virus outbreaks and a struggling property sector," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a commentary. He expects China's policymakers to keep limits on lending relatively tight and control credit growth.

"The upshot is that policy easing is likely to soften the economic downturn rather than drive a rebound," he said.

Slowing activity in China, the region's biggest economy, can chill growth throughout the region. Lockdowns and other precautions imposed to combat outbreaks of coronavirus can also worsen shortages of key parts and components, adding to difficulties with shipping and supply chains.

The Shanghai Composite index gained 0.6% to 3,541.67, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 0.7% to 24,218.43.

South Korea's Kospi sank 1.1% to 2,890.10 after North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea early Monday in its fourth weapons launch this month, South Korea's military said, with the apparent



PHOTOS BY KIN CHEUNG — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman wearing a face mask walks past a bank's electronic board showing the Hong Kong share index in Hong Kong, on Monday. Shares were mixed in Asia on Monday after China reported that its economy expanded at an 8.1% annual pace in 2021, though growth slowed to half that level in the last quarter.

goal of demonstrating its military might amid paused diplomacy with the United States and pandemic border closures.

Germany's DAX gained 0.2% to 15,910.54 and the CAC 40 in Paris also was up 0.2%, at 7,156.53. Britain's FTSE 100 jumped 0.7% to 7,592.79. The future for the S&P 500 picked up 0.2% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1% higher.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 advanced 0.7% to 28,333.52 as the government vessel located machinery orders rose in November as private investment and manufacturing activity improved during a lull in coronavirus outbreaks. Shipbuilders orders surged 170%.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 climbed 0.3% to 7,417.30.

On Friday, the S&P 500 eked out a 0.1% gain, closing at 4,662.85. The tech-heavy Nasdaq surged 0.6% to 14,893.75. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.6% to 35,911.81.

Smaller company stocks also bounced back from an early slide. The Russell 2000 index rose 0.1%, to



A woman wearing a face mask walks past a bank's electronic board showing the Hong Kong share index in Hong Kong, on Monday.

2,162.46.

A rally in technology stocks, plus gains in energy and other sectors, helped outweigh declines in banks and elsewhere in the market on a day when investors were mainly focused on a mix of company earnings reports and discouraging data on retail sales.

The mixed finish capped a week of choppy trading on Wall Street that deepened the market's January slump. The benchmark S&P 500, which soared 26.9% in 2021, is now about 2.8% be-

low the all-time high it set on Jan. 3.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury was steady at 1.79%.

The price of U.S. crude oil rose 30 cents to \$84.12 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. On Friday, it rose 2.1%, helping to send energy stocks higher.

Brent crude added 6 cents to \$86.12 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar rose to 114.32 Japanese yen from 114.18 yen. The euro climbed to \$1.1430 from \$1.1417.

LA COUNTY

Police searching for suspect in fatal stabbing of woman

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES » Police were searching Monday for a suspect in the fatal stabbing of a 24-year-old employee of a Los Angeles furniture store.

The woman was found dead by a customer at the store in the Hancock Park neighborhood on Thursday, police said.

Investigators described the suspect as tall and

thin, wearing all black clothing and a face mask. Police haven't identified a possible motive.

Family members identified the victim as Brianna Kupfer, a graduate student pursuing an architectural design degree at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Relatives described Kupfer to CBSLA as a gifted artist who always had a positive attitude.

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PANDEMIC

Air Force team helps Yuma hospital care for COVID patients

The Associated Press

YUMA, ARIZ. » Needing assistance due to staff shortages and increasing numbers of COVID-19 patients, including some requiring high levels of care, Yuma Regional Medical Center applied to the federal government for help.

That call was answered two weeks ago with the arrival of a 15-member Air Force medical augmentation team. Now about halfway through a 30-day deployment at Yuma Regional, the team's members are stepping in to help the hospital's personnel wherever help is needed, the Yuma Sun reported.

That help has been essential for providing faster, more attentive care for patients, whether it's putting an extra set of eyes on patients' vital signs or freeing up hospital staff to attend to developing situations, said Kymberly Miller, a COVID-19 unit nursing director for the hospital.

"With more people involved in their care, you can provide for emergent situations ... and the better the outcomes will be," Miller said.

The augmentation team includes a doctor, a physician's assistant, five nurses and a handful of technicians. Most were deployed from Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. Others came from Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts, Hill Air Force Base in Utah and Edwards Air Force Base in California.

Maj. Katherine Kasch, the team's commander, is among those deployed from Eglin.

Kasch said she and other nurses on the team are registered nurses "so we can function at that capacity," but need some assistance on using the

hospital's documentation system.

"The nurses at YRMC have been very welcoming and grateful," Kasch said. "They've been doing this for two years. Anything they can get as far as assistance, especially when some of the patients have higher acuity requiring more care, makes a big difference."

Most of team members' prior deployments were overseas "so it's been great actually being able to help people in the U.S., to alleviate some of the suffering from people in Yuma," Kasch said. "I'm very honored to have been selected to come here. It gives more meaning to my mission."

Kasch said the team's members have learned to switch gears quickly to work together as a team. She shared that they constantly ask each other if they're OK.

"You want to make sure everyone has some resource," Kasch said. "It's constant interaction with each other to alleviate the homesickness ... we try to do team building stuff."

Since the team has been in the Yuma area, two members have had birthdays and Kasch said one of their team building activities involved a birthday celebration since it's hard being away from family.

"Everybody has husbands and children and family members behind," she said. "We don't want them to worry about us. We're constantly checking on each other."

The nurses at Yuma Regional have been welcoming and made the experience good in spite of the situation at hand, Kasch said. "They tell us about places to go see and things to do to take advantage of being out here."

HUNTINGTON BEACH

Diver dies after going missing near oil platform

The Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH » A commercial diver who went missing in the ocean near an oil platform off Southern California was found dead, authorities said.

The search began Sunday morning in the area sur-

rounding the oil processing facility known as platform Elly, about 5 miles off Huntington Beach, the U.S. Coast Guard said on Twitter.

Sonar equipment on a Long Beach Fire Department vessel located the missing person's body at

a depth of about 250 feet around 3 p.m., department spokesman Brian Fisk said.

The body was pulled from the ocean and handed over to Los Angeles County Coroner's officials Sunday evening, Coast Guard officials said.

The diver's identity was

withheld pending the notification of relatives, the Orange County Register said.

A pipeline running to platform Elly spilled tens of thousands of gallons of heavy crude last October, in one of the worst oil spills in recent California history.

YUBA COUNTY

Officials seize animals, including horse, from home

The Associated Press

OLIVEHURST » Sheriff's deputies removed dozens of animals including a dead horse from a Northern California home and are seeking an arrest warrant for a suspect, authorities said.

A search warrant was served last week at the residence in Olivehurst,

where deputies found 61 animals living in "deplorable conditions," the Yuba County Sheriff's Department said.

The animals included 21 pigs, 12 dogs, 5 chickens, two goats, two lambs, two cats, two rabbits, two cows, one horse and one bull, the Sacramento Bee reported Sunday.

The home was determined to be unfit for occupancy by Yuba County Code Enforcement, and investigators are seeking a felony animal cruelty warrant from the district attorney's office.

An investigation began Dec. 28 after authorities received reports from neighbors regarding the welfare

of animals at the property north of Sacramento.

The animals were taken to two county-run facilities and examined by veterinarians. They will remain under county care until criminal proceedings conclude, at which point they may be available for adoption, the Bee said.

Thefts

FROM PAGE 1

ing inquiries to police. The

United Parcel Service declined to comment on investigations into the cargo thefts but said the company was cooperating with authorities.

Cat

FROM PAGE 1

at a low cost to pet owners and TNR organizations, according to Brookhouser.

In addition to TNR, both Community Cat Allies and Best Life have foster and adoption programs to find homes for kittens and friendly stray cats, which, unlike ferals, once lived with humans.

"Any kitten I get off the street is a joyous moment for me," Chaffin said. "To look at their little faces

and to know that they don't have to grow up out there — that's a memorable moment."

Today, both Chaffin and Davidson have made it their life mission to help cats living alongside us in the community.

"Humane treatment of animals comes in many forms," Brookhouser said. "And one of those is being proactive to take care of animals through spay/neuter so that we don't have a problem with too many animals and not enough homes in our community."

Money

FROM PAGE 1

State officials estimate they need an additional \$2.5 billion to cover upcoming demand. The federal government is expected to redistribute additional, unused funds this spring. But California's tenant protections end in March, allowing landlords to resume evictions for nonpayment in most cities.

Housing and landlord advocates say the ever-lengthening pandemic has strained a system launched in March to stem evictions and keep families housed during the health crisis.

"California will need significantly more funding from future federal reallocations in order to continue

to meet the needs of low-income California renters impacted by COVID-19," said Lourdes Castro Ramirez, the state's Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency secretary. The state will continue to focus relief toward the lowest income families and tenants facing displacement, she said.

Tenants and landlords apply to state and local programs, and eligible, low-income renters can have up to 100% of their back rent paid to their landlord. Some may also qualify for payment of future rent. The state estimates the various programs have helped nearly 250,000 families and distributed about \$2.5 billion to landlords.

The slow pace of payments has been an issue for the program since its

inception. After March 31, landlords will again be allowed to evict tenants for nonpayment in most cities, increasing pressure to make aid payments. Housing advocates are worried and landlords are restless.

"We are very concerned," said Debra Carlton, executive vice president of the California Apartment Association. "Millions of dollars have gone unpaid to tenants and owners. Many owners have received no rent for months. They cannot pay their taxes, mortgages and other expenses if the rent continues to go unpaid."

Aid programs saw a surge of requests in October when some protections ended for tenants who did not apply for aid. Advocates say although the rapid spread of the omicron

variant has not yet produced a spike of increased need, they expect it will be economic upheaval continues for many low-wage and frontline workers.

Safety net nonprofits have seen steady demand in recent months for food and clothing, allowing low-income families to put money toward rent. "The reality is, people are still struggling in our high-cost region," said Greg Kepferle, CEO of Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County.

Bart Charlow, CEO of Samaritan House in San Mateo, said increased donations have helped support the charity. But, he added, "we're far from over with the pandemic and we're far from over on the economic after-effects ... We don't expect private charity to continue at this pace."