



Datebook
Bountiful can't-miss Bay Area concerts for 2020, including Billie Eilish. **E1**

Nation

Intruder stabs 5 at N.Y. rabbi's home amid rising violence against Jews. **A4**



Sporting Green
49ers capture NFC West title, top seed in playoffs

Defense stops Seattle inches from goal line in final seconds to save thrilling 26-21 victory. **B1**

Raiders end Oakland era with loss, another season without playoffs. **B1**

San Francisco Chronicle

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Emergency sirens get high-tech makeover

By Mallory Moench

It was blustery on the first Saturday in December. Wind and rain drove most residents of a quiet neighborhood in Mill Valley's hills into their homes, except for a few brave dog-walkers. Then suddenly, at noon sharp, a siren pierced through the canyon on Vasco Court.

"This is only a test," a robotic voice recording blared. It was a routine monthly check of a new siren system, activated with a tap on a cell phone app by Mill Valley Fire Battalion Chief Scott Barnes. In a wildfire, it could save lives.

"It seems that every large fire we've had in the past ... some of the negatives we hear are 'I wasn't notified. I didn't get an emergency notification,' " said Barnes, who's been with the fire district for 29 years. "This system is one more tool to provide that notification."

This year Mill Valley was one of the first California cities to install this new siren system, called Long Range Acoustic Device, or LRAD. Mill Valley's previous, 2-decades-old siren emitted a generic alarm for all emergencies. The new system can blare messages with specific instructions about what to do or where to go. It has battery backup that can survive PG&E power shut-offs and backup activation methods for when cell phone networks fail.

Long before text messages, Bay Area residents learned of impending disasters via sirens. But worsening wildfires, power shut-offs and

Sirens continues on A7

S.F. Housing Authority digs out of scandals, financial ruin

By Dominic Fracassa

Kate Hartley was in the back of a cab when she got the call.

It was October 2018, and Hartley, then the director of San Francisco's Office of Housing and Community Development, was en route to a city event to celebrate an affordable housing program.

The phone rang, and Hartley picked it up. On the other end was Barbara Smith, then the head of the San Francisco Housing Authority.

"I've got some bad news," Smith said.

The Housing Authority, which tens of thousands of vulnerable San Franciscans rely on for affordable housing assistance, was facing a huge budget shortfall.

For more than a year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and a specialized accounting firm had been scouring the Housing Authority's books. The agency had a long history of alarmingly poor book-keeping, and financial analysts wanted a clear picture of the authority's red ink.

That morning, Smith had been briefed on

Housing continues on A5

Bay Area's biggest stories of 2019



Jessica Christian / The Chronicle

Customers shop at La Tapatia Market in Napa during PG&E's power shut-offs in October.

By Lizzie Johnson

For the third year in a row, the biggest Bay Area news story emerged from California's wild-fire emergency.

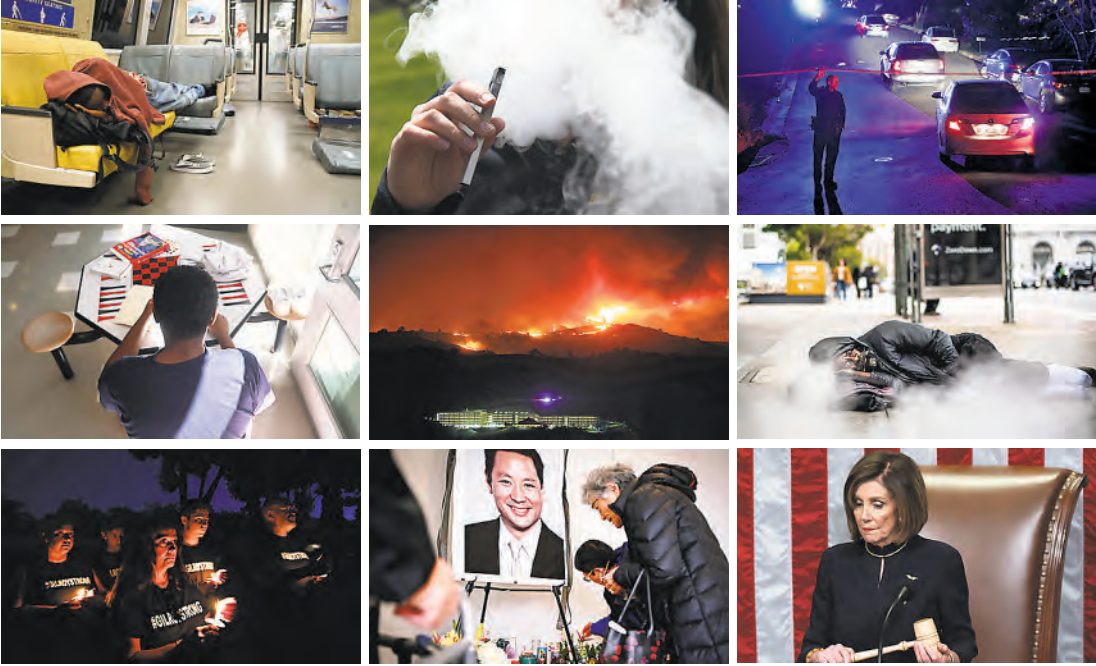
But there was a twist: After the Wine Country fires grabbed headlines in 2017 and the Camp Fire in Butte County followed in 2018, the No. 1 story in 2019 was not a deadly inferno — but rather the effort to avoid one.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s precautionary move to black out millions of customers across Northern California brought a new and very personal dimension to the wildfire crisis, underscoring the dangers of climate change and the failures of the utility company that is central to our lives.

PG&E's goal was to make sure electrical lines didn't spark in high winds. Nonetheless, on Oct. 23, a Sonoma County inferno named the Kincade Fire kicked up in an area that hadn't been part of the shut-offs, though the cause has yet to be determined.

That was the second biggest local story of the year, according to a vote by our staff.

Turn to **Page A6** to see what other stories captured the imagination and defined the year.



ONLINE EXTRA
Chronicle stories from 2019 that shouldn't be missed: [sfchronicle.com/2019-great-reads](https://www.sfchronicle.com/2019-great-reads)

Helping S.F. residents age gracefully — at home

By Anna Bauman

Jeff Van Bueren bounded up a steep sidewalk in his North Beach neighborhood, long strides carrying the 63-year-old over slick leaves and past Victorians to a fog-obscured view of the Bay Bridge.

"Just wanted to get the heart rate going," he said.

Beside him, volunteer Sa-

mantha Wales had to break into a jog.

"He's slowly getting me fit," the 47-year-old joked.

The pair's recent morning jaunt was part of a weekly routine designed to help slow the progression of Van Bueren's Parkinson's disease. The meetups are coordinated by NEXT Village SF, a nonprofit organization that serves the

city's fastest growing population: seniors.

Adults older than age 60 will make up 23% of San Francisco's population next year, and 27% of all residents a decade from now, according to the city's Department of Disability and Aging Services.

NEXT Village, whose name stands for Northeast Exchange Team, seeks to help seniors in that corner of the city — which has San Francisco's highest concentration of elderly residents — remain in their homes as long as possible. The work is vital in a city known for its high cost of living, as well as its many steep hills.

The organization is part of the national Village to Village network, which has more than

Village continues on A7

Weather

Some clouds, then sunshine.
Highs: 56-62.
Lows: 35-46. **D4**

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