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MERCED SUNSTAR

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BREAKING NEWS ONLINE AT WWW.MERCEDSUNSTAR.COM

Falcons win thriller, to host 49ers Sunday

SPORTS, PAGE B1



AG LAND: Prices soaring in the valley

LOCAL, PAGE A2

Rail system property discussions set to begin

Bids to be submitted to design, build tracks

By **TIM SHEEHAN**
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State leaders will consider giving the go-ahead for the California High-Speed Rail Authority to begin negotiating for property in Fresno and Madera counties needed for high-speed train tracks.

At its meeting today in Sacramento, the state's Public Works Board is expected to approve the formal selection of 356 separate parcels by the rail authority. The Public Works Board, which includes the directors of the state's Finance, General Services and Transportation departments, is in charge of buying land for highway and other transportation projects in the state.

Also this week, five contracting teams are expected to submit their bids to design and build the first stretches of the proposed statewide rail system.

The Public Works Board's executive director, Greg Rogers, said selecting the parcels will let the rail authority begin making offers to owners whose property is targeted for the first stage of construction. Those parcels are either in the path of the tracks themselves or will be affected by relat-

SEE RAIL, PAGE A7

Brown seeks efficiencies at state's universities

Intentions made clear by his budget plan

By **DAVID SIDERS**
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Gov. Jerry Brown, who paid relatively little attention to the University of California for the first two years of his term, started showing up for board meetings late last year, urging spending reductions as part of a "new paradigm" in higher education.

"We are going to have to restrain this system in many, many of its elements," Brown said in November, "and this will come with great resistance."

If his intentions were not entirely clear, they became so Thursday, when Brown released his an-

SEE COSTS, PAGE A6

County's Hmong community among the nation's largest

CULTURAL IMPACT



The area's significant Hmong community gathers each year to celebrate the Hmong New Year at the Merced County Fairgrounds, with traditional dress, such as that worn in these photos, a common sight.

MERCED SUN-STAR

By **YESENIA AMARO**
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Merced is home to the fifth largest Hmong community in the country, according to a recent study.

The study, published in the Hmong Studies Journal's special issue on the 2010 census, states that Merced's Hmong population saw a significant increase from 2000 to 2010, going up to 7,254 from 6,148. The study used information from the 2010 census and expertise from scholars around the country.

California overall continues to have the largest Hmong population of any other state, with a total of 91,224. That represents a 40 percent increase from 2000.

Minnesota and Wisconsin are two other states with a large Hmong population.

"Hmong in California in terms of socioeconomics are not doing quite as well as Hmong in some other states," said Mark Pfeifer with the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul, Minn.

Pfeifer, who coordinated the efforts of the study, which took more than a year to complete, said that could be because the Hmong population in the state is concentrated in the Central Valley — a region that has suffered from unemployment and tough economic times.

He believes the socioeconomics can be improved by education and jobs that match the skills of the community.

Houa Vang, executive director of

SEE HMONG, PAGE A7



>> **ONLINE:** To read the Hmong Studies Journal's special issue on the 2010 census, go to www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-1322012-2010-census-special-issue.html.

MONDAY MERCED MATTERS

Martial arts fighter conquers obstacles

By **RAMONA GIWARGIS**
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Watching mixed martial artist Edward Mackey exchange jabs with his opponent inside a steel cage, you'd never know the 26-year-old Livingston resident almost didn't make it.

Growing up in the streets of Merced, he was faced with several choices —

drugs, gangs and guns.

"I've seen a lot of violence in that neighborhood," Mackey said about growing up on West 21st Street.

A move to Livingston in 1992, when Mackey was 5 years old, was supposed to make things better. But it only made things worse.

SEE FIGHTER, PAGE A7



BEA AHBECK CASSON/bahbeck@mercedsunstar.com

Mixed martial artist Edward Mackey of Livingston wraps his hands before training Friday.

EDITOR'S NOTE: 'Merced Matters' appears every Monday. In it we will tell the stories of Mercedians — ordinary people doing extraordinary things, extraordinary people doing ordinary things and a lot in between. We hope you like our effort to let you know more about others in our community, and we welcome your suggestions. Please contact Victor Patton at vpattton@mercedsun-star.com or (209) 385-2431 with your ideas for 'Merced Matters.'

QuickTake

News outside Merced County

GOING PAPERLESS: Millions of U.S. seniors are being pushed into the age of digital banking. Starting March 1, most Social Security checks no longer will arrive by mail. See Page A-3

TAXES RISE: The first paycheck of 2013 contained a surprise for many: a tax hike that shrunk earnings by 2 percent or more. See Page A-4

GOLDEN GLOBES: At Sunday night's Golden Globes, hostage thriller "Argo" won for best drama and director for Ben Affleck. "Les Miserables" was named best musical or comedy and won acting honors for Hugh Jackman and Anne Hathaway. See Page A-4

WEATHER

Sunny and chilly today, clear and frost tonight. High of 49; low of 28.

CONTACT US

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COMING TOMORROW

The Merced County Office of Education is taking the lead in administering a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant.

