



Musical Of 'Jane Eyre' Coming To Playhouse

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FRENCH STUDENTS VISIT FOR TASTE OF AMERICANA

They end up cleaning section of Main Street!

President Trump may have received French President Emmanuel Macron at the White House this week as part of an official state visit, but meanwhile Merced residents are receiving a special French visit of their own.

Students with Horizons du Monde have made their way from France to Merced as part of a program that gives young French students ages 13 to 14 the opportunity to experience America and its culture.

After settling in with their host families for a 10-day international stay, the students made their way to the Merced Arts Center. After touring the facility with Executive Director Colton Dennis, and viewing the current exhibits, the students volunteered to work with staff to help revamp the planters in front of the Downtown Merced gallery, and clean the mosaic on the outside wall.

Following the gardening, Dave Fossum from the Bear Creek Ukulele Society gave the students a lesson on



how to play the ukulele.

To the delight of their host families, the students put on an impromptu performance after they quickly learned the ukulele version of the famous lullaby "Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques,

Dormez vous? Dormez vous?"

And, but of course ... Nobody in the audience was sleeping.

TIMES PHOTOS BY JOHN MILLER



★ ELECTION PROFILE ★

Tietjen touts experience, advocacy in race to lead MCOE

BY JONATHAN WHITAKER
johnwhitaker@midvalleypub.com

For months, Steve Tietjen has been spending his weekends meeting with community groups across the region and talking about his goals as the Merced County Superintendent of Schools.

On one recent stretch, he went from communicating with young people and elders at a Sikh temple in Livingston, to a fundraiser in support of literacy initiatives in Merced, to a backyard meet and greet with an impressive crowd of top UC Merced researchers and faculty members.

At the latter, Tietjen led a spirited discussion on ways the university could improve interactions with the county's 20 school districts to reach more local educators, more classrooms, and more data to boost program grant writing efforts.

Soon an idea surfaced to create a specific liaison office at the Office of Education that would serve as a pipeline of information and contacts for faculty and staff at UC Merced and Merced College.

"We generated a possible solution here through collaboration," Tietjen said. "I feel it's important to build strong teams. New ideas are great, but if you don't have a strong team to implement them, they are not going to go anywhere. A leader is not leading if no one is following. As the superintendent of schools, you are, in a way, the head follower. You are following the idea of more student success, and you are building a team around that idea as you manage a very large organization."

Tietjen, 62, has served in his current position since January of 2017 when he was invited into the role by former Superintendent Steve Gomes who retired before his term ended. Now Tietjen wants to continue in the seat for four more years, but it's an elected office, so for the first time in his life, he's hitting the campaign trail.

He faces Richard Lopez, the superintendent of the Merced River Union Elementary School District, and Gabriela Pantoja Sanchez, a Delhi middle school teacher, in the Election Primary culminating on June 5. The race could be decided at that point if one candidate garners more than 50 percent



Steve Tietjen

SOURCE: ATWATER POLICE CHIEF DECLINES BUY-OUT OFFER

He's said to be on notice to relinquish badge, gun

BY BEVERLY BARELA
beverlybarela@midvalleypub.com

Atwater Police Chief Sam Joseph decided not to accept a buy-out offer which would require him to voluntarily resign and waive his right to sue for wrongful termination, according to a credible source who wishes to remain anonymous.

The source also indicated that the news received an almost immediate reaction from Atwater City Attorney Churchwell White, and that Joseph was notified on Tuesday that an officer would be sent to collect his badge and gun,

and a Sacramento law firm, Stoel Rives, LLP, would be investigating him to terminate him.

The reported offer to Joseph was presented last week, according to the source, demanding his response within two days. The in-house management review of the Atwater Police Department on which it was based was led by attorney Debra Hinshaw Vierra (no relation to City Council member Cindy Vierra), who is "Of Counsel" to City Attorney Churchwell White.

According to the source, the offer was presented along with a list of partially investigated items attributed to Chief Joseph, compiled by attorney Hinshaw Vierra. The source reported the items involved things like procedures in the

workplace that were possibly issues prior to Joseph's appointment as police chief, and issues of trust which may have arisen during routine negotiations with five employees who wanted to be promoted based on a verbal promise by a previous administration.

According to the Times' source, things became heated when four of the employees strongly disagreed with the point of view expressed by Joseph, who did not feel accepting a verbal promise made in the past was fair to all employees eligible for the positions.

Chief Joseph was informed, according to the source, that these items would be a starting point to be pursued by

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New El Capitan Hotel expected to dramatically change downtown

BY DOANE YAWGER

Merced's El Capitan Hotel is about to embark on a journey which will see it try to recapture the 19th Century grandeur it once enjoyed. The \$16 million project at West Main and M streets is due to be finished in fall 2019 and help downtown Merced become a destination in itself.

Scott McBride, director of development services for the city of Merced, says Merced hasn't had a quality hotel in downtown for a number of years and there is a need for it.

A 114-room boutique hotel, cafe and restaurant are planned, with retail space on the first floor. The hotel should be able to accommodate 200 to 300 guests.

The four-story original El Capitan Hotel building in mid-block on 18th Street will remain and be updated while the surrounding single-story buildings

will be razed.

"It (hotel) will give a unique opportunity for people to have more of urban downtown experience," McBride says. "Our hotels are a little removed from the cultural events of downtown. This will bring an influx of new people to sample the downtown experience. It makes downtown a real destination."

Denise Frazier, the city's chief building and construction project official, said what's exciting about the El Capitan Hotel project is the "walkability" the complex will provide to enjoy other downtown amenities.

"It's excitement, the first step in private investment. The single-story retail outlets on the first floor will capture everyone's attention. I like the project; my husband and I like to travel and experience things like this," Frazier notes.

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A rendering of what the new El Capitan Hotel will look like from Main Street in Merced.