

## Suspected DUI motorcycle wreck cancels graduation for two Highland seniors

BY JOHN COX  
jcox@bakersfield.com

Thursday was memorable for all the wrong reasons after two 18-year-olds just hours from graduation crashed on a motorcycle at high speed in a suspected DUI in northeast Bakersfield.

The Bakersfield Police Department said neither was wearing a helmet when the motorcycle went down mid-afternoon near Panorama Drive and Union Avenue, sending the passenger down an embankment. The

agency cited speed and impairment as possible factors in the crash.

The unidentified passenger was discharged from a local hospital Thursday night after suffering a concussion and abrasions, BPD reported. Driver Michael James Smith III remained in custody as of Friday morning after being treated for what BPD said was a fractured elbow.

Smith, set to be arraigned as soon as Monday, faces the possibility of felony charges, based on BPD's suspicion that he was

intoxicated and that his passenger suffered great bodily injury.

Ironically, BPD officers had just left Highland High — the school both young men attended — after recording a social media video reminding graduates to celebrate responsibly. A news release the agency issued late Thursday urged people not to drink and drive.

"High school graduation is an accomplishment, but one bad decision can change a life in an instant," it said. "Underage drinking is illegal, and impaired driving

is not only illegal but is also dangerous and never worth risking your life or the life of another."

The incident was the latest of 331 motorcycle crashes BPD has counted since January 2023. Almost 4% of them were reported to be fatalities.

Personal injury attorney Matt Clark of Bakersfield law firm Chain | Cohn | Clark said that last year there were 443 DUI crashes in Bakersfield, 3% of them fatal, and 2,224 DUI arrests by the



COURTESY OF BPD  
A Highland High graduation ribbon lies strewn near the site of a motorcycle crash Thursday afternoon near Panorama Drive and Union Avenue in northeast Bakersfield.

Please see **WRECK** | A2

## After an unusually cool week in late May, we begin the transition toward summer



PHOTOS BY ROD THORNBURG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

One reason it got so cold this week, the National Weather Service said, is because the low pressure system carried cold air all the way from the Gulf of Alaska. Lucky us!

BY STEVEN MAYER  
smayer@bakersfield.com

It's been a stellar week of unseasonably cool and cloudy weather in the southern valley — although some folks may disagree about it being "stellar." Either way, it's time for a warmup.

Residents of Bakersfield and surrounding communities can finally expect a slow return to sunny and much warmer conditions with high temps in the 80s through the weekend and rising into the mid-90s next week, said Carlos Molina, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service

in Hanford.

"Typically what happens when we get this kind of a brief cooldown is that we'll have a disturbance that will move through the Pacific Northwest, and it normally doesn't produce much precipitation because all of the precipitation usually is pushed into the Pacific Northwest," Molina said.

"But what happens for us is that ... we will basically get a push of marine air into Central California. And of course, the marine air is much cooler and



Two people enjoy the weather at the Panorama Bluffs on a nice Friday in late May.

Please see **WEATHER** | A4

## Residents ask for city support for road safety, MLK park

BY PETER SEGALL  
psegall@bakersfield.com

Residents asked the Bakersfield City Council to tackle road safety, particularly on Harris Road, and to support funding for a major upgrade to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

This week several members of the public urged council members to approve \$3 million in Public Safety and Vital Services funding for the first phase of the park's overhaul, which the fund's oversight committee recommended against.

"There was concern that it was not an appropriate use of Measure N funds. I respectfully disagree," said Evelyn Young Spath, a community advocate.

The project received an \$11.9 million federal grant in 2024 for the first phase of the project but that funding requires \$12 million in local matching funds. Valley

Please see **CITY** | A3

## Kern voters express anxiety, frustration ahead of primary election

BY PETER SEGALL  
psegall@bakersfield.com

"A mess," "Scary," "Crazy." All terms used by Kern voters to describe the upcoming primary election.

In the week before the June 2 primary, some voters said they were still weighing their options for governor while others said it was an easy choice.

"It seems like a circus with the Democrats this year and that's what's making me anxious," Wanda Glass said after she dropped off her ballot at the Kern County Administrative Building Friday morning. "Because I think there's just too many candidates, and it's a really important election," she said.

Glass said she voted for Katie Porter, citing the former U.S. representative from

Please see **VOTERS** | A2

### IN MEMORIAM | CARLOS WHITE

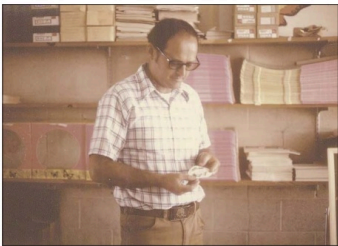
## He grew up studying insects, and built a business that allowed millions to share his passion

BY STEVEN MAYER  
smayer@bakersfield.com

Few people have popularized insect education for children and adults like Carlos White.

The longtime entomologist, Shafter resident, innovator and family man founded Insect Lore with his business partner, John Nickelsen, in the late-1960s.

The company soon developed the Butterfly Garden, a kit that would capture the imagination of generations of students, eventually touching the lives of millions of children across the United States and Europe by giving them an opportunity to study the magic of metamorphosis up close.



COURTESY PHOTO

Please see **WHITE** | A3 An early photo of Carlos White working at the Insect Lore "lab" in Shafter.

### FOREIGN RELATIONS

Extending the ceasefire with Iran is still under consideration by the US  
**NATION & WORLD** | B1

### MONTH AHEAD

Keep your June calendar booked as we experience ever-changing weather  
**EYE STREET** | D1

### BASEBALL

Liberty plays Fresno Bullard in the Division 1 baseball title game tonight  
**SPORTS** | C1



PRICE: \$2.00

### OUTSIDE TODAY

YOUR COMPLETE FORECAST | A7

HIGH 84 LOW 58  
AIR QUALITY 41 | Good

### INSIDE YOUR CALIFORNIAN

Advice / Horoscopes.....	D3	Opinion.....	A5
Classifieds.....	C2	Puzzles.....	D3, D5
Comics.....	B5	Sports.....	C1
Faith.....	A8	Television.....	D4
Nation & World.....	B1		
Obituaries.....	B4		

## WRECK

Continued from PAGE A1

California Highway Patrol accused Kern County, Bakersfield has among the nation's highest per-capita rates of DUI fatalities, Clark said, adding that Thursday's crash is "just another example of why you cannot operate a motor vehicle impaired."

Though he had no data on how often DUIs occur around graduation time, Clark said this time of year strikes him as, historically, a period when young people tend to suffer tragedies.

"It just seems like every year you just sort of brace yourself because these kinds of things can happen," he said.

BPD reported Smith was driving a KTM motorcycle when he lost control and struck a guardrail at about 2:37 p.m., three hours and 23 minutes before the start of Highland's graduation ceremony at Dignity Health Arena downtown.

The agency said his passenger went 75 feet down an embankment after he was ejected, leaving graduation caps, gowns and cords strewn about the crash scene.

A single seat belt was found at the scene, but BPD said neither person involved in the crash was wearing it.

Inmate records maintained by the Kern County Sheriff's

Office say Smith was being held in jail in lieu of bail of \$400,743. They indicated he is suspected of driving without insurance or a proper driver's license and that he faces an infraction for having a blood-alcohol level of more than 0.1% as a person under the age of 21.

KCSO further noted he is suspected of driving with a blood-alcohol level greater than 0.08% — the legal definition of intoxication and a felony — and that while driving under the influence of alcohol he is accused of causing bodily injury, also potentially a felony.

Clark said that whether Smith is ultimately charged with a felony could depend on the extent of his passenger's injury. He noted that, historically, concussions can be considered traumatic brain injury, which could qualify as great bodily injury.

He emphasized that driving drunk is not the only problem motorists need to guard against, because prescription and illicit drugs, as well as marijuana and even distractions such as cellphones, create a risky environment for people on the road.

"You mix alcohol and a motor vehicle, drugs and a motor vehicle and distracted driving, and you have a recipe for disaster," Clark said.

Highland's principal did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

## VOTERS

Continued from PAGE A1

Orange County's background as an economist.

Another voter, Sharon Ray, said it was a pretty easy choice to cast her vote for Riverside Sheriff Chad Bianco.

"I'm just tired of the way things are being run now," she said.

Several voters, across party lines, declined to state which candidate they'd chosen.

Another voter, Natalie Dilly, said she voted Republican but declined to say which candidate earned her vote.

While Democrats have faced a crowded field for their candidate, Republicans have had to make their own choice without to support Bianco or his chief rival, Steve Hilton.

Dilly said her own decision was easy but she knew of many who weren't.

Even if her preferred candidate does not make it to the general election, Dilly said she'd be fine voting for either Bianco or Hilton in November.

"I'm sorry damn scary," she said of the upcoming mid-term election.

"Anything's better than Newsom, though."

After dropping off his



PETER SEGALL / THE CALIFORNIAN  
A woman drops off her ballot at a drop box outside the Kern County Administrative Building on Friday.

ballot, Hayward Cox said only that he voted Democrat but that his choice for governor was "not at all" easy to make. Still, he said he is hopeful about the election's outcome.

At a rally supporting Democrat Finoa Ma's campaign for lieutenant governor at Jastro Park on Sunday, several voters said they hadn't fully decided on a candidate for governor.

"I'm concerned about the environment and I'm not sure that (Tom) Steyer is going to do about it the right way," said Ann Gallon. "I think that Becerra might have a better focus on protecting the environment."

Although at a rally for a Democrat, Greg Fontes said he was an independent and while he knows who he's voting for, declined to say

who that is.

"The thing is because of my military background, I will never, ever put down the commander in chief, no matter who he or she is," Fontes said. "I just won't." "I'm going to stand up for America, and I'm going to stand up for the working man, and that's what I'm doing here, supporting the working man."

Nick Hernandez said he and his partner still weren't sure which candidate for governor they would vote for — "That jungle primary is just crazy," he said — but in another closely-watched race, they had a preference.

"A friend of mine is running for office for the 22nd Congressional district, Randy Villegas," Hernandez said.

"Seeing him run, I think he has a good sense of a younger generation that's coming in to bring in some ideas that I think are popular in other parts of the country that are a little bit different from what we've seen here in the valley, and so that's comforting."

Villegas is locked in a tight race for the Democratic nomination in the 22nd District with Assemblywoman Dr. Jasmeet Bains.

Both are trying to oust incumbent U.S. Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford. Valadao is widely viewed as being able to bring attention to the general election but who'll take the No. 2 slot is seen as a toss-up.

The intra-party race between the two Democrats has become quite strident, with both campaigns leaning heavily into negative messaging about the other.

"In a way, it's kind of comforting that (Villegas) is able to garner so much attention and so much media, I mean, space from some of the other candidates," Hernandez said.

"That they're spending so much money and spending so much time having to consider him as a viable contender, as opposed to a third-party candidate that isn't going to amount to much."

## TODAY IN HISTORY

**1431:** Joan of Arc, condemned as a heretic, was burned at the stake in Rouen, France.

**1911:** The first Indianapolis 500 auto race was held at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, driver Ray Harroun won the race with an average speed of 74.6 mph.

**1922:** The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in a ceremony attended by President Warren G. Harding, Chief Justice William Howard Taft and Abraham Lincoln's surviving son, 78-year-old Robert Todd Lincoln.

**1935:** Babe Ruth played in his last major league baseball game for the Boston

Braves, leaving after the first inning of the first game of a doubleheader against the Philadelphia Phillies.

Ruth announced his retirement three days later.

**1971:** The American space probe Mariner 9 blasted off from Cape Kennedy on a journey to Mars.

**1972:** The members of the militant group known as the Japanese Red Army opened fire at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion Airport, killing 26 people. Two attackers died; the third was captured.

**2002:** A solemn, wordless ceremony marked the end of the cleanup at ground

zero in New York, 8½ months after the terror attacks of Sept. 11 brought down the World Trade Center's twin towers.

**2024:** Donald Trump became the first former American president to be convicted of felony crimes as a New York juror found him guilty of all 34 charges in a scheme to

mislead government officials about his influence in the 2016 election through a hush money payment to a porn actor who said the two had sex. (Trump received a no-penalty sentence, or unconditional discharge, just 10 days before his January 2025 inauguration to a second term.)

— The Associated Press

## The Bakersfield Californian

## CONTACT US

Address: 4900 California Ave., Suite 100A  
Bakersfield, CA 93309  
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