

Calistoga Tribune

Independently owned and published in Calistoga for Calistogans since 2002

\$1

January 31, 2025

CHS BASKETBALL TEAMS VICTORIOUS
Read how the Wildcats fared in their matchups last week
PAGE 5



Calistogan shines, wins IDOL NV 2025



PHOTO BY MITCHELL GLOTZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Calistoga resident and St. Helena High School sophomore Myka Suhr (center), 15, won the valley-wide youth singing competition, IDOL NV, earlier this month. Also pictured: Abby Johnson (left), 15, Vintage High School and Kale'a Dacanay, 15, American Canyon High School.

Local teen sings her way to top honors

By **Elsa Cavazos**
Napa Valley News Group

Calistoga native and resident Myka Suhr has always enjoyed singing, but performing in a local competition was something she had only ever dreamt of. That is, until her mother signed her up for her first ever competition, IDOL NV, which Myka won on Jan. 19.

Myka, 15, who went to school in Calistoga until eighth grade and now attends St. Helena High School, has been a long-time participant in school choirs. It was her mother Sharon Suhr, however, who signed her up for the valley-wide IDOL NV youth singing competition. Between winter break, the holidays and family va-

cations, Myka had less than six days to prepare for auditions.

"I kind of went into auditions not really putting a ton of pressure on myself," Myka said. Ultimately, she added, she was there for the experience and to have fun. "I can't imagine my life without music, without singing. I like it so much because it's an outlet for expressing emotions in a way that just speaking can't."

Myka won the competition, surpassing nine other finalists, with her performance of "Stay" by Rihanna. Accompanying Myka on stage was her sister Monica Suhr, 17, who played the piano and created a special arrangement for the song.

Myka said she was particularly thankful for her sister's presence on stage.

"Honestly, it was really great having her there because half of the kids at semi-finals and then finals had already done the competition last year, and they were familiar with each other from even other drama performances in the area," she said. "So honestly, my sister and I were a little bit out of place, and I was super grateful for her to be there."

Monica, a senior at St. Helena High School, started taking piano lessons in kindergarten and now takes private lessons in Calistoga. The morning of the final performance, Monica said she woke up thinking her sister had a chance at winning.

See **IDOL NV** back page

'We've lost the middle class': Napa Valley tourism industry leaders speak on rising trends

By **Mariela Gomez**
Napa Valley News Group

Almost every hand in the room shot up when the question was posed at the recent Tourism Talk! Forum held in St. Helena: "Do you feel like Napa Valley has lost the middle class as tourists?"

The response was nearly unanimous – a resounding yes – to the question posed by Eric Reichert, president and CEO of the Calistoga Chamber of Commerce.

Winery executives, hospitality managers, small business owners and chamber representatives gathered last week for Tourism Talk!, an open forum led by Napa County Supervisor Anne Cottrell of District 3. The event, moderated by the chambers of commerce from Yountville, St. Helena and Calistoga, provided a platform to explore the trends, challenges and shifting visitor demographics shaping Napa Valley's tourism economy.

While spending per visitor has increased, overall foot traffic has declined, noted Whitney Diver McEvoy, president of the Yountville Chamber of Commerce. McEvoy, who recently announced her upcoming departure from the role, acknowledged the challenges ahead.

According to the latest study by Visit Napa Valley, tourism in Napa Valley generated \$107.5 million in tax revenue in 2023 – a 26 percent increase from 2018 – and contributes up to 40 percent of city budgets through tax funding.

Despite such economic nuances, there remains a gap in visitor diversity. Black visitation, while still low, has increased from 4 percent in 2018 to 11 percent in 2023, according to the same study.

The growth, while notable, is tempered by possible underlying issues of exclusion highlighted in a 2020 article titled "What Rac-

See **TOURISM** back page

Napa Valley Asian American Film Festival to debut

By **Elsa Cavazos**
Napa Valley News Group

The first Napa Valley Asian American Film Festival, which debuts at the Napa Valley College (NVC) on Feb. 7, is the result of a partnership inspired, in part, by IW Group, a creative multicultural agency aligned with Interpublic Group and its founder, Bill Imada.

The festival will include conversations with college staff, filmmakers, producers and community leaders.

"Napa Valley is a place where cultures thrive," said Imada, who has resided in Napa for more than

a decade. "The region attracts people of all interests, from artists to agronomists and from entrepreneurs to high-tech innovators. One way to showcase the richness of Asian American stories is through films, and Napa Valley College's Performing Arts Center is the perfect venue to screen the cinematic achievements of several talented filmmakers."

The festival kicks off on Thursday night with a private dinner by Yountville's RO Restaurant and Lounge Chef de Cuisine Jeffery Hayashi. On Friday morning, local and regional vintners and restaurateurs will provide food and beverages

at the performing arts center. Actress and AMRYN winemaker Kara Wang, (*Top Gun: Maverick*) and actor and content creator Ryan Alexander Holmes,

See **FILM FEST** back page

The Napa Valley Asian American Film Festival will debut at Napa Valley College next Friday, bringing together college staff, filmmakers, producers and community leaders to showcase the richness of Asian American stories in film. Pictured: Jean Shim, director of *A Great Divide*, is one of many participants.



FILM POSTER COURTESY AERIE ON ELMS



PHOTO BY HANNAH ARISTA



MITCHELL GLOTZER PHOTOGRAPHY

Above: Myka Suhr won the 2025 IDOL NV competition, surpassing nine other finalists, with her performance of "Stay" by Rihanna. "All of a sudden, winning this competition, so many doors have opened," she said. **Left:** Accompanying Myka on stage was her sister Monica Suhr, 17, who played the piano.



IDOL NV

Continued from page 1

"I'd say it's easy and effortless when it comes to (performing together), because we've been singing and playing together at home for so long that it's just kind of routine," Monica said. "We can add our own pieces of individualism and work together on that. So that's really cool."

Myka does not recall when or how she began to love singing but said it has always been a part of her life and remembers her mother singing to her and her siblings all the time. "When your parents are singing to you, you kind of develop that ear for music," she said.

Sharon said of her daughters' performance, "I was just really proud of them, and I thought it was just super special that they could do this together before her sister Monica goes off to college next year. So, a really fun memory."

She recalled the first song Myka penned

when she was in first or second grade. She had just started piano lessons alongside her sister and wrote a song called "I Hate Piano Lessons."

"We chuckle at that, how she (wrote) her first song when she was little when she was angry about practicing," Sharon said. Myka took up guitar instead.

Evy Warshawski, co-founder and director of E&M Presents, which produces the contest, launched the first IDOL NV in 2007 when she was executive and artistic director at the Napa Valley Opera House.

"We held similar IDOLs twice again, skipping a year each time," Warshawski said. The competition ended when she left the Opera House. She and her husband, Morrie, later founded the nonprofit E&M Presents to bring more family-oriented entertainment to the valley. Last year, they decided to bring back IDOL NV.

"It felt like time to give IDOL a try again,"

"I can't imagine my life without music, without singing."

— Myka Suhr

Warshawski said. "This year was the second consecutive year we produced the event." Auditions were held in December and January. Judges, all professionals in music, theater and performing arts in Napa Valley, evaluated the performances, and the best-scored singers moved on to the semi-finals and then the finals, held at the Napa Valley Performing Arts Center.

"Myka caught the attention of the judges at auditions, the semis and finals. And remember, the judges change each time," Warshawski said. "I believe she chose just the right song for her voice, and her delivery was so natural. Backing her up on piano was her sister Monica, and that lent a really nice live musical quality to the overall presentation.

Also, I love the fact that she didn't think she would win, so she went out there almost on a fluke, encouraged by her mom to give it a try.

"All the singers gave it their all; each one could have taken the top spot," Warshawski added.

The contest is a community effort, War-

TOURISM

Continued from page 1

ism Looks Like in a Napa Valley Tasting Room," by writer J'Nai Gaither, which explores barriers that may discourage visitors from engaging with Napa's wine culture. However, there is a rise in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) influencers, removing the stigma surrounding access to wine experiences.

The topic of diversity was only briefly discussed at the forum.

"Napa remains a bucket-list destination," Cottrell said at the forum. "However, fostering repeat visits is crucial, and we need to bring back generational visitors who return again and again."

Yet, participants in the forum pointed out that younger generations are redefining travel and spending habits in ways that pose challenges to traditional tourism models. Studies show that young adults are consuming less alcohol, spending less overall and prioritizing experiences over extravagance.

Movements like Dry January and Sober October are growing in popularity, while a Gallup study found that alcohol consumption among adults under 35 has dropped from 72 percent two decades ago to 62 percent today.

Additionally, for the first time in history, younger generations such as millennials and Gen Z have less disposable income than their parents, according to Pew Research. These economic realities, combined with a recent U.S. Surgeon General advisory linking alcohol consumption to cancer, are sending ripples through Napa's wine and tourism industries.

"We need to be careful and not become like the tobacco industry, which is now seen as one of the least trusted and most harmful industries," said one winery owner, who preferred to remain anonymous. "We don't want that to be us."

Skyrocketing prices for hotels and wine tastings are also steering visitors toward more affordable options in cities such as Fairfield and American Canyon, forum participants noted.

An Expedia search revealed that hotel prices in Yountville range from \$600 to \$1,700 per night, often excluding wine tastings or other activities.

When Amy Carabba, president and CEO of the St. Helena Chamber of Commerce, asked the room, "Of the wineries present, who offers tastings for \$50 or less?" only a few hands were raised.

"The commonality here is 'How are we going to serve and again attract the middle-class tourist?'" Cottrell remarked moments before the forum drew to a close.

Warshawski emphasized. Sponsors include Amplifi Napa Valley, Festival Napa Valley, Community Projects and the Gasser Foundation. Through these partnerships, contestants are able to make industry connections.

For her first-place performance, Myka won a \$1,600 cash prize, plus tickets to BottleRock Napa Valley and a goodie bag with other gift certificates. Myka also won the opportunity to make a live recording.

Sharon said the family is looking forward to the opening of the Brannan Center in Calistoga, where construction is expected to be completed this fall. "We feel like that's going to be a fantastic place for anybody interested in the performing arts, and we hope that in the future (Myka) might be able to sing there," she said.

Myka, who had always had the dream to perform, said that winning IDOL NV has enabled her to consider a future in the performing arts.

"All of a sudden, winning this competition, so many doors have opened, and all of a sudden, it feels really real that my future could potentially have something like that," she said. "And even if nothing comes of it, you know, at least I tried."

FILM FEST

Continued from page 1

seen on *The Morning Show*, will serve as co-emcees, providing details on the films and leading Q&A discussions with directors, writers, producers and artificial intelligence film technologists.

Among the moderators will be Nicolette Morales, Napa Valley College professor of ethnic studies, who will talk about the importance of representation in film; MARGINAL's Sanjay Sharma, who will address cinematic innovations in AI filmmaking; Patricia Ratulangi, Nielsen vice president of communications, who will discuss the significance of Asian American filmmakers in popular culture; and CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment) Executive Director Michelle K. Sugihara, who will discuss how representation has led to greater opportunities for Asian Americans in filmmaking.

"Now more than ever, the historic Napa Valley is the perfect setting to merge film, food and

technology, through a vehicle that amplifies the unique contributions that we as Asian Americans have, and continue to make, to this country's rich history across all these categories," Sharma said. "We aim to spotlight and celebrate the powerful cultural and commercial engines that our shared diasporas help drive."

MARGINAL is an independent studio focused on storytelling from subcultures and voices that develops and produces feature films, series, animation, interactive/web3 and audio series.

Dr. Patricia van Leeuwen Moonsammy, senior director of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) at NVC, said the films were chosen by a panel of leading figures in the film industry, including members of the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment, and MARGINAL.

Another participant is NVC Ethnic Studies Professor Nikki Morales, who was involved in identifying Filipino nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic for the feature-length film, *Nurse Unseen*.

Moonsammy said the films are a broad and expansive representation of the Asian American experience, including Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Filipino stories that are American stories. The films deal with a wide array of themes including forbidden love, displacement and relocation, diasporic connections and alienation, sacrifice, anti-Asian hate, technology, surveillance, alternative realities and the supernatural.

"This is really important right now, centering Asian and Asian American stories that are scripted, acted and directed by Asian Americans, from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and cultures and experiences, and identities and perspectives," Moonsammy said. "We need to see ourselves represented in the media in a manner that is authentic, that comes from a place of love, and that realistically represents the lived experience."

According to the 2020 census in Napa County, Asians make up 9.4% of the population; 33% of American Canyon residents identify as Filipino American, according to data from 2022.

Moonsammy said the discourse around diversity, equity and inclusion has been circulated by conservative comments which suggest that DEI initiatives are divisive and dangerous. She wants to remind others of the importance of DEI in institutions, especially in environments such as a community college.

"DEI programs are designed to create greater opportunities for equity by dismantling institutional barriers to resources and support for people from communities that have been systematically disadvantaged. And when we dismantle those barriers, everyone benefits. Because our institutions are improved, DEI initiatives create welcoming and inclusive environments for all," she said.

"We want everyone to feel invited and embraced in our schools, offices, businesses and communities. So, at Napa Valley College, we're so happy to be co-sponsors of the Napa Valley Asian American Film Festival because the core mission of the film festival aligns so well with the values of the college."

NAPA VALLEY ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL



Friday, Feb. 7

11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Napa Valley College
2277 Napa Vallejo Hwy
napavalleyasianfilmfest.com

Tickets: \$10 all-day pass includes access to all screenings and panel discussions, food and wine fair, \$15 general admission on the day of the festival.

Single screening tickets: \$5 general admission; \$3 per film for students, faculty, and seniors aged 60 and above.

Festival admission includes complimentary local, AAPI-inspired food and beverages, courtesy of culinary partners.