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San Diego Community Newspaper Group



Orange County band Undecided Future at 2019's Springboard West (Photo by Collin Worrell Photography)

Emerging artists descend on Ocean Beach for Springboard West

LUCIA VITI | DOWNTOWN NEWS

Springboard West 2020 – a music festival, band bootcamp and beer crawl – returns to Ocean Beach to celebrate some of the world's finest musical talent Jan. 9-11.

Founder and Director Barry Coffing will showcase some of the most talented – and undiscovered – musicians in front of the industry's top executives as a way to discover, give back and celebrate the future of music.

Crossing all music genres, this nonprofit, sustainable arts venture isn't about "making money." Mentors devote their time as advisors while searching for musical phenoms as 40 musical

SEE MUSIC FEST, Page 15

'Danny's Story' of transphobia, assault breeds empathy in local high schools

KENDRA SITTON | DOWNTOWN NEWS

"I came here to feel normal," Danny laments as the audience of San Diego High School students watches him experience yet another instance of being othered while at the fictional high school he just transferred to in a play put on by Blindspot Collective.

"Danny's Story" details the experiences of transphobia and eventual sexual assault of a trans high school student. Blindspot



SEE DANNY'S STORY, Page 6

Danny is played by Jack Mason-Brase. (Photo by Kendra Sitton)

Seaport Village revitalization continues

DAVE SCHWAB | DOWNTOWN NEWS

Plans to give Seaport Village a huge, distinctively San Diego "makeover" are still in play, though it's taking longer than anticipated.

"A project of this size and nature doesn't just happen — it evolves over time," said Yehudi "Gaf" Gaffen, managing partner of Protea Waterfront Development, the team behind Seaport San Diego, a re-imagining of the 39-year-old, 90,000-square-foot Seaport Village waterfront shopping and dining complex.

"Our vision is to create a vibrant, experimental-based attraction near the water," said Gaffen. "Our goal is for this to be a legacy project for more than just San Diego, that's going to be transformational for the whole West Coast."

Years in the making, the long-term Seaport Village redevelopment's two major new attractions, an aquarium and an observational spire and platform, continue to anchor the project.

However, Gaffen noted there have been "enhancements" made to the overall project concept, which now includes construction of three, brand-new full-service hotels as well as a "new generation" student hostel. The hostel will have beds in shared rooms offering travelers less-expensive accommodations.

Another new feature of revitalizing Seaport Village will be the introduction of a "butterfly wonderland." Gaffen said that project is based on an existing butterfly exhibition in Scottsdale, Arizona,

SEE SEAPORT, Page 11

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Plans in motion for major revamp of Children's Park

City Council approves plans for \$8 million improvement project

DAVE FIDLIN | DOWNTOWN NEWS

It has been touted as a project years in the making, but ultimately was made official after just minutes of discussion and unanimous support from San Diego decision-makers.

Children's Park, a largely underutilized 1.4-acre green space at 326 W. Harbor Drive, is set to undergo \$8 million worth of large-scale improvements that supporters say will give the site an opportunity to live up to its name.

According to city documents, the park's refreshed array of features is to include a forest-themed playground area and picnic amenities. Also in the works is an adult exercise equipment area, off-leash dog running area and a vendor building that could serve as a platform for special events.

Additionally, the construction project, set to wrap in summer 2021, is to carve out new space for public art, a new walkway to the adjacent Civic Pond, a lawn area and attendant-staffed public restrooms.

The City Council on Dec. 17 issued several pivotal authorizations linked to the project, including approval of the overall plan and a compensation agreement with Civic San Diego, the agency that formerly handled all aspects of Downtown redevelopment.

Council member Chris Ward, whose district includes Downtown, said he believes Children's Park and another closely aligned endeavor — construction of the first phase of the East Village Green park project — will net positive results in the years ahead.

"This was a big lift to get a monumental new park facility into the East Village community," Ward said of the efforts to bring both proposals to reality. "This has been a very much ongoing project."

Council member Scott Sherman also went on record in support of the projects before the formal vote was taken. Sherman said the use of such funding sources as park district revenues and development impact fees is a prudent use of the money.

"It's for a good cause," Sherman said. "I think it's a win-win for everybody."

According to city officials, none of the park's \$8 million worth of costs will be covered through the

SEE CHILDREN'S PARK, Page 11



A rendering of the planned Children's Park (Photo courtesy Schmidt Design Group)

East Village Green gets the green light

Art on the Land
By DELLE WILLETT

I wrote about East Village Green in October 2016 and am pleased to see that the park now has a green light to break ground in the summer of 2020, with the first phase ready by summer of 2022. In case you missed my column, I'm sharing it with you now.

Where some people might see vacant lots and utility infrastructure, Nathan Elliott sees opportunity. Elliott is a principal with OJB Landscape Architecture, a national landscape architecture firm with a San Diego presence since 2003.

Working with Civic San Diego,



A multi-use sport court and community room will support a wide range of public programming and events.



East Village Green's west block includes a new community center, event lawn, café space and children's park. (Courtesy photos)

the city's Park and Recreation Department and a team of local consultants, Elliott has led OJB's preparation of East Village Green's General Development Plan (GDP), and his team is currently preparing to begin the design process that will ultimately lead to the park's construction.

"Our work takes us across the country to pursue and develop these kinds of projects and it is extremely gratifying to work on such an important project in our own hometown," said Elliott.

Anticipated as a three-phase project, East Village Green's GDP

SEE EAST VILLAGE GREEN, Page 14

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San Diego celebrates Zandra Rhodes, pets

Fashion Files

By DIANA CAVAGNARO



GASLAMP HOLIDAY PET PARADE

The 12th annual Gaslamp Holiday Pet Parade took place on

Dec. 15, at Martin Luther King, Jr. Promenade. This year, the event was sponsored by Just Food For Dogs and had a pet expo with many vendors that were all pet-related. They had a fun contest to go around to all the booths and have your program stamped and then put into a drawing for many fun

prizes. The first 350 pet entrants received a complimentary goodie bag.

All the furry critters came dressed in their favorite costumes, some matching their owners' costumes and many of the participants put together creative floats. At 2 p.m., the parade marched up

Fifth Avenue to E Street and came back down Fourth Avenue along with marching bands, dignitaries and pets and their owners. Not all the entrants were dogs, some pets were cats, chickens, bunnies, and pigs. When they arrived back at MLK Promenade, prizes were given for the best in the following categories.

This year's awards went to:

• **Best Ugly Holiday Sweater:** Ollie, the West Highland Terrier, with handler Victoria Brunzell.

• **Cutest Critter:** Chicka the chicken, Gingerale the chicken, and Waffles the rabbit, with handlers Mikey Johnson, Hunter Johnson and Grace Green ("Alice in Wonderland").

• **Best Pet Costume:** Leuke, with handler Viki Solano.

• **Best Non-Canine Pet Costume** Jazzy the dog, and Maya the cat, with handlers Greyfield Nguyen and Angela Aguilar.

• **Best Pet Holiday**

Costume: Sir Ruffles Von Vicious (Ruffy), with handler Jan Savage (Feliz Navidog).

• **Best Costumed Duo:** Tia the dog, with handler Jaimie Flores (Queen Tia).

• **Best Costumed group:** Kylo-Ren the dog, with handlers the Andrews Family ("Where's Waldo").

• **Best Float:** Lucy the Boston Terrier, with handler George Pisano (Harry Potter).



Best in Show and grand marshal for 2020
(Photos by Diana Cavagnaro)



Astro Mutt



Furst place winner

• **Best in Show:** Zachary and Belle the dogs, with handlers the Hoeberecht family (they will be the event's grand marshals next year).

• Charity Advocate Canine Tucker Doodle received the **GreyFriars Bobby Award**. If you missed this fur ball gathering, be sure to put it on your calendar for next year.

'50 FABULOUS YEARS'

The House of Zandra Rhodes presented a special luncheon and rooftop terrace party celebrating five iconic decades of the Fashion House of Zandra Rhodes. This event took place on Dec. 11, at the L'Auberge Del Mar. Zandra spoke about the most pivotal moments in her career. Models showed the audience one-of-a-kind vintage Zandra Rhodes garments that swept the fashion scene during the last 50 years. Everyone was given a private viewing of the upcoming film "Zandra with a Zee," a documentary highlighting Rhodes' life in fashion.

The event had a special auction where guests could procure vintage garments and other Rhodes items such as handbags, pillows, and artwork. The afternoon was finished with an after-party on the Beachside Rooftop Terrace. For more information about this fashion icon, visit zandrarahodes.com.

THE GOLDEN HOUR

The Westgate Hotel and Dame Zandra Rhodes presented a fashion show and luncheon downtown



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Cross Campus caters to Downtown professionals

VINCE MEEHAN | DOWNTOWN NEWS

Briana Tovey is the senior campus manager of Cross Campus, a coworking hub located in Little Italy where professionals can rent workstations or offices by the hour, day, week or even longer. She serves as the point person at this brick building that used to be a major furniture warehouse on India Street near Laurel.

The concept is simple; working professionals can have access to workstations and conference rooms without having to commit to a long-term lease.

There are a growing number of coworking spaces in San Diego and the nation. “Coworking paces are set up for a lot of different reasons, one being smaller commitments for office space,” Tovey explains. “And there are also options for people to drop in and

use us once a week, or a couple of times a month, so it’s flexible office space. We cater to startups who are growing and don’t know exactly where they’ll be in a year and don’t want to commit to a long-term lease, and we also cater to a lot of remote workers.”

These remote workers can be in San Diego on a business trip and need to book a conference room for a few hours or can be consultants that need a fast and easy workspace for the day. Many find these coworking spaces through phone apps such as Deskpas, which recently added San Diego to its network.

Sam Rosen is the co-founder and CEO of Deskpas and says that San Diego is a perfect target for his company due to the influx of professionals who come to the city and prefer coworking set-ups. His site takes the legwork out of

searching for a meeting room in an unfamiliar city and makes the reservation process fast and easy.

Tovey agrees that Deskpas is a key tool for travelers to locate coworking spaces and works well in directing people to Cross Campus. “It’s great for us, because if people are traveling and they want to do coworking, they can set it up on Deskpas. And they can even bring a guest if they want, so it’s more exposure for us, and serves as another platform that draws people into our space.”

Cross Campus features various amenities that young professionals gravitate to including wall-mounted bicycle racks, a fully functioning kitchen and dining area, and even beer on tap. The ambiance is fun and casual with many professionals choosing to work together at large tables as opposed to hiding in a cubicle.



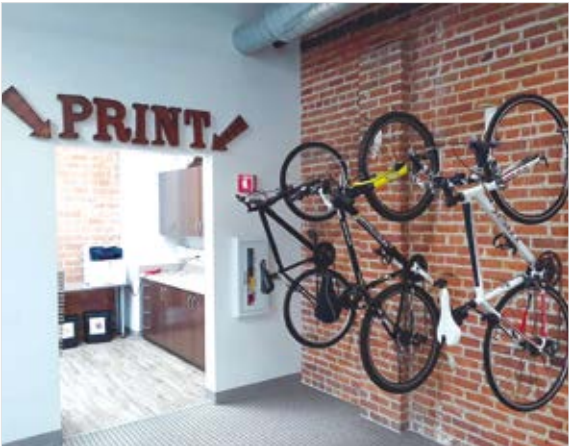
Cross Campus Senior Campus Manager Briana Tovey in the dining area. (Photos by Vince Meehan)

The workers must provide their own computer, so the work tool of choice for the clients are typically laptops. However, if you require multiple monitors, Cross Campus can provide you with them. Tovey elaborated on how easy it is for workers to do this. “We don’t provide computers – most people work off their laptops – but we do lend people monitors. So if you come with your laptop, but you’re a graphic or web designer and you need two screens, you just check one out – it’s free – you borrow it for the day, you bring it back when you’re done.”

Tovey definitely enjoys her job at Cross Campus and her enthusiasm is infectious as she roams the large

workspace. She checks in on people and makes sure that everybody is happy. She enjoys the camaraderie that Cross Campus intentionally generates for its workers. Large common areas bring workers together and creates a prime environment for collaboration. She adds that this brings a smile to her face when she sees it happen. “It’s a great place for cross-pollination because there are people here who do a little bit of everything. There’s a very wide array of ages and backgrounds represented here; I love it when I see people working together – it’s my favorite!”

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



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Declutter your life for a stress-free 2020

KATHI BURNS | addSPACE To Your Life

2020 marks the beginning of a new decade and if you want to embrace it with 20/20 vision and clarity, this is the perfect time to begin decluttering and organizing your life.

The average U.S. home contains more than 300,000 possessions. It is no wonder why we sometimes feel like our possessions are possessing us!

Most of us spend a great deal of time buying, maintaining, storing, trying to access and keeping track of our items.

When your life is overrun with clutter, you are not able to see clearly what you need to do to create more success or to simply have more free time.

The great news is that when your home and your life become organized and decluttered, you will automatically have extra room for new experiences and will also experience a greater sense of peace and well-being.

When we waste time searching for things we know we own, but cannot find, we become frustrated and lose precious hours from our life. Studies show that the average person wastes 3 1/2 hours each week searching for lost items.

There are several simple steps you can take to start 2020 on an organized path. These steps are simple but not necessarily easy. Keep in mind, there is no one end result — it is all about your personal vision for this new decade. If you feel ready to begin anew, here are a few basic steps you can

take right now to start this new decade feeling like your life is under control!

The first organizing tactic is to set up a permanent donation box in your home.

It is important to position your donation bin in a place that is quick and easy to access. A hall closet or right inside the garage door typically trumps other locations.

Once you set up a permanent donation bin for items you no longer want, use, or love, your life will become less cluttered with less effort. Develop your new habit of releasing unwanted items into this bin for four to six weeks until it becomes automatic.

It doesn't really matter what type of bin you use for your unwanted items. It can be as simple as a plastic tub or old box. The main requirement is that it stays vertical on its own. This way it is super easy to open the closet door and toss items in as soon as you decide they are no longer needed, used or loved.

To guarantee success, once your donation bin is full, you must take it immediately to your closest donation station.

Get into the habit of going to the donation station as frequently as your bin fills up. If your bin is the perfect size and shape, simply empty it and bring the bin back to keep the process going!

Adding a second donation bin inside your master closet will dramatically help you reduce your closet congestion by helping you get rid of clothes you no longer wear.

When you try on a piece of clothing and take it off right away — this is a good indication that you no longer really like it. We only wear 20% of the clothes in our closet so this might be the perfect time to get real with yourself. If you don't want to wear it today, why would you want to wear it tomorrow?

If in doubt and you just can't talk yourself into tossing it immediately, place the hanger backward onto the rod. In a few months, check to see if you ever wore it again. If not, toss it onto your donation bin quickly and be done with it!

Once you have a donation station set up inside your home, it is time to start the purging process.

Your next step will be to assess each space every time you open a door or drawer. Do a quick scan to check if there is anything inside that you have not used for the last six months or a year

A pro organizing tip: It is easier to make decisions if you empty the drawer. Seeing all of the contents will help you make a quick assessment of the contents. You will probably be surprised or even shocked at how much stuff that drawer contained.

Before you place items back into that drawer or cabinet, think about how you might be able to optimize that space. This area will be better organized when you create separate zones to contain each type of item.

It is easy to contain collections of 'like' items within

plastic bins. You can also employ baskets to serve as quick and easy dividers in deep drawers. Use pre-made plastic drawer bins for instant cabinets within cabinets.

For instance, my bedside drawer has a few different caddies within. One caddy holds pens and notepads, another holds vitamins, my extra cables are stashed inside a plastic bag and the last container holds my reading glasses.

This strategy follows the principle of containing 'like with like' that you will often hear professional organizers like myself teaching. The reason we love this organizing tactic is simply when similar items 'live' in the same location, they are much easier to find when needed.

One super important decluttering strategy is to purge your home on a regular basis. The beginning of each year is the ideal time. The beginning of a new decade makes decluttering even more significant. Start this decade with systems put into place and remove all clutter from your space!

Keep in mind that purging and releasing items on a regular basis is a win-win! It helps you pass your good out into the world and at the same time makes your home much less stressful and you will absolutely receive the bonus of more free time for fun!

—Kathi Burns is the CPO founder of addSpace To Your Life! Learn more at addspacetoyourlife.com ❖

Danny's Story

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

Collective created the piece and has taken it on two tours in San Diego high schools. Its latest tour finished with three shows at San Diego High School on Dec. 20. The play gives an intimate look at the struggles Danny, played by trans actor Jack Mason-Brace, faces after moving to San Diego to start over. In its efforts to build empathy, create accessible conversations for young people, and help high school students practice how to stand up for someone else, the second half of the presentation involves audience interaction with the six-person cast.

Wilfred Paloma's joker, the MC and moderator in forum theater pieces, facilitates conversations with the high school students where they can discuss what motivated the characters and the different oppressions Danny faces.

"One thing I strive to bring to the room is whatever is said in the room, is whatever is said in the room. We're going to acknowledge it and treat it with the same amount of weight as any other bit of the conversation," Paloma

said. "This is about the community and coming to where these folks are. This is the foundational thing that anchors me in the room."

After the discussion, the performers run through several scenes again. This time, when something goes wrong, a volunteer from the audience steps in for an actor to try and write a better outcome for Danny. Often, the high school students transform Danny's friend Gionni from a bystander into an advocate who stands up for Danny.

"The hardest part about playing this role is that she is intentionally a bystander," Sofia Zaragoza, who originated the role of Gionni, explained. In real life, she hopes she would stand up for someone. "To me, it's really empowering to get to be that person people want to step in for. I feel like I've seen every shade of response people can do — from the person who comes up dropping wisdom bombs cool and collectedly to the people



The cast plays songs including Lady Gaga's "Born this Way" as students file into the theater to see "Danny's Story." (Photo by Kendra Sitton)

who come up yelling and ready to fight. As extreme as I've seen some of the responses, more often than not, the things that I see inspire me to be a good friend in the face of oppression."

In other places, the students practice how Danny could share his experiences with his family and friends so they can help him.

Paloma navigates these difficult conversations with finesse by carefully explaining that Danny is never at fault for being a victim but there are still ways in which he can use his power to stand up for himself. To emphasize that a victim is never to blame, the final scene of the sexual assault was not redone with students' participation. The

students' goal was to use Gionni to stop the bully and perpetrator, Adam (Marc Caro-Willcox), before his behavior escalated to that level.

The piece of forum theater has helped students find tangible ways to recognize and combat transphobia and other forms of bullying. It also requires the largely LGBT+ performers relinquish control of their characters — and the conversation — to young people who may have never been exposed to this issue before.

"Every process is completely different depending on who's in the room. What's beautiful about the process is that we give it over to our audience. We say, 'we're gonna show you a piece.' We don't exactly know who they are — how supportive of the trans conversations they are, how curious, how judgmental, but we're trusting them to bring their perceptions and questions," said Catherine Hanna Schrock, "Danny's Story" playwright and Blindspot Collective cofounder. "We're illuminating an oppression we think is very important for people to be aware of."

SEE DANNY'S STORY, Page 14

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San Diego organ donor honored in Rose Parade

KENDRA SITTON | DOWNTOWN NEWS

A local business owner and organ donor was honored posthumously in the Rose Parade on Jan. 1. He was born in Italy but came to San Diego on vacation and never left. Alessandro (Alle) Speroni owned Soleluna Cafe in Cortez Hill, where he met his wife Dana.

"Alle was the sun on a cloudy day. He could turn anyone's day around with his charm and witty humor. He knew how to listen deeply and easily made one feel like there was no one else in the room," Dana said. "He was a man you want to know and strive to be."

In 2013 at age 41, Speroni died suddenly from an aneurysm while surfing— a tremendous loss for his wife, family and friends. Since Speroni was a registered organ donor, through his death, he was able to save four lives with the help of Lifesharing, who carried out his final wishes by finding recipients for his heart, liver, kidneys and pancreas.

"Being a donor family, to me, was a gift. It brought light to a very dark time. Losing a loved one is tragic and life-altering; there is very little I can say to describe the moment you hear that your loved one has passed. Devastating is an understatement. Knowing, however, that the one you love can change someone else's fate is game changing. The overwhelming sadness turned into hope — the hope that Alle's organs would remain strong enough to save someone's life, the hope that he could prevent another tragedy, the hope that he could create a miracle. That is everything he did and more; he saved four people's lives," Dana Speroni explained. "I only hope they are living life the way he would have."

The Donate Life float's theme was "Light in the Darkness" and highlighted Southeast Asia's Festival of Lights — Diwali.

"The greatest fear we have after losing our loved ones is that they will be forgotten. This is a memorable event that is watched by so many people. It gives me peace to know his memory continues to live on, his organs continue to live on, and that his smile can be shared with the world," she continued.

A portrait of the cafe owner was featured in the Rose Parade in Los Angeles. Dana and family created the floral portrait out of coffee and spices. It showcases his famous smile.

"I miss everything about him, but... I miss his smile the most. That was the smile that won me over. I met Alle at the coffee shop he owned across the street from my house. I was a regular and there was never a day I would walk in and not be greeted by that warm, affectionate smile. It was that same smile that both started



Cafe owner Alessandro Speroni
(Photo courtesy Philip DeFalco)



Dana Speroni creating the floral portrait of Alessandro Speroni.
(Photo courtesy Lifesharing)

and ended my day in his remaining years," Dana said.

The float was sponsored by Lifesharing, which is federally designated to coordinate San Diego's organ donations. In 2018, they saved a record 403 lives. Two thousand people are currently on the transplant list in San Diego.

"I hope through Lifesharing I can continue to honor Alle's memory and encourage others to follow in his footsteps to become donors and give others the gift of life," Dana said.

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



Dana Speroni volunteered to help make the float in the Rose Parade that honored her late husband. (Photos courtesy Lifesharing)



Dana Speroni and her brother Gil Pulde decorating the Donate Life Rose Parade float. (Photos courtesy Lifesharing)

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Little Italy updates

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Culture & Heritage



By TOM CESARINI

ITALIAN CONSULATE SERVICES COME TO LITTLE ITALY

The Italian honorary consulate of San Diego will be opening its office in Little Italy at Amici House in the early part of January. The office will be helping Italian co-nationals with consultations for dual citizenship, passport renewals, and vital records. Appointments can be made online through the San Diego consulate website (which is in the works) and will be located at sditalianconsulate.org. The consulate primary phone number is 619-800-7974. The Italian consulate of San Diego works closely with the Italian general consulate based in Los Angeles, which serves Southern California, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico.

LITTLE ITALY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESERVES OUR ITALIAN COMMUNITY STORIES

Under the auspices of Convivio, the Little Italy Historical Society — a Convivio auxiliary dedicated to the Italian American narrative of San Diego's Italian quarter — will be embarking on several new projects this year including a documentary series and new photographic exhibits. We are also continuing to add to our digital repository of Italian American historical photographs, documents, and oral histories. Want to be a part of preserving Little Italy's unique cultural assets before they disappear altogether? Contact us to get involved or for more

information at conviviosociety.org/volunteering.

WALKING TOURS OF LITTLE ITALY OFFER CULTURE AND CUISINE

Experience the story of Little Italy San Diego — a neighborhood with an Italian presence since 1871! Our exclusive walking tours of Little Italy resume with two morning tours in January and February. Our Bel Mattino (Beautiful Morning) Tour begins at Cafe Zucchero (inside Nonna, located at 1735 India St.), for our continental Sicilian breakfast, followed by the guided excursion through the neighborhood. Breakfast includes a cappuccino, hot tea, or Italian soda and an Iris — a traditional Sicilian, ricotta-filled pastry (more than half a pound!). Ticket cost is \$29 per person. More information on our tours can be found at conviviosociety.org/excursions.

—Tom Cesarini is the executive director and founder of Convivio and also serves as the Italian honorary consul of San Diego. Convivio cultivates community and fellowship, advances Italian cultural identity, and fosters multicultural awareness across myriad disciplines through education and research, social enrichment, and innovative programming. Visit: conviviosociety.org. Follow along: @conviviosociety (Facebook / Instagram / Twitter)✧



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Food & Drink Blotter.

BY FRANK SABATINI JR.

Get your fix of Philly cheesesteaks, burgers, beer, spirits and other creature comforts at the new **Bottle Rocket** in the East Village.

Formerly **Monkey Paw**, the venture is owned in part by Matt Guilbert, who is also a partner at **The Regal Beagle** in in Middletown. (3659 India St.)

The quaint space received a “visual facelift” featuring brighter colors, said Guilbert. It’s open from 11:30 a.m. to midnight, Sunday through Thursday,



Loaded cheesesteaks in the East Village (Courtesy of Bottle Rocket)

and until 2 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. 805 16th St.

City Tacos will replace the now-shuttered **Larry’s Deli** near **Petco Park** in the next two months, according to a manager from the original North Park location. Over the past decade, the eatery has expanded into La Mesa, Imperial Beach and Encinitas. It is lauded for its unique sauces and garnishes used in tacos filled with assorted proteins such as lamb, and vegetables such as sauteed spinach



This lamb-leek taco and others are coming to a Downtown address soon. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

and portobello mushrooms. 324 Seventh Ave., citytacossd.com.

The newly opened **Gaslamp Breakfast Company** has replaced **The Dive SKC**, and it offers a menu of classic and creative dishes such as steak and eggs, bacon or vegan omelets, orange-thyme waffles, fried rice Benedict with crispy ham, and more. There are also craft beers and kombucha on tap, as well as cocktails made with assorted fruits and vegetables.

Situated in a 3,148-square-foot space, the restaurant is patterned after **North Park Breakfast Company**, which opened several months ago at 3131 University Ave. Both are owned and operated by the Rise & Shine Restaurant Group, which also runs **Breakfast Republic**, **Fig Tree Cafe**, **El Jardin Cantina**, and **Feast & Fareway**. 551 J St., 619-937-3074, breakfast-company.com.



A new place for morning fare in the Gaslamp Quarter (Alternative Strategies)

What was known as **The Grand Lobby Bar** inside Downtown’s towering **Manchester Grand Hyatt** has remodeled and renamed **The Landing**. The new, modern design features custom woodwork, marble tabletops and a glass centerpiece mural illustrating crystal-blue water.

The beverage lineup now focuses on high-end wines, rare liquors and the option of build your own

cocktail from a selection of spirits, bitters, syrups and garnishes. From the revised food menu, customers can also build their own charcuterie boards. The redo is part of a completed property-wide renovation. 1 Market Place, 619-232-1234, manchestergrand.hyatt.com.

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



The recently opened Metl Bar & Restaurant (Photo by Arlene Ibarra)

The original Aztec word for agave is “metl.” It’s also the name of a new Gaslamp Quarter bar and restaurant specializing in mescals, tequila, whiskeys, creative cocktails and free live music.

Metl Bar & Restaurant was launched by Jenna Elskamp and her husband, Randy, in the space previously occupied by **The Hopping Pig**, of which Jenna had a small stake.

“We never had a cover charge for live music at The Hopping Pig and we want to continue allowing local bands to pub themselves out there,” she said, noting that throughout the month of January bands are booked on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Starting in February, they’ll be featured on Wednesdays as well.

A regular menu of casual fare is also in place. It features everything from fish tacos and Buffalo wings to soups, flatbreads, burgers and steak frites. 748 Fifth Ave., 619-546-6424, metlsd.com.



Build your own cocktail at The Landing (Facebook)

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Ray Anthony Thomas, Steven Anthony Jones, Anthony Chisholm, Keith Randolph Smith, and Amari Cheatom. Photo by Joan Marcus.

The return of swank

Restaurant Review

By FRANK SABATINI JR.



In the occasional attempts made by San Diego restaurants (steakhouses in particular) to create luxurious atmospheres beckoning to the days of formal dining, something always seems amiss. Either the seats aren't cushy enough, the lighting is harsh, the use of steel and concrete is excessive, or most often, soundproofing is sorely lacking.

Animae
969 Pacific Highway
619-432-1225, animaesd.com
Prices: Starters (hot and cold), \$7 to \$22; noodle and rice dishes, \$16 to \$34; meat and seafood entrees, \$27 to \$160

At the splendidly designed Animae, such faux pas are avoided. It's where diners can sink their tushies into \$5.5 million worth of comfort while supping on pan-Asian cuisine stamped largely with big, complex flavors.

Heavy draperies and plush carpeting flow amid furnishings and décor that brilliantly mesh together accents from the Art Deco and midcentury periods. Compared to so many hyped restaurants that have hit the local scene over the past couple decades, Animae defies them all in style and comfort. Even in a full house, there's enough space between tables and circular booths to allow for audible conversation.

Staying true to fine-dining haunts from a century ago, there is no open kitchen. So what you don't see are the charcoal-fueled grill and oven working their magic on various proteins, or the noodle-making skills of executive chef Joe Magnanelli, who partnered with designer-entrepreneur Chris Puffer and celebrity chef Brian Malarkey to open Animae late last year.

The venture falls into the portfolio of the Puffer Malarkey Collective, which owns Herb & Wood, Herb & Eatery, Farmer & The Seahorse, and Herb & Sea. It is anchored in Downtown's spanking new Pacific Gate luxury condo building.

Magnanelli honed his pasta skills while working as executive chef for San Diego's Urban Kitchen Group, which operates a fleet of Italian-style "Cucina" establishments. Although he wasn't on

duty the night of our visit, which might explain why the black garlic udon noodles with lobster we ordered didn't rank among our meal's epic dishes. More on that in a moment.

Several starters, however, were spellbinding.

A snow pea salad with Japanese mustard greens, fresh mint and crunchy bits of garlic offered an orchestra of flavors tied together by nori-vinaigrette. Refreshing, grassy and teasingly tangy, the medley was as ultra-healthy as it was delicious.

A bowl of Baja-inspired street corn tossed in almonds, Japanese chili spice (togarashi) and kimchi aioli is the mother of all corn recipes with its varied textures, zesty kick, and buttery essence obtained by finely grated Cotija cheese. The Mexican-Asian fusion worked seamlessly.

Nutty-tasting "forbidden black rice" is the bedding for kung pao prawns, which are given a Hawaiian twist with sun-dried pineapple. Broccolini, lotus root, chilies and white sesame seeds played keenly into the scheme while elevating it way above ho-hum versions of Chinese kung pao.

As a lover of meats cooked over charcoal, the honey-lime chicken skewer sent me over the moon. The charred flavor of the meat (all thigh pieces) ran deep — almost more so than chicken cooked over briquettes at backyard barbecues. Lively papaya slaw underneath was a fitting bonus.

Yet my craving for udon noodles was met with disappointment. Cloaked in an appealing bisque-like sauce and strewn with chunks of lobster — some of them overcooked — the noodles were too dense and clumpy for my liking. Served al dente, a friend who ordered the same dish a week later said her noodles were also overly weighty. And the promise of black garlic went missing.

Our desserts returned us to the level of sensationalism from which we began. A long, rectangular platter was the vessel for "East meets West" featuring a lineup of petite confections such as chai cookies, rum-soaked butter cake, ponzu caramels, a matcha madeleine, and more.

Equally ravishing was a fluffy puck of chocolate pavlova with yuzu mousse and coconut-lime ice cream. Every forkful tasted delightfully different from the last.

Animae's menu is a study in originality, which one should expect when a European-leaning chef like Magnanelli finds himself



Cushy seating and swagged fabrics define Animae's interior (Photos by Dustin Bailey)

working under the partial direction of a showman-chef like Malarkey. Their offerings are meant to deliver flavor surprises, whether it's in a whole fried snapper accented with citrus, fennel and olives, or butter dumplings

served over beef carpaccio — dishes on my radar for a second visit.

Better yet, the ambiance within this high-ceiling space returns you to the glory days of fine dining, and with just the right amount of whimsy tossed into the mix.

—Frank Sabatini Jr. is the author of 'Secret San Diego' (ECW Press) and began his local writing career more than two decades ago as a staffer for the former San Diego Tribune. You can reach him at fsabatini@san.rr.com.❖

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(l-r) Baja-Asian street corn; Hawaiian Kung Pao prawns (Photos by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

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Reaching for the stars

SANDEE WILHOIT | DOWNTOWN NEWS

Some buildings naturally take your breath away, but the interiors turn out to be less stellar. Others are largely utilitarian on the outside but are quite lovely on the inside. The Watts-Robinson, San Diego's first Chicago-style skyscraper, is both. I am, of course, referring to the second Watts-Robinson building. Although the first building was no slouch, it could not rival the elegance and splendor of the second structure.

Early owners of the lot were Judge Charles B. Richards, later director of the San Diego Savings Bank and Dr. Thomas C. Stockton, the physician who assisted Nurse Anna Scheper at the Davis-Horton House. By 1885, the property was owned by Robert Johnson, who set about constructing the first building at the site. It consisted of a 48-foot frontage on Fifth and an 80-foot frontage on E Street. The first floor was divided into two large stores with the upper floor divided into eleven offices. Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson became ill and passed away before his project was finished. All of his property was sold after probate and the new owner was Henry Watts.

Mr. Watts continued to rent out the upper floors as offices, while half of the ground floor now housed a wholesale liquor store and the other half served as a grocery store. The land boom of the 1880s encouraged real estate speculation, and several real estate offices also opened in the building.

Although business was booming, Mr. Watt's health was apparently suffering, and he passed away on Feb. 25, 1889, at the Florence Hotel. His estate passed to H.C. Watts. Under Watts, a different type of clientele occupied the building. They included dentists, the Postal Telegraph Company, and a theosophist. Upon his death in 1889, his son Nathan, a real estate agent, took over the building. Nathan rented to a variety of clients and also opened the building to several service firms, including the Chicago Barber Shop, a photographer's studio, and the Blockman Banking Company.

By 1912, Nathan aspired to something grander. He completely demolished his 26-year-old building to make way for an



A look at the details of the Watts-Robinson Building (Photos by Tim Trevaskis)

imposing 11-story building in the style of the Chicago School of Architecture. The projected structure would have 10 stories above the ground and two below. The basement excavation alone cost \$4,557, with the building contractor, the F.O. Engstrom Company, receiving \$142,000. The Thomas Haverty Company was the plumber and charged the sum of \$18,446, while the Van Emon Elevator Company received the bid for installing elevators for \$297,000.

The depth from the street level to the footings was 35 feet, making it the deepest of any business in the city. The sub-basement housed all of the building machinery, which included the boiler room, vacuum cleaning system, compressed air plant and elevator apparatus. The San Diego Savings Bank secured the entire basement and first floor, as their new banking quarters.

The building was of steel reinforced concrete and hollow tile. The exterior was finished with cut limestone and granite and cement plaster.

The 130 offices above the first floor were equipped with hot and cold water and special waste outlets. Additionally, there were compressed air, gas and electric outlets for the use of doctors and dentists. Additional amenities included steam heat, mail chutes, vacuum cleaning systems and two high-speed elevators with uniformed attendants. The interior corridors were wainscoted with white marble and Australian gumwood and featured tiled floors. The halls and offices were well-lighted and ventilated.

The San Diego Savings Bank opened its doors on Nov. 22, 1913, although the date of completion is listed as Dec. 11, 1913. Thousands of visitors thronged the magnificent new headquarters of San Diego's foremost financial institution, which stayed at this location until 1927.

In 1926, Nathan Watts died and his sister, Pauline Watts Settle, a prominent socialite, took over the property. It was her father-in-law, a judge, who nominated General Ulysses S. Grant for the presidency. She remodeled the building in 1937 after the Great Depression,

The Watts-Robinson Building

1913

Northeast corner of Fifth and E Street

Architects: Leonard T. Bristow & John B. Lyman, Jr.

Architectural Style: Romanesque Revival

adding more marble and new elevators. In 1944, Mrs. Settle sold the property to Isadore, Betty, Abraham and Florence Tamara Teacher. Isadore was a jeweler, which very likely influenced the many jewelers who consequently occupied the building. The Teachers were a very colorful family. Isadore was acquitted of charges of receiving stolen goods, but later convicted of income tax evasion. He received a full pardon from President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1960. His sister, Florence Tamara, did not fare so well. She was murdered in her home in Mission Hills in 1976.

By 1951, the Watts Building had once more changed hands. It was sold to Joseph H. Norman, a broker from Texas and California. He promptly turned the property once again, and the new owners were a group of attorneys from San Francisco, led by a Mr. Robinson. It then became the Watts-Robinson Building, the name by which it is now known. The structure continued to house doctors, lawyers, jewelers, photographers and importers.

The building continued to change hands throughout the ensuing years until 1988, when the Gaslamp Plaza Suites opened as an elegant 60-suite hotel. The Gaslamp Plaza Suites remains and was joined by the Melting Pot Restaurant.

Many of the original architectural aspects are still evident, including the marble wainscoting, elaborate ceilings, brass elevator doors, gumwood carpentry and etched glass windows and doors. They provide an echo of slower, more elegant and formal times.

—Sandee Wilhoit is the historian for the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation. She can be reached at swilhoit@gaslampfoundatin.org.



The Watts-Robinson Building from across the street

Seaport

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

which he described as “a magical, educational and entertaining experience for both kids and adults.”

Additionally, Gaffen noted the number of hotels in the project has now grown from three up to as many as six.

Meanwhile, the transition from old to new at Seaport Village continues. In October 2018, the Port of San Diego became the owner/landlord of Seaport Village, with Protea Property Management, Inc. (Protea) managing and operating the shopping and dining center for the Port.

“Working in close collaboration with our partners, the Port of San Diego is revitalizing and enhancing the experience at Seaport Village for residents, visitors and the businesses that operate within it,” said Garry Bonelli, San Diego Board of Port Commissioners chair. “Our goal is to create excitement and energy within Seaport Village, and also strengthen our relationships with our tenants while maximizing revenues for the public’s benefit.”

The port is presently revitalizing Seaport Village through a variety of new and established entertainment, shopping and dining options, along with site enhancements and operational improvements.

In February 2019, the board of Port Commissioners approved approximately \$2.2 million in funding to implement various repairs, maintenance and site enhancements including:

A brand refresh complete with an updated logo and colors that have been, and will continue to be, incorporated into new signage and refreshed painting throughout the center, promotional material, etc.

New landscaping such as an urban beach and more native, drought-resistant plants.



An old rendering of a view of Seaport Village. An updated rendering is expected in March. (Photo courtesy Manolatos Newlson Murphy)

New outdoor furniture that allows for flexibility in seating and uses of various spaces.

Seaport Village tenants that have opened their doors since the start of the refit include: Something Sweet confectionary, Introstem luxury skin-care products and Vino Stoppers novelty gift store and wine shop.

New Seaport tenants opening in 2020 include: Mike Hess Brewing with a beer tasting room and patio area and full-service restaurant; Mr. Moto Pizza; Spill the Beans specialty coffee and bagel shop; and San Pasqual Wine Tasting Room expansion.

There have, however, been some unanticipated “snags” encountered in the Seaport Village redo.

“Once we started undergrounding, we uncovered some pretty significant issues dealing with an active earthquake fault, as well as finding out that all utilities and electricity services, and every toilet in Coronado and North Island, flushes through our site,” said Gaffen. “So we had to go back to the drawing board to rethink the project which we then, in March of 2018, presented to the public for feedback.”

Noting he expects Seaport’s new re-imagining to be finalized conceptually by summer 2020,

Gaffen added that a “very comprehensive environmental study will have to be completed before the project can move forward, expected by the end of summer next year.”

Of the revised project, Gaffen added, “Nothing has been subtracted. Enhancements have been added, such as the observation tower which will now incorporate a hotel in the base.”

Gaffen added the planned aquarium “has really become part of a blue campus integrating learning- and blue-tech innovation centers demonstrating the importance of the ocean in trying to correct climate change.”

Best case, said Gaffen, the Seaport Village redo “will break ground in 2024 with the project being completed in 2029.”

Gaffen concluded Seaport Village’s new look is going to have a new focus as well.

“Seaport Village has historically been more of a tourist destination, not really local,” he said. “We’re interested in creating a much more attractive place for locals. We want it to be a place where locals hang out. We want this to really be the jewel in the crown for Downtown San Diego.”

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

Children’s Park

CONTINUED FROM Page 3

municipal operating budget.

In terms of sustaining the costs for the park, several speakers shared their visions to keep the park’s maintenance and upkeep directly off the city’s tax rolls.

“If it’s handled correctly, and we produce events, that will also generate some additional income,” David Hazan, past president of the East Village Association, said at the council meeting, in reference to rental income. “It’s been proven that people will come into the East Village ... for events that are properly produced.”

Diane Peabody Straw, current president of the East Village Association, said there will be many benefactors of the park improvements — including, as she described them, the neighborhood’s “15,000 four-legged residents.”

“The many features that are planned for this park are incredibly needed and will go a long way in making East Village feel like a livable community,” Peabody Straw said.

The project also has the backing of other groups, including the San Diego Downtown Residents Group.

“I can’t thank the staff enough,” Gary Smith, the organization’s president, said. “The Children’s Park — from being a grass nothing if you look at the plans — will actually become a place the community will want to go.”

While the city and Civic San Diego formally severed ties this summer in response to a much-publicized court settlement about relations between the two entities, collaborative efforts have since continued.

In a jointly authored memo, Christina Bibler and Brad Richter of the city’s Economic Development Department clarified

why Civic San Diego is still involved in the future of Children’s Park.

“The operating agreement, resulting from a lawsuit settlement, provides for Civic San Diego to implement the wind down of redevelopment activities and to provide the management and completion of specific projects,” Bibler and Richter wrote in the memo.

With the City Council’s stamp of approval in place, a timeline calls for Civic San Diego to prepare construction documents in January and award a contract in the first half of the year. Further plans call for construction to begin in July or August, which should take close to a year to complete.

Children’s Park’s roots stretch back 25 years. The current amenities were installed in 1995.

—Dave Fidlin is a freelance journalist with a special affinity for San Diego and its people. Contact him at dave.fidlin@thinkpost.net.✉

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PUZZLES ANSWERS ON PAGE 13

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CROSSWORD

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- ACROSS**

1 Database management system

5 Soft blue-gray mineral

11 Algerian coastal city

12 A healthy redness

16 El __, border town

17 Part of the mind

18 Female body part

19 Atrocities

24 You can call Paul Simon this

25 Copyread

26 Large integers

27 Large, flightless bird

28 Bread and whiskey are two

29 Indicate pain or discomfort

30 Worry

31 Wild goats

33 Belittle

34 More supernatural

38 Wakes up

39 Intestinal pouches

40 Popular dance

43 American state

44 CSI actor

45 Having a keen enthusiasm for

49 Swiss river

50 Restaurant item

51 Intense unhappiness

53 Unit of loudness

54 Increase in velocity

56 Mesoamerican religion

58 Early multimedia

59 Forearm bone

60 An unprincipled person

63 Swarming with

64 Shellfish

65 Root of taro plant
- DOWN**

1 More silly

2 Adult beverage

3 Iron used for lofting

4 Noses

5 Smile

6 One who examines closely

7 Lethal dose

8 Denotes past

9 "This Is Us" actor Fitch

10 Dabbling ducks

13 Polish beer

14 A type of cat

15 Shows respect for

20 Of I

21 Commercial

22 Chai and chamomile are two

23 Lodging option

27 Geological times

29 Unit of electrical inductance (abbr.)

30 Where G-men work

31 Hot beverage

32 One of the six noble gases

33 Southern constellation

34 South American nation

35 Suitable for use as food

36 The back

37 I (German)

38 Blood group

40 Fit to stand trial

41 Praise excessively

42 Female's title

44 EU predecessor

45 Acutely insightful and wise

46 Disguised

47 Improved the appearance of

48 Generator

50 The real __, the genuine article

51 Male's title

52 Home of the Hawkeyes

54 About aviation

55 At all times

57 Military peace officer

61 College degree

62 Indicates position

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East Village Green

CONTINUED FROM Page 3

identifies a 4.1-acre park bound by 13th, 15th, F and G streets in the heart of San Diego's growing East Village neighborhood. The block of 14th Street between F and G streets is envisioned as a pedestrian plaza that could be closed to accommodate street fairs, farmer's markets and community events.

The project's first phase will include the 40,000-square-foot city block east of the New School for Architecture and an additional 20,000-square-foot parcel on the block to the east. The East Village has precious little public open space, although it has been recently expanded by the addition of Fault Line Park in 2015.

The OJB team, in collaboration with Civic San Diego, led a series of public workshops that solicited feedback from the community and offered a series of alternative concepts for the park. The park's proposed plan reflects a hybrid solution integrating the best ideas for each concept and will include a wide range of program activities that will appeal to people from all walks of life. "East Village Green will truly have something for everyone," said Elliott.



The community center's gymnasium features an operable wall in a glass façade to create a seamless relationship with the park.

Projects like Quartyard and Maker's Quarter demonstrate the very real demand in the neighborhood for public space, Elliott believes. As more residential development is added to the neighborhood, the need for more public open space will increase.

Currently an arts and industrial neighborhood in transition, the East Village is anticipated to evolve over the next decade to a mixed-use community of nearly 30,000 residents. This new urban park will be the signature open space for the neighborhood and is envisioned as the hub of community activity. "It will be a place where everyone is welcome," said Elliott.

Urban sites often pose unique challenges to designers, and East

Village Green's site includes a number of challenges that the team hopes to leverage into new creative opportunities. The site contains a series of active seismic faults and a 22-foot elevation change from one end to another. Understanding key neighborhood assets like the new Central Library, Petco Park, Quartyard and Makers Quarter also offer insights as to how the park might be used.

Elliott and his team believe that alternative funding and operational models for the park might provide funding to mitigate key issues identified by neighborhood residents in the public workshops, like security and maintenance, although he did note that finding



A pet-friendly café space overlooks separate dog parks for large and small dogs. (Courtesy photos)

the right "fit" for the community is a key part of that dialogue.

The economic downturns often result in reduced municipal tax revenues, making the operations and maintenance of public open spaces more challenging for the city departments that care for them. An increasingly popular tool in this work is collaboration with nonprofit foundations or private entities to support park operations, Elliott explained.

Elliott is excited about the project's potential to be a hub for "creative collision" by becoming the neighborhood's central gathering space. "I think the East Village is in the midst of an unprecedented transformation and we're very optimistic about the ways this

Features of East Village Green:

- Community center with meeting rooms and basketball half-court
- Two-level underground parking structure
- 11,000-square-foot event lawn with real turf
- Performance pavilion and plaza
- Children's play area
- Interactive water feature
- Reading room
- Off-leash dog parks
- "Bark Bar" pet-friendly outdoor dining
- Food truck parking
- Table games area
- Generous pedestrian sidewalks
- Drought-tolerant landscape
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important new public open space will help catalyze that change," he said.

—Delle Willett has been a marketing and public relations professional for over 30 years, with an emphasis on conservation of the environment. She can be reached at dellewillett@gmail.com.

Danny's Story

CONTINUED FROM Page 6

Zaragoza is proud to be in the play because this is the first time she has seen trans and nonbinary identities talked about in a way aimed at young people in San Diego, even though she grew up here. She has witnessed push-back from schools unsure about welcoming the piece onto their campuses, but students' reactions to the shows have made her more committed to doing theater for social justice work.

"One of the most magical parts every day is seeing these young people come to the realization about these things in life, whether it's LGBTQ+ rights, or sexual assault, or the other topics we bring up, but seeing them come to those realizations in real time makes it worth it," Zaragoza said.

"Danny's Story" is Blindspot Collective's second school tour play since it was founded three years ago to bring theater of the oppressed and social justice theater to San Diego. Their first educational play, "Safa's Story," is about racism and immigration and is aimed at a primary



Sofia Zaragoza's character, Gionni (right), is a bystander as Danny (Jack Mason-Brase, left) is bullied by Adam (Marc Caro-Willcox, center left). Later, students will stand in for Zaragoza to practice how a friend could stand up for someone being bullied. (Photo by Kendra Sitton)

school-age audience. Unlike "Safa's Story," which is based almost entirely on one student's account, "Danny's Story" was developed after a group of local LGBTQ+ high schoolers and young adults shared their stories over two days. After the listening session, Schrock took what she heard and developed a script that delved into some of the common experiences many of the participating trans youth shared.

"We started because we were interested in new work and new voices, and interested in theater at the intersection of social justice

and artistic development. We are interested in topics and issues that are in the blindspot of society," Schrock explained. "We show the impact of oppression is tragedy. Only we can then change that. We can change our own lives, we can change the lives of others."

Blindspot Collective is currently developing a new piece of verbatim theater that will focus on the community in National City through interviews. Schrock hopes to open it this summer.

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

Zandra Rhodes

CONTINUED FROM Page 4

called "The Golden Hour" on Nov. 7. The event began with a social hour celebrating Zandra Rhodes' 50 years in fashion. This amazing fashion show revealed the "Golden Hour" collection on the runway. Different designs throughout Rhodes' 50-year career were shown to the delight of the audience. Rhodes is a British

fashion designer who is known for fabulous textile designs and is recognized for her pink hair.

The theme for the Pink Parade Luncheon was named by Jeanne Jones and created by executive Chef Fabrice Hardel. After the show, guests were very excited to have a book signing with Rhodes. They lined up to have Rhodes sign her new book "50 Fabulous Years." Following the book signing, a Zandra Rhodes pop-up shop was set up and guests could come and try on the garments. Proceeds went to The American Friends of the Zandra Rhodes Museum in London. Currently, this museum has an exhibit named "Zandra Rhodes 50 Years of Fabulous" and runs until Jan. 26, 2020.

—Diana Cavagnaro is an internationally renowned couture milliner based in the historic Gaslamp Quarter. Learn more about our hat designer, teacher and blogger at DianaCavagnaro.com.



Models wearing Zandra Rhodes at L'Auberge Del Mar (Photo by Diana Cavagnaro)



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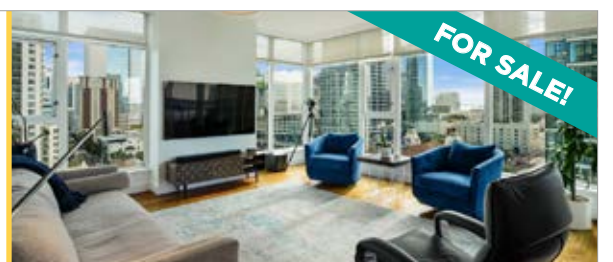


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Music Fest

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

ensembles – including seven San Diego bands – perform through the event’s “springboard effect” to launch careers that otherwise may never materialize.

Coffing, a music industry phenomenon, remains determined to help other bands “break through,” while sidestepping the “mistakes” he made.

“Earlier in my career, I thought having talent was enough,” he said. “I could sing, write and produce songs. I made an incredible record with my own money. I knew it was a hit, but I didn’t play the game so I didn’t go very far.

“I couldn’t let what happened to me happen to anyone else,” he continued. “Don’t get me wrong, I love the music business. But, the game’s rigged. Music’s a team sport. It’s not just about talent. It’s about having a good manager, a great producer, and excellent co-writers. Even The Beatles didn’t make it alone.”

Coffing added that “no matter how talented, no band ever hits a No. 1 single out of the gate.”

“Music professionals will help budding artists get halfway across the street, but after that, there isn’t much help,” he said. “These bands have the talent, the perseverance, and the strength, but they’ve never had the opportunity to prove themselves or learn what’s needed to progress within the industry. And that’s what we do, along with giving fans a front row seat to the action.”

Coffing described Springboard West as a “junk filter” for industry professionals. Applicants are capped at 3,000 and whittled down to 300 before 40 are chosen.

“We go through 3,000 bands to say hey, here’s 40 we think you should take a look at,” he



Wild Planes performing at Urbn Leaf at Springboard West in 2019 (Photo by Seagrave Photography)

said. “We find talent before and after they’ve been featured on ‘American Idol’ or ‘The Voice.’ But while ‘American Idol’ and ‘The Voice’ focus on making a television show, I focus on making a rock star.”

Coffing mathematically defined a band’s profile in “quarters.” Twenty-five percent are “good to go”; 25% have “pure talent” but lack a business acumen; 25% have “lots happening” with some that needs to be pulled back; and 25% have an “Achilles heel,” a missing element that’s hindering their progression.

Talent arrives to the festival from all over the globe including Australia, Canada, the Republic of Georgia, and even Vietnam.

“We extend invitations on the off chance that they can make it, as travel’s often a hurdle for everyone in this business,” he said. “The smaller markets can’t find a team to complete them while the industry needs to find new blood and fresh talent that’s not just from three cities. Springboard removes that barrier.”

The event kicks off with a two-day Band Bootcamp replete with panels, workshops, one-on-one interviews, and “moment of truth pitch sessions” with industry

notables. The truth panels are noted to be current within an ever-evolving industry.

“Our industry professionals aren’t just talking supervisors here because of what they did 10 years ago,” said Coffing. “We’re current and active within an industry that’s constantly changing.”

Coffing moderates to learn “along with everyone else.”

“The more I learn, the more I can help,” he said. “These bands are our clients.”

Bands are guided with brutal honesty.

“The talent isn’t here to be showered with compliments or given a pep talk,” explained Coffing. “Every band’s wonderful and talented. But we’re here to ask truthful questions. We’re here to get these bands to break through.”

The Texan native modeled Springboard music festivals after South by Southwest, a musical platform that stages independent artists in front of industry professionals. Coffing knew that he could present a “better show,” so he started his first festival in 2012.

To date, Springboard music festivals across the U.S. have assisted more than 500 artists with career-changing management and publishing contracts; placed more than 15 songs in movies; and fronted bands as openers to commercially successful bands.

“Playing in front of 50,000 people is huge,” said Coffing.

Coffing touts an impressive list of musical accolades brimming with hundreds of movie and television tracks; BMI songwriting awards; No. 1 hits; and even an Emmy nomination. The musical entrepreneur currently represents more than 12,000 record labels and publishers for film and TV licensing.

The event ends with bands “playing their hearts out” during



Wild Planes performing in 2019 in Ocean Beach. (Photo by Collin Worrell Photography)

Downtown’s Digital Lizards of Doom

LUCIA VITI | DOWNTOWN NEWS

Digital Lizards of Doom is an alternative rock duo that features Gabriel Valentin on guitar, strings, and vocals and Gallie Fisher on mandolin, keys, and vocals. Their debut album, “Lizards and Labyrinths” sold 25,000 copies worldwide.

The singer-songwriters from America’s Finest City were touted in Forbes Magazine for their work as producers and performers within the genres of rock, dance, electronic and folk music as well as the world of pop culture.

Valentin created the “sci-fi thriller-inspired band” based on his storybook characters from his graphic novel “Digital Lizards of Doom” as a “massive love letter to everything pop culture and all things nerdy.”

They are thrilled to be chosen among the 40 performing artists at Springboard West Music Festival by Barry Coffing.

“I love the idea of gathering this mash of talent to be a part of something bigger,” said Fisher. “Springboard West gives artists the exposure that they need and deserve. We’re stoked to meet, network and support our fellow artists in our own backyard. We’ve enjoyed a group chat with the other artists so we already feel like family.”

“We’re honored to be chosen, knowing that we’ve created



The Digital Lizards of Doom are made up of Gallie Fisher (left) and Gabriel Valentin (right). (Photo courtesy Digital Lizards of Doom)

something that can make it through something so rigorous to then be shared with everyone else,” added Valentin. “We’re not taking any of this lightly. We’ve worked extensively to give the audience of mentors a totally wonderful, unforgettable, and fun performance.”

Valentin is working with Fisher to “build more than a music medium.”

“We’re building a universe to let everyone know that they can go as deep as they’d like to enjoy head bopping music,” he said. “Everyone’s welcome.”

“Our connection is meant to glean that useful spirit where everyone remembers what it felt like to be a kid and have that childlike wonder and fascination with the world,” concluded Fisher. “Digital Lizards of Doom is a very safe place to experience something fun and unique.”

—Lucia Viti can be reached at luciaviti@roadrunner.com.

the Band and Brew Crawl through Ocean Beach venues and breweries, including the OB Brewery, Winton’s, The Holding Company and The Harp.

Venues are strategically chosen to be within “50 yards from each other.”

“Forty bands take what they’ve learned and deliver the performance of their careers,” said Coffing. “Bands are staggered so fans aren’t forced to choose what band they want to see, they can see them all.”

According to Coffing, Springboard West adds “tremendous

economic impact” to the Ocean Beach community.

“We struck gold by partnering with Ocean Beach,” said Coffing. “This hip, beach community understands our goal of creating independent artists. Ocean Beach and Springboard West is a perfect marriage that gets bigger every year.

“January’s a great time to look for new talent and Ocean Beach is a great place to find it,” concluded Coffing.

—Lucia Viti can be reached at luciaviti@roadrunner.com.

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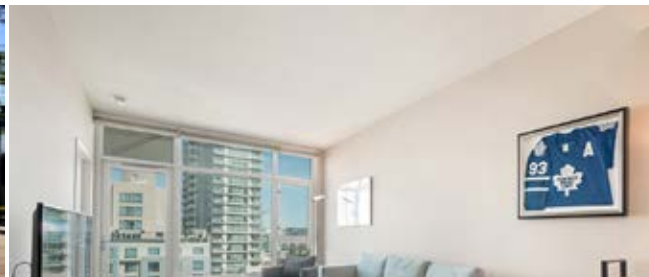
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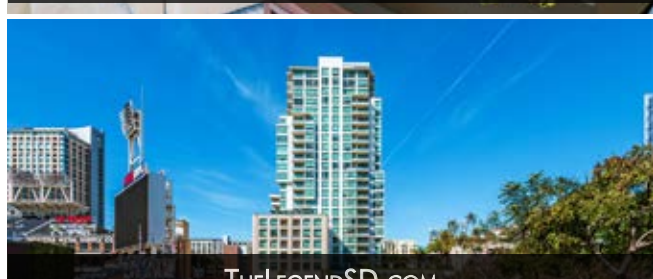
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