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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2025

134 YEARS, NO. 39

CHUALAR

County honors Bracero tragedy survivor

SUPERVISORS RECOGNIZE
LAST SURVIVING WORKER
OF 1963 TRAIN DISASTER



At 81, Isidro Hernandez Tovar remains the last living Bracero survivor of the 1963 Chualar tragedy, carrying forward the memory of his fallen companions.

BY RYAN CRONK
MANAGING EDITOR

CHUALAR — Monterey County has honored the last surviving Bracero of the 1963 Chualar train tragedy, recognizing his life story and the enduring legacy of Bracero workers during Bracero Worker History Recognition Week.

During a special ceremony Sept. 16 at the Monterey County Board of Supervisors chambers, officials presented an official resolution honoring Isidro Hernandez Tovar, 81, of Los Angeles. Hernandez Tovar was only 19 years old when he survived the horrific crash that claimed the lives of 32 Bracero workers on Sept. 17, 1963, in Chualar.

Packed with 57 workers inside a makeshift bus, Hernandez Tovar was among 25 survivors after a Southern Pacific train hit them. He suffered severe injuries and spent more than a month hospitalized.

Supervisor Luis Alejo, who led the recognition, reflected on the significance of honoring Hernandez Tovar as the last living witness of the tragedy.

"He endured severe injuries, spent a month in the hospital, and has carried the living memory of that painful chapter in California history, where

→ See BRACERO, A10

GONZALES

UPGRADE Gonzales Fire Department's new fire engine will be ready to serve the city by mid-October.

Joining the fleet

FIREFIGHTERS PRESENT NEW FIRE ENGINE DURING DEDICATION EVENT

BY MICHAEL RAMIREZ
FREELANCE REPORTER

A brand-new Fouts fire engine was presented Thursday afternoon during a dedication ceremony in front of the Gonzales Fire Department.

The new \$750,000 machine was funded by the County of Monterey Community Development Block Grant and Gonzales Measure K.

Gonzales Fire Chief Jason Muscio was pleased that the new fire engine has arrived and will be up and running soon.

"It was extremely important for our fire department to have this new fire engine," Muscio said. "We have been switching back and forth with our two older fire engines as they have been breaking down, as one is

→ See FIRE, A10

SOLEDAD

Ceremony pays tribute to missing military



A POW/MIA Flag Ceremony is held outside Soledad City Hall on Sept. 19, honoring U.S. military personnel who were taken prisoner of war or remain missing in action.

POLICE DEPARTMENT HOSTS
POW/MIA FLAG OBSERVANCE

STAFF REPORT

SOLEDAD — Soledad Police Department hosted a POW/MIA Flag Ceremony last Friday to honor and remember the courageous U.S. service members who were captured or remain unaccounted for.

"This ceremony is more than a tradition; it is a living promise that their sacrifice will never be forgotten, and their families are never alone in their vigil," according to the department in a news release.

Set against the backdrop of Soledad City Hall, the Sept. 19 gathering served as a moment of unity and reflection.

→ See CEREMONY, A10

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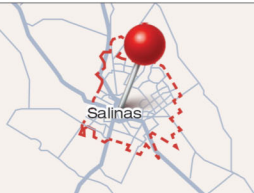
WEATHER

Cloudy
Tonight will be partly clear
Thursday will be sunny
Today's high: 83
Today's low: 65
→ Forecast on page A2

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Members of the Gonzales, Correctional Training Facility and Chualar fire departments gather in front of the new Gonzales fire engine on Sept. 18.

FIRE

Continued from A1

18 years old and the other is 22 years old. For the new machine, we just have to get the radio installed and provide training to our firefighters to get familiar with all the new knobs and controls on the fire engine. We should be ready to use the new

machine by the second week of October as the engine will need no break-in period."

Attending the Sept. 18 ceremony were firefighters and staff from Gonzales, Correctional Training Facility and Chualar fire station.

Gonzales City Council members were also on hand for the event, along with students

from the City of Gonzales Kids Power After School Program and many community members eager to view the new engine.

"Thank you to our community, partners and staff that made it out to the Fire Dedication today," wrote City of Gonzales on social media. "This is a huge milestone in being able to continue to keep

our community safe. Again, we extend our appreciation to the County of Monterey and Measure K Committee for providing funding through the CDBG and Measure K."

Monterey County Supervisor Chris Lopez said it was an "honor to be a partner in helping bring the equipment our communities deserve to

keep us all safe."

"These investments also keep our brave firefighters safe as they respond to calls in our community," Lopez added.

"Together we are building the tools that will help us create the community we want to see. It's a privilege to fight for us all and help make these victories happen."

BRACERO

Continued from A1

32 workers tragically lost their lives," wrote Alejo on social media. "Now 81, it was a tremendous honor to present Isidro with an official recognition from the Monterey County Board of Supervisors as the last surviving Bracero of the Chualar Tragedy alongside his wife of 50 years and several of his children."

The recognition coincided with the

62nd anniversary of the crash, considered the deadliest labor-related transportation disaster in U.S. history at the time. The tragedy spurred greater awareness of the conditions faced by Bracero workers, who were recruited from Mexico between 1942 and 1964 to support U.S. agriculture and railroads.

"These courageous Braceros contributed enormously to California and our nation's agriculture and laid the



Historian Dr. Ignacio Ornelas (far left) and local officials honor Isidro Hernandez Tovar (middle, with his family on the right) with resolutions and recognition certificates at the Sept. 16 county board meeting.

foundation for thousands of families in Monterey County and beyond," Alejo added. "Monterey County is proud to salute Isidro and we are grateful for all you have done for California."

At the board ceremony, Hernandez Tovar briefly spoke in Spanish (translated to English below) while accepting the honor. "I want to thank you all for this recognition, even though I don't deserve it, but thank you for everything," he said. "Thank you all for everything you do for us. Thank you, thank you. That's all I can say. Thank you."

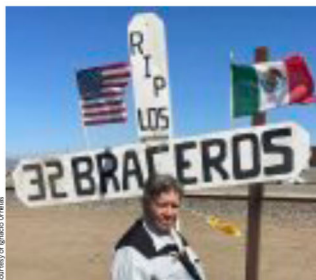
In addition to last Tuesday's ceremony, Hernandez Tovar returned to Chualar, where he revisited the

crash site, the roadside memorial and the new Bracero Legacy Mural. He reflected on the loss of his best friend Sixto and others who died that day, before sharing a meal in Chualar with family and historian Dr. Ignacio Ornelas.

The county resolution honoring Hernandez Tovar highlighted his life journey — from growing up in Zapotlanejo, Jalisco, Mexico, to his Bracero work in the Salinas Valley fields, his recovery after the crash and eventually settling in Los Angeles, where he worked more than 30 years with the Molding Corporation of America.

Hernandez Tovar and his wife, Carmelita, have raised six children during more than five decades of marriage. His story, county leaders said, embodies the resilience, dignity and lasting contributions of Bracero workers.

"The life story of Isidro Hernandez Tovar reflects courage, endurance, and quiet heroism, serving as a living testament to



Isidro Hernandez Tovar visits the roadside memorial honoring the 32 Bracero workers who lost their lives.

the contributions and sacrifices of Bracero workers and immigrant laborers who helped shape the history and prosperity of the United States," stated the resolution.

The Board of Supervisors first declared Bracero Worker History Recognition Week in 2023, and this year chose to honor and celebrate Hernandez Tovar as the only remaining Bracero of the Chualar disaster 62 years ago.

"(The Board) commends his resilience, perseverance, and devotion to family, and expresses its deepest gratitude for his lasting contributions as a Bracero worker and immigrant laborer whose story embodies the strength and spirit of the Latino community," the resolution concluded. "We also honor and celebrate (him) as the last surviving Bracero of the Chualar Bracero Tragedy."

CEREMONY

Continued from A1

City officials, local veterans and community members stood together in gratitude and remembrance, reinforcing the city's enduring commitment to those who served and sacrificed for freedom.

"This ceremony is a reminder of our unwavering respect for the men and women who defended our nation and never returned home," said Soledad Police Chief Patrick Valenzuela. "Their courage inspires us to cherish the liberties they fought to protect and to keep faith with the families who still wait for answers."

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