

MISSION TIMES COURIER

October 9 – November 12, 2026

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Staying connected to nature



Carol Lockwood, San Carlos Community Garden co-founder, says the garden encourages people to slow down and feel more connected to one another. See more on page 16. (Photo by Kelly Wood/Special for Times of San Diego)

COVER STORY

San Carlos community struggles with pain and grief after the shocking deaths last month of the well-liked Voight family

What happened in San Carlos, off Boulder Lake Drive, on Sept. 14 is something no neighborhood or community should ever experience. A well-liked neighborhood dad, a decorated Navy veteran, a fixture known for tinkering with things in the front yard, digging fence posts and puttering in the garage, suddenly snapped on a Tuesday night, and that shocking event has rocked this quiet suburb to its core. To say this tragedy was unexpected or came as a shock is an understatement. Two of our writers live in San Carlos and were personally affected by the tragedy. One was the Voight's neighbor who went to check on her friends and found a heartbreaking scene. **PAGE 2**

WEATHER

City addressing how troubled reservoirs will brace for El Niño

In 2025, the Division of Safety of Dams designated both Lake Hodges and Lake Murray as posing an "extremely high" downstream hazard if they fail. Record-breaking heavy rainfall forced the city to release 11 billion gallons of water from Lake Hodges from 2023 to 2024, according to the Santa Fe Irrigation District in February 2024. Lake Murray has not had a major release. Still, if it ever exceeds its restriction, the state requires the city to fully open its low-level outlet, according to Department of Water Resources spokesperson Jason Ince. **PAGE 10**



GARBAGE FEES

Councilmembers trash Mayor Gloria over garbage fee error

Last month, the city acknowledged a "glitch" with the garbage fee that impacted residents city-wide. 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. Gloria ordered city staff to get to the bottom of it. Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera, at the budget committee, said, "...something needs to change drastically and quickly because the city and its residents can't afford more mistakes like this." **PAGE 4**



TRAGEDY IN SAN CARLOS

A community struggles with pain and grief after the deaths of the Voight family

By DORIAN HARGROVE
and KAREN PEARLMAN
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN CARLOS — Neighbors die. Marriages dissolve. Residents relocate. Kids who once congregated in front yards and built forts in empty lots head off to college.

These are the inevitable changes that every community experiences.

But what happened in San Carlos, off Boulder Lake Drive, on Sept. 14 is something no neighborhood or community should ever experience.

A well-liked neighborhood dad, a fixture known for tinkering with things in the front yard, backing up ATV trailers, digging fence posts and puttering in the garage, suddenly snapped on a Tuesday night, killing his 13-year-old daughter and his wife — it was her 54th birthday — before turning the gun on himself.

To say this tragedy was unexpected or came as a shock is an understatement.

That Tuesday at around 9:10 p.m., the tragedy unfolded in a quiet, hilly stretch of San Carlos, just a few blocks from Cowles Mountain.

Now gone is the dad, Dave Voight. Gone is his wife, Amy, a witty, strong, loving mom. Gone far too early is their daughter, Mya, a charismatic and sweet 13-year-old middle school girl with a boundless future ahead.

For neighbors on Boulder Lake and the surrounding side streets, Mya's outdoor chalk parties and the accompanying giggles of her neighborhood friends have

On Sept. 15, a neighbor found three people dead in a San Carlos home. They were close friends, the couple and their young daughter, and the neighbor, Karen Pearlman, a long-time San Diego journalist, has grappled with her emotions since the profoundly painful discovery. She writes for Times of San Diego and its community newspapers, including the Mission Times Courier. So does editor Dorian Hargrove, whose son attended school with Mya Voight, daughter of Amy and Dave Voight. Here they share their thoughts about the Voight family and the heartache and disbelief of having such a tragedy hit so close to home.

been replaced. A piercing quiet surrounds the corner home that until so recently was loud with happiness, love, and laughter.

So many questions

The three loud bangs that sounded in the cozy San Carlos community that Tuesday night have dissipated, but the memory of them and what they meant rattles inside the heads and hearts of neighbors.

It shakes a middle school, too, touching homes such as mine. My son went to school with Mya.

The day the family was found, as I drove my son and his friend to soccer practice, I listened to the seventh graders talk about Mya. They spoke of their brief interactions with her. They talked about how nice she was. My son said Mya gave him a piece of gum a few days before. They listed all their friends who knew her.

I felt the rattle as I drove. As a parent, an incapable one at times, I wondered how to respond. As a journalist, a reluctant one at times, I knew some of the details.

The questions from the two boys began.

Did they find the killer?

Did they find guns?

Why did he do it?

What were their final moments like?

I know other kids asked their parents these same types of questions. I know other parents whose children were close with Mya faced questions I could only imagine; I prefer not to.

I kept quiet and responded in brief, controlled sentences. I left details out. I stopped short of any response that could prompt follow-ups. I wondered if I was doing them a disservice. I thought about how hundreds of other students were likely asking their parents or whomever similar questions. I wondered if they had better answers. They likely did.

The rattle isn't just personal. It's a reminder of years and decades of tragedies that we have seen and heard on the news. We have no answers for them either.

This is not a debate over mental illness or a discussion of gun control. This is a reaction to a sudden loss, one felt even by someone like me, who had never known of the Voights' existence before Sept. 15. This is a community's attempt to answer a question no one, no place, ever wants to try and answer.

The neighborhood, while transformed, will live on. A new family may eventually move into the home on that corner lot.



A makeshift memorial to the Voight family has grown next to their house in San Carlos. (Photo by Karen Pearlman/Special for Times of San Diego)

But for those who considered the Voights friends and valued their presence in the community, the reminders will be impossible to forget; the pain and grief will linger and bubble under the surface.

Karen Pearlman was so close to the Voights that her pain goes beyond mere questions.

During nearly four decades of covering East County for The San Diego Union-Tribune, and more recently as a contributor to Times of San Diego, Pearlman has previously found herself at crime scenes. She has interviewed people unable to process, unable to escape the quiet grasp of grief. Now, she is one of them.

It was Pearlman, the longtime journalist who was among the Voights' closest neighbors.

It was Pearlman who walked into the home and stumbled into the unthinkable. It is Pearlman who, like so many, will live with the questions that can never be answered.

Remembering the Voights as friends, good neighbors and a loving family

By KAREN PEARLMAN
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN CARLOS — I was walking my dog just around the corner when I heard the three loud bangs come from the vicinity of the Voights' home. I was unsure if it was a propane tank backfire or HVAC system breaking down, or something from their backyard that blew up.

I did not realize what the sounds actually were until after police told me the following day that Dave Voight had a collection

of guns locked away in a garage safe.

I have been the Voights' regular dogsitter and housesitter for about five years, and walked their dogs with my own dogs over many years as well. I knew the previous homeowners and the layout of the house, which the Voights had upgraded and improved tenfold. When they were out and packages arrived, I often received text messages from Dave, his wife Amy, or both, to use the house code they had shared with me to bring their items inside.

After thinking more worriedly about the noises I heard, I sent a text message 20 minutes later to Amy, who was celebrating her 54th birthday, and then texted Dave, asking if either had heard the bangs and to ask them if they were safe.

There was no response.

The following morning, I sent another round of texts and made phone calls to each of them separately. The couple's vehicles sat unmoved in the driveway



A photo of Amy and Dave Voight at the memorial next to their house. (Photo by Karen Pearlman/Special for Times of San Diego)

Continued on Page 3

Remembering the Voights

Continued from Page 2

when they should have been gone, with Amy and Dave off to work or driving the few blocks to Pershing Middle to drop Mya off at school.

I rang the doorbell. No answer.

I peered inside. No movement.

I knocked again and banged my knuckles on the master bedroom window. No response.

I went back to the front door. I typed in the key code and entered the Voight home.

Once inside, I yelled for Amy, Dave and Mya. I walked down the hallway into the dark master bedroom and saw something unspeakable, a scene that will forever be etched into my mind. I saw the family dog, Penny, who is hard of hearing, sleeping nearby.

The next 12 hours were mind-numbing. Mostly, I sat on the curb in front of the Voights' home with a department psychiatric team and the San Diego police chaplain, and did my best to answer endless questions from detectives, as swarms of San Diego police officers and workers from the coroner's office went back and forth into and out of the home, eventually removing the bodies of the family I knew so well and loved.

As a journalist and storyteller, I want the community to know who the Voights were, what they meant to the neighborhood, in an effort to better align the assumptions that accompany tragedies of this scale. Here is how I remember them.

Dave was a Chicago native, a decorated Navy veteran working for the government, devoted to his family, who thought his daughter hung the moon, and was fiercely loyal to his military brothers and his friends. We sent texts to each other during Chicago Cubs and Chicago Bears games, cheering and booing as appropriate. Proud of his country, he kept the American flag flying high from the top of their house. His truck bore a USA emblem.

Amy was the quintessential California girl, upbeat and active, physically fit and mentally tough. She was a generous friend with a huge heart, who rescued dogs and tested her green thumb with plants and flowers. She was the rock who grounded her family, and outside the home she ferreted out bad actors working as an integral part of the local NCIS, the Navy's investigative service.



Photos of Mya Voight with the family dog Penny at the memorial outside their house. (Photo by Karen Pearlman/Special for Times of San Diego)

Mya was an eighth grader who had struggled a little in school early on but overcame it to become a star student who loved her family, her dogs, creating art, goofing off with her friends and playing tennis and volleyball. There was always a lot of shouting, laughter, and pool splashing in the summer when Mya hosted her friends.

They adored their black Labrador, Buddy, and I loved dog-sitting for him when the family went out of town, as well as for their terrier mix, Penny (who was rescued on Sept. 16 from the home by San Diego firefighters from our local station 34. She has since been rehomed).

I walked Buddy for several years for an hour every morning along with my own dogs and, upon our daily return, was always greeted by an upbeat Dave, who would give the dogs a bunch of carrot chunks as treats.

I remember seeing Dave jump to action in times of neighborhood crises. Once, a neighbor's dog was attacked by another dog. Dave went into high alert.

He left his house, ran around the corner, picked up the injured dog, calmed down the dog's owner, put both in his truck and sped away. He told me later that he drove through every red light and stop sign until he got the dog to the animal emergency room to be seen for puncture wounds.

When I ordered a mini trampoline (similar to one that Amy had and I used at their house) that I could not put together, I brought the package to the Voights. Dave assembled it, and later told me Amy had to help him finish the task.

Amy always brought me back gifts from wherever the family would go – a T-shirt from Hawaii, a hoodie from Lake Arrowhead, soaps and a body scrubber from Palm Springs, mugs from Chicago.

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County releases data on city's trash fee error that overcharged residents

By DORIAN HARGROVE
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — A homeowner on Meade Avenue in Normal Heights was billed \$3,152 for the city's new trash fee, even though the correct annual charge was \$534.

The \$2,618 overcharge was the largest among 44,038 San Diego properties that received inflated trash fee assessments because of a city spreadsheet error.

County of San Diego data, obtained by Times of San Diego, shows 15 homes were overbilled by more than \$2,000 on their property tax bills.

The largest overcharges were scattered across the city, affecting homeowners in neighborhoods including Bankers Hill, Hillcrest, College Area and North Park.

In total, 1,026 property owners were overcharged by more than \$1,000 in trash fees, which differs from the 640 customers that the city identified on its website.

The majority of the 44,038 homeowners who received erroneous bills were overcharged between \$100 and \$1,000, while 13,822 were overcharged by less than \$100. A total of 97 homeowners saw their trash fees increase by less than a dollar.

In all, the average overcharge from the billing blunder was just under \$269.

District 9 had the highest share of overcharged customers, with about 62.9% receiving bills above the amount they signed up to pay.

The county released the data in a public records request that was submitted by journalist Marty Graham, who was one of the first to discover the city's mistake after reading a post on Nextdoor from a neighbor who spotted an overcharge on their bill.

Graham then got to work with a friend. They looked at the size of trash cans in their Normal Heights neighborhood and then went on the county assessor's website to look to see if their property bill matched the receptacle size. Graham and her friend found that 34% of the homes in their informal survey had the wrong trash fees listed.

Graham alerted the media. The county tax collector posted a message on its website. San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria soon released a statement calling for quick action.

"San Diegans deserve accurate bills, and this error is unacceptable," Gloria said in a statement, three days after Graham first alerted the media.

The city is now trying to unwind the "glitch." 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.

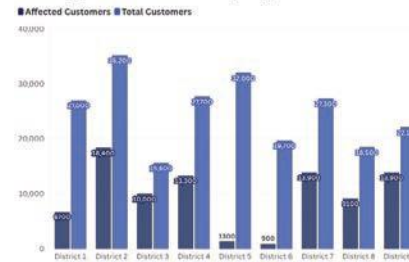
That wasn't enough for Councilmember Henry Foster III, who, before the city's budget committee last week, said he was "disgusted and appalled" by the error, particularly because he said it would hit his constituents in District 4 hard.

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:

San Diego Trash Fee Overcharges by District



(By Dorian Hargrove/Times of San Diego)

"...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.

"San Diegans expect their city government to be accurate and accountable," Gloria 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."

Not all are convinced the accountability and accuracy has been achieved.

"Throughout unscrewing this mess, it's been citizens doing the work, and the county," Graham told Times of San Diego. "The city told reporters it was typically \$100 overcharge for 44,000 households. Their own data shows that the median overcharge was \$201 and the average was



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

\$269. The highest overcharge was more than \$2,600. Is it a lack of math ability or a lack of candor?"

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.

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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
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before
they take
place is
critical.”

Joe LaCava,
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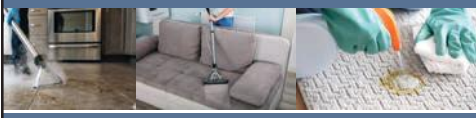


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On heels of trash fee error, Gloria to take national affordability tour

By DREW SITTON
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Mayor Todd Gloria stood up on Sept. 25, at the close of last 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 recently 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 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 urged residents not to pay the current listed



Mayor Todd Gloria, president of the United States Conferences of Mayors, announced a national affordability tour at a press conference on Sept. 25. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

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.

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. Gloria 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. "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 in a statement to Times of San Diego, following this story's initial publication.

"The mayor can change that tomorrow by hiring an experienced professional to run the city's day-to-day operations."

The mayors at last week's news conference touted their jobs leading cities as uniquely positioning them to inform federal policy because they know what Americans need day to day.

"There's no other group in the United States that actually get things done like mayors, doesn't matter if it's technical solutions to protect our community, getting the trash picked up," said Mayor Daniel Rickenmann of Columbia, S.C. "Our focus is to outcomes."

That focus has shifted to affordability outcomes, no matter the mayors' political bent.

"When it comes to serving the people we represent, doesn't matter what political party you are, doesn't matter the differences that you have," Rickenmann said. "Nobody gives a damn as long as that pothole gets fixed."

In USCM's biggest study ever on affordability, 93% of mayors surveyed said that costs had risen in the past year and 96% said their residents were very or extremely concerned about the affordability crisis.

The study prompted October's tour, in which Gloria plans to meet with residents struggling to afford rent, healthcare, food and other costs, then leaders addressing those issues. It begins in Albuquerque, N.M. with a look at childcare expenses.

San Diego State University breaks ground on Fenton Parkway Bridge

By SENNA IHAB OMAR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

MISSION VALLEY — Construction began Sept. 21 on the Fenton Parkway Bridge, which will provide vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists with a new crossing in Mission Valley. The bridge is designed to let water flow completely over it during heavy floods.

The bridge will extend Fenton Parkway over the San Diego River to Camino del Rio North. It will include one traffic lane in each direction, bicycle and pedestrian pathways on both sides and a center-turn lane for access to San Diego State University's Snapdragon Stadium.

The project is intended to improve "multimodal transportation in the area and improve public safety by providing a reliable and direct access route for emergency response personnel," SDSU officials said in a press release. It will also expand access to the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System Green Line trolley stations at Fenton Parkway and SDSU Mission Valley.

As construction enters its third week, the university said traffic impacts will be minimal on Camino Del Rio North and at the Fenton Parkway/River Park Road intersection.

With a \$53 million price tag for design, entitlements and construction, general contractor Flatiron Dragados anticipates

construction will be complete in fall 2027.

The Fenton Parkway Bridge project is part of a 2018 agreement between SDSU and the City of San Diego, which also led to the development of SDSU Mission Valley.

Although SDSU is constructing the bridge, it will be owned and operated by the city, Anne Collins-Doehne, director of land use planning and environmental review for The California State University system, said.

In 2022, SDSU and the city entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for the Fenton Parkway Bridge project and have worked closely on the bridge's design, environmental review and permitting.

"The bridge is an essential public facility that has been in the Mission Valley Community Plan for decades," SDSU's press release read.

San Diego's Mission Valley Community Plan was originally adopted by the City Council in 1985 and has been amended more than 20 times to reflect changes in the city's planning, most recently in 2019, according to a 2019 report to the Planning Commission.

The plan covers 32,000 acres in central San Diego. It will include 4,600 residential units, including SDSU student, faculty and staff housing, affordable, workforce and market-rate housing and SDSU's multiuse Snapdragon Stadium.

SDSU said that 10 percent of the units will be affordable housing, approximately

460 of the 4,600 units. Those units will be available to those who qualify for affordable housing, including students, faculty, staff and the general community.

The plan also includes approximately 400 hotel rooms and 6,000 parking spaces.

For additional details and information on the project and construction, visit missionvalley.sdsu.edu/community-updates.



Rendering of Fenton Parkway Bridge, a new high-water crossing in Mission Valley. (Courtesy of San Diego State University)

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ACLU asks court to compel city to remove Flock cameras

By TESSA BALC
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — Two organizations have joined forces to seek an injunction against the city of San Diego over the San Diego Police Department's use of automated license plate readers.

They're asking the court to make the city stop using ALPRs and terminate contracts associated with the technology, while uninstalling all streetlight cameras that operate as readers and deleting all the stored data that has been collected by the systems.

Last week, the ACLU Foundation of San Diego and Imperial counties and the Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans, the plaintiffs in the case, stood in front of the Hall of Justice in Downtown San Diego to announce the suit.

The plaintiffs argue that the technology, due to the high density of cameras throughout the city of San Diego, violates the right to privacy protected in the California constitution.

By retaining ALPR data for a month-long period, the plaintiffs claim SDPD can create a pattern based on people's movements throughout the city — and others with whom they associate too.

"And let's be clear: These cameras do not just take an individual snapshot of an individual license plate so that somebody's car can be looked up later," Frederick Carroll, legal director at the ACLU foundation, said.

"They work like every other camera. They contain the whole image that the lens sees. So that includes make, model, color, license plate, bumper stickers, identifying insignia, the ball cap you're wearing when

your window's down, the tattoos you're showing when your arm's out the window."

While the speakers highlighted the technology's capabilities, they were also quick to point out its shortcomings.

They cited a Times of San Diego report, also included in the lawsuit, that found a man had been wrongfully identified as the perpetrator of a crime by a Flock camera, and spent time in jail despite being innocent.

Homayra Yusufi, a senior policy strategist at PANA, said that despite being touted as a tool to be used in an emergency, ALPRs did not direct law enforcement toward the scene of May's fatal mosque shooting in time to prevent it.

"My community was ravaged in May after white supremacists shot and killed members of my community. On that horrific day, ALPRs were not just an

affront to our democracy, but they were ineffective," she said.

"So, when you compile the fact(s) that these are ineffective technologies and who they are surveilling and targeting, we have to recognize that this technology is being used against us, not for us."

Carroll told Times of San Diego that to their knowledge this is the only local lawsuit targeting a city in an attempt to discontinue its use of ALPRs under the California constitution. He said, though, that there are complementary efforts, including a case in Northern California called *Siren v. San Jose*.

Seth Hall, of the Trust SD Coalition, formed in 2019 to push back against and promote responsible use of the smart streetlights in wide use across San Diego, said he believes the track the city is on is a slippery slope.

"When's it going to be a big enough deal? Hall said.

SDPD now discloses why officers search Flock license plate readers

By DORIAN HARGROVE and TESSA BALC
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.

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Volunteers pitch in for San Carlos United Methodist Preschool remodel

(More than 60 volunteers worked in shifts to update the popular preschool at San Carlos United Methodist Church. Volunteer Gail Haag wrote about the volunteers who braved the summer heat to keep chipping away at what is expected to be a three-year renovation. Below are the notes from the group's latest effort to update the community's largest preschool.)

"It was very inspiring to have so many people willing to give of their time and financial resources to help our preschool. Many hands definitely made lighter work (though it was a LOT of work)! It was fun to think of the reaction of the teachers when they first saw their new rooms." — Lois DeKock, church member

This was the sentiment of many as church and community volunteers showed up during the week of July 25 to Aug. 1 to completely renovate three more classrooms of the San Carlos United Methodist Church's well-known preschool. Since the preschool operates year-round, this three-year project, expected to be completed in 2027, happens during the two-week summer break when the school is closed.

History

The San Carlos Preschool has served young children from the San Carlos community since the 1960's. The preschool was the first permanent structure on the church's campus, even before the permanent church. The fine staff under the direction of Wendy Kosa provides a robust, fun, play oriented program where children naturally explore, discover and learn. Over the years, classroom items have been "fixed" and slightly changed, but the well-used rooms were showing their wear.



One of the lunch teams, Mary Ann Church and Cathy McGinnis, with a taco making station. (Photo by Gail Haag/Special for Times of San Diego)

So, church members Chuck Haag and Vance Mills came up with a volunteer-led plan to give the nine classrooms an update in just one week.

"Could I hope for a better way to spend my retirement? Pitching in for a preschool deeply connected to a church whose mission I share, while building my skills at painting ceilings and laying plank flooring. I want to be in that number when the saints march into another preschool classroom," said church member and volunteer Tom Shaver.

Sixty volunteers showed up over the course of the week and heard project manager Chuck Haag make his morning announcement, "Volunteers doing professional work."

Breakfast and lunch were provided each day by volunteer 'food teams.' Breakfast is at 7 a.m., then a short devotion and prayer is offered up for that day's task. Haag followed the morning announcement with a detailed explanation for the day



From left, volunteers Gilberto Lira, Martha Shaver, Bill Broadwell, and Peter Lahoo work to renovate a room. (Photo by Gail Haag/Special for Times of San Diego)

and safety procedures to go along with it.

"Working together as a church community to benefit the preschool was very gratifying and rewarding. To see the old, tired rooms transformed in one short week was amazing. We had so many levels of volunteers from skilled to beginners, and it was great to see teaching and learning happening as we worked together. The food, as always, was amazing and the entire project was so expertly organized. It was a pleasure to be a part of the renovation," said volunteer Bambi Deis.

The work was extensive. Each room received a new air-conditioning unit, new overhead lighting, and new safety door locks. Work began with a Saturday demolition day, followed by prep day, paint day, flooring day, cabinet and countertop installations, all new childproof outlets, new "teacher shelves," and cleanup for the teachers' return.

The work turned the 'tired' rooms into

light, bright, well-organized learning spaces.

Project benefits

The experience brought together 60 different people ranging in age from teens to some in their 80s.

Some people liked to demolish things, so they came on the first day, while others came for painting. Nothing could have been done without the 'helper bees.'

New friendships were made as people came together in a genuine spirit of giving their time and talents. The last day can be emotional as people walk through the beautifully finished rooms, an example of faith in action where people patiently work together to accomplish each daily goal, which ultimately meets the entire week's goal.

"The church and preschool community that comes together for our preschool renovation project serves from the foundation of love and service to others. The time, talent, and gifts brought together in Phase 2 surpassed all expectations and truly reflected a unified commitment to creating the learning environment our children and families deserve. I see the impact daily. On a personal note, I was profoundly transformed for a second time working alongside these awe-inspiring people. Bring on Phase 3," said Preschool assistant director Cindy Prodor.

Looking to the future

Plans for next year are already taking shape. Along with renovating the last three classrooms, an outside area will receive new landscaping and "landscape learning" gardens will be developed for the children.

The work of the volunteers was not overlooked.

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City addressing how troubled reservoirs will brace for ‘Super’ El Niño

By THOMAS MURPHY
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — In preparation for a looming ‘Super’ El Niño, or “Godzilla El Niño” as others have coined it, the city is shoring up two of San Diego’s aging, water-level-restricted reservoirs. In 2025, the Division of Safety of Dams designated both Lake Hodges and Lake Murray as posing an “extremely high” downstream hazard if they fail.

Record-breaking heavy rainfall forced the city to release 11 billion gallons of water from Lake Hodges from 2023 to 2024, according to the Santa Fe Irrigation District in February 2024. Lake Murray has not had a major release. Still, if it ever exceeds its restriction, the state requires the city to fully open its low-level outlet, according to Department of Water Resources spokesperson Jason Ince.

State regulators capped water levels at both reservoirs because of seismic safety concerns, with Lake Hodges restricted to less than 30% of its maximum capacity. State inspectors found the structural condition of the Lake Hodges dam was “unsatisfactory” and in need of immediate repairs.

Reservoirs can fill and spill during years with extreme rainfall potential, according to Public Utilities Department spokesperson Jennifer McBride, but the city faces a different storm-management challenge at each reservoir.

“This year, the city is again taking early, proactive steps to manage reservoir levels and is using updated hydrologic forecasts from regional and statewide partners to guide decision-making,” McBride told Times of San Diego. “This includes drawing down reservoirs well before the rainy season by sending water for treatment and use.”

The city will actively manage Lake Hodges’ water level before and during storms, releasing water to not exceed the state restriction.

Built in the early 20th century, both dams have seen three ‘Super’ El Niños — which struck San Diego in 1957–58, 1982–83 and 1997–98 — but never before have they faced a major El Niño season under their current operating restrictions.

Lake Murray: Less runoff, different risks

Lake Murray faces the same regulatory constraint, but not the same stormwater



Lake Murray Reservoir in San Diego.
(Photo by Thomas Murphy/Times of San Diego)

pressure or poor condition. The Division of Safety of Dams described its condition as “Fair” in 2023, meaning it does not have any structural deficiencies. Unlike Lake Hodges, Lake Murray is not in dire need of repairs.

State regulators restricted the reservoir’s water level to 90 feet in 2023, 5 feet below the dam spillway. If Murray exceeds that restriction, the state requires the city to fully open the dam’s low-level outlet.

Lake Murray poses an “Extremely High” downstream hazard in the event of failure, so a large reservoir water release could prove problematic. The state reports that a failure could affect downstream areas along Alvarado Creek and the San Diego River, including La Mesa and the College Area.

The city does not plan to lower Murray. The reservoir has a very small watershed and does not typically receive significant rainfall or runoff, according to Public Utilities.

The Murray Urban Runoff Diversion System also diverts runoff away from the reservoir.

Murray primarily supports the operation of the Alvarado Water Treatment Plant, so its water level normally remains relatively stable.

The city says it operates the dam a few feet below the regulatory restriction to provide additional freeboard for runoff.

Lake Hodges: More runoff, less room

Lake Hodges was first restricted by state regulators in 2019. The reservoir is capped at 280 feet — 35 feet below the 315-foot spillway crest, according to the dam safety division. The restriction has substantially reduced the amount of water the city can store at the reservoir.

The Division of Safety of Dams described Lake Hodges’ dam condition as “Unsatisfactory” in 2022, classifying the dam as requiring immediate or emergency repairs. Its possible failure is classified as an “Extremely High” downstream hazard.

Old Mission Dam: The 200-year-old engineering marvel in Mission Gorge

By DEBBIE L. SKLAR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

Located in the rugged landscape of Mission Trails Regional Park is a stone structure that quietly tells one of San Diego’s earliest stories.

More than 200 years ago, an ambitious engineering project was built along the San Diego River to capture water, support agriculture, and help sustain Mission San Diego de Alcalá.

Today, Old Mission Dam remains one of the region’s most important reminders of the challenges involved in establishing the Spanish mission community and the ingenuity used to overcome them.

Construction of the dam and irrigation system began around 1809 and was completed in 1815. The project was designed to divert water from the San Diego River to Mission San Diego de Alcalá and included a stone diversion dam, a settling basin,

and a masonry aqueduct that carried water downstream to support the mission’s fields and livestock.

The stone structure was an ambitious undertaking for its time — and much of it still stands today.

A river that shaped San Diego

For thousands of years, the San Diego River corridor was home to the Kumeyaay people, who relied on the landscape for water, food, and natural resources. The river shaped where people lived and traveled through the region.

When Spanish missionaries established Mission San Diego de Alcalá in 1769, securing a dependable water supply became essential. The mission needed irrigation to grow crops and support its agricultural operations.

The answer was one of the most ambitious engineering projects undertaken in early San Diego.



Old Mission Dam aerial tramway. Date unknown. (Photo and caption info courtesy of the San Diego History Center)

Building a water system in the early 1800s

Construction of the dam and aqueduct was carried out largely by Kumeyaay laborers under the direction of Franciscan missionaries. Workers shaped stone, carved channels through the rugged terrain, and built a system capable of carrying water nearly three miles from the river to the mission.

The completed irrigation system helped transform Mission San Diego de Alcalá into a more productive agricultural center, providing a dependable supply of water for crops, orchards, and livestock.

The changing landscape of Mission Gorge

Mission Gorge continued to play an important role long after the mission era.

The surrounding landscape supported ranching, farming, and later the granite industry. Beginning in the 1870s, granite quarried from Mission Gorge was used in roads, buildings, and portions of the San Diego Bay breakwater, helping shape San Diego’s growing infrastructure.

The same landscape that once supplied water for the mission later helped provide materials that helped build the growing city.

The stone structure was an ambitious undertaking for its time — and much of it still stands.

San Diego Unified and city create new policy for joint-use fields

By DAVE SCHWAB
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — San Diego schools and the city have launched a pilot program at three campuses to try and settle the battle between schools and the community at large over waste left on joint-use fields.

The sites, Pacific Beach Middle, Franklin Elementary in Kensington and Birney Elementary in University Heights, are using color-coded status systems based on reports filed by school principals.

When a principal at a pilot site reports pet waste on left a field, Samer Naji, a spokesperson for the San Diego Unified School District, said that field moves from green, or open status, to yellow, a warning alert.

Two additional reports while the field is in the yellow, move it to the red zone, triggering a 15-day closure.

Joint-use fields across the region are plagued by issues including animal waste left behind and turf damage from holes holes dug by dogs, which pose tripping and injury hazards for students.

Some residents also have complained that fenced school fields are frequently used as unauthorized off-leash dog parks by dog owners.

Heavy misuse of joint-use fields forces local authorities — such as San Diego Unified and the city of San Diego — to intermittently close fields to the public for weeks or months to repair turf and clean the facilities.

The pilot program prompted District 1 Councilmember Joe LaCava to call upon schools and the city to “get serious” about keeping joint-use fields clean and safe for students and the public.

Last year, noted LaCava, the field at Crown Point Junior Music Academy in PB was closed due to unsafe conditions.

“This closure was motivation for the city to pilot a new approach to protect students,” said LaCava, rather than closing the fields or banning dogs.

Within weeks of its launch, LaCava said one joint-use field was in the red, another



The sign on the exterior of the fence at the joint-use field at Crown Point Elementary at 4033 Ingraham St. (Photo by Dave Schwab/Times of San Diego)

was in the yellow, but the third stayed clean and remained green.

After a closure, the field reopens in yellow status for 30 days before being cleared to return to green, Naji said. But if additional incidents are reported during that 30-day interim, longer closures result.

City-installed signage on each field indicates its current status.

“Because these fields serve our students during the school day and the broader community outside of school hours, it is important that we keep them clean, safe and available for everyone,” Naji said.

Pacific Beach Town Council president Charlie Nieto said the group “has long supported creative solutions to remedy the chronic deficit in parks within our communities.”

But he added, of the joint-use fields, “a few bad actors did not do their part to look after this shared resource.”

He’s pleased with the green-yellow-low-red system.

“Through the new warning system, our local families, pet owners and community members will still be able to enjoy these facilities, with some new accountability measures in place,” he said. “We believe that even with a bit of a learning curve, this plan will put us on a pathway to additional park space that is safe, clean, and welcoming to all that love Pacific Beach.”

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Remembering the Voights

Continued from Page 3

Amy was forever looking for ways to add more greenery to her yard, and recently shared her joy at finally being able to grow her long-wished-for plumeria flowers after one of my friends gave me her cuttings to give to Amy. Amy was also an avid cook and baker of gluten-free treats and sometimes shared sweets she made with me.

Mya was a bundle of joy and positivity. She would do countless cartwheels and other gymnastics on her front lawn, draw with colored chalk on the family's driveway with her friends, ask to pet dogs walking by her home, and ride her bicycle around the neighborhood with her parents. She had learned to drive an All Terrain Vehicle quite young. Dave would share with me how she excelled on desert driving adventures when she was gifted a pint-sized ATV of her own.

When the Voights' Labrador Buddy died in 2025, around the same time Dave's mother passed away, the sadness was palpable in their home.

After losing Buddy, Dave called me and asked if Mya could borrow my dog to

sleep with her at night. That was the regular deal for nearly two weeks. The two also had occasional sleepovers in the months that followed.

These are my memories. I soon learned they were similar to the ones shared by so many others lucky enough to be in the Voights' lives.

The memorial service at a chapel in Liberty Station on Sept. 28 was attended by hundreds of people, including many of Dave's military brothers and Amy's colleagues, as well as Mya's teenage friends. Many of us San Carlos neighbors also showed up. We shared memories of this dearly loved family with one another.

Amy's sister, Tammy Teague, spoke to the crowd of people mourning her younger sister.

She said she could be in front of the crowd for days with the stories of her sister. She shared some memories of their childhood. She explained how Amy was her closest confidante and how hard it is without the daily conversations they shared.

Amy's sister also said that the family held no anger toward Dave, and gave examples of times shared by the extended family, scenes that showed the deep love

the three Voights had for one another.

Dave's nephew shared stories about his uncle and some of their family get-togethers. Two of Dave's military brothers shared some of the antics that their friend was known for, and also how proud he was of his family.

Some of Mya's young friends spoke about FaceTiming with her, baking cakes, dancing and more. One girl who is a year younger than Mya said Mya would always prepare her for her coming school year by telling her how her previous school year had gone.

The family's long-employed housekeeper tried to keep from sobbing while recalling the kindnesses of the Voights and watching Mya grow up.

The problem, the true tragedy, is that there really is no villain here.

While the deaths can raise questions about veterans' needs post-war, guns, mental health care and pharmaceuticals, and more, these are circular discussions with no real signs of a resolution or an end.

The true end in this particular story is the end of three loving and well-loved people who made their neighborhood, our part of San Diego, a better place.

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Mi Pan Artisan Bakery brings European tradition to Mission Gorge

By ROBIN DOHRN-SIMPSON
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — The aroma of freshly baked European pastries wafts through the air as you enter the new Mi Pan Artisan Bakery on Mission Gorge Road.

You are greeted by a tempting display of European-style pastries and racks filled with freshly baked sourdough bread.

The newly opened neighborhood bakery in Mission Gorge is the result of the hard work and persistence of husband-and-wife team Alejandro Gomez and Alejandra Ruelas.

“We started slowly with sourdough bread and banana bread and built our pastry business at farmers’ markets. As we open our new bakery, we will continue to sell at two farmers’ markets in town: Little Italy and Chula Vista,” Alejandra Ruelas said.

Like many people, the pandemic of 2020 became a turning point in Alejandro's career. After losing his job, he decided to use the time to pursue his passion for baking and put his self-taught skills to work.

Although Gomez is a native of Mexico, his baking style leans toward European traditions, with breads and pastries inspired by global influences and grounded in traditional French baking techniques. He continues to explore new baking techniques and styles, which promises to keep patrons excited about discovering new pastries each month.

Currently, his pastries include an almond croissant filled with almond frangipane that is light, flaky, and basically perfection. Another favorite is “Las Cukies,” a sourdough cookie made with three types of chocolate — dark, semi-sweet, and sweet — along with walnuts, peanuts, and almonds, then finished with a sprinkling of Maldon sea salt.

He has also perfected the canelé, a small French pastry flavored with rum and vanilla that originated in the Bordeaux region of France. With its caramelized exterior and tender, custard-like center, the canelé is a delicious example of Alejandro's dedication to traditional European pastry techniques.

Alejandro will rotate pastries monthly or seasonally, giving customers something new to look forward to.

Pan de Muerto will be introduced in late



Husband-and-wife team Alejandro Gomez and Alejandra Ruelas are co-owners. (Photo by Robin Dohrn-Simpson/Special for Times of San Diego)

MI PAN ARTISAN BAKERY

Where: 6435 Mission Gorge Road.

Hours: Daily from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. or until sold out.

Info: Look for the grand opening starting on Oct. 7 with extended hours and a full menu. Visit mipanbakery.com.

October, while Italian panettone cakes will make their debut during the holidays. Future breads they plan to introduce include an Oaxacan mole sourdough bread and a medialuna — a smaller, sweeter and denser adaptation of the croissant popular in Argentina.

Coffee is also an important part of the Mi Pan experience.

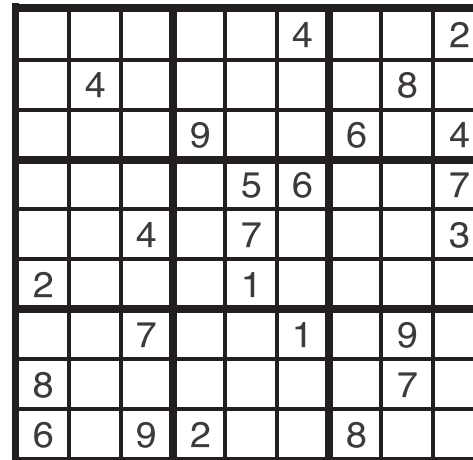
"We partner with two local coffee companies for our drip coffee and our espresso," Alejandra said.

Currently, the drip coffee is “Bombon,” with fruity flavors of guava, pineapple and lychee lollipop. The espresso is “Matriarch,” with notes of chocolate.

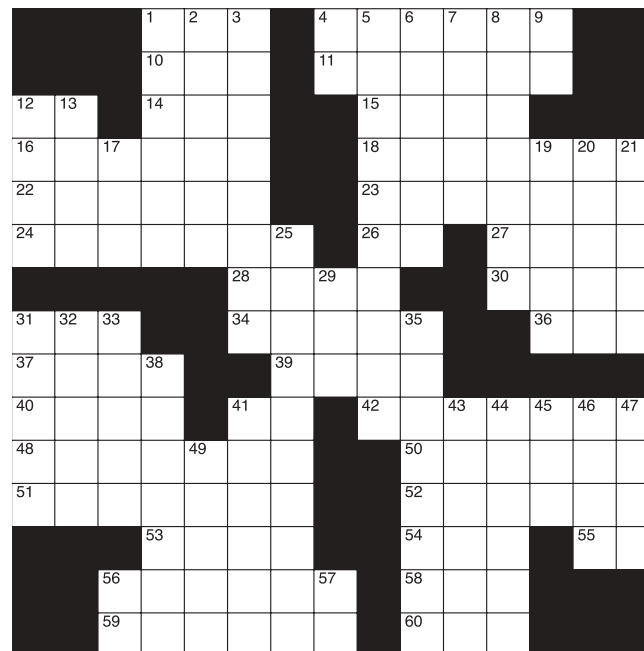
"I'm so excited to get everything out of our garage and home kitchen and into a large commercial kitchen. We can bake our daily breads in half the time. Alejandro can sleep a couple of extra hours a night now," Alejandra said.

This new brick-and-mortar bakery represents more than an expansion for Mi Pan — it is the realization of a husband-and-wife dream, one flaky, buttery pastry at a time.

SUDOKU

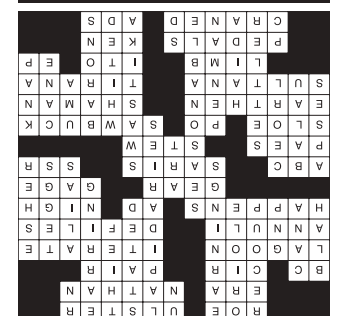
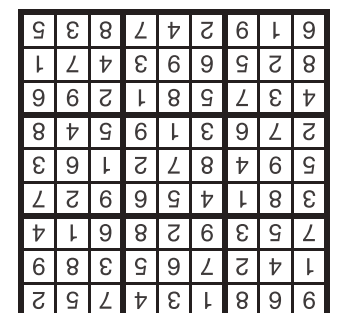


CROSSWORDS



13. Town in Galilee
17. Value
19. Alternative identity
20. Sheep in their second year
21. Town in Surrey, England
25. Appropriate to a time of year
29. Creative work
31. Recesses
32. Largely forested municipality in Germany
33. Rider of Rohan
35. Ancient symbol co-opted by Nazis
38. Pioneer
41. Scribe
43. Painted a bright color
44. Member of British nobility
45. "Pulp Fiction" actress Thurman
46. Helps people walk
47. Crest of a hill
49. People of southeastern Alaska
56. One's own device
57. The Mount Rushmore State

ANSWERS



CLUES ACROSS

1. Small Eurasian deer
4. Province in Northern Ireland
10. A major division of geological time
11. Broadway actor Lane
12. Canadian province (abbr.)
14. Human gene
15. Two
16. A notable one was “blue”
18. Utter repeatedly
22. Ring-shaped objects
23. Sullies
50. Medicine man
51. Seedless raisin
52. National capital of Albania
53. Appendage
54. OJ trial judge
55. European government entity (abbr.)
56. Bike parts
58. Friend to “Barbie”
59. Stretched to see or hear
60. Commercials

CLUES DOWN

1. Make up for
2. Baltimore ballplayer
3. Wages
4. International organization of countries
5. Engravers of gems
6. Declared as fact
7. One who steals
8. Jewelry
9. Hospital worker
12. Nonsense (slang)

Podcasting expands across San Diego State as more take the microphone

By ROMAN AGUILAR
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO — San Diego State University is expanding its use of podcasting, with students and faculty increasingly turning to the medium for class assignments and their own shows.

The university library's Digital Humanities Center now operates five professional-grade podcast studios for students, faculty and staff. Recording sessions jumped from 96 during the 2022–23 academic year to 662 last year.

Ricky Pope, an SDSU faculty scholar and licensed psychologist, is among those who have taken to the microphone. He started the "Homepage Podcast" in fall 2024 as another way to reach students, particularly commuters who may spend less time participating in campus life.

Pope brings students and campus organizations onto the podcast to discuss their experiences, challenges, and resources available at SDSU.

"I really wanted to bring other students on campus and to kind of get a voice of their experience," Pope said.

Podcasting has also moved deeper into the classroom. Nearly 40 programs across eight colleges now incorporate it, with students recording projects in subjects ranging from Spanish to journalism,

media studies and theater.

Professor Noah Arceneaux turned to podcasting in his media law and ethics course after looking for a different way for students to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

"I really just wanted the students to do something to flex their creative muscles and to give them a different opportunity to express themselves differently," Arceneaux said.

Pamella Lach, director of the Digital Humanities Center [DHC], said instructors assign podcasts for different reasons. Some want students to experiment with more creative assignments or learn to communicate with a public audience, while others see podcasting as a way to discourage overreliance on generative AI.

The assignments still require many of the fundamentals of a traditional paper. Students research a subject, organize their ideas and demonstrate what they have learned, but they also have to think about how their writing sounds when spoken aloud.

Concerns about AI played a role in Arceneaux's decision to work with Lach to develop the podcast assignment for his JMS 494 media law and ethics course. Arceneaux said he grew frustrated after reading papers he believed were largely machine-written, with minimal student input.

He acknowledged that podcasting does



Podcast recording equipment inside San Diego State University's Digital Humanities Center on Sept. 17. (Photo by Roman Aguilar/Times of San Diego)

not eliminate AI use. Students can still use it for research or to help write a script, but recording the final product adds another layer of participation.

"I nonetheless thought that doing this assignment would force them to apply more human effort than they might otherwise do," Arceneaux said.

Patrick Flanigan, the center's programs and operations specialist, has watched podcast assignments spread across disciplines.

Spanish professors send students to the studios to record conversations that demonstrate their language skills. Journalism, media studies and theater students also use the space for class projects.

Flanigan said speaking about a subject gives students another way to demonstrate their understanding of the material. "You have to know it," Flanigan said. "You can't just fake it."

Students do not always arrive with podcasting experience, however.

Digital Humanities Center employees help them set recording levels, get comfortable hearing their own voices through headphones, and learn how to use editing software. Staff members teach students how to produce their projects rather than doing the work for them.

Flanigan said some students return to the studios after completing their assignments. One student chose podcasting for a Digital Humanities class, later started a podcast about her band and eventually became an employee at the center.

Tyler Granger, a civil engineering student in his second year working at the [Digital Humanities Center], had never used its podcast studios before taking the job.

Now, Granger helps other students prepare to record and participates in "Chat DHC," a podcast featuring the center's student employees.

He said studio bookings typically start slowly early in the semester before increasing around midterms and finals as podcast assignments come due. Spanish courses are among the classes that bring larger groups of students into the studios.

San Diego State University's Theatre Program is 100 and hot as ever

By JOSHUA SCOTT
SPECIAL FOR SAN DIEGO TIMES

SAN DIEGO — Although theatre activities at San Diego State University date

back to 1914, the program formally took shape in 1926 when Sybil Eliza Jones established a regular drama program and directed the university's first full season of faculty-led productions.

Over the past century, SDSU theatre has expanded from the Little Theatre, established on Montezuma Mesa in 1931, to the opening of the Dramatic Arts complex in 1967 and the Performing Arts District in 2023. The university's theatre program has also developed a national reputation for innovation in design, technical theatre, musical theatre and theatre education.

Among its milestones, SDSU launched Theatre for Young Audiences in 1971, established the California State University system's first Master of Fine Arts Degree in Design and Technical Theatre in 1978, and created the nation's first and currently only Master of Fine Arts program in Musical Theatre in 1982.

SDSU's theatre legacy can also be seen in the careers of its alumni. Notable graduates include actors: Gregory Peck, Cleavon

Little, Marion Ross, Carl Weathers, Kathy Najimy and Julie Kavner. And let us not forget three-time Tony Award-winning costume designer Gregg Barnes, known for Broadway credits including Legally Blonde (2007), Kinky Boots (2013), Aladdin (2014) and the award-winning Some Like it Hot (2022).

The centennial season will take place throughout SDSU's Performing Arts District, which includes the Main Stage Theatre, the Prebys Stage and the outdoor Lamden and Clay stages.

The season opens with Andrew Lipka's The Wild Party, running Oct. 16–22 at the Main Stage. Based on Joseph Moncure March's 1928 narrative poem, the musical follows a group of guests whose decadent Manhattan party spirals into jealousy, violence and tragedy.

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Your first choice for a third space: The Mission Trails Visitor Center



Mission Trails Regional Park

Kinsee Morlan

There is a lot of conversation lately about the importance of “third spaces,” the places we spend time outside of home and work where we can simply be around other people.

Coffee shops, libraries, parks and community centers have long filled that role. At a time when so much of life happens behind a screen or arrives at our doorstep in a cardboard box, I love seeing San Diegans rediscover how awesome it feels to go somewhere, see familiar faces and feel part of a community.

The Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor Center is one of those places.

You can come for a hike, but you certainly don't have to. Wander through the exhibits, browse the gift shop, sit outside with a cup of coffee, or bring a friend and

catch up while looking out over Mission Gorge. I recently enjoyed a lunch date with my husband on the terrace, where we ate sandwiches and coleslaw from nearby Cheers Deli and listened to chirping birds instead of the usual soundtrack of two teenage boys asking what there is to eat. It was lovely.

There's no requirement to accomplish anything here. Sometimes it's enough to simply be somewhere beautiful.

This fall, we have even more reasons to gather.

Every Wednesday and Sunday, Trail Tykes brings together a growing community of parents and caregivers who want their young children to love nature. Families explore, learn and spend time outside together, and along the way, parents meet other parents who are looking for the same kind of connection.

On Nov. 14 and 15, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., the Visitor Center will host our annual Holiday Marketplace, with local artists, makers and small businesses offering gifts you are unlikely to find anywhere

else. There's something special about buying a holiday gift directly from the person who made it. You can meet the artist, hear the story behind their work and know your purchase is supporting someone in your community. Those small choices add up and help keep San Diego's creative economy thriving.

That spirit of community extends beyond the Holiday Marketplace.

On Wednesday, Oct. 21, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., we're hosting a bridal open house for couples interested in getting married at Mission Trails. We have watched newlyweds dance on the terrace here as live music plays and the sky turns pink and orange behind the mountains. It is a wonderful reminder that parks can be places for meaningful gatherings as much as recreation.

Sometimes, community happens on a much smaller scale.

Our gift shop is open whenever the Visitor Center is open, and our giant stuffed snakes have become such a hit that we can barely keep them in stock.

But one of my favorite stories involves a different animal.

A woman who had an encounter with a mountain lion at Mission Trails recently returned with her children and bought each of them a stuffed mountain lion. She didn't want them to remember the experience as frightening. She wanted them to see it as something rare and special.

I love that.

Mission Trails can be where you climb a mountain or spot wildlife. But it can also be where you shop for a handmade gift, marry the love of your life, meet a friend, bring your kids, or enjoy one of the best views in San Diego with a sandwich and a side of peace and quiet.

However you use it, consider the Visitor Center your community space. “Third space” may be the official term, but around here, we're not above campaigning to be No. 1 on your list.

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

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San Carlos Community Garden celebrates creativity, connection and cultural heritage



San Carlos Community Garden

Kelly Wood

The San Carlos Community Garden has grown into much more than a place for planting vegetables.

Established in 2011 as a joint-use community garden with the Sierra School of San Diego, the San Carlos Community Garden now proudly offers 72 community plots for individual lease, as well as common areas devoted to native plants, succulents, roses, an orchard, sensory experiences and education.

Throughout the garden, visitors encounter a landscape shaped by community collaboration and creativity, garden practices and knowledge shared by earlier generations, an appreciation for the natural world, and a strong commitment to nurture and grow community.

Garden plots, mosaics, murals, gathering spaces and community-built features come together to tell a larger story about what can happen when people create a shared place with purpose.

For Carol Lockwood, one of San Carlos Community Garden's longtime garden

leaders and co-founder, art and nature share an important purpose; one that stands on the philosophy that encourages people to slow down, notice their surroundings, and feel more connected to one another.

"From the beginning, San Carlos Community Garden's shared vision was to create not only a productive garden, but also a beautiful and restorative community space where people could gather, learn and connect," said Lockwood, whose interest in art, education and community-building has helped inspire numerous San Carlos Community Garden collaborations with volunteers, students, artists and local organizations over the years.

"Creating spaces where visitors and volunteers can rest, relax and contemplate the restorative powers of nature and their own creative endeavors has always been a top priority of mine," she said.

San Carlos Community Garden's art, nature and community-inspired vision are apparent throughout the garden. A partnership with Patrick Henry High School's art program produced a large mosaic butterfly that towers over a pollinator garden, while other creative installations include a mosaic totem in the Succulent Garden donated by a local artist, a colorful wind sculpture, wind chimes, painted rocks hidden throughout the garden, educational plant signage, and artfully designed

sky-blue benches placed throughout the garden.

The garden's community character is also visible in more than 20 Eagle Scout projects completed on the property. These projects have added a Little Free Library, pergolas, benches, picnic tables, rain barrels, kiosks, signage, a play-ground sandbox and other features that blend function with thoughtful design. Together, they demonstrate how volunteerism can leave a lasting imprint on a shared public space.

"Working with the scouts has been a special joy as we both seek to be creative while adding value to the community that will last for years," Lockwood said, noting that the garden's motto, "Building Community," is something its leaders take seriously.

Shaped by landscape design and horticulture experts and volunteers, specialty gardens add another layer to the experience. San Carlos Community Garden's Native Plant Garden, Succulent Garden, Rose Garden, Orchard and Sensory Garden create opportunities for visitors to appreciate plants not only for their beauty, but also for their ecological and educational value. These spaces invite people to observe, ask questions and better understand the relationship between healthy landscapes and healthy communities.

Honoring San Carlos Community Garden's Cultural Heritage

Just as a mosaic is formed from many individual pieces, the San Carlos Community Garden continues to be shaped by the people, histories, cultures and ideas that come together within it. That spirit will take on special meaning on Nov. 21, from 9–11 a.m., when the San Carlos Community Garden will host representatives from the Kumeyaay Nation for a free event recognizing its indigenous roots and cultural heritage.

The program will feature Charlene Elliott, director of the Sycuan Band's Cultural Resource Center and Museum, and Harmony Sweetgrass, 2023 Miss Kumeyaay Nation. Through cultural items, stories and shared knowledge, the workshop will explore Kumeyaay history, traditions and the enduring relationship between Kumeyaay Nation's indigenous people and the land.

Lockwood sees this gathering as a natural extension of the garden's evolving identity. "Their connection to our lives today and the reverence we can develop in this relationship with the Kumeyaay Nation is a very exciting new chapter in the garden's future," she said. "I think we have a lot to learn about enriching our lives."

Double author talks and the In-N-Out Reading Program returns



San Carlos Branch Library

David Ege

Historical Women Behaving Badly is a double author talk at the San Carlos Branch Library.

Join us on Oct. 23 at 2 p.m. for a special presentation by authors Debbie Wastling and Janell Strube dressed in period costume.

Wastling's book, "Irish Secrets and Lies," tells of suffragists in Britain; and Strube's book, "Adelaide: Painter of the Revolution," recounts the story of an artist during the French Revolution. Two authors, two centuries.

On Oct. 16 at 2 p.m., author Sandra

Bonura will discuss her book "The Zoo Lady: How Belle Benchley Built the San Diego Zoo." Belle Benchley navigated the San Diego Zoo through the brink of bankruptcy to become the world's first female zoo director, and her legacy changed the world.

Come hear the story of how she spent her days in the trenches pioneering open-air habitats and developing new ideas on animal care that built the zoo into the global icon it is today.

We will be holding a special program called Paws to Read on Oct. 21 at 2:30 p.m. for children ages 5 and up to read to a real dog. Studies show that children can improve their confidence and reading skills by reading aloud to animals. Dogs make the perfect nonjudgmental audience. All dogs are provided by the San Diego Humane Society.

The In-N-Out Burger Reading Program will run through Nov. 14. Children ages 4 to 12 can read five books or for 300 minutes and earn a free hamburger or cheeseburger. Pick up a reading log at the library or register online through the Beanstack app. Earn up to three rewards. For more details, visit mysdpl.org/innout. Thank you to our sponsors at In-N-Out Burger.

Come join us for our Lego Builder Club program on the second and fourth Saturday of every month from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. We will be meeting on Oct. 10 and 24 to learn, play, and create with LEGO bricks. Explore new ideas and share concepts with other attendees. Each creation will be displayed in the library for two weeks. LEGO bricks contain small objects, so this program is for children ages 6 and over. Parental supervision is suggested.

Our Youth Chess program is for children ages 18 and under and meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month from 5 to 7 p.m. Whether you're new to chess or already know the game, join us to learn rules and strategies, practice your skills, and enjoy friendly matches. Chess helps build focus, problem-solving skills, and confidence — and it's a ton of fun to play. Our teen volunteers have worked with children of all ages. Sessions will be held on Oct. 13 and 27.

The Junior Innovators STEM Club is a program for elementary and middle school students that is held on the third Tuesday of each month at 4 p.m. Children will work hands-on on a variety of science and math activities. Join us on Oct. 20 for fun and engaging STEM presentations and projects hosted by the Patrick Henry High School Junior Innovators Club.