

# MISSION TIMES COURIER

September 11 – October 12, 2026

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## Aztecs plan to inspire cheers



San Diego State cheerleaders show their spirit for the Aztecs at Snapdragon Stadium. SDSU has reduced season ticket prices as a way to boost fan turnout. See page 13 for more. (File photo by Chris Stone/Times of San Diego)

## COVER STORY

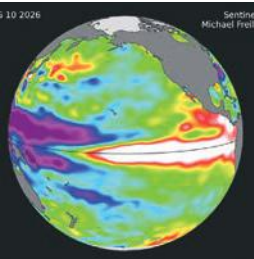
**Dailard Elementary School to celebrate 50 years of serving San Carlos community**

To honor Dailard Elementary's place in the San Carlos community, there will be a celebration for the school's semicentennial from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Sept. 26. The event program features student performances, the presentation of a time capsule and a timeline of old photos and yearbooks documenting the school's history. The Dailard School Foundation, a parent-teacher organization that organizes fundraisers and events for the school, is the main group working on the event. The celebration is open to current and former Dailard students, teachers, staff, families and community members. **PAGE 2**

## WEATHER

**What scientists know now about the 'Super' El Niño**

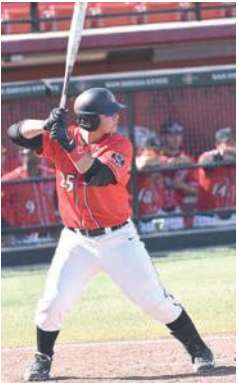
Scientists at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography have been studying the formation of this El Niño. For San Diegans, El Niño can mean more rain, bigger surf, coastal flooding and warmer ocean temperatures. **PAGE 8**



## SPORTS

**SDSU alum Ty France, last of MLB players guided by Coach Gwynn**

One of the feel-good stories of the year for the Padres is the emergence of once and future first baseman Ty France. He was drafted by the Padres, and is the last active Major League tie to San Diego great and Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn Sr. **PAGE 14**



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# Dailard Elementary in San Carlos celebrates 50 years

By Sean Monney  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

**SAN CARLOS** — When Dailard Elementary first opened its doors to students in 1976, Jeanie Grant Moore quickly enrolled her two daughters.

She lived, and still lives, only a block away from the San Carlos neighborhood school and was glad her daughters could now walk to school.

That year, Grant Moore's youngest daughter entered first grade.

Today, a half-century later, Grant Moore's great-granddaughter is now in first grade at Dailard.

"It's so exciting that it's been there for 50 years," she said. "I can't even believe we've been here for longer than 50 years in this house. But it kind of brings it all back, thinking about this."

To honor Dailard Elementary's place in

the San Carlos community, Grant Moore is now helping to organize a celebration for the school's semicentennial from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Sept. 26.

The celebration is open to current and former Dailard students, teachers, staff, families and community members.

The event program features student performances, the presentation of a time capsule and a timeline of old photos and yearbooks documenting the school's history.

Grant Moore dug up photos from the original dedication of the school, which is named after former San Diego Unified School District Superintendent Ralph Dailard.

She said the same lectern she photographed at the dedication ceremony in 1976 will be used for speakers at the 50th anniversary celebration.

"So in some ways, it has stayed a lot



**Dailard Elementary will hold a celebration from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Sept. 26.** (Photo by Dorian Hargrove/Times of San Diego)

the same," Grant Moore said.

The Dailard School Foundation, a parent-teacher organization that organizes fundraisers and events for the school, is the main group working on the event.

Janine Zuniga, co-communications chair for the foundation, said she's hoping the semicentennial will allow former

students to reconnect with one another and meet the younger generation of students and families.

"It's a really great community school," Zuniga said. "They really are focused on just making the best students, scholastically and all around."

Grant Moore said the neighborhood owes a lot of its community feel to the elementary school.

She said that when she moved to San Carlos in the 1970s, most of her neighbors had school-age children who walked to school and played in the streets.

"There was a kind of lapse in that community feeling for a while because the kids got up to a certain age and moved away," she said.

"But now, I think that's returned. We just seem to have a lot more younger people in the neighborhood than we did for a while."

## New lower speed limits rolling out with student safety a priority

By Drew Sitton  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

**SAN DIEGO** — Two events in the 2025-2026 school year reshaped how officials at all levels are moving to protect students on city streets with youngsters and teens back in class.

The first was the death of 11-year-old Andrew Olsen last October, and the injuries suffered by his siblings after a car hit the trio. They were crossing Jackson Drive in San Carlos on the way to Pershing Middle School.

The second was a law passed by the state legislature making way for local cities to lower their speed limits in critical zones, an action that once was banned.

### Lower speed limits

Subsequently, the San Diego City Council passed an ordinance lowering speed limits on 20% of the city's streets, including school zones, business districts, places with a history of fatalities and those with high traffic from pedestrians and cyclists. The plan accounts for 679 miles of the city's roads.

"There's a lot to implement in the plan," said city spokesperson Anthony

Santacrose. "We think school zones are most important to implement first."

Limits for the school zones will fall to 15-20 miles per hour around the schools, then 25 miles per hour in areas between 501 to 1,000 feet away from schools.

The effort to implement that ordinance began in July, with signs now in place to reflect the lower speed limits near schools in San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Nestor.

The city is continuing to update signs, moving in a general south to north direction. In August, crews are adding new signs in Southeast San Diego, and parts of downtown and adjacent areas like Barrio Logan. The peninsula, too, may get its signs this month. The next goal, for September, will be parts of mid-city, including City Heights, North Park and College Area.

Although transportation crews may face delays due to anticipated El Niño storms, the general plan is for all school zone speeds to be updated by the end of the school year.

Once the school zones are finished, the city will decide what to prioritize next, among the fatal corridors, business districts and high-pedestrian-traffic areas.

"We are glad that the city took the Vision Zero coalition's recommendation to prioritize reducing speeds in school

zones first," said Anar Salayev of Bike SD. "From there, we want to see similar treatments made on corridors that have a history of injuries and fatalities. Ultimately, we want to see material change made in these zones — beyond mere changes to speed limit signs."

### San Diego Unified survey

As the city worked on its plan to reduce speeds, the San Diego Unified School District began its own efforts to protect students traveling to and from school.

After Olsen's death, Superintendent Fabi Bagula surveyed every principal in the district, asking for recommendations on how to improve student safety.

"We believe that (the) road is a part of overall student wellness. If they don't feel safe in their commute to come to school, then we believe that impacts their wellness," said her chief of staff Enrique Ruacho. "The safest road in any city should be the road to school."

A few of the principals included in the survey, as well as parent organizations, had already advocated road improvements with their city council members. Bringing their changes into a comprehensive plan helped principals throw the

might of the school district behind them. discussions with the council offices.

"Too often, communities rely on their principals. Well, now you know they have the superintendent and our entire board focused on this issue," Ruacho said.

In July, the school district released the results of its survey in a report detailing over 100 traffic safety improvement ideas near schools, which officials described as "specific, place-based and actionable." The report included simple fixes, like repainting crosswalks, to more expensive interventions, like adding speed bumps or flashing lights at crosswalks.

"It has really created a stronger focus and a spotlight on improving traffic safety," Ruacho said.

Parents have expressed appreciation for the survey — and added suggestions of their own.

One-fifth of those 107 suggestions are on school property, but the rest require coordination with the city. Some of those fixes, like repainting, are underway, but other changes, like adding a new crosswalk, require a traffic study by the city and design before work can take place.

Continued on Page 3

# Friars Road Speedway: SDPD issued more speeding tickets on Friars than any other road

By Dorian Hargrove  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — San Diego Police issued more speeding tickets on Friars Road last year than any other street in the city.

That's not altogether new: Friars Road has led all thoroughfares for speeding-related citations every year since 2018. But SDPD officers have issued more speeding tickets on the road in 2025 than in any of the past eight years.

Data obtained and analyzed by Times of San Diego shows SDPD wrote 668 tickets along Friars Road last year. That accounted for only a slight increase over 2024, when police issued 634 speeding citations, but it was more than double the number of speeding tickets police wrote on Friars in 2023.

From 2018 through 2025, police issued an average of 506 speeding-related tickets anywhere on Friars Road.

But the vast majority of those — 68% — were issued in a four-block stretch from near the intersection with Qualcomm Way to just west of the Costco and IKEA shopping center on River Run Road.

That four-block stretch of Friars has the distinction of most tickets in the city, the single block in San Diego with the most speeding tickets issued was in South Bay, at Britannia Boulevard and Interstate

905 in Otay Mesa. Officers handed out 277 speeding-related infractions there last year.

The block with the second most tickets was 7800 Kearny Villa Road, near Miramar Air Force Base, between State Route 163 and Pomerado Road, with 240 citations. The third-highest block was 8900 Friars Road, with 235 speeding tickets issued last year.

In all, San Diego Traffic officers wrote approximately 6,266 speeding-related tickets in 2025, the highest since 2021, when officers issued 6,525 speeding infractions.

Speeding, according to findings from the California Highway Patrol, is one of the leading causes of accidents statewide. "Speeding continues to be one of the leading causes of serious and fatal crashes on California's roadways," said CHP Commissioner Sean Duryee in an April statement. "When drivers choose to exceed safe speeds, they reduce their ability to react and increase the risk for everyone on the road. Slowing down is one of the simplest steps that drivers can take to protect themselves and others."

Meanwhile in San Diego, elected officials and staff released a speed management plan in February 2026, aimed at reducing speeds on city roads to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries.

## Student safety a priority

Continued from Page 2

"Those sorts of requests take much longer," Ruacho said. "The biggest roadblock is always going to be funding, especially as, much like the city, we're experiencing tighter deficits that we have to grapple with."

In Washington, D.C., San Diego Unified lobbyists are pushing for the district to receive \$2 million in funding to implement those changes. The costliest proposal would be a \$750,000 concrete wall along the west side of Washington Elementary, in Little Italy, near an off-ramp.

Other ideas are less expensive, like \$100,000 to light Foster Elementary's parking lot in Allied Gardens and \$50,000 to mark and add signs at a

designated pick up/drop off spot at Cabrillo Elementary in Point Loma.

For now, the city transportation department is looking at the recommendations and seeing what is feasible.

"We're step by step going through everything that they've recommended," Santacroce said. "The ultimate goal is the safety of the children, the school children, and the members of the community who are in and around the school. The goal is safety. So there's no 'no's.' We're evaluating everything."

## State response

Beyond this local movement, student safety is getting attention at the state level too. The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) launched its "ABCs for School Zone Safety" campaign, running throughout August.

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# AMALY offers community resilience through Muslim-centered therapy

By Brooke Binkowski  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — A pair of Palestinian Muslim friends had already decided on their niche in 2020, as the world was upended and traumatized by the COVID-19 pandemic.

San Diegans Halima Said and Amira Abudiab said they began the nonprofit AMALY, which is Arabic for “my hope,” because they saw an urgent need for Muslim-centered, culturally responsive mental health care.

Then came May’s targeted attack at the Islamic Center of San Diego.

## Doing the work

To be Muslim in America is to occupy a highly unique cultural space, one that can be simultaneously isolating and difficult to explain to those who are not Muslim or of Middle Eastern descent.

Compounding the issue is the fact that while Muslim therapists certainly exist, many do not advertise themselves as such, and Muslims seeking help often receive

negative assumptions and criticism of their faith from non-Muslim therapists that can badly affect their mental health.

Co-founder Halima Said, also a licensed therapist and Muslim of Palestinian descent who grew up in Imperial Valley, said that while AMALY is intended for everyone, they specialize in therapy for the Muslim and Middle Eastern communities.

“Amira and I are both from the Muslim community in San Diego,” Said said. “[We] recognized there was a need.”

Said received her master’s degree from San Diego State University, where she was a graduate of the Community-Based Block Multicultural Community Counseling and Social Justice Education master’s program.

“I feel very passionate about bringing the work back to the community I grew up in,” said AMALY co-founder Amira Abudiab, 32.

“I was ready to go into the field — really wanting to learn everything — so I could bring it to our community in a way that culturally made a lot of sense, and so I did a lot of training in severe mental illness.”

Abudiab is a licensed therapist who did much of her early work at crisis



AMALY social media discusses the prevalence of stress. (Image courtesy AMALY.org)

residential centers before opening AMALY with her friend Said.

“San Diego is also unique in that we get a lot of refugees as well,” said Abudiab. “People that are coming from war, needing to escape something... there’s a lot of trauma there.”

## More personal

The need for work such as AMALY’s was thrown into sharp relief by the shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego, in which three community members were killed.

After the attack, the work became even more personal for the organization.

Halima Said attends the Islamic Center of San Diego, and Amira Abudiab attended school there as a child. In the days after the attack, they hosted virtual and in-person therapy sessions for those affected, as well as healing circles.

That is another way that their beliefs set them apart as therapists. “We do healing circles, we do believe in collective healing.... For the most part we always try to be prepared to deal with a crisis,” added Said.

AMALY also specializes in suicide prevention, as suicidal ideation can vary by culture and is sometimes not recognizable to people outside it, as well as severe mental illness and cultural humility training to help non-Muslims understand the stereotypes, stigmas, and microaggressions often directed at Muslims.

“This training was created because other clinics would do Middle Eastern educational training on us, and I would sit in on those and think it was horrible because it spread more stereotyping,” said Said.

Continued on Page 5

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# Family of SDSU grad, who died after rollercoaster ride, settles suit

By Dorian Hargrove  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The family of a San Diego State University graduate who died after suffering a brain injury from riding a Six Flags Magic Mountain's rollercoaster in 2022 has settled their lawsuit against the theme park.

Christopher Hawley's family confirmed that a settlement was reached weeks before trial was set to begin in Los Angeles.

Hawley, 22, visited the park in June 2022 with his younger brother and cousin.

He was the sole rider in his row on the rollercoaster X2, one of the theme park's top attractions. The family's lawsuit states that the ride was unusually rough, jerking riders "around like rag dolls" before coming to an abrupt stop.

After exiting the ride that day, the family's complaint says Hawley had trouble walking, holding onto the railing. He told his brother and his cousin that his head hurt moments before slouching to the ground and losing consciousness.

At the hospital, doctors found that Hawley had sustained a massive brain bleed, the blood pushing his brain out of its normal position. He died on June 24, 2022, one day later.

According to the family's lawsuit, the coroner determined Hawley's death was from "head trauma" that he sustained from a "park ride accident."

The family sued Six Flags and the company



Christopher Hawley, left. (Photo courtesy of the Hawley family)

that designed the ride in August 2023.

After three years of litigation, on Thursday, weeks before trial was set to begin, the family and the theme park agreed to settle for an undisclosed amount.

"The attorneys at Wisner Baum LLP handling the case for the Hawley family confirmed that the matter has been resolved," reads a statement from the law firm. "The family is pleased with the outcome. At this time, they respectfully request privacy as they bring this case to a conclusion and move forward together."

While the settlement may allow Hawley's family some closure, the park continues to deal with safety complaints and injuries on the X2 coaster.

A recent investigation from CNN found that two women suffered brain injuries in July of this year after riding X2; one of them is still in a coma.

Six Flags Theme Parks did not respond to a request for comment on the settlement.

## AMALY

Continued from Page 4

Then there's the quotidian issues that come from simply living through 2026 in the United States, such as eating disorders or addiction, or mental illness. These are just as present in the Muslim community as they are everywhere else.

"We just don't talk about it," said Abudiab. "Most people from our community don't utilize these resources." Sometimes that is due to not understanding how the system works, she said; sometimes it's due to a bad experience, and sometimes it's pressure coming from within the community itself.

## Virtual and in-person care

AMALY offers in-person therapy sessions as well as virtual ones. These are held at SDSU's Center for Community Counseling and Engagement, or CCCE, in City Heights.

They offer three types of services: Individual and family therapy, workshops and training, and community and group sessions.

"And that is our way of trying to cover as much as possible," said Abudiab.

The care they offer is also supported by the non-governmental organization Islamic Relief, providing resources that the organization has been unable to receive from San Diego.

Read more at timesofsandiego.com.

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## Peters wants the feds to build a large-scale carbon removal system

By Alysa Horton  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rep. Scott Peters is part of a legislative push to tackle climate change by removing carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere.

He's a co-sponsor of the Carbon Dioxide Removal Leadership Act of 2026, a bill proposed in both chambers of Congress that would require Secretary of Energy Chris Wright to create a robust carbon removal regime within his department.

"San Diego will face the effects of climate change from sea level rise, more intense wildfires, and flooding, which we've seen over the past couple decades," Peters said in an interview with Times of San Diego. "It's important for the federal government to do what we can to lower emissions and slow the rate of climate change."

The bill has five main components: increase carbon removal, create a rigorous tracking and reporting program for that removal, lower the removal cost over time, support new technology generation and create domestic jobs that serve local communities.

Erin Burns, the executive director of Carbon180, said California and its leaders have been on the frontline of carbon removal efforts and advancement.

"Peters (is a) huge carbon removal advocate ... He's been thinking about this and how it can help folks in San Diego," she said. "California has a lot of amazing carbon removal leadership in general."

Carbon180 is a national carbon removal advocate, pushing the federal government to embrace policies and projects that remove carbon at a gigaton scale — that is, billions of tons each year. Erin Burns said the scale Carbon180 is trying to help achieve is "what climate models show we need ... especially now."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that limiting global warming to 1.5 to 2°C will require urgently cutting greenhouse gas emissions and removing substantial amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

The Carbon Dioxide Removal Leadership Act of 2026 supports the potential development of future carbon dioxide removal technologies, while currently focusing on direct air capture — where giant fans pull in surrounding air and pass it through chemical filters at an industrial plant.



Rep. Scott Peters. (File photo by Thomas Murphy/Times of San Diego)

Peters said that desire for new technologies could be an economic development opportunity for the San Diego region.

"We don't have a lot of heavy industry in San Diego," he said. "There are opportunities for things like direct air capture ... and that's something that does require a lot of a lot of land. That's something that could be set up in our county as well as any place else."

Wil Burns, the co-director of the Institute for Responsible Carbon Removal at American University, warned direct air capture can be complicated because of the need for ongoing storage.

"You have to have areas underground geologically that are stable enough that you can store the CO<sub>2</sub> for long periods of time, so it doesn't leak into groundwater or end up back in the ground," he said. "You need pipelines or other things to get the CO<sub>2</sub> from where you've captured it to where it's going to be stored, unless you're lucky enough to have a direct air capture plant that's just right above areas that you can store the CO<sub>2</sub> — that's not usually what happens."

The institute looks at developing technologies for carbon removal, like enhanced rock weathering, which can permanently store carbon, unlike direct air capture.

Enhanced rock weathering spreads finely ground rocks rich in magnesium and silicon over soil. As the rocks react with rainwater and CO<sub>2</sub>, they break down and convert the CO<sub>2</sub> into stable bicarbonates and carbonates, locking the carbon away — a permanent storage.

Any carbon removal efforts need support from states and the federal government, Wil Burns said. He said the need for governmental action is to keep pace with the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change's projections and rising global temperatures.

"We have to aggressively decarbonize the economy, stop putting more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, but we also have to take huge amounts out of the atmosphere if we're going to meet these temperature goals," Wil Burns said. "There's no turning back from that, and the question is 'How do we get to those huge levels that we're nowhere near at this point in the longer term?'"

Erin Burns — she and Wil Burns are not related — said the carbon removal needed to combat emissions will require multiple strategies.

"You can create a carbon removal project, or you can create lots of kinds of them, (but) can you actually get to that gigaton scale? ... because if we're only going to remove a couple million tons, frankly, we're kind of wasting our time," she said. "That's not going to get us to any meaningful impact on climate."

She pointed to a game called Road to Ten Gigatons, developed by her colleagues, to show the difficulty of balancing the different carbon removal approaches to remove 10 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere by 2050.

"(Carbon removal is) really not one thing. It's this really broad set of approaches, and some of them work well, and some of them — the best way to frame it is ... Can it work at scale? Can it work in a way that matters for climate?" Erin Burns said.

Wil Burns said carbon removal is one of the least politically controversial tactics to combat climate change.

"It's one of the few things that the (Trump) administration has not been openly hostile to," he said. "It's a mixed bag, but it means that there is a possibility that this legislation could go through and the president could sign it."

Still, neither Wil Burns nor Erin Burns believe the bill will pass right now. Both said they believe the timing and political climate will hold this bill back.

"To be honest, I think it's less about how people feel about CDRLA and more about, are we gonna — how much are we gonna pass at all?" Erin Burns said. "We're just not doing that in Congress right now, especially on climate. What I am optimistic about is that, despite the fact that we're not doing that, the support and enthusiasm for carbon removal in Congress has not waned."

# City’s aging stormwater system requires repairs before El Niño

By Drew Sitton  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — As warnings of a potentially historic El Niño mount, city crews are fast at work preparing for the unknown. Workers in the city’s Stormwater Department are tasked with clearing a record number of stormwater channels to prepare for potential flooding, along with replacing flood control gates in Mission Beach and conducting emergency repairs on stormwater pumps and generators. On Aug. 20, city directors for the Office of Emergency Services, Stormwater and Infrastructure updated councilmembers on the Environment Committee about their departments’ work to try to prepare the city for what could be a historic El Niño weather pattern. Assistant Chief Robert Rezende from the Office of Emergency Services noted that sharing the plan with the council was the first step in the city’s preparation for what would be the strongest El Niño since before 1950. “This is not the culmination or the end

point of the preparedness that we’re doing,” Rezende told committee members. “It’s not that it’s done. It’s really just getting started.” Preliminary preparations began in June, when the city formed a large working group with employees from 24 departments. The group was tasked with identifying gaps in past flood responses and preparing the city as much as possible for potential floods. The working group, said Rezende, also used an audit of the city’s response to floods in January 2024 that destroyed dozens of homes in South San Diego. During the Aug. 20 Environment Committee meeting, department leaders said the working group has identified 50 projects and is working towards improving communication and coordination between departments, agencies and the public. At least one councilmember on the committee expressed concern that the city needs to focus on infrastructure needs. “The city has launched a website. A website is not gonna solve the city’s inadequate storm drain system,” said council president Joe LaCava.



Flooded and road closed signs in Mission Valley. (File photo by Adrian Childress/Times of San Diego)

One of the most concerning obstacles the city faces, however, is finding the funds needed to pay for the preparations and improvements. Those budget constraints can be seen clearly in the case of the “sandbag working group.” While the group has prepared a plan, found a vendor and secured a storage area to fill 100,000 sandbags to hand out to residents, it has yet to find \$300,000 to execute the plan, which will take two months to complete. That is only one of many El Niño-related projects that face budget uncertainties.

Despite using low-interest federal loans, known as WIFIA, to design a replacement for the city’s largest stormwater pump in Old Town, the city does not have funds to actually replace it. In addition, the Jamacha Waterway Revitalization Project is in the design phase too, but the city needs \$100 million to complete the project. The stormwater department, meanwhile, began inspecting and clearing important stormwater drains when the fiscal year began. Much of the maintenance focus has been on areas fixed around Chollas Creek that were reconstructed after the January 2024 flood. Despite this, stormwater director Todd Snyder had a grim outlook on the upcoming winter weather. Snyder noted that very few of the city’s channels and drains have the capacity to handle a 100-year storm, which is a measure of a large amount of rainfall within a short period of time, such as two inches within three hours in San Diego. Only 17% of channels are sized to handle a 100-year storm and only one of the city’s 15 pump water stations was designed for a 100-year storm.



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# 'Super' El Niño – what scientists know now and what to learn

By Thomas Murphy  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — As San Diego city workers prepare for a potentially historic “super” El Niño, some scientists say it’s still too early to tell if San Diego and Southern California are in for historic rainfall and flooding.

Scientists at UC San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography have been studying the formation of this El Niño. Researchers published a new, multi-part FAQ guide explaining what El Niño is, why this year’s event could be unusually strong and how scientists are tracking it.

For San Diegans, El Niño can mean more rain, bigger surf, coastal flooding and warmer ocean temperatures. But scientists say it’s still too early to know exactly what this year’s event will mean, particularly when predicting rainfall and flooding.

Historically, El Niño has increased the odds of wetter weather across Southern California, but the strength of an El Niño and actual rainfall in San Diego are not always intertwined.

One thing researchers do agree on is that forecast models reveal a moderate-to-large El Niño this year, with some suggesting it could be the largest in the 150-year historical record.

So, what exactly should San Diegans expect this year?

## WHAT IS THE EL NIÑO–SOUTHERN OSCILLATION?

El Niño is a natural climate pattern that begins thousands of miles away in the tropical Pacific Ocean. When water near the equator becomes unusually warm, it can alter weather patterns around the world.

El Niño is one of two dominant weather

patterns in the Pacific. While El Niño occurs when warm water builds up, the opposite pattern, La Niña, occurs when cooler water gathers in the region.

Southern California typically experiences drier conditions during La Niña. The two patterns are part of a larger climate cycle known as the El Niño–Southern Oscillation.

In the case of El Niños, rising temperatures weaken the east-to-west trade winds that normally push warm surface water westward across the Pacific. As those winds weaken, warmer waters remain and build up in the east. Higher ocean surface temperatures affect the air above, creating more intense storms.

“The tropics are like the engine room of the Pacific,” Shang-Ping Xie, a Scripps professor of climate science, wrote. “Heat in the tropics drives global atmospheric circulation. In that sense, variations in the tropical Pacific like El Niño can have huge impacts on global weather patterns.”

One key measure is whether sea-surface temperatures in specific areas of the Pacific on the equator remain at least 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit above average. Those sea-surface temperatures are now what federal agencies are monitoring.

Sea-surface temperatures in the region are 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above average, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, putting the odds of a very strong El Niño during fall and winter at greater than 90%.

While the presence of an El Niño is a certainty, its impact on Southern California and beyond is not as certain.

“It does not necessarily mean that the event will have a huge impact on our own weather in the U.S. during the upcoming fall and winter,” said Scripps researcher



Graduate students in Scripps Institution of Oceanography retrieve a mooring off the coast of Del Mar, which measures the temperature and salinity of the ocean. (Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego)

Art Miller. “Calling this a Super El Niño simply refers to the magnitude of the event in the tropical Pacific.”

More often than not, El Niños have resulted in stronger and more frequent winter storms for San Diego County.

“We’re keenly interested in this 2026–27 strongly developing El Niño because some previous strong cases, like the massive events in 1982–83 and 1997–98, were among the wettest years on record in California,” Scripps climate researcher Dan Cayan wrote.

“While we might partially attribute elements of individual storms to El Niño, we are left with statistical odds, rather than precise yes or no characterizations,” Cayan continued.

For residents along Chollas Creek in Southcrest — a neighborhood that suffered severe flooding during the January 2024 storms — another strong El Niño raises concerns that San Diego could see similar flooding again.

Preparations are already underway. The Office of Emergency Services

has formed an El Niño working group with representatives from city departments and public safety agencies to coordinate how the city prepares for storms, responds to emergencies and communicates with the public.

## WHAT SHOULD SAN DIEGANS DO NOW?

City officials recommend that residents make an emergency plan, prepare an emergency kit, sign up for emergency alerts and check whether their homes are in or near flood-prone areas.

These areas include Chollas Valley, Sorrento Valley, Mission Valley and the Tijuana River Valley, according to city maps.

The city says 15,000 acres and more than 6,900 structures are located in FEMA-designated flood-hazard areas. Officials also warn that flooding can occur outside those designated zones.

Residents should also know their evacuation routes and never attempt to drive or walk through floodwater.

The Office of Emergency Services has launched an El Niño HYPERLINK (“https://www.sandiego.gov/elniño”) preparedness webpage with information about flood risks, emergency preparation and alerts.

But it does mean there is enough uncertainty — and enough potential for extreme weather — that officials will continue preparing before the first major storm arrives.

## COASTAL FLOODING

Potential heavy rainfall is not the only danger of the oncoming El Niño. Changes in ocean temperatures, waves and storm patterns can increase coastal flooding and accelerate erosion, particularly during high tides.

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# City leaders urge residents to prep for flooding due to El Niño

By Drew Sitton  
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — It's here, and it's big: 2026 is the year of the potentially record-breaking Super El Niño.

Nearly every city department was on hand at Balboa Park recently to explain the city's preparations for heavier-than-normal storms and flooding — while urging residents to do their own readiness work, too.

"The city is doing everything we can to be prepared, and we're asking for your partnership in doing the same," Mayor Todd Gloria said. "You do your part. We do ours."

The Office of Emergency Services, Police, Fire-Rescue, Transportation, Stormwater, Homelessness Strategies and Solutions, Environmental Services, Performance & Analytics, and Communications, among others, were in attendance alongside elected officials.

In other words, the entire city is preparing in case of a potential natural disaster.

"The leaders and subject matter experts behind me represent our city's unified approach to preparedness," said Fire Chief Robert Logan. "But preparedness doesn't start and stop with city departments. We're asking San Diegans to prepare with us."

The cross-section of department officials reflected the city-wide action being taken ahead of expected extreme weather conditions this fall and winter, with the warm water in the Pacific from El Niño expected to drive heavy rains and fast flooding.

"If you've seen flooding in the past in your neighborhood, expect the same, or perhaps even worse during El Niño," said Council President Joe LaCava. "We need residents and businesses to take steps now."



Fire chief Rob Logan addresses the media during a press conference on preparing for El Niño weather. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

## EMERGENCY SERVICES

Partners from other jurisdictions were in attendance too, including the county's emergency response team.

In addition, Assistant Fire Chief Robert Rezende announced that a meteorologist from the National Weather Service, Felix Castro, will also be embedded in the Office of Emergency Services.

"(Emergency planners) have worked tirelessly alongside staff from nearly every city department to get us ready for El Niño, to ensure a citywide preparedness to handle whatever comes our way. We're not taking this weather event lightly," Rezende said. "Residents need to take steps to stay ready too."

He urged residents to research whether they are in a FEMA flood zone, build a to-go kit with three days of supplies, create an evacuation plan and stay informed by signing up for Alert San Diego emergency notices. Then, when the storms hit, never drive or walk through flooded areas and move to higher ground if flooding is a threat. "If an evacuation order is issued, that is

not the time to make a plan. It is the time to execute your existing plan," Rezende said.

The city launched an El Niño webpage to detail how to prepare for the expected extreme weather and connect residents with resources.

"Preparedness is a shared responsibility because when we prepare together, San Diego is stronger and safer," Logan said.

The fire chief said he was proud that OES reorganized to fall under the Fire-Rescue department because it "strengthens the connection between citywide emergency planning and operational response."

During storms, transportation and stormwater staff will patrol neighborhoods, ready to address clogged drains or other issues that arise.

First responders also have heavy-duty equipment on hand for rescues.

## INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE

One aspect of getting ready for heavy rains is clearing drains and maintaining stormwater channels, pipes and pump stations.

"We've really accelerated maintenance on all of those," said Todd Snyder, director of the city's Stormwater Department.

Before 2024, he said the city typically cleared four stormwater channel segments per year. In the budget for fiscal year 2027, the department plans to clear 67 segments, accounting for 20 miles. To do that, crews are out six days a week for 12 hours per day.

"That's historically far and above anything that we've ever done before," Snyder said.

After the January 2024 floods, San Diego increased its investment in the stormwater system. Multiple capital improvement projects are underway to replace aging infrastructure.

Long-term, the city is upgrading an aging system.

The city took out a \$733 million low-interest federal loan from the Environmental Protection Agency to pay for upgrades to the system, but those dollars are expected to run out long before the system is fully upgraded. Those take years though, with current stormwater systems not up to the task.

"Our stormwater system faces a \$5 billion funding gap over the past five years," LaCava said. "But I have never seen a city hall under this leadership move more quickly to understand the nature of stormwater, our infrastructure and the potential impact to residents and our businesses."

However, even with the boost in maintenance, as well as several ongoing capital improvement projects in the stormwater system, it won't be enough amid the scale of predicted rains and how old the system is.

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# Taste of College Area returns for third annual tasting event

By Sean Monney  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Taste of College Area returns Sunday, Sept. 27 for its third year, bigger than ever and featuring even more restaurants, coffee shops and bars.

The self-guided tasting tour includes 19 of the College Area and Rolando's best eateries and coffee houses, where ticket holders can sample a variety of drinks and dishes.

Tickets are \$40 and can be purchased online through the College Area Business District, the nonprofit putting on the event.

Jim Schneider, the organization's executive director, said he hopes to get both locals and people who live outside the neighborhood introduced to new restaurants.

"This highly undiscovered neighborhood of College Area and Rolando has got a lot to offer," he said.

"The bars, restaurants and all the amenities here are not just focused on college students. Normal people can come here, too."

Schneider said this tasting event is the result of years of work growing the businesses in the district by supporting some of them through the COVID-19 pandemic and providing assistance with bookkeeping.

"We gained a lot of goodwill out of that whole effort," he said. "The businesses knew us better, and we wanted to find ways to bring people back into their shops."

Schneider said Taste of College Area, first held in 2024, was one of their ideas to increase traffic to neighborhood restaurants.

"Second year was about double the success, if you look at it from a financial perspective and the number of people that came," he said. "This year we're hoping to do that one more time."

The tasting event includes new spots like Love Letters Pizza, Mesa Bar and Grill, and Dessert Castle, as well as decades-old neighborhood staples like Woodstock's Pizza and Sala Thai.

The business district stretches from 55th to 73rd Street, so the event has hired four Old Town Trolleys to shuttle

### Participating businesses

- Barlando
- Boxing Crab
- Charoen Krung Thai Cuisine
- Cheba Hut
- Dessert Castle
- Dirty Birds
- Himalayan Yak & Yeti
- Love Letters Pizza

- Majorette
- Penelope's Mexican Food
- Pokedon
- Sala Thai
- Scrimshaw Coffee
- Smashburger
- Tajima
- The Mesa Bar & Grill
- Tokyo Sushi Loha
- Woodstock's Pizza
- Yogurtland

event-goers along El Cajon Boulevard, stopping at different restaurant hubs.

"The whole idea behind that is to get on the trolley, have a whole bunch of people that may or may not know each other, talking about the event, sharing their experiences, and then getting dropped off at a place where you can walk to a few restaurants," he said.

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# From ocean to grill: A taste of 100s Seafood Grill

By Robin Dohrn-Simpson  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

**MISSION VALLEY** — If you have the urge for fresh seafood, bring your appetite and head over to 100s Seafood Grill Buffet. It's centrally located under the 805 bridge on Camino del Rio South in Mission Valley, and has easy access with plenty of free parking. The name of the restaurant reflects the variety of seafood and grilled meat options.

"Maybe the name came from having 100 items in our all-you-can-eat buffet," said manager Remus Poon.

The ultra-modern decor features a stunning chandelier centerpiece of hundreds of lights, highlighting the main buffet. The restaurant is expansive, with seating for around 400 people. There are many large tables for larger parties. This is perfect for a family gathering. Just be aware that they don't take reservations for parties of fewer than 10 people.

The seafood is plentiful, with plates of mussels, shrimp, crab legs, oysters, octopus, and much more.

"We have 15 different sushi rolls every day. We also have Teppanyaki, cooked and prepared for you by Japanese swordsmen chefs. Choose your ingredients from a variety of options and watch them being grilled while you watch," Poon said.

For those who don't want seafood, not to worry; there is a huge assortment of grilled meats such as chicken, ribs, steak and prime rib.

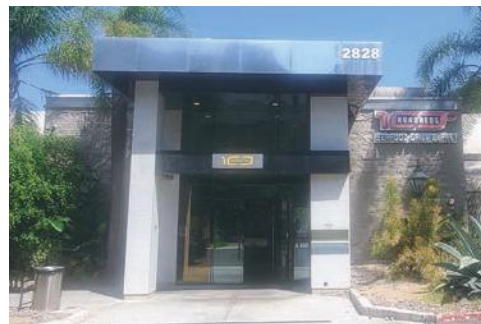
The hot food section changes regularly, but generally you can find orange chicken, green beans, and roast duck.

Also, multiple garden salads, kale salad, quinoa salad, mushroom salad, Caesar salads, spicy octopus salad, spicy seafood salad, and platters full of fresh seasonal fruits. There are plenty of choices for vegetarians.

Every Thursday is all-you-can-eat lobster night. Baked lobster with mayonnaise sauce.

"We receive a new shipment of Maine lobster weekly, just in time for Thursday's lobster feast," Poon said.

If it's possible for you to massage your stomach to find extra room for dessert, you can enjoy a separate buffet of delicacies.



**100s Seafood Grill at 2828 Camino del Rio South.** (Photo by Robin Dohrn-Simpson/Special for Times of San Diego)



**The main buffet island.** (Photo by Robin Dohrn-Simpson/Special for Times of San Diego)

Desserts include Crème Brûlée, cheesecakes, and plates full of cookies. Oh, and don't forget the 44-inch tall chocolate fondue tower. Try the gelato counter with about 10 different flavors.

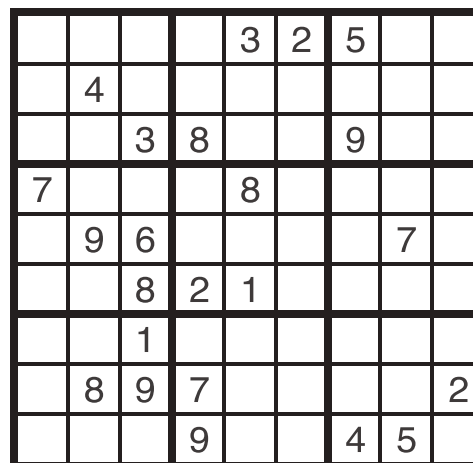
Prices for the Lobster evening are different than those for the other days. There is children's pricing also for ages 3-11, and a small assortment of child-friendly foods. Drinks are extra for everyone. They also offer to-go options if you want to have a buffet at home.

Prices vary depending on what you order. Seniors and Military personnel (active duty and veterans only, not their family members, though) can receive a 10% discount.

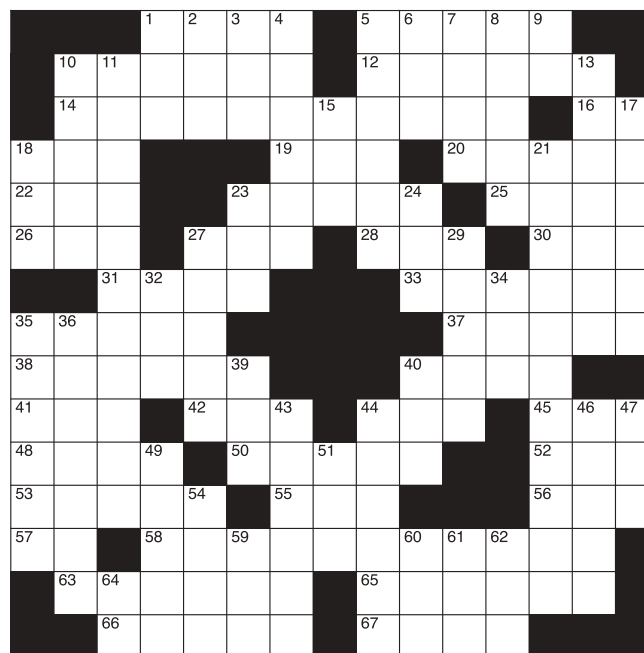
There are also discounts for dining on your birthday (ID required).

They are open Mondays-Fridays (except Tuesdays) from 4-9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday hours are noon-9 p.m. Located at 2828 Camino del Rio South. Call for reservations for groups of 10 or more at 619-906-4886.

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### CLUES ACROSS

1. Longtime Vogue editor Wintour
5. A Spanish title of respect
10. A way of looking
12. Properly
14. Rolled steel
16. Not down
18. Law degree
19. Consume food
20. Intermediate ecological stage
22. Old world, new
23. Dispense justice
25. Stiff hair-like structure

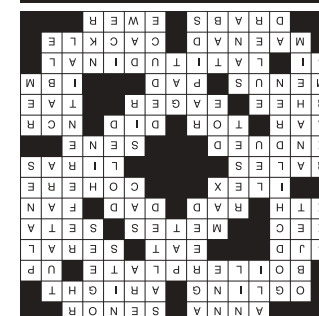
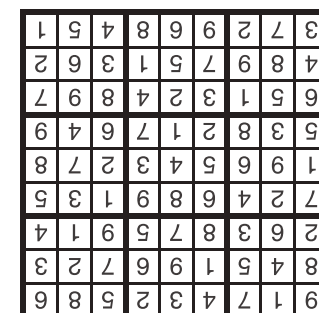
48. Syngman \_\_\_\_, Korean president
50. Very willing
52. Arctic explorers (abbr.)
53. Food listings
55. Bachelor's place to crash
56. Big Blue
57. Sports magazine
58. Relating to a place north of south of the equator
63. Female follower of Bacchus
65. A type of laugh
66. Slovenly women
67. Large jug

### CLUES DOWN

1. Boxing's GOAT
2. Zero
3. Midway between north and northeast
4. Concurred
5. Added flavor
6. Amount of time
7. Eggs of parasitic insects
8. S-shaped moldings
9. Atomic #45
10. \_\_\_d'art: small artistic item
11. A godparent's "kids"
13. Nocturnal burrowing lizard

15. Hit lightly
17. Aircrafts
18. Witness
21. Alluding to something
23. Take to the limit
24. Baglike structure in a plant or animal
27. Start over
29. Administered
32. Romanian monetary unit
34. Unit of liquid capacity
35. Equip with weapons again
36. Disney town
39. Female deer
40. Title of respect
43. A place to go rafting
44. A way to conclude
46. Type of television
47. Georgia rockers
49. Leonhard \_\_\_\_, Swiss mathematician
51. Slang for gun
54. River in Bosnia and Herzegovina
59. Bar bill
60. Small, gray-headed crow
61. Frozen water
62. Norwegian krone
64. Commercial

## ANSWERS



# So you think you can dance with AI? An SDSU professor is giving it a go

By Eileen Mamaghani  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Within SDSU's dance department, professors like Joseph Alter are using artificial intelligence as a tool for step-by-step instruction.

In dance, choreography ideas can come easily, but explaining the steps doesn't always make sense. So Alter found a fix for this through AI.

Alter, a professor of dance, said he creates "web-based apps that serve as visual learning tools for students."

Using generative AI, Alter can command animated stick-figures to perform jumps and pliés in a combination of steps. Other times, he'll bounce ideas off the platform or sequence choreography.

"I try to fashion things for students that bring them into new places, rather than repeating, reiterating things they already know," Alter said.

But Alter said he understands the limitations of AI, especially within a creative field such as dance.

He'll ask his students to input dance-related questions into AI to determine the credibility of its answers. Students are then able to navigate what AI can and cannot do.

Alter noted AI's ability to "hallucinate," or pull factually incorrect information out of thin air. Within dance education, explaining moves incorrectly could hamper a student's understanding of an entire piece of choreography.

"If you're not a subject matter expert, it sounds plausible," Alter said, "But if you know something, if you're an expert or are well read even in the subject, you'll see that there are many, many errors."



Students of San Diego State University dance professor Joseph Alter in a group performance. (Photo Courtesy of SDSU School of Music and Dance)

Reflective writing, an activity in Alter's class, breaks down personal experiences and asks that students make sense of those moments through pen and paper. Alter tells students to get up and start moving around if they feel stuck.

"AI can't do that for you," Alter said.

While AI has an understanding of dance, it can't recreate the act in a human way.

"Dance is an embodied practice; you actually have to have human beings in a space collaborating to do it," Alter said.

Julia Elbert, a dancer and former student of Alter's, said the professor's mode of teaching with AI was helpful in specific instances.

"He would create mapping sequences," Elbert said, to imitate the form of a flock of birds or a school of fish, spatially set to Alter's preference, for students to recreate.

Elbert said each sequence, recreating animal movement, "was very helpful in learning proximity."

Despite the ways AI can help students visualize, it can't fully understand dance as a practice, according to Elbert.

"I don't think it's gonna be possible for AI to fully embody or understand all

the teeny tiny nuances that goes on [for] doing the most simple steps," Elbert said.

Students of Alter's and other SDSU faculty have witnessed the university's growing incorporation of AI within degree programs, certifications and now a literacy credential.

In July, California piloted a micro-credential program, AI-Ready California, so students and individuals entering the workforce can learn skills in AI.

Freshmen enrolled at SDSU are now required to take a one-credit course, "Academic Applications of AI," to earn this credential.

James Frazee, vice president of information technology at SDSU, said AI is becoming a standard in and out of the classroom.

"Having some fluency with AI is becoming an expectation of a lot of employers now," said Frazee, noting conversations between employers and the university.

"AI is forcing us to have conversations around what we know about how people learn," Frazee said.

To keep learning from students and faculty, SDSU runs an AI Survey, gauging

the group's evolving attitudes around AI as the technology advances.

Instructors are allowed to decide how they want to use AI in their classrooms, Frazee said.

Jennifer Humphrey, another professor in SDSU's dance department, expressed her desire to keep her AI strictly administrative and out of the classroom.

"I'm limiting my use of AI to things that allow me to remain in the studio for more hours," Humphrey said.

What differentiates dance from AI, Humphrey said, is that unlike AI, dance has consequences. Physical action—touch—creates consequence.

"The purpose of dance is about getting people into a room, collaborating with one another and encountering the physical world," Humphrey said.

Students and classrooms are evolving, but it's not solely because of AI, said professor Alter.

"I've seen changes in students, but it's hard to pinpoint exactly what is precipitating these changes — I don't think it's AI though," Alter said.

## Proposed In-N-Out in College Area delayed, but still in the works

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SAN DIEGO — A proposal to open a new In-N-Out Burger location at the former Rite Aid building near 60th and College Avenue in the College Area is still a long way from opening.

Originally slated to open in 2025, the burger chain is still in the permitting process with the city of San Diego.

According to an article from The Daily

Aztec, the family-owned fast food chain was forced to make some technical changes to the design. Doing so, a city spokesperson told the college newspaper, has now allowed the company to move forward with the application process and exempts it from having to undergo any public hearings before approval.

In January 2026, the restaurant amended its permit application.

Since announcing its plan to open a

restaurant in the College Area, residents have shared some concerns over the traffic it will bring to an already busy intersection at 60th and College Avenue.

Despite that, a spokesperson for the fast food chain tells Times of San Diego that the company is still committed to opening the restaurant but needs all the proper approvals first.

"We do hope to open a new restaurant at 6405 El Cajon Blvd in San Diego," wrote

In-N-Out Burger's Director of Real Estate, Matt Loevenguth. "At this stage, we are in the development application process, so it's still too early to say when, or even if, we will obtain the approvals necessary to open a restaurant there."

Added Loevenguth, "We appreciate our customers in San Diego and the surrounding area who have expressed their anticipation, and we're hopeful we'll be able to serve them at this proposed location."

# San Diego State lowers ticket prices in fight to fill Snapdragon

By Mark Nero  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — After struggling in recent years to attract large crowds to its home football games, San Diego State has responded by reducing season ticket prices at Snapdragon Stadium, while creating a new discount ticket package that also might help boost turnout.

For 2026, season tickets cost 4% to 35% less than they did a year ago, depending on the seats and section, according to the university.

The starting base price for single games remains in the same range, at about \$23-30, including fees, depending on the seating area and opponent. But medium-priced and higher-priced single-game tickets have been lowered, depending on the row and section.

Season ticket prices this year range from \$175 to \$775, down from \$200 to \$1,200 per seat in 2025.

“Season ticket pricing has been lowered across the board to make tickets more affordable and accessible for the loyal fans and community,” the university said in a statement.

Also new for 2026 is a “family four-pack”

option, in which a quartet of tickets can be had for \$76, plus fees. Parking is included, which further adds to the value: last season, parking prices ranged from \$30-45 alone, depending on the lot, vehicle size and whether the pass was purchased in advance or on game day.

For SDSU’s home opener, a 53-20 win over Portland State on Saturday, Sept. 5, tickets remained available at multiple price points the Thursday before.

The Aztecs have for years struggled to come close to selling out Snapdragon Stadium, which opened in 2022 and has a capacity of 35,000 for football games.

Last season, the team drew an announced average attendance of 26,189 fans per game. That ranked 82nd among all NCAA Div. I football teams, according to data from dticker.com, a digital media service that covers NCAA Div. I college athletics.

It should be noted, however, that the “official announced average” is different from what’s known as the “turnstile” average, which counts the number of people who physically pass through a gate or scanner at the stadium, rather than the number of tickets distributed.

Last year, the turnstile average was 17,406 people for Aztecs football games,



A young fan shows his support at Snapdragon Stadium. (File photo by Chris Stone/Times of San Diego)

according to sports data site Aztec Mesa and other local media outlets. That number, which is about 8,700 fewer than in the official average attendance count for the year, is less than half of Snapdragon’s capacity.

In 2024, the Aztecs officially averaged 24,799 attendees per game, but the reported turnstile average was 16,759. In 2023, the announced average per-game attendance was 24,800, but the turnstile average was 17,066 fans per game.

The per-game increase in attendees – both in official and turnstile numbers – from 2024 to 2025 can be attributed in part to the Aztecs having a better year on the field compared to the prior two seasons.

Under then second year head coach Sean Lewis, SDSU went 9-4 (6-2 in the Mountain West Conference) in 2025, compared to 3-9 (2-5 MWC) in Lewis’ first season and 4-8 (2-6 MWC) in 2023 under former coach Brady Hoke.

With SDSU now in the Pac-12 conference, which has a higher national profile and wider name recognition than the Mountain West, its games will be on national television more often and against better-known opponents — such as Washington State, Oregon State and non-conference foe UCLA.

“Top to bottom, it’s a very competitive league,” SDSU Athletic Director John David Wicker said of the Pac-12 during a July 24 media conference. “We know that we’ve got teams (in the conference) that are investing and competitive at the highest level.”

And if San Diego State invests and competes at a top level along with other Pac-12 schools, the end result for the Aztecs might not be just more wins and better recruiting classes, but more spectators at their games on a regular basis — perhaps justifying a return to higher ticket prices.

## Poinsettia Bowl, last played in 2016, returns to San Diego in December

By Noah Perkins  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — San Diego will get a second college football bowl game this December as the SDCCU Poinsettia Bowl returns after a nine-year absence.

The 13th Poinsettia Bowl is scheduled for Dec. 23 at Snapdragon Stadium, with kickoff set for 4:30 p.m. The Holiday Bowl will follow Dec. 28 at 2 p.m., giving San Diego consecutive postseason football events at the stadium. Both games will be televised by The CW.

The Poinsettia Bowl was last played in 2016, when BYU defeated Wyoming 24-21. The game was discontinued after that season following a 12-year run as an NCAA-sanctioned bowl.

San Diego County Credit Union will again serve as the Poinsettia Bowl’s title sponsor. SDCCU held the naming rights

during the bowl’s previous run from 2005 through 2016.

The revived game will feature a team from the new Pac-12 against a Power 4 opponent from the ACC, Big Ten or Big 12. The arrangement gives San Diego State a potential path to the game after the Aztecs joined the reconfigured Pac-12 this year.

SDSU played in three Poinsettia Bowls during the event’s previous run. The Aztecs defeated Navy 35-14 in 2010 before falling to BYU 23-6 in 2012 and Navy 17-16 in 2014.

The Poinsettia Bowl has roots that predate its modern incarnation. A predecessor was played at Balboa Stadium from 1952 through 1955 as a military bowl before the event eventually returned in 2005 as an NCAA-sanctioned college football game.

Its revival comes during a particularly unusual period for the sport’s conference landscape.

The Pac-12 relaunched this summer



SDSU football players prepare for their game against Navy in the 2014 Poinsettia Bowl. (File photo courtesy of San Diego State Athletics)

with Oregon State and Washington State joined by six newcomers: SDSU, along with Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State, Utah State and Texas State. The conference’s return has created additional postseason opportunities for its members.

The changing landscape also contributed to the loss of the Los Angeles Bowl, which previously provided a postseason

destination for teams from the Pac-12 and Mountain West.

The Holiday Bowl will retain its connection to the Pac-12 by matching a former Pac-12 program against an ACC opponent. Last year’s Holiday Bowl featured Arizona against SMU, with SMU winning 24-19.

For The CW, the two San Diego games add another piece to the network’s growing college football lineup.

“The CW continues to build on our biggest college football season ever with the addition of the SDCCU Poinsettia Bowl and the Holiday Bowl,” said Mike Perman, the network’s senior vice president of CW Sports. “We look forward to collaborating alongside Sports San Diego to bring two more premier college football bowl games to a national audience.”

Sports San Diego CEO Mark Neville said the organization is eager to have the game back.

# SDSU alum Ty France, last of MLB players once guided by Coach Gwynn

By Barry M. Bloom  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The Padres have been winning during the second half of the season mostly because of an offensive turnaround from their superstars, but the feel-good story of the year has to be the emergence of once and future first baseman Ty France.

The Padres are 10-4 in their last 10 games, and a half game behind Arizona for the third Wild Card spot as they head into the final stretch.

France grew up in Orange County, was drafted by the Padres, and as a member of the San Diego State baseball team more than a decade ago is the last active Major League tie to San Diego great and Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn Sr.

That makes France Padres royalty just by association.

“Looking at it now it’s unbelievable,” France said in an exclusive interview with Times of San Diego. “Just the amount of knowledge he had and how good he was at being able to slow down the game for us. He was there to get you better, get you to the next level and hope you succeed.

“I mean, I still call him Coach Gwynn. That’s how I viewed him. But now being so far removed from college I understand how special that was.”

Gwynn was head coach of the Aztecs when he died at 54 on June 16, 2014, from complications of salivary gland cancer. France was a member of that team.

Gwynn retired in 2001 after 20 seasons, all with the Padres, holding a .338 lifetime batting average, while amassing 3,141 hits and a record-tying eight National League batting titles.

He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame along with Cal Ripken Jr. on a July day in 2007 when a crowd of 75,000 poured into Cooperstown, N.Y. There hadn’t been that many fans before and not even close since.

Gwynn replaced Jim Dietz as the Aztecs coach in 2003. Along the way, some of his prominent players made it to the majors, including the electric pitcher Stephen Strasburg and his son, Tony Gwynn Jr., now one of the Padres’ broadcasters.

His father always had high expectations for France, the younger Gwynn said.

“Ty reminded him of his approach as a hitter in terms of using the whole field,” he said. “He wanted Ty to be drafted, and he knew when he got his foot in the door he would hit.”

France was picked by the Padres in the 34th round of the 2015 draft, made it to the Padres, and lasted almost two seasons during his first San Diego tour before being traded to the Mariners in late 2020. He was batting .305 at time.

France bounced around and played in the World Series for the Blue Jays last fall when they lost to the Dodgers on the final pitch of Game 7.

The Padres re-signed him as a free agent on Feb. 15, the eve of spring training, on a one-year deal for the princely sum of \$1.35 million. He joined the team as a utility player, but played his way into the lineup and has started 117 of their 122 games at first base.

He’s hitting .294 (.267 during the first half of the season and .347 since then) with 20 home runs and 63 RBIs, according to MLB statistics. Gwynn was right. “When it comes to hitting my dad wasn’t wrong about a lot,” Gwynn Jr.



Ty France as an Aztec in 2015. (Photo courtesy of San Diego State University)

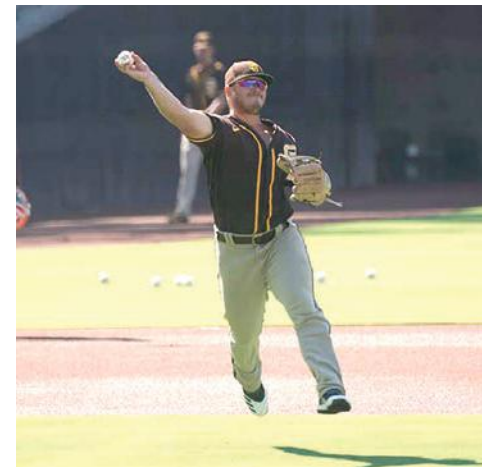
said. “The question was where he would play, and he turned himself into a Gold Glove first baseman.”

France, who won his first Gold Glove last year, evidently has Gwynn’s famous work ethic. He recently took incessant throws across the diamond and grounders at first base, leaving an interviewer waiting at Chase Field in Phoenix.

Gwynn wasn’t much of a fielder either when the Padres drafted him in 1981 with a third-round pick, also out of San Diego State. His arm was weak.

During batting practice at old Jack Murphy Stadium, a Padres coach, the late Bobby Tolan, backed him up to the cyclone outfield fence so he could long-toss the ball, building up his arm strength. Gwynn started 2,122 games in right field and won five Gold Gloves.

Gwynn’s greatest adjustment as a college coach, he said at the time, was not expecting his young players to have his commitment. That’s a common malady among star players who become college coaches or big league managers. Gwynn forgot he split his time as a guard playing basketball where he’s still San Diego State’s all-time assist leader, for a single-game (18), season (221) and career (590). Baseball was really an afterthought,



Ty France throws a ball to first base during a 2020 practice. (File photo by Chris Stone/Times of San Diego)

although he batted .416 in 1981, his final college season.

Someone at the old San Diego Tribune used to say, “Tony could fall out of a bathtub and hit,” which he proved in his final 2001 season, batting .324 despite playing on an injured left knee.

“I don’t want to say the game was easy for him,” France said about Gwynn. “But he was so talented, he was part of the zero to one percent. He was so at that level of the game he couldn’t understand why, as college kids, we weren’t as good as he was. It took him awhile to adjust.”

France was a .337 hitter for his three college years, most of them under Gwynn, who passed away before his final season. Gwynn always attributed his cancer to chewing tobacco, a habit he never really quit.

France remembers the day Gwynn died as if it was yesterday.

“Everything we heard he was getting better,” France recalled. “He was getting past it. I was going to come back for my junior year, and he was going to be there as coach. That morning I woke up to a handful of text messages and phone calls asking me if it was true? I had no clue. And I turned on the TV, and it was all over the place.”

Gwynn played in the only two Padres’ World Series appearances, 1984 and 1998, both losses. France has a chance to do it this postseason.

The Padres are right there in the NL Wild Card race. If he does ultimately lift a trophy, he can dedicate it to Gwynn.

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# September heat at Mission Trails: Know when to skip the hike



## Mission Trails Regional Park

Kinsee Morlan

September may say “fall” on the calendar, but San Diego weather doesn’t always get the memo.

At Mission Trails Regional Park, some of our hottest days often arrive just as summer is supposed to be winding down. And when temperatures climb, the smartest way to enjoy the park may be to skip the hike altogether, especially if you’re thinking about bringing along a furry friend.

Mission Trails is beautiful year-round, but much of the park offers limited shade. On a hot afternoon, exposed trails, rocky terrain and dry chaparral can turn what seemed like an easy outing into a much harder one.

So before heading out, check the forecast and think about the conditions you

will encounter on the trail. Start early. Carry more water than you think you will need. Choose a shorter route. And on extreme-heat days, give yourself permission to come back to hike another time.

And if your hiking partner has four legs, be even more cautious. Hot ground can burn paws, and dogs can overheat quickly while hiking. Heavy panting, searching for shade, slowing down or refusing to keep walking are all signs worth taking seriously. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your hiking buddy is leave them home in the air conditioning.

But skipping a hike doesn’t have to mean skipping Mission Trails.

The Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor Center offers another way to experience the park, especially on hot days. Inside, visitors can cool down while exploring exhibits about the plants, wildlife, geology and human history of this remarkable place. Step into the theater to watch one of our educational films, browse the exhibits, look through our gift shop, or take some time to talk with a ranger or volunteer.

And the Visitor Center’s respite from the heat now extends beyond its walls. Two new large umbrellas now provide additional shade overlooking the park, thanks to donor support and LUCE et Studio. The umbrellas are a seemingly simple improvement, but on a hot day, a patch of shade makes a huge difference.

Heat is also becoming part of a much larger conversation about the future of Mission Trails. The City of San Diego and Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation are looking at ways the Visitor Center and surrounding spaces can better serve visitors during increasingly hot conditions, including improved cooling, more shade and other ways to make the park safer and more comfortable during extreme heat.

And heat is only one part of the challenge. Since 2024, vegetation-management crews engaged by the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation have removed invasive brush from more than 750 acres at Mission Trails, reducing dense vegetation and other wildfire fuels while also

supporting the health of native habitat. This work is being overseen by the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation in partnership with the City of San Diego as part of a larger effort to prepare the park for hotter, drier conditions and increased wildfire risk. The crews will continue invasive removal for another year and finish with habitat restoration in fall 2027.

The heat, the new shade at the Visitor Center and the ongoing work to reduce wildfire risk all point to the same idea: enjoying Mission Trails means paying attention to what the landscape is telling us. Some days, that means getting out early before the sun is in full force. Other days, it means staying close to the Visitor Center, finding some shade and saving the hike for another morning.

A hot day doesn’t have to cancel your visit. It may just change what the visit looks like.

*Kinsee Morlan is the communications and external relations manager for Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation.*

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# Live music round-up — Meltt at the Quartyard, Casbah dance party

By Bart Mendoza  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

## Indie-Pop quartet Meltt pops into The Quartyard

On the road in support of their new album, “Pathways,” Vancouver-based indie-pop quartet Meltt makes an appearance at the Quartyard on Sept. 16. Fans of modern pop will love the band’s atmospheric, radio-friendly tunes, such as their new single, “Goodbye,” with lead singer Chris Smith’s vocals giving everything a soulful edge. Aficionados of groups such as Johnny Hates Jazz or Maroon 5 will find much to appreciate in Meltt’s music.

- **Meltt:** Wednesday, Sept. 16 at The Quartyard, 1301 Market St. 6–9 p.m. \$28.

## Casbah dance party with Funky But Chic

Get your dancing shoes ready! On Sept. 11, the Casbah hosts a special event featuring an appearance from Schizophonics side project, Funky But Chic. Dressed in costumes reminiscent of Parliament-Funkadelic, the group, led by Schizophonics guitarist, Pat Beers and drummer Lety Beers, specializes in fun dance floor filling cover songs from a wide range of artists including Rick James, Dee-Lite and Prince. Attendees will want

to get to the show early for a performance from psychedelic electro rocker Jesika von Rabbit, with DJ Mazee and DJ StackAly keeping the party going between sets.

- **Funky But Chic:** Friday, Sept. 11 at The Casbah, 2501 Kettner Blvd. 8:30 p.m. \$20.

## Blues Pioneer Bobby Rush at the Music Box

Blues legend, Bobby Rush, plays Music Box on Sept. 15. A blues pioneer, Rush worked with nearly all the genre’s early icons, from Muddy Waters to Willie Dixon, even joining a band alongside fellow legends, Elmore James and Pinetop Perkins, with a catalog of his own releases that goes back to the early 1960s. Rush’s latest album is a collaboration with fellow guitarist Kenny Wayne Shepard, “Young Fashioned Ways,” with a few songs from the album, including “Uncle Esau,” in the current set. However, the bulk of the night’s music will be from Rush’s own lengthy string of releases. Rush is a force of nature, still belting out tunes with good humor and passion. There aren’t many original blues musicians left. If you are a blues fan, this show is an absolute must. Manzanita Blues open the show.

- **Bobby Rush:** Tuesday, Sept. 15 at Music Box, 1337 India St. 8:30 p.m. \$38 and up.



Bobby Rush. (Photo by Bill Steber)

## Black Uhuru Still Going Strong

Long-running reggae group, Black Uhuru, returns to the Belly Up Tavern for a show on Sept. 14. Formed in 1972, the band hasn’t issued a new album since 2022’s “New Day,” but there are over 100 singles in their discography, so there is no shortage of choice material for the night’s setlist. Black Uhuru has had a changing lineup in its nearly five-decade-long existence, with founding member Derrick “Duckie” Simpson, now joined by singers Kaye Starh and Andrew Bees. While the group’s lineup has changed over the years, they remain one of reggae’s

best live acts, with an energetic show to match their superb musicianship.

- **Black Uhuru:** Monday, Sept. 14 at The Belly Up Tavern, 143 S. Cedros Ave. 7:30 p.m. \$37 and up.

## Sing Along to Sweet Caroline!

Iconic singer-songwriter Neil Diamond may have retired from touring a decade ago, but his music’s popularity only seems to have increased in the ensuing years. There are currently multiple tribute acts around the country performing Diamond’s music, with one of the most popular being So Good! The Neil Diamond Experience, starring Robert Neary.

Neary and the gang are stopping off at the Epstein Family Amphitheater on Sept. 11. The band is terrific, and Neary does a good job of replicating Diamond’s signature moves and sound. Diamond released a new album earlier this year, *Wild at Heart*, but this show is all about his amazing catalog of hits, with songs such as “Forever In Blue Jeans,” “Solitary Man,” and, of course, “Sweet Caroline,” sure to be amongst the evening’s highlights.

- **So Good! The Neil Diamond Experience:** Friday, Sept. 11 at the Epstein Family Amphitheater, 9500 Gilman Drive. 7:30 p.m. \$20 and up.

# San Diego Music Hall of Fame reveals inductees, including Big Mountain

By Noah Perkins  
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The late rockabilly artist Mojo Nixon and the reggae band Big Mountain are among the artists newly announced as inductees as part of the San Diego Music Hall of Fame’s class of 2026. Other performers scheduled to be inducted in the Oct. 16 ceremony include jazz, punk rock and blues artists, signifying the musical diversity of the San Diego music scene.

“It’s a wonderful, eclectic group and I am really excited about this year’s show,” Hall of Fame founder Jefferson Jay said.

The full list of inductees, according to Jay, is:

- Mojo Nixon, an eccentric rockabilly artist who’s best known for his song “Elvis is Everywhere,” which was a staple on MTV in the late 1980s. Nixon, who

died in 2024 at 66, is also known for collaborating with National City native musician Skid Roper.

- Big Mountain, the reggae band that was formed in San Diego in the mid-1980s. They’re best known for their cover of Peter Frampton’s “Baby, I Love Your Way,” which reached No. 6 on the Billboard songs chart in 1994.

- Claudia Russell, aka Jazz Kitty, a longtime KSDS 88.3 radio DJ known for her weekly program “Bohemia After Dark,” as well as for her championing of San Diego jazz and the city’s music community.

- The Penetrators, a pioneering San Diego band that helped establish the city’s early punk scene in the late 1970s. The band, which disbanded in the mid-1980s, began reuniting periodically for live performances a few years later.

- Larry Grano, a drummer, singer and San Diego music mainstay. His career



The group Big Mountain, which appeared in Ocean Beach in June. (File photo by Elizabeth Villagomez)

has included performing in the tribute bands Rockola and Steely Damned as well as being the lead singer for the Soul/R&B band, the Soul Persuaders.

- Lady Dottie & The Diamonds, an award-winning San Diego band that combined blues, soul and rock music during their electric live shows, led by vocalist

Dorothy Mae “Lady Dottie” Whitsett.

- Oliver Luck, a veteran trombonist, musician and longtime educator whose career touched generations of musicians and students.

Luck, a World War II veteran, was a professional musician before and after the war, and performed with Count Basie.

Several live performances are set for the induction ceremony, including from members of the bands Big Mountain, the Penetrators and Nixon-affiliated band the Beat Farmers, Lady Dottie and the Diamonds, Oliver Luck & Richard James, Gato Papacitos and more.

“Our lineup of performers is amazing,” Jay said.

The ceremony is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 16 at Vision Center for Spiritual Healing, 4780 Mission Gorge Place. It will be preceded by dinner at 6 p.m. Tickets start at \$61.60 and are available online.