

# Calistoga Tribune

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BRANNAN CENTER NEARING  
FINAL CONSTRUCTION PHASE

See how the performing arts  
venue will look upon completion

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## Local Q fire investigation completed

December restaurant blaze likely caused by spontaneous combustion of oily rags

By Danielle Wilde

Napa Valley News Group

The overnight Dec. 19 structure fire that destroyed the Local Q 707 restaurant was ruled accidental and was most likely caused by the spontaneous combustion of oily cloth rags, the Calistoga Fire Department's investigation has concluded.

According to the investigation report, which was finalized earlier this month, other potential fire causes were assessed and ruled out by various methods including on-site inspections, video footage review, geolocation data and lab testing.

Lab analysis confirmed oils present on remnants of burnt dish rags found at the fire's source of ignition.

"We found evidence of rags that were sent off to a laboratory to confirm or deny whether or not there were organic oils in it that could cause self-heating and auto combustion,"

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## Council contemplates use of Measure D funds for housing expenses

By Danielle Wilde

Napa Valley News Group

The City Council discussed during its Tuesday meeting how to spend its Measure D funds, which are earmarked for affordable and middle-income housing-related expenses.

The city currently has \$2.4 million in the special tax funds and, Planning Director Greg Desmond said, barring any recessions or pandemics, he expects the account will continue to accrue roughly \$1 million per year.

Council members directed staff to explore options that include using the fund to hire a new employee at Planning and Building, developing middle income housing at the Earl and Eddy site, reestablishing a program that paid for repairs within the city's mobile home parks, and subsidizing water bills.

"I think what we're finding, because all the council members made some very good suggestions, (is) that we can't do it all with the money we have, and it's going to be very difficult to prioritize," said Councilmember Kevin Eisenberg.

Ballot Measure D was approved by a two-thirds majority of Calistoga voters in the November 2018 general election and increased the

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## Meet three Latino Leadership Napa Valley professionals

By Elsa Cavazos

Napa Valley News Group

For the first time, thanks to a collaboration between Latino Leaders Roundtable and the Napa County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, three Latino Napa County natives, Marcela Rodriguez, Rigo Nava and Liliana Estrada, are Leadership Napa Valley scholarship recipients.

Leadership Napa Valley began in 1987 as a program supported by the Napa Chamber of Commerce. The program selects par-

ticipants annually from a list of applicants who undertake a nine-month journey together, learning leadership skills and teamwork as they explore different aspects of Napa County.

Applications are \$200 and tuition is \$1,950, though employers can sponsor class members. Rodriguez, Nava and Estrada are able to participate free of charge through this new scholarship program.

The purpose of Leadership Napa Valley is to train and inspire new leadership, and employers often suggest the program

for individuals in whom they see great potential, which was the case for this trio. Although Leadership Napa Valley has had Latino participants before, this is the first time they have come in through the Latino Leaders Roundtable.

All three recipients come from immigrant families from Mexico and are first-generation college graduates. And the three have been motivated by their families to pursue bigger opportunities. For Rodri-

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### AT THE OLD BALL GAME



PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

St. Helena Little League kicked off its 64th season last Saturday at Crane Park. Of the league's 232 players, 39 are Calistoga residents. Calistoga's Little League was able to field four teams of its own this year and will return to Tedeschi Field for its opening day this Saturday. See Page 6

## Holocaust survivor Nick Hope dies at age 100

By Danielle Wilde

Napa Valley News Group

Holocaust survivor and longtime Calistogan Nick Hope died on March 10 at Adventist Health St. Helena hospital at age 100, following complications from pneumonia.



Nick Hope

forgiveness, and, as his anglicized name suggests, hope.

"He was full of hope, resilient, patient and firm as a rock," said his youngest son, George Hope. "He knew what suffering was all about and was loving and kind to everyone he met."

Hope was born Nikolai Xoprenko on Aug. 14, 1924 in the coal mining village of Petrovka, Ukraine. As a child, he lived through the Holodomor famine, which killed two of his brothers. After he left home at age 17 in search of work, he was arrested by Adolf Hitler's SS soldiers and taken as a forced laborer to Wolfratshausen, Germany. He worked there for nearly a year before being sent to Dachau concentration camp in February 1943.

Three months after Hope arrived at Dachau, he raised his hand to volun-

teer for a transfer to the Munich-Allach Dachau subcamp to work at a BMW armament factory, a split-second decision that he later said saved his life. At the subcamp, he suffered torture, abuse and starvation as he witnessed friends and fellow prisoners perish around him.

In April 1945, as American forces closed in on the concentration camp, Hope and other prisoners were evacuated and sent walking for days on what he later found out was a "death march." The group was intercepted and liberated by the U.S. Army's 42nd Rainbow Division.

Life after liberation wasn't easy. Weighing just 80 pounds and suffering

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# LEADERSHIP

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guez, it is her grandpa who always encourages her to keep going.

Rodriguez, a Calistoga resident, was born and raised in town. She is the education program manager at



Marcela Rodriguez

UpValley Family Centers. She started with the nonprofit organization six years ago as a youth diversion coordinator, helping offer alternatives to formal process-

ing in the juvenile justice system. She was promoted three years ago.

"I love being able to grow up and give back to the communities that I was born and raised in and who essentially kind of helped shape who I am today," Rodriguez said.

She studied psychology and criminal justice and originally wanted to become a lawyer. During one of her classes at Santa Rosa Junior College, she learned that UpValley Family Centers had a diversion program.

Rodriguez had known about the nonprofit since she was in kindergarten, when the family center was starting up a classroom. In her cur-

rent education role, she oversees its youth and school programs such as bilingual playgroups in Calistoga and St. Helena and youth mentoring programs, among other school-based services.

Rodriguez said growing up, she often found herself in positions of leadership in Girl Scouts and other student activities. She believes being the eldest of three sisters might be the reason. Being a leader "was something that was just natural," she said.

"I think for me, it's being able to speak up for those that maybe feel like they aren't being heard or don't have a voice or are afraid to use their voice," she said. "I'm proud of where I came from, of who I am, of my culture, of my family. But I do think that there definitely needs to be more people, more representation."

Rodriguez, Nava and Estrada all agreed that the best lesson from the Leadership Napa Valley experience is understanding how connected Napa is and learning about the county. For example, Nava said, at one meeting, they created a mock-up city council meeting.

Nava's story is similar to Rodriguez's. Born and raised in Napa, he studied at Napa Valley College. After earning associate degrees in anthropology and behavioral sciences, he attended UC Davis,



Rigo Nava

where he majored in history and minored in Spanish.

Upon returning to Napa, he worked in the wine industry, which led him to realize he was good at sales, e-commerce and marketing. Nava now has his own marketing company and is also the marketing director for the Napa County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Returning to NVC to take marketing classes, he said a professor became his mentor and introduced him to the chamber, which led to this marketing opportunity.

"I would ask her; am I wrong in thinking this or that?" Nava said. "Because I really had no reference point of what's right, what's wrong, what's good, what's bad. That was really helpful to learn that and eventually branch out."

"There's no blueprint or like mentorship on how to navigate corporate America," he said.

Estrada is the lead bilingual advocate for NEWS, Napa's domestic violence and sexual abuse shelter. Born in St. Helena and raised in Calistoga, Estrada went to school in St. Helena and now lives in Napa. After majoring in psychol-

ogy and Chicano studies at UC Davis, she worked as a research assistant focusing on immigrant and farmworker communities.

Estrada described her current role as her first big job after college. Her executive director, who had also taken part in Leadership Napa Valley, told her about the program and encouraged her to apply.

Estrada and Nava agreed that being able to create community and network within the leadership program has been helpful.

"The ability to meet other leaders in the community has made it so that I have not only felt confidence in myself, but confidence to be able to pursue what I need to do in order to advocate for vulnerable populations," Estrada said. "I'm constantly learning what it means to be a leader and what that encompasses and how you can get to that point."

They each have a project to complete in the program. Rodriguez is working with the Napa Valley Vine



Liliana Estrada

Trail, Nava is working with nonprofit Molly's Angels and Estrada with the Community Emergency Response Team in Napa.

Estrada emphasized how

important it is to have Latinos in programs like these, especially considering the current political climate.

"I think I've just honed my leadership skills and also my confidence," she said. "I came into Leadership Napa Valley feeling like an imposter, like I didn't deserve to be there."

"I feel as a minority, and even as a woman... we don't see ourselves represented that often. I've always felt I had to prove that I deserve to be at university or in a position of leadership. But what I've realized is to step into that space, to take ownership of it, is empowering. And it's not only empowering for yourself, but to other people that look like you," Estrada said.

Molly Rattigan, president of the board of directors for Leadership Napa Valley, said the idea behind partnering with Latino Leaders Round Table, is to continue to provide scholarships "to ensure our class represents the makeup and diversity of our community and that financing isn't a barrier to somebody being able to participate."

"We feel diversity brings new perspectives, brings different perspectives. It brings different learning experiences, different histories, different everything, and difference is good," Rattigan said.



DANIELLE WILDE FILE PHOTO

Nick Hope, a Holocaust survivor and longtime Calistogan, died on March 10 at age 100. The centenarian attributed his longevity to his active lifestyle and the practice of forgiveness.

# HOPE

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from several injuries and ailments, Hope spent the next four years in and out of hospitals, recovering from the years of abuse and malnutrition. It was at the hospital where he met his wife, Nadia, also a Holocaust survivor.

"After the Holocaust, I wondered every day how I got through that," Hope told the Tribune last September. "Before I found the Lord, I thought because of my experiences, I would never be normal. I couldn't forget what I had been through."

Hope said after he found God, he learned that forgetting was not the answer. Forgiveness was.

In Germany, he and Nadia had two children, Olga and Victor, before the couple immigrated with Victor to the U.S. in 1961. They settled in Calistoga and had two more children, Jenny and George.

Hope worked as a landscaper, and later as a carpenter, con-

structing many homes and local landmarks, including the Sharpsteen Museum. He also helped renovate popular resorts, such as Dr. Wilkinson's Backyard Resort and Mineral Springs and Golden Haven Spa.

He lived with his two sons at the Myrtle Street home he built for his family in the 1960s, and maintained an active lifestyle, regularly working out and walking with family. The centenarian credited his longevity with a healthy diet and exercise.

Hope was committed to his physical health and adhered to a strict exercise routine, which he did with the help of his physical therapist and his children. His workouts were built on the Arnold Schwarzenegger-backed fitness app, The Pump, and his daily regimen was fine-tuned by Schwarzenegger himself.

"He wasn't 100 to us," George said. "He was always punctual and thorough and had an amazing work ethic, and it showed in his physical being. He made every effort to be as healthy as possible so he could continue his legacy,

sharing his love of God to everyone he came in contact with."

The Holocaust survivor returned to the Dachau memorial site many times with family to commemorate the camp's liberation and speak about his experiences. Most recently, he traveled there last May for the 79th anniversary; he had intended to travel there again for the 80th anniversary. Some of Hope's family still plans to travel to Germany next month to attend the anniversary in his honor.

Hope was preceded in death by his daughter, Olga Xoprenko, and his wife, Nadia Hope. He is survived by his children Victor Hope, Jenny Hope McLaren and George Hope, and by his grandchildren Janessa Vella, Jacob Shafer and Joseph Shafer.

A memorial service will be held on Sunday, March 30, at 11 a.m. at St. Helena Seventh-day Adventist Church, at 1777 Main St., St. Helena.

His family is requesting donations be made at: <https://tinyurl.com/2f6jekuj/>

# FIRE

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said Calistoga Fire Chief and city spokesperson Jed Matcham. "They did come back and did contain the natural types of oils that they can do that. They can create self-heat, (which can cause) a thermal runaway."

Spontaneous combustion, he explained, happens when fire ignites without and external heat source, in this case, according to the report, fatty oils. These types of fires are caused when oils oxidize and trigger a chemical reaction that generates enough heat to reach an ignition temperature.

"There were no other energy sources in the area that we were able to identify," Matcham said. "All your normal energy sources that start fires, whether it's a discarded cigarette or an electrical issue, friction from machinery, anything like that, we ruled out all of those possibilities."

The investigation results refute rumors that had circulated on social media following the fire, alleging it had been ignited by an unhomed individual who had

made a heating fire.

"As far as the reports of possible homeless involvement," Matcham said, "the fire started inside of the building and there was no indication that anybody had been inside that building at the time of ignition."

According to the report, it was a homeless individual who first detected the fire and attempted to stop traffic to report the incident. The Calistoga Police interviewed the man and ruled him out as a suspect.

The building was vacant at the time of the fire and no injuries were reported. The estimated damages, which included the building and its contents, according to the report, were roughly \$1.4 million.

Since the December fire, what remained of the two-story Riverlea Square structure, owned by Matt Howell, has been demolished.

Local Q 707 had been a popular barbecue café in town since it opened at the location in early 2020. Its proprietors, Rob and Laura Sereni, have also operated the Lincoln Avenue Brewery since December 2023. They did not respond to a request for comment.



BRIAN WEBB FILE PHOTO

The cause of the Dec. 19 structure fire that gutted the Local Q 707 restaurant on Foothill Blvd. was likely the result of oily rags that spontaneously combusted during the night, an investigation concluded.