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101 SECTION B

Liccardo is trying to end pension war

If it ever existed, the honeymoon is well and truly over for San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo. Now he has to deal with the hard lifts, and none is heavier than finding peace in the city's pension wars.

We saw the first shape of Liccardo's answer last week. If you need the bumper sticker description, it would be this: Moving away from ex-Mayor



SCOTT HERHOLD
COLUMNIST

Chuck Reed, but not far enough to please the paladins of retirement benefits, the cops and firefighters. On the merits, there is much to commend Liccardo's plan: He is seeking \$25 million in yearly savings from negotiations over Measure B, Reed's pension reform plan. That's half as much as the city originally envisioned.

"I'm confident that the only way to get to a solution is negotiations," Liccardo said Friday at an 18th-floor meeting with reporters.



Liccardo
Mayor seems ready to embrace tax increases

"It's our job to build the bridge halfway." Significantly, Liccardo's proposal, while tied to restoring services, does not get too deeply into the weeds. He has suggested that the burden of

paying more for pensions, the kernel of Measure B, could be eased by salary increases. The mayor also seems ready to embrace tax increases. His plan relies on city voters to approve a sales tax (either ¼ or ½ cent) and for county voters to approve a transportation measure in 2016.

Politics of peace

None of that means the politics of peace will be easy. As the man who asks for negotiations, Liccardo is not unlike the leaders of France or Germany who crave an end to hostilities in eastern Ukraine.

The public safety unions, who hold favorable cards in litigation, are more in the position of Vladimir Putin. The facts on the ground, including job possibilities elsewhere, have moved in their direction.

Liccardo's plan already has drawn denunciation from cops and firefighters, who called the city's decision to set an "arbitrary" savings target "a major step backward."

Moreover, the new mayor faces several political and legal restraints. First, he has only a tenuous majority on the council, which has a strong block leaning toward labor.

Second, Liccardo is facing obvious pressure from well-heeled neighborhoods to do something about crime. Although adding a couple of hundred police officers might not change the crime rate significantly, doing nothing makes for very bad optics.

The tricky part of all this is that Liccardo signed on to Measure B as a councilman before the 2012 election. He's saying now that he would be content with half a loaf of bread. That will probably require going back to the voters, who had approved Measure B overwhelmingly.

Asked Friday whether the city had gone too far with pension reform, Liccardo said no, that the measure was needed at the time to avoid laying off cops. He is nonetheless edging away from the harder position he took as an ally of Reed.

Is it the right way to go? Yes. The city needs to make a concession, particularly to hold a police force together. Liccardo understands that if he wants to do other things as mayor, he has to reach peace on the pension front.

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FIVE-ALARM FIRE IN SAN JOSE

Blaze destroys 2 shops

Classic car collection worth more than \$1M also goes up in smoke

By Robert Salonga
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SAN JOSE — A relentless fire engulfed an industrial duplex in North San Jose early Saturday, sending a column of acrid smoke across the valley sky as owners of two car-customizing businesses saw their livelihoods go up in flames. And one lost a classic car collection.

The five-alarm fire, which also prompted evacuations of homes and businesses, was reported just before 7 a.m. on Commercial Court near Berryessa Road. The auto shops were destroyed, fire officials said.

No injuries — either to people or a leashed security dog that was freed from his post in the nick of time — were reported in the blaze, which was kept from spreading to neighboring businesses by about 110 firefighters.

Because the winds were light, the thick column of smoke from the fire generally rose straight up into the sky rather than spreading wide. But it still cast a brown haze over parts of the valley and was visible along a stretch of Highway 101.

An assessment of possible health and air-quality effects by city environmental officials was underway Saturday, and homeowners and business people immediately downwind, or south-

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Firefighters respond to a five-alarm fire on Commercial Court near Berryessa Road that destroyed two auto shops.

SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT



KARL MONDON/STAFF PHOTOS

Crows gather in Redwood Shores trees on a late afternoon. A bird count in the 1950s tallied dozens of crows in San Jose, and the recent counts have averaged 1,200.

FLOCKING TO THE CITY

Ravens and crows adapting to Bay Area cities in record numbers

By Nicholas Weiler
Santa Cruz Sentinel

They're smart and resourceful — and they're flocking to Bay Area cities in record numbers. They know this is where all the opportunity is these days.

Crows and ravens were once rare in urban areas, but now they seem to be everywhere.

They cluster in parks and scrounge behind dumpsters, cackling and brawling and fixing passers-by with calculating stares.

"They're a nuisance," said Yvonne Hager, owner of Heather's Made To Go, a drive-thru coffee shop in Scotts Valley. "They've stolen three pastries from me this week!"

But ecologists say it's time the locals

See CROWS, Page 14



INSIDE

How to tell the difference between a crow and a raven and see how their population has grown. **Page 14**

The owner of a Scotts Valley coffee shop reported crows stealing three pastries in a week.

HEALTH PLAN

Meeting insurance deadline

Little sister prods siblings to enroll by the Sunday target

By Tracy Seipel
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SAN JOSE — Proving once again that annoying little sisters have their place in life, San Jose residents Juanita Valencia and Gloria Lopez on Saturday finally signed up for health insurance — well before Sunday's official midnight deadline to enroll in a 2015 plan.

But it took relentless prodding by their younger sibling, Lupe Serrano, a 56-year-old housekeeper at Regional Medical



DEADLINE

The Covered California enrollment deadline is 11:59 p.m. Feb. 15.

Center of San Jose, to get them to an enrollment event at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish.

"I call her a little firecracker," said Valencia, 60, a temporary worker at a medical device manufacturer. "She likes to tell us to do things, and she told me *I had* to do this. She's looking after her big sisters."

See ENROLL, Page 4

ONLINE EXTRAS



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Warriors ready for All-Star show

See photos, read recap as Warriors' Curry, Thompson compete in battle of conferences at 5:30 p.m.

www.mercurynews.com/sports

What's next on 'Walking Dead'

Read Chuck Barney's recap after tonight's episode.

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Kevin Hart sets tour dates

Comedian will play Oakland, San Jose, Sacramento arenas.

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Will wave of warmth last?

See latest conditions and check forecasts to find out for sure.

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Crows gather in the trees in Redwood Shores. Crows and ravens are cousins in the corvid family. KARL MONDON/STAFF

Crows

Continued from Page 1

learn to love their noisy new neighbors: Crows and ravens are probably here to stay. These clever birds thrive in our cities because, in many ways, they're so much like us.

Volunteers in the Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count first noted a few dozen crows living in San Jose in the early 1950s. Since then the birds have flourished.

By the 1980s, San Jose volunteers were documenting hundreds of crows during the annual daylong count, and in the past five years they have counted an average of 1,200 crows in the city. Bird watchers around the greater Bay Area have reported the same explosive growth.

When crows started showing up in Palo Alto in the 1970s, "it was something people talked about," said Steve Bousman, author of the "Breeding Bird Atlas of Santa Clara County" and longtime record-keeper for the local Audubon Society. "Now they're a common bird. I hear them almost every morning."

The story is much the same for ravens. Raven sightings were almost unheard of outside Marin County until the 1990s, but

Audubon volunteers around the greater Bay Area now count hundreds of them each year.

As cousins in the corvid family, crows and ravens can be hard to tell apart at first glance. But ravens are considerably larger than crows, sport thicker beaks and have beardlike tufts of feathers around their throats. Ravens also have deep croaking voices, while crows have a higher-pitched caw. The birds also have distinct social lives. Ravens usually live alone or in mated pairs, while crows are more sociable, often living in large family groups in which elder siblings help parents care for younger chicks.

John Marzluff, a leading expert on crow and raven behavior at the University of Washington, said he sees a great deal of humanity in the corvids he studies. Like us, he said, they are long-lived and form long-lasting monogamous relationships. They are also among the most intelligent of bird species, rivaling many primates with their skillful tool use and ability to adapt to changing environments.

Urban crows have adapted to the human world around them, Marzluff said. In some cities they have learned to use cars to crack tough nuts and wait for walk signals to retrieve their pulverized prizes.

They're also attuned to individual humans. People who feed one crow will soon find themselves followed around by a flock of begging birds, Marzluff said.

And it's best not to get on their bad side. Eight years ago, Marzluff captured several crows while wearing a caveman mask. To this day, he said, every crow around will scold and divebomb him if he ventures on campus wearing the mask.

Even youngsters who weren't born at the time of the original "crime" had learned to treat the mask as a threat after seeing how older birds reacted to it, Marzluff said.

"The fact that they're watching us and paying attention to what we do, that's humbling," he said. We should see something of ourselves in these smart, social, faithful birds, he said. "This is another form of life out there that's trying to do the same thing we are."

Crows and ravens have lived close to humans for millennia. The carrion crow haunted ancient battlefields, and early farmers learned to erect scarecrows to keep the birds away from their crops. Ravens in particular are central characters in ancient mythology: The Norse god Odin kept two ravens as his messengers, and native peoples of the Pacific Northwest told stories of Raven the Trick-

ster who created the world by accident.

In the 19th century, crows were actually quite common in the Bay Area, according to contemporary naturalists. But as the land was developed for agriculture, farmers shot them, poisoned them and chased them away. By the early 20th century they were rare outside of rural areas, where they foraged in woods and fields and stole human garbage and crops when they could get them.

But after World War II, as American suburbs spread, crows once again adapted to the changing human landscape. With open spaces for foraging, trees to roost in at night and lots of garbage around, the suburbs were an ideal habitat.

Another big change came in 1972, when crows and ravens became protected under the Federal Migratory Bird Act, according to Kevin McGowan of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This meant it was no longer legal to shoot them without a federal permit.

Over several generations, the birds seem to have learned that our growing cities were now safe havens with plentiful food and limited predators, and they began to move to cities en masse.

They may fascinate bird

Quoth the raven: 'I'm not a crow'

These two species, American crows and common ravens, overlap widely throughout North America, including the Bay Area. They look quite similar, but with a bit of practice, you can tell them apart.

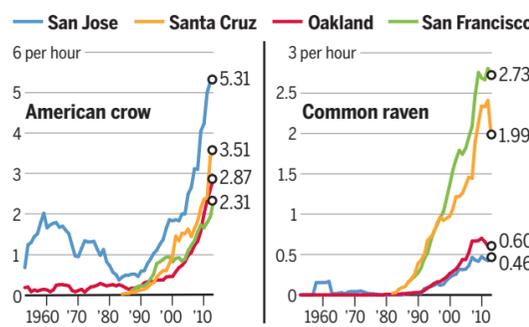


American crow		Common raven
<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>		<i>Corvus corax</i>
17 to 20 inches	Length	24 to 27 inches
32 to 40 inches	Wingspan	46 to 54 inches
About 20 ounces	Weight	About 40 ounces
8 years	Lifespan	30 years
High-pitched "caw-caw"	Vocalization	Deep, croaking voice
Fan-shaped	Tail	Wedge-shaped



Local populations soaring

Data from annual Audubon Society bird counts show that crow and raven populations have been rising locally for decades. Below are the number of sightings per hour by Audubon Society volunteers in several Northern California cities as of 2013.



Note: Each data point represents the average of the preceding five years. Sources: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon Society DOUG GRISWOLD/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

biologists, but the boom in corvid populations has ruffled feathers among wildlife ecologists, who say ravenous ravens in particular are a threat to sensitive bird species like the marbled murrelet, whose nests corvids prey on.

California park officials have attempted to reduce raven populations by trapping and killing the birds, said Portia Halbert, an environmental specialist with State Parks, but the clever corvids quickly learned to recognize and avoid animal-control teams. To take the ravens by surprise, she said, "they have to change clothes, change hats."

Instead, Halbert has spent the past 10 years re-vamping how the parks handle garbage and educating visitors about the need to eliminate the food scraps that draw ravens there in the first place. She and her teams even begun placing faux murrelet eggs laced with unpleasant toxins throughout the forest, hoping the ravens would learn to avoid them.

These efforts have significantly reduced the number of ravens in the parks, Halbert said, but she acknowledged that at this point they are never going to be rid of them entirely.

"They're here," she said, "and they're here to stay."

MY TOWN

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