



Two-day event celebrates Latino culture

Fiesta del Rio, June 13 and 14, will be a celebration of Latin culture taking place at the volunteer fire department in Rio Dell. Featuring sports competitions, food, live music, vendor booths and more, it is sponsored by the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce and is the brainchild of board member Wally Coppini, representing months of planning with a team of businesspeople and agriculturalists from mid-Humboldt.

It will introduce the Mexican handball sport called Pelota Mixteca to the county. A sport widely played in Mexican regions such as Oaxaca with California teams based in cities like San Jose and Fresno, it is played on a hard surface, with teams of five members keeping a ball in play with the use of large gloves, with a striking surface that takes the place of a racket in sports such as tennis, with which it is often compared. Except there is no net. Competitions will be played on Wildwood Avenue, which will be closed from Dollar General to Root 101 on Sunday, June 14 for the event.

Other activities will take place at Fireman's Park, including a bocce tournament and a taco cook-off. Food trucks will provide a range of meal options Saturday, and a barbeque is planned for Sunday. The band Monument Road is scheduled to play Saturday, from 4 to 6 p.m. and the Latino favorite Ultima Eleccion will perform both days. See the insert in this month's newsletter for the schedule. To sign up as a vendor or for the bocce or taco competition, go to riodellscotiachamber.org and click Fiesta del Rio.

Chamber names new board member

Suzanne Maese joined the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce board of directors, filling a seat left vacant after the death of Gabe Smith earlier this year. Maese heads Margro Advisors, a cannabis consulting firm at 117 Wildwood Avenue, Rio Dell. She and a friend turned business partner, Kelly Flores, founded the firm a decade ago, moving to the area from Southern California after learning of the issues the legalization of cannabis would create in the area and drawing upon their business experience to help.

She later purchased the historic building that houses her office, doing renovations and upgrading the outside, with the help of a city beautification grant, to feature a mural. Flores meanwhile has returned to Southern California to be near family and pursue other business opportunities, but the pair remains close.

Noting that the cannabis industry has changed a lot in 10 years, Maese says she's "never been busier," partly because growers still have needs and other consulting firms have closed. The recent federal rescheduling of cannabis from a Class 1 to a Class 3 substance is one example of changes that will continue to affect the industry in ways she is now learning about, to assist clients in responding.

Maese formerly worked for Kraft Foods and General Motors and lived 13 years in Europe where her husband's career took them. Missing Mexican food, she launched a tortilla business with a Chinese classmate in her German language program. That venture grew from selling products at a farmer's market in Zurich to buying equipment from the Texas-based Mission Foods and having it shipped to Switzerland to expand their production.

Maese is interested in seeing how the chamber can increase its membership and more fully engage the community. She would like to see more input from youths, and to find ways that the chamber can better benefit its members.



While happy with her career for now – "It's the best work I've ever done," she says, helping her 200 clients be successful – Maese also looks forward to retirement. A member of the San Pasqual tribe of Native Americans, she plans to retire on tribal land near San Diego and build a home of natural materials.

**The last day to
VOTE
in the California primary is June 2nd**

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Deadline for July newsletter is June 5th.
Call the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce at 707-506-5081 to advertise.

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End of an era for Rio Dell fire department

Shane Wilson is visibly happy as he shares his thoughts in a "farewell to the community," marking his retirement from the fire department this month after 30 years as chief. "I'm at peace with the decision," he said, as the department has a good team going forward and the community will be well served.

A Rio Dell native, Wilson recalls growing up with all the mischievousness of a rambunctious boyhood. He figured he owed it to the town to give back, and coached baseball for 15 years. He got into the fire department initially at the invitation of a colleague at the mill when he was 24.

It was more of a men's club in those days, he recalls, with drinking being a part of everything from training sessions to wind-downs after fire runs. He nonetheless found the training "like drinking from a fire hose," there was so much to learn. Within a year he was promoted to engineer, then to captain, assistant chief, and by age 33, to chief.

Wilson realized the need for more professionalism and brought several changes to the culture of the department, including joining five other departments in the Eel River Academy so all fire fighters in the region received the same training. He led the creation of four battalions, incorporating the small departments of Shively and Redcrest into those of Rio Dell and Scotia. He saw the increase of the local assessment and maintained a rolling five-year plan to schedule the timely updating of equipment. Over time the department has widely expanded the types of situations it responds to, for instance those involving hazardous materials, necessitating additional training.

Wilson has another year in his day job as deputy state fire marshal supervisor, but has stepped back, with wife Lisa, from their day-to-day involvement with the department to ensure the team taking over is thoroughly familiar with what needs to be done. The couple is researching a motor home they plan to buy and use to visit national parks, among other goals they have yet to finalize in the year ahead.

"I never thought it would be this long," Wilson said of his three decades leading the department, but "it's been the honor of my life" to serve. He will miss daily contact with lifelong friends but is proud of the department and notes "it's in good hands" going forward.



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Fire runs for April 2026:

Medical aid – 40
Mutual aid med Fortuna - 2
Haz containment - 2
Billable – false alarm commercial - 10
Structure fire - 1
Debris fire - 1
Public assists - 5
Meetings - 3
Drills - 3
Special events - 0

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New fire chief to take the helm

Ryan Heussler will take over as chief of the four-battalion volunteer fire department June 6 when Shane Wilson steps down on his 54th birthday.

A veteran of more than two decades with the department, and assistant chief for more than 12 years, Heussler speaks of the things he's been through – structure fires, extractions, "field saves" – a reference to administering CPR – and "tough calls." It's been "a lot of laughs, a lot of tears," he says, and he's been mentored throughout by Wilson.

"He's the best chief this town will ever see," Heussler said, because of the "100% dedication" of Wilson and his wife, Lisa, to the department.

Taking over as chief was not an automatic thing to Heussler, who points to the community support and "good core group of members" who make it possible for him to tackle this new role. "I have two businesses," he says of demands on his time, and with girlfriend Kymberly Culbert has a blended family of six children. He therefore wants to focus on the chief role and move other tasks to committees.

Fundraising, which includes Wildwood Days, the Mother's Day pancake breakfast, and the July 4 fireworks sale, is now being handled by Cory and Kiley Johnson. Membership, which he handled for years, has now been moved to a committee and remains a pivotal aspect of the department's success. Like every other department in the nation, he says, this one is in dire need of new members. It's a huge time commitment, he acknowledges, and even as chief his stipend is just \$140 per month. "If we had to rely on Cal Fire to handle our calls the cost would be in the millions," he says, adding, "It's not a question of if you will someday need us, but when."

One asset he calls out for special mention is Nate McKnight, who will be the new assistant chief, moving up a step as Heussler does. "When Shane announced his retirement, we each pointed to the other," Heussler says. "His being assistant chief is super instrumental in my accepting the role of chief."

A Rio Dell native, Heussler says he grew up when Rio Dell "was frowned upon" and he got involved to make a difference. Now, he notes, it's one of the best places in the county to be. In his free time, Heussler enjoys back country hunting, and fishing, especially with his 15-year-old son, and learning to fly his Piper Cherokee plane.



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Volunteering is her therapy

Piedad Velasco is this month's featured volunteer at the Rio Dell Community Resource Center. While center coordinator Sarah Reback extols her helpfulness to the organization, Velasco is effusive in her praise for the center and the extent to which volunteering brings her meaning.

Trained as a medical assistant and phlebotomist, Velasco was working at Fortuna Family Medical Group until that day in 2020 when she suffered a stroke at home. She was flown to a hospital in Napa and later received therapy in Fortuna but continues to use a walker for mobility.

"I felt useless," she says, after the stroke but her spirits lifted when she got involved at the resource center three years ago. She helps with cleaning and organizing, greeting people in English and Spanish at events like the twice-monthly community lunch.

Velasco came to the U.S. from Mexico City more than 40 years ago, living in Smith River, where she met her husband, Juan, now retired from 22 years at the Eureka Water Department. The couple moved to Rio Dell in 1993. She remembers the exact minute they opened the door as new owners, 10:45 a.m. on May 3 - it was that important to her. They raised four children - Juanito in Corona works for UPS; Hector is in the U.S. Air Force; Claudia is an obstetrics nurse in Sacramento; and Pedro works for a tire company in Vacaville.

"This is my therapy," Velasco smiles as she scans the busy room and springs up to greet a newcomer.



YARDSALE, FUNDRAISER TO BENEFIT KIDS

The Kiwanis and others are planning to gift each school child in Rio Dell and Scotia with a new backpack filled with school supplies this August and you can help. A Scotia/Rio Dell yard sale June 13 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. will raise funds. Want to be included? Email scotiariodellyardsale@gmail.com to have your address on the map.

Or scan the QR code to donate directly to the effort. Questions? Email backpacksforkids2026@gmail.com.



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