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WEEKLY

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Saint Mary's guard Augustas Marciulionis (3) Photo SMC Athletics Dept./Tod Fierner

SMC men's basketball relies heavily on younger players

By Jon Kingdon

Coming off a successful 2021-22 season highlighted by Coach Randy Bennett's 15th year with at least 20 wins in his 21 years at Saint Mary's, (and a career winning percentage of 70.6), an undefeated record at home (16-0) for the first time, a victory over a number ranked team in the nation (Gonzaga) and a win in the NCAA tournament, Bennett still remains cautiously optimistic about the upcoming season. Despite three returning seniors in the starting

lineup, this is an uncharacteristically young team with eight freshman and sophomores in the team's top 11 players. "We're taking it a step at a time," Bennett said.

This past August, the Gaels went to Australia and played and won five games which provided the team with some much needed experience though there was a tradeoff in Bennett's mind. "It's a tricky deal because we skipped some steps in our preparation to go and be able to compete," Bennett said. "So, we had to go back to square one on some areas. We're ahead offensively but we did skip some steps

along the way defensively. In scrimmages against Arizona and Hawaii, we were exposed in areas where we did not play well but from square one, we were able to accelerate the process a lot faster."

Losing and replacing two all-conference players in center Matthias Tass and guard Tommy Kuhse is Bennett's biggest concern. "We're trying to figure that out right now," Bennett said. "With (junior) Mitchell Saxen stepping in at center, we now have to fill the backup role which Mitch played so well last season along with losing Kuhse's scoring, leadership and toughness." ... continued on Page A8

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We're back and we're better than ever!

Opening Night
hosted by

Matias Bombal
Nov. 10

Special Screenings
hosted by

Jan Wahl
Nov. 12 & Nov. 14

Q&A
with

Christopher Knight
Nov. 13

Award Ceremonies

Barrie Chase
Nov. 12

Randal Kleiser
Nov. 13

Slipping through the cracks: Lafayette renters struggle to stay afloat

By Sharon K. Sobotta

Hamza Houcher has held jobs delivering pizzas for Round Table, assisting at the Chevron station and working at the Lafayette Post Office. Now, Houcher has put down temporary roots in a one-bedroom rental unit that he shares with his wife and baby for \$1,600. If Houcher had it his way, he'd stay in Lafayette forever – if only he could afford it.

"We had our baby over a year ago and I've been trying to find a bigger place with my income," Houcher said. "I looked everywhere for low-income places in Lafayette, but there's nothing (available)." As multiple high density housing developments are coming up around the city, Houcher put his name in the myhousekeys.com hat to try his hand at accessing one of the few below market rate purchase options in town, but so far he's coming up short.

"Most of the units are full market rate and then there are several moderate level options and one low-income option and I'm number 59 on that list," Houcher said. "It seems like the people in charge assume that everyone in Lafayette earns \$100,000. That's not the case."

Sunita Shastri, a single mom of two and a preschool teacher at The Child Day School in Moraga, found a one bed unit for \$1,900. Shastri earns a little less than \$2,500 a month. She utilizes her gov-

ernment issued EBT card to cover the cost of essential groceries and she is able to get a discount on PG&E and internet in her home.

How would she make ends meet and pay rent without these things? "I wouldn't," Shastri said.

Shastri and her family are in the queue for affordable rentals in Lafayette. Before finding her current place for \$1900/month, she was preparing for the possibility of being homeless.

Anna Connolly is a single mother of four, who is a licensed realtor and works as a server in a downtown restaurant to help cover her \$3,800 of monthly rent. Even though she works hard, Connolly said she still comes up a little short sometimes and has to lean on family. "I feel embarrassed and ashamed to be at this point in my life and still need to ask for help."

Prior to her divorce, Connolly was a homeowner and a stay-at-home mom. "A lot of people that I've known from in town have questioned if I still live in Lafayette now that they see me working as a server," Connolly says. "The truth is that if this can happen to me (as a person who's been here since I was 9), it can happen to anyone."



Rental for \$6K on Brook Street Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

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Election results: Since the midterm elections occurred after press time, Lamorinda Weekly will post local certified election results at www.lamorindaweekly.com once finalized. To view results directly, visit electionresults.sos.ca.gov.

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