



Tracy Emerson cries after delivering remarks during a celebration of life event remembering her son Kyle at Griffio Distillery in Petaluma. Kyle Emerson, 29, died of an overdose in a SoMa hotel in late May.

Building a new life, until a fatal relapse

Man’s death leaves family angry at S.F. response to drug crisis

By Maggie Angst

For 15 months, Kyle Emerson dedicated every day to creating the life he wanted. The 29-year-old worked two jobs, participated in daily cold plunges and group fitness workouts, went to school to become an emergency medical responder, and routinely attended meetings through a 12-step recovery program. It was a major feat for the Petaluma man, who had struggled with addiction for half his life before reaching a point in early 2024 where he considered driving out to the ocean and overdosing on fentanyl. Day by day, Kyle strung together his longest consecutive stretch without using drugs while working toward becoming a San Francisco firefighter. He hoped to help others suffering with addiction. “Instead of being afraid all the time of losing him, I had a little over a year to just be so proud of him and enjoy watching him succeed,” said his mom, Tracy Emerson. But just days after com-



A photo of Kyle Emerson with his mother, Tracy, is displayed at his celebration of life event. After a long struggle with addiction, he got sober and was taking classes to become an EMT and working two jobs. But he relapsed after about 15 months.

pleting his EMT training program, Kyle failed to show up for work at the Petaluma eatery Lunchette, where many community members knew and loved him. And, within a matter of hours, officials confirmed the outcome that Tracy had long feared. Kyle was found dead in the bathroom of a hotel in

San Francisco’s SoMa neighborhood, with a pipe and lighter in his hands, according to his mother. An official cause of death is not yet available, but Kyle’s mom believes he fatally overdosed after booking a two-night hotel stay and going to the city to purchase drugs. Kyle’s main drug of choice was crack cocaine, but he had also

overdosed on the powerful opioid fentanyl several times in the past, Tracy said. Kyle’s death — among the latest in an ongoing overdose crisis that claimed 637 lives in San Francisco last year — devastated his family and friends and left many questioning why someone who

Relapse continues on A9

SFUSD overhauls ethnic studies

District to employ curriculum from provider used elsewhere in state

By Jill Tucker

Ethnic studies classes will look a lot different in San Francisco high schools this fall, with the district ditching its homegrown and controversial curriculum for off-the-shelf content that teachers will be required to follow closely. The shift announced Monday followed significant pushback in recent months regarding the required high school course, with parents, politicians and conservative activists arguing the curriculum was divisive, antisemitic and promoted progressive activism, among other concerns raised. The change leaves little time for the San Francisco Unified School District to select a new curriculum, purchase it and get ethnic studies teachers — who are on summer break — up to speed on the content before school starts Aug. 18. Officials said they plan to source the coursework from a national educational provider whose material is already being used elsewhere in California. Superintendent Maria Su said she has been working off a priority list since she took over the fiscally and operationally unsettled district in October, which included closing a \$114 million budget deficit and replacing a disastrous payroll system. She is checking off those two items this summer and said ethnic studies was next. While other options were considered, Su said freshmen would still be required to take a yearlong ethnic studies course, unless they seek a waiver, and

SFUSD continues on A9

High-alcohol wine’s success makes no sense

By Esther Mobley

The market reports are unequivocal: As Americans are drinking less, nonalcoholic and low-alcohol wines are skyrocketing in popularity. In fact, according to a leading analyst, these products were responsible for the only growth that the wine industry saw last year. And so no one would have expected that the industry’s biggest phenomenon in 2025 would be an explicitly *high*-alcohol wine. But that’s exactly what XXL, a brand of fortified, flavored 16% Moscato, has become. XXL launched in 2023 and sold 85,000 cases, a modest showing for a brand with national chain-store aspirations. Last year, it grew to 1.8 million cases. This year, according to Marc Oliveira, CEO of parent company Tri-Vin Imports, it’s on track to do more than 2.5 million. Its success doesn’t make any sense, and yet the numbers can’t lie. XXL may be an early indication that nonalcoholic wines are not guaranteed the swiftly upward trajectory that some analysts have assured. Or it may simply be this moment’s requisite counterpoint to the overarching impulse toward

Wine continues on A8

Area was especially windy in May, June

By Greg Porter

Has the Bay Area been windier than normal recently? Some form of this question has been echoing across the region. On Reddit, a frustrated user kicked up an active thread by asking, “What’s up with the wind lately?” Local sailboarders have been discussing the feistier than usual winds on their own online forums. We’ve also had a number of our readers ask if it’s been unusually windy. With so many people asking, we decided to look at the data to determine if May and June were indeed exceptional-

ly windy for the Bay Area. We analyzed average maximum daily wind gusts at five Bay Area airports: Santa Rosa, San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Livermore. We chose maximum wind gusts over average wind speed because they better reflect the memorable, extreme weather experiences people tend to notice. The Bay Area’s wind patterns in 2025 have indeed been abnormally strong. So far through June 26, Oakland is on pace to have its windiest month of June on record, with an average wind gust of 34.23 mph, nearly

Winds continues on A8



Five Bay Area airports in May ranked in their top five of all time for wind gust intensity. And Oakland is on pace for its windiest month of June on record.