



MEMORIAL maker Roberto Marquez checks the one he erected in Altadena for victims of the Eaton fire.

On alert for human error

It is perhaps the most pressing unanswered question from Los Angeles' January firestorm: How did officials fail to issue timely evacuation alerts for residents in west Altadena, where all but one of 18 Eaton fire deaths occurred?

Nearly five months after the deadly fire decimated Altadena, two possible scenarios have emerged as to what went wrong that chaotic night. Either there was some human error along the chain of command issuing evacuations or there was some type of technical error

Evidence grows that personnel caused delays in evacuation orders during the Eaton fire. But who is to blame?

BY GRACE TOOHEY AND JENNY JARVIE

in sending the alerts.

An independent investigation was launched after The Times revealed the lapse in mid-January. But it's unclear what investigators have since discovered, and county officials have repeatedly declined to answer questions and have delayed responses to public records requests, often citing the ongoing inquiry.

But there is growing evidence that the critical shortfall — in which flames moved into west Altadena hours before

[See Alerts, A6]

Veterinarian students are in high demand

But they may also find themselves in high debt from school

BY ANTHONY SOLORZANO

Fourth-year veterinarian student Alexandra Ponkey maneuvered the camera and the surgical tools through the incisions on the belly of a 2-year-old German Shepherd named Jackie.

On her last day as a student, as part of her laparoscopic procedural class, Ponkey took on the role of primary surgeon to spay the dog and remove its ovaries. But before she could cross the graduating stage as a licensed veterinarian, she had to go back into the surgery room — this time as the assistant to another student taking on the job of primary surgeon.

Ponkey, 34, left her first career of teaching and training horse riding and care to achieve her childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian. The hands-on

[See Veterinarians, A7]



SEZA BOYAJIAN trains at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona.

Can films convince people that AI is a force for good?

BY WENDY LEE

MOUNTAIN VIEW — For decades, Hollywood directors including Stanley Kubrick, James Cameron and Alex Garland have cast artificial intelligence as a vil-

lain that can turn into a killing machine.

Even Steven Spielberg's relatively hopeful "A.I.: Artificial Intelligence" had a pessimistic edge to its vision of the future.

Now Google — a leading developer in AI technology

— wants to move the cultural conversations away from the technology as seen in "The Terminator," "2001: A Space Odyssey" and "Ex Machina."

To do so, the Mountain View, Calif., tech giant is funding short films about AI that portray the technology

in a less nightmarish light.

The Google initiative, called "AI on Screen," is a partnership with Santa Monica-based Range Media Partners, a talent management and production company that represents a wide variety of entertainment ci-

ents, including actors and writers. Range is producing the films.

So far, two short films have been greenlit through the project: One, titled "Sweetwater," tells the story of a man who visits his child-

[See Google, A9]

Flight to Africa violated order, U.S. judge says

Migrants were denied a chance to contest being deported to a place with which only one person had ties.

BY RACHEL URANGA AND ANDREA CASTILLO

The Trump administration violated a federal court order against deporting immigrants to countries where they have no ties without giving them a chance to contest their removal, a federal judge in Boston said Wednesday.

Federal officials confirmed that eight immigrants with serious criminal records had been deported Tuesday on a flight to a third

country. But they refused to publicly say where the men were being taken. Lawyers said the plane had been headed to strife-torn South Sudan.

U.S. District Judge Brian E. Murphy in Massachusetts said that migrants from Myanmar, Vietnam, Cuba, South Sudan and Mexico did not have a "meaningful opportunity to object to transfer" to the African nation, where only one had connections, in defiance of a court order last month. The judge said he would determine later what, if any, the punishment might be for the administration.

The decision came during a hearing to consider an emergency motion filed by attorneys after they learned their clients, two Asian immigrants detained in Texas, along with the others, had been sent to South Sudan, which is engulfed in armed ethnic and political conflict and a refugee crisis that has displaced over 4 million people.

Lawyers for the U.S. government said detainees had enough time to raise fears of harm, if sent to a third country, with immigration officials at the detention center. And the men needed only 24 hours' notice before being removed.

But Murphy balked at that. The time between when the men were told they would be deported Monday evening to when the plane took off was about 17 hours, the judge surmised — "obviously insufficient."

He said the actions were "unquestionably violative of this court's order."

[See Deportations, A5]

U.S. to dismiss consent decrees

Feds will cancel police reform agreements with Minneapolis and Louisville. **NATION, A6**

Enrollment down for a seventh year

State's number of public school students dropped by 0.54% over the last year. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Studio highlights Les Paul's legacy

United Recording in Hollywood boasts guitar god's gear and a tour. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

Weather
Sunny, slightly cooler.
L.A. Basin: 82/59. **B6**

Markets **A9**
Opinion Voices **A10**

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