UPTOWN NEWS

November 6 – December 3, 2026

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INSIDE



Revival of a beloved Chinese restaurant

PAGE 10



SRO Lounge closes after 44 years

PAGE 9



San Diego designer Kenneth Barlis reaches his peak Maximalism

PAGE 13

SAN DIEGO Reader NEW ISSUE INSIDE!

Ciao Bella!



San Diego artist Cecelia Linayao's 'Ciao Bello' street chalk art brightens the annual Galbani Bella Vita Fest in Little Italy, which featured artists, Italian food, wine tastings, live music, and family activities on Oct 17. (Photo by Thomas Melville/Times of San Diego)

COVER STORY

Large San Diego Pride events 'not sustainable,' board says, as organization dealing with financial crisis

San Diego Pride, beset by funding woes, could be close to sharply curtailing its flagship July events. Starting in November, Pride also will reduce its staff of 14 to three part-time employees. The board, speaking at a recent meeting billed as a community listening session, did not provide any specifics about what the 2027 parade and festival could look like. **PAGE 2**

POLITICS

Election Day surprise: Group begins process to recall Mayor Todd Gloria

Mayor Todd Gloria did not appear on the ballot this Election Day, but an effort to oust him is moving forward by a group led by criminal justice advocate Genevieve Jones Wright who filed a Notice of Intent on Oct. 29 to recall Gloria. **PAGE 5**

COMMUNITY

Master plan update for Balboa Park

The city launched a community survey and new website, seeking public input on the future of Balboa Park for a new master plan. The plan will guide the future of San Diego's crown jewel for the next 30 years, touching on all aspects. **PAGE 4**




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Large-scale San Diego Pride events 'not sustainable,' board says as organization slashes staff amid financial crisis

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — San Diego Pride, beset by funding woes and about to lose its seventh executive director in the last three years, could be close to sharply curtailing its flagship July events.

KishaLynn Elliott, the first Black lesbian to lead the organization, is departing Nov. 6 largely for financial reasons. Starting in November, Pride also will reduce its staff of 14 to three part-time employees. As a result, the volunteer board is transitioning from governance to operations as its members take on the work of departing staff members.

The board, speaking at a Tuesday meeting billed as a community listening session, did not provide any specifics about what the 2027 parade and festival could look like. Members, though, described the current model as infeasible — particularly the group's large music festival in Balboa Park intended to raise money for the organization.

In 2026, the cost of permits tripled and fees associated with having police and fire monitoring crowd safety also rose. The city, amid its own budget crisis, refused requests to lower the fees. Then, attendance fell enough in July that Pride's take from concessions suffered too.

"Essentially, San Diego Pride builds a venue for two days, and that was where all those fees come into play, right?" said board co-chair Martha Henderson. "That's not sustainable any longer. That cost us too much to do."

For 2027, that likely means a return to how Pride started, as a volunteer-run, grassroots event, said board co-chair Paris Quion.

"We're just going back to old school steps to save money until we find ourselves in a more comfortable position, then we can go back," Quion said.

In addition to affordability and inflation concerns, San Diego Pride sits at the apex of two industries struggling to survive this economy: music festivals and LGBTQ+ nonprofits.

Several prominent music festivals in San Diego have folded or gone on hiatus. Simultaneously, LGBTQ+ nonprofits have struggled to secure government grants and philanthropic funding that were once readily available. Individual donors have been unable to make up the difference.

These are issues in other cities as well. Phoenix Pride filed for bankruptcy and Long Beach Pride is in a "debt crisis." One of the oldest organizations, Tucson Pride, shut down after 50 years.

"LA Pride has one staff member. One," Quion said. "Now they're lucky. The city of (Los Angeles) pays for their police (and) fire."

She estimated that San Diego Pride paid over $150,000 to police and fire in July for an event that in the past has drawn 250,000 attendees, providing a major economic boost to the region. San Diego Pride's 2025 economic impact report estimates that the parade and festival generate almost $30 million in greater San Diego.

At the dire town hall Tuesday, Pride board members offered up no big numbers, instead discussing the organization's financial challenges. But they frustrated those in attendance by withholding firm budget numbers.

Still, many community members have longtime investments in the organization and are committed to seeing it go forward. Yet they want more communication and involvement in how that can happen.

"I feel out of the loop," said a volunteer and festival manager, Shiloh Tamir. "We're kind of feeling like these (financial issues) are coming from nowhere."

Pride's website has not posted financial reports since 2024 when an audit began. Only one set of meeting minutes have been posted in 2026. The fact that Elliott is leaving and layoffs are imminent has been reported in the media, but Pride has yet to announce it on social media or in email newsletters that used to be sent weekly.

Sue Hartman, who claimed that when she left the board in 2023, Pride had around $2 million in funds, begged the board to let the community step in.

"Please let us help you, because you're going to fail all of us," Hartman said. "We're all showing up, and literally showing up not to disparage you, but because we want Pride to survive."



Singer Kehlani performed at the 2025 San Diego Pride Festival. The event could fall victim to San Diego Pride's budget woes. (File photo courtesy of Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

The only board minutes posted this year date back to February. In that meeting, which went over the year's final budget, the document notes that Pride had net $20,000 due to "extraordinary circumstances." That was attributed to extra consultants brought on to navigate the backlash to 2025 festival headliner Kehlani's criticism of Israel.

Despite the serious internal issues San Diego Pride needs to confront, the organization faces the additional issue of ongoing community conflict over its response to a number of issues, from prominent staff departures to Kehlani and the Israel-Hamas war.

How the conflict in the Middle East derailed a San Diego civil rights organization was again in evidence Tuesday night during the listening session at St. Paul's Cathedral. The meeting included a pastor describing Zionism as an "abomination," prompting an outcry from nearby Jewish attendees.

More than the financial future of the organization, attendees re-litigated decisions in the past three years related to Pride and the Middle East. They include leaders canceling a SheFest workshop on pinkwashing the Palestinian conflict in 2024, sticking with Kehlani in 2025 despite comments perceived as antisemitic, and a parade contingent that this year bore an Israeli flag splattered in blood.

(In a post-meeting statement, Pride clarified that an internal investigation showed that the CODEPINK parade contingent was not a group authorized or reviewed by Pride to take part in the parade, but instead snuck in from the free speech zone. San Diego police declined to approach the group because of the risk of escalation.)

Eric Ramirez, who attended the meeting, wanted to hear a discussion of "what's going to save Pride from insolvency." That didn't happen.

"I feel like a single issue has just taken up so much air in the last year. I'm concerned about how much effort and hours this board is dedicating to that, when there's really more pressing issues, like the fiduciary breakdown of Pride," Ramirez said.

At Pride's last town hall, following the departure of Executive Director Fernando Lopez in 2023, community members urged the board to keep up its year-round advocacy and programming. In 2025, former board members, staff and volunteers sent a letter sharing concerns that governance of the organization had gone sour, while urging more year-round public advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights beyond the July celebrations.

Quion admitted the board did not want to cut popular programming that started at the high-point of the organization, so members hoped raising revenue could make up the difference.

That didn't occur as many corporate sponsors that officially boycotted the event in 2025 due to Kehlani did not return this year, despite promises to do so, according to Pride leaders. They attributed that in part to Trump Administration pressure on businesses to drop DEI efforts.

But revenue projections also were based on record-breaking ticket sales to see Kehlani and the other 2025 headliner, Kim Petras. While Jewish organizations and some sponsors fled the 2025 festival, people flooded in to see Kehlani. That flood stopped in July, when the 2026 slate of performers failed to attract nearly as many people.

The funding outlook worsened despite Elliott instituting new ways for individual donors in the community, rather than corporations, to fund Pride. They included a fashion show fundraiser.

Council committee votes to terminate services with Flock Safety

By TESSA BALC
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO



Audience members who object to the Flock ALPR contract seated in the council chambers at City Hall, Dec. 9, 2025. (Photo by Adrian Childress/Times of San Diego)

SAN DIEGO — The Budget and Government Efficiency Committee voted to adopt a resolution to end the police department's use of automatic license plate readers citywide on Oct. 21.

The resolution will now go to the full City Council for approval. If passed, the city's existing Flock contract would be terminated.

The resolution titled "Rescind ALPR use policy," was proposed by councilmember Henry Foster III in response to widespread backlash against Flock Safety, the company that administers the city's license plate reader program.

Foster's proposal calls for the termination of the city's contract with Flock Safety, and for the city to delete all stored data along with it.

Ultimately, it calls on SDPD to do away with its current policy for using ALPRs, effectively prohibiting the technology.

This doesn't take ALPRs off of the table in the future. Rather, the city would need to treat any proposal for a new vendor of ALPRs as a completely new technology, completing an entire Privacy Advisory Board review and going through council approval.

In the resolution, local incidents are cited as to why the city should end its relationship with Flock, including the wrongful arrest of two men, as first reported by Times of San Diego, who are now suing the city, and a mistaken breach of data that allowed other agencies to access San Diego Police Department's network.

On Sept. 30, the ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial counties filed a lawsuit against the city of San Diego, claiming the technology violates the California Constitution's stated right to privacy and is asking a court to compel the city to terminate its contract with Flock.

The option of cancelling the city's contract with Flock was most recently on the table in June during budget discussions. At that time, Foster, alongside council members Sean Elo-Rivera, Vivian Moreno and Kent Lee unsuccessfully voted to do so.

But now, another councilmember has landed on their side of the aisle, creating a council majority in favor of cancelling the contract.

Stephen Whitburn's first sign of vocal opposition to Flock came last week at a press conference. He framed it through his increasing concern of the federal government's use of the tech for immigration enforcement.

"I want public safety tools that help San Diegans feel safe," Whitburn said. "If Flock cameras are causing many San Diegans to feel unsafe, then they have lost effectiveness as a public safety tool."

His support could potentially tip the scale toward a successful vote if the other four council members who voted to terminate the contract in June stay on that side of the aisle.

Despite this new council majority, Mayor Todd Gloria could veto the resolution. Gloria is a vocal proponent of the technology and has doubled down on his support for it in recent weeks. On the same day Whitburn changed course, signaling he would vote to remove the technology, Gloria released a statement asserting it is a necessary tool.

"Keeping San Diegans safe is my highest responsibility as mayor. Automated license plate readers have assisted in nearly 900 criminal investigations and allowed San Diegans to recover over $8.7 million in stolen property. The results speak for themselves.

"Public safety and privacy are not mutually exclusive. We can give our police officers effective tools while holding their use to rigorous standards. Where improvements are needed, we should make them, and we hold our technology providers accountable."





San Diego launches update to master plan of Balboa Park

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The last time the city updated the Balboa Park Master Plan, President Bush was in charge — the first one — Apple still called its computers Macintoshes and Janet Jackson and Paula Abdul ruled the pop charts.

It was 1989 when the city adopted the most recent Balboa Park Master Plan. While some specific parts of the park have had focused amendments, a new plan in the works will be the first comprehensive look at the entire park in almost four decades — and city residents will play a big part.

For the overdue update, the city launched a community survey and new website Wednesday, seeking public input on the future of Balboa Park.

It's the first of many surveys and opportunities for community engagement that the city plans to embark upon while developing a new master plan. The plan will guide the future of San Diego's crown jewel for the next 30 years, touching on all aspects, including new recreation and facilities, transportation and accessibility, historic preservation and environmental protection, but perhaps most importantly, revenue generation and financial stability.

"We want to hear from the entire community, the entire region. Balboa Park is a regional park," said Casey Smith, chief housing and community development officer. "We want to hear from everybody."

"This is a big, monumental step for Balboa Park," said Andy Field, director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

The city council expects to adopt the plan in 2028. SANDAG, the Prebys Foundation and Caltrans are funding the nearly $2 million plan effort through grants. It is being executed by city staff and outside contractor WRT Planning + Design.

As much as officials want to hear from the community, though, the cash-strapped city not only needs to identify new revenue streams for Balboa Park, but also shape a plan that makes it easier to secure additional outside financial support.

"Having that master plan in place, identifying infrastructure priorities, gives the city the ability to seek out public-private partnerships, to seek out grant funding, to be able to get something funded," explained Heidi Vonblum, director of the City Planning Department. "When we don't have an updated master plan, it's a little bit more chaotic to be able to seek funding and know that we're seeking funding for things that will best serve the community."

Moving Balboa Park to financial stability is one of the main concerns for city officials. An August report found that as attractive as Balboa Park is, it has many cracks beneath the surface, totaling $1 billion in deferred maintenance. That has left park leaders only able to fix the most urgent needs while trying to prevent future issues.

"If the funding doesn't exist, then we're not able to go in and start working on the deficit of the infrastructure needs," said Jon Richards, a deputy director in the parks department in charge of Balboa Park.

But recent revenue-raising efforts proved wildly unpopular with the public. Paid parking for residents goes away in January after widespread outcry.

Panama 66 and other restaurants in the park are beloved institutions, generating sales tax, but nowhere near the revenue needed to begin chipping away at the massive maintenance backlog.

Could the city have a new revenue stream in place before the scheduled adoption of the new master plan in two years? For instance, ahead of the 1989 Master Plan, the city raised its Transit Occupancy Tax (TOT) from 7 to 8%.

"There's a variety of ways that we can plan for increased revenue generation, so that we can ensure that this park can be lovingly maintained and cared for for the future," Vonblum said.

At the dedication of a restored pergola near the Botanical Garden Building in April, Mayor Todd Gloria discussed the financial pressures the park faces. He noted that since funding for Balboa Park maintenance and operating costs come from the general fund, that means the park must be weighed against other pressing needs during every annual round of budget talks.

"(Balboa Park) should not have to compete with our police officers and firefighters. It can sustain itself," Gloria said at the time, when the city was still defending the much-reviled parking fee as the first dedicated stream of revenue for the park.



The restored pergola at Balboa Park was unveiled on Friday, April 10 after an 85-year absence.
(File photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

Since then, the city has taken on even more Balboa Park costs, after parting ways with Save Starlight, the nonprofit attempting to revive the shuttered Starlight Bowl, adjacent to the San Diego Air and Space Museum. Now the city must take on security and repair costs at the venue.

The behind-the-scenes negotiation between the city and nonprofits about park management, like the wear and tear on the property, might not be obvious to casual observers. Another shift involves Forever Balboa Park, which changed its name to Balboa Park Conservancy. Visitors might miss it, but those issues are top of mind for those most committed to stewardship of the 1,200-acre park.

"You'll find that Balboa Park stakeholders who operate within the park are very much focused on the financial sustainability of the park and the revenue generation and the governance structure because, obviously, they're impacted by it day to day," said Emily Piatanesi, a senior policy adviser in the mayor's office. "They see the infrastructure needs."

But the new plan is about more than stakeholders. It includes the public too and the public cares about more than maintenance and governance.

Residents also are intrigued by big ideas, as seen in the aging master plan, which offers a glimpse of the community's values back in 1989 — and of what might have been.

Ideas were proposed, then studied before being discarded. For instance, planners looked at whether equestrian horse trails could be added to the park, but ultimately decided the proposal wasn't feasible due to the required length of the trails.

Some strategies were implemented, like the reclamation of the Pan American Plaza. Today, it is a pedestrian-only space at the heart of the park, rather than a parking lot.

Other ideas that fell by the wayside include a trolley connection to the park, pedestrian and bike bridge along 8th Avenue and a parking garage beneath the Organ Pavilion so that more surface-level parking lots could be transformed into green space or gathering spots.

Those ideas will be revisited for the updated plan, provided they align with modern needs.

The plan is also not the only thing that could lead to changes at the park. Museums and other institutions have major remodels in the works that often include some sort of capital improvement in the park.

The San Diego Museum of Art, for example, wants to rebuild its west wing with a design from internationally-renowned architect Sir Norman Foster. SDMA also wants to redevelop the Plaza de Panama outside its front doors into a comfortable gathering spot where people stop to linger, rather than a place they rush across to find shade.

But the central mesa isn't the only place that could be redeveloped.

Field, the parks director, noted that as much as Balboa Park is a regional park, it also serves as the local park for some of the fastest-growing communities in San Diego. Morley Field, for example, is really a North Park neighborhood park despite being part of Balboa Park. Golden Hill Park, also part of the wider park, primarily serves the needs of the Golden Hill neighborhood.

Bankers Hill and Hillcrest, which like Golden Hill and North Park border the park, each only have one small park. Normal Street Promenade in Hillcrest will not even fully open until next year.

Along with downtown and other Uptown neighborhoods, the edges of Balboa Park that border those neighborhoods could be

Continued on Page 5

Group begins process to recall Mayor Todd Gloria

By TESSA BALC
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Mayor Todd Gloria isn't appearing on the ballot this Election Day, but an effort to oust him is moving forward.

A group led by criminal justice advocate Genevieve Jones Wright filed a Notice of Intent on Oct. 29 to recall Mayor Gloria, which now begins the recall process.

The notice published in the San Diego Daily Transcript on Election Day, Nov. 3, means the group can soon begin the formal signature-gathering process to call a special election.

Publishing a notice of intent in a local paper of record is an initial step in the recall process.

The notice must be served to Mayor Gloria by Nov. 8 and the city clerk by Nov. 13. Gloria will have the opportunity to respond to the stated reasons for circulating the petition before signatures can be collected. That response will have to be written up and published in a paper of record by Nov. 17.

At the earliest, the petition can begin circulating Nov. 24.

Once in circulation, the clock starts and they'll have 120 days to collect the signatures of at least 15% of registered voters in the city. If that happens the council is required to call a special election.

Leading the charge is Jones Wright, a public advocacy attorney who ran against Gloria for Mayor in 2024. Joining Jones Wright are longtime southeastern San Diego community activist Kathleen Harmon, Terrie Best, Donnetta Moore and Shelby Huffaker.



Mayor Todd Gloria at a City Council meeting reviewing his proposed budget for the next fiscal year on April 20. (Photo by Thomas Murphy/Times of San Diego)

"We seek the recall of Mayor Todd Gloria because he has failed to put everyday San Diegans first and is unfit for office," the group's statement reads. "We have lost confidence in his competence, leadership, judgment, and candor. San Diegans deserve honest answers, transparent decisions, responsible stewardship of public money, and a mayor who is accessible and accountable to the people."

The reasons for the push to recall Gloria, according to the notice, are the his handling of city finances, his housing policy, which the proponents say favors developers and his lack of leadership on San Diego's homelessness crisis.

"Public office is a position of trust that carries a responsibility to protect the well-being of the people. San Diegans deserve a mayor focused on their needs, not political advancement. We believe his record warrants removal," the notice says.

The last recall effort against a sitting mayor in San Diego was against Bob Filner amid allegations of sexual harassment in 2013. Filner resigned before the recall effort could move forward.

Gloria's office could not be reached for comment immediately.

BALBOA PARK

Continued from Page 4

redeveloped to suit community needs. Now is the time for those residents to weigh in on what that looks like.

"The west side of Balboa Park is an area that currently has none of those kinds of facilities—no athletic fields, no big recreation center," Field said. "So it'll be very interesting to see what the community today is looking for, especially as we've seen such changes as, for example, the Uptown community has seen extensive residential development."

Future surveys will also target specific demographics, like seniors and families with children, who are the primary users of parks. In addition, the city's outreach will look beyond those who go to Balboa Park often, asking people in the region who don't visit what could inspire them to do so.

The process is a chance for big ideas, although, like in 1989, not all of them will be implemented. Again, it comes back to money.

"When will it happen? It's all dependent on funding," Vonblum said.

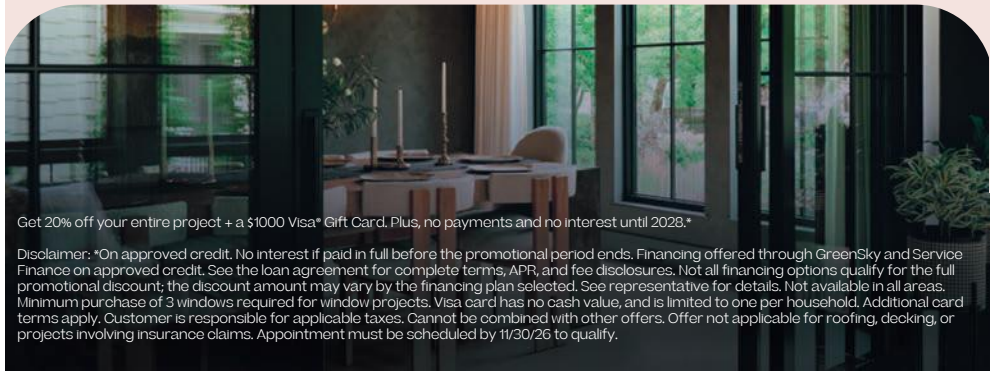
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City Council unanimously pauses data center construction

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO



Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera speaks to the crowd flanking him at a press conference last week opposing a data center on the NAVWAR site in Old Town. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

SAN DIEGO — On Oct. 27, the City Council unanimously approved placing an emergency pause on data centers that will last for 45 days, with options to renew for the next 20 months, amid outcry over a proposed data center at the Navy's base in Old Town.

The moratorium on data center construction gives the council time to craft an ordinance to better manage the creation of these facilities.

Mayor Todd Gloria pushed the moratorium effort last week after Voice of San Diego reported that Manchester Financial Group was considering building a massive 400-megawatt data center on the Naval Information Warfare Systems Command (NAVWAR) headquarters in Old Town.

Critics instantly slammed the idea for environmental reasons and the impact it could have on electricity and water costs, in addition to the plethora of other criticisms such as noise pollution, radiating heat, guzzling electricity which apply to all data centers.

But San Diegans also had specific concerns about whether a low-lying, industrial facility was the highest and best use of the NAVWAR land. The 60 acre site could be the ideal spot for a mixed-use development.

Council members described the redevelopment of NAVWAR as a once-in-a-generation opportunity that could place muchneeded new housing close to one of the biggest transit hubs in the region. In particular, that housing could benefit service members who work nearby.

However, the city has no say on federal land use.

During public comments to the City Council, residents called on the city to create as much friction as possible surrounding the NAVWAR data center, so that Manchester might abandon the plan.

"San Diego needs more affordable housing, not more computer servers," Councilmember Stephen Whitburn said. "Federal ownership does not mean San Diegans should be shut out of decisions which will impact us for generations to come."

In a statement, Manchester president Ted Eldredge said nothing is finalized on the NAVWAR site. Manchester is considering several ideas, including the data center.

Manchester does have a strong proponent of the plan in the White House. President Trump is pushing for development of new data centers, particularly on federal land where community opposition cannot prevent them. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, meanwhile, has selected developers to build data centers at Fort Bliss in Texas and Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, with more bases to follow.

City Council members, joined by State Assemblymember Chris Ward, called on San Diego's federal delegation to write to the Navy in opposition to the data center.

Representative Scott Peters, whose district encompasses NAVWAR, is currently pushing a bipartisan bill that would address energy costs and permitting. In particular, it would ensure that the companies behind data centers would have to take on the costs of upgrading the electric grid and paying their energy costs, so ratepayers would not subsidize data centers' energy and have those costs passed onto them.

Peters may soon have another data center opponent joining the San Diego congressional delegation.

"We need regulations to protect the public, especially as big tech companies come to town," said Councilmember Marni von Wilpert ahead of her aye vote for the moratorium. Von Wilpert is the favorite to win the District 48 race.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation similar to Peters' proposal recently, although it remains untested. California also has no jurisdiction on federal land.

Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera's proposed ordinance, outlined at a rally outside City Hall last week, would go further.

He proposed that land undergo an independent evaluation to see if it would be better for housing than a data center, so no large data centers would be built by right. Plus, the data center would need to be a minimum distance from schools, homes, parks, and other sensitive uses. Community and school districts would also have a voice in the planning process. Next, developers would take on all the grid upgrade costs, hire union workers, use only renewable energy, and have a water recycling plan.

Elo-Rivera added a few of those ideas, as well as a rule that the City Council must be notified within seven days of a data center proposal coming to the city, to the moratorium. The full ordinance language is awaiting approval by the city attorney.

"There are certain places where these data centers may be appropriate. NAVWAR is not one of them. The middle of our cities are not those places," Elo-Rivera said at the press conference.

Several data centers already operate in the city, including one along University Avenue in North Park. Government regulators had not caught up to the nascent technology and data centers were permitted like warehouses when it was built.

Elo-Rivera described the North Park data center as a "dead zone" in the middle of a vibrant, lively neighborhood.

The moratorium will apply to new data centers like the one in North Park, even though NAVWAR is exempt.

Popular Hillcrest breakfast spot sues city over loss of revenue

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

HILLCREST — Hillcrest fixture Hash House A Go-Go is suing the city of San Diego, alleging a city storm drain replacement effort caused a dramatic drop in business.

According to the lawsuit, the storm drain project turned Fifth Avenue into a construction zone, removing parking, blocking traffic, churning up dust, and driving away customers.

Hash House's suit said the project, which lasted from late 2025 through June of this year, not only cut off traffic along Fifth Avenue but also closed nearby side streets, further preventing customer access.

"The city, through its conduct in performing the [construction] created a condition which repeatedly and continuously obstructed and interfered with [Hash House's] free use and enjoyment of the property," reads the lawsuit, obtained by Times of San Diego.

The restaurant was not the only small business in Hillcrest upset that construction drove customers away.



Hash House A Go Go estimates it lost between $28,000 to $40,000 per month during construction on Fifth Avenue, tort filings show. (File photo by Adrian Childress/Times of San Diego)

Hash House, and several other small businesses impacted by the construction project, filed tort claims with the city, asking for reimbursement for their economic losses from Dec. 2025 through June 2026.

The tort claim for Hash House A Go Go claimed revenue was down over $40,000 in February, a 17.8% loss over a three year rolling average.

Continued on Page 11

'Years of dog pee' blamed for fallen street light in Little Italy neighborhood

By SENNA IHAB OMAR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LITTLE ITALY — Alyssa Ash was driving her car in Little Italy shortly after 7 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 2, when she heard a loud crash. Ash and her passengers panicked, and when they looked up, the stoplight at the corner of India Street and Hawthorne Avenue had fallen to the ground.

No one hit the stoplight. Witnesses said it just fell over on its own. No one was injured, but the pole knocked off a car's front bumper.

Police officers arrived at the scene.

As did San Diego transportation employees, who said the pole's base was corroded from years of dogs peeing on it, likely causing it to topple.

Nate Brown, a witness at the scene and engineer with a local energy company, said the fall sounded like a gunshot. Brown and his friends were eating dinner at Mona Lisa Italian Foods when they heard the crash and rushed outside.



Fallen streetlight in Little Italy. (Photo by Senna Ihab Omar/Times of San Diego)

The base appeared severely corroded, Brown said. Since the pole was still connected to live power, Brown said it was a safety hazard.

Brown's friend, Eliot Vargas, tried to sweep up some of the glass from the street, removed the light that fell off the pole, and set it aside.

Continued on Page 11

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Father Joe's Villages breaks ground on mass timber housing project

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — A piece of Father Joe's Villages' ambitious goal to build 2,000 affordable housing units for vulnerable San Diegans fell apart two years ago. A new construction technology has resurrected the project, which broke ground Monday.

The eight-story building at the corner of Island Avenue and 16th Street is the first affordable housing development in San Diego to use mass timber, an engineered wood product that is cheaper than traditional steel and concrete.

"We're introducing mass timber to San Diego. It's very exciting," said Joowan Lee, founder of Arete Development, which is handling the project on behalf of Father Joe's.

Mass timber has other advantages as well, including its lower environmental impact. Plus, it is fire resistant so property insurance costs go down in the long run.

Since aspects are pre-fabricated, it is also faster to build. Father Joe's conservative estimate for opening the development is March 2028, but construction company oWOW estimates that it could be done by the end of 2027.

An early pioneer of mass timber, oWOW Construction has tested the technology across California, starting with a 20-story tower in Oakland. This is their first project in San Diego.

"We were doing it before it was fully legalized, and before it became a cool thing that everybody's talking about," said CEO Danny Haber. "We're happy we could help save the $10 million plus to make this site happen."

The project contains 124 units made up of 68 studios, 55 one-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom apartment. In addition to cost savings, mass timber also takes up less interior space for support beams. Switching to mass timber after the 2024 financing fell apart actually gave Father Joe's space to add an additional 22 units without increasing the number of floors. Plus, some studios were upgraded to one bedrooms.

The units will be restricted to those making 30 to 60% of the area median income. That income level means not all who move in will be formerly homeless, but those at great risk of losing their housing. Some are just holding on "by their fingernails," said Deacon Jim Vargas, who leads Father Joe's Villages. He argued that it is cheaper for the community and less traumatizing for individuals to prevent homelessness, rather than waiting until someone is on the street.



Deacon Jim Vargas, flanked by Councilmember Stephen Whitburn and Arete Development CEO Jodi Rothery, celebrates the groundbreaking of an affordable housing project at 16th and Island. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

"The cost of food, gas, goods and most of all, housing have put many of our neighbors in a precarious state," Vargas said. "Every affordable home we build is one more person or family that finds stable housing instead of ending up or staying on the streets."

Father Joe's may also use mass timber on another project. The nonprofit plans to build a 15-story building on top of pilings above the four-story former skydiving center that the city once used as a housing navigation center.

Another San Diego developer set to use mass timber is PROTEA/Malick, which pitched an 11-story urbanist dream for San Diego Unified School District's headquarters in University Heights.

Father Joe's Villages is turning to the technology because the economics of building affordable housing have become increasingly difficult, according to Arete Development CEO Jodi Rothery.

In this case, another homeless-serving nonprofit, God's Extended Hand, donated the property to Father Joe's Villages after the city said the old building at the site was a hazard. Even with the donation, that was not enough savings to move forward.

Rothery had nearly received a city building permit in 2024 when the financing fellthrough. Shifting to mass timber dropped the cost per unit from $530,000 to $380,000— shaving millions off the overall cost. That made the $47 million project more competitive for state tax credits and grants, as well as private investment.

Continued on Page 11

Climate scientists and others call for action on diesel trucks at the port

By THAÏS GIRAUDET
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Local environmentalists met at the Clean Air Summit of San Diego Climate Week in October to tackle environmental justice priorities for the Portside Community.

During the event's panel, scientists and environmental activists discussed the need for pollution regulation to address the impact of diesel trucks in neighborhoods near the port.

In May 2026, the San Diego Air Pollution Control District failed to pass the Indirect Source Rule, an air-pollution policy designed to regulate warehouses and distribution centers that utilize highly polluting diesel trucks.

According to the Air Pollution Control District's own 2021 Emissions Reductions Plan, "Barrio Logan's rate of asthma-related hospital visits is higher than 92.9 percent of census tracts throughout the state," while its cancer risk ranks in the 90th percentile nationally.

Despite those findings, the board concluded the costs outweighed the benefits and decided not to pass the Indirect Source Rule.

That decision angered community members and environmentalists.

José Franco Garcia, executive director of Environmental Health Coalition, spoke during the panel about the need to regulate emissions from diesel trucks. He has witnessed firsthand the disappointment from Barrio Logan and National City residents who suffer disproportionately from air pollution caused by diesel trucks.

"What community members are dealing with is seeing these diesel trucks regularly, hearing the noises from them, seeing them drive by their kids' school and knowing that their kids' asthma gets aggravated," Franco Garcia said.

Paula Stigler Granados, an associate professor at San Diego State University, serves on the Air Pollution Control District as its science advisor.

Stigler Granados voted in favor of the indirect rule source. She disagreed with other Air Pollution Control District Board members' arguments that the costs were too high.

"What cost is public health? We can't put a price on our lives. We can't put a price on our kids' asthma," she said.

The panel also discussed the sewage and air pollution crisis at the border.

Aurora Czajkowski, a PhD student at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, studies the connections between water and air pollution.

Czajkowski said people can choose not to go in the water, but they can't choose to stop breathing.

Czajkowski said scientists and community members need to be involved before local officials write policies.

"If we're really trying to understand that our policies are working, we need to have the data to back it up," she said. "That involves creating monitoring networks that span wherever the pollution is reaching. Our monitoring networks should not stop at international borders. They should extend across watersheds."

Stigler Granados agreed: residents need to be more involved at the decision-making table.

"Making sure if we host a meeting, it's at the right time, the right place, there's food, there's childcare, there's enough people at the table, and if enough people didn't show up, then we didn't do our job," Stigler Granados told Times of San Diego.

When asked what San Diegans who want to help can do, all panelists agreed the most powerful action is to get involved politically and to vote.

SAN DIEGO Reader

Orange Man Bad?

An Encinitas psychotherapist looks back on her time in the Osho/Rajneesh cult

Guru Rajneesh's daily drive-by in one of his Rolls Royces. (Photo credit: Stephen Broad)

Orange Man Bad?

An Encinitas psychotherapist looks back on her time in the Osho/Rajneesh cult

By Matthew Lickona
SAN DIEGO READER

Another election, another slog through the fevered swamp, another skirmish between the Woke Mob and the MAGA Cult — even though neither side thinks of themselves that way. "People don't join cults, do they?" asks Encinitas psychotherapist Nicola Ranson. "You join an organization because it already appeals to what you're interested in and excited about." Ranson knows whereof she speaks: from 1979 to 1985, she was a disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, an Indian guru whose influence was so powerful that his followers built a city in central Oregon and named it for him: Rajneeshpuram. They did other things, too, including poison 751 Oregonians with salmonella in an effort to swing an election. Now she's written a memoir documenting and examining her experience before, during, and after her discipleship: "A Slice of Orange: Loving and Leaving the Osho/Rajneesh Cult".

What Ranson was interested in was Rajneesh's blending of "cutting-edge humanistic psychotherapy with Eastern spirituality. I was drawn to both those things, and the combination was irresistible." What she was excited about was being part of "a very happy group of people" who shared a philosophy of "living in the moment and living life to the fullest. That's very appealing, especially when you're trying to get things done. It's hard for people to appreciate what a massive undertaking this was. We had 100 square miles of land. We had a sewage system, a water system, all the infrastructure — and we did it in record time. I found it very creative to put my energy in with other people's and have these results. I saw it as my city."

But she wasn't just a citizen; she was a disciple. "Rajneesh was a very magnetic man. It felt like he was looking right into you and seeing you. He could influence several thousand of us while we were meditating. We would be in a wonderful state of peace, or excitement, or whatever he was generating. A lot of people still see him as a spiritual figure. He was also human. And it took me a long time to see that and understand that."

Ranson's parents were atheists, but they sent her to a convent school. There, she found herself attracted to "the good works, the kindness, and the contemplation," but repelled by the hierarchy. "The priest was an intermediary with God, and that never made sense to me. I wanted to have direct contact."

The times, they were a-changin'. Ranson visited Rajneesh's ashram in India, and he preached the direct contact she craved. "With Rajneesh, he talked about trusting your experience: 'Go inside, and experience your connection to the divine. Don't get distracted by me. I'm just here to point the finger.' The East was beginning to open up. I don't think this would have happened without the human potential movement, without the hippie movement, without the Beatles and Maharishi Mahesh. There was tremendous excitement, and more sexual freedom, and it was a great time to be young."

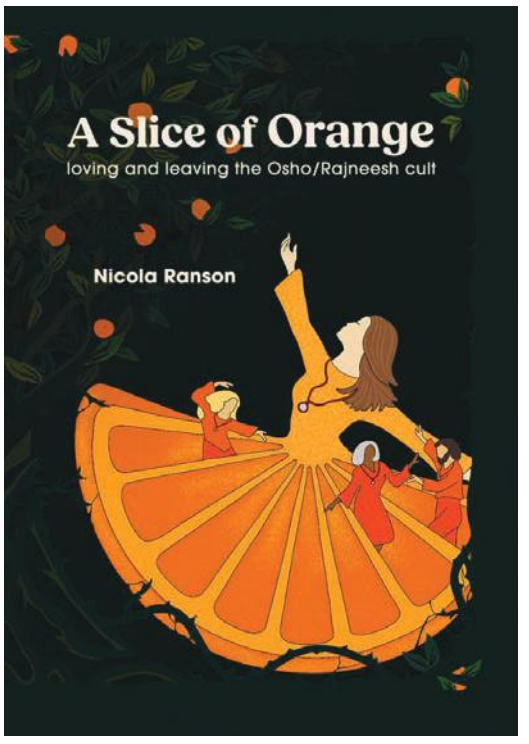
But the same openness that made things so exciting "also led to a complete lack of boundaries. Catharsis was a big thing for the human potential movement — letting it all hang out, yelling and screaming and jumping up and down. There was a lot of catharsis in Rajneesh's therapy groups in India, and looking at it now, that was extremely dangerous. You had some fragile souls, and there were some adolescents, and did I mention that everyone was naked in most of these groups? And yet, people participated and said it was the best thing you could ever do. I felt that as a rather repressed Englishwoman, it helped me open up a lot. But when you opened up, when you had your breakdown and cried as you recognized certain aspects of yourself, there was the guru's picture on the wall. Huge, like six feet, the only

Rajneeshpuram: "It's hard for people to appreciate what a massive undertaking this was." (Photo credit: Mac Marshall)



decoration in the room. The goal of the group was to bring you closer to him, and I bought into it because that's what I was there for. But it's not exactly empowering people as we would see it today."

Rajneesh preached freedom. "He was all about, 'The belief system is conditioning. If we get beyond the conditioning, you can get to the true spirit.' But in the process of doing that, I didn't realize that I had bought into another conditioning along the way, and that is what led to such devotion that I could be part of something that was doing criminal acts. We felt we were spreading love. The most important thing was for the city to survive. If someone had asked me to do something criminal, I can't say that I would have said no."



Book cover for "A Slice of Orange". (Courtesy Photo)

Ranson didn't join a cult; she joined a spiritual organization, albeit one that "became a cult in the end. But I think it's very easy for the public to look at people who have done something that makes them stand out as a cult — we all wore orange, for example. And they think, 'Oh my God, how could they be so stupid?' And they don't see that the dynamics are really human. It's not just a bunch of weird people falling for someone. These are humans going after ideals, making something better, making a better world. And in the course of it, they get caught up in something that maybe becomes harmful."

It's a tricky business. People need community. Building a community requires solidarity. Solidarity often requires sacrifice. But the same Dylan who sang "Don't follow leaders/Read the parking meters" also sang "You're gonna have to serve somebody." "I think we do need leaders, and we do need teachers," says Ranson. "The whole guru phenomenon worked for centuries in certain countries, and I wouldn't toss that out. But we were told that if we felt critical about something, it was because we weren't surrendered enough, and that the mind was the problem. 'Leave your mind at the door along with your shoes.' But I think the mind is actually quite useful. And it's not all about the spiritual experience. Let's stay grounded. If you're grounded, you can bring up something that's been labeled as negativity. Maybe it's anger, doubt, grief — but it's telling you something."

Ranson says that the ex-cult community refers to shelf-breaking moments. "You keep justifying and explaining and making sense of things. And you put these moments on the shelf, and there are usually a lot of them. And then at one point, there's so much that the shelf actually breaks." She had two. The first was an omission that came when "4,000 or so homeless individuals were brought into the ranch. "There were voter registration tables set up in the cafeteria. It was an attempt to sway an election." The attempt failed, and soon after, Rajneesh's secretary Sheela called a meeting of the entire community and berated the newcomers. 'How dare you come and abuse our hospitality. We had zero criminality before you came. There have been attacks against women!' There was some truth to that. We had naively brought in a lot of gang members, a lot of mentally ill people. There were problems. But some of them had settled in and wanted to stay. And Sheela started kicking people out, and it was done so cruelly. They weren't even allowed to go back to their tents. They were dragged out, screaming that they

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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didn't want to go, and thrown on buses and dumped in towns in Oregon. I stood there and thought, 'Oh my God. This is wrong. This is not love.' And I felt a crack in myself. And I was acutely aware that I was mute. I knew if I said, 'This isn't right,' they'd say, 'Okay, get on the bus.'"

The second was a commission. After the poisoning, Sheela fled the ranch and Rajneesh blamed her and her associates for that and other crimes. During a public meeting, Oregon television journalist Walden Kirsch objected that some of Rajneesh's own followers didn't believe that account. "Rajneesh became what I saw as really angry, which was a shock. I didn't know he got angry. I thought he was some special sort of being. And his retaliation was, 'Of course my people believe me. Everyone who believes me, I want you to raise your arms and say yes, three times.' And there was this chorus of 'Yes, yes, yes.' And I found my arms going up, because there was a tsunami of arms coming towards me, like at a football game. And I felt like, 'I love him. I'm one of his people. I have to back him.' I put my arms up and said yes three times, and I felt absolutely sick as I did it. Because I knew that the journalist was telling the truth, and that I was lying."

That crack in the self is not just an expression. "A lot of people come out of cults and immediately go into another one, because there's kind of a vacuum. As for myself, it was a frightening, shocking, dissociative time for me. 'What's true? Who do I believe? What's the reality?'"

The answers did not come come quickly or easily. "But I'm grateful for the experience, because it blew apart my mental structures, realizing, 'I've bought into a belief system without my realizing it.' Cults are not just for other people. I get people who tell me, 'Now that I'm reading your book, I can see that I would have joined.' I think cults make a wonderful lens to be able to look at ourselves, if we stop saying, 'How could these people believe that?' and turn it around to, 'How come I believe what I believe?'

The experience was profound, and influences her current work as a psychotherapist. "When someone comes to me with shame and says, 'Oh, I did these stupid things,' I'm thinking, 'I doubt they were as stupid as some of the things I did.' I'm very accepting. And I think the compassion I've found for my younger self is something I would wish on many people."

On November 14, Ranson will hold a celebratory book launch for A Slice of Orange at the Encinitas Library Community Room from 3-4:30 pm, in partnership with Camino Books in Del Mar. Orange clothing is encouraged. "I want to celebrate the book, and writers, and indie presses, and all the people who have helped me." And on December 6th, from 1-2 pm, she'll be doing a reading at Carlsbad Village Books, followed by a discussion with Psychology Today's Gina Simmons Schneider.



The author with her mother at Rajneeshpuram. (Photo credit: Stephen Broad)

San Diego Reader
855 First Ave. Suite 201A
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SRO Lounge closes after 44 years of serving as 'safe haven' for trans community

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

BANKERS HILL — A longtime LGBTQ+ establishment in Bankers Hill, SRO Lounge, closed Sunday after 44 years in business, a development the bar announced with just a few hours notice on Instagram.

SRO Lounge sat next to The Balboa, a bar famous for its burgers, on Fifth Avenue and Elm Street. John Sanfilippo and Bryan Galvin opened the lounge in 1982 and it became a popular destination for cross-dressing, gender non-conforming and transgender San Diegans.

Transgender leader Paris Quion said over text that the abrupt closure hit the community "like a ton of bricks."

She said for many trans and nonbinary people, "SRO has been our safe haven from a difficult world to maneuver. A world that most times treats us like 'others,' sometimes even within our own community."

She described the bar as a break from the negativity trans people experience elsewhere.

People flooded in on Sunday night to share memories of a longtime safe space and reminisce.

"People were just there to have one last drink," said Tyler Renner. "It was packed, wall to wall, people everywhere. The bartenders were in a really good mood. They seemed really happy to connect with so many people."

When Renner moved to San Diego over a decade ago and Googled LGBTQ+ bars, SRO Lounge sat at the top of the results. When he visited, it was the first queer space he went to that catered to the trans community when so many other spaces are gay-male dominated.

"I was just like, 'Wow, how cool that there's a space, not just for LGBT people in general, but trans-specific folks,'" he recalled.

On social media, some patrons shared that SRO Lounge was a place they first felt welcome and affirmed when exploring their gender expression and coming out. Others were sad to lose another safe space.

"It's sad to see it close," wrote Rev. Dan Koeshall, retired pastor of The Met Church. "May another safe place be found for many who found refuge there."

In its farewell announcement, the SRO team wrote "This small space has given all of us a place to belong. No matter your walk of life, you always had a place where you felt welcome."



Inside the SRO Lounge on Nov. 1, its last day in operation after 44 years in business. Patrons mourned the loss of a safe space. (Photo by Tyler Renner/Special for Times of San Diego)

The announcement noted that the closure was a "see you later," not a goodbye. SRO's owners could not be reached to clarify what their future plans may be.

Developers, however, have long eyed the site, at 1807 Fifth Ave. An expired building permit from 2019 outlined plans for a four-story, mixed-use building there intended for restaurant and office use on the lower floor and 20 residential units above.

Supporters hope the lounge can rise again. Quion, the owner of the Hillcrest restaurant, InsideOut, texted "I personally am not giving up on continuing the legacy of SRO whether in the current space it is in or elsewhere … We can't give up on our queer spaces, it's just far too important and lifesaving."

People on social media were also saddened not just about the SRO Lounge closing, but that yet another unique spot in San Diego had ceased to exist.

"There's truly nowhere like it anywhere else — and San Diego has lost so much of its eccentric, quirky, clever hometown spots already," lamented Michail Takach in a comment on the announcement.

The city's enduring gay bars are almost entirely in Hillcrest now, with a few exceptions in North Park, including The Eagle, Pecs Bar and gay-friendly Redwing Bar.

San Diego's longest-operating gay bar, The Hole, rebranded to Bar 1924 early this year with an upscale cocktail menu.


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Food & Drink Blotter.

BY FRANK SABATINI JR.



RESTAURANT REVIEW
Frank Sabatini Jr.

Japanese food truck and Gladstone's coming soon, Square Pizza and humorous wines

Gluten-free Japanese food truck is born

Look for the upcoming debut of a food truck named Tako Pug, which fills a neglected niche in the world of Asian cuisine.

North Park residents Ron and Christina Tolle hope to wheel out the truck in the coming month with a menu of Japanese, Chinese, and Hawaiian dishes that are entirely gluten-free. The concept reflects his Japanese heritage and her quest for flavorful Asian food since being diagnosed with celiac disease last year.

The married couple each left corporate jobs to pursue the culinary venture, although he worked as a chef in the early 2000s at Roppongi in La Jolla, and Lowe's Coronado Bay Resort before that.

Their celiac-friendly fare will include musubi, onigiri, orange chicken and a dual pork dish called "piggy piggy." The truck's location schedule is still being finalized, although it will appear regularly at the Gluten-Free Pop-Up Market held on the second or third Sunday of each month at 3366 Adams Ave. in Normal Heights.

The couple whimsically chose the name, Tako Pug, because "tako" is the Japanese word for "octopus," and a red octopus is their pet pug's favorite toy. takopug.com.

Gladstone's opening in Seaport Village

The Los Angeles-based "coastal seafood" restaurant known as Gladstone's is nearly a year late in opening at Seaport Village, in the bayfront structure formerly occupied by Edgewater Grill. The 9,680-square-foot space was completely gutted and is still transitioning into a Cape Cod-style design featuring a large wrap-around patio.

Expected now to open in early 2027, the menu will feature clambakes, ahi tuna towers, coconut shrimp, fish-and-chips, and more. 861 W. Harbor Drive, 619-663-8898, gladstonessandiego.com.

Meatball subs and color-changing spoons in Balboa Park

At the recently opened Element 8 Cafe inside the Fleet Science Center, customers are not only gobbling down the kitchen's meatball sandwiches and assorted flat breads with gusto, but they are being taken by surprise when consuming the cafe's soft-serve ice cream.

Available in nearly a dozen flavors, each serving comes with a plastic spoon that reacts to temperature shifts. Sink it into the ice cream and its color vacillates between fuchsia and deep purple.

In keeping with the scientific connection of its host museum, the spoons use thermochromatic technology. And the cafe is named after its chemical listing as "oxygen" on the Periodic Table of Elements. 1875 El Prado, 619-238-1233; fleetscience.org.



The award-winning Detroit-style pie at Square Pizza Co. (Photo by Thomas Melville/Times of San Diego)



Gluten-free Japanese fare will soon be rolling through the streets. (Photo courtesy of Ron Tolle)

Wines paired to humor

A tasting of five global wines during a 70-minute comedy act focusing on wine culture will be held at 5:30 and 8 p.m. on Nov. 14 and Jan. 16, 2027, at the Adams Avenue Theater, located at 3325 Adams Ave. in Normal Heights. The event is titled, "An Idiot's Guide to Wine: Comedy Over Wine." It is produced by Fever, an international live-entertainment company.

The show's comedic narrative will be led by a still-unnamed local comedian, who will satirize wine culture while bringing wine terminology and flavor notes into layman's terms.

Attendees must be at least 21 years of age. Tickets range from $64 to $83 and can be at feverup.com.

East Village versus Pacific Beach pizza

Having just passed its one-year anniversary in downtown's East Village, the owner of Square Pizza Co. said there is a noticeable difference in pizza preferences between downtown customers and those who patronize his older, flagship location in Pacific Beach.

Owner Frederico Santos noted that East Village customers inexplicably favor chicken on their pizzas, which are all square in shape and come in four types of crusts.

"Any style pie with chicken on top are the big sellers, and yet the menus at both pizzerias are the same," he said.

In Pacific Beach, the hefty Detroit-style pizza topped with pepperoni is king. Santos doesn't know why there is a vast fluctuation in tastes. But he said that his cautious decision to open in East Village has paid off.

He also noted the differences between the two shops: The East Village location is larger; it has indoor-outdoor seating, and serves beer and wine. 699 Park Blvd., 619-730-1238, squarepizzaco.com.

Revival of a beloved Chinese restaurant underway in North Park

By FRANK SABATINI JR.
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

NORTH PARK — Before closing in 2019 under the name Peking Restaurant, the business located at 2877 University Ave. ranked among San Diego's oldest family-run kitchens. It had operated since 1931 as a place where Cantonese-style fare was served from clattering steel carts under the glow of ornate Asian lanterns.

To the excitement of consumers and preservationists, the 3,500-square-foot space, along with its detailed historically designated facade, will come alive again under the name Chop Suey Lounge.

North Park residents Jacquelyn Kelly and business partner Jason Bess, secured a lease for the property last year from family members of the late original owner, Leo Fong. Two generations of Fong's family ran the restaurant until seven years ago. Some of them retired. Others chose different career paths. The space has been dark ever since.

Kelly is rooted in the hospitality field. She last worked as director of operations at Ironside Fish & Oyster for locally based CH Projects. Bess hails from the construction industry.

"I always wanted something of my own," said Kelly. "So, we met with the Fong family, talked about what ideas we had for the space, and the rest is history."

The property's unmistakable exterior features cherry-red columns flanking the entrance. They mimic the gates to some imperial Chinese city, albeit on a quaint scale. Above the threshold is aged neon signage in wonton font, which displays the dual names of the restaurant from past decades: "Peking Cafe" and "Chop Suey."

Project architect Chris Bord of Room & Bord Architecture in City Heights assures the facade will be carefully refurbished and maintained in respect to its original design. He said that both the signage and trim will be replaced with "real neon" lighting. In addition, the existing inauthentic metal doors at the entrance are slated to be replaced with wooden doors



The neglected facade has become a site for political posters but will soon be restored to its original splendor. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr./Special for Times of San Diego)

flaunting "details that reflect the restaurant's earlier history."

Working in collaboration with Crave Design in Point Loma, the gutted interior

Continued on Page 11

HILLCREST BREAKFAST SPOT

Continued from Page 7

May was less dire for the long-standing restaurant, with a 9.5% loss of $28,000.

The city denied those claims. The city declined to comment for this article due to pending litigation.

Some of Hash Hash's other neighbors also said the construction negatively impacted business.

Victoria Robertson, who owns Divo Diva Cafe, said in June that while the cafe was impacted, she did not want to take on the added expense of litigation after already losing thousands of dollars during the construction.

"We're just trying to stay positive and be grateful that the fence is gone and that the construction is gone and the tractors are gone and sort of hit reset and keep making a great experience for the customers," she said.

Dorian Hargrove contributed to this report.

FALLEN STREET LIGHT

Continued from Page 7

Officers blocked off the street until city transportation employees could remove the stoplight and install a temporary pedestrian crossing.

After the pole fell, the wires controlling the stoplights and pedestrian crossing remained active, allowing them to flash red, yellow and green throughout the night until transportation employees could deactivate the wires.

The biggest concern with the removal process was the live wire, Mike Plewe, a traffic signal technician for the city of San Diego and the first to arrive at the scene, said.

Plewe arrived at the scene at approximately 8:15 p.m. and began assessing the damage. He began deactivating the wires in the stoplight and waiting for backup to help with the removal process.

Shortly after he deactivated the wires, at 10:20 p.m., two more city transportation employees arrived with a crane to begin the removal process. They finished removing the pole at 11:10 p.m. and began installing a temporary stoplight to manage pedestrian crossings on the one-way street.

FATHER JOE'S VILLAGES

Continued from Page 8

Father Joe's now has an updated building permit, thanks in part to a city program where projects made up of 100% affordable housing jump to the front of the line at the Department of Development Services.

"San Diegans want more affordable housing, and this city is streamlining the process and making it easier to get these homes built," said Councilmember Stephen Whitburn, who represents East Village, where the project is located.

Financing includes a construction loan from California Bank & Trust, a permanent loan from Citibank and tax credit equity from the investment bank, Raymond James. Ultimately, philanthropic gifts from billionaire philanthropist Irwin Jacobs and the David C. Copley Foundation completed funding for the project.

"After the years of planning, designing, financing, redesigning, refinancing and what felt like a mountain of paperwork," Rothery said, "it is very exciting to finally be standing here with shovels instead of spreadsheets today."

CHINESE RESTAURANT

Continued from Page 10

is currently making way for a stylish main dining room that will welcome customers with a menu of American-Chinese dishes. Salvaged lanterns will be incorporated into the scheme, as well as new service carts. There will also be a stage for live jazz music with booth seating in front of it.

The blueprint reveals a smaller dining area behind the bar. It has been loosely named Ginger Roots. Kelly said it is being created to accommodate eight guests at a time on a communal table that will be positioned close enough to the kitchen to qualify it as a "chef's table."

"It will be a little more fine dining. We'll dive into Asian-fusion with local seafood, whole fish and sushi," she added.

Kelly is hesitant to predict when Chop Suey Lounge will open, despite that most of the permitting hurdles have now been conquered. In the hang-up right now are approvals for cabaret and full-liquor licenses.

"We are looking at some time in 2027. There's been a lot of twists and turns with the building," she said.

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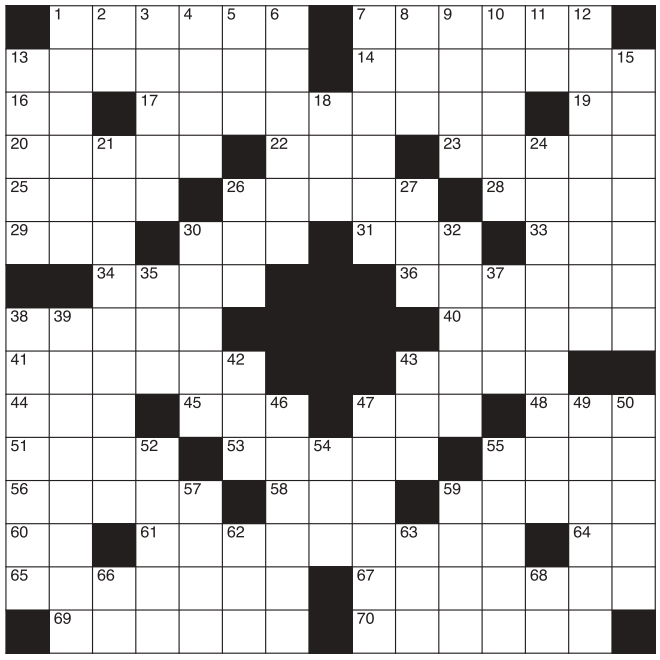
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SUDOKU

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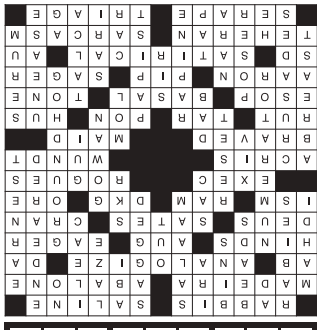
CROSSWORDS



CLUES ACROSS
1. Spiritual leaders
7. Containing salt
13. Fortified wine
14. Edible mollusk
16. Blood type
17. Make a comparison
19. Government lawyer
20. "Game of Thrones" actor Ciaran
22. 8th month of the year (abbr.)
23. Very willing
25. ___ ex machina
26. Satisfies
28. New Zealand mountain
29. A doctrine
30. Popular Dodge truck model
31. Dekagram
33. Naturally occurring solid material
34. Company higher-up
36. Villains
38. Cricket frog genus
40. Influential early psychologist
41. Endured
43. Servant
44. You can get stuck in one
45. ___ and feather
47. Passive optical network
48. French ballet dynasty
51. Employee stock ownership plan
53. Forming a bottom layer
55. Sound
56. Yankees slugger Judge
58. Dickens character
59. Beloved late sportscaster Craig
60. "The Mount Rushmore State"
61. Sarcastic and critical
64. Atomic #79
65. Longtime Atlanta Braves pitcher
67. Humor
69. Shawl
70. Preliminary assessment of patients

CLUES DOWN
1. Animal disease
2. Commercial
3. Craft supplies
4. Containers
5. A way to save for your golden years
6. Common Arabic greeting
7. Bulged downward
8. Acquired brain injury
9. Lay about
10. Intestinal
11. Not yes
12. In a way, pleased
13. Messianic figure in Islam
15. Resulting from intense conviction
18. Not in
21. Number above the line in a fraction
24. Lawn pest
26. Pouch
27. Ancient language (abbr.)
30. Start anew
32. Wild flower
35. Fourteen
37. Graphical user interface
38. Facing the same way
39. Campaigns
42. Touch lightly
43. "Boardwalk Empire" actress Gretchen
46. Violent seizure of property
47. One who supports the Pope
49. Malaise
50. Body fluid
52. Inauthentic person
54. Title of respect
55. Moth genus
57. Central Japan city
59. Silk garment
62. Draw from
63. Automobile
66. A male
68. Powerful government lawyer

ANSWERS



4	1	9	2	7	5	3	6	8
8	6	2	3	4	1	9	7	5
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SD Film Week features a soccer star and fictional take on OB high school

By MARK NERO
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

EAST VILLAGE — San Diego theater Digital Gym Cinema is known for showcasing independent, international and art house films from all over the world. But for one week in November, it will host an event dedicated solely to locally made films and shorts.

Starting Saturday and continuing through Nov. 15, San Diego Film Week is being held at the independent, nonprofit theater and lounge located in East Village.

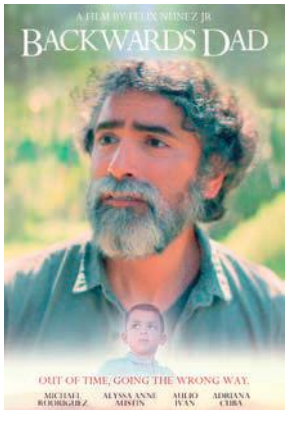
"We are the last real art house cinema in San Diego," Glenn Heath, Digital Gym Cinema's artistic director, explained during a recent interview. "Our mission is to show films from around the world; documentaries, international films, experimental films, repertory films, you know. And (San Diego) Film Week is part of that mission."

The festival, held annually since 2017, is the only one of its kind that exclusively showcases the city's film industry. Though the event is held at Digital Gym, it's operated by Film Consortium San Diego, a venture that helps promote and sustain local moviemaking.

"It kind of speaks to our mission in supporting local filmmakers and supporting local groups that are trying to find a place to present their work," Heath said of Digital Gym hosting the film festival, "because outside of the multiplexes, there's not a lot of options for them.

"We have become a kind of a great spot, a great place for people who are local filmmakers, student filmmakers, (to) screen their films for audiences," he added.

As part of this year's event, four feature films and dozens of shorts that have a local connection will be screened under the guidance of the festival's curator, Film Consortium founder and president Jodi Cilley.



Poster for 'Backwards Dad.' (Image courtesy of Film Consortium San Diego)

Full-length films

The films to be screened are:

• "Better Call Babs," a documentary about the life of a local, Babs Fry as she finds redemption while recovering from addiction by dedicating her life to rescuing and rehabilitating lost pets and feral strays. Directed by Cam Lui and Michael Schnee. Run time: 90 minutes.

• "Backwards Dad," a fictional drama about a man who develops a condition that makes his mind age backwards. In the film, he races to confront a past love and meet the son he never knew before becoming too young to remember the son at all. Director: Felix Nunez. Run time: 120 minutes.

• "Fair Trade," about a group of adults who are outcasts in California's foster care system. They form a covert network to rescue abused children — only to cross a moral line by selling them into what they believe are better families. Directed by Vu Mai and Kevin Blakeley. Run time: 120 minutes.

• "Infernal," a fantasy film that follows Azrael, a man driven to rescue his wife. His journey through hidden truths and shifting allegiances ignites a struggle that will uncover something far greater than he ever imagined. Directors: Darien Andreas Brown, Brandon Self. Run time: 120 minutes.

Film shorts

The shorts range in length from two to 20 minutes and also will be screened each day. Some that may particularly resonate with local residents are:

• "Sunset Cliffs," a drama set in 2004 San Diego, revolving around a handful of students at (the fictional) Ocean Beach High School.

Celebrated San Diego designer Kenneth Barlis reaches Maximalism

By DIANA CAVAGNARO

SAN DIEGO — Kenneth Barlis has been on an extraordinary journey as a fashion designer since winning Fashion Week San Diego as a 19-year-old fashion student in San Diego.

"Doors opened up for me," Barlis said. "I was the first winner of FWSD. I won on my first try.

"I was just trying to be part of these amazing designers. Winning on my first competition was beyond excitement and gave me a lot more confidence on my vision as a designer."

His next big break came when he appeared as a contestant on Bravo's "Project Runway," season 19. His career continued to grow, attracting celebrity clientele such as Carrie Underwood, Kehlani, Offset, Janet Jackson, Zara Larsson, Troye Sivan, Iggy Azalea, RuPaul, and Bella Poarch.

"One of my favorite moments has to be working with Carrie Underwood. This whole year she has been wearing Kenneth Barlis. At the 'American Idol' finale, and then the stylish Blue Sapphire Mini Dress at the Super Bowl. Carrie Underwood is one of my faves!"

This talented designer, now 32, creates evening gowns, menswear, and bridal fashions, often incorporating his Filipino heritage into his designs, including elements inspired by the traditional malong. His creations feature bold, vibrant colors, exquisite craftsmanship, gorgeous embellishment, and intricate beading.

Barlis launched his label in 2012 and opened a design studio. In 2018, he established the KB School of Fashion, training young models for pageants, runway shows, and industry careers.

He has successfully worked with pageant queens from various international competitions including Miss Universe, Miss International, and Miss World. Recently, he was announced as an official judge for Miss USA.

"We work with so many girls who represent so many countries," Barlis said. "I love pageantry and the idea of empowering women. Every time I see women in my gowns, they feel so powerful and beautiful.

"I found every woman I work with has a different background. All have different stories to tell. I learn so much from them and am inspired to make my collections better. I help them and they help me to make the world better."



Kenneth Barlis at his fashion show last month in Mission Valley. (Photo by Diana Cavagnaro/Special for Times of San Diego)



Menswear designed by Kenneth Barlis. (Photo by Diana Cavagnaro/Special for Times of San Diego)

On Oct. 24, Barlis presented his biggest fashion show at the Legacy Resort Hotel in Mission Valley. The evening's theme was "Maximalism" with a "more is more and more is better" attitude. This spectacular 300-piece fashion show sold out, drawing a standing room-only crowd.

The collection showcased a rainbow of vibrant colors, beginning as actual customers took to the runway modeling his designs. The show unveiled his entire KB Collection.

Barlis also announced plans for a world tour featuring major cities around the world, along with the launch of additional products. Barlis plans to introduce a new menswear collection next year, following positive feedback from previous runway shows, including a successful appearance at Fashion Week in Canada.

"We have plans to introduce a new KB menswear collection next year," he said. "Popstar and influencer, Zara Larsson, recently wore KD menswear on the cover of Basic Magazine."

He also discussed an upcoming shoe collection designed to provide more comfortable heels for pageant contestants. Development will begin with the creation of molds in Asia and the samples are expected by the end of the year. They may potentially arrive in time as Christmas gifts for the pageant enthusiasts.

‘The Surge’s’ mature dancers translate Sinéad O’Connor’s music into movement

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — For choreographer Sonya Tayeh, the death of Irish rock icon Sinéad O’Connor kicked off a wave of grief and nostalgia. Tayeh danced to her music, remembering her first exposure to it in underground raves in Detroit as a teen.

And from that well of grief, she developed “The Surge: An Ode to Sinéad O’Connor,” coming to San Diego in November.

The resulting dance-theater concert is a poetic, not biographical, examination of O’Connor. It features her music, interspersed with excerpts from her memoir.

“In no way am I trying to, or would I ever try to define a life or explain a life,” Tayeh said. “I just want my body to remember what it means, from someone who (had) such a desire for righteousness and a desire for truth and a full life to live.”

Tayeh, 49, has a troupe of 10 women performing the ode. The dancers, ranging from their 40s to 60s, dance across church pews, exploring themes of mental health, spirituality and transformation.

O’Connor’s voice soared, “howling” in Tayeh’s estimation, and also had a grittiness to it, both vulnerable and strong at once. Translating that to dance meant balancing swirling movement with staccatos of sharp poses.

“We play with this broken undulation, and this static sharpness and twirling, whirling dervish energy — you know, like this whipping energy,” Tayeh explained. “There’s a volume in the physicality.

“It has a muscularity to it,” she further explains, “not a masculinity” but a muscularity “that these women carry.”

A few of the performers sport O’Connor’s shaved head, the lifelong buzzcut she wore to subvert pressure from music executives to showcase femininity in a certain way.

Casting mature dancers was important to Tayeh, who has witnessed them being locked out of opportunities over assumptions that age makes someone less.

“THE SURGE”

Where: Balboa Theatre. Tickets start at $59.

When: 7:30 p.m. Nov. 7.

O’Connor died in 2023 at age 56, having endured decades of media scrutiny and backlash for her stances, including opposing abuse in the Catholic church, while drawing attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis and women’s rights. Her activism did not ebb before her death.

“Especially for women, we are told that we should quiet down, close our world and make it smaller,” Tayeh said. “I just think that’s a hugely missed opportunity for artistic excellence.”

O’Connor, in addition to her unique voice and writing ability, was also praised for an uncompromising artistic vision. It’s something Tayeh is known for as well .Her commercial choreography credits range from work with pop icons like Miley Cyrus, Florence and the Machine and Kyle Minogue to the musical “Moulin Rouge!” and guest spots on “So You Think You Can Dance.”



Dancers Jennifer Nugent and Amy Miller in rehearsal. (Photo by Joseph DiGiovanna/ArtPower)

“Sinéad O’Connor was a voice of a generation, an artist who was never afraid to be exactly who she was,” Elizabeth Bradshaw, director of artistic programming at ArtPower at UC San Diego, said in a statement.

Live music this week: Thomas Dolby, and The Band tribute band

By BART MENDOZA
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

Thomas Dolby

Best known for a string of new wave hits, circa the early 1980s, British musician, Thomas Dolby, has cast a big shadow in music. Appearing at Music Box on Nov. 9, Dolby’s biggest hit was 1982’s quirky “She Blinded Me With Science,” but over the decades Dolby can also be found on hit recordings by the likes of Foreigner, Def Leppard, George Clinton, and Joni Mitchell. For this tour Dolby is performing the bulk of his 1988 album, “Aliens Ate My Buick,” but fans can rest assured he includes a cross section of songs from his early albums, including such dance floor favorites as “Hyperactive” and “May The Cube be With You.”

Thomas Dolby: Monday, Nov. 9, at Music Box, 1337 India St. 8 p.m. $56 and up.

Chunky Hustle Brass Band

The sounds of New Orleans come to Balboa Park on Nov. 6 with an appearance from the Chunky Hustle Brass Band at Panama 66. In addition to their originals, the horn-focused, seven-piece band includes such expected standards as “St. James Infirmary” in their sets, but also occasionally throws in some fun curveballs, such as the “Sesame Street Theme.” Fans of jazz, blues and funk will enjoy the Chunky Hustle Brass Band’s music, with the bonus of the concert taking place in one of San Diego’s most scenic concert settings, Balboa Park’s sculpture garden.

Chunky Hustle Brass Band: Wednesday, Nov. 6, at Panama 66, 1450 El Prado. 6-8 p.m. No cover.

The Band tribute band

San Diego-based tribute to The Band, Chest Fever, will stage a version of their namesake bands classic “Last Waltz,” concert at the Belly Up Tavern on Nov. 12. At the original performance, which took place on Nov. 25, 1976, at Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco, The Band was joined by a host of musical luminaries, and the same will be true for this show. For this one-off event, Chest Fever is set to be joined by the likes of Kimmi Bitter, Mike Stax (The Loons), Isaiah Mitchell (Earthless), Nena Anderson and more. Fans of The Band’s music will enjoy Chest Fever’s versions of songs such as “The Weight,” “Up On Cripple Creek,” and “The Shape I’m In,” with the band managing to recreate period accurate sounds, as well as capture the spirit of the original recordings.

Chest Fever presents The Last Waltz: Thursday, Nov. 12, at The Belly Up Tavern, 143 S. Cedros Ave. 7 p.m. $45 and up.

Billy King and the Bad Bad Bad

Austin’s Billy King and the Bad Bad Bad take over the stage at The Casbah on Nov. 12. Mixing rock ‘n’ roll with psychedelia, as well as touches of surf and blues, as heard on their new single, “The Ballad of Backwoods Bobby,” Billy King and company deliver a heavy sound that has more than a bit of swagger in its grooves without sacrificing song hooks. Fans of groups such as The Black Crowes will find much to appreciate here. Opening the show are incendiary rockers The Film Company, and Bloo.

Billy King and the Bad Bad Bad: Thursday, Nov. 12, at The Casbah, 2501 Kettner Blvd. 8:30 p.m. $16.

Acoustic Evenings

Promoter Jefferson’s Jay’s popular Acoustic Evenings concert series is moving from the Athenaeum to the La Jolla Community Center, with the first show set for Nov. 6. For fans of the area’s singer-songwriter community, it doesn’t get much better than this. Each show features three of San Diego’s premier acoustic performers playing short sets, with this edition set to showcase music from Tim Flannery, Steve Bulman and Jay. All three artists are headliners, and worth a listen, but Flannery in particular is a gifted performer, with a wealth of excellent originals that cast his sound somewhere between Richard Thompson and late period Tom Petty.

Acoustic Evenings: Friday, Nov. 6, at the La Jolla Community Center, 6811 La Jolla Blvd. 7:30 p.m. $30.

Eternal Wave

Beach rock quartet Eternal Wave play at Beaumont’s on Nov. 7. Headquartered in Santa Barbara, the band has a slew of fun originals such as “Hippie Summer” and “I Just Wanna Surf.”



EAST VILLAGE NEWS

Dominic Li Mandri

Find creative nightlife and holiday festivities in East Village

The days are getting shorter and that means that there's more time for nightlife in East Village. This month's calendar is packed with arts and culture events, creative community activations and holiday festivities that spotlight the eclectic personalities that make up the East Village neighborhood.

Arts and culture and entertainment

As San Diego's largest downtown neighborhood, East Village is a hub for arts and culture with numerous music venues, art galleries, and community gathering places that are brimming with creativity this fall.

On Saturday, Nov. 7, Becoming Heirlooms: Artist Roundtable & Gallery Walk will be held at the Central Library from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The meet and greet will feature a roundtable conversation with artists from the exhibition, moderated by Craft Desert curators Kerianne Quick and Adam John Manly. Hear directly from the artists about their work, creative practices, and the ideas explored throughout the exhibition. Following the conversation, guests are invited to meet the artists and curators and join a guided gallery walk and talk.

Quartyard keeps East Village buzzing this month with a lively lineup of outdoor concerts, DJ sets and entertainment. Get your laughs in at Matt Stanton's 1,000th comedy show on Nov. 6. Dance the night away at R&B Block Party's Hip Hop Takeover on Nov. 21. And don't miss San Diego Freak Out Presents: *Triptophantasia* on Nov. 27, featuring Yasawa Group along with local artists Wild Wild Wets, Jackie Mendoza, and DJ Andrew McGranahan. With its open-air setting and eclectic programming, Quartyard offers plenty of reasons to spend an evening enjoying East Village's vibrant entertainment scene.

Now that the baseball season has wrapped, live music takes center stage at Petco Park.The lineup includes the seventh annual Día de los Deftones on November 7, featuring Deftones, The Neighbourhood, AFI and more across two stages. Electronic DJ Max Styler will also take over Gallagher Square on November 28.

Tree Lighting on Nov. 29

Come to see the holiday season in full swing at the East Village Tree Lighting on Sunday, Nov. 29 from 4 to 8 p.m. Spread the holiday cheer with live music, family-friendly activities, photos with Santa and the Christmas tree lighting led by the East Village Association and San Diego's elected officials. More details about this festive event to come!

For the latest updates on East Village Association, visit eastvillagesandiego.com and follow on Instagram @EastVillageSD, TikTok @EastVillageSD and Twitter @EastVillageSD.



LITTLE ITALY NEWS

Christopher Gomez

Kickoff the holiday season with cultural celebrations

Welcome the holiday season in Little Italy, where cultural celebrations, unique local shopping, and a vibrant neighborhood atmosphere set the stage for a festive November. From celebrating Italian heritage to discovering one-of-a-kind gifts from local makers, there are plenty of ways to experience the best of the neighborhood while supporting local businesses.

Celebrating Italian heritage in style

Celebrate San Diego's Italian heritage at San Diego FC's Italian Heritage Night on Saturday, Nov. 7 as the club takes on Sporting Kansas City. Presented in partnership with the Little Italy Association, Convivio and the Italian Cultural Center San Diego, the event offers fans a chance to celebrate Italian culture while cheering on the home team, with a special-edition "Forza San Diego FC" commemorative scarf included with designated ticket packages.

Also on Saturday, Nov. 7, Our Lady of the Rosary Italian Catholic Church, on State Street in Little Italy, will host its 87th annual Spaghetti Dinner from noon to 8 p.m. Enjoy great food, live entertainment, faith and community while also giving back to the neighborhood's local parish. Tickets are $25 for adults and $10 for kids and can be purchased online.

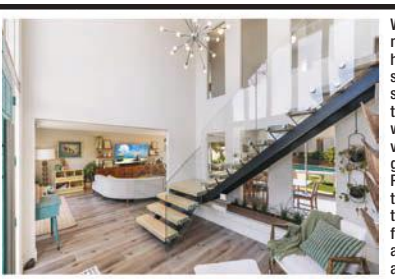
The celebration of Italian festivities continues Sunday, Nov. 8, when more than 30 new, classic, and rare Lamborghinis, will take over W. Date Street between Columbia and State streets and the Piazza della Famiglia for the Bulls of Sant'Agata Charge Little Italy in honor of Movember. Presented by the Little Italy Association in partnership with Lamborghini San Diego, the event runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and showcases Italy's most iconic supercars along with musical entertainment and a lively atmosphere!

Shop Small! Shop Little Italy!

As the holiday season quickly approaches, Little Italy makes shopping locally easy. Visitors can explore the neighborhood's many independent and locally-owned businesses to find gifts this holiday season. Discover clothing and accessories at Stroll, browse home décor and gifts at Vitreum, eco-conscious beauty and personal care items at Desert Rose Care Shop, unique collectables and gifts from Studio 1840 or explore the neighborhood's many other unique shops and galleries.

Discover a dynamic mix of women-owned businesses, local artisans, and one-of-a-kind treasures on Sunday, Nov. 22 at the Female Maker Market, monthly marketplace held in Little Italy's Piazza della Famiglia. Stroll through vibrant merchant booths featuring handmade goods, trendy fashion, wellness products, and unique gifts.

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Welcome to 5996 Bounty Street, a stunning mid-century modern home nestled in the highly desirable community of Del Cerro. This spacious 5-bedroom, 3-bathroom residence sits on over a quarter-acre lot and has been thoughtfully upgraded to blend timeless design with contemporary style. A dramatic two-story vaulted entryway showcases a striking floating glass-and-wood staircase and restored 1965 Palm Springs double doors, setting the tone for the vintage-meets-modern aesthetic throughout. The recently remodeled kitchen features white shaker cabinets, newer appliances, and opens seamlessly to a bright and airy floor plan enhanced by luxury vinyl wide plank flooring and expansive windows that flood the home with natural light. The family room offers a cozy gas fireplace, perfect for relaxed evenings. Step outside to enjoy the resort-style backyard with a sparkling swimming pool, low-maintenance turf areas, fruit trees, raised garden beds, and a fire pit for entertaining.
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Rotary's first Latino Mr. & Mrs. San Diego: A volunteer dynamic duo

By RON DONOHO
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Ted Martinez Jr., Ph.D., and Lidia S. Martinez, an amiable pair, spent time on Zoom recently talking about being named Mr. & Mrs. San Diego 2026 by the San Diego Rotary Club.

They're the first Latino couple chosen in the 72-year history of this award, given to locals who personify the organization's Service Above Self motto.

They laugh at the same jokes and sometimes finish each others' sentences and thoughts. Together for 44 years, including 27 years in San Diego and 15 in downtown's Marina District, Ted and Lydia both smile modestly when asked what it feels like to be Mr. and Mrs. San Diego.

They each have different service paths. But Lidia said they have an agreement.

"Between the two of us, if one of us says yes to something the other supports it 100 percent," she said. "It works for us. It helps that we really like each other. And organizations we support get double the pleasure."

They both volunteer for the USS Midway Museum. Sometimes when they attend Midway events, Ted goes as a board member and Lydia is his plus-one. Other times, Lydia is a corporate sponsor and Ted is her guest.

They both came from humble beginnings before gaining workplace success that led into volunteer and community work.

One of seven children, Ted grew up in a migrant farmworking family. As a youngster, a teacher helped him get into a college track. Ted went on to become a community college president and chancellor, and served at Grossmont College from 1997 to 2007.

In 2003, he founded the National Community College Hispanic Council Leadership Fellows Program. The organization helps emerging leaders gain access to mentorship and professional networking.

Ted said the program currently has 400 fellows in 28 states. And has helped launch the careers of 50 community college presidents and 70 vice presidents.

Lydia interjected: "There was the announcement of Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey. The former president of Palomar College, she became the deputy chancellor/provost for the Riverside Community College District. She was one of Ted's mentees."



Ted and Lidia Martinez. (Photo by Paul Nestor)

Ted nods. I ask how that made him feel. "Well, sentimental," he said.

"He cried," Lydia noted. "Ted's a crier."

Ted nodded, again. "Well, this was the intent of the program, and it is working."

During Lidia's 30 years with Southwest Airlines, she helped establish the company's multicultural affairs department. She's a first-generation college graduate, coming from a family of 11 siblings who received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from San Diego State University in 2022.

Today, through ¡Adelante! Strategies and her service on multiple nonprofit and civic boards, Lidia advises organizations on strategic partnerships, community engagement, leadership and philanthropy.

She also keeps busy working with organizations that support foster kids, address anti-poverty issues and run recovery homes for men and women.

"Lidia and Ted Martinez so wonderfully deserve this honor of being this year's Mr. & Mrs. San Diego," Rotary Foundation President (San Diego Rotary Club 33) Wendy Urushima-Conn said. "For decades, they have supported community members and organizations that uplift those [who] have been underserved and overlooked. And have lifted up new generations of leaders in our midst along the way."

The Rotary's Mr./Mrs./Ms. San Diego award dates back to 1952 when it was established by the Grant Club. Rotary took over the awards in 1976.

