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Trial set for alleged killer of North Park teacher

By NEAL PUTNAM

A trial date of Oct. 4 was set on Feb. 24 for the man suspected of lying in wait and killing a teacher in North Park who was engaged to the man's ex-girlfriend.

Jesse Milton Alvarez, 31, pleaded not guilty before a San Diego Superior Court judge in the Feb. 1, 2021, slaying of Mario Fierro, 37.

Judge Daniel Goldstein heard testimony Feb. 9 in the preliminary hearing and ordered Alvarez to stand trial for murder with the special circumstance of lying-in-wait.

A prosecutor may announce on March 25 whether the District Attorney's office will seek the death penalty or a life term in prison without the possibility of parole if Alvarez is convicted of first-degree murder.

Fierro was a popular teacher and football coach at Cathedral Catholic High School and was engaged to Amy Gembara, another teacher, who testified in the hearing that she broke up with Alvarez in Sept., 2019.

SEE **TEACHER KILLED**, Page 13

Elephant trespasser remains a fugitive

By NEAL PUTNAM

An arrest warrant remains outstanding for a man suspected of child endangerment and trespassing into an elephant enclosure at the San Diego Zoo because he failed to show up in court as he promised.

Jose Manuel Navarrete, 26, was seen with his 2-year-old daughter as he was trying to take a photo inside the elephant enclosure on March 19, 2021.

"wanted to take a photo with the African bull elephant."

The zoo said the elephant habitat "is home to our Asian and African elephants." They said the man went through "multiple barriers, purposely and illegally trespassed into a habitat" around 4:20 p.m., according to their press release.

—Neal Putnam is a local court reporter.



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Daughter's ballet hobby launched mother's tutu career

Fashion Files

By DIANA CAVAGNARO



Tutu Terry is the creation of Terry Wholey, who is in the business of creating tutus. They come in different shapes such as Flat, the Belle, the Platter, the Classic and Romantic. She designs custom work for clients all over the country as well as internationally in countries such as Canada, Mexico and Greece.

Wholey came from a sewing background with a grandmother who was a couturier in Cuba. She grew up with a love for sewing and dance. After 10 years of volunteering at her daughter's ballet company, she decided to start her own



Cinder Fairy design (Photo by Vladimir Zabazhinski)



Sketch of Flames of Paris (Photo courtesy Terry Wholey)



Flames of Paris (Photo courtesy Terry Wholey)



Fuchsia Regalin (Photo courtesy Terry Wholey)

business. First she decided to study by attending various tutu schools. These intensified workshops were

with Claudia Folts at tutu.com and additional mentors in cities such as Las Vegas and Chicago.

To make a tutu, Wholey first starts out with a drawing of everything. Next, she makes a

Basque which is a piece that measures from the waistband down

SEE FASHION, Page 6



Modern-style tutu (Photo courtesy Terry Wholey)



Sugar Plum tutu (Photo courtesy #stunning_photography805)



Snow Queen (Photo courtesy Terry Wholey)



Terry Wholey with winning entry Starry Night (Photo by Toby Batley)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Virtual fashion show
Gretchen Productions will produce a live virtual fashion show for Soroptimist International of San Diego at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina. The afternoon also features the "Live Your Dream" awards. Sunday, March 12. For info: 619-670-9880

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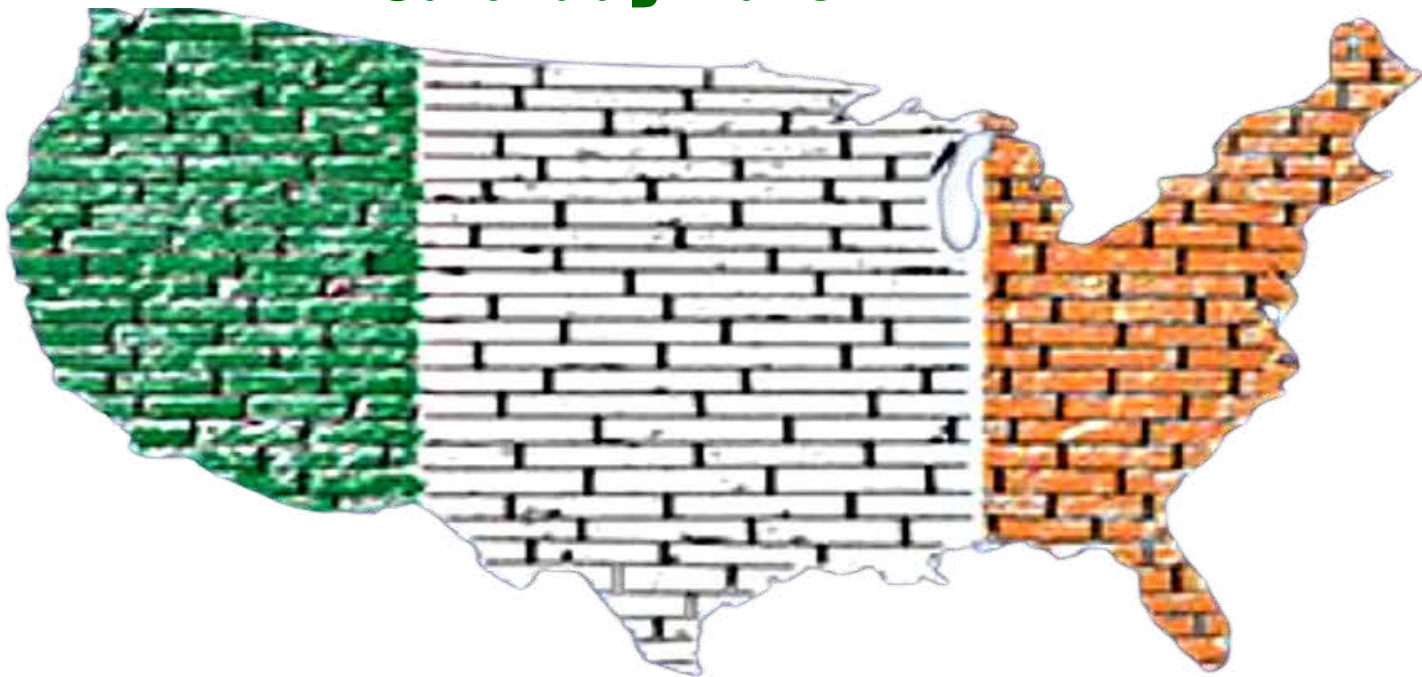
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Supporting working families, youth and micro-businesses

District 4 News
By NATHAN FLETCHER



Since my last column in Uptown News, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors has advanced several measures to support working families, young people who want to turn their lives around, and provided financial support to struggling micro-businesses.

In February, the Board of Supervisors passed a Working Families Ordinance I co-authored to require the use of a skilled and trained workforce and provide for a prevailing wage on construction projects on County land. It is important workers on county-owned land are paid fairly for their hard work. San Diegans should be able to support their family with good jobs and fair rules to protect them. We felt it was important for the County to become an example for others, and so we took the first step by requiring these workplace standards to reduce poverty and promote the middle class.

Our efforts to offer every child a fair shot at a successful future continue! We recently cut the ribbon on a brand new Youth Transition Campus in Kearny Mesa that was built to give young people the opportunity to turn their life around. This new campus is a place where young people who have come into the criminal justice system but want to change their circumstances can receive the



Supervisor Nathan Fletcher at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Youth Transition Campus. (Courtesy photo)

encouragement, treatment, education, support, and skills they need. This is the type of place that could inspire them to get on a path to a better future, maybe even become an entrepreneur.

I meet with a lot of small business owners and know how tough it can be for them. While COVID is more and more in our rearview mirror, the impacts remain. With this in mind, the Board of Supervisors recently approved \$3.875 million in funds to help 1,550 micro-businesses that have faced historic barriers to accessing capital. When you're a business owner that employs fewer than five full-time workers, the margins can be thin, and every dollar matters. The action we took is a small step we can take to support our local small businesses."

The micro-businesses that receive the grants can use the

money to purchase equipment, invest in working capital, apply for new permits, and for debts and costs accrued because of COVID-19.

To apply for a grant, or learn about any of the programs I discussed in this column, please visit sandiegocounty.gov.

If you need to contact my office, please call us at (619) 531-5544 or email nathan.fletcher@sdcounty.ca.gov and follow me on social media. To invite me or my team to your organization's meeting, request a proclamation or grant, and learn about the work we're doing, visit SupervisorNathanFletcher.com.

—Nathan Fletcher is the San Diego County Supervisor representing the Fourth Supervisorial District, and he serves as Chair of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

Fashion

CONTINUED FROM Page 4

to the hips. This piece will hold everything. Ten layers of tulle are made in different degrees of length. The bodice is usually six to eight pieces or can even be as many as 16 pieces. Then a traditional fabric is used for the lining called Coutil. Pipe edges are added and then the bodice is finished with a metal boning so it will fit like a glove with ease. The last part of the creation is a plate with decorations and then the overlay with more embellishments on the bodice.

Wholey said that it takes easily 40 hours to complete one tutu, although more complicated designs can take longer than a week.

The design needs to fall in line with the repertoire being performed. In 2018, she won the designer of the year for International Ballet Competition (IBC) in Jackson, Miss. named Starry Night which incorporated navy/gold organza combined with a very



Winning entry for the International Ballet Competition called Starry Night (Photo by Toby Batley)

dark navy and dark gold lame. The tutu is navy net and navy-blue glitter tulle in every other layer.

After her success, Wholey said that she is hoping to launch a second line named Epic Designs which will be a formal and bridalwear business. Currently she lives in Escondido and her work space is a casita behind the house so her commute to work is only 10 seconds each day. Recently she was

commissioned by the Southern California Ballet for Alice in Wonderland. This will debut on March 26 and 27 in the Poway Center for the Performing Arts. For more information visit: tututerry.com.

—Diana Cavagnaro is an internationally renowned Couture Milliner based in Alpine, California. Learn more about our Hat Designer, Teacher & Blogger at DianaCavagnaro.com

Letters

To the Editor

I have just read the puff piece on Stephen Whitburn which was published in your February 2022 issue and I feel compelled to respond.

You heap praise on Mr. Whitburn for "his effort to serve his community," but I live in his community and everything he has done, is doing, is damaging my community.

The most destructive program supported by Mr. Whitburn is the "Homes for All" initiative, which purports to be the magic solution which will create masses of new, affordable housing, by allowing developers free rein to build as many units as they want in older neighborhoods that have, until now, been zoned single-family. The new regulations remove virtually all restrictions, while also eliminating permit fees for developers, without requiring that any of the housing produced should be permanently affordable. Early results already show that the housing being produced is market-rate, not affordable, so the de-zoning (and destruction) of older neighborhoods will only result in developer enrichment, not affordable housing. The group "Neighbors for a Better San Diego" has been campaigning against these changes, trying to reason with, amongst others, the members of the City Council, like Mr. Whitburn. Mr. Whitburn, a member of the Land Use & Housing Committee, attended a meeting at which about 4 hours of impassioned, well-informed, fact-based testimony was presented to him, in an effort to have him consider supporting a handful of very reasonable amendments to the city's new developer giveaways. Mr. Whitburn refused to budge, without offering any factual basis whatsoever for his position.

More recently, it has come to my attention that Mr. Whitburn, apparently acting on his own initiative, has sought to significantly loosen restrictions on retail outlets for cannabis sales, such they could be located in much closer proximity to schools, daycare centers, churches and other sensitive locations. Also part of his plan is to increase the hours of operation for cannabis outlets in San Diego. It is extremely ironic that Mr. Whitburn purports to be concerned about substance abuse, while initiating and pursuing the weakening of restrictions on the sales of drugs.

One can only wonder whose interests Mr. Whitburn really supports. Certainly not the interests of the majority of his constituents, but very possibly the interests of his donors.

Sincerely,
Frances Kamen
Normal Heights

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For breaking news and investigative story ideas contact the editor by phone or email.

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City to raise fees for special events to raise income while the events industry struggles

By DAVE SCHWAB

While a compromise struck recently by City Council to phase-in proposed special-event fee increases for nonprofits is helpful, it's not nearly enough to support a live-events industry on the brink of collapse from pandemic restrictions, said an industry spokesperson.

"The cost increases are coming from all sides after many of us in the live-events industry didn't work for the last 18 months," said Laurel McFarlane, president of the San Diego Event Coalition. "Other industries like hairdressers and gymnasiums were able to find ways to work. But our industry was almost completely shut down. It hasn't been open since June 2021."

Added McFarlane: "There just seems to be this non-understanding that there is a complete industry here that basically just took it on the chin during the pandemic. But instead of giving us a few years to recover, the City is potentially increasing fees in an industry that's barely hanging on as it is."

The fee controversy erupted after a recent City proposal to hike 50 different user fees 40 percent or more to recover costs and generate a projected \$8.4 million in

annual revenues. It is the first time City user fees for events have been raised since 2013.

On Feb. 14, District 1 Councilmember Joe LaCava got unanimous approval for his amendment to more slowly phase in an increase in special event fees for nonprofits over four years instead of two. He argued the change will significantly lessen the burden for nonprofits while reclaiming some City fee revenues.

"There are 580 different fees the City charges to nonprofits and commercial enterprises, and these fees have not been changed in over 10 years," LaCava said. "[The fees] were no longer comparable to what it costs the City to provide those special services."

LaCava pointed out one fee hike proposal that drew nearly all of the negative reaction was for special events operated by nonprofits served by uniformed police officers. "The City's original proposal was to keep the current hourly rate the same for one more year, bump it up 50% next year, then bump it up again to the full rate in the third year," said LaCava, pointing out that increase would take fees charged for uniformed police officers at special events from \$55 an hour to \$119 an hour in two years.

"My recommendation was to spread that over four years to make it more of an incremental increase to get the City back its costs while giving a longer ramp-up time for nonprofits," said LaCava. "That allows them the ability to adjust, and in some cases rethink, how they can more effectively host their events, and have better control of those costs. It isn't a perfect solution. But it gives a little more breathing room for nonprofits and the San Diego Event Coalition."

Racquel Vasquez, senior City spokesperson said that, according to City Council Policy 100-05, the City performs a comprehensive user fee study every three to five years. "The study aims to identify the cost of service for activities that charge user fees and develop target cost-recovery rates that could bring existing fees in line with full or partial cost recovery, depending on City policy goals. Police special-event fees will not see an increase next fiscal year.

"However, the fees will gradually increase over three years arriving at a total subsidized cost of 33%. In other words, only 67% of the cost to provide the service will be recovered by the City. The increase in costs is a result of

salary and benefit increases and the fact that these fees have not been raised in a long time."

To put things in perspective about fee increases, McFarlane said special events for rental of tents, tables, chairs, etc. that cost about \$75,000 in 2020 would go up to more than \$225,000 under the new fee structure for the exact same rentals.

Those kinds of increases, McFarlane warned, will necessitate major changes – and cutbacks. "We will have to modify the events because no one can afford those kinds of increases," she said. "It's just at the point where free events are going to have to go away because they're no longer (financially) sustainable. We're just asking, as a coalition and an industry, to not have more fees right now. It's the exact opposite of what the industry needs."

McFarlane added: "We understand there need to be some fee increases. We're just saying we need to get all the stakeholders to come to the table and come up with a financing plan that's somewhere in the middle. We need to have a meaningful dialogue with the City Council to tell the side of the event industry, and to tell the City that it needs to find other revenue streams to help subsidize nonprofits and free events."

LaCava thinks his plan to phase in cost increases over a longer period of time is a fair and workable compromise. "I crafted a solution to meet the needs of both the City and our community partners," he said. "While the City needs to recover its costs in providing special services, it can reduce the sticker shock of catching up after past administrations failed to implement incremental fee adjustments over a reasonable time frame. These nonprofit-sponsored special events increase our quality of life and add to the city's economy."

—Dave Schwab can be reached at reporter@sdnews.com.

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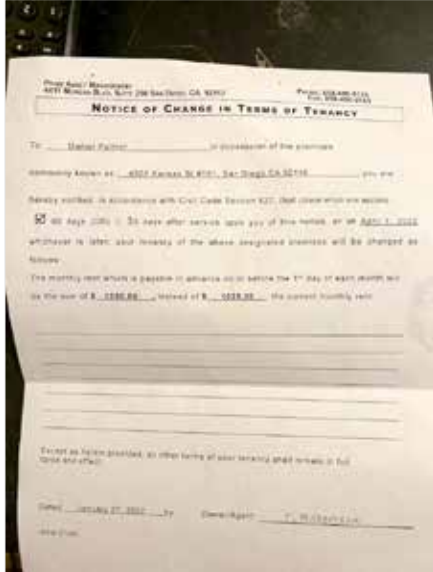
Rents increase up to 100% at North Park building

By KENDRA SITTON

Tenants of an apartment building in North Park are speaking up about what they describe as a “prime example of blatant greed.”

According to the residents of the Kansas St. apartment building, Asset Property Management sent notices they were raising the rent above rent control limits while simultaneously limiting their access to amenities due to renovations.

In February, most of the tenants received 30-day notices that their rent would rise 10% — which is above the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the area. For others, the reality was worse. A few Section 8 senior citizens had their rent raised nearly 100%. A photo of Daniel Palmer's, a Section 8 resident, 60-day notice showed his rent was to increase from \$1025 to \$1950.



A Section 8 resident had his rent increase by \$925.

“You just look at it in utter disbelief that somebody could be so inhuman for just corporate greed,” tenant Don said.

The news was devastating for another senior tenant who thought it would be her ‘forever home.’

This comes amid renovations that have blocked access to the pool, spa and other amenities. The rents were raised last year as well, making some fear that increases will continue and staying there will not be sustainable. Some have already chosen to move out while others are seeking legal aid so they can stay

housed amid limited affordable housing options in San Diego.

“There are a lot of empty apartments of people who have left,” said tenant Alexandria Harris.

She has lived there for four years and wanted to stay until she and her fiancé could afford a house. The rent increase is causing extra stress for the teacher and grad student as she fights to stay in the building.

Until 15 years ago, the apartment building was restricted to seniors. When a pair of brothers purchased the building, they opened up the units to people of all ages which is when Don moved in.

Don described the previous landlord as keeping the apartment building clean and well maintained. He was even given discounted rent when he lost his job.

The problems began when the landlord decided to retire a couple years ago and the new owners hired Asset Property Management to take charge of the building. Asset Property Management chose not to comment on this story.

“They will say that they've raised the rent to be more commensurate with the market. Well, that's ridiculous because what people are getting for their money here is not reflective of market value,” said Don.

Don believes the continually rising rents are an effort to push out old tenants so the company can finish renovations and charge higher rents to new tenants.



The renovations have limited amenities and been distracting for people working from home. (Photos courtesy Alexandria Harris)

“Pushing people out into the streets through higher rents is exactly what their latest mode of trying to get people to leave this building so they can continue their renovations,” Don said.

For those trying to find housing elsewhere, asking rent in the region has increased 25.7%, or \$500, in the past year according to a study by Dwellsy. This comes amid a rise in homelessness as many simply cannot afford the cost of housing in the area.

CPI for the area should limit landlords from raising the rent more than 9.1%. Even if the CPI was followed, Harris worries it would still harm vulnerable seniors living on a fixed income.

“There's a handful of elderly people still left here that are still dealing with this crap and they shouldn't have to pay this extra money,” Harris said.

The tenants fighting to stay in the building have turned to the

City Council, the office of Mayor Todd Gloria and the state licensing board but have found no fast help. Now they are hoping media pressure and a possible lawsuit might be able to keep them in their homes.

Harris said the conflict with management has hurt the community of friendly and caring neighbors.

Even weeks after the 30-day notice was posted, Harris is shocked by the rent increase.

“We were literally flabbergasted. It was insane. I couldn't believe that it was happening. I still can't believe it's happening,” Harris said.

The residents speaking up worry that their community is not the only building where rents are rising faster than tenants can afford.

—Kendra Sitton can be reached at kendra@sdnews.com.



The apartment building on Kansas Street used to house only seniors, some of whom are looking for a new living situation for the first time in years.

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Cher tweets about Hillcrest banner honoring son

By ANNE HAULE

It was pre-pandemic when the Hillcrest Business Association launched its new beautification program. One of its projects, the LGBTQ banners along University Avenue, has put Hillcrest in the celebrity Twittersphere.

Cher, internationally famous singer, performer and supporter of the LGBTQ community, recently acknowledged the Hillcrest University Avenue banner of her son Chaz Bono, tweeting: “So Proud of Chaz... was beyond excited when I saw this. It’s in San Diego, on University Ave.

YEAH!” Her tweet, posted on Feb. 6, has garnered well over 16,000 likes and put University Avenue (and Hillcrest) on the map!

The banner Cher is referring to is of her transgender son Chaz. In addition to a photo of Chaz, the banner describes him as follows: “Writer, musician, and actor. Bono has been a spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign and director of GLAAD. Both Chaz and Cher are outspoken LGBTQ activists.”

The Chaz banner is one of 15 banners lining both sides of University Avenue from Park Boulevard on the East to First Avenue on the west. The other banners feature Anderson Cooper, Laverne Cox, Ellen DeGeneres, Lady Gaga, Neil Patrick Harris, Elton John, Don Lemon, Ricky Martin, Janet Mock, Elliot Page, Wanda Sykes, Elizabeth Taylor, George Takei and Lily Tomlin.

The idea of lining the thoroughfare with banners was inspired by the Italian celebrity banners

that are showcased in Little Italy. Using street banners to highlight the nature of the community seemed perfect for Hillcrest.

The Beautification Committee took the banner idea and decided to highlight the LGBTQ community of Hillcrest by displaying large, beautiful color photos of famous people who have been supporters of the LGBTQ community. The banners showcase a broad diversity of LGBTQ celebrities and supporters.

The HBA Beautification Committee, chaired by Trent St. Louis, includes Jonathon Lopez, Ben Nicholls, Cecelia Moreno, Gail Friedt, Patrick Santana, Sasha Varone, Jerry Strayve and Kirsten Randal. Once the idea was agreed upon, the committee went right to work — purchasing the licensing rights to use the celebrities’ images, drafting brief bios, and contracting with vendors to print and mount the banners. The result of the committee’s work is our own LGBTQ “Avenue of Fame,” highlighting the extraordinary cultural

contributions of these individuals in supporting LGBTQ rights.

The next time you are walking down University Avenue to visit one of its delicious eateries, fun taverns or unique shops, take a minute to look up and give a silent salute to the courageous celebrities whose strong and colorful images remind us of the importance of supporting LGBTQ rights.

—Anne Haule
is a writer based in Hillcrest.



Proud mom Cher tweeting about the Hillcrest banner. (Photos by Anne Haule)



The banner of Chaz is one of 15 in Hillcrest.

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FIX Body Group offers personalized healthy solutions

By VINCE MEEHAN

Everybody knows that the key to long life with your car is preventative care. Tire rotations, oil changes and tune-ups are critical to keeping your car up and running for years to come. And different cars need different levels of care based on their design. But when it comes to taking care of their body, many people do not follow the same preventative care model as they give their cars, partially due to the limitations of the healthcare system.

Dr. Patrick Cucarola, is the clinic director at FIX Body Group which specializes in preventative



Dr. Patrick Cucarola with the TruSculpt weight loss device.

care treatment as well as personal therapy for existing issues including sports related injuries.

“You can be on this earth for only so long and it can be amazing, or you can be on for a very long time and it can be terrible,” noted Cucarola. “I like the long and amazing life and that’s what I do for myself, that’s what I do for my family, and that’s what I do for our patients as well.”

Cucarola grew up in Colorado as an active sports and athletics enthusiast which led him to pursue healthcare as a career. He earned his doctorate in San Francisco, then relocated to San Diego after visiting a few times.

In 2013, he met FIX Body Group founder Dr. Shawn Robec and joined his team where he soon became a partner. While founded on sports therapy, FIX Body Group soon expanded their scope to go beyond the range of athletic care to include a wider spectrum of programs designed to get patients to peak health and keep them there.

“We were primarily more sports medicine, where we combined sports chiropractic massage, physical therapy as well as personal training to help people externally with their body or any injuries. Now, we have transformed

to help people with their internal health as well. That’s one of our primary goals and where we see the most benefit.”

FIX Body Group avoids the “one size fits all” model of medicine. They shun mass-marketed fad diets and focus on a personalized wellness program that addresses the patient’s unique issues and needs.



A hall of fame features famous athletes who have visited FIX Body Group including Michael Jordan.

FIX Body Group provides health coaches that provide therapy and analyze lifestyle choices to spot areas that could be issues. This can be as simple as getting you outside and moving more often, or more complex such as removing known inflammatory foods or checking hormone balance. Cucarola said

hormone balance can be key to good health as people get older because the body does not produce as many hormones as it did when it was younger. He credits therapy and nutrition programs as being key in achieving that proper balance.

“When you combine optimizing your hormones, adding the proper nutrition and exercise, then you’re heading in three different areas and that’s where people get the best results,” noted Cucarola. “We’ll work with people through nutrition, overall lifestyle changes, helping them out with their fitness as well as balancing out hormones so they can feel younger and look younger and continue to live their best life.”

FIX Body Group utilizes a three-step program to insure that patients get the personal treatment they need. First, they consult with the patient to assess the areas that will require attention. Second, they work together with the patient to come up with a regimen that will get the best results. Finally they give treatment along with information and tools to ensure that they stay healthy.

FIX Body Group also addresses aesthetics as an option for visitors to the center. This includes micro-needling for facials that target wrinkles as well as a non-invasive weight loss procedure.

“We have a device called TruSculpt where in a 15-minute procedure you can lose 25 percent of fat in a specific area permanently,” Cucarola stated. He added that aesthetics goes a long way in overall confidence, which contributes to personal health. “When you look better, you feel better, you promote yourself, and you work



Dr. Patrick Cucarola (Photos by Vince Meehan)

harder. You look and feel better, and you’re living your best life!”

Cucarola explained that people are born with fat cells that may grow bigger as an adult due to a bad diet or lack of exercise. If they lose weight by working out and improving their diet, the fat cells will shrink but never go away completely. He added that the TruSculpt procedure eliminates those fat cells permanently using monopolar radiofrequency without any downtime after the procedure. He compared it to liposuction without the surgery. The procedure can be localized to certain areas so that people can literally sculpt a classic hourglass figure or a V-cut torso. T

The goal of FIX Body Group is to work with patients in a personalized program that lets them excel at life pain-free and equipped for success.

For more info, go to FixMedicalGroup.com.

—Vince Meehan can be reached at vinniemeehan@gmail.com.



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Dr. Stephanie Green

Solar rates

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

The California Public Utilities Commission delayed a January vote on a proposed policy change that would make rooftop solar owners pay into the fixed costs of maintaining the grid. Currently, all those costs are shifted onto energy users without solar panels. This includes costs such as maintenance repairs as well as projects to move wires underground in order to prevent wildfires.

The Wall Street Journal characterized the current policy as “welfare for the wealthy” with rich Californians benefiting from the subsidies while costs were shifted to the poor.

Opponents worry this will discourage new solar customers and hurt the state’s booming solar industry.

San Diego County has the most solar penetration of any California county – with an estimated 25% of homes using the renewable energy source. Those homeowners are compensated at the market rate for any excess energy they contribute to the grid.

Haney Hong, a resident in east San Diego, revealed that due to his rooftop solar panels, his annual San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) bill is around \$56. Meanwhile, those without solar are estimated to pay \$240

more annually than their solar counterparts.

Even if this subsidy changes, there are still many state programs in place as incentives for people to switch to solar. However, even with those cost-saving measures in place, studies show the vast majority of homes with solar make more than \$50,000 in income. Sixty-five percent of residential solar customers have incomes in the six figures.

“Residential solar is overwhelmingly purchased by those who can afford the initial costs,” Hong said.

Poorer households, as well as renters and people living in apartments, are cut off from the benefits of solar and the costs of maintaining the grid are shifted to them.

Hong leads the San Diego County Taxpayer Association and is urging the California Public Utilities Commission to more aggressively fix this inequity than their shelved proposal would have. The organization is advocating for the commission to increase the rates for solar customers within five years rather than slowly over 15 years. Their proposal would make the rare low-income solar customers exempt from rising costs.

“When... we create structures that don’t help those in poverty, we run the risk of concentrating [wealth] and making California

even less livable than it already is,” Hong said.

The focus on more equitable metering comes amid a major surge in energy costs. SDG&E attributes the rise in rates to a hike in natural gas prices and an increase in use during the December cold front.

“There is a challenge in the ability to meet the demand for natural gas, which of course, spikes the price,” said Anthony Wagner, communications manager at SDG&E. “The natural gas cost has gone up about 25% in the last year, and SDG&E does not make a profit off an upcharge in gas. So whatever it costs at the wholesale price plus the cost of transmission and distribution is the cost that we pass off to our consumer or customer.”

According to CBS8, SDG&E has the highest electricity rates in the country. The rates have risen since 2013 as SDG&E makes the grid more climate resistant and works to prevent wildfires. Still, Semptra, the owner of SDG&E, made \$9 billion in profits annually in a report they released.

“If we don’t fix, for instance, the things in this solar rate proceeding and that energy metering, it’s only going to push your rate higher and higher. And so we have to fix these structural issues in the rates,” Hong said.

All price increases must be approved by the California Public Utilities Commission, but

Edward Lopez, executive director of Utility Consumers’ Action Network (UCAN), told CBS8 that the commission often puts politics over people and rarely decreases rates.

The high cost of energy in the area is just another aspect of why San Diego is becoming too expensive for many. San Diego was recently named the least affordable city in the nation, surpassing San Francisco in a report conducted by home-buying platform OJO-Labs. While other metros like New York City may look more expensive on the surface, they are paired with higher wages.

Legislators are implementing other programs that should increase renewable energy use and decrease costs.

San Diego Assemblymember Chris Ward introduced AB2316 to establish a statewide solar and storage program. He noted that 45% of Californians are renters who cannot install solar. His idea is to install smaller-scale community solar projects so renters, residents, and business owners who cannot install solar themselves can subscribe to the project and receive a credit on their utility bill for their share of the power that is produced. The storage aspect would also help decrease energy costs during peak hours when the sun has set.

After seven years of work, the cities of San Diego, La Mesa,

Encinitas, Chula Vista, and Imperial Beach are rolling out their San Diego community choice energy program that partially breaks SDG&E’s monopoly. Nonprofit San Diego Community Power will provide those cities with an alternate power source while still using SDG&E’s grid infrastructure. The nonprofit has two rate plans: a more expensive 100% renewable, carbon-free energy one and another with 50% renewable energy that is comparable or slightly cheaper than SDG&E energy rates.

Customers can choose to opt-out of the program. Libraries, fire departments, and other city properties began using the alternative energy source in 2021 and the program is expanding to residential customers. According to the San Diego Union-Tribune, San Diego Community Power’s 767,700 total customers will make it the second-largest community choice aggregation, or CCA, in the state.

While those cities are looking to meet their climate plan goals of using 100% renewable energy by 2035, for many customers the more urgent worry is being able to afford their ever-increasing energy bills.

Amid the new programs and policy changes, there is hope that both goals can be met.

—Kendra Sitton can be reached at kendra@sdnews.com.

Quick tips to improve your home internet experience



As more households are working and learning from home these days, here are some easy tips to help improve your internet experience.

Use audio instead of video for virtual meetings. Video calls can be a strain on your service. Consider video for must-

see moments. Or turn the camera on only when you’re speaking.

Doorbell cameras and pet cams. When you’re home, lower the resolution on doorbell cams and pet cams. You can still effectively monitor the areas. And turn off pet cams if you’re at home.

Get a 360 View. Cox Panoramic Wifi gives you wall to wall coverage, including those dead zones in your home. If you have Cox Panoramic Wifi, use the Cox Panoramic Wifi app to:

- Manage devices on your home internet;
- Pause the wifi on other devices (like the kids’ iPad) when you’re on important video calls.

Computer Virus Protection. Computer viruses and malware can slow down your internet. Use the free Cox Security Suite Plus powered by McAfee to protect your home computer. Cox Panoramic Wifi customers can turn on Advanced Security in the Cox Panoramic Wifi app.

Secure your wifi. Password protect your home wifi to keep out unauthorized users.

Location, location, location. Your internet experience may be slowed down if your wifi router or modem is in a bad location. Remember to:

- Elevate your modem or router on a shelf or tall piece of furniture (wifi signals travel outward and downward);
- Avoid placing your router near a microwave, mirror or fish tank, which can affect the signal.

For more tips, visit www.cox.com.



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City Council approves new street vending ordinance

Vendors will be limited in high-traffic pedestrian areas

By DAVE SCHWAB

On March 1, San Diego City Council voted 8-1 to pass an ordinance to regulate sidewalk vending and establish penalties for non-compliance.

"Many street vendors are mom-and-pop businesses with lots of immigrants, new Americans, and people of color," said District 8 Councilmember Vivian Moreno who dissented. "Unfortunately, the ordinance is overly broad and not specific enough. It goes beyond what is required by SB 946. I'm also concerned about there being uneven enforcement, where vendors would be heavily enforced in some areas, while in some areas they would not be."

SB 946 established parameters for the local regulation of sidewalk vendors. Its intent was to decriminalize sidewalk vending by limiting violations with administrative citations rather than criminal citations, in turn promoting entrepreneurship and economic success for sidewalk vendors.

Authored by District 2 Councilmember Jennifer Campbell's office, the new City ordinance will take effect 30 days after final passage by the City Council. All sidewalk vendors will have until June 1 to either cease vending activity or comply with the ordinance's provisions.

"We have an ordinance that brings the City into compliance with SB 946 that went into effect in 2019 and brings vendors into the formal economy," said Campbell. "This ordinance sets requirements and provides legal clarity for vendors who want to abide by the rules and have successful businesses while protecting public health, safety, and public spaces."

"SB 946 decriminalized sidewalk vending and established requirements for local regions to regulate them," Campbell's chief-of-staff Venus Molina told the Council. "The [new] ordinance applies to special events, swap meets, farmers markets, and shoreline parks. These regulations must be directly related to public health, safety, or welfare. There are distance requirements between vendors and a prohibition of vending in high-traffic

pedestrian areas. Vendors must obtain a vending permit. No insurance is required and the permit would be renewed annually."

Enforcement of the new sidewalk vending ordinance calls for warnings and referrals on the first offense, \$200 fines for vendors without permits and \$500 for those with permits for a second offense, \$500 fines for vendors without permits, and \$1,000 for those with permits for a third offense and \$500 fines and/or impoundment of vending equipment for subsequent violations for those without vending permits and \$1,000 fines and/or equipment impoundment for vendors with permits.

Mission Beach Town Council President Larry Webb asked the Council not to require the ordinance to be approved by the California Coastal Commission claiming that would "greatly increase the number of sidewalk vendors that we already have in Mission Beach blocking public access to the beach. Let's give everyone in San Diego their beach access back."

"For several years, Mission Beach has been completely overrun by sidewalk vendors trampling on the natural beauty of the beach area," said Mission Beach beach rentals owner Matt Gardner and past MBTC president, who also complained of vendors not paying taxes like traditional businesses. "This is a very welcome and much-needed ordinance."

"Today's action is an important step in establishing sensible rules and regulations and allows us to comply with SB 946 and help those who want to become entrepreneurs," said Campbell before moving passage of the sidewalk vending ordinance.

"This ordinance affects our neighborhoods for micro-businesses and our brick and mortars and this is a challenging thing to negotiate while allowing microbusinesses to safely flourish," said District 1 Councilmember Joe LaCava. "We're achieving multiple goals in decriminalizing sidewalk vending while lowering barriers to small businesses operating and taking ownership and laying the groundwork for successful growth. Resolving this issue has been a priority for my district."

Teacher killed

CONTINUED FROM Page 3

“He did not take no for an answer,” said Gembara, who said she filed for a restraining order against Alvarez after he repeatedly called her and went to her home.

Alvarez is suspected of waiting an hour outside the home of Fierro, 37, who was shot six times on Feb. 1. Fierro was found at 7:10 a.m. on the sidewalk of Kansas Street near Monroe Ave.

The firearm was painted white. One witness who was watching from a distance thought the two men were struggling with a thermometer until she heard shots fired. She had thought it was a dispute over COVID-19.

A DA investigator testified Alvarez purchased a firearm and took multiple gun safety courses the same day. He interviewed a course instructor who told him that Alvarez asked him this odd question: “Where’s the best place to shoot someone to kill them?”

The safety course instructor told Alvarez the purpose of firing a gun is stop a threat, not to kill someone, said the investigator.

Alvarez allegedly used his brother’s car to travel to North Park to kill Fierro. Police arrested Alvarez at his Serra Mesa home about 13 hours later and seized a handgun that is suspected of being the murder weapon.

Alvarez remains in the George Bailey Detention Facility without bail.

When Gembara was asked about Fierro, she said, “We shared dreams and goals and visions together.”

—Neal Putnam is a local court reporter.

CASA volunteer

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

The North Park resident scanned the QR code so he could sign up for an information session.

“I thought, hey, well this is perfect,” he said.

Another reason he was excited about the opportunity is that kids had always been part of his day-to-day life, whether through being the neighborhood’s favorite babysitter, helping with his mom’s daycare, working at summer camps and later spending time with his nieces and nephews. When he moved to San Diego, those daily interactions disappeared. For people who are not parents or educators, it can be difficult to have meaningful intergenerational relationships. This is one way he incorporated working with kids back into his life.

After the introductory session, he immediately applied to be a volunteer and went through the extensive training program. Since then, he has been an active volunteer for the past two years and has worked with three foster youth. Details around the children are confidential but he did confirm he has worked with teenagers and LGBT+ youth.

For older foster youth, Morscheck explained “there’s a big emphasis on developing some of those independent living skills, focusing on getting your high school diploma and thinking about post-high school plans.”

During his training, he shared with Voices for Children that he

was a member of the LGBT+ community and was willing to be matched with LGBT+ youth so they could receive culturally-competent care.

“I learned through my training that LGBTQ youth are over represented. In fact, some stats say that one in three kiddos in the foster system identifies as LGBTQ. I found that very troubling and concerning and if I could be part of helping to make sure that youth in the system don’t get re-traumatized by folks or providers that are not providing LGBTQ inclusive services,” he said.

One of the reasons this model has been adopted by many judicial systems is that it gives foster youth individualized attention. Social workers have dozens of cases and are often overworked. Bringing in a volunteer who only works with one or two kids at a time means they can get to know the children as a whole person.

“I just really, really enjoy getting to know the individual youth that I’ve been matched with and seeing them succeed has been a huge highlight,” Morscheck said. His favorite moment was celebrating one of his youth getting their high school diploma.

In addition to building a trusting relationship, the advocacy role the volunteers take on means they help solve problems like transferring education records when the child is placed in a new living situation or ensuring they have transportation to a doctor’s appointment.

The final aspect of being a CASA is that they send a

SEE CASA VOLUNTEER, Page 14

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SUDOKU PUZZLE

Fill in the blank cells using number 1 to 9. Each number can appear only once in each row column and 3x3 block. Use logic and process elimination to solve the puzzle.

	9				3		6	
7						1		
		3					4	5
		2		8		6		
5							1	
3		4		9	6			
		5		6	7			2
						5		
9	3							

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

	1	2	3	4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11	12	
13								14						15
16				17				18					19	
20		21				22				23		24		
25					26				27		28			
29				30				31		32		33		
			34	35						36		37		
38	39										40			
41					42				43					
44				45		46		47				48	49	50
51			52		53		54				55			
56				57		58				59				
60			61		62					63			64	
65		66						67				68		
	69							70						

- CLUES ACROSS
1. Neckwear

7. Fish parts

13. Cooking

14. Quality

16. Rural delivery

17. Popular superhero

19. Partner to Pa

20. Shivering fits

22. Wrath

23. Linguistics pioneer

25. Large integers

26. A way to prepare food

28. Group of badgers

29. Peyton’s little brother

30. Rock out

31. Danish krone

33. Take from with force

34. Baroque musical instrument

36. Zodiac sign

38. Hebrew alphabet letter

40. Independent member of a clone

41. Type of garment

43. Satisfy

44. One point south of due east

45. A way to wipe out

47. Moved quickly on foot

48. Bar bill

51. An idiot

53. Performed with the voice silent

55. Body fluids

56. Rhythmic patterns

58. “___ my it’s”

59. Type of wrap

60. It shows who you are

61. Carousel

64. Type of college degree

65. Molding

67. Closes again

69. Verses

70. Surface

- CLUES DOWN
1. Short, thick stick

2. Rhode Island

3. Animals of the horse family

4. Very important persons

5. Folk singer Di Franco

6. Boredom

7. Long speech

8. Footballer Newton

9. Expression of sorrow or pity

10. Linear accelerator

11. One quintillion bytes

12. Smallest interval in Western music

13. Box

15. Cheese dish

18. Make a mistake

21. Done by all people or things

24. Circumference

26. Chum

27. Electrocardiogram

30. Sandwich chain Jimmy ___

32. Showed old movie

35. Important event on Wall St.

37. Where wrestlers work

38. Free from contamination

39. Eastern Canada coastal region

42. Slang for gun

43. High schoolers’ test

46. Fathers

47. Call it a career

49. Productive

50. Musical groups

52. Yellowish-brown

54. Lowest point of a ridge

55. Beloved late sportscaster Craig

57. Fill up

59. Cardinal number that’s the sum of 5 and 1

62. Frost

63. Jewel

66. Atomic #45

68. Top lawyer

	E	G	H	E		S	E	M	A	H	R				
S	T	V	E	S	E	H	E	C	I	N	R	O			
D	B		G	I	L	I	H	W		D	I				
N	V	V	S		L	O	D		S	V	T	V			
V	H	S		L	E	C	V	L	J	V	H	F			
B	V	L	N	V	R	F	V	S		S	B	E			
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H	I	F	V	S		E	H	I		S	E	N	O	V	
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H	E	B	R	I	T	V	C		E	N	I	S	I	N	C
S	E	E	L	V	C	S		T	V	A	V	A	R	C	

	C	R	A	V	A	T		S	C	A	L	E	S			
	C	U	I	S	I	N	E		C	A	L	I	B	E	S	
	R	D		S	P	I	D	E		M	A	N				
	A	G	U	E	S	I	R	E		S	A	P	I	R	A	
	T	E	N	S	P	U	R	E		C	E	T	R	O	B	
	E	L	I	O	L		G	E	M	I	N	I				
	A	L	E	P	H		R	A	M	E	T					
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	P	R	A	T	S	T	A		C	E	T		S	E	R	A
	I	D	A	L	S	A	O		T			I	G	I	G	A
	C	O	R	N	I	C	E		R	E	S	E	A	L	S	D

4	9	1	2	5	3	7	6	8
7	5	8	6	4	9	1	2	3
6	2	3	7	1	8	9	4	5
1	7	2	5	8	4	6	3	9
5	6	9	3	7	2	8	1	4
3	8	4	1	9	6	2	5	7
8	1	5	4	6	7	3	9	2
2	4	7	9	3	1	5	8	6
9	3	6	8	2	5	4	7	1

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Culinary school

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

and tall hat combined with the vast array of stainless steel in the kitchen leave no doubt that culinary art is taught here and the students eat it up.

Chef Zardkoohi started the California Culinary Arts Institute

after losing his previous job to Covid. He decided to offer his courses to kids aged 11 to 17 as a way to inspire the youth to pursue culinary arts. Previously, Zardkoohi taught at the National Culinary School and the Art Institute of San Diego's culinary program while also serving as the banquet chef at the Barona Resort & Casino. He was also teaching at

Valley College in San Bernardino where he had to commute from San Diego. After he was laid off, he decided to start his own school, which he says was something that was always in the back of his mind.

Zardkoohi insists that anyone can learn to become a chef, no matter what their skill sets are. "Anyone in any position who likes to cook or bake, they can become a chef. You can be a pilot, and at the same time you can be a good chef. You can be an attorney or a doctor and you can be a good chef."

The chef said cooking is a part of life and really should be taught in school, even elementary school, and points to countries like Japan, Iceland and Finland who have successful culinary programs for young students.

The school features a full-sized culinary kitchen and an equally large presentation room where the students put together their final plates. Zardkoohi says he teaches the students how a restaurant operates from both the front and the back – the front being the actual dining area and the back being the kitchen. This way, his students are prepared to take their experience out into the real world if that's what they want to do.

Carlos Sandoval is one of the students taking advantage of Zardkoohi's vast array of culinary knowledge.

"I've learned that you can make anything from scratch using whole fresh ingredients," Sandoval said as he stirred a pot



(L to R) Student Carlos Sandoval, chef Sohrab Zardkoohi, student Everest Franz at the California Culinary Arts Institute (Photos by Vince Meehan)



Students receiving hands-on instruction from an experienced chef.

of broccoli soup the class had just created. He added that his favorite food to cook and eat is pasta. Everest Franz is another student who has enjoyed the mentorship of Chef Zardkoohi.

"This school has been great! I always liked to cook but my parents kinda taught me – but they also didn't have any proper training. So I learned stuff like how to hold a knife correctly, how to chop things correctly, how to dice an onion, how to julienne things. Just even the more basic fundamentals that are really useful when cooking any dish. And that's been really useful and good to learn," Franz said.

Zardkoohi is also using his new enterprise to give back to the community by partnering

with Solutions For Change, a North County non-profit foundation with services for homeless families. He says that for every five students that sign up for his classes, he will offer a child from Solutions For Change free enrollment in the form of a scholarship. In addition, his outdoor patio will soon be converted to a dining area where the general public can come for lunch or dinner. As part of the student's graduation, they will work for four months serving food for the diners so they can get a real life feel of how a restaurant works. And all income from that dining experience will go towards Solution For Change as well as a number of animal shelters.

For more info, go to: CaliforniaCulinaryArts.com

—Vince Meehan can be reached at atvinniemeehan@gmail.com.



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written report to the judge who appointed them every six months. The report includes how the youth is progressing, any barriers they are facing and an update on their overall wellbeing.

"It's about making sure that the child has a voice," Morscheck said about ensuring the child's perspective on aspects of their life is included in the comments to the judge.

Initially, Morscheck was concerned about the time commitment but he found ways to make volunteering flexible. In addition, he has a supervisor and other people he can lean on for help.

"it's been one of the most meaningful and I think impactful volunteer experiences I've ever had," Morscheck said.

Morscheck said that Voices for Children is particularly in need of men and LGBT+ people to volunteer so they can be matched with kids of shared experience. He encourages anyone with even a small amount of interest to sign up for an information session at speakupnow.org.

—Kendra Sitton can be reached at kendra@sdnews.com.



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Food & Drink Blotter.

BY FRANK SABATINI JR.

NEW CHEF, NEW HORIZONS FOR RMD GROUP

A young, powerhouse chef has taken on the role of culinary director for San Diego's ever-expanding **RMD Group**.

Wilfried Bergerhausen steps aboard after recently working as corporate chef for a New York City-based restaurant group that operates venues in London, Dubai, San Tropez and Miami. He also served as executive chef at the acclaimed **Le Cirque** in the **Bellagio Las Vegas**, where at the age of 28 he helped earn the restaurant a five-star Forbes rating.

Bergerhausen is a native of France and obtained much of his formal training there at prestigious schools and restaurants. His culinary style is known to be eclectic and modern, but with respect to tradition. He will oversee menu development for all of RMD's kitchens, which include **Lumi**, **Rustic Root**, **Huntress**, **Ballast Point Brewing Company**, **Hard Rock Hotel's Float** and more. rmdgroupsd.com.

ATTENTION WINE LOVERS

Hillcrest will see the arrival later this year of a tasting room by **Pali Wine Co.**, which specializes in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay made from grapes grown on its Santa Ynez vineyards. The company operates an outlet in Little

Italy (2130 India St.) and has additional tasting rooms in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.

A rep we spoke to at the Little Italy location said the company recently secured the space previously occupied by Oscar Wilde's Pub for its second San Diego location. He added that it will be about seven months before it opens. Expect wines by the glass and bottles as well as vino-friendly fare that will include cheese and charcuterie boards.

SOME THINGS ARE FOR FREE

In celebration of its 10th anniversary, **Lucky's Lunch Counter** near **Petco Park** will be giving away one free overstuffed sandwich on March 16 to each customer who signs up for the eatery's newsletter via a QR code available for scanning upon arrival. The giveaway will run from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., or until supplies last.

Visitors can choose from the following options: Corned beef; pastrami; honey-roasted ham; roasted turkey; roast beef; tuna salad; or chicken breast salad.

A SAN DIEGO CHEF IS ON THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION RADAR

Anthony Wells of **Juniper & Ivy** in Little Italy is a semifinalist for a **James Beard Foundation**



New, creative gelato flavors at An's Dry Cleaning (Courtesy photo)

Award in the category of "Best Chef: California."

Normally held each year across several categories, the awards were suspended since 2020 because of internal ethics issues as well as the impact Covid had on the restaurant industry. Their return reveals a semifinalist list that will bestow national honors to outstanding restaurateur, chef, baker, restaurant, bar program, and more.

Wells is the only San Diego candidate in both the stateside and national categories. His career at **Juniper & Ivy** began in 2014, when he helped open the restaurant as its sous chef. He soon ascended to chef de cuisine before taking the position of executive chef.

The foundation will announce the finalists on March 16, followed by a presentation of winners June 13 during an awards ceremony in Chicago. 2228 Kettner Blvd., 619-269-9036, juniperandivy.com.

COLD AND DAZZLING

The gelato repertoire at An's Dry Cleaning in North Park never loses creativity. Since the shop



Wilfried Bergerhausen brings his culinary savvy to San Diego. (Courtesy photo)



A favored cold-water seafood have come ashore at Rubio's. (Facebook)

opened a new location in Del Mar under the name **An's Hatmakers** (1555 Camino Del Mar, Suite 115), a handful of new flavors with intriguing names have been added to the menu, which rotates every two weeks.

They include "Hanfu," made with pomegranate, grapefruit and orange blossom. Another called "Denim" unites banana, caramel and Nutella, while "Newsboy" is simpler in comparison in its offering of vanilla gelato with macademia nuts.

"When we create a new flavor, we give it time to shine on

the menu and then bring it back every month or so, depending sometimes on the seasonal aspect of it," said Taylor Paris, head of operations.

For the latest menu, visit the web site. 3017 Adams Ave., 619-450-6166, adcgelato.com.

TRENDY SHRIMP

Rubio's Coastal Grill has joined the craze for red Argentinian shrimp, which boast a sweet, buttery flavor similar to Maine lobster tail.

For a limited time that we hope lasts forever, the San Diego-based chain will feature the wild-caught crustaceans in a chipotle-honey preparation. Customers can savor it in bowl, burrito or plate form.

The shrimp have become hot sellers in restaurants and grocery stores over the past two years. They are trawled from clean, icy waters off the southern tip of Argentina, and boast attractive red threads when cooked. rubios.com.

— Frank Sabatini Jr. can be reached at fsabatini@san.rr.com.



The sandwiches are big and free at Lucky's Lunch Counter for one day only this month. (Photo by Patrick Samokhvalof)



Local chef Anthony Wells is up for a prestigious award. (Photo courtesy James Beard Foundation)

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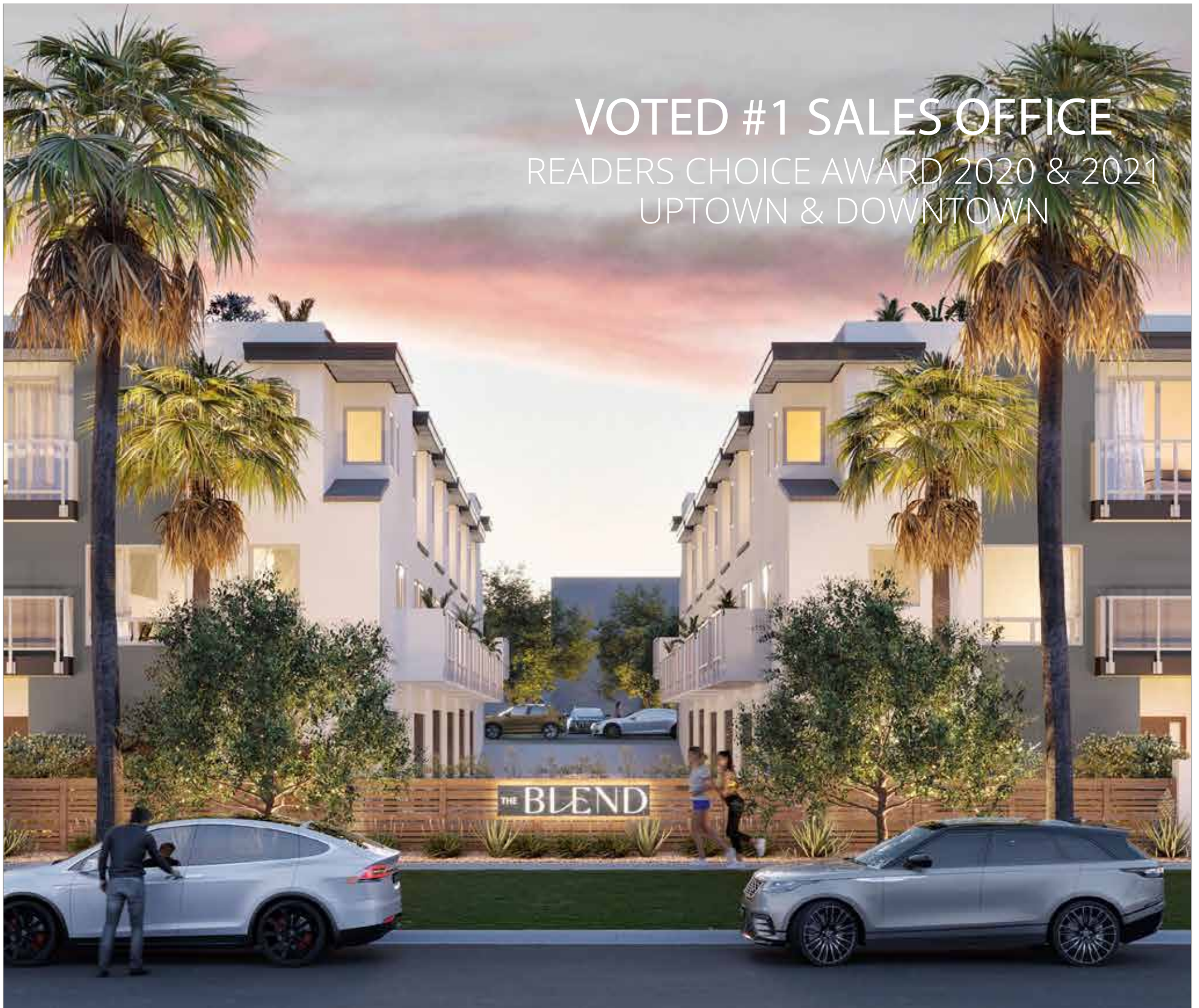

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