Opinion: Small Calif. city a rare success story

By Joe Mathews

California's small, rural towns are supposedly desperate and doomed, as state policy favors our coastal mega-regions.

So how do you explain Gonzales?



Joe Mathews

Despite its location in the high-poverty Salinas Valley, the city of just 9,000 has a success story to share: relatively low crime, 96 percent high school graduation rates, new health facilities, sustainable infrastructure, and a string of economic development victories.

Most intriguingly, Gonzales has made its small size an advantage. Building on stable leadership—the city manager, Rene Mendez, is in his 13th year—Gonzales has kept city government streamlined so that it can move faster in planning and project approval—a very valuable trait in slow and bureaucratic California. An example: A large vegetable processing plant for Taylor Farms was proposed for Gonzales in July 2013—and completed in April 2014.

Speed works. In the past three fiscal years, Gonzales's tax base has grown by 17 percent, 19 percent, and 20 percent, respectively, as it has added industrial and commercial

development. Those gains represent more than 1,200 new jobs.

The city is now home to companies oriented toward technology, agriculture and the environment. Among these are HealthySoil, which manufactures products that improve crop production; Ramsay Highlander, which designs and manufactures advanced harvesting equipment; and Constellation Brands, an international producer and marketer of beer, wine and spirits. Soon, Gonzales will be home to a 130,000-square foot Mann Packing facility.

Gonzales's approach is unconventional among California small towns. The typical formula is to beautify the town center and develop a signature entertainment venue that attracts visitors, while chasing major retailers like Costco to produce high levels of sales tax for municipal coffers.

Mendez, who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley and came to Gonzales from Inyo County, knew that Gonzales, small and somewhat isolated, was not a natural fit for tourism and malls. Instead of chasing visitors and big retailers, he wanted the city to build itself to serve its own residents. So the city has enhanced its industrial footprint and took advantage of its proximity to agriculture. Gonzales doesn't have a Costco, but produces the vegetable trays you buy there.

Mendez says that since his small city lacks bureaucracy, he and other officials must build relationships themselves with businesses and other stakeholders. In environment-obsessed Monterey County, Gonzales has learned that it must invest in sustainability. Gonzales built a wind turbine, its tallest structure and most distinguishing landmark, to accommodate Taylor Farms, which does extensive recycling of water and waste and relies on solar power and onsite cogeneration in its Gonzales facility.

Many of Gonzales's partnerships are designed to serve its youthful population: 60 percent of residents are below age 35,

and more than one-third are 18 or younger. In 2013, the city and school district jointly created a youth council to tackle community improvement projects, and shape policy, recently on medical marijuana and underage drinking. Two youth council members have non-voting seats on the City Council.

But the best example of the Gonzales way may involve health care.

Five years ago, the city had just one full-time doctor, who was overwhelmed by patients needing her services. So the city convinced Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System to open a facility in Gonzales. A fundraising campaign, led by a million-dollar donation from Taylor Farms, helped get that clinic built. That might have been enough in some places, but simultaneously, the city was negotiating with non-profit Clinica de Salud to set up a second clinic. Gonzales now has six doctors and four dentists.

Gonzales's record is less impressive on other issues, especially housing. The city is badly overcrowded, with 4.1 persons per household. Mendez notes that Gonzales hasn't managed to build even one single-family home since 2005, though that's not for lack of effort. The city is working on three new developments that could produce more than 6,000 housing units, as well as new schools and a library. But none has been built, as developers and the city struggle with familiar California issues of ownership, financing, and regulation.

In California, small, freewheeling cities have been viewed with suspicion because of scandals like the one in Bell, where the city manager plundered $5.5 million, via inflated salaries. But Mendez, whose $190,000 annual pay is about average for a city manager, says that Gonzales shows that smaller cities can use their freedom for progress if they make smart partnerships, including with each other. "Our types of communities have to do a better job of working together to

pursue jobs and advocate for each other," he says.

Gonzales has more to do. Community development director Thomas Truszkowski took me around the city, talking about infrastructural improvements for industry. Gonzales also could use a hotel, he said—to accommodate the visiting executives and employees of its growing businesses.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Adults without kids cause ripple effects in housing market

By Adina Solomon, Washington Post

Sara Moran's closet in her Colonial house, built in 1920, once served as a nursery for a past homeowner. But Moran and her husband don't need that nursery. They have no plans to extend beyond the confines of their two bedrooms and small yard in Stratford, Conn.

The fertility rate in the United States has fallen to its lowest levels since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began keeping records in 1909. The general fertility rate is the total number of births per 1,000 women age 15 to 44. According to provisional data, the rate last year was 62 births per 1,000 women.

The decrease in the number of people having children affects the real estate market and decisions.

Read the whole story

WSOP.com marks four years of online poker

By Thomas Moore, Las Vegas Sun

One of only two remaining online poker providers in Nevada, WSOP.com is celebrating its fourth anniversary this week.

The company began operating on Sept. 19, 2013, several months after the Nevada Legislature passed Assembly Bill 114 and Gov. Brian Sandoval signed it into law legalizing the business.

At the time, skeptics said that if online poker was limited to a few states – the federal push to legalize has fizzled – the industry would struggle.

Read the whole story

Summer home sales spike in El Dorado County

By Hudson Sangree, Sacramento Bee

More homes were sold across the four-county Sacramento region this summer than in any similar period since the peak of the housing bubble in 2005, CoreLogic reported Wednesday.

In the Sacramento suburbs, El Dorado County's median sale price for new and existing homes in August was $483,000, up 16 percent from the same time last year and the highest it's been in a decade, CoreLogic said. The high median price for new homes there, more than $600,000, helped boost that figure.

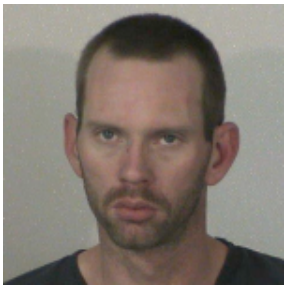
El Dorado County had by far the highest price for new homes in the four-county region this summer.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe man arrested on multiple felony charges

A parolee from South Lake Tahoe who was wanted on a misdemeanor warrant from Stateline was arrested on felony charges this week in Douglas County.

Deputies stopped Ray Brashears, 33,on Sept. 19 at about 9pm while he was driving in Minden.



Ray Brashears

"DCSO K-9 Bak was used and he alerted to methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia from the exterior of the vehicle," the department said in a press release.

Investigators said they found five used hypodermic needles and 0.4 grams of methamphetamine.

During the search of the vehicle they found a wallet with a Medicaid card, military ID, Social Security card and a Nevada driver's license not belonging to Brashears. Deputies located three cell phones, blank checks, equipment and materials which may have been used in counterfeiting documents and identification.

Bashears was arrested on the warrant, along with charges of obtaining/using personal identifying information of another person to harm or impersonate them, possession of a financial forgery laboratory, forgery, and possession of hypodermic needle.

Bail was set at $211,592, though he was place on a parole-probation hold.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Mutt Strut becoming one big dog party

The annual Mutt Strut will begin at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe at noon on Oct. 1 and will end at Tahoe Beach Retreat.

There will be music and games, plus a raffle, and a big lake to play in.

A big change this year is there are no fees. Tahoe Animal Coalition decided to turn the event into a big community dog walk, minus the poker run.

But that doesn’t mean the nonprofit isn’t accepting donations.

ACT is now running the only spay-neuter program in the South Tahoe area, and that requires money to keep it going. A raffle will help raise money for the group.

Expect delays near Y in SLT on Friday

Expect lane closures on Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe on Friday for paving and striping work.

Weather prevented the work on Wednesday and again Thursday, so Highway 50 will be reduced to one lane in each direction from Dunlap Drive to Winnemucca Avenue on Sept. 21 from about 11am-5pm. Work normally ceases at 11am on Fridays.

The work again will be dependent on weather and temperature conditions.

For more information on Caltrans’ highway projects in the basin, go **online**.

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1 fatality in 16-vehicle accident; snow an issue



First snow of the season on Sept. 21 at Sugar Bowl. Photo/Sugar Bowl

Westbound Interstate 80 is closed Thursday afternoon because of a 16-vehicle fatal accident.

Other injuries have been reported.

The freeway is closed at Eagle Lakes. Traffic is being turned around at Kingvale.

Snow has closed Ebbetts (Highway 4), Tioga (Highway 120) and Sonora (Higjway 108) passes.

Residents on Upper Kingsbury Grade woke up to a couple inches of snow on Sept. 21.

Tahoe City has received measurable snow.

It has been snowing on and off on the South Shore; as of 2pm it was starting to stick in Meyers.

Scattered rain and snow showers are also in the forecast for Friday, with sun returning for the weekend. The temperature will be increasing as well.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

· Tahoe Donner PUD has upgraded its energy-saving lighting programs. Qualifying customers may get up to 32 free LED light bulbs. For more info, call 530.587.3896.

· Child Advocates of El Dorado County will receive a $10,000 donation from Cumbre Insurance Services.

· North Tahoe Business Association's fundraiser, Passport to Dining, is set for Nov. 9, 6-9pm at the Tahoe Biltmore. For more info and to buy tickets, go **online**.

· TART is offering free night service between Crystal Bay and Squaw Valley until 10pm and between Tahoe City and Tahoma until 9:30pm. Go **online** for the fall route schedule.

· The Douglas County Planning Commission needs another member. **Applications** are due Oct. 18 at 4pm.

Jack Lake – 1930-2017

Edwin A. "Jack" Lake died Sept. 13, 2017, at home with his two daughters by his side. He was 86.

Named at birth Edwin Aaron Lake, at a very young age he let it be known he wanted to be called Jack.

He was born Dec. 6, 1930, in Chickasha, Okla., to Edwin Aaron Lake and Ruth Llene Lake. He was raised in Ninnekah, Okla., by his mother and step-father Jack Webster Tilton. He and younger

brother, Billy Lee Tilton, grew up on the family dairy farm.

He graduated high school in 1948 in Ninnekah, completing his final requirements for graduation by reciting the lyrics of his favorite Hank Williams song.

On March 4, 1949, he and his beloved high school sweetheart Jeanneane Thornton were married. They then moved to Oklahoma City where he attended Hills Business University and worked for the state Office of Farmer's Home Administration. Their three children were born in Oklahoma City.

Jack spent his early career in professional photography. He and Jeanneane owned and operated a camera store and studio in Duncan, Okla. He later served with U.S. Army Signal Corp as a civilian photographer based at White Sands Missile range in New Mexico. While based there, he spent three years in the Arctic at Fort Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, where both the U.S. and Canadian governments were supporting the International Geophysical Solar Research Program.

The family moved to Merced in 1964. There, they owned and operated a retail store for several years. In 1971, they moved to South Lake Tahoe, where he began his illustrious real estate career. They lived and worked at the original Lakeland Village. He established Lake Realty and became the "quintessential" agent for Lakeland Village property owners for the next 45 years.

In March 1976, he and Jeanneane moved to the Carson Valley, which became their much loved home until the time of their deaths.

His life's passions were photography, flying, horses, camping, and fishing and ever-expanding collection of country music. But, most of all, was his love of family.

Jack was preceded in death by his parents, his beloved wife of 63 years, Jeanneane and his son, Carl Dean.

He is survived by his brother, Bill (Edna) Tilton of Alabama; daughters Linda Sue (Tim) Noble of Gilroy and Carol Jean “CJ” Lake-Johnson of Gardnerville; granddaughters Jennifer (Peter) Beninger of Gilroy; Katy (Mark) Gardner of Dayton, and Kimberly (Landon) Smallwood of Gardnerville; grandsons Jason (Andrea) Lake of Minden and Ryan Noble of Gilroy; great-grandchildren Tyler Dean Lake, Lucas James Noble, Everett Ryan Noble, Isabella Hope Beninger, Kendra Jewell Gardner, Landon Kayne Smallwood, Avalon Grace Beninger, twins Travis Robert Gardner and Trevor Stevon Gardner, and Daymian Jack Smallwood; a cousin in Texas and numerous nieces and nephews in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Georgia, and Alabama.

He was buried at the Genoa Cemetery. The family is planning a celebration of life at a later date.