

LA MESA COURIER

September 25 – October 22, 2026

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INSIDE



**Act II continues
resale shop legacy**

PAGE 11



**La Mesa Reads:
The return of One
Book, One San Diego**

PAGE 13

**La Mesa to fund
city's first Pride
event in 2027**

PAGE 3



**Chic culinary hub
coming to Maytag
Appliance Center**

PAGE 12

Foothillers celebrate Homecoming win



The Grossmont High School student section celebrates the Foothillers 54-45 win over Otay Ranch in the Homecoming game on Sept. 18. See more photos of Homecoming on page 15.

(Photo by Grossmont High Yearbook staff photographer)

ELECTION PREVIEW

**Mayor, treasurer, and two bond
measures on ballot for La Mesa**



Voters will begin receiving mail ballots on Oct. 6, giving voters a month to decide who will lead the city moving forward. Inside is a look at what will be on the ballot on election day, Nov. 6. The marquee race on the ballot is to see who will replace Mayor Mark Arapostathis, who is termed out after 12 years in office. High-profile candidates include current City Council members Laura Lothian and Patricia Normandy-Dillard. Also in the race is former treasurer Jim Stieringer. **PAGE 5**

COVER STORY

**La Mesa's homeless
action plan expires
with goals achieved
but 'more work to do'**

Beginning in 2019, a citizens' task force developed a plan with four main goals: Improve public communication, provide direct outreach, expand housing access and identify funding opportunities. La Mesa officials say it met those goals, while admitting that it has a far way to go before eliminating homelessness. The city credits much of its success to the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement program, which relies on social workers armed with resources rather than police for day-to-day homeless outreach. Since its inception, the HOME team has found permanent housing for 380 people who would otherwise be unsheltered. **PAGE 6**

OKTOBERFEST

**La Mesa Oktoberfest
returns, gives boost
economically to city**

From Friday, Oct. 2 to Sunday, Oct. 4, Oompah music will serenade beer-stein holders as they watch dachshunds race in between bites of schnitzel at the city's annual Oktoberfest.

While admission to the festival is free and open to all ages, the event's impact on the local economy is a force. According to the city, there is a 75 percent business spike for hotels and casinos, a 41 percent boost for shops and services and a 25 percent uptick in dining during Oktoberfest weekend. **PAGES 7-10**





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La Mesa to fund city's first Pride event, coming in 2027

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — Come June 2027, a portion of La Mesa Village will be transformed with rainbows for the city's first-ever Pride celebration.

City hall has raised the rainbow flag for the past five years — but the La Mesa City Council's decision to fund a Pride event goes deeper.

The initial reactions have been encouraging, with some people even asking: What took so long?

"The response has been insane, awesome," said Rodney Elliott, a La Mesan spearheading the effort.

La Mesa will join Ramona, Santee and Alpine Prides in bringing visible LGBTQ+ support and solidarity to smaller, inland communities outside San Diego's core gayborhood of Hillcrest. Those suburbs have numerous LGBTQ+ residents, though they are not always as visible, who were lured east by the same affordability and green space that entices any transplant to move outside the city.

"La Mesa has a huge LGBT community. We live here because we have lots of friends here," Elliott said. "They all (move) to La Mesa to have a house that's affordable in a great neighborhood where neighbors all are loving (and) supportive."

Elliott and his production company book the talent for La Mesa Oktoberfest and Holiday in the Village, as well as other San Diego music events like Adams Avenue Street Fair and Shamrock Festival in the Gaslamp.

Plus, he serves as the entertainment director for Orange County Pride and has worked at other Pride organizations. Starting La Mesa Pride brings those efforts home. "It's what I do," Elliott said.

With that background, La Mesa Pride promises to be a music-heavy event modeled after similar activations in the village. In its first year, it will take place in the parking lot at Allison and Palm avenues.

In addition to music, a fenced-in 21-and-up area and information booths, the Pride event will include a march from Vons supermarket to the festival. Its organizers

expect a bigger footprint and more things to do in the future.

"We do hope it will grow," Troy Tinker, Elliott's husband, told the city council on Sept. 8.

The inaugural event received \$15,000 in funding from the city's Village Enhancement Fund. Under the program, half of parking meter proceeds, up to \$50,000 each year, go towards village programming that raises the profile of La Mesa's small businesses and supports parking in the village. A wellness fair also received \$20,000 from the council.

"We're glad that our community supports us," Tinker said.

There was a bit of confusion regarding the upcoming event, however.

During the council meeting, staff presented La Mesa Pride as being put on by Diversionary Theatre in University Heights. According to the applicants and Diversionary itself, at some point wires got crossed. The theater will be the recipient of fundraising proceeds from the event, but did not apply to run it. Instead, Tinker and Elliott formed a 501(c)3 for the express purpose of putting on La Mesa Pride.

The couple chose Diversionary as the recipient after Tinker had roles in Diversionary productions "Merry Me" and "Midnight at the Never Get."

"They have been so good to my husband and we have a relationship with them and love what they do and what they stand for," Elliott explained.

The theater supports the event. "We will be proud to participate in the celebration and march in the parade," said Diversionary executive director Jenny Case. "I was raised in La Mesa and hold the city very close to my heart. I'm genuinely thrilled to see a Pride celebration taking root in the community where I grew up."

That sentiment was shared by others. Councilmember Lauren Cazares, before the unanimous vote to approve the parking district funds, said she appreciated Elliott and Tinker for bringing Pride plans to life. "As the first and only member of the LGBT community on this council, I want to say thank you," Cazares said.

The exact date for La Mesa Pride is being finalized by the city.

“

The response has been insane, awesome.”

Rodney Elliott,
La Mesan
spearheading
the effort

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La Mesa appoints 20-year-old UCLA student as treasurer

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — La Mesa's newly appointed city treasurer, Emmett Stewart, is the youngest officeholder in San Diego County, and likely far beyond county limits.

During a Sept. 8 meeting, the majority of city council members voted to appoint the UCLA college student, 20, as the city's next treasurer, over the only other applicant, longtime financial analyst Bill Exeter. The pair are also going head-to-head in November for a full four-year term as treasurer.

When the La Mesa City Council received former treasurer Matt Strabone's resignation in July, they voted to appoint someone to the position rather than hold an expensive special election so close to the midterms.

As the November race heats up, Stewart will have the advantage of being an incumbent in the role, although that won't be reflected on the ballot, which has already been finalized to describe him as a "Financial Analyst."

Stewart faces Bill Exeter, with four decades more experience, who is listed as "Treasurer/CFO/CEO" on the ballot. Exeter, a Republican, lost to Strabone in 2022.

"La Mesa needs a treasurer who has already proven himself," Exeter said in an opening statement before the council. "The considerations boil down to one word, and that is experience."

By appointing Stewart to the role, the council unleashed a conversation on ageism. To some, his youth was a boon.

"I bring a fresh set of young eyes and ears to our local government," Stewart said.

Stewart became the youngest officeholder in the city's history, beating out Councilmember Lauren Cazares. She was elected to the council at age 24 and said she was told many times she was unqualified or underqualified.

"I'm hearing that a lot tonight," Cazares said.



La Mesa city treasurer Emmett Stewart. (Screenshot by Drew Sitton/City of La Mesa)

Cazares argued Stewart's youth was a boon because he had a new perspective and made sure young people in the city had representation. In her questions, Cazares described the role as having a "limited scope" and being for less than 90 days.

"All of us learned on the job as council members overseeing this budget," she said.

Republican Councilmember Laura Lothian voted against Stewart's appointment, stating he lacked experience and knowledge for the role.

"Do you know the amount of money that you would be overseeing?" Lothian asked.

"A lot of money," Stewart said.

"How much?"

"I do not know the direct number."

She also questioned what portfolios Stewart had managed, which he acknowledged was only his personal portfolio, not outside clients or companies.

The La Mesa treasurer manages the city's

\$70 million portfolio. Treasurers are paid \$1,100 per month in the part-time role.

While in office and later, Strabone advocated for the city's finance department to take over the elected treasurer role, with public and council oversight. Strabone said asking the small city to find qualified and willing candidates was a challenge. He also worried some would take on the role "to pursue ideological pet projects that have nothing to do with the scope of the job."

Despite his concerns about the role, Strabone improved La Mesa's finances while in office, according to Lothian, with record-breaking returns.

"I feel like this position is very important," Lothian said. "I understand we have an accounting/financial department, but there's a reason there's a treasurer."

This summer, Stewart's LinkedIn showed him interning at Expedito, a Fortune 500 logistics company. At UCLA, he is majoring in math and economics while serving as the spikeball club's safety officer and as a self-employed tutor. Last year, he worked as a resident assistant.

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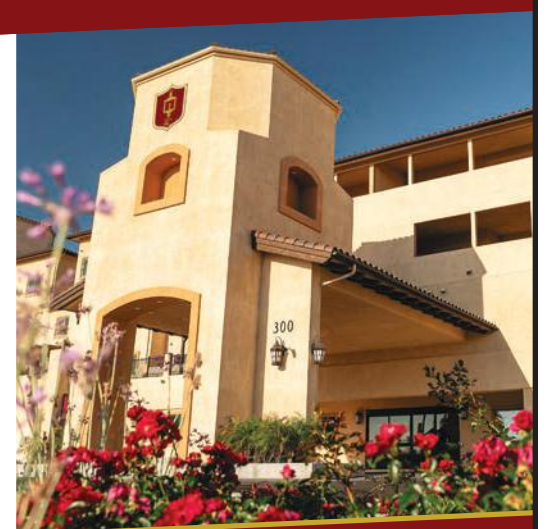
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Mayor, treasurer, two bond measures for education on the ballot for La Mesa

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — Voters will begin receiving mail ballots on Oct. 6, giving voters a month to decide who will lead the city moving forward. Here is a look at what will be on city residents' ballots on election day, Nov. 6.

Mayor

The marquee race on the ballot is to see who will replace Mayor Mark Arapostathis, nicknamed "Mr. La Mesa," who is termed out after 12 years in office.

High-profile candidates include current city councilmembers Laura Lothian and Patricia Normandy-Dillard. In recent months, Lothian and Normandy-Dillard have squared off over the naming of Bill Walton Way and the future of La Mesa housing development.

Normandy-Dillard — whose top issues are investing in streets, transportation and finishing a library expansion — brings strong name recognition and no major controversies as she seeks to lead a city that has become decidedly blue in the last decade.

Lothian, on the other hand, is known as a conservative who fights for neighborhood issues such as clogged storm drains and other street-level issues. She encourages residents to reach out to her directly with neighborhood issues.

Also in the race is former treasurer Jim Stieringer. The Republican is running to stop what he called the "ghettoization" of La Mesa. Stieringer has served as a trustee of the Grossmont Union High School District and served five terms on the Grossmont Healthcare District Board of Directors.

Rounding out the race is Quinn Reese. Reese is a regenerative farmer who prides himself on not being a politician. Reese says the city needs leaders who are not tied to donors but instead fight for all La Mesa residents.

The fundraising edge in the race has gone to Lothian, who has outraised Normandy-Dillard in the latest filings, with \$22,163 on hand compared to Dillard's \$8,727.

Lothian has received support from Assemblymember Carl DeMaio and his firebrand organization Reform California. East County mayors Bill Wells, from El Cajon, and Santee Mayor John Minto also endorsed Lothian.

On the Democrat side, Normandy-Dillard has received endorsements from State

Senator Akilah Weber, Assemblymember LaShae Sharp-Collins and County Supervisor Monica Montgomery-Steppe. Normandy-Dillard also has support from powerful labor unions including the San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council.

Treasurer

Two candidates are vying to replace Matt Strabone, who resigned for a job at NATO.

Republican Bill Exeter, who ran against Strabone four years ago, faces 20-year-old UCLA student Emmett Stewart, a financial analyst and business operations intern.

The La Mesa City Council appointed Stewart on Sept. 8 to a three-month interim treasurer position, giving him a pseudo-incumbency advantage going into the election.

Measure AA

Also on the ballot, the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District is asking voters to approve a \$131 million 30-year bond extension for school improvements and maintenance.

If approved, the bond money would pay for facility improvements, including repairs, maintenance and construction projects. It cannot be spent on teacher pay or increasing hiring to lower classroom sizes.

The bond revenue would be eligible for state matching funds, which could increase the amount of construction spending it brings to the district.

The bond would extend the current property tax rate set all the way back in 2002, at \$22 per \$100,000 of assessed value. If approved, property owners won't see a spike in their bills but will see that rate stay for longer.

Measure G

In higher education, Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District is asking voters to approve Measure G, which would generate an estimated \$624 million for facility investments and maintenance.

If passed, the money would be used to replace dilapidated and aging buildings throughout the district and would help pay for fireproofing campuses in wild-fire zones.

The bond would extend a property tax rate set in 2002, at \$25 per \$100,000 in assessed property value, through 2058. It would not raise taxes from their current rate.



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Wednesday

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WHO WE ARE

EDITOR

Thomas Melville
tomm@
timesofsandiego.com

GENERAL MANAGER

Andrew Keatts
andrewk@
timesofsandiego.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Dave Schwab
daveschwab@
myyahoo.com
Drew Sitton
drews@
timesofsandiego.com
Dorian Hargrove
dorianh@
timesofsandiego.com

WEB & SOCIAL MEDIA

Tessa Balc
tessab@
timesofsandiego.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Chris Baker
cbaker@
timesofsandiego.com

ADVERTISING

advertising@
timesofsandiego.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Logan Araiza
Connie and Lynn Baer
Bonnie Baranoff
Nadine Hesano
Laura Lothian
Jake Sexton

SUBMISSIONS/NEWS TIPS: Send press releases, tips, photos or story ideas to tomm@timesofsandiego.com. For breaking news and investigative story ideas contact the editor by phone or email.

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La Mesa's homeless action plan expires with goals achieved

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — After five years, La Mesa's Homeless Action Plan, adopted in Feb. 2021, expires this year.

The city touts meeting the plan's core goals and developing an outreach model that other cities have copied.

Creating the plan was not an easy task. Beginning in 2019, a citizens' task force developed a plan with four main goals: Improve public communication, provide direct outreach, expand housing access and identify funding opportunities.

La Mesa officials say it met those goals, while admitting that it has a far way to go before eliminating homelessness.

"The city has met all goals, but we understand there is more work to do," said city spokesperson Grecia Aguilar.

The city credits much of its success to the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME) program, which relies on social workers armed with resources rather than police for day-to-day homeless outreach.

Since its inception, the HOME team has found permanent housing for 380 people who would otherwise be unsheltered. During its five years, the team grew from two contracted workers to an in-house team of five, including a housing navigator. "It's a model that's working," said Bonnie Baranoff, who chaired the citizens task force that wrote the Homeless Action Plan. "Whether you like it or not, homeless people are there. And I feel it's just gonna get worse."

The population today

In the annual 2026 point-in-time count, volunteers counted 39 unsheltered people throughout La Mesa, including unincorporated areas. An additional 36 were in the Vista Sands emergency shelter for transitional-age youth, with three others in transitional housing.

It was a 25% drop from the year before. While a drop compared to recent years, La Mesa's HOME team still has work to do.

In the first quarter of 2026, the HOME team engaged with 52 clients per month on average. Three-quarters of those clients were first-time contacts. That's largely due to La Mesa's access to transit and its services.



The affordable housing development at 8181 Allison Ave. in La Mesa across from a bus stop. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

La Mesa has the most trolley stops of any city outside San Diego. And one such stop is an easy, flat walk to the La Mesa Library, which has maintained hours and weekend services cut by city of San Diego libraries.

Large numbers of those experiencing homelessness also travel to La Mesa for medical care, as Sharp Grossmont is the only emergency room in East County.

"They're not unhoused or precariously housed in La Mesa. They come (to La Mesa) because they've been coming for years," Baranoff said.

As an example of how variable La Mesa's unhoused population is, Baranoff points to La Mesa First United Methodist Church's Fresh Start program. It attracts over 250 people to the church site on the first Saturday of the month for breakfast, hot showers, clothes and to connect with service providers.

"Transit centers and trolleys bring individuals into and through La Mesa, but they aren't necessarily staying long," said Tyler Renner, a spokesperson for People Assisting the Homeless (PATH). He noted there are only a couple of known camping spots, something local outreach workers confirmed.

Other metrics put the homeless population much higher by including those precariously housed, meaning they might not sleep on the sidewalk but are couch surfing, staying in hotels, or sleeping in cars.

When factoring those numbers in, the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District reported 500 students lacked consistent, safe housing in the previous school year.

The HOME team

La Mesa's HOME team began with just a one-year contract with local nonprofit,

PATH. But in November 2021, the team was transferred under the purview of the police department.

Before the HOME team's formation, 3.3% of calls to police were related to homelessness.

"Everything's just been dumped into our lap because we're 911. We're here 24/7, 365 days a year," said Police Chief Ray Sweeney. "It's expensive to send an officer on a homeless call for service when there's no crime. All it is is the person experiencing homelessness."

Past outreach initiatives had failed. Years before becoming chief, Sweeney oversaw a program where county services rode along with police officers twice a week to do proactive outreach to unhoused people.

"What we noticed is that we didn't house anybody; we really didn't get people signed up for service. The question was always why?" Chief Sweeney said. "The answer to me right now is extremely clear: that the badge and the uniform were a barrier."

Former La Mesa Police Captain Matt Nicholass was the first to come up with the idea for an outreach team inside the police department, one that did not include uniformed officers.

Retired Capt. Nicholass visited Eugene, Ore., where he learned about the CAHOOTS initiative, in which outreach workers and mental health professionals deal with non-criminal social issues, rather than officers.

"When you want to become a police officer, it's probably not to try to help people with social services," Baranoff from the citizens task force said. "You see the burden that it has on first responders, as far as police and fire, but we didn't know what outreach would look like."

La Mesa adapted the program, keeping the same approach that trained service providers were better equipped than police to be the front lines of the homeless crisis.

After failed homeless approaches in the past, Chief Sweeney was unsure the HOME Team would work, but he described the results as "absolutely amazing."

The HOME clinicians agree.

"Us going out instead of police intervention allows us to build rapport with people," said Matthew Smiley, a HOME clinician. "Us being able to do that without a police presence allows us to buy some goodwill with the people."

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4pm-10pm

Sat, Oct 3rd
10am-10pm

Sun, Oct 4th
12pm-8pm

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Friday, Oct. 2

Hofbräuhaus Biergarten

5-6 p.m. | Detroit Underground
6:45-8 p.m. | Alt2K
8:30-10 p.m. | Cassie B

Craft Bier & Seltzer Garten

4-6 p.m. | Danny Grisa
6-8 p.m. | Andrew Aoun
8-10 p.m. | SHEFA

Hop Haus on Palm

4-6 p.m. | DJ Joey Jimenez
6-8 p.m. | DJ YODAHRIZZ
8-10 p.m. | DJ NAVA

Saturday, Oct. 3

Hofbräuhaus Biergarten

11:15-12:15 p.m. | That Beatles Cover Band
12:45-1:45 p.m. | Barbwire
2:30-3:30 p.m. | Santana Pa Ti
4:15-5:15 p.m. | Full Strength
7:30-8 p.m. | Young Guns
9-10 p.m. | Liquid Blue

Craft Bier & Seltzer Garten

10-noon | DJ Thomas
Noon-2 p.m. | Barbie Fish
2-4 p.m. | Court 'N Jo
4-6 p.m. | Zohar
6-8 p.m. | AB3D
8-10 p.m. | SHVA

Hop Haus on Palm

Noon-2 p.m. | DJ AB LUV
2-4 p.m. | Jenny Pocket
4-6 p.m. | Bille Knight
6-8 p.m. | Nicholas Crates
8-10 p.m. | DJ YODAHRIZZ

Sunday, Oct. 4

Hofbräuhaus Biergarten

12:45-1:45 p.m. | Captain's Orders
2:30-3:30 p.m. | Jimmy's Buffet
5:30-6:30 p.m. | Trey Hill Country Band
6:30-7 p.m. | DJ DAM
7-8 p.m. | Paging the 90's

Craft Bier & Seltzer Garten

Noon-2 p.m. | FIA
2-4 p.m. | Wes Smith
4-6 p.m. | MUJOOH
6-8 p.m. | Da Maria

Hop Haus on Palm

Noon-2 p.m. | DJ YODAHRIZZ
2-3 p.m. | DJ AB LUV
3-4 p.m. | AFREEKA
4-5 p.m. | Kaylove
5-6 p.m. | Kaysway
6-7 p.m. | Wolfgang Alexander
7-8 p.m. | DJ YODAHRIZZ

WHEN:

- Friday, Oct. 2 (4-10 p.m.)
- Saturday, Oct. 3 (10 a.m. - 10 p.m.)
- Sunday, Oct. 4 (noon-8 p.m.)

WHERE:

La Mesa Village — the main entrance is on La Mesa Boulevard and Spring Street.

PRICE: Free.

Biergarten tickets: \$8.
VIP tickets (21+): \$15-\$49.
VIP tickets (under 21): \$10-\$25.

ATTRACTIONS

German food and more: Savor authentic German favorites like bratwurst, pretzels, sauerkraut, and schnitzel — best paired with a cold stein of beer.

Glücklich Games: Flex your strength and join the fun with Oktoberfest-inspired challenges and friendly competition.

Ferris Wheel — Take a ride high above La Mesa and catch some stunning views of the festival below.

SEPTEMBER 25 – OCTOBER 22, 2026

Artisan Alley Craft Faire: Shop unique, handmade finds from local makers along Allison Avenue.

Dackeldorf Dachshund Village: Bring your furry family members along for dog-friendly Oktoberfest fun.

Dog Race Times:

- Friday, Oct. 2 at 7 p.m., 8 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 3 at 12:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 5 p.m., 6 p.m., 7 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 4 at 12:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m., 6 p.m.

Dachshund Planking

- Friday, Oct. 2 at 6:45 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 3 at noon, 1:30 p.m., 3 p.m., 4 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 4 at 1:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., 3:45 p.m.

Dog Fashion Show

- Friday, Oct. 2 – 6 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 3 – 11 a.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 4 – 3 p.m.

Howl-deling and Trick Contest

- Friday, Oct. 2 – 5 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 3 – 6 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 4 – 1:30 p.m.

Pop-Up Mini Pumpkin Patch and Flower Shop: Adding to the charm of the festival, we're excited to feature a pop-up pumpkin patch with a reading nook and a pop-up flower shop.

Der Deutsche Dance Square: Ever tried hula hooping in Lederhosen? Whether it's line dancing, two-stepping, or belly dancing, this square is open for you to learn a new move.

Kinder Village: The little ones won't miss out on the fun! From Ferris wheels to face painting, and balloon art to inflatable slides.

3 Stages of Live Music & Entertainment: Whether you're grooving to oompah beats, rocking out with a cover band, or busting moves to live DJs, La Mesa Oktoberfest's three stages have something for everyone.



La Mesa Oktoberfest returns with beer, dachshunds, live music and an economic boost

By Karen Pearlman
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — It's that time of year again in downtown La Mesa, when priorities shift to polka, pretzels, pooches, pints and partying.

From Friday, Oct. 2 to Sunday, Oct. 4, Oompah music will serenade beer-stein holders as they watch dachshunds race in between bites of schnitzel at La Mesa's annual Oktoberfest celebration.

The event, in its 53rd year, has far surpassed any run-of-the-mill German-themed celebration.

The beloved multi-block community festival has proved a vital economic engine for the city.

"I think what makes La Mesa Oktoberfest so special is the tradition behind it," said Laurel McFarlane of The National Center for Community Enhancement, the non-profit that produces La Mesa Oktoberfest. McFarlane is also founder and producer of The Shift Studio, the event design and management agency that organizes, designs and manages events.

"We hear from people every year who came with their parents when they were kids and are now bringing their own children," said McFarlane. "There aren't many events that get to be part of a family's memories for more than five decades."

City staff and political figures are typically part of the scene every year. La Mesa City Councilmember Genevieve Suzuki said that after many years of attending



La Mesa City Councilmember Genevieve Suzuki dresses for the occasion. (Photo courtesy of Genevieve Suzuki)

the Oktoberfest as a citizen, only recently has she been able to up the ante on dressing for the occasion.

"It's ironic," said Suzuki, who was sworn in as a councilmember in December 2024. "I was always brave enough for a chicken hat, but it took getting elected to work up the nerve for a dirndl.... More than anything, I'm glad to see Oktoberfest growing again and welcoming visitors after the pandemic. It's a joyful reminder of what La Mesa does best."

While admission to the festival is free

Continued on Page 10

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La Mesa Village Association

LA MESA OKTOBERFEST

Continued from Page 9

and open to all ages, the event's impact on the local economy is a force.

A March 10 City of La Mesa staff report to the City Council featured a Feb. 27 letter from McFarlane's National Center for Community Enhancement, which found the number of out-of-towners who visited the East County city jumped from 31,400 on a typical day to 42,692 during the event.

The letter also shared a 75 percent business spike for hotels and casinos, a 41 percent boost for shops and services and a 25 percent uptick in dining during La Mesa's Oktoberfest weekend.

The city council unanimously approved a three-year special event permit through 2028, and a 50 percent city cost recovery reduction capped at \$40,000 annually to offset police, traffic control and inspection costs.

"One of the biggest benefits of Oktoberfest is the exposure it brings to La Mesa Village," McFarlane said. "We have people coming from all over San Diego County who may not otherwise spend time downtown, and the festival gives them a chance to discover

our restaurants, shops, bars, coffee shops and other businesses. The weekend itself obviously brings a lot of people into the Village, but we also hope that people find a business they like and come back."

Three Biergartens, two stages and nonstop music

This year's adult beverage events include the ceremonial keg tapping at 6 p.m., Friday, Oct. 2, at the Hofbräuhaus Bier Garten, officially kicking off the weekend. There will also be two other distinct biergartens: the Hop Haus on Palm and the Craft Bier and Seltzer Garten.

While general festival admission is free, entry to the biergartens is \$8, with various VIP upgrades available offering special bars, commemorative steins, and front-of-the-line privileges.

The entertainment lineup might feel more like a street fair than offer a strictly traditional Oktoberfest vibe.

Along with traditional accordion-driven polka, the two stages will feature rock acts, cover bands, and DJs, including Detroit Underground, Santana Pa Ti and Paging the 90s.

"One of the things we've really focused on is creating more throughout the

Village rather than having everyone concentrated in one area," McFarlane explained. "Between the three biergartens, multiple stages, family activities, dog programming, shopping and food vendors, there are more places for people to explore and spend time."

Dachshunds and artisans

Beyond the bites, beer and musical beats, the festival leans heavily into all-ages activities.

The "paw-pular" Dackeldorf Dachshund Village returns at 5 p.m., Friday, Oct. 2, featuring wiener dog races, pooch-powered fashion shows and a howl-deling/trick contest open to all canine breeds.

This year will showcase a new competition: "Planking with a Dachshund," where participants hold a plank while a plush dog sits on their back.

Competitive events for humans will be at the event's Glücklich Games and will feature beer stein holding, bratwurst tossing, Bavarian pretzel eating, and chicken hops. Family-forward visitors can visit the Kinder Village for pumpkin activities, flower-crown making and a Ferris wheel.

For shoppers, a dedicated Artisan Alley on Allison Boulevard will offer vendors

selling handcrafted products.

"I think one of the things that makes Oktoberfest special is that we're always trying to keep the traditions people love while adding something new each year," McFarlane said. "Even if someone has been coming for 20 years, we want there to be something new for them to discover."

Crowds and logistics

No one ever seems totally certain about the attendance numbers at the La Mesa Oktoberfest. While promotional materials and vendor applications boast expected crowds of more than 100,000, the March city staff report cited annual attendance at just over 50,000.

"Because La Mesa Oktoberfest is a free, open festival throughout the Village with multiple entrances, we don't have a traditional ticket scan that gives us an exact attendance count," McFarlane said. "The 100,000-plus figure is based on historical attendance and visitation patterns over the three-day weekend. I think the important distinction is that we are talking about visits to the festival rather than necessarily 100,000 individual people, since many of our guests come back for more than one day."



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Act II in La Mesa — Continuing a resale fashion legacy

By Thaïs Giraudet
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — One day before Dolores Buller turned 93 years old in July 2026, the La Mesa City Council surprised her with a proclamation, honoring her 40-plus-years of entrepreneurship and community engagement.

“For more than four decades, Dolores Buller has exemplified the entrepreneurial spirit, generosity and unwavering commitment that define the very best of the City of La Mesa,” read Councilmember Patricia Dillard.

Buller’s commitment to La Mesa began in 1982, when she opened Act II, a ladies’ resale boutique. She then helped found the La Mesa Chamber of Commerce (now the East County Chamber of Commerce) and the early La Mesa Village Merchants Association.

“I definitely was surprised,” Buller said. “I’ve been really, really involved with the Chamber ever since I got into business, and so them recognizing me like that, it

just made me feel wonderful.”

Buller has since handed the reins of Act II to her daughter, Deanne Ross. Ross continues to grow her mother’s vision of bringing higher-end resale clothing to downtown La Mesa.

She was there to support her mother when the city recognized her.

“It was so touching and meaningful,” Ross said. “She lived, ate, and breathed these stores. She would even go home at night and fix jewelry, sew buttons on clothes. I mean, my mom worked and worked and worked.”

So did Ross.

Ross began working in her mother’s store at 12 years old. She had fun arranging the window displays and fell in love with every aspect of the business. Despite graduating from San Diego State University with a bachelor’s degree in speech communication, Ross wanted to keep working at Act II alongside her mother. Buller, however, had other plans.

“My mom actually fired me,” Ross said. “She said, ‘You need to go see what it’s



Deanne Ross outside Act II at 8360 La Mesa Blvd. in La Mesa. (Photo by Thaïs Giraudet/Times of San Diego)

like to work for somebody else. So, I did that. I did not want to.”

Ross spent six months working at a mall while begging her mother to let her come back. Eventually, she returned, rich with takeaways.

“As a mom, it was the best thing she could have done,” Ross said tearfully.

Today, Ross owns and runs the 44-

year-old business full-time, having seen the second-hand industry change over the years.

“Resale was completely unheard of; I was young when my mom started the stores, and I couldn’t tell people, my friends, that I was wearing used clothing because it was so taboo,” Ross said. “Now I have a 20-year-old daughter, and she’s really cool because her mom owns a resale store.”

Beyond shopping locally, Ross also mentioned how “rotating your closet” is a good way to be sustainable.

“There’s so many clothes out there, there’s so much fast fashion,” she said. “It’s unbelievable the amount of clothes that people bring in to sell to us, like high-end designer stuff.”

With over 10,000 followers on Instagram, Act II continues to grow and has remained a staple clothing store for downtown La Mesa. Still, Ross emphasized the importance of being owner-operated.

“You can’t have a small business and just think that you’re gonna open the doors and then not work in that store.

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Chic culinary hub is coming to old Maytag Appliance Center next year

By Frank Sabatini Jr.
SPECIAL FOR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA MESA — The owners of Lost Cause Meadery and Oddish Wine, both headquartered in San Diego's Bay Park neighborhood, recently closed escrow on a prized piece of vintage real estate near La Mesa Village to fulfill their next hospitality venture.

Billy Beltz and his wife, Suzanna, plan to open a 5,000-square-foot operation that puts a coffee shop, cafe, restaurant, bar, and retail wine shop under a wooden barrel-shaped ceiling that has been intact since the 1940s.

Located at 8495 La Mesa Blvd., just one block northeast of La Mesa Village, the aged building originally served as a food market and butcher shop. It eventually was turned into a secondhand children's store, and then a bike shop, and most recently, Phillip's Maytag Appliance Center.

"We want to keep the building as original as possible," said Beltz, while also pointing to the storefront's large front windows and mid-century-style awnings.

"We're keeping those as well."

He added that the building's interior is currently "a big open space," which means no gutting is required.

Once city permits are secured, the couple will begin implementing the design for their yet-unnamed business. The blueprint will encompass a kitchen for preparing all-day fare, plus dining areas and a bar for serving beer, wine, mead and cider. It will also showcase a wine shop and eventually come to include an outdoor seating area.

The goal is to begin greeting customers by late 2027.

Beltz and his wife will primarily oversee the beverage program for spotlighting their small-production organic wines and assorted meads, which are crafted in Bay Park. They will also feature libations from guest producers.

The couple has earned numerous medals



Billy and Suzanna Beltz are local producers of mead and wine. (Photo courtesy of Oddish Wine)

in international mead competitions since they started producing it nine years ago. Known otherwise as "honey wine," mead comprises a base of fermented honey, yeast and water. Complexity is achieved with the addition of fruits, peppers and spices.

The project's culinary component will be spearheaded by Bica, a hip cafe in San Diego's

Normal Heights neighborhood known for its European-style sandwiches and fish options.

Beltz said the partnership with Bica came naturally "because we're friends with the owners and we like how they engage their community by hosting different events."

With a wood-fired oven and rotisserie due to be installed, Bica's culinary team is brainstorming over menus that will range from morning and midday fare to choices tailored for dinner. Specific dishes, however, have yet to be determined.

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La Mesa Reads — The return of One Book, One San Diego



LA MESA READS

Cassie Koldewyn

One Book, One San Diego is back in its 20th year! Our region’s annual community reading program has been encouraging San Diegans and our neighbors in Northern Baja to read and discuss the same book since 2007.

The goal is to bring “our community closer together through the shared experience of reading.”

Presented by KPBS in partnership with over 80 public libraries, service organizations, and educational institutions, join us as we read and explore this year’s exciting selections.

For the first time, the 2026 adult selection is a historic horror novel:

“The Buffalo Hunter Hunter” by Stephen Graham Jones

This award-winning tale shares the story of Etsy Beaucarne as she transcribes her ancestor’s 100-year-old diary entries, detailing the tragic massacre of 217 Blackfeet in Montana. Etsy is quickly drawn into a fantastic story of violence, vampirism, and vengeance, playing out over the last century between her family and the Native Americans murdered at the Marias Massacre.

Author Stephen Graham Jones is a master of the macabre, bringing historical wrongs to light, illustrating the pain of generational trauma, and sharing the myths and legends of Indigenous Americans.

Join us at the La Mesa Library on Wednesday, Nov. 18, at 1 p.m. to discuss “The Buffalo Hunter Hunter.”

“The Cartoonists Club” by Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud

The incredible and beloved Raina

Telgemeier and Scott McCloud bring us this year’s teen title, “The Cartoonists Club.” Four kids come together to form “The Cartoonists Club,” where each can use their talents and passion to create incredible comics.

Makayla isn’t sure how to turn her ideas into a story; Howard and Lynda love to draw but aren’t confident in their skills; and Art just wants to share his creativity. Together, they learn how to craft a comic, and readers can do the same. Featuring a great story, practical how-to advice, and all the excitement of storytelling, this is the perfect guide to inspire future comic book writers!

Teens can discuss “The Cartoonist Club” on Sunday, Nov. 15, at 2:30 p.m. at the La Mesa Library.

“Books on Bikes” by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell

“Books on Bikes” by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell is the beautiful 2026 picture book selection for kids and families. Available in both English and Spanish, this true-to-life story demonstrates how bikes, laden with books, can bring stories to everyone.

The gorgeous illustrations by Brizida Magro show the intrepid Lía, who loves to read and is excited to share her books, pedaling her trusty bike through the neighborhood.

“Books on Bikes” is the perfect tribute to book-loving kids and the people who read to them!

Visit www.sdcl.org/OneBook to find this year’s titles at your local branch, download a free digital copy, and find more upcoming One Book, One San Diego activities.

Check out our other fun programs at the La Mesa Library. Visit a galaxy far, far away with us on Saturday, Oct. 17, starting at 11 a.m. for Star Wars Reads Day. Meet the 501st Legion, make your own lightsabers, and join the rebel cause! Costumes are welcome. Visit sdcl.org/LaMesa for more information and events.



(Book cover photos courtesy of La Mesa Library)

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Grossmont holds 'Hiller Hoedown' Homecoming



FOOTHILLER FOOTSTEPS

Lynn and Connie Baer



Foothiller cheerleaders get in the spirit of the 'Hiller Hoedown' theme on Homecoming. (Photo by Megan Long/Grossmont High School)

Since the graduation of Grossmont High's first senior class in 1921, homecoming has been a tradition. In the 1920s, homecoming was called "Alumni Day." In the early decades, the celebrations varied, but often included an alumni play, a basketball game, a dance, and alumni attending classes of their favorite teachers "to live again, for a while, in memories of the time when they, too, were students here."

This year's homecoming theme, celebrating the start of our 106th year, was "Hiller Hoedown" with dress-up days for students and staff including Denim Days on Tuesday, Country Sunset (wear sunset colors) on Wednesday, Country! on Thursday, and Extreme Blue and Gold on Friday.

Friday's events began with the KUSI Alarm Clock Pep Rally from 6:30-8:55 a.m. in the New Gym. The ASB class encouraged "Every Hiller to join. This year we were back live on KUSI showing the community why it is 'Great to be Young and a Foothiller!'"

They were live all morning on KUSI, culminating in a 10-minute segment.

Students came to school decked out in blue and gold. In their second period, they took a class photo. If their class had a higher percentage of blue and gold compared to other classes, they won a prize. If 50% or more of the class were dressed up, they automatically won a prize.

After second period in the New Gym, ASB hosted the Homecoming Pep Assembly with fun for Foothillers students and staff.

The Homecoming Game

The Hillers defeated Otay Ranch 54-45. During the halftime performances of the Marching Band and Dance, the 2026 GHS Homecoming Royalty Court Queen and King were revealed as the show concluded with fireworks.

2026 Royalty Court: Madi Busch, Madi Naputi, Saraya Roppe, Elsie Strongosky,



Staff came to school decked out in blue and gold on Friday. (Photo by Megan Long/Grossmont High School)

Aurora Rodriguez, Jonah Yost, Tyler Holmes, Marshal Rhine, Santiago Monreal and Darion Crawford

Congratulations to Queen Madi Naputi and King Marshal Rhine.

Saturday's Homecoming Dance for GHS students took place behind the 1922 "Castle" from 6-10 p.m. Students learned country dances from a line dance instructor. There were two food trucks, photo booths, photo opportunities, games, and more. Casual attire and closed-toed shoes were encouraged.

While the details of Grossmont High Homecomings have evolved over the years and decades, the spirit of our alumni is ever present when they visit the campus. This summer, several classes have already visited campus to relive their memories of being a Foothiller and to celebrate the new buildings and improvements on campus.

Upcoming GHS Museum Hours for All and Reunions: 10-1 Saturdays, Oct. 10 (Classes of 1956 and 1966), Oct. 24 (Class of 1976), Nov. 21. Or Fridays by prior appointment when school is in session. Contact: ghsmuseum@guhsd.net, foothillermuseum.com.

Foothillers celebrate Grossmont High's 106th Homecoming



The 'Wanted Dead or Alive' frame fits with the country and western theme of Grossmont's Homecoming.



The Foothillers celebrate the school's 106th Homecoming with 'Hiller Hoe-down' theme.



Grossmont students pose at the Homecoming Dance.



Wide receivers Julian Uribe (11) and Maz Bewley celebrate Grossmont's 54-45 win over Otay Ranch in the Homecoming game on Sept. 18.

The Grossmont High Royal Court members congratulate Madi Naputi (in blue) being named Homecoming Queen at halftime. (All photos by Grossmont High Yearbook staff photographers)



Grossmont High's Homecoming Queen Madi Naputi and King Marshal Rhine.



Saturday's Homecoming Dance for GHS students took place behind the 1922 'Castle.'

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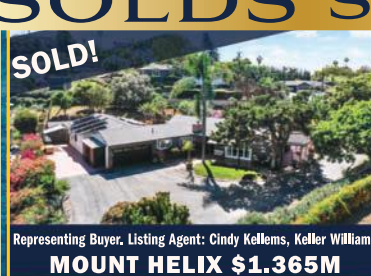
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