

**Celebrate  
Lunar New Year  
See Valley  
Entertainment**

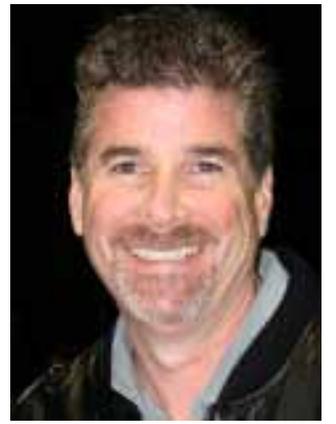
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**New on the Menu! New Eateries see page 8**

**Chamber  
Awards Their  
Highest  
Honor**

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# Valley Vantage

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Armenian Schools Targets of Hate Crimes

Two Armenian schools in the west valley were targeted Tuesday by what are now being called “hate crimes.” AGBU Manoogian-Demirdian School in Canoga Park and Holy Martyrs Ferrahiam High School in Encino both found Turkish flags draped over gates and stairways. The flags are seen as insulting and a hate crime because of the Armenian genocide, where the Turkish Ottoman government exterminated 1.5 million Armenians. Schools were immediately on lockdown but remained in session. Reaction from the Armenian community was immediate and outraged. Because there was no trespassing, police called it an “incident,” not a crime. While it is being investigated, students have hung the tri-colors of the Armenian flags in place of the Turkish ones.

### FEMA Aid Deadline for Woolsey Fire Victims Extended

Congressman Brad Sherman has announced a 15 day extension for those affected by the Woolsey Fire to register for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Residents of Los Angeles and Ventura Counties who suffered losses from the fire now have until February 15th to register with FEMA in order to be considered eligible for several disaster assistance programs. This extension also applies to low-interest disaster loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). Those impacted by the fires can register with FEMA online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or by calling 800-621-3362 (TTY 800-462-7585). Multi-lingual operators are available. The toll-free numbers are open daily 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. (PST). The SBA Disaster Customer Service Center’s toll free number is 800-659-2955. Help is also available by sending an e-mail to [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov) or by visiting [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov). Survivors may apply online at SBA’s secure website: <https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela/>. The Disaster Recovery Center currently located at 30440 Agoura Rd. in Agoura Hills will cease operation at 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 31, and a new SBA Disaster Loan Outreach Center will open on Friday Feb 1, at 9 a.m. at Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, 1 Dole Dr., Suite #116 Westlake Village, CA 91362 from 9 am to 6 p.m. Monday thru Saturday .

### Mentally Deranged Man Causes Market Scare

Reports of a man with a shotgun at Erewhon Market in Calabasas last week created panic in the community and on social media. He claimed to have a gun so employees of the store called the Sheriff’s Department. Upon arrival there were no two guns in his car and they took the suspect, who they described as “mentally unstable” to a mental health facility for treatment.

## Giving Dignity to Victims of Human Trafficking

One of the shoes belonged to a four-year-old. One to a 14-year-old. All belonged to valley victims of human trafficking.

The shoes were on display this week at Dignity Health Northridge Hospital, which is spearheading a campaign to raise awareness among its staff to spot the signs of trafficking on patients who come in for other complaints.

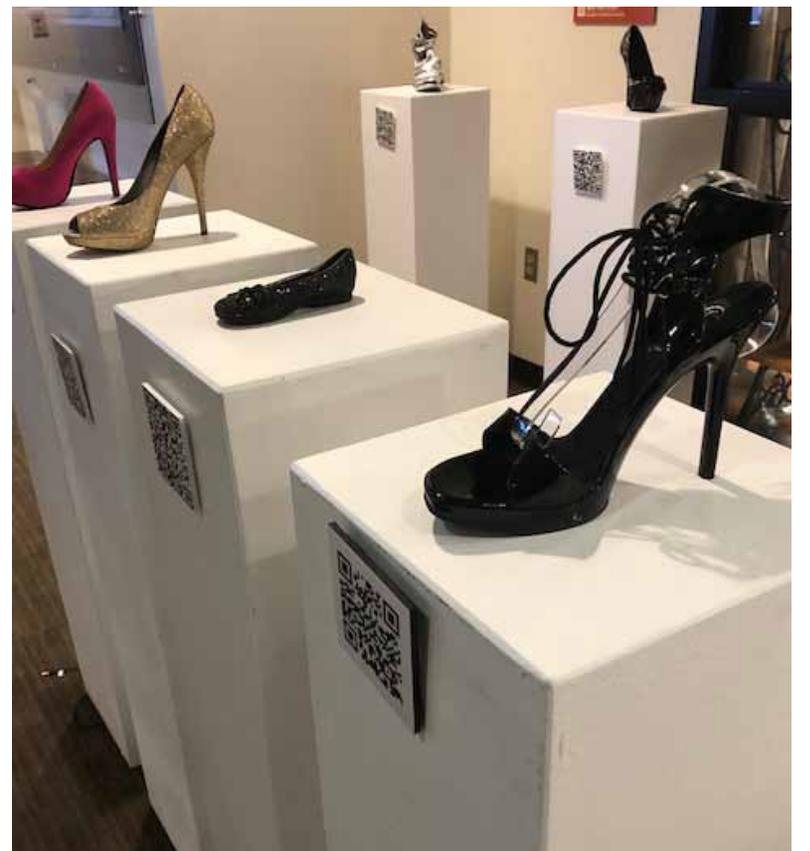
They may come in for pain, cuts or broken bones. Their trafficker may be with them. Unless someone spots the signs, no one may ever know that they are working the sex trade under duress.

“We’ve always trained our staff to spot the symptoms of child abuse,” said hospital CEO Paul Watkins. “We are now training them to look for signs of trafficking.”

Signs of sex trafficking include branding or tattoos, often using the word “daddy”- as traffickers refer to themselves. Dollar signs are another favorite tattoo, as are bar codes, as victims are treated as property to be bought and sold, not as human beings.

One of the staff most involved in the effort to identify these victims and treat them with respect is Dignity’s Survivor Advocate Christine Cesa, herself a real-life trafficking survivor.

She has been down that road, and approaches patients with empathy and compassion. “They need to feel that this is not their fault. They need to know there are people and resources there to help them. They come in ashamed and afraid. We are learning



**Shoes from trafficking victims on display at Northridge Hospital.**

to ask pertinent questions,” she continued. “Do you have ID? How did you get here? What do you do? Do you keep your money or give it to someone else?”

These questions and more help Dignity’s staff discern whether someone is being forced into what is

### Since August, 43 sex trafficking victims have walked into Dignity.

modern-day slavery.

And the statistics are horrifying. Cesa reported that since last August, 43 patients have come into the four Los Angeles Dignity hospitals for other complaints, and have been assessed as being in the human trafficking trade. Northridge

has seen the most cases.

Nationwide, the 24-hour hotline for human trafficking reported 8,759 calls in 2017. California logged the most. “That’s just victims who’ve reached out,” said Cesa. “Most patients don’t even know help exists.”

Cesa reported that contrary to popular belief, 98% of the victims are U.S. citizens, not far-east women and children bound and gagged and snuck into the country.

“Look at me,” she said. “I was a normal kid, normal valley house. But nothing in my life was normal.”

She did not go into specifics about her own ordeal, but said her

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