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## Water contractors hope for a wet spring

**John Lindt** – CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The National Weather Service has published a map showing the likelihood of wet weather in California from March 24-30. Other sources

say it looks good for early April too.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. forecaster John Lindsey confirms the opinion for Central California, saying “The long-range models suggest a return

to wet and unsettled weather by the middle of next week. At this time, rain may develop by March 25.”

One factor — warming water temperatures in the Pacific are fueling expectations of

an El Nino pattern.

California got a good dose of wet weather in February and early March, but has been dry since. Farmers are

**Wet Spring | 3**

## Apartment rehab spruces up Fresno’s ‘Sin City’



**Chuck Harvey** – STAFF WRITER

Rehabilitation of the San Ramon Apartments signals a big step forward in Fresno’s goal of transforming the El Dorado Park neighborhood — often referred to as Sin City — into a vibrant and safe community.

Zumwalt Construction Inc. has finished upgrading the San Ramon Apartments within El Dorado Park near Bulldog Stadium. Apartment renters at San Ramon that had been moved out during construction are scheduled to move back in on March 22.

The Fresno Housing Authority, which runs the complex, will hold off on a grand opening until the tenants have a chance to settle back in.

As they return, renters will see some major improvements, including new site work, landscaping, courtyard, roofing, railing, windows, French doors, flooring paint and light fixtures.

New carports and a laundry room have also been built, along with wrought iron security fencing and security site lighting.

And it was all done in a four-month period. Total development cost for the 32-unit project is \$4.2 million, with \$3 million from City of Fresno Neighborhood Stabilization Program and \$1.2 million from Fresno Housing Authority.

**Apartments | 2**

CHUCK HARVEY | Kurt Zumwalt, president of Zumwalt Construction, completed the \$4.2-million rehabilitation of the San Ramon Apartments in Fresno in a four-month period.

## Franchisors have sights set on Fresno area

**Ben Keller** – STAFF WRITER

Several national companies have their eyes on Fresno for expansion. All they need is a handful of willing entrepreneurs to set up shop.

National Franchise Day on March 4 recognized the nearly one million franchised businesses operating in the United States, from restaurants, hotels and gas stations to car dealers, retail stores and repair services.

Many of the franchising companies have flocked to California, believed to be on the forefront of new ideas and dotted with large population centers.

After registering to do business in California a few years ago, Netherlands-based Oil & Vinegar has big plans for the state to supplement its Mediterranean boutique and tasting rooms with local products grown in the Central Valley.

While the company has some 90 stores globally selling food, sauces and other



CONTRIBUTED | Oil & Vinegar, a Mediterranean boutique featuring food, sauces and other cooking products, is interested in franchising a Fresno location.

cooking products, only 16 have been opened so far in the U.S. However, President Matt Stermer predicts that California will have more locations than any other state in five years time, particularly in ar-

reas around Fresno where the farming culture is already ingrained.

“We actually like markets like Fresno

**Franchises | 4**





CHUCK HARVEY | Renters at the San Ramon Apartments will see some major improvements as they move back in, including new site work, landscaping, courtyard, roofing, railing, windows, French doors, flooring paint and light fixtures.

### Apartments | from 1

The improved apartments stand out from existing apartments on the street that may not see a rehab for some time. However, the builder, Zumwalt Construction, and the city see it as a good first-step in sprucing up the area and addressing safety concerns.

Brandi Johnson, communication manager for the Fresno Housing Authority, said the improved section of apartments is encouraging other apartment owners to throw on some fresh paint and do some minor renovations of their own.

It could also help property values in the area, she said. She said no further Housing Authority projects are currently planned for El Dorado Park, but the authority, knowing that many apartment complexes in the county are aging, has rehabilitation of rental housing going on in various parts of the county.

Rehabilitation is a kind of work Zumwalt Construction specializes in. Also the builder wants to erase the "Sin City" image the El Dorado Park area had developed.

"Zumwalt Construction Inc. specializes in multi-family rehabilitation projects and anticipates doing additional projects within this category of construction," said Kurt Zumwalt, president of Zumwalt Construction. "Presently we are rehabilitating 123 units in Mendota for the Fresno Housing Authority."

The Mendota housing rehabilitation is taking place at Mendota Apartments at 778 Quince St., Rios Terrace at 424 Derrick Ave. and Rios Terrace II at 111 Straw St.

Zumwalt said demand has picked up for low-cost apartment projects including rehabilitation work. He said the need is strong to catch up on deferred maintenance and refurbishment for multi-family housing.

Besides improving the looks of the housing, firms like Zumwalt Construction bring the housing up to building and safety codes.

Asked what tenants are looking for in refurbished apartments, Zumwalt said the big things are a safe environment for their families and affordable rent.

The challenge at San Ramon Apartments was to rehabilitate 32 public housing units to current market standards.

Architect for project was R.L. Davidson Inc. of Fresno.

Work was completed on Feb. 28.

The city of Fresno was anxious to see improvements in the apartment complex that is run by the Fresno Housing Authority. The entire El Dorado Park neighborhood covers 30 acres and is dominated by multi-family apartments.

According to the El Dorado Neighborhood Plan, the development was first constructed as affordable housing for Fresno students. However it has deteriorated over the past 15-20 years.

In 2011, police found several weapons and drugs while serving a search warrant for an alleged gang operation at a San Ramon apartment in El Dorado Park. And the incident wasn't isolated.

So the city was anxious to secure money for a significant upgrade in the park.

Funding for the San Ramon Apartments project was provided through low-income housing tax credit equity currently being used in Fresno County.

Goals set forth in the neighborhood plan include setting strategies for a safe, crime-free environment, encouraging some neighborhood commercial projects, improving or replacing substandard housing, preserving and expanding housing opportunities for existing families and new residents and creating a central open space area along with private gardens and courtyards.

The plan also calls for closer ties with Fresno State.

In 2013, Fresno Housing Authority received \$60 million in tax credit equity for rehabilitation projects.

The authority has begun efforts to rehabilitate 400 public housing units in Fresno, Mendota and Orange Cove. Plans also include constructing community centers with computer labs, kitchens and offices.

In 2013, the Department of Housing and Urban Development selected Fresno Housing Authority to be part of its Rental Assistance Demonstration program that allows the authority to use private sector funds as well as equity in current developments to pay for affordable housing building improvements.

The authority estimates that the cost of needed improvements in the area has soared to more than \$100 million.

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