



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

Adam Miller uses a grinder on a component for a 20,000-gallon tank for a local customer. Bryant Fuel Systems demonstrated a helicopter "hot fueling" system at a U.S. Army base in Alabama in 1991, shortly after the company's founding. It left thinking it was on track to winning a federal contract. And it was. But because of bureaucratic and other delays, the contract to build and deliver 12 helicopter fueling systems didn't arrive until recently. Persistence finally paid off for a company that, in the meantime, has become an innovative leader in its field.

BETTER LATE ...

Long-delayed military contract opens opportunities for local manufacturer

BY JOHN COX
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Bakersfield fuel tank manufacturer Bryant Fuel Systems LLC was a 3-year-old startup with few sales under its belt when, in late 1991, it got its first big chance to dazzle U.S. Army brass.

It was a hit. Word quickly got around military circles that the above-ground fuel tank Bryant built for Fort Irwin National Training Center near Barstow had slashed the amount of time it took to refuel combat aircraft. Unlike competing tanks, this one could fill up military helicopters while they were still running.

Five months later, the Army solicited bids for more than 20 tanks with specifications resembling Bryant's system to equip its helicopter training base at Fort Rucker, Ala. Half a dozen bids came in but no purchase contract was issued.

In the quarter century that followed, Bryant went through its share of ups and downs, changing hands and gradually



Mike Provencio welds tubing for a fueling station, one of 12, for a customer in Alabama.

prevailing in what the company views as not only vindication for a plucky little company that could, but also a breakthrough sale that may well lead to bigger and better things.

'BITTERSWEET'

Looking back, longtime Sales Director George Adam said Bryant would probably be on a different trajectory now if the company had gotten the Fort Rucker contract in the early 1990s.

"That's bittersweet. There's negatives and there's pluses," he said. "Had we landed a replica or replicas of that Fort Irwin system at Fort Rucker, yes, the world would have traveled much farther and much faster and much deeper."

"Yeah, we would've (become) a bigger company and a bigger player,

Please see **BRYANT | A5**

building up commercial and government clientele. Then, in 2018 — finally — the Army announced Fort Rucker was in need of 12

above-ground fuel tanks much like the one Bryant had demonstrated all those years before. Bryant's bid ended up

Peace garden to become major feature of BC campus

BY STACEY SHEPARD
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What started as a local celebration of the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi to commemorate his 150th birthday has now grown into a major project that will become a permanent and defining feature of Bakersfield College.

BC President Sonya Christian recently announced the peace garden project, a series of gardens that will be scattered throughout the campus and linked by pathways, including a 2-kilometer shaded walking path through campus.

"We plan on transforming our entire campus, in fact all our campuses, into a beautiful garden of reflection and learning ... for our students, employees and community to enjoy — to learn, heal, energize, converse and thrive," Christian said in a recent video posted during opening week for the fall semester.

The project will be completed over the coming years as BC undergoes major renovations and new construction thanks to Measure J, a \$500 million, voter-approved bond measure to modernize the Kern Community College District's facilities. Much of the money



Christian

Please see **PEACE GARDEN | A4**

VIEWPOINT

Space Command would be a coup for Palmdale — and Kern, too

The single biggest economic godsend to hit Kern County thus far this century might not be hitting Kern County at all, in the strictest sense.

The U.S. Space Command, a unified, multibranch extension of the Department of Defense tasked with protecting the safety and interests of America and her allies starting at 100 kilometers' altitude, could be setting up permanent terrestrial headquarters in Palmdale.

The northern Los Angeles County community of 155,000 is 15 miles south

of the Kern County line and 18 miles south of the Mojave Desert burg of Rosamond, which sends its property taxes to Bakersfield.

A U.S. Space Command headquarters in Palmdale would bring \$2 billion in federal investment to the region — an infusion that might translate, in total



ROBERT PRICE
FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

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STATE OF THE CITY

Even during the time of COVID-19, leaders express optimism
LOCAL | A3

KENTUCKY DERBY

Authentic wins, giving trainer Bob Baffert record-tying 6th victory
SPORTS | D1

DINING OUT WITH PETE TITTL

New Vintage Grill keeps it cool on the patio
EYE STREET | E1

Tehachapi wrestling tree fosters careers in public service, a desire to help others

BY RON STAPP
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As the old saying goes, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." That's especially true in Tehachapi, where the idiom has been set into motion, for at least the past two decades if not longer.

And while there are plenty of orchards of the juicy fruit lining the area's mountain landscape, the tree in question more literally refers to longtime high school wrestling coach Desi Lovenguth, whose impact on his athletes cannot be overstated.

"I've never met someone like Coach Desi," said Adam Moreno, a 2009 Tehachapi High School graduate, who wrestled for Lovenguth for three years and also ran cross country and track and

field for the Warriors. "He's a great coach. He made you want to do your best. You wanted to perform well for him just based on the way he treated you.



Lovenguth

"The way that he coached us, he added life lessons to the way that he taught us. That was a big part of it. He was grooming us for life, not just for the sport, I would say. It was Desi's way of teaching. Not only applying what he taught us on the wrestling mat, but to take that into your everyday life. And we really appreciated that about Coach Desi."

Please see **WRESTLING | A2**



EMT Adam Moreno is a 2009 graduate of Tehachapi High School, where he wrestled and competed for the cross country and track and field teams.
SUBMITTED PHOTO



PRICE: \$2

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