



THE WEEKLY COUNCIL INFORMATION REPORT

June 11, 2021

FIRE DEPT. PROVIDES TRAINING TO BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

On Friday June 4th, Captain Richard Ramirez and Firefighter Sophal Prum had the opportunity to train the Merced Boys & Girls Club staff on CPR and AED lifesaving techniques. The AED is a newly acquired tool for the Boys & Girls Club.

The Merced Fire Department is proud to partner with the Boys & Girls Club for this important training. Hopefully they will never have to apply their training in a real-life situation, but if they do, they will be ready to respond and make a difference.



CAPTAIN JACOB STRUBLE RETIRES AFTER 27 YEARS OF SERVICE



Jacob "Jay" Struble began his career with the Merced Police Department in 1994. Over the years Struble has worked in several specialty units, including the Mounted Enforcement Team, the Gang Violence Suppression Unit, the Detectives Division, and he was a member of SWAT for many years.

Struble was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in 2006. As Sergeant, he supervised Patrol and the Traffic Unit.

In 2016, Struble was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, where he supervised the Crisis Response Unit (SWAT, BOMB, CNT), Operations Division, Administration Division, Detectives, Records, Dispatch, and Property & Evidence.

In 2019, Struble was promoted to the rank of Captain. As Captain, Struble supervised the Crisis Response Unit (SWAT, BOMB, CNT), the Administration Division, Detectives, Records, Dispatch, and Property & Evidence.

Struble's favorite assignment was on the SWAT Team. He started as an operator and worked his way up to the SWAT Commander position, which is the highest-ranking SWAT team member.

Struble said his favorite thing about the job has been working with the great men and women of the Merced Police Department. He has enjoyed coming to work every day and has made some lifelong friends within the Department.

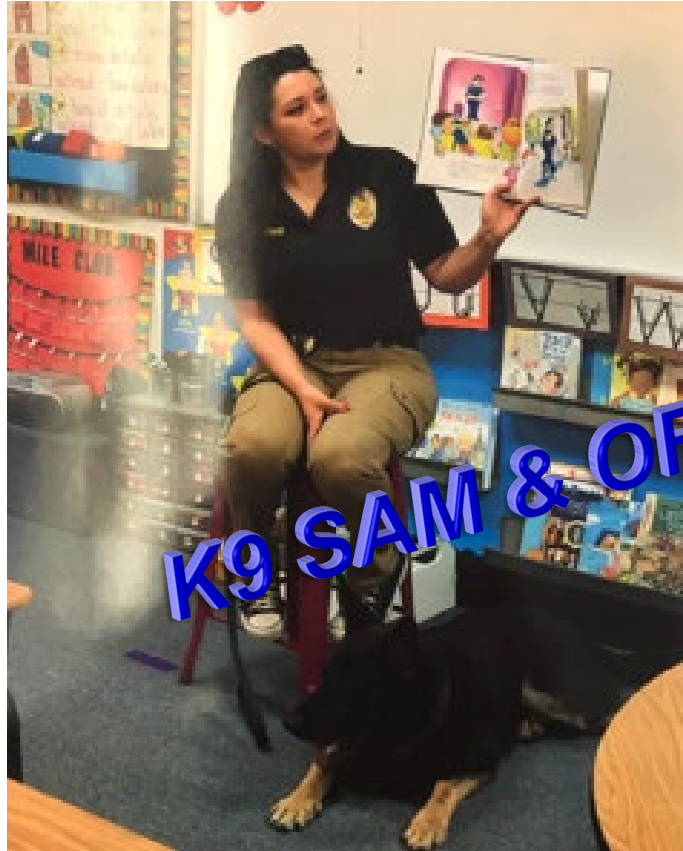
Struble said it will definitely be different waking up Monday morning and not coming to the place he has called his second home for 27+ years. He said he will truly miss seeing, talking, and working with all the great people that work at the Merced Police Department. Struble said the best advice he has for new officers, is for them to come to work every day, do their best for the residents of Merced, and leave for the day knowing they did the best they could do.

Struble plans to take two months off and then begin his new career with the Merced County DA's Office.

Thank you, Captain Struble, for your 27 years of service! Happy Retirement!

GUEST READERS – TEAM HENKE & SAM

Officer Angela Henke and K9 Sam visited St. Paul Lutheran School this week. Officer Henke read to the students, while K9 Sam enjoyed some free backrubs from the kindergarten to 6th grade students. The students had so much fun, they sent Officer Henke and Sam a commemorative "Thank You" card.



K9 SAM & OFFICER HENKE



MEET OUR NEWEST POLICE OFFICERS

The Merced Police Department had two new Police Officers and one new Police Officer Trainee start on Monday, June 7, 2021.



RAMON AYALA – POLICE OFFICER

Ramon was born in Merced and raised in Winton. He and his wife moved to Merced in 2017. They are expecting a baby girl at the end of next month. He attended Merced Community College and then attended the Fresno Police Academy in 2020.



SANGGALIH "SANG" KUSUMO – POLICE OFFICER

Sang was born and raised in Los Angeles County. She has her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Cal State Bakersfield. Sang put herself through the Tulare Kings County Academy.



WILLIAM TREVINO – POLICE OFFICER TRAINEE

William was born and raised in Merced and is a graduate of Merced High School. He has an associate degree in Criminal Justice. William was on active duty in the Army for four years and is currently enrolled in the National Guard. He is the proud father of 4-year-old twins.

2021 LAW ENFORCEMENT TORCH RUN



The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics fundraiser concert for the Merced County Team (Merced PD, Merced City Fire, Riggs, Merced CHP, Merced SO, Atwater PD) featuring the "Blue Line Band" is this Saturday night, June 12th, 2021.

PUBLIC WORKS CREWS IN ACTION

RAHILLY PARK CLEANUP EVENT

Public Works crews assisted in the cleanup effort at Rahilly Park on Saturday, June 5th.



WELL SITE #21 MAINTENANCE

Water crew tested and fine-tuned motor controls at Well Site #21.



STORM STATION MAINTENANCE

Sewer staff cleaned the storm station at Paulson Road/Donna Drive.



RESTRIPING AROUND TOWN

The Streets crew continued their re-striping venture throughout town.



PARKS CREW REPAIRS IRRIGATION

The Parks crew repaired an irrigation main line at Ada Givens Park.



TREE PRUNING CONTRACT

The City's contracted tree pruning services continued tree pruning this week with crews working in the Fahrens Park II vicinity.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM – PROJECTS UPDATE

PROJECT #121053 – G STREET, PARK AVENUE TO BEAR CREEK, ROAD REHABILITATION

The G Street project is progressing. The new water has passed its first set of tests and there is one more set of testing that is in works. These water tests ensure that the water line is not leaking and that the pipe is sanitized before connection of the pipe to the overall water system is made. The safety and sanitation of the water system is paramount. City forces and the contractor will be working this weekend to sample and test the water in the lab.

The City Engineer expects the water tests to go well. Once the water tests pass, the Water Division will make the connection to activate the line to the main system. Then, the construction of the pavement section may begin (est. two weeks). Staff are hopeful the section of the road will reopen to traffic around June 25th.



PROJECT #117020 – GERARD SEWER MAIN, HWY 99 TO KIBBY RD.

Rolfe Construction Co., Inc. back filled the sewer line.

This project is approximately 40% underway.



PROJECT #120060 – N STREET IMPROVEMENTS, 16TH TO 18TH STREETS

The TBS Contractors, Inc. poured catch basins, worked on streetlights and new irrigation this week.

The project is approximately 40% in progress.



CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

1. 117020 - Gerard Ave. Sewer Main Hwy 99 to Kibby Road
2. 120060 – N Street, 16th to 18th Streets, Roadway Improvement
3. 121053 - G St. – Park Ave. to Bear Creek Rehabilitation (emergency)
4. 117038 - V Street, 16th to 18th Streets, Road Improvement (bid opening 6/1/21)

PROJECTS IN DESIGN

1. Highway 59 Widening (11%)
2. Highway 59 and 16th Street Signal and Channelization (90%)
3. Motel Drive Multi-Use Path (100%)
4. R Street, 16th to 18th (90%)
5. B Street Improvements (50%)
6. G Street Improvements Childs to 13th St. (100%)
7. Orchard Avenue Sewer (50%)

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION MEMO

Please find attached, the Planning Commission Action Memo from the meeting of June 9, 2021.

JUNETEENTH EVENT AT McNAMARA PARK

The California Central Valley Journey for Justice along with other groups in the community are hosting an event giving a final farewell to Merced Hero Joseph Edwards who died on April 28, 2021.

Please see attached article about Mr. Edwards and his bravery that saved four people in 2010.

The event is planned for Saturday, June 19, 2021 at McNamara Park.

REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE

1. PC Action Memo Page 10
2. Juneteenth/Edwards Article Page 11

City of Merced
MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 10, 2021
TO: City Council
FROM: Kim Espinosa, Planning Manager
SUBJECT: Actions at the Planning Commission Meeting of June 9, 2021

At their meeting of June 9, 2021, the Planning Commission adopted a finding that the 5-Year Capital Improvement Program was consistent with the General Plan.

The Commission cancelled the Planning Commission meeting of June 23, 2021, due to a lack of items.

If you have any questions about this item, please feel free to contact me.

n:shared:Planning:PCMemos

JUNETEENTH CEREMONY AT McNAMARA PARK

I am reaching out to let you know that the CA Central Valley Journey for Justice (along with other groups in the community) is planning an event on Saturday, June 19 to give a final farewell to a local homeless hero (Joseph Edwards) that died on April 28, 2021.

The City of Merced also honored him and Bernice Gonzales (common law wife) for their heroism on April 4, 2011 with Mayor Spriggs presenting the recognition. We would like to ask if the City would also provide us with a final recognition to Joseph Edwards at this memorial event.

We believe it would be a great gesture. I have attached article will provide more detail for your consideration. One of the planning committee members is also checking into the planting of a tree at McNamara Park to make sure we have the city's protocol. We eventually plan to place a plaque close by.

Thank you,
gloria m sandoval



Bernice Gonzales and Joseph Edwards saved several people from drowning in Big Creek, a river in Merced.

On the bitter night of December 17, Joseph Edwards put his life on the line to save the lives of four college students. The four had been driving along Bear Creek in Merced when they lost control of their VW Beetle. The car skidded off the road and plunged into the rushing creek water, then sank 10 feet to the bottom. Singlehandedly, Edwards pulled all four to safety.

It was a remarkable feat of courage and selflessness, yet the story did not appear locally until four days later. By then, it had been broadcast on television and printed in newspapers as far away as Florida. Only then did the hometown newspaper, the Merced Sun-Star, interview the Good Samaritan and belatedly publish the story.

Edwards and his partner, Bernice Gonzales, were members of Merced's "underclass"—the homeless. On the night of December 17, they had taken refuge below a bridge, waiting out a particularly fierce winter rainstorm. Suddenly, the night was shattered by the racket of a car skidding off the road, down the slick embankment and into the rushing water—just feet away from where the two sat huddled together for warmth.

JUNETEENTH CEREMONY AT McNAMARA PARK

The voice of a young woman screaming for help brought them to their feet. Instantly, Edwards jumped into the frigid creek, following her cries. He grabbed her outstretched hand and began to pull her to safety. She begged Edwards to go back, crying that there were three others still in the water. And so he did, two more times, guided only by the glow of the submerged car's taillights.

Then panic struck him. The fourth victim could not be found. Only after making several dives was he able to locate the victim, who was still trapped in the car. The young man was unconscious, and he was trapped in his seat belt. Even so, Edwards somehow managed to free him and pull him to safety.

Gonzales had used a cell phone to call for help. Just as Edwards reached the bank with the last victim, the wail of sirens and flashing lights signaled the arrival of emergency vehicles. Rescue personnel hurried to take over what remained of the rescue. As Gonzales and Edwards watched, the dazed students were bundled into vehicles waiting to rush them to the hospital. Watching the retreating brake lights of the ambulances and police cars, the Good Samaritans stood alone once again in the dark night. Then they returned to the underpass to try to get some sleep.

At daybreak, they awoke, chilled to the bone and aching from the physical effort of rescuing the students. But Edwards could not forget the faces of the four victims, especially the last young man who was unconscious, and he began to worry. So he and Gonzales

"cleaned up" as best they could and headed to the office of the local newspaper to ask about the condition of the foursome.

The two must have been a sight when they appeared in the tidy newspaper reception area. In clothes caked with mud and still soggy, Edwards and Gonzales made their way to the counter. The receptionist eyed them skeptically as they tried to explain the reason for their visit. To their surprise, their account of the previous night's accident and rescue was the first the newspaper had heard of the incident.

Four days later, news of the rescue was finally reported in the local newspaper. The flurry of positive publicity prompted a donation of cash put together by workers from Livingston's Foster Farms plant. Several young women put together new backpacks creatively stuffed with food items, gift certificates, gloves and headgear. When a Sun-Star reporter interviewed the couple, Edwards thanked everyone who had made donations to he and Gonzales. His words were simply, "I'm blessed."

Aftermath

The cash gift enabled the couple to spend Christmas off the streets. They found a small apartment and were preparing to move in. It would be their first home in a year, since Edwards was laid off from his construction job. With no possessions of their own—save the clothes on their backs and the newly donated backpacks—they scavenged for everything else they would need. And in January, Gonzales and Edwards were again in a place they could call their own.

It was then they agreed to let two of us come there to interview them. On a typically foggy January night, I found myself standing at their front door. I knocked hesitantly, but there was no answer. I tried again, and abruptly the door to the adjacent unit was pulled open by a diapered toddler whose mother simultaneously took one look at us, yelled at the child and slammed the door shut. Finally, the Edwards' door opened slightly; we were recognized and invited in.

JUNETEENTH CEREMONY AT McNAMARA PARK

Of the three-room unit, their “new” furnishings filled one room—a mattress on the floor, a lamp atop a cardboard box, two chairs (one wooden, the other a flimsy metal lawn chair) and a “Raiders” blanket that covered the picture window. In one corner sat a shiny new food dish and litter box to accommodate a scrawny tortoise-shell kitten that had adopted Gonzales while they shared their underpass shelter.

Edwards wasn’t home yet, but Gonzales spoke willingly about the night of December 17. As she talked, she darted about the room, picking up paper plates and cups—“straightening up” for her guests. Then Edwards arrived, shook hands all around and perched on the end of the mattress. He recalled the night of December 17. As he told his story of the rescue, he lovingly stroked the back of the purring kitten.

The topic moved to the future. Edwards spoke of his dream of going back to school at Merced College to become a counselor. He hoped to be able to help others like himself who were “down on their luck.” His expression grew serious as he told of a tough early life. He recalled how he had barely survived a serious car accident at age 16 and how his severe head injuries had left him with the burden of daily seizures ever since.

Edwards spoke with gratitude of the financial help they had received from strangers. Still, he insisted, by rescuing the four college students, he was only doing what he had been taught—to “do the right thing” for others. He repeated his belief that it was he who was

“blessed.” Then, handing the kitten to Gonzales, Edwards abruptly arose and announced that he needed to be elsewhere. The interview had ended.

Several weeks later, an attempt at a follow-up visit had disappointing results. The gray

“Raiders” blanket no longer covered the window. Through it, the only signs of their former occupancy were some scattered papers and soda cans on the cement floor. Edwards and Gonzales, and the kitten, were gone. No one saw them leave; no one knew where they had gone.

Recognition

A grassroots group of Merced residents joined in an effort to locate Edwards and Gonzales. The goal of the group is to find a way for the couple to be publicly honored for their brave rescue of the four students. The citizens also hope that the positive publicity will benefit the community, as recent news from the area has been depressing. Reports have focused on negative issues such as record-breaking rates of unemployment and real estate foreclosures. Even the widely read Forbes magazine has chimed in with an article criticizing the city.

News of the December rescue has reached the National Enquirer. The March 14, 2011, issue featured a full-page article headlined “Homeless Hero.” Color photos show Edwards and Gonzales at the Bear Creek rescue site, and another shows a remnant of the wrecked car lying in the weeds beside the rushing creek water.

The City Council had agreed to recognize Gonzales and Edwards. Unfortunately, there was a mix-up as the couple was not present at that March 7 City Council meeting. Although Police Chief Floyd Higdon claimed to have contacted them, the couple stated that they were not notified. The mayor made no mention of the heroes being homeless either. That same night, opponents and proponents of the homeless heatedly discussed the March 5 eviction of other homeless people from the Sierra

JUNETEENTH CEREMONY AT McNAMARA PARK

Presbyterian Church Sanctuary, where the homeless had sought refuge after the city enforced a no camping ordinance and evicted them from their encampment on Black Rascal Creek in October 2010.

After three long months of lukewarm publicity, a transformation has begun. Acclaim is taking the place of indifference. The story of the heroic December rescue has come to the attention of the American Red Cross. The agency has announced plans to recognize the couple with the Good Samaritan Award at its annual awards banquet in Fresno.

The citizens' group has also been working with Dr. Robin DeLugan, an assistant professor at the University of California, Merced. The group plans to co-sponsor a forum on abolishing homelessness in the area. Dr. DeLugan has secured a meeting place on campus for April 9. The planning committee has unanimously agreed to dedicate the forum to Edwards and Gonzales at the beginning of the event.

The couple is still out on the streets, but they have reestablished contact with friends and supporters by cell phone. Edwards reports that he has been contacted by a representative of the Carnegie Hero Foundation, located in Pittsburg, Penn. The Commission honors civilians who perform acts of heroism and sometimes also offers financial assistance.

Less than an hour before the deadline for this report, a remarkable coincidence took place. In a grocery store parking lot, this reporter had a chance meeting with Edwards and Gonzales. Plans were made to keep in contact, phone numbers were exchanged and the couple was informed about the forum at UC Merced. When Edwards heard that the forum was scheduled for April 9, his eyes fill with tears. April 9, he explained, is his birthday.

The May issue of the Community Alliance will include a follow-up story on the couple's progress. Meanwhile, we wish them well.