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smoke-free life

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North Bay YMCA faces financial crisis

Budget woes could lead to center's closure

By CAROL BOGART
DAILY REPUBLIC

SUISUN CITY — Mike Hudson realizes what the future may hold for the North Bay YMCA if the center does not become more self-supporting. Hudson, chairman of the North Bay YMCA advisory board, said the center could be forced

to close.

Linda Griffith, vice president of risk management and legal affairs with the parent San Francisco YMCA, said closing the 12-year-old North Bay YMCA is "always an option" if the parent YMCA has to continue to shore up the North Bay YMCA's finances.

"With any operation, you want to

make it work financially," Griffith said.

Griffith said it costs \$1.6 million annually to operate the North Bay YMCA. The deficit for fiscal 2007-08 was \$530,000, she said, and the parent YMCA covered it.

This is not the first year the North Bay YMCA has operated in the red. To date, the parent YMCA has sub-

sided the costs of operating the North Bay YMCA by about \$3.9 million since 1995, Griffith said.

Membership fees are a key financial component for the North Bay YMCA, said Executive Director Rodney Chin, and membership is dwindling. In October, the parent YMCA gave the North Bay YMCA 90 days to come up with a plan to turn things around, Chin said.

"We've been given a tenuous re-

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YMCA MEMBERSHIP

A family membership at the North Bay YMCA is \$75 a month. A single membership for youths ages 8-17 is \$30 a month. To learn more about other membership plans, call 421-8746. Residents interested in serving on the North Bay YMCA advisory board can call board chairman Mike Hudson at 429-9794.

VARIETY IS SPICE OF FARMING life

Agricultural areas exemplify Solano County's diversity



Hot summer days, cool summer nights and fertile soils make Suisun Valley ideal for vineyards.
Daily Republic file (2005)

A farm worker, below, drives a tractor through walnut trees at Sunrise Orchard in Vacaville.

Chris Jordan/
Daily Republic



Brad Zweerink/Daily Republic

Benjamin Gutierrez throws hay to sheep on Al Medvitz's 3,600-acre ranch in the Montezuma Hills. The Montezuma Hills are just one of nine diverse agricultural areas in Solano County.

By BARRY EBERLING
DAILY REPUBLIC

FAIRFIELD — Craig McNamara grows walnuts on hot, flat valley land near Putah Creek. Al Medvitz raises sheep on grassy, windswept hills near the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

These diverse operations have something in common -- they're both in Solano County.

Diversity is the name of the game in the county's farm industry. Microclimates and topography create an array of unlikely places. Cattle can graze on foggy hills near Vallejo during the summer even as a Dixon farmer mops his brow amid 90-degree heat in his tomato field.

"No other California county has the access to the Bay, Delta, coastal range and to the soils of the Central Valley," said Kurt Richter of the UC Agricultural Issues Center.

Richter and Alvin Sokolow came up with the nine farming regions listed in their recently completed, county-commissioned agricultural study.

To tour the nine farm regions is to see

Solano County in all its diversity, with places so different they can feel like a world apart. Understanding the nine regions could help save and boost the county's \$243 million annual farm economy.

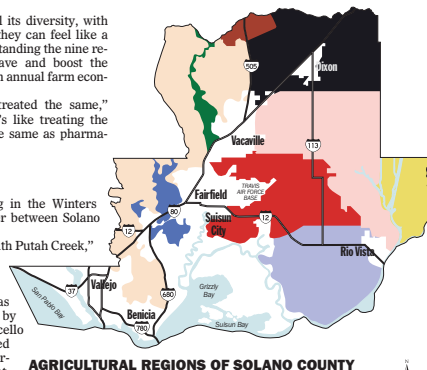
"They can't be treated the same," Richter said. "That's like treating the housing industry the same as pharmaceutical sales."

Winters

Walnuts are king in the Winters area near the border between Solano and Yolo counties.

"We're blessed with Putah Creek," said McNamara, who farms 450 acres.

Putah Creek was tamed 50 years ago by the massive Monticello Dam, which created Lake Berryessa reservoir. But prior to that, it raged during big



AGRICULTURAL REGIONS OF SOLANO COUNTY

■ Winters ■ Dixon Ridge ■ Montezuma Hills
■ Western grazing ■ Elmina and Main Prairie ■ Pleasant, Vaca and Lagoon valleys
■ Suisun and Green valleys ■ Jeppson Prairie ■ Ryer Island

Source: UC Agricultural Issues Center

See Farming, Back Page

No money in budget, no time in prison

By DON THOMPSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO — Car thieves, forgers, scam artists, drunken drivers and some drug dealers might never serve a day in prison — even for repeat crimes — under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposals to reduce California's inmate and parolee population, corrections department and law enforcement officials said.

It's one of the many potential consequences of abruptly upending the prison system to save a projected \$400 million in corrections department costs over the next 18 months.

Schwarzenegger is asking state lawmakers to approve releasing nonviolent, non-serious, non-sex offenders from prison if they have less than 20 months remaining on their sentences. It's part of the plan he announced Thursday to pare a \$14.5 billion state budget deficit.

Those offenders would be released on "summary parole," where they would be subject to searches and drug tests but would not be under parole officers' supervision. They could be sent back to prison only if they were convicted of new crimes, not for routine parole violations.

The proposals would apply to new convicts as well as to current prisoners, said James Tilton, secretary of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

"There is going to be a population that does not spend one day in prison," corrections spokesman Oscar Hidalgo said.

The department said those convicted of drug offenses, drunken driving, white collar or property crimes such as vehicle theft, grand theft or receiving stolen property likely would serve little or no time.

Prosecutors said those crimes typically bring sentences of 16 months, two years or three years in prison, depending on the circumstances. The defendants may serve time in county jail while they await trial, but would not be sent to state prison after their conviction.

"You rip people off, and prison is no longer an option. That's not good public policy," objected Vacaville Police Chief Richard Word, president of the California Police Chiefs Association.

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WEATHER



Mostly sunny skies today. Look for a high of 56 and a low of 36.
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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

MONDAY

Women's Investment Group 6-8 p.m.
RW Investment Group, a women's investment group, will hold its monthly meeting at the Country Club Estates Outhouse. The group will learn about the stock market and invest money as a group. Minimum investment is \$25. The meeting is open to the public.
1800 East Tabor Ave., Fairfield, Info: 631-4245 or laura.rwinvestments@gmail.com.

Vision Problem Support Group 2-4 p.m. Monday, for people with serious vision problems such as macular degeneration, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 1600 Union Ave., Fairfield. Info: 425-5409.

COMING UP

Terrific Tuesdays 3:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The Fairfield Cordella Library will have activities for children ages 5 and older.
5050 Business Center Drive, Fairfield. Info: 784-2680.

Baby Bounce 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. Tuesday, Songs, stories and finger plays for infants to 18 months.
Fairfield Cordella Library, 5050 Business Center Drive, Fairfield. Info: 784-2680.

Preschool Story Time 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, Preschool story time with sto-

ries, songs and crafts.
Fairfield Civic Center Library, 1150 Kentucky St. Info: 421-6503 or http://www.solano library.com.

Scarlet Brigade Band Fundraiser All day, Wednesday. The Fairfield High School Scarlet Brigade Band will hold a dine and donate fundraiser at Red Robin to benefit the band. When diners present a flyer when paying for their meals, Red Robin will donate 20 percent of the bill to the school's band programs. To download the flyer,

go to <http://www.scarletbrigade.com>.
1350 Travis Blvd., Fairfield. Info: 438-3065.

ICD Lecture 5:30-7 p.m. Wednesday. A free lecture for people who are living with or may be receiving an implantable cardiac defibrillator (ICD) will be conducted by Dr. Milind Chond at the Hilton Garden Inn. The lecture is free, but seating is limited. The lecture is part of the NorthBay Healthcare Advanced Medicine Lecture Series.
2200 Gateway Court, Fairfield. Info: 438-3500.

Daughters of American Revolution Meeting 11 a.m. Wednesday. The Chief Solano Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution will hold a meeting on "Revolutionary DNA" with guest speaker Katherine Hope Borges. Hostesses are Connie Lawson and Betty Rodden. Courtyard by Marriott, 1350 Holiday Lane, Fairfield. Info: 374-4374 or 422-1400.

Prison: No YMCA: More members are needed

From Page One

Nearly 40,000 criminals were sent to prison last year for non-serious, nonviolent offenses. However, some would be excluded from early release because of a violent criminal history or because of their behavior in prison, the corrections department said.

"As far as I'm concerned, this entire program is an act of insanity," said Kern County District Attorney Edward Jagels. "They will do less time than they would if they were sent to a local jail. . . . The message will get very strongly to the criminal community that, except for a crime of violence, you have nothing to fear."

Sending criminals to local jails is barely an option because most are so crowded that inmates serve a fraction of their sentences, Jagels said.

"I'd say, 'Send me to prison,' knowing I'm never going to serve a day," said Ryan Sherman, spokesman for the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, which represents prison guards and parole agents.

Schwarzenegger's plan would eliminate about 4,500 guard positions. Because of vacancies and attrition, Tilton estimated more than 1,000 guards might eventually be laid off.

Releasing long-term inmates a few months early will not boost California's crime rate, based on the experience of 13 other jurisdictions in the U.S. and Canada, according to a study released Thursday by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

"The research is overwhelming that you can do this without endangering public safety," said Barry Krisberg, president of the Oakland-based research organization. "If people start trying to terrorize the community that there's going to be a crime wave, that's not going to happen."

Yet Krisberg is among those who worry that convicts released early to summary parole will not have adequate rehabilitation programs or the support they need to re-enter society.

"The state is basically saying, 'Good luck, and we hope you don't kill anybody,'" said Christine Ward, executive director of the Doris Tate Crime Victims Bureau, based in Sacramento.

Releasing enough inmates to free up 22,000 prison beds next year, as Schwarzenegger proposes, also could trigger changes to the \$7.8 billion prison and jail building program approved by lawmakers and signed by the governor last year.

From Page One

prive that will allow us to put together a recovery plan," Hudson said.

Griffith said the North Bay YMCA has not been given a "drop-dead deadline," but the parent YMCA has informed the branch that its financial picture must improve. The North Bay YMCA must have its budget for the coming fiscal year ready to submit in April, Griffith said.

Chin said various ideas for reducing the deficit are being floated. Chief among them is making the organization better aware of the programs offered by the North Bay YMCA.

"Some people don't even know we're here," Chin said.

Hudson believes the North Bay YMCA needs to change its focus from health and fitness to programs geared toward youths.

"We can't compete with 24 Hour Fitness," said Hudson, who added that more youth programs would result in more donations and grant funding.

The North Bay YMCA recently established a Teen Drop-in Center for at-risk youth, funded for a year through a Quality of Life grant from Suisun City, said city spokesman Scott Corey.

In addition, Chin said 150 youths play in the YMCA-south Jr. NBA basketball program and many of their parents attend the games. Derrick West said he and his wife, Nina, haven't missed a game since their son, Dvon, first started playing when he was 10 years old.

Dvon, now 15, and his parents are all active members of

the North Bay YMCA.

Chin said 1,700 paid memberships would be enough to support the North Bay YMCA, but current membership is at most 1,100.

One source of funding for the North Bay YMCA is its annual community support campaign, which Hudson said has raised \$28,000 toward its \$33,000 goal. Chin said that is encouraging because the campaign is just halfway through its fundraising cycle.

Hudson also is a member of the Suisun City Council. The city charges the North Bay YMCA \$240,000 each year to lease what was once the city's community center. When asked whether the city would back off a bit, Hudson said, "Undoubtedly the city will end up contributing to the Y, but the question is, 'How much?'"

To pay off the lease in full through November 2017, Griffith said, would cost \$1.9 million.

To trim the deficit, the parent YMCA "wants us to turn up the heat on our donors," Hudson said.

Griffith said the parent YMCA is working with the North Bay YMCA to help solve its financial problems. "That's a friendly process," she added. "That's a collaborative process."

Chin said the parent YMCA has promised to loan the North Bay YMCA the services of two grant writers. Hudson believes the North Bay YMCA should hire a grant writer of its own.

North Bay is Solano County's only YMCA. It currently serves 8,000 people. Both Hudson and Chin believe that if the North Bay YMCA does a

better job informing the community about its services, and more people use them, more donations and grant funding will follow.

One example is the swimming pool at the North Bay YMCA, which Griffith said costs \$275,000 a year to operate. The center's "Splash" program offers free swimming lessons when local schools are on spring break. This year, "Splash" will be sponsored by the Kiwanis Club in Fairfield, Chin said.

Service organizations are "really stepping up" to help the North Bay YMCA whittle its deficit, Chin added.

The Jr. NBA is one of the best examples of urban services programs offered by the North Bay YMCA, Chin said. The program is aimed at youths ages 5-14.

Longtime coach Derrick Johnson said, "I've seen some kids come in here with no discipline, some wayward children, some under the wrong influences. At the Y, we get to know the kids on a personal level. Most kids want to please us."

Program director Deon Price said, "The Y is a seed to improve the quality of life for these young people."

Hudson added, "These are kids who are focusing their energies on a positive."

Players such as Dvon West and his friend, Darius Wise, 16, are positive influences on younger players, Chin pointed out. Wise is an International Baccalaureate honors student at Armijo High School who also plays varsity football.

West helps out with the North Bay YMCA's after-school program and last year was named Teen Volunteer of



Mike McCoy/Daily Republic

Melvin Mason and Dvon West play basketball at the North Bay YMCA in Suisun City on Thursday night.

the Year.

A younger friend, Melvin Mason, 13, said he comes to the North Bay YMCA every day. He and his brother used to try to "sneak in," he said, prompting his parents to buy a family membership.

Two years ago, the North Bay YMCA had few programs for urban youths, Chin said. The new Teen Center, scheduled to open later this month

or early in February, "will give the kids somewhere to hang out and not intimidate" the Y's older members," he added.

The North Bay YMCA is located at 586 E. Wigton Way in Suisun City and is open to all residents of Solano County.

Reach Carol Bogart at 427-6955 or at cbogart@dailyrepublic.net.

Farming: Microclimates, topography create variety of spaces

From Page One

winter storms, spilling its banks and flooding acre upon acre.

These historic floods led behind rich, loamy soils, McNamara said. The creek today provides water for farms and feeds into aquifers, he said.

Winters-region farming produces \$13 million annually, 7 percent of the county's annual total. But that relatively modest slice is in part because of the area's small size. The region tops Solano County in per-acre annual value at about \$2,000.

A problem in the region is growing encroachment from rural residential homes, Richter said.

Montezuma Hills

Medvitz and his wife, Jeanne McCormack, raise sheep and grow grains on more than 3,600 acres near Rio Vista and the Sacramento River.

"It's hilly grassland," Medvitz said. "It's not like the oak woodlands or mountainsides of eastern Solano. There's not a lot of surface irrigation water. It's pretty expensive to pump water from the river into the hills."

Montezuma Hills farmers have had to find their own niche in the county's agricultural world. This is a dryland farming area, with much of the water used falling as rain.

Helping farmers survive economically are huge, electricity generating wind turbines and natural gas fields, which are compatible with farming. Some farmers have leases with energy companies that bring them extra income. But the falling dollar and

last year's drought conditions pose challenges, Medvitz said. Sheep-raising is in decline and more farmers are turning to cattle, he said. Still, he is "cautiously optimistic" about the area's farming future.

"If we could figure out a way to do cheap irrigation, we could have another agricultural paradise out here," Medvitz said.

Suisun Valley

Hot summer days, cool summer nights and fertile soils make the coastal hill valley near Fairfield ideal for vineyards.

Suisun Valley is a distant 45 miles from the cool Pacific Ocean, so hot days are expected. Yet, the region's unique system of bays and gaps in the hills allows cool breezes to kick up in the late afternoon, much like what happens in the Napa Valley.

Temperature swings from day to night are often 35 degrees to 40 degrees, said Roger King, a farmer and president of the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association. Grapes can retain acidity in the levels needed for fine wines.

Suisun Valley has several wineries. Growers also sell grapes to wineries in other counties, including those in Napa Valley.

Local growers have faced low prices for the past few years, but King sees things getting better.

"We're starting into a very healthy leg of a new cycle, where supply is coming back into balance and actually coming short of demand," King said.

Pleasants, Vaca and Lagoon valleys

Rose Loveall-Sale grew up in Pleasants Valley near Vacaville and can remember the old days.

"When I was young, it was all orchards," she said. "It was all stone fruits and walnuts — a very quiet, out-of-the-way area."

Most of the farming in flat orchards is gone. Loveall-Sale these days sees more big houses on 20 acres and more horses. Agriculture has changed in these coastal hill valleys that, unlike Suisun Valley, don't get the cooling marine influence.

Now there are small, niche farms, such as Loveall-Sale's Morningsun Herb Farm. On a mere 3 acres, the farm turns out several hundred thousand plants annually for sale to the public and nurseries.

Richter called this area the "home of the hobby farmer." That's no put-down. Products from some of the farms are sold at the farmers market in the San Francisco ferry building and served at Berkeley's Chez Panisse Restaurant and Cafe.

"There are a lot of very small producers who are doing some very progressive, small-scale, high-value production," Richter said.

Dixon Ridge

Dixon Ridge has a combination of good soils, climate, access to water and large parcel sizes that allow farmers to adapt to market conditions, Richter said.

That makes it one of Solano County's most important farming areas.

"It's the most flexible,"

Richter said.

A farmer with walnut trees can't change crops from year to year. Dixon Ridge farmers can switch among wheat, tomatoes, bell peppers, alfalfa, sunflower and other crops. They have also got plenty of Lake Berryessa reservoir water for irrigation.

This 63,000-acre flat area near Dixon generates \$64 million each year, 33 percent of the county's annual farming total. Among the challenges listed in the study is development, both urban and rural residential. Interstate 80, which is sort of a growth conveyor belt, cuts through the Dixon Ridge.

Ryer Island

Ryer Island is so far removed from the hustle and bustle of modern life that the only Solano County access is by using the Real McCoy ferry.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta island is a few miles north of Rio Vista on Highway 84. Levees hold back the waters of Miner and Steamboat sloughs from a 24,000-acre area planted with such crops as grapes, alfalfa, wheat, corn, pears and tomatoes.

"It's closer to the Dixon Ridge area than anything else in the county," Richter said.

This is one farming area in Solano County that has no fear of being annexed by a city for subdivisions. But its remoteness also adds to transportation costs because farm products must be moved using a narrow bridge on the Yolo County side.

"Farmers are smart. They've got it figured out,"

Richter said.

Elmira/Maine Prairie

Elmira/Maine Prairie east of Vacaville looks much like the flatlands of the Dixon Ridge and is next to the Dixon Ridge.

But the soils are heavier and less fertile. The region has its own farming strengths. Many farmers grow alfalfa, corn and wheat, and ship it to dairies elsewhere in the Central Valley.

"Hot days and cool nights and the Delta breeze produce high-quality feed stuff for dairy cows," Richter said.

Having a dairy locate there to use the alfalfa, corn and wheat would boost the area's economy, Richter said. He called dairies "processing plants."

But proposals for large dairies have caused controversy in Solano County. Opponents say the dairies cause air pollution and other stretch that can drift into cities.

Western Hills

The hills that separate Solano and Napa counties are used for cattle grazing.

Jepson Prairie

Sheep and cattle graze in this Central Valley area near Highway 113 east of Vacaville. But it's best known for the vernal pools where such rare creatures as fairy shrimp live.

"It's more important for its natural resources," Richter said.

Reach Barry Eberling at 425-4646, ext. 232, or at beberling@dailyrepublic.net.

California Lottery

SuperLotto Plus/Saturday

Numbers picked
1, 10, 23, 41, 43
Mega number 8
Saturday's jackpot estimate (drawing 7:57 p.m.) \$36 M

Daily 3/Saturday

Afternoon numbers picked 6, 3, 7
Night numbers picked 5, 9, 8
Match three is order for top prize; combinations for other prizes.

Fantasy 5/Saturday

Numbers picked 6, 17, 18, 19, 32
Match all five for top prize; Match at least three for other prizes.

Daily Derby/Saturday

1st place 3, Hot Shot
2nd place 12, Lucky Charms
3rd place 10, Solid Gold
Race time 1:45:66
Match winners and one for top prize; Match either for other prizes.

On the Web: www.calottery.com