The Bakersfield Californian

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Car dealers look for solutions to jump in crime along Bakersfield Auto Mall

BY JOHN COX
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A surge in crime along the Bakersfield Auto Mall has local car dealers weighing options for boosting security, potentially including asking for a share of the city's Measure N tax revenue.

An email circulated Thursday among Bakersfield auto dealerships listed a rash of thefts, close calls and other problems during about the past two weeks. The person who originated the message — an executive at a local company that provides security services along the auto mall — said his company had not seen such a high level of activity since June 2022.

The executive, BL Solutions CEO Richard Garrett, said his company's efforts to stop crime along the auto mall "is contingent on a unified approach where we are all working together, and that is the purpose of this email."

As Garrett explained by phone Friday, sharing of information is one possible solution, even as it requires competing businesses to disclose details they might not have passed along in years past. Another possibility, which he admitted would benefit BL financially, would be for the minority of auto mall dealerships that don't already contract the company's services to go ahead and sign up.

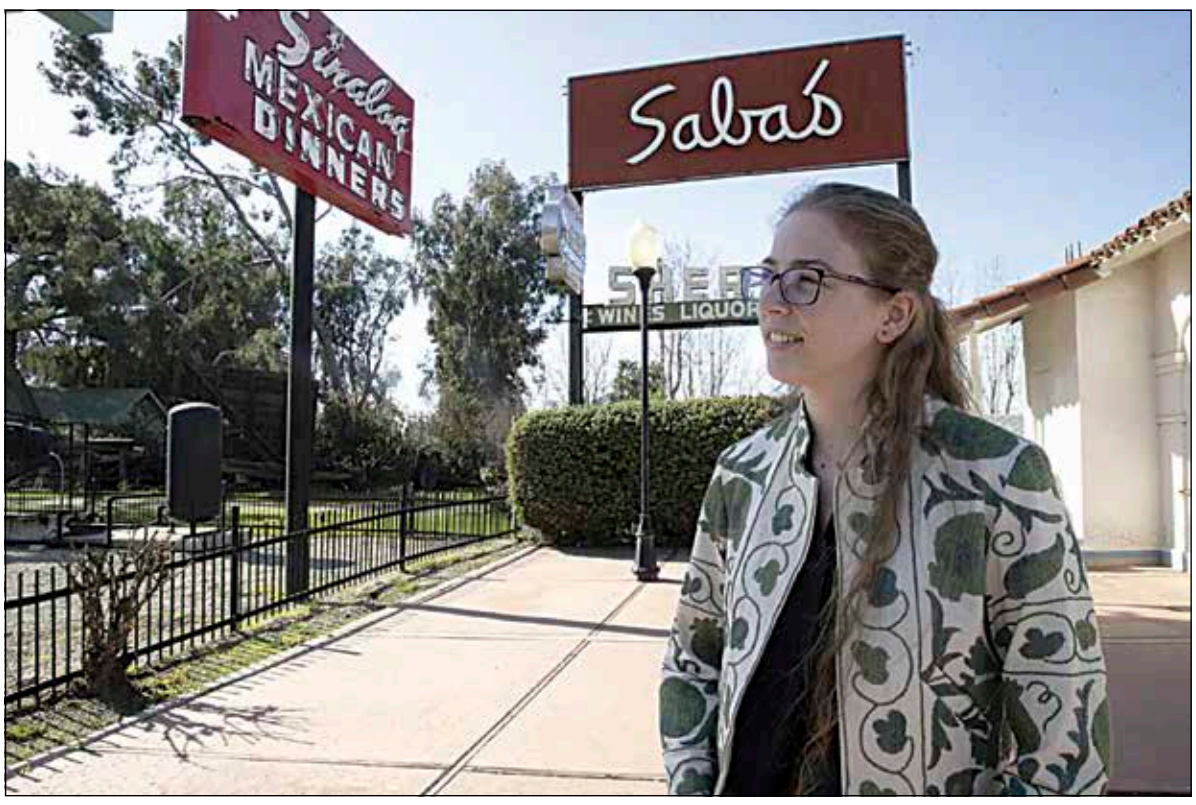
Another idea that surfaced recently, and which may take on added urgency amid the uptick in crime against dealerships, is to apply for some of the Measure N money set aside in 2018 for quality of life improvements. But it was unclear Friday how likely it is that fund might help pay for improving security along the auto mall.

The city of Bakersfield has provided money for security

Please see AUTO MALL | A3

KERN COUNTY MUSEUM

Neon collection is a gas ... as new signs arrive for 2024



PHOTOS BY ROD THORNBURG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Kern County Museum Curator Ashleigh Meyers talks with a reporter about plans to add four neon signs to the museum's Neon Plaza this spring. See more photos at Bakersfield.com.

BY STEVEN MAYER
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The Kern County Museum, its Executive Director Mike McCoy and Museum Curator Ashleigh Meyers have scored some new neon — and the signs from Bakersfield's past are expected to be restored and on display by spring.

"I want to get them up before Get Lit in April," McCoy said, referring to the annual gala event and fundraiser scheduled this year on April 27 at, you guessed it, the Neon Plaza on the museum grounds.

Imagine a beautiful spring night, surrounded by the glowing neon signs from the Far East Cafe, the Silver Fox, Tops Market, Amestoy's on the Hill (which is no longer on the Hill), Regent Cocktails, and many others.

Meyers, who has been curator since last spring, provided a sneak peak of the new signs, most of which are awaiting some TLC in the museum's storage warehouse.

The reputation of the museum's growing Neon Plaza is gaining a measure of prestige in other areas of the state, Meyers said. Two other facilities in California are using the local museum as a model for their own neon displays.

The Fierro Shoe Shop is believed to have offered shoe repair services for many years in the 300 block of South King Street in east Bakersfield. The mostly restored neon sign is one of the latest acquisitions at the Kern County Museum.

But the four new additions, she said, are going to require some funding to bring them up to the museum's standards.

"I need about $15,000," McCoy said.

Please see NEON | A3

'Where's the river?'

City lowers required flows pending interim agreement

Required flows down the Kern River channel were lowered by the city of Bakersfield on Monday as officials have collected more data on how much water is actually needed for the river to get west of town, according to an email from the city Water Resources Department.

The move is part of a larger effort to re-water the river through town per an ongoing lawsuit against Bakersfield by several public interest groups.

In late December, parties involved in the lawsuit were ordered by Kern County Superior Court Judge Gregory Pulskamp to come up with an interim flow regime that would keep fish populations healthy pending full environmental studies that would set long-term flows in wet and dry years.

LOIS HENRY
SJV WATER

The Water Resources Department had issued a memo in December to Kern River rights holders that it would keep enough water in the river so that 20 cubic feet per second passed over the McClung Weir, several miles west of Allen Road.

On Monday, the city notified Kern River interests that it was changing that flow requirement so that water passing McClung would "not exceed 20 cfs."

As of Thursday, only 5 cfs was measured at McClung and residents had definitely noticed the drop as rivulets weaved between large sandbars in the riverbed.

"Where's the river," was the subject of an email sent to SJV Water on Wednesday from an anonymous reader. "Based on your arti-

Please see HENRY | A3

BVARSITY ALL-AREA

Meet the top performers of 2023 in high school volleyball

SPORTS | C2

JIM FILLBRANDT | 1936-2024

He left a legacy in both public education, theater arts

BY STEVEN MAYER
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He was quite literally a legend in Bakersfield's theater arts scene for more than five decades, one of the founders and creators of what would become Bakersfield Music Theatre and its key performing arts center, Stars Theatre Restaurant in the city's downtown district.

James "Jim" Fillbrandt, who also worked 40-plus years as an educator and an administrator in the Kern High School District, as well as a longtime board member at Valley Strong Credit Union, and as a loving husband, father and grandfather, died Tuesday after a long illness. He was 87.

"He was charming and very witty," said his wife of 65 years, Jeanne Fillbrandt. "One of my friends said he was the funniest guy she ever met."

But he was also a thinker and a doer, wielding an unusual left-right-brain combination that

Please see FILLBRANDT | A3

Jim Fillbrandt, at Stars Theatre Restaurant in 2006, was being honored by the Arts Council of Kern for his lifetime of work in local theater.

HENRY A. BARRIOS
THE CALIFORNIAN, FILE

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