

HEALTH CENTER LAYOFFS » Site in Petaluma cuts 32 workers after millions in funds related to COVID run out. **A3**



49ERS BOLSTER DEFENSIVE LINE » SF agrees to deal with pass rusher Leonard Floyd, who had 10 sacks last season. **B5**

The Press Democrat

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TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024 • SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA • PRESSDEMOCRAT.COM

‘Deeply troubling allegations’

SANTA ROSA » Former employee accuses ex-CEO of Redwood Empire Food Bank of sexual harassment

By **SARA EDWARDS**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Redwood Empire Food Bank is being sued by a former senior executive who says ex-CEO David Goodman sexually harassed her during the five years she worked for him at the Santa Rosa nonprofit — and that he

wrongfully fired her as a result. According to the 33-page civil complaint filed Feb. 23 in Sonoma County Superior Court, the employee was the victim of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, failure to act, retaliation and wrongful termination. It also accuses others within the organization of failing to

prevent the “discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, from occurring.”

The plaintiff, Lisa Cannon, was hired as director of development in November 2018. In January 2019, the food bank’s director of finance and human resources, Pamela Handelman, warned Cannon that Goodman became “easily enamored of people and it usually doesn’t last very long, and when he’s done, they will have a target on their

back,” according to Cannon’s lawsuit.

Goodman would share with Cannon intimate details about his marriage, spend hours in her office for non-work-related purposes and make lewd comments to her, the complaint also states. “In or around 2021,” according to the lawsuit, Goodman told Cannon he had obtained a concealed-carry weapon permit and that Cannon could not tell anyone.

“CEO Goodman brought the gun to work for about six months and showed it to Plaintiff about two times before November 2023,” the complaint alleges. “Goodman at some point told Plaintiff that he was looking for a new holster because it was chafing him ‘down there.’”

In June 2021, Handelman said that Goodman being around Cannon so much was “hurting

TURN TO CEO » PAGE A2

HOMELESSNESS » Reduction in the number of unhoused people within Sonoma County leads to less money for service providers battling crisis

‘Penalized’ for success



JOHN BURGESS / THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

From left, COTS outreach worker Randy Clay, People’s Village manager Stacie Questoni and resident Jeff O’Dell count the number of tents in a homeless encampment next to the river and train tracks in Petaluma during the 2023 Sonoma County Point in Time count of homeless people.

By **JEREMY HAY**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The apparent reduction in the number of people who are homeless in Sonoma County has crimped funding for homelessness services, meaning fewer dollars are available for nonprofit providers trying to tackle what remains a major crisis.

This year, for example, in its current round of funding, the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition is distributing just

over \$5.8 million in local and state dollars, compared to \$6.7 million last year.

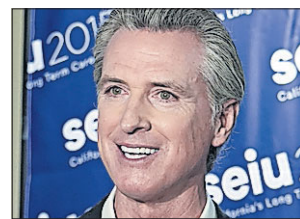
That’s because the county’s annual “Point in Time” count of homelessness in January 2023 reported a 22% drop from the year before in the number of people who are homeless in Sonoma County (from 2,893 to 2,296). That lowered the amount of state funding that flows into the county at the very moment continued success becomes arguably a tougher task.

INSIDE

Social Advocates for Youth’s collapse will reshape homelessness funding process. / **A8**

“Once you start to lower your (Point In Time) count, the remaining people who are experiencing chronic homelessness are generally more difficult to house for a number of reasons, and that difficulty means it costs more,” said Chris Cabral, CEO of COTS, a Petaluma-based homelessness services provider that has applied for \$1.45 million in funding from the coalition.

TURN TO SUCCESS » PAGE A8



Gavin Newsom

MINIMUM WAGE

Secrecy shrouds pay law exception

Pact keeps public from knowing why bakeries exempt from increase

By **ADAM BEAM**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO — As California prepares to enforce a new \$20-per-hour minimum wage for fast food workers next month, an unusual exemption for eateries that bake their own bread has come under scrutiny due to allegations it was initially intended to benefit a wealthy donor to Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom’s campaign.

But details have been hard to come by because of a tactic rarely associated with public policymaking: a signed confidentiality agreement that prevents some private groups from talking about their negotiations.

Two sources familiar with the negotiations confirmed to The Associated Press the agreement signed last summer covered some of the private parties involved, including labor unions representing restaurant workers and the industry group for restaurants. The agreement did not include Newsom or any other public officials. They said the agreement — first reported by KCRA — was not meant to shield the public from details

TURN TO SECRECY » PAGE A2

NORTH BAY

Mexico’s election excites local expats

Country poised to elect first female president as voting gets easier for those abroad

By **AGUSTIN E. PRADILLO**
FOR LA PRENSA SONOMA

Sonoma resident Tony Garcia is set to vote in the upcoming presidential elections.

But for Garcia, that will be in June, when Mexicans are set to elect a new president. Garcia, who retains his Mexican citizenship, will vote in Mexico’s upcoming elections from Sonoma County, online.

Garcia is so pumped about Mexico’s elections, which this year includes two women vying for the presidency, that he has joined a small but fervent group of Sonoma County residents

with Mexican nationality who are spearheading a movement to promote voting via “Voto en el exterior,” or vote from abroad.

In the North Bay, that means urging Mexicans who live in Sonoma or Napa counties and who are eligible to vote to do so via the internet — an option available this year for the first time —

TURN TO EXPATS » PAGE A7



FERNANDO LLANO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Xochitl Galvez, at left, and Claudia Sheinbaum are the leading candidates in Mexico’s presidential race.

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POST-ELECTION BUDGET: Biden is planning tax breaks for families, cheaper health care should he be elected to second term. / **A10**

SANTA ROSA
High **64**, Low **38**
THE WEATHER, **B10**

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GOOD MORNING, SONOMA COUNTY

TODAY'S WEATHER IN SANTA ROSA

64 degrees, cloudy with a couple of showers early this morning. For more local weather, turn to **Page B10**.

NUMBER OF THE DAY

32 Number of employees that Petaluma Health Center has let go after running out of pandemic-era funds. To read this story, turn to **Page A3**.

FROM THE COMICS



'PEANUTS'

From Santa Rosa's own Charles M. Schulz. For more "Peanuts," visit peanuts.com. To read more of today's comics, turn to **Page B8** or visit pressdemocrat.com/comics

WHAT YOU'RE READING

Here are the three most-read local stories on pressdemocrat.com.

- Sonoma County resident scammed out of \$20,000 urges others to be aware
- Plane parachute saves Santa Rosa family in Mendocino County crash
- Redwood Empire Food Bank CEO placed on leave amid lawsuit filed by former employee

QUOTABLE TODAY

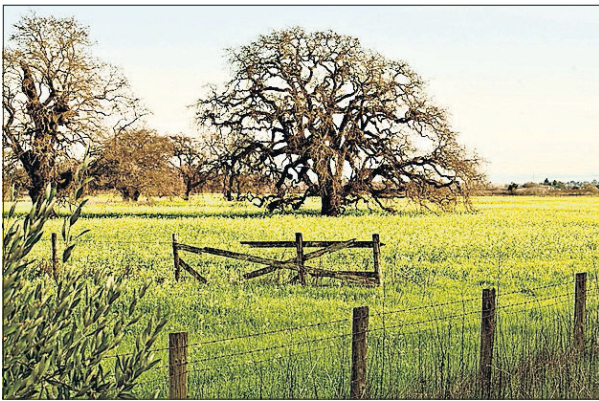
What community members are saying in today's newspaper.

"People are outraged about the way the county and the state have proceeded with this specific plan."

ALICE HOROWITZ, a representative of the citizen's action group Eldridge for All, as more than 250 protested the expanded proposal to redevelop the Sonoma Development Center. Read more on **Page A3**.

SONOMA COUNTY SIGHTS

Want your image in the paper? Submit a photo describing who, what, where, when, author of the photo and where they live. Low-resolution or missing caption information will not be selected for print. Email images in a JPEG format to pdights@gmail.com.



RAYMOND DARWIN / TEMELAC

A field of mustard in full bloom.

SONOMA COUNTY REFLECTIONS

A daily slice of life written by our staff and our readers.

Where to satisfy crispy croissant craving

I'm obsessed with pastries. Cinnamon rolls, sticky buns, danish, pain aux raisins, pain au chocolat, etc. I haven't met a baked good I didn't like. My favorite by far is the simple croissant. I've spent more time than I'd like to admit seeking out bakeries and burning gas in search of the absolute best one. I've never been to France, but I do know what I like: A beautifully golden pastry puffed high with flaky, buttery layers of crisp deliciousness. A good croissant shouldn't be easy to eat neatly, it should leave a big mess. Thankfully, there is no lack of good croissants at bakeries around Sonoma County. My current favorite is from Sarmentine. I was in love from the first bite. It's pure bliss.

—Yovanna Bieberich, *The Press Democrat*

TODAY IN HISTORY

1912: The Girl Scouts of the USA had its beginnings as Juliette Gordon Low of Savannah, Georgia, founded the first American troop of the Girl Guides.

1987: The musical play "Les Miserables" opened on Broadway.

1994: The Church of England ordained its first women priests.

2003: Elizabeth Smart, the 15-year-old girl who vanished from her bedroom nine months earlier, was found alive in a Salt Lake City suburb with two drifters, Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee. (Mitchell is serving a life sentence; Barzee was released from prison in September 2018.)

FOR THE RECORD

If you find an error on our news pages, please let us know; call 707-526-8585 or email pdnews@pressdemocrat.com.

CEO

CONTINUED FROM A1

the organization," the complaint states, and that despite Handelman discussing Goodman's behavior with him, he was unwilling to change.

The complaint also states that when Cannon told Goodman she would not be spending unusual amounts of time with him, Goodman told her to write a daily report about what she was working on — or hold daily meetings with him to keep him updated on her work.

Cannon's lawsuit states that on Jan. 12 of this year, Goodman asked her to meet him in his office. He told her their relationship was "harmful to the organization" and that he had no other option but to fire her.

"I can say you resigned if that is better for you and your future," Goodman said to Cannon, according to the complaint.

"I did not resign so please don't say that," she responded. The complaint states Goodman asked what it would take to keep the plaintiff quiet about her termination.

Reached by phone Monday evening, Goodman said he is "not in a position to comment" on the litigation.

In a statement emailed Monday morning to people close to Redwood Empire Food Bank, Board of Directors chair David Berry said the food bank became aware of "some deeply

"We are tackling this situation head on and committed to keeping you informed when we are able, given the legal process. The board will remain focused on ensuring the Redwood Empire Food Bank continues to provide critically important hunger relief to those in need."

DAVID BERRY, Redwood Empire Food Bank's board of directors chair

troubling allegations of inappropriate behavior involving Mr. Goodman which has resulted in a lawsuit." Redwood Empire's director of programs, Allison Goodwin, will serve as the organization's interim president and CEO.

The email, obtained by The Press Democrat from multiple sources, also said Goodman resigned from the food bank last week before the board became aware of the lawsuit. Once the board received a copy of the filing, Goodman was placed on administrative leave and subsequently "released" rather than be allowed to resign.

"We are tackling this situation head on and committed to keeping you informed when we are able, given the legal process," Berry said in his email. "The board will remain focused on ensuring the Redwood Empire Food Bank continues to provide critically important hunger relief to those in need."

Cannon's attorney, Candice

Clipner, disputed that timeline. She emailed The Press Democrat that the food bank's board was aware of Cannon's lawsuit prior to last week.

Cannon's complaint says she experienced pain and suffering, damage to her reputation and emotional distress as a result of Goodman's actions. She is seeking unspecified damages.

In an apparent move to bolster Cannon's case, her complaint details a separate allegation involving Goodman.

In a 2020 phone call with board members from the California Association of Food Banks, one member of that group said she was not comfortable around Goodman and asked that he be removed from the board, the complaint states.

After forming a special committee to investigate the claim, Goodman was removed from that board in spring 2021, according to the lawsuit.

You can reach Staff Writer Sara Edwards at 707-521-5487 or sara.edwards@pressdemocrat.com.



David Goodman

SECRECY

CONTINUED FROM A1

that could embarrass public officials. Instead, it enabled two sides who distrust each other to come together and work out a compromise.

The sources spoke only on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the negotiations.

Such agreements are common in the context of employment agreements, settlements of lawsuits, and deals involving trade secrets or intellectual property. But they're less common in the legislative process, said David Loy, legal director of the First Amendment Coalition, a group that advocates for transparency in government.

"I think the public does have a right to know how the sausage is being made, so to speak. And if the deal is essentially cut between private parties and more or less rubber-stamped in the Legislature, it's troubling that the public doesn't get to know what deals are made," Loy said. "On the other hand ... a private organization is not obligated to produce records or comment to the media that doesn't want to. So, I would say it's a complicated issue."

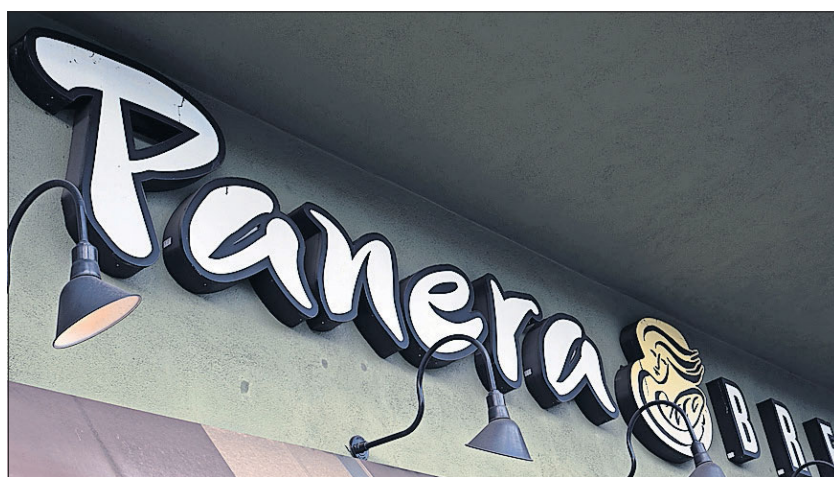
Bob Hertzberg, a former Assembly speaker and state Senate majority leader, called concerns about the confidentiality agreement "much ado about nothing." He noted that all legislation must be vetted in public by the Legislature. This agreement, he said, was likely just a mechanism "to start a discussion."

"What ends up happening in these situations is ... you end up having people in the same room who hate each other, don't trust each other," Hertzberg said. "The bottom line is you need to build trust. Everything is about trust to get people even to get into the room."

The legislation establishing a \$20-per-hour minimum wage for restaurant workers included an oddly specific exemption for eateries with on-site bakeries that sell bread. The exemption was also in a similar bill that passed in 2022, predating the confidentiality agreement.

Bloomberg News cited unidentified sources last month in reporting that Newsom had pushed for the bakery exemption to benefit Greg Flynn, a campaign donor whose company owns 24 Panera Bread restaurants. Newsom has called that allegation "absurd." His administration's legal team then analyzed the law and said Panera Bread was likely not exempt.

Flynn also denied the allegations and said that starting in April he would pay all hourly workers at his



RICHARD VOGEL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

The state's new minimum wage law for fast food workers includes an exemption for eateries, such as Panera Bread, that bake their own bread.

Panera Bread restaurants \$20 per hour or more.

Still, the mystery remains over who pushed for the bakery exemption and why it was included in the law. Even Democratic Assembly member Chris Holden, the author of the law, said he didn't know how it got in there.

That's in part because the origins of the law reflect the reality of public policymaking in the United States. While all legislation must be vetted in public hearings and voted on by elected officials, in many cases bills start with private parties — including companies, trade groups, and advocacy organizations — seeking to either protect their interests or resolve problems.

Lawmakers often act as referees on contested pieces of legislation. In the most intense conflicts, they will sometimes publicly urge both sides to talk with each other directly to resolve the thorniest issues.

That's what happened in California last summer when labor unions and the fast food industry were locked in an escalating conflict over workers' rights and companies' legal liabilities. That conflict appeared headed toward the ballot box in the form of a referendum asking voters to decide. But that path would have cost both sides millions to pay for campaigns.

Democratic state Sen. Tom Ueberberg — chair of the powerful Judiciary Committee — implored both sides to "get to the table, stop posturing and negotiate a global settlement."

Those groups, which included the Services Employees International Union and the California Restaurant Association, worked through the summer to reach an agreement that would withdraw the referendum from the ballot. That agreement turned into legislation which

eventually became a law requiring a \$20 minimum wage for fast food workers beginning April 1.

While management and labor often negotiate in the workplace, they rarely work together at the state Legislature. At the time, labor unions were actively trying to organize workers at fast food restaurants. And the industry was fighting to avoid an expansion of their legal liability that they said would have made it much harder to do business in the state.

The minimum wage law did get public hearings in the Legislature. It was also debated on the floor of the state Assembly and Senate, where lawmakers made no changes, voted on it and sent it to Newsom, who signed it into law.

Republicans — whose numbers in the Legislature have dwindled to the point that they have almost no power to influence legislation — have long complained that Democrats negotiate major bills in private, only to then rush them through the required hearings with no changes.

Republican Assembly member Vince Fong said he will introduce a bill this year that would ban non-disclosure agreements with public officials as part of negotiating legislation. It's unclear if Fong's proposal would have applied in this situation, as the confidentiality agreement did not include public officials.

"Transparency in government is the foundation of our democracy. It builds trust and confidence in the public process," Fong said. "The fact that there are organizations that are using NDAs to prevent the public from knowing what's going on — that's wrong."

Newsom spokesperson Alex Stack said Fong's proposal would not change anything for their office because "the Governor's office doesn't sign NDAs, for legislation or anything else."

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