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Santa Cruz Sentinel

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WEST CLIFF DRIVE

Construction along 900 block nears completion



SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Crews work on the West Cliff repair on Wednesday.

By Aric Sleeper
asleeper@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ » With the completion of some construction projects along West Cliff Drive in sight and others still far off on the horizon, Santa Cruz Public Works and Granite Construction provided an update on the repairs occurring along the scenic roadway Wednesday morning.

“We’re at about the year milestone of construction on West Cliff,” said Santa Cruz Public Works Assistant Director Kevin Crossley, at the corner of Woodrow Avenue and West Cliff Drive Wednesday morning. “It’s hard to believe, so we felt that it would be appropriate to invite you all out to come take a look at the progress and share some big updates about what lies ahead for the remainder of this year and part of 2025.”

Crossley, who coordinates the construction efforts on West Cliff Drive, and Granite Construction Project Manager Bryan Adames led a tour for media members of the projects happening

on West Cliff Drive Wednesday, alongside Santa Cruz City Manager Matt Huffaker and others.

“The volume and the pace of the projects we have on West Cliff is unprecedented,” said Huffaker. “They will not only allow us to restore two-way (traffic) along West Cliff but will also protect some of our most vulnerable sections along West Cliff at least for the foreseeable future — until Mother Nature intervenes at some point. The amount of work that’s been underway over the course of the last year is pretty incredible.”

After providing city staff and members of the media with reflective jackets and hard hats, Crossley led the crew behind the protective fence along the 900 block of West Cliff Drive near Woodrow Avenue to explain how public works and Granite Construction have been rearmoring the coast since the onslaught of winter storms in 2023.

The infill walls at 920 and 932 West Cliff Drive are just about done, Crossley mentioned, and Adames added that the wall at 920 is about



ARIC SLEEPER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Santa Cruz City Manager Matt Huffaker, Associate Professional Engineer Miguel Lizarraga and Public Works Assistant Director Kevin Crossley escorted media members through the multiple construction sites on West Cliff Drive Wednesday morning.

14 feet thick at the base.

“It’s a substantial wall with thousands of yards of concrete,” said Crossley. “Credit to Granite, for in about three months getting this part of the project reconstructed. We’re just waiting for railings to go in. The wood will be removed, and we’ll put in metal hand rail-

ings and that will be the completion of the work here. We’re excited to reopen this area to the public.”

Adames explained that the railings on the two walls are planned to be installed next week. He mentioned that the 136-foot-long wall at 920 West Cliff Drive and

REPAIRS » PAGE 2

FLORIDA

Milton hits as a Category 3 storm

By Terry Spencer and Kate Payne
The Associated Press

TAMPA, FLA. » Hurricane Milton made landfall Wednesday along Florida’s Gulf Coast as a Category 3 storm, bringing powerful winds, deadly storm surge and potential flooding to much of the state. Milton drew fuel from exceedingly warm Gulf of Mexico waters, twice reaching Category 5 status.

The cyclone had maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (205 kph) as it roared ashore near Siesta Key in Sarasota County, the Miami-based National Hurricane Center said. The storm was bringing deadly storm surge to much of Florida’s Gulf Coast, including densely populated areas such as Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Fort Myers.

Heavy rains were also likely to cause flooding inland along rivers and lakes as Milton traverses the Florida peninsula as a hurricane, eventually to emerge in the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday.

MILTON » PAGE 2

CAPITOLA

Attorneys make closing arguments in murder trial

By Jessica A. York
jjork@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ » Speaking to a packed courtroom over two days of closing arguments this week, trial attorneys for the prosecution and defense agreed on one thing: the death of Capitola woman Alice “Alyx” Herrmann came at the hands of her partner.

Left to the jury to decide after five weeks of witness testimony was to what degree — if any — the actions of tech finance worker and musician Theobald Lengyel, also known to friends as “Milo Stone,” should be mitigated to a lesser conviction.

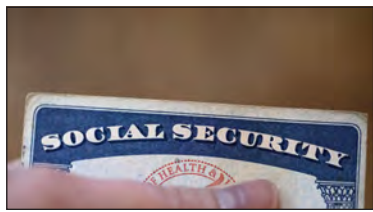
“We listened to her in fear. We listened to her in pain. You heard her cry, you heard her frustration,” Santa Cruz County Assistant District Attorney Emily Wang told jurors on Tuesday, referring to a 3-hour-and-14-minute audio recording file retrieved from Herrmann’s phone midway through the trial. “You heard her struggle and try to fight back as she was being restrained, held down and strangled for the last 53 minutes of her life.”

TRIAL » PAGE 2

SOCIAL SECURITY

Scheduled cost-of-living hike ‘won’t make a dent’

About 70.6 million recipients are expected to receive a smaller cost of living increase for 2025 than in recent years. **PAGE A5**



CABRILLO COLLEGE

Judge sentences stabber to prison

Steve Wooding was sentenced to 15 years for attempting to murder a student with a hunting knife in 2018. **PAGE A4**

BUSINESS

- Dow Jones**
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- S&P 500**
5,792.04 (+40.91)
- Nasdaq**
18,291.62 (+108.70)

SOCIAL MEDIA

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TODAY IN HISTORY

1845

The U.S. Naval Academy was established in Annapolis, Maryland, with an inaugural class of 50 students.

1935

The George Gershwin opera "Porgy and Bess," featuring an all-Black cast, opened on Broadway, beginning a run of 124 performances.

1964

The Summer Olympics began in Tokyo, the first Summer Games to be telecast around the world.

1966

The Beach Boys' single "Good Vibrations," written by Brian Wilson and Mike Love, was released by Capitol Records.

1973

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, accused of accepting bribes, resigned his office and pleaded no contest to one count of federal income tax evasion.

2014

Malala Yousafzai, a 17-year-old Pakistani girl, and Kailash Satyarthi, a 60-year-old Indian man, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for risking their lives for the right of children to receive an education and to live free from abuse.

Birthdays

Actor Peter Coyote is 83. Entertainer Ben Vereen is 78. Actor Charles Dance is 78. Author Nora Roberts is 74. Rock singer David Lee Roth is 70. Country singer Tanya Tucker is 66. Actor Julia Sweeney is 65. Actor Bradley Whitford is 65. Football Hall of Famer Brett Favre is 55. Actor/TV host Mario Lopez is 51. Hockey Hall of Famer Chris Pronger is 50.

Star report

Eilish refuses to talk about her sexuality

Billie Eilish, 22, has learned a hard lesson about publicly discussing the details of her sexuality. The Grammy and Oscar winner, who sparked controversy earlier this year for comments she made about her sex life, now says she won't ever do it again.

"I wish no one knew anything about my sexuality or anything about my dating life. Ever, ever, ever," she told Vogue in its November cover story, published Tuesday. "I'm never talking about my sexuality ever again. And I'm never talking about who I'm dating ever again."

Eilish raised eyebrows with some comments about sex in a Rolling Stone story back in April, when she revealed it's her "favorite topic."

— New York Daily News

LOTTERY

TUESDAY'S WINNING NUMBERS

Daily 3 Afternoon: 1, 7, 0

Daily 3 Evening: 8, 3, 0

Daily 4: 1, 0, 7, 6

Fantasy 5: 7, 11, 20, 25, 34

Daily Derby

1st: 5, California Classic

2nd: 3, Hot Shot

3rd: 2, Lucky Star

Race time: 1:45.93

Super Lotto Plus

Saturday's drawing: 2, 8, 17, 33, 47

Mega number: 3

Wednesday's estimated jackpot: \$29 million

Mega Millions

Tuesday's drawing: 3, 19, 20, 22, 66

Mega Number: 9

Friday's estimated jackpot: \$150 million

Powerball

Monday's drawing: 18, 30, 31, 52, 63

Powerball: 22

Wednesday's estimated jackpot: \$336 million

Repairs

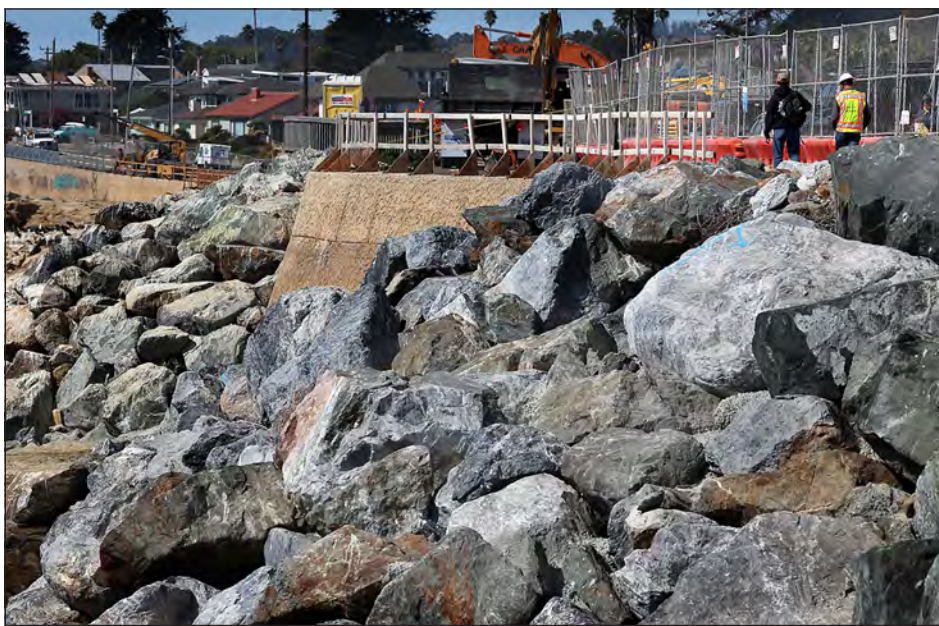
FROM PAGE 1

the approximately 65-foot-long wall at 932 West Cliff Drive consist of a standard concrete core and decorative concrete face, built upward 2 1/2 feet at a time.

"These two are gravity walls," added Adames. "It's literally a mass of concrete that's in the ground here. We had to get all the way down to bedrock. We key into the bedrock three feet and then you just build this like you eat an elephant — one bite at a time."

Granite Construction began to build the walls in the winter months and Adames mentioned that the elements were often against them, but they kept their eyes on the ocean and worked through it.

"We'd get the swells that would come up and over and you'd have to wait them out," said Adames. "Any water intrusion that did come in, we'd have to pump out because you can't get concrete mixed in with the ocean. As those swells would come, we'd just have to keep our eyes on the tide and deal with them as they



Repairs to armor the cliff from damage caused by Jan. 2023 storms continue Wednesday along West Cliff between Woodrow Avenue and Columbia Street.

show up."

Last winter, wave action caused a massive sinkhole in the pedestrian path at 944 West Cliff Drive. The hole was recently filled with a combination of gravel and concrete slurry, according to Crossley.

"It was over 20 feet deep," said Crossley. "We had to dig the hole out, plug the hole at the bottom of the wall and fill it

back in. So, this is an example of new damages that happened in between other projects that we were already in construction on. Fortunately we already had Granite at the site and they were able to pick this job site up too."

Further west at 960 West Cliff Drive, which also sustained further damage earlier this year, the crew at Granite Construction is

drilling a series of piers, which will connect and form a secant pile wall.

"We're working as quickly as we can now to restore the additional erosion that took out some of the path and also damaged the existing retaining wall, which you'll see Granite crews cutting some of the rebar on to make a connection between the new and existing wall. That's known

as the 960 site and that's what's going to govern the reopening of the 900 block, so we're hoping to tie that up by the end of the year," said Adames.

"And we are sprinting towards that goal," he added. On the other side of Woodrow Avenue, the Bethany Culvert Project is well under way and Adames predicts it will be done around Thanksgiving of this year.

"We're on track, as Bryan said, to have the project finished within the November timeframe," said Crossley. "Unfortunately we won't be able to open the road to two-way (traffic) right away."

Crossley explained that construction crews discovered a 70-foot-deep sea cave around 1016 West Cliff Drive, which will serve as an impasse for automobile traffic until next summer or later, but the 900 block should be open for two-way traffic by the end of 2024 — before winter hits. "We'd like just a regular winter," said Crossley. "It'd be nice just to get through this winter and button up the work we've started and not have as much or more work created for us for next year."

Trial

FROM PAGE 1

The prosecution has provided evidence that Lengyel likely placed Herrmann in a choke hold until she was strangled to death, though the specifics of the death were unclear after her body had decomposed for nearly a month in a shallow grave in the East Bay's Tilden Regional Park. The audio recording included audible sounds of Herrmann's screaming for help and later coughing and asphyxiating.

"You heard it when her voice simply gave out," Wang later added, describing the audio as "brutal and horrific." "You were there when this woman left this earth."

Wang characterized Lengyel's motivation as an overreaction to being told "no" when Herrmann refused to go out and play pool with him on the night of her death, despite his alleged efforts to "gaslight" Herrmann.

"She did not know how much danger she truly was in that night when she decided to stand up for herself," Wang said.

Defense attorney Annrae



PHOTOS BY SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Theobald Lengyel, right, appears in court with his attorney Annrae Angel on Tuesday for closing arguments in Lengyel's murder trial for the Dec. 4 killing of Alice "Alyx" Herrmann. Lengyel and Herrmann look out from the photo, at left, which the prosecution displayed in court as they began their summation.

Angel told jurors Wednesday that she had never contested that her client had killed Herrmann, adding that there was no way they could not be affected by listening to the recording. She described the proceedings as almost two trials, before the recording was aired and after. The task at hand for jurors, she said, was not to let emotion or bias color their ability to give Lengyel fair consideration.

"Most of what you heard is true, it's just about how you're going to interpret it," Angel said.

Angel argued that there were reasons to discredit the testimony of several witnesses, pointing to what she saw as inconsistencies in their testimony compared to earlier statements, intoxication, need for context and wishful thinking.

Angel said that what jurors needed to consider was that her client, when making frequent references to killing Herrmann, himself and their dog on the Dec. 4 night of Herrmann's death, was being hyperbolic and that alcohol was a factor in the night's outcome.



Superior Court Judge Nancy de la Peña listens on Tuesday to the prosecutions closing argument, delivered by Santa Cruz County Assistant District Attorney Emily Wang, at right.

Lengyel's actions should also be seen in light of provocation from Herrmann during a "contest of wills" between the two, Angel argued. She went on to paraphrase Herrmann's comments during the recorded audio, including references to financial issues between the couple and shared insults. Angel reminded jurors that, though the final hours where the argument ratcheted up between the couple were "heartbreaking," they could not use that in their decision-making.

"This is not something he would have decided to do in any rational way," Angel said of Lengyel. "That is

why I do not believe it was first-degree murder, it was not a rational event."

Lengyel did not testify on his own behalf, leaving attorneys for both sides to speculate on his motivations

"All of this talk about provocation, which we never really got a reason why," Assistant District Attorney Conor McCormick, co-counsel on the case, later offered as a rebuttal. "I don't know from that argument what the provocation was, still, other than that it devolved into arguments about other things."

Jurors were sent out to deliberate shortly before 4:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Milton

FROM PAGE 1

Milton slammed into a Florida region still reeling from Hurricane Helene, which caused heavy damage to beach communities with storm surge and killed a dozen people in seaside Pinellas County alone.

Earlier, officials issued dire warnings to flee or face grim odds of survival.

"This is it, folks," said Cathie Perkins, emergency management director in Pinellas County, which sits on the peninsula that forms Tampa Bay. "Those of you who were punched during Hurricane Helene, this is going to be a knockout. You need to get out, and you need to get out now."

By late afternoon, some officials said the time had passed for such efforts. By the evening, some counties announced they have suspended emergency services.

"Unless you really have a good reason to leave at this point, we suggest you just hunker down," Polk County Emergency Management Director Paul Womble said in a public update.

Multiple tornadoes spawned by the hurricane tore across Florida, the twisters acting as a dangerous harbinger of Milton's approach. Videos posted to social media sites showed large funnel clouds over neighborhoods in Palm Beach County and elsewhere in the state.

Milton, which has fluctuated in intensity as it approached Florida, was a Category 3 hurricane Wednesday evening. It was expected to remain a hurricane after hitting land and



JULIO CORTEZ — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A person walks under light rain on Wednesday in Tampa, Fla.

plowing across the state, including the heavily populated Orlando area, through Thursday.

Tampa Bay, near the top of a long stretch of coastline that could be in the bull's-eye, has not taken a direct hit from a major hurricane in more than a century.

"That doesn't mean that it couldn't happen," said Luisa Meshekoff, who nevertheless was staying put with her partner and eight cats in their home, a brick warehouse in a mandatory evacuation zone in Tampa's Channel District. The couple considered leaving but felt bringing the cats to a shelter wasn't an option, and they worried that getting stuck on the roads could be dangerous.

"I think if you have water and batteries, everything's OK," Meshekoff said. "I could be singing a different tune by 2 in the morning."

Milton threatened communities still reeling two weeks after Hurricane Helene flooded streets and homes in western Florida and left at least 230 people dead across the South. In many places along the coast, municipalities raced

to collect and dispose of debris before Milton's winds and storm surge could toss it around and compound any damage.

With the storm weaker but growing in size, the surge was projected to reach as high as 9 feet (2.7 meters) in Tampa Bay.

Jackie Curnick said she wrestled with her decision to stay and hunker down at home in Sarasota. But with a 2-year-old son and a baby girl due Oct. 29, Curnick and her husband thought it was for the best.

Curnick said they started packing Monday to evacuate, but they couldn't find any available hotel rooms, and the few they came by were too expensive.

She said there were too many unanswered questions if they got in the car and left: Where to sleep, if they'd be able to fill up their gas tank, and if they could even find a safe route out of the state.

"The thing is it's so difficult to evacuate in a peninsula," she said. "In most other states, you can go in any direction to get out. In Florida there are only so many roads that take you north or south."

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