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Bounty of stolen property found in wanted SUV

■ Driver arrested, faces multiple charges

By MARY SCHLEY

THE SILVER Nissan Pathfinder was believed to be connected to the recent rash of vehicle burglaries in the Monterey Peninsula, and when a Monterey County Sheriff's Deputy spotted it at the Mid-Valley shopping center Saturday evening, she also found the man who may be responsible for many of

those break-ins.

Authorities are now working to determine the rightful owners of the piles of stolen property officers found inside the SUV.

Reynaldo Gomez, 54, remained in Monterey County Jail this week on charges of possession of burglary tools, possession of stolen property, and felony burglary, with bail set at

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Are our schools safe enough?

■ Administrators, teachers reassessing open campuses, unlocked gates

By MARY SCHLEY and KELLY NIX

IN THE wake of the Parkland, Fla., school shooting that left 17 people dead, administrators at Monterey Peninsula campuses are updating their safety plans, meeting with law enforcement, and reassuring parents and students their facilities are safe.

But, while the National Center for Education Statistics reports that in the 2013/2014 school year, "93 percent of public schools reported that they controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours," most campuses here rely on fencing, along with signs directing visitors to sign in at the front office.

That means most Monterey Peninsula school campuses, public and private, can be easily accessed by strangers, while other facilities, including small claims and traffic divisions of Monterey County Superior Court, are more secure.

'Safety is No. 1'

Shortly after last month's shooting, Carmel Unified School District Superintendent Barb Dill-Varga sent a message to district parents assuring them that "safety is our No. 1 priority."

But she also acknowledged that "most educators across the nation are examining current protocols and wondering if enough has been done" — and that includes Carmel Unified.

The district updates the safety plans for each of its campuses annually and conducts routine drills for earthquakes, fires and hostile intruders, according to Dill-Varga. Given that many shootings are committed by disaffected, distraught or mentally ill people, school officials "have intentionally been working to make sure that our students feel included, feel valued, and know that we will not tolerate bullying and harassment of any kind."

The schools also try to "proactively identify any signs of student emotional or mental distress that in some of these tragic national events have gone unattended and are the early warning signs of violence," she added.

Paul Behan, CUSD public information officer, added that each classroom contains a manual for dealing with emergencies. In the case of gunfire, teachers and kids are advised to "find safe cover, physical barrier, or, using best judgment, run away from the disturbance or noise." The protocol also call for "locking down" classrooms.

"Our schools have already done at least one lockdown or

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PHOTOS/COURTESY MONTEREY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Reynaldo Gomez (right) after being arrested Saturday. The Nissan he'd been driving was filled with stolen property, which deputies laid out on the hood of a patrol car and Gomez' SUV.



Salinas 'Dreamer' will plead guilty to smuggling

By KELLY NIX

THE MAN law enforcement officials say was caught Jan. 29 attempting to smuggle four would-be immigrants across the southern border will plead guilty to a federal misdemeanor charge, according to documents filed this week in a federal court in Arizona.

In January, United States Border Patrol agents arrested Saul Rodea-Castro, 26, and another man for a human smuggling operation near Yuma, Ariz. Rodea-Castro, prosecutors say, drove a Ford F-150 truck to carry four illegal immigrants across the border into the United States in exchange for thousands of dollars.

Aiding and abetting

The Salinas man is a recipient of the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals, an Obama-era program that has permitted children who were brought to the United States illegally by their parents to stay in this country, and even hold jobs, without fear of being deported.

Rodea-Castro — who had worked for an agricultural company but who has been held in detention in Eloy, Ariz., since his arrest — will now plead to a federal charge of aiding and abetting "an alien to elude the examination and inspection of immigration officers of the United States," according to documents filed Tuesday in United States District Court, District

of Arizona.

The misdemeanor is punishable by a maximum fine of \$5,000, six months in prison, or both. But according to his plea deal, Rodea-Castro will avoid a more serious felony crime related to the smuggling effort. The plea stipulates that Rodea-Castro will spend 90 days in prison, and be given credit for time already served.

A Feb. 27 indictment by a Yuma, Ariz., grand jury said Rodea-Castro "knowingly and in reckless disregard" transported the four illegal immigrants in violation of the law.

However, the plea agreement document — which is supposed to contain a statement of guilt by Rodea-Castro — erroneously contains co-defendant Ramiro Ramirez-Betancourt's plea and admission. The document was signed by Rodea-Castro's court-appointed attorney, Ana Castillo. Federal prosecutors did not respond to messages from The Pine

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Feisty crowd packs hearing on rentals

By CHRIS COUNTS

AS THE county continues its slow march toward adopting an ordinance regulating short-term rentals, a Carmel Valley Land Use Advisory Committee hearing on the topic March 20 laid bare the contention that exists between supporters and opponents of the vacation rental industry.

More than 100 people packed the sanctuary at St. Philips Lutheran Church for the hearing, including many from Pacific Grove and Carmel Highlands, two other places where vacation stays have led to conflicts between neighbors.

After county official Melanie Beretti provided a progress report on the ordinance, more than two dozen residents gave their views on the topic. The crowd appeared split between

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Three-day 'Comic-Con for Doris' kicks off March 29

By CHRIS COUNTS

CARMEL VALLEY resident Doris Day turns 96 on April 3, and to mark the occasion, local and faraway fans of the singer and actress will gather for three days of music, film and festivities.

Besides commemorating the birthday of the woman who was called "America's Sweetheart," the event coincides with two landmarks in her remarkable career — the 50th anniversaries of the premiere of "The Doris Day Show," and the release of her final movie, "With Six You Get Eggnoll."

The celebration kicks off March 29 when the Cypress Inn, which she co-owns with Denny LeVett, presents an evening of Doris Day-themed bingo. Actress Jackie Joseph — who co-starred in "The Doris Day Show" and "With Six You Get Eggnoll" — will serve as host.

"All the clues on the bingo cards will have to do with Doris's life or career," singer and event organizer Scott Dreier explained.

The event starts at 8 p.m. The cost is \$20 for 14 games, and all proceeds will be donated to the Doris Day Animal Founda-



Doris Day, photographed in 2017 by People Magazine.

tion, which she founded in 1978 to help rescue animals on the Monterey Peninsula.

The next evening — March 30, at 7:30 p.m. — the party moves over to the Carmel High School Performing Arts Center, where birthday cake will be served, and Dreier and a quartet of jazz musicians will perform Day's music. Clips from "The Doris Day Show" will follow, along with a panel with Joseph and actors Bernie Koppel and Philip Brown, who starred on the show.

Charities benefit

The celebration wraps up March 31 at 7 p.m. at Carmel High with a screening of "With Six You Get Eggnoll." The film will be followed by a panel talk with Joseph and actors John Findlater and Jimmy Bracken, who starred in the movie.

Both nights will include fundraising raffles, and Friday's proceeds will benefit the SPCA for Monterey County, while Saturday's proceeds will be donated to the Animal Friends Rescue Project.

Tickets are \$200 and will get you into Friday's and Saturday's events.

For tickets or more information, visit

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