



THE REGULARS



Photos by Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Removing rattlers to protect people

By Scott Strazzante

AUBURN, Placer County — From early March to late October, Len Ramirez, 60, has a sole focus — to catch rattlesnakes before they harm a human or a pet. Based two hours northeast of San Francisco in Auburn (Placer County), he has operated Ramirez Rattlesnake Removal since 1985. During rattlesnake season, the California native is on call 24/7 and is willing to travel anywhere that a client reports a snake problem, but generally works between Napa Valley and Nevada County. Ramirez's interest in snakes started at an early age while he watched the popular television show "Wild Kingdom." "It was my dream to be the savior of the Earth and save



snakes," he says. With that dream in mind, Ramirez purchased a red shirt at age 14, applied an iron-on decal that read "Rattlesnake Search and Rescue," and bicycled around his Cupertino neighborhood looking for clients. His early foray into the business world didn't pan out, so Ramirez concentrated on his other love, tennis. Ramirez was a highly ranked junior and once battled a brash up and comer from New York named John McEnroe. Soon afterward, Ramirez settled into a role as tennis pro, which he held

Top: Len Ramirez, who runs Ramirez Rattlesnake Removal, places a young Northern Pacific rattlesnake in a holding tank at his home. Above: Ramirez frees a young Northern Pacific that got stuck on a glue pad.

CAMPAIGN 2020

Harris offers universal plan for Medicare before debate

By Tal Kopan

WASHINGTON — Sen. Kamala Harris unveiled her version of a Medicare for All health care plan Monday, seeking to gain high ground going into the next presidential debate on an issue that has at times tripped up her campaign. The plan the California Democrat spelled out in a Medium post differs somewhat from the flagship legislation led by independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, a fellow contender for the Democratic nomination who has pulled the field left on the issue. Harris' plan would make the phase-in period significantly longer than Sanders', an attempt to address skeptics' concerns about replacing Americans' private insurance with a government-run system. Unlike Sanders' proposal, Harris' plan would create an option to include private insurers that offered policies whose coverage and costs met Medicare requirements. The issue is sure to come up in Tuesday and

Campaign continues on C2

U.S. News pulls UC Berkeley from rankings list over errors

By Nanette Asimov

Like a student whose test score is disqualified, storied UC Berkeley — among the highest-ranking universities in the nation — has been kicked off the 2019 college rankings by U.S. News & World Report, whose listings are relied on by high school students everywhere to decide where to apply. The 2019 U.S. News rankings had listed UC Berkeley as the second-best public university after UCLA. But after UC Berkeley recently told the service that it had provided several years of wrong information about the size of its charitable contributions — which accounts for 5% of a school's ranking — the campus of Nobel Prize winners and touted researchers got the boot. UC Berkeley was "unranked," and this year's listing now skips the No. 2 spot and goes directly to third-ranked University of Virginia. U.S. News continues on C3

OTIS R. TAYLOR JR.

On the East Bay will return.

BAY AREA

On call to protect rattlers, humans

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until age 26. He then returned to a herpetological focus and established his business. Ramirez concentrates specifically on the Northern Pacific and prairie rattlesnakes that frequent Northern California, but he has been called on to remove a black mamba and a cobra. Last year, Ramirez captured and safely relocated more than 1,200 rattlesnakes. Once a week, he travels to an uninhabited remote forest north of his home to release the rattlesnakes into the wild to give them

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Len Ramirez, rattlesnake wrangler

a chance to reach their normal expected life span of 25 years. "Part of my service is to defend rattlesnakes. I do not like to see them killed," he says. To stay safe in rattlesnake country, Ramirez recommends bringing dogs in at night to avoid confrontations with nocturnal snakes and carefully scouting property before working in the garden or sending children out to play. If someone hears the distinctive rattle of a rattlesnake, Ramirez says to freeze and identify where the noise is coming from, take several steps back, out of danger, make sure there is not another in the vicinity, and then give him a call. In his free time, Ramirez can be found tending



Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

For only the second time in his career, Len Ramirez catches two Northern Pacific rattlesnakes at once.

to his large collection of cacti or driving his Dodge Viper with the vanity plate R8TSLNK. So, keep an eye out over the next three months for Ramirez, wearing his trademark cowboy hat and driving his bright red Dodge Ram pickup emblazoned with "Rattlesnake Wrangler" on the side. If you spot him, he most likely will have a smile on his face. "Every day is the best day for me because I am doing what I love," he says. Scott Strazzante is a San Francisco Chronicle photographer. Watch a video at www.sfchronicle.com/theregulars. The Regulars is a photo and video column that offers a glimpse into the lives of ordinary people in the Bay Area, caught in routine activities of modern urban life.