

Solano is revitalizing its tourism industry for 2021



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a message from our chair

Two-year tenure taught me true meaning of leadership



ife presents opportunities throughout our journeys that should not be missed.

Two years ago, I became Chair of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, covered with myriad ideas, extreme hope and boundless energy to move the Chamber forward. Although I was nervous, I took solace knowing that I was taking the helm of an incredible, dedicated and robust board and Chamber.

During my first six months, our President and CEO, Debi Tavey, took a leave of absence for health reasons. She returned one week before the country shut down for Covid-19, which is when all our lives changed.

Economically, small businesses were hurt the most. They felt lost, confused and in need of support. Emotionally, we suffered our own losses, spent countless hours in tears and experienced the greatest change in how we function daily. It has been an impact forever etched within our minds and souls.

At the Chamber, we understood the need to support our community and fought the battle to keep our businesses afloat. Together with Tavey, the Board of Directors and our amazing Ambassadors, we met via Zoom, attended community meetings and discussed all possible ways to upkeep our oath to members and businesses alike. We never stopped because it was the right thing to do.

As I sit and write my final article for the Voice as Chair of the Chamber, three words come to mind: Perseverance. Commitment. Loyalty.

I was presented with an opportunity two years ago to fully embrace these words, understand with depth their meaning and truly live out their purpose. Although various challenges and obstacles stared at me straight in

the eye, I was able to overcome these situations because I had a team of incredible leaders. They were committed to our success, were loyal to the Chamber, and believed in the act of perseverance to move forward. I am beyond fortunate.

We became a hub for businesses, continued our advocacy efforts via Zoom and strengthened our relationships with the cities of Fairfield and Suisun City. We are stronger now than ever.

During my tenure, I learned about the challenges businesses face, the relevance of advocacy and the true meaning of leadership. However, and most importantly, I established the greatest friendships ever.

Although I will no longer call Tavey at 7:30 a.m. almost every morning or send text messages to board members (especially our Executive Committee) at random times of the day, I will carry our conversations in my heart and forever be grateful for all their support.

I was given a grand opportunity to not only lead this Chamber, but to be the only person (and woman!) to lead the Chamber for two years. It has been an incredible and unforgettable journey, and I thank all our community members, elected leaders, Chamber Ambassadors, Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and especially Tavey, for walking next to me each step of the way.

Your new Chair will be Terrance Strong of MV Transportation, and I have no doubt that he will continue to grow our Chamber to greater bounds.

And with that, meeting adjourned.

Andrea Garcia

Chair, Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce















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EMERGING LEADER:

Teekz Yenpasook

OF TOURO UNIVERSITY

eekz Yenpasook, a third-year osteopathic medical student at Touro University California-Vallejo, was recently named the 2021 National Student Doctor of the Year by the Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents' (COSGP). Yenpasook was chosen of thousands of student doctors nominated based on his leadership skills, efforts to increase diversity in the medical field, and be the voice of underrepresented communities in healthcare and Solano County. In addition to this great accomplishment, he directs Touro University's



field began. Fortunately, a time came when his treatments were over.

He reenrolled in school and transferred to the University of California San Diego's Physiology and Neuroscience baccalaureate program. He was able to set up a free health clinic in Tijuana, Mexico while still working full-time. Saying he was busy would be an understatement.

"When it came time to transfer to a medical school, I was still working full-time and my grades weren't great." He received below satisfactory scores on his Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). He was turning in his applications to medical schools and getting rejection letters in return.

Yenpasook finally had a shot with Touro University's Master of Science in Medical Health Sciences program in Vallejo. The one-year program is laborious and researchintense, but it increases student's medical science knowledge

Biotech Academy Summer Internship for high school students, as well as developed courses in LGBTQIA+ Considerations in Healthcare, Structural Incompetency, and Culture Humility within the medical community. While his life may sound ideal on paper now, that wasn't always the case.

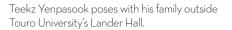
Yenpasook was raised in Oakland by a single-income family household in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood. After having a bumpy upbringing, he was finally on a path that many young adults take part in. He was attending community college, meeting new people, and climbing his way up the Starbucks Coffee business ladder. Then at the young age of 21, his world stopped. He was diagnosed with lymphoma, a blood cancer that affects lymphocytes, a type of white blood cells. The diagnosis led Yenpasook to leave school and his full-time job. He described himself as being both

unstable. He was enduring chemo

financially and emotionally

treatments every two weeks, which eventually transitioned to intense daily radiation therapy. "I remember always being the youngest person in the chemo clinic," Yenpasook said. "It gave me a huge perspective on how cancer doesn't discriminate."

While receiving his treatments, he was attending support groups. He did cancer walks even though the chemo was making his body weak. "That community is where I found compassion for others with illnesses." And that is how his interest in the medical





certain benchmarks are guaranteed an interview for admission into the TUC Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine.

"I was lucky to get an interview with the College

base. Students who complete the program with

"I was lucky to get an interview with the College of Medicine. They heard my story and saw the passion in me. I promised to be an exemplary student and I did not go back on my word."

Yenpasook found mentorship on campus, through volunteering, and advocacy work. At his time at TUC, he's helped increased the diversity of the student body and promoted inclusion throughout all aspects of healthcare—including gender, ethnicity, and financial status. During his preclinical years, he served as the Vice President of Admissions in his school's student body, focusing his term on increasing the representation of minority communities. "I was recruiting more women, people of color, and people in the LGBTQ community to provide more representation in medicine and to Touro's campus... I believe that doctors who

can connect with their patients culturally lead to better healthcare. And I want to see more of that representation here in Solano too."

He hopes his story will inspire the next generation of both medical students and business leaders. "No matter your upbringing and background, you need to believe in yourself. Do not give up. If you need support, reach out to your friends, mentors, your community, and keep moving forward." Again, this is coming from a man who grew up in a single-income household, battled cancer, struggled to get into medical school, then went on to win a National Student Doctor of the Year award.

"Teekz Yenpasook exemplifies the values of Touro University – he has demonstrated time and time again his commitment to equality, the practice of osteopathy, and to his fellow man," said Sarah Sweitzer, TUC CAO and Provost in a press release. "I can't think of a more worthy recipient of this honor and I look forward to watching Teekz continue to do great things. I know that as a physician, he will be a fierce advocate for his patients and the communities he will work in." •



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EMERGING LEADER:

Alma Hernandez

OF SUISUN CITY COUNCIL

lma Hernandez encourages more women to get involved in the community and politics.

"My journey as a council member is to learn, grow and serve," describes Alma Hernandez, a new member of Suisun City's City Council. Alma Hernandez was the highest-voted City Council candidate in Suisun's Nov. 3, 2020, election. Before becoming a council member, she was the President of the Solano Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Founder of Latinas de Solano County, and Board Member of the Solano County Library Foundation, as well as serving on various councils in Solano County. Community involvement grips her.

It began when she was younger. She grew up in Suisun. In high school, she joined the Key Club, Honor Society, the International Student Club, and was the leader of the marching band at Armijo High School. She went on to attain her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from CSU Sacramento. While attending the university, she was involved in multiple organizations and committees including CSUS Women in Business and the Future Business Leaders of America Phi Beta Lambda. Post-graduation, she began working with school districts across California. She expressed the importance of that early position.

"It gave me a sense of working on something I was really passionate about, which was education. Also, working with a diverse group of people from all over the state, understanding



Alma Hernandez is a new member of the Suisun City Council.

policy, governance like local school boards, and budget and finance. It gave me a foundation for what the city council role was."

Moreover, Hernandez credits her entrepreneurship spirit as a building block to success. "When I moved back to the area, I decided to launch an event planning business working with nonprofits in the area. I reached out to the Solano Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to help support their fundraising efforts and its work with nonprofits," a gateway to Hernandez's target demo. "I found it was such a great way to collaborate with the business leaders in the community. Now, I've been a board member for eight years!"

Hernandez has been able to find mentorship and close friendships

in her time serving on the various committees. "For three years, other local leaders asked me, 'Have you ever thought about running [for city council]?' At the time, I didn't know if that was an opportunity."

This self-doubt among women is often named the Confidence Gap or Ambition Gap. Among young adults, men are twice as likely as women to have considered running for office someday, according to a study conducted by American University's School of Public Affairs and Loyola Marymount University. The study also states that even if their politically relevant skills were equal, women were more likely than men to question their qualifications. Furthermore, for men, 84 percent of those who were encouraged to run for office considered doing so. For women, 66 percent who've received

any encouragement to run for office reported interest in a future candidacy.

Like Nike, Hernandez advises women to just do it. "It doesn't have to be mayor or city council. It can be a school board, a community program like PTA or a neighborhood watch. There's so many opportunities for women to serve in leadership positions and grow."

COMMUNITY CHAMPION
Alma Hernandez

WARCH FOR AREALS 2021

She also says that being a millennial Hispanic woman does give her a certain perspective and brings diversity to the delegation.

Her uniqueness can be compared to the diversity that Suisun City offers. Hernandez likes that there are various methods to arrive at Suisun including boat, train, cycle and car. This brings an opportunity to make the town more attractive. "It needs to be a place where families can go and enjoy walking the waterfront, enjoy the downtown busi-

nesses, and it has diversity."

She reminisces about the potential Suisun City had before the COVID shutdown. "Before shelter-inplace, we had downtown events and you saw the diversity. You saw and felt the community! It connects people. I'm looking forward to when neighbors can be neighbors again."

Hernandez says a strategic plan, which is in place

until 2025, lays out a goal of improving the quality of life, revitalizing downtown, and helping small businesses. "There's an opportunity in Suisun City to attract businesses that are unique to our community. I'm looking forward to that."

If you're a woman interested in running for elected office, Alma Hernandez recommends the program she used, Emerge California. •



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Studies Show Where Americans Stand Financially, plus the Money Trend for 2021

little over a year ago, a mandated stay-at-home order was in place. We were debating who's considered "essential," and many of us did not know what would happen to our jobs and businesses. While 2020 was an uneasy year for many of us, a majority of Americans now feel neutral to very confident about the economy according to recent studies from Travis Credit Union (TCU).

Travis Credit Union published two surveys in which they asked participants about their financial wellbeing. One conducted at the end of 2020 asked 2000 participants about their year's spending and saving habits. Another survey of 2052 participants,

recorded between February to March 2021, measured fiscal wellness and tracked trends within the younger generations.

Among the respondents in the first survey, 50 percent reduced their spending in 2020 than in years prior, with 67 percent of them saying that was a conscious decision. Two-thirds of participants delayed large purchases due to the uncertainty of COVID-19, admitting that the industry with the biggest hindrance was travel. Fifty-one percent have big travel plans at a standstill. Thirty-nine percent of people held off from buying a new car and 34 percent are putting a pause on purchasing a new home.

When reviewing their year-end budget, half of the participants saw an increase in purchasing household supplies, 34 percent increased their dining and takeout spending, and nearly 30 percent had an increase in alcohol. Fifty percent



Two-thirds of participants in the first survey delayed large purchases due to the uncertainty of COVID-19, admitting that the industry with the biggest hindrance was travel.

admit to anxiety-induced spending, using shopping as a coping mechanism. The average spend was between \$24 to \$74.

In order to improve their financial health, 50 percent of respondents in the second survey have increased the funds in their savings accounts, 45 percent paid down debt and 45 percent have been able to invest their money. Fortunately, 34 percent of people were able to increase their income in the last year.

There is a sense of optimism in the air for 2021. Half of the participants say they are in good financial standing, with two-thirds saying a goal for this year is to save more. Many were in a fortunate state when the stimulus checks came in. Thirty-one percent were able to put the stimulus money into their savings, one percent generously donated the money, and



In order to improve their financial health, 45 percent of respondents in the second survey have been able to invest their money.

19 percent put their funds into the stock market. This leads us to a trend TCU saw within the younger generation: Investing with No-Fee Trading Apps.

In separate data from Market Insider, 25 to 34-year-olds planned to invest half their stimulus checks into the stock market. The rise of no-fee trading apps such as Robinhood, combined with a year of sheltering in place, has fueled the trend. TCU noted that many are new to the experience – 57 percent surveyed say they started investing using these apps within the last year.

The top three trading apps were Robinhood, E-trade, WeBull, and Fidelity. Eighty percent of people who invested using the apps described themselves as feeling "empowered." Fifty-six percent admit to checking their investments daily. "While we always advise consumers to invest their money under the formal guidance of professional, experienced financial advisors, we're aware of this cultural shift in retail trading and we're curious to investigate the trend," says TCU in the statement.

A majority of the people surveyed said they did not learn

personal finance growing up, so they've steered towards both traditional and social media to learn. The top three resources mentioned were Dave Ramsey, Suze Orman, and Jim Cramer. Seventy percent had gone to social media site Reddit to learn about stock market tips. Reddit is the origin of many "meme stocks" or "stonks." Both terms refer to stocks with bad financials, but the hype from early-buyers plus FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) drives the share price high. A great example is in January when an army of retail traders coordinating on Reddit's WallStreetBets forum wrangled with short-focused hedge funds and pushed their favorite stocks such as GameStop (GME) and AMC Theatres (AMC) higher. There was recently a congressional hearing on the issue.

After delivering these results, Travis Credit Union says "of course, in our experience, if you're looking for safe, reliable, long-term savings and financial wellness, nothing beats having a true professional at your side." If you're interested in professional financial advice, you can contact Travis Credit Union or the Fairfield Suisun Chamber of Commerce for a list. •





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How Solano County is reviving its tourism industry for 2021

s California prepares to fully reopen, our travel and tourism industry is encouraging people to revisit local businesses and parks. Solano County is a prime destination for both tourists and residents. It's nestled between San Francisco and Sacramento, and neighbors the beautiful and aromatic wine region of Napa and Sonoma Valley. The wineries trickle into the hills of Suisun and Fairfield. We have noteworthy restaurants, craft breweries, farms, shopping and lodging. Nevertheless, these industries have been impacted by the pandemic's shutdown.

In hopes of revitalization, our local Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are using 2021 to revive the community and reconnect with America. "We're working on a recovery strategy," said Anand Patel, CEO of Visit Fairfield. "We're reopening the floodgates slowly so we're prepared for the potential influx. We want to make sure we're mindful

from a visitors standpoint as well." Patel and his team at Visit Fairfield are conscious about what tourists want to explore, knowing that experiences are not one size fits all.

Visit Fairfield has begun its 2021 media series, in which journalists from different outlets come to Fairfield and receive a catered journey through the area. "When a journalist comes one at a time, it allows us to customize the experience to what their specialty is ... If they're into beer, we'll take them



Anthony Taylor is the manager of the California Welcome Center, which is located at the Jelly Belly factory in Fairfield.

to Heretic Brewing. If they're interested in olive oil, Il Fiorello does a great job of explaining the growing and producing process." Patel goes on to say that for magazines such as National Geographic, he'll take the writer kayaking through Suisun or rent bikes and cycle across the wine region.

Recently, the organization partnered with Visit California, Jelly Belly, and the City of Fairfield to open a California Welcome Center located at the Jelly Belly factory. Inside, Welcome Center Manager Anthony Taylor asks visitors what they are interested in. He makes recommendations to better their time in Solano. Additionally, Visit Fairfield is focusing its social media efforts on TikTok.

"TikTok has been an inspirational form from a travel perspective. The beauty of TikTok is your brand can step away from its identity and still have your message across by using trends." Patel praised United Airline's use of TikTok. TikTok is the rising social media app amongst Gen-Z and Millennials. It's known for popularizing songs, sounds

and memes using video. You can follow Visit Fairfield on TikTok at @visitfairfieldca.

The other DMO in the area, Visit Vacaville, is repositioning itself toward Community Shared Values. "We want to make sure that our residents are more engaged in tourism and why it benefits them. So, we're trying to have a greater focus on communicating to our residents," said Melyssa Laughlin, the organization's President/CEO. Visit Vacaville launched its new



Visit Fairfield has partnered with Visit California, Jelly Belly and the city of Fairfield to open a California Welcome Center, which is located at the Jelly Belly factory.

website, www.visitvacaville.com, and is redesigning the annual Visitor Guide.

A new project Laughlin is excited about is the Vacaville Savings Pass. The pass, which is now available to download, is similar to a digital coupon book and will update monthly. "It will get people moving around again, so it will support our residents and retail." Campaigns toward the end of the year include a Taco Trail, a Beer Trail, and an Ag & Art Trail. The trails introduce tourists to multiple businesses within a certain trade at once.

Both Visit Fairfield and Visit Vacaville agree that businesses in the area have become more resilient since the shutdown and reopening measures. "Businesses have gotten creative in how they do business, which will make them stronger in the long run. For example, the outdoor dining programs – I hope those stick around," adds Laughlin. •

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- Activities & Excursions
- Housekeeping

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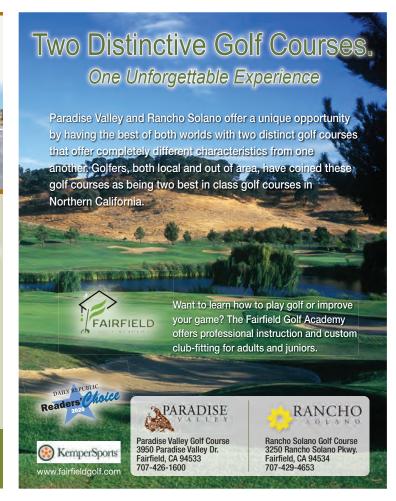
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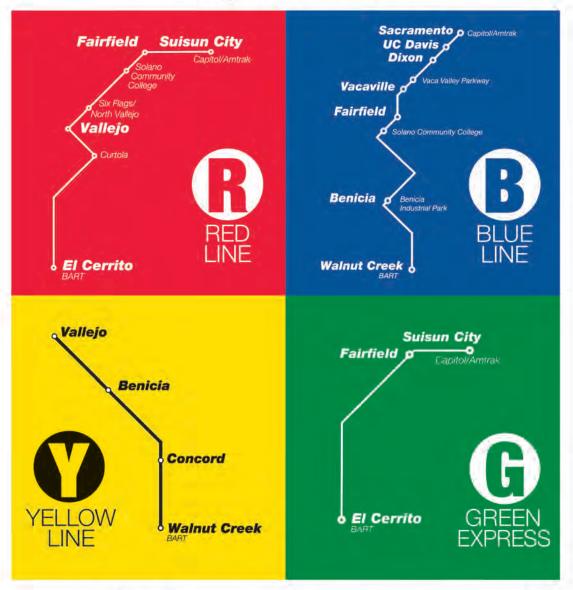






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