

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRUCE SPANGLER

## 15 MINUTES

### Butte County: We're open

Bruce Spangler was born and raised in Oroville, so when he was able to find a job there in his field—he started in hospitality in 2003—he was eager to return to his hometown. With a degree in zoology from Humboldt State, he fell into the hotel business because it paid the bills—and he excelled at it. He's been general manager of the Holiday Inn Express in the City of Gold since 2011 and is currently serving as president of Explore Butte County, aka the Butte County Tourism Business Improvement District. He recently took time to talk with the CN&R about the local tourism industry, which has been impacted by the Camp Fire on two fronts—not only in the loss of attractions in the burn areas but also in the influx of houseless residents and out-of-town laborers staying in local hotels. Check [explorebuttecounty.com](http://explorebuttecounty.com) for more.

**Did the fire affect how you market our area to out-of-town visitors?** Once the Camp Fire hit, Explore Butte County had an emergency meeting. We pulled in [marketing nonprofit] Visit California, plus [local representatives], and we had a round table to discuss ideas as to what we should do at this point. We knew we had to rethink our strategy. The most important thing is to support our communities at this time. So, all of the events and festivals—in Paradise, Oroville, Chico and the surrounding areas—we



will continue to highlight those. We want to remind people that Butte County is still open. But we switched our marketing focus to the drive markets rather than overnight stays. So, we're targeting people in Sacramento and Redding, anywhere within about a two- to four-hour drive.

#### Are there any vacancies?

We're starting to see, as hoteliers, that for Thursday to Sunday, occupancies are opening up. So, that means there's availability to book leisure travel. We're starting to have wedding blocks come in—that's really important for Chico, spring weddings. And we're building up to our busy season.

#### Chico's expecting a new Holiday Inn Express—any updates?

We're hoping to open there at the end of May. Unfortunately, it won't be open before graduation, but we're hoping by June 1. We have a Visit California trip that's

coming through [then], a group of international tour operators coming from a symposium in San Francisco who are taking a tour of the northern region of California. It'll include an overnight stay in Chico, with a full day in Oroville, Chico and the surrounding areas. We're excited to host something like that.

#### Are you seeing any new trends in the tourism industry?

People are getting back into doing road trips. Visit California is seeing that as a huge motivator. So, our next campaign will be a road trip campaign. San Francisco is a huge, prime market for us. It's just far enough out that people want that couple-day stay. They want to get out of the city, into the open spaces, but not too far, so they don't have to devote too much time to it.

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## THE GOODS

### Mall musings



by  
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I haven't felt much like shopping since the Camp Fire. I know I advocate in this space for supporting our local retailers, but I myself have struggled to find the motivation to go buy, for instance, new jeans or a new pair of shoes. But, last week, I mustered the energy and forced myself out of the house and over to the **Chico Mall**. If nothing else, it would give me a chance to see what's going on there now that the disaster resource center has closed.

The cool news: Several new places are preparing to open in vacant storefronts. And three of those are Paradise businesses. The first that caught my eye was **Dove's Gypsy Heart Boutique**, a popular Skyway women's clothing/home décor store owned by its namesake, **Dovie Detches**. The Paradise shop didn't burn, but Detches has been clearing out inventory the past few weeks in anticipation of moving to the Chico Mall. The new digs are across from **American Eagle Outfitters**.

Next door to Dove's (and next to **Rue Guy**) is another Paradise transplant, **Americana Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu**. Opened by head instructor **Andrew "Mu Shu" Osterlund** in 2007, the martial arts studio offers memberships, classes for kids and adults, and private lessons.

The third Paradise transplant in the mall is **Backyard Solutions**, which is hard to miss with its large Jacuzzi in the front display window. The store specializes in outdoor appliances and décor, from barbecues to greenhouses, and is located next to **Hot Topic**.

**CAMPING TIME** The **Oroville/Feather Falls Casino** is Butte County's only KOA campground, and I recently got word that it is changing its designation to a **KOA Journey**. What that basically means is it's conveniently situated along "the highways and byways of North America" and it has long, pull-through parking spaces that make setup and tear-down particularly easy. The Feather Falls campground also has wifi, cable, a dog park and gift shop. Plus, it's right by the casino! Adding to its allure, the Oroville/Feather Falls Casino KOA received the 2018 KOA Founder's and President's awards for world-class service and exceptional quality standards.

**GROWING BUSINESS** I was driving down Park Avenue a week or so ago and noticed the **Taqueria Martinez** sign outside the walk-up window at 1530 Park Ave. had been replaced by one advertising **Taqueria Pinolera**. (Martinez had been part of the **Cocina Cortes** family, whose patriarch passed away last year.)

I stopped to check it out. My first question: Are you related to the **Tacos el Pinolero** trucks? The answer: Yep! The on-site kitchen has allowed them to expand their menu options, but at the time of my visit they were still working on getting the menu printed. So, go see for yourself.

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