

# The Press Democrat

A SITCOM WITH  
NORTH COAST TIES



Upcoming TV show based on  
quirky career path of food blogger  
and SR native Gabi Moskowitz  
**Sonoma Living**

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2014

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SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

*"It's like 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.'  
I can't have a conversation. I feel isolated here mentally."*

RON RECCHIONI

## Older, and alone



Photos by JOHN BURGESS / The Press Democrat

**ON HIS OWN:** Ron Recchioni lives in an assisted-care facility in Santa Rosa, where he says he feels isolated among the other residents, many of whom have dementia. Recchioni relies on one friend's weekly visits and occasional dinners with another to break up the time he spends alone.

### In Sonoma County, many older residents feel debilitating effects of isolation

By JEREMY HAY

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

One early February day, as midmorning light fell into the bedroom through a slatted window shade, Ron Recchioni's dementia-plagued roommate was, as is so often the case, asleep.

The stray sounds of TV shows and voices in the hall were behind him, and Recchioni, 75, blind, and in a wheelchair, said he feels very alone.

"He's a really nice guy; ex-teacher," he said of his roommate in the east Santa Rosa assisted-living home. "But he can't remember anything except 40, 50 years ago."

Managers have told him that most of the facility's residents have dementia of some sort, said Recchioni, a former real estate agent who moved to Sonoma County from Millbrae in 2001.

"It's like 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,'" he said, referring to the landmark book and 1975 film

TURN TO **ALONE**, PAGE A11



**REACHING OUT:** Kim Brown, 61, packs in her rented Santa Rosa room for a trip to Santa Cruz for her grandson's 10th birthday. Brown is working to connect with others through a peer counseling program and a women's support group.

## Asia's thirst for wine matures

Market booming as China overtakes France, Italy as top consumer of red wines

By BETTINA WASSENER

NEW YORK TIMES

HONG KONG — Six bottles of 1990 Romanée-Conti Burgundy sold to an Asian buyer at a Christie's auction in Hong Kong last month for 980,000 Hong Kong dollars — about \$126,345 U.S.

A case of wine from the Cros Parantoux vineyard in Burgundy, France, fetched \$82,333 in a sale held by the American auction house Acker Merrall & Condit at a restaurant overlooking Hong Kong's harbor.

Fine wine comes at a price in Asia, but there are plenty of buyers. Asian consumers have become a major factor in the global wine market, with China overtaking France and Italy last year as the biggest consumer of red wine. Now, customers in the region are getting more sophisticated, educated and diverse in their wine choices.

"There are a lot more wine lovers in Asia, and they are enjoying a lot more wines," Simon Tam, head of wine at Christie's China, said about the auction house's recent sale. "The market is maturing very, very rapidly."

Asians traditionally have been drinkers of whiskey, brandy and local spirits like baijiu, a liquor distilled from grain, rather than wine.

TURN TO **WINE**, PAGE A9

## Little violence, high turnout in Afghan vote

By SHASHANK BENGALI

LOS ANGELES TIMES

MAIDAN SHAHR, Afghanistan — Afghanistan passed the first major test of the impending post-American era Saturday with an election that featured a robust turnout, minimal violence and few glaring reports of cheating as voters began the process of selecting a successor to 13-year President Hamid Karzai.

Next comes the counting of roughly 7 million ballots nationwide and the investigation of hundreds of claims of irregularities, from the serious to the superficial.

The process is likely to take several weeks and none of the three presidential front-runners is expected to win an absolute majority, which would mean a runoff vote between the

TURN TO **AFGHAN**, PAGE A11

## NRA turns up in court to fight for gun rights

'800-pound gorilla' assists owners in hundreds of lawsuits

By PAUL ELIAS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The San Diego County sheriff denied Edward Peruta a permit to carry a concealed weapon. Christopher Haga's gun collection was seized, and he was charged with crimes after he mis-

takenly was linked to a theft of assault weapons from a Fresno-area military base.

The National Rifle Association then lent legal assistance to both men as part of its aggressive legal and political campaign to blunt gun controls across the nation.

Emboldened by a seminal U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2008 that upstanding Americans have the fundamental right to keep guns in their homes, the NRA has involved itself in

hundreds of legal cases, many in California.

That case "unleashed a torrent of litigation," said UCLA Law School professor Adam Winkler, a Second Amendment expert.

Much of it is either started by the NRA or supported by the organization, which offers financial assistance and legal help to people embroiled in lawsuits and legal trouble because they own guns.

TURN TO **NRA**, PAGE A10



**Ed Peruta**  
Gun owner's San Diego lawsuit aided by NRA.



SANTA ROSA  
77 / 45  
THE WEATHER, **B12**



**HELP FOR STRICKEN BABY** Rescuers parachute to crippled sailboat 900 miles at sea to help ill child; Navy vessel steams toward site / **A3**

**Books** D5  
**Business** E1  
**Classified** E5

**Cohn** C1  
**Crossword** E7  
**Forum** T5

**Lotto** A2  
**Movies** D7  
**Rubino** C2

**Smith** B3  
**Scoreboard** C4  
**TV** E6



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# ALONE: Sonoma County's fastest-growing population group is those age 65 and older

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

about a mental hospital. "I can't have a conversation. I feel isolated here mentally," said Melissa Fike, senior programs manager at the Community and Family Services Agency. The Santa Rosa nonprofit group offers services including individual and group counseling for elderly county residents.

There is no way to know how many of Sonoma County's roughly 81,000 residents age 60 and over are in isolated situations, which over time, experts say, lead to physical and mental health issues and even can shorten lives.

But such difficulties may well bedevil more and more people in their later years. The county's fastest-growing population group is residents age 65 and older. By 2020, it is projected to number 99,448, or 20 percent of the population, according to the state Department of Finance.

And informal measures suggest that cases of isolated elderly people are far from rare, the situations often made more acute by poverty, lack of transportation, disability and emotional or physical distance from family members.

The Community and Family Services Agency serves about 130 people a year, Fike said. She estimated that 75 percent of those clients are in some way isolated, their social interactions few and their ability to get out of their homes extremely limited.

Another gauge is at the Council on Aging, whose Meals on Wheels program delivers food to about 1,800 people five days a week. The program's clients are largely homebound with very few social interactions — often the very reason they are enrolled in the meal program, said Laura Colgate, director of the agency's senior nutrition program.

"It's very common, a very high percentage," Colgate said. "Quite often, our drivers are their only physical contact."

## Most common problem

That debilitating situation is familiar to many elderly Sonoma County residents, say people who work with senior citizens.

"Isolation is a huge issue. In the program I run, it is the most common problem," said Melissa Fike, senior programs manager at the Community and Family Services Agency. The Santa Rosa nonprofit group offers services including individual and group counseling for elderly county residents.

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**'Just burning time'**

There is on David Harnage's wall, in a little room squeezed between his kitchen and living room, a collage of photographs of people he rarely sees or who have left the world. A son who comes once a month. Another who lives in Tahoe and whom he sees far less. His grandchildren. His wife, Alvarine, who died in 2001.

In a week, other than the Meals and Wheels delivery person, Harnage, 92,

had only seen his caregiver, with whom he has an efficient but not particularly close relationship, and his four small dogs.

"What breaks the isolation is when Meals on Wheels comes. Over the years, they have pulled me out of some isolated spots," said Harnage, a onetime divinity student, seated in his wheelchair and surrounded by piles of books about Christianity.

Those spots keep coming, though, their shadows falling during a long conversation on a sunny but chilled March afternoon.

"Look," he said to a visitor, pointing across the living room at an electric fireplace that warmed the small house crowded with a lifetime's belongings.

"I'm just burning time, just like that is," Harnage said. "And my time is getting short."

He watched his wife live out her last five years in a nursing home. He spent six months in one himself after breaking a hip. He won't consider that option.

"I'm going to die here in this house," he said, making a promise, flashing some defiance he still has in reserve. It appears occasionally, then dissolves.

One minute, Harnage, a former nurse, sounded like Muhammad Ali.

"I'm as good as the best and better than the rest, because the best are not bitching and the rest are," he said. "That's how to live."

But soon, he talked of how in three weeks he had not gone to church, one of his few interactions with the world not made through his TV.

His ride had been unable to come, he said. He hadn't asked for another.

"I just don't want to beg them to come get me," he said.

Also, a man who once came to take him shopping at times could no longer lift him, and so that activity had gone away, too.

"I kind of brought it on myself by not

sticking up my nose and saying, 'Come get me,'" he said.

Later still: "How many times have I counted these four walls?" Harnage wondered aloud. "And how many times have I looked at these pictures?"

**Dangerous situation**

Such circumstances are more than difficult to bear; they threaten well-being.

"When people are isolated and alone, you get into the tapes in your head," said Fike at the Community and Family Services Agency. "It becomes a cycle that creates even more inertia and, I think, can create a lot of hopelessness."

That can lead to carelessness, loss of appetite and a reduced desire or ability to reach out for support.

"It can definitely be a dangerous situation," said Healdsburg therapist Drew Ross, who works mostly with the elderly.

"Because of self-neglect, they stop having the want, will or ability, or all three, to care for themselves," said Ross, whose Creative Counseling group of therapists works with elderly clients and their families around the North Bay to manage the aging process.

**Struggling back**

"I suspect it has something to do with depression," said Kim Brown, 61, speaking about the 45 pounds she said she lost last year. "I completely lost my appetite."

Brown is struggling back from a long, hard year that started in January 2013 when she moved from Concord into a rented room in a Santa Rosa family's home.

A child of the 1970s Haight-Ashbury scene, she was steeped in the ideals of collective living. In Concord, she had lived since 2002 with two daughters and two grandchildren. But they scattered when their rent was raised.

Alone in Santa Rosa — despite a

warm welcome extended by her landlords — "I felt obsolete, like I had no purpose," she said.

"They have their lives and their blood. And I get that," Brown said of the family she lives with. "I spend most of my time alone in my room or, when it's sunny, out in the backyard reading."

She has a smoker's throaty voice and nervous hands. She performs a Buddhist ceremony every morning in the backyard. She tries to stay sharp.

"I watch 'Jeopardy' every night to keep the wheels turning," she said. "I read a lot. But I miss intellectual stimulation on a regular basis."

Brown's ability to go out is limited. She has no car and must ride a bicycle or take a bus, and then she goes only to places she needs to. She also has to cope with severe leg and memory problems, stemming from a bad car accident in 2000.

Slowly, though, she is regaining a foothold in the larger world.

The county's office of In-Home Support Services steered her to the Community and Family Services Agency, which set her up in a 12-week peer counseling program. And last month, she joined a women's support group the agency runs.

"I'm hoping that I can get to know some of them a little better, but it just seemed like a good first step," Brown said.

"And I found that's a lot of what they are going through, isolation. I guess it's a symptom of getting old," she said.

**'In another place'**

In late March, allergies overtook Ron Recchioni.

One day he sat in his wheelchair in his room, sipping water between coughs, trying to keep his spirits up. Growing tired.

His roommate was asleep again. The day was rainy. Gray light came between his shades onto his yellow bedspread.

But then a friend stopped by with a cup of coffee from McDonald's. And a pianist visited, sitting down to play in the activity room down the hall. The melody drifted into Recchioni's bedroom.

He loves such moments: good company, which happens too rarely, and good, live music, which the home's activity director arranges regularly.

"It completely lifts me," he said. "I'm not here, I'm in another place."

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*"I spend most of my time alone in my room, or, when it's sunny, out in the backyard reading."*

**KIM BROWN**

Moved to a rented room in Santa Rosa after living in Concord with family members for more than a decade

## RESOURCES

**Community and Family Services Agency**, for counseling and support groups. 545-4551, ext. 211

**Council on Aging**, home visits. 525-0143, ext. 108

**Creative Counseling**, counseling specifically for the elderly and their families. 239-2310

**Senior Center Without Walls**, phone-based activities for the elderly. 877-797-7299; [seniorcenterwithoutwalls.org](http://seniorcenterwithoutwalls.org)

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# AFGHAN: Some voters left Taliban-controlled rural areas to cast ballots in safety of cities

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

top two no earlier than the end of May.

Still, voters stared down Taliban death threats and lingering memories of past fraud-scarred elections, trekking through the deserted streets of Kabul and rain-swept fields in the provinces to polling places guarded by 195,000 Afghan soldiers and police.

Some voters quietly left Taliban-controlled villages to cast ballots in the safety of cities and towns. Others waited in long lines under wet skies at schools and mosques, and some were delayed even longer when many polling places ran out of ballots and had to be resupplied.

By day's end, officials said voter turnout had far surpassed the 4.6 million of the 2009 presidential election, and approached that of the first election after the fall of the Taliban, in 2004. Barely one-third of the voters were women, owing to Afghanistan's conservative society as well as fears of Taliban attacks.

But after a series of high-profile Taliban assaults in recent weeks aimed at derailing the polling — decried by the insurgent group as a U.S.-sponsored plot — violence Saturday was relatively limited. Four civilians and 16 Afghan security personnel were reported killed nationwide.

"We showed the world we are a democracy," Karzai said in an evening address to the nation.

It was heartening news for U.S. officials, who publicly maintained a studied silence but privately described the vote as a barometer for the direction Afghanistan will take after most of the remaining 33,000 American troops withdraw by year's end.

"I commend the Afghan government, electoral bodies and the (security forces) for their enormous effort to plan, secure



**An Afghan man casts his vote at a polling station in Jalalabad, east of Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. Voters lined up for blocks at polling stations nationwide to pick a successor to President Hamid Karzai.**

and hold the elections," tweeted the U.S. ambassador to Kabul, James Cunningham.

With Karzai constitutionally barred from seeking a third term, the Obama administration hopes that a change in leadership will refresh relations, which have soured under the increasingly combative Afghan leader. Each of the three presidential front-runners has pledged to sign a long-awaited security agreement that would allow a few thousand American troops to remain beyond 2014 to carry out counterterrorism operations and continue training Afghan forces.

For a sizable number of rural Afghans, however, the election didn't take place at all: Officials did not open 956 out of a planned 7,168 polling stations because they were located in areas that soldiers and police couldn't secure. There also were reports from several other areas that ballot papers weren't delivered to some unsafe districts.

In outlying parts of Wardak province, just west of Kabul, the Taliban circulated letters for weeks warning that anyone who participated would be punished or killed. So the night before the vote, 52-year-old Sher Agha drove to the provincial capital of Maidan Shahr, where government security forces patrol the streets.

Early Saturday morning, draped in a mustard-colored shawl to ward off the chill and spitting rain, the tall farmer cast his ballot at the provincial government compound that served as the main polling center in Maidan Shahr, a mountain-ringed town one hour's drive from Kabul.

"People should be proud to vote," he said. "But where I live, people are afraid they might be killed if they vote."

As in past elections, voters had their forefingers dipped in indelible ink to guard against multiple vote-casting. The mark could draw the attention of the

Taliban, but many, like Sher Agha, decided it was worth the risk.

Low turnout and little official oversight of the balloting in rural areas could open the door for vote-rigging allegations, as in 2009, because of the ability of political partisans to buy off election staff and security forces. One such effort was exposed when the Afghan interior ministry announced that it had arrested two police and intelligence officers for stuffing five ballot boxes in Sayedabad, one of Wardak's most troubled districts.

Voters also were selecting members of elected advisory boards known as provincial councils. At the offices of Mohammad Hazarat Janan, deputy head of the Wardak provincial council, reports came in all morning from rural areas where voter turnout was low.

However, in one rural district, Jalrez, poll workers told Janan they had exhausted all 600 ballot papers within barely two hours of voting. He suspected that was an attempt to cover up possible ballot-stuffing.

"They are making excuses to pave the way for fraud," Janan said, while acknowledging he would have to request a formal investigation.

By 11 a.m., four hours after polls opened, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, the government-appointed election watchdog, said it had received about 200 complaints. They ranged from voting stations that opened late to reports that candidates or authorities had interfered with voting in the provinces, said the commission's spokesman, Nader Mohseni.

One leading presidential candidate, former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, tweeted, "There are reports of serious fraud in several locations but all is docu-

mented and will be passed on to (the complaints commission) for investigation."

Another front-runner, 2009 presidential runner-up Abdullah Abdullah, told reporters that tens of thousands of people were unable to vote because polling stations ran short of ballot papers.

Both candidates had warned of fraud for weeks leading up to the election, leading some observers to speculate that they were laying the groundwork for challenging the results should either lose to the other or to a third leading candidate: Zalmay Rassoul, a longtime Karzai adviser and ex-foreign minister who is seen as the incumbent's choice.

There were reports of minor clashes between security forces and armed militants in a handful of provinces. In Logar province south of Kabul, an explosion at a polling station killed a civilian, while two firefights between militants and security forces resulted in no civilian casualties, security officials said.

For the vast majority of Afghans, however, voting was relatively uneventful. In the polling center in Maidan Shahr, as election workers barked orders at unruly voters, 18-year-old Shahrab stood patiently in line, wearing a tattered faux leather jacket and a wide grin.

"It's my first election," said the college student, who uses only one name. Coming of age under the U.S. military's occupation of his country, he moved from the countryside to Kabul to study law and political science, and had come home to cast a ballot for the first president he would have a voice in selecting.

Who that candidate was, he wouldn't divulge, saying only, "I came to elect a loyal president who will bring peace and stability to our country."