

## SWEET RELIEF

Erceg shines as reliever, lifting A's bullpen.

SPORTING GREEN, B1



## SIERRA WARNED AHEAD OF STORM

Late-season winter-like weather may bring foot of snow to some places.

BAY AREA & BUSINESS, A3



## HELLO, NOSTALGIA

Seinfeld makes directorial debut with too-sweet film.

DATEBOOK, B7

# San Francisco Chronicle

SFCHRONICLE.COM

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2024

CONTAINS RECYCLED PAPER

\$3.00



Photos by Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

Rahni NothingMore dances during the Downtown First Thursdays block party on Second Street.

## New street party brings 'electricity' to S.F.'s core

### Inaugural Downtown First Thursdays attracts thousands

By Roland Li

The first of San Francisco's monthly Downtown First Thursdays block parties drew thousands to the city's core as thumping bass, dancing crowds and food vendors enlivened the usually mellow area, with a giant disco ball hanging from a crane taking over Minna Street's alleyway.

Attendees browsed arts and crafts vendors on Second Street, painted a communal mural and listened to sketch comedy. Lines for food stands hawking Peruvian dishes, oxtail and Nepalese momos stretched along the corridor.

It's the latest in a series of new nighttime events around the city, including the Sunset and Chinatown night markets, efforts to inject energy into areas recovering from the pandemic.

**Downtown continues on A10**



Aaron Jones leads his son, Hendrix, 4, during the block party, part of efforts to inject energy into areas recovering from the pandemic.

## Pot change would be boon to state

The federal government's expected move to reclassify cannabis as a less dangerous drug could be a lifeline to struggling legal weed businesses in California — and possibly lead to lower prices for consumers.

The Drug Enforcement Agency is expected to reclassify cannabis under the Schedule III category of the Controlled Substances Act, akin to codeine and anabolic steroids, the Associated Press first reported. Until now, it has been in the Schedule I category, equated with drugs such as heroin that have no known therapeutic value.

**JOE GAROFOLI**  
IT'S ALL POLITICAL

"This move will acknowledge what California has known for almost 30 years: Cannabis has medical value," said Nicole Elliott, director of California's Department of Cannabis Control. "It will enable new scientific research into the value and potential risks of the plant. It will also help level the financial playing field for businesses that have long been burdened by inequitable federal tax laws."

But — and there's always a "but" when it comes to regulations involving cannabis — don't expect the changes to happen overnight in California, where \$4.4 billion worth of legal cannabis was sold last year.

Changes will become visible next year at the earliest, as it will take months, at least, for the federal government to complete the reclassification process. Cannabis, like Schedule III drugs, is still a federally controlled substance and subject to criminal

**Garofoli continues on A11**

## Biden's reaction to demonstrators could alienate some young voters

By Shira Stein

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden ramped up criticism of protests at college campuses around the nation Thursday, saying, "There's the right to protest, but not the right to cause chaos."

His characterizations of the protests may be further alienating some young voters, some of whom told the Chronicle they believe his comments are giving implicit permission for the increasing police violence against dem-

### INSIDE

Three injured at UC Berkeley during confrontation. **A5**

Some protests end after schools' leaders make deals. **A12**

onstrators. Two Democratic members of Congress suggested the administration could do more to engage with the substance of the protesters' concerns and to explicitly condemn violence carried out by police.

Police conducted violent ar-

rests of students at UCLA and Columbia University over the last two days. A viral video last week showed police in Atlanta forcefully wrestling to the ground and arresting an Emory University professor who asked officers why they were arresting protesters.

Young voters are getting the message from the White House and other elected leaders that "their voice doesn't matter and deserves to be crushed," Angus

**Biden continues on A11**



Chris Kleponis/Tribune News Service

Speaking this week about protests at universities, President Joe Biden said that "dissent must never lead to disorder."

## Oakland's crime dips after spike

### Violence prevention program cited in slowdown so far in 2024

By Eli Rosenberg

Oakland officials are hailing data showing that crime has fallen significantly, after a spike in 2023 drew national attention and raised concerns among residents about the direction of the city.

Crime is down 33% overall in Oakland so far this year compared with the same period in 2023, according to the latest police statistics through April 28, with significant drops in categories including homicides, assaults, rapes and burglaries.

The improving numbers, which City Hall officials attribute to changes in the operation and organization of the Police Department, raise hopes that the city may be beating back its crime wave, which has dragged on Oakland's business environment and raised questions about its post-pandemic vitality.

Yet, despite the overall decline, one type of crime has continued to worsen. Robberies, which play a critical role in public safety concerns and the perception of security, are up 11% in the first four months compared with last year. Because of that, the overall level of violent crime, which rose 21% last year, has remained flat in 2024 as rising robberies offset gains in other categories such as homicides.

City Hall officials say they are optimistic about the figures, but they acknowledge there is plenty of work to be done.

"Oakland is turning the corner and the public safety investments we have made are paying off," Mayor Sheng Thao said in a statement. "Our hard

**Oakland continues on A11**

## Court asked to forgo jail time in cliff plunge

By Matthias Gafni

The wife of Dharmesh Patel, the doctor accused of intentionally driving a Tesla off a San Mateo County cliff with his family inside, wiped away tears as she spoke publicly for the first time, telling a judge she believes her husband should receive mental health treatment instead of prison time.

Neha Patel read a statement saying she misses her "best friend" and their children miss their father. She said Dharmesh Patel had a mental health episode that led to the crash, but that his illness is treatable and she wants to reunite her family.

"I don't want to see Dharmesh prosecuted with any of his charges," said Neha Patel, appearing over Zoom on Thursday in San Mateo County Superior Court. "I am pleading with the court to grant him his mental health diversion."

Dharmesh Patel, wearing a red San Mateo County jail jumpsuit, also appeared teary-eyed as his wife said that his children miss him and cry themselves to sleep at night.

"Seeing my kids in constant pain is one of the hardest things I've had to endure," she told the judge. "Once I tuck my children into bed at night I'm reminded of my own solitude. I really miss my best friend. I really miss my partner in my life."

**Patel continues on A10**

