



Photos by Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

Artist David Hollowell stands in his studio in Woodland (Yolo County). The retired UC Davis art teacher fell off his roof three years ago and was diagnosed with expressive aphasia, the loss of ability to produce language.

Artist stops work on masterpiece

Muralist who lost speech in fall suddenly puts down brush

By Matthias Gafni
STAFF WRITER

WOODLAND, Yolo County — Almost every day for seven years, artist David Hollowell stenciled and painted whimsical landscapes and creatures onto the 20-foot-tall walls of an empty room in his family's home. The mural is a grand optical illusion that has garnered millions of views on TikTok.

It is also incomplete. Earlier this year, Hollowell simply stopped making art for the first time in decades. It's unclear when, or if, he'll restart.

Ask his daughter, and she answers that she is hopeful. His wife said maybe after he has taken a long break. It has been several months since Hollowell picked up a paintbrush, the family said, and they are more concerned about his happiness than him completing his masterpiece.

Ask Hollowell if he'll eventually finish the project and he can't answer, literally. As a result of a brain injury sustained in a fall, he can't speak more than a few utilitarian phrases, often limited to "I understand" and "How are you doing to



A Hollowell self-portrait is displayed in his home. The fall caused three fractures on the right side of the artist's skull and caused a bleed in his brain's forward area.

day?" Finishing the mural is the last thing on his immensely creative, but damaged, mind.

"I want to ..." he repeats on a recent visit to his eccentric home in rural Woodland, northwest of Sacramento. After numerous increasingly tortuous tries, his daughter Adrienne and his wife, Feral, finish the sentence his brain was straining to share.

"I want to *speak*." On May 9, 2021, the celebrated artist, then 70, climbed a fruit picking ladder from his front yard on to the roof of his home to replace a solar panel. Feral had warned him about the high winds that day, but Hollowell went ahead, stubborn as always. A man assisting with the roof work found him on the ground near the end of the family's driveway, blood

pooling beneath his head. The 10-foot fall stole most of his ability to express himself, something that had always been at the center of his life and family.

Doctors at UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento counted 27 broken bones. Three fractures on the right side of his skull caused a bleed in the forward area of his brain. Specialists warned his family

Artist continues on A9

Power still out for some in city

PG&E continues work to restore electricity two days into outage

By Jessica Flores, J.D. Morris and Annie Vainshtein
STAFF WRITERS

Pacific Gas and Electric Co. officials said Monday afternoon that 4,400 customers in San Francisco would remain without power past 2 p.m. as the utility worked to restore service after a massive blackout over the weekend.

The company had previously said all remaining homes and businesses would have power restored by 2 p.m., but walked that back on Monday. Some customers were expected to remain without service more than 48 hours after the outages were first reported on Saturday afternoon.

PG&E said it encountered "additional complexity" while trying to restore service to the remaining customers on Monday, extending outage times. According to the utility's outage map, most of those still without power were in the Richmond District and the Civic Center area. About a third of the city had no power at the height of the outages on Saturday.

PG&E said power was expected to be restored by 6 a.m. Tuesday.

PG&E said it uncovered "significant damage" to its system and that the company was working to ensure its equipment was "stable and safe," said Sumeet Singh, chief operating officer of PG&E, at a

Outages continues on A6

Audit: Unused phones cost state agency \$4.6M

By Adam Ashton

California's unemployment agency kept paying cellphone bills for 4 1/2 years without checking whether its workers were actually using the devices.

That's how it racked up \$4.6 million in fees for mobile devices its workers were not using, according to a new state audit detailing wasteful spending at several government agencies.

The Employment Development Department's excessive cellphone bills date to the COVID-19 pandemic, when it shifted call center employees to remote work and faced pressure to release benefits to millions of suddenly unemployed Californians.

It acquired 7,224 cellphones and wireless hot spots by December 2020. State auditors analyzed 54 months of invoices since then and found half the devices were unused for at least two years, 25% were unused for three years and 99 of them were never used at all.

The investigation, which auditors opened after receiving a tip, identified 6,285 devices that were unused for at least four consecutive months and said the department spent \$4.6 million on monthly service fees for them.

Phones continues on A6

Fine for felling trees climbs toward \$1M

By Kate Talerico
STAFF WRITER

In February 2021, Oakland city arborists responded to a report of an illegal tree removal on leafy Claremont Avenue. When they got there, they saw eight mature trees on the ground. In the middle of the property was a man holding a chainsaw.

Three years later, city arborist Tod Lawson said that moment marked the beginning of what he called "the most egregious illegal tree removal case" he'd seen in his 34 years with the city of Oakland.

City staff allege that

the property's owner, Matthew Bernard, and crews he hired cut down 38 mature trees without permits in 2021 and 2022 across his land, on an adjacent city property and on his neighbors' lots. Bernard could face fines of nearly \$1 million — one of the highest fees for tree removal in the city's history.

Barnard also is engaged in a bitter legal battle with his neighbors over the tree-cutting.

Aerial images show the undeveloped lot completely covered by trees as of 2020. Today, none are left on the property — the steep slope is bald,

Trees continues on A8



Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle

Matthew Bernard, with his domestic partner, Lynn Warner, on their Oakland property, also is embroiled in a lawsuit with his neighbors.