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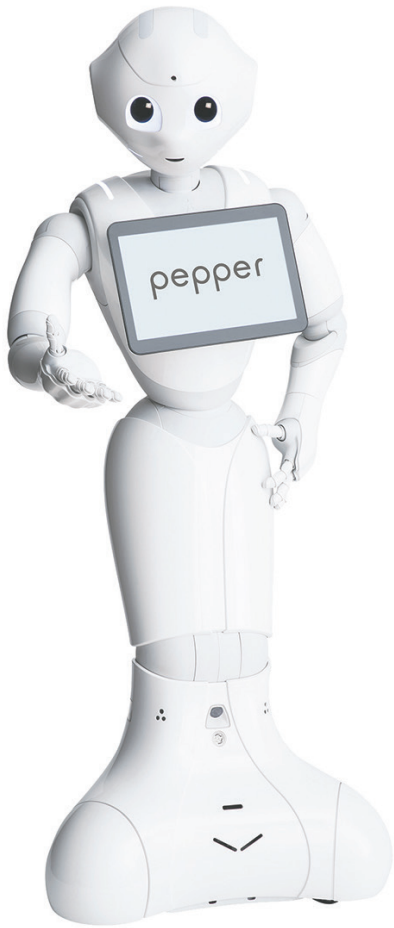
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TRUSTED BY LOCALS AND LOVED BY VISITORS SINCE 1915

‘I’m Pepper. Welcome to Carmel.’

■ Chamber raising \$25K for robot

By MARY SCHLEY



AMID THE pleas on GoFundMe.com for money to help families dealing with cancer and people injured in brutal accidents is a \$25,000 wish by the Carmel Chamber of Commerce: to buy a robot to greet people at the visitor center at Carmel Plaza.

“The Carmel Visitor Center wants to bring Pepper the Robot to Carmel to be our Official Carmel Concierge! She’s interactive, fun, and programmable for visitors of all ages and cultures,” the plea reads. “The Carmel Visitor Center had 32,202 visitor walk-ins in 2017 alone. Imagine the enhanced experience of meeting Pepper the Carmel Concierge on their visit!”

According to SoftBank Robotics, Pepper “reads your emotions by analyzing voice, facial expressions, and vocabulary,” and uses the data “to learn over time.”

“Pepper’s friendly personality makes it easy to love,” the company says. “With natural body language and magnetism, Pepper is guaranteed to charm your customers.”

SoftBank also claims Pepper “is the world’s first humanoid robot that can move naturally, avoid obstacles, identify sounds, and recharge independently.”

Finally, the robot can take advantage of “new apps and innovations to improve the Pepper experience.”

Chamber officials want to raise enough money to get the robot in time for this year’s holiday season. “We would be incredibly grateful for your help in giving Pepper a new home,” they said.

Divided commission scuttles shop’s plans to rent bikes

By MARY SCHLEY

A SPLIT planning commission rejected a couple’s request Wednesday night to rent bicycles at their new shop, Mad Dogs & Englishmen, located on Mission Street south of Ocean Avenue. While the bulk of their business would focus on sales of bikes and related gear, Jennifer Blevins and Martin Watson had hoped to rent 20 conventional and electric-assist bicycles at their store, but two planning commissioners decided the city is simply too dangerous to turn tourists loose on bikes.

The bike shop is located near the city’s designated bike route on San Carlos Street, and the owners plan to carry several premium American and European brands and styles of bicycles ranging in price from \$500 to \$8,000. Mad Dogs would be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the summer season, with shorter hours in the winter.

Nobody else rents

While most of the business would focus on sales and service, Blevins and Watson proposed renting out a small number of bicycles. Several other area shops, though none in Carmel-by-the-Sea, rent bikes to visitors, they noted. Senior planner Marnie Waffle recommended commissioners approve the

business, including the rentals.

“I think it’s fabulous, the bikes are fabulous — they almost have a retro feel to them which fits in well with Carmel’s atmosphere,” commissioner Julie Wendt said, adding that the store’s location is ideal for that type of shop, too.

“I have safety concerns,” countered commissioner Stephanie Locke, because many of the streets here are narrow and prone to congestion, especially in the busy summer months when cars, people and dogs are in abundance. She also noted that many cyclists don’t obey the rules of the road, riding two or three abreast, running stop signs — and even talking on cell phones while riding.

“For all those reasons, I can’t support the rentals,” she said.

Commissioner Gail Lehman felt similarly. “Our streets are not made for bicycles,” she said. “I don’t even think they should be in Carmel at all.”

Chair Mike LePage sided with Wendt and also noted that the city council authorized bicycle rentals as an approved type of business in town.

“I’ve cycled for 40 years,” he said. “I understand the safety issue, but I also feel that this is a nice alternative for transportation in the city.”

The argument that bikes aren’t safe

See **BIKES** page 17A

Developer pulls project after height complaints

■ May resubmit without affordable units

By KELLY NIX

A 40,000-square-foot building proposed for Lighthouse Avenue that would have featured market-rate townhomes, affordable housing, a restaurant and retail shops was withdrawn last week by the developer even though city officials liked it, the Pacific Grove economic development director told The Pine Cone. And if the developer decides to submit a revised application, affordable housing might not be part of it, he said.

Gerald Leigh Properties had proposed tearing down the decrepit 3,472-square-foot building at 522 Lighthouse Ave. and building a four-story, 43,912-square-foot structure with 14 market-rate townhomes, workforce townhomes, retail shops, a restaurant and an underground parking garage with 32 spaces. The current building houses Goodies deli and retail store Marina Patina.

See **DEVELOPER** page 18A

Bomb scare shuts library

By MARY SCHLEY

THE PERSON who left a well-worn leather briefcase containing self-help cassette and VHS tapes on the library’s front steps Monday morning no doubt thought he was doing a good deed, but the bag looked suspicious enough that it prompted police to shut down the library and call in the bomb squad.

The bag had been left by the front door before Harrison Memorial Library opened for the day, and when it was still there several hours later, a patron pointed it out to one of the employees, who notified police, according to Sgt. Ron Pflieger.

Pflieger and officer Mike Bruno responded to check out the large leather briefcase but decided opening it wouldn’t be worth the risk, so they evacuated the library, strung police tape along the bordering sidewalks of Lincoln Street and Ocean Avenue, and blocked off Lincoln with their patrol cars while awaiting the arrival of the Monterey County Sheriff’s Bomb Squad.

While a Monterey Fire division chief suggested expanding the evacuation area to include businesses on Lincoln and part

See **SCARE** page 19A

Bar fight over a girl, conspiracy — or both?

By MARY SCHLEY

WHEN NEWS broke last week of an investigation into an alleged conspiracy in which a Salinas man was paid \$100 to start a fight with Mayor Steve Dallas at Mission Ranch so that onlookers could photograph the incident to make Dallas look like a drunken brawler, Monterey Peninsula resident Kelley Taylor wondered if city attorney Glen Mozingo was referring to a run-in that included her and another man.

“I can’t imagine Steve Dallas was involved in more than one bar brawl at Mission Ranch,” Taylor told The Pine Cone this week. And if it is the same incident, “there’s been some sort of weird misunderstanding,” she said.

During the AT&T Pro-Am week more than a year ago, Taylor was at Mission Ranch with a date, David Petersen, and they were dancing, she recalled. Dallas was there, too, and she said he knew she had recently broken up with her fiancé.

“When we came off the dance floor, Steve grabbed my arm, and was saying, ‘I want you to meet these guys, I want you to meet these guys,’” she said.

“Steve walked over and grabbed her by the hand and then yanked her in his direction like a caveman would,” said Petersen, who lives in Omaha, Neb.

‘You don’t let that slide’

At that moment, a shoving match ensued between the two men. “When someone disrespects a lady, you don’t let that slide — you confront him,” Peterson said.

But when he did, Dallas “immediately turned, got me by my throat, and pushed me back up against the bar,” according to Peterson. He said he pushed Dallas’ hands away, but the mayor again took him by the throat. Other than that, Peterson claimed he did not touch Dallas. The confrontation ended when onlookers separated them.

Petersen said he didn’t report the altercation to police, thinking that all involved were probably intoxicated and might end up in jail.

At the time, after hearing about the alleged fight, Pine Cone reporter Kelly Nix asked Dallas what had happened at the bar, but the mayor told him “nothing,” and denied being escorted out of the bar.

Dallas also told Nix, “People like starting

problems, that’s why I have security with me all the time.”

When asked about the security, Dallas said they’re “his buddies.”

On Thursday, Dallas confirmed the incident happened, and said, “I downplayed the attack against me at the time and didn’t realize the significance of it. I did not know who the assailant was. I was just lucky there was private security guy who intervened and whisked me away.”

Didn’t talk to investigator

A few months ago, after sexual-harassment allegations were made against the mayor, Petersen and Taylor could have told the investigator about the run-in, but didn’t.

“David and I both declined to talk to the investigator about this particular incident, because I didn’t feel it had to do any-

See **SCUFFLE** page 17A

Another slide blocks Highway 1



PHOTO/COURTESY CALTRANS

Big Sur hasn’t had much rain this year, but recent storms triggered a slide March 13 near Limekiln State Park that dumped large boulders on Highway 1, closing it for more than 24 hours. The scenic route was cleared and repaired by noon the following day.