

# Local news

## State names three local schools as 'distinguished' in education

BY LAURA LIERA  
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Principal Libby Wyatt had excitement in her voice as she heard that Liberty High School had been named one of the three California Distinguished Schools in Kern County Thursday afternoon.

"They hadn't notified me at all so I called the district and they said it was true, so I am ecstatic," Wyatt said after The Californian broke the news to her. This is Liberty's first year being recognized by the state.

The distinguished schools program honors some of the state's most exemplary and inspiring public schools, ones that demonstrate significant gains in academic achievement, according to the California Department of Education.

Along with Liberty High, Norris Middle School and Fruitvale Junior High were also recognized.

All schools submitted an application late last year and were notified through phone calls or emails Thursday. A total of 218 public middle schools and high schools were recognized in the state.

Wyatt said Liberty's staff and students deserved the kudos after all the hard work they have done.

"Teachers and students go that extra mile that really makes me proud," Wyatt said. "The students go to tutoring classes to really understand questions they might not understand and it's amazing to see."

As part of the application process, schools had to provide two signature practices that they believe puts them ahead of every other school in the state. Wyatt chose to identify the collaboration between teachers and the culture-against-failure atmosphere they have created on campus.

"There are a lot of students that don't have support outside of school and it's important that when they step onto campus, they have the support of every single teacher that will strive to do everything possible for them not to fail," she said.

Following similar academic footsteps, Principal Leslie Roberts of Fruitvale Junior High has created an academic culture at school that has allowed her students to perform at their highest potential.

"We organize ourselves academically and collaborate with one another to create a learning community," Roberts said. "Through our culture of learning, students can join clubs, learn Spanish, join the drama class and many other electives that will

prepare them for high school and their future."

This is Fruitvale Junior High's fifth award and the 18th for the Fruitvale School District.

Fruitvale district Superintendent Mary Westendorf is glad the junior high staff and students are getting recognized again.

"To know that the staff's focus is on each student and their education is just rewarding," she said. "It's a validation that we are doing and meeting student needs that will allow them to have an exemplary quality of education."

Validation is something that Norris Middle School District Superintendent Steve Shelton is honored to have received.

"The staff and students work hard every day and it's great to be distinguished and to have that recognition," Shelton said.

This was the first time the school had applied.

"The application has changed and it changed for the better in my opinion," Shelton said. "Now they have a team of educators that come down and spend the day observing the school, validating what we submitted in the application and they saw the type of school we are first-hand."

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## Local man crushed by steel in Simi Valley industrial accident

BY CINDY VON QUEDNOW  
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A 58-year-old Bakersfield man died when a 5,000-pound piece of steel slipped off a crane as it was being unloaded Wednesday in Simi Valley.

He was identified Thursday as Clinton Morgan of Bakersfield. He could not get out of the way before the steel fell on him, according to the Ventura County Fire Department.

Another man got out of the way and suffered minor injuries, officials said.

The incident occurred about 4 p.m. Wednesday at Pre-Con Products, 240 W. Los Angeles Ave., authorities said. The company makes, supplies and installs precast concrete and other products for public works construction.

Authorities said Morgan was a driver for Valley Wide Distributors, a trucking company based in Bakersfield.

An autopsy to determine the cause of death is scheduled for Saturday.

In addition to Ventura County fire personnel, Simi Valley police investigated at the scene, as did representatives from the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, authorities said.

Erika Monterroza, a spokeswoman for Cal/OSHA, said a chain holding the steel broke and that the steel crushed Morgan. Cal/OSHA has no record of any previous investigations into Valley Wide or Pre-Con, she said.

Monterroza said the state might need up to six months to determine whether there were any violations involved in the work-related death.

## Worth noting | Community

### Tax filing, carrot cook-off and more

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

The United Way of Kern County offices will be transformed into a tax return oasis for residents who have waited until the last moment to file, offering free tax preparation and filing to individuals and families making less than \$50,000.

Kern Volunteer Income Tax Assistance is reaching out to low- and moderate-income wage earners this tax season with help submitting their taxes from 3 to 8 p.m. Monday at 5405 Stockdale Highway, Suite 200.

**Haggin Oaks Farmers Market is celebrating its one-year anniversary** and will host what's expected to become an annual Carrot Festival and Carrot Cook-off.

From 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, community members are invited to attend

the festival as well as submit a carrot dish in one or all of the following categories: hot dish, cold dish, vegan and dessert.

All entries should be submitted to the Kaiser Permanente tent by 10 a.m. the day of the event in order to be judged.

**Beale Memorial Library is celebrating its 25th anniversary** on Truxtun Avenue and is having a half-day event that aims to showcase community collaboration and inspire learning.

On April 20, the library will showcase 25 events in different zones at the library from 1 to 6 p.m. The events range from learning how to make jewelry to learning how to use the eLibrary.

The event is free. For more information, call 868-0745.