



# *Santa Maria Valley* **ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT**

**March 2026 | Prepared for the Community of Santa Maria**



## Introduction

The Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce is proud to present our Monthly Economic Impact Report for March 2026, highlighting ongoing efforts to support business growth, workforce development, tourism promotion, and community engagement throughout the region. During the month, the Chamber's Economic Development team supported three potential new businesses and provided assistance to 11 local businesses and residents through consultations and startup support.

Throughout March, the Chamber engaged in a wide range of programs and outreach efforts. Membership remained strong with 803 members, while the Hispanic Business Group, now with 215 members, continued to support local entrepreneurs with beginning their startup journey. Tourism remained a key focus, with the 2026 Craft Cocktail Contest collaborating with seven local establishments and website engagement driving 1,024 hotel referrals. Workforce development efforts advanced through CTE teacher tours of Vandenberg Space Force Base and recruiting volunteers for mock interviews with students through Partners in Education.

The Chamber remains closely connected to local government and regional partners through 30 events and meetings, including the Tri-County Chamber Alliance Annual Meeting and the State of Vandenberg. This report highlights the Chamber's continued role in supporting local industries, strengthening workforce pipelines, and advancing the economic vitality of the Santa Maria Valley.

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## Economic Development



## Business Attraction

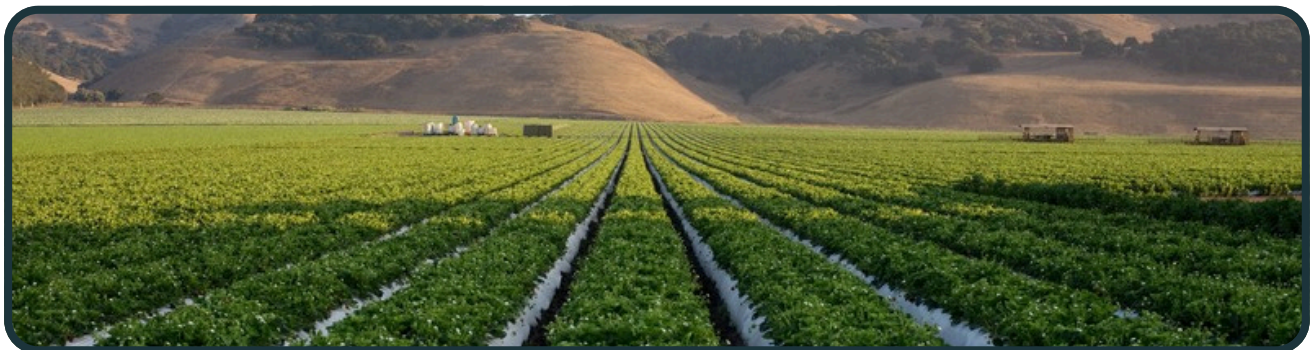
The Chamber's Economic Development department provided direct support to 3 businesses thinking of starting a business or moving their business to Santa Maria.

| Business Type/Idea | Support Provided                       |
|--------------------|--|
| Paint business     | Business license information & process |
| Security company   | Information on Gov contracting         |
| Demolition company | Funding needs and general info         |

## Business Retention & Assistance

The Chamber's Economic Development department provided business assistance services to 11 local businesses and residents.

| Business Type     | Support Provided          |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Banking           | Meeting of CEO            |
| Resident          | Info on HWL housing types |
| EconAlliance      | Intro to new ED           |
| UPC               | City General Plan         |
| Resident          | Heritage Walk tile        |
| Resident          | Heritage Walk Tile        |
| Noozhawk          | AA Flights                |
| KCET              | AA Flights                |
| Hotelier          | Inspection difficulties   |
| PT Business       | Location needed           |
| SB Humane Society | Location needed           |



# Providing Business Support

## Chamber Membership



## Networking Opportunities



**380+**

### Networking Event Participants

This includes the Chamber's weekly Build Your Business networking events, Mixers, and Chamber committee meetings.

“As a long-time member of the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce, Laurus College values the connections we've made through their events, initiatives, and partnerships. The Chamber plays a key role in keeping us engaged with the dynamic community we serve!

-Dr. Karen Edwards, Director of Workforce & Economic Development, Laurus College

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## Event Updates

The Tri-County Chamber Alliance Annual Meeting brought together leadership from San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties to align on regional advocacy and economic sustainability. The event reinforced the importance of maintaining a competitive business climate and ensuring the Santa Maria Valley remains a priority in policy discussions.



## Providing Business Support

### Military Affairs

Tom Stevens and Amy Richwine from Vandenberg Space Force Base shared about the current and future housing needs of the Base.



### Business & Government Roundtable

Michael Foote of REACH and came and discussed with the group the regions activities supporting growth and economic development

### Ambassador Committee

The meeting was led by Ambassador Chair, Paula Fuller of American Self Storage. Cara Martinez, Ambassador Chamber Staff Liaison provided a board update in absence of our Vice Chair. She also shared updates on upcoming meetings and events, and coordinated Ambassador assignments for these activities. Also a report on new members for February was presented, along with updates on recent Ambassador outreach efforts.

# REACH

Ideas + Action for a Thriving Central Coast

# Providing Business Support

## Hispanic Business Support

The Chamber’s Economic Development department helps support Hispanic business outreach efforts through the Hispanic Business Group, which organizes educational and networking events.



Business Outreach & Assistance was provided to the following Hispanic businesses:

| Business Type/Name                | Support Provided      |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Accounting Business StartUp       | Start Up Assistance   |
| Mobile Detailing Business StartUP | Start Up Assistance   |
| Regal RPX 14                      | HBA Business Outreach |
| Mexican Restaurant                | HBA Business Outreach |
| Barbershop/Salon                  | HBA Business Outreach |

## Updates & Additional Activities

- HBA Committee Meeting: March 18, 2026
- Cal Chamber Meeting: March 17, 2026



# Tourism

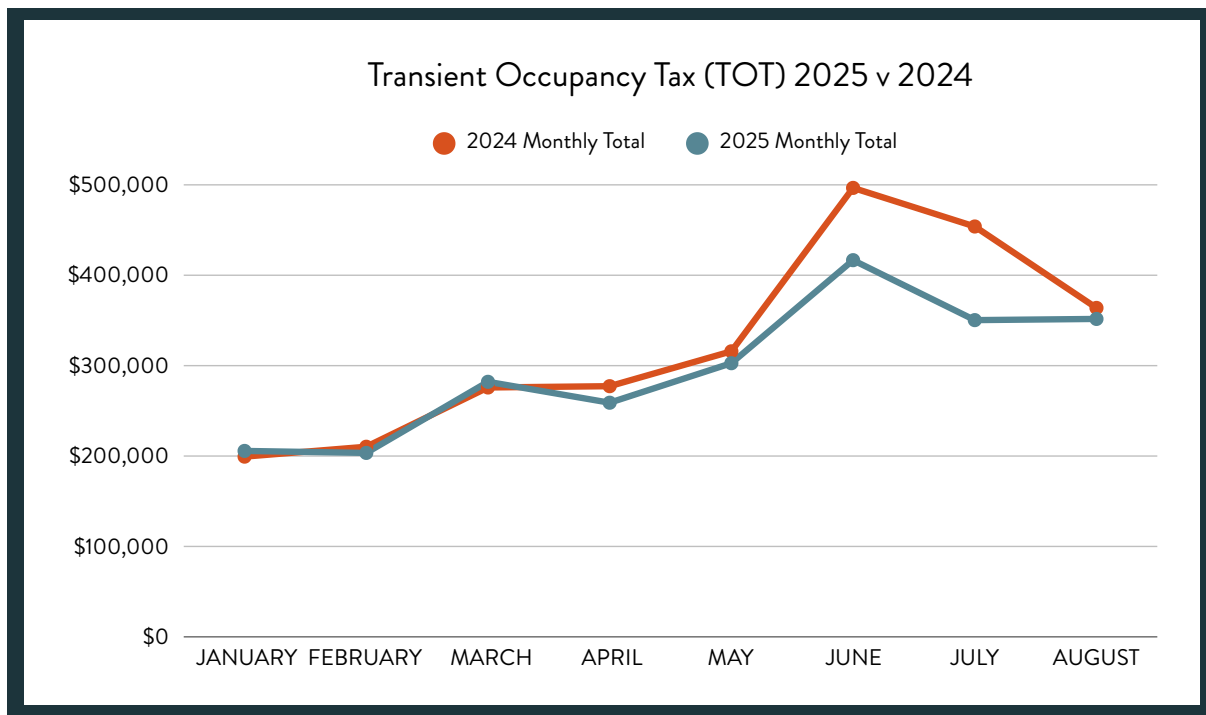
## Transient Occupancy Tax Data

Despite the well-documented headwinds facing the tourism sector across the country, driven by consumer economic concerns and the current political climate, our Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue is demonstrating promising signs of stabilization as we head into the last quarter of the year.

The latest report, covering data through August, shows a monthly year-over-year decrease of 3.35%. This monthly result indicates a strong deceleration of the negative trend when compared to the average monthly year-over-year decline of 6.35% that the area has experienced so far this fiscal year.

While our year-to-date (YTD) revenue for the January-August period remains in deficit, showing an 8.54% decrease compared to the same period in the prior year, the most recent monthly performance highlights our destination's enduring appeal and the resilience of our local tourism market. We remain strategically focused on leveraging this recent momentum to close the gap and secure the strongest possible fiscal finish.

| Month    | 2025 Monthly Totals | 2024 Monthly Totals | Monthly Percentage Change |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| January  | \$205,657.77        | \$199,345.75        | +3.17%                    |
| February | \$203,468.55        | \$210,286.10        | -3.24%                    |
| March    | \$282,109.55        | \$275,837.25        | +2.27%                    |
| April    | \$258,990.80        | \$277,268.38        | -6.59%                    |
| May      | \$302,702.66        | \$315,838.18        | -4.16%                    |
| June     | \$416,673.19        | \$496,629.02        | -16.10%                   |
| July     | \$350,359.24        | \$453,920.91        | -22.81%                   |
| August   | \$351,666.37        | \$363,851.23        | -3.35%                    |



## Tourism

### Community Support

The 2026 Craft Cocktail Contest program collaborated with seven local breweries, tasting rooms, and restaurants to drive evening foot traffic and highlight Santa Maria's mixology scene throughout March. To ensure merchant success, we provided high-value marketing support, including professional photography sessions, custom in-store collateral, and a dedicated SEO-driven landing page.

The campaign was heavily promoted across print, email, and social media, resulting in high community engagement and the selection of Costa de Oro (People's Choice) and The Range Kitchen & Bar (Judges' Choice) as winners.



### Website Traffic

Our tourism website (santamariavalley.com) remains a strong driver for hotel referrals.

**37,598 Website Visits**

**1,024 Website Hotel Referrals**



### Brochure & Visitor Guide Distribution



**540**

Visitor guides distributed to local hotels, businesses and through Certified Folder Display placements



**540**

Wine guides and maps distributed to local hotels, businesses and through Certified Folder Display placements

## Tourism

### Trade Shows & Industry Partner Events

Suzanne Singh and Jennifer Ayala from our Chamber team attended California's annual tourism industry conference. This event brings together industry leaders to discuss trends, research, and strategies for the state's travel sector.

Efrain Salazar from the Chamber along with General Manager Robert Cooks from the Best Western Plus Big America, and Audrey Bustamante from the Historic Santa Maria Inn, attended the Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show, connecting attendees with thousands of vacation options and featured destination exhibits.

Jennifer Ayala and Scott Shute from the Historic Santa Maria Inn, attended the Bay Area Travel & Adventure Show. Travelers had the opportunity to meet experts, explore vacation options, and book trips. The Santa Maria Valley was promoted as a premier destination, and attendees were informed about the area's attractions, dining, and wine offerings.



### Paid Advertising

2026 Craft Cocktail Contest \$50 Paid Ad: Our social media team boosted the launch post for Santa Maria Valley's 2026 Craft Cocktail Contest. The boosted ad reached 4,674 accounts and received 8,058 views.



### Familiarization (FAM) Tours & Media



We hosted 1 FAM tour in March:

- Nora Tarte: Reporter and travel writer for 7x7 magazine, Nora Tarte, is a FAM we hosted on March 28-29. She focused on a writing assignment specifically to promote Old Town Orcutt.

## Workforce Development

### Teacher Tours

High School CTE teachers from across Santa Barbara County to Vandenberg Space Force Base for the day. The tour included a mission brief from military command, and tours of NASA and United Launch Alliance (ULA).



### Partners in Education

We assisted with recruiting volunteers for mock interviews with students.



### Leadership Santa Maria Valley

The March topic day was about Health & Human Services. We heard from Dr. Ketelaar about the state of mental health treatment and case load in northern Santa Barbara County and also learned about Marian Regional Medical center from Sue Anderson, CEO. We toured the Good Samaritan Shelter, Casa de Flores (a home for Veterans), the Vocational Training Center, Growing Grounds Farm, and Hope Village. These tours focused on mental health care, adult disability support, and homelessness.



### Workforce Development Board

We provided a letter of support for a regional coordination project to help align industry and education specially around manufacturing-related jobs.

As well we conducted an Industry Tour at Avid Water as part of our Industry Sector Committee Coordinator grant.



COUNTY of SANTA BARBARA  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

## Advocacy and Addressing Housing Needs

### Advocacy and Support Letters

Simas Park FY 2027 support letter  
SMPD TRIC & Drone support letter  
WDB EDD Regional coordination letter  
AB 1534 Support  
HR 1163 support  
AB 1776 oppose  
SB 1123 oppose

## Community Involvement

### Local Meetings & Events

The Chamber's Economic Development department stays actively involved in the community to build relationships and understand the needs of local businesses and the community.

#### Economic & Community Development

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- Teacher Tour at VSFB
- Business Tour at Avid Water
- BBQ Fest meeting
- Finance meeting internally
- Outlook Forum Conference
- 64th Annual Square Dance convention- Tourism attend and speak
- West Coast Kustoms car show planning meeting
- Marketing meeting (2)
- TMD meeting – history, marketing strategy

#### Business Support & Meetings

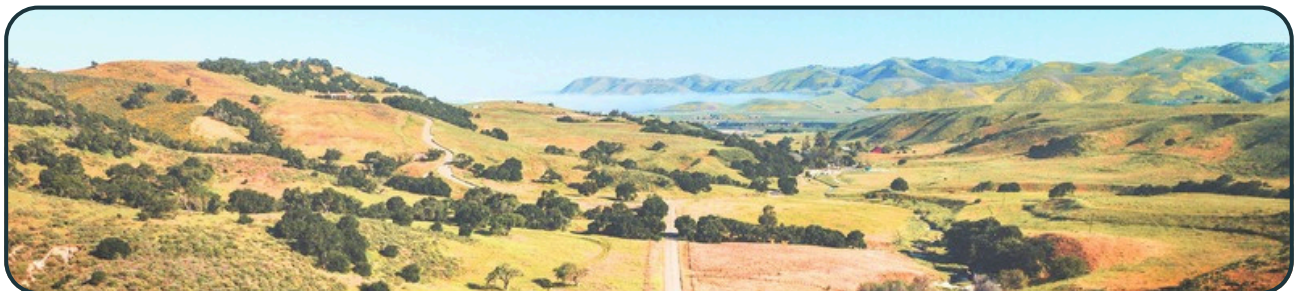
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- BYB weekly networking meeting (4)
- Partners in Education Board Meeting
- United Way Board Meeting
- Santa Barbara County Workforce Development Board Board Meeting
- Chamber Board Meeting
- LSMV Board Meeting

#### Community Events

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- State of Vandenberg
- Chamber Mixer - Boys & Girls Clubs of Mid Central Coast
- Build Your Business (BYB) weekly networking meeting
- Tri-County Chamber Alliance Annual Meeting
- CASA Easter Egg Hunt



## Chamber Media Mentions

| Topic                            | Publication  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| State of Education               | <a href="#">MSN</a><br><a href="#">Noozhawk</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">KEYT</a> |
| State of Vandenberg              | <a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Lompoc Record</a>   |
| Events and Programs              | <a href="#">Noozhawk</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a>  |
| Community                        | <a href="#">Noozhawk</a><br><a href="#">KEYT</a>   |
| Chamber Commentary and Spotlight | <a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a><br><a href="#">Santa Maria Times</a>                                       |
| Housing Summit                   | <a href="#">Noozhawk</a><br><a href="#">40under40</a>  |

## Tourism Media Mentions

| Topic                     | Publication   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Wine                      | <a href="#">California Meets and Events</a><br><a href="#">Associated Press</a><br><a href="#">Visit California</a> |
| Restaurants / Attractions | <a href="#">Visit California</a><br><a href="#">Pride Journeys</a><br><a href="#">AOL</a>                           |





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