

UPTOWN NEWS

October 2 – November 3, 2026

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Galbani Bella Vita Fest in Little Italy set for Oct. 17-18

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New breakfast spot Cherries and Batter opens in Hillcrest

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Cutting-edge theater to be excited about

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HalGLOWeen swings into the Zoo



During HalGLOWeen this month, in the San Diego Zoo outback, guests can watch a kooky, wildlife-themed glow-in-the-dark acrobatic act of the Spooky Revue. See more on page 13. (Photo courtesy of the San Diego Zoo)

COVER STORY

West Uptown residents saying San Diego leaves them in the dark on huge projects

Residents have formed a new nonprofit, West Uptown United, as a check and balance on what they say is unfettered and unpopular development of parcels along canyons and deep into neighborhoods as part of the city of San Diego's Complete Communities Program. Residents formed the group after stumbling onto a plan to build a seven-story, 74-unit apartment complex where a single-family residence once stood on two parcels at 3554 and 3560 Front St. Under the city's Complete Communities Program, developers are allowed to build larger and more dense projects near transit without public notification or hearings. **PAGE 2**

GARBAGE FEES

Councilmembers trash Mayor Gloria over garbage fee error

Last week, the city acknowledged a "glitch" with the garbage fee that impacted residents citywide. The city's admission to the error immediately set off a new crisis for Mayor Todd Gloria, with one councilmember calling for him to resign and two others placing the screw-up at his feet. **PAGE 6**

FASHION

Fashion Week San Diego returns with runway shows

The official Runway Night will be on Oct. 3 at UCSD Park and Market, the arts and culture venue downtown. The highlight will be 11 New York avant-garde pieces, including the intricate crochet workmanship of Bliss by Mel. **PAGE 11**



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West Uptown residents say city leaves neighborhoods in the dark on projects

By DORIAN HARGROVE
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Residents in West Uptown are fighting back to prevent developers from snatching up parcels occupied by small single-family homes and building massive high-rise apartment buildings, all without any public notice.

Residents have formed a new nonprofit, West Uptown United, as a check and balance on what they say is unfettered and unpopular development of parcels along canyons and deep into neighborhoods as part of the city of San Diego's Complete Communities Program.

Residents formed the group after stumbling onto a plan to build a seven-story, 74-unit apartment complex where a single-family residence once stood on two parcels at 3554 and 3560 Front St.

Residents learned about the proposal through word of mouth and the city's

development services portal. They immediately became aware of parking impacts as well as other potential effects, including more traffic, fire hazards, loss of sunlight and encroachments into the canyons.

"We could have potentially not found out until crews were demolishing the house next door," said Ransom Hamrick, a West Uptown resident, who helped form the new group.

The lack of public notification is one of the reasons why Hamrick says he and his neighbors formed West Uptown United and why more than 50 others have joined in support.

Under the city's Complete Communities Program, developers are allowed to build larger and more dense projects near transit without public notification or hearings, in order to expedite the permitting process and add to the city's housing stock.

Neighbors along Front Street had no



Artists' rendering of 3650 Front St.
(Rendering from preliminary review)

idea that a developer and a neighbor were working together to transform the two parcels.

"We're not anti-development," Hamrick said. "We understand housing is completely important. It's making sure that the development is responsible. We're here, we're watching, and we want to do something about this," he said. "We just want that progress to be done the right way."

Hamrick says the city's Complete

Communities Program will continue to usher in high-density projects in neighborhoods such as Bankers Hill, Hillcrest and North Park. Hamrick believes community organizations such as West Uptown United will likely be needed to offset community impacts.

"A lot more people are aware of this strategy and are beginning to push back on it, not to stop it, but to reform the absolute freedom that this program has given developers to just do whatever they want without any say from the community," he said.

The group says it is not opposed to housing construction but wants developments to better fit established neighborhoods and undergo greater community scrutiny.

More often than not, Hamrick says San Diego's housing debate is framed as a choice between development and anti-development camps, which means the middle ground is left out of the equation.

101 Ash Street gets new name, and plan for affordable housing

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The City Council moved forward with a plan to convert its troubled office tower at 101 Ash Street into 249 affordable housing units.

The council approved the general concept for the housing conversion last year. This vote tweaked details of the deal with 101 Ash Venture LP now that financing mechanisms and building plans are nailed down.

Under the 65-year lease, the city retains ownership of the building and will receive 5% compound interest on its value from the developer. More importantly, Norm Miller, a real estate professor emeritus at the University of San Diego, told the San Diego Union-Tribune, "the city is getting rid of a lemon."

The 249 income-restricted affordable housing units will range from studios to three bedrooms, with an additional three manager units. The building's ground floor will offer 25,000 square feet of retail and a 4,000-square-foot childcare center. An underground garage has 138 parking spots.

The 21-story building will also shed an address burdened by years of controversy

in favor of a new one: 107 Ash St. The change means future housing will not share the moniker of a city scandal that cost taxpayers over \$200 million and became a glaring example of the city's miscalculated real estate deals.

"We all know the history, and this is an opportunity to move past that," said Councilmember Kent Lee.

The city council entered a \$128 million lease to own agreement in 2017, relying on city staff reports that the building only needed \$10,000 in maintenance and a bit of pressure-washing. After spending nearly \$32 million on a remodel, city staff moved into the building in 2019 only to be evacuated after high levels of asbestos were found inside. The building has sat vacant since 2020, with taxpayers paying \$5 million annually for upkeep.

In 2022, the city purchased 101 Ash St. for \$86 million to end litigation and move forward.

In recent years, independent appraisals have valued the property at \$3.9 million, only due to its location downtown.

To find a use for the 21-story tower, the city council voted in July 2025 to let a developer lease the building and convert it to affordable housing. The past year was

spent finalizing the plan and securing funding for the \$254.7 million project. The money comes from eight sources, including HUD. The San Diego Foundation filled a gap when affordable housing credits fell short. That complexity in funding is partially blamed on the high cost of the conversion, which comes out to \$1 million per unit.

"This is what it takes to provide 100% affordable building. It is not cheap. It's an absurd process that we make developers go through," said Council President Joe LaCava. "But it's the only process that we have."

Another factor adding to the expense: The difficulty of adding housing to an office building, which is never cheap because it includes overhauling the plumbing system to add bathrooms and kitchens to every unit. This case is only more complex due to asbestos mitigation.

"Converting an office building is challenging to do physically," said Councilmember Stephen Whitburn. "I appreciate the creativity of the developer and the Economic Development Department for working to ensure that this 100% affordable housing project actually comes to fruition."

While the city council unanimously



101 Ash St. in downtown has been a source of controversy for city leaders and candidates. (Photo by Chris Stone/Times of San Diego)

approved the updated ground lease, several public commenters shared concerns about the plan, from asbestos abatement to financing.

City staff offered assurances that the reconstruction would extend the building's life, and months of preparation from the builder assured the city this is the best way for the city to offload the building.

"We kind of dealt with this building before, kind of had assurances before," said Councilmember Henry Foster III. "Let's just make sure we are holding the parties accountable... as they are doing the work that they're doing."

Personal safety, cleanliness sticking points in survey about downtown

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Residents sounded off on their perceptions of downtown in an international survey, with the majority of respondents describing it as a great city experience, though scores on walkability, personal safety, cleanliness and public transit access all fell below the national average.

The global architect firm, the Gensler Research Institute, based in San Francisco, shared the results of “The Downtown Report: City Pulse 2026” at Downtown San Diego Partnership’s new event, The State of Downtown.

Gensler’s report compared San Diego’s downtown experience to those all over the world and asked residents what they wanted to see downtown. Researchers looked at submissions from over 35,000 respondents, who were surveyed online between July and November 2025, and asked to evaluate 75 cities.

The results, presented before San Diego business, civic and philanthropic leaders on Sept. 15, could influence future downtown plans. In the survey, 74% of locals said downtown was a great experience, with even more, 87%, describing the city overall as a great experience.

That was much higher than the national average of 79% of respondents who said their city is a great experience.

Safety, however, is another issue for both San Diego respondents and those in other cities. Local scores fell below the national average of 31% with just 27% of San Diegans feeling safe downtown. Cleanliness, too, was lower than the national average of 33%, with only 26% describing downtown San Diego as clean.

In response, Betsy Brennan, who leads the downtown partnership, asked attendees, as the San Diego Sun reported, “What does downtown need to thrive, and who do we need to bring together to make it happen?”

Gensler’s data highlighted the desire for more independent shops and cafes, after-hours events on weekdays that activate the area, mixed-use development and safety improvements.

Some of those efforts are underway, like increased police presence in the Gaslamp. But others are taking longer to manifest, such as Civic Center revitalization, as well as broader efforts to activate outdoor spaces and create a possible arts district.

“

What does downtown need to thrive?”

Betsy Brennan,
Downtown San Diego Partnership

Mixed-use development has already become more popular, as office-only downtowns suffered during the pandemic. For an active downtown people enjoy visiting and lingering in, Gensler said employment, culture, tourism, residential life and public space reinforce one another.

While organizations like the Prebys Foundation and even the San Diego Community College District have expressed interest in revitalizing downtown, Mayor Todd Gloria noted one major setback: lack of funds.

Already, city budget shortfalls ended the Fifth Avenue Promenade, a popular program blocking cars from the Gaslamp. Since the program’s end in 2023, brawls have become a regular feature on crowded sidewalks.

Gloria, who spoke at the downtown partnership’s event, also said homelessness remained the most complex problem to solve. But Gloria, who lives downtown, argued that the daily reality of downtown does not match viral videos of violence.

“What I see in my daily life, with my own eyes, and what I see on social media are two different things,” said Gloria, according to the Sun. “You can tell your own downtown story or you can allow people who do not live or work or care about downtown to talk about downtown.”

The partnership did take note of cheaper, quicker interventions to improve the urban environment, like better lighting.



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San Diego to require warning signs on cryptocurrency ATMs to prevent scams

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SAN DIEGO — San Diego could become the first California city to require warning signs on or near cryptocurrency ATMs to prevent scams.

The proposal, from San Diego City Council President Joe LaCava, is intended to combat scams that allegedly focus on the machines and primarily target senior citizens.

In the schemes, the scammers persuade victims to deposit cash into cryptocurrency ATMs located in grocery stores, convenience stores and smoke shops. Once the money is transferred, authorities say it is difficult or impossible to recover.

LaCava, at a Wednesday news conference for his proposed policy change, said warning signs would interrupt the scam before it's too late.

"Stopping scams before they take place is critical," he said. "In many cases, funds lost to these criminal activities are difficult to recover and can prevent individuals from putting food on the table, making rent and purchasing needed medication."

Cryptocurrency ATMs are common across San Diego and San Diego County. Tracking how many of them is difficult.

State data cited by LaCava show 111 cryptocurrency ATMs operating at 75 locations across the city. Nearly half of those machines, 55, are located at 24 Safeway and Albertsons stores, which share the same parent company.

However, the state data may not be complete. A Times of San Diego visit to a College Area location listed in the dataset found no cryptocurrency ATM. Meanwhile, a basic internet search identified several cryptocurrency ATMs at locations not included in the state data, suggesting the actual number of machines operating in the city could be higher than reported.

Under the proposed ordinance, which was unanimously approved by a council committee on Wednesday, operators would be required to post warning signs informing customers about common

scams and directing them to a city website with fraud-prevention information and reporting resources.

"Our objective is to inform members of the public about the dangers of cryptocurrency ATM scams and empower businesses to recognize and support San Diegans before they become victims," LaCava said.

Before the committee hearing, representatives from AARP California and the city's Senior Affairs Advisory Board joined LaCava to support the measure, describing the signs as a simple way to stop scams at the point of transaction.

"Imagine for a moment that you are a senior," said Gwenmarie Hilleary, chair of the Senior Affairs Advisory Board. "You answer the phone when it rings. There is a friendly voice. You are told your bank account is compromised, or maybe you won a prize."

Hilleary said scammers often spend days or weeks building trust with a victim before directing them to deposit money into a cryptocurrency ATM.

"There is a moment before the crypto machine is used," Hilleary said. "If we put a bright warning sign on the machine, cautioning folks to stop and think before they act, we can prevent some heartache."

Israel Hernandez, associate state director for advocacy and community engagement at AARP California, said adults 60 and older accounted for roughly two-thirds of the \$389 million reported lost through cryptocurrency ATM scams nationwide last year, or about \$259 million.

LaCava said the proposal was modeled in part on a similar effort in Omaha, Nebraska, where local officials and AARP reported a significant reduction in scam-related losses after introducing warning signs and public education campaigns.

"The signs matter because it's the final point of the transaction," Hernandez said. "By the time someone gets to the crypto kiosk, they've already been in conversations, and they've already been falling prey to the scammer."

“

‘Stopping
scams
before
they take
place is
critical.’

Joe LaCava,
City
Council-
member

SDPD now discloses why officers search Flock license plate readers

By DORIAN HARGROVE
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Police Department, for the first time since officials installed automated license plate readers at 500 locations across San Diego, at the beginning of the year started releasing the reasons officers tap into the surveillance tool.

San Diego Police Department spokesperson Ashley Nicholes said the step is meant to improve transparency and accountability.

“The reason field is one of the audit improvements we worked with Flock to implement, including required case numbers for searches,” Nicholes told Times of San Diego.

Of the 114,692 times San Diego Police officers searched automatic license plate readers since the start of the year, 19,210 of those searches were for stolen vehicles, 17,141 were for arrest warrants and 13,221 were for gunfire or weapons offenses, according to SDPD’s data.

The change comes as controversy over Flock’s mass surveillance tools has reached a new level. Opposition in San Diego became an international story last month, and national opposition

has suddenly become a bipartisan issue. Concerns include allegations of officers misusing the software, including stalking romantic partners, and the technology’s accuracy, after two San Diego men said officers errantly used ALPRs to tie them to an attempted carjacking, even though they were miles away from the crime when it occurred.

But the city’s data on ALPR searches reveals that the new disclosure for the reason for a search doesn’t always provide transparency.

The top three reasons for searches — stolen cars, arrest warrants or weapons and gun offenses — accounted for 43% of all ALPR searches from January through the end of July, according to the data, obtained and analyzed by Times of San Diego. The rest of the 10 most common reasons for searches were all in some way related to theft, weapons or drugs.

However, the 11th most frequently used category for a search is listed as “other.” From January through August, officers disclosed “other” as their reason 3,962 times.

SDPD requires officers to provide a more detailed response when they use that selection — but those details are not publicly released.

Nicholes said that if a query like “immigration” or “reproductive care” is entered, the system automatically shuts down.

SDPD’s dataset contains 152 different reasons for searches.

“SDPD mandates the use of ALPR technology strictly for legitimate law enforcement purposes, such as solving crimes and locating missing persons, while explicitly prohibiting personal use. SDPD’s diligent compliance work under the TRUST Ordinance has even served as a model for improvements made across Flock Safety’s platform, such as the required event or case number feature,” Nicholes said.



Automated license plate readers located at 2244 Moore St. (Photo by Adrian Childress/Times of San Diego)

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UPTOWN NEWS



DOWNTOWN NEWS

Councilmembers trash Mayor Gloria over garbage fee error

By DORIAN HARGROVE
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Normal Heights resident Marty Graham read a post on Nextdoor on Friday, Sept. 18, alerting neighbors that their property bill showed the city of San Diego had misreported its trash fee to the county. Graham, a semi-retired journalist, and got to work looking into it with a friend who is an expert in data analysis.

The two recorded the types of trash cans up and down nearby streets in order to find what their likely annual trash bill would total. They then logged on to the County Assessor's website and looked up the property tax bill for those properties.

In all, they recorded the tax bills of 100 homes.

They found that roughly 34% had inflated bills. Graham and her friend contacted reporters and posted on social media.

On Wednesday, the city acknowledged the error, which officials said was discovered Monday. It impacts tens of thousands of residents, the city admitted, and immediately set off a new crisis for Mayor Todd Gloria, with one councilmember calling for him to resign and two others placing the screw-up at his feet.

Now, in the face of an already unpopular trash fee, Gloria says he has ordered city staff to get to the bottom of it.

"Yesterday, I was briefed by City staff about errors affecting the Solid Waste Management Fee on some property-tax bills. San Diegans deserve accurate bills, and this error is unacceptable," Gloria said in a statement.

"San Diegans expect their city government to be accurate and accountable," he said. "When we fall short, my responsibility is to acknowledge it, correct it, and make sure it does not happen again. That is exactly what we are doing."

The city is now trying to unwind the "glitch" that impacted up to 87,000 residents citywide. Officials say they will notify residents directly if they were discharged and that in the meantime, they can wait on payments and will not be responsible for any costs associated with late payments.

That wasn't enough for Councilmember Henry Foster III, who, before the city's budget committee Wednesday, said he



A San Diego trash truck. (File photo courtesy of the city)

was "disgusted and appalled" by the error, particularly because he said it would hit his constituents in District 4 hard.

He then called for Gloria to resign.

"The mayor needs to look at himself in the mirror and do what's right by the residents," he said. "Mayor Gloria needs to do the right thing for the residents of San Diego and step down."

The city, he said, "continues to make significant mistakes and that speaks to the competency of the mayor."

Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera, also at the budget committee, fell short of calling for the mayor to resign, but said: "... something needs to change drastically and quickly because the city and its residents can't afford more mistakes like this."

San Diegans, he said, need "someone who wakes up every single day with one job, and that's making sure the city is clean, services work and residents' bills are accurate. We have a job to do as council and that's to make good policy and govern in a way that makes life better."

Gloria took over the role of chief operations officer for the city in early 2025 when he dismissed the city's top bureaucrat, who had previously held the position since 2022.

"No amount of good policy work can make up for the basics not being done well, and we can't do that if the information we get is inaccurate, or basic operations can't be performed at the most basic of levels," Elo-Rivera said.

Graham is feeling the impact of that failure on her limited finances.

"(My bill) is \$224 higher, and my mortgage company will make me pay it via escrow," she wrote in a message to Times of San Diego after finding the error. "My mortgage payment went up \$100 a month already because of trash fees. I'm a senior

on a fixed income in this inflationary economy."

Graham found some bills appeared a few hundred dollars over the annual fee, according to the size of their trash receptacle. Another, she said, was nearly \$1,500.

Times of San Diego spoke to another resident who found a charge of \$2,353 on their upcoming property tax bill, approximately \$1,650 more than what it should have been.

Graham and her data buddy's research has now resulted in a message on the County Treasurer's website.

Elo-Rivera, before the budget committee, also credited the county with its efforts to try and contain the fallout from the city's error.

"I did speak with the county treasurer and tax collector last night, and it sounds like the county has been working hard to limit damage, and I appreciate that, but this was a city operational failure as [Foster] said. And it will likely carry city costs," he said.

Meanwhile, despite the error, the city still issued a call to encourage residents to sign up for their trash portal.

"We encourage customers who have not already done so to create an account in the Residential Waste Collection Services Portal at WastePortal.sandiego.gov. This will allow you to view your service information and receive future updates from the City about trash service," officials said in the city statement.

Councilmember Kent Lee called on Gloria to restore the chief operating officer position, rather than filling the role himself.

"If an error of this magnitude can occur without officials noticing, the problem goes deeper than any one employee or one mistake, and we must confirm the refuse fee program is operationally sound," Lee said.

"It's the city council's responsibility to help the public get to the bottom of this, and it's the mayor's responsibility to put his house in order so people can trust that their bills are correct," he said.

Graham is awaiting city action.

"The city didn't know until we started shrieking," she said. "First answer was 'Huh? File a claim.' When the claims started pouring in, somebody went and looked. Doh!"

On heels of trash fee error, Gloria to go on national affordability tour

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Mayor Todd Gloria stood up at the close of a week dominated by City Hall's latest management crisis and explained how he approaches his responsibilities as mayor.

"This is not a job. This is a lifestyle. There's not a day that I don't work," Gloria said of his role, which includes serving as the city's COO and president of the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM).

"I feel the pressure of the fact that no matter how good or bad a job I do, I only get to do this job for eight years, and so I'm going to make the most of every single day that's there."

He made the remarks Friday in front of the fall leadership gathering for the Conference of Mayors. Gloria was flanked by dozens of other mayors at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront hotel to announce an upcoming "affordability tour" to show how cities are responding to the high cost of living.

The press conference came two days after the city admitted to trash fee errors that led to some residents receiving property tax bills up to \$2,700 higher than they expected. Others were undercharged. The mistake affects more than 87,000 customers.

Allies, though, touted his advocacy on the national level. Lincoln, Neb. Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird defended Gloria's record of sending both dollars home and contributing to legislative solutions, including the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, passed by Congress in July.

"He's a formidable advocate," Baird said, noting Gloria's leadership in shaping the massive bipartisan housing bill.

"He's been there in those meetings, sitting at the table and explaining what San Diegans need, as well as what cities across the country need," Baird said. "Especially in his role as president, it's impressive and it's making a difference."

The city, meanwhile, announced last Friday that it sent corrected trash fee information to the San Diego County treasurer/tax collector office.

It is now the county's role to correct the flawed property tax bills, action which the city said would begin Saturday. With property taxes due on Nov. 1, officials urg-

ed residents not to pay the current listed amount until they are sent corrected bills.

Residents received bills associated with the wrong address, according to a FAQ on the city's website. While half of people were undercharged, others faced costs substantially higher than the trash service they received.

The city's new figures show that 87,681 customers were affected. Of that total, 44,041 are seeing an overcharge. The largest share of them, almost 14,000 properties, received an overcharge of less than \$100. But a sizable number, 639 customers, saw bills with charges between \$1,101 and \$2,700 higher than the correct total.

For some council members, the error can be explained by Gloria jettisoning the city's former COO, Eric Dargan. Gloria eliminated his role, the city's top administrator, in February 2025, electing to take on the duties himself amid a budget deficit.

Dargan made \$375,000 per year. Councilmember Kent Lee said this week that the position should be restored. His colleague, Henry Foster II, called on Gloria to resign.

The trash fee mistake has led to conversations — among councilmembers and other critics — about whether Gloria is taking on too much. On Friday, however, he defended his ability to get everything done. Beyond overseeing the city's basic operations, that includes keeping in touch with council members, city executives and constituents, he said, along with continuing to use roles like his Conference of Mayors presidency to represent the city.

"I will guarantee you, taxpayers in this city are going to get their money's worth out of me over the next couple of years," Gloria said Friday. "I make the most of every day, including making sure that San Diego's voice is heard at a national level."

Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera disagreed with his assessment though, saying San Diego issues matter nationally, but San Diegans need to be heard at home too.

"Taxpayers get their money's worth when the city works and right now, too often, it doesn't. This trash billing failure is one of too many operational mistakes that, taken together, have cost the city millions of dollars and undermined residents' confidence that we can get the basics right," Elo-Rivera said.

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70-year-old man dies after struck by car on El Cajon Boulevard

By THAÏS GIRAUDET
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — A male pedestrian died after a vehicle struck him in the early morning in an area known as a “hotspot” for accidents in North Park.

According to the San Diego Police Department, the pedestrian, 70, was standing on the south sidewalk of 3000 El Cajon Boulevard around 5:30 a.m. Monday before he stepped away from the curb and into the street.

At the same time, a 66-year-old male driving a 2006 Mercedes E350 and traveling eastbound on El Cajon struck the man. Doctors pronounced the pedestrian dead

at a local hospital, according to the police report.

It is unclear why the pedestrian left the sidewalk. Police traffic units responded to the incident and are handling the investigation.

Numerous crashes

This crash is not an isolated incident along El Cajon Boulevard. According to Aria Grossman, policy manager for Circulate Planning & Policy, three intersections along El Cajon Boulevard made their 2025 Fatal 15 list of the most dangerous intersections for pedestrians and cyclists in the city of San Diego.

Between 2015 and 2025, there were 18

crashes that resulted in serious injury or death to pedestrians and cyclists alongside El Cajon, according to data provided by Grossman.

Holden Leslie-Bole, chair of North Park’s Public Facilities and Transportation subcommittee, also said El Cajon had, by far, the most pedestrian-vehicle conflicts out of anywhere else in North Park.

“This is the hotspot that we’ve seen a lot of other crashes happen at,” Leslie-Bole said. “We’ve been pushing for traffic calming across all El Cajon Boulevard as well as safer intersection controls, and we’re definitely going to try to work more on improving this intersection because it’s not the first time that people

have gotten hurt right around 30th and El Cajon.”

Leslie-Bole said the subcommittee has recommended solutions to the city in the past and has seen good results from stop signs and crosswalk installations. He said community groups are still pushing for improvements along El Cajon.

“I think we’re all kind of hoping that we can work with the city to get action before more people are hurt. ... This needs to be a corridor-level approach because the problems at one intersection are pretty similar to the problems of another intersection, and overall we just need slower vehicle speeds across all of El Cajon Boulevard.”

Irwin Jacobs gives \$50M for towers to house senior homeless at Father Joe’s

By CHRIS JENNEWEIN
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Father Joe’s Villages announced a five-year project on Sept. 28 to dramatically expand housing for homeless seniors in downtown San Diego thanks to a \$50 million gift from Qualcomm co-founder Irwin Jacobs.

The project would transform the nearly 40-year-old Joan Kroc Center on Imperial Avenue into a high-rise residential campus with over 500 units, of which 130 would be dedicated for seniors.

“I’m looking very much forward to seeing this whole process move ahead and ultimately see some tall buildings rising right here and then people in them,” said

Jacobs at a press conference in the courtyard of the Kroc Center.

He was joined by Deacon Jim Vargas, CEO of Father Joe’s; Mayor Todd Gloria, and Supervisor Paloma Aguirre.

Preliminary architectural plans for the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Family Campus call for three residential towers, the tallest of which would be 19 stories.

Homeless services would operate out of facilities on the first three floors. A new chapel incorporating the aging center’s



A rendering of the completed Joan and Irwin Jacobs Family Campus. (Rendering courtesy of Father Joe’s Villages)

distinctive bell tower would be constructed on a third-floor plaza.

Jacobs pointed out that the percentage of homeless people who are seniors is rising, and praised the plan to combine housing and homeless services in one place. “They get the home first, and then they get a lot of care,” he said, adding that his donation is split between construc-

tion of the residential towers and services for the homeless.

Work on the new campus would begin

early next year, with the first phase opening in 2029.

Vargas said Father Joe’s, the region’s largest homeless services provider, has pledged to build 2,000 units of affordable housing. Jacob’s gift represents a major part of the effort.

“This gift will ensure that hundreds of seniors will have a roof over their heads and the opportunity to prosper,” Vargas said.

Aguirre recalled meeting a homeless 86-year-old woman during the annual point-in-time count in Chula Vista in January.

“Your gift matters so much,” she said to Jacobs. “This isn’t just a building. It’s a promise to that woman in Chula Vista that she won’t grow old alone on the street.”

Federal prosecutors accuse 12 of operating sham daycare network

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SAN DIEGO — Federal prosecutors in San Diego have charged 12 residents for running what prosecutors say was an elaborate daycare scheme that generated more than \$10 million in proceeds from child care subsidy programs.

According to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of California, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies teamed up to close down what they allege were sham daycare facilities.

Prosecutors say the 12 people, aged 22-

years-old to 63 years old with daycare facilities in San Diego and El Cajon, obtained home child care licenses and registered with Child Development Associates and the YMCA. The defendants, prosecutors say, submitted falsified attendance records to collect money from government subsidies.

The government alleges Child Development Associates and the YMCA relied on the records and issued payments using federal funds designated for eligible child care services.

The defendants, who all reside in either

San Diego or El Cajon, were arrested last Thursday for allegedly falsifying monthly attendance records required to receive federal funds to pay for childcare.

Prosecutors say surveillance footage and other documentation showed that the defendants said they were caring for children when they were not, and in some cases were not even in the country at the time.

In one example, a man claimed to care for as many as 25 children every day for two straight months, though surveillance recordings showed children at the

daycare just one of the days.

In other instances, prosecutors say defendants were caring for far fewer children than they claimed in the attendance records.

“Today is a bad day for home daycare fraud,” said U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon. “These are the first charges alleging this type of fraud since the formation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division. These fraudsters may have criminally gamed the system before. But today, the game is over.”

City News Service contributed to this report.

SAN DIEGO

Reader

MAKING FANTASY REALITY

Local filmmakers tell the story of *Infernal* PAGE 2

4 Small Shows to see this October PAGE 3

Left to right:
Brandon Self,
Darien Andreas
Brown,
Adrian Ross
(Photo by:
Matthew Lickona)



MAKING FANTASY REALITY

Local filmmakers tell the story of *Infernal*

By Matthew Lickona
SAN DIEGO READER

The story is famous enough that it still shows up on cinephile social media, over 25 years later. Peter Jackson was a minor director whose resume included some cult spatter-horror, a well-regarded indie drama, and a big-budget flop. So he did what any crazy dreamer would do and started pitching a two-picture film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. New Line's Bob Shaye heard his pitch and asked: why only two movies when there are three books? Crazy, meet crazier. The rest is fantasy movie history.

It feels like San Diego filmmakers Darien Andreas Brown, Adrian Ross, and Brandon Self heard that story and said, "Hold our beers." They had put out one short film together, so they did what any trio of crazy dreamers would do and made *Infernal*, the 135-minute first chapter of a multi-film fantasy saga that has so far enjoyed two sold-out screenings in San Diego, won an award for Best San Diego Feature Film, and gotten *FilmThreat* critic Bobby LePire to write that "another visit to this world and these characters would be most welcome." And they did it by without formal training, filming on weekends for five months, on a budget south of \$10,000 — because, as Brown puts it, "No one told us no."

Brown, who wrote the original screenplay and also stars, co-directed, co-produced, and worked the boom mic, says that "It started with Adrian coming up with the idea for the short film *The Endless*, and him getting the ball rolling." Explains Ross, who plays the reluctant warrior Hiram in *Infernal* and also

co-wrote and edited, "I was auditioning for a ton of things, and you know how it is: you get some stuff, and you get rejected a lot. We were just like, 'Let's make our own stuff, and let that be our audition.'"

"It inspired all of us," continues Brown. "We're three people who don't really like to wait for an opportunity. It inspired me to be like, 'Let me try writing a script.' It came out of a personal experience. I was in debt, and I was facing a decision: either go to my mom's in Arizona, get a job, and lose my film life and the community I've built here, or stay and fight and not allow certain things happening in my life to control my destiny. That's essentially where the story and themes of *Infernal* came from. So I ended up writing this big old script, and I brought it to Adrian, and all he said was, 'Let's do it.' We've always had the confidence that we could do it. We just needed *The Endless* to kind of prove it to ourselves that we had what it takes to make a film."

Infernal tells the story of Azrael, a man troubled by portentous dreams who is captured by the forces of the wicked King Herod and separated from his wife Rheiya, who becomes the prisoner of the King's Blade, Cain. Azrael escapes with the aid of the charming rogue Ephraim and sets out to find his wife, but both he and she find themselves caught up in something larger and more complicated — something hinted at in the opening monologue's description of a prophecy regarding a wolf and a falcon.

"I've always loved romance," says Brown. "And then betrayal becomes a theme, because how do you make romance interesting? You add more elements. And then

in the editing room, we came to realize that was the crux of our story."

"We had almost five hours' worth of footage," laments Self. "Trying to trim it down was some of the hardest stuff. But we had a test screening, and there was one piece of criticism that stuck with me: 'You should really just stick to the core story of what *Infernal* really is.' And that was Azrael trying to find his wife. But there's so much more to the story that we had to cut out. We definitely want this to be part of a bigger world." He mentions *Game of Thrones* — with its multiple houses competing for power — as an influence.

There are many others. Shakespeare shows in the occasional flights of high-flown dialogue. The talk between Cain and Rheiya veers into psychological territory, with its talk of broken chains and becoming who you really are. And as the names suggest, says Brown, "the stories in the Bible definitely played a part in crafting the story." But Azrael is no saint; he's not even a pure soul like Luke Skywalker — even if *Star Wars* clearly informs his relationship with Ephraim. ("I love *Star Wars*," grants Ross.) Brown cites *Lord of the Rings* and *Dune* as inspirations, but also the video games *Elden Ring*, *Bloodborne*, and *Dark Souls*. "I think that's what inspired the grittiness of the world, the murky tone." Self notes that video games even helped shape the story: "At the film's end, he has an item that he can't use, because he's not yet at the level for it. He needs time to build up his skills."

Talking of which: nobody here went to film school. "Our school was being on sets and making the film," says Self. "You learn terms very quickly when you're on

a set and you get told what something is. It's better than any flashcards you could make." On set is where the three came together: Self was the cinematographer (and more) on the micro-budget epic *Heroes of Pacific City*, in which Ross was acting.

"I've known Darien for 15 years or so," adds Ross. "Shout out to Roosevelt Middle School. We've always talked about wanting to make movies, and we've made silly things just for fun." After they hooked up with Self, "*The Endless* was our first step toward making a legit film: telling an entertaining narrative, finding the crew that were able to bring skills we didn't have, doing the best we could with the resources we had."

Ah, resources. Much has been made of the astonishing look of *The Lord of the Rings*, thanks in no small part to Weta Workshop's meticulous costume and prop work. The *Infernal* team had Temu and Etsy, and even that "was a lot of the cost" of the film, says Brown. "In the early stages, we tried making stuff out of cardboard and cans. That wasn't really getting the job done. But we saved on costs by building our own sets, making our own costumes. Adrian took up sewing."

"We bought all this fabric," says Ross, "and I just made all these tunics, and they worked. And we realized pretty quickly that it would cost a ton of money to have a set that looked like an actual set. So we shot 90% of the interior stuff in Darien's garage. We just hung these bolts of fabric around the interior of the garage to have it feel like the inside of a tent, and used different colors to signify the different camps." They pulled a similar trick for the



standoff between opposing battalions at the end: it's the same group of actors in different costumes, with scarves covering the bad guys' faces to hide the double-up.

Self continues: "The budget forced us to think creatively about every single decision. I feel like it helped us create something that's never been told in exactly this way." Where, say, House of the Dragon puts millions into the spectacle of, well, dragons, Infernal relies heavily on "keeping it close, forced perspective, making sure that 180-degree line was not being crossed" — camera techniques that help the viewer believe spaces are larger than they are. Especially when those spaces are mostly drenched in shadow, the way they would be if torches provided your only source of light.

King Herod's throne room was perhaps the biggest challenge. "We could do tents and we could do forests," says Ross. "But we didn't have a throne room. When we started production, we didn't know how we were going to do it." As they neared the end of filming, they still didn't. "We were fortunate enough to use the Actors Workshop Studios space in Sorrento Valley. We built a box, and we found some cardboard pillars. And we had walls, so we bought some stone-patterned wallpaper. Looking back, I think we could have gotten some better wallpaper, but the funds were running out."

Actors Workshop Studios provided more than just space: it provided key members of the cast. (Notably, instructor Mark



Infernal Movie Poster.
(Photo courtesy of Fab7)

Coulter plays Herod, and fellow student Adam Wallace plays Cain.) "We were very fortunate to have that connection," says Ross. "They were really helpful in finding actors we could pay with screen time, people who wanted to show what they could do. The project just took on a life of its own." Ricardo Concepcion, who found a dream role in the warrior Kodger, knew Connor McCluskey, who

owned lots of swords and spent weeks training the cast to use them. Travis Brock, who worked with the trio on *The Endless* and plays Ephraim, was engaged to a girl whose family owned a piece of property in Potrero that was varied enough to stand in for a whole world.

"We were really fortunate to find that," says Self. "But you want to talk about where the budget went? Food and water. The land didn't have electricity or water or anything like that. I had to coordinate with somebody to bring a port-a-potty out. These are people with bodies you're dealing with, and these are things you have to think about."

"We'd spend the whole week preparing," adds Ross. "All of our gear, our props, our costumes, the set design, what we were going to be shooting. That was, Saturday morning would come around and everybody could just get into character and go through their lines while we were getting all the technical stuff set. We'd shoot anywhere from six to thirteen hours. It really became a family affair, people putting in everything they had."

Two years after giving themselves the green light, Brown, Ross, and Self have their movie, and they didn't even need help from Bob Shaye at New Line. Now they're submitting to festivals — Beverly Hills, Los Angeles Fantasy Festival, etc. — and waiting to see who notices their 135-minute audition for the next thing.

Four smaller shows to see this October

By Sgt. Tiki **SAN DIEGO READER**

DEATH FROM ABOVE 1979

Formed in Toronto, Canada circa 2001, Death From Above 1979 eschews guitar in order to play heavy noise rock, punk, and danceable electronic grooves using only a bass guitar, a drum kit, and vocals. They earned their underground rep on the strength of an acclaimed 2004 debut album *You're a Woman, I'm a Machine*, which featured cult hits like "Romantic Rights." Though they split for a while around 2006, they returned in 2011 and have continued to release successful albums such as 2014's *The Physical World*. Their fourth and most recent studio full-length *Is 4 Lovers* dropped back in 2021, but they have been releasing re-imagined anniversary editions of several classic tracks from their debut album. They also earned a small level of internet notoriety for their remake of the Journey radio staple "Don't Stop Believin'."



Death from Above (Photo courtesy of Billboard)

Where: Observatory North Park

When: October 10

Ages: All Ages **Cost:** \$54+

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MURSIC

Founded in 2013, symphonic metal band Mursic is a theatrical hard rock group with members based in both San Diego and Hollywood, including founding drummer Clay Hackett, formerly of romance-metal band Suicide Chords. Naming influences such as Faith No More, King's X, Dream Theater, Opeth, Marillion, Genesis, Yes, and Magnum, their sound is characterized by a blend of classical and synthesized keyboards, creating a heavy, operatic rock style. Their debut album, *Spawn From a Nightmare*, dropped in 2014, establishing their film-score-meets-arena-rock sound by fusing massive orchestration, haunting melodies, crushing guitars, and soaring vocals into a blend of symphonic metal, gothic rock, and progressive hard rock. They released a new album last year called *Oblivion*, as well as a newly remastered version of their 2014 debut. Also appearing will be local alt-metal band Find Me Falling, whose self-titled debut album dropped last year, and San Diego guitarist Rio. The Casbah lists the show at \$10, with doors at 7:30 and the show at 8:30.



Mursic (Photo courtesy of The Casbah)

Where: The Casbah

When: October 14

Ages: 21+ **Cost:** \$10

TILTWHEEL

Tiltwheel is a beard punk band fronted by Davey Quinn, aka Davey Tiltwheel, who writes a lot of songs about beer and has an indie punk side project called Come Closer. One of the early Tiltwheel releases from 1997, a 1000-copy-run seven-inch single, was the first release from underground punk label Accident Prone. They cite among their influences Fear, Leftover Crack, Black Flag, Flipper, and Dead Kennedys, and have appeared on split singles via Rad Girlfriend Records and Brassneck Records. The Little Italy show is headlined by Dillinger Four, a Minneapolis punk rock band known for their "D4-Core" sound, blending the fast, aggressive rhythms and dual-guitar attack of 1980s hardcore with melodic hooks. The group's lineup has remained intact for nearly thirty years, and they recently released their first new music in around eighteen years, a digital single for the track "Don't Happy Be Worry." The bill includes Prision Postumo, an urban punk band from Santa Ana well established in the contemporary Latin American and Spanish-language punk scenes.



Tiltwheel (San Diego Reader file photo)

Where: The Casbah **When:** October 11

Ages: 21+ **Cost:** \$30

TAKING BACK SUNDAY

Formed in the late '90s in Long Island, New York, Taking Back Sunday helped shape modern emo music, beginning with their debut full-length *Tell All Your Friends* and its fan-favorite anthem "Cute Without the E (Cut From the Team)." They exploded into the mainstream when their 2006 major-label album *Louder Now* reached number two on the Billboard 200 chart on the strength of the hit single "MakeDamnSure," their most commercially successful song. Early tracks such as "You're So Last Summer," "Twenty-Twenty Surgery," and "Liar (It Takes One to Know One)" earned them a perennial berth on college radio. The bill includes post-hardcore heroes Thrice, who were mostly inactive from 2012 through 2015 before reuniting, as well as pioneering emo/pop-punk band Saves the Day.



Taking Back Sunday
(Photo courtesy of Live Nation)

Where: Petco Park (Gallagher Square)

When: October 11

Ages: All Ages

Cost: \$63.70+ currently listed

Reader

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There’s a good chance this year’s El Niño will break records

By TESSA BALC
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

“It could get pretty darn bad.”

SAN DIEGO — Summer’s end means the precipitation we could see from this year’s potentially record-breaking “Super” El Niño is just around the bend.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center released its September El Niño update Thursday, saying there is a greater than 90% chance of a very strong event in the Northern Hemisphere during this fall and winter.

Chandler Price, a meteorologist at the San Diego office of the National Weather Service, said just because an El Niño is evident, it doesn’t automatically mean an unusually wet winter. Price says he and other researchers need to see a weather pattern develop before they can provide a forecast.

If the El Niño brings increased rain to the coast, Price said the region could begin to see winter storms as early as late September and they could last through April.

While the amount of rain San Diego will get this year is still up in the air, high tides and large ocean swells will hit

the coastline. In preparation, the city of San Diego began its annual installation of sand berms on city beaches and the Mission Bay shoreline Thursday to help protect against flooding. They will take several weeks to install and are expected to be completed by early November.

Another figure NOAA released is a 75% chance this El Niño will exceed the strength of previously recorded events dating back to the 1950s when the agency began collecting data on El Niño weather patterns. Price said that’s actually a good chance of breaking the historical record.

There have been six strong El Niños on record. But strength and precipitation don’t go hand in hand, something scientists are making clear to the public.

Price pointed out that the strong events with the highest precipitation as well as those events with the lowest precipitation both had similar scores on the index used

Daniel Swain,
National Center for Atmospheric Research

to classify them.

Looking at the past data, there is an 83% chance that this El Niño, if it comes in among the strongest on record, will result in more precipitation than we would typically see, Price said.

So, should we sound the alarm?

In spite of the 1972 tune “It Never Rains in Southern California,” Price says San Diegans should stay vigilant for flooding every winter, not just during an El Niño.

“The good thing about this is that it is encouraging new conversations about how you prepare for this on a personal or structural level,” he said.

While widespread flooding is still not a guarantee, Price says he has a lot of confidence in the fact that Southern California will see coastal erosion and coastal flooding.

Daniel Swain, an associate researcher at UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and a research partner at the National

Center for Atmospheric Research, agrees. “There will be significant coastal flooding that will get worse from here... How bad it gets will depend [on] whether we get alignment of the king tides, the peak of a coastally trapped Kelvin wave and a big storm event,” Swain said.

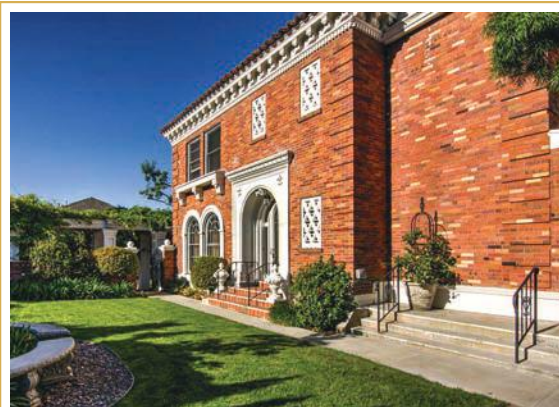
“It could happen, and it could get pretty darn bad. That would paralyze a lot of the low-lying infrastructure.”

The Kelvin waves Swain mentioned are just extremely large, slow-moving waves that do not break. They’re important to note because they bring higher water levels than we would typically see.

These elevated water levels along with high surf, Price said, have already contributed to visible erosion, and could likely be something that will continue through the winter. And as sea levels are expected to rise by a foot in the next couple of decades, the discussions El Niño has brought to coastal communities on how to adapt is something, Price said, that will likely need to continue outside of these events into the future.

“[Elevated surf days have] already done a lot of damage and erosion,” Price said.

“King tides today might look like what every day looks like in 100 years. So, I think it’s a great conversation to be having.”



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Food & Drink Blotter.

BY FRANK SABATINI JR.

New breakfast options arise



Cherries and Batter replaces the former Au Revoir French Bistro. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr./Special for Times of San Diego)

The long-awaited Cherries and Batter in Hillcrest recently soft-opened with a toothsome draw.

As indicated in the name, the casual eatery specializes in pancakes and waffles topped with house-made cherry compote. They are among options on an ambitious menu that also includes egg scrambles and breakfast plates, and lunch items such as hot dogs, veggie sandwiches and BLTs.

The restaurant is backed by Roberto's Taco Shop Food Services and operated by business partner Miguel Chavez, who can often be seen working the griddle. 420 Robinson Ave., Suite A, 619-230-5555, cherriesandbatter.com.

Food and Drink Blotter: Long-brewing breakfast spot has soft opening

If you're a fan of soft, creamy eggs, look no further than the new Egg Tuck in downtown's Core-Columbia District. The growing chain originated as a pop-up in Los Angeles' Koreatown several years ago and recently made its San Diego debut. Egg Tuck's cult classic is a brioche sandwich capturing soft-scrambled eggs, chives and two different house sauces. The eggs are cooked low and slow with splashes of cream. Enhanced versions of the sandwich are also available, along with potato tots, breakfast burritos and coffee drinks. 1331 Columbia St., 619-228-9097, egguck.com.

Still navigating the city's permitting process is EggBred, an Orange County-based franchise slated to open in the next few months in North Park. Its slogan, "Different Yolks for Different Folks," points to egg dishes paired with never-frozen meats, such as chorizo and breakfast sausage, plus house-made condiments and Japanese milk buns for sandwiches. Adding to the lineup are poutine, loaded potatoes and fresh juices. 2810B El Cajon Blvd., eggbred.com.

Downtown San Diego welcomes Whole Foods

Wide aisles, an expanded selection of beer, wine and liquor, and 176 free parking spaces for shoppers are among the perks at the new Whole Foods, which opened at the base of the mixed-use high rise called The Torrey. Located in downtown's west end, a stone's throw from Little Italy, the store spans 45,400 square feet, which rivals the Whole Foods stores in Hillcrest and La Jolla. The company claims that



Perfectly displayed produce at downtown's new Whole Foods. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr./Special for Times of San Diego)

much of the produce is sourced from local and regional farmers. Although until the hype cools down, expect long checkout lines and fast sell-outs of prepared foods during lunch hour. 201 W. A St., 619-825-0705, wholefoodsmarket.com.

Taste of East Village held over two days

More than 30 restaurants will put forth samples of their latest and greatest menu items for the fifth-ever Taste of East Village, to be held from 4 to 8 p.m., Oct. 14 and 15. Organizers have mapped out two different routes over the course of the two days to give participants a chance to fully explore the expansive downtown neighborhood. Restaurants taking part on the first day include Le Charcuterie Bar, Nick the Greek, Milk & Cookies and The Lost Abbey Brewing Co., which will dole out beer samples.

Second-day participants include East Village Tavern + Bowl, Beshock Ramen, The Kebab Shop, Knotty Barrel Gastropub and Lola 55. Tickets are \$48.75 per day.



Beshock Ramen is taking part in Taste of East Village. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr./Special for Times of San Diego)

They can be purchased at check-in at 808 J St., per availability, or in advance at eastvillagesandiego.com.

Modern Mediterranean cuisine comes to Bankers Hill

Gone are the bold interior colors and deep-red exterior that defined the former Barrio Star restaurant. The structure has now been painted over in soft earth tones by Filo, a Bankers Hill newcomer that opened to the tune of Mediterranean-inspired tapas as well as dry-aged burgers, pasta, seafood and meats.

The food is complemented by signature cocktails as well as craft beer and an accommodating collection of spirits. Filo is the brainchild of Juan Carlos Gomez, who owns the long-established upscale El Agave Restaurant and Tequileria in Old Town. Gomez gave the interior an airy, soothing design that brings elegance to his mostly shareable plates. It opens at 4 p.m. daily. 2706 Fifth Ave., 619-202-9218, filosd.com.

Disney cruises to double sailings out of San Diego port

By JENNIFER VIGIL
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Disney Cruise Line recently announced a new agreement through at least 2031 to approximately double the number of annual cruises out of San Diego.

The deal, with the Port of San Diego, grants Disney priority access to the port's North and South berths at the B Street cruise terminal. The line's destinations out of San Diego include Catalina Island, Baja California and the Mexican Riviera.

The agreement, according to a news release, will clear the way for a wider range of seasonal options and more frequent departures.

"This agreement not only enhances business operations between the port, Disney and all our cruise line partners – it also supports a thriving cruise industry that injects millions into the region's economy and welcomes thousands of visitors to our waterfront each year," said Ann Moore, chair of the port's board.

According to the port, the terms will help the agency better plan and maximize the use of its cruise ship terminals as officials see upward trajectory in cruise calls and passengers.

Last year, Norwegian Cruise Line made San Diego a homeport for the first time with 21 calls set for the 2025-26 season. Overall, the port said 107 different voyages were scheduled for the season, with

389,000 passengers expected to sail in or out of San Diego.

That traffic is predicted to rise dramatically in the coming season, reaching up to 190 total calls and 800,000 passengers, not only due to the Disney expansion, but also new Royal Caribbean homeports in the region.

San Diego's cruise traffic has steadily risen since 2014, when it hit a low of 49,000 boardings, according to a report by Cruise Lines International Association. Boardings climbed up to 145,000 in 2019, but the pandemic killed that momentum as travel ground to a halt.

"San Diego has been an important part of our West Coast operations for more than a decade, and a place our guests

love sailing from," said Jose Fernandez, vice president of port strategy, development and operations for Disney Cruise Line. "This new agreement supports our long-term growth and helps us continue contributing to the region's economy."

The line has been sailing from San Diego since 2012. The city will soon welcome two Disney Cruise Line ships for the 2026-2027 season, the Disney Magic and Disney Wonder.

Disney Magic, arriving in October, will offer three- to seven-night sailings through November followed by a 14-night Panama Canal trip to Galveston. The Disney Wonder will homeport in San Diego from October 2026 through April 2027, with three- to seven-night itineraries that are set to include Catalina Island, Cabo San Lucas, Ensenada and Puerto Vallarta.

Fashion Week San Diego returns with runway shows downtown

By DIANA CAVAGNARO
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Fashion Week San Diego will hold its 19th opening night and runway shows the first weekend in October. Expect a high caliber of emerging and established designers, prestigious celebrity brands, and talented top models.

Opening night on Friday, Oct. 2, will be held at the San Diego Automotive Museum in Balboa Park. The evening will introduce

Fashion Week San Diego's new partner, Nouveau Riche, a virtual reality company specializing in crypto and music.

Their music segment, called Pandora Box, will perform at the event. One of the featured performers is a Tony-nominated musician. The audience will have a sneak peek at upcoming designs, with models positioned alongside the museum's cars. One of Fashion Week San Diego's designers, Brittany Grisham of Grisham Manor, will be signing her latest book about mermaids and pirates.

The official Runway Night will be at UCSD Park and Market, the arts and culture venue downtown. This exciting evening will be presented in three different segments beginning with Community Night, which will highlight 11 New York avant-garde pieces, including the intricate crochet workmanship of Bliss by Mel. These pieces were shown at Sotheby's earlier this year in partnership with the Art Renewal Center.



Model Marley Navorro wearing a Grisham Manor design. (Photo courtesy of HC Photo)

The San Diego audience will now have the privilege of viewing them on the runway.

The second segment will feature community partners, including the San Diego Mesa College design winner, Brooke Jones, from the Golden Scissors Fashion Show and Shapes to Form. The retail partners will include Zeglio Custom Clothiers and World Tribe Cashmere.

Shapes to Form will be promoting their youth and arts program, Haute Steam X, scheduled for Nov. 7. This program for students under 18 years of age consists of four classes covering sustainability, photography, sewing, a slow fashion clinic, and experts who come in and share their experiences, such as CFDA. The second portion of the class is hands-on experience. Applications are currently being accepted and can be found on the Fashion Week San Diego website.

The final portion of the evening will have a line-up of fabulous designers showing their creations on the runway. Some will be established designers, while

FWSD events

Oct. 2 – Opening Night at San Diego Automotive Museum in Balboa Park, 6 p.m.

Oct. 3 – Official Runway Night at UCSD Park and Market, 6–9 p.m.

Oct. 4 – Trunk Show on the rooftop at Andaz San Diego by STK, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

others are emerging talent entering the field. The finale will spotlight celebrity brands, including San Diego designer Liz Russell.

On Sunday, Oct. 4, there will be a Trunk Show on the Rooftop at the Andaz San Diego from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. This gives everyone a chance to meet the designers and purchase a favorite outfit directly from the collections.

For more details about this event, visit <https://fashionweeksd.com/>.

Diana Cavagnaro is an internationally renowned Couture Milliner based in the Southern California area. dianacavagnaro.com.

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2. A state of excitement
3. Jest at
4. Sandwich store
5. Chapter of the Koran
6. Dismounted from a horse
7. Small vehicle
8. Irrked
9. A disreputable man
10. Monetary unit of Samoa
11. A list of woes
12. Weight unit

HalGLOWeen returns to San Diego Zoo with live music, games

By SENNA IHAB OMAR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Zoo returns with HalGLOWeen for the ninth year in a row. Starting on Oct. 3 and running through Oct. 31, every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, families can enjoy an immersive, glittering, glow-in-the-dark annual Halloween extravaganza at the Zoo after dark.

From Halloween snacks to the specialty evening experiences, this “all fun” and “no frights” Halloween spectacle has something for wildlife lovers of all ages. As the sun sets and Halloween begins, attendees can enjoy several special activities, entertainment, costumed characters, live music and Halloween decor.

Zoo members are eligible to attend an exclusive HalGLOWeen preview night on Friday, Oct. 2, and receive access to all the HalGLOWeen events a day early.

There are plenty of events to choose from. Here’s a sampler:

The Zoo Boo Crew will greet guests upon their entrance. The crew will take photos with guests as they trek on their afterdark adventures through the park. Guests can meet beloved Zoo characters like Dr. Harry and friends, dressed in their Halloween finest. The Boo Crew will be available for 30-minute meet-and-greets at 5, 6, 7, and 8 p.m. on Front Street.

At the Front Street Stage, the Skeleton Band, a live rock and pop band, will play Halloween hits “that have your bones rattlin’ to the groovy, ghouly tunes,” according to the San Diego Zoo. The Skeleton Band will perform for 30 minutes at 5:30, 6:30, 7:30, and 8:30 p.m.

In Centennial Plaza, to the left of Front Street, guests can partake in Boolahoops, a glow-in-the-dark, hula-hooping dance party with interactive games and prizes. Each dance party will last 30 minutes and will happen at 5, 6, 7, and 8 p.m. Dr. Zoolittle’s Tricks and Treats, also in Centennial Plaza, is a live 30-minute show featuring wildlife trivia and interactive

activities; performances will take place at 5:30, 6:30, 7:30, and 8:30 p.m.

In Wildlife Explorers Basecamp, located near Centennial Plaza, the Zoo’s wildlife care teams will introduce guests to “spooky” featured creatures; presentations will last 30 minutes and will take place at 5:15, 6:15, and 7:15 p.m. in Rady’s Presentation Area in Wildlife Explorers Basecamp.

From High above Wildlife Explorers Basecamp, acrobatic spider performers will show their skills, weaving webs through the night sky. The Spider’s W.E.B. will perform continuously from 5 to 9 p.m. at Desert Dunes in the Wildlife Explorers Basecamp. From 6:30 to 9 p.m., every 10 minutes, the Glow-Gos will take over the Busy Bee Patio in Wildlife Explorers Basecamp. This animated, neon-colored pumpkin group will sing original songs and tell silly jokes to guests as they roam through the park.

Out in the outback, guests can enjoy a “kooky wildlife-themed specialty act” of



From high above Wildlife Explorers Basecamp, acrobatic spider performers will show their skills, weaving webs through the night sky. (Photo courtesy of the San Diego Zoo)

the Spooky Revue, according to the San Diego Zoo. This specialty glow-in-the-dark acrobatic act will last 20 minutes and take place at 5:30, 6:30, 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. at Sydney’s Grill. After the show, guests can head to the Boardwalk Beer Garden to hear a haunting performance by The Dusty Keys. The “eerie, silly, and talented organist” will take the stage for 45 minutes at 5, 6:05, 7:10 and 8:15 p.m., according to the San Diego Zoo.

Scary-fun events in and around downtown for Halloween this month

By RON DONOHO
SAN DIEGO SUN

The Haunted Trail

Through Nov. 1. The Haunted Trail of Balboa Park, a Halloween scare staple for 26 years, offers a mile-long trail through twisted pines and gnarled oak, and a 3,500 square foot eXperiment Maze. CNN named the trail one of the Best Haunted Attractions in the United States. hauntedtrail.net.

Fright for Future Haunted Maze

A free haunted maze of “true terrors” will bring scary issues concerning people, planet, and animals to light this Halloween season at 3720 El Cajon Blvd. Along the way, attendees will discover ways they can make a difference and be part of the solution. This event is in partnership with several local organizations all dedicated to making this Halloween a hauntingly impactful one. Open Oct. 16–18, and Oct. 23–25. More information at frightforfuture.org/.

Haunted Hangar Halloween Bash

The Midway Museum on the Embarca-

dero hosts a Halloween event (The Goonies Edition) on the hangar deck of downtown’s iconic decommissioned aircraft carrier on Oct. 24. Promised: pirate antics, spooky surprises and family-friendly fun.

San Diego Zombie Crawl

Oct. 24–25, Oct. 30–31, and Nov. 1. This five-day bar-crawling event kicks off each day at American Junkie on Fifth Avenue. Included: lots of free shots, access to more than two dozen Gaslamp Quarter bars and clubs, and deals on dining, hotel stays and overnight parking.

Trick Or Treat on India Street

All ages are invited to India Street in Little Italy on Oct. 26 to trick or treat in an urban setting at participating businesses, and enjoy a party at the Piazza della Famiglia.

Haunted Jungle Bar

“Lost Temple Tavern,” a haunted jungle bar, will run from Oct. 10 through Oct. 31 at Margaritaville Hotel San Diego. Lost Temple Tavern will resemble an overgrown haunted jungle filled with tropical skeletons, cursed castaways, anti-

ent artifacts and eerie twists on familiar island elements with photo-worthy moments and spooky surprises. margaritavilleresorts.com/margaritaville-hotel-san-diego.

Barks & Boos Yappy Hour

On Saturday, Oct. 24, Hilton San Diego Gaslamp Quarter will hold its Barks & Boos Yappy Hour at Wild Hare Bar Garden from 4 to 6 p.m. The dog-friendly event will feature a Halloween pup costume contest with prizes, happy hour food and drink specials, a pup-friendly menu, seasonal treats and giveaways. Costumes are encouraged.

Cirque Nocturne at Hard Rock Hotel

This year, Hard Rock’s 15-DJ, property-wide party extends the Halloween calendar to the first day of November. Party and overnight packages are available. hotel.hardrock.com/san-diego/halloween.

Rooftop Cinema

Various nights. Downtown’s outdoor theater atop the Manchester Grand Hyatt has lined up various spooky movies for

the Halloween season. Selections include “Death Becomes Her,” “Sleepy Hollow,” and “Hotel Transylvania.”

Gaslamp Halloween

Halloween night, 8 p.m. – 2 a.m. Fifth Avenue closes to cars and becomes a costume runway. Every rooftop bar (Altitude, Sidebar, Nolita Hall) and every club (Parq, Omnia, Fluxx) runs a costume contest with \$500 to \$5,000 prizes.

Little Italy Halloween Wine Walk

Oct. 24, 4–7 p.m. Little Italy Piazza and India Street. Boutique tasting stops through Little Italy’s shops and galleries in costume. Ends at the Piazza with a costume contest and DJ. Sells out — buy tickets by early October.

Adams Avenue Halloween Bar Crawl

Oct. 24, 7 p.m. – 2 a.m. Adams Ave from Kensington to Normal Heights turns into an unofficial costume crawl — Sycamore Den, Tiger!Tiger!, Blind Lady Ale House, Rosie O’Grady’s all get costumed crowds. No cover, no tickets, no shuttle needed.

Times of San Diego’s Thomas Melville contributed to this story.

Cutting-edge theater to be excited about this fall on San Diego stages

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Theater boasts some of the biggest national successes for San Diego performing arts. For instance, this fall, a national tour of “The Outsiders” returns to the city in November where it originated, after winning the Tony for best musical in 2024.

But “The Outsiders” isn’t an outlier: Many plays and musicals first seen by audiences in San Diego have made their way to Broadway and beyond, starting with the Stephen Sondheim musical “Into the Woods” in 1986.

Here are the upcoming productions, including world premieres and other cutting-edge performances, that audiences hungry for new work should check out before the shows (potentially) move on to greater fame.

Oh, Mary!

West Coast-premiere dark comedy “Oh, Mary!” through Oct. 4 from Broadway San

Diego at the Civic Theatre. This off-the-wall spoof started as the must-have Off-Broadway ticket for queer people in New York City before sailing to Broadway on a wave of word-of-mouth popularity. Its playwright Cole Escola initially played the historically inaccurate Mary Todd Lincoln, until seasoned comedians including Maya Rudolph, Titus Burgess, Jinkx Monsoon and Jane Krakowski stepped into the role. I’ve never been so tempted to fly to New York just to see a play as when Bowen Yang, of “Saturday Night Live” fame, took a crack at playing the alcoholic, miserable Mary as she tries to make it as a cabaret star in the weeks before Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. In the national tour in San Diego, “RuPaul’s Drag Race” star Alaska Thunderf*ck plays the titular Mary grappling with thwarted dreams. Tickets, Broadway San Diego.

Begin Again

World-premiere musical “Begin Again,” through Oct. 18, The Old Globe Theatre.



Nolan White and ‘The Outsiders’ North American Tour company. (Photo by Matthew Murphy/Broadway San Diego)

This pre-Broadway engagement will refine the new production, based on the 2013 John Carney film starring Keira Knightley as heartbroken songwriter Gretta. She is discovered by struggling producer Dan, played by Mark Ruffalo, and they perform songs across New York City.

In this musical, the band Train (remember the ‘00s hits “Hey, Soul Sister” and “Drops of Jupiter”?) lent their pop song

prowess to compose an all-new score about “rediscovering passion” and the “courage to start over.” Tickets, The Old Globe.

Our Lady of the San Diego Convention Center

World-premiere “Our Lady of the San Diego Convention Center” from TuYo Theatre begins at The Old Globe and tours across San Diego through Oct. 18. The piece is set at the Convention Center in spring of 2021 when it became a mass holding facility for unaccompanied migrant children. The piece is writer Mario Vega’s second work for TuYo after the musical “Pásale Pásale.” It is produced in partnership with Casa Familiar, the San Ysidro-based organization that was among the providers of 24-hour care for young asylum seekers in 2021. That might make for a unique insight into what actually happened at a San Diego venue that is one of the region’s biggest national draws. Tickets, reserve pay-what-you-can (suggested, \$25).

From film fests to dance, more things to explore this fall

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Some art defies easy categories. But variety is the spice! So, we created this special category to encompass a cornucopia of artful fall celebrations. Here we touch on fine arts, film, opera, dance, books and some Halloween fun.

Trolley Dances

Trolley Dances takes place Oct. 3 and 4 starting at UTC Mall, then shifting to various locations. In partnership with the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, dance companies and community groups perform at locations along public transit trolley lines and at stations. Former San Diego Dance Theater artistic director Jean Isaacs created the program over 25 years ago to make dance accessible to all of San Diego by taking art “to the people.” Tour guides lead audiences on and off the trolley to view original dances from over 50 local performers. Tickets, San Diego Dance Theater.

San Diego Italian Film Festival

The festival is celebrating its 20th edition

with a new launch event that honors the history that began with late founder Victor Laruccia and his legacy within Italian San Diego culture. Part of that legacy is the short film competition Ristretto Awards, now in its eighth edition. The rest of the festival, through Oct. 10, takes place at the Museum of Photographic Arts at the San Diego Museum of Art and Digital Gym Cinema in East Village. Tickets and schedules, San Diego Italian Film Festival.

Poéticas del Arrabal: Opera and Tango

Oct. 4 at 6:30 p.m. at the San Diego Museum of Art. Camarada, the chamber music group, celebrates its first season in residence at SDMA with a concert blending music and visual art. The museum’s rotunda will host the Camarada Tango Quartet with singers Gabriela Bojórquez and Martín de León for an exploration of tango through the music of Astor Piazzolla in arrangements by Andrés Martín. Tickets start at \$50, San Diego Museum of Art.

SDIFF galas and awards

The San Diego International Film Festival celebrates 25 years at its After Dark Party

on Oct. 17 at 8 p.m. at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach. The festival will hand out filmmaker awards at the industry party before the Mustache Bash Band takes the stage. The entire fest takes place from Oct. 13–18, and includes popular programs like Night of the Stars and Culinary Cinema in La Jolla. Admission — festival passes start at \$250 with individual tickets available for parties and screenings.

Rigoletto

San Diego Opera presents “Rigoletto” on Oct. 23–25 at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. on Sunday. In this classic opera by Giuseppe Verdi, court jester Rigoletto is betrayed by the Duke of Mantua after a joke lands poorly, threatening his wellbeing, along with his daughter Gilda. What follows is a tale of sacrifice and revenge directed by Christopher Mattaliano and conducted by Yves Abel with libretto by Francesco Maria Piave. Tickets, San Diego Opera.

Silent Movie Mondays

“The Headless Horseman” on Oct. 26, 7 p.m. at Balboa Theatre. Organist David

Marsh brings this eerie film to life with musical accompaniment that transports the audience back in time to 1920 to see the silent film the way it was meant to be heard, with a massive theater organ. The film stars John Barrymore as respectable Dr. Jekyll, whose evil alter ego spins his life out of control. Tickets, \$18.

Yokai Masquerade

Yokai Masquerade on Oct. 31 from 6–10 p.m. at the Japanese Friendship Garden and Museum. Celebrate Halloween with this unique ode to folkloric Japanese spirits — see artistic displays, after-hours museum exhibits and the grandeur of a yokai parade — all while in masked costumes. Tickets, \$60.

Visiones Nocturnas

Through Jan. 17, 2027. The new Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego exhibition, “Visiones Nocturnas: Queer Nightlife in Contemporary Art” includes art that explores a variety of spaces — clubs, dive bars, backyards and bathhouses — as sites of queer joy and possibility. More than a dozen artists have pieces in the exhibit.



LITTLE ITALY NEWS

Christopher Gomez

The leaves are falling, and autumn is calling, and that can only mean one thing: October is officially here.

Beyond the new fall vibes, this month is Italian Heritage Month, and the Little Italy Association has everything for a festive celebration. Learn the best ways to celebrate Italian heritage in Little Italy, from events to pumpkin-inspired bites and sips.

Neighborhood Happenings

October is packed with events in Little Italy, beginning with The Feast, hosted by the Busalacchi Restaurants on Sunday, Oct. 11, from 5 to 10 p.m. The inaugural event will transform India Street into an open-air dining experience, closing the street from W. Fir to W. Grape streets and bringing guests together around

The Feast, Galbani Bella Vita, and Trick or Treats

communal banquet tables for a family-style Italian feast in the heart of the neighborhood. This is a ticketed celebration and space is limited. To reserve your seat at The Feast, go to www.barbusa.com/the-feast.

The festivities continue Oct. 17–18 with Galbani Bella Vita Fest, a celebration of Italian culture featuring chalk art, food, wine, music and more. From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., visitors can stroll through the neighborhood as talented artists create elaborate chalk paintings and then enjoy authentic Italian bites and wine.

Rounding out the month is Trick-or-Treat on India Street on Sunday, Oct. 25, inviting little ghouls, goblins and witches to dress up for an urban trick-or-treating adventure throughout the neighborhood. Piazza della Famiglia will transform into a scene straight out of “The Nightmare Before Christmas,” complete with a giant 13-foot Jack Skellington, towering pumpkin stacks, and plenty of photo oppor-

tunities. Families can also browse seasonal vendors curated by the Little Italy Mercato for fall finds and festive goodies!

Fall Bites and Sips Guide

As we move into pumpkin spice season, be sure to hit all of your favorite neighborhood spots to savor the best autumn flavors. Wanting to get your fall flavor fix in the morning? Stop by Bird Rock Coffee Roasters, Parakeet Café, and Pappalecco for seasonal fall latte specials featuring signature pumpkin and spiced syrups paired with seasonal bites. For those still looking to cool off, treat yourself to hand-crafted, artisanal frozen desserts inspired by classic fall desserts at Handel’s Homemade Ice Cream, Holy Paleta and



The Galbani Bella Vita Fest takes place Oct. 17–18 with chalk art, food, wine, music and more. (Photo by Thomas Melville/Times of San Diego)

Salt & Straw. From comforting sips to sweet treats, there are so many ways to enjoy the staple fall flavors.

San Diego FC’s Italian Heritage Night

Join the Little Italy Association, Convivio and the Italian Cultural Center for San Diego FC’s Italian Heritage Night on Saturday, Nov. 7. Watch as San Diego FC takes on Sporting Kansas City for a matchup that is sure to excite! This is a game you won’t want to miss, so be sure to snag your tickets to receive a limited-edition commem-

orative “Forza San Diego FC” Italian Heritage Night scarf. Get your tickets today at italianheritagenight.com.

October brings cooler temperatures, pumpkin flavors and plenty to celebrate.



EAST VILLAGE NEWS

Dominic Li Mandri

The calendar may say fall, but in San Diego, October is all about locals’ summer. With warm sunshine lingering well into the season and summer crowds beginning to thin, October is the perfect time to experience the city like a true San Diegan. And there’s no better place to start than East Village.

Taste of East Village

October welcomes the return of the

Fall for the tastes of East Village this October

popular culinary event Taste of East Village, the ultimate opportunity to explore the neighborhood and discover all the world-class food and beverage that East Village has to offer.

Taking place Wednesday, Oct. 14 and Thursday, Oct. 15 from 4 to 8 p.m., this year’s event expands to two days, with more than 30 participating restaurants across two distinct routes. Guests can choose one day or both, discovering a different side of East Village with each route.

The concept is simple: come hungry and explore. At check-in, ticket holders will

receive a Taste Passport complete with a neighborhood map and participating restaurants’ menu offerings, making it easy to chart a personalized culinary adventure. Along the way, guests can sample everything from savory bites and hearty entrees to sweet treats and refreshing drinks, highlighting the breadth of East Village’s food and beverage scene.

The Wednesday, Oct. 14, South Route features a diverse selection of destinations between 10th and 15th avenues, including Asa Bakery & Cafe, Bub’s @ The Ballpark,

Café Alessie, Cafe de L’Opera, Doggos Gus, LandShark Bar & Grill at Margaritaville, Le Charcuterie Bar, The Church by Lost Abbey, Nékter and Nick the Greek, with additional participating restaurants rounding out the route.

On Thursday, Oct. 15, the North Route offers another opportunity to explore, with stops between 8th and 13th avenues including Bay City Brewing Co., Beshock Ramen & Sake Bar, Bird Rock Coffee Roasters, East Village Tavern + Bowl, El Comal at Quartyard, The Knotty Barrel, Lola 55 and The Invigatorium, among others.



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