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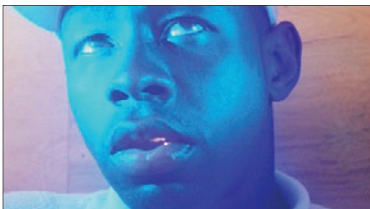
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Employees help customers decide what strain of marijuana they would like to purchase at Urbn Leaf, a dispensary in the Linda Vista/Morena area. (Photo by Connor McBride)

Meet your neighborhood dispensaries

Three local pot shops receive recreational marijuana licenses

Sara Butler
Editor

As of Jan. 1, 2018, folks have started lining up at local dispensaries to get their hands on recreational cannabis, which is now legal for adult use in the state.

Currently, less than a dozen shops are now operating with recreational marijuana state licenses. Three of these coveted spots have been snagged by Mission Valley locations: The Healing Center San Diego, Apothekare and Urbn Leaf, the latter located in the nearby Linda Vista/Morena area.

The Healing Center San Diego (THCSD) is the brainchild of Ray Taylor. After encouragement from his son

— who is a cannabis grower — Taylor agreed to take his retirement money and open up a dispensary. He teamed up with his wife's brother, Jim Dickinson, to open up a safe and legitimate establishment in the local market.

"When my [business] partner Jim and I decided to do this, we wanted not to open a pot shop, but open an actual professional dispensary where I would feel comfortable having my family come," Taylor said.

Taylor said he always envisioned opening the shop in Mission Valley. He was already familiar with the area because he holds car shows at the nearby SDCCU Stadium. He is the owner of the San Diego Auto Swap's "San Diego Cool Car Truck Cycle Expo."

However, due to the upcoming stadium development, 2018 is his last year running the event. Though he will miss the car shows, the change does open up his schedule to run the shop.

Since opening THCSD, his business venture has taken on a new meaning of helping others. He noted that interacting with alcoholics, sick kids and even a friend with severe prostate cancer has shifted his mindset.

"When I first got in the business, it was sort of money-motivated," Taylor said. "But to be honest with you, after working in the business for a year, the best part of this business are the hugs you get from people that you save."

See **DISPENSARIES** page 3 →

Courageous trailblazer

Cleaning, protecting and promoting the San Diego River

Sara Butler
Editor

Tiffany Swiderski isn't your typical leader. Everything about the San Diego native — from her adventurous résumé to her cool-chick appearance — seems to stand out in an office setting; perhaps that is part of the reason she prefers being out in the field. It is there where she develops a large staff of volunteers.

For the past two years, Swiderski has held the title of the field coordinator at the San Diego River Park Foundation (SDRPF), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration of the San Diego River.



Tiffany Swiderski (right) is committed to keeping the San Diego River clean. (Photo by Connor McBride)

See **SWIDERSKI** page 14 →

MISSION VALLEY NEWS BRIEFS

CHARTER SCHOOL TO OPEN IN LINDA VISTA

Thrive Public Schools is expected to open a new charter school in Linda Vista later this year.

Thrive is a group of free charter schools with a mission to provide disadvantaged communities with quality education and college preparedness. The schools specialize in project-based learning, blended online learning and social emotional growth.

The 35,000-square-foot campus will house 500 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. It features 30 learning spaces, a technology lab, community rooms, an outdoor classroom, learning lounges and collaborative student offices.

"Establishing a school in Linda Vista has been a top priority since our founding in 2014," said Nicole Assisi, CEO of Thrive Public Schools.

To execute this education-based project, Thrive partnered with Civic San Diego (CivicSD), a city-owned nonprofit corporation that works to vitalize underserved communities. The area surrounding the school's site has been identified as one of the six most distressed blocks in San Diego, according to Assisi.

"We're really bringing families back to the community," she said. "For a long time, families have left severely distressed neighborhoods to get their children's education elsewhere."

Located at 6882 Linda Vista Road, the school will replace the previous Bayside Community Center building on the corner of Comstock and Kelly streets.

Visit thriveps.org/admissions to apply for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year. Informational presentations will also be held monthly at Linda Vista Library, 2160 Ulric St. A list of sessions is available at thriveps.org/tour.



MISSION CENTER OFFICE UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP

On Dec. 15, Omninet Capital, LLC acquired Mission Center Office Park, a three-building,

See **BRIEFS** page 2 →

Briefs, from page 1

183,692-square-foot property located in Mission Valley. The property was previously owned by Kearny Real Estate Company.

Omninet Capital is an investment firm that currently owns over 10 million square feet of commercial space and over 13,000 residential units across the country.

Louay Alsadek of CBRE Capital Markets — who was one of the transaction investment advisors — shared why the real estate company selected Mission Valley.

“Mission Center Office Park’s ideal location, diversified tenant roster and established history of excellent

performance attracted significant interest from investors,” Alsadek said in a press release.



GULLS TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY NIGHT

You Can Play and the San Diego LGBT Visitors Center

will benefit from the celebration of Diversity Night with the San Diego Gulls hockey team on Saturday, Jan. 20 at Valley View Casino Center when the Gulls take on the San Jose Barracuda.

Tickets cost \$25 and include admission to the Bud Light pre-game tailgate party. Up to \$9 of every ticket sold at bit.ly/2kNXnln will be donated back to the San Diego LGBT Visitors Center and You Can Play. Make sure to use the promotion code word “Diversity” before purchasing tickets.

Tickets can also be purchased at the LGBT Visitors Center, located at 502 University Ave. at the Fifth Avenue intersection in Hillcrest.

The Anaheim Ducks Sled Hockey Team, the San Diego Chill and You Can Play will also be among the many honored during the evening.

You Can Play is an initiative that works to ensure safety and inclusion for all who participate in sports, including LGBTQ athletes, coaches and fans.

“You Can Play is excited to partner with the Gulls to promote inclusion and respect in hockey and beyond,” said Chris Mosier, vice president of program development and community relations at You Can Play. “This night shows LGBTQ athletes, coaches, and fans and their allies that they are not only welcomed at Valley View Casino Center with open arms, but also valued as members of the San Diego Gulls family.”

In conjunction with You Can Play San Diego, a special engagement of “LGBTs In The News” with Thom Senzee will take place two days before the game.

The panel will feature Matt Savant, Gulls president of business operations, plus celebrity athletes and experts exploring the challenges and opportunities LGBT players face in professional, amateur and school sports.

Happening on Thursday, Jan. 18 with a meet-and-greet at 6:30 p.m., the panel will get underway at 7 p.m. at Gossip Grill, located at 1220 University Ave. in Hillcrest.

More information can be found at youcanplayproject.org and lgbsinthenews.com.

For game details, visit out-ontheice.com.

MVPG SEEKS BOARD APPLICANTS

Mission Valley Planning Group (MVPG), a volunteer group representing the interests of Mission Valley, is still accepting applicants for their March 2018 election. All applicants must either reside, own property or own a business in the community planning area.

Four position categories — Class I, II, III and IV — are available for a four-year term. Class I is a sole or partial Mission Valley property owner. Class II is a resident or business representative paying taxes on a property in the area. Class III is a resident — owner or renter — with a primary address in the community, while Class IV is a local business

person with a business address in the region.

Applicants must have attended a minimum of two meetings prior to submitting an application. Meetings are open to the public and held at noon on the first Wednesday of the month at the Mission Valley Library, located at 2123 Fenton Parkway. For more information, visit bit.ly/2nIfGgF or contact MVPG membership chair Keith Pittsford at kpittsford@sgpa.com.



MARCH IN BALBOA PARK TO STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Community members will march at Balboa Park from 1-3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 13, to bring one of San Diego’s major human-rights issues out of the shadows at Junior League of San Diego’s fifth annual Human Trafficking Awareness Rally.

Local anti-human-trafficking leaders will teach the crowd to recognize and assist victims before the marchers start their walk through the park with homemade signs of hope.

Human trafficking involves exploitation in many forms, from forcing people into prostitution to subjecting them to slavery or involuntary servitude. Sadly, the FBI names San Diego as one of the 13 areas with the highest rates of child sex trafficking in the nation. These advocates will spend their Saturday speaking out for the sake of those most at risk, including children who are homeless.

Meet up in Balboa Park, at the intersection of Laurel Street and Sixth Avenue.

Speakers include San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan; Assembly member Brian Maienschein; Jamie Quient, Free to Thrive president and managing attorney; and Joseph Travers, Saved in America executive director and private investigation manager.

Visit jlsd.org for more information.■

Me-Time Goes Prime-Time.



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Builder Close-Out
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PROMONTORY
by The New Home Company
Sales Gallery Now Open
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The Heights from the mid \$600s
The Bluffs from the mid \$800s



ELEVATE
by ColRich
Now Previewing
619.881.7471
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Civita Boulevard off Mission Center Road civitalife.com



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Resume to David Mannis
at David@sdcnn.com
(619)961-1951

► Dispensaries, from page 1

Now with recreational marijuana on the table, he's excited for the community at large to receive to receive what he describes as mental and physical benefits of cannabis. He intends to keep the shop professional with an emphasis in education, as some first-timers don't know much about the substance.

His motto? "Take care of your people," he said with a smile.

Taylor shared that most of his customers are clustered around the Mission Valley region and within a 5-mile radius, such as nearby Uptown communities.

The community demand has led other dispensaries to open nearby, such as their new neighbor Apothekare. Though he was initially worried about the competition, the day one of the stores opened up, THCS's business actually picked up.

"Camino del Rio South may end up being like Adams Avenue ... if you want antiques you go to Adams Avenue, if you want weed you go to Camino del Rio South," Taylor laughed.

Down the street from THCS is Apothekare. The company, known for their Kearny Mesa location, recently opened up a Mission Valley storefront this year. According to Apothekare's website, they are San Diego's largest cannabis shop.

Mission Valley News reached out to Apothekare numerous times prior to publication deadline, but the dispensary did not return our phone calls or interview requests.

Just west of these two Camino de South dispensaries is Urbn Leaf, located at 1028 Buenos Ave. The Linda Vista/Morena dispensary was the second to be licensed in San Diego and the eighth in the state.

Urbn Leaf's founder Will Senn has been in the cannabis industry for his whole life. He is very politically active in the space and one of the United Medical Marijuana Coalition (UMMC) co-founders. He has owned dispensaries in San Diego for about a decade, currently running the two Urbn Leaf locations with a third spot in the works.

Despite his extensive experience, Senn had a hard time finding a spot for the first Urbn Leaf before landing its current address.

"We looked for locations and it's so tough to find a



The Healing Center San Diego's co-owner Ray Taylor (right) with his staff

landlord who is willing to rent to you, because a while ago a lot of landlords were getting threatening letters from the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] ... and it was pretty bad. Everyone was being sued by the city attorney.

"I was lucky enough to find a willing landlord," he said. "They're great. We got a great relationship; we try to be the best neighbors possible."

Though the shop has been operating with a medical marijuana license since April 2017, the influx of people in January brought on some unanticipated challenges – but these have not deterred customers.

"I thought people would be a little turned off by the lines, [but] everybody's been pretty stoked," he said. "They're pretty happy about it, right? They're meeting their neighbors in line and they're talking and they're excited about cannabis being legal. It's pretty refreshing."

Urbn Leaf has a 70-person staff, with an average 20-25 people working per shift. According to Senn, the dedicated staff has been working around the clock, pulling all-nighters multiple days in a row. Yet they rarely show any exhaustion with their smiles and friendly attitude toward customers.

Extra security has also been hired to address the parking concerns and to ensure customers do not park in the lots of nearby businesses. So far, there have been no complaints, incidents or protests from their neighbors or the Linda Vista/Morena community.

"[Our dispensary] actually makes [the community] safer," Senn said. "Before we moved in here, this street had a lot of transient people living on the street here. You don't see that anymore, because we're here. Because we have guards here,

cameras everywhere, lights at night. We really tried our best to clean up the area the best we can."

In addition to making the Mission Valley area safer, Senn notes that the biggest benefit of recreational marijuana legalization will be the extra money available for the greater San Diego region. He believes the tax revenue may go toward public safety and services, such



A look at some of THCS's product for sale (Photos by Connor McBride)

as the police force, fire department, and libraries.

Though the federal government is casting some political uncertainty over the future of medicinal and adult-use cannabis in California, recreational weed is still legal in the city and state. Considering the high percentage of the initial licenses granted to shops in Mission Valley, more recreational marijuana shops may

spring up in the region this year.

While these first two weeks of legalization have seen customers walking away with sealed goodies and wide smiles, we may hear a different community response at upcoming City Council meetings.

—Sara Butler is the editor of Mission Valley News. Reach her at web@sdenn.com. ■



Liam, a rescue pitbull owned by an Urbn Leaf employee, greets guests inside the dispensary.



A member of Urbn Leaf's staff grabs product for a customer



Urbn Leaf staff working during peak hours at the dispensary

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SPRINGBOARD WEST RETURNS

Music festival looks to bring artists, mentors and fans together

Jen Lothspeich

As its name suggests, the Springboard West Music Festival aims to catapult emerging talents to the next level of music-making when it comes to town Jan. 12-13, but it is not for the casual player.

Emerging artists are selected from all over the world to perform at the festival — not just for San Diegans — but for industry professionals who have worked with top talents. Plus, with a two-day “Band Bootcamp,” participants also receive guidance from those qualified mentors and get the chance to perform for them.

The Springboard Festivals started in Houston, Texas, in 2012; last year, they ventured into a new frontier with a sister event named Springboard West in San Diego and are returning for three days of fun this month in Ocean Beach.

The festivals’ founder, Barry Coffing, who has written No. 1 hit songs and placed over 200 tracks in movies and television, has a passion for helping artists who are ready to get serious about their music careers.

Starting with 800 submissions from bands hoping to play the festival, Coffing and his team had to narrow it down to their top 40 selections.

Coffing said that originally, they set out to represent all genres equally, but soon realized the entries themselves led them in another direction.

Spotlight on Springboard West artist Lad’s Holiday

One of the only local bands to make it through the selection process is indie alt-rockers Lad’s Holiday. The busy quartet is also releasing an EP in January and is excited to have been chosen for Springboard.

“This event is huge for us,” said the band’s lead guitarist Cody Seeger. “As an independent band, [you’re] looking for that big break — this event could be it.”

While playing for hometown crowds and convening with like-minded artists is on the agenda for these guys, the “Band Bootcamp” seems to hold a special appeal for a group like this.

“With approximately 80 mentors and industry professionals attending the event, it is an amazing opportunity to network and learn,” Seeger said. “It is going to be an amazing weekend and we are very humbled to be a part of it. We look forward to getting our name out there and seeing what happens.”

LadsHolidayMusic.com



San Diego’s alt-rockers Lad’s Holiday will be one of the few local acts on the bill.

“We found that our third-best blues artist wasn’t as good as our 20th-best rock artist,” he said. “So, we quit doing that. We just started saying, ‘We’re gonna be genre-agnostic.’”

As a result, the lineup for this year’s Springboard West is a mixture of talents including those that play indie rock, hard rock, pop, and Americana, along with many singer-songwriter types.

While at the festival on Friday, Jan. 12, musicians will spend the day attending panels and participating in “Moment of Truth” sessions, which might sound intimidating but are invaluable to burgeoning artists.

Coffing said short performances put the bands in front of people like himself along with other music supervisors and industry professionals, with a chance to perform a minute of a song and get feedback.

“You think you’ve got a radio single? OK, here we go,” Coffing said of the on-the-spot pressure for these performances. “We’re not there to be their friends. We’re there to tell them the truth.”

Of course, this festival is not just for those in the industry as the bands also come to play for the San Diego music crowd. Both of the festival dates offer lots to locals who want to discover up-and-coming artists and enjoy supporting local businesses and charities.

Springboard West’s local planning manager, Heather Hudson — who also owns San Diego’s Revolt Wine Co. — said her business’ ideals just happened to fall right in line with Springboard’s goals.

“This is exactly what Revolt stands for,” Hudson said. “Revolt against anything holding you back and going after your dreams. By partnering with Springboard, I’m able to put that mission into action and help make an impact.”

With the bands in place, Hudson was tapped to enhance things with a local flavor.

“One of my biggest goals for Springboard this year is to connect, involve and make a positive impact on the local community,” she said. “I wanted to loop in local businesses



Springboard Festival founder Barry Coffing (Photos courtesy Springboard Festival)

including beverages, food, art, fashion and nonprofits.”

Following Friday’s “Band Bootcamp” with the participating bands, the public will also get to experience the fruits of Hudson and Coffing’s labors, as they are welcomed to the OB Theatre. There, the festival musicians will take part in unplugged performances, with these ticketed events also featuring an art show, a fashion element and craft beverages — as Hudson had hoped.

All proceeds from the unplugged show’s \$10 ticket price will go to two local nonprofits that work with kids with autism — The Autism Tree Project Foundation and The Pioneer Foundation.

Hudson will be pouring her Revolt wines — which will also be available for purchase at these events — while local craft beer companies Amplified Ale Works, Karl Strauss, Mike Hess Brewing Company and others serve up the suds.

In addition, local artists Thomas Condry, Hannah Kazik, and Jack Stricker will display their work and SAAS

Springboard West Music Festival

Friday, Jan. 12–
Saturday, Jan. 13

VIP Unplugged Performances

Friday, Jan. 12
6–11 p.m.

OB Theatre

\$10 goes to supporting nonprofits

Band & Brew Crawl

Saturday, Jan. 13

40 bands on four stages
Winston’s, OB Theatre,
The Harp and Mother’s
Saloon

1–11 p.m.

\$10 goes to supporting nonprofits

SpringboardWest.com



Los Angeles-based Americana band The Sound of Ghosts will perform at the Springboard Festival.

Streetwear will also showcase their wares — all for perusing while the crowds enjoy the bands’ stripped-down sounds.

While these local aspects and other types of art come in to play on Friday, Saturday is strictly for music lovers.

The festival’s finale — dubbed the Band and Brew Crawl — is on Saturday, Jan. 13, and will feature the 40 bands and musicians chosen for Springboard, all performing at four venues around Ocean Beach: Winston’s, OB Theatre, The Harp and Mother’s Saloon.

With unique artisans, craft libations, performances by emerging bands, and the chance to support nonprofits — Springboard is a win for music fans. And with music industry insiders offering insight to the bands selected to attend, it offers them a price-less stepping stone in their musical journey.

—Jen Lothspeich is a wine-drinking, cat-cuddling native San Diegan who dreams of writing a best-selling true crime novel. Find her on Twitter at @Jen_Evel. ■

Young landscape architect works to shape the future

Art on the land
Delle Willett



As a kid, Nate Magnusson always wanted to be an architect.

Growing up in Tempe, Arizona, Magnusson was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, and had opportunities to explore several of his commercial, institutional and residential projects.

"Those early experiences helped sharpen my vision for design," he said.

And after his first two years studying at the School of Architecture & Environmental Design at Arizona State University, Magnusson changed his major to landscape architecture, "... as it resonated better with my goal of connecting people with nature through design."

Although he still has a love for architecture, Magnusson appreciates being a landscape architect.

"Now, working on projects from all shapes and sizes, I'm able to see the communities who benefit from our hard work and dedication to elevate the public and private spaces throughout San Diego and Southern California," he said.

In 2017, Magnusson served as one of the younger presidents of the American Society of Landscape Architects

(ASLA), San Diego chapter. Magnusson first joined ASLA in 2011, serving as vice president of community outreach.

During his recent term as president, Magnusson brought passionate energy to the 40-year-old chapter and helped formulate its reputation as one of the most active of the organization's 50 chapters in the country.

He also co-chaired the ASLA 38th annual golf tournament on Sept. 11. In addition to raising \$5,000 for their community grant, Magnusson challenged the members to raise an additional \$3,000 for the 9/11 Memorial in New York City, which they did.

"When I visited the memorial, it had a moving impact on me," he said. "The design of the reflecting pools and surrounding forest of oak trees provide a place for contemplation and remembrance. As landscape architects, we can all continue to have an important role in providing spaces, large and small, to strengthen our communities."

While local landscape architect Michael Brennan, principal of Carson Douglas Landscape Architecture, took over as president of ASLA in November 2017, Magnusson will continue on as immediate past-president and said he'll still be heavily involved in the chapter's future.

Magnusson is a senior project manager at Schmidt Design

Group (with headquarters on Sixth Avenue in Downtown San Diego), where he's worked for the past 11 years.

Notable projects he has managed include Stone Brewery World Bistro and Gardens in Escondido, which won the 2007 Orchid, and ASLA San Diego President's 2009 awards; Stone Brewery World Bistro and Gardens at Liberty Station, San Diego, which won the People's Choice Orchid Award 2013; Civita Park, Mission Valley, San Diego; Lake Skinner Recreation Area, Winchester, California; Vive on the Park, San Diego, and Lux Art Institute, Encinitas.

Magnusson lives in La Mesa with his wife, Tatum, owner and jewelry designer of Love Tatum Jewelry, and their French bulldog, Dumpling. In his spare time, he enjoys surfing, drawing, painting, and experiencing new and delicious food.

Now that his presidential term is over, Magnusson plans to continue his involvement in shaping the future of the local ASLA chapter, along with shaping the future of his brand-new baby girl, Ever Aila Magnusson.

—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. ■



Nate Magnusson with his wife Tatum enjoying the fruits of his labors at Civita in Mission Valley. (Courtesy Schmidt Design Group)



Magnusson designed the Civita Park Amphitheater in Mission Valley. (Courtesy Schmidt Design Group)



A water feature and garden Magnusson designed at Stone Brewery in Liberty Station (Photo by John Durant)

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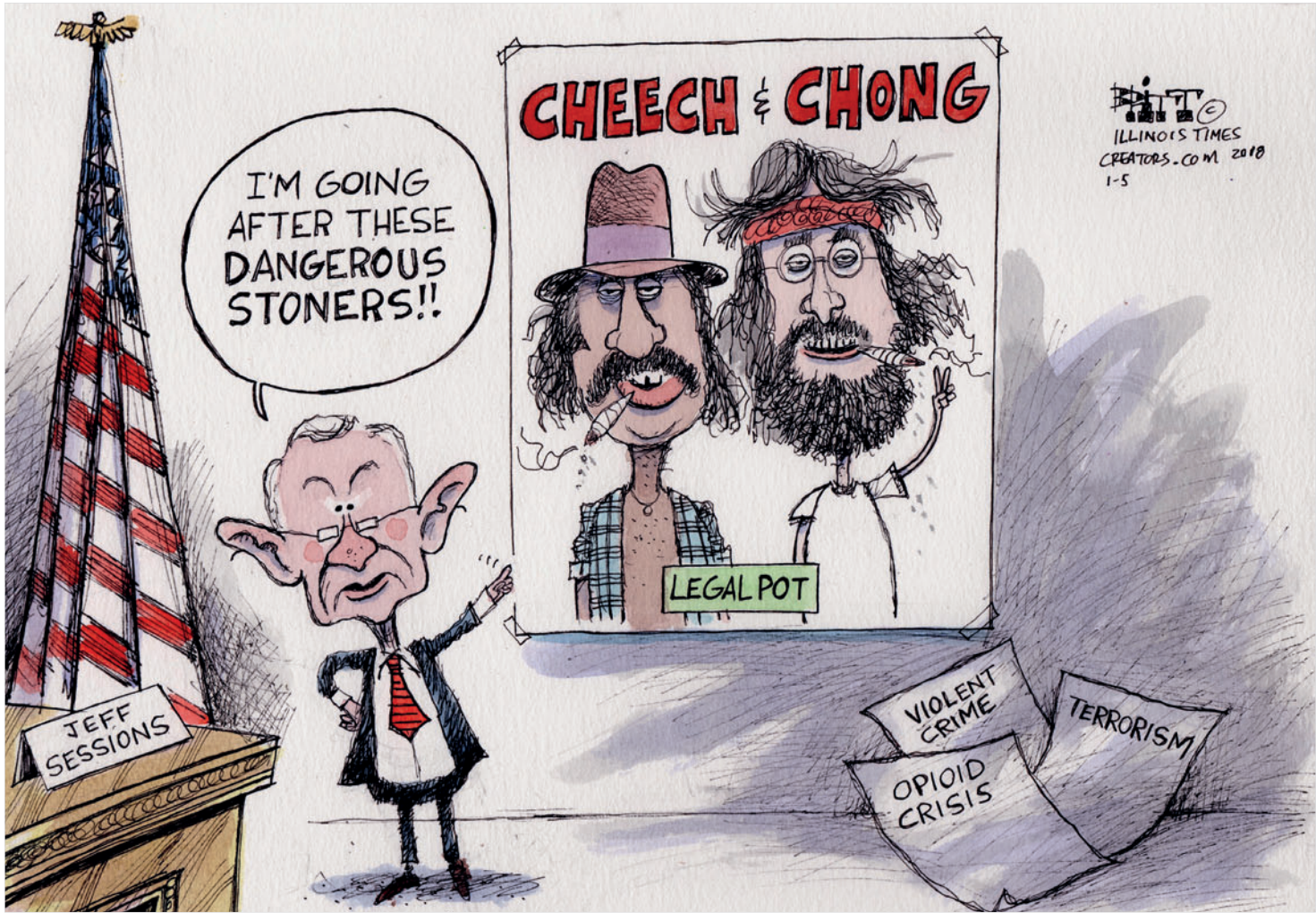
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Guest editorial

Need health insurance? Enroll in Covered California by Jan. 31 and save

Covered California News

As the calendar turns to 2018, Covered California is in the homestretch of its drive to sign people up for health insurance by Jan. 31, the final day to enroll.

As an incentive, the agency, which administers the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in the state, is touting lower prices and financial assistance available to most Californians who qualify.

“The time is now to ring in the New Year with a quality health plan that provides protection and peace of mind,” said Peter V. Lee, executive director of Covered California. “We have seen thousands of people signing up every day as we near this key deadline.”

The latest data shows that more than 220,000 new consumers signed up for coverage through Dec. 15, which is about 10 percent more than last year, when 199,000 consumers selected a plan during the same time period. In addition, approximately 1.2 million existing Covered California consumers have had their coverage renewed for 2018.

A recent Covered California analysis found that the net monthly premiums for

enrollees who receive financial help are on average 10 percent lower than what new and renewing consumers paid last year. The lower prices are a result of more financial help being available for consumers who qualify for assistance. The Affordable Care Act is designed to protect consumers by providing more premium tax credits when premiums rise.



“With the Jan. 31 deadline approaching, we want to make sure that consumers know about the increased financial help that is available to help bring health care coverage within reach,” Lee said. “When you do the math, hundreds of thousands of Californians are the winners — getting quality coverage at lower rates than last year.”

What individuals will pay varies based on their circumstances, including whether they get subsidies to help purchase coverage, where they live and the plan

options they choose, Lee said.

The analysis found that consumers who select a Silver-tier plan are on average paying \$3 per month less than they were in 2017, while consumers who select a Gold-tier plan will pay on average \$78 less per month.

Since 2014, more than 3 million people have purchased health insurance through Covered California, and nearly 4 million have enrolled in the state’s Medi-Cal program. Together, the gains have cut the rate of the uninsured in California from 17 percent in 2013 to a historic low of 6.8 percent as of June 2017.

Consumers interested in learning more about coverage should visit the website, where they can explore their options and find out if they qualify for financial help by using the “shop and compare tool.” Consumers can also get free and confidential enrollment assistance by visiting coveredca.com/find-help and searching among 800 storefronts statewide and the more than 17,000 certified enrollers who can assist you with understanding your choices and enrolling, including assistance in other languages.

—Representatives for Covered California can be reached at CoveredCA.com or by calling 800-300-1506.■

Letters

A questioning analysis

[Ref: “Taking a loop in a Tesla,” Vol. 11, Issue 8, or online at bit.ly/2nRN847.]

Just got through reading your article about Tesloop in the recent edition of the Mission Valley News and wish to comment.

First, I found the piece more of an advertisement for Tesla than as an article about a ride-sharing service. You spent a good portion of your article telling us about the vehicles that Tesla makes, what technological options Tesla vehicles possess, etc. (Although you were somewhat incorrect in that you wrote, “their driving range is approximately 250 miles.” While this figure may be for the high-optional Tesla models, it is not for all their vehicles. Besides, ambient temperature, use of air conditioning, speed, terrain, how many passengers and luggage is aboard, etc., will all sap mileage.)

Second, I’m somewhat skeptical that Tesloop has no association with Tesla other than buying their cars for their ride-sharing business. Why would your driver, Michael, go into an explanation of the vehicles capabilities and the concierge, Miles, mention the Tesla’s safety rating and such, if not to get passengers interested in perhaps purchasing a Tesla product? Elon Musk has a reputation as a serial promoter and I wouldn’t put it past him to hide his signature behind Tesloop.

Third, comparing riding in a Tesla to air travel is certainly comparing apples to oranges. Sadly, more often than not, taking a Greyhound bus to your destination compares favorably to most air travel nowadays. Besides, one would expect to be in the lap of luxury paying \$79 one-way from San Diego to L.A.

You made a claim that Tesla’s “are the safest cars on the road.” Who told you that, Michael or Miles? Have you researched this claim or just took it as fact coming from your driver and concierge — people that may indeed be employees or subcontractors of Tesla.

I hope to read more of pieces on Tesloop, including when this ride-sharing business raises its prices or expires completely.

—Stuart Rachmuth, via email.■

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What will 2018 hold?

Congressional Watch
Andy Cohen



Congress can be a fickle beast, particularly when one political party controls both chambers and shows little to no interest in working with their counterparts from across the aisle. This is what happened throughout 2017. Republicans finally had the unified government they craved and promised big things would come. Those promises, for the most part, fell flat.

Despite their majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, Republicans failed to accomplish much of anything. Their promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act died embarrassingly (and let's be honest: There was never any real intent to replace it). They failed to even consider one of President Trump's stated priorities, infrastructure. They took no action on the DREAM Act, beginning the process of deporting DACA (deferred action on childhood arrivals) recipients, most of whom have never known any other country and are productive members of American society.

Their only real accomplishment, if you can call it that, is the tax cut bill that was signed into law just before legislators left for the holiday break in December. It was a hastily cobbled together bill relying heavily on lobbyist input, which explicitly excluded Democrats from the process. It is a law that cuts taxes on the rich and corporations, but according to both the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation, leaves middle class and poor taxpayers worse off in the long run. The law also adds \$1.5 trillion to the debt and deficit.

Scott Peters (D-52), Susan Davis (D-53), Juan Vargas (D-51), and Darrell Issa (R-49) all voted against the tax bill, with **Duncan Hunter (R-50)** being the lone "yes" vote among the San Diego delegation. Issa was one of only two of California's 14 Republican members of Congress to vote "no."

So this was the Republican Congress' major accomplishment in 2017. It also sets up some important battles in the months to come.

By mid-January, Congress must pass a government spending bill in order to keep the government open and operational, otherwise we will see another government shutdown.

This bill will need to address everything from military spending to health care spending. Critical among the needs is CHIP (child healthcare insurance program), which provides health insurance for 9 million children nationwide. Federal funding for CHIP ended on Sept. 30, and states have been scrambling ever since to stretch their budgets and ensure coverage for eligible children. Most states are or have already run out of funds, which means those children will be without health care.

Also at issue is what should be done about DACA recipients: Democrats are adamant that they continue to receive protections and be allowed to remain in the U.S. without fear of deportation, and many Republicans agree.

The spending bill cannot be passed without Democratic support, and Democrats will likely not support a bill that does not adequately address CHIP and DACA. The current continuing resolution that was passed on Dec. 22 expires on Jan. 19, meaning Congress has to act before then to keep the government open.

Also at issue is President Trump's border wall, funding for which House Republicans, at least, are expected to attempt to include in any extended funding measure.

So how will San Diego's five representatives in Congress likely vote on this important measure?

Juan Vargas is unlikely to vote for anything that does not include strong protections for DACA recipients. Representing a border district, immigration reform is his bailiwick.

Susan Davis and Scott Peters, are also unlikely to vote for anything that does not address DACA and offer full funding for CHIP, though they are both pragmatists and will likely compromise where possible — assuming the Republicans who control the process are willing to compromise.

Duncan Hunter is likely to vote against anything that funds CHIP or creates protections for DACA, and will insist on funding for the border wall, which is extremely unlikely to happen.

Which leaves Darrell Issa as the wild card. Issa is in trouble, and is fighting for his electoral life. He has expressed support for protecting DACA recipients in some form, and wants to be viewed as sympathetic to their cause. But how far will he be willing to go? In the past, Issa has voted "no" on CHIP funding, but given his current electoral challenges, opposing insurance for 9 million poor kids is unlikely to play well in his rapidly changing district. My guess is he'll find some way to tepidly support a funding bill.

CHIP funding, by the way, is relatively inexpensive in the grand scheme of things: Leading up to the tax vote, Utah Republican Senator Orrin Hatch insisted that the government simply could not afford to fund CHIP (and he was one of the original authors of the first

CHIP program!). Full funding of the program for five years will cost \$8 billion. But compare that to the \$1.5 trillion deficit the tax bill creates, and CHIP is but a pittance, relatively speaking.

The biggest challenge coming in 2018, however, will be whether or not Republicans decide to slash funding for Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security in order to pay for their tax cut bill. House Speaker Paul Ryan has already signaled that this is coming. Eliminating "entitlement programs" has long been a dream of Ryan's, and he sees this as his golden opportunity to take significant steps toward that end. The way he sees it, the budget hole the tax cut bill creates justifies decimating "entitlements."

Look for Peters, Davis, and Vargas to adamantly oppose any and all efforts to slash what they view as programs essential to maintaining a decent quality of life for all Americans. Hunter will, of course, support such measures.

Which again leaves Issa as the wild card. In the past, he might have supported efforts to slash Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. But again, his precarious electoral prospects will come into play. Efforts to curtail these programs will inflame his constituents and all but ensure his retirement from Congress in November.

—Andy Cohen is a local freelance writer. Reach him at ac76@sbcglobal.net. ■

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Landmark deal to increase police pay

District 7 Dispatch

Scott Sherman



To stem the flow of departing police officers and keep San Diego neighborhoods safe, the city government and the San Diego Police Officers Association came to an agreement that will make officer salaries more competitive compared to other regional law enforcement agencies.

In recent years, San Diego has faced a police officer recruitment and retention crisis as many officers retired and others went to competing agencies offering better pay. In fact, the number of police officers has dropped to under 1,800. Staff numbers should be over 2,100.

Before the deal was made, the starting salary for an SDPD officer was \$49,428. Compare that to \$54,564 for Escondido police, \$56,240 for San Diego County Sheriff's deputies, \$71,195 for Carlsbad police and \$75,322 for Chula Vista police.

The new contract will now enable the police department to retain experienced officers, attract lateral transfers and recruits the department desperately needs.

The agreement calls for pay increases as follows:

- July 1, 2018: 8.3 percent increase (3.3 percent of which was previously approved)
- Jan. 1, 2019: 5 percent increase
- July 1, 2019: 3.3 percent increase (previously approved)
- Jan. 1, 2020: 5 percent increase

The agreement also includes additional increases for officers as follows:

- July 1, 2019: 5 percent increase for officers with 20 or more years of sworn service in law enforcement

- July 1, 2019: 4 percent increase for all officers in exchange for negotiated changes to certain flexible health benefits.

If approved, officers would receive cumulative increases totaling 25.6 percent to 30.6 percent over the two-year agreement, depending on years of service and future negotiations on flexible benefits.

Our city is blessed to have one of the finest police forces in the state. This deal will help make it even better.

—San Diego City Councilmember Scott Sherman represents the District 7 neighborhoods of Mission Valley, Grantville, Allied Gardens, Del Cerro and San Carlos. ■

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Say YES!



Erica Moe

When you took stock of 2017 and set out a plan for this new year, did you make a vow to just say no? No to additional commitments, no to volunteering, no to one more extra responsibility? If you did, I want to encourage you to say yes instead. This time, when you say yes, do it with the conviction that you

can be in control of how those things are done. Then you can make the most of every new thing you take on.

Say yes to a challenge

Are you competitive? If so, taking on a friendly challenge may be the motivation you need to get moving. At the YMCA, try Team Challenge with a group or Grid Iron challenge on your own. Also, create a challenge for your friends or coworkers using an app such as RunKeeper.



(Photos courtesy Mission Valley YMCA)

Say yes to standing

Do you spend hours a day sitting in meetings? Organize a stand-up meeting. By standing three hours a day, you can burn up to 174 more calories. In addition, research shows it can also lower your blood sugar.

Say yes to celebrations

If you are in charge of organizing the birthdays in your family, try taking the guests to the trampoline park, roller-skating rink or the rock climbing gym. The children – and adults – will learn a new skill, work up a sweat and have a lot of fun.

Say yes to vacation

Planning time away can be relaxing. Make the most of your time by selecting an active



vacation. Whether you cycle through Napa or kayak the Grand Canyon, each adventure

allows you to make memories and burn calories.

Say yes to social time

Instead of communicating with friends on social media, meet face-to-face at a local park for a walk. Breathe in the fresh air while you catch up with your connections.

Say yes to play

Kick family board game night up a notch with a bike ride or visit to the park. Rather than sit on the sidelines while the kids are on the playground, join them. Watch those steps on the pedometer rack up.

Say yes to walking

Add a walking meeting to your calendar. Get your blood – and ideas – flowing while crossing items off your to-do list. Other opportunities include walking the dog or getting off the bus one stop early to walk the rest of the way. Note that 2,000 steps are equivalent to a mile. Aim for 10,000 steps per day.

Say yes to volunteering

Find a way to be active and make a difference. The YMCA is always looking for volunteer coaches. Help children develop a skill and learn life lessons while keeping active yourself. Get out your soccer cleats – the field is calling you.

Saying yes to these activities can mean burning up to an extra 300 calories a day, which translates into almost three pounds in January alone or 36 pounds in 2018! People who move throughout the day are more likely to reach or maintain their weight-loss goals versus those that are sedentary during the day and only active for one vigorous exercise session.

—Erica Moe, M.S., is an ACSM-certified exercise physiologist who writes on behalf of the Mission Valley YMCA where she is fitness director. ■



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DINING OUT IN SAN DIEGO BITS OF FOOD NEWS FROM MISSION VALLEY AND BEYOND

Frank Sabatini Jr.

Mission Valley has become home to a second San Diego location of **Shake Shack**, the New York-based burger chain that made its local debut in October in Westfield UTC mall. The newest outpost, which opened Dec. 21, is located within **The Millennium Mission Valley** mixed-use complex.

In addition to its usual line-up of burgers, chicken sandwiches, hot dogs, crinkle-cut fries and frozen custards, the menu features two versions of the frozen custards unique to Mission Valley: the chocolate “shark attack” with fudge sauce and chocolate-truffle cookie dough; and the vanilla “salt N’ SANDiego” with salted caramel sauce, crumbled sugar cone and bananas.



Shake Shack's Smoke Shack single burger (Courtesy of Bay Bird Inc.)

Craft beers by **Modern Times**, **Bear Republic** and other local breweries are also available. 675 Camino de la Reina, shakeshack.com.

Mission Valley’s dearth of pizzerias recently grew larger with the closing of **The Works** in the Friars Mission Center shopping plaza. The space, which is nestled among **Grater’s Grilled Cheese**, **The Flame Broiler** and **Tandoor**, was still up for lease as of Jan. 1. 5608 Mission Center Road.

A little further east in the Rio Vista Plaza, **The Poke Co.** has replaced **Kasi**, an Indian restaurant that struggled under fleeting sets of owners. This is the second San Diego location of the Los Angeles-based Poke Co., which has an outlet in the Gaslamp Quarter as well. 8950 Rio San Diego Drive, 619-542-9234, thepokeco.com.



Create your own poke bowls at the newest San Diego location of The Poke Co. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

The iconic A-frame structure in Hillcrest that housed **Wienerschnitzel** for many years sprung back to life Dec. 28 as **Copper Top Coffee & Donuts**. Owner Josh McCorkle, a Seattle native who worked in the restaurant and coffee industries for 20 years, said the venture marks the first of more coffee shops he hopes to open around town.

“Hillcrest was the warmest and most inviting community

we could find for our first location,” he said. “We’re serving high-end coffee in a drive-through setting.” The menu features coffee drinks and a proprietary blend of espresso, using beans from the Seattle-based roaster, **Rococo**. There’s also locally sourced **Bootstrap Kombucha** on tap along with cake-style doughnuts made to order. Those are available with various toppings such as white chocolate with coconut and sprinkles; sugar and cinnamon; and salted caramel with chocolate and crushed walnuts. Additional flavor combinations are in the pipeline along with breakfast and lunch sandwiches. McCorkle retained the walk-up window in front and added a drive-through window in the back. New seating alongside the building was installed as well as fresh plumbing, lighting and kitchen equipment. “I love the idea of turning something old and decrepit into something fresh and vibrant,” he added. 101 W. Washington St., coppertopcoffee.com.



Josh McCorkle recently introduced Copper Top Coffee & Donuts in a familiar Hillcrest structure. (Photo by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

The stretch of Adams Avenue near 30th Street continues growing into a culinary hot spot with the announcement that a former dry cleaner’s will soon morph into a gourmet gelato shop. Due to open this spring under the name **An’s Dry Cleaning**, the project has been years in the making between longtime friends and will feature seven rotational flavors using ingredients sourced from local purveyors whenever possible. Some of the flavors will stick to tradition while others featuring cactus, goat cheese and wasabi not so much. The gelatos will also be used



Don’t be misled by the name of this upcoming gelato shop on Adams Avenue. (Courtesy Bay Bird)

to create cakes adorned with carved fruits. 3017 Adams Ave., adcgelato.com. —Frank Sabatini Jr. can be reached at fsabatini@san.rr.com.■

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Reincarnation in Mission Valley

Come On Get Happy! Dr. Ink

Some elements of Primos Mexican Food & Bar are brand new. Others not so much compared to when the establishment operated earlier this year as Primos Public Corner.

Since reopening a few months ago under the new name, the owners initially introduced happy hour Sunday through Thursday, slashing the prices of all drinks by 50 percent. That changed, however, on the early December day I ducked in for a cheap nosh and drink.

Now, happy hour is Monday through Friday — still from 2 to 6 p.m. except for all day on Wednesdays. And the bargains are a little different, yet equally enticing to Fenton Marketplace shoppers

who might have blown too much money at Costco or Ikea across the parking lot.

Well drinks, margaritas, Micheladas and draft beer cost \$4.50, while trios of supreme taquitos or a pair of tacos with chicken, beef or fish are an easy \$4. Ditto for a half order of chipotle-bacon fries.

Chips, fried pork skins and several salsas are for the taking at an open station where you'll also find brined carrots and roasted peppers. Also new is the elimination of full wait service in areas outside the bar lounge.

If you want to loll over a margarita made with Rancho Alegre Tequila or a Tangerine Express beer from Stone Brewing Company on a table in



A pair of fish tacos on the cheap

the back rotunda section or the roomy outdoor patio, you'll have to order and fetch it yourself at the bar. No big deal.



Rebranded and open for business (Photos by Dr. Ink)

I perched in the bar area on one of several high tops and amid a barrage of sports games and commentary shows playing on flat-screen televisions. Thankfully the sound was off. A playlist of contemporary Latin music filled the place instead, prompting me to order a margarita.

The young, female bartender doubling as a waitress in the lounge area explained with excitement that the "marg mix" is made in-house. It blends orange and lime juices with a touch of simple syrup — exactly how I like them. Served in a tall, slosh-less glass, which I also prefer opposed to chalice versions, I opted for a pair of fish tacos as well.

The deep-fried fish fillets were encased heavily in batter, but they weren't shamefully greasy. The cabbage was fresh and crisp, and the peppery aoli was a zesty departure from traditional white sauce. Something about their overall quality seemed better compared to when I ate them during the restaurant's previous incarnation.

The tortillas chips at the salsa bar were more appealing too. They were thinner, fresher and lacked the weird seasoning

RATINGS

Drinks: ★★★★

The house margarita tasted bright and citrusy — not too cloying, not too tart. Micheladas and about 15 craft and domestic beers on tap are also discounted during happy hour.

Food: ★★★★

A station featuring warm, complimentary chips are parked alongside several decent salsas ranging from mild to hot. Minced onions, roasted peppers and fresh cilantro are also for the taking. In addition, a pair of traditional fish tacos from the happy hour menu contained fillets of deep-fried white fish that were a tad over-battered.

Value: ★★★★

You can score three "supreme taquitos" or two fish, beef or chicken tacos for \$4, which are \$1 to \$2 below their regular prices. And basic margaritas are \$4.50 during happy hour, down from their \$7 price tag.

Service: ★★★★

Full table service is provided in the bar area only by a young, perky staff eager to point out the happy hour specials. Food and drinks arrived quickly.

Atmosphere: ★★★★

Many of the design elements from Primos Public Corner have carried over into the establishment's newest incarnation: graffiti art, strings of Edison-style light bulbs and a spacious outdoor patio accented with a fire pit.

I remember from my visit last winter.

Aside from happy hour, Primos offers all-you-can-eat tacos for \$10 on Tuesdays. Combine that with the drink specials during happy hour and you'll luck out with one of the most indulgent deals Mission Valley has to offer. ■

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Happy hour: 2 to 6 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (all day on Wednesdays)



A traditional margarita with free chips and habanero salsa

FISH FOR ALL TASTES

Restaurant Review

Frank Sabatini Jr.



It's the El Pollo Loco of seafood, a proliferating West Coast chain that uses various species of fish in plates, tacos, salads and bowls. In two recent visits, the place favorably snagged my palate.

California Fish Grill made its San Diego debut this summer in Mission Valley's Park Valley Center. It was founded in Orange County in the late 1990s and has spread its affordable

fire-roasted street corn in the offing for an extra \$1.75. It's worth the up-charge.

He ordered ahi tuna cooked rare and chose seasoned olive oil as his flavor component, which was so inconspicuous we couldn't detect it. Just as well because the substantial cut of tuna, with its attractive grill marks on the outside and ruby flesh inside, tasted as clean and fresh as any you'd encounter at a reputable sushi bar.

Rounding out the meal were a few sheaths of beautifully

Combined with two sides — the street corn and spicy garlic fries — I've paid nearly double for the equivalent of this meal in full-service seafood restaurants. This was worth every cent.

I'm often asked what establishments in San Diego serve the best fish and chips. Outside of The Corner Draffthouse in Bankers Hill or KnB Wine Cellars in Del Cerro, I find most to be afflicted by something; they're either greasy, dry, soggy or over-battered. (Sorry Shakespeare's and



Fish and chips with kale coleslaw

fast-casual concept into nearly 20 cities throughout California.

Customers are faced with numerous wild-caught and farm-raised choices, all listed conveniently with descriptive tasting notes. Varieties range from swordfish and sea bass to salmon, ahi, ono and giant shrimp. Among the flakier options are swai and tilapia, not to mention Louisiana catfish and Idaho trout. Although aside from shrimp, the company draws the line at pricier shellfish such as crab and lobster, which you won't find on the menu.

In my first meal with hubby in tow, we stuck to the "grilled" section of the menu. When doing so, you can opt for a finishing sauce (or seasoning) such as garlic butter, chimichurri or Cajun spices. The plates also include two sides, with excellent

grilled zucchini, a bowl of lightly seasoned white beans served in their own juices and a slice of white bread for mopping up everything.

I gravitated to the giant shrimp, served butterflied and with parsley-rich chimichurri as my sauce choice. As the most expensive item on the menu (\$13.99), it featured five or six of the jumbo crustaceans, grilled expertly with half of their shells on as a means of adding a little extra flavor.

Princess Pub. You're frequently guilty of at least one of those crimes.)

Assuming I didn't happen to just get lucky ordering them right after the deep fryers were refilled with new



Grilled giant shrimp topped with chimichurri sauce

french fries. Also included with the meal is decent coleslaw strewn with (yawn) fresh kale.

After ordering at the front counter and being handed a buzzer, you pick up your meals on large, metal cookie sheets from a buffet table fronting the semi-open kitchen.

The latter half of that system works well, although because customers are faced with decisions — grilled versus fried; plates versus tacos



California Fish Grill is a San Diego newcomer (Photos by Frank Sabatini Jr.)

California Fish Grill

1530 Camino de la Reina
Mission Valley

619-541-8723,
cafishgrill.com

Prices: Starters and sides, \$1.50 to \$6.99; salads, \$9.49 to \$12.99; bowls and tacos, \$8 to \$11.99; grilled fish and fry-ups, \$8.49 to \$13.99

or bowls, etc. — the order line can move painfully slow, as though everyone ahead of you is opening a mortgage. Additional staff and cash registers are sorely needed since this isn't quite as easy as ordering a Filet-o-Fish at McDonald's.

Other menu options include Asian shrimp and Cajun salmon salads; breaded shrimp, pollock or calamari; fried catfish; various fish tacos including ono Veracruz; and rice bowls filled with proteins such as cilantro-lime salmon or "dynamite" shrimp. Chicken breast is also available, and served either straight off the grill or in salads, bowls and tacos.

Beverages include a limited selection of craft and domestic beer, plus titillatingly flavored tap sodas by Stubborn and house-made lemonades and iced teas.

California Fish Grill is the kind of chain eatery fish lovers have long deserved, a bright and modernly designed place that is affordable, yet with some exquisite dishes that you'd be more apt to find in gastropubs and full-service restaurants.

—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. ■



Ahi and a side of zucchini from the grill

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MVN+Puzzles

ANSWERS ON PAGE 13

SUDOKU

Fill in the blank cells using numbers 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.

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

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CROSSWORD Deep Freeze

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		

- ACROSS**

1 Caruncles

6 Powdered soapstone

10 Takes, in hunting

14 Make use of

15 District

16 Great Lake

17 Intensity of cold

19 Opera

20 Canadian prov.

21 Understanding

22 Promising

24 Golf accessories

26 Cooking vessel

28 Degree

29 Regrets

31 Baldness

36 Theater attendant

38 Place

39 Fathers

40 Sault Sainte Marie

41 Discredit

44 Corded material

45 Makes a mistake

47 Mountain lake

48 ___ Howe, sewing machine inventor

50 Restore

52 Fish sauce

53 Sedan

54 Afghan

56 Jokester's stock in trade

59 Supports

63 Former serviceman: abbr.

65 Pedal digit

66 Bitter herb

67 College course

70 English county

71 Former prime minister

72 Felt concern

73 Irritable

74 Private rooms

75 Strand of hair

- DOWN**

1 Early explorer

2 Sheep-like

3 Challenge to climbers

4 With a Little ___ of Luck

5 Winter vehicle

6 Graceful dance

7 Exist

8 Minus

9 Randomly choose

10 Like some wheats

11 Seed covering

12 French author

13 Place in office

18 Tears

23 High peak

25 Institute legal proceedings

27 Diminished to a point

30 Age

32 Forsaken

33 Grotesque representation

34 Mental conception

35 Serpents

36 One who employs

37 Painful

38 Tiny quarrel

42 Surprised

43 Elongated fish

46 Companionship

49 One round in a race

51 Moving vehicle

52 Ripener

55 Stove parts

57 Stabs

58 Plants

59 Japanese drink

60 Begged

61 Desire ardently

62 Lateral

64 Diplomacy

68 First two-digit number

69 Sailor

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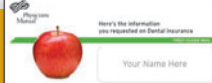
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► Swiderski, from page 1

Now a Ramona resident who commutes daily to the SDRPF office, Swiderski attended high school in Linda Vista, meaning she frequently crossed the San Diego River while growing up. Yet, like many locals, she wasn't really aware of the natural resource nearby. Part of what she loves about her job today is educating other unknowing residents about its existence.

"I love connecting the community with the river," Swiderski said. "I think I had always known that there were bodies of water in Mission Valley, but I don't think I realized they were all one body of water that was connected."

In her current role, Swiderski coordinates the River Cleanup program, which consists of small events with core volunteers, as well as larger weekend community

cleanups. These core volunteers — who are required to complete a minimum of 25 hours working in the riverbed — are called "Gold Shirts" after the T-shirts they receive once they meet the requirement.

In 2017, Swiderski organized approximately 60 cleanups, which collected a total of 261,100 pounds of trash.

Though this seems impressive, Swiderski said the numbers are less than the foundation's average in previous years. In an effort to keep the community safe, she said the nonprofit had to suspend the larger, weekend cleanup program due to hepatitis A concerns.

Despite this roadblock, the outbreak hasn't stopped her momentum. Every Wednesday, Swiderski rounds up her vaccinated crew of core volunteers for small, low-key cleanups. She also started up a new Saturday morning cleanup in December 2017 that has continued into the new year.



The biweekly cleanups occur on inactive, vacant sites.



Swiderski and her volunteers have formed a makeshift family out in the field. (Photos by Connor McBride)

With an emphasis on the natural aspects of the river and its resources, the River Cleanup team often runs into the abundant homeless population that chooses to camp in the riverbed.

"Although we're an environmental nonprofit and focus on the environmental side of things, we deeply care about the people who live in the riverbed," Swiderski said. "We meet people all the time."

While the SDRPF cleanups always occur on inactive, vacant sites, sometimes an active homeless encampment will be set up nearby. Swiderski and the volunteers always make sure to inform the inhabitants that they will be conducting a cleanup, so as not to alarm or disturb them. The team also makes a point to talk to people, learn their names and get to know them — often learning how they ended up in their situation and what resources they may need.

"I don't care if they remember [my name] ... if I can help one little bit, it's wildly successful for us, but it's also huge morale booster for them," Swiderski said.

In addition to the River Cleanup program, Swiderski is also in charge of all private events. Local corporate groups or service organizations — such as Town and Country and the Rotary Club — often approach her to put together team-building activities that give back to the community, which may involve the creation of murals and plant and butterfly gardens.

Swiderski said that sometimes the Gold Shirt volunteers step up and take on leadership roles at these events, educating the groups about the San Diego River, native and invasive plants, and sources of trash.

"I think that some of the work we do can be a little exhausting and emotionally draining, especially when you see the trash continuing to come back," Swiderski said. "But the volunteers have so much energy and so much passion that it re-energizes me. We've very much become a family."

"I try to keep things light and fun, because

the nature of the work we all do together, what brought us together, is a really heavy thing," she said.

In addition to keeping the group in good spirits, Swiderski strives to be fully transparent with the volunteers. She treats them as part of the staff and often invites them to meetings at the SDRPF office in the Morena area to discuss upcoming cleanup locations, possible challenges and new ideas.

"I never feel like I'm doing this job by myself because I have so many amazing volunteers that have a vested interest in the success of the program and the organization — I love that," she said.

SDRPF conducts River Surveys twice a year in April and October. In their most recent survey, they found that the number of active homeless camps jumped to 116, up from 61 last year. Other information they collect also includes overall trash data, including storm water debris, dump sites, construction waste and invasive plants.

Swiderski emphasized the importance of sharing these data with their partners — including stakeholders within the city of San Diego, the police, lifeguards and landowners — so the information can be used for community benefit. SDRPF then offers recommendations based on the data to the groups, and lends a hand orchestrating necessary cleanups.

"The information that we collect [in the surveys] and the work we do is cool because it's not just us as SDRPF doing this work and holding on to it," she said. "We're really trying to get so many stakeholders together to make a difference and get the river clean and healthy, but also keep people safe."

Aside from her SDRPF career, Swiderski's professional and personal path has been full of adventures, volunteer experiences and other nonprofit work.

"I have done a few rounds of AmeriCorps, so I have done some disaster relief and some wetland restoration work ... I really loved that," Swiderski said. "I got started doing it because I went on alternative spring break to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and did some recovery work [there]. I was blown away by all of the efforts a year later that were going on."

Last fall, Swiderski flew out to Houston, Texas, to help out with Hurricane Harvey. She also challenged herself to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa last March. After her friends politely declined, she decided to make the trip solo, eventually meeting up with a group celebrating International Women's Day to complete the mission.

Despite her many achievements, Swiderski always directs the conversation back to her volunteers in the River Cleanup program. She said that when she felt like giving up on the Kilimanjaro climb, she scrolled through encouraging emails from her crew for motivation.

"I seriously love those people," she said. "We're a crazy, productive, loving bunch."

Though the community cleanups are still on hiatus for safety reasons, the biweekly cleanups are open to the dedicated public. For more information about the San Diego River Foundation, visit sandiegoriver.org. If you'd like to join Swiderski and the Gold Shirt team, email volunteer@sandiegoriver.org.

—Sara Butler is the editor of Mission Valley News. Reach her at web@sdenn.com.



A Gold Shirt volunteer picks up trash at a Saturday morning cleanup in December 2017.

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Mission Valley News

COMMUNITY AND ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CALENDAR

FRIDAY
Jan. 12



'Hamilton'
Broadway San Diego presents "Hamilton," the story of America then, as told by America now. The play features a score that blends hip-hop, jazz, blues, rap, R&B, and Broadway. Appropriate for ages 10 and older, since there is some strong language. 8 p.m. at San Diego Civic Theatre, 1100 Third Ave. Runs through Sunday, Jan. 28; various times. Visit bit.ly/2qML9Qn.

'Dime Stories': Open Mic
San Diego Writers Ink invites you to share your story! Bring your three-minute "Dime Story" of approximately 500 words of prose to perform at their open mic. Food and wine available at 6:30 p.m. \$5. 7 p.m. at Liberty Station, 2730 Historic Decatur Road, Barracks 16, Suite 204. Visit bit.ly/2mch7AH.



San Diego Sockers vs. Tacoma Stars
Indoor soccer, 7:35 p.m. Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2meqrFf.

SATURDAY
Jan. 13

2018 San Diego Beer Festival
The San Diego Beer Festival returns to Liberty Station with another fun-filled day of beer, food trucks and music. The event will feature dozens of local and international craft beers, as well as San Diego's most popular food trucks (food sold separately). \$45 for general admission (1-4 p.m.) and \$55 for VIP (noon-4 p.m.). 21-and-older event. No pets allowed. Visit sandiegobeerfest.com.

Old Town Saturday Market
Support local artisans and buy paintings, photography, pottery, and more. Free. 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at Harney Street and San Diego Avenue, Old Town. Also held on Sundays. Visit oldtownsaturdaymarket.com.

SUNDAY
Jan. 14



Demun Jones with special guests
Demun Jones performs with special music guests. Tickets start at \$12. 21-and-up. 7 p.m. Brick by Brick, 1130 Buenos Ave., Morena. Visit ticketf.ly/2qHc5AZ.

TUESDAY
Jan. 16

Mission Valley Library Book Club
Join fellow book nerds to read and discuss a selected book each month. January's selection is "The Shoemaker's Wife" by Adriana Trigiani, available for checkout at the library. 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Mission Valley Library, 2123 Fenton Parkway. Visit bit.ly/2A960Sd.

WEDNESDAY
Jan. 17

SDSU Aztec basketball vs. Fresno State Bulldogs
Watch Aztec student athletes shoot some hoops. 8 p.m. Viejas Arena, 5500 Canyon Crest Drive. Visit bit.ly/2qK1xkq.

Friends of the Library Meeting
Friends of the Library and Mission Valley Library staff will provide updates on upcoming projects, goals and more. 6-7 p.m. at Mission Valley Library, 2123 Fenton Parkway. Visit bit.ly/2A960Sd.

Knit-a-Bit Knitting and Crochet Circle
Bring your own knitting or crochet project to work on while spending time with others who share your talent. 12:30-2 p.m. at Mission Valley Library, 2123 Fenton Parkway. Visit bit.ly/2A960Sd.

FRIDAY
Jan. 19

San Diego Gulls vs. San Jose Barracuda
See American Hockey League on the ice. Gulls Bobblehead giveaway night. 7 p.m. Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Also on Saturday, Jan. 20 at 7 p.m. Visit bit.ly/2qFPkwZ.

The Fighting Able
Say farewell to The Fighting Able as they perform their final show. Special guests are Sam Hell, The Peripherals and Dirty Pennies. 21-and-up. Tickets \$5. 8 p.m. at The Merrow, 1271 University Ave. Visit bit.ly/2qHiig3.



SDDT Company Repertory Performance
San Diego Dance Theater presents "JANUS II: Dances of Beginnings, Transitions, and Endings." Choreography by Jean Isaacs, Trystan Loucado, Gina Sorens and Kyle Sorens. Tickets \$15-\$40. 7:30 p.m. at Saville Theatre, San Diego City College, 14th St. and C St. Also on Jan. 20. Visit bit.ly/2qLe47k.

SATURDAY
Jan. 20

Estuary Clean & Green
San Diego River Park Foundation invites you to their annual estuary cleanup! Join a group of dedicated volunteers to remove trash and debris from along the shore from Dog Beach to the upper estuary. Some volunteers will be in kayaks. Limited number of free T-shirts available. 9:30-11:30 a.m. at South Shores Road. Visit bit.ly/2qHHxPe and RSVP at volunteer@sandiegoriver.org

PULLEY
SoCal punk rock band Pulley will perform with Versus The World, Gods of Mount Olympus and Skipjack. \$15. 21-and-up. 8:30 p.m. at Soda Bar, 3615 El Cajon Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qKxUPP.

San Diego Gulls vs. San Jose Barracuda
See American Hockey League on the ice. Diversity night with pre-game tailgate party in parking lot. 7 p.m. Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qFPkwZ.

SUNDAY
Jan. 21

Hemlock Society panel
Hemlock Society of San Diego presents a panel about refusal of treatment and how best to die with dementia. Panelists include Amy Abrams, Lisa Heikoff, Hannah Wilder and Bob Uslander.

Free. 1:30-3:30 p.m. at Scottish Rite Center, 1895 Camino del Rio South. Visit bit.ly/2kIUpFf.

San Diego Sockers vs. Ontario Fury
Indoor soccer, 5:05 p.m. Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qK7H49.

U.S. Women's National Soccer vs. Denmark
The U.S. Women's National Soccer Team takes on Denmark. Tickets start at \$25. 4:30 p.m. at San Diego County Credit Union Stadium, 9449 Friars Road. Visit bit.ly/2qLwm8j.

SATURDAY
Jan. 22

Unsung Genius: Trivia Night and Karaoke
The Merrow presents an evening competition full of trivia and karaoke. 21-and-up. Tickets \$2. 6 p.m. at The Merrow, 1271 University Ave. Visit bit.ly/2qL3DjU.

WEDNESDAY
Jan. 24

Black Heart Saints
Black Heart Saints will perform with special guests Three Chamber Heart and Kodasounds. 21-and-up. Tickets \$5. 8 p.m. at The Merrow, 1271 University Ave. Visit bit.ly/2qL3DjU.

SDSU Aztec basketball vs. Colorado State Rams
Watch Aztec student athletes shoot some hoops. 8 p.m. Viejas Arena, 5500 Canyon Crest Drive. Visit bit.ly/2qK1xkq.

THURSDAY
Jan. 25



An Evening with Gregory Boyle
University of San Diego welcomes Father Greg Boyle — the founder of the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program in the world — to speak on campus. Tickets \$28-\$38. 7-9 p.m. at Camino Hall, Shiley Theatre, 5998 Alcala Park. Visit bit.ly/2qK7pds.

Disney On Ice: Follow Your Heart
Disney characters and stories are brought to life with the artistry of ice skating fun for the whole family. All ages. Tickets start at \$30. 7 p.m. at Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Runs through Sunday, Jan. 28; various times. Visit bit.ly/2qI2ObN.

FRIDAY
Jan. 26

Sitting On Stacy at SOMA
Indie-rock band Sitting On Stacy will perform with special guests Groove, The Bashdogs, Pumphouse, PVKE and Stray Monroe. Tickets \$10. All ages. 6:30 p.m. at SOMA Sidestage, 3350 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qEHWSF.

SATURDAY
Jan. 27

SDSU Aztecs women's basketball vs. UNLV
Watch Aztec student athletes shoot some hoops with the Runnin' Rebels. 1 p.m. Viejas Arena, 5500 Canyon Crest Drive. Visit bit.ly/2qI3tKf.

Murder Mystery Scavenger Hunt
Are your detective skills good enough to solve a murder? Grab a team of four or five friends for a unique competition game designed for adults. Tickets \$55. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. in Old Town San Diego. Visit bit.ly/2qledby.

10 Years at SOMA
Alternative-metal band 10 Years will perform with special guests From Ashes To New and Painted Wives. Tickets \$17. All ages. 6:30 p.m. at SOMA Sidestage, 3350 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qKHDWi.

TUESDAY
Jan. 30



The Killers
Rock out with The Killers, the Las Vegas four-piece known for the classics "Mr. Brightside" and "Somebody Told Me." All ages. Parking \$20. 7:30 p.m. at Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qHceEj.

FRIDAY
Feb. 2



San Diego Gulls Hockey Tickets
See American Hockey League on the ice. 7 p.m. Valley

View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qEdic5.

SDSU Aztecs basketball vs. Air Force Academy Falcons

Watch Aztec student athletes shoot some hoops. 5 p.m. Viejas Arena, 5500 Canyon Crest Drive. bit.ly/2qK1xkq.



Tyler, the Creator
American rapper Tyler, the Creator stops by on his tour promoting his latest album "Flower Boy." All ages. Parking \$20. Tickets \$40. 7:30 p.m. at Valley View Casino Center, 3500 Sports Arena Blvd. Visit bit.ly/2qLyr4m.

MONDAY
Feb. 5

American Mosaic Story Concert
Write Out Loud presents an evening of short stories and literature read by trained actors. Refreshments provided. All ages. Tickets \$25. 7 p.m. at Old Town Theatre, 4040 Twigg St. Visit bit.ly/2qIboqY.

FRIDAY
Feb. 9



'Dime Stories': Open Mic
San Diego Writers Ink invites you to share your story! Bring your three-minute "Dime Story" of approximately 500 words of prose to perform at their open mic. Food and wine available at 6:30 p.m. \$5. 7 p.m. at Liberty Station, 2730 Historic Decatur Road, Barracks 16, Suite 204. Visit bit.ly/2mch7AH.

WEDNESDAY
Feb. 14

Old Town Community Planning Group
3:30 p.m. at The Whaley House, 2476 San Diego Ave. Visit bit.ly/2kqllX9.

Knit-a-Bit Knitting and Crochet Circle
Bring your own knitting or crochet project to work on while spending time with others who share your talent. 12:30-2 p.m. at Mission Valley Library, 2123 Fenton Parkway. Visit bit.ly/2A960Sd.

VOTE TODAY

FOR YOUR FAVORITE DINING & ENTERTAINMENT VENUES IN MISSION VALLEY!

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN
THEATER TICKETS, MOVIE PASSES
AND OTHER GREAT PRIZES*

*Must Complete at Least 50% of Ballot to Qualify



Vote using the ballot or vote online!

MAIL YOUR BALLOT TO: Mission Valley News
123 Camino de la Reina, Suite 202 East, San Diego, CA 92108.

OR VOTE ONLINE AT: Missionvalleynews.com One ballot per person. Ballots must be postmarked, submitted online, or hand-delivered by 11:59 pm on Sunday, January 21, 2018

CONTACT INFO (Must be filled out for your vote to be counted):

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

DAYTIME PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

Dining & Entertainment

American Cuisine	Donut Shop	Mexican Cuisine
Bakery	Food Truck	Micro Brewery
Barbeque	Family Restaurant	Movie Theatre
Beer	Farmers Market	New Restaurant
Billiards	Fast Food	Nightclub
Breakfast	Fine Dining	Outdoor Dining
Brunch	French Cuisine	Pet Friendly Dining
Buffet	Greek Cuisine	Pho/Noodle House Restaurant
Burger	Golf Course	Pizza
Burrito	Happy Hour	Romantic Dining
Business Lunch	Health Food Store	Rooftop Lounge
Casino	Hot Wings	Salad
Casino Buffet	Indian Cuisine	Sandwich
Casual Dining	Irish Pub	SD County Winery
Catering	Italian Cuisine	Seafood
Chinese Cuisine	Japanese Cuisine	Spanish Cuisine
Cocktail	Jazz Bar	Sports Bar
Coffee Shop	Juice	Steakhouse
Comedy Club	Late Night Dining	Sushi
Comfort Food	Live Music Venue	Thai Cuisine
Dance Club	Lunch	Vegetarian/Vegan
Deli	Margarita	Wine Bar
Dessert	Martini	
Dinner		