



Photos by Gabrielle Lurie/S.F. Chronicle

Jen Pelka, owner of Une Femme Wines, and dog Pita in the vineyard at her home in Sonoma. Pelka wanted to open an unconventional tasting room in Sonoma that would have drawn more young people to Wine Country.

Cold water thrown on winery plan

Project pulled after Sonoma County rejects pool at tasting room

By Esther Mobley
SENIOR WINE CRITIC

Jen Pelka had a vision for her wine brand, Une Femme. Instead of a traditional tasting room, she dreamed of a pool club in Sonoma where day-trippers could sip sparkling wine with views of vineyards and the Mayacamas Mountains. She would offer a free shuttle to and from San Francisco, catering to young people “in the Marina,” she said, who are “the kinds of people that we want to fall in love with wine and get up to Wine Country.”

Pelka got close to realizing the dream. She persuaded investors to commit nearly \$7 million to the project. Her offer to buy the Patz & Hall tasting room, a well-known landmark in Sonoma, was accepted. She hired a pool designer, who began drawing up plans to add one to an open lawn. But when she brought the proposal to the Sonoma County planning department, the dream began to shatter.

Wineries and tasting rooms in Sonoma County cannot have pools, a coun-



Une Femme started as the house wine for Pelka’s Champagne bar, the Riddler, which had locations in San Francisco and New York before closing in 2020.

ty planner ultimately informed her.

A spokesperson for the county planning department, Genevieve Bertone, said the department doesn’t create these rules but merely enforces them. If Pelka wants the rules around pools at wineries to change, Bertone said, she should lobby her local supervisors for a change to the county’s zoning.

The dilemma gets to the

heart of one of the central conflicts that defines modern-day Wine Country: Local governments must balance the growth of the wine industry, which powers much of their economies (wine accounts for one of every four jobs in the county, according to the Sonoma County Vintners), with the voices of those who don’t want to see the region become a wine-tinged Disneyland.

In Napa County, with its particularly strict land-use policies and vocal anti-growth faction, this tension is familiar. But Sonoma County is known for being more lenient — more wineries here, for example, are allowed to host weddings.

To Pelka, the prohibition on a pool at a winery “feels like really significant regulatory over-

Wine continues on A8

Prop 50 backers haul hefty war chest

Fundraising breaks state website as gap with opposition widens

By Sophia Bollag
STAFF WRITER

SACRAMENTO — With a week to go, supporters of Proposition 50 have raised more than twice as much as opponents, a gap that has widened significantly in recent weeks.

Supporters have reported \$129 million in contributions while opponents have reported just \$46 million. Spending is also lopsided, with supporters reporting more than double the expenditures of opponents.

The supporters’ haul, the lion’s share of which has been raised by a committee led by Gov. Gavin Newsom, is so massive that state regulators struggled to display the latest campaign fundraising and spending report on the state’s archaic campaign finance website. The report, which was due Thursday, was finally available Monday. A similar delay happened for the previous report last month, too.

Prop 50 would replace California’s congressional maps, drawn by an independent commission, with new maps drawn by Democrats that aim to flip five seats from Republican to Democratic control. They are designed to help Democrats wrest control of the U.S. House of Representatives to provide a check on President Donald Trump, and to counter moves by Republican-controlled states that are redrawing their own maps to favor Re-

Prop 50 continues on A9

Trump’s demands to UCLA revealed after faculty suit

By Lynn La
CALMATTERS

At a planned rally Monday at UCLA, the faculty associations of UCLA and the wider University of California were taking a victory lap and urging Gov. Gavin Newsom to join their fight against President Donald Trump’s demands for a \$1.2 billion settlement with the renowned public university.

The federal administration’s 27-page settlement proposal was made public Friday after the UCLA Faculty Association and the Council of University of California Faculty Associations sued the public university to disclose the information under the California Public Records Act. The proposal outlines the administration’s vision for higher education that is free from efforts to promote diversity and transgender inclusion.

The university system argued that making the proposal public would cause it “irreparable harm” during ongoing negotiations with the administration, but released the information after a California superior court judge ordered it to do so and the state Supreme Court rejected its appeal.

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USAA eyes rate hike for homeowners

By Megan Fan Munce
STAFF WRITER

USAA, the seventh-largest home insurer in California, is seeking permission to raise rates on homeowners by an average of 7.3% starting next year.

If approved, USAA’s nearly 350,000 customers would see their rates change at their first renewal date following April 30, 2026, according to a filing with the California Department of Insurance.

Condo owners would not see any increases under the currently requested rate changes, the filings show.

The exact price range will vary depending on each customer’s home and which of USAA’s four subsidiaries they’re insured by. Currently, the average policyholder with USAA home insurance pays \$2,428 a year and would see their annual premium rise by \$178 if the request is approved without changes, the filings show. However, some would pay thousands more per year, especially in areas with high fire risk.

In the 90265 ZIP code including Malibu, customers would pay \$732 more per year on average, but one customer’s rates

USAA continues on A9



Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

USAA, the seventh-largest home insurer in California, wants to raise rates, citing rising home values, repair costs and severe weather.

